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NURTURING THE WORLD OF TOMORROW

More charity chain stores for Beijing

Main challenge:
Finding strategy
that works in a
commercial way

By HUANG YING
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The network of charity supermarkets is expected to expand across Beijing, both in urban and suburban districts.

In residential communities with a supermarket, donation sites will have to be established, according to a senior official.

In the charity supermarkets and donation sites, there will be a system for processing articles that are donated by residents, said Cheng Liyan, director of the charity work office of the Beijing Civil Affairs Bureau, earlier last month on Beijing Public Service Radio.

For example, he said, old clothes collected by the donation sites will have to be cleaned, sterilized and ironed before they go on sale in the market. Clothes that cannot be recycled will be processed into other products.

Revenues gained through selling donated products at the charity supermarkets will be returned to the donation sites and used to help impoverished



Chen Zhiyan, a 22-year-old shop owner, shows an article of clothing in the Tongxinhui charity store in Dongyao village, in Chaoyang district of Beijing.

residents living in the community, Cheng said.

Currently, there are about 8,000 charity supermarkets across the country. Most of them are subsidized by local governments, said Wang

Zhenyao, dean of One Foundation Philanthropy Research Institute at Beijing Normal University.

They largely rely on government funding and haven't found appropriate commercial

strategies yet, Wang said.

However, Beijing-based Tongxinhui charity chain stores have managed to turn losses into profits.

The first shop was opened in 2006 by Migrant Workers

Home, a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving migrant workers. It has now expanded to 12 stores in Beijing, all of them located in residential communities around the Fifth and Sixth Ring Roads.



Because most of our customers are migrant workers, we chose to locate the stores closer to them."

WANG DEZHI
FOUNDER, TONGXINHUI CHARITY
CHAIN STORES

"Because most of our customers are migrant workers, we chose to locate the stores closer to them," said Wang Dezhi, one of the founders of the chain.

After losing money for the first two years, the chain began to turn the tables in 2010. Last year, it reported a profit of about 130,000 yuan in its financial report, which is released once a year on its official website.

Wang put down the store's success to a number of reasons, among them its effective management.

Not only does Tongxinhui charity chain store collect donations of a variety of articles from residents, but also from universities, enterprises and other nonprofit organizations.

Up to now, it has established ties with about 50 colleges in Beijing and about 100 enterprises, such as Cathay Life

Insurance Co's Beijing branch and Datang Telecom Technology & Industry Group.

"Volunteers in colleges help us to collect the donations and we also have set up donation boxes in companies," said Wang Dezhi. "The number of families that frequently contribute to our donation box is 3,000 and the number of our partners is on the increase year-on-year."

Charity chain store staff visit donors' homes to receive articles after being told they have something to give. The items are kept in a warehouse awaiting demand from stores.

"A store requires a delivery once a week when the business is doing quite well," said Wang.

Challenges grow with expansion because it will require more cost for management if more stores are opened. In addition, efforts should be made to improve transparency, said Wang.

"I hope we can release our financial report once a quarter or even once a month," he added.

Wang Zhenyao said that for most of the charity supermarkets sponsored by governments, the problem that needs to be solved immediately is in applying business systems. For Tongxinhui, the biggest obstacle in their expansion is that they lack the experience of running large-scale charity chain stores.

Remote Tibetan county reaches out to the world via micro blogs

By XINHUA in Lhasa

Zayu county, located in Southwest China's Tibet autonomous region, has managed to connect with tourists around the world despite its remote location through the magic of micro-blogging.

Wang Ruizhi, a local government official in the county's village of Zhala, opened an account for the village on Sina Weibo, the country's most popular micro-blogging site, in 2011. He said he has updated it every day since then, posting information about activities, weather and tourism in his village.

Ni Yong, the county's deputy Party secretary, took a cue from Wang's efforts to promote his village and worked to encourage other villages to create their own online presence. To date, 15 of the county's 96 villages have opened accounts on Sina Weibo, Ni said.

"Although roads and rail do not reach Zayu, information about the county must be spread," Ni said.

The county's rough terrain often causes transportation disruption and snow sometimes traps local residents in their homes. The villages' Weibo accounts, therefore, are particularly useful in helping the county maintain communication with the outside world, Ni said.

Village officials have been tasked with updating the Weibo accounts. The county's publicity department requires no fewer than 10 posts each month for each village account, according to Jampa Yudron, deputy head of the department.

"Weibo can help us present the work we have done, as well as share information and resources to attract investors and tourists," Yudron said.



A herdsman takes care of her yaks in Lhasa. Local government officials make use of micro-blogging to help farmers in remote areas in the Tibet autonomous region maintain communication with the outside world.

What I want to do most is to help local residents sell their agricultural products through Weibo."

WANG RUIZHI
VILLAGE OFFICIAL, ZHALA, TIBET AUTONOMOUS REGION

Zhala is a two-day drive from the Tibetan capital of Lhasa. Although the walnuts, peaches and other agricultural products harvested in Zhala could be sold for a great deal of money in the city, poor transportation infrastructure prevents local farmers from

selling their products elsewhere. "What I want to do most is to help local residents sell their agricultural products through Weibo," said Wang.

The micro blog accounts have not only allowed Zayu county to make its voice

heard, but have also allowed it to hear the voices of others. Wang recalled a Weibo user with the user name Ye Zihang Henry who contacted him in May to ask about donating clothes and food to local residents. Wang gave the user an address and received a parcel containing the donations on June 19.

"Seeing smiles on the faces of the Tibetan elders and children with food and clothes made me feel happy. I will go to Tibet again and visit Zayu if I have the chance," Ye commented on a photo posted by Wang on the village's Weibo account.

Ni said the county micro blogs allow villagers to get a glimpse of the outside world. "I can obtain information about other villages through the text and pictures they post. Other staff members can directly communicate with each other through private messages and comments," Ni said.

Wei Zejun, another official from Zayu county's publicity department, said the county's residents manage to keep up with the micro blogs through their mobile phone networks, as conventional networks have yet to reach the county.

"In fact, local residents don't know much about Weibo. We will send village officials to teach them how to use Weibo and help them to understand local policies," Ni added.

Jin Jianbin, a professor at Tsinghua University, said the micro blogs have played a significant role in facilitating communication and exchanges between the villages of Zayu and other areas.

Jin said the local government should request more support to boost literacy among the county residents in order to help them better understand the micro blogs.

charity briefs

More transparency demands for RCSC

The State Council has pledged to encourage the Red Cross Society of China to boost its transparency in a guideline issued on July 31, Xinhua News Agency reported.

The RCSC and its branches should, as required, disclose information regarding fundraising, expenses, public bidding and other finance-related areas, according to a guideline on the development of the RCSC. The RCSC should also improve the work of its spokespersons in order to respond to public concerns promptly and thoroughly, the document said.

The RCSC came under fire last year after a woman calling herself Guo Meimei wrote micro blog posts in which she claimed to work for an organization under the RCSC. Her posts also depicted her lavish lifestyle, leading some netizens to believe she was engaging in embezzlement. Although the organization that Guo claimed to work for was later found not to exist, the incident had a negative effect on the RCSC and triggered calls for greater scrutiny of charitable organizations.

Charities urged to open up books

The Chinese government publicized a set of regulations asking charity foundations to regularly publish financial reports and tighten internal management, Xinhua News Agency reported.

The regulations, published by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, require charity foundations to regularly publish detailed reports on donations and expenditures after a charity project starts.

The regulations acknowledge the donors' rights to know how their money will be spent and make it clear that foundations must "give truthful answers in a timely manner."

Those who violate the rules can be disqualified in their annual appraisal or receive administrative punishment, according to a statement issued by the ministry.

Moreover, the regulations stipulate that "foundations should not fund any profit-seeking activities."

China had about 2,500 registered foundations at the end of 2011, more than twice the number it had in 2005. Their total assets were more than 60 billion yuan (\$9.52 billion) and donations received totaled 33.7 billion yuan in 2011, according to the ministry.

Brothers walk 400km to aid impoverished girl

Two primary school brothers in North China's Hebei province raised nearly 7,000 yuan for a 16-year-old girl in an impoverished family during a 18-day fund collection, Beijing News reported.

Xie Pingyun and Xie Pingran, aged 11 and 13 separately, walked about 400 kilometers from their hometown to Beijing. The teenagers walked about 10 hours each day. They were accompanied by their father.

The brothers decided to donate the money to a local charity fund.

11 missing following Yunnan's heavy rain

Torrential rains in Southwest China's Yunnan province on July 31 have left 11 people missing, provincial authorities said.

Heavy rains triggered floods in the townships of

Zhengxing and Weiyuan, located in Jinggu county, according to the provincial disaster relief office.

Seven people have been reported missing and two others stranded in Weiyuan township, according to the report to the office by the civil affairs department in Pu'er.

Rescuers are searching for the missing, and provincial government workers have rushed to the townships to conduct disaster relief work.

Talk show host Cui treats storm heros

Famous Chinese talk show host Cui Yongyuan invited 150 migrant workers in Beijing to join a banquet after they bravely saved passengers trapped in heavy rain, the People's Daily reported.

More than 100 passenger were saved on a highway in Beijing after an unexpected storm struck the capital on July 21.

"I decided to invite the heroes because they represent the essence of our culture," said Cui. "Although they are just ordinary workers, their behavior in the storm was extraordinary."

The rain has affected about 1.9 million residences in suburban areas, killing at least 77, the local authority said.

Conservation program at Qinghai 'Lovers' Lake'

China has approved a conservation program for an inland plateau lake in Northwest China's Qinghai province, Xinhua reported, citing information from local environmental protection authorities.

According to the program, which was approved earlier this month by the ministries of environmental protection and finance, 430 million yuan will be invested over three years to protect the environment of Keluke Lake on the Qinghai plateau, the provincial environmental protection department said in a statement.

The lake, located northeast of the Qaidam Basin, Haixi Mongol and Tibetan autonomous prefecture, is the only freshwater lake in the ethnic prefecture as well as a major water conservation area in Qinghai, said the statement.

The lake covers 57.4 square kilometers and has been dubbed "Lovers' Lake", as birds migrate there in spring and summer to reproduce.

1,100 Tibetan plant seeds preserved in 'Noah's Ark'

Chinese botanists have collected the seeds of more than 1,100 plant species found in the southwestern Tibet autonomous region and preserved them in a national biotechnical bank, Xinhua News Agency reported.

The seeds were gathered over the past five years mostly near the upper reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River and on the Qiangtang grassland, researchers with the institute of Tibetan plateau research under the Chinese Academy of Sciences told Xinhua.

The samples were derived from plant species either native to Tibet or with considerable economic value, such as varieties of grass and traditional Tibetan herbs, said the researchers.

They are being kept in China Germplasm Bank of Wild Species, a leading bio-resource storage facility dubbed the "Noah's Ark" of the country's plant species.