Eat That Frog community interest company (CIC)
Developing a digital strategy to support community inclusion and employability
(October 2016)

Summary

Eat That Frog is a Community Interest Company based in the South West of England. Developing the digital skills of learners is a key component in the company’s efforts to support learners to access government employment services and gain paid employment. To help realise this learner-focused mission, Eat That Frog are also developing a digital strategy. The expectation is that ensuring technology is used effectively to support their business functions will also have a positive impact on the overall experience of learners. The strategy will include provision for reliable access to WiFi and secure data systems for all their operational centres and learning spaces, using technology to communicate effectively and developing the digital capabilities of their staff.

The challenges

Some of the key challenges that Eat That Frog are facing include:

» Digital inclusion is an important aspect of the work of Eat That Frog. Job Centres require users to engage online so having access to technology and being able to use Government systems such as Universal Job Match are essential for the company’s clients. For some clients, these digital elements can be a barrier and they need support to develop the skills and confidence to do things like create and upload curriculum vitae, apply for jobs and claim online.

» The company operates from centres in Paignton, Torquay, Torbay, Newton Abbot and Plymouth. Ensuring each centre is has reliable WiFi and access to appropriate technologies can be challenging.
The company works collaboratively with many different agencies and employers so needs to maintain and exchange data securely. Compliance with data security requirements of organisations such as the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) place an additional layer of complexity on business processes.

Many staff are highly skilled in their own professional area (eg catering and horticulture) but need training to use the systems, to develop and apply digital techniques in their own practice and to support learners to become digitally confident and proficient.

The solutions

“We make our Internet accessible and use cloud-based systems so geographically it shouldn’t matter where you are. You can provide the best kit in the world but if you can’t get a high speed connection there is a problem.”

Gail Rochelle, business operations director, Eat That Frog C.I.C.

With support from their regional Jisc account manager and external advisors, Eat That Frog are developing a digital strategy. The aim of the strategy is to ensure that learners can gain the skills they need to take an active part in their community and move forward in life and to use technology efficiently to support the business functions of the organisation.

Some of the steps the company has already taken include:

» Undertaking a holistic review at the way the company works and how technology is used to support learners. Eat That Frog are actively looking at ways of reducing paperwork and printing, taking online appointment and course bookings, monitoring contacts and sharing records between team members as well as making industry-standard software available to staff and learners. The company took the decision to purchase Office 365™ for all users and uses the collaboration software SharePoint™ to work and communicate more effectively with staff.

» Establishing reliable and secure broadband at all of their centres. Apart from being essential to support digital inclusion and develop learner skills and confidence this enables Eat That Frog to benefit from cloud-based systems and access centrally stored data and resources using software such as DropBox™.

» Inviting staff to participate in a digital vision day when all tutors came together to think of ways in which they could benefit the community and meet the needs of those who may be socially isolated. The day included a brief from Eat That Frog’s business director followed by focused group work to brainstorm and develop ideas and consider budgetary requirements. Some of the ideas generated on the vision day that are
being taken forward include **Frog TV** where learners use video footage to showcase their skills to employers, **Podcast** sessions (podcast audio files rebranded to reflect the ‘frog’ theme) for those who prefer audio to video as a means of sharing their learning and pop-up cafés. The session also generated a lot of creative discussion on the digital skills needed to create apps and to repair mobile technology screens – potential small business opportunities for Eat That Frog's clientele.

» Reviewing teaching practices and methods by:

› making learning available via the Moodle™ learning platform for those who can’t always get to the learning centres
› exploring use of e-portfolios to help learners capture and build evidence in a variety of formats and share it with potential employers
› moving away from stand-alone computers and laptops to networked resources and use of touch-screen and mobile devices. The company has invested in a range of devices to meet a broad range of accessibility requirements: touch screens are invaluable in allowing people to look at things on a different scale and expand items on the screen and tablet devices can be easier to use than a computer, are more tactile and provide access to a large variety of apps. The multi-purpose use of mobile devices such as smart phones means it is important to ensure that content is accessible and displays appropriately for users who access content in that way.
› data projectors are bulky to move around and take time to set up. Use of cross-platform screen mirror protocols like Miracast™ allows users to display multimedia between devices without cables or a network connection and facilitate greater learner interaction.
› use of classroom management tools such as AB Tutor Monitor™ to create a supportive environment and address common problems where people may have difficulty logging-on or remembering passwords.

» Investing in staff training and development to ensure they are able to use the systems and online facilities, create resources and integrate technology into their delivery and support. Some of the training is delivered in-house, for example, the digital media tutor works with other tutors to show them how to film, edit and upload video resources. Other training for specific technologies is delivered by external trainers. There is also a buddy system in place to provide mentoring and support for staff as they learn to use technology personally and professionally. Staff working with learners with higher needs and challenging behaviour are being trained to use tablets and smartphones as part of their teaching strategy to engage learners and to help maintain concentration.

Focused provision for learners includes a wide variety of skills training, employability and IT courses with initiatives such as:

» **Work Clubs** where free access to the internet is offered along with support to access Universal Jobmatch and resources to help get users on line and create CVs. If learners need help to get on line, search and apply for work or to create a CV they can access short courses where a tutor can help develop job seeking and computer skills.

» Computer skills are needed in every industry and through their **Skills For Jobs (Computers)** programme, Eat That Frog offer basic and intermediate skills training in a flexible way set at a pace that aligns with other
learning priorities. Learners have the option of taking individual units of qualifications so they can focus on the specific skills they need. These courses offer level 1 and 2 in the use of common office software (Office 365) and the fundamentals of using a computer.

» An **advanced Level 3 IT course** for those over 24 years of age. This is a practical, hands-on course designed to improve IT skills for business including social media and web. Learners study at their own pace, with flexible learning that fits around work and life commitments.

» **Pre-employment courses** offering either a short two-day, or more in-depth five-day, course leading to a full qualification. These courses help learners to gain fundamental skills in how to search and apply for work and are free to those aged 19+ and seeking work.

» **Self-start** – a bespoke service for those seeking to establish themselves as self-employed. This provision includes one to one support to develop a business idea and a corresponding business plan as well as information on the different types of self-employment and relevant legal requirements.

» **Get Ready For Work** – a programme designed to help unemployed learners aged 16-64 with a health or disability related issue to overcome their challenges and build the confidence to move into paid work or self-employment. This programme includes the development of a personalised action plan and portfolio, access to IT and business skills, 1:1 mentoring, well-being support, fitness workshops, work experience opportunities and lifestyle skills.

» Informal opportunities to use technology is offered at sessions such as the **Over 50s Lunch Club** where participants can receive support to do things like contact friends and relatives abroad.

» Eat That Frog are also a **UK online centre**, a service operated by the digital and social exclusion charity the Tinder Foundation. They support learners to gain a broader computer learning experience using Learn My Way open learning and the free online courses that have been designed to help beginners make the most of the online world.

Eat That Frog are also launching an ethical recruitment agency and are working with employers and other partner organisations to develop sustainable employment opportunities. This will ensure that their clients receive the appropriate support, employability skills development and training they need to prepare them for work. Any profits from the agency side of the business will be reinvested in the company’s community work.

**Impact**

Learners who previously felt challenged in their use of technology are now feeling confident. Eat That Frog is able to reach more learners in more creative ways and help an extended client group to use the internet, improve their job search skills and apply for jobs online. Some learners are visiting the company’s centres to use Skype™ to take part in video interviews with potential employers.
The digital vision day has led to a more project-based approach to developing creative and innovative solutions. Tutors are working with media specialists to promote learner achievements to potential employers using video and audio technology which is generating portfolio evidence that is easy to share. For example:

» horticultural students have used video to showcase their skills in building poly tunnels and growing produce

» catering students are using photography and video to show their culinary skills and the dishes they have prepared

In addition, older members of the community at risk of becoming socially isolated are creating slideshows that act as digital family albums to share with others.

Because Eat That Frog is a CIC the community aspect of their provision is a central guiding principle. Digital technologies have enabled the company to develop more personalised solutions and to deliver learning to people at home or wherever they can best access it. One-to-one lifestyle mentors use technology to help people overcome barriers and build confidence, for example:

» use of GoogleMaps to show people directions to an interview or other location relevant to their needs

» use of mobile technologies to look up transport times and health care services

» use of benefit calculators to show people how they could be better off in work

While these seem small challenges overcoming them can make an enormous difference in helping someone to move on in life and to gain employment or participate more actively in their community.

A significant outcome from the digital vision day has been the adoption of a more collaborative and project-based approach which is benefitting the wider community. Staff and learners working on programming courses are using micro:bit technology to inspire young people to explore computer programming as a future career and to create innovative teaching aids. Teaching people how to create apps and supporting them to develop their ideas encourages entrepreneurial skills and start-up industries.

Staff have also moved forward in their use of technology and are benefitting from more efficient working practices. For example, the paperwork for staff working with learners who are returning to work after illness is now being done using electronic forms and iPads. When a visit is arranged (usually at the client’s home) the necessary paperwork is attached to the diary entry of the member of staff conducting the visit. When the forms are complete and signed by the client, the form is uploaded to SharePoint™ and made accessible to administrators, saving considerable time and effort.

The investment in developing the digital vision has increased the organisational capacity of Eat That Frog and helping to secure new business. The company is able to respond quickly and provide flexible options for learners, employers and government agencies.
Key points

» Reliable and secure access to the internet of sufficiently high speed and robust WiFi are essential to the business model, efficient working practices and the ability to use digital technologies creatively to support learning, help learners gain employment and participate actively in their communities.

» Eat That Frog have had to look at systems as a whole and have trialled new approaches and initiatives in Paignton before expanding provision to satellite centres. This has enabled the company to refine systems and services before they are rolled out to all centres and users.

» The contribution from staff at the digital vision development day unleashed a series of creative and innovative ways in which technology can be used to support existing services and users and has identified new possibilities. It has also helped to build a more collaborative and integrated project approach where skills used in one area of the business can be applied and demonstrated in other areas.

» Collaboration tools like SharePoint™ can reduce email inbox traffic for staff and provide a managed structure for resources that is easily accessible.

» Using technology to overcome what seem like small challenges can have a powerful impact for individuals. The cumulative effect of these can be very significant.

More information

Website: http://eatthatfrog.org/

Contact: Gail Rochelle, business operations director, Eat That Frog C.I.C. gail.rochelle@eatthatfrog.ac.uk