LetsLocalise

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Managing Innovation

Let's Localise – How to build a 'hyper-connected community'

You can find a video interview with founders Gaurav and Divya Garg here

And another interview with Rufus McNeil, one of the LL team, talking about the challenges of developing an ecosystem strategy for a social innovation platform

'I made a promise to myself that I want to impact one million children in the next five years.' – Divya Garg

Listen to its co-founders describe Let's Localise, and you can't help but be impressed by their ambition.

Let's Localise is a digital platform that responds to the increasing funding shortages facing schools in the UK, by seeking to connect them with the untapped goodwill within their local communities. It does this through three core 'pledges'.

'Pledge a Penny' - In many senses the most straightforward of the three, 'Pledge a Penny' allows users to pledge money to specific funding schemes set up by schools. (This pledge contains the only funding stream to Let's Localise; 5% of donations go to the operational costs of Let's Localise).

'Pledge a Resource' - Where direct funding is not always the answer, the 'Pledge a Resource' option allows users to pledge resources for which schools have specifically expressed a need.

'Pledge a Minute' – This pledge allows users to pledge their time, via expert talks, coaching sessions, or practical skills.

Though predicated on helping schools to better serve their students, the Let's Localise platform contains within it the potential for significant growth beyond its current sector. The goals of its founders are by no means unachievable, though it will require significant consideration and aptitude to fulfil them. This study explores the Let's Localise case so far: by positioning Let's Localise within a current trend for platform innovations, investigating the psychology and technology that will facilitate its participatory

economic model, and finally by examining the outreach strategy upon which its success depends.

An 'Eco-system for Togetherness'

There is nothing inherently new about the idea of a platform innovation (see a further exploration of platform innovations [here](#)). What separates Let's Localise from the majority of these innovations is that it seeks to fulfil a social purpose - instigating community action in order to counteract the persistent underfunding of key services. It does this primarily by enabling connections. Let's Localise is a multi-user platform, facilitating the demands and contributions of a variety of participants, including schools, parents, individual experts, businesses and alumni. The Let's Localise platform acts as a common ground for each of these users. Schools are able to post their needs - whether in terms of fundraising, specific resources, or recruitment – and members of the community are able to respond to meet them (as well as post offers of time and resources to which the schools can respond). Shashi Mallissery, who is responsible for the product delivery for Let's Localise, emphasizes the variety of ways in which diverse users can engage with the platform, describing Let's Localise as an 'eco-system of togetherness'.

For the schools at least, the motivation is clear (there is no charge to schools using the platform – though a 5% fee is charged on financial donations). In order to explore the level of motivation within communities, Let's Localise conducted a number of surveys within the Wokingham area. The overarching results were that within communities too there is an underlying intuitive understanding of the current financial pressures on schools, and a general wish to do something about it, as Gaurav Garg describes it, 'people want to give back but don't have a way or a platform to do so'. It is this kind of motivation that has driven more traditional forms of fundraising, think school fairs and table-top sales. In Divya Garg's words, the issue with this kind of thing is that it is 'not a collected effort… everybody is doing everything'. It is through Let's Localise's specific technology that they intend to capitalize on this general sense of community enthusiasm, and direct it into a substantial form of social action.

Understanding Motivation - 'Democratising Goodwill' through Technology

The psychology of motivation bears some discussion at this point. It was originally thought that there were two types of motivation: 'intrinsic motivation' (acting because the action is inherently interesting or enjoyable); and 'extrinsic motivation' (acting

because the action leads to a separate desirable outcome). For the most part, it can be fairly reasonably understood that school fundraising and volunteering fits into the second bracket. This is unfortunate, because extrinsic motivation is most often associated with an initial increase in action, but a longer-term decrease; the effect isn't easily repeatable. For example, parents and community-members might choose to participate in voluntary action or fundraising for a school for the duration that their child or relation is attending, but once the immediate desirable outcome is over, so too are their efforts.

More recently however – and this is where the Let's Localise model is advantageous – it has been understood that motivation tends to lie on a spectrum, ranging from 'intrinsic motivation' to 'extrinsic motivation' to 'amotivation' (non-compliance). Within 'extrinsic motivation' lie further categories for which the effects are not so necessarily short term: 'integration' (the goals of the action are the same as the individuals goals); 'identification' (the individual consciously self-endorses goals of action); 'introjection' (desire for approval from others); and 'external regulation' (compliance with external rewards or punishments). Let's Localise harnesses the power of 'identification' (the individual consciously self-endorses goals of action), and 'introjection' (desire for approval from others) in its use of technology.

Users who are visiting the Let's Localise platform for the first time in order to support a specific school or scheme are extrinsically motivated by integration- the goals of the school or scheme are the same as their own. At this point, as Gaurav Garg puts it, they are confronted by a 'world of opportunities available to them'. Because, as Garg describes it, 'information is symmetric' on the platform, individuals who have visited in order to support a specific school are then shown campaigns of schools outside of their locality, but in line with their goals. At this point they are extrinsically motivated to support these schemes by identification- the individual consciously self-endorses goals of action, because they are in line with their own. This model applies too to businesses with corporate social responsibility budgets. Whilst a business may have historically chosen specific areas or types of CSR engagement, the Let's Localise platform uses analytics to show them schools and projects that are in line with their goals, but outside of their usual remit or locality. This model is then reinforced by emailing businesses each time a CSR opportunity arises that relates to their historical activity. In this way, Let's Localise intends to 'democratise goodwill'- providing opportunities to schools that are overlooked under usual circumstances.

The science of motivation plays a further part in the Let's Localise platform, in the ways in which users are able to see the story of their contribution unfold. Introjection (the desire for approval from others), has likely played a part in Parent Teacher Association meetings from time immemorial, but the visibility of campaigns on the Let's Localise platform capitalises on this form of motivation. Users can see 'Recent Pledging Heroes' on the Let's Localise homepage, and the progress and results of campaigns are clearly shown too.

This visibility contributes to the sense in which users can actually see the effect their contributions make. As Rufus McNeil, contributor to the proposition and outreach strategy for Let's Localise, describes, 'if you don't think you'll make a difference, you don't really try'. By making big issues - such as the underfunding of schools - tangible, Let's Localise creates a framework within which users are motivated to contribute, and to continue contributing, because they are able to see the positive effects their actions have resulted in.

Outreach

In identifying the challenge of scaling Let's Localise, Divya Garg describes a combination of cogs- interconnected parts of the same machine:

> 'We have a central cog which is a school, around that we have different cogs which are alumni, parents, businesses, charities and government'… 'We are trying to give a steady spin to each cog… once all the cogs start moving… school, which is sitting right at the center, that will be nurtured.'

This picture is at the heart of the Let's Localise model. At the moment, focus is on becoming 'world famous in Wokingham', as one of Let's Localise's advisers describes it. By taking their time to build a solid pilot scheme in the Wokingham area, Let's Localise have ensured that the structure at the heart of their venture is a reliable one. They have a number of schools already using the platform, and two national leaders in the area of education endorsing their product. Their challenge now lies in convincing wider members of the community, beyond those directly associated with schools, to engage with the platform. There are a number of ways in which Let's Localise are meeting this challenge.

Rufus McNeil describes the challenge as one of storytelling:

> 'The first story is that there is a need, there's a desperate shortfall of funding, and that's affecting local children. And so, the first point is to get that message across,

that schools do need help. And interestingly, most people instinctively get that… The next part is then to turn that into something tangible and say, OK, this school needs help, but what kind of help, and how is that something that you in the community, or in a business can help with? So that's when what we try to do is to take an individual need of the school, and turn that into a story. So, say a school wants to do more with its kids in terms of fitness, so they're looking to get additional table tennis tables or basketball hoops. And what we're trying to do – and we're still working on this – is to able to find the best way of communicating out to people that that is something they can genuinely help with, and that they'll see a benefit when they help. Whether that's by putting funding in to help, or whether that's by helping paint the gym, or whatever it might happen to be. That they can see a group of children affected by that, and having their experience of school improved by that.'

Once the immediate school community are engaged in this way, Rufus suggests the outreach strategy from that point can be a generally organic one, driven by this storytelling; as the central cog starts to turn, so too will the rest:

'What we aim to try and do is gradually expand out… by using initially the parents and the schools existing methods of communication on social media, to pique the interest of others, and from that grow into people who in the local area are thought leaders or might be particularly loud voices in the community with sway and influence, and then out into local businesses who are interested in becoming a part of that growing community, and continually outwards, and as it grows it draws more and more people in.'

It is with this in mind that Let's Localise are currently focusing on developing collaborations with organisations, charities and businesses, in order to get to a point where there are significant numbers of users on the platform, therefore increasing its value to everyone.

Gaurav Garg describes this process as 'trying to create a 'hyper-connected community''… 'As is common with any digital platform, both sides need to grow at same time, you cannot have a situation where one side grows more than the other'. He likens the efforts to scale Let's Localise to other platform innovations such as Uber. In this case too, value is created the more users are involved with the platform, 'as you get more drivers, more passengers come. More passengers come, more drivers. As each side comes onboard you get more value'.

Let's Localise have been trialing a number of ways to build awareness of its platform. As I write this, the UK is just beginning to lift Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. Over the past few months Let's Localise have been offering quiz sessions for locked down school parents, thereby building positive relationships between Let's Localise and the school community, from which organic growth can develop. Beyond these local efforts, Let's Localise have also taken on a business development manager, to focus on building alliances with corporates and charities. Based upon the reasoned assumption that the state of the UK economy post-Covid-19 will likely result in increased financial difficulty for schools, Let's Localise anticipate there will be an equal surge in compassion from communities and businesses. The intention of Let's Localise is that careful instruction of their outreach strategy will allow them to maximize their growth potential during this moment of increased need and altruism.

Further to these direct approaches to diffusion, Let's Localise are in the process of building two types of Advisory Boards to help steer their venture over the coming months. One will be what Gaurav Garg describes as a 'traditional Advisory Board', comprising primarily of academics able to contribute the latest research in the field of diffusion and innovation. The other will be a 'Think Tank', comprising of thought leaders from the spheres of education and technology, able to provide guidance with regard to the needs of the market. In this way they hope to make use of expert opinion in the careful management of the diffusion of the Let's Localise platform.

Into the future, Let's Localise have described ambitions beyond the education sector, and the possibility of moving into fields such as healthcare and charities. As Rufus McNeil describes:

> 'Lots of places that look after people in different forms are naturally places that draw a public desire to help, and need that help. So, if we go back to that model which says, you've got a need over here, you've got people who want to help over here, essentially anywhere where that is true, Let's Localise should be able to help.'

There is a general understanding that these possibilities, though well within the reach of Let's Localise, will be met with a considered approach. The focus for the moment is on setting in motion the central cog of the Let's Localise machine – schools – before its drive is able to extend the effect outwards.

Conclusion

Across each of the Let's Localise team members I spoke to there was an overall faith in the goodwill of individuals and businesses – that people want to help, but don't necessarily know how. It is not an unfounded claim. It is based upon significant research and surveys, the upshot of which is that most people simply feel that either their contribution would be insignificant, or they do not know how to contribute. The Let's Localise platform provides a solution. What is clear is that in order for it to be effective, its diffusion into wider geographies and sectors will need to be managed judiciously. Let's Localise's awareness of this fact, and the efforts with which they have taken on board expert advisors and managers, is the best indictor possible of their eventual success.

You can learn more about Let's Localise via their website here.

Questions for Discussion

- Make a list of at least five other examples of platform innovations. In what ways are their models similar or different to Let's Localise?

- Take a look at the Accelerating Diffusion tool. Try to apply this tool to the Let's Localise case.

- Read this report on Storytelling. Prepare a short presentation on its key points.