

BBM solves lake pollution problem

The Residents and Ratepayers Association of Homestead Park in Johannesburg harnessed the power of BlackBerry Messenger (BBM) in its successful fight against the pollution of a man-made lake in the suburb.

When the lake in the suburb began giving off a foul smell, the association was asked to investigate. As a volunteer-run, non-profit organisation, they realised that the fight against pollution would need a cost-efficient and convenient way of mobilising volunteers and keeping residents informed.

Since many active members of the association and a large portion of the community's residents already used BlackBerry smartphones, secretary of the association Zaheer Khan and other members decided to use BBM as a way to communicate about the pollution problem. The association created a user group that was open to any community resident with a BlackBerry smartphone.

Case study to resolve other issues

Khan says they picked BBM because they could easily set up a private group just for its residents and they could track whether messages were read or not. "Every time there was new information that needed to be broadcast, we could do it immediately," says Khan. For example, at one point the local authorities proposed a solution to the odour problem but one of the residents knew that it had already been tried unsuccessfully in two other places.

"We were able to petition the City Council not to use that solution and to use another solution that was much more effective," says Khan. The use of BBM also attracted the attention of the popular environmental TV series 50/50. "Other communities that saw what we were doing on TV are starting to use us as a case study on how to resolve issues they may have."

In the end, pressure from the association finally led to a solution. As it turns out a smelly swamp was forming near the dam due to low oxygen levels in the water. By re-oxygenating the water, the smell went away.