



True Volunteer Foundation



TVF & Technology
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True Volunteer Foundation (TVF) depends on technology to underpin the model that has successfully enabled it to reach and help people in over 25 countries. From its inception in 2005, TVF has gained momentum in reaching and helping more people much more quickly. With new communication tools TVF as an organisation is responding to new understanding in innovation both to those who can help and those who need help.

Was it possible 10 years ago for a charity to even envisage operating the way TVF runs? It would have been a big bag of "ifs". TVF charity projects are both local and global and the structure of the organisation is low cost- that's no monies spent on the infrastructure of services, office space and on technology which are all kindly donated. We manage Corporate Sponsors giving them bang for their buck with our Charity Partners.

10 years ago, even with charity funding, overseas community projects would be on-site driven, - communication was truncated- technology was proprietary and expensive. Infrastructure meant running your own personnel and IT systems. Calling on your satellite phone was always limited by the transmission range and battery life. With only 30 minutes of voice calls, it was strictly for Emergency Use Only and then usage was made in critical situations. You were also the deemed the communications expert as you knew how the radio and software and hardware magically worked together. That was then.

Today the above situation has changed. Truly globally connected, we have a full gamut of hardware and with it software. Cameras, microphones, batteries and speakers all shrunk and squeezed into multiform products from desktops to baggable laptops to pocketable mobiles and multi-use smartphones where we can easily write, reply, listen, talk and see, photograph and record each other. And in some cases all these functions happen at the same time. With technology getting popular, costs become more affordable and user numbers increases. This inevitability makes the technology ubiquitous where it's even changing the language with the most particular use/function of technology turning that company into a verb: to Google, to Facebook, to Skype, to BBM. It's easy and descriptive of informing how we split our modes of communication.

A charity like the True Volunteer Foundation has been greatly enriched by the simple ability to take advantage of these emergent mobile and telecom gateway technologies. Volunteering is not 9 to 5 yet skills are always needed within TVF. Internet and web technologies provides a digital mechanism to getting information across the TVF teams. As a charity TVF understands that our volunteers can lead busy lives yet can still volunteer even a few hours each week. We can do what we can do because we understand flexibility is the key and that mobile technology has become a viable way of working within our organisation. We could never be deskbound at a certain time in one location- our volunteers work or are somewhere else or have children to attend to or live 3000 miles away. Technology allows you to volunteer in your own time.

We learn to adopt and adapt. For instance a Bluetooth connection allows hands free conversation in the car stuck in a traffic jam, VoIP calling to your phone bypasses expensive international call charges. Skype is available on the laptop for video conferencing across cities. Whether you're in London, Lagos or Laos, volunteering can be broken into manageable hourly chunks of time. TVF volunteers use their own personal smartphones and mobiles to communicate via instant messaging from the likes of Yahoo, MSN amongst others. Some of us can BBM each other pecking away at our Blackberries on that 1 hr journey to and from work. With new productivity tools we can easily make use of our time to send and receive email. With SIP technologies such as SIPgate acting as our virtual receptionists collecting voice and even faxing (some people still insist on it) our time is made more productive in meeting sponsors and partners. For instance after the meeting you can

check your email and listen into the voicemail message which has been sent as an mp3 file which you can then relay onwards. With mobile and wireless on the bus, train, wifi on planes companies are catering with the on demand requirements of working and travelling. Even now in the "dead time" of the underground journey you can work read and write offline before popping up again to regain the signal link. Volunteering during journey time can be wisely spent and is low-cost and accessible with technology.

As TVF grows its organisation and role must become more structured like a control centre. We have an extranet running on donated computers running on open source applications. The extranet is our digital hub where our project managers and volunteers can stay point-to-point connected with projects with all stakeholders. Project choices and decisions can be made here and projects assessed online. We still prefer faces and Volunteers can even bring their laptops and come into the offices to hotdesk from high speed broadband wireless connection we have in Poland Street. If you want you can easily work from the house. Even a few hours volunteering can easily be achieved whilst you wait for the lunch to cook or pretend to watch that boring film again. Volunteering is connected by the internet and not location.

Even our very own Paolo Brand in our Public Relations having fried his own personal laptop resorted to using his work computer as to fulfill his commitment to TVF. "For 5, maybe 6, whole minutes my world disappeared! I couldn't tweet that I had computer problems LOL!!! :)"

Information Technology is also the product of the TVF. We can see the smiling faces of people. What's more exciting is seeing projects blossom and develop as the volunteers contribute on developments. Help and assistance is community led towards results and outcomes. And by looking at our website you can literally see, watch, play the video footage of how TVF and volunteering does make a difference all around the world. From Argentina to Madagascar to Vietnam there's photos where TVF has helped empower communities, children and businesses into building schools and increasing health standards to financing small businesses. Volunteers make use of cameras to show the newly built schools when uploading photos onto the extranet site to show the end results to all involved and to document and record our achievements and videos from whichever location we are committed to. Volunteering is made more transparent with technology.

True Volunteer Foundation is fortunate to be able to have people use their time in volunteering using everyday communication tools. TVF is demonstrating many ways that technology can influence volunteering and understanding that a greater variety of people with skills including technology and media are also key factors in the organisation. Volunteering is still people first and foremost. Technology makes it a bit easier. So If you tweet, facebook or enjoy the media biosphere then you can become a True Volunteer. It's in your pocket or bag.

Our founder Michael Padmanathan when not caressing his Blackberry and who always has the last word- *"Technology aggregates True Volunteer Foundation into a working organisation across demographics and nations. With 59% of the developing nations having some access of mobile communications, we can, see and hear and react very quickly from both charity partners and corporate sponsor organisations. With technology and social network channel TVF can bring together more people as we are very optimistic in offering more of our important services both locally and globally this year."*

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