Cheshire County Council's roadworks webpage

Summary

Cheshire County Council has new powers under the Traffic Management Act 2004 to control roadworks in the area. The council wanted to the public to be able to access present and planned roadworks information through the internet.

This has now been achieved. 'Cheshire Roadworks Online' is an easy-to-use internet service allowing travellers to plan journeys avoiding roadworks.

Key learnings

Sharing knowledge and expertise between council departments helps create better services for the public.

Everything happens somewhere. Presenting complex information on maps of the local area helps the public use technical information for their own purposes.

Background

Background to Cheshire County Council

Geographically, the county of Cheshire is bordered by North Wales, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Derbyshire.

Cheshire County Council is a first-tier local authority, with six second-tier district authorities. These include Chester City, Ellesmere Port and Neston in the west, Vale Royal and Crewe and Nantwich centrally and Macclesfield and Congleton in the east.

Policy background

The Traffic Management Act 2004 came into force on the 1 April 2008. The act gives further powers to local authorities to coordinate roadworks by utility companies. This is in order to minimise disruption to citizens and businesses in the locality.

Who was involved?

- Cheshire County Council Highways Department
- Cheshire County Council IT Department.

The problems and how we tackled them

Cheshire County Council had an existing list of planned roadworks, supplied by the utility companies. The problem was that this was a dull, technical list that didn't present the information in a very useful or engaging way. It did not help citizens to plan their routes around the county.

The county IT department worked closely with the highways department in order to provide the 'Cheshire Roadworks Online' service for residents.

The service took 530 person-hours to produce and utilised the council's in-house information technology (IT) infrastructure to reduce costs. Development work started in October 2006, and the system went live at end of February 2007.

One problem faced by the development team was that information supplied by utility companies was often very technical. To make it 'user-friendly', the council's IT department worked closely with the highways department. They found more informative and non-technical expressions to help the public understand what was happening.

For example, the technical definition of a major roadworks scheme can be very different from the public's understanding of major roadworks. This normally involves restriction of traffic flow and delays.

The system therefore includes a 'back office' facility. This allows council web-editors to easily create dynamic mapping, using the county's corporate internet mapping system. And it also makes it possible to highlight 'high impact' schemes likely to inconvenience the travelling public.

Outcomes and impact

The outcome of the project has been that council information is now easily accessible for citizens to use. The service was officially launched in June 2007.

Features of the website include:

- the ability to view planned street works, graded by severity, on a map of the local area
- the ability to 'zoom in' directly to a Cheshire postcode, street, town or district for roadworks planned in that area – for example, near a citizen's residence or place of work
- textual information to help citizens locate areas more easily
- the ability to view existing roadworks only or to include planned roadworks up to three months in advance
- information that has been thoroughly tested before it is made public to ensure that non-essential technical information is removed.

The site can be viewed via the county council's transport and roads webpage.

The service has been publicised to all councillors at a launch event. It has also been communicated to the rest of the council through the monthly staff magazine. Council members have praised the site and compliments have been received from other councils.

The close working between the two departments has cemented cross-departmental working and new projects are on the horizon.

What we could have done better?

The team suggest they could have consulted the general public regarding the symbols they have adopted to show roadworks around the county. They were based on internal discussions between the departments and by looking at examples of symbols used by other councils on the internet.

Next steps

The team have some further plans for the project. Potential new developments include:

- adding an email notification function, enabling citizens to register for updates notifying them when new roadworks are planned in their area
- adding suggested diversion routes for citizens and businesses to ensure smoother traffic flow during major planned works
- further publicity for the general public.

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Cheshire's roadworks webpage – on Cheshire County Council's website