Legal social ethical and professional issues document

Introduction

During the course of this project, developing a system that will usually involve user interaction will inevitably bring about a range of legal, social, ethical and professional issues which will need to be carefully considered and discussed to help prevent any major consequences from occurring that may negatively impact our system. The current system which is intended to be built is an online web-based system for travellers. This document will be divided into several sections which will give a detailed overview of the relevant legal, social, ethical and professional issues which are important to highlight.

Legal Aspects

Data protection

One legal aspect that is important to be aware of is the data protection act which is a law that has been implemented to dictate how organisations should handle the personal information of their consumers. Any organisation which uses personal data must follow a certain set of rules, these rules state personal information is:

* Used fairly, lawfully and transparently
* Used only for specified purposes
* Used in a way that is adequate and relevant
* Accurate and up to date
* Maintained in a secure and safe manner which includes protection against unauthorised use, access loss or damage (GOV UK, 2018)

Due to the fact users will have to register with our online web system to use all the functionalities, data protection is a crucial aspect that all members of the group will need to be aware of to comply with this policy. One major advantage of complying with this act is that it will help to build trust and confidence with our users as if we are able to ensure any personal information we obtain is able to be kept safe and secure, users are more likely to consider our service to be reliable and will more likely register with our website without fear of any consequences. Whereas failure to ensure customer security will destroy the trust the user may have had and will prevent any future users on placing their trust on our system (Niles, 2011).

Furthermore, if this system was to go live then complying with data protection will help prevent an organisation from losing millions as breaching this act can cause a business to receive potential fines (Niles, 2011). Overall data protection is an important legal aspect that must considered when developing the prototype of this system or even the live version to help prevent any negative impacts from occurring such as financial loss, lack of trust from users, an organisation receiving a disastrous reputation etc.

Copyright

Another legal aspect that needs to be avoided is the issue of breaching copyright laws, copyright laws in general have been implemented to specifically restrict people from copying/plagiarising work from other people and claiming it as their own (Ukessays, 2016). Because the internet allows users to freely search and download huge amounts of information onto their computer, this had made copyright a difficult issue to manage effectively. As a result, when developing our web-based product it is crucial for all members of the group to avoid using any logos/images that have been copyrighted or to completely plagiarise any work from another user as not only can it bring legal problems such as being taken to court or paying compensation. But also, copying someone else’s work and claiming it as your own betrays the idea of fair play which is viewed as ethically/morally incorrect (Ukessays, 2016).

However, it is important to note there are certain exceptions regarding copyright. For example, a person can copy small amounts of work if the use is non-commercial research or private study. Furthermore, criticising or reviewing copyrighted work is permitted under the use of ‘fair dealing’. Overall copyright rules show the margin of error is small as completely copying work is unacceptable, copying small extracts can be acceptable depending on the scenario and the context around it. This also shows if any member of the group does use some else’s work in acceptable terms then they must assess and decide if the work they are using will cause any financial impact on the copyright owner because of their use(GOV UK, 2018).

Social and Ethical Issues

Regarding the topic of social and ethical issues which needs to be addressed, one issue that needs to be considered is an established level of integrity and trust towards the users of this system. A normal level of integrity includes the concept of being completely honest with the users of our system by providing correct and accurate information on the quality of the product, what features the product offers and how it works. By being open and honest, as well as being committed to treat every user fairly and equally. It will help to build and maintain a healthy relationship between the developers of this system (our group) and to potential users who may be interested in our product. By maintaining this level of trust between ourselves and to other users, it will be an important factor regarding the overall success of our product as keeping the users of the system satisfied will be hugely beneficial as they will continue to use system on a regular basis and may possibly inform other users to use the product which will bring more exposure that will be crucial if this system was to be funded and go live (Oster, 2019). Failure to maintain the usual standards of integrity and honesty with our consumers can cause a range of severe consequences to occur. One potential consequence that can occur is the complete breakdown of trust from our consumers which would cause current users and future potential users to permanently not use our product as well as any products we may release in the future as users may decide to never place their faith within us ever again. Another consequence of this would be income loss as users who decide to stay away from our product will decrease the overall income of the organisation. Furthermore, users who feel cheated or feel we have been unfairly dishonest towards them may decide to take this matter further by going to court or by issuing libel charges that would cause us to lose a significant amount of money and would also tarnish our reputation to the point where it would be difficult to reverse (Oster, 2019).

In addition, another social/ethical issue that needs to be considered is the subject of web accessibility. In general, many people usually take for granted their ability to operate a computer/laptop without any problems but unfortunately there are certain people who do not have that luxury as they may have a disability that prevents them from effectively using a computer as compared to the rest of the population (Lunka, 2019). As a result, this raises concerns in regards to our own system as using it will require a user having to use a computer/laptop to access the product which for the average person may not pose any problems but for anyone who currently has a disability, this may prove to be a hindrance as they may struggle to navigate through the website. As a group this is an issue we will have to discuss in more depth in which we may have to rethink some of our ideas in terms of the overall design of the website, how we can improve the user interface, to discuss in more detail on the colour scheme of the system and to decide which colours will be appropriate especially for users who may be colour blind to specific colours etc. One possible solution that we can implement to help individuals with disabilities is to possibly use screen readers which for anyone who is visually impaired, this will be beneficial as a screen reader will audibly dictate the contents of a webpage to the user (Lunka, 2019). By implementing a feature like this would be an advantage as it would mean we can expand our target audience by being able to include as many people who can use our system to satisfy their needs.

However, if we are not able to implement any effective features that would help improve web accessibility then there may be a scenario in which as a group we may have to compromise and utilise a risky approach of acknowledging that some users will not be able to use our system. Although as mentioned earlier in this section, this approach could potentially be problematic as it would mean certain individuals who may have an interest in using our site will have to miss out and as a result, we may not be able to attract a large amount of users to use our prototype product and in the scenario in which this system was to go live. A big organisation would potentially lose out on huge money if the web accessibility of this site was not versatile enough to accommodate everyone.

Privacy invasion is another social/ethical issue which needs to be taken into consideration especially since our system will require users to register with personal data such as usernames, passwords etc. Online privacy in general is hugely important for website visitors and users as they don’t want their privacy to be invaded by unauthorised users or any organisations. Which is why businesses must ensure to their consumers that not only will their information be kept confidential but also to ensure their personal data will not be accessed by hackers or by any unknown user (Angus, 2014). As a group, we must discuss and achieve a conclusion on which personal information will be necessary to collect and which information will be considered as unnecessary to obtain. One action that could possibly be taken to help gain the trust of consumers would be to implement an effective privacy policy which would benefit our system as it will reduce the level of scepticism within our users and users will more likely sign up without fear of their privacy being exposed. By implementing this policy, we will be able to display to our users on how we collect their information and how we will manage their information on a daily basis (Angus, 2014).

On the other hand, another form of action that could be taken would be to use a range of security validations within our system to ensure to our users, high level security techniques will be implemented to prevent any unauthorised users with malicious intent to access their information. Since this system will be created in PHP we can put in place different types of validation methods to improve the security of our system such as hashing which is a technique to storing passwords securely whilst making it impossible for a human to read it (Greenberg, 2016). Failure to implement any of these methods will lead to a risk of a user’s personal data possibly being taken by potential hackers which will prevent our consumers from ever placing their trust and faith on our system, this links back to the data protection legal issue which was mentioned earlier on.

Professional Dimensions

Regarding the professional dimensions, the compatibility aspects of the web system will be important as when the system is eventually finalised, it will be crucial for the system to operate on different versions of operating systems, web browsers e.g. Windows, Linux, Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari etc. by making this system compatible with different types of browsers and operating systems we will able to incorporate all users who will have different types of hardware, software, browser versions etc. By doing this it will reduce the chances of a user of not being able to access our site regardless of the fact they may have updated or outdated technology. If we don’t make the system compatible enough then there is a huge chance that we will risk alienating the majority of our audience which as a result, will attract less users towards the website (Ukessays, 2016).

Furthermore, another professional aspect that will be crucial is the consistency of our CSS (Cascading style sheets) implementation, it will be necessary to have a specific style that will be applied consistently through different webpages e.g. blue background with black font. Using a consistent style will make the website appear highly professional to visitors of the site, it will also help to make users become familiar with the website as they will look at certain colours/themes and will instantly recognise, and link these details towards our system. The consequences of not delivering a consistent style will make the overall appearance of the system appear unprofessional and incoherent with the rest of the design as if one webpage had a certain set of colours e.g. red and black background. And another webpage had a different set e.g. yellow background. Not only will this look poorly organised but will also confuse the user and will be less likely to visit the site more than once (Wake, 2016).

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