

Friday, August 22, 2003



Tackling technology needs

Atlanta Business Chronicle - by [Kevin Madigan](#) Contributing writer

Nonprofit organizations, by definition, operate on a shoestring. If they are to thrive, however, they must keep abreast of technological developments and ensure the maintenance of their infrastructures.

Two separate companies with comparable goals, [TechBridge](#) and TeamTech, were created specifically to meet the technology requirements of nonprofits. TechBridge, launched in 1997, designs, builds and maintains computer systems for various nonprofits, allowing them to focus on their goals without getting mired in the intricacies of technology. The infrastructure of Project Open Hand, one of TechBridge's recent successes, was in decay and in dire need of a major revamp. TechBridge provided a firewall upgrade, inventory control, anti-virus control, server backup and other necessities.

It also helped the newly opened Children's Museum of Atlanta plan and implement everything from servers to software, saving time and thousands of dollars in the process. "We continue to provide ongoing assistance there. One of our consultants works with them as needs arise to tackle technology questions," said TechBridge CEO Jack McMillan. "We're looking at some different delivery models to see if we can serve some of the smaller nonprofits more economically, so we can bring high-quality solutions to them, but at a price point they can afford."

TeamTech has a similar approach, but it puts most of its focus on providing nonprofits with technical advice, training and, sometimes, equipment.

"We give \$45,000 worth of IBM equipment to nonprofits every year," said TeamTech Manager John Cooper. "We do projects just like [TechBridge does], but our service model is slightly different. We set up networks. We do community forums. The Southeastern Conference, we manage that."

Dot Org: The Southeastern Nonprofit Technology Conference, as it is officially known, is a significant achievement for TeamTech, which holds the annual fall gathering under the auspices of its partner, the Georgia Center for Nonprofits. Last year's event brought representatives from more than 250 regional nonprofits to the city with exhibits, workshops and guest speakers on everything from budget planning to e-marketing innovations.

The company also manages a training laboratory at Atlanta's Loudermilk Center, with hundreds of nonprofit organization employees attending courses at discount prices, according to Cooper, who describes TeamTech as a safety-net service provider for nonprofits.

"Most of them cannot afford an IT person," he said.

There also is the TechConnect program, which specifically trains nonprofit executives and middle-management personnel in the ways of technology.

IBM Corp. is heavily involved in many different technological projects that benefit Atlanta nonprofits, particularly where children are concerned. The KidSmart Early Learning Program now is active at various child-care centers in the area, including Sheltering Arms, giving preschoolers the opportunity to use fully functional miniature computers that are supplied by IBM in partnership with TeamTech.

"KidSmart is a really neat visual project," said Gretchen McWhorter, IBM's media relations manager. "The centerpiece is a kid-friendly computer. They share a little bench, and do early-learning programs as part of their day-care or preschool center activities."

The most recent IBM venture with kids and computers involves the Atlanta-based Boys & Girls Clubs of America, which has received 6,400 desktop PCs that use a new wireless technology called Wi-Fi. Implementation and installation of Wi-Fi systems is 50 percent less expensive than standard models. About 200,000 children at more than 1,000 Boys & Girls Clubs across the country now can go online and develop skills and learning tools that will serve them throughout life.

"It's been huge," said Amy Ruttkamp, Boys & Girls Clubs of America's director of public relations. "We're seeing kids now lining up outside the tech centers rather than lining up outside the basketball courts."

Best Buy has donated hardware such as digital cameras to the Boys & Girls Clubs to supplement their arts programs, and Microsoft Corp. has provided \$100 million in training, software and funds to create curriculums.

"We're teaching these kids everything -- basic computer skills, Web design, digital movie-making, digital music-making, graphics, photo," Ruttkamp said. "It's really exciting."

Students worldwide who need extra help with their studies now can rely on MentorPlace, which allows more than 6,000 IBM staff members to assist, tutor and collaborate with children in a secure, online setting. The program, monitored by teachers, also gives pupils encouragement.

Scientifically minded students now have another tool in their arsenal, TryScience, which functions as an online museum, capturing scientific experiments and information from museums around the world and from its local partner, SciTrek.

"All three of these, Mentor Place, Kid-Smart and TryScience, are using our technology to ... provide access for young people in ways that we could never do before," said Ann Cramer, director of corporate community relations in IBM's Atlanta branch.

IBM also is the presenting sponsor at the annual Technology Service Day, hosted by Hands On Atlanta, at which volunteers teach novices of all ages how to set up and make use of computers.

Some corporations are developing software programs specifically targeted to the goals of nonprofits. Children's Healthcare of Atlanta now operates the ScriptLogic desktop administration system in its hospitals, standardizing desktop settings for 4,000 staff members and 2,400 PCs from a network administration level, where company-standard templates, anti-virus updates and other workstation configurations can be deployed. "[It] has reduced the number of support calls, resulting in more time to focus on other tasks," said Jason Judge, CEO of ScriptLogic Co.

Deloitte & Touche LLP is taking full advantage of the Angel Points software program, piloting a roll-out from the Atlanta headquarters that will eventually reach offices around the country. Juliana Deans, the company's senior marketing manager for community relations, Southeast, said Deloitte & Touche now can track all community service activities, monitor costs, measure trends, recognize employees, support the culture of employee volunteerism and position philanthropy as a strategic component of the company's corporate outreach and strategy.