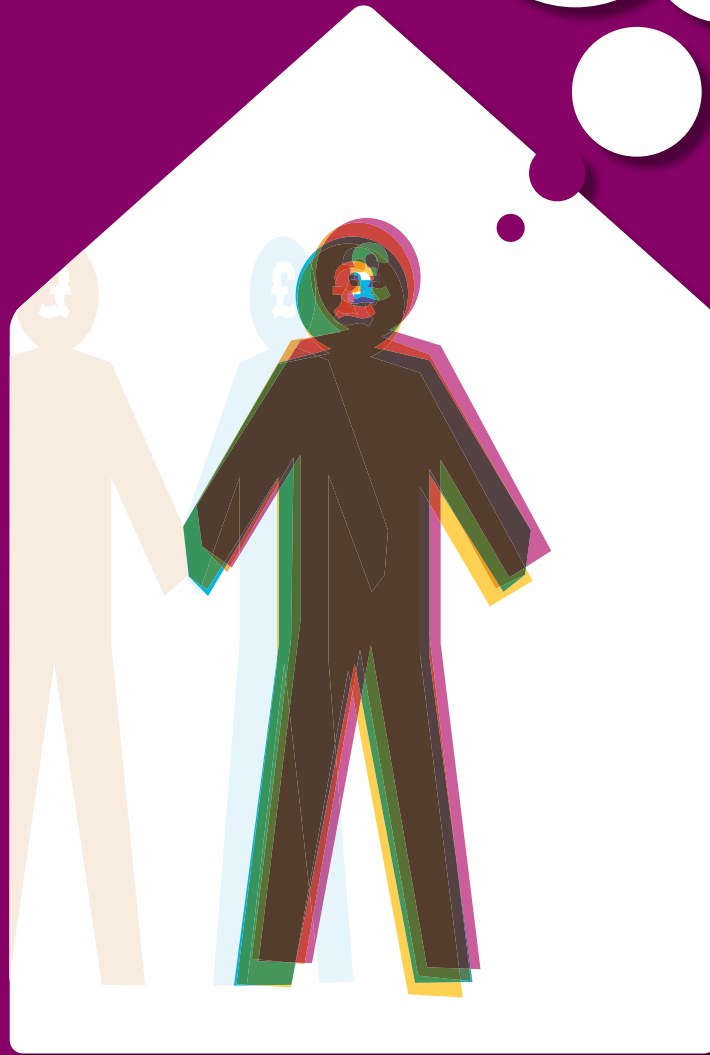


INSIGHT

INSIDE: IRRIV HB reform discussion board // Fraud in the public sector // Get to grips with FOI

A
single-minded
fraud



Discover the devastating impact of single person discount fraud and what is being done to prevent it

Access more ar

Many of my articles have discussed the provision of websites as one of the main access channels for delivering public services in a more efficient manner. However, this access channel has one obvious flaw – not everybody has internet access, and some may not even want access.

In March this year, Ofcom published its consultation, *Access and inclusion – digital communications for all*. The report found that even with a very high availability of a basic broadband service, take-up of broadband currently stands at just under 70% of homes in the UK. As a consequence of its consultation, Ofcom decided that further information was required.

Ofcom therefore commissioned a major piece of research aimed precisely at securing a better understanding of the causes of non-participation in the market for broadband, and the possible drivers for change. The organisation found data from this study, combined with data from their communications tracking survey, showed that just 70% of adults in the UK have the internet at home, and 5% say they intend to get it in the next six months. Just under one in ten (9%) say their main reason for not having the internet relates to finance/resources, and 13% say it is because of a lack of interest or need (defined in this report as 'self-exclusion'). The remainder (3%) provided other reasons or said they did not know.

Variation by age, socio-economic group and presence of children shows an interesting picture. Younger people aged 16-24 are more likely than the UK adult population as a whole to have the internet at home (78%) or say they intend to get it (9%). In contrast, 75-year olds are less likely to have the internet (20%) or intend to get it (4%) and are more likely to provide self-exclusion reasons related to need/interest for not having it (50%).

Many of our customers, especially those in receipt of benefit, may fall in to the '75-year old plus' category.

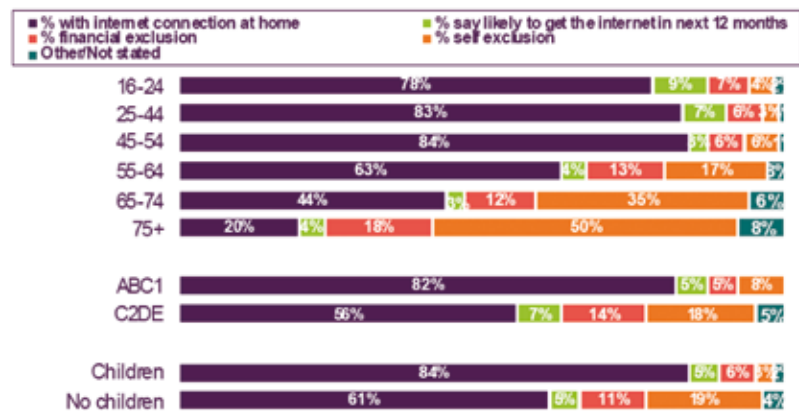
There are two main groups of people who don't have the internet at home, and don't currently intend to get it – the self-excluded and the financially excluded.

Self-excluded

- ◆ 42% of adults without the internet at home said the main reason was down to lack of interest or need;
- ◆ the self-excluded tend to be older and retired, and 61% have never used a computer;

The internet remains out of the reach of a significant percentage of the UK's population, restricting the availability of some public services. However, **Simon Bailey** believes that digital TV could provide a more inclusive solution

Figure A: Internet take-up in the UK by age, socio-economic group and presence of children in the home



- ◆ this group shares a sense of indifference, with many struggling to express any reason why they should have the internet at home; and
- ◆ some also felt they were too old, or believed that it is for younger people.

Financially excluded

- ◆ 30% of adults without the internet at home said the main reason was that it was too expensive, or that they did not have the knowledge or skills to use it;
- ◆ half of respondents in this group cited expense or costs, while 27% said the cost of a computer or not owning a computer was their main reason for not having an internet connection; and
- ◆ concern about not being able to afford the monthly payments is a factor among those who cannot afford the internet.

The graph above shows that only 20% of those over 75 have access to the internet, with 50% of those excluding themselves from it.

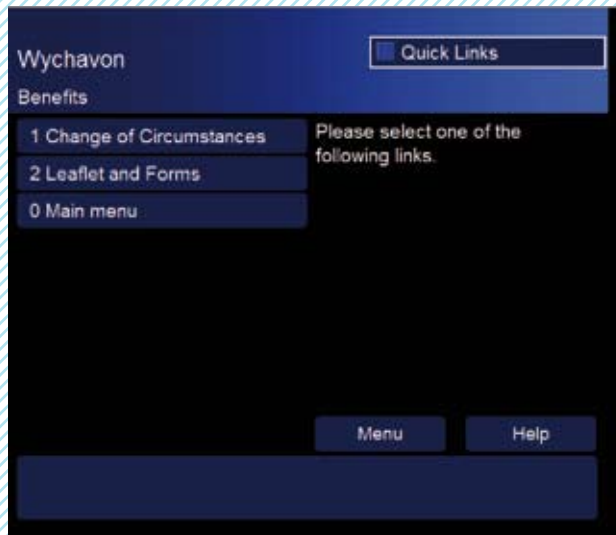
So, if people wish to exclude themselves, what other options are available to them? One little known but important area is that of digital TV.

With the roll out of 'Freeview' digital TV to be completed by 2012, those over the age of 75 will have access via their TV to interactive services. Many authorities are currently providing access to service via digital TV. Currently, 56% of homes in the UK have access to interactive digital TV, a figure expected to rise to 65% by the end of the roll-out of digital TV.

The service is provided by Looking Local which is a national portal offering access to local government and relevant related services on digital interactive TV, mobile phones, kiosks and internet-enabled consumer electronics. Looking Local has been developing a national solution for these platforms for over six years and has the non-internet, digitally divided homes and citizens in mind.

With 88% of homes having digital TV and 55% having access to more than one set, the use of digital TV appears to tick all the boxes.

However, to use interactive digital services a two-way communication with SKY and Virgin Media is required, delivered by connection to a telephone



“Many authorities are currently providing access to service via digital TV”



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line attached to the viewing box. Freeview will require a broadband connection to enable true interaction with the digital services – these types of connections and set top boxes are becoming more available.

The information provided by Looking Local is:

Sky users:

- ◆ press the interactive button on your remote;
- ◆ select SKY Active from the menu;
- ◆ select interactive services;
- ◆ select local services; and
- ◆ select Looking Local.

Or

- ◆ press the interactive button on your remote;
- ◆ select SKY Active from the menu;
- ◆ select A-Z; and
- ◆ select Looking Local.

Virgin Media users:

- ◆ press interactive;
- ◆ select news & info;
- ◆ select community;
- ◆ select Looking Local; and
- ◆ select Northern England and then Oldham.

Freeview users:

- ◆ press home;
- ◆ select interactive;
- ◆ select local services; and
- ◆ select Looking Local.

Alternatively, to get a feel for the service, visit www.lookinglocal.gov.uk where you get access to the live Looking Local portal.

Some councils have the system up and running – at Wychavon you can select to request forms and benefit leaflets and even report a change in circumstance.

At Bristol, information regarding housing benefits is easily available to customers. The site appears to be giving information without being interactive – however that is often all people will want.

It is not just about giving information or allowing users to request information. Interactive TV can also be used effectively to collect payments:

As with all access channels, the self-service method is much cheaper than personal or telephone contact. The business case on the Looking Local website provides a strong financial argument for using their service.

The figures provided are based on actual usage of a LA's website and uses the cost of a call centre call – £3.68 per call (National Audit Office Call Centre Study).

- Average user sessions per month: 687
- Average screen hits per month: 9,760
- Pro rata sessions per annum: 8,244
- Pro rata hits per annum: 117,120
- Equivalent cost via call centre: £30,337
- Savings per annum: £18,337

In conclusion, with so many people excluded from the internet, an alternative self-service access channel should be available, and digital TV is possibly the answer. ✨