Chapter 16
Interview:
Portal Experiences of Not-for-Profit Organisations

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ABSTRACT

Not-for-profit organisations are significant users of IT services, including Portals, for the use of public outreach and service delivery. While lacking the resources of the commercial sector, many not-for-profit organisations' needs may be similarly complex if they are relying on a portal for service delivery to a vulnerable client sector, or for the protection of medical records. In this paper, the authors examine the experience of service delivery to two medium-sized not-for-profits in Melbourne, Australia.

INTRODUCTION

Not-for-profit organisations make extensive use of portal technology for public outreach and service delivery. This case study looks at the challenges of a resource-poor sector and how it meets often sophisticated requirements. The study is based on the experience of industry practitioner Rick Noble, who has worked with not-for-profits in a technology development, support and man-

agement capacity for more than 10 years. He is interviewed by Greg Adamson, co-Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Web Portals*.

Can You Provide An Introduction to the Use of Portals by Not-For-Profit Organisations?

Various not-for-profit organisations will think of portals in different ways. It depends on the maturity of the organisation and which area or sector they are in as to what their interpretation and sense of

meaning of the word portal is. It is a generic term for many, perhaps not well understood by some. In one sense portal for some organisations just refers to a web site. It is an entry point for their service users. It could mean a collection of sites that have a common thread.

There are a number of organisations I have worked with that have been developing web sites for service users as an entry point to a range of service models. There are three types of web sites that not-for-profits engage with.

First is the primary web site. The main web site is their public facing marketing and information site. It is their reference point of contact for potential funding partners, service users and general public.

The second type of site that not-for-profits engage in is specifically service driven, so it needs to deliver a product via the web. A couple of good examples are amphetamine type sites www.meth. org.au and www.bluebelly.org.au. These sites are about meth and amphetamine use and harm minimisation. They are two pertinent examples around a service based web site, provided by medium sized not-for-profits.

The third is an ancillary web site, developed as an additional entry point or complementary service to a core project. This is typically a 'landing page' style or a small set of pages with a limited amount of information.

Each one of these three traditionally has a different funding source. That is key for not-for-profits. The main site is rarely funded: not-for-profits when they go for tenders rarely get infrastructure funding, as opposed to universities and others, who do get the money to do a job, and money to support the workers in providing that service. The third one, the ancillary site, is very rarely funded so that needs to come from other sources, whether it is an internal funding stream or development funds.

So Funding is a Major Issue?

The funding model for service-based sites is a really interesting one. It is an external environment which sets up a competition between organisations that would otherwise be collaborative. So there is a tension between collaboration and competition when portals are set up in a tendering environment. The problem is with the cost in time of responding to tenders. The Collaborative Internet Innovation Fund (CIIF) tendering model is a little different. They will seek expressions of interest, and then the shortlisted candidates receive money to develop their proposal. Rather than have to find the time and money internally, it is a funded process. That is a key change. CIIF is in their second round of funding. If you look at most of the major Australian government departments, they seek response to tenders in a competitive manner.

Each of the three types of sites tends to be underfunded compared to commercial areas, so the level of funding provided to produce a particular web site or portal of a particular quality is normally sub-standard, and to some degree the lack of funding has to be compensated for by additional effort and input from the staff involved.

I've worked on all three types of portals, primarily with two different organisations, one of which is Moreland Hall. Both are around the 100 EFT [equivalent full time] mark, about $10 million in terms of expenditure and therefore funding, on which they aim to break even. The client base is either drug users; drug affected groups such as families, or wider society, maybe a particular community; and policy makers within government. Both the organisations I have worked with operate on a harm minimisation model.

I think it is worth looking at two meth/amphetamine sites, which have a lot in common. Certainly the two organisations have similarities and those sites, meth.org.au and bluebelly.org. au have a close relationship and a similar commonwealth funding stream.

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