

Go where the people are: The Netti-Nysse bus in Tampere

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Organisation: Education Export Network, Tampere Region of Finland

Country: Finland

Level of government: Regional/State government

Sector: General public services

Type: Public Service

Launched in: 2001

Overall development time: 1 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

Tampere in Finland has become internationally known for its e-government activities. It is the third biggest city in Finland (about 220 000 inhabitants) with three universities. Many ICT companies, including Nokia, are based there.

At the same time, Tampere has become known for its innovative digital inclusion training approach. This training is not provided in a library or other public building, but in a bus. The basic idea is simple: 'go where the people are who need a service.' Indeed, this idea is catching - it is now being used in new healthcare services which are provided on wheels.

Why the innovation was developed

- Netti-Nysse is a local (and colloquial) way of saying "Internet Bus." This clever combination of the Finnish words for the internet and buses is calculated to make local people smile. (In English it would be pronounced 'netty-nooseh' - or in German 'Netinüsse').
 - The original purpose of the internet bus was to reduce the digital divide in Tampere, Finland's high-tech city. It was established in 2001 when there was a lot of demand from local people to acquire basic computer skills.
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Objectives

Improve access, Improve service quality, Improve social equity, Improve user satisfaction

- Even in 2013 there are still many elderly people who need help with ICT. Netti-Nysse offers both courses with basic ICT training and special courses such as Picasa, text processing and digital stories.
 - The bus provides media education to preschool children who are far away from the city center. The bus is also used for many kinds of cultural activities such as open air movies, photo marathons, campaigns for reading, community happenings and fairs.
 - In 2012, Tampere Council decided to experiment with providing health advice and health care through the internet bus as well. A public health nurse and some staff from a local NGO working on health care issues now work on the bus two days a week in different locations. The doors are open and it's easy for anyone to wander in, share their concerns or just talk with the staff on the bus.
 - The objectives of the bus-based health services are to increase the capacity of local people to help themselves and to prevent ill-health via the internet and everyday health practices.
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Main beneficiaries

Elderly people, Families, Government staff, High-risk populations, Low-income groups, People with disabilities

- Residents of Tampere, Finland

Results

Service quality

Responsiveness:

- The anonymous feedback from learners is collected systematically. It has been very positive and encouraging. Only one gentleman expressed his opinion that there were better uses for taxpayers' money.
- A participant in our ICT training course for retired staff from the company Turva gave us the following feedback: "The course was good and really useful for pensioners who have not used computers, the internet and e-mail during their working life. This supported my flimsy skills. I am really grateful for the knowledge and the skills that I got."
- A participant on another ICT training event said: "Excellent course, both from the point of oral and written teaching. The tutors were extremely clear and their teaching style was communicative and polite. It was very pleasant to come to the course in the mornings because I knew I would be treated well. Thank you! I did not fall in love with the services of computers though. It is more like a necessary evil."

Development

Design

When the idea of the internet bus was born in 2000, it fit perfectly into the strategic framework of the City of Tampere and its ambitious e-government programme at that time. Afterwards, the bus became a permanent service of the local library.

Testing

- To deliver ICT services via the bus, many technical issues had to be resolved. The bus needs electricity and air conditioning, even when the engine is turned off.
 - It needs to be a comfortable place to work when the outside temperature is between -25C and +25C. The internet connection needs to work everywhere and has to be strong enough for 11 computers.
 - We have found solutions for all of these issues. The technology of the bus has been updated over the years.
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Implementation

Tools used:

- The service concept of an internet bus has been developed together with customers. The services need to be flexible and open to all communities. The most important success factor has been the informal atmosphere inside the bus.
- Our staff have a strong customer service background. They never lose patience and they find the right words to explain difficult issues. We try to make it easy for our customers to relax with us. At any one time, we can have 10 persons using the computers and two tutors in the bus. Sometimes, we work even with smaller groups, if people are scared of the technology. The computers are set up in such a way in the bus that everyone has enough privacy to focus on his or her learning and, at the same time, the helper is always near.
- The public health service started in autumn 2012. The bus is hired for health services two days a week and one evening shift per month. The health bus service stops in four places in the suburbs, where it stays for two hours. The health staff provide local people with information on their medication, measure their blood pressure and most importantly, talk about their health concerns and decide if they need to see a doctor.
- Local people are made familiar with self-help sources available on the internet. During the health visit, the internet is often used and local people are encouraged and supported to find useful information online. If they lack basic ICT skills, 'first aid' is given straight away and a place on a basic course is reserved. This pilot is currently planned to run at least until the end of 2013.

Resources used:

- Back in 2000, the project got FIM 600 000 (about EUR 100 000) from the City of Tampere to convert the first bus. This was very cheap. For instance, we got the bus painted in vocational schools, and we also had private firms as sponsors. IBM offered the computers at half price. Microsoft gave us the software programmes for free. The first bus is now out of use and in the local museum.
- In 2005, the second bus cost EUR 340 000. About 70 per cent of these costs were covered by the e-Tampere programme of the local authority and the rest was shared between the Ministry of Education, regional funds and business partners.
- Besides the capital and equipment costs, we also pay salaries for four people. Overall, the operating expenses are about EUR 250 000 a year (excluding the administrative costs of the library). The income depends on projects funded by external partners and varies from EUR 6000 – 100 000 per year.

Lessons Learned

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- We are often asked what we have learned during the 12 years of running the internet bus. Our ten key learning points are: An idea needs to have a mother or father who has enough freedom and responsibility to innovate; Do it together in a network; Don't be shy; Make it as simple and concrete as possible; Do it to benefit aspects of people's everyday life.
- Rules for teaching: Show a good sense of humour, common sense and patience; Encourage people and make clear to them their own learning progress; Encourage people to share their knowledge and skills; Try out new projects; Promoting ICT skills and good health practices need commitment and perseverance.
- We are happy to help and advise other organisations to develop services in an internet bus. We have gathered experience in developing two buses (one was an old, refurbished bus, while the other was a brand new bus).
- We know what kind of technical solutions work in different environments and how to design the bus to support learning and community capacity building. We are also very interested in international exchanges on service design and public service innovations, and open to suggestions for workshops and events.

Other information

The internet bus Netti-Nysse is now well known in Tampere and is associated with many innovative ideas and projects. In November 2001, Netti-Nysse and the City of Tampere received EU recognition with an "e-Government Best Practice" award and the staff took the bus to Brussels.

In addition, the National Board of Education in Finland awarded the Netti-Nysse the national prize for an innovative adult education practice. In 2004, the Millennium Technology Prize Foundation gave us a Special Recognition Award for a people-centered application that exploits internet technologies. In 2008, the Internet Bus Netti-Nysse and Tampere City Library were chosen as one of the five e-Literacy finalists in the European Commission e-Inclusion Awards Competition.

*The program described in this innovative case study has been discontinued and is no longer in operation.

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