

Strengthening the Volunteer Base for Community ICT Learning Centres



Community Web Site Evaluation

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A: Anick Farmstead
Anick
Hexham
Northumberland
NE46 4LW

T: 01434 607914
E: peter@talkinghat.co.uk
W: www.talkinghat.co.uk

Community Web Sites Research Project

The project

The objective of this piece of research was to identify what constitutes a community web site and how such web sites can best serve their communities.

It assessed the impact of local, (possibly village hall, parish, voluntary sector or local authority), web sites on the lives of 'ordinary' people living in Tynedale's mostly rural communities with the intention of developing and publishing a set of criteria for effective community web site design in the future.

The Research

The first stage was to identify existing local community web sites and assess their function, purpose and content in order to establish a set of criteria for content which can then be reviewed against the results of research with residents.

A questionnaire was devised and used consistently throughout the research period. (Appendix I)

In parallel with this, the views of people in the communities were sought by means of the questionnaire and a sample of face-to-face interviews. Communities were identified where a Village Hall Learning Centre had been established and these were used as the basis for interviews. In addition a further sample of interviews were conducted through the networkers of Volunteering Tynedale. In all, 25 interviews were conducted with representatives of 18 local communities representing a third of the village and small town communities of Tynedale.

There were three main questions:

What exists already?
What do people want?
What can they have?

In summary, the responses to individual questions were as follows:

Knowledge of local web sites

What awareness is there of community or local web sites?

There was a greater awareness of local web sites than had been anticipated. Some 50% of the respondents were aware of and knew the URL for a web site which served their community. In two cases this was a web site which either they or their organisation had developed and maintained and in which they had some personal involvement. In the other cases it was a web site managed by another organisation in the community – a parish council for example. 25% were aware of one or more local web sites, but could not quote the URL and 25% did not know of a web site serving their community. Respondents who were unable to name a community web site were generally resident in communities where there was no community web site.

Spread of local web sites

In all, 15 communities actually had a web presence and 3 did not. (Appendix 3). In the communities where there was no web presence there has been little or no historic consideration of the benefits. There were communities, for example Stocksfield village and Allen Valleys, where a community effort has established a web site that is used to good effect by the community and outsiders. In one community, (Kirkwhelpington), a web presence has been made available through a regional newspaper and is informative, but only in very general terms and lacking detailed information.

In one community the interviewee was able to list the URLs for nine local community serving web sites, but as can be seen above this was an exception.

Where web sites existed, the provision was varied.

Each interviewee was asked about the purpose of a community web site. Community web sites were perceived to serve three main functions:

- 1. The noticeboard function**
 - a. To provide information about the community, for the community
 - b. To provide information about the community to outsiders
- 2. The promotional function**
 - a. To market the locality to outsiders
 - b. To reflect the locality
- 3. The communications function**
 - a. Provide contact details of key people
 - b. Provide a forum for discussion

Purposes specifically mentioned were

General information

Inform the community

Access to local information, doctors, dentists, allotments, parent & children groups, scouts & guides

Information about the location

Information about activities

Information about projects

Information for ex-pats

Information for newcomers

Report activities

Reflect the locality

Resources for residents

Event information

Market the locality

Promote local businesses

Explain everything about the area to outsiders

Make the community aware of the organisation

Broaden the audience

Provide contact details

Links to other useful websites

Help the community

Provide a local forum

There appears to be little or no knowledge of community web sites

Is there an understanding of the purpose of a community web site?

Is there an understanding of the purpose of e-government web sites at local levels?

Impact

Have local web sites 'changed' the lives of local people in any way? If so, how?

There was little evidence of lives being 'changed' by the existence of a local community web site. Where change was identified, it was in the way that people make use of computers and there were a number of examples where the interviewee spoke of always having a computer available for a variety of purposes. Some spoke of now being able to rapidly access local information and to be better informed about events and activities in the area.

There does not seem to have been an objective assessment of the value of a local web site other than it allows the community to have a "web presence". In some cases this has been where the web site is focused on promoting the area, usually for tourism or to attract outsiders to buy locally produced goods on-line. There are local examples of commercially orientated web sites where businesses have been successful.

What expectations are there of local web sites?

The majority of responses to this question indicated that in general people had not considered what their expectations might be. Many of the identified expectations reflected the purpose of a local newspaper. Reports of local events with photographs, items of local news, a calendar or diary feature, parish council business, a facility to advertise sales and wants, information about transport, a village notice board, local history pages and a picture gallery were the main features. Interestingly, particularly bearing in mind the way that the web is becoming a publishing platform, all of these present opportunities for local people to take control of the content of their web site.

How do people in the communities get to know about local web sites?

There are no prescribed methods of promoting local web sites within communities. Very few communities had made any real effort to promote their web site other than by mentioning it in minutes, general word of mouth promotion around the community and in a few cases by the production and distribution of a leaflet or flyer. Having established a web site, there were few communities who had grasped the opportunity to use web features to capture and make use of email addresses of their visitors. Only one community collected visitor statistics and made any use of them to direct future development. Other techniques used to promote the web sites included an article in the local newspaper, a coffee morning, demonstrations to organised groups in the village, reciprocal links on other web sites and more aggressively seeking a high search engine ranking. Only one community claimed to publish their URL on all printed material.

Most community web sites are static sites - sites which are there to inform their visitors and their editorial control is usually in one person's hands. This is entirely acceptable but fails to take note of the emergence of a new genre of web sites where the visitor is also a contributor. This development of Web 2.0, dubbed the Participatory Web, changes our perception of the web as an information bank and to some extent a research tool. The introduction of tools such as blogs, vlogs, Napster give the user an opportunity to use the browser as a gateway to a universal desktop where facts, opinions, information, images and data can be shared, commented upon, corrected and debated.

What impact has broadband had on rural living?

A small number of people cited being able to use new communications technologies, such as Skype (a Voice Over Internet Protocol) which meant that they could now communicate more easily (and without any additional cost) with friends and family - particularly those living abroad where the cost of traditional telephone calls might previously have been a barrier. Higher speed connections have also made email more usable particularly in exchanging documents and photographs with family and friends.

There was little mention made of the opportunities for working from home although in rural areas this is an attractive proposition to many people either on a full-time or occasional basis. According to the National Statistics Office there are 2.4 million teleworkers (people who use computers and telecommunications to work at or from home) in the UK. This represents 8% of the workforce. In the north east, 6% of the workforce can be defined as teleworkers. Teleworking is an evolving phenomenon and as new Internet based communications technologies emerge there will undoubtedly be growth in the sector presenting opportunities for community web sites to provide support.

What other technologies (recent, new or emerging) might impact on rural living - and how?

Interviewees were asked to identify some of the new and emerging technologies that are changing the way we will make use of the Internet. From a list of some 32 items, there was a general lack of knowledge or understanding of the newer features, most of which relate to Web 2.0. Those marked in bold in the table below are those about which there was little knowledge. This result reflects the demographics of those living in these rural communities and our expectation should not be higher. Nevertheless, many of these technologies could have a significant impact on the lives of older people in remote communities. For example, WiFi, Bluetooth and WiMAX are wireless networking or communication products that reduce the number of trailing wires. WiMAX will enable

communities with a geographic spread of up to 3 Kilometres to share a common wireless Internet connection, potentially reducing cost and increasing accessibility. Folksonomy developments will facilitate the development of collaborative, 'social' websites for photo sharing, reminiscing or simply storing anecdotes.

<p>3G 4G 802.11 ADSL2+ Blog Bluetooth Creative Commons Folksonomy GPRS HomePlug IPTV M-learning MMS GPS HDTV Moblog</p>	<p>PMP Podcast Presence RSS Semantic Web Smart card Smart phone Set Top Box Terabyte Ultra Wide Band Vlog VoIP Wi-Fi Wiki WiMAX WLAN</p>
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A glossary of these (and other) terms can be found in Appendix 2.

It is interesting to note that all these technological advances are available and in use now, but despite the impact that some of them will have on our lives, there is very little explanation of them available in layman's terms. There may be opportunities to develop a series of short courses in making use of these technologies in rural communities.

Has the broadband era left rural communities disadvantaged in any way?

Where ADSL broadband has not been made available (there are two communities where the provision is scant) residents are disadvantaged by the cost of dial up connection and there was evidence of reluctance to use the Internet as freely as they would like. For some this has meant that they do not take advantage of some features, such as VOIP, that broadband can offer. Lack of broadband limits their use of the Internet to a narrow range of the more essential tasks such as email, whereas those who have a broadband connection claim that they rarely turn their computer off, preferring to have it ready for use on demand.

There is a wide variation in the wealth of communities in Tynedale. Some, closer to Newcastle, have a wealthier population of retirees, often from professional backgrounds where the cost of broadband is not seen as an issue; others comprise farming communities where employment is low, and the cost is an issue. It might be surmised that community computer resources would be in popular demand in these poorer areas, although low take-up suggests that Internet access is not regarded as a priority. This is in spite of the fact that for a huge proportion of the population, Internet access has become an everyday activity, "a part of life" as one interviewee claimed.

Usage

How frequently are local web sites accessed (a) at home, (b) in a public place or (c) at work?

No clear picture emerged of the amount of use made of local web sites. Where there is a robust presence it is acknowledged that they are used, although the lack of monitoring of visitor statistics makes it difficult to assess. Tynedale's rural communities have seen a growth in computer ownership and Internet connectivity in parallel with the rest of the UK and this has resulted in a reduced demand for public access computers. The general pattern of usage of the Village Halls Consortium's computers appears to average around 5 or 6 people a week who regularly visit the centres. Their use of community equipment is more likely to be for learning, researching and booking holidays, learning about and using

email and spreadsheets, creative writing producing publicity material for local events and activities and publishing the village newsletter.

What would encourage greater use of local web sites?

Sixty per cent of interviewees were unable to offer any suggestions. Of those who did there were two main themes, currency and content.

Firstly, that the web site should contain current information. Pages that are tangibly out of date, have not been updated for some time, have incorrect content or have links to non-existent pages or web sites do not encourage visitors to return. Web sites whose credibility is diminished in this way ultimately become moribund.

Secondly, it was considered essential that the content of local web sites met the needs of and reflected the nature of the community. Maintaining a web site is an important task and often a thankless one. The growing emphasis on the web as a participatory medium offers a way to ensure that a wider range of local people can make their own contributions to the maintenance and have some sense of ownership. Integrating a content management system (CMS) can make a significant contribution to widening public participation in a web site.

There was some mention of the needs of older members of the community for whom accessibility is of prime importance. Increasingly older people require more visually accessible web pages (large typefaces, simple page structure and easy and logical navigation).

Is there a pattern of usage - eg do people in Otterburn use local web sites in a different way from those in Prudhoe? Why? What affects the pattern?

There was no clear evidence of any pattern of usage related to any individual community except that, as might be expected, where a web site was dynamic and reflected more closely the needs of the community there was some evidence of greater use. The web is a global presence and serves all those who can access it with a degree of equality dependant on their needs. It might be assumed that people in Riding Mill might make more use of online banking and investment services than they would be to download Agricultural Tenancies Act (1995) information from the Defra web site. The reverse may be true of Greenhead which is more of a farming community. Whilst this is pure conjecture, it does reinforce the view that community web sites should strive to ensure that their content reflects the nature of the community and its needs.

What barriers to use are perceived? For example, is age a greater issue in rural areas than in towns?

About 60% of interviewees offered some observation of barriers to use of the Internet. Mostly these were focused on older people and their fear, lack of understanding, suspicion, unfamiliarity and inhibitions in using computer technologies. Amongst some of this group there is also the fear of making the first step in purchasing and using computer equipment and making a choice from the bewildering selection of connection options available. For a few there were issues in the security of personal and financial information when buying online. For a wider age group in some areas, there is an issue of the cost of both equipment and connection, and availability of service. There was also some concern expressed about the cost and availability of support (both technical and user related) and the fear of being "left alone" when something goes wrong. From a user problem perspective, (usually software related or related to the way in which a user has performed some task), this is a greater fear. When something goes awry with technologies that are not properly understood, a sense of failure is engendered.

A recent report from Ofcom ¹ examines the attitudes of older people to communications technologies and how they engage with it. It groups older people (age 55+) into 4 segments.

Current users: **'Absorbers'** and **'Self Starters'**
Non-users: **'Rejecters'** and **'Disengaged'**

Absorbers may be described as those who had been obliged to learn to use computers and the Internet at work and were now home users. They tend to be rational and functional in their attitudes towards technology, easily absorbing new technology products and services into their lives. Essentially, this segment can now be seen as part of the technology generation and is digitally included.

Self Starters have had no training at work and had taught themselves. They were very diverse in terms of age, socio economic grade and health and were sufficiently motivated to educate themselves. Their levels of competence varied considerably. Their reasons to get started varied from the specific – a need to communicate with family - to the more general - a desire to stay in touch and keep up to date.

The diversity of this segment demonstrated that factors such as age, income, location and health did not necessarily appear to be barriers to take-up. Attitude and character were the key determinants of take-up more than any other factor.

Recent and ongoing learning experiences meant this segment provided a rich insight into the difficulties faced by older people when learning PC or Internet skills.

One of the key findings from the Ofcom research was that non-users were not all 'rejecters' of the Internet as previous surveys may have suggested. Instead, the majority of non-users in the sample turned out to be interested in using the Internet given the right set of circumstances.

Non-users were largely consistent in the reasons they gave for non take-up – lack of skills, ability and motivation, as well as a number of social and environmental reasons were mentioned as potential barriers to involvement. In short, many were simply afraid – afraid of the unknown, of their ability, of breaking the PC, of appearing foolish, etc.

Whilst all these non-users appeared initially to voluntarily exclude themselves from internet usage, it was clear that only a minority maintained outright rejection ('Rejecters'), and the majority, after some discussion, showed an unexpected interest in getting started ('Disengaged').

Rejecters were unlikely to respond to attempts to engage them. This was a diverse group – from busy grandmothers to contented hobbyists – and their reasons for ongoing non-involvement were similarly varied. Overall, they were happy to voluntarily exclude themselves and were unlikely to change their attitude.

Disengaged people were the key discovery of the Ofcom findings and the evidence suggests that this segment comprises the majority of current non-users within the 55+ age group

The report observes that similar to the 'rejecters' in terms of diversity, this audience visibly grew in confidence as the discussion progressed, with many suggesting by the end of the groups that they would like to try the Internet. The key issue that emerged was the manner in which to engage this audience. This group was approximately two thirds of the initial segmentation.

Whilst the population of Tynedale is by no means wholly comprised of older people, there are 46% of residents who are aged 45 or over. The Ofcom report focuses on an older population, which mirrors to some extent a proportion of the Tynedale population, and its findings reflect much of the information gathered in this web site exercise. The Ofcom

¹ Older people and communications technology - An attitudinal study into older people and their engagement with communications technology - Ofcom - June 2006

evidence suggests that there are a significant number of non-users who currently feel 'disengaged' from the modern world but given the appropriate support and assistance would overcome their concerns and fears and benefit from computer or internet usage.

This section of the Ofcom report suggests that to engage with this audience, the environment for learning has to be specifically tailored towards older people – in essence, courses (free if possible) run by older people for older people and designed for genuine beginners. In addition, the idea of a mentor, based locally that could assist face-to-face or at least over the telephone, was considered similarly important. Tynedale, of course, has had a scheme of this type in operation for the last 6 years or so through the Village Halls Consortium. Its focus was not particularly directed at older people, but the lessons learnt from this exercise and the Ofcom research suggests a revision of the aims of the Village Halls Consortium Learning Centres with an emphasis placed on familiarity with the web in order to engender a culture embracing community web sites.

Ideally suited to assisting with this tailored approach would be the 'Self Starters' group – their learning experiences have meant they have a unique insight into the difficulties faced by older people when learning PC or internet skills.

Usability and accessibility

What are considered to be good/useful/essential/dire/useless/patronising etc features of a local web site?

Consistently, about 40% of interviewees expressed no view on this topic. Those that did respond echoed to some extent their answers to earlier topics and additionally offered the importance of the currency of information, ease of navigation, an A to Z index and a site map, all of which are good web design practice.

There was demonstration of an awareness of good design and layout, navigation, the considered use of colour and images.

In terms of accessibility and the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) there was a significant lack of knowledge - only one third of the interviewees were aware of implications for web sites. The DDA is legislation to support accessibility. Web accessibility is about making a website accessible to all Internet users (both disabled and non-disabled), regardless of what browsing technology they're using. For disabled users this includes those who are visually impaired, have poor or partial sight, are colour blind, deaf, are unable to use a keyboard or mouse or who have some other disadvantage such as epileptic users who must always be careful to avoid seeing flickering between 2 and 55 Hz, web users from outside your industry who may not understand industry jargon or acronyms or users whose first language is not English and who may not be able to comprehend complicated language.

Even amongst industry specialists there is some misunderstanding of the DDA requirements. A sample of community web sites were subjected to the W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) accessibility validation tools and were unable to meet the standards.

Where community web sites have already been developed, what soft technologies have been used?

Knowledge of software applications used to develop local web sites was thin. About 40% of respondents knew of an application that had been used. Emerging as the most popular was Deamweaver.

Are there examples of good and/or innovative practice that can be shared?

Two examples of good practice were cited. The first was in making use of a Content Management System to allow residents to make their own contribution to specific areas of the web site. This had been enthusiastically received in the first instance, but following some minor controversy it was decided to withdraw the facility. CMS generally allows authorised individuals to make contributions to selected pages of the web site. For example, it might be appropriate to allow the secretary of the Women's Institute to post notices about future meetings or reports of past meetings. This not only relieves the web

master of some chores, but also gives a sense of ownership to the WI. Careful management and monitoring of a CMS feature can contribute to a dynamic and well-used web site. The second example relates to visits made to local businesses in a successful attempt to generate advertising and demonstrates that with a little effort an additional facet of a local web site can add value both in terms of attracting a wider range of visitors and in generating a small revenue stream.

How can community web sites encourage, support or promote social enterprise?

There was a disappointingly poor response to this topic, probably because no one had considered the possibility and because there are, as yet, relatively few social enterprises in the district. There is some debate about whether or not community web sites should support local businesses. One school supports promoting them on the basis that they are an integral part of the community, whilst the other suggests that this commercialises a community web site. Social enterprises somehow fall in the middle. There was only one example of a social enterprise taking the lead in developing a community web site although in fact this site serves visitors in general rather than the community itself.

Where a community has not developed a local web site or has a web site in need of updating, are there opportunities for working with the community to develop one?

Overwhelmingly, the responses to this topic were positive. There is a demand for communities to have a web presence. Mostly the aspirations are fairly modest - a few pages about the community, the locale, its people, and its societies and activities. There is little evidence in the way of planning for this, it's just seen as "having a village web site". There are however, opportunities for enhancing a web presence by using some of the current web thinking and planning properly to meet the needs of not only the community but also its visitors.

Most indicated a preference for either the parish council or a community or voluntary group to take the lead in developing a web site, although one respondent already had in mind an enthusiastic individual who could take the lead.

In terms of actually designing and producing a web site there was little preference for either of the suggested options. About half felt that they would benefit from a web site designed by a professional web designer, (but some had not considered the cost implications), whilst the others thought that the work should be undertaken by an enthusiastic amateur. Given the implications of the DDA serious consideration should be given to preparing some form of guidance for those who wish to follow the 'home grown' route.

Summary

The provision of community serving web sites is greater than expected although the consistency of aims, content and quality is greatly varied. There is to some extent an understanding of the purpose of a community web site, but in some cases this is not applied as fully as it could be. For example, in spite of the fact that each of the communities had public access computer and Internet access facilities only a small number had made any attempt to promote these resources.

Most of the web sites provided information that was of interest and value to both the community and to outsiders. A handful had produced web sites that only served to inform outsiders.

The quality of design, accessibility, ease of use and content varies enormously as might be expected across a network of diverse communities.

Only one web site offered the facility for community participation - most had vested editorial control in one person (a webmaster) who was responsible for the maintenance and currency of the web site.

There is a feeling that community web sites are underused. The lack of statistical evidence makes it difficult to understand the reason for this. Certainly there is a lack of promotion in some cases and in others the content of the web site is either not aimed at local people or is not meeting their needs.

Improvements could be made to the ways in which community web sites are marketed. Promotion is generally pedestrian and is undertaken in a traditional way, frequently relying on word of mouth. Very few communities promoted their URL in a pro-active way with, for example the web address on all printed materials, the village notice board or on posters in the village hall.

None of the web sites had taken advantage of being able to capture email addresses of visitors in order to inform them of future events or developments and to build a database of visitors with a view to future marketing exercises.

All of the web sites except one, had a "Web 1.0" generational quality to them. This is not a criticism necessarily, but implies that there is potential to develop these resources employing newer and emerging technologies that allow the visitor or user more participation.

There is little evidence of an understanding of the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act and even less evidence of compliance.

The presence of Community Champions adds considerable value to a community's use of computers and the Internet. Volunteers are essential components of promoting the use of the Internet in particular and there are many whose range of skills can contribute to the development of a network of Community web sites.

Amongst those who did not have a web presence and those whose web sites might be described as moribund, there is a positive interest in the future development of their web sites. The idea of some guidance was well received.

There is no overall preference for using local enthusiastic volunteers to develop web sites as opposed to professional designers. The former is entirely appropriate if the individual has the right mix of skills, as is the latter if the cost is not prohibitive. There are benefits in both.

Recommendations

Both this study and the related guidance notes should be widely circulated to all the Tynedale communities to encourage more focused thinking about the aims, content and quality of community web sites.

In essence, all the Tynedale Village Hall Community Champions are volunteers, although many do not think of themselves as being defined quite as formally as that. There are opportunities to encourage the Champions to take advantage of the network support offered by Volunteering Tynedale.

A small group should be established, comprising the volunteer Community Champions from each of the communities, to promote the sharing of ideas, good practice and resources. A robust email network should be encouraged to underpin face-to-face meetings where appropriate. It may be desirable to develop a simple web site where information and ideas can be pooled. Tynedale Council (see below) have agreed in principle to consider how they might be able to assist in providing an infrastructure for the hosting of community web sites and in the development of web templates for use by the communities.

'Absorbers' and 'Self Starters' (Ofcom report) should be encouraged to participate in the development of community web sites and particularly to attempt to engage the 'Rejecters' and 'Disengaged'. This will have the effect of widening participation in the use of community web sites.

Consideration should be given to raising awareness of the expansion of the Web 2.0 environment and the ways in which it can benefit communities. The objective will be to make community web sites more participatory. The development of a set of advanced guidance notes covering the ways in which Web 2.0 will influence the use of the Internet is desirable and could be reinforced by a short series of workshops.

The expectation that each of the communities individually will attempt to embrace the recommendations of this report is slim. Undoubtedly, there will be one or more communities who may address some of the issues on their own, but in order to achieve a critical mass and for there to be a significant impact on the configuration of community web sites across the District, some support will be required. Funding should be sought to employ a part-time co-ordinator (perhaps as little as one day a month) to manage and maintain an impetus in this network and promote the development of consistently well designed, accessible and current community web sites.

Tynedale Council could make an important contribution to the development of a network of community web sites by providing hosting facilities and links to and from the Council's web site. There would be benefits to both the Council and the participating communities. From a marketing perspective it would raise awareness amongst the Tynedale communities of the Council's web site and extend the range of resources available through the e-government agenda by providing a direct channel to the Council's online services. It would give credibility to the communities' web sites and provide residents with additional channels to the Council's services. Access to a Content Management System (CMS) interface would simplify the tasks of the community web masters and offer opportunities for residents to become content providers rather than content consumers. The Council has recently launched a learning directory web site (<http://www.tynedalelearning.co.uk>), which already has links to some, if not all of the Village Halls Consortium Learning Centres. As the TynedaleLearning web site becomes more established, the Consortium's Community Champions will make extensive use of it to support and guide their users. Integrating prominent links to TynedaleLearning into community web sites will undoubtedly increase activity on the site and add to the importance of the role of community web sites. Collaboration of this nature between a local authority and its communities is a good example of the ways in which e-government can make a contribution to community development.

Tynedale Village Halls Consortium and Volunteering Tynedale

Community Web Site Research

Questionnaire

The objective of this piece of research is to identify what a community web site should consist of and how such web sites can best serve their communities.

It is intended to assess the impact of community web sites on the lives of people living in Tynedale's mostly rural communities and will lead to the development and publication of criteria for effective community web site design in the future.

If you can't answer a question or it isn't appropriate please leave it blank.

Definition of community web site:

A website developed by and serving small communities, village halls, parishes, voluntary sector, charity or community organisations or local authorities.

In some instances, a local businesses' web site might be classed as a community web site, depending on the content of the site.

A community web site may also seek to inform those living outside the community, eg tourists, expatriots, relatives of residents, amateur historians or those who are simply curious about a locality.

1. Knowledge of local web sites

1.1 Please list any community web sites that serve your community:

1.2 What do you think is the purpose of a community web site?

1.3 What do you understand by the term "e-government web site"?

2. Assessing the Impact of Community Web Sites

2.1 What do you think local people might expect to be able to use a community web site for?

2.2 What features do you think local people might expect to see on a community web site?

2.3 Thinking about your community, what would be the best way(s) of making sure that local people got to know about and used a community web site?

3. Broadband

BT claims that all Northumberland exchanges are now Broadband enabled and that More than 99.8 per cent of lines connected to a broadband exchange should now be able to get an ADSL broadband service.

3.1 Given that Broadband is apparently universally available throughout Tynedale what impact has broadband had on rural lives - if any? (Apart from "It's faster!"). Has Broadband brought any benefits to your life?

The spread and popularity of Broadband is leading to the emergence of other new technologies (in particular, software and hardware developments that make use of the speed and availability of Broadband)

3.2 Are any of the following (recent, new or emerging) technological developments of any significance to those living in rural communities?

Draw a line through or put a 'X' against any of the following which you do not know or understand - eg: ~~PMP~~ or PMP X

3G 4G 802.11 ADSL2+ Blog Bluetooth Creative Commons Folksonomy GPRS HomePlug IPTV M-learning MMS GPS HDTV Moblog	PMP Podcast Presence RSS Semantic Web Smart card Smart phone Set Top Box Terabyte Ultra Wide Band Vlog VoIP Wi-Fi Wiki WiMAX WLAN
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3.3 Can you think of any ways in which the broadband era has left rural communities disadvantaged?

4. Usage of community web sites

We would like to get some idea of the ways in which local people make use of community web sites.

4.1 From your own experience and your knowledge of local people, please give some indication of how often they might (or do) access community web sites.

4.2 What would encourage greater use of local web sites?

Is there a pattern of usage - eg do people in Otterburn use local web sites in a different way from those in Prudhoe? Why? What affects the pattern?

4.3 Can you name any particular features that would be specific to your community or locality and would add value to your community's web site?

Eg:

Transport information

Learning opportunities

Employment information

Community opportunities (volunteering etc)

4.4 Can you think of any barriers to using the Internet are or may be experienced by people in your community?

For example, is older age a greater issue in rural areas than in towns?

5. Usability and accessibility

5.1 Using your knowledge of web sites in general, can you think of any features or content that you consider to be good/useful/essential/dire/useless/patronising etc features of a community web site?

5.2 If a Web site were to be developed for your community, which of the two options would be more appropriate?

1. Professional design, layout, navigation, use of colour and images created with professional software or programming
2. Construction by local people using simple and possibly free web development tools

5.3 Are you aware of the Disability Discrimination Act and the way it affects web sites?

6. Assessing the content of community web sites

Thinking about any community web sites that you know:

6.1 Can you name any features or content that you feel is missing and would add value to that site?

7. Where community web sites have already been developed

7.1 How has the web site been promoted in the community?

Eg:

House to house leaflet delivery

Newspaper advertisements

Posters or notices in shops and pubs

Word of mouth

Other (how?)

7.2 Can you name any examples of good and/or innovative practice that can be shared?

7.3 Do you know of any examples where a community web site has encouraged, supported or promoted social enterprise?

Eg: community business, co-operatives, volunteer groups etc

7.4 If your community has a web site, do you know who has taken the lead in developing it?

- The parish council
- A community or voluntary group
- An enthusiastic individual
- A local business
- The district council
- Other (who?)

7.5 If your community has a web site in need of updating, or has not developed a local web site, do you think there are there opportunities for working with the community to develop one?

- Yes
- No

7.6 Which organisation would be either likely or most appropriate to take the lead in its development?

- The parish council
- A local church or church group
- A community or voluntary group
- An enthusiastic individual
- A local business
- The district council
- Other (who?)

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. Please return the completed form to Volunteering Tynedale.

Glossary of Technology Terms

3G

Third-generation mobile telephone networks, which in the UK are based on wideband code division multiple access (W-CDMA). This is the next-generation successor to GSM networks, currently allowing download speeds of up to 384Kbps and providing more network capacity. All the major mobile phone companies have launched 3G services, but coverage remains limited.

4G

Fourth-generation mobile phone networks are still in development. They are expected to be IP based and allow seamless roaming between different kinds of networks. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) specification for 4G services are for data rates of 1Gbps with a stationary client and 100Mbps with a moving client. 4G services are expected to appear around 2010–15.

802.11

Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE) standards for wireless local area networks (WLANs), more commonly referred to as Wi-Fi (see below). Currently 802.11b (11Mbps), 802.11g (54Mbps) and 802.11a (54Mbps) are the main standards. 802.11b and 802.11g work in the 2.4GHz frequency, and 802.11g is backwards compatible with 802.11b. 802.11a works in the less crowded 5Ghz frequency range and is not compatible with the other two standards. The 802.11n, standard, which is yet to be ratified, should allow real-world data rates exceeding 100Mbps. There is also a range of other 802.11 standards such as 802.11i – wireless security – and 802.11e – QoS (see p56) for wireless networks.

ADSL2+

Asymmetric digital subscriber line (ADSL) 2+. ADSL is currently the most common form of broadband internet access technology in the UK. It provides broadband connectivity over existing telephone infrastructure, with the uplink speed being lower than the download speed (asymmetric). ADSL2+ is a newer version of this technology that should allow connection speeds of up to 24Mbps where conditions allow (depending on proximity to telephone exchange).

Blog

Web log (blog): an online journal/commentary with simple automated content-creating facilities, links and response mechanisms. Blogs often use RSS (see below) so that readers can subscribe and receive new content as it is published.

Bluetooth

A short-range wireless technology. It is mainly used to connect devices and peripherals such as mobile phones, headsets, printers and cameras. The most common Bluetooth standard has maximum data rates of 721Kbps, but the newer Bluetooth 2 (Enhanced Data Rate) allows for speeds up to 2.1Mbps.

Creative Commons

A licensing system developed by Lawrence Lessig and others at Stanford University. Creative Commons (CC) licences allow a content creator to decide how published work may be copied, modified and distributed. UK versions of the licence are now available.

Folksonomy

Derived from folk + taxonomy, a Folksonomy is a way of categorising data on the web using tags generated by users. Folksonomies are used on collaborative, 'social' websites for photo sharing, blogs and social bookmarking. Social bookmarking websites are services that allow users to store their favourite websites online and access them from any internet-connected computer. Users tag their favourite websites with keywords. These are then shared with other users and build into folksonomies of the most popular sites arranged under different categories.

GPRS

General packet radio services, and sometimes referred to as 2.5G: an update to GSM mobile phone networks that allows for faster data downloads. GPRS is also being used to fill in gaps in 3G coverage (see previous page).

GPS

Global positioning system: a satellite-based location technology that can determine position down to a few metres. GPS modules are used for in-car navigation and in handheld navigation devices, and can be added to PDAs and laptops. Location-based services that make use of the technology are being developed for education.

HDTV

High-definition television: current UK PAL standard-definition television has a resolution of 625 lines (although not all the lines are used for the picture). High-definition TV has a much higher resolution. There

are two main standards: 1080i (interlaced) and 720p (progressive scan), 1080p is also available. Some HDTV services are expected to launch in the UK in 2006.

HomePlug

The HomePlug Alliance develops standards for networking over electricity cabling in the home.

IPTV

Internet protocol television: television/video delivered over broadband to PCs or set-top boxes (STBs).

ISP

Internet service provider: the company that provides a user with access to the internet and other services.

M-learning

Mobile learning: learning delivered through mobile devices.

MMS

Multimedia messaging service: a network service that allows mobile phones to exchange photos and other files.

Moblog

A blog posted to the internet from a mobile device.

PMP

Personal media player: a mobile device, with built-in colour display, that can store and play a variety of media files such as photos, video and music.

Podcast

Podcasts are audio files that can be easily distributed via the web and downloaded to computers and personal audio players. Podcasts are often syndicated so that users can subscribe (usually for free) to a particular service and have new content automatically downloaded. The software required to produce and distribute podcasts is available for free or at little cost, making this form of 'broadcasting' extremely accessible.

Presence

Functionality in certain applications, such as instant messaging programs, that allows users to know the 'state' of their contacts – whether they are online, if they are busy or not and possibly which form of communication they can be contacted by.

RSS

Really simple syndication: a set of XML-based specifications for syndicating news and other website content and making it machine readable. Users who subscribe to RSS-enabled websites can have new content automatically 'pushed' to them. This content is usually collected by RSS-aware applications called aggregators or news readers. Some web browsers now have these news readers built in.

Semantic Web

The Semantic Web is being developed to allow devices, information services and applications to interact directly with each other dynamically over the web.

Smart card

A smart card is a credit-card-size device with an embedded microchip. There are two main types of card: contact and contactless (proximity). Contact smart cards, such as the new chip-and-PIN credit cards, need to be inserted or swiped through a reader. Contactless smart cards use short-range radio that allows them to be read when they come close to a reader. These are often used for door entry systems, taking attendance in schools, cashless catering and a range of other services such as transport systems (London Underground Oyster Card, for example).

Smart phone

A mobile phone that includes PDA-like functionality. They tend to be more powerful than standard phones, with larger screens and expansion slots for memory cards. Applications can be installed on the phones.

STB

Set-top box: the device that gives access to digital television services such as satellite television, IPTV or Freeview. STBs are becoming more sophisticated, with built-in hard drives and network functionality.

Terabyte (TB)

A data storage capacity term meaning about 1,000 Gigabytes.

UWB

Ultra wideband: an emerging, high data rate wireless technology. Intended to provide high-speed wireless connections over short distances, it is expected to be used for cable replacement applications and for multimedia networking in the home. However, the IEEE 802.15.3a standards process for UWB has now been halted as agreement between rival solutions could not be achieved. Devices using the two incompatible solutions are expected to come to market in 2006. The first implementations should be wireless versions of USB 2.0. UWB has not yet been approved for use in Europe.

Vlog

A blog based on video content.

VoIP

Voice over Internet Protocol (IP) is a technology that breaks voice communications into packets that can be sent over IP networks such as local area networks (LANs) or the internet. This has advantages in terms of cost savings and increased functionality/manageability.

Wi-Fi

A term that is used generically to refer to wireless networks based on the IEEE 802.11 standards. However, Wi-Fi actually refers to products certified as being standards compliant and interoperable with other Wi-Fi devices. This testing and certification is carried out by the Wi-Fi Alliance, a not-for-profit industry body.

Wiki

Wikis are collaborative web pages that can be viewed and modified by anyone with a web browser and internet access.

WiMAX

WiMAX is a high-speed wireless technology based on IEEE 802.16 standards. It is intended to provide wireless broadband coverage over a large area. As with Wi-Fi and 802.11, WiMAX is the industry body that tests and certifies products as being standards compliant and interoperable with other WiMAX devices. There are different standards for fixed/nomadic and fixed/mobile access. The first WiMAX implementations, based on 802.16-2004 (fixed), are expected to provide a wireless alternative to DSL and cable broadband internet access. WiMAX base stations are likely to cover cells of 3–10km with maximum speeds of 40Mbps (shared between all connected users in the cell). A mobile version of WiMAX (802.16-2005), incompatible with the fixed version, should eventually provide WiMAX connectivity to a variety of devices such as notebooks, PDAs and mobile phones. Mobile WiMAX cells are likely to provide 15Mbps in cells of 1–3km. Currently, several companies have launched 'pre-WiMAX' services using equipment not yet certified by the WiMAX Forum.

WLAN

Wireless local area network.

List of community web sites cited by respondents to the survey

Interviewees specifically mentioned the following web sites. Other web sites were mentioned which, on inspection were specific to a local business, organisation or event and contained no general community information, have been omitted. Although it serves the whole county it was felt that the Northumberland County Council web site qualified as a community site because of the nature of much of its content and its links to, and promotion of, community web presences.

URL	Community Served by this web site
www.wylam.info -	Wylam
www.hexhamyi.org.uk	Hexham Young people
www.sica.org	Stocksfield Institute
www.stocksfield.org	Stocksfield village
www.communigate.co.uk/ne/kwvill/index.phtml	Kirkwhelpington village
www.prudhoe.org	Prudhoe community
www.fawside.org.uk	Allendale communities
www.cybermoor.org.uk	Alston communities
www.acombparishcouncil.gov.uk	Acomb community
www.corbridge.gov.uk	Corbridge community
www.haltwhistle.org	Haltwhistle community
www.laverocks.co.uk/gilslandmag/	Gilsland, Greenhead and Bewcastle communities
www.kielder.com	Kielder community
www.slaley.org.uk	Slaley village
www.northumberland.gov.uk	Northumberland County
www.bellinghamvillage.net	Bellingham community
www.tynedale.gov.uk	Tynedale District
www.northumberlandlife.org	Northumberland County
www.prudhoeparishchurch.org.uk	Prudhoe Parish Church community
www.thischurch.com/html/ebenezer.html	Prudhoe Ebenezer Church community
www.ruralvoices.org.uk	Rural Northumberland
www.allenvalleys.co.uk	Allen Valleys communities

In addition to these specific URLs a number of other local web sites were mentioned by name, (but not URL), and a subsequent web search failed to find them.

Communities which took part in the survey where there is either no community web site or where there was no knowledge of one.

Falstone
Whitfield
Wall