
Minutes

Title: Online User Advisory Panel

Date of Meeting: 17th March 2008, 13:00-16:00

Location: The National Archives (TNA), Kew – Conference Room B

Attendees: TNA:
Jeff James - Head of Advice and Records Knowledge (JJ) (Chair)
James Lawson - Customer Intelligence Manager (JL) (Secretary)
Guy Grannum - Your Archives Manager (GG)
Emma Allen - Documents Online Manager (EA)
Jenny Cottle - Senior Marketing Manager (JC)
Caroline Kimbell - Business Development Manager (CK)

Simon Harper – Managing Director of Ancestry UK (SH)
Matthew Woollard - UK Data Archive (MW)
Geoff Stone - Society of Genealogists (GS)
Barbara Harvey - Guild of One-Name Studies (BH)
Geoff Riggs - Federation of Family History Societies (GR)
Kathryn Thompson - British Association for Local History (KMT)
Paul Blake - Regular Readers (PB)
Sue Donnelly - Public Archive Sector (SD)
Adrian Towers - Government Records Management Community (AT)

Apologies: TNA:
Gemma Richardson - Strategic Development Manager (GR)
Jennifer Rigby - Head of IT Strategy (JR)
Dan Jones - Head of Business Development (DJ)
Mercedes Clark-Smith - Head of Web Team (MCS)
Olivia Dickinson - Web Team Operations Manager (OD)
Ruth Selman - Head of Knowledge Transfer (RS)

Andy Church - Senior Product Manager, Ancestry UK (AC)
Else Churchill - Society of Genealogists (EC)
Ian Wakelin - Private archive sector (IW)
Richard Ambrose - eBay (RA)
Gaynor Burns - BBC (GB)

Action

- 1 **Welcome**
- 1.1 JJ Welcomed those present to the meeting and introduced Simon Harper, Managing Director of Ancestry UK.

2 Minutes and matters arising

2.1 Correction: Item 7: 'Jeff Pick' – Should read 'Geoff Riggs' - apologies

3 Ancestry UK business and activity for 2008 – Simon Harper, managing Director, Ancestry UK

3.1 SH explained that he intended to give a discussion-based presentation, welcoming input and questions from panel members throughout (see *separate document for the full presentation*). SH gave a brief introduction to Ancestry, an international business with approximately 500 staff and 15 million users globally. Data on the Ancestry site is hosted centrally, but there are national parameters (UK users access data that is tailored to the UK, for example). He also clarified that he would be talking primarily about the UK business activity of Ancestry.

3.2 SH explained that historically, content had dominated Ancestry's agenda, but that more recently they had increased their focus on usability and the user experience, running in parallel with their commitment to provide breadth and depth of content. In particular he felt that Ancestry could continue to improve on the usability of their services for less experienced customers, as well as increasing the opportunity to share information on Ancestry and nurture the potential for the 'community' activity online.

3.3 SH reported that the first quarter of 2008 had seen less traffic on Ancestry than the same quarter in 2007, but that traffic had been more consistent, with users spending longer periods of time on the site. He felt that this was likely to be as a result of a shift in the user demographic, with a younger audience engaging with more recent features such as building family trees and uploading photos etc...

3.4 SH reported that new content is released on Ancestry on a weekly basis and the breadth of content is rapidly increasing to encompass family history in a broader context (e.g. military history and migration records).

3.5 SH reported that there are quality checks made on the site, with Ancestry staff checking for obvious errors as well as responding to users reports of obvious errors. There is also a relatively new facility for users to report ambiguous, or suspected errors on the site themselves, without deleting the original data.

Questions and discussion

3.6 -It was asked if it is possible for a user to remove a family tree from the site once it has been created. SH responded that it is possible to remove a tree at the click of a button.

3.7 -It was asked if non-subscribers could engage in the community aspects of the site. SH responded that non-subscribers could do a certain amount (as long as they had registered their details) but at a certain point would have to subscribe (for example non subscribers can start to build a family tree, but to get to richer content they would need to subscribe).

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- 3.8 -It was asked if users are restricted to accessing information relating to the country they access the site from. SH responded that for ease of use, searches are based on data from the single country in question, but that it is possible to use a 'Global Search' facility to access data from other countries.
- 3.9 -It was asked if there is content from South America on the site. SH responded that there is not currently a comprehensive collection, but that as Ancestry expands its collection, there would be a potential for migration records relating to South America to become available.
- 3.10 -It was suggested that there is further scope for Ancestry to improve the level of contextual information available relating to the records on the site, such as background historical information and more in depth geographical and social / local history of places mentioned in the records, for example. SH said that he agreed with this observation, and would take this onboard when considering future developments.
- 3.11 - SH finished by thanking the group for their time, and saying that he would be happy to come to future meetings if there were other topics or queries relating to Ancestry.

4 Ancestry User Group (beta testing) - Simon Harper, Managing Director, Ancestry UK

- 4.1 SH reported that there had not been a great level of response from the Online User Advisory Group to Ancestry's invitation to take part in the Beta testing group, and there was still time to volunteer. It was asked how much time and commitment would be required to become a member of the group. SH responded that there is a great deal of flexibility and Ancestry are grateful for any time that users are able to give. It was also asked if it is necessary to be a subscriber to get involved (no).
- 4.2 It was noted that the best measure of the success of the Beta testing group will be seeing how much of the feedback that is given is taken on board when improvements are made to the site.

5 Digitisation update – Caroline Kimbell, Business Development Manager

(See separate document)

6 Your Archives street indexing project update – Guy Grannum, Your Archives Manager

- 6.1 The idea for the street indexing project had been introduced when it was in its infancy by Ruth Selman at the previous meeting, and had met with a positive response from the group. GG reported that it had been agreed, in part due to the endorsement from the OUAG, that the project should be taken forward, and that it would be one of his responsibilities to manage it.
- 6.2 GG recapped on the idea behind the project, explaining that Census street indexes (currently often only available in a hard copy form) are to be used to create a structure around which users will be invited to contribute information on particular places using the wiki functionality of Your Archives.
- 6.3 GG explained that the project was still in its early stages but that he envisioned that the initial uploading of the framework street index data could be completed largely on a voluntary basis, and possibly be done remotely, if scanned images of the index pages were made available online to volunteers.
- 6.4 GG called for advice from any members of the panel who had experience of sites, which function in a similar way and work well, or who could advise on structuring the information from the street indexes in a way that would lend itself to providing an effective framework for future user input.
- 6.5 Moving forward, GG reported that he was looking into putting together some draft structures, as well as case studies to demonstrate how the basic structure could be utilised. He hoped to share these with the group and ask for feedback (*Post meeting note: GG will be attending the next meeting to share some draft pages*). Eventually, when a satisfactory structure for the pages has been established, the project would be left to evolve through user input (with mediation where necessary). It was agreed by the group that the project should be launched softly.
- 6.6 The issue of the variety of different methods of dividing the country (post codes / OS Grid References / Registration districts etc...) and the problems raised by their discrepancies was raised. MW offered to pass on information on some work that has been done to rationalise this. It was agreed by the group the project is very exciting with great potential.

7 Results of annual online customer satisfaction survey – Jenny Cottle, Senior Marketing Manager

(See separate document)

8 External member presentation – Sue Donnelly, Archivist, London School of Economics

(See separate document)

Barbara Harvey volunteered to give the presentation at the next meeting.

9 Next Meeting

Date: 14 July 2008

Time: 13:00 – 16:00

Location: The National Archives, Kew – Training Room