

Debunking the Cloud

Lasa's recent European Not-For Profit Technology Conference looked at the potential of cloud computing solutions for the third sector, and generated diverse opinions on its pros and cons. We look at the differing viewpoints of Morgan Killick, a frequent contributor to the ICT Knowledgebase, against four claims commonly advanced by advocates in favour of cloud computing. Computanews referees the debate....

Claim 1: Cloud Computing is better for the environment.

The general consensus put forward by advocates is that moving applications to the cloud and reducing the amount of computer hardware in use and replacing them with cloud computing solutions can reduce energy costs and carbon dioxide emissions. Factor in various tax incentives to go green and you have a compelling argument for adopting cloud solutions.

Morgan: Any generic claim about environmental efficiencies really needs to be unpacked. In terms of hardware, it is fair to talk about the specific power consumption of one particular type of server being less than another, or of a virtualised server relative to a non-virtualised, or even the production methods and carbon offsetting of one manufacturer being more green than its competitors. However, claims about the environmental benefits of software-as-a-service are far harder to substantiate.

How can the environmental cost of a web-based CRM be measured against

an in-house Access Database for example? Consider here that the web-based CRM requires a dedicated data centre with scores of servers and 24/7 power, lighting and security, yet the Access database can reside on a single PC or a server that will be turned on anyway because it is used for countless other things. Moreover if the database is only stored on a PC, that PC is typically only be consuming power for 25% of the available hours in a week because it is turned off after work and at weekends!

Cloud computing is not green of itself. One cloud provider may be greener than another, but making the transition to the cloud per se will contribute to the saving of the planet.

Computanews: Whilst this question is simple yet profound in its implications for greening technology, there is no easy answer one way or the other. There are no international standards for measuring the "eco-friendliness" of cloud computing, and until cloud providers make the data available claims of 'eco-friendliness'

in this issue

Debunking the Cloud
page 1, 4-5

Lasa tech conference
report - page 6

Tips 158: Cloud Apps
page 7

Tech handbook - page 8

Paul Ticher on Data
Protection - page 9

Paula Graham on open
source - page 10

Adam Clamp on Green IT
page 11

Rightsnet: Relaunching a
website - page 12-13

Windows 7 licensing
page 13-14

Facebook: the movie
review - page 15

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Lasa has been providing the voluntary and community sector with high quality and impartial ICT advice since 1984.



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editorial

At the end of September, Lasa ran the first European Not-For-Profit Technology Conference in the wonderful surroundings of London's Garden Museum. We focused on cloud technology and whether it will provide benefits to small to medium sized third sector organisations.

In this Computanews we provide a brief overview of the conference and a link to the full report. There's also an article which looks at both sides of the argument for the cloud and we list our favourite cloud-based tools and services.

Also in this issue we welcome contributors who will be writing regular columns on their particular specialist areas. All three have written for us before and we're delighted to have them on board. In alphabetical order, they are Adam Clamp, Paula Graham and Paul Ticher.

Adam runs the Green IT Company and will, unsurprisingly, be covering green computing - in his column this issue he ponders on what a green computer actually is and what the benefits of it are.

Paula works for FossBox and will be looking at the latest developments in the world of Free and Open Source (FOSS) computing - she examines how resilience can be built into computing through some of the work she is doing with London-based third sector organisations.

Paul really needs no introduction as many of you will have seen his articles in Computanews or on the Knowledgebase on data protection in the past - he examines information security and data sharing in this issue.

Elsewhere, we find out how the rightsnet website was recently upgraded to embrace new areas of social welfare law, there's an introduction to Lasa's latest publication, the ICT Handbook, and Circuit Riders advise on upgrading (or not) to Windows 7.

Finally we load up on popcorn and take a trip to the movies for The Social Network, the story of the stormy evolution of Facebook.

Editor: Ian Runeckles

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could be seen as little more marketing hype.

Claim 2: Cloud storage is cheaper

Supporters of cloud computing claim that economies of scale offered by cloud providers make file storage cheaper than other options.

Morgan: This claim is demonstrably untrue in the general case. Let's take an online backup for an organisation with an average amount of data on a server, say 100GB. A quick tour of online providers shows prices ranging from £25 to £100's per month. Yet a 1TB (1000GB) external hard disk will set you back a one off cost of £100 or so. This should last for several years and is thus far cheaper than the cloud option for raw data. Even if you factor in the need for a more comprehensive server backup suite like BackupExec, which is available to registered charities at just £75 from CTX, this will contain considerably more functionality than most cloud services.

There is no doubt however that some cloud solutions are exceptionally good value or even free. Idrive, Dropbox, Amazon services, etc. are offered at incredible rates and often make brilliant financial sense. But it cannot be assumed that cloud storage is a money saver.

Computanews: We'd have to agree with Morgan on this one – some cloud storage providers are certainly offering very attractive prices, but they don't begin to compare with hard disk prices. And you might also want to ask yourself about where your data is stored and what guarantees you have in case of data loss. We'd also recommend adopting cloud storage as part

of a back-up plan, not your only back-up.

Claim 3: Cloud Computing Cuts Down The Needs for Servers & IT Support

It was a noticeable mantra amongst the cloud providers and advocates at the conference that transitioning to the cloud would obviate the need for the flashing box in the corner and the staff needed to keep it working.

Morgan: This claim, I think, is the most controversial when you consider the nature of the audience of the conference. Now, if you happen to be a CEO or IT Manager for a large company with a server room and a whole bunch of servers, each of which is dedicated to a specific task, it is a fair claim that adopting a cloud solution for one of those tasks may allow you to dispose of the server that currently hosts it, and save some support costs to boot.

However, most small organisations will have one or perhaps two servers at most. Many of these servers are often handling multiple roles - file sharing, permissions, logon scripts, group policies, updates, mail server, print server, managing antivirus, back-up and hosting the odd internal database. Moving one or two of those roles to the cloud will not make that server redundant as other roles will still be necessary.

Transition costs are frequently overlooked in the cost of moving services to the cloud. Transition costs include time and money spent in planning, consultancy, coding, external support, testing, data migration, training and re-arranging policies, procedures and processes to suit a new system and should

never be dismissed as trivial.

Where this claim is perhaps more apposite, is for very diffuse or very small organisations where staff are spread across many sites and locations, or there are only a small number in a single office. In many cases there will be no replacement costs as they have very little hardware and probably no server to replace. Here the cloud is in its element and cloud solutions are vital to consider as an enabler of improved sharing and collaboration for a decentralised and fairly tech-savvy organisation.

As for cutting IT support costs, until such time as we only ever use solid state devices to plug directly into the cloud there will always be a need for IT support for PCs and laptops, and the existence of the cloud does not change this.

Computanews: Cloud based services – such as an online office suite of email, calendar, documents, file storage – offers many smaller organisations with little or no infrastructure a low cost and convenient option. However, medium and larger sized organisations without deep pockets may balk at the cost of transitioning their IT infrastructure to the cloud.

Claim 4: Security is Not a Problem

Morgan: If you are storing data online your security is only as good as a username and password - and this represents an increased security risk over traditional local area networks (LAN's) for three reasons:

Firstly you have no choice but to

...cont'd from page 1

accept the security system on offer. By contrast, if you want flexible access to your Windows server you can decide whether to allow this only through a VPN, only for specific users, or specific IP addresses, or set increased password complexity requirements. With a cloud system, these options are not so common and security is consequently lower.

Secondly, the nature of websites means that options for 'remembering password' or 'keep me logged in' can be offered. Whilst the casual user sees this as a useful option for not having to remember yet another password, us system administrators know that that PC is totally compromised if it falls into the wrong hands.

Thirdly, whilst we are all familiar with trusting our personal data to online providers and websites, trusting data we hold on behalf of someone else raises the game.

Again, let's be honest here... that personal data is compromised all the time! We lose billions of pounds to internet fraud, phishing and identity theft every year. Most of us see this as an acceptable risk because such fraud is actually a crime against the bank, and we get our money back when it is discovered. But these protections will not apply for

organisational and personal data held on behalf of others. There is no-one to compensate us if it is compromised - the organisation is directly responsible for privacy and confidentiality.

Computanews: Cloud providers claim that security is paramount because they can't withstand the damage to their reputation or market share from in the event of a serious security breach. However, as Computanews columnist Paul Ticher points out in this issue, you should be aware of your Data Protection responsibilities wherever you store data, and to check the terms and conditions issued by cloud service providers as they offer the consumer limited protection.

Conclusion

Morgan: My own issue is that the 'cloud' term is being used to sell products and services, but in my experience, these claims do not always stack up. I will not be avoiding the cloud, but will treat it like any other technology and appraise it on its specific merits for each and every case where it is proposed.

My advice to clients and fellow advisers is therefore as follows: Firstly, look at the full costs. The costs of cloud solutions are often hidden in the huge effort required

to re-engineer current systems, and hidden in monthly fees which can easily

amount to more than the capital expenditure needed for 'traditional solutions' in the first place.

Secondly, we need to do more to facilitate awareness of existing remote and home-working technologies. It is vital that the sector does not conflate the cloud with flexible working, as many of the non-cloud solutions already in existence are cheaper and potentially more secure than the alternatives.

Finally, we must extend and share our own experience of the cloud with impartiality and honesty. We urgently need more evidence of organisations that have or haven't adopted or transitioned to specific cloud solutions. We need more insight into the advice that was useful and not-so-useful for their decision-making, and how they feel about the whole thing 12 months down the line. In time, each of us must become aware of the factors – the constraints and considerations – that will determine whether the cloud is right or not, just in the same way we have done with countless other types of technology for many years.

About the author

Morgan Killick is the managing director of ESP Projects Ltd, a Sheffield based provider of ICT support to the Third Sector. ESP can and does advise on cloud solutions where they are appropriate.

Many thanks to Morgan for his kind permission in allowing us to run an abridged version of his article.

Web: www.espprojects.co.uk/tech-news/debunking-the-cloud-conference-reflections



Fog lifts @ cloud conference

The report of the Lasa European Not-For-Profit technology conference, held at the Garden Museum on the 28 and 29 September, is now available at <http://ukriders.lasa.org.uk/conferences/conference-2010>

The conference, which explored the pros and cons that the Cloud presented the third sector, examined the influence this technology could have on contact management, document storage, collaboration, distributed working, media and networking.

During the event there were formal breakout sessions which examined the implications that the Cloud would have on social tools, change management, supporting homeworkers, data protection, learning, telephony and cloud databases.

Leading cloud service providers and advocates representing appiChar (the conference's main sponsor), IBM, Microsoft and Salesforce Foundation took part in a panel discussion on current and future trends in cloud services. There was also a Skype interview with Holly Ross, Executive Director of NTEN.

Simon Davey, Managing Associate preponderate.net, said "The conference was a great opportunity to catch up with colleagues, learn more about specific subjects, spark new ideas and motivate myself to get on with the development projects I've been planning for far too long."

The conference evaluation showed over 25% of the delegates rating the conference as exceptional and another 75% rating it as good. Over 70% of attendees were


there to find out about specific technologies and over 60% to network with their peers. 96% thought that the conference met their expectations either fully or mostly and two thirds agreed that the facilitators were experienced and good at communicating. Event photos are on Flickr at www.flickr.com/photos/ukriders

On the day before the Conference, several conference delegates volunteered at one-to-one technology surgeries. Representatives from local third sector organisations received valuable advice on social media, open source, websites, software donation, fundraising for ICT, networks, ICT strategy and databases.

Ian Runeckles

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Tips 158 • Cloud Apps

We round up some of the best 'Cloud' based apps for file storage, sharing documents and organising online meetings as recommended by delegates at Lasa's recent technology conference.

File storage:

Dropbox – <http://www.dropbox.com> provides free online storage for up to 2GB of data. It synchronises with offline data which can be on multiple devices. It can also be used to share documents with other users e.g. client files and project progress documents. Remember that data protection principles apply. Also keep track of your storage limit as it can be easy to go over the limit if uploading large video files. **Box.net** (www.box.net) offers a similar storage service for shared documents.

Online Office suites:

Google Apps – hosted email and collaboration tools such as Gmail, Google calendar, Google docs.

Zoho (www.zoho.com) and **OfficeZilla** (www.officezilla.com) provide an integrated suite of collaboration tools ranging from project management to document creation and editing. As with all online services you should be aware of data protection and data back-up issues.

MyOffice (www.myoffice.net) is a UK based subscription service providing online documents, calendars, contact management and email. Prices start at £49.50 per user per annum.

Microsoft's Office Office Live (www.officelive.com/en-GB) provides for online document creation, editing and upto 5GB of storage. The free upgrade to Windows Live SkyDrive (<http://ask.officelive.com/workspace/wiki/support/upgrade-to-windows-live-skydrive.aspx>) provides 25GB of storage and integrates with the offline version of Office.

Notebook:

Evernote (www.evernote.com/) is an online notebook which can be accessed from anywhere and on multiple

devices. Evernote has text recognition of photos and PDFs, with users able to tag items. Evernote allows users to share their notebooks. **Zotero** (www.zotero.org/) is an alternative option.

Telephony and virtual meetings:

Skype – www.skype.com – Free Voice Over IP and messaging application. Used by a number of delegates in organisations – in some cases getting embedded in distributed organisational culture i.e. if you're logged online at Skype then you're working. Try alternatives like **OoVoo's** (www.oovoo.com) free web browser based conferencing.

Illuminate (www.illuminate.com) is a premium alternative providing e-learning and virtual conferencing tools.

Event management and meetings:

Eventbrite (www.eventbrite.com) provides a one-stop-shop for event management. Eventbrite is free if your event is free, or fees apply for paid for events. **Amiando** (www.amiando.com) is an alternative service which is reckoned to be cheaper than Eventbrite when dealing with large scale conferences.

Doodle (www.doodle.com) is a free online service that makes it easy to arrange mutually convenient meeting times.

Graphics:

Jing (www.techsmith.com/jing) allows users to capture and edit screenshots and share them via Twitter, Facebook or flickr.

Screencast (www.screencast.com) sharing high quality videos, images and documents. **Slideshare** (www.slideshare.com) offers a similar free service for sharing presentations online.

Lasa launches technology handbook for third sector organisations

The newly launched 'Technology Handbook' will enable organisations to organise and store their ICT information in one place. Lasa's Ian Runeckles reports....

It's been a long time coming but the 'Technology Handbook' is now available from Lasa's website.



The handbook is designed to be a central repository of all information relevant to the configuration and management of the technology services within an organisation - from your ISP's login details to where licence keys are stored.

It is aimed at voluntary sector staff who have responsibility for supporting, developing, managing and securing ICT systems. This will vary according to the size and complexity of an organisation so could be an accidental techie, ICT manager, trustee or volunteer.

The benefits of using the handbook are that it:

- allows ICT issues to be tackled methodically rather than piecemeal;
- easily identify missing information - backup discs, licence keys, insurance, etc;
- better plan and manage ICT for the future;
- help an organisation to gather information required as part of an ICT healthcheck;
- assists support staff, both internal and external, to easily access vital information when troubleshooting or upgrading;

The handbook is intended to be a document that is continually maintained and updated as the ICT system changes. However, it is not a user guide, nor is it instructional and it does not replace skilled or experienced ICT staff.

The handbook is designed to be printed out and filled in by hand (low tech!). You can download the guide from <http://www.lasa.org.uk/publications/computanews-guides/>

Acknowledgements

The 'Technology Handbook' was devised and written (in the main)

by Mike Veitch of The Helpful Helpdesk (www.helpfulhelpdesk.org.uk) aided and abetted by members of the UKRiders mailing list (<http://lists.lasa.org.uk/lists/info/ukriders>) with further input from members of Lasa's Information Systems Team (www.lasa.org.uk/ict).

The 56 page handbook covers all areas of an organisation's technology. It is split into eight sections:

1. The organisation – e.g. mission, strategy, budget
2. Compliance – e.g. health and safety, data protection, waste electrical regulations
3. Inventory – hardware, software
4. Configuration – passwords, server, network, internet
5. Contracts – e.g. support, maintenance, internet service provider
6. Policies – e.g. disaster recovery, acceptable use, data protection
7. Procedures – e.g. user induction, backup
8. Appendices – sources of further information

Paul Ticher's Data Protection update

Data Protection may never be your top priority, but it never quite goes away. The big issues right now are information security and data sharing.

Since April 2010 the Information Commissioner has had the power to levy a penalty of up to £500,000 (yes, half a million) on organisations that have "seriously contravened the data protection principles and the contravention was of a kind likely to cause substantial damage or substantial distress". Now they are threatening to use this power against a law firm which is well known for helping copyright owners to pursue illegal file-sharing.

In the course of a denial of service attack on the web site of ACS:Law, a file containing the personal details of over 10,000 alleged illegal downloaders of pornography was left exposed and unencrypted. Unsurprisingly, it was soon made available on other sites. Some ISPs have withdrawn cooperation with ACS:Law as a result – proving that serious Data Protection breaches don't risk just a financial cost. For third sector organisations the reputational damage could easily outweigh any fine or compensation that was due, and it's worth reminding people of that if they balk at taking Data Protection seriously.

Yet again the Information Commissioner has taken action against an organisation that failed to encrypt vulnerable data. Earlier this year, West Berkshire Council lost an unencrypted memory stick which held confidential details

of children. An investigation found that the stick should have been withdrawn after the council introduced encrypted memory sticks in 2006. You should think seriously about enforcing encryption on any data that leaves a secure area, on memory sticks, laptops, or any other mobile device.

Security came up at the Lasa European Technology Conference in September, too, in the context of cloud computing. If an organisation stores its data in the cloud, it's still responsible for what happens to it.

Most cloud providers – of backup services, database applications, e-mail and the rest – need a reputation for good security, so in practice there may not be a problem. But contractually they tend to make no promises. Read the small print in the terms and conditions very carefully (or better still get a lawyer to read it) before signing your organisation up to using cloud-based services, and make sure that the risks have been highlighted so that the person signing-off the contract is aware of them and can make a balanced judgement.

Data sharing has been a very grey area for a long time. Now things might be becoming a bit clearer. The Information Commissioner has just published a draft Code of Practice, setting out when and how it is OK for organisations to share data with other organisations. The draft Code is out for consultation until 5 January.

If your organisation shares, or gets

asked to share, data with others, especially with public bodies, it would be worth looking at the **draft code of practice on the sharing of personal data**. Go to www.ico.gov.uk

About the author

Paul Ticher is an independent Data Protection specialist and Computanews columnist.

Data Protection help from the expert

- Our staff need Data Protection training
- Our Data Protection policies need updating
- We're merging with another organisation - what about combining our membership data?
- We've just had a Subject Access Request

Whether your Data Protection problem is big or small, immediate or long term, Paul Ticher has the answer. Drawing on 25 years' experience of Data Protection in the voluntary sector he can deliver training, carry out audits, help to write policies and procedures, or give guidance on specific problems or questions.

He's also the author of **Data Protection for Voluntary Organisations**, now in its third edition, and available from the Directory of Social Change. Email: paul@paulticher.com Call: 0116 273 8191

Open Source and ICT for Resilience

Paula Graham of Fossbox begins a regular column for Computanews on the latest developments in free and open source software.

With the Spending Review now out of the bag, I'm seeing ICT frequently cited as an area where cuts can be made with least impact on service delivery. Many of our users are also finding recent ICT grant applications unsuccessful. You might think that would be bad news for an ICT project like ours but actually it's something Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) can really help with.

Fossbox has been running a number of initiatives aimed at helping smaller organisations develop a more sustainable approach to ICT -- with lower capital investment, streamlined maintenance and better use of free community support. Ubuntu and many other FOSS software now delivers the features and useability VCOs need, making computer re-use and/or free alternatives to costly productivity software a genuinely practical option.

ICT is, of course, a difficult area for most non-profits and many groups are understandably wary of systems which are relatively untried in the third sector. So we managed to talk four groups into a practical pilot of the Ubuntu system. We offered 6 months free tech support and agreed to put things back exactly as they were if they didn't want to continue using Ubuntu after the trial period.

The Ubuntu pilots

Our guinea-pigs weren't the only ones feeling some trepidation and there was certainly a bit of gnashing of teeth as we all hit a learning curve - but all four organisations are still running Ubuntu one year on, either with paid support from us or free support from their own volunteers and the Ubuntu-UK community.

All the organisations saved significant capital sums by using free software and/or buying lower-power systems without any OS pre-installed thus saving anywhere from £60 per computer to thousands of pounds by re-using existing equipment. Some of the organisations reported minor inconveniences, but they each have all the functionality they need to run their organisations and deliver services effectively. Read the case studies here. (www.fossbox.org.uk/?q=node/7)

ICT for resilience training

This year, *Awards for All* gave us funding to deliver some free, practical 'taster' workshops to build on what we've learned and start setting up training workshops to build the necessary skills and resources for the third sector in East London to use FOSS. The workshops were fun and

oversubscribed with requests for more of the same - which we were able to do because we'd bought laptops without an OS pre-installed and thus saved enough from the capital element of our grant to run a second set of workshops, doubling our service delivery. We think this is a pretty good way of practising what we preach and Awards For All agreed!

To help reduce costs we compiled a Free CD with FOSS that runs on MS Windows and some tutorials (<http://bit.ly/ajs694>) in association with East London CVS Network. We'll be running more workshops over the next few months until May 2011.

About the author

Paula Graham runs Fossbox, a sustainable IT consultancy based in East London, and has been advocating Free Software, sustainable IT, and equal representation for women in ICT for the past decade.

Email: info@fossbox.org.uk

Web: www.fossbox.org.uk

The logo for Fossbox, featuring the word "FOSSBOX" in a bold, stylized, blocky font with a slight shadow effect.

Buying a 'green' computer

Adam Clamp from the Green IT Company joins Computanews as a regular columnist on green ICT. In this issue Adam looks at what makes a 'green' computer.

I've been quizzing myself and others on what makes a computer 'Green' and I've come to the conclusion that computers are not 'green', or to be more accurate, are not environmentally sound. The manufacturing of computers is not an environmentally friendly process, and according to Worldometer a staggering total of over 200 million computers are sold each year. Forrester Research estimates that where it took 27 years to reach the one billion mark, it will take only 7 years to grow from 1 billion to 2 billion computers in use worldwide by 2015.

However, if you really want a green computer, the right information is not always easy to find on retail websites, and you'll probably need to go directly to the website of manufacturers like Acer, HP, IBM, etc to find the green details for their products.

As a rule, computers with better energy efficiency and lower power consumption will also have longer lives because waste heat causes greater wear on the internal components and reduces the lifespan of the product. If you are serious about green computing, here are some things to look for:

Greenpeace Guide to Greener Electronics – the guide ranks the 18 top manufacturers of personal computers, mobile phones, TVs and games consoles according to their policies on toxic chemicals, recycling and climate change. See

www.greenpeace.org/international/campaigns/toxics/electronics/how-the-companies-line-up/

Energy Star compliance (www.eu-energystar.org/) – Energy Star is an international standard for energy efficient consumer products. Devices carrying the Energy Star logo, such as computer products, generally use less energy than required by standards.

Restriction of Hazardous Substances - The RoHS directive (www.rohs.gov.uk/) restricts the use of six hazardous materials in the manufacture of electronic and electrical equipment. It is closely linked with the **Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive** (WEEE) which sets collection, recycling and recovery targets for electrical goods and is part of initiatives to reduce toxic electronic waste.

IT ECO Declarations - provides environmental information on the environmental attributes of the product and the company's environmental profile in an industry standard format.

End of life recycling - given the push for energy efficiency and other "green" initiatives, many companies like IBM and Phillips are focusing their equipment recycling efforts.

Embodied energy and carbon - look for products with the lowest total embodied carbon value possible as this refers to the

energy consumed during resource extraction, transportation and manufacturing of a product.

VeryPC is a good example of a company doing their utmost to carbon offset and reduce the amount of embodied carbon in their products. Based in Sheffield, they use locally recycled steel and aluminium extracted from Iceland using renewable energy sources, with the end product manufactured locally.

It is not easy being 'green' and the more people that insist on greener technology options, then the more manufacturers will make it easier to purchase green products.

Further reading

www.worldometers.info/computers/
www.ecma-international.org/publications/standards/Ecma-370.htm

www.defra.gov.uk/sustainable/government/advice/public/buying/index.htm

About the author

The Green IT Company was set up to help companies and organisations to implement and use greener forms of technology. It also aims to raise awareness of the environmental impacts of the IT industry and what we can do to reduce them.

Web: www.greenitcompany.co.uk

Relaunching a website – putting users first

Earlier this year, Lasa's welfare rights website for advice workers www.rightsnet.org.uk was relaunched with a host of new features, including, for the first time, daily updates in other areas of social welfare law. Shawn Mach, editorial director of rightsnet, looks at the milestones along the way to the delivery of the new service.

rightsnet was originally launched in 1998 with the support of grant funding from the then National Lottery, and quickly established itself as the leading website of its kind in the UK. Providing daily news and case law updates in welfare benefit and tax credit law, and peer-to-peer support through a range of adviser discussion forums, tens of thousands of frontline advice workers from the voluntary and public sectors use rightsnet regularly to help them deliver information, advice and support to their clients.

However, despite the success of rightsnet in the welfare rights field, for some time we'd been aware that no comparable service was available to support those of our users who might also be working with clients experiencing, for example, debt or housing problems. During 2009, with the effects of the economic downturn beginning to be felt, it was also becoming increasingly clear to us that the demand for advice and information in other areas of social welfare law was likely to escalate and place enormous strains on frontline advice services.

In late 2009 we embarked on some low key 'research' to corroborate



our best guess of the kind of support our users might need in the future. To do this we launched an online questionnaire (using www.surveymonkey.com).

As a first step to fleshing out our ideas for how the new service might work - and inspired by the work Lasa's ICT Champion has been doing on his blog (<http://ictchampion.lasa.org.uk>) - we set up a test Wordpress site (<http://wordpress.com>), and then spent the next three

to four weeks researching, writing and publishing test content for the new service. We hit on a house style of summarising articles within 50 words and thought it might be possible to expand into other areas of law without any significant extra resources.

Job done, we then killed the blog and drew up a spec for our web developer, Zack Morgan (www.mid.co.uk) for a beta version of the

...cont'd from p 12

service which we envisaged would be a stand-alone, microsite linked to from the core welfare rights-focused rightsnet site. However, events then somewhat overtook us.

The rightsnet site had pretty much been on the same platform since its launch more than 10 years earlier and, behind the scenes had begun to creak at the seams, and we couldn't ignore it any longer. Bringing forward the 'migration' of rightsnet to a new platform (we opted for <http://expressionengine.com>) also presented the opportunity to scrap the 'microsites' idea and instead integrate our new 'other areas of law' service into the core

rightsnet site itself. Although the re-platforming of rightsnet onto Expression Engine delayed the launch of the new service, we're so pleased because re-positioning rightsnet as a 'one-stop shop' across now five areas of law has boosted our profile and given visitors to the site easier access to the information they're looking for.

Fast forward to autumn 2010, and the new service has now been live for a little over three months during which time we've published more than 350 news and case law updates in four extra areas of social welfare law (debt, housing, employment and community care law).

Since launch, we've tweaked the service here and there, but it seems the work we put in to make sure that we kept our users' needs to the forefront at every stage has really paid dividends with significant increases in traffic on the site, and early feedback from our visitors indicating that they're already finding the new service invaluable. Next stop immigration law!?

About the author

Shawn Mach is editorial director of rightsnet, a Lasa service providing access to the most up to date welfare rights and social welfare law information on the internet.

Web: www.rightsnet.org.uk

Windows 7 licensing

This article is drawn from a recent discussion on issues around licensing Microsoft Windows 7 on the UKRiders email list. Lasa thanks contributors to the discussion for sharing their knowledge and expertise.

Alan Bradshaw at Bradford CVS asked:

"I'm advising a charity who have discovered they are eligible for Windows 7 upgrades via the CTX donation programme (www.ctx.org). Their computers currently run either XP or Vista, and with some extra RAM (memory) will probably cope with Windows 7 (am I too hopeful?). But they are largely second-hand or donated machines with OEM operating systems and no original install disks.

I presume that a Windows 7 "upgrade" installation will need to

verify that the computer already has a valid copy of Windows from which to upgrade. They all do, but are without documentation apart from "Product Key" labels. Upgrading from XP apparently requires a "clean install" and I envisage running into problems with the Microsoft Licensing tangle....or am I worrying unnecessarily?"

Licensing issues

On the Microsoft front, the upgrade licence provides the option to install from fresh - so as long as the machine is being rebuilt there

won't be any previous licence or disk requirements. There shouldn't be any licensing issues unless the original (OEM) copies of Windows were reinstalled at some point with dodgy licences.

Ensure that you are upgrading from a business version of Windows XP (XP Professional and not XP Home) otherwise the license is invalid.

Since this is an upgrade product, to install this operating system you must have a licenced installation of one of the following operating systems on the device where you

...cont'd page 14

...cont'd from p 13

are installing the upgrade:

- Windows Vista Enterprise, Business, or Ultimate;
- Windows XP Professional or Tablet PC;
- Windows 2000 Professional;
- Windows NT Workstation 4.0;
- or Windows 98.
- You cannot upgrade from the Home editions of Windows XP or Windows Vista.

The restriction that does not allow "Home" versions of XP/Vista/Windows 7 to be upgraded using a Volume Licensing edition DOES NOT apply to charities. You can use a licence purchased through the CTX donation programme - www.ctxchange.org - (which is subject to the volume licensing rules) to any computer provided it already has a valid licence for a Microsoft operating system. See www.microsoft.com/licensing/about-licensing/windows7.aspx#tab=4

Will it run?

Generally speaking Windows versions are designed for the specification of PCs being manufactured at the time Windows is shipped. Happily both PC specification, performance and Windows gets better every generation. The official hardware requirements are at <http://windows.microsoft.com/systemrequirements> but as usual these should be treated with a little scepticism because most people will run Windows 7 plus a whole bunch of other stuff on top.

If thinking of an upgrade on an existing PC tread carefully - four years or older, it's generally not worth it. For machines under four years, upgrades to RAM, possibly

a hard drive may be needed. Download and run the Windows 7 upgrade advisor <http://bit.ly/b9BvMc> If the machine passes that, then it's recommended to carry out a test installation on one machine and see how it goes.

It needs to be borne in mind how much RAM each PC has, because Windows 7 just like Vista, needs at least 1.5 - 2Gb. To get the best experience out of Windows 7, some technical support companies recommend a dual core processor and upgrading a machine's RAM to 2 - 4Gb before even considering an upgrade.

It also needs to be established whether the organisation has any existing software that won't run under Windows 7.

A 'clean install' will mean entirely wiping the Windows XP machines. For Vista machines, there is a direct upgrade path that doesn't require a reinstall as long as you stick with the 'right' paths, which are (only) Home Premium to Home Premium, Professional to Professional or Ultimate to Ultimate. It is recommended that a clean install is done though.

Think before acting

Overall it would be an idea to establish what the driver is here. What do they hope to gain from the upgrade?

It could well involve a lot of disruption to back everything up, reinstall programs and user accounts and restore data. Having said that, it might still be worth taking up the CTX upgrade offer. The price is unbeatable, so if they ever get decent quality donated kit

in future it might be worth having a batch of licences 'at the ready' to upgrade stuff cheaply before it gets used.

The last word(s)

Windows 7 should not be thought of as an upgrade from Vista, and cannot be compared to Vista as it's like comparing Windows 2000 to Windows ME. If you have 20 - 30GB of free disk space why not set up a dual boot operating system and see how you get on? An alternative is to stick with XP until they can raise funds for newer hardware which will come with Windows 7 pre-installed.

Contributors to this discussion

were: Zorina Baksh and Phil Anthony (Co-Op Systems), Orlando Karis Brown (Attache Solutions), Morgan Killick (ESP Projects), Richard Eynon (appiChar), Matt Hughes (Engage Multimedia), Jeremy Barker (Scunthorpe CAB).

About UKRiders

Established by Lasa, UKRiders is an active email list community of around 500 members who discuss all aspects of non-profit technology.

To join the discussion go to:

<http://ukriders.lasa.org.uk/>

Editor's note

Some replies were edited for brevity.



THE
SOCIAL
NETWORK

The Social Network (2010)
Directed by David Fincher
Starring Jesse Eisenberg, Justin Timberlake...
Film review by Ian Runeckles

We can't remember when Computanews last ran a film review, so rarely is it that the world of technology is the focus for a film. Mostly the films are just made by computers, not about them. However, *The Social Network*, about the creation of the world's most popular social networking website, Facebook, has three stories running in parallel – two civil litigation hearings between Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and co-founder moneyman Eduardo Saverin, and between Zuckerberg and the Winklevoss twins who claim he stole their idea - and then there's the story itself. The film is based on the book *The Accidental Billionaires* by Ben Mezrich, and neither the film or the

book have involved Zuckerberg. It depicts Zuckerberg in the opening scenes as the social misfit Harvard student but brilliant computer nerd who is dumped by his girlfriend Erica and then tells the world about it, extremely unkindly, in his blog. In fact, except for Erica, most of the characters in the film are pretty insufferable and unlikeable. Having humiliated Erica online, he then hacks into Harvard's systems to download their (female) student "face book" photos to go on his

Facemash.com website for other students to rate their "hotness". Having been hauled over the coals by the powers that be for bringing down the Harvard network (I

put in more (of Saverin's) cash and extend the site to other universities across the States including Stanford where Sean Parker, of Napster (in) fame, latches onto it. They take it worldwide, ditching Saverin along the way and the rest, as they say, is history. Facebook now has over 500 million users and has made Zuckerberg a reported \$25 billion.

The story is entertainingly told, there are some excellent one-liners which I can't repeat here, the privileged world of the Harvard student is well depicted and there's a thumping soundtrack by Trent Reznor, (Nine Inch Nails). The computer bits are convincing - there is the occasional bit of geek-speak ("I need a Linux box running Apache and MySQL and I need it now!" or words to that effect) - and none of the usual impossible-looking GUIs that you see in techie-ish movies (*Independence Day* and *The Net* spring to mind). Of course the coders and hackers can all type at the speed of light and nothing is beyond their abilities

"There is a certain irony in the fact that an all-conquering virtual social environment was created by a bunch of people with zero social skills"

actually can't understand why at this point the college didn't kick him out, but anyway) his notorious programming skills are recognised by the identical Winklevoss twins, a pair of jock Olympic rowers who essentially have the idea for a kind of Harvard Facebook and engage him to write the code for them.

Mark has other plans though and with the help of Saverin who stumps up \$1000 he codes the first version of (what is then called) The Facebook exclusively for Harvard students. The idea takes off, they

(except having girlfriends...). There is a certain irony in the fact that an all-conquering virtual social environment was created by a bunch of people with zero social skills – but maybe that's the point...

What's next on the silver screen? Who wouldn't love to see a film of Robert X Cringley's book *Accidental Empires: How the Boys of Silicon Valley Make Their Millions, Battle Foreign Competition and Still Can't Get a Date* about the birth of the PC? Just me then – oh well, back to updating Facebook...

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About Lasa

Established in 1984, Lasa has provided technology advice to the third sector for 25 years. Its two main aims are to promote social inclusion through access to social welfare law, information, advice and guidance; and to promote an efficient and effective sector through improving access to impartial technology advice and support resources – such as Computanews and the London e-bulletin (www.lasa.org.uk/lasa/mailling-lists)

Our online ICT Knowledgebase (www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk) is a comprehensive source of independent expert technology advice for third sector organisations, now containing over 300 articles. The Suppliers Directory (www.suppliersdirectory.org.uk) connects third sector organisations with over 150 approved suppliers of technology products and support services across England. Lasa is also noted for its consultancy work and leadership in developing the Circuit Rider model of local technology support. (<http://ukriders.lasa.org.uk/>)

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Credits

We thank all of our contributors.

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