

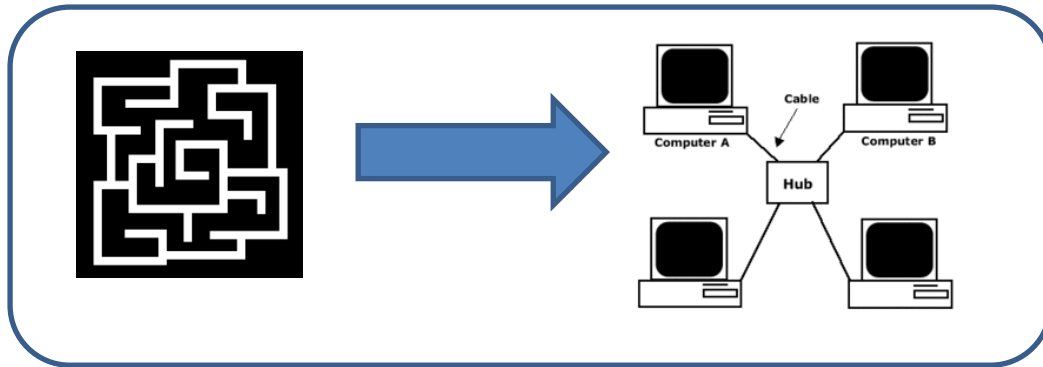


IT and Communications in Neighbourhood Houses

DRAFT

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Introduction and background

IT and Communications. It's a bit of a maze, but an area we increasingly all have to deal with to some degree or other. At regional meetings over the last several months, IT issues have regularly been raised. There has been a desire for some focused information to be shared with Houses that helps them to think about the issues they need to respond to.



This paper brings together the issues and opportunities Neighbourhood Houses commonly face with regards to Information Technology, Communications and the provision and use of computers and internet systems.

Change is surely the only constant in this topic area. There are regularly new systems, websites, and technologies being promoted or used by different groups. Many are very useful, some are not. Many will be useful to some of us, and not appropriate for others. In this paper we will try to focus on the issues and opportunities that most Houses share, or that many may wish to know about or benefit from.

In brief this paper will seek to address the following areas.

1. Information storage and back up
2. Security and protection of information
3. Communication within the House between staff and staff and volunteers, and the community
4. Online tools to improve communications and project management

Social Media is another area that we could look at in this paper, but for now it will not be considered.

Definitions

There are many technical terms in IT, so here is a brief description of what we mean by some of the terms used in this document.



- **Data** – your electronic information: your word documents, spreadsheets, posters and presentations, emails and contacts, forms, photos and other graphics – all the information you keep on your computer
- **Data Storage** – Where and how you keep your data. There are various ways of storing your data, including on hard drives, flash drives (also called thumb drives), and remote storage sites (in the ‘cloud’) like Dropbox
- **Back-up** – the copying of data onto a separate storage system. If something goes wrong with your everyday data storage system, you have a copy of the data where you can retrieve the files you need from.
- **Application (app)** – piece of software that runs on a computer. These may include your web browser, virus protection, Office suite, and your email client
- **On-line tool** – software that provides a way to do something that is not on the computer you are using. These can be accessed through your web browser., and sometimes, these maybe an app or an online website based tool that you can use to do something, or to communicate in specific ways. (an example is www.doodle.com, which you use to schedule meetings)
- **Network** – If you have multiple computers in your House, they may all run independently, or they may be connected into a network, so that they can access the same information easily.
- **Platform** – the hardware (computer) and software (operating system) on which software applications can be run. For instance a PC or a laptop with Windows 7 or Windows 10 is a platform. It provides the technology on which applications can be run. Most of us will be using PC platforms, but others include the Apple OSX systems, or Linux/PC platforms.
- **Hybrid IT** – this is a combination of online and computer-based tools or solutions. For instance, you might use Google Mail as your email server (online), Microsoft Office for your documents (computer-based), and Google Apps to collaborate with other staff members and volunteers (online)
- **Version control** – often when we create documents, we might send it to someone for their approval or contribution. If they send it back with changes or recommendations, you need to have a process for identifying which is the current version, or the one you want to use or keep, which one is the most recent. This is referred to as version control.

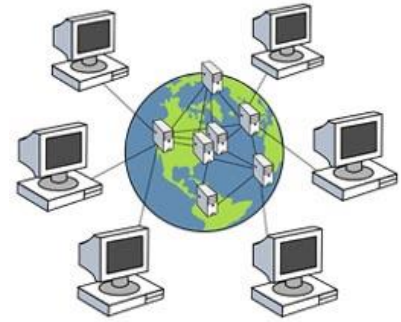
Some assumptions:

- Houses are busy places these days. We will assume that you have more than one computer being used by staff and or volunteers.
- ‘Computers’ refers to both desk top systems and laptops that you may have.
- Many Houses will also have computers for public use. These computers may also need some thought in terms of how they connect to your system, but ensuring a level of protection of House computer systems from the public access systems.

Hardware and type of connection to the internet

Networking and internet connection

How are the computers in your House connected, and connected to the internet? The system you have may define what options you have in terms of how you store and manage your data and information.



If you have several computers at your site, how are they connected?

1. Are they storing their own information independently, with their own connection to the internet?
2. Are your computers connected to a central Server – a point where most information could/should be stored.

If you have more than one or two computers that staff and volunteers are using, you should seek advice on setting up a server.

(You will likely want to separate the server from public access computers.)

How are your computers connected to the Internet?

- a Wireless network using a router which enables any computer, laptop, tablet or phone to connect to the internet, once they have the password
- a Local Area Network (LAN) which is physical cords running from your modem or router to each computer.
- a combination of both

Information storage and back up

Considerations



For many years most of us have just used our computer to store the information we work on. If we have been organised we purchased an external hard drive and copy information across to that device periodically. Perhaps we've then stored the hard drive in the desk on which the computer sits? What if the facility burns down, or someone breaks in and steals the lot? Proper backing up now means a more sophisticated approach.

Almost every aspect of our work at Neighbourhood Houses uses Information Technology to some degree. Information about how projects are planned, implemented and reported on is created and stored by various people at your NH (Word documents, Excel spreadsheets, Publisher posters or newsletters maybe some of this information). Some of that information will be very important. It

could be important because of the people the information relates to – affecting privacy concerns, or it relates to the development and management of a significant project, and contains many ideas and plans and tools needed for implementation of the project. Is your information safe and backed-up? If your system breaks down tonight, and you cannot retrieve any information from it, what information will have access to?

Some houses may just be storing their information on the various computers that people work on, with no central ‘Server’. If you do not have a central server, it is harder to properly ‘back up’ and safely protect your information because you have to back-up each computer. With a central Server backing up information is much easier, as you are backing up one *network of computers*, rather than lots of individual computers. If you have a Server it is possible to back up information to a remote server – another server hosted by your IT Service Provider for example, and this gives you ‘remote back-up’.

Information needs to be:

- stored safely, so that it cannot be accessed by people who should not have access to it
- backed-up. It needs to be stored on more than one system, and in more than one location. This is so that if one system or location breaks down, you can easily recover your data. Houses have lost their whole electronic filing system, and sometimes even though they had a backup, it was lost or damaged at the same time because it was in the same location.



Solutions

Options include:

- Regular back up to external hard drives (not recommended)
- Cloud based data storage (Global systems like Google Drive or Dropbox, or that provided with Office 365 Essentials)
- Cloud based data storage through a local provider. Local providers, that either Houses or NHT are using include:
 - Operand in Hobart. (NHT provider will soon be able to provide a local cloud)
 - *Tell us your providers....*
- In-House server with an external back-up provided by an external service provider such as those above (this is the system that NHT currently uses.)

Local Tasmanian Businesses that can provide the support and services you may be looking for.

Does my House have a central Server?

Yes – you can set up a remote back up process with your IT Service Provider easily

No –

It is recommended you get advice as to the best solution for your House, whether to move to purchase a server or move to the cloud. (Okines have just gone through assessing this process, and are recommending to their Committee, using Cloud based systems, and purchase of Office 365 Non-Profit E3 and costs \$6.70 per user per month – see details below

Security and protection of your information

Considerations

Do you have a few passwords relevant to peoples email accounts, or web based tools and sites that you use? So how do you store them? Most houses do not keep case notes or files on people they support, however you may have personal information of a personal nature, such as contact information, phone numbers etc, which you need to store securely. Just as you should have a process for storing important or confidential information in paper form (lockable file cabinets, or locked offices to ensure only the appropriate and authorised people have access to such information) so should you with electronic information. Access to computers for staff and volunteers should be password protected. Public systems and computers that you may have in the house for general use, should not also be used for storage of important, or private information relevant to the House operations.

SPAM and other unwanted emails.

The email system you select will likely impact the amount of unwanted email, and possible malware and spyware attacks. It is best to talk through these issues with your IT person/supplier, and get advise based on the system you are using

Solutions

1. Password protection
 - a. Lastpass online application such as Lastpass, or Password Safe
 - b. Encrypted document that is stored in your system electronically
 - c. A sheet of paper in the drawer at the office (not recommended ☺)



2. Data security and protection

- a. Purchase of a server with remote back up via an IT Service provider is highly recommended
- b. Storage of information in the 'Cloud'
 - i. You can use a large provider like Google Drive (included if you use Google Gmail apps as your email provider), or iCloud (an Apple system), Dropbox is another very common one, or Onedrive – which is the Windows application aligned with Office 365
 - ii. You could use a local service provider that offers cloud services.
NOTE: it's important to understand that the fastest and most productive use of Cloud storage means all the files in the Cloud, are also on your computer system. This may result a lot of information on each computer. Talk to your IT Provider for advice.

Website name - pricing	Application/purpose	notes	Cost
Lastpass	https://lastpass.com password manager – one password to rule them all can use via the web for free. Down load the premium version – it's cheap	I use this personally and really like it. It took a little bit of getting used to, but once I got there, it is one of the most useful apps I use, and is very reasonably priced for personal use (\$12/year – not sure what business prices are)	Has a free online version. \$12/year for up to 5 shared users \$24/year for up to 100 users
Password Safe	http://passwordsafe.sourceforge.net/ similar to Last pass.	Steve has used – iOS version.	Free
There are other applications just search for password manager apps			

Communication within the House between staff and staff and volunteers

Considerations

Communications between staff and volunteers can be complicated. Email is fantastic, and most of the time for most people may well be adequate. However some drawbacks are that you don't always know the communication has been read, understood or actioned. Email is now so prolific it can be easy to loose track of an important message and the action required with in it, purely because it disappears from your viewed screen as so many other emails come in. There are some very useful online tools and applications now available, but before we look at them, we'll talk about good email options available, because you will realistically continue to use email, especially with other people outside the organisation.



Solutions

- Office 365 – St Helens are using this package, and recommend it. \$5 per month with Microsoft 365 but gives up to 5 licences; We have 7 users so therefore have 35 licences for computers, it also means you can access Microsoft suite anywhere, any computer. This means a user – say John Bloggs – can have his personal email: John.Bloggs@myneighbourhoodhouse.org – and then various aliases – information@myneighbourhoodhouse.org
- Google Apps- NHT is using this platform

Website name - pricing	Application/purpose	notes	Cost
Google Apps https://apps.google.com/intx/en_au/pricing.html	Email and information storage, shared calendar. is a web based platform, meaning access is available from any system anywhere Connects with Google Hangouts, which is a Google version of Skype.	Multiple users can access and work on a doc at the same time	\$5/month/user with additional email addresses
Office 365 Essentials – Non-profit https://products.office.com/en_au/nonprofit/office-365-nonprofit-plans-and-pricing	New alternative to MS Office – offers all the usual applications of Office, but adds document storage, and is a web based platform, meaning access is available from any system anywhere Includes access to SKYPE	Multiple users can access and work on a doc at the same time	Click on the link \$2.80/month/user
MS Office Outlook	Included in your MS Office Suite, probably the system you are using at the moment		Included when you purchased MS Office

Online tools to improve communications and project management

Considerations

There are more and more applications and online tools that can improve the ways communication happens between individuals in teams. Some houses are using tools that help with a variety of communication issues.

Being able to communicate easily with specific groups of people around particularly projects and activities can be useful.

Being able to access shared documents can really help in managing version control. With the right tools you can even have several people accessing and editing the same document at the same time. Here are a couple of tools that help with project management, and communications between people within the House and its volunteers and staff

Solutions

Project management across a team

Website name	Application/purpose	Notes	Free/cost
https://asana.com/	Project management	Have just been trying this between a couple of us at NHT, and so far really like it. I can see that it would be useful for project work	Free option
https://trello.com/tour	A Trello board is a list of lists, filled with cards, used by you and your team. It's a lot more than that, though. Trello has everything you need to organize projects of any size.	St Helens uses this and recommend it	
Onenote https://www.onenote.com/		I find this a really useful tool personally for keeping track of lots of information on different subjects projects, but I don't use it to collaborate.- Jonathan	Free
Slack https://slack.com/	A messaging APP for teams. Team conversations, sharing documents easily from Dropbox, Drive etc	Untested, but I've heard Malcolm Turnbull is using it!	Has a free plan

Other useful tools

Calendars		Notes	Free/cost
http://www.teamup.com/ - an online calendar sharing tool	Teamup make life easier for team leaders and group administrators. It enables everyone to contribute and access information that is relevant to both the group and the user. No user account is required. A specific web link is all that is needed to access a calendar or event. Creating a free calendar takes only 30 seconds	untested	Has a free option

Other tools			
Scheduling tool- Very useful and easy to use	www.doodle.com Useful for arranging meetings between lots of people with different schedules or in different locations	I've used quite a bit, and really like it - Jonathan	free
Event booking	http://www.trybooking.com/default.html Provides credit/debit card use by customers.	I've used it, and found it pretty easy. It connects to your bank account if you want, and helps to manage registrations at the event (JB) Cheapest I've found	Cheap % of ticket price plus a small fee charged to the customer.
	https://www.eventbrite.com.au/		Cheap % of ticket price plus a small fee charged to the customer.
	https://www.ticketbooth.com.au/		Cheap % of ticket price plus a small fee charged to the customer.
Canva	https://www.canva.com/	Easy to use graphic design tool. Provide pictures and artwork and formatted banners, text etc that you move about on your screen.	Free platform, but you purchase some images and text boxes for use as you need them - \$1 per item so cheap to use
Short video maker	http://biteable.com/	St Helens NH have one on their website promoting their work.	
https://upto.com/embed-calendar	Calendar tool to embed in a website – would be good for promoting events to the community	Untested, looks good, but probably better shared by multiple houses or NHT to purchase a license if we all agreed	\$9/month minimum
SKYPE	http://www.skype.com/en/ also accessed through MS Office online tools	Video or audio calls over the internet through computers or phones.	Free

Website platforms			
WIX – website building platform	http://www.wix.com/	Untested – looks like a similar tool to Wordpress	
Wordpress	https://wordpress.com	https://wordpress.com	

Communications to your network and community

Mailchimp	Newsletter distribution. once established – people can manage their own subscriptions and unsubscribe from your messages		Free for up to 2000 contacts

By the way – new things are being developed all the time. Another website you can find many other new options, ideas and free applications (and get stuck in) is: <http://growth.supply/free/>

This website has heaps of tools, resources, apps and other useful things to check out – for free. Be careful, some do lead to things where you may need to acknowledge copyright or have costs down the line, but it's worth checking out if you are looking for something specific. It's aimed at – young funky, tech savvy latte drinking citizens of the world, - Like US!

Some local providers currently being used by members. (please let us know if there are others you are happy to recommend).

Business	Location	Contact and info
Operand	Hobart william.ofarrell@operand.com.au 0407 686 927 http://www.operand.com.au/	William O'Farrell provides IT support to the NHT office. He is soon to be able to offer Cloud services