



# The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

## Final Copy of Case Study

**LOCATION:**  
*Warrens, WI, US*

**ORGANIZATION:**  
Sparked.com

**YEAR:**  
*2011*

**ORGANIZATION URL:**  
<http://www.sparked.com>

**STATUS:**  
*Laureate*

**PROJECT NAME:**  
Sparked.com

**CATEGORY:**  
*Collaboration*

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

Sparked.com, developed by The Extraordinaries, solves two problems. First, America's participation in charitable activities is very low due to increasingly busy lifestyles making it hard for people to contribute to causes they care about. Second, the ability of non-governmental and non-profit organizations around the world to respond to increased demands is constrained resulting in an incredible number of needs going un-served. Sparked.com combines emerging crowdsourcing models of open innovation, open challenges, and open collaboration and applies them in a novel way through micro-tasks creating what they now call "micro-volunteering". You could just as easily call it cloud volunteering because the SaaS solution developed for Sparked.com meets every definition of a cloud based service only that it includes the added dimension of delivering volunteers as a service (VaaS). Sparked.com allows non-profits to get work done for free by posting challenges which are classified by the causes supported by the requesting organization and the skills required to solve the challenge. Everything from assistance with fundraising, web design, social media implementation, and strategy is available on demand from volunteers located around the world. For companies seeking to support employee engagement and individuals looking for ways to give back, Sparked.com connects them to challenges matched to the causes that matter to them requiring skills they possess and are able to donate. Sparked.com has taken pro bono work and volunteering to the cloud and scaled it, connecting over 150,000 volunteers on over 1450 challenges for the benefit of hundreds of organizations and non-profits serving millions of people and issues around the world. Let us not get too lost in the story of how The Extraordinaries has revolutionized volunteering thru an innovative cloud solution. The real story is the outcomes achieved by the non-profits as a result of the assistance of the Sparked.com volunteer community.

### SOCIETAL BENEFITS

Sparked.com connects resources of the "crowd" to fulfill vast unmet needs of nonprofits around the world to provide safe drinking water, buy books, build



schools, promote fair trade, and creating community kitchens. Sparked.com reminds us we can make a difference even when we only have a few minutes.

### **PROJECT BENEFIT EXAMPLE**

“As a managed services CIO supporting clients in higher education, everyday my work is focused on making a difference in the lives of the students at the colleges I serve. Although my work is very fulfilling, I have a desire to contribute more broadly. But when you live in Wisconsin and its minus 24 degrees you have to find outlets for your interests to avoid cabin fever. So I began contributing to open question and answer sites and entering open challenges for commercial and professional benefits with my spare time. Then one day I heard of about Sparked.com at a Gartner conference. The moment I joined as a volunteer I realized the impact it would have in my life and for the causes supported by the organizations I would help. Sparked.com has given me a meaningful alternative outlet for my time and talents and enriched my life through the challenges I answer as I learn about the organizations and their missions. Through Sparked.com I am able to volunteer for an array of causes that are important to me and that are in need of assistance for which I would otherwise never be able to help.” -Jerry Bishop, Volunteer, Sparked.com “I really see the potential of crowdsourcing for community organizations and think it's a big idea. Much of Kiva's success can be attributed to the support and generosity of its fan base, as we've leaned on them for everything from translations to marketing. Having a tool to effectively and efficiently engage them via microtasks would be a win-win, allowing Kiva to continue to scale while allowing Kiva's fans to feel a deeper sense of ownership through participation.” -Premal Shah, President, Kiva.org Through the power of crowdsourcing, Sparked.com was able to facilitate a connection between a Massai village in Kenya (that works with international NGO AVIF), and a developing world water expert, who is a regular micro-volunteer on the site. A few days after posting a challenge to Sparked asking for help getting started and expert guidance in planning to drill a well in their village in Kenya, Jackson, a Massai warrior, had his answer: a micro-volunteer from the United States had seen the challenge, and had connected him with a well-drilling company a few provinces over in Kenya that he had interacted with years earlier as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Africa. Jackson's village is now on track to complete the well this year, allowing his community to focus their efforts on education and other important issues, rather than spending half of each day walking miles and miles to fetch water.

### **IS THIS PROJECT AN INNOVATION, BEST PRACTICE?** Yes

### **ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION**

Recognition through the 2011 ComputerWorld Honors Program would certainly do great things for the world of non-profits and their causes. The power and reach of ComputerWorld and the Honors Program would raise increased awareness for non-profits of the opportunity to seek assistance through Sparked.com enabling them to meet their needs that might go unfulfilled without that connection. The Honors Program would also expand the awareness of companies that would participate in Sparked.com and for individuals looking for ways to volunteer. Sparked.com has received recognition through the following awards since its launch: 2010 Rolex Young Laureates Award for Enterprise 2009 Ashoka Changemakers Award Winner 2009 Knight Foundation Community Grant Award 2009 Echoing Green Social Enterprise Fellowship 2009 United Nations World Summit Youth Award 2009 Netsquared N2Y4 Challenge Winner 2009 FACT Social Justice Award Winner 2009 Huffington Post Philanthropy Game Changer