The Jackpoint project

Who has never needed help for something, and had no idea where to look for it? Who has never been through his entire list of contacts, looking for someone able to fix a computer on short notice, lend a sewing machine, or who knows where to find a locksmith at 11 PM on a Sunday? We have all had to deal with a friend’s friend who knows a guy who could help us, and the stress that goes with such situations.

Jackpoint is a community website project that focuses on mutual aid and putting people in contact, in order to make these situations all the more easier. Te idea was born of two friends, who realised they each had very wide and heteroclite networks, and often asked each other for help. Jackpoint would be able to put people in contact directly via a website. By getting rid of middlemen, all that is left the people’s skills and knowledge, accessible to all. More than this, one of Jackpoint’s ambitions would be to get different communities that don’t often communicate (such as Goths, geeks and so on) together, around themes and discussions they all care for.  
Jackpoint is inspired by projects such as Metafilter, Stackoverflow or Parano.be.

How does it work?

Jackpoint will be accessible by invitation only. Invited members will fill in their profile with their skills, spoken languages and any special equipment they would possess (this information will be, by default, private, and it will be their choice to show it publicly or not), and will then be able to interact with others.   
Users will be able to visualise how people on the site are connected to each other through a “handshake” system. A direct connection will be one handshake away. His or her connections will be two handshakes away, and so on.

***Asking for a hand***

When a member needs some help, he will need to post a message, tagging in it the skill or skills required to help him out. All the users who have the required skills will receive a note informing them that someone needs them on the site, and be able to answer easily. Users will then vote for the most accurate answer.

After helping someone out, if the helper is not in need of any of the skills the person he has helped possesses, he will be able to receive a “help token” instead, that he will be able to use later, or transfer to another user.

Messages can be posted anonymously, for example in the event of organising a party for one of the registered members.

A “karma” system will reward the most helpful members of the site.

Group purchases

A part of the site will be dedicated to group purchases. Members will be able to get together to buy items. For example, if a promotion offers 100m of fabric for €100, which is a lot of money to take out at once. The person interested in buying can ask other users if anyone would like to split the costs and share the fabric.

Announcements

In another part of the website, users will be able to post classified ads to buy and sell things and job offers.

Text Wall

What can one do if, on a Sunday at 11 PM, one breaks his key in the lock whilst coming home? Not everyone can access the Internet constantly, or have enough phone credit to call for information. Jackpoint may be the answer:  
The server will have a dedicated phone number, to which users can send a text message in case of emergency. It will appear on the website on a special page, and online members will be able to answer the cry for help. These answers will be sent back to the mobile phone that first sent the message.

Places and events

With Jackpoint, it will also be possible to share information about places to go, or events under way.

Through a tagging system, members will have the possibility of entering places in the Jackpoint database and give feedback. For example, where to find a pharmacy open at night, or which shop to go to for specific products. It will also come in handy to warn people about places to avoid.

Jackpoint also gives user the possibility of organising events, or tagging conventions, fairs or any other event people could be interested in, without knowing where to look.

Groups, workshops and tutorials

One of the site’s goal is gathering together the users’ knowledge, and sharing it with others. People will have the possibility of creating groups to discuss on a theme they enjoy, or a project that needs a variety of skills to see the day. This will make it easier to have different points of view on one subject.

Users will be able to post tutorials online to share their passions with other Jackpoint users, and even organise workshops, to show what they like in real life, with the help of equipment and demonstrations. They will also have the possibility of posting news articles on subjects they really enjoy.

Mechanics

Jackpoint will be based on a tagging system in each message. Tags will refer to skills, places or themes the users discuss, in order to index everything easily.

Although Jackpoint will be a private website, questions and answers will be accessible from Google. Guests will only be able to see the text, though, and have no information on who wrote what.

Users will also be able to download a part of the database on their computer so it can be accessed even offline. In case of server breakdown, this saved data could come in very useful to get the website working again.

The webmaster is also thinking about creating a Jackpoint mobile application, in order to make it accessible from virtually anywhere.

Jackpoint is a non profit, free of rights project. It will be an open source website with a downloadable database. Anyone will be able to use the code to create their own Jackpoint network. If something happens to the webmaster, the downloaded database will act as a security, so the website can run without him. Members can rest assured, their personal messages will keep safe even if someone exports the data, as they will be encrypted using their password as key.

Interface

The website will have a steampunk theme, as a reference to the origins of the name Jackpoint. In the game Shadowrun, the meeting place for hackers and also social hub for exchanging information bears this name. It also refers to the saying “jack of all trades, master of none”, an English expression to describe people who are good at many thing but experts in none. The image is characteristic of the spirit of the website.

Upon logging in, members will be notified of messages that deal with their skills and people who need their help. A banner will give, on every page of Jackpoint, useful little tips such as “always keep an old mobile phone in your car. In case of an accident, it has a lot less chances of breaking than a smartphone.”

Progress:

So far, the core of the encoding has been done and the webmaster hopes to be able to launch Jackpoint before July, with a beta version of the site available, hopefully, at the end of March. It is a very heavy project to handle alone, and any help would be more than welcome!

The first thing to be finished will be:

* The member registering form and list of skills
* The “Ask for a hand” page
* The places and event tagging
* The Text Wall