OCD Challenge 2.0
Project Proposal
OCD Challenge (ocdchallenge.com) is an online self-help program for people with OCD. The program focuses on educating people with OCD about the disorder and how it works, and introduces them to Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP), a form of cognitive behavioral psychotherapy that is supported by research evidence and considered to be a “first-line” treatment option. While ERP is most effectively delivered by a trained specialist, numerous treatment barriers stand in the way of universal access for those who need it, including a shortage of trained providers, the costs associated with treatment, and the stigma associated with seeing a mental health professional. Self-help tools like OCD Challenge bridge the gap for countless people in need of treatment.

OCD Challenge was created by Elizabeth McIngvale, PhD, and served as a core part of the programming offered by Peace of Mind Foundation until it merged with the International OCD Foundation (IOCDF) in 2020. After the merger, the IOCDF became the operator of the OCD Challenge website and continues to make maintenance updates and provide technical support for users.

The core features of OCD Challenge include high-quality psychoeducation about OCD and ERP, an interactive program that allows users to structure a self-help program that meets the needs of their unique symptom profile, and a progression system that allows users to track their progress as they move through the program. OCD Challenge has also historically collected data from participants to inform research on who uses the program and what sort of results they have achieved (data was collected with informed consent and IRB approval).
After the IOCDF and Peace of Mind Foundation merged in 2020, the IOCDF performed an audit of OCD Challenge to determine what, if any, updates needed to be performed on the website. IOCDF staff also reviewed usage data, content, and identified trends in user tech support inquiries. Based on the results of this audit, we identified key strengths and weaknesses of the program, and our priorities for a refresh of the website.
Existing Strengths

- **Strong international user base:** 41% of registered users are from outside of the United States

- **High volume of new sign ups:** approximately 2,000 new accounts were created in the past 12 months

- **Well-written and informative psychoeducational content**

- **High-quality video content**

- **Interactive, evidence based self-help for OCD** — a unique and essential tool that fills a need for people with OCD around the world, and is well-aligned with the IOCDF mission
Existing Challenges

- **Low retention of users**: most OCD Challenge users do not return to the program after creating an account. Approximately 75% of accounts are never logged into after they are initially created, and just 11% of users are still logging in to the program 7 days after creating an account.

- **Low utilization of language support**: just 2% of users are utilizing languages other than English. There are 0 users utilizing the Mandarin Chinese translation. Spanish, French, and Portuguese have the strongest user bases.

- **User experience**: anecdotal information collected through tech support tickets, as well as staff review of the website, indicates that the exposure hierarchy tools may be too difficult for some users and usability could be improved.

- **Not enough feedback for users**: OCD Challenge includes visual feedback in the form of a mountain climber moving up a mountain as the user progresses through the program, but many users weren’t sure if they were advancing based upon the visual feedback currently offered.
The IOCDF has developed a vision for updating and refreshing OCD Challenge in the following ways:

- Improve website and program design to make the experience of using the OCD Challenge website intuitive and simple, including for users on mobile devices—a key point of access to the internet for people around the world.

- Integrate features that “gamify” the experience of using OCD Challenge, offering users frequent rewards and challenges that help keep them engaged and progressing through the program, and offer incentives to complete exposures.

- Update OCD Challenge’s already-strong foundation of evidence-based content with the feedback of additional experts in the areas of internet-based CBT and OCD self-help.

- Preserve OCD Challenge’s excellent language support and translate all content updates into at least the most frequently-used languages on the site (Spanish, French, and Portuguese). The IOCDF’s Spanish Language programming and Global Partners program offer ideal channels to increase the impact of translated content.

- Create an option for providers working with their clients.

- Connect users to existing IOCDF resources and content throughout the program (e.g., resource directory, support groups, awareness events, scholarship opportunities, and From the Experts articles for those who wish to take deeper dives into specific topics).

- Improve the ability of IOCDF to manage and update OCD Challenge content without the ongoing intervention of a developer (reduce long-term operation cost).
Proposed Improvements

Website user experience

OCD Challenge has traditionally employed a battery of questionnaires to collect research data regarding program participants. Although use of questionnaires has been somewhat curtailed since the merger between POM and IOCDF, a key area of improvement for the program would be to limit the number of questionnaires to the extent possible, and to collect program evaluation data in the background where possible. The time it takes from sign-up to education should be minimal, and the information we collect at that stage should be geared towards setting up the program for each user’s unique symptom profile.

A frequent source of user questions and complaints is the exposure hierarchy tool in the existing version of OCD Challenge. The program asks participants to assign a score to their OCD triggers, and moves them through their hierarchy of triggers by prompting them to tackle less challenging triggers first. However, the process for moving between triggers is not intuitive, and often users are unable to move to the next “level” and perform exposures for a new set of triggers until they have completed the previous level a certain number of times. OCD Challenge 2.0 should introduce flexibility for users to move freely between triggers and engage in the exposures they feel ready to tackle at any given time.

In order to address user retention issues, OCD Challenge 2.0 presents a great opportunity to further “gamify” OCD Challenge. Having OCD and getting treatment are never fun, but earning virtual points and rewards can help users feel good about everything they have accomplished through the program. Adding game elements to the program could also encourage users to do a higher volume of exposure tasks, and encourage them to try to tackle triggers they may not feel 100% ready for —both of which may increase OCD Challenge’s effectiveness. OCD Challenge 2.0 also offers a chance for implementation of best practices in email-driven user engagement and re-engagement. If users haven’t logged in for a while, they would receive prompts or even rewards for logging back in and completing an exposure.
Currently, many elements of OCD Challenge cannot be changed or updated without the intervention of a web developer. Translated content is especially costly, as it requires developer intervention in nearly every part of the program. OCD Challenge 2.0 should provide staff without advanced programming skills an easy way to edit and update OCD Challenge content. Although developer intervention may always be needed at some level, making it possible for IOCDF staff to perform basic content updates will significantly reduce the long-term costs associated with operating OCD Challenge.
Contact

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