



# Telecommunication solutions for people with complex communication needs

A web 2.0 approach to education and awareness  
[www.newell.org.au](http://www.newell.org.au)



Additional funding provided by:





## **Telecommunication solutions for people with complex communication needs**

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Novita Children's Services

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With additional support from the Australian Communication Exchange (ACE) and Telstra

Published in 2011

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## 1. Introduction

This short report details the development of the Newell Network website [www.newell.org.au](http://www.newell.org.au), a project led by Novita Children's Services with a number of active partners. The aim of the website is to establish a community-based space that empowers individuals with complex communication needs and support organisations to add information on available solutions and to receive direction to known applicable resources.

The report also contains reflections on the project from those leading it and makes recommendations about its future. In doing so, the report provides a valuable record of web 2.0 approaches to empowering people with disabilities and the collaboration needed in doing so.

### 1.1 *What are complex communication needs (CCN)?*

"Complex communication needs" (CCN) is a term used to describe the needs of people who have little or no speech. These communication problems are associated with a wide range of physical, sensory and environmental causes which restrict or limit a person's ability to participate independently in society. People with CCN include those with Cerebral Palsy, Autism, Stroke, Intellectual Disability, sensory impairments and degenerative conditions such as Motor Neurone Disease.

Communication is one of the most crucial requirements to participation in society. Communication is the means by which we are educated, employed, understood and loved. It is crucial to participation within our individual environments. Communication enables us to:

- express feelings and thoughts in order to understand and respond to others
- achieve our goals and advocate for ourselves and others
- build friendships and socialise
- engage services and supports within society
- acquire and share information.

All of these factors may be impacted if a person has CCN. A slower rate of communication, limited availability of vocabulary, or difficulties that others experience in interpretation of their communication can lead to barriers for these basic human rights and desires. One of the main obstacles to participation is the limited opportunities people with CCN are given in society to fully express themselves. Even the most efficient augmented communicator takes longer and requires more effort than natural speech. Time restrictions or physical limitations

such as fatigue can limit the quantity and quality of messages that people with CCN can communicate on a daily basis.<sup>1</sup>

In Australia, one in five people have a disability, for which 6% of the people results in profound to severe restriction of core activities. For 18% of these people, the severe restriction includes communication. Nearly 13,000 Australians use aids to assist with speaking. Over 86,000 people in Australia use aids for reading/writing. One in seven users of government disability services (over the age of five years old) has little or no effective communication. Over 40% of users require assistance for communication.<sup>2</sup>

The UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that "communication enables peoples with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms,"<sup>3</sup> Enabling those with CCN to communicate via communications technology is essential.

## **1.2 Background**

In 2009 a network of people met to workshop the issue of telecommunications for people with complex communication needs. This collaboration was between the Australian Communication Exchange (ACE), Novita Children's Services, individuals with complex communication needs, and those representing people with complex communication needs including organisations such as Communication Rights Australia.

The workshop participants identified the following areas as necessary to enable people with complex communication needs to succeed with telecommunications, in order of decreasing priority (See Appendix 1 for more details):

- access to information,
- funding,
- emergency services,
- training and education,
- access to support,
- innovative solutions,
- equity,
- implementing existing known solutions and services

The consensus settled on establishing a national phone help-line to assist with telecommunications access. However, given that a help-line was going to require an ongoing significant commitment of recurrent funding which would be difficult to

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<sup>1</sup> From Speech Pathology, Novita Children's Services.

<sup>2</sup> Speech Pathology Australia, Melbourne, Victoria

<sup>3</sup> Part v. of the Preamble at <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>.

secure, a website that contained details of known solutions was considered a reasonable and possible alternative.

The establishment of a website became the focus of the group. This outcome supported a community based Web 2.0 style that had earlier been suggested by Robert Morsillo from Telstra in discussion with Rob Garrett as a venture worth trialling. The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), the peak body that represents all consumers on communications technology issues, was approached for funding. Novita succeeded in obtaining a \$50,000 grant from the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network Grants Scheme, to establish a website to provide a useful and sustainable information and education tool for people with complex communications needs and those supporting them. The project included in-kind and funding support from Australian Communication Exchange, Telstra & Novita in addition to the grant and support from ACCAN. Support has also been provided to this project from Communication Rights Australia, The National Relay Service and The Independent Living Centre NSW, through their contribution of staff to the Website Reference Group.

### **1.3 Overview of project**

The aim was to establish a community-based website that empowers individuals with complex communication needs and support organisations to add information on available solutions and to receive direction to known applicable resources.

Objectives of this project were to:

- share information about solutions for people with complex communication needs
- highlight gaps in telecommunications access and information
- collect information that the community needs and collate it in one space
- allow a space where individuals can voice their opinions
- identify actions and funding required to make telecommunications more accessible.

Features of this project, given the purpose and the funding currently available, were that it needs to be:

- easy to access
- easy for people to contribute ideas, solutions and comments
- designed for both end users and their supporters
- oriented towards low maintenance beyond the funding period.

Design guidelines specified that it should be straightforward, uncluttered, usable and functional. The website must be accessible to those with a disability. This meant that it would need to be compliant with W3C guidelines, especially in relation to guidelines related to people who have complex communication needs.

Throughout this project, we have ensured that the potential end users and their supporters are involved in the process. This was clearly the case in the original group that determined the issues and then set the priorities. To ensure the final product did meet the perceived need, end users and their supporters have been involved in all aspects of development, as much as possible.

A website reference group was included in the project to provide support and direction throughout the project. This reference group included three people with complex communication needs and three professionals with extensive experience working with those with complex communication needs.

## 2 Website Project Reference Group

The role of the project reference group was to:

- Advise the management team
- Respond to proposed web site design
- Provide feedback and input
- Assess (evaluate & appraise) significance of the website, by commenting on the following areas:
  - Is it accessible?
  - Is it appropriate for the community?
  - complexity
  - layout & navigation
  - Are language guidelines meaningful to the community?
- Assist in marketing the website by:
  - making it known in their state and community
  - distributing information to be provided. For example, add link to own website, include in newsletters, mention at presentations & conferences when appropriate, assist others involved in marketing
- Contribute (or suggests contribution) to website content. Both before and after the website launch, group members were expected to:
  - be contributors
  - follow up potential contributors
  - suggest other contributors.

### 2.1 Members

- Rob Garrett, Team Leader | Division of Research & Innovation
- Toan Nguyen, Rehabilitation Engineer, Novita, and PhD candidate at the School of Electrical and Information Engineering, University of South Australia
- Jan Ashford, CEO, Communication Rights Australia.
- Matthew Hesketh, a qualified Engineer (CAD) and website designer. Matthew is studying psychology, has Transcortical Motor Aphasia and works part-time as a builders drafter.
- Harriet Korner, Client Services Manager, Independent Living Centre NSW.
- Darryl Sellwood, a Director of Australian Communication Exchange Limited, University of South Australia Researcher (Honours) and an AAC user.
- Annabel Vasquez, Education and Information Officer WA/QLD, National Relay Service.

- Hank Wyllie, a fiercely independent and individual person with Acquired Brain Injury, acquired late in life, who communicates by means other than speech.

## **2.2 Face-to-face and Online Meetings**

The very fact that those with complex communication needs were involved in the process required new methods of communication to be explored and tested, particularly given that the communication needed to occur between members who were located in NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

The initial face to face meeting that was held in Adelaide on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2010 and was found to be essential for the members to understand the communication needs within the group and to establish the group.

Subsequent meetings occurred through the use of the online Skype conferencing facility. This solution supported communication via voice and text simultaneously. The experience was very much a learning process. The initial Skype meeting turned out to be a failure because users were using different versions of the Skype software, which were not compatible when using the conference facility. In addition, it was difficult to support remote users when instructions needed to be customised for particular versions of the Skype software. By the time of the second meeting, we had ensured that all users were using version 4.2.0 or above. Interestingly, throughout the series of regular meetings a new version of Skype became available that would have supported video conferencing. This version was not used for the project meetings. Even with common software there were other significant challenges.

At times the meetings were difficult to manage, specifically as it was not clear as to whether the communications were being received by all members of the group. The reliability of the communication was a major factor for some meetings. As we gained experience we found it necessary to ask one member to monitor the connections and to alert others when the connection failed, or when a member has dropped out. Sometimes recovery was as simple as reconnecting. More than two intermittent connections made the meetings impractical. Members who were experienced users of Skype were essential to the successful outcome.

Whereas all conference participants could hear the voice conversations, only some were able to speak and the others needed to use the text instant messaging facility within Skype. Even for a good typist, this is nearly always slower than voice. The conference participants that needed to use text were not fast typists resulting in two different rates of communication. The keen awareness of all participants to this problem was vital for the teleconference to function effectively. The Skype notification that a member of the conference was typing text turned out to be an important indicator. Inevitably some of the responses in the conversation were missed. These difficulties, along with having to deal with the three hour time difference in summer, made it impractical to have meetings of duration greater than about two hours.

Even with these issues it was impressive that we were able to function with participants scattered across WA, SA, Victoria and NSW.

Significant outcomes of the Reference Group meetings:

1. There was a clear resolution that the website needed to support those with complex communication needs to gain access to the telecommunications network and not be side-tracked by the needs of others with a disability. There was consensus that the needs of those with complex communication needs have not been adequately dealt with in the past.
2. Members all contributed to establish a list of individuals & organisations that needed to be contacted & informed re the new community site. A shared web-based Google spreadsheet document was created so all members could independently contribute to and edit the list.
3. There were extensive communications at the meeting and via emails regarding the language and terminology to be used to describe the individuals that the site would support. Eventually all members of the Reference Group agreed to go along with the terminology used in the grant application, which is Complex Communication Needs (CCN). This is an issue to be resolved by the community and it was suggested that it needed to be an open discussion that could potentially occur on the Newell Network site.
4. Given the divergent thoughts regarding the terminology to be used, the issue of naming the website became more complicated. The website URL required a short succinct word or couple of words but the words and phrases commonly associated with the role of the site were typically “telecommunications”, “complex communication needs”, “severe communication impairment”, “those with little or no speech but a lot to say”, “phones”, “instant messaging”, etc. It was difficult to find a satisfactory name derived from these words & phrases. Given this situation it was decided to use the name “Newell” to give the site a URL of “www.newell.org.au” and then embark on the journey of educating the community regarding the role of the site. The name Newell was in recognition of the contribution of Rev Dr Christopher Newell, who has made a very significant impact in the field of telecommunications and disability.

### **2.3 Communication with the Website Reference Group and Key Stakeholders**

In order to effectively communicate with website reference members and key stakeholders throughout the project a “Yahoogroups” listserver was created. This list server was used extensively during the project to communicate between members of the Reference Group and other key stakeholder via the email address of WebRefGroup@yahoogroups.com.au.

The use of this email address and listserver assisted greatly with following up actions from meetings, and further discussion of issues that were touched on during meetings. Email was an inclusive medium for all group members, relying on text alone, rather than speech as well.

The Yahoo based facility also enabled documents to be uploaded to the associated website and could easily be downloaded by members. There was no cost associated with setting up and using this list server.

## **2.4 ACE Board Technology Forum**

This project also reported to the Technology Forum established by Australian Communication Exchange Board and chaired by Darryl Sellwood, ACE Board Director. Rob Garrett is a member of this group and reported on progress at the quarterly meetings as well as submitting 1 page monthly reports.

## **3 Development of the Website**

### ***3.1 Development of the Specification***

The outcomes from the 2009 workshop identified that solutions do exist but are scattered across the nation and are not readily known about or available to those with complex communication needs and their supporters. Prior to the development of the Newell Network site, telecommunication solutions for those with complex communication needs could be found online, however users would need to search amongst many other products to find them. Solutions were also not effectively marketed to those with complex communication needs.

A significant role for the website was to enable those with knowledge and experience to easily share their experience on the site. This community based role of the site called for the careful analysis of likely questions and contributions to assist with the specification of the website. Dr Daniel Woo supported the management team with suggested processes. These included the reference group members naming the typical questions that are likely to be asked, and listing features that they consider the website must have. Analysis of this information revealed that the issues could be classified into different areas that would need moderation and contribution from various individuals with skills in the various areas of need. For example, some questions related to the selection of an appropriate phone and others to the implementation of a recommended solution. The support and skills needed for each of these areas of activity is likely to be sourced from different sectors of the community. In addition, some resources are only available within particular regions of Australia.

To this end, the specification was written to enable moderators or groups of moderators to be associated with categories or regions selected by the website users.

The “Must Do’s” named by the Reference Group members confirmed the original mandate that the site needed to be straightforward, uncluttered, accessible and easy to use. These items named also influenced the priorities of the tasks to be tackled.

The website specification was contracted to Red Neon Designs and the look & feel and logo created by Heidi Rurade Design.

Feedback on written specification was sought from the Reference Group members before being passed to the Australian Communication Exchange for implementation.

### ***3.2 Implementation of the Website***

Whereas the specification served as a valuable tool to define the site requirements, it turned out that some parts of the requirements were readily implemented and others did not fit within the available resource and timescale.

The Newell Network site was built using the Joomla content management system ([www.joomla.org](http://www.joomla.org)) which contained a base or core system along with modules to provide additional functionality. All of the components of the system can be modified to create the look and feel needed and the required user interface through the use of style sheets, but the actual role or functionality required was determined by the module used. There are numerous modules available across a wide spectrum of functionality. To implement the functionality we required was a matter of finding the module that most closely matched our requirements. Having identified a potentially suitable module, features could be easily omitted but could not be readily added. The modification of a module's functionality was possible but had the added complication of needing to be repeated or checked to confirm that the changes work correctly following an upgrade in the version of the module. Where possible solutions were typically found by using alternatives available within the resource. The resource available and the timescale did not support the writing of software code.

The current website uses the Joomla core framework for management of the "Home", "Resources", "Feedback" and "Contact Us" features. The "Ask" section is built on the "Community Answers" Joomla module. These two modules do not necessarily have common features. For example, the task of adding key words is readily available in the core module but not in the Community Answers module.

Given the advantage of hindsight a more efficient use of the resources may have occurred if the site designers had a much closer relationship with the site creators. At the commencement of the web specification process we did not know or understand the implications of the web creation process available to this project. Our specification contained detailed requirements that were not able to be implemented. Understanding this process would definitely have affected the web specification process. We would have clearly defined the required need but not the details of the implementation and functionality. The required need would have then been used to select the Joomla module that most closely matched our requirement and alternative ways considered for the functionality not able to be implemented within the selected module.

The compromises required close co-operation with the staff member who was creating the site. Regular communication and feedback regarding the site requirements with the ACE staff member was essential to ensure the result was as close as possible to the specification. This process often occurred while project staff were looking at the results of the site changes while on the internet and on the phone to the site creator. The face-to-face meeting that occurred between Darryn Arndt & Gunela Astbrink early in this process was found to be essential to fully appreciate the need for the ongoing close communication, and to understand the constraints and possibilities.

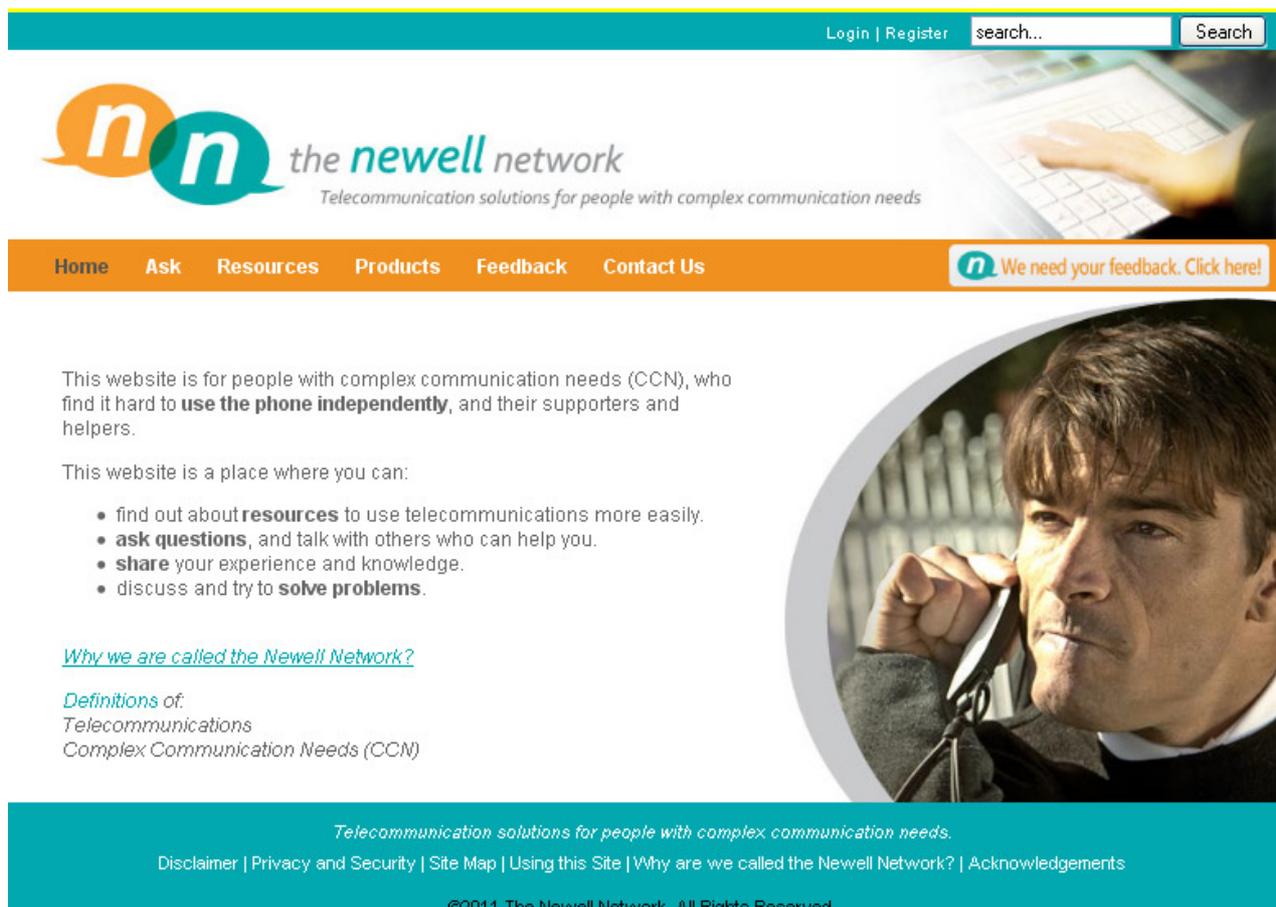
## 4 Development of Website Content

### 4.1 Website Moderators

Given the current implementation of the site, moderators are essential. Development of the "Resources" and "Products" sections was completed by the moderators. Moderator training occurred via the internet using the WebEx web based software. Gunela Astbrink in Ballina, Lucy Barnham in Bullaburra (Blue Mountains), Toan Nguyen & Rob Garrett in Adelaide with the trainer, Darryn Arndt in Brisbane.

A "Submit Product" & "Submit Resources" feature has been developed so that the community can submit products & resources with appropriate tag words being selected by the submitter. This feature will ensure that the information is presented in a consistent and orderly manner on the site, encourage greater community involvement and decrease the involvement of a moderator.

### 4.2 Home Page [www.newell.org.au](http://www.newell.org.au)



The screenshot shows the home page of the Newell Network website. At the top, there is a teal navigation bar with links for "Login" and "Register", a search bar with the text "search...", and a "Search" button. Below this is the Newell Network logo, which consists of two overlapping speech bubbles, one orange and one teal, each containing a white lowercase 'n'. To the right of the logo is the text "the newell network" in a teal sans-serif font, with the tagline "Telecommunication solutions for people with complex communication needs" in a smaller, grey font below it. To the right of the logo and tagline is a photograph of a hand typing on a laptop keyboard. Below the logo and tagline is an orange navigation bar with links for "Home", "Ask", "Resources", "Products", "Feedback", and "Contact Us". To the right of these links is a teal button with a white 'n' icon and the text "We need your feedback. Click here!". Below the navigation bar is a large circular image of a man in a suit talking on a mobile phone. To the left of this image is the main content area, which contains the following text: "This website is for people with complex communication needs (CCN), who find it hard to **use the phone independently**, and their supporters and helpers." followed by "This website is a place where you can:" and a bulleted list: "• find out about **resources** to use telecommunications more easily.", "• **ask questions**, and talk with others who can help you.", "• **share** your experience and knowledge.", "• discuss and try to **solve problems**." Below the list are two links: "[Why we are called the Newell Network?](#)" and "[Definitions of: Telecommunications Complex Communication Needs \(CCN\)](#)". At the bottom of the page is a teal footer bar with the tagline "Telecommunication solutions for people with complex communication needs." in white, followed by a line of links: "Disclaimer | Privacy and Security | Site Map | Using this Site | Why are we called the Newell Network? | Acknowledgements" and a copyright notice: "©2011 The Newell Network. All Rights Reserved."

### **4.3 "Feedback" website submissions**

The "Feedback" page is accessed via the Menu bar at the top of the page. Since the launch of the website in May, seven people have completed the feedback form online. We expect to receive increased feedback as more people use the site. The feedback was positive with all respondents indicating that the structure was good, very good or excellent, and six of seven said that accessibility of the website was very good or excellent. The feedback about content was spread with two persons indicating it was fair, two stating it was good, one very good and two excellent. This could reflect that the content is still being added to the site and be influenced by whether people found the information they were seeking.

Most people offered ideas for making the site even better. The ideas included:

- prompting people to indicate which state they were based in to facilitate better answers to questions asked
- clearer prompting for asker of question to indicate that the question has been resolved
- making links to each of the state Independent Living Centres
- increasing the number of images
- adding details about the functionality of a particular product listed in the Products section

### **4.4 "Contact Us" submissions**

The "Contact Us" page is accessed via the Menu bar at the top of the page that provides people with an option to communicate information or questions that do not fit into the "Feedback" and "Ask" a question sections of the website. It also provides people with a more private forum than the "Ask" section of the website if they have a question they do not want open to the website community.

Since the launch of the website in May we have received online submissions from 5 people through the "Contact Us" page. It is anticipated that this will increase as community awareness of the website increases.

The reasons people have used this section has been varied, and included enquiries, as well as giving information. Specific examples include:

- One individual informed administrators that she had promoted the Newell Network on her blog, and sought permission to use images.
- Two individuals asked to feature a product or service on the website. Appropriate online forms have been forwarded to these individuals.
- Two individuals asked questions specific to their needs, similar to those found in the "Ask" section.

The "Captcha" security feature has been removed from the "Contact Us" page, to improve accessibility and ease of use. It was thought that any spam submissions

received as a result of lower security could be monitored at present, given the manageable number of submissions overall. If submissions greatly increase in the future, security options can be revisited.

#### **4.5 The “Ask” feature**

A key part of the Newell Network website is the Ask section. This is where people with complex communication needs can share information and ideas. People can ask questions and get answers from their peers or from experts in the field.

Much work has been put into making the Ask section as user-friendly as possible, bearing in mind the restrictions of Joomla, the content management system. The Ask section is powered by a Joomla add-on module called Community Answers. It has a relatively simple user interface compared to other discussion forum software reviewed.

We have worked closely with ACE staff, in particular Darryn Arndt, to streamline the functions of the Ask section to make it suitable for Newell Network users. Feedback indicates that it mostly meets the needs of users but with some difficulty reported. A new version of Community Answers is currently being assessed and we expect the deployment of this latest version will make the Ask section easier to use. The latest version is still being tested and is not yet live on the site.

Currently, registered users can submit their question and indicate which category it belongs to:

- Finding the right phone
- Testing the phone
- Costs
- Using the phone
- Trouble-shooting

In each case, there is a sub-category that is consistent with the categories in the Products section i.e. home phones, mobile phones and computer-based solutions. Considerable thought was put into these categories to reflect the real-life situation of a person trying to work through their telecommunications options. These categories are as intuitive as possible and as the content of the website grows, they should enable a user to locate information and share ideas as easily as possible.

When someone responds to a particular question, the “asker” receives an email with a link to the answer on the website. The “asker” can then check if the answer meets their needs and respond that it has satisfied their needs. If this is the case, the answer is listed under “Resolved”. Other people looking at the answer, can give it a thumbs-up or thumbs-down, and this is indicated in the questions list by a white tick on a green background (in the latest version only). Question listings also indicate if the question was asked hours, days, weeks or months ago and states how many answers there have been. Under the “Home” section are ten questions and five resolved questions. The “Open” tab lists 21 questions that are still to be resolved.

We believe that the “askers” in some cases may have been satisfied with the answers and used the “thumbs-up” icon rather than responded that the answer is resolved. This issue is being addressed through changing the wording of the message that the “asker” receives when a question has been answered.

The “Popular” tab lists the questions that have been most “clicked on”. Currently, there are 26 listed. The “Answered” tab has 22 questions that have been answered.

It is also possible to search within the Ask section for particular questions. This facility will grow in importance when the number of items in the Ask section is much larger.

At this early stage of the Newell Network website, it is encouraging to note that the site is already being used in the way originally envisaged i.e. people sharing information and ideas to make it possible for people with complex communications needs to use telecommunications.

#### **4.6 The “Resources” Section**

The Resources page is accessed via the Menu bar at the top of the page. When the user clicks on the link, a list of categories appears. These categories are:

- Disability service providers
- Choosing products
- Phone companies and industry associations
- Community organisations
- Your rights
- Government information

When the user clicks on a category, a listing of resources (organisations, support groups and services) relevant to the category appear. A simple sentence describes what the resource is. The name of the resource in the sentence acts as a link to the external webpage. The user can click on a link of interest for further information. Information has been kept to a minimum on the Newell Network website, in order to facilitate ease of use and access. Text is presented in plain English to assist users with literacy difficulties.

There are currently 17 resources listed overall, with a breakdown of each category given below.

- Disability service providers - 6
- Choosing products - 1
- Phone companies and industry associations - 3
- Community organisations - 2
- Your rights - 2

- Government information - 3

An online form has been created for other organisations to submit information about themselves to be included in the Resource section of the website. This is a single page form, with a set format. It enables people to provide information in an easy-to-use, structured format. This will give the Resource section consistency in the amount and type of information provided and the layout and look.

#### **4.7 The “Products” Section**

The Products page is accessed via the Menu bar at the top of the page. When the user clicks on the link, a list of categories appears. These categories are:

- Mobile phones
- Home phones
- Computer-based solutions.

Currently these categories are sufficient. However, depending on the types of products submitted in future, this may need to be reviewed.

When the user clicks on a category, a listing of relevant products appear, with a title and introductory sentence. The title acts as a link to a page with further information on that product on the Newell Network website.

- In each single product page, the user will generally find:
- a brief description of the product,
- its likely usefulness for those with complex communication needs,
- a photo of the product, and
- a link to an external website for further information.

Information has been kept to a minimum on the Newell Network website, in order to facilitate ease of use and access. Text is presented in plain English to assist users with literacy difficulties.

There are currently 9 products listed overall, with a breakdown of each category given below.

- Mobile phones - 3
- Home phones - 2
- Computer-based solutions - 4

We are currently in the testing stage of an online form for relevant people (e.g. product developers, suppliers, users with expert knowledge) to submit information about a product to be included in the Products section of the website. This is a single page form, with a set format. It will enable people to provide information in an easy-to-use, structured format and also allow them to select from a preset range of

tag words which will facilitate effective searches in the future. This will give the Product section consistency in tagging, layout and look.

The site was launched at the 2011 AGOSCI Conference, May 2011 in Adelaide “Taking to the Streets” (see section 5).

## 5 Promotion of the Project

- **11 - 14 Aug 2010, ARATA Bi-Annual Conference, Hobart**

Presentation "Website for the disability community to share telecommunications solutions" Rob Garrett

Rob Garrett was able to meet with Dr Daniel Woo & Harriet Korner for first time.

- **Nov 2010, "AGOSCI in focus magazine", Issue 30 Vol. 1**

Article "Telecommunications Website Project for People with Complex Communication Needs" pp.13-14

- **Summer 2010, "Independent Living" Journal of Independent Living Centres Australia, Vol 26 No 4**

Article "Sharing Telecommunications Solutions" pp 14 - 16

- **15 - 16 Nov 2010, Communications Policy Research Forum**

Paper "Users informing users: A web 2.0 approach to information about accessible telecommunications for people with disability." Rob Garrett (Novita) & Robert Morsillo (Telstra)

- **10 May 2011, Telstra Disability Forum meeting.**

Gunela Astbrink was able to present The Newell Network to the Telstra Disability Forum meeting on Tuesday 10th May.

- **11- 14 May 2011, AGOSCI Bi-Annual Conference, Adelaide**

The Newell Network was a conference satchel sponsor. A copy of The Newell Network brochure was included in all of the AGOSCI satchels. As a sponsor, The Newell Network logo and name appeared in the Conference Handbook and on the conference website:

<http://www.alloccasionsgroup.com/agosci-2011-conference-sponsorship>.

The Newell Network also featured in Darryl Sellwood's 3-hour Pre-conference workshop "Finding telecommunications solutions for people who rely on augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) technologies", Wed 11th May 2011. This was a full house and an outstanding success. The Newell Network hands-on station was staffed by Gunela Astbrink.

The A1 sized Newell Network poster was displayed as a part of the poster presentation for the duration of the conference.

The entire conference audience were introduced to The Newell Network in Darryl Sellwood's Keynote Address "Take this: it's more than participation, it's enabling satisfying lives".

The Newell Network was also introduced during the "Disability Equipment – Accessing telecommunications" presentation by Wayne Hawkins, Disability Policy Adviser, Australian Communications Consumers Action Network (ACCAN).

- **17th May 2011 – Tool for promotion via email.**

Marketing copy was developed by Lucy Barnham and approved by Rob Garrett, for use over email. This has been used by team members to promote the Newell Network on various listservers (e.g. AGOSCI, ARATA, etc.) and to other significant organisations and stakeholders via email. It will continue to be used as required.

- **18-19th May 2011, Daily Living Expo**

The Newell Network was publicised by Harriet Korner at the Assistive Technology Suppliers Australasia (ATSA, formerly IRSA) Daily Living Expo. This was a very big expo at Rosehill Racecourse Exhibition Centre.

- **7 June 2011, Speech Pathologists in Adult Disability**

The Newell Network was presented by Lucy Barnham to a group of about 40 people, mainly professionals with a few people with complex communication needs. The presentation was well received & tied in well with issues they were talking about which included communication rights and access to appropriate AAC technology.

- **8 June 2011, Cerebral Palsy Alliance**

The Newell Network was presented by Lucy Barnham to a team meeting at Prairiewood. This was attended by about 20 people on the allied health services team (Lifepoints). They plan to disseminate the information to other services in the organisation, including CAS and accommodation.

- **20 June 2011, Link Magazine**

News article regarding the launch of the Newell Network submitted to the Link magazine for August edition.

## 6 Discussion & Recommendations

### 6.1 Community Involvement

From the outset of this project it was clear that no single individual or organisation had the required answers to support the full range of individuals with complex communication needs to gain access to the telecommunications network. The possible solutions were also challenged by the short lifetime of commercially available options and solutions. As a consequence, the establishment of a community of individuals and organisations to share and pool information and solutions was considered essential for the project to be a success.

Given that the aim was to create a Web 2.0 community based website, the Website Reference Group was an essential part of the project. Not only did the Group define the bounds of the project and raise issues not initially expected, but they also demonstrated a very high level of commitment to the project, were acutely aware of the unmet needs, provided essential links to other interested parties and fully appreciated the need for the website.

Issues such as the use of appropriate terminology were never fully resolved but there was consensus in regard to the use of “complex communication needs” on the website. The issue of the appropriate terminology to be used was broader than this project. Whereas a forum on the site could provide an avenue for the discussion to occur, the discussion could (and does) also take place in other disability related forums and communities. It would appear that the community of professionals in the field agree with the use of “complex communication needs” but this is not the case within the community of individuals with complex communication needs!

**Recommendation 1:** That consideration be given to the inclusion of a “Forum” section that would enable the community to discuss and resolve issues such as the use of appropriate terminology and other issues that do not fit well within the existing “Ask” section.

### 6.2 Using Skype for Communication

There were new challenges to be resolved when the Reference Group met via Skype. These Skype based meetings required:

- Individuals who are aware and experienced with the alternatives communication techniques used by those with complex communication needs.
- Clear guidelines to assist with different rates of communication.
- That all users are working with the same or similar versions of the Skype software. This ensured inter-operability and assisted in the instruction and support.

- That phone and contact information for all participants was readily available so that it was possible to contact them easily when the connection was questionable.
- Shorter meetings initially to give participants time to become familiar with the technology, and to develop skills at taking part in a meeting in which participants are using both speech and text to communicate.
- The time of any one meeting be limited to less than 2 hours and allow for extra meetings.

**Recommendation 2:** Guidelines be developed to assist when conversing with people who have complex communication needs in a teleconference involving participants who have varying speeds and methods of communication to ensure fairness with communication turns and agreed procedures.

Our experience demonstrated the need for the NBN, which is expected to supply better bandwidth and a guaranteed quality of service. This will be required to enable reliable and workable meetings that will enable individuals with various abilities to effectively contribute in projects of this nature. The increased bandwidth should also support video conferencing, which could well be significant, given the greater effectiveness of face to face communication, compared with voice and text only. The reliability of the system will need to match the reliability of the current landline phone system.

**Recommendation 3:** That the complex communication needs community actively endorses the need for an Australian internet network that has a guaranteed quality of service and level of reliability that matches the level of service that is currently experienced by the home phone network.

### **6.3 Expanding the Network**

The site name of “The Newell Network” was chosen because it offered solutions to those with complex communication needs wanting to use the telecommunications network. It also addressed the need for a community network to be involved to contribute their experiences and expertise. The Reference Group members’ role in the development of the community network was critical. Their knowledge of the community and associated networks made it easy to identify key players. The process of making contact with this community began at the AGOSCI 2011 Conference and is still continuing.

**Recommendation 4:** That funding be made available to enable all those named as being significant to this community to be contacted and invited to contribute to the Newell Network.

The establishment of the community network will require time. It is expected to become more significant when people are dealing with a particular person’s situation. The significance of the web site will become more important as the number of real life scenarios are added to the “Ask” section of the site. Ongoing activity on the site will require moderator support.

**Recommendation 5:** That moderator support be provided to ensure that the full benefit of the site can be realised.

#### **6.4 Moderation & Maintenance**

The Products and Resources sections have been added by the website moderators with little involvement of the community. Both the “Submit Product” and “Submit Resource” web-based forms are in development. They will enable anyone in the community to submit a Product or a Resource to the site. This process supports the further development of the community of site users. Moderators will still need to vet the submission, transfer the form content to the website and be involved in any changes that are required.

**Recommendation 6:** That the Product and Resources submission process be further developed so that any member of the community can make a submission and then be able to edit and maintain the submission following approval by a moderator.

This recommendation will significantly decrease the moderator role and along with the recommendations below will enable the task of moderation to be shared across the community.

At present, any activity on the site instigates an email to the four administrators who have been part of the project team. Decisions currently need to be made as to who needs to respond to the notification of activity. The original specification supported the concept of multiple groups of moderators where a group was connected to different website areas of need. The classification of the need specified by the contributor would then automatically direct the request to the appropriate moderator group.

**Recommendation 7:** That modification to the site along the lines proposed in the specification be implemented to allow the moderation and administration of the site to be shared with interested community members who have the required knowledge.

#### **6.5 Refining the Search Capability**

The website is built using the Joomla Core content management system for all but the “Ask” section, which is using the Joomla “Community Answers” module. In a sense, these two parts of the site can be considered as two separate websites, both customised to meet the look and feel requirement of The Newell Network site. The consequence of this approach is that the content in one section is not readily available in the other section and that the search processes supplied with each section are not the same. For example the questions and answers contained within the Community Answers module that have been added under the category of “Finding the right mobile phone” have no relationship to the products that have been added under the category “Mobile phones”. To find similar entries under a particular category requires the activation of two different search processes, one for each section of the site.

In addition to this issue, there is potential for a lack of consistency in the words and tags used in each section of the site. For example, searching for a “home phone” solution will not find entries that have been submitted using the words “landline phone” or “fixed phone”. The implementation of the “Submit Product” and “Submit Resource” web based form will promote consistency of the tags as the contributor will be asked to select words from a supplied list, alternative techniques are needed in the “Ask” section.

While the content on the site is relatively small, it is feasible and practical to browse the site for solutions to a particular problem or issue. As the content increases, the search facility will become critical and will need to be improved to ensure that users can find content relevant to their issue.

**Recommendation 8:** That the consistent tagging of entries that has started in the Products and Resources section be completed.

**Recommendation 9:** That there be a careful analysis of the performance of the search facility within the core Joomla system and the search facility within the “Ask” section and, if found inadequate, alternative search processes should be considered. This may involve a search system or wizard that requires the user to select items applicable to their needs rather than the user having to try a word, which may or may not be found.

## **6.6 Future Management of the Website**

The experience so far confirms the significance of this site and now raises the issue of the support for its ongoing future. The community development and response clearly can support an important and cost effective solution for those with complex communication needs. Ongoing funding will now strengthen this new valuable resource. Appendix 2 contains details of our proposed next steps for the future for The Newell Network.

**Recommendation 10:** That an appropriate structure be put in place to ensure that the issue of ongoing funding is resolved and the recommendations are considered and acted upon. See Appendix 2 for starting points to this recommendation.

## 7 Conclusion

As a result of the broad recognition of the complex issues associated with the identification of workable and satisfactory telecommunication solutions needed for those with CCN, this project has received extensive financial, in-kind and community support from industry, end users, supporters and carers. This support has made possible the creation of The Newell Network community based website as well as enabling and establishing a network of Australians wanting to share their experience and to assist others gain access to the telecommunications system.

The project has demonstrated that there are important solutions available to assist those with complex communication needs and there are community minded individuals who are prepared to share their experience and knowledge.

The website has been public from 10<sup>th</sup> May 2011 for a period of only 7 weeks at the time of writing. Given that the content contribution is typically driven by end user needs and that the nature of solutions are varied and often customised to meet individual needs, it will take a significant period of time for a meaningful and comprehensive array of solutions to be included. Once this “critical mass” of information exists, it will entice others to use the site and to become aware of the value and significance of the site.

It is noted that there are a low number of individuals who have completed the web based feedback form but this could be influenced by the fact that some users have already made a contribution to the site and are less likely to complete the feedback form. The feedback was clearly positive.

The experience to date fully supports the concept and now raises the issue of ongoing support for the site. Given that little of the shared community moderation specification could be implemented, ongoing paid moderation and administration support is now essential. Whereas the recommendations made are expected to significantly decrease this need, it is clear that there will always be a need for some level of ongoing moderation of content and administration of the website necessary to maintain this valuable resource.



## 8 Appendix 1: Report on CCN - Telecommunications Activities

**Rob Garrett**

25 February 2010

### ***Summary***

As a result of ACE support, a significant eighteen member Australia-wide reference group of key end users and professionals motivated to improve telecommunications access for those with Complex Communication Needs and Severe Communication Impairments has now been established.

A dedicated email list server and a one day face-to-face workshop have facilitated the creation of the reference group which has identified and prioritised important issues and areas for future action. The most important issue was the lack of access to currently known information that is scattered across Australia.

Ongoing Australia wide group communication has been tested through the use of simultaneous voice and text conference facilities provided by the free Skype to Skype VoIP system.

### **Building of the network**

The initial direction was to create a community of end users and their supporters who either experience the problems or who are conversant of the issues related to those with Complex Communication Needs (CCN) or Severe Communications Impairment (SCI) who want or need to access the telecommunications network.

A free email list server was setup under the following banner:

*For discussion of issues, ideas, activities and solutions related to assisting those that have a Severe Communication Impairment (SCI) to gain meaningful and effective access to the Australian telecommunications system either via a phone or the internet.*

Group members were sought from the Australia Rehabilitation & Assistive Technology Association (ARATA), Australian Group on Severe Communication Impairment (AGOSCI) and other appropriate networks.

A total five end users and thirteen professionals have joined the list. These members are scattered across Australia with contributors from NSW, Vic, SA and WA. Fifty-two messages have been sent over the period September 2009 to date. Messages can be

sent to the members of the group using the email address of [SCI Telecom@yahoo.com](mailto:SCI_Telecom@yahoo.com) and members of the list can look at all recent messages at the web site [http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/SCI\\_Telecom/](http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/SCI_Telecom/). This group requires individual registration which can be requested through the use of the email address [SCI\\_Telecom-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:SCI_Telecom-subscribe@yahoo.com).

A motivation for the establishment of the list server was to identify participants who had experience with CCN/SCI for participation in a one day workshop. The invitation to participate in this workshop of up to 10 people was sent to the SCI\_Telecom list. We are also wish to establish a Research Reference Group from within this community to assist and guide future research.

## **One Day Workshop re Telecommunications & People with SCI/CCN**

*The objectives of this workshop were to:*

*Identify problems, issues and needs of the target group.*

*Indication of how these are currently been addressed and how successfully.*

*What do we want at the end of the day?*

*List of issues, problems and needs that are impeding successful access to the network*

*The list to be prioritised in the order of importance.*

*Feasibility analysis: what can reasonably be done?*

*Identification of future directions.*

A total of nine people participated in the workshop held on 28 October 2009 at NovitaTech. There were five from SA, three from Victoria and one from WA. Three of the attendees experience severe communication difficulties and the other six people had extensive experience working with individuals with CCN/SCI. All of the travelling and accommodation expenses for interstate attendees and their carers was covered from ACE supplied funds.

Questions submitted to attendees to consider in preparation for the workshop were:

### **For those who are Professionals/Supporters/Carers –**

What experience have you had supporting and/or implementing telecommunications solutions for people with SCI/CCN?

Please identify the issues and problems that you have had when assisting those with SCI/CCN to gain effective access to the telecommunications network? Please list and prioritise.

What do you think are the **key changes needed** to resolve these issues or problems? If possible, please prioritise these changes.

Do you know of any programs or service models that assist/support people with SCI/CCN to gain effective access to the telecommunications network? Please describe and outline any pros and cons.

**For those with SCI/CCN –**

1. How are you currently accessing the telecommunications network?

Do you think this access is successful? (Yes or No?)

**If No** What are the current problems associated with gaining access to the telecommunications network? Please list and prioritise.

**If Yes** What were the key factors that needed to be considered in identifying and implementing the successful solution?

2. Do you need or want **other ways** of accessing the telecommunications network?

**If Yes** Please list and prioritise these needs or wants?

What are the fundamental issues or problems that are stopping you from obtaining the access you need or want?

**If Unsure** Is this because - (please tick all that apply)

- You are unaware of the other possibilities?
- You do not have access to anyone to discuss possible options?
- You are uncertain about costs?
- Others?

Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

At the time of the workshop the key issues were identified. Not all of the workshop objectives listed above were met within the time available on the day. The participants agreed to finalise the voting on the priorities via email. Each workshop participant was given a total of fifteen votes that could be attributed to the individual items in any proportion. The final prioritised list of issues identified follows:

Key Priority	Key themes identified	Total Votes	%
	<b>(Individual items that scored 5 or more votes in red)</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>Access to information</b>		
	• <b>Lack of access to good information &amp; available solutions</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6%</b>
	• Don't know where to get the information	2	2%
	• Lack of knowledgeable people	2	2%
	• Knowledge of the NRS and other solutions	2	2%
	• NRS help desk – not widely known	1	1%
	• Updated information of phone compatibility	0	0%
	• Information on new technology – continuously updated	4	4%
	• Accessible information, plans and contracts (tailored to specific groups)	4	4%
	• Lack of knowledge of disability issues, individual needs & services	2	2%
	• National wide TV ad on the teleco needs for PWD?	2	2%
		<b>25</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Funding</b>		
	• <b>Equipment (DEP)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6%</b>
	• Services (does not exist at a national level)	3	3%
	• Training	3	3%
	• <b>Ongoing support</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5%</b>
	• Assessment	1	1%
	• Usage (particularly for SCI/CCN users)	0	0%
	• State issue – different for each state	1	1%
	• Lack of for expertise to main advice or services	2	2%
		<b>21</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Emergency Services</b>		
	• <b>an issue for people with SCI/CCN.</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10%</b>
	• an issue for skype?	1	1%
	• An issue for ACMA.	1	1%
		<b>12</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Training &amp; Education</b>		
	• Back to basics – understanding of the concept & telecommunication & level of confidence	4	4%
	• Customisable for different levels	1	1%
	• NRS – communication with relay officer	1	1%
	• Strategies to use the technology (so it is more acceptable by others)	1	1%
	• Knowledge, training and use of equipment	2	2%

	• For service providers – ongoing	0	0%
	• Individual advocacy (help required in this area) & community awareness	3	3%
	• Outreach	0	0%
		12	11%
<b>5</b>	<b>Access to support</b>		
	• After sale support	4	4%
	• Initial training	3	3%
	• Technical & troubleshoot	2	2%
	• Ongoing lifestyle and needs	1	1%
		10	10%
<b>5</b>	<b>Implementing innovative solutions</b>		
	• Exploring possible options for those that can't access current technology	4	4%
	• Innovative solutions for changing needs – ongoing	3	3%
	• Adaptable solutions that grows with the person.	3	3%
		10	10%

<b>7</b>	<b>Equity</b>		
	• Recognising the nature of disability and the extra costs associated with having a disability.	5	5%
	• Equivalent access	0	0%
	• Human rights as leverage to access	4	4%
		9	9%
<b>8</b>	<b>Implementing known solutions</b>		
	• Telecommunications “health check” every 6 months	5	5%
		5	5%
<b>9</b>	<b>Service</b>		
	• Frustration with automated responses	1	1%
	• IDEP	0	0%
		1	1%
	<b>Totals (15 points each for 7 voters )</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100%</b>

At the conclusion of the 1 day workshop the attendees completed an evaluation form. Participants rated the workshop favourably typically as “Excellent” or “Very Good”. Five people rated the length of the workshop as “Just Right” or “Too Short”; one person ticked “Too Long”. Comments recorded under “the main points you feel you learnt” were:

“What I came here for I feel is going to happen”

“Workshop was productive”  
“Gained a lot of information to take back”  
“User priorities – emergency services for example”  
“Lack of knowledge of users re current solutions; very basic information or no information known about current solutions available”  
“Most info. was not new to me, but it was good to share views and information”  
“Core group of people who are interested in telecom issues in particular access”  
“Networking, feedback and interaction with others”  
“Views of a range of people, especially users”  
“Main barriers to telecommunications / access”  
“Ideas re some potential solutions.”

## Post Workshop Activities

In addition to voting on the priorities via email, experimental trials occurred using the VoIP Skype software conference facility in both voice and text (called Chat in Skype) so that all workshop participants could participate in a discussion regardless of where they live in Australia.

Nearly all of the workshop participants joined a Skype session setup to brainstorm solutions to the most important key theme priority “*Access to information*” and concentrate on the items within the category that had the highest individual votes, namely:

*Lack of access to good information & available solutions*

*Information on new technology – continuously updated*

*Accessible information, plans and contracts (tailored to specific groups)*

The unanimous agreement was that there was an important need for an Australia wide phone-in help line available to assist those with CCN/SCI to gain and maintain access to the telecommunications network. This help line would need to be staffed by people who have up-to-date knowledge of current solutions and appropriate expertise in the CCN/SCI field so that they are able to direct individuals to appropriate effective sources available.

As a secondary consideration, the group considered that a website that contained details of potential solutions would be of significance. Discussion revolved around how this might happen in such a way that would facilitate those with current experience and knowledge of solutions being able to share it with the rest of the community. Given the diverse nature of disability, it was considered that the structure of the site would be critical for success. Future activity will focus on progressing this high priority issue.

## 9 Appendix 2: Future options for The Newell Network – a start

Activity Areas	Complete work underway & partly completed	Next steps and longer term goals
<b>Funding &amp; Support</b>	Remaining balance of the Telstra supplied funding. Ongoing website development in-kind support from ACE. Ongoing consumer support from the current Website Reference Group.	Follow up the possibility of extending the current funding with organisations such as ACE, Telstra, ACMA, etc. Explore ongoing consumer support from the current Website Reference Group. Organise funding support as part of the ongoing Disability Equipment costs (perhaps the new Telecommunications Universal Service Management Agency (TUSMA) or NRS Outreach?).
<b>Website enhancements</b>	Complete testing and activation of the existing "Submit Product" & "Submit Resource" forms then make forms public. Classify existing Product & Resource entries on the site using the tags words introduced in the new "Submit Product" & "Submit Resource" web based forms. Reformat "Resources" section to match the functionality of the "Products" section and to ensure compatibility with new "Submit Resource" form.	Explore ways to get the Q&A contributions tagged via the user selection from a list a tag words. Development of an effective search wizard that takes advantage of the consistent tagging of website content. Consider the need for a forum and implement if necessary.
<b>Website content</b>	Rob Garrett & Toan Nguyen to submit products & respond to questions on the Ask page.	Encourage all interested parties to contribute content.

<b>Publicity</b>	Finish contacting the key individuals named by the Website Project Reference Group members. Encourage those contacted to use the Submit Product & Resources forms and solicit potential moderators.	Write articles for community newsletters. Encourage Web Reference Group members to speak at meetings about the Newell Network. Consider & implement ways to promote the site to the key community organisations & groups.
<b>Decreasing moderation costs by the involvement of community moderators.</b>	Initially talk to key members of the ILC's to see if they would consider contributing to queries related to finding the right phone.	Subcontract a Primary Moderator to monitor website activity and to forward incoming issues to other appropriate knowledgeable moderators for their action. Modify the website so that all incoming issues are automatically directed appropriate knowledgeable moderators for their action utilising the categories specified by the submitter.

