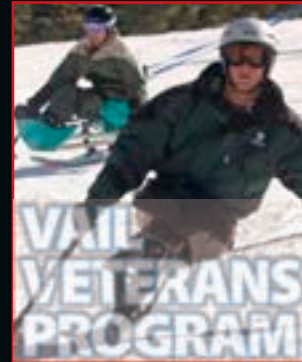


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CONNECTION & COLLABORATION



CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: THE BUSINESS OF DOING GOOD



DENVER BOTANIC GARDENS

From Horse and Buggy to Leading Edge and Beyond by Michael C. Vaughn

Corporate social responsibility is not just about creating a business model that generates dollars to your organization. Sometimes it's about bringing your brainpower and expertise to the larger collective. Sometimes it's about employee empowerment and creativity. Sometimes it's just about making your community a better place. That's the story of the collaborative technology venture at Denver Botanic Gardens (DBG).

In June 2007, Brian Vogt, CEO of DBG, reached out to Colorado Technology Association (CSIA) for help with incorporating new technology into the Gardens. Some of their board and key volunteers were invited out to the Gardens for a presentation on Vogt's ideas. Being one of the key volunteers, I saw this as a great opportunity to help in multiple areas: to help the Gardens bring everything up to date in all technological areas, collaborate with multiple companies in Colorado to make this a success, and to give something back to the community. In August, I sat down with Brian to discuss the technological challenges facing the Gardens. We discussed the archaic infrastructure, absence of connectivity, and overall lack of 21st century technology and decided that to move DBG into the Information Age we needed to recreate the entire platform.

Chuck Robinson, DBG IT Manager explains that just over a year ago they evaluated whether technology at the Gardens provided customers with the support that they needed. The answer was no. "We had a mix of computer switches that were outdated and not exactly top of the line, no external access to information, and a webpage that was too flat to serve a growing customer base of staff, community members, scientists, education leaders, and horticulturalists throughout the world," he said.

As a member of the CSIA, I worked directly with DBG management to understand the needs and the limitations of the institution – especially funding constraints. I led a coordinated effort to assemble seven key task force members to assist in bringing this landmark entity "up the technology ladder."

The Technology Task Force (TTF), which was comprised of various local technology companies, volunteered their time

to create a strategic plan for Denver Botanic Gardens, which would not only bring them up to par, but would allow them to become a leader in their industry through technological resources.

"The Technology Task Force at Denver Botanic Gardens has shattered any belief that a non-profit organization cannot be cutting edge technologically. From a pure marketing perspective, it is critical that we are able to employ social networking, provide Wi-Fi, and utilize other Web strategies that reach the broadest audience possible," said DBG Director of Marketing, PR & Events, Robin Doerr.

She added, "It is no secret that Botanic Gardens in general have challenges attracting an audience under the age of 35. We need to have a presence with a younger demographic – online. It is an integral part of our marketing strategy. The technology professionals on this team are helping us make that reach a reality."

PROJECT DEFINITION AND STRATEGY DEPLOYMENT

In August last year, the TTF presented a nine-phase project plan with components addressing both infrastructure and web needs. It was a complete analysis of DBGs current capabilities and core infrastructures – with a vision for sustainability in mind. To start with, the team implemented a LAN/WAN cleanup. Then, the TTF performed a needs assessment on the overall technology status of the Gardens, which drove a 2008 roll out of new technologies, such as LAN/WAN restructure, web site refresh with social networking capabilities, and Wi-Fi implementation across the 23-acre campus with DS3 broadband connection. But, the plan also served as the part of the platform for the master development blueprint for the Gardens, which was approved in December 2007. To date, this team has grown to over 30 volunteers.

"Within about a year from the first meeting, we went from obsolete equipment and capabilities to leading edge. The activity was, and still is, intense but with a continued vigor from the staff at DBG and the Technology Task Force it has become a model



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of efficiency and effectiveness that I have not seen in my 25 years in this industry," commented Robinson.

The purpose was to bring in the "best of the best" of technology to achieve the latest and greatest for the DBG, therefore creating an environment that is second-to-none for the next 10 years and beyond. The mission was to be volunteer-driven first, while collaborating with companies to execute on this "best of the best" philosophy.

Donations, trade-in-kind partnerships and overall reduced costs were three key factors to the success of this effort. In fact, by September 2008, the TTF had reinvigorated the technology at the Gardens to the tune of about \$1.5 million, which about 50 cents on the dollar was reduced due to this approach. So far, everyone on the team is committed to help for the next 3 years.

RECOGNITION

To show appreciation and celebrate the success of the team, DBG hosted Technology Day on July 31, 2008. It was an event that attracted nearly 1,000 attendees to witness the launch of the redesigned web site, panel discussions, and new product demos from Cisco, NEC, Sun Microsystems, TEKsystems, Newsgator Technologies, to name a few. RJ Macklin Associates hosted a virtual field trip for kids from the DBGs Plant Science Investigator camp, as well as summer camps in Xalapa, Mexico and Ontario, Canada.

Indeed, the TTF created six industry "first's of its' kind" in the world to harmonize a botanic gardens facility with state-of-the-art technology.

"While it's easy to think of our Technology Task Force as a group who has brought fiber optics, Wi-Fi and integration to the Gardens; who have helped our operations move faster and leaner; and who have enriched visitors' experiences; I think their most important contribution has been a heartfelt passion, dedication and joy that they bring to us every day. Building a bridge between a venerable institution and a whole new audience is remarkable," said Brian Vogt, CEO of Denver Botanic Gardens.

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WHAT'S NEXT

"What is on the technology horizon for Denver Botanic Gardens for 2009," you ask...?

Imagine a new way for patrons to connect with plants/flowers - All plants/flowers will be tagged with RFID (remote frequency device) technology and can be connected by using small devices to download how to grow them and where to buy them in their area - all at the click of a button!

Imagine high definition streaming video around the Gardens that can be viewed in real time from the web to see events, weddings, etc. in real time anywhere in the world.

Imagine an easier way for anyone in the world to gain knowledge of any plant or flower in the entire Rocky Mountain Region accessible via the web.

Imagine an alternative place for people to work for the day that is a sanctuary of nature using the accessibility of a free Wi-Fi network.

Imagine smart bracelets to track children on campus at all times and tracked from mobile devices using RFID.

CSIA president, Su Hawk commented, "During our history we have been very fortunate to have the involvement of hundreds of technology leaders whose vision, passion and involvement strengthened the landscape of the IT industry in our state. Our community of leaders is so important to us, and so it makes us enormously proud again that a truly unique group of people are transforming the Denver Botanic Gardens' technology. Thanks to the team of dedicated volunteers, Brian Vogt, and team at the Gardens - they have become the first-ever technology task force for a cultural institution in our state's history. As a result of their stewardship, Denver Botanic Gardens will grow even taller as a world-class cultural institution, and each person involved will have the pride of knowing that one person truly can make a difference for many generations."

For additional information regarding the Technology Task Force, please contact Michael C. Vaughn, Chairman of DBG Technology Task Force at technology@botanicgardens.org or visit <http://www.botanicgardens.org/content/gardens-tech-team>. ▲