

Not Just Gumboots and Scones

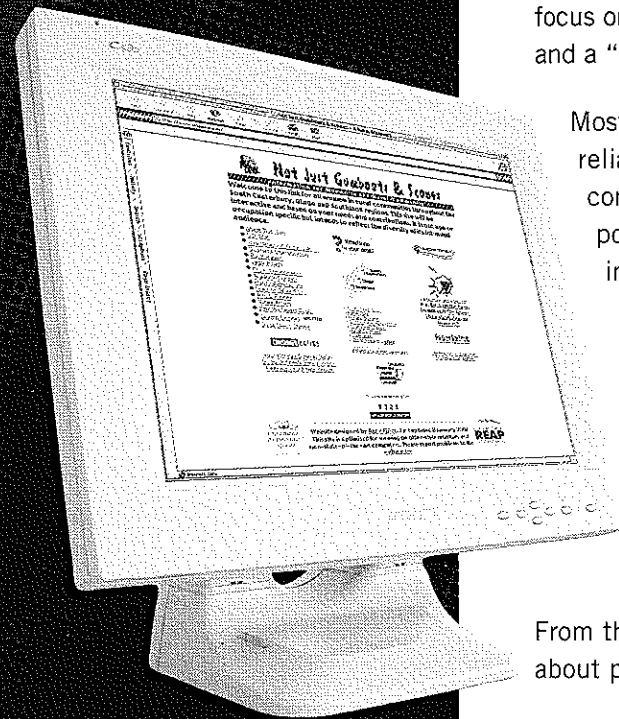
Creating community and opportunity for rural women in isolated areas of the southern South Island, by offering access through a website to up-to-date and relevant information, training, political interaction and resources.

Notjust grew from the need for people, particularly women, living in scattered and isolated rural settlements in the lower South Island of New Zealand, to obtain information about local events, training and educational opportunities, and share information and support each other. The “backbone” was formed through CEG (the Community Employment Group) bringing together women active in their local communities to identify common needs and work out ways of meeting them. From this evolved the idea of a regularly updated website with the focus on simple use, easy access to current information, and a “small is beautiful” approach to management.

Most farms now have computers and sometimes reliable phone connections. *Notjust* facilitated computer and Internet training through a local polytechnic, and provided modems for those four information centres lacking connection hardware.

The focus has always been on using IT for community-building, whether around a topic of common interest or on a geographical basis. “What’s On in Your Area” pages highlight events and issues for places such as Waimate, Fairlie, Central Otago, Queenstown/Lakes, and rural Southland.

From the “Rural Issues” button, inquirers can learn about public attitudes to RCD (rabbit calicivirus).



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disease), the new national weed strategy and current projects of the Parliamentary Commissioners for the Environment. The site lists Parliamentary legislation under way, and enables people to make submissions on this and other consultations on a wide range of rural and agricultural issues.

It also facilitates and provides feedback on local events such as the A&P Show Dance at Middlemarch, which gained national media attention.

Existing and newly-formed organisations in the region can have their own page(s). Thus the Wanaka section includes information on the Work Initiative Centre as well as the Wanaka Community Directory, the Dunedin Rural Development Network lists its seminar topics for the coming year, there is a page about Cool Climate Crops and a section on olive-growing with world-wide links. A list of study opportunities includes regional polytechnics and universities, and training institutions range from the Correspondence School to aviation, tourism and travel training options.

The site links to nation-wide funding information, Government agencies and sources of publications.

Technically, the network has to take account of rural hazards - electric fence interference with telephone lines, slower transmission (thus longer connection times) in cold and wet weather, the number of exchanges some connections have to traverse, and the toll-bars on phones in community halls and other centres which make demonstrations and group training difficult.

How was the project funded? While the site depends on volunteers, the preliminary work was supported by CEGs and continuing costs are covered anyway the organisers can. They pay a token amount to ensure the webmaster is not out of pocket, describing her as "either an underpaid worker or a little-rewarded volunteer".

The group have been well supported by Central Otago Rural Education Activities Programme (REAP) in administration, and has obtained some business sponsorship of specific pages. More funding from CEG and a Lotteries Grant will mean further training can be scheduled.

What would they do differently?

Recognise the amount of work involved and support the webmaster more intentionally.

Make provision for pages but not set them up till the content was there.

Stress importance of updating to all community groups with their own pages.

"We just want to be part of the information age and still part of the local community."

Useful tips

Best service came from a local and interested Internet Service Provider (ISP) rather than a bigger one. This choice has to be balanced against stability, reliability and traffic capacity.

Some search engines are better than others, and offering choice helps people make best use of all the information.

Key success factors:

- Being clear about what was wanted before starting.
- Knowing that some farmers have older hardware/software and designing accordingly.
- Finding a suitable umbrella organisation, thus minimising administration and management requirements.
- Using a local ISP with an interest in the project.