



Field of Honor

Creation of the Flight 93 Memorial aided by Software as a Service.

By Alison Lake

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Although New York's twin towers are a ubiquitous symbol for the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Flight 93's crash into a rural field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania that same day is an equally meaningful image for Americans. That tragic event prompted the surrounding community, along with families of victims and people around the world, to rally for a way to commemorate the event.

A California firefighter wrote, "A common field one day. A field of honor forever," on a memorial quilt sent to National Park Service. This quote became a unifying sentiment behind the memorial's creation, said Jeff Reinbold, NPS planner and project manager of the memorial.

From the start it was evident that many voices would join in to participate in the process. The following groups partnered to create a memorial of Flight 93:

- * The Flight 93 Advisory Commission: 15 members, including families, local residents and officials, national figures, and the Director of the NPS.
- * The Flight 93 Memorial Task Force: About 90 members including family, community members, first responders, educators, and other local, regional, and national stakeholders.
- * Families of Flight 93: A private non-profit 501(C) 3 organization.
- * The National Park Service: Oversees the planning and design of the memorial and administers it as a unit of the national park system. The temporary memorial is currently open.

Rather than unilaterally choose a memorial design, these stakeholders opened up a design competition to anyone with a desire to contribute. In order to orchestrate and run such a transparent and open competition in a narrow window of time, Reinbold turned to technology. NPS used Neighborhood America's Public Communications System, an enterprise social network, to manage the memorial's design process.

This web-based, software-as-a-service (SaaS) solution, helped NPS manage public involvement in the competition for the winning design of the memorial. "One of the technology's biggest benefits was being able to involve families and the public in a meaningful way, and to create a dialogue about 9-11," said Reinbold. "The web-based technology allowed us to begin this conversation with the public and determine how to best commemorate the passengers and crew of Flight 93."

This participatory process helped in the design competition but also encouraged the inclusion of thoughts and emotions on 9-11 from around the world, according to Anne Hoffman, director of customer strategies at Neighborhood America. "We had to solve the problem of geography and make something meaningful that 50 years ahead would mean something." With such a sensitive and painful topic, the communication and comment software allowed public discussion "and allowed them time to get used to the idea of a memorial."

"Our biggest challenge was our determination to do it through a partnership, including 400 relatives around the country and overseas, and also invite the public to participate," said Kim Patrick Kobza, president and CEO of Neighborhood America.

Neighborhood America's SaaS collected and published documents, PowerPoint files and images from each submission, allowing for both judging by the various design committees and also for comment from the public, according to Kobza. "It was an emotional process and had to be inclusive and create a sense of ownership. The victim's families were involved and encouraged to comment on the submissions," he said.

Some 1,000 contestants paid \$25 to enter the competition, and entries came from around the world and from individuals, firms and student engineers, among others. Finalists in the open design competition submitted entries consisting of text, videos and images, along with a more specific prototype, which were uploaded to the public involvement web site for evaluation and comment.

NPS then displayed all entries online and physically in a warehouse near the crash site for people traveling through. Families could log in and view design feedback and a final report. "We wanted to hear what people were saying from around the globe," said Hoffman. Kobza compared the commentary system to a town meeting where citizens take turns at the microphone and voice their opinions.

The software application operates with two basic parts. Its back-end web-based software service capability integrates tools such as GIS, content management and project management for working teams and support of a public involvement site. Its capture mechanism -- key to the goal of creating ownership in the memorial project -- moderates and collects public content.

Designs were collected electronically and went straight to the back-end communications manager. Although the final decisions were left to the voting committees, public preferences were given high priority at every stage. "Considerations from other designs even showed up in the final plans," said Hoffman.

The winning design, "Crescent of Embrace," is still under construction and will feature a crescent of maple trees and a single wind chime for each victim of the crash.

www.flight93memorialproject.org/
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