

Volunteer Finder

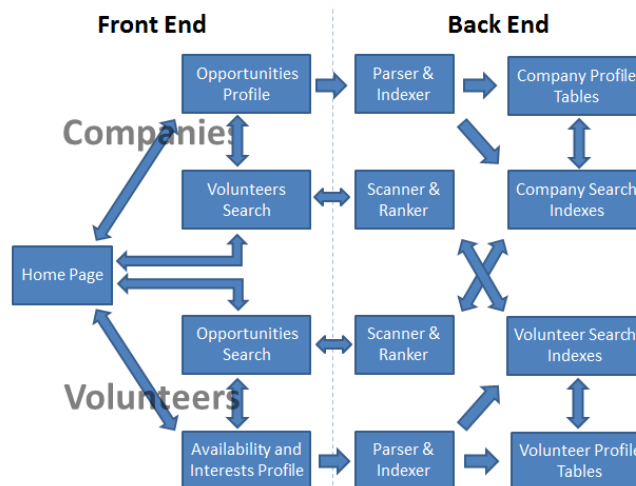
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Introduction

For many nonprofit organizations, the difficulty of finding volunteers when they are needed can be a large hurdle to jump. After some searching, we were only able to find a single company (VolunteerMatch) that provides such a service. As an effort to promote volunteering in communities, we have decided on building a similar website.

The Design

The site will have two major sides: the volunteer side, and the organization side. Both the organizations and volunteers would have profiles and could manage their information, which would be stored in a database. The volunteer side will let a user add and modify account information, such as interests, skills, and time available. The organization side will enable an organization to search by keywords, time available, or both, as well as update organization information, such as mission statements and addresses.



Improvements to Our Competition

VolunteerMatch, though it is fairly well organized, is far from an optimal product. One of the primary improvements we would add to the VolunteerMatch is the searching capability. With their website, they provide the ability to perform basic keyword searches on description/title, searches on the name of the organization for which you wish to volunteer, searches based on partner companies, keyword searches based on skills, categorical searches based on interests, and categorical searches based on suggested age range. Though this provides decent searching abilities, there are several areas for improvement. On their site, if you search for a

term, the results shown will only be results with all of the terms included. For example, if you search for the term “computer stuff”, all opportunities containing only the word “computer” will not appear in the results. This is undesirable and should be improved upon. Also, we feel that the searches based on skills should also have a categorical component as opposed to being just a keyword search. This searching capability could be implemented with Lucene, a Java search library with ports to a variety of languages. Lucene would also take the heavy lifting away from database searching using “LIKE” queries.

One major component that could be added to the search is times of availability. Participants should be able to filter their search results based on their availability. As a result, we hope to add in information for companies to provide when the volunteering opportunity is available so that participants may find opportunities more easily.

Additionally, allowing companies to search on volunteers is a great improvement to the VolunteerMatch model. This would allow companies to find the most effective dates/times to host their volunteer projects/meetings. It would also allow companies to reach out to our community and find interested volunteers.

Volunteering opportunity suggestions based on previous volunteering experiences would also be implemented.

Additional Features

We want to include a copyable Iframe for companies to post on their website regarding the postings they have on our site. Thus they will not have to manage information in two places, but only one.

Also, we want to include the ability for companies to upload images of the work place or of previous volunteers.

Volunteer reviews and allowing volunteers to directly email a company through our website is also simple, additional features.

Conclusion

With this site we hope to promote volunteering in communities by creating an easy interface for organizations and volunteers to interact and come together. The most important capability of the site would be to implement a good searching algorithm, to provide both organizations and companies with the most relevant information regarding the other party. With a strong search algorithm in place, interaction and getting volunteers would be made easy.