Evaluation Report

on

Connecting Up 2011 Conference and Workshop –

Reboot your Nonprofit

(1-3 Jun, 2011 Melbourne, Australia)

Prepared by

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I. Introduction

The Conference held in Melbourne, Australia this year addressed key issues facing non-profit organizations in areas such as technology, organization, leadership and fund-raising. There were more than 50 distinguished speakers; many of them were world-known figures locally or from USA and Canada.

A total of 394 attendees, with 19 delegates from 6 overseas regions/countries had made the conference quite interesting. There were 12 booths mostly managed by commercial entities such as software companies specializing in fund raising software or donation management systems.

The two-day Conference was followed by a workshop run by Holly Ross, CEO of NTEN (USA). All Hong Kong delegates participated in the workshop and found it most rewarding.

Prelude to the Conference was an informal reception held by the Connecting Up 2011 Board at the Conference Hotel on 31 May. The dinner provided a good chance for all to know more about the Board and to promote mutual understanding and inter-connectedness among non-profit making organizations worldwide.

II. Insights & Observation

A. Summary of Conference presentations

The main theme of the Conference was Leadership and Effective Communication with the stakeholders. In fact the underpinning focus was on how the use Technology, especially social media, may help enhance the two strands. It is a pity that we could not attend all sessions, as there were many concurrent presentations at one time. Yet from those I attended, two main strands stood out. They are:

i) Leaders’ Decision – making
In the face of tighter purse-strings all over the world, governments have been spending less on social services. Leaders and administrators from non-profit making organizations have to resort to new ways of soliciting resources. From the past to the future, they have to learn, re-learn or de-learn their skills and approaches in order to act proactively to the new paradigm and new practices.

Almost all speakers in the Conference placed emphasis on developing new ways of recruiting volunteers, soliciting donations and engaging the public. In this new era, the use of twitter, face book and blogging take the place of sending out letters and messages.

ii) Engagement in dialogue with the stakeholders

One-sided communication is somewhat obsolete. Organizations have to regularly engage in dialogue with their sponsors, donors and stakeholders in order to sustain trust and commitment. Listening and sharing are a key to success.

iii) Partners in Collaboration

Organizations cannot prosper alone. Collaboration and partnership with the business world will lead to greater synergy and more effective outcomes. In the Conference, companies such as Microsoft, Cisco, VisiCase, SapmeaD-Link, Blackband, Karman, Pro-Bono and Staging Connections etc shouldered their social responsibility by offering free (or at a modest cost) services to the participating NGOs, mostly in Australia only.

B) Insights from other presenters

i) Darren Rowse : Blogging for Good

Darren, Australia’s top professional blogger, gave us an interesting story on blogging was and the powerful impact this had on community services, both locally and overseas. In his presentation, he told the story of Amina, a girl in Africa who suffered from disability in vision and mobility. In his blog, Darren told about the
plight of the girl and her dream to become a doctor. Over 100,000 viewers, touched by the girl’s perseverance and optimism, responded to his blog. Eventually, Darren got the chance to visit her in her own country, bringing with him the blessings and donations from numerous bloggers.

That was the “Good” of blogging.

Dareen also pointed out tips for engaging in blogging - The Three Is – Inform, Inspire and Interact. According to him, to build such a network and to maintain momentum of the blog, one had to be persistent and regular. An understanding of the language and culture of the audience was important.

ii) Holly Ross: Workshop on technology Leadership for the Sustainable Win

Holly was the Conference keynote speaker, dwelling on the theme of leading change in nonprofit organizations. However, I was more impressed by the workshop she conducted on Technology Leadership for the Substainable Win.

In the workshop, Holly, putting aside the theoretical side of strategic planning, focused solely on practical ways of setting technology strategies in one’s organization and led us through the process. When planning the project, Holly suggested that we should be clear about the Objective, Audience, Content, Tools, Training and Support, methods of measurement and the Experiment (Project). She brought up the idea of SMART - specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-based.

The workshop was practical as it provided a chance to practice planning a technology project back in our own organizations.

iii) Kiel Van Daal and Paul Armstrong: Online Tools and how to use them effectively
The speakers mainly shared five aspects of using online tools effectively. First, the Content Management System (CMS) is the collection of procedures used to manage work flow in a collaborative environment. “Drupal” is a good example of CMS that the procedures can be operated on an online platform. Second, Issue Management System (IMS) refers to the discipline and process of managing business issues and usually implies using technology to electronically automate the process. System backup is one of the important function. Third, Email Service Provider (ESP) is a very common tool of web communication. Forth, Ecommerce Tools can enhance the transaction of online membership, selling and donation, Paypal is a good example of it. Finally Time Management and Finance Tools can improve the agency finance system and manage the donation. Speaker added that online tools is not very common used around the non-profit organization. However, it is the time to think about the investment of online tools from zero to start.

Since the Ecommerce Tools have already become more popular in Hong Kong, NGO should have more consideration on the investment of online tools on both agencies management and service providing, especially the development of E-transaction on donation and membership system.

iv) Wesley Cooke: Amazing timing, outstanding results

The speaker shared a lot of figures of Facebook user and other online communication. The figures showed there is a huge amount of interaction on the web in every second, including page view, text, photo and video. On the other hand, there is also a huge amount of spam mail in everyday. And people do not have unlimited time to read all the information. The question is how to engage your targeted user in the big ocean. Wesley shared a website of Acc International Relief, which is owned by a non-profit organization for donation. The website is designed in a simple and colorful outlook. The simple icon and some impressed photo have been used instead of the long paragraph of text. People can easily grasp the mission of the organization on the first page. And the social media such as Facebook have been used to expand its network. When we plan to create a website for NGO in Hong Kong, we may
think to put all the information and content into the page. It is a functional approach for the usage of website, but it may not be the best way for the targeted user to understand your organization.

v) Wayne Turner: Risky governance? Refresh your knowledge now

The speaker presented the role of Board in risky governance, included accountability to stakeholder, Monitoring key performance and result, setting strategic direction and board level policy. A poor governance will create a lot of unknown risks in the organization. The risk includes financial risk, core operating risk and management risk. The role of the board is essential on development of ICT in non-profit organization. Board should create a future plan of the organization and assist the organization to attract funding support on ICT development. On the other hand a board with updated policy and procedure on handling ICT risk can enhance a secure development on ICT. The similarity in Hong Kong is that the using of web 2.0 or interactive platform in service or administration is a big challenge on managing the risk and crisis. So the board of organization should update its knowledge, policy and procedure of handling the updated ICT issue. The board should also seek advice from the ICT professional.

vi) Meeting the challenges of Consumer Directed Care (CDC) – the role of online technology

CDC is a system placing customer in a position of choice by using an online platform. It also shifts the power balance from the service provider to the customer. Customer can involve more in the case planning, budgeting and the selection of service. All the choice and option of the customer can be checked and selected on the online platform with One Screen Overview Interface. It also benefit to the monitoring of the case. All the management, case manager and case worker can assess the profile of customer to monitor the case progress. It is a good example that we are not pushing people to get online, but get connect to people and resources.
vii) Community History 2.0: museums and communities exploring new

This session is mainly share about the usage of website to promote the Community History. History is about story of people, history is a social capital, connect capital and bonding capital. Internet can help people connect to history more easily. Beside of the traditional visitation of museum, the video about the community history can be posted in Youtube. A History Wikipedia can be a platform to collect any small pieces of community history. Google map with photos will also be used.

viii) Using technologies to engage with isolated workers

In Australia, the situation is changed by the government fund that the disabilities stay more in home, the collaboration and communication between workers becomes more important. The speaker Linda Budd introduced three online platforms for the communication between workers, which are Yammer, Skype and Vimeo. Yammer is an enterprise social network. It is just like a Facebook with more function for collaborative work. It have already used by more than 100,000 companies worldwide.

ix) Buckle up for the next revolution – cloud-based software; Cloud Computing; Cloud Computing for Nonprofits

It is a summary to conclude those three sessions about the topic of cloud computing. Cloud computing is a web based platform and platform as a service. It is a part of internet and being opened in different OS. The vendor of service has to maintain the relationship with client instead of selling it once. Cloud service provides lower cost for operation. Other stakeholder of the non-profit organization such as the government and funding body, can more easy to get information of the project. The operating interface can be updated frequently comparing with the OS. The trend of cloud service includes Hyper connect, mobility, internet services, social media and consumerisation. Cloud service is blurring the lines of organization, facilitating the collaboration and rapid innovation, and enabling new business model. In order to
start the cloud services in NGO, a high speed broadband and the device are the basic requirement. The investment on service is instead of the investment on the capital. And the workplace and work model will be changed a lot. Under the cloud service, small organization can do large organization work. Bushmob Program is one of the example that a service has grown from one staff to eight staffs with an active volunteer team in Australia. The speakers reminded that now is the great time for non-profit organization to change the service into cloud.

III. Recommendation

a) We should consider trying out some of the ways adopted by our counterparts in the Conference and adapt in Hong Kong. Instead of using social media for a social cause in Hong Kong, we may make use of blogging, twitter or face book etc to help recruiting volunteers, raising funds, or involving in other projects.

b) The world is changing fast and we cannot resist the advent of the E – Age. Although changing culture and changing paradigm is not easy at all for us, we still need to learn more about the use of social media. The HKCSS may take the lead and assist NGO leaders on the formation of a Technology policy and implementation strategies in their organizations. This is of paramount importance as the Hong Kong Government, like other governments all over the world, is cutting budgets on social services. More workshops and seminars may help promote the concept and use of technology.

c) We should also be mindful of the new development of the SWD in reviewing the information and communication technology strategy for the sector. The council should try to introduce new concepts and trends workable for our international counterparts so as to bring benefit to the HK community.