

HCDE 318

Team Hopper

Valerie Huang

10/15/2016

## User research report and Competitive analysis

### Introduction

Our project is aiming to help university students to have cheaper and better travel experience. When college students travel, most of times they do not want to spent too much money on hotels or Airbnb. While travelling alone, they sometimes reach out to their friends living in that city, hang out with them, and live in their home. However, sometimes when students visit a place with no local friends or family and have to spend a lot of money on expensive hotels. Our project is going to help them with this problem by providing a platform for them to connect to more college students who are potential friends and temporary roommates. Since we are not earning profit from students, our product allows users to use virtual currency to rent rooms. Users who are sharing rooms can provide available bed or couch to users who need a place to stay and earn virtual currency from them.

### Competing products

Online tourism is a very competitive market and it is growing rapidly. The total amount of online tourism product purchase in 2012 quarter 3 is increased by 27.8% comparing with the same period in 2011 (Bilgihan & Bujisic, 2015). Since the goal of our product is to help students find temporary housing, our team is mainly focusing on analyzing two types of products: hotel booking and peer-to-peer homestay network. Online hotel booking product is one of the major competitors. It allows potential guests to gather information about hotel amenities and facilities in a utilitarian nature since they can compare prices

without contacting a hotel's sales representative or travel agent and prepare their travel itineraries while looking at a screen (Liu & Zhang, 2014). Example products would be Expedia (as shown in Figure 1) and Hotels.com.

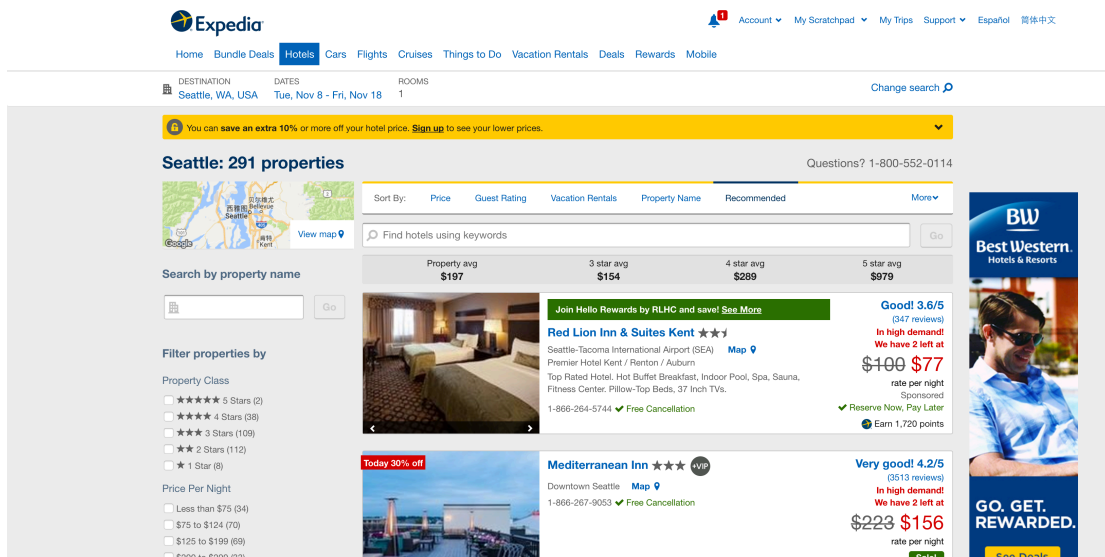


Figure 1 Users can find most of the hotels at Expedia

A phenomenon peer-to-peer homestay network company is Airbnb (shown in Figure 2), which is also one of our major competitors. Airbnb allow its users to lease their house in short-term or rent other people's house in a relatively cheaper price, comparing to hotels. It aims to help people feel belonged anywhere on the earth. Another peer-to-peer network is call Couchsurfing, which provides similar solutions. In the competitive analysis part, I will be focusing on this product.

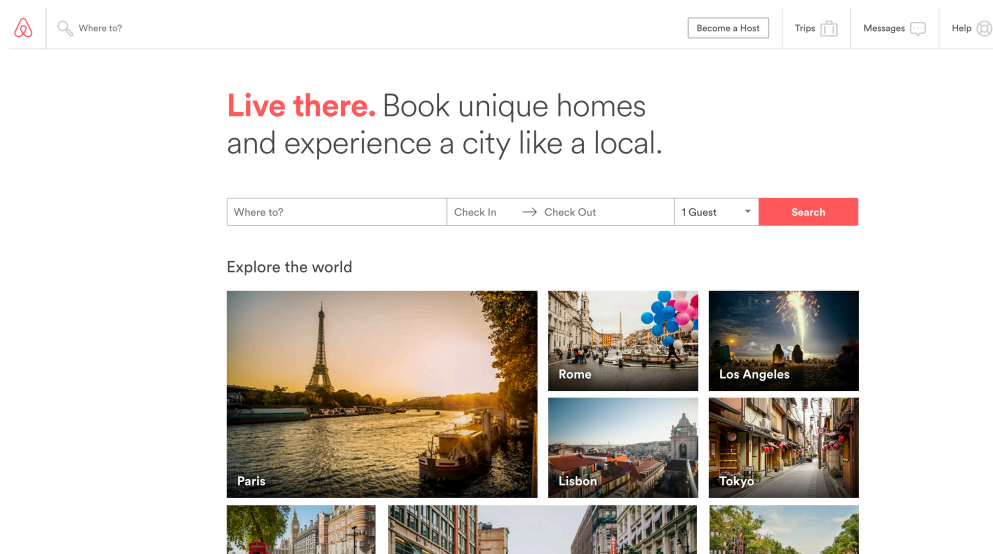


Figure 2 Welcoming home page of Airbnb

# Competitive analysis for Couchsurfing

## Target users

Couchsurfing is open to anyone who wants to travel and connect with other people, or are willing to share their home. It encourages people to share their lives, experiences, journeys, and home (Rosen, Lafontaine, & Hendrickson, 2011).

## Strengths

To help users get more connections, Couchsurfing is holding a lot of events in different communities (shown as Figure 3). This is a creative way to “provide” more references to its users. Through the events, users not only have fun and make more friends, but also get to know more potential hosts or guests, or connections of good hosts or guests.

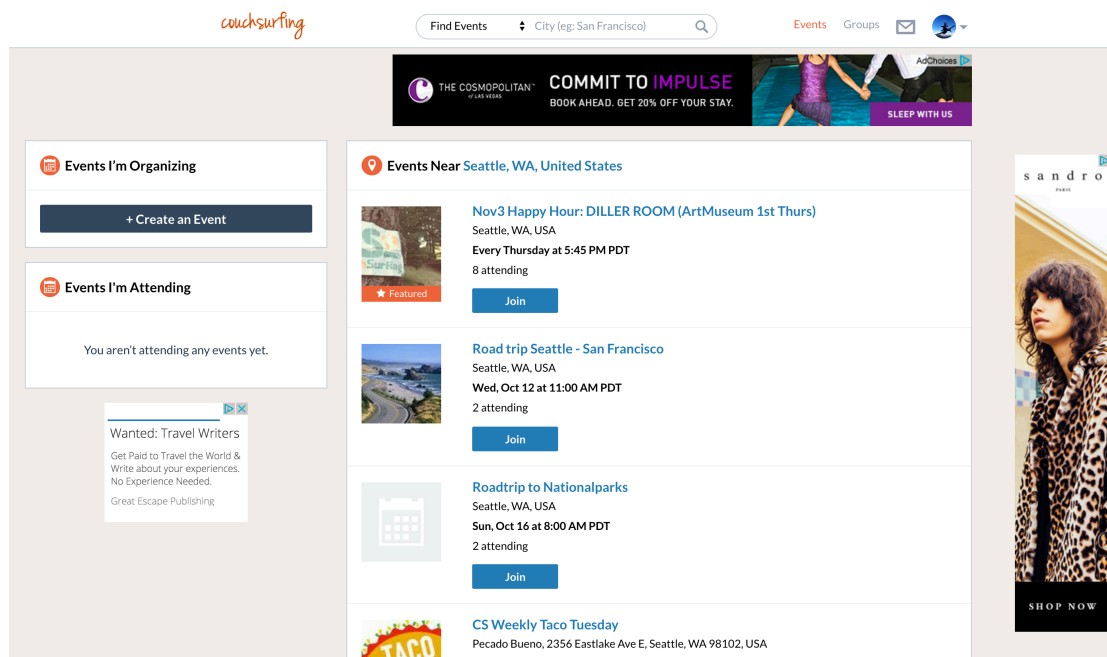


Figure 3 Local events hosted by couchsurfing

## Weakness

Safety issue is the primary concern of both Couchsurfing and our product. How Couchsurfing is addressing this issue was by reminding users to review profiles and references carefully, trust their instincts, report negative experiences, and a few other minor suggestions

(<http://www.couchsurfing.com/about/safety/>). Another way they encourage users to do is to verify their account by paying 20 dollars with a visa card or Paypal (Figure 4). Verified users will have a green check on their portraits. Having a visa card or Paypal account does not necessary proof their identity, and reminding users to be careful does not guarantee security. Although it is almost impossible to verify every user's identity, there may be better way to protect their users.

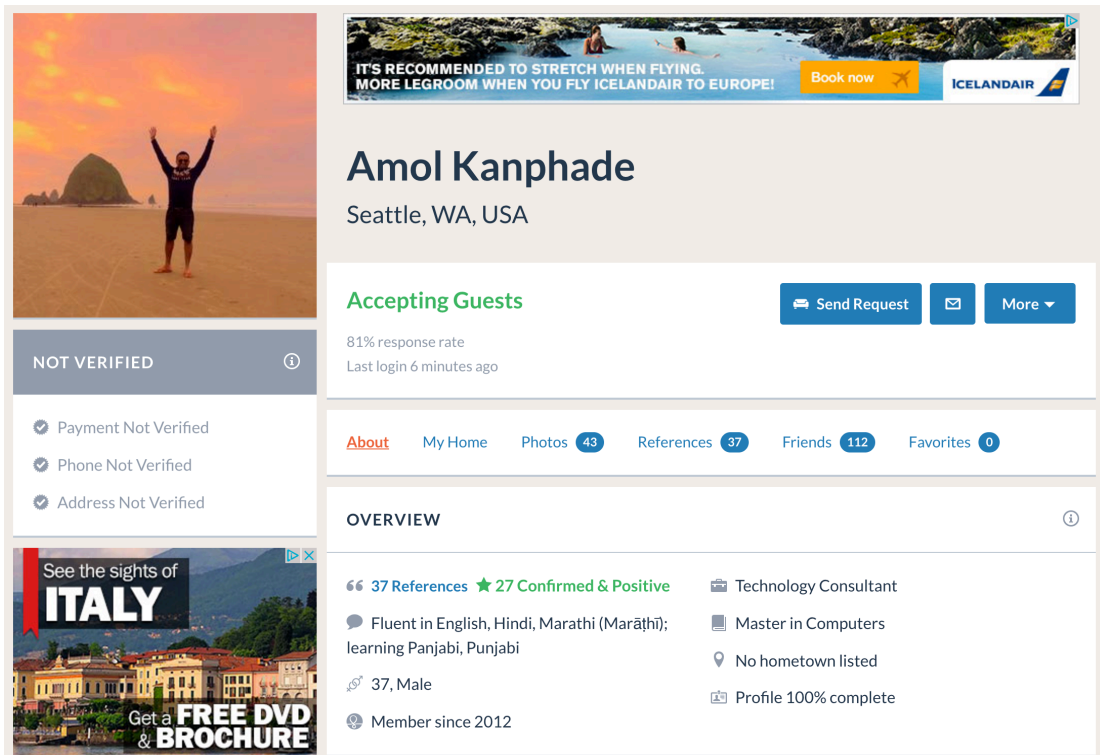


Figure 4 Typical host without verification

## Compare and Contrast

Having the same concern of safety as Couchsurfing, we hope to create a credibility system that can get users know each other by a more statistical way, instead of simply charging users money. Users get higher credibility only when they are highly rated or commented on good behaviors. Only users with good credibility can have discount price and users with higher credibility get better discounts. We hope users can review and make comment seriously, so our price is based on that. Our team is still discussing further details, but we keep our value in mind and will always strive to help our users have cheaper and better travel experience.

## Detailed list of sources of competitive analysis

Spencer's recommendation

<http://www.couchsurfing.com/about/how-it-works/>

<http://www.couchsurfing.com/about/safety/>

<https://www.google.com/>

<https://images.google.com/>

<https://scholar.google.com/>

<https://www.airbnb.com/>

<https://www.expedia.com/>

## Interview Q&A

This interview is semi-structured, so there will be many follow up questions. Major follow up questions are recorded below, whereas minor follow up questions are not but answers to these questions are recorded. The answers are not direct transcript. Some of the answers were summarized carefully and the meaning of the participants should not be changed. I was carefully not to tell the participant what our project is about, so that she did not try to give me the answer I needed.

Participant:

Name: L

Gender: Female

Occupation: UW student

- What do you think about travelling?
  - I really like travelling, and I travelled a lot. I never stay at home during vocations and I just love to be in new places.
- How do you choose where to live?
  - I love Airbnb and that's the only thing I use when booking place to stay.
- How do you feel about Airbnb?

- It is very convenient and it's cheaper than hotels, and I just like to stay in different places.
- Follow up question: what do you not like about Airbnb?
  - Most of times its really good and sometimes you can find very good price, but sometimes the house is not as shown in the picture. It can be dirtier. But hotels sometimes are dirty too, so I still choose Airbnb. There was once a very bad experience that the room was underground but the owner did not claim that on the website. But I finally got refund.
- Which website do you use most? (Not asked)
- What requirement do you have when you choose Airbnb or hotels.
  - My requirement is to be clean. It doesn't have to be extremely clean if I stay in other person's house, but at least the restroom should be okay. And I hope the house is at good locations like close to public transportation.
- Follow up question: Would you compromise if the room you are going to stay is very cheap?
  - Maybe not.
- Follow up question: What if it is free.
  - Maybe, but it still can't be too dirty.
- Do you visit friends while travelling?
  - Yes, if I have good friends living there. I stay with them if we are very good friends.
- What do you feel about meeting new people while traveling?
  - I will be careful because if I don't know who they are, they can be dangerous.
- Follow up question: What if you know their background?
  - Then it would be nice.
- Do you travel alone?
  - No.

## Findings

These findings are only based on the answer of a sole participant and are not reliable enough to be used in the design of the product. This participant's answer will be analyzed together with other participants in other interviews later.

- The participant loves travelling and stay at others home.
- The participant prefers cheap place to stay.
- The participant likes clean environment but does not like hotels.
- The participant can lower the expectations if it is free.
- The participant is willing to make friends only when safety is guaranteed.

## References

- Bilgihan, A., & Bujisic, M. (2015, July). The effect of website features in online relationship marketing: A case of online hotel booking. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 14, 4th ser.
- Liu, J. N., & Zhang, E. Y. (2014, May). An investigation of factors affecting customer selection of online hotel booking channels. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 39, 71-83.
- Rosen, D., Lafontaine, P. R., & Hendrickson, B. (2011, September). CouchSurfing: Belonging and trust in a globally cooperative online social network. Retrieved October 18, 2016, from [http://www.academia.edu/370371/CouchSurfing\\_Belonging\\_and\\_trust\\_in\\_a\\_globally\\_cooperative\\_online\\_social\\_network](http://www.academia.edu/370371/CouchSurfing_Belonging_and_trust_in_a_globally_cooperative_online_social_network)