

DOMAIN STUDY ON THE USE OF ICT BY VWOS IN SINGAPORE

By

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Table of Contents

A. Summary.....	2
B. Quantitative data on the use and adoption of newer ICT.....	4
C. Examples of successful use of newer ICT by VWOs in Singapore.....	10
D. Barriers to Usage.....	16
E. Wish list & ideas on support needed to help VWOs succeed in the adoption and usage of newer ICT.....	21
F. Annex A.....	22

A. Summary

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide an understanding of the voluntary welfare organisation (VWO¹) landscape in the use of newer technologies, like Web 2.0². The assessment focuses mainly on the use of ICT for community engagement (donors, volunteers and public interactions)

The domain study was undertaken by Usha Menon of =mc|Asia³, between October 2009 and January 2010. This report details the responses of 86 VWOs, to an online survey as well as face to face interviews with 20 of these VWOs, to gather an in-depth understanding of their ICT needs, potential and barriers to adoption related to community engagement.

This paper contains:

- Quantitative data on the use and adoption of newer ICT by 86 VWOs in Singapore
- Details of interviews with 20 VWOs on their successes and barriers in the adoption of newer ICT
- Wish list and ideas gathered from VWOs on the support needed to succeed in the use of new ICT for community engagement

Some global examples on the use of newer ICT by non-profit organisations for community engagement have been included as possible inspiration for future community engagement in Singapore through ICT – Annex A

¹ A Voluntary Welfare Organisation (VWO) is one that provides welfare services that benefit the community and is not profit-making. VWOs are typically registered as a Society, a company limited by guarantee or as a trust.

² Web 2.0 refers to the second generation of web development and web design. It is characterised as facilitating communications, information sharing, user-centered design and collaboration with the World Wide Web.

³ =mc|Asia (www.managementcentreasia.com) is an international consultancy based in Singapore, working exclusively with the non-profit sector. Specialising in strategy, fundraising, management and leadership development, =mc | Asia is one of very few providers of training and consultancy services with expertise in and 'know-how' of non-profits in Asia.

The Need Statement

This domain study focused mainly on the social service organisations in Singapore.

Based on the responses to the online survey which were further validated through face to face interviews, the top 3 barriers to adoption of ICT for community engagement are:

- The lack of knowledge of the range of newer ICT tools and solutions
- The lack of ICT savvy personnel to efficiently use the tools available
- Insufficient funds to implement and sustain the usage of the ICT solutions

Similarly, the most requested support to enhance the usage of ICT by VWOs were:

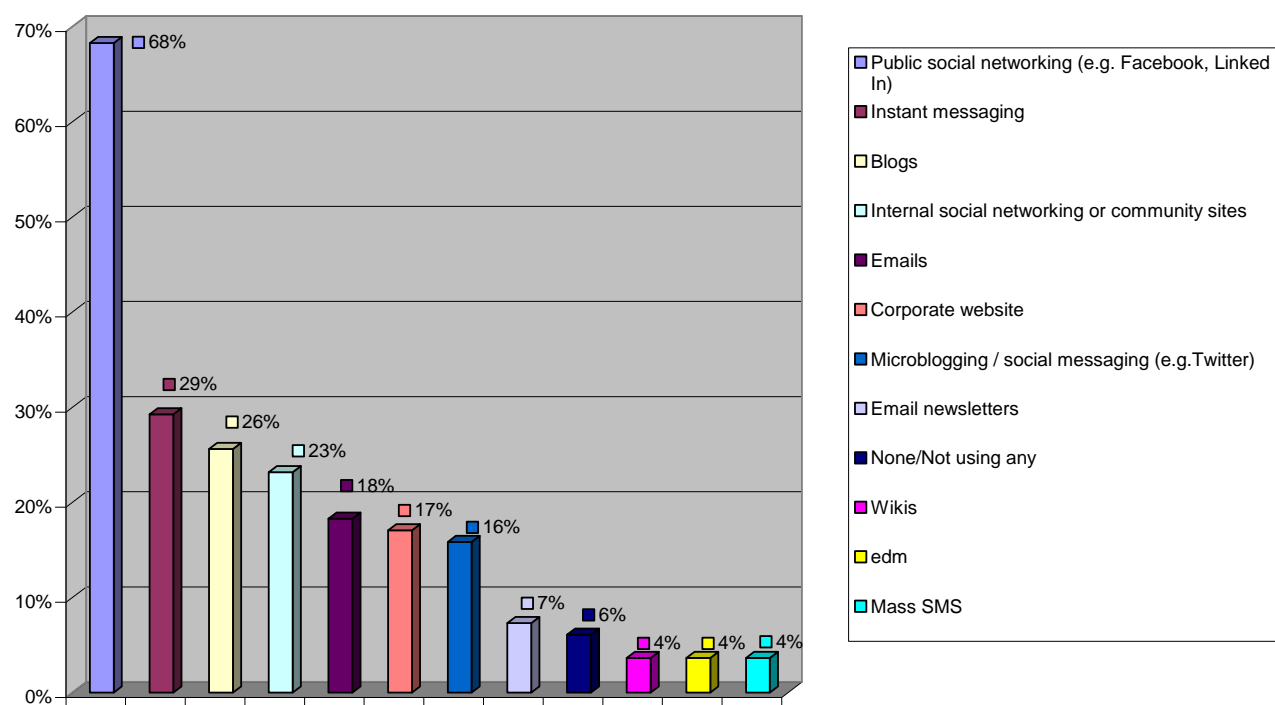
- Human capital development related to ICT usage (general public, staff and volunteers)
- Creating awareness of the use and benefits of ICT among VWO management, staff and general public
- Advice, help-desk and consultative services for individual VWOs to plug into and leverage on the sector-wide and cross-sector collaboration

The lack of an ICT road-map for community engagement, tailored to the VWO sector realities, can be identified as the root-cause of the current deficiencies, in the usage of ICT for community engagement by VWOs.

B. Quantitative data on the use and adoption of newer ICT

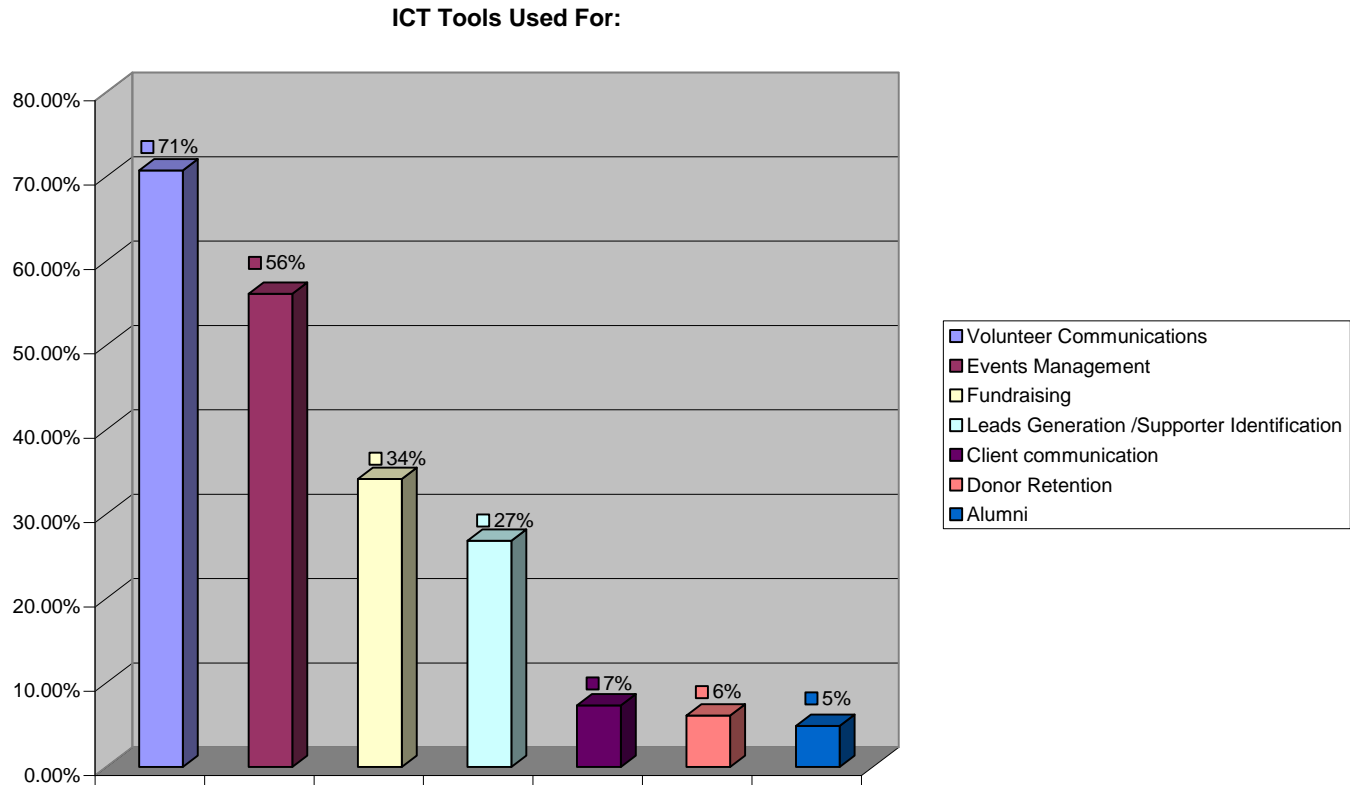
1. The most popular tool used by VWOs to communicate with the community was found to be public networking sites, with almost 68% of the organisations surveyed⁴ saying they used the same to reach out to their beneficiaries, volunteers and donors. Around 6% said they were not using any form of ICT and used traditional forms of communication to engage the community.

Social Media Tools Used to Communicate with Community



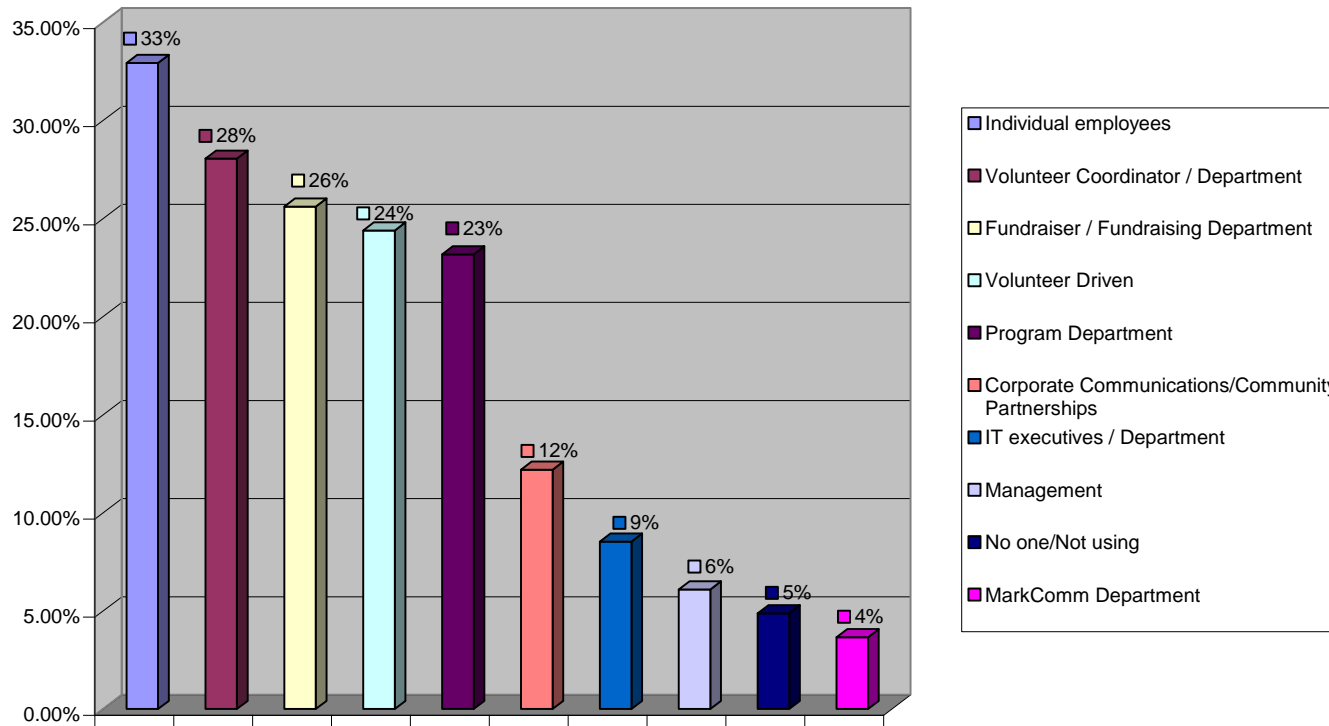
⁴ A total of 86 organisations were surveyed for this section.

2. Around 71% of the organisations surveyed said they use ICT for volunteer communications; more than half the number of respondents (56%) said they use ICT for events and event management and around one-third (34%) use the same for fund raising.



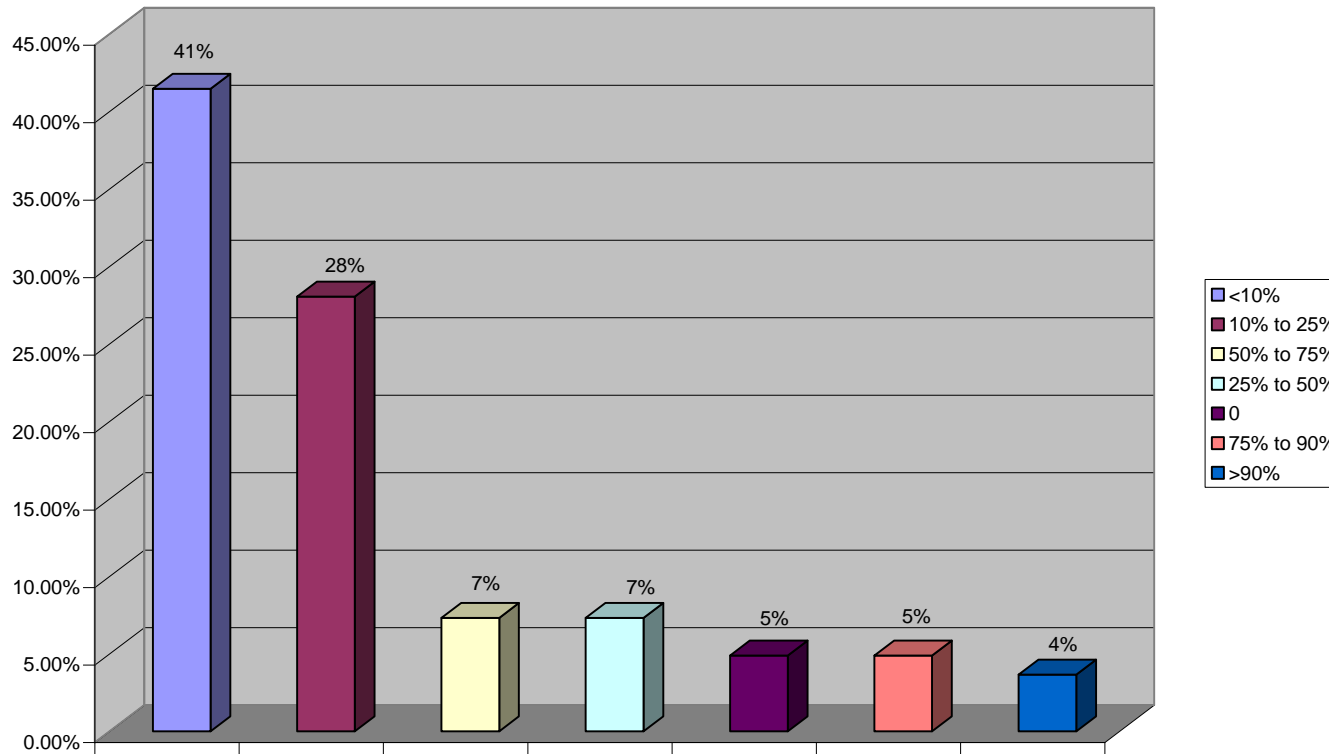
3. The use of ICT in most organisations surveyed seems to be driven by individual employees (33%). The other respondents said it is driven by their Volunteer Department (28%), Fund Raising Department (26%), individual volunteers (24%) or by the Program Department (23%). Only around 4% said the Marketing and Communications department drives and promotes the use of newer ICT tools.

Who is driving use of newer ICT tools?



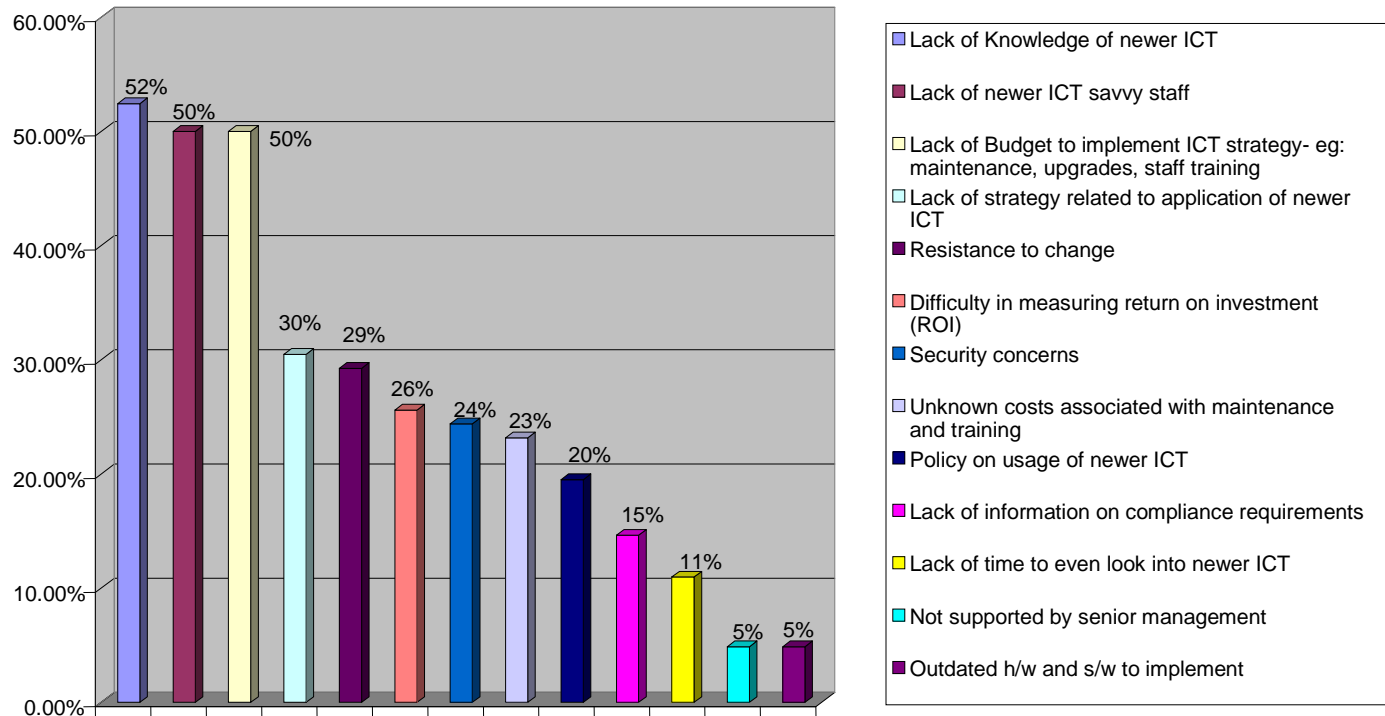
4. The usage of ICT by employees within the organisations surveyed appears to be low: around 41% said less than 10% of their employees use ICT for communication and only 4% of the respondents said over 90% of their employees have adopted and use ICT.

% of employees using ICT



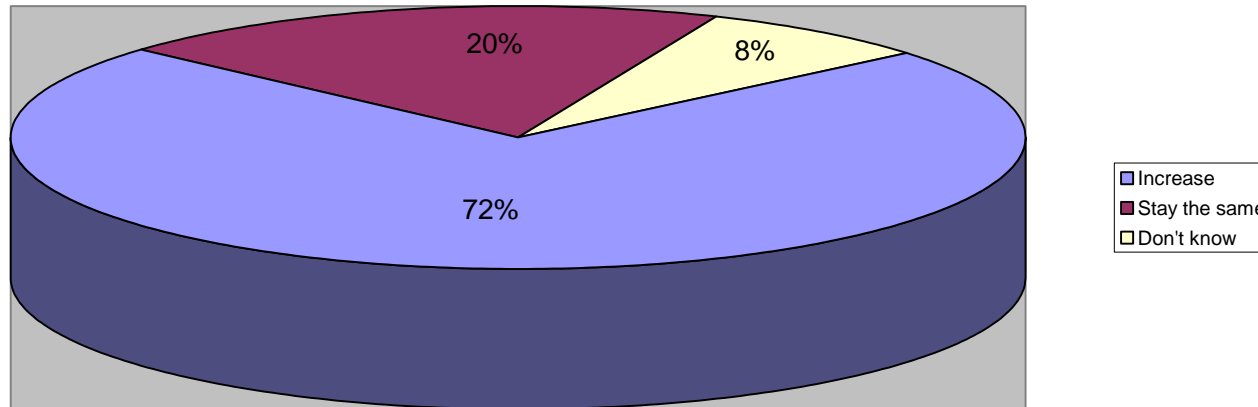
5. The three top barriers to adopting ICT were lack of knowledge of the newer ICT tools available (52%), lack of newer ICT savvy staff (50%) and lack of budget to implement newer ICT tools (50%).

Challenges in adopting ICT



6. Encouragingly, around 72% of the respondents said their ICT usage has increased since the previous year; 20% said it is the same.

Has ICT usage increased since last year?



C. Examples of successful use of newer ICT by VWOs in Singapore

Respondents shared their success stories involving usage of the social media and other forms of ICT⁵:

1. e-newsletters

Of the 20 organisations interviewed, 4 respondents (**20%**) reported the success of the use of e-newsletters.

- e-newsletters are now being preferred by both, the organisation, and the community. VWOs found that using e-communications not only enhanced the environment friendly practises but it also provided for savings on the cost of printing, paper and postage.
- e-newsletters expedite the dissemination of information to the community

2. Social Media

Annex A provides examples of usage of social media eg: Facebook, Ning, Twitter, Blog, YouTube and Instant Messaging (IM), for community engagement overseas. In Singapore too, VWOs have begun utilising this medium for their outreach.

Of the 20 organisations interviewed, 8 organisations (40%) cited instances where Facebook, Twitter and Blogs were successful, albeit on a small scale.

Benefits:

Of the social network sites Facebook seemed to be the portal of choice. One organisation identified the reasons as follows :

- Easier to use than other social media tools because of the following reasons:
- Easier to upload pictures; Facebook can be linked to YouTube – this allows videos to be uploaded on the organisation page
- Less complicated compared to MySpace
- Creates communities and helps in networking
- No need to recruit too many people as the medium has a wide reach
- Facebook is seen to help reach out to wider audiences during events

⁵ A total of 20 organisations were surveyed in this section

Successes:

- Facebook and Twitter was used successfully by a VWO during Flag Day 2009 for a donation drive. According to them, Facebook and Twitter are seen to aid impulse giving / donations.
- An organisation that started a Facebook page for its volunteers in June 2009 saw the number of fans grown from 400 to 1400. The Facebook email blast reaches 3000 members and volunteers. 60% of this database are in the 18 to 34 years age-group. The page helps build awareness and promotes the vision of the organisation
- Blogs were used by one organisation to draw volunteers for Flag Day 2009. The Flag Day was advertised on the official website and it provided a link to the blog, which directed traffic to specific information that volunteers would need to know. A blog is helpful because of the ease with which information can be shared with volunteers and donors and the ease of uploading information online, specific to the event. It also doesn't clutter the official website.
- A 31 second YouTube video by an organisation carrying information about it was sent to friends and family for feedback. A survey questionnaire for MCYS, accompanied the video and was sent through an e-blast. The survey was done for MCYS, as part of their funding requirement. Data collection was hugely successful since it reached a large number of people. Since respondents replied via email, this saved cost and also reduced survey manpower since survey was online. Volunteers signed up because of the reach of this video.
- Instant messaging has helped communication with staff with hearing impairment.
- Outreach through Ning can easily help classify information and helps in segmentation of demographics, so the information reaches the intended audience.

3. e-mail

Three organisations (**15%**) cited instances where simple email communication has helped.

Successes:

- One organisation spoke about how every event (including Flag Day) is successful because of email. Events usually involve around 600 people. An email blast helps reach these people. Email also reduces costs - printing, postage, paper etc.

4. Mobile and Gaming Technology

Benefits:

- Skype and Webshare are used as a cheaper option to international phone calls, while interacting with international affiliates. Two organisations cited using these tools extensively.
- VWOs have experienced the benefits of SMS in reaching out to a large audience. It is a comparatively cheap option, and can also be used creatively in programs run by the organisation.

Successes:

- One VWO which runs a helpline to give emotional advice and support to 'O' Level students during exams, used Hello Technology (which is a third party software vendor) which registered nearly 3,000 SMSes in 2008. Volunteers use SMS to respond to queries from students. SMS is convenient as the youth are comfortable and familiar with mobile technology and most of the target audience is using it - helps reach out to those students who do not want a face-to-face interaction
- Another organisation uses mobile downloads for its outreach program. The beneficiary needs to SMS to a number and video is downloaded through that. The organisation partnered with StarHub on this.
- Gaming technology can also be used creatively as was done by a VWO which used the game Second Life to educate users about health lifestyle and eating. There is a virtual Second Life office scenario where if you eat unhealthy, the player loses points.

5. Organisation Website

Successes:

- One VWO said its website was able to promote 'alternative treatment' for cancer patients and promote training courses. The website also helps recruit younger volunteers and staff.
- Websites have also helped in the following manner:
 - Information on upcoming events/past events are easy to post and update vis-à-vis calls, hard copy mails and letters etc.
 - The organisation has been able to reach out for help it requires during events
 - Thank you messages from beneficiaries generated interest and response from supporters
 - Monthly calendar online helps people know what to expect
- Go Red Campaign: One VWO ran a campaign called the Little Red Dress campaign to promote a cause and raise funds, which has been marked as a huge success and made possible by the use of the website and the internet. Designers designed red-dresses and there was an online auction and bidding on the organisation website. This increased traffic to the website. Channel News Asia, ST Online, Facebook and Twitter were also used to channel traffic to website. This program has been replicated by international chapters of the organisation.
- After the 'Contact Us' page was added to one organisation's web page, their call volume, which is around 300 – 400 per month has gone down by at least 90%, thus freeing up resources. ICT helps automation and productivity, less manpower to manage phone lines and channels resource into more productive work. Another organisation said 60% of online bookings for various programs now come in through the website.

6. Software Packages

- Salesforce.com offers free licenses for its CRM package which can be used for donor and volunteer management. Since the software is free for VWOs, it was adopted by one organisation. Salesforce.com Foundation has a team dedicated to servicing non-profit organisations.
- The software currently used by Handicaps Welfare Association (HWA) has been found to be more user friendly than the NCSS negotiated software. It

was customized by a vendor for HWA – the team has suggested possible usage by other VWOs.

- Deployment of AKSAAS's SaaS technology will make the organisation more transparent. Heartware Network is the only organisation in the world which currently has an online accounting display. Retail donors can see an hourly update of the P&L Statement. Repeat donors are given a password to access accounts.
- Heartware Network is incubating an integrated system that can benefit the entire sector especially the small and mid-sized ones raising income under \$1 million. Heartware Operation Management Enterprise Systems (HOMES) is an integrated system which will comprise:
 - Heartware Web Portal (Front Office) – which will be a public area
 - Business Operation Volunteer Management System (Youth Bank)
 - Accounting and Governance System (Back Office) – which will be a secured area
 - HOMES will cost minimum of \$100 per use per charity each month to implement and will benefit at least 100 charities.
- NUS once offered free tickets for an event to volunteers of an organisation. A basic Volunteer Management System was set up by the organisation, which cut down work since a constant updating on the tickets status was done automatically. ICT helps productivity, provides usable information, cuts down time on the phone, generates a higher probability of positive matches.
- Google docs (which cuts down error on data entry), analytics etc. helps information and document sharing. This is a free tool and is user friendly.

7. Internet Technology

Successes:

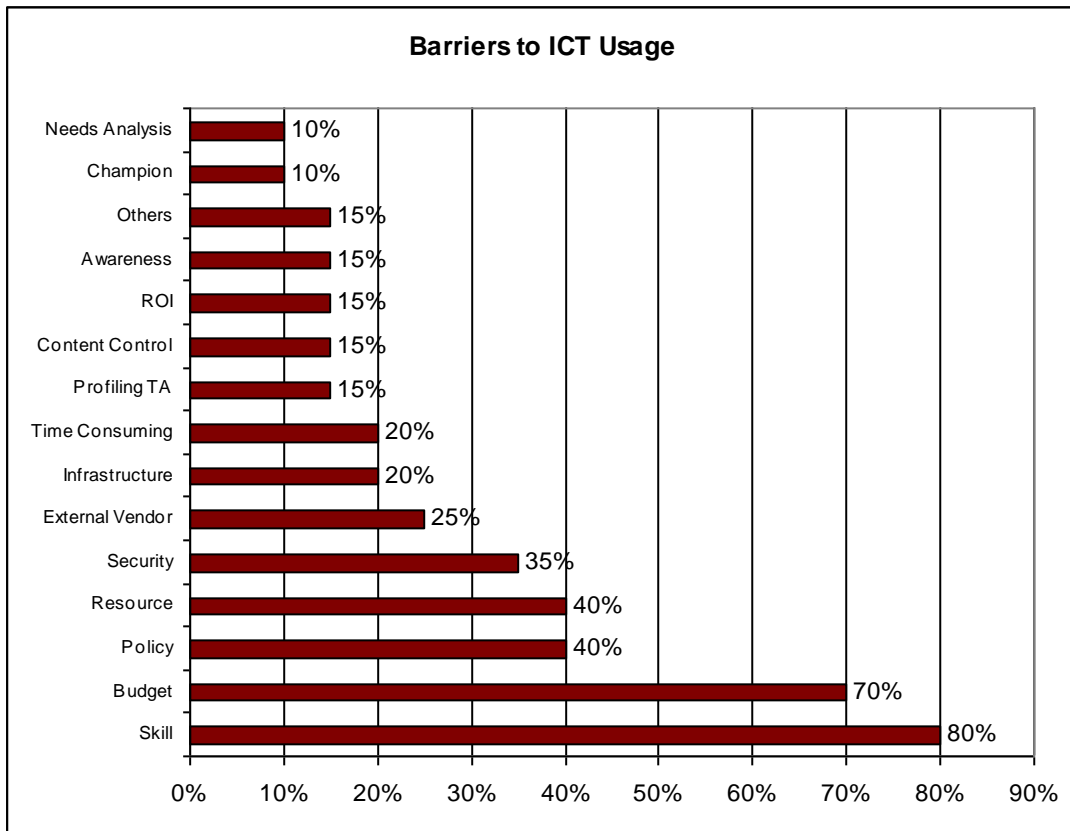
- Owing to the adoption of technology, work-from-home option is now available to around 5 -10% of the staff of one organisation
- Board members are able to do their assessment online and on time – this helps in better governance.

- The internet has been used extensively by one organisation to create a Youth Bank - Heartware Network has worked with around 56,000 volunteers, translating to around 390,000 volunteer hours and has raised around 750,000 SGD for other charities.
- One organisation is using a 'Reader/ HDB disc technology' to read tags while delivering meals to clients, some of whom suffer from dementia. This helps the volunteers communicate and confirm that food has been delivered, as some clients may forget that they have actually had their meals.

D. Barriers to Usage

VWOs face several barriers in adopting and using ICT. The top 5 barriers to usage of ICT were reported to be:

1. Skill of the staff (80% respondents), which could be due to several reasons such as lack of training, motivation, age etc.
2. Budget constraints (75% respondents), which could be due to internal reasons such as lack of policy, or due to restrictive costs of infrastructure, software, maintenance etc.
3. Policy (40% respondents) – organisation specific and external policies, which hamper the use of ICT
4. Resources (40% respondents) – lack of trained resources to manage and implement ICT tools
5. Security (35% respondents) – confidentiality issues and security threats associated with the usage of ICT and social media.



The responses of the 20 VWOs are documented below and categorized under the following:

1. Skill Sets

Internal:

- Lack of training for staff
- VWO staff are generally resistant to any new technology as it requires time and effort on their part to acquire the necessary skill sets.
- Lack of expertise within an organisation leads to no blueprint, needs-analysis or strategy.
- The main engagement with the beneficiaries of VWOs involves face-to-face communication; ICT engagement is not a priority in such cases.
- The older staff at some VWOs find it challenging to adopt new forms of technology. This can limit the use of ICT when engaging the organisation's beneficiaries.

External:

- Beneficiaries and volunteers of VWOs who are not familiar with ICT and social media have to be communicated and engaged through traditional forms of outreach.
- Training content is usually developed keeping in mind the youth. This alienates the older generation and affects confidence levels.

2. Restrictive Costs and Limited Budget

Internal:

- Most VWOs do not have policies which would promote the usage of technology. For example, while the staff of some organisations are encouraged to engage their beneficiaries on their hand phones, there is no bill reimbursement policy.
- Infrastructure and specialized software costs are restrictive to organisations and beneficiaries.
- Most organisations lack the budget to send their staff for skill upgrading and training in ICT or to hire trained IT staff. Funding for such matters is also hard to obtain.

- Hiring consultants to develop systems or strategies for the organisation can be expensive to VWOs. This prevents VWOs from building organisations specific robust systems or from planning ahead.

External:

- Technology can be expensive – email, building and maintaining websites, software systems and hardware come at a cost which cannot be afforded by VWOs. This can be restrictive to VWOs.
- In order to optimize search results in Google to drive more traffic to their websites, Search Engine Optimization needs to be done. However, buying search words is costly and not affordable by VWOs.
- Online portals of VWOs which are used to sell merchandize can be expensive to maintain also because of the credit card service fee of 3%. E-commerce – which can help VWOs immensely by generating income and reducing dependency – becomes a costly affair.

3. Policy

Internal:

- There is no specific ICT document for use within the organisation, which outlines ICT communication policy and e-engagement
- Social networking sites are not encouraged by some organisations as they are seen to take up time, encroach on work hours and also create bandwidth problems. This impedes usage of social media and familiarity with the tools.

External:

- Most VWOs do not have enough knowledge on online media guides, laws and protocol. This prevents them from using ICT for community engagement as taking a stance on online media response is a concern.

4. Resource

- Social media engagement requires time and close follow-up. Most VWOs do not have the resource band-width to manage such demands.
- Most VWOs do not have a dedicated IT Department to handle purchase, implementation, maintenance and security.

5. Security

Internal:

- Board members of organisations are hesitant to use technology and have concerns about the risk associated with security
- Organisations are concerned about data when migration is happening to online systems. One organisation has said it will not touch its financial data for fear of losing data.

External:

- Some VWOs said content on social networking sites can lead to confidentiality and security issues as online content can be viewed by many. So the Communications Department of many organisations are still guarded on the usage of this medium.
- While e-commerce could generate income for VWOs, there are security concerns around the same with regard to password theft, credit cards etc.

6. External Vendors

- Most VWOs are unhappy with the quality of software and services provided by vendors. VWOs have conveyed that most softwares are not user-friendly, do not work as promised and are not suited to the organisation's specific needs.

7. Infrastructure

- Infrastructure and maintenance costs can be restrictive to most VWOs. Also, most hardware in VWOs is handed down or donated and usually outdated – this adds to maintenance costs.
- VWOs are limited in their usage of technology by the profile of their beneficiaries who may be disabled or from low income households where there is no access to technology.

8. Time

- Since online media is interactive, most VWOs find it difficult to keep up with the demands of continuous engagement.
- Most VWOs do not have the time to upgrade their skills to improve ICT usage. Hence, a lot of time is spent exploring tools through trial and error when an immediate need arises.

9. Profiling of target audience

- When VWOs use ICT to engage their beneficiaries, a challenge is the profile of their beneficiaries and volunteers. The elderly don't frequent websites and are limited in their usage of social networking sites. So it is a challenge for most VWOs to reach out to older stakeholders through the usage of ICT.
- Most VWOs lack the knowledge of demographic profiling and using this data to build audience specific campaigns to communicate with their stakeholders.

10. Online Content Control

- Online content is a concern for most VWOs if it cannot be monitored effectively. While negative feedback is welcome, unfiltered comments may hurt the organisation.

11. Return on Investment (ROI)

- Difficulty in measuring ROI - most VWOs are not able to measure the return on investment on ICT. Many VWOs spend on websites, blogs etc., but are not able to track the people who visit the same and hence are not able to determine how many of the website visitors either volunteer or donate.
- VWOs have conveyed that they are unaware of the benefits of long term/short term ICT usage, and the same has not been quantified.

12. Awareness

- The lack of awareness of the various ICT tools and their benefits prevents VWO from embarking on its usage. This is compounded by the fact that data and statistics related to ICT usage and success in the sector is no usually available.

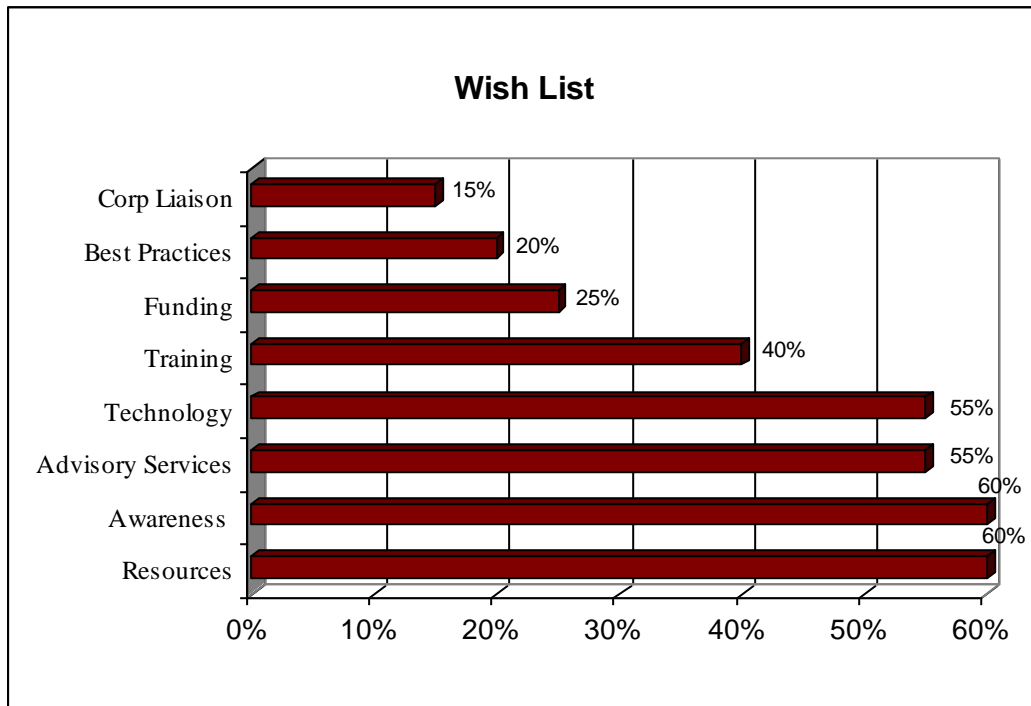
13. Lack of a Champion

- VWOs do not have a strong champion to drive the use of ICT. Most said that if the top management were savvy, it would help drive the usage of ICT.

14. Others

- Lack of knowledge on the effective usage of email communication e.g: avoiding spamming, is seen as a barrier to fully realising the benefits of such modes of communications

E. Wish list & ideas on support needed to help VWOs succeed in the adoption and usage of newer ICT



Organisations stated their wish-list. The top five are (please refer to the section below for an explanation on each):

1. Resources and Manpower
2. Awareness generation to the public and within VWOs
3. Advisory Services to VWOs on ICT
4. Access to technology
5. Training

F. Annex A

Global Examples of Successful Use of ICT by Non-Profits

Twitter

Twitter lets you write and read messages of up to 140 characters, or the very length of this sentence, including all punctuation and spaces. The messages are public and you decide what sort of messages you want to receive—Twitter being a recipient driven information network. In addition, you can send and receive Twitter messages, or tweets, equally well from your desktop or your mobile phone.

When you combine messages that are quick to write, easy to read, public, controlled by the recipient and exchangeable anywhere, you've got a powerful, real-time way to communicate. And real-time communication is turning out to be ground-breaking for users and businesses alike.⁶

While no official statistics are available from Twitter about their demographics, market research firms such as Nielsen⁷ say Twitter is the fastest growing site in the Member Communities category for February 2009 with a 1,382 percent year-on-year increase in the number of unique visitors to Twitter; the largest age group on Twitter is 35-49. The study also goes on to say that the ability to use Twitter via mobile phones is also a driving factor behind its success. In the last quarter of 2008, 812,000 unique users sent or received Twitter text messages from AT&T or Verizon cell phones.

During our survey we found that one of the least understood and used tools is Twitter. While most organisations are exploring Facebook, SMS technology and even blogs as a way to communicate with their beneficiaries, volunteers and donors, several expressed their inability to understand how Twitter could help.

Given below are two case studies on the use of Twitter by social organisations.

1. Twestival

Twestivals are events organized on a global and local level and brings together Twitter users offline to promote fund-raising for a chosen cause.

⁶ <http://business.twitter.com/twitter101>

⁷ http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/twitters-tweet-smell-of-success/

A Twestival or Twitter-Festival is a global series of events organized by volunteers around the world under short timescales via Twitter, which brings people offline for a great cause.⁸

According to Beth Kanter, a blogger on social media and its usage in the not-for-profit space, "Many nonprofits perceive "personal networking" on social networking sites like Twitter to be a waste of time. If this campaign reaches its financial goal and is a success for the organisation, there certainly should demonstrate a ROI for personal networking and building relationships?"⁹

The 2009 Twestival¹⁰ brought together 202 cities around the world to support the organisation charity:water. An astonishing \$250,000 was raised – all of which went directly to the projects. charity: water staff flew to Ethiopia weeks later to drill the first well, and connect the Twitter community with the people they served.

The local Singapore Twestival 2009¹¹ was held on the 12th of September in support of Children's Cancer Foundation.

2. Twitterati

Twitter is now popular with celebrities – the 'Twitterati' - who often use this medium to communicate with their supporters, or in some cases, raise awareness and support a cause. A recent example of Twitter being used for social causes was when Hollywood actor Ashton Kutcher supported the organisation Malaria No More. The actor challenged CNN to a popularity race to get 1 million followers on Twitter and promised a charity donation if he won. His win translated to 10,000 malaria nets for Malaria No More, and a win for technological innovation and innovative use of social media¹².

⁸ <http://twestival.com>

⁹ http://beth.typepad.com/beths_blog/2009/02/twestival-are-fundraising-groundswells-a-massive-opportunity-or-distraction-for-nonprofit-organizati.html

¹⁰ <http://www.charitywater.org/twestival/index.php>

¹¹ <http://singapore.twestival.com/>

¹² http://www.malarianomore.org/news/features/twitter_ashton_kutcher_beats_cnn_to_1m_followers/

Facebook

Statistics on Facebook¹³

- There are more than 350 million active Facebook users, more than 3.5 million events created each month
- Average user spends more than 55 minutes per day on Facebook
- Average user clicks the Like button on 9 pieces of content each month
- Average user writes 25 comments on Facebook content each month
- More than 70 translations available on the site; about 70% of Facebook users are outside the United States
- There are more than 65 million active users currently accessing Facebook through their mobile devices.
- Facebook Causes – “Any Facebook user with a little passion and initiative can create a cause, recruit their friends into that cause, keep everybody in the cause up-to-speed on issues and media related to the cause, and, most importantly, raise money directly through the cause for any U.S. registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit or Canadian registered charity. We process the donations automatically via credit card, tally the results, and report the donation activity via a public "scorecard" in the cause. This allows us to reward people who grow their causes, donate, and successfully raise money.”

The Nature Conservancy and Lil Green Patch¹⁴

The Nature Conservancy is a global conservation organisation dedicated to protecting ecologically important areas. The organisation’s social media strategy is simple: find where people spend time online and engage them in those places. “Nobody wants another password, network or profile,” says Jonathon Colman, social media strategist for the Conservancy. One example of how the Conservancy is building an online audience is the Facebook application (Lil) Green Patch. Users grow a virtual garden and send plants to one another. Based on the number of plants received by members of the community, sponsors contribute money to save the rainforests in Costa Rica -- every ten plants received translate into one square foot of

¹³ <http://apps.facebook.com/causes/about>

¹⁴ <http://www.fastcompany.com/node/1112956>

rainforest for The Nature Conservancy's Adopt an Acre program. So far, the application ranks amongst the top five most popular applications on Facebook -- it currently has about 6.3 million users -- and has saved over 70 million square feet of rainforest.

Chase Community Giving¹⁵

No cash means no problem for Facebook, users thanks to the latest partnership of Facebook and Chase Community Giving. In an innovative new program, Facebook users have the chance to participate in third-party giving to their favorite charities. Chase Community Giving is launching this grassroots campaign to inspire what they hope will be a new way of corporate philanthropy. Facebook users, now totaling more than 300 million, can simply add Chase Community Giving as a friend and then vote for which of more than 500,000 small and local nonprofits will receive donations from Chase totaling \$5 million.

Jamie Dimon, chairman and CEO of JPMorgan Chase says, "The grassroots nature of Facebook will allow us to hear directly which local charities matter most to our communities, hopefully creating an even bigger impact." Facebook executives are happy to see their social network harnessed for this philanthropic cause. "Chase's creative approach – crowdsourcing for charity – puts the power of corporate giving directly in the hands of Facebook users," says Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook.

More than 500 nonprofits with an operating budget of \$10 million or less will be eligible. The charity receiving the most votes will be awarded \$1 million, the top five runners-up will receive \$100,000 each, and the 100 finalists, including the top winners, will be awarded \$25,000 each. The voting process for round one has already begun and will continue through December 11. In this preliminary round, Facebook users will vote for non-profit organisations they think should receive a portion of Chase's philanthropy funds.

Then, in round two, the top 100 organisations will have the option to submit a Million Dollar Grant proposal to Facebook users, detailing the difference they would make in their local community with the significant extra resources. Round two voting will be open to Facebook users from January 15 to February 1. This charitable crowd sourcing could

¹⁵ <http://www.thedailytell.com/2009/11/facebook-and-chase-community-giving-let-americans-decide-what-causes-matter-most/>
<http://apps.facebook.com/chasecommunitygiving/>

be the latest trend in the growing number of online giving techniques companies are using to promote corporate philanthropy.