

BIN THERE, DONE THAT.

There are more than 6,600 nonprofits in the Chicago-land area doing great work to combat a variety of social problems, from homelessness to poverty to literacy. Most run their own collection drives and then distribute goods to their beneficiaries. While that model has its benefits, it can also create significant duplication of effort for philanthropic organizations and an inundation of donation requests for the business community.

Geeta Singh, a 1989 ILLINOIS finance graduate, believes there's another business model that has merit in the nonprofit environment, and as executive director of Bin Donated, she's working to put that aggregator model to work.

"For nonprofits, the process of conducting drives and collecting for their wish lists is resource-exhaustive," explains Singh. "Our collaborative model streamlines the entire collect and distribute process, which maximizes efficiency. It also helps reduce costs for nonprofits, and for our partners it adds another dimension of corporate social responsibility."

HOW IT'S DONE

Bin Donated partners with Chicago hotels, businesses, residential and commercial buildings, and foundations to collect and distribute in-kind donations for local nonprofits. For hotels, the donations are remnant toiletries; for dentists, it could be new toothbrushes and toothpaste samples; for corporate partners, it could be books, school supplies, toys, winter coats, or other needed items.

Here's how it works. Big, blue Bin Donated bins are placed in the business where items can be easily collected. That could be anywhere from the housekeeping area of a hotel to a corporate break room to the lobby of a bank. When the bins are full, the Bin Donated truck—yes, there's only one—and its part-time driver pick up the donations and deliver them to other nonprofits across the city that then distribute them as needed. It may sound simple, but logistics is one of the biggest challenges for the nonprofit and the corporate partners. The Bin Donated model makes it easy.

WHY IT WORKS

"Even though we're a very young organization, we've been able to make a sizeable impact. In just under 3 years, our 150 nonprofit partners have received more than 120,000 pounds of in-kind donations worth more than \$1.25 million," says Singh.

And there is no cost to the charities, as corporate partners help fund both the costs of collection and distribution. That frees up other monies for the organizations to carry out their social mission so more people are served.

It works for businesses, too, because they have one partner that organizes all the pieces of the collection and distribution, which makes it an easy, efficient, and effective way for the business and its employees to give back to the community.

And then there's the environmental benefit. Thousands of pounds of essential goods are diverted from landfills and get reused by people who need them. That's a triple-bottom-line winner.

WHAT IT MEANS

For the past two decades, Singh's career has included work in international corporate finance, global mergers and acquisitions, strategic business development for startups, and even running a casino hotel. So why make this move to the nonprofit field?

"This is an opportunity to utilize my extensive corporate and professional skills and help put form and structure around an unstructured marketplace," she says. "I could see that with Bin Donated it was possible to move the needle in a very quick and meaningful way that was also extremely innovative. Nobody else in the country is addressing the need that Bin Donated fills in the manner we do. Our model is to create a systematic, scalable solution that has wide-ranging benefits for business, for charitable organizations, and for the at-risk communities." ●

Cathy Lockman

WHO
Geeta Singh, executive director of Bin Donated

WHAT
A new business model for nonprofits

WHERE
Bin Donated of Chicago

WHEN
Founded 2009

WHY
To reduce costs for charitable organizations and help sustain the environment

