

Unleashed (DPC)



Deloitte using an app created

BACK in 2012, a conversation was held within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet regarding the potential use for electronic data currently held by the Government. The idea of releasing non-sensitive data to a group of digital entrepreneurs and developers was something that the department felt had genuine potential for unleashing a range of potential new services, smart phone applications or web tools that could benefit the community.

However, at the time there were only 3 datasets open to the general public. If the project was going to make any real change, or have any clout amongst the community who would be involved more datasets would need to be uncovered. It was known that there was so much more data held by Government that could be used for decision-making, problem-solving or general information sharing.

If this was going to happen, it was going to be a huge project that needed many people onboard. The project team needed to not only get digital entrepreneurs and developers onboard to participate, but to bring other Government departments on board to both release their data, and support the process.

The Approach

The project team that was formed had a good mix of skills – some with sound project management skills, community engagement skills, data and technical knowledge, and others with skills that helped to ‘pitch’

the idea to other departments. Many meetings were held and one by one other departments came on board with agreement to be involved, offers of significant sponsorship money and a commitment to work through ways to release their non-sensitive data to the public.

As a result of this process, the project became a collaborative effort between a range of departments and organizations. Whilst each department or organization had different objectives for wanting to be involved, the common ground was a genuine desire for improving services, sparking enterprise and enabling participation.

The next step was to work out ways to encourage participation by the digital entrepreneur and developer community. The team developed a communication strategy and chose to take an approach of identifying key influencers and networks within this community and to help plan the event and reach potential participants.

It was decided that the project would be centered around a 48-hour event, estimating that approximately 50 digital entrepreneurs and programmers would work in teams. The event then became a node of the national “GovHack” competition, in which there were 8 nodes across Australia.

Over a weekend, participants had 48 hours to craft and share a video pitch showcasing their ideas, proof of concepts and how they would reuse the data. The event culminated in cash prizes for the best ideas generated.

The event was a huge thing to organize in itself – hosting 50 - 100 digital entrepreneurs for a 48 hour continuous weekend in a central venue that was always available,

and needed fast, accessible wi-fi internet access was challenging. Integral to the success of the day were a team of volunteers who helped to ensure participants had a pleasant and conducive experience and helped the event run smoothly over the continuous 48 hours. Access to good food, coffee and snacks throughout the day and night was also appreciated by participants; this was deemed an absolute necessity by the experienced GovHack organizers.

What was achieved?

The Unleashed event demonstrated in a very short period of time what is possible through releasing government data. The initial estimate of digital entrepreneurs more than doubled, with 100+ participants and more than 30 observers. 26 new smart phone applications or web tools were developed in the 48-hour period.

The winning Adelaide entry as part of the GovHack competition was 'Giving them a better chance in life: Analytics meets early childhood development' (by The A-Team) which demonstrated community benefit. In addition Emergency (by Emergance) received an 'honorable mention' in the competition. Locally, the 'Social Active' application (by Bazinga) won the Premier's award, and showed the potential for benefit to the digital economy in South Australia through the release of open data.

South Australia received the inaugural Best Government Contributor Award, which is a special trophy for the department, agency or government that was the best contributor to GovHack 2013. South Australia had the highest number of participants and teams compared to all other states involved. Also, several of the teams who developed ideas have gone on to implement them as business initiatives. Unleashed has successfully been replicated in 2014 and 2015, with national prizes awarded to local teams. A regional node of Unleashed was also successfully run in 2015 in Mount Gambier. **BT**

What went well?

Unleashed demonstrated the possibilities when data is free to creative entrepreneurs; how we can stimulate the digital economy; how genuine collaboration can bring new skills to create public benefit at minimal cost to Government; and new ways of working. It also showcased innovation through the use of technology, and how to engage with the entrepreneur and developer community.

Agencies are now also more aware of the benefits of open data. There are now 217 published data sets, available for public information. These data sets were previously unintentionally buried due to lack of process to make them publically available. Unleashed and the Open Data Declaration created a huge shift in how government shares with data with the community and ensures a much higher level of transparency and accessibility.

The project challenged thinking and the way we do things. There were a multitude of shared objectives, rather than a problem to be solved. Many people didn't see this project as traditional 'engagement' but it has been a good example of what can be achieved when working collaboratively, both across Government and with a specific community of interest.

What would we do differently?

One thing that the team would like to have undertaken, but weren't able to within their time constraints, was to link the digital entrepreneurs and developers to Government policy people prior to the event. This could have helped to focus them more on specific problem-solving. Equally however, this may have narrowed down the project too much, and limited creativity.