



The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

YEAR:
2012

STATUS:
Laureate

Organization name:
m-Via

Organization URL:
<http://www.m-via.com/>

Project Name:
m-Via Improves the Lives of Immigrant Families with Boom Service

What social/humanitarian issue was the project designed to address? What specific metrics did you use to measure the project's success?

Currently, over 60 million adults in the U.S. do not have bank accounts and increasing bank fees continue to push people out of the banking system. Many of the unbanked are migrant workers who left their homes in order to support their loved ones in other countries. In fact, U.S. immigrants send over \$50 billion per year to their home countries and with this many of these migrant workers face obstacles when sending money, including hours of travel to reach transfer centers; safety concerns of being held up or robbed from carrying big sums of cash; and pricey fees that force them to make one big payment. m-Via wanted to solve this issue and created Boom, the U.S.'s first mobile payments solution for cross-border transactions. With Boom, immigrants with mobile phones can send remittance payments via text message. They no longer have to travel to questionable, inconveniently located cash-based transfer centers like Western Union, risk being robbed carrying large sums of cash, and pay fees upwards of \$25 per transaction. Instead, they can visit retailers and ATM locations in their neighborhoods to load funds to their Boom account. Then, they can send a text message and "boom!" their family and friends in or outside the U.S. instantly receive the funds. In just nine months, m-Via has activated more than 2,000 Boom account users, who have executed over \$2 million in transactions. They have made strategic partnerships with retailers including 7-Eleven, which has over 43,000 locations worldwide, and Diconsa, which has over 23,000 stores throughout Mexico. They are continuing to work with local family centers in L.A., Miami, and New York to offer this service to anyone who needs it.

Please describe the technologies used and how those technologies were deployed in an innovative way. Also, please include any technical or other challenges that were overcome for the successful implementation of the project.

When Bill Barhydt, the CEO of m-Via, set out to build the company's technology platform three years ago, he started from scratch. Since then, Bill has created a closed-loop banking system that supports the first U.S. cross-border mobile payment system. To accomplish this, Bill established strategic partnerships with key players in the mobile banking and mobile payments space. First, m-Via partnered with CBW Bank to become a certified merchant bank, thereby allowing Boom customers to store their money securely in a regulated bank branch. Second, m-Via partnered with Shazam to build an infrastructure for consumers to wirelessly access their funds. m-Via then established relationships with retailers like 7-Eleven and Diconsa to provide customers with centralized locations at which they can load cash on to their Boom accounts. Finally, m-Via also developed a system of short codes that allows users to share money through standard text messages without having a bank account or credit card. This also allows m-Via to remain carrier-agnostic as it grows its business and to keep the costs low for all participants.

Please list the specific humanitarian benefits the project has yielded so far.

Prior to Boom, families of the world's unbanked population had little control over their money. They could not share it with family members in a risk-free, inexpensive way. Their only choice for sharing money was to send money to family and friends in their country of origin through banks and credit unions. Recipients, most often women, typically had to travel great distances, facing robbery and attack to pick up and return with these funds. Along with these risks came the fear of the disappearing dollar. As Bill was building m-Via, he heard many stories of family members who sent money across the border via cash-based money transfer services, only to find out later that the intended recipient never received the cash. Instead of controlling how their money was distributed, people were shocked to find that their family and friends were left with nothing. With Boom, people can control the way they share, save, and spend their money. They can trust that the recipient does not have to leave home to receive the funds and that the funds are securely transferred. Furthermore, Boom has eliminated the fees associated with transferring money, thereby allowing people to select how much money they share at a time. With Boom, people can take back control of their money.

Please provide the best example of how the project has benefited a specific individual, enterprise or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work.

High poverty and crime rates force many of the men living in villages in Mexico and Haiti to travel to the U.S. for work. Meanwhile, their wives and family remain in their home countries, awaiting money from them, and unfortunately, the money does not always arrive. During his trips to villages in Haiti and Mexico, Bill listened as women crying on his shoulder described how they could not access money sent to them from the U.S. Sometimes they could not access the money because they could not leave their children while they spend days traveling by bus or foot to pick up the money. Sometimes they could not access the money because it simply was not there when they went to pick it up. Sometimes when they managed to pick up the money, they would be attacked and robbed as they carried the cash home. Fortunately, Boom has eliminated these three scenarios. By making it possible to receive money via text message, recipients no longer have to leave their children and travel to pick up remittance payments. Because m-Via is a certified merchant bank, it is legally responsible for ensuring every mobile payment is received by the intended person. Finally, Boom eliminates the need to carry cash, eliminating risks of robbery and attack. Boom has dramatically changed the lives of people sending and receiving money in the United States, Mexico, Haiti, Dominican Republic and other key immigration sources.

