

Public Access to the Internet - Critical e-Citizens - "wifi Exeter"

The meeting on April 1st is intended to look at public access to the internet in Exeter. Life Bytes has no site at the moment as Paris Street is ready for demolition. There is web access in the library but for limited hours. An internet café is more likely to experiment and explore new ideas, so there is knowledge about recent developments that can be passed on to people who drop in.

Internet cafés could take several new forms. They probably won't continue as they are. Web access could be a minor part of a food site, as on Longbrook Street. This may work as an encouragement for other streams of income. However the training support could be missing from such situations.

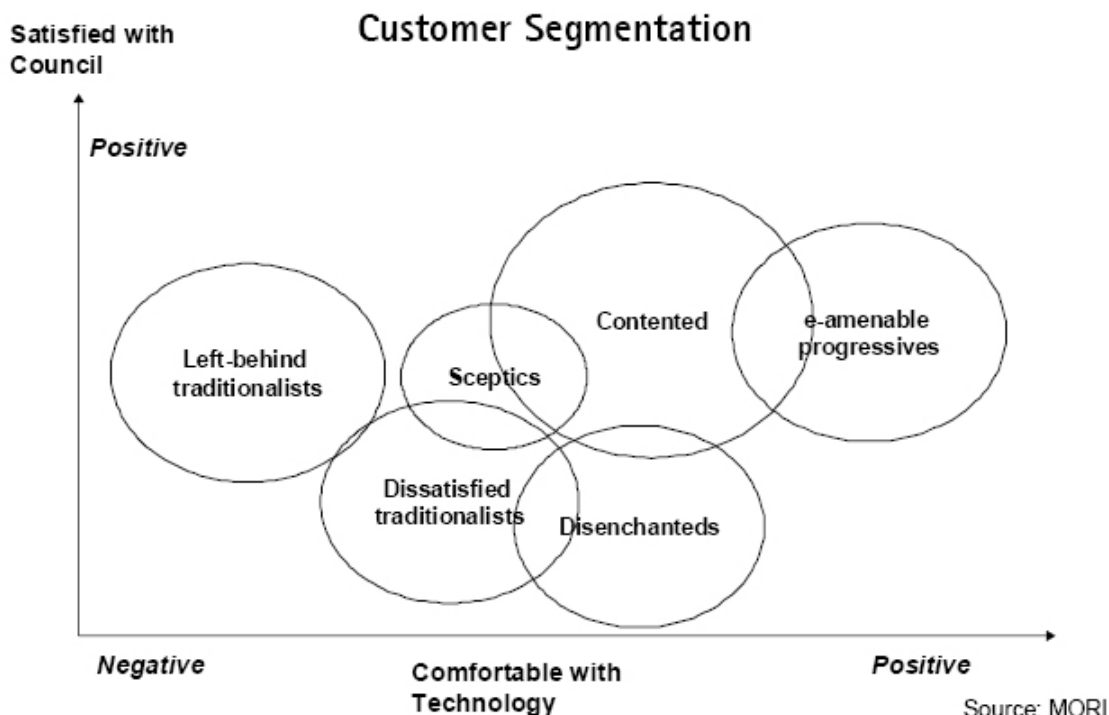
One approach I am taking is to work with the Internet Express domain as an online version of an internet café. This was the original name for the site on Queen Street and the site continues as something, as does Hyperactive.

Exeter has a reputation as a wi-fi centre, based on the number of hot spots per head of population. However there is not much evidence that these are used. Many IT Boxes in pubs are still mostly used for games. Some public demonstration could be useful. The PC World near Tesco has yet to install BT Openzone as was available at Exe bridge. Maybe the demand is not that great. The phone box in South Street has never been seen in wi-fi use except for the experiments and survey carried out by Life Bytes.

However the Southgate Hotel continues to offer Freespot access to wi-fi. This could be a better model in the longterm as people get used to it. The cost of coffee can be enough to cover access costs. It seems possible that the Phoenix might offer wi-fi access in future. However no plans are known for anything like the free wi-fi in the centre of Bristol.

The issue of public internet access is addressed by recent initiatives relating to 'e-citizens'. This includes a concern with the 'digital divide' but is also concerned with how local authorities and other government sites will reach a situation where most of their services are used online. There are two projects, one a campaign funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), one a qualification similar to the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) organised by the British Computer society (BCS).

I know that people from Life Bytes and others are concerned with the issues around the 'digital divide' and they will add this to the meeting but I want to concentrate on another aspect that came over from a BCS presentation about the e-citizen qualification at the Learning Technology show in January. There is some government awareness that online services will not really save significant expense until they are widely used. There is enough experience to show that online systems can work and there is a proportion of the UK public that will use them. However there are also groups of people who are unlikely to use them so potentially there will be the expense of maintaining hard copy systems as well as online development costs.



So far the BCS site has very little information on the actual syllabus. The best information seems to be from Parity Training

<http://www.parity.net/eCitizen/syllabus.aspx#>

The e-Citizen qualification includes the following units:

BASIC IT <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using the Computer• Components of a PC• Files and Folders• Using Applications• Getting Online	EMAIL <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concepts of Email• Sending Email• Receiving Email• Handling Mail
EXTRACTING INFORMATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Range of Content Available• Searching for content• Access content structure	INTERACTION WITH THE INTERNET <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Range of Services Available –• Completion of online forms• Use of online forms• Online Banking• Purchasing online

It is not obvious how this will work as a qualification. Why will people want one? However the syllabus is interesting. I am working on a 'critical' version for Internet Express. Most people I know have their own take on something like the European Computer Driving Licence. Learning theory suggests that critique contributes to integration of new ideas in a personal context. So for most people the syllabus will be a starting point rather than a route to a qualification.

The ECDL often assumes Microsoft Office. The first suggestion would be to add plug-ins to the browser, for example Flash and Acrobat Reader. there is a case for open source software such as Firefox. For forms interaction PDF and FLEX in Flash are both worth looking at. There are various ways to listen to or watch different media. The basic syllabus fails to cover this but it would probably be part of the range of use that would encourage investment in bandwidth.

'Basic IT' should include security. There is another government site called ITsafe that actually offers significant content for free download.

Again there is an issue around this that could result in forms of support for public web education. "We need to up the security game of ordinary citizens, because if they fall down on information security then their compromised machines can be used against us" said Roger Cumming, director of the National Infrastructure Coordination Centre (*Computing* Oct 14, 2004).

This could be another argument for open source. Most knowledge at Life Bytes has assumed Windows but there are links with Psand who can support Linux.

There will be an online version of the course that could be adopted elsewhere.

The meeting will be concerned with real time and space. What happens next in Exeter? Best result would be some form of site with web access but if this is not possible, what other structures might happen?

BCS www.ecitizen.co.uk/index.htm
ODPM www.e-citizen.gov.uk/
ITsafe www.itsafe.gov.uk

Life Bytes www.life-bytes.co.uk
Internet Express www.inxpress.co.uk/castle
Hyperactive www.hyperactive-cafe.co.uk

Psand psand.net

Will Pollard 01392 660639 will.pollard@gmail.com

Meeting April 1st 4pm to 5pm Computer training room, Central Library

(5-7pm Digital animation from scene.org , best to book before Easter)