

Community TeleCentres for Urban Youth

Research Brief

Key words: Telecentre, Content-Led Approach, Community Training, Sustainability, Youth, ICTs, Video

This summary report presents some of the findings and conclusions of a three year project that explored a different telecentre model. When this research started young people in the poor urban communities of Soweto and Mexico City had little or no access to appropriate PC and IT skills training and limited access to local information and services.

The key feature of the model is that a group of young people form a team that develops local content. This may be putting offline Internet content on to CD Rom so that it is easily available to the community at minimal cost. More frequently it involved the making of videos that discussed local issues in the local language in the local context. The potential for such products is that they have a saleable value outside the community, and that they have the potential to build up a digital body of knowledge relevant to poor communities. The research included an evaluation of the income-generating potential of the model, and monitored its progress throughout the lifetime of the project.

No other group had been identified with a similar approach. The project approach was widely advertised and discussed at the start of the project to ensure its distinctiveness. During the lifetime of the project, a focus on content has emerged among the wider development community, especially those concerned with how ICTs affect the poor.

The proposed key design features of each telecentre were:-

- The telecentre should have a **Content-Led Approach**. The heart of the Digital divide is the recognition that Information is valuable. It is an opportunity for power. A key objective for the telecentres is to create a mechanism for allowing the poor to realise the economic worth of local knowledge and know-how. Therefore the centre will include a Multimedia Content Design Studio as part of the telecentre and a system for rewarding indigenous content. A youth-led editorial committee has been proposed.
- To make the content immediately accessible and obviously appropriate to local people the service provision is to be based on the **Life Events approach**. This follows the general trend in e-governance to present services through a life approach or life event interface.
- The initiative will be **Youth Led**. Even in these poor areas generation Y have been exposed to computers and accept their potential as the norm. The consultation showed that many poor children had some access to computers and understood their significance.
- Where possible build using **Open Source Software**
- Focus on delivery of services via consumer **Alternative Information Appliances**. DVDs and games consoles (for example) can offer significant savings on even basic computers
- There is a need to find the optimal risk adverse approach with regards to stable networks and future expansion.
- **Personal Digital Storage**. Should be made available to protect important data such as land deeds or birth certificates.
- There should not be an assumption of 24/7 connectivity with the global community. It is important to explore **Alternative Connectivity Options**.



Conclusion

While there are considerable lessons to be learned from the research, it would not be true to say that all the centres were an unqualified success. The research was greatly affected by the management system of each community centre, and by cultural and contextual factors not anticipated in the model design.

Security was a big issue with theft causing delays in progress. Management was also an factor, changes in personnel combined with an absence of direction and editorial constraints leading to reduced impact. Of benefit to the model were the connections with the community, the consultations and the participatory training.

However, the quantity and type of content produced by the youth was more limited than expected. Some finance has been generated by the products indicating a financial return that can help sustain the technology and community centre, but it has yet to generate a full cost recovery of all costs. Similarly, the content has been almost equally orientated to promoting the centre and communicating its needs to the outside world, than to answering key questions from the local community about local community issues. At the closure of the research there are a large number of unfinished products in the pipeline but a question remains as to whether there is the discipline to finish the products.

Lessons Learned

- A content-led approach is a realistic model, and should be promoted in most multipurpose community centres (or telecentres)
- The forms of technology are continually changing and do not affect the creation of content – it is therefore not critical to the model to have any specific type of technology - as long as there are mediators within the community who understand the technology and can work with those who cannot drive the technology so that the latter can express themselves.
- Video is significant technology for getting the semi-literate to create local content, and should be promoted as a local tool.
- The livelihoods or ‘Life events’ approaches which emphasise the benefits of the technology more than the technology itself are an important emphasis in the design of any ICT for Development initiative.
- Adults learn best when studying for a subject that has obvious applicability to their life – telecentres should not confine themselves to ICT subjects only.
- The financial sustainability of ICT activities can be significantly enhanced by the production of content which has a market beyond the immediate community. However, the production of digital media is by no means a guarantee to financial sustainability and is subject to the normal market forces – of needing to be appropriate, needing to meet customer demand, having a suitable supply chain, etc

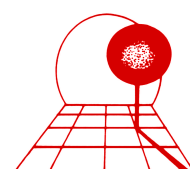


The full report is available to read at:
www.youthtelecentres.org

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