Exploring Academic Access to Information

Establishing stakeholder perspectives and design implications for a user-centered textbook model

The Problem
65% of surveyed students “said that they had decided against buying a textbook because it was too expensive.” Yet, “94% of them were concerned that doing so would hurt their grade in a course.” Since the early 2000s, eBooks have been offered at a low cost - but students are wary to change their habits and publishers have yet to make principal titles available in the digital format. Today’s designers must work within the current system of access and use so that stakeholders can remain comfortable as academic information becomes digitally distributed.

Stakeholders

Publishing Business
Commissions and edits texts to provide reliable academic information

Faculty Choices
Decides on best source of information for assigned homework and readings

Student Perspectives
Values low-cost information - choosing the best resource across all formats

Bookstore Decisions
Buys formatted texts based on student habits and faculty course history

The Solution
All those interviewed responded to a proposed “Freemium” solution that allowed for free access to texts but required payment for some features. After analysis of user’s responses to this model, I created technical recommendations to solve current problems of academic access. A solution must...

Provide similar navigation and annotation to a physical book in addition to digital-only features (e.g. “Bookmark” and “Find”)

Connect with consumers through the bookstore, allowing publishers access to students through the established relationship.

Allow secure “upload” of texts by students, faculty, bookstores and publishers to enforce copyright and protected use

Design Process

Literature Review
Investigated current issues in the realm of academic access and developed “Freemium” model proposal, similar to Spotify

Faculty & Student Interviews
Prompted user feedback of the “Freemium” model to understand consumer desires, needs and habits

Bookstore Focus Group
Confirmed user needs and generated design recommendations based on feedback from Subject Matter Experts

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