

## **NINEVEH NEWS - Issue: March 2005**

**INSIDE NINEVEH** – Tim Dawes ([tim@nineveh.co.uk](mailto:tim@nineveh.co.uk))

The publication of Better Connected has become one of the most eagerly awaited events in of the e-local calendar. In a tempestuous e-government sea rendered almost unnavigable by short-term thinking, sound-byte policies and political spin, Better Connected is an island of common sense and consistency. Progress reporting by central government, the ODPM especially, tends to be self-justifying and selective. Their reports read like dodgy dossiers; Alastair Campbell inspired creations - although, sadly, without his exquisite sense of the political zeitgeist and snappy Daily Mirror prose.

SOCITM Insight' swork can be overly detailed and sometimes their publications make very heavy reading, but Better Connected is the best evidence-based resource on e-government progress we have. For one thing, unlike the ODPM' sprogress measures, it has remained consistent over an extended time period. Some criteria assessments have been adjusted over the years, but that is only to be expected as technologies and practices develop. In fact it is quite remarkable that the four point scale of site assessments as Promotional, Content, Content Plus and Transaction has remained a useful measure for so long in so fast a changing scene. This crude scale does have its limitations, but the annual survey does its best to deal with this by looking at special aspects every year.

So what does Better Connected tell us? Well, in summary that progress towards transactional e-government is sure and steady. 8% of UK local authorities have achieved Transaction status (up from 5% last year) and a further 49% (up from 38% in 2004) are now in the next category – Content Plus. The long term trend is remarkably uniform with similar levels of progress over the last three years. Whilst encouraging in itself, one feature of this finding is that it firmly contracts ODPM' sprojections about meeting the e-government targets – especially the Priority Outcomes that map very closely to transactional Internet facilities. Of course the headline Better Connected findings are for the UK as a whole and the specific ODPM targets apply only to England, but the fact remains that only 6 English Counties and 9 Districts have attained Transactional Status. The Yorkshire and Humberside region has only 1 Transaction site and the East Midlands none at all.

I conclude that the ODPM' spredictions are wrong. Even allowing for a speeding up of progress in response to the looming deadlines, the best evidence we have, i.e. the Insight Team' swork, suggests that less than half of English authorities will actually meet the e-government targets.

### **ITIL – Service Management Essentials, Foundation course New dates in May**

As you may know, Nineveh is pleased to be working with Fox IT to offer this ITIL foundation course. A new date has been set in May for this three-day course, leading to the ISEB/EXN Foundation Certificate in IT Service Management, and is being held at our premises in Havant, Hampshire, from 9-11 May. Our competitive price includes the examination fee. You can find more details and book your place from our web site at <http://www.nineveh.co.uk/events.php>. Completion of this course is also worth 15 SOCITM CPD points. For further information please ring Ruth on 02392 471811. This will probably be the final course in Havant this year.

PLEASE NOTE: we have taken bookings already and appreciate early bookings to secure the venue.

**Playing the game of “Snakes and Ladders”**  
– *achieving the ‘holy grail’ of transactional T status*

*An article by Lamorna Spry, a Nineveh Associate whose extensive experience makes her an authority in this area.*  
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Those of you who have read the SOCITM *Better Connected* 2005 review may have noticed the front cover artwork with the analogy to the Snakes and Ladders board game. Reaching the ‘holy grail’ of transactional status is not the end of the road in terms of website development, particularly as standards and expectations are continually rising. Many authorities have improved their status and gone up the ladder, only to find themselves sliding back down a slippery snake the following year.

In our October newsletter, Ben Schlaepfer talked about the importance of usability and accessibility as being vital criteria for a successful website and the ODPM’s priority outcome G23, requires local authority websites to be:

- *Intuitive to use*
- *Efficient to use*
- *Easy to remember*
- *Enjoyable to use*
- *Consistent in their behaviour*

I also feel it is essential to bear in mind the response times which users experience, because there are still a number of local authority sites which have loads transactional elements but are so slow that people must dread having to revisit them. Although the *Better Connected* review outlines the criteria which should be met to achieve ‘T’ status, websites are unlikely to achieve that status if the above criteria for G23 are ignored, no matter how many transactional elements are available on the website. Since ‘usability’ can be very subjective, extensive guidelines have been defined by the LAWS project ([www.laws-project.org.uk](http://www.laws-project.org.uk)) together with the LGCL standard (local government category list), the latest version of which can be found at <http://www.esd.org.uk/standards/lgcl/lgcl.doc>. However, new software has emerged which also enables more objective assessment of usability.

For example, Speed-trap’s Prophet e-Gov software, used for a pilot study as part of the *Better Connected* 2005 review, allows authorities to actually view the clicks which users make during their time within the website. ‘Hot spots’ and redundant areas of web pages can immediately be identified allowing web masters to review and change parts of the site which are no longer effective. The software also allows analysis of users’ search criteria and whether that search was successful. Authorities can now make changes to their website and quantify the success of those changes.

Councils such as Cotswold DC, who have shot up the ladder from promotional to transactional in six months, have achieved their success by embracing simple navigational techniques together with clear and comprehensive A-Zs to meet the

usability priority outcome. Such sites not only have a number of key transactional features such as “Find my nearest”, council tax balances, planning application searches and so on, but they provide their users with obvious ways of finding those facilities. They also encourage user interaction and communication through online polls and consultation, always aiming to bring the user back to the site through interesting and lively news and events pages. A transactional site encourages and forges a community spirit where users can make a transaction and feel confident that the local authority will respond, where appropriate, in a timely and professional manner.

Finally, for those websites which have stubbornly remained at C+, there still remains hope of T status before the deadlines expire, so long as future development is the result of an objective analysis of usability, rather than a roll of the dice on the e-government Snakes and Ladders board game.

## **EVENTS DIARY – Edited by Ruth Scott ([ruth@nineveh.co.uk](mailto: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>

### April

7 – Best practice in data management – enhancing & enabling data sharing, London, Kable

12 – Improving the ICT Front-Line, Birmingham, Socitm Learning

19 & 20 – Account Management for the ICT Dept. Stratford-upon-Avon, SOCITM Learning

20 - 21 – Local e-gov Expo, London Barbican Exhibition Centre, [sara@revolution-events.com](mailto:sara@revolution-events.com)

20- Community Consultation 05, Where next for effective engagement, London Inmarsat Conference Centre, [www.neilstewartassociates.com/sa200](http://www.neilstewartassociates.com/sa200)

20 – CPA 2005 Improvement Planning, London, [www.lgc-cpa.co.uk](http://www.lgc-cpa.co.uk)

21 – Information Management and Knowledge Sharing, London, Socitm Learning

26 – 28 Infosecurity Europe 2005, London, <http://www.infosec.co.uk/>

26 – 28 Helpdesk & IT Support Show 2005, London,

28 – Socitm Spring Seminar, Coventry, Socitm

To add events to this diary contact [Ruth@nineveh.co.uk](mailto:Ruth@nineveh.co.uk) or ring 023 9236 074

### May

4 – Websites in the public sector in Scotland, Edinburgh, Kable

9.10.11 – ITIL Service Management Essentials, Havant, [www.nineveh.co.uk/events](http://www.nineveh.co.uk/events)

12 - 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Government Computing Northern Ireland Conference & exhibition, Belfast, Kable

13 – Technology Wales, Cardiff, Them Ltd, [www.technologywales.co.uk](http://www.technologywales.co.uk)

26 – Ashford BC Customer Service Open Day, [www.ashford.gov.uk/events](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/events)

10-11 – Negotiating skills, Birmingham, Socitm Learning

18 – Managing Change programmes, Stratford, Socitm Learning

19 – Human aspects of Change Management, Stratford, Socitm Learning

## **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](mailto:news@nineveh.co.uk)

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