

NGO 2.0: An Experiment with Web 2.0 and CSR

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What will happen to the children living in a county undergoing drastic desertification?

What kind of future is awaiting them? *Rescue Minqin* (the county in question) is a grassroots NGO in Gansu Province, part of China's underdeveloped wild west where resources are scarce and to which the rest of China and the world paid little attention.

This is a typical dilemma in which credible, mid-sized grassroots NGOs find themselves: their Web 1.0 website (<http://www.minqin.cn/>) has outlived its usefulness because it could not engage the public in a creative, participatory manner. In fact, the faster the number of small websites like theirs mushroomed, the more insulated they grew from each other and the more fragmented the scene of NGO1.0 in China has become.



Teenagers with learning disabilities at a Lanzhou Hui Ling sponsored sports competition

Then there is *Lanzhou Hui Ling* (<http://you.video.sina.com.cn/b/24498084-1564047337.html>), a grassroots organization that helps out the children and young people who suffer from learning disabilities and mental retardation in poverty households. Struggling with scant resources and a lack of technological know-how, they do not even have a website to begin with. They are unable to reach out to audiences beyond those living in the small city of Lanzhou, nearly two thousands miles away from the more affluent parts of China where people can afford to give gifts to the impoverished and the marginalized.

NGO 2.0 Project came into existence to answer the needs of communication expressed by Rescue Minqin and Lanzhou Hui Ling (and their poor cousins). The former is in want of a more interactive platform that will enable them to market themselves

better to the outside world, while the latter desires owning a website without having to construct one.

NGO 2.0 project was funded by Ford Foundation in Beijing and launched in May 2009 by MIT, Ogilvy in Beijing, the University of Science and Technology of China, Friends of Nature, Sun Yat-sen University, and NGO Development and Communication Net. We hold four training workshops for communication capacity building of mid-sized grassroots NGOs in Western provinces, teaching them how to collaborate with each other via Web 2.0 tools on a new social networking platform we are building.

Why is it a Web 2.0 project? Web 1.0 contains ‘read-only’ materials, its underlying architecture is not open source and its content management system is costly to build and maintain. Web 2.0, commonly known as the generator of ‘writerly texts,’ has shifted from a content system built on an expensive up-front investment to an ongoing participatory and interactive process which enables NGO workers and volunteers to upload, tag, remix, and share each other’s content easily. The technological and financial threshold of Web 2.0 is low because such sites can be built by pulling together an assembly of open source codes and systems.

In mid October, we will roll out the beta version of this platform. Both the NGOs and the communities they serve can sign up on this platform for free. By creating, reusing, and sharing all kinds of new media content, grassroots NGOs can strengthen their organizational capacity, share media-based skills, design innovative events, and nurture civic participation and engagement.

This new Web 2.0 platform will be piggybacked onto a popular portal (<http://www.ngocn.org/>). Run by one of our six collaborators, this site generated a total

of 4,623,645 page views from 2007 to 2009. We will thus be able to tap into the rich resources of an existing Chinese NGO online network without having to create a website of a different domain name to compete for visibility and memberships.

What will be of particular interest to the corporate world is a ranking feature embedded in the platform that evaluates NGOs' organizational transparency and communication capability. This ranking system will allow corporate donors to leverage the Web as a means of enhancing their social responsibility programs. The data in question will be generated electronically for our platform users. This evaluative system is designed to assist corporate donors to identify the NGOs they wish to fund and help them track the financial and communication credibility of each NGO during the grant period and beyond.

Being a partner of this NGO 2.0 project, Ogilvy Beijing works with the six-party team to fineness the terms of evaluation. *Each criterion of assessment is quantifiable in this system.* Sample questions include the following: Could the organization provide an annual audit report or an account for the review/audit by either its board of directors or by a third party? Could the organization effectively control its spending, reasonably allocate its funds, and eliminate any possibilities for embezzlement or misuse? Does the organization have a well-established financial management process, such as a set of comprehensive financial management rules and procedures; limits and guidance on sign offs. Is the process understood by every employee? Furthermore, the yardsticks for ranking an NGO's communication capability will help track the activities of an organization's online discussion forums, analyze their communication patterns; evaluate

and predict each NGOs' growth trends; and assess the degree and scope of each NGO's outreach capability.

Rescue Minqin is currently working with our team on a Web 2.0 idea: bringing fun-seeking Chinese netizens to plant virtual trees in their desert on Google Map and to track their growth afterwards. As for Lanzhou Hui Ling, they are happily testing our new 2.0 platform. Both organizations will participate in the ranking system. And they hope to gain support from corporate donors to serve the children and other target population in their impoverished townships.

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