



Broadband Community Radio Develops Marketable ICT and Media Skills

Hayzee Base and Nikki Pinkz broadcast their music and chat show *The Grill* every week to a global audience. But the sisters - aka Vanice and Venessa Scott - aren't (yet) megastars. Their voices, and the music they play, are transmitted - or 'webcast' - over the Internet from Manchester's Northern Quarter.

The Grill is just one feature of the three hours daily programming of music, chat, news and drama by community station QT Radio. The station 'webcasts' from the CSV Media Clubhouse on Tib Street in Manchester. This is one of a national network of Media Clubhouses run by the charity CSV (Community Service Volunteers). The Clubhouse also hosts a community film unit, and a quarterly youth magazine. Like QT Radio, they are staffed by a mix of volunteers, and students on CSV Media's vocational courses. Many were unemployed before they became involved with the Clubhouse.

Even hard to reach groups appreciate media skills

Phil Barker, CSV Media's Northern Operations Manager, argues that "even the most resistant of individuals to skill acquisition and development can be attracted to learning if they see it as directly relevant to their lives. Media projects do this easily - especially when there's the chance, as with QT Radio's webcasting, to be at the cutting edge of technology." He gives the example of ultra-tough 14-16 year olds who have



Hayzee Base (left), Steve Black, and Nikki Pinkz producing *The Grill*

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Key Facts

- **QT Radio is one of Britain's first community Internet radio stations, and is providing experience and skills to around 70 young people a year**
- **Millions of people already listen to Internet radio and the audience is growing quickly**
- **The technology can also be used by business and community groups, e.g. to provide coverage of events.**



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been producing a feature for the station on their lives in, and their likes and dislikes of, inner city Hulme.

Broadband reduces the costs of radio transmission

Phil’s words are given practical illustration by the life history of Steve Black, QT Radio’s (paid) Project Worker and technical wizard. Steve remembers that “three years ago I was unemployed - partly because I have a disability - and was drifting around a bit. I had been involved with pirate stations, and so when I heard about CSV Media’s radio course I applied. After passing I worked as a volunteer until I got the chance to help set this up.” And he glances with pride at a powerful black computer, and its high speed broadband connection to the Internet. This not only makes QT’s webcasting technically feasible, but also changes traditional radio station economics by providing a relatively cheap alternative to the high costs of conventional broadcasting.

Many other Clubhouse students and volunteers have gone on to higher education, and some are finding media work, including freelancing for BBC radio. The Clubhouse lessons are also being applied elsewhere. Hayzee Base, for example, is using the experience gained as a student and volunteer to provide webcast services and other content for the members of her local church.

Global partnerships and community helplines

QT Radio also has development plans. The station will soon offer downloads of programmes so that they can be listened to at any time on personal audio players. Partnerships are being built with other community Internet stations around the world, with the aim of exchanging programmes and ideas. And helplines and web information will be set up to

accompany social issue programmes. These build on CSV Media’s previous experience of providing support for BBC and other local radio stations. As Phil Barker observes, “the value of this kind of community action radio was shown when we did a slot on carbon monoxide poisoning from faulty fires. When we described the symptoms of poisoning, one listener realised that they applied to her son, sleeping in the next room. She managed to bring him round, and thereby saved his life.”

Valuable as these activities are, Phil believes that the ultimate value of projects like QT Radio is “connecting hard to reach, low skill, groups with the creative and digital industries that will provide many of Manchester’s future jobs. It’s tremendous to see unemployed young people developing not just the skills, but also the self-confidence, that will allow them to find satisfying work.”

Further Information

The Northwest Regional Development Agency wants the region’s people and businesses to benefit from the new opportunities created by the digital revolution. It has worked with partners to establish Digital Development Agencies in Cheshire and Warrington, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Greater Merseyside and Lancashire to achieve this at local level. The agencies help identify ICT priorities for their areas, work with local organisations to identify projects to address them, and secure the resources to make these projects happen.