

TMOnline Final Report: September 2005

PPCR Associates



OFFICE OF THE
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER



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1. Introduction

The core objective of TMOOnline was to offer an online resource that would provide a comprehensive range of support services to further the aims of tenant controlled organisations and other housing organisations in the management of their own housing stock. The initial aim was to offer the service to London based TMOs.

The fundamental premise was that this would be best furnished by a web-based portal available at all times ('24/7'). The development of the project has been funded the ODPM through an IIA grant. The central control of information afforded by Internet technology, the ease of access for the majority of TMOs to this information source and the relatively low running costs made a persuasive case for the commercial viability and delivery of resource via the TMOOnline portal.

2. Overview

TMOOnline resourcing was largely provided by a project team of PPCR consultants, as well as volunteers from TMOs and representatives from the ODPM and IIA. A Working Group was established which met quarterly throughout the development of the project to work through tactical issues and a Steering Group of funding body representatives, PPCR consultants, TMO representatives and other stakeholders met periodically to review strategy and core issues.

Funding was provided through the Innovation Into Action grant regime, part of the ODPM and administered by the CIH. This established seed funding for a three-year programme with the intention that TMOOnline could become self-financing after this point.

In the end this did not happen. The reasons for this are covered below. One of the core aspects of the site, the Training Modules has been further developed and is now available on the National Federation of TMOs website.

3. Development

TMOnline has proceeded to date on the funding initiative provided by Innovation into Action, an arm of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Funds were provided quarterly from inception in Quarter 2 of 2001 to the final transfer of the site to the National Federation of TMOs in April 2005. The funding enabled the creation of the web site, the gathering of information that formed the core information resources and the staffing of the PPCR project team. Some time was taken to survey and canvass opinion from a wide range of TMOs in the London area at the commencement of the project. This survey found wide-ranging support for the creation of an online resource with caveats about the final structure and ownership of the organisation.

An Initial Feasibility Report was published early in the life of the project presenting the findings of the survey and established the case for forward progress and planning.

The site was launched formally on the 10th July 2002 in London and all TMO representatives, the ODPM, CIH, ATIC and National Federation of TMOs (NFTMO) were invited. Following the launch, various marketing exercises were conducted to promote the awareness, use and acceptance of the site.

In the final marketing exercise, contact was made with 85 of the London based TMOs. The purpose of this contact was to promote the site, communicate a password and provide general advice. As part of the exercise, 45 TMOs were visited by a member of the PPCR development team. The primary target of these visits were permanent TMO staff members rather than committee members, although the staff agreed to keep committee members informed.

Feedback from the marketing exercise was that the core of the site as a resource is of significant value, particularly the library. In all consultations with TMOs, enhancing the online training was seen as being especially valuable for both staff and committee members.

Following this feedback, work was undertaken to develop stand alone interactive training modules for the site. The following modules were written and designed for internet access:

- About TMOs
- Agreements and Partnerships
- Delivering the service
- Money and Finances

The first one of these was piloted at the NFTMO Conference in April 2004, at which useful customer feedback was obtained to assist the further development of these interactive modules.

4. Products and services

The services to be provided by TMOOnline were carefully discussed and reviewed by the Working Group and the Steering Group and a final product was agreed that appeared to offer the best possible value to the constituency it was designed to serve. The web site was carefully controlled for access by a password unique to each TMO, although it allowed multiple accesses to members and staff and committee members within each TMO. Once logged on the user had access to a range of services:

- *The Library.* This is an online document repository of some 400 documents and had the potential to grow considerably. This was furnished with documents from two main sources:
 1. Policy and procedure documents from existing TMOs.
 2. Official policy documents from the ODPM and other government departments.
- *Recruitment services.* Following suggestions at a working group meeting this feature was incrementally improved and allowed TMOs to scan for all vacancies from TMOs as well as their own and place advertisements for staff. They could also search for cv's placed by individuals seeking opportunities with TMOs
- *Services.* This feature was also further developed, following initial design, users of the website could directly enter details of contractors that they have used as well as give them a performance rating.
- *Training.* The initial thoughts on the training element of the site were that it would contain contacts and sources of training material and resources that would be of interest to TMO staff and committee members.

However, following the marketing exercise and feedback from the Working Group and LACOG, a revised work programme was submitted to IIA to enable training modules to be developed for hosting on TMOOnline. As said earlier, these have been produced and are now Internet ready and operational.

Feedback from TMO visits during the marketing campaign suggested this would be a major incentive to encourage usage and uptake of the resource in general.

- *Forum* This was a particularly valuable though underused resource feature. What became clear during the marketing exercise was that many TMOs have little to no contact with TMOs outside their local authority area. This can be despite the fact they are geographically closer to TMOs outside the borough than to those within it. The forum was designed to enable threaded discussion ('chat') to be conducted between participating TMOs and for free exchange of information, ideas and cross-borough issues to be raised and 'discussed'.

4.1 Usage

A total of 178 passwords were issued for TMOOnline

Summary

Hits	126132
Total Visiting Users	2386
Time Period	November 01, 2004 to April 20, 2005,
Average Hits per User	52.86
Average Users per Day	13.95
Hits cached by Client	2550 (2.02%)
Report generated on	April 21, 2005 at 11:15:53 AM
Incomplete downloads/file requests	52 (0.04%)
Unique IP Addresses	874
Each user has visited approximately	2.73 times
Hits on Pages	117777
Hits on Files	1075
Hits for Graphics	6451
Total time spent by all users	157 days, 02 hours, 58 minutes, 23 seconds

From the above, we can say that in the 6 month period from November 2004 to April 2005, there were a total of 874 unique IP addresses visiting the site, for an average of 2.73 times. The total number of visiting users was 2,386, however, if we discount those visiting for less than one minute, 1,875, the true figure of actual users is approximately 511, over a 6 month period.

5. TMOOnline – Organisational structure

There was considerable debate as to the final organisational structure of TMOOnline, originally three models were proposed.

- A cooperative model with an elected management board and constituted as either a limited company or IPS and run along similar lines to a TMO.
- Cooperative of consultants – this would see the resource run as an independent service organisation and competing commercially for work for the TMOs. The providers would be commercial organisations and set up as a company.
- Management company – the company would be an independent organisation with a contracted range of services and overseen by a commissioning board. The running of the resource would be contracted out to the organisation which won a tendering competition. The board would be elected at an annual TMO seminar

These were discussed at the Working Group and Steering Group meetings. It was suggested that the third model could be developed via a Commissioning Board comprising of TMO Staff and Committee Members and that this could be extended as a group that also looks at strategy.

Subsequently, meetings and discussions took place with the emerging National Federation of TMOs (NFTMOs). These were extremely productive and following substantial amendments and rationalisation to the TMOOnline site, it is now operating under the umbrella of the NFTMO.

If potential users try and access the TMOOnline web site address they are redirected to the NFTMO web site.

6. SWOT analysis

It may be worth considering a SWOT analysis for TMOOnline and how these factors have changed over time

Strengths:

- quality of product;
- range of interactive services;
- 24/7 access;
- ease of maintenance and control;
- relative ease of access and influence of target groups
- VFM

Weaknesses:

- Lack of awareness of TMOOnline availability/achievements/resources, amongst potential users/target audience;
- lack of computer skills in the target communities;
- turnover of staff and motivation levels;
- the need to continue marketing TMOOnline to promote and publicise its value
- TMOOnline perceived by existing staff as another additional work 'chore' – the need to break through the 'chicken and egg' barrier
- time taken for generating active usage
- the failure of the marketing exercise to 'get the message across' to TMO Committee Members, potentially a large user group.
- The attempt to design a product for more than one audience: TMO Staff and TMO Committee Members

Opportunities:

- revenue through advertising and membership;
- different products, different markets, different geographic locations;
- online training (USP) and other related training events and seminars carried under the TMOOnline banner

Threats:

- End of funding with no replacement monies or income
- Apathy from target community
- As a stand-alone organisation, TMOOnline would need to access (employ?) a part time support worker with both administrative skills and specialist technical knowledge to be able to administer and update the TMOOnline site.

7. Marketing

Marketing was a feature of the resource since inception. Newsletters, factsheets and promotional material were produced and distributed and there were many Working Group meetings, contacts with associated groups such as LACOG and direct marketing undertaken. This latter drive built on a telephone marketing campaign in the months prior to direct visits. Passwords were actively distributed so that virtually all TMOs in London had them.

In the final marketing exercise, three factsheets and mouse mat were produced and sent out promoting not just the site but also the development of the online training programme (see appendix). The timing of specific marketing exercises required some thought. It seemed that it simply took considerable time for the site to be accessed and used on a regular basis..

8. Conclusion

The TMO community that participated in the questionnaire survey conducted at the beginning of the programme have a combined turnover estimated at over £15m per annum. There was a not unreasonable assumption made throughout the history of the funding programme that if the online resource meets or exceeds the needs of the users at a cost that offers good value for money, it will be viable. The site was proven to be technically proficient and met targets established for it at the outset.

TMOnline take increased steadily over the duration of the development. It was a unique product with a built-in discrete marketplace, but failed to penetrate sufficiently amongst TMO Committee Members.

However, with the development of the National Federation of TMOs and their website, it was agreed that this would be the best 'home' for the core elements of the site. The NFTMOs offers a comprehensive service to all member TMOs and also has the resources, through the remainder of the IIA grant to undertake a continuing marketing effort (national roll out).

Ron Houston
PPCR
20th September 2005