Spoiled Tomatillos Alpha

Lisa Oakley, John Martin, Benjamin Campbell, Peter Battinelli, Arianna Tang
1/26/2018

Overview of the Problem

The client is an external entity to our organization. They are contracting with our firm to develop a product to bridge the gap between media consumption and social interactions in the online sphere. The client is a startup who came to us to make a "Phase 1 prototype" of this product and convey to potential buyers that this product is feasible, works correctly, and has interest from a user base.

This organization consists of a CEO, Michael Weintraub, and a team of co-founders/CTOs in the form of other professors and teaching assistants. They are the core team of a startup which is motivated by the possibility of acquisition in FY19. They have determined that there is a market and a need for this sort of product, and feel that this is a feasible goal.

The interest in the movie-recommendation with social media platform stems from the idea that there is a market for the marriage of media consumption and media sharing. The eventual goal is to create a one-stop-shop for not only watching movies, but forming and filtering social circles based on shared interests in various media. After determining that there are two separate spheres that have yet to be bridged by any large competitor, they hope to build a platform where individuals can connect and bond over shared interests. Eventually they hope to go as far as to create an experience of virtual camaraderie when users consume and discuss opinions on different forms of media. They are starting with movies but hope to eventually expand into other domains such as books and music.

For this "Phase 1 prototype," the goal is not to achieve all these initiatives, but to show that, for a concise user group, sharing and connecting over movie preference is desired and feasible. To achieve this, there is an expectation that what we present will be a Minimum Viable Product (MVP). This product will contain only the core functionality that is necessary to convey the feasibility and potential of the product. This product should be well-built for expansion and should function in a clean and appealing manner. It should also be secure and compelling for new users and potential acquisition targets.

The development of this MVP is important to the client because they hope to be acquired and feel that this proof of concept will be a first step toward that goal.

Background

The product is going to be designed from the ground up. The client has a new organization and there are no legacy products we will be required to interface with. This is the client's initial domain. The company has previously deployed a prototype website which is being used to gauge interest in our firm's final product. Interest was determined from the number of web hits the site generated. The maintainers of the original prototype are the founding members. The product may interface with reliable external datasets in order to populate the movie database. These external datasets are to be read from only.

The new system is designed with monetization in mind. The monetization plan revolves around the social recommendation algorithms which are to be implemented. These social recommendation algorithms may eventually be used to generate items such as affiliate links on movie tickets, links for monetization from platforms such as iTunes, Amazon Prime Video, etc. The client has expressed interest in extending the platform to cover other media including music and books. Expansion to these other forms of media is seen by the client as a public service. The system is going to be made specifically for the one client so there are no plans to release this software for general availability.

The Spoiled Tomatillos Board is also considering the possibilities of selling user data. The board yet has not come up with a strong strategy for this endeavor. The board has ethical and personal privacy concerns and would like to balance transparent business practices with lucrative profit models. The Spoiled Tomatillos Board is to be considered as the initial set of operators of the platform. The platform will then have a dedicated set of system administrators appointed by the Spoiled Tomatillos Board to oversee final operations.

Scope

After initial interaction with the client through the form of a project overview and a short interview section, we have determined that there are a few basic, defined requirements:

- Users are able to sign up for and access accounts
- Users have the ability to search movies and glean basic information about them
- Users can rate and review movies which will lead to recommendations
- Users can identify and connect with friends
- Users can recommend movies to friends
- Users can be grouped based on connections and interests
- There is a notion of Admin users who have more capabilities than end users
- The recommendations come from algorithms that can be shown to work

This project scope comes with some known risks and difficulties. The foremost consideration is that we have fixed time period to complete the work. It has been shown that we cannot reasonably have fixed scope if we want to make a quality product. To design a well-tested system which is designed to grow smoothly, we will have to be strict with our definition of what the highest priority, core features of the product should be. As the project comes to fruition, it is the team's desire to work with our clients through demo's and further interviews to mitigate this potential issue. It is our firm's desire to limit scope creep as much as possible to have a successful product.

Though the client has performed a cursory investigation into the feasibility and interest for this product, the client is a new startup with little experience in this field. They have not created such a product before and there is a lot of ambiguity in the specific expectations of this product. Additionally, our firm is new and has not completed such a project together and has no previous experience designing this sort of system. This leads to a lot of unknowns both technically and organizationally. Therefore, we see amplified risk because we have few known factors in planning and development.

We further see difficulty in resource limitation. We are a team of 5 performing the roles of Product Management, UI/UX Design, and Development. Because no member of this firm is employed full-time, this means there is a scarcity of productivity hours, and an additionally short length of time for the full project. This means that there is risk related to how much of the scope can be feasibly accomplished.

Our team has made a few assumptions. One is that the core functionality of the product lies in the ability to rate movies, the ability to connect with others, and a recommendation algorithm that uses these two factors to suggest movies to users. We assume that all other features and functionality can be categorized as "nice-to-haves," but are not necessary to the development of an Alpha-level product. This means that expansion of core scope will be met with a conversation about realistic expectations and may result in the loss of other core features.

Another assumption we have made is that the client will raise flags early if it appears we are moving in the wrong direction or making incorrect assumptions. We plan to check in regularly about the status of the project, and the client should be aware that late changes can lead to increased risk in our ability to meet all the core needs.