Omni Executive Summary

Team Omni – North America

Omni is a language learning system that uses social networking to encourage student collaboration. One of the greatest obstacles for language students is moving from the classroom to native speaking; Omni seeks to overcome these difficulties by providing students with the tools and connections they need to succeed. Using social networking to accomplish this provides a medium that students are already comfortable with and allows them to use it for learning languages.

Omni allows its users to meet and communicate with each other in the languages that they are learning. By telling the network about a user’s interests and knowledge, it is able to match that user with other people they are likely to enjoy talking to and learning with. Integrated into Omni are a set of features designed to help language learners of varying skill levels share information. When students encounter difficulties they can work past them by cooperating with both standard language tools and by requesting help from other users. When a user is unable to write or read a message in a desired language, they may request that another user in the network translate it for them. A ranking system is also part of the network so that those users who go out of their way to help others are recognized and rewarded for their efforts.

One of the key architectural aspects of Omni is that all functionality is offered as an XML web service. By allowing this open access to Omni, other networks and services can mutually use the power of the network to allow their users to communicate across language barriers. An example of this is that both a user of a college course management system and a user of an instant messaging service may both be interested in how to speak about a topic such as air travel in a language other than their own. By accessing Omni’s language services, both of these users could benefit from the same set of accumulated knowledge and ability in order to retrieve the answers they need.

Social networks are near universally offered as a free service, so the revenue necessary to maintain and develop Omni will come from selling advertising space on the web site. This model has proven successful in many other social networks. Advertisers usually pay simply to have their ads displayed prominently on pages throughout the site, but the structure of Omni provides additional unique opportunities that both encourage user participation in the network and benefit the advertisers that invest in Omni. Advertisers would have the opportunity to give items such as their products, branded apparel, or items to the social network to be distributed to users who are especially dedicated to helping other users. This provides additional incentive for users to help out others and provides advertisers with more exposure than they would get with simply an image on a web site.

Learning foreign languages is a vital part of education now and will become increasingly important as technology makes the world seem smaller and smaller. Omni seeks to be the language neutral link between people across the planet.