

Partner Toolkit – Charities – magazine article

Since last summer, when the Prime Minister asked me to spur on Government's existing efforts to bridge Britain's digital divide, I have become convinced that we stand on the brink of a remarkable opportunity in the UK: to emerge as the world's first 100% connected nation.

Countries all over the world are seeing connectivity as the most important investment in ensuring future competitiveness. We are already lucky enough to live in one of the most information-rich countries in the world: we boast world-class creative industries, and hosts of our small businesses and social enterprises depend on connectivity to unleash entrepreneurialism, to trade, to create communities of interest and social action.

But 10 million people in the UK have never used the web and of these, 4 million are also socially excluded. As media and industry expands ever faster into digital-only services, these people are losing out on new channels to information and education, to government and to commerce. Conservative estimates from the report I commissioned from PricewaterhouseCoopers last year put the cost to UK plc of this huge skills gap at £22bn a year. The potential savings in terms of the education, employment and efficiencies are vast: and it is the people who have the most to gain who are the ones missing out.

The new coalition has already confirmed its commitment to this agenda, and Government will continue to work hard to address this issue. However, I firmly believe that many of the skills to really make progress here lie in organizations such as yours. Whether through your power to excite and inspire, influence or innovate, or through direct contact to the people in communities who most need our help – charities have a vital part to play.

That is why I have set out to build a cross-sector coalition in the hope that our campaign might be able to capitalize on your organization's talents and strengths. BT, TalkTalk, Sky, Microsoft, Google, Skype, MoneySupermarket, McDonalds from industry; Save the Children, UK online centres, NAVCA and Youthnet from the charitable sector, are together just a few of the leading organizations to have already signed up, to help us reach our goal of getting 2m more people online by the time of the Olympics in 2012.

It's a great starting line-up but we need even more momentum to have a real impact. I'm writing now to encourage you to add your charity's name to the campaign and to ask a key person in your organization to develop a bespoke digital pledge that plays to your strengths: I'm aiming to enlist 10,000 organizations – from industry giants to SMEs, from nationwide charities to local community initiatives.

I can't think of a better way to demonstrate your commitment to social justice and the fundamental needs of the communities you seek to support, than by helping us reach a truly networked society and to create a real lasting social legacy of which we can all be proud.

You'll find lots of information and sources of inspiration, ideas of how other organizations have joined the campaign, and our detailed strategy, at our website: www.raceonline2012.org. I'd really welcome your opinion – please email martha@raceonline2012.org to arrange a time to share your ideas and formulate a digital promise.

Thank you.

Martha Lane Fox
UK Digital Champion