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## Can regional community web portals become sustainable? : the Albany GateWAY : a case study

Gillian Sellar  
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**Can Regional Community Web Portals Become Sustainable?  
The Albany GateWay: A Case Study**

by  
Gillian Sellar

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
at the Faculty of Business and Public Administration,  
Edith Cowan University  
2001



## ABSTRACT

Asking the question “can regional and community web portals become sustainable?” demands a foray into many different disciplines. Sociology, education, business, strategic and knowledge management, organisational theory, relationship management and current technological trends and capabilities are some of the areas on which community projects, such as the development of communities on-line, are founded.

Case studies are the recording, analysis and reflection of some human process. The making of the Albany GateWAY is the specific example of this work, but it is more than just a case study. The GateWAY story is told in conjunction with research for both the project and this thesis. It took the author into a variety of disciplines which formed the basis for argument and description in building the community web portal [www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au). It is essentially a piece of qualitative research engaging in both existing and emerging theories of virtual community development and practice. The work is fundamentally a heuristic enquiry through which I am able to make an original contribution to knowledge in a creative and progressive way. A clear understanding of the methodological implications of this work only fully emerges towards the end of this inquiry and in this I ask the reader to persevere.

The key bodies of knowledge this work effects are those of leadership and management of a value-producing entity in the design, development and implementation of a community on-line. It is important the reader interacts with the web portal online, particularly accessing given on-site web addresses, which act as live references to the body of this text. Albany GateWAY functions as a result of proactive leadership and grounded management strategies, which have led to the ‘bringing of the Great Southern region online.’

The GateWAY, as a community on-line, is a virtual organisation dependent on a geographical base. The people of the Great Southern of Western Australia have the same needs and desires of people all over the world, but being able to congregate,

communicate, buy and sell and virtually be a united and productive entity, is a new concept many still cannot grasp.

In order to assist this process of a participatory, virtual community and to ultimately make it sustainable, there is a need for effective strategies based in sound organisational networks, social theory, knowledge of marketing, brand research systems development and ICT theories. These theories, woven into a workable business and strategic development plan are the keys to building a successful, viable portal. Once accomplished this theory and practice may become the benchmark for other communities on-line to emulate and build upon. Being connected and using the knowledge that connectivity provides, including initial funding and resource assistance, is the key to future sustainability of any organisation or group, physical or virtual.

Valdis E. Krebs (1999) poses the question, “If knowledge is power, what is connected knowledge?” He continues by suggesting the new economy operates on the complexities of connections. Human resource (HR) professionals in the past focused solely on the individual and recently on collections of individuals called teams. The economics of networks has no place for independent (i.e. unconnected) objects whether they are individuals, teams or computer systems. All individuals, communities, systems, and other business assets are massively interconnected in an evolving economic web. Efforts at making sense of this new world are beginning to reveal some basic principles at work in the complex adaptive systems we call our organisations, work groups, economic webs and to no lesser degree communities on-line.

There is a central difference between the old and new economies: the old industrial economy was driven by economies of scale; the new information economy is driven by the economics of networks. (Carl Shapiro, Hal R. Varian 1998)

Recent research on productivity and effectiveness in the knowledge economy provides insight into what works in the connected workplace. Certain patterns of connections appear around both effective individuals and successful teams when performing knowledge work. Other research shows us how to provide the “missing links” that change a poor economic network into a better conduit for information, influence, and knowledge.

Organisational learning (Crossan M, Lane H. W, and White R. E 1999) addresses key premises in renewal and continuation of enterprises through understanding the basic relationships between the three levels of individual, group and organisation. In the framework they present, the four processes of intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalising aptly assist the description of this case study. The development of GateWAY progressed through each of these stages at different times, as a constantly changing phenomenon and all are embedded in the story, which unfolds in the following chapters.

Further to this, other research into marketing and relationship management (Heide J. B. 1994) provided grounding in governance issues. Heide's definition of governance being a "multidimensional phenomenon, encompassing the initiation, termination and ongoing relationship maintenance between a set of parties" succinctly describes the process of growing and maintaining the proactive relationships between community and businesses, in a cooperative way. These relationships were and still are crucial to GateWAY's survival.

Governance issues around the structure and strategies for virtual organisations (Marshall P, McKay J, and Burn J 2001) also have implications for GateWAY. The development of collaborative practices which have been translated in reality as partnerships with local Information Technology (I.T.) businesses, community groups and service provision agencies, to the enhancement of the GateWAY regional model, are founded in one of the basic premises Marshall et. al, refer to as "pivotal to the concept of virtual organisation".

Many rural and regional economies, like those of the agriculturally based Great Southern of Western Australia, are now at the cross roads of becoming connected networks, working together to enhance and progress new ways of doing business, or, in failing to do so will gradually decay.

Effective communication within a region is essential to allow regional communities to set directions and take action and to allow regional development to occur. The key needs of regional Western Australia, with respect to communications, were reviewed in the communications audit published in May 1997. This audit concluded that a wide gap existed between the level of communication services available to those who live in regional Western Australia and those who live and work in the metropolitan area. (Boshe 1997)

The ‘wide gap’ mentioned in the Boshe Report (1997) is also known as the “digital divide” where certain geographical, socio-economic and minority groups are disadvantaged by lack of access to information and communication technologies (ICTs). This disparity has become the focus of government attention in the roll out of telecommunications facilities Australia wide since 1997 and increased funding has been earmarked to address this problem, particularly in rural and regional Australia. *(e.g. Funding for the expansion of rural telecommunications and information services has been provided by the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services. The Networking the Nation project, through the Regional Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund, funds a range of infrastructure and access projects. ([www.wa.gov.au/regional/policy/html/capacity/capacity](http://www.wa.gov.au/regional/policy/html/capacity/capacity))*

There is no question as to what we must do to assist our regional communities. Providing access to the new technologies, training, introducing marketing and e-commerce solutions to move local goods and services, encouraging on-line engagement and building community awareness are just some of the critical factors calling for a new type of leadership, a leadership which understands and practices the codes of connectivity. Albany GateWAY is an attempt at broaching these concerns by creating a conduit between the Great Southern region and the rest of the world.

Essentially it appears that sustainable regional community web portals have a greater chance at succeeding if they become “knowledge connected” i.e. the sharing and use of different ideas and methods to maximise communication and productivity. (Smith 1999) The effective management of this knowledge by community groups in creative, cooperative ways through local and global networks, whilst maintaining their individuality of culture and place, is the task at hand. The major question is how?

### **Can regional community web portals become sustainable?**

## DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
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Signature

14th March 2003

Date

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Many of the above mentioned voluntarily gave of their time to edit town or topic sites on-line, attended GateWAY meetings, shared ideas and created some wonderful work. A few had the vision of what the portal could mean to our region, to their local communities and businesses and were prepared to support the idea of GateWAY since its inception.

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<b>Albany GateWay</b>	the Great Southern region of Western Australia's community web portal. <a href="http://www.albanygateway.com.au">www.albanygateway.com.au</a>
<b>B2B</b>	business to business electronic transactions
<b>B2C</b>	business to consumer electronic transactions
<b>BEC</b>	Business Enterprise Centre e.g. Albany Business Centre (ABC)
<b>CAMS (Contract and Management Services)</b>	a department within the Western Australian government which enables tender and business database information to be electronically accessible on-line
<b>Case studies</b>	a method of conducting qualitative research through the recording, analysis and reflection of some human process or event using written or electronic media e.g. journals, tape recordings
<b>Committee</b>	the Albany based group of stakeholders/facilitators who worked in conjunction with the Perth Consortium
<b>Community on-line</b>	a geographically based community of interest(s) connected virtually via a web portal usually owned and governed by the people of that specific community or region.
<b>Consortium</b>	group of Perth based stakeholders/facilitators responsible for initiating the Albany GateWay Project. OIC, ECU, ISA, IBM (see below)
<b>CPC</b>	Cost per click refers to the averaged cost of a banner ad campaign per click. That is, the cost divided by the number of times a click through to your site occurs.
<b>CPM</b>	Cost per thousand page impressions, usually meaning advertisement views by visitors to those pages.
<b>CPS</b>	Cost per sale is the calculation for return on investment of the advertising campaign.

**Cross-media/reciprocal agreement**

where specific media organisations e.g. T.V. stations or newspapers cross link with others e.g. web portals to avail themselves of promotional opportunities in mediums different from their own.

**CTR**

Click through rate means the percentage of site visitors who click on a banner advertisement to go to the advertiser's site estimated at around 1% on average.

**DPS**

distributed publishing system e.g. WebIT

**E-business**

(electronic business), derived from such terms as "e-mail" and "e-commerce," is the conducting of business on the Internet, not only buying and selling but also servicing customers and collaborating with business partners.

**E-commerce**

the processing of economic transactions, such as buying and selling, through electronic communication. E-commerce often refers to transactions occurring on the Internet, such as credit card purchases at web sites.

**ECU (Edith Cowan University)**

a Western Australian University

**EIP**

E-GateWAY Incubator Project (E-commerce business project 2000)

**EOI**

expression of interest

**GEM (Government Electronic Marketplace)**

the state government's online electronic trading system working in tandem with CAMS (Contract and Management Services) to bring Western Australian business on-line

**Governance**

a multidimensional phenomenon, encompassing the initiation, termination and ongoing relationship maintenance between a set of parties

**GSDC (Great Southern Development Commission)**

the regional development government body

**Heuristics**

a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher.

**IBM (International Business Machines)**

one of the first major computing and software solutions firms in the world to develop the PC market.

**ICQ ("I Seek You")** Internet-related chat and messaging system

**ICT**

Information Communications Technologies

<b>ISA (Integrated Systems Australia)</b>	a Perth based I.T. solutions firm
<b>ISP</b>	the link between the user and the Internet, usually by means of a dial-up service
<b>mIRC</b>	free Internet Related Chat device
<b>OIC (The Office of Information and Communications)</b>	located within the Western Australian Department of Commerce and Trade, renamed the Department of Industry and Technology in 2001
<b>On-line Community</b>	any virtual group with an interest or shared topic/ motive which uses chat, discussion, ICQ or mIRC devices to communicate with each other anywhere in the world.
<b>Organisational theory and learning</b>	a framework leading to the understanding of the interrelated nature of basic relationships between the three levels of individual, group and organisation, within specific communities of interest. Central to this are the four processes of intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalising in order to enhance functional processes
<b>Organisational management</b>	the process of managing organisational theory and learning within community, business or service provider organisations
<b>Phenomenological</b>	a fact or occurrence that appears or is perceived by the senses and that the cause maybe questionable
<b>Reflective Research</b>	reflection of one's self as researcher and the subjective nature inherent in qualitative and phenomenological approaches, in order to analyse and query the essence of one's findings and summations from a heuristic rather than quantitative base
<b>REM (Regional Electronic Marketplace)</b>	where businesses can trade directly with each other through their regional portal. Basically REM achieves for local business what GEM (government electronic marketplace) for business statewide
<b>RFP</b>	request for proposal
<b>RFQ</b>	request for quote
<b>Social capital</b>	the collective resources required for individuals, groups, organisations, businesses, and communities to sustain a healthy future in a changing environment.



<b>URL</b>	Universal Resource Locator or an address on the World Wide Web, accessible through any browser e.g. Microsoft Internet Explorer or Netscape
<b>WebCT</b>	a tool that facilitates the creation of sophisticated World Wide Web-based educational environments and enables online information management and reporting systems
<b>WEBIT</b>	the distributed publishing and portal management system designed by Opensearch Pty.Ltd, for use in the GateWAY portal
<b>Web portal</b>	a large web presence consisting of numerous websites and other facilities, all accessible through a dedicated server and acting as a funnel to channel local and visiting traffic through the one conduit in a concerted fashion

## TEXT BOX FORMATS AND GRAPHICS

Throughout this thesis different text boxes have been used to house four types of recorded interviews or communications.

1. **Journal entries** (taken directly from a 380 page journal recording each day's activity over the two year project period) appear like so:



Journal: Friday, 29 October 99

Travelled to Perth for meetings with Opensearch (Chee Wong) and ECU (Martyn Wild). Decisions need to be made over schedule and site production, Business Plan meeting and discussions about marketing plans. Chee and I start first real work on the building of the site.

The magnitude of the task to be performed would have daunted me had I any real inkling of what lay ahead. At times I felt like a plate spinner in a circus; the one that sets up a dozen or so sticks and progresses spinning plates until all are up. Getting "the plates" up was going to be one thing. "Keeping them turning" would be another!

2. ICQ Grabs (*ICQ refers to "I Seek You" a free Internet chat device enabling private or group realtime communications*) e.g.



c2 10/28/99 3:09 PM

Gill, I've received your email thanks.. thinking about it.. and preparing something for tomorrow now there's heaps of things to cover.. but I'll try to summarise things best I can.

gilly 10/28/99 3:12 PM Great.....My major concerns are mainly the On-line admin side of things. We MUST set up an efficient way of operating, otherwise we'll never get on top of the deluge yet to come! Thanks for your support. Looking forward to seeing you tomorrow.

### 3. E-mail examples e.g.:



E-mail from Mark Pitts-Hill to GateWAY interests:

Over the past few weeks we have considered the legal entities that might best serve the longer term interests of AGW. John Booth from the Federation of Co-operatives presented to us and discussed the financially flexible entity of the modern Co-op. The Co-op model is attractive to us because of its ability to --

attract private investors/preference share holders (business viability)

have voting members that can derive personal benefits and that elect a board (community ownership and protection)

can attract state and federal funds

The committee believed it was very important to ensure that the community asset is protected, whilst having a portal that was sustainable and viable. To be relevant in the IT world, and to keep pace with product-service life cycles, ongoing development of the portal and its applications is vital.

Discussions with regional Co-ops have also been taking place to see how AGW could assist them in extending their product offerings to their members through AGW and benefit from an alliance with a regional carrier.

### 4. Taped Interviews e.g.:



Q (Gill): Michael, what do you, as the Team Leader, Business and Communities On-line, in the Office of Information and Communications, see as the main aims behind community portal development in Western Australia?

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

This thesis is both an account of an action research inquiry and personal learning account of the creation and development of the Albany GateWAY web portal, over the course of two years, 1999-2001. I engaged in a self-evolving process of working on creating the Albany GateWAY project, recording whilst researching, reflecting whilst building relationships and connections between the various strands of my work and local community. These strands became the foundation for the spiral metaphor employed to illustrate my journey and weave together the four basic threads of timeline/history, themes, methodology and theory.

The sequence of GateWAY's **Events** on the spiral graphic (*a large, fold out graphic representing the four, interwoven elements of this work is found in the back inside cover of the volume*), is illustrated by a red strand, in the form of a timeline. The timeline is broken up into twenty-four monthly sections, which create an events backdrop for the graphic. This provides a factual, linear record representing the course of key events and is a constant through the work, marking significant activities and occurrences, which formed the basis for the other elements of this work

**Themes**, the yellow strand, illustrates the nine key themes of People, Planning, Procedure, Passion, Promotion, Partnership, Product, Politics and Profit. ((Hagel and Armstrong, 1997; Kollock and Smith, 1996; Lendrum, 2000).

**Methodology**, the green strand, weaves the Reflective, Phenomenological and Heuristic methodologies which, in this work, are based on recorded, "lived experience" approaches. (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; Habermas, 1984; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994).

**Theory**, the blue strand, addresses the numerous disciplines and areas of influence on the theoretical research of this study and are signified here as Knowledge, Relationship and Organisational Management, Education, Sociology, Business and Strategic planning, E-commerce, Marketing, I.T. trends and capabilities. (Tellefsen, 1999; Baker and Sinkula, 2000; Crossan, Lane and White, 1999; Daft, 1998).

The spiral graphic represents a visual metaphor linking all the concepts, themes and events that make up GateWAY. The capitalised “WA” (for Western Australia) in the word “GateWAY” is intentionally used, as a brand name, along with the rainbow, spectrum logo used throughout the portal site at [www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au). Albany and the Great Southern have been long called the Rainbow Coast so the ‘morphed’, perspective in the logo represents the concept of foreground to distance, from here to elsewhere and back, which is symbolic of the virtual nature of the Internet.

In Chapter Two I introduce the beginning of the Albany GateWAY project and some background into how and why I became involved. It is here I pose the core question, “can regional community web portals become sustainable?” In order to find the answer to this question, if there is indeed one, I needed to select a methodology, which would assist in finding a model, or process, on which to base my work and research. Reading Merriam (1988), Winegardner (1999), Marshall (1981) and Yin (1994) it became clear that a qualitative, reflective practice approach presented in the form of a case study seemed the most appropriate for my work. My case study approach embeds the literature review in the body of the text and embodies many of the key foundations behind qualitative research.

Given that the most important element in a case study is the researcher’s ability to recognise and handle a variety of evidence derived from diverse data collection techniques e.g. documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations and participant observation, suited the my role as Manager and researcher in the GateWAY process.

I also employ an heuristic inquiry and reflective phenomenological approach to this case study whilst engaging with the works of Tesch (1990), Miller and Slater (2000) and Douglass

and Moustakas (1984). Heuristics as a form of phenomenological inquiry brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher. In this work I use a non-standard research proposal format employing the first person active voice, communicating feelings, intuitions and metaphors, and embedding the literature review and definition of terms within the flow of the text. The two terms are interchangeable with heuristics used more when describing discoveries and personal insights in the course of an inquiry. It should be noted the terms phenomenological, heuristic, action or participatory research and living inquiry all describe the act of recording and interacting with real life situations on which the researcher reflects for greater meaning and perception.

Researchers involved in the passion of discovery learn to rely on judgement based on mature experience of the phenomenon under investigation. It is something which happens from within as well as external influences and it is in this subjectivity that insights occur. It is a heuristic passion that leads to discovery, but it is born of a desire to reveal truth that is universal. It is not just something that satisfies one's own subjective cravings but serves something greater than the self, revealing deeper patterns that connect us all to a universal truth. This is what Polanyi (1962) calls "personal knowledge", and it is the basis for the development of new or potentially useful knowledge, which embraces the qualitative research approach and enhances inherent outcomes. The personal knowledge and experience I gained, as both a researcher and project manager through the adoption of these methodologies, is immeasurable.

Heuristic inquiry is derived from but different from phenomenology in four major ways:

- (1) Heuristics emphasises connectedness and relationship while phenomenology encourages more detachment in analysing an experience.
- (2) Heuristics leads to "depictions of essential meanings and portrayal of the intrigue and personal significance that imbue the search to know" while phenomenology emphasises definitive descriptions of the structures of experience.
- (3) Heuristics concludes with a 'creative synthesis' that includes the researcher's intuition and tacit understandings while phenomenology presents a distillation of the structures of experience.
- (4) "Whereas phenomenology loses the persons in the process of descriptive analysis, in heuristics the research participants remain visible in the examination of the data and continue to

be portrayed as whole persons. Phenomenology ends with the essence of experience; heuristics retains the essence of the person in experience."

Douglass and Moustakas (1984)

*Symbolic interactionism*, a term originated by Herbert Blumer (1986) relates closely with the other methodologies being expounded as it encourages the importance of meaning to the individual as an acting entity participating in the "primacy of direct empirical observation as a methodology". Symbolic Interactionism is based on three assumptions that communication occurs through the creation of shared significant symbols, that the self is constructed through communication, and social activity becomes possible through the role-taking process. This emphasis on interactions among people, use of symbols in communication and interaction, interpretation as part of action, self as constructed by others through communication and interaction, and flexible, adjustable social processes complements the methodological approaches of this work. This theory sits well with Habermas (1976) and Jacob's work (1987), particularly in relation to the social processes central to any community development project.

I feel I engaged in all these three activities in my role as Manager and that other community members became involved in the communication process through the sharing of information, learning of skills and gradual taking of greater responsibilities once the portal had been built.

In the first chapter the project is defined and a description of the evolution of the GateWAY as a pilot project begins. The spiral metaphor is extended as a process of change (Polanyi 1962) and meanings of social action and the "inter-subjective meanings", which constitute "social matrixes in which individuals find themselves and act" (Habermas 1976) start to be woven into the work. Engaging with Habermas (1984), Crossan, Lane and White's work (1999) brought to the fore, issues of subjectivity, intuition, and the importance for a researcher to actively participate in social action, all compounding my decision to use these methodologies in the GateWAY process.

At times my inability to separate the GateWay process from my personal processes became problematic. I was helped to clarify this dilemma through discussions with my supervisor, Mark Williams and the instructive assessments and suggestions of Judi Marshall and Jack

Whitehead from the Centre for Action Research at Bath University. They assisted me in scrutinising my work, in developing better skills of reflective practice and further assisted me in understanding the place of inquiry in the development of my professional practice. My work needed reworking in several ways and these interactions developed sounder ideas and approaches to my community of inquiry, as well as helped me contribute more effectively to the task of building a community online.

Discussion about tools for empowerment through Shuler's discourse on Meliorism (1997) and Reason's suggestion that the "tradition of participatory rural appraisal" which "is concerned with 'putting the first last' and creating practical knowledge of use to the underprivileged" (2001), became key concepts in my approach. GateWAY was built from the 'grassroots up' as a result of research, reflection and interactions with contemporary, community development researchers. There was growing evidence that the type of community based I.T. project I was attempting with GateWAY did not work well with a 'top down structure'. This is discussed in length later on, however this point coupled with the fact that intuitively it seemed the correct modus operandi given local circumstances became the path I chose.

Engagement with the work of other researchers in both content and approach led to my adoption of the underpinning philosophies and methodologies of this thesis. The importance of interaction through online networks such as the Community Informatics discussion boards at [communityinformatics@vancouvercommunity.net](mailto:communityinformatics@vancouvercommunity.net) and [ciresearchers@vancouvercommunity.net](mailto:ciresearchers@vancouvercommunity.net), were crucial to being involved at the epicentre of the emerging areas of Community Informatics and community online development. Dialogues with Community Informatics (C.I.) practitioners and others involved in emergent theory and practice of virtual community development assisted my critical thinking around objectives and implementation issues. For example, Harris, Gurstein and Morino all prompted consideration of constructing a clear development strategy at the outset with 'bottom-up', demand-driven development objectives being usually more preferable than top-down, supply-driven ones. This consideration and appreciation of the needs of community development recipients and how those people would themselves express their needs drove GateWAY's initial community development strategies.



It was difficult at times keeping myself from being sidetracked into technical or longwinded exhortations about telecommunications issues and questions in rural and regional Australia, whilst attempting to tell GateWAY's story. Online conversations with Abeles, Cameron and others diffused the need to include, and perhaps get "hung up on", such questions as "what practical actions would identify the needs of rural communities and industries that relate to improved communications?" This whole growing area of I.C.T. and virtual community building is becoming so saturated with multitudes of diverse ideas and arguments that it was important for me to maintain focus on getting the work done, whilst keeping "half an ear" on the debates of my C.I. colleagues online. It was a balancing act.

GateWAY would not have eventuated in the way it has, unless some of the theories and ideas from such conversations were absorbed and applied. Improved communications come from providing access, encouraging engagement and building awareness and as these key points became the main aims for building the web portal and the GateWAY process became living inquiry in action. I reiterate the importance of the reader to interact with [www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au) to see this in action. Text can only record the portal development process and my own accounts as a reflective practitioner, but it cannot fully enliven it!

During continuing discourse and discoveries I realised many questions led to the ultimate one for me, which was how do I do good research whilst trying to build a community online and do both convincingly? In discussions with my supervisor Dr. Mark Williams I was guided to prevent too many new questions from taking on a life of their own. Mark suggested they must be explored in relation to the core question, which in my case was "Can regional community web portals become sustainable" but that keeping a focus on the key issues of my work was paramount. The next step was to re-evaluate the original question (project) in terms of the new questions as well as the new answers. In Chapter Four and Five this questioning of myself and the process is in evidence even though at times I wanted to reject the project (question) because it was not always going the way I expected it to go. I learnt that limiting oneself to what is already known or by fear of the unknown is poor research!

Mark Williams continually encouraged this type of self-questioning, regardless of whether my work ended in failure or not. He prompted me to think about potential failure as a

part of honest personal growth and “as part of heuristic research, I (he) endeavoured to address my (his) strategic rationality by engaging in an analytical psychological *inner discourse* as part of being a *reflexive practitioner*”. (Williams 1995) This encouragement to pursue rigorous ‘inner discourse’ as an essential part of my reflective practice deeply effected the way I worked in building GateWAY and ultimately the way I wrote this thesis.

Chapter Three substantially deals with the process of the project, my research and the implementation of the chosen theories and methodologies at the “grassroots level”. Community design principles, examples of community online development and elements from these cases that assisted in the building of the GateWAY are considered. Interviews, social capital research and the importance of social capital to long-term economic well being, particularly in an increasingly networked society (Halpern, 1998; Temkin and Rohe, 1998), are also covered. Even though it is predominantly descriptive, this section attempts to weave in activities and events as well as examples of community involvement and growth. I also include conscience notes about my performance as a leader and manager and refer to Jack Whitehead’s challenges to educational practitioners, to question their practices. (Whitehead 1989)

I have attempted to weave the timeline/events strand into the overall work and journal entries appear where relevant. Invariably these entries deal with some problem or aspect pertinent to a particular stage of development on GateWAY, as well as describing my feelings and insights at that time. In hindsight it might have been an idea to continue the colour coding of the four different strands of the spiral throughout the text of this thesis, even though I suspect that would have been unacceptable format for our Graduate School! Diversionary as this comment might seem, I actually spent sometime doing this in one frivolous moment and the result was very interesting. Every time an event occurred it was recorded in red, the same for references to methodology (green), theory (blue) and themes (yellow), with the overall effect being a text version of the spiral graphic in the back cover.

The rest of Chapter Three is a description of the beginnings of GateWAY, the events and people who shaped the first few months interwoven with descriptions of what and why I chose to document it as a piece of *living research*, written from a *Meliorist* viewpoint. Meliorism is a

pragmatic, problem-solving viewpoint which assumes that things can get better, but only if people act to ensure that outcome and manage relationships in a form of proactive governance. (Schuler 1997) I have introduced all these related terms as different authors use them to describe the process of living research as methodology. Case study is the medium or vehicle used to encapsulate my research setting and the message is one of meliorism and social/ symbolic interactionism. Herein I am telling the story of the Albany GateWAY, weaving in the research, methodologies, themes and experiences on which the web portal was constructed.

Throughout the work it was difficult to refrain totally from ‘techno- speak’ and getting bogged down in computing jargon as I wanted the ‘human interactive’ process to evolve as the key consideration. I ask the reader to be patient in some sections where technical and iterative items have been listed and not discussed at much length, as recording them is also an important part of the process. Interestingly this could also be used as an example of the differences between quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The technical backbone of the GateWAY project, though incredibly important to the functionality of the portal, pales in significance to the human/social interaction and community building aspects. Again a descriptive balance had to be struck between technical and non-technical components of the project and I have tried to present both in as constructive a way as possible.

Online interaction with [www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au) will assist the reader’s understanding of the immensity of the task undertaken and witness the technical and community processes functioning together. Examples of GateWAY web address links are supplied throughout the thesis to assist the interactivity of this process and it is hoped that once visitors come to the site they will spend some time exploring the many facets, faces and facts on the GateWAY.

A sample mini-case study of the E-commerce Incubator Project is a grounded research example illustrating community awareness-raising and user participation activities being implemented through the project. Journal entries and records of email conversations continue the reflective and participatory nature of the work and serve to highlight, as well as document, the processes in action.

Two GateWAY participants are also showcased in mini-case study form, as examples of local people's commitment to and participation in the community online process. The lists of Topics and Towns are all web links edited by over 130 volunteer editors on a daily basis. Again the reader is invited to participate online by visiting a few of these GateWAY sites, including:

[www.albanygateway.com.au/home/comm\\_prof](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/home/comm_prof) [www.albanygateway.com.au/Home/Biz\\_Week](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Home/Biz_Week)  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/home/pers\\_prof](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/home/pers_prof) <http://http://www.albanygateway.com.au/home/feature>

This chapter concludes with my misgivings about the lack of local leadership at committee level and acknowledgment of ongoing concerns effecting the project. These issues are dealt with in ensuing chapters where I engage more closely with suggestions made by Whitehead (1989) and Williams (1998) around "self reflection" and critical questions of personal attitudes and approaches as integral factors in improving my practice.

In Chapter Four I become introspective. There are moments of self-doubt and concerns about possible failure of the project and subsequently my work, which is not something I willingly entertain. True learning or progress cannot occur without change and the spiral metaphor of this work symbolises this process.

A key turning point occurs when I am challenged by a colleague, Grant Malcolm, about GateWAY's motives in charging users for portal services by asking me whether we want GateWAY to be a "cathedral or a bazaar?" My responses and the importance of this unexpected challenge are documented further in the chapter, as do other invaluable interviews with C.I. and virtual community researchers in the emerging area of community development and information, communications and technology applications.

The Jonah files account is an important inclusion as it records a real life incident, which threatened GateWAY and some of its people in early March 2002. This case study follows the qualitative, phenomenological methodologies already described and becomes a major event on the timeline. Godwin (1994) and Ostrom (1990) discuss the phenomena of online community building as only really coming of age once "the community has faced a challenge or threat to the status quo of that community". Despite the nasty nature of this incident it happened, like the

Grant Malcolm interaction, for a reason. Both incidents challenged me as portal manager and as a researcher, which helped transform me into a better manager, probably a better citizen and hopefully into a better leader.

My decision to include the whole record of the email accounts, which transpired during the course of the Jonah files incident, is two-fold. Firstly, in order for the incident to be told as it actually happened and as truthfully as possible from my point of view, it needed to be exposed unedited. Secondly, the incident marked the coming of age of GateWAY as a growing community online, illustrating the unorchestrated, protective behaviour displayed by community members, whilst I was away. These people felt enough ownership rights to monitor the situation and band together as a united group. Their behaviour signalled a clear message that my work in building social capital (*a term often used by Preece, Smith and Kollock whose work I reference in discussion about the social aspects of community building*), and the providing of free access to training and the WebIT publishing system, had in some ways empowered them to act when their online group was threatened.

The Jonah files case study raised issues about security, privacy and cyber governance. Suler (1997) and Ostrom (1990) discuss these issues in their research on online community development and the threats and weaknesses of the Internet as an open source conduit for information. The anarchic nature of the Internet also leaves it open for abuse, sometimes in the form of hackers and sometimes in the form of stalkers who ‘hide’ and disrupt online in much the same way as their off line counterparts. The Jonah incident was both challenging and threatening. Being able to confront my feelings and actions by reflecting on and writing them out has been incredibly cathartic!

Sustainability, organisational management and leadership are core concerns in Daft’s work (1998) on organisation theory and design. His research along with that of Boyd (1999) and Marshall et al (2001) all point to a “core ideology that permeates organisational life and guides decision-making”. Reflecting on this idea of ‘core ideology’ guiding decision-making became crucial to the process of the project and my work. Leadership and relationship management issues (Kouzes and Posner 2000) emerged as noticeable factors in the early management stages

of the project and the technical and iterative development of the project are discussed at length throughout this section.

I was searching for a best practice solution to a multifaceted set of problems at this juncture and bringing all the, human and technical elements together in an organised fashion to form a functional portal, seemed integral to decision-making and problem solving processes for the project.

Chapter Five embodies all the different theories and methodologies introduced in Chapter One, as the time line spirals forward linking events with themes and theories. Nine themes identify GateWAY as a work in progress. My intent was to draw on all aspects of my experiences and other research into an interrelated matrix, covering all issues and outcomes of the GateWAY process.

Kollock (1996) declares, “there’s no algorithm for community” and he argues strongly for community involvement in the building of a web portal, so that “vibrant communities” are created instead of “lonely museums”. His ideas echo the conversation with Grant Malcolm where he posed the question “is GateWAY going to be a cathedral or a bazaar?” I claim to be building GateWAY as a marketplace or “bazaar” where people are the centrepiece of the process and so *People* becomes the first theme in the chapter.

In this chapter I propose a difference in meaning between the ideas of online communities and communities online based on online conversations with Rheingold, Williams, Hanson and Baker. (All these people are community members of an online discussion group called Brainstorms, which Howard Rheingold created as a platform for community builders and like minds to meet and share) This proposal leads to definitions of what these communities are and how they differ. Borgstrom (1990), Cameron (1998) and Smyre (1999) speak of building “capacities for transformation” and the need to “rethink and retool our local institutions within a futures context. This raised some questions for me in relation to GateWAY e.g. how can we ensure democratic ownership? *(Along the lines of meliorist approaches already mentioned in this*

work) and is it possible for both commercial and community interests to be accommodated under the one organisation?

These are serious issues for GateWAY as the question of sustainability hinges on building a revenue generating business, whilst maintaining a community focus. Issues such as knowledge management, leadership and funding are also considerations close to the surface of any sustainability proposal for ICT organisations everywhere.

The *Planning* theme section deals with business planning and e-commerce considerations and gives a summary of some revenue generating options for GateWAY. Tellefsens' work (1999) in constituent market orientations and Mahoney's dissertation (1977) on strategic management and determinism argue for adopting win-win strategies whilst partnering with other compatible organisations.

These concepts lead directly into the next theme of *Procedure*, which in terms of GateWAY can be broken down into ten main points. These are listed in the chapter and include both technical and non-technical considerations. Lendrum (2000), Marshall, McKay and Burn (2001) define partnership and collaboration as the "way of the future". Lendrum asserts that "Confrontation is turning into cooperation, competition into collaboration, separate and often conflicting strategies into shared visions with common goals", whilst Marshall et al examine a couple of businesses as case studies in presenting their Co-alliance model for shared partnerships in virtual organisations. There are implications in this research for GateWAY and cooperative strategy paradigms, as proposed by Lorange and Roos (1992) and Axelrod (1984) were also pertinent in constructing GateWAY's I.T. Cooperative model. Information Technology has changed the way we communicate, do business and interact and it has also altered some of the old paradigms of organisational structure.

Information requires thinking, and thinking about thinking, as well as doing for the "light to go on." The technology has to be cognitively adapted as well as adopted. In other words, this requires active learning-by-doing. Combine this with importance of common adoption and it reinforces the importance of local technology alliances and empowerment of local people through access provision services.

In other words, an information technology service such as GateWAY can't just be a conduit that closes the social distance between those who create the innovation and those who use it. It must provide a catalyst for local organisational innovation and provide links to resources that support local technological experimentation e.g. GateWAY's distributed publishing system, WebIT.

Collaboration and successful networking are possible only through collaborations involving two or more people or agencies that agree to share information and resources to achieve some common goals e.g. Opensearch and Albany GateWAY in this case. When such collaboration is achieved using the Internet, it is termed as an online collaboration. The key components of an online collaboration are sharing both information and resources as well as having a shared vision. Any barriers of real space and time are overwhelmingly minimised when a community goes into online collaborations and this was one of the core considerations when designing the GateWAY portal.

The next theme *Passion* is a definitive part of this chapter as it is the one factor, which cannot be manipulated or assumed in anyway. It is also a wonderful theme to have in a work based on participatory research, heuristics and phenomenology. The short section on passion might be construed as self-indulgent, however the point being made is that without it or a desire to drive an innovative idea to success, few community based projects will come to fruition. Passion as a contextual theme fits well into the action research paradigm as feelings, intuition, insights, and dreams are all sources of realising and guiding one's research. (Moustakas 1990, Tesch 1990)

Product, Promotion and Profit are three related themes, which were researched in detail from a business and marketing perspective. Finding viable approaches towards the creation of a value producing entity, in both economic and social terms was paramount for GateWAY to become viable.

Hagel and Armstrong's work (1997) in theorising commercial community development suggested the importance of aggregating, retaining and encouraging members to make online



transactions. Moreover they discuss the need for “community architecture” where volunteer members were paid to manage sub-committees etc. In GateWAY’s case these ‘volunteers’ became editors/content providers for the various topics and town sites throughout the Great Southern region. This concept was then translated into a marketing concept called the Gophor initiative, where local people have the opportunity to make a healthy commission whilst promoting their web portal’s online options. This reinforces the ownership for growth concept, which is discussed further in the *Politics* section of this chapter.

The scope for this investigation into organisational management and marketing theories was so broad I found myself tailoring the time I spent researching these areas to sourcing information which would directly assist decision-making about which paths to take and pitfalls to avoid. It must also be noted that my work was not just research based as from the start of the project I was actively working within the regional communities, creating the GateWAY platform for online interaction and managing the daily business and technical aspects. Porter’s value chain analysis (1995) a method for deconstructing into strategically important activities and understanding their input on cost and value, inherently influenced the GateWAY business plan and marketing orientations. These methods provided an effective way to plan and implement many of the daily and longer-term functions.

Stabell and Oysten (1998), Tellefsen (1999), Rayport and Sviokla (1995) provided valuable arguments for “competitive advantage” and “constituent orientations” being first identified then turned into “win-win situations through value creation for others”. GateWAY’s marketing and promotions areas are founded on some of this theory by providing local business with both on and off line advantages in the form of cross-mediation opportunities with other media through GateWAY partnerships. Having partnered with GWN TV, The Weekender newspaper and Albany Community Radio, GateWAY became strongly placed to assist its online clients with this type of promotional opportunity. This in turn promotes GateWAY’s activities further producing a value chain and competitive advantage over other commercial web portals offering similar core products e.g. web pages, banner advertising etc. from outside the region. Partnership, ownership and sound organisational management appear to be foundations towards a sustainable future for GateWAY.

In discussion with my supervisor Mark Williams, the final chapter of my work was to synthesize the preceding chapters and revisit and analyse the methodology, theories and themes of my work, then relate it all back to the central metaphor to produce a timely and relevant conclusion.

Reflecting on both the functional and poorly performing elements of the process I constructed Chapter Six as a series of reality checks, revisiting some of the key technical, iterative and theoretical aspects in an attempt to draw some comfortable conclusion. Drawing on the thematic and theoretical body of the work and the various conversations, interviews and online interactions that influenced my work, I arrived at a series of outcomes. Following these outcomes is a summation consisting of future recommendations for GateWAY, research agenda and a set of answers to my research question “Can regional community web portals become sustainable?”

Trusting my own lived experience coupled with the ideas and inclinations of others, helped record the building of the Albany GateWAY and my personal journey as a reflective practitioner. The process, though slow and arduous at times, was aptly suited to the chosen methodologies, which gave me license to feel and think my way through its various challenges. Being able to discuss, analyse, describe and question in the course of the work strengthened my ability to stay focussed in the physical and administrative tasks the actual ‘building’ process required.

I grew as an individual, leader, student and practitioner during the course of these two years working on the Albany GateWAY project. A great deal of that process was founded in maturing through reflection, study and self-analysis which this qualitative and action based research afforded me. I doubt whether I would have got this far if I had taken a quantitative approach in recording this event, as numbers, formulas and measurements rarely touch the flesh and blood of real life situations.

The GateWAY is a lively tribute to reflective inspiration, determination and to the all those people who actively participated in building our community online. It is reassuring when

occasionally theory and practice work together to produce something of value for many people to own, use and share.

Going on means going far,  
Going far means returning.

(Tao Teh Ching)

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **The journey begins**

Monday, 29 March 99

#### **“ALBANY GATEWAY PROJECT**

#### **PROJECT COORDINATOR**

A part time position exists for a person to coordinate the first stage in the establishment of a community based Internet site. This position will require;

- Interpersonal skills in dealing with the wider community
- Organisational skills
- Marketing and public relations skills
- Ability to work with a team
- Familiarity with the Internet

- Business/computing background would be an advantage

The first stage will take approximately 3 months after which a management position may be offered to complete stages 2 and 3.

Job descriptions available from the Great Southern Development Commission, phone

██████████/fax ██████████

Applications close March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1999.”

This advertisement, placed in the Albany Advertiser a few weeks prior to 29<sup>th</sup> March, 1999, jumped out at me as I read the morning paper. For six years I had been running my education, software and I.T. consultancy business and having completed a couple of media and I.T. related contracts and maintained a steady flow of private students, it was time for another challenge. Here I was attending an interview for the coordinator’s position, wondering what exactly the selection panel wanted and what Albany GateWAY would mean. The short power point presentation I had prepared, attempting to describe how I envisaged such a project developing, now appears a juvenile, pale vanguard to what has eventuated since. Nevertheless here was my simplistic vision and some intuitive feeling about the fantastic possibilities in the creation of a community web portal, which might bring the people of my region and the advancing new technologies together. The job description in the advertisement omitted to mention the need for some community development experience or a realistic timeframe such an initiative would actually take to develop. Neither was the need for certain strategic and diplomatic skills (beyond the “Interpersonal skills” mentioned), nor a detailed enough technical skills set acknowledged. Hence the salary being offered from the outset was never really commensurate with what was really required. In hindsight I realise, the steering committee and Perth consortia were in fact breaking new ground. No one had written job specifications for a community web portal manager’s position before and in effect we were all “flying blind!” As with so many community projects, Albany GateWAY was to become a work of passion, not a work for pocket!

I was offered the position.

And the seasons they go round and round  
And the painted ponies go up and down.  
We're captive on a carousel of time.  
We can't return, we can only look  
Behind from where we came  
And go round and round and round in the Circle Game  
(Joni Mitchell 1968)

As a teenager I attended a below average high school in the northern back blocks of the car manufacturing wastes of Elizabeth and Salisbury in South Australia. The late sixties were a time of flux. American astronauts landed on the moon, videotape was a relatively new invention and post secondary education promoted new, unconventional areas of study.

Educational technology, media studies and communications were three such areas and I was naturally drawn to these disciplines as I was drawn to the music of Joan Baez, Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell. Computers or at least personal computers had not become the everyday tool they are today.

Few had heard of the Internet, though American Government Intelligence Agencies were developing and using both for surveillance and intelligence purposes and whether they knew it or not, starting the revolution which would, like many other revolutions, change the way human beings related and communicated forever.

Salisbury East and Elizabeth were the dumping grounds for English migrants. As manual "fodder" for the manufacturing sectors of South Australian industry, these "shopping centre" suburbs was devoid of inspiration, faceless zones where no real community existed. Small groups, usually sporting in nature, had their own collectivity, but there was nothing to engage or hold teenagers who didn't play sport. The city was miles away, transport was spasmodic and 60's television the "opiate of the masses". (Apologies to Karl Marx 1881)

It was difficult finding and forming a sense of belonging and interaction with the outside world. It was from these roots that I started questioning the meaning and relevance of community. How did one find others with similar interests or points of view in a restricted population? How could one reach out and interact with people and events elsewhere? How

could communities like mine prevent social decay and then decline when all the majority of young people wanted, was to “get out of there!”

Joni Mitchell’s “Circle Game” embodies the concept of motion, change and a return to the beginning of something. However, change really occurs when the next turn of the circle, spirals off into a new form or experience. Mitchell’s imagery inspired the visual metaphor, which runs through my work. Using these to portray a continuum, a timeline of the life of the GateWAY project, interweaving the people, events, emotions and issues of a personal and community process.

Declining rural communities throughout the world have prompted grassroots activists to start building community networks designed to revivify communities by encouraging dialogue and providing a forum for voices that too often go unheard. *Community Informatics* (CI) is regarded as one of the most exciting phenomena of the last decade, namely the diffusion and use of Internet Technologies within communities (Gurstein 2000, Romm 2000).

Communities can now connect electronically to participate in activities such as community projects, long-distance learning, creative performances, and *virtual spaces* on computer screens. Community networks are computer systems that are designed for community use, where people share a common vision, common needs and common interests. The concepts of *on-line communities* and *communities on-line*, as a recent and important, global communications phenomenon, have come about due to a series of social, political and economic trends which have heralded their rise, growth and development. (Schuler1997, Smyre1999, Rheingold 1992).

“Can regional community web portals become sustainable?” is the core question of this case study and The Albany GateWAY Portal, the specific project being researched. Not only is the Albany GateWAY project one of the first communities in Australia to come on-line using a regional portal, but it has been designed from the base up as a community based project. The people of the Great Southern in Western Australia are the content providers, on-line editors and ultimate owners of the GateWAY.

Most other community web portals have been developed from the top down (e.g. Peel Direct, My Southwest and Avon On-line). They are technically well crafted, information rich sites and provide much “static” data, but lack a sense of visible, interactive community. “There

doesn't appear to be anyone in the main street!" There are the on-line business directories, libraries and a wealth of text based resources, but entering these one is met with static information, and various places to go to, but no apparent lively, community interaction. (Habermas 1976)

In researching the first two years of operation of the Albany GateWay project, this investigation is a piece of living research (Merriam 1988, Marshall 1981, Yin 1994), into the numerous facets of the creation of a community portal. Leadership and commitment were required to achieve the ultimate goal aimed at bringing people from a specific country region and the new information technologies together in the formation of a unique, community on-line.

It should be noted that, since I am employing an heuristic inquiry and reflective phenomenological approach to this case study (Tesch 1990, Miller and Slater 2000.) I am using a non-standard research proposal format employing the first person active voice, communicating feelings, intuitions and metaphors, and embedding the literature review and definition of terms within the flow of the text. Effectively I am telling the story of the Albany GateWay, weaving in the research, methodologies, themes and experiences on which the web portal was constructed.

Case study is a method of conducting qualitative research, and while those terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they are not synonymous. Case study research evolved as a distinctive approach to scientific inquiry, partly as a reaction to perceived limitations of quantitative research (Gall, Borg, and Gall, 1996). It is one of several approaches to qualitative inquiry, probably the most frequently used and arguably the best known and least well understood outside the scholarly research community." (Winegardner 1999)

Merriam (1988) characterises qualitative research as an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help to explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible, and in which the focus of the study is on interpretation and meaning. It became apparent to me early in the process of recording, developing and researching the sustainability of GateWay, that I needed to choose a methodology, which suited the case. My case study approach embeds the literature review in the body of the text and embodies many of the key foundations behind qualitative research:



- There is overarching interest in understanding the meaning people, through the process of developing a community on-line, have constructed.
- There is an inductive approach to knowledge generation.
- Central to qualitative research is gaining the emic, or insider's, perspective, that is, the perspective of the participants in the research study.
- Meaning is mediated through the investigator's own perceptions. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.
- The end product is narrative and descriptive.

(Merriam 1988)

In examining further the case for adopting a qualitative approach, it became clear this had to be the methodology I should use, particularly when reading Yin's (1994, 1993) case study model. He suggests the most important element in a case study is the researcher's ability to recognise and handle a variety of evidence derived from diverse data collection techniques and to use each type to the best of the current state of the art.

Yin stipulates the need for experience with documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts. This evidence is then treated in a converging manner, by applying the concept of triangulation, to establish the facts of the case. As distinct from a linear approach to data analysis, in which each data source is analysed separately and leads to findings and conclusions independent of the other sources, Yin views each source as potentially contributing to identification of a central fact which is supported by the convergence of evidence. (Yin 1994)

GateWAY is no linear event and being actively involved in a project like Albany GateWAY, the "reality", and "knowing" inherent in what actually occurs, needs honest presentation. In *The Republic* (Book VII), Plato offers the allegory of the cave in which human knowledge is likened to the shadows (reflections of reality) that play on the walls of the cave as people and objects pass between the light and the walls. Plato, through Socrates tells us "the forms which these people draw or create are converted by them into images. But they are really seeking to behold the things themselves, which can only be seen with the eye of the mind"

Our knowledge is based on images and reflections of our personal and social experiences. "These images, like those on Plato's cave walls, provide no more than a reflection of reality.

Decision-makers need a system that allows us to get closer to reality, but in the context of the broader system which contains the system we are dealing with". (Barabba 1995)

Judi Marshall (1981) aptly describes "getting closer to reality" through personal process as being integral to making sense of the research process.

I can't imagine doing an adequate analysis of data if I haven't participated in collecting it. I always tape interviews because so much happens that I'm not able to attend to at the time, and I find that listening to it again brings all sorts of new things up. When I've got the transcripts, they are flat, written copy, so I always listen to a few tapes before I get involved in actually trying to analyse the data, to re-catch some of the flavour. And I also make notes of what people were like, the impression I got from them, and I have that in conjunction with the interview transcript so that I can conjure up that person, and still see them. It is important to have the full meaning because words and sentences can be very empty and stark if they don't have the full atmosphere and context in which they were said.

This archiving of the GateWAY process as a case study predominantly follows this "getting close to reality through personal process". As Marshall notes, this process records my experiences, ideas and actions within a social and technological framework. They are subjective. However it is this process of envisioning and decision-making within a "real" situation which leads to successful outcomes and prepares one for change and discontinuities. It would not be enough to merely hypothesise or postulate about such a process, it needs to be lived and in this become self-reflective and action orientated.

This work is both a journey and a mission. By investigating the history, developments and potentials of this subject, I am travelling the recent past of various aspects of 'connected' community online development and will look into the future of what might be. The mission was to take this discovery, knowledge and theory and build a community on-line in "my own backyard", with and for the people of my region in the Great Southern of Western Australia. The journey was one of leadership and learning.

"A leader's primary contribution is in the recognition of good ideas, the support of those ideas, and the willingness to challenge the system in order to get new products, processes, and services adopted. In this sense, it might be more accurate to call them early adopters of innovation. ...Leaders are learners. They learn from their mistakes as well as their

successes.”(Kouzes&Posner2000)

The growth and development of the Great Southern region of Western Australia is dependent on growth of awareness, accessibility and communication between and for all community members. The infrastructure for this needs to be developed further, but perhaps the most important concept is interactivity. Any community is lifeless without relationship. Brilliant technology is irrelevant without content and context.

As the manager of the Albany GateWAY project, my aim was to build a regional community portal, which actively involved diverse members of its geographical community in daily interaction and discourse and which eventually, hopefully would become a sustainable model for the future. This project gave me an opportunity to develop more effective leadership skills, broaden my knowledge and networks within the local communities of the region.

### **What is GateWAY?**

Albany GateWAY was an initiative to develop a Web presence, which would act as a “portal” or gateway for Albany, Western Australia and its surrounding regions. It was to showcase the region globally, and enable communities of interest to develop, allow delivery of services online and encourage e-commerce to develop. The three basic reasons for creating the GateWAY were:

1. To build awareness of the benefits and opportunities of the Internet.
2. To encourage engagement in the Information Age.
3. To provide access to the online environment and the region.

The project aimed to bring together Internet based initiatives being pursued in the Albany and Great Southern area, together with a number of new programs, in one online web portal. This would give people easy access to information, resources and business anywhere in the Great Southern region, as well as allowing the world access to the region.

Eventually the web portal would be linked to other e-commerce applications, including call centres and smartcards to create a one-stop-shop for goods, services and information.

Albany GateWAY, would be a single portal of entry to the electronic environment of the region. It would lead to all individual online sites; other business and commerce based sites and community sites such as local organisations and government services. Information would initially be classified under three streams – community, services and business.

It would be designed to link into the WA Government's ONLINEWA initiative. One component of ONLINEWA is the WA Communities On Line (WACOL) project which would see the creation of a web-based framework for community use. Albany GateWAY was to be designed to fit directly into the WACOL Networked Communities framework.

I have extrapolated the following eight aims and objectives from the first consortia's concepts of what GateWAY was to achieve. It was to be:

1. Managed locally (with a management system developed for local needs)
2. Sustainable
3. Simple to maintain
4. Easy to use
5. Appropriate to the users
6. Community based resource
7. E-commerce viable
8. Innovative

A major report, commissioned by the Great Southern and Goldfields Esperance Regional Development Commissions, titled "Telecommunications – From Needs to Solutions – Great Southern, Esperance and Ravensthorpe" incorporated in its recommendations, the need to develop the GateWAY. (Farr 1999) In further discussions with Peter Farr a year after he had written the report, he made it clear that our region had many needs in the communications areas. Awareness raising processes were needed, in tandem with any technological developments, as the level of knowledge and skills in the community would need advancing to cope with any proposed solutions.

From the outset it was clear that GateWAY had to be as much about empowering rural/regional people, as it was about the roll out of better telecommunications facilities. The GateWAY would evolve as a “value producing entity” mentioned earlier, demanding a leadership role from me. To follow this thread closely throughout the work I reiterate how essential it is for the reader to engage with the community online at [www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au). While doing so it is important to drill down to the various levels of topics and towns, events and stories in order to fully gain an insight into the community, the lives and behaviours of the participants therein. Local contributors have individually edited every page directly online through GateWAY’s distributed publishing system (WebIT), which has become the crucial application in enabling the growth of the community online.

### **The Evolution of the GateWAY Project**

The Albany GateWAY project began as a result of discussions between two Perth-based ICT industry members who were currently engaged in projects in Albany. The Office of Information and Communications (OIC) had worked with local government agencies regarding needs and had developed the concept of Just Ask Robert (the creation of a business development website designed for Business Enterprise Centres and piloted by the Albany Business Centre). International Business Machines (IBM) had held discussions with local medical practitioners regarding the implementation of health commerce software.

As a result of a meeting between IBM and OIC, prompted by Robert Siegel of the Albany Business Enterprise Centre, the concept of the Albany GateWAY was developed. Edith Cowan University (ECU) and Integrated Systems Australia (ISA) were invited to participate in the development of this concept and became known as “the Consortium”.

There was close contact with the Great Southern Development Commission (GSDC) which had initiated a number of online related projects in the Great Southern and was working actively towards raising awareness of the uses of the Internet. A working group had also just completed the first draft of a study called *From Needs to Solutions*, which dealt with infrastructure issues and possible solutions. It was recognised that there were several

commonalties between the projects, and others being undertaken in the region, and that there was benefit to be gained from bringing all the projects together under one umbrella.

It was decided to bring them together under a project tentatively called “Albany GateWay”. The project would bring a number of Great Southern initiatives together in one web-based service “portal” or “single window”. OIC and the GSDC then organised a workshop for all the stakeholders and other interested people in the Great Southern to gauge public reaction to the concept.

## **Stage One: Developing Albany GateWay Initial Brief**

### ***Consultation Processes***

As a result of the decision to float the Albany GateWay concept with the Great Southern Community, a process of consultation with the community was organised by OIC and the GSDC.

### ***First Workshop – Development of GateWay Concept***

OIC and GSDC organised a workshop to introduce the concept of GateWay to the community and to work through possible applications of online technology to the needs of the region and the proposed pilots. The workshop was financially supported and led by OIC, IBM, ECU and ISA. The 40 delegates enthusiastically endorsed the GateWay concept, which led to:

Agreement that the Albany GateWay would be a portal to online activity in the Great Southern. It was agreed that it would consist of a web-based framework under which would sit a series of pilot projects to start the process of populating the website. These pilot projects were to include:

- Doctors Desk – implementing an admittance and discharge system for Albany medical services
- Just Ask Robert – a web based business planning services for the Albany Business Centre
- Producers – bring the fresh food and wine industry online

A submission for the Federal-funding program ITOL (Information Technology on Line) through DIST was prepared by the Consortium and endorsed by a number of Great Southern

stakeholders. It was submitted on the strength of the enthusiasm shown by initial workshops in Albany.

### ***Second Workshop***

A second workshop was organised by OIC and GSDC (again financially supported and attended by OIC, IBM, ECU and ISA) at which the GateWAY concept was discussed at greater depth. The meeting resulted in a number of outcomes:

- A steering committee would report back to the larger working group. Perth based consortium members were included ex-officio. The steering group had a number of issues to address including local ownership and management of the site; the incorporation of existing online sites; funding and technology.
- The wineries and producers indicated that they would rather “sit back and see what happens” – they are enthusiastic but unable to commit in the early stages. The local sustainable development group SCRIPT comes in with a pilot called “Living Links”.
- Local web developer Neil McKnight demonstrated his online business site – Albany Online – which had the hallmarks of being the basis for a good community site. He had already brought a number of tourism oriented businesses online in a technically good site.
- The Albany City Council and Premier’s Department also funded a series of workshops run by Stephen Alexander, as a community awareness campaign. Rural, business, educational and tourism organisations were invited to participate.

### ***Post Workshop Events: ITOL (Information Technology On-line) Submission***

*(ITOL is a department of the National Office for Information and the Economy, NOIE, a major federal government-funding source for e-commerce and I.T. projects throughout Australia)*

- A concept site plan for GateWAY, indicating the three streams – community, business and service was proposed. Consortium members were kept informed of the issues by email and attended meetings in Albany when possible.

- Continued support of the consortium, by the Albany Committee, in pursuing the necessary funds with the following inclusions: the employment of a local project manager (coordinator) and a particular emphasis on creating e-commerce trading systems.
- The consortium was informed by ITOL that its application was shortlisted though more work had to be undertaken before it could be funded. This work included ensuring local project management and an outcomes statement.
- The Albany steering committee was appraised of this at a meeting (attended by OIC) and the issues were worked through resulting in a number of critical outcomes:

### ***Post Workshop Events: Prototype***

Following discussion with local community groups and stakeholders there appeared to be a great deal of interest in the Great Southern in the concept of online trading and enabling people to “buy local”. This was re-emphasised by the steering committee members who indicated that there was support for enabling Great Southern businesses in the uptake of e-commerce through providing a mall or online shopping facility with secure transaction. It was decided that e-commerce enabling would be a key driver of Albany GateWAY and this was incorporated into the reworked ITOL submission.

To ascertain what the community wanted in a web portal I decided to build a small prototype to demonstrate the site with three initial pilot sites – a business; a community group and a government service. Existing websites in the region would be contacted and incorporated including Albany Online and the local Chamber of Commerce’s site. This was deemed necessary to enable local people to see the concept “in action” as the marketing and awareness aspects had been identified as highly important if the project is going to succeed. It was also the first step towards encouraging community participation.

I believed that once people had a sound idea of how the GateWAY could work and what it could do they would begin to more clearly see how the electronic environment could possibly enhance and answer their personal communication needs. They might become more open to using the Internet once offered training in the WebIT application, which enabled them to publish



their community and business information anywhere they chose. It was also a primary move towards creating a democratic, online management system.

Funding was committed from OIC, GSDC and the local community to create the prototype with the aim of demonstrating it at a workshop meeting on February 8, 1999.

***Post Workshop Events: Management Issues***

The Committee also concluded that it was necessary to look at the following issues regarding the future of the project:

- The need for the consortium to continue in their role as adviser, giving assistance and working to develop skills in the region. The consortium members met to discuss the Steering Committee’s findings and resolved to continue to seek the funding with the heightened emphasis on e-commerce, particularly to the creation of a trading system for the region, and to ensure that the process was documented.
- The creation of a model and standards for community portal project management and sustainability.
- The recognition that awareness raising programs are vital to the long-term success of GateWAY and other similar projects.
- Provision of e-commerce capabilities and training.

The members of the consortium recognised during the second workshop that the transition to local ownership had moved more quickly than anticipated and worked with the Great Southern community, at the workshop, to adapt the program to suit.

**Phase Two: Redefining the GateWAY Brief**

As a result of the speed of the community consultation phase two clear paths needed to be defined in order to optimise the project’s success:

***1. Enabling E-commerce Plan***

- The construction of a solid platform to enable e-commerce to develop in the region.

- The steering committee had gauged public opinion and believed that the time was right to devise and implement an e-commerce system which would be designed with the needs of the region in mind and which could then be adopted by other regions with ease.

To enable this process it was important to look at the specific trading needs of regional communities and at the management needs of such a system.

## ***2. A Business Plan***

The need for a business plan which outlined these issues and addressed long term management and sustainability was identified, together with the need to have the security of maintenance personnel on call, while the process was being defined.

### ***Awareness and Content***

It was recognised that encouraging a critical mass of users was of great importance in raising awareness of the use of online environments and e-commerce. Awareness raising and marketing programmes would be necessary to address this through two main avenues:

1. Traditional PR and marketing programs
2. A critical “online” community of interest

While the GateWAY site was to develop a number of communities of interest, these were looking towards having specific outputs which would generate interest slowly as they developed and would be adapted for use outside the region. However there was also a need for an “instant hit” community of interest which would be high profile and have the effect of bringing non-Internet literate people online in a participatory, rather than observer role.

Following consultation with business, employer groups and others in the Great Southern (and other regions of WA) it has become evident there was a need for an e-commerce project which demonstrated the power of the Internet as a business tool.

A project called ArtsNET, in which arts, crafts and cottage industries was to be brought online in a single window environment was to be created as part of GateWAY. The participants are often single person enterprises, which are characterised by spending time on marketing when they could be producing product for sale.

### ***Web Service***

The proposed web based service would allow an online presence for all practitioners giving them access to global markets. The sites would need to be:

1. Cheap and accessible
2. Easy to establish and maintain (made using templates without needing HTML skills.)
3. Updateable from any browser (so they would not necessarily have to own a computer)
4. Hosted remotely
5. Linkable to a personal webpage.
6. e-commerce enabled

The result would be an online catalogue of arts, crafts and cottage industries in the Great Southern. The web service would also include training, networking and communications opportunities to enable practitioners to gain the full benefit of e-commerce.

Bringing an entire “community of interest” online in a simple, easy to use web environment also acted as a demonstration site for other such communities of interest. This would create an upsurge in the development of large websites with a corresponding increase in employment opportunities in the Information, Communications and Technology industry.

### ***Project Management – Appointment of Project Manager***

In mid March 1999 the position of part time Coordinator for the Albany GateWAY Project was advertised. This person would be responsible for the establishment of a community based Internet site. The person would be responsible to the GateWAY Committee and the funds and contracts to be let by ECU (which had charge of the ITOL funds), on presentation of invoices.

### ***Deliverables and Items of Service for the Project in Stage One***

Following is a list of deliverables drawn up by the committee for the first stage of the GateWAY project:

1. To develop, implement and manage a community awareness campaign and community involvement in securing a high regional public profile for the GateWAY project.

2. To identify target audiences.
3. To establish an on-line website, Albany GateWAY brand/badge, domain name and to represent GateWAY.
4. To identify and evaluate community websites.
5. To develop design imperatives for the GateWAY website.
6. To identify requirements for community education and awareness.
7. To write a strategic report at the end of the three months to record and address the activities and issues of the Albany GateWAY project to the 24<sup>th</sup> of July 1999. This report was to make recommendations about commercial sustainability, growth and the future development and management of Albany GateWAY, leading to the preparation of a full business plan in stage two.

These were my job and outcome statements and the events which flowed from the outset were to take on a character all their own. The interplay of time, circumstance and personalities were to shape the GateWAY process into a real life drama, filled with all the elements common in fiction; though this real life process progressed as more than mere documentary.

### ***Transition, Recurrence and Metaphor***

Metaphor and imagery are powerful tools when attempting to describe human communication processes, as has been used by other researchers (e.g. Bogdan and Biklen 1982 Jacob 1987 Williams 1998). Many times, from the outset of my time developing GateWAY, I felt like I was being pulled into some vortex, an unknown place that presented as both exciting though risky. This feeling often resembled a whirlpool, not being sucked down or up nor horizontally. It was more a diagonal (45-degree), three-dimensional movement. This spiral motion constantly recurred in my dreams, but the sensation was one of exhilaration in riding a tubular wave, rather than distress or fearful of being thrust into some void. The ultimate question: “was I in, or out of control?” (See pages 114 and 162)

## Methodology

### *Heuristic Inquiry*

*Heuristics* is a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher. Heuristic inquiry accentuates the personal experience of this phenomenon and the essential experience of others who also experience this phenomenon intensely” (Patton 1980, 1990). This approach is also commonly referred to as *reflective practice*.

The word heuristic is Greek in origin (*heuriskein*) and means to “discover”. *Heuriskein* means, “I find” and relates it to another word for discovery “eureka.” The reports of heuristic researchers are filled with the discoveries, personal insights, and reflections of the researchers. Discovery comes from “a kind of being wide open in surrender to the thing itself, a recognition that one must relinquish control and be tumbled about with the newness and drama of a searching focus that is taking over life” (Douglass B & Moustakas C 1984)

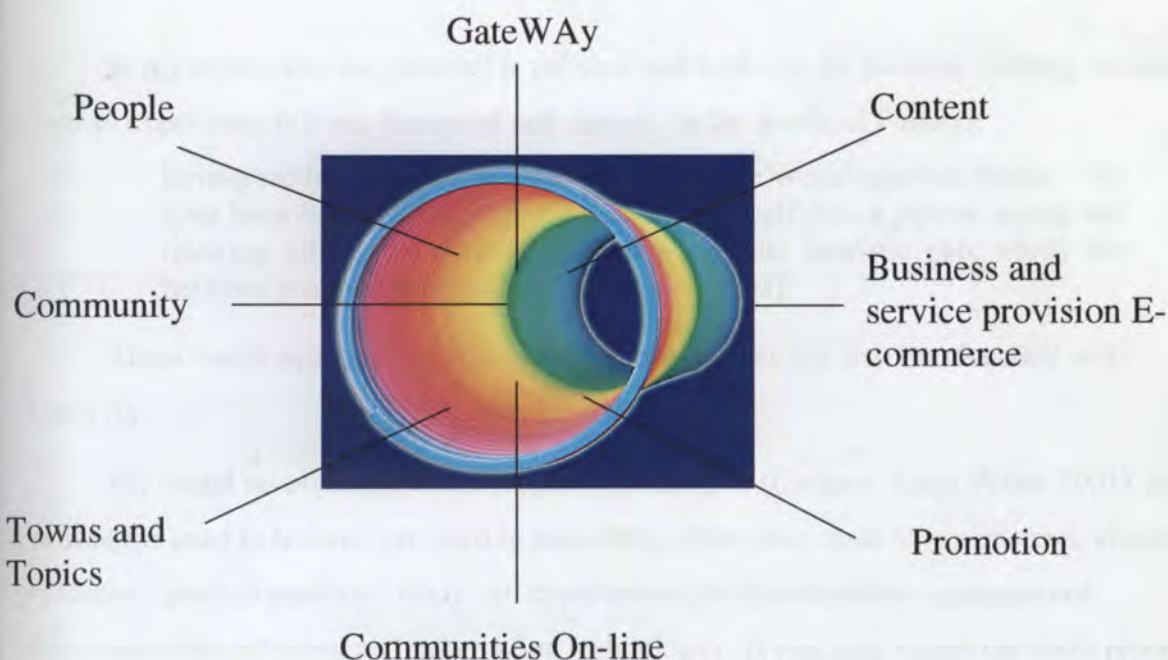
The Heuristic process leads one from the individual to the general and back again, from the feeling to the word and back to the feeling, from the experience to the concept and back to the experience. Since I first started my research into, and creation of, the GateWAY, a spirallike image or symbol has become a recurrent metaphor for my work and runs as a constant thread through my reflective practice.

The spiral is a symbol denoting eternity. It runs through nature, science, mysticism, art, and symbolises the essence of life, as represented in a DNA molecule. Spirals abound in nature, and have long been symbols of the cosmos, astronomy, alchemy, the I Ching, the Jewish Cabala or tree of life, Aboriginal and other ethnic and native art, and are ever present in literature. Yeats (1938) for example conceived of the universe as a structure of opposing spirals, which he called “gyres”; “man lives and dies between his two eternities”.

The universal spiral vortex is perhaps the most complete symbol by which we map our cosmic journeys. As William Blake wrote in his poem “Milton”:

The nature of infinity is this: That everything has its  
Own vortex, and when once a traveller thro’ Eternity  
Has pass’d that Vortex, he perceives it roll backward behind

His path, into a globe itself unfolding, like a sun....  
Thus is the heaven a vortex pass'd already, and the earth  
A vortex not yet pass'd by then traveller thro' Eternity  
(Blake 1803)



**Figure 1. The major post structural metaphor of the thesis – a spiral which represents the development of the Albany GateWAY project.**

I use this spiralltic metaphor to illustrate and assist the description of the journey GateWAY has become and the processes, which have shaped it. The metaphor as a descriptor has roots in *ethnomethodology*, (a language-oriented approach employing tape recordings to capture accounts of everyday language to assist in the study of language interactions and how people deal with ambiguous meanings). It is also based in *symbolic interactionism*, (the study of how “humans live in a symbolic environment as well as a physical (one). They act in response to symbols as well as to physical stimuli”. (Blumer 1986, Jacob, 1987, p27) Sometimes ethnomethodology is seen as a type of symbolic interactionism. (Meltzer et al.1975, Tesch 1990).

## Personal Effects

In my experience the personal is political and both call for passion. Change occurs only when an experience is lived, honoured and shared. In the words of Polanyi:

having made a discovery, I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes have become different; I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently. I have crossed a gap, the heuristic gap, which lies between problem and discovery. (Polanyi, 1962)

These words echo my feelings and experiences since my first involvement with GateWAY.

My initial involvement in the project was intuitive (Crossan, Lane, White 2001), in so far as I sensed the need to become involved in something which was close to my interests, chosen profession, areas of academic study and experiences (media education, interpersonal skills/counsellor, educator and information technology). It was time to use my skills proactively in a project from which my local community would benefit. I have been involved in the *Information Technology* (O'Neil 2001) scene in our region for sometime and knew that the "digital divide" was already occurring in my community. I felt intuitively drawn to participate in this new project, even though the concept was new and in the main, undefined.

Access to a symbolically structured object domain calls for procedures that are logically distinct from those developed in the natural sciences, procedures designed to grasp the "meaning" that is constitutive of social reality. Social action depends on the agent's "definition of the situation" and this is not solely a matter of subjective motivations. The meanings to which social action is oriented are primarily inter-subjective meanings constitutive of social-cultural matrix in which individuals find themselves and act: inherited values and world views, institutionalised roles and social norms, and so on. Any methodology that systematically neglects the interpretive schemata through which social action is itself mediated, that pursues the tasks of concept and theory foundation in abstraction from the prior categorical formation of social reality, is doomed to failure. (Habermas 1976)

There is no substitute for experience, none at all. All the paraphernalia of communication and of knowledge-words, labels, concepts, symbols, theories, formulas, sciences are all useful only because people already knew them experientially". (Maslow 1966) Renata Tesch alludes to



similar notions in her qualitative research discourse, which analyses qualitative constructs, such as ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism and phenomenological approaches in research. (Tesch, 1990)

My work is a record and re-creation of lived experience. The GateWAY, as a challenge, is fulfilled through examples, narrative descriptions, dialogues, stories, taped interviews, on-line chat histories, autobiographical journals and diaries, draft reports, CDROM presentations e-mails and other personal documents. (Reason 2001, Marshall 1981)

Throughout the process of recording and writing this work I have attempted to be as clear and as honest in the retelling and use of personal accounts as possible. Everyone cited in this text has been identified under their real name. The only exception is Jonah, the on-line stalker, who caused GateWAY and me personally, so much angst between March and late June 2001. All direct participants e.g. the several taped interviewees and other consenting community members, gave written permission for the use of their stories, recollections and photos where appropriate. In the event anyone, for whatever reason feels wrongly represented, I apologise here in advance. I have genuinely attempted as true and real a representation of people, events and circumstances as possible.

This work is about people, communication, participation and community as much as it is about commercial viability and sustainability. I believe the essence of any type of successful community development is the empowerment of individuals of that community to have access to the skills, own the decision-making processes and use existing and new knowledge as a platform for growth and prosperity in their community. The people of the Great Southern, particularly farmers and others dependent on the land for a living in our region have a great opportunity to participate in GateWAY. The sustainability of a regional community portal depends on the inclusion and participation of these members, (Cohill, Kruth 1999), for they are the main ones who provide on-line content, support and goods and services for others in the region to purchase and use.

Local communities need a local on-line marketplace to keep the region alive. (Silver 2000, Selznick 1992)

Participatory research has a double objective. One aim is to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people – through research, through adult education, and through sociopolitical action. The second aim is to empower people at a second and deeper level through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge: they “see through” the ways in which the establishment monopolises the production and use of knowledge for the benefit of its members. This is the meaning of consciousness raising or *conscientisation*, a term popularised by Freire for a “process of self-awareness through collective self-inquiry and reflection”. The tradition of participatory rural appraisal similarly is concerned with “putting the first last” and creating practical knowledge of use to the underprivileged members of our world (*community*). (Reason 2001)

My personal journey as the Manager of the GateWAY project is documented as a piece of *living research*, written from a *Meliorist* viewpoint. Meliorism is a pragmatic, problem-solving viewpoint which assumes that things can get better, but only if people act to ensure that outcome and manage relationships in a form of proactive governance. (Heide 1994)

As Reason (2001) alludes to in the above quotation, people can only act and have a constructive effect on their future if they have the tools to become empowered and a common cause to make it worthwhile. People of course do influence the course of the future in large and small ways through their actions. To counter the possibility of critical decisions being made out of the public view, the public needs to be given greater access to decision-making processes. Democracy is a tool of public deliberation and decision-making. It is a tool of Meliorism (Schuler 1997).

An interesting synergy developed, between adopting a heuristic methodological approach, embracing the imagery of spirals and taking a Meliorist, proactive stance in my work. These formed the foundations of this case study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **The Work: Procedure and Implementation**

Communities arise for different reasons. Some form around a vision or cause, such as Earth First, Jews for Jesus, or the anti-war movement. Others form around a charismatic figure such as Elvis, L. Ron Hubbard, or Jesus. Other communities arise organically, such as the folks who gather on Saturday nights at the local pub for a game of darts. Regardless of how your community gets started, everyone involved will find it more satisfying if its purpose is clear. Ask yourself these questions:

1. What type of community am I building?
2. Why am I building it?
3. Who am I building it for?

(Amy Jo Kim 2000)

Community on-line projects cannot be created as standalone events. The very nature of community building at any level requires networking and sharing of ideas and processes.

In *Community Building on The Web*, Kim (2000) introduces three basic community design principles: Design for growth and change, creation of feedback loops and empowering of individuals within communities. This potentially leads to empowered communities, but note it is a ground up process, not the reverse.

With these principles in mind, I set about researching and assessing other community websites and portals, to ascertain how and why others had gone about creating their community sites and portals. Several communities on-line were studied to determine the essential components necessary for successful implementation and pitfalls, or extraneous activities, which might effect this process. Interestingly enough finding a similar project to emulate or learn from, proved difficult, as I came to realise what we were attempting with GateWAY hadn't actually been done before in quite the way we intended.

Different community portals have differing needs and objectives. GateWAY's all encompassing brief had no visible counterpart, with only projects like Peel and Avon showing any definite similarities. In this was a lesson. Every region, or community on-line has its own individual idiosyncrasies and there is no one formula for developing a community on-line. However, there are enough similarities between geographically related places for the sharing of ideas and models, which maybe of use to new portals in the early days of development. Two years after GateWAY's instigation, guidelines and methodology towards building sound community portals is far easier to access, as the early adopters enter their second or third years of operation.

Key communities on-line and related projects, providing focus and information for this project were:

#### **Blacksburg Electronic Village (Blacksburg Virginia USA)**

*(Interview with Alan Birrell, Business Development Manager of the 2 Cities webportal [www.2cities.com.au](http://www.2cities.com.au) project at Joondalup and Wanneroo, Western Australia. 2001. Alan visited the BEV project to gain some ideas into community portal building. A discussion with him about his Blacksburg and 2 Cities experiences follow this description of the project.)*

The BEV project <http://www.bev.net> demonstrated the delivery, support and integration of high capacity network services into the daily activities of an under served and disadvantaged population in a rural Appalachian county. The Blacksburg Electronic Village (BEV) was created to extend Internet-based network services, training, user support, and resource integration throughout Montgomery County, including government information, citizen access, social services, education, and business information to homes, schools, public libraries and places of work.

The Blacksburg Electronic Village was a model for community networking through a formal partnership with Radford, Virginia. Additional communities were assisted in their efforts to replicate the BEV model through an online clearinghouse of information and documentation on how-to establish, operate and nurture a broadly-based community network. Formal evaluation of several key initiatives assessed the use and impact of networking in rural

communities, the utility and effectiveness of online K12 science materials, and the utility of online delivery of information resources devoted to the replication of the BEV model.

The main aim was to extend the success of the Blacksburg Electronic Village into the predominantly rural areas of the county outside Blacksburg and to replicate the model in another communities. It also attempted to post training materials and other “how to” documentation online for communities around the country, and to evaluate the success of these efforts.

This project demonstrated the integration of high capacity Internet-based services throughout a rural, under served county in Appalachia. These included government information, social services, public education, and local business information to homes, schools, public libraries and places of work. The project also demonstrated the replicability of the Blacksburg Electronic Village (BEV) as a model for community networking. To support the wider replication of the BEV model, the project built an online BEV clearinghouse of information and documentation on how to establish, support, and sustain a community network in other places. (Kavanaugh and Cohill 2000)

Social capital research demonstrates the importance of social capital to long-term economic well being, particularly in an increasingly networked society (Halpern, 1998; Temkin and Rohe, 1998). Over a three-year period Kavanaugh conducted a study of residents in Blacksburg Electronic Village and found that electronic networks were expanding existing social networks within a geographic community. There was increased public engagement and community involvement was attributed to about one fifth of Internet users in that community who were predisposed towards community involvement. (Kavanaugh, 1999).

Two of GateWAY’s main objectives were to increase public engagement and community involvement and so the Blacksburg model became important in researching this concept of ‘networking geographically based’ communities.

There are three qualities of the Blacksburg Electronic Village information infrastructure, which distinguish it from many other community network projects:

1. The BEV is committed to countywide, ubiquitous, and inexpensive access for all citizens. Through strong cooperative efforts with the public schools and the public library, all

interested schoolteachers, children, parent and citizens will have free, direct access to the Internet, including private electronic mail accounts.

2. From the beginning, the BEV made access to high quality local services a primary goal. The Blacksburg Electronic Village has some of the most comprehensive community Web and gopher pages in the world (<http://www.bev.net.gopher.bev.net>). These information resources serve both information providers in the community and information consumers.
3. Every BEV user has direct access to the Internet, ensuring that members of the community can take advantage of the worldwide reach of Internet users and services. The software that BEV provides makes each user's computer part of the Internet. All BEV users can interconnect and inter-operate directly with any other public computer or service on the Internet, worldwide.

Unlike many other networking schemes, the Internet architecture scales up easily and economically to support users ranging from small home users to large institutions like public schools and local governments. In Blacksburg, the existing Internet infrastructure is already in place to support large numbers of new users. The obstacle to increased expansion into the less affluent and less educated rural areas of the county is not the availability of computers (many homes already have one) or access to the network (local Internet access is already available), but education.

BEV increased rural access to the Internet and to local, Internet-based information services by developing an educational program designed to serve students and teachers, parents and citizens, and local government officials.

Based on the eighteen months of experience providing network services in Blacksburg, a careful, deliberate education process was the critical first step toward increased use of the network by the community.

The three main aims of the project during the grant period were:

1. Educate a wide variety of rural, under served users on how to integrate network services into their daily activities.

2. Evaluate and test the replicability of the BEV model for community networking through a formal partnership with another community (Radford).
3. Assist other communities interested in networking by augmenting and enhancing the BEV online clearinghouse of “how-to” information, documentation, evaluation and training materials.

It appears community access to the Internet is an education problem, not a technology problem. The BEV experience indicates that the solution to every problem encountered thus far is education, user support, and integration of local information resources into daily life. By focusing on three key information and integration diffusion points (public schools, public libraries, and public servants in county government), it is expected to reach a core group of users that will create a critical mass of users and local services which will attract large numbers of users.

### **Blacksburg as a model for GateWAY**

Blacksburg and Albany GateWAY share similar paradigms. Both are rural based projects, cooperatively operated for egalitarian access and education purposes. The major common purpose is in assisting all citizens, within a certain geographical area to acquire and use a specifically created community portal system, for the benefit of all members.

Despite the differences in population, country of origin and funding dissimilarities, Blacksburg provided an interesting and practical model to learn from, particularly in ideas for education and training of the community in Internet and independent content use.



Alan Birrell Interview:

**Gill:** Alan, why did you visit the Blacksburg project and what did you discover?

**Alan:** When we first started setting up the Joondalup and Wanneroo community portal concept, we looked around the world to find some examples of community

portals which provided the infrastructure so people can get cheap, high speed access to the Internet. Blacksburg was one of those mentioned so we visited Virginia and BEV.

What I came away with was some definite ideas for infrastructure development that we need to do here and a very clear idea on how to involve the community and the sorts of facilities we need to provide for our portal, with the knowledge that BEV.net didn't have a clear model for sustainability. This was something we had to create for ourselves.

This led us to come up with quite a different business model based on how to bring value to small business. Now I don't have an I.T. background, I had my own business for 25 years in the transport industry and my first ideas was to develop a management structure. We set up a separate incorporated body which would be responsible for the development and ongoing management of the whole project, and the members of that are the key stakeholders: The City of Joondalup, City of Wanneroo, Edith Cowan University and the two local business associations.

**Gill:** So there's good communication between the parties?

**Alan:** Yes, very good communication and because it's been taken out of the local government arena we have a separate body responsible for management and I report to a committee not made up of those five key stakeholders. The business plan will be expanded to include a community advisory group and a business advisory group, with chair people directly responsible to the Board. So that was the first step, to develop a clearly defined management structure.

The next thing was to look at where income could be earned. It was my view that there had to be value for business in being part of the portal, so we had to come up with a model that would provide enough benefit to business so they'd pay for it, to pay for a service, which was commercially viable. So our model is to develop a regional electronic marketplace (REM) where businesses can trade directly with each other. Basically REM achieves for local business what GEM (government electronic marketplace) is attempting to do for businesses throughout the state, though REM is a "two way traffic model" not "one way" like GEM.

We felt that local businesses were going to be disadvantaged if the two local governments used GEM for their business transactions, because the small businesses face problems of cost and access. So both the cities of Joondalup and Wanneroo will do their purchasing through REM so they will attempt to purchase locally first. The marketplace will provide a platform for local businesses to have their catalogues listed and small businesses will be able to trade with each other.



**Gill:** What's the difference between this and becoming an ETA (Electronic Transaction Association)?

**Alan:** An ETA just enables businesses to have their catalogues listed within GEM so they can trade with business, however REM allows small businesses to transact with other small businesses. We're going to run a pilot programme of this using five businesses from each city, ten businesses. Businesses down to a lawnmowing contractor will be able to use REM to trade, therefore paying to be part of the marketplace. This is how we're going to generate the income.

**Gill:** So REM is actually the portal's product?

**Alan:** Yup, so we'll have a two stage structure, we have 2 cities, community groups etc, so we'll have a sustainable model. REM offers to save businesses money and open up other markets to them. Now if we get 100 businesses using REM there will be 98 different solutions. Small businesses will have to change the way they operate quite dramatically in order to take advantage of it but will feel the benefits in the long run.

**Gill:** How much will this cost small businesses?

**Alan:** Somewhere between \$500 – \$800 per year and then they'll pay per transaction, perhaps 50c-80c per transaction.

## **The 2 Cities Portal**

Alan Birrell's business model for the Joondalup/Wanneroo portal [www.2cities.com.au](http://www.2cities.com.au) will be an interesting project to follow, as they develop their community on-line in the next year or so. Starting with such a strong emphasis on business involvement could prove the way to ensure sustainability. In fact Alan Birrell sees it as the only feasible way to ensure future sustainability. Observing how 2 Cities involves community in this process will be another matter, as this area does not appear to have been solidly addressed, as yet.

## **Ballarat On-Line Regional Network**

Ballarat Online <http://www.online.ballarat.net.au/> is a community based group interested in the Internet, keen to help people become comfortable using this new medium. They provide information, free and low cost training and support for all things Internet. The website provides an Internet map of the region's activities and information services. It is used by people in the

region and further afield to exchange information and to keep up to date and learn about Information Technology developments.

There are support and learning functions including access to introductory and advanced training as well as links to online learning and technical tips. They also provide low cost access to the Internet and this comes with Introductory Training thrown in! They are open 9 – 9 weekdays, 2 – 6 weekends, with women’s interest groups and games sessions on at specific times. Advanced learning, for Web page writing Web searching and other special interest use is also available.

The Ballarat On-line site functions very well as a directory resource with topics such as Arts and Culture, Business, Tourism, Education and Training, Local entertainment and Employment, which gives a good scope of information about the region. However, there was no sense of an active community on-line, no discussion boards or chat rooms or suggestion of the actual Ballarat community interacting on-line. This was to prove a trend in many of the community-based portals I researched and was another example of “top down” development.

**WA On-Line**

*(Taped interview summation with OIC representatives Michael Ashford and Jackie Gill in Chapter Four: Reflection and Interaction)*

Online WA Communities <http://www.online.wa.gov.au> is a range of products and programs, which introduce people to, and raise awareness of the opportunities and benefits of the information age and the Internet (Ashford and Gill 2000). The availability of information and products is mobilising demand in regional areas for the provision of online services, leading to an improvement in telecommunications infrastructure through upgraded facilities being offered by carriers who are responding to this demand. The main aims of WA On-Line are:

- Community participation in the development of online services.
- Encouraging small and medium businesses to become innovative users.
- Partnering with agencies/private sector to achieve best practice and pioneer services for communities.

- Developing a state-wide skills enhancement program, in partnership with learning institutions.
- Working with key national bodies (NOIE, OGIT, etc.) to develop awareness-raising programs.
- Increasing the ease of communication and information-sharing between communities, while decreasing the cost;
- Promulgating the use and delivery of communications infrastructure to regional WA.
- Highlighting and demonstrating the effectiveness of the online environment;
- Development of services which help people get online, wherever they are;
- Encouraging businesses to explore and adopt the use of e-commerce in their operations;
- Encouraging decentralisation through teleworking and creating new jobs; and
- Encouraging young people to stay in regional WA by being able to “stay in touch” with things of importance to youth.

This government portal was created as a “Doorway to Western Australia’s Information and Services”, and is an initiative of the Office of Information and Communications within the Department of Commerce and Trade, and the Department of Contract and Management Services.

**Peel Region, Western Australia <http://peeldirect.com.au>**

*(Taped interview excerpts and summation with Greg Williams, Regional Development Officer – Peel Development Commission in Chapter Four: Reflection and Interaction)*

**The Peel eCommunity Web Portal [www.peel.ecommunity.com.au](http://www.peel.ecommunity.com.au)** is a free listing of several hundred community groups within the Peel region of Western Australia. The listing includes (name, address, phone, fax, URL, email, contacts, aims and objectives), which can be sorted by location, community category (ie sport, arts, charity, historical, youth, culture etc), or keywords. This portal was officially launched in February 2000. Community groups appreciate being able to have an online listing of their group, and very importantly an online Calendar of

Community Events, all for free, and are starting to take responsibility for updating and thus ownership.

**The Peel eMarketplace Web Portal** [www.peel.emarketplace.com.au](http://www.peel.emarketplace.com.au) is a listing of nearly 3000 businesses within the Peel region and offers a free basic listing to businesses which includes (name, address, phone, fax, URL, email), which can be sorted by location, industry, or keywords. This portal has been operating for the past 12 months (and has been continually upgraded) and was formally launched at the Mandurah Performing Arts Centre. The response from the local businesses has been fantastic, as they are very glad that they can have access to a free listing of their business, which is part of a suite of products and services managed and delivered by the Peel Business Enterprise Centre to help them understand and adopt E-commerce.

Peel e-Community Portal is a website containing information and linkages on information that will be of interest to the whole Peel community and people interested to know what is available within the Peel region. This Portal is a one stop shop for all community groups to list their services, what they do, and how to contact them. The information can be accessed at individual community level, Mandurah/Murray/Boddington/Waroona/Serpentine-Jarrahdale, (e.g. search for all tennis clubs in Boddington) or for the whole region. The type of information that will be contained within the Portal will include :

1. Regional information on Geography and weather

2. The Peel Economy

Peel eMarketplace (Electronic Trading Network – E-commerce)

3. Visitors Guide

4. Events/Festivals Calendar (database)

5. Community Groups Directory (database)

6. News (fed from the community groups input)

7. Peel History & Heritage

8. Emergency Services

9. People Search

## **Avon On-line**

*(Taped interview and summation with Jacinta Overman, Development Officer, Wheatbelt Development Commission in Chapter Four: Reflection and Interaction)*

The Wheatbelt Development Commission in Western Australia identified an opportunity to harness telecommunications technology to establish a sub-regional community and business network. Avon On-Line <http://www.avononline.com.au> provides the Avon community with a detailed virtual “one-stop” information presence catered to their region. It provides linkages to and between business, sporting and cultural events, local news and discussion pages, libraries and other sites with information on the area.

It is envisaged that the facility will encourage business within the region by heightening the community’s awareness of goods and services available locally. Similarly, local events will benefit from the exposure and the community will benefit from ready access to an extensive and useful network to the region. This project constitutes the first step in establishing a multi media industry in the Avon region by creating a local demand for multi media services such as digitising, as well as an awareness and usage of telecommunications amongst the community, which fulfils another objective of the Avon Smart Community Group

## **Communities on-line and commonalties**

It appears most of the community portals reviewed above had similar aims and objectives, even if they varied in location, approach and implementation. These commonalties formed the basis for my definition and aims for GateWAY:

1. To develop a Web presence, which would act as a “portal” or gateway for a region.
2. To showcase the region or community globally, and enable communities of interest to develop, allow delivery of services online and encourage e-commerce to develop.
3. To build awareness of the benefits and opportunities of the Internet
4. To encourage engagement in the Information Age
5. To provide access to the online environment and the region

It is my observation that there was an element missing in most of these community portals, with a sense they were being built *for* the people of their communities, not *with* them. All are technically very proficient and have high interactivity for information access, however there was a low sense of community input through content or discussion. It appeared these “places” were shopping malls, not market places. Sanitised on-line environments, where easy navigability and good design leave the visitor well informed, but not included. I wanted to build something closer to a market place, with “virtual buskers and stall owners”, locally grown ideas and produce and a commonplace “air and share” atmosphere. (Malcolm 2000)

### **Communication the key**

Communication and the proactive sharing of information became a key factor in the early development of GateWAY. Any project or portal manager is only as good as the effectiveness of their ability to deliver a functional portal at the end of a pilot period. From the outset I had a number of people with whom I needed to develop a sound working relationship. These were members of the two committees, the Perth consortia the Albany GateWAY Steering committee, a few early participants and some local media and I.T. people.

The Perth Consortia consisted of Martyn Wild (Edith Cowan University), Jackie Gill (Office of Information and Communication), Sean O’Brien (IBM) and Kim Forrest (ISA). These formed the instigatory group assisting the Albany GateWAY Committee with professional expertise and “big picture” experience.

The Albany Committee consisted of Barbara Madden (Development Officer GSDC), Rob Siegel (Albany Business Centre), Jeff Claughton (Accountant) and Jan Waterman (Albany City Heart). Attempting to maintain communications between two committees proved difficult and time consuming after a while, and I would strongly recommend any such project to be headed up by only one, cohesive body, working locally with the project Manager and local community and businesses.

Despite this state of affairs I designed a timeline and prototype strategy for handling these communications using an open, “succinct and often” approach based mainly on e-mail and telephone interactions. Meetings were numerous and important for “face-to-face” exchanges. It

was here I realised this job was not going to be an easy one. I write more about this in Chapter Four: Reflections and Interactions, where I summarise and suggest different ways this process might have been more functional.

The priorities for this communication process were as follows:

- The first priority was to establish a functional network of all parties currently involved in GateWAY and to initiate a community awareness campaign.
- To set up a regular e-mailing information service for all committee members and peripheral associates of the Project.
- To encourage specific interest groups, e.g. CRANK youth to be involved from the outset. Met with them to offer them initial access to GateWAY site as it developed.
- To respond to numerous calls and e-mails about the project.
- To keep a daily journal of communications, meetings and activities.
- To write numerous media releases and articles for local news media.
- To research the concept of communities on-line extensively.
- To contact all concerned and meet with key people e.g. Albany steering committee, Perth consortia and Neil McKnight Wobble Web Design (Albany On-Line).



Journal entry: Wednesday, 5 May 99

2pm: Web design meeting with Neil McKnight (WobbleWeb), at Commercial Centre, Albany. Discussed logistics of getting first page up and running – basic content etc – will have something up by Wed/Thurs next week. Neil has some predetermined ideas about how GateWAY should “look” and “function”. I am finding his reticence to accept different ideas a bit tedious and sense he feels like he’s already “built” the GateWAY model (in the Albany On-Line model), and can’t see why it needs to be changed. The fact is that his work, although technically highly proficient, doesn’t give the community a voice in what they want or need. They are being told, not asked or encouraged to participate. I can’t accept this modus operandi! We need a consultative prototype for the community to respond to!

It was at this meeting I realised that many of these issues (with regards to Neil's involvement), had not been dealt with appropriately, before I was appointed Manager, and now it was my responsibility to sort out the following:

1. No definite contract stipulating deliverables
2. Misconceptions about previous performance in developing the first prototype (*somehow Neil was led to believe, or he assumed, his concept was going to definitely be used as the "technical backbone" of the Albany GateWAY Project.*)
3. The designer's concern about payment and ownership issues
4. Poor communication
5. Concern over intellectual property rights.

From the outset I was challenged with a set of preset problems, which did not assist a smooth transition into my new engagement as Project Manager. Heide (1994) addresses different approaches to relationship management within organisations, whilst Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggest the necessity for shared values making a difference to an individual's level of commitment to an organisation. "Commitment is a matter of the fit between a person and an organisation and personal values drive fit." (Kouzes and Posner 2002)

Having to work with these issues and concerns dominated much of the initial site development. The process would have been much easier and productive, had the initial web design contract been either put out to tender, or a firm set of deliverables set for the existing web designer. Given the difference in vision and management styles it was highly unlikely the previous, and very loose, arrangement with the web designer in question would have worked out.

### **Promotions and awareness raising**

One of the first strategies in beginning a new public project like GateWAY was to raise awareness and start a promotional campaign to achieve that end. A list of promotional activities undertaken follows:



- Designed a Logo Competition flyer to launch the GateWAY concept and promotion. Every town in the Great Southern received copies of the flyers through newspaper adverts, inserts in local magazines, schools, TAFE colleges, libraries, main street shops and other commercial outlets. Local printers and graphics firms used for production.
- Radio interviews on ABC 6AL, 6AY and 6VA (archive tapes of some of these interviews available with media appendix accompanying this work), and news coverage with GWN.TV.
- Newspaper coverage with Media releases in tandem with Logo Competition opening e.g. the Albany Advertiser, Weekender, Gnowangerup Star, Great Southern Herald, Bremer Bay Bulletin, Kojonup News, Tambellup Topics and Denmark Bulletin.
- Meetings with key organisations and players in the regional scene e.g. Albany City Council, ABC 6AL, GWN, City Heart, CRANK (Youth Group), Education Department District Office and Schools, Great Southern College of TAFE, Local IPSs Telecentres, Mythic Media, GSDC, OIC, ECU, IBM and various representatives from community groups and businesses.

### **Prototype Development**

The first design decision was to prepare a prototype web page which would temporarily be hosted by Wobble Web Design on their server. The page was to have an interactive map of the Great Southern region and some basic information for users. This concept was merely implemented to illustrate how the final site could deliver information for businesses, community groups and service providers. The other important aspect was to encourage local folk to “have their say” about what they wanted included on their community site. This was successfully handled via e-mail, fax and telephone calls.

A marketing/promotional decision was made to use the lowercase version of the word gateway, with capitalised WA letters; (gateWAY). This emulates the colloquial lower casing of e-mail and other programming text. It also accentuates the “WA” (Western Australia). This version embedded in the logo design became widely accepted and recognisable as the GateWAY

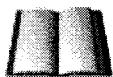
emblem, on such things as business cards and in advertising. (N.B. However the upper case “G” is used when writing about GateWAY in documents or text records about the project.)

The prototype page was created and floated on 17<sup>th</sup> of May 1999, three weeks into the three-month, pilot stage. GateWAY’s Launch of the fully constructed portal took place on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2000, at the Esplanade Hotel, Albany. One year, almost to the day, later.

The concept of how we were to design the future site changed as suggestions and requests were recorded from businesses and community members. The idea of a regional website started to take shape. An interactive map of the region as the centrepiece of the page seemed an appropriate image and concept, communicating the regional nature of the project from the outset.

It was important to initiate the on-line communication as soon as possible, even though the final site was to appear very differently to the original prototype. From the beginning, I attempted to use the medium in the way the medium was intended to be used, by installing interactive features for locals to have their say.

The responses gleaned (197 in total), over a 4 week period, gave a sound direction for what was needed and wanted by the local community. It is from these responses and my research into best practice websites and the imperatives behind good web design that Albany GateWAY was eventually created and continues to develop.

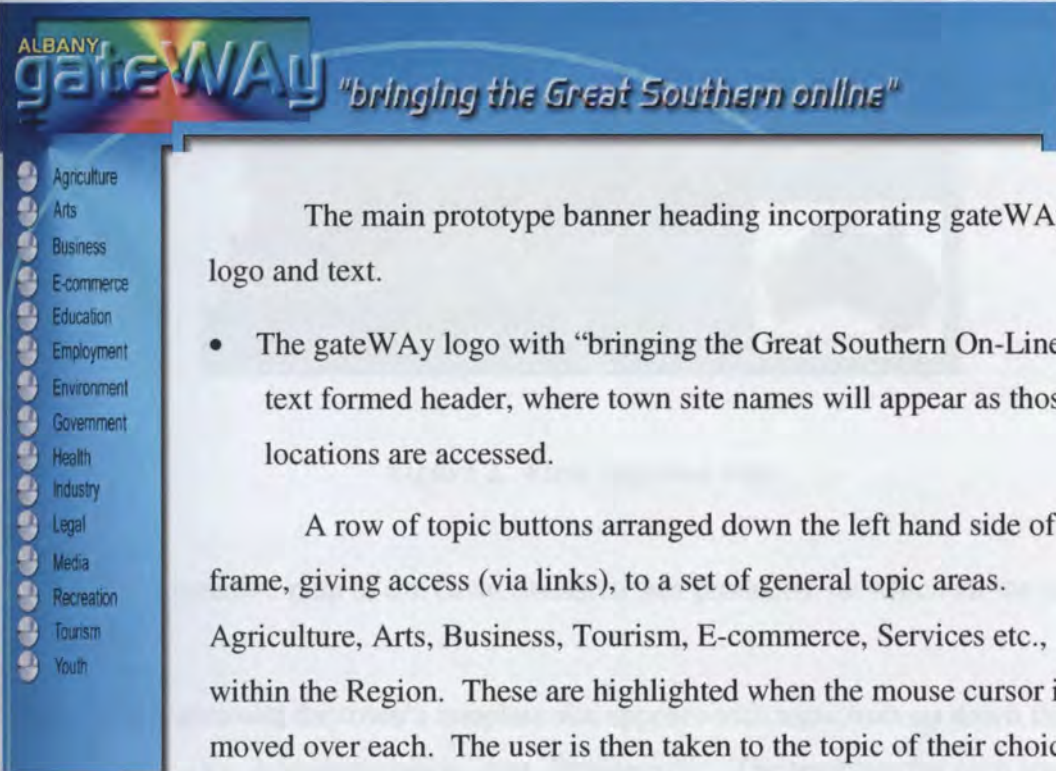


Journal entry June 1999:

I am starting to realise the immense importance in getting the local community to feel some ownership of this process from the outset. People need to have their say and the difference between GateWAY just becoming a regional business directory, versus a truly interactive web portal, lies in empowerment of the community. The development of an easy to use Distributed Publishing System is crucial to this happening. GateWAY, and other regional portals will not effectively survive if DPS is not built into the functionality of the site.

## Design of GateWAY prototype

Drawing on the best practice examples of other sites, the following elements were chosen for the prototype page design. This was an important activity as it was to lay the foundations for the future GateWAY site design. It was the first step in an evolutionary process.



The main prototype banner heading incorporating gateWAY logo and text.

- The gateWAY logo with “bringing the Great Southern On-Line” text formed header, where town site names will appear as those locations are accessed.

A row of topic buttons arranged down the left hand side of the frame, giving access (via links), to a set of general topic areas. Agriculture, Arts, Business, Tourism, E-commerce, Services etc., within the Region. These are highlighted when the mouse cursor is moved over each. The user is then taken to the topic of their choice instantaneously, thus complying with user friendly navigability design imperatives.

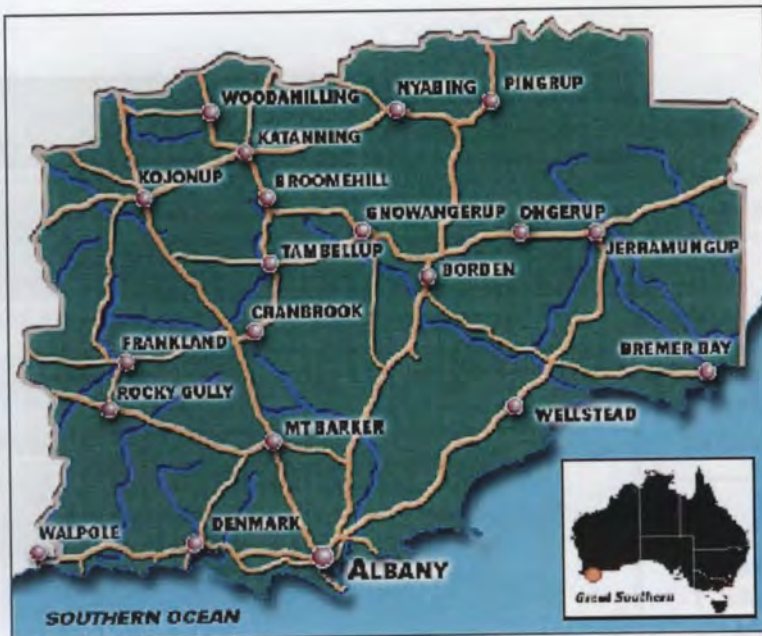
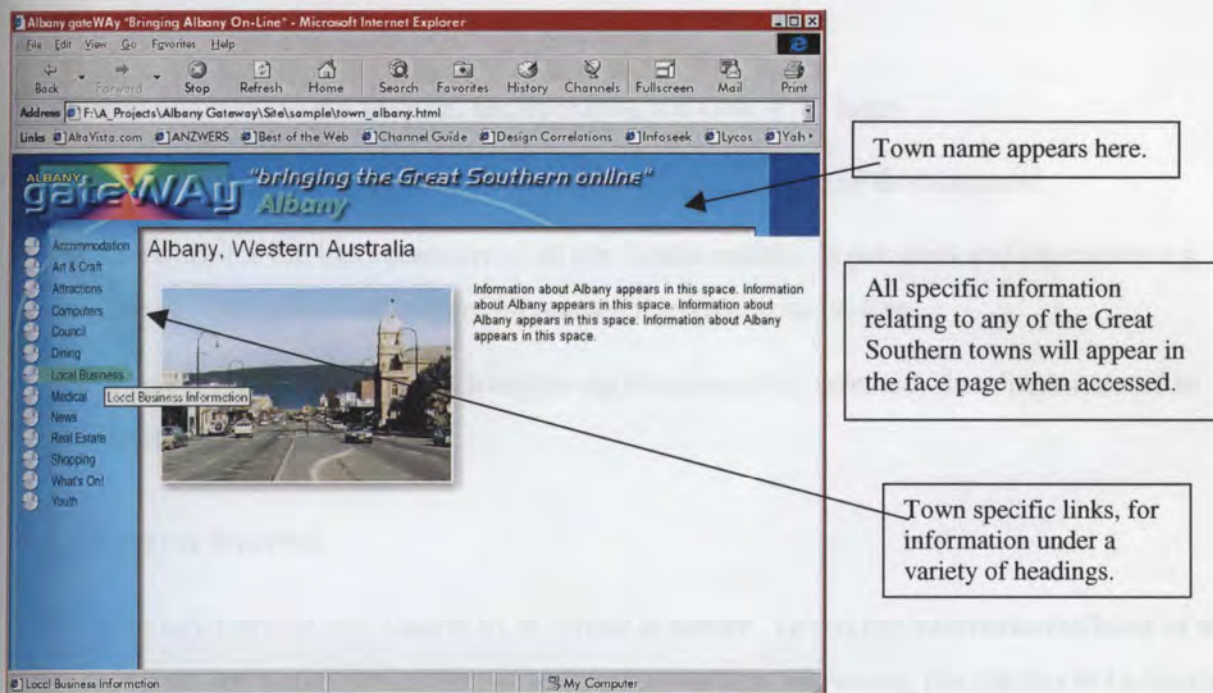


Figure 2. First regional map

An interactive map of the Great Southern was produced, on which all the major towns are accessible.

Once accessed the town's template site appears with topic buttons down the left side, in alphabetical order: Accommodation, Arts, Business etc. The template for each town has its name and the generic navigation bar as standard.





**Figure 3. Prototype Template**

- Information within each town site will be submitted by the town, with businesses
- Community groups and local service providers will supply their own town specifics
- User assistance buttons e.g. Help, About Us and E-mail to take the user to additional information and support offered by the site.

**Figure 4. Interactive buttons**

## Prototype Completion

The prototype phase delivered the following:

- A “look and feel” to the website, incorporating the GateWAY logo.
- A degree of interactivity so the site is ready for the next stage of development.
- A framework for the incorporation of all site functionalities as per aims and objectives e.g. chat, discussion groups and secure e-commerce transactions on-line.
- Readiness for database and search engine applications to be selected, then implemented to enable on-line operations.

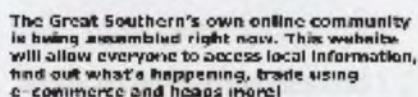
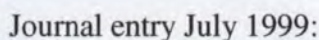
## Site and server location

Like any Internet site, GateWAY is virtual in nature. Given the interconnectedness of the Internet, it does not matter where the site technically resides. However, the site has to be hosted on a physical server somewhere. In this regard, the server could symbolically be seen as the “heart” of GateWAY through which all GateWAY business and communications pass. The current popular notion of “here or elsewhere”, in terms of customers and communications begs the question “does it really matter where the server sits?” After all it is just a “box”, a device for achieving the objectives and deliverables, which the GateWAY project offers. There is, however, a perception that the physical manifestation of GateWAY needs to be located within the Great Southern and symbolises ownership and independence from influences elsewhere.



Journal entry March 8th, 2001

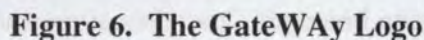
The server was delivered to the GateWAY Cooperative on April 11th 2001, and is now physically housed in Albany, at Omninet’s ISP offices. This will ensure the availability of on the spot technical support and maintenance, access to the latest technology and high-speed connections both within the region and to the Internet generally.



Think of all the things which make living in our region so special, and remember, your design will be the badge or motif which our website will carry world wide, so keep it relevant and vibrant.

was notified by phone on Tuesday 5 June, and published in *Al-Hayat* and other Fikile Kulleri on Thursday 10 June. All entries were confidential, and the names of signatories were the property of a press officer.

**"bringing the Gre**

79

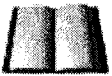
## Figure 7. Logo Competition Flyer

### Going to tender

Once design imperatives were in place and the new Albany GateWAY logo/brand was chosen, it was time to employ a professional web design/development company to assist with building the “real” GateWAY. Advertisements calling for expressions of interest and requests for quotes in becoming GateWAY’s host ISP and Web design developer were placed in newspapers.

Requests for Quotes (RFQs) for these positions were sent out. Closing date was 6<sup>th</sup> August 1999. An Industry Briefing took place for RFQ applicants on Friday 30<sup>th</sup>, July 1999 in Albany, Western Australia. Representatives from the four members of the Perth consortia, IBM, ISA, ECU and OIC, were to conduct the briefing. However, Jackie Gill and Sean O’Brien were unable to attend, leaving Martyn Wild, Kim Forrest and Rob Jefferies to host the event. The expertise these people brought to GateWAY were invaluable in assuring the employment of the best technical and design teams possible.

The Industry briefing also provided local ISPs, Web Design businesses and I.T. personnel with high level professional consultation, normally accessible only in the major capital cities and probably at a prohibitive price. The fact that big commercial concerns like IBM and ISA recognised the need to support and assist regional initiatives, is in itself of immense value to the Great Southern. Albany GateWAY is fortunate to have such backing as the second stage of the project, and perhaps the more technically focussed part, begins.



Journal entry July 1999

Ironically, when it came to the crunch IBM didn’t actually supply anything, other than their representative’s time and presence, and as time progressed I sensed rifts starting to appear between other members of the committees. This was to develop into an unfortunate state of affairs later on, as meetings became difficult. It seemed like our Project has become a “testing” ground for other agendas. All parties did initially seem to have positive and supportive motives for the



GateWAY project. However this tension between members of the committees, was to make it difficult for the Albany steering committee to keep a tight rein on proceedings. In fact, the Albany committee suffered its own lack of administrative leadership as time progressed and as the Manager I had to make a decision to get on with the job and not get embroiled in “personalities and politics.”

GateWAY’s early days were as much a relationship management project as an I.T. one. Dealing with two separate and diverse committees and a range of sceptical local I.T. business owners (who viewed GateWAY’s development as a threat to their livelihoods, rather than an opportunity for expansion) were my initial problem. “If they are to be effective in improving the effectiveness of their organisation’s management, professionals must see they are helping to manage connected assets, not unconnected individuals”. (Krebbs 1999)

Ensuring good communication flow between the existing parties was the first step towards building a functional system, as was applying research suggestions such as “an organisation is a life form that lives in a symbiosis with its environment. It cannot be socially justified, understood or survive unless it has positive exchange with every salient part of its environment.” (Tellefsen 1999)

I realised an open system in which fair competitive practice and delegation of tasks had to be implemented, if the core objectives of the project were to be fully accomplished. Subsequently certain tasks were deployed to committee members, as in the following example *e.g. Kim Forrest of Integrated Systems Australia (ISA) was asked to research and prepare a report on E-commerce options for GateWAY in July 1999. As a member of the Perth consortia team he provided us with some sound technical direction and the report gave a clearer idea about what we should be looking for and requiring when it came to e-commerce capability for GateWAY.*

## **RFQ (Request for Quote) Results**

Omninet, a local Albany Internet Service Provider (ISP) and Opensearch, an I.T. solutions firm, won the ISP and Web Design contract respectively. It was a relief to finally have this decision made and a definite set of technical people to work with. There was some

resentment form a few of the local contenders regarding Opensearch's win, as they are a Perth based company. However none of the local designers included the DPS application provision into their submissions and some of the local quotes were very high, compared to Opensearch's.

## **Website Design**

The design of the GateWAY website (as the main conduit for the portal) is based on recent web design research. The key questions in designing a website or pages are "who are the users, what do they want and how will that be achieved?" Users must be treated as customers and it is from their needs and point of view that GateWAY must be constructed.

As Jakob Nielsen, a world-renowned web pundit, states "the user interface is the "look and feel" of the website. Of those two terms, the feel is the most important. People aren't just sitting there just enjoying the website, they're trying to do something with it. The web is very user driven, they just want the facts." ([www.clipwebzine.com](http://www.clipwebzine.com) : Interview with Jakob Nielsen about Web useability)

Another source used, which is becoming a universal site for web designers, is the Top Ten Mistakes In Web Design (Alertbox at [www.useit.com](http://www.useit.com)) A list of the top ten web design mistakes, which are updated each month give a basic idea of what not to do when creating a website. Such issues as overly long download times, lack of navigation support, opening of new browser windows etc, are presented and point the way to good website development and management. This involves three levels:

1. **Interaction design** (navigation support, search, templates)
2. **Content design** (the actual substance of the site and design of other media types used to communicate content as opposed to site interaction.)
3. **Website management** (the way all information and presentation is handled)

It is from these and other sources the following design imperatives were created. An extensive search for other community websites, to see what they provided and how they worked, was also undertaken.

## Best Practice Examples (Models)

A number of worldwide community websites were researched during the prototype phase. The main aim was to define the different approaches to effective community website design and implementation, and establish criteria for the main design elements. A list of URLs, which formed a major part of the enquiry into best practice site research, are collated in the Appendix section.

The main criteria I used in assessing these sites were:

1. **Content** – who is the site aimed at (audience), what is it attempting to do and how is this achieved?
2. **Presentation** – what web tools, visuals etc, are used to enhance the impact of this site? Is the site welcoming, clear, easy to use and successful? Is it a quality site?
3. **Productivity** – does it work, is it easily accessible and does it appear to communicate the purpose of the site.
4. **Useability** – how easily navigable is the site and is information easy to access?

Out of approximately sixty sites selected only a few were designed for areas larger than towns or small communities. Interestingly enough, none were examples of setting up a regional website or portal, with e-commerce ability. Most of these sites contained elements from the Design Imperatives list, but few achieved all the criteria. No site researched offered an e-commerce facility or information service. There was also a noticeable lack in “personalisation” of content and interaction.

Perhaps the most significant examples, relevant to GateWAY, were Australian states or small group concerns, e.g. Ipswich City Council, Hunter Valley Region and the Tasmanian – Communities On-Line Project, Peel direct, Avon On-line. It was from this exercise that I developed the final design principles to be employed by Opensearch as key factors in the “look and feel” of the new GateWAY portal.

## **Design Imperatives**

The design imperatives selected were based on a model I developed from researching practitioners like Nielsen and which addressed the need for GateWAY to be:

### ***Informative***

- a. The site must provide the necessary information in a clear, concise, easy to understand and use format.
- b. Good information architecture and content design, accessible to a wide audience.
- c. Ensuring optimum global access to, and visibility for, gateWAY.

### ***Interactive***

- a. Simple, clear navigation techniques are essential.
- b. Facilitation of all the other design imperatives through site structure and interactivity.
- c. Ease of interaction e.g. can the user access information they need in one or two easy steps? Efficient, seamless navigation is imperative.
- d. Provision of discussion groups, chat and e-mail facilities, synchronous (eg. Web chat) and asynchronous communication (eg. mailing lists) facilities and bulletin boards.
- e. Access to a site specific search engine; and multimedia content.
- f. Enable remote updating of content information by a diverse range of users, using a browser-based interactive system.

### ***Attractive***

- g. Graphic design components should assist navigation.
- h. General feel/look of the page and branding (logo) should have visual appeal.
- i. The page environment needs to be personalised enough to deliver an individualised service to particular customers.
- j. The site should have a similar look on all major web browsers. Design elements specific to certain web browsers, or the latest generation of browsers, should be avoided. If such

features are incorporated, the site should contain alternative content that is compatible with other major browsers and /or earlier versions of browser.

- k. Quality control of site appearance and links.
- l. Create a range of content templates for towns, businesses, community organisations, etc., each with a common “look and feel”.

***Productive***

- m. Increased business for web clients e-commercially by using design and development strategies that will strongly encourage users to demonstrate loyalty and commitment to, and interest in, the site.
- n. Sustainability. Albany gateWAY must become self sustainable through brand marketing of gateWAY products.
- o. Extensive use by many different individuals for business, community interests communications and service provision. An evaluation process will need to be created to gauge the effectiveness, once the site is fully functional.

**Technical Issues**

***Existing software and frameworks***

The technical function of GateWAY and the actual structure of the site are interrelated. Essentially a website is an interactive database, using search engines, navigation tools and specially written software to perform set tasks in achieving the desired goal.

The GateWAY website progressed through three technical stages:

- Stage 1: Design of website’s “look and feel” and basic operation of links to existing sites and pages. Emphasis on structure and good design imperatives.
- Stage 2: Development and implementation of specific software to do specific tasks. e.g. search, list serve, DPS, e-commerce capability. Concentration on the technical aspects of making the site highly navigable and interactive.

- Stage 3: Refining both design and technical operations, software applications and ease of site use for daily maintenance, upgrading etc.

### ***Software and Web Designer's role: Opensearch***

A technical decision had to be made about which software would be the platform for the Albany GateWay site. There are a number of existing applications, which deliver the software requirements for such a site, and it was a matter of deciding which software would be used. Windows NT, MIE5 and ASP became the platform. (Drawbacks are, editors cannot edit on Macintosh computers and other browsers e.g. Netscape does not visually present the information in the same fashion as MIE5. These problems really need to be addressed at an early stage in the development phase.)

The main tasks involved in management of the website were to:

- Recommend and implement best practice solutions in developing and building the web service, particularly in consideration of its regional focus and expected diversity of users.
- Use various media and functionalities as appropriate to provide for optimum useability in the site, in relation to a range of:
  - Regional user groups, including community groups, small and medium business enterprises, and local governments.
  - Non-regional groups, such as potential tourists and other visitors to the Great Southern, online customers requiring to purchase goods and services.
- Submit a management plan for accepting and implementing regular updates and changes to site content and/or functions.
- Enable remote updating of content information by a diverse range of users, using a browser-based interactive system.
- Create a range of content templates for towns, businesses, community organisations, etc., each with a common "look and feel".

- Follow a development methodology that will allow iterations of the webservice to be implemented online, and one that, in particular, will ensure an online presence will be maintained at all times.
- Use design and development strategies that will strongly encourage users to demonstrate loyalty and commitment to, and interest in, the site.
- Liaise with hosting ISP for implementations and maintenance of the webservice.
- Provide regular reports based on usage statistics and useability feedback for the site.
- Register the webservice to ensure optimum global access to, and visibility for, the webservice.

These case specific tasks followed task identification criteria noted in Crossan et al (1999) and Daft (1998) as essential procedures prior to technical implementation of any I.T. project.



Journal: Friday, 29 October 99

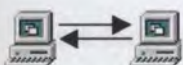
“Travelled to Perth for meetings with Opensearch (Chee Wong) and ECU (Martyn Wild). Decisions need to be made over schedule and site production, Business Plan meeting and discussions about marketing plans. Chee and I start first real work on the building of the site.

The magnitude of the task to be performed would have daunted me had I any real inkling of what lay ahead. At times I felt like a plate spinner in a circus; the one that sets up a dozen or so sticks and progresses spinning plates until all are up. Getting “the plates” up was going to be one thing. “Keeping them turning” would be another!”

## **The Main Site**

Building on the prototype base using the researched design principals was an excellent place to start. I set up on ICQ (“I Seek You”, on-line chat device) with Chee Wong, Regional Development Manager with Opensearch Pty. Ltd, and this medium became our primary

communication device over the ensuing months. Chee in Perth and me in Denmark became a real example of teleworking in progress.



ICQ GRAB:

c2 10/28/99 3:09 PM

Gill, I've received your email thanks.... thinking about it.. and preparing something for tomorrow now there's heaps of things to cover.. but I'll try to summarise things best I can

gilly 10/28/99 3:12 PM Great.....My major concerns are mainly the On-line admin side of things. We MUST set up an efficient way of operating, otherwise we'll never get on top of the deluge yet to come! Thanks for your support. Looking forward to seeing you tomorrow.

c2 10/28/99 3:14 PM that's just a database system .. like the one u've done on MS Acces ...no probs... should be easy..it's not really in the project task list.. but i know it's easy to do.....we can discuss it tomorrow.

gilly 10/28/99 3:15 PM Thanks Chee..... It's important we get this "rocking and rolling" now! G:)!~

c2 10/28/99 3:17 PM yeah.. there's heaps of planning..unbelievable amount.. we'd probably spend 2 weeks just on drawing up plans and conceptual designs..

gilly 10/28/99 3:19 PM and the rest. Alot is hanging on this project and again, if we make it successful our community's road is paved!

C2 10/28/99 3:28 PM yup.. i know what u mean ☺





## **Figure 8. Photo of Chee Wong – Opensearch**

### **The Elements**

“Walk the walk and talk the talk” was a phrase, extensively used by champions and purveyors of the new on-line community concepts. There was a lot of “talk the talk” and, as is the case in many movements, not so much actual “walking”, took place.

Visions, workshops and theories on the topic abounded, but very few, if any of the people organising and encouraging the creation of community portals at government level had actually built one! Interestingly enough when I started to research the evolution of communities on-line, there were really very few real life examples to emulate let alone to answer important practical questions.

What makes a community portal a viable community on-line? There are numerous web sites described as community portals, but often on closer scrutiny they appear more like a business directory. For example, [www.mysouthwest.com.au](http://www.mysouthwest.com.au) has a detailed business directory and the appearance of an interactive community site, however taking a closer look discussion forums are devoid of postings. There’s no true flavour of who the people of the area are, what the place they live in is like, or what they do. Maybe the creators of this portal didn’t choose to cater for their users in that way and that’s fine, but really My Southwest is more a business website/directory, than a community portal.

Community portals are more than technically savvy on-line productions or “dressed up” databases. They show a human face. The face of the community its location, industry, history, beliefs, attractions and encourages those people to interact with one another through them.

So what are the specific elements which make a viable community portal?

These elements can be classified in to two broad categories; physical and non physical.

**Physical Elements**

The technical aspects and actual building of the GateWAY site were based on a close working relationship with Opensearch, a company specialising in the creation of Web portals such as online communities, workspace portals and E-marketplaces. The WebIT solution is a blend of sophisticated content management (Rosenfeld and Morville 1998, Nielsen 1999), E-commerce enablement tools integrated with a powerful user management and security platform that enables a Web portal to be developed and managed with maximum efficiency. GateWAY operates on a Microsoft NT/2000 & SQL Server 7.0 technology platform. All clients utilise MIE5+ to access all functionality provided by Web IT.

The distributed publishing environment combines a number of software technologies and components to deliver its functionality. Included amongst those are:

- Microsoft Windows 2000 Server
- Microsoft Internet Information Services 5.0 (IIS)
- Microsoft Active Server Pages (ASP)
- Microsoft SQL Server 7.0
- Microsoft ActiveX Data Objects (ADO)
- Structured Query Language (SQL)
- Microsoft Visual BASIC Scripting Edition (VBScript)
- Various applets and components to support file uploading, file management, WYSIWYG page editing, system administration, and dynamic generation and sending of e-mail messages
- HTML
- JavaScript

A set of prepared templates is made available to web page authors to use as the basis of their pages. Each template is custom-designed for a particular purpose and includes a number of

sections that can be edited by the web page author (the end-user of the template). Text, graphics and tables can be entered and formatted using a WYSIWYG, (“what you see is what you get”) page editor, that runs under Microsoft Internet Explorer or later. The corresponding HTML and JavaScript is automatically generated and stored in the Microsoft SQL Server site database for future recall and editing. ASP scripting controls whether the multifunctional templates operate in edit, moderate or publish mode and automatically includes any required navigational elements of the site.

The site is administered by a series of ASP scripts that run on the web server and allow designated administrative users to access the configuration aspects of the site, add new users, prepare and assign new pages to users, moderate the content of the pages, and ultimately publish the pages. Administrative users can also create and administer discussion boards and control the banner advertisements that are displayed on the site.

All configuration settings are accepted via JavaScript-enabled HTML forms, while VBScript, SQL, ADO and ASP combine to ensure that the settings are saved securely in the site database. The administrator requires nothing more than an authorised account name and password and access to suitable web browser software (such as Microsoft Internet Explorer). The web server handles all the technicalities behind the scenes.

### **Physical design Elements for GateWAY’s “face and functionality”**

Drawing on knowledge management research (Cothrel, Williams 1999), coupled with good interactive and content design (Fleming and Koman 1998, Nielsen 1999), laid a theoretical basis for the absolute need to encourage knowledge sharing and networking on GateWAY. This would only occur if the site was “user friendly”, easily navigable and allowed the clear dissemination of information about the region, with tools encouraging the exchange of ideas and insights. Following are the key design elements or categories, which form GateWAY’s skeletal, iterative structure.

## **The Map**

The clickable map of the great Southern region was the first definite content type decision. GateWAY as a community of place is identified by where it is on a map. A geographical map with all 25 towns was revamped from the existing prototype and made interactive so one would go to any selected towns town site on GateWAY, once it had been clicked.

## **Towns**

We decided to keep the basic design of the site simple, with three basic content avenues, Towns, Topics and Discussion Boards. Obviously the GateWAY search engine was integral to the site's functionality, however by arranging the input of content into these three categories provided the platform for the WebIT (Distributed Publishing System) implementation. WebIT became the key tool in making GateWAY a truly open community site, with its application software platform delivering editing capability anywhere, anytime. Each of the twenty-five Great Southern towns, were given a free "Town Site" with the ability to choose various subcategories like Council and Shire, Local History, Local Attractions, Accommodation etc. e.g

[www.albanygateway.com.au/town/albany](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/town/albany)

[www.albanygateway.com.au/town/jerramungup](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/town/jerramungup) or go to

[www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au) and select any town of your choice from the drop down town menu or clickable map.

This gave a free service to regional residents, as people from each town were encouraged to volunteer for the free WebIT training in order to maintain their own town pages. Effectively this strategy was a team building exercise where "the productivity and effectiveness of the regional community on-line would be dependent on the ability to access knowledge and information whilst easily communicating through a functional organisational network." (Hansen and Nohria 2000)

Team building and collaboration are key concepts in current and emerging management theory. The organisational learning framework, Crossan, Lane and White (1999) propose consists of four processes, “intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalised-linking individual groups with organisational levels.”

The GateWAY process implemented these processes through awareness-raising, information dissemination events, community consultation and then converted the results into hands-on, WebIT (DPS) workshops which led to integration of content provision and community ownership of the web portal.

Putting theory into practice I travelled extensively throughout the region during the next 8 months, presenting the GateWAY concept to local towns and communities and conducting training sessions along the way. This proved to be one of the most effective dissemination techniques, as I met and worked with the people for whom and by whom GateWAY exists and functions. Arent Greve (1999) from the Norwegian School of Economics declares, “effective managers spend more than 80% of their time interacting with others. Those with good personal networks tend to be more productive, better able to coordinate tasks and find the knowledge necessary to accomplish the goals of the project.”

It was a time to encourage, freely give access and training in WebIT, and perhaps most importantly to build awareness and trust. Nothing replaces face-to-face contact and the sharing of something, which can effectively change people’s lives. I became totally committed to working in this melioristic way and without this kind of leadership, the project would probably not work.

## **Topics**

A series of general interest topics such as Agriculture, Arts and Crafts, Tourism, Education and a number of others, were created. Each of these major topics gives visitors and locals an extensive range of information to choose from. Every aspect of life in the Great Southern is encouraged to be represented e.g. the Sport and Recreation site covers sporting and leisure activities throughout the region and gives a lot of valuable information to local sporting and special interest groups as a free service. [www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/sport](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/sport) .

The Topics section also binds the towns and business together, by providing a public forum for entry of important information and a place where views can be aired and shared. Topics of current relevance are accessed from the main Home page and this attracts a lot of interest and interaction from the general public. e.g. [www.albanygateway.com.au/home/opinion\\_1](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/home/opinion_1)

**Discussion Boards**

Discussion boards like [www.albanygateway.com.au/home/discussion\\_board](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/home/discussion_board) give the whole community a chance to have their say. This is a valuable tool in the building of GateWAY’s social capital or ability to reach others for information, advice and problem solving. It is the property of social networks. (Greve 1995) Anyone can post comments, ideas or opinions about any subject broached within the Discussion boards, which reside throughout the site.

These boards have been a good way to introduce people to using the Internet as a place to communicate and do business.

**Moderation, disclaimers and board violators**

Instances where GateWAY’s discussion boards became a public forum violated by one or more visitors are recorded and discussed in Chapter Four: Themes. Abusive language, references to pornography and other unacceptable subject matter were posted. Intimidatory threats to various members of our community, both on and off – line, were also made. Protection of site and users is an important consideration in portal development.

It is important to mention here, whilst we are discussing implementation and strategies for portal development, security, privacy and on-line interactive policies must be discussed and implemented from the outset.

GateWAY has learnt the hard way through these incidents, as initially little time or thought was put into protecting our site and users. Some suggestions on handling this are made in Chapter Three: Reflection and Interaction, but key issues such as assigning moderators and a set of guidelines for board use should be defined prior to launch.

## Search Engine

The GateWAY database has grown exponentially since first created in April 2000. This coupled with our search engine provides an excellent point of reference for anything or anyone in the Great Southern. The internal search engine has both generic and specific search capabilities, which instantly access any topic, town or item inputted into the system. This search system is then accessed as a total portal with [www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au) being found on all major universal search engines.

## Technical Summary

*(Note to the reader: The following technical summary sections are an attempt to clarify which 'early stage' technical and iterative considerations needed to be made for an interactive web portal. In no way is this definitive, but written like this to illustrate the scope of knowledge and capability needed to ensure functionallity of the end user system. The term 'iterative' is used to describe the interfacing of human and technical aspects where design implications such as appropriate software and other online options are mentioned.)*

The technical and administrative iterations behind developing GateWAY and in fact a viable model for future community portal development can be itemised in the following way:

- Business Planning
- System Planning & Design
- Graphic & Web Design – look/feel & templates
- Programming – coding of templates and development of other customisation
- Internal & User Testing
- Installation & Commissioning
- Training
- Support
- Upgrade/Maintenance

The technology models used by GateWAY's web development team, OpenSearch (Wong 2000) suggest a that a portal comprises six major technical components.

1. **Content** – a content management system to enable anyone, anywhere at anytime to participate in each stage of the content management process from creation, editing, approval, publishing, access, archival to unpublishing. This will enable any number of users to contribute to the development and maintenance of content on the portal within a secure and logical environment in accordance with business rules defined by the portal owner.
2. **Collaboration** – a site-wide system for creating and managing Web-based collaboration at all levels – administrators, content contributors and end-users. Collaboration objects need to be generated “on the fly” without re-programming or technical administration.
3. **Application** – a “plug-in” approach to enable services to be delivered to its members based on an ASP (application service provider) model. The most popular portal applications are business-to-consumer and business-to-business E-commerce “plug-ins”. These applications enable members to build and manage their own E-commerce presence for trading within a B2C or B2B E-marketplace environment.
4. **Integration** – the integration of existing databases, content, network infrastructure, call centres and business rules to produce a seamless and comprehensive solution.
5. **Personalisation** – a sub-system for end users to personalise the content they are presented with at the portal. Personalisation is an excellent strategy used by portals to retain user loyalty.
6. **Workflow/Automation** – integration of automated processes to manage complex logistics.

## **Client and customer requirements**

Efficient access to information and communication facilities (chat and bulletin boards) and development of business opportunities and advice to determine a working, coherent, online presence (including e-commerce facilities, and promotional strategies), at entry-level (low-cost),



non-threatening, rates. Most people interviewed require relevant, current information to be continually available and businesses, service organisations and community groups wanted the ability to determine their own information at will, without recourse to a “third-party” information intermediary.

These were important considerations in building the portal infrastructure and central to the thematic issues of product, promotion and future profit, which will be reviewed in detail in Chapter Five of this thesis. They lead directly into content management and system performance considerations, which along with strategic planning posed a series of both iterative and technical questions.

## **2. System Planning & Design**

System/network requirements and performance along with a business plan were other critical design elements needing consideration. Those used in the construction of GateWAY were:

- Operating System and Database System requirements/configuration.
- Scalability – how much growth is anticipated?
- Expected traffic – members and end-users?
- Server requirements?
- Where will the site be hosted? Shared-server or dedicated server hosting?
- Will the web developer have remote access of the server?

### ***Content Management***

The question of who and how content management would be handled was probably as important a consideration as the question of who was going to provide the content. This was a management issue once WebIT training and community involvement has been achieved.

The basic questions to be asked are:

- Q: Are there any special requirements within the first four stages of content processing—creation, updating, moderation and publishing?
- A: There are special requirements in these four stages and all demand “user friendly” interfaces. WebIT was created as a simple image and text processing system, functioning under the MIE5+ browser for uploading to the Internet. It needed to have uncomplicated application with moderation capabilities for new users. WebIT delivers all these features
- Q: What interfaces will best meet user expectations: simplicity and ease of use versus features and additional training?
- A: The WebIT/MIE5 interface provided the best solutions for both training and simplicity of use.
- Q: Other than the members’ area to enable editing of content, are there any restricted areas within the Website?
- A: Restricted areas needed to be built into the administrative facility of the WebIT package. These include membership management, user/password creation and control, discussion board administration, uploading and deletion of banner ads and other administration options.
- Q: Does the portal need content archival? How will this be achieved? How would the archived content be accessed?
- A: Archiving functions are absolutely necessary as technical records of content and portal activities assist the monitoring of publishing and user activity on an ongoing basis. This basic record keeping function, delivering valuable data for administrative monitoring and future decision-making purposes.

- Q: How important is un-publishing? Does content expire?
- A: Content maintenance is extremely important, as are deletion or unpublishing capabilities, where questionable or incorrect content is remotely published. Content should not expire, but be subject to removal by administration once it is no longer current or valid.

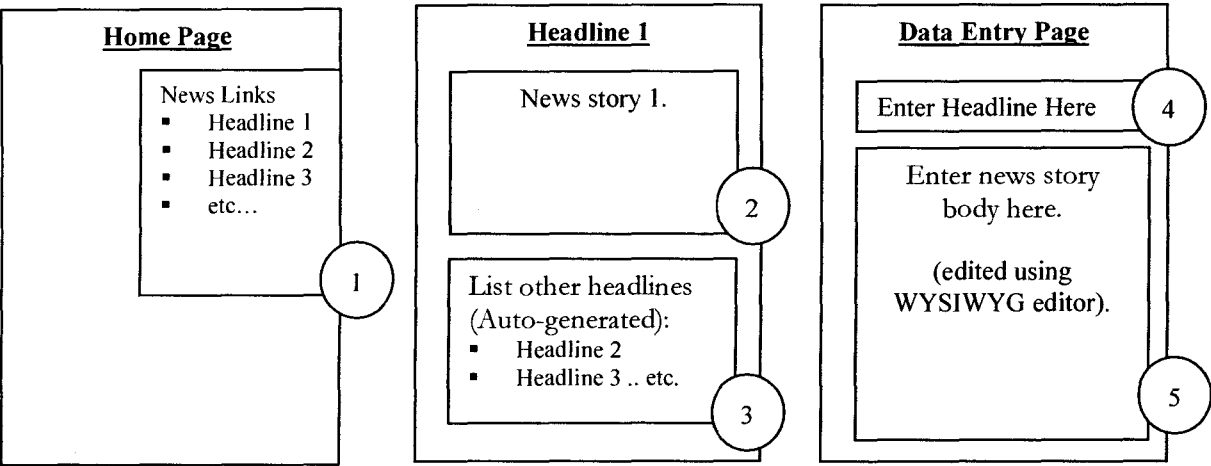
GateWAY's content management procedures were to address and deliver all the above, providing a functional, interactive distributed publishing system, based on the following iterations.

### ***Templates (Static Pages)***

- These templates are typically used for pages with content that does not change frequently and does not have any dynamic properties. These templates use the WYSIWYG HTML editor to edit various pre-designed sections, e.g. [www.albanygateway.com.au/home/about\\_us](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/home/about_us)
- These templates are the easiest to design and develop. Typically, these templates are used on pages such as: About Us, Company Information, Staff Profile, Terms of Use, Copyright and other pages with static content.
- Site navigation is automatically handled on these templates.

### ***Templates (Dynamic Pages)***

- These templates are significantly more complex and powerful. These templates have pre-programmed functionality that allows them to share content with other pages or perform other automated functions. The news-feed pages shown below are typical examples of such dynamic templates.



**Figure 9. Template example**

- From the content entered by the content editor (4) & (5) the system can automatically update (1), (2) & (3).
- Other common dynamic templates are: discussion forums, project profile and member's profile, e.g. [www.albanygateway.com.au/home/discussion\\_board](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/home/discussion_board)

Other considerations, which need to be made, are functionality of live information feeds from external sources (eg, ASX, Reuters, etc), and Copyright and other legal implications associated with a distributed content contribution model.

### ***Technical Collaboration***

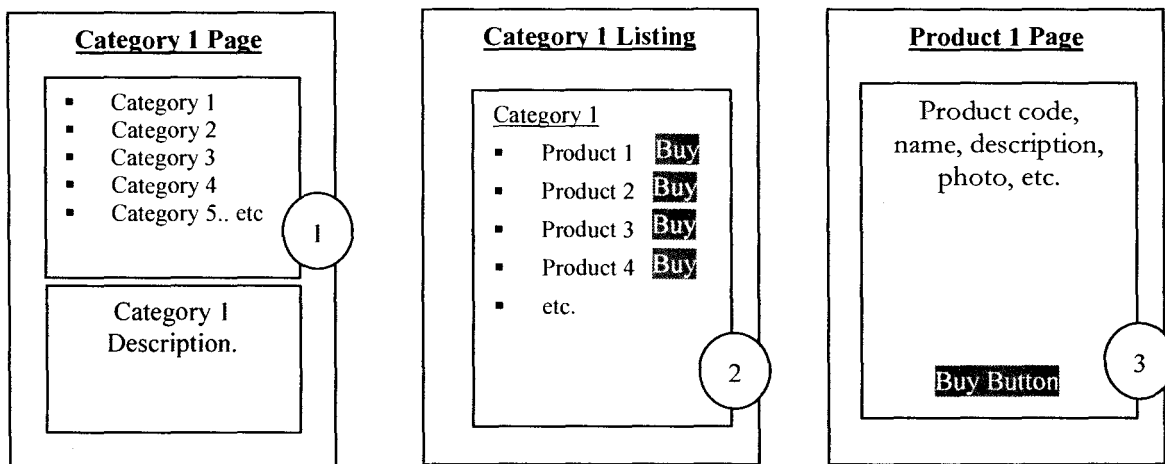
The term “collaboration” (working together jointly in a cooperative manner) is being increasingly used in the I.T. area and definition needs to be made between technical collaboration and the human or partnership/business type of collaboration. Both are needed for successful portal development and technical collaboration here poses the following questions:

What collaboration items are required: document library, discussion forums, and chat rooms, mailing lists? Who will be using these collaboration items? Will it be the administration team only, administration-content contributors, end-users-content contributors, public use or any other combination?

Another consideration is which applications to use? The applications chosen for a community portal depend on a number of factors. The operations and useability of a portal depend on the objectives set and level of interactivity. Questions such as “what applications will the portal be delivering, e.g. content editing, E-commerce or other applications?”, “how will these services be delivered, e.g. membership or free public system, commission or subscription?”, and “how frequent will new applications need to be delivered to portal members?” need to be asked early in the developmental and planning stages.

E-commerce applications also need to be considered early in the portal development phase, if the portal is proposing an e-commerce facility to users. In the case of GateWAY we needed to ask:

- How will the B2C E-commerce application be integrated with Web IT?
- How many products will each online store have?
- What is the likely maximum?
- How will order processing take place?
- What integration into existing inventory/accounting systems or workflow systems would be required?
- How will payments be processed: Real-time credit card processing or offline processing?
- Will payment by non credit card means be available to members?
- Will the portal aggregate all payments for its members or will each member have individual merchant accounts?
- Will the portal aggregate handling of stock and distribution for all members?



**Figure 10. E-commerce template diagram**

### ***E-commerce Templates***

Building the E-commerce backend to GateWAY required the answering of the following questions and a generalised system for other portals is included in this section.

- How many different types of stores are required? e.g. how many templates?
- For smaller portals, usually 4-6 templates are sufficient (under 100 members).
- For mid-sized portals, up to 15 templates may be required (between 100 – 5000 members).
- For larger portals, it may be required to design up to 30 templates. (Above 5000 members).

This was the option GateWAY took out. Templates allow members to customise their online store's look and feel and the way their products are presented. The example below illustrates two templates. The first one allows users to place orders on the category listing page while the second one requires navigation to the product page

- B2B E-commerce
- What business model will the portal be operating under: closed system or open system?
- How will the portal handle payment: real-time or offline?
- What additional administrative procedures need be implemented: quality assurance, centralised stock/inventory, credit checks?

### ***Integration***

The following questions need to be asked during the first phase of development, as integration with existing applications can alter functionality.

- Does the portal have to integrate with any existing databases, content, customer relationship management application and ERP systems?
- Do new client-side applications need to be developed for departmental integration with the portal system (eg, stock/accounting application for sales/accounts department)?
- Does new network infrastructure have to be created to facilitate efficient operations of the portal?

### ***Workflow***

Does the complexity of business processes warrant the integration of the workflow server/system?

### ***Personalisation***

Ownership and social collaboration are key concepts in any community web portal, hence Personalisation of content is essential.

- Q: Does the content on the portal require personalisation?
- A: Content needs to be personalised, as all content posted on individuals from the community on-line create the site. They need acknowledgment and others need to know who, what, why and how the specific content relates on the site.

### ***Graphic & Web Design***

- Will the portal be initiating or providing any assistance in terms of graphic/Web design?
- Does the portal have logos, graphics to establish site look and feel?
- Does the portal have site map or some form of user interface?
- Does the portal have corporate style guide or design policies?

### ***Programming***

- Will the portal be involved in any programming related tasks?

- Does system knowledge need to be transferred to the portal for support or further development?

### ***Internal and User Testing***

- Does the portal have any specific testing procedures or benchmarks?
- Does the system require independent third-party testing.

### ***Installation and Commissioning***

- Q: Will installation be on a shared-server or dedicated server?
- A: A dedicated server owned and maintained by the community portal is essential to ensure technical, administrative and security issues are monitored.

### ***Training***

Administrator, editor and technical manager training is a high priority to ensure the smooth running of the portal. A detailed account of all aspects of training issues are addressed in Chapter Three: The Work.

### ***Support***

- Technical support needs to be available 24 x 7 on any virtual community, with at least one fulltime technical manager with volunteer or other assistance. Editing, publishing and other general support enquiries need a management system to ensure customer satisfaction and good communication flow throughout the organisation.

### ***Upgrade/Maintenance***

Issues surrounding the following questions need to be seriously considered in the course of portal development projects:

- What upgrade path does the portal require?
- Does the portal intend to make further development to the system?
- What intellectual property belongs to the portal?



## Management and Performance

In asking these preceding questions I was searching for a best practice solution to a multifaceted set of problems. Bringing all the, human and technical elements together in an organised fashion to form a functional portal, was integral to decision-making and problem solving processes for the project.

I decided to create a virtual management process with Opensearch, whereby I ‘oversaw’ the technical and iterative development from the regional base. I delegated all of the technical development tasks via Chee Wong the regional manager for the I.T.company, with strict reporting procedures made on a daily basis. This left me to work ‘on the ground’ with local interest groups who would test the system as it gradually progressed.

Reflecting on the fact that the newness of community web portal development research marks it as emergent, rather than existent and calls for continual questioning, sometimes without finding any answers. Many theories in the area have as yet been unproven or at best disproven e.g. the ‘build it and they will come’ concept of the mid-1990’s, where .com and other Internet related hype predicted success, as long as web sites looked or functioned well. This proved incorrect as often as not the key factors of people and human behaviour were left out of the equation.

Effectively a set of unknown variables were being dealt with and I decided to manage decision –making processes under the following premises:

- An on-line community can only work if strong relationships between members and users are created and maintained. The technical or technology aspect of portal building, though integral to the process, is a functionality that is easier to manipulate. These two key technical and personnel elements need serious consideration and planning before administration and design decisions were finalised.
- The existing [www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au) site was to become a living example of most of these functionality type questions being answered. Moderation was achieved by constant attention not only to requests for publishing coming in, but to individualising e-mail responses to editors with problems. This in itself has proven a very demanding, but highly

worthwhile approach to maintaining editor interest and commitment, hence the constant flow of regular, fresh content. This is what makes GateWAY stand apart in the community on-line world. What it all boils down to is the creation and maintenance of relationship. (Cothrel, Williams 1999 pp22-23)

GateWAY functions quite well in both these aspects, however, as in any project there have been times when technical problems have arisen with certain applications malfunctioning for one reason or another. Some of these are recorded in my journal entry, which follows. Opensearch, GateWAY's web development partner, must be congratulated in all their efforts in the technical development of GateWAY, as on the whole the applications have worked adequately, given the time and funding made available.



Journal entry Friday, 26 May 00

Email to Chee at Opensearch:

Hi Chee,

I need to let you know that the following problems are turning into a bit of a nightmare today:

1. Administration and editing from the usual [keeper@albanygateway.com.au](mailto:keeper@albanygateway.com.au) ...DON'T work. I cannot create pages, edit the home page, moderate or in fact perform any administration functions at the moment.

If there is any change in password or log in please tell me.

2. Accounting: please get us the list of recently subscribed businesses/members. Because we don't have the Accounts package we don't know who, what, how much or where? How can we answer queries if we don't have the facts?

3. The submission form is NOT working I've had 4 people using the contact us link to tell me they've tried today!

4. The database doesn't perform "true" searches or at least it certainly doesn't search accurately enough. Some people are getting upset they can't find themselves after they've supposedly subscribed. What do I tell them?

Chee, we really can't afford for so many things to be dysfunctional, please can you ensure these 4 main problems are addressed and corrected now. My day has

so far been spent in placating people! The system should be working better than this by now, don't you agree?

Thanks,

Gill:~)

It took a fair few teething problems, but most of these were sorted within the ensuing months and being on-line through ICQ and e-mail with Chee really assisted the handling of these various problems. Community building is not easy at the best of times. Community on-line building doubles the complexity of the task, as technology is introduced into the equation. Nothing in this portal world appears predictable.

## **Non Physical Elements**

### ***People***

People and effective communication with those people are the primary elements to the building of any portal. Within the first six months I set out to build relationships with many different people, from community groups members, stakeholders, committee and businesses, through to government representatives and individuals who were to become a valuable resource in the form of editors. Communities on-line are built on the historical and social foundations of communities of place. Disseminating then implanting the idea that this project was to be a grassroots up, community owned endeavour became paramount.

Inherently it became evident, that if GateWAY was to work, an understanding and harnessing of the region's *social capital* was imperative. Without social capital there is no community and where proximity and change alter a community's boundaries, so the nature of community changes.

Social capital refers to the collective resources required for individuals, groups, organisations, businesses, and communities to sustain a healthy future in a changing environment. These are the networks, shared interests, shared visions, trust and sense of belonging, central to any true community. It is this social capital that seems at greatest threat as

the technological revolution thrusts humanity into a matrix -like warp, distorting reality and disrupting the foundations of people's known worlds (Figallo 1998).

On-line communities (and communities on-line) have, both by need and circumstance, evolved in response not only to the threat of the new, but as a direct product of the technologies themselves. Without the personal computer revolution, enhanced telecommunications capabilities, and the ingenuity of communications companies there would be no virtual world and no need for on-line communities. (Smith and Kollock, 1998).

The basic aims behind the development of any community on-line are to provide access, encourage engagement and build awareness, where perhaps all these factors have been previously challenged in existing physical communities. These are the basic tenets of the Albany GateWAY with a primary focus on people not technology.

### ***Promotion***

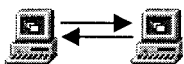
Developing the community's awareness about GateWAY's objectives and functions was to be a key concern over the ensuing months after GateWAY's pilot project has been completed. There are several ways this occurred:

- Presentations and visits to all the major local towns in the Great Southern. Meetings with local councils, tourist bureaus, community groups and local residents.
- Media exposure through articles, reports and presentations, e.g. The Weekender Newspaper's editor gave GateWAY regular features in the newspaper. The GateWAY logo is also printed on page 3 of each weekly edition.
- GWN, WIN TV, ABC and other local radio stations are keen to be seen supporting community based projects and could be approached for news and events coverage.
- Advertising in all the above in selected ways.
- Schools, colleges and youth groups will be encouraged to have GateWAY on-line links and chat groups, giving a greater sense of community and a growth in awareness to young people. Specific events like a "Youth Week On-Line Expo", run by kids from Telecentres and youth groups like CRANK, could bring kids from all over the Great Southern on-line.

- Similarly, seniors groups such as TeleSeniors will have their own sections. Encouragement to learn about the Internet and communicating differently on-line will feature for all interest groups.
- Community groups and service providers would also be approached and offered awareness raising seminars about GateWAY's objectives, functions and vision. These groups could have access to a "Special Events" page where weekly promotions of not for profit organisations activities could be booked.

### ***Training and Awareness***

Provision for Training and Awareness components within the GateWAY framework was essential. Training relating predominantly to WebIT (DPS), e-commerce and e-business would be catered for in a couple of different ways, while awareness campaigns were designed to reach a broader section of the community. WebIT (distributed publishing systems), became a tool for empowerment of a community on-line. It is this tool which gives a community a life beyond that of a mere directory driven web site.



On-line discussion with Chee regarding the first WebIT training process:

**gilly** 2/9/00 2:09 AM Is there anyway I could get the basics before then....the total DPS doesn't have to be fully functional and tested....only I really need to have some idea as I have to set up training sessions for the DPS editors etc down here .e.g. how long do we need for sessions, where, equipment etc.....

**c2** 2/9/00 2:15 AM we need 1 computer for each person there with a suitably fast internet connection to each computer, we can't really plan the sessions till u have a look and that can be probably ready to access (for you) by end of next week, but only in Joondalup... so..... it's gonna difficult to plan it out unless you get to the city again.

**gilly** 2/9/00 2:21 AM OK.....see the DPS is, as you know, central to the CONTENT generation on GateWAY, and when we launch we have to have something behind each topic and category. I'm concerned about giving the Editors enough time to learn the procedure, practice and then produce.....Is there much to learn?

**c2** 2/9/00 2:27 AM not much to learn.. probably 2 hours can do it all.. well.. depends how much u wanna teach them !!! if u just wanna teach them how to do their job.. it's dead easy. if u wanna explain to them how they fit into the whole picture.. that could take days !!!!! if not weeks !!!!!!!!!!!!!!! lol they will need to know how to use a word processor.. and how to use tables .. like in MS Word.... that's about it.

**gilly** 2/9/00 2:31 AM Great.....so is what I'm hearing it would only take me a couple of hours to learn? Also if I can't teach then until the DPS is ready to go then I might as well hold off longer... (I'm under a bit of pressure about this from various groups and individuals....too good a marketing job on my part....now need the goods!!! LOL!

**c2** 2/9/00 2:40 AM lol! well.. don't be fooled the administrator (Gill Sellar) has a much bigger job than the editors remember.. the administrator have to control the navigation.. and everything else the editors just type.. and publish.

**gilly** 2/9/00 2:43 AM OK so what shall I do set a date...like 18/2/00 to come up.....or wait until around the 8/3/00?

**c2** 2/9/00 2:43 AM what you should be telling them.. those editors. is to collect the information into MS word files at the moment, much like what was discussed about last week don't leave it lying around as faxes at worse.. get them to print it out they or u just have to type it all out again !

**gilly** 2/9/00 2:45 AM Well they've responded to that idea by saying they would prefer just to put stuff on gateway directly once the DPS is available.....see most of these people aren't being paid to do this and often work from isolated places.

**c2** 2/9/00 2:46 AM oic ,well... i supposed if it's ready.. and they can type fast.. it serves the same purpose, no probs.

**gilly** 2/9/00 2:46 AM So.....when would suit you?

**c2** 2/9/00 2:47 AM probably about 20/2 for your training.... and late 20's for the editor training ?

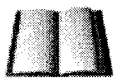
**gilly** 2/9/00 2:48 AM You see Chee.....by me going out and training these people in the DPS it is also a PR stint for GW.....many people still only have a vague...if any idea about what the potential is behind all this and it's my job to sell it.

This communication with Chee is an example of how I worked closely online, (from a country location) with my technical crew, who were based in Perth. Often I was unsure about functionality issues and continually concerned about how everything would be implemented. Even though this was very challenging, the task at hand seemed insurmountable and this was the

first conversation we had about the WebIT training programme, which was to culminate in many people being trained throughout the region.

This was an important time event on the spirallic timeline, as it marked the “hands-on” start of empowering locals by training them in a process of mass communication. Three of GateWAY’s main aims of building awareness, encouraging engagement and providing access were embodied in the WebIt training sessions and GateWAY’s path to becoming a value producing entity had begun.

Following is my journal account of the first WebIT training session in Albany.



Journal Friday, 10 March 2000

The first DPS training workshop of the Topic Editors took place today. This was an important milestone in GateWAY’s development because it initiated the true COMMUNITY INPUT factor, the encouragement and training of community members to take responsibility for the content on GateWAY!!!!

Following are the names and topic categories they’ll be heading up for the general info sections of GateWAY:

TOURISM:

-Sue Campbell (Executive Officer Tourism/GSDC) and Katrina Wright (GSDC)

MEDIA+ I.T.

- Andrew and Rhyl MacFarlane, Albany Design and Publishing

AGRICULTURE:

- Leigh Gammond, Computer Training and Farm Secretarial Services

- Kylie Woodgate

LEGAL

- Antonia and Shirley., Albany Community Legal Services

## BUSINESS

- Julie Wright, Albany Business Centre

## INDUSTRY

- Mark Pitts-Hill Executive Officer I.T./GSD
- Colin Berry, Albany Port Authority

## SPORT + RECREATION

- Tony Norment, Ministry Sport and Recreation

## EMPLOYMENT

- Louise Hillman, Department Youth, Employment and Training

## HEALTH

- Sandi Burton , Mary Whitty, Margaret Martin

## ARTS+CRAFTS

- Annette Grant

## ALBANY PAGE

- Nathan Mashman and Amanda Rumble

## KENDENUP PAGE

- John Seeber Kendenup

## ALBANY ADVERTISE

Ray Moore and Murray

## EDUCATION

- Emma Franklin, District Education Office

## YOUTH

- Ben Ellis

## ENVIRONMENT



- Marg Robertson

SENIORS

- Severin Crisp

The day went very smoothly and feedback was excellent. Opensearch have a few minor glitches to iron out, but all went well. e.g. e-mail from one participant:



Subject: Re: Topics List- GateWAY page

Date: Fri, 09 Feb 1996 09:04:13 +0800

From: user [REDACTED]

“It was a great session Gill. I look forward to you working out the “caching” issues; otherwise it’s a friendly and effective piece of software. I enjoyed the session it was well conducted. The energy and atmosphere was great. Congratulations.”

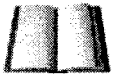
Cheers

Tony Norment (Ministry of Sport and Recreation)

Here the first coil in the GateWAY spiral completed a revolution. The commencement of the real site development built on the prototype model with local content provision creating something new. The momentum had well and truly started and it was this energy which would carry GateWAY forward.

People from all the topic areas and towns were trained in WebIT in the ensuing months. There are over 100 people now (February 2001), trained in our region and WebIT is the tool, which has determined GateWAY’s success in keeping content up to date and local.

E-commerce and E-GateWAY 2000



### Journal entry:

There were problems with the implementation of E-GateWAY from the outset. Firstly, it was asking far too much too quickly of the Project to attempt this component in the region. Businesses were barely adopting e-mail and web sites as a functionality of their businesses, let alone having the idea or ability to become “e-commerced up”. Members of the Perth consortia, who tended to come down here in their advisory capacity with theory and postulation, pushed this. I felt somewhat “set up” over the E-GateWAY incubator business and it only cranked along with a hell of a lot of effort “on the ground”, by me generating interest in local businesses and Victor Annamalai and ECU’s involvement. The local businesses were interested but definitely NOT ready! Things might be somewhat different in a year’s time.

E-commerce was a new concept for most businesses and the Great Southern community as a whole. I found there were several factors needing consideration, before a strategy could be constructed for training in e-commerce.

- **Readiness**— who was most likely to be receptive and ready for e-commerce training?
- **Suitability** – which sector of the community was most suitable to attempt e-commerce training with, e.g. small businesses, community organisations, service providers? The question of “how e-commercially viable was their product or service” also needs assessing.
- **Need** – where did the greatest need lie and how is that need substantiated?
- **Awareness** – should training primarily offered to those with an existing understanding or knowledge of e-commerce and an ability to commit to a training program?

### Proposal for Training in E-Commerce

Expressions of interest were called for from registered businesses in the Great Southern, to participate in and then mentor the e-commerce challenge through the GateWAY initiative. This was to be called the E-GateWAY Incubator Project. Members of the Perth Consortia enthusiastically promoted this concept and GateWAY was promised assistance in implementing it.

**E-gateWAY 2000 Incubator Project (The Theory)**

The E-GateWAY incubator project was to provide for a model of “intensive e-business incubation”, a training concept created by Dow Digital for their Peel Project. This was funded by Regional Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund, a programme administered federally by the Department of Communications and the Arts. It was also used in their EComNow Programme, created initially for the South Australian government.

It was aimed at growing local business overall and particularly in the electronic “marketspace”. Upon the full implementation of their business plan, each business would then emerge regionally, as an E-Commerce champion, and be expected to offer mentoring services to other businesses operating in a similar sector.

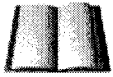
**Objectives**

The objectives of the Incubator Project were to:

- Create an understanding of the concepts and practice of the E-commerce development process.
- Describe and define how E-commerce would impact on specific businesses.
- Assist participating businesses in laying the foundations for E-commerce planning and strategy.
- Provide on going support through the incubation stage until evaluation.

**E-commerce Project Coordinator**

There was supposed to be an experienced, e-commerce project coordinator employed, to work alongside and under the direction of the Albany GateWAY Project Manager on a part-time basis. This did not eventuate. My journal entry below describes the disastrous turn of events this whole, premature attempt at getting the incubator project up and running became.



Journal entry: Monday, 20 March 2000

THE EIP WORKSHOP! – became a bit of a disaster today. OIC's sub contractee (Helen Roberts) was supposed to deliver the EIP project but missed the plane the night before the workshop, then missed it again the following morning, leaving me in a very awkward situation. ECU representatives Martyn, Dragan, Victor and I "wing it", but not being prepared, made things incredibly difficult !! Helen Roberts was supposed to have run the workshop with us all assisting. Because the ECU guys and I weren't prepared for her non-attendance a bit of a "gong show" transpired!

I feel drained as it took quite a bit of liaison, encouraging and educating to get the 15 businesses to attend and commit.

Nevertheless, we managed to keep all 15 participants present for the workshop and I am in damage control mode right now. Will fly up to Perth to discuss next steps with ECU tomorrow. The EIP people MUST NOT be let down again! It's hard enough getting them there for a day let alone this!

Reflecting on this event I again questioned my actions as project manager, rather than just point the finger at others inability to deliver. Should I have 'called the whole thing off' when it became obvious promised services were not being delivered? Perhaps I should have insisted on proper research and at least a survey of a sample group of local businesses. Why didn't I? In the first meeting with the Perth consortia I had suggested a survey of the region to specifically identify computer and Internet use, skills levels etc., but I had been dissuaded. The Perth consortia wanted the project to quickly get underway, to produce something to show as a model in community online development for government funding bodies, as soon as possible.

I understood the urgency for action, however my academic training in planning and researching strategy before implementation, left me at a point of conflict. I was employed by these committees to deliver a specific set of outcomes, so it was a matter of following others directions rather than my own instincts. What eventuated was yet another example of where "top down" duplicitous, management from afar turned into an impediment and made me distrustful of that modus operandi.

In discussing structure, strategy and success factors for virtual organisations, Marshall et al (1999) suggest “ the needs of centralised administrations should impede as little as possible the work of those employees involved in creating value for the organisation. Unnecessary administrative activities should be minimised or abolished altogether”. The two committees’ structure, in the early stages of the GateWAY process, was doomed from the beginning despite the best of intentions of those concerned. Conflicting ideas and management styles of both the Perth based consortia and the locally based steering committee was to put GateWAY’s first steps at risk. The failure to deliver a presenter and resources for the first e-commerce workshop was an early indicator that this administrative structure was dysfunctional.

In hindsight I feared the delay and disruption to the other emerging and functioning aspects of GateWAY e.g. growing online participation of the regional community after successful WebIT training workshops and increases in site use and requests for more online options. I did not want to jeopardise the core project.

### **Salvaging the E-GateWay Incubator Project**

Fortunately, with assistance from Victor Annamalay, another PhD E-Business student from Edith Cowan University, we were able to salvage some credibility with the 15 businesses selected by jointly taking on the running of a new set of workshops. Following is a detailed account of the delivery.

#### **Overview**

The second try at the Albany GateWAY, E-Commerce Incubator Project aimed to develop, implement and evaluate a model of “intensive e-business incubation”. A comprehensive educational model to bring regional SMEs online and to significantly expand the amount of e-commerce activity in the Great Southern region through the development of regional e-commerce “champions” were also significant aims. The main outcomes from this project were

to include the development of an educational e-commerce model and a set of related resources that could be applied to other regions in WA and beyond.

This project (EIP) was to be originally managed by Ms Jackie Gill representing the Office of Information and Communication (OIC) at the WA Dept of Commerce and Trade, and Dr Martyn Wild, of the We-B Research Centre (We-B\_RC), Edith Cowan University (ECU). The original project duration was to be 18 weeks split into three 6-week blocks. The OIC were to direct the first and the third workshops and ECU, the second. The participants were to be 15 assorted businesses from the region. The outcomes from this project were to include the development of an educational e-commerce model and a set of related resources that can be applied to other regions in WA and beyond. Also a number of refereed conference and journal papers that described the process of design and implementation and the evaluation of the results of this model were to be published.

## **Rationale**

Albany is the town centre for this region located about 430km south of Perth, Western Australia. Its population is approximately 30,000. Its economy is based around agriculture, fishing and tourism. Communications infrastructure is moderate allowing the community a level of online access that is not costly, yet adequate, but still low per capita compared to that of Perth.

There are approximately 5,000 businesses in the region. There is a mix of business to business (B2B) and business to consumer (B2C) type of commerce. The Tourism and Viticulture industries tends to have a higher B2C mix than most of the other industries and businesses in the region.

The Albany GateWAY has developed as a major regional, community web portal. It is a single entry point for individuals, communities, governments and businesses to access and interact with Albany and the Great Southern region. It provides a focal point for local, regional and global online activities and in particular supports regional development.

GateWAY is an important cog in the process of helping these small businesses succeed online. Online communities have been a feature of the Internet since its earliest days.

Newsgroups (an early form of online community originally began as an experiment in 1979, described as Usenet) were the primary driver for the growth of the Internet during the 1993/94 period. Subsequent to that, the rapid rise of America Online was driven by its ability to generate vibrant communities through chat and online messaging.

From an article that Mathew Schwartz wrote for Computerworld (Schwartz 2000), he quoted New York based theglobe.com's Director of New Product Development, Christopher Auxier as saying that "an online community was a destination site where a user could find proprietary interactive technologies such as chat, forums and home-page building." These tools encourage users to become more participative thus enriching the content of that portal encouraging others to visit that site to view the content. By providing visitors an opportunity to engage in a trustful relationship through that portal, communities create a customer relationship. The spin-offs for the businesses associated are that they can develop and sell products and services more readily to their customers.

It has been established that creating community is conducive to e-commerce (witness the malls that "spring up" in suburban areas). People don't like to shop in an empty store. In real life, many people make decisions about where to shop and what to buy based on the apparent popularity of a store or product line, on the availability of store personnel for advice and guidance, and on the counsel of friends and fellow shoppers.

Community buying is emerging as an important factor in e-commerce according to Jay Marathe (Marathe 2000) Head of Consulting at Durlacher Research Ltd. In an article he published, he stated that "group buying" influences product development, the prospect of cheaper prices negotiated from manufactures due to the interests of aggregate buyers, or in this case, the businesses who purchase a raw good or service from the same supplier (Marathe 2000). Jupiter Communications discovered that 90% of shoppers prefer to communicate while shopping online. Lands End, the US clothing catalogue and website introduced a desktop based tool that allows two friends to surf the store together and to chat in real time while shopping online.

The Albany GateWAY has not, as yet, reached its critical mass and businesses will have to support the GateWAY until it reaches it, prior to moving onwards to future sustainability.

People are central to GateWAY's operations which already has a developed "sense of community," a community on-line.

The portal actively attracts users and customers through a number of its interactive content options, e.g. personalised distributed publishing system WebIT, with E-commerce adding to this capability for both community and business users. GateWAY has been developed to combine both business and community aspects, as interrelated and co-operative functions.

## **Methodology**

Dr Martyn Wild, in consultation with Gill Sellar, Portal Manager, outlined a model for this project, to ensure its success (Wild 2000). It consisted of 6 stages. These were

### ***Stage 1: Identification of businesses***

The businesses had to be representative of the size and industry sectors of the region. It was determined that 15 business would be selected initially with the expectation that 40% of this businesses to "drop-out" after the first session.

Gill Sellar, the project manager had set about selecting the 15 businesses through a process of self-nomination and interviews. The businesses had to be representative of the industry sectors in the Great Southern Region. It was decided from the onset that the businesses would pay to be involved so as to give them a greater stake in the completion of the project. The businesses selected were:

#### ***Accommodation***

1. Karma Chalets — Denmark, Judy Raudino
2. Pindelup Farm— Tambellup, Jenny
3. Glenlea Farm— Katanning, Alec and Lynn Leach

#### ***Arts And Crafts***

4. Golden Hill Candles/Denmark, Ted and Helme Holmes

#### ***Education and Lifeskills***

5. Esteem Plus— Albany, Maggie Dent



### ***Horticulture***

6. Eden Gate Blueberries/Youngs Siding, Greg Luke

### ***Industry***

7. Wilson's WA Machinery— Torbay, Gary Wilson

### ***I.T. And Computing***

8. Multigroup— Albany, Wayne Savill

### ***Local Government***

9. Albany City Council, Rob Jefferies
10. Jerramungup Shire Council, Tizi Benora /Bob Olson

### ***Retail***

11. Albany V-Belts and Rubber, J. Madigan

### ***Tourism***

12. Whaleworld— Albany, Les Bail
13. Great Southern Adventures— Bremer Bay. Charmaine and Bob Wilson

### ***Winery***

14. Alkoomi Wines— Frankland, Merv Langey
15. Porongorup Winery— Porongorup, Gene Harma, John Wade

### ***Stage 2: Materials development***

The materials required were to be developed based on the prior knowledge of the participants. To encourage their involvement, a web-site using ECU's WebCT environment was to be created as one of the support mechanisms. The development of the material was to be completed by the project coordinators and the research assistant.

At the first workshop, it was proposed that the principles and processes of e-business and business-to-consumer e-commerce functionality were to be presented. As a result, each participant business will have an understanding of how e-commerce might advantage their business. The participants would also begin the development of an e-business plan to enable them to implement an online strategy for their business.

The knowledge and expertise of the SMEs' in relation to e-commerce were to be identified so that an educational program could be developed for the next two workshops. Through a general discussion that was held, issues were raised such as the difference between e-business and e-commerce, security, hosting, web development, online transaction processes. The benefits of the Albany GateWAY were discussed.

The communication process was also outlined in this first workshop. Communication between the mentors and the participants was through email, web discussion board and telephone. A website would be created for the workshop as a centralised location where all the information pertaining to the project will be stored. Edith Cowan University's WebCT environment will be used for this. A website was created for use during the life of this project. The participant business would be encouraged to join the Albany Gateway Portal throughout the duration of the project so that they may, in turn, become mentors for others in their community to participate in their portal.

WebCT is a tool that facilitates the creation of sophisticated World Wide Web-based educational environments (WebCT 2000). It does this in three ways:

1. It provides an interface allowing the design of the presentation of the course (colour schemes, layout, etc.)
2. It provides a set of educational tools to facilitate learning, communication and collaboration.
3. It provides a set of administrative tools to assist the instructor in the process of management and continuous improvement of the course.

### ***Stage 3: Workshops***

A presentation of the concepts and operation of e-commerce as well as the importance of the creation and implementation of an e-business plan were deemed to be topics of the first workshop run. OIC were to direct this intensive to prepare the EIP participants to identify their needs and develop an understanding of the advantages of e-commerce in their B2B and B2C functions.

The data for this section was synthesised through notes, phone and email communication between Victor Annamalay, Gill Sellar and Martyn Wild as well as communication with the participants themselves.

***Day 1***

The first workshop was scheduled for the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2000. The attendants were to be Ms Helen Roberts, Ms Gill Sellar, Dr Martyn Wild, Mr Dragan Velichkovich and Mr Victor Annamalay.

Due to unforeseen events, Ms Roberts did not attend the workshop although she was the presenter. At an unscheduled meeting prior to the workshop, the remaining attendants prepared a plan to present (“off-the-cuff”) to the business participants attending. The plan was for the presentation was:

***Introduction***

Introduction of the presenters and participating businesses: The presenters each gave a brief “bio” about themselves. Each business also gave an introduction stating why they were participating and how they thought each would benefit from E-commerce. The participants felt that this was a very useful activity as they got to know each other’s business and their reasons for attendance. Those that were “newer” to the concept of e-commerce found benefits that they had not considered that could enhance their businesses from the others. This activity gave the presenters the opportunity to ascertain the level of e-commerce commitment of each participant.

***Discussion***

E-commerce – definition and issues: The session was split into two sessions. The first part was presented using a whiteboard and material cached from the ECU site. The participants were given a definition of E-commerce. Issues such as security, domain names, and “ball-park” costs were discussed. Technology: Some of the technologies that are used as well as the benefits of employing technology to aid existing business processes were discussed. Items discussed included SSL, email, web development and web forms, hosting, domain registration, ISP, online payment strategies.

***Activity***

E-Business Plan: For this next section, the participants were put into three small groups of five. The E-Business plan section was “hands on” where each presenter discussed the value

of an e-business plan with one of the smaller groups. The groups had to start developing their plan. For this task, it was decided that one business in each group was to be “workshopped”. The other members of the group would help the volunteer to develop the beginnings of a business plan. To end this session, all the groups reformed into the main group again and the “findings” from each small group were discussed.

Web sites of interest: This section of workshop began after lunch in the Computing Laboratory of the venue. Sites that were to be looked were [www.ina.com.au](http://www.ina.com.au), [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), [www.dstore.com](http://www.dstore.com), and a demonstration of [www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au) and WebIT was given.

WebCT: The final part of the presentation entailed a discussion of WebCT and the communication mechanism for this project. A website was created for use during the life of this project. [http://webct-business.cowan.edu.au/SCRIPT/EIP/scripts/serve\\_home.pl](http://webct-business.cowan.edu.au/SCRIPT/EIP/scripts/serve_home.pl). For this presentation, the site had a bulletin board service and email list. The participants were given a demonstration of the BBS to encourage them to open communication channels between each other.

***Stage 4: Mentoring***

A mentor was to be identified to aid each of the businesses to further refine and implement their business plans. The method of communication was to be via email and telephone.

***Stage 5: Issues***

A second one-day intensive was to be run six weeks after the first workshop. Issues arising from the first workshop were to be addressed as well as any other problems that were to be resolved. In the six weeks prior to this workshop, the participating businesses were to communicate to the mentors any problems or issues. The outcome during these six weeks will determine the type of expertise required for the second workshop.

***Day 2***

A meeting was held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2000 between Ms. Gill Sellar, Dr. Martyn Wild, Mr. Dragan Velichkovich and Mr. Victor Annamalay to discuss the previous workshop and the next one. Workshop 2 was scheduled for 1<sup>st</sup> May 2000 approximately 6 weeks after the first workshop. It was agreed that Workshop 1 was a failure and that Workshop 2 will have to be

very successful. It was decided that Edith Cowan University would deliver the remaining two workshops. Mr. Velichkovich had also indicated that he would not be able to actively participate in the project due to his other commitments.

The first priority was to finalise the design of the EIP site. The site was located at [http://webct-business.cowan.edu.au/SCRIPT/EIP/scripts/serve\\_home.pl](http://webct-business.cowan.edu.au/SCRIPT/EIP/scripts/serve_home.pl). The login id and password were “guest”. This website contained the following links:

- To do tasks: industry specific sites for the participants to explore. Tasks that the participants had to complete prior to the next workshop were listed here. The activities would prepare the participants for the next workshop.
- Resources: a list of articles and definitions. The information presented here will contain selected readings, case studies for the participants.
- Reference: a generic dictionary/reference application used for any terminology that the participants had difficulty with.
- Contact List: an email contact list of all participants and coordinators of the project.
- Bulletin Board: a bulletin board application for all participants. The questions and issues that arose from this medium would determine some of the content of the following workshop.
- Workshop Overview: information about the following workshops.

Content was to be added throughout the life of the project. The Bulletin Board and Email list were to be the main communication medium. The BBS would encourage greater interaction between the participants and coordinators. The BBS was later changed to the Albany GateWAY site (for the third workshop). A new list server was also set up at [www.egroups.com](http://www.egroups.com).

Gill Sellar suggested an approach she felt would most benefit and encourage the participants into a greater commitment was to base the other workshops on three tenets: What’s in it for me? How do I do it? How much does it cost?

She also suggested that one of the EIP businesses should be developed as a case study for the next workshop. This would encourage the businesses a sense of reality and ownership. The business Gill had chosen was Karma Chalets.

### ***Karma Chalets***

Jude and Joe Raudino have had some experience with web pages, having had a listing and page on the Travel Australia portal since 1997. Jude had said that once she had a listing on that portal, her email enquiries rose from zero to about 15 a week. She felt that she needed to increase Karma's profile and offer more information for her prospective clients. After some consultation with a local web developer, she and Peter had decided to develop a full e-commerce capable website. This was to be done in stages. The first stage was to develop a more comprehensive (more information than the existing Travel Australia site) brochure site. This site would include updated pictures and accommodation prices. They were also registering their domain name – karmachalets.com.au. Both felt that having their domain name would add to the professionalism and had important marketing benefits.

In getting the Karma site ready for the second workshop, there were some difficulties in coordinating the information required. The process of creating the site was straightforward as there were limited options as to how the elements would be placed on each page. The advantage of having a strict template policy was that for the inexperienced it would not be difficult to create a site that was simple to navigate and easy to read. It also encouraged a uniform user interface throughout that site and its linked portal. The most obvious disadvantage in a strict template policy is that it does stifle flexibility and creativity for the user. A seasoned web developer would find this kind of environment stifling.

As Karma Chalets had already contracted the development of the site to a local website developer, all the relevant information was dependent on how quickly that developer would release that information. The difficulty arose due to the lack of information available as the local developer managed it. Using information captured from the outdated Travel Australia site finally completed the site. Content also came from an interview held with Jude Raudino. A booking form was also created for Karma Chalet. This form was placed on an Openmalls secure server that was linked to the non-secure Karma site. While this form could accept credit cards, it did not have the facility to process them. At that time, Openmalls did not have the facility for this option. There was no information for up-to-date room availability as there was no facility to host an online database link. The site was used during the presentation as an example to

highlight the process of developing an enhanced “brochure” website that was within reach of most of the EIP participants.

*Planning of Workshop 2*

The plan was based upon the three tenets that Gill Sellar prescribed: -

- What’s In It for Me?
- How do I get it?
- How much does it cost?

This workshop would address the first tenet and most of the second tenet and only some parts of the third. Its purpose was also to build a knowledge base of basic concepts that would be required for the next workshop, which was more difficult because it would describe more fully some Internet technologies that were more relevant for the participants. The areas addressed were as follows:

What is E-Commerce, what are its forms and who are its participants? The discussion included information about B2B and B2C commerce e.g. types of e-commerce that included Interactive Voice systems, hybrid systems and full online commerce systems.

Other areas discussed included where e-commerce succeeds and where it can fail. This part of the presentation fell under the “What’s in it for me?” section.

The “How do I get it?” section of the presentation encompasses the E-Business Plan, Site Development and Marketing. In the first workshop, the Business Plan section failed, as there was no coordination of information between the presenters and their groups. In this workshop, the focus was to consider particular components of their business plan. The participants had to look at their business plan in more specifics. The participants were put into two large groups of eight. Victor Annamalay, the presenter, moved between both groups to facilitate the discussion. Gill Sellar led the second group. The groups discussed competitive advantage, market space, product mix, customer service levels and pricing. This made up the “e-commercability” of their business. Another area they had to look at was that of fulfilment. The points to consider here were traditional modes, costs of delivery, in-house/outsourced mechanism, returns, transaction

mode and process. The last area of consideration was marketing – budget and mix between traditional and online.

Jude Raudino was called upon to discuss the process she and Peter had used to develop their online strategy. Jude had indicated that they did not have a formal plan as such, rather, they had decided what they wanted achieve and how much they were prepared to spend. She mentioned that they spent a lot of time looking at other holiday sites to see what their options were.

The next section of the workshop was a presentation on Site Development and Site Marketing. Under the heading of Site Development, recommendations for e-commerce sites such as navigability, user interface and building user trust were discussed. Under Site Marketing, methods of marketing online were discussed. Use of portals, search engines and directories were discussed.

The last section of the workshop was the “How much does it cost?” section. This section was delivered under the following headings – Web Design, Site Hosting, and Transactions. Under Web design, the costs were broken into component costs of graphic design, coding, scanning etc. The figure quoted was approximately \$75.00 per hour. This costing was also dependent on the level of e-commerce functionality. Under Site Hosting, the cost of hosting a “brochure” site was quoted using quotations from iiNet, Telstra and Netway. The cost of hosting an e-commerce site was discussed as well. The cost of setting up an e-payment facility was discussed under Transaction Costs. The quotations presented in this last section of the workshop were “ball-park” prices only as this area will be the main topic of discussion in the last workshop.

To conclude this section, Gill Sellar spoke on the benefits of the WebIT system and its costs. Gill also acted as a “foil” throughout the presentation, introducing questions that had been asked prior to the workshop, in her communications with all the participants. This role was also important as it gave her the opportunity to voice issues that people had asked her previously but may have been too embarrassed to ask in public.



### ***Stage 6: Refinement and implementation***

The expectation was that the participant businesses would further develop and refine their business plans and strategy over the next six weeks leading up to the last workshop. In the final one-day intensive, the businesses would present their e-business plans, achievements and other issues that arose throughout the 12 weeks.

#### ***Day 3***

The third workshop was scheduled for 4<sup>th</sup> July 2000 and planned along the same lines as the second with the emphasis on “How do I get it?” and “What does it cost?” model. Using Karma Chalets as the EIP example and having Jude Raudino as an interviewee proved to be successful and it was decided at a meeting with Dr. Martyn Wild, Ms. Gill Sellar and Mr. Victor Annamalay to apply the same approach to the last workshop. Gill Sellar had chosen Great Southern Adventure Tours as the EIP “guinea pig”.

#### ***Great Southern Adventure Tours***

Charmaine and Bob Wilson were just beginning to go through the training of the WebIT system and they were not having much success due to their lack of computing experience. They had both learned the WebIT system, however, they were having trouble with the population of their site. An issue that often affects many beginners is the difficulty in selecting content. They also did not know how they could apply e-commerce functionality that was complementary to their business.

#### ***Planning of Workshop 3***

The third workshop was planned to be three hours in duration, instead of a full day. The focus of this workshop was to discuss the e-payment facility of an e-commerce site. Concepts that were to be discussed also included types of payment, security and the automated payment process. As this workshop was going to be much shorter in duration, the Wilson's were not going to be asked to speak, however, their website would still be showcased. Mindful of the difficulty, Bob and Charmaine had in their initial attempts at creating a website, it was decided that the site would be created using two of their company's brochures. This would help them and the other participants understand that not a lot of content is required to create a site that was interesting and functional. Unlike the Karma Chalet example, this site also had a functional

payment facility. Although there was no credit card authorisation available, the form verified that the card was valid and sent the details in an encrypted format.

The workshop was divided into two sections – “How do I do it?” and “How much does it cost?” that was a follow-up from the previous workshop. In the “How do I do it?” section, there was a recap on the benefits of e-commerce to start the presentation. As the focus of this workshop was e-commerce, the functionality of an e-commerce site was discussed. The other areas of discussion were the process of purchasing, online ordering, online payment, order processing and levels of customer service. The next section of the workshop covered the areas of payment types, automated payment processing and security concepts. The next section of the workshop, under the heading of “How Do I Do It?” consisted of a discussion on Merchant Agreements, Payment Authorities and Providers and Digital Certificates.

The final part of this workshop consisted of detailed costs and locations of suppliers. In the third and final workshop, there were fewer participants. The six businesses that attended were:

- Great Southern Adventure Tours
- Karma Chalets
- Wilson’s WA Machinery
- Golden Hill Candles
- Whaleworld
- Glenlea Farm.

The other businesses had sent their apologies as they had other commitments. Due to the smaller numbers, this workshop was run on a more informal manner. Any issues that had arisen previously were discussed. The Adventure Tour site was discussed with more detail spent on the design. Some changes were also demonstrated “live”. The booking form was also discussed in great detail as input was given on how the form may be improved. The booking form was also demonstrated live, with a secure email received automatically after the form was submitted.

Following was a discussion on the technology behind the creation of the form and how the form could be adapted to different situations. The participants experienced a “real-time” booking, payment and credit card verification procedure. A demonstration of WebIT was given by updating two pages from the Adventure Tours site.

**Results**

*Perceptions*

In preparing the materials for the series of workshops, four outcomes were identified that would enable these businesses to begin their participation in e-commerce. These outcomes also fit nicely into the four domains for learning; knowledge, attitude, skill and adoption as identified by Guba (Guba 1989).

**Table 2. E-commerce outcomes and domains grid**

Domain	Outcome
Knowledge	To develop an awareness of the Internet and e-commerce by examining some of the more critical components that constituted the requirements for e-commerce.
Attitude	To reduce “technology phobia” related with e-commerce.
Skill	The businesses to identify areas that were critical to their online strategy.
Adoption	To encourage the SMEs into their first steps towards e-commerce.

Content was developed based on information gathered from a number of sources such as University curriculum materials, magazines, journals and articles written by e-commerce “experts” to address the first outcome. For the second outcome, barriers were identified that were pertinent to these businesses and how these could be overcome as well as the dispelling of any myths that arose throughout the workshops. By looking at case studies of similar sized and larger business that already had mature e-commerce web strategies, the third outcome was to be

met when these businesses could identify areas that were critical to their online strategy. The fourth outcome was to encourage the SMEs into their first steps towards e-commerce by applying their “new” knowledge using the Albany Gateway as the opportunity to step into the e-commerce domain at comparably little cost.

The level of understanding of E-commerce and web technologies was very low amongst the participants. There was also a lack of knowledge as to what was available locally as well. There was some expertise in Albany; however, this was not readily available at times. Gill Sellar had indicated that any type of information delivery would have to be at a very low level. Many participants had not had much experience on the web.

The first workshop was not as successful as expected. Initially, the discussion tended to be too difficult for most of the participants as they were not familiar with the underlying technology of the WWW. Many of the concepts introduced were challenging, as there was no basis for them to build the new knowledge on. This part of the presentation slowly evolved from a presentation to a forum that was led by the questions that arose from the participants themselves. The questions that surfaced during the discussion weren't generally related to the Community Portal and e-commerce. The questions related more to “beginner Internet” questions than e-commerce issues. Examples of the questions included

“Who is the best ISP in Albany?”

“What's the difference between Netscape and Internet Explorer?”

“How does email work?”

“I've got an ISDN line installed but I don't know how to use it.”

“How do I get my site on a Search Engine?”

The second section, Business Planning, was moderately successful. Some believed that there was no need for a business plan as “they knew what they wanted, so all they had to do was to learn how to get it.” The other tendency was to use this section to have more of their personal questions answered. The questions that surfaced here related more to e-commerce.

Some of the questions asked included

“How do I get paid?”

“How can I get more people to come to my site?”

“How much does it cost to develop a site?”

“How does the Internet help with delivery of my products?”

“How do I beat my competitors on the Internet?”

“How secure is the Internet?”

In general, there was not much done in terms of business plan development. This occurred because there were three presenters and each presenter headed a group. There were no strict guidelines that determined the flow or the outcome for this section and as a result each presenter led their group according to their needs and experience. The participants came away from this section without anything tangible in terms of an e-business plan. The fundamentals should have been discussed prior to the group work, as each group would have more “concrete” guidelines to follow.

The third section of Day 1 suffered from hardware problems. There were 21 networked computers which had access to the Internet, albeit, slow. This hampered the flow of the presentation, as there was a continual wait for the Internet sites to download. Some of the participants did have the opportunity to look at [www.ina.com.anu](http://www.ina.com.anu) and the registration process of a domain name. Others took the opportunity to search other online shopping portals such as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), [www.dstore.com.au](http://www.dstore.com.au) and a demonstration of [www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au) and WebIT was given.

In this, the last section, of the presentation about WebCT, the interest and concentration of the participants began to wane. The venue chosen for this “hands on” task was confined. The “live” connection to the Internet was very slow. A local ISP also gave a small presentation on their range of product offerings. It was very difficult to manage all participants as each browser on the computers loaded at different rates, which meant that people were working at different rates. Given the resources, it would have been better for the participants to view the sites as a presentation.

This part of the presentation went the same way as the former due to limitations outlined above. It was later decided that initial communications would be through the use of the telephone and email.

The second and third workshops were well received. Feedback from Gill Sellar indicated that the participants were happy with the delivery and content of the workshops. During each of the workshops, all participants were willing to involve themselves in all activities. All the participants were willing to ask questions as well as answer any that were put to them. The interest that each participant showed was very promising. However, this impetus was not sustained during the periods between each successive workshop. The participants did not use the bulletin board system nor any of the information that was presented on the initial EIP site at [http://webct-business.cowan.edu.au/SCRIPT/EIP/scripts/serve\\_home.pl](http://webct-business.cowan.edu.au/SCRIPT/EIP/scripts/serve_home.pl).

For the second workshop, it was decided that all the information relevant to the EIP would be hosted on the Albany Gateway site under the E-commerce link. This also included a BBS as well. Gill Sellar did keep in contact with the participants by telephone, however they were reticent in using the news list, email and BBS. Throughout the term of the project, Victor Annamalay had kept in contact with the participants through email, however, none of them had initiated an email. Gill Sellar stated that there was a perceived barrier between the presenters from Perth and the participants. They believed that as Victor lived and worked in Perth, he would be too busy and that they didn't want to impose on him. The participants used Gill as the intermediary to voice any issues or questions that was redirected to Victor. Gill also noted that most of the participants were not only not really ready for the e-commerce process, but were not "active on-line", as in they had little time or inclination to participate in on-line forums, chat channels or other immediate Internet based devices.

### ***One Month Later***

The issue of interactive participation, a fundamental requirement of any community, is the problem. One month after the last of the workshop, the sites that had been work-shopped during the project have been left unattended. There have been no changes other than the initial additions. There has been no other communication; the BBS has not been used. This is indicative of many such community portals that rely on small businesses that need to manage

their own websites. These small businesses do not have the resources (usually time) to spend on any extra workload in this regard. Under these circumstances, the community portal would be better off to offer an outsourced option for the businesses to use.

***Six Months Later***

A survey by phone was conducted six months after the final workshop to determine what affect the EIP workshops had on the participants. (See Appendix section for participant responses) The method of questioning was informal, i.e. by telephone – no eye to eye contact.

The domains that were measured through the use of the phone interview are Knowledge, Skill, Attitude and Adoption (Guba 1989).

**Table 3. Phone Survey**

Knowledge	Skill	Attitude	Adoption
Why did you participate in the EIP?	Do you have a business plan or web strategy?	Are you intending to go online?	Do you think a domain name is important?
Did EIP meet your expectations? What areas did you feel were well addressed? What areas needed development?	Have you registered a domain name by yourself? Would you feel comfortable doing it by yourself?	Do you use email in your regular correspondence?	What kind of strategy would you use to develop presence? Outsourced or self-developed?
Are there any benefits of being involved or having your business on a web portal?	Do you feel confident in hiring someone else to develop your business website? Would you be able to evaluate whether you were getting value for money?	Would you make a purchase online? Would you offer the purchase ability from your site?	Do you think that having e-commerce ability to be beneficial to your business?
How important are search engines in your business promotions?	How comfortable are you at finding information on the Internet?	Are the statistics that your web server's host gives you important for the success of your business?	Have you considered a budget for your online strategy?
Are you comfortable with how the Internet or E-commerce could work for you?	What kind of maintenance could you do personally?	Has completing the EIP Workshop changed the way you looked at the Internet and E-commerce?	What's your next step?

The survey was applied to five of the original 15 participants. The five selected were those that attended all the workshops and had kept in regular contact during the workshops. By the second workshop, four participants had dropped out and did not attend. Two participant businesses had sent representatives that had no “power” to affect change in their businesses; their participation was, perhaps, a token gesture to recoup their cost for these workshops.



Two of the participants were also used as case study examples during the workshop. They were chosen for the survey to see the level of progress they would undergo once the EIP Project had completed. The extract of the responses relevant to the survey is included in the Responses section of this paper.

**Outcomes from this Project**

While the participants generally indicated that they felt that they had value from being involved in the EIP Workshops, as could be seen from the responses, there is still reticence in the move online. Wilson’s WA Machinery is still looking to get their database online, Great Southern Tours have not updated their pictures; Glenlea Farms have not corrected their situation with regard to the use of their domain name. Golden Hill Candles are still developing their web strategy. However, Karma Chalets have developed their new website. This reluctance can be attributable to any number of reasons.

***Knowledge***

From an educational perspective, the participants did learn a great deal in terms of what they could expect from putting their businesses online. They participated in the process of getting a business online, from registering a domain name to using a secure server to take payments. The participants, through the knowledge gained, have more insight in what they can expect to pay for a solution to suit their businesses. There is a more realistic view of what the Internet can offer these businesses currently and how that can be achieved.

The issue of online security decreased, as the participants became more knowledgeable about e-commerce. As the participants progressed through the workshops and they became more aware of the security concerns that are associated with e-commerce and the Internet, their apprehensions began to dissipate. It bears out that the business with better understanding of the benefits and pitfalls of e-commerce or those businesses with more e-commerce ability are more ready to trust it. This confirms the conclusions drawn in the APEC report (PriceWaterhouseCoopers 1999).

No issues about disintermediation arose in any of the workshops. Disintermediation is defined as the reduction or elimination of the role of retailers, distributors, brokers, and other middlemen in transactions between the producer and the customer (Atkinson 2001). The

participants did not believe that they would be affected by any losses in business caused by disintermediation as they considered themselves to be suppliers and producers. It was seen more as a benefit as it afforded them the possibility of more direct access to customers and markets. However they were not aware of how the legality of circumventing the existing channels of supply would affect them. This reflects the level of attention that has been given by the Government to this area and existing legislation.

### *Attitude*

SMEs operate in a very competitive environment and their focus is on economic survival. There is limited motivation to introduce technology unless forced upon by a major trading partner or competitor. The participants are proficient at the simplified forms of e-commerce such as email, however, there is still reticence with integration of e-commerce technology in to their existing business process. While all participants were unanimous in their belief that e-commerce can greatly benefit their businesses, they perceive that the existing telecommunications and IT infrastructure in their region is still immature and incomplete and this belief is also carried over to e-commerce.

Communication costs were a factor in their level of competitiveness. While many of them had personal email, the majority of these businesses did not consider its use as a communication and marketing tool. Many felt that it was inconvenient that they had to be online to send and receive email. They felt that as the fax was always on (connected to the telephone line) it was more reliable and also secure. It was noteworthy that these businesses did not associate faxing as an insecure mode of communication and were quite happy to send private information on it. Their perception of unreliability may be attributed to their experience of having problems with their computer, inadequate telecommunications infrastructure, cost of an Internet connection (ISP costs) and poor access to skilled personnel. There isn't much that can go wrong with a fax machine and it can be instantaneous.

A CommerceNet report identified that four of the top ten barriers for non-U.S. companies in 2000 concerned security and encryption; trust and risk; user authentication; and fraud and risk of loss (CommerceNet 2000). Although the participants did not specifically identify which particular security issues were predominant, they were concerned with security in general. Due

to their limited knowledge of this area, their judgments were based on hearsay and media, which at times, appeared to be sensationalised. The lack of face-to-face transactions with a party that they may never meet because of geographic location was a concern in the ability for the collection of monies on Internet-based business-to-consumer transactions. This apprehension was less for business-to-business transactions. The CommerceNet report indicated that the “collection of monies” was the sixth barrier to E-commerce in 1999, however, this had dropped for the 2000 statistics (CommerceNet 2000). As e-commerce becomes more prevalent between business partners in the regional areas, there will be a carry-over to the business-to-consumer sector as well.

### ***Skills***

The cost of technology, implementation and skilled personnel were considered to be prime inhibitors to e-commerce participation. The SMEs were not aware of the legality and liability issues involved with e-commerce. They felt that it was an important concern but felt that there was not enough information available about these issues.

The participants discussed fulfilment as an ongoing concern and thus, can be considered to be a barrier. The businesses felt that current delivery channels were inefficient and expensive. Concerns about deliveries on a global scale, management of returns, local and international tax regulations affected the confidence in the level of participation of e-commerce. The participants indicated that there was a poor understanding of business processes involved in the move to e-commerce. The participants felt that many of the solutions/solution providers did not understand the businesses. Their fear is that their current business processes may not support the addition of e-commerce. The lack of information about successful business models for SMEs to follow was not encouraging.

### ***Adoption***

“Beating the competition” was one reason why they participated in this project. They felt that by developing an e-commerce strategy, they could provide better service to a greater number of customers that covered a wider region. Being first would also give them a competitive advantage. They acknowledged that an online presence enhanced their business image and could facilitate access to other markets that they would previously have not had access to. They

believed that by having access to other markets, their revenues would increase, however they did not feel that there would be any reductions in costs, as the majority of their customers did not trade online.

Online transactions seem to be in the distant future for all of the participants. The level of distrust of technology was prevalent. Media reports of security breaches have increased the apprehension for these businesses to participate. Even those that had made purchases online were not happy with their experience, although this was due to the poor quality of service and fulfilment rather than technological issues. However, these experiences did have an effect on their decision to participate. In completing the series of workshops, the businesses aimed to be able to take orders and provide customer service on the web. This equates to Level 3 on the 4 level scale used by APEC to categorise e-commerce capabilities of SMEs (PriceWaterhouseCoopers 1999).

Another issue that arose as a barrier to participation was the lack of partners wishing to trade online. There is no incentive for many of these businesses to move online, as they believe that the recuperation of costs are long term and there are no significant benefits in being an “early adopter”. This perception is also a carry-over from the belief that e-commerce is purely direct selling to customers. The major trading partners in the region have invested heavily into the existing infrastructure, which is less focussed towards Internet Communication and Technology due to the inadequate communication infrastructure that has existed in regional areas. As a result, there is less urgency to move online. Until the “major players” in the business-to-business e-commerce infrastructure of these regional areas commit to an online strategy, the uptake for these smaller businesses will be slower than their non-regional counterparts.

## **Conclusion**

There is still hesitation in moving online and the inertia associated with change is predominantly the main reason (Commerce 1999). The SMEs are more cautious of new technology than their non-regional counterparts because of the weaknesses in the technology and

communications infrastructure in these regional areas. While there is a willingness to adopt, the results need to be more clearly measurable.

The participants acknowledged that there were benefits to being associated with the Albany GateWAY (at the very least, a listing on their directory). However, during the time of the project, the Gateway was still very immature and did not reflect the full benefits of an e-hub or e-marketplace. There was no e-commerce solution/model for the SMEs available and the provision for an e-payment gateway implementation was still down the road. The search functionality on the portal was limited and unreliable. A more mature Albany Gateway would encourage greater participation and at higher levels of e-commerce. Bakos (1998) described the function of a market or e-market as being threefold:

- matching buyers and sellers;
- facilitating the exchange of information, goods, services and payments associated with market transactions; and
- providing an institutional infrastructure, such as a legal and regulatory framework, that enables the efficient functioning of the market.

Traditional markets provided the first two functions through intermediaries and the government addressed the third function. However, Bakos states that information technology performs the three functions with greater efficiency and reduced transaction costs. A maturer Albany Gateway could provide the infrastructure to perform these functions, which would present a greater benefit for the SMEs to participate in e-commerce. It appears that when left to their own devices, the SMEs had lost the “drive and interest” that they had displayed during the series of workshops. For “real” adoption of e-commerce in this regional community to occur, there are a number of barriers that need to be removed.

The motivation to participate has to be nurtured. Until there is a critical mass in terms of electronic trading partners for these regional SMEs, the uptake of e-commerce will be slow. E-commerce will remain a low priority for these businesses. Another barrier is technology transfer, which is characteristically a slow process. For a mature technology, adoption and utilisation occurs over several stages, this progression is more complex if the technology is considered to be

immature (Department of Industry 1996). In many parts of regional Australia telecommunications and IT infrastructure is still immature. This affects the reliability of e-commerce technology, which leads to a distrust of e-commerce in general.

Knowledge, in itself, will not encourage these SMEs to fully adopt e-commerce in the short term. Any program designed to hasten the adoption of e-commerce of SMEs needs to focus on the perception of business need, level of understanding and impediment of the physical environment of the region to be successful. (Annamalay 2000)

Building a community online and attempting to make the web portal e-commerce viable were to prove separate issues. Revisiting the project aims and objectives was crucial in assessing performance to date and to regain some focus on what was to be achieved and how the process had worked or otherwise in attempting to make GateWAY:

1. Managed locally (with a management system developed for local needs)
2. Sustainable
3. Simple to maintain
4. Easy to use
5. Appropriate to the users
6. Community based resource
7. E-commerce viable
8. Innovative

By the beginning of the year 2000 six of the eight objectives were in place, or close to being implemented. These were objectives 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8. Items 2 and 7 were nowhere near being addressed. Sustainability and e-commerce were to prove difficult to achieve in the short term.

Pressures from the two committees to start pushing e-commerce to small business, as already discussed, was an issue and despite a lot of theory and rhetoric from government and business development organisations, no one was able to provide a workable e-commerce

application or model from which to work. I felt we were being asked to do what hadn't as yet been done in the community web portal world.

This period from February 2000 to May 2000 was stressful, but it did raise some interesting leadership issues. Two types of leadership were at play in this scenario. The consortia or management committees who were directing a politically driven push for this e-commerce roll out and my own, which was based at the grass roots level and very much dependent on what Kouzes & Posner (2000) refer to as the five principles of successful leadership. They maintain that "Leaders are at their personal best when they are able to successfully, constructively and positively:

1. Challenge the process
2. Inspire a shared vision
3. Enable others to act
4. Model the way
5. Encourage the heart

My main challenge was to maintain the community aspect of the portal and ensure growth occurred in the healthiest and best possible ways. It was here that my meliorist stance and study of organisational learning, an understanding of the basic relationships between the three levels of individual, group and organisation, (Crossan, Lane and White 1999), came into play.

The whole e-commerce implementation issue was premature and poorly handled, but the community development side of GateWAY was growing and producing a lot of interest both inside and out of the region. Before long we were ready to celebrate the Launch of GateWAY on 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2000!



Journal entry: Friday, 19 May 00

## LAUNCH DAY!

Albany GateWAY was launched on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2000 at the Esplanade Hotel, Albany Western Australia. Very nervous, I get to Albany early to go over last

minute details with Chee and Julie. Then down to the Esplanade to assist in setting up and making sure technical side is AOK.

EIP businesses set up stands and displays beautifully. This is the e-commerce Expo we promised them and all went really well. The 15-second video clip ImageQuest put together delivered a punchy introduction.

Senator Ian Campbell (Federal Minister representing John Alston Minister for the Arts and Communications), arrived an hour late and rudely left in the middle of the proceedings. Well we are not really that important are we? So much for rural relations Liberal Party!

My speech went quite well. I tried to acknowledge everyone's efforts and the demonstration of the site went quite smoothly.

A highlight of the Launch was being presented with the 2000 Yellow Pages Asia Pacific IT&T Award for the Best New Innovation in Regional Community trophy by Martyn Wild who had received it at the gala function in Perth.

I was relieved it went relatively smoothly with all the hard work paying off! Flowers from Judy Raudino on behalf of the GateWAY members were a wonderful surprise. All the EIP's were great, as were the audience, helium balloons and wine tasting!

The first real life version of the GateWay site was launched, with News, Community Profile, Personal Profile and Business of the Week being highlighted on the front page.





**Figure 11. Martyn Wild (ECU), Gill Sellar (GateWAY) and Chee Wong (Opensearch) with the Award Trophy at GateWAY Launch**  
<http://www.itawards.com/wa/2000win.htm>

## The Next Stage

The Launch was the beginning of serious work in the full implementation and planning needed to progress GateWAY into a profitable and sustainable future.

Between May and December 2000, the real life of GateWAY started happening. People from every town in the region were trained as editors and various Topic editors came from all over to organise, Agriculture, Arts and Crafts, Business Classified Ads, E-Commerce, Education, Employment, Environment, Games, Government, Health, Indigenous, Industry, Legal, Media and IT, Member Listings, Seniors, Sport and Recreation, Tourism, Training, Travel, Women, Youth and each regional town already had its volunteer editors publishing on a daily basis (see clickable town map on [www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au) home page.)

For the first time I felt like the greater community was starting to understand what we were trying to do and that first and foremost GateWAY was their community portal, where they

could participate (Merriam 1998) and freely communicate. GateWAY as a participative venture was starting to gain and hold considerable value for the community on and off line.

### Community Involvement

Two examples of locally active GateWAY participants were Ben Ellis from Albany and Sarah Liddiard from Jerramungup.



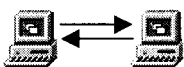
**Figure 12. Photo of Ben Ellis**

[www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/youth](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/youth)

**Ben Ellis**, an 18-year-old from Albany approached me in August 2000, excited about the prospects of becoming involved in GateWAY. Ben took over the editing of the GateWAY Youth site and started designing animated web advertisements and logos for various pages. Amongst a flow of different ideas he came up with were: an on-line shopping plaza, creation of an e-zine and development of a web page for his grocery delivery business he wants to start up. Ben currently works at Coles Albany and has expressed a desire to “get out of there and get into web design!” GateWAY is encouraging Ben as best we can, having lined up a couple of on-line jobs and a possible placement with a local I.T. company, as soon as Ben enrolls in a T.A.F.E. computing course.

I mentioned Ben’s first e-mail correspondence to Chee on ICQ because I wanted to share my growing excitement about the increasing community interest being shown. The ICQ device

had proven to be invaluable, as I could off load concerns, ask questions and regain perspective usually in the course of a single chat session. This needs to be noted, not only as tool for online management, but a record of the management process using the technology it was attempting to get others to use as communications device. ICQ would also be a way to teach remote users/editors online in ensuing months, hence increasing participation and producing a valuable community communications tool.



**gilly** 6/8/00 11:18 PM Hey Chee, look what just came down the tube:

“Hello, my name is Ben Ellis and I am a member of Albany’s often maimed “wild” youth. At the moment, I am working with the Albany GateWAY project, by giving suggestions and ideas on how the GateWAY can be a greatly interesting place to visit and surf from by like me, the youth of Albany, giving them our perspective. I have many idea’s on how the youth of Albany will be able to enjoy more their surfing experience by helping more senior people, understand what WE want to read about and what WE want to look at.

But I am not just full of idea’s, I am currently working on a couple of idea’s in a serious fashion with other involved web designers. Does the thought of a monthly E-zine interest anyone or how about a teen dedicated website full of music, parties, cool links and other various content? Stay tuned...

Ben Ellis

mail: bellis@iinet.net.au

**gilly:** 6/8/00 11:20 PM I’m getting stuff like this all the time.....isn’t it great? This kid is 18 years, stacks shelves in Coles and wants to be a web designer. He really wants to support local Youth through GateWAY.

**c2** 6/8/00 11:22 PM that’s excellent gill just make sure u keep all this organised so we can bring on these resources when needed...and we will need them...

Community participation and ownership of GateWAY were two major premises on which it was built. In Chapters 3 and 4 of this text other individuals demonstrate their commitment and involvement to the project. In presenting these examples I am following the qualitative research methodology on which my work is based. (Winegardner 1999) These



examples, within the larger case study, which my work encompasses, provide “living evidence, which helps to explain the meaning of social phenomena.” (Merriam 1988) (Yin 1994)



**Figure 13. Photo of Sarah Liddiard – Jerramungup Editor**

Sarah Liddiard is typical of many countrywomen. She's a mother, farmer, Jerramungup's librarian, she established the first Farmstay Bed & Breakfast in the Shire of Jerramungup In 1989, and has completed a Dip. in Agriculture with the intent of increasing her management skills in running a farm. The Liddiard's manage three farms (3,500 hectares) running a combination of sheep and crops.

Besides being the PR Officer for the Jerramungup Agricultural Society for two years and an active member of the committee, she has judged at the Jerramungup, Gairdner and Boxwood Shows. Sarah is the President of the P&C Swimming Pool committee, an active member of the school's P&C for the past seven years and been on the town's Tourist and the Townscape Committee.

She is also on the committee to launch a Biosphere Interpretation Centre in a tourist development on the South Coast Highway. Besides this she still finds time to edit Jerramungup's town GateWay pages, study and promote her town with a vision and energy much needed in the farming communities of our region.



E-mail: 15th May 2001 from Sarah Liddiard of Jerramungup

“The GateWAY site is an opportunity that I could not resist to promote Jerramungup. It is a feel good site indicating that the Jerramungup community is alive and well despite the “exceptional circumstances. I wish I had more time to play with the Jerramungup gateWAY site. I have endless ideas to trial but not everyone has my enthusiasm and vision. I have received many comments from people living outside our community about the site. These are the people I wish to attract. Imagine if they click onto the Jerramungup site and leave that site with a favourable impression of our town. What a marketing opportunity not to be missed.

I commend the concept of the whole GateWAY site and its goal to promote the Great Southern. The site is totally affordable and the web page I have designed for the Farmstay ([www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au)) I have been able to link to other sites with ease. I have not had to learn a complicated HTML format just practice live on the WWW.

For country, remote rural communities this portal offers advantages that are still untapped. Every business in the town of Jerramungup needs to be listed on the site with a vast database of information that will encourage people to our town. GateWAY is part of the process required to revitalise our town so that services rebuild. The disparity between services offered to country and city dwellers can be stemmed.”

Sarah and Ben are two examples of hundreds of people who, through using the WebIT DPS, create and provide content to GateWAY on a daily basis. This process and the growing involvement of residents of the region to participate in the community on-line have given GateWAY the apt name of “The People’s Portal”.

Following is a list of some of the people and organisations, which became involved, in the last year:

**Topic Areas:**

- Agriculture – edited by Leigh Gammond from Ongerup  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/agriculture](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/agriculture)
- Art and Crafts – edited by Sophia Gatti from Albany  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Arts and Crafts](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Arts_and_Crafts)
- Business – edited by Julie Wright from Albany [www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/business](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/business)
- E-Commerce –edited by GateWay volunteers <http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/E-Commerce>
- Education –edited by Emma Franklin and Alan Williams  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Education](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Education)
- Employment – edited by Hazel [www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Employment](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Employment)
- Environment – edited by Melinda Lyons from Denmark  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Environment](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Environment)
- Games –edited by Kaye Stott and Geoff Prince from Youngs Siding  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Games](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Games)
- Government – edited by John Seeber from Kendenup  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Government](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Government)
- Health – edited by Debbie Wals from Albany [www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Health](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Health)
- Indigenous – edited by Gwenda and Sophie Hills from Albany  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Indigenous](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Indigenous)
- SRAACC (Southern Region Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee)- edited by Graham Townley from Denmark [www.albanygateway.com.au/sraacc](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/sraacc)
- Industry – edited by GateWay volunteers [www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Industry](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Industry)
- Legal – edited by the Albany Legal Service from Albany  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Legal](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Legal)

- Media and I.T.- edited by GateWAY volunteers  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Media\\_and\\_IT](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Media_and_IT)
- Seniors – edited by Severin Crisp from Albany [www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Seniors](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Seniors)
- Sport and Recreation –edited by Tony Norment, Lisa Edwards and Nicci  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Sport\\_and\\_Recreation](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Sport_and_Recreation)
- Tourism – edited by Katrina Wright from Albany  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Tourism](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Tourism)
- Training – edited by GateWay volunteers [www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Tourism](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Tourism)
- Travel – edited by GateWAY volunteers [www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Travel](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Travel)
- Women – edited by Jeanann Barbour and Janet Owens  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Women](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Women)
- Youth – edited by Ben Ellis from Albany [www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Youth](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Youth)
- General WEbIT editing and new graphics design elements – Amanda Rumble and Nathan Mashman

#### **Towns:**

- Albany – edited by Katrina Wright [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Albany](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Albany)
- Borden – edited by Helen Archer and Pleun Hitzert  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Borden](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Borden)
- Bremer Bay –edited by Terri Smart [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Bremer\\_Bay](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Bremer_Bay)
- Broomehill – edited by Jo, Karina and Jeannie  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Broomehill](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Broomehill)
- Cranbrook – edited by Tina Pope [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Cranbrook](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Cranbrook)
- Denmark –edited by Colin Wright [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Denmark](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Denmark)

- Frankland – edited by Brenda Brown and Betsy Watkins  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Frankland](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Frankland)
- Gnowangerup – edited by Christine Smith [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Gnowangerup](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Gnowangerup)
- Jerramungup – edited by Sarah Liddiard and Elke Grainger  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Jerramungup](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Jerramungup)
- Katanning – [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Katanning](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Katanning)
- Kendenup – edited by John Seeber [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Kendenup](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Kendenup)
- Kojonup – edited by Neil McRae [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Kojonup](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Kojonup)
- Mt. Barker – edited by John Seeber [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Mt\\_Barker](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Mt_Barker)
- Narrikup – edited by Kath Lymon [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Narrikup](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Narrikup)
- Nyabing – edited by Kevin Dickson [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Nyabing](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Nyabing)
- Ongerup – edited by Trish and Enid [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Ongerup](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Ongerup)
- Pingrup – edited by Chrissie Smith [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Pingrup](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Pingrup)
- Porongurup – edited by Carolyn Brown [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Pingrup](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Pingrup)
- Rocky Gully – edited by Brenda Brown [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Rocky\\_Gully](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Rocky_Gully)
- South Stirlings – edited by Kerry Harfield  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/South\\_Stirlings](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/South_Stirlings)
- Stirling Ranges – edited by Pleun Hitzert  
[www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Stirling\\_Ranges](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Stirling_Ranges)
- Tambellup – edited by Eryn Hicks [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Tambellup](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Tambellup)
- Torbay – edited by Greg Luke [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Torbay](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Torbay)
- Walpole – edited by Jenny Willcox [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Walpole](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Walpole)
- Wellstead – edited by Joyce Hall [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Wellstead](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Wellstead)



- Woodanilling – edited by Pam Cooper [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Woodanilling](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Woodanilling)
- Members Listings [http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Member\\_Listings](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Member_Listings)

Many of these businesses have web pages on GateWAY which they edit themselves. All these people were WebIT trained, as were the Topic and Town editors. There are over 100 WebIT skilled people out in the region and more trained every week. It is these people who provide all the valuable content for the “People’s Portal!”

## **Future Directions**

At the final joint committee meeting (Thursday May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2000) at which Edith Cowan University, represented by Martyn Wild, attended for the last time, a series of suggestions for the future direction of GateWAY were mooted. Unfortunately the tense relationships between members of this joint committee, over many issues of “stake” and “agenda”, rather than enhancement of the GateWAY process, yet again proved a harrowing experience.

In my Journal entry 25<sup>th</sup> May 2000, I’ve recorded the uncomfortable repartees and personal postulations of a committee divided which as I have intimated before, was a real draw back from early on in the process. Nothing really came from that arduous meeting and even though I attempted to present my strategic plan incorporating the way forward as I saw it for GateWAY, it became apparent real administrative leadership was not going to come from this group, as it was currently constituted.

The sound community base, which GateWAY is built on, has seen the portal weather a number of both external and internal crises. The options and issues I outlined in my strategic plan and report are critical considerations to the ongoing growth of GateWAY. Serious funding and structural concerns need addressing by the new Cooperative Board. These issues are further addressed in Chapter Five: Themes.

Following is a graphical representation of how I saw the strategic structure for GateWAY’s future implementation. A detailed report is found in the Business Plan in the Appendix section of this work. The model basically works with the GateWAY administration at the hub, responsible for all strategic and management duties. These duties oversee four separate

areas: Accounting and Finances, Marketing and Promotions, Technical and I.T and Training. The three other smaller modules represent the three main administrative tasks of overseeing the daily Management, Moderation and Marketing aspects of GateWAY.

Structure and Function

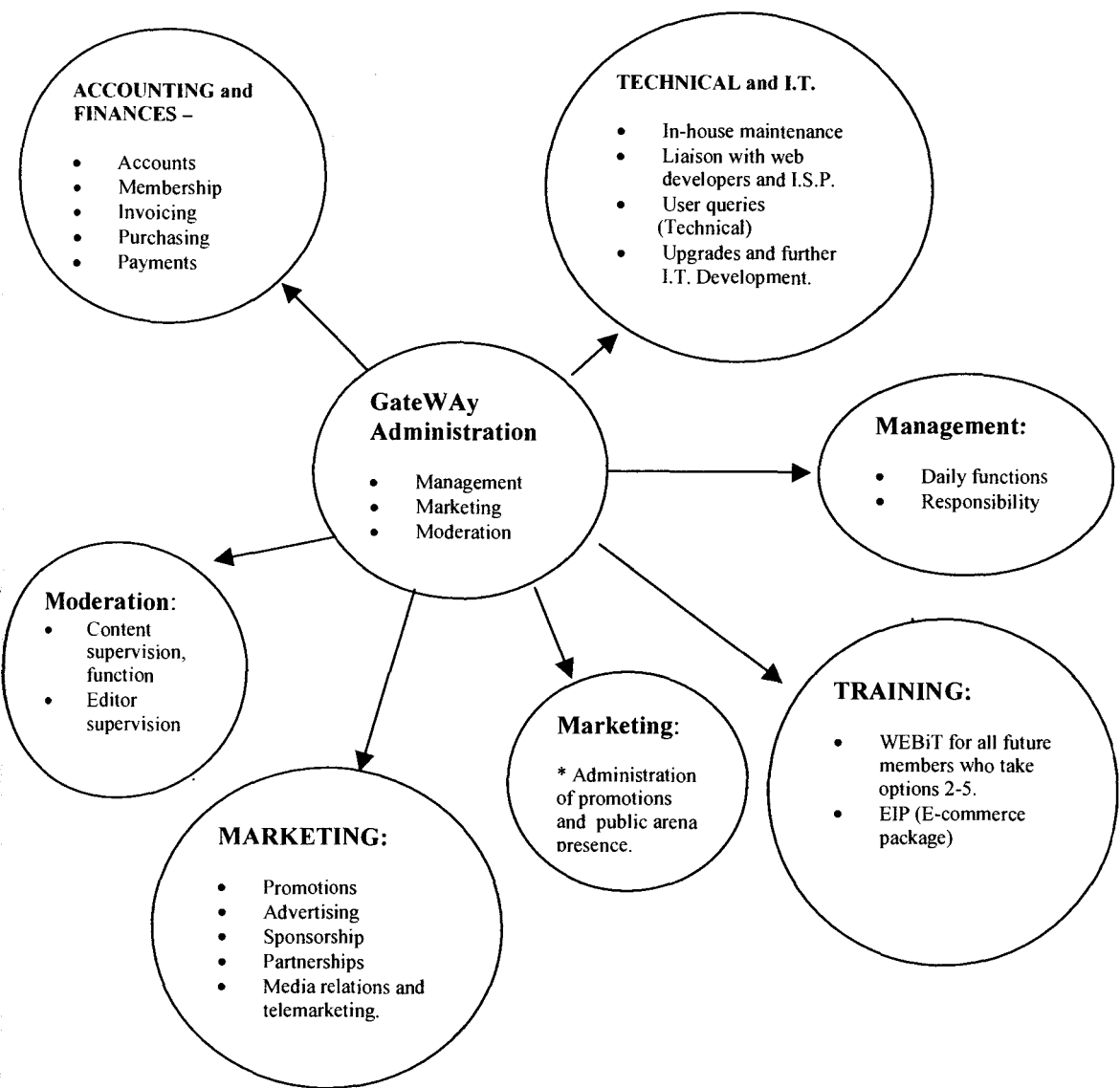


Figure 14. Diagram of Strategic Plan

The local leadership void

I had delivered a functional regional community portal to the people of the Great Southern by the end of May 2000. Effectively GateWay was becoming a “value producing

entity” in the sense it was ‘adding value’ to the ways and means our regional community was enabled to globally and locally interact, online.

I had voiced my opinions about how the new strategies should be implemented, however after the last committee meeting only two members of the original committees and myself remained, Mark Pitts-Hill (Great Southern Development Commission) and Robert Siegel (Albany Business Centre). As Manager I had no voting rights on any decision-making and what ensued was a “flailing around” of ideas and “research” into which way we were to go and who to go with in the I.T. telco line. This was one of the most frustrating times in my professional life!



Journal Entry: Friday, 7 July 00

Morning meeting for the “Future of GateWAY”...at which my attendance was not required. I couldn’t believe what was left of the committee could possibly make any decisions about the future of GateWAY, with none of them actively doing anything for the portal in reality. I heard nothing back that day from Mark or Rob the ex-officio members of the previous steering committee. Seems like another case of “wait and see”, though I must admit the lack of leadership and support from prominent community members has been astounding considering the “goldmine” GateWAY potentially is.

I decided to “go it alone” and commit to further developing the community and media aspects of GateWAY for without that nothing would exist. The portal’s future structure and entity was never far from mind. Somehow GateWAY becoming a not-for profit organisation or company didn’t seem right. There had to be some other structure, which would be workable and suitable. The idea for becoming a Cooperative first surfaced in a discussion with Jan Waterman (future Cooperative Board member), when I had voiced concerns to her over the issue.

I hit a low point after the portal Launch, realising what I really needed was a team to work with on a daily basis, not just reports from a monthly meeting, which often progressed

without my involvement. It appeared that neither of the two remaining committee members, *(both public servants within government funded departments)*, had any concept of leadership strategies, just conventional bureaucratic methods for directing “employees”. In retrospect, I should have voiced my concerns louder and insisted on being kept in the administrative loop. However, the burden of day to day responsibility in maintaining, training, promoting and building the community network took priority. Anyone being asked to manage a community portal must be kept in the loop at all times, given solid support on ground level tasks and allowed a certain amount of autonomy for creative decision-making and strategy implementation.

From a different point of view, I can see that not being involved in the arduous, drawn out meetings which ensued in the months following Launch freed me up to “get on with the Work!” This if nothing else forced me into personal and managerial places I’d never been before e.g. making daily decisions completely without direction other than my own vision and research. This probably wouldn’t have happened, and I wouldn’t have been quite as challenged had it been different. I actually acknowledged a need in myself to “be in control” if I saw something as “my project” and a reluctance to trust others, whose motives and agendas were unclear to me at any given time.

Theories about leadership practices abound with discussions focussing on control and power issues. Daft (1998) describes two important considerations in organisational design relevant to these issues, namely:

1. How to integrate the various behaviours and activities across the parts of organisation, so that they are coordinated towards a common goal: and
2. How to facilitate the flow of information within the organisation, so as to minimize the uncertainty in decision-making at various managerial levels?

The problem I faced was the duality of being in a leadership (therefore control) position without a solid administrative team or committee assisting. When contracted to deliver a set of outcomes one has to “take the helm” irrespective of what support is, or isn’t available. People

need to control for a plethora of reasons, amongst which, fear, ego and greed are three. Max DuPree believes “ it is human nature to want to have power over our experience - to control events and outcomes” (DuPree 1997). He asks “ How willing are you as a leader to truly delegate authority and responsibility? Do you have faith in the judgement and skills of your teams? Can you tolerate, equally, the subsequent failures and successes inherent to the processes of a project?”

I seriously asked myself these questions with regards to my performance, or at least how I perceived it. I believed I was able to delegate responsibilities, but in the early days of GateWAY, to whom? There was no other staff at this point and other than the set technical agreement with Chee and Opensearch, there were no others to assist. I had great faith in the judgement and skills of Chee and the contracted technical crew, but little in the consortia at the time.

I found the final question harder to answer. “Can you tolerate, equally, the subsequent failures and successes inherent to the processes of a project?” I wasn’t sure about being able to tolerate failure of the project, given the personal and professional investment I had contributed, to its vision and growth. This was however an issue I realised I needed to deal with, not only in my professional life, but personally as well.

Reflecting on my motivations at the time, I was driven by nothing other than a belief that “A leader's dynamic does not come from special powers. It comes from a strong belief in a purpose and a willingness to express that conviction.” (Kouzes and Posner 2000.) I felt I had a passionate belief and a vision to make GateWAY work for melioristic reasons.

## **A Way Forward**

I decided to meet with Jan Waterman, President of Albany City Heart to discuss GateWAY’s alternatives. She has valuable experience as a businesswoman with knowledge of businesses and power structures in Albany. We tossed various options around and it appeared a Cooperative model would probably best ensure GateWAY being kept in the hands of the people,

whilst still able to make money and function as a bona fide business. She and I met with John Booth (Chief Executive Officer W.A. Federation of Cooperatives) before introducing the idea of a Cooperative to Mark Pitts-Hill and Rob Siegel, the two remaining committee members. This was the only way after weeks of “going nowhere” down the “regional carrier and possible company structure” paths, we had of salvaging the process. Once the seed was sown the others took it on as there didn’t seem a better proposition, and GateWAY’s first steps in becoming a Cooperative were put in motion.



E-mail: Tuesday, 22 August 00

E-mail from Mark Pitts-Hill to GateWAY interests:

Over the past few weeks we have considered the legal entities that might best serve the longer-term interests of AGW. John Booth from the Federation of Co-operatives presented to us and discussed the financially flexible entity of the modern Co-op. The Co-op model is attractive to us because of its ability to-

attract private investors/preference share holders (business viability)

have voting members that can derive personal benefits and that elect a board (community ownership and protection)

can attract state and federal funds

The committee believed it was very important to ensure that the community asset is protected, whilst having a portal that was sustainable and viable. To be relevant in the IT world, and to keep pace with product-service life cycles, ongoing development of the portal and its applications is vital. Discussions with regional Co-ops have also been taking place to see how AGW could assist them in extending their product offerings to their members through AGW and benefit from an alliance with a regional carrier.

It took seven months for the Cooperative to be finally established and in that time GateWAY grew as a community on-line. Ironically, the lack of top down administration probably left the way clear for a fairly unrestricted editing and publishing environment to develop at the grassroots level.

Implementation of the Cooperative model assisted the possibility of the sustainability and e-commerce issues to at least be addressed in a formal and concerted fashion, with hopefully a more proactive group of people taking administrative responsibility and ready to work with me in a proactive way.

### **Community Building and GateWAY Growth**

Between June 2000 and March 2001 many meetings, events, presentations and on-line developments constituted the groundwork for the GateWAY portrayed today at [www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au)

All town councils and shires were contacted, visited and members of staff trained. The twelve Telecentres in the region were also visited and coordinators and other volunteers WebIT trained. Meetings with government departments such as Education, Ministry of Justice, Agriculture, Sport and Recreation, Family and Childrens Services, Commerce and Trade, Employment and Training, Office of Seniors and various other local government bodies took place during this time.

Community organisations like the Malleefowl Preservation Society, SCRIPT, RIC (Regional Information Centre), Albany Herbarium and Wildflower Society, Staying on Your Feet, Equine Management, Churches, Healers, SES, Albany Hospice, and many more, seized the opportunity for free exposure.

Local wineries, tour operators, growers, small retail outlets, art and crafts people, sporting clubs, hobbyists and special interest groups joined GateWAY to promote their specific areas of interest.

Over 700 pages were created to deal with all these people's needs and requests. Presentations to various groups and meetings spread the word and partnerships with GWN (Golden West TV Network) and The Weekender Newspaper, assisted GateWAY's off-line presence within the community.

Here was symbolic interactionism at work in the community where individuals participated in a communication process through the creation of shared significant symbols. (e.g.



The acceptance of the WebIT DPS as a common tool on the GateWAY platform). The people involved embraced ownership of their portal through a new technological communication system and increased social activity became possible through the role-taking process, as champions/editors/users. This emphasis on interactions among people, use of symbols in communication and interaction, interpretation as part of action, self as constructed by others through communication and interaction, and flexible, adjustable social processes complements the methodological approaches of this work

In these ten months we became a vibrant community on-line and eventually, after much waiting and deliberation, GateWAY became a Cooperative on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2001. The signing of the official papers ushered in the next stage of the GateWAY, with the promise of local representation on the Board of directors and a share float for the regional community to participate in, finally paving the way for the “People’s Portal” to remain and grow as such.

### **The GateWAY Cooperative**

The main objectives of the Albany GateWAY Cooperative Limited are to:

- Promote the principles of cooperation among members.
- Operate Albany GateWAY (an internet portal) that is owned, controlled and managed by residents, community groups and businesses, that have both online presence with Albany GateWAY and a principal residence or office in the Great Southern Region of Western Australia.
- Develop the site content that creates communities of interest and high repeat visitor rate.
- Develop a suite of products that can be sold regionally and elsewhere.
- Employ labour for any part of the cooperative’s operations or carrying out of any company objectives.
- Issue shares in the capital of the cooperative. (Articles of Association of Albany GateWAY Co-operative Limited 2001)

## Albany GateWAY Interim Directors sign

Today (27/3/01) the four Interim Board of Directors for Albany gateWAY, officially signed documentation to form Albany gateWAY Co-operative ~ Bringing the Great Southern on line. To encourage regional participation and ownership, membership will be available shortly. Members will be asked to nominate and vote in directors for the official Board. The GSDC have been actively involved with the project from its inception two years ago. At this historic signing, the GSDC congratulate the efforts of Gill Sellar (Manager), and the many volunteers, who have made gateWAY a vibrant regional Internet portal. (Mark Pitts-Hill— Development Officer GSDC March 2001)



**Figure 15. Photo of Cooperative Board signing papers**

Pictured (left to right) Gordon Thomas (interim chairman) Robert Seigel, Jan Waterman, John Booth (Federation of Co-ops), Graeme Norrish-Katanning absent.

## The Work: Conclusion

The creation of the Cooperative in late March 2001 was an appropriate moment to conclude the writing up of the Work section of my thesis about GateWAY. This date on the spirallitic time line, marks exactly two years since GateWAY's inception and a positive place to conclude this part of the documentation. Even though we've endured the onslaught of discussion board violations, disloyalty and harassment by one of our once trusted editors and problems with local committee leadership, many positive events transpired. New members, editors, businesses

and volunteers have joined, over 100 people have been WebIT trained, and new information published everyday. There is a strong sense of community as GateWAY continues.

I have been conscious throughout this work of my own limitations, not just as a researcher, but as the Project Manager of this exercise in building a community on-line. Jack Whitehead (1989) challenges educational practitioners with the question, "How do I improve my practice?" Part of my role in GateWAY has been that of a leader and educator, and it is in these two main areas I needed to question myself about how I had managed things, dealt with people and performed as a decision-maker.

I believe that a systematic reflection on such a process provides insights into the nature of the descriptions and explanations, which we would, accept as valid accounts of our educational development. I claim that a living educational theory will be produced from such accounts. The idea that philosophers interpret the world whilst the point is to improve it, is not a new idea. I have been urging my fellow academics for some years (Whitehead 1982) to carry out an investigation into their own educational development as they question themselves on how they are improving their practice. (Whitehead 1989)

Self-analysis is probably one of the most difficult processes in life. How can it be anything but subjective, particularly when passionate about something important? From GateWAY's inception I knew I needed to be more than just a project manager or a researcher, as those are merely titles. Improving the way I dealt with people, made decisions and sought assistance with problems were important in my personal and professional development, irrespective of the effects they might have on GateWAY.

A decision to increase my computing and I.T. skills levels and qualifications in the area of both people and management information systems improved my ability to deal with corporate and government entities and with many issues at the community level. Moreover, studying virtual community development whilst attempting to build a community online, provided structure, discussion and analysis at a level at which I otherwise would probably not have engaged.

It is irrelevant which discipline or area of work you immerse yourself in, there is no avoiding the inevitable questions about accountability and effectiveness. There is no other way

to truly assess, learn from, correct or alter dysfunctional actions and move on, than through constructive criticism by others, honest self examination and correction. These are central processes in the evolution of knowledge, network, cultures and markets (Burn, Marshal and Wild 1999) and were uppermost in my mind during the two years of GateWAY's development. I learnt a lot from my mistakes and successes. My responses to these are peppered throughout the thesis in the form of journal accounts and specific references, e.g. pp.136-137 Chapter Four: Reflection and Interaction.

Overall I feel I succeeded in the goals I set the project, and myself, however there were many failures along the way and this account bears testament to these actions, events and outcomes.

There is a point in every journey where one must take stock and decide to look back, even though the present and future demand attention. Joni Mitchell's lyrics (1968) referred to in the first Chapter of this work, and the ever-present spirallitic metaphor, are constant in hindsight. Given all the tasks, highs and lows of the process, I can now honestly answer the questions Amy Jo Kim (2000) posed at the beginning of this chapter:

**Q: What type of community am I building?**

**A:** An interactive community on-line which offers its participants a variety of ways to become involved, access information and skills, and increase their awareness in a cooperative and supportive environment. A place where business and community interests are fostered under a Cooperative organisation, which has a role in developing and assisting the future prosperity of the region by using the Internet and other new technologies.

**Q: Why am I building it?**

**A:** Because if I don't contribute to my community, given the opportunities and education I've been fortunate enough to have gained in I.T and Education, then I would not be fulfilling a role which was meant for me. I also enjoy the challenge of new, innovative projects and GateWAY has certainly presented me with that opportunity.

**Q: Who am I building it for?**

**A:** For the people of the Great Southern region of Western Australia, the visitors from elsewhere who might like to know more about and hopefully visit and do business with our region, and for myself. Becoming involved in community development, particularly in such a new area as the I.T. industry is important work, if I see a future for my family and myself, in a small country town on the southern most edge of Western Australia.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Reflection and Interaction

The key is to make sure we stay open to the synchronistic flow without jumping to conclusions too quickly. Every mysterious event in our lives is a message. If we keep our energy high and remember the truth we are here to tell, the process of synchronicity will continue – perhaps not as quickly as we would like, but it will continue. From our current questions will rise intuitive images of what we can do, and when we begin to take this action, exploring as we go, our flow will always move forward. We will find that most synchronicity comes to us via the truths of other human beings. (Redfield 1997)

Analysis and interpretation of the patterns, viewpoints, insights, events and actions that emerged from considering the themes of the previous chapters, are important tools in providing meaning and resolution, in any process.

I realise my involvement in, and passion for, the GateWAY Project was at times myopic. Is it possible to have passion and perspective when one becomes totally immersed in a task or cause? I probably would have argued this in the affirmative a few years ago, however I feel my closeness to the project altered my perceptions. In this instance I admit to not being as open as maybe I should have been to constructive criticism, or feeling burdened with the responsibility of “breaking new ground”, and in that a possibility of failure. (Williams 1995)

Heuristically my work attempts at highlighting my experience as both reflective practitioner and researcher. My personal experience in developing GateWAY and the records and accounts of participants in this ‘phenomenon’ (Patton 1990. Jacob 1997) led from one event to the concepts and premises the project was built upon and then back to the experience again. It is this ebb and flow, question and answer which lies at the heart of the recurrent metaphor on which this work is based.

The importance of reflection and assessment of one's work cannot be underestimated. Like the image of the spiral I've used as a visual metaphor throughout this work, there is no true learning or progress without change. Ever changing circles, curving back around almost revisiting a previous event or issue and then moving ever forward, symbolise a truth.

Redfield's statement, "We will find that most synchronicity comes to us via the truths of other human beings", is brought to light in the following on-line interaction with a person who had no idea their private e-mail was being forwarded to me (by a third party). This happened only because of his initial negative comments made about GateWAY. How our dialogue started and events that led to an eventual face-to-face meeting are a real example, not only of what Redfield and other current day philosophers write about, but the power of the Internet in forcing change and contemplation.

An on-line activist, Grant Malcolm sent this following e-mail, to his family who lives in the Great Southern. A member of his family forwarded to a friend who was supportive of the GateWAY Project and contemplating becoming an editor. This person forwarded it onto me as they thought I should know what others were saying and thinking about GateWAY.

Even though this process is in a way a breach of privacy it became a valuable "pass-on", as it made me re-evaluate and scrutinise more closely what I was doing as Project Manager.



E-mail from Grant Malcolm 11<sup>th</sup> June 2000

It is I believe, a limitation of the vision driving this project that there is a failure to acknowledge that everyone purchasing an internet connection with web space through an Internet Service Provider already has control over their own content on the internet – WEBiT and AlbanyGateway haven't given it to them. I would maintain that AlbanyGateway is taking a leaf out of Al Gore's book (he made a statement along the lines of his having invented the internet) when seeking to claim they are giving the people of the region control over their own internet content. We have always had that.

What they are saying is, we will not link to your site unless you are prepared to pay for it.

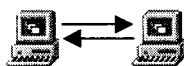
What makes communities on the Internet work is links. Not portals. Free open linking between sites with shared interests and common goals. Any portal or site is only as good as the sites it links to and the sites that link to it. If other sites don't link to you, people won't find you and unless you offer links to other sites sharing similar goals, there is every chance visitors will quickly realise your site is shut off from other related information on the internet and will go elsewhere.

If AlbanyGateway is at all serious about building community online then it will realise that by charging the community to provide links to independent websites in the region, AlbanyGateway is cutting itself off from the rest of the internet where links are free and reciprocal.

Building communities is about empowering individuals to realise and accomplish shared goals. AlbanyGateway has gone some of the way down this path. But as long as it chooses to charge for links to other related sites in the area, it will be an exercise in exclusivity and will not represent the breadth of the community in that region. Imagine if the Denmark Co-op started charging \$10 for each notice posted on the board outside! The community would quickly erect a free notice board elsewhere. It is just as easy and cheap to provide free rather than paid links on Albany Gateway.

The concerns I've raised which were very specifically that Albany Gateway is seeking to charge people in the community for some services with little or no value and that this will cripple the growth of this fledgling online community, has not been addressed.

My initial reaction was to go into defense mode, feeling Grant had not looked deeply enough into our model or understood that GateWAY was attempting to do the very things he criticised us for not doing. I took his comments personally continuing the discussion on-line at [casoca@egroups.com](mailto:casoca@egroups.com), an on-line discussion board created after the Creating and Sustaining Online Communities Conference at Mandurah, Western Australia in March 2000.



On-line Discussion [casoca@egroups.com](mailto:casoca@egroups.com) 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2000:

**Gill:** In response to your comment "and I can well understand it stirring up resentment." Well, that's not the case, I don't resent other people having opinions as long as they let others have theirs. Your comment is welcome and has been noted.



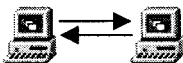
**Grant:** I'll ditto that, Gill. But my apology stands. My private comments were not intended for you or Ian and the harsh tone spoke to my own family about a history of frustration with the Tourism WA website.

**Gill:** I am not complaining Grant, just responding. I feel it is you who might be the complainant, seeing as you seem to think there is some chicanery over all this.

**Grant:** I am complaining. But I don't believe I am suggesting chicanery. I do believe GateWAY is built on a flawed model for creating a sustainable online community – for the reasons I've outlined in the post above and in my last mail to you.

**Gill:** When I was asked to get GateWAY up and running it was a Perth consortia and local steering committee who had already made the decisions about where the \$\$\$ were to go. My job was to try and make the damn thing work (under much difficulty in some instances.) If this hadn't happened we wouldn't have any GW or portal and perhaps some people think that may be a good thing.

Grant's admission to being frustrated with a government run Tourism site gave me a clue as to where he was coming from. If I had maybe asked him to elaborate on his family's "history of frustration with the Tourism WA website", it might have taken the conversation off into completely different territory, but I was affronted and failed to see where Grant was coming from. Ironically, after many hours of on-line debate and one face to face meeting it seemed we had very similar points of view about community and ownership, but that only evolved once we'd vented ourselves in virtual debate.



**Grant:** I have some limited appreciation of the difficulties you must face as I work for a not for profit agency. For three years we provided free access to a comprehensive database of 10,000 community recreation activities via the Internet.

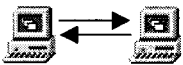
**Gill:** If you think the vision of GateWAY is limited then why not put your hand up to make sure it becomes less myopic?

**Grant:** I hope I'm doing that in some small way.

**Gill:** why not offer to sit on the committee and help your community with something which is essentially to assist them., regardless of the \$\$\$\$ and cents issues. Maybe you have some knowledge to share on how to get a community

portal to be a vibrant thing, without charging anyone, anything. That would really help.

This was a rather ridiculous suggestion on my part, seeing as Grant didn't even live in the Great Southern and in hindsight I was probably reacting at the time to a feeling of lack of administrative support. I distinctly remember feeling pressured at the time to produce a successful, self sustaining community portal (the very concept of which maybe contradictory), and therefore a need to justify the membership fees. Reflecting on this episode, I was still working through my coping mechanisms for dealing with criticism and failure about anything to do with GateWAY and admit Grant became the target of these frustrations for a short while.



**Gill:** this sort of interchange is so important to every community on-line's sustainability, a pooling of ideas is of utmost importance. So thanks for raising this Grant:-)

**Grant:** building communities is about empowering individuals to achieve shared goals. Extrapolating from this; healthy, strong communities are places where the constructive participation of individuals is encouraged, welcomed, valued and active.

**Gill:** I absolutely agree,

**Grant:** But do we?

**Gill:** GateWAY is attempting to "empower" its regional towns and community groups by giving each a free web page and a distributed publishing system facility,

**Grant:** I didn't mention regions, towns or community groups. I specifically referred to "individuals". The people seeking to interact with and participate in community portals are just that; individual people. As long as the portal fails to encourage individual visitors to become directly involved as individuals, it will be an exclusive environment where the value of difference in our community is subjugated.

One of the strongest and I would maintain most negative trends in our society at large is the move towards corporatisation. It is de-personalising and fails to

adequately recognise the diverse needs and very real differences between individuals in our society.

I understand now that GW does allow community groups and towns free listings and I'm delighted to hear it. My apologies for getting the facts wrong in that regard.

Cheers

Grant Malcolm

As our on-line conversations continued I started thinking about Grant's arguments and began considering them. I kept coming up against the fact that now GateWAY had been launched and was functioning successfully, we had to start making money and work towards sustainability. How could a community portal become financially self sufficient if it didn't have charges or costs of some sort? Was the answer to only charge businesses and for profit organisations? What realistically could we hope for in terms of a sustainable future for GateWAY? It seemed most other regional portals were dependent on government funding and in that restrictions applied as no certain guarantee of continued funding seemed a poor business model on which to build!

Grant had made me look more closely at some pertinent issues like, "What did I see GateWAY as, a "cathedral or a bazaar?" and how were we going to sustain GateWAY simultaneously as a community resource and a business?

### **Lessons from Grant**

The outcomes of these weeks of on-line communicating were an acquaintanceship, the discovery of another person with a meliorist point of view in the same area of interest as myself, and a lesson in self assessment. I learnt about dealing with criticism from a stranger on-line, being concerned that my project was under fire and that reaction, before listening and contemplation, is not necessarily the most productive initial response.

Grant's honesty, even if his initial criticisms had been fuelled by another event concerning another website, assisted a genuine reassessment of the criteria, which made up the original premises, on which the portal had been fashioned. He gave me, and therefore

GateWAY, the opportunity for growth through self-examination, which is invaluable in improving who we are and what we do as people. The one main question, which sticks in my mind from this interaction, was, “are you building a cathedral or a bazaar?”

I would like to think GateWAY is and will always be a “bazaar”, where real people interact on-line in a place they choose to come to find community, meaningful interactions and are able to transact on-line. Again the “People” theme takes precedence in this discussion about reflection and interaction. In Chapter Four: Themes I write, “People make Portals and without them as the central theme, portals do not become communities on-line”, and in retrospect this focus has not changed. The numerous different personalities, who became actively involved as editors and volunteers, each have a story to tell and GateWAY gives them the opportunity to tell it.

## **Community Feedback**

Even though Grant Malcolm’s interaction has been used as a case study to illustrate the importance of reflection and evaluation of the project, feedback from various people regarding their initial responses to GateWAY as a community medium came in various ways. These also helped the current GateWAY “look and feel” and other iterative considerations. For example Ron Ipsen, a larrikin Victorian community portal builder, whom I met at the CASOC 2000 Conference in Mandurah, observed the following in an e-mail soon after GateWAY’s launch:



Email from Ron Ipsen Project Manager, Gippsland Community Network, VicNet East ,28<sup>th</sup> May, 2000:

Hi Dude,

well what can I say, congratulations! Designing to meet the communities needs is the way to go. Anyway, you wanted some feedback, in a word “maps” that’s what is missing from your menus, especially tourism stuff simple things like “is Walpole on the corner of WA?”

Graphics tell a lot in a few bytes if they are done right. Little maps showing the roads around the towns, drop down to town maps, later to be expanded to town maps and locations of shops, servos, accommodation etc and stuff. Think about it.

(I have the maps for my region but haven't put them up for internal political reasons.- BTW when you gonna give me your DPS software? :-)

Ron.

Maps. The one constant for any geographically based community online is its location. Ron's observation was right, as the first map of the region appeared to float in space all on its own without geographical reference to other areas around it. Walpole of course is not the last town on the corner of southwestern Australia, only the most westerly town in our Great Southern region. It became clear we needed to change the map to show more clearly where our region's boundaries lay. Another map was created showing clearer state and national geographical location.

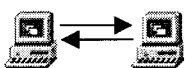
Since Ron's suggestion, negotiations were started for a local mapping firm Geotask, and the Regional Information Centre RIC), [www.scric.org.au](http://www.scric.org.au), to work jointly with GateWAY in creating town and area specific maps for the portal, including GIS capability. RIC is creating and evaluating a simple GIS-related information resource for the region. Specifically, this would involve:

1. Developing experimental web-delivered maps of potential use for the Great Southern region, and carrying out evaluations of their use. In the first instance this would likely be maps of towns in the region.
2. Investigating the concepts and practice of Community GIS – where members of a community collectively update a geographical information as a shared resource.
3. Raising awareness of geographical information issues in the region and the expertise of bodies in the region, like GeoTask, SCRIC.
4. This project will give the region and outside visitors a valuable resource in locating specific information about localities and their facilities. This in turn has potential in

tourism and wine industry promotion, as well as serving the community at a local level, e.g. SES (State Emergency Services)

It is easy to get lost in the mechanics and organisational demands of developing a portal such as GateWAY, and something as simple as a good front page map and others for towns of the region, was initially not seen as a priority. Hopefully, as GateWAY grows and develops these sorts of partnerships with local organisations will see GateWAY become a totally interactive and productive resource.

Ron Ipsen is also recorded voicing some similar beliefs to those GateWAY has been built on. Again his no nonsense approach to empowering and democratising all things I.T. for people in differing socioeconomic groups, is worth mentioning. His e-mail response regarding "Internet Access for small communities" on the CASOC discussion board, December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1999 conveys this message:



Ron Ipsen: Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> December 1999:

In Gippsland (Victoria) we developed what would now be called a "portal" in 1996. It didn't take all that long to discover that any centralised regional approach to information production was a bit of a furfy as no single publishing point could keep track of all of the changes occurring in a vast number of communities.

<http://www.comu.net.au>

In 1997-98 we set out to get the communities to publish their own information. This was done by a "ground up" approach via the telecentres and the ACFE sector. We taught each of these centres to deliver hands on training utilising funding from the "skills.net" program. we then began to teach each centre to publish their own information on their own website.

<http://bi.gips.com.au/neighborhoods/>

<http://www.skills.net.au> – (the skills.net site)

each community was issued with a domain name, a mail server that functioned to that domain name and a web server. The physical hardware resides at a central point but each community has control of and publishes their own information production process and feels a sense of ownership.

each participating community centre (about 40 of them) was issued with free internet access and provides public access through their own hardware. This is in

addition to that provided by libraries etc. We are also moving to support in this same manner communities of interest as well as the geographic communities.

<http://www.herbgrowers.net>

<http://www.landcare.net>

<http://www.ninetymilebeach.net>

Although the html is not great, it is a start and they own it and are building it themselves. We are currently in the process of upgrading the publishing skills within the community and running advanced courses etc. Further work will include the smaller regions as they were mostly not included in the first wave as they did not have an active ACFE centre.

Ron.

Both Ron and Grant assisted my processes of reflective practice, with some of their suggestions eventually being implemented on GateWAY. One aspect of organisational learning is being 'active in continuous conversations and interactions with others'. (Baker and Sinkula 2000) There has been a considerable amount of this type of interaction on and around GateWAY since its inception, with input from other virtual networkers, researchers and participants in various I.T. related communities of interest.

Community Informatics and Community Networking are two emergent areas of both practice and theory in the world. There is a growing group of community networking and community online advocates such as online discussion groups e.g. [communityinformatics@vancouvercommunity.net](mailto:communityinformatics@vancouvercommunity.net) and conferences e.g. Electronic Networks - Building Community [www.ccnr.net](http://www.ccnr.net) and Community NetWorking [www.flexiblelearning.net.au](http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au). These people and online events are all currently contributing to the emerging bodies of knowledge in these areas.

## Problems as rite to passage

Learning from the trials, which beset the project through every curve of its spirallic journey, became crucial in defining greater functionality and the on going design of a better cyber environment for our users. Technical problems such as:

- The accounting package not delivered in full after 6 months of waiting. Still unreliable. At present the slowness of response to any function in the package makes it unusable, even without the programming bugs.
- WEBiT package problems e.g. when in edit mode the time out mechanism cuts in far too quickly. Editors, particularly newcomers find it frustrating when they have spent some time on their edit page, only to be told they have to log in again because the application has timed out. Action needed: increase timeout mechanism time. WebIT drops out with “too many editors” error. What is the limit? Can it be extended?
- Membership identification is reliant on people’s e-mail addresses. This makes things very difficult when 2 people share e-mail address, but wish to register separately. Identification should be some other item such as name or a number.
- No template control of templates or map interactivity through WEBiT, so when we need to add or change information on these parts of the screen we always have to go back to Opensearch. E.g. main map, Denmark wine and food map.
- Search control is not activated in administration section of WEBiT.
- Banner ad control functions, however the 0-99 interval mechanism whereby the regularity of appearance of an ad on the site is set, does not function. All banner ads, irrespective of which interval selected, appear to be on just one random rotation intervals e.g. I’ve tested the banner ad mechanism on 17 ads at one time from 0-99 and there is no marked difference. This control efficiently inserts banner ads onto the screen, but it doesn’t enable setting of intervals.
- Statistics Package – The Statistics Package does not give information in some areas. For example, “no data available” message in the Referrers By section. This may be something



we have not setup correctly-we don't know! It also seems to give erroneous hits information in some cases. I have noticed this in the Pages By/Directory function. I have brought this to the attention of Opensearch with no response. If a member has an external web page and becomes an editor of a Gateway page the system lists their external web page as an option for WebIT editing. Surname is listed before first name on the \$11 membership page.

These were some of the technical problems we faced once GateWAY had "gone to air" as a regional portal. After many hours, phone calls and ICQ interactions we finally started sorting the problems out and now that the GateWAY server is located in Albany and we have our own technical support things are easier to manage.

Modification of the system with more user friendly add-ons e.g. easier log on access to user options and events calendar has been designed. It is essential that local, on the ground support is available and encouraged within a region. Having to constantly go elsewhere for expertise and support, though virtually possible, undermines and doesn't assist in growing local skills and expertise. GateWAY is now committed to encouraging local I.T. talent and plans to run workshops and offer free exposure to these growing businesses.

Problems are integral to rites of passage. Change and growth, irrespective of whether it is social, emotional or technical cannot move forward without the many challenges dysfunction brings. Rites of passage for GateWAY came in a multitude of challenges. One in particular, more than the others, follows in the *Jonah Files* section and addresses some difficult issues all community portals or web sites ultimately have, in relation to cyber governance issues.

## **Cyber Law – Rules and Regulations**

One important area overlooked when developing the technical side of GateWay, was that of privacy and security issues. Attempting to get the portal developed, launched, on-line and basically functioning took the better part of a year. At no time during that process did we discuss legal issues, policy for use of the site or proper disclaimers.

Opensearch inserted a basic disclaimer at the bottom of each page, which read:

The Albany Gateway Disclaimer

## Terms and Conditions of Use

The following represents the Terms and Conditions that govern your use of this Website and the materials and information accessible on or from this Website.

The Albany Gateway as owners of the site may from time to time change this Website (including the Terms and Conditions of use). Your use of this Website means you accept the Terms and Conditions. If you do not agree with the Terms and Conditions please do not visit or use the Website.

1. The Albany Gateway takes no responsibility for and makes no representation with respect to the accuracy of the information on this Website.

The Albany Gateway does not endorse or recommend any products or services on this Website.

2. The information on this Website is protected by the provisions of the Copyright Act (1968) (C'th). Any software available from this Website is governed by the licence term accompanying the file. Nothing in this Web page gives you the right to exploit any intellectual property rights whatsoever.

3. The Albany Gateway makes no representations about any other Website or the accuracy of any content contained in that other Website.

The Albany Gateway makes no representations about information or statements posted to this Website by third parties.

4. Your rights and obligations under these terms is governed by the law of Western Australia.

However, this made no reference to abusive or defamatory postings and bad language, neither did it give users any parameters for unexpected, potentially damaging on-line behaviour, by individuals choosing to violate the site. It was more about ownership and copyright and was by no means a legal document per se and ended up a toothless disclaimer in the light of ensuing events.

Was I at fault as Manager for not ensuring security issues were addressed prior to launch? Could I claim that with the burden of responsibility and lack of administrative guidance it was unreasonable to expect me to have 'covered all bases', particularly future security considerations?

Retrospectively, I had to take responsibility for omission of a proper set of security procedures. In the process I learnt how important it was to technically protect the community's virtual space. Since this incident a number of security protection procedures have been created and installed e.g. abusive/bad language filters, enforced log ins for access to community spaces e.g. events calendar and discussions boards and editing rights to web pages. The following account illustrates how 'user behaviour' can be unpredictable and how it stands out as a negative example in sharp contrast to the predominantly positive, 'user behaviour' witnessed by editors and contributors in general.

The following incident became a defining point in terms of on-line interactive management as well as marked another important point on the development spiral, as GateWAY came of age.

*N.B. This following vignette details the threat posed by an on-line stalker (whose name has been changed). People like this can threaten the sustainability of the community portal by the emotional damage such acts can do to the leadership and participants of a community on-line. In this case we lived through it, learning many valuable lessons about on-line security and privacy issues in the process.*

### **The Jonah Files: A community online under threat**

A strange sequence of events started to unfold, starting 3rd March 2001.

I received this e-mail from a person we'll call "Jonah", an editor who had moved from the Albany region to another country town outside the Great southern region, and had begged to set up a GateWAY site there.



E-mail From: Jonah

To: keeper <keeper@albanygateway.com.au>

Subject: Why have my pages got links to sex on them

Date: Saturday, March 03, 2001 12:13 PM

“Gill, where are my pages and why have they got links to sex sites on them, I am getting a few nasty phone calls here , what the hell is going on , if this is a way to get Better RATINGS keep me out of it , I am not interested , Gateway has gone to its lowest yet.”

This first communication about any violation of the GateWAY editing system came as a bit of a shock, seeing as Jonah had appeared to be an ever vigilant, contributor to GateWAY, and on the surface, not someone who would abuse the trust he'd been given as an editor.

Initially, it seemed like someone had accessed the passwords to his site and linked the porn site [www.ampland.com](http://www.ampland.com) behind his front page, horoscope section. This was very strange seeing as Jonah had been the only person trusted with the log “ins” and passwords for that site, and unless he had given them out, there was no one within reason that would have been able to tamper with his work.

I started getting phone calls and e-mails from people saying someone was posting abusive messages on our main discussion board and all my Saturday was taken up with attempting to find out who and how this had happened.

My reply to Jonah's initial e-mail reads as follows:



Email to Jonah: Saturday, March 03, 2001

From: **keeper@albanygateway.com.au**

Hi Jonah,

as you can see from the time on this e-mail it is very late.

I have done nothing but answer calls and go into total damage control over what's been happening on your site.

This whole saga has really damaged GateWAY and maybe it's best to shut the site down totally. Maybe you could tell the various community people what's happened and soon, hopefully, they'll have their own web portal to go through.

I will be doing a diagnostics test with my web technicians on Monday or Tuesday and even though it'll be a heck of a lot of unnecessary work, I found out tonight we'll be able to locate the exact DNS server which will tell us which computer the person who put up the porn stuff came from and they will be dealt with duly by assessing the ISP addresses used in the "porn" content upload. The ISP can then tell who it was. Isn't technology incredible?

I await your reply about shutting the site. There's been foul play and we cannot afford this any further. Got to check the facts!

Gill:~)

Why was this happening? It's not as though GateWAY was some political or religious activist site set to attract dissidents. Who would bother with our small community portal and why? What were the facts and how was I going to manage this intrusion and abuse of editing privileges? These questions haunted me for quite awhile before and after the incident.

I began to wonder who I could trust as a different twist on the story started, like a second thread, when Jonah e-mailed me again to complain about another GateWAY editor, Rob Daniel, whom he disliked.



From: Jonah

To: <keeper@albanygateway.com.au>

Subject: What is with this guy

Date: Sunday, March 04, 2001 10:31 AM

Gday Gill ,

honestly what is with this Rob Daniel , here is his last email to me .

"ITS FUNNY Jonah, SOMETIMES EXPOSURE LIKE THIS MEANS PEOPLE WILL TALK ABOUT IT EVEN MORE, and go in for a peek anyway. Most publicity ends up being good publicity, eventually, even if it starts out looking

like a disaster. Best thing to do is to get it into the local newspaper, even an interview on the news. Most people understand how a site can be hacked into, the rest is free publicity. Turn negative into positive maybe!

catch you soon, danny

This guy is really getting under my skin always trying to make a story ie: the syringe he found whilst he just happened to have a camera , take a look at the photos and go ask a pharmacist if that is a syringe in the picture , could it be Rob himself after his big breaking story and because I gave him a hard time about this negative story thing , has he access to my passwords Gateway has been running so smoothly until recent , WHY IS THAT ?????”

Jonah indirectly attempted to plant a suspicion that Rob Daniel had tampered with his site, after having e-mailed me several times about his dislike of Rob’s style of journalese.

It became patently obvious a case of rivalry and misunderstanding has arisen in Jonah’s mind, as he felt he and GateWAY are being “wronged” in the way Rob Daniels writes his articles. Jonah was scornful of Rob’s writing and he wanted me to “shut Rob down” from having a say, in fact from being an editor. I declined. I informed Jonah that everyone has a right to their opinion and that Rob was contributing a lot to GateWAY by creating and maintaining The Paper, on-line newspaper, site.

[www.albanygateway.com.au/home/the\\_paper](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/home/the_paper). Jonah became livid!

After this the main discussion board started going wild with postings such as “baydot.com sex site, better than GateWAY by far”. Whoever posted this obviously tried to implicate the baydot.com people in this posting and this sparked the following e-mail from a Ron Coleman, owner of baydot.com an ISP and computer shop in the town to which Jonah has recently moved. Jonah had previously mentioned Ron on a couple of occasions, saying that baydot.com was stealing his ideas and “against GateWAY” Rob Coleman instigated the communication to GateWAY in a simple message saying:



“please ring me (phone number was given)

from Ron Coleman”

I called Ron and he filled me in on how Jonah had supposedly been operating and using GateWAY to muscle in on the action in their town. He told me Jonah had threatened him with legal action if he didn't “pull his head in” on one occasion. Then he told me Jonah intimated he's going to link a porn site to GateWAY to really cause us some trouble!

Jonah's behaviour seemed way off beam here, as the lines between what the real issues were regarding his upsets and those imagined issues became blurred. I started suspecting Jonah as starting to play the saboteur, foolishly thinking he would not be traced or touched hundreds of kilometres away from Albany, or that after his relatively good track record as an editor we would even suspect him!

I decide to e-mail him back:



Hi Jonah,

GateWAY is obviously posing a threat to some locals over that way. Now that they have been federally funded for their own portal development maybe it's a good idea to just let them get on with it. As has been pointed out to me last night, our Great Southern GateWAY is not your region's portal and should probably not be trying to represent people in another region. If your local people are so keen on self-promotion let them go for it. Our GateWAY is NOT to be dragged into anymore of this conflict.

I've no idea how things got so out of hand or how communication was handled or mishandled. Again I'm too far away from the setting and know noone really over that way. I appreciate your efforts in attempting to establish GateWAY in that neck of the woods, but given the circumstances would appreciate all official statements or information disseminated about GateWAY to come through me first. Your site was not solicited by GateWAY and when our new Cooperative's Board is formed they'll probably ask why we've got a presence there when it's not directly part of our charter.

You mentioned about being time challenged at the moment. Maybe just see to yourself and not be too concerned about the Esperance site. As you said your new studies are very demanding and even just keeping up the boating and fishing aspect is time consuming enough.

Cheers,

Gill:~)

Jonah doesn't answer any of the questions asked of him, but replies:



Gday Gill ,

ok then shut the site down.

Yep why not get rid of the site I have now lost interest , and you are so right people are free to air their own opinions and I will voice mine , if its good publicity for gateway this public slanging match in have your say well so be it only for the (GOOD OF GATEWAY) of course , more hits no worries lets get this site rocking .

I wont be free of Gateway till I have sent you a cheque back & I hope to have it back to you really soon, (This is reference to a cheque I sent Jonah to help him enrol in a tertiary computing course at a local College. He had written to me saying he didn't have the money, but would have loved to do the course. Seeing as Jonah had been a very proactive editor and spent a lot of his time and effort in getting a particular GateWAY hobby site up and running I decided to personally help him out.)

Thanks, Jonah

“GONE FISHIN”

In future communications Jonah never admitted to being consulted on the pending closure of his site, having a tendency to twist everything he perceives into actuality of the moment. This is interesting because Jonah took on a variety of personas during the saga while maintaining he didn't post or e-mail as other people. We finally gained electronic proof of this through I.P



(Internet Protocol) tracing via local ISPs (Internet Service Providers), but again the law had no jurisdiction for this type of on-line behaviour.

I reply with:



Jonah

you sound so angry, this isn't about me and it isn't about HITS FOR GATEWAY!

You wanted to set up your site and were not asked by GateWAY management to do so!. I, as always, have tried to encourage you, but somehow sometimes you get the wrong end of the stick. Like you thinking your stuff wasn't being published, until I put you straight on that one last night re: having to be away and handing the moderation and publishing over to keeper2.

If what you've just written to me is what you really believe and want to do then it is you who is pulling the pin on yourself, not me. I was just trying to suggest some options for you, it was not a "GateWAY management "decision at all.

What's really the problem Jonah?

Gill:~)

Then personally abusive postings began.

Jonah went berserk on a daily basis with accusations and messages like:

"[www.albanysexWAY.com](http://www.albanysexWAY.com), [albanypornway.com](http://albanypornway.com), [www.albanysexWAY.com](http://www.albanysexWAY.com)" and "hope a child molester doesn't see this" and then posted my home address and phone number after he had threatened my daughter and me on-line. Jonah's obsession with child pornography and the need to have sexual references in just about anything he posted, portrayed a sick person in need of some immediate help. Jonah started emerging as a "Jekyll and Hyde" character, masquerading one moment as this really concerned 'community minded guy and then as a disgusting poster of abusive and threatening messages in e-mails and to discussion board topics.

What could I have done at this point? This saga had started effecting my personal life and I felt like I had to protect two children, my daughter (since his threats were also aimed at her) and GateWAY.



E-mail from Clift Walsh (alias Jonah): 27<sup>th</sup> March 2001 1:05pm.

What a Phunny Phucka you are

Hey how old is your daughter .

What does she look like

Do you know everything about me

This e-mail was closely followed by another from “Lou Reed” (alias Jonah) which has a photograph of a group of prisoners in prison greens and newspaper clipping, detailing how one of them robbed a Roadhouse, rammed Police vehicles and injured Police.

These particular e-mails had a profound effect on me as I saw them as personal threats, albeit indirect, but once the hoax phone calls started I felt like I was being forced to take part in a drama, not of my making. At this point I started feeling drained and for the first time ever in the history of GateWAY, I felt like giving up.

Jonah continued to accuse other volunteer editors of undermining him, and calls them various defamatory names. No one on GateWAY was responsible for any of this as we checked and double-checked with editors. They had no reason to “bring Jonah down”. It was all in his head! He was relentless in these postings to the point where two discussion boards had to be closed down permanently.

The Albany Police were informed and we started the electronic tracing of IP and ISP addresses. I called on some people at the state government's Office of Information and Communication to advise on what to do.

Official e-mail from Gordon Walker (Department of Commerce and Trade)



From: Gordon WALKER <[gowa@commerce.wa.gov.au](mailto:gowa@commerce.wa.gov.au)>

To: <[keeper@albanygateway.com.au](mailto:keeper@albanygateway.com.au)>

Sent: Thursday, March 08, 2001 1:19 PM

Subject: GateWay Hacking Problem

Gill,

As discussed there are two main issues with the hacking of the GateWay site.

1. Security

The server hosts (OpenSearch) should be required to confirm:

- a. That all patches, security processes etc are up to date
- b. The capacity of the server – specifically if it is able to cope with the “hacker practice” of trying to overload the server and obtaining entry by that means
- c. Do they have a security policy in place that specifies strategies, procedures, quality control, who has access and when etc. Albany GateWay should also have its own security policy in place particularly given the “distributed management system” utilised for updating of the site.
- d. The security policy is particularly important as 60-70% of hacking occurs from “internal sources”. In this case that refers to people who have access/publishing rights to the GateWay as well as the people at OpenSearch.

I have discussed the matters above with OpenSearch however you put these issues to them formally.

It would be prudent to “shut down” the Albany GateWay site until the breach is identified and corrected. However as I understand that this is a particularly difficult solution at the moment then perhaps an alternate solution is to suspend the access/publishing rights of all except (say) yourself and possibly a select (higher level) group of others.

## 2. Legal Action against “hacker”

a. OIC’s role is policy and planning and we have no direct role in operational issues. There is no other body in Government apart from Police Services that does. I have spoken to the Computer Crime section in Perth and the appropriate process is to report the matter to the local “police management unit” if you wish to pursue this.

b. I understand from other sources that the police attitude in general is that it is expected that the customers “house should be put in order” as a first step.

c. In relation to c. apart from ensuring adequate security is put in place it is necessary to “secure the electronic evidence”. In essence this means getting copies of all computer logs, access times etc. A “certified master copy” should be made of the evidence by “sealing the copy” with a signed note stating the date and time, and by whom the copy was made. It must be ensured that this “certified master copy” is not accessed for any purpose whatsoever (apart from court evidence).

d. You should consider the use of a consultant who specialises in security issues of this type to advise you further.

A further issue of Legal Action against the “server host” arises. I don’t know if you were considering this step, but if you were, then I understand that civil action would be required.

## Disclaimer

The information above has been provided from information gathered in the course of enquiries and is believed to be true and accurate. No person or organisation should act on the basis of the content of this email without taking appropriate advice. Neither the Department of Commerce and Trade nor any of its staff accepts responsibility to any person or organisation in respect of the content of this email

Regards, Gordon

Gordon Walker  
Senior Project Officer, OnlineWA Communities  
Office of Information and Communications

Dept Commerce and Trade  
Tel: (08) 9327 5664 Mobile: 040 844 3603  
Freecall for Country Customers 1800 628 767

It was here that some serious points had to be considered:

1. What powers does a portal manager have when someone violates the portal?
2. How effective was a disclaimer when someone continually ignored the warning therein?
3. What constitutes an effective disclaimer?
4. How does one enforce the rights of all other community on-line members to have freedom of speech, when one or two people continually post inappropriate material on the community discussion boards?
5. What existing laws protect people from abusive on-line behaviour from a perpetrator?
6. Are there such a things as cyber laws, and if so what are they?

Despite Gordon Walker's suggestion to "shut down" the Albany GateWay site until the breach is identified and corrected", I couldn't bring myself to do it and decided to keep a 24 x 7 surveillance of the portal happening, with assistance from Amanda, Ben, Katrina, Danny, Steve, Gordon and Rachael.

I had appointments in Perth the weekend all this started to happen. Following is Amanda's account of what transpired from the 5th to the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2001, in my absence. It not only showed the great diligence and concern of these "volunteers", but it is also an illustration how each of these people cared enough about their portal to prevent everything from going under. It also made me realise how important these people were to the life of GateWAY. This was the one of the many signs that GateWAY was in reality becoming "owned" by the people of the region and a real example of shared vision and protection of a community asset. If they didn't feel something important to them was under threat, then why would they have bothered?

*(What follows are the e-mail records from Amanda Rumble, a GateWAY editor who was responsible for moderating the site whilst I was away. The whole list of e-mail interactions is included here in its entirety depicting the chain of events between Amanda and other GateWAYers. I felt it was important to include it all for authenticity and to illustrate the emotion the Jonah event generated.)*



E-mail from Amanda Rumble 10/3/01:

**Ok, let's begin 05/03/2001**

First thing I received is that e-mail from Jonah with two of Gill's messages attached...we've all got copies of that!

Then later that night...(recreating the scene of the crime here)

Danny called me at 12.23am to say that some one had posted the passwords on GateWAY. I sent Danny an e-mail...

**12.23am (From Amanda to Danny)**

"Thanks for your call – sorry if we were a little on the sleepy end...understand the possibilities of the actions here. Gill's in Perth.

Will be on for 20min to cleanup – SMS or send me a e if you need to chat, any ideas who???"

I then sent an e-mail to Rachael Thomas saying:

**1.25am (From Amanda to Rachael)**

"Don't even look at the time this was sent – I got a call in the middle of the night from Danny (Rob Daniel) to say that someone had published all the gateway editing usernames and passwords onto the main discussion board. Gill's in Perth as you know for a few days...so I went into admin to delete a few messages to say the least.

Perhaps first thing tomorrow morning, can you give me a call (I'll call Gill as early as possible) and we'll try to organise some damage control from this end, ok!?! Not really sure how to deal with this one – I know it's a really serious issue, as Jonah is editing other pages that he's not allowed to by guessing the username and passwords etc etc etc.

Just really need to know how we can change some of the security settings into gateway (eg. the first grey box that appears), and how soon this could happen? Perhaps I should try and chew on Gill about it first – as Opensearch will probably have to do the work.

If this is a little confused, I'll explain more in the morning – I haven't learnt how to get the brain functioning with less than four hours sleep, sorry...Talk tomorrow,”

Then I spent quite a while reading through the discussion board messages – getting into the admin section and trying to remember where the delete function was for the messages on the discussion board.

Then I sent a message to Danny to keep him in touch with what was going on...

#### **1.48am (From Amanda to Danny)**

“Ok, checking in with you – thanks for the call...action has been taken and the offending messages have been removed.

Like you said there are still a few problems, which I will be attempting to deal with tomorrow ASAP (as soon as my eyelids open enough to dial the phone). Please leave this problem with me to deal with – I'll hand it over to Gill and it'll go from there.

Keep me posted ASAP if anything else appears on there – I'll be right onto it until Gill gets back from Perth Wednesday, ok?

Thanks again, sleep now!”

Then I thought I'd better check in with Ben to see what had gone on during the day...

#### **1.55am (Amanda to Ben)**

“Not sure if you'll remember me, I work closely with Gill on the GateWay work and have similar privileges to you in regards to the admin section...

I'm interested in the whole “putting gateway's passwords and usernames” deal on the discussion board over the last few hours tonight. You stated that you have

removed some offending material earlier in the day – what was it? Have you got a copy of any of the messages before you deleted them? Any ideas as to how you know that it's just a guy posting usernames etc onto the web?

Please let me know whatever you know about this whole ordeal, and we'll try and get this side of things sorted out ASAP. Thanks for your help on monitoring the discussion board – e-mail me with any further problems there and please don't forget to take a copy of whatever you delete.

Hear from you”

Ok – that was day one of hellishness – let's proceed into day two!!!

Here we go 06/03/2001

**9.30am**

I call Gill in Perth on her mobile for about 25 minutes to discuss problems regarding last night's dramas, oblivious to what's on the discussion boards now.

**10.00am – approx**

I call Danny to check in with him – find out the latest of the bad news...

**10.15am – approx**

Call Rachael – fill her in on all the details, haven't made any major decisions yet!

**10.25am – approx (just checked my e-mail)**

Just found Ben's reply to me e-mail send last night...(e-mail written at 9.23am)

**(From Ben to Amanda)**

“Hey Amanda.. sorry bout last night. I was talking to Katrina Wright yesterday afternoon and she was saying that the message board was getting pretty wild so when I got home, I decided to have a look. I saw people going ape due to the simple fact that someone guessed someone else's password.

I posted a few messages telling everyone to chill out and all that happened was a small security breach... ie the password was easy to guess therefore easily fixed.

A few people got upset and before I could explain myself fully, a post was made detailing the “gateway\_user” and “a1g2p3” information including putting someones name in front of the “@gateway.com.au” and the password “password”.



I accessed myself to the discussion board (i had never moderated a board before) and from there deleted the message. Seeing Steve couldn't contact Gill I made a decision to remove most of the flaming. Jonah got annoyed and when a message was posted by someone saying they were going to publish passwords onto other websites, I pulled out the guns and tried to chill the situation. Although apparently these messages were a hoax but I don't want to comment on what could happen in the future. As I have admin stats, I would be happy to help with re-assigning passwords and other tasks if need be.

I could help do this at the business centre voluntry if I were to be allowed when im not working at Coles.

Please feel free to forward this email to all fitting recipients.”

(Comment: I found out that a large number of e-mails were posted onto many of the discussion boards, so...)

Then, I wrote another e-mail to Danny...

**10.33am (Amanda to Danny)**

“Thanks – onto the delete key as we speak – I’m going to ask Rach to “suspend” all the discuss boards until new security in place – what do you think?”

(Comment: Gill has got a copy of the piece of paper of a large number of the e-mails that were posted onto the discussion boards, their titles, “Passwords” and “We will hack you” – and the times down to the second that they were submitted. Danny, Rach and I had to make a decision about what to do because people still had the potential to get into WebIT with the old system passwords – so we made a drastic and highly difficult decision! So I called Rach – and said delete them all, and so they disappeared!)

Another e-mail to Danny...

**10.52am (Amanda to Danny)**

“Chill out – password will change VERY soon, Rach is deleting boards as we speak...not the best way but it's fast.

E-mail me any updates,”

**11.01am**

“It's been done – no worries now – try login in again.

Call me if you can still get in with the old details – I seriously doubt it, what a relief hey?”

In reply to Danny’s message...

“Definitely, right away! Don’t give this dick head a box from which to sprout!! :) rob”

Received this message from Rach...

**11.02am (From Rachael to Amanda)**

“Hi Amanda,

All Discussion Boards have been deleted. The only ones left are the Farmers one and the Home Page Comments. I had to delete the seniors one because it was a child to the main one, it hadn’t been used since August last year!

As soon as we have the new password, we can begin putting them back up.”

E-mail Rach to keep her posted (currently we were waiting for the new password to come into affect)...

**11.27am**

“New passwork is now in effect – thanks heavens...I was beginning to get a little nervous! We still can’t put the discuss boards back up, remember that ANYONE can write to them...the security problem has been fixed (so no-one can give out the new password) but they can still post all sorts of crap...

Perhaps there should just be one – from the main page, that you Danny and I can monitor as much as possible, that way people can still have their say about what’s going on...what do you think?

Then again, maybe we should just stay away from doing anything until Gill comes back – your call...

Thanks for dealing with this stuff ASAP, now all we have to do is pick up the pieces and grow stronger!



I sent another e-mail to Danny...

**11.32am (Amanda to Danny)**

“Thank heavens that one is sorted – now we’ll just pick up the pieces and start over. All the discuss boards got seriously killed – we’ll built more though.

What do you think about the idea of ONE board on the home page, now that there are no problems with people giving out the now unusable password – and you, Rach and I will just keep a close eye on it – and axe it if it starts getting nasty, what do you think? That way people can still have their say – and we’re not crumbling under the pressure of one person’s actions.

Let me know what you think...”

This message is in reply to Danny’s message below mine...

**11.46am**

“You forget – there is a security feature that bumps you out after 20 min if you haven’t done anything...

Regardless of all this crap – you still coming to this launch/lunch Thursday 12.30pm with the core editors? Well, you have to, you’re our main man! How’s the content filling going of the site’s new pages? Slow but steady hopefully – with a bit of luck we’ll have everything ready to launch by the end of the week.

Keep me posted, have a great day!”

**(From Danny to Amanda)**

Hi Amanda, all secure again, and the new password is active.

Nice one! Depends now how long whoever it is stays within the site before he logs out, as to how much damage they can do.

Gill mentioned bringing the discussion boards back online as is straight after the new password starts working.

Sent Rachael another message...

**12.00pm – Noon (From Amanda to Rachael)**

“I’ve just been into the home page touching it up – and writing that new item Gill wanted me to put in, re the security issue.

Could you please publish it as soon as you get half a chance?

Danny also thinks it's a good idea to have ONE discuss board off the home page – perhaps just start another general one? I'd be happy to keep an eye on it (Danny too) to monitor the “content” until this saga cools down, what do you think?

Thanks for your help.”

Then took quite a few hours off the computer to cool my head (a little brain fried – medium crispy), until the evening...

Received a bulk message from Steve Brooks...

**7.55pm ( Steve to Amanda)**

“After Last Night’s Problem (5/3/2001)... We will go on...

And to all Admin of Town Page’s Please go to your Have Your Say page’s and Delete the *We Will Hack You*

because to Tourist or Visitor’s to the area having a look at your site don’t want to read thing’s like that im sure...

Over the Next Few day’s it’s going to be fairly busy as GateWAY’s Main page is going through major change’s and this problem has troubled us..

If anyone would like ANY Assistance please don’t hesitate in contacting Me (Steve Brooks) or Ben Ellis

and we will try our hardest to assist you....

also please let’s remember

Albany GateWAY is a Community Project and let’s keep it this way...

Thank’s”

Another e-mail to Rach, in reply to her message below...

**10.02pm (Rachael to Amanda)**

“Basically Jonah sent an e-mail out to all the people he could think of that are even remotely involved with GateWAY – about the Esperance site being closed down. Just explain to these people – that it was a chain e-mail that did not interest them, and was not intended for their reading anyhow...

You received the e-mail from Jonah too – called “Gateway Site Closure” 5/3/01, check your messages online – don’t pay it any attention though!

Hopefully we're through the most of the crap re passwords etc, but there's still heaps to sort out – thankfully Gill's back tomorrow night, so it'll get dealt with then I guess...

Thanks for your help pulling this thing back together,”

Another day gone – now we're up to 07/02/2001

Danny sent me an e-mail asking if we could salvage any of the message from the now deleted discussion board (sorry I think I deleted this message...)

My reply went as follows...

**11.24am (Amanda to group)**

“Hey – it was all or nothing unfortunately. You can't remove a board without deleting EVERYTHING in it! I know it's a real shame, but what do you do? Have you moderated (removed messages) from the NEW discuss board? It's looking pretty blank...what's going on there?

Talk soon, otherwise see you at 12.30 Fredrick House tomorrow.

Let's fill in the time gap a little here – so far ONE discussion board is up on the home page, on the proviso that Danny and I monitor it constantly (a deal Rach, Danny and I made)...things still going ok.

An e-mail I received from Danny...

**4.53pm (From Danny to Amanda)**

“Hi Amanda, no i haven't removed anything from the board. That's strange, because after I took the discussion board off the page I went into somewhere and read some of the messages to ensure they were still there.

I presumed by this that they stayed in the system.

There must have been thirty off messages deleted that night, by ben i think, and i waited around to see what would happen. I suspect Jonah passed out, but the last message on the board was from the person giving out the passwords. That was deleted, but I stayed up a bit longer and they re appeared. That was when I went in and deleted the discussion board from the page, merely intending to take away the opportunity for others to “invade” the site. I knew I wouldn't be able to stay awake all night!

I've seen the results of hackers in a site for just an hour or so, the site never recovered! I was aware of this, and really made an on the spot decision.

Probably the wrong one as it happens, but who knows what would have happened over night if it had all been “open”. The site could have been gone by morning, as I really thought it was Jonah and believed he had ALL the passwords and could do as he wished. or not. I really didn’t know.

bugger.”

Then I got a call from Gill to say she was home – so I won’t bother unless absolutely necessary to add all her messages and my reply’s onto here.

### *End of the events – or so we hope...*

Sigh, I hope the reconstruction of events above are helpful to any investigations etc that are made. There is more detail that could be filled in by Danny, Ben, Wayne and possible Rachael if necessary – as I dare say we were the main onlookers of the chain of events over the last few days...

In trust and respect,

Amanda Rumble

This account of events serves as an accurate record of one of the major events during the Jonah incident. I included the whole set of emails as an archive for future reference and a clear example of community spirit and commitment. It also serves as a real example of participant behaviour being influenced by a sense of responsibility and ownership. At this point I realised how important GateWAY had become in the lives of some of our people and in that we had succeeded in bringing some of the region online in a valuable way.

On Thursday March 8<sup>th</sup> I received a call from the District Education Office saying that “someone” has called them to say Albany Primary School’s site has been linked to the porn site. Ironically, I received an e-mail from Jonah on the following Monday 12<sup>th</sup> March, saying: “So when I found out about the Albany Primary School Saga along with other links made to porno on the same page I contacted the Education Department and directed the operator to the appropriate site.” Jonah now started implicating himself further by still pretending someone else was responsible for these violations, whilst making sure he was seen to be playing “hero” by calling the Education Department, to ‘warn’ them.

Jonah was a fool to think we didn't already suspect him sabotaging his own site and he was only confirming this suspicion by continually contacting others, either by phone or e-mail about the "problems" GateWay was having under the guise that he's just "trying to help".

I attended a meeting with Inspector Barclay Bailey from the Albany CIB on the afternoon of the 12<sup>th</sup> March, where he took a statement and informed me about how they intended investigating further. In the meantime the various discussion board postings, some of them abusive and all defamatory were being traced by Opensearch in Perth and by local ISPs.

Jonah persisted with behaviour, bordering on obsessive, he wrote: "I have plenty of time spare at the moment and I am watching the message board constantly, so if the hacker posts anymore messages I will record them as well as your comments and anyone else's that are of relevance." Here is one example of his inflated sense of importance. Jonah never had administration rights on GateWay and it appears as this saga unravels, this is what he wanted more than ever. I had always reserved trusting Jonah with this power., continually feeling there was something not quite right about him. My intuition proved correct!

In another e-mail on March the 25<sup>th</sup> he continues his delusions with the following:



Hello Gill ,

Wow what a mess , hey cause your busy at the moment would you like me to write to all the towns to let them know their notice boards are down , or have you already told them , Nah I didn't think you would have , ok that's cool I will help you out and get right onto it for you , just to lend a hand .

Volunteers my ass you say one second that it is all run by volunteers yet Ben Ellis and Rob Daniel are looking to make money by signing up advertising space, or is Gateway just exploiting their volunteers , YOU do not know the true meaning of Volunteer , its all about making the quick buck , By the way have you spoke to

the lotteries commission yet , I have , I have also handed over that Ulead Photo Express to the appropriate persons to view and perhaps take action , Hey Gateway must be getting heaps of hits now which is a good thing , I am trying to help get the hits up also by writing to other portals to let them see gateway and the dramas you are having at the moment , oh yeah had to have my say at the onlinewa have your say board , and I found your comments there also , Yes I know I have been busy , hey but you don't have to thank me its my pleasure , any time you want more hits just ask LOL LOL , I heard that you have been ringing Esperance bay , Oppps I was supposed to keep that quiet LOL LOL , hey just shows what kind of person you are , cant ring me but will ring others . Well gotta head off in the next couple of days to start full time work , Yup in the IT industry , well gotta pack and catch my flight , but hey I will send a postcard "NOT" LOL

Jonah became increasingly deluded about his importance to GateWAY, which simply didn't exist He didn't have the right to e-mail anyone, anything regarding GateWAY, but showed signs of getting everything out of perspective. Jonah getting a job elsewhere in the I.T. industry given his "history" and level of eductaion, would have been highly unlikely. The attempts at "red herring" us began in earnest when he realised no one was really listening to him.

Hundreds of foul messages were posted on a daily basis. Each one was copied and sent to the technicians to trace on our server and to Inspector Bailey of the Albany CIB. An example of the many communications sent and received regarding the electronic tracing of these messages follows:



**From:** keeper [<mailto:keeper@albanygateway.com.au>]

**Sent:** Friday, 16 March 2001 4:58 PM

**To:** Gary Giles; [mike@opensearch.com](mailto:mike@opensearch.com)

**Subject:** Re: More traces please

Mike and Gary please also trace these postings as well.

We're building a picture and if this guy is the same one as before I think the Albany detective will be hot on the trail.



Thanks guys you're wizards!!!! and this garbage will all be over soon I hope.

Gill:~)

Table 4. Example from Discussion Board Posting 15/3/01

Subject	From	Sent
<a href="http://www.albanygatewaysexsites.com.au">www.albanygatewaysexsites.com.au</a>	you make me sick (alias Jonah)	3/15/2001 3:03:54 PM
<a href="http://www.albanygatewaychildporn.com.au">www.albanygatewaychildporn.com.au</a> <a href="http://www.albanygateway.childpornlink.com">www.albanygateway.childpornlink.com</a>	you make me sick (alias Jonah)	3/15/2001 3:09:54 PM
<a href="http://www.albanygatewaysexlink.com">www.albanygatewaysexlink.com</a> .	Ok mr paper dude explain to all now that you have your little place how come there was a sex link in the business listings from the Albany Primary School and others , we all await your reply in your paper  Disgusted (alias Jonah)	3/15/2001 7:54:54 PM



From: Gary Giles

To: keeper

Sent: Friday, March 16, 2001 4:20 PM

Subject: Re: More traces please

Alrighty, the first one:

2001-03-15 07:03:54 202.72.151.5 – 203.33.253.245 80 POST  
/templates/template6/reply\_message.asp – 200  
Mozilla/4.0+(compatible;+MSIE+5.5;+Windows+98)

And the second one:

2001-03-15 11:54:54 202.72.151.5 – 203.33.253.245 80 POST  
/templates/template6/reply\_message.asp – 200  
Mozilla/4.0+(compatible;+MSIE+5.5;+Windows+98)

Looks like the same guy as before.

Incidentally, it doesn't matter what the time on the server is unless it needs to be related back to "real" time for someone (e.g. if Westnet check their proxy, etc).

-Mike

Jonah continued his on-line harassment. Over 493 postings were logged, GateWAY members received hoax phone calls, and personally abusive and threatening e-mails sent.

This whole incident continued for four months. The Albany CIB received continual I.P address traces from GateWAY's technical crew, all hoax calls were reported, but they failed to do anything to reprimand Jonah, as all emanated from public phone boxes. We were informed the police force is understaffed and it would be impossible to monitor all phone boxes in the area of Telstra's traces.

The saga took a turn when Jonah's log "ins" were traced to two computer access sites in Melbourne, The Satellite Internet Café and the State Library of Victoria. Jonah "slipped up" by showing his Centrelink I.D. card to the librarian as identification before using their public access computers. The Police traced him by calling the Library after their I.P address was logged as a source system for some of the latest postings. The Satellite Café didn't keep user records. However, the electronic traces were definitely from there.

The hoax phone calls were monitored for a few days. Jonah relentlessly called several of the GateWAY members on public phone boxes in the Melbourne CBD, which automatically disconnected when no payment was made on the callers end. The amount of time and energy

Jonah put into this was incredible. Telstra traces confirmed Jonah used five main CBD phone boxes in Melbourne.

John Suler in an article entitled, *The Bad Boys of Cyberspace: Deviant Behavior in Online Multimedia Communities and Strategies for managing it* suggests:

Deviant behavior occurs along a continuum from mild to severe. The most severe types probably are those that would be universally detested anywhere, anytime. The mildest types may be labeled as deviance or not depending upon the culture and the particular situation. For the most part, these mild and usually unintentional forms of deviance are the result of carelessness, playful mischief, immaturity, or simple ignorance. Correcting such misbehavior may be very easy. Briefly explaining the community's rules of etiquette, educating the user about the program, and/or encouraging the person, in a friendly way, to "ease up" should be enough. If that simple, benign intervention doesn't work, then the deviance may be more intentional and indicative of a personality problem. (Suler 1997)

Suler's reference to "benign intervention" certainly didn't work with Jonah and so we are left with the assumption that Jonah's "deviance may be more intentional and indicative of a personality problem."

## **Summation**

Jonah needs sympathy and psychological help. Behaving this way is an attention seeking display, a cry for help for what some psychologists would call obsessive-compulsive behaviour. His actions were destructive and cruel to certain members of our community on-line, but were they premeditated and perpetratory or was Jonah simply acting out a "naughty little boy" with family of origin problems needing psychiatric assistance? These questions will probably remain unanswered, haunting the incident as a warning, as much as a lesson in trust giving and risk taking when dealing with people online.

How should I have handled this situation? Jonah was welcomed, trained and given plenty of opportunities to become a valued member of our community on-line. He did this well, though obsessively at times, but only for a few months. The turning point came when he moved away from Albany. Would it be presumptive to surmise why his behaviour changed, why he

became jealous of others contributing to GateWAY, why he turned so vitriolic and abusive, and why in fact he ultimately sabotaged himself?

The time is imminent for cyber legislation to be made, covering a wide spectre of computer and Internet use, not just hacking or on-line fraud. Jonah's case could not be classified as hacking. It was more like on-line abuse and harassment, which in the real world laws exist to deal with this kind of behavior.

### **Privacy, security and cyber governance**

The Internet is an increasingly important communication and business tool. Many consequences of its use, however, are not specifically addressed by existing law. Moreover, unique aspects of Internet communications may make it resistant to the application of traditional legal principles and rules.

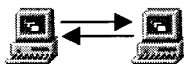
Nowhere is this more evident than in disputes over forum. Traditional rules relating to jurisdiction and competence incorporate a notion of territoriality. But Internet communications are not geographically dependent. The very origin of an e-mail message may be unknown. Website information cannot be confined to a target audience, but is disseminated simultaneously to a global market. It may affect individuals in a myriad of jurisdictions, all of which have their own particular local laws. (Ogilvy Renault 1998)

This gives rise to enormous challenges. If someone posts a message on a web site, can he or she be prosecuted for obscenity, harassment, libel, threats and other abusive comments? Jonah, the real life example of someone who perpetrated all these things on-line, cannot be prosecuted currently in Australia for their misuse of a discussion board. There is no legislation designating abusive on-line behaviour as criminal or reprimandable, leaving all web sites and community portals open to cyber assault of this kind.

So what lessons are to be learnt from such an event, occurring to a young community portal just attempting to establish its presence? How could this saga have been handled differently? What security measures should be made standard policy before a community portal launches? It is important to distinguish between the terms *technical security issues* and *human security issues*. The first is highly manageable as it basically requires the implementing or creation of software or hardware applications e.g. firewalls, user password and log in encryption,

or other digitally applied functions. The latter is much more difficult to manage and even though technical measures can be put in place to reduce the risk of violation, there is no way of controlling human behaviour to totally prevent it. This begs another question, which goes beyond the research areas and parameters of this specific work, "How can cases like this one, influence future legislation issues around online activity and virtual spaces?"

The moment this perpetration started happening I was thrown into a state of disbelief and immediately created the following disclaimer for board users to read prior to posting of messages:



#### Disclaimer for Discussion Boards

#### PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE USING GateWAY DISCUSSION BOARDS!

Considering the real-time nature of these discussions, it is impossible for us to review messages or confirm the validity of all information posted. We do not vouch for or warrant the accuracy, completeness or usefulness of any message, and are not responsible for the contents of any message. GateWAY administration will delete any messages posted, which violate the privacy of an individual or are personally abusive or pornographic in nature on request from members of the community on-line.

The messages express the views of the author of the message, not necessarily the views of GateWAY. GateWAY cannot be held responsible for the actions or on-line behaviours exhibited by people deciding to post on GateWAY message boards.

Any visitor who feels that a posted message is objectionable is encouraged to contact us by e-mail. We have the ability to remove objectionable messages and we will make every effort to do so, within a reasonable time frame, if we determine that removal is necessary. However, this is a manual process, so please appreciate that we may not be able to remove or edit particular messages immediately.

It is a condition of your use of GateWAY that you do not do any of the following:

restrict or inhibit any other user from using or enjoying any Forum.

post or transmit any unlawful, threatening, abusive, defamatory, obscene, vulgar, pornographic, profane or indecent information or material of any kind, including without limitation any transmissions constituting or encouraging conduct that would constitute a criminal offence, give rise to civil liability or otherwise violate any applicable law.

post or transmit any material of any kind which violates or infringes upon the rights of any other person, including material which is an invasion of any privacy or publicity rights or which is protected by copyright, trademark or any other proprietary right, or derivative works with respect thereto, without first obtaining permission from the owner or relevant right holder;

post or transmit any material of any kind which contains a virus or other harmful component.

delete any author attributions, legal notices or proprietary designations or labels in any file that is uploaded.

The Albany Gateway official disclaimer on Terms and Conditions of Use of the GateWAY portal are found at the bottom of every page.

Needless to say this disclaimer had no effect on Jonah, in fact it's highly likely he never read it. How many people bother to read web site disclaimers? How can they be enforced anyway? The electronic nature of the medium renders webmasters and portal managers powerless, unless a site is actually hacked. Jonah's action could not be classed as hacking, because he wasn't using code or other electronic means to perpetrate. He was using our public boards to vent his problems and there's no legislation making that a crime at present.

GateWAY was forced into reassessing its security issues. A more robust system was built requiring membership numbers and log in for all users. Effectively this restricted the previous direct accessibility, however we needed to sacrifice some freedom for protection. In the light of recent world events, it appears security is one of the major concerns in both the virtual and real worlds of our lives.

Basically, GateWAY has had to "go it alone" on this incident. The supportive words and involvement by the Police were momentary respites, however the damage was done to individuals who had to shoulder the abuse and threats. This area of abuse in public domains needs further research and action. It is now time for legislation to address the problems

GateWAY faced in this instance and it is up to those government authorities responsible for this area of on-line communication to lead the way in making this happen.

Revisiting the heuristic methodology base of my work, Douglass and Moustakas (1984) whilst discussing the “discovery of personal insights and reflections”, mention a need to recognise that “one must relinquish control and be tumbled about with the newness and drama of a searching focus.”

The essence of my reflective practice work was taken up with this “discovery” concept and a growing realisation of my issues with “control.” How could I lead if I “relinquished control?” Could I only discover new ways of interacting by letting go of the concept that leading, or being an effective leader means having control at all times? What are the parameters of too little or too much control and where does trust fit into this leadership/control paradigm?

GateWAY had faced its first major violation: The *Jonah incident*. If I had “pulled the pin” (as suggested by Gordon Walker of the OIC), on the site I doubt we would have easily got back up again. (*I was probably, subconsciously, not prepared to “relinquish control” in this instance, as much as an act of defiance towards Jonah as a determination not to lose face.*) Deferring to perpetrators empowers them, not their victims. In effect the GateWAY community became more empowered and strengthened by this incident and as a leader and practitioner I gained increased confidence, knowledge and experience and revivification for the task at hand.

Sustainability is reliant on empowerment. In the case of community interaction this empowerment and support of the community as a whole, energises the leaders and champions of that cause, to continue in their work.

## **Leadership and Organisational Management**

Many rural and regional economies, like those of the agriculturally based Great Southern, who are now at the cross roads of becoming connected networks, working together to enhance and progress new ways of doing business, or, in failing to do so will gradually decay. There is

no question as to what we must do to assist our regional communities. Providing access to the new technologies, training, introducing marketing and e-commerce solutions to move local goods and services, encouraging on-line engagement and building community awareness are just some of the critical factors calling for a new type of leadership, a leadership which understands and practices the codes of connectivity. A leadership which understands and practices the codes of connectivity e.g. openness, inclusiveness, skill sharing, use of various means of communication mediums, and one which has the courage to question conventional modus operandi, will be the driving force to accomplish these goals.

Essentially it appears that sustainable regional community web portals may only be successful if they become “knowledge connected” in creative, cooperative ways to both local and global networks, whilst maintaining their individuality of culture and place.

[www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au)

To achieve and maintain excellence, an organisation needs a special kind of leadership vision that provides leadership of the organisation, not just leadership within the organisation. Leaders must provide a vision of what the organisation can be and what it stands for; they give a sense of direction, shared purpose, and a meaning that persists. Top managers support and promote a core ideology that permeates organisational life and guides all decision-making. (Daft 1998)

In discussing strategies for implementing change, Daft (1998) outlines five elements, which need to be present for change to succeed. They are ideas, needs, adoption, implementation, and resources. Successful leadership embraces and activates all these whilst building trust and shared vision within their organisations. For community based organisations this often means a local champion or practitioner who is prepared to “get their hands dirty” in building the community of interest. Leadership demands vision, the ability to motivate with knowledge and understanding of the task at hand. This was one of my personal goals.

What can we call GateWAY’s core ideology? Is it the ongoing maintenance (both technical and non-technical), of a community web portal whose initial aim was to build awareness, encourage engagement and provide access to the online environment and the region? If this is the case, then as the Manager it was my job to promote the core ideology and to guide



decision-making. I endeavoured to do this. How effectively I achieved this is probably for those of my community to judge, however the main points Daft (1998) makes have been central to what I perceive as 'special leadership' and the need to practice 'the codes of connectivity.' His notion of "top managers" relates equally to community (not-for-profit) oriented leadership and to business (for profit) leadership, particularly where interpersonal skills are discussed.

"Community based projects, as distinct from corporate or government led initiatives, need leadership, which challenges the process by venturing out and searching for opportunities to change the status quo for the better". (*GateWAY achieves this primarily by offering a free service to community members, whilst supplying the online tools needed for encouraging positive participation and information sharing.*) [www.albanygateway.com.au/member/options](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/member/options)

"Leaders who are willing to experiment and take risks, to innovate and experiment to find new and better ways of doing things and who understand that product and service innovations do not exclusively come from internal sources, but also from customers, clients, vendors and people in the front lines". (*Opportunities to develop business and new services online and to 'have a say' in what and how GateWAY develops, is an open option through the Cooperative. Shareholders, local contributors and businesses have equal opportunity in the process of growth and change GateWAY is destined to go through.*) [www.albanygateway.com.au/home/extrainfo](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/home/extrainfo)

"Process innovations tend to come from people doing the work if they are welcomed and encouraged to make suggestions. They work to turn disappointments and mistakes into learning opportunities". (*Perhaps the best example of this was the Jonah incident where the GateWAY volunteers team, those editing and assisting at practical levels suggested building filters and a compulsory log in linked to identification system, to protect their valuable asset in future.*) (Daft 1998, Dietel 1998)

GateWAY has become a platform for the region to grow its connected networks further. Through increased training in the use of new technological applications and the introduction of

marketing and e-commerce solutions to move local goods and services we will see a future where the region is able to compete equitably on the world stage.

## **Other Points of View**

The spiralllic metaphor I use as a thread throughout this work has significance beyond a mere visual representation. (*See fold out in Appendix section*) The metaphor as a descriptor has roots in *ethnomethodology*, (a language-oriented approach employing tape recordings to capture accounts of everyday language to assist in the study of language interactions and how people deal with ambiguous meanings). It also embraces *symbolic interactionism*, (the study of how “humans...live in a symbolic environment as well as a physical (one). They act in response to symbols as well as to physical stimuli” (Jacob, 1987). Sometimes ethnomethodology is seen as a type of symbolic interactionism. (Meltzer et al. 1975 Tesch 1990).

My work is a record and re-creation of lived experience and in that is a piece of ‘ethnomethodological interactionism.’ (Tesch 1990) The GateWAY, as a work in progress, is fulfilled through examples, narrative descriptions, dialogues, stories, taped interviews, on-line chat histories, autobiographical journals and diaries, draft reports, CDROM presentations, e-mails and other documents. Many examples of some of these mediums have already been used throughout the work to illustrate concepts and enliven the content. This is in keeping with phenomenological and reflective practice descriptions of “The lifeworld, the world of lived experience, is both the source and the object of phenomenological research. And so we need to search everywhere in the lifeworld for lived-experience material: through interview, observation, language analysis, fictional accounts, etc.” (Van Manen 2000)

Habermas (1976) clearly states ‘Any methodology that systematically neglects the interpretive schemata through which social action is itself mediated, is doomed to failure.’ Habermas demands the “grasping of ‘meaning’ that is constitutive of social reality.” Hence the qualitative nature of this type of research approach is only enhanced by “experiential accounts or lived-experience descriptions (which) are never identical to lived experience itself”. Van Manen (2000) continues this thread in describing, “All recollections of experiences, reflections on

experiences, descriptions of experiences, taped interviews about experiences, or transcribed conversations about experiences are already transformations of those experiences. The upshot is that we need to find access to life's living dimensions while hoping that the meanings we bring to the surface from the depths of life's oceans have not entirely lost some the natural quiver of their undisturbed existence. (Van Manen 2000)

I spent a number of hours taping a few key people who shared involvement in community on-line theory and practice, and who had a vision, invariably with a meliorist outlook, which assisted my research and perspectives on the topic.

Greg Williams, a regional Development Officer with the Peel Development Commission first became involved with the concept of community on-line in late 1997 through the Peel Development Commission.



**Peel Region, Western Australia** <http://peeldirect.com.au> (Taped interview excerpts and summation with Greg Williams, Regional Development Officer – Peel Development Commission on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2000.)

**Q (Gill):** What is your view of community portal development in relation to the Peel region?

**A (Greg):** Well, we haven't documented the whole thing in one process, but the portal is one big infrastructure consisting of training, local access, local governments, communities of interest. There's a myriad of things and they all somehow intermesh with each other.

**Q (Gill):** You were obviously inspired to do this, it was something, which you were passionate about, what has been the single most difficult thing for you?

**A (Greg):** I don't know if I'd call it difficult, rather a shortcoming in understanding the technology, and I've had this discussion with quite a few people around the place saying we're just facilitating. I call on technical people when I need assistance in this area.

**Q (Gill):** What aspects of Peel On-line do you think actually works for the community?

**A: (Greg):** I'm very big on developing the tool and getting people to use it for their purposes, having a reason for using it. Rather than give them the tool and

say use it, we have to give them the ideas to use it. For example one of the wins we've had is with the Seniors who were inspired by Hilda des Artes ([www.seniornet.com.au](http://www.seniornet.com.au)), who visited us and assisted the creation of a seniornet program here. We had a lady who was devastated when her son, daughter in-law and grandchildren went to Brunei. She now talks to them on the Internet everyday. Two years ago she couldn't use a computer. So we show the community that it's a tool for going on-line.

**Q (Gill):** So how does this further impact into your community?

**A (Greg):** Well one of the next biggest projects is that we're building a senior secondary college in Mandurah, it's going to be just years 11 and 12, with 1,200 students in the next 18 months and one of the things we're putting into that college is an I.T. curriculum. That I.T. curriculum is going to be turning those senior college students into job worthy I.T. specialists. For example they'll learn to be Microsoft certified technical engineers, they'll learn Cisco programming, graphic arts and how to manage a business for themselves. They'll learn how to pull a computer apart and put it back together again. This is the first stage. The second stage will be where the lessons and the classes will be beamed by satellite to all schools around Western Australia. The third phase will be all the people who don't understand technology, like Greg Williams, will get to go and do night classes there and pick up all of those skills. So it'll be a Centre of Excellence endeavouring to create jobs in the region. Our kids will be specialists in I.T. and able to remain in the region if they so wish and work remotely.

## **Lessons from Peel**

The Peel Project had a much higher profile than GateWAY from the outset. Their infrastructure and funding were all geared towards setting up a model portal for emulation throughout the state. Greg William's perseverance and skill as a facilitator must be acknowledged, in accomplishing as big a task as the Peel Direct/Peel On-line.

GateWAY emulates some of the Peel features, such as directories or topics for business, community organisations and service providers, and in fact the aims of the two projects were similar.

The one criticism of Peel must be that despite all the infrastructure and attempts at implementing a community on-line, the first time visitor, or infact frequent visitors are not presented with a lively feel for who the people of the region are and what they do.

The design is technically and graphically excellent, navigability is sound, but [www.peeldirect.com.au](http://www.peeldirect.com.au) appears more a “cathedral than a bazaar”, a directory rather than an interactive market place. The debate about what community portals are attempting to achieve lives on. Peel became a good practice example to review before and during the building of GateWAY, which was of immense use in assisting the setting of some of our parameters.

The next interview with Jacinta Overman, reveals the similar initial approaches taken by both the Peel and Avon regions in the creation of their community web portals.



**Q (Gill):** How did you get involved with the Avon On-line project?

**A (Jacinta):** It started with a telecommunications audit to do with the Wheatbelt region, we looked at the telecommunications infrastructure and how it was being used. We found tht the Wheat belt was fairly well serviced, but not being used to its full capacity. So we started a whole series of projects which were aimed at increasing Internet usage, and understanding of e-commerce. We looked at the Avon area mainly as it has low level of Interent usage and computer ownership

**Q (Gill):** When you say low, have you got some statistics to illustrate this?

**A ( Jacinta):** We’re talking around 22% or less.

**Q (Gill):** Would you class this as part of the “digital divide?”

**A ( Jacinta):** Yes, its dichotamous as there are some people who are really up with it, like regional operators who have websites with e-commerce functions, then there are other people who’ve got no idea. So, it’s the general populace we’re aiming to educate about the Internet. So that’s the strategic context, however Avon On-line is designed to be something which is local and interesting, so people can use it for the types of information they want locally versus the confusing nature of the Internet as a whole. It’s meant as a starting point.

**Q (Gill):** Who employs you for your work on Avon On-line?

**A ( Jacinta):** The Wheatbelt Development Commission employs me as the Project Manager for the project, but we’re cogmisant of the fact that it can’t bea governemtn model or be seen to be owned by government, The Commission has played a facilitating role and we’ve tried to devolve the interest and responsibility for maintaining the portal to the community.

The role we played was not the tech-heads who said this is what you want and need, it was really a community development role.

**Q (Gill):** So with that very clear description of what it is, when somebody asks you “what is a regional portal”? what’s your answer?

**A (Jacinta):** The Avon On-line portal is a regional website which has information relating to the Avon area, on its people, lifestyle, events, opportunities which is maintained by people in the Avon and not by a web master. It’s a culmination of the effort of our 10 interest groups, which form the basis for Avon On-Line and people from each of those interest groups have a responsibility for updating the site because they’ve been trained to do so.

**Q (Gill)** How are you going to make yourselves sustainable?

**A (Jacinta):** That’s a big one really as the most important success factor is the commitment and enthusiasm of the people who’ve been trained to update it and who have been involved since the beginning. However, as volunteers this can’t go on indefinitely. I’m actually grappling at the moment with how to rekindle some of that enthusiasm or support them so they can continue that role.

It’s great in theory to have this devolved structure having input from all these people and groups, but at the moment it’s not really working well because people are busy and only have so much time to give voluntarily. They are also finding it difficult to use the Harvest Road software (WebLite) which our site has been designed on.

I think there’s a mental barrier to why this doesn’t work.

**Q (Gill):** Do you think there would be such a mental barrier if they were paid to do this work?

**A (Jacinta):** Yes of course because that commitment would change from a social interest type of commitment to an economic decision one. We don’t have a webmaster at the moment but I do some of the work as an employee of the Development Commission. What we really need is a technician to assist the volunteers with their uploading and editing problems.

**Q (Gill):** So when these editors are ready to publish, who moderates the content?

**A (Jacinta):** At the moment it’s myself and the BEC (Business Enterprise Centre). We’ve always recognised the need for quality assurance and that opening bits of the website up to public access could mean chaos, so this works by:

The ground level where people we’ve trained and trust understand the need for quality assurance and are responsible to publish.

There’s a steering committee, which represents each of the 10 interest groups, and that committee has the role of promotion and marketing, maintenance of standards, and sustainability issues. E.g. making sure nobody has put anything on the bulletin board that’s offensive.

This is working OK at the moment but in the future someone should be paid as a proper portal manager from the revenue Avon On-line makes.

**Q (Gill):** What are your management committee or board looking at as a model for the portal in future?

**A (Jacinta):** I think we'll move towards having a paid technical person responsible for keeping the portal lively with content and assistance to volunteers. The original Avon On-Line concept came out of an incorporated body which is the Avon Smart Community Group. The process of developing Avon On-Line was done under the auspices of this body, but not by the body. We involved a lot of other people which make up the 10 interest groups and committee which are informal. To handle the financial side of things we're setting up a Public Company Limited by guarantee, which means there'll be five directors of a nominated company which will allow us to accept funding and broker or sell Harvest Road Web Wizard products. We can also go into partnership with other companies.

**Summation**

Both the Peel and Avon portals were initially driven by their Development Commissions, whereas even though the Great Southern Development Commission was on the Albany GateWAY committee, it hardly had the same intense, incubation type role these other two afforded their budding communities on-line.

Albany GateWAY, for instance, never had a "home" in the GSDC's premises, or the amount of funding allocated to the other portals. I realise my constant reference to how these other portals got far more government assistance than we did, is probably becoming tedious, however this was a fact.

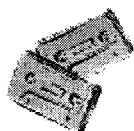
Avon and Peel based their portals on Harvest Road software applications, whilst GateWAY went down an uncharted path by co-developing the WebIT, distributed publishing system with a Perth based web development firm; Opensearch. This came about by a series of historical and strategic events, which were to forever impact on the GateWAY Project.

Albany GateWAY was the only regional portal to be driven by a consortium of Perth based organisations comprising of a University (ECU), a government department (OIC), a private computing firm (ISA) and a representative from IBM. This duplicity of involvement was to pave a very different path for GateWAY compared to the other two portals.

The one common factor between the managers of the Avon and Peel portals and myself was our shared visions of what the development of our respective portals could mean to our communities. Both Greg and Jacinta believed their projects would assist their communities better with the technological advances the rest of the world were embracing, and which they would ultimately be forced to address. Again, the Meliorist point of view I've expounded throughout this work is in action here. It appears that unless regional and community portals have one or two champions, who provide leadership, drive and a passion for the concept, then the whole developmental process could be lack lustre, if not doomed.

### **Government 'Community On-line' Drivers**

Michael Ashford and Jackie Gill were two of the first champions of virtual community concepts in Western Australia. I first met them when they were working as a team in the Office of Information and Communication of the Western Australian Department of Commerce and Trade in 1999, just after being employed as the GateWay Manager. It was important to record and archive their points of view on the history and direction of portal development in our state, seeing as those who are immersed in the work and daily management issues of innovative concepts, rarely get time to do it. Both individuals were passionate about bringing Western Australia on-line and their interviews follow.



**Q (Gill):** Michael, what do you, as the Team Leader, Business and Communities On-line, in the Office of Information and Communications, see as the main aims behind community portal development in Western Australia?

**A (Michael):** Awareness raising and increasing of the adoption of on-line technologies within the community, economic, social, cultural and education areas are the main aims. Building services, partnering with other people to build services or demonstrate projects as well as the production of tool kits and the supply of funding for specific projects does this.

**Q (Gill):** So where did this all begin in Western Australia?



**A (Michael):** I suppose I was one of the earliest people who conceptualised what the on-line or the information age could do for rural and regional economies. As I was working in community developments I quickly realised you could use community development processes in whatever you did on-line. In 1995 Brett Sabien and I put a paper up to the government, outlining a whole series of potentials for the embracing of on-line technologies in rural and regional W.A. That was endorsed.

**Q (Gill):** What was your first attempt at a regional community portal?

**A (Michael):** We worked with a group of innovators in the Peel region who understood the economic and social restructuring needs for this to take place. This became a long-term strategy and an e-marketplace was built as part of the portal development.

**Q (Gill):** So how would you define a portal for lay people?

**A (Michael):** It's a large number of groups having a presence at a central point, usually businesses, community groups which are based around a geographical location like the Albany GateWAY, or they could be a community of interest e.g. Remote, Rural and Regional Women's Network [www.rrr.wa.gov.au](http://www.rrr.wa.gov.au) . So it is more than a website with the key thing being interactivity, with community ownership and operation as a key issue.

**Q(Gill):** What is the department doing to assist rural and regional people in the uptake of e-commerce?

**A(Michael):** We run e-commerce workshops for SME's, raise their awareness about e-commerce options and the ability to tender for and supply services to government on-line.

Our job is to raise awareness and educate businesses in the uptake of the new technologies.

This has to be a relatively quick process, as most businesses don't have the time for long courses in implementing new ideas into their businesses. We are currently trialling a model to train people to deliver e-commerce workshops.

**Q(Gill):** So Michael, what advice have you for GateWAY as it's about to be set up as a Cooperative and needing to further embrace the adoption of e-commerce in the region?

**A (Michael):** There are several ways of doing it, like public money programs available, there's resources like people in OIC who will train local people in your community to start delivering it for you. Obviously you have to look at the financial sustainability of it and we would encourage organisations to charge a small fee that allows the process to become self sustainable. With Albany GateWAY we would go to the Board and ask them which would be the best ways they see e-commerce being implemented in their region. You would need someone full time to do that in a region and as I've said for the Peel region, there

should be five people fulltime on the project. You need someone on the ground marketing full time for 6-8 months and a continuation of community awareness raising and training programs running synonymously with the delivery of e-commerce options.



Interview with Jackie Gill (OIC) Monday 6th November 2000

**Q(Gill):** Where did the GateWAY concept start for you Jackie?

**A(Jackie):** October 1998, Michael Ashford and I were feeling our way with the On-line communities as part of the major strategy of the state government. We were feeling our way as all we'd done up until that point was to put together the tender document for what at that stage was called WACOL (W.A.Communities On-line). Dow Digital had actually done a prototype which ran on C.D. and Peel was running with the Peel project, so we worked in with all that. Michael and I went down to Albany to present a FORUM meeting of all the heads of government departments down there. So we talked about on-line service delivery and what was happening and at that time the concept of portals still hadn't emerged. We met with Rob Siegel and Chris Probert to discuss how we could assist the business incubator they were building and came up with the idea for building a demonstration site for the Business enterprise Centre. I wrote up a tender document for Robert and decided to call it "Ask Rob".

We also spoke with Barbara Madden (Great Southern Development Commission) and Bruce Manning (Southern Province Project) who mentioned IBM had been talking with James Lee a local doctor about setting up a demo site for discharge and admissions, between the hospital, the chemist shops and the doctors. So we met with Sean O'Brien (IBM) after Rob suggested a meeting and we scoped out a scope for a thing we called Gateway and the three points of business, community and government.

We went down to Albany and ran a workshop and it was there that Neil McKnight showed his Albany On-line project for the first time and gave everybody the idea about what it meant to have aggregated content. We talked about tourism and integrating everything that was happening in the Great Southern, as a window to the world.

**Q(Gill):** So when did ISA and ECU come into the picture?

**A(Jackie):** After the workshop Sean invited me to meet with Sally Han (who was to be replaced by another ISA colleague, Kim Forrest) before the project actually

started, and Martyn Wild from ECU. We then became the Perth consortia, had a second workshop in Albany and got the commitment of the community, even thought there was some antipathy from local IPS's as they saw this as taking away from them.

**Q(Gill):** How do you see GateWAY with regards to portal development in Australia, in relation to other portals such as Peel and Avon?

**A(Jackie):** The intent behind GateWAY was different because Peel and Avon, were both far more peak body or top down driven. The reason I got involved in Albany GateWAY was because I believe in communities, I believe in going upwards. If the ITOL grant hadn't gone in, I would have done Albany a totally different way. Because of the ITOL grant going in when it did we actually derailed the community development process. I've thought about it a lot and this happened because we forced the community to take our submission, we didn't come to let them to do it themselves. There is a vast difference and I actually believe the natural process didn't occur through the community development model that's why we had such huge problems. We should have waited another 6 months for the next rounds of ITOL and let the community decide and that's why your job's been so damn hard. You didn't have any other champions down there and the champions you did have got lost because they didn't like the process either.

**Q(Gill):** Well Jackie how do you see the future of community portal development, do you see us being able to become sustainable?

**A(Jackie):** Community is one of those really weird things. Once something's started it's Pandora's Box, but the process of community development waxes and wanes and the thing about a project like GateWAY is it has to be left on its own to see what will happen. Everything which is artificially sustained has a life while it's being artificially sustained, but you've got to see what that life is, when it's left on its own. It's like the bird, let it free and if it comes back it was always yours.

I personally believe that GateWAY, let go, will probably go "splosh!" and a whole group of people that don't have anything to do with it now, or marginally to do with it will come in and say..."hey we can't let this happen!" You just can't tell where that'll come from, but I have no doubt that the paradigm has shifted now. It's there, it's part of the Great Southern and it will always be there. As for portals they're already going into the next phase now they are becoming Internet systems. Portals don't allow for enough dynamic movement in terms of how do you manage them, what are the leadership processes, e-democracy, how do you keep them scalable? I've created a little acronym called SYSTEMS – Scalable, Intuitive, Secure, Transparent (capable of working across all platforms), Electronic, Management, Secure. It's about managing community's collective information and in the future these Internet systems will become part of our daily lives.

Portal development or “Internet Systems” as Jackie would call them appear to be becoming more a matter of managing and organising community information than just the “directory” sites of the past. GateWAY, from what Michael and Jackie describe is currently somewhere in between being a mere “directory” site and an “Internet system”. (I.S.) I would like to think of GateWAY being closer to the I.S. than the “directory” parameter, but only time will tell as to where GateWAY ends up.

Jackie Gill is now working on a Statewide Connectivity Program, which aims at increasing Western Australian’s quality of life through the application of the online environment and the Knowledge Economy. The foundations of this initiative are based on key infrastructure, content and access enablers, which the Western Australian Labor Government is currently adopting as part of its new Information Technology and Telecommunications policies. (Gill 2001)



Interview with Martyn Wild Senior Lecturer in Business Information Systems and director of the We-B Centre Edith Cowan University: November 2000

**Q (Gill):** Where did the concept of Albany GateWAY start for you and what did you see as your specific role?

**A (Martyn):** I have a specific role at the University to attract funding from outside the University, to ensure we have a reasonably high research profile nationally. So it began as part of the relationship we were developing with ISA (Integrated Systems Australia) to get a good marketing opportunity in being involved with a University and a state government initiative to do something in the regions.

We decided to go for the ITOL funding and I ended up with the task of writing the submission with Sally Han and Brian Stewarts of ISA and we managed to be successful in that application.

**Q (Gill):** So why Albany?

**A (Martyn):** That’s where OIC came in and particularly IBM, who had been approached by a Doctor’s consortium in Albany to set up a health initiative called

Doctor's desk. Jackie Gill and Sean O'Brien (IBM) were collaborating over this initiative and OIC also had a programme of e-commerce awareness which they were trying to develop around the regions. So, as Albany had expressed an interest through the Doctors desk initiative it became the focus for the possibility of a future portal. This formed the basis for the Perth consortia, around the ITOL application and then the Great Southern Development Commission, (Barbara Madden) got involved.

**Q (Gill):** Weren't there some community awareness workshops run in Albany?

**A (Martyn):** Yes, there were two or three separate workshops at The Esplanade, where Jackie, Sean and I drew up a programme and made a presentation to the community. It was an open invitation event at which there were at least 50 people and out of that came the people who were either notorious or famous for their contribution. The most notorious was Neil McKnight who had a very big stake in playing a role in the project and was infact appointed by OIC (irrespective of the ITOL funding) to create a pilot.

**Q (Gill):** So as you see it, was Neil maybe set up a little bit to believe he was going to be the chosen web developer for GateWay?

**A(Martyn):** OIC(Jackie Gill) responded to the obvious need that Neil had made in the workshops, where he'd staked a claim to say he was probably the leading local, web designer and expected the job. There was a lot of local negativity, like there was a guy who had his own ISP down there who was initially very strongly in favour of the concept but was concerned he become a beneficiary of the funds. He did however point out the negative points which could emerge particularly the possible eclipsing of local people's skills and their livelihoods. He had to be convinced that local industry wouldn't be eclipsed, but that the project would bring it into play.

**Q (Gill):** So those were the beginnings?

**A(Martyn):** Those were the beginnings and interestingly the Albany Business Centre represented in Rob Siegel, was there from the start and since then have emerged ads housing the GateWay in what I would call its commercial phase. Up until that time the Albany Business Centre played no role in developing the project or in really understanding it. Rob Siegel was more interested in driving their own website development and got funding from OIC, infact substantially more than GateWay got from them, and it was a much smaller scale operation. I remember working with Jackie and Sean, work-shopping the website developer with Rob Siegel for the Ask Rob site.

We put a great deal of ideas into that, but to Rob's credit, he had a very certain way of going, he wanted it to be dynamic and interactive, but he just wasn't very good on the technology side of things. He needed a lot of support and infact what has emerged is a very undynamic, static site, which is a pity. So these were the beginnings. From the outset it took a long time to embed the notion that this

project was to grow economic development and to grow a side of the economy in the region which would not grow as fast as it might do without having the GateWAY down there.

It was extremely difficult to get over at a conceptual level, what GateWAY could become and what it was always intended to be and the set of strategies we were looking at to make GateWAY a sustainable business and the technology side of things baffled people. They had no notion of what portal was or what a participatory technology, which WEBIT (DPS) was meant to be, and that it could be used to empower the community rather than disempower them.

**Q(Gill):** Where did you see your role and value in the project?

**A(Martyn):** I wrote the successful ITOL application, even though Jackie Gill did visit Canberra and meet with the people there to help it along, on the contextual side of it. This was quite supportive. I also think I understood what technology was necessary to grow a community involvement and wrote the RFQ for the web development side of things.

**Q(Gill):** What's been the worst thing around GateWAY for you?

**A(Martyn):** The continual battles to attempt to get the Albany steering committee to understand what this was about. It was frustrating having to repeat myself every time I went down. The Perth consortia were frustrated with the lack of awareness in the region and even though this sounds arrogant, but there was a lack of leadership, appreciation and understanding of what went into the project from a number of sides which supported the project from the outset. I still believe that GateWAY needed to have a strong commercial strategy to become sustainable.

**Q(Gill):** What's been the best thing?

**A(Martyn):** I felt privileged to be involved in the project as it was the first time I'd worked with a regional group and it's given me a set of relationships which has since gone on and done other things. Like I got to meet you, and without you the project wouldn't have worked at all and one of the things we learnt very early on was that a project such as this has no hope of success without a local project manager and champion. It needs somebody who is geared to work politically, with both the opportunity and the people.

## **Reflection and Interaction: Conclusion**

By reflecting on these different interactions which made up and shaped GateWAY in some way, a thread of key issues emerge. Leaving aside the idiosyncrasies of personal points of view, but extracting the common threads, we are left with an interesting synergy of purpose and vision.

It appears that everyone involved in the early stages of GateWAY really wanted this concept to work as one of the first of its kind and as a challenge to the perceived “conservatism” of the Great Southern region. In a way this was unintentionally a meliorist approach by these participants from the outset particularly as many of our rural and regional folk, struggle along in a blinkered state, only half realising the potential our region and people actually have as a whole. We as yet have no regional brand, not one strong marketing or promotional facility in which all Great Southern organisations and businesses believe, or energise to make it work.

It could be facetious to assume GateWAY could be this organisation, but it does embody many of the principles of community development and regional promotion, essential to growth and prosperity in the new technological age. GateWAY is a relevant tool, which if assisted by many of the existing local governments and business organisations could be an answer to the promotional needs of our region, electronically to the world, in a concerted and en masse way.

All of the archive material collected, documented a journey of the birth, growth and the challenges our regional portal has endured. As GateWAY spirals towards a new era with the Cooperative in place, new partnerships imminent and local I.T. professionals starting to take a more proactive role, the promise of profit and success for all involved is a distinct possibility.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Themes**

During the process of developing the GateWAY a number of themes and issues developed which became integral to the project. Some have become the most pivotal factors effecting GateWAY e.g. Ownership, Leadership, Community Needs and Readiness, Technological change and its effect on rural/regional communities.

Many of these issues have no precedent, as projects of this type are relatively new and much of the work tends to be “works in progress”. Nine recurring themes formed the basis of the project and these provided an interrelated matrix from which all the issues and outcome developed into a community on-line’s existence. They are:

1. People
2. Planning
3. Procedure
4. Partnership
5. Passion
6. Product
7. Politics
8. Promotion
9. Profit

(Sellar 2000)



# 1. People

There is no algorithm for community. That is, there is no step-by-step recipe that can be followed that will guarantee a specific outcome. Building community is a fundamentally different activity than writing computer code: code does not write back and code does not respond strategically to one's actions. What makes for a successful online community is often poorly understood. At this time (1996), the tendency of those involved in building graphical virtual worlds is to create visually compelling worlds that look good, but do a poor job of fostering social interaction. Many of these systems have more in common with lonely museums than with the vibrant communities they set out to create. (Kollock 1996)

Kollock's statement "Many of these systems have more in common with lonely museums than with the vibrant communities they set out to create." in effect throws out a challenge to all would be portal developers, who seriously want to build vibrant communities on-line. It appears a list of design principles for communities needs to be created, which set some firm guidelines for community portal development. This can be achieved by examining the key points made by several protagonists in this area and amalgamating them into such a proposal.

Ostrom (1990) has constructed a set of design principles for successful virtual Communities, though they seem more geared towards on-line communities, than communities on-line (p191). He suggests we ensure:

- Group boundaries are clearly defined
- Rules governing the use of collective goods are well matched to local needs and conditions
- Most individuals affected by these rules can participate in modifying the rules
- The right of community members to devise their own rules is respected by external authorities
- A system for monitoring members' behaviour exists; this monitoring is undertaken by the community members themselves
- A graduated system of sanctions is used
- Community members have access to low-cost conflict resolution mechanisms

GateWAY as a community online meets most of these principles, however because Ostrom is predominantly referring to online communities (as distinct from communities online) the final two points, 'graduated system sanctions and access to low-cost conflict resolution mechanisms', are not relevant.

Other requirements for the possibility of encouraging cooperation and growth within a community on-line, are proposed by Axelrod (1984):

- Arrange that individuals will meet each other again
- Ensure they are able to recognise each other on-line
- Give information about how the other has behaved until now

Both Axelrod and Ostrom proffer good starting points here, although Axelrod's final point would be one for debate in most communities. For example, in the event that Jonah (Chapter Three) ever asked to rejoin GateWAY after the way he behaved, how would we discuss that request and what information would we legally be able to divulge? Giving people information about other people's "behaviour" implies some form of unofficial judicial system, open to abuse, bias and control. I would query this point, but have no qualms about sharing of personal information within a community, provided the individual is open and gives permission for this to occur.

GateWAY participants are clearly informed that any information they choose to publish about themselves is totally their responsibility. This is a condition for membership and user logins and is intended to promote positive user behaviours while using [www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au).

Godwin's (1994) principles for making virtual communities work give a more extensive set of suggestions, aimed at building and securing community interactions.

He suggests the following:

- Use software that promotes good discussion
- Don't impose a length limitation on postings

- Front-load your system with talkative, diverse people
- Let the users resolve their own disputes
- Provide institutional memory
- Promote continuity
- Be host to a particular interest group
- Provide places for children
- Confront the users with a crisis

Again Godwin, like Ostrom relates his principles for virtual communities more towards online communities than communities online. We have here, along with previously mentioned suggestions, the foundations of a list of possible interactive social design principles for communities on-line. (N.B. these should not be confused with the iterative web design principles outlined in Chapter Two: The Work.)

### **Design principles for communities on-line**

The three key concepts or aims, a community on-line has at its core are to:

- Build awareness
- Encourage engagement
- Provide access

Following on from these, subsets can be created incorporating such aspects as:

- The use of software that promotes good discussion and interactivity (e.g. WebIT)
- Provision of institutional memory (e.g. having some archival process like bulletin or discussion boards, database records and long time user recall and sharing of past events on-line)
- Promotion of continuity

- Encouraging the hosting of a particular interest group e.g. editors and volunteers on GateWAY can choose a topic, a town or a community group to edit for
- Provide places for different age groups e.g. Seniors, Youth on GateWAY
- Confront the users with a crisis (e.g. the Jonah incident happened to GateWAY rather than GateWAY presenting the community with the crisis.)
- Arrange that individuals will meet each other again
- Group boundaries are clearly defined
- Rules governing the use of collective goods are well matched to local needs and conditions
- Most individuals affected by these rules can participate in modifying the rules
- The right of community members to devise their own rules is respected by external authorities
- A system for monitoring members' behaviour exists; this monitoring is undertaken by the community members themselves
- Community members have access to low-cost, effective conflict resolution mechanisms

Regional community portals need to be communities on-line, not just websites or on-line communities. So what is a community on-line? How is it different from a community website? What other models were there to learn from and possibly emulate?

The concept of communities on-line is a recent phenomenon. Rapid developments in technology, the growth in information systems and scope of human knowledge are all major factors in the decay of community, as we've known it, and the rise of virtual communities. Without social capital there is no community and where proximity and change alter a community's boundaries, so the nature of community changes.

Social capital refers to the collective resources required for individuals, groups, organisations, businesses, and communities to sustain a healthy future in a changing environment. These are the networks, shared interests, shared visions, trust and sense of belonging, central to any true community. It is this social capital that seems at greatest threat as

the technological revolution thrusts humanity into a matrix-like warp, distorting reality and disrupting the foundations of people’s known worlds (Figallo1998)

GateWAY’s “social capital” has been slowly building with all the country towns in the region coming on-line and in someway connected through our portal. Each town has a home page and off that are sub topics such as local arts, attractions, news, accommodation, local history etc. Each page edited by people from that town e.g. Broomehill [www.albanygateway.com.au/town/broomehill](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/town/broomehill) and Jerramungup [www.albanygateway.com.au/town/jerramungup](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/town/jerramungup), gives even the most remote rural people a chance to inform and promote their local town, businesses and community groups.

Most of the GateWAY towns have started using the portal to enhance their networks within their own communities and also with those in other parts of the region. If nothing else it is this networking (Krebbs 1999), which has proven a mainstay for many of the editors. The immediacy of e-mail and the Internet has given farmers, business people and interest groups, on-line assistance and information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and even in tough times, an on-line network much like the “old bush telegraph”.

Then there are the various diverse community groups who use GateWAY as another way to gather and inform their members. Examples are:

***Schools:***

Albany Primary School

[www.albanygateway.com.au/member/albany\\_primary\\_school](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/member/albany_primary_school)

Jerramungup District High School

[www.albanygateway.com.au/member/jerramungup\\_district\\_high\\_school](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/member/jerramungup_district_high_school)

***Seniors:***

ACT4S (Albany Computer Training for Seniors)

[www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/seniors/act4s](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/seniors/act4s)

The Wildflower Society

[www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Albany/Wildflowers](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Albany/Wildflowers)

***Sporting and recreation groups:***

Great Southern Netball Association

[www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Sport\\_and\\_Recreation/Great\\_Southern\\_Netball\\_Association](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Sport_and_Recreation/Great_Southern_Netball_Association)

Boating and fishing enthusiasts

[www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Albany/Boating\\_and\\_Fishing\\_Home](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Albany/Boating_and_Fishing_Home)

People are the key to sustainability of any community or business enterprise. Nurturing a sound group of interested, skilled and active people can set a community portal on the road to success. No people – no portal.

In her book “The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet”, Maureen Wertheim argues that:

The concept of the network is a good metaphor for thinking about human communities and cyberspace; that in as much as any idea of space is a communal creation, the act of constructing that space offers opportunities for creating a better human condition, and that at the very least the network of relationships created by online interactions are a start. (Wertheim 1999)

This concept of providing “opportunities for creating a better human condition” brings us yet again to another turn in our spirallike metaphor; to the meliorist approach mentioned earlier and essential to the People theme. The belief that proactivity can “make things better” in a democratic way for a community network, enhancing interactivity and transactions at all levels, must surely be at the core of any community’s future.

On-line communities and communities on-line have, both by need and circumstance, evolved in response not only to the threat of the new, but as a direct product of the technologies themselves. Without the personal computer revolution, enhanced telecommunications capabilities, and the ingenuity of communications companies there would be no virtual world and no need for on-line communities. (Smith and Kollock, 1998).

To reiterate, the basic aims behind the development of any community on-line are to provide access, encourage engagement and build awareness, where perhaps all these factors have been previously challenged in existing physical communities.

**Communities on-line vs. On-line Communities**

The difference between the idea of community on-line and on-line communities should be defined here, as these differences are integral to the People and community theme.

As an on-line member of an on-line community called *Brainstorms*, created and hosted on the Internet by Howard Rheingold and consisting of many invited members from all over the world, I started querying the semantic and semiotic difference between “on-line communities” and “communities on-line”. Was it just a cultural difference, seeing as most on-line communities to date exist in North America and Europe, or was it a conceptual difference, which had not as yet been defined or discussed?

The following excerpts are from the Life On-Line section of Brainstorms.  
<http://www.rheingold.com/community> where I posed the following question:



Brainstorms: 18-MAR-2000 01:59

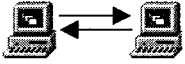
Gill Sellar (gilly): “Hello again! Having read many replies to this initial question I posted, it seems that On-Line communities and communities on-line are not the same thing. WELL, MUDs, FidoNet etc have all been formed around an on-line community of interest e.g. games, topics, needs....anyone, anywhere can theoretically participate through shared interest.

Being on-line grew the community! Or, “on-line” came before community.

As I work daily towards attempting to bring my physical community in the Great Southern region of Western Australia, on-line, it has become apparent that here we have an existing community becoming more connected, through a common GateWAY or portal. Community came before the “on-line” bit, thus becoming a community on-line.

Hope this is not too pedantic. Gill

My posting prompted a number of responses one of which follows:



Brainstorms: 19-MAR-2000 00:02

John D. Williams (johndwilliams)

..."it seems that On-Line communities and communities on-line are not the same thing. [some have] been formed around an on-line community of interest... Being on-line grew the community! Or, "on-line" came before community. [Some already] have an existing community becoming more connected, through a common GateWay or portal. Community came before the "on-line" bit, thus becoming a community on-line.

Now this is a fascinating concept and I am keen to read the responses of others more experienced with online communication. My gut reaction is that there has to be a decided difference between online groups creating a community and a community which creates a VC."

Interestingly enough, I used this particular on-line community, Brainstorms, to float my idea concerning its nature and the difference of it to a community on-line. It was here that the concept was nurtured. It became evident the concept was more than a mere pedantic argument or grammatical placement of the word "on-line", so that it exists as an adjective in one case and an adverb in another. It assisted the accurate definition of and subsequent channelled research, into this phenomenon of a new form of community. Communities of place making themselves accessible not only to the people whom physically constitute them, but also to communities elsewhere. This is the true globalisation of community and essentially the foundation of "communities on-line".

This important distinction clarifies the difference from the outset and the term community on-line should be used when referring to the process of bringing existing physical communities on-line. When on-line communities such as chat channels, special interest groups and other subject or activity dominant groups are mentioned, they will be referred to as on-line communities.

Research into the nature of Communities On-Line shows components of communities on-line are greater than the sum of their parts, with those parts ostensibly consisting of:



- Shared interests and knowledge. Relationships created over time to form a shared history, and a complex web between members.
- Shared vision (future) where the members feel part of a larger social, geographic and economic identity.
- Shared technological capability, where computers and Internet access empower community interaction with the outside world.
- Access to education, training and resources where there is encouragement of participation, awareness building and an exchange of things valued by members.
- Ability to change, control and transform the processes and products of the community.

(Borgstrom 1998)

There are also assertions that we can only consider ourselves to be a community on-line

when:

- All community members have reasonable access to on-line services – reasonable being defined as; local call access from home, free community access points, as well as quality services and download speeds appropriate for on-line service delivery)
- Ability to publish from non-centralised computers, using DPS (distributed publishing systems such as WEBIT, Harvest Road) directly onto the Internet.
- Community literacy is commensurate with accessing on-line Services: that more than 50% of people educated to literacy are also computer literate to the standard necessary to interact with on-line services.
- On-line services are used as community communications and interaction tools. Standard Telephone Dialing (STD) and International Subscriber Dialing (ISD) should be replaced by Voice over IP telephony in better than 10% of cases. Conferences and chats are regularly used, and e-mail is used more frequently than facsimiles; web portals start being used as community communications devices.
- More than 50% of all homes have an Internet connection. Access to Telecentres and Rural Transaction Centres should be included in this component.
- More than 10% of all community Internet users have developed (or had developed for them) a WWW presence.
- Greater than 25% of all community businesses transact over the Internet – (e-commerce ability in selling/buying goods or services)

- That a measurable community economic benefit is being achieved through the use of on-line services.

(Don Cameron 1998)

Four different types of community: communities of transaction, interest, fantasy, and relationship can be found on the Internet, or through on-line services, but the successful community of the future will incorporate all four—or as many as possible. Gradually the basics of community and attributes of communities on-line will become blended. (Hagel and Armstrong 1997)

Rheingold (1992) describes on-line behaviour as “just about everything people do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind”. He argues that”

There is no such thing as a single, monolithic, online subculture; it’s more like an ecosystem of subcultures, some frivolous, others serious. The cutting edge of scientific discourse is migrating to virtual communities, where you can read electronic pre-printed reports of microbiologists and cognitive scientists. At the same time, activists and educational reformers are using the same medium as a political tool. You can use virtual communities to find a date, sell a lawnmower, publish a novel, conduct a meeting.

If this is the essence of communities on-line then is there a future in pursuing their development? Is it possible to develop and maintain such communities and what are the parameters and problems associated with such endeavours?

Our Communities of the Future (COTF) network of people worldwide is dedicated to the creation of what we call building ‘capacities for transformation.’ We are convinced that all of us are at the beginning of a journey to rethink and retool our local institutions within a futures context, and that totally new capacities will need to evolve over time for communities to be able to meet the challenges of an increasingly fast-paced, interconnected, and complex society. (Smyre 1999)

Following in the spirit of Smyre’s words the critical questions are whether we are building new communication technologies and networks because we can, or because they can actually provide some genuine use. If the latter is true then how do we ensure democratic ownership and use of these technologies? Can both commercial and community interests be

accommodated or will the more vulnerable of the two, community, be overtaken by business as has so often happened in any mass media environment to date?

GateWAY is an example of how the new communications technologies can provide a genuine and proactive use for a regional community. The establishment of the GateWAY Cooperative as a solution to providing a for-profit, but community owned base is a creative solution to the issues of democratic ownership of a web portal. It is an attempt at accommodating both commercial and community interests with neither one nor the other dominating. It remains to be seen whether this approach works in the future, but for now it seems an elegant solution to a vexing problem, faced by all community portals throughout world.

Knowledge of how communities on-line eventuated and subsequently developed in Australia is central to understanding how and why the Albany GateWAY came into existence. Several communities on-line have been studied to determine the essential components necessary for successful implementation and some of the pitfalls and extraneous activities, which effect this process and its subsequent sustainability. These examples were covered earlier in both the Preface and Works chapters and the findings unequivocally showed that people make portals and without them as the central theme, portals do not become communities on-line, exist as meeting places or places for transaction, discourse or belonging. Nothing surmounts social capital as the most important asset of community, hence the aptness with which GateWAY has been called “The People’s Portal”.

**2. Planning**

Planning a strategy and implementing the decisions made within that strategy, are difficult tasks to successfully achieve in any project. I’ve already referred to the “talk the talk and walk the walk” phrase, which was used in early presentations promoting the attributes of portal development. Planning and procedure is the “walking” part of such projects and how well this is achieved defines all the other parameters.

GateWAY initially portrayed a sense of “the blind leading the blind” on many issues, and I decided that there was only one way to proceed and that was to “do it and not worry about making mistakes”. The “talkers” gave no clear demonstration or hands-on practical assistance.

There were no real life examples of any community portals built in Australia, which had been constructed and survived from a ground up model. It seemed pointless to follow the existing top down, directory driven portals seeing as there appeared to be very little interaction between people. The aim here was to build and breathe life into a true community portal, which really gave access through engagement, to the people of its region.

### *Strategies*

Building relationships with the people of the region was a paramount strategy. Giving them something for nothing, such as WebIT training and free websites, was the path chosen and this proved to be successful for a number of reasons.

Firstly it built trust. By physically visiting each town, offering free training in what was basically an empowerment process and staying a night or so in a local Bed and Breakfast or Hotel, buying dinner, or breakfast showed support for local concerns. This “getting one’s hands dirty” and the fact that I actually live within in the region in which I was trying to implement this project, was and should be a crucial foundation strategy to any project of this sort. The town of Jerramungup, on the region’s most easterly border, is a good example of this. Sarah Liddiard, who featured as one of our GateWAY volunteers in the Chapter Two, contacted us very early during the prototype stage of GateWAY’s first page.

Initially Sarah enquired about advertising her farmstay accommodation business [www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Jerramungup/Accommodation](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Town/Jerramungup/Accommodation) on GateWAY. As the months progressed she became a key contact (as did many other town locals), in that particular town. When it came time to offer Jerramungup WebIT training, Sarah was the obvious contact as she had liaisons with the school. This network spread throughout the local Telecentre, library, sporting and cultural groups and businesses until Jerramungup had several WebIT conversant people, providing regular local content for their own town website [www.albanygateway.com.au/town/jerramungup](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/town/jerramungup) This meant they had ownership and control, not from the GateWAY administration, but from their town base. GateWAY only provided the platform for this communication and it formed the basis of planning for people’s involvement.

Other active community participation examples are the towns of Broomehill [www.albanygateway.com.au/town/broomehill](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/town/broomehill) and Narrikup [www.albanygateway.com.au/town/narrikup](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/town/narrikup) and Kendenup [www.albanygateway.com.au/town/kendenup](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/town/kendenup). Topic editors from various towns in the Great Southern provide regular updates on a wide range of community interests like Horses [www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/horses](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/horses) , Rock and Roll dancing [www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/dancing](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/dancing) and

Besides this a growing business community is evident at [www.albanygateway.com.au/members/options](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/members/options) with the Albany Chamber of Commerce putting its business directory online in partnership with GateWAY.

To fully understand and observe the community participation levels on GateWAY, the reader must interact with the community online. It is constantly changing and as a ‘value producing entity’ it has a high level of social capital, infrastructure provision and trust invested in it.

### ***Business Plan***

Social and economic planning is interrelated (Preece 2000). One cannot function without the other and despite what seemed quite accurate forecasting in the first business plan, time and experience called for a new business plan to be created.

Following are key questions I felt needed to be considered for developing a sound business plan GateWAY:

- What were the portal’s business objectives?
- What strategies would the portal use to achieve these objectives?
- Who are the potential members? What were their backgrounds? Were they part of a vertical group or from all industries within a geographical region?
- What was the size of the market (ie, max number of potential members)?

- What services/products was the portal providing its members?
- How would these services/products be marketed to its members?
- How would the portal be marketed to end-users?
- Who were the competitors?
- What capital would be needed to ensure adequate working capital until break-even or profit points were reached?

With these questions as a starting point I began preparing the new GateWAY business plan in a climate where GateWAY had been grossly under resourced from the outset, and had been very much an early experiment in all ways. The initial \$75,000 NOIE/ITOL funding barely paid for the first year of operation. It became patently obvious the initial objectives could not be totally achieved without the application of more start up and continuing resources, in order for the portal to get into a breakeven or self-sustaining mode.

Business and strategic planning are crucial to plotting a positive course in any business venture and it was now time to ensure we had a soundly based idea of where GateWAY needed to go to start on the road to sustainability.

Writing a vision statement meant encapsulating the essence of what I imagined could be achieved by and through GateWAY. Turning to research in business and management information systems, particularly that dealing with organisational theory and performance assisted this process. Marshall, McKay and Burn (2000), in their work on structure, strategy and success in virtual organisations suggest, “A shared purpose or vision serves as the ‘glue’ of the virtual organisation (Hedberg et al., 1994; Wiesenfeld et al., 1998). It also serves as the life cycle of the virtual organisation.” Their observation that amongst the critical success factors for such organisations ‘trust and risk’ were two of the main challenges, noting that “many of the strengths and powerful characteristics of the virtual organisation also tend to render it vulnerable”.

### ***Vision Statement***

GateWAY has the potential to become a thriving, sustainable community web portal, not only achieving its aims of building awareness, encouraging engagement and providing access to the new technologies, but by making a financial profit to assist future growth.

The GateWAY Cooperative will provide the management structure and foundation for this to be achieved. All profits will be reinvested in the portal to employ local I.T. talent and maintain GateWAY at the leading edge of Australian communities on-line, by building trust and sharing risk in a collaborative fashion.

### ***Mission Statement***

Over the last year, the Albany Gateway has developed as a major regional, community web portal. It is a single entry point for individuals, communities, governments and businesses to access and interact with Albany and the Great Southern region. It provides a focal point for local, regional and global online activities, and in particular supports and develops regional awareness of, and activities in, the Internet.

It is now time to progress GateWAY's growth by enabling e-commerce for business, further training local people in the WebiT distributed publishing system and in Internet and e-mail use and maintaining vibrant, current and parochial content on a broader scale. The mission to continue bringing the Great Southern on-line is to be ramped up, to assist more people to access the new technologies and strengthen the already existing community on-line.

Mission statements should clearly spell out what the organisation intends doing to ensure the vision statement is met. For GateWAY this meant defining a set of goals which broached all aspects of the portal's development.

### ***Goals develop the portal further in order to:***

- showcase the region globally
- develop communities of interest
- ensure access and interaction with GateWAY at all times

- provide training in WebIT
- deliver services online
- deliver business–consumer and business–business e-commerce
- grow the regional online economy for the Great Southern of Western Australia

Leading on from the mention of strengths posing future ‘vulnerability’ problems and therefore potentially threatening goals, Chesborough and Teece (1996) identify a number of tensions to watch out for in planning strategy and business models for virtual organisations. For example “strengths such as mutual trust, shared risk and opportunistic behaviour can become weaknesses when conflicts or misunderstandings arise, or unforeseen opportunities work to favour some of the parties more than others.” (Chesborough and Teece 1996)

Some of these concerns became clearer when I started working on the SWOT analysis and the rest of the work which followed from this was quantitative, working with estimates and projections based on product costs and anticipated turnover, once the portal options started to be marketed.

## **SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)**

### ***Strengths***

- GateWAY has established itself as a major community based, regional portal, attracting a wide local, interstate and global audience.
- The “grassroots up” design and community building exercise has been successful, providing GateWAY with a solid base for content provision and local involvement.
- The WebIT distributed publishing system is an effective tool for content provision and maintenance, whilst empowering users to publish their own content at anytime.
- Low cost, low risk entry level for business and community groups on the Internet.



- Functioning as Cooperative gives GateWAY the flexibility to act like a business, but involve the community in the administration and direction of their regional portal.

### ***Weaknesses***

- Costs of maintaining and developing the portal further are hindered due to low level of initial seed funding actually needed to ensure continuity.
- Community is demanding more “free” services, but revenue can’t keep up with needs and demand.
- Quality of material on the site is variable – the “raw edge”, which might hinder adoption by businesses concerned about image.
- No funding for full-time personnel to administer, train and maintain the portal. It is totally volunteer supported at present.

### ***Opportunities***

- Potential to become the leading business portal in the Great Southern
- Developing as a major promotions facility for the region and could be a leader in regional branding initiatives.
- Conduit for bringing the community to business and vice versa through e-commerce and other on-line communication functionalities.
- To become a regional ETC (Electronic Transaction Association) for GEM (Government Electronic Marketing) through which local business can tender and procure goods and service electronically.
- Prospective specialised web hosting and bandwidth agent.
- Multiple partnership opportunities with local and regional organisations e.g. Chambers of Commerce, Great Southern Region Marketing Association, local councils.

### ***Threats***

- Lack of “bridging assistance funding” to ensure sustainability until Cooperative becomes fully functional.

- Inability to maintain community interest and input due to reliance on volunteer labour.
- Competition from other portals in future.
- Campaign from disaffected individuals may destroy public perception of and trust in GateWAY.
- Perceived lack of security, or Internet security issues, in public's mind.
- Any perception that GateWAY is taking core business away from local I.T. businesses, will cause friction within that sphere.

A full copy of the business plan is to be found in the Appendix section of this work, which was written after research into market orientation and analysis, business demographics, core product and service identification and viable budget projections were studied. This business plan became the blueprint for the future strategy towards building both a social, as well as as financial 'value producing entity'.

### **3. Procedure**

Procedure or the "modus operandi" of a project is tied to closely following the planned strategies. This doesn't imply lateral thinking or creativity can't still find a place, however a project like GateWAY is as much about people and knowledge management as it is about ensuring that technical procedures work, and in this lies the essence of procedural technique.

The process became more important to me, than the product, in the first eighteen months of GateWAY. How does one build, develop and manage a virtual, intangible event or process when there's no handbook or guidelines? Drawing on my experience as an educator, facilitator and project manager it was logical to follow a tried and true method for designing and implementing a project such as GateWAY.

The N.O.S.E. model (Tyler 1950) gave a sound starting point with needs, objectives, strategies and evaluation being the four components incorporating a feedback loop at the end to ensure continuity. The bulk of this research has already been covered in Chapter Two: The

Work, however it is important that GateWAY's implementation is recorded in the following 10 procedures:

1. Research and assessment of existing community web portals and literature/best practice examples in the area
2. Ascertaining community's needs.
3. Definition of objectives based on those needs.
4. Planning and building of a community on-line in both the human and technological sense. Implementing good web design imperatives for easy use and navigability.
5. Promoting the vision of a community on-line and what benefits this brings to our region.
6. Fostering good communication channels with community volunteers and other stakeholders.
7. Providing training and tools for empowerment for local community.
8. Developing partnerships and encouraging engagement through collaboration and community building exercises.
9. Assessing progress, modifying and retrying technical functions. What problems were there with the systems and software? What worked and what didn't with editors on-line?
10. Attending to details and listening to all queries, regardless of how tedious or time consuming.
11. Building trust through doing, demonstrating and enthusing large groups of sceptics, being there and showing perseverance and leadership.
12. Taking note of criticism and attempting to improve all aspects of the service and products as the project developed.

**4. Partnership**

Never before has the world seemed so small, the marketplace so competitive, changes more rapid and the pressure to perform so intense. Confrontation is turning into cooperation, competition into collaboration, separate and often-conflicting strategies into shared visions with common goals. No longer can a single organisation, public or private sector, be all things to all people. Going it alone is clearly not the smartest option and the business landscape is littered with poorly performing firms that have refused to share. However, attaining genuine and sustainable competitive advantage has never been more challenging to understand or difficult to achieve. (Lendrum 2000)

Partnership or collaboration (Marshall, MacKay, Burn 2001, Daft 1998), is another important strategy toward sustainability and the GateWAY Cooperative model is enhanced by the adoption of a number of regional partners, from within our geographical community.

GWN TV and the Weekender newspaper were quick to join with GateWAY early on in the piece. GWN exchanged a banner ad for an equivalent worth of television commercials on their station. The Weekender runs our logo and website address on page three of every edition in exchange for continual web presence on our home page.

Other examples of interested partners are AussieHost, the Albany Chamber of Commerce and Industry, as well as the Great Southern Regional Marketing Association. Cross mediation and partnership arrangements bring each other's clientele to the medium and effectively shore up the partnering organisations against outside competition and threats.

A cooperative strategy paradigm proposed by Lorange and Roos (1992) suggests four success criteria for this approach:

- 1. Compatible strategy and culture
- 2. Comparable contribution
- 3. Compatible strengths
- 4. No conflict of interest

Even though they are mainly referring to larger companies and multinational concerns, Cooperative strategy still has a place for smaller firms as the "increasing internationalisation and tightening of competitive pressure, stemming from global scale and/or scope advantages effects

all parties. Hence a need to team up with partners to ameliorate resource shortages and gain time.” (Lorange and Roos 1992)

Now that GateWAY is a Cooperative, collaboration with other organisations is a basic tenet for survival. Partnerships and sharing of skills, knowledge and assets is the new “modus operandi” in a rapidly changing business and social environment. (Lendrum 2000) It is this partnering which will make the portal sustainable. The meaning of competition takes on different tone when viewed in a collaborative light. It remains to be seen whether one can collaborate with competitors and still healthily compete with them in the same instance.

Maybe competitors within the region will learn to collaborate when threatened by outside forces, but compete against each other on a local level. It is too early to tell how GateWAY’s Cooperative venture will fare, but it now has a solid technical and social base on which to grow and truly assist the local community in coming on-line.

**5. Passion**

Is passion a theme? If so then how is it defined in relation to a process, a creation of a technical and community interface which is a virtual presence with no ostensible physicality? How can one be “passionate” about something with no obvious life, a mechanism for communication in a post modern, often passionless world?

Perhaps the answer lies not so much in where and what GateWay is, but in who and why. In the second chapter I mentioned this work being both a “journey and a mission”. GateWAY demanded full energy and commitment from day one and without a passion or desire to achieve the project’s objectives, it is doubtful whether it could have succeeded.

“My initial involvement in the project was intuitive, in so far I sensed the need to become involved in something which was close to my interests, chosen profession, areas of academic study and experiences.” I had up until this time worked extensively with people of differing abilities and within the media/I.T. area. It seemed appropriate to now blend all these skills into something broader and hopefully useful, for as many people of my community, as possible. The term “digital divide”, referring to the “haves” and “have-nots” of our community,

the people who for social or economic reasons could not access the means to own computers with Internet connections and the wherewithal to learn how to use it, was central to my personal reasons for becoming involved.

I also wrote “the personal is political and both call for passion”. How could these not be themes in a heuristic methodological approach, particularly given my meliorist stance on any I.T. access issues, in these definitive times of technological change? To reiterate “things can get better, but only if people act to ensure that outcome. People can only act and have a constructive effect on their future if they have the tools to become empowered.” (Schuler 1996)

Thou hast been.....  
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards  
Has taken with equal thanks.....Give me that man  
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him  
In my heart's core, aye, in my heart of hearts  
As I do thee...

Hamlet To His Friend Horatio

A sense of self-mastery, of being able to withstand the emotional storms that the buffering of Fortune brings rather than being “passion's slave,” has been praised as a virtue since the time of Plato. The ancient Greek word for it was *sophrosyne*, “care and intelligence in conducting one's life; a tempered balance and wisdom,” as Page Du bois, a Greek scholar translates it. (Goleman 1996)

Goleman's basic message has to do with ‘emotional self regulation’ and the ability to balance both intense feelings and rationality to a point where both coexist, enhancing an individual's actions and presence. Passion then has a definite place in the themes of this work. Without it I wouldn't have been driven to lead others to persevere, share and build what has become an important communication medium for the people of the Great Southern.

Community networking entrepreneurs face a formidable challenge. Are they part of a social phenomenon that is destined to stall or implode, or do they represent a vibrant force, capable of building on the knowledge they have accumulated, adapting to a rapidly changing world and community needs, and

ultimately achieving positive, lasting social change in their communities?  
(Mario Morino 1994)

Morino aptly sums up the two extremes all serious community portal builders face on a daily basis. There have been times I've felt like everything was going to disintegrate, progress was too slow and support hard to find. Then, out of the blue some wonderful e-mail or phone call would happen, flushing back all the reasons why this was an important project to complete and rejuvenated I'd get on with the job.

Passion, as a subject and object of the process that became GateWAY, was my fuel during tough times and I'd like to think it was also an inspiration to others that supported, became empowered and proactive in the creation of our community's first, on-line project.

## **6. Product**

The successful marketplace will invite consumers into a communal experience and let them meet people as well as buy products...it will make shopping a transaction involving not just goods and services but also experience. It will not forsake community for commerce. (Rayport and Sviokla 1995)

Products, goods and services, of a web portal are mostly intangibles

[www.albanygateway.com.au/home/advertise](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/home/advertise) and [www.albanygateway.com.au/member/options](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/member/options) reliant on participant's use and needs in order to be generated and improved. The base product of the Albany GateWAY Project is [www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au) and the promise of channelling prospective customers and visitors to the websites of towns, businesses and community groups within the region, from elsewhere. It is also a "marketplace" as Rayport and Svinkla term it, where entertainment, persuasion and information become on-line experiences attracting and hopefully maintaining active visits and revisits, by people from everywhere.

One of the most difficult things to sell or promote to small business is the advantage of being on-line with a major regional portal and what it can offer. This is why it is essential for portals to have statistics packages [www.albanygateway.com.au/Top10.asp](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Top10.asp), which offer each paying client a regular update on where, when and how many hits/visits their site is gets within specific time frames.

Statistics are an invaluable marketing tool. Customers usually want some way of quantifying the traffic or interest and hopefully “sales” or “interaction” their site receives, as this gives something measurable from a medium, which in all essence is abstract and largely unproven. Analysis of statistical data collected between August 2000 and June 2001 appears in the final chapter. Data logs for this period are collated in the Appendix section.

**7. Politics**

***Ownership***

Few things are more personal or political than the concept of ownership. Ownership is a primary factor in achieving sustainability for a community portal. (Cohill and Kruth 1999; Kollock 1998) There are a number of ownership configurations e.g. local government authorities, such as town councils, or development commissions might drive and incubate, (as in Peel Online), or private individuals or companies can be instrumental in setting them up, taking a share of the profits. Another option is where the people of the region/area might own the community portal in the form of a Cooperative. (Albany GateWAY)

Whichever strategy is employed, all have to ask the same questions about the structure, planning and function of the organisation.

***Ownership and planning questions***

A sound and achievable business plan along with a viable strategic plan, with at least a 3-5 year projection is the first of these imperatives. A number of factors needed to be considered and a close eye kept on the portal’s performance, from day one of launch. Issues such as “Who are the users and what do they want or need to access through the portal?” “What functions are in place to raise awareness, encourage engagement and provide reasonable access?” “Who owns the portal and what formal structure does it have e.g. a company, not for profit organisation or cooperative?” all needed addressing. Kim (2000) emphasizes these considerations before any structural work is started on building a virtual presence. Her basic community design principles of design for growth and change, creation of feedback loops and the subsequent empowering of individuals within those communities, fit well with Cohill’s research into local ownership issues and community based projects. (Cohill 1999)



Other questions such as “Is there leadership and a range of different people involved in the management and function of the portal and what products or services does the portal offer locals and visitors from elsewhere?” raise core people and product management issues. These issues are central to the portal business process and effective organisation of both governs viability. Baker and Sinkula refer to the “ causal relationship between learning orientation and organisational performance and also between learning orientation and new product development.” They see these as “ critical issues to managers because it better informs them about organisational traits that can influence marketplace performance.” (Baker and Sinkula 2000)

I understand the importance of Baker and Sinkula’s iterations on these subjects and informing and leading the Cooperative Board must be a major role in

addressing GateWAY’s future in developing revenue generating options with a view to a sustainable future.

Further planning questions such as “Is the portal interactive, are local businesses, community groups and individuals able to contribute and edit at will and are incentives in place for local people to become involved and at what levels?” need earnest consideration. Web portals rely on visitor interaction to enable an online transaction platform to be viable. Use and customer loyalty builds business confidence once questions like “What marketing and promotional activities exist to push the portal’s existence and pull “eyeballs”, clients, contributors and customers?” and “Are partnerships active between the portal and local media, businesses, government and community groups?” have been addressed. The development of strategies for dealing with these questions is documented in both the Business Plan (*appendix*) and Product and Promotions sections of Chapter Five.

Perhaps one of the most difficult administrative questions is one about content management. “Who maintains the life and soul of the portal? Who moderates and who takes responsibility for keeping information fresh, interesting and non-libellous.” Setting up a technical sructure for moderating discussion boards or content upload to the server is easily maintained once the applications have been built, however time, cost and efficiency factors surrounding the inevitable need for someone to provide constant, live online mediation is

another. Serious consideration of how this online management system will function should appear close to the top of the priority list of any developing community online.

### ***Lack of local knowledge and understanding.***

Lack of local knowledge and understanding are key issues in attempting to create a web presence such as Albany GateWAY. Traditionally rural communities have been under resourced in areas such as education, health and telecommunications. They are usually the last to embrace technological advances and until now have been left out of the training and communication networks, integral to the development of knowledge and understanding.

At the start of the GateWAY project, some towns in the Great Southern did not have public Internet access or Telecentres, e.g. Kendenup, Mt. Barker, and Redmond. Telecentres help people to acquire the skills necessary for using computers and the new technologies. Accessing GateWAY requires Internet access through sophisticated hardware, software and reliable ISP provision. Local call status is imperative for rural dwellers, to make access to and through GateWAY, cost effective. Access issues are political and require appropriate government legislation and funding to be fully addressed.

A report by the Council of Small Business Organisations and the Department of Transport and Regional Development (CRLRA 1999), found that regional communities with populations of under 15,000 are the least resilient to negative economic shocks. Rapid economic change, particularly through the impact of new technology e.g. the Internet, e-commerce etc., serve as external pressures on small, rural communities.

The report also suggested local initiatives and local actions could reduce the negative impact of rapid economic change on small rural communities. Most of the towns in the Great Southern have populations far less than 15,000 and Albany GateWAY, as a local initiative, has an opportunity to assist the region in becoming informed, e-commercial and connected.

### ***On-Line Services and Internet Access/Needs and Issues***

Albany GateWAY must be easily accessible to the majority of Great Southern residents. Local ISPs and computing businesses need assistance in increasing their customer bases and quality of service. By supplying information and opportunities for the local I.T. community, to

access or participate in e.g. hosting and training opportunities or in using the site to advertise and promote their businesses, their involvement will be guaranteed.

Even though the number of people purchasing computers and connecting to the Internet increases daily, there are still those members of the community who do not have the personal resources to achieve this.

The GateWAY development process can assist all residents of the Great Southern in accessing the Internet by:

- Providing information on-line about local I.T and ISP services.
- Encouraging liaison and communication with the Telecentre Network.
- Providing on-line information about where and how to gain Internet access in all locations in the Great Southern.
- Encouraging participation in the use of the GateWAY, WebIT distributed publishing system, for towns and organisations to communicate and provide regularly updated content to the site.

The key issues for potential and existing Internet users are:

- Points of presence
- Access speed
- Reliability of service
- 24 x 7 support and accessibility
- All up costs
- Training and support
- Access to computers and software

There has been a mixed standard of service from ISPs in Albany (and surrounding areas). The ISPs interviewed are improving this situation and appear to be offering a reasonable service. They have developed rapidly and will require substantial capital input to maintain their service and competitiveness. This may produce problems in the future. Many Albany

businesses are at such a size, or play a central regional role, that effective Internet provision is becoming a “mission critical” issue for them. At present, the local Internet service providers face a challenge in totally supporting this need, and Telstra services are seen by them as part of the problem. (Farr 1999)

### ***Competition between local ISP's and computing businesses.***

The rivalry, which has existed between local ISPs and computing businesses, can either be seen as an acceptable norm of healthy competitiveness, central to any free enterprise system, or a barrier to the creation of a cooperative initiative like GateWAY.

Albany GateWAY must be instrumental in raising ISP's awareness, offering an equal opportunity for them to compete for hosting rights, e-commerce facilitation and industry briefings when and where appropriate and possible.

Currently it appears the biggest threat to ISPs is not so much each other, but Telstra, Australia's national Telco.

By offering \$24.95 per month, local call Internet connection options to rural and regional Australia and not reducing the cost of terrestrial services which local ISPs rely on to provide their services, Telstra is effectively squeezing smaller ISPs out of the marketplace. One local ISP has forecasted the demise of smaller ISPs and the I.T. industry in the Great Southern because of Telstra's pricing schemes.

### ***Dealing with dissenters***

The preliminary community forum and meetings for the establishment of the two GateWAY committees, The Perth consortia and the Albany Committee and the two workshops held in late 1998, were breeding grounds for discontent over the issue of a local/regional portal. I was not present at any of these events, as they were held prior to my engagement as Manager.

From numerous verbal reports by people who were involved in the initial process, there appeared to be a real enthusiasm for the concept of creating a regional portal, however the questions of who, how and where were to become contentious issues.

GateWAY was to suffer from the outset from political or perhaps more aptly described personal rivalry and agendas, which were to leave an indelible mark on the process and final

outcomes. Some of these examples have already been touched on in other sections of this work, such as the rivalry between local ISPs, however it was more than this. There was jockeying for positions on the newly formed Albany GateWAY committee from individuals, anticipating profit or privilege for their business concerns.

It was interesting to see one prominent committee member resign early in the proceedings when I made it clear no one ISP or Web Design firm would automatically have precedence over others in the region. After this event I actively canvassed as many local I.T. businesses as I could to find out what they wanted and had to offer GateWAY and knew that ultimately we had to “go to tender” to prevent further political problems in future.

These “problems” however continued despite a formal and proper RFQ (Request for Quote) process being implemented, as the winner of the development contract was a Perth based firm (owned by a Malaysian Company, Opensearch), which was not happily received. The winning ISP was however a local firm Omninet, which of course no-one queried, even though some other ISPs were again “put out!”

GateWAY was to also have an uphill battle with local media concerns. We approached the Albany Advertiser to partner with us in a “cross-media” agreement where we would promote their newspaper if they promoted our portal. This process was one which research was showing had great merit for all concerned and was the way larger, international companies were going. We spent three months meeting with and then waiting for some response, to no avail. It appeared we were likely seen as competitors, to an already threatened print medium, which had not as yet come to terms with the new technologies, and as a subsidiary of The West Australian newspaper, could not make an independent decision.

The Albany and Great Southern Weekender, an alternative local newspaper was approached, welcoming GateWAY with open arms. Since this alliance The Albany Advertiser refused to report anything to do with GateWAY e.g. the Launch on May the 19<sup>th</sup>, which was quite a big affair with federal representatives attending and GateWAY winning the Telstra 2000 Regional I.T. Awards. None of this was reported and the only time The Advertiser saw anything about GateWAY being newsworthy was when they headlined their Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2001 edition with: *Site Opens Gate To Porn!* (the Jonah files event) This was both amusing and

annoying seeing as the incident they were covering didn't happen in the way it was reported and appeared as an anti-statement towards GateWAY. The irony was our own on-line newspaper *The Paper* was coincidentally launched on that day and we recorded over 83,000 hits that week with all the publicity.

### ***The Politics of Place***

As in any geographical location there are issues which towns have disputed for many years and still dispute. Maybe it's a bit grandiose to compare the rivalry of Melbourne with Sydney over which is Australia's major business or cultural centre, to that of Katanning and Albany, but it exists.

I was totally unaware of the history both these two largest towns (Albany now being classified as a city with more than 30,000 people), in the Great Southern subliminally shared. Katanning, the second biggest populated town in the region, sees itself as the "heart" and northern gateway to the Great Southern. Albany, with its port, first European settlement status and large industrial and retail base, sees itself as the "capital" of our region. When attempting to educate, train and offer GateWAY's services to Katanning, I was met with a very difficult task. The two first committees, having named GateWAY, Albany GateWAY, effectively condemned the portal to an unnecessary struggle in becoming truly regional. GateWAY should have been called "The Great Southern GateWAY", "Southern Regional GateWAY", or something to that effect. Perhaps Albany was too case specific for the rest of the region.

Persevering with Katanning was time consuming and generally unrewarding. Take a look at their town site. It has no energy and no one seems really concerned they're not portraying themselves, on-line to the outside world. The site is free, the WebiT training was offered freely and delivered at the Katanning Telecentre, as was a public presentation at the Katanning Recreation Centre. It appeared that political factions within the town and a suspicion of Albany were key factors in the attitude encountered there. Katanning's Mainstreet Coordinator and Telecentre Coordinators were enthusiastic and very welcoming, however they could only provide a venue and invite public participation. The Katanning community was not ready or open for this development a year ago, but things might change as renewed and differing energies are brought into GateWAY.

Politics cannot be avoided in any community project. There will always be those who support, those who dissent and those who “couldn’t give a damn” regardless of what goals might be achieved for the community as a whole. Vision and community leadership will always have to do battle with politics and perceptions and through the whole GateWAY process I’ve come to realise the importance of setting and maintaining a definite course. Many challenges threaten to block and divert, but with a personal conviction and an intuition the idea might work and therefore might make a difference, one’s efforts may prove fruitful.

### The Cooperative Model



**Figure 16. GateWAY Cooperative Model**

The Cooperative model illustrates the collaboration between community and business, with both working towards a profitable partnership of all concerned. Partnership (Lendrum 2000) and collaboration as already discussed, are key success factors in the future of virtual

organisations. GateWAY is now actively seeking the development of primary relationships with local organisations e.g. The Albany Chamber of Commerce.

The formation of business partnerships and alliances is pivotal to the concept of virtual organisation (Grenier and Metes 1995; Henning 1998). Acquiring and/or developing all the required resources and competencies in order to avail itself of windows of opportunity can be both too time consuming and too costly to be an appropriate response for an organisation acting on its own. However, access to the required knowledge, skills, infrastructure or other resources may be available through entering into alliances or partnerships with all, or part only, of other organisations. (Marshal P, McKay and Burn 2001)

In adopting this approach the GateWAY Cooperative gives the region a chance to:

- grow its own I.T. industry
- encourage I.T. development and incubation
- provide a legal/formal structure on which to grow
- profit and excel through harnessing local skills and enterprise
- own and manage GateWAY locally
- ensure a viable, sustainable platform and process for future generations

GateWAY was called the “People’s Portal” the moment our first editors provided content for the site. The development, use and implementation of a DPS WEBiT system was central and crucial to GateWAY working. The people of the Great Southern own the information on GateWAY, they will be able to buy shares in the GateWAY Cooperative and have a say through discussion boards and direct e-mail access to the “Keeper”, whenever they have something to communicate. The Cooperative’s Board of Directors will be elected by the shareholders, thus maintaining a democratic and egalitarian form of governance.

The Cooperative structure seemed like a more progressive alternative to the formation of a not for profit organisation or company, which would have put the power into a hands of a few. There is always the probability it could end up being bought out by a larger concern, become exceedingly difficult to manage and sustain as a community enterprise, or simply not work, as the people who contribute would not have a voice!



## 8. Promotion

Marketing a community web portal is similar in many ways to other products, be they goods or services. A marketing plan should be an integral part of any business plan. Marketing plans work alongside business plans and GateWAY's e-plans addressed the following issues when it came to promotion and marketing.

### *Advertising*

How can newspaper, TV, radio, banner and other media be used to advertise and promote GateWAY? How much would this cost and how effective would the various media be in relation to on-line promotions?

The answers to these questions vary. Firstly, it depends on which website, newspaper or other medium you want to advertise in or on. For example advertising or having a web page/site on the WATC (Western Australian Tourism Commission) website and GateWAY are two very different things. Advertising in the West Australian Newspaper and Denmark Bulletin are also different things. Television advertising is expensive and often out of the reach of small or community based organisations. Radio though not as expensive, still requires accurate targeting of specific audiences to prove effective. There are no sales or promotional certainties with any one form of advertising. Decisions about advertising budget spending should be made in relation to current market research. This accentuates a chance at leveraging the best return for the amount committed. (Heide 1994, Stabell & Fjeldstad 1998)

In the Planning section of this chapter we reviewed print advertising costs as part of cost breakdowns for the business plan budget.

Advertising in the local print media pricing:

- \$18 – \$25 for a small classified ad in that section of newspapers and local rags.
- \$90- \$100 for an eighth of a page.
- \$137 – \$158 for a quarter page.
- \$510- \$610 for a half page

- \$695-\$795 for full page or more depending on the advertisement.

*(Averages as of July 2001)*

GateWAY only used this medium for one off events like promoting the Logo Competition or classified advertisements when The Paper, the GateWAY on-line newspaper was launched March 17<sup>th</sup> 2001. We do have a cross-media/reciprocal partnership going with The Weekender Newspaper, where our logo and URL are displayed on page 2 or 3 of their weekly edition. In exchange we have their logo and a link to their website on the Albany page where weekly news is reported. Other than this print advertising has not been a major option for our regular promotions.

A similar cross-media/reciprocal agreement with the Golden West Network (GWN) for five weeks free to air GateWAY commercials in exchange for GWN's banner ad linked to their website running on GateWAY for a year was negotiated. GateWAY would have had to pay for advertising past that point.

**Internet advertising and banner linking** has proved to be the most lucrative medium, as no money exchanges hands just the website address e.g. <http://www.west-oz.com/> Westoz.com a WATC based website has freely linked GateWAY to their site as we reciprocated with theirs.

**Web advertising** can also take the form of payment for the number of times an advertisement is viewed. The current rates are anywhere between \$20-\$50 per thousand page impressions or ad views. Other rates are available for click through advertising and there's a confusing set of acronyms such as CPM, CTR, CPC, and CPS, which offer different options. These refer to:

- **CPM** – Cost per thousand page impressions, usually meaning advertisement views by visitors to those pages.
- **CTR** –Click through rate means the percentage of site visitors who click on a banner advertisement to go to the advertiser's site estimated at around 1% on average.

- **CPC** – Cost per click refers to the averaged cost of a banner ad campaign per click. That is, the cost divided by the number of times a click through to your site occurs. Say the site you are advertising on charges \$1000/month and the CTR is 1% of 100,000 ad views, then the cost per click is \$1000/1000, or \$1 per click.
- **CPS** – Cost per sale is the calculation for return on investment of the advertising campaign. Using the above example, if you make 10 sales out of 1000 click throughs, then it has cost you \$100 per sale which may or may not be profitable depending on the profit margin on each sale of each product or service.

Affiliate or associate programs in web marketing have already been discussed, but more specifically refer to business relationships with other e-commerce vendors in which you get a percentage of each sale that results from your recommendation – usually from your website. This works best when the affiliate has the software to track the customer coming from your site, and can inspire confidence in you that your reference is being recorded.

GateWAY is just in the process of setting up affiliate or associate programs with assistance from these sites: Linkshare at [www.linkshare.com](http://www.linkshare.com) Refer-It at [www.refer-it.com](http://www.refer-it.com)

Targeted advertising is important. As with offline advertising, if you can get your message to a group of customers who are likely to be interested in your product then your sales percentages should be higher. At search engine sites banner ads are served according to the search terms you put in the search box.

The dream of tightly targeted advertising on the web is evolving slowly. If you consider that you're buying preferences, newsgroup postings, emails, chat and so on which are subject to possible recording and subsequent database delivery, you can see how targeted advertising will be used. If a *cookie* detects your presence at a website, it could look up your database profile and serve a banner advertisement based on your interests. Web cookies are simply bits of software placed on your computer when you browse websites. Not all websites have these, but many do, especially the large well-known websites. Websites use cookies so they can track what you are viewing, and although they won't necessarily know you by name (lets hope it never gets to that point), the website will recognise your computer when you come back to visit again.

GateWAY is starting to look more closely at this option as research suggests sophistication of targeted advertising on the Internet is expected to increase dramatically over the next few years.

Research and best practice examples, published on the Internet, have also influenced GateWAY's marketing strategy. For example 10 Top On-line Marketing Tips have been developed by Peter O'Shea, Editor of E-Commerce Today Australia's leading E-commerce publication. He suggests the following when considering on-line marketing as a tool for your business:

1. Obtain permission from prospective customers – offer subscription to a newsletter, e-mail list etc.
2. Inform Customers – build trust by telling you customers what information you collect about them and what you plan to do with it.
3. Give customers chance to opt out – unsubscribe to mailing lists etc.
4. Personalise –address customers personally and only send them information in which they are interested.
5. Provide good customer service – set up ways for customer to feedback needs and gripes etc. Bad service loses customers
6. Know your customers – who are they, what do they want? Use personalisation technology to assist in this form of data collection.
7. Add value – your customers need a reason to keep coming back to your site. Free services, quality, relevant content, discounts, statistics etc...ensure revisits.
8. Brand your business – everywhere. Logos, tag lines, create an image of what you wish your products or services to project.
9. Measure and record – track and keep assessing marketing trends, web traffic with statistics and analysis tools.
10. Reach out- register on as many search engines as possible, e-mail lists and affiliates you can.

(O'Shea 2000)

Live presentations, where I've been asked to present the GateWAY concept and development, have also proven to be an effective marketing tool. e.g. *CASOC 2000, Mandurah W.A., FACET, (Forum Advocating Cultural and Eco Tourism), conference in Albany, 30-31st July 2001 and Tasmanian Community Network – Smart Communities Forum: "Get on with IT!" Launceston, Tasmania. August 2001.*

The number of visitors and hits on the site rise each time a live presentation has been successfully completed. I often target the audience with real life examples from GateWAY as it is

happening. For example at the Women Going Places Conference I showcased some of our local businesswomen such as Judy Wood's Jassi Skincrafts and Tinglewood Wines business one of GateWAY's first members:

[www.albanygateway.com.au/Member/JASSI SKINCRAFT and TINGLEWOOD WINES](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Member/JASSI_SKINCRAFT_and_TINGLEWOOD_WINES).

This is one powerful method, which is low cost and high return in promotional terms and builds user trust and activity.

The GateWAY marketing and promotions strategy will mature once the Cooperative has established a marketing budget, promoted a marketing manager and partnered with the newly formed Great Southern Region Marketing Association, which will hopefully lead the way in a regional branding initiative. It is imperative GateWAY is proactive in this process as the objectives of both organisations are symbiotic.

## **9. Profit**

In electronic markets...your creativity and ability to leverage the communal ethos of the marketplace dictate whether you win or lose.(Hagel & Armstrong 1997)

Profit and sustainability are symbiotic terms in the discourse of enabling the growth of communities on-line. Community is no longer seen as an impediment to online commerce. No longer is it thought of as just a useful add-on to Websites, or as merely a synonym for strategies of interactive marketing. Instead, community is frequently described as central to the commercial development of the Internet, and to the imagined future of traditional media and mass customisation in the wider world of marketing and advertising.

In the last few years business texts with titles like "Expanding Markets through Virtual Community", "Creating Compelling Commerce Sites Via Community", and "Hosting Web Communities: Building Relationships, Increasing Relationships and Maintaining a Competitive Edge" have become widespread. Furthermore, statements like the following are now commonplace in the business press:

Many electronic commerce sites have fallen short of expectations because they failed to create compelling reasons for customers to change their buying behaviour. The missing element: community. By using interactive discussions, businesses can infuse electronic commerce sites with

community, thereby delivering value in addition to convenience, enhancing perceived trustworthiness, and creating online experiences conducive to shopping instead of simple browsing or buying. 'Virtual communities', built around products can increase sales, reduce marketing and customer acquisition costs, foster brand loyalty, and provide cost-effective market research and focus groups...community is the fourth evolution of the Internet, and commerce sites that don't harness it will miss out. (Wilson, 1999).

One of the most influential business texts to theorise commercial community development is Hagel and Armstrong's *Net Gain: Expanding Markets Through Virtual Communities*. Hagel and Armstrong not only acknowledge the existence of "community", but also consider in almost ethnographic detail the different kinds of community possible. They believe that commercial development of the Internet centres on organising and exploiting the potential of virtual communities. They write:

We suspect that the skills required to organise a community will be as important as any initial advantage a company might appear to have based on its assets. The keys to becoming a successful organiser over time will be the abilities to aggregate members, retain them, and encourage them to make transactions. (pp143 Hagel and Armstrong 1997)

Hagel and Armstrong describe how to identify community members who can be paid to manage sub-communities, and volunteers who can be encouraged to build parts of a site. For example, it describes how to train "community architects" whose job it is to "acquire members, stimulate usage, and extract value from the community". They also describe how to identify community members who can be paid to manage sub-communities, and volunteers who can be encouraged to build parts of a site.

In relation to this GateWAY employs this "community architecture" principle already, and in fact volunteers and other community involvement has been the mainstay in the portal's development. In the second half of 2001 we need to find ways to remunerate these people, to maintain the interests, time and effort so many people have already contributed.

The discussion of community is organised around metaphors of the organic and of the ecosystem. For example, the heart of Hagel and Armstrong's model is what they term an "organic management style" (p. 155). They argue that with an online community a completely

different approach to management must be considered in which a high degree of autonomy is ceded to members, and where managers display “a gardener’s touch” (p. 158). They write, “seeding, weeding and feeding are the best metaphors for online organisation and evolution.” The image of a dynamic, partially “self-organising” ecosystem is perhaps the most pervasive means of representing virtual communities, a result of the fact that member-generated content and interaction is crucial in models of commercial online community, and this cannot be controlled too directly. An organic management style involves such practices as “planting” user driven tools, suggestions and motivations, allowing a high degree of self-organisation, and carefully balancing factors such as intimacy, continuity, size and growth. Examples of these are found in both GateWAY’s towns and topic websites e.g. [www.albanygateway.com.au/town/broomehill](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/town/broomehill) and [www.albanygateway.com.au/town/jerramungup](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/town/jerramungup) .

This theory is extremely close to the heart of what I envisage GateWAY to be, or at least become. The creation of the Cooperative enables profit making and sustainable business practices, with the key recipient being the Great Southern community. The metaphor of community as an ecosystem is used to promote the idea that if left to themselves communities will evolve in ways that are rational, suit commercial development, do not require coercion, and which will fit traditional patterns of ownership and control. When it comes to ownership, there exists what they term “natural owners”, businesses and groups that have related interests and who are specifically suited to the task of building virtual community.

Perhaps the best current example of this is Pre-Emptive Strikes’s Gordon and Rachael Thomas who initially voluntarily worked on GateWAY, but saw an opportunity to further their business aspirations whilst still assisting the community portal. They are now responsible for the further technical and e-commerce development stage of the GateWAY, through which they have developed a sound I.T. business in the region whilst improving the portal’s functionality.

Hagel and Armstrong’s core argument is that the knowledge, content, and resources produced by online communities or communities on-line in our case, are extremely valuable commodities. They write:

The distinctive value of on-line environments is their ability to capture and accumulate member-generated content; virtual communities aggregate an enormous collective expertise that could not possibly be matched by any individual expert. (Pp.95-108)

They assert that “in electronic markets your creativity and ability to leverage the communal ethos of the marketspace dictate success or failure and that up until now, such potential resources have been highly disorganised. They suggest that community architects could organise, structure and archive community knowledge and resources so that they are searchable and accessible in ways that that are profitable to both the community, and to vendors, advertisers, and marketers.

If this is the case then GateWAY has the potential to leverage a place for all its business members in electronic market places around the world. Profitability in this case would be measured by how much outside business we could attract to our region from elsewhere. Member-generated content is particularly valuable for several reasons:

- It attracts new members
- The investment people make in their writings and relationships foster strong member loyalty. This inhibits what the authors call “churning” (or to use the terms commonly employed in business texts, it raises “switching costs” and enables “lock-in”.)
- It enables more subtle ways of interweaving marketing and advertising, media form and content, communication and community formation than exist in traditional mass media.
- It allows for sophisticated forms of customisation, which in turn creates another barrier to people switching to a different virtual community.
- It provides detailed and inexpensive demographic information on interests, habits, and buying practices, and reduces vendor search costs.

In describing the evolutionary paths of online community development, the highest stage of development is the “infomediary”, where there is perfect symmetry between user interests, profiles, and the interests of vendors. This is where the most sophisticated mass customisation can exist, where transaction costs are negligible, geography is insignificant, intermediaries



disappear, where consumers are fully informed and can maximise the value of their personal information. This is basis for a 'try local-buy local' virtual environment which focusses online activity through the community's cooperative portal.

The symbiosis of community, communication, commerce and marketing is so perfect that they are practically indistinguishable, or as Hagel and Armstrong put it, "at this point the community redefines the market by becoming it." In essence, virtual communities have the potential to enable the formation of a subject closer to the ideal, fully informed customer of traditional economic theory, and enable market efficiency and sustainability for all concerned.

### **Value chains, competitive advantage and constituent orientation.**

Virtual for profit organisations are characterised by adaptability and flexibility in "turbulent business environments", and are able to quickly respond to changing markets. (Marshall, MacKay and Burn 2001). Knowledge of variables such as value chains and networks, and the forces affecting competitiveness and value creation, is useful in understanding and participating in emerging on-line markets.

Value chain analysis (Porter 1995) is a method for deconstructing an organisation into strategically important activities and understanding their impact on cost and value. GateWay for example, consists of two basic "activities"; the Media or community component and the Business, or for profit, component. The Business component will be the financial, profit making and administrative driver, reliant on, and supportive of the Media/Community aspect. Jointly, these components provide a symbiotic functionality to the successful working and growth of GateWay. In turn GateWay will be able to actively compete with other on-line portals in attracting and maintaining customer loyalty and business.

Once GateWay embarks on this "competitive advantage theory, the identification of alternative value creation technologies leading to value chain analyses" (Stabell and Oystein 1998) and the future creation of competitive advantage networks will have to be realised.

Tellefsen (1999) discusses "orientations", another important concept for emerging communities on-line, in relation to how and why "particular" subcultures (e.g. Albany

GateWAY) form. These groups have identifiable sets of cognitions (e.g. a need to compete in a rapidly changing social and economic climate) developed around a particular solution for the group (e.g. creation of a community web portal) His description of a constituent oriented organisation, is one in which:

Signals are picked from all parts of the environment, especially from the firm's stakeholders. Focus is on win-win, the driving force is market behaviour optimisation, and the goal profitability via value creation for others. It is long term, interactive, integrative, harmony seeking and materialistic in nature. A constituent organisation implies that the organisation is network oriented. (Tellefsen 1999)

GateWAY, by virtue of being a Cooperative, is a constituent organisation. There are commonalities in culture, geographical location, desire for prosperity and a future for the region. Further recognition of the constituent, learning, marketing orientation and leadership principles Tellefsen (1999) alludes to would enhance the Cooperative's performance. A greater degree of flexibility and encouragement of increased knowledge and managerial capabilities based on these models, would benefit the healthy, sustained growth of the portal as a network and increase the potential of its community and business foci.

This, of course is the theory, and now as GateWAY embarks on its second phase of developing the E-GateWAY, e-commerce options, the practice will define what eventually happens. Remembering our first failed attempt at introducing a dozen or so local businesses to e-commerce, we must learn from the mistakes and move on. Knowledge and awareness levels are the greatest drawbacks, but if we work slowly and carefully with businesses that are ready, or almost ready for this next step, there is no reason why E-GateWAY cannot become the cornerstone function for cooperative profitability.

Profit should however, not only be defined as financial success. In completing the final twist in the spiral metaphor, we return, albeit in a slightly different way to the core consideration of all this work: The People. If the people of our community on-line truly benefit from having this resource at their fingertips then that is an intangible, which no statistics package or business projection can predict or monitor. It is here where the true "gold" lies for our community on-line.

## **Themes: Conclusion**

The key factors of ownership, partnership, good planning, leadership, knowledge and organisational management, are all foundations for GateWAY's future sustainability. They form the basis of the nine themes of portal development and are woven throughout this work.

Albany GateWAY as the Great Southern region's web portal has already succeeded in, and continues to progress further, the main initiated over two years ago by:

- Building awareness of the benefits and opportunities of the Internet
- Encouraging engagement in the Information Age
- Providing access to the online environment and the region
- Collaborating with business, community groups and service providers
- Becoming sustainable

As GateWAY enters its second year of "cyber- life", we are slowly edging towards becoming a sustainable, creative and fully functioning community portal, not totally reliant on government funding, but a locally, self sustaining entity. There are currently (October – November 2001), over 1300 web pages being edited and maintained daily by local people. Community groups and business owners have started to realise the potential in this new medium, not only as a business tool, but also as a cost effective and time efficient means of communication. It has been and continues to be a long and tedious road, but one our region needed to take.

GateWAY is a pioneer in the community portal world, being built on the themes described above and attracting increasing interest, users and audiences who will in turn assure continuity.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Analysis

Everything is relative, as in the duality of yin and yang. Change is the only given, nothing remains the same, and all standards are relative. Only the fact of change itself is unchanging. Eventually, everything will return to the beginning of all things – to the Tao (way) or Divine Intelligence of the Universe – because that is how the cycle began initially. (Adeline Yen Mah, 2000)

Adeline Yen Mah eloquently brings us back to the image of everything, including change being a cycle of events. The spiral, used to portray GateWAY's journey thus far fits in with her perception of "everything is relative" and "returns to the beginning of all things, but does it? A spiral appears to curve back on itself, but forward momentum, and the concept of change shaping new and uncharted ideas and events gives a lasting metaphor for the process of portal development

This work has gone beyond the metaphor, become more than the sum of its parts when reflecting on the effect of the heuristic process and the personal growth experienced in researching, writing and living it. Dadd's and Hart's research into doing practitioner research differently suggests "for some practitioner researchers, creating their own unique way through their research may be as important as their self chosen focus," holds true for me. The fact I had substantial choice and control in the methodological approach, coupled with a motivation driven by personal identity and engagement in an important and worthwhile project, enabled my sense of identity within both the research and creation processes of GateWAY. (Dadds, M & Hart, S 2001)

This is clearly observable in the Chapters on Reflection, Interaction and Themes. It becomes impossible to separate out one theme, issue or event from another as all become entwined in the process. Like a DNA molecule unravelling its precious life-creating cargo, so

the spirals of themes and events, realities and the virtual, energise an image of progress and growth, weaknesses and strengths, successes and failures all of which have been part of the making of GateWAY. This closely relates to Adeline’s reference to “duality”, for it is this duality which provides the momentum which in itself creates change.

Change is a constant and continuity a necessity for community development projects to reach their full potential. Dealing with change and attempting to ensure continuity of the project was challenging. It was reassuring to have an “ even if GateWAY fails, I’ve tried my best and that’s what really matters” fallback position. However, it was only a dim flicker in the back of my mind because I refused to accept this option in the short term and dreaded the fallout if it eventuated.

As I have already intimated, in the introductory chapter of my work, I was continually searching for a best practice solution to a multifaceted set of problems, which the GateWAY project posed. Reflective inquiry and interactive practice grounding assisted in bringing all the human and technical elements together in as a continuous way a possible. At the beginning of this work I asked for the reader’s patience in understanding the methodological implications of this work as an emergent process. Now in conclusion I trust the methodologies on which I built my written work assisted my practical work and became integral to key decision-making and problem solving processes for both the project and myself, have been made clear.

It occurred to me that good leadership leaves a healthy legacy, which in turn means continuity of the vision, built on determination and hard work. So what are the factors enabling continuity and what parameters should I ensure are firmly set in place for this to happen?

**Continuity**

The life or death of community, as we have known it, seems to be dependent on the basic tenets of:

- Education (awareness raising and skills training which empower all in the community)
- Communication (the ability and desire to connect with others and develop those relationships.)

- Accessibility (ability to access communications technology and services at a reasonable price, in or near one's home).
- Vision and strength of honest leadership
- A common purpose for the common good.

Mal Bryce, a founder of one of the first W.A. communities on-line (Peel 1998), and observer of life on-line offered his thoughts on this:

I think we've lost a lot of innate goodness in communities because we've all become so time challenged, in the last 25 to 30 years, in an economic sense. I actually think there's more fun to be had and more satisfaction in breathing life back into our geographical communities. I think virtual communities will take off and have a life of their own, but the more complex issue is taking this technology, discovering something tangible, practical about the outputs and using that tool box to breathe life in an enhanced way, back into the geographical communities we already have. (Mal Bryce 2000)

The development of communities on-line could well be a major step towards ensuring the continuation of our social capital, the building blocks of our humanity and the interaction we all need to survive. Debate will always prevail over which elements or outcomes most importantly make for a successful community portal, be they real or virtual.

Interestingly enough the debate of what is real and what is virtual and where the two meet (or collide), assists in answering some of the questions Amy Jo Kim (Kim 2000) posed earlier in Chapter Three of this work. Much has been written about where does the virtual end and reality begin and vice versa in recent times, and it is my experience that the two become seamlessly intermingled when the portal becomes used for information, persuasion or entertainment as an agent for change and better communication. This is not to say all these three things are always good or well portrayed on-line, but the question of reality and virtuality must be uppermost in the minds of portal builders, as they construct these on-line environments.

The kinds of questions that have preoccupied the more high profile literature, as well as much discussions and common sense about the Net, have assumed an opposition between the virtual and the real. 'All this stuff going on in cyberspace, is it real or not?', 'What kind of reality is virtuality?' 'Is it as real as or more real than reality, is it mistaken for reality, or is it a new reality that shows up the constructed, performed,

artificial nature of our old offline reality?', 'Is it a good thing or a bad thing, does it spell out doom or liberation for offline life, utopia or dystopia?' On one hand, a range of authors, sometimes assimilating 'virtuality' to a dystopic reading of the postmodern notion of 'simulation', see the Internet in terms of increasing 'depthlessness' and superficiality, as a poor substitute for the socially essential features of co-presence and face-to-face interaction. On the other hand, often in relation to post-structuralist projects, virtuality provides a kind of social laboratory or even liberation in which the performative character of all social realities and identities can be brought to light, deconstructed and transcended. (Miller and Slater 2000)

So what are the real potentials and advantages a successful GateWAY portal could progress with and achieve? Is long term sustainability really possible?

The intention to establish GateWAY as a commercially profitable regional portal with an exceptionally high level of community use and involvement could produce substantial economic and social benefits for the community.

GateWAY as a Cooperative with participating members receiving shares, will actively seek to partner with the other commercial cooperatives in the region, by becoming their e-commerce solution and promotions conduit. Statistics from the Harvard School of Business (1999) show that long standing customers of trusted traditional business branches significantly increase their volume of purchases when they begin using a website. This pattern provides a strong incentive for the other cooperatives to develop an on-line capability. The overall picture is a "buy local – try local" program which is aggressively competitive with state and national level businesses, and which also returns profits to the local community.

Providing e-commerce capacity to other regional cooperatives will in turn give GateWAY access to approximately 6,000 families who are members of those cooperatives. GateWAY and its partner cooperatives can develop addressing this customer base, additional regional Internet based business initiatives. Many other locally owned businesses will be brought into GateWAY. Quite a few have already linked, bought advertising and accessed e-commerce training, which will be provided by GateWAY on a continuous basis.

The current media, information and entertainment aspect of GateWAY will continue to be developed. The partnership with The Weekender a Great Southern owned regional newspaper,

will be enhanced by partnerships with town newsletters and bulletins. The partnership with regional TV station GWN, the regional College of TAFE and prospectively the Albany Chamber of Commerce and Regional Marketing Association will only forge the further establishment of GateWAY as the main Internet portal for the region.

Local government is starting to participate on-line and GateWAY's objective is to offer all Local Government Authorities (LGA's) in the region an on-line presence and conduit for informing and communicating with their ratepayers and electorates.

### **A Social Paradigm**

Social interaction and organisation in online communities is not an issue that can be ignored, nor is the challenge simply to design a better user interface. But it is also incorrect to say that there is nothing much one can do – there are important steps that can be taken to encourage the development of successful online worlds. (Kollock 1996)

Albany GateWAY as the Great Southern Region's web portal has taken some important steps to do what Kollock suggests by:

- Building awareness of the benefits and opportunities of the Internet
- Encouraging engagement in the Information Age
- Providing access to the online environment and the region
- Collaborating with business, community groups and service providers
- Implementing steps towards becoming sustainable

As we enter our second year of “cyber- life”, we are slowly edging towards becoming a sustainable, creative and fully functioning community portal, not totally reliant on government funding, but a locally, self sustaining entity. It has been and continues to be a long and tedious road. GateWAY is a pioneer in the community portal world thus attracting interest and international and interstate audiences. In this GateWAY has truly started “bringing the Great Southern On-Line!”



All these events, themes and ideas, interwoven at different points on the spiralling development of GateWAY, blend technology and the human processes of the need for communication into a living metaphor, one which Howard Rheingold sees as:

The technology that makes virtual communities possible has the potential to bring enormous leverage to ordinary citizens at relatively little cost – intellectual leverage, social leverage, commercial leverage, and most important, political leverage. But the technology will not in itself fulfil that potential. An informed population must use this latent technical power intelligently and deliberately. More people must learn about that leverage and learn to use it, while we still have the freedom to do so, if it is to live up to its potential. (Rheingold 1998)

Rheingold equates “leverage” here with power and it is this subject of power and empowerment which drives the meliorist point of view, a socially good, humanitarian and egalitarian stance, defining ownership and participation of many, not just the few.

What has GateWAY achieved? The ultimate discussion about whether a project has succeeded or otherwise should encompass more than a completed checklist of ticks or crosses against initial aims. The gestalt is greater than its parts and for any action to be worth something it needs to be assessed, as much for its failures, as its successes.

## **Statistics**

In terms of quantitative assessment GateWAY has statistically performed well. The usage analysis of Albany GateWAY [www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au) was undertaken by analysing the Web server logs on the Windows 2000 server hosting this site. Analysis was undertaken with the assistance of MediaHouse Statistics Server 5.02.

The period of time analysed was from August 2000 to June 2001 inclusive. Analysis before August 2000 was not possible, as raw log data was not made available. When interpreting results from any Website usage analysis, the unstructured nature of the Internet should always be kept in mind. Some of the results extrapolated from such analysis can be misleading and should be used with caution.

To understand the process it's important to understand how a Web server log records the Domain of the computer requesting a particular page. For example, if a computer from

[www.teststats.com](http://www.teststats.com) is requesting to view the home page of [www.albanygateway.com.au](http://www.albanygateway.com.au) most log analysis software will interpret the requesting .com Domain as from American origins. This of course is not correct, as a.com Domain can be located anywhere around the world. Hence some of the recording and analysis components of any statistics package leaves data of this sort open to interpretation and hence is often flawed in both methodology and results. This is not to say other components of the recorded data aren't valuable, however it's necessary from the outset to state a definite concern about how and what the results actually show.

One of the most meaningful ways to analyse the “overall” usage of the GateWAY Website is to look at the sessions served on a monthly basis. The number of sessions served is a good measure of the number of visitors to the site. On any given session, a visitor will visit one or many Web pages and stay lasting a specific length of time. The number of Web pages served and the duration of each session is a good measure of the “stickiness” of the site. A “sticky” site is one that is able to capture the attention of its visitors. This is usually a good indication that the site has quality content and a lot of it, to keep its visitors reading.

**Sessions**

The table below shows the number of sessions served from August 2000 to June 2001. The results show a minimum of 5395 sessions in April 2001 and a maximum of 9099 for June 2001. These figures indicate the continuing popularity of the GateWAY site. A noticeable increase in site usage was noticed in March and April 2001. This can be contributed largely to the “stalker” (Jonah) incident (see Chapter Four), that started on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2001 and which drew attention to Albany GateWAY in the following months. The table below shows the total number of sessions served for each month:

Table 10. Total number of sessions per month

Aug 2000	Sep 2000	Oct 2000	Nov 2000	Dec 2000	Jan 2001	Feb 2001	Mar 2001	Apr 2001	May 2001	Jun 2001
6544	6545	6110	7594	6655	6843	5866	8316	5395	8815	9099

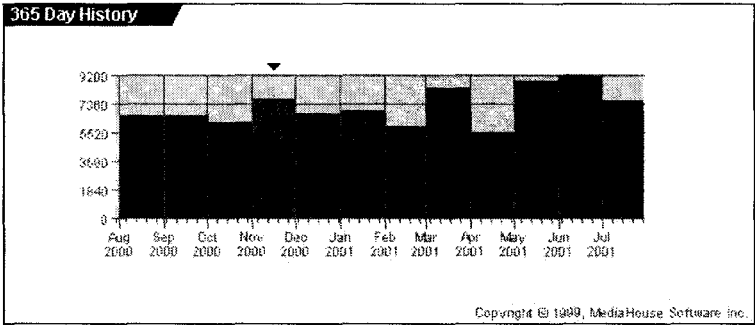


Figure 17. 365 Day History Bar Graph

*Time Spent Per Session*

The table below shows the average time spent by visitors on sessions to the GateWAY site. The results range from 292.58 seconds (nearly 5 minutes) to 532.17 seconds (nearly 9 minutes). These figures illustrate the continuing “stickiness” of the GateWAY site as an average of 5 minutes on a Website is considered numerous.

However, there was a downward trend for the time spent on the site. This can be explained by the increased efficiency of Web IT editors (GateWAY content providers that log into a password protected Web space to add and edit content). It may also be contributed to the fact that development of new content on the site has slowed down somewhat in the last few months, leading to visitors reading few pages that are regularly updated.

The table below shows the average amount of time spent per session for each month represented in seconds:

**Table 11. Time spent per session**

Aug 2000	Sep 2000	Oct 2000	Nov 2000	Dec 2000	Jan 2001	Feb 2001	Mar 2001	Apr 2001	May 2001	Jun 2001
501.9	503.1	378.1	469.3	437.8	392.4	484.5	532.1	476.6	308.3	292.5

***Page Views Per Session***

The average number of page views to the GateWAY site backup the trends shown by the “Time Spent Per Session” trend analysed above. The results range from 5.74 pages per session to 12.83 pages per session. These figures shows an average of 5 page views on a Website is considered numerous.

Once again, a declining trend can be seen, similar to that in the “Time Spent Per Session” analysis. This is most likely contributed by the same factors as discussed above. A significant increase in March and April can be seen in the following table, contributed to by “stalker” incident mentioned previously.

The table below shows the average number of page views per session for each month:

**Table 12. Average number of page views per session**

Aug 2000	Sep 2000	Oct 2000	Nov 2000	Dec 2000	Jan 2001	Feb 2001	Mar 2001	Apr 2001	May 2001	Jun 2001
9.03	7.08	7.12	8.49	8.46	7.29	9.21	12.83	11.07	6.27	5.74

**Results**

A full analysis of these GateWAY statistics could itself be the subject of another research paper. The bulk of results shown above cover an adequate domain and time span to illustrate the effectiveness and popularity of the GateWAY site in it’s first year or so of operation. It is important to note that such pages as The Paper, [http://www.albanygateway.com.au/home/the\\_paper](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/home/the_paper), members business listings [www.albanygataeway.com.au/topic/members\\_listings](http://www.albanygataeway.com.au/topic/members_listings) and Albany town site

[www.albanygateway.com.au/town/albany](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/town/albany), continually showed as the most used pages, but many others were not far behind in their hit or session rates.

Over all site activity was consistent, with small fluctuations from month to month. The most important information recorded was a steady user/visitor growth trend and the potential GateWAY had to grow exponentially in future, with new developments and further training of WebIT editors to continue pulling an audience from all over the world. Statistically GateWAY demonstrates an active, healthy site, having achieved its primary purpose of “bringing the Great Southern on-line” and the world to us. (See [www.albanygateway.com.au/Top10](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Top10) for current key performance indicators and ongoing statistical data.)

## **Poor Performance**

There were a number of things, which did not work, and which, as always in hindsight, could have been done better for a better outcome.

### ***Technical and Iterative Problems***

Firstly, there were some deficiencies in certain aspects of the technical and iterative components of the GateWAY platform. The following items needed to be identified and rectified, and form the basis for GateWAY’s new iterative look and functionality.

- New website design – including new navigation system, automatic rotation of images from the Great Southern across the front page, and new dynamically-ranked index pages for towns, topics and discussion boards
- Dynamic page hit counting on all topic, town and member pages and dynamic reporting of key performance indicators
- Design and documentation of new membership plans
- Restructuring of all site databases to remove dependence on e-mail addresses and facilitate incorporation of new membership options
- New membership option facilities – including online acceptance, processing, recording and invoicing for each option

- Design and construction of a template for all page templates to facilitate more efficient maintenance of the existing templates and simplify the construction of new ones
- Redesign of all page templates to remove HTML coding errors and provide better support for browsers other than Microsoft Internet Explorer
- Replacement of Members and Business Listing pages with pages that extract their content live from the site databases

The direct benefit of these enhancements is that the site will expose more of its facilities to visitors, and be easier to navigate, be more secure and more accommodating of the requirements of those visitors.

### ***Administration Problems***

The initial handling of the administrative arena, from the very first community consultation workshop right through to the inception of the GateWAY Cooperative Board was a “hit and miss” affair with too much conflicting input at the start and very little support when it was really needed. This is a lesson for all community portals to ensure their administrative committees consist of proactive local people, all understanding the project and having defined roles.

The premature push to progress e-commerce throughout the region, by government and service provider representatives along with inadequate maintenance funding within the first two years of operation, imposed pressure to become self sustaining before practically or physically possible.

Forming and maintaining a proactive committee proved a difficult task for the GateWAY Project. Differing agendas, lack of local knowledge and vision and political rivalries all added to a wasteland of committee leadership. As the Manager I found the going very tough given this scenario. Dealing with conflict issues, already described earlier in this work, took much valuable time. A task, which seemed clear cut to begin with, became a HR (Human Resources) management problem from its earliest stages.

New community portal managers and committees may take heed of this experience and ensure that a range of proactive, energetic and educated (as in I.T., knowledge and organisational

management aware and literate individuals), constitute their committee or board. If the majority of the members are there for pecuniary or other agenda motivated reasons the early days of the portal can be more demanding than need be with continuity and continuing support a shaky possibility. All portal managers need a strong team to work with and job specifications and contracts should clearly state what exactly is expected of the portal manager, over a set period of time.

## **Outcomes**

The “living” web presence, which GateWAY provides, is a platform for:

- A design model for other such initiatives in the development of communities on-line elsewhere.
- A benchmark for research into the social, economic, strategic and humanistic possibilities of the Internet and its application to any community situation.
- An ongoing living project available for anyone to participate in, study, research, or transplant.
- A working model for E-commerce development in rural Australia as from November 2001.

All these outcomes point to GateWAY being a “ value-producing entity”, not only in technical or information technology terms, but in educational and social terms where a local community is concerned.

Revisiting the thesis question “can regional and community web portals become sustainable?” we see how the key concepts of leadership and management have been utilised in the design, development and implementation of a community on-line, which has now become a value-producing entity. This coupled with emergent research in community informatics and current technological trends and capabilities have been interwoven as foundations for GateWAY as a tool. Yet, GateWAY has become more than just a tool. It has a life of its own now generated by both tangible and intangible factors which enhance this work’s spiral metaphor, itself more than mere process or product.

## Recommendations

These key recommendations come directly from the Themes (Chapter Five) section of this work and are taken from “The 9 P’s of Portal Development”. (Sellar 2000) All nine headings fit into three distinct categories of Infrastructure, Content and Access and characterise the various elements suggested for sustainable regional, community portal development.

**1. Infrastructure** – the technical and administrative aspects of building a firm base for the portal’s development. (*Planning, Product, Profit*)

- Formation of a proactive management committee to ensure support for the Project Manager and team, guide the building process and administer funds and decision-making processes.
- Adoption of a Cooperative structure as the foundation for community ownership and involvement through share options and voting rights.
- Development of a viable business and strategic plan, with 3-5 year projections.
- Building of the actual web portal in conjunction with a successful tender applicant.
- Monitoring and implementation of current Knowledge Management, marketing research and organisational theories to enhance the portal’s performance.
- Implementation of the Distributed Publishing System (WebIT) – imperative as a tool for empowerment and content provision for the portal.
- Functional (24x7), technical and iterative design of the platforms and system on which the portal is based.
- Provision for implementation of security and privacy methods to protect the technical, Iterative, e-commerce and personal aspects of the portal
- E-commerce training and capability for electronically transacting with businesses within the region and elsewhere.



**2. Content** – the substance of the community on-line, the activities, which help it develop and the methods of ensuring healthy growth and sustainability. (*Promotion, Procedure and Partnership*)

- Promotion of regional events, activities and individuals in order to showcase the region's strengths and attractions.
- Creation of a functional set of procedures for the provision of on-line content through the WebIT distributed publishing system.
- Featuring local people and their stories wherever possible in an endeavour to build awareness and trust, which in turn translates into user and customer loyalty.
- Inviting, offering assistance to and actively engaging with prospective partners or sponsors in collaborative, mutually beneficial ventures.
- Engaging in cross-media/reciprocal practices e.g. banner swapping and mixed media promotions.

**3. Access** – the means by which people are trained, motivated and encouraged to participate in their community online. This involves *People, Politics and Passion*.

- Recognition and creation of partnerships and collaboration as the keys to sustaining confidence in the portal.
- Training in WebIT for all who want to be able to edit and contribute to the community on-line
- Informing regional businesses and community organisations about I.T. developments and giving them access to the new technologies and an opportunity to participate in their regional portal.
- Encouraging proactive champions and local leaders to motivate and promote the benefits of participation in the portal, to their specific geographical or communities of interest.

- Engage in constructive and evaluative observation of what others are doing, whilst “getting on with” our own brand of community portal. Individual idiosyncrasies, peculiar to a particular region or locality will flavour the portal. These must be preserved.
- Keeping PEOPLE the focus consistently through the building and development stages. In the end it’s the people of a regional community who will ensure the success and continuation of the portal.
- Never losing sight of what real potentials and advantages a successful virtual portal means to the community at large.

## **The Future**

GateWAY has the potential to become an exemplary virtual organisation for new local and national initiatives such as Network and Connectivity programs, aimed at increasing the quality of life through the application of the on-line environment and Knowledge Economy (Gill. J 2001)

The future issues of, “equity of lifestyle through providing access to services which deliver a platform of social justice in an environment which nurtures and encourages community values, health and supportive networks. Creation of sustainable business growth and life long learning”, (Gill 2001) are key ideas in the next wave of research and policy implementation in on-line organisational networks. Unfortunately, government policy often excludes real life examples over quantitative feasibility studies, which rarely touch the heart of what is actually wanted or needed at the grassroots level of non-metropolitan communities.

In a Statewide Connectivity Program, as mentioned above, GateWAY and the Great Southern region already provide a “living incubator” for the progression of these ideas, based on the three main tenets of Infrastructure, Content and Access. Given the government’s recent policy commitments in this area, a possible future role for GateWAY could be as a working “flagship”, for these policies and organisational strategies. This in turn could assist GateWAY in its long-term goal of full sustainability.

## Conclusion

Empowerment and sustainability go hand in hand when attempting to create a community on-line for one without the other will render the portal impotent. It is unlikely community portals will become sustainable if they are not appropriately funded and nurtured through their first 2-3 years of existence, by either federal, state or local governments.

New community portals assured of an adequate source of funding for 2-3 years, contact with other existing portals and the people making those portals work have a good start to a successful future. Sound local leadership at a committee level, extensive community consultation procedures to raise awareness in regional communities and an informed idea about what technical and non-technical specifications the new portal needs to adopt, have a definite chance of becoming sustainable in the long run.

Even though the Albany GateWAY Cooperative structure is in its infancy, I propose the cooperative model has a workable chance of succeeding. Providing a proactive, cohesive Board of Directors and shares in the Cooperative are properly enstated, future ownership and sustainability can be ensured. GateWAY will need to follow its new strategic plan, as well as float its shares as soon as possible, so locals can buy into and support it. This doesn't exclude the need to source some extra seed funding to assist in getting GateWay well and truly into its second phase.

However, with the new pricing structures for business and efficient implementation of the new business plan, the E-GateWAY 2001-2002 initiative has every chance of successfully bringing the portal into the world of e-commerce. The redesign of the look and feel of the site, (which is already underway) and the adding of more features such as the events calendar and online newspaper gives GateWAY a good chance of becoming sustainable.

Community ownership and governance are at the core of a cooperative, with both business and community emphases sharing equal weighting and supporting each other in a collaborative way.

Sustainability is as much about people and relationships as it is about profit. There is no question that the future of our local community and businesses will depend critically on the

quality of relationships developed with customers and suppliers, both internal and external. The GateWAY Cooperative must become the “keepers” and not expect one person or a committed few to bear the burden of ensuring the portal lives and grows.

Vision and lateral thinking will be the tools of trade for a successful future. Those individuals elected to the Board of Directors must have, or at least accept and respect, these qualities as the call of the new technologies heralds in a new way of decision-making, problem-solving and of doing business. They must also ensure the community maintains a healthy stake in what is essentially their property. GateWAY’s iterative and operational foundations have been firmly laid and are continually metamorphosing, so it is now committed leadership and support which GateWAY needs to further enhance its remarkable rise as one of Australia’s most successful portals.

Relevance and speed are commodities of the Internet Age. Security and privacy issues will become crucial factors in maintaining viable web portals and in building trust in on-line “inter” and “trans” actions. These are some of the lessons learnt over the past two years in the building of GateWAY, lessons from doing, not hypothetical musings or posturing.

Strategic partnerships (Lendrum 2000) with selected customers and suppliers will play a fundamental part of the business strategy of local and global organisations in the future. Just as important is the way we care for and assist our local communities, which after all are the heart of any true community on-line. How we determine and manage these relationships, to ensure continuous improvement in all aspects of a community on-line’s life, will be the key to that success.

**Q: “Can regional community portals become sustainable?”**

**A: Yes, if the people of those communities are:**

- Empowered with skills and knowledge about the new technologies.
- Led by a proactive, administrative committee or Cooperative, who are directly responsible to the people it represents.
- Given access to appropriate resources and are adequately funded for 2-3 years from inception.
- Encouraged to collaborate with each other and different organisations, to strengthen the community on-line.
- Assisted in the creation and implementation of a sound business plan.

**Without strong leadership and communal desire for a community on-line, it is highly unlikely a community web portal can effectively become sustainable.**

### **Future Research Agenda**

Continuation of research into the viability of community web portals is essential, over and beyond this case study of the Albany GateWAY, as it only offers one model and one experience. How generally applicable and transferable is the GateWAY model as a solution for other community portals?

It would be interesting to observe how this model works for other communities wishing to bring their people on-line. Obviously every community has its idiosyncrasies and differences and only by trialing the GateWAY model elsewhere can its strengths and weaknesses be tested.

Further research into organisational networks and knowledge management, specific needs and limitations hindering access to, and the take up of new technologies in rural and regional areas needs to be addressed. Equality of access, irrespective of geographical location is essential.

The limitations of this case study were:

1. A lack of other functional regional community web portals with which to compare, share ideas and exchange data.
2. Limited funding and resources to carry out richer data collection procedures or implementation of training and awareness programmes.
3. Conflict between the need to generate income to sustain the portal, whilst attempting to build and develop critical components in both technological and non-technological terms.
4. Insufficient knowledge about consumer/user behaviour, organisational and network theories and deeper leadership and management principles.
5. The need for more in depth analysis of our e-commerce incubator program and further research culminating in a useable e-commerce business training program, aimed at non-metropolitan small to medium sized businesses.

It is highly likely the GateWAY model will require modification in response to differing needs, approaches, agendas and consequences, wherever it is trialed or applied. Government policy needs to reflect a deeper understanding and commitment to the infrastructure access and content issues discussed earlier in this section. A greater understanding of the principles and effects of the new technologies on communities, business and individuals by those with decision-making powers, might ensure an egalitarian approach to the devolution of funding, resources and knowledge management procedures in the future.

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## APPENDIX

### ALBANY GATEWAY 2001 - 2002 BUSINESS PLAN

#### Vision Statement

GateWAY has the potential to become a thriving, sustainable community web portal, not only achieving its aims of building awareness, encouraging engagement and providing access to the new technologies, but by making a financial profit to assist future growth.

The GateWAY Cooperative will provide the management structure and foundation for this to be achieved. All profits will be reinvested in the portal to employ local I.T. talent and maintain GateWAY at the leading edge of Australian communities on-line.

#### Mission Statement

Over the last year, the Albany Gateway has developed as a major regional, community web portal. It is a single entry point for individuals, communities, governments and businesses to access and interact with Albany and the Great Southern region. It provides a focal point for local, regional and global online activities, and in particular supports and develops regional awareness of, and activities in, the Internet.

It is now time to progress GateWAY's growth by **enabling e-commerce for business, further training local people in the WebiT** distributed publishing system and in Internet and e-mail use and maintaining vibrant, current and parochial content on a broader scale. The mission to continue bringing the Great Southern on-line is to be ramped up, to assist more people to access the new technologies and strengthen the already existent community on-line.

#### Goals:

Develop the portal further in order to:

- showcase the region globally
- develop communities of interest
- ensure access and interaction with GateWAY at all times
- provide training in WebIT

- deliver services online
- deliver business–consumer and business–business e-commerce
- grow the regional online economy for the Great Southern of Western Australia

## **SWOT Analysis ( Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)**

### **Strengths**

- GateWAY has established itself as a major community based, regional portal, attracting a wide local, interstate and global audience.
- The “ grassroots up” design and community building exercise has been successful, providing GateWAY with a solid base for content provision and local involvement.
- The WebIT distributed publishing system is an effective tool for content provision and maintenance, whilst empowering users to publish their own content at anytime.
- Low cost, low risk entry level for business and community groups on the Internet.
- Functioning now as a Cooperative gives GateWAY the flexibility to act like a business, but involve the community in the administration and direction of their regional portal.

### ***Weaknesses***

- Costs of maintaining and developing the portal further are hindered due to low level of initial seed funding actually needed to ensure continuity.
- Community is demanding more “free” services, but revenue can’t keep up with needs and demand.
- Quality of material on the site is variable – the “ raw edge”, which might hinder adoption by businesses concerned about image.
- No funding for full-time personnel to administer, train and maintain the portal. It is all volunteer supported at present.

### **Opportunities**

- Potential to become the leading business portal in the Great Southern
- Developing as a major promotions facility for the region and could be a leader in regional branding initiatives.
- Conduit for bringing the community to business and vice versa through e-commerce and other on-line communication functionalities.
- To become a regional ETC ( Electronic Transaction Association) for GEM (Government Electronic Marketing) through which local business can tender and procure goods and service electronically.

- Prospective specialised web hosting and bandwidth agent.
- Multiple partnership opportunities with local and regional organisations e.g. Chambers of Commerce, Great Southern Region Marketing Association, local councils.

## **Threats**

- Lack of “bridging assistance funding” to ensure sustainability until Cooperative becomes fully functional.
- Inability to maintain community interest and input due to reliance on volunteer labour.
- Competition from other portals in future.
- Campaign from disaffected individuals may destroy public perception of and trust in GateWAY.
- Perceived lack of security, or Internet security issues, in public’s mind.
- Any perception that GateWAY is taking core business away from local I.T. businesses, will cause friction within that sphere.

## ***Market Analysis***

The GateWAY has the potential to effect the way over 52,864 Great Southern residents, communicate and do business next year and in years to come. There are approximately 5,000 businesses in the region and if we look at ABS Internet usage figures for the nation, we can make some educated projections for our region.

## **Internet Access in the Region**

In May 1999, just under 26% of capital city households had home Internet access compared with nearly 17% of households in other areas of Australia. The comparable details for May 1998 were 18% and 8%. (ABS September 1999)

By November 2000 over half (56%) of the households in Australia, or 4.0 million households, had access to a computer at home. The number of households with home Internet access rose to 2.7 million, or 37% of all Australian households.

While the proportion of households with home access continues to rise for both computers and the Internet, the difference is decreasing. Higher levels of access occur in households with higher incomes, in households with children under 18 years and among households located in metropolitan areas. (ABS November 2000)

## **Other Results:**

- In the 12 months to November 2000, 10% of all adults in Australia, or 1,335,000 adults, purchased or ordered goods and services for their own private use via the Internet.
- Few Australian adults (12% of all adults) used the Internet to access government services in the 12 months to November 2000.
- A similar number of Australian adults (13% of all adults) used the Internet to pay bills or transfer funds in the 3 months to November 2000.
- In the 3 months to November 2000, almost half (49%) of all adults in Australia used the telephone to pay bills or transfer funds, two thirds (67%) used EFTPOS and almost three-quarters (74%) used ATMs.
- Very few Australian adults (7% of employed adults) had an agreement with their employer to work from home on an ongoing basis. Five out of every six of those adults reported they made use of particular technologies, such as portable PCs, modems, floppy disks, CDs or mobile phones, to work from home.

The influence of the Internet has spread considerably throughout Australian households over the three years for which information was collected. In February 1998, the first quarter of the survey, roughly one in every eight households had home Internet access compared to one in every three by November 2000. Before the end of the year 2001 it is expected that every second household in Australia will have home Internet access.

(Australian Bureau of Statistics ABS November 2000)

### Great Southern Projections

Statistics gleaned from the main local ISPs in the Great Southern region, suggest membership growth at between 7%-10% sign up rate per year e.g. **Omninet** who are the ISP for Denmark, Mt. Barker and Albany estimate a client base of approximately **7,000** current Internet client accounts. Given Telstra, iiNet and Westnet ISPs declined to give any figures for current Internet use in the region, an estimate can only be made on the independent local ISP figures and projection rates. We will keep this estimate at **9,100** users for the purposes of this business and marketing plan. The calculation being made on the basis that Omninet’s client base makes up approximately 70% (or 37,400) of the region’s population.

ISP	Town	Population	ISP client base	Percentage
Omninet	Albany	29,000		
	Denmark	3,800		
	Mt. Barker	4,600		
SUB TOTAL		37,400	7,000	70%
Other	All others	15,464	2,100	30%
Regional TOTAL		52,864	9,100	100%

## **ELECTRONIC E-COMMERCE ACTIVITIES**

### **Purchasing/ordering goods or services via the Internet**

Nearly 5% of Australian adults (650,000) used the Internet to purchase or order goods or services for their own private use in the 12 months to May 1999. These Internet shoppers made an estimated 3 million purchases or orders via the Internet and nearly 76% of Internet shoppers paid for their purchases online. By comparison, in the 12 months to May 1998, an estimated 409,000 adults purchased or ordered goods or services via the Internet.

In the 12 months to May 2000, adults made Internet purchases/orders for the following main items:

- books or magazines (by 36% of adult Internet shoppers);
- computer software (by 18%);
- music (by 18%);
- computer hardware (by 14%); and
- food and groceries (by 13%).

During this period, 81% of adult Internet shoppers paid for all or part of their purchases/orders on-line. The total amount of the purchases/orders made by each adult was \$500 or less in over 70% of cases. Of adults making purchases/orders:

- 35% spent up to \$100;
- 36% spent between \$101 and \$500;
- 17% spent between \$501 and \$1,000; and
- 11% spent more than \$1,000.

Hypothesis A: If we estimate 5% of the Great Southern population purchases goods/services via the Internet by the Year 2001, then 2,500 people will potentially be using e-commerce facilities to do so.

Hypothesis B: If 5% of 5000 ( approx) businesses in the region use, or start to use the Internet for e-commerce/e-business by the year 2001, then an estimated 250 could be e-commerced and dealing through GateWAY by 2002

A+B = 2,750 organisations and individuals could be potential "GateWAY brand" buyers, with listings, web pages, advertising and sponsorship potential for the site.

## **Other Marketing/ Promotion Areas**

Most businesses in the Great Southern use either radio or newspapers to advertise. Advertising, particularly at a once off rate, is costly and doesn't always reach the desired audience. I consulted a number of businesses in the region to find out how much they pay for advertising and how much would they be prepared to pay to come on-line with GateWAY. Two examples are:

Mariners Rest Wines – A small to medium sized winery currently looking to increase their profile in the industry. Excited about GateWay concept and want to come to e-commerce training sessions when they're run. They would be prepared to initially spend between \$250-\$500 and work within a cooperative set up with some other wineries so would look at joint venture.

Jassi Skin Crafts – A SME producing sheepskin products e.g. ug boots, cuddly toys and clothing. Would spend at least \$200 -\$400 if they could get e-commerce.

These businesses, even though they are at different stages of development in the I.T. arena are aware and concerned about how they're going to become Internet resourced and visible. All complained about the traditional off-line media being costly and not very effective.

### **Pricing:**

Advertising in the local print media pricing:

- \$8 - \$ 15 for a small classified ad in that section of newspapers and local rags.
- \$35- \$50 for an eighth of a page.
- \$50 - \$65 for a quarter page.
- \$ 100- \$150 for a half page
- \$200-\$500 for full page or more depending on the advertisement.

These are “ one off” prices. Some businesses get discount deals for multiple ads and the prices listed above are approximations of three regional newspapers and town specific bulletins.

If we look at this pricing and compare it to what we're offering customers on GateWAY, our pricing structure and products are extremely competitive.

### **Conclusion:**

The following is a breakdown of statistics from which we can initially work:

Population of the Great Southern region = 52,864 (2001 with growth of 1%)  
Number of businesses = 4,872 rounded to 5000)

Number of people on-line = 9,100 (estimate)

Estimated economic growth rate = 1.5% (GSDC/DOCAT figures)

Estimated growth rate of I.T./Internet related markets = 10% per annum.

### **Needs:**

Customers/clients want access to Information, Communication (e.g. chat / bulletin boards) and Business opportunities (e.g. e-commerce facilities, advertising, web presence), at reasonable rates.

Most people interviewed want relevant, up to date information continually available and businesses, service organisations and community groups want the ability to alter information on their web sites, at will and when necessary.

Many local businesses are currently seeking information about using the Internet more effectively as a marketing and business tool. There is an indication they would appreciate being assisted by a community-based organisation, such as GateWay, to get the facts and training to become more e-literate.

POPULATION BREAKDOWNS FOR REGION and BUSINESS ESTIMATES (targetted to come on-line with GateWay in 12-18 months):

<i><b>Population</b></i>	<i><b>Town</b></i>	<i><b>No. of businesses (estimate)</b></i>
<i><b>100—1000</b></i>		
	<i>Ongerup</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>Frankland</i>	<i>10</i>
	<i>Cranbrook</i>	<i>10</i>
	<i>Bremer Bay</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>Tambellup</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>Jerramungup</i>	<i>10</i>
	<i>Borden</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>Wellstead</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>Woodanilling</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>Nyabing</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>Broomehill</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>Rocky Gully</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>Pingrup</i>	<i>5</i>
<i><b>1000—5000</b></i>		
	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>25</i>
	<i>Kojomup</i>	<i>25</i>
	<i>Mt. Barker</i>	<i>25</i>
	<i>Gnowangerup</i>	<i>25</i>
<i><b>10,000—50,000</b></i>	<i>Katanning</i>	<i>50</i>

	<i>Albany</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Total</i>		<i>330*A minimum projection</i>

\*This is the minimum projection of the number of businesses targetted to come on-line with GateWAY in the first 12 months. There are currently 165 paying businesses and organisations listed on GateWAY. We hope to at least double that number in the next 12 months.

[www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/member\\_listings](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/topic/member_listings)

## **Marketing Plan**

### **Marketing and Promotions Strategies**

A number of activities make up a suite of profit making possibilities for GateWAY.

- **Membership**

GateWAY offers an \$11 per year membership option to all comers. For this each member gets a listing, something like a Telstra Yellow Pages Listing, only interactive: [www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Members\\_Listings](http://www.albanygateway.com.au/Topic/Members_Listings)

This \$11 per year is a “toe in the water approach” to encourage businesses, individuals, service providers and community groups to start using the Internet as one way to enhance their accessibility.

- **Cooperative Shares**



Preference shares, initially valued at \$x per share (*for arguments sake \$1 has been factored in to work with in this document seeing as share price has not been set, as yet.*) will be offered for purchase to members of the regional community. This way GateWAY remains in the hands of the people with regional ownership secured.

- **Web page options**

A range of web page design options are offered to people wishing to create a presence on the Internet without it being too scary or expensive.

GateWAY provides a simple to use word processing type editor (WebIT), to edit your web page. A 1 hour training session, cost \$55, is required to get you on your way to editing your web page as much as you like, as often as you like. After you submit your application you will be contacted to arrange your training session.

- Plan 2 - \$55 per year - 1 web page you maintain to promote your business.
- Plan 3 - \$110 per year - Up to 5 web pages you maintain to promote your business.
- Plan 4 - \$220 per year - Up to 10 web pages you maintain to promote your business.
- Plan 5 - \$550 per year - Full E-commerce enabled web site. (coming soon)

- **Hosting**

Hosting options on the GateWAY server will be given to businesses and local government or projects requiring an Micorsoft NT platform and SQL capabilities. e.g. SRAACC and RIC.

Hosting costs \$550 per annum with \$220 once off set up fee.

- **Training**

Training is a key element in assuring a portal's sustainability. Knowledge and skills gleaned in the process of portal development need to be shared and spread throughout the community. GateWAY currently has over 100 editors, spread over 25 regional towns and 20 Topic areas, all contributing content daily on-line.

**WebiT**, (GateWAY's DPS, distributed publishing system), training sessions cost a business **\$55** once off, with constant on-line support. Community groups and not for profit organisations receive this training **free**.

- **Advertising and marketing**

Albany GateWAY is the single entry point for people to access all that the Great Southern has to offer. GateWAY has partnered with GWN and like [www.onlinewa.com.au](http://www.onlinewa.com.au) is attracting enormous interest from within the state, nationally and overseas. GateWAY is currently receiving thousands of hits every day and with televised advertisements being regularly broadcast from the second week of August; this rate of interest is expected to only increase.

A comprehensive program of online marketing is being conducted through cross sponsorship arrangements and link exchanging with existing businesses in the region who currently have a web presence to create an entire network of community and business interest. To make your business visible and attract customers to you, website banner ads are available to assist your business to gain maximum exposure on the Internet.

### **The Nine Advertising Options**

1. Business listing - name, contact details, email and URL with 25 words or less description - \$11 per year.
2. Single Web page - \$55/year with all listing functions
3. 5 Web pages - \$110/year with all listing functions
4. 6-10 Web pages - \$220/year with all listing functions.
5. 11- 20 Web pages - full site plus e-commerce options - \$550/year
6. Top Premium Banner Ads – \$2000/year
7. Footer Banner Ads – \$1000/year
8. Mid Size Ads – \$ 720/year
9. Little Ads – \$350/year

Top-of-page Advertisement ( Header)

16.93cm by 2.12cm

We can create a banner ad to your specifications and have it running on all GateWAY pages, on a hit/rotation process for 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It will appear on all GateWAY pages at different intervals, getting constant, total site coverage. It can even be animated. Places are limited.

Prices are all GST inclusive:

\$199/month

\$590 per 3 months

\$1129 per 6 months

\$2000/year

#### **Page-footer Advertisement**

16.93cm by 2.12cm

We will create a footer banner ad for you which will run 24 hours a day, seven days a week to the world! These footers will be exclusively displayed on 2 pages of your choice and can also be animated.

The prices are all GST inclusive:

\$100/month

\$290 per 3 months

\$550 per 6 months

\$1000/year

#### **Other Advertising Options**

## Mid Size Advertisements

5.0cm by 2.0cm

We will create a mid-size ad for you which will run 24 hours a day, seven days a week to the world! These ads will be exclusively displayed on 2 pages of your choice and can also be animated.

The prices are all GST inclusive:

\$ 66/month

\$198 per 3 months

\$ 380 per 6 months

\$ 720/year

## Little Advertisements

4.0cm by 1.2cm

We will create a little ad for you which will run 24 hours a day, seven days a week to the world! These ads will be exclusively displayed on 2 pages of your choice and can also be animated.

The prices are all GST inclusive:

\$33/month

\$99 per 3 months

\$180 per 6 months

\$350/year

## Further Marketing and Promotional Projections

### Short-term:

- Initiate a comprehensive expansion of online link exchanging. Ticketek.com.au for example, has over 1,100 hypertext links from around the world to its website. These range from related professional organisations such as the Sydney Entertainment Centre, to individuals who have personal web pages devoted to their favourite band.
- Swap animated banner advertising with wa.online.com.au and other online portals that contain a complimentary community focus. Banner ad exchanges allow more information to be presented and are more eye catching than a plain old link.
- Do extensive link and banner exchanges with local and state based government agencies that have a high profile online presence in the public domain.
- Undertake an extensive research of all businesses and community groups in the Great Southern who currently have a web presence. Offer to provide a free business listing in exchange for becoming a promoter of gateway via a graphical link to albangateway.com.au, (the GateWAY logo would need to be distributed for this purpose and would become an icon representing sites providing quality and community involvement in the region).
- Approach large non-government organisations such as Bankwest with an animated banner advertisement (link exchange) proposition. Western Australians who do their banking online with Bankwest would then be drawn to the GateWAY advertisement increasing the site exposure.
- An animated banner advertisement for GateWAY could read as follows:
  - Screen 1 – (Forest photo on left with text) “Do you have a yearning for the forests down south?”
  - Screen 2 – (Logo and text) “Albany GateWAY, “Your single entry point to the whole of the Great Southern region of WA.”  
Wine and whales could be used in a similar vein to forests to attract users to the site. People do not know what Albany GateWAY is and I believe we need to provide something familiar to introduce them to the portal concept.

### Long-term:

Create an Albany town website marketed separately. (eg: [www.albany.net.au](http://www.albany.net.au)), or similar. This site would have more of a domestic focus. The Albany town page on GateWAY would become tourist focussed, providing tourist information and highlighting whale tours, the Porongurup etc on the opening page.

The Albany town website and The Paper, GateWAY's on-line newspaper would compete directly with the Albany advertiser in that they would provide daily information. (Something no Albany newspaper currently provides). It would be an expansion on the theme of the Albany town page and would have more of an Albany focus rather the current Great Southern focus. Albany.net.au would be a sister site of GateWAY and the two could feed into one another.

- **The GateWAY GOPHOR Initiative**

GateWAY Gopher is a strategy to take the marketing of GateWAY one step further into the region and will provide locals, already involved in GateWAY, with revenue making ability through their regional portal.

**Q: What is a Gopher?**

A: A person who wants to earn **50%** of all the GateWAY options they sign up whilst promoting GateWAY in their town. We see this person as proactive in wanting to "GO phorward" and "GO phor it" in a big way.

- **E-GateWAY – E-Commerce Strategy**

E-GateWAY will implement an e-commerce-training programme for small to medium sized businesses, starting in May this year. Businesses wishing to partake of our \$550 (10+ web page with full e-commerce service) will automatically be the first to partake of the programme.

One day workshops will be held and each business given one-on-one assistance in understanding and implementing an e-commerce approach to fit in with their business plans.

If a business applies for inclusion in the programme without a business plan, it will be suggested that one is absolutely necessary to prepare for the E-commerce aspect.

## Financial Plan

1. Manager's salary	\$35,000
2. Marketing and Promotions	\$25,000
3. Main Editors	\$36,680
4. Administration	\$37,000
• Administrative assistant	\$15,840
• Sub contract fees	\$5,000
5. WebIT Training courses + Gophor Project – Implementation and training	\$20,000
6. Technical Support and ISP	\$21,400
7. E-GateWAY 2001 ( e-commerce)	\$15,000

TOTAL = \$210,920

## CASH FLOW PROJECTIONS

### Example: Income Projection (Starting second half of first year)

<i>ITEM</i>	<i>Cost per annum</i>	<i>Number estimated</i>	<i>Total</i>
Memberships	\$11	350	\$3850
Cooperative shares	\$1	15,000	\$15000
Option 2 web page	\$55	100	\$5,500
Option 3 web page	\$110	50	\$5,500
Option 4 web page	\$220	20	\$4,400
Option 5 web page	\$550	12	\$6,600
Hosting	\$770	2	\$1540
WebIT Training	\$55	150	\$8,250
Banner ads (header)	\$2,000	6	\$12,000
Footer ads	\$1,000	10	\$10,000
Mid-sized ads	\$720	20	\$14,400
Little ads	\$350	30	\$10,500
			\$97,540
TOTAL			

**Example: Expenditure Projection (starting second half of first Year )**

ITEM	Duration	COST
<b>Personnel/ administration</b>		<b>\$92,520</b>
Project Coordinator	12mths	\$35,000
Administration Assistant	12mths	\$15,840
Editors/Site Maintenance	12mths	\$36,680
Consultancy/sub contract	As required	\$5,000
	12mths	\$20,000
<b>Marketing/Promotions</b>		
Marketing Manager	As required	\$5,000
<b>Technical</b>		<b>\$21,400</b>
	12mths	\$9,600
Technical Support		
ISP Hosting Fees	12mths	\$1,800
Server upgrades		\$10,000
<b>E-GateWay/E-commerce</b>		<b>\$35,000</b>
E-commerce package		\$15,000
Training and Implemetation		\$20,000
	<b>12mths</b>	<b>\$37,000</b>
<b>Administration Costs</b>		
Office,Phone, postage, insurance	12mths	\$6,000
Travel, petrol, accom.	12mths	\$5,000
Equipment hire/purchase	24mths	\$20,000
Software		\$5,000
Sundries		\$1,000



	\$210,920
<b>TOTAL</b>	

**First Year:**

<i>Income</i>	\$97,540
<i>Expenditure</i>	\$210,920
<b>Deficit</b>	- \$113,380

**\*Cash flow Projections need to be constructed monthly or quarterly**

**Example: Income Cash Flow Projections\***

ITEM	<i>Sept</i>	<i>Oct</i>	<i>Nov</i>	<i>Dec</i>	<i>Jan</i>	<i>Feb</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>April</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>June</i>	<i>July</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sept</i>
Memb/s	320	320	320	320	320	320	320	320	320	320	320	320	320
WebPPs													
Option 2.	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250
Option 3.	458	458	458	458	458	458	458	458	458	458	458	458	458
Option 4.	458	458	458	458	458	458	458	458	458	458	458	458	458
Option 5.	550	550	550	550	550	550	550	550	550	550	550	550	550
Adverts:													
Banner	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000
Footer	833	833	833	833	833	833	833	833	833	833	833	833	833
Medium	1200	1200	1200	1200	1200	1200	1200	1200	1200	1200	1200	1200	1200
Little	875	875	875	875	875	875	875	875	875	875	875	875	875
Shares	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250
Hosting	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128
WebLT	687.	687.	687.	687.	687.	687.	687.	687.	687.	687.	687.	687.	687.
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8028</b>	<b>8028</b>	<b>8028</b>	<b>8028</b>	<b>8028</b>	<b>8028</b>	<b>8028</b>	<b>8028</b>	<b>8028</b>	<b>8028</b>	<b>8028</b>	<b>8028</b>	<b>8028</b>

**Example: Expenditure Cash Flow Projections\***

ITEM	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept
Manager	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916
Admin	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500
Costs													
Marketing	2641	2641	2641	2641	2641	2641	2641	2641	2641	2641	2641	2641	2641
Editors	2640	2640	2640	2640	2640	2640	2640	2640	2640	2640	2640	2640	2640
Tech/Support	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	800
ISP Fees	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150
Server	833	833	833	833	833	833	833	833	833	833	833	833	833
Soft.													
E-Com Training	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916	2916
Total	16396	16396	16396	16396	16396	16396	16396	16396	16396	16396	16396	16396	16396
	6	6	6	6	6	6		6	6	6	6	6	6

\*These projections need to also be constructed for years 2+3, taking into consideration fluctuations in some items e.g. software purchased in first year would not necessarily be an item of expenditure in the second

#### Analysis:

A deficit of about \$100,000 would be expected in the first year of operation. The shortfall would be made up with funding accessed from one or more of the various funding organisations mentioned below. It is assumed initial funding would be in the vicinity of between \$100,000 - \$300,000, with breakeven occurring in the third to fourth years of operation. From that point it is anticipated The Portal would make a profit and become sustainable.

In a three-year cash flow projection with a 10% increase in business activity and allowing for 4% inflation, \$111,585 could be attained in second year of operation. In the third year the total would be closer to \$156,220 given the same conditions.

Hence it would take a good 3 – 5 years, treating the model exponentially, for any portal to assume any amount of constant cash flow leading to the possibility of future sustainability.

The Albany GateWay Portal, operating under the new Cooperative structure, with revamped service and options costs and the floating of shares, anticipates becoming sustainable within a 2 year period once the initial \$100,000 funding has been secured. Once a sound and functional business base has been created, both community and businesses in the region anticipate a large uptake of GateWay services. The first year's operations and results illustrate a high level of interest and demand.

**Best Practice Research Websites:**

<http://www.brevard-fl.com>  
<http://www.northfork.net>  
<http://www.reston.com>  
<http://www.crdli.org>  
<http://www.creamerica.org>  
<http://www.crid.state.nc.us>  
<http://www.valleyguide.com>  
<http://www.tcn.asn.au>  
<http://www.avon.net.au>  
<http://www.valleyweb.com>  
<http://www.stcroixonline.com>  
<http://www.coeurdalene.com>  
<http://www.beachcomber.com>  
<http://www.greatlakesonline.com>  
<http://www.caribbean-on-line.com>  
<http://www.webcom.com>  
<http://www.lakeshore.mb.ca>  
<http://www.pacomms.mtx.net>  
<http://www.wctb.co.uk>  
<http://sheringham.co.uk>  
<http://www.sarpy.com/sarpycounty>  
<http://www.milltown.ca>  
<http://www.rottnest.wa.gov.au>  
<http://www.tco.asn.au>  
<http://www.queenstown.tco.asn.au>  
<http://www.deloraine.tasonline.org>  
<http://www.geeveston.tco.asn>  
<http://www.ipswich.qld.gov.au>  
<http://www.infohunt.nsw.gov.au/hunter>  
<http://www.ebroome.com>

Brevard Florida site (US)  
NorthFork Technet site (US)  
Reston Web On-Line (US)  
Long Island site (US)  
Colorado (US)  
North Carolina site (US)  
Illinois Web site (US)  
Tasmanian Network (Aust)  
Valley Web Site, Western Australia  
Annapolis Nova Scotia site  
St.Croix Online site  
Coeur d'Alene's Community Nth. Idaho  
Cape May Web site  
Great Lakes site  
Caribbean Web site  
Virgin Islands site  
Lakeshore Manitoba site  
Port Augusta On-Line  
England's West Country On-Line  
Norfolk England ON-Line  
Nebraska Online  
Milltown Community sites  
Rottnest Island W.A.  
Tasmanian Communities On-Line  
Queenstown Tasmania  
Deloraine Tasmania On-Line  
Geeveston Tasmania On-Line  
Ipswich City Council site  
Hunter Region, NSW  
Broome, Pearl Coast, site

### Responses of EIP Workshop Participants Telephone Interviews:

Knowledge	Why did you participate in the EIP?	Did the EIP meet your expectations? What areas did you feel were well addressed? What areas needed development?	Are there any benefits of being involved or having your business on web portal?	How important are search engines in your business promotions?	Are you comfortable with how the Internet or E-commerce could work for you?
Wilson's WA Machinery	I already have a website, I wanted to have my product database online so that people can look at it and place an order by phone, fax or email. I wanted to find out more about the cost and what technology I needed. I have someone who does web site work for me	There was a lot of information. It was very technical in the first meeting. The other two were better; there was more discussion and time to understand the information. I would have like more pricing information about web design.	The Albany Gateway is very important. It gives the businesses down here an identity. It might increase our tourism. It is quite cheap to put your site there but it doesn't have a database site or flexible enough for me yet. I have to contract someone.	I didn't understand how the search engines worked, I still don't fully but I have a better idea. The problem I have is my product often comes up in the wrong place (category). If you type in 'slasher', some 'porno' sites come up. I think my business needs to be listed well on the search engines but I also advertise in a few farming magazines, these are where my business comes from mainly.	Yes, it has confirmed my first thoughts about the Internet. I have read a lot about it but the workshops have made things clearer.

	but I don't know if he is any good.				
Glenlea Farms	The business we want to put on the Internet is new in Australia. It's not a product that you can buy over the Internet. Our site is going to be for information where people can look at our information and contact us.	We thought the workshops were very useful. In the first week we registered our business name, it was quite easy. The payment system was interesting but it didn't apply to us. The breaks in between each workshop was quite long. Using the examples (local case studies) was very good, but it might have been better if there were two different types of businesses. The domain name section was important to us.	We're all for the Gateway. It is well priced. We are having some trouble getting our domain name working with our website. It costs a lot more for hosting.	The search engine is not that important for our business. We advertise in some magazines because it is directed at the people who are interested in our products. We make sure our web site and email is included.	The EIP has been good for us. The knowledge we got has helped us identify our needs more clearly. It has also saved us money because we realise we don't need anymore than the Gateway package currently.
Karma Chalets	I wanted to find out more about e-commerce. There are a lot of hotels on the Internet that people can book for accommodation.	I felt all the information was very valid. I didn't think it was too technical. The payment system was especially pertinent for us. We were used as a case study, it was helpful to see how we could turn our brochure into content for our website on the Gateway. I especially liked the information on the payment	The Albany Gateway will be very important for this region. If someone gets to the Albany Site, they will be able to find us. It about the same price compared to the our Travel portal but we	Search engines are very important. Putting in the right keywords will help us get placed higher in the listing.	The EIP has not been a waste of time for us. We've got full value out of it. The site that Victor created will remain but will include a redirect to our main site.

	n. We need to be competitive and the Internet for us is the next step. We already have a website on a Travel Portal and it has been very good.	gateways and prices. I have someone creating a more comprehensive site and the EIP help me understand the costs involved.	have to create our site.		
Great Southern Tours	We need to get on the Internet because our clients use the Internet. We haven't got a site and we want one.	Victor was very helpful and knowledgeable. It got too technical sometimes. I thought we spent too much time on the 'business plan' side of things. Victor built a web site for us and put it on the Gateway. It's a good site but we haven't received much interest to date.	The Great Southern Region is a very popular region for tourists. I don't know if our clients in Europe will find the site easily enough. If they find Albany Gateway they will find us. The Gateway is cheaper than us having to do everything ourselves.	We're listed at the top on the Gateway but we don't show on a normal search engine. If we can be placed high on a normal search it would give more clients. We let our existing customers know our website because they often check back. I want to put photos on the Internet of some of our tours.	I know a lot more than I did about e-commerce and how it can help us. When I have more time, I'll go into it more deeply.
Golden Hill Candles	I wanted to learn more about e-commerce and web design. I can do html	I found the content interesting and well structured. Although it wasn't what I had expected, I'm glad I had decided to participate. The first workshop was too long and unstructured.	The Albany Gateway is a good idea. I'm hoping to get Call Centre involved. Gill has done a great job in getting it up and	I didn't find this section of any real value as I have been using the Internet for a few years.	The e-commerce section, especially the transaction system was very clear.

	but I wanted to learn about JavaScript and CGI. I was more interested in the technical aspects of the Web.	The break in between each workshop was too long. I felt there was too much emphasis placed on the Gateway.	running.		
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Skill	Do you have a business plan or web strategy?	Have you registered a domain name by yourself? Would you feel comfortable doing it by yourself?	Do you feel confident in hiring someone else to develop your business website? Would you be able to evaluate whether you were getting value for money?	How comfortable are you at finding information on the Internet?	What kind of maintenance could you do personally?
Wilson's WA Machinery	I haven't got a business plan as such but I know how much I want to spend. There is someone on my company who has some skill in web design. He created my site and put the photos on it.	I didn't register the domain name myself, I had paid someone to do it. If I knew how easy it was, I would have done it myself.	The person that I have doing my website doesn't know as much as I thought he did. I know exactly what I need.	I know how to use search engines but I often get things I didn't want but I suppose it is just the way the searches work.	In my case, maintenance is very important because the database can change weekly. I want to make it automated so that someone at the office can update the database and it will be updated on the web.
Glenlea Farms	We already have a business plan as we are setting up this new business. At the moment, the website is only a small part of it.	Yes, we did it ourselves after the first workshop.	Our site isn't going to be difficult, Gill trained us on the WebIT system and we'll be doing it ourselves.	We knew how to use a search engine before.	There is not a lot of change to our information. The site is quite easy. The WebIT system is good because we can change our web content whenever we want.



Karma Chalets	We have a comprehensive business plan. The EIP workshop identified some extra cost areas such as the payment system and the inbuilt maintenance costs.	Our first site was created by someone else through their templates. We've contracted a design company to create our main site. We understand the costs more clearly. The domain name was included.	The EIP helped us convey what we wanted more clearly. We also had a better idea of 'industry standard' prices	No problems here.	Our pricing changes seasonally. We also have 'specials' so our site will have to be updated regularly. We'll be paying someone to maintain our site.
Great Southern Tours	We don't have a business plan at the moment. I know the areas that we need to develop and how much we can spend. The web site we currently have doesn't cost much.	We'd like to register our domain name but haven't done it as yet. The EIP notes have the address to register. We'll have to look it up.	Victor and Gill have shown us how easy it is to create our site ourselves. If it gets popular, we'll consider an upgrade – and contract it out.	We're listed at the top on the Gateway but we don't show on a normal search engine. If we can be placed high on a normal search it would give more clients. We let our existing customers know our website because they often check back. I want to put photos on the Internet of some of our tours.	The only changes I do are the photos after a tour. It took me a while to learn WebIT but I've got the 'hang' of it.
Golden Hill Candles	I'm still not sure how I can use to sell my candles effectively. The issue is delivery costs.	I don't have a domain name yet but I could do it easily.	Yes I do. The cost associated can vary but I have a better idea of the costs involved for each of the component.	I didn't find this section of any real value as I have been using the Internet for a few years.	I understand the value of maintenance. When I create my site, I'll do them as required.

<b>Attitude</b>	Were you intending to go online before the EIP?	Do you use email in your regular correspondence?	Are the statistics that your web server's host gives you important for the success of your business?	Would you make a purchase online? Would you offer the purchase ability from your site?	Has completing the EIP Workshop changed the way you looked at the Internet and e-commerce?
Wilson's WA Machinery	Yes, definitely.	No as much as I'd like to.	The statistics will be an important component of my web strategy.	Yes, but it depends on what I'm buying. My products will be in thousands of dollars, I will be offering orders only, transactions will be by way of bank transfers.	I have done a lot of reading and it has reinforced my own conclusions.
Glenlea Farms	We weren't sure if it was for us.	No we don't. We're hoping that this will increase.	It will be handy to see how many people look at our site.	I'm still not sure if it is secure enough. We'd prefer to wait.	It has shown what it can do for our business. It will be an added marketing channel.
Karma Chalets	Definitely!	We were very surprised at the response when we got the first site up. The number emails that we answer seems to increase monthly.	The stats are a definite plus in terms of decision to get online.	We have purchased books and clothes online. Our site is designed to facilitate bookings online, including payment.	It confirmed what we already knew and helped reinforce.
Great Southern Tours	Yes, we felt we did. Our clients had also asked us.	Not a lot, but I customers tend to book through emails more.	Any statistics is useful.	We haven't made any purchased yet. We're not sure about a full booking system yet.	The EIP showed us what was possible and hopefully, we will use what we learnt.
Golden Hill	Eventually I will. I	Email is a very	I'm sure that it would	I have made purchases	No, it hasn't. I have

Candles	am still not sure how it is going to help in my business.	important part of my correspondence. I have been using it for a few years.	be, however, as was discussed, they could me misleading.	online. The last purchase was a computer system. I wasn't too happy with the level of service or support. If I can iron out the delivery issues, I'd be quite happy to offer purchases.	been very 'pro – Internet'.
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<b>Adoption</b>	Do you think a domain name is important?	What kind of strategy would you use to develop presence? Outsourced or self-developed?	Do you think that having e-commerce ability will be beneficial to your business?	Have you considered a budget for your online strategy?	What's your next step?
Wilson's WA Machinery	Yes, definitely. It will give us an identity.	I'd like to have the site done in my office.	There is a need for it now and it will get more important as time goes on.	Yes, but it depends on what I'm buying. My products will be in thousands of dollars, I will be offering orders only, transactions will be by way of bank transfers.	Create my database to get online.
Glenlea Farms	Yes, definitely.	Our site is not complex, the standard Gateway plan is fine for us.	At the moment it's a brochure for us. In the future, probably.	I'm still not sure if it is secure enough. We'd prefer to wait.	Wait to see what happens.
Karma Chalets	Definitely!	We'd rather pay for expertise.	We putting a lot of cash into it now – it better be!	We have purchased books and clothes online. Our site is designed to facilitate bookings online, including payment.	Get our main site online.
Great Southern Tours	Yes, but we haven't registered one yet.	The Gateway site is enough at the moment.	Our clients in Japan and Europe are asking for it.	We haven't made any purchased yet. We're not sure about a full booking system yet.	Find the time to update my site.

Golden Hill Candles	It is very important.	I will do it myself. I'm very interested in learning more about the technology.	In some way, it will be.	I have made purchases online. The last purchase was a computer system. I wasn't too happy with the level of service or support. If I can iron out the delivery issues, I'd be quite happy to offer purchases.	Learn more about the design side of things
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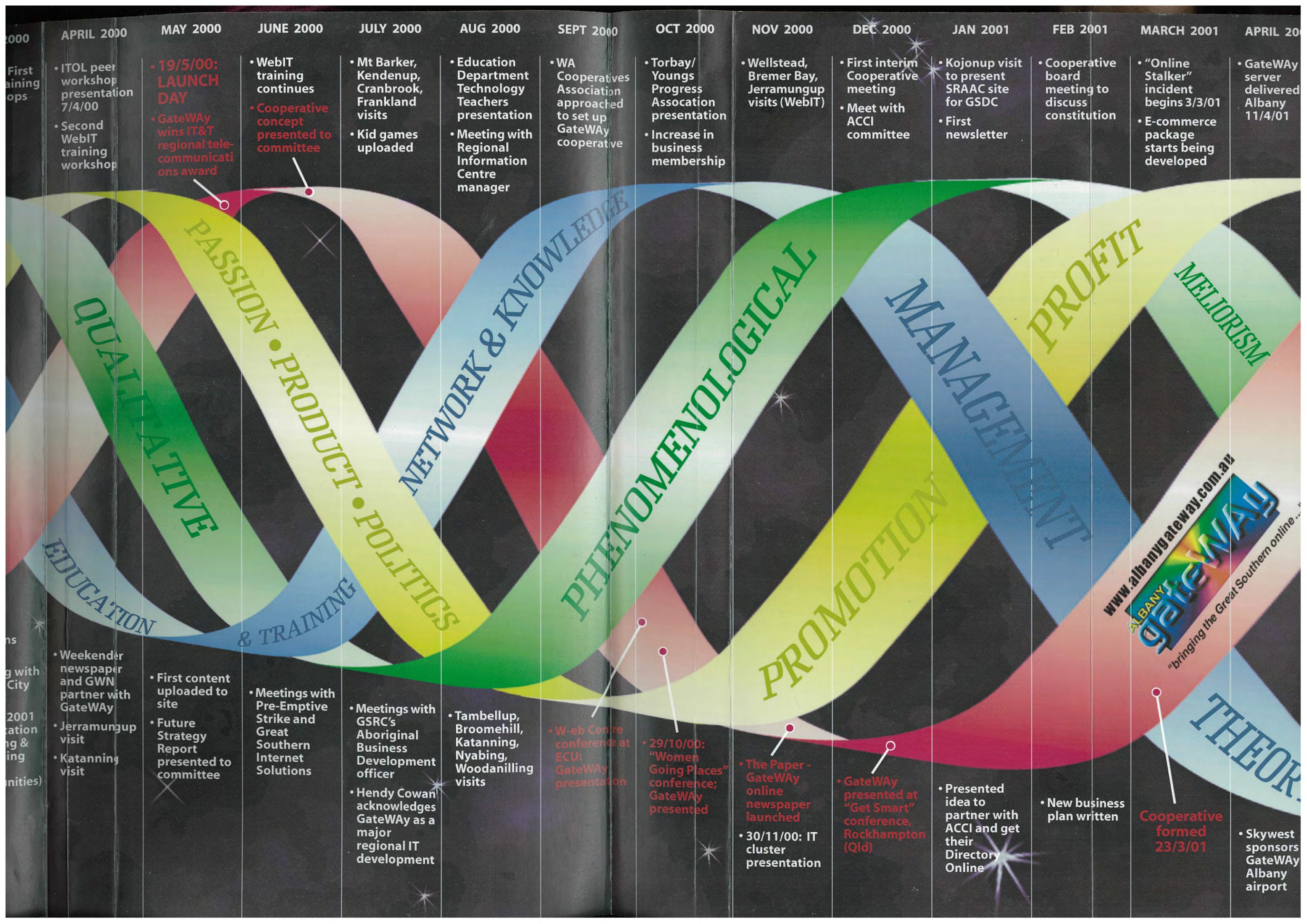


- First committee meetings  
19/4/99: Perth Consortium  
23/4/99: Albany Committee
- Community meetings (schools, towns, youth)  
• 13/5/99: Prototype page up and running
- Assessment of community responses
- First chairperson resigns!  
• RFQ written for tender applications
- Marketing plan commences  
• Opensearch and Omninet win tender contracts
- Regional communication model for GateWAY implemented
- Prepared final draft business plan
- Local business enquiries increase  
• 2/11/99: GSRC keynote address
- Key meetings with local service providers
- Presentation to Regional Tourism Association
- Site development continues (ICQ extensively used as portal is developed online)
- 10/5/00: First Web training workshops



- Radio (ABC) interviews  
• 25/4/99: logo competition launched  
• Online research of other communities online started (best practice examples)
- Logo created, winner announced  
• Media releases
- Consultation process implemented  
- Community  
- Businesses  
- Service providers
- GateWAY "brand" logo launched  
• Local Communities Action Plan disseminated  
3/7/99: Industry briefing for prospective web developers  
- draft report presented to committee
- Community consultations active through  
- all towns  
- all shires  
- all Telecentres  
- all community groups  
• Radio interviews
- Invitation to give keynote address at Great Southern Regional College's 25th anniversary celebrations
- Presentation to Great Southern Development Commission board  
• Community of interest work continues
- Great Southern Telecentres join GateWAY  
• Great Southern regional arts meeting at Mt Barker  
• Business plan presented
- Opensearch and GateWAY collaborate on portal development  
• Meetings with Geotask and GWN
- PROJECT REPORT 2000  
• E-GateWAY incubation businesses chosen
- Topic Editors contacted to participate  
• Wineries show interest
- All towns visited  
• Meeting with Albany City Council  
• CASOC 2001 presentation (Creating & Sustaining Online Communities)





2000    APRIL 2000    MAY 2000    JUNE 2000    JULY 2000    AUG 2000    SEPT 2000    OCT 2000    NOV 2000    DEC 2000    JAN 2001    FEB 2001    MARCH 2001    APRIL 2001

- ITOL peer workshop presentation 7/4/00
- Second WebIT training workshop
- 19/5/00: LAUNCH DAY
- GateWAY wins IT&T regional telecommunications award
- WebIT training continues
- Cooperative concept presented to committee
- Mt Barker, Kendenup, Cranbrook, Frankland visits
- Kid games uploaded
- Education Department Technology Teachers presentation
- Meeting with Regional Information Centre manager
- WA Cooperatives Association approached to set up GateWAY cooperative
- Torbay/Youngs Progress Association presentation
- Increase in business membership
- Wellstead, Bremer Bay, Jerramungup visits (WebIT)
- First interim Cooperative meeting
- Meet with ACCI committee
- Kojonup visit to present SRAAC site for GSDC
- First newsletter
- Cooperative board meeting to discuss constitution
- "Online Stalker" incident begins 3/3/01
- E-commerce package starts being developed
- GateWAY server delivered Albany 11/4/01

- Weekender newspaper and GWN partner with GateWAY
- Jerramungup visit
- Katanning visit
- First content uploaded to site
- Future Strategy Report presented to committee
- Meetings with Pre-Emptive Strike and Great Southern Internet Solutions
- Meetings with GSRC's Aboriginal Business Development officer
- Hendy Cowan acknowledges GateWAY as a major regional IT development
- Tambellup, Broomehill, Katanning, Nyabing, Woodanilling visits
- W-e-b Centre conference at ECU: GateWAY presentation
- 29/10/00: "Women Going Places" conference; GateWAY presented
- The Paper - GateWAY online newspaper launched
- 30/11/00: IT cluster presentation
- GateWAY presented at "Get Smart" conference, Rockhampton (Qld)
- Presented idea to partner with ACCI and get their Directory Online
- New business plan written
- Cooperative formed 23/3/01
- Skywest sponsors GateWAY Albany airport

www.albanygateway.com.au  
**ALBANY GateWAY**  
"bringing the Great Southern online..."