

Design Thinking – Innovation Idea Summary

Who are you?

My name is Harish Ravi Shankar, and I am a 2nd year graduate computer science student at the University of Florida. I have close to 5 years of work experience working in IT, primarily as a database administrator. My business experience comes from being involved with the pre-sales team of Tata consultancy services, the world's largest consulting firm. As a database administrator for 3 Fortune 500 clients, I have managed vital cogs of their production systems, automating many tasks to save delivery time and optimize existing resources like their servers and systems. As part of my graduate degree, I have done projects in several diverse areas of computer science like Distributed systems, Machine learning, Compiler design and Bioinformatics. I currently serve as an application analyst at University of Florida's IT wing (Enterprise systems), where I manage data related to student finance and sponsored research.

Unmet need/Problem statement

As an employee in 2 leading consulting firms, I often did 85% of my work by serving clients remotely. I would get a clear description of what was expected, and with the right resources, I could deliver/support within the provided deadline. I realized though this model existed for multinational companies that could afford consulting services, it could be scaled down to offering freelance services to small scale projects for people seeking those with highly specific expertise. My background in computer science, coupled with my knowledge of computer science in building a website and interpersonal skills will help me create this service platform, akin to Uber or AirBnB business model.

End Product and Underlying Technology

The product will be an on-demand P2P (peer to peer) online platform, in the form of a website, (**Remotlee.com**) where people could post about work they needed done, and find appropriate talent (who could also advertise their skillsets) to solve their problem. **The product itself is just the website, acting as the middle-man between client and freelancer, without providing any consulting services of its own.** It could also serve as an aggregator of freelancers. People can post any work they need done like designing an app, to someone who can review their resume, or tutor them on a subject. The web-based platform will aid in recommending potential freelancers for a posting based on required skillsets, help in negotiating payment between both parties, act as a communication medium and provide the client with a project status tracking platform, and potentially resolve any disputes. The whole website can be designed in any of today's available opensource web technologies. The platform can also be available as a Mobile app.

Target Market

The target audience of this service platform is people are seeking professional help to complete small individual projects at affordable rates. This can also be used by small scale companies looking for freelancers to work on their projects for a small amount of time. Professional services often charge unreasonable rates, and are unaffordable to those seeking work for tight budgets. This platform will allow potential purchasers of services, to search according to their budget, and required level of expertise and based on ranking of freelancers, which will increase upon every successful completion of a client project, and client rating feedback.

Competition and Competition Advantage

While there exists freelance aggregators like **Fiverr** or **Upwork**, much of the freelance workforce available on this website is found to be unreliable and improperly vetted. One can find many customer support issues, where clients complain of unfinished work, unresponsive freelancers and generally poor experiences. The service differentiator is that my platform will offer is a proper vetting and background verification of freelancers who are registered on the website, keeping them tightly curated and exclusive, and removing any non-performers based on consistent complaints, those who do not use the platform regularly. The platform is also a lot more accessible than mediums like **HourlyNerd**, that offer these services only to enterprise level clients. Another salient feature is the guiding recommendation engine, that takes clients to star performers of respective domains. The platform will also charge a lesser commission than other websites offering such aggregated services and a complete refund to source, instead of just re-usable credit unlike other competitors do.

Funding and Operations

The website can itself be built by a team dedicated software engineers. Revenue required will be domain registration, servers required to run the backend operations of the website. A core business development and marketing team, can aid with the publicity of the platform on social media and get sponsored search engine results, leading to traffic and website hits. Venture capitalists can be approached for the initial round of funding, and then based on more daily active users and transactions on the website, commission revenue can be generated to sustain operations. As operations expand, a customer support system can be put in place to handle all user requests. Since the product is an online platform, ensuring publicity is the major chunk of distribution detail.

Go to Market Strategy

The market for this online platform is potentially all users of the world-wide-web. Thus, the scope of the product and the large user base, can ensure enough profits are steady. By charging a small commission at both ends, for both purchaser and seller of skills, the profits are twice fold. There is a huge demand market for on-demand, premise services and platforms that provide this facility. Aggregation services are the way to go for the future, and represent a great ever-expanding market.

Stakeholders and Partners

Stakeholders can see a minimal investment and maximum reward in this venture. The initial setup costs are very negligible, as there is no mass production or distribution involved, just setting up of a website and a Mobile app. Approvals required are to setup a domain and become a registered LLC. Once the site reaches maturity, there will be a significant return on investment, and become known as the hub of all freelancers across the world, seeking to sell their services to potential buyers. Being part of such disruptive innovation is a matter of pride for all parties involved in the growth of this platform.