

Students recommend Web to link seniors, services

Overview: The University of Tennessee College of Business Administration full-time MBA program collaborates annually with local nonprofit organizations and TECH 2020 start-up companies. Students “walk in the footsteps” of these organizations to develop leadership skills from the application of knowledge obtained in the classroom. The business school has two compelling interests — an educational experience for MBA students and outreach to the community.

Three students collaborated for six weeks with the One Call Club for Seniors, which assists Knox County residents, age 60 years and older, in maintaining their health and independence by having access to reliable, reasonably priced services they need to remain in their homes.

The MBA students: Charis Walker (project manager), Sean Ford, Salt Sheikh, led by faculty advisor Pat Richardson.

The client partners: Kathy Sergeant, program manager; Zoe Evans, Bob Cun-

ONE CALL CLUB FOR SENIORS

What: Membership program that refers Knox County senior citizens to services that assists them in maintaining their health and independence living in their homes

Agency: Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee

Program manager: Kathy Sergeant

Funds: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Covenant Senior Health, Mercy Health Partners, Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church, Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church and a local family foundation

Phone: 865-524-2786

Web site: <http://www.knoxseniors.org/onecall/>

ningham and Sam Fowler, members of One Call Club for Seniors’ advisory board; and Barbara Monty, director of the Office on Aging.

The opportunity: To understand and recommend best practices so that One Call Club for Seniors can become a self-sustaining organization and to benchmark funding models for similar organizations nationwide.

The approach: The team devoted 270 hours to a proven, problem-solving framework of engagement: developing baseline measurements, conducting research, benchmarking best practices, reaching conclusions, making recommendations and predicting outcomes. The students conducted extensive research that included clientele meetings, company Web site searches and telephone interviews.

Key findings: The senior referral service industry is relatively new and offers significant opportunities for innovation and growth. As baby boomers get older, the customer base and demand for senior referral services will increase.

Several key differences were noted between the benchmarked organizations

community services, etc. This, in turn, could provide new client leads for One Call Club for Seniors.

- Have an interactive customer-review section of vendors to ensure service quality.

- Allow service providers access to a password-protected area for them to monitor customer feedback, find business opportunities, post ads, etc.

- Create a revenue-generating model that includes a directory of services, ads for participating vendors, etc.

- Market the service toward adult-children caregivers as a second core customer group.

- Supplement the One Call Club for Seniors annual-fee model with other revenue-generating opportunities to cover costs and defer cost increases to core customers.

- Charge vendors a one-time fee for participation in the vendor-referral program and for marketing on the Web site and in printed materials.

- Have the vendor return a percentage of its contracted fee back to One Call Club for Seniors in exchange for the referral.

- Set a service-commitment bar to ensure that vendors are delivering a quality service. For instance, vendors must be

and One Call Club for Seniors.

At the time of the research, in spring 2008, One Call Club for Seniors had not yet adopted an online/Web site strategy for reaching its clients and suppliers, only a telephone service.

One Call Club for Seniors set up its referral service so that clients paid an annual fee for access to its service providers. Other organizations charged their suppliers for their referral to the client instead.

One Call Club for Seniors identified its customer base as residents aged 60 and older. Some organizations extended that definition to include adult children of this population base.

Recommendations:

- Create a Web site to reach people who use the Internet as their primary source of information.

- Set up a blog that senior citizens and their adult children could access for information on helping seniors remain independent at home, access available

bonded and customer feedback should be available to all clients.

- One Call Club for Seniors should continue to provide the human-interaction, one-call feature.

The results:

“We took the students recommendations seriously and began almost immediately with the development of a Web site,” Sergeant said. “We felt this would expand our efforts to reach the adult-child market.”

Lessons learned: The students discovered that proper data collection produces much more than research, but also fresh ideas and perspective.

“The students’ research confirmed our belief that the need we saw locally is being successfully met in other communities and showed us how they were doing it. This study not only gave us valuable information, but built our self confidence and reputation among funding sources,” Fowler said.

Case Study is provided by the University of Tennessee College of Business Administration. For more information on becoming a client company, please contact Pat Richardson at prichar3@utk.edu.