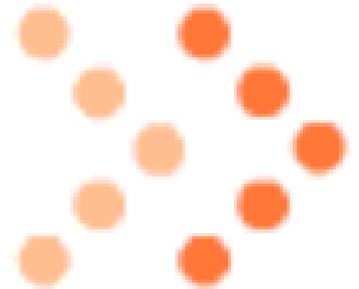


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The Siebel Foundation: strategic focus achieves groundbreaking results

Success Stories » The Siebel Foundation: strategic focus achieves groundbreaking results



When Woodside-based software developer Tom Siebel and his wife Stacey established the Thomas and Stacey Siebel Foundation philanthropic organizations do: *they chose not to accept grant proposals.*

"I find the traditional means of running a foundation to be a little curious," says Tom, who was named one of BusinessWeek's 'Top 100' in 2007 and 2008. "To have people poring over grant requests, studying them, vetting them, analyzing them, and then at the end of the day finding out that they could be having a larger impact if they chose certain areas and just tried to focus on them."

Investing primarily in projects it creates and operates, the Siebel Foundation's strategic philanthropy focuses on community-based, underprivileged, methamphetamine prevention as well as creative educational, research and alternative energy initiatives.

"We try to do things that will have significant impact," explains Tom. "I have the opportunity to work with some very talented people where the consequences of failure are actually very low, and the consequences of success are almost unbelievable."

The Meth Project: small risk, large impact

Unbelievable success is exactly what the Siebel Foundation has achieved since launching The Meth Project in Montana in 2005. A decade later, the Siebels were alarmed to discover that the state had the 5th-highest methamphetamine use in the U.S.

The Foundation set out to create a revolutionary program that would drastically decrease Meth use. *The strategy?* Public service advertising.

"At the time, methamphetamine addiction and its consequences were the number one cause of drug-related crime in America, a deadly problem in states like Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Arizona, New Mexico, Missouri, Illinois, Colorado and Georgia," explains Siebel. "The overall cost of methamphetamine use in the United States on an annual basis is probably about \$30 billion."

Using the American Cancer Society's renowned research-based marketing campaign against cigarette smoking as a model, Tom's target audience of 12- to 17-year-olds never to try the drug.

Four waves of award-winning TV, print and billboard spots with the slogans 'Not Even Once' and featured the statement: "This is a harrowing portrayal of addiction: kids attacking their parents, a young girl selling her sister's body for drugs, and terrifying scenes of drug use."

"It's loud, it's graphic, it's kind of edgy," says Tom. "The messages are getting through. The ads have won a stack of industry awards."

In April 2008, the Montana Attorney General's office reported that teen Meth use had dropped nearly 45% since The Meth Project started. Montana dropped from #5 in the country for Meth use to #39.

"We were able to get an organization started that is having a very, very substantial impact upon reducing methamphetamine use in Montana, Arizona, Idaho, Illinois and Wyoming," adds Tom of the Meth Project's model being replicated across the country.

"Our goals for these projects are very aggressive. When we go into a state with the Meth Project, we're trying to cut methamphetamine use in half. Siebel Foundation funds also attracted enough other private donors and state government grants to cover the operating budgets."

Parallel goals: nurture scholars and create a "brain trust" for the Foundation

Another highly strategic initiative that Tom is particularly proud of is the Siebel Scholars program, created by the Foundation in 2006 to support exceptional computer science and business graduate students at 10 leading universities, each of which received a \$2.6 million endowment program in perpetuity.

"The Siebel Scholars serve as a brain trust for the Siebel Foundation," adds Siebel. "Much of what we do in terms of strategic philanthropy is done by the Siebel Scholars. The Meth Project came out of conferences we had on the criminal justice system and on methamphetamine use."

Chosen for their academic excellence and leadership qualities, each Scholar receives a \$25,000 award for their final year of gradu

Siebel notes that the annual Siebel Scholars conference, where current and alumni Siebel Scholars get together with some of the debate global issues, is not only a vital part of the program; it's also a creative way to develop future Siebel Foundation projects.

"The Siebel Scholars program is an unbelievably exciting program," enthuses Tom.

Another innovative idea that came out of a Siebel Scholars conference grew into one of the Foundation's most promising new ve \$20 million prize challenge launching in the Spring of 2009. Teams are required to design a house that achieves net zero non-rer cost as a conventionally built home.

"The objective is to see if we can use this prize money to facilitate a great deal of innovation around the world focused at drama housing," explains Tom.

A focus ... on strategy

The key for small foundations with big goals, Tom suggests, is to limit your scope (and increase your likelihood of impact) by fin significant difference.

"Find something that fits the scale of operation of the respective foundation, and choose a project or create a project that is goir community," emphasizes Tom.

"The community might be the school, it might be the town, it might be the county, or the state, or the country or it might be the opportunity is to make a difference, to change something for the better, and to know that you changed it. That's where the satis

Wendy Helfenbaum is a writer and television producer in Montreal.