Eller College of Management
The University of Arizona

MIS 111 Freshman Honors Showcase

ChannelKit

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Executive Summary

Channelkit is an online website organization tool created in 2013 by four entrepreneurs: Greg Funtusov, Lisa Oreshkina, Nina Zavrieva, and Lara Simonova. This website’s primary function is a storage space to which users link websites (if they purchase an upgrade, PDF and image files can also be added). Each uploaded or linked item is stored in individual pages called “channels.” Currently, Channelkit is still a relatively small and new company and, as such, provides a stable, high-speed, and low-population environment for users to experience.

This group aims to market Channelkit as an educational product for students and teachers to adopt to aid the classroom in two ways. First, we will offer Channelkit as a way for professors to reduce plagiarism by forcing students to link their sources in a centralized location. This will prove especially pertinent in Geoscience 170, taught by Dr. Jessica Kapp. In that class, the students complete, on a monthly basis, writing assignments in which students must integrate classroom material with outside research. To check for plagiarism, professors perform efficient, but ineffective, “spot-checking,” wherein teaching assistants scan for suspect or convoluted phrases to prove that a student cheated. While this method may function as a basic review method, it does not allow preceptors to quickly find from which sources the students took their material. Additionally, because students must perform these assignments in a written format, they cannot use Turnitin to check for copied material. Thus, Channelkit offers a much simpler solution by having students, who already search for material online, store sources in a channel that professors or teacher assistants can check rapidly. Not only will this help capture those who cheat, but also it will discourage the instances of plagiarism by threatening students with the possibility of preceptors detecting their copied work and tracing the material to linked sources.

A second way Channelkit will function in education will be by providing a hub for students and teachers to upload content with strong explanatory power. Traditionally, students receive the material directly from a teacher who provides an explanation in his or her words. However, not every student may grasp this concept immediately; with the rise of Google, students increasingly perform lengthy and tedious extracurricular searches to understand difficult ideas. With D2L, teachers attempt to post material that aids students, but oftentimes this material consists of the day's lecture and no more. Moreover, students have no way of sharing their own material, which may have substantially helped them. Channelkit removes this invisible barrier by providing a crowd sourced space for linking content. Teachers could paste supplementary content to a class channel—while students could post links to their Quizlet pages, helpful explanations, fascinating videos, and educational images that describe processes. When it comes to studying for tests, the aforementioned process could be applied just as smoothly.

Although Channelkit is a small company with a relatively unknown product, its accessibility and ease of use makes it rather simple to implement across a wide distribution of age groups with varying degrees of technological experience. Our group plans to see a substantial decrease in plagiarism and a significant boost in grades, as students interact with an advanced content distribution platform.
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I. Introduction

Implementing Channelkit in the classroom will substantially reduce plagiarism, help students categorize useful education websites, and raise grades and retention. Currently, plagiarism and ineffective dissemination of information plagues academia. By completing this project, our group aspires to show a technology that facilitates fair learning by compelling students to find and share reputable sources with their peers and teachers.

II. Product Assessment and Overview

a. Channelkit’s design allows it to have various purposes, but its main value proposition lies in its ability to quickly store linked sources in a visual manner. Its users can create accounts in seconds, find a website they want to store, and link it to their page with a custom comment. Each page is referred to as a channel, hence the product’s name. See Figure 1 to see an example of how channels are categorized in a user’s dashboard (Figure 1). Sources can be rearranged rapidly according to date, with a category, or through a personalized tag. The current markets for this product are education, information design, and the field of art. In the first case, teachers within the education sector would be the primary customers, who would compel students to use the product in their classes. For teachers, most would not need to implement a course fee for their classes to allow their students to use Channelkit, considering that the features needed for instructors are included in the basic, free package. Information designers would use Channelkit to link the websites to the databases to rapidly locate their information. Since they will work heavily with original JPG and PNG files, they will
be the most likely to purchase the subscription package, which includes picture uploading. For example, one information designer uses Channelkit to link websites that help him create presentations and infographics (Figure 2). The same holds true for freelance artists, who may use Channelkit Pro to aggregate pictures and create custom categories for specific pieces of art. As of now, Channelkit offers a simple pricing structure consisting of two levels of accessibility and content manipulation. The first level has no price and provides the user access to essential Channelkit features. One can link sources with a description, mark links with tags and pre-built categories, design groups and channels, publish channels publicly, and sort bookmarks. Channelkit calls their second level of content access “Channelkit Pro.” At this stage, a user will pay five dollars a month to be able to star bookmarks, create independent text notes and custom categories, share a private link to a private channel, and upload PDF, JPG, and PNG files. Another benefit of Channelkit Pro is having access to planned features such as importation and exportation of Excel files and channels that multiple people can edit.

b. Channelkit is still developing their business model. According to their press-kit, “[Channelkit] will be launching premium features in a few months. These will mostly be focused around solutions for small teams and collaborative bookmarking” (“Press Kit”). The organization appears to still be reviewing ideas for features to collect revenue. Channelkit also seems to be producing more refined business models. Channelkit is currently ad-free, but will most likely introduce an advertising interface when they become more mature in order to compete with similar web services.
Channelkit is a private company with four employees: Lisa Oreshkina, Greg Funtusov, Nina Zavrieva, and Lara Simonova. Channelkit lists their mailing address in New York City, but the company has hosted events in Lisbon, Portugal and Moscow, Russia. It is likely that all technical work is done across the “cloud;” that is, completed online and stored via web servers. Unfortunately, such knowledge is not made easily available because of the small size of the company. In other words, it needs to guard its operations management, as well as its business structure.

c. Channelkit integrates web links into a visually appealing manner, which is ideal for our project because it allows for a versatile technology. The technology can easily be applied to the world of academia as a tool to discourage plagiarism or the citation of non-scholarly sources, while also providing a way to produce collaborative study aids. Channelkit is vendor-hosted and easily accessed through their website. According to their press kit, Google Chrome is the recommended browser. Concerning mobile use, “There is no dedicated Channelkit app at this time, IOS and Android apps coming later this year. If you are on mobile, you can still save links by [emailing] them” (“Press Kit”). Therefore, Channelkit is available across all platforms, but rather laborious to use on a mobile device.

III. Proposed Instructional Activity

a. Channelkit has a wide array of targets in terms of a suitable market and could certainly be optimized for application to high school and lower division college courses. Channelkit does not have a specific discipline or subject matter it targets, and affects
some better than others. Furthermore, it can benefit assignments across curriculums by allowing students to compile and present groups of sources. Since Channelkit is such a flexible technology, it can be equally effective for group projects, individual work, or online activities. Lower-level classes at universities generally have more leeway in their curriculums. Thus, professors in these courses will have a greater likelihood of implementing Channelkit. However, because Channelkit could augment the classroom in a variety ways, the level of difficulty in its implementation will vary.

b. Since this product is a modification of a current classroom activity to check for plagiarism, it does not necessarily add a layer of educational content or technology to the classroom in its primary form. However, Channelkit’s centralized storehouse does allow for a place to which students can pin helpful supplementary material to the classroom for other students to review. Thus, the product functions in two ways. First, Channelkit empowers teacher assistants, and proctors, to more accurately and efficiently check for plagiarism by compelling students to link their sources for monthly writing assignments. When it comes time to study, the teacher can post review content or topics to Channelkit, while students actively search for useful material to add to the class channel. While this material would be gathered over the course of a unit, students can assist each other by uploading pertinent explanations, images, videos, and audio files, boosting grades and connecting classmates.

c. The manner in which Channelkit assignments could be graded would be heavily contingent upon the nature of the goal or assignment. For instance, at the simplest level, an assignment could involve compiling a number of credible sources on
a subject into one convenient channel. Alternatively, Channelkit could supplement written work, with the bibliography completed interactively and responsively through Channelkit. Both of these assignments use Channelkit effectively, but differ on Channelkit’s role. If an assignment uses Channelkit in a supplemental or complementary role, then it should not need to be graded to any extent more than its role as an auxiliary component in the assignment. If Channelkit was the focal point of an assignment, then it could be graded on criteria such as aesthetics, linked content, or relevance to the topic of research.

d. The instructional outcome of adding Channelkit to a class would be a more interactive, engaging environment, especially for online assignments. More interesting assignments means a higher chance of a student finding himself intrigued by a class. On top of that, understanding and retention of the class material, and thus the average grade of the class, would correspondingly increase.

e. Our group selected Dr. Jessica Kapp’s “Geoscience 170A1 Earth: From Birth to Death?” for applying this technology to a classroom. This class would effectively utilize this website because it adds a layer of protection against plagiarism for periodic writing projects in the course. While the writing exercises ask students to investigate sources, there is no way of accurately or effectively assessing the resources wherefrom students derived their information. Additionally, because the class has an assortment of preceptors and teacher assistants, who already spot check for plagiarism, their efforts could be supported by Channelkit’s centralized resource collection center.
f. The incorporation of Channelkit into this class can be categorized, with confidence, as a modification of an existing writing activity. Our technology does not transform the essays the students will write, but rather it facilitates honest learning and creates a centralized storehouse for web resources. Additionally, when studying for exams or when learning about class concepts, Channelkit modifies the process by connecting student and teacher, through a website, for the purpose of sharing helpful online explanations, diagrams, and videos.

IV. Feasibility and Design Assessment

a. We interviewed Dr. Jessica Kapp for Channelkit’s incorporation into Geoscience 170. She had generally positive feedback. The interview was helpful in that we were able to devise even more potential applications for the technology produced by Channelkit. Throughout the course of our discussion, we did not change our position for the following reasons:

Channelkit is technically simple. Students will likely be able to access it for free. Nonetheless, they may need to pay the fifteen-dollar premium charge depending on what Channelkit defines or redefines as “premium” features. Channelkit is simple to use, as long as an Internet network is accessible—which can be assumed if the student is collecting sources across the Internet. Overall, Channelkit is fairly simple to learn, and has a quick tutorial on the main page of their website. In addition, technical support from Channelkit can be obtained via email or social media. Channelkit does not currently have any required costs (excluding the cost of Internet and a computer), but this may change as they roll out their premium features. Another key aspect that demonstrates
Channelkit's commitment to user satisfaction is how it collects information. Channelkit does not retain any sensitive information that would be deemed a risk if they were to go out of business, or if the site were to go down. Since this application only acts as an improvement on procedures already taking place, teachers have the fail-safe of returning to the previous methods if Channelkit were to become unavailable, deeming it a fairly low risk.

Therefore, because of its simplicity, the low amount of information it collects, and how easily teachers could revert to others methods in the event that Channelkit crashed, Jessica Kapp appeared highly pleased with its possible implementation. Accordingly, we did not change our view towards its “appropriateness” because of how delighted she seemed toward the current model of classroom use. Moreover, she was peppering our group with questions, indicating a remarkable level of skepticism and interest.

b. The technical needs of Channelkit do not exceed those that are already easily accessible in universities. All students at this university have access to campus-wide Wi-Fi. Channelkit will only manifest itself in the form of another open tab on a student’s laptop. This seamless addition of new technology adds to the overall ease and flexibility of Channelkit.

c. Operationally, Channelkit is extremely intuitive. With the technological savviness of today’s generation of students—which will only increase going forward—the grand majority of students will never have any issue adjusting to
Channelkit. There is little to no learning curve for Channelkit. Indeed, the application is the culmination of multiple technologies with which students are already familiar—such as Microsoft PowerPoint, Prezi, D2L, and others. Channelkit can be picked up immediately by students, which will make its implementation quick and seamless.

d. Channelkit is a free, online application available through the official Channelkit website, which means that the cost of obtaining the product is nonexistent or negligible. If a professor decided that Channelkit Pro was necessary for a class, then the fifteen dollar fee for the upgrade could simply be added as a class fee. Because the actual application is hosted on the Channelkit website and does not need to be downloaded, there are no update costs that could arise. If a student has a laptop and Internet access, they will be able to access Channelkit and the majority of its features free of charge.

e. If Channelkit were to go out of business, be discontinued, or be briefly disabled for any period of time, then the traditional approach to assignments that Channelkit replaces could be used temporarily. Since Channelkit combines aspects of different applications, like PowerPoint and Google Drive among many more, the work that Channelkit brought to one unified location can be de-compartmentalized if necessary. In the highly unlikely scenario in which access to Channelkit could be disabled without prior notice, students should still keep records of their sources used in Channelkit on another platform as a backup.

f. This product, if adopted in an University of Arizona classroom, would not release information part of a student’s “educational record.” Channelkit requires only an
email and password to sign-up. Although this may threaten disclosing students' academic email addresses, pupils can avoid this problem by either using a personal email address or taking 10 minutes to create an account solely for using Channelkit. Biographical information could be displayed if a person uploaded a picture of themself, shared revealing information within a comment or the “Info” page, or connected Facebook or Twitter accounts. Absolutely no internship program data, grades, test scores, course work, course schedules, or disciplinary records need be shared.

This technology inherently caters to those with disabilities in numerous ways. Since the purpose of this site is to link websites visually with colorful tags, those with visual impairments or cognitive disorders may be attracted to this site’s ease of use. Additionally, in numerous web browsers, this site allows users to zoom-in on text through keyboard shortcuts. Regarding cognitive disorders, because of the simplicity of its process, which involves copying sites and pasting them in a custom channel, this would interest those with autism or obsessive-compulsive disorder. Indeed, it caters to those who have a predisposition to excessively grouping items. Due to its lack of audio component or flashing images, hearing and seizure issues would not factor into this site’s level of accessibility. It does not heavily use external technologies either; therefore, those who have mobility disorder or difficulty working with a device like a mouse will find that a keyboard is all that is necessary. Unfortunately, this site does have a major drawback: the blind cannot utilize this tool whatsoever. As Channelkit is a small program, it has not invested heavily into disability accommodations and as such
the reason Channelkit appeals to and functions well for many audiences arises often out of coincidence.

Some users may consider some portions of the Terms of Service and Privacy Policy of Channelkit unreasonable. According to Section 7 of their website’s Terms and Conditions, Channelkit will retain account information, “for a commercially reasonable period of time for backup, archival, or audit purposes” (“Terms of Service”). This period of time is unnecessarily vague and should discourage students from posting any personal information. Another frustratingly nebulous part is the section concerning collection of IP address information. On one hand, Channelkit states that it will only use IP data for statistical analysis, a reasonable expectation; conversely, Channelkit makes an exception to utilize that same data to personalize the site in certain cases (“Privacy Policy”). These conflicts of intended data use can be attributed to the fact that Channelkit is a new website that probably still has not found an efficacious way to store and analyze data. Therefore, students should not be concerned about Channelkit selling personal information to third parties. A final unnecessary piece of information that Channelkit collects is the location of a user when accessing some of the website’s services (“Privacy Policy”). Disabling location services on devices can easily prevent Channelkit from collecting this information. For Channelkit’s usage in a classroom, there are no services on the website that will need to collect this information.
V. Next Steps and Future Work

As previously stated, the advantage of Channelkit is that its incorporation into a class does not require serious alterations to existing teaching methodology. Nevertheless, in order to effectively use Channelkit, some basic understanding of the software is recommended. Based on the results of our initial interview with faculty, it is safe to say that this level of basic understanding will not be hard to reach for faculty members who are interested in adopting new technologies in their classrooms. For instance, in a fifteen minute discussion with an interested faculty member, we were able to teach her how Channelkit functions. Thus, an effective implementation of Channelkit probably requires a 15-30 minute long information session with interested faculty members. This could be considered as the first step of the future work before a class would be able to use the product.

The second step before implementation is deciding how a professor wants to use Channelkit. Channelkit has numerous applications. For example, it can be used as a collaboration tool or as a review tool. Nonetheless, this second step is probably the most crucial one, since this one determines the future success or failure of Channelkit’s adaptation. Therefore, we would advise a future user to consult with someone who has experience with Channelkit when setting up Channelkit in the classroom. This consultation could also be done in form of a faculty training.

The third step of implementation is familiarizing students with it. We believe that the most effective way of teaching the students how to use it is by letting them “play
“play around” with Channelkit for a while. The reason why we believe that this is the most effective method is because we think that experience-based learning leads to the strongest understanding of a new tool. To ensure that all students “play around” with Channelkit, we advise faculty to allow for class time in which the students can test the software. All students should bring their laptops, because Channelkit cannot be accessed otherwise. Furthermore, in order to ensure that during the class time students are actually getting accustomed to Channelkit and are not doing something unrelated, we would advise the faculty to set goals for the students. For example, they could require students to create their own account or their own channels. A secondary assignment might be to upload some form of content to another channel. These goals ensure that students grasp Channelkit and to be ready to use it in their projects.

VI. Conclusion

Channelkit is a highly flexible and simple technology with several applications to the academic world. Its most notable aspects include a reduction of plagiarism and the development of student study aids. Channelkit’s ease of use means that the integration of this technology into the classroom could be done quickly and efficiently. Its importance lies in the fact that Channelkit fills a glaring hole in academia that exists due to a lack of proper assignment oversight and collaborative technologies. To accomplish this feat, Channelkit aids the community with a centralized service for content storage and review. At the University of Arizona, Channelkit will raise students’ grades, increase source transparency, and ensure academic integrity with minimal cost and effort.
VII. Bibliography


Appendix A: Summary of Faculty Interview and Feedback Received

Following our interview with Dr. Jessica Kapp on November 17th, our group received feedback primarily in the form of potential obstacles that would hinder our product’s implementation. For example, one concern that she posed was that students may have difficulty using this product because all new technologies have a learning curve. However, because of Channelkit’s user-friendly design, similar to the level of knowledge required to operate an Apple product, we were able to demonstrate Channelkit’s low barrier to entry. Couple that fact with how the majority of students are highly adaptable to technology and Channelkit becomes approachable rather than daunting. A second problem she stated was that Channelkit’s plagiarism aspect could not compete with Turnitin and its automatic detection system. In Kapp’s specialized case, since students do not hand in their assignments online, but instead only perform research on the web, we found that Channelkit would be the best option to fight cheating. Finally, Kapp argued that D2L already provided a platform whereby sources could be shared. The main problem with this argument is that D2L does not allow a rapid way to quickly link sources for students and teachers. Also, it does not give flexibility in organizing those web pages for student users. Third, D2L demands plenty of mandatory maintenance, something that is unheard of for a small product like Channelkit. Despite all of these critiques, the professor appeared highly interested and stated that she would definitely consider it as an addition to her classroom.
Nonetheless, she still wishes to review the product and tinker with it before she uses Channelkit in the fall semester of 2016.