

Services Only Available Online – A Summary

The Internet is delivering more convenient, accessible and effective services across all sectors - public, private and civil society. In some cases it is supporting incremental improvements – complementing existing service delivery channels such as phone, post and face-to-face. Increasingly, however, the Internet is driving genuine transformation – opening entirely new possibilities. The result is that more and more services online are not available through traditional delivery channels. Those offline are now missing out on many areas of public and civic life, and a growing number of cultural, educational, employment and social opportunities that are available only online.

The table below begins to illustrate this point by identifying categories of benefits of being online alongside some example services where there is either a) no 'offline' equivalent or b) one could be conceived but it would be hugely more expensive or inconvenient. It is not meant to be exhaustive but is, instead, illustrative of the breadth of areas of life that the internet is pervading. Furthermore, it is not meant as a criticism of the relevant service providers who have clearly embraced the transformational potential of the internet to deliver innovative new business and service delivery models. In a networked nation – such innovation thrives, but everyone can benefit from it.

Benefit Category	Example Benefits	Example Online 'Only' Services
Finance and Income	<p>Being online can help people to save money, shop for 'online' only deals, receive special discounts, access 'online' only financial services, financial information and advice etc.</p> <p>Products, services, insurance and interest rates are often more competitive through the internet. On average, consumers save £560 per year each year through greater choice, time and money saved by e-retail. Lack of internet access can therefore reinforce financial exclusion.</p> <p>58% of UK internet users buy goods and services online – the highest in Europe – and they spent an estimated £4.4bn online in April 2010. Over 7m people have sold something on eBay's UK site.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Price comparison web sites like moneysupermarket.com and gocompare.com allow users to shop around for the most competitive services and consumer products in one place - There are web sites, e.g. myvouchercode.co.uk which provide promotional codes, e-vouchers or discount codes to save money when you shop online, or affiliate cash-back sites such as www.quidco.com and www.rpoints.com – there are no offline equivalents. - Some banks (e.g. Egg, First Direct), shops (Amazon) and markets are entirely online and it is not possible to buy or sell without the internet. There is no offline equivalent on anything like the same scale as eBay. Other 'online only' shops can often provide much more competitive prices than high street prices. - Online telephony and particularly video calls e.g. via skype, are difficult and much more expensive to replicate offline – especially for international communications. - The online benefits advisor provides 24/7 access to benefits advice across a broad range of benefits that would be difficult to replicate through one or two telephone calls/ meetings.
Education and Skills	<p>Being online can provide access to a wide range of formal and informal learning materials, support communication between pupils, teachers and parents, and improve the skills and educational outcomes of adults and children.</p> <p>There is research showing that children who are online at home can achieve a two grade improvement in a subject at GCSE, and will spend an average of 5.8 extra hours a week doing homework or additional learning activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - BBC Learning provides access to online courses and interactive training materials for children and adults. While individual courses may well have 'offline' equivalents – the choice and breadth of material, along with the interactivity and convenience make it hard to compare with traditional approaches. - Language learning websites like LiveMocha put you in touch with native language speakers who review and support both written and verbal exercises via the internet. - Secondary schools will provide online reporting for parents by 2010, and primary schools by 2012 – those parents without internet access will miss out.

Benefit Category	Example Benefits	Example Online 'Only' Services
Health and Care	<p>Those online have access to a wide range of health services, information and advice and peer support networks. There is an increasing number of internet applications and services to help manage your own health information and records.</p> <p>It has been estimated that the NHS Choices website saves the NHS £44m a year by reducing “avoidable and unnecessary consultations”. Microsoft has estimated the potential cost savings if more people took more control over managing their health information – using internet health applications. If this could be increased from the current 13 per cent of the population to 25 per cent actively managing their health, it could save the NHS between £2bn and £5bn</p> <p>Some GP surgeries marketing all electronic channels have experienced high take up, with over 50% of appointments being booked electronically. This has led to a significant decrease in the number people that ‘do not attend’, in one case those not attending dropped from 13% to less than 0.5% in six months.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patient Opinion enables you to share your experiences of health services with others, and vice-versa – but you need to be online to benefit from it. - NHS Choices provides one place to find your nearest GP, dentist, hospital, pharmacy and carer services.
Housing	<p>The online population have greater information and choice around housing opportunities (social or otherwise) being able to, for example, search for, and view flats and houses virtually online.</p> <p>Some housing associations that are deploying electronic choice based letting systems have experienced efficiency gains and increased the reach of their service. Solihull Home Options is a multichannel choice based lettings (CBL) system. In Solihull 94% of bids for housing are now being made over the Internet, with 93% of people finding the bidding process easy. The system has reduced pressure on frontline staff and helped the housing service cope better with massive waiting lists.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sites like houseprices.co.uk provide information on local house prices online and rightmove has a huge amount of housing opportunities including overseas properties. - New and innovative Choice Based Letting schemes are emerging which allow people to view properties and bid for them via the internet. Although these properties can be viewed and bid for in person those online can view and bid for the properties remotely, and check the status of their bids at any time including outside normal working hours.

Benefit Category	Example Benefits	Example Online 'Only' Services
<p>Crime and Safety</p>	<p>Those online have access to information and services that the police, fire brigade and communities themselves are increasingly publishing around local crime and safety issues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interactive crime mapping services have no real 'offline' equivalent services to map and compare local crimes with other areas. - Interactive fire safety educational games for children are available on a number of government websites
<p>Environment and Transport</p>	<p>It's easier to be greener when you are online – with access to a wide range of advice and services around recycling, calculating your carbon footprint, taking the most effective public transport route to a destination and reporting environmental issues.</p> <p>Online travel information searching and booking is one of the most popular activities on the internet with 87% of internet users making travel plans over the internet and over half of leisure travel booked online at an estimated annual value of £17bn - the UK is the largest online travel market in Europe.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some airlines are virtually 'online only' – even if they have call centres call costs can be very expensive and travel discounts are illusive. In some cases you have to check in online also. - Transport Direct provides an innovative, interactive route planner for public transport in the UK and for helping people to change their mode of travel. There is no phone or traditional channel equivalent to this service. - The Act On Co2 online carbon calculator enables people to find out how much Co2 they create and reduce their footprint. - If you aren't online you can't access Freecycle which connects people with things they want to get rid of, and which would otherwise end up in landfills, to those who will use it - Online train and air ticket booking services often let you select your seats, a service that isn't fully available over the phone or counter - You can view parking contravention photos online when you get a parking ticket. - Web sites like trindelays.co.uk allow you to match your train journeys to those that were late and apply for compensation. - Some companies offer online paper-free billing and statements and some, like BT have offered discount incentives - There is no offline equivalent of Google Earth or the satellite imagery viewing functions in Google Maps.

Benefit Category	Example Benefits	Example Online 'Only' Services
Employment	It's easier to find work with the internet, and easier to gain and sustain work with ICT skills. More than 90% of all new jobs require basic internet skills. Over 7m job adverts were placed online in the UK in 2007 some of these exclusively online. (Source - The Nielsen Company)	- Many public sector jobs have been advertised only online or accept online-only applications e.g. in 2009 100% of the Identity and Passport Service jobs were advertised externally for online application only , and 20% of the Home Office.
Community	Those online can play a more active role in their community; find out or publicise local activities, search for volunteering opportunities, interact with neighbours more, make views known to local elected officials and engage in local decisions, etc. 40% of UK internet users actively engage with social media including posting to blogs, chat sites and newsgroups.	- Hyperlocal community web sites, of which there are a growing number, help neighbours to interact more effectively around issues that matter to their community. The network effects are such that it is very difficult to achieve the same level of interaction offline. - Ecomodo is an online marketplace that lets people lend and borrow each other's everyday objects, skills and spaces – this would normally only be possible within your immediate social network – but the internet extends the concept beyond this opening up many more opportunities

Benefit Category	Example Benefits	Example Online 'Only' Services
<p>Social Wellbeing and Quality of Life</p>	<p>Those online can use the internet to support their hobbies and interests, and access cultural resources. They can use the internet for enhanced social interaction with family, friends and others.</p> <p>There are over 25m active Facebook accounts in the UK – only the USA has more - over one million of these are over 50 years old. Social Networking now accounts for around 12% of UK web visits.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are many 'online only' communities and forums and web sites that facilitate these e.g. Facebook, Youtube etc - Email is a key online application some features of which are difficult to replicate offline e.g. a key feature of email is that it enables you to send long/ short messages to multiple people which fast becomes too difficult using traditional channels - Unless you have access to the internet or an appropriate cable subscription service you can't access the BBC iPlayer, even if you have paid your TV license fee - When buying music online (e.g. iTunes) you can download individual tracks, in the shops you are forced to buy the whole album. Furthermore there are bands who choose to only release their music online, or release early for those online (e.g. Gnarl Barkley "Crazy" is one of the first singles to top the UK singles chart purely on download sales) - England's World Cup qualifier against Ukraine in October 2009 was the first major sporting event to be screened solely online - Some sports and cultural activities require online applications – for example – the London Marathon runs an online ballot. - You can watch a trailers online before booking cinema tickets.

Benefit Category	Example Benefits	Example Online 'Only' Services
<p>Aggregation and Transparency of Information and Services.</p>	<p>Those online can increasingly go to single places on the web which provide entry points into aggregate groups of services, data or information that those offline would have to go to individually via traditional channels – they are vastly more convenient.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The large internet search engines like Google are simply not replicable offline unless you are prepared to spend significant amounts of time searching reference libraries. - There are huge datasets and information services available online which are scarcely available in offline forms – for example ONS Neighbourhood Statistics, Data.gov.uk, and the local and regional information systems and observatories around the country. - There is no traditional telephone or face to face equivalent of Directgov – the UK government website which places 'Public services all in one place' - An increasing number of organisations, particularly companies, don't advertise telephone numbers or make it quite difficult to find them preferring to signpost customer and clients to their websites instead.