Involvement in Small Community Based Organisations’ Websites

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Abstract
This study is concerned with identifying stakeholders that community based organisations (CBO) in Australia, New Zealand, and the UK turn to when considering, developing, maintaining, and updating their websites. Several stakeholders are identified based on the strength of their ties with the CBO. A key finding is that stakeholders with weak ties are increasingly involved, from deciding who will host the website through to the stage of website redesign. Findings of the study have implications for setting policy on community based organisations.

Keywords: Community based organisations; website life cycle; stakeholder; strong ties; weak ties

Introduction
Community Based Organisation (CBO) is the loose title for a category of organisations that service a wide range of the community, such as a school, a sporting body, a community centre, or a charity (Burgess & Bingley, 2008). CBOs typically face a number of barriers when implementing websites, including how they can effectively access and retain the knowledge needed to initially develop, and then maintain, their websites. CBOs can turn to different stakeholder groups to source the knowledge they need. This article is concerned with identifying the different groups that CBOs turn to during different website stages (considering, developing, maintaining, and updating their websites). It commences with a brief review of literature that examines the nature of CBOs and their websites and discusses the notion of strong and weak ties and how these may be applied to assisting with technology-based change, such as that of introducing a website to a CBO. The article then goes on to report on a study of 35 CBOs and their associated website experiences.

Literature Review
There is no one term that can be employed to describe Community Based Organisations (CBOs). In examining studies of the sector across different regions, Denison and Johanson (2007) suggest that the terminology used to describe such organisations varies – with terms such as voluntary organisations,
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non-profit organisations, non-government organisations (NGOs), community organisations, and charities being employed. CBOs are a widely diverse group. This diversity exists in CBOs’ origins, finances, activities, the people they serve, and the means they use to achieve their goals. They range across environmental groups, playgroups, child care, charities, sporting associations, church groups, service clubs, and so forth. CBOs rely on engaging people for the benefit of their membership or to promote a wider cause and typically need to build relationships with different groups, such as volunteers, supporters, donors, and the media. The majority of community organisations are small, are community-based, have limited resources, and often rely on volunteer labour to carry out their operations (Kenix, 2007; Spencer, 2002). Although referring to small businesses, Thong, Yap, and Raman (1994) referred to these limited resources as resource poverty. Although traditionally slow to adopt newer technologies, there is some indication that CBOs have become more willing to adopt technologies such as the Internet (Kenix, 2007). For the purposes of this study, the authors have adopted the definition of a CBO as being a non-profit, non-government organisation which serves a local community’s needs.

### Website Use in CBOs

Spencer (2002) identified that the Internet was potentially useful to CBOs for fundraising, attracting and managing volunteers, providing information, as a tool for advocacy, and to assist to build communities and enhance relationships by engaging website users. Kent, Taylor, and White (2003) suggested that a strength of the Internet was that it could help individuals to realise that they share interests with others. There have been few studies that examine the level of use of websites by CBOs in detail. In 2003, the Centre for Community Networking Research (CCNR) in Australia conducted a nationwide survey of 923 CBOs (Centre for Community Networking Research [CCNR], 2003). The survey showed that the vast majority (97%) of respondents had computers and over 60% of respondents actually had a website, which was a significantly higher rate than other similar studies in the late 1990s. Website adoption rates ranged between 50-75% for most categories of CBOs that responded. Just under half of the smaller CBOs published websites, compared with over three quarters of larger CBOs (CCNR, 2003).

In relation to the purpose of CBO websites, Goatman and Lewis (2007) examined the adoption and use of websites by charities in the United Kingdom. They observed that little attention had been paid to the use of the Internet for marketing purposes by charities. They identified the primary purposes for having websites as being to raise awareness of the charity, raise awareness of its mission, provide relevant information or services, provide contact details, and generate new supporters. The authors concluded from the results that charities generally considered their websites to be moderately successful across a range of purposes. The study also suggested that larger sized charities considered their websites to be more successful than did their smaller counterparts (Goatman & Lewis, 2007).

In a study of South African non-government organisation websites, Naude, Froneman, and Atwood (2004) found that a lack of knowledge, time, and finances (that is, resource poverty) hindered website development, as well as a lack of commitment to managing the website effectively.

Having discussed the purpose of CBO websites and the barriers they face in setting them up, the discussion now moves to who is involved in setting up CBO and maintaining websites.

### Involvement in CBO Website Design and Use

Carroll and Rosson (2007) discussed the notion of participatory design in relation to the websites of community groups. Whilst participatory design is not a new concept (for instance, see Muller & Kuhn, 1993), the authors refer specifically to its use for CBOs. The fundamental premise of participatory design is that the people affected by the outcomes of the design ought to be included
in the design process (Brereton & Buur, 2008). Carroll and Rosson (2007) suggested that participatory design integrates two propositions: (1) the *moral* proposition that those who will be most affected by the ‘design outcome’ (in this case, use the CBO website) ought to have a say in its design, and (2) the *pragmatic* proposition that the people who will adopt the design outcome (that is, use the website) should be included in the design process. These separate groups are involved throughout design, installation, implementation, and subsequent use. Brereton and Buur (2008) suggested that computing is so ubiquitous that new challenges are faced by designers, including the need to take into account the technical consideration of design in the social context it is occurring. In effect, users become the “heart of the design process” (Makagonov & Reyes Espinosa, 2008).

Terry and Standing (2004) examined user participation in electronic commerce systems development in three Australian organisations and suggested that organisations may be more likely to involve internal users (that is, from within the business) than external customers in the design process.

Makagonov and Reyes Espinosa (2008) discussed the difficulties involved in designing websites for a specific type of community organisation, a non-profit regional museum. They outlined the challenges:

- the stakeholder (in this case financer) that paid for the website was not the final user of the website and did not have any demands on the website content;
- the user did not pay for the final product (and was often not considered or even identified when the website was being designed); and
- there was a wide variety of potential users (such as scientists, students and tourists).

Figure 1: Participatory Design Activities for ICT resources in CBOs

(Adapted from Carroll and Rosson (2007, p. 251))

Carroll and Rosson (2007) discussed a number of activities associated with participatory design that were aimed at improving the use of information and communications technologies (ICT) resources (websites being a subset of other ICT in a CBO, such as computers). Although they typically were discussing the websites of larger CBOs, many of their arguments are relevant to all CBOs. Their views are summarised in Figure 1.

In Figure 1, *Direct Participation* relates to the direct involvement of website users in its design process. *Resource for change* refers to resource poverty in relation to the use of ICTs. The centre
of the figure refers to the prerequisites for introducing effective ICT changes into CBOs. The arrows in Figure 1 reflect the tension between the scarcity of resources in many CBOs (the authors suggest these are people, time, and funding), and the importance of direct participation in design activities.

In discussing how organisations might support effective ICT use, Denison and Johanson (2007) discussed the notion (arising from social network analysis) of strong and weak links. Where the authors use the term ‘link’ they are actually referring to the notion of a ‘tie’ as they refer to the work of Granovetter (1973) who discusses strong and weak interpersonal ties, where the strength of a tie is “the combination of the amount of the time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie” (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361). Granovetter (1983) argues that “our acquaintances (weak ties) are less likely to be socially involved with one another than our close friends (strong ties)” (p. 201). Strong ties are those that can typically be relied upon and can provide a “trusted environment in which to operate and harness local capacity” (Denison & Johanson, 2007, p. 12). For instance, in small businesses it is common for ICT advice to be sourced from friends and family members (Burgess, 2002), which would be considered to be strong ties.

However, weak ties can also be important as they can provide access to new ideas and new opportunities through access to information from other parts of the social system that cannot be accessed within a restricted circle of close friends (Granovetter, 1983). The use of consultants by small businesses would be such an example of the possible benefits of weak ties (Burgess 2002). A combination of strong and weak ties could provide a useful balance in relation to the design of websites for CBOs. Community members participating in the design process would be an example of the use of strong ties.

Denison and Johanson (2007) bemoaned the lack of studies related to the use of ICT in CBOs – suggesting that this lack of knowledge is a barrier to policy setting and planning in the sector. They also suggested that these studies, which have predominantly involved surveys, could be supplemented with qualitative studies. Responding to the call of Denison and Johanson (2007), the authors were keen to investigate the development and use of websites of CBOs in relation to the notion of strong and weak ties and how they may support CBOs that face resource poverty (as per Thong and associates, 1994) in their use of ICTs. Denison and Johanson (2007) argue that strategies involving the encouragement of a combination of strong and weak ties could be developed to support the development of strategic applications involving technology-based change (such as websites) by CBOs. In examining the use of strong and weak ties by other authors, Granovetter (1983) suggested that in many instances the theory is useful to explain empirical findings that “would otherwise have been anomalous” (p. 228). A unique perspective of the study was investigating the stakeholder groups and strength of ties in regards to the different stages of website development and use – from initiation of the idea to have a website, to its ongoing maintenance – as this had not been investigated elsewhere.

Methodology

As mentioned earlier, the aim of the study was to investigate the development and use of websites by CBOs. This translates specifically to the question of which particular stakeholders were involved in the different stages of considering, developing, maintaining, and updating CBO websites.

The study was conducted between March 2008 and April 2009. It involved semi-structured interviews with staff of 35 CBOs in Australia, New Zealand, and the UK. Interviews were conducted in metropolitan and rural areas. In Australia, these were conducted in and around the city of Melbourne; in New Zealand, the interviews were conducted in and around Auckland and Christ-
church; in the UK, the interviews were conducted in and around Cardiff and Luton. Interviews were seen as the most appropriate form of data collection as the reasons behind the use of strong and weak leaks in different stages of website development were to be investigated (as per Williamson, 2002).

The aim was to achieve a spread of CBOs across a range of areas. Originally it was intended that this would be across sporting clubs, youth services organisations, charities, libraries, and ‘neighbourhood houses’ (or community centres). However, as many CBOs in the UK register as charities it was decided to amend that category to be known as ‘support’ organisations. The interviewees were identified via a Google search, initially by location (e.g., ‘Melbourne’ or ‘Christchurch’) and then by type (e.g., ‘youth services’). Thus, the selection of CBOs to interview was not random as it relied on the order that they appeared in the Google search. However, it was felt that this approach (use of ‘search engine’ that arranged findings according to some predetermined algorithm) was appropriate as at least it was possible to use a single engine to source the required organisations. The alternative was to use different lists to source different types of CBOs in different locations. As the study targeted the use of websites, only CBOs that actually had websites were selected. In most instances these websites were standalone, but in a small number of instances they were hosted by a peak body, with a specific section of the website devoted to the CBOs that were interviewed.

The interviews were generally conducted at the premises of the organisation in question, although some interviews were conducted at a mutual point of agreement. In two instances, interviews were conducted by telephone when a convenient meeting time and/or place could not be arranged. Where possible, two of the researchers attended the interview to capture the data more effectively (this occurred for 56% of interviews) as the interviews were not recorded. Five interviews were initially conducted in Auckland, New Zealand, in March 2008. After these initial interviews, the researchers refined some of the questions (which remained predominantly the same) for the remainder of the interviews. In some instances, if it was felt a vital piece of data was missing or misunderstood, interviewees were emailed after the interview for further clarification. It was necessary to have a reasonably structured set of questions and a formal method of recording the answers as the interviewers were often at different places (that is, countries) at different times. However, the researchers were reasonably experienced in the conduct and analysis of interviews and felt comfortable with moving off the immediate topic or jumping to different questions in the interview protocol as the situation dictated. The questions were asked under a series of themes – demographics, adoption of the website, building the website, maintaining the website, promoting the website, and measuring the success of the website. After each interview, notes taken were initially written up via a pre-prepared MS Word template by one interviewer, from written notes taken during each interview. These were then checked and updated by the second interviewer if present at the interview. Results of demographic questions, quantifiable answers (to questions such as ‘how long have you been in business’) and ‘prompted’ answers were initially entered into an MS Excel spreadsheet, which allowed quick analysis (using the ‘autofilter’ feature) according to demographic categories and the basic identification of themes. For this paper, a more detailed identification of individual interviewee responses according to themes occurred via the use of the qualitative research support software package NVivo – which allowed each interview to be imported from its MS Word file. Then, individual interviewee comments were tied to themes (which were set up as ‘tree nodes’ in the software). This assisted in ensuring that all comments made by interviewees in relation to the particular themes were identified.

When analysing the interview responses it was intended to also examine the extent to which strong and weak ties had influenced the stages associated with website adoption, design, and use. Granovetter (1983) examined a number of applications of his theory, predominantly in relation to the use of strong/weak ties to gain employment or as part of an economic/social system. How-
ever, some of the studies did examine the transfer of knowledge across a social system. Across these studies, the definition of strong ties was expanded by some authors to include relatives and neighbours as well as friends. Huijboom (2007, p.141) also suggested that strong ties involved “a strong relationship such as a family tie or close personal friendship”. Weak ties included work colleagues and ‘friends of friends’ (Granovetter, 1983), also described by Huijboom (2007) as a loose acquaintance, such as contact made at a conference. Braun (2004) examined ICT diffusion in an Australian regional tourism network and actually further differentiated weak ties by classifying them as internal (to the network) and external weak ties. This study uses this option to classify strong and weak ties as follows:

**Strong ties:** family; friends (in the case of CBOs these would be family members and friends of those in the organisation involved in the various website stages).

**Weak ties (internal):** paid staff (employees); members; volunteers

**Weak ties (external):** consultants; Internet Service Providers (ISPs)

Another challenge was to determine the various website stages. It was considered to use a traditional systems development life cycle (SDLC) approach, such as the stages suggested by Cater-Steel and Grist (2004) in regards to how small businesses might build an e-commerce website:

- Systems analysis/planning
- Systems design
- Building the system
- Testing
- Implementation and Maintenance.

However, the researchers felt that it was likely that from the point of view of identifying stakeholder involvement in CBO website development some of these stages would effectively become merged as they were carried out by the same person or group. The researchers were also interested in who were consulted at these different stages, not just who were carrying out the tasks of the stage. Thus, it was decided to introduce a new set of ‘website design’ stages (that might also be easier to explain to CBOs during the study):

- Thinking about introducing a website (this is a stage that would normally be before the start of a traditional SDLC proves)
- Deciding who hosts the website (unique to website development)
- Building / designing the website (a combination of systems analysis, planning, design, building, and testing)
- Redesigning the website (subsequent website redesigns)
- Updating website content (it could be argued that this should not be a ‘website design’ stage as such).

It was always intended that a sample of CBOs across different countries would be beneficial to compensate for any ‘local’ differences. The selection of Australia (and Melbourne in particular) was from a convenience point of view as this is where two of the authors are located. Interviews in New Zealand and the United Kingdom were carried out as the researchers were already there in some other capacity (such as conference attendance) at different times.

It was an interesting (almost impossible!) exercise to try to classify the size of CBOs by one measure. A simple measure of ‘number of employees’ that might work for small businesses does not apply to CBOs as different stakeholders play different roles. Thus, it was instead decided to determine who performed ‘the functions’ that support the ongoing operations of each CBO. For instance, in a sporting club a committee member (such as a club secretary) can perform functions...
to keep the club running on a day-to-day basis but can also be a ‘member’ of the club. In some community centres and support services the members or participants also perform functions keep the CBO running. In libraries many of these functions are performed by paid employees. For the most part, the functions are provided by paid employees or volunteers. Table 1 shows a number of measures that provide an indication of the range of CBOs that were interviewed. Note that the rows indicate the proportion of CBOs that had each type of service provider. For instance, 43% of sporting clubs had services provided by paid employees, 57% had services provided by volunteers and 29% had services provided by members. The rows for each type of CBO do not add to 100% as many had a service provided by more than one group of providers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number interviewed</th>
<th>Paid employees (%)</th>
<th>Volunteers (%)</th>
<th>Members (%)</th>
<th>Regular users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Centre</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Typically 1000-4000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Typically 1000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporting club</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25-500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support services</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Typically 150-1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth services</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>300-2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The columns labelled ‘paid employees’, ‘volunteers’, and ‘members’ relate to those people that provided the services for the different CBOs. Overall, eight out of 10 CBOs employed paid employees, with a similar range (74%) relying on the services of volunteers. A small proportion of CBOs also relied upon their members to provide services. The last column of the table provides an idea of how many people use the services of the CBOs. Each type of CBO is now briefly examined.

**Community centres** typically provide a number of different services out of a single location. Most had a small number of paid employees (3-15) and volunteers (1-25). There were two ‘larger’ community centres that had 36 and 61 employees respectively and 20-25 volunteers. One of these also had 83 members that helped to provide services. Community centres typically serviced 1000-4000 regular users.

**Libraries** turned out to be an interesting group. This is because most of them that were interviewed were actually aligned with other libraries in the region and were supported directly by government resources. Libraries mostly relied on paid staff and also served a large number of users.

A variety of **sporting clubs** were interviewed. Most relied on volunteers or members to provide their services, but there were three clubs that had paid employees, mostly to provide coaching services (but also some limited administrative functions). Sporting clubs typically serviced a smaller group of users than other CBOs.

CBOs that provided services to support family, disabled, and elderly groups or the community in general were classified as **support services**. These CBOs typically had a small number of paid employees (1-4), although many of these were supported by volunteers. One organisation that provided elderly services relied on its members to run the organisation and to provide all of its services. The number of users supported by these CBOs ranged from 20-1200, but typically numbered in the hundreds.
Youth Services CBOs could also be classed as a support service, but other researchers had classified them into a separate group and the researchers have followed this classification in this study. As with support services, these organisations were typically run by a small number of paid employees who were supported by volunteers. However, there were two CBOs in this category that had 25 and 64 paid employees respectively. One other CBO used some of its members to help provide services. The number of users of these services ranged from 300 to 2000.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the CBOs that were interviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Comm centre</th>
<th>Library</th>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When arranging the interviews, CBOs were mostly contacted by telephone, with some being contacted by email. The researchers asked to speak to someone in the organisation that could comment on its website. A range of interviewees resulted, which have been classified into three categories:

- **Managers**: who were in charge of general operations.
- **Staff that had specific roles** within the organisation.
- **Staff that specifically had ICT-related roles** in the organisation.

The breakdown of interviewees is shown in Table 3. Note that the CBOs where the interviewee had a specific ICT role were mainly Support Services or Youth Services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number interviewed</th>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Specific Role</th>
<th>ICT Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Centre</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporting club</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support services</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth services</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The authors were very interested in determining who was involved in the various stages of website development and use, as their previous (and other) small business research had suggested a range of involvements, from relative and friends, employees, consultants, and others. These responses were classified into people that represented strong and weak ties with the organisation. The results are shown in Figure 2.

Each interviewee could nominate more than one group involved in the different stages. Note the different number of responses for each stage. In some instances the interviewee was not involved with the organisation when the stage occurred (for example, some interviewees were not part of
the organisation when the website was created, especially with older websites). The website re-
design stage was not relevant if the CBO had not gone through a redesign. The stage which re-
ceived the most responses was the one that involved updating website content, as this was an on-
going process.

On some occasions, separate external groups were involved in different website stages. For in-
stance, a community centre used participants from a scheme involving work for unemployment
benefits; one CBO gained assistance from their Peak Body. These are represented as ‘Other’ in
Figure 2.

![Stakeholders in website stages](image)

**Figure 2: Stakeholders in CBO website design stages**

One of the limitations of Figure 2 is that it is only really possible to compare the percentages of
involvement by each separate type of stakeholder across the different website stages, rather than
against each other. This is because Figure 2 represents the responses from all types of CBOs
combined, and the representation of different stakeholders across the CBOs was not measured.
Thus, a more appropriate measure is to examine the representation across the stages by the
strength of the ties represented in each group. This is shown in Figure 3.

The results suggest that, depending upon the stage, there were often different groups involved in
different website stages. In some instances, consultants were used at all stages, sometimes even
updating content. In a number of instances the task went to a member that had some expertise in
the area. For instance, in two sporting clubs in Australia the website design was handled by mem-
bers – in one of these the member was paid as a consultant. A community centre, also in Austra-
lia, had a member that ran an Internet consulting business and he provided the service “for free”.

Note that for many CBOs most stages involved reliance on both weak internal ties (paid staff,
members, and/or volunteers) and weak external ties (predominantly consultants), but there were
differences in the level of involvement of these groups across the different stages.

The different stages will now be analysed further according to the type of CBO.
Initially Thinking About the Website

This stage is concerned with who was involved with thinking about the website before it was developed. The authors were expecting more involvement from strong ties at this stage. It has been known for some time in small business research that many small business owner/managers rely on family or friends to provide ICT expertise (Burgess, 2002). Alternatively, weak ties can be important in helping to add new information that can assist with adoption decisions (Braun, 2004).

More than half of the CBOs stated that paid staff were involved in initial thinking about the website, with external consultants and members being other prominent groups. Almost half of the interviewees indicated that more than one group was involved in thinking about the website (such as paid staff in conjunction with a consultant). Members were involved in initially thinking about the website in nearly all of the sporting clubs – a group which stands out as having greater levels of member and/or volunteer involvement than other types of CBOs throughout all of the stages. In all of the other categories of CBOs, a majority of the organisations involved paid staff in initial thinking about the website. Note that there were a number of ‘other’ groups involved in thinking about websites. Two CBOs (a community centre in New Zealand and a support services organisation in the UK) involved users in thinking about the website. The community centre suggested that they consulted informally with potential users of the website. This fits in well with Carroll and Rosson’s (2007) idea of involving users in the stages of website design. A community centre in Australia also involved ‘work for the dole’ participants in thinking about the website (‘work for the dole’ being where citizens perform some type of task as a requirement of receiving unemployment benefits).

Summarising, there was a strong representation by weak-internal ties (paid staff, members and volunteers) when decisions were being made about adopting the website. Weak-external ties (consultants and/or ISPs) were consulted by half of the CBOs. Only 7% of CBOs consulted strong ties when thinking about the website.
Deciding Who to Host the Website

This stage is concerned with who is involved with making the decision as to where the website is hosted. Again, it was expected that there would be some involvement from family and friends in regards to recommendations of which ISPs to use for hosting, but as with the previous website stage this was not the case. Paid staff and consultants were primarily involved in deciding who was to host the website. Interestingly, there was not as much consultation amongst multiple groups occurring in this stage, with only 14% of CBOs indicating that more than one group of stakeholders was involved. Note that this is the only stage where Internet Service Provider (ISP) involvement was above 10% (this being an expected outcome as they usually host the websites), with three CBOs (a community centre and youth services organisation in Australia and a sporting club in the UK) relying on their ISP for advice on website hosting.

There were some unusual instances of stakeholders involved in selecting the website host. A library in New Zealand was approached by an organisation offering a free website hosting service and a community centre in Australia relied on a friend telling them about an organisation that specialised in hosting ‘non-profits’ after the company that first hosted their website “went bust”. Sporting organisations predominantly relied on their members and consultants to provide advice as to who should host the website.

Overall, CBOs generally turned to either weak-internal or weak-external ties for advice on hosting the website – but rarely both.

Building / Designing the Website

This stage is concerned with who is involved the actual building and design of the website. It was expected that there would be more reliance on external expertise as often these tasks can require technical skills. The three major stakeholder groups in this stage were again consultants, paid staff, and members. However, this is the first stage where the involvement of consultants is the most prominent. More than one group was involved in building/designing the website in 30% of the CBOs, so there was more consultation occurring than with the decision to select a website host. A different example of consultation (between paid employees) occurred in an Australian community centre, where the design was “carried out by the co-ordinator and the IT guy”. Sporting clubs were again unique, predominantly relying on members and consultants. One sporting club in the UK relied on website development software that was “dead easy, you just drag and drop”. As with the stage that examined who initially thought about the website, other groups involved in the building and design of the website were website users and ‘work for the dole’ participants.

Overall, the levels of involvement of weak ties, internal and external, rose slightly – suggesting wider consultation at this stage. The involvement of strong ties remained low.

Redesigning the Website

Some 19 of the CBOs had gone through or were going through a major redesign of their website. However, questions related to this stage evoked more comments from interviewees than for any other website stage. As Figure 2 shows, there was a much higher level of involvement of consultants in website redesigns than for any other stage, with 63% of all CBOs that had gone through a redesign involving consultants in the process. Another important finding in this stage is that the level of involvement of multiple stakeholders is the highest for any stage (58% of CBOs used a combination – mainly consultants and paid staff or consultants and members). The message here is that CBOs had already been through less rigorous and often less successful website incarna-
tions and had determined that the same ‘mistakes’ would not repeated the next time around – through greater use of professionals and greater consultation.

There was one case (UK support services organisation) where users were involved in the redesign and one CBO (Australian youth services) that relied on using existing website templates in their redesign. Interestingly, the UK support services organisation had charged its members with the task of seeking out a low cost alternative, such as a local college, for website development. As a result of the interview, a student project group from the interviewer’s Australian university carried out the redesign for the CBO as part of their studies!

Interestingly, interviewees tended to open up more to the interviewers about this stage than for any other stage.

Libraries tended to portray the most official approach to this stage of website development. One Australian library had used their own internal IT professional to develop the ‘scope’ of the revised website, but then employed a consultant to carry out the redesign. Another Australian library had also ‘scoped’ the redesign internally (with paid staff) in conjunction with consultants, who then built the new website. However, the consultant was located in another state, which made effective communication regarding the altered design quite difficult.

One reason that emerged for having a redesign was the need to make the website more interactive. This occurred with a New Zealand youth services organisation. A New Zealand support service organisation suggested that a need to tie with other support groups was a motivation for their website redesign.

A few CBOs cited the need to have a website that they could update themselves as strong criteria for initiating a website redesign. One Australian support organisation involved paid staff in conjunction with consultants to redesign the website so that paid staff could update it. The UK support services organisation mentioned earlier (that used the Australian students to develop their website) also had a strong desire to be able to update the website themselves. Another UK support services organisation bemoaned the involvement of their consultant and suggested that fact that they could not update the website themselves was a real disadvantage that could only be rectified by the proposed redesign. Similarly, an Australian sporting club commented that the site needed to be flexible and easy to change as they could “barely do this now”.

Overall, the results suggests a greater level of involvement of weak ties, internal and external, as CBOs moved from deciding who to host the website, to designing and building the website, through to eventual redesigns of the website. This suggests a greater understanding of the need to consult more widely with appropriate stakeholder groups as CBOs gained more experience of the process involved.

**Updating Content on the Website**

This stage is concerned with who is involved in updating the content of the website on a regular (or other) basis. The ongoing use of the website can occur after the initial implementation and then after any redesigns, so this phase could also be placed before website redesign in Figures 2 and 3. It was expected that this phase would involve the greatest use of weak ties—internal as the update of content is often a regular task (thus less likely to be carried out by family and friends) and the ongoing update of the website by a consultant would be costly. This was predominantly reflected in the results for this website stage, except for the use of consultants. In just over half of the CBOs, paid staff were responsible for updating the content of websites, although members (one in three CBOs) and even consultants were involved in updating content. It was quite a surprise that consultants were involved in updating content in approximately one in five websites. For instance, one UK support services organisation were quite annoyed when they found they had
to rely on their consultant to update the website – they were expecting to be able to do this themselves.

This stage was mostly carried out by one group, with only 19% of CBOs suggesting that more than one group was involved. Content was predominantly updated by paid staff in libraries and community centres. In sporting clubs, content was predominantly updated by members. In one instance (UK support services), website content was updated by a peak body organisation on an infrequent basis. Similarly, two rural support services organisations in New Zealand had to email content updates to their peak body to action.

There were some interesting approaches taken to updating content. In one New Zealand sporting club, the club secretary would prepare material for the website and pass it onto the ‘webmaster’ (another member) to update the website. Interestingly, the secretary sent out similar material via email (such as a newsletter) directly to members – this occurred automatically through ties with a database of club member email addresses. In a New Zealand library the website content was mostly maintained by the librarians – but when they came across difficulties they relied on (free) help from a library member with ICT expertise. A sporting club in Melbourne had an online forum where members and outsiders were able to contribute content, with ‘standard’ web updates being handled by their website administrator. The advantage of the forum was that it attracted new members and kept existing members interested during ‘quiet periods’. The disadvantage was that a member may post a comment that offended another member and cause some friction. It was felt a password system might alleviate some of this – but at the risk of losing some of the freedom and spontaneity of the forum.

**Discussion**

There is strong evidence emerging from this study that there is a reliance on different groups that CBOs turn to at the various stages of the website development and use. Paid staff was the group that were most commonly relied upon, but this was only by 36-56% of CBOs (depending upon the stage of website development and use). Of the other weak-internal ties, members and to a lesser extent volunteers were relied upon. In relation to weak-external ties, consultants were predominantly relied upon, although ISPs were involved in some instances when the decision to decide where the website would be hosted was considered.

A key consideration is in relation to when a combination of stakeholders was relied upon by CBOs. Table 4 shows the percentage of CBOs that relied on more than one stakeholder group for each website stage. Nearly half of the CBOs consulted more than one stakeholder group when thinking about the website, with most of these being a combination of weak-internal and weak-external ties.

**Table 4: CBOs that relied on a combination of groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website stage</th>
<th>CBOs that relied on a combination of groups (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about the website</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who to host the website?</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building/ Designing the website</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redesigning the website</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updating content</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the most significant result from Table 4 is the proportion of CBOs that involved multiple stakeholder groups (again, mostly a combination of weak-internal and weak-external ties) in
the redesign of websites. This (and the comments of interviewees) suggests that there was more emphasis placed the second (or third or fourth…) time around on ensuring the website would do what it was meant to do in the most efficient manner possible. In some instances this meant providing more functionality for website users, but in a number of instances it was to provide more functionality for the CBOs themselves – specifically in relation to having the ability to them to update their own websites without the need for expensive consultants to perform this basic task.

Another aspect that emerged out of the study was the support for the notion that many CBOs face limitations in relation to limited skills, finances, and time (resource poverty) in relation to the various website stages. However, the strongest comments typically related to knowing what to do at each website stage and how to do it. Two key themes emerged in this area. The first related to CBOs sometimes not possessing adequate skills at the various website stages – which is where the importance of having weak-external ties emerges. However, sometimes frustrations related to having the skills available but not having the access to be able to change the website design or (especially) content. For instance, a website might have been set up a while ago and the current staff have no idea of where it is hosted or how to access it to alter the content. In other instances staff may feel constrained as they have to send off proposed website changes to consultants (or even peak bodies) and rely on them to make the change. In the case of the former this was a catalyst for many of the website redesigns that were occurring at the time of the interviews.

The final aspect of the study to note is the reliance on different groups by different types of CBOs. For instance, sporting clubs certainly placed a greater reliance on members than any of the other types of CBOs. Libraries and community centres had a greater reliance on paid staff than the other CBOs. However, it should be remembered that the classification into different types of CBOs means that the particular numbers of CBOs in each type were relatively small – these findings need to be considered in that context. Certainly, apart from sporting clubs (which relied on its members in the various stages of website design) and some limited examples of website users being consulted, there was little other evidence of actual users of the websites being involved in website design (as suggested by Carroll & Rosson 2007). However, when these groups are considered on a combined basis in the form of the strength of the ties that they offer, then it can be seen that overall the heaviest reliance was on weak-internal ties across all website stages (with most use when thinking of the website and when updating website content). Weak-external ties were initially used by half of the CBOs, increasing to almost two thirds of CBOs when a website redesign occurred. A low proportion of CBOs used strong ties, and those that did tended to use them across all of the website stages, except for updating website content.

It was suggested earlier it is ideal to have a mix of strong and weak ties in regards to the diffusion of innovations (Denison & Johanson, 2007), in this case the CBO website. The results of this study, however, suggest that CBOs generally turned to a combination of weak-internal and weak-external ties when moving through the website stages from thinking about a website to implementing and eventually redesigning the website. Denison and Johanson (2007) suggest that strong ties can play the role of harnessing and operating local capacity. Perhaps in CBOs this role is assumed by the weak-internal ties, such as employees and volunteers.

This study has been unique in that it examined the involvement of different stakeholders in the website design process across the different stages of considering, developing, maintaining, and updating CBO websites. The results have shown different levels of involvement across different stages. This is a unique finding in itself and provides a new approach to research into website development by organisations such as CBOs and small businesses. Additionally, this study introduces an alternative approach to the traditional SDLC (as per Cater-Steel & Grist, 2004) in examining the website life cycle.
Importantly, there was a greater reliance on multiple stakeholder groups when CBO websites were redesigned than for any other stage. However, this mostly involved greater consultation amongst *weak-internal* and *weak-external* stakeholders, rather than those that represented *strong ties*. This finding is important as it suggests that with greater maturity CBOs look to reverse the effects of earlier mistakes. This could be useful to policy makers and peak bodies that advise CBOs in their website practices. CBOs could be encouraged to include a wider mix of weak ties in early website stages. Rather than involve weak-external ties at a later stage, they could be involved to a greater extent when a CBO is thinking of implementing a website. Thus, this study contributes to policy research in the area of capacity building for CBOs.

The results also showed almost no use of external ‘customers’ of the CBOs in any of the stages of website development and use. This is supported by the findings of Terry and Standing (2004), who found that organisations were more likely to involve internal users (from within the organisation) than external customers in the design of electronic commerce systems. Thus, Carroll and Rosson’s (2007) notion of having *direct participation* (that is, user participation) in website design is predominantly limited to those with *weak-internal* ties, such as members, employees, and volunteers. This is an important finding, as although it reflects the convenience of involving *weak-internal* ties in the design process, there is a suggestion that CBOs could also consider involving their external customers as additional *weak-external* ties (in addition to consultants) to make their website design process more ‘participative’.

This study has a number of limitations. The attempt to cover a variety of CBO types (five) has meant that it was impossible to delve deeply into the specific nuances of a particular CBO type. The number of CBOs reported (35 overall) does not provide *definitive* quantitative evidence for the relationship between weak-internal and weak-external ties, although the lack of reliance on strong ties throughout the website stages was a strong outcome. Another limitation may be the similarities between the countries where the study was conducted. However, the qualitative nature of the study did provide insights into the reasons behind the reliance on weak ties and the increased consultation amongst weak-internal and weak-external as CBOs progressed from initially designing the website to subsequent redesigns that the authors believe could be of use many CBOs that fall outside of the study area. Future research could further investigate the lack of focus upon strong ties by CBOs and the possible reasons for this. This research also identified potential differences across different types of CBOs. Future research could examine these differences, as well the adoption of websites by CBOs in other areas, such as rural regions and developing countries.

**Conclusion**

This article has made a unique contribution in that it has reported for the first time on the stakeholder groups involved in different stages of website development and use in CBOs – as well as the strength of the ties. The evidence certainly suggests a reliance on different groups depending upon the stage of website development and use, and also different groups being relied upon in different types of CBOs. A key finding of the study was the greater than expected involvement of consultants and the wider consultation of groups (specifically involving both ‘weak-internal’ and ‘weak-external’ ties) that initially occurred from deciding where to host the website and then increasingly through to the website redesign phase. As CBOs moved through the website stages, from thinking about the website, deciding how to host it, designing it and (especially) to major website redesigns, many realised the importance of weak-external ties in bringing in new ideas and expertise not readily available to the CBOs via weak-internal ties and strong ties. This has implications for policy setting groups as they advise CBOs on how to set up and maintain their websites – but also for CBOs that are new to website use who can examine these results and consult more widely in the early stages of website design.
Small Community Based Organisations’ Websites

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**Biographies**

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