

Digital Communities

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Summary

Communities are ready to take the next step towards a digital future. It is time to move on from pilots and projects to policies and programmes.

As the only national organisation exclusively focused on community ICT, the 2020 Communications Trust has some answers. We have spent 10 years experimenting with pilots and projects and are impatient to move to a digital 2.0 future. But communities can't do it alone. We need partners who will trust us and invest with us. Through the Digital Strategy, Government has demonstrated a cautious interest in partnerships, but we think it is time to mature these partnerships. The Community Partnership and Broadband Challenge funds have clearly demonstrated that communities will provide matching support to any Government contribution. But we cannot pretend this is an even-handed trusted partnership. The bureaucracy and overhead that came with these programmes is a serious deterrent to all but the most hard-headed and experienced community participant.

So our message from the community sector to partners in government and business is:

- trust us;
- collaborate with us; and
- invest with us.

The community sector will contribute directly to the Government's goals of families - young and old, national identity and economic transformation and help prepare all New Zealanders for a digital future.

The community and voluntary sector is already a major player in New Zealand's economy. According to Statistics NZ, non-profit institutions contributed \$3.64 billion or 2.6 percent to New Zealand's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2004. Over one million (1,011,600) volunteers gave more than 270 million hours of unpaid labour to non-profit institutions in 2004. When valued at a market wage, the value of this voluntary labour increases the economic contribution of non-profit institutions to \$6.95 billion or 4.9 percent of GDP. This is similar to the contribution of the entire construction industry. Given the size of the sector, there could also be cost savings and efficiencies that can be gained by improving the performance of the sector itself.

I wish to comment briefly on the 10 Ps (not to be confused with the Digital Strategy 3 Cs) that I believe are the core ingredients for our Digital 2.0 future. I will be drawing on the 2020 Communications Trust's 10 years of experience and Riaka will follow up with the T hoe community's digital journey.

But first let me briefly address the four questions in the programme:

What are the social impacts of the internet?

The only threat we face is if there is inequitable access. Simply put, every New Zealander must have equitable and affordable access to the Internet, and the skills to use it effectively. The skills to consume and the skills to produce. The 2020 Trust was established in 1996 with this vision and it hasn't changed. This is not a matter for debate.

What about kiwis who don't have access?

This is not an option (except of course for those who choose not to have access). The challenge for us all is to ensure that our generation is not responsible for creating a new divide. And of course, the real issue is not just about access; it is about effective use.

How important is community to New Zealand?

Community is the heart and soul of digital New Zealand. Simply not a point for debate.

Our values-based culture and heritage . what are we doing to preserve our history?

Digital technologies provide us all with exciting new opportunities for preserving and promoting our culture and heritage . all New Zealanders should have the skills to participate. Full stop.

These are the easy questions . let me turn now to the more challenging issues in terms of our digital future.

People

Our digital journey must start and end with people and the communities they live in. People are the key stakeholders for government and business in New Zealand's digital future. They are the constituents, voters, employees, consumers, investors, etc. So what are their needs? Their desires? Their visions? Their dreams? Without a clearly defined vision, and one that is owned by the community, we can forget about any form of digital future.

This does not mean that the whole community must have a digital future vision . but there must be at least one local champion and typically, they will need a hand up (as opposed to a hand out).

The 2020 Trust's *Computers in Homes* initiative is a proven solution for strengthening families' digital literacy and especially in building links between families and schools. Programmes are implemented at a local school level typically with 15-25 families, and always supported by a local champion.

The Digital Strategy 2.0 must start and end with people

Problems

The second step in the digital journey is to clearly understand the problems or opportunities. What problems are being addressed? Or what opportunities are being pursued? What benefits are there for the community, the family, the individual in using digital technologies?

It is easy for digital champions to gloss over this step . surely the benefits are obvious? Digital natives would probably agree, but given that most decision-makers and community leaders in New Zealand are not digital natives, although a few may be new digital immigrants, the benefits of digital solutions are not always so obvious.

So what are the problems or opportunities? Access to education, health and entertainment services are common responses, but it really is up to each community to answer for

themselves, depending on local priorities. One thing is certain that without access to the Internet, the choices available to communities will become increasingly limited.

The statistics are of great concern.

In December 2006, one third of New Zealand households had no access to the Internet. That's 400,000 households. Our estimate is that there are school-aged children in at least 100,000 of these and most of them are in low socioeconomic . The 2006 census reported only 40% of Maori households with the Internet, with as few as 33% in Northland and Gisborne. The census also reported a national average of only 33% for Pacific Island households.

This imbalance is nothing short of a time-bomb.

Internet access gives Maori and Pacific Island people the choice to begin a digital journey.

Partners

The 2020 Trust recognises the value of working with partners. As it happens, we have no choice. We have no government baseline funding, no major corporate benefactor nor any income from product sales. We are a not-for-profit charitable trust and support our activities through project funding and volunteer time.

We acknowledge Government as a critical partner . most of our initiatives have relied on government funded support as the catalyst. For example, the Ministry of Education has been the catalyst for *Computers in Homes*, but we have always generated matching resources from local communities and business partners. I would like to make special mention of Computer Associates (or CA, as they are now known), the first major corporate to start investing in *Computers in Homes* programmes . in both Huntly and Naenae.

Our recent very successful eDay (e-waste day) with CANZ (Computer Access New Zealand Trust) also relied totally on partners; we were able to leverage on seed funding from the Ministry of Education through the computer refurbishing programme (CANZ) to run a \$300,000 initiative. Over 50 partners contributed to this initiative.

The Digital Strategy 2.0 must be based on strong partnerships.

Pilots

Pilot activities help to demonstrate the benefits of digital initiatives and there is no doubt that they have played a very important role during the last 10 years. Government in particular seems to have been attracted to the concept of pilots . the cynic would perhaps say this helps to avoid raising expectations about scale-up projects and future funding.

We have no problem with pilots for exploring new ideas and raising awareness. We think there is a good fit for the corporate and community funding organisations to support pilots. Pilots are typically time and budget-bound and are a good fit with the 31 March focus of most corporates and the funding cycles of community trusts. We particularly welcome InternetNZ's *Digital Opportunities Foundation* initiative in this regard.

eDay, again, is a good example. The Dell eDay pilot in 2006 collected 50 tonnes of e-waste; in 2007 we were able to scale this up to 12 centres and over 300 tonnes.

However, while business and community trusts are often willing to support small-scale pilots, they are unable to make longer term, larger scale commitments. This is where Government and the Digital Strategy 2.0 must focus.

Leave the pilots to the corporates, community trusts and charitable foundations

Projects

Our approach in the 2020 Trust is to follow up on successful local pilots with well-defined national projects. These draw on lessons learned during the pilot and provide a starting-point model for other communities. In our short 10-year history we have supported a number of very successful projects, addressing all 3 Cs of the Digital Strategy. We began with connectivity on the 1990s with the NetDay project. This involved using volunteer teams to wire up schools with Cat.5 data cabling. This ran for a number of years with Telecom and Tyco as our major partners. In the content area, our big success has been *Living Heritage*, a partnership with Sun Microsystems, the National Library and CWA New Media, and also recently supported by the Community Partnership Fund. In the confidence area, our flagship *Computers in Homes* project, that has now been rolled out in over 100 school communities, with significant support from the Ministry of Education and the Community Partnership Fund, but also from the local communities themselves.

There is no denying that Government has an important role to play in supporting digital projects, but we feel that, as for pilots, it is time to move on. The Digital 2.0 strategy should not be about projects.

The Digital Strategy 2.0 must move on beyond projects.

Policies

It is our view that projects that work should move into policy. And projects like *Living Heritage* and *Computers in Homes* that have been around for some 7 years, or projects like e-riders that are well established in other countries, are overdue for mainstreaming into policy.

We recognise the difficulty of doing this, especially for whole-of-government initiatives. Good digital initiatives focus on people and unlike government departments, people do not always fit nicely into departmental silos. *Computers in Homes* delivers benefits for children (MOE), parents (TEC and DOL), communities (DIA, MSD, MOH, MfE), etc. A single investment can deliver results in many different areas.

The first hard question then in migrating successful projects into policy is to identify a lead government agency and find a champion in that agency who has both the time and the vision to lead the policy work.

The next challenge comes in finding relevant policy research. We have been careful to continuously monitor and evaluate our programmes but have struggled to engage policy makers, but we are not going to give up! We have confidence in this approach, as we did succeed with our NetDay initiative in the 1990s. The Ministry of Education eventually acknowledged the importance of data cabling and changed its school property policy to

require that all new buildings be fully wired. Subsequently, this policy has been reinforced, with cabling standards being set and funding being made available for schools to upgrade older buildings.

Transform the successful projects into government policies.

Programmes

Once a policy has been agreed, the rest becomes much easier. Government agencies then have the mandate to develop programmes to embed the projects into their work plans addressing mainstream government objectives. This is very much business as usual for Government, in terms of annual funding and budget cycles.

A good current example is the product stewardship work being undertaken by the Ministry for the Environment. We think we will need to manage community-based e-waste days for another two years before legislation kicks in and the mechanisms for the safe disposal of e-waste are implemented. Another good example is the *Computers in Home* programme for refugees, now covered in baseline funding by the Ministry of Education.

We look to the Digital Strategy refresh to assign clear responsibilities and budgets to lead agencies to take forward the successful digital strategy projects.

We would be happy to see initiatives such as the Community Partnership Fund and the Broadband Challenge continue, as these funds certainly help to get the attention of business and community partners. However, better mechanisms are needed for managing these programmes. Outsourcing is an option we would recommend.

Embed digital strategies for programmes that work, outsourcing delivery/implementation

Plans

But before I give the impression this is just about central government, let me remind you of the earlier ~~part~~ partners. With central government doing its bit, it is essential that the other partners don't forget that they have a role too. Local government is one of the most important partners as they have a key responsibility for planning the environments in which communities exist. and again this includes all three Cs. connectivity, content and confidence. We have seen excellent leadership from Wellington City Council for over 10 years. originally with a digital vision that resulted in the creation of both our own 2020 Trust (to address capability issues) and City Link (to address connectivity issues). More recently we have seen leadership in the content world as well, with Wellington City Libraries joining forces with Christchurch and the National Library as key players in the development of innovative library plans.

I believe that Wellington City has also been the first to announce a broadband vision with a timeframe - all citizens to be connected to broadband by 2012.

Prepare sector Action Plans, engaging government, business and communities

Progress

A failure of Digital Strategy 1.0 is that we really have no sense of what progress we have made on the digital journey. We can definitely point to lots of interesting and successful projects, but can we honestly say what milestone we have reached. This must be a feature of Digital Strategy 2.0 . measurable milestones that will signpost our progress as a country towards a digital future.

This suggests the need for research funding. It is also impossible to even consider mainstreaming funding for community ICT initiatives from a policy perspective without measureable outcomes, hence the need for research funding. A new initiative to support community-based research would require modest funding - approximately \$5 million would be sufficient . A good example is the Scottish Community Action Research Fund.

Milestones to signpost our progress and research funding to monitor progress

Participation

The last 10% participation. This is the outcome we are seeking. A somewhat fancier term is digital inclusion, but the concept is the same. Citizens who participate in societies feel empowered to not only take charge of their own lives but also contribute to their communities. And this must surely be the digital investment dividend (or payback) for government, for business and the community. A digitally-connected and enabled community contributes directly to all three of government's goals: families- young and old, national identity and economic transformation.

The sooner we get there the quicker we get this payback.

Participation by people is the payoff.

Tūhoe Digital Journey

So where to from here . how to progress from pilots and projects to policies and programmes? We can learn from one of New Zealand's leading examples of a digital journey . a journey that started a very long time ago, but one that the 2020 Trust has had the privilege of sharing in recent years with our *Computers in Homes* programme.

Ladies and gentlemen - the T hoe Digital Journey.