The Computerworld Honors Program

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Final Copy of Case Study

LOCATION:
McCordsville, IN, US

ORGANIZATION:
Net Literacy

YEAR:
2011

ORGANIZATION URL:
http://www.netliteracy.org/

STATUS:
Laureate

PROJECT NAME:
Digital Literacy "best practices" site

CATEGORY:
Digital Access

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The rate of change is increasing and those that are not digitally literate are being left behind. Limited to snail mail, "paper" resumes, and calling 411 for information, those that are "offline" are being left behind in this digital-centric world. Enter Net Literacy, an all-volunteer nonprofit founded by middle school students. Initially, these middle school volunteers experienced great difficulty being viewed as a credible organization by some adults. But after thousands of student volunteers spent 100,000s of hours using technology to increase digital literacy and computer access to over 150,000 individuals in the Midwest, this challenge vanished. Student volunteers refurbished 12,000 computers for students on free and assisted lunch programs, churches, senior centers, community centers, schools, and other nonprofits. Students have scripted/stared in Internet safety PSAs approved by the Indiana Department of Education, increasing Internet safety awareness to 100,000ss. The student-created messaging consists of "real" and frank discussions about choices and the consequences of engaging in unsafe behavior online. Net Literacy's student volunteers innovate, plan, and perform all of the service learning programs, and 60% of Net Literacy's Board is comprised of high school and college students. Adult board members are responsible for governance and the treasury function, and include educators and good corporate citizens from companies including Intel, Microsoft, Dell, and Cisco Systems. Students' use of technology to influence the societal paradigm is novel concept, and their "good practices" have been acclaimed both nationally and internationally. Personally honored by two American Presidents including one at a White House ceremony, Net Literacy has also won awards for their digital inclusion youth-empowered programs including the "Jefferson Award for Public Service" by Senators Lugar and Bayh, the "National Prudential Spirit of the Community Award" by General Powell, the "National Kindness Award" by Senator Dole, and the "Above and Beyond Award" by the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. After visiting Europe, Africa, and Asia to discuss digital inclusion and digital literacy challenges with educators, NGOs, ISPs, and Intel's World Ahead executives, Net Literacy found that both some of its good practices had international applicability and

that many of the good practices in the visited countries could enhance and expand Net Literacy's offerings. Net Literacy's students believed that a digital literacy website that aggregated international best practices would facilitate international digital literacy initiatives, since digital inclusion conferences and summits have proven "unsustainable" over the years. A beta site was launched in August, 2010 using Wordpress. After receiving the endorsement by Internet associations representing 225,000 Internet companies on five continents, a production site launched in February, 2011. Now, DigitalLiteracy.org is becoming the digital inclusion and digital literacy "Rosetta Stone" for the international sharing of digital literacy and digital inclusion good practices. Net Literacy's student volunteers have started to enter the hundreds of best practices submissions they have received from around the world and plan to finish the backlog by June. Sharing digital access "good practices" will facilitate digital inclusion and digital literacy around the world.

SOCIETAL BENEFITS

Summits promoting digital access occur infrequently; and this student-run NGO learned that sharing "best practices" were conferences' most important purpose. Net Literacy innovated a web-based site where digital access "best practices" could be facilitated and shared 24X7. The site was endorsed by Internet associations representing 225,000 organizations on five continents.

PREVIOUS PROJECT UPDATED/EXPANDED?

Launched in a beta version 1.0 in 2010 and in production version 2.0 in February, 2011, this digital access site that shares international best practices is a program that will continue to evolve to meet societies changing digital access and digital literacy needs. Currently over 300 digital access "good practices" have been submitted and will be entered into the database by June, 2011.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION COMPLETE?

Yes

PROJECT BENEFIT EXAMPLE

The concept was conceived in June 2010 by Net Literacy's student president after he returned from a trip to Hong Kong. The beta website was launched in August. In September, the concept and beta site was presented at iWeek in South Africa. By December, 2010, the site was endorsed by Internet associations representing 225,000 organizations on five continents. A production site was launched in February, 2011. Based upon the beta version of the site, hundreds of digital access and literacy good practices have been submitted. During the next three months, this backlog will be added to the database of shared digital access best practices. Once the backlog has been entered, Net Literacy will reach out to other NGOs, ISP organizations, IT companies, government agencies, and initiatives such as Intel's World Ahead initiative to continue populating the site. As an example, Net Literacy is visiting Sydney, Australia in May 2011 to further collaborate with digital access NGOs as Net Literacy continues to refine and expand the functionality and shared best practices digital access offerings. Two recent examples follow: "This will boost the spirits and would encourage the team responsible for spreading Internet Learning Programme among common man in India. I (would) be also advising NIXI and Sify Directors/Chief Executives to provide their support for your cause. Looking forward for more interactions and (would) be glad to be your host in India at your convenience." Naresh Ajwani, President, Cyber Café Association of India and Director, National Internet Exchange of India "We would be delighted to link with your site…there are some superb organisations that we are connected with and would be a great

addition to your site. I am copying some of them in this email to give them the 'heads-up'." Fiona Wallace, Corporate Social Investment Manager, UniForum SA, The Co Za Cares Project and Chair: Teacher Training Working Group, South Africa ISPA

IS THIS PROJECT AN INNOVATION, BEST PRACTICE? Yes

ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION

Sometimes, existing technology can be used in novel ways to produce unexpected results Net Literacy's (www.netliteracy.org) model of digital access and inclusion has been named an innovation and a best practice by an increasing number of organizations. Several examples follow: The US Internet Industry called Net Literacy the preferred digital inclusion model for increasing digital access in a filing to the FCC entitled "Digital Inclusion: Bringing The Rest Of America Online With Broadband," co-authored by USIIA President and CEO David McClure and Daniel Kent, Net Literacy Student President and Founder. The European Union's Study on Digital Inclusion named Net Literacy as one of the "91 most promising good practices" based upon an investigation of countries including the 27 Member States, Canada, the United States, India, among others. Microsoft's publication "Innovating for inclusion: A Digital Inclusion guide for those leading the way" cited Net Literacy in a 2009 publication. Other organizations, including the US Broadband Coalition with 170 members that range from Google to Comcast and from Verizon to Cisco Systems cited Net Literacy and its model as a policy consideration in its 2009 "Adoption and Usage Report" for its programs in broadband adoption, helping the disabled, and improving the education process. The report was prepared for the FCC in behalf of America's broadband industry to provide industry input to the FCC's National Broadband Plan. In 2010, the FCC cited the Net Literacy model of its "Digital Literacy Corps" and two of Net Literacy's programs in the National Broadband Plan prepared for Congress. Net Literacy is a member of Broadband for America's Adoption Committee and has been extended a courtesy membership or works with organizations including the USIIA, WISPA, the NTCA, and WCAI. A Net Literacy student volunteer visited Hong Kong to meet with Intel's World Ahead leadership, the HK ISP Association, and HK Internet Professional Association to discuss digital inclusion best practices. Reflecting on digital access challenges in the United States and noting that Hong Kong shared many similar digital access problems; the student conceived, constructed, and populated a beta DigitalLiteracy.org "best practices" website where countries across the world could effectively share digital access good practices. Net Literacy was invited to present its DigitalLiteracy.org good practices website program to ISP associations from around the world in Johannesburg, South Africa. The web-based concept of sharing digital access "best practices" was more efficient and a sustainable methodology rather than the past practices of conducting conferences, and summits, which proved not sustainable over the years. The digital literacy "best practices" website was endorsed by Internet associations representing 225,000 Internet companies on five continents, including South Africa ISPA, the (Australian) IIA, the USIIA, and the Internet Cyber Café Association of India. The production version of DigitalLiteracy.org was launched in February, 2011. Additional functionality (e.g., a translator to convert the site into 59 languages, and functionality for the visually impaired and color blind) is in the process of being added, after which the backlog of 300 best practices submissions will be added to the database.