

CasaNexus

Contact

Connie Chan, undergraduate 2012 conch@mit.edu and Moji Jimoh, undergraduate 2012 mojimoh@mit.edu

Need

Many MIT students pursue short-term work opportunities to gain insights about fields or industries that they would be interested in working. These opportunities are offered all over the country, but in order to participate one needs a place to live. Not every summer internship program can offer housing to its participants. So in order to find housing, students turn to the Internet or the family and friends. There are problems with both approaches. The Internet has a few types of websites that don't serve the short-term temporary housing market very well. There's Craigslist, which is a free service, but you have to be wary of scams and their website is not designed to support detailed searches; there are sites that are tailored to short term housing listing, but one has to pay to get information to connect with someone and that business model does not seem convenient for students; there are free housing search sites, but they are geared for longer term housing commitments.

This website will address the needs by providing an easy to use interface for posting and searching for housing. The unique business of this website is that we want to work to promote housing exchanges, i.e. if there are students who live in Boston (not in a dorm) looking for housing in San Francisco for the summer, its very likely that the inverse is happening as well and if we can provide a connecting point then we can connect the two housing markets. However, assuming that the net flow across the country is not equal we plan to support the housing market with postings from alumni and parents.

Description

The website will serve two populations: people posting housing openings and people looking for housing opportunities. Students, alumni, and parents will be able to post available housing spots and information about the terms of housing, such as, cost, location, availability, amenities, or any special conditions. Students who are looking for housing can use the website to quickly find options for housing that meet their criteria. The website will also provide a measure of security from the scams of Craigslist and allow for a more user-friendly experience for both posters and searchers. In terms of procuring housing opportunities we are working with the MIT Alumni association to get MIT alumni and parents involved in posting housing availabilities for the Externship program next year. For the summer, we are working with the Alumni Association to contact other schools and the MIT Inter-fraternity council to get opportunities posted in Boston and outside of the Boston area.

Impact

The people most immediately affected will be MIT undergraduates searching for summer housing or externship housing, but ideally this will grow and we can connect with universities across the country.

Scale Up

We are planning on connecting with MIT Inter-fraternity Council to post their Boston area summer housing opportunities and with the MIT Alumni Association to seek out potential housing opportunities outside of the Boston area. In the long run we are gearing up to have a robust system for the Alumni Externship Program next January.

To scale from the prototype to the full implementation, we need to implement account creation (which would prevent scam artists by requiring people to have university email addresses), as well as other features like the ability to search for housing within some radius of a given location (it currently only returns places that match the location string that you put in), search results to be shown in a Google Maps instead of just a list, posters to be able to upload pictures of their houses (that searchers can see), an internal messaging system, user profiles, etc.

Team

Connie Chan is an undergraduate in the class of 2012 studying course 6. She is a veteran of this competition having entered it last year with CrowdSkimmer. Her next steps after MIT is working full-time as a software engineer for Ooyala in San Francisco. Connie developed the website and its interface as well.

Moji Jimoh is an undergraduate, originally in the class of 2011, but graduating with the class of 2012. She is studying course 2, with an emphasis on control and system dynamics. She is interested in usability of products and services in general, and in particular anything related to urban mobility. Her next steps after MIT are still being determined, but she is looking to pursue opportunities with a transit agency. She is working on developing the market for the website.

License

MIT License

Working Prototype/Functional implementation

<http://bit.ly/casanexus>

The prototype doesn't include the ability to create an account, but I created a few testing accounts. cnorris@mit.edu (password: cnorris), cbartowski@mit.edu (password: cbartowski)

Software Requirements and dependencies

It runs on Amazon EC2, with Ruby with Sinatra, and MySQL. I use Twitter's Bootstrap to create the user interfaces.