

Reflections at the end of a contract

Written by Lisa Harvey

Thursday, 23 June 2011 06:15 - Last Updated Thursday, 23 June 2011 08:54

There are turning points in the life of a business that turn it up or down. Nearly 3.5 years ago we had one of the up turning points that gave us both challenge and opportunity. It was a contract from FaHCSIA to build an information clearinghouse for the homelessness service delivery sector, the [National Homelessness Information Clearinghouse](#) .

This was, by a long way, the biggest job we had ever bid for and we needed a lot of luck to get it. That luck came in the form of an innovative and insightful public servant, Rex Direen. This was well before the Gov2au agenda was on the table, but he wanted something that would provide a free flowing and collaborative engagement with the homelessness sector. This was innovative for many reasons:

- It enabled the delivery of information that the Department could not otherwise deliver through their own channels.
- It encouraged engagement through comments, discussions and the establishment of communities of practice.
- The audience were an under-resourced, overworked group who were not early technology adopters.

Energetica was given the contract and I believe that was because we shared the vision. We understood the power of access to information and online engagement. We understood the audience, having worked with service delivery agencies, and we understood the technology.

Our bid was to build the site in Joomla!, when Open Source was still not well understood within government, and we were engaged to take over the entire management of the site, including the sourcing of content and the engagement of the community.

Presenting such a small company with such a big job was risky for the Department, but the outcomes for both sides are greater when someone is prepared to think differently.

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For the Energetica team no project is "just another contract", our clients are special because they are making a difference in their part of the world. The Clearinghouse became a cornerstone of our work and we are immensely proud of the job we did.

It is hard to measure the total difference it made to our business. I can say that we are a long way now from where we were then and it gave us confidence and we learned a great deal from the project.

So now 3 years after the site was launched by Minister Pilibsek at the [Yfoundations \(YAA\)](#) conference our contract has come to an end. FaHCSIA will relaunch the site and manage it internally. We leave them with an active community, a huge resource and a great deal of goodwill within the sector.

Our [final article](#) on the site has some statistics.

For our part we feel like we have made a difference to homelessness in Australia. Our purpose is to help those who help others and the Homelessness Information Clearinghouse helped us to do this in spades.

For my part I want to particularly thank my great team who put in the effort needed to make the Clearinghouse such a great resource:

Kim Brebach - who did the site build and wrangled the unbelievably complex IA into something elegant.

Lydnsey Jackson - who, with limitless energy, managed the technology, distributed the newsletter, sourced content and kept the whole thing ticking along nicely.

Narelle Patterson - who kept up the content management for the last months.

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Paul van Reyk - Whose connections in the sector are unmatched and whose enthusiasm for the sector is even greater. It simply would not have happened without Paul.

I'd also like to thank the various teams at FaHCSIA who left us to do our work and listened to our many ideas for improvements and innovations for the site.

Winning the contract was a great up-turning point for Energetica. The expiry of the contract is not a great down-turning point. We will miss the work and wish we could continue it, but it is no longer our biggest project and we have a lot of great work to get on with.