Executive Summary

Student Consultant, Konstantin Sykulev
Community Partner, Robin H. Spencer

I. Background Information

Konstantin Sykulev worked with Robin Spencer and Andrea Trowery at Message Carriers. You may contact either of them at their emails which are robin@messagecarriers.org or andrea@messagecarriers.org. Message carriers is located on 5907 Penn Avenue in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania.

> *Message Carriers is an organization which comes to the aid of people who are suffering from alcoholism and other addiction diseases. It helps them recover and try to ensure that they have the same rights and privileges as all other people.*

II. Consulting Tasks

As the consultant my scope of work was to help Robin and Andrea learn how to make updates to Messagecarriers.org. This included them learning and being capable of updating their photo album page and the events page, which are the two most dynamically changing pages. In order for them to keep this sustainable they have documentation on each process to ensure they don't forget any steps and must regularly updating these pages on a regular basis.

III. Outcomes Analysis and Recommendations

The following are some outcomes for the completed tasks:

- Updating pages conveys to visitors who view the website that the organization is successfully hosting events that are assisting with recovery

- An increase in traffic to their website

- Portraying Message Carriers as a more successful legitimate organization for donors

After completing the scope of work planned two recommendations were made on how technology could improve processes at Message Carriers. The first was implementing a centralized system for storing contact information about clients, donors, and volunteers and the second recommendation was having a formal way of backing up important data and files. Having a centralized system for storing contact information allows staff members quickly access contact information to send out newsletters, invite members to events, and ask donors for money. This will cut down on time spent searching through Microsoft Excel files, e-mail address books, and Microsoft Word Documents where current contact information is stored. Having a formal way of backing up important information will save Message Carriers a large amount of time in the event of a computer or USB Flash drive failure. It will save information that may take hours to reproduce and information that

may be unrecoverable or unreproducible in the case of such a disaster. More about each recommendation and their impacts can be read later on in the report under the recommendations section.

Community Partner

Robin H. Spencer

Robin@messagecarriers.org

Message Carriers
5907 Penn Ave, Suite 215
East Liberty, PA 15206
http://www.messagecarriers.org

About the Consultant

Konstantin Sykulev

kys@andrew.cmu.edu

Konstantin is a junior in Information Systems.
He is planning on starting his own
web development and consulting firm.

Final Consulting Report

Student Consultant, Konstantin Sykulev
Community Partner, Robin H. Spencer

I. About the Organization

Organization

Message Carriers is located in East Liberty on 5907 Penn Avenue, Suite 215. The mission of
Message Carriers is to accomplish helping those who are suffering from alcoholism and other
addictions diseases. Message Carriers also believes that those people who suffer from these
addictions should have the same rights and privileges as all other people. Message Carriers
used to be associated with SOAR(The Society of Americans for Recovery), however has
recently become independent. They promote the process of recovery through a series of
programs and meetings which are organized for a person and his or her family. In order to
qualify for these programs a person must pay a very small fee and become a member of
Message Carriers. Message Carriers have events every month including walks, baseball
games, picnics, and other organized outdoor meetings for these members. They are currently
based in Pittsburgh but wish to expand further into southwestern Pennsylvania. However in
order for them to expand they need to improve their external communication. Information
about events and meetings is now only promoted by word of mouth and a newsletter which
does not reach a large population. They have recently launched a website in order to keep up
with current technology trends and to improve external communication. However, for this
website to be a successful tool they must update it often. An updated website will display a
successful organization and thus will result in more donations and more volunteers. More
money and people to help out with programs means they will be able to expand to a larger
community.

*"To come together in belief, love and gratitude; to strength and grow in our own recovery by
sharing it with one another and with anyone ready to recieve it; and to create a place of
recovery, for recovery, in recovery, supported by the One who gives life and restores it."*

Facilities

Message Carriers is currently located in a two room office on 5907 Penn Ave in East Liberty. This office is one of many offices on the second floor of the office building. This office building is fairly large and is filled with many other businesses. Their office is suitable for accommodating two people and large enough to have a conference with a group if needed. Most of the behind the scenes work and planning for events is done at this location however a majority of events are not held in this office.

Programs

Message Carriers has a variety of different programs which are all available for a low cost to its members. You do have to be a member to attend these events, but signing up is very easy and costs very little because Message Carriers wishes to extend its hand to everyone who is in need of recovery. Different programs target the different needs of its members and members are allowed to attend more than one if they wish.

R.E.A.C.H - Recovery, Educating, Advocating, Communities, in Healing.

The Family Program – A three week curriculum that is designed to help love ones better understand and cope with the problems caused by the disease of alcoholism and substance abuse. These three week sessions are planned for one evening a week depending on the demand or can be held as an all day session on the weekend. The main message of this program is "NO SHAME. NO BLAME. LOVE. EMPATHY. INFORMATION. HELP. ADVOCACY".

Voices of Recovery Choir - Is a choir made up of members who are in recovery and people who are in support of recovery. The choir was formed in May 2004. They have sung at many different events and places including at churches, ground breakings and other gatherings to promote recovery.

Habitat /Building for Recovery - This project consists of helping to rehab houses in Allegheny County in which newly recovering persons can live. These recovering individuals will assist and learn a skill from the contractors while the contractor will volunteer their time and skills.

Inside/Out - This component is for the ones who do not fit into the criteria for any of the services that are available upon completion of their consequences of their negative action while under the influence. The recovering individual will receive literature such as the AA Big Book and the NA Basic Text. We will also distribute this literature to those who want to know more about the recovery and the 12 Steps process.

Ambassadors of Recovery - This is a person who will represent the recovering community in response to community crises (fire, flood, storms, etc,) and in community celebrations. Volunteers from the recovering community who are seeking to show their gratitude for their gifts of recovery in return of helping others in need of these types of services.

Mentors in Recovery - These are men and women in recovery who will seek to help at-risk youth in such ways as tutoring, mentoring and other caring relationships to help prevent their becoming involved with alcohol and other drugs.

Staff

Message Carriers currently has 2 members **Robin H. Spencer** and **Andrea Trowery.** Robin H. Spencer has been the chairwoman and director of the organization for about 6 years. Andrea Trowery has recently been made a full time worker at Message Carriers, although she has previously donated her time as a volunteer. There are many volunteers who help run the events that Message Carriers hosts, however none of them officially work for Message Carriers and only attend the events. Robin also recently recruited two temporary volunteers who were

responsible for making the web page. These two volunteers however were only hired for a short period of time to help in the creation of the website but it was agreed that they would not help in the maintenance or the updating of the website.

Technical Environment

Each staff members has a Dell desktop computer that is fairly new and run Microsoft Windows. Each computers has a printer and one has a scanner. They have a digital camera to take pictures at the events they host. They have a few USB flash drives to relay information between their computers. They have high speed Internet connection via a DSL and a wireless router to split the network, however they do not use the network to share files. They have a laptop with Microsoft Office installed on it for the presentations Robin makes at conferences she attends. Robin uses Microsoft Power Point to make and present these presentations. They have a phone system with multiple lines installed in their office and Andrea is responsible for answering phone calls. Phone calls can be rerouted into Robin's office if they are for her. Both are very knowledgeable about the phone system and seem to use it without any hesitation. Both also know how to use web mail (such as Hotmail and AOL), and basic applications like Word and Excel. As stated earlier they have a website, however, they outsource their web hosting to GoDaddy.com. Their domain, server space, and e-mail is purchased through GoDaddy.com.

Technical Management

Message Carriers does not have a formal office technology manager. However both Robin and Andrea work together to handle all the technology problems and repairs. Neither of them have any formal technical training and therefore are not extremely technologically educated, but try hard to fix problems that arise. Currently everything is fully functional and there does not seem to be anything that is out of order.

Robin recently recruited external volunteers to create the Message Carriers website in July. These volunteers took the role of creating the layout and creating all the code for the current Message Carriers website. However the agreed to not be responsible for any maintenance or updating that would be associated with the website.

Technology Planning

Message Carriers does not have any formal technology plan for the future of the organization. But they had planned to create a their current website and it was recently uploaded in August 2006.   After the website was uploaded to the Internet Message Carriers realized they did not have the resources to update or manage the site, so they sought out help. The organization deals with technological problems or issues as they arise. They understand the importance of technology as a tool for external communication but they do not have the skills or resources to accomplish this goal. Their informal technological goal is to stay up to date with "new technology". However they are not aware of how these technologies may help them achieve their mission statement better. Any technological purchases planned for in the future would be planned by Robin because she is the director for the organization.

Internal and External Communication

Most internal communication is handled face to face in the office. Their offices are adjacent to each other and thus are within talking distance. File transfer between the two computers occurs through the USB Flash drives and e-mail. External communication is accomplished through the website, phone, and both through e-mail and postal mail. They rely heavily on word of mouth to spread the news about Message Carrier events. They have a list of current volunteers as well

as contact e-mail addresses and phone numbers. This information is not stored in a centralized database but is spread out between Word documents, Excel documents, a rolodex, and e-mail address books. Robin also has a short list of donator's e-mail addresses in her personal e-mail address book and is personally responsible for contacting these supporters. Volunteers and members are contacted before each event occurs to verify participation, however donors are contacted only when majors milestones or improvements have occurred at Message Carriers. The volunteers who had created the website also created @messagecarriers.org emails address for both Robin and Andrea. The e-mail that is currently sent to each of their @messagecarriers.org e-mails is forwarded to each of their personal e-mail accounts.

Information Management

Contact information for Message Carriers 90 members is divided between a Rollerdex, Microsoft Word document in the form of address labels, and an Excel document with a table of contact information. They store some member e-mail in Robin's Hotmail address book, but currently there is no formal or centralized contact information system. There are also currently no official system to back up contact information or any data. Most information is backed up on multiple USB flash drives which are not reliable, and is hard to search for when needed.

II. Scope of Work

Task 1. Website Updating and Maintenance

A well maintained and up to date website portrays a successful organization and also aids an organization in bettering their external communication. Although the organization's staff is not available 24 hours a day the website is always open and ready to be browsed by members, volunteers, or donors. This allows users to view information about Message Carriers at anytime and more importantly at any place with a computer. Thus it is important to have a frequently updated website, which would portray the image of an active organization to the target audience of donors and volunteers. The most important pages that must be updated is the web album page and the events calender page. These two pages will be the most viewed pages and are vital in the display of successfulness or Message Carriers to an external audience. A successful non-profit organization is more likely to attract more volunteers and donations. Thus if Message Carriers receives more donations and volunteers they will have the chance to increase in size. The larger and more members the organization gets the more opportunities they will have to help more people come together and aid others in recovery.

My approach to having a well maintained website is educating both Robin and Andrea in how to make simple changes to MessageCarriers.org. This will include training sessions in basic HTML and how to use Filezilla, NVU, and The Web Album generator, which they have to ease their process of updating. I will also create instructions in both a pictorial and a textual form describing the processes that I teach them. These will be given to both Robin and Andrea for later reference if a process is forgotten. These instructions are important in the sustainability of the knowledge i educate them with.

Expected Outcomes

-Robin or Andrea are able to update the web album page

-A digital newsletter is posted bi-monthly along with their hard copy on the website

-Links to other sites that have similar missions as Message Carriers or work in the Human services sector.

-The ability and actual use of the @messagecarriers.org email for public relations purposes

-A Testimonials Page is maintained by Andrea and Robin

Updating the web album page, a digital newsletter, links to other sites, and a testimonials page conveys to visitors who view the website that the organization is successfully hosting events that are assisting with recovery. The testimonials page is especially important because it highlights the real life examples of the success of Message Carriers. This will increase donations as well as the total number of volunteers. This will help improve and spread the Message Carriers reputation.

Using an @messagecarriers.org email as opposed to Hotmail or AOL will improve Message Carriers professional image. When contacting donors with a @messagecarriers.org account it is more likely for donors to trust the organizations authenticity and firm foundation.

Since MessageCarriers.org has been recently launched the site is receiving minimal traffic. An increase in traffic can be measured by more people wanting to volunteer, more feedback from the testimonials page, and more talk about the website at Message Carrier events and meetings. An increasing list of member and volunteer information will also be a good measure of how successful this implemented task was. This can also be translated to an over all growth and increase of popularity of Message Carriers.

Additional Impacts

Updating and managing the website will improve the current external communication of the organization and expose it to more viewers, volunteer, and donors. Also having a website allows other organizations to link to Message Carriers, which will provide it with valuable exposure that it would not normally get. It will make information more available to the public and more importantly at any time of the day. The website also allows for a discreet way of viewing information about Message Carriers for people who are worried about being looked down on by asking for help. This will target a very important group of people that need help but are too afraid to look for it. With an increasing amount of people asking for help, donors who believe in the Message Carriers cause will feel like donating to Message Carriers will provide a larger impact. In turn this will increase the total amount of money and support that is being donated to Message Carriers. This newly donated money and support will definitely have a very positive outcome on facilities, staff, and technical environment.

III. Outcomes and Recommendations

Task 1. Website Updating and Maintenance

Andrea and Robin of Message Carriers now know how to modify the dynamic pages on their website. These pages are the photo gallery page, testimonials page, newsletter page, and event page. Robin and Andrea have the ability to upload photo albums, receive testimonials from the web form and post them on the web page, upload the bi-monthly newsletter, and add or remove events from the event page. Previously, Message Carriers relied on volunteers to create their website. There was no documentation made after the initial creation and Robin and Andrea had trouble editing content. Now, they do not have to rely solely on these volunteers for their website maintenance. Through learning how to edit their website using Filezilla and NVU, they have also gained a basic understanding of how the Internet and web pages work, which they did not know before. The direct outcome of this new knowledge and education has increased traffic on the website. When the website is regularly updated the traffic increased by 10% over the past three months. As a result of that Message Carriers has actually received five messages from their feedback form, from which previously they have received none. Message Carriers has also got an another donor and six more volunteers. This allows Message Carriers to accomplish their mission through offering guidance to more people. This also supports their long term goals of expanding into more of south-western Pennsylvania.

Originally the photo page was not updated and contained two albums from events that had happened about a year ago. The first task was teaching Robin and Andrea how to update the photo page, they were very eager to start and wanted to be able to upload photo albums as quick as possible. They learned how to generate web albums using a program named "the web album generator". They now generate all of the web albums in this fashion and it saves them a lot of time. They have upload nine of these generated web albums via an FTP client named Filezilla and are comfortable using this client by themselves to transfer any files to the web server. In the process of uploading files to the Message Carriers web server they learned the directory structure of the web site. They do not upload files into the root directory, but use the sub folder for newsletters and photo albums to keep their web server organized. They create links to the photo gallery using an HTML generator program named NVU. They feel comfortable with this program and use it to edit a variety of the web pages on the website. The first album that was uploaded without any help did not work properly, which developed important trouble shooting skills. Since then Andrea has had no problems uploading web albums and checking links. Andrea also taught Robin how to edit the captions on pictures and albums and a total of five albums were successfully uploaded without any help. In order for this task to be sustainable they must actively make an effort to update the photo gallery page soon after new pictures are taken. The consultant has created a set of instructions to ensure that no steps of this process are forgotten. Robin and Andrea both understand the importance of updating the photo page, and frequent practice will keep them from forgetting the process.

Andrea and Robin have been educated in the process of adding new pages to their menu and website. They have a basic understanding of how their menu works and a basic understanding of how to use the template of the home page to create another page. They have been stepped through the process of creating a new page and have created one under supervision of the consultant. However Andrea has expressed concern in creating any more sub pages because

she feels that the site currently has a very well defined strategy and there is no need to force any more information onto the website. Although they will most likely not need to create many more sub pages for their website a specific list of instructions exists that contains the steps of the process. Andrea has not made a new subpage since she has learned how but is confident that she can follow these instructions to create a new subpage if needed. This may be a small risk to sustainability because Andrea has not created a subpage without supervision. Andrea has successfully uploaded two old news letters onto the website with some assistance, and two on her own. She used the same FTP client and NVU to upload and add links to these newsletters. In order for this task to be sustainable the bi-monthly newsletters must be released and sent to Andrea. Andrea must also be positive she knows and understands this process well because she will not have time to practice this very often. However to minimize this risk a set of detailed instructions created by the consultant have been left for Andrea to refer to.

The testimonials page used to be called the feedback page where visitors could fill out a form and send a message to Message Carriers. We came to a mutual decision to switch this page's purpose from a feedback page to a testimonials page because it would be of more value to the visitors of the website. Since this task was completed it generated twice as many responses from users as the feedback page. Robin and Andrea have uploaded a total of seven testimonials and edited two after uploading when they found mistakes without any help. In order for this task to be sustainable the website has to receive feedback from users, volunteers, and donors that is then reviewed by Andrea or Robin and then be posted on the website. Andrea and Robin must promptly review feedback and post it to ensure users do not get discouraged because their feed back was never posted. They must also be sure to keep their testimonials page to a recent size; they must delete old testimonials as new ones come in. As with the other tasks a set of step by step instructions has been made to ensure that this process will be remembered.

The original events page had large schedule for all events from September to December. This schedule was created by one of the previous volunteers who created the web site. Robin and Andrea have been taught to modify this page and instructions have been made for how to take off old events and place new events on to the website. This is also done with the NVU program and is similar to the other HTML editing tasks. Since Andrea and Robin have been taught the events page has been kept up to date by them; ten old events were removed and seven new events were added. Robin and Andrea mentioned that the events page is one of the most significant pages on the website and must be continually be updated . In order to sustain this process Message Carriers must keep up with updating the events page. The editing of this page cannot be put off until a later time, old events need to be taken off as soon as they occur, and new events must be placed on when they are confirmed.

Recommendation 1. Centralized Contact Information Database

Currently Message Carriers does not have any formal or centralized way of storing contact information. Contact information is stored in e-mail address books, a rolodex, papers on file, and a Microsoft Excel file. Since Andrea has been at Messages Carriers she has expressed interest in creating some sort of centralized data-base by putting new contact information into an Excel file. Currently Andrea has been compiling this data in an Excel file. But this file only contains new contact information, which is a small fraction of the total contact information Message Carriers has. Andrea stated that she wished to begin placing some of the old information into Excel to make it easier to find. It is vital to an organization to keep their

contact information in a very centralized place and keep a back up of that data-base. This is especially true for a non-profit organization that relies heavily on volunteers, members, and donors to be sustained. They must be able to quickly access contact information when sending out newsletters, inviting members to events, and asking donors for money.

Message Carriers' ultimate goal is to expand to serve all of southwestern Pennsylvania. This would mean a very large amount of contact information will have to be accessed by staff members quickly. Currently the contact information "database" contains fewer than 100 users, but this number will increase very quickly with the expansion of Message Carriers. Some sort of centralized database searchable must be established to ensure successful tracking of contact information as Message Carriers expands. If there is no database where a staff member can look for contact information it may take them hours to find a certain user. However once there is a centralized database this will cut down on the amount of search time to less than a minute. This will allow staff to be more efficient and accomplish more work and spend less time searching for contact information. Although Excel has a find feature, having a customized web based system would allow for many more useful time saving features which are discussed about later.

Currently, when paper newsletters are sent out from Message Carriers they must find all the members who should receive a newsletter, enter these members' information into a Microsoft Word document and print out the address labels from this document. However, once this database is completed it should include a feature that would print out address labels of all the members that are to receive the newsletter a staff member could insert a stack of envelopes into a printer and simply select print newsletter labels. This would save the staff members an incredibly large amount of time and frustration created in finding the address of recipients.

A similar feature can be applied to e-mailing newsletters. If this database is web-based, a feature to send e-mail newsletters to all members would greatly cut down on the time it would take a staff members to find all these member e-mail addresses and send the e-mails out individually. Saving time contacting users will ultimately save more time for helping users and hosting events.

Steps to implementation:

     -Create a list of information that each contact would have. This would include details such as name, phone number, cell phone number address, etc. As well as details such as whether or not they are a donor, volunteer, or member, and if they should be receiving e-mail newsletters and or paper newsletters.

     -Decide whether or not to have a web based database or not. My recommendation is to use a web based system. This will allow the staff to do work from any location, not necessarily from the office. This will also allow for an easier time backing up information, although this method may prove to be more unsecured than a non-web-based system. The web based system could be placed in a directory on the messagecarriers.org web servers, which would decrease the amount of resources needed for this option

-<u>Option #1</u>: Find a volunteer or hire one to aid with the creation of the database. This can be a very complicated process and should be stepped through with a technical person. However once this database is set up very little maintenance would be required. Many of the processes such as adding a field or creating a new user account would be very basic for Andrea and Robin to do, and would not require a consultant.

-<u>Option #2</u>: If a volunteer cannot be found to create a customized data-base an open source or free address book can be used. An example of such an address book would be the Yahoo.com address book. This would provide Message Carriers with a centralized place to store all their contact information, but would not provide them with all the useful features, described earlier, that a customized address book would. However i would still recommend a technical user be present during the signing up process to ensure Robin and Andrea have a clear understand of all the features of the address book.

-<u>Option #1</u>: Documentation for the data-base would be created in turn by the technical person and Andrea and Robin to ensure they completely understand all of the instructions. This documentation would include how to use the database and its features.

-<u>Option #2</u>: Documentation for the open source address book would still need to be created to ensure Robin and Andrea did not forget any of the features or vital commands of the address book.

-<u>Option #1</u>:Training on how to use the database must be led by the creators

-<u>Option #2</u>: Very little training would need be to held for the Yahoo Address book. This is a fairly simple application to use and understand.

-After the database is setup all the contact information must be placed into it.

Resources:

-Another student consultant from Carnegie Mellon University

-Volunteer who knows some web databasing language (such as PHP, mySQL).

One of these two resources should be used to aid in the construction of the database. However the creation of the database should be done with Andrea and Robin present to insure they have a general Idea of how the database works.

-A volunteer who is technical and can pick up new technologies quickly or has previously used the Yahoo Address book.

Recommendation 2. Data Back-up Storage

Currently Message Carriers has no official system of backing up their important data. Data is currently stored on one of three computers or one of several flash USB drives. Some important data is stored on only one computer and other important data is stored on all devices. Recently one of the USB flash drives stopped working and a few important documents were lost. This current way of stored and making sure important information is not lost is very unstable. Implementing a some sort of method to back up information would not only ensure that important information is not lost but that it is organized in at least one location.

It is vital for every organization to have a back up of all its important information. Inevitably most electronic storage hardware fails and most information contained on this storage device is lost. Losing important information could cause an organization hours or days of back tracking and or recreation time. This is also implying that the information can be remembered and restored. There may be certain pieces of data that may be lost and irretrievably. With this in mind it is strongly discouraged for an organization to not have multiple copies of important documents. Having at least one other place that important information is stored greatly decreases the chance of losing data. Message Carriers could store important information such as contact information, newsletter templates, old newsletters, pictures from events, and financial records in such a back up location. This would make sure that some of this irreplaceable data is not lost if a computer or flash USB drive crashes. In the event that a computer or flash USB drive crash having a back up of data would save Robin and Andrea a very large amount of time. They would simply have to restore this data and could be using it minutes later, where in contrast if this data was not backed up they could possibly spend days restoring the information. It is especially important that they back up pictures from events that they have hosted. Such data could not be restored because events cannot be recreated. Losing such data would cause a number of problems such as having no proof the event occurred or not having photographs of the event to place into the bi-monthly newsletter.

Steps to implementation:

-Create a list of important information that needs to be backed up. This information would include anything irreplaceable or any important documents that would take long periods of time to recreate.

-I recommend signing up for an Internet backup database. This will be a lot less expensive than buying a dedicated computer to backing information up. Signing up for a service such as storegate.com which allows you securing upload information to their servers. This also allows this information to be accessed from any computer that has the Internet.

-Organize the information that should be transferred over to the website. It is important to organize this information so it is easier to find it later, and easier to figure out what documents are in need of updating and which are the newest version. I recommend this be done on Robin's computer because her computer is hooked up to the Internet through the wired connection, as opposed to Andrea's which is hooked up through a wireless connection. The transfer will be quicker and more stable on a wired connection.

-Transfer all information to the on line servers.

-Create a schedule for when backing up information occurs. This can be a weekly schedule. Such as every Friday at 4:30 before work ends person X is responsible for updating the back up server. This will ensure backs ups are actually done on a routinely basis

Resources:

-*http://www.storegate.com/* This website allows users to sign up for an on line storage account. It allows them to upload and store files to the company's servers.

About the Consultant

<u>Name</u>: Konstantin Sykulev

<u>Year</u>: Junior Class of 2008

<u>Major/Minors</u>: Information Systems major, with a Computer Science minor.

<u>Career Plans</u>: I plan on moving to New York City after completing Carnegie Mellon and putting my full effort into the web development and consulting company my brother and I started.