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ADVANCING WORLDWIDE INTEREST IN SPACEFLIGHT THROUGH A NONPROFIT OPEN DATA INITIATIVE

Abstract

The free and open accessibility of spaceflight information serves as a cornerstone for involving the general public in space activities. The aim of this presentation is to demonstrate the effectiveness of fostering the development of innovative outreach methods through the open provision of reliable resources in democratizing access to knowledge and enabling widespread engagement with the rapidly evolving space industry.

Organized by a non-profit called The Space Devs, this endeavor is dedicated to the collection of public spaceflight information in a database updated in real-time by a team of volunteers located around the world. It is then made available to the general public through an open standardized data retrieval portal. As one of the few projects of its kind, the uniqueness of this initiative lies in the free and full accessibility of its dataset, which surpasses others in both scale and scope. It includes, but is not restricted to, all orbital launches since Sputnik 1, space agencies and companies, launch vehicles and pads, astronauts, spacecraft, space stations, as well as spaceflight events and news. This project is also distinguished by its expansive user base, ranging from hobbyist app and website developers, to content creators, teachers, academic groups, museums, consulting firms, and space agencies. The available data and features have progressed over multiple years in response to user feedback and industry trends, while their increasing popularity has been measured through usage metrics. The number of projects leveraging this service, their combined public reach, and their standing in the industry have served as important success indicators. Current assessments indicate that this initiative has garnered a widespread global reach, estimated to extend into the multiple millions.

This work elucidates key learnings for stakeholders in the field, underscoring the effectiveness of combining crowd-sourced data with precedence-based decision-making. It also highlights the importance of advocating for conservative consumption of public resources. Additionally, it finds that incorporating integrations with established entities from inception can significantly enhance interest in new offerings.

Furthermore, it emphasizes the benefits of instant and informal communication channels between users and team members for faster implementation of corrections and updates. Finally, it illustrates how finely tuned automations can help handle an increasing workload without compromising on quality of service.

Overall, this presentation showcases how a project such as The Space Devs stemming from passionate volunteers collaborating across borders can meaningfully impact the landscape of space outreach and education.