

Public Sector News

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Power of Information

<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk>

Published in June, *The power of information*¹, a report commissioned by the Cabinet Office and written by Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg looks at the opportunities that exist to develop citizen- and state-generated information in the UK, and to share it electronically. It includes examples of situations where information has been developed and shared and then looks at the resulting benefits. It quotes the examples of lower treatment costs where information about HIV has been shared using online communities and the drop in 'food-borne' illness through sharing food safety information in Los Angeles.

The government response to the report identifies three challenges for itself. These are:

- Engaging in partnership with user-fed online communities
- Ensuring that it fully understands and responds appropriately to changes in the information market and
- Advising civil servants on how best to participate in new media

Digital Divide

<http://www.ukonlinecentres.co.uk/readingroom/research>

The digital divide is often referred to but some research has been conducted that shows just how wide the gap is between the 61% of the population who make use of digital services and the 39% who don't. Far from being a closing gap the research shows that the difference between those who run their lives online and those for whom this is still a complete mystery is becoming more of a problem. The problem is that those members of society who are already disadvantaged are more likely to be the ones without access to the information and services online. This reinforces the divide, as they then do not have access to the information and services that could help them. The report from the UK online centres is based on research by FreshMinds.

Land Registry

<http://www.landregistry.gov.uk/>

If you need to access property information held by the Land Registry, you will be pleased to know that their online database now covers almost 60% of land in England and Wales. This is a rise from just 48% two years ago, and the Land Registry is confident it will achieve its aim of delivering a comprehensive register.

¹ *The power of information: an independent review* Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg June 2007 and *The Government's response to the power of information* by Ed mayo and Tom Steinberg Cm 7157 June 2007

Government websites

The National Audit Office reported in July¹ on progress in delivering online services, and found that little had changed since its previous investigation in 2002. The report showed that Directgov, the main focus of government information for the citizen, is well received by the public. For the first time Directgov has appointed a Chief Executive, Jayne Nickalls, who has been appointed to draw government content together through this site. Information for the business community is to be focused through businesslink.gov.uk. The 'home' of Directgov is to be the Department for Work and Pensions, moving there from the Central Office of Information in April 2008.

The report said that some areas of government websites are too complex and have too much text. They also have too much 'policy' material, which is often not relevant to the user. Many people use government websites infrequently, often for transactions, such as purchasing car tax or completing a tax return. The Jobcentre Plus site is the exception, with 78% of its users visiting it at least once a week.

Scottish change of name

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk>

In case you missed it, the Scottish Executive is now known as the Scottish Government. It is believed this title is less confusing and more closely identifies the role of the Executive. The cost of changing signs, and so on, is said to be £100,000. but worth it.

Public Sector News is supplied by ALGIS (The Affiliation of Local Government Information Specialists) which represents information professionals providing information services to local authority staff and elected members. Jane Inman is currently Chair of ALGIS. ALGIS welcomes anyone with an interest in public sector information who feels they would benefit from being part of a community working in the same area. For more information go to <http://www.algis.org.uk>.

¹ *Government on the Internet: progress in delivering information and services online Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General HC 529 Session 2006-2007 July 2007*