

APPS

Mixing business and charity

iNotForProfit creates customizable user experience

Linda Givetash, Record staff

Not-for-profit organizations rarely have the resources to utilize new technology, but one entrepreneur has created a tool to bring the charitable sector into the digital world.

Looking for a way to combine his passions for starting a technology company and contribute to the not-for-profit sector, Jonathan Grover came up with the idea for iNotForProfit.

iNotForProfit provides organizations with a customizable smartphone app they can use to promote their causes by integrating their online activities — everything from tweets to donation forms — into one mobile hub. “It came out of a realization that a lot of the charitable organizations I was volunteering at or working with, they didn’t have the capabilities or resources to take advantage of the same technologies that gives so many benefits to companies or business,” Grover says.

The app aggregates social media activity, highlights upcoming events and includes donation and volunteer registration functions. It keeps constituents in the know with updates on their smartphones, requiring little to no effort on their part to seek out new information. Rather than researching ways to support a charity, volunteers and donors can have opportunities presented to them when it is convenient for them.

“Charity falls into the passion parts of our lives but our work and our personal life typically comes first and then comes that passion, so very often it’s not that we don’t want to connect, it’s that it’s not convenient for us to connect.... (so) why don’t we change that paradigm?” Grover says.

The app, available on BlackBerry, Apple and Android devices, is based on a subscription model where not-for-profit organizations pay for their customized version at a price that is about equal to a cup of coffee a day, Grover says. The fee keeps his business afloat but is manageable for charities on tight budgets, he says. Organizations are not locked into a contract either, meaning they continue subscribing because the app is



MARTA IWANEK, RECORD STAFF

Jonathan Grover is the founder and CEO of iNotForProfit, a startup that develops mobile apps that help not-for-profit organizations raise funds and promote themselves.

iNotForProfit Inc.

Business: Mobile apps for non-profits and charities

Founded: 2010

Executive team: Jonathan Grover, founder and CEO

Employees: under 10

Address: 295 Hagey Blvd., Waterloo

delivering benefits.

iNotForProfit designs each app to reflect the branding of a particular charity. The charity can then access the back end of the app to change features or update events, send newsletters and integrate new social media accounts on a web-based platform. As new features are integrated into the app, they become available to all subscribers at no additional cost.

Grover and his team of less than 10 work out of the Accelerator Centre in Waterloo. The business initially was self-funded and has since received financial and mentorship support through the centre’s federally funded JumpStart program. Grover notes that the mentorship and networking opportunities provided direction as the business made early decisions on issues from financial planning to marketing, saving it time and growing its capacity. It’s eliminated some of the trial-and-error process many startups face as they develop, he says. “In the startup community here I’ve

got to meet so many of the CEOs that are currently here but also the (Accelerator Centre) graduates ... hearing their success stories and some of the challenges they’ve encountered too. It’s immensely helpful,” Grover says.

Working out of the centre has also connected Grover to the first dozen charities — many of them locally based — that subscribe to the app. Both Social Venture Partners Waterloo Region and Capacity Waterloo Region were introduced to iNotForProfit at the Accelerator Centre and both have since benefited from the customizable features that support their unique needs.

“People like to have these things on their devices for convenience sake,” says Andrew Wilding, director of operations for Capacity Waterloo Region. While the app replicates much of what his organization offers on its website, it is far more mobile friendly — an appealing feature to constituents who are

always on the go.

In addition to using the app as a promotional tool, Social Venture Partners has found another practical use in its daily operations. “One thing that we want to work on and capitalize on is the feature that’s built in there to log volunteer hours,” says Jennifer King, the organization’s executive director. “Having them easily go into the app, click a button, submit their volunteer hours — not only would we get more accuracy, it’s also just-in-time information.”

For organizations that rely on donations and volunteers, iNotForProfit is showing promise as a tool to help them achieve their objectives. “Obviously, all of our organizations have to change to attract some of the newer entries, people who are involved in volunteering, the younger generation that are used to using their mobile devices for different things,” Wilding says. “It’s certainly beneficial to attracting that new generation of donors and volunteers.”

With additional similar success stories from subscribing not-for-profits, Grover hopes to see his business grow rapidly, gaining between 500 and 750 clients in the coming year. His goal is for iNotForProfit to graduate from Accelerator Centre with 1,000 clients in early 2015. ■