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CCT 693
Assignment 2
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Initial Project Description

An online service as a learning environment sounds intriguing.

As an action research project does this mean:

a) that the online service would be the site where participants learn and shape what kind of learning environment this should be.

—E-mail response from PJT

All good Internet sites have a few things in common. First of all, they have up-to-date, specialized content. This maginate content is crucial to a site's success. Visitors browse websites in order to see and read material—that is, to learn new things. In that sense, all websites are to some extent classrooms. On websites, the roles of teacher and student are often blurred. It is easy to believe that the users naturally assume the student role; the authors of the site, the teachers. However, for a website to build a steady flow of traffic, the authors must maintain relevant content. This is no easy trick. So one approach to the content problem is to set-up an environment that exploits a user-driven information architecture.

My friend DJ, who is an electrician himself, was recently looking for some work. Searching the Internet for other, local electricians seemed like a reasonable thing to do. To his surprise, he was unable to find a site that met his needs. What he was looking for was an Amazon.com—of electricians: he wanted an annotated listing of local electricians, with star-rankings, reviews, and scores in several attributes. So I thought, what a great idea for an action research project.

I want to build a community that helps its members find electricians that fit the users' needs. To do so, I propose a simple rating, ranking, and reviewing system not unlike many other websites (such as Amazon.com).

Project Description

While thinking about which structures allow an online community to thrive I came up with the following few observations. These sites

1. Give the users agency in the use and structure. (E.g., personalization features) (**Agency**)
2. Make use of information the users already know and allow them to contribute that information to others. (**Contribution**)
3. Are specialized in this content, and therefore appeal to a niche, expert community who can provide content. (**Specialization**)
4. Has an immediate response of a user's contribution. (E.g., ranks change, reviews are displayed, etc.) (**Immediacy**)

My observations may not be fully exhaustive. They certainly are a good place to start. Without a strong, sustained constituency, any website will perish. I have tried to surface some attributes of structures that encourage constituency building among anonymous users who interact only with each other's shadows. The trick, now, is to figure out what these shadows want and provide a means to allows them give it to themselves.