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Emerging Technology: New Opportunities for the
Community Sector

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Editorial

This issue of the Journal of Community, Citizen's and Third Sector Media and Communication brings together research papers that seek to continue a dialogue about key questions started in the last issue of 3CMedia. One of these key questions deals with the continuing quest to find the *raison d'être* for community organisations (including community media organisations) in times of participatory culture, media convergence and Web 2.0. Do the affordances of these socio-cultural and technical trends render the third sector less significant or even obsolete as some commentators speculate? Citizen journalism challenges conventional notions of news reporting. Users of blogs and social networking sites display and discuss their political, civic and environmental concerns on their profiles through personal statements, online group affiliations and virtual badges. Taking advantage of peer to peer forms of electronic communication such as mobile phone text messaging, the *Critical Mass* movement has established a history of successfully organising large political demonstrations in a decentralised manner without the need for a single dedicated institutional entity to coordinate the efforts. Indeed, in Shirky's words, "Here Comes Everybody" (2008).

In the last issue of 3CMedia, Rennie (2007) discussed principles of open source software development to propose the notion of the 'open source organisation' as a practical way forward. Responding to challenges (and opportunities!) of convergence, user-generated content and participatory Web 2.0 services, Rennie renews the third sector's reason for being. She sees community media organisations as conduits that channel and harness the grassroots motivation, efforts and activities by providing capacity and leadership in operating, managing and maintaining media services and systems. The papers in this issue of 3CMedia continue some key aspects of this debate, especially in the context of young people, digital identity, digital divides and the lessons to be learnt by non-profit and community organisations.

Four of the papers in this issue have been selected from presentations given at the *Making Links* conference 2007, which was held at the NSW Teachers Federation Conference Centre in Sydney on 30th and 31st October, 2007. Although its origins are with community health organisations, the *Making Links* conference series targets the whole community and non-profit sector. Jill Sergeant, *Making Links* Conference Chair and Website Officer at the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO),

organised a networking meeting on 17th May 2004 as a satellite event in conjunction with the HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C & Related Diseases Social Research Conference in Sydney at the time. This informal gathering brought together web, media and information technology workers and volunteers based in a variety of community organisations throughout Australia to discuss common issues and challenges, to share resources and knowledge, and to organise means to communicate more effectively across the sector. With this spirit in mind, the idea to organise a more coordinated and regular event, that is, the *Making Links* conference series, was born at this meeting.

This year, we celebrate *Making Links*' 5th birthday from 11th to 13th November, 2008, at The University of Melbourne with the core themes of community, responsibility and sustainability (see <http://www.makinglinks.org.au/>). By now, *Making Links* has established itself as one of the leading forums in Australia where social action and technology converge and related questions and developments are discussed in a supportive environment. So far, community media organisations have been underrepresented at these events, and I encourage the readers of 3CMedia to check out this year's program and to consider participating in what always shapes up to be a stimulating and thought provoking event.

It is very welcome and appropriate that the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, a peak association of the community broadcasting sector, is facilitating the dissemination of research presented at the 2007 *Making Links* conference. The papers in this issue of 3CMedia explore some current and emerging technology trends and examine the opportunities these trends open up to the community sector from a number of different perspectives.

Atari Metcalf and his colleagues report on a research and youth development initiative by *The Inspire Foundation* that looks at the role information and communication technology plays in the life and well-being of young people. The objective is to promote civic engagement and social connectedness with young people at risk of mental health issues and experiencing marginalisation. The article traces the project's development and seeks to better understand young people's use of ICT and outline new media literacy skills necessary to promote and support civic engagement and social connectedness.

Christine Satchell presents research findings derived from two new media and mobile technology studies into the identity formation of young people in digital environments. She describes how the challenges for digital identity management systems in these studies were responded to with design solutions, and offers a set of lessons and recommendations how these ideas relate to organisations in the non-profit and community sector. Christine was a keynote speaker at *Making Links* 2007.

Ali Kia provides a unique account of the situation of young people in Iran accessing the Internet to satisfy personal and collective communication and interaction needs. He discusses the role the Internet plays in the everyday life of young people who participated in his study. His paper offers a rich analysis of the way Internet access and usage shape and impact on how these young people form, represent and experience their identity between traditional and modern lifestyle choices.

Danny Butt was the second keynote speaker at *Making Links* 2007. His article highlights some of the problems associated with planning, executing and evaluating development projects that seek to take the benefits of new media and information and communication

technology to local communities. Danny suggests a way forward by avoiding an externally forced upon focus on short term practical outcomes and instead recommends a nuanced communication approach in order to manage and balance the expectations of external stakeholders.

Edwina Luck and **Elizabeth Buchanan** wrote a paper that is not based on a presentation given at the *Making Links* 2007 conference, but we felt that its topic and contribution was sufficiently complementary to the theme of this issue that it warranted inclusion. The article looks at sporting organisations in Australia and discusses their current communication and membership outreach strategies. In a number of ways, sporting organisations – being attractive to and populated by a majority of young people – face similar concerns and challenges as other non-profit and community organisations, and this paper presents a thorough study that points at ways organisational capacity can be strengthened to meet the contemporary communication needs of members and constituents.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Jill Sergeant, founder and chair of the *Making Links* conference series for her excellent work, vision, collegiality and immense productivity and organisational talent. I also thank 3CMedia's editor, Dr Christina Spurgeon, for fruitful discussions and for her great support of this special issue. Further, each article has been carefully refereed by expert reviewers, the editor of 3CMedia, plus myself as the guest editor of this issue, and I am grateful to these colleagues for their comprehensive commentary and quick turnaround of reviews, including: Prof. William Dutton, Oxford Internet Institute; Prof. Michael Gurstein, New Jersey Institute of Technology; Dr Neil Selwyn, University of London; Dr Mary Ann Allison, Hofstra University. Thank you.

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About the guest editor

Marcus Foth is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Creative Industries and Innovation, Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Brisbane, Australia. He received a BCompSc(Hon) from Furtwangen University, Germany, a B. Multimedia from Griffith University, Australia and an MA and PhD in digital media and urban sociology from QUT. Dr Foth is the recipient of an Australian Postdoctoral Fellowship supported under the Australian Research Council's Discovery funding scheme. He was a 2007 Visiting Fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, UK. Employing participatory design and action research, he is working on cross-disciplinary research and development at the intersection of people, place and technology with a focus on urban informatics, locative media and mobile applications. Dr Foth has published over fifty articles in journals, edited books, and conference proceedings in the last four years. He is the conference chair of OZCHI 2009, a member of the Australian Computer Society and the Executive Committee of the Association of Internet Researchers. More information at www.urbaninformatics.net