

Backing Indigenous Ability Response Paper.

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Background

Techlink Pty Ltd specialises in providing technical support and training within Central Australia's most remote Aboriginal communities. Techlink is presently delivering the IT Training and Support Program funded by DCITA through the auspice of Desert Inc to 34 Central Australian communities. Techlink is often the only provider of IT support in this area. Techlink has managed and supported previous NTN and TAPRIC programmes as well as providing commercial services to many agencies with these communities.

This response is therefore based on this knowledge and experience together with 15 years of living and working on Aboriginal communities.

Overall comments

The main idea I wish to promote is that ISP infrastructure needs to be priced the same as cities with unlimited broadband download plans. This is currently not the case with satellite based broadband. While aggregated access within centralised specialist technology centres (RTC's) seems like a cost effective model the over quota monthly usage charges would make financial sustainability hard to justify even if the concept was culturally inclusive for indigenous communities.

Computer technology like phones should be decentralised and integrated into the workplace and homes of indigenous people. Access to online technologies should parallel the uptake of telephony and pay TV.

Training while advantageous does not need to be the highest priority. Fixed phones, mobiles and faxing were never trained individually and it seems that most people worked out the essential features of DVD, VCR and many other complicated technologies like play stations, digital recorders, cameras, Autoteller machines and eftpos without training. All that was required was a need/desire and affordable costing for the technology to become persuasive.

Online computer technology like the photocopier needs support and regular maintenance. This should be acknowledged and carried out proactively. Even cars don't run forever service free. Community members are understanding this and even engage the ritual of car washing and vacuuming. Computers will also become a prized possession and cared for once they fulfil meaningful function in their lives.

In an ideal world Aboriginal people will be allowed free access to online information from shared community computers to use and create what is important and relevant to them. At the moment E-commerce can't be accessed by most community members because the supporting monetary structures of credit card ownership and the necessary financial management skills are not in place. Many people are keen to

discover the online world however even their own community access points are heavily policed by non indigenous staff and available opening times are limited.

Unfortunately as the communities open community access centres, Art Centres that were assisting in this area by providing an artists' computer have found a reason to stop this service.

This has occurred at least 6 Central Australian Art Centres in the past year and reflects a growing desire to concentrate solely on the core business of art and of course profit creation.

This issue is of course couched in the believe that Indigenous people now understand the opportunities of online access and its potential rather than the cynical view that why deliver computers to Aboriginal people if they are not ready and are not requesting computer access.

I believe that Aboriginal will uptake this technology in different ways to perhaps how I do but they will make use of the technology in ways that benefit themselves and are relevant to their needs.

The following sections of this formal response target the questions as referenced from the discussion paper.

3.3.2 Public Internet Access.

Q7 The concept of Hub communities is a white fella structure that views a larger centre as an appropriate place to again centralise resources for clustering of their support. The reality is that in order for people to engage with technology as a part of daily life the technology actually needs to be in their daily life. Small homeland communities have actually had the best track record in uptake of technology due to being able to freely control and have access to their computer. In communities of less than 50 people the computer terminal is associated solely with the one extended family group. They typically don't have more than 4 non indigenous staff and are more responsible for the operation of their own homeland. Larger community such as Yuendumu, Ernabella or similar may have over 130 non indigenous residents or more than a third of the population is engaged in some form of service provision. The impact of this often being that the traditional owners actually control nothing. The concept of hubs should be forgotten in favour of totally decentralising the computer terminals so that everyone no matter what family sex or age can feel comfortable working within their workplace or social gathering area. To understand the way that indigenous people divide and share assets is understand the inclusivity would prohibit any notion of hubs.

Q8