

Welcome to Exeter

THE INNOVATIVE 'ELECTRONIC CITY'

An article by Kable.net.com, published by ZDNet.co.uk News on 2nd March 2005, shows that Exeter is among the top 20 Councils with transactional websites when it comes to e-accessibility. The findings looked at the Society of IT Managers' Better Connected 2005 report, which analysed 468 local authority websites.

The findings warned that many local authorities might not be able to meet the Government's 'priority targets' for online services, with online accessibility proving to be the top concern of most of the local authorities involved with the study. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), describes the 2005 targets as aiming to enhance the quality and availability of local e-services. These cover such areas as education, democratic renewal and community information.

The report's author, Martin Greenwood – SOC-ITM Insight programme manager, commented: "Councils need to collect more evidence about usage and potential usage of web sites in their areas, and match this with dedication to getting the quality of the product right at a more detailed level than before in order to make self-service a truly attractive option that works in practice and will be repeated. Finally, Councils should become more proactive and more sophisticated in marketing what is on offer to those target groups who might be interested."

Meeting Targets With .Net

Exeter City Council has responded to the challenge through the development and launch this May of its new website, based on GOSS' Intelligent Content Management (iCM) and CITIZEN solution, which is now used by 16% of the local authorities in England and Wales. Accessibility was one of the major concerns of the City Council, particularly as they wanted to offer a wide range of services across multiple platforms. CITIZEN meets these requirements.

Paul Evans, Exeter's Head of IT, expects to meet all of the priority outcomes and targets. He believes that "iCM has been instrumental in mak-



ing this possible, especially when it comes to website developments and the provision of online services. It provides a solid .Net technology-based foundation, which will enable us to develop customer-focused applications and realise the next stage in our customer contact strategy."

What Attracted Exeter to The GOSS Solution?

He also comments: "Although a number of other solutions in the market were considered, several other Devon authorities had previously purchased the GOSS system and we had received favourable reports about it from them. This made for a compelling case for a purchase as far as we were concerned. It now means that we are part of an established user-base within the South West and can share development ideas."

"We are a Microsoft site both in terms of development and technical infrastructure, so choosing a product that followed our development path was the natural choice. This now enables us to develop the product and capitalise on its potential."

Evans therefore recommends that this should be one of the prerequisites for anyone seeking a CMS solution, and this should incorporate an analysis of not just the available technologies but also the resources that an authority has at hand.

A key part of this is the question of whether a council can undertake its own development and support of the system. He also recommends that:

- You purchase a CMS that is extensible and customisable to meet your business needs as they evolve
- You choose a product that is in use by others with a similar business to your own, and which has a proven track record of reliability and functionality

Exeter is also starting to steer its website towards delivering more and more online self-service, and 3 months ago it began to be used as an information resource for its customer services centre. The "underlying technology will also soon be used to run our corporate intranet", Evans adds. With Government targets in mind, Exeter wishes to provide 24/7 access to online transactional services for the benefit of its citizens. It also aspires to become the regional capital of the South West, and iCM is expected to help the council to achieve this.

So What Are the Benefits of iCM?

"We believe that the move to iCM has improved our site in a number of ways and this has provided multiple benefits", he says. The benefits are:

- The search function is more intuitive and effective, and produces better search results than our previous system. He also believes that it increases the likelihood of return visits;
- A reduction of dead-links, providing a better user experience which increases the potential for return visits;

- Exeter is also beginning to develop some of its own functionality within the system, which should lead to more interactivity and a more compelling website for users to visit;

- Improved Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is forthcoming through integration with the Council's CRM self-service portal, enabling 24/7 transactions;

- With this the site will become key to our Customer Service and Access strategy.

He believes that people are attracted to "proven solutions which have a clearly defined cost of ownership and roadmap."

About GOSS Interactive

GOSS provides managed services and intelligent and enterprise-wide content management solutions. GOSS solutions are based on a sound understanding of your requirements and the technology we use to meet your customers' needs.

<http://www.gossinteractive.com/ExeterCityCouncil>

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