iFoundIt

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Introduction

For our business we have decided to create an app to be available on every smart phone. The name is iFoundIt and it is the University of Arizona’s new centralized version of the lost and found. Currently, when someone loses or finds something, they can turn it into many different places and it can be incredibly hard to track the item down. With our new app design, everything can be posted and tracked in one place. This will also replace a University surplus warehouse and be able to conserve capital. It is a more effective method to account for lost and found items because currently only items valued at $150 or more are reported through the UA police department. The purpose of this app is to save the University money and effort while creating an easier way for consumers to reunite with their lost items. This is a product designed by students, for students.

How it Works

iFoundIt runs on a principle of goodwill, much like a traditional Lost and Found. Studies conducted by home insurance companies have shown that people can lose up to nine items which amounts to close to 200,000 in a lifetime. People aren’t finding their items; however, this system centralizes the traditional Lost and Found. The “loser” loses an item on their college campus or in the surrounding area. Someone else, “the finder”, finds it and pick it up. As an example, a pair of headphones could be found. The “finder” goes on the app page and chooses which category to post on. These will be range from headphones, jewellery, to various electronics. Then the finder posts that they found the item with a vague description and wait. The loser then goes on the app
page and finds their item. Through an in-app messaging system, the loser messages the finder with identifying information about the item. If it is headphones, they would ask, “Did you find white Apple headphones with fraying on the cord?” They need to be as specific as possible to verify that this is their item. The loser could also elaborate with the location if they think they know where they lost it. This is a bit of a sticky area because obviously they don’t know exactly where they lost it otherwise the loser would have found it. Continuing the conversation, the finder confirms that the item belongs to the person messaging them. They then meet up and return the item to its rightful owner. Once they complete the swap, both people hit a button on their respective mobile devices to confirm. This will also give feedback on lag time between losing and finding an item.

That is the basic premise of the app, but we have concerns to go over before finally deciding how to implement the app. For security and ease of access, we would preferably link the app to the University of Arizona’s NetID login system. Once iFoundIt is rolled out to other campuses, they would log in through their systems. This would be a limiting factor, however, on who could find an item. They would have to be part of the university’s system, but would secure the entire app because people in the NetID system are vetted somewhat by the University of Arizona.

Another consideration would be whether or not to do an incentive system. Without an incentive system, we would maintain that principle of good will, and idea that the app is “for students, from students.” A businesswoman at the showcase suggested that angle would be a lot more powerful than an incentive and more cost-effective. Many people do cherish and revel in
that, “I did a good deed today” sensation and that would motivate people to find and return items. They would also use the app and help others find items in the event that they lose theirs.

We could incentivize iFoundIt by adding that when the “finder” finds an item and successfully goes to the effort of reuniting a loser with the item, they get a certain number of points. After a successful number of swaps, that can equal a certain percentage off items at the university bookstore. As talked about in financials, this is a still an asset to the university. A concern of this system is that two friends would “find” each other’s lost items, claim a successful return, and rack up points for lots of money off at the university bookstore. Odds are, this will happen very rarely, but is still a significant concern. A way around this is an alternative login method.

Which app tells others who your friends are? Facebook. Most people have Facebook and are friends with their friends in real life on that system as well. If we link iFoundIt up to that system, it could access your basic profile information and friend list. The benefit to this is that most people would not give this a second thought and would allow it. This would, in turn, give us our security system. After a certain number of finds between groups of friends, our operating system would alert us that someone was taking advantage of the app and cut them off before they could blink. This would be infinitely harder as far as app development is concerned. We would need some sort of algorithm to tell the system when mutual friends or friends of friends on Facebook are finding each other’s items. Also, we would need to secure this by implementing an authoritative measure to see if they are cheating the system. If we accidentally cut off two people who by chance really did find a friend’s item, they might not be inclined to rejoin the app. We might lose a significant portion of users. To mitigate this by handling claims, we would probably
need a team of people in an office somewhere, so this would not function exclusively online. We risk losing users if people are waiting for emails and don’t have a customer service number to call if they got cut off from the app.

A way to slow this process down would be to have a processing status on claiming rewards. iFoundIt would alert the user that their reward is being processed if the operating system notifies us they might be cheating the system. Before points go into the account, a team of people would investigate online to determine whether or not it was a legitimate find. We would also need some kind of report button on the app to report theft or someone holding an item hostage, although this will be unlikely. Logging in through the UA NetID system gives us access to a lot of information. If we have your full name, it is not difficult to find out more information. Police could, in an event, prosecute and find someone very quickly. To summarize, iFoundIt as a concept has a lot of potential. User interface design would have to be heavily taken under consideration to ensure that users can easily maneuver the app while still maintaining integrity on the claiming rewards part of the deal.

App Development

For app development, we would need to take under consideration the direction in which we want to carry the app. A user friendly and accessible app would be key because we do not want to exclude any students based on disability or other potential limiting factors. We would want an optional audio component so that vision impaired people could listen to descriptions to find their lost items. Also, an algorithm for detection of abuse of the reward system would require a more complex programming as would a log-in and the reward system itself. There is an
extensive iOS 8 Apple development software for free through Apple which does have capabilities to create databases.

Advantages

There are many advantages to replacing the current lost and found procedures at the University of Arizona with a smartphone app we call iFoundIt. The main advantage is that it will save the university money. Currently, there is a storage surplus warehouse where all of the unclaimed items that have been found go. This warehouse is holds staff and also requires upkeep and maintenance along with rent. With the initiation of a replacement app, the warehouse could either be discontinued or used for a better purpose by the University.

Another advantage is that consumers will be able to locate any little item that is found. Right now, only items that are valued at over $150 are reported by the UAPD. This means those keys, headphones, scarves or anything under that amount usually end up in someone’s office or at the information desk in the library. Although those items aren’t valuable to the UAPD they are very important to people sometimes and deserve to be reported. With the app, any item can be reported from the smallest to the biggest items. This is a much more consumer friendly lost and found.

A third advantage is the convenience of a centralized lost and found. As of now, if you find something in a building you’re likely to turn it into the main desk. However, it may sometimes be in a random professors office or with maintenance, which makes it extremely challenging to track down. Also, if an item is found outside of a building it can often be difficult to figure out where you should turn it into which will make it even harder for the person who lost
it to try to find it. In the app, people who find items can post them online no matter where they were dropped or forgotten.

This app is designed to create ease for both the person who lost an item and for the one who found it. It will cut costs around the University or open up an extra warehouse space. It will also be more convenient because it will be available to report and item of any value instead of just the high priced ones. These are just a few of the advantages of replacing the current, unorganized lost and found system at the U of A with a much more era friendly smartphone app.

**Making it a Reality**

After talking to a number of UTIS specialists at the showcase, we have been given the confidence that iFoundIt can be made a reality. Our initial plans are to implement the app amongst U of A. This process includes meeting with UTIS and presenting and designing the official software. While iFoundIt can easily function as its own stand-alone app, we are hopeful that it could also be incorporated into the “Arizona Mobile” app for optimal convenience and centralization. In order to make this happen, the university would have to both recognize and publish the app. According to a survey performed by AppMuse, the average cost of developing an app is around $6,500 dollars. However, an app such as iFoundIt that includes security measures, in-app messaging and authorization from the university would prove to be much more. Apps such as these may cost anywhere from $50,000 to $100,000 to implement. It is our hope that the university or a private investor would see the price of development as a necessity amongst what would prove to be a profitable, long term investment.

After introducing and implementing the app at the University of Arizona, we would like to expand to other universities. We would present the success of the program at the U of A as a
model of the app’s potential. Due to its versatile design, we believe iFoundIt can be successful in a multitude of settings. Other universities are undoubtedly experiencing the same problems regarding lost property, meaning that a streamlined and centralized system can be beneficial anywhere. We hope to expand by sending proposals to all public universities within the first year of the app’s life at the University of Arizona. Then, in the following year our goal is to be operational in at least ten large, state schools. This will get us the publicity and reputation to continue to reach out to even more schools.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have created a consumer friendly lost and found app for smartphones that will replace the current, ineffective lost and found system at U of A. iFoundIt will replace the costly warehouse that the university could be using for other purposes. It will also create a centralized lost and found where you can post anything you found no matter how big or small. The value limitation will be non-existent and anything can be posted no matter how mediocre to some it may seem. This app creates a sense of hope for everyone to able to find what they have lost instead of living with the complete dread that comes with it usually.

This app functions as a user friendly method of finding items and reuniting them with their owners. iFoundIt works in that finders can quickly and accurately reunite losers with their lost items by having a central lost and found, right on the central page. Owners respond with identifying factors on their lost items and then the finder is rewarded with doing a good deed or percentage off at the university bookstore. People would also have a secure log-in through Facebook or UA NetId which would be more closely designed for a campus system, but
Facebook would provide more accessibility to people not part of the university system in a campus area.

Looking to the future, we hope to grow iFoundIt at both the University of Arizona and across the country at other universities. With help from the UTIS department and/or private programmers we hope to develop the app to be fully functional within the next year. iFoundIt will revolutionize the way we look at the traditional lost and found system by bringing it to the twenty-first century.
Works Cited

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