

PEOPLES OAKLAND

Amit Mirpuri, Consultant
Gary Lefebvre, Assistant Director

I. PRESENTATION OF THE SITUATION

A. Background/Mission

People's Oakland, located at 3433 Bates St., South Oakland, provides social rehabilitation for adults with mental illness between the ages of 18 and 65. It provides program members with various challenging and stimulating activities. It also, helps members work through substance abuse issues and supports them in finding employment. Peoples Oakland was established in 1971 as a community agency to improve the quality of life in Oakland's neighborhood. In the early 80's, Peoples Oakland began a mental health project to address needs of persons with mental needs living in the neighborhood.

B. Location & Activities

People's Oakland purchased and moved into the four-story structure situated in Bates St. in May of 1999, but rents out the third floor for additional income. Of the other three floors, the first floor is used mostly as recreation space and for a snack bar. The first floor also has a room for martial arts classes, which is a shared space with the Weight Watchers' Group. The second floor is used mainly for administrative offices although it also has some vacant offices used for storage while the fourth floor has the vocation skills learning area and additional offices. The cooking classes take place in the fourth floor, but they are trying to renovate the second floor to manage that. Both the second and fourth floors also have conference rooms. The different floors are accessible only using the elevator, as the stairway has been secured to allow emergency exit only.

The activities provided by Peoples Oakland include the following:

- current events discussions
- cooking classes,
- writing groups
- day trips
- basketball and softball teams well-known for their championship games
- classes in resume writing
- interviewing and networking classes
- typing classes
- the program, "Milestones", where members work together to achieve competitive employment
- The Coffeehouse, which addresses the needs of people with mental illness who are recovering from substance abuse

C. Staff

Peoples Oakland has a staff of 22 people. Maureen Cooke and Gary Lefebvre are the main staff members who deal with the technology management and planning. Maureen has been the executive director since 1980. She has been the motivation behind the organization's move towards the technology age. The assistant director, Gary Lefebvre, has been at Peoples Oakland since 1982. He is the chief of database management, personnel management, staff training, quality assurance, and deals with many of

the information technology issues. Gary has a history of working to help his community. When joining Peoples Oakland, little did he know that his curiosity and patience would lead him to become knowledgeable in the field of information technology. Not only is he currently working on developing a web design solution, he is also learning a lot more about networking and how information is passed from one point to another.

In addition to being technologically savvy, Gary is also taking classes to develop his abilities to manage accountability and task distribution for nonprofit organizations. This added knowledge helped him to write a successful proposal for a large grant which they received. These funds were used to network their computers and to enhance their technical power by investing in new, more powerful computer systems.

Other people involved in the staff are - the intake person who does the main database registration for new members, the accountant, the Representative Payee who manages payments for members who are unable to pay on their own, a person in charge of the CIS data entry which involves staff logging, signing in for members and registering working hours for employees, an administrative assistant, and finally there are lots of other staff that is not involved in the administrative aspect of things and are more involved in activities and what not.

D. Technology

Peoples Oakland has been using computer technology since the 1980s when they had Apple IIe machines. At the beginning of the consulting partnership, they had 22 computers: 15 for staff, and 7 for members. By the end of the consulting partnership, Peoples Oakland had 22 more new computers. (See Appendix A for a full description of the technical environment.) The staff computers are connected to a Novell network. The member computers are not networked. The computers have different configurations (486 processors to Pentium 200 MHz processors) and run different operating systems (Windows 3.1 and DOS 6.1. Staff used different software applications, including Word, WordPerfect, QuatroPro, PageMaker, etc. Three staff computers are configured to access the Internet via a dial-up modem. America Online is the Internet Service Provider.

II. PRESENTATION OF PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The consulting partnership with Gary focused on 3 issues:

- 1.) Arrival of new computers with different software and operating systems combined with the opportunity of standardizing software.
- 2.) Redundancy in work environment.
- 3.) Opportunity to increase personal availability to members and member interaction.

Each issue is discussed below.

1. Problem/Opportunity: Arrival of New Computers with Different Software and Operating Systems - Create a Standard for the Type of Software Used

The arrival of the new computers created an opportunity for the organization to standardize software products. The benefits of using the same products include:

1. It is easier to share files;
2. Easier to fill in for staff when they are absent;
3. Easier to manage site licenses than licenses for individual products;
4. Easier to share training and to train each other;
5. Can setup templates for everyone to use;
6. Makes supporting individual computers on the network easier;
7. Makes trouble-shooting problems easier;

However, a large part of the staff is not familiar with the new software and its environment. Many staff members have developed competence in other products and would rather not have to change.

Setting a standard for the software used by the staff of People's Oakland can become very useful as they get larger and start to divide a lot of the tasks. In fact, it could also help them in their current situation since, often times, one staff member needs to take a look at something that another staff member has done. Overall, this would increase the speed, efficiency, and communication of data between staff, which would allow them to better serve the members of the organization.

Approach Taken

In order to restrict the kind of software used by the staff of Peoples Oakland, only Microsoft Office software was installed in every computer. This forces anybody who is not familiar with this product to look for help when needed. Generally, whenever there is a problem, most of the staff comes to Gary to have him solve their problem, but we wanted to avoid this because he doesn't have the time to devote to helping people with small problems using the new software.

In order to avoid the situation where people would come to Gary to ask for help, we would need some kind of documentation that they can always refer to or some form of help that is constantly available. Microsoft Office already has a help system implemented in all its software components. Thus, if the staff were to be taught to use the help available in this software package, they would be better off. This however would not be enough since computers sometimes intimidate people and using a help function provided by the computer or software package might not be the optimal solution.

In order to satisfy this requirement, documentation would be useful. However, this was a problem because someone would have to be very knowledgeable about the software and have to summarize it as best as possible. Fortunately, Microsoft makes its documentation available online. This documentation was what was needed by the organization along with a small documentation on how to use the help available on the software itself.

Outcomes

Currently, the documentation is still not available. Since we expected the documentation to be used on a daily basis, we decided to wait until the organization's website is made and have a link to it from there. The reason we planned this is because it serves as a source of motivation to visit the site. More about the site will be presented when we discuss future issues. The increased capacity that my community partner has at this point is the resource to which I pointed out. He can easily have the documentation available without having to do any work. This is also sustainable in the sense that Microsoft constantly updates the

documentation. Furthermore, if at any point, Peoples Oakland were to change the software it uses or update it to Microsoft Office 2002 for example, the Microsoft website would carry the new documentation online so the current one would be easily replaceable.

The main question to ask at this point is how does this added capacity help the staff and the organization as a whole. Although this is not currently implemented, the staff is bound to be greatly affected by this new method of solving their problems because once they get used to using online documentation and software help support, this will teach them to be much more self-reliant and will be able to adapt to new software packages very quickly in the future. Furthermore, the standardized software will also help them help each other since they will be using the same packages. This is more something that can be seen as an increased capacity for the entire organization, but that hasn't taken place as of yet.

Yet another issue is how can we be so sure that all this will necessarily happen. We can note that the task on the part of my community partner is purely to make this documentation available to his staff online and to create a small documentation that will explain to the staff how to use the help functions already available on the software. We cannot be completely sure that all this will happen, but providing a link on the website to the documentation is a large part of this process and requires very little work since my partner has gone through an extensive study of HTML and ASP coding. This aspect of the outcomes will become clearer as the next few problems and opportunities are presented and the approaches that were taken to solve them.

Recommendations

As the task has not been entirely completed, it would be best to go about the whole process in the following way exactly:

1. Get the Microsoft documentation directly off the web
2. Get a volunteer to summarize the documentation by just cutting the existing documentation and rewording anything that seems to be too wordy
3. Post the personalized version on the website and have a link to the actual documentation for further reference

Now that we have the source of documentation, it is not hard at all to create a smaller and easy to use documentation for beginners. This can be done at any point, but the sooner it is available, the better it would be. Having a link to the Microsoft documentation is quite important because it gives the staff a path to look for help. They are so used to going to Mr. Lefebvre whenever they have a problem, but this will provide an opportunity for Mr. Lefebvre to just redirect them to a source, which will help the staff become more self-sufficient.

One possibility to complete the task of creating a smaller documentation very quickly is to assign the task to existing staff members. This is a good way to get them to look through the main documentation and have them learn a little more about the software that they use. Obviously there is a need for an incentive so maybe Gary could continue what he has been doing for people checking their emails. Currently, Gary rewards people who check their emails. He could easily use this method on members who are volunteer to summarize different Microsoft applications. In fact, he could have separate teams for separate software and this would really makes things go faster.

Clearly the only resource that is really needed here is the following site:

<http://www.microsoft.com/enable/products/docs/default.htm>. This site contains documentation for all Microsoft products and will be constantly updated by Microsoft Corporation which is a good thing for the staff who will probably go through software updates in a year or two. The biggest key problem with this

is that people have to be motivated to use it instead of asking other people and so, if anybody does have a question, they would usually come to my community partner. But now, it is crucial for my community partner to redirect them to the documentation and tell them what to look for so that in the future, they can do it themselves.

2. Problem: Redundancy in Work Environment

Many times, my community partner gets calls where the person on the other end requests information. Sometimes, this information needs to be faxed. A form would be a good example of data that needs to be faxed. In order to complete this request, my community partner needs has to find the form and then take the time to fax it. He handles several such requests a day and it consumes a big chunk of his time.

Mr. Lefebvre is very busy and his time is definitely not expendable. This is why this process needs to be eliminated or somehow refined so that he does not have to do this over and over again.

Approach Taken

In order to solve the problem of redundancy in work and be able to take the advantage to present all kinds of information about the organization to the public, my community partner created a website.

By placing forms and other requested information on a web site, anyone could download it whenever they want, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. To access this information, one only need access to the Internet. Between libraries, community organizations, offices, and home-based computing, Internet access is increasing. Gary felt that the majority of persons requesting information would have Internet access.

- We chose to program directly in HTML instead of using FrontPage or Macromedia Dreamweaver because often times, when designing web pages in FrontPage or Dreamweaver, the pages look different when using Netscape versus using Internet Explorer. By using html, we achieved consistency in the web page code, an important issue when designing websites. If a site is inconsistent in different browsers, it tends to irritate the user and discourages them from further use. This is why we chose to program directly in HTML.
- We decided on the design and the rules we would use to create the website.
- We completed this entire task by performing the specific steps listed in Appendix B.

These steps helped us understand how to design a professional website without losing quality in any way. This allows for a two to three day implementation for the website and any content that needs to be made available can easily be done.

Outcomes

- Gary is currently in the process of completing the entire Peoples Oakland web site.
- FTP software was installed and used by Mr. Lefebvre to transfer information onto a web server.
- Gary solves a web problem without the consultant by using the knowledge and processed we practiced
- Problem he solved: He realized that tables are a key to organizing information on a web page. He managed to put a paragraph of text written around an image by using tables. This is not an easy task in html. It required figuring out how to code hierarchical tables. This final step showed that he was ready to build a web page for the organization.
- Gary can easily have a section that is called "How you can help" and this would act as a way of reaching out to people who would care to help out. He might get someone to volunteer to help out with a specific activity or he might get someone who has a large sum of money to give some to

Peoples Oakland. This is a big step in that sense that they are not limited now to the people who are living in Pittsburgh to help them out financially and can reach out to people around the world.

Another important issue is sustainability. My community partner can definitely maintain the organization website with his newfound knowledge. If he ever forgets anything that he has been taught, he can always refer back to his www.webmonkey.com printout or the site itself for that matter. Another reference he already has is his works that he has stored on a zip disk. He currently uses the site printout whenever he finds himself stuck on something.

Recommendations

Maintaining the Web Site: It is important to remember that along with building websites, maintaining websites is an aspect that most people forget and render the website useless. When a website is content-based, there is a need continually update that content. Old content that is not longer useful makes the site seem very unprofessional. Thus, my recommendation is to set aside a time every 2 weeks or every month to update the site. If the site displays daily information, it is important to update it everyday. Since this requires some time, this job can be redirected to other staff, which brings me to my second recommendation.

Web Site Team: When managing a website, it is best to get more than one person to work on it so that if there is a need for a lot of change, it can be done in a short period of time. Also, if at any point, my community partner does not have time or has to leave the organization for any reason, there needs to be someone who can take care of the site. Thus, developing a team of persons with the knowledge and skill needed to maintain the web site would expand the organization's capacity. In the long term, this will help the organization make their information available to its members and staff along with the rest of the world in a presentable manner.

Here are some resources that have been used throughout this consulting and could be useful in training and maintaining the website:

1. www.webmonkey.com - site with HTML examples and code documentation
2. Self-made documentation – during this learning process, my community partner made a documentation to help him out whenever he needed.
3. Sample pages – there are sample pages made by my community partner on his disk, but that is currently inaccessible.
4. <http://www.nmisp.org/>, http://www.ffcmh.org/Eng_one.htm - some sites that have good design and are worth using as reference

3. Opportunity: Increase Personal Availability to Members & Member Interaction

Currently, Peoples Oakland facility and staff are only available, M-F, between 9am and 5pm. Peoples Oakland's clients need information that they can only get when the facility is open. They need to be able to get this information when they need it. The staff would like to cultivate a greater sense of community among the members and encourage them to communicate regularly.

Approach Taken

Using the web and Internet communication tools, the consulting partnership decided to build a web community for Peoples Oakland. A web community is made up of a group of people who communicate over the Internet via message boards or through Internet Relay Chat. These message boards can be used

to post news, information on personal experience, available jobs, and basically anything else that is of interest to the user. This would make Peoples Oakland a 24-hour serving non-profit organization

Building a web community that would have a great impact on the members and staff.

- Uses high tech communication.
- Change the process of information distribution.
- Last minute information can be placed on a message board to inform everyone.
- Member could easily communicate with other members for support on a particular problem or to get help and advice.

Gary programmed scripts that he could easily incorporate into the web site. Using the scripting language ASP, he setup a registration system which will allow certain people to get restricted access to specific parts of the site. (See Appendix C for detailed information.)

The approach used to build a community online is not very simple. It primarily requires building tools that would help build the community such as a message board and some polls for example. However, people need to come to the website and actually post a message. In order to have that, there needs to be some form of reward basis. This can be done using a point-to-point method, which is basically a competition of who can post the most messages. Of course, there is the risk of having a lot of junk messages, but this can be avoided. In any case, in order to start with something, my partner had to learn ASP. The following steps summarize the steps we took to learn ASP:

1. Go to www.webmonkey.com and follow the links to their ASP guide.
2. I personally helped him at this point to show him how ASP worked and made references to the guide at times.
3. We started by building a message board. I kept asking him questions on what kind of data needs to be used and we reviewed databases and standard SQL commands just before.
4. After showing him how variables are stored and manipulated in forms, I showed him how to store information into a database and how to retrieve it.
5. I showed him that there were 4 basic steps in an ASP page: information retrieval, data-validity handling, database storage, form creation.
6. Then I asked him to build his personal registration system, which he did.

The last step would be the ultimate test for him because building a registration system requires a comprehensive understanding of ASP and how it works.

Outcomes

Gary built a personal registration system. A personal registration system stores a user's information in a database for future reference and to control restricted access. This would be needed for any interaction between users on the web site. To implement the personal registration system, Gary completed the following tasks:

- Building a form
- Retrieving data from a form
- Creating a database
- Connecting to the database using ASP
- Error-checking the data supplied by the user
- Storing the data in the database

These are the basic requirements for building a registration system.

As soon as Peoples Oakland website becomes available, Mr. Lefebvre will be able to implement the personal registration system, providing the bases needed for shared interaction.

Recommendations

Make WebMonkey your Reference: Although my partner has made an entire script in ASP, I still feel that it is hard to sustain it because the only resource he has is www.webmonkey.com and he mostly learned most of the ASP through me. Since he did not use the WebMonkey reference that often, it seems that he might not be able to use it properly as a reference. Thus, for this reason, I think it would be good for him to go over WebMonkey and relate whatever he knows to that reference. If he does get stuck, he could always use this site. This is a recommendation to do as soon as possible.

Use MS NetMeeting: Another web-based tool to use to build community is Microsoft NetMeeting, which supports visual and audio channels. Video-conferencing is becoming quite popular and could be used in the future for private-in-home consulting. Video-conferencing is a technology that could be used to great benefit by Peoples Oakland. It could help members decrease feelings of isolation and increase their sense of community.

Web-based Tools: Finally, it would be nice to build some more tools for the website such as polls that would encourage interactivity or even games which are becoming more and more popular over the web. These tools are easy to build using ASP since it is all about receiving data and manipulating the page viewed based on the data you get. A memory game is a good example of this. This would definitely encourage building a community and help the organization in its serving its members.

Some references that might be useful would be:

1. <http://www.aspin.com/> - general ASP site which provides lots of ASP resources such as scripts, host info, and lots more
2. <http://www.setupsite.com/> - a cheap and seemingly good host with ASP capabilities
3. <http://www.brinkster.com/> - free host that supports ASP; best for testing usage
4. <http://line9.com/tek9.asp?pg=freebies&specific=29> - using automated emailing in your scripting

The resources listed above are some great tools to use to build more ASP tools and take the whole thing one step further.

A. Technical Environment

Technical Environment <u>Before</u> Consulting Process:	Technical Environment <u>After</u> Consulting Process:
7 Pentium MMX machines - 200 Mhz - Windows 3.1 - No network - Used by members 15 486 machines - Windows 3.1 - Dos 6.1 - Novell network – 10 user license systems - 3 computers with internet connection Primary Database: dBase 4 Software programs used: Word Perfect, Quattro Pro (spreadsheet), Page Maker, Peach Tree Accounting, and PowerPoint	Dell Dimension 4100 Series Pentium III machines - 933 Mhz - 128 MB SDRAM @ 133 MHZ - 20.4 GB 7200 RPM Ultra ATA Hard Drive - Windows 2000 Dell PowerEdge 2400 Base (Server) - P3K 933 MHZ w/ 256K, 133 Cache - Processor Terminator Card with Air Baffle, 133 MHZ - 256 MB SDRAM 133 MHZ, 1*256 MBDIMM - Running Windows 2000 Server - 5 Client Access Licenses Upgraded to 30 2 Xerox Printers: Xerox Docuprint N2825

B. Technical Environment

- Go to www.webmonkey.com and follow the links to their HTML references.
- Print the references and follow through from top to bottom.
- Attempt to make an initial page with just text.
- Attempt to make a page with some graphics.
- Attempt to make a page with a link.
- Attempt to make a page with a table that holds the text and graphics in it.
- Design a complicated table where the image and data overlap in terms of the image taking up more row-space or column-space than the text or vice versa.
- Now program a page that follows this design using rowspan or colspan.
- If you can create this page using tables inside the table data, try that as well. (This is an option based on how the design is made.)
- Now pick a graphic and open it in Adobe Image Ready.
- Slice the graphic into small random pieces.
- Store the slices.
- Restore the image on a web page using hierarchy tables – (tables inside tables) with the following attributes: cellpadding, cellspacing, border, rowspan, colspan
- Design a basic form that takes input.
- Use textbooks and web resources such as other non-profit organizations with similar goals in order to decide what makes a site attractive and professional vs. purely entertaining and amateur-like.

C. Concept of Registration System

The registration system is designed for the purpose of restricting access to specific information. Some information does not need to be shared to the entire public. The registration system takes care of that. It recognizes staff members and general members as well as the public. Some people don't want to be recognized by the public as being a member of Peoples Oakland which might lead them to mistaken conclusions about them. In any case, this systems allows Peoples Oakland to protect the identity and information on specific members and at the same time allow them to share information internally.

Peoples Oakland Web Site Home Page

