

File Over Ocean Protocol – Prototype Report

Project Description

File over Ocean Protocol is an exploration of an unconventional message transmission medium, the message in a bottle, with a digital twist. Participants upload messages, and on a send date the messages are loaded into a physical bottle with a USB key inside and sent out into the sea. While the full archive of the messages sent, a metadata archive of the senders, imagined “recipients”, and short descriptions are made public.

Project Stage:

Presently, the prototype represents a barebones presentation of the core concept. It contains:

- A simple home page, with a description of the project and the aforementioned metadata “index” being presented to the user as examples of what “other people” have sent (currently hardcoded in)
- A form which accepts text and file entry, although it immediately discards this information
- A first go at a user interface/design scheme

It is my assessment that while the core concept is sound, *something* further may be required to make the project more compelling. There are a few different angles that this could take, including a collection of stories sent to fictional people.

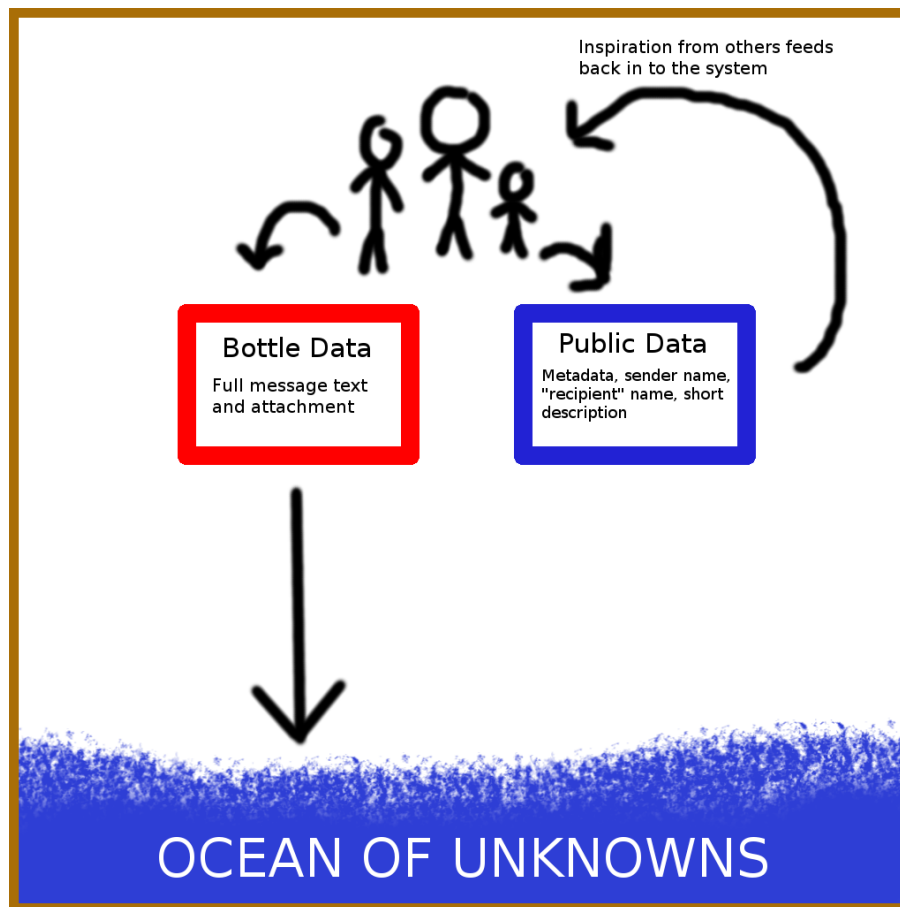
Project Components:

The first thing someone coming onto the project sees is the home page. I want it to feel familiar in function to other websites, although the text should strongly provoke an interest in writing a message above all else, when the project is in Phase 1: Sending. After the message is sent, the page will shift focus to providing info about the project as it happened and as an entry way into the metadata index. The page will also give examples of messages sent by people on the front page itself, giving people an idea of what other people have sent right away.

The main submission form is presently the core of the project. Currently it's fairly straight forward, and I plan to keep it that way, since I want to make the writing experience fairly unintrusive to the user. However, I'm looking into options for making it more interesting before the writing actually starts as well as after. It is the core of the

project, the creation of the message. Before the form itself it also currently has instructions, telling the participant to fill in the forms and adding a bit of clarification (your “name” need not be the name you use in the real world, and a “recipient” can be just about anything). It also instructs the user to take it as an open writing prompt, as the writings should be spur-of-the moment writing.

The metadata index displays what other people have seen, and a link will be provided to this from the front page. Currently it is not in the prototype although examples exist on the front page of faux submissions. It gives people an idea of what other people have sent both before and after the bottle has been sent.



Data Map:

Users will send Messages, which consist of:

BOTTLE DATA:

The main text body (mandatory, plain text, UTF-8 formatted)

Attachment (optional, arbitrary file, 2 MB size limit)

PUBLIC DATA:

Sender name (mandatory, 50 character limit)

Recipient name (mandatory, 50 character limit)

Short Description (potentially replaced/supplemented with Title?) (mandatory, 150 character limit)

The public data will be shown in the public metadata index, and the bottle data will only be sent in the bottle. The bottle will also contain the public data attached with the bottle data. In the bottle, the USB key will have a file structure containing the following:

Messages (folder)

 messageWithAttachment.zip

 text.txt

 image.png

 messageWithoutAttachment.txt

README.txt

The README will contain information about the project, a way to contact myself, and a private, unique key to prove that the bottle was found which may also be submitted via a form on the website once the bottle has been sent.

Component Reflections:

I think the core idea of having an informational front page with a quick submission form is a good one. However, the execution and design of these could be significantly changed and I hope to do so. A more sophisticated UI and design would go a long way towards making it more appealing. The project is quite minimalist and operates on more of a conceptual angle than a technical one, so quality over quantity in the scenarios where the user can interact with the site will be key. Having an informational page on the site about the project may also be a good addition.

Thematic and Conceptual Reflections:

Since the networking component of the project is in interacting with the metadata given by other users and incorporating that into your own creation, I'm considering adding another component to make this more prominent than it was in the prototype as I felt in the prototype it didn't feature nearly as much as it should and this is a problem. The experience felt isolated. What follows is an idea to make the project much more connected:

The "imagined recipient" entry in the public data could be expanded upon much more. I think this could evolve into a user created cast of personas that the messages are sent to, giving the messages a much stronger thematic link to each other as they're all addressed to members of this fictional cast. To make the cast related to each other, they could all be crewmates on a fictional ship, thematically tied to the message in a bottle of the project.

The way this would be incorporated is that prior to writing the message the participant would be introduced to this ship, and a member of this crew with a name, a background, and some short description of them. After reading about them, if they're satisfied with writing a message to this crew member, they could proceed. Otherwise, they could request the page for another one, or create their own. If they create their own, the crewmate is added to the roster for other users to be introduced to. The index of messages would be linked to the roster of crewmates, with it turning into a list of the crew along with the messages sent to them.

The writing for the crew in their descriptions, name, and background would also be public, unlike the letters to the crew, giving the participants a chance to share part of their writing with others while preserving the mystery of the letters.

This would leave plenty of room for creativity for the writings, and expand upon it by adding an opportunity to add to this cast for everyone to see and use as a part of their writing prompt.