

## Value Added Online

THIS GUIDANCE NOTE was created in response to two events jointly organised by NFASP and Axis for artists' studio groups and organisations. The events were held in June 2010 in Manchester and Lancaster in the North West, with the purpose of focusing on how studio groups can develop a powerful online presence. The sessions discussed:

- How can you effectively promote your studio group and activities to a range of audiences, including those with influence?
- How can you demonstrate your studios are creating public benefit?
- What tools and techniques can help you develop a cohesive website or make an existing one even better?
- How can this add value to your studio group?

Both events were supported by the Artists' Professional Development Network (APD).

### Website Content

#### What and who is your website for?

A website is often the first point of contact for your group or organisation. At the NFASP/Axis event in Manchester, participants pooled their thoughts about what their website is for and who their potential website audience should be. This included not only users and visitors of the studios/gallery but also:

- potential funders and sponsors
- local and regional authorities
- educational organisations
- local groups, agencies or organisations needing artists as an educational or community resource
- new and emerging artists
- commissioners, buyers, curators and arts professionals
- potential partners such as development and funding agencies, and commercial, public and social developers.

Studio organisations, depending on their size, scope and vision, have to consider reaching out to a whole range of audiences beyond just their peer group and regular attendees, and should ask themselves:

- What other audiences should we as a studio organisation target through our website?
- What audiences would we like to influence – and how do we identify these?

Artists' studio websites, especially those of smaller and non-charitable groups, are often designed as simply a means of promoting the artwork of individual studio-holders and studio events. The sites feature images of each artist's work and statements or CVs, as well as events such as open studios and gallery events.

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So how can studio groups make better use of their websites to advocate the full range of what they and their studio-holders do? How can you show the impact of your group, including benefit to the public, extent of community engagement and wider cultural contribution to attract and influence funders, sponsors and new audiences?

**Demonstrating Public And Community Benefit**

For studio organisations with charitable status, or considering applying for charitable status, demonstrating public benefit is a strict requirement.

Local and regional authorities and funders also look for the public benefit, sometimes called public value, your group or organisation contributes to their area. If you are a charity or not-for-profit organisation such as a social enterprise, this could affect your organisation's ability to claim business rate relief.

Your studio organisation can also demonstrate **public benefit or value** on your website by showing what the artists in your group are involved with. This can range from exhibitions and residencies to educational activities, commissions, and lectures. It's important to emphasise activities that are also taking place **away from the studio premises**, especially if they benefit the public in some way. That way, anyone visiting the site and wanting to know more about the group, can get a clear idea of what the group is about and how active studio holders are.

On your website:

- highlight exhibitions or residencies being undertaken by studio-holders away from the studios
- emphasise any **community and educational engagement** your studios are involved in: workshops, community residencies and projects, educational programmes within or outside of the studios
- show that artists have Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks to work with children or young people
- upload **images** from community and education work (make sure you have signed photography release forms)
- add **quotes** to provide direct evidence of your community engagement or other activities
- make clear any programmes your organisation is involved in within the **public realm**: public art, art visits, tours or walks, city or region-wide open studios, festivals that studios take part in or help organise

This will all help to show the studios' contribution to community well-being and quality of local and regional cultural life. It will also help show that your organisation is not just artists' studios but also a community resource.

## Yorkshire Artspace Public Benefit Survey

YORKSHIRE ARTSPACE in Sheffield recently undertook a comprehensive Public Benefit Survey of their studio-holders. Artists recorded all their activities in the preceding year that involved direct engagement with members of the public – exhibitions, talks, community projects, media – through a questionnaire to ensure the information was in a consistent format and Yorkshire Artspace collated the data. The survey was conducted to highlight the importance of providing studios to artists and craftspeople in Sheffield.

Mir Jansen, Programme Manager at Yorkshire Artspace, describes how the Survey (08/09) is

being used to create a powerful advocacy tool for funders, partners and the Charity Commission: "A new funding climate means attracting development partners for new studios is essential," says Mir, adding that the survey has enabled Yorkshire Artspace to raise its public profile and illustrate the valuable commitment the organisation and its artists have to the local community.

The Yorkshire Artspace Public Benefit Survey for 2008/9 can be downloaded from their website. It highlights that:

- there were more than 2 million visitors to over 6,500 days of exhibitions involving studio holders.
- studio holders delivered 1,656 days of education, outreach and life long learning – reaching almost 8,000 participants.
- artists worked with many commissioners and partners, from galleries and museums to local authorities and schools.
- artists gain many benefits from their studio practice.

These facts and more, brought together in one report, give a powerful overview of the cultural and community impact of the Yorkshire Artspace artists' activities both within and, more importantly, outside of the studios. Yorkshire Artspace's website aims to reflect this by profiling the diverse activities and highlighting news about individual studio-holders. Yorkshire Artspace intends to gather similar information each year.

Yorkshire Artspace's Public Benefit Survey:

<http://artspace.org.uk/download-file/downloads/Public-Benefit-Survey-2008-09.pdf>



*Community Engagement: Studio tour*

<http://artspace.org.uk/programmes/community-engagement>

### Useful links:

NFASP members can use the NFASP Public Benefit Toolkit to record information on the benefit artists provide to the public through the wide range of activities they undertake. Simple to use, the toolkit takes the form of a questionnaire and is designed for studios of all sizes and types.

**NFASP Public Benefit Toolkit** – <http://www.nfasp.org.uk/page.php?id=108>

Smaller studio groups will be able show similar public benefits to those of Yorkshire Artspace. Whilst the statistics may not be so large, they can still provide compelling evidence of your studios' contribution to cultural and community life in your area.

Coventry Artspace is contracted to support the Arts Development Service at Coventry City Council and offer accessible support services for a wide range of professional and voluntary creative practitioners that make up the city's thriving and varied creative and cultural industries - see <http://www.coventry-artspace.co.uk/news.html>

### Example: Targeting Local Authority Arts And Cultural Officers

#### How can your studio group fit into a local authority's cultural strategy?

Sara Noonan, Creative Industries Development Manager at Central Salford Urban Regeneration Company (URC), says: "You have to consider the public sector brain and what potential funders, supporters and commissioners may be looking for in terms of your website content". Sara identifies the following issues:

**Economic:** visitor economy, innovation.

**Regeneration:** attracting private investment, improvements to the public realm, participation, inclusive and community-related activities.

**Social:** expressing cultural diversity, engaging excluded communities, improved quality of life for residents, local wellbeing.

In terms of the content of your website and e-newsletters, you need to target the "right information, right place, right amount, and right audience," says Sara Noonan. "Be wary of too much irrelevant information."

#### How to target information on your website and e-newsletter

In her former role as Communications Officer for Creative Lancashire (CL), Charlotte Dawson was responsible for the CL website and the e-newsletter, which goes to 2,500 recipients. The CL newsletter offers an opportunity for studio groups to promote their work and events within the region.

"Local arts officers are looking for clear and easy to understand information," says Charlotte. She emphasises the need for studio groups to target e-newsletters and information with clear, up-to-date information and in time for local or regional listings, as well as taking advantage of using social media to further promote their organisation's activities.

**GUIDANCE NOTE: VALUE ADDED ONLINE****Useful links:**

Creative Lancashire [www.creativelancashire.org](http://www.creativelancashire.org)

Salford City Council [www.salford.gov.uk/artsdevelopment.htm](http://www.salford.gov.uk/artsdevelopment.htm)

**Targeting Your Messages More Effectively**

- Project a **clear identity** for your group. Do not combine too many mixed or confusing messages.
- Create the best profile of individual artists, with images and links to their sites, but also **maintain the balance between individuals and the group**. Give the group a strong, collective identity.
- **Work your mailing list**: link up with as many agencies, groups and organisations as possible. For example, regeneration agencies, art colleges, schools. What connections do your studio members have? Neighbourhood organisations, council links, etc. These may be 'natural allies' or they may be relationships that need to be nurtured.
- Demonstrate clearly your affiliations and **connections**, partnerships and links with national, regional and local organisations – from schools, businesses, other arts organisations, member organisations such as NFASP, neighbourhood communities, public sector and more. Always include web links to organisations. And encourage organisations to link back to your website.
- Improve your website with **added value content** – such as mission statements, aspirations, group and individual achievements, blogs, public benefit and community engagement projects.
- Show clear links to sponsors, funders, membership associations (such as NFASP) with logos and weblinks.
- Media/press: send e-newsletter and press releases to local, regional and national press, as well as any media websites that include listings or arts events and news.
- Use Charlotte Dawson's motto: "Be yourself, build your network, develop consistency, post regularly."

**Creating Interest And Keeping Your Website Up To Date**

How can you make your website more dynamic and less static?

- Update the home page as regularly as possible, with good use of images and clear information – and latest news, events, etc. Don't leave the home page static.
- Make sure your site is always up-to-date! Don't leave old events on the home page.
- Rotate featured artists every month on the home page.
- Add visual interest with links to Flickr, YouTube or Vimeo and others (see below).
- Use Blogs, Twitter and Facebook links (which can be put onto the homepage) to give your website a 'human face'. See Mushroom Works Studios and Gallery as an example; they link to Facebook, Blog and Twitter from the home page.
- When writing for the site, avoid long blocks of text and keep the information concise, headlined and clearly spaced

## Who will update the website?

When studio organisations cannot employ any staff, artists often give their time and commitment to the website voluntarily and the common complaint is that this often falls to one person! Where possible, encourage members to update their own artist profiles by uploading photos, information on exhibitions, residencies and other activities. Also link to the artist's own website.

Blogs: one or two artist members may be interested in writing a blog or using Twitter (tweeting) for the site. Link to the blog and Twitter from the home page.

Cost: it is possible to update the website in an affordable way, especially using links to free social networking sites.

Board or committee members could be responsible for creating a private section for members to access important information about the studio organisation (e.g. the rules of the organisation, details of membership, studio application procedures, audited accounts for two years, AGM paperwork, minutes of board meetings).

## E-Newsletters And Mailing Lists

Email newsletters or mailing lists are a vital way of driving traffic to your site and keeping organisations up-to-date with your activities. They are still regarded as one of the best ways of maintaining relationships on the internet.

- Mailing lists can be made part of a tailor-made or hosted website within the Content Management System (CMS).
- Upload newsletters onto the website – and make it easy to click to subscribe to the newsletter from the home page.
- Format and style – keep it concise and ensure you make all the vital ingredients – dates, locations, etc – immediately visible, as you would for your website generally.
- A snippet and link to the main story on the website is the best way of directing readers back to your site.
- Research has shown that the average time a user spends on a newsletter is around 50 seconds. Users tend to 'scan' rather than 'read' the newsletter so it is best to avoid lengthy introductory text.
- Don't send information about events two days before. Give some time for events to be added to media/press listings or other local or regional listings that promote events.

## Writing For The Web

"There is an expectation in our sector that we should use long words and make text as impenetrable as possible," says Sheila McGregor, Chief Executive of Axis. "The reality is that on the internet, users have a 400-800 word attention span. The key is to balance intelligent and clear language."



On the internet, users don't read every word online, they scan the page. Follow these basic guidelines:

- Don't bury the important information in the text. Follow news-writing guidelines and make sure all the vital information is in the first paragraph, i.e. start with the conclusion.
- Use clear, plain language. "Never use a long word where a short one will do" (George Orwell in "Politics and Language")
- Space the text out with very short paragraphs. Break it up using headlines, subheadings, bulleted points - so that information can be found easily. Highlight keywords with bold text.
- Don't forget to put event dates, locations and venues at the top of the text. This seems obvious but it is amazing how often this information is either left out or buried further down.
- Maintain a personable and informal 'voice' – don't be anonymous. But avoid too much waffle!
- Make the best and most appropriate use of images for visual impact.
- Use simple headings with key words to allow search engines to find your page more easily.
- Use weblinks within the text where appropriate.

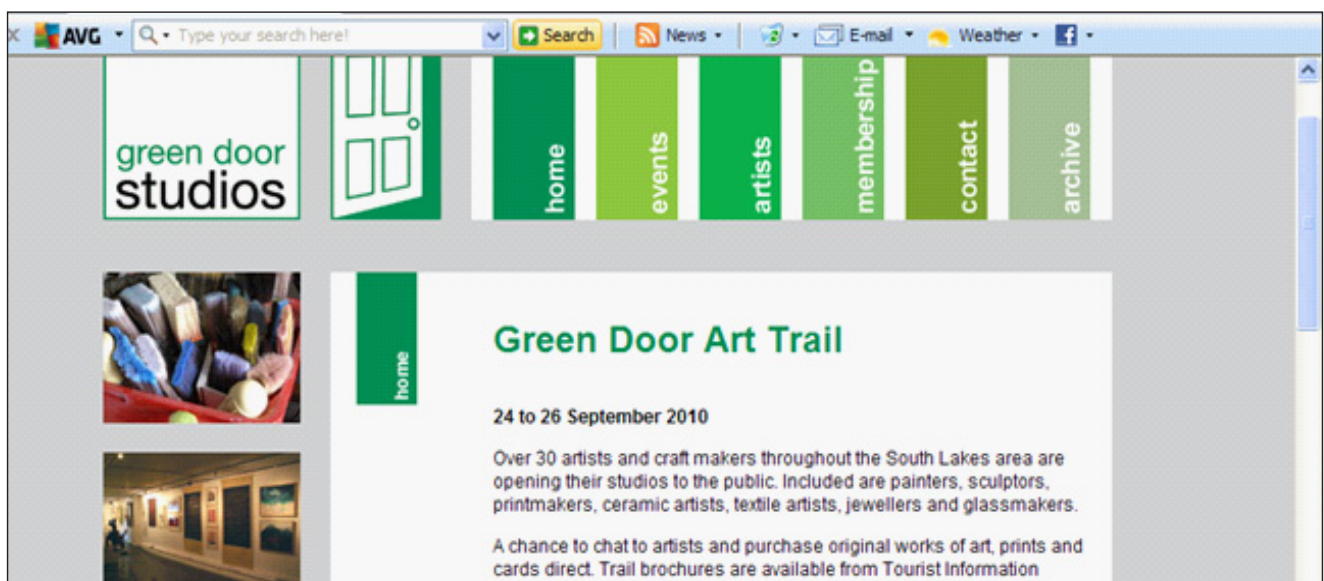
### Useful sources of information:

Plain English site's tips for the web: <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/files/websitesguide.pdf>

George Orwell's six rules for writing can be found at: <http://thoughtcapital.wordpress.com/2007/04/22/george-orwells-6-rules-for-writing/>

### Technical: Developing A Web Presence

When deciding on the structure of your site, you need to create a logical navigation menu and organise the information clearly with sub-categories so that it can be found easily by a range of audiences. Make sure your home page can be accessed easily from every page of your site. You need to consider how easy the system is to use and its flexibility to customise.



## Content Management Systems (CMS)

This is software you use to edit and maintain your website. A tailor-made CMS using a web designer can be relatively expensive and is only worth considering if you are planning a complex site that does not fit into categories covered by off-the-shelf publishing platforms, like the ones listed below.

It is much more cost-effective to use online hosts or publishing platforms such as Drupal, Wordpress, Mr Site and others. Most of these also have built-in search engine optimisation (SEO) tools to help increase traffic to your site, and are compatible with Google Analytics, which allows you to see how users are browsing your site.

You will then want to use Social Media platforms to complement your website, eg. Wordpress (blog), Facebook, Ning, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, Vimeo.

With the advent of more sophisticated social media platforms that operate like a website, you also have to ask: how necessary is it to have a website? Consider what information you should put on a social media platform as opposed to a website, and make sure they are linked up.

### Drupal:

**Pros:** You can customise code extensively and create function-rich, high quality websites. There is a range of free themes, extension modules and a large community for help and support. Drupal can generally extend more than Wordpress.

**Cons:** There is a steeper learning curve than with Wordpress (code knowledge needed) and it is longer to set up. Themes and blogging are arguably not as good as Wordpress. You need your own web host.

[www.drupal.org](http://www.drupal.org)

### Wordpress:

WordPress started as just a blogging system, but can now be used as a full content management system:

#### Wordpress (blog):

**Pros:** Easy to make look good with free themes and excellent for blogging. Large community for help and support. Simple to use.

**Cons:** Not so easy to customise without programming knowledge. Upgrades can sometimes cause problems. You also need your own web host.

[www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com)

#### Wordpress (hosted site):

**Pros:** Easy to set up and you don't need a web host.

**Cons:** Wordpress related domain name. Harder to improve SEO. Limited customisation.

[www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com)



**Mr Site:**

**Pros:** A cost-effective and easy-to-use publishing host (costs from £20 to £100 to set up your site). Has built-in SEO tools and mailing lists.

**Cons:** Complete reliance on the publisher. Mr Site uses a non-standard format that cannot be taken away and installed somewhere else.

[www.mrsite.com/](http://www.mrsite.com/)

There are many other free CMS including Joomla ([www.joomla.org](http://www.joomla.org)), Plone ([www.plone.org](http://www.plone.org)), OpenCMS ([www.opencms.org](http://www.opencms.org)) and Mambo ([www.mambo-foundation.org](http://www.mambo-foundation.org)).

**Social Media**

These can help complement and upgrade your website. Social media sites are free and can also lend your studio group more of a 'human face' and allow interactivity, networking, comments and feedback. **They also give you a more active relationship with the community.**

**Facebook:**

Facebook is easy to set up and has a huge community but it is harder to customise and 'stand out'. However, people used to Facebook will be used to the layout and not see this as a disadvantage.

An important initial decision is whether to create a group page or a Like page (previously Fan page). Different studio organisations have opted for both, but a Like page is generally seen as the better choice because it is a lot easier for other Facebook users to like an organisation than to become a member of a group.

Make sure that there is a clear link to your Facebook page from the website home page and back again. Facebook is particularly good for posting events and latest news. Axis reports that its Facebook page enabled the organisation to increase its international reach. So think global!

[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

*Spike Island Facebook page* <http://www.facebook.com/spikeisland>

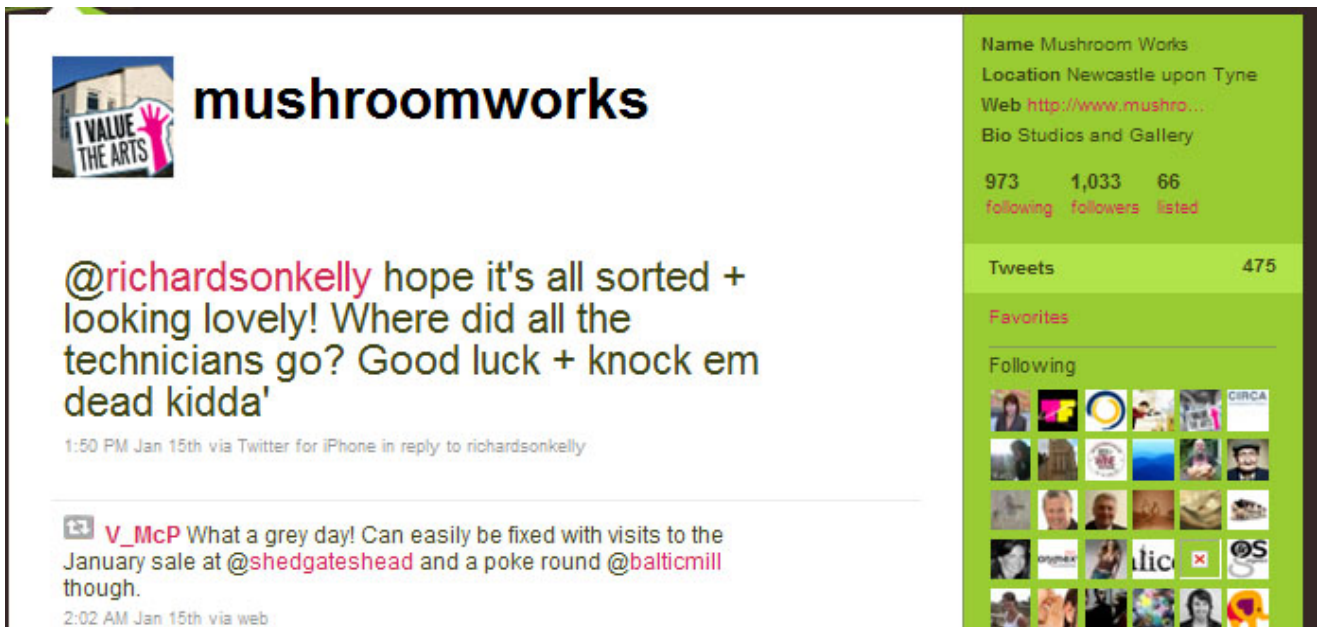
**Twitter:**

Link your Twitter feed from the home page of your website to make your website less static and update it quickly.

Twitter gives you a way of creating a live news feed to your website with up-to-the-minute news. It also lends your organisation a 'friendly voice' and gives users a peek 'behind the scenes'. Twitter can also be linked to your Facebook status update.

It is easy to put the Twitter plug-in/widget on your site. It can also help drive traffic to your website. However, it takes time to build up a following and effort to keep it up. The 140-character rule is limiting on content.

[www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)



**Ning networks:**

A useful way of setting up a social network around your studio organisation, generating cross-links with other studio groups, local and regional organisations and agencies, and sharing knowledge within studio provision sector.

NFASP has launched a NFASP Ning network and is encouraging regional groups to form within the network. This is an ideal way to foster discussions, interactivity, feedback, networking, forums and to post events. However, Ning is not yet as well known as other networks.

[www.ning.com/](http://www.ning.com/)

<http://nfaspmembers.ning.com/>

**MySpace:**

Large community and great entertainment options – videos, music, games, etc. But there are security issues, and it can look too chaotic. <http://www.myspace.com/>

**YouTube:**

Easy to upload video and add to your site, but not specialist for artists and the videos are limited in quality. You can create your own YouTube channel, i.e. a profile page that features all of your videos. There is a great accessibility feature on YouTube - transcripts for hearing impairment can be provided with the video, or even created automatically from speech recognition.

[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

**Vimeo:**

Like YouTube but for higher quality video as there is no bandwidth limit like YouTube. You can have a Vimeo plug-in widget on your site. Caters for a more creative audience. <http://vimeo.com/>

**Flickr:**

Many studio sites now include a link to a Flickr site to upload photos, record and document events. <http://www.flickr.com/>

**Posterous:**

This service allows you to update Facebook, Twitter, blogs and websites automatically in one go. Currently a free service but a premium service will replace it.

<http://posterous.com>

**Mobile devices:**

More and more you will need to make your site accessible to mobile devices, as these become an increasingly popular way of accessing the internet, eg. iPhone, touchscreen devices.

**Other Technical Issues****Monitoring usage**

**Google analytics** allows you to monitor usage of your website – and is free to use. It's an easy way of getting user feedback. [www.google.co.uk/analytics](http://www.google.co.uk/analytics)

You can also conduct your own basic user research by getting friends who don't know the organisation to look at the website and give you feedback.

**Web accessibility**

Web accessibility is the degree to which a website is accessible to all people, including those with impairments. **Making your site accessible** is a legal requirement under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002. Accessible sites are usually better sites, too, with the clearest content and widest possible audience.

Details of optimising for accessibility are relevant mainly to the web designer/developer, but it is good to be aware of them. Once your site has been created, you can check its accessibility compliance using automated tools. Web 2.0 has introduced many new interactive challenges, ie. Facebook, Twitter, eBaby, Iphone, iPhone. Think first: who do I exclude?

### Useful links:

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (W3C)

<http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>

<http://achecker.ca> (online checker)

<http://www.totalvalidator.com/validator/ValidatorForm> (online checker)

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/1995050.htm>

Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2001

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2001/20010010.htm>

PAS 78 (normally £30 from BSI, but this is a free Word copy)

[http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/pas78\\_word.doc](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/pas78_word.doc)

Information on free YouTube video captions and transcripts

[http://www.youtube.com/t/captions\\_about](http://www.youtube.com/t/captions_about)

For the complete document on Accessibility by AXIS, go to:

<http://nfaspmembers.ning.com/forum/topics/resources-from-value-added>

**Get Ambition:** An interesting case study on website accessibility can be read on [www.getambition.com](http://www.getambition.com) – Ambition is an organisation that helps arts organisations develop digitally. The organisation worked with North West Disability Arts Forum to create a pioneering, accessible website.

Read the case study here:

<http://www.getambition.com/resources/the-dada-story-ambition-case-study-2009/>

[www.getambition.com/resources](http://www.getambition.com/resources) - Get Ambition has a ning network, too.

**Links to all presentations – via [nfasp.org.uk](http://nfasp.org.uk) or the nfasp ning site**

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