

# Connekt: Building inter-organizational relationships

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## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the **concept of a web application** known as Connekt. This application aims designed to bring student organizations, across the world, together.

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

H.4.m [Information Systems Applications]: Miscellaneous.

## General Terms

Management, Performance, Design, Human Factors.

## Keywords

Social networking, facebook, organizations, student organizations

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Social networking has changed the paradigm of communication between people across the globe. This paper proposes a web application, Connekt, which aims to use this social media to the advantage of major student organizations at educational institutions which share similar or complimentary visions and missions. In most cases, the relationships established between organizations are limited to email communications or referential meetings. Connekt aims to help these groups develop relations with other organizations across the globe, thus increasing their pool of prospective collaborators. Connekt is a concept to create a social network which members can use to create organization profiles and connect with other organizations which share similar goals. Relationships established over this network will allow organizations to share data, information and resources, that they find helpful, with others who would need them as well. This would help develop a more integrated community of sorts with more effective student organizations.

Connekt will be equipped with a large number of features that would help organizations and would act as incentives for them to join the network. Connekt would offer functionality such as:

- Updates and news from various organizations
- Sharing resources amongst collaborating organizations
- Organizational social network identity
- Locating organizations across the world with the help of keyword searching

Connekt will use Facebook's external APIs to authenticate individual members on the Connekt platform. Individual users of the application would not require creating separate profiles for this application, but rather be able to use their Facebook identity in this application. These profiles would serve as members of the organizations in the network.

The revenue model of Connekt is similar to that of other social networking websites that exist today. It depends on content-based user-targeted advertising on the web pages. The application also hopes to extend to advertising models where we directly establish relationships with corporate houses which target student organizations for either product sales or support such organizations.

The idea behind Connekt is seizing the opportunity to create a collaboration space for the motivated youth in educational institutions across the world. The power to make a difference in the world lies in the hands of students; Connekt is an effort to make communication for student organizational goals a breeze.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Let us consider a scenario where two student organizations, Development Solutions Organization (DSO) in Carnegie Mellon Qatar and Californian Students Welfare Foundation (CSWF) at University of California at Berkeley, both have a similar vision for international development and perform similar projects in their respective universities. They both perform knowledge generation tasks from scratch. They both face the same challenges everyday, such as getting in touch with NGOs, gathering statistics and data on global issues, conducting development projects, etc. These student organizations are not able to achieve too much alone because they are small, lack a public established identity and perform voluntary work without much industry support. Thus, there is a need of something which connects these organizations.

Connekt is a concept of a social network aimed at bringing together and establishing collaborative relationships between student organizations working towards common or complementary goals all over the world. The concept of Connekt merges social networking and organizational collaboration into one. It allows the individual members of different student organizations to collaborate easily, by allowing them to share resources and relevant expertise. It will provide student organizations with a platform to share their knowledge-base and resources, helping organizations with similar tasks in the process. The feature rich interface will allow users to augment the process of performing inter-organizational relationship establishment and

sustenance tasks. Connekt draws upon Facebook's Connect extension APIs which allows users to authenticate themselves without the need of creating or managing individual profiles. Meta tags will help organizations establish their role and mission, which when indexable, will allow other student organizations to learn about others of their kind.

Connekt will require dedicated developers and a technology infrastructure which may be funded by the medium of advertisements on the network website. Similar to the concept of AdSense (© Google), Connekt will harness the power to content-related advertising networks to display advertisements.

### 3. BACKGROUND

A couple of years after the advent of the web 2.0 era, there are a plethora of social networks today, flourishing with the most diverse forms of technology for human interaction at the threshold of 21st century. Most of these networks also have acquired specific polarities in terms of usage purposes and user demographics.

Therefore, it is highly unlikely that individuals may feel the lack of means and methods to interact with others of their kind. But what they would definitely and infinitely want more of are newer opportunities and incentives for interacting with others in student organizations trying to accomplish similar goals. Giving requisite attention to these two voids (of opportunities and incentives) in the current scenario, Connect has been envisioned.

### 4. FEATURES

The purpose behind Connekt is to establish links between student organizations in different educational institutions scattered around different parts of the world. In order to do so, Connekt will provide all the tools as a platform to achieve this relationship building.

Connekt will allow a student organization to create its web identity, which is a simple means for them to establish their ethos amongst other organizations and institutions. At the same time, it will be a social network of many such organizations who wish to join forces with others who share common or complementary goals. This identity is, however, a little different from that of regular social networking websites as it not only allows organization profile management, but also encompasses features of membership management for integrating the members of the organizations. This is achieved using Facebook Connect.

In order for an organization to be able to identify similar organizations in different (or same) educational institutions, Connekt will provide searching and indexing of organizations, based not only demographics and organization names, but also on semantic meta data, which better defines the goal of the organization. This brings in ease in locating the prospective partner

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organizations.

As a member organization of Connekt, an organization will enjoy the ability to exploit the following features:

#### **Easy, yet powerful inter-organizational communication**

Using organizational level messages, individual messages, organization updates, news, projects

#### **Powerful collaboration tools**

Document and resources sharing, knowledge management, expertise sharing

#### **Sharing customization levels**

Control over resource distribution, willingness to support projects, financial records

### 5. FUNCTIONALITY

Through Connekt, organizations' members will be able to establish and maintain long-lasting connections with other organizations by using dynamic relationship features. Assigning meta data to information and promoting relationships with organizations with complementary goals develops semantics relationships between different organizations and their members.

- Connekt will allow an organization to "friend" other organizations; just the way social networking websites such as Facebook allow individuals to friend people they may know.
- Connekt attempts to efficiently promote real-time communication using Web 2.0 tools amongst student organizations. This will reduce lag or response time, and ensures higher-probability to responses.
- The application will also allow organization profile managers to establish positions and roles of student members.

### 6. BENEFITS

There are many advantages and benefits for students in organizations to be using Connekt to grow. Three of these highlight features are listed as follows:

#### **6.1 Together, they achieve more**

This concept derives itself from the organizational theory of "Together, we achieve more". Connekt will provide an extensible, quick and very reliable platform for communication between organizations. This, in turn, support collaboration on projects, exchange of ideas and knowledge, and improved cooperation which allows organizations to grow to their maximum potential and with the support of other organizations with limited resources.

#### **6.2 "All-in-one"**

Connekt will not just be a tool to provide connectivity between organizations, or just a portal to serve all the different student organizations. It is a one-stop integrated extensible application that supports the everyday functioning of student organizations by offering the ability to partner, and benefit while offering help. It revolves around the idea of organizations being able to share their

resources, build long-lasting relationships with other organizations and share expertise and knowledge for mutual growth.

### **6.3 E-identity**

Connekt is aimed to help organizations of different sizes from various parts of world establish web identities without needing to maintain individual websites. The concept works similar to the way social networks allow individuals to maintain their identity for the public. This idea is applied to student organizations in Connekt, who can have public e-identities identifying them and their mission and vision. The application is expected to be ready for a number of languages to support those organizations that do not have English as their lingua franca.

## **7. PEOPLE**

Although Connekt is all about organizations, the most vital element on any organization is its people. Organizations will be able to establish good relationships on the social network only when the individuals using the application are able to adapt to the new process of communicating in a fairly new environment. Although this will be a new application, its interface will be very similar to existing web applications and social networks, and is design-centric, which allows easy navigation and task management. The focus of Connekt remains the roles of users in organizations to establish the necessary organization identity.

### **7.1 Social distances**

The fundamental issue that exists in the community is the lack of communication. This is generally due to geographical distances between the groups that we are aiming towards. Organizations cannot meet new organizations that share the same vision as them because there is there isn't any platform currently that them to meet each other. Connekt will help to bridge the gap of geographical distance by letting groups open profiles on it, and the application will suggest other organizations with similar missions that can share ideas. This way organizations that would otherwise not know of each other's existence would be able to share ideas on processes involved in their day-to-day work, and be able to collaborate with each other, thus creating an online knowledge base, which could even potentially help infant organizations start up.

### **7.2 Privacy & Security**

With any network comes the issue of privacy and security. The fact remains that when one connects computers, people will be able to access data they are not authorized to access from any computer linked in the network. It is no different for Connekt. However, Connekt will have the opportunity to let users set their privacy levels. Instead of hiding 'personal information' like in Facebook, Connekt will let users hide sensitive data collected from surveys or studies. They would be able to show it to those who they want within the same organization category, but not with anyone outside that category. Also, no one but the owner of a certain piece of data would be allowed to modify it, creating a sense of integrity and credibility.

## **8. PROCESS**

Social networking amongst individuals in the world has already transformed the way people communicate with each other and learn about friends. It has allowed individuals to connect with long-lost friends and communicate with distant friends.

Just in the way there are barriers to communications and noise in such interactions (which is what social networking sites try to remove), barriers exist in the communication between student organizations not only in different educational institutions spanning across different countries in the world, but also amongst organizations in the same educational institutions, despite being in the same physical location. This is the noise which Facebook has tapped on to build their business model and have been highly successful. The process of communication between friends and acquaintances earlier was email, telephone, or personal interaction. There has been a penetration of a new paradigm of communication which reduces cost, time, and limitations in communication.

The current communication process between student organizations today is either interaction in person, email or telephone communication. Within educational institutions, these organizations are able to meet and build relationships which allow them to achieve common or complementary goals and cooperation. This is also a rarity, considering the time constraints in the world of academia. And when it comes to relationships between organizations scattered in a town, a country, or the globe, there is minimal communication, except for cases where powerful industry leaders are able to bring them together in conferences or workshops, spending large sums of money. The larger the physical distances are, the lesser the communication or presence knowledge levels are.

Connekt addresses these very issues of noise and barriers to building such organizational relationships and is just tapping on the tried-and-tested methodology used by successful social networking websites. It provides (individuals in) organizations a platform to establish a social space, learn about other organizations focusing on similar or complementary goals, establish relationships between various organizations interested in working with each other to achieve together and for individuals in organizations to explore interests in other organizations. This will also drastically change the process of brainstorming for birth and growth of thoughts and ideas, opinion sharing, resource sharing and collaborative building, etc.

## **9. TECHNOLOGY**

This application will be a pure web application, built using server-side programming languages and frameworks like PHP or Ruby on Rails. The front-end of this application will be heavily dependent on AJAX and will out user interaction, speed and communication design on the forefront.

Let us assume that a user is a node of a network of nodes in a regular social networking site, for example, Facebook or MySpace. In such applications, the target core audience of the application is not a smaller network of nodes, but rather a single node i.e. a user itself. The focus of social networking websites remains having to improve experience of a single node. For this reason, Connekt will be designed around the idea that each student organization will be a node on the network, and that the

application will provide an interface which gives an organization the feeling of one entity with its own identity. This way organization can be the epicenter of activity.

Individual users will still remain the heart of the application, but they will function as sub-nodes, as they represent organizations, rather than being organizations themselves. Rather than focusing on having the users to create individual network accounts, the application architecture focuses on using Facebook Connect as an underlying standard set of APIs for establishing individual identities on the application. This will remove the need for us to focus on profile management, data aggregation and security issues.

Data storage and management will be critical in this process, and it will be our responsibility to build and maintain a growing technology infrastructure so support this application, as number of users and proportionally number of organizations grow.

Just like Facebook, Connekt will have an open connectivity model allowing other developers to build meaningful applications for the Connekt platform.

Building this application would require teams of dedicated developers and designers, if we wish to achieve high quality and performance of the application.

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