

How technology is helping employee volunteering drive more change

By [Chris Venter](#)

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More than any other industrial revolution that has come before, the fourth industrial revolution has humanity at its core. Ours is a world in crisis and the potential solutions that technology offers to its myriad problems is fuelling creativity and innovation in virtually every sector. The corporate social investment (CSI) space is no different, and corporates are using technology to enhance their employee volunteering programmes to the benefit of employees, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their business endeavours. Important and productive changes are taking place as a result.



Chris Venter will be speaking at FirstRand's 2019 Beyond Painting Classrooms conference.

Data-driven decisions

Technological improvements in employee volunteering have given corporates access to information that could previously only be surmised at best. Now, through effective data capturing and monitoring systems, they are able to learn about the causes that matter most to their employees, connect these people to relevant organisations, track the time that they spend volunteering, and mark these points against other critical metrics, such as staff turnover and revenue.

In just 10 months after signing on a global financial services client in early 2017, software social enterprise Benevity was able to prove that employee volunteering had increased from 18,000 hours to 35,000 hours. More people were volunteering in more locations around the world, and the result of this was filtering into other aspects of the business, too. With this data on hand, the company was able to make decisions that made sound business sense and also had a strong social impact.

Access to detailed data is teaching corporates that employee volunteering does not only fall under their CSI departments, but under human resources, strategy and finance, too. Employees who feel that their personal interests are supported are more likely to remain with a company, and to foster loyalty outside of the company by promoting the volunteer-based work it undertakes. Of course, these efforts also nurture a certain type of internal culture, drawing socially and ethically aware employees and clients.

Adopting a skills-based approach

As technology improves, businesses are able to fine-tune their employee volunteering practices even further. Through digital integration, employees can now connect with NGOs who not only need their time but also their specific skills. This means that web developers and copywriters can give grassroots organisations a digital presence, and numbers gurus can offer financial advice to organisations that simply don't have these skills on hand – let alone on a volunteer basis. Technology facilitates these sorts of connections in ways that are long lasting and authentic.

A word on authenticity

Fundamental to the future of employee volunteering is an outright avoidance of greenwashing. Employees, shareholders, recipient NPOs and the media can no longer abide CSI for CSI's sake. They see through the box-ticking exercises and reject the lack of engagement and commitment to which these initiatives point. Civil society has also come to expect corporates to take action on solving social issues that governments the world over have failed to adequately address.

CSI endeavours therefore have to incorporate the needs of local community organisations, and the skills and interests of employees. And in order for this process to be truly authentic, these efforts have to filter from the top, from corporates' most senior leadership. Executives who fail to see the value of this approach will be left behind – and their businesses, too. It's also likely that businesses that ignore this route will lose valuable talent: younger employees are actively choosing to work for purpose-driven organisations, and expect their employers to help them take action on social issues.

In South Africa, where the need for people to give back to their communities is so abundant, employee volunteer programmes are a corporate necessity. But in order to have a tangible impact, they have to be both real and seamlessly integrated. While technology is driving developments in the employee volunteering space, these advances don't necessarily need to be at the cutting-edge of what the fourth industrial revolution is producing. Some of the most effective technological innovations that can be used in employee volunteer programmes already exist. It's all about using what we already have at our disposal to communicate and connect and drive change.

As technology evolves, the employee volunteering trinity of businesses, employees and NGOs start to serve each other in increasingly meaningful ways. And as they do, they are driving the fourth industrial revolution – and humanity – forward.

Venter will be speaking at the 2019 edition of the Beyond Painting Classrooms conference. To find out more about the conference, set for 11 and 12 September at The Wanderers, Illovo, click [here](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Venter is the director of business development for Europe, Asia Pacific and Africa at Benevity. Venter will be speaking at FirstRand's Beyond Painting Classrooms conference.