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Developing a Strategic Is Plan for the Cherry Creek Sneak

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REGIS UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL FOR PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN
COMPUTER INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Developing a Strategic IS Plan

for

The Cherry Creek Sneak

PROFESSIONAL PROJECT

Stephanie Bass

December 2005

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Abstract

The Cherry Creek Sneak is the 3rd largest 5-mile race in the United States. Currently, 10% of the proceeds from the race are donated to the Colorado Governor's Council to fight childhood obesity. The co-owners of the race, Pat Downing and Paula Tiernen, live in different states, and because of this, are unable to manage The Cherry Creek Sneak, or any business regarding the race efficiently. In order to continue the race in the future, they have requested that the Cherry Creek Sneak website be the place where their business is conducted. The goal of this project, therefore, is to create a Strategic IS Plan that would support this virtual corporation.

The systems and technologies that 'the sneak' presently uses are old, outdated and inefficient. The several Excel spreadsheets, which contain the data of their participants, volunteers and sponsors, are extremely ineffective and disorganized. One of the primary goals of the Cherry Creek Sneak is to continue to raise runner participation to increase the amount of money that is donated to fight childhood obesity. In order to do this, data management is crucial as well as having the ability to conduct business, anytime or anywhere. If runner participation does not continue to grow, the future of The Cherry Creek Sneak continuing remains unknown.

Improving the systems, technology and business of The Cherry Creek Sneak would have many benefits. First of all, the ability to own, manage and control their own data could lead to enhanced reporting on participants, volunteers and sponsors. Better target marketing, financial reconciliation and possible financial gain are other areas that could greatly benefit by the introduction of new systems. Most importantly, however, would be the creation of a virtual corporation in order to conduct business online without having to consider the time or day or location.

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1.0 Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Statement of Problem and Goals to be Achieved

The Cherry Creek Sneak currently uses old and out-of-date technology and business methods. The pre-existing system for race participant registration consists of an Excel spreadsheet that is hand-keyed from manually prepared race registration forms. Participants register on a standard registration form at a sporting goods location or other participating business. The forms are then sent to a processor to create csv files of data that are supplied to the organization. As a result, tracking of sponsor, volunteer and results data is not well maintained.

Transmission of participant data to interested parties consists of emailing an Excel spreadsheet and other documents among race organizers. Each interested party maintains his or her own Excel spreadsheets, resulting in inconsistent and multiple versions of these spreadsheets.

The ultimate goal of The Cherry Creek Sneak is to streamline these processes using up-to-date technology and in the process become a corporation that can do business from anywhere in the world. There are several benefits to becoming a virtual corporation. Some of the benefits include the following:

- Cost—reduce overhead by hiring contractors
- Flexibility—work from anywhere at any time
- More Efficient Management—reap the benefits of having the structure of a small to medium-sized business but have the impact of a large business

- Consumer Benefits—pass along cost savings to consumers and build customers’ trust through a closer, virtual relationship.

1.2 Definition of Terms

The Cherry Creek Sneak will also be known as “The Business.”

1.3 Relevance, Need for the Project

Because The Business is run using antiquated technology, efficiency, cost savings and race attendance are poor. The Business must invest in modern technology that encourages participation. This includes updating the processes to include:

- Automated systems instead of the current manual paper system
- Improving the database using one which tracks changes and limits the number of users
- Purchasing several software packages which will allow for online registration, the recording of results, and bib barcoding.

This will ensure the race’s future.

1.4 Limitations and Scope of the Project

1.4.1 Financial

The cost of introducing new technology may be a larger investment than The Cherry Creek Sneak is willing to make. Purchasing off-the-shelf software and having it configured can cost a company thousands of dollars and does not

even include the cost of maintenance. This can be offset by using students who are willing to sacrifice payment in exchange for the IT knowledge and experience.

1.4.2 Expertise

In order to cut costs, several of the IT projects will be done by Regis students who will be learning on the job. Companies outsource for this type of work because they already have the intelligence and experience and can get the work done in a short amount of time.

1.4.3 Time

Because the IT projects will be completed by students, the time commitment for these projects must be flexible by both The Cherry Creek Sneak as well as the students. In addition to allowing for time to work on the project, the graduate student may also have a full time job and family, which could take away from devoting 100% of their time to the project, whereas hiring a professional would allow for full time devotion to the project.

2.0 Chapter Two: Project History

2.1 Current State of The Business

Currently The Business is not efficiently run because its technology is outdated. For example, its database consists of several Excel spreadsheets that contain information about race participants, volunteers and sponsors. The data on the spreadsheets can be updated or changed by any of the owners or administrators as they see fit. Because there is not a change control process or

change control tool, the integrity of the data becomes questionable. The owners of The Business live in different states: one in St. Louis and another here in Denver. Because of these current arrangements, the owner commutes from St. Louis to Denver several times a month, wasting both money and time. The current design of The Cherry Creek Sneak website is not set up to run as a virtual corporation and does not allow for online business. There is no way for any sort of race management to take place. For example, database management will become very efficient as it eliminates the continued need for Excel spreadsheets to be mailed back and forth to administrators. An updated website design would also help with media, sponsor and volunteer contacts, direct mail and email campaigns. As such, it is difficult to efficiently manage any aspect of the race or run the business. By becoming a virtual corporation, the registration process, the means and timing of race results, marketing, public recognition, customer expectations, and chip timing will all be streamlined. Plus, a virtual corporation will allow for a greater presence in the community and schools. This can be achieved several ways:

- Enabling public electronic access to the scheme's information and material 24 hours a day
- Greater access to information via the web, coupled with deliberate marketing, to broaden public awareness of the services provided by the organization

- Participant forms, as well as sponsor and volunteer forms and templates freely downloaded and printed by visitors to the site

2.2 Where The Business Would Like to Be

2.2.1 More Efficient Business Model

The ultimate goal of The Business is to be able to do business more efficiently and economically while increasing participant numbers. This task can only be accomplished by The Business revising its current processes, which consist of inefficiently gathering data, relaying race results in an untimely manner and the manual process of updating the data, which involves the labor-intensive task of entering data from Excel spreadsheets. Upgrading to a reliable system in which all the contributors, including race participants, volunteers, sponsors and administrators could use would be much more helpful for all the parties involved.

The participants, the actual runners who use the system to register and get race results; volunteers, whose information is used for contact purposes for future races; and sponsors, who make significant donations of both time and money, would be able to get their responsibilities done effortlessly. This would cut down on a lot of stress knowing that the information entered is correct and its integrity is not jeopardized. Limiting the number of users who interact with the data allows for better control of the data, leading to more reporting options and more detailed reports on participants, volunteers and sponsors.

The current design of The Cherry Creek Sneak is not conducive to online business. In order for the co-owners and administrators to have a virtual business, a web portal and single communications platform is necessary. This way, regardless of where the owners are, the necessary information could be accessed and business would continue uninterrupted. No longer would it be necessary to email spreadsheets back and forth, increasing the chances of losing or corrupting the data. Instead, the owners could communicate using a web portal in which only administrators would have access to change or update existing data.

2.2.2 Increase Race Participation

The Business would also like to increase race participation. Currently participation numbers are declining. In order to increase numbers, The Business must concentrate on winning and keeping customers, including volunteers, sponsors and runners. The Business first needs to refine its marketing plans and take advantage of new opportunities, including: getting corporations involved, using a website logo link from other pages on the web, and web marketing, which would increase the number of visitors to the website, and mass email. Newsletter production could also be increased by allowing the visitor to sign up for delivery of the newsletter while on line. The Business could also benefit by further promoting the race and race products to make it more enticing. This would include such things as:

- Stressing the importance physical fitness

- Giving away prizes in numerous categories
- Make information more available regarding helping out charitable organizations
- Promote the ‘fun’ aspect of the race; running with friends and family, signing up with a group of friends from school, etc.

2.2.3 Establish a Branding Direction

The Business would also like to establish a branding direction. In order for The Sneak to become a solid business, the public must become familiar with certain aspects of The Sneak. The logo or brand, which represents The Cherry Creek Sneak, must be visible and recognized wherever it is seen. It should stand out and always create the same look and feel. The brand, look, feel, and slogan should reinforce the values of the business and project a positive and consistent image to the customer. It must also be able to sustain time and growth and continually represent the Sneak’s values, including its commitment to healthy kids and to the community. This includes the business and schools in the area as well as inviting individuals to participate either as a runner or volunteer. Because some of the Sneak’s values involve the surrounding community and schools, these activities would go hand in hand with the race.

2.3 How The Business Can Grow and Become a Virtual Corporation

In order to grow its business, The Sneak needs to supplement its existing technology or introduce new technology or processes. The existing processes

either needs to be supplemented or replaced. These include but are not limited to: developing a true relational database, building and improving upon the existing Sneak business, establish a branding direction and finally, become a fully functional virtual corporation.

2.4 Establishing a Branding Direction

Many people have become desensitized to advertising and think about branding as just an ad campaign, but it really has more to do with a business's identity, which is defined as the complete professional image that a business wishes to project to make it recognizable and distinct. A successful business identity is consistently carried through all aspects of a company's access to the public, customers, and potential customers: business card, letterhead and envelope, brochures, print advertisements, Web presence, media advertisements, and signage.

All that is owned, produced, stated, sold and marketed by the company falls under the broad heading of a brand. From the name and logo to the business philosophy and corporate mission; from the advertising campaign message to the design elements; from the products and services. Some of the things that can be done to establish a greater branding direction are the following:

- Analyze the market audience: Obtain demographic and lifestyle information about customers.

- Put yourself in the customer's shoes: Jump into their heads and think about them during the advertising process. The energy used to promote your brand should be focused toward winning over your key customer.
- Create brand awareness through consistency. If the business is not consistent about establishing its brand, it will never create brand recognizability.

2.4.1 Sustain Time and Growth

Flexibility is necessary for a business to continue in the long run and grow profitably. Today's business environment is becoming more complex, fast-paced and unpredictable. These dynamics give rise to the need for business flexibility to cope with constant change and to get ahead of the competition. Flexibility means playing an active role in responding to and shaping market changes. In many cases, companies are not prepared for change and can't respond fast enough internally to handle major sudden external events such as not having the foresight to allow The Business to grow. This would mean, for example, having an operating system that instills the idea that change is inevitable. Often, companies are held back by inflexible, slow IT environments that cannot deal with increases or decreases in demand or with changes in market requirements. The IT systems of The Cherry Creek Sneak must be ready to make adjustments accordingly.

2.4.2 Relationships that Build Loyalty

Customer loyalty does not stem from clever ploys to collect every conceivable piece of data from customers and then sell them something they don't want. The Cherry Creek Sneak shouldn't try to manage loyal customers—those who have participated in the event for several years either as a race participant, sponsor or volunteer. Long-standing relationships arise from trust gained over many transactions and are sustained by customers' beliefs that the company wishes to keep them around rather than drive them away. The Business needs to spend time and money gaining more participants, both runners and race volunteers as well as continuing to invest in the loyal ones and keep them coming back.

Research has shown that a five percent increase in customer retention rates results in a 25 percent to 95 percent increase in profits. Everyone wants to retain their existing customers. Few companies, however, are implementing positive strategies aimed at retention. Their advertising and sales programs are designed to find and promote their products and services to new customers. The Cherry Creek Sneak has thousands of 'customers'.

In the past fifteen years, computers have become so sophisticated and powerful, and their prices have become so inexpensive, that it is possible to keep in a computer today the kind of information that the old corner grocer kept in his

head, and to use that information to recognize and do favors for those customers. By setting up a participant database, and using it to start a dialog with their participants, companies can reestablish contact with their customers, build loyalty, referrals and repeat sales. Retention building is possible. Certain strategies can be implemented to address this:

- Membership programs
- Welcome and thank you communications
- Satisfaction surveys, followed up by phone calls and letters
- Beefed up customer service, empowered to solve problems
- Enhanced technical support with follow up satisfaction calls
- Event-driven communications that are meaningful to the customers' lives
- Databases that keep track of customer's purchases, preferences, complements and complaints, which are used to carry out loyalty building services and dialogs.
- Integrated marketing programs where the advertising, direct communications, customer service, database marketing and sales programs are all orchestrated together and designed to build loyalty.
- Segmentation of the customer base by lifetime value groups, and different marketing programs designed for each segment.

2.4.3 Meet Customer Expectations

Repeat business is the most profitable business so losing a large number of participants, volunteers and/or sponsors hurts the outcome, even if replaced with new ones. In order to avoid losing repeat business, delivering the expected product or service should be The Business's minimum standard. The expected product for the race sponsor would be more visibility and sense of appreciation for the company providing the services. Visibility is a way to receive prominent recognition for the business in exchange for supporting The Cherry Creak Sneak. In turn, the more recognition the sponsor or company receives, the higher the chances of profitability and business of the company. The public tends to view sponsors of the race as being involved in the community. The views that a company takes part in the community and gives back is looked at positively. The community appreciates this involvement as a sponsor.

There are a few expected products for the race participant:

- One, have an easy registration process using online registration
- Two, have an excellent experience not only running the race but being able to access the website and look at race results shortly after
- Three, know that finishing the race is an accomplishment and that staying healthy and fit is important. The expected service or

product for the volunteer helping at the race is to have a sense of community involvement.

The Sneak needs to focus on several things order to meet these customer expectations:

- Follow through on promises made to customer: Every promise made by the business in an advertisement creates a clear expectation on the part of the customer. Fulfill marketing promises as quickly as possible, without the customer having to ask for what was promised. When a company carries out its promise, the credibility shoots up while the customer's anxiety level drops down.
- Know what the expected product is: To provide a higher level of service, The Sneak must know what the expected product is. Many times, customers don't know what to expect. Great salespeople think in terms of opening relationships rather than closing sales. They understand that the big money and job satisfaction come from keeping customers instead of churning customers. Therefore, they discuss customer expectations up front. The expected product may be different for different customers. The way to give the customers a better experience is to ask them what kind of

experience they expect and then to deliver those expectations instead of taking the order and running.

- Be proactive: Be sure to let the customers know what other customers have experienced. Put things into perspective. Tell them how long it is going to take to see results or to train their people on the new equipment. You'll build your credibility when that's exactly what happens.

There is commonly a mismatch between what the customer expects and what is delivered. To meet and exceed customer expectations, this mismatch must be avoided. This gap between customer expectations and what the customer actually receives can be avoided by keeping the following two things in mind:

1. Accurately portray the product and service by:
 - An advertising promise—the promise The Sneak is making to their audience in their advertising
 - Support for the promise—bulleted statements that support the claims.
 - Advertising tone—the emotional images conjured up by The Sneak's message that is appropriate for both the product and the audience.

- Rationale—statements referring back to product/market research that back up The Sneak’s creative strategies.

2. Let customers define their own expectations

- Determine what the customer’s expectations are by asking questions. Survey them by phone or by using the website as an instrument to collect data. Use this information to make improvements in customer service and always make sure to follow through with promises. Using a simple business model that uses such things as Measuring customer satisfaction levels, Benchmarking, service level agreements, and managing the customer expectation gap can help achieve superior customer service and exceeding customer expectations.

3.0 Chapter 3: Methodology—SCRUM

For this project, SCRUM methodology was used. The SCRUM methodology is a metaphor for the game of Rugby. Rugby evolved from English football (soccer) under the intense pressure of the game.



SCRUM assumes that the development process is an unpredictable and complicated process instead of a well-understood approach that can be planned, estimated and successfully completed. The primary difference between this methodology and the traditional waterfall is that the SCRUM approach assumes analysis, design and development process in the Sprint phase are unpredictable. SCRUM is an enhancement and more flexible model of the commonly used iterative/incremental object-oriented development cycle. One of the similarities, however, is that even though SCRUM uses the same team approach as the traditional interactive/incremental cycle, the teams are organized and managed in a different way. This methodology has been successfully used in both small and large business and is proven to be effective when done correctly. There are several things to keep in mind when using this process:

- Customer requirements--how the current system needs enhancing. The existing use of Excel spreadsheets is time consuming and open to errors because of the process of having to manually enter the data.
- Time pressure--what is the time frame required. Since this project is being done free of charge by students, The Cherry Creek Sneak must be willing to make slight adjustments to the schedule.
- Competition—what is the competition up to. The Boulder Bolder 10K and the Susan G. Koman Race for the Cure are very popular and continue to grow in numbers. The Cherry Creek Sneak must observe what actions make these races so successful.
- Quality—what is the required quality. Because The Cherry Creek Sneak makes certain promises to their participants, it is important that they be able to fulfill these promises. For example, if the website states that a runner's results will be available online the following day, The Cherry Creek Sneak needs to deliver on that statement.
- Vision—what changes are required to fulfill the vision. The vision of The Cherry Creek Sneak is committed to

keeping kids fit and reducing childhood obesity in the community. In order to achieve this, the Sneak must continue to grow in numbers and profitability.

- Resources--what funding is available. Again, since this project is being done by Regis students, the only major cost to the race would be any hardware or hosting services that would be needed.

SCRUM is comprised of the following groups or phases:

Pregame

- Planning—define requirements and estimate the schedule and cost. A small team or individual student would need to gather requirements while working closely with the client. Another student could draft a proposal using that information to determine cost and schedule of the project.
- Architecture—design how the system will be implemented. This phase includes system architecture and high-level design. A student interested in completing their project in this area could complete the IT requirements and design document based on the Business Requirements. This design document would also include the architecture needed to complete the project.

Game

- Development sprints—development of functionality and working closely with the variables of time, requirements, quality, cost and competition. This is an iterative development cycle that is used to evolve the system. Any teams or individuals involved in The Cherry Creek Sneak project meet on a regular and consistent basis and discuss the finding and any issues that have arisen.

Postgame

- Closure—preparation for release, including documentation, pre-release staged testing and release. This includes having a team or individual involved in the implementation and training of the users of the new system.

Scrum Methodology

■ Pregame

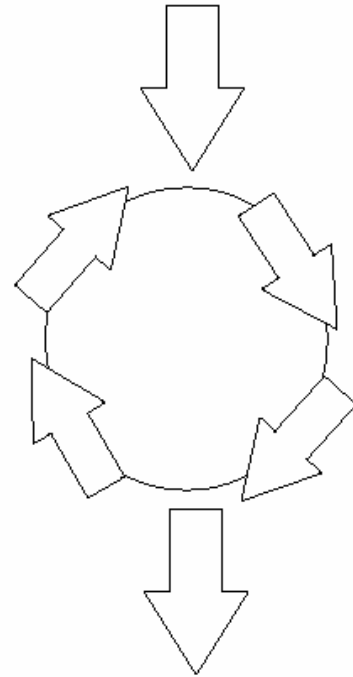
- Planning
- System Architecture/High Level Design

■ Game

- Sprints (Concurrent Engineering)
 - Develop (Analysis, Design, Develop)
 - Wrap
 - Review
 - Adjust

■ Postgame

- Closure



Teams involved in SCRUM methodology are managed and organized differently than traditional project teams. The SCRUM Master, in this case is the Regis advisor heading up The Cherry Creek Sneak Project, is the person responsible for enforcing SCRUM practices, guiding SCRUM Teams in making decisions and the SCRUM Master also clears obstacles that may prevent the team members from reaching their goals. In addition to those tasks, The SCRUM Master may acquire resources necessary for achieving Sprint incremental deliverables. In the case of this project, The SCRUM Master is the Regis advisor overseeing the entire project.

SCRUM Teams are formed to carry out the tasks and reach the deliverables. The deliverables in this case include any Business Requirements documentation, IT Requirements, Design Documents and possibly any necessary prototyping. SCRUM teams are small, cross-functional, and autonomous. For The Cherry Creek Sneak project, SCRUM teams consisted of one person working on a specific task in order to complete the project. For example, one person was designated to design the database, another was responsible for the data migration and another was responsible for the delivery of the Strategic Information Plan.

4.0 Chapter Four: Build a Sneak Business

Public recognition is crucial to building a successful and valuable business. If a company receives positive recognition, the reputation of that company is benefited. Reputation can be used to predict future behavior and

make adjustments. Naturally, a company that has a positive reputation is more likely to be successful than a company that has a negative reputation. Positive public recognition can greatly influence a business by increasing participation in the event. If the community is aware that the practices of the business are fair and honorable, they maintain a solid commitment to conducting their business practices in an ethical fashion, and then naturally, participant, sponsor and volunteer relationships will be valued and strong. The Business must have and continue to keep an excellent reputation within the industry and community. All of these will influence participation as well as maintain the loyal contributors of the event.

4.1 Physical Fitness Market

The physical fitness market today is very competitive and in order to get ahead, The Cherry Creek Sneak must stand out from other races such as the Boulder Bolder. Research has shown that the more clear the identity of the business, the more it is expected to thrive and survive. Once the Sneak has established a clear identity, it needs to maintain this identity as the business grows.

Becoming a larger presence in schools around the community could greatly increase The Sneak's popularity.

4.2 Presence in Schools

Because one of the main objectives of The Cherry Creek Sneak is to inform the area youth on physical fitness and health, it is important that they maintain a presence in the Denver and surrounding areas. For example, representatives from The Sneak might want to consider putting together a short presentation on healthy eating to be shown once a month to the students, or once a month hold a 'practice' event that would lead up to the race. If The Sneak is recognized throughout the schools, kids will be more likely to participate in the program.

Becoming more of a presence in the schools and in the community is a high priority for The Cherry Creek Sneak. There are several benefits to a more recognizable presence in schools:

- Children are a uniquely profitable market.
- As future adults, children are potential consumers for all goods and services.
- Children spend 20 percent of their time in school.
- Children's spending has roughly doubled every ten years for the past three decades.

4.3 Market to Sneak Customers

Marketing to customers means meeting and exceeding customer expectations. The aim is to know and understand the customer so well that the

product or service sells itself. This is where market research is essential and should be a starting point when developing the marketing strategy. Below is a list of what could be done to increase participant numbers and determine what type of individual would best fit the demographic of The Cherry Creek Sneak.

1. Market Research

Information gained through marketing research is information that can guide important strategic business decisions. Market research is effective when the findings or conclusions reached have a value that exceeds the cost of the research itself. Additionally, it will help identify opportunities in the marketplace and reduce the risk of doing business in areas that are not profitable.

2. Research the Competitors

The Boulder Bolder, The Turkey Trot, The Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure. Investigate and determine what works for them, why these events have been successful for so long and why they continue to have increased numbers of participants.

3. Competitive Advantage

Deliver the same or better benefits as the competitors but at a lower cost. The Cherry Creek Sneak must create superior value for its customers and profits for itself.

4. Customer Relationships

Customers are at the heart of every business and strengthening those relationships would maximize growth and profitability. Find out why customers make the choices they do and use that knowledge effectively.

5.0 Chapter Five: Data Collection Issues

5.1 Centralized Database

Collecting and using data causes the most trouble for The Business. Foremost, data is entered into the system from several different resources. The most unreliable source is the Excel spreadsheets which when entered manually, is open to lots of different errors. Currently design and implementation of a reliable database are being addressed by additional Regis students. More accurate data can be assured by having a centralized database that only allows changes by certain individuals using a change control process. This updated method of storing data along with implementing other up-to-date systems can improve efficiency and lower costs; increase the understanding of the participants, such as their habits and interests; and improve communications. Obtaining the above means better customer service, access to new markets, growth and greater profits.

The combination of a centralized database with restricted access would allow for less mistakes and more accurate information. For example, if a past

race participant would like to register for the race again, instead of entering all of their information, they would only have to enter their last name or street address and city in order for the database to find them. This would save the customer a lot of time and show the runner that they are valued and appreciated for their participation in the race.

In addition to better data, a centralized database would allow access to new and different markets. Companies love doing business with other companies that are profitable, efficient and have streamlined their processes. This is exactly what would happen if The Cherry Creek Sneak were to implement a centralized database. The race would draw more participants as well as sponsors who would be increasingly valuable to this event.

The primary advantages of a centralized and managed database or website are that it provides the opportunity for quality control; that maintenance of data availability is offloaded to the managed database; and upload restrictions ensure that data is in a uniform and in a searchable format. In this type of solution, the data is stored and managed at the repository, which typically also provides a range of searching and data processing facilities. In addition to the above, a centralized database would also allow for more flexibility in the system that would be needed as technology changes so quickly.

Since currently this data resides on Excel spreadsheets and is manually entered into the system, there is a high risk of the data getting entered

inaccurately. If the data is not entered accurately, for example, a phone number or address of a sponsor is mistyped, a representative of the race now has to spend time and money tracking down the correct information to contact the business. This inconvenience and waste of valuable time could lead to a loss of contract with the sponsor and possibly, other tentative sponsors. If the data is being correctly stored in one place, and is accurate, this loss of business, which would ultimately lead to loss of profits, would not happen and businesses could be contacted early for donations. By having sponsors lined up early, other potential sponsors may be more willing to take part in the event. This also could help with increasing the profits of The Cherry Creek Sneak. The more businesses that sponsor the race would increase the number of race participants and this would lead to larger profits and continued security of the race in the coming years.

5.2 Online Registration

Several online registration programs are currently available for purchase. Online registration is simple and cost-effective. It helps increase attendance, member retention and donation collection. The ability to rapidly distribute information to their customers and a wider audience creates a much larger base of potential attendees, registrants and donors than a paper-based system. Online registration forms can contain personalized invitations. These invitations have "click here to register/donate" links that are a powerful marketing tool, which almost guarantees increased event attendance, retention and collection. The

Boulder Bolder is a great example of an event whose registration processes are streamlined and efficient as evidenced by the fact that every year, their race participant numbers increase.

By using this method in combination with networking and walk-in registration, online registration provides a way to manage the data so that its integrity is not affected. Not only is entering data manually a waste of time, but in doing so, the chance of mistyping the information is much greater. Losing data or having inaccurate data is frustrating to participants, volunteers and sponsors. Some of the benefits of online registration are detailed below:

- Increase invitation response rates by as much as 100%

Since personalized invitations can be included as part of online registration, it becomes very simple for the interested party to register for the event.

- Cut costs by as much as 90%

Paper is a very expensive way to do business when compared to using online registration. For example, if a flyer is sent out with a mistake that was not seen beforehand, an additional notice has to then be sent, raising the cost to the business.

- Reduce attrition at the event

Participant numbers would remain steady and perhaps even increase if The Sneak were able to communicate more effectively

with its customer base. Sending out an occasional mass email or a personalized invitation for the event would indicate their commitment to the races' supporters.

- Spend less time on processing and data entry

Online registration eliminates "data entry" expenses by removing the need for a staff member to input data. This "Registrant Centered" process enables the registrants to fill in the registration information themselves. This allows registrants to input their data themselves, and because of this, they are less likely to commit data entry errors.

- Get to know the participants better

Since online registration allows the participants to enter, change and update their information, things like interests and hobbies could also be included as part of the registration process. This allows for The Sneak to 'cater' to their needs and establish a stronger relationship.

- Increase business opportunities

Sponsors and other businesses could use the online registration site to advertise their services, therefore increasing the profits for The Sneak.

5.3 Bib Barcoding and Chip-Timing

Two areas in which updated technology would be extremely beneficial to The Cherry Creek Sneak are chip timing and bib barcoding.

5.3.1 Bib Barcoding

Currently bib barcoding is used at the race but technology has changed greatly since this tool was introduced. One fairly new piece of technology that has recently been used for bib barcoding is the 701 RF Terminal. The 701 RF Terminal is a low cost, easy to use hand held bib code bar reader and it requires no wiring. The actual terminal does not need any programming that communicates with PCs (or any computer) by serial port or through TCP/IP addressability. The Cherry Creek Sneak needs more efficient and cost effective programs to compete with other events.

In addition to or as an option to bib barcoding, the chip timing system that The Cherry Creek Sneak currently uses needs to be updated. The current system of the runner tearing the tag off of their bib and handing it to one of the race volunteers where it is placed on a hook in order of the racers' finish and scanned into the system is a fairly accurate method, however, newer technology exists where the chip is attached to the back of the runner's bib and the time is recorded automatically by the computer when the runner crosses under an antenna at the finish line. With this system, all results are 100% computerized, automating

everything and eliminating any chance of missed data. With this system, up-to-the-minute results can be provided while the race is in progress.

In addition, Badgers can be used as an effective backup system to double-check finishes times. A Badger is a racquet shaped paddle that is used in the finish line chute to scan the barcode on the participants bib. The nice feature about this system is simply the fact that the bib, with the chip attached, can be thrown away after each event. Therefore, the runner is not burdened with chip recovery upon completion of the race. In addition, no mats are required at the finish line. For a race with many runners who like the ultimate in accuracy and speed, this is a great idea.

5.3.2 Chip Timing

Many of the popular races in Colorado and the United States use chip timing technology. This concept automatically computerizes race results in a manner that is both timely and accurate. One of the things that makes a race appealing is allowing racers to get their results shortly after the race has ended. Chip timing makes this possible. New technology is available that allows for a computerized chip to be placed on the back of the runner's bib barcode. As the runner crosses the finish line, their time is automatically recorded by an antenna

and logged in the computer. This eliminates any chance of missed data and provides up to the minute race results.

6.0 Chapter Six: Becoming a Virtual Corporation

Presently, the owners live in different cities in the United States. One is located in Denver, Colorado while the other resides in St. Louis, Missouri. Because of the lack of technology, the owners are forced to commute once a month for a two-week period in order to manage the business. This is both costly and time-consuming. Establishing The Cherry Creek Sneak as a virtual company would allow both parties, as well as other employees, to work more effectively while at the same time, greatly reduce costs.

Using technology to work remotely has grown over the past several years. For example, technology like e-mail, web conferencing and high-speed Internet connections encourage virtual work. Studies have shown that virtual companies that allow employees to work remotely benefit not only the bottom line but productivity as well. This is a result of the reduced travel costs and increased knowledge transfer and the speed of solutions while lessening bottlenecks and possible customer delays. In today's competitive economy, adopting and supporting virtual work is essential.

A virtual business can be implemented either using internal resources or through outsourcing. Because The Cherry Creek Sneak is a small business, it

would benefit from using internal resources. Both co-owners, as well as other employees, volunteers and sponsors would be allowed to access information to better perform their functions for The Cherry Creek Sneak. Other benefits include retrieving information from the database, running reports, getting financial information, or accessing any other type of information anytime without having to travel to an office or meet with other employees face to face. An investment in an intelligent information technology infrastructure to support remote workers and establish a virtual company would be a better use of working capital.

7.0 Chapter Seven: Lessons Learned

Many things were learned during this project in developing a strategic plan for The Cherry Creek Sneak.

- How to develop a Strategic IS plan
- Setting up a planning meeting
- Different models in planning
- The benefits of being virtual corporation
- Technology and networking

Additionally, there are several obstacles I encountered while undertaking this task. First of all, it was hard to meet with the co-owners on a regular basis because one of them resided in St. Louis, Missouri and the other here in Denver. Secondly, the co-owner in St. Louis, who happened to be the one who provided

all the information, left The Cherry Creek Sneak to pursue other ventures before it was completed. Lastly, I waited too long between the time when I submitted the outline and proposal in 696A to the time I actually wrote IS plan in this course 696B.

In conclusion, The Cherry Creek Sneak is a great organization that promotes healthy living and the importance of physical fitness, especially in kids. In order to continue to grow and remain a successful race in the Denver area, a strategic information system (IS) plan needs to be developed. This project involved developing a strategic IS plan for The Cherry Creek Sneak. This strategic IS plan will allow The Cherry Creek Sneak to expand its vision and goals and become the blueprint for future and current races. A regular review of this plan is recommended in order for it to keep pace with the ever-changing environment of The Cherry Creek Sneak and to monitor the progress of the current plan.

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