

Making technology better

Robert Daniel is an ICT consultant and developer, and has worked with a lot of organisations, of all sizes, both within the third sector and outside. Computanews asked Robert if he had any tips on how to assist the smooth running of technology projects, based on his experience.

It seems that many of life's problems stem from a failure of communication, and ICT is no exception. The communication between those providing the technology and the users is particularly prone to misunderstanding, and the outcome may be that the user doesn't quite get the solution they wanted, or that the solution they end up with has consequences they did not anticipate.

To try and avoid those problems, I always make sure I understand why the user wants what they do, and what they hope to achieve, even when they are clear what they want. There may be alternative solutions they have not considered, or other possible causes of the difficulties they are having. I also try and explain any implications that a particular choice may have, just in case they were not aware.

For example, clients often ask me to make some specific changes to a database, such as adding some new fields to a form. I always find out more about the information they want to collect, and how they intend to use that information. Often, I can suggest

improvements that will make it easier for them to report on that information later on.

The stereotype of people who work in technology is that we lack communication skills, but I really don't think that is the case. We do, however, have to be careful to explain ourselves in plain English, rather than in technical terms, and as the specialists we have to take responsibility for the service we provide.

Small is beautiful

Not all technology projects have to be large. A small improvement to a task you carry out frequently can add up to a large saving over time. Using a template to create frequently used letters or emails, or creating a macro to automate a task in Word or Excel could be all you need to speed up a tedious task.

I once helped an organisation where, once a month, the finance person spent half a day reconciling bank accounts in a bank statement with a list of known

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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

The knowledgebase is 10!

Lasa has been providing technology advice to third sector organisations since Computanews was first published in January 1984. Knowledgebase was officially launched in January 2001 when websites and the internet became a more viable proposition for third sector organisations including ourselves.

Technology back then (and arguably now) was complicated and it was hard to get help from anyone who didn't speak geek at you. Over the years, knowledgebase has proved invaluable to many organisations and others working with them. Many of the issues that were around for organisations back at the start of the new millennium are still around now – the technology may have changed but the issues are often still the same... As new technologies emerge, many organisations need help to understand how they can use them appropriately to help achieve their missions.

In 2001 websites were a fairly new development for third sector organisations. Now if your organisation doesn't have some kind of online presence you could potentially miss out on many opportunities because funders and donors will often expect to find information on the internet about your work and impact.

When the Knowledgebase made its debut we covered the basics of Buying IT, a new thing called the Internet, and the novelty of portable computers, with our now Chief Executive Terry Stokes describing himself as a "veritable one man travelling internet show." (<http://bit.ly/e97eiy>) In 2001 websites tended to feature static pages in which organisations talked at their supporters. Ten years later social networking and other "Web 2.0" applications like Twitter, Facebook, and blogs now allow you to go to where your supporters are and connect interactively with them. Now we have the potential that cloud computing offers in terms of Martini "anytime, anyplace, anywhere" access to office productivity applications, document sharing and the like. You don't necessarily need a powerful computer – just access to the internet.

Despite the promise that new technology and especially the internet offers, many organisations remain "excluded" and will continue to need help to effectively and strategically manage what technology they have. Lasa is, justifiably, proud of its knowledgebase. For much of the time it has been around, the knowledgebase has been unfunded. Thanks to everyone who has contributed to the knowledgebase, or allowed us to use their content on the site, and everyone who has used the resources over the years. We are excited about the next 10 years and beyond, providing quality content to help third sector organisations.

Editor: Ian Runeckles

Computanews now accepts advertisements

If you offer a technology product, service or event aimed specifically at the voluntary sector you can draw attention to it through the pages of Computanews.

Computanews is a specialised magazine covering the use of technology within the voluntary sector. It has a key audience of:

- organisation managers and trustees
- staff responsible for their own organisation's technology
- Circuit Riders who provide advice and technology support to other organisations

Computanews rates:

- 1/8 page £60
- 1/4 page £100
- 1/2 page £180
- 1 full page £300

A 10% discount applies if advertising in multiple issues.

The circulation of Computanews is currently around 2,500 copies per issue, distributed 4 times a year. We anticipate that the circulation will increase now that it is available as a free, downloadable file. To place an advert, or for more details about rates and dates, email: computanews@lasa.org.uk or phone: 020 7426 4473

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www.appichar.co.uk

subscribers. With a few Excel macros, I was able to automate the process so it took just minutes. Half a day a month may not seem like much, but over a year that is six days work saved!

Three Magic Words

It's hard to say "I don't know", especially at work when perhaps we feel we should know everything, but I don't think it is reasonable in a field as broad, complex and fast-moving as ours to expect to have a ready answer to every question. Unfortunately, some people when they don't know the answer to a question will become evasive or they will try and bluff their way through. Better to say that you will find out and reply later.

I was in a meeting once with developers and managers, where a developer, when asked a question on the spot, gave an answer that he was not at all sure about. Decisions were then taken on the basis of that answer, and when it later turned out that his answer was wrong, he then had to inform everyone involved in the meeting. It was embarrassing for him, and ultimately the delays caused by unpicking the decisions made at the meeting were greater than would have been caused if he had just said "I don't know – I will find out and get back to you."

Another three magic words: "keep it simple". I have met quite a few people in IT who, when asked to solve a problem, seem to take it as a personal challenge to find the most elaborate solution they can. The trouble with elaborate solutions is that there are more ways they can go wrong, and they may be too confusing for the user.

Personally, I think the simplest solutions are the most elegant, and when you break a complex procedure into simpler steps, it is often easier to spot which steps can be improved or automated.

Penny Pinching

Anyone who has ever battled with a slow PC, an unresponsive mouse, an unreliable network connection

has become much cheaper over the years, so I really don't think it makes sense to cut corners with equipment. I've worked in organisations where it took literally minutes for applications like Outlook to open, and where you had to be careful not to open too many applications at once, in case your PC ground to a halt. When you add up all the time being wasted and compare it with the cost of a

We won't have to bother you if you leave us a good set of basic instructions



or struggled to read a screen that is too small or poor quality will know how frustrating it is. It's bad for productivity and it's bad for morale. Poor quality mice and keyboards can exacerbate problems like repetitive strain injury (RSI) and poor monitors to headaches.

Obviously organisations don't have unlimited technology budgets but, in relative terms, hardware

bit more RAM, or even a new PC, it just doesn't make sense.

About the author

Robert Daniel is a freelance database developer and consultant, and has written several databases for the advice sector, including Lasa's AIMS

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Getting the nation to Go ON

This January and February, UK online centres are challenging the 9.2 million offline Brits to make going online their New Year's Resolution. Abigail Stevens, Communications Manager at UK online centres, tells us what's being done.

Last autumn, UK online centres' National Get online week, now in its fourth year and a major part of the digital inclusion calendar, saw 90,000 people get started online. Go ON get more out of life online is the follow-up campaign, which will see around 1,500 venues across England, including UK online centres, libraries, Jobcentre Plus offices and community centres, running Go ON activities.

nation. For example, if just 3.5% of unemployed non-internet users found a job by getting online, it would deliver a net economic benefit of £560m. If all offline adults made just one online contact each month with government instead of a telephone or face-to-face contact, it would save an estimated £900m per annum. But inspiring people to get online in an economic downturn isn't

before, or if they already know a little bit. With our free and easy computer courses they can get to grips with computers and the internet at their own pace. So if you know someone who isn't online yet, it's the perfect opportunity to get them along to a Go ON!"

One person who has already benefited from going online, with a bit of help from UK online centres,

"I've worked in a factory for most of my life, so I'd never really touched a computer before... I decided it was time to give computers a go, and I'm so glad I did." Allen Nicol

UK online centres have been around since 1999 with a remit to improve public access to technology. Now the organisation's mission is to reach, motivate and support one million people online by 2013 by galvanising community action and participation. UK online centre partners are based in some of England's most deprived areas, and run by community leaders with the help of 14,000-plus volunteers who are often former learners themselves.

Digital inclusion remains a priority for government, and is led by the UK's Digital Champion Martha Lane Fox. Her recommendations to government focus on the potential cost savings of an online

easy. The key for UK online centres has been to work in partnership, developing relationships with public, private and third sector organisations brokered by Martha Lane Fox's Race Online 2012 team.

UK online centres' Managing Director, Helen Milner, explains: "The aim of the Go ON get more out of life online campaign is to inspire people to make going online their New Year's Resolution! Visitors will get the chance to find out how the internet could help them in everyday life – from getting on at work to keeping in touch with family and friends, exploring interests to saving time and money. It doesn't matter if someone has never even touched a computer

is Allen Nicol, 56, from Sheffield. He said: "I've worked in a factory for most of my life, so I'd never really touched a computer before. I never thought it was something I'd never be able to do - I felt I was being left behind. Every time I switched on the television these online addresses kept coming up for more information! A lot of people in my age group are scared of looking stupid, but I decided it was time to give computers a go, and I'm so glad I did. The internet has opened up a whole new world - if you want to know anything it's right there in front of you.

"I'm definitely getting more out of life online. Computers and the

Tips 159 • New Media

To help survive in the current economic climate, third sector organisations need to take advantage of new media to tell their story to funders and elevate themselves above the competition. Miles Maier, London ICT Champion, has five tips to get you jump-started:

1. Good content is everything

Rise above the background noise by having something positive to say about the difference you make. Give funders and decision-makers interesting real-life stories, not reams of stats, to show impact.

Read more about how Women's Resource Centre used new media to tell their story at:
www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/wrcsocialmediajourney

2. Good content needs a social media plan

Be strategic about choosing your message and identifying the right tools - Twitter, Facebook, blogs or video - to reach your chosen audience.

This handy social media guide (<http://bit.ly/ccwJ9i>) from the ICT Champions will get you started.

3. Deepening relationships, collaborations and engaging stakeholders

With funding down and mergers and collaborations high on the agenda, resist the urge to batten down the hatches because you need to make friends, get people on your side and look at new ways of working together.

Use tools like Twitter to make sure you're a part of the

conversation and to generate buzz about what you do.

Start with our Knowledgebase article on Twitter at:
www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/twitter

4. Use online videos to tell your story

Video is immediate and tells your story to funders better than a chunky report. Funders want to know what difference you make and some of the most effective videos feature beneficiaries talking about the positive impact a project has had on them.

Using the camera built into a mobile or low cost flip cameras keeps the cost down.

Read more at: www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/webvideo

5. Use analytics to make the case for using new media

Explaining new media to the unconvinced members of senior management and your board can be a hard sell. Use analytics to demonstrate the increased reach and effectiveness of your message.

Learn how to read web statistics at:
www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/webanalytics

...cont'd from page 5

internet keep you up to date with the world. I go along to the Heeley Online Centre every week and they're always friendly and helpful. I'd encourage anyone to have a go - life is far too short for regrets! Go ON and give it a try."

Supporting Go ON

Help spread the word! Article templates, web banners and twibbons are all available in a Go ON advertising

pack <http://bit.ly/ezm4Uq> Find your nearest Go ON activities by calling 0800 77 1234. Get offline friends, family or even employees along to a Go ON session.

If you could set up a UK online centre or have a computer centre which could benefit from being part of the UK online centres network <http://bit.ly/gwlTqp>

Web: www.ukonlinecentres.com/goongetmore
Email: ukonlinecentres@ufi.com

Managing ICT to survive the funding cuts

Louise Brown of NCVO looks at how technology can help third sector organisations survive the funding cuts.

Supported by the City Bridge Trust, NCVO has been running 'Managing IT' seminars for Chief Executives and trustees to help them think more strategically about their technology, to consider these high level challenges, and to look at how technology might be a solution for the practical issues they're facing.

Many organisations face unprecedented challenges over the coming year: massive cuts in public spending, increased requirements for transparency and accountability, the move from grant funding to contracted public service delivery, an increased need for collaboration. At the same time as all this, technology is changing around us, giving more power to the individual and changing the traditional role of organisations. Any one of these happening would cause an organisation to stop and reassess, but all at once means it is vital to take stock in order to guarantee your future survival.

The processes that people want to make more effective include:

- volunteer recruitment
- demonstration of impact
- remote working
- effective campaigning
- collaboration in delivering services
- internal & external communication

- funding and money management

When you actually look at the nitty gritty of what people want to do better, a small number of technological solutions suggest themselves.

Databases

If you do only one thing to maximise the effectiveness of your organisation then it has to be improving how you manage your information using databases. If you can track your contact with clients or donors, and understand which of those contacts has the biggest impact, then you can target your resources more effectively. You may manage your data using a set of interconnected applications (such as email and Excel), a single database or something more complex – each of these has its own benefits and drawbacks, but complexity usually comes at a price.

If reviewing your databases is something you are considering then start by talking at board level about what information you need to know in order to effectively manage your organisation.

Carry out an audit of the information you already collect for your board and funders: where does it come from? How is it used?

What information do you need to extract in order to produce reports or funding bids?

Having a database that quickly gives you what you need in order to do your job will save both time and money.

Cloud computing

Cloud computing is probably one of the biggest opportunities for voluntary organisations to do more with less. At its heart is a flexibility which allows organisations to be more responsive with their offering, taking little adaption to offer new or different services or to scale up or down.

The online, interconnected nature of the tools mean it is easier to work across locations, to work collaboratively with other organisations, and to access resources when out of the office.

Of course there are concerns over cloud computing, as with anything, and it's important to work with organisations to assess them realistically. Yes, information is online so technically anyone can access it - but with effective password management the risks shift in focus and not necessarily in size.

As a management board, think about whether or not your current

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technology is meeting your needs and whether or not it will meet the needs of your organisation after 1st April. If it does then fine, but if not, treat it as an opportunity to review how you use ICT in your organisation. Make sure cloud computing is one of the options on the table.

Social media

Social media, when done well, can help with so many areas of work. Social media is about stories and connections - if you can talk passionately about what you're doing and connect with the public then you can ask those people to support your campaign, volunteer their time, promote your services, join your discussions and respond to the impact of your work through donations.

Getting involved with social media doesn't take money but does need the support of managers in time and staff. Find someone who is already using social media well in their personal life and charge them with trialling it in your organisation. Try out one tool to start with, such as Twitter, and evaluate what value it brings.

Tomorrow's hot social media tool will almost certainly be different to today's so make sure you're driven by a clear strategy rather than following the crowd. Think about what allows you to connect with the people you're trying to reach and say what you want to say.

The leadership role

And what's the role of the organisational leader in this? Your technology strategy needs to be driven by an organisational mission

so it's no good handing the job to your techie with their eyes on the shiny boxes.

Start with a discussion at your next management or trustee meeting about what's going to be expected of your organisation over the next year and whether you have the tools to be able to do that.

If you have the time and resources, audit your organisational processes (not just the ones currently done using technology) then consider each in turn and whether or not they could be done more effectively.



“SEEING WHAT'S NEEDED”

Don't panic and try to do all of this on your own - an IT volunteer can help to take you through this process.

Contact iT4Communities for more information on IT volunteers at www.it4communities.org.uk.

More information

Download the Trustee seminar handouts (PDF 620KB): <http://bit.ly/g5iydK>

Further reading on the ICT Knowledgebase: www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/databases

www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/cloudcomputing101

www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/introductiontosocialmedia

About the author

Louise Brown is ICT Development Officer at NCVO.

More information at: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/advice-support/ict/aging-ict

Paul Ticher's Data Protection update

Have you reviewed your information security recently?

Shortly after the last Computanews went to press, the Information Commissioner issued his first 'penalties' (or fines) under the powers he gained last April. The unlucky pioneers were Hertfordshire County Council and A4e, and both committed serious breaches of security.

At the council, details of a child abuse case were being faxed to a barrister, but got sent to a member of the public by mistake. Two weeks later, they did the same again: information about care proceedings went to an unconnected barrister instead of to the court. The result: a £100,000 penalty.

The lessons? Carelessness with highly confidential information is taken seriously, even if very few people are affected. Routine breeds complacency. You must take action immediately when a security loophole is identified.

At A4e a worker was issued with an unencrypted laptop for working at home. Inevitably, it got stolen, containing the personal details of 24,000 people who had been clients of A4e's legal advice centres in Hull and Leicester. The penalty in this case: £60,000.

More lessons? Even if no one – apparently – is harmed, and the information relatively benign, being careless with large amounts of personal data is taken seriously. Using an unencrypted laptop (or memory stick – see below) to hold personal details is almost bound to get you into trouble.

What you can do about security isn't always obvious. Laptops: encryption is the only way. But faxes? How do you best ensure that they end up in the right place? Send a trial page every time before the main document? Have a second person verify the number before transmission? It's not obvious, but if you regularly send confidential information by fax – and in many cases there is little practical alternative – you need to consider this carefully. See www.out-law.com/page-11569

Stoke-on-Trent City Council only just avoided a similar penalty for losing a memory stick which was neither encrypted nor password protected and contained information about 40 children in care. The incident happened before the new powers came into force.

In the run-up to Christmas the Information Commissioner received publicity for his pretty-much-annual press release pointing out that there is no ground under Data Protection law for schools to forbid parents (or other relatives) photographing their children in school plays. This is because domestic purposes ("personal, family or household affairs") are essentially exempt from the Act.

If you work with vulnerable people and there are reasons why photographs might pose a risk, you need to think through the grounds on which you might seek to restrict them. A growing risk area is social networking sites. While a photograph in a family album may be fine, the same photograph on

Facebook or similar may not be. Although organisations are clearly bound by the law, in no case to my knowledge has an individual yet been held to lose the domestic purposes exemption by putting a photograph on an internet site, so there is very little redress.

About the author

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

PAUL | TICHER

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

Whatever your Data Protection problem, Paul 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.

Email: paul@paulticher.com
Call: 0116 273 8191

Open Source: What's coming for FOSS in 2011?

Paula Graham of Fossbox lives dangerously and makes some bold predictions for free and open source software in 2011

What can we expect from FOSS in 2011? Here are my top 5...

1. Open source usage up - PC

World predicts that Open Source will make great strides this year (<http://bit.ly/eFn3QD>) suggesting that hardware manufacturers will increasingly include Linux drivers (find out at www.linux-drivers.org if there are Linux drivers for your peripherals), Google's operating system Android will conquer the mobile devices market and many tablets will offer dual-boots with various Linux operating systems. Low-power ARM chips (www.arm.com) will become commonplace even in PCs and laptops because Ubuntu (www.ubuntu.com) runs comfortably on low-power, small-screen technology (which Windows can't).

2. Reducing costs

- a CMS Wire survey (<http://bit.ly/ebRsLX>) indicates that the downturn is sending more businesses towards Open Source and that usability is at the top of the list for FOSS developers.

3. Collaboration

- will be key, and the trend identified by Gartner in 2009 towards open source Content Management Systems will probably continue into 2011 as CMS remains a key technology and case

management becomes a 2011 buzzword (<http://bit.ly/gowPsP>).

4. Cloud services

- software Insider blog (<http://bit.ly/gEpy5>) predicts that cloud services will become a key business and technology strategy. Virtualisation has also been tipped to move into the mainstream.

5. LibreOffice

- a new fork (version) of OpenOffice.org (www.libreoffice.org) will become the productivity suite of choice on Linux.

Ubuntu news round-up

Ubuntu Natty Narwhal (<http://bit.ly/hO9kDg>) is due in April 2011, and the biggest change for Desktop users will be the move to the new Unity desktop 'shell'. Ars Technica (<http://bit.ly/eadcln>) has published a detailed overview.

There will also be improved integration with cloud services, and work on the Ubuntu One personal cloud (<http://bit.ly/g6ZiKy>) which automatically syncs your files, contacts, notes and bookmarks between computers, is progressing.

Also in the cloud, Rackspace's Openstack www.openstack.org/ and Eucalyptus <http://bit.ly/evkhQh> provide tools for building public and personal cloud

services. On the server front, Ubuntu Server promises to make virtualisation easy (<http://bit.ly/f2OLFz>). Accessibility is also a priority, and you can find out more at the Ubuntu Accessibility Team's wiki (<https://wiki.ubuntu.com/Accessibility>).

LibreOffice Productivity Suite

Ubuntu Natty will also include the new LibreOffice productivity suite. You can download Ubuntu, Windows and Mac versions at (www.libreoffice.org/download).

I've just installed LibreOffice 3.3 on my Ubuntu 10.04 desktop, and my first impressions of it are very good. It has much the same interface but it's appearance is crisper, clearer, faster and slicker. There's no learning curve at all and experienced OpenOffice.org users will be able to carry on without a glitch, whilst even Microsoft Office users should quickly feel at home.

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.

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Web: www.fossbox.org.uk

FOSSBOX

Green or Ethical?

Adam Clamp from the Green IT Company enlightens us on the difference between ethical and green computing.



We've investigated greener computers in a previous article, so what about widening this out a bit and trying to buy a more ethically made computer?

We have eco labelling, but few if any labels that encompass more than just environmental impact. The only one I am aware of is the **Ethical Consumer Best Buy Label**. But the last time they ran an ethical scoring test on computers was back in 2007. However some companies do display their **Ethical Award** label.

Measuring the ethical status of a product requires assessing many different areas including:

- 1. Investments** - do manufacturers invest in armaments, animal testing, fossil fuels or are they invested in by companies involved in human rights abuses?;
- 2. Relationships** – Are they part owned by or work in partnership with those involved in unethical practices?;
- 3. Environmental performance** – is it good, is it bad or have they been accused of any environmental violations? Do they operate in an energy efficient manner and show care for the environment? What's their record on human rights?

If you are concerned about any of

the above then eco labels don't give enough information as they relate to the 'greenness' of manufacturing materials and processes - not human rights.

Green is the new marketing buzzword, and as ethical consumers we need labelling that tells us more about the overall impact of a product, not just on the

Ethical checklist:

- Research companies for any ethical claims and certification..
- Obtain Corporate Social Responsibility Statement.
- Check new and up to date reports carried out by Ethical Consumer.
- Assess environmental performance by looking out for regulatory logos and accreditation marks.

environment but on animals and people too.

Our decisions even when buying computers and IT equipment and who we choose to buy from makes an enormous difference to whether our money is invested ethically or not. But alas a lot of the time the choices we make are governed by time and money.

At the end of the day the only sure way I know to find out whether a company or product is ethical is by contacting them direct and seeing

what answers you get.

Presently there is no concise guide or service you can access that will help guide you to the latest products on a regular basis. Some are available but go out of date quickly, particularly with such a fast changing business sector such as the electronics industry. Nothing can at present replace direct contact, research and assessment. This would be something you or a specialised consultant would have to do and is very time consuming.

Resources

Ethical Consumer Magazine and the Ethiscore online system will help to guide your choices on a wide range of products. The magazine and Ethiscore have been created and are managed by The Ethical Company Organisation. The next issue (March/April 2011) of their magazine will focus on computers.

Web: www.ethicalconsumer.org

Web: www.ethiscore.org

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.

the green **IT** company

www.greenitcompany.co.uk

Sayonara ICT Champions

Along with its funder Capacitybuilders, the Regional ICT Champions project comes to an end this March. NAVCA's Paul Webster looks back at the achievements of the ICT Champions and their legacy for the sector.

Regional ICT Champions, co-ordinated by NAVCA have operated mainly with local support and development organisations (such as a local council for voluntary service), to provide strategic support, signpost to technology help, and develop new resources to help groups better use technology.

Regional ICT Champions have made a definite impact on the sector, and there are many examples of where organisations' use of technology has improved through work with their ICT Champion.

"The ICT Champions keep me up to date with ICT developments useful in my work which I probably wouldn't learn about otherwise because I'm not that technically minded." (CVS Staff Member)

In the East Midlands as a result of the ICT strategy a £330,000 lottery bid was awarded enabling organisations to receive ICT health-checks, training and support. In the North West the ICT Champion provided ICT systems and planning advice for Chester CVS and in both Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire the ICT Champion helped establish

local Circuit Rider services. We've also produced a series of factsheets, templates and health-checks which are free to download from www.ictchampions.org.uk

Regional Champions also developed the very successful 'ICT answers in a box' to answer 50 of the most commonly asked questions about ICT, together with signposting for more information to detailed websites such as the ICT Knowledgebase. Contact your ICT Champion for a free set of cards. Development Workers are also an important source of general

Tower Hamlets CVS

New organisations often struggle with putting together an ICT plan to get them through their first 18 months of life. Miles Maier, the London ICT Champion, helped THCVS put together an ICT plan, and advised them on database planning and the design of their new website. Su Jolly, THCVS Chief Executive said, *"Going to Miles for advice saved us time and money we didn't have on putting together a plan that will enable us to grow and have confidence in our technology decisions."*

www.thcvs.org.uk

information and advice to small groups, and we have developed a specialised package of training to help them better signpost technology resources to the groups they work with.

We have also seen an explosion of interest in social media, and over the last 12 months we have

delivered workshops and practical surgeries to over 250 organisations.

Finally this year we have conducted a number of pieces of research and developed further resources which will be available very soon:

- What makes a good ICT Support provider
- How to establish a successful ICT Social Enterprise
- A toolkit for implementing a CRM database system
- Social Media Planning Guide
- ICT health-checks and training needs analysis

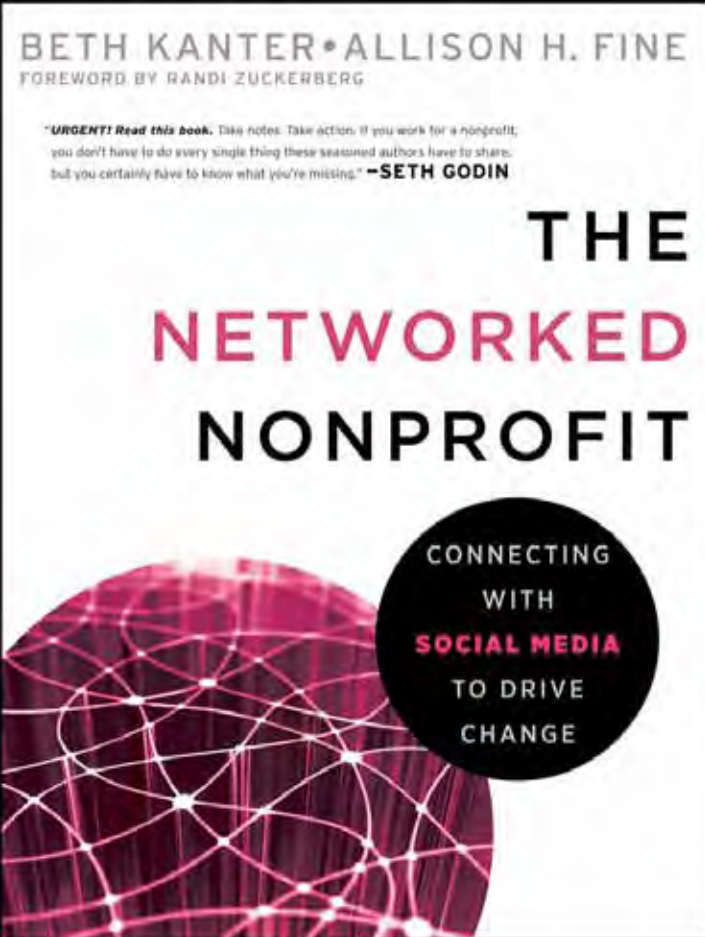
Although some organisations may still be reluctant users of technology, new programmes of work from Government require digital skills and technological competency from those providing the services. Third sector organisations also need to recognise that those who best use new technologies to communicate messages or to campaign for local action are those that will survive.

And in many cases, all that is needed is the support of an ICT Champion or other trusted local provider to help move them to the next level, to have an effective technology plan and save money through the efficient use of technology.

About the Author

Paul Webster is based at NAVCA, co-ordinates the project, and dabbles in new media.

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tweets. Allison is a writer and researcher who has examined social change in the internet age <http://afine2.wordpress.com/> – together they combine here to produce something that is scholarly but generally pretty readable.

The book defines networked nonprofits as "... simple and transparent organisations. They are easy for outsiders to get in and insiders to get out. They engage people on shaping

crowds, monitoring and learning.

If it all sounds a little academic and heavy, (I did to my great delight encounter astroturfing* and karma banking**) it is lightened by many examples of how social media has changed organisations' ways of working in the digital age. Although fear of change is something that is addressed in the book, maybe Beth and Allison's total tearing up of the rulebook on how organisations traditionally work is a step too far for some. Will funders understand how networked nonprofits operate once caution has been thrown to the wind and the walls between staff, governing bodies and the crowd are torn down? How many funders or donors will look encouragingly at organisations that wildly experiment with their cash? Do small organisations have the resources to withstand failed projects? And if crowd contributions are 90% useless, as stated in the book, then how much effort is involved in wading through the chaff to get to the wheat?

In conclusion the authors suggest befriending social media mentors, trusting staff to have conversations and experimenting with new media. Becoming a networked nonprofit may not happen overnight but use a single project or event to see how it works.

The Networked Nonprofit - Using Social Media to Power Social Networks For Change

Beth Kanter & Allison H Fine

Pub. Jossey Bass, 2010, ISBN 9780470547977, 192 pages

Review by Ian Runeckles

First a warning - if you are looking for a Dummies-style how-do-I-go-about-tweeting-and-facebooking manual then this isn't it. It is much more of a book about how social media is being implemented into organisations and how that is affecting both the organisations and the (socially networked) world in which they operate.

Beth is a recognised social media innovator and is familiar to many working in the nonprofit technology arena through Beth's Blog www.bethkanter.org and her [@kanter](https://twitter.com/kanter)

and sharing their work in order to raise awareness of social issues, organise communities to provide services, or advocate for legislation." They engage in (many) conversations outside their normal purview to build relationships through the use of social media tools – "conversation starters" such as blogs, YouTube and Twitter, "collaboration tools" such as wikis and discussion groups and "network builders" like Facebook.

The bulk of the book looks at how networked nonprofits must operate to use social media successfully

"Maybe Beth and Allison's total tearing up of the rulebook on how organisations traditionally work is a step too far for some."

and effectively – the culture, how to listen and engage, build trust and, ultimately, make their organisations simpler. It examines how organisations can work once structured in this way, looking at

* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astroturfing>

** www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=karma%20banking

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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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