

Access Anywhere – A Community Initiative

Creating an online local community resource

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June 2006

Introduction

Access Anywhere is a new online resource initiative which aims to achieve local community engagement by providing easy access to relevant content over multiple devices.

When addressing the local community, attention is directed towards the needs of 3 key groups, namely; local residents, businesses and public services, including particular focus on 3rd or independent sector groups.

Access Anywhere is referred to as an online community resource as it is seen to be important to stay away from too much traditional internet jargon when promoting this offering.

The system itself is focused on two areas at this point – the PC system and the TV system.

Use of the PC web gives a place where all sectors of the community can meet online, and provides a platform for aggregating appropriate services and generating local content. Use of connectivity to the TV extends the online reach to almost 98% of households.



The principal objective has to be to deliver meaningful, relevant services purposed in such a way as to be suitable for the users' choice of access device.

Background

1. Why TV?

Currently the digital divide has fully one third of UK households without internet access at home. The principle reasons cited according to a study by ODPM are:

- Perceived cost
- Complexity of technology
- Lack of relevant content

Put simply, this solution addresses all three via the more familiar interface of the television by providing on-line services that appear as a natural evolution of Teletext, and extend on into new media rich means of delivering entertainment, information, communication and retail services.

2. Why PC?

Whilst evolution of the PC internet is rapid, it still requires a fair degree of software tools and expertise to maintain a presence on the world wide web. For many, especially local businesses within a given community, it is not yet a sufficiently simple task to keep their online collateral up to date. Businesses and Community Volunteers are amongst the main groups targeted to become members of the online resource, communicating their messages to local users.

By offering a straightforward means of access via the PC browser, businesses and other authors can maintain their content through a simple text editor and image upload procedure. No special software, no significant training is required, thus the proposition for members is simple - if you can type, you can maintain your online presence.

This is extremely important as having valid, up-to-date copy is critical in answering the demand for relevant content and maintaining the interest in, and usefulness of, the community resource for its users.

The Product Set

A vital part of the design philosophy of the easy2™ system in supporting the Access Anywhere community online resource has been to make it easier to use and easier to access.

As mentioned above, the easy2™ system allows members to log in via Internet Explorer on a standard PC, and maintain their content.

The system allows for various levels of membership, with associated differing levels of access permissions and security. Similarly the presence a member may choose to have can range from a simple 2 line listing to a full dedicated web site.

Consideration for publishing member information to alternative platforms such as the TV is inherent in the easy2™ system. Form is separated from function, so that a suitable layout and navigation experience can be derived from the same content. This minimises the expense and time that may be required in members repurposing content for different platforms.



PC and TV screen shots of Access Anywhere

It is simply not suitable to provide a browser capable set-top box and leave the user to navigate the Internet at large.

Community Engagement

The concept of community engagement focuses on three core sectors, residents, local businesses and public services.

Residents are served through PC and TV publishing of local, regional and national content covering entertainment, information, communication and transaction.

Businesses are served through various levels of web presence within the system, including free line listings, customised entries through to full web sites, future-proofed .

Public Services will be in a position to place information embedded throughout the site alongside entertainment and other information services, thereby increasing the exposure and opportunity for online connection with clients. The example below shows a local authority public service notice about Alternate Bin Collection feedback on the TV media player. Further information can be accessed by pressing the blue button on the remote control.



TV Media video player with embedded rolling messages (top right)

Product Roadmap

Access Anywhere for the TV has been designed on the easy2™ platform to work across a range of devices. Starting from basic services using a hybrid Freeview set-top box with dial-up, through to embedded streaming video and audio services for current 1 - 2Mbps broadband, on to full screen HD ready plug-ins for FTTH fibre networks of tomorrow.

Already easy2™ has variants in development for different TV hardware and software platforms to make local community access as easy as possible. Applications for TV rollout include system integration with existing units through to planned major new build developments incorporating fibre and wireless networks and bespoke specification in-home hardware.

Indeed it is the flexibility of the easy2™ system and the Access Anywhere community content resource that makes it ideal for deployment across existing and new build developments, integrating communities and technologies to deliver optimum results.