

Developing an on-line resource of ICT information for the Third Sector

Background Information

One of the main activities of the Wales CVC Circuit Rider project was to develop an **ICT Information and Support Resource** on behalf of the CVC Infrastructure Group. The creation of this resource is an important Strategic development by this Group to establish ICT as an important and essential part of voluntary sector work.

Extracts from project documentation.

The Project team will establish a single reference point and resource repository that can be accessed by all Infrastructure partners, initially on a virtual basis. **The aim** is to provide information and support to enable County Voluntary Councils and other infrastructure agencies to build the capacity of locally based groups, helping to bridge 'the Digital Divide' and to improve services offered through voluntary action.

The focus will be on up-to-date information and research outcomes; examples of best practice; pilot project work; innovative development and future planning.

The following vision of the resource was developed by the CVC Partnership, initially for a web based resource but also to produce hardcopy or CD as required.

The Vision

'Website with a Third Sector View'

The Project Team will, on behalf of the CVC Infrastructure Group, create a single focus for good quality ICT information and resources, that can be used by County Voluntary Councils across Wales to promote the use of ICT by the Third Sector.

How the team developed the On-line Resource

Stage One – the specification

A specification was drawn up by the team and the Partnership. The following information is a cut-down version of the specification.

Potential Users of Resource

The resource will be open to all users and, although information will be of varying technical depth, no restrictions will be placed on access. The target audience is as wide and varied as the Voluntary Sector, so the resource will be designed with the common factors found within the sector, rather than types of users or organisations in mind.

The majority of groups are short of time and money and many do not have access to new technology if they do not work or attend college. Some are put off by technology and find a lot of ICT confusing.

Anticipated users will be:-

Any County Voluntary Council staff in Wales who wish to link to ICT information for use with locally based groups

Any Voluntary Group or Community Organisation who may locate resource through research, marketing or signposting

Any Circuit Riders or ICT Development Officer in other organisations

Presentation Formats

There will be different presentation formats to cover different access to computers and the internet. The **Website** will be the primary resource, with a **regular digest** produced from latest website content for either email or hardcopy distribution.

Selected project publications, such as **How to.. guides, Information Sheets** will be produced in hardcopy and on CD- ROM/DVD or Memory stick depending on resources available.

All project resources will be bilingual and will meet Accessibility standards.

Content Creation

Initially the Project team will select relevant information, catalogue and write brief reviews of external Web-based resources, articles and publications using their own experience of working with ICT in the voluntary sector.

Resources created to support local activity with groups will be available eg How to Guides... Information Sheets, Case Studies etc along with sign-posting information to local ICT suppliers, ICT Training and funding for ICT.

In time, the resource will be open to other interested parties to add content and to comment on content already added.

Budget Resources available to Project Team

No budget was available to purchase any software, although there were funds available for staff training.

Low cost or free options were considered first with the intention that, if these options did not produce an appropriate standard of presentation, then future funding applications will be considered.

Technical Considerations

Current Development Environment

The 123-communicate project (2006-2008) uses a selection of Adobe Dreamweaver templates designed by the team and Adobe Contribute for content creation and maintenance by the voluntary and community organisations.

The Project Team wish to expand what the 123-communicate can offer to groups, as well as developing a well as an information resource outlined in this document.

The project rents dedicated web space for the voluntary and community group websites.

As providers of information County Voluntary Councils need to deliver the same content in several different formats, therefore Content Management Systems should be considered.

Stage Two - the evaluation and selection of a Content Management Systems

What is a Content Management System (CMS)?

A CMS is a computer software system for organising and facilitating collaborative creation of documents and other content. A CMS is frequently a web application used for managing web sites and web content.

A Content Management System (CMS) is a set of processes, applications and databases that help an organisation create, store, coordinate, and publish information in a useful format, a timely fashion, and with a consistent method.

"Content" refers to any meaningful information (data) formatted for consumption by an audience.

A web-based search of available CMS software was carried out and reviewed. Although there are several hundred different CMS systems available, none of the reviewed Open Source software met enough of the initial specification to be considered.

The following observations were made;

- Many are very similar or have been based on each other software.
- The level and standard of support through web-based communities and documentation varies from non-existent to comprehensive.
- Open Source systems require a certain degree of technical skill.
- Most Open Source systems use PHP which needs to be kept secure by continual updating of the installation which would have resource implications.

Several Proprietary systems were reviewed and many fulfilled the initial specifications. They would have cost approx. £10,000 plus ongoing support. As no budget was available, this option was not pursued further, however the demonstrations and research helped to identify features and possibilities.

In view of this the review of Open Source CMS systems was revisited and a detailed study of three systems (Wordpress, Mambo and Joomla!) was carried out.

The selected system was **Joomla! 1.0, an Open Source Content Management System.**

Reasons for selecting Joomla!

During the writing of the specification it became clear that we had a very ambitious plan for the online resource we were creating so we needed a solid system with potential.

We considered the following main features of each system; Security, Politics / Legal Issues, Version Stability and Updates, Ease of Use

Wordpress

Security	There seems to be a good system of security patching.
Politics / Legal Issues	Nothing noted
Version Stability and Updates	Current version 2.3. It appears to be quite a stable system with regular updates.
Ease of Use	There is good documentation and support for its intended purpose as a blog. Limited support for modifications.
Conclusion	It soon became clear that Wordpress, built as a blog system, would need a large number of add-on components and also a degree of rewriting of the html and css and probably php. It may be useful for simple websites, perhaps for groups on a similar scheme to 123-Communicate.

Mambo

Security	A mature opensource cms with a good reputation. Development seems to be ongoing and apparently security vulnerabilities are addressed but quite where to go for this information is unclear
Politics / Legal Issues	Currently there are licence problems with commercial add-on modules. This might dramatically affect Mambo. The out-of-the-box installation is not sufficient for our needs. Mambo does not have sufficient secure reliable add-ons for our needs.
Version Stability and Updates	Current version is 4.6.2. . Version 5 is being developed. It is unclear if there would be ongoing support for earlier versions.
Ease of Use	The user interfaces are clear but the actual using of the system was not intuitive. Documentation was patchy and scattered. When found it proved difficult to follow instructions and some were incomplete.
Conclusion	Mambo was not chosen because of the limited documentation and worry over the politics and security.

Joomla!

Security	A mature CMS with a good reputation. Active development and attention paid to security issues. If there is a security patch for the main Joomla! component, there will be a knock on effects to any add-on modules so use as few as possible.
Politics / Legal Issues	Following a period of instability, immediately after the split from Mambo, the Joomla! team seem very focused.
Version Stability and Updates	Current version 1.0. Joomla! is actively being developed and modified. There is a new, rewritten version 1.5 being developed. The preparation seems to be very thorough, including help for migration. Out of the box, Joomla! manages the content needed to make a comprehensive web site. However, one of the benefits of Joomla! lies in the application framework that makes it possible for thousands of developers around the world to create powerful add-ons and extensions (Components, Modules, and Mambots).
Ease of Use	There is very good documentation, tutorials and general information about the current version. The community spirit seems very welcoming and helpful.
Conclusion	A robust stable solution. Use is greatly helped by the free documentation and tutorials.

Overall Conclusion

Following our appraisal and hands on testing of all three systems we decided on Joomla! to build the on-line resource.

The main deciding factors were:

- the excellent free support that comes with Joomla! in the form of an active web community and documentation. As with the main Joomla! web resources, this is written in a straightforward accessible style.
- the availability and information on the add-ons. Several add-ons were identified as having potential for enriching the content of our site.
- the stability and security of the software and ongoing development.
- Joomla! is quite intuitive to use with built in help in the user interface.
- the availability of templates and other commercial support.

We want our resource to be a living, interactive experience with contributions from users in the form of reviews, new material etc. and Joomla allows us to have what we want.

Stage Three – website planning and content creation

The team went through a process of information architecture design to determine the layout of the site, the features, the navigation, and the user experience.

Once the main sections were outlined, the team produced reviews, articles and links to resources to provide a basic knowledgebase, which was added to over the course of the project.

Going forward it is hoped that other initiatives will be featured and contribute to the resource.