# Digital Britain Unconferences:

# London Reports

**26 May 2009**

The London Unconference attracted a significant attendance. The group suggested discussion topics and broke into smaller groups to manage the debate on the eleven topics that got at least four votes each. The sessions were fed back to the whole group, edited summaries of which follow.

## Session 1. Local media

Input: William Perrin

Key question considered:

*What is the future of local media given rise of self publishing and decline of commercial models?*

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report:

Recognise that the future of local news and information is bottom up, community generated, not top down broadcaster or printer generated.

Stop using 1950s analogue language "community 'TV' and 'local radio', instead use the phrase "community publishing" which is media neutral. Recognise that the web empowers communities to choose for themselves which medium (written word, audio, video) they need to empower themselves in communication, leave that choice to them, and support them.

Recognise that traditional broadcasters and printers and their lobby have not adapted their business models – stop rewarding failed business models with funding.

Research extent of community web publishing in the UK - in some communities the local website is far more popular than broadcast current affairs shows see for instance:

http://www.kingscrossenvironment.com

http://www.parwich.org

http://www.digbeth.org

http://www.ventnorblog.com

http://www.london-se1.co.uk

http://www.talkaboutlocal.org

Directing funding to local media

Apply value for money criteria to the spend per person engaged in producing the medium, awarding a large number (hundreds or thousands) of very small grants (£2,000 for training say 15 people), rather than a small number of large ones

Focus on skills and empowerment on the web, not technology.

Community web publishing is cheap to free on the ground (using free web publishing tools) - the only funding needed is some basic skills. Money put aside for digital switchover subsidy or money allocated to community radio and television should be made 'medium-neutral' and

open to people to bid for on vfm criteria of cost per person engaged in producing the medium.

The existing spectrum for community TV and radio could be auctioned off and the money put into online grass roots bottom up web publishing. 4IP is a good model - funding for venturing on the web.

## Session2. National-scale digital infrastructure

Input: Vinay Gupta

Key question considered:

*What are the digital equivalents of the London Eye or Buckingham Palace?*

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report:

The government needs to support British design build and utilisation of digital equivalents of the London Eye, Millenium Dome, or Buckingham Palace. One suggestion here is a National Geospatial Backbone - sort of like an online Ordinance Survey, but with two additional features.

Firstly, an API to allow ordinary citizens to upload map features and layers. Secondly, a trust system to allow groups like local authorities, police and fire services to add features to the national map in a trusted way so that ordinary users could see what they publish. The purpose of the utility would be to genuinely build a digital Britain: a layer over the entire country showing where things are, what they are, and what they mean.

How might these proposals be funded?

This is a fairly cheap project - most of the data is already owned by the Government in the form of Ordinance Survey and other mapping tools. Perhaps it could even be done by some group like the BBC - sort of "data broadcasting."

## Session 3. Infrastructure (UK Data Transport) and Greater Use of Wifi Access

By Mike Kiely

Key questions considered:

*1. Could free wifi (801..11 & 802.17) be more readily encouraged in public spaces and in municipially managed buildings including public housing?*

*2. Digital Britain report should include a description of the current UK Data Transport Infrastructure (what's its capable of – best efforts broadband and a strategy for where we need it to be to support critical services?*

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report:

1. Initiatives to support greater use of wifi.

2. A description of the Data Transport infrastructure to support the Universal Service. Mike Kiely has offered to provide a draft.

How might these proposals be funded?

Item 2 is summarising the planning rules and underlying assumptions of BT's 21CN, Virgin Core network, carphone (opal) and even C&W.  The picture we are seeking describes the attributes of these networks today thus what's possible and what application are not possible. Our current internet access is not engineered for Broadcast TV.

A mathematical and statistical picture of our broadband networks previously presented to Ofcom can be examined here -

http://www.pnsol.com/publications.html#pmdtq

Further material on the minimum quality and performance needed is available here -

http://bbbritain.co.uk/guarantee.aspx

Implicit within this description will be the nature of the outcomes we as a society can expect to achieve.

## Session 4. Privacy

Input: Jim Killock

Key questions considered:

*1. Technology is powerful, with potential for mass surveillance*

*2. State, government and individuals are actors*

*3. Protections, legal and technical are woefully inadequate*

*4. Future of the net depends on trust and therefore privacy*

*5. Proportionality needs to be applied when privacy is removed*

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report:

1. Include online privacy as a key objective for Digital Britain

2. Recommend ISO standard for privacy, compulsory for business over a certain size

3. Recommend that opt out right should be mandatory (can be excluded by contract, for example mortgage providers that insist they will data share)

4. Simplify regulation: enforce co-operation to stop buck-passing or merge regulators

5. Access audit of large databases should be mandatory

6. User education is needed

7. Communicate privacy agreements in simple terms (in icons like CC licenses)

How might these proposals be funded?

Many of the concerns are dealt with through better business practice or system design, needing legislation rather than funding. Governments would need to allocate better levels of funding to create 'privacy by design' when making new systems.

## Session 5. Digital skills and inclusion

Input: Helen Milner

Key questions considered:

*1. Do people of Britain have the digital skills they need to take part in Digital Britain?* No

*2. Does Digital Britain need to do more for people who never use the internet (but for whom the broadband infrastructure is already in place)?* Yes, there needs to be much more focus in the final report in supporting and inspiring the people who can get online but don't. It's about people, not just infrastructure.

*3. Does Digital Britain need to do more for all citizens so that Britain can excel in digital innovation and business creation?* Yes,

*4. What would basic digital skills look like?*

*5. How can we move more people into wanting to be part of an innovative and creative Digital Britain?*

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report:

1. Digital Britain needs to be far more ambitious about digital inclusion. The unconference would like to see a bold target, for example, getting 3m more people online.

2. People can't use digital technologies without the skills to use them. An entitlement to basic digital skills should be included in the final report.

3. New strategies often focus on the people at the bottom (with no skills) or the people at the top (with the highest skills). Focus on a continuum of digital skills that can inspire and involve all citizens will turn us into a Digital Britain that believes that the skills and ambition of its people is the bedrock of excellence and success.

This *continuum* model is as much about role models, sharing creativity and innovation, and business creation as much as skills. The final report should ensure that there is an understanding of this throughout Government, throughout all education institutions, and throughout all employers and employer support agencies.

How might these proposals be funded?

1. 3m more people online will create £600m - £900m industry value, take the money needed for this (approx £100m) from infrastructure build and ask industry to pay the final £100m when the Government has got another 3m people online.

2. The Department of Innovation Universities and Skills (DIUS) can look to their internal skills budgets to ensure an entitlement can be funded.

3. Start small with an awareness campaign amongst partners, develop a pledge to support digital excellence and creativity, host annual awards role modelling new businesses as well as community digital activists.

Embed in further and higher education, and make sure this is an ambition for all not just an elite.

### Session 6. Community usage and interauthorship

Input: Ghislaine Boddington

This session set out to cover

- *public authored content*

- *crowd sourced content*

- *user generated content*

- *micro communities creating joint content*

There was real concern that the report did not cover this important area. To enable the use of the web to its key potential, connectivity between small to large groups of people, working/creating together through local-to-local processes, is an imperative. These *group creations* need to be taken into account, as do the process of rights protection in relationship to these projects i.e. creative commons etc

Examples were put forward from within the groups' experience of community activist and networking sites, where the community is empowered through the use of simple publishing tools to develop web sites allowing them to publish issues and concerns of the locality, creating a network of information - online group creations processes developed through the uploading of media (video, sound and text) by communities at a distance to each other to co-create projects e.g. books.

Other creative examples included projects of sentences written in relay by 500 people, films using 30 sec clips uploaded by 300 different people, communities gatherings for live events and mass creation projects, the use of telematics ( full bodied video conferencing) to connect people in gestures, in debate and in performances for educational and social usage. These shared mapping of human geographies - economics, social and political - linked to community concerns - community owned networks for exchange and broadcast - can be used for care in community projects, local news, rural connectivity and so on.

There was concern about UK Original content - is any content really for the UK only? It was felt that local-to-local connectivity, one of the key potentials of the web, must be used to enable debate between one

community and another distant community with a similar issue e.g flooding, farming, education, whatever country the communities are in. This should not be limited by UK focussed thinking, good advice and information may come from a community in another country.

## Session 7. Billionaire Businesses

Input: Ellie Louis

Key questions considered:

*1. What do we have to do to create the conditions and the right environment for significant internet based business in the UK?*

*2. What do we have to stop doing?*

*3. Where are the gaps in our investment ecology?*

*4. How does the new landscape allow for small business 'pebbles' to grow alongside big 20th style business 'boulders'?*

*5. Should the UK actively intervene with the big internet players on behalf of UK users? - In particular French/US sites?*

*6. Why don't we use our language to our advantage more?*

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report

1. Promote a culture of enterprise that allows experimentation in new business models. Seek to develop approaches to digital business that go beyond the accepted norms of 20th Century success models.

This means supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs in the taking of risks. This means being realistic about expectations as to potential failure rates. Provide funding that allows for "failure" in the pursuit of the big innovative wins.

2. Lead the online innovation culture through social networks of highly creative individuals and entrepreneurs who can coach and mentor and also get involved with supporting new ideas as they evolve for digital businesses.

3. Establish sources of funding for new digital enterprises that have a stake in the success of the business idea rather than shareholder value. This could be in the form of an Enterprise Bank managed along the lines of the former personal bank manager approach.

4. Learn from other digital enterprise cultures such as Silicon Valley - find out how ideas are developed into successful business propositions. How is risk viewed? Attitudes to failure? Funding support?

5. Stop focussing on large 20th Century business as the bedrock for the Digital Britain of the future. Start focussing more on smaller more nimble business that can adapt with the same speed to the changing environment and rules.

6. Start the culture of digital entrepreneurship with children in schools. Strongly associate creative thinking with business skills: idea generation, communication, social skills, design, P&L management, cash flow, analysis of customer needs.
*How might these proposals be funded?*

More incentives for investors into UK business

Use existing innovation funding to focus on digital enterprises

Commission payments based on success of business

## Session 8. Defining the Uploaders Charter

Input: Brian Condon

Key question considered

*Why doesn't the report consider the uploader as much as the downloader?*

There are three points that 'we almost managed to agree on' [laughter].

Uploaders' Charter Clause 1 - Fair recognition of value creation.

Where communities create value by uploading and sharing content, there should be symmetry in how that value is shared out. Currently too much of the value is trapped by people who are not the creators of that value.  Such value needs to be reinvested in the community which creates the content.

Uploaders' Charter Clause 2 - Rights protection must be 'symmetrical'.

The rights of all content creators shall be equally respected. The creator must be able to determine licensing rights.  The rights of individuals and SMEs shall be protected with equal force to those of large powerful organisations whether public or private. Participants described many instances of large enterprises with significant market power ignoring the rights of individual creators of content.

Should a Rights Agency be created (and there was significant disagreement in the group as to the practicability or efficacy of a Rights Agency), there should be symmetrical treatment of all.

The group noted that there is already a significant body of law around copyright which applies to content.  It may be that this can form the basis of protection in the 'new world', although we risk corrupting the new world by using the tools of the past.

Uploaders' Charter Clause 3 - networks must be symmetrical

In Digital Britain, upload speeds will play an increasing role in the level of participation and inclusion for individuals and groups. Any Universal Service Obligation must ensure that services are symmetrical (in that upload speeds should equal download speeds). In any case, upload speeds need to be explicit and included, as they are not currently. Participants will be brought much more into Digital Britain through more symmetrical access. Upload speeds will become increasingly important in future as an engine of value creation.

*Symmetry is an important driving concept for Digital Britain, in value creation, in rights and in the universal services obligation.*

## Session 9. Rights

Input: Bill Thompson

Key questions considered:

*1. The balance between rights holders desires for complete control and the wider public interest*

*2. The nature and importance of the public domain*

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report:

1. There is scope for negotiation between rights-holders and the general public over extensions to copyright law and what is offered in return. For example, in return for higher penalties or criminal prosecution of serious commercial infringers we could ask for compulsory labelling of DRM, a service-level agreement allowing for refunds if eg capabilities are removed from devices and an undertaking to respect copyright law over contract provisions

2. The public domain will become increasingly important as digital tools allow more creative expression to be shared. There should be an undertaking from government that no laws will be passed which remove material from the public domain.

3. In order to enhance the public domain provision should be made to remove Crown and Parliamentary Copyright and place material created with public funding in the public domain

4. Just as economic impact assessments of policies are prepared as part of the legislative process, we should have public impact assessments that look at the impact of proposed law on the creative use of the internet, freedom of access to material and the long term effect on the creative industries

How might these proposals be funded?

The proposals made here should be revenue neutral as they do not require any direct investment, and indeed if the economic benefits of the sharing culture are taken into account then the negotiation between rights holders and the public could be positive.

## Session 10. Digital Britons

Input: Andy Gibson

Key questions considered:

What does digital mean for the people of Britain?

*How do we balance the needs of "Digital Britain" with being part of a globally-connected community?*

*What are the wider implications of the digital age on society and the economy, beyond the "digital sector"?*

*How does the digital revolution impact on our personal skills needs, and our personal wellbeing?*

*What are the implications of digital technologies for social inclusion and participation?*

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report:

1. Engagement with public services to be digital by default to increase efficiency but give service users a choice of engagement channels to avoid replacing one set of exclusions/barriers to access with another.

2. "Digital DIY" skills should be encouraged. - Key skills training should include not just use of software but how to use digital and social tools to build communities, campaign for key issues and contribute to and create new social media.

3. Fund research into the impact of digital technologies on our mental and physical health, and training for the public in how to incorporate new technologies into our lives in healthy and sustainable ways.

(See http://www.digitalhealthservice.com for more information)

4. Support digital enterprise to help Britain become the economic and cultural leader in the digital economy, but ensure that this wealth and influence is shared fairly with the people of Britain, particularly those who contribute content to it.

5. Better use of digital tools to create a sense of "membership" of the British state, particularly to give the nation a tighter sense of unity in an age where technology is eroding the value of national boundaries.

6. Public-funded content, including that produced by the BBC, to be made freely available digitally to the "members" who have funded its creation. Derivative products (e.g. DVDs) should be discounted to license-payers or tax-payers

How might these proposals be funded?

Cost-savings on e-government to be directed towards public skills and digital inclusion initiatives in the first 3-5 years.

Public partnership with community groups, social enterprises and hacker/tech communities to deliver e-government and e-participation agenda, and 'digital DIY' skills training.

Create New lightweight company structures for digital enterprises offering tax incentives in return for co-operative style membership structure to remunerate content producers and community members.

## Session 11. Broadcast

Input: Andrew Wise

This work stream focused on the Digital Britain Interim Report's recommendations concerning the broadcast industry (TV and Radio) and the print media / journalism.

[*Editor's Note - The report submitted for this session was a very detailed view of the state of the broadcast, print media and journalism sectors and actions described in the Interim Report. This edited summary highlights the session recommendations only. The full report detail is available online.*]

Look beyond the legacy

We ask that the report looks further than the narrow confines of the existing "legacy players" and embraces the new players and how they can be encouraged to grow and generate new economic activity in the future.

Liberate new business models

We know the business models and value chains are evolving and ask are the existing players regulatory and financing structures helping to liberate new business models or suppress competitive innovation?

Redefine the vision and remit of a 'Public Service Broadcaster

We concluded that the final report needs to be more visionary and evaluate "What do we mean by Public Service Broadcaster" – what public service do we want them to offer and how would that be interpreted in the new Digital world

Should part of the public service remit be to incubate new digital content and/or be a route to market for such content?

Should organisation such as the BBC be providing infrastructure for community radio and / or taking some of its output and mashing into their own – likewise for other audio, video and text content (and if so then the IPR of the content creators needs to be fully acknowledged and respected)

The privileges given to the PSB sector must not be allowed to out compete the new digital competition, especially in its early stages as it struggles to get a foothold and shape the new markets.

*Support the fundamental change require for existing broadcasters, but not to the exclusion of new entrants.*

We asked the question "How does the report help the existing broadcasters prepare for the new digital age?"

It may be an unanswerable question to ask what their future business models need to be in order to be sustainable in a digital world of multi channel, multi creator content – but we felt that the report should at least make some recognition that change needs to happen, will happen and is happening.

Fundamental change is required, not just tinkering at the margins of should we merge this part of the BBC with that part of Channel 4.

Have more faith in the law-abiding businesses

We draw comfort from some developments, as ever the vast majority of the public will utilise the services of recognised and trusted brands – in the past this has been players such as the BBC – in the future it could be YouTube.

We see evidence that responsible brand owners wish to respect IPR and Privacy

It is sine qua non that a trusted brand must be seen to respect things like privacy and IPR. The bad publicity generated by Facebook's recent attempt to change its terms & conditions relating to IPR forced it to back down or lose brand equity. Likewise YouTube is no longer the bad boy of pirate video, clips of Premier League football and F1 racing are generally taken down quickly at the request of the IPR owners.

Have more faith in the law-abiding citizen

Indeed, the change that is needed is a way to make the content that users want legitimately available to them in the format they want it in – when you make MP3 music available for purchase the generally law abiding public flocks to buy it.

Just as business models and value chains are changed by digital technology – so are marketing concepts. Media Brands are moving away from single linear product to "market hotels" creating a space for consumers to come and experience content from a variety of sources in a recognisable trusted environment. This is not something the government should or could play a role in, but it needs to be aware that fundamental structural change is upon us from all angles in the Great Digital Britain (or is that the Digital Great Britain? Either way it's great to be here).

## About

The London Digital Britain Unconference was held on May 6th 2009 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Mall, London. There were 55 people in attendance.

This report has been collated from the individual submissions from each event, edited and summarised by

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Session reports on individual topics were submitted by Mike Kiely, Andrew Wise, Helen Milner, Andy Gibson, Vinay Gupta, Brian Condon, Bill Thompson, Jim Killock, William Perrin and Ellie Louis.

We would like to thank all of those who took part for permission to use their reports.

We would also like to thank all those who attended, took part and supported this project, without whom the unconferences would have been impossible.

http://digitalbritainunconference.wordpress.com