

Interview with Royi Biller, CEO, NPTEch

GuideStar Israel: an important step towards Israeli nonprofit visibility and transparency

October 2010

For the first time anyone in Israel or the world at large can freely find information on all registered nonprofits (NPOs) in Israel. Launched on the 3rd of August 2010, [GuideStar Israel](#) has been a revolutionary step towards improving the visibility, transparency and accountability of Israeli nonprofits. Keisha Taylor (GuideStar International's Communications Manager) had the opportunity to speak with Royi Biller, the CEO of [NPTEch](#), the nonprofit behind the launch of GuideStar Israel about the website, the information it contains and possibilities and hopes for its future.

Shaking up Israeli civil society

According to Mr. Biller since GuideStar Israel's launch NPTEch has overwhelmingly received "warm feedback and congratulations about the big revolution in accessibility to information about nonprofits. People who look at it from the capacity building and infrastructure point of view all understand that this is a very significant thing that took place." The introduction of this database to Israeli nonprofits is indeed an important milestone in its civil society sector. One month after the launch there were already 200,000 visits to the site by 17,000 unique visitors and about 13,500 of the 30,000 Israeli nonprofits listed on the site had their profile viewed. According to Mr. Biller "these figures stunned us because we did not expect so many people to find interest in GuideStar and in nonprofit organisations."

Finally, an online presence for all Israeli nonprofits

The impact of GuideStar is made even clearer when Mr. Biller, speaking about a recent university study, yet to be published, points out that it has shown that 50% of NPOs in Israel do not have a web presence. This was before the launch of GuideStar, which now provides a web presence for all. According to Biller, "GuideStar leaves no room for decision around whether they should be on the net or not (NPOs) can just make a decision to settle for the minimum information presented on GuideStar and not supply anything else." It follows that this is a very big first step in moving the Israeli civil society sector online and it is an important one. Having a web presence can also potentially aid NPOs use of other online resources to help improve their effectiveness.

As Biller points out "What we see as our task is to help these nonprofits realise that this is something that is beneficial for them and then encourage them to make high quality content available through GuideStar. I am not sure GuideStar as a tool on its own would be able to push nonprofits towards using more ICT tools. I do think that once GuideStar becomes more and more a familiar brand name in Israel and people learn that GuideStar will be the one place, the one stop shop to look for nonprofits, which it is by the way, at the moment, these organisations will realise that their constituents are looking for them on the web."

What's available on GuideStar Israel?

The basic information available for almost all of the organisations listed on the site include the year of incorporation, charity number, legal status, the registered goals they are trying to reach, the address and the names of the founders. The audited annual financial reports and narrative report for about 12,500 organisations registered with the Israeli Registrar of nonprofits are also available on the site, but more work has to be done to get this information for the remaining 17.5 thousand organisations that

have yet to submit their reports. According to Mr. Biller *"They may be active but not reporting, they may be inactive but not yet have taken any steps to undo the registration. So there is a big group of organisations that don't file their annual reports as they should, as the law requires."*

One of the more ambitious efforts undertaken before launch was the use of a technology application to blacken out the names, addresses, phone numbers and other personal information of individuals like employees and volunteers mentioned in the reports whose privacy needs to be protected by law. However, information on other individuals such as members of the critique committee and founders of the organisation remain visible. According to Mr. Biller *"it (was) quite a complex separation where we had to teach a group of individuals to distinguish between people whose privacy should be protected versus those who are condemned to be publicly transparent because of the Law of Amutot, (the law of nonprofit organisations)."*

Future plans

NPTech also has plans to integrate GuideStar Israel data into volunteering and microphilanthropy websites noting that *"GuideStar will become not only a place to see information but also to take action, whether it's to volunteer or to contribute through donations"* They also plan to add more information sources to be accessed through government channels. This will not only include information from the Ministry of Justice (one of the GuideStar Israel partners, who provides most of the data) but also the Ministry of Finance, the tax authority, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Welfare. According to Mr. Biller *"All these organisations have lots of data about nonprofit organisations ... so our agreement with the government currently only entails the Justice Ministry but it leaves room for negotiation with other government agencies to add additional information sources."*

He also spoke about the need to have a translation engine on the site as a priority highlighting that *"The only thing that people have found confusing up until now is the fact that the site is multilingual but the data is only in Hebrew."* There are also plans to make the site more text based, so that information currently only available in pdf format will be received in text form and can also be searchable on the site. According to Mr. Biller *"Once we have the textual data then we can also perform all sorts of manipulation and analysis ... such as geographical locations of nonprofits"*. He also hopes that information on salaries would be made available pointing out that *"nobody really knows what is the average salary or the average general and administrative expense in Israel for nonprofits"*.

Speaking on the use of the site, he notes that at the moment visitors to the site are looking for a specific organisation rather than searching by phrase like 'children at risk', but suspects this will change over time, once they utilise the site more often. He also underscored the importance of organisations providing content which is more concise on GuideStar Israel and hopes that GuideStar Israel can improve NPO reporting. He advises nonprofits to utilise GuideStar to find donors, volunteers and other organisations they would like to form joint ventures with.

NPTech, TechSoup Global and GuideStar Israel

Mr. Biller also gave some insight into NPTech's upcoming software donation programme with [TechSoup Global](#), which he hopes will be launched by the end of this year. GuideStar International and TechSoup Global combined their operations in April of this year and as far as he is concerned, GuideStar and TechSoup are the two most important projects that should be implemented in Israel. He suggests that *"TechSoup needs GuideStar for eligibility and vetting of organisations. GuideStar needs TechSoup*

because many organisations do not specifically realise the benefit of being transparent and so we would like to encourage them to do that. One way to encourage them to do that is to supply them with free software, in exchange for their disclosure of information through GuideStar, then they have a motivation to contribute additional information."

A survey done by NPTEch two years ago revealed that the number one service requested by nonprofits was discounted software and according to Mr. Biller, Israel is a "Microsoft country" because of Microsoft's Hebrew support. He cites "Microsoft as the single most important donor in TechSoup Israel." The importance of the GuideStar International and TechSoup Global combination can most certainly be emphasised once this programme is implemented and hopefully the combined offering will be available soon.

Feedback and comments welcomed

NPTEch also provides assistance to Israeli nonprofits who would like to map their technology needs and develop technology infrastructure within their organisation. If you would like to provide feedback on the GuideStar Israel site, or learn more about what is happening with GuideStar Israel you can visit their [blog](#) (currently available only in Hebrew) or/and follow them on Twitter [@NPTEchIsrael](#)