Case Study

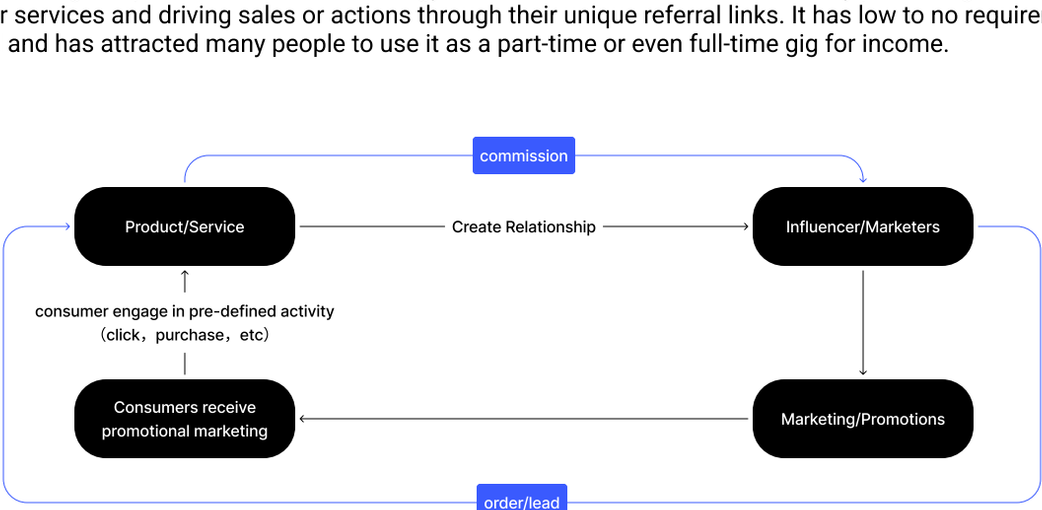
Affiliate Marketing Business Module Localization

OVERVIEW

Objective	Current State	Role
Create an efficient, back-end management platform for US affiliate marketers	The company's affiliate partner program primarily focuses on team management to increase revenue. It is currently operating in countries such as Singapore and Indonesia with positive results.	**UX Researcher.** Research whether this business model is suitable for the U.S. Provide insights for localization of the business model, and improvement ideas for the current Prototype.

What is affiliate Marketing?

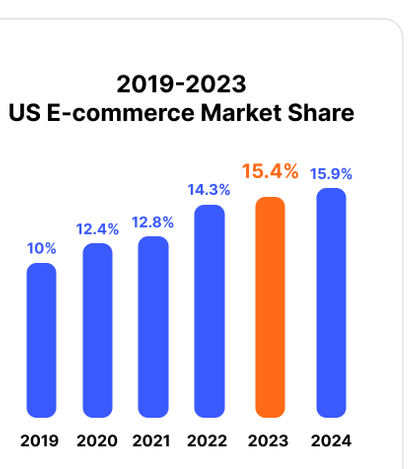
Affiliate marketing is a performance-based strategy where affiliates earn commissions by promoting a company's products or services and driving sales or actions through their unique referral links. It has low to no requirements to get started and has attracted many people to use it as a part-time or even full-time gig for income.



Why the US Market?

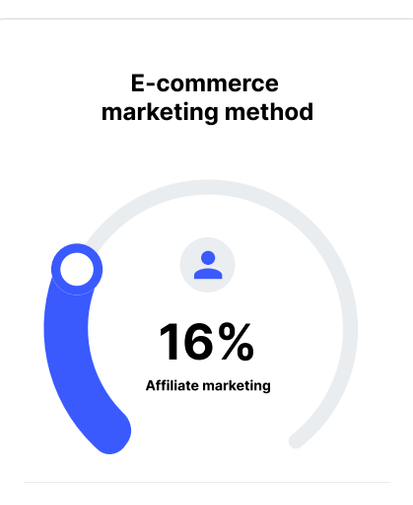
To determine if entering the US market could be valuable for the company, I researched online to get an initial understanding of the U.S. affiliate market and found the following data that suggest affiliate marketing in the U.S. is a rapidly expanding industry that offers significant opportunities and potential.

2019-2023 US E-commerce Market Share



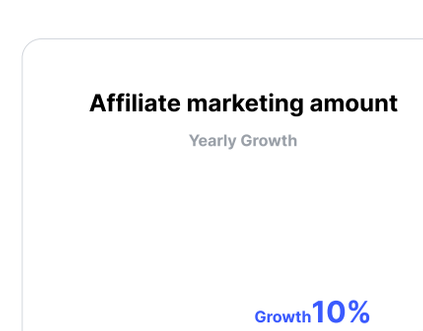
E-commerce is taking up an ever-growing share of consumer spending in the United States."

E-commerce marketing method



Affiliate marketing has became one of the major marketing strategy for many e-commerce site

Affiliate marketing amount



Affiliate marketing is growing at rate of 10% year over year

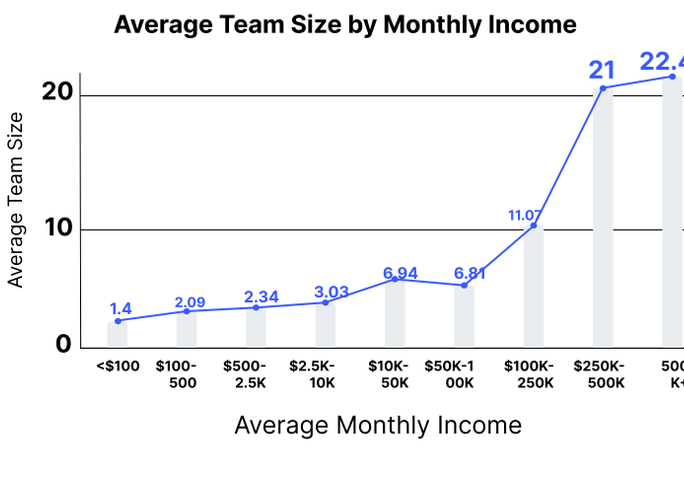
Furthermore, ***the data suggests that dedicated affiliate marketers can achieve greater success by building and managing an affiliate marketing team. (source: Authority Hecker)***

Affiliate Marketer who earns 6 figure annually have 6+ team members

The affiliate Marketing team's Income grows exponentially with team size.

The affiliate's income and traffic significantly increases with experience.

Average Team Size by Monthly Income



Therefore, ***it is worth looking into how we can build a platform that can help experienced affiliate marketer to grow and expand profit through expanding their team.***

Design Challenge

1. *How can we successfully migrate the collaborative affiliate marketing platform to the US to establish a highly efficient collaboration module.*
2. *How can we attract more beginners/potential marketer and help them grow to increase the platforms overall earning potential.*

Research Methods

As the project is currently in its early development and experimental phase. I am responsible for reaching a conclusion and developing a plan within a short timeframe. To achieve this, I have chosen market research, forum research and interviews as they are cost-effective and efficient research methods.

Market Research

To gain an initial understanding of the US affiliate market. I started a journey as a marketer to experience and analyze their core users, key functionalities, and promotional strategies on the following platforms

AWIN amazonassociates BEST BUY

The important finding based on my research and experience includes:

The existing platforms currently does not have mature team collaborative business models so there's definitely a gap to be filled

Compare to the Asian market, U.S. companies runs their own affiliate programs instead of running affiliate programs through large e-commerce platform

Existing affiliate platforms in the U.S. are relatively basic. There are opportunity for us to build a product with better user experience to earning market share

These findings indicated that:

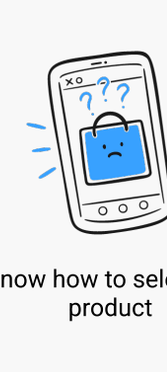
1. ***The opportunity for building a team collaboration focused affiliate platform.***
2. ***We need to Prioritize intuitive and clean UI design to differentiate your platform from competitors***
3. ***Our platform need to build-in flexibility to be able to work with different types of affiliate programs, put in consideration of how we can attract affiliate programs to collaborate with.***

Forum Research

I reviewed forum posted across 3 of the major affiliate online community and found the following major barriers for newcomers:

Lack of direction or plan confused about how to start

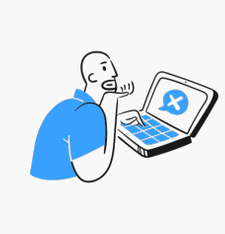
Many people still don't know how does affiliate marketing works



Don't know how to select the right product

Confused about tracking, don't know how to analyze data

Difficult to get responds from affiliate managers

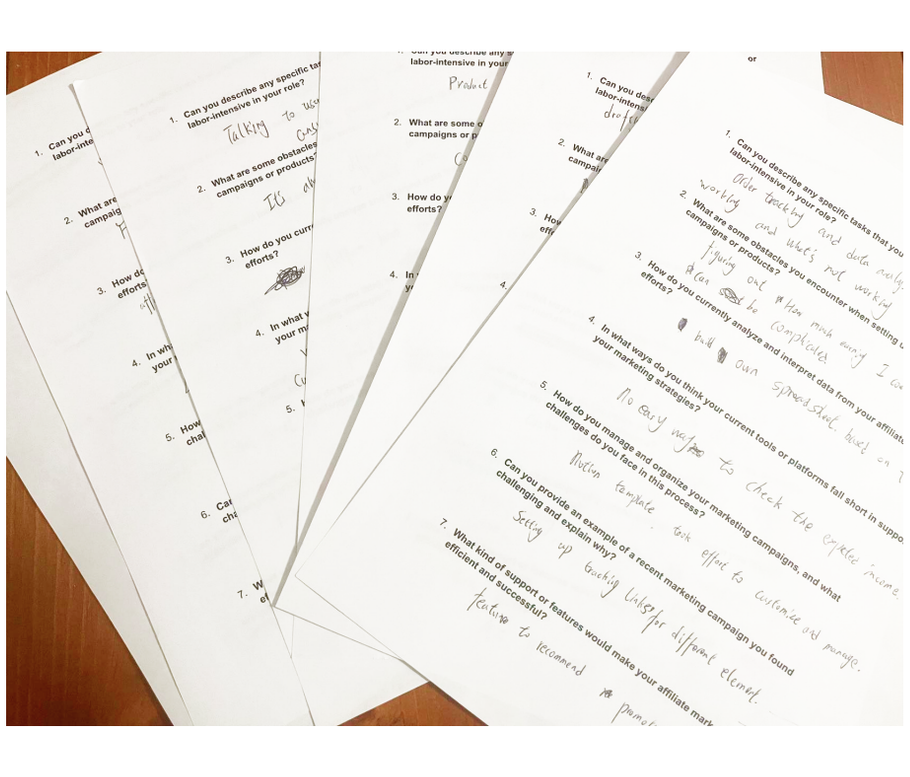


Don't know how to bring traffic to their site

- Based on forum discussions, new affiliate marketers encounter numerous barriers when entering the business. They often seek advice or strategies for getting started. One prominent issue that stood out from my research is *the "chicken and egg" dilemma that many new comers face: to be successful in promoting, they need support from affiliate managers. However, they typically receive less attention if they lack experience or proven success in the field.*
- Many users on the forum are *struggling to understand the basics of affiliate marketing and are unsure if it's the right fit for them.*

Interview

Interview objectives: I conducted semi-structured interviews to understand how they address challenges faced by new marketers and to identify any issues they encounter with the current products.



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Affiliate marketers attended the interview

20+

Years of total experience combined

Interview findings:

1. Experienced marketers find it significantly easier to connect with and build relationships with affiliate programs

2. Maintaining a community and followers is key to success as an affiliate marketer. but it is very time-consuming, (experienced marketers has the need assistance to expand their reach in community)

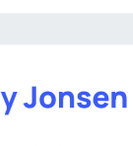
3. Experienced affiliate marketers find that one of the major bottlenecks in their growth is the lack of support. Daily 'errant' tasks consume a significant amount of time

Therefore I think ***developing an affiliate marketing platform that helps experienced affiliate marketers expand their teams by providing support and assistance to new/potential affiliate marketers*** is a feasible solution.

User Persona

To help sympathies with the user, I built the following personas based on the findings from the interview and forums I gathered:

Jay Jonsen



I am used to with online service and I usually do my online shopping from Instagram.

AGE	42
EDUCATION	Masters in Business
STATUS	Married
OCCUPATION	Affiliate Marketer
LOCATION	Atlanta
TECH LITERATE	High

Extrovert · Dedicated · Spender · Tech-savy

Bio

Jay is a driven and knowledgeable affiliate marketer with a proven track record of success. Ready to take on new challenges, Jay seeks opportunities to leverage expertise and drive growth in dynamic and innovative environments.

Core needs

- Expand to reach more audience and niche to increase earning
- Finding High-Quality affiliate programs
- Keep up with industry trends and changes in affiliate marketing

Frustrations

- Complicated process to track down promotional materials
- No easily identified or sort promotional opportunities
- Too much complicated tasks, not enough time to solve

Brands

simplifi Fidelity

Affiliate Niche

Budge control · Finance

Platform

Website · Mobile App

Cameron Brown

My goal is to mentor upcoming marketers, share my knowledge, and contribute to the growth of the affiliate marketing community.

AGE	39
EDUCATION	Masters in Business
STATUS	Married
OCCUPATION	Affiliate Marketer
LOCATION	Atlanta
TECH LITERATE	High

Extrovert · Motivated · Altruistic · Tech-savy

Bio

She currently lives in Atlanta. She finished her master in business and has years of experience as a Sales Manager before She decided to start her own business and become a full time Affiliate.

Core needs

- Continue to stay ahead of industry trends and adapt to new technologies and strategies.
- Mentor upcoming affiliate marketers and contribute to the growth of the affiliate marketing community.
- Explore new niches and verticals to diversify affiliate marketing efforts and expand revenue streams.

Frustrations

- Sifting through large volumes of data to extract actionable insights can be time-consuming and mentally tax.
- High amount of work load to balance multiple campaigns, partnerships.

Brands

headspace nora

Affiliate Niche

Health/Wellness

Platform

Website · Mobile App

Wade Wilson

I am trying to seek a way to make some extra cash, and affiliate market showed up at the right time

AGE	22
EDUCATION	Bachelor in CS
STATUS	Single
OCCUPATION	Student
LOCATION	Blacksburg
TECH LITERATE	High

Introvert · Thinker · Spender · Tech-savy

Bio

Wade currently lives in Blacksburg, He is a full-time student at Virginia Tech. He is experimenting with affiliate to gain practical experience and generate some extra income

Core needs

- Need to know how to bring more traffic to his site
- Need step by step guidance from experienced colleges
- Need to learn the profitability of the selecting niche

Frustrations

- Information overload
- Difficult to get in touch with affiliate manager
- Difficult to create attractive content

Brands

VARMILO logitech

Affiliate Niche

Tech Gear

Platform

Website

Emily Clark

I love discovering new beauty products and sharing my finds with friends

AGE	24
EDUCATION	High School
STATUS	Single
OCCUPATION	Receptionist
LOCATION	Johnson
TECH LITERATE	High

Organized · Shopaholic · Spender · Tech-savy

Bio

Emily Clark is a personable and organized receptionist who loves shopping online. She is exploring side hustle opportunities that can leverage her passion for online shopping, Emily is eager to earn extra income and explore new skills outside her day job.

Core needs

- Earn additional income to enhance her lifestyle and savings.
- Understand how affiliate marketing can work as viable side hustle.
- Turn her love for online shopping into a profitable venture.

Frustrations

- Balancing her full-time job with a side hustle, leaving limited time for learning and execution.
- Concerned about any up front costs
- Struggling to find trustworthy resources with the abundance of information online

Brands

ULTA SEPHORA NORDSTROM NARS

Affiliate Niche

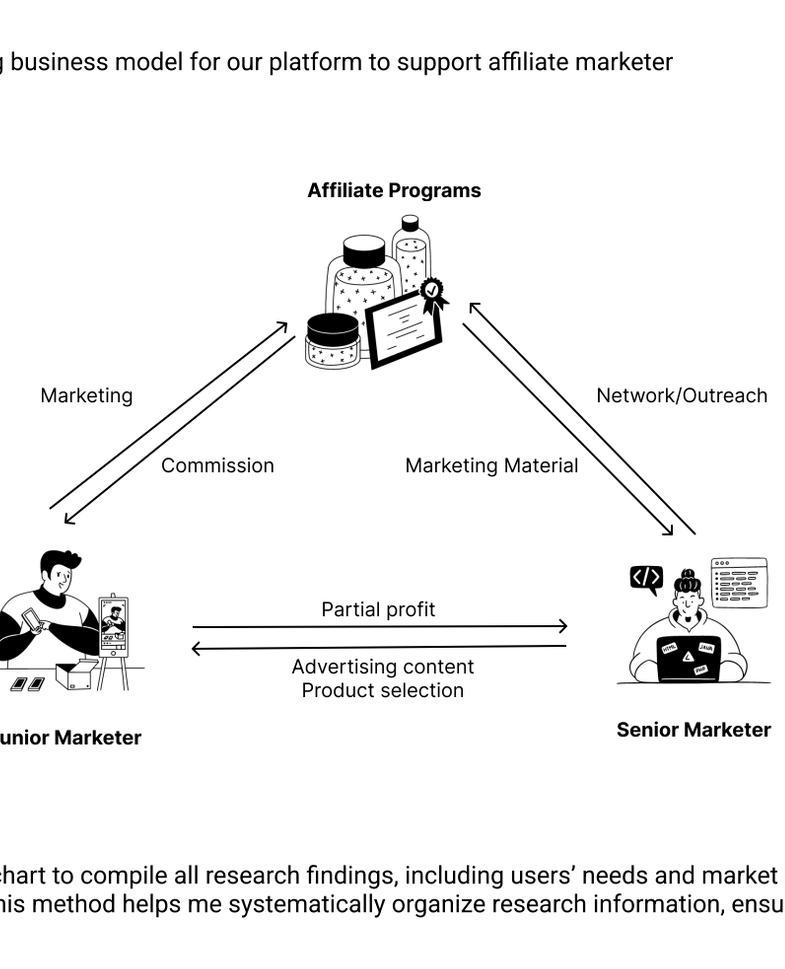
Budge control

Platform

Website · Mobile App

Solutions

I proposed the following business model for our platform to support affiliate marketer



I created the following chart to compile all research findings, including users' needs and market demands, and brainstorm solutions. This method helps me systematically organize research information, ensuring no valuable insights are overlooked.

Attract User

Need	Solution
Platform need path to promote and recruit new affiliate marketer	**Feature reward system for current user through recruit new marketers.**
Platform need to attract visitor to become new users	**Set up home page to showcases success stories, incentive learning materials, etc.**

Onboarding

Need	Solution
Platform need to encourage user to use more frequently	**Feature daily check-in, learning materials, new user can increase commission rate through completing tasks**
New member needs to learn and get hands on experience	**Set up the official mentor module for the platform: video tutorials, text and image tutorials, and provide packaged learning materials to new user to lower the learning threshold**
Platform need to find a way to reward user from being active on the platform	**Platform track the promotion activities, and reward higher commission rate when it reaches certain quantity**

Campaign Selection

Need	Solution
Team need to share quality product for campaign ideas.	**Feature for team members to create campaign suggestion**
Team need access and view all the campaign/product that is available to advertise	**Feature product material create and select function**
User needs to easily location product they want to access	**Feature variety of filter selection based on the research finding**

Link Transfer

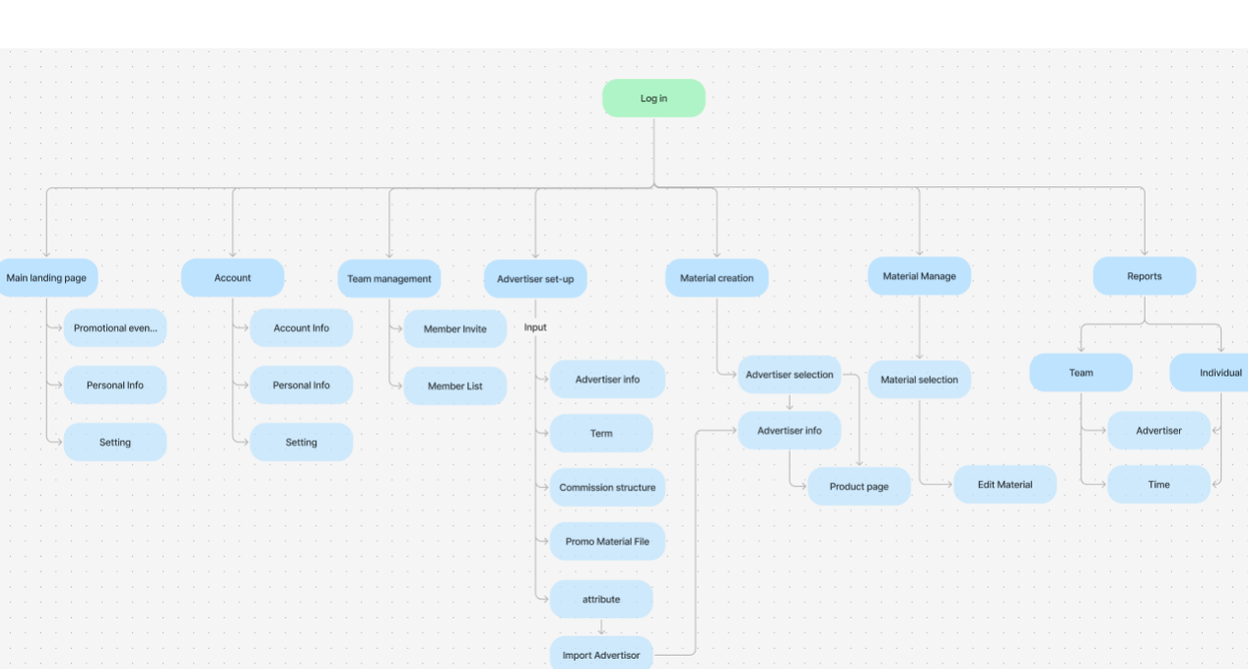
Need	Solution
User need to distribute link to team members	**Additional channels can be assigned to already transferred link**
User need a quick way to create the affiliate link when they see suitable material on advertiser's page	**Browser add-on that allow direct page transfer back to the link creation page**
User need to create multiple links for different team members in the same niche	**Feature where channels can be grouped, link can then be created in batch through group.**

Content and Data Analysis

Need	Solution
User need assistance in creating content that can attract target audience	**Feature for team members to create campaign suggestion**
User need to assist team member to review data, and provide insight and feedback.	**Data export, feature to request/share access to performance dashboard**
User need to view and conduct data analysis to drive profitability improvement	**User need to view and conduct data analysis to drive profitability improvement**

Information Architecture

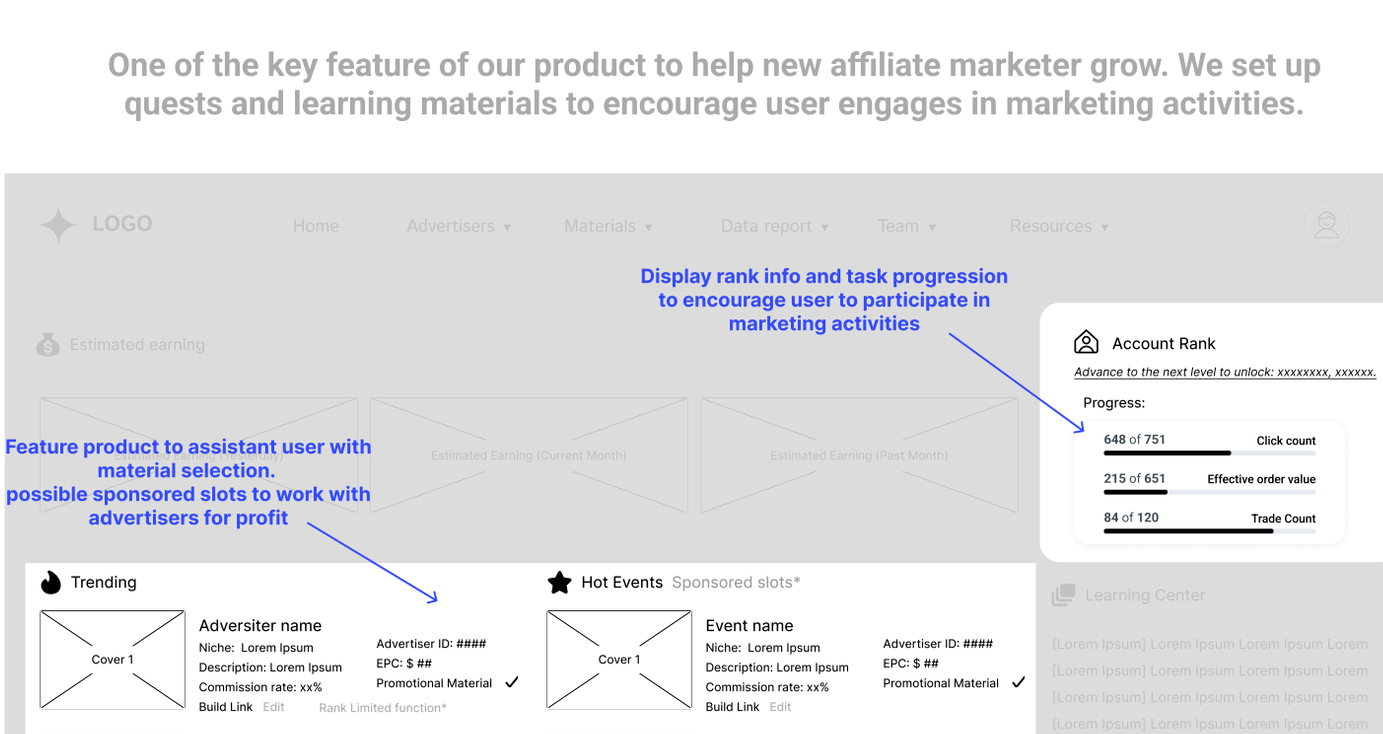
The following information architecture was constructed to help communicate the structure of the product and keep everyone on the same page.



Lo-fi Prototype

Landing Page

One of the key feature of our product to help new affiliate marketer grow. We set up quests and learning materials to encourage user engages in marketing activities.

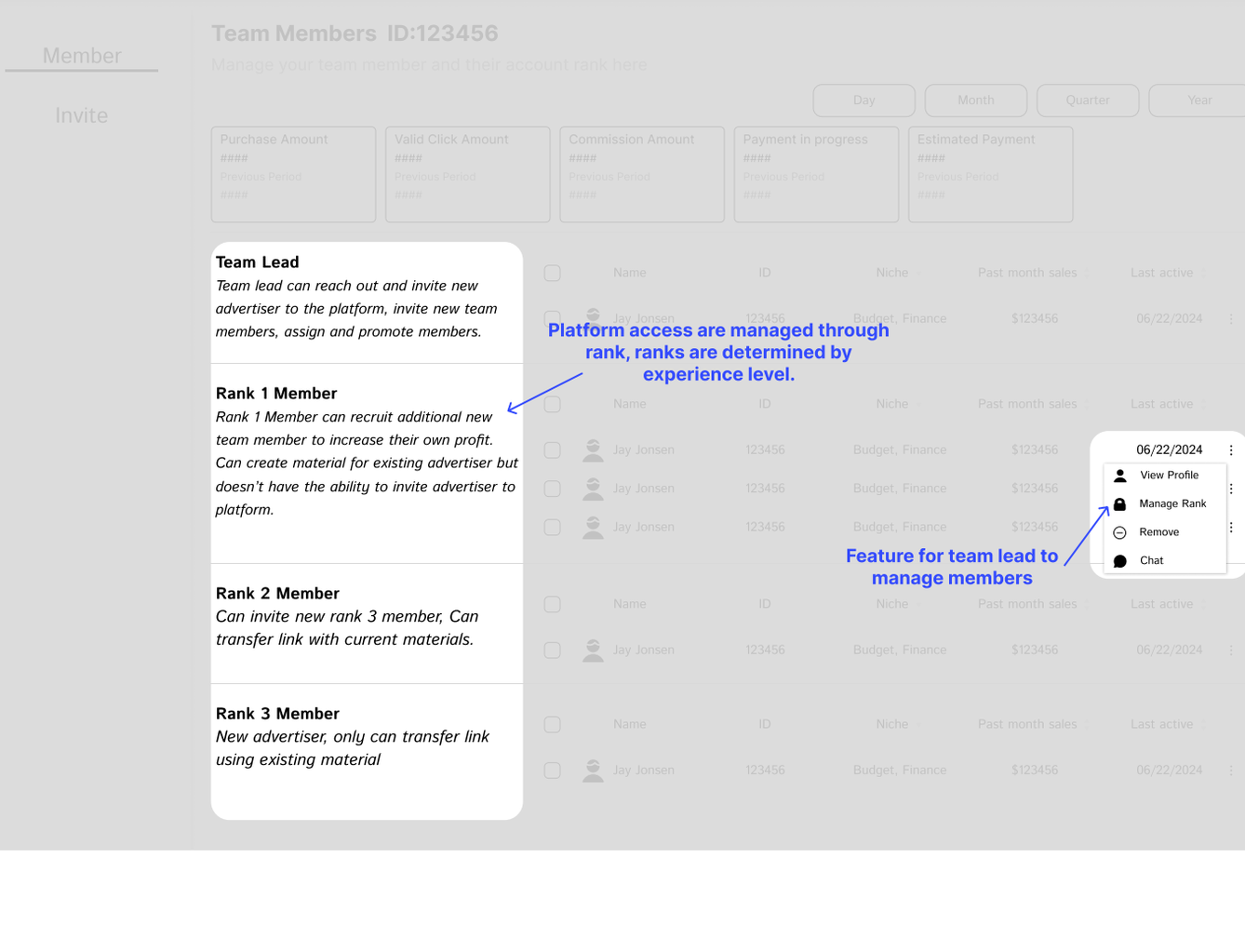


Display rank info and task progression to encourage user to participate in marketing activities

Feature product to assistant user with material selection. possible sponsored slots to work with advertisers for profit

Team Page

The other Key feature of our platform is to assist experience marketer grow with team to generate more profit. Senior marketer can assist Junior marketer with product selection, product marketing material at the expense of partial commission of the sale.



Team Lead
Team lead can reach out and invite new advertiser to the platform, invite new team members, assign and promote members.

Rank 1 Member
Rank 1 Member can recruit additional new team member to increase their own profit. Can create material for existing advertiser but doesn't have the ability to invite advertiser to platform.

Rank 2 Member
Can invite new rank 3 member, Can transfer link with current materials.

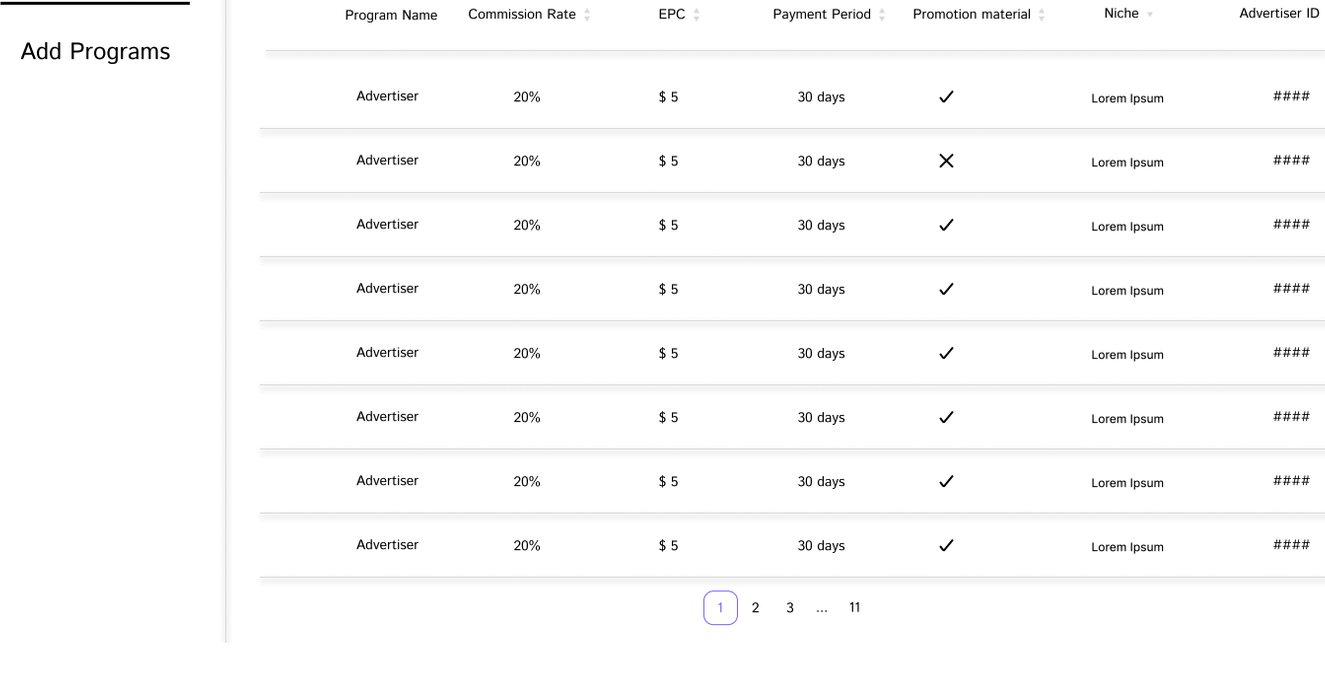
Rank 3 Member
New advertiser, only can transfer link using existing material

Platform access are managed through rank, ranks are determined by experience level.

Feature for team lead to manage members

Advertiser Panel

All marketer can choose to promote with any affiliate programs that's already registered Senior affiliate marketers can also help Junior marketers to bring affiliate programs they want to work with on the platform



Current Programs

Add Programs

Search

Program Name	Commission Rate	EPC	Payment Period	Promotion material	Niche	Advertiser ID
Advertiser	20%	$ 5	30 days	✓	Lorem Ipsum	####
Advertiser	20%	$ 5	30 days	✗	Lorem Ipsum	####
Advertiser	20%	$ 5	30 days	✓	Lorem Ipsum	####
Advertiser	20%	$ 5	30 days	✓	Lorem Ipsum	####
Advertiser	20%	$ 5	30 days	✓	Lorem Ipsum	####
Advertiser	20%	$ 5	30 days	✓	Lorem Ipsum	####
Advertiser	20%	$ 5	30 days	✓	Lorem Ipsum	####
Advertiser	20%	$ 5	30 days	✓	Lorem Ipsum	####

1 2 3 ... 11

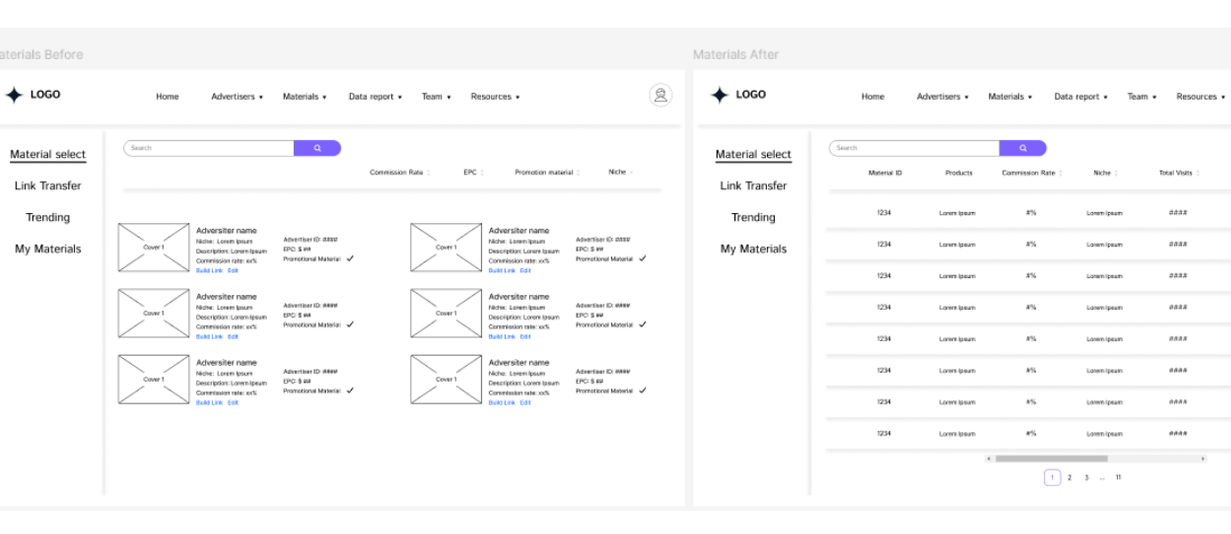
Usability study insights

As this is still in the early stages of our development, the initial Usability study is conducted with colleges from internal UX teams, here is what they said:

Problem 1:

"Current Material selection page can only display 6 materials per page with limited information displayed, Marketer also need to allow more actions at this page.

Before **After**



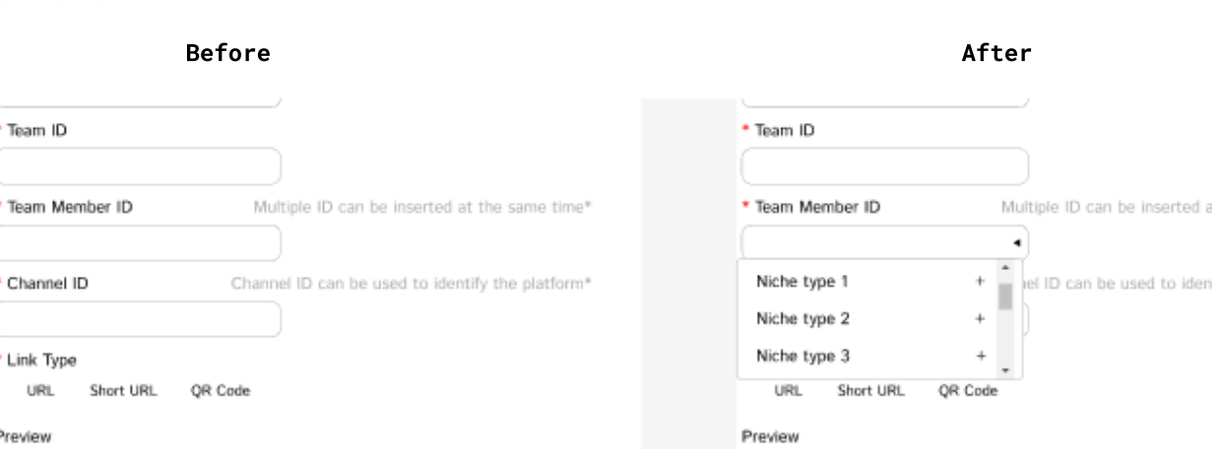
Problem 2:

"On Link transfer, it allows user to input multiple member to batch create links for the team members, but I don't think I would be able to remember each member ID clearly.

Solution

Add drop-down link under team member ID for user batch select team members through tagged Niche area

Before **After**



Final Thoughts

Next Steps

The current lo-fi design has been validated as feasible. The next step is to pass the task to the UI team members, who will collaborate with the front-end developers for layout and development. I conducted presentation align current research findings and insights with corresponding colleges including stakeholders, supervisors, UI amd front-end teammates.

Lessons Learned

I spent a significant portion of time collaborating with product, research, and engineering. We worked together at a fast pace to deliver the trial experience starting in June with the release in November. Through advocating for the user experience in the direction of the tool, I gained a stronger understanding of how design plays into the product strategy and the trialists' journey.