

LGEO Research

Local Government Engagement Online Newsletter



Exploring online neighbourhoods

Featuring HarringayOnline.com, a successful community website since July 2007

Recently I met up with Hugh Flouch and talked about his success running HarringayOnline, a neighbourhood network online working to strengthen the neighbourhood of Harringay in the north London Borough of Haringey. This piece was taken from the online interview I conducted with Hugh. I find it is important to

explore exemplary community websites such as HarringayOnline and determine how local councils should respond to the increasing presence of its community online.

<http://www.harringayonline.com>

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Hugh also talks about what are HOs motivations, HOs members, funding and the response its received so far.

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Here you'll learn about all HOs achievements and how its increasing Harringay's social capital.

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Tips

Getting the word out

A huge range of methods online and some offline.

Online

1. SEO
2. Get listed anywhere – directories, listing sites, Wikipedia etc
3. Set up a Harringay Online Flickr group
4. Local Newspapers
5. Local Yahoo Newsgroups
6. Entered & was successful in a UK Govt sponsored award – great for momentum
7. Every nook and cranny on the net where someone might be interested in Harringay

Offline

8. Local residents groups
9. Building relationships with local politicians
10. Had little Harringay Online business cards created to hand out in shops/at bus stops etc
11. Poster in local supermarket
12. Local schools
13. Local pubs
14. Just get out there!

HarringayOnline.com Background

As mentioned earlier, Harringay Online is a neighbourhood network working to strengthen the neighbourhood of Harringay in the north London Borough of Haringey. Through social networking technology Harringay Online provides a virtual high street cafe-cum-village hall, which blends web-based and real world neighbourhood interactions to build stronger more empowered communities.

Harringay Online is focussed on achieving four main outcomes:

1. Building a sense of place in a neighbourhood – an understanding and appreciation of the neighbourhood to encourage a feeling of belonging and regarding a place as home.

2. Building social capital in the neighbourhood – building networks, norms and trust that enable people to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives – simply put building community spirit or neighbourliness.

3. Empowering local people to take action shape their neighbourhood – working to improve local people's ability to influence local decisions and affect local circumstances

4. Engaging people in local democratic processes.

Ultimately our goal is to increase the wellbeing levels of people in neighbourhoods.

Features

1. The Harringay Online concept is proven to mobilise and organise local communities and act as a key enabler of key outcomes outlined in the Government's recent focus on community empowerment. (being active, having an influence).

2. The Harringay Online concept also delivers on the softer less quantifiable aspects of empowerment, which are critical to people's wellbeing. Membership in social networks was shown by the Office of National Statistics report on Social Capital to have a positive effect on reducing crime and grime and improve health in a neighbourhood. It also provides a basis for deeper local engagement.

3. The technology underpinning the Harringay Online concept removes the historical cost barrier to co-ordinating group action. The Harringay Online concept is designed to be free (or almost free) at the point of delivery.

4. Technology on its own is not enough. Without a real incentive all the technology in the world is nothing more than all the technology in the world.

Features continued...

5. In 2007 the Commission on Integration and Cohesion explicitly stated that residents who believe they can influence local decisions are almost 50% more likely to trust local authorities. By enabling residents to have a better influence on local decisions the Harringay Online concept helps build that trust.

6. The Harringay Online concept is designed to encourage people to engage in local democracy at their level of comfort which has resulted in many people engaging a little, some engaging moderately and others becoming very active.

7. From the outset concept has embraced offline and online. Online is the start an connector, offline creates the glue.

Motivations

The initial motivation was personal experience of myself and of my neighbours of sense intense disempowerment in our ability to shape the place where we live.

We were also keen to increase the community spirit in the neighbourhood by building stronger personal connection between individuals and between community segments.

Members

A mixture of locals and outsiders. All are welcome. The members map (drop-down off the Members tab gives you some sense of the concentration and bear in mind if numbers per street were to be taken into account the picture would look very concentrated on Harringay.

We have intentionally reached out to the Harringay Diaspora and have ex-Harringaeites active on eth site from Germany, Israel, Australia, Hong Kong, Canada, USA and from around the UK

Info Deliverables

1. Core Info relative to place-shaping, e.g. planning applications, Town planning, relevant UDP issues, how to influence etc.
2. General info on how to access local services, e.g. waste collection, neighbourhood management, health, etc
3. Policing, crime and local safety
4. Information on local businesses/traders – recommendations, discovery etc
5. Info on Local events.
6. Local News.
7. Local History
8. Although mainly a local site, it is not restricted to just local stuff and we include a range of posts on a variety of other interesting stuff.

Having said all that, remember that Harringay Online isn't necessarily principally focussed on information giving.

Response

Do you think the local councils should respond to developments and activities on your website? If yes, how can they do so?

Definitely.

- a) Contribute.
- b) Attend social events
- c) Fund the replication of the site through other neighbourhoods.

What type of information gets the most response?

Core Info relative to place-shaping,

e.g. planning applications, Town planning, relevant UDP issues, how to influence etc.

Funding

The members fund HarringayOnline, but we are also looking at a local advertising / sponsorship stream.

Harringay Online Achievements

Hugh talks about HO's achievements & increasing social capital

- The website led an effective campaign to fighting the arrival of a cluster betting shops on our local high street.
- The website ran a residents' priorities survey which achieved a 70% response rate.
- The survey was submitted to the local authority together with a plan to use its output as the basis for a local charter. This idea has now been accepted and is going ahead.
- Harringay Online has helped drive the idea of a Street Festival – also now accepted in principle - and is co-ordinating residents in the planning phase.
- The website has led campaigns around traffic issues, recently generating the largest petition ever submitted from the neighbourhood – well in excess of the site membership at the time. In addition to signing an online petition, volunteers from the site covered nearly every street in the area was on foot.
- Site members are learning new information and new skills about how to engage directly around issues they feel are important.
- The local police are active contributors on the site. The website has worked with them to help them understand people's priorities and direct their resources accordingly.
- The website has actively sought to build the bridging element of neighbourhood social capital and is forging new connections between heterogeneous groups in the area.
- Members report the huge benefits of the site's ability to enable members to provide one another with practical and emotional support with problems and difficulties.
- Working offline as well as online, the site has enabled the forging of many new neighbourhood friendships and connections.
- This year the site co-ordinated members to organise the biggest neighbourhood summer fete held in living memory.

Increasing social capital

- a) Bringing together disparate residents and traders group who till Harringay Online only ever collaborated occasionally when facilitated by the Council. They are now collaborating on a range of projects.
- b) Co-organised the neighbourhood's biggest local summer part in living memory.
- c) Co-organising a street festival.
- d) Through the site various local events have been set up, from local fun baseball afternoon, local visits, regular social meet-ups etc

Most members would simply not have connected with their neighbours without this network. So, it's facilitated the development of real online and offline relationships and friendships. It's enabled us to connect to achieve things in our neighbourhood and we have a growing list of achievements in that respect. It's helped people learn more about their area and feel more

connected with it. It's connected people with information about what's going on, get good tradesman recommendations, share skills and access support from local government and other agencies.

HarringayOnline – Quarterly Visitor Stats July 2007 – March 2008

	July – Sept '07	Oct – Dec '07	Jan – Mar '08
Visits	1,392	2664	10,654
Members	103	226	455

By the end of 2008, we had 1,100 members with between 200 and 300 different people visiting each day.

Harringay Online Testimonials

Here are some examples on how HO has had an impact on the community

A collection of compliments gathered from members:

“For years I put up with the O’Donovan’s skip trucks tearing down my road and waking me up a few minutes before my alarm went off. It was not until this site came along that I actually got off my bum and did something about it. The encouragement and cheering (people sitting in front of a computer) I got from members of this site was a huge factor in finally winning the war.”

“I am only a recent user of this blog but already I have met new local people on here and learned so much about this area that I live in. As well as have the opportunity to find immediate information relating to local needs. Because of this and much more, I have no hesitation in sending money in support of a project that ‘will’ change lives via connecting and sharing ideas and knowledge with each other – this place really works.”

“This site has been an incredible force for community good, as just about everyone I’ve met through it has commented. It’s helped people form connections with their neighbours, it’s been a channel through which local businesses have been able to communicate with residents (Cafe Lemon; Baldwin’s; the Big Green Book Shop), and – this is the thing that really amazes me – it’s been a tool through which residents have been able to come together to find solutions for problems that the council would otherwise have to deal with!”

“Before Nige and I were introduced to the site (through Hugh on Flickr) we felt like strangers in the area and didn’t know any of the local residents, community activities, campaigns, shops, pubs, bars, restaurants etc that we now have the knowledge of...and all because of Hugh, Liz and other key HoL-er’s commitment and dedication to helping create a strong, harmonious community for us all to live in. I thank you for making the area feel like a real home for us now and somewhere for us and I’m sure many more to lay real foundations for the future (rather than just living in a flat and feeling disconnected from neighbours and the local community which I’ve definitely experienced living in London in the past”

“This site actually provides a sustainable infrastructure on which to build further things. Residents can form networks with those interested in the same things (gardeners; cyclists; book club), learn about good local resources (Muna’s; the bike repairman at the Castle; the Japanese supermarket in Crouch End), join together to organise for things that benefit the whole community (cleaning the dog mess from the Passage, doing something about overloaded trucks illegally driving down Ladder roads before everyone’s houses start falling down). Just one example from off the top of my head – I learnt about a rubbish removal scam on this site – not the council’s, though I read it and Haringey Accord’s site thoroughly on more than one occasion – and no doubt saved myself a massive headache and a lot of money.”

Continued...

Harringay Online Testimonials

More testimonials from the Harringay Online community

“For various reasons I haven’t seen my dad’s face for 35 years. He’s been dead since 1974 and I have no photographs. I’ve often wondered. Joining this site brought back so many memories and deepened my curiosity and to cut a long story short I managed to get in touch with my dad’s sister last week and visited this weekend. I haven’t seen my aunt and uncle since my dad died either. Yesterday I came home with an armful of photographs of my father and I haven’t stopped looking at them since. I look like him and I know that for certain now. If Harringayonline hadn’t been here life might have taken a different turn and I might still not be quite sure what my father looked like. Not all the thanks is due to Harringayonline but a large part of it is, particularly to Hugh who set this up in the first place. That’s the power of a community site such as this. Thank you”

“After almost a year of banging our heads against a brick wall re an illegal conversion to HMO/bedsits on our lan , we have it seems got some where. I don’t want to jinx things but your site has been a great help and comfort”

“Hello Hugh, Thanks for your welcoming message. What a wonderful site – thanks for getting it all started. It’s good to find there’s people with a real passion for the area and who want to improve things here. I discovered the site by chance – I was googling for info on the old greyhound stadium as I’ve often wished I’d been here to enjoy it, those good old days! I’ve been a few times to Walthamstow which has been fun so hope you have a good time if you’re going tonight. Between negotiating the dog mess and litter and counting doorbells on the HMOs (I never knew there were so many) I’ve enjoyed seeing the old pictures of the area and hearing what people are up to now. I think Harringay online is going to be very addictive.”

“I think the website is good because it informs the residents about what is going on around them, it affords them to contribute to the debate of issues that affect everyone and promotes friendship.”

“Hello Hugh,
I don’t actually live in Coningsby road anymore. I live in Italy now, moved out very many years ago. But I’m so glad I can get a feel of my old neighbourhood thanks to “Harringay community”. Hope you don’t mind I’m not actually a resident NOW. Bye”



Harringayonline
COMMUNITY
Connecting the Residents of Harringay



Continued...

Award & Recognitions

Harringay Online proves to be a hit and continues to grow. Well done! ☺

- In July 2008, the website received the Judges' Special Commendation at the Catalyst Awards and was one of three entries singled out for presentation to Gordon Brown.
- Ning, the world's leading white label social network will be featuring HoL on its blog in the near future. They wrote that this is for : "a small series for the Ning blog about why Ning makes a great platform for creating a social network for your city or neighbourhood. As part of this, we want to highlight the **top networks** on Ning in that niche, and I think Harringay is a great example of exactly that type of local social networking."
- The founder was invited by DCLG to facilitate a session for Directors of Communication from English LAs.
- The RSA recently recognised the work of Harringay Online when the founder of the website was invited to join RSA as a fellow in recognition of the site's achievements.
- The site is featured as a best practice site on the EU's epractice.eu website.

Thank you once again to Hugh Flouch for the interview! Hope this was helpful for the readers.

This newsletter was brought to you by Liz Azyan, a PhD student from Royal Holloway, University of London. If you wish to subscribe to Liz's newsletters and blog posts, please subscribe at <http://www.lgeoresearch.com> via feedburner.



Future Plans & Hopes

Plans

- Continued growth of membership
- Continued growth of role in energising and facilitating local place-shaping
- Seeking support for the site to be replicated elsewhere in the borough and beyond

Hopes

No doubt future developments will drive change. For the time being, I see them as a critical tool for driving local empowerment, engagement and community building.