'*Now &Then*' community heritage wiki project

Mallala Museum /Collections Council of Australia
2011

Local History goes Digital!

Now&Then is an online community heritage project that has been piloted in the small South Australian community of Mallala (population 500). The local volunteer-run museum worked with the Collections Council of Australia and Sweet Technology to establish a wiki website about the town's history and heritage.

The website contains articles about the people, places, organisations, events and things that are significant in the history of the area. It is researched and written by local people in the same
way that articles are written for *Wikipedia*, using Web 2.0 crowdsourcing and content sharing tools, only the content is deliberately and proudly local. The site also incorporates current news and blogs of interest, including the Local Sports Blog and news from the Council.

The innovative *Now&Then* wiki enables the museum to connect with its local community, and encourage direct community participation in the identification and compilation of its significant stories – about the people, places, organisations and things that have created, and continue to create, the district's shared sense of place and identity.

Participants have reported a high level of interest from the Mallala community shown by increased visits to the museum, offers of photographic and other historical materials, as well as the provision of further information for the wiki site itself. The local school has a greater appreciation of museum as a key resource fpr the new national history curriculum and the local council has become more aware of the potential for collaborative projects with the museum. The project has also established a presence for the museum on social media sites such as *Flickr* and *YouTube* and two blogs have been established to support the project, *Mallala Museum News* and a *Mallala Sports* blog. Using these tools in tandem with the wiki enables easy and efficient participation for a range of people. Introducing first time computer users to wiki-based collaboration, blogging and photo and video sharing, is one of the important outcomes.

The wiki also provides an appealing, non-threatening and easy to use tool through which the people of the Mallala district are becoming familiar with using the internet, as active users, not only as passive browsers.

Members of the Museum Committee, who have been the active volunteer labour force behind the project, have embraced many new ways of using computer and Internet technology, including blogging, writing wiki articles and uploading to *Flickr* and *YouTube*. For a number of them, some in their 70's and older, this is their first experience in using personal computers and the Internet. They are now also examples and mentors for their peers in the community- both young and old.

The project has produced a community heritage wiki template for other regional museums and organisations to adopt in their own communities. It has activated interest in history and heritage, internet training and usage and bringing benefits to small regional museums and their communities.

http://mallala.nowandthen.net.au