



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA
GREATER ST. LOUIS AREA COUNCIL

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Nonprofit

Customer Profile

The Greater St. Louis Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America provides programs for 56,000 young people in 37 counties in Missouri and Illinois. It employs 80 people and coordinates 15,000 volunteers.

Business Situation

A dated, 2003-era Web site prevented the Greater St. Louis Area Council from incorporating “Web 2.0” features such as blogs into its site and fully harnessing the passion of volunteers.

Solution

The Council completely redesigned and rearchitected its Web site using Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010 so that it can offer blogs, wikis, interactivity, and broaden content publishing to volunteers.

Benefits

- Help in growing Scouting
- More engaging Web experience
- Volunteers empowered
- Savings of U.S.\$45,000 annually

Boy Scouts Aims to Boost Participation and Community-Building with Web Refresh

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“Be Prepared” is the motto of the Boys Scouts of America, but the Greater St. Louis Area Council of the Boy Scouts felt not only unprepared, but behind in its Web outreach. Eager to create a more user-friendly Web site that incorporated social computing capabilities such as blogs, wikis, and interactivity, the Greater St. Louis Area Council enlisted the help of Aspect, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, to help migrate the site to [Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010](#). The Council believes that its contemporary Web presence will help grow Scouting by providing higher quality information to youth, parents, and volunteers. Site visitors can better find what they need, and the Council’s 15,000 volunteers can more readily contribute their expertise through blog postings. As a bonus, the Greater St. Louis Area Council expects to reduce Web hosting and maintenance costs by U.S.\$45,000 annually.



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Situation

The Greater St. Louis Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America provides educational programs that build character, teach participatory citizenship, and develop personal fitness. The Council’s geographic area includes 27 counties in Eastern Missouri, and 10 counties in Southern Illinois.

Approximately 56,000 young people participate in Greater St. Louis Area Council programs each year as members of 1,100 Cub packs, Boy Scout troops, and Venturing crews. Based in St. Louis, Missouri, the Council employs 80 people and coordinates more than 15,000 adult volunteers.

As an organization that primarily serves children and teens, the Greater St. Louis Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America knew that it needed to reach them where they “live”—which today is on the Web. The Council not only wanted to attract youth, but also more engagingly communicate online with parents, volunteers, donors, and even its own staff members. Its 2003-vintage Web site was a stumbling block in all these areas.

Aged Web Site

In 2003, the Greater St. Louis Area Council moved online with a static, “brochureware” or “Web 1.0” Web site created using Microsoft Content Management Server 2002, a full-featured Web publishing program at the time. By 2009, however, both its Web server hardware and software were old, making site maintenance and support difficult and expensive, and the deployment of new features virtually impossible. The Council spent between U.S.\$60,000 and \$80,000 a year maintaining the site, which included hosting, software

licensing, fixing bugs, and adding occasional enhancements.

Difficult Navigation, Publishing

Mostly however, the old Web site was not very user-friendly or capable of accommodating newer “Web 2.0” features such as blogs, wikis, and other [social media](#) features. “We put binders of information for volunteers on our original Web site, which eliminated lots of phone calls,” says Joe Mueller, Director of Public Relations for the Greater St. Louis Area Council, Boy Scouts of America. “However, we didn’t have a good search engine, so people couldn’t always find things. It was difficult to navigate from one section of the site to another, and people often left in frustration.”

The Council also wanted to eliminate a content publishing bottleneck. In addition to about 30 staff members who published content, the Council had given publishing rights to at least one district executive in each of its 15 districts. Each coordinator works with about 1,000 volunteers, who had to feed their content to the district executives; therefore, the executives usually only managed to post updates weekly at best.

Missed Opportunities

The Council realized that enhancing its Web site to be more contemporary, usable, and effective would address many challenges that the St. Louis Scouts faced. “During the last 20 years or so, our youth membership and camp attendance has remained flat or decreased,” Mueller says. “We wanted to better promote and market our camping and outdoor programs to Scouts, leaders, and parents. We needed to engage more community organizations, such as churches and schools, to sponsor Scout units, and

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recruit more adult volunteer leaders to deliver the Scouting program. We also needed to nurture and cultivate relationships that could then be converted to donations, which have also been on the decline.” Additionally, the Greater St. Louis Area Council wanted to use its Web site to bring together and communicate with its vast network of staff members, volunteer leaders, parents, community leaders, and Executive Board members.

One Council board member summed up the challenges and solution to Mueller when he said, “Your whole world begins at your Web site.” Mueller knew that the Greater St. Louis Area Council needed to plunge wholeheartedly into online [social computing](#) to truly welcome that world.

Solution

Mueller had already taken his first steps into the new world of social networking in 2008 by establishing a Council presence on YouTube, [Facebook](#), Twitter, and Flickr, and also launching a blog (using software from WordPress). But he knew that the Web site was the Council’s primary online outreach vehicle, and it needed to be brought into the twenty-first century.

Find the Right Partner

Peter Tymbel, Information Systems Administrator for the Greater St. Louis Area Council of the Boy Scouts, supported Mueller’s desire to incorporate social computing features into the Council’s Web site. Tymbel determined that the Council should migrate the site underpinnings from Content Management Server to Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007.

“We performed an evaluation of Web software, including Office SharePoint

Server, Doubleknot [a content management system for nonprofits], and open source solutions,” Tymbel says. “We’d had good experience with Content Management Server early on and decided that Office SharePoint Server was the logical progression and a solid program. We liked its ease of use and the fact that it was fully Web 2.0-enabled, with RSS feeds, blogs, wikis, and so forth. We wouldn’t have to do anything to gain these features out of the box.”

The technology decision made, the Council then sought a technology partner to help it implement its ambitious changes. In June 2009, it selected Aspect, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner that specializes in Microsoft Unified Communications and collaboration solutions. “Aspect did an outstanding job of presenting a vision to us,” Mueller says. “On their own, they performed usability studies and exercises and really opened our eyes to how the general public and our volunteers navigated our current site and how we needed to improve it.”

Tymbel adds, “Of all the vendors we contacted, only Aspect brought a deep understanding of usability to the table. They were another set of eyes that helped us look at our problem from a different perspective. Plus, they have former Boy Scouts on their staff and really understood our culture and organization.”

Start with the Latest Software

As the Council and Aspect moved from planning into information architecture design, they learned about [Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010](#). “When we learned about the improved social computing features of SharePoint Server

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2010, we decided to skip Office SharePoint Server 2007 and move directly to the 2010 version of the product," Tymbel says.

In fall 2009, Aspect started an official needs assessment. It identified Web-related applications and content that needed to be updated or changed, and formulated a plan to restructure the Council's Web content. Aspect architects created a new site map and information architecture, devised page layouts, and created wireframe designs for the layouts. Next, they worked with graphic designers to redesign the home page and create secondary page design templates. "We customized SharePoint Server 2010 to meet the Boy Scouts branding guidelines, but we used the navigation, site hierarchy, and search features right out of the box," says Sundar Swaminathan, SharePoint Solutions Architect at Aspect.

For infrastructure-level coding, the Aspect team used the [Microsoft Visual Studio 2010](#) development system; specifically, the Microsoft Visual C# development language and Microsoft Visual Studio Team Foundation Server 2010. To create the page layouts, they used Microsoft SharePoint Designer 2010. The team also upgraded the underlying Web applications to Microsoft .NET Framework 3.5.

Launch Blogs, Interactive Maps, and More

In phase one, ending March 2010, the Council migrated select content from the previous site to [SharePoint Server 2010](#), and deployed blogs. This means the Council can now extend blog authoring beyond the Council staff to volunteers, who are critical communicators within the Scouting community.

"Our district coordinators go to a couple of meetings a month and come back with 5 to 15 news items that need to be placed on the Web site," Mueller says. "Instead of coming back to all that administrative work, we can now give the volunteers the keys to the Web site so that they can update their own material.

"With SharePoint Server 2010, it's so much easier to publish content," Mueller continues. "The new Ribbon and user interface give users an intuitive, familiar environment that looks a lot like Microsoft Office."

In phase two, from April to December 2010, Aspect will incorporate Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, a new events calendar application, and dynamic cross-linking of content. RSS feeds will provide subscribers with updates on program additions or changes. For instance, if a price for a program changes or if an event is cancelled, RSS feeds would push information to the subscriber, rather than the subscriber having to visit the site.

With a SharePoint-based collaborative calendar, the 15 districts within the Council can collaborate more effectively on a shared calendar. The Council can also make the calendar interactive to offer online camping reservations and registration for events such as training courses, den chief conferences, and day camps. Aspect will use the [Microsoft Silverlight browser plug-in](#) and ASP.NET AJAX extender controls to implement these features.

With dynamic cross-linking of content, the Council will be able to make site navigation much simpler, enabling visitors to conveniently jump to content of interest.

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Benefits

By migrating its Web site to SharePoint Server 2010, the Greater St. Louis Area Council of the Boy Scouts has created a more engaging Web site packed with "Web 2.0" features. The Council is confident that this more contemporary Web presence will help the Scouting program grow, enable site visitors to find what they need, disseminate up-to-date information, harness the passion of volunteers, and even save money.

Showcases Scouting

The Council staff has high hopes that its new Web site will contribute greatly to promoting the growth of Scouting in the St. Louis area. "Our new SharePoint Server 2010-based Web site has the potential to improve our overall program quality and help us grow Scouting," Mueller says. "Our constituents will be able to get information faster and get better-quality information. This will help our leaders deliver better programs to kids. If the programs are good, participation will go up, attendance at our camps will increase, and donations will even go up. The Web is the entry portal for everyone who is shopping for programs, looking to volunteer, or otherwise engage with Scouting."

Offers a More Engaging Web Experience

The new Web innovations, such as blogs and interactive maps, help the Council do a better job of answering questions, getting parents and volunteers involved, and disseminating ideas and coaching for those new to Scouting. "People can actually find what they're looking for on the site now without abandoning the site in frustration," Mueller says. "This is especially important for people who are new to Scouting." Aspect will help the Council further speed information

location as it deploys metadata tagging, user ratings, user recommendations, and other interactive features.

Creating and posting content is much easier now, so the Council can keep its site fresher with all kinds of content, including text, images, audio, and video. This keeps visitors and members coming back for more. Enhanced [social media](#) features also enable the Boy Scouts to be more responsive to site visitors, using blogs and other mechanisms to more rapidly respond to queries.

Empowers Volunteers, Encourages Community Building

Extending content publishing rights to volunteers is completely new and a very big deal for the Greater St. Louis Area Council. This capability will enable the Boy Scouts to knit these valuable people more closely into the Scouting family and tap their talent. "The ability to give volunteers the ability to post photos or videos from a weekend camping event or awards ceremony gets the information up there immediately," Mueller says. "If it's a week late, no one really cares anymore. Being able to post it that night or the next morning is huge; the YouTube generation wants to see news immediately."

Plus, from a resource utilization perspective, the Scouts have a saying: "Never do what a volunteer can do." Explains Mueller, "We want to harness the passion and creativity of volunteers—that's why we've been so successful for 100 years. Paid staff just provides support. Giving volunteers the ability to create and publish content will directly improve the quality and relevance of our programs."

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Peter Tymbel, Director of Information Systems, Greater St. Louis Area Council, Boy Scouts of America

Beyond enabling volunteers to post content and blogs, the Council plans on using SharePoint Server 2010 to cultivate [communities](#) where any group of people with common interests can exchange ideas and best practices. Staff members, parents, and even Scouts will be able to blog about their experience and encourage others. This will be useful in the “How To” section of the site where people can share ideas about skills such as packing for camping or cooking with a Dutch oven. The Scouts can also use wikis to collaborate on songs, stories, games, and honing other skills.

Saves an Expected \$45,000 Annually

As a nice bonus, the St. Louis Area Council will even pocket some savings from its move to SharePoint Server 2010. “We expect to halve our hosting costs, from \$30,000 to \$15,000, by consolidating our Web-server footprint from two servers to one using Microsoft virtualization software,” Tymbel says. “We also believe that the upgrades to [SharePoint Server 2010](#) and the .NET Framework will reduce ongoing code maintenance, perhaps by 50 percent—another \$30,000 annual savings.”

With a Web site riding on SharePoint Server 2010, the Greater St. Louis Area Council of the Boy Scouts is more prepared than ever for whatever comes next.

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