

The One-Ipswich Community

Jeff Hume

A Recipe for Success Ltd, 44 Felaw Maltings, Ipswich, Suffolk, UK

Tel +44 1473 409933 Fax 44 1473 409944

jeff.hume@arfs.co.uk

David Field

Ipswich Borough Council, Civic Centre, Civic Drive, Ipswich

Tel +44 1473 432000 Fax +44 1473 432522

david.field@ipswich.gov.uk

Abstract : One-Ipswich is an initiative that is people and community led, and where the drivers are the needs of the community. Technology was not used for its own sake, but only where appropriate, and to support the aims of the project.

1 Introduction

Ipswich is located in the south east of England, one of the wealthier regions of the UK, and receives little in the way of central government funding for new initiatives.

Tight funding means that Ipswich Borough Council, the lead partner in the One-Ipswich community website project, tempers its approach to new initiatives accordingly to:

- Focus on the real need for any new potential project
- Partner where they can, to save budget and resource
- Start small and cheaply, by prototyping a project if possible, recognising that the technology may need to change if the project succeeds

Ipswich Borough Council has used this approach with success in previous initiatives, such as leisure bookings, e-voting, IDTV, and so on. Due to previous success, this strategy was also used in the One-Ipswich community website project, and affected the choices made, as indicated in the sections which follow.

2 Project aims and objectives

One Ipswich (www.one-ipswich.com) has been established with an overall aim to identify and delivery local priorities through partnership working and, most importantly, to “provide opportunities for people and communities to take part in decision that affect them”. One-Ipswich’s Community Strategy is based on five key priority themes with underlying principles, which have been agreed through extensive consultation. These are Culture & Learning, Crime & Disorder, Environment & Transport, Economy & Regeneration, Health & Well-being, underpinned by the principle of Access & Fairness for all.

Although the Lead authority was Ipswich Borough Council, the One-Ipswich project brought together numerous non-local authority partners, such as Connexions Suffolk, Department for Work and Pensions, Employment Agency, Environment Agency, Ipswich and Suffolk Council for Racial Equality, Ipswich Arts Association, Ipswich Council for Voluntary Service, Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust, Ipswich Partnership, Ipswich Primary Care Trust, Ipswich Society, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, Suffolk College, Suffolk Constabulary, Suffolk Learning and Skills Council, Suffolk Learning Partnership.

2.1 Objectives

The main objective of the project is to create a community website that will :

- Support the goals of the One-Ipswich community in delivering more effective, joined up services
- Support the goals of the 5 community forums. The community website will enable members of isolated and/or deprived communities to participate in and feel a part of the greater community
- Engage the community in participating in the goals of e-government, using a grassroots approach of consultation and participation.

Other objectives of the project include:

- Assisting residents and other interested groups in creating a picture of their local communities to encourage community strength
- Ensuring the community website is designed for use by those with special needs.
- Ensuring the community website is widely available to those in deprived and/or remote rural areas
- Avoiding unnecessary duplication between organisations and identifying gaps in information and understanding
- Maximising awareness and availability of existing sources of data
- Developing a project that acts a spur for further joint-working and partnership development

All of the One-Ipswich partners have been involved in the scoping of community website project, either through the initial one-to-one interviews conducted during the design & review stages of the project, or at the launch event on the 3rd of March 2004, or post launch through using the website as a communications channel to the local Ipswich community.

2.2 Key benefits

The overall aim of One-Ipswich, and the community website, was to “provide opportunities for people and communities to take part in decisions that affect them”. Hence, improving communications, encouraging active participations, and bridging the digital divide are key benefits for this project.

2.3 Measuring success

The success of the One-Ipswich project can be measured through tangible and intangible measures, both from the partners and from the community itself. Ongoing take up is promoted via a number of channels, including the Ipswich Council for Voluntary Services website

community editors, through ongoing usage of the website for surveys and consultations, through ongoing promotions of the website on local buses, and through the ongoing work of the area forums.

2.4 Sustainability

It is expected that this effort will be self-sustaining through the active participation of the voluntary sector providing website editorial support and funding via the provision of sponsorship and advertising opportunities on the website.

It was identified that the involvement and buy-in of all stakeholders at an early stage has led to the successful implementation of the project. However, while it is important to consider all stakeholders at an early stage, it is important to solicit a continuing commitment of support from those same stakeholders for the community project to make a sustainable and lasting impact on the future of the community.

3 Interoperability issues

3.1 Organisational/human interoperability issues

Organisational and human interoperability issues were significant in the One-Ipswich project, and were a known risk right from project initiation. In order to minimise the risk of these issues, 30% of the budget was allocated to consultation with partners and the community, so that potential problems could be dealt with up front.

3.1.1 Organisational interoperability issues

For many years the partner organisations involved had maintained their own data, building complex repositories for everything, ranging from personnel details to the holdings of a large museum. Access to this information had generally been restricted, with a wall of paperwork and bureaucracy separating the information from those who might wish to use it.

The One-Ipswich website needed to be able to access information from a wide variety of partners, many of whom had never interacted significantly before. It was critical to work in consultation with these organisations, to explain the value of sharing this information between them.

It was also important to achieve partner buy-in to the One-Ipswich project, so a series of consultation workshops were held, to determine the needs of the community, and test the validity of the ideas proposed for the project. This was a critical success factor for the project, as the partners had to be heavily involved for the project to succeed. The workshops specifically targeted a number of partners, including local authority departments, voluntary organisations and so on. All workshops discussed how a community website might be used, who would benefit and how, how to improve accessibility, and so on.

3.1.2 Human interoperability issues

In addition to the organisational challenges, there were also significant issues bottom-up, i.e. with the individuals within the community themselves. Many community members had been involved in previous initiatives and were unsure how this project would be of benefit to them.

It was key that the community would not only use the site, but would commit to keeping their own local information up to date – most content providers will not be expert users, and they

also may be very busy. So, just as important as organisational buy-in was to get the community involved.

Methods used to ensure organisational/human interoperability included:

- Consult with partners and the community to ascertain their needs and achieve buy-in
- Ensure that the technology chosen meets the needs of partners and the community, such that:
- The system used to add content to the site was easy to use for novice PC users, and that it can be used from any PC anywhere
- The system requires little or no training, as content providers are bound to change over time

3.2 Technical interoperability issues

In the past, integrating data from the very many different locations and organisations often had to be done manually, by translating and re-keying data from hard copy, and from incompatible systems.

In addition, many organisations already had their own websites, and were concerned that their information on the One-Ipswich community website would be difficult to update. They did not want a system that was complex and difficult to use.

It was also critical to adhere to standards for communication, representation, storage and accessibility, such as the World Wide Web Consortium and Bobby.

Lastly, it was important that technology was used as a means to an end, and only when relevant. The key issue was not the technology and what it can do. It was the needs of communities and how the technology can be used strategically to meet those needs.

Methods used to ensure technical interoperability included:

- **Use standard interfaces.** In the One-Ipswich project, information was imported via a simple CSV extract from other organisations. Post-prototype, an XML interface could be used. The use of standard interfaces meant that as the website grows and extends, other information can easily be accommodated. The use of standard technologies in the system also helps to ensure Bobby and W3C approval.
- **Use a content management system.** To ease content addition and editing, it was important to hold the content in a content management system, so that updates could be made to centrally held information regardless of the user's physical location. Hence, for the One-Ipswich project a content management system (CMS) with a browser interface for editing content was used.
- **Use relevant technology.** It was critical to the success of the project to utilise tools that were simple to learn, as training groups with disparate skills and in a variety of locations would be difficult and expensive. A technically adept but hard-to-use CMS would not suit the users involved in this project, so a CMS with a training time of 15-30 minutes was selected, and a Flash training course also provided.

3.3 Semantic interoperability issues

In the first phase of One-Ipswich, semantic interoperability was not a significant issue, as the site is currently small and not networked to wider organisations. Hence, in phase 1, “friendly metadata”, specific to the communities and organisations involved, was used. This friendly metadata allows users to accurately search the site for information in a way that has meaning to them.

In a future phase, it is envisaged the site will be a part of the larger One-Suffolk portal. At this point, it is likely that information such as jobs and events will be shared across the county, so that the Dublin Core standard will be used.

The important consideration is that this need for extensibility was understood at the start of the project, and so the system selected supports both “friendly metadata” and the Dublin Core.

3.4 Solving interoperability issues - example

An example of successful resolution of an organisational/technical interoperability issue in this project revolved around the wide variety of GIS systems that existed in the partnership. The partners used a variety of statistical models, but could not form an overall picture because the systems couldn’t share data, making it impossible to compare data for strategic planning.

As part of this project, owners of the systems agreed a common standard for reading and export, so that they could share the data in the Partners area of the One-Ipswich website.

This meant that partners could do better strategic planning as a group for the first time. As one example, schools, the police authority, and the NHS used a multi-agency approach to attack antisocial behaviour by using their combined data to identify hot spots of deprivation in Ipswich, then working together to solve major local problems such as vandalism, truancy and poor health.