Value and usefulness

Craig Thomler is one of the most respected commentators in the field of eGov – especially Australian eGov – but occasionally I have to take issue with his pronouncements. In a post in his blog at **http://tinyurl.com/2cljgvd**, he looked at the value of Apps competitions; these are the events where people are invited to take government information and do something smart with it. He cited the competitions held this year by the NSW and Victorian governments that resulted in around 300 new systems, and he used a rough calculation to arrive at a figure of $6 million dollars in value. The problem as I see it is: just because someone's done it, is it of value? Many (perhaps most) of the apps are quite trivial and would never have been developed by government agencies in any case, so should they be counted as any sort of government savings? I'm not saying that we shouldn't be having the competitions, but let's not dilute their benefit with unreasonable claims.

On the other hand, he also mentions a case where a forensic examination of some Canadian government information (carried out before the current rash of 2.0 activity) led to real savings of around $3.2 billion. You can read about that one at **http://tinyurl.com/2ahenl9**

An apt comparison

I've had a chance to fiddle around with an iPad in the electronics store, and I'm very impressed with the way that you can read books on it. Now you do have quite a few options about which reader to use, and Jason Perlow at ZDNet has done a pretty good review of the various apps on offer. See it at **http://tinyurl.com/2vfntyf** There are a couple of surprises in his assessment.

Musing on firendship

If you have half an hour to spare, and you want to find out a bit more about Social Media concepts, have a look at The Real Life Social Network v2 (**http://tinyurl.com/38gq6wh**). The presentation comprises over 200 slides, but they'll open your eyes to just what it is you're being exposed to when you're enjoying yourself on Facebook or Twitter. What I liked particularly was the analysis of 'friends' and how the current generation of products lumps them all into the one category – with potentially unfortunate results in some cases.

Open season on Open Government

He had over six months to consider the report of the Gov 2.0 Taskforce, but it still took the Federal Minister for Finance and Deregulation until just before the beginning of the Caretaker Period to release the Commonwealth's *Declaration of Open Government* (at **http://tinyurl.com/25zdnkh**) Many of his supporters lauded this great leap forward, but there were just a few nigglers who wondered what's so open about The Filter, the Gillard/Rudd deal, and a few other not-so-open issues. Then the blog was closed for comments until after the Election, and that was that.

Rolling along

Speaking of the election, there was a fine how-do-you-do in the rush to enrol in the few days between the calling of the election and the closing of the rolls. (Of course this avoids discussion on why people don't get on the roll earlier – like when they turn 18 – or tell the AEC when they change their address, but let that bide.) GetUp! was active on two fronts: trying to force the hand of the AEC in helping people to submit their applications online, and initiating legal action to challenge the brevity of the period for enrolling after the election is called. They were, of course, successful in the latter case. As for the former, well it may accelerate the full provision of online registration – unless of course everyone is so relieved that the election is finally over and we can put it off until next time. No worries.

Communicating effectively

It's always good to get in touch with another professional group. In this case, it was a bunch of Communications people at a Public Sector Marketing conference. They are of course a primary client group for people working in the web space so their general needs and attitudes were not much a novelty. It was the applications though that gave me plenty of food for thought.

There was the Department of Immigration, for instance, that's using YouTube to gets its message out – with particular emphasis on warning people against using people smugglers (**http://www.youtube.com/user/notopeoplesmuggling**). You might be a little dubious as to whether it's an effective way of communicating with the appropriate group of users, but they say they've determined that there's a very high level of awareness of their website among both the Australian ethnic communities and the target groups in places like Afghanistan.

Then there's VicRoads (**http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/Home/**) with their series of videos on YouTube using humour to communicate road safety messages to Gen Y. In their case the message was overshadowed by the fruity language and the attitudes portrayed – and they got a lot of free publicity thanks to the attention of more conservative sections of the media. I was also interested to see that they're busy developing iPhone apps for road users, despite one of the prime safety warnings being about the dangers of using your mobile as you drive.

How big is your market?

The VicRoads plans made me think about doing things for the iPhone and whether there were enough of them around to justify specific developments. I was a little surprised to find that current estimates are that there are well over 1.5 million iPhones, iPads, and other smartphones in Australia now. That represents over 6% of the population – and it's growing. If you're interested in getting your message out, it's a market segment that you shouldn't avoid.

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