

# Broadcasting We must change Ofcom's auction



**Damian Radcliffe** is head of broadcasting at volunteering organisation CSV

Ofcom's predictable decision to auction off the spectrum freed up by the switch from analogue to digital TV broadcasting at the end of last year did not make a good Christmas present for the sector.

The decision to follow a purely market-led approach will clearly favour big broadcasters such as mobile phone companies and dotcom giants. Many of these businesses are owned and funded by foreign investors and have the financial resources to buy up valuable spectrum – resources that sector agencies simply do not have.

Moreover, in order to recoup the huge costs associated with buying spectrum, providers will inevitably follow subscription or pay-per-view models. This will further reinforce the digital divide by leaving millions unable to afford the new services on offer.

Earlier in 2007, CSV and representatives of other volunteering organisations, including TimeBank and umbrella body the NCVO, argued against such an approach, proposing instead that social value needed to be part of the auction mix as well as hard cash.

We felt that some of the spectrum should be used by service providers to encourage social inclusion, community relations, employability and crime reduction as well as to create a platform for contributions to the

arts, culture and heritage. It should not be used simply as a cash cow for publicly listed companies.

This argument has largely fallen on deaf ears so far. By deciding not to ring-fence spectrum for services such as local television channels, which have strong public service, community and social action agendas, the regulator is making it very hard for charities and community groups to enter the auction process.

The challenge now facing the sector is to accept that the auction process is happening, but to try to influence the nature of it. If we don't, then we may be unable to benefit from the new spectrum and the new ways to reach our target audiences that this will bring.

One way around this problem is to encourage Ofcom to use an auction model in which licence awards are made not only on the basis of money but with public purposes and social benefits taken into account.

Such an approach could encourage commercial providers to explore partnerships with charities that would otherwise not be able to benefit from the newly released spectrum. The fact is that services motivating people to tackle crime, improve their health or reduce their carbon footprint will not only create social capital, but they could also save the Treasury more money in the long term.

## Medium and message

Autism charity TreeHouse has created a calendar that gives tips for communicating with autistic pupils



"Just because 29 other children are doing something, how am I supposed to know I should be doing it too?"

### Teaching aid: the classroom calendar from TreeHouse

TreeHouse, the charity that promotes better education for children with autism, has produced a calendar it says will help teachers and children in mainstream schools improve their relationships with autistic pupils.

Each month has a key message from the perspective of an autistic child, such as: "Sometimes I may take you literally. If you say you will be back in a second, that's what I expect you to do."

A spokeswoman from TreeHouse says: "The messages are meant to convey how autistic children often feel in the classroom. We get so many calls from parents and schools who are struggling to get autistic children to learn effectively that we decided to come up with a simple teaching aid to help."

A 2007 survey by the National Union of Teachers found that only 30 per cent of teachers felt confident about working with autistic children, so the calendars include helpful tips for them.

The idea came from the charity's Parent Support Project, which consulted its network of 10 groups around the country to come up with 12 messages.

The calendars were sent out free to mainstream schools in 10 areas, which include Birmingham, Oldham and Ealing. "We have had an enormous response so far," says the spokeswoman. "We will continue to send out calendars to anyone who requests one until we have run out of the 4,000 we produced."

Indira Das-Gupta

## Site Visit [www.philanthropyuk.org](http://www.philanthropyuk.org)

Organisation **Philanthropy UK**

Agency **Jamkit**

Spend **£20,000**

Accessibility **W3C conformance level AA**

Philanthropy UK encourages people to donate to good causes and promotes a culture of giving.

### Development

The charity decided it needed to overhaul its old site because it contained little more than information on the charity itself, and did not serve the organisation's aims of helping people give. The redeveloped website was launched in September last year.

### Design and content

The site has a clean and straightforward look and is smartly presented. A menu bar at the top of each page allows easy navigation to the major areas of the site.

The charity clearly places a premium on the news section being kept up-to-the-minute, because it was updated several times in the days preceding this review. It's good to see, because many similar



sections on other voluntary sector websites include "latest news" that is actually several months old.

The organisation provides a free fortnightly email bulletin to subscribers that gives them news about the field. A quarterly newsletter is also available on the website.

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The resources section is packed with information for people interested in giving to charity. It explains issues such as venture philanthropy and provides recommended reading list.

Overall, the site is a solid and well thought-out resource, although it does not break any new ground.

### Special features

The site includes a philanthropy directory, which aims to provide comprehensive information to potential donors on a wide variety of organisations. It's an impressive piece of work and contains a wealth of information ordered in a logical manner.

### Philanthropy UK says

"We are a virtual organisation, so our website is Philanthropy UK."

Andy Ricketts