



Innovative charity improves productivity of its volunteers and reinforces zero-cost model with the help of BlackBerry solution

Founded in 2004, True Volunteer Foundation (TVF) is a fast-growing non-governmental organisation. TVF provides a range of educational services including building schools, capacity building for micro-finance entrepreneurs, large-scale health projects, and addressing environmental and animal welfare concerns. Last year over 100 TVF volunteers helped impact over 170,000 people with projects across 28 countries.

The Challenge

At first glance True Volunteer Foundation is like thousands of other charities: its mission is to help eradicate extreme poverty, suffering and environmental damage by empowering people through education. What makes it different is its operating model. First, TVF volunteers are not paid and they must cover their own expenses. This enables TVF to achieve a near-zero cost base. According to Michael Padmanathan, founder of TVF, "This approach is highly appealing for volunteers and corporate sponsors, who are often put off by the high running costs of traditional charities."

Second, TVF uses technology to make it easier for people to donate time. Volunteers sign up to have a "social career" alongside their day jobs. They are given a specific role – either on a project or providing support services to the whole charity – and sign a contract to donate a specific number of hours a week. The work is broken down into tasks, and volunteers use TVF's secure extranet to access these tasks and complete their work.

But with the explosion in personal mobility, it was becoming increasingly difficult to find volunteers willing to donate time. "Studies show that 3 out of 4 people in the UK are willing to give money to charities, but only about 1 in 4 give time," says Padmanathan. "Time is a very precious commodity these days." To get around this problem, TVF looked closely at how highly mobile people work. It realised that there is a significant amount of time wasted during what Padmanathan calls "dead time" spent commuting or in between meetings.

TVF wanted to find a technology that would let volunteers turn this down time into time donated to the charity.

Key Benefits

- Attract and retain more volunteers
- BBM helps support zero-cost business model
- Secure access to charity extranet
- Corporate brand recognition and affiliation

The Solution

“Let’s say you are a TVF volunteer who works 40 hours a week and you commute on the train one to two hours a day,” says Padmanathan. “There’s a chance that you have a BlackBerry smartphone, which you use to manage work-related email. Now what if the volunteer could use some of that commuting time managing TVF-related email instead?”

The first thing TVF does when it recruits a new volunteer is ask the person to obtain a BlackBerry® smartphone, if they don’t have one already. Today over half of the volunteers use BlackBerry. TVF’s IT department then sets up the phone to access their TVF email account. Volunteers can also access the TVF extranet securely from their BlackBerry device. TVF opted for the BlackBerry® platform because Padmanathan considers the user experience to be superior to other smartphones because of the quality of voice communications, push email experience, the convenience of a full-QWERTY keyboard and BlackBerry® Messenger (BBM™). Moreover, the IT department insisted on the BlackBerry solution because of the built-in security features and the ability to help enforce IT policies.

The Benefits

Padmanathan credits the BlackBerry solution with helping TVF maintain a near zero-cost base and improve the effectiveness of each volunteer and hence the charity as a whole. “To put it simply, BlackBerry has helped increase our output. If we didn’t have BlackBerry smartphones, the amount of work volunteers could do in a day would be much less, which means we wouldn’t be able to do as many projects in year,” he says.

This increased efficiency is primarily due to the flexibility the BlackBerry solution provides the volunteers. In a telling example, Padmanathan said that prior to owning a BlackBerry smartphone, one volunteer used to complain that she was submerged by upwards of 25 TVF project emails a day when she got home from work. After moving to a BlackBerry smartphone she was able to handle the emails in down time between classes and on breaks during the day. “She no longer has to action emails in the evening, so she’s much happier and gets more done,” says Padmanathan.

Another key benefit is the immediacy of BBM. With more and more TVF volunteers using BlackBerry smartphones, BBM has replaced texting. “With traditional texting, messages sometimes get lost and you sometimes have to pay for each message. With BBM we know when messages are delivered and we can share files – all with no extra cost,” says Padmanathan. Volunteers use BBM Groups to chat in real-time instead of calling each other or using voice over IP, which helps to keep costs under control. “Especially when you have projects in so many different geographies, it’s absolutely brilliant,” Padmanathan adds.

Finally, using the BlackBerry solution has helped contribute to TVF’s brand image when working with corporate sponsors. “Sponsors appreciate the efficiency and professionalism of TVF, which BlackBerry helps us achieve. When you are showing a key presentation using the BlackBerry smartphone you come across as very effective and very innovative. It’s not something you see very often in the charities sector, and it helps to reinforce our reputation as a charity driven by efficiency”, concludes Padmanathan.



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Michael Padmanathan
founder, of True Volunteer Foundation

Industry:

Other – Not-for-profit

Region:

UK

Company Size:

Medium

Solution:

BlackBerry® smartphones

BlackBerry® Messenger (BBM™)

blackberry.co.uk/casestudies