

Making a Difference

True Social Commitment

An Interview with Patrick R. Gaston,
President, Verizon Foundation

EDITORS' NOTE During his more than 20 years with Verizon, Patrick Gaston has served in a variety of management positions in operations, marketing, human resources, strategic planning, and government relations. Prior to assuming his current post in December 2003, he served as Executive Director of Verizon's Strategic Alliances Group. Gaston sits on a number of national nonprofit boards and is also a member of the board of directors of Bed Bath & Beyond, Inc. Also a fellow at the Aspen Institute, he holds a bachelor's degree in management from the University of Massachusetts and an MBA from Northeastern University, and he earned an international certificate in business from Ecole Supérieure de Commerce in Reims, France.



Patrick R. Gaston

COMPANY BRIEF Verizon Communications Inc. (www.verizon.com; NYSE: VZ), headquartered in New York, is a leader in delivering broadband and other wireline and wireless communication innovations to mass-market, business, government, and wholesale customers. Verizon Wireless operates America's most reliable wireless network, serving nearly 66 million customers nationwide. Verizon's Wireline operations include Verizon Business, which delivers innovative business solutions to customers around the world, and Verizon Telecom, which brings customers the benefits of converged communications, information, and entertainment services over the nation's most advanced fiber-optic network. A Dow 30 company, Verizon employs a diverse workforce of nearly 235,000.

The company's philanthropic arm, the Verizon Foundation (www.verizon.com/foundation) is one of the largest corporate foundations in America and places an emphasis on promoting education and literacy, preventing domestic violence, and supporting the volunteer efforts of Verizon employees and retirees.

How has the Verizon Foundation become a part of the larger corporation's culture, and on what areas does the foundation focus?

We believe in corporate responsibility. We serve more than 100 million customers, and our business model is very much focused on the community. So it's really important that we support our communities. We determine areas in which

our competencies and interests can address a social need. So far, we have identified education, literacy, Internet safety, telehealth, and the prevention of domestic violence. In these areas, we've tried to become more methodical, attach metrics to our success, and hold our partners more accountable.

How do you hone in on programs that will have the biggest possible impact in the community?

In the area of education, we are primarily focused on grades K to 12, providing teachers the tools they need to be more effective in the classroom, make learning interesting and fun, and improve student achievement. We do this by offering online literacy and educational resources on a free Web site called www.thinkfinity.org. We look for credible, passionate partners who have a track record of developing standards-based educational resources and materials. We fund 11 organizations to develop Thinkfinity.org content in every major academic area, from math and science to reading and economics, which we then house on this free Web site for educators.

Currently, the U.S. academic curriculum for grades K through 12 doesn't place a heavy emphasis on math, science, and engineering. Because these subjects are of great importance to a company like Verizon, we're taking real action. We're working with our Thinkfinity.org partners to continually strengthen our math and science content for high-school-level students and make sure it gets into the hands of students, teachers, and the volunteer community. Last year, we built relationships with departments of education in 17 states and invested \$1.2 million in grants so they can absorb Thinkfinity.org resources. We provided them with professional development so they can teach their teachers to introduce the content to their classes. This year, we'll bring this program to seven more states.

There are more than 55,000 resources on www.thinkfinity.org. We're actively working with several organizations that comprise hundreds of community centers and libraries across the country to make Thinkfinity.org resources available to the volunteers, community leaders, and children who frequent these places so they can be helpful in after-school programs and provide assistance with homework as well.

How are employees encouraged to participate in the foundation's initiatives?

Verizon has one of the strongest corporate volunteerism programs in the country. Through our HopeLine program, we refurbish discarded cell phones and donate them to domestic violence shelters. We have recycled more than 4.5 million cell phones and granted more than \$5 million from the proceeds to domestic violence shelters and prevention organizations. We put recycling bins in work locations and educate our employees on the importance of their phone donations. We tap into what they care about and give them an opportunity to be engaged.

These values are driven from the very top – from [Verizon Communications CEO and Chairman] Ivan Seidenberg. Our corporate sense of philanthropy reflects the values and commitment of our leader. If I have a legacy in my current role, I hope it is having helped to nurture, through the foundation, a culture of true social commitment that touches existing and future Verizon employees.

How important is it for the foundation to establish partnerships with world-renowned organizations?

It is very important. Our first step is to establish clear goals for the foundation, and those goals dictate the kinds of partners we go after. Our partners in education range from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, to National Geographic, to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, to the National Endowment for the Humanities, to the National Museum of American History. We have also developed relationships with the National Center for Family Literacy and ProLiteracy Worldwide, for instance. They are the best at what they do, have a track record of delivering results, and are as committed to improving education and literacy as we are.

The Verizon Foundation becomes involved with issues like literacy, for instance, because if kids are not graduating from high school, are not prepared for college, and are unprepared to join the workforce, companies like Verizon will face challenges in finding employees with the skills we need. That need dictates our strategy as a foundation and dictates the kinds of partners we need to help us develop tools for educators around the country. ●

Thinkfinity.org staff provided educators at the 2007 National Educational Computing Conference with a demonstration of the easy-to-use and free educational resources available on the site.

