

# **Project Proposal: Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network**

## **1. Introduction**

Many teens today consider participation on key social network sites as essential to being seen as cool at school. They often flock to social network sites for entertainment and to socialize with their friends. These sites have since developed significant cultural resonance amongst American teens in a short period of time, and continue to be an important part of teen social life (Boyd). This proposal concerns the use of Ning's social network technology to develop an online community around a newly-launched gaming service for teens at the Fayetteville Free Library (FFL) located in Fayetteville, New York.

Dubbed the Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network, this social network site will provide teens with a platform to socialize and share their gaming experiences and game tips with one another through blogs, podcasts, videos and photos, as well as to keep abreast of the library's gaming activities and other teen events. In addition, it allows the FFL to engage teens and seek ideas from them to improve various aspects of the gaming service such as the choice of games and gameplay formats. Finally, the Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network also serves as a marketing tool to raise the visibility of the library and its gaming service among teens.

## **2. Strategic Planning**

The Fayetteville Free Library is a member of the Onondaga County Public Library System. It started as a subscription reading room in 1906, but membership fees were withdrawn in 1911 through a new permanent charter. The library's collections grew rapidly, together with the addition of children's services (Fayetteville Free Library, "History of the Fayetteville Free Library").

As part of the library's ongoing strategic plan, community needs will be recognized and services adopted to meet them through evaluation. The Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network fits into the library's aim of staying relevant to the needs of its teen users. Fayetteville is already doing this through existing services such as online homework help, a tutoring room, and a dedicated space in the library for teens to read books and anime titles, use the Internet and mingle with other teens. Adding more teen services such as a social network site, which most teens are familiar with, is a natural expansion of the library's portfolio of teen services.

## **3. User needs assessment**

The Fayetteville Free Library is located in a relatively wealthy neighborhood. According to Sperling's, a commercial data service provider, Fayetteville has a total population of 12,699 as of 2007, with about 7.2 percent of residents aged between 10 and 14, and 5.6 percent are

aged between 15 and 17. Since individual age breakdowns are not available to derive the total number of residents who fall into the teen age group of 13 to 19 years, the potential size of the target audience may be assumed to be greater than 700, a number that only includes teens from the 15 to 17 years age group.

#### *Internal assessment of user needs*

The library needs to improve its visibility among teens online. Although the library has a few blogs, they are mostly used to disseminate information about library events and new additions to its collections. None of the blogs are targeted at teen users. With declining teen visitorship, the library recognizes that it needs to connect with its teen users, who are already creating and adding content such as blogs, podcasts, videos and photos on other online sites. The Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network will not only serve as a social networking platform for teen gamers, it will also bridge the existing gap between teens and the library.

#### *External assessment of user needs*

The library has not performed any survey or obtained feedback that formally addresses teen demand for the Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network. To assess that demand, the library should conduct surveys to obtain feedback from the teen community. Surveys will help the library gather specific demographic information related to teens in the Fayetteville area, and their willingness to participate on the Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network. In addition, the library can conduct a focus group of six to 10 teens, or a mini focus group of four to 5 teens who already participate on other social network sites.

#### *Impact on users*

The impact of new library services can generally be classified into a few main areas: greater social inclusion; changes in skills/competencies; and changes in attitudes/behavior (Poll, 2005). In the context of the Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network, the impact on users is as follows:

**Greater social inclusion:** Participation on the Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network has the potential to foster greater social inclusion among teens. Through their interaction on the social network, new relationships can be forged and existing relationships will be deepened.

**Changes in attitudes/behavior:** The Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network has the potential of exposing teens to other library services by including feeds from the library's blogs on the site. Teens may also change common perceptions about the library as a place that is only about books. They may come to find that the library can also be a place for them to network, socialize, learn and have fun at the same time.

**Changes in skills/competencies:** Teens who are shy or introverted may also improve their social skills through the Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network. Teens will be given the chance to report on gaming events on their blogs within the network, thus improving their writing skills. They will also be given the chance to express their creativity through podcasts and video editing.

#### 4. Recommendations for action

The Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network plays a complementary role in the library's gaming program. It will provide teens with a platform to participate in activities related to the gaming. On the social network site, teens will be able to create and share their gaming-related podcasts and blogs, as well upload videos and photos of gaming events. It will also give them an opportunity to maintain and strengthen the friendships and ties forged with other teen gamers during gaming events and tournaments.

To ensure that teens are familiar with editing photos and videos as well as creating blogs and podcasts, workshops will be conducted by members of the library's teen advisory board, whose teen advisors will create and administer the Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network. This will instill a sense of ownership among teens and allow them to take up leadership roles. Teen librarians will oversee the teen advisors and guide the workshop sessions if necessary.

##### *What is Ning?*

Ning is a Web-based social software tool that allows individuals and organizations to create their own social networks based on the specific needs of a community. Although Facebook groups also support communities of interest, Ning offers a more compelling set of features that puts the community in the center (rather than the individual in the case of Facebook). Based on Ning, the following features will be available on the Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network.

**Blogs:** Teens will be able to blog about their own gaming experiences and share them with their friends. This gives teens an opportunity to compose their thoughts and sharpen their thinking and writing skills. All tag posts can be tagged and users can limit their views to specific posts.

**Forums:** Teens will be able to pose questions and thoughts for discussion within the community. The library can also seek comments or feedback from teens on the forum pages.

**FFL blog feeds:** Feeds from other Fayetteville library blogs will be incorporated to expose teens to other library services such as upcoming library events and book recommendations.

**Podcasts:** Teens will be able to upload podcasts that they've created. The topics for the podcasts are decided by the teens, and can range from information about the latest game titles to tips for a specific game, or interviews with prominent gamers and game clans. By default, Ning does not provide feeds for music/podcasts. A partial workaround is to generate an Atom feed for the podcasts using the Ning REST API. However, this feed only updates users of new content, and will not allow podcast downloads. This issue may be resolved with access to the social network's source code. Ning is also expected to include feeds for audio content in future.

Additionally, the podcasts will also be available to teens as a gadget that can be added as an

application in their Facebook accounts. The gadget can be created easily using Ning's built-in API tool.

**Videos and photos:** Teens will be able to upload videos and photos of gaming events that they've taken and edited onto the social network site. Alternatively, they can also choose to host their videos on YouTube and photos on Flickr, and incorporate them into the social network site easily. The videos and photos will also be available to teens as gadgets that can be added as applications in their Facebook accounts. They can be created using Ning's API tool.

**Member chat:** Teens will be able to chat with other members who are online at the same time. The chat feature was incorporated using a widget created by a third-party Ning developer.

**Events:** This section will contain a list of upcoming gaming events and tournaments held at the library.

**RSS subscription center:** Here, teens will be able to subscribe to individual feeds or choose to subscribe to a single feed for all available feeds from the site. This aggregated feed can be created using a mashup tool such as Yahoo Pipes.

**Member groups:** Teens will be able to form groups based on their favorite games or even form game guilds and teams to participate in tournaments.

**Activity updates:** The latest activities taking place on the social network site are included here. This may be announcements on new gaming titles available at the library or the addition of a new member.

**User profiling:** With Ning, the library can also create a short survey at the point of sign-up to better understand the gaming habits of its teen users, such their their favorite games, the amount of time spent playing per week, or whether they have heard of or attended any library gaming event. This information is useful in planning or refining the library's gaming service.

## **5. Goals, outcomes and assessment of success**

### **Goal 1: To demonstrate that the library continues to stay relevant to teen needs**

This goal addresses the library's mission of meeting the needs of individuals and groups in the community. The Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network will underscore this commitment by providing a platform for social networking activities which teens are already familiar with.

- Outcome 1: At least 30 teens will sign up and participate actively on the Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network within the first month of availability.

Teen participation on the social network site is a good indicator of success. Within the first month, the library should attract at least 30 teen active members. This can be measured through the number of members, comments, blogs, photos, videos and podcasts uploaded.

- Outcome 2: 50 percent of teen members will return to the library for non-gaming activities.

One of the interim outcomes of the Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network is to raise the visibility of other library services. Through the social network site and gaming activities combined, it is hoped that teens would be exposed to other library services. An indicator of this would be the number of teens who return to the library for non-gaming activities. This can be easily measured through surveys.

### **Goal 2: To encourage informal conversations between librarians and teens in a virtual environment**

- Outcome 1: Library staff will respond to at least 50 percent of blog posts and comments on the Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network.

While the library has reached out to teens in other services such as the anime club, there is very little interaction with teens outside the walls of the library. The Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network will allow librarians to get closer to teens and gaming culture to improve their understanding of teen needs.

### **Goal 3: To attract teens to participate in the library's gaming activities**

One of the goals of the Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network is also to serve as a marketing tool to attract teens to the library's gaming service.

- Outcome 1: At least 20 teens will participate in each gaming session.

Teen turnout numbers at gaming events are also indicators of the success of the social network site in attracting teens to gaming events. For the first two months, the library should expect to attract at least 20 teens per gaming session. Higher numbers should be expected as awareness of the service increases over time.

### **Goal 4: To position the library as innovative and cutting-edge**

This goal will improve the image of the library among teens as a place beyond books and traditional library services.

- Outcome 1: 50 percent of teens will be able to identify the library as a provider of innovative services.

One of the goals of the social network site is to position the library as cutting-edge and innovative. This can be measured using survey instruments.

### **Goal 5: To help teens improve social skills**

This goal addresses the need to provide teens with opportunities to improve their social skills by interacting with other members of the community through the Fayetteville Teen Gaming Network.

- Outcome 1: 50 percent of teens on the social network site will improve their relationships with friends and other members of the community within 6 months.
- Outcome 2: 50 percent of teens on the social network site will participate in other non-gaming related social activities online or in person. Both outcomes can be measured through surveys, focus groups or observations of teen behavior during gaming events over time.

### **Works Cited**

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