

UN Habitat Jam reaches out to the global community.

Overview

UN Habitat Jam
 Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
www.wuf3-fum3.ca

Industry

- Government



“The fact that the debate on slums has moved from the academic world to streets of cities such as Nairobi, Dakar, Cape Town and Mumbai, Rio, Lima and Manila is in and of itself a powerful signal to world leaders on the need for concerted action.”

—Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director,
 UN-HABITAT, Nairobi, Kenya

Challenge

The World Urban Forum (WUF) was established by the United Nations to examine rapid urbanization and its impact on communities, cities, economies and policies. The organization hosts an international conference every two years attracting some 10,000 delegates to discuss issues, share ideas and set out action plans. However, with 10,000 delegates - mostly made of people who could either afford travel to the conference or find a sponsor to cover the costs - WUF knew it was missing input from a number of areas and more importantly, from the very people living in urban squalor the organization was set up to help. For the then-upcoming 2006 conference in Vancouver, UN and host-country officials needed a new idea and approach to gathering input from around the world. The group used IBM's innovative “Jam” communication method as inspiration and asked for help in setting up a Jam-style online communication tool capable of reaching out to the urban poor and front-line aid workers around the globe.

Solution

In December 2005, the Canadian government, IBM and UN-HABITAT hosted a 72-hour ‘Habitat Jam’ to stimulate ideas in preparation for the WUF3 conference scheduled for June 2006 in Vancouver. The group wanted to engage large numbers of people beyond the usual delegates by empowering and stimulating tens of thousands of global citizens - rich and poor alike - with the ultimate goal of turning ideas into action on critical issues related to urban sustainability.

With a 12 to 14 week event preparation timeline, IBM Global Business Services used internally-developed Jam Event methodology to prepare, market and host a 72-hour real time discussion around urban habitat issues, ideas and best practices. The event was followed by a two to three week post-analysis period during which the team used the discussion logs to create an event report with key conclusions and actionable ideas. The UN Habitat Jam was an unprecedented on-line grass roots exchange of ideas combining chat and blogging formats. The event was the first time IBM's Jam-style communication technique was used outside the company. The forum was also ground-breaking in the way it gave people around the globe, even those living in some of the world's most impoverished areas, access to information and a voice for their concerns and ideas.



IBM began the development process working with the UN and the Canadian government to define and structure the event. IBM then provided and adapted the supporting technology infrastructure to administer and host the three day discussion. IBM also leveraged its extensive marketing resources to promote the discussion - including donating space on its own w3 internal website to encourage participation. Special Event Hosting infrastructure like that for events such as the US Open and Wimbledon was also used for this event. The UN, with IBM's support, brought technology to slum areas in places like Africa, Brazil and the Philippines to ensure lack of Internet access and available computers were not a barrier to participating. In other areas too remote, or where English is not a commonly spoken language, the UN ran "idea cafes" to collect information to be posted during the live event.

During the actual Jam session, real time text mining technology was used to identify key words and emerging themes then post alerts on major threads and discussion developments. The behind-the-scenes facilitations and orchestration effort involved some 50 to 100 facilitators, moderators and subject matter experts, many of which were IBM volunteers to the project.

Benefits

- The Habitat Jam engaged over 39,000 participants from 158 countries in discussion of issues critical to sustain cities
- The International Centre for Sustainable Cities was able to identify over 600 actionable ideas, of which 70 ideas were included on the WUF 2006 agenda
- Partner organizations successfully brought the voices of women, youth and slum dwellers to the dialogue: 78% of the participants were from these three groups

Why it matters

The UN's World Urban Forum wanted to directly and immediately reach out to the front-line aid workers and the very people in urban slum areas around the globe that the organization was set up to help. With the Habitat Jam, 78% of participants were the women, youth and slum dwellers normally excluded from these discussions. Their ideas provided valuable insight and practical ideas for making life a little better in some of the poorest areas of the world. IBM's ideas and technology made it possible for ordinary people to have a real input on tackling serious global issues.

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