



Goodwill
Southern
California

News&Media

Listed on *Forbes.com* | March 2013

Forbes
com

The Most Important Social Enterprise in 2013?

Giovanni Rodriguez, Contributor

The other side of job creation — job preparedness — is one of the nation's top priorities. What does this mean for Goodwill®, an organization that's been at this for more than 100 years?

In the world of marketing and social engagement, you sometimes look for “moments” — the alignment of events, priorities, and opportunities to tackle big issues in a profoundly different way. For me, a consultant who has advised a range of businesses, non-profits, and government agencies, there are very few moments as important to the national economy than the jobs crisis. And there are few organizations positioned to do as much as Goodwill Industries, an organization that's been working on the other side of job creation — job preparedness — for more than 100 years.

For those of you who know Goodwill only as the chain of retail storefronts (there are 2,800) where you can donate or purchase used goods, it might be surprising to learn that the retail business — and several other Goodwill operations — are singularly focused on funding programs that enable Americans to find jobs, train for them, and practically prepare for them. Not too long ago, the organization also began to expand their market footprint by adding digital to the mix. Shopgoodwill.com is one of the top auction sites on the Web today. With all of its storefronts — both physical and digital — Goodwill is raising a massive amount of cash to serve its core mission. Total amount of revenue generated last year by Goodwill's 165 agencies in the US and Canada (and 14 affiliates in 13 other countries): \$4.43 billion. And with more than 80 cents on the dollar going toward its mission, the impact is substantial. In 2011, more than 190,000 people found jobs through Goodwill and served more than four million people with “community-based services such as child care, youth mentoring, financial education and transportation.” And, as the email signature of some of their staffers says, “Every 38 seconds of every business day, a person served by Goodwill earns a good job. Every 8 seconds, another person accesses Goodwill opportunities to build careers and strong families.”

That alone is impressive. But where the organization is now headed — at the time of our big jobs crisis moment — may make things even more interesting. If

Shopgoodwill.com was the organization's first big response to the digital world, GoodProspects — a site dedicated to empowering job seekers with the help of online mentors and peers — is the organization's first big response to the postdigital world, the more socially networked world that consumers today occupy, both online and offline. Which raises the question: how much more can Goodwill do now that it is entering this new world? Who else can work with Goodwill to fulfill the mission? What will Goodwill need to do to engage these new constituencies?

The New Ecosystem

Here's one thing that happens when you go postdigital — that is, when you enter a world that is more open, more interactive, more engaged: you open yourself up to a potentially wider ecosystem. Goodwill has grown over the decades by being open to wide range of players — government agencies, businesses, technology vendors (here's one tech vendor: Kuato, which is building gaming apps that teach coding). With GoodProspects — because it is both virtual and more interactive — the net widens quite a bit. Not only additional players in government, business, and technology, but additional players in other parts of the Goodwill ecosystem — new donors, new shoppers, new mentors, and yes, new job seekers. It also opens Goodwill to opportunities with an industry that is undergoing similar disruption: higher education. There are many schools, particularly at the community college level, that are exploring alternative vehicles for education, training, and job preparedness. The opportunity for Goodwill is to develop a platform for participation that serves the many different constituencies that feel a shared responsibility for the organization's overall mission.

The Brand Promise

Once the platform is developed for participation, it needs to be marketed for participation. What would inspire new donors and shoppers to participate in the new Goodwill ecosystem? What would inspire additional government agencies, businesses, and technology vendors to seek partnerships? What would move a college to look at Goodwill differently? Already, the organization has looked at ways to evolve how the brand is perceived by its constituents. Stores, in certain regions, are getting a refresh. The main corporate Web speaks to broader range of constituents. But a great next step for Goodwill would be to align its communications with the historic moment it now enjoys. Everyone in the Goodwill ecosystem ought to know that their participation is helping with the national agenda of getting people back to work ... every item they donate, every item they purchase, every job seeker they mentor.

The Goodwill experience

But there's something else. When you enter the postdigital world, you need to think about its rules ... in order to learn them, or, if you are truly innovative, in order to subvert them. One rule: consider all the customer touch points, online and offline, that a platform of engagement enjoys. Goodwill, you will note, grew fast as an

organization with many retail storefronts, and even in the postdigital world — where other retailers are struggling to compete — Goodwill continues to grow through its physical presence. What innovations can Goodwill and its constituent agencies explore with all this physical space?

Another rule: on the digital side, the opportunity for many brands today is to deeply consider the value of the online experience. How does GoodProspects make it compelling for a visitor to engage, to return, and to bring others to the experience?

Finally, there's the rule of the long tail — that the new world of digital enables organizations to see their community with greater clarity, with greater specificity, and not as a single monolithic entity. In recent communications, Goodwill worried that its mission to help people find jobs may be compromised by the digital divide — the technology gap that separates the haves and have-nots in our economy. It's a valid concern, particularly today, given Goodwill's embrace of digital technologies. But this new phase in Goodwill's evolution will also reveal that there are important outliers in the target communities that the organization serves. For example, Hispanics: study after study has shown that Hispanics outperform most every other ethnic group in social and mobile technologies. The numbers drop, of course, the lower one goes down the income scale. But if there's one thing we have learned about social engagement is that it can dramatically facilitate communication between those who are on social networks and those who are not. They are facilitated by intermediaries — people who can navigate different environments, some which are visible in the postdigital world, some which are not.

The intermediaries in Hispanic markets are sometimes known as biculturals. They are special indeed, but they are just one of many new constituencies that Goodwill is now in the position to engage and recruit to its cause. I look forward to seeing the progress it makes with this and other groups. With its alignment to one of the nation's greatest priorities, and its move into a world of greater engagement, Goodwill could very well become the most important social enterprise of 2013.