Team 34

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INFO I-494 Capstone 2018-19

October 2, 2018

Fall 2018

**Team Project Research Report**

Our team decided to create a forum, which help users to find friends in games and communicate with other players. In order to achieve this goal, we need to think about our target people, platform, feasibility, risk and other factors. We are in the progress of making a plan and doing research. Below are the ideas and resources we currently have.

**Business Case**

Since one of the major function our forum is to communicate, people who want to find friends in games would like to use your solution. Also our platform for users to upload their articles and thoughts of games or news, it is also a good platform for people to find people with similar interests.

First, our forum has three kinds of users, guest user, normal user and premium member. Guest users can only read the news but cannot make any comments. Normal users can not only read but also upload their articles. In return for a fee of $12.99 a year, premium members are able to block advertisement, place someone on blacklist, have access to all sections and other privilege. Therefore if people want a better service and experience, they can choose to pay the annual fee. This is how we produce revenue from users. Secondly, our forum would like to have a working relationship with game companies and media companies. If we are able to attract more sponsors to attend our project, there will be more users have interested in realizing the procedure to request for a new account. It will be a virtuous cycle of operating the forum in a long term.

Potential users may think out forum is a welcome place for gamers. In order to attract more potential users, we would like to cooperate with more credible bloggers, YouTube vloggers and other reporters. Also we can have work relationship with game companies and let them have official accounts. Therefore I believe the potential users would like to choose our forum because they think they will get useful information from us. On the other side they may have some concern of our forum because of the strict membership system, annual fee and unfriendly users.

**Platform**

We will be building a web-based forum and implementing various functionalities in the forum. We want to use the web platform because it is the most convenient and the most efficient platform for both the users and us, the developers. The web is the most used and the most common platform for all users. Android and iOS systems are both restricted to users' devices. Meanwhile, the web platform can be accessed through all types of web browsers in different digital devices. For us as the development team, we have experience in using HTML, CSS, Python, and PHP to create websites and using MySQL to build databases. We're looking forward to establish a peaceful and collaborative community for game lovers.

**Competing Technologies**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Our Forum** | **NeoGAF** | **GameFAQs** | **IGN** |
| Register/ Log in | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Read threads (guest user) | √ | √ | Only some of them | √ |
| Create or Reply threads (guest user) | X | X | X | X |
| Read threads (registered user) | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Create threads (registered user) | √ | √ | √ | Only developers and game reviewers |
| Reply threads (registered user) | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Prime | $12.99/annual | X | X | $29.95/annual  $14.95/quarter  $6.95/month |
| Report system | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Latest news | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Game rating | √ | X | √ | √ |
| Categorize gaming platforms | √ | X | √ | √ |
| Each game has its own board | √ | X | √ | √ |
| User personal page | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Showcase | √ | X | X | X |
| Customazie homepage | √ | X | X | X |
| Achievements | √ | √ | X | X |
| Friend system | √ | √ | √ | X |
| Block users or keywords | √ | X | X | X |
| Artwork/ Workshop | √ | X | √ | Only authorized users |

In comparison to other exsisted competing technologies including NeoGAF, GameFAQs, and IGN, our forum is user-centered, user-friendly, and full-functional. Unlike our competitors, we will offer a personal space that is dedicated for users to share their thoughts, game achievements, screenshots, and etc.. Our forum will be more personalized to our users than the other gaming forums. The features and functionalities in our forum will enhance our users' experience by giving them something more than just gaming tips such as the connection with other people. We're aiming to let users show their personalities and make new friends in our forum.

**Features of your solution**

In the Computing Technologies section above, we have compared some of our features with other three common game forums. There are three specific features that make our game forum special than others, which are prime, customize homepage and block users/keywords. From our research, our primary users who is the gamers don’t like people using foul language to attack others, they want the forum feels more like a community and they can have an identity within it.

First, let me introduce our Prime function. The user can sign up to be our member for free, but they can also choose to sponsor us and become prime member. As a prime member, you will not see those advertisements which will disturb you, they can change their name once a month and use gif image as icon. Second, prime user in our game forum can place other user in the blacklist and normal user can report other user to the moderator, it can prevent cyberbully and foul language, in order to build a healthy environment for the users since we seem cyberbully as a very serious issues happening on the internet recently. Thirdly, our users can customize themselves with their homepage and icon, prime members can adjust personal homepage using banner and different anime effects, they can introduce themselves and their interest on the homepage. We found out that it can individualism users and helps user to dedicate into the forum, and it helps people to find someone with the same interest and make more friends.

With those features we listed above, I think the users will be attracted to use our forums. In the future, we can make more improvements and special features for user to enjoy our forum.

**Fesibility**

There is brunch of gaming forums already existed on the internet. There are common gaming forums which can be a good example and model for us to learn, and they are both popular for gamers. NeoGAF, which launched in 2004 and focus on gaming news and reviews, it’s also the one of the biggest gaming forums on the Web with over 700,000 threads and 95 million posts. (makeuseof) Another good example will be GameFAQs that launched in 1995, it is the oldest gaming forum where you can discuss games in their specific boards. The third one is IGN Boards, it is a forum which included multi-sections of interest like games, anime, comic …etc. I believe we can get benefits from these forums and develop the project, learning from their features won’t be difficult, but we think it’s difficult to solve the issues in their forums, because some of the common issues are involved between the users themselves.

Building a website forum, we decide to use html as a base and build a Mysql database to save all the data in the website. Since IU provide us the server for our website and the database, it shouldn’t be any cost for them. About the design and development part, we have to use photoshop and other design software, we can install most of them for free with our IU account. These technologies and servers don’t require any licenses. In total, it is a low-cost project but require complex and large amount of works.

In my vision, the ERD diagram in the database is large, since there is large amount of data will be saved into the database, all the user’s data, their post, commands…etc. will save into the database. Therefore, after the website is launched there will have new data saved into the database every minute. In I211, we learn how to save the users’ input into the database, like post/edit/delete posts, create boards, edit their profile…etc. I will apply this function into the website to help the database uploaded automatically, except some unexpected situation, all the actions users have done will be relatively uploaded into the database.

**Risk**

There are three main potential issues that may arise after the launch of our game forum. The first potential problem is that some users who use the forum may have toxic behaviors that damage the network environment. Since our forum is open to users of all ages and countries, cultural and ideological differences can lead to inevitable quarrels. These comments and replies are likely to include inappropriate speech that contains discrimination against the race, gender or belief. We hope that everyone can share their thoughts and find new friends, so obviously, we don’t want it to become negative because of bad online behaviors. Secondly, Users’ account security is very important. Each user has a homepage with personal information and articles. The issue is that user account may be stolen by hackers. These hackers are likely to tamper with user data. As developers, contents that users have edited and published need to be protected. The last issue is the unauthorized repost of forum users’ articles. An important part of the forum is to share gaming experiences and useful strategies. The problem of user’s article being stolen may undermine trust between users and us. The above three ethical issues are likely to damage the reputation of the forum and lead to a huge loss of users.

We will make some regulations on online speech and try to monitor the content without restricting the freedom of speech. Also, we will store users’ confidential data and try to keep them safe. Just as I mentioned above, unpredictable account theft is unavoidable, so the only thing we can do is to protect data integrity as much as possible. Last but not least, we will protect all the user’s work including comments, artworks and articles. If we find illegal reposting, we will negotiate with them immediately to protect copyrights. Of course, if possible, legal measures will also be taken.

**Team composition**

In order to develop this game forum, we believe that we need to master several web development technologies. For Front-End development, mastering HTML is the most basic requirement. Also, a good web page layout can make a good impression on the user. So it is necessary to be proficient in using DIV+CSS. Learning JavaScript is to add special effects to a web page. We hope that this forum can be more designable. Special effects like adding text scrolling and auto-switch images can increase the diversity and complexity of our forum. The database is used to store user information that includes login data and personal information. For Back-End, we currently have some basic knowledge of PHP and Python. These two techniques can help us extract some specific data from our database. So far, we have a basic understanding of most web development technologies. Obviously, although we have the skill sets that match with the process of developing the website, basic knowledge is not enough, we need to master some of those.

We are going to buy some intermediate or advanced textbooks. Some of the knowledge points mentioned in the book are likely to be used in future development. Watching tutorial videos is also a good way to study web development technologies. It is also helpful to check the comments down below because some of the viewers will come up with questions that haven’t been mentioned in the video. Studying websites that similar to ours is also a good training method. Analyze strengths and weaknesses while browsing competitors’ forums. We can take advantage and apply them to our website, avoid those weaknesses we find while developing our own forum at the same time.

In addition to the technologies that we already know, we also need to use scripting languages like Java and image editing software like Adobe Photoshop which we have no idea how to use for now. We will also use the above training methods to learn new knowledge.

**Conclusion**

As all the analysis above, our team is going to make a forum for users to find friends in game. Comparing to other forum, ours can provide a homepage for users and has a convenient rating system. In order to achieve this goal, we need technology to support us. Besides html, we also have to learn more about ERD diagram, CSS, PHP Adobe Photoshop and other technologies. It is important to attract more users to join in our forum with good service and experience. To operating a website, revenue is necessary. Developing work relationship is a good way to make our forum more credible. There are some risks we need to consider. For example we have to protect the security of user information. We will try our best to provide a healthy and comfortable convenient for users to communicate. Currently we are learning technologies and do researches to keep us on a right track.

References

<https://www.neogaf.com/>

<https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/>

<https://www.ign.com/>