



## **Summary of meeting**

### **Public Chairs' Forum Seminar with Martha Lane Fox, UK Digital Champion, 22 November 2011**

#### **Background**

Martha Lane Fox founded lastminute.com in 1997 and was appointed UK Digital Champion in 2009. At the time of her appointment, 10.5 million people had never used the internet before. Over the past two years, this figure has reduced by 1.6 million people.

#### **Benefits of going online**

Research from PWC shows that middle income families will save up to £560 annually by going online, net of costs, while those on low incomes will save £240, which comes from savings made by paying by Direct Debit etc. Likelihood of getting a job goes up 25% and salary in work rises by 10% for those online. Children with access at home see a two grade increase at GCSE. People's confidence increases and loneliness – crucial among the elderly population who remain disproportionately offline - is reduced.

#### **Race Online**

Race Online 2012 is the cross-sector campaign launched by Martha Lane Fox to 'inspire, encourage and support' get people online. Its ambition is 'to make the UK the first nation in the world where everyone can use the web.'

Race Online receives minimal Government funding (and Martha Lane Fox herself waived the fee she was offered for her post) and uses its partners' assets to get people online. The campaign has 1200 partners,

ranging from the very small, to the very big such as Post Office, libraries network, UK Online centre network, Job Centre Plus and Mecca Bingo.

“Give an hour” is a recent example of Race Online’s work. Led and promoted by the BBC, with editorial, talent and educational resources, this public-facing campaign sought to address the reason most people (64%) cite for not going online: lack of motivation. It encouraged the 40 million adults in the UK who have internet skills to spend the hour they gained when the clocks went back in October inspiring and encouraging an offline friend, family member or neighbour to try the web for the first time. . Race Online has also brought out low-cost high quality refurbished PC and connectivity offers to remove cost as a barrier (a factor for 23% of offline population); launched a national network of ‘local digital champions’ who can offer support and encouragement locally and within organizations, and a blueprint for councils, ‘Go On places’.

### ‘Digital by Default’

In tandem with Race Online 2012, Martha Lane Fox has been advising Government on its own use of digital. She conducted a review of DirectGov, the Government’s web estate, all of whose recommendations were accepted by Francis Maude, and which has resulted in the launch of the new Government Digital Service in December 2011. The organizing principle behind her recommendations to Government is ‘digital by default’ – i.e., justifying why something shouldn’t be done online, not why it should. At Google, employees are taught to think internet first. Online should be the primary option. There is some resonance from government for this approach; the challenge now is implementing it. Mike Bracken, founder of the Guardian ecosystem, is now heading up the Government Digital Service

The principle is that the home page should be Google. Or, it should be as simple as Google to use. Websites should start with what people come to Government to look for, as opposed to telling them what they want.

Not only does this benefit government in terms of efficiency savings, and better, more responsive services, but it also benefits the people who are least likely to use the internet – those on pension and benefits - are most likely to use government services. Making Government websites easier

to use makes it easier for everyone. Educating people to use the internet needs to be taken seriously. Government needs to take the lead and educate people; this skills is now as fundamental as learning to read.

### Greater efficiency through digitalisation

Digital boards are an example of greater efficiency and effectiveness. Martha Lane Fox sits on the boards for M&S and Channel 4. At Marks and Spencer, big paper packs have now been exchanged for an iPad, which is delivered to board members before the meeting.

### Roundtable discussion – key points included:

- Going digital versus government spend restrictions: caution was urged over massive spends – things can be designed much more cheaply.
- People who are in leadership positions may not be that knowledgeable, or at the cutting edge of digitalisation. Adaptability needs to be hard wired. A broader look at how government structures work is necessary – one solution is to have more young people on boards.
- The digital agenda was previously with local government. This has now shifted to central government. The Prime Minister is supportive, as well as Francis Maude and Iain Duncan Smith – Duncan Smith has referred to it as a ‘tool against poverty’.
- MLF is only tasked with looking at adults. However, she has been shocked by how few children have exposure to the internet at school. She is interested in using the digital skills of children to help adults.
- There is a big divide between those children that have access at home and those who don’t.
- The importance of the customer is something that is crucial and should be at the heart of digitalisation.

- Lose/tight – what's the right balance? User design should be tightly controlled.
- Having a digital impact assessment in every regulation is a good idea.
- Issue of IT in Government - new systems are needed and certain contracts need to be renegotiated to make digitalisation work.
- Is the political cycle of governments too short to make real change?
- International examples of digitally advanced and capable countries include Estonia, Lithuania, Singapore, South Korea, Canada and Australia.

Martha closed by encouraging all chairs to join her in the championing role in their organisations and to commit to being Digital by default; i.e. for us all to play our part in leading the culture change that is needed.