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Process for design of Social Networking Sites

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ABSTRACT: From a business perspective, social network platforms now become an enormous source of opportunities and revenue for both large corporations and small businesses. It can help organizations build a community around their products/services, raise brand awareness and generate sales leads. In other words, in this digitally evolved era, a social network platform is a great social marketing tool.

KEYWORDS: Media sharing websites, Business and professional sites, Informational sites, Educational websites, Hobby networks, Scientific & Academic websites, Dating platforms.

I. INTRODUCTION

We are in an era in which people like to connect with each other. According to Hootsuite's The Global State of Digital, average modern internet users have around 8.3 different social media profiles and spend at least 2 hours per day on social media channels. This number lifts to 9.4 accounts and 3 hours for people aged 16.24.

II. RELATED WORK

1) 1. Planning stage

At the planning stage, you have to define the type of your future social network platform, the target audience, and what will intrigue them to use your platform.

Identify the type

You cannot start building a social network platform without knowing what type of network you will create. Depending on your expertise or the business you want to make a profit from, you can choose one among those 8 popular types below:

- Media sharing websites: Instagram, Youtube, Flickr
- Business and professional sites: LinkedIn, Indeed
- Informational sites: Reddit, Quora
- Educational websites: Coursera, edX
- Hobby networks: Linustechtips (Tech), Bimmerforums (Car)
- Scientific & Academic websites: ResearchGate, Academia.edu
- Social networks Facebook, Twitter
- Dating platforms: Tinder, Bumble

Identifying the right type not only helps you to target the right audience later but also directs you to determine your network's key features and your potential competitors correctly.

Brainstorm ideas & concept

After choosing the suitable network type, your original idea of your social network platform should be elevated into a unique platform concept. While brainstorming various ideas & concepts, you should also keep in mind that your network should be niche and offer unique value to users. The more special the concept is, the higher chance your social network will become popular.

If you don't know where to begin, these questions can be helpful in terms of brainstorming:

- Are there similar social media platforms that have succeeded?
- What unique features will your network offer to the users?
- What value can your network bring to the users?
- How to monetize your site?

Determine the target audience

Your social network platform is designed to fulfill certain needs of certain users. You can't just target everyone. The better you understand your target audience, the higher conversion rates, and ROI for your platform. You can utilize market data, gather demographics, psychographic data, and behavioral habits of potential users to narrow your focus.

2) 2. Choosing networking services technology

Depending on the complexity, the uniqueness of features, and development cost, you can choose from ready to platforms to downloadable software:

Social network platform builders

Social network builders such as [Ning](#), [Spruz](#), [SocialGo](#) is the solution for a simple platform with basic social networking functionalities like registration, user profile, messaging. However, it is not ideal for monetizing because you do not own the code or stored data.

Social media plugins for open-source CMSs

The social media plugins like plugins in WordPress allow you to create a basic social network based on the website you already own. They provide almost all the basic functions for connecting people and require some technical background to install.

Social media software

This solution is the perfect choice for developers or companies who want to create a unique social network platform with a tight budget. Social media software lets you control data and code (but not as full as in the custom development). You will also have more advanced social network features like analytics, monetization tools, SEO, compared to the two above solutions.

Custom-built solutions are for complex projects with exclusive features and a high level of security. It is the most expensive and highest technical requirement among the 4 solutions. Nonetheless, the potential is endless. You can basically create anything you have a vision for and maximize profits from it. Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and many other famous social marketing platforms are all custom-built.

Template solutions like platform builders, plugins for open-source CMSs, and software are cheaper and easier to implement while building a social network platform from scratch requires a large budget and back-end resources. However, the do-it-yourself solution will provide you with a web resource that fully meets your needs and is a better choice for the long term.

3) 3. Deciding on key features and functionality

At this stage, you need to gather up all information you acquire in the planning stage and decide on what features your platform should have to address the need of your target audience while still fitting with your business model. The first step is to shortlist the essential features that should be available in every social network. Even though the types of features may vary depending on the social network platform niche, there are some basic functionalities your platform cannot lack. Consider including those following features:

- Newsfeed
- Messaging
- Media file sharing
- Notifications
- User Profile
- Search
- Invitations
- Registration

And most importantly, do not forget to come up with unique features that differentiate your social network from other websites. Your social media platform's advanced and unique features can serve both to enhance your user experience and to provide additional monetization channels. You also have to consider your budget and timeline since the advanced features will cost you a lot of resources to implement.

4) 4. Coming up with UI/UX design concept

All successful social network platforms have one thing in common: a user-friendly design. You must ensure that your users enjoy their experience and keep coming back. A complicated UI/UX design won't work in this case because it will be too difficult to use for most people. A simple, intuitive and attractive interface is the ultimate goal and it will help you acquire users and encourage them to use your network.

5) 5. Developing software

Once you have the concept, the features, and the design in your hand, you can proceed with developing the full product. This stage is the most time-consuming and money-grubbing phase since it takes from at least a few months (for the simple platform) to years of continuous development (for complex custom networks) to complete a usable network.

Hiring professional developers to program your social network platform is a good option since they will do the hardest job for you in the shortest time possible. All you have to do is keep track of the process and make sure your hired developers team delivers a product that meets all technical requirements, and platform standards, and especially, offers the features you expect.

6) 6. Testing & Launching

Testing is no less of a critical task than the development itself. It should be done both during development and even after that. There are 6 standard testing steps you need to follow: functionality testing, usability testing, interface testing, compatibility testing, performance testing, and security testing. Going through this entire process, you will have a high-quality network that your users will love. If all the testing runs smoothly, your proud product is now ready to be released.

7) 7. Promoting & Measuring performance

Without promotion, no one will know about a newly born social network. Therefore, it is necessary to apply as many marketing activities as possible to acquire more users for your social network platform. You should consider email marketing, SEO practices, paid aids, lead generation, branding, etc. as they are now the most effective social marketing tactics to increase the number of users.

Another important step is evaluating your network performance regularly. Always keep your eyes on some key performance indicators such as customer acquisition cost, user activation statistics, churn rate, user engagement. These metrics reflect your success or in other words, how much money you can earn.

8) 8. Maintaining & Monetizing

Owning an operable social network platform is not enough. You also need to guarantee its smooth and effective function in the future. Like the developing stage, it can be done as an on-demand service. Maintaining the existing product can include but is not limited to these tasks: product updating, bug fixing, additional features adding, scaling, etc.

Although your platform can be free for users, it must bring you financial benefits in some ways. Back to your plan and deploy these tactics that you already planned when deciding to go with the current social network's concept. Some popular monetization strategies include allowing advertising on your platform, affiliate marketing, selling products, services providing (training, coaching), or donations.

III. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

Social network platform is a worthy investment these days but the path toward it will take a lot of time, effort, and resources. We, at Design eloper, couldn't be more excited about the idea of creating a winning social network platform with you.

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