

The South Australian Common Knowledge Community

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INTRODUCTION

Online communities can have useful international dimensions because of the very nature of the World Wide Web's networking capabilities. However, while developing our South Australian community services and practice requirements, we have found a definite tendency in people that they "like and stay with their own kind." Much of the literature examining the uptake of ICT in community has found that local content is a vital issue. Why? It has been widely demonstrated that local Web sites developed locally provide ownership where an international or national Web site often fails. Another key success factor in the local use of Web sites (in fact, any Web site) has been found to align with whether the development was born from "a need" within the community, i.e., the community has the need and requirements and then provides input, takes ownership of output, etc.

The primary goal for the South Australian Common Knowledge Community Project was to provide a single access point for South Australian communities to share information and improve knowledge, therefore, raising awareness about the community-services sector in South Australia, as a whole.

Community Information Strategies Australia Inc. (CISA Inc.) was established in 1981 to manage the South Australian Directory of Community Services and provide support to the state's community-services sector in information provision. CISA is generally accepted as the major body in community information services in South Australia and maintains the community information standards policy.

CISA Inc. has made it possible for the sharing of community-services information through its printed directory, in-house software product, Infosearch, and its associated online version, Infosearchweb (www.infosearchweb.com).

The South Australian Common Knowledge Community Project offered public and community-service providers alike, an abundance of information pertinent to them via a single access point (www.commonknowledge.net.au).

The project aimed to achieve its primary goal by encouraging community-services organizations to coop-

erate in a partnered approach to information management. Traditionally, this included general community-services information; however, the project was to undertake the online capture of associated event and news information as well. The project also undertook to ensure that information maintenance, presentation, and dissemination was addressed. In this process, a framework of standards and guidelines for each of these aforementioned steps was introduced.

BACKGROUND

Our information-rich society is being overloaded with options: ergo, a dependable, single community news and information access point was needed.

At the time of project proposal and business case development, sourcing specific information was an arduous task within South Australia. Under such a scenario, an organization, member of the public, funding body, or MP wishing to obtain more information about the community sector or an individual organization within the community sector, they would be faced with a large task of researching a large number of Web sites, newsletters, pamphlets etc. Given the complexity, lack of cross-referencing, the different forms of presentation of this material on the Web and the time involved, many people seeking information would simply give up in frustration. This situation severely limited the South Australian community-services sector's ability to publicize its capabilities and achievements effectively.

THE PROJECT

The South Australian Common Knowledge Community project provides the community sector with a common platform for communication and knowledge building for both stakeholders and the general public.

The primary goal of South Australian Common Knowledge Community was to improve information sharing, thus creating an enhanced general awareness of the

community sector, and the sector's achievements within South Australia.

The project achieved this by encouraging organizations to cooperate in a shared approach to news and information management that included online capture, maintenance, presentation, and dissemination. After an initial pilot project, funding was received from Community Benefit SA to launch the project throughout South Australia. The project development essentially integrated two existing public information services: *Infosearchweb* (the South Australian community services directory) and *Eventspool* (the South Australian "what, where, when" event listing service), with the new "Common Knowledge" news and information service, or *CK News*, creating the overall South Australian Common Knowledge Community.

As larger community-services organizations typically had some form of existing pamphlet or newsletter through which they distribute their information, the transition for them was relatively easy, as Internet access was generally readily available. The dilemma for smaller community-service organizations contemplating whether they needed a Web site or newsletter (knowing that it would cost money to establish, time to maintain, and pressures to deliver) was solved by offering this free service.

With access to the South Australian Common Knowledge Community, organizations could achieve most of their communication goals without a Web site; they simply lodged any new material with *CK News* or *Eventspool*, through a simple, standardized online system. The local Web site presence developed in this manner, provided a sense of local ownership where an international or even (Australian) national Web site could not. The Common Knowledge Community Project offered the South Australian public and community service organizations an abundance of information pertinent to them through a single access point.

Time-poor people from both the business and community sectors in South Australia were able to benefit from interacting through the single Web access point to gain entry to information about all the relevant community

services on offer through South Australia. In particular, it gave all users specific information about community organizations, including contacts, activities, and operational strategies.

The entire service was provided free of charge to the general South Australian community and commerce and community-service organizations and groups to ensure no organization was disadvantaged. The benefits brought to these groups by the project included the following:

- Easy access to information for the public and community-service organizations
- Equal standing and promotion online for all community-service organizations
- Avoidance of the need for community organizations and groups to afford or manage their own Web sites, through using *CK News* and *Eventspool* to cover most of their online information dissemination needs, i.e., contact details, what's on, and organization reports
- Establishing standard practice for community news, events, and information for dissemination, i.e., via e-mail to registered subscribers
- Distribution of community news and information to a broader community audience, providing better promotional opportunities

CONCLUSION

The Common Knowledge Community Project promotes the community sector as a whole while saving individuals time and effort.

The overall project resulted in raised awareness and the profile of the whole of the South Australian community services sector. It also provided time-poor people and those with limited online skills the ability to swiftly and efficiently source much more specific information about South Australian community-services organizations.

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