

Make It My Computer

EE15N Group Project

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Alice Muna

Brian Tse

Lin Lin

Thierry Uwilingiyimana

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Abstract

The number of Internet users is increasing around the world, especially in developing countries such as China with over 100,000,000 users¹. However, among the majority of these internet users, only a small percentage own their own personal computers, and even fewer have broadband Internet access in their homes, therefore the majority of these people use public computers at Internet cafes. Our project, www.makeitmycomputer.com, is designed to personalize any public computer by creating a program that changes all the customizable settings of Windows or Mac OSX to each user's individual settings while also giving them a limited amount of storage space. We are proposing to create a startup based on this concept and offer people this free service that will allow them to access their "own" computer through any public computer with Internet access.

¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/2145865.stm>

Executive Summary

Our ultimate objective is to make a product that will solve the problem of unfamiliarity of different computers and allow people to be more productive. The website that we will be designing, www.makeitmycomputer.com, will personalize any public computer. We will by create a program that changes all the customizable settings of Windows or Mac OSX to each user's individual preferences. The goal is for the users to log onto our website, click a button, and transform an unfamiliar public computer into one that they are familiar with, which will include personalized features from web browsers to screensavers. Therefore, we must ensure that our website is as user-friendly as possible, and be able to integrate seamlessly with the major operating systems, such as Windows and Mac's OSX. Moreover, we will offer them a limited amount of storage space they can access through their "desktop" that will allow them to store and access files on our servers, just like a FTP program. This will allow users to access their own files, as if the public computer was their own computer at home.

The long-term view of our startup is to initially offer this service to English and Chinese speaking users and it will eventually expand to be used by people who speak many different languages. We will make money mostly through advertising and offering users the possibility of upgrading their service to buy more storage. With this money, we will expand our company and eventually offer even more features and services.

Analysis of the problem

In many countries, having a personal computer with high-speed Internet usage is extravagant and rare. For example, people in China frequently rely on Internet cafés to use the Internet. A problem that these people regularly face is the unfamiliarity of the public computer. Other than the physical differences between a private and public computer, the main difference is the content and appearance of the computer. Many people are uncomfortable with the unfamiliarity of public computers. It's frustrating to look for icons or files on an unknown computer. In addition, everyone enjoys having his or her own personal settings, such as background, font, resolution, etc. People enjoy being able to put their favorite picture as the background, or being creative with the appearance. Other than unfamiliarity on the computer level, there is also unfamiliarity on the level of web browsers. Many users rely on their "favorites" tab on their web browsers, Internet settings, and toolbars to navigate easily through their favorite pages. A familiarity of computers improves productivity and also gives users a pleasant experience even if it is on a computer other than their own.

Many people and companies recognize the need for individuality and personalization of computers. Nowadays, people enjoy having the option to personalize everything from cell phone ring tones to screensavers. There are many computer programs and websites such as Yahoo!, Google, and MSN that promote this kind of expression. Popular home pages for many computer users are the customizable homepages belonging to these major websites. These webpages require users to log on to view their personalized homepages that can include the local weather, the latest news, stock market updates, movie times, email notifications, and many other options. Users

can easily view information that interests them, which saves them time. In return, companies increase the number of people to access their website, therefore increasing their advertising revenue.

One of the most popular and biggest advances in web browsers in the past year is Firefox. Internet Explorer is the most commonly used browser in the world, but their dominant monopoly on web browsers has gone down now since the creation of Mozilla's Firefox. The biggest difference between the two web browsers is the open-source nature of Firefox that allows users to customize their browsers. Users have embraced this and created their own themes and extension plug-ins that are integrated with the browser to make each person's unique. Ultimately, the popularity of Firefox is attributed to targeting individual creativeness and ease through having a program in which users can design their own browsers.

Even though many programs focus on customizing different aspects of your computer, but there is no specific program that focuses on accessing all of these same specifications on another computer with the exception of the personalized home web pages. Many of these companies fail to promote this sense of personalization on an inter-computer level via the internet.

An interesting company that offers a similar solution is Gotomypc (www.gotomypc.com). This site allows users to access their personal PC at home from anywhere. It instantly connects you to your home computer and allows you to access all your programs, files, emails, and network resources remotely. This is a great idea, but mainly targets businesspeople who need to constantly have access to their files at home

and use it as a virtual office. Gotomypc also charges a fee for their service, whereas our project is designed to be without cost to the user.

As mentioned earlier, our objective is focused mainly for the common computer user rather than people who frequently travel. We're specifically focusing on people who don't have their own computer and only use Internet cafés, specifically targeting developing countries such as China and India. Gotomypc's idea would not accommodate these people since you have to have your computer on all the time in order to access it. Our project focuses on customizing all of the available functions of your computer and using our website to synchronize every function with the click of a button. It will instantly transform everything to your exact specifications. Our idea came from the personalizable web pages you log into, but decided to expand it to a whole spectrum of things we can personalize.

Objectives

The objective of our project is to create a successful startup that will allow users to make any public computer virtually their own. To achieve this, we must set goals for both the design of the website and for our startup's business strategy. Our service must be user friendly and provide a service that people will actually want to use. In order to get people interested in our product, we will initially launch it as a free service. We are targeting a demographic that mainly uses public computers in developing countries, so cost will be a big issue for them. Another objective that will make people want to use our service is the security of our website, how customizable their options are, and how much it promotes familiarity and comfort for them.

In order to be user friendly, our website must be easy to navigate. The website can't be too technical and should include an easy tutorial. Our web address is easy to remember (www.makeitmycomputer.com) because the address is exactly what our service is intends to do for each user. To be easy to use the website must integrate seamlessly with Windows and Mac, and also with different web browsers such as Internet Explorer, Firefox, and Safari. It must also load quickly and have a good support for users with problems.

The objective for our business strategy is to expand and grow in the size of our company, and also for us to be profitable in the long run. To do so, we must base our ideas for our business strategy on these objectives.

Alternatives Considered

Storage Alternatives

1st Alternative

With this alternative, our website would provide each user with a personal virtual computer. The virtual computer would provide the user with 1 GB of free space and all computer programs and applications that come with a new computer. Every time a person logged onto their virtual computer, all the changes that would have been made previously, files that would have been saved anywhere on the computer and all and any settings that may have been changed would all be saved. Downloaded computer programs and applications would also be saved onto the temporary hard drive of the computer being used and then be sent to our servers when the user logs off. Here's a list of the programs this alternative would provide the user with:

- Office Programs (Word Processor, Access, PowerPoint, Excel)
- Media Players
- Email Programs
- AIM
- Regular Windows applications (Paint, Notepad, WordPad, Basic games, etc...)
- Ability to download more

2nd Alternative

The other alternative was to design a webpage that projects the look of one's personal computer rather than actually providing all the services that a regular personal computer would give. The difference between this design alternative and the first is simply that the second one would only provide 20 MB of space. This difference, however, in effect limits the number of services that we can provide the user with. This design simply focus on recreating the feel of having one's own computer by saving all the settings in all the programs that the user would use from any computer. The settings that we are saving at this point are:

- PC Settings:
 - Wallpaper, Screen Saver,
- Application Settings
 - AIM
 - Remember Username and Password
 - Preferences (Fonts, window styles, sounds, downloading file, etc...)
 - Internet
 - Personal Favorites
 - History
 - Font size, color, style
 - Office Programs (Word Processor, Excel, Access, PowerPoint)
 - Recovered Files
 - Last (4) opened files
 - Auto complete
 - Default font
 - Other Applications (Paint, Notepad, WordPad, etc...)
 - Last opened files
 - Last Path opened/saved in
 - Computer Games
 - Last Games Played
 - Scores and Names

- Features last saved

Website Functions

1st Alternative

The first alternative would lead the user to a homepage where he would be given the option of choosing setting for the computer that he or she would be using. As soon as the user finished inputting the preferred settings, he or she would click a button to submit the settings and our embedded program would personalize the computer being used with the entered settings.

2nd Alternative

The second design alternative would simply embed a program on the computer that would be made functional by logging into one's account. Upon logging in, the computer would be immediate personalized and the user would go about his or her business as usual. At log off, our embedded program would take note of all the settings that were modified and send them as a packet to our server. By 'taking note,' our program will simply be watching the data files in which the computer usually saves favorites, cookie files, history files, system properties files that regular the font and keep tract of what picture is the wallpaper and what files are ran for screen saver. These files are saved on the hard drive and our program would simply access them, package them, and send them to our server when the user logs off.

Basis for Design Selection

The option that would be taken with regards to storage should be which option is financially feasible. It should allow for fast loading of the webpage, and not interfere with the service offered being compatible with all types of computers. The storage should promote comfort and familiarity and it should also allow for many features. Finally, the storage option adopted should facilitate customization and the security of information.

Website function

The most important objectives that we outlined on our objective tree were ease of use, compatibility with all computers, fast loading, and user-friendliness. We also agreed on that it should promote familiarity and comfort, and provide people with security of the information saved on the computer, and above all the service should be fully customizable. All these features can be accommodated by the style that we opt for in our designs that are detailed below.

Evaluations of Design Alternative

Storage Alternative

1st Alternative

The first storage alternative has quite a few advantages. People like a lot of space. This option gives five times more space as much as the second does which is attractive to many people. The next advantage of giving the people this much space is that they would get a lot more programs and applications with this space and they could save their personal files on the computers.

People would especially like the option of downloading other applications onto their computers. This option is closest to giving the people a 'virtual' computer. This option would, however, cost us a lot of money which would then force us to charge more than we would otherwise.

The ability to download programs and giving the users programs, however, would restrict them in terms of the operating systems that they can use. So this option is not fully compatible. This option does a very good job promoting familiarity and comfort to the user for it would be just like a personal computer. It would have a lot of features, and the space would afford programs to protect their files.

2nd Alternative

The second storage alternative design offers several advantages. First, not everybody needs a gigabyte of space as a personal hard drive. Most people would waste any space beyond just what they need and providing an excess of space is thus profitable for neither the user nor the service providers (us).

The second reason why we felt that the second alternative would be best for us is simply economical. We would like to provide this service, free of charge, to as many people as we can get our hands on. Therefore, provide a small space to each individual user translates into the ability to offer the service to even more people.

Looking ahead, a third reason for choosing the latter is that our project stands as a good business project which could flourish with enough clients. Therefore, giving less space in order to get more users would later be financial more profitable. Giving an introductory space of 20 MB would also allow us in the future to be able to sell more space to those who need it and therefore providing an additional source income.

Website Functions

1st Alternative

This alternative is not the easiest to use because it requires technical knowledge on the user's side. Every user would have to be knowledgeable about computer properties and settings. We would also be assuming that the users know exactly what they want and that they know how to translate their 'preferences' into technical terms. In terms of familiarity, giving the users the option of changing their settings via options and a list of alternatives ruins the whole idea of giving the user the feeling of being at their own computers. When you turn on your computer, you are not first asked to specify your settings before you can actually start using the computer.

In addition to the above, for this system to be fully customizable we would have to go very deep into technical options and this would end up confusing the users.

2nd Alternative

The second alternative would be much easier to use because the user would not have to input the properties or preferred settings. It would be a hassle trying to remember the settings that one works best in. So the user would simply log in and get to work. Since everything would be done in the back stage by saving the files like the cookie files and favorite websites data files, the website would provide an easy and convenient way of remembering program properties set while being used.

The second alternative is much more customizable than the first because the user would not be limited by a list of alternatives to changes. The user would just go ahead and makes changes to the computer and then those settings would be saved for next time.

Finally, it is easier to protect files send in a package as opposed to data read from text boxes and radio boxes.

Design Alternative Selection

Storage Alternative

We chose the second design alternative because it was more in line with our objectives than the first one. It makes our service free and still gives the user a feeling of being at home and in front of their personal computers.

Website Function

It became apparent that giving the user the options might be a little overwhelming and asking too much of the user. We, therefore, decided that the second was easier to use and more user friendly. It also satisfies our objectives and provides security to the user's information and allows for full customization of the computer.

Alternative Startup Ideas

After designing the web service, we will have the task of making the startup successful. Our overall goal for success is to have a site that many people use and is profitable for our startup. We also would want to expand the company in the future. Revenue will be a metric for our success as well as the amount of users we serve.

One of the things we have to consider is the budget we have. We will pitch this idea to several VCs and see how much money we can get. Therefore, we must consider whether to launch our product to the general public or limit ourselves in the beginning.

Like every project, our goal is to save as much money as we can. The team of people we have for our startup can either initially be a big team or a small team. We also have to decide on the best means of making money and determine on whether or not to make it a paid service or earn money solely through advertisements. Marketing is another important issue. We will have to advertise online advertisements or other public ads, depending on our budget.

Business design strategy and basis for strategy

As mentioned before, for our company to be successful, it is necessary to consider all of the options listed above in order to prepare for the operations of our company. For most of the options we listed above, the main concern is the budget. We probably will not receive an exorbitant budget to be able to sustain all the alternatives above, so the basis for our selection is mainly going to be based on the cost.

With regards to the size of our team, the benefits of a big group are more manpower, which leads to more raw productivity. This will allow us to move faster through the design process of the site itself. However, the drawbacks are that it will cost much more to employ a larger group of people. It will also be harder to communicate among everyone, and the efficiency of each worker will probably go down, especially if there is a bottleneck at one point. For example, if a programmer is past his deadline, a graphics designer can not work on his part until the programmer is done. The benefits of a smaller group are the decreased cost, the higher efficiency of each worker, and increased communications between everyone. Even though the product will probably be designed slower, it will hopefully be a better one.

Another factor we must consider is whether or not we should initially launch our site to the general public, or to a select few for beta testing beforehand. The launch of a full site will allow everyone who has heard about our product use it. However, this is a drawback because since the product has not been tested first, it may not be ready for everyone to use. Launching to a small number of beta testers will be the best way to launch the website because it will not cause a strain on our servers and will give us time to make corrections to the site based on user feedback. We plan to launch our website to 1000 beta testers and we will offer our services initially in English and Chinese. We are choosing China because of the most number of Internet users who don't own their own computers and rely on public computers. This will be the best way to ease into the launch and make it better before offering it to a wider audience.

A final consideration we have is to decide upon is how to make money for our site and how to market it to gain more users. We can make money by charging all the users a fee to use our services. Since one of our objectives is to reach as many people as possible initially, we're not going to charge anything. Most people will not use our service if it costs money, and we are targeting people that do not own their own computers. A better alternative is to make money through advertising. We will also offer an upgraded paid service that allows users to have a larger storage space and to be ad-free.

For marketing, we are going to advertise in certain strategic forms of mass media, perhaps on TV or the Internet based on our budget. However, another alternative we have is through word of mouth through the beta testers and others interested. Slowly, these beta testers will be able to give invites to our site to their friends. They can also get

more invites by offering suggestions, reporting bugs, or by using the service frequently. This is similar to Google's invite only approach to Gmail.

Eventually, our long-term goal is to expand our services in other languages and eventually become global. Once we are profitable, we can expand our company by hiring more programmers to think of new features we can have, and making the website faster and giving more storage space to each user.

Group Roles

Alice Muna

- **Document Editor**
- **Author of the “Abstract” and “Executive Summary”**

Brian Tse

- **Author of “Analysis of the Problem,” “Alternative Startup Ideas,” and “Business Design Strategy and Basis for Strategy”**
- **Created pictures for Powerpoint presentation**

Lin Lin

- **Created Pictures for Powerpoint presentation**
- **Author of “Objectives”**

Thierry Uwilingiyimana

- **Author of “Alternatives Considered,” “Basis for Design Selection,” “Evaluations of Design Alternatives,” and “Design Alternative Selection”**