reSEARCH Engine: closed LinkedIn for researchers

Elevator pitch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0GqMumIQbc

Q. Elevator pitch

Hello. A major problem in the world of academic research is the lack of communication channels between researchers working on different projects. This is especially relevant now with necessity of interdisciplinary approaches. I personally face this problem as a graduate student; so do my peers.

A platform for researchers to discover different projects is necessary to foster collaboration. My idea is to build that platform, with the approach of prioritizing discovery, rather than dissemination of complete information, which is the job of a research paper.

Our primary customers are companies looking to hire or collaborate with researchers on relevant projects. Our users are student and faculty researchers, postdoctoral fellows, for-profit corporations, grant donors, and venture capital firms.

Q. Problem description

Even within a small university like Tufts, departments within the same school are isolated. I personally researched this and found multiple opportunities for collaboration. I found these because I explored multiple labs in different departments. I also found a lack of clear channels for this discovery, and I made ad-hoc channels to do this.

Mid and large cap corporations interested in collaborating with researchers face the problem of lack of communication channels with academia, and go through ad-hoc solutions like sponsoring conferences to gain access to academia. Lack of communication channels within academia is faced also faced by researchers interested in searching for collaborators, postdoctoral fellows, and PhD students.

On a very human note, researchers work on spectacularly cool stuff but it is usually published in complicated terms on inaccessible platforms. It is a shame how most people, even those interested in research, miss out on it.

Q. Problem worth and impact

This problem is worth solving for 3 reasons:

1. Interdisciplinary approaches to solving problems are faster and more insightful. This approach is necessary as we grapple the increased quantity and magnitude of problems, arising from a combination of factors. Think climate change, racism, societal divide, to name a few. These problems are caused by a combination of factors, requiring interdisciplinary research spanning arts, engineering, and social sciences.

2. Collaborations with corporations opens up a financial market, that will hopefully drive investment and public interest in academia

3. Researchers need a platform that is effectively a public resume, a social account of achievements. In simpler terms, researchers love the feeling of being Rick because they feel the world sees them as Morty (not to get too deep)

This solution has a direct impact on the world of academia. Processes becoming opener, increased collaborations, and interest in academia are some of the tangible impacts we will be able to gauge easily. The indirect impact of higher collaborations, across various disciplines and problems, is a long-term goal we have. While this may be difficult to directly gauge, and not to be too optimistic, but the long-term effects of this could be massive.

Q. Customers and pain points

ENTERPRISE CUSTOMERS:

1. Corporations that lack access to academia, or have to pay a lot for access. Large cap companies have preferential access to academia, they may be closely linked through existing social connections. These corporations have opportunities to collaborate with or hire researchers, but lack a dedicated search engine-type platform for academic research. They are our primary customers. They face the lack of channels to explore projects across research institutions, and have to combine business development executives, conference sponsorships, and donations to gain access to academia.

2. Firms interested in taking research projects to market through acquisition, private investment, or other means. These firms serve as proverbial needle-in-a-haystack searchers who try to find opportunities to profit with. I believe this idea will spawn a related industry which is best explained as "investment banking for research projects".

POSSIBLY UNPAID CUSTOMERS:

1. Postdoctoral fellows looking for new work positions

2. Grant donors looking for projects to support

3. Students interested in pursuing research

4. Universities looking to increase accessibility to their research for higher admissions, rankings, collaborations

Q. Solution. How is it better?

My solution is a web application in which the basic component is a research project. Each project is managed by the researchers in that project. A project is explained in simple terms to focus on quick discovery. Each projects contains a list of collaborators, who each have a profile with an email to contact them. Later on, a short explanatory video (video abstract) of the research can be included for better UX.

Existing alternatives like Linkedin are too broad. Our approach takes into account the world of research and is primarily made to better serve a specialized audience, and address a very specific pain point: lack of communication channels for academic research.

Other projects of focus on dissemination of information (ResearchGate, JoVE). They contain detailed information about the research project, through research papers and explanatory video abstracts. They serve to know about a project in depth. Our platform focus on breadth. We aspire to showcase only essential and differentiating features of research projects to emphasize discovery of projects rather than complete dissemination. These projects serve as next steps after discovery on our platform.

Broadly speaking, we are:

1. A search engine for research projects for our enterprise customers

2. A showcase for universities

3. A social resume for individuals

Through one data source of research projects, we become a platform with 3 distinct sides. These are the sides we intend to focus on.

Q. Plan for distribution, adoption, and impact

I have a 4 stage plan

1. Initial interest and core researcher base signup: I am currently collecting signups from academia and industry for my platform. I am curating the platform, and attuning to serve pain points. I am also in the process of manual data collection for research projects, and plan to have a live demo by the end of November.

2. Live demo: A sales pitch with a live demo sent to our partners in industry, leveraging Tufts' network

3. Correction: Updating the platform after results and conclusions made from live demo

4. Repeat with new universities and batches of corporations

To drive yet limit adoption to a specific consumer base, we will initially roll this out to universities and signed up corporations only. An essential aspect of this solution is specificity and the necessity of keeping irrelevant content away from our users. This specificity is a way we intend to maximize our impact, by facilitating deeper connections between a smaller pool of users. This is our initial plan. Later on, we plan to open this up more globally, for which a different approach will need to be brainstormed.

Q. Why are you the right team to solve this problem?

Being a graduate student in engineering with experience with startups puts my in a great position between academia and industry. I understand pain points well and know how to carve a solution from them. Being a Tufts student, I have access to a high-quality yet small pool of persons in academia to test out my concept.

An major discord between academia and industry is profit. A large portion of academia is non-profit which is the motivation of many researchers. This discord, stemming from the profitable nature of industry, inhibits connections between researchers and companies. Being a student-led platform allows us to align our motivations with researchers, while maintaining a healthy link with industry. This puts us in a unique middle position that gives us a big advantage over groups from either camps.