

Problem

According to UGA today, ex-prisoners account for about 3% of the entire US population, and ex-felons who have not seen jail time account for about 8% of the entire population. Considering a US population of roughly three hundred million people, which comes to about nine million ex-prisoners and twenty four million ex-felon. Out of so many people, recent estimates say that five to six million of those ex-prisoners and twelve to fourteen of the ex-felons are unemployed. Why is it that so many Americans with a criminal history are unable to find work? One of the leading causes is due to employers being unwilling to hire said individuals. Therefore, there is a problem here that needs to be addressed.

There are already many solutions in place to try and assist ex-felons and ex-prisoners with this problem. What these solutions do is assist them to be better people and help them find jobs that are accepting of ex-felons and ex-prisoners. However there is still the issue that companies are unwilling to hire ex-criminals. So there is still some sort of structural inequality that has not been addressed by these current solutions.

The big issue is that employers don't feel like they should put their company at risk by hiring individuals with records. They feel that it would just be best to move onto the next application and interview someone who has no history because it wouldn't put their company at risk and it would reduce potential issues in the future for the companies and employees.

The cause that we will be focusing is employers who immediately move onto the next applicant when viewing applications where the applicant has marked that they are an ex-felon. According to John Schmitt and Kris Warner, "By contrast, only about 40 percent of employers would 'definitely' or 'probably' hire applicants with criminal records, especially for jobs that involve dealing with customers or handling money" (Ex-Offenders And The). As stated most companies wouldn't hire a person who was convicted of a crime let alone even consider the person. "Mostly for service jobs, ranging from minimum-wage employers from McDonald's to CNBC parent Comcast and, in Mayo's Atlantic City backyard, casinos, which he said are practically cities unto themselves, demanding an array of service workers" (Why Companies Are). This doesn't solve the problem considering ex-felons are working for companies for minimum wage when they are well qualified for other positions.

Solution

The solution that we created for the problem is to create an entire web course using Coursera, an educational web platform, designed to help educate ex-felons on many aspects involved with the employment process. The reason we chose this route is due to our target population being likely to lack a lot of the soft skills, job hunting resources, business apparel, and financial smarts they will need to know or understand when it comes time to trying to become employed and reintegrate back into society.

We chose Coursera as our basis as it is already a well-established and well-known website that provides classes on many different topics, so we felt that including our topic on that

site would also allow us to integrate and promote some of their more technical courses as our users would be interested in those skills as they prepare themselves for employment.

The content itself will be broken up into several different categories that are important for the employment process. The lessons are ordered in a linear order to imitate the chronology of the employment process. The lessons begin with “job hunting” and “interviews”, then move on to lessons about “business environment” and “professionalism” and then finally round out with “finances”. These are ordered in a way to imitate the steps one must take to become employed, first learning about how to search apply for jobs and then about how to perform well in interviews after the application process. The business environment and professionalism are important to understand once a job has been acquired and the employee must know how to behave, act, and perform well as an employee. Finally they will learn lessons about handling the results of working, which is money, and how to manage it responsibly.

The content for each lesson will contain weekly video lectures, activities and scenarios that relate to the lectures, and two tests to evaluate users mid-lesson and at the end of the lesson. The creation of the video lectures will either need to be recorded and uploaded or sought and vetted to be acceptable for the course (Figure 1). Activities should be relevant to the lecture that it is included with and should be accessible/doable for those with a lower income and education (Figure 2). Scenarios should be designed to provide students with possible situational problems relevant to the lecture and allow them to choose from multiple answers what they think the best solution to their scenario would be (Figure 3). These should almost feel like mini quizzes for each lecture. The two tests should both be cumulative of the lectures that precede them (Figure 4). That is, the first test in the middle of the lesson should test the user on material from the all the lectures in the first half of the lesson, and then the second test at the end of the lesson should test the users on all the lectures from the lesson, both in the first and the last half of the lesson, to ensure retention of knowledge.

Video Example: Figure 1



Activity Example: Figure 2A

Turn a word into a story

"Practice making up stories based on a random word or sentence you find in an arbitrary news article that you have not read. This practice will not only help with reacting and adapting to unexpected questions, it will help you develop the skills needed to tell coherent stories in real time." —Bob Kulhan, founder & CEO of Business Improv in the New York City area

Scenario Example: Figure 3

Response:

Rank the following options in order of relevance.

- A) You decide that you cannot send the report to your manager without addressing the inaccuracies and completing the information. So you reschedule your other work to edit the report.
- B) As this is a new client, you hope that they won't notice the report isn't finished. As such you approve the work and send to your manager.
- C) Due to the time constraints, you complete the most important changes and then send it to your manager.
- D) You explain to your manager what has happened and you request that you send the report/analysis by the next day.
- E) You raise the report as an issue with Sophie and ask her to carry out the most important amendments.

Test Example: Figure 4

Sample Question

When an interviewer asks you to tell them about yourself what question should ask them, so you can give them a more direct answer?

- ☐ Is there a particular aspect of my background that you would like more information on?
- ☐ Would you like me to tell you about my life growing up?
- ☐ Do you want to know about my experience working during my high school years?
- ☐ Would you like me to expand on my qualifications for the job

Evaluation

The way that we chose to test our design was by heuristic evaluation. We used ourselves as testers using this method. What we did is we laid out the ten important heuristics for usability and design, and then we went down the list, one by one, and scrutinized our high fidelity prototype that was designed in Figma to determine what was done in accordance with the heuristics, what was not, and what was effectively out of our control as several heuristics involve analyzing pieces that are not within the scope of our design. To clarify, we are designing a lecture course to be hosted on coursera, so many of the heuristics such as the errors and usability are provided by the coursera platform, not us.

What we would change about our design in accordance with this test is the following: To better show the status for the user, the scenarios that go along with the video lectures should include a system of scoring so that the user can evaluate their performance. We reorganized the order of the planned lessons to be in an order that is more logical in the sense of the employment timeline; looking for a job and preparing for interviews, skills to have that are important to be successful in the workplace and once a job is acquired, and then skills that are still relevant to the job like finances but come afterwards and are more related to leading a successful life. And to ensure that the videos are accessible and connectable to our target audience, we would change the videos to be less geared towards individuals with higher education as many ex-felons are not highly educated, so the videos would be made with language and examples aimed more specifically at users with a lower level of education, most likely high school. There are several other aspects that we would like to change, however those are a part of the coursera platform, and therefore not within the scope in which we can make edits. It may be possible to suggest to coursera to make these changes to better enhance our design but at the time we are unable to make those changes.

Limitation

Currently, limitations that exist within coursera are having a monthly renewal to take courses and become certified so users will need to be able to afford the course. Users will be required to be able to access internet and if they are not able to afford it will be unable to use the course. Users who are not self driven to learn and better themselves may struggle as there is no one to hold them accountable to learn and complete the course. The content for our design may be limited in the way that creators may not be the most qualified to provide the content or if the content is not verified to be factual, then misleading or poor content could be created or used in the lessons. Also, the certification may be discredited due superstitions that online courses are not as good as the traditional in class form of education. Our design is intended for ex-felons and ex-criminals however this does not mean that users outside of these groups are prohibited. Our assumption for our users is that they are most likely uneducated, ex felons needing assistance to get reintegrated into society, who are willing to become better people.

References

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