



All Together Now - On-Line Magazine Benefits the Disadvantaged

It seemed the end of the road for Tom Dowling's editing career when his Liverpool-based magazine *I can do that* folded in 2004. But, as a wheelchair user, Tom knew that the publication's mix of information, news and human interest was valued by the readership, consisting of tens of thousands of disabled people, carers, and those getting on in years.

So, he did something to help them by gathering support from regional government agencies, local authorities, NHS Trusts, foundations and business for a successor, *All Together Now!* As its strapline - 'For anyone who won't let anything get in the way' - indicates, its aim is to make a positive difference to the lives of people who are often isolated and excluded from society.

Internet edition makes local magazine national

However, the new magazine is no mere replica of the old for, as Tom observes, "we took the opportunity to rethink our publishing strategy to get an even greater readership. The best way to do this was to have a free, printed, version for the region, and to reproduce the content in a web version to reach a national audience."

Both editions of the magazine provide news, information and entertainment for anyone whose lives are affected by disability or age. Serious articles about topics such as claiming benefits or access are interspersed with lighter material. One recent issue carried a competition with the top prize being a dive in a shark-filled tank. The formula certainly impressed the judges of the annual Getting the Message Across Awards, who selected *All Together Now!* as a "triumph over adversity: a phoenix rising out of the ashes of its hugely successful predecessor."



Tom Dowling with Liverpool band The Farm, who helped to launch the magazine.

"The Internet has saved us a phenomenal amount of time, and made us more efficient"

Key Facts

- **An on-line edition enables a Northwest magazine to reach a national audience**
- **Broadband often reduces the cost and time of acquiring business information**
- **The web can offset some of the isolation often felt by elderly and/or disabled people.**



“Broadband will play an important role in Britain adapting to the ageing society we know is coming”

An immediate success

The on-line edition of *All Together Now!* was an immediate success, achieving over 12,000 hits in its first few months. One early reader was Colin Clarke, who e-mailed to say: “I heard about your magazine on Radio 4’s You and Yours programme. What a shame *All Together Now!* is not readily available to those of us living in Hampshire. Still, now that I have found your website, I have something that will keep me informed. As a disabled person I am sick and tired of finding out things that are available just by luck or by word of mouth. Well done!”

Tom Dowling believes that, as well as extending the magazine’s reach in this way, “the Internet has saved us a phenomenal amount of time, and made us more efficient. When we are researching stories, or possible clients and partners, the web offers an instant source of information. If we didn’t have broadband it would take far longer to source our stories, and be much more difficult to keep the on-line magazine fresh through daily updates. And the stack of Yellow Pages we had covering the whole country is now redundant as all the information contained in them is available at the click of a button for free via broadband.”

“The technology,” he continues, “is so cost effective, and it is easy to take it for granted after a while. You only realise how much you rely on it when suddenly something goes wrong, or you have to do without it for some reason.”

The Internet supports human interaction

Tom and his administrator, Chris Groves, can also work from home more easily because they have broadband connections there. However, in spite of the temptations to avoid rush hours and the bustle of city life, both men choose to go to the office frequently. Tom Dowling comments that, “we enjoy working together and it enables us to bounce ideas off each other which, in this industry, is very important. It helps to keep the magazine

fresh and interesting. The best way to use the Internet is to support - rather than replace - people working and socialising together.”

Tom was confident that the print version of *All Together Now!* would succeed. So it has proved, with more than sixty thousand copies of the paper magazine now distributed across Merseyside, Cheshire and North Wales via NHS Trusts, councils, charities, community groups, and 50 major supermarkets.

However, he had some doubts as to whether an on-line *All Together Now!* would take off. He knew that many of his readers have never used the Internet. But he senses a growing awareness of the need “to encourage and assist the elderly and people with disabilities to experience how powerful a tool it is, and what a difference being connected can make. It can give them the information and confidence to do more with their lives, and reduce the social isolation they often experience. I’m sure that broadband will play an important role in Britain adapting to the ageing society we know is coming.”

Further Information

The Northwest Regional Development Agency wants the region’s people and businesses to benefit from the new opportunities created by the digital revolution. It has worked with partners to establish Digital Development Agencies in Cheshire and Warrington, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Greater Merseyside and Lancashire to achieve this at local level. The agencies help identify ICT priorities for their areas, work with local organisations to identify projects to address them, and secure the resources to make these projects happen.