

Broadcasting Australia ain't what it used to be



Damian Radcliffe is head of broadcasting for volunteering charity CSV

I remember the Summer of '97 as if it were yesterday. I'd just helped to launch the UK's first ever volunteer-led commercial radio station, Oxygen 107.9. In theory, Oxygen could be heard by 180,000 people; in practice, its audience was probably a lot smaller. It was the glory days of Britpop: Blur, Oasis and Pulp were in their prime.

In commercial radio, Australian-influenced formats and production ideas were increasingly dominant, and many felt that commercial radio down under was the best in the world. So when I recently visited the country I was excited to see whether the sector still had a lot to learn from the Aussies.

Sadly, I don't think it has – certainly not in terms of how charity issues are covered. In a country where the Salvation Army has been Aussiefied to the point that it is known as the 'Salvos', I expected a more down-to-earth approach to promoting the sector. Instead, the only time I came across the Australian voluntary sector on television or radio was in the context of rather old-fashioned public service announcements.

Presenting issues such as volunteering or cancer in this way immediately makes the content seem too dull and worthy. It is a turn-off.

The contrast with the UK could not be starker. Partnerships such as

those between CSV and BBC local radio ensure that voluntary sector content is considered to be mainstream – it sits alongside other output. In doing this, we seek to avoid 'otherness'; we normalise voluntary sector issues, making them part of audiences' everyday lives.

Capital Radio's coverage of its Help a London Child charity does the same thing. It is both high-profile and mainstream, which gives the issues importance. The heart disease infomercial I heard on an Aussie station did the opposite when it was billed at the outset as a public service announcement. It was the equivalent of going up to someone in the street and saying: "I'm sorry to bother you, but..."

The lack of pride or conviction in the material I came across in Australia simply reinforced traditional views of worthiness. The communications failed to grab me by the scruff of the neck.

That's what good charity campaigns and good broadcasters do, and that's what I found sadly missing down under.

So next time you find yourself despairing that the British media doesn't 'get' you – which, granted, it sometimes doesn't – then consider this: you're still probably better off than some of our southern hemisphere counterparts – even if they do get better weather.

Medium and message

Conservation organisation WWF is the latest charity to take its message to virtual world *Second Life*



Conservation Island: highlights environmental issues

Visitors to virtual world *Second Life* can now visit WWF's new Conservation Island and explore different habitats to learn more about the environment.

Conservation Island was developed by specialist digital agency Enable and volunteers from around the world. The island is divided into unique habitats designed to highlight some of the environmental issues facing the planet.

There is a lost world populated by orang-utans and pandas. One ice cream-selling orang-utan tells his customers about the devastating impact that palm oil, a common ingredient of ice cream, is having on his forest environment.

David Cole, online outreach manager at WWF International, says: "Second Life provides a unique environment that allows us to interact directly with supporters and members of the public. People can explore our virtual island, interact with objects and talk directly to WWF staff. They can gain a real understanding of some of the conservation challenges we face and WWF's solutions to them. We hope to reach a new audience."

Cole says the initial response has been positive. "People from all over the world are contacting us and offering their time and talents to help us develop the island," he says.

In the future, WWF will look at ways to use Conservation Island to promote its work through virtual events or other interactive displays.

Indira Das-Gupta

Site Visit www.myasiaspace.net

Organisation Concern Worldwide
Agency Jamkit/in-house
Spend £16,000
Accessibility No W3C accessibility rating

International relief charity Concern Worldwide set up *MyAsiaSpace* in a bid to reach out to marginalised young Asian people in the UK and around the world. It was launched in May.

Development

MyAsiaSpace was initially developed with the aim of showcasing entries to a photography competition Concern is running for young British Asians.

Design and content

Entries to the photography competition and pictures taken by professional photographers working in Bangladesh feature prominently on the homepage. The professional pictures provide insights into life in contemporary Bangladesh, fulfilling one of the site's main objectives of broadening visitors' understanding of life in developing countries. The contrast in



quality between the professional and amateur pictures is occasionally stark.

MyAsiaSpace is aimed principally at young people and has an urban feel. It is light on content, although that makes it easy to enter the competition. The site also includes information about events aimed at the

Navigation 5
Accessibility 3
Innovation 3
Content 3

14
20

Asian community in Britain, such as the London Mela, as well as a discussion board.

Concern Worldwide plans to expand the site's features after the photography competition closes at the end of the month. At the time of writing, the charity had not decided what content the site would include.

Special features

Pictures submitted to the photography competition are uploaded to the site and appear in a gallery for users to browse.

Concern Worldwide says:

"The site fits with our campaigning work to engage young people and promote international understanding. We hope to encourage participation and repeat visits from young Asians all over the world."

Andy Ricketts