DECA INNOVATION PLAN
Grapevine

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I.   Executive Summary

Business Overview: Grapevine is a mobile application on iOS and Android platforms that has a goal of improving multi-level business connections to help improve and communicate workplace quality and experiences. It consists of 3 developers shown below, and over 15 local test companies, offering licenses to businesses to promote jobs and get data through their employees all in one app. Grapevine aims to allow prospective employees to gain real-world information about what future jobs would entail, directly from current workers, and allow employers to improve working conditions based on employee feedback.

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Problem Statement: The problem at hand is regarding unemployment and job searching during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic aggravated a huge existing problem with misinformation during the job finding process. Studies showed that around 70% of people unemployed or looking for jobs in the US last year claimed they had little or no direct information about what their previous job and workplace would be like. This means that people looking for jobs can't get reliable information without direct connections to an employee, especially when these companies either lack or don't have specialized HR programs specifically for the branch or workplace.

Testing Methodologies and Designs: The research conducted was based on the usability of the app in professional settings. The app was tested and analyzed in over 15 locations in the Overland Park community, including schools, studios, large chains, and local startups. Employers were given company-specific controls, viewing anonymous and public feedback on worker experience, and both improvements in the companies as well as feedback on the app itself were noted and analyzed.

Objectives and Strategy: Grapevine aims to expand across the state into tourism and sport businesses along with the current ones. It will aim to hire more employees to make a website and more specific licensing agreements along with security measures. This along with continued feedback + development will bring the company higher profits in the coming 3 to 4 years.

Financial Proposal: The proposal is for 25,000 for 25% equity as well as 2.5% royalty on license sales for the first 3 years of the investment. Expenses will be on website building, advertising to companies, app development, general publishing, and application security. Profits will be low in the first year, coming from guaranteed licenses and use, but is estimated to pick up considerably in the 2 years after that. More details will be provided, but this will grant a profit of 50% within 2 years, and 80% within 3 years of the investment.

II.   Problem

Investigation

Today's supply chain problems and worker shortages have been exacerbated by workers' reluctance to take a job due to unfamiliarity with the environment and employers' inability to retain current employees. Grapevine eases worker reluctance by giving workers the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the workplace and lightens retention struggles by giving employers the opportunity to hear their employees' requests firsthand.

A source from the Harvard Business Review states that prospective employees may have very specific wants and needs that not all businesses can provide. 88% of workers stated they wanted flexibility in working hours, which according to the Society for Human Resource Management, is only guaranteed to around 48% of workers in the US. Similarly, 62% of employees stated that they wanted their workplace to value quality over volume, which almost 90% of businesses claimed to do, but only 60% did.

A survey of 1,583 U.S. white-collar professionals shows that flexibility is popular but not always accessible.
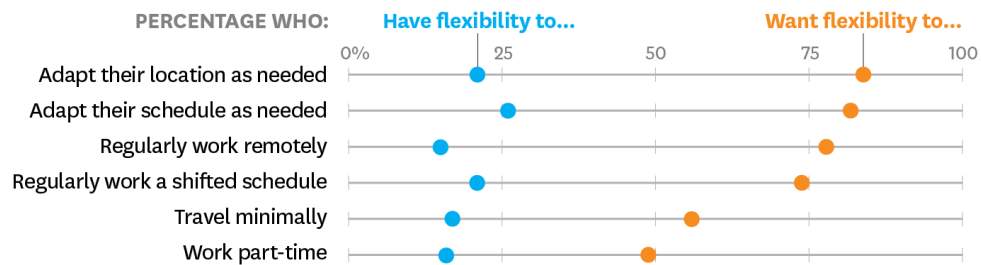
This issue stretches from flexibility and creativity to safety and accommodation as well. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, many workplaces rated themselves highly in their ability to account for worker disabilities and limitations, while employees rated those same places lowly.

Why does this problem exist, however? Finding out why brought me to interviewing people in my own community. Doing so would allow me to communicate with business owners and employers as well as employees to find reasons and solutions for it.

Table 2.

Joint Distribution of Accommodation-Sensitive and Work-Limiting Health Problems, by Question Sequence

	Standard Sequence		Alternative Sequence		
	(unweighted)	sequence	(unweighte	sequence	p-value
A. Overall					
Accommodated at workplace	86	6.2%	128	12.1%	<0.001
Accommodation would help	138	8.6%	160	10.7%	0.077
Accommodation would not help	1,013	85.1%	959	77.2%	<0.001
Total	1,237	100.0%	1,247	100.0% .	
B. By Work-Limiting Health Status					
Health limits work AND					
Accommodated at workplace	24	2.2%	30	1.9%	0.554
Accommodation would help	79	4.1%	97	4.5%	0.581
Accommodation would not help	164	8.4%	155	9.3%	0.428
Subtotal	267	14.7%	282	15.7%	0.479
Health does not limit work AND					
Accommodated at workplace	62	4.1%	98	10.2%	<0.001
Accommodation would help	59	4.6%	63	6.2%	0.069
Accommodation would not help	849	76.7%	804	67.9%	<0.001
Subtotal	970	85.3%	965	84.3%	0.479

Research

Through extensive interviews on the issue and a potential solution being an app to share workplace experiences, it was found that the reason for the issue is a disconnect between employees and employers that causes them to believe certain things regarding the positions that cause job information to be misleading.

Recorded Interview major comments (8 participants)
Potential Uses of the Idea
"The app can definitely be used for teachers. I was luckily able to find a good job environment for my first job, but I think that **this app would have made it a lot easier.**"
"I would say that as an intern at CACU, I was **only given 3 or 4 reviews** on their website about intern experiences and how it helped. **On linkedin, interns usually don't document themselves as workers there, and even if they do, most aren't willing to share so it's a complete crapshoot.** I think that this app can help that by connecting people who can actually comment on their experience to future interns or employees."
"I think that as someone who recently re-entered the workforce, this would **really help me in the future**. My job is a work-from-home one, so there weren't community meetings and I **wasn't able to talk to actual employees which made it hard for me to see what the job actually was like.** I was only given lots of information about the job by the people trying to hire me, which made it **hard to know if what I was hearing was filtered or not.** I think this **app sounds very useful.**"
"The app can be **used for consumers. I'd like to see that a business holds a high standard for employee treatment.**"
"As you know I work at BVW, and since the whole staff are employees hired by the district, we are able to know how the job is just by talking to the hirers themselves. However, in my previous job as a teacher, **the district was formatted differently and I didn't know that coming into the job. If I had known that information,** I wouldn't have made that decision. **I think for teachers, students, and employees, this is a great solution to a huge problem**, you know, I have also thought a lot about."

Employer's perception of position

GAP without HR capability

Actual experience and feedback on job quality

Companies that lack high-paid HR departments or those that are specifically focused on the branch, are unable to resolve a connection between employers and employees.

The problem at hand is that companies without significant assistance from specialized HR managers or assistants, lack a connection between employees and their employers on what a job is like and the worker experience. This stunts the growth of a company, preventing the fixing of problems, and also causes misinformation during the job searching process which can leave many families of employees in hard circumstances due to the difficulty of job switching during the pandemic.

The Solution

Grapevine provides a place for employees to share their opinions regarding their work environments for future employees. They can also share their interests, helping prospective employees decide whether a job is right for them. Grapevine is meant to create a more transparent workplace for the benefit of both employees and employers.

III.   Customer Segments

Target Market

The target market found through researching the problem is companies that aren't able to acquire strong HR departments specific to their workplaces, whether they are small businesses or large enterprises. The idea in this is that local companies would buy licenses to gain valuable information on employee feedback, and that large corporations would buy licenses for individual branches to help managers find info through the app on employees there. The market to bypass would be businesses that have specific workplace HR departments, which can already establish those connections.
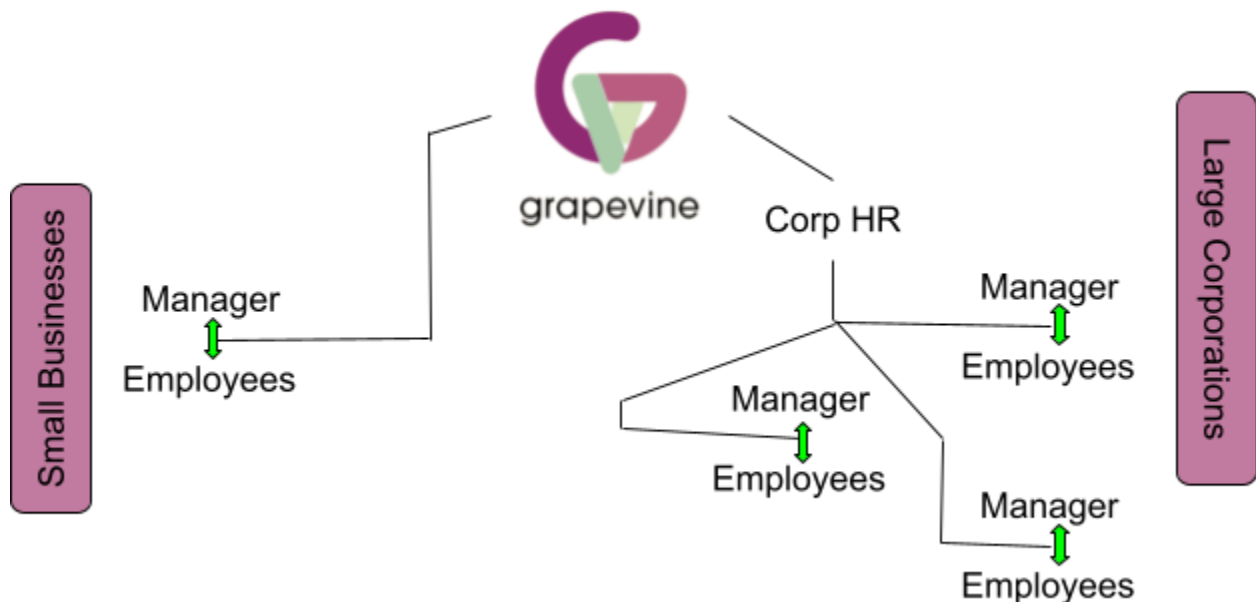

Market Research

The test strategy has been to apply the app to a target company in the community or neighborhood. The strategy of Grapevine once public will be to appeal to local stores that are part of bigger companies such as fast-food chains. These may include McDonald's and Burger King restaurants, and companies such as Mattress Firm. Then the strategy would be to expand to higher-skill working environment corporations like Zoom or Teva. These bigger companies can allow Grapevine to increase in popularity among many different markets and areas. The goal then would be to expand to all types of businesses across the country, then in the world.

So far, there have been beta-product testings in target markets including local shops like Tropical Smoothie Cafe, LGP String Studios, Meyer Music, Blue Valley West High School, Blue Valley North High School, Cosentinos, and more.

The application is very useful for students, professionals, employers, and even consumers. From our surveys sent to our target audience, we got an overwhelming amount of support about how the novel solution would not only help people with job searching, but would also help employers fix problems related to their work environments, and incentivize this in the market by showing consumers that companies value their employees. Grapevine is directed towards prospective employees, working employees, students, retired professionals, and employers. The target markets during startup were schools to review classes and different local businesses. Below are the statistics on how the app performed before and after improvements.

Signigicant market feedback and improvements seen below can be found on the app's GitHub: https://github.com/Jerryx2020/Grapevine
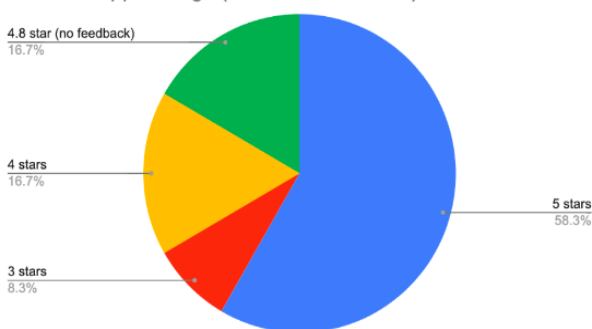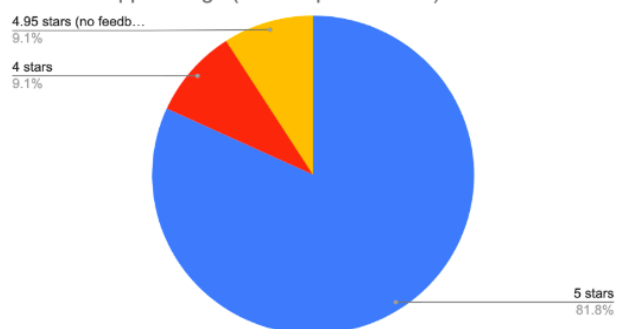
Marketing Objectives

The market objectives that the business will strive to achieve are based on gaining enough to expand nationally and internationally in the coming 10 years. This will entail expanding to 10 businesses within the first 2 months, 30-50 in the first year, and a steady influx of around 50 small businesses and local chains each year after that. Feedback from tests found that good licensing costs were around 3-4 thousand dollars per year, something businesses could afford.

IV. Unique Value Proposition

Product/Service

The importance of sharing job experience has been intensified by the Coronavirus pandemic. When people are taking new jobs, they often aren't able to gain first-hand experience through shadowing or interning in person. Without any familiarity with a specific workplace, deciding to apply for and accept a job offer is a hard decision. Grapevine gives employees the ability to share experiences and applicants the ability to explore an environment without even being there, making the decision unimaginably easier.

Benefit and Advantages

Grapvine creates a medium for employees to communicate with each other and employers to make changes to benefit the working environment. This helps all levels of business, and can allow consumers to know that companies are highly rated through the app. It also helps prospective employees find accurate information regarding what their job entails.

Novelty/Uniqueness of the Solution

Grapevine is an app that aims to function as an HR device for companies that aren't able to access that for themselves. It localizes and centralizes all functionality of an HR department in one place, which is a unique app never done before. Its novelty and elegant design won it 6th at the FBLA National Mobile App Development Competition in 2021.

Why Grapevine?

Apart from its functionality and novelty, the MAIN REASON why grapevine is so valuable is that it's already been developed and tested. Through extensive research and market testing, it's gained improvements and a steady and concrete method of development, which means that investors can be assured that the product will grow. The app is popular and helpful for all levels of business, and is in a category of its own, where nothing has been produced like it before.

V.   Solution

Product Summary

  Grapevine provides a place for employees to share their opinions regarding their work environments for future employees. They can also share their interests, helping prospective employees decide whether a job is right for them. Grapevine is meant to create a more transparent workplace for the benefit of both employees and employers.

  Grapevine is an IOS/Android application that runs on X-Code and Adallo software. In the app, there are posts about job ratings, worker experience, and recommendations for future employees or prospects. The app uses Google's Firebase data storage system to give it its social media capabilities. The app is a gateway solution that allows users to smoothly lead themselves into another experienced worker's social media platforms and contact information.

  It functions through licenses paid companies for specific branches or workplaces, where grapevine will collect data from employee accounts, both anonymous and public, to share with employers and give ratings on the workplace. It uses QA AI systems to rank reviews in order of best to worst to help give employers efficient data on their workplaces.

Product Development

  In building Grapevine, we experienced many problems including pesky database networking glitches, several failed attempts at a search function, and one point at which our IDE simply refused to run our app. In each case, we persevered through frustrating debugging, an adventure that included hours of reading through Google Firebase documentation, an exotic foray into the world of AI, and several days of waiting for a patch to Apple's Xcode.

  But, beyond our relatively ordinary bugs, Grapevine, itself, was the result of technical difficulties. We began without much experience programming mobile applications. As a result, our initial model was extremely crude. It had a poor interface, clunky dynamics, and a dysfunctional database. We decided that a complete overhaul was necessary and that we would conduct research to tailor our app to the needs and wants of our target market.

  We surveyed more than 30 professionals, asking what they would want in an app used to share information about work environments. From their responses, we derived three main pillars upon which we would rebuild our app: simplicity, safety, and singularity.

We united these three pillars into what we call the "Gateway Model." It perfectly describes the way that we keep the focus on our main goal of improving the workplace by connecting people. We don't try to recreate the many features and functions already built into other platforms; instead, we offer a unique forum and help our users connect within and without the app. We defer neither the responsibility of moderating our platform nor the obligation to protect our users; we subject our venue to rigorous review and give our users the ability to remain anonymous. We don't drift from our initial goal; we stick to it. We were confronted with countless problems throughout the development process, and we drew lessons from them that we turned into these few tenets.

We united these three pillars, and we built Grapevine.

Upper Management

Grapevine was developed by 3 students in the Blue Valley District: Shishir Vargheese, Jerry Xia, and Nathan Bronson. The management scheme is where coding-related problems are handled by all 3 members of the team, and the rest of the duties are split among them. Shishir handles advertising and outreach, registering for contests, and giving short presentations to companies to sample within. Jerry handles the app improvement scheme, where reviews and professional feedback are translated into changes and fixes, and works with the Android version of the app on Adallo. Nathan takes care of a lot of the heavy lifting within the code but also works on the database and licensing.

Company Growth

As the company grows, we plan to increase our employment to high school interns and then college students. After we develop a solid base of computer science and marketing majors, we can transition into paid jobs. Upper management will stay within the group of 3 founders.

Nathan Bronson   Jerry Xia   Shishir Vargheese

Financial Analysis

Loan Amount

The requested investment is for **25,000 US Dollars**.

Income Statement - Years 1-2

Revenue	Licenses	3,500 * 10 + 4000 * 20
		0.26 * 1,000 + 0.26 * 10,000
	Total Revenue	$117860
Expenses	Advertising/Marketing Testing Expenses (Yr 1) Website Design Application Security	-20,000 -20,000 -20,000 -40,000
	Total Expenses	-100,000
Gains	Loan/Investment	25,000
Losses	N/A	N/A
Net Income	(Revenue + Gains) - Expenses	$57860.00

Cash Flow Statement

Operating Cash Flow	Net Income	$57860
Investment	Loan/Investment	$25,000
Growth	Gain Percentage Royalties (2.5%)	28% 30% 74% 5,140
Return	Return after 2 years	**$37,640.00**

Conclusion

Grapevine is currently the most secure investment possible, as the product is already in existence and tested. With your investment, Grapevine can grow to a level above all expectations and will give a 50% return within 2 years after the investment. This is due to the fact that it is a unique venture that's already been developed and tested, with guaranteed licenses through tested markets.

With this, it is clear that there is only one way forward, and that is to invest in your future and our future, Grapevine.

Thank You

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