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Nancy L. Russo

Northern Illinois University, nrusso@niu.edu

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# Application Development in The Social Computing Non-Profit Sector: Motivating and Managing Volunteer Developers

Nancy L. Russo  
Northern Illinois University, USA

## Abstract

This paper examines the volunteer developers contributing to the on-line microfinance site, Kiva, to provide understanding of issues related to motivating and managing volunteer developers in social computing non-profits.

**Keywords:** social computing, volunteer workforce, non-profit organizations, microfinance

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## APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOCIAL COMPUTING NON-PROFIT SECTOR: MOTIVATING AND MANAGING VOLUNTEER DEVELOPERS

The Internet has changed the way all organizations – commercial and non-profit alike – interact with their external constituents, including customers, suppliers, supports, and/or contributors. The Internet and collaborative technologies, particularly those categorized as Web 2.0 technologies, have facilitated the growth of communities around organizations, products, causes, and a wide variety of personal and professional interests, including the development of software. The reach of communities and the methods by which members can add value to communities have grown in parallel with the growth of high-speed Internet access and the availability of easy to use on-line technologies (Parameswaran and Whinston, 2007).

This has resulted in a large “Internet-based volunteer work force – people who use Internet applications to pursue a personal interest through volunteering contributions of time and talent that may create value for organizations and their customers or members” (Moon and Sproull, 2008, p. 494) While these volunteers may make valuable contributions to the organizations and communities and causes they support, little is known about how these volunteers are motivated to provide high-quality contributions, particularly in the non-profit sector. In the “social computing” sector, benefits for the community, for the target cause, or for society as a whole, may have a greater impact than performance. A broader set of skills, not just technical and domain skills, but also political (understanding of the organization’s goals, procedures, and constraints) and relationship skills have been suggested as relevant in the non-profit sector (Zhang, Guitierrez, and Mathieson, 2010).

This study will examine a particular subset of non-profit organizations: Internet-based groups that provide opportunities for investors to engage in microfinance projects. Microfinance involves providing relatively small loans to the working poor, often, but not exclusively, in the developing world, to support the creation of a small business. These small businesses could involve farming, bakery, retail, or other services. Loan recipients are expected to pay off their loans, with a significant amount of interest (ranging from 18-60%). Reported repayment rates top 95%. The funds can be returned to investors or reinvested with new loan recipients, and interest payments also support the administrative costs of the local microfinance lender. There are a number of these groups, including eBay’s MicroPlace, WorldVizionMicro, and the primary organization of interest, Kiva. Kiva has a section of their website, build.kiva, to provide information for and about volunteer developers of applications used on the site and elsewhere. The contributions of these volunteer developers will be used to explore the issues of motivating and managing the application development contributions of volunteers in the social computing environment.

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