TOP DRAWER SOCCER: CAN A STARTUP SCORE POINTS WITH USER INFORMATION?

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Note that while the case is written from a developer's point-of-view, most startups focus on operations first and user experience or other strategic marketing issues later. This case offers a unique vantage point of the dilemmas faced in these situations, focusing on data collection as an input towards revenue improvement.

Case Synopsis

As of 2011, Top Drawer Soccer (TDS) was the only online destination for club and college soccer news, scores, schedules, rankings, and analysis [1]. The website also had recruiting features and tools for youth players (ages 14-18) aspiring to play soccer in college (after age 18). Joseph Konowiecki bought the website from its original owner in 2008. Like most start-up websites, TDS started simple. The goal for TDS was to become a profitable website within three years. After TDS was not yet profitable and the CEO was looking for a plan to see when he can stop pouring money into the business and see profits on the balance sheet.

TDS had two main sources of revenue—digital advertising (traditional banner ads, site sponsorships, email blasts, and social media integrations) and subscriptions. The two subscription options were a monthly plan for $4.95 and an annual plan for $49.95. Both plans automatically renewed each month or year unless the customer notified TDS that he or she wanted the subscription cancelled.

Seth Burleigh, VP of Operations at TDS, was told by his programmers that the website had to be coded from scratch on a new, proprietary platform for this new feature to be possible. While recoding the entire site would take six to nine months, Phase 1, which included the user registration system, had to be completed by July 1 to be ready for the college soccer season. Set now has to decide which fields to include on the new user registration page to collect enough data useful enough for TDS to generate revenue and provide Director of Sales, Ron Dvorkin, with a compelling sales tool, but not so many fields that it created a negative user experience.

The next day Seth would only have 30 minutes to convince Joe to adopt his plan to improve user data collection. The conundrum he faced was that research showed when a site required users to provide many personal data points, it could cause them to abandon personal data sharing altogether. Seth's improvement plan had to be achievable and effective or he might lose his position with the company.

Instructors may decide to ask students to write up a plan and/or a presentation that responds to the questions at the end of the case and help Seth compose his presentation for the next day.

Case Usage

The case is suitable for undergraduate courses in introductory marketing management, digital/interactive marketing, entrepreneurship courses, and introductory business courses at the graduate level. It is also extremely suitable for classes covering privacy or data collection topics and for focusing on data collection as an input towards revenue improvement.

Learning Outcomes

The content of this case is designed for students to achieve the following learning outcomes:
1. To explore alternative strategies of online businesses to create primary and secondary revenue streams using consumer information.
2. To determine the best practices for user data collection and how a company can improve its user data collection practices without harming user experience or losing the trust of its subscribers.
3. To address the ethical issues and dilemmas with the above explorations and overview self-regulatory (e.g. Interactive Advertising Bureau, Direct Marketing Association), and government (FTC) regulations and guidelines regarding user data collection.
4. Understand how marketers are forced to use imperfect and incomplete data, make reasonable assumptions, and come up with an effective and feasible plans for a small businesses/startups.

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REFERENCES

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[1] "Top Drawer Soccer," n.d.. [Online]. Available: https://www.topdrawersoccer.com. [Accessed 2011].

The complete case, teaching notes, and references are available for faculty upon request from *kristen.walker@csun.edu*.