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Pineapple Pair

Refocusing Target Market

This semester we didn't make any hard pivots on the overall strategy of Pineapple Pair. In January, we had two personas: Networker Nelly (Conferences) and Adventurous Alan (Leisure Solo Traveler). With constrained resources, we had to decide which of Pineapple Pair's target audience we should focus on. We chose Adventurous Alan because we felt this group had wider application use. Our decision was informed by our experiences working with conferences this past semester.

In all, Pineapple Pair partnered with more than 6 conferences including several of HBS conferences'. Our services were posted on each of the conferences' websites where attendees can learn about us when looking for alternative accommodations. We had over 40 people express interest in pairing with more than 10 resulting in potential matches, but these matches didn't result into actual hotel bookings. When a user was matched, they would receive an email "Congrats! You've Been Paired!" and be directed to book a hotel to share with their new pair. Reasons for users not moving forward with a hotel room usually were: "I already found a place", "no longer interested", or we received no response from either user. Part of the issue is timing of when users post a request to share a room. We found about half of the requests to share a room are submitted within 5 days of the conference date, and the other half is 2+ weeks in advance. Those who submitted in advance are less likely to wait around till last minute to get a paired result. While we saw the immediate appeal of conferences, we do think it is a smaller audience and therefore, decided to focus on the leisure solo traveler market. That said, by narrowing our focus, it informed our go to market strategy and our app design.

Design Choices

Focusing on Adventurous Alan meant we would have users from all walks of life and less likely to have things in common (compared to conference goers attending a like-minded event). That said, we decided to enhance the user profiles to include details that we would increase commonality amongst users (languages spoken, hometown, education, etc.). Gender was another hot topic. We are still deciding whether to go with "Other" or switch to gender pronouns to be more inclusive. As of now, we have chosen "other", but I am not a fan. While we ask each user for their age and gender, we deliberately chose not to publicly display age or gender in user profiles. Our algorithm takes this into account on the backend when showing users their search results.

I am not a good designer or creative by any account, but I did have intuition of what good design looks like. We focused on keeping our app simple and make the call-to-action obvious. As a result, the search results of upcoming trip became the default landing page. The user's experience is centered around each of their trips. The user toggles through each of their trips to navigate to search results, request to pair, chat inbox, etc. By doing this approach, it allowed us to delete the traditional navigation bar at the bottom, which originally included (Trips, Inbox, Search, Profile). We added a large "+" button that hovers on the bottom right corner making it easy for users to add trips, a behavior we wanted to incite.

Our Team and Being a Product Manager

If I could reset, I would hire the DEV team much sooner. I spent my winter break searching for developers, hoping to find someone scrappy who could potentially join on as a technical founder. I wanted to avoid hiring a company, but it came down to two companies. I already knew about DEV and liked their work, but we were curious about the second company's pricing. There was a lag of communication with the second company. As a team, we never set a hard deadline, but if we did, I should've advocated for the last week of January (when DEV team starts their projects). The flip side is we did take our time, were diligent, and learned a lot about hiring developers. This being our first development project, we realized communication is important and having someone local became a priority.

At the beginning of the semester, we did a great job managing the developers with timelines and weekly check ins. We explicitly wrote out the features and flow of the app to provide to the DEV team. This was helpful to have documented because sometimes the DEV team would "forget" what was promised or try to cut back on features to save time. Our documentation saved us from cutting back or underdelivering. Towards the second half of the semester, our focus shifted to our marketing plan and broke up our existing work flow (spring break didn't help) in managing our developers. We should have never lost focus on DEV. DEV team fell behind on schedule and also had a change of team members. In an attempt to deliver the final product by the April 9th deadline, DEV team revisited the features asking what is a must have. Part of this was a give and take. While we had a written list of must have features, we also had a softer list of features as nice to have, if time permitted. I think we did a good job prioritizing the features and flexing the schedule to accommodate DEV. While it was easy to be upset at DEV for falling behind, I didn't think demanding on-time delivery was going to be productive. Instead, I focused on how to accommodate without compromising the product.

The role of a product manager is challenging, but I enjoyed the process of building a product. This year has been a stretch experience in learning as much as possible about PM. My approach has been to always gravitate towards the end user and empathizing with their experience. As a founder, I loved the customer interviews, building the vision, and solving a problem. While I understand importance of details, having to keep track of each feature and managing the DEV team was less appealing to me. I just wanted to see the demos/wire frames, provide feedback, and have it done. I'm not sure PM is right for me, but I loved going through this experience and building a product.