



Left: Mother Jean Cornneck with some of the youngest children at Mother of Peace orphanage in Zimbabwe, Middle and Right: NaNoshka Johnson

## EventRegistration.com Founder Gives Back as Her Business Grows

BY HARRIET DIAMOND

NaNoshka Johnson embodies many of the concepts inherent in a strong team leader. She built a dynamic in-house team to drive her vision and deliver an outstanding service and related products. She kept her eye on the winds of change and leaned into them to energize her growing business. She expanded her team to include external experts to round out service/product delivery. Finally, she recognized her role as part of her community and developed a way to reinforce that team through extraordinary community service that is integrally tied to her businesses success, soaring in tandem.

### THE WOMAN

Founder and CEO of EventRegistration.com, a Web-based registration, ticketing and merchandising solution for meetings and events, NaNoshka Johnson has been an entrepreneur for almost 15 years. Her projects include supporting the Space Station Freedom Program, the California Code of Regulations, and projects for Ford Aerospace/Space Systems Loral, Sun Microsystems, World Cup Soccer, NIKE,

and Grants for the Arts.

A frequent speaker on issues affecting today's businesses, she was appointed technology chair for San Francisco's Small Business Forum by former Mayor Willie Brown and serves on Mayor Gavin Newsom's task force to develop guidelines for San Francisco's free Wi-Fi network.

Johnson, who has a son—Miles, age 7—takes parenting seriously, too. She is on the Miraloma School Site Council, charged with ensuring continuity between the regular school curriculum and after-school activities.

Beyond her business and volunteer obligations, this dynamic entrepreneur teaches Web design and Internet strategy at the University of California at Santa Cruz and developed and taught an Internet strategy course at San Jose State and Golden Gate universities.

Separating Johnson's philanthropic fiber from her entrepreneurial venture is a bit like untangling two chains that have been winding around each other for a long time. Giving back, she explains, is "the fabric of who I come from, what I've been taught, who I am. I initially tried to differentiate the personal from the work. But, I wanted to know that I was making a differ-

ence every day, connecting to our broader community."

To give you the perspective from which you can appreciate the magnitude of NaNoshka Johnson's dedication to her community, I will first introduce you to her business and its background.

### THE BUSINESS

Many people dive into waves or run from them, others learn to successfully ride them. Johnson caught the wave of opportunity and developed a business niche that had not been fully recognized by those who needed it most.

As the owner of a tech company, she was speaking to meeting planners about the future of technology and its application to their field. During the Q & A portion of her talk, a discussion evolved around the challenge of event registration.

Johnson asked, "If you could register attendees online, how would that help you? If you had these resources at your disposal, then what changes would occur? To what end?"

The buzz in the room was palpable, and she recognized the opportunity. She enlisted the experts, the conference planners, to help her help them. She knew that the

road to change was not going to be a smooth one. In fact, at the time, only 48 percent of the industry was e-mail savvy. Johnson spent the first 18 months on outreach, setting the groundwork by educating industry practitioners about the benefits of Web-based solutions.

Johnson has faced uphill battles at times getting meeting planners and others to recognize the value of integrated solutions to their event problems and crises, or even just an imperceptible lack of efficiency. But, she has persevered, knowing that the services she offers are valuable.

“My goal was always to ensure that people walked away from my seminars knowing how a technological solution could simplify their jobs and improve their delivery of successful events,” she explains.

Today, EventRegistration.com provides registration, ticketing and merchandising solutions for people who plan, coordinate and promote meetings and events. Johnson describes her company as an end-to-end solution, promising to guarantee an organization’s event successes year after year. The firm’s comprehensive service menu includes a multi-lingual call center, staffing, badging and credentialing, secure payment processing, complete mail house fulfillment, and translation services. In addition to its extensive list of services, EventRegistration.com also offers an array of products, including customized online registration forms, a dynamic reporting module, an e-marketing and merchandising tool, a silent auction capability, and lead retrieval and attendance tracking.

Not wanting to be pigeonholed as serving only one audience, Johnson has focused on the product, which is applicable to a broad spectrum of clients. As a result, her company’s services are used for events such as corporate meetings, association annual events, tradeshow, conferences and seminars, parties, galas, formal dinners, film and art festivals and premieres, sporting events, and weddings.

The EventRegistration.com team is a global one, and Johnson views her virtual team as a work in progress. Developing team spirit via computers and telephones is more challenging than working face-to-face. Yet, she is proud of the fact that she has built a highly successful enterprise that relies heavily on technology and long-distance relationships to get the job done.

## THE SOUL

As Johnson’s business brought her to conference venues, often in large cities, she began to see the pervasiveness of homelessness, and the disconnect between her environment in any given city and the plight of those on the streets was staggering. Her own city, San Francisco, was not exempt, either. As an active participant in San Francisco’s tourism industry, Johnson became acutely aware of the need for additional resources and solutions.

In 2005, she asked herself, “Why wait until I’ve completed my professional life before following my nonprofit, humanistic passion?”

In merging her ideas of work with her drive to give back to her community, Johnson created the concept of “Web-Based Event Registration Made Easy” meets “The Gift of Giving.” Whether participating in, or planning, an event, Johnson encourages businesses and individuals to use the EventRegistration.com Web site, which is dedicated to *Eradicating Homelessness: One Person...One Purchase...One Event...at a Time*. A “do-er” by nature, Johnson does not see money alone as the answer to any social problem.

“It’s really about matching funds with great ideas,” she says. “Many nonprofits do great work. We want to help them leverage what they’re doing.”

EventRegistration.com’s goal is three-fold: 1) connect the conference and tourism community with the homeless; 2) collect innovative ideas, in addition to monetary gifts, to support solutions; and 3) bring a new voice and a new solution-based strategy to an age-old problem.

EventRegistration.com’s Web site builds on the words of Walt Disney: “You can dream, create, design, and build the most wonderful idea in the world, but it requires people to make the dream a reality.” As the site pronounces, the people of EventRegistration.com have a simple dream: “The Eradication of Homelessness. We are passionate that everyone should have a place to call home. We are asking you to join our journey. Help us make homes a reality for all humanity.” To that end, the company suggests three paths to helping:

1. Use EventRegistration.com for an event. A percentage of profits from each event funds innovative homeless initiatives.

2. Donate proceeds from your event directly to the EventRegistration.com fund that targets and supports innovative homeless initiatives.

3. Become an “Awards Sponsor” and help acknowledge “solutioneers, the people behind the innovative ideas and programs that help eradicate homelessness.”

One of the biggest barriers to locating and regularly assisting the homeless is just that: These individuals are homeless; they have no addresses, no phone numbers. In a country riddled with systems, they are in none, and Johnson and her company are working to eradicate the invisibility of this growing population segment. She cautions that not every model works in every city, and she urges a focus on the human factor.

EventRegistration.com solicits creative solutions, pieces of solutions, and sparks to ignite larger solutions and provides a vehicle for business leaders who may have wanted to reach out to the homeless community but didn’t know how.

“How we look at people leads to how we treat them...Good people with good ideas are tackling this problem every day,” Johnson says. “I’m eager to join the dialogue and to work toward finding breakthrough solutions.”

Her focus on the human factor has also led her company to other works, such as donating materials and funds to the displaced through organizations like the San Francisco-based City of Refuge United Church of Christ’s Ark of Refuge ([www.arkofrefuge.org](http://www.arkofrefuge.org)) and Yvette A. Flunder Foundation ([www.sfrefuge.org/flunderfoundation.shtml](http://www.sfrefuge.org/flunderfoundation.shtml)) and contributing funds to the Mother of Peace Orphanage (<http://mopzimbabwe.org>) to help house and care for parentless children in Zimbabwe.

For NaNoshka Johnson, the personal and the work are intertwined, and she and her company are, indeed, making a difference every day.

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