Make it useful:

Revitalizing a legacy digital service

As product owners of this amorphous system, the POs were tasked with making the oft-critiqued service usable with uncertain resources and competing institutional priorities. They accomplished this by focusing efforts in 4 key ways

Our home-grown institutional repository began almost a decade ago. Over time, the code grew unwiedly, driven by an eagerness to meet as many use cases as possible. There were few individuals to articulate service priorities or advocate for user needs. This left the system underutilized and undervalued. This poster describes how the product owners (POs) began the lengthy process of revitalizing a legacy digital service with an emphasis on usefulness.

Context

Aging technical stack that is difficult to maintain and grow

Limited adoption and awareness on campus

An overly broad scope with no clear user group

Uncertain resources and institutional commitment

Strong vision

Clear limits

Small changes

User oriented

01
The POs were given the freedom to articulate their ideal vision and mission statements. This was essential for moving the service forward. These statements serve as the foundation for prioritizing feature requests, advocating for resources, and communicating about the service consistently to internal and external stakeholders.

02
Firm boundaries allowed the POs to scope developer work, prioritize maintenance and feature development, and deny implementation of previously requested features that were no longer relevant to the repository The POs could also drop support for unused services, allow other services to limp along, and improve existing strengths.

03
There were known frustrations with the service that were easy to start with: small changes to the user interface, such as use metrics, received immediate positive feedback from key stakeholders. Additionally, the POs prioritized stalled projects to either complete the project or accept the sunk-costs and clear the backlog for other projects.

04
Early in the revitalization process, the POs accepted the service would never be comprehensive. Instead, by focusing on user needs and decreasing the burden to create a comprehensive research repository, the POs have been able to prove the value of a discipline-agnostic approach to internal and external stakeholders.

One clear challenge was the amount of emotional labor necessary in revitalizing a service. In our efforts, we spent a significant amount of time and energy apologizing for previous failures, managing expectations by scaling back previous promises, and grappling with the current technical short-comings of the service.

Challenges

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