

Feed the World

We all know that the internet is made up of two parts, websites and email. Except that it's not – there's also something else that combines the best of both these worlds. Simon Pavitt explains the benefits of the world of news feeds.

Although there are many specialised methods of transferring data using the infrastructure of the internet, the two that people most frequently use are websites and email.

However, there's a third mechanism which is a mixture of both of these, and similarly deserves to be used by voluntary organisations on a daily basis – news feeds.

What is a news feed?

A news feed is simply an extra page of a website that contains a summary of all the latest items that have been added. It is not designed to be read by humans, but is created automatically in a particular standard format that enables computer programs to use the information.

Just as you need a web browser to view webpages, or an email program to read email messages, you need a news reader program to display news feeds. Once you have subscribed to a particular news feed, the news reader program will check the page at regular intervals to see what new content is available and download any new items.

News reader programs can be used to check hundreds of news feeds so are sometimes called news feed aggregators.

Why use news feeds?

In general, news feeds provide similar information you could get by visiting websites or subscribing to an email newsletter or alert. So why bother

subscribing to news feeds?

Continually visiting numerous websites to check for new content quickly becomes untenable. And wading through an email newsletter to check if there is an item of relevance can be tiresome.

On the other hand, subscribing to a news feed means you automatically receive any new content whenever it is published and can make online life easier because they offer:

- **availability**
as news feeds are generated automatically, they are available for all sorts of specific issues, topics, categories and situations where it would not be physically possible to provide email alerts.
- **focus**
news feeds can offer more focused information than is possible to provide with a manually created email newsletter. It is easy for one website to offer multiple news feeds, each on a different topic.
- **size**
the content of a news feeds generally consists of many individual items, rather than multiple items as in an email newsletter. This makes them easier to manage, bring to the attention of colleagues or delete if not relevant.
- **security**
when you subscribe to a news feeds you do not hand over an email address so there is no possibility that it might

Where did the idea come from?

The development of news feeds happened alongside the creation of blogs. As more and more blogs appeared it became increasingly hard for people to keep track of all the new content that was being generated.

It was no longer feasible to visit hundreds of websites to see if anything had changed – each site would have its own design, menu system and categories making keeping track of new content an impossible task.

What was required was a standardised, automated way to keep track of new content from multiple websites. Instead of users having to go to each website, there needed to be a way of getting all the new content to come to the reader.

The news feed format arose to fill this need, and news feed reader software was developed to present the content to users. Alongside this, the automatic production of news feeds was built into website content management systems and other web software.

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Feed the world

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end being used for sending other marketing information or spam. Similarly, there is no chance of news items getting lost in any spam filters or other quirks of the email system.

- **continuity**
there is no need to re-subscribe if your email address changes.

How do I read news feeds?

There are three steps involved in starting to use news feeds:

- getting a news feed reader
- subscribing to a news feed
- subscribing to some more news feeds.

Once you have a program that can display news feeds, you subscribe by entering the address of a news feed that you are interested in receiving. Then whenever something new is published you will be able to view it in your news reader program.

Getting a news reader

Just as there are web browsers for viewing websites and mail program for reading email messages, so there are dedicated programs to display and store news feeds.

As news feeds are essentially specialised web pages, it's not surprising that web browsers can display them (see 'Really Simple Start'). However, if subscribing to more and a handful of news feeds then the extra features of a specialised news feed reader will probably be useful.

Web browsers typically display a fixed number of previous items from any news feed. Specialised news feed readers retrain previous items and often offer features such as the ability to categories items, add comments or tags to them, delete them or forward them to other people.

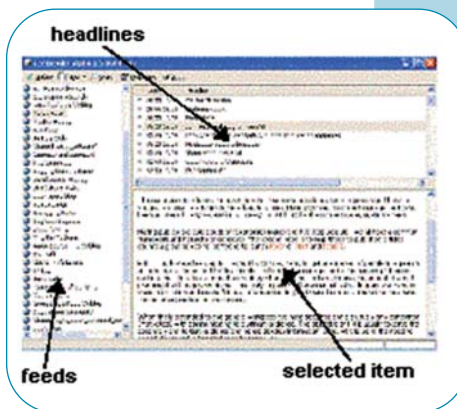
There are many different news feed readers available with slightly different features and ways of doing things, but they all do basically the same job.

A key choice, however, is whether you want to install a program that runs on your own computer and downloads the latest news items, or you want to access an online program so that you can view them from any computer with internet access.

There are many choices of news reader programs to install, such as FeedReader [www.feedreader.com] or FeedDemon [www.feedException.com] for use with Windows, while standard choices of online news reader include Bloglines [www.bloglines.com] and Google Reader [www.google.com/reader].

Whatever choice you make, the screen layout will generally be fairly similar to that of an email program.

Usually on the left there will be a list of the news feeds you have subscribed to, at the top of



the screen will be a list of headlines from the news feed you have selected, and below that will be the content of the specific news item you currently have selected.

Really simple start

There is almost certainly already software on your computer that can display news feeds. As news feeds are essentially specialised webpages, a quick way to get an idea of their usefulness is to use a web browser.

As an example, using Firefox to subscribe to the latest technology stories from BBC News available at [newsrss.bbc.co.uk/rss/newsonline_world_edition/technology/rss.xml]:

- 1 go to the website address
- 2 select 'Live Bookmarks' from the drop down menu and click 'Subscribe'
- 3 select where in your Bookmarks you want it to appear and click 'Add'.

Now whenever you go to the bookmark it will always show the newest 40 technology items from BBC News. A similar mechanism exists in other web browsers, such as Internet Explorer.

Some email programs can also read news feeds. An advantage of using your email program is that all your new information and alerts can be handled in the same way in the same place, and you can categorise, delete or forward news items just as you would if they had been received by email.

An example of such a programs is the popular, free Thunderbird [www.mozilla.com/thunderbird]. To subscribe to news feeds in Thunderbird:

- 1 select Tools and then Accounts
- 2 click on the Add Account button
- 3 select RSS News and Blogs and click Next.

Another way to start exploring the world of news feeds without having to use any new software or change your way of working, is to take advantage of a service that converts news feeds into emails. Once such service is SendMeRSS [www.sendmerss.com] which allows you to subscribe to news feeds but sends all the items to you as email messages.

Subscribing to a news feed?

Once you have set up your news reader program you can start subscribing to news feeds. Often the programs comes with a few common news feeds already set up, but you will always want to delete any that are not relevant and add new ones.

When you start looking you will find that news feeds are everywhere on the web. But sometimes even though a news feed is available from a website, it does not always publicise the fact explicitly. This can be because it simply assumes that users will

expect there to be a news feed, or just because there is not space to publicise the fact in detail.

The availability of a news feed is often only indicated in by the presence of what has become the standard feed icon image, which by convention is usually orange. Occasionally a badge with the letters 'XML' or 'RSS' will be displayed instead, or the word 'Syndicate' or 'Subscribe' used, but they are all being used to highlight the availability of a news feed.



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Auto subscription

Some websites offer shortcuts making it easier to subscribe to their feed using certain news readers.

Depending upon the website, these look something like this:



This makes it easy to get started, but you will be extremely lucky if there are shortcuts for your news reader for every news feed you want to subscribe to. So it's important to learn the process of subscribing to news feeds using your own news reader program yourself.

Web browsers usually display the news feed icon in the browser bar if it detects that a news feed is available, and this address is what you need in order to subscribe. In your news reader program click on 'Add' or 'Subscribe' and you should be able to paste in the news feed address and subscribe to the news feed.

Once you've done this, any new items belonging to the feed will automatically be downloaded, ready for you to read.

News feed search

Once you have the bug, more news feeds can be found by searching for those on a topic you are interested in at Syndic8 [www.syndic8.com] or Technorati [www.technorati.com].

Getting attached

News feeds can include attachments such as pictures and other files in the same way that emails can. Sound files attached to news feeds are known as Podcasts. These can be subscribed to in just the same way as an ordinary news feeds, so that, for example, you receive the latest edition of a radio program whenever it is broadcast.

OPML format

Sometimes an organisation or service offers a collection of news feeds that it finds useful in its work so that others can also easily have direct access to the same up-to-date information about the issue it works on.

These are often provided in OPML format, which many news feed readers can import in order to automatically subscribe to multiple news feeds. Similarly, a collection of news feeds can be passed on to others by exporting them in OPML format.

Websites

If you operate a website, it can become very time-consuming to be creating original content on a regular basis. Many web content management systems and web development software allows for the display of news feeds from other websites. Whenever it publishes a new item, your website will automatically be updated with the new content. By selecting news feeds on a particular combination of topics and sources you can make your website a more valuable resource for its visitors.

Most providers of news feeds are happy for others to re-publish their news items as it spreads where their content appears and brings it to the attention of different audiences. But if any doubt, it's wise to check with the provider that publishing their news feed is OK and that they are happy with the frequency that this happens.

Creating your own news feeds

Once you have started subscribing to news feeds from individual websites, you might want to experiment with creating your own news feeds to meet your own specific requirements. Once you have set up such a news feed, you can then subscribe to it in your news reader program.

A few of examples are:

- **news**
popular search engines, such as Google [www.google.co.uk/alerts], allow you to set up a news feed which alerts you whenever there is a news story that matches your own criteria. Although sometimes it is necessary to juggle with the precise search terms to ensure you get a useful number of relevant items, alerts could be set up for a specific topic you organisation works on, or its name, initials, projects or key staff,
- **blogs**
it is almost certain that there will be bloggers writing about

your organisations issue. Many of these will be providing new information, suggestions and opinions that your organisation could take advantage of or respond to. You can set up news feeds that monitor blogs for use of specific terms at Technorati [www.technorati.com] or Digg [www.digg.com]

News feeds do not replace the sending of email messages, but they are an efficient way of monitoring websites and receiving alerts about new information, and an alternative to subscribing to email newsletters and online groups.

Jargon Jar

news feed

a method for exporting and importing content, also known as a web feed

news item

a piece of content that belongs to a news feed

news feeder

a program used for reading news feeds, also known as a news aggregator

podcast

a news feed with a sound file attached

RSS

Really Simple Syndication, a way of formatting new content

XML

a computer language for specifying data formats

OPML

a format for offering subscription to a group of news feeds

More information

- [www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/whatisrss]
- [www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/internet/page7325.cfm]
- [www.socialsignal.com/nonprofit-RSS]
- [www.commoncraft.com/rss_plain_english]
- [www.whatisrss.com]
- [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/help/3223484.stm]
- [www.feedburner.com/fb/a/feed101]

Mobile 2.0 for the voluntary sector

Mobile phones are everywhere. Literally. Their increasing use, and the availability of new services for them, means they are becoming an effective tool for doing everything from organising your mobile life to campaigning for social change.

Mobile 2.0

Mobile phone services and web services are also being increasingly integrated. This convergence has been summed up by the use of the term Mobile 2.0. The promise of Mobile 2.0 is to add portability, ubiquitous connectivity and location-based services to enhance information and services found on the web.

The days of small mobile phone screens and expensive mobile web tariffs are also fast disappearing. Most experts in the field are expecting mobile devices to quickly overtake computers as the most popular way of connecting to the internet.

Unique benefits of mobile technology:

- First truly personal mass media – we don't share our phones with our family.
- First always-on mass media information is always available 24/7, even when idle.
- First always-carried mass media – 7 out of 10 people sleep with their phone within reach.
- Only mass media with a built in payment channel – twice as many people have phones than credit cards.
- Offers point of thought ability to create or consume content whenever the mood strikes.

In the last issue we looked at developments in internal phone systems. In the first of two articles, Miles Maier turns the attention on mobile telephony and the implications for voluntary organisations in the way they operate and provide information.

Mobile numbers

The latest studies estimate there are 3 billion mobile phones in operation around the world – this compares to an estimated 1.2 billion personal computers. With these sorts of numbers, mobile technology is beginning to have a significant impact the way we live and work. Using our mobile phones we can now surf the internet to search for nearby services, send and receive email, text friends and colleagues, take and send pictures, record audio and video – and even make phone calls.

Mobile phones have also emerged as the likeliest means of bridging the “digital divide”. In 2000, the United Nations set a goal of 50% of the world's population having access to a phone by 2015 – this has already been achieved, with nearly 80% of the world's population living within range of a mobile network. Mobile infrastructure is cheaper to deploy than fixed landlines, mobiles are cheaper than PCs, and surprisingly have turned out to suffer few of the weaknesses of PCs.

Mobile usage

Before we can exploit mobile technology we need to know what people are doing with their mobile phones. In the UK, there are some 44.5 million subscribers to mobile phone networks from a population of 60.5 million (ONS, 2006). Text messaging is by the far most popular service, with email and web browsing

	France	USA	UK
Total Mobile Subscribers (millions)	44.5	207.0	44.5
Send text messages	72%	40%	86%
Used photo/video messages	21%	15%	29%
Used email	7%	9%	8%
Used web browser	8%	10%	13%
Download ringtones	5%	10%	4%
Watched mobile video/TV	1%	1%	1%

(Source: *m:metrics* [www.mmetrics.com], 2007)

some way behind, mainly because mobile tariffs in the UK have made them expensive.

However, this could change with the introduction of faster 3G (third generation networks), larger touch-screen devices like the iPhone and the surging popularity of mobile social-networking sites like Facebook.

Mobile home

More and more people are favouring the flexibility of mobile phones. According to UK telecoms regulator Ofcom, mobile-only homes are on the rise with 12% or more UK households relying solely on a mobile phone.

In the UK's cities, Greater Manchester has the highest levels of mobile-only homes at 28%, followed by Birmingham (22%), Liverpool (21%) and Yorkshire and Humber (18%). However, in London the proportion relying on mobile telephony is lower than average (7%).

(Source: *Ofcom The Nations & Regions Communications Market 2008*)

Mobile applications

New mobile tools and services are appearing all the time. Some of the applications that can help organisations work more efficiently and flexibly are:

Mobile Office

Mobile office applications offer a low cost way to engage without the complexity or cost of investing in computer hardware. If you have staff who work remotely or spend long periods out of the office, chances are that they will want to keep in touch by using their mobile phone to check emails, calendar and contacts.

Push Email systems

Most mobile operating systems will work with Microsoft Exchange Server – the software most commonly used by businesses for setting up staff with email, calendar and contacts. If you want email delivered instantly to your mobile wherever you are in the world – then you need Push e-mail.

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Windows Mobile 6

Windows Mobile is a compact operating system combined with a suite of basic applications for mobile devices. Integrates with Microsoft Exchange Server.

BlackBerry

BlackBerry is a proprietary operating system which provides support for wireless synchronisation with Microsoft Exchange Server's e-mail and calendar, as well as with Novell GroupWise and Lotus Notes. You'll need to install BlackBerry Enterprise Server to enable synchronisation with mobile devices.

This provides an "always-on" capability, in which new email is instantly transferred (pushed) to the mobile phone as it arrives.

However, if you do decide to grant mobile phone access to Exchange Server you should also be aware of the security risks and take appropriate precautions. For example, what will you do if the Chief Executive leaves their mobile phone in the pub with all their emails and contacts easily accessible?

Microsoft Active Sync

A second option is use Microsoft Active Sync to synchronise Outlook email, calendar, contacts and tasks with your mobile phone [www.microsoft.com/windowsmobile/en-us/help/synchronize/device-synch.msp]. Synchronisation will only work when your phone or PDA is physically connected to your office computer.

Google Mobile

As an alternative to BlackBerry, Windows Mobile and Active Sync, Google has made many of its free services, such as Search, Maps, Mail, Calendar, News Reader, Picassa photo albums and Youtube videos, accessible via web pages specially designed for mobile phones. All you need to get started is a mobile phone with a web browser.

To get started you will need to sign up for a free Google account. Once you've done that, go to Google Mobile [www.google.com/intl/en_uk/mobile] and enter your mobile number.

Status: Phone number successfully validated.
Why haven't I received my verification code?
Enter a new phone number and operator to change where your SMS notifications are sent.

Country:

Telephone number:

Operator: [See Help Centre for supported providers.](#)

Verification code:

Google will then send you a text message with a verification code for you to enter in the Google Mobile web page. You can now access Google services from your mobile phone, but be sure to check your mobile's tariff for web browsing before starting.

Calendar Sync

Outlook is not designed for viewing on mobile phones not running Windows Mobile or BlackBerry. However, Google Calendar Sync [www.google.com/support/calendar/bin/answer.py?answer=89955] provides two-way syncing between your Outlook calendar and your Google Calendar, so you can now view your Outlook calendar via Google Calendar on your mobile phone.

Calendar reminders

Options

Reminder:

[Add a reminder](#)

Show me as: Available Busy

Privacy: This event is:
 Default
 Private
 Public

[Learn about private v. public events](#)
[Publish this event](#)

Many people keep reminders of dates in many different places – on a work computer, on our home computer, on our mobile phone, in a paper diary and on post-it notes stuck on the fridge door.

Using Google Calendar [www.google.com/calendar] can take the hard work out of this by sending free text message reminders of calendar events to your mobile phone. All you need to do is create an event on Google Calendar and schedule a reminder.

Outlook email and Google Email

If you don't have a Windows Mobile or BlackBerry device, the easiest way of viewing your Outlook email on your mobile phone is to set up an account in Google Mail. Both Google and Microsoft [www.tinyurl.com/yjle4d] have instructions on how to do this. However, do bear in mind the security implications of making company emails accessible to a mobile phone.

VOIP

Voluntary sector organisations make use of VoIP to make free or cheap calls over the internet to colleagues and partners all over the world. However, mobile VoIP is still in infancy and is mostly limited to mobile phones with WiFi capability as many mobile networks do not have the capacity to handle VoIP calls.

One of the best known VoIP providers is Skype, which has mobile versions of its software

for around 50 different handsets and Windows Mobile devices [www.skype.com/intl/en-gb/download/skype/mobile]. Skype also has its own 3 Skyphone handset [www.skype.com/intl/en-gb/allfeatures/3skypephone] which offers free calls to other Skype mobiles or Skype subscribers with a computer.

In the UK, Tesco has begun a pilot extension to its VoIP service – Tesco Internet Phone – onto mobiles, offering WiFi capable handsets the chance to make free calls to other Tesco customers [www.tescointernetphone.com].

Two new services, GrandCentral and TalkPlus, provide subscribers with one number that rings their mobile, home and office phones. This could have great potential for small organisations and home-workers who need to take work calls but don't want to advertise their personal number.

Grandcentral and TalkPlus also offer voicemail services, which could offer a lifeline for homeless communities without access to a mobile or traditional voicemail. MobileActive reports [www.mobileactive.org/mobiles-service-delivery] on the Community Voice Mail (CVM) program which has helped 40,000 people a year across the USA access voicemail services.

Mobile conference calls

Mobile conferencing calling is in its infancy, but a new service called RokTalk [www.roktalk.com] offers interesting possibilities for rural communities or organisations needing to co-ordinate a large mobile workforce. RokTalk is currently a free beta service (by application only) and allows calls to up to 30 people simultaneously.

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Mobile imaging

With ScanR [www.scanr.com] you can turn your camera phone into a scanner, copier, and fax. All you need to do is take clean photos of documents and business cards and ScanR will extract any text and contact information.

Conclusion

Many commentators believe that mobile phones have the power to overcome the “digital divide” – they are cheaper, easier to maintain and more ubiquitous than personal computers.

In the UK we are poised on the verge of third generation (3G) faster mobile networks and in recognition of this services are increasingly being designed and delivered to mobile phones. All we need is for tariffs to be sensibly priced and we could see mobile web browsing over-take browsing from personal computers.

The future is here and it has a ringtone!

In the next part we look further at the impact of mobile phone technology on campaigning and advocacy work, the provision of services based on location and mobile social networking, and some of the organisations taking advantage of new mobile tools and services.

Mobile jargon alert

1G: First-generation wireless telephone technology. These are the analogue mobile phone standards that were introduced in the 1980s and continued until being replaced by 2G digital.

2G: Second-generation digital wireless telephone technology, able to deliver download speeds of up to 59.2 Kbit/s.

3G: Third generation of mobile phone standards and technology, able to deliver download speeds of up to 14.4 Mbit/s.

4G: (also known as Beyond 3G), Fourth-Generation Communications System, is a term used to describe the next step in wireless communications. 4G systems are projected to offer a fully IP-based integrated system capable of providing between 100 Mbit/s and 1 Gbit/s speeds.

Bluetooth: a wireless protocol utilising short-range communications technology facilitating both voice and data transmissions over short distances.

GPRS: General Packet Radio Service – a second generation (2G) mobile data service including SMS, MMS, WAP, email and Internet for mobile phones.

GPS: Global Positioning System – a global navigation system that enables GPS receivers to determine their location, speed, direction, and time.

LBS: Location-based Services – the ability for a mobile device to provide information that is relevant to its physical location using GPS.

Mobile: Portable personal communication devices able to connect voice calls or data requests wirelessly. Not to be confused with “cellular” or “cell.”

Mobile 2.0: The convergence of mobile services and web services. The promise of Mobile 2.0 is to add portability, ubiquitous connectivity and location-based services to enhance information and services found on the web.

MMS: Multimedia Messaging Service – a standard system that allows sending messages that include multimedia objects such as images, audio, video and rich text.

Palm OS: used by Palm’s Treo line of mobile phones, though gradually being replaced by Windows Mobile.

PDA: Personal Digital Assistant – a handheld computer, also known as small or palmtop computers.

Smart phone: a mobile phone offering advanced capabilities beyond a typical mobile phone, often with PC-like functionality.

SMS: Short Message Service – a communications protocol allowing the interchange of short text messages between mobile telephone devices.

Symbian: a proprietary operating system designed for mobile devices owned by Nokia, Sony Ericsson and others.

VOIP: Voice Over Internet Protocol – making use of the internet for phone calls.

WAP: Wireless Application Protocol – an open international standard for applications that use wireless communication. Its main use is to enable access to the Internet from a mobile phone or PDA.

WiFi: the trade name for a popular wireless technology used in home networks, mobile phones and video games.

Windows Mobile: a compact operating system combined with a suite of basic applications for mobile devices.

First principles

Ever met a techie with principles?

uk circuitriders
voluntary sector technology support

Ian Runeckles of Lasa hopes there will be more of them around with the development of a set of principles which cover technology support work within the voluntary sector.

If you are looking for technology support it's good to know about the background of the company you are approaching. While individual staff might have their own technical qualifications, it's useful to know about the way their company works too, whether this is based on standards such as those of the ISO, PQASSO, a trade association or some other kitemark.

However, the main requirement for supporting voluntary organisations is to have an understanding of how the sector works, such as its funding mechanisms, its emphasis on equal opportunities, its less hierarchical structure and the degree of collaboration between organisations.

It can sometimes be hard to identify companies orientated to work within this context from those who simply undertake IT work in general.

To help with this problem, the ICT Hub's Circuit Rider development programme recently co-ordinated the production of a set of principles designed to cover technical support work within the voluntary sector.

Ian Runeckles explains some of the issues involved:

Why we need them?

Well, everyone needs them! The starting point of the ICT Hub project [www.lasa.org.uk/circuitriders/training] was that we wanted to provide quality,

reassurance and safeguards to the voluntary sector organisations we work with.

In conjunction with work we've been doing on standards, skills and training, we saw it as a way to drive ICT support and development standards in the sector; maintain and enhance the values of the sector; raise the profile of Circuit Riders and Circuit Riding and provide sector organisations with independent advice.

As we started to think about how to develop training and quality standards for Riders, it became obvious that we needed to publish a statement of principles. Everything we wanted to do started there and although we knew that some work had been done on them, they were not ready for publication just yet.

We thought it was important to put the ethos and commitment of many organisation and individuals who provide the sector with technology assistance into words, so that it is easier for others to appreciate their difference and quantify the values they bring.

How did they come about?

There's been a long gestation period and a lot of different people around the world have contributed!

I'm sure they've been talked about since circuit riding started in the US ten years ago, but my first awareness of their development came at the NTEN

[www.nten.org] NonProfit Technology Conference at Philadelphia in March 2004.

We took the standards that were discussed there to the UK Circuit Rider Conference in 2005 and did some more work, and then took on board an ethical dimension at the 2006 conference.

Summit Collaborative and nPower Indiana also had statements of their principles and we brought all this together at a Lasa-organised meeting in July 2007. Members of the UKRiders mailing list [lists.lasa.org.uk/lists/info/ukriders] contributed and the Project Advisory Group pulled it all into shape. The principles were published in January 2007.

What do they consist of?

There are ten principles which are split into four sections. For me, they summarise effectively our ethical and moral obligations to the organisations we work with. And seeing how many others have signed, they've obviously struck a chord with those who provide technical support and advice to the sector.

Who can sign up to them?

Anybody who thinks they apply to their work with the voluntary sector. They are a voluntary code and signatories are not vetted to check that they adhere to the Principles, so it's possible for any IT company to sign up. But despite the principles having widely publicised, it's clear from

those that have signed up that they do take their obligations seriously.

How can you find who's signed up?

The easiest way is to look at the page on the Lasa website which lists the signatories [www.lasa.org.uk/circuitriders/signatories.shtml].

Many of them will also be on the Suppliers Directory [www.suppliersdirectory.org.uk] so the organisation can also be assured that they've been through a vetting process. You may also see the UKRiders logo on signatories websites which shows they've signed up.

But, of course, we'd also suggest that you ask questions of the Rider or organisation about their working methods and take up references from their other clients.

What happens next?

Well, following what we've done here, in the US non-profit consultants and organisations are revising their set of principles. And in the UK, the Big Lottery has funded a London circuit rider project which will look at training and accreditation, and there are standards and skills guides funded by the ICT Hub coming soon.

For more information contact: [crprinciples@lasa.org.uk]

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The Circuit Rider Principles

I/we commit to...

Vision and values

- Recognise and respect the characteristics (vision, values, culture, funding, mission, beneficiaries and services) of the particular Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisation I/we work with and adapt my approach appropriately.

Working practices

- Work honestly and transparently, declaring any conflicts of interest (including reselling activities) and be prepared to say when a non-Information and Communication Technology (ICT) solution is the best course of action.
- Use non-technical language and examples to help organisations understand ICT and their choices.
- Understand the limitations of my/our ICT skills and knowledge and help to connect VCS organisations I/we work with to other ICT providers and development workers if unable to meet the organisation's needs.
- Ensure legal and best practice requirements are made explicit to the organisations I/we work with (e.g. health and safety, data protection, environmental, accessibility, inclusion, confidentiality and licensing).

Learning, professional development and support

- Engage in continuous learning to maintain the necessary skills and level of knowledge to understand ICT, the VCS in general and any sub-sectors (e.g. health, environment, etc.) I/we work with.
- Participate in and share my/our knowledge with the VCS ICT community and the organisations I/we work with.

Supporting organisational development and sustainability

- Help organisations understand the impact ICT can have on staff, volunteers and beneficiaries, taking responsibility to highlight and assist with change management.
- Equip organisations with tools, knowledge and processes to enable them to make informed decisions and take full advantage of ICT and how to make ongoing strategic decisions with or without external support.
- Enable organisations to understand the total cost of ownership (TCO) needed to maintain and improve their ICT commitments, offering choice and refraining from prescribing dependency-based ICT solutions.

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Quotes from signatories

"The principles are our first step at something IT support workers can use to show that we are trying to do a professional and sector specific role."

Dave Greenhalgh

"Clients don't always understand or appreciate the added value they get from circuit riders. The new principles help raise awareness of the comprehensive nature of our service – we can point to something and say 'that's what I do!' "

Morgan Killick, ESP Projects, Sheffield

"Whilst I know there has been 'lively' debate about the need for a set of principles and what they should contain, good or bad, I feel as a movement we need to gain approval in the eyes of the public and people feel more comfortable using services that are 'governed' by a 'code of conduct/principles'.

I see the principles as affirmation of our intent to meet the needs of our clients in the most effective and professional way possible.

I also see the principles as indication that the Circuit Rider Movement is trying to take itself and its message seriously. It is not going to suit everyone. But when ever you are looking for consensus/agreement you need a place to start from, and this is what the principles give us.

The other important role the principles can help with is in explaining what Circuit Riding is about and what it hopes to achieve and what benefits it can bring to the VCS."

Paul Jefford, Cambridge Circuit Riders

"Signing up to the principles was an automatic because we had already been working to an almost identical philosophy since we were first formed. Our organisation had already reached the same conclusions (though not necessarily worded it as well) as to the type of service our not-for-profit clients deserved and needed.

When we first read the Principles, it was confirmation for us that others had also reached the same conclusions as we had. Here was an opportunity to succinctly document what we believed and also allowed us to 'nail our colours to the mast' so to speak and confirm to our client that not only did we really believe in these principles but there were other similar-minded organisations out there who also followed them."

Jae Campbell, DOT-COMmunications, Hebden Bridge

"This code of conduct shows the world that we follow basic tenants of ethical service, whether as staff, support organisations, consultants or vendors. Also, I like having something most of us charity technology folks agree on, which helps connect us to each other."

John Kenyon, John Kenyon Consulting, San Francisco

What's a Rider?

A Circuit Rider is mobile ICT support and development worker who has a caseload of voluntary and community sector clients. The first Riders operated in the US in the mid 1990s and Lasa has been working on developing the model in this country for around 7 years. For more information go to: [\[www.lasa.org.uk/circuitriders\]](http://www.lasa.org.uk/circuitriders)