



2010 WINNING CASE STUDY  
Most Innovative Firm  
Digital Public



## Part 1: Why we're the most innovative consulting firm

Most organisations claim to be innovative, so what distinguishes Digital Public? For a start, we implement two key principles:

### 1. We draw on a wide diversity of views, expertise and experience, and are open to change.

It's worth remembering that 12 years ago, Google didn't exist. Six years ago, Facebook was a college project. Digital Public was created to reflect the needs of a rapidly changing and increasingly digital world. We set out to combine the rigour of a consultancy with the creativity of an agency, and from the beginning, have built a diverse and creative team. We recruit our people for their breadth of experience, which ranges from putting satellites into orbit to working with young drug users and offenders. They are practitioners as well as consultants, and all have experience of delivering services to customers, often to very senior levels, in the public, private or third sectors.

In 2007 we decided to join Engine, the UK's largest independently owned communications company, rather than a traditional consultancy group. This allows us to bring a different perspective to clients' problems, and to draw upon a wide variety of creative thinkers to inform our work, including our President Robin Wight, an industry-leading advertising creative and expert in brain science and neural marketing.

### 2. We live life in continual 'Beta'

In the old consulting paradigm, strategies were set in stone and built to last for five years or more. We believe those days are over. We enjoy "living life in Beta" (referring to the software launch stage where real people get involved in trying out new stuff). We invest in the creation and rapid development of ideas, and the ability of our staff to bring them to fruition. We 'crowd source' ideas by holding frequent ideas labs and open innovation sessions that include external input to generate service concepts that help solve client problems.

Many of these ideas go into our 'digital sandbox' – a virtual toolkit of applications and services that allows us to demonstrate to clients how services can be deployed in real world settings.

As more ideas are tested, the range of applications and information in the sandbox grows, making the development of future concepts faster and cheaper.

Just as important as having ideas, and a process to test them, is the delivery discipline to see them through to completion. Clients trust in our ability to build teams with the right balance of creative, planning and delivery skill, and to manage risk along the way.

## Part 2: Business approach and real-life examples

### Example 1

Over the past 18 months we've worked with NHS Direct to transform their service offer from one dominated by telephony to one that serves users through multiple channels, including webchat and

online. This programme of innovation helped them cope with the flood of enquiries they received during the swine flu outbreak of early 2009.

As part of the transformation process, we harnessed ideas from NHS Direct's 16,000-strong member base, who posted thoughts about services they'd like to see developed on an online 'Ideas Tree', and rated ideas that others had put forward.

We fed these ideas into the development of a suite of online tools that patients could use to check their symptoms. We led a cross-disciplinary team of clinicians, content writers and developers to develop these tools, which represent a significant innovation for the health service:

- They shift the triage process online, saving time and money
- They provide a scalable, always-on channel for the entire health service at times when it is under pressure (as was the case during the swine flu outbreak)
- They respond to the channel preferences of users and an increasing demand for online health advice

### Example 2

Crowd-sourcing is changing the face of private sector service delivery. We're developing innovative channels to bring a similar transformation to the public sector, putting stakeholders and citizens at the heart of policy making and service delivery.

Since May 2009, we've worked with the Digital Communications team at the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), leading a team of developers, designers, consultants and civil servants to create:

- A government data warehouse (the first of its kind) that allows third party developers to use DCSF data to create new products and services
- An online prototype service (pictured) that helps parents choose a school for their child, by combining Ofsted data on school ratings, DCSF data on attainment and user generated content such as blog posts relating to the school into a user-friendly format
- Monitoring dashboards that provide ministers with a personalised online point of access to traditional and social media content relevant to their policy areas

We prototype because it leads to usable innovation that is:

- Rapid and low-cost
- Open – allowing stakeholders to participate in development
- Unconstrained by tightly specified requirements documentation
- Lower risk – identifying key points of failure at an earlier stage

### Example 3

Our work with the Families Unit at the DCSF focuses on achieving efficiency through innovation. Parent Know How, a £60m scheme we manage on the Department's behalf, aims to transform information and support services for parents in England.

We've created an Innovation Fund to encourage and finance third-sector specialist providers to improve their effectiveness and efficiency. Designed particularly to improve use of digital media, the Fund aims to:

- boost capacity (by enabling helplines to direct some callers to online information, thereby freeing up capacity for others whose needs could only be met on the phone)

- engage with target audiences who were not calling the helplines (for example, fathers are far less likely to use the telephone for support than to look online)

Our programme has in the past year reaped considerable dividends for the Department, outlined below.

### Part 3: Measurable results

Our innovation brings real benefits:

#### Strategic

We've repositioned NHS Direct's service offer to deliver through a range of channels that meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century citizen. For the DCSF, we've transformed parenting service delivery and improved the capacity and capabilities of suppliers.

#### Financial

For the DCSF, our innovation has driven down the cost per parent helped from £32 in 2008 to £9.15 in 2009, while driving up parents reached from 90,000 to 2.185m. This is well ahead of both the original targets and schedule (set at reaching 750,000 parents by 2010-11 at a cost of £12 per parent helped).

For NHS Direct, we've set in place the development of a suite of symptom checkers creating massive savings for the health service, with a cost of 12p per patient contact compared with a telephone contact cost of £13.81.

#### Qualitative

We've helped NHS Direct fulfil its brand promise: 'We're here, whenever you need health advice and information'. We're helping the DCSF connect with its stakeholders and the public more deeply than ever before, and ensuring that millions of parents have access to the advice and support they need.

#### Sustainable

At NHS Direct we've transferred our knowledge and a full library of supporting process documentation to a permanent team. At the DCSF we're collaborating with the civil servants we work with to ensure that innovation is mainstreamed into their working practices.

### Part 4: Testimonials

*"Digital Public are able to deliver sustainable innovation through working with our team. Their work is not about producing reports or strategies about what you should do; it's about getting their hands dirty and getting it delivered in partnership with us. Digital Public's work enabled us to review our service offer and introduce new channels, which meant we were able to respond very quickly when swine flu emerged in April 2009. At peak, tens of thousands of people were using the symptom checker each day. Had it not been available, our phone service would have been overwhelmed."*

**Ronnette Lucraft, Commercial Director, NHS Direct and Operations Director, National Pandemic Flu Service**

*"I have worked with many consultancies but Digital Public are unique. They are very responsive and can produce solutions to complex problems rapidly. In several instances, I have brought them urgent problems with only days to respond; they have never failed to deliver. When we required a*

*mass communication tool quickly, they went from a verbal specification on Saturday morning to a working prototype by Tuesday. When we needed social media engagement, they built interactive content and did a major blogging, microblogging and social network push in less than four days. Often the exact requirements cannot be specified from the outset. Instead, they have worked with me to propose the scope and outline, and then delivered solutions against this. Their consultants have very different skill sets and backgrounds, but never fail to work together to deliver innovation in all dimensions – strategic, technical and communication.”*

**Darren Leafe, Head of Digital Communications Unit, Department for Children, Schools and Families**