



INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Mobilizing an Online Business

Consider the experience of the following web sites:

Sometimes called the “Netflix of textbooks,” Chegg offers online textbook rental. Users can rent textbooks for a semester, quarter, or a summer, and Chegg provides a prepaid UPS shipping label so a user can return a rental at no additional cost. Users returning books late or in poor condition incur stiff penalties. Chegg also offers users the option of buying books – both new and used – with an option to return each book to Chegg at the end of the semester at a predetermined price. To date, it remains unclear whether Chegg will attract a sufficient set of participants to satisfy users’ book requirements.

Meetcha offers a social network specifically designed for singles ages forty and up. Although anyone interested may join the site, Meetcha explains that “we’re focused on singles better than forty ... others who get where you are in life.” The Meetcha site offers standard social networking functions as well as “People Out Doing Stuff” activities for members “to meet up in groups without all the pressure.” To date, it remains unclear whether Meetcha will attract a sufficient set of participants to satisfy users’ requirements.

Avego offers an instant ridesharing application. After installing Avego onto their smartphones, users specify their desired destinations and identify themselves as passengers (seeking driver assistance) or as drivers (potentially available to pick up one or more passengers, to the extent compatible with the driver’s route). Avego servers match drivers with passengers with as little as a minute of advance notice – potentially assigning a passenger to a driver already en route. To date, it remains unclear whether Avego will attract a sufficient set of participants to satisfy users’ travel requirements.

Car-Part operates a used auto parts market. Dealers (primarily junk yards) list the parts they offer, including quality, price, and location. Interested consumers search for parts using a multi-level menu (make, model, year, component name, geographic area). For particularly obscure parts, consumers can specify their requirements, which are sent to candidate dealers for review. To date, it remains unclear whether Car-Part will attract a sufficient set of buyers and sellers to satisfy users’ requirements for used auto parts.

What could managers of these companies do to spur adoption of their respective platforms?