Developing Community Websites

Developing a community website can be a great way to bring the community together and will provide a space for you to share ideas, information about local events as well as news and photos.

Where to start

As a community you will need to gather together to discuss ideas and decide what the purpose of the website is going to be, thinking about:

- Why do you want or need a website?
- What will it be about?
- Who is it for? Is there a target audience?
- What are the benefits of a website (versus other media)

Following on from that, find out who would like to be involved, look at people's skills and interests – what would they like to do? As a group you can play to each others strengths and use the existing skills amongst you. It may be useful to ask:

- Who is good at writing, communication, organising and promoting local events, photography, drawing and design?
- Who has computer skills? Knowledge of HTML and design packages would be an advantage. Agree a way to work together – committee, group vote, leader?
- Agree on how much time people want to give to the project.
- Agree a common set of values and goals for the project.

Domain names & hosting

You will need to register a domain name and organise for the website to be hosted. A domain name is the address of your website; this allows people to find the website when browsing the internet either by typing it into the address bar or via a search engine (Google, Yahoo etc).

Websites are hosted on servers and you will need to 'rent' some server space from a hosting company in order for your website to appear on the internet.

Nominet encourage you to register a domain name through a registrar (ISP or registration agent) who will act as your agent and submit a domain name application to Nominet. For more information see www.nominet.org.uk/.

There are hundreds of registrars out there, such as www.123-reg.co.uk, www.34sp.com, www.domainexpress.com and many will offer hosting packages too. Costs for registering a 'co.uk' domain (probably best for community websites) are usually around £10.00 for 2 years and £20.00 for a 'com' for 2 years. If you want to register as an organisation you can choose an 'org', also around £20.00 for 2 years. You can check availability of a domain name at any point without purchasing.

How to design and build a website

Structure & Navigation
- Draw sitemap 'family tree style' diagram to show the structure of the site
- Work out navigation - how pages are connected and linked
- Produce page layout sketches based on the content

Design
- Share ideas, inspiration, mood boards, look at other sites
- Determine the style, tone and visual look and feel
- Design look and feel (colours, typefaces, images and graphics)

Building your webpages (HTML & CSS)
- Create page templates using HTML and CSS or 'off the shelf' templates
- Add content and upload pages, check and review
- Test in browsers and fix templates

Updating your website
- Adding new content, optimising images
- Creating new pages and updating navigation
- Keeping the site up to date and relevant

Timescales and budget

Developing a website does not have to be expensive, however it might be useful some have some funds available to cover your costs. The community may have access to funding or you may wish to apply for a grant to help with the website development. Local businesses may also be interested in sponsoring the website.

As a group it would be helpful to look at timescales, do you want the website to be live in time for a community event or by a certain date? If so:

- How much time is available?
- What do you want to achieve by when?
- Are there any long terms aims/plans for the website?

Woking out a schedule based on the work that needs to be done can help, and setting a 'launch date' will help everyone stay focussed.

Hiring a web design company

Designing and developing a website requires computer knowledge and could require graphic design skill, basic knowledge of HTML and CSS, access to and ability to use software ie Photoshop, Dreamweaver or FrontPage. Depending on the skills you already have, you may want to consider hiring a web designer or developer.

There are number of very good web design companies in Cumbria and you could start by searching www.businesslinknw.co.uk or search engines (e.g. Google, Yahoo) to see a list of companies based in your local area. Look at their websites, review their portfolio and work they have done to date. Select the three companies that you feel offer the best websites and service. Following an initial phone call, meet with each company to discuss the website in more detail and ask them to provide a detailed quote.

Once you have selected a company, make sure you have a robust contract or agreement in place, detailing deliverables, costs and timescales, with regular review and sign off points.

When work is underway, it is important that the community stays involved and has plenty of opportunity to review work in progress and give feedback. If everyone feels they have ownership of the website, the end product will be better and it will continue to be maintained and looked after by everyone once the site launches.

Other community websites

www.ravenglassvillage.co.uk

www.muncasterparishcouncil.org.uk

www.witherslack.org

www.seberghamwelton.org.uk

www.bramptonandbeyond.org

Useful websites

www.calc.org.uk

www.thelocalchannel.co.uk

www.businesslinknw.co.uk

www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

www.crea.co.uk

www.cumbriafoundation.org

Domain and hosting links

www.123-reg.co.uk

www.1and1.co.uk

www.34sp.com

www.ecologicalhosting.com

For more information please contact ACTion with Communities in Cumbria on Tel: 01228 817224 or visit our website: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

ACT champions community and rural issues