Product Management Case Study: Local Online Community Platform

Demonstrating strategic pivoting and user-driven product development

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Executive Summary

- **Had an idea about a local-online community platform similar to discord, developed hypothesis, did research and validation**
- **Learned that discovery is lacking when it comes to local discord community servers**
- **Developed strategy to use discovery gap as a wedge for community platform**
- **Built and launched basic discord discovery platform, and analyzed results using various metrics**

Key Result: Launched discord discovery platform, validated initial product-market fit signals in the idea

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1. Original Problem Hypothesis

Initial Problem Statement

Original Idea: An online community platform similar to discord, but built specifically for local community.

- Problem: Dissatisfaction with social life; lacking in-person community and friends
- Hypotheses:
  - There are people who feel more comfortable interacting with people in an online environment, but also want more in-person friends and community
  - There are people who enjoy using online platforms to communicate and play games on who want more friends to play games with and hang out in-person
- Opportunity: If these demographics are underserved there is potential in creating a platform to facilitate online communities based on location, bridging the gap between online and in-person interaction

Proposed Solution

Initial Approach: Originally conceived a Discord-like platform optimized for local communities, with the belief that existing platforms weren't tailored for location-based interaction, IRL meetups, and creating an environment where the participants can easily make new friends

- Features: Community discovery, meetup planning, voice communication, text channels
- Main Differentiator: Discovery tailored for finding communities near you that match your criteria
- Customer segments: College graduates, discord users/gamers, hobbyists (D&D players, hikers, etc.)

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2. Research Process & Discovery

Research Methodology

How I Investigated the Problem:

- Research Methods:
    - Viewing Reddit posts
    - Posting on Reddit
    - Messaging Reddit users
    - Viewing discord servers
    - Messaging Discord users
    - Interviewing friends
    - Surveys
- Spoke to 20+ people over DM's over Reddit and Discord, spoke to 2 people

Key Research Activities

User Interviews:

- Conducted: Interviews with wide range of customer segments:
    - Non-location based Discord users
    - Location based Discord users
    - Recent college graduates
    - Bumble BFF users
- Methods
    - Browse subreddits: r/bayarea, r/lonely, r/LifeAfterSchool, r/discordapp
    - Search for terms such as "discord", "friends", within subreddits
    - Read through posts and message those of interest
    - Join relevant discord servers

Market Research:

- Search Volume Analysis: Found ~25k monthly searches for local online community
- Competitive Research: Identified current alternatives:
  - Discord
  - Facebook Groups
  - Meetup
  - Geneva
- Identified key features, audience, and gaps in current alternatives
  - Discord: Weak location based discovery
  - Facebook groups: Convoluted by other posts and primarily used by older audience, outdated interface
  - Meetup: Purely used for coordinating meetups, cannot be used as on online hub
  - Geneva: Very small, not many people know about it, communities are private and can be hard to get into

Behavioral Observation:

- Browsed reddit posts, discord forum posts, and who was introducing themselves on discord servers

Critical Insights Discovered

What the Research Actually Revealed:

Finding #1: Interest in but no easy way to find local niche interest based groups

- Evidence:
  - Posts on SF Bay Area discord asking things like "where can I find bay area trans discord" or "where can I find bay area hardware discord"
  - Reddit threads full of people asking for a specific discord, for example a thread of many people asking for the discord link to a bay area hiking group
  - Expired links to discord servers
  - Interviewee telling me they would be interested in a local CSGO group if they knew where to find it
  - I tried to find communities myself and realized they can be frustrating to find, for example searching online local communities brings up facebook and meetup but not discord servers, and searching for specific discord servers was very hit or miss and would at the very least require digging in reddit or google

Finding #2: Wide range of reasons people go to discord, but some go because they feel more comfortable and find it easier to find those who share interests, and some who want to transition more to in-person, confirming hypothesis

- Evidence:

- ○ Existence and activity of local discord servers such as SF Bay Area
- ○ Interviewees saying that they are more comfortable socializing online, it's easier to find people they share interests with, but that they also want to meet people
- Quotes:
  - ○ "I have some social anxiety that I'm trying to work through but I also love to meet new people"
  - ○ "[Discord] just gives me a way to feel someone out before I talk to them I guess"
  - ○ "I do wish more in person interactions and leaving online behind or not be as active"
  - ○ "i [tried to shift from online to in person] but still isn't as smoothly as online feels and honestly irl its kind of hard to find ppl w the same interests like gaming i feel like online u find ppl w same interests easier than irl thats why u can bond quicker"

The Pivot Moment: I realized that people do value online communities for the reason I thought they would, but may already be satisfied with what is already available just on discord. However, the biggest gap that I noticed discord did not provide was the ability to easily find such communities. I realized I could pursue discovery, and even use it as a wedge if I did want to create my own platform.

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3. Strategic Decision: Problem Prioritization

Problem Comparison Framework

Original Problem vs. Discovered Problem:

Factor	Original Problem (Platform Quality)	Discovered Problem (Discovery)
Market Size	High	High
User Pain Level	Low	Medium/High
Solution Complexity	High	Low/Medium
Time to Validate	High	Low

Strategic Rationale

The "Wedge" Strategy Decision:

- Reasoning: Discovery seemed like a bigger issue, would be easier to solve and validate, and was something anyone looking for a community would want meaning the market was big
- Transition: I could build a discovery platform alongside performing more research, trying to identify pain points with existing platforms other than discovery, and could later use discovery platform as a wedge for my own specialized platform, or make the discovery the entire platform
- Risk mitigated: Time risk of building a platform that no one wants

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4. Revised Product Strategy

New Product Approach

Discovery-First Strategy:

Phase 1: Discovery Platform

- Core features (MVP):
    - A curated Directory of Bay Area Discord servers and Facebook groups
    - Each server given a brief description, and relevant information including size and activity level
    - Organization of directory to make it easy to navigate
    - Ability to submit community to be on the directory
- Success metrics: Conversion rate, traffic volume

Phase 2: Platform Transition

- How discovery insights will inform platform features
    - Search query analysis can identify categories and unmet needs
    - Behavior analytics will reveal which community types have highest engagement/join rates
    - Common user questions during discovery become automated onboarding flows
    - Successful vs failed communities in discovery inform platform moderation/engagement tools
- Migration strategy from discovery to full platform
    - Launch "premium" communities native to discovery platform with enhanced features (ie analytics)
- Competitive advantages this approach creates

- ○ Data advantage
- ○ User acquisition flywheel
- ○ Network effects

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5. Implementation & Results

MVP Development & Launch

What I Built:

- Simple discovery platform for Bay Area discord servers
- Key features:
  - ○ Servers divided into categories based on size and activity
  - ○ Search
  - ○ Server tags
  - ○ Feedback and server submission
- Launch timeline: I collected the servers over the period of my research, and created the platform in a single day using lovable

Results & Validation

Usage Metrics (first week):

- Total visitors: 179
- Server clicks/joins: 40
- Server submissions: 11

User Behavior Insights:

- Most popular servers: Neurodiverse Universe, r/Berkley, NorCal Nerds
- Biggest cities by users: San Jose, San Francisco

Qualitative Feedback:

- People engaged with my post on San Francisco Bay Area discord channel
- Received positive feedback, and people thanking me

Validation Outcomes

What I Learned:

- There are many server members/creators who want their servers to be discovered
- Confirmed user demand for discovery solution

Next Steps:

While there was positive feedback and early product-market fit signals, there was not enough to validate that there would be enough demand for a discovery platform for it to be a sustainable product. Next steps would be to identify why I got the results I did, and use what I learned to decide where to go from here, which could include a complete pivot, a new marketing strategy, or adding new features. In order to better understand the results I would want to interview users themselves.

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6. Skills Demonstrated & Learnings

Skills Demonstrated

- User research and interview techniques (inspired by the mom test)
- Data-driven decision making and pivoting
- MVP development and rapid prototyping
- Market analysis
- Product strategy

Key Learnings

What This Process Taught Me:

1. Product lifecycle from conception to launch
2. How to use data to inform decisions
3. How to search for and identify gaps in a market through user research

What I'd Do Differently:

- Now that I have a greater understanding and familiarity with the process, I would provide myself greater structure
    - Set stricter deadlines for myself ("do X by the end of the week" instead of "do X sometime in the next week or so")
    - Set clearer goals (i.e. "interview 15 people" instead of "interview people"
- Document my process in a more organized manner
    - Store interviews in documents
    - Track key decisions and reasonings

- Set clear goals with metrics before making decisions (i.e. instead of "learn more about users through analytics" -> "understand which servers users are interested so you can better decide who your target audience is")
- Nothing because this is how you learn 🙂(half-joking)

Appendix: Supporting Materials

Research Artifacts

- [Discord Discovery Survey](#)
- [Community Platform Survey](#)
- [Example Interview](#)

[Product](#)