



## 2RRR 88.5 FM community radio station

**Using a website to manage a community radio station in a distributed environment**

2RRR is a Sydney community radio station that aims to broadcast informative and entertaining material while facilitating and encouraging wide community use of its broadcasting facilities. 2RRR's website is rapidly becoming essential to its operation, and the station has experimented with leading-edge technologies such as streaming audio and webcasting.

### **A radio station intranet and website in one**

2RRR first went to air in 1984. The station sees itself as an important voice of diversity and believes that diversity is its greatest strength. As well as broadcasting, 2RRR provides community information and cultural exchange, and people can use its broadcasting facilities for their own cultural activities.

2RRR, which serves the suburbs of Ryde, Hunters Hill, Gladesville, Eastwood and Epping, also promotes cultural and artistic activity in the district, initiating concerts, lectures, seminars and other activities.

It is funded by a mix of sponsorship, volunteer labour and occasional government grants, which enable it to maintain its facilities and improve its services.

The station has approximately 100 volunteers, who mainly work in radio programming, and a paid office manager three days a week. In 2000, new volunteer

positions and subcommittees were established to help with the increasing workload.

2RRR provides a range of industry recognised training courses covering aspects of radio broadcasting such as production, announcing, scriptwriting, broadcast law and technical operations. The station also participates in the Australian Ethnic Radio Training project, offering training for foreign language applicants.

In 1995 2RRR established a website to promote the station online. Over time the station has implemented a strategy based on a distributed content management system and automated feeds of news and events. This has allowed the station to streamline internal processes and reduce workloads while providing the functions typically associated with an intranet.

Developing the website and using it to support internal processes has been a continual and gradual process. For example, the website was enhanced to support the programming processes used by the program director.



2RRR has experimented with some leading-edge technologies such as streaming audio and webcasting. While replay on demand might not be costly in terms of Internet bandwidth, it would introduce significant storage costs, so webcasting is used only for special events. Generally ICT use has been limited by a lack of resources and the prohibitive cost of new technologies.

In 2004 the website serves two functions equally: it is an intranet for the station's volunteers and a website aimed at the general public. For the public, the site includes all the features that regular or casual visitors could expect: news, a program guide, sponsorship and membership details, information about the station's short courses in radio production, and contact details. For the station, the website has become an online hub that helps members manage the station. It enables programmers to control the station's public face. By automating processes, this system enables more equal workload distribution.



The distributed content management system allows online management of the production of radio programs. Administrative staff and individual programmers can access the system from any web browser and submit new items, update content directly and provide details of coming programs and related material. New items are then added to the database and automatically displayed on the relevant webpage. For example, the home page contains a database driven news service: when a user visits the website and views the home page, the news section is constructed dynamically from the database and displayed.

The station is currently developing an enhancement to the programming database: it will feed data to a program subscription so members of the public can subscribe to a particular program and receive emails containing news items about that program. It is still being tested and will probably be provided as an additional automated news feed.

The automated news feeds are produced by RDF Site Summary (RSS). This is a lightweight, extensible format for description and syndication that facilitates the provision of content feeds from websites. These feeds can then be incorporated into third-party websites or accessed through a separate RSS reader or aggregator.

Using the station's RSS feed, subscribers can design the service to their own needs by selecting news updates based on a range of categories. Although this result could have been achieved through a series of email

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newsletters, the station chose RSS because it is flexible and because it is cheap to establish and maintain.

Sponsorship is crucial to the station's survival and it is important that sponsors be properly acknowledged. Sponsor details are managed through a database, with entries including a brief description, contact details and an expiry date.

Support for some administrative processes, such as running meetings of the board of directors, has been added recently. A calendar function automatically maintains a meetings schedule, emails requests for agenda items and generates an agenda which is emailed to the directors before the meeting.

## Benefits

2RRR's website is a significant achievement by volunteers and at almost no direct cost to the organisation.

The website and its distributed content management system give the station significant control over its internal processes and enables members and programmers to be responsible for their own content. ICT provides staff and volunteers with tools such as automated prompts that help them to schedule their work. This has significantly reduced the time spent on station management and enables volunteers and staff to pursue other important tasks, like raising money.

## Barriers

Cost and access are the most significant barriers to 2RRR's increased use of ICT. The station is a small organisation and relies on donations and support from members with relevant skills and knowledge. If those members were to leave the

organisation, 2RRR would have to divert scarce financial resources to pay people to do the work.

The station's lack of resources and skills has implications for planning. 2RRR does not have the resources to develop, and commit to, a detailed information technology strategy. This means that its planning must be careful and incremental and that it must take advantage of development opportunities as they arise.

In the long term, ICT will be increasingly dominated by Internet and digital broadcasting. 2RRR will be affected by this because these developments will use a lot of its funding. This will probably mean that technically feasible developments, for example, automated programming and on-demand streaming of programs, will be delayed.

Individual members have experimented with webcasting, primarily by running broadcasts from their homes. These proved popular but the costs, including a separate licence fee, additional hardware and access to adequate Internet bandwidth, are prohibitive for a small station. This means that webcasting is used only for special events, a policy to be reconsidered only when the direct costs to the station decrease. It is likely to become a realistic option only when the station is required to implement digital broadcasting in about 10 years.



## Key lessons

- Value and manage staff and volunteers efficiently. Organisations need people with the relevant skills and knowledge to recognise and implement opportunities or to effectively manage additional staff brought in for specific projects.
- Increased automation and ICT use frees staff and volunteers to concentrate on other activities to benefit the organisation.

## References

2RRR [www.2rrr.org.au](http://www.2rrr.org.au)

2RRR RSS newsfeed [www.2rrr.org.au/rss/news.xml](http://www.2rrr.org.au/rss/news.xml)

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY

## More information

In these case studies, communities, nonprofit organisations and groups share their experiences and lessons they have learnt using ICT: enhancing capability and service delivery; supporting and building communities, networks and connections; and overcoming barriers and challenges.

*Australia's Strategic Framework for the Information Economy 2004–2006* emphasises the need to ensure that all Australians can participate in the benefits of the information economy.

Key strategies in 2004–06 will be to strengthen collaboration and capabilities in nonprofit organisations, facilitate the creative use of ICT for building stronger communities and social cohesion, and develop networks, capabilities and tools to enable participation by people who are facing economic, geographic or social barriers.

**For more information visit the DCITA website [www.dcita.gov.au](http://www.dcita.gov.au) or email [community.connectivity@dcita.gov.au](mailto:community.connectivity@dcita.gov.au).**

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