Proposed Business Plan for ATHEN

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Background

In 2002, seeing a need for resources and a formal community to exchange information about electronic, IT and curriculum accessibility in the college and university setting, a group of individuals who worked in this area created ATHEN.[1] Its purpose and goals as listed in its official bylaws are as follows:

ATHEN shall be an international nonprofit organization based in the United States. ATHEN's goals include the following:

- ***Collect, disseminate, and advocate best practices in access technology (AT) in higher education. Access technology is defined as any assistive technology, accessible information technology, or alternate media that can be used to facilitate the success of individuals with disabilities. Higher education is defined as post-K-12, post-secondary, further education, college, university, or equivalent.***
- ***Establish a professional identity for those who practice AT in higher education.***
- ***Present a collective voice for the professional practice of AT in higher education.***

Initial Activities

The initial activities of ATHEN included creating an organizational structure, including the election of officers, the creation of formal bylaws, and registering as a formal non-profit in state of Indiana[2]. Initial resource development included creating a listserv, an e-journal and a web site.

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[1] Access Technology Higher Education Network

[2] We understand that there has been some discussion of registering ATHEN as a 501c3. It is the understanding of this committee that this has not been undertaken. ATHEN might consider partnering with universities and other 501c3 organizations in order to apply for federal grants.

Accomplishments to Date

Since its inception, ATHEN's accomplishments have been significant. Over the past 11 years, ATHEN members have worked diligently to create a voice for accessibility at EDUCAUSE, have formed collaborations to influence accessibility of IT products and services being considered for implementation as campus-wide solutions throughout the country, provided workshops and tutorials, presented at local and national professional conferences, partnered with Accessing Higher Ground (AHG) for a yearly conference, written blogs on Assistive Technology and Accessibility, developed guidelines and best practices and have participated in the establishment of standards and maintained a very active listserv. In other words, ATHEN has become a recognized resource for accessibility in higher education and the expertise of its members is often called upon by both service providers and vendors.

Need for Change/ Limitations of Current Model

While ATHEN has accomplished much with limited resources, including increased influence with technology developers and vendors; the establishment of a forum and community to share expertise and knowledge, the current operating model of ATHEN has limitations.

In particular, and perhaps most importantly, the "volunteer" model of ATHEN has limited the organization's ability to address and complete a number of goals and projects. For example, without any paid staff, journal contributions, updates to the website, membership recruitment, administrative tasks and all related activities are reliant on members finding the free time to work on these uncompensated activities. Since almost all members who do non-paid work for ATHEN have other jobs, which are their priority, ATHEN activities are consistently delayed. ATHEN needs to develop a model where there is at least some paid staff.

While ATHEN management should continue to be member initiated and driven, it now needs paid professional staffing or consultants to update and maintain the web presence and membership information, including outreach and membership recruitment through the use of social media and other tools, editing and publishing the e-journal, facilitating training and other administrative activities.

To accomplish these suggested changes, a new fee structure needs to be implemented accompanied by more value-added ATHEN benefits and services to members. The proposed plan that follows lays out the process for this model.

Proposed Steps for Achieving Change

Step 1

Add the following to the bylaws:

- New bullet item (after item 1) to Article II--Purpose
    - Facilitate, educate, advocate and collaborate with other entities for accessibility and usability of devices, software applications, tools, learning environments and resources used in higher education
- Add new membership classifications to Article III—Membership
    - Vendor— Vendor members shall consist of companies that support AT in Higher Education and have a documented commitment to accessibility

Step 2

Acquire the financial resources, estimated at $5,000 to $7,500 to conduct activities listed in Step 3 & 4. The specific strategies for acquiring these resources are outlined below.

Step 3

Enhance and build upon the existing ATHEN website and information resources. Establish the web-site as a recognized resource for current information, with links to tools, techniques, tutorials, blogs, collaborations, presentations and other member activities; space for publishing e-journals and a place for transactions, event calendars, etc.

The following are at least a subset of suggested changes and resources to add to the ATHEN website[3]

> a. More informative & timely home page; including events calendar, teaser leads to e-journal and blogs etc.; Options to follow on social media & mobile – twitter, rss, podcasts, etc.
> b. Committee information including chair with contact information
> c. Ongoing Blog/ RSS feed – on interesting new resources, links to articles, developments
> d. Membership area, privileges, registering, pay, look-up etc.
> e. "About us" section with ATHEN mission, perhaps a picture
> f. Legal issues - where are we at?
> g. How-to articles
> h. e-journal articles
> i. Training/Resources page – links to non-ATHEN videos, websites, training materials around the web, teasers to resources in membership area – i.e. clips of videos
>> i. ATHEN videos
>> ii. AHG videos
>> iii. Membership list
> j. Public Information on product evaluations
> k. Product Evaluation in progress:
>> i. Product evaluations (point to UIL site)
>> ii. Evaluation wikis

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[3] This list was compiled as an attempt to provide a number of ideas that could be added to the ATHEN website. It will be up to the executive committee with input from members to prioritize this list and decide which activities are to be taken on.

Step 4
Enhance and build upon existing membership-related and networking activities:

- Publicize ATHEN and its activities with all relevant communities, creating partnerships with other organizations for information, training etc. Push the listserv and web presence at every opportunity
- Proactively build the community and increase membership through social media, networking and other tools
- Training: Provide topic specific and high-end training using webinars, videos, tutorial etc. This is not to duplicate other training provided by other but short, topic specific information on many technical subjects that is not available anywhere. For example, how to use screen reader /voice recognition and Blackboard. Often this information is discussed on the listserv, which by its nature is short-lived. Leverage members' knowledge and skills to provide this training.
- Collaborate with software and device vendors to ensure accessibility/ usability of their products
- Actively engage AT vendors to ensure good integration with emerging technologies
- Accessibility / usability product evaluations

Step 5
Continue to develop ATHEN resources through the use of paid staff. Maintain a funding stream to support these activities.

Strategies for Step 2: Acquire funding of $5,000 to $7,500
1. It is recommended that we seek funding from corporate sponsors
2. However, to avoid the possibility of a long delay while ATHEN seeks corporate funding, it is recommended ATHEN also obtain the necessary funding through a rise in membership fee structure.[4] The new recommended fee structure is as follows:

Suggested Fund Raising & Revenue Generating Changes & Activities

Types of Memberships*

Types of Memberships	Current	Proposed
Individual (Professional)	$50	$100
Institutional (High Ed)	$100	$200
Vendor	$50	$ 200
Associates/Partners (WebAIM, EASI etc.)	$ 50	$ 150
Student	$ 25	$ 25
Honorary	N/A	N/A

*Open to all (i.e. non-members): Public Listserv, teaser of e-journal articles, events calendar, blogs, wikis and public information on product evaluations, information and registration on ATHEN/partner workshops

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[4] If corporate funding is obtained, the additional revenue gathered through the higher fee structures can be used for other or future activities.

Time Frame for implementing new fee structure:

The new fee structure would start at the established renewal date: the December 1, 2013.

New Membership Privileges

- Access to all members
  - Membership listing/ Searchable membership database
  - Ability to create and edit membership profile
  - Private Listserv
  - Private forums for topic discussion/ collaboration
  - Topic specific tutorials, help files, videos etc. created by members
  - Discounts for AHG conference and other negotiated webinars fees
  - Recorded webinars and presentation
  - Quarterly meetings (online)
  - Regular E-journal
  - Member-lead webinars
  - Detailed product evaluation database
  - Individual member can initiate and/or call for collaborations for product/ service evaluations
  - Listing of sponsors & affiliates on our materials at ATHEN Booths (EDUCAUSE, CSUN, AHEAD, etc.) & other outreach (i.e. ATHEN web site)
  - Ability to post to wikis and comments on blogs
- Vendor (must have a documented commitment to accessibility of their product and agree to not send emails to membership list without approval)
- Member
  - Logo placement on open pages
- Partner/ Associate:
  - Posting information for webinars including within events calendar
  - Provide discounts to members for registration

Ongoing Outlays

- Website update and maintenance
- AHG sponsorship
- EDUCAUSE booth
- Conference booth (CSUN, AHEAD, etc.)
- editing e-journal
- administrative tasks

Proposed Timeline

Date	Action	Key Players	Comments
Winter 2013	Implement new fee structure	ATHEN Executive Committee	
Spring 2014	Decide upon specific tasks of hired staff – activities derived from business plan	ATHEN Executive Committee with membership input	
Spring 2014	Hire staff/consultant	ATHEN Executive Committee	
Spring 2014/Summer 2014	Staff/consultant implements changes to website and conducts other activities specified by Executive Committee	Staff/consultant with ATHEN Executive Committee oversight	
Summer 2014	New version of website is posted and feedback is provided by members	Staff/consultant with ATHEN Executive Committee oversight	
Summer 2014 & ongoing	New membership recruitment emphasizing new resources of website	Staff/consultant with ATHEN Executive Committee oversight	