History Connector

This project is a database driven interactive visualization of historical events and their connections. Much of the time history is presented as a series of facts with no clear indication of how they relate to each other. Doing so negates one of the main reasons to study history: finding out what made what other things happen, and how those led to the world we have today. This project, tentatively named “History Connector”, provides a solution to this by presenting in a clear and engaging manner how historical events relate to each other.

The product will consist of a timeline with labeled bubbles at the appropriate points representing events. Each bubble is color coded for the category of event that it qualifies as: Political events (transfers of power, alliances forming), Natural events (natural disasters, environmental changes) Cultural events (religious movements, social movements, art movements), Science/Technology events (new technologies, new discoveries), Economic events (depressions, new resources being discovered), War events, and Other events. The examples given are not the hard limits of what qualifies, just examples. There would also be the ability to add extra lines and highlights to denote that multiple events are part of one overarching event or general trend, such as a war or a social movement. The interactivity is in selecting the bubbles to expand them for more content. This would include the name of the event, a description, and images (if the user chose to include them). On the sides will be shown the lines connecting the event to past and future events.

The idea of a “connection” here is a case in which the results of an event or the content of the event are relevant to an event that occurred afterward. Such an example would be Japan deciding to ally with Germany in WWII (Political), which led to the bombing of Pearl Harbor (War), which led to the United States entering the war (War). Another would be the Abolitionist movement (Cultural) and Abraham Lincoln’s presidency (Political) being related to the Emancipation Proclamation (Political), which is related to the Civil War (War).

The content would be based on user input. Therefore, user friendliness is very important. The timeline would be created with beginning and ending years of the user’s choice. A simple and mostly text based interface would allow the user to create a new event featuring a name, description, past and future connections, and uploaded images. The input would be put into a database made specifically for the individual user.

The main initial target market for this product would be educators, largely reached by advertising. They could use History Connector to present information for a class in a more engaging manner than the plaintext of a book, which to many students, especially at the level of secondary or primary education, is not very exciting. It could also be used for assignments: Take this topic, create a History Connector vision of it. Other possible customers would include textbook companies, historical societies, or anyone else who wants to present historical information in an accessible and engaging manner.

The source of revenue would be paid subscription. The amount of subscribers would also be the way to measure History Connector’s success. There would also be the ability to temporarily allow others to have access to one’s subscription, for the aforementioned case of using History Connector for school assignments.

The costs involved here would be mainly be coding time and server space. Server space would need to expand as History Connector’s user base grows. Research time, in order to develop the content for a good prototype, would be necessary for this project as well.

History Connector would be a way to make the intricacies of history clearer to someone who is not deeply entrenched in historical knowledge. Similar technologies that create timelines and visualize connections between concepts do exist, such as Office Timeline and Seealso.org. But so far nobody has combined the two ideas for the purpose of explaining history well. History Connector is a unique and effective solution to an abiding issue with the presentation of history.