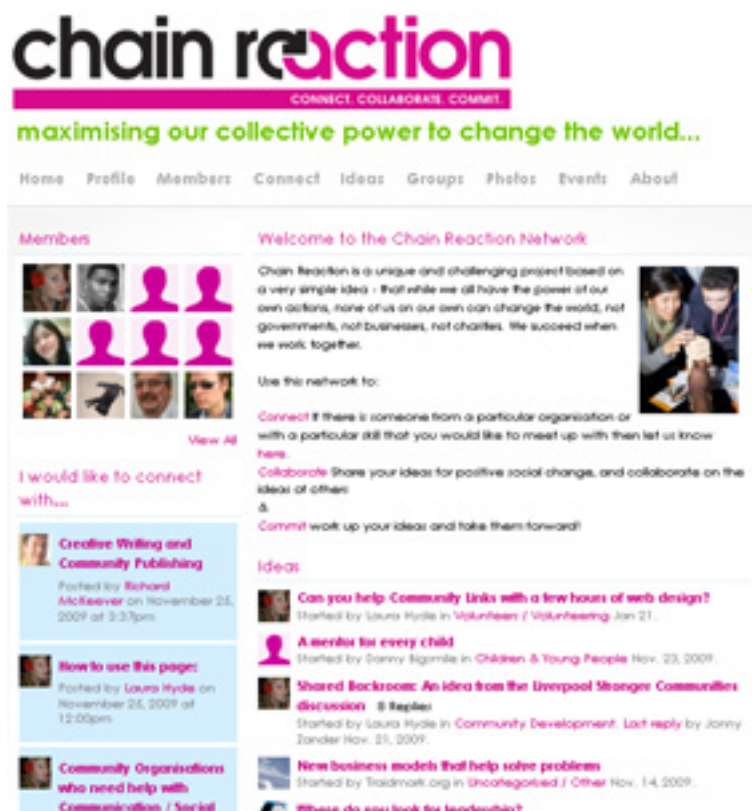


Examples of best practice: new media

You've probably heard of facebook, bebo and myspace – they are a reasonably new medium allowing people to stay in touch online with colleagues, friends and family who could potentially be thousands of miles away. A 'Ning' network is very similar to these sites, however, it is a membership only network that is more geared up to business use. This section is designed to show how effective these networks are and how they could be used for successful stakeholder communications.

According to Ning network's website – www.ning.com – “Ning is the social platform for the world's interests and passions online. Millions of people every day are coming together across Ning to explore and express their interests, discover new passions, and meet new people around shared pursuits.”

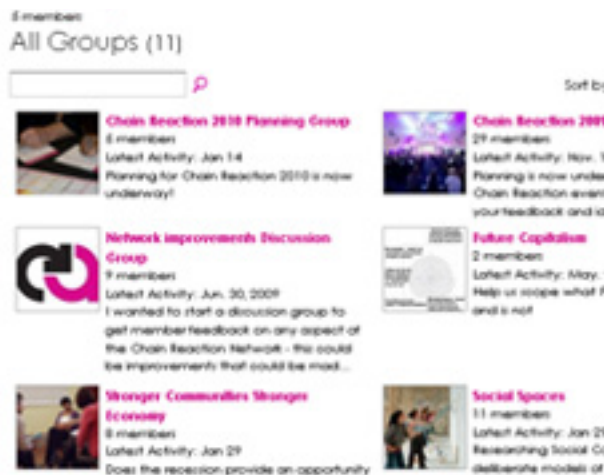
Community Links, a member of the AdviceUK network, have used a range of new media to enhance their relationship with other voluntary organisation's and delegates before and after their annual Chain Reaction conference, a Ning network is just one of them. Their site can be found at www.chain-reaction.ning.com. Below you can see the home page.



Using a Ning network allows you to interact with people who have an interest in your work, without the hassle and expense of travelling and hiring meeting rooms. Community Links make an immediate impact with their network homepage – when members log in they see good quality conversation on a range of interesting subjects presented in a vibrant and easy to navigate way.

Each member has their own profile, which enables them to say more about themselves, areas that they are interested in and skills they may be willing to share.

At the top right hand corner of Community Links' site, there is also a quick link to see the members of the network.



Another great feature is the ability to split into groups, which could perhaps be done for discrimination advice, debt advice etc. To the left you can see the groups that chain reaction have on their Ning network.

By using the ideas section, members can share their aspirations, problems and experiences. This is a quick and effective way of working together as other people's input is free and can be instant (if members are online at the time). Here you can see how Community Links have put this into practice.



Having an active online community doesn't mean never meeting up in the real world. Instead Community Links' uses the events section on Ning to generate interest in offline gatherings. Events can be searched by date or interest.



To set up a free Ning network go to www.ning.com and follow the step by step instructions given on screen.

You will then need to invite people to join your network. Due to it's highly interactive nature, the site is probably better suited to remote collaborative working (as Community Links are using it) than maintaining a relatively formal relationship with more distant stakeholders.

Be aware that online communities can require a bit of effort to establish. People will want to see that the community is active and effective before participating themselves, so you will probably need to invest some time in contributing content and starting conversations. After a short while, though, the community will begin to manage itself.



We would like to thank Community Links for allowing us to use extracts from their successful Chain Reaction website (Ning network). For more information about how Community Links are using Social Media contact:
Richard.mckeever@community-links.org



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