

# ICT foresight



**campaigning  
and consultation**  
in the age of  
participatory media



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in the age of  
participatory media

**Hansard Society**

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**NCVO Third Sector Foresight**

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## ● FOREWORD

**The Vodafone UK Foundation** aims to help the people of the UK to have fuller lives by enabling access to information and opportunities via new technology.

ICT is transforming the ways in which people communicate with, and relate to, other individuals and institutions. Voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) play a vital role in bringing people together, building skills, generating knowledge and providing a voice for individuals and groups. ICT is having an impact on all of these activities yet there is evidence that VCOs have failed to identify at a strategic level how ICT will change the environment in which, and the ways in which, they work.

To this end we are pleased to fund this series of Third Sector Foresight reports, which aim to build understanding of the impact of ICT, in the belief that the voluntary sector will be better equipped to exploit the potential of new technologies to improve the lives of their users and beneficiaries.

*Sarah Shillito*

**Sarah Shillito**

Head of Foundation

Vodafone UK Foundation



**Technology developments move fast** and with that comes ever-increasing ways for the voluntary and community sector to reach new audiences, engage with their existing audience and make their voice heard in the public arena. The ICT Hub is therefore pleased to have funded this Third Sector Foresight report, which highlights the opportunities and challenges facing the voluntary and community sector in the areas of consultation and campaigning. The ICT Hub is already undertaking some activities to help the sector take advantage of new technology and will be responding strategically to this publication in its future planning.

Research carried out by the ICT Hub has shown that whilst many organisations would like to take advantage of technology such as blogs or web casting, many small and medium-sized voluntary and community organisations, who often don't have a dedicated member of staff for ICT, still need access to basic ICT support.

We at the ICT Hub are working to address the issue of support by providing a range of free and low cost resources, including events, a website and publications. This will help voluntary and community organisations use ICT more effectively and efficiently. For more information about the ICT Hub, visit our website [www.ictHub.org.uk](http://www.ictHub.org.uk).

*Nicola Thompson*

**Nicola Thompson**

Head of the ICT Hub



## ● ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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The **Hansard Society** is an independent, non-partisan educational charity, which exists to promote effective parliamentary democracy. The Hansard Society's e-Democracy programme seeks to develop innovative ways of using new interactive technologies to reconnect Parliament with citizens and encourage participation in the democratic process.

[www.hansardsociety.org.uk/programmes/e-democracy](http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/programmes/e-democracy)

**NCVO** is the umbrella body for the voluntary sector in England. We work to support the voluntary sector and to create an environment in which voluntary organisations can flourish. NCVO's Third Sector Foresight project helps voluntary and community organisations to identify and understand the strategic drivers that may impact on them, and provides tools to help organisations transform this understanding into robust strategies that can directly improve their effectiveness.

[www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/3s4](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/3s4)

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Finally, we would like to thank the Vodafone UK Foundation and the ICT Hub for funding this series of reports.

## ● INTRODUCTION

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This is the first in a series of Third Sector Foresight reports on the emerging relationship between voluntary and community organisations, and information and communication technology (ICT). ICTs have been with us for some time – though evidence suggests that voluntary and community organisations have not readily taken advantage of them – but the pace, breadth and disruptive nature of their increasingly widespread introduction and use make this a good point at which to review progress and look at future opportunities. This report, which is based on desk research and a survey of almost 300 senior managers in the voluntary and community sector, maps out emerging trends in relation to the critical ‘voice’ and representation roles of the sector, covering campaigning and consultation.

It is probably a cliché to state that ICT is changing many aspects of our society including how we communicate, how we transact business and how we consume goods and services. There are numerous examples, from the relatively mundane (providing information and advice via a website) to the fully interactive (signing up to a social networking site such as MySpace). Increasing ease of use, combined with ever-lower costs, is likely to make these new ICTs both ubiquitous and pervasive.

Such changes have also influenced the structures and processes of the State, including the ways in which government and its agencies communicate, consult with, and deliver services to, its citizens. Although ICTs are not *driving* the shift to more participatory forms of government, the opportunities they afford have been timely. Large-scale IT projects run by government departments often make the news, but just as important are the small-scale, sometimes experimental, advances made by local statutory bodies in areas such as consultation.

Voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) are not immune from such changes, and indeed many are embracing them. In the areas of consultation and campaigning (the focus of this report), VCOs are key intermediaries in the relationship between the State and its citizens – as well as independent, distinct voices in their own right. In addition, it is becoming more apparent that many new social change organisations are growing from purely online origins. The main body of the report examines these roles and relationships, looking at how ICT has or could change the nature of such relationships, and in some cases what is achievable. There are an increasing number of innovative organisations using ICTs to engage with their stakeholders, a few of which are illustrated in this report. However, for others the new ICTs are “indistinguishable from magic”, requiring skills or knowledge that rapidly become obsolete.<sup>1</sup> A challenge, therefore, for this report has been navigating between utopian visions of the possible and realistic guidance on the probable.

The structure of each chapter therefore reviews current drivers and trends, and illustrates these with case studies on the innovative use of ICTs. It also considers implications for those organisations wishing to follow up the issues. The final section of the report contains a glossary that aims to cover some of the most frequently used jargon in this area.

Finally, other reports in the series will cover accountability, social networks, and delivering services. If you have any comments, either on this report or issues you would like to see covered in future reports, contact us at [foresight@ncvo-vol.org.uk](mailto:foresight@ncvo-vol.org.uk)

**Ross Ferguson, Megan Griffith, Milica Howell and Karl Wilding**

August 2006

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1. “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic”, Arthur C. Clarke, 1973.



## ● CONSULTATION

### Introduction

Organisations in all sectors face increasing calls to be more accountable to a wide body of stakeholders. This, in turn, has put much more emphasis on gathering different perspectives when making decisions or formulating policies. For governments and political parties this has been compounded by the decline in political and civic engagement, highlighted by falling party membership and declining voter turnout. As a result, there is significantly more interest in, and activity around, consultation and consultation processes.



Voluntary and community organisations are often integral to such consultation processes. By providing a voice for the marginalised, or by representing those groups difficult to reach via approaches designed for the mainstream, they provide a means for consultation processes, and ultimately the democratic system, to function more effectively.

This first chapter looks at the issue of consultation and how ICT is changing approaches and providing new learning on how to involve citizens and communities. An analysis of recent developments is complemented by case studies of current use, with a concluding section on issues to consider.

### At a glance

#### What is happening?

- Declining participation in formal representative politics (e.g. membership of political parties and voting at elections)
- Increasing engagement of the public in decision-making (e.g. in evidence to parliamentary select committees)
- Use of online tools to facilitate debate (e.g. pilots at a national and local level)
- Local government is expected (though not strictly compelled) to consider the voluntary and community sector in policy development

Opportunities 	Risks 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity for VCOs to increase influence with policy makers by collecting and passing on the views of users (acting as an intermediary)</li> <li>• Online consultations can be relatively efficient and effective</li> <li>• ICT can enable more transparent consultation processes</li> <li>• Opportunity to deepen relationships with supporters and users by openly taking account of their views and experiences, and then feeding back results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government wishing to bypass VCOs in order to reach ‘the public’</li> <li>• Private and public sector organisations with more resources and expertise in using ICT moving into the ‘participation’ arena</li> <li>• ICT making consultation too cheap and easy, thereby resulting in more poorly thought-through consultation</li> </ul>

## Context: political participation is changing

The traditional certainties of the British political system – a representative parliamentary democracy, where citizens elect politicians to represent them – have gradually eroded to the point where commentators talk of having reached a crisis point. Many of the current trends influencing British politics revolve around this core dynamic of representation. Some commentators look upon changes in forms of political participation negatively, seeing them as symptoms of a good system's decline; whilst others interpret the change more favourably, as 'evolution'. Whether they are good or otherwise, it is clear that conventional modes of political participation are being reconfigured, and new structures and forms of expression are replacing some altogether. ICT is beginning to play a role in this reconfiguration.

Whilst over half of adults in the UK say they are interested in politics, fewer are participating in traditional ways such as voting in general elections and joining political parties.<sup>2</sup> If parties are playing a reduced role in connecting the public with the political process at local, national or international levels, then it has been argued that VCOs will be able to legitimately claim the status of 'representative organisations' in ways that political parties no longer can.<sup>3</sup> But this is not without challenge: VCOs are often set up to further the interests of certain groups or address particular (increasingly single) issues in contrast to the wider remit of political parties. Moreover, ICT is likely to facilitate the emergence of single-issue groups, as it will enable even more niche (but inevitably disparate) individuals and communities to connect with each other. As such, there is still a need for the strategic overview and mediation between competing demands and needs that representative institutions can provide.

Evidence suggests that engagement might be encouraged if it is less episodic. A recent survey of political activists<sup>4</sup> stated that 80% were 'absolutely certain' to vote compared to 50% of non-activists.<sup>5</sup> This may suggest that more frequent involvement in politics between elections might increase the likelihood of voting at elections. In trying to avoid low voter turnout and boost political engagement, there is a growing consensus that greater engagement of the public in decision-making, especially at a local level, is required. This has been translated into government (national and local) inviting the public to participate in decision-making at various stages of the policy process: from analysis, through implementation, to evaluation. Yet it has been argued that much of this new engagement with the public is not taking place in statutory bodies, but within 'new governance spaces' such as deliberative forums. Increasingly these are both online and offline.<sup>6</sup> The VCS is ideally suited to generating and facilitating these spaces, and for developing innovative ways of including the public in decision-making that move beyond conventional consultation.

*All the signs indicate that we will see increasing innovation in this area [new kinds of conversation], even though it remains unclear which forms work best in terms of delivering good decisions and making people feel engaged. There will also be competition between governments, parties, the media and NGOs as to who is best placed to hold such conversations.*

– Geoff Mulgan, *Post Party Politics: Can participation reconnect people and government?* (Involve, 2006)

2. *An Audit of Political Engagement 3*, (Electoral Commission and Hansard Society, 2006)

3. Ben Rogers, 'From Membership to Management?' in *Parliamentary Affairs* 58:3 (Oxford University Press and Hansard Society, 2005)

4. Defined as those who have been involved in at least three political acts, excluding voting, over the course of three years

5. *An Audit of Political Engagement 3*, (Electoral Commission and Hansard Society, 2006)

6. A good example is The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, which has developed a community consultation model called Planning for Real. See [www.nif.co.uk/planningforreal/](http://www.nif.co.uk/planningforreal/)

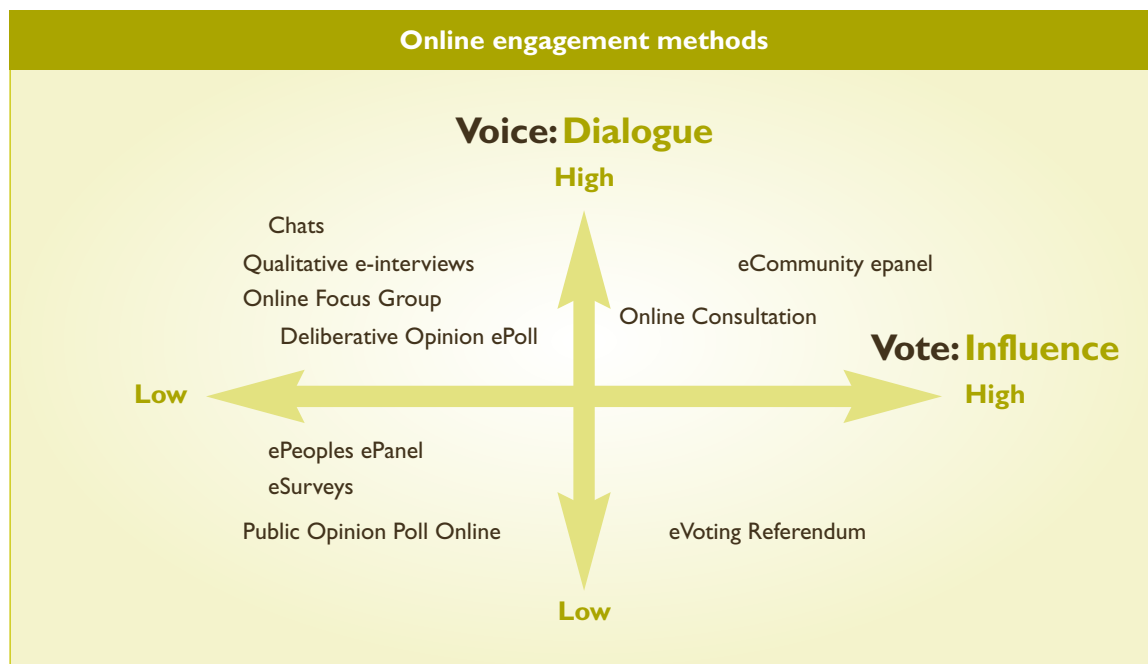
## ICT-enabled innovations: experimenting with online consultations

ICT is enabling organisations in all sectors to experiment with new and enhanced ways of engaging citizens and stakeholder groups. A range of participatory methods has been explored: some are completely new; others simply vary established tools and approaches. Our focus here is on those participatory methods and structures that have emerged as a result of widening access to, and literacy in, ICT.

*The challenge for contemporary democracy is not to create new technologies for delivering and new audiences for receiving online spin, but to develop engaging ways for citizens to connect, interact and make a difference. I call this DIY politics.*

– Stephen Coleman, Spinning the Web (Hansard Society, 2005)

Government is particularly keen to assess the contribution that technology can make to the political process. In early 2006, for example, the Department for Constitutional Affairs initiated a series of public consultation exercises using deliberative online forums, blogs and instant messenger/chat platforms. The ‘Digital Dialogues’ pilot allowed government departments to explore ways in which technologies could be deployed and how those being consulted would react to its opportunities. At a local government level, a major exercise was launched by the former ODPM’s (now DCLG’s) ‘Local eDemocracy National Project’ to promote better interaction between citizens, representatives and local authorities using ICT. However, problems remain: for example, there is significant variation in usability and accessibility standards between local authority websites, while awareness levels are uneven.<sup>7</sup>



Source: *Bowling Together: Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation* (Hansard Society, 2001)

The UK Parliament, amongst all the UK-based institutions, has conducted the most sustained investigations into the merits of technology-led participation. Parliament first began its exploration of online consultation in 1997 and has since commissioned over 25 online forums through which parliamentary bodies have encouraged public deliberation on legislation and policy.<sup>8</sup> Smaller-scale projects have been trialled at a local government level, also with promising results.<sup>9</sup>

7. E-government Bulletin, Issue 218, July 2006. [www.headstar.com/egb/special/websites-si-july06.pdf](http://www.headstar.com/egb/special/websites-si-july06.pdf)

8. An account of the parliamentary forums is available at: [www.hansardsociety.org.uk/programmes/e-democracy/tellparliament](http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/programmes/e-democracy/tellparliament)

9. *Deeper and wider community engagement – Local eDemocracy National Projects Benefits study* (IDEA, 2006)

## ● LESSONS FROM PARLIAMENT'S ONLINE FORUMS

The forums have had either open or closed access depending on whether Parliament wants to hear from the general public or a particular segment of opinion. The forums are asynchronous<sup>10</sup> and run over a period of at least three weeks (the longest running for eight weeks). A system of moderation is employed whereby participant contributions are measured against pre-agreed terms and conditions and the objectives of the consultation.

### Benefits to citizens:

- Consultations are accessible 24 hours a day from a location of their own choosing
- The tone, look and feel are designed to make the process of contributing less intimidating
- There is not the same requirement for contributions to be heavy on detail as there would be in written or oral evidence
- Participants are able to give experiential evidence, provided in their 'own voice'
- In feedback gathered at the end of each forum, citizen participants spoke of an enhanced perception of their own efficacy and the responsiveness of Parliament

### Benefits to Parliamentarians:

- Consultations are accessible 24 hours a day from a location of their own choosing
- The forum automatically aggregates contributions, allowing them to sift the data by key search terms and demographics
- Conducting consultations online engages the 'hard-to-reach' as well as those experienced in participating through more conventional structures

## VCOs are exploiting ICTs to lobby for change...

Both those designing policy and scrutinising it are convinced that there is value in involving the public in policy development to a greater extent. However, the scale and regularity required by a programme of enhanced stakeholder engagement, which the public will trust and that will result in robust policy, has made both government and Parliament cautious. They have looked at the existing opportunities for the public to participate in the policy process and have judged these routes to have become clogged, in many cases, by campaign and lobby groups – many of whom are VCOs – who over-represent their own agendas under the cover of 'the public interest'. As a result, they are concerned that if they were to invest in new structures then these would only provide more options to those 'usual suspects' – a classification that for some policy makers includes VCOs.

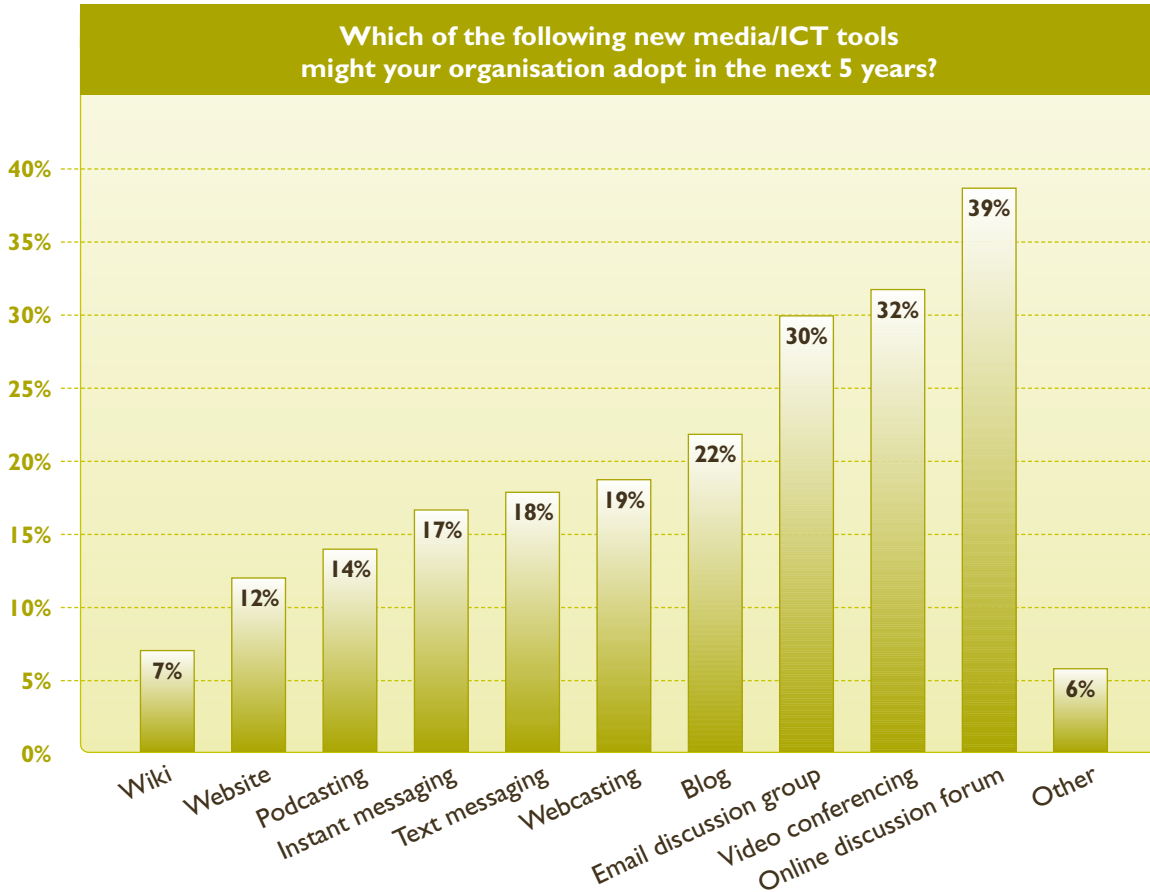
*Politicians are particularly concerned about participants seeking to undermine representative governance by claiming unique legitimacy in speaking on behalf of fellow citizens... However, there is a danger in expressing reservations about public participation within policy-making as if it were the same thing as the public making decisions instead of elected representatives. Policy-making and decision-making are linked, but separate roles.*

– Stephen Coleman, *Bowling Together: Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation* (Hansard Society, 2001)

Of course, the VCS has a recognised and constructive role in the making and scrutiny of policy. International, national and community-level VCOs often bring their causes before Parliament and government, invoke the public interest legitimately and engage in sustained campaigns for change. Their proximity to communities gives them valuable expertise, research, practitioner experience or the ability to speak on behalf of marginal groups unlikely to keep the interest of the media. ICT can help to consolidate this contribution, whilst also enhancing its credibility.

10. A type of two-way communication that occurs with a time delay, allowing participants to respond at their own convenience

Evidence from our survey of VCOs would suggest that there is substantial, though not overwhelming, interest in using ICTs to engage with users and stakeholders. When asked which ICT applications they would consider adopting in the next five years, blogs (22%) and webcasting (19%) featured highly, but it was deliberative forums that came top of respondents' 'wish-list' (39%). The low priority placed on websites (12%) may reflect already high levels of deployment though this, of course, does not necessarily reflect their level of interactivity.



Source: NCVO/Hansard Society (2006)

By providing the means to engage in consultation, such web-based forums are likely to be useful to VCOs as well as to parliamentary bodies. For example, when a campaigning organisation becomes aware of a crucial government green paper, rather than simply submitting a formal response paper or attending a government-organised stakeholder meeting, the organisation may choose to set up a forum and hook the debate around the government's consultation questions. It would then invite its stakeholders to use the site and submit the resulting discussion as evidence alongside any conventional response. The organisation would be consulting with its stakeholders, providing them with a platform to share their own ideas, opinions and perspectives, whilst also giving their campaign a boost by being transparent about how they reached their position.

*Websites were traditionally a communication medium and now the tools we provide cut across networking, team support, teleworking, campaign/project organisation as well as communications activities, especially when the 'comms' work is now allowed to become more personal and targeted. In the end it's about universal engagement, without boundaries.*

– Dan Dixon, Headshift, interviewed March 2006

## ...and to consult more widely with their own stakeholders

A widening range of ICT applications are increasingly available to help VCOs to communicate and consult with their stakeholders. Some are increasingly familiar: for example, blogs<sup>11</sup> can allow stakeholders to comment on the organisation's activity on an ongoing basis without the need for intensive facilitation.<sup>12</sup> Although allowing staff or stakeholders to blog can make it harder for an organisation to control its public communications and reputation, it has been argued that the payback is enhanced trust. Institutions that are perceived to let go of control and allow a diversity of voices to be heard are reported to be perceived as more trustworthy. Such 'rolling consultations' might start as a novelty but – with the right strategic direction and resources – can become productive, mainstream channels for dialogue between an organisation and those it represents. Moreover, as the internet is joined by more powerful forms of mobile technology, the potential for regular, yet manageable, consultation will greatly expand.

*VCOs tend often to act individually, so beside the adoption of new and innovative tools, there must be an organisational mind shift that will include a loss of control over their supporter base. This is an issue for big groups, while smaller ones are usually more flexible in their activities and decision-making.*

– Gillo Cutrupi, TotalTactics.org, interviewed March 2006

## ICT is facilitating collaborative consultation between sectors

ICT should also encourage greater collaboration between VCOs and those making or scrutinising policy. Precedent already exists where VCOs have provided select committee inquiries with access to their online forums and established 'participant bases'. Facilitation is required for policy-orientated forums to work well and deliver consensus or usable data, and in recent years VCOs have taken up the challenge of providing this service for both Parliament and government (see the Diabetes Dialogue case study on pages 15 and 16). Developing these partnerships could prove valuable in sending the public a clear message about the legitimacy of the policy process and do much to encourage the active citizenship that democracies require to stay vibrant and progressive.

## Issues to consider

ICT offers opportunities to consult more widely and regularly with your stakeholders in a cost-effective way. However, there are some important strategic questions to ask before you start:

- Are you prepared to devolve or share decision-making power?
- Are you willing to act once you have asked stakeholders about what they think?
- Do you have processes in place to feed back to those who contribute?
- How will you ensure that you are transparent about how the recommendations you make relate to data collected, so that individuals can trust you as a channel for their views?

Good consultation exercises need adequate resources. Consultation via technology, for all its aggregative and logistical qualities, is no different to offline methods:

- Do you have sufficient capacity for management and facilitation?
- Have you spent enough time considering and agreeing the objectives of a consultation?

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11. A blog is a website that resembles a time-stamped journal, runs in reverse chronological order, is frequently updated and allows commenting from visitors on specific, individual posts.

12. A good example of a VCO blog comes from YouthNet UK. They have a blog for staff [www.youthnet.org/blog/page/blog](http://www.youthnet.org/blog/page/blog) – and another for volunteers [www.do-it.org.uk/magazine/blogs](http://www.do-it.org.uk/magazine/blogs).

Technology cannot guarantee universal coverage even in an age of mass, always-on communications. Not everyone has the skills and confidence to use technology to participate, nor should access to technology be assumed to be universal:

- How can ICT enhance and support your existing methods and structures?
- How do you relate the information collected by online methods with information collected by other (offline) means?
- How can you ensure that you reach all of your stakeholders, including those who do not choose to engage with you online?

## Conclusion

The practical tools and resources underpinning the trends identified in the discussion above are widely available, ranging from the relatively costly, tailored packages through to open source approaches or off-the-shelf packages. Navigating your way through the many options might be helped by using some of the VCS infrastructure resources available in the sector (such as the ICT hub), asking peer organisations what they have used, or simply finding out who among your workforce or trustees has skills in this area.

Whichever approach you adopt, engaging in consultation – particularly that of a deliberative nature – can do much to improve the relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders. It also increases your influence with policy makers. However, effective, manageable consultation is not as simple as putting up a website and sending out an email inviting people to ‘have a say’. Indeed, doing it well is difficult. Consultation exercises that take this passive approach are almost certain to fail and will do more harm than good because false expectations can be raised and people’s time wasted. ICT is not a shortcut, but it does provide a wider range of options, many of which are well-suited to the resources and values of the VCS.

### ● CASE STUDY

#### Diabetes Dialogue [[www.diabetesdialogue.org.uk](http://www.diabetesdialogue.org.uk)]

**The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Diabetes** was set up to monitor diabetes care in the UK. They believed that the best way for Ministers, parliamentarians and officials to find out how policies were being translated into ‘front line’ service delivery was to consult directly with grassroots stakeholders. To do so within the Group’s tight budgetary and time constraints, it turned to the option of an online deliberative forum.

The first ‘Diabetes Dialogue’ consultation ran for seven weeks in 2004 at [www.tellparliament.net/diabetesdialogue](http://www.tellparliament.net/diabetesdialogue). It examined issues around quality of life, adequacy of service provision and funding. Over 250 people took part in the consultation, including patients, their families, healthcare professionals and medical experts. The result was a unique insight into diabetes services, showing what works and where improvements still had to be made. Such was the positive experience of the APPG and the participants, that it was decided that ‘Diabetes Dialogue’ should be run on an annual basis.

The second ‘Diabetes Dialogue’ consultation ran for five weeks in 2005 on its own dedicated website, [www.diabetesdialogue.org.uk](http://www.diabetesdialogue.org.uk). The forum focused on five aspects of national diabetes frameworks and attracted over 500 participants.

*continued overleaf...*

**Case Study (Diabetes Dialogue) continued from previous page...**

Diabetes UK played a vital role in the success of 'Diabetes Dialogue' in its role as a partner organisation. Diabetes UK works with people with diabetes, their carers and families. With over 170,000 members and a network of offices across the UK, it was in a perfect position to help the APPG build the visibility of its consultation. The organisation drove traffic to the site and provided reference materials to encourage informed debate. Through its involvement in the consultation, Diabetes UK was able to show that it was not just geared for lobbying but also capable of supporting open, constructive scrutiny.

The APPG was struck by the proportion of participants who were people with diabetes, or their families; in previous consultation exercises, the majority of views had been from practitioners or experts. The APPG were able to see where practitioners' opinion and lay opinion differed on the quality of care and its coverage – findings that the Group would not otherwise have had access to. The structured nature of the deliberation also allowed the participants to move from providing opinions to discussing solutions.

Reports from both the 2004 and 2005 'Diabetes Dialogue' forums are available at [www.diabetesdialogue.org.uk](http://www.diabetesdialogue.org.uk)

## ● CASE STUDY

### Netmums [[www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com)]

**Netmums is a web-based network** of groups around the UK for mothers with young children. It is run on a voluntary basis by mothers for mothers and has 150,000 members, 40% of whom are from low-income families. The network is not a charity but describes itself as a 'social enterprise with third sector values'. Support has been forthcoming from the commercial sector and includes BT, the Early Learning Centre and digital children's TV channel, Nick Jr.

Whilst there is a lot of information available for parents at the national level, Netmums claims that it is unique in providing local information. Though the network has community-based volunteers, Netmums says that ICT has been the key in providing this service effectively and sustainably.

Their use of ICT revolves around a central website that branches off into micro-sites and forums – all designed, built and maintained by the network itself. Although it says that it would be interested in exploring new technology, Netmums is conscious that whilst its online tools may not be at the cutting-edge, they are accessible to all its members no matter what the quality of their computer or speed of their internet connection.

In 2005 the government proposed to make several changes to the regulations around employment rights and maternity. With many of its members regularly expressing concerns about the employment choices available to them, Netmums decided it was necessary to take this opportunity to raise the wider concerns, and to describe the vast range of issues facing mothers trying to balance home and work. From 12-18 May 2005, Netmums conducted an online survey of 4,000 mothers of young children.

As a result, a report was produced providing an account of the survey and the findings generated. This was submitted in response to the DTI's consultation, *Work and Families: Choice and Flexibility*. In her response to the survey the Minister for Women and Equality, Meg Munn, said 'Thank you for your report on your recent survey, "the Great Work Debate", which has fed into the DTI's Work and Families consultation on Choice and Flexibility. This helps to give us an insight into the day to day issues that parents are dealing with in their everyday lives.'

## ● CAMPAIGNING

### Introduction



Despite the emphasis increasingly placed on the service delivery role of VCOs, campaigning continues to be central to the values and activities of the sector. ICT clearly has an important role to play here: whether in terms of linking previously disparate organisations or active citizens, providing new opportunities to raise awareness, or enabling campaigners to demonstrate support more effectively than previously possible. Moreover, many VCOs have demonstrated a capacity for innovation around the use of ICT, using a broad range of tools and approaches that have proved surprisingly effective.

This second chapter explores some of these new approaches and ideas, supported by an increasing amount of evidence which suggests that ICT-enabled campaigning fits with current lifestyles, but that the challenge for much of the sector might be keeping up with the fast pace of developments. Case studies and issues for future consideration again supplement the analysis.

### At a glance

#### What is happening?

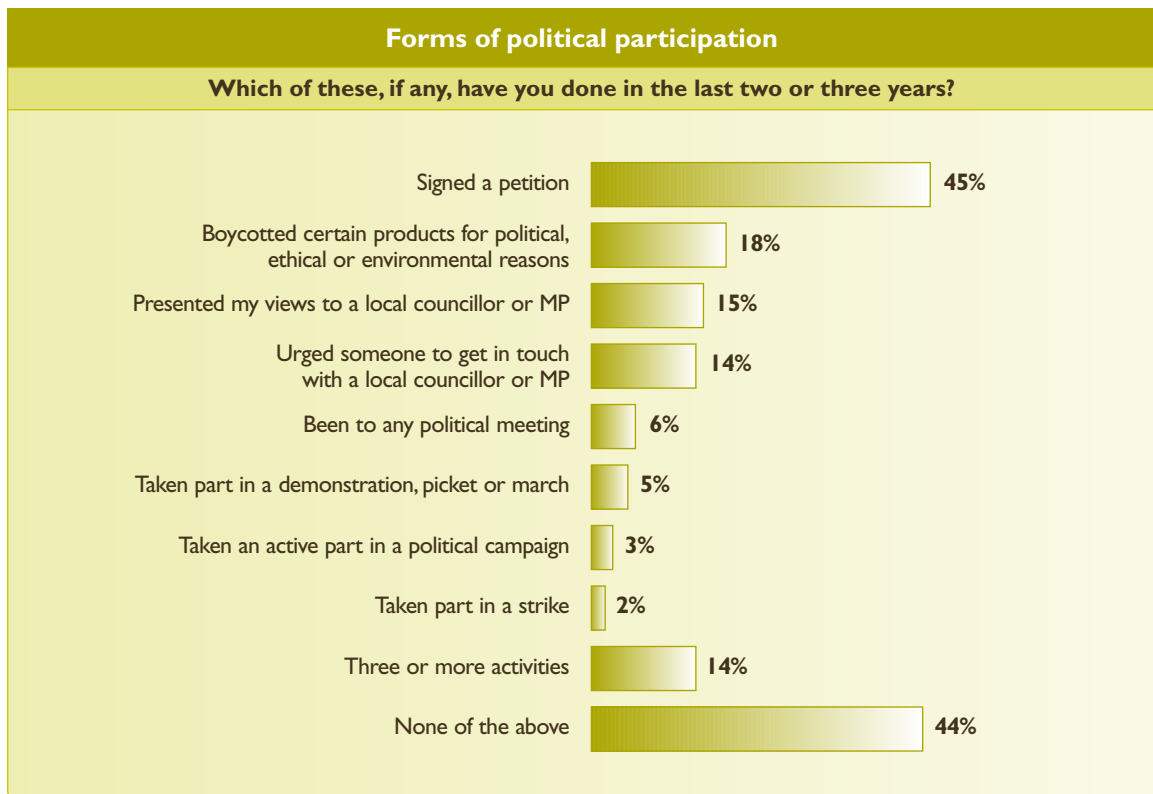
- A rise in single-issue politics and engagement in less formal political structures
- Much more interest in collaborative approaches to campaigning through coalitions
- Increasingly media and web-literate population who are difficult to reach and generally cynical about marketing and communications
- Widespread use of 'net activism' (e.g. use of electronic mailing lists and online petitions)
- Increasing recognition of the potential of 'social software' (tools that exploit the networking potential of the web) for campaigning

<b>Opportunities</b> 	<b>Risks</b> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The more immediate nature of communications make short, rapid approaches to campaigning more feasible</li> <li>• Web-based tools offer the potential for more accountable and transparent campaigns, in particular making it easier to feed back directly to supporters</li> <li>• Increasing ease of use and widening familiarity make web-based tools accessible even for the smallest VCOs, enabling organisations to quickly establish a campaigning presence</li> <li>• Technologies such as e-mail and online petitions facilitate participation amongst groups who otherwise might self-exclude for cultural (such as young people) or commitment (the cash-rich/time-poor) reasons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk-averse VCOs fail to connect with supporters whose lifestyles are increasingly digitally oriented</li> <li>• ICT lowers barriers to entry, meaning that it becomes harder for organisations to distinguish themselves from an increasing number of messages</li> <li>• ICT enables more, sometimes dissenting, voices to be heard, making campaigns potentially more difficult to control or focus</li> </ul>

## Context: citizens are expressing their political identities in new ways

The first chapter has already highlighted the concern of politicians and commentators alike that the habits and norms – voting, joining parties, activism – that have traditionally underpinned the British democratic system are disappearing. Such concerns perhaps reached a hiatus after the 2001 general election, with particular concerns around the low turnout amongst young people. Was it disengagement, apathy, lack of awareness or were people just so content that they didn't feel the need to go to the polls? If people were dropping out of the electoral process in increasing numbers, what would be the implications for other forms of active citizenship and, in turn, democracy?

Some of these concerns might have been overdone. Analysis is increasingly distinguishing between the deeper problems of civic engagement (participating in State affairs) and relatively healthy civil engagement (participation in community activities, often through VCOs).<sup>13</sup> Attempts to better understand what is shaping politics and political participation particularly highlighted evidence of a trend for mobilisation around single issues and engagement in less formal structures.<sup>14</sup> Although traditional political engagement is in decline, participation more broadly is not. 44% of the population volunteered formally at least once in 2005 (29% volunteered formally at least once a month during the same year)<sup>15</sup> and 45% have signed a petition in the last two or three years.<sup>16</sup>



Source: Ipsos MORI for An audit of political engagement 3 (2006)

People are increasingly choosing to express their personal political identity in a variety of ways. Some are less direct, others relatively 'low-key', with a mix of both individual and communal approaches. Boycotting products, ethical consumerism more broadly, signing petitions, going on demonstrations and sending out links to websites are some of the best-known examples.

13. Jochum, et al, *Civil renewal and active citizenship: a guide to the debate* (NCVO, 2005)

14. Gerry Stoker, *Why Politics Matters – Making democracy work* (Palgrave, 2006)

15. 2005 Citizenship Survey (DCLG, 2006)

16. *An audit of political engagement 3* (Hansard Society and the Electoral Commission, 2006)

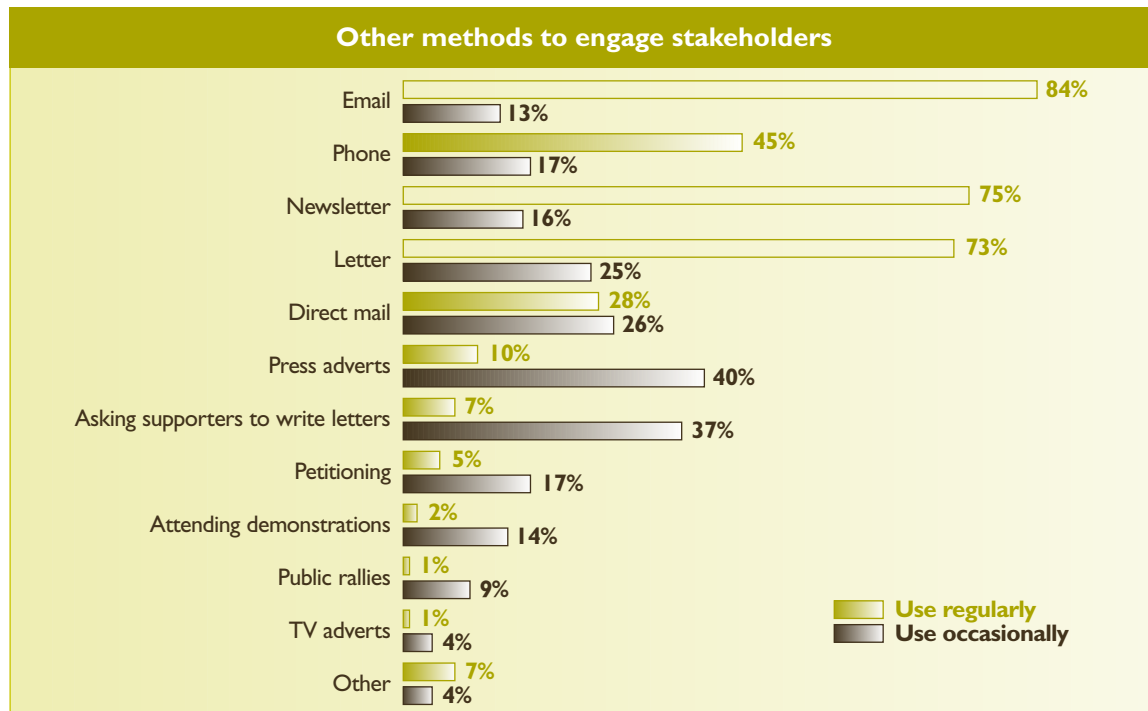
Many of these new modes of engagement are often associated with protest movements, which itself might signal dissatisfaction with traditional political structures or campaigning approaches. Recent examples highlighted in the media centred upon animal welfare, climate change, child access rights, anti-war movements and petrol pricing. Whether or not these activities constitute legitimate political engagement remains a matter of debate; but it cannot be ignored that for many citizens, ethical consumerism or posting a picture on a website<sup>17</sup> is increasingly being seen as a more powerful way to ‘have a say’ than exercising their right to vote.

That this trend is particularly pronounced amongst young people provides hope to some who see it as evidence of a general, consistent but latent interest in politics. Others, however, view this ‘atomisation’ as being the very factor that is eating away at political engagement. If the former is correct, it might be the case that the relative literacy of those who have grown up with the new ICTs might be harnessed to convert latency into engagement. The following sections explore some of the ways in which the sector is already making this happen.

## Campaigning organisations are familiar with the techniques of ‘net activism’...

Although VCOs have rightly addressed the needs of communities by increasingly delivering services, it remains the case that campaigning for change is fundamental to the mission and values of the sector. Campaigning involves a range of activities like lobbying, direct action and raising issues in the media. Whether local, national or international in focus, the most effective campaigns use their activities as a means to an end – to maximise impact by changing the policies or behaviours of individuals and institutions.

Our survey of VCOs explored the use of ‘traditional’ methods of engaging stakeholders in order to benchmark the uptake of newer, ICT-enabled approaches. Communications channels (e.g. letter, email, phone and newsletters) featured highly but there was also significant use of ‘political’ methods such as attending demonstrations (14%), asking supporters to write letters (37%) and petitioning (17%).



Source: NCVO/Hansard Society (2006)

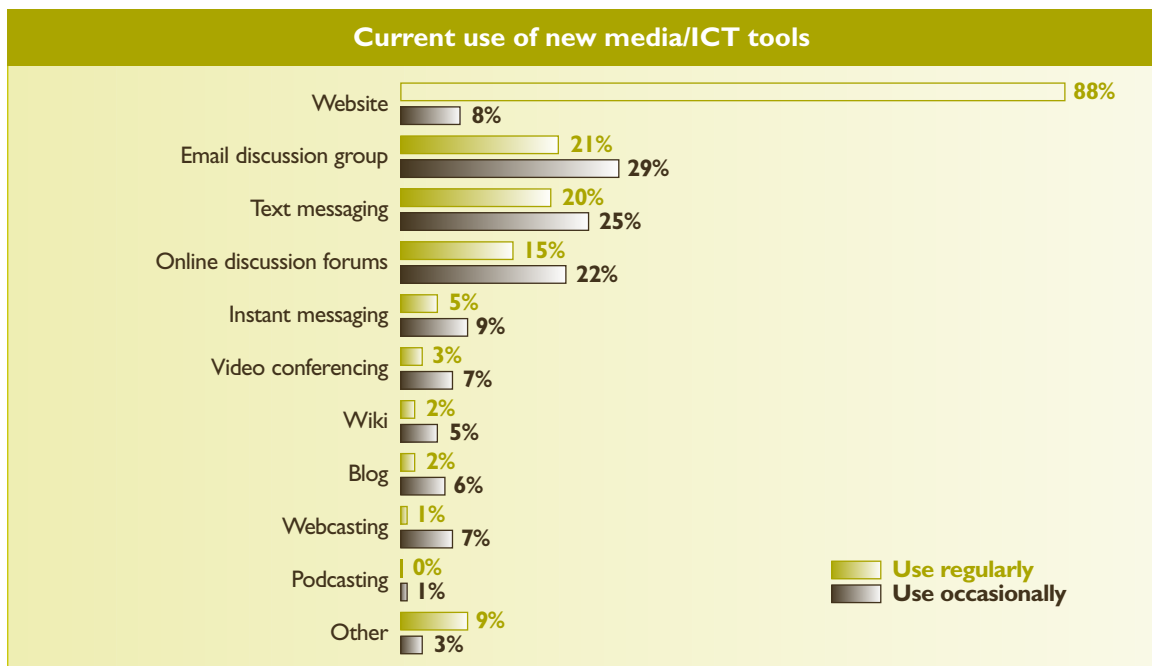
17. A good example is [www.werenotafraid.com](http://www.werenotafraid.com), established after the ‘7/7’ London bombings.

An increasingly ICT literate population might, however, be open to communications and transactions that are associated with the emergence of the web (and the technologies often referred to under the ‘Web 2.0’ banner<sup>18</sup>) and mobile communications. If so, a number of more effective campaigning tools might quickly gain acceptance in the sector.

Some of these approaches are already a decade old. The VCS was quick to grasp the concept of ‘net activism’ in the mid 1990s: electronic mailing lists were set up to ensure news and developments got out quickly to subscribers. Emails usually contained links back to the organisation’s website where (over time) opportunities were then provided to send pre-written e-cards to politicians, sign online petitions, donate, or simply read the latest news report. These web-based techniques have become part of the established toolkit available to campaigners. Now this ‘first wave’ is being supplemented by an assortment of new applications that are more interactive, integrated and immediate.

### ... but are less familiar with newer participative tools

The emergence of increasingly sophisticated web-based tools offers VCOs the potential to make their campaigns more prominent, creative and cost-effective. Blogs, discussion forums, instant messaging and podcasting are all examples of what the new media industry has dubbed ‘participatory media’ and ‘social software’.<sup>19</sup> All of these tools exploit the networking potential of the web while offering significant scope for bespoke configuration. All are widely available, while those developed collaboratively by the open source movement (known as ‘open source’ software) are generally free to purchase. These have the potential to put publishing and distribution within the reach of even small-scale organisations, particularly as ease of installation and use gradually improves.



Source: NCVO/Hansard Society (2006)

Respondents to our survey indicated a confident but conservative use of ICT for the purposes of ‘getting the message out’. Websites (88%) were by far the most standard applications used to communicate with stakeholders, followed by email. Further research might differentiate between those websites that are effectively an online ‘brochure’, and those that offer a greater degree of interaction. More ‘innovative’ and ‘interactive’ applications, such as podcasting and wikis<sup>20</sup>, were acknowledged but used to a far lesser extent.

18. Refers to a second generation of services available on the web that let people collaborate and share information online – for example, blogs, wikis, tags and podcasts

19. The Economist, ‘Among the audience – A survey of new media’, 20 April 2006

20. A wiki is a web resource that allows users to add content to or edit a webpage

Of the technologies now available, it is perhaps blogs<sup>21</sup> that offer the best potential. Where websites provide an information source, blogs now also provide commenting features that enable visitors to compose their own statements of support for a campaign, rather than passively signing up to a pre-scripted statement. Many bloggers have their own sites: bloggers linking to or supporting the campaign websites of bigger, less-trusted institutions might lend a credibility and authenticity that is difficult to get in other ways. In addition, a web of linkages helps build the campaign's network traffic and exposure.

Anticipating the potency and authenticity of such 'peer-to-peer networking', some campaigns entrust promotion to the grassroots supporters they are trying to attract. Make Poverty History, for example, invited authors and owners of all types of websites to add a simple, uniform banner to their homepage – the digital equivalent of the wristband – as a striking visual expression of political support (see the case study below).

## **New technologies are connecting dispersed supporters**

New technologies are a truly disruptive force in that they offer VCOs the ability to significantly increase their visibility beyond their usual communities of interest or geography. ICTs have for some time heralded the 'death of distance', but less attention has been paid to how so-called 'rich media' content (such as video and audio) traditionally distributed by the TV and radio broadcast networks can be directed to those who campaigners find hard to reach.

Using sound and video, organisations can make their campaigns brighter, bolder and less text dependent. Again, the necessary software is becoming cheaper, easier to use and less demanding in terms of hardware requirements, whilst most modern web browsers are able to handle rich media content. Such content can be distributed 'virally' through email or integrated back into visitors' own sites; this could open up new forms of campaign activism where the initiative lies with the public rather than a central coordinating organisation. Needless to say, this is also significantly cheaper and easier to monitor than traditional broadcast methods.

The ability to both 'timeshift' (make content available at any time) and 'placeshift' (make content available anywhere) makes web-based communications more valuable than broadcast or printed media campaigns. Localised issues can be given international exposure, while international stories can be given a local angle. Whereas broadcast-driven communications were time-scheduled (and by definition were available only in a finite period dictated by media costs), web-based communications can be prolonged, or even staggered, lengthening the potential window during which exposure is possible.

International NGOs have been quick to take advantage, but there are also opportunities for small campaigning groups. Local campaigns – pushing for shared goals but separated by many time zones – could begin to link up and collaborate, whether simply by referencing each other or by pooling audiences and resources. For example, local environmental groups in different countries (but operating under the same supranational legislation or multinational corporations) might find that ICTs facilitate collaboration that was previously impossible due to logistical obstacles.

Those online communications that stand out and successfully maintain their momentum are spread by 'peer-to-peer' distribution, where a central coordinating function is not required or desired. Most of this exchange is conducted via email but 'social software' is being specifically developed to tap into the public's appetite for media-sharing in a way that standard websites never could. Sometimes this is as simple as adding a 'tell-a-friend' form on a page; whereas with blogging, the idea of networking – linking to and commenting on other blogs – is central to the practice.

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21. A blog is a website that resembles a time-stamped journal, runs in reverse chronological order, is frequently updated and allows commenting from visitors on specific, individual posts

## Campaign space is becoming more crowded and competitive

All the cost, efficiency, distribution and participatory features offered by ICT are immensely liberating for VCOs, previously used to surviving on scraps of airtime and competing with big-spend commercial campaigns. However, just as technology presents campaigning opportunities, it also challenges traditional, established organisations and their practices.

The features that make ICT-led campaigning feasible for established VCOs, also make it feasible for individuals to set up and run their own campaigns. Private individuals now have access to tools and networks through which they are able to organise, collate resources, attract support, monitor marketing and promote their causes. With their lack of assets and reduced overheads, these enterprises might be more flexible, more innovative and more successful than established VCOs. Organisations need to avoid the temptation to see this as a threat. As 'old' media companies are learning slowly and surely, aggressive 'space grabbing' in the new communicative and informative environment does not work. Instead VCOs need to be adaptive and confident and consider collaborating with other organisations.

*Action Network users often talk about the sense of empowerment they gain from taking action. This is because they start to make connections with other people in their community, when previously they didn't even know their neighbours. They work together and build the capabilities of their community to deal with issues. So even if they don't win the campaign at hand, they're better able to respond the next time a challenge arises. In short, people who take action end up feeling better about their lives and where they live.*

– Martin Vogel, BBC Action Network, interviewed in March 2006

Over the course of the next five years, the internet and its applications will be joined by mobile devices and narrowcast TV. Campaigns will launch and spread more quickly, and people will have more opportunities to act upon them. It will be possible to target by geography, age and interest more effectively than before.

The VCOs that are successful in years to come will be those that make the best strategic choices about technology's contribution to their services and values. Good campaigning – like good consultation – will increasingly be launched through a multitude of channels to make it more appealing and easy to access by the public when, where and how they want it.

## Issues to consider

ICT represents the best chance for VCOs to compete in the busy, mass communication spaces of the 21st century. The 'democratisation' of media driven by grassroots use of 'social software' chimes with the core values of the VCS. However, there are some important strategic questions to ask before you start:

- Are you aware of the role that ICT currently plays in your organisation?
- What support do you need?
- Are you in tune with the changing tastes and modes of communication used by the citizens you hope to engage?
- Do you consider ICT as simply a communications strategy or do you consider how it can be used to increase engagement?

*VCOs need to find trustworthy people who they could talk to. When I say trustworthy I mean people who know about technology but who might well say, "Actually your organisation doesn't need to apply all these tools, there is no role for them". What is lacking at the moment is independent advice on these issues.*

– Tom Steinberg, MySociety, interviewed April 2006

It is now even harder to control the agenda of the communications environment that VCOs operate in. The point of the new 'participatory media environment' is that there is less chance for domination by a single party or interest.

- Is it more sensible to find out and highlight what people are saying about an issue rather than launch your own promotional activity to force the issue in the mainstream media?

## Conclusion

The new technologies described above are not a cure-all for the difficulties and challenges faced by VCOs wishing to achieve social or political change. Used strategically, they provide the means to be more effective, accountable and reactive. Associated monitoring packages and analysis tools ('analytics') now also provide instantaneous feedback, allowing organisations to continuously develop and sustain the momentum of their campaigns.

But the new tools are not a replacement for core campaigning skills and competencies. It is also clear that many of these approaches require new 'skillsets' and resources. As in the conclusion to the first chapter, it is clear that VCOs will need support and guidance to take advantage of ICTs. In the case of campaigning organisations, some of the best examples to follow might be some of the most low-cost, individual approaches of web-only 'organisations'.

### ● CASE STUDY

#### Jamie's BigVoice [[www.jamiesbigvoice.com](http://www.jamiesbigvoice.com)]

**During the 2005 general election campaign**, the homelessness charity, Crisis, was concerned about the lack of attention on homelessness issues. The charity needed a creative communications exercise that would freshen the homelessness issue, get it on the election agenda of the broadcasters and political parties, and encourage public debate.

They decided to use a blog and invited Jamie McCoy, a 54 year old, ex-homeless, former addict, to become the author. The charity hoped that it would raise the visibility of their election-based campaigns by blogging, but the method of delivery – via a blog authored by a private individual and on which the public was able to voice its support or criticism – meant that Crisis had to accede a lot of control over the content and its exposure.

The results of this innovative communication campaign were positive. The blog was picked up by the mainstream press and broadcast media, including The Times and CNN. The presence of the blog encouraged a number of candidates to discuss the issues and visit the site to post their comments. Crisis also felt that their campaign was given extra credibility by placing trust in Jamie to take on the challenge and deliver a running commentary of the election in his own distinct voice.

Jamie still enjoys blogging on homelessness issues and politics in general, and encourages others to view blogging as a useful way of engaging in society.

## ● CASE STUDY

### Make Poverty History [[www.makepovertyhistory.org](http://www.makepovertyhistory.org)]

**Make Poverty History** has been one of the most widely supported and recognised campaigns in recent years. A broadly-based coalition of charities, trade unions, campaigning groups and celebrities mobilised around key events in 2005 – principally the G8 Summit hosted in the UK – to urge national governments and international institutions to change policy on trade, debt and aid.

Make Poverty History was memorable for its creativity and ubiquity. The coalition also made the most of online campaigning techniques and demonstrated that the web was no longer solely a channel for niche markets, rather it could ensure a cost-effective, high-visibility campaign, particularly where the target audience is young people. Two approaches stood out for their coverage and innovative approach – their use of banners ads, and virtual rallies.

Many people recall first becoming aware of the campaign through seeing a banner ad on the web. Banners were not just placed on the sites of mainstream media companies and news groups, but also on those of a diverse group of organisations and private individuals. Clicking on one of these banners directed people back to the corporate site where they could find out more about the campaign and ways of supporting it. In this way, the campaign's coordinators cleverly placed their resources at the centre of a network that then grew organically through peer-to-peer distribution, ultimately achieving visibility across large swathes of the web.

The campaign brought large numbers of people together in public to demonstrate their support through sheer numbers. In addition to these 'offline gatherings', the campaign also brought people together online. G8rally.com was a good example of such sites. Where some of the sites were forums and chatrooms, G8rally.com placed more emphasis on accessible and attractive visual content. Users of the site arrived, signed up and could then create a unique, quirky avatar<sup>22</sup>. Each avatar had a placard and users could compose their own short message about poverty and their hopes for its eradication. This message and their name were then added to the Make Poverty History petition submitted to G8 leaders. Demonstrators placed the avatar on a virtual Edinburgh landscape from where they could interact with others and read their messages. In total, 53,439 people took part in the virtual rally, they were mainly female and the average age was 27. Overall, through G8rally and its other online channels, Make Poverty History attracted 800,000 activists.

To dismiss the significance of such large campaigns as one-off aberrations in the public's interest and willingness to engage is to miss a fundamental step change in campaigning opened up by new media. The online activity behind Make Poverty History was undoubtedly well resourced, but still stands out as an instructive example of how to effectively devolve the distribution of campaigns and campaign messages to a supporter base. What Make Poverty History got right was that it saw the value of the online public not so much as passive donors but as participating advocates.

22. An avatar is a graphic which represents a user on a website

## ● CONCLUSION

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Any number of the ideas, tools or approaches discussed in the preceding pages will be at best new or at worst seemingly irrelevant. Some might be used in ways not considered important at the time of their design – text messaging was originally conceived as a way of updating the software on mobile phones. Nevertheless, it is clear that the current wave of innovation in ICTs is here to stay, is increasingly mainstream, and is in a state of perpetual change. Like the telegraph and telephone before it, the opportunities presented by the internet and mobile telephony are changing some of the old certainties of how we work.

### Practices are varied

Whether in consultation or campaigning, there is clearly evidence that organisations, regardless of sector, are finding ways to adopt more participative approaches to their work through use of new ICTs and the cultural and operational changes they bring. For some organisations, blogs, online discussion forums, rich media and the like will be disruptive and challenging to old ways of working; for others, these participative tools will simply fit with a way of working that is focused on the user and their engagement in all aspects of what the organisation does.

But given the obvious fit between such technologies and the values and approaches of the VCS, we may question why their uptake has not been wider. There is of course no single answer, but the elements are likely to include their potentially disruptive nature, ongoing concerns about accessibility for those already marginalised by ways in which society works, and more tractable ‘supply-side’ issues (finance; skills; support). Some individuals and organisations are comfortable with the age of mass, on-demand, always-on communication; others find it threatening. This has been the case in the commercial sector, where it may seem that for every web-savvy outfit leading the way by embracing the web, there is another whose dominance of the market is being undermined by new technologies<sup>23</sup>.

The VCS will therefore not be unique in the coming years in seeing winners and losers, leaders and also-rans. New technologies will certainly change the landscapes of campaigning and consultation, not least because of their ‘disintermediating’ tendencies. The experience of the commercial sector might suggest that new, innovative organisations have an opportunity to stake their place alongside older, more established brands, but that over time those larger brands will catch up as they become literate with the new tools. It is also clear that good ideas or websites still have the opportunity to spread virally with little or no marketing effort – at the time of writing, YouTube (a video blog website that enables people to share their videos) has grown from launch in February 2005 to serving c. 100 million videos per day in August 2006<sup>24</sup>.

### Less ‘I’, more ‘C’

Where ICTs are deployed by VCOs, our findings (and those of others) indicate that the focus is on passing information on to stakeholders. The already established model of providing a ‘brochure’ website is increasingly likely to frustrate or turn off supporters. Yet, there are clearly pathfinders, both in the VCS and other sectors. As our case studies have illustrated, these innovative organisations use the opportunities afforded by the many new tools to enable two-way communication, collaboration and cooperation. The focus on the ‘C’ in ICT points towards a vision where campaigning and consultation evolve in response to continuous dialogue, and where the mutual ethos of the wiki movement leads to co-production of website content.

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23. There are many examples of the ‘disruptive’ effect of new technologies, such as the spread of digital cameras (and now mobile phones with cameras), web-based DVD rental and electrical retailing

24. [www.youtube.com/t/fact\\_sheet](http://www.youtube.com/t/fact_sheet) The use of other social sites such as del.icio.us and flickr has also seen rapid growth

Where VCOs seek to use such tools, there clearly needs to be a readiness to accept the cultural changes they bring. The strategic application of such tools necessitates that they are integrated into ways and means of working, rather than simply bolted onto organisations as a way of communicating with younger or more media-savvy supporters. The emphasis on participation and dialogue will, in turn, have implications for transparency and accountability – the subject of the next report in this series.

In conclusion, it is worthwhile returning to the starting context for this report, namely the concerns about the health of democracy and representative politics in the UK. It would be easy to conclude that the seemingly revolutionary characteristics of participatory media will reconnect politicians with the public, or that they will increasingly engage an often cynical, disenchanted electorate. In themselves they will not; moreover, if the new technologies simply repeat the old mistakes of consultation and dialogue with decision-makers, they will harden and reinforce disaffection. For consultation, they offer a new contract: an accountable, transparent, two-way dialogue. For campaigning, they offer a new collectivism: the ability to connect shared experiences, demonstrate a voice and influence otherwise distant institutions. ICTs can, and should, strengthen the role of voluntary and community organisations in a society where government and governance increasingly emphasise the practice of participation and the role of active citizens and users.

## ● FURTHER READING

### Free reports

- 'Among the audience – A survey of new media' (The Economist, 20 April 2006)  
www.economist.com/surveys/displaystory.cfm?story\_id=6794156
- *An Audit of Political Engagement 3* (Electoral Commission and Hansard Society, 2006)  
www.hansardsociety.org.uk/programmes/parliament\_and\_government/audit3
- *Bowling Together: Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation* (Hansard Society, 2001)  
http://bowlingtogether.net/
- *Civil renewal and active citizenship – a guide to the debate* (NCVO, 2005)  
www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/?id=1512
- *Deeper and wider community engagement – Local eDemocracy National Project Benefits study* (IDEA, 2006)  
www.e-democracy.gov.uk/knowledgepool/default.htm?mode=1&pk\_document=471
- *Direct Representation – Towards a conversational democracy* (IPPR, 2005)  
www.ippr.org.uk/ecommm/files/Stephen\_Coleman\_Pamphlet.pdf
- *Giving (in) to the internet* (Anna Goatman, University of Manchester, 2004)  
www.ctt.org/about\_ctt/recent\_publications\_and\_presentations/128.asp
- *Neglecting Democracy – Participation and representation in 21st Century Britain* (Hansard Society, 2005)  
www.hansardsociety.org.uk/assets/3933\_HANSARD\_DEMOCRACY\_A5.pdf
- *Open Source Democracy – How online communication is changing offline politics* (Demos, 2003)  
www.demos.co.uk/publications/opensourcedemocracy2
- *Post Party Politics: Can participation reconnect people and government?* (Involve, 2006)  
www.involving.org/mt/archives/blog\_37/Involve%20Post%20Party%20Politics%20.pdf
- *Power to the People – An Independent Inquiry into Britain's Democracy* (Power Inquiry, 2006)  
www.powerinquiry.org/report/index.php
- *Spinning the Web – Online campaigning in the 2005 general election* (Hansard Society, 2005)  
www.hansardsociety.org.uk/node/view/393
- *tellparliament.net interim evaluation report – 2003-2005* (Hansard Society, 2006)  
www.hansardsociety.org.uk/programmes/e-democracy/tellparliament
- *Wide Open – Open source methods and their future potential* (Demos, 2005)  
www.demos.co.uk/publications/wideopen
- *Weblogs – a powerful voice for campaigns?* (Hansard Society and Crisis, 2005)  
www.hansardsociety.org.uk/assets/Weblogs\_pamphlet-\_a\_powerful\_voice\_for\_campaigns.pdf

See <http://del.icio.us/ictforesight> for more useful websites and reports

### Publications

- Conor McGrath, *Lobbying in Washington, London and Brussels* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2005)
- Gerry Stoker, *Why Politics Matters – Making democracy work* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2006)
- Steve John and Stuart Thomson (eds.), *New Activism and the Corporate Response* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2003)

## ● GLOSSARY

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**Accessibility** The extent to which a website is made usable to all visitors, including those with disabilities such as aural, visual or other physical disabilities.

**Aggregator** A type of software that pulls together updates and content from other websites, usually via an RSS feed (see Syndication).

**Analytics** Software that helps organisations track website traffic – for example, the number of people visiting a site, how they arrived at the site and how long they stayed on a given page.

**Application** A software program designed to perform a specific task or group of tasks – for example, word processing or image browsing.

**Asynchronous** A type of two-way communication that occurs with a time delay, allowing participants to respond at their own convenience.

**Blog** Short for weblog. A weblog is a website that resembles a time-stamped journal, runs in reverse chronological order, is frequently updated and allows commenting from visitors on specific, individual posts.

**Blogsphere** A name for the network created between blogs.

**Broadcast/Narrowcast** Broadcast is when a piece of information is sent or transmitted from one point to all other points. Narrowcast is when a piece of information is sent or transmitted to a specific type of recipient.

**Convergence** The coming together of two or more disparate disciplines or technologies to produce something new.

**Digital** Referring to communication techniques and procedures whereby information is encoded as binary language, as opposed to analogue representation of information in variable, but continuous, wave forms.

**eDemocracy** The use of technology for political engagement.

**File sharing** The practice of swapping files with other people over the internet. File sharing systems allow people to upload files and access those uploaded by other people.

**Hardware/Software** Hardware are the physical components of a computer system – for example, the monitor, the modem and the printer. Software are programmes that tell a computer which tasks to perform.

**ICT** Information and communication technology. Refers to a range of applications for gathering, storing and retrieving information.

**IT** Information technology. The branch of engineering that deals with the use of computers and telecommunications to retrieve, store and transmit information.

**Instant messaging** A form of electronic communication that involves immediate correspondence between users who are online simultaneously.

**Moderation** Moderation is a way of maintaining standards in online discussions. A moderator may remove unsuitable, aggressive or offensive contributions from the website or forum in accordance with their moderation policy.

**Online discussion forum** A facility on the web for holding themed discussions.

**Open source** Refers to any programme whose source code is made available for anyone to work on, modify or learn from.

**Podcasting** Method of distributing multimedia files, such as audio programmes or videos over the internet for playback on personal computers or mobile devices. The files are typically downloaded automatically.

**Polity** Politically organised society.

**Real time** When events that happen in real time are happening virtually at that particular moment.

**Representation** Where someone speaks, votes, makes decisions or takes action on behalf of another.

**Rich media** Content consisting of multi-media components such as audio, video or special effects.

**Social software** Refers to a second generation of services available on the web that let people collaborate and share information online – for example, blogs, wikis, tags and podcasts.

**Stakeholder** Someone who has a connection and will be affected by success or failure.

**Streaming** The playback of sound or video without the need to download the file.

**Syndication** Where web feeds make a portion of a website available to other sites or individual subscribers.

**User generated content** Content produced and uploaded to a website by its users rather than its owners.

**Webchat** An internet chat room where people engage in online discussions in real time.

**Weblog** – see blog.

**Wiki** A web resource that allows users to add content to or edit a webpage.

## ● THIRD SECTOR FORESIGHT



**NCVO's Third Sector Foresight project** helps voluntary and community organisations to identify and understand the strategic drivers that affect them and provides tools to help organisations transform this understanding into robust strategies that can directly improve their effectiveness.

### **Voluntary Sector Strategic Analysis**

This annual publication provides concise and relevant information about trends affecting the VCS, analysis of the implications and suggested strategic actions.

*“This is invaluable to me as a Chief Executive of a small/medium sized non-profit organisation, because it gives me access to thinking on strategy I could not possibly find within my limited resources.”*

### **Tools for Tomorrow – a practical guide to strategic planning for voluntary organisations**

This toolkit provides step-by-step guidance to small and medium-sized organisations.

*“This good value guide will be refreshing and challenging for those organisations that have an established cycle for business planning. I wish that this guide had been put into my hands seven years ago as I began to lead a medium-sized, local charity into more strategic growth and development.”*

### **Foresight Network**

The free Foresight Network was set up to disseminate regular information about strategic issues to leaders and planners in the VCS, and to facilitate peer support and knowledge sharing.

*“I found it very useful, especially the trends section. I often work with groups who have no idea about future trends and need to be encouraged to look outside their own four walls, so 'seed' information from a variety of areas is particularly useful both as an example and a starting point.”*

– (from a CVS)

### **Third Sector Foresight Seminar Series**

These free seminars provide space and time for leaders to explore and discuss strategic issues and share knowledge and ideas with their peers. Seminars have been held on: the changing economic landscape; changing regulation and perceptions of risk; strategy renewal during periods of growth; the impact of the Pensions Commission report on the VCS; and, local government reform.

### **Online database of drivers and trends – going live in 2007**

We are currently building an online database which will provide a useful source of analysis and data on drivers and trends to help VCOs understand their environment, how it is changing and the impact on their organisation.

## ● ICT HELP FOR FRONTLINE ORGANISATIONS



**The ICT Hub** provides a range of no cost and low cost services to help voluntary and community sector organisations benefit from ICT including new media technology.

The ICT Hub is a partnership of national voluntary and community organisations and the partners are AbilityNet, IT4Communities, LASA, NAVCA and NCVO.

The ICT Hub's resources are for very small, small and medium-sized voluntary and community sector organisations. To find out more about the ICT Hub visit:

**[www.ict hub.org.uk](http://www.ict hub.org.uk) or call freephone 0800 652 4737**

*“Well managed information and communications technology (ICT) can save time and money – and increase innovation”*

### **No cost and low cost ICT training and seminars**

The ICT Hub in partnership with the Media Trust is offering a series of free afternoon events around England to increase the voluntary and community sector's knowledge of new media and inspire the sector to make use of blogs, podcasts, video and other online resources. For further information about these and other new media events visit the events section of the ICT Hub's website.

### **ICT Publications**

For useful and informative publications on ICT for voluntary and community organisations visit the publications section of the ICT Hub's website.

### **ICT website of good practice resources**

The ICT Hub's online knowledgebase is a comprehensive, online source of practical help, information, and independent advice on ICT, for small and medium-sized voluntary and community sector organisations. Knowledgebase can be used for:

- Help with developing websites and databases
- Help with developing ICT policies and strategies
- Information on how to make your computer accessible for people with disabilities
- Support with software and hardware
- How to set up and manage networks
- Visit the knowledgebase section of the ICT Hub's website to find out more.

### **Free help with a media volunteer**

The ICT Hub is supporting the Media Trust and IT4Communities to broker more volunteering opportunities to help frontline organisations benefit from new media. To find a volunteer to help your organisation take advantage of new media visit the ICT Hub's website how we can help – volunteering and new media sections.

### **Research into the ICT needs of the sector**

Explore findings in the research section on the ICT Hub's website, to find out more about the ICT funding needs of the sector, and the take up of, and attitudes to, ICT.

**[www.ict hub.org.uk](http://www.ict hub.org.uk)**



This publication can be made available in large print and alternative formats on request.

Please contact NCVO on 020 7713 6161 for more information.



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