

Backstep

www.back-step.com

It was a red-eye flight. As my cab pulled up to the airport I wearily stepped out, thanked the driver, and dragged myself to the check-in counter. How was the woman behind the counter so cheerful at 5:30AM? No one should be so happy at that ungodly hour. She handed me my ticket and I thanked her with an incomprehensible mumble while trudging away towards the security line. And then it hit me. I left my backpack holding my expensive computer and headphones in the cab. Even as I ran outside I knew it was too late. The driver was gone, along with my Macbook.

The next two days were miserable. I spent my time alternating between calling every cab company in Las Vegas (where I was living at the time) and mentally kicking myself for being so absent minded as to leave my single most important possession in the back seat of a cab. But amid it all, I couldn't help but wonder why there wasn't an easier way. Why did I have to call every cab company in Las Vegas? Why wasn't there a centralized site where I could go and see if my item had been reported? Curiosity gave way to action and Backstep was born.

The slogan of Backstep reflects the blunt purpose which inspired it's creation: Find lost stuff. Its brevity masks the more complex system which is required for implementation of the idea. In order to enable users find their lost items, we must - of course - have those lost items listed. For this to occur, one of two things must happen. Either the person who found the item must submit it on back-step.com or the

organization which manages the physical location where the item was lost must file the item with Backstep. Perhaps an example would illustrate this better.

Say Bob leaves his jacket in Yankee Stadium and goes onto back-step.com to file a lost item report. Sally finds Bob's item. At this point, Sally has two choices (not counting stealing the jacket). She can try and find the person who lost the item herself or she can report the item as lost and hand it over to the appropriate authority. In either case, our system relies on the item being filed on back-step.com. So in our example, we need either Sally or Yankee Stadium to file the item as lost on back-step.com. To do this we need two things:

1. Visibility in search engine results. If we're the top result, it's far more likely that Sally files the item through us.
2. Relationships with organizations like the Yankees. If we're able to form and then leverage these relationships, it puts us in a far better position.

But how do you make money with a product like Backstep? The answer comes from the power of information. Going back to our example, if we know that Bob has lost a coat in Yankee Stadium, we immediately have two valuable pieces of data. We know that Bob has lost a coat, and thus might soon be in the market for a new coat, and we know where Bob lost his coat which means we know the general area where Bob is. This information could be extremely useful to coat sellers for the purposes of ultra-targeted ads. Additionally, over time trends regarding where people are losing items and what types of items they're losing will begin to emerge. This data would be invaluable to sellers as a guide for ad placement. If you know where people are losing a lot of coats,

it becomes apparent that an ad for discounted coats might be well suited for that location.

The beauty of Backstep is that it is relevant to every human on Earth and thus marketable to every person on Earth. I'm not just trying to build another Facebook or Twitter, Backstep is trying to solve a real problem that most everyone has at some point faced. Just as Amazon is synonymous with online shopping, the goal is for Backstep to be synonymous with lost and found.