

# stories

from The Local Government Web Network



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*what's your story?*

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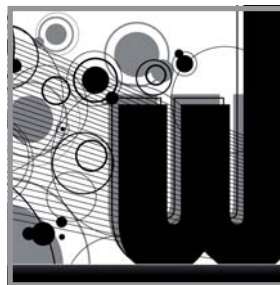
The web is a rapidly changing thing. JavaScript, is an important part of it, and has gone through many different stages: from a promising, but useless initiative from Netscape (we still remember how annoying jumping text and popups were), to the bread and butter of Web 2.0. Now is the time for the JavaScript renaissance.



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When asked at a conference recently "is print dead?". The answer was no, not yet. For now it continues to be a format that compliments our efforts online. Local Governments would be unwise though if they continued to rely on print and didn't ready themselves for the future web.



**Diana Mounter**



**Reem Abdelaty**

# Hello

## **Welcome to Issue Number 1 of our new magazine: Stories.**

The internet can give you instant access to a plethora of information and tools. Working on the web is a fast-paced field of learning, and the resources available via the internet can be a web designer's best friend. But perhaps the greatest way we can teach each other our experiences is by telling a good story. Reading a tutorial, a text book, or wiki page might bring you to learn the same information, but when you hear it from someone first hand it makes that information "real" and something you might relate to.

This magazine, printed and online, is a platform for people working in government and in industry to share their experiences, and maybe start a conversation. Perhaps during our conference and through our networks online, you can ask each other - what's your story? Together, by sharing our stories, we might help each other build the web a better way.

### **Diana Mounter and Reem Abdelaty**

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# Does your council even need a website?



**We love the web. But we don't love council websites.**

Local Government gets just 0.14% of all visits made by Australians on the internet<sup>1</sup> - and a significant slice of that is to our library catalogues and tourism portals.

What are Australians doing online?

We're searching, shopping, banking, using webmail, following the news and checking the weather<sup>2</sup>.

We want information but mostly we want to do something. And we're choosing to do it online when it's convenient and saves us time and money.

The internet is now also our preferred way to interact with government<sup>3</sup>.

For councils, this means that buying a parking sticker, reporting a missed bin collection or participating in council decisions about your street are the kind of services our constituents want and will use.

But do we need a website for this?

If we expose our information (appropriately licenced) as machine-readable data to the web, third-party services can aggregate that data across LGAs, cities and states and deliver it to the user without our website getting in the way.

To find out what day your waste and recycling is collected, should you even have to know which LGA you're in? What if a single gateway delivered this information based on a simple input, your street address?

To report a pothole, broken streetlight or dumped furniture in the U.K., you can locate it on a map at [FixMyStreet.com](http://FixMyStreet.com), a process made even simpler if you're holding a location-aware phone ("the pothole is here, where I'm standing, now"). FixMyStreet forwards your report to the appropriate agency and lets you know when and how it has been resolved.

Or you can give your postcode to [TwitterPlan.co.uk](http://TwitterPlan.co.uk) and it'll tweet you when development applications are made in your street or neighbourhood.

[TwitterPlan.co.uk](http://TwitterPlan.co.uk) and [FixMyStreet.com](http://FixMyStreet.com) are easy to use because they focus on a single task and offer a common interface to all councils.

Another model is EveryBlock, the US site that aggregates public information like crime reports, building permit actions, restaurant inspections and local media and maps it to your block, street and neighbourhood.

Navigating information spatially is now second-nature to most people.

If we geocode our location-based data, it can be layered on Google Maps (and other online mapping tools) or accessed by an iPhone application. Choose a playground for its proximity and facilities, avoid roadworks on your commute or overlay the local environmental plan onto your property when planning a build. »

**Bernard de Broglio** studied English at university but ended up writing HTML and CSS. He has been working at Mosman Council since 2002, pushing more acronyms (okay, abbreviations) like API, XML and RSS. Based in Mosman Library, he has been fortunate to be surrounded by information professionals who understand the benefit of open data and the need to take Council's web presence beyond its website. The cakes are good, too.

*"To find out what day your waste and recycling is collected, should you even have to know which LGA you're in?"*



If we open our data to the web, our constituents can choose how to consume it. It's the 'many minds principle' - the coolest thing to do with your data will be thought of by someone else<sup>4</sup>.

But there's something else that more and more Australians are doing online - and that's sharing among themselves. Photos and videos, stories and opinions, experience and capability. Ten per cent of all visits by Australians are to social media sites<sup>5</sup>.

Why are Facebook, YouTube and Twitter so popular? They're about people, not pages.

Look through a council website (mine included) and you won't see many names or faces. Aside from the mayor, councillors and senior staff, the creators and custodians of our online content are anonymous. Even photos of our community tend to be more about stock images than identity.

Who are we?

Now go look at Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. It's all names and faces.

What if your environmental education officer had a profile and picture? A blog instead of a webpage? Answered questions ("Yes, envelopes with plastic windows are okay in your paper recycling!") about recycling on Twitter? Did some seeding and weeding on Wikipedia? Participated in the local 'transition towns' network and gardeners forum? Added photos of the bushcare group on Flickr? Worked online with constituents?

I'm sure the messages would be better communicated - and have the opportunity to evolve - when not presented as a static text-heavy webpage two levels down filed under 'Environment'.

Many of our outreach services would benefit from us actually reaching out.

For some of our internal customers, the mere existence of the council website blinds them to this wider, social web.

Event listed on our home page? Media release posted? Tick the box for online marketing. PDF uploaded alongside a few paras cribbed from the public notices with link to contact form? Tick the box for online consultation.

If we didn't have a website, we'd have to get smart.

*"If we didn't have a website, we'd have to get smart."*

Who do we want to talk to? Where do they go online?  
Let's meet them there.

And when we did bump into our constituents, we might get a less than polite reply if we didn't introduce ourselves, if the conversation wasn't framed in plain English or if we ignored them once they'd taken the time to answer our questions.

Once upon a time I had a vision that the council website itself could be the local social network. But we're not Flickr or Facebook or YouTube. We're not in the business of building community platforms. And we know that there will never be one hub - the internet is a network of networks.

What we do have is unique local content and knowledge.

We want our constituents to get that information. But more than that, we want them to use it. Pass it on, comment on it, add to it. Social media enables active consumers of information in a way that a traditional website cannot.

You might even argue that there's an economic rationale here - 'other people's bandwidth'!

Of course, the one thing Council websites do well is popping up at the top of Google's search results when you're looking for a locality. They work efficiently as a directory of our services and facilities and a gateway to our satellite sites and social media spaces. The .gov.au domain name validates our identity and gives credibility to our content.

So, our councils do need a website. But much more, they need web services. And people.

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<sup>1</sup>Hitwise, *Hitwise Online Government Report, 2009*:  
<http://www.hitwise.com.au/registration-page/au-government-report.php>

<sup>2</sup>Hitwise Dashboards, *Top Websites and Search Engine Analysis, 1 July 2009*:  
<http://www.hitwise.com.au/datacenter/main/dashboard-1706.html>

<sup>3</sup>Australian Government Information Management Office, *Interacting with Government: Australians' use and satisfaction with e-government services – 2008*:  
<http://www.finance.gov.au/publications/interacting-with-government/index.html>

<sup>4</sup>Walsh, Jo; Rufus Pollock, *Open Data and Componentisation XTech 2007 (slide 14)*.

<sup>5</sup>Hitwise, *Weekly market share in category 'Computers and Internet - Social Networking and Forums' measured by visits, June 2009*.



# Web Review Wednesday

**Encouraging staff to update their web content can take a disproportionate amount of an administrator's time. By holding a review event you can increase participation while reducing the time spent chasing updates.**

**Rachel Macdonald** built her first website as a teenager in 1994 to share her short stories with the world. She has a double degree in Creative Writing/Information Studies and has been working on Local Government websites since 2006. Her specialities are turning Council-speak into accurate, informative, web-specific content and championing usability/accessibility issues. In her spare time she dreams about being fluent in Mandarin.

## ***Holroyd's situation***

I work for Holroyd City Council, a small council in Western Sydney. It is my job to oversee and develop our internet and intranet presence. Much of my time is spent collecting information from other staff to create content that communicates Council's services and plans to the public.

As a one-woman team I am unable to keep abreast of all current and future projects, and rely on staff to keep me informed. Officers have become used to providing information to go on the website but then often forget to update the page when details change or a project ends.

Sending out emails asking for staff to review their pages was not effective enough. Officers who liked working on the website would act quickly but their pages were rarely the ones that were languishing. Staff responsible for the information on the least-updated pages were the least likely to respond to requests.

## ***Goals of Web Review Wednesday***

All initiatives I had tried relied on staff doing web reviews at their own desk and own convenience, but it became clear that the web was always going to be the chore left till tomorrow. I began to think about ways to enthuse staff and inject some energy into the process while clearly defining the amount of time the review task would take.

Staff responded well to discussing issues face-to-face as opposed to via email and as most staff are yet to learn how to update the site themselves it reduced the amount of time spent on the task if I fixed the changes as they went. It became clear that reviewing needed a face-to-face component.

*"...it became clear that the web was always going to be the chore left till tomorrow."*

I also wanted to lighten the mood a bit, somehow make it a bit fun. I thought about ways to create an enjoyable atmosphere; music, food, other staff members. We have a computer training area that has eight computers. I decided to hold a review meeting there advertised more like an event, where staff could come and eat snacks while reading over their pages and having them updated instantly. I named it Web Review Wednesday and decided to hold it once a quarter to get a proper review calendar in place.

## ***Setting it up***

As there would need to be around twenty-five staff involved I decided to hold four meetings on one day. I tried to group staff with their friends or people in similar roles. Staff could see who they had been grouped with. I also let them know of the other meeting times in case they couldn't attend their suggested one.

In the email sent out I was very explicit in the time that it would take: fifteen or so minutes if people read the pages before coming, an hour at most if they didn't. It was also said that if they could not come right on the hour that coming half-way through would be fine; this was to reduce the number of staff who, being late due to a phone call or other distraction, then chose not to attend.

I wanted staff to review old content rather than hatch new pages that wouldn't be reviewed either. Problems that would take a long time to untangle would be marked down for a one-on-one meeting later.

Several staff were unable to attend; I made separate appointments with them prior to the Wednesday so it was clear the review was still going to occur.

## ***On the day***

I turned all the computers on prior to people arriving so they could just walk in and get started. I wasn't able to have music playing but I did provide chocolate biscuits and mixed nuts as well as coffee and tea. I made sure that each meeting had its own supply so that the afternoon meetings were not getting leftovers.

When people began to arrive they took a snack and sat down at a computer. I repeated the goal of the review and what the staff member needed to do as they got comfortable and offered all the support that I could, including clarifying what was meant by 'review'.

Participants spent on average twenty minutes in the room. The majority of changes were to times, dates, fees and phone numbers. These were all changed immediately, which staff liked because they could see their changes done in real time and left feeling like the task was complete until the next review.

Some staff needed to go back to their desk for more information to make corrections. In these cases they were generally emailed to me later that day.

When the review of a page or group of pages was complete the person responsible signed an attendance sheet. This provided evidence of who reviewed pages and added a sense of importance and responsibility to the exercise as well as a clear indicator that they'd completed the task.

## ***Positives of Web Review Wednesday***

General attendance was very high and the amount of content reviewed in one day was more than had been done in the last six months. Previously pages would be reviewed randomly and it was hard to ever feel like the site was truly up-to-date. Having most work completed in one day was very gratifying because both myself and participants felt the achievement; the task was no longer endless!

Having many staff in the same room proved invaluable when it came to content that seemed to simultaneously belong to several sections and none, particularly in relation to engineering and planning (separate departments at Holroyd). These staff members found that though they were working in different areas they wanted to get the same message across. With no prompting from me staff began to work together on plans for improvement.

One manager had never actually looked at the website before and found that nearly every detail was incorrect. This staff member had been asked via email several times to look at the site but only his attendance at the event accomplished this. This manager was shocked by the inaccuracy and left the event determined to set a workflow in place to avoid this happening in the future. »



*“One manager had never actually looked at the website before and found that nearly every detail was incorrect.”*



One of the least tangible but very valuable outcomes of Web Review Wednesday was the amount of goodwill generated. Staff appreciated the simplification and concentration of the review task, and were happy that much could be fixed there on the spot. The fact that food was provided and that they could have a chat with the person next to them also cheered them. It was great to see staff feeling more positive about the website after the review.

## ***Negatives of Web Review Wednesday***

Some staff were hard to focus on the task of reviewing. Two staff members came in with huge restructuring plans that they insisted on talking about, causing other staff who had minor changes to wait. Next quarter I will outline more clearly the difference between reviewing and restructuring in the invitation.

One staff member was surprised by the presence of others as he had assumed it was a private meeting. I had taken for granted that staff would see that there were several invitees and had not been as explicit as I could have. This staff member was fine and as the next meeting will involve the same people the issue shouldn't be repeated.

While the event did persuade some staff to become involved in the review process who had been previously difficult to engage, there was still one or two people who said they would come and then never showed on the day. The level of participation was high but not complete.

## ***Outcome***

I think that overall Web Review Wednesday was a success and something that could be tried in other councils. It addresses the problem of staff who lack time and motivation and reduces a process that could drag on for months or never be done, into a single day with a week of additional updates afterwards.

*“get people together to review and update in real time in a relaxed environment.”*

The biggest issue before and after Web Review Wednesday was the same: staff who avoid reviewing pages. Although not all staff came to the event most did and certainly the number of people who needed to be chased up personally was dramatically reduced. The problem has not been completely solved but it has been addressed and reduced to a manageable level.

## ***Doing it yourself***

The idea itself is very simple; get people together to review and update in real time in a relaxed environment. Apart from buying snacks it can be done with very little other cost. Having a computer training room makes things easy but if your council doesn't have one then think about your library services or the number of laptops you could collect.

There are ways to extend the event feel, such as prizes, music and even decorations. If there are not many people to involve perhaps try a morning tea or lunch. The approach should be tailored to your council but I would encourage you to hold on to the relaxed/fun feel. That will help get them back the next time!

This isn't the only way to increase participation in the review process, but if you are a one-person team it's a simple low-cost approach to try.

# *Digital communication – ignore it at our own peril*



**The days when Local Government could rely on their local newspaper and radio station to get their message to their community are long gone.**

Recent events in Iran and China have highlighted the power of electronic media and social networking as a communications tool. Social networking sites were the chief means for citizens to communicate with each other and the rest of the world. Their respective governments, realising that they were losing control of the information stream, stepped in to close them down – or at least attempted to.

While a rather extreme demonstration of the growing power of online communications, it also shines a spotlight on just how much has changed in our world.

Local Government should ignore the lessons here and the opportunities of digital communications only if they want to risk being left in the dark ages.

## ***The paradigm is shifting***

The trend to receive news and communications through 'non-traditional' means is gathering pace. The latest mobile phones have of course evolved into complex means for bringing together information from a huge range of sources, and online sources such as websites, online newspapers, blogs, wikis, RSS feeds, email and even the rather loud new kid on the block, twitter, feature heavily.

For Local Government to ignore these methods is to ignore a wealth of quick and, once the initial hurdles have been negotiated, easy methods to communicate with their community and, even better, to build a relationship with them.

A vibrant and effective online presence certainly need not be intended to replace traditional means – indeed, I don't think we have quite reached that junction just yet. But a well designed and implemented presence can definitely enhance Local Government's image, communications stream and relationship with their community.

*“Blogs offer a chance for councils to present an issue and get a quick response from the community”*

## ***Selling what we have to gain***

However, your ability to provide innovative communications is not only limited by IT's ability to implement new infrastructure or systems. Perhaps the most important factor is a genuine understanding at management level of the benefits they could gain.

To begin with, an obvious point to stress is that a website is of course accessible to an enormous volume of people from almost any location. You control the information that goes up and you can change it whenever you like.

It also allows those people to interact with council conveniently, not only in terms of transactions, but also in an exchange of information.

These streams move beyond the one-way information flow, and allow community members to interact with their council. »

***Kate Walsh is the Manager of Communications at the Local Government and Shires Associations. She has been working in the Local Government industry for ten years in both NSW and Victoria, experiencing life in both rural and city councils before coming to work for the Associations that represent both of those areas. She has also had previous lives as a web content coordinator, advertising manager, and within the commercial public relations sector.***



Blogs offer a chance for councils to present an issue and get a quick response from the community in an environment where voices that might get drowned out by the vocal minority have a chance of being heard.

Citizens groups also form easily on the web, and they are often motivated by their common passions and interests to take up causes and carry them forward beyond a point that Local Government may have the capacity for.

If you can get senior management to look at digital communications in this light, they should be better able to understand the benefits for councils willing to embrace the shift.

## ***Gaining community trust and understanding***

There is an advantage that rises above and beyond the simple stream of communication.

If we are to establish and maintain the trust of our communities, one of the chief goals of Local Government must be transparency.

There is no question that Australians view their political hierarchy with a great deal of healthy cynicism. Some of it is undoubtedly warranted, but much of it is born of a simple lack of understanding of the constraints under which they operate.

Sharing information offers us a way to bridge this gap. If our community members have easy, negotiable access to the various factors that influence decision making in Local Government – for example, the planning documents, the research, the funding restrictions and the reasons for them – then they can develop a much clearer understanding about why their elected officials make the decisions they do.

## ***Staff are winners too***

Sharing of information can also smooth the work flow within a council. With the advent of integrated planning guidelines, there is a clear need for communications channels within a council to step up a pace.

*“...one of the chief goals of Local Government must be transparency.”*

A well developed intranet allows collaboration that may not have been a part of Local Government up until now, where information ‘silos’ have a tendency to form. It can allow sharing of common goals, independent research that can feed other projects and access to the full depth of staff skills across the organisation.

Maintaining an effective website is just one example that illustrates how the incorporation of digital communications into a council’s ethos can make what seemed like an insurmountable problem evaporate.

In too many councils the website is still an online brochure, with one staff member designated as an administrator who all too often has either to beg for content or manage overwhelming requests from departments wanting all their information made available now.

Why not write digital communications into existing work plans? There are many voices in council that could contribute to your online communications, as long as policy and the flow of responsibility are clear, with a certain degree of flexibility.

There is no reason why communications staff, IT, librarians, planners, environmental project officers and front desk staff cannot come together to create a vibrant and relevant online presence that spans web, email and social networking sites.

# OOOG! Uh what is it good for?



*James Purser is a 32 year old father, husband and self confessed "Geek". Aside from Open Government, James is also a great fan of Free and Open Source Software, having served on the Linux Australia Council for two years as an Ordinary Member, and utilising it in his day to day work. Outside of his business he has an interest in alternative fuels, gardening and media production and anything "new, cool and shiny."*

**Let's start out by defining what OOOG is shall we? OOOG stands for Open source, Open standards, Open Government.**

It started out as a personal standard that I used when judging the suitability of a project or solution for use with Gov2.0/LocGov2.0 work. When I look at a project or solution I measure how it stacks up against the following criteria:

## **Open Source:**

- Available Under An Open Source License
- Open To Third Party Contributions
- Active Development Community
- Government Contributes Back To The Open Source Project

## **Open Standards:**

- Supports True Open Standards
- Does Not Force Usage Of Non-Standard Formats
- Project Is Publicly Committed To Open Standards
- Provides Public Service Information In Open Standards

*"The use of Open Standards across the board can mean budget savings"*

## **Open Government:**

- Implementing The Project Will Allow For Greater Openness in Government

## **Why those criteria?**

Well apart from the fact they make a funky looking acronym, each of the above taps into something I think is important in any government project.

Through the use of Open Source Software, the government encourages the development of the local ICT industry and importantly, a widening of the talent base the Government can call on.

The use of Open Standards across the board can mean budget savings (It's a lot easier to develop against an Open Standard than a closed one), the development of new and interesting services (Third Party usage of Public Service Information becomes much easier) and it ensures data portability. »



Open Government is something we all benefit from. The greater flow of information between the Government and the public means more opportunities for the public to become engaged with a political system that in certain circles is seen as being separate from “Real Life”.

### ***Not just for breakfast***

Since then I've come to the realisation that OOOG can be used as an independent measure of not only Gov2.0 projects, but government in general. How well a government body ranks on the OOOG scale tends to reflect how open and innovative they are in their day to day operations.

*“how well does your Local Council rate on the OOOG Scale?”*

For example, how well does your local council rate on the OOOG Scale?

Do they use Free and Open Source Software?

What Standards are in place for document exchange or Web Work?

Are they open to the idea of collaborating with the public and sharing information or does the Silos mentality still reign supreme?

These are just some of the questions that you could ask to ascertain their OOOG score. Have a look, ask some questions and do your OOOG survey.

### ***OOOG survey***

Since I originally presented on OOOG at Publicsphere 2.0 I've been pondering the possibility of a more formal implementation of the OOOG Rating. This would take the form of a annual or bi-annual survey that would cover as much of the government sector in Australia as possible. This includes Local, State and Federal.

This means that that OOOG Rating scoring system will need to be formalised and I'm working on that at the moment. I would love to hear people's thoughts on the idea and suggestions as to the best way to formalise the system.

## ***A real live OOOG Rating***

As an example I thought I would include the first on paper OOOG Rating that I've done so far:

### ***Open Australia***

For those of you who may not be aware, Open Australia is a project run with the aim of opening up the process of Government from the outside in, inspired by the UK project [theyworkforyou.com](http://theyworkforyou.com). For more information about Open Australia, please refer to *p29*.

#### **Open source: 9/10**

From the start, the Open Australia project has both relied upon and contributed to Open Source software. The code for the site is publically available under a BSD Style license, while the code for the web scraper/parser is available under the GNU Affero General Public License.

They have a publically available bug tracker, using the closed source JIRA Issue Tracking System cost them a point here, but as far as I can see that's the only part of the system that relies on closed source software.

#### **Open standards: 10/10**

As with Open source, Open Australia relies on and promotes the use of Open Standards, both in document formats and on the wire communications.

Aside from their site adhering as closely as possible to international web standards, all documents are in PDF format, each Member of Parliament has their own RSS feed and the Open Australia project has adapted the [theyworkforyou.com](http://theyworkforyou.com) API to their own needs, meaning that third parties can now create new services based on Open Australia's information. Even if you don't feel like working with their API you can access the xml generated by their scraper directly.

If there's an open way of communicating information, Open Australia either has it covered, or is planning to cover it soon.

#### **Open Government: 10/10**

Open Government is everything that Open Australia is about. The whole reason that Open Australia exists is to open up the process of Government to the people. It's doing a pretty good job of it as well.

*“Open Government is everything that Open Australia is about.”*

#### **Final Score: 29/30**

The only place the Open Australia project lost a point was in Open source through the use of the JIRA Issue tracker. However, that being said, they are certainly using it to it's fullest potential and in the long run it's supporting the development of Open Source Software, Open Standards and Open Government.

On a personal note, I truly do appreciate the amount of time and effort that the Open Australia crew have put into the project. The fact that they are building a truly open store of information about the way our Governments work should be celebrated.

**Final Note:** One of the reasons I'm pushing OOOG is that we are potentially at the cusp of major change in the way that we view our Government and how it works. As the internet embeds itself further and further into our society and culture we need a way to measure how well government is reacting to the changes. OOOG can be such a measure.



**Ben Buchanan** started creating web pages more than twelve years ago, while completing a degree in everything but IT. He has worked in both the public (university) and private sectors; and worked on the redevelopment of major websites including *The Australian* and three generations of Griffith University's corporate website. He now works as Frontend Architect for News Digital Media and writes at the 200ok weblog: <http://weblog.200ok.com.au>.

# Coffee Theory

**Ask web professionals about the tools they use, and it's likely they'll start talking about hardware, software and web applications. That's understandable, but it's not the whole picture.**

I believe things like software pale in comparison with the most powerful tool available: coffee.

I'm not talking about caffeine. What I'm talking about is the power of informal work time. It's wrapped up in what I call Coffee Theory, which in short form is this: *Large organisations only survive because people drink coffee.*

## ***It's all about people***

When I think back over the projects I've worked on, technology was often the least of our problems. Before we started coding, there were people to convince, requirements to gather and budgets to get approved.

Sure, bugs can be nasty and frustrating – but they can be fixed. You're smart, you can Debug Stuff. But you can't debug people; and if you hit a big People Problem right away you might not even get to the coding stage.

People can balk at an idea, play politics and ultimately bring your project to a halt. One thing is for sure – you can't solve people problems by hacking code.

The good news is a lot of people problems are communication problems, and coffee can help you fix those.

## ***Communication problems***

Large organisations generate a huge amount of data, but they struggle getting the right information to the right people.

The problem starts with simple overload – there's just too much email and documentation for any one person to read. Attempts to filter information have mixed success, since the gatekeepers may not always know what's relevant to everyone else.

If the organisation is big enough – or you are part of a network of similar organisations – there can be entire teams who do similar work, but have no effective lines of communication.

At best, you're probably missing great opportunities for collaboration, knowledge sharing and just meeting new people.

At worst, you can have teams working at cross purposes, duplicating effort and stepping on each others toes. Good things like "what's the best solution?" get lost in the noise. The organisation has ended up in a state of disconnection.

## ***So how does coffee help?***

The morning coffee break does not respect hierarchy, structure or politics. When you go for coffee, you can and will meet everyone from the developer who sits in the next cubicle, right up to the CEO.

*"People who otherwise wouldn't talk to each other can still meet over coffee."*

People who otherwise wouldn't talk to each other can still meet over coffee. Organisational disconnects are repaired by the humans in the system, since they are social beings who get together and chat about Stuff™.

Without coffee, without informality, organisations would grind to a halt. Think about it: if you wanted to be told everything through official channels, do you think you'd ever get anything done?

So coffee is the reason that large organisations survive. If individuals are smart about it, coffee can also be a way for them to thrive and have fun within these bureaucratic behemoths.



## ***Extend your social network***

One of the best things I've ever learned about work life is that "networking" is just a fancy word for being sociable. So if you're worried about taking some time out of your day for the coffee run, remember that keeping in touch with co-workers is an important part of work life.

Even if you're not a hard-edged, career-driven type, being friendly with people makes work life infinitely more enjoyable.

The coffee run is an ideal time to make and maintain contacts. You'll learn what people are passionate about; hear what they're working on; and just simply get to know them better.

*"... 'networking' is just a fancy word for being sociable."*

You don't need to get into some unnatural Networking Mode, nor do you need to be pushing an agenda. Just go with the flow and see what opportunities come up.

You should always be a little diplomatic of course – remember, if you're about to tell someone how bad a system is... they might have been the one who set it up. So be nice.

## ***The coffee shop is not a boardroom!***

Beyond the random gathering of the coffee run, you can use coffee as a way to break down barriers with specific people.

If you've had a string of meetings with someone and still find yourselves at an impasse, try meeting in a coffee shop instead of the office. The change of pace can help find a new approach, or prompt people to explain underlying issues they didn't think to discuss in meetings.

*"...being friendly with people makes work life infinitely more enjoyable."*

People relax in coffee shops – they do not relax in boardrooms. Take people out of strict working environments, and you may find "impossible" problems can be sorted out in half an hour.

Coffee is informal, it's friendly and it's personal. It shows that you're interested in the person as well as the business card. It may not work on everyone, but you might be surprised who it does work on. »



## ***“But I don’t like coffee...”***

*Great, or maybe we could go somewhere and just eat a bunch of caramels. When you think about it, it’s just as arbitrary as drinking coffee.*

– Will, Good Will Hunting

Coffee theory does not strictly require coffee. Coffee is just a very common social ritual which is accepted in most offices. In your office it could be tea, ice cream or indeed eating a bunch of caramels.

The actual *thing* doesn’t matter. Just watch out for informal moments which offer an opportunity to step outside the normal, staid office dynamic.

## ***What about beer?***

Sure, beer is another social lubricant. But unlike coffee, it does not sharpen your ability to pitch your ideas. Alcohol is also commonly consumed at the end of the week. So although on Friday night someone was totally convinced you’re on to something, by the time Monday rolls around they’ve probably forgotten the conversation entirely.

Besides that, not everyone drinks; however most people do enjoy some form of break during the work day. They also tend to do it every day, so you don’t have to wait another week for the pub night to roll around.

So beer has its place; but realistically while you’re likely to achieve general social bonding between workmates—and yes that’s a good thing—you’re far less likely to get any real work done.

## ***To the coffee shop!***

Regardless of your role, at some point the human factor is going to be the biggest hurdle you have between you and your goals.

The challenge may be selling an idea; resolving a dispute; getting people to work together; or finding new ways to do old tasks.

*“Sometimes you need to get people out of the workplace and into a different mindset...”*

Whatever it is, sometimes the office will not hold the answer. Meetings, email and phone calls can’t fix everything. Sometimes you need to get people out of the workplace and into a different mindset – and going for a coffee is an ideal way to make that happen.

So that’s Coffee Theory in a nutshell. It’s about bridging the gaps left in work communications, so you can get people together and get things done. It’s about embracing the human side of work life; and accepting that informal work time can be the most productive time of the day.

It’s worked for me so far, I hope it works for you too.

Now, who’s up for a coffee?

# Tweeting the live local challenge

**Twitter, the latest social networking tool to reach global proportions, offers a great deal of potential, and also a great deal of hype.**

Media outlets around the world took notice of Twitter this year, and its use as an organising and information tool in Iran after elections in June put to rest suggestions that the microblogging platform was a web novelty.

Even before Iran, various marketing “gurus” were emerging to offer expertise in the fledgling service, and web strategy sites had begun to publish top 10 lists of tips for marketing your products with Twitter – a sure sign that a meme is in vogue.

OK, great. But if you’re doubtful of the gurus’ expertise and you don’t have a huge political uprising thirsting for information, what good is Twitter?

Our experience during the launch of the live local project earlier this year is that Twitter is great for telling real stories in real time. When I feel like I’m being marketed to by any of the few dozen people and groups I follow on Twitter, I stop paying attention immediately. But when I’m exposed to something real and genuine – words that often describe non-profit and Local Government projects – my interest perks up.



The **live local** project gives Australians an online place to share stories about improving their communities. It’s based on the idea that various efforts to live more sustainable lives – eating food grown locally, walking, cycling and using public transport, creating friendships with our neighbours – go a long way in making neighbourhoods more livable and more enjoyable.

Just over a year ago, NASA created a Twitter account for its Mars lander. A NASA staffer tweeted regularly in the first person, building a narrative as the spacecraft performed its tasks elsewhere in the solar system. The public loved it, and it accumulated around 10,000 followers (which was a lot in the earlier days of Twitter) who asked questions, some of them very technical, and followed its every move.

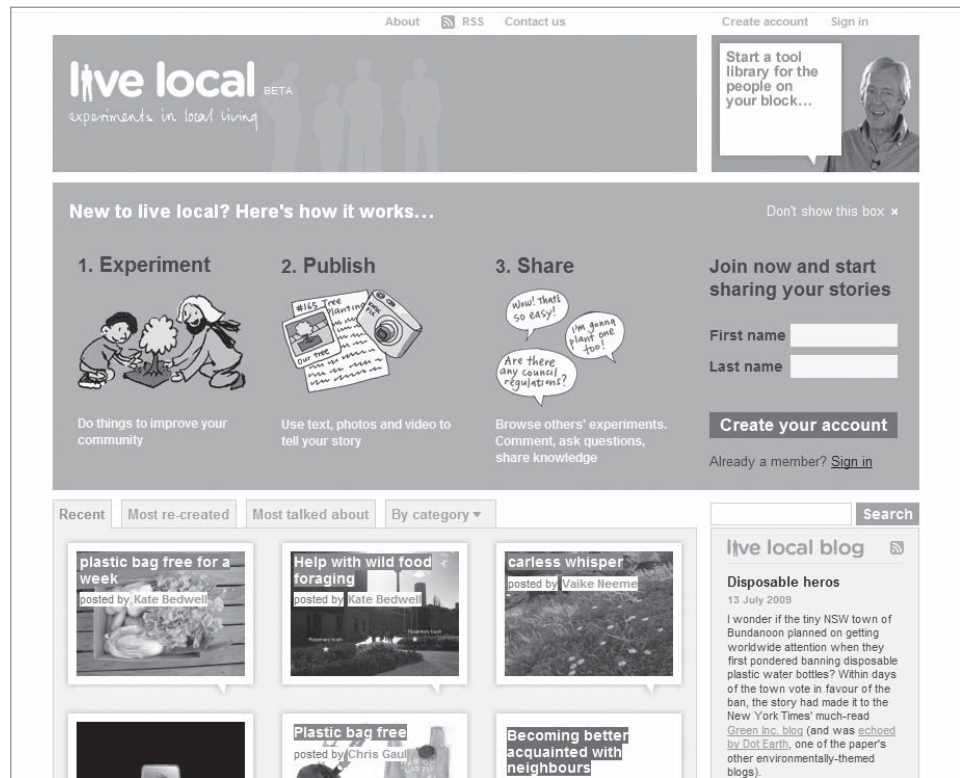
NASA’s success in making a nerdy space robot interesting to the world informed our search for a clever and cost-effective way to spread the word about **live local**.

We tracked down two of Sydney’s most influential and popular Twitter users – Rebecca Varidel (@frombecca) and Kate Carruthers (@kcarruthers), both very busy, successful, multitasking, multi-careered women, with over 15,000 followers between them. Once we found them, we gave them a challenge: live as locally as possible for a week, and talk, blog and tweet about it.

Varidel and Carruthers loved the project’s objectives, and both happily accepted the challenge. They spent a bit of time preparing (and waiting for us to be ready), and began tweeting about the challenge in advance. A #livelocal hash tag emerged (adding the hash sign to a word turns into a quasi-official topic that people can search for), and discussions began to grow organically around various themes – all before the site’s official launch. »



**John MacFarlane** is a writer, editor and producer who has long balanced nerdy technological pursuits with nerdy cultural pursuits. John enjoys media theory, satire, bad architecture, outdoor exercise and vegetarian meat substitutes, among other things. John holds a Masters degree in Media Studies from Concordia University in Montreal (focus areas: political rhetoric, civic engagement) and degrees in journalism (Concordia) and electrical engineering. He enjoys playing ultimate frisbee, riding a bike and misses winter sports because Sydney does not have winter. John has worked for major newspapers, global film projects and new media firms. He is a senior producer at Digital Eskimo.



<http://www.livelocal.org.au/>

When the challenge began, several thousand people joined Varidel and Carruthers on their journey – a few of them doing the challenge themselves, and the rest sharing the experience by reading and retweeting the women’s narrative as it emerged.

*“The response was enormous, and I received Twitter messages all day every day during the challenge.”*

“I had the world watching,” Varidel said. “The response was enormous, and I received Twitter messages all day every day during the challenge. I also received offers of assistance to provide backyard produce and acreage produce in Sydney online, as well as suppliers and markets where I could buy the food from within the region limitations.”

A month or so after the end of the challenge, the #livelocal tag is alive and well in Twitter searches, appearing in conversations about 100 mile diets, sustainable farming, smiling at neighbours, and on and on. More importantly, thousands of people shared in a part of **live local**, and understood it not as a product or a service, but an experience, a story and a movement.

When used intelligently, Twitter can be personal; your messages may only go to hundreds or perhaps thousands of people, but each of them experiences the message as part of a dialogue with you alone. Instead of seeming like a blunt campaign, Twitter has the power to seem like a conversation – and, today, conversations are far more effective than marketing messages.

*There are many tips on how to best use Twitter, most either painfully obvious or of dubious validity. Like all technology tools, it needs to be tailored to your unique context and the project’s goals. If you absolutely must get on Twitter today, our back-of-envelope advice is this: Engage in conversations on Twitter first, grow a following and then experiment with different ways of delivering council services or specific campaign messages that are about the two way communication at which Twitter excels. The golden rule, though, is to keep it personal, compelling ... and short – 140 characters, to be precise!*

# *Intranets and usability*



**It's now been a little over a decade since I designed and built my first Intranet. I had been building websites for a university for some years, but my first Intranet was my first public service job, and my first experience of how government handles internal communications and knowledge sharing.**

Back then, in the 1990s, we lived in a Web 1.0 world where websites had simply replaced previous electronic distribution methods like FTP, News Groups and electronic Bulletin Boards. I remember very clearly creating pages with early WYSIWYG editors like Hot Dog and the first version of Microsoft FrontPage.

For me, the early days were a mixture of creativity, graphic design and HTML coding skills. Building corporate Intranets, though, saw other dimensions added, like the battle for real estate on the front page. I found myself surrounded by people who felt that unless their area appeared there, then no one would find their information. What usually resulted was an Intranet designed by committee – little more than a laundry list of links of business areas with no context and lots of downloadable PDFs and Word documents behind them.

And of course, the IT department would then train staff how to use this 'tool' because, realistically, the navigation was far from usable – it only served the "Powers That Be" and wasn't designed in such a way so as to make it usable by the people who would need it to find information.

I remember staff then trying to rely on 'search', but, again, people don't generally write for others in mind. They write for themselves. This meant the terms they used in search just didn't match the words in the documents and so the search engine was then blamed for not being good enough.

The behaviour that typically follows is simple – print out the corporate directory to phone someone and ask them to email them a copy of a document directly. It's a behaviour I've seen plenty of times now. It's usually the first symptom that your Intranet just doesn't work as well as it could.

I quickly learned, though my first years in government, that the best and easiest means for building an Intranet so it would actually be usable was to involve those people who were actually going to use it – not their bosses, and not through committees<sup>1</sup>. Fortunately, not many managers have time to come to a 2-3 hour workshop. Rather than sit in a room, though, and just ask people to talk about what they wanted, I learned instead to apply collaborative design techniques.

The first tools I learnt as an Information Architect remain my favourites today. They are:

- Personas
- Card sorting
- Collaborative web page design
- Prototyping the solution »

**Matthew Hodgson** is an experienced social media and web strategist with 15 years experience in information architecture, information management and knowledge management, working with the government and commercial sector to deliver innovative solutions to difficult web problems. He has published papers in the areas of social psychology, has lectured at the University of Canberra on social computing, and is regarded as one of the most engaging speakers on information architecture, agile business analysis, user-centred design, and social media in Australia.

*“...people don't generally write for others in mind. They write for themselves.”*



Card sorting workshop.  
Photo Credit: Jorge Barahona

## ***Personas***

Starting with Personas is an awesome means of setting the scene for workshop participants. It gets everyone thinking about who is going to use the Intranet, from newbies to veteran staff members.

I ask the group to come up with a name, contribute to the person's background, and to the picture by drawing from workforce statistics from the agency's own HR area to make it a real representation of a staff member. I also encourage people to have fun with it. Whether they like or dislike the persona they create, though, this person is the one they will need to keep front of mind when going through their other activities.

## ***Card sorting***

I then follow personas with card sorting. I put a list of all the content into a spreadsheet and get it to produce a list of 100 random items and print them out onto small cards. I then put people into groups of 3-4 and ask them to sort the cards into themes – like with like – and label the theme. Printing each card set in a different colour means I can differentiate each of the groups' preferred ways of collating the content once they're done.

As each group sorts cards into themes I usually walk around and challenge the way they're doing things (usually just by asking questions). People's first reaction is to simply reproduce what they know and use the same terms, acronyms and labels. Of course, most of these conventions will result in an Intranet that is unusable by a new employee, so I ask whether the labels they're using will be understood by the personas we created earlier in the workshop. In my experience, this approach has an instant affect. Given people contributed to creating the persona in the first place, they find it difficult to disagree when you point this out.

*“It will quickly become obvious to everyone that people think about information in different ways.”*

Having each group present their themes and card categories to other groups is the next step. It will quickly become obvious to everyone that people think about information in different ways. Having a few managers in the room to witness this is also worth its weight in gold.

## ***Collaborative web page design***

The final task is to have each group design a home page for the Intranet and to put their categories onto the page as the site's navigation. I then ask each group to present their ideas to everyone else.

It's these tasks that will give you your information requirements for your Intranet, one that will align with how the site's users think about their information. Putting together that navigation, though, isn't always straightforward because I rarely find that everyone comes up with the same categories, themes or designs.

Firstly, people take the cards whose content labels have the most meaning to them. That is, the first cards people pick up either represent the most important content, or the content used most frequently, or both. These cards will be placed in a pile to the left with subsequent piles moving toward the right. This order of sorting and collating cards left to right will give you the navigation order preference.

The next step, though, is to record the sort order of all cards across all groups in an Excel spreadsheet. Collapse similarly labelled categories and assess whether or not a piece of content appears more prevalent in one category or another. What you end up with, after analysing the results, importantly, is a navigation structure that will match the way people think about their information.

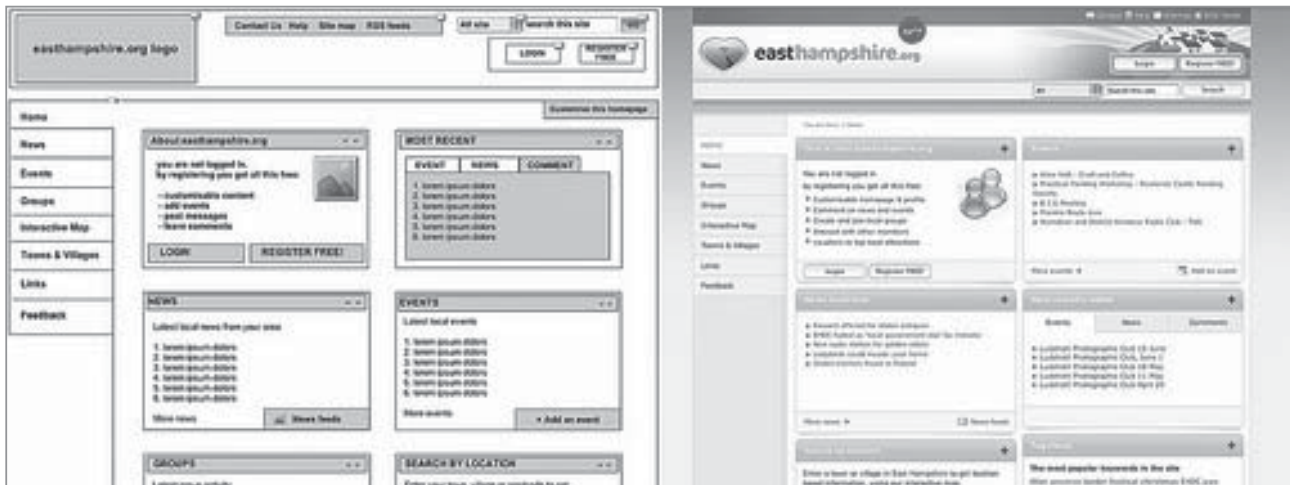
## Prototyping the solution

The last task is to prototype the solution. This involves creating a mock-up of your overall design and findings and asking people to comment and test whether your solution will work for them. There are lots of different types of prototypes, from sketches on paper through to clickable HTML, the later of which can be easily done through software like Adobe Fireworks or my personal favourite Axure RP. These tools allow you to create a graphic representation of your solution.

I normally use Axure to create a high fidelity HTML representation of my solution. I even include the banner and icon graphics from the graphic designer so that it looks as real as possible, make the navigation clickable, and put in existing content so that it feels real. Once this is done I give people a task to try and find that content and record the time it takes to find it to assess whether the new solution is better than the existing Intranet. Of course, if you've put everything together properly, and you've incorporated all these user-centred design elements, then all will be fine.



Paper prototype.  
Photo credit: Samuel Mann



Credit: Wireframes Magazine

I use these techniques every time I design, build and project manage my Intranets. If you adopt these simple tools yourself you'll definitely see an improvement in your Intranet.

*“If you adopt these simple tools yourself you’ll definitely see an improvement in your Intranet.”*

*‘Having a steering committee is important to any project. They’re responsible for approving project’s initial business case, signing off on milestones as they are reached to reflect the project us going as required, approving scope changes, and signing off on expenses and risk strategies. They’re not the ones, though, who should decide what the navigation should look like. Intranet navigation is about finding things so there should be some science behind the decisions on what goes where and why. The result will be navigation and supporting features that are objective.*



# *Don't forget the RSS*

**Amongst all the other concerns and constraints of running a Local Government Website, it's easy for 'Really Simple Syndication' (RSS) feeds to be consigned to the too hard basket. But the big secret of RSS is that it can be very useful while requiring relatively little effort.**

*James Dellow is a Senior Business & Technical Consultant at Headshift, Europe's leading social media and social computing consultancy. Headshift established a presence in Australasia in 2008 and is now working with a range of local non-profit, government and commercial organisations. He was awarded a Master of Business & Technology (MBT) from the University of New South Wales in 2005. However, his undergraduate qualifications are in public sector management and working at Headshift is allowing him to take an active interest in exploring the opportunities for Government 2.0 in Australia. Blog: <http://www.headshift.com/au/> and <http://chieftech.com.au>.*

*“The recent Victorian bushfires has highlighted the importance of geotagging”*

## ***What are you missing?***

In its simplest form, RSS provides an alternative subscription channel that is like an email newsletter. But its more sophisticated uses allow people to track changes to individual pages or documents on a council website, or receive as-it-happens updates on all sorts of issues such as development applications, or the state of sports grounds during bad weather. RSS can also be used as an application programming interface (API) that will allow people in the community and other council users to use this information in new ways, sometimes 'mashing' this RSS information with data and information from other sources.

Unfortunately many councils are missing out on its potential by simply not specifying RSS as a requirement when developing their website or acquiring a new Web Content Management System (WCMS). Adding RSS later into an existing site is possible (as I will explain later), but the best results and greatest flexibility will come from native support for RSS.

## ***What makes RSS useful?***

There are many reasons why people choose to subscribe to RSS rather than receiving email updates or simply visiting a Website for the latest information. For some, it is simply a way of reducing the number of emails in their inbox. Others may already be subscribing to hundreds of feeds as part of their personal or professional information habit - and no, they don't want to make an exception just for you. RSS also reduces spam because there is no need to hand over an email address when subscribing.

A basic use of RSS on a council Website could simply be a media release or 'what's new' news feed. For subscribers, this provides a convenient alternative to email newsletters. Depending on how you use RSS, it can be updated periodically (like an email newsletter) or more blog-like, with smaller but more frequent updates.

A more sophisticated use could include the ability to subscribe to changes on any page or in a particular group of pages on your website. RSS can also be used to tell subscribers about almost any kind of information that changes from time to time. For example, podcasting relies on RSS to tell subscribers that a new audio or video file is available to download.

## ***Mapping RSS to the real world***

The recent Victorian bushfires has highlighted the importance of geotagging - the process of adding geographic metadata to information. You can geotag both the source of an RSS feed and also individual articles. By geotagging each article, they can be displayed on a map or users can combine or filter feeds based on a location of interest.

While many of us would have taken for granted the map created by Google to track the bushfires during this period, none of the data they used was geotagged in its original

format. Behind the scenes, Google's programmers were forced to use a combination of manual and automatic parsing to create a geotagged RSS feed to allow updates about the fires to be plotted easily on a map. Meanwhile the fire authority's own websites struggled to keep up with demand. This information could have been easily syndicated through different channels had they provided geotagged RSS themselves. This would have reduced server workload and would have allowed people to filter irrelevant information.

Also, once Google had the bush-fire data in a workable format, they were able to 'mash-up' this information with other data, such as NASA satellite imagery that could pin point other unreported fires.



## ***Tips for specifying RSS in your Web Content Management System (WCMS)***

The next time you update your WCMS to include RSS, there are three key points to remember:

1. Pick the RSS formats you want to support (RSS 1.0, RSS 2.0 and ATOM). If you have to pick a single RSS standard to implement, I recommend picking the Atom Syndication Format ("ATOM") standard, although the RSS 2.0 standard continues to be popular. You should also consider the need to support geotagging.
2. Feed auto-discovery tags allow a user's web browser and other applications (such as Feed Readers) to 'automatically' detect the RSS feeds on your website - while it should be relatively easy to add the code to support feed auto-discovery into your website template, ideally your WCMS will already support this.
3. If your WCMS provides other social media functionality, such as blogs or discussion forums, make sure the way RSS is implemented supports these features. For example, as a minimum, every blog post or forum thread should have its own RSS feed. But feeds can also be provided for topics, tags or even comments.

Once you have determined your RSS, remember to be wary of WCMS vendors that either don't support RSS in their products, or want to charge extra to provide it. Despite what they might tell you, RSS is not complicated or new.

*"Despite what they might tell you, RSS is not complicated or new."*

## ***What can you do right now with RSS?***

If you aren't currently in a position to upgrade your Website or WCMS, it doesn't mean you have to wait before you can start using RSS.

Canterbury City Council, for example, is using a combination of two free services Feed43 (<http://feed43.com>) and Google's Feedburner (<http://feedburner.google.com/>) to create an RSS feed of library events. Feed43 ("feed for free") can monitor a Web page for changes and updates your custom RSS feed each time you update the page. Feedburner acts like a proxy server for feeds to help to make it more reliable. It also provides other features, such as feed usage metrics. »



While not a perfect solution, it demonstrates that it is possible to create simple, useful feeds using readily available online tools (and often at no cost).

Once you have one or more feeds set up, you can also manually add auto discovery to individual web pages or your website template (it requires a line of html code to be inserted into the <HEAD> section).

You can do more with your feed by using free or cheap web-based services such as automatic posts to Twitter, email subscriptions (useful if you don't currently have that function available), Web widgets, and more!

## ***The RSS network effect***

In the long term, the need for Local Government to provide information in RSS format goes beyond simply providing an alternative channel for email newsletters. This is because unlike Federal or State Government, Local Government has a wealth of information that their local communities would find useful in RSS format, as it directly affects them as residents or may be needed during emergencies. As more organisations start to provide information via RSS, the more useful this combined information will become.

Keep in mind there is no need to run before you can walk - even a simple 'what's new' feed is a great start.

## ***Further Reading***

Wikipedia - for an introduction to RSS, ATOM and GeoRSS:

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS>
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atom\\_\(standard\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atom_(standard))
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GeoRSS>

Mash the State - a grassroots campaign currently focused on encouraging UK local councils to adopt RSS. The site has lots of practical tips for implementing RSS:

- <http://www.mashthestate.org.uk/>
- <http://mashthestate.wordpress.com/> (blog)

# The State of JavaScript

The web is a rapidly changing thing. JavaScript is an important part of it, and has gone through many different stages: from a promising, but useless initiative from Netscape (we still remember how annoying jumping text and popups were), to the bread and butter of Web 2.0 (whatever that is!) Now is the time for the JavaScript renaissance.

When the Ajax tsunami hit, any interaction was accepted as a revolution. Hopefully that's over, but it did put the spotlight on JavaScript and left lots of interesting stuff behind. Firstly Ajax itself. We learnt that you shouldn't use Ajax everywhere, but that doesn't mean you should discount it if it is the best solution for a particular situation. Thankfully these days you don't need to worry about implementation details — most of the hard lifting has been done by pioneers. Dedicated JavaScript programmers created many comprehensive libraries and released them into the wild. Poorly designed libraries have died, but good libraries have emerged, giving you a mature group of tools you can use to enhance the user experience of your pages.

## Libraries

I won't cover all libraries in this article, so for those I've missed, no offence!

The first set of libraries are ones you can use for day-to-day tasks, be it show/hide elements on the page, Ajax-related code or animation. For these tasks choose one (or many if you like) of the following:

- **Dojo:** <http://www.dojotoolkit.org/>
- **ExtJS:** <http://extjs.com/>
- **jQuery:** <http://jquery.com/>
- **Mootools:** <http://mootools.net/>
- **Prototype:** <http://www.prototypejs.org/>
- **Yahoo! UI:** <http://developer.yahoo.com/yui/>

You've probably heard of them, or are even currently using one. These are big names that are hard to miss. But wait, there's more!

Web development is not only about HTML juggling. Okay, so a lot of the time it is, but sometimes you want to do something different, something far removed from the usual scope of web development. Let's take a look at some libraries that allow you to do something unusual, and still do it well.

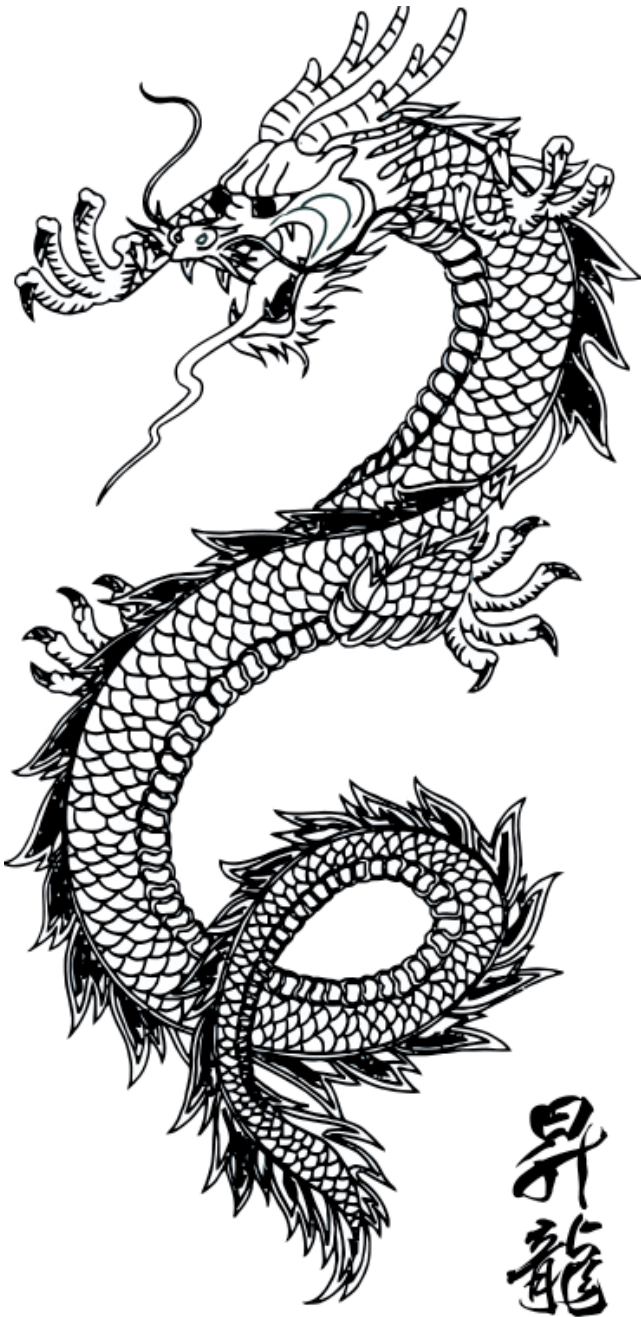
## DateJS

A tiny library that helps you deal with dates. It can parse dates written in human form such as "tomorrow" or "next Sunday". This can really make your date inputs shine. Not mention it has a great API (application programming interface). <http://datejs.com/>. »



**Dmitry Baranovskiy** has over 8 years experience in creating web applications. Having started as a back end developer, more recently he has changed his orientation to front end development and even pure design. These days he spends his working hours trying to embrace a wide range of front end technologies while working as a JavaScript Developer for Atlassian. He is also the creator of Optimus, the Microformats transformer, as well as Raphaël, a JavaScript Vector Library. At any given moment he is always working on three secret projects, though no one knows where he gets the time for any of this.

*“sometimes you want to do something different, something far removed from the usual scope of web development.”*



Dragon converted from SVG source:  
<http://raphaeljs.com/dragon.html>

## **Cufón**

Ever wanted to use your corporate fonts on your website? With Cufón it's easy. Convert your font into a JavaScript file using the online tool, include the JavaScript into your page and voila! Your font is shining on your page. All font characters are pulled into the page using native browser technologies, such as VML<sup>1</sup> for Internet Explorer and Canvas<sup>2</sup> for other browsers. The Library is heavily optimised for performance and has a neat protection for your commercial fonts. <http://wiki.github.com/sorccu/cufon/about>.

*“You can create interactive charts or diagrams for pretty much anything you can think of”*

## **Raphaël**

If you think that to have a circle on a web page you need an image file or Flash™ - you are so 2007! Because since 2008 the Raphaël library has given you the ability to make cross-browser drawings. You can draw simple or complicated shapes, dynamically change their attributes (like fill and stroke), rotate them, scale them and so on. You can create interactive charts or diagrams for pretty much anything you can think of with Raphaël. Check out the demos and prepare to be amazed: <http://raphaeljs.com/>.

## **Processing.js**

From the creator of jQuery, the infamous John Resig, comes yet another masterpiece. Processing.js is sort of a Processing language to JavaScript. This library is extremely powerful, especially if you've had experience with Processing before. It uses Canvas, so it doesn't currently support Internet Explorer: <http://processingjs.org/>.

Bear in mind that all these libraries are free, so you don't have to pay a cent to use them to help make the web a better and prettier place.

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<sup>1</sup>VML: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vector\\_Markup\\_Language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vector_Markup_Language)

<sup>2</sup>Canvas: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canvas\\_\(HTML\\_element\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canvas_(HTML_element))

# OpenAustralia

**OpenAustralia - or, “how two people who don’t know anything about building websites or the Australian Government came to build a website giving the community Hansard and Australian Government data”.**

## **theyworkforyou.com**

We were two film visual effects professionals working in London. I was working on popular movies like Troy, Harry Potter and Wallace and Gromit, while Matthew was developing software to take lens distortion off film images and working in Research and Development. We’d both been using email and what became the internet since 1992 but could not be described as web developers.

All that changed when web developer, technologist and self proclaimed geek, Dorian Moore, led us one sunny June morning in 2004 to attend Notcon at Imperial College.

Notcon was a conference like no other we’d ever been to. In fact, it was a format that would later come to be known as barcamps or un-conferences. Among the presentations were a (not very functional but amusing) timepiece made using a prawn and mayonnaise sandwich, tales of clandestine exploration of tunnels in London, and realtime video output through an old ZX spectrum computer.

It was here that we accidentally witnessed the birth of TheyWorkForYou.com.

A few guys from mySociety (a democracy organisation in the UK) showed us how politicians had promised to take their online presence seriously, and then went on to demonstrate that their websites had changed very little from year to year. How easy it was to poke fun at the Political parties and their sad attempts at a web presence.

What was needed, we were shown, were people who had a vision of what they wanted out of a website and understood how it could help people.

MySociety had both. They unveiled a website chock full of useful features, of ways to connect people with their elected to representatives. By showing how government decisions are made, TheyWorkForYou.com was a new way to combat political apathy, and a window for the increasingly disaffected masses in the UK to see who really was working for them.

## **Hacking openaustralia.org**

Mightily impressed, on landing in Australia a few months later we tried to talk our few web developing friends into developing the same website here. Didn’t our government also work for us?

We were spectacularly unsuccessful. Everyone thought it was a great idea, but no-one had time to do it.

Fast forward a couple more years, and Matthew and I became permanent residents. We were now here for the long haul and it was no longer only up to others in Australia to make the effort. The company we both worked for operated a Charity Leave scheme, so Matt signed up for a paid week and spent it putting together a first prototype of OpenAustralia.org. This was the start of an Australian TheyWorkForYou, lifting data straight from the Government’s Parliamentary Website .

Six months in, with an unshakable belief in the project, Matthew quit his job to dedicate more time to developing the site, alongside his own Visual Effects software business. There was so much to do and he had little help from others to begin with. Somehow, until the site was built the project was too abstract and removed to be possible here. »



***Kat Szuminska***  
*is one of the founders of the website OpenAustralia.org and a director of the OpenAustralia Foundation, a not for profit institution aiming to find better ways of making government, public sector and other useful information freely and easily available for the benefit of all Australians. She’s also a volunteer gardener around the Blue Mountains where she lives, and now only occasionally squeezes in a bit of film VFX supervision.*

*“By the time we had a hackfest a year later we had 1700 people signed up for email alerts”*



But Wade Millican kindly set up a blog and free hosting was provided by Andrew Snow of Octopus Computing – [OpenAustralia.org](http://OpenAustralia.org) remains online courtesy of this local company to this day.

Once this early version was built, we had something to point at. The beta release saw more helpers coming out of the woodwork, giving technical and user feedback on the site. By the time we had a hackfest a year later we had 1700 people signed up for email alerts when their representative spoke in Parliament, or if someone talked about a subject close to their hearts or perhaps their wallets. This number continues to grow.

## ***Hacking OpenAustralia***

OpenAustralia volunteer Sarah Stokely invited programmers and designers to come together for OpenAustralia's inaugural Hackfest. Following the open source model, attendees work on whatever they're best placed to do, whether this is because it's their passion, their skill or because it happened to fit in their schedule for the day.

Over 40 people came on the day, all willingly giving up their Saturday afternoon to make something for the public good. Some people we knew through twitter, but most were supporters we'd never met before. Matthew kick-started proceedings, with a talk about how OpenAustralia works, discussing a few of the things in the bug database (aka our big list of things to do), and some inspiration for future projects.

In the spirit of OpenAustralia participants were invited to work not only on [OpenAustralia.org](http://OpenAustralia.org), but on any civic minded project. The amount of work achieved was quite beyond our expectations. Some treated the day as a deadline by which to get things finished, others had ideas they miraculously pulled off in an afternoon, and projects were hatched that continue to be worked on today. All in all, a bunch of useful new stuff was created.

## ***What next?***

We continue to work on freeing up more Parliamentary Hansard, and are in discussions with State and Territory officials for permission to do this. The practical day-to-day information we all deal with is some of the most important public data in the lives of Australia's citizens.

We've recently expanded our goals and are developing two projects that connect directly with and use council information in the hope of making life a little simpler. Both take some software from the UK as a starting point, kindly shared with the world by the ever awesome open source community.

First is FixMyStreet, which is a citizen-centric way of reporting broken lights, pot holes and rubbish dumping without having to find out which council or department deals with that particular issue. The interface for this mobile application was fleshed out at the hackfest and Rob, Jake, and Nathanael are going great guns getting the iphone version going.

Along similar lines is an as yet unnamed application along the lines of the UK's [www.planningalerts.com](http://www.planningalerts.com). The UK version allows people to sign up for email alerts when a planning application is lodged or progressed in their area. We'll start with that code,

and extend it to allow Aussies to look around their local neighbourhood, or any address in fact, to get the full development picture. We can do this because it's all Open Source software.

## ***Learning to free the data***

We always intended to make it very easy for third parties to access the data running OpenAustralia, but we got strong incentive to do it when we staged an event that was all about sharing data. The Hackfest was a perfect opportunity for Matthew to focus on this area, by getting the Application Programmers Interface (API) and source XML data up and available for all.

*“...if you have useful data you should push it out rather than wait for people to ask for it.”*

As soon as we made the API available, people starting building things with it. Until then, nobody had even asked us about getting the data. The lesson we learned, which we've heard again from many other people and organisations, is that if you have useful data you should push it out rather than wait for people to ask for it. You won't even know there's a need for the data until you make it available.

## ***Use it or lose it - getting started sharing data***

You too can push data out - don't wait for people to contact you. Give people a specific time frame or a starting point but allow and encourage them to go off in any direction - it will engage and excite people even if they do something completely different or in a different time frame. It doesn't matter. You have got their attention.

Creating a sense of community around an idea is very powerful. NSW Food Authority probably didn't think their Register of Offences and the Register of Penalty Notices would be the subject of a mashup, but that's exactly what gotgastro.com has created.

Give access to your data and lift restrictions on use by working with contemporary licensing models. Using Creative commons you keep your copyright 'but allow people to copy and distribute your work provided they give you credit — and only on the conditions you specify'.

You can start small by letting out some amusing entertaining or historic data that is not contentious. By the power of creative commons licensing, local trailblazers The Powerhouse Museum, and the ABC Pool ([www.pool.org.au](http://www.pool.org.au)) have been opening up content, sharing their archives, and encouraging the rest of us to play with their material.

At the other end of the scale, you could really take the plunge. Got a really big problem that won't go away? Facts and figures clouding the issue? Put your information out there, dust off those databases and spreadsheets and let people see what you're working with by putting that information online. Don't worry about the formatting too much or building a fancy website around it. Declare its existence and then ask people to come up with their ideas, ask them to help you.

Wherever you chose to start, make it clear what you are allowing people to do with the information you share, chose licensing that fits your comfort zone and obligations, and remember to let everyone know where you put it.

If you're a big council or a group of councils working together, don't drag your developments into consensus based decision making. Make something small, and then share it with other councils, only make what you need and don't lock up a great idea in an over ambitious development plan. It will fail.

If you're outsourcing, make Open Source software a requirement in your procurement. Others can adapt their needs more easily if they can freely reuse work you've already done. And so can you.

If you're starting off on the process of opening up data from your council or reviewing copyright for republishing that data, we'd love to hear from you.



# About

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## **Welcome to the second annual conference from the Local Government Web Network.**

When we ran our conference last year we knew that there was a lack of communication between web workers in Local Government and so weren't surprised to find that for many of you it was the first time you'd met other staff working on the web in this sector. The network and conference were created so that we can all learn from each other and share experiences, and continue to challenge ourselves in how we use technology within and for our communities. We are thrilled to be back again this year to help continue and grow the network.

Last year the push for increased accessibility of our websites was high on the agenda. This has not disappeared, and the use of social media by the public sector is a hot topic that has also only increased in popularity. Now we have impending pressure to be more open and transparent, which will affect our use of web tools and how we publish public data. The role of a council's website is moving from a static information portal to an interactive and engaging experience. This makes it an exciting time to work on the web, and also a challenging time.

From the feedback we sought from last year's conference, and from watching the growing activity in the public sector online, we hope we have brought you a program that is not only relevant to your every day work, but also addresses some of the challenges you will likely face in the coming year. This year we changed the schedule to bring you a day of in-depth workshops. We are also excited to bring you another panel session on online community engagement, and a workshop with the Government 2.0 Taskforce. We hope that the conference day combined with the workshops will inspire you and give you new skills.

This year we have also introduced some new social elements to the conference to help you create connections with like-minded people. At the conference we are running a half hour "lightning talks" session to give some of you the opportunity to share what you're working on with others. We have also introduced a conference dinner this year to give you more time to network with others and enjoy a nice meal and night out for the many of you who are visiting Sydney.

We hope this conference will help further the growing web community in Local Government. We encourage you all to join our Google group if you'd like to participate in discussion outside of the conference, and to make use of the new online networking tools we'll be introducing in the near future, including the online version of this magazine.

Thank you to those of you who have returned for this second conference, and welcome to the new attendees. We hope you all enjoy it and leave buzzing with ideas to help you shape the future of the public sector online.

**Reem Abdelaty and Diana Mounter**

# Questions, questions...

Internet access sponsored by

unwiredbusiness™

## ***Can I get internet access?***

Probably! We expect to have wireless internet access on the day, but there's a small chance we could hit problems though. If all goes according to plan we'll tell everyone what the password is on the day and you'll be able to ask any of our conference helpers.

## ***Where is the conference dinner?***

The conference dinner will be at Subsolo Spanish Restaurant and Tapas bar, 161 King Street, Sydney. We'll give you a map at the conference and we will arrange a meeting place so we can walk together so no one gets lost!

## ***When and where are the networking drinks?***

Networking drinks will be on Friday at the conference venue. They'll begin just after 5 when the conference workshops end, and last for an hour. If you want to carry on into the night we suggest posting your recommendations for a venue via Twitter (see more about Twitter below).

## ***How should I tag photos I upload from the We Believe in Community conference?***

Take as many photos as you like (as long as the person you're photographing doesn't mind). Post them on Flickr and tag them with lgwn09 so we can pull them into our website. And don't forget to view our own photos at: [www.flickr.com/photos/lgwebnetwork](http://www.flickr.com/photos/lgwebnetwork).

## ***How should I tag my Twitter posts, and what's it for?***

We'll be using Twitter to provide an online real-time message board during the conference. To make sure your posts appear tag them with #lgwn09 – you can use this to comment on the conference as it happens (appropriate comments please!) you can also ask questions to the conference organisers, and suggest venues for meeting up after the conference finishes. Watch posts from the conference at: <http://search.twitter.com/search?q=lgwn09>.

## ***Will presentation material be available after the conference?***

Yes, speakers' presentations will be available from our website (<http://conference09.lgwebnetwork.org>) after the conference. We'll let you know through our blog when these are available, so make sure you're subscribed!

## ***Will there be podcasts?***

Yes audio podcasts will be available from all the sessions on our website after the conference – thanks to help from James Purser. We will link the podcasts from the conference website and advertise through our blog so revisit the site about two weeks after the conference.

## ***How do I keep in touch?***

There's a few ways you can stay connected with the Local Government Web Network, check out the subscription options and social networks we use on our website at: <http://lgwebnetwork.org/subscribe>.

## ***I've still got questions! Who do I ask?***

There will be conference helpers at the registration desk and Reem and Diana will be around the whole day so feel free to track us down. You can also twitter questions if you can't find us or don't want to get up from your seat!

# Prizes at the conference

**As if the conference wasn't exciting enough, we're adding even more excitement by giving out some prizes at the conference. Read on to see how you can win:**

## ***Random (positive) "Tweet"***

***Sponsored by MOB***

Follow us on Twitter and post a tweet during the conference, about something interesting you've learned, something you really enjoyed, perhaps something positive you got out of a presentation. Use the tag: **#lgwn09** when you post your Tweet so that it shows up on the message board. You'll only be able to accept the prize if you own up to your Twitter name and are present at the conference when we draw the prize.

## ***Feedback form lucky draw***

***Sponsored by MOB***

Filling in the feedback is invaluable to us to get your feedback. Based on the feedback we received last year we made significant changes to how we're delivering this year's conference, so know that we pay attention to what you say! Make sure you fill in your feedback form and hand it in at the registration desk, or fill it in online by close of business on Friday 28 August.

## ***When are we drawing the prizes?***

Random "Tweet" will be drawn about 5pm on Thursday 20 August at the conference. If you're not there I'm afraid you won't win! We'll keep on drawing until someone present at the conference wins.

The Feedback Form Lucky Draw will be drawn on Monday 31 August at the LGSA offices. The winner of the Feedback Form Prize will be published on the conference website and the winner notified by email.

## ***What is the prize?***

We'll be giving away the new "talking" iPod Shuffles courtesy of MOB. The iPods are inscribed with "We Believe in Community" so you remember what's at the heart of this conference.

## ***Who can enter?***

Anyone who is a registered conference delegate and who is NOT:

- A speaker
- An official sponsor/supporter of the conference
- A member of the conference staff or volunteer.

## ***Lightning Talks***

***sponsored by Fat Publisher***

This year we've started an event called "Lightning Talks". This is an opportunity for you to get up and give us a five minute presentation on something cool you've done at your council. Whether it's incorporating social media into your communications or a project you've managed through your council such as an intranet re-design, we want to hear about it. The successes, the failures, the cautionary tales and the celebrations. The prize? A sexy brand spankin' new iPhone courtesy of our sponsors Fat Publisher! This prize will be based on a popular vote via clapping at the conclusion of the presentations.

*Lightning Talks sponsored by*





**Kate Lundy**

# Government 2.0-building a citizen-centric approach

**Senator Kate Lundy will discuss how Government 2.0 technologies and methodologies can help all levels of government in building a strong citizen-centric approach in the delivery of government services, as well as for direct engagement in government processes.**

She will discuss her goals with the PublicSphere project, and share her experiences in this space as someone who has always pushed the envelope of digital engagement and communications for government.

## **Kate Lundy**

*Kate Lundy was first elected to the Senate for the ACT in 1996, at the age of 28. She began her career at age 16 as a labourer in the construction industry, becoming involved in the Building Workers Industrial Union (now the CFMEU), and later becoming a workplace delegate and a full-time union organiser. In 1987, she was elected Vice-President of the ACT branch of the BWIU and in 1993 she became the first woman to be elected as President of the ACT Trades and Labour Council. She was a foundation member of Emily's List, established by Labor women to support the election of more Labor women to Parliament.*

*An avid sportswoman, she is a member and patron of the Canberra Rowing Club. She lives in Canberra with her husband and children.*

## **Parliamentary Service**

*Elected to the Senate for the Australian Capital Territory, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2004 and 2007. (Territory Senators serve for the same term as the House of Representatives).*

*Her responsibilities have included:*

- *Deputy Chair Environment, Communications, IT and the Arts Legislation Committee*
- *Full member, Environment, Communications IT and the Arts References Committee*
- *August 1997 - Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Minister for Sport and Tourism and Assistant to the Shadow Ministers for Science and Information Technology, Youth Affairs and the Arts*
- *October 1998 - Shadow Minister for Sport and Youth Affairs and Assisting on Information Technology*
- *November 2001 - Shadow Minister for Information Technology and Sport*
- *August 2004 - Shadow Minister for Arts, Sport and Information Technology.*





**Bob Crawshaw**

# *Online marketing: The new online territory calls for a new compass*

**It is the age of now and now communications.**

New social media applications allow anyone, anywhere to create and distribute content and comment on your content. At no cost and in real time. Democratic dialogue increasingly challenges messages from the corporate bunker. It's brand new territory for PR and marketing teams and so far no one has invented the compass let alone drawn the map.

How can council communicators go online to engage young digital natives while reaching out to municipal tribal elders often fearful of crossing the digital divide?

This session explores how others are rising to the challenge of online communications and what works, what doesn't and why.

## ***Bob Crawshaw***

*Bob Crawshaw began in PR as the Australian Army's first Director of Public Affairs. He has 15 years public relations experience in the public and private sectors and runs Maine Street Marketing, a company specialising in media relations, new media and marketing. He works with some of Australia's largest government agencies and a range of not for profit organisations.*

*Bob is a member of the International Association of Business Communicators, the Australian Marketing Institute and the Public Relations Society of America.*

*Bob Crawshaw blogs marketing, PR and social media at: <http://mainestreet1.blogspot.com>.*





# Local-e future steps

**Local-e is about to undergo a fundamental change. By August we will have (hopefully) concluded a tender to find a new content management system to drive Local-e. This will push us headlong into the future, but will also require some significant work on our part.**

**Reem Abdelaty**

What do we need to do to prepare, and how will this change impact on a day to day basis? We will discuss this and other issues around this change.

## **Reem Abdelaty**

*Reem has been running Local-e (formerly Local Online Communications and Linkages) for three years. In that time she has managed to travel all over regional NSW, including Broken Hill, Brewarrina, Deniliquin and other parts in between, visiting her clients. Reem has a particular interest in making sure that her clients have access to the latest information in the web world.*

*Prior to this Reem was involved in setting up Local Government Procurement, and earlier still she was in the wilds of the private sector.*

*Reem loves cooking and adores spending her spare time writing and taking pictures for her food blog.*

*Reem holds a Bachelor of Arts in Politics and History from the Australian National University, and a Graduate Certificate in Commerce from the University of Sydney.*





# Workshop with the Government 2.0 Taskforce

**Lisa Harvey**

**The Government 2.0 Taskforce was formed against a backdrop of increased interest by governments worldwide in the potential uses of public sector information and online engagement.**

The Taskforce is made up of policy and technical experts and entrepreneurs from government, business, academia, and cultural institutions.

Its work falls into two streams. The first relates to increasing the openness of government through making public sector information more widely available to promote transparency, innovation and value adding to government information.

The second stream is concerned with encouraging online engagement with the aim of drawing in the information, knowledge, perspectives, resources and even, where possible, the active collaboration of anyone wishing to contribute to public life.

The Local Government sector has a lot to say as both a supplier and user of public sector information. We would like to hear what you say about your own experiences of engagement with other levels of government, and also on how your constituency engages with, or expects to engage with you on both access to public sector information and digital engagement.

Your sector has different constraints and work with people at different junctions so your experiences are important to the Gov 2.0 Taskforce.

## **Lisa Harvey**

*Lisa Harvey is an IT specialist working in the not-for-profit sector. She is the Managing Director of Energetica, a small business that provides websites and online communities for not-for-profit organisations. Energetica was established in established in 2000.*

*Lisa has over 25 years' experience in the IT industry with 17 years working with not-for-profit organisations. Lisa also worked for 7 years for Unisys. Lisa has worked as National IT Coordinator for LHMU.*





**Oliver Weidlich**

# Mobile Web

**The web can be complex enough, but now we have increasing numbers of Australians also using the mobile internet and other mobile-based services.**

Oliver will cover what people are doing with their phones, and why mobile is a useful and easy source of information. We'll cover the key things to be aware of when creating mobile sites, applications and content, as well as showing examples of what can be done.

## **Oliver Weidlich**

*Oliver draws on a background in psychology, experience in usability and understanding of mobile technology to identify key issues for client business strategy and customers, and to recommend and design solutions. He has a wide range of experience evaluating and improving the end-to-end customer experience with mobile devices, portals, applications and content. Oliver has consulted for clients such as Hutchison, Optus, Telstra, ninemsn, ABC, MySpace and RPO.*

*As part of the local mobile industry Oliver is playing a key role in the design and project management of the Australian Mobile Phone Lifestyle Index, which looks at mobile content usage in the local market, a project on behalf of the AIMIA Mobile Content Industry Development Group. He also co-hosts Mobile Monday Sydney, a mobile focused networking night.*

*In addition, Oliver is a judge, author and speaker on the mobile customer experience.*





# Exposure: Transparency, Communities and Government Data



**Mark Pesce**

**The pressure is on to open up and deliver timely and rich information to everyone who asks for it, when they ask for it, in the format they need.**

There's no real way to satisfy everyone's needs. The only reasonable alternative is to become completely transparent in data collection and data sharing, relying on the energy of the community to crowdsource their way into a solution for their problems.

This all sounds simple enough, but the road to a transparent nirvana is studded with potholes. Knowledge is power, and in the old way of doing business, he who controls the information possesses real power.

This new way of doing business is becoming ever-more-common in the 21st century and challenges the old way of thinking. Which strategy will win out?

## **Mark Pesce**

*Known internationally as the man who fused virtual reality with the World Wide Web to invent VRML, Mark Pesce has been exploring the frontiers of media and technology for a quarter of a century.*

*His work has kept him on the forefront of emerging developments in science, technology and media. With a unique ability to make abstract concepts clear for lay audiences and to further the knowledge of the technologically savvy, he is a highly sought-after public speaker, lecturing throughout the world on a variety of topics from the latest trends on the Internet, to current developments in neuroeconomics, to the future of design in an energy-conscious world. Pesce is first and foremost a storyteller, taking everyday examples from the world around us, then using these to illuminate the finer features of world that seems to be changing more rapidly every day.*

*The author of five books and numerous articles, Pesce is widely respected as a technologist, futurist, philosopher and communicator who can translate abstract concepts into concrete explanations. Mainstream publications such as Forbes ASAP, TIME Digital, WIRED and The New York Times have profiled him and his views on the interactive era. A well-respected journalist, Pesce has written for WIRED, Feed, Salon, PC Magazine, and The Age. For the last three seasons, Pesce has been a panelist on the hit ABC show THE NEW INVENTORS.*

*Pesce currently holds an appointment as an Honorary Associate in the Digital Cultures programme at the University of Sydney, and in 2006 founded FutureSt, a Sydney media and technology consultancy. Working with clients such as Telstra, Lonely Planet and SanDisk, Pesce brings his encyclopedic knowledge of technology together with a consumer-focused sensibility to refine clients' products and strategies.*



# Writing for the web

**Is your website disorganised, disjointed and inconsistent? Is it full of copy cut and pasted from print material? Is your site search the most-used function on your site because no one can find what they want? Is your site just plain boring?**

**Ray Welling**

This hands-on workshop will teach you to create copy for your website that is:

- easy to scan with the eye
- engaging for busy web readers
- action-oriented
- credible
- concise
- more likely to get good search results
- aimed at your target audience as well as secondary audiences
- web-friendly rather than print-oriented.

**Thanks to Zazoo and OurPatch for sponsoring this workshop.**

**Links:**

Zazoo - <http://www.zazoo.com.au/>

Ourpatch - <http://www.ourpatch.com.au/>

## **Ray Welling**

*Ray Welling is Director and Content Guy for Zazoo, a digital content consultancy based in Sydney. Starting out as a journalist and editor, Ray has been involved in planning and creating Internet content since 1995, working with leading government bodies, interactive agencies, financial services companies, healthcare organisations and the Sydney 2000 Olympics to improve their online communication with their customers.*

*Ray also has specific experience in creating content of interest to regional and rural Australia as the managing editor of OurPatch, a network of community-based websites for regional and rural Australia.*







**Dmitry Baranovskiy**

# *Introduction to JavaScript*

**The Web is changing. JavaScript is not an optional toy scripting language anymore. It is fully functioning powerful language that is essential to know.**

In this workshop Dmitry will cover the usually ignored basics of the language, and will run through JavaScript libraries, like jQuery, Cufón and Raphaël, that could help you to solve many of your web site problems. Or even push your boundaries about what's possible on the Web.

## ***Dmitry Baranovskiy***

*Dmitry has over eight years' experience in creating web applications.*

*Having started as a back end developer, more recently he has changed his orientation to front end development and even pure design. These days he spends his working hours trying to embrace a wide range of front end technologies while working as a JavaScript Developer for Atlassian.*

*He is also the creator of Optimus, the Microformats transformer, as well as Raphaël, a JavaScript Vector Library.*

*At any given moment he is always working on three secret projects, though no one knows where he gets the time for any of this.*

### ***Links:***

*Optimus - <http://microformatique.com/optimus/>*

*Raphaël - <http://raphaeljs.com/>*





**Russ Weakley**

# Real World CSS

**Over four hours you will build a website layout from the ground up - starting with a flat graphic mockup; and ending with a clean markup and elegant styled page using XHTML/CSS.**

You will learn:

- How to style elements such as form, legend, fieldset, inputs, and labels.
- How to overcome some of the harder aspects of form styling such as column layouts, floating in forms and positioning legends.
- How to write efficient CSS.
- How to deal with older browser and Internet Explorer browsers (IE5, IE6 and IE7).
- How to deal with common IE issues such as the 'duplicate character bug', 'double margin float bug', 'dropping column bug' and more.

## **Who should attend?**

Designers and developers with a basic knowledge of CSS who want to take it to the next level.

## **What will I need?**

- A laptop with a CD drive.
- A browser.
- Some sort of text editor (Notepad, BBEdit, SkEdit, TextMate, Dreamweaver etc).

## **Russ Weakley**

*Russ Weakley has worked as a web designer for the last 13 years. Russ has a detailed knowledge of web design and development. His expertise covers graphic design, interface design, site architecture and standards based development especially in the area of XHTML/CSS. Russ chairs the Web Standards Group which was set up to assist web developers learn about new technologies and accessibility issues. Russ has produced a series of widely acclaimed CSS-based tutorials as well as a book, 'Teach Yourself CSS in Ten Minutes'.*

## **Link:**

Web Standards Group - <http://webstandardsgroup.org/>



# Thanks to Sponsors and In Kind Contributions

## ***In Kind Contributions***

**James Purser** from [Collaborynth.com.au](http://Collaborynth.com.au) for recording and editing our audio podcasts.

**Minh Giang** for capturing the conference on camera and uploading the photos to Flickr. Minh also happens to be a food blogger so if you like food you might want to check out her blog: [www.eatshowandtell.com](http://www.eatshowandtell.com).

Thanks to **Rob Manson** for hosting the audio files from our speakers sessions, it's great to be able to offer people these great resources – we'll be making these available after the conference.



## ***Sponsors***

This conference would not be possible without our sponsors. In our second year we are very grateful to have received support from new sponsors as well as people that have supported us from the beginning.



Our major conference sponsor, **Bang the Table**, came on board early, and have been supportive of the network from the very beginning. In particular, we'd like to thank **Matt Crozier** for facilitating the panel discussion as well as being our major sponsor! Drinks are on Bang the Table!



This year, we held our first Conference Dinner at **Subsolo** Restaurant, a gorgeous and fun meal supported by **Sophos**. In particular we'd like to thank **Michelle Chen** for connecting with us, and again coming on board so early.



Another new initiative this year is *Lightning Talks*, a way of sharing your stories in a quick and digestible way. Thanks to **Brad Pollard** of **Fat Publisher** for providing an iPhone as the most awesome first prize.



Running a web conference with no access to the web just wouldn't be cricket so we are very happy to have **Unwired** on board to make sure you can Twitter and Flickr during the conference.



Putting together the workshops was a challenge for us this year and we were thrilled to have **Zazoo** and **OurPatch** step in and conduct the *Writing for the Web* workshop for us. Thanks in particular to **Ray Welling** for presenting.

And finally, thank you to **Donna Spencer** for providing two signed copies of *Card sorting: Designing usable categories*, her new book, as prizes.

# *Thank you...*

**There's a few people we need to acknowledge and thank for their support and assistance in bringing this conference together.**

First, the LGSA events team: **Meg Fisher**, **Michelle Simonetta** and **Karen Rolls**. Their advice, support and guidance has, again, been invaluable.

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A special thanks to **Kate Walsh**, LGSA Communications Manager, and to **Fay Daoud**, LGSA Media Officer, for helping us bring together our new magazine in a timely and well written manner.

**The Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW** for continuing to support this conference and the Network and for allowing us to utilise their resources.

## ***Speakers***

We owe a special thanks to all our speakers for giving up your time to contribute to our conference, without you this conference would not be possible. We are inspired by how many of you connect with what we're trying to do. We are pleased to deliver a fantastic lineup for the second year running, and want to sincerely thank you for sharing your knowledge with us and the conference attendees.

## ***Article authors***

Thanks to everyone who contributed to our new magazine (some at very short notice so an extra Thank You to you!). We are very excited to add this magazine and website to the network. We really appreciate you giving up your time and sharing your knowledge and experiences through your articles. It's great for us to be able to share stories from the public sector and industry in this first edition, and we hope it inspires others to share their stories in the future.



**Diana Mounter**  
Co-Founder of the  
Local Government  
Web Network

# *Our future on the web*

**I was asked at a conference recently “is print dead?”. My answer was no, not yet.**

Ten years ago when I was working in the printing industry there was concern that print wouldn't be around in five years time, that everything would be on the web. Print isn't dead, and until it's replaced by something tactile to fill our desire for “leisure reading”, or we have the internet literally everywhere, then it probably won't die. For now it continues to be a format that compliments our efforts online. And in a country where it's going to take eight years to build a national broadband network it will continue to be not just complimentary but a primary communication medium.

Local Governments would be unwise though if they continued to rely on print and didn't ready themselves for the future web. Already it's no longer something we visit only from our desktop computer. Web enabled, location aware devices bring new power to the linked web of data. Releasing public data in ways that can be used by these devices will change our web presence from sites to services, to community spaces and networks, and feeds of information. It's an exciting time to work in government on the web.

## ***Growing the Local Government community***

To help council and public sector web workers face the challenges ahead, we aim to develop better networking and knowledge management tools in the future. We will give you the opportunity to contribute and share your stories online and in print with this magazine. We'll be introducing wikis to allow us to build up a knowledge center of information that we hope you will contribute to. We will continue to extend and improve our subscription methods, as well as participating in conversations in social and professional networking sites.

To support our online and print presence we hope to have more face to face meetups, through this and/or other networks. The We Believe In Community conference will continue to be an important annual gathering of public sector web workers from New South Wales, and (we hope) with our growing connections from around Australia.

Working in the public sector gives you the opportunity to make a difference in your community. Your organisation's website already is, or soon will be, your primary communication tool. You have an opportunity to make a difference to the experience people have when they interact with the public sector online, and that can be beyond your traditional website. You can be part of building a better web, and in the process you have the opportunity through this network to share the hard lessons you learn.

Next time you pick up, download, or scroll through this magazine, I hope you find yourself in it...



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