

A Silver Lining In Every Cloud:

Applying Time, Talent & Tech for Business & Social Good

Making homemade blankets for those in need and delivering high-impact business technology solutions are worlds apart at first blush. At Appirio, a global mid-size Cloud Technology solutions company, they are one in the same, shaping how Appirio does business and serves the communities in which their employees and customers live and work.

“*Doing good to do good*” is the way Appirio looks at their business model and approach. As a growing company with 600+ employees, Appirio uses their employee time, talent, and company’s technology know-how to make a difference in the communities they serve. The leadership team sees community engagement, partnerships, and volunteering as the connective tissue that shapes their culture and brings together their employees, customers, and partners to create business success and community impact success. And, while it feels good to contribute, it is an effective tool to help the organization recruit and retain top talent in a competitive market, differentiate their brand and company, and open doors to meet other people who shape business opportunities.

Silver Lining Turns to Gold

The backbone of this corporate responsibility effort is an initiative called “Silver Lining.” Kicked off just 3 short years ago, Appirio’s Silver Lining Program was created to mobilize its employees to make a measurable impact on the communities in which they work and live. Inspired in part by community benefit programs



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created by technology partners like Salesforce.com and Google, the Silver Lining program was launched in 2010 through the passion of Appirio employees who have made giving back part of their personal and professional lives. The program’s keeper of the flame is Kim Arden, Appirio’s Community Engagement Manager (see sidebar).

Business alignment is one of the keys to success of any Corporate Responsibility and Employee Engagement program. “Cloud Technology, by its very nature, provides access to people, resources, and information that is both affordable and scalable,” said Narinder Singh, chief strategy officer, Appirio. “While it is not critical that Cloud Technology be at the center of all our community initiatives, it provides a powerful inflection point with the everyday heroes at organizations we work with, including JDRE, Architecture for Humanity, and UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital. At Appirio, we understand that we have to live up to the responsibility of our good fortune and take small steps that hold ourselves and the organizations we work for accountable to do more to help.”

APPIRIO CORPORATE PROFILE



Founded: 2006
Number of employees: 600
Customers: Over 400 enterprises
Primary Business: Cloud Technology
Company website: appirio.com
Nonprofit partners include:
Can Do Canines, Project Linus
Social Responsibility Program: Silver Lining

Silver Lining has 3 core focus areas for the Appirio team.

Pro-bono professional services.

Appirio deploys talent and technology to help select nonprofits adopt and use Cloud Technologies, accelerating impact. For example, Appirio organized a program called “Extreme Cloud Makeover,” a high-impact, fun initiative. During one of their major partner’s Conference, the team solicited ideas from Nonprofits in need. Twenty-five nonprofits applied, creatively using both written and video entries. Employees voted and chose the nonprofit organization Appirio should work with – “Can Do Canines.” This organization trains service dogs and matches up dogs with people with specific special-care needs. Appirio’s employee and technology volunteering effort allowed Can Do Canines to move from antiquated technology to advanced systems, enabling the organization to provide a new level of capabilities in matching canines with people in need.

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Company sponsored group volunteer activities.

This social impact effort is focused on company-sponsored regional activities where employees get together to focus on a specific community cause in need. This effort can run the gamut from technical pro bono projects using their resources and skills to simply rallying employees to assist groups in need – big and small. For

example, the local San Francisco employees partnered with customer NetApp to assist a local environmental nonprofit in putting on a large community and educational outreach event in the form of a Halloween celebration. In addition, a group of 50+ employees, “mo bros and mo sistas,” raised \$10,000 as part of the “Movember” no shave effort to fight prostate cancer. On a larger scale, Appirio holds an annual global community service day, creating community engagement that spans a couple of continents impacting groups across Ireland, Singapore, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. This effort serves 82 nonprofits and 300+ employees in a variety of ways, from individual volunteer activities to technical projects for in-need nonprofits.

Volunteer Paid time off

Appirio employees can pursue their own personal volunteer activities – things that move and motivate them. Each team member receives 8 hours of paid time off annually to commit to a social cause of his or her choice. This is affectionately called “VTO,” or volunteer time off, and the efforts vary greatly with each individual’s passions.

Jump Starting a Community Engagement Program

For many companies, getting started can be the hardest part of any community partnership program. Appirio started small at just the 100 employee mark, picking a few key areas and working with employees to understand their ideas and get them involved. In the beginning it felt like a bunch of events strung together, not a program. As they grew, Appirio figured out how to

ANATOMY OF A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MANAGER



Kim Arden is Community Engagement Manager at Appirio. She has been in this role for about 2 years and has been the champion of Appirio’s Silver Lining Program.

As chief cheerleader, educator, and evangelizer, her role is to organize the program and make sure employees, executives, and participants understand and utilize the program to create impact in the communities in which Appirio and its employees work and live.

She is also very aware that community engagement and partnership efforts are always balanced with the needs of the business. That business savvy and social passion comes naturally because Kim started her career in finance business, before transitioning to an important role – as a stay at home parent. As she reentered the workforce, Kim wanted to bring her business and social passions together. So she started volunteering in the community – through PTA/school and her church to name a few – and tried to think outside herself. Through this process, she came across a pilot project at Appirio. She dove in and discovered an upstart company where community and social impact were part of the founders’ value system. Kim believes this is the future – the way to conduct business, build a differentiated company and brand and, most importantly, to make a real difference.



more gracefully interweave business objectives with their CSR and community involvement. At the top of the list was leading with their strengths in tech talent and resources to make a difference and strong reliance on employee participation. This also helps to have impact on an ad hoc, dynamic budget.

To help accelerate and to merge business partnerships and outcomes with community, Appirio looked at “readymade” partner and customer events where their employees, customers, and communities were already doing good things. For example, Salesforce.com does very high-profile charity and community efforts

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as part of their customer conference, Dreamforce. This approach differentiates the Appirio brand at one of the largest Conferences in the technology business and gives employees a bigger picture of its purpose while aligning with its business initiatives.

Appirio has grown rapidly, to 600 employees, and has moved from a few focused efforts to interweaving this community engagement mindset into how it does business. However, business is dynamic and conditions change often.

Lessons on Sustaining Community Programs

After 2+ years of an active Silver Lining Program, what are the keys to keeping a program going? At the core is leadership and

sustaining the passion. Leaders have to lead by example with creativity and perseverance. It is also about storytelling and constantly communicating the benefits and outcomes, sharing personal and business successes. Most important, it is about employee engagement. Today, for many employees, it is not just about salary or money. Increasingly today’s top performers define winning companies and employers of choice as those with a social conscience who recognize they are part of a larger, global community.

Measurement can be tricky. Most of Appirio’s metrics are qualitative and focus on participation, employee retention, and direct employee and nonprofit customer feedback. In an Appirio employee survey conducted this past summer, 96% of employees said community and social involvement was very important to them, and 82% reported that the program helped them get to know their colleagues and create a better team. This is especially critical for a team that works virtually across the globe on customer projects, often spanning multiple continents.

From Blankets to Business

The Appirio Silver Lining Program can be summed up best by remembering the tie between blankets and business. To underline the meaning of community engagement, Appirio has an employee whose wife started a national nonprofit called “Project Linus.”. This special charity makes homemade blankets and provides them to kids in need (from those in the hospital to those who are homeless). Appirio employees participate as part of the new employee onboarding process by literally making the blankets while working together in groups. They feel the impact, they get to know their colleagues, and they start off with teamwork as the best way to work at Appirio. That’s Business4Better!

ABOUT BUSINESS4BETTER



Business4Better’s (B4B) mission is to create successful business and nonprofit partnerships that directly impact communities and expand the meaning of being a better business. B4B brings together business, nonprofits, and CSR thought-leaders to thrive, share, inspire, educate and form partnerships that prove Business4Better is truly better for us all.

business4better.org



In Partnership with:
Nonprofit Partners



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