

Volunteering Portal: Stay Connected to the Arabic Volunteering World

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we present a novel Volunteering Portal that covers volunteering organizations within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The main objective of the portal is to establish a direct connection between volunteers and volunteering organizations by providing a convenient environment for both to communicate efficiently. Through Volunteering Portal, organizations can post opportunities, search and elect volunteers. At the same time, the volunteers can search and apply for opportunities offered by charity organizations as well. Since Volunteering Portal handles these services that are needed for the volunteering process, it release the organizations and volunteers from the effort that is made if this process was manually handled like interviewing or applying form collecting and choosing between volunteers.

Keywords

Volunteering Portal, social network, web portal, volunteering.

1. INTRODUCTION

Volunteering plays a major role in societies progress and increases the level of awareness through individuals. It helps people to develop new skills, gain information, enhance existing knowledge and get familiar with different jobs and fields, by learning how charitable organizations work and make this person qualified to get a real paid job, which would add pride and satisfaction to the volunteer personality. Volunteers have a huge impact on their societies; because they provide services that help individuals, families and the community to address local needs and problems. On the other hand, charity organizations that do not have steady income usually need volunteers to run their activities and advertise it by giving a positive image of the organization in

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the community. Today, more than 1.7 billion people worldwide have Internet access. Accordingly, that would have a huge impact on individuals and society.

From an article by Susan J. Ellis in July 2003 [1], the author searched the following keywords using Google and found these numbers of items on the Web:

- Volunteer: 8,770,000 (found in 0.23 seconds!)
- Volunteer Management: 1,940,000
- Volunteer Administration: 1,310,000
- Volunteerism: 272,000

We searched the same keywords on October 2011 and found a huge increasing in the number of topics as following:

- Volunteer: 59,500,000 (found in 0.07 seconds!)
- Volunteer Management: 48,900,000
- Volunteer Administration: 327,000,000
- Volunteerism: 5,930,000

Since the growth in the number of volunteering topics on Internet, finding volunteers has become easier and faster and volunteering opportunities become more available.

Charity and volunteering organizations in Saudi Arabia have a main role in health care and society development. According to a previous statistic done by the Ministry of Social Affairs of Saudi Arabia in August 2011, the number of volunteering organizations has reached around 610 [2]. Many of those organizations manage a big number of volunteering opportunities and usually ask volunteers to help them in organizing these opportunities. One example is the Down Syndrome Charitable Association (DSCA) which manages many opportunities with some volunteers help including teaching classes, family training, association's library, seminars, etc. [3]. Although DSCA has its official website, it follows the traditional approach in gathering volunteers for a specific event by interviewing volunteers one by one which in fact consumes too much time and effort.

As we mentioned above, a big number of charity organizations in Saudi Arabia do not have official websites where they can post

their announcements and activities and gather volunteers through it, instead, they use a traditional technique in advertising events by spreading posters and flyers.

Although many people in KSA have interest towards volunteering work, they cannot find out about opportunities in an easy way. Knowing about a volunteering opportunity in KSA could be through friends, social networks or media advertisements. Even though, they could miss a lot of opportunities due to the lack of communication. From the organizations point of view, during managing volunteering opportunities they can face some difficulties in gathering volunteers.

In this project, we are building the Arabic online volunteering community called Volunteering Portal that matches volunteers with non-profit organizations. Volunteering Portal aims to establish a fast and efficient connection to improve the volunteering process. It reduces the time and effort for both volunteers and organizations and to encourage people to volunteer. It is dedicated to connecting volunteers and organizations in a convenient way. Our website is a national portal for interactive volunteering work.

The remainder of this paper is organized in three sections: Section 2 presents the features of similar projects in the world. Section 3 gives details of Volunteering Portal project. It concludes with future work to be considered to the portal.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the most famous and successful volunteering websites are reviewed by highlighting their common features

One of the most popular and successful websites in the volunteering field is GoVolunteer [4]. It is the Australia's first national volunteer recruitment website. The main characteristic feature of this site is to have a large number of local opportunities that gives volunteers the freedom of choosing regarding to their interests.

There are many worth mentioning English website that runs in UK such as Do-It [5] and Vinspired [6]. Do-It owns a huge database that has 500,000 registered volunteers and over 1 million volunteer opportunities. The other popular website known as national young volunteer's service is Vinspired. It is dedicated to helping young people to volunteer in ways that matter to them.

All these websites have similar features and differ only in small details. All they provide search and free registration functionalities for volunteers. While they differ in registration for organizations where some of them require a registration fee and others do not.

3. VOLUNTEERING PORTAL

Due the absence of an Arabic website that gathers both volunteers and volunteering organizations in Saudi Arabia, we proposed a novel Arabic Volunteering Portal with distinguished features.

Volunteering Portal provides services that are needed by volunteers and organizations in a simple and reachable way. It helps volunteers in finding out about opportunities in the volunteering field according to their interests and personal choices. It also assists organizations in advertising their

opportunities and helps them in gathering the largest number of the best volunteers.

Our system provides a search function for both guests and registered volunteers to search for opportunities based on their interests. In order to use other services provided by the website, such as applying for an opportunity, the user is required to register to the system. Volunteering Portal's system generates suggestions to both volunteers and organizations about opportunities based on volunteer's interests and about volunteers who is interested in organization fields respectively. The system allows sending private messages between registered organizations and volunteers. It also allows volunteers to apply to many opportunities and allows organizations to elect many volunteers. Also, registered volunteers are able to keep track of organizations' new opportunities and other volunteers' activities. The system increases the rate of popularity of both volunteer and organization based on number of participations in events and based on the number of offered opportunities respectively. The system's main functions are presented in Figure 1.

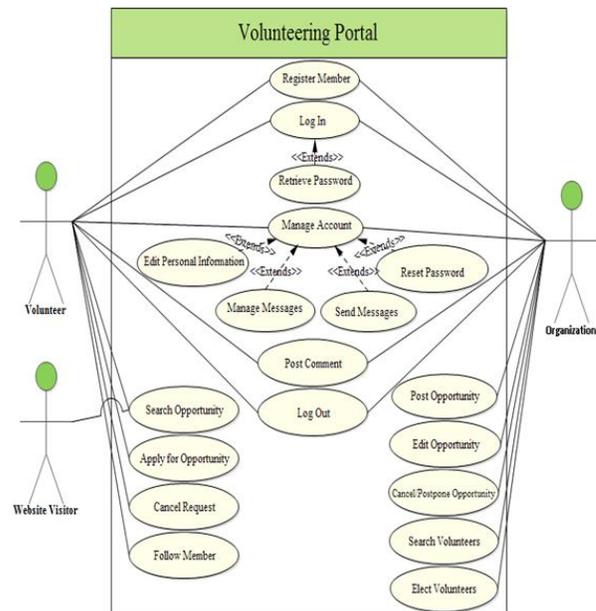


Figure 1. Use Cases Diagram.

The model we used for developing Volunteering Portal is multitier architecture. The system consists of three layers, as shown in Figure 2:

Presentation Layer: Users of the portal are divided into two main types:

1. Internal participant: System administrator.
2. External participants: System members and visitors.

Application Layer: This layer presents the main system which is divided into 5 subsystems: event (opportunity) management, messages management, volunteer's management, organizations management and account management. The system is also connected to an email server for confirming registrations and sending notifications.

Database Layer: Volunteering portal's database is implemented using MySQL Workbench 5.2 CE.

The system is implemented by using Microsoft Visual Studio ASP.NET C#.

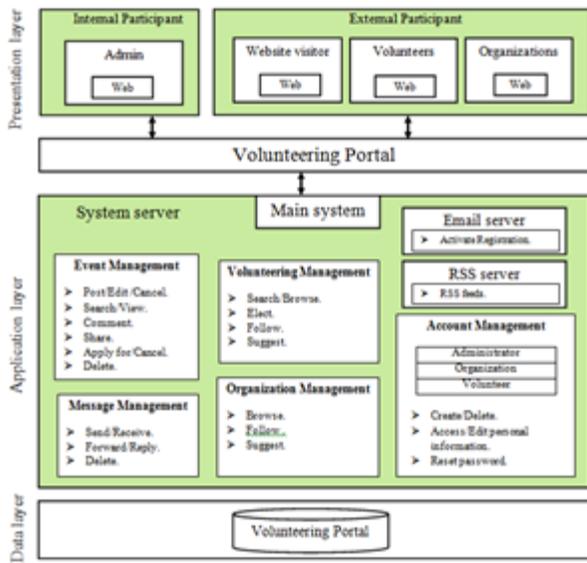


Figure 2. System Architecture.

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, a novel Arabic Volunteering Portal is presented. Although volunteering has been existed since ancient times, so it cannot be called a new concept, most Saudi charity organizations follow paper-based approaches when managing processes regards volunteers gathering. Meanwhile, organizations that have official websites, they use online approaches which have poor and limited functionality. Also, the lack of websites that is concerned with volunteering in Saudi Arabia led to the loss of volunteer work definition and importance.

The mission of Volunteer Portal is to advance the process of volunteering in Saudi Arabia. It provides a special combination of a search engine and a social network. Volunteering Portal connects charity organizations with volunteers in a convenient environment where organizations can find specific volunteers based on their interests much faster and easier than traditional

processes. Also, volunteers can find opportunities and participate in them more efficiently.

We believe that Volunteering Portal will fill the big gap of communication between volunteers and charity organizations in KSA and it will play a big role in increasing the number of volunteers in society.

We are considering some future work to improve Volunteering Portal by adding more services and functionalities such as:

- Supporting English interface and content.
- Adding advance search by providing more options such as specifying opportunity dates and time and also semantic search.
- Implementing a functionality that allows organizations to cooperate with each other.
- Implementing a functionality that allows volunteers to create volunteering groups.
- Expanding the area of volunteer opportunities, organizations and volunteers to the Gulf Region and then worldwide.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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