BigBurgh.com: Successes and Challenges in Building an Online Resource for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

Bob Firth, Informing Design
Sally Stadelman, City of Pittsburgh
Introductions

- **Sally Stadelman**
  - Manager of BigBurgh.com
  - City of Pittsburgh Department of Public Safety

- **Bob Firth**
  - Founder, Informing Design, Inc.
  - Designer of BigBurgh.com and Manager for first two years
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BigBurgh.com

Pittsburgh’s homeless services web-app

- Collaboration between the Homeless Children’s Education Fund, the City of Pittsburgh Police Bureau, and Informing Design
- Replaced a paper list with a digital resource
- 18 months of research, stakeholder meetings, coding, testing, and re-coding
BigBurgh.com

What you’ll find on the app:

• It’s NOT an app, it’s a website!
• Pre-sort by gender identity, veteran, or family
• Spanish Translation
• Everyday needs vs. Urgent needs
• Services provided by geo-location
• Mapped, listed, quick-look schedule
• Access narrative: what you actually need to know to find the location
• Quick call-out to who should and who can access the service
• Phone number
• Feedback form
• Directions: google maps
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BigBurgh Service Criteria

BigBurgh Criteria: Services that address dire, immediate needs, with as few barriers to access as possible. Listing is for the service itself, and does not require referral or reference to another database.

To qualify for BigBurgh, a service must be:
- Free of cost
- Free of unrelated requirements
- Require a minimum of documentation
- Be High Quality, and generally available without onerous delay, maintain regular hours or is by appointment
- Be from a Disinterested Provider, Respecting the Dignity and Independence of Clients
- Be Open to All with Relevant Need/Interest, without regard to race, creed, or sexual orientation
- Fit into one of the existing categories
The BigBurgh Principles

- Quick, easy-to-use, intuitive interface
- BigBurgh information is collected and organized from the USER’S point of view
- Commitment to adequate staffing behind the app to always keep information up to date
  - Maintenance of accurate information is AS IMPORTANT AS good design and technology!
Day to Day Operations

- Custom made back end that encourages data to be stored in a way that guides user to succinctly relay information
- Constant outreach, trainings, monthly check-ins and site visits
- Distribution of cards and card stands
- Other tools we use:
  - Trello
  - Mixpanel
What makes BigBurgh easy to use?

Based on Google’s Firebase NoSQL database in the cloud – near instantaneous responsiveness
Interface respects information chunking limitations of short term memory (7 ± 2 rule)
Categorization Scheme:
determined by content
delineates relevant distinctions between groupings of services in simplest, everyday language (ambiguity-averse!)
gets granular by need/population-type so one button = one action
results in hierarchy of short comparative sequences of categories that is easy for the user to follow
Correspondingly Granular Content Designed to be “Self-Serve”
each listing aligns tightly with its categorization completely covers all needed info, without resorting to call or outside website for services that are actually obtainable by user (free, low barrier, predictable hours, no external referral required)
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**USAGE DATA**

*April: rate as of 4/15*
BigBurgh’s unique model

- Public-Private partnership
- Strong leadership, process initiated by community leaders
- Created by private industry expert who specialized in detangling complex government issues
- Commitment to adequate manpower, building and maintaining relationships with providers
What to consider…

If you’d like to start your own BigBurgh!

- Resources:
  - Budget for
    - coding
    - staff (not intern)
    - beta testing
    - Advertising

- Stakeholders

- Balance between smart design, technology, and manpower/community buy-in/relationship building

- Where are the front doors to your homeless provider system?