Learning Badges for You

A Canadian

Digital Learning Badge

Supplier

Venture Proposal
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ETEC 522, Assignment 3,
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LB4U.ca

VISION & MISSION

Imagine knowing that at the end of learning experiences there is a token of your accomplishments, easily displayed and celebrated within social networks of global, life-long learners. Consider hearing "*There's a badge for that*" as frequently as you hear "*There's an app for that*". That's the vision of Learning Badges for You (LB4U), a Canadian digital learning badge provider. Our success is in validating, supporting and celebrating the success of Canadian learners and their learning achievements.

DESCRIPTION

Digital learning badges (DLB) are a disruptive, game changing technology to current systems of certification and accreditation of learning achievements (Knight & Casilli, 2012). DLB combine a graphic image with embedded metadata. The open, flexible framework includes the badges, assessment, and infrastructure (Mozilla, 2012). The true value of DLB comes from the depth of 'behind' information included in the underlying metadata. Learners can combine badges as "living transcripts of skills and competencies" (Knight & Casilli, p. 279) through LB4U's unique display options and badge board templates.

LB4U will do for education what Foursquare has done for social geo-location - enable learners to "set goals, motivate behaviours, represent achievements, and communicate success" (Knight & Casilli, p. 279). A proof-of-concept pilot completed by Mozilla and Person 2 Person University (P2PU) models the potential for this product. The open-badge infrastructure (OBI) from Mozilla provides the necessary technology standardization and specifications. (Mozilla, 2012)
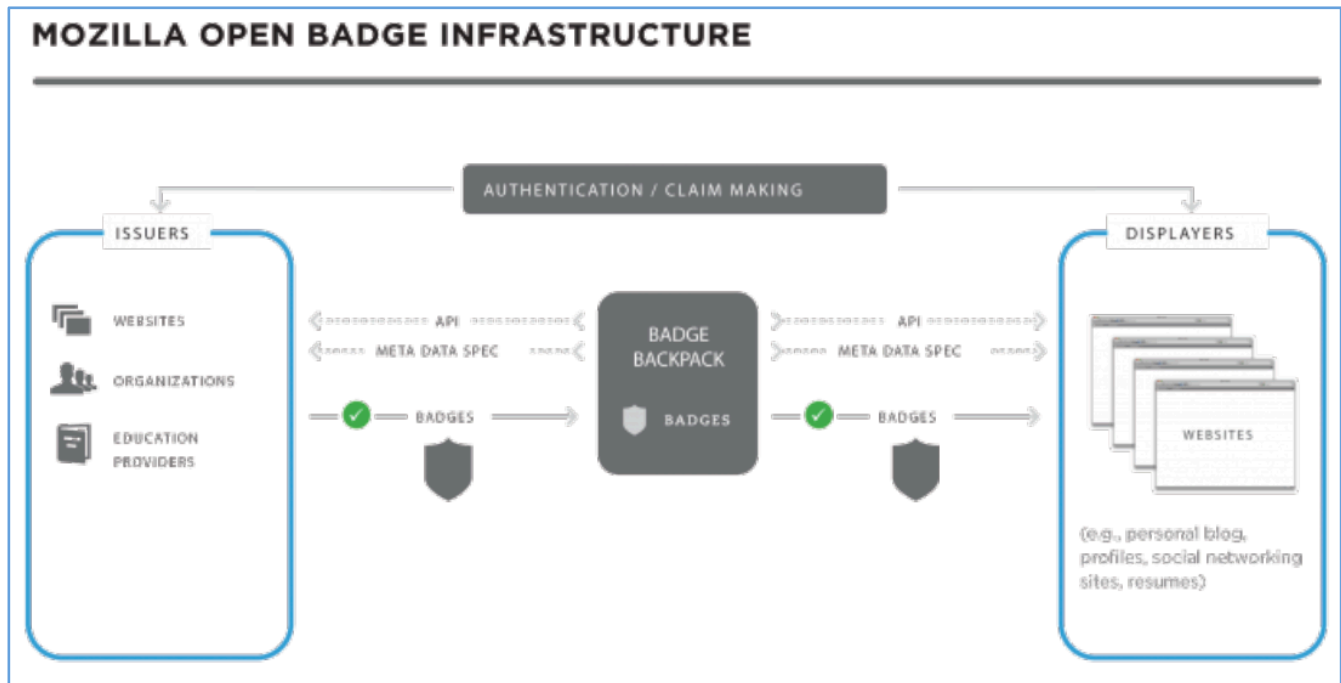

Image 1

LB4U is a Canadian, web-based learning badge supplier that connects issuers with earners. By designing DLB for educational institutions, with their brand, course information and certification data embedded within a graphic display, LB4U provides value-added service to learning suppliers. By providing learning badges

and unique display options, LB4U provides value-added service to earners of learning achievements. Badge differentiation through image, size, colour, and dimension demonstrates increasing levels of proficiency. Badges capture learning paths, signal achievements, motivate learners, support innovation and flexibility, identify and build reputation, and build community (Mozilla, 2012). Badges become artifacts demonstrating skills (hard skills showing mastery or soft skills showing qualities), accreditation and tasks completed in online, blended, and face-to-face learning in formal, informal, non-formal and self-directed learning environments. In current open, transparent, transitional and fluid learning contexts, LB4U is poised to provide collaborative, social and accreditation service to the learning marketplace.

Business Model

Providing free design and accreditation support to cash-strapped Canadian education providers (universities, K-12 school systems) will help build LB4U's reputation as a transparent, trustworthy, willing partner in the development of creditable learning products. Payment for authentication, security and hosting services through annual fees per course, on a scaled system, will net necessary income. Providing free design and support for non-profit organizations (Scouts,

4

Guides, etc.) will strategically place LB4U as a partner in life-long, child-centered learning environments.

Badge Metadata - coded 'under'

Badge Issuer: UBC - MET
Badge Earner: H. DeWaard
Date: August, 2012
Badge Details:
• completion of ETEC 522
• 4 assignments completed
• mastery in venture analysis, educational market analysis, constructing venture pitch, awareness of ed. tech market trends

ETEC 522

UBC

Earnings from individual learners, who desire to engage, showcase and socially connect their learning achievements with others will be tiered on per use, hosting and service basis. In this way, LB4U establishes a focus on learners and educators to support skill development, personal and professional growth and provide service that is inclusive, social, participatory, and lifelong.

Target Market

Starting with the Ontario online learning marketplace in the K-12 and higher education learning, because of its penetration into online learning environments (Contact North, 2011), LB4U will build relationships, market credibility and delivery structures. Provincial control and mandates within formal learning contexts in the Canadian education marketplace dictates that LB4U builds localized, provincially responsive contacts and delivery systems. Providing service to MOOC (massively open online course) learning environments (Siemans, 2012; Educause,

2011) will extend LB4U's services into the global learning marketplace. Extending badge provision services to corporate, government and associations in their skill development and learning contexts will increase market potential for LB4U products.

Barriers to Entry

DLB design and infrastructure is new technology that requires research and development in design and delivery. Current accreditation and degree granting structures in formal learning environments can be roadblocks to success in digital learning badge provision. Philosophical differences in learner engagement and motivation may prevent organizations and individuals from accessing, providing or engaging in DLB technologies. Competition from U.S. based badge providers (Learning Time, LEAD, Pearson, K12) may infiltrate the Canadian learning environment, thereby affecting market share.

Strategic Partnerships

Partnerships and affiliations in the DLB environment will include technology and development, education and learning, venture and support, and non-profit relationships. These include:

- Mozilla, for current design and delivery mechanisms for OBI
- Microsoft, for current design and delivery of learning badges for self directed, educator learning
- Ontario Learn, a consortium of colleges partnered in providing online learning in the Ontario learning landscape
- Contact North, Ontario's distance education and training network
- e-Learning Ontario, online provider to Ontario K-12 education systems
- OSAPAC, the Ontario software acquisitions and licensing advisory committee
- Ontario and other provincial teacher's unions and professional colleges
- CNIE, the Canadian Network for Innovation in Education
- Desire 2 Learn, Ontario learning management system provider
- Moodle LMS providers - Remote Learner, Ontario and Lambda Solutions, B.C.
- Baldwin Sales, provider of physical awards and stickers in Ontario learning markets
- Canadian and Ontario Scouting and Guiding organizations


Financial Overview

Valuation of LB4U will be regularly re-examined over time as research,

development and production of DLB technology, design and delivery changes.

Goals for the venture capital at this early stage is for financing to continue

progress on product design and development, hiring talent in IT and marketing,

establishing distribution and contacts within individual education organizations,

co-creation of accreditation and certification protocols in partnership with

learning organizations, validating products and processes, and attracting investor interest. (Callow & Larson, 2003)

It is challenging to generate a pre-money valuation. Considering specific variables as they change over the life of LB4U is important (Callow and Larson, 2003). Summary statements outlining variables appear here but will be detailed in the full business plan:
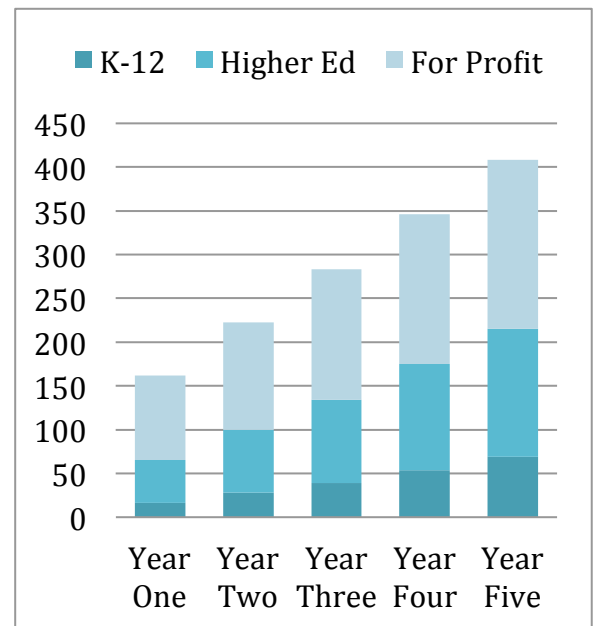
- CEO and management team – The CEO brings extensive expertise in education (K-higher ed.) with thirty-four years of experience, as well as demonstrated leadership ability in administrative, curriculum and educational technology domains. The management team currently includes IT support, marketing expertise and the project writing team.
- Novelty of the value proposition – Since DLB is a new technology, the Canadian education marketplace has no similar commercial ventures providing design or display services.
- Evaluation of intellectual property – Current OBI provides an open, transparent provision of coding and collection technology. Capital will provide opportunity to establish commercial and copyright products within viable, granular, transparent and portable solutions unique to Canadian learning ecologies.
- Expected time-to-market – funding will provide enhanced time-lines for acquisition of hardware, software, web development, security, privacy, access portals, and marketing for the 2013-2014 school year schedule.

- Expected path to profitability – using tiered purchasing options from free, basic, and premium options, LB4U expects to reach profitability within the Ontario sector within two years of release. This is based on a conservative market share of 20% of the 550,000 online learners in Ontario K-higher education organizations (Jean-Louis, 2012; Barbour, 2011) purchasing a minimum of three DLB and one badge display board (approx. $10/learner). With expected improvements of completion rates in Ontario higher education from current 70% of registrations, and increased demand from 59% of the population to 70%, the return on investment will be significantly improved. Without accurate data on Canadian online learning offerings (Jean-Louis, 2012), overall profitability in countrywide distribution is challenging. With the influx of Canadian development of MOOC's (Siemans, 2011), possible market potential of 200,000+ participants world wide per course will improve profit margins.

- Estimated capital needs and burn rate – the initial $100,000 investment will establish one year of funding at a burn rate of $1900 per week for hardware, network, software, salary and communication costs.

- Syndicated risk – shared risk by the management team through credit on current holdings, employee stock options and appropriate levels of profit sharing will minimize early stage risk. R&D will utilize beta-testing formats to encourage early adopters to engage in co-design and display potentials.
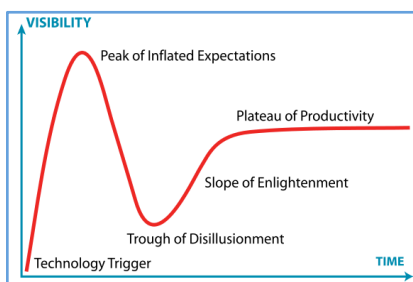
Through strategic application of user adoption patterns and hype phases (see image), LB4U will penetrate the challenging educational markets (Gartner, 2012; Avila & Wilson, 2011).

With direction and commitment from Canadian and provincial government announcements to improve learning outcomes, investments in innovative learning products will continue. Remarks from U.S. government officials have already shown support for DLB technology (Duncan, 2011). Canadian potentials in this sector (OntarioLearn Annual Report, 2011; AUCC Report, 2011) parallel the global online learning increases of 25-33% over five years in K-higher education (GSV Advisor Report, 2011). The potential profits over that timeframe are significant, if the technology and infrastructures are carefully designed at the early stages.

Venture Analysis

Venture strengths

- Easily understood service and delivery models for investors and target clients, despite the fact that DLB technology is in development and design stages or does not yet exist (Mozilla wiki; Casilli, 2012)
- Proposed strategic partnerships increase adoption potential within education sectors and markets
- Service and commitment to not-for-profit partners
- Open marketplace with untried product provides room for opportunity in Ontario and Canadian markets
- Awareness of demographics, adoption and hype cycles
- CEO awareness of how to navigate the Ontario K-12 and higher education

marketplaces

- Potential to revolutionize education sector will excite and interest early adopters and socially engaged digital learning populations at individual and educator levels

Venture weaknesses

- Meeting IT development and integration within specific market timelines since OBI is still under development (Casilli, 2012; Knight, 2011)
- Market study is required to determine the need and potential demand
- Digital badge systems are not a 'one-size-fits all' technology (Jenkins, 2012; Shaw, 2011)
- Creating portability and authentication protocols for all institutions, course offerings or learners
- Working through the 'hype' cycle
- Time and network development of strategic partnerships through current organizational contacts
- Addressing philosophical and pedagogical differences in engagement and 'gamification' of education (Knight, 2011; Jenkins, 2012; Resnick, 2012; Watters, 2011) at individual, system and organizational levels

Conclusion

LB4U is an innovative, learner and educator focused provider of DLB. Our design and distribution systems deliver ecologies of scale for co-creation and 'cooking' badge construction to enhance learner motivation and opportunity within collaborative, connected learning networks. LB4U provides the bridge between issuer and earner with badge expertise and services (see image).
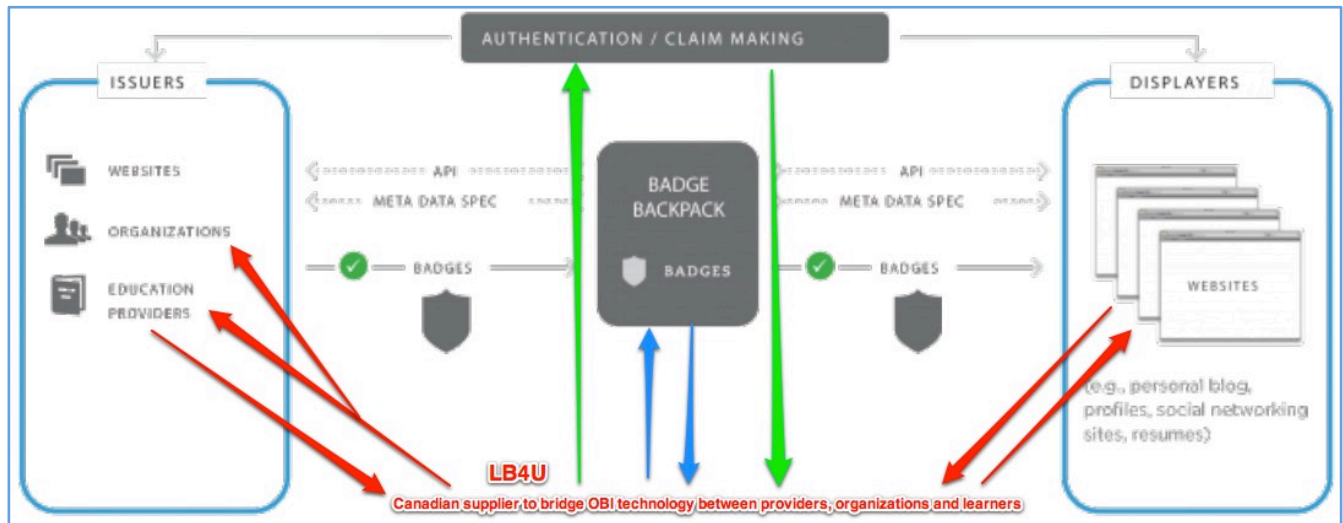
LB4U position in digital learning badge ecosystem

With current proof-of-concept and pilot phases completed by Mozilla (Knight & Casilli, 2012), LB4U is developing the Canadian contextual data and delivery systems. By investing in LB4U, you can invest in the skills, leadership, commitment, domain expertise and experience, passion for educational technology and learning, vision and integrity of the CEO and management team. In return for your investment you can provide strategic support, direction, leadership, sales and marketing, and experience in business ventures. LB4U, with your support, can transform the learning landscape for educators and learners at all ages and stages in Ontario and Canada, in the present and into the future.

H. DeWaard, CEO
LB4U.ca
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Personal Venture Self Reflection

Despite challenges with philosophical and pedagogical arguments for and against the use of DLB, this venture comes from personal and professional need for community, engagement, motivation, achievement and recognition. Being able to share learning accomplishments in a graphic display with future employers, family and friends is enticing. Incorporating embedded metadata that links to my work provides viewers with opportunity to explore skills mastered.

Bringing badges into the Ontario learning ecology would support learners who are disengaged, disenfranchised and dropping out. Recognizing hard and soft skills brings meaningful purpose to learning. Daniel Pink describes autonomy, mastery and purpose (both intrinsic and extrinsic) as key elements of motivation. DLB fit into this canvas, despite Jenkins' or Resnick's skepticism.

I explored widely, broadly, narrowly and deeply, into the online learning environments in Ontario, Canada and globally, as well as technologies in DLB. I'm not sure I'm ready to jump into the various communities I discovered in my investigation, but MET has taught me to risk, explore and sometimes jump in where you dare not tread. After earning my badges for MET, that may be the next venture opportunity just waiting!

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