

Report to Window on Woking Advisory Board
13 July 2007

Setting a brief for the development of Window on Woking for *Business*

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide a discussion paper for the Board in order that it may contribute to setting a brief for opening up the community website to business users.

This matter was considered by the Council's Web Strategy Group earlier this year, and its recommendations are shown below. The views of the Board are sought in respect of the proposals set out in this report and the Strategy Group's recommendations.

Background

Window on Woking was set up as a community website, offering web space to local not-for-profit groups at no charge. It has been successful in meeting this objective with nearly 500 organisations now registered with WoW and using it either to provide their sole web presence, or as an additional presence alongside other websites.

The registration process currently includes the statement:

The purpose of this community website is to encourage, assist and promote 'not-for-profit' organisations, groups, clubs and societies that serve the community in Woking;

And,

Window on Woking is provided for use by not-for-profit organisations and you agree not to use the website to engage in commercial activities, and not to advertise or sell goods or services.

Organisations applying to join the site are required to confirm they meet these restrictions. Consequently a number of applications have been rejected from organisations that have subsequently confirmed they are not strictly not-for-profit, (although sometimes there is no distinction to their users).

Making the site available to businesses

A commitment was made by the Project Board to open up the website to commercial organisations, but the terms and basis on which this would be provided have yet to be determined. As a pre-cursor to making it available to commercial organisations, the site has since last October invited businesses to register their interest. To date 28 businesses have completed the form, and a further 15 have expressed an interest by email or paper form. A summary of the type of business that has expressed an interest is attached at Appendix 1. Whilst the level of interest thus far has been modest, no advertising has been carried out to date beyond promotion at the Woking Means Business exhibition last year.

Key Points for Consideration

- What level of service is to be provided to commercial organisations?
- What features should be provided?
- How should we define which businesses qualify?
- How does this proposal relate to other corporate activities?

The impact of this proposal on the Council's ability to support existing and new users is a primary consideration.

Each of the above points is expanded below:

1. What level of service is to be provided to commercial organisations?

We currently provide unlimited web space to organisations and aim to provide next working day support. WAVS contributes to the Support role for organisations, but has indicated that it is not willing to do so for commercial users. Offering an equivalent service to commercial organisations could significantly increase the demand on staff and consultant time providing user support and may impact on server space.

On the positive side it is anticipated that the majority of commercial user will have their own web presence, and will simply use WoW as a local search engine to promote their existing sites.

For consideration:

- Should we limit the webspace provided to only one web page per commercial organisation?
- Do we limit the support offered?
- Do we make a charge for this service?

Web Strategy Group's recommendations: in view of the costs associated with collecting revenue, the relatively low fees charged by existing web directories and the contractual implications of charging for the service, the Group recommends no charge should be made for the service offered. Furthermore, the Group recommends the scope of the service provided be limited to a single web page. This will help to reduce the Support demand.

2. What features should be provided?

We currently offer a range of features, such as password protected content, events and online grants applications and new features are also under development.

For consideration:

- Offer a limited range of features?
- Use a bespoke styling for 'commercial' webpages to distinguish from not-for-profit users?
- Add specific features (e.g. consumer feedback/ranking?)

Web Strategy Group's recommendations: the range of services offered needs to be defined (with reference made to the consequential demand for support). A single mandatory template should be defined for businesses to distinguish commercial organisations from not-for-profit. The registration process will include agreement for contact information to be held on the Council's contact management system (but will not to be sold on)

3. How should we define which businesses qualify?

We currently do not provide a strict geographical limit for WoW organisations, as that are located outside the Borough do nonetheless serve the local community.

For consideration:

- Should we define a geographical boundary?
- Should we define a business size (staff/turnover?)
- Should we define the types of business?

Web Strategy Group's recommendations: we restrict registration to business addresses within the Borough. Whilst size of business should not be qualification, certain types of business may be excluded (legal opinion to be sought on this)

Summary of services offered by businesses that have pre-registered with Window on Woking

- Mobile Security patrols for business and residential premises.
- Web Design & Hosting for small businesses and the voluntary sector.
- Entertainment lighting specialists
- Domestic heating and plumbing installations
- Monthly independent community magazine and local directory.
- Drama lessons for children aged 5-16.
- American super stretched limousines.
- Maintenance and care for the foot and skin as well as advice on foot care.
- Local plumbing and heating installation service.
- Teaching parents/Carers how to massage their babies.
- Bouncy Castle Hire service
- Architectural ironmongery, locksmiths, key cutting and general security
- Advising SME's practical personnel and Human Resources advice and help at operational level
- In school work helping children with difficulties.
- Traditional Yang style long form of Tai Chi.
- An independent Community Magazine and local directory
- Film and video production company
- Boat shop
- Assisting lone parents to gain skills and employment..
- Psychotherapy and counselling
- Writing, producing and directing music videos, short films and documentaries.
- Children's books. Pre school though to secondary school.
- Aerial installations
- Household Maintenance
- Architects
- Mortgage Advisor
- Graphic Design
- Property management and lettings
- Holistic health therapist
- Electronic visuals/multi-media

All but 8 of the above currently have a website.