

Australian National Broadband Network Plans a Perfect Match to OneWebDay's Theme of Digital Inclusion



Vicky Pinpin-Feinstein, OneWebDay Sydney Organizer, August 5th, 2009

For those of us looking for ways to celebrate digital inclusion as this year's OneWebDay's theme, Australia seems to be a pretty exciting place to be. Whether you are into Web 2.0 and its workings, in government looking for ways in which social media can help you do your job, or whether you are in the nonprofit community intent on using these new media tools to assist with mission-driven goals, there's been a flurry of activities in recent months both at the federal, state and local levels related to broadband plans, Web 2.0 or Government 2.0.

At the national level, the Rudd government announced in April 2009 a multi-billion broadband infrastructure plan which aims to reach 90 per cent of Australian households and businesses using optical fiber. Over the course of 8 years, the government intends to spend up to \$43 billion dollars (\$31 billion US) to build a broadband superhighway that will improve internet speeds in Australia by up to 100 times, a goal seen as critical because Australia currently lags behind OECD countries in broadband access. The country is behind Japan, Singapore and South Korea and is in the bottom half of OECD countries. The government's Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy is spearheading all efforts of the plan. In late July, the government announced the appointment of Mike Quigley, recognized as Australia's most broadly and internationally experienced telecommunications networks executive as the top boss of the federally funded company, the National Broadband Network. Other top officials for the company are expected to be announced soon.

In other initiatives, the government announced in June the establishment of a Government 2.0 Taskforce (<http://gov2.net.au>) that will look into how government information can become more accessible, usable, and to look for ways in which it can enable more interfaces with its various publics as well as promote greater collaboration across agencies. The taskforce is chaired by Dr. Nicholas Gruen, the CEO of Lateral Economics and long time policy adviser to federal government ministers. Its other members are prominent government and business leaders across the country and who will participate in completing a report by year's end. In addition, the taskforce is responsible for managing a \$2.45 million (\$1.83 million US) fund in support of the development of Web 2.0 tools and applications that have the potential to enable greater engagement between the government and community. These grants will be administered in the form of funding for pilots and projects or may come in the form of prizes for innovative applications.

Similarly, politicians are joining the Web 2.0 bandwagon through various policy and issues campaign activities. Senator Kate Lundy, a Parliament member since 1996, was an early pioneer and was one who saw the potential of the internet in the 1990s as a medium that can "break down the normal power relationships in society." (See Senator Lundy's "How I Became Interested in ICT" on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSPRShRc7BY>)

On June 22, Senator Lundy's office organized a Government 2.0 one day event in Canberra with 170 people attending, about 300 people following it on Twitter totaling 2,500 tweets on the day and over 400 more watching it on live video streaming (<http://www.katelundy.com.au/2009/06/23/government-2-0-public-sphere-next-steps/>). They have just completed a briefing paper which you can access on her blog at <http://www.katelundy.com.au/2009/05/29/public-sphere-2-open-government-policy-and-practice/>. These efforts have been ably supported by Pia Waugh, her IT &T advisor and a keen observer of all things Web 2.0. See her blog at <http://pipka.org/>. Similar events will follow in coming months.

Inspired by Senator Lundy's efforts, Member of the NSW Legislative Council, Penny Sharpe, will be convening a Government 2.0 event on September 4. She is actively seeking the participation of segments of the NSW population

who are new to Web 2.0 and would like to learn more and engage in it. Ms. Sharpe believes that “new technologies are already changing the way individuals connect and interact with the state as well as how we connect and interact with each other.” She added that “it’s time for us to discuss what that can mean for our governments and our parliaments.” To this end, she is looking for speakers and panelists interested in discussing the ways in which Web 2.0 can potentially transform models of democracy at the state level. She is also actively seeking ideas, suggestions, recommendations and advice on how the event will be organized and soliciting people’s views on some topics she has listed in her blog. You can find out what these topics are on her web site

at <http://pennysharpe.com/nswsphere>. For those interested in attending this free event, you can sign up

at <http://nswsphere.eventbrite.com/>.

At the city level, the City of Sydney convened a conference on June 24, 2009, to look at how the web is transforming government. Dubbed Web 2.0 in Government Conference, the City of Sydney recognized that more and more governments around the world are increasingly engaging their constituents online in the hope of improving policy development and service delivery. The conference was an opportunity for both the public and private sectors to discuss the opportunities and challenges presented by Government 2.0 initiatives. The conference put together leaders in Government 2.0 in Australia although the one disappointment about it is that for a topic that seeks broad and open government and one which inherently advocates greater participation and access, the conference limited interested parties or individuals from participation because of its pricey registration fee. The one day event cost \$695 (\$520 US), an amount I would say would certainly limit people keen on watching their wallets at this time, at least the ones whose companies would not pay for such an event.

The nonprofit community around Sydney, Melbourne and elsewhere are also increasing their engagement of social media tools in pursuit of mission-driven initiatives. They recognized the need for using these tools to engage, advocate, influence as well as improve efficiencies in delivering programs and services to social sector clients. One such company is Energetica (www.energetica.com.au) whose principal and founder, Lisa Harvey, is also a member of the Government 2.0 Taskforce. There are also entities such as CollabForge (<http://collabforge.com>), a company that participated in OneWebDay last year. Its founder, Mark Elliott, is a key member of this year’s OWD in Melbourne. Getup (<http://www.getup.org.au>) is a grass-roots community organization currently working on campaigns that include climate change, internet censorship, the government’s Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and economic fairness. Over at MakeBelieve (<http://www.makebelieve.me>), Lily McComb’s team, which includes Nick Moraitis, Ben Margetts and others, focuses on helping not-for-profits and other socially responsible organizations in doing good through the development and management of campaigns on issues as diverse as marine life to youth leadership. These organizations are a small sample of what is out there in the Australian nonprofit arena based on the 6-7 months of observing the scene, so to speak, since I moved to Sydney. I am certain there are many more that escaped my radar and which I will continue to see as I explore this community. Ping me if you know others – both individuals and organizations, that I can feature in this blog and whose support we can solicit in the quest to make many more Australians aware of not just OneWebDay but the significance of the internet in their daily lives.

URL: <http://onewebday.org/2009/08/05/australian-national-broadband-network-plans-a-perfect-match-to-onewebday-s-theme-of-digital-inclusion/>