

Getting Switched On *Online*

Gill England, Brigette Shutkowski and Julie Urbahn

Careers New Zealand

Presented at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) and
Career Development Association of New Zealand (CDANZ)
Career Research Symposium, 8 July 2011

Getting Switched On *Online*

Contents

Purpose of this paper	2
Summary	2
Preliminary research findings	2
Online spaces from a client perspective	3
Online spaces from a consultant perspective	3
Phase 1 of Webchat Guidance	3
Phase 1 evaluation approach of the service	3
Key learnings	4
Professional practice learnings	4
Conclusions from client evaluations	6
Moving into social media spaces	6
What is social media?	6
Why are we doing this?	7
How are we doing it?	7
What are we finding?	8
Conclusion	11
Acknowledgements	11
References	12

Purpose of this paper

Careers New Zealand has been offering chat through our contact centre for over eight years and in July 2010 moved into offering career guidance via the chat function. As with all of our technology enabled services we undertook a phased approach, conducting worldwide research and evaluating the first phase from 1 July - 30 September 2010.

This paper reiterates the preliminary findings of Careers New Zealand's career guidance via the web from both the clients' and practitioners' perspectives. It summarizes how Careers New Zealand has moved webchat guidance into the second phase and taken the step into the social media space.

Summary

Phase 1 of webchat guidance was the first stage of extending technology-enabled personal services as part of the new integrated service delivery model. Phase 1 centred on delivering guidance services via the online chat channel, and included stages of:

- Scoping - research/explore options based on client needs and environment scan
- Prototype - design, test and run webchat guidance through a pilot
- Evaluation - determining the success of the prototype
- Adopt - establish standards for business processes and professional practice
- Implement - train and coach for delivery into business as usual

At the end of Phase 1 an evaluation was conducted and key recommendations were implemented. Since October 2010 webchat guidance has grown, moving from seven consultants to 17. Careers New Zealand has continually revised practice and enhanced the on-line guidance service. By participating in social media spaces, we are moving beyond the provision of personalised one-to-one advice and guidance to having a presence in and influencing a range of on-line spaces.

Preliminary webchat guidance research findings

With online spaces, the focus is now on constructivist/social constructivist approaches to careers and that this space needs to be viewed as a third space and not as a collective of assumptions and fears from practitioners that the online environment is isolating, absent of cues, less social and requires more work. Clients have the opportunity to author/re-author their career stories and construct/reconstruct meanings of identity through the written word. Practitioners could ask three questions: "what is this space, how does it work, how can it offer new ways of experiencing relationships in a post modern world. There is an advantage of archiving, storage and review of transcripts, both for the client and practitioner. (Goddard 2008)

On-line spaces from a client perspective:

- Communication between the client and practitioner is primarily in snapshot, threaded constantly developing written text and the client has time/space control in choosing when and where to engage in his/her career development work.
- Clients have the opportunity to author/re-author their career stories and construct/reconstruct meanings of identity through the written word. (Goddard 2008)
- E-counselling appeals to people who are unlikely to come for face-to-face counselling; for reasons such as geographic location, sickness or disability; those with time-pressured work, family and study commitments; convenience of accessing counselling through the internet at a time and location that suits them and perceived anonymity. (Brown 2006)

Cyber-counselling offers an additional source of help to clients who might otherwise be unable to obtain any assistance because of cost, distance, or unavailability. (Maples and Han 2008)

On-line space from a consultant perspective:

Clients engage with practitioners in an on-line (cyber-counselling) environment. Identity and credentials of practitioners is key, and the first point of contact is often through a 'shop window' such as a website. Some clients prefer seeing a photographic image of the online practitioner. (Evans 2009)

Consultants need technological infrastructure that is fit for purpose, ongoing high quality technical support (for consultants and managers), high quality and timely training, careful and ongoing monitoring of service delivery and regular evaluation of the impact of on-line services. (Brimrose).

Phase 1 of webchat guidance

Phase 1 was from 1 July - 30 September 2010. The seven consultants were trained in the BOLDChat software and were very much part of the design and development of webchat guidance.

The age range of the clients was from 14 to over 60. Twenty percent were Māori or Pasifika and 17% identified as Asian.

Phase 1 Evaluation Approach of the Service

No external provider was used to evaluate Phase 1 of webchat guidance.

Each webchat guidance client was offered the opportunity to complete an on-line evaluation of their session using the Survey Monkey platform. The client was emailed a link to the evaluation survey.

The five questions asked via Survey Monkey were:

- 1 How much of a difference has your session made to your current situation (e.g. ability to take or decide about your next steps)?
- 2 How comfortable/confident were you with managing your career before today's session?
- 3 How comfortable/confident are you now?
- 4 What are you going to do as a result of today's session?
- 5 Do you have any other comments about today's session, or Career Services¹?

Questions 1-3 provided a rating from 1-5 and questions 4 and 5 gave the client the opportunity to provide a narrative.

The results of the online survey

Clients who completed an evaluation	74%
Clients indicating the service had made a difference to their current situation	99%
Clients who believed the webchat guidance session exceeded their expectations	45%

The change in how comfortable/confident clients were before and after the session is a significant outcome:

	Before session	After session
Somewhat comfortable or higher with managing their career before their session	47%	98%
Not comfortable	53%	2%

Quantitative data was also gathered from:

- Google analytics - indicating how many 'hits' the "Talk it over" page (Career New Zealand website) received.
- BOLDChat data - indicating who the clients were, if they received Assisted Advice or guidance, where they were from, which consultant worked with them and for how long.
- Careers New Zealand's Client Relationship Management (CRM) data – providing demographic information.

Qualitative data was also gathered from:

- Client transcripts - providing information on the quality of the chat from each consultant. This was also a very effective means for peer review.
- Threads on Career New Zealand's Yammer² community, team meetings phone calls and e-mails.

¹ In May 2011 Career Services changed its name to Careers New Zealand.

² Yammer is a social micro-blogging network for private business communities.
<https://www.yammer.com/>

Key Learnings

Professional Practice Learnings

Webchat guidance offers several advantages for clients:

- Accessibility, anonymity and convenience - for clients who are geographically or socially isolated, or have physical disabilities. Our consultants have found that people who would not normally pick up a phone or come for a face-to-face session are engaging in career conversations via chat. Clients were able to either continue with their chat when it moved into guidance, or choose to make another appointment at a time that suited them.
- The service appeals to clients from all ages and stages.
- The medium uses the written word, it helps both clients and consultants to clarify their thinking and also gives the opportunity for clients to read through or discuss with others at a later date.
- The ability to choose who the client could chat with. Clients could look at the profiles of the consultants on the website and choose the person who would best suit their needs based on these profiles. (However, it is unclear how many clients actually chose this option).
- Access to one of Careers New Zealand's target client groups - youth. Our experience has shown that a great number of school students are using this service, sometimes in the classroom with teachers/Careers Advisors and Gateway co-ordinators in the room with them. (The added advantage here is that Careers New Zealand has a new way to support schools).
- The ability to use the tools and resources of our website at the same time as chatting with a consultant, therefore receiving instant feedback.

Our consultants had to change the way they worked, both from a technical perspective and from a guidance perspective. They were not able to see the client, watch for cues or even hear intonations, which could provide valuable information. One consultant found the medium 'flat' initially. Consultants were also unable to rely on physical tools such as card sorts. Consultant observations included:

- young people seem to be extremely confident using this medium. (Some young clients also mentioned that they would have issues with going to see someone face-to-face.)
- we have found that migrants like this 'safe' way of communicating.
- the longest chat time was 1 hour 38 minutes, which is far longer than our expectations. One of the most challenging aspect has been the time aspect, with most sessions taking longer to reach a resolution for the client and learning a new art in 'clarification' and reflection of issues.
- at times, consultants were unsure if clients were still 'there'. This often required patience from the consultants.
- at times it was challenging refining and analysing the thread of the conversation and picking up on precisely the right issue. This often required re-reading the threads of the chats while still online with the clients.
- the client transcripts have proven to be an excellent tool for peer review.
- for those consultants who are trained in telephone guidance, the convenience of being able to switch mediums has been useful.
- the need to handle prank chats

- there have been a few clients who have presented with mental issues. This has raised our awareness and has necessitated the development of processes for crisis situations.
- care needs to be taken with keyboarding, grammar and use of language, i.e., slang.

Conclusions from client evaluations

From the clients who used the webchat guidance service and who chose to complete the evaluation, we can conclude that:

- Only 1 client out of the 53 believed that their session had made no difference at all.
- All clients who answered “not comfortable at all” with managing their career before the session in question 2 had moved from this point after their session.
- The service more than met the expectations of the majority of our clients.
- Even though Phase 1 was a trial period and a time of taking a ‘fast failure’ approach, the webchat guidance consultants have provided a service that has made a marked difference to a great many of their clients.
- Webchat guidance suits clients who want to use this medium for privacy reasons and anonymity.
- The added bonus of being able to use the tools and resources of our website has not only made a difference to our clients, but also has gone towards raising the awareness of the website and our other integrated services such as telephone guidance and face-to-face.
- Clients appear motivated to make change after their session. This could be immediate with accessing more tools on our website such as CV4Me and CareerQuest.

Because clients received a transcript of their session, they were able to re-read and reflect on their next steps, so things are not forgotten. It was clear from some of the comments that the clients had looked through their transcripts to answer the question.

Moving into social media spaces

What is social media?

Our participation as an organisation in the social media space is a complex web of interactivities and our audience is potentially limitless.

Whenever "social media" comes up in conversation, it is often talked about as if it were an elevated form of the Internet. However, social media has been defined as "The ability for anyone to hear anything, and say anything to everyone. And this is now business as usual."³

³ Definition by Matt Lane, author of the *Guidelines for the use of social media in the State Sector, Principles for interaction with social media* (<http://tr.im/jmtG>) and *Implementing social media monitoring* (<http://tr.im/jmtZ>).

Why we are doing this?

By participating in conversations in the social media space, Careers New Zealand is supporting the strategic priorities of:

- service innovation based on a deep understanding of clients and what works
- bold leadership that steps the organisation forward to build a NZ culture of career

We want to raise awareness of as well as actively engage people in our products and services. These people may be our clients, or groups we are working with to build their capability to help their clients in career development. Also initiating and joining in with career conversations, nationally and internationally to support our role in influencing and researching to make sure we are collegially leaning and developing – leading and learning at the same time.

We are trying new approaches to extend our reach with our clients, going to their spaces, rather than expecting them to come to us. What we are coming to understand is that the career conversations are going on out there with or without us, so we can ignore them, or try to keep up (Lane, 2008). We are not even necessarily in a position to moderate, from our position as career experts. We just have to join in.

How are we doing it?

In terms of leading the careers sector, The Fifth International Symposium for Career Development and Public Policy (14-17 Nov 2009) identified 4 themes, one of which is Transformational Technology. Careers New Zealand now leads an on-going international development group in this area.

Careers New Zealand has had a presence in the social media since 2009, starting with an active presence on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). We are taking a flexible, experimental approach to working in this space. Knowing that our activity is purposeful and aligned to our strategic direction is important too. A Social Media Strategy and guidelines, based on best government and international practice, have been developed, and adapted to each of our social media activities.

We are currently piloting a blog, [At the Sharp End](#). Initially this will have a “question and answer” format, although our aim is to add in “thought pieces” from guest bloggers. The blog will be evaluated at the end of the year, and we will look at the effectiveness of the more informal, public-facing on-line career conversations in light of our overall strategic direction. Alongside that, we are testing out systematically participating in related on-line forums, [NZGirl](#), [TradeMe](#) and [GradConnection](#), to connect with a cross-section of clients across a range of different platforms.

While there is not a dedicated resource, Careers New Zealand web content developers, practice advisers, careers advisers and career consultants have incorporated social media activities into their role. They share the task of status updates on Facebook and Twitter, keeping up an average of two to three Tweets and

Facebook posts a day. The on-line forum team members spend time in their allocated forum and explore possible “ins” for beginning or getting involved in career-related topics or conversations.

To create a “buzz” of activity from young people, without inviting scepticism from that audience always poses a challenge for public sector agencies. We have conducted a number of campaigns on Facebook, starting with the “Spring-clean Your CV” campaign in September 2010. Facebook followers of Careers New Zealand were invited to make a comment stating why they needed their CV updating. They then went into the draw to win time with one of our career consultants for feedback and help to improve their CV.

As a sponsor of Stage Challenge, we have been able to follow virtually the shows around the country, local staff have presented drama awards and we have put updates of winners’ activities on [Facebook](#). From the Stage Challenge activity we significantly increased the number of “Likes” from secondary school aged young people on our Facebook page, and invited one-to-one career conversations with our target audience on-line.

Around the same time as Stage Challenge, we invited young people to apply for a week-long [internship](#) with our website content team. Our Facebook page told the story of the successful applicant, Alex Ashton, with daily updates on his [Flickr](#) work experience photo diary.

Careers New Zealand also have a You Tube account and belong to the LinkedIn community, making most use of LinkedIn at this stage with our leadership in the [Capable Auckland](#) career development forum. These are in the early stages of development, but provide other avenues for engagement.

What are we finding?

One of the challenges we have is measuring how we are doing in the social media space. We are measuring factors such as impact and reach on Facebook, using Google analytics, and Twitter, using on-line tools such as [Twitterlyzer](#) or Twitter Counter. **Impact**, as defined by Twitalyzer, is a combination of the following factors:

- number of followers a user has
- number of unique references and citations of the user in Twitter
- frequency at which the user is uniquely retweeted
- frequency at which the user is uniquely retweeting other people
- relative **frequency** at which the user posts updates.

Impact changes month to month, depending on the social media activity of the team, and demands of other work, but has steadily tracked upwards since September 2010 from 0.2% to 0.3%.

The significant development is the increase in the number of followers for @CareersNZ:

Date	Twitter followers
End September 2010	556
End June 2011	831

Our Twitter followers and those who mention and retweet our tweets are predominantly others in the careers, human resource and business sectors. So the role that we have in mind when tweeting are those of “thought leaders”, “influencers” or “sharers” with peers who are passionate or at least interested in career-related issues.

Careers New Zealand moved to a new Facebook page in early May 2011 as part of the switchover to our new branding and trading name in mid-May. Subsequently, we have had to build up the number of “Likes” on our page from zero, which along with interactions and monthly active users, are the key measures of reach and impact. On the previous Careers New Zealand Facebook page, over a period of a year, we had reached 450 Likes.

As at 26 June, the Careers New Zealand Facebook page had:

- 289 “Likes”
- 3, 501 Monthly active users
- 33,157 Post Views
- 176 post feedbacks

This [link](#) shows the current “Like” and “Interaction” statistics for the Careers New Zealand Facebook page. Through campaigns such as Stage Challenge and inviting a week’s internship on the web team we have managed to regain ground with what is emerging as a youth audience in the Facebook space.

Here is some initial blog data since launch of the blog, *At the sharp end* 1 May 2011 – 24 June 2011:

Visits	646
Absolute Unique Visitors	296
Pageviews	2,485
Average Pageviews	3.85
Time on Site	00:05:36
Bounce Rate	40.09%
New Visits	43.65%

The blog is still in its early “listening and learning” stage of development, however, it is encouraging that visitors are spending an average of just over five and a half minutes on the blog site.

This way of working with potential and existing clients can be complementary to our one-to-one advice and guidance services by phone, web and face-to-face modalities. The difference is that these modalities are public-facing. The advantages of this are that users/readers/others in the conversations are equally “expert” and can bring their unique perspective to the issue being discussed. The perception of their role is emerging as facilitators or expert conversationalists rather than as career practitioners offering guidance.

We have found in Facebook and Twitter that if the question that comes up is of a personal nature, we refer the person to our one-to-one webchat or phone career advice and guidance services. The expertise of the group participating in the conversation, be it a thread on Facebook, a forum or a blog comments is equally as valuable. Our intent is not to drive clients to our services, however we are available should a person want to sort out their issue “off-line”. Comments can be moderated, and any “unhelpful” participants are merely ignored, chastened or counteracted by others in that space.

What we want to somehow track, is the possibility that what is perceived as public “chatter” can be in some way transformational and be part of individual and collective career education and development for the participants:

“Random texts, tweets, and microblogs can look like a lot of chatter. But is there something that can be learned, captured, understood by all the chatter? What can our clients learn about their patterns, anxieties, interests, and values by collecting their reflections and actions in this way? Is it a new way to learn?” (Goddard, T. [E-career landing](#))

As information of all kinds float past us, the skill is in capturing, filtering and processing what is useful, as if organisationally and individually we were like social media “anemone”:

“Sometimes subjects come up that you think couldn’t possibly relate to each other, but after a bit of thought you can see that they do. For example, a tweet from @timoreilly put me onto an amazing article about what makes a good teacher (<http://bit.ly/c7h0tT>). ...Because I care about being a good manager the transfer of information about good teaching skills to good management skills was useful and a real eye opener.” (State Services Commission [blog](#) post)

Conclusion

We know that webchat guidance is successful. Client evaluations, incorporating qualitative and quantitative data; and practice observations indicates that this is so. Careers New Zealand staff providing webchat guidance has grown from 7 to 17 in less than a year. Now we are exploring how best to work with people in social media spaces. One thing that is emerging is that the role of the career practitioner in social media spaces is entirely different to that in the delivery of advice and guidance services, by whatever modality. It will evolve to one of commentator, supporter and expert moderator where the potential reach is limitless.

A client is able to receive a Careers New Zealand experience in a personal space, such as face-to-face, telephone guidance or webchat guidance but we are seeking to discover whether it is also possible to have a transformational experience in the wide open spaces. The client may now be our fellow participant in our on-line forum or blog, but however we see them, people are still at the heart of what we do.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the Careers New Zealand webchat guidance and social media teams for their commitment to innovation, their 'let's try it' attitude and their desire to provide career support to all New Zealanders.

References

Brimrose, J. (2010). An investigation into the skills needed by Connexions Personal Advisors to develop internet-based guidance – Summary Report. Retrieved from the internet at

http://www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/pdf/Warwick_Connexions_WEB.pdf

Brown, C. (2006). Career Counselling by Email – Guidelines for Practitioners. *The Australian National University Careers Centre*.

Evans, J. (2009). Online Counselling and Guidance Skills: A practical resource for trainees and Practitioners. Sage Publishing.

Goddard, T. (2008). E-career counselling – A new approach for constructing and defining career stories. Paper presented at Australian Association of Career Counsellors National Career Conference, 27 March 2008, Hobart, Australia
[E-career landing blog](#)

Lane, M. (2008) Guidelines for the use of social media in the State Sector, Principles for interaction with social media (<http://tr.im/jmtG>)
Implementing social media monitoring (<http://tr.im/jmtZ>).

Maples, M.F. and Han, S. (2008). Cybercounseling in the United States and South Korea: Implications for Counseling College Students of the Millennial Generation and the Networked Generation. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 86, 178_183.

State Services Commission blog, *The Purple Patch*, 17 March 2010. Guest post by [Trudy Rankin](#). Chief Information Officer at the [Department of Conservation](#)