



Community Internet Project

Background

For those in mainstream society, the information revolution has transformed their lives. It has done this in four distinct ways:

- it has informed them
- it has entertained them
- it has educated them
- it has enabled them to communicate with each other quickly, widely, effortlessly and in a cost effective manner.

Conversely, for those outside mainstream society such as the homeless, the mentally ill and the sick and elderly, it has had the opposite effect. For most of them, the information revolution has served mainly to isolate them further and place significant hurdles in their way of participating meaningfully in or with mainstream society.

It has done this by failing to facilitate access to the tools necessary for these groups to participate in this revolution. Those tools include mobile phones, computers, the internet and the necessary education and training to use them.

As the lives of those in mainstream society continue to advance faster and faster through the use of these tools, the gulf with the groups outside mainstream society is widening because of these access problems, and at the same rapid rate.

The project

This project is about providing a significant service to the community by bringing the tools of the information revolution to those who cannot readily access them. Although initially designed to service the needs of our local community, the ability to extend it to similar groups in both national and international communities is obvious.

It has its genesis not just in the idea that those in our target groups need to be able to meaningfully participate in and with an ever changing mainstream community. It also has its genesis in the likelihood that if these tools are made available to these groups,

the transformative effect on their lives is likely to be even greater than those experienced by mainstream society.

For people in these groups information, entertainment, education and communication, are four of the most critically important factors in their lives. The ability to access mobile phones, computers and the internet with proper training, will quite simply change their lives.

The prospect of extending these resources to those in remote communities through the roll out of the NBN, significantly broadens the number of people who can enjoy the benefits of this project.

Community social media

Having access to the four critically important services the information revolution can bring to people's lives is only part of the story.

To have access to email platforms such as hotmail and gmail, and to the existing social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook as well as appropriately designed Apps, will not only allow these groups to meaningfully participate with each other and mainstream society, but will change the way carers of people in these groups interact with them.

For instance, through Facebook groups with the homeless, providers of food, clothing and medical services will be able to tell them where they are and make arrangements to see them. Providers of accommodation in shelters will be able to tell people if beds are available. For those suffering with a mental illness, through personal web pages, information on their illness, treatment programs and medications including side effects can be made available to them.

Homeless people will be able to use Twitter to communicate with each other and the wider world. As a result, they will become more 'engaged' with society and more able to see themselves as being very much a part of that society, rather than an isolated, forgotten segment.

This form of community social media will also lead to important cost savings. For example, the cost of printing and publishing hard copy information pamphlets will drop significantly. Patients from these groups in hospital can be discharged earlier because they are more contactable to (for example), change dressings. By making members of these groups more contactable, it is easier and more cost effective to arrange appointments, meetings, social functions and access to resources.

Conclusion

The arguments in favour of this project proceeding are so compelling that it should really be a matter of *'when'* and not *'if'*. Because the tools and the resources are already available, and because the numbers in the target groups are in comparison to the size of mainstream society quite small, the cost of implementing the project is in relative terms not likely to be significant.

Additionally, because of the nature of this project and the likelihood of positive publicity being generated for those who participate in it, there will be an attraction for major corporations including resource providers in related industries, to participate by donating resources, time, money and services.