

Service in the age of YouTube

KarmaTube, an online project, curates positive video stories that stir the human spirit

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SYED Muzamil Hasan Zaidi did not throw a party on his 22nd birthday. He committed 22 random acts of kindness and captured them on video. Toshiro Kanomori, a fourth grade teacher in Tokyo effortlessly gets his students to feel empathy for each other while maintaining that the main goal of his class is to learn how to be happy. Solar Demi goes around lighting dark shanty town homes in the Philippines with his ingenious method that requires nothing, but an ordinary soda bottle and water.

KarmaTube.org (KT) is where you want to be if you wish to see these and over 1,100 videos that ooze positivity. Why KT?

Mainstream media feed on a spiral of fear. Stories of crime, violence and disasters dominate because they get the ratings. Positive stories that stir the human spirit are not commercially viable. The ones on YouTube have to compete with 'Gangnam' videos of the world.

KT curates precisely those videos that have the power to move you inside. The curation process begins when anyone suggests a video. KT has dedicated video scouts too.

The editor in chief, or officially, volunteer coordinator, views the video and if found appropriate for KT, is added to a pending queue. Eight to ten reviewers, including the editor then rate each of the videos in the pending queue.

The ones that make this second filter join the approved queue. A team of writers pick videos in the approved queue to write short descriptions and three "Be The Change" items, each designed to progressively nudge the viewer toward action.

Finally, permissions to host the video are obtained before the video goes live on KT.



BEING PROACTIVE: KarmaTube is just one of nine such uniquely conceived projects of ServiceSpace that have a common philosophy. Over 40 KT volunteers represent an office-less global community. Since the beginning of KT in October 2006, it has attracted viewers from 150 countries

Three to four videos go live every week; one of them gets to be video of the week (VoW). Last week, it was *The Happiest Man in Sri Lanka*, that guaranteed to bring a smile to your face, if not make your own preoccupations seem lighter.

Not bad for three minutes of free online therapy! Despite KT's over 50,000 VoW subscribers, the channel remains assiduously ad-free, with the caveat that some of the videos pulled in from YouTube may carry ads.

Also, there is no paid staff. The editor in chief, reviewers, writers and scouts are all volunteers. Welcome to ServiceSpace, of which, KT is just one of nine such uniquely conceived projects with a common philosophy. 'Giftivism' is best explained by its founder Nipun Mehta in a TEDxBerkeley talk. Like in any creative endeavour, the three key constraints on 'giftivism' projects are

that they are 100 per cent volunteer run, all energies are directed to adding value, so no fundraising and all service acts, however small, are to be honoured. That is not to say that ServiceSpace projects do not accept donations, they are not solicited. So good luck finding how to donate to KT!

Since the beginning of KT in October 2006, it has attracted viewers from 150 countries. 85 per cent plays are from the US (66 per cent), followed by Canada (8.6 per cent), then India and the UK (3.7 per cent), and Australia (3 per cent).

Yoo-Mi Lee, KT's main volunteer coordinator, skipped the main street entirely in her career path from Wall Street to service street. Lee explained, "It was my incompatibility with the people and the lifestyles that made me realise that if I didn't get out then, while I was not making that much

money, it would be impossible for me to do it when I started to make the mythical amounts of money you see in the papers at the end of the year. I wanted to live a more wholesome life, surrounded by people doing 'good' and working to improve my community, wherever I ended up."

She ended up shuttling between Puducherry and Vancouver with her partner Mark Jacobs, another KT volunteer writer, and occasional lawyer.

Over 40 KT volunteers represent an office-less global community. Ana Miller, KT video reviewer from Portugal lives in the UK. She is a writer, researcher and a mom who is deeply involved in her daughter's school.

Vicky Lynn, KT writer, lives in the US and works to support cancer and abuse survivors. Uma Havaligi, KT technology volunteer, works for a production house in Bengaluru

that does the animation for Hollywood. Krishan Patel, KT filmmaker liaison, is a strategic management consultant in the US. Mia Tagano fuels KT's social media and Facebook efforts. She is an actor and teaches drama and dance to small children in the San Francisco bay area.

Why do highly qualified professionals enter the ServiceSpace?

Says Lee, "I do it because I decided about ten years back, to devote my life to service. Working with ServiceSpace has changed me in innumerable ways — I see the world through a different lens now — from the point of view of 'how can I be of service' in every aspect of my life. I strive to be a 'contributor', not just a 'consumer' in this world."

(The writer is a social entrepreneur and is on the faculty of IIM-Ahmedabad)

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