



**DIGITAL BIRMINGHAM**  
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**NEW WEBSITE HELPS COMMUNITY GROUPS FIND THEIR VOICE**

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The pioneering work of Birmingham's vibrant social media community is being showcased in a new website supported by Digital Birmingham's Open City project.

BeVocal.org.uk has been developed by Birmingham social media consultant Nick Booth (AKA Podnosh), who describes it as "a site about social media for social good in Birmingham and using the internet to turn public data into something useful".

The site aims to highlight the work done by community organisations as they make better use of the internet and digital media tools, and show how they can access and use data from public bodies to help them, he said.

"BeVocal.org.uk brings together all of Birmingham's online social media activism in one place, and shows how, by using social media and digital tools, different people can change the way they tell their own story, the way they collaborate and the ways they organise themselves and campaign."

Digital Birmingham's Open City project is funded by the Department for communities and Local Government as part of its Timely Information for Citizens initiative, which aims to develop new tools for citizens to engage with councils and contribute more effectively to local decision-making.

Digital Birmingham's Economic Development Manager, Dave Harte, said:

"BeVocal.org.uk represents the initial stage of our Open City project.

It's intended to raise awareness of what you can do with public information that can help your cause or neighbourhood.

"We want to respond to people's needs rather than just create tools for the sake of it, and the website is helping us understand those needs and find the issues that we will address in the next stage of the project."

It's hoped that highlighting the work of the social media activists who support communities in this way will reinforce Birmingham's rising profile as a leader in social media activism, added Nick Booth.

"Birmingham has a high profile for its thriving community of bloggers and social media enthusiasts," he said. "We want to ensure it stays that way."

The BeVocal.org.uk team has organised a series of local social media surgeries to take the digital message out of the city centre and into the neighbourhoods, and demonstrate to community groups how blogging and other social media tools can be used to connect and communicate with local residents and opinion formers alike. To date, local surgeries have been held in Acocks Green and Lozells, complementing the regular surgeries held in central Birmingham.

The next stage of the Open City project will support the development of demonstrator projects to highlight how taking data from public bodies can be turned into useful information. The project will run until September 2009 when it will report back to government and, hopefully, influence future government support for projects of this kind.

ENDS (457 WORDS)

PIC CAPTION - The new BeVocal website at the first Lozells social media surgery: from top: Raj Rattu, managing director of community consultancy; John Heaven, project officer, Digital Birmingham; Nick Booth, social media consultant and founder of BeVocal.

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Digital Birmingham is a Birmingham City Council initiative and a strategic partnership of private, voluntary and public organisations throughout the city. It aims to establish Birmingham as a leading European digital city in 2010 and ensure that the benefits of digital technologies are available to all in the city. For more information visit [www.digitalbirmingham.co.uk](http://www.digitalbirmingham.co.uk).