

Supporting Each Other Locally



C O N  
N E C T  
C A N  
N O C K

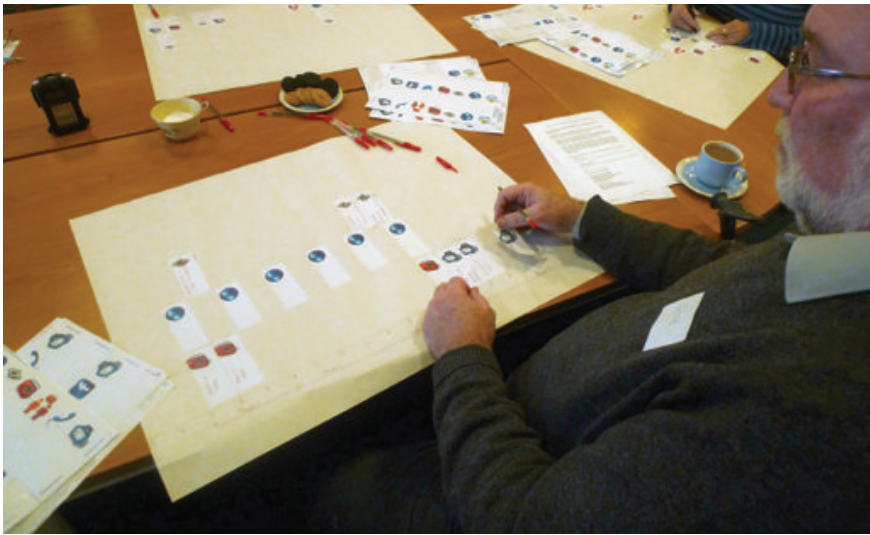
**Connect Cannock Newspaper Pilot**

Jerome Turner and Dave Harte

# CONNECT CANNOCK



*Distribution of the newspapers by different members of the community helped to increase the area the papers reached.*



Members of the community participate in a workshop.



A screen grab of the newspaper, available to view online. (August, 2014).

# Connect Cannock Newspaper Pilot

Connect Cannock,  
Cannock,  
Staffordshire.

## **Contributors**

Jerome Turner,  
Dave Harte,  
Birmingham  
Centre for Media &  
Cultural Research,  
Birmingham City  
University.

**W** *Connect*  
*Cannock.co.uk*

**W** *Creative*  
*Citizens.co.uk*

**T** *@Connect*  
*Cannock*

**T** *@jezturner*

**F** *facebook.*  
*com/connect*  
*cannock*

## **Digital Tools Used**

*Adobe InDesign,*  
*Newspaperclub.*  
*com,*  
*Facebook,*  
*Twitter.*

**Connect Cannock is a ‘hyperlocal’ news website serving a community where the local newspapers have ceased publication. In this project, Connect Cannock, together with researchers from Birmingham City University, encouraged local people to participate in the introduction of a new printed newspaper, which brought the website to the attention of a wider cross-section of the community.**

## **About**

The aim of this project was to re-introduce a physical newspaper into the community. Through focus groups and workshops with local people in Cannock, we learnt that local newspapers were sorely missed and that many people had not heard of Connect Cannock (the online website, Facebook or Twitter accounts). Therefore one of our aims was to play into people’s current ‘media’ ideology (that news was found in newspapers), but inform them of their local online news source.

Another aim was to test the potential for more participation in Connect Cannock’s newsgathering and writing from local residents and organisations. To date, the editors have been very active online, but ongoing relationships with readers had not necessarily been established. One relationship was with a local photography group, in which the editors often organised ‘photowalks’ with them socially, and we (the researchers) joined one of these, discussing local, ‘newsworthy’ issues inspired by encounters around town. The resulting photographs would go into a double page spread in the newspaper.

The newspaper was compiled and written by the Connect Cannock editors, with additional stories provided by other contributors. We had assumed that much content could originate from the existing blog and Facebook page, but many new stories were created too, and a large part required chasing stories that could appropriately fill various awkward page spaces (not a usual concern in online media). We used Newspaper Club, who specialise in printing small runs of newspapers for community groups and events. We printed 1,000 copies and the

*“People miss the Chase Post as they felt it was ‘their’ local paper. Now that that’s gone, there’s a big void in printed press and people don’t really like the Express and Star as it’s not ‘local’ enough and not community targeted. It has little news and mostly irrelevant ads that people aren’t interested in. It’s certainly opened my eyes to how much people value what we [Connect Cannock] do.”*

*Editor of Connect Cannock*

team hand-delivered them to cafés, shops, hairdressers and newsagents in small batches, so that they could then be distributed onwards into the community. The paper proved very popular with residents, and a second issue has since been designed and printed, with the additional aim of testing the potential for selling advertising.

### **What was the impact of the project?**

The newspaper pilot enabled Connect Cannock to exercise an idea, and also engage with a new cross-section of their community (those who would like local news, but wouldn’t always think of looking for it online).

### **How did digital tools make a difference?**

The key thing with this project was using the print medium to link the existing online digital media to the offline world in a new way, attracting and engaging people to become familiar with the Connect Cannock website.

### **What next?**

Connect Cannock have already produced a second print newspaper, for which they attracted some paid advertising, and are considering making it a more regular feature. Like many other hyperlocals, they need to find ways to make it viable in terms of the time and money it takes to produce it. Even if it doesn’t continue, the newspaper has acted as an effective way to bring the website to the attention of the people of Cannock.

## What Others Can Learn

### Take advantage of existing relationships

Utilise existing connections within your readership, and look for them in unexpected places. Sometimes it will require a few phone calls or emails to set a steady flow of press releases rolling your way, but once established this can provide news from community sources such as schools, the police, and your local council.

### Print is different to online

Not only do people perceive print media differently to online media, but the practice of setting up and running such a project is also very challenging. It requires an understanding and expertise in design and layout that is not usually expected in similar online local news blogs.

### Print can be a source of income

It is possibly easier to sell advertising space to organisations and businesses in print media than it is online, but requires a lot of determination, confidence and time. Advertising will help to cover printing costs up to a point: as the number of adverts increases, so does the page count, and therefore print cost, in order to accommodate it.

*“Thank you for the copies of your newspaper, read it cover to cover and couldn’t put it down - great read, and hoping there will be another one. Fantastic, thank you.”*

*Cannock Resident*