

Public Service Publisher: Open Media Content

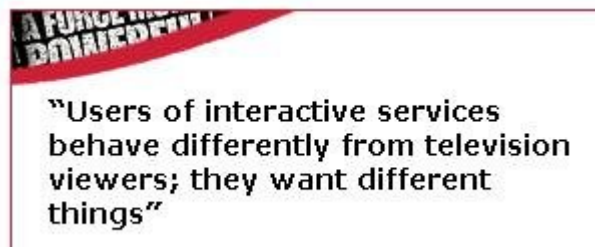
by Andrew Chitty, Managing Director, Illumina Digital

PSP Creative Forum

To explore the creative potential of a Public Service Publisher we need to look at what it might do - the content and services that it might bring into being and how these will touch the lives of citizens and contribute to public culture. It is hard to describe any new organisation and even harder if the PSP is thought of as a challenge to our cherished system of Public Service Broadcasting. But the needs and behaviours of citizen/users in the first decade of the 21st century are different to those of viewer-consumers in the last decades of the 20th century.

The ideas presented here are the output of the PSP Creative Forum - a series of creative workshops and dialogues facilitated by OFCOM during 2006. The Forum wanted to ask what would such an organisation make, how would it benefit citizen/users and to start to define the Public Service Values that would underpin its outputs. The contributors were asked to think about creative potential and outputs rather than structure or organisation; all were leading contributors and innovators in the exciting territory where digital media and public service meet. We aren't attempting to be definitive or comprehensive but to provide glimpses of future potential that will open up a dialogue which others will explore.

The overriding feeling of the participants was that the UK needs something like the PSP sooner rather than later. We need it to develop a coherent vision of public service values and content in a networked world. Should such a uniquely British organisation be created then, just like Channel 4 in the early 80s, it would call into being a new wave of creative businesses that would serve the UK well in the changing media landscape. As one participant said, "what we see now are the equivalents of the 19th century end-of-the-pier zoetropes and nickelodeons, but somewhere in there is the new cinema".



It is clear that networked and digital media driven by user participation are now at the heart of our culture. Audience consumption of audio-visual media is changing with a steady drift from linear programmed media like conventional TV towards

not only online and on-demand media but to other interactive and participative experiences. Rather than abandoning the concept of Public Service as the broadcast model changes, this shift to interactive media offers the opportunity to revitalise our concept of Public Service for these new and active users rather than just to support the viewing habits of the past.

Users of interactive services behave differently from television viewers; they want different things. The distinction between 'lean forward' and 'lean back' media captures an essential quality - users approach a website with an active purpose in mind - be it to find content and information or to participate or contribute.

In recent years the UK has been recognised in many global awards for excellence and innovation in rich media public content on the web. A wealth of PSP-like content is [Already Out There](#) in embryonic form, but until now these projects have been isolated examples of creative excellence, subject to stop-start discretionary funding and not shaped by any coherent or strategic vision of the nature of public service content. One of the PSP's roles will be to take these prototypes, explore which can work and how they can scale and deliver a coordinated strategy for sustainable public service interactive content.

With a thriving creative community of independent production companies, interactive writers and digital artists, web-enabled public organisations and design agencies that now employ more people than the broadcast TV sector, with a strategic intervention like the PSP, the UK clearly has the talent base to capitalise on this dynamic new sector of the creative economy.

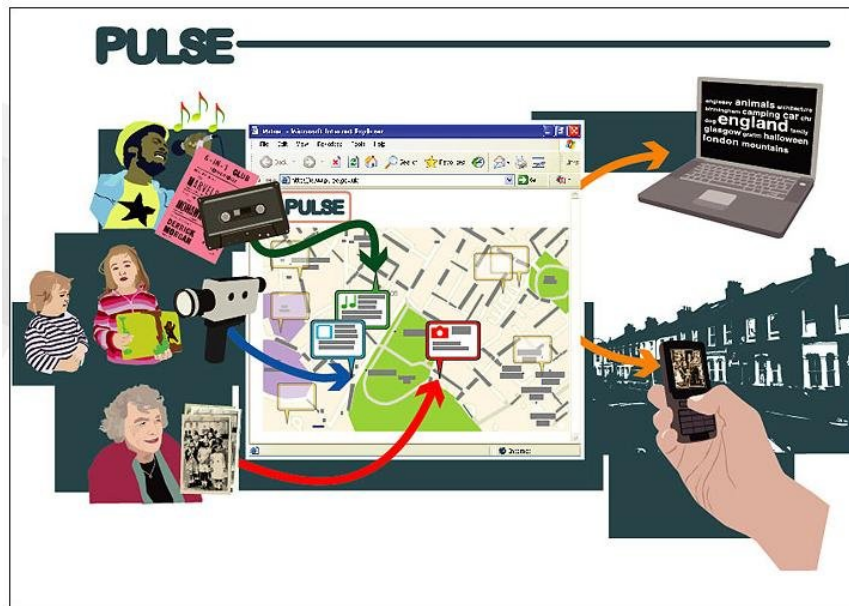
Content characteristics

Threaded through all of the creative propositions discussed in the Creative Forum process has been one key idea - Participation. This is the defining quality that separates successful networked content from broadcast media. The ability of users to create, annotate, comment and communicate around content underpinned the adoption of the internet as a cultural phenomenon from the days of email, through the spread of the world wide web to blogs, social networking sites like Flickr and Massively Multiplayer Online Games like World of Warcraft. This is a two way communications medium where users need an "architecture of participation" to engage.

The concept of participation can provide the heart of a new concept of Public Service. It encourages citizens to become users rather than viewers of content: active participants, who produce, modify, comment on, judge and repurpose content rather than act as the passive (though grateful) recipients of broadcast information and entertainment. Rather than thinking of high quality "content" in the manner of TV programmes it might be more useful to think of high quality

participatory services where linear content is only one aspect of an experience that might be accessed through many channels - online, via mobile, kiosk or TV.

[Pulse](#) is an illustrative example of just such a content-led service - a hypothetical online platform for social history created from user generated and archived digital media. Its initial aim is to provide a public space to allow users to deposit material of social significance which can be tagged by theme, location and context. Pulse would also have an editorial layer which encourages and commissions individuals and communities, professionals and amateurs to weave stories or 'curate' areas of the service. (See appendix 1 for details of Pulse – a hypothetical commission for the PSP)



Could a broadcaster not serve these audiences equally well? Narrative history has of course been one of the most successful TV genres of recent years. The first problem is structural: Pulse's combination of social history, cultural identity, current affairs and interactive digital media would probably fall across several commissioning departments; 360 degree commissioning is still an aspiration rather than a reality. Even so, any of the current PSBs could be expected to deliver some high quality, probably presenter led, flagship series in this area. Innovative new formats might draw in new audiences with celebrity or archive as Wall to Wall's Who Do You Think You Are? has done for the BBC and The Second World War in Colour did for ITV. There might even be a web site where users are asked to contribute their own stories around the TV material. But after the series' broadcast these contributions will remain untended and unused - until and unless the series is re-commissioned. And money talks - current evidence suggests that the budget provided for any online participatory element is unlikely to exceed 5% of the budget for the TV series. With the best will in the world it is hard for the participatory tail to wag the television dog.

That isn't to say that there haven't been worthy attempts by broadcasters to create stand-alone participatory projects that share some of the characteristics of Pulse. But this has proven problematic. Without a TV component much of the armoury of the broadcasting organisation cannot be used: the editorial excellence, promotion and ability to engage the audience. The partnerships with other organisations which could mitigate this are rarely successful. And absence of TV means these projects receive little recognition within the organisation. Delivering these types of project through the online division of current PSBs seems to offer no clear advantage over a PSP type entity which could always partner with broadcasters where a television component is required.

The whole PSP approach to the creative process and the relationship to its audiences will be the reverse of that in television. In television the editorial vision is the producers'; they determine subject, story, format and presentation; the audience is only invited to comment afterwards (if at all) as an extension of the programme. Pulse starts from the participatory principle - the audience are the users who build and own it. They contribute content and by tagging the content, they decide what is meaningful to themselves and to others. Narrative layers are vital but they contextualise and structure the content - they do not replace it. Any subject can be covered if the users want to see it and the service is there for the long term. And because of this, audience numbers are different. Pulse, like many other PSP projects is probably best seen as having the "long tail" characteristics described by Chris Anderson.

Participation

It seems to us that an assumption of Participation is the starting point for all PSP experiences but we believe there are other characteristics that are likely to be almost as important:

Personalisation

In a networked world there is no need to think of the audience for a drama, entertainment or informational experience as an undifferentiated mass. As an active participant you can choose to tell me who you are, where you are and what you are interested in. As a producer I can use this information to provide you with a personalised experience.

Permeability

Growing from the traditions of the Internet, PSP-supported projects and services blur the distinction between producers and consumers. The creators of the story sit at the centre of concentric rings of other professional and amateur participants. Those nearer the centre invest time and energy in active participation; those at the margins consume the story more passively. Everyone can find a place where they gain most reward.

Community mediation

Though seen by many traditional media owners as a recent phenomenon, User Generated Content (UGC) in the form of self-publishing was always one of the prime engines for adoption of the web in the mid-90s. Harnessing the power of UGC for public service objectives will mean identifying communities with public service objectives and empowering them to create, mediate and moderate their own content and services. This shift in emphasis recognises the need for new editorial visions but devolves this to the community to deliver rather than establishing the PSP as an all-knowing editorial monolith.

Location sensitivity

The development of mobile technologies allows content to become sensitive to the location in which it is accessed. Factual, information, entertainment, drama and arts experiences will be pervasive - delivered to users dependent on where as well as when they want to engage.

Collaborative authorship

The PSP should encourage the emergence of new, strong and distinctive authorial voices that reflect the contemporary UK as well as incorporating diversity of views both within individual projects or services and across the entire output. Participative experiences require new forms of collaborative authorship that will foster the diversity of views that is felt to be disappearing from Public Service Broadcasting.

These are the qualities that will be central to the Public Service Content and experiences that the PSP will call into being. Some of them are present in (some) Public Service broadcasting and PSB-associated digital media activities but they certainly are not, and probably cannot be, central to organisations whose centre of gravity is the commissioning and production of television. But if these are a first draft of the Public Service Values of the PSP, in which areas should it be active?

Content road map

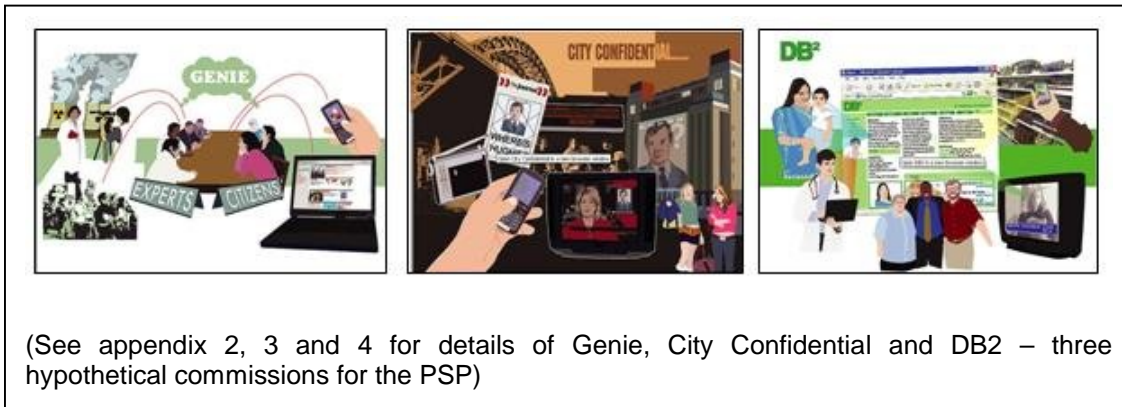
The workshops that have fed into this document investigated a series of content areas which seemed to combine the values identified by OFCOM's PSB review and some degree of non-broadcaster Public Service Content: Arts and Culture, Drama and Narrative, Political and Social Action, Factual Content and Gaming.

These workshops have informed the authors of five [Personal Visions](#) of how the PSP might transform the digital landscape: Inspire, Story, Act, Investigate and

Play respectively. These aren't the 'departments' of any future PSP but a starting point to discuss where the PSP might concentrate its efforts.

During the process we found some recurrent themes which we have illustrated with hypothetical commissioning scenarios to allow people to get to grips with the many different ways PSP projects might operate and be delivered.

Commissioning scenarios



The huge potential of Augmented Reality Games (a.k.a. Mixed Reality, Alternate Reality) as a hybrid experience was identified in the context of drama, gaming, factual and even environmental content. [City Confidential](#) is a hypothetical PSP ARG, but there are many examples of this emerging genre combining performance theatre and networked content. More on this can be found in the Personal Visions for [Story](#) and [Play](#).

The concept of co-created and co-designed services like ActivMobs from the RED Unit of the Design Council is another widely applicable approach that clearly moves beyond and is distinct from the successful social action campaigns run by Broadcasters. [DB2](#) shows how this approach to empowering citizens to make better use of existing public organisations and public content might be used by the PSP in the arena of health.

The potential for projects which combine professionally produced and user generated content in a deliberative process or structured dialogue also arose in several contexts from minority sports to science policy. [Genie](#) explores this.

Some 'content' areas that we considered now seem to us better viewed as common approaches. Despite (or perhaps because of) the achievements in richly interactive educational content we do not think the PSP would ever have a 'Learning Department', rather that some level of active learning will be present in any project or service the PSP would fund. Also our attempts to address directly how the PSP should enable online communities now seems the wrong approach:

in the world we imagine everything the PSP does will involve supporting, connecting and empowering communities of interest and/or geography.

Drawing together both the themes and examples from the Forum process there seems to us three distinct types of content for the PSP, each of which overlaps with the other two:



Circle 1: Content led Services

- Leveraging existing public investment
- Co-created
- "Making institutions work better"

Circle 2: Narrative experiences

- Fact & fiction
- Location sensitive
- Participative
- Authored

Circle 3: Community generated content

- Diverse and specialist, temporary and ongoing new 'institutions'

Content Led Services are designed to empower individuals or groups and to get the best out of existing public investment in content or organisations. This may be creative empowerment - mashing and modding content that the taxpayer has

already invested in. Or it might be personal empowerment - using new services built around health content that have been co-designed with users.

Narrative Experiences are the areas where the new forms of 'professional' content will be created: participatory dramas and factual experiences which will engage new audiences and make full creative use of networked media. This is an area where the UK can excel requiring a combination as it does of creative writing, theatre and performance, interactive and game design and televisual skills.

Community Generated Content is where the PSP connects people; supporting 'new' organisations in the form of content creating communities. These communities will create and deliver their own services for their uses and will be both specialist and diverse. It may be that birdwatchers will finally be able to create content **for** twitchers rather than **about** them as television does.

Of course the most interesting areas, and potentially the most fruitful, are at the intersections. Co-created Health services, described further by Jennie Winhall in [Act](#), are similar to those advocated by Cottam and Leadbeater as a necessary direction for public services. As such they sit between Content Led Services and Community Generated Content. And whilst [City Confidential](#) appears firmly within narrative experiences, large parts of the experience will be community generated.

A simple venn diagram cannot possibly represent a content or commissioning strategy for the PSP, but it does provide some initial thoughts as to the different types of commissioning and partnering relationships the PSP will have to establish and sustain, and the different kinds of commercial and public entities with which the PSP will interact.

It is most likely that Content Led Services will require the PSP to work with existing organisations. No doubt this would present challenges in terms of contractual and funding arrangements but also opportunities for partnership and long-term sustainability.

Enabling Community Generated Content and services will mean identifying and supporting People and Networks. But how will these be identified and on what grounds would existing communities be selected? How would the PSP deliver innovation where existing community networks are weak or absent?

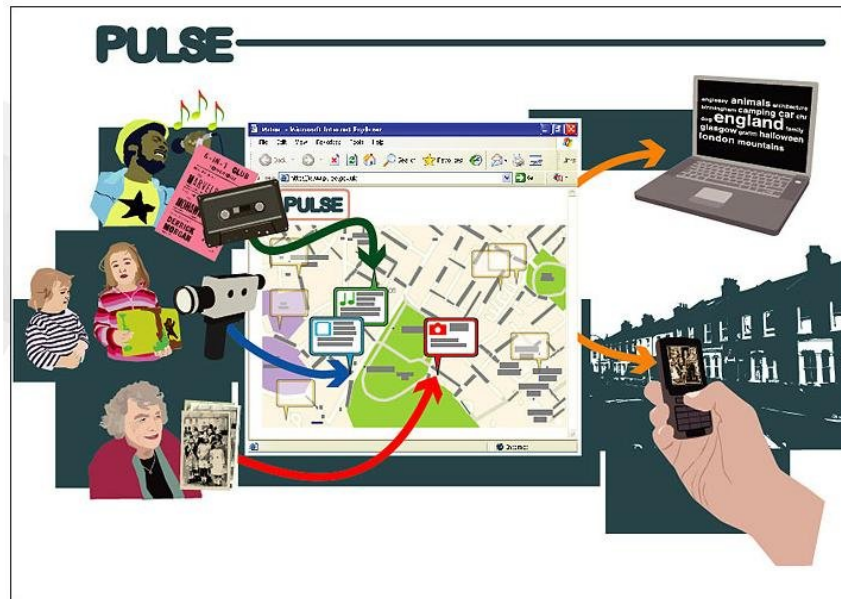
Delivering Narrative Experiences would seem to be the most familiar territory, being a case of working on a project-by-project basis with producers and production companies. The challenge for the PSP will be to establish and support a supplier base with the right skills and capacity whilst continuing to provide equal access for new entrants.

To deliver the variety of innovative content and services that we have mapped out for the PSP will require new ways of working. It will be hard to achieve this by grafting these new working practices onto an existing organisation. Perhaps it is necessary to create a new organisation to shake up the landscape and find new ways of doing things. That is what Channel 4 did in the early 80s, and one of the by-products of the establishment of the channel and the legislative framework around it is a thriving UK independent production sector with mature companies, diversity of supply and business models increasingly based on the creation of intellectual property. The PSP could have the same galvanising impact on the interactive media sector - turning acknowledged creative excellence into real economic value.

Appendix: Commissioning Scenarios

1) Pulse

Pulse is an online living archive that provides a platform for users to reflect on and contribute to the changing nature of British society.



Pulse illustration by www.RobsonandJones.com

But the PSP's commitment to Pulse is to create far more than a digital vault - it also provides the framework for an editorial layer that mines this web of social, oral and documented histories. Initially Pulse would work with communities, individuals, historians and existing archives to seed Pulse's content. Editorial projects would be commissioned to create original content around particular themes of contemporary or social importance or to curate thematic or geographical areas of Pulse. For example, Common Ground is working with Pulse to extend its Campaign for Local Distinctiveness.

Pulse is a framework and a socially engaged editorial proposition. The PSP has committed funding to develop the architecture and provide the editorial and management team with a commissioning budget for three years. But to succeed Pulse will be delivered, exploited and ultimately sustained through partnerships. One of the early projects is to populate the archive with content liberated from the BBC's 1986 Doomsday Project - an early example of a user generated archive presently unavailable to its contributors. Pulse will make it nationally accessible and updatable by anyone with a mobile phone. Technology partners will provide digital storage and platforms and Pulse will work with the JISC funded Digital Curation Centre on preservation standards. Partnerships with broadcasters,

publishers and RDAs will promote particular campaigns, market and distribute Pulse content and broaden access.

Pulse embodies the PSP's creative and public purpose: it provides an innovative participative service which builds on current trends in user behaviour but throws into the mix the editorial values of public service content. It is permeable, personalised and location sensitive and will be as living and diverse as the communities that build it.

2) Genie

Genie - Beyond a current affairs approach to science and technology decision making.



Genie illustration by www.RobsonandJones.com

Some of the most challenging political issues of the next 10 years are framed in terms of choices grounded in scientific evidence - access to drugs for cancer therapy, implementation of biometric and DNA profiling, the benefits of stem cell research and perhaps most significantly environmental issues whether they be energy policy, climate change or habitat depletion. These are hot and complex topics. But despite their prevalence in the media the gap between the beliefs of scientists and policy makers and those of the public has never been wider.

Genie is one of a number of fixed period PSP projects that will use participatory media to bridge the gap between 'expert' groups and lay citizens; bringing them together in a deliberative process that seeks to forge common ground and

communicate the results to the wider population. This last element elevates Genie beyond any citizen jury process yet tried out.

The objective of Genie is to devise a consensus on the right options for UK energy policy. The project is launched with a series of professionally produced media 'kits': authored films representing various positions and associated information resources devised with the support of partner organisations like the Royal Society, Wellcome Trust, Institute for Fiscal Studies and so on. These are distributed across a variety of online destinations possibly including a PSP supported destination such as Civic Commons.

The media kits are used as an invitation to recruit a citizen's panel who want to take part in the process. Initial reactions are sought and posted online prior to a series of online and face-to-face events. These encounters are documented and made available to the wider audience. From events around the UK, mixed teams of lay people and policy makers are formed to investigate particular aspects and concerns: nuclear storage; energy security; feasibility of renewable technology etc. These mixed teams produce a second wave of media kits which are distributed, debated and annotated online. This iterative process culminates in a final media document (or film) which is launched online and through a broadcast partner with responses from politicians and those involved.

The key to Genie is the bringing together of "experts" and citizens in this iterative process where each side not only begins to understand the other's motivations and beliefs but in the process opens up this mutual education to a wider audience of their peers. Genie has many media outputs, some of which may well be aired on television but Genie is not making television "about" the decisions facing us as citizens. It is a participative process in which the decisions are actually being taken.

But surely PSB's could do the same job producing a hard-hitting documentary and current affairs season culminating with some form of debate-come-interactive event? Undoubtedly the BBC or Channel 4 can and will do this as ITV once did with landmark shows like Central's seminal Can Polar Bears Tread Water? But the Genie approach goes far beyond red button voting on a fixed menu of policy options based on an adversarial view of the world. It is about a mutual exchange between experts and citizens - about devising new options - and this takes time, a commodity that television is notoriously short of. Hitherto Public Service Broadcasting's remit has been to analyse the world; the ambition of this kind of Public Service Content is to create a framework for deciding how we want to change it.

3) City Confidential

City Confidential is an Augmented Reality Drama which users can participate in online and in cities across the UK.*



City Confidential is a thriller set in the world of the scandal-mag-come-style-sheet of the title. Editor Hughie Shepherd has hit on a rich seam of stories in the world of local celebrity, politics, urban redevelopment, arts and culture and the network of back-scratching and corruption that binds them together.

Online and on public screens across the city his face is everywhere - asking for your contributions to "tell it like it is". You become engaged in Hughie's world, explore the video features, subscribe to the Citybitch Vodcast and receive text messages alerts as you enter the city's shops, bars, galleries and concert venues. Out shopping on a Saturday you're invited to meet the journalists working for CC. You contribute your own stories... and you begin to realize that Hughie has made himself a marked man. Accused of taking bungs from local developers Hughie disappears from view. Can you find him, clear his name and expose the real story?

Part conspiracy drama part urban reality show, City Confidential invites you to participate in an ongoing drama and contribute your own content. Online, on mobile, on TV and in the real world CC explores the paranoia and excitement of the city.

Piloted in Newcastle/Gateshead in 2009 with the support of the PSP and Screen North East. CC is written by Tom Wrong and produced by multimedia production company Media69 in collaboration with Slam Dunk Theatre Company and digital studio Waste Concept.

The first 'series' of City Confidential will be rolled out in 2010 in Glasgow, Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol, Belfast, Cardiff and London with support from their respective regional Development Agencies. Each city will generate its own users and its own edition. Everyone can join the national experience at www.cityconfidential.net.

City Confidential is also available as a simultaneous short run TV series drawn from the ARD and broadcast by one of the PSP's broadcasting partners.

How would TV treat this? - As a terrific conspiracy thriller. Viewers could watch but not contribute. They couldn't find their own way through the story. But more importantly it wouldn't encourage them to contribute their own content about their city and the challenges it faces. This factual and contemporary content not only surrounds the ARD it becomes part of it. How could TV do that?

* with apologies to Colin Bateman

4) DB2

DB2 - a co-created content-led service for diabetes.



The management of chronic health problems and the promotion of healthier lifestyles is one of the biggest challenges facing the UK and one where Public Service Broadcasters have played a campaigning role. But health is also an area where the new, participative PSP approach could make a real difference:

empowering mixed communities of professionals and users to create content and services that share knowledge and develop new strategies for managing health.

DB2 is a PSP project to test this approach - providing a content-led service to help people live well with diabetes. It is a model for the co-creation of new services and illustrates the difference between the PSB approach of making content **about** an important issue to the PSC proposition of creating content-led services **with and for** the people involved.

During the DB2 trial in Bolton (where 10% of households have at least one diabetic) service design and production company Red:Pink worked with diabetics, their families, carers and health professionals to create an online community where they could share solutions to common problems. Content in the form of written posts, photographs, videos and podcasts were uploaded by patients themselves, their families, nurses, doctors and diabetes specialists. People facing similar issues supported each other through the platform, and people who have overcome particular problems can share their stories and advice with others. A ranking system allows the community to decide what is most relevant. One of its early successes was an instructional video created by a patient and nurse team as to how to get the best out of your diabetes consultation, that now forms the basis of the NHS's best practice guidelines.

Following the trial the DB2 platform will be opened up nationally with new clusters across the country creating innovative new services, content and tools. Those currently in beta include:

- An online application that allows you to analyse the nutritional content of food shopping services and a mobile application that allows you to do the same when you're in the supermarket
- A collaborative cooking service for families to partner-up to cook meals - locating other volunteers via DB2's postcode database.
- A regular hosted forum for newly diagnosed diabetic teenagers
- Online progress tools that allow users to track over time actors most relevant to them.

DB2 is a thriving community which now provides much of the informational content on diabetes management to local health trusts as well as specialist advice and research for broadcasters and other media channels. After three years support from the PSP its also well on the way to being self-financing having gained support from both the health and food retailing sectors.

Broadcasters commission a wide variety of factual, campaigning and lifestyle programming about health issues. From the Fat Challenge to Too Fat to Walk. But even as campaigns, the impact of these programmes is inevitably short lived. Chronic and serious health issues like diabetes and cancer are avoided by commissioners. The interested audience is

perceived to be small and the wider audience thought to find the issues depressing and intractable. The PSP approach is to serve those users with an ongoing need, not to make programmes about their problems for an audience of others.