



## Internet Radio Builds Skills and Community Networks in Tameside

Phil Loftus moved from Denton to Toronto in 2004. But now more Tameside people probably hear his voice than when he lived there. The reason is Phil's continuing involvement with Tameside Web Radio (TWR), an Internet radio station which operates from the Hattersley CyberCafe.

TWR Programme Director Andy Hoyle explains that "Phil anticipates returning, and still has friends and family here, so wanted to retain his contacts. He records a show in Canada and sends it to us through the Internet. We edit in some local links, and put it on air. It's possible because we both have high speed connections which allow us to transfer large files quickly and cheaply. In fact, our station probably wouldn't exist without broadband because, although you can listen over a dial-up connection, it's often low quality and, of course, expensive."

### **New skills for the socially excluded**

Phil's show forms part of the 168 hours of news, entertainment, live music (from local pubs) and sport programming which TWR 'streams' (broadcasts) over the Internet each week. Users access the station by visiting its web site and clicking to download the material to a computer.

The station's aims, explains Erica Davis, Community Development Worker at Hattersley Neighbourhood Partnership (one of the partners which established TWR), "are to provide useful information to the community, and



*Erica Davis of Hattersley Neighbourhood Partnership at the TWR studio*

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### **Key Facts**

- **Community radio station in Hattersley uses the Internet to broadcast material**
- **Producing and listening to the station helps to overcome the digital divide**
- **Broadband enables remote production of content.**



***“They’re expanding their general information technology skills,  
which helps to tackle the digital divide in Hattersley”***

to strengthen local networks and skills, particularly those relating to new media. We especially target people who are socially excluded, such as the unemployed.”

People without Internet access at home can access the station through an expanded network of ‘listening posts’ - computers with broadband connections - throughout Hattersley.

TWR builds on previous community radio stations which used conventional FM radio. However, as Andy Hoyle remembers, “they were only allowed to broadcast for short periods so there was no continuity for those involved in production and editing. With Internet radio we can broadcast when, and for as long as, we want to. It’s much better. And people can access us by logging on whenever they feel like it, so we get more listeners.”

**100 people trained in radio and IT skills**

Training for the new station began in July 2005 with a course in radio production for 30 people, with subsequent courses for another 70. Dan Jillings, an actor who experienced periods of unemployment, was one participant. TWR has allowed him to learn new skills and he now produces a show in which he interviews famous local people, including stars from *Hollyoaks* and *Coronation Street*. Two disabled trainees have also formed the perfect ‘production team’. Karl Crookes is very confident at presenting material but is blind and so can’t produce. Martyn Heelam is the opposite, and so they form a very complementary partnership.

**Reducing the digital divide**

Erica Davis highlights other benefits from the project. “When people come into the CyberCafe to listen, or get involved in production, they’re expanding their general information technology skills, which helps to

tackle the digital divide. The same is true if someone decides to go on a computer somewhere else to hear the station.” The station also offers a new channel for free or low cost advertising by community organisations or small businesses.

Internet radio is much more suited to community participation than broadcast radio because it’s easier to record, and amend, shows in advance. Andy Hoyle believes that “this makes a huge difference to our levels of involvement.” And, as with Phil Loftus, it means that material can be recorded away from the CyberCafe studio and sent in via broadband. This enables more people to become involved, and also allows the four members of staff to work from home. As Andy Hoyle observes, “being able to work remotely means that I can record bits for the station in advance when ideas come to me. I also avoid the time and cost of travelling to the studio. And I can fit TWR in with my other work in a way that wouldn’t be possible otherwise.”

**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.