Case Study: Springster

Springster: A Global Digital Brand Reaching a New Generation of Connected Vulnerable Girls

Principle(s) Addressed
Address Privacy & Security, Be Collaborative

Overview

Springster [http://www.girleffect.org/what-we-do/springster/] is a global mobile-first platform which builds vulnerable girls' confidence and skills online to help them fulfil their potential offline. Springster not only features content for girls, but also by girls themselves - including a mix of entertaining and educational content covering issues such as sexual and reproductive health, menstruation and building self-confidence. The location-specific content is aimed at 14- to 16-year-old girls in the Global South" who can be out of or behind in school, live in poverty, have married at a young age or have a disability. Springster helps girls find meaning and strength in each other's experiences. In so doing, it creates positive change in girls' lives by building their knowledge, resilience and self-belief.

Springster is a digital brand within Girl Effect [http://www.girleffect.org/] that is currently available in 66 countries in 17 languages and has 1.3m unique users each month. There are plans to expand the feature set to include more interactive tools.

Background

Since 2004, Girl Effect has been working with partners around the world to identify and understand the issues and challenges faced by vulnerable girls face. We define *vulnerable* as a girl who is not enrolled or is behind in school, identifies herself as part of a marginalized ethnic or religious group, has married at a young age and is perhaps pregnant or already a mother, lives in poverty ($3.10 per day or less as defined by the World Bank), has sustained a disability, or is not currently living with her parents.

Objectives

- Develop relevant, empowering, actionable and relatable content for vulnerable 14- to 16-year-old girls worldwide.

- Increase girls' knowledge around health, education, finances and personal safety in a way that is culturally appropriate.

- Positively influence girls' online and off-line attitudes and behaviors towards the issues that they face most by providing resources, information and a safe place for girls to connect and share their stories.

- Ensure girls' identity and data are secure and private to create a safe online experience that enables them to share their stories openly.

Principles for Digital Development

In 2013 we worked to increase girls' presence within the Global Goals for Sustainable Development [http://www.globalgoals.org/] and, in response, launched Girl Effect Mobile (GEM) — a mobile-first platform to connect vulnerable girls to each other and to the relevant content, services, tips and advice they were missing. In 2017 GEM evolved into Springster, a new online global identity created specifically to champion vulnerable girls.. Springster is a global mobile platform and website created for 14- to 16-year-old girls that focuses on connecting girls to the information and resources they need to effect positive attitude and behavior change online and offline. To date, Springster reaches an average of 1.3m unique monthly users, is available in 66 countries and 17 languages. Sixty percent of these users are both female and between 13 and 24 years old. On average per visit, users read three pieces of content, typically short-form articles, and stay on the site for more than two minutes. The countries with the highest number of users are Pakistan (2.3 million), Indonesia (1.3 million) and South Africa (497,000).

In collaboration with Facebook Free Basics [https://developers. facebook.com/docs/internet-org] and local mobile network operators, Springster is available free of charge worldwide. Springster can also be accessed on social media and through partnerships with a number of clients. The mobile platform allows users to access information, including health-, money- and savings-management, among others. Of the 66 countries where Springster is used, Indonesia, Nigeria, South Africa and the Philippines have been identified as priority markets, with locally created content to address the particular challenges that girls face in these communities.

Project Lifecycle Application

- **Analyze & Plan.** Springster is unique in that it brings together representatives from different sectors who work within the same platform to think creatively about leveraging technology and content to empower girls. Internally, the Springster team works collaboratively with our product, content, gender, monitoring and evaluation, and privacy and security teams to synchronize

> "Springster was chosen as a name that coins a term for an entire generation. A Springster is a smart, empowered and forward-thinking girl. Someone who's curious about the world, wants to learn more, meet new people and better herself through education and connection."
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> SPRINGSTER

our knowledge and feedback. Additionally, we fold in expertise from external stakeholders, including local content teams, distribution partners and social media platforms to solicit feedback on the software and create culturally sensitive content prior to development [http://digitalprinciples.org/understand-the-existing-ecosystem/]. Data privacy and security considerations are addressed from the beginning of the project lifecycle and are vital to the success of the platform.

- **Design & Develop.** Designing a platform thoughtfully from the beginning will prevent having to rebuild or significantly adapt later. For Springster, developing the platform with an expert on our defined privacy and security standards (known as the Girl Safeguarding Policy [http://www.girleffect.org/media/3052/gem-girl-safeguarding-policys_19-05-16.pdf]) was essential for safely reaching vulnerable girls worldwide. Conversation is a cornerstone of the content approach, and we have created several feedback loops and community-building features throughout our content to allow us to engage with our users. From comment threads to polls and user-generated content initiatives, we elevate the voices and value of girls while giving them space to have meaningful digital connections with us and others. Our content-production system was developed to be rigorous and focuses on high levels of quality control, which involves input from gender specialists, digital safety teams and editors. Through user-centered design, developers spent time understanding how girls use the internet and mobile devices [http://digitalprinciples.org/design-with-the-user/]. Springster conducted extensive formative research with girls and their families (surveys, in-person interviews, etc.) to develop a deep understanding of girls' lives and needs before creating content. We used this information to determine focus areas and then mapped content to specific, related objectives based on local context. The research found that many girls do not view the internet as a safe place. Instead of seeing the internet as a platform to connect and share advice, girls have experienced harassment and bullying on social media. We see Springster user
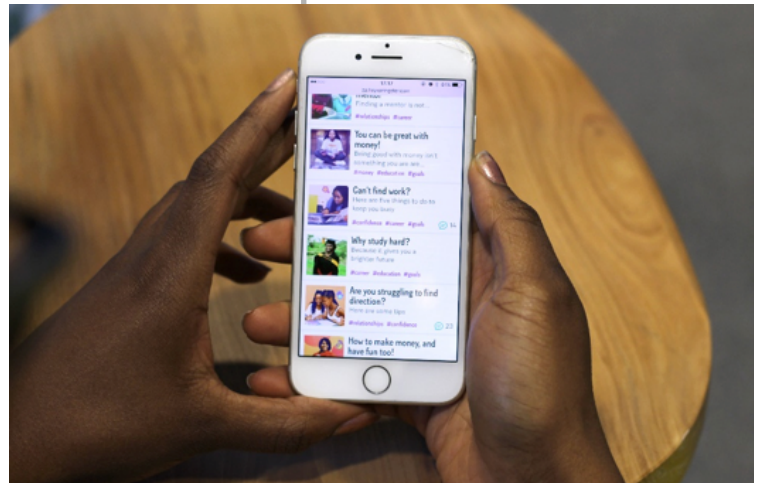
> "Springster celebrates the diverse, inspirational and convention defying experiences of girls through entertaining and educational content and stories written for and by girls."
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> SPRINGSTER

data as something that the girls own and, therefore, we ensure that all data are encrypted to increase security. Additionally, a clear and easy-to-understand registration process and terms of agreement signed by each user before linking any identifiable data further reassure users of the security of their data.

- **Deploy & Implement.** Customizing a platform for vastly different contexts over dozens of countries and numerous languages can be difficult to execute [http://digitalprinciples.org/design-for-scale/]. We are working to prioritize the experience of the girls who use the platform, although they are not the only stakeholders. The perspectives of parents, siblings and relatives are important too because they often control when

Springster in the hands of a user.
PHOTOGRAPH: GIRL EFFECT

and how girls access mobile phones. We recognize this and regularly test the platform and the content with parents and advisory committees to find the right balance. Additionally, we pay close attention to the needs of girls in varying cultural contexts. For girls in more traditional or conservative societies, discussing menstruation or sexual and reproductive health can be socially sensitive. We create content that empowers girls with knowledge and inspiration while also making sure that the content will not cause significant problems if girls are reading, commenting on or talking about it with friends and family. Managing and regularly adapting content can be complicated and expensive. To date, the site is free to use on Facebook Free Basics, and translations have been donated. However, as Springster continues to seek out additional sustainable funding, we will need to balance the goals of the funders while keeping our audience of vulnerable adolescent girls a top priority.

- **Cross-cutting: Monitor & Evaluate.** Springster is continually collecting and analyzing data to ensure that content makes sense to the users, as well as to support planning for scale and sustainability [http://digitalprinciples.org/be-data-driven/]. The monitoring and evaluation team regularly looks at metrics

in relation to reach, engagement, participation and impact, including number of repeat users, bounce rates, page views and registrations on the site. Data on knowledge, attitude and behavior change is gathered through surveys, in-person interviews with users, and interviews with users' families and friends. The team analyzes comments that express needs, as well as questions being asked and answered, to inform both content updates and how site participation is changing users' intentions and behaviors. In 2017 Springster launched a new survey tool for cohort analysis, allowing segmentation according to demographics, content consumption and use of features. The tool will be used to gather baseline and endline data in order to evaluate impact of the site and its content on users.

RESOURCES

Girl Safeguarding Policy: Digital Privacy, Security & Safety Principles & Guidelines, Girl Effect.
http://www.girleffect.org/media/3052/gem-girl-safeguarding-policys_19-05-16.pdf

Our purpose, Girl Effect.
http://www.girleffect.org/our-purpose/

What We Do, Springster.
http://www.girleffect.org/what-we-do/springster/

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Our lessons learned and recommendations are centered on the principles of privacy and security [http://digitalprinciples.org/address-privacy-security/] and collaboration [http://digitalprinciples.org/be-collaborative/].

- Define privacy and security standards and factor in the supplementary costs of building a safe and secure site before starting to build the platform. For Springster, developing the privacy and security standards (known as the Girl Safeguarding Policy [http://www.girleffect.org/media/3052/gem-girl-safeguarding-policys_19-05-16.pdf] with a data security expert was crucial to ensure that users have a safe online experience.

- Understand how your target audience uses the internet and mobile devices, and pinpoint areas of concern when it comes to users feeling unsafe due to cyberbullying and harassment. Through focus groups, in-person interviews and surveys, Springster collected these data and built the platform to address challenges commonly faced by vulnerable girls.

- Create a clear and easy-to-understand registration process and terms of agreement to be signed by each user before linking any identifiable data to that specific individual through posted comments, surveys and story submissions. Ensuring that users are aware of when and how their data are being used supports the objective of creating a safe online experience.

- Limiting direct communication between moderators and users allows for transparency and accountability. Creating robust moderating and reporting frameworks helps to keep girls safe from spam, cyberbullying and harmful language, while online safety content and girl-friendly user guidelines encourage proactive community building instead of reactive comment policing.

- Identify the players in your ecosystem, and create strong partnerships with stakeholders, funders, users and local teams. Soliciting partners' feedback, experiences and knowledge will assure context-specific and culturally appropriate content.

- Regularly attend local events and host meetings with the local organizations and stakeholders that work on issues of development, information and communications technology, gender, evaluation, and data privacy and security. Documenting and sharing work, results, processes and best practices collectively elevates the larger community and ecosystem.