SoCal Lacrosse minimizes costs and enhances youth services by moving operations to Google Apps for Nonprofit

At a Glance

Goals
- Save on administrative and operational costs
- Provide better support for youth lacrosse participants
- Reduce paper use and logistical hassles for volunteers

Approach
- Launch Google Apps for Nonprofit and Google Checkout

Results
- Implemented robust, no-cost communication and collaboration solution
- Eliminated costs of outsourced registration providers
- Provided cloud-based mobile communications system for volunteers and parents
- Went paperless for registration, waivers and payments

Business

What can a handful of committed volunteers with a passion for lacrosse offer youth who yearn to participate in the sport? Ask Dan Olmsted, co-founder of SoCal Lacrosse, Orange County, California's largest youth lacrosse organization. After discovering his love of the sport and passion for exposing young players to the game, Olmsted started SoCal Lacrosse in 2004 as a non-profit organization. Today, SoCal Lacrosse serves close to 400 young people who are participating in one of the oldest and fastest-growing sports in the North America.

Originally developed by Native Americans, lacrosse is well established on the East Coast and is now making its way west. "Traditionally, youth in Southern California didn't have much of a chance to participate in the sport," says Olmsted. "But over the last decade, lacrosse has literally exploded in popularity among team sports in the country with exceptional uptake in California. Our goal is to nurture youth who are interested in lacrosse and provide an avenue for them to share in the honor and spirit of the game."

Challenge

An all-volunteer effort, So-Cal Lacrosse is run by business professionals and coaches who squeeze extra hours into their already busy days to support the organization. Any cost savings on operations are funneled toward philanthropic efforts, including scholarships for kids who could not otherwise afford the opportunity to play the sport.

Until recently, however, operations and communications at SoCal Lacrosse were disjointed and expensive. Registering kids for the program required a third-party online service that charged hefty fees, and volunteers had to manually collect and manage documents such as checks and waivers – a paper- and time-intensive process that wasted valuable practice time.

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—Dan Olmsted, Founder, SoCal Lacrosse

Coordination and scheduling was also difficult for the organization. When ad-hoc tournaments occurred, or games or practices were rescheduled or rained-out, parents, volunteers, and coaches had to scramble to spread critical news to the parents and players. Schedules were maintained on individual spreadsheets and emailed to volunteers and parents, leading to inevitable version-control problems and communication gaps. In addition, volunteers and parents were unable to receive communications on their mobile devices, an important consideration because most of them interact with the non-profit on the go, in a few moments of their spare time. The organization had an existing website, but it had limited functionality and required hosting fees.

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"Our registrations were doubling annually," says Olmsted. "With limited infrastructure and a staff of 100 percent volunteers, we were in need of more organization and structure. We had to do more for kids in the program by spending less on operations and administration."

Solution

Many of the volunteers had used Google Apps in their professional lives and saw how it could improve efficiency and collaboration. Then they learned about Google Apps for Nonprofit, and unanimously deemed it a perfect fit for their organization. "When we looked at the functionality and the cost of Google Apps for Nonprofit – free – we immediately mobilized it to the entire organization," says Olmsted.

Jim Roberson, Director of Communications, drove the deployment of the Google Apps solution and says implementation was quick and easy. He signed up all the volunteers for a Gmail account and ported the website to a free Google Site using a Google template.

Everyone began using Google Docs to manage rosters for hundreds of players as well as for game and practice schedules. Google forms are now used to capture data and manage waivers, registrations, and more – eliminating the paper chase and the cost of an outsourced registration provider.

Google Calendar, which is integrated with the SoCal Lacrosse site, helps everyone stay coordinated. Google Voice lets the organization automatically route voice messages to parents to keep everyone informed of late-breaking news or schedule changes. And Google Checkout – not part of the integrated Google Apps suite but highly complementary – is used to manage payments for SoCal Lacrosse-branded merchandise on the website as well as for member payments and donations, all without paperwork or ordering hassles.

Benefits

For SoCal Lacrosse, Google Apps for Nonprofit has scored big on both sides of the balance sheet. The organization has gone completely paperless for registration and payments, saving trees, time and money. The ability to eliminate the third-party hosted registration provider has conserved expenses, while donations from entities such as corporate sponsors are automatically processed through Google Checkout.

Google Apps provides a richer, more convenient experience for internal and external communication – and all the information everyone needs is centralized in one location and available from mobile devices. If there's a rain-out or last-minute game, it's easy to alert everyone, no matter where they are at the time.

The most important advantage, however, is that youth in the program benefit from these improvements. Gmail and the free website created using Google Sites lets SoCal Lacrosse connect kids to more information – including upcoming high school games, clinics, and other opportunities to enhance their skills. Says Olmsted, "With Google Apps for Nonprofit, there's also the direct function of cost-savings, which translates into the ability to disburse more scholarships, pay for more field time, and give youth in the program wider opportunities by doing things like scheduling more games and tournaments."