



# USER STORY

## The Cinergy Foundation Making an Office of One Work in Today's Economy

### FOUNDATION PROFILE

**Foundation Type:** Corporate Foundation

**System:** GIFTS-SQL Server

**Modules:** IGAM, Customizer, AP Link

These are high-tech times in which filing your taxes online, making appointments on sophisticated voicemail services, or doing your banking at 3AM with your computer as your "teller" are standard. No lines, no rushing, no inconvenience. Sometimes, however, you need the input of a real person. You might have a question that entails more than a quick, automated reply or have a project — like a grant application — that involves some collaborative problem solving. In a perfect world, there is both: quality technology and quality people.

Karol King, Manager of the Cinergy Foundation, the Cincinnati-based power company's corporate giving program, has made this very discovery, especially in the current economic and political climate that has left corporations and individuals alike wondering what is next. Everywhere staff departments are being downsized and extra fat is being cut away. As someone with graduate degrees in both theology and in the humanities, she has found that a combination of technology and human experience is the most effective way to fulfill her particular grantmaking processes.

Unlike independent foundations, corporate giving programs, like Cinergy's, are totally dependent on

the financial health of the company. Corporate philanthropy boils down to one fact: profit needs to be made before it can be given away. During the last three and a half years during which King has worked at Cinergy Foundation (before that she worked for five years for the corporation), she has seen her department go from a staff of four to a staff of one: herself.

On average, the foundation gives 1,300 grants a year, directed at arts and culture, education, and "healthy communities." As of February of this year, 2003, they had already processed 314 grants. "Our budget has decreased, so the number of grants we are able to award is going down," she said. According to King, the budget for the foundation in 2000 exceeded \$5 million and this year it has decreased to \$3.14 million. "That amount is definitely nothing to scoff at, but the budget has fallen because of these darker economic times."

The first of April found King running the foundation solo; the job of her last colleague, Betty Davis ("We both have famous names ..."), had been eliminated. King had to come up with a new strategy for her grantmaking process.

Though she had her reservations, she was steered by the corporation toward

what was thought to be a cost-saver, at least in the short-term. That cost-saver was an ASP solution— a system where a technical team is responsible for all of your software, data, backup, security, upgrades, and licensing. The theory was that without the IT staff (which was also being outsourced), this total ASP solution for grants management would fill in the gaps, taking care of the technical facets of the foundation. This in itself was thought to be another way for the foundation to cut costs.

When King and Davis [who was then still working at the foundation but as a contractor] went to get set up with the ASP, they found that the online grants management company was good but -- for their needs -- not comparable to MicroEdge, whom they'd been using at the foundation for years, long before King even came on board.

*"I wanted to stick with what I knew worked for us as well as the people I had come to genuinely like and respect," she said.*



King also pointed out that one of the main strengths of using MicroEdge is the very fact that it inherently understands both technology and grantmaking.



*"MicroEdge knows and understand the needs of the grantmaking community," she said. "That's the key difference."*

Another main stumbling block for King and Davis while using the ASP was the fact that they couldn't seamlessly export data to Word or Excel. They used Crystal Reports, but for their processes not being able to export to these programs slowed down their work.



*"I was just used to MicroEdge and GIFTS and all the great details in the software. I knew that — long-term — using a full grants management system like an ASP solution would not be the most cost-effective and the most efficient for the way we do our grants management. Especially since I would be an office of one."*

After her experience with the ASP, King decided to go back to using

MicroEdge's GIFTS software program, plus IGAM [MicroEdge's Internet Grant Application Module] in order to make things work. She knew about the product, and she knew that she could set it up and oversee it without the expertise of the IT staff. She recommended this technological move to her bosses.

King is frank about the fact that to run the foundation the way it had been with four staff members and the way she wants to keep running it, she cannot do it alone. But she does know that in this economy when departments are being dramatically downsized, she will get closer to her goals with the help of a program like IGAM. "Technology like GIFTS and IGAM supports the philanthropic culture even though corporations, like Cinergy, feel they are forced to scale back because of this sagging economy." It is important, she added, that the foundation look ahead and try to think about where it wants to be

in the next three or four or ten years, not just in the next six months. Even if Cinergy, the Corporation, has to scale back during these tighter times, Cinergy, the Foundation, needs to keep moving forward." Looking at the big picture, especially in this economy, is crucial for effective and inspired grant giving."

The economic and political climate is clearly uncertain these days; no one is sure what the country's next move will be, or their own for that matter. But as King has discovered, all you can do is push ahead and make the wisest choices to reach your goals. For her, in her now office of one, that translates into choosing top-notch technology and coupling that with "the human side, the brains and hearts that do the philosophical thinking which in turn make grantmaking so important and essential for our society."