The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

Status:
Laureate

Year:
2013

Organization Name:
Feeding America

Organization URL:
www.feedingamerica.org

Project Name:
Feeding More People by Leveraging Mobile Technology to Improve Distribution Efficiency

Please select the category in which you are submitting your entry:
Human Services

Please provide an overview of the nominated project. Describe the problem it was intended to solve, the technology or approach used, how it was innovative and any technical or other challenges that had to be overcome for successful implementation and adoption. (In 300 words or less.)

Right now, more than 50 million Americans are food-insecure, meaning they don't know where their next meal is coming from. One of the main causes is that many people simply cannot afford to buy food for their family. In 1965, John van Hengel decided to solve this problem by collecting food from grocery stores for which packaging is damaged or the food is near expiration but still edible. Van Hengel negotiated with neighborhood grocery stores and persuaded them to donate unsalable food. He went on to establish a network of foodbanks in 1979, and today Feeding America is the largest hunger relief organization in the U.S., spanning more than 200 foodbanks that distribute three billion pounds of food to

37 million people each year. Managing the timely distribution of perishable food is not easy, especially for a nonprofit organization. Technology plays a critical role in making sure food collection from grocery stores is cost-effective. In the past, truck drivers manually filled in forms to document items picked up at retailers and delivered to foodbanks. The information then had to be loaded into the Feeding America back-end system for inventory management. By utilizing the SAP/Syclo Mobile Platform, Feeding America will eliminate manual data entry, allowing the organization to reduce the time and effort involved in moving food to people. Truck drivers will capture items electronically on mobile devices that feed information into the backend system. This results not only in more efficient inventory management and route planning, but also reduces administrative work. The staff will ultimately have more time to serve people in need. Using mobile technology will also help Feeding America reduce operating expenses significantly, which enables the organization to put more trucks on the road and deliver more food so fewer people go hungry.

When was this project implemented or last updated? (Please specify month and year.) Has it incorporated new technologies and/or other innovations since its initial deployment? (In 300 words or less.)

Project is in pilot.

Is implementation of the project complete? If no, please describe the project's phases and which phase the project is now in. (In 300 words or less.)

The Feeding America SAP Syclo Mobile Platform project is in the final stages of a pilot in the Detroit area. Production deployment is scheduled to occur in February 2013.

Please provide at least one example of how the technology project has benefited a specific individual or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work. (In 300 words or less.)

"We aspire to feed more people, and SAP Syclo helps Feeding America run better," says Kevin Lutz, Senior Vice President for Feeding America. "With every dollar we save, we can serve eight more meals. Mobile technology helps us reduce our operating expenses, which ultimately enables us to put more trucks on the road, pick up more food and feed more people. The technology is critical in making sure even collecting the smallest quantities of food is cost-effective and worthwhile. By utilizing SAP Syclo, we eliminate manual work, allowing us to reduce the time and effort involved in moving food from the source to the people in need." Lutz adds, "When Feeding America was looking for a mobile platform, it

was very important to find technology that can be customized, connects to our back-end database, and runs on multiple platforms without us having to recode. By utilizing the SAP Syclo on mobile devices in our trucks, when delivering donations to homeless shelters and feeding organizations, we can now capture what's being picked up and what's being delivered electronically. This eliminates paperwork and manual data entry. Most importantly, this results in cost savings and more money to provide more food to more people in need."

Would this project be considered an innovation, a best practice or other notable advancement that could be adopted by or tailored for other organizations and uses? If yes, please describe that here. (In 300 words or less.)

The SAP mobile platform deployed by Feeding America is an innovative approach to making the food collection and distribution process more efficient that could be adopted by charitable food distribution organizations across the globe. The demand within charitable food distribution organizations to implement mobile platforms is currently very high. That's because distribution centers see immediate benefits from utilizing mobile platforms that improve their operations by giving them enhanced process efficiencies that reduce the staff requirements for manually keying in product information. Personnel resources can then be utilized for other needs where they can directly serve people in need. The most important benefit that food distribution organizations gain from a technology like the SAP Syclo Mobile Platform is the ability to leverage the technology to put more trucks on the road and help more people in need by picking up more food and delivering food more quickly. Improved efficiencies through the technology allow organizations to increase the amount of food they deliver. For every food distribution organization, more meals can be served to more people for every additional dollar that is donated. This also translates to benefits on the cost side: Every dollar saved in system administration and operating expenses also allows food organizations to feed more people.

If there are any other details that the judges should know about this project, please note them here. (In 300 words or less.)

Despite significant advances in agriculture and food production in the last century, fighting hunger remains a challenge. Even in developed countries, limited access to food by the poor remains one of society's most troubling problems. In the United States, more than one out of five children lives in a household with food insecurity, which means they do not always know where they will find their next meal. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 16.7 million children under 18 in the United States live in this condition, unable to consistently access nutritious and adequate amounts of food necessary for a healthy life. In 2010, the top five states with the highest rate of

food insecure children under 18 are the District of Columbia, Oregon, Arizona, New Mexico, and Florida. Twenty percent or more of the child population in 36 states and D.C. lived in food insecure households in 2010. This is a major problem for society because a critical component to a healthy life is nutrition. From birth, the intake of vital nutrients is essential to the growth and development of a healthy individual. Good nutrition, particularly in the first three years of life, is important in establishing and maintaining a good foundation that has implications on a child's future physical and mental health, academic achievement, and economic productivity. Unfortunately, food insecurity is an obstacle that threatens that critical foundation. The SAP Mobile Platform solution is helping Feeding America address this challenge. The technology is expected to bring the organization closer to its goal of growing its food distribution channel to five billion pounds over the coming years and feeding all 49 million Americans in need.