

NINEVEH NEWS - Issue: October 2004

INSIDE NINEVEH – Tim Dawes (tim@nineveh.co.uk)

The conference season is drawing to an end – thank goodness. Nineveh held its own conference for the first time this year. 80 delegates from many different authorities attended the public day which was sponsored by Business Web Software, Capita, Innogistics, Plantech, SAP, Scomag, Security and Standards Ltd, Vivista and Web Labs (thanks guys!). As part of our commitment to supporting local arts, the event was held at Havant Arts Centre - a venue which proved a refreshing change from the formulaic hotel approach and was very well received by delegates. It's great to turn up to set up an event and find that as you've booked the theatre you get a dedicated lighting technician! If you were not able to make it to "Nineveh 2004" you can find the presentations on our web site at <http://www.nineveh.co.uk/conference1.htm>

The SOCITM conference was held this year at Edinburgh and featured the usual mixture of earnest speakers and heavy networking (a euphemism for late night sessions in the bar). The format this year featured more workshop and debate events, and was, I thought, the better for that. Nevertheless, I confess I took one morning off to go shopping in Princess Street and an open top bus tour of the city – I wanted to take a look at the new Scottish Parliament building. One of the sessions I did attend was the presentation on National Projects. I have to say it was not especially convincing and there was much talk at the conference about the gap between the official ODPM line on all those NP "products" and the actualité. Ever the populist, I asked from the floor why, unlike just about everything local government does, the ODPM's performance on e-local wasn't subjected to vigorous independent review. When asked by the chair to say if I thought the NP strategy had been a waste of money, I said that, although some NP had produced useful outcomes, judged in the round the strategy looked like poor value for the taxpayer and it would have been far better to give all the funding direct to local authorities. This got a round of applause.

Nineveh is continuing to expand its business. We passed the milestone of 50 local authority consultancy customers earlier this year and have been picking up new customers at the rate of 2 or 3 a month. Established customers are also continuing to demand our services. In consequence we are moving to bigger office premises in a few weeks time (the usual contact details will not change – we are only moving up the road) and we are also on the look out for new consultants. If you have experience of working with local authorities on ESD projects, please get in touch.

OPEN SAUCE – THE PRACTICALITIES

As you may know, Nineveh is now a completely Open Source organisation, in terms of our own administrative systems. Not just our web sites, but also our office servers and clients are 100% open source. We do, of course, continue to advise clients on Microsoft based technical infrastructures. Indeed all our clients are proprietary users and, in truth, some of them think we are a bit quirky in not wanting to send our hard earned money to Seattle – though they don't seem to have the same prejudice with respect to IBM, Novell, Unisys, HP, Plantech, Capita Software Solutions Anyway, we are very pleased to be able to support and recommend to you the latest Netproject event "Succeeding with Open Source" taking place on 2nd December in Birmingham. You can find more details and book your place from our web site at <http://www.nineveh.co.uk/events.php>

BEST PRACTICE IN ONLINE SERVICE DELIVERY?

An article by Ben Schlaepfer, a Nineveh Consultant whose specialty is Electronic Channel design with development and integration experience gained with Blue Chip financial services suppliers.

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With so much focus on achieving online transactional capability and end user self service, what is being done to ensure these services are useful, usable and most importantly used - rather than just being a tick in a box or indeed the right traffic light status on an IEG return?

Fortunately for Local Authorities there is a wealth of government and independent information – and direction - available to ICT Managers and their Web Managers that provide detailed advice and guidance in designing and building compelling, user centric sites and services.

Usability best practice insists that online services are focussed on the needs of the user, rather than the technology choices or organisational preferences of the provider. The application of Usability best practice during design followed by testing of initial prototypes will ensure that this consideration is addressed.

In depth, practical usability advice is available in the form of the Quality Framework for UK Government Website Design: [Usability issues for government websites](#), published by the Office of the e-Envoy and is one of the best single, detailed, publication on the subject that this author has read.

Accessibility is another essential part of the customer focus mix: an accessible service will work with, amongst others, assistive technologies – i.e. text to speech readers used by visually impaired people and those with older PC setups. As well as the obvious ethical responsibility to include all users there are legal obligations: it is unlawful for a service provider to treat disabled people less favourably for a reason related to their disability under Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA). The Disability Rights Commission and the Royal National Institute for the Blind have both successfully pursued cases against organisations under the act, and as more services are delivered online such cases will only increase. The Guideline for UK Government Websites: [Illustrated Handbook for Web Management Teams](#) devotes twenty-nine pages to the subject of achieving good levels of accessibility that are distilled from the World Wide Commissions (W3C) vast [Web Accessibility Initiative](#) site.

Web standards detail “how” technically to deliver the “what’s” and “whys” of Accessibility and Usability focussed design. Web standards are also based upon the recommendations of the W3C and provide technical direction to browser manufacturers and web developers. By understanding the current level of standards support in browsers and the direction that the W3C is leading future browsers, services can be built that are viewable on multiple devices by the widest possible audience and are also faster to download and ready for the next generation of browsers. There appears to be very little government-authored information in this sphere but excellent resources can be found at the [Web Standards Project site](#).

It is important to remember that these issues apply to services delivered via the Internet (both information / promotional and transactional), Intranet and Extranet (Business to Business).

The office of the e-envoy effectively mandates these three elements of online service delivery by the provision of extensive – if somewhat disparate – checklists and guidelines to support their implementation. This provides a useful benchmark unheard of in the private sector, but opens the possibility that local authorities could be judged against a set of standards, without being fully aware of, or understanding them.

There are a plethora of individuals and companies offering “assistance” via audits and reviews covering one or all of the above – accessibility is a particularly hot topic at the moment due to the possibility of prosecution. My advice would be to ensure that projects currently in development take

into account all three disciplines and that existing services are reviewed either by yourselves using the various checklists or by a trusted third party with a proven knowledge of these subjects AND an understanding of the specific challenges faced by Local Authorities.

EVENTS DIARY – Edited by Ruth Scott (ruth@nineveh.co.uk)

For SOCITM events please visit: <http://www.socitm.gov.uk/Public/learning/Calendar.htm>

For Kable events please visit: <http://www.kablenet.com/ke.nsf>

October

18 – 20 AGI2004 Chelsea Village, London www.agi2004.org.uk

28 – Managing Change Programmes, Stratford upon Avon, SOCITM

November

2 - 3rd Annual Event, IT Security in the Public Sector, London, <http://www.kablenet.com/ke.nsf>

2 – Information Security Review, Doncaster, SOCITM

3 – BS7799 Overview, Doncaster, SOCITM

4 – Websites in the Public Sector, London, <http://www.kablenet.com/ke.nsf>

9 – Cutting IT Expenditure Using Open Source, Birmingham, Netproject, info@netproject.com

11 – Information Management and Knowledge Sharing, Stirling, SOCITM

16 – Freedom of Information in Local Authorities, London, Neil Stewart Associates

www.neilstewartassociates.com/sal187

23-23 Content Management for the Public Sector, London,

[http://www.ark-group.com/home/xq/asp/sid.A3ABE0E3-6088-4A0C-9C4A-](http://www.ark-group.com/home/xq/asp/sid.A3ABE0E3-6088-4A0C-9C4A-80C4D0018D1A/eventid.622A6E44-12C4-41B3-B224-F25391EE0967/qx/events/event.htm)

[80C4D0018D1A/eventid.622A6E44-12C4-41B3-B224-F25391EE0967/qx/events/event.htm](http://www.ark-group.com/home/xq/asp/sid.A3ABE0E3-6088-4A0C-9C4A-80C4D0018D1A/eventid.622A6E44-12C4-41B3-B224-F25391EE0967/qx/events/event.htm)

25– Cutting IT Expenditure Using Open Source, Birmingham, Netproject, info@netproject.com

29/30 – Account Management, Birmingham, SOCITM

December

30 Nov-1 Dec - 7th Annual Government Computing, Scotland, Edinburgh

<http://www.kablenet.com/ke.nsf>

30 – 2 Dec – Online Information & Content Management Europe 2004, London www.online-information.co.uk

2 – Succeeding with Open Source, Birmingham, Netproject, info@netproject.com

To add events to this diary contact Ruth@nineveh.co.uk or ring 023 9236 074

FINALLY

Your feedback is important. Let us know of anything happening in your area that would be of interest to other subscribers in the public sector, send to:

news@nineveh.co.uk

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