From March through to July 2006, the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) ran a pilot implementation of online tendering technology at a number of councils across Tasmania to investigate the maturity, suitability and cost effectiveness of this technology for Tasmanian Local Government.

The pilot revealed that there is a high level of suitability and cost effectiveness for those councils that participated in the trial. Cost savings made by the participating councils varied according to those councils existing practices, however all councils observed an increase in the vendor engagement through the apparent expansion of potential reach of the advertised tenders.

The recommendations from the pilot were that the LGAT should seek a Head of Agreement contract with a suitable vendor, offering online tendering services on an opt-in basis. Further, it was recommended that a Head of Agreement should follow an Expression of Interest for such technology that Hobart City Council was planning to advertise.

The LGAT in collaboration with Kingborough, Central Coast, Hobart City and Devonport Councils recently completed a tender for the provision of an online tendering system (LGAT200701) Head of Agreement. Responses were received from Intec, IPro Live, TenderLink, Tenders.net and Tenderwatch. The committee evaluated the responses for this Request for Tender and it has been agreed that the response from TenderLink was the most suitable for the Tasmanian Local Government sector. We are now completing contract negotiations with TenderLink and should be able to offer an online tendering solution on an opt-in basis to Tasmanian councils in the near future.

The Head of Agreement that is being finalised, will allow Tasmanian councils to sign up for online tendering services with TenderLink, using the established contract without alteration. However, it should be noted that this Head of Agreement does not prevent Tasmanian councils from establishing their own online tendering solution, should they so desire.

Following the establishment of the Head of Agreement, training sessions will be made available to councils, irrespective of the councils taking up this contract. This can be seen as an opportunity for councils that are thinking about engaging in online tendering, to have a ‘hands-on’ training session, to see if online tendering is for you.

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**Talking Computer Overcomes Online Access Issues**

The Internet is a great tool, for those who can read. Now, a new ‘talking’ computer program, Browsealoud, has made it possible for people who are visually impaired, or who have literacy difficulties, to surf the web too.

Browsealoud is a program that reads web pages aloud for people who find it difficult to read online. Free software, which can be downloaded from the Browsealoud website, will enable website visitors to hear the words on the screen by hovering their mouse cursor over the text they want to hear. Once downloaded, the software is easy to use and it will help users get the most out of using the website.

By improving accessibility to websites, Browsealoud generates greater digital inclusion and interaction with people with disability, literacy difficulties, visual impairments and where English is a second language.

Australia’s older adult population (60 years and older) is expected to double between 1999 and 2031 to over 6 million. In a further 20 years, they will make up a quarter of the Australian population. With this growth in the older population, the proportion of web visitors with low vision problems and other disabilities will increase significantly.

To visit the Browsealoud website, go to www.browsealoud.com.au.

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1 UNSW 1999; Vision Australia Foundation 2002; ABS 2001
You may have invested considerable resources in getting the public to interact with you on your website, but unless it is structured, designed and organised with the user experience in mind, you run the risk of losing visitors before you’ve had an opportunity to capture their attention.

The number of visits to websites continues to grow. More visits by the public means more work, more customer enquiries, emails, complaints, and phone calls. This is going to be hard for an organisation to manage if the website is difficult to use and frustrates users because they can’t find what they are looking for. People who interact with websites are becoming less tolerant of difficult-to-use designs, or websites which are too slow to load. It is important users are able to find their way around a website within a few seconds and can quickly scan the content and navigation. Browsers don’t have the patience to read a manual on how to navigate around a home page, or use an online form.

Usability practices, such as testing a website with a sample of the public during website creation, can mean the difference between an organisation whose website operates efficiently and effectively, and one that fails to meet the needs and goals of its audience. Usability practices not only improve customer satisfaction but also set the foundations for long-term website improvements.

Usability testing should take place at the very early stages of website development. Even at the drawing and concept phase. Small but effective tests will ensure the website delivers the right kind of experience to fulfill the organisation’s objectives, while restricting future costs to website enhancements and website reconstruction.

To find out how your organisation can enhance the usability of its website, contact AdditionalView on 62233 046, or visit the website at www.additionalview.com.au.

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Councils face some challenges in light of growing communities and increased responsibilities, but there are steps they can employ to be best prepared to meet these changes.

Local councils have undergone big changes in recent years. Reforms in the sector have seen key functions delivered by councils evolve beyond ‘rates, roads and rubbish’. Today, councils are required to deliver a vast array of services, many of which require engagement with their local residents and businesses who, increasingly, demand 24/7 availability of services.

This growth in responsibilities creates a number of different pressures for councils. For example, the number of services offered can grow exponentially, requiring additional employees and resources. This would mean that council’s current IT systems and processes may be rendered useless if they are unable to scale to meet new requirements. Secondly, as council buildings become more geographically spread out, it grows increasingly difficult for constituents to interact directly with their councils.

The pressure is on for Local Government to meet the changing needs of their community and, like all businesses, councils are faced with the dilemma of implementing new initiatives and improvements without the necessary increases in funding or resources.

One of the keys to successfully fostering a strong community and improving services, is for local councils to maintain pace with advances in technology. This will enable councils to optimise service delivery and their internal systems, uniformly and consistently, whilst meeting the increasing demands of residents by continuing to roll out online services.

The right technology can ensure that councils are equipped to deal with the growth of their workforce, region and responsibilities. Flexible and scaleable IT systems which enable online communication will help councils to interact with even the most geographically disperse community. It will also enable councils to deliver services around the clock such as the payment of rates notices, animal charges and planning applications, all online.

For further information on the technology available to support your council, contact TechnologyOne, Tasmania on 6231 5338.