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# Become a Companion: Social Media That Leads to Social Good

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# Become a Companion: Social Media That Leads to Social Good

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research is part of a series of conference papers from graduate students at Molloy College in Rockville Centre, NY. The theme emerges from a pedagogical philosophy that an essential learning outcome of a graduate education is the significant influence that business has upon society. For example, developing a focus on job creation rather than solely profit-taking must be integrated into the disposition of emerging business leaders. The learning activity leading to the learning outcome is requiring the graduate business students to experience a real-world project. The students are presented with an opportunity to study a problem and to generate a set of solution-driven recommendations that will lead to social good.

## **Keywords**

Social media, social responsibility, marketing, not-for-profit, social entrepreneurship

## **1 PEDOGOGICAL PHILOSOPHY**

The decision to earn a graduate degree requires the student to make a commitment to a discipline. A student's undergraduate educational journey provides the student an initial preparation for a professional path, but also for participation as an educated citizen of the world. A democracy must have citizens who understand how each influence the larger collective society. The undergraduate educational journey provides breadth. The educational journey of a graduate student is different. The designers of a professional major within a graduate program should ensure that the student's experience is accelerated through education. The result is a level of expertise in the student's chosen profession. The curriculum is about depth. The outcome is an individual who is professionally self-sufficient, yet has a yearning for continuous learning.

Dominican education is built upon four pillars: Study, Spirit, Community, and Service. Through transformative education, Molloy College promotes a lifelong search for truth and the development of ethical leadership (Molloy College Mission Statement). In 2012 the college-wide theme was "Civic Engagement." As a result, both undergraduate and graduate capstone courses were redesigned to significantly integrate the college theme with the educational program outcomes.

The capstone course was designed to act as that last stone put in place when constructing a building that will last forever; it marks the structure as complete. The Molloy College capstone course is intended to provide the students with an opportunity to demonstrate the evidence of learning. The student must demonstrate the skills, knowledge, and disposition that have been gained as a result of the graduate educational journey.

The Fall semester 2015 MBA Capstone Class was divided into two teams. Each team formed a consulting firm and was introduced to a real-world client with a real-world problem. This conference paper summarizes the work produced by the students under the consulting firm name of, "Skylos Solutions." The team used the Bloomberg Philanthropies, "Mayor's Challenge" application to guide the consulting process through four stages: (1) establishing a solution-driven vision, (2) developing a turnkey implementation plan, (3) determining the impact of the plan, and (4) determining if the solution can be replicated.

## **2 THE CONSULTING PROBLEM**

The client is Canine Companions for Independence (CCI). Canine Companions is a Not-for-Profit organization that has been established for 40 years. Its mission changes the lives of people with disabilities. The Executive Director of the Northeast Region, Debra Dougherty, served as the direct client for the student consulting team.

In summary, Canine Companions for Independence provides highly trained assistance dogs to children and adults with disabilities. The Northeast Regional Center of CCI consists of 13 states including New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Washington DC, Virginia, West Virginia, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. On average, the Northeast Region has revenues of \$1.86 million with expenses of \$2.34 million. This region is currently running a deficit of \$480,000 per year. The organization is quickly growing, and its expenses are equally growing. The consulting problem is the need to get to break-even.

### 3 THE VISION

The vision for the solution is the development of a turnkey implementation plan to increase donation revenues to offset its expenses. The team proposed a new campaign titled, "Become a Companion." It is a monthly-automated donation program. This monthly donation program will subsidize the incurred costs necessary for raising and training the canines. The monthly donation program will allow donors to receive updates, such as pictures and videos of the canines' journey at CCI – from training, placement, and graduating, by simply donating \$20.16 monthly. The amount of \$20.16 reflects the current donating year, and equals less than \$1 per day. To put in perspective, \$20.16 can purchase 2 movie tickets or 4 cups of coffee. We challenge donors to replace those purchases and donate to CCI.

The Vision is innovative because it provides a sustainable way for Canine Companions for Independence to secure valuable donations, not just in terms of monetary value, but sentimental value as well. There are multiple reasons why a person may be willing to subscribe. He or she may wish to help out those who will require these companion dogs, or he or she wishes to help the organization and its cause because of his or her love for animals. These reasons are served by the marketing plan presented to the client.

The consulting team's implementation plan uses CCI's limited advertising budget, as well as the limited time of its already overextended employees, by creating a streamlined process for the "Become a Companion" program. Most importantly, our idea introduces a funding stream that, to date has not been implemented by CCI. With a monthly donation system in place, the Northeast Region of CCI will be guaranteed income by the many donors whose credit cards and/or bank accounts will be on file and designated to be charged the \$20.16 per month for the year. Engaging charitable and generous supporters at a reasonable level, such as "less than \$1 a day," will ultimately lead to greater exposure for the organization and increased relationships with new donors.

In summary, establishing a cost-efficient and innovative marketing strategy, Canine Companions for Independence will achieve sustained success in its pursuit to break-even. Its awareness strategies will publicize its activities, such as training and partnering disabled individuals with his or her "four-legged companion," in an effort to gain new contributors. The executive director, Debra Dougherty, will have the opportunity to apply these actions to broaden CCI's horizons for funding.

### 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations focused on recruiting donors and managing the client relationships. The consulting team's recommendations included the following components:

- **Develop a social media campaign to attract new donors.**  
Canine Companions for Independence already maintains and regularly updates accounts with Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and

LinkedIn. We suggest that CCI's Northeast Region create its own Instagram account (@CCInortheast). Instagram is a free social media platform in which CCI can post flyers for fundraising events and videos of testimonials. Instagram allows account holders to attach a link in its "bio" (biography). We recommend that CCI have its own landing page, where viewers and followers can easily access information and donate specifically to the Northeast Region.

- **Develop a pseudo-relationship with its donors.**  
CCI should provide periodical updates on how the donors' funds are being used by the organization. Photos and stories should be shared via e-mail to keep the donors updated on the progress of the dogs and candidates. By establishing an automated monthly donation plan, CCI can obtain these donations every month without having to track down donors or do any additional fundraising. This will allow CCI to focus on other fundraising efforts, such as its annual "DogFest, Walk 'n Roll" and "Spring Gala." We have created materials, such as videos, that CCI can use on its social media handles. These videos will provide information about the program and generate more awareness for the cause. Other than providing periodic updates to donors and making sure the donors' payment information are kept up-to-date, there is minimal commitment required from CCI employees in terms of time and money.
- **Partner with other organizations.**  
Reach out to and network with companies, schools, and Long Island retailer, using the already-created materials, with the intent of identifying new donors or additional partners. Whether CCI chooses to have these outside entities engage in donation programs, such as joining CCI's Annual Walk event or fostering a donation campaign on its site, the tools and means will be there to aid in recruitment and allow for this program to grow locally and regionally. We have developed a list for CCI of local (Long Island-based) and regional celebrities that could be approached with the intent of developing a spokesperson relationship. These celebrities may have strong ties to the area, making them more likely to want to support CCI's local events. Even the smallest gesture such as a "retweet" on Twitter could have a substantial impact.
- **Integrate a client management system.**  
The monthly donation program, "Become a Companion," will work together with the program "Constant Contact." The client management system, Constant Contact, will facilitate the relationship between donors and CCI. Donors will receive monthly e-mails of pictures, videos, and

compelling story updates. These pictures and videos will allow donors to feel connected to CCI and its mission. These videos may be mini clips of a canine performing tasks for his or her human partner or captivating videos of the impact a dog can have on his or her partner's life.

Our monthly donation program will also offer multiple levels of giving. Even if donors start small, such as donating \$1.00 per month, it is important that CCI cultivates a positive relationship – in hopes that the donor will increase his or her amount level over time. The entry-level amount will be \$20.16, reflecting the current donation year. This is essentially less than one dollar a day. When you join Canine Companions for Independence, you will join a special group of people reaching out each month to offer highly trained assistance dogs and ongoing follow-up services to people with disabilities.

### **5 COSTS OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS**

The recommendations to CCI recognize the limited budget available. The only expense that CCI will incur is related to the client management system, "Constant Contact." In order to contact and update donors on the progress of the canines and his or her partner, as well as share electronic promotional flyers of upcoming events, we recommend that CCI purchase the Constant Contact's "E-mail PLUS" option, as opposed to the standard "E-mail" option. This option includes features such as: (1) permits three users to manage Constant Contact, (2) collects donations, (3) connects to Facebook, and (4) allows subscribers to register for fundraising events. Constant Contact also offers savings for non-profits. The "E-mail PLUS" option costs begin at \$38.25 per month managing 0-500 contacts. Canine Companions can purchase this same level at the price of \$31.50 per month. Canine Companions can save an initial \$81 per year (\$6.75 savings per month) just for being a non-profit organization.

For the first year, we suggest that CCI purchase the option that offers storage of 0-500 contacts, which costs \$378 for the year. For our assumptions, Skylos Solutions wanted to forecast conservative figures to calculate the amount of years and the amount of donors needed in order for Canine Companions to recuperate its deficit of approximately \$480,000, assuming that the deficit remains constant and CCI does not incur any more expenses. For the first year (2016) of launching "Become a Companion," if CCI is able to accumulate 200 monthly donors among the 13 states (about 15 donors per state), this program will help raise \$48,216, less the yearly cost of the service constant contact. In the second year 2017, the deficit will decrease to \$431,784 (\$480,000-\$48,216). If the donors from year 2016 continue to participate in this donation program and if CCI is able to reach out to 200 more donors (400 donors total), the amount raised for 2017 will be \$96,648. The cost of using Constant Contact will remain the same because the limit of 500 contacts will not have been reached as of yet. However, by the third year 2018, assuming another 200 new donors participate in the monthly donation program, CCI will have

to upgrade its level of contacts to 501-2,500 contacts, thus increasing the cost of Constant Contact to \$504 per year. Although, the cost for the service increases by the third year, the amount of deficit decreases even more to \$145,002 making the Northeast Region of CCI one step closer to covering its entire deficit. Finally by year 2019, if the same progress of new donors (additional 200 donors each year) is maintained, CCI will now have 800 donors by the fourth year and will raise \$193,530. At the end of the fourth year, Canine Companions would have raised a total of \$483,396, enough to cover its original deficit of \$480,000.

We also recommend that external grants be identified and pursued. The Ambrose Monell Foundation is a foundation that aids in the research of mental health and handicapped to improve physical, mental, and moral condition of humanity throughout the world. CCI's eligibility for this grant has been confirmed with its receipt of the IRS determination letter and its tax-exempt status.

### **6 FACTORS THAT COULD DERAIL THE PLAN**

An essential component of the consulting work is to make the client aware of risk factors. Three of the largest risk factors that could derail this business plan are: (1) resistance to donate, (2) hesitant to renew, (3) unsubscribing. In an effort to mitigate these risks, "Become a Companion" will be offered at two donation levels: The "Prime" level will include the current year donation rate, such as \$20.16 in 2016, and any higher amount. This level will receive the e-mail updates of the canines. The "Junior" level will be any amount less than the current year's donation rate, but will not receive updates. Although these donors will not receive updates, he or she will receive a "thank you" e-mail, and the donation will be a taxable deduction. The Junior level can be marketed as a gift alternative. By offering different levels of donation, we understand that individuals may not be able to donate the full "Prime" amount. However, it is imperative to convey that any donated amount can make an impact. For example, if a college student can donate at least \$1.00 per month, the donation will be appreciated. As time progresses, the individual can increase his or her monthly donation. The dedication to donating has never escaped the mind of the individual, and he or she is encouraged to advance to the "Prime" level. We want to hearten the idea of donating to CCI – even with a small amount, but with the idea of growing over time.

### **7 SUMMARIZING THE DESIRED OUTCOMES**

Our main objective is to implement a sustainable way for Canine Companions for Independence to generate monthly donations for its organization, while incurring little to no additional expenses. Outcomes achieved will be attributed to the Northeast Regional level; its Long Island area Regional office located in Medford, New York. This program is designed to theoretically run itself, therefore the organization can continue to operate as it normally does and pursue the various fundraising initiatives it already has in place.

We also recommend that CCI generate increased awareness for its contribution to society. One of CCI's biggest problems is that many people are not familiar with its mission or the services that the organization provides. Our plan will help expand CCI's reach by promoting the organization and its mission to the public. CCI may feel as if it has reached the "crossroads" of its target market, however our plan will help expand that market and potentially generate additional supporters.

- **How long do you think it will take to show results?**

There will be an investment in time to initiate these initiatives. Our team has provided all of the start-up material. Twelve months of Instagram videos have been developed for our client. But CCI must take the time to learn the "Constant Contact" system, to use the material developed, to put the plan in place. Once the "Become a Companion" campaign is officially launched, the results will be immediate. Although not likely to reach the fundraising goal straightaway, the money from the individuals who sign up for the program will be deposited directly to the CCI's Northeast Region. As "Become a Companion" increases its donor base and gains speed through social media efforts, e-mail blasts, and word-of-mouth, CCI's deficit should be steadily depleting and progressively reaching its break-even level. In order to maintain excitement and energy behind this program, it is imperative that the social media presence remains at the forefront with updates on number of dogs being supported, number of new "companions" involved in the CCI family, etc. If the current staff at CCI is able to launch the "Become a Companion" campaign in early 2016 with the \$20.16 donation level, it will have the entire year to focus on reaching the minimum fundraising goal.

## **8 IMPACT ON SOCIETY**

There is a need for this solution throughout the US. The Northeast Region of Canine Companions for Independence includes 13 states (New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Washington DC, Virginia, West Virginia, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine). Currently, our implementation plan is geared towards the Northeast Region facility, located in Medford, New York. As the implementation plan expands, additional cities in the Northeast Region can utilize this solution to raise awareness and additional donation funds for CCI.

Skylos Solutions wishes to impact the world in positive ways. We are excited that our solution grows Canine Companion's mission and helps it to enhance the lives of individuals with disabilities. We are pleased that our plan does not interfere with CCI's existing operations, but complements them. Our ideas do not ask for CCI to change its strategy, but create an outlet for additional donation revenues. Through our recommendations, CCI will have more access to funding that is necessary to expand and grow

within communities. If our implementation plan is successfully executed, we will have helped a national organization impact the lives of others, and that accomplishment would be rewarding for our team.

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## **REFERENCES**

Will be supplied upon request.