

VICNET OFFLINE

Background

VICNET is a community networking enterprise of world significance based at the State Library Victoria, aimed at empowering Victorians in the information age with the capabilities to publish, share and find information and to participate in online communities both locally and globally.

It has done this since 1994 by pursuing strategies in three areas;

1. Information Management
2. Community Development, and
3. Access Services.

To this end it has:

- *Established one of Australia's first ISPs, now providing access using wireless, fibre and DSL.*
- *Connected every library in Victoria to the Internet for public access.*
- *Rated in the top ten news sites in the country, according to Nielsen Net ratings, currently attracting 20 million visits per year to one of the biggest websites in Australia.*
- *Enabled thousands of community, business and government groups to publish on the Internet for the first time, including the Age, the Public Record Office, The Melbourne Comedy, Fringe and Film Festivals, the Grand Prix as well as Save Albert Park.*
- *Trained over 100,000 people, including seniors, disabled people, those with NESB and aboriginal people, in Internet use via Skills.net training centres.*
- *Toured Victoria continuously with its Internet Roadshow since 1997 and delivered over 25,000 training hours since 2000.*
- *Helped 38,000 people join online communities in it's My Connected Community (mc²) project.*
- *Begun working to bring broadband Internet to rural communities in areas of market failure.*
- *Partnered with DHS to deliver broadband access, support and training to state-funded kindergartens across Victoria*

This work has been enabled in the past by thriving ISP business activities, Multimedia Victoria, the Community Support Fund, BHP, Cisco, Sun Microsystems, Networking the Nation, DHS and many hundreds of volunteers.

VICNET will be 10 years old this month, as the State Library Victoria turns 150.

There are currently 60 staff employed at Vicnet.

State Library Victoria are proposing to cut half of these jobs on 30 June.

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What will be cut?

Skills.net & Skills.net Roadshow

Skills.net is a community-based program to provide affordable internet training and access to people who wouldn't otherwise have access to the internet.

Skills.net projects, coordinated by community organisations such as neighborhood houses, community centres and public libraries, are giving Victorians the skills and online services they need to understand the Internet and make the Net work.

The Skills.net program has trained and provided access to more than 100,000 members of the Victorian community.

In particular, Skills.net is assisting technologically disadvantaged communities, including those in rural and remote Victoria, people with disabilities, women, older Victorians, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, indigenous Australians and low income earners.

An integral part of Skills.net has been its Roadshow.

Since 1997 a mobile 'Internet classroom' has been travelling around Victoria, working with local community organisations to raise awareness and to promote the benefits of using the Internet.

The Skills.net Roadshow introduces beginners to the Internet and provides training to those Victorians who are not connected to the Internet at home or have not used the Internet for more than five hours in the last month or do not use the Internet as part of their work.

In June 2000, the Skills.net Roadshow was recognised internationally when it was selected as a finalist in the world's largest information society competition, the Stockholm Challenge Exhibition.

Building upon the success of the Skills.net Roadshow the State Government of Victoria launched a second Roadshow in July 2000 to meet community demand in metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria.

Since September 2000.

VICNET has achieved;

24,453 TRAINING HOURS

1,821 TRAINING COURSES

11,667 PEOPLE TRAINED

5,795 PEOPLE [55+]

941 PEOPLE [NESB]

1,505 PEOPLE [UNEMPLOYED]

5,405 PEOPLE [RURAL]

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1. My Connected Community (mc²)

My connected community (mc²) ensures that community groups are provided with the support and tools needed to build an online community.

mc² provides training and online resources to enable community groups to:

- *publish online*
- *network with members*
- *extend group membership and activities*
- *communicate with other communities of interest, either locally or worldwide*
- *establish a website*

The key objective of mc² is to rapidly stimulate the development of online communities of interest within Victoria.

Community Leaders are selected from community groups (including cultural and sporting clubs, associations, special interest and social groups) who are willing to develop an online community of interest amongst their members and the wider population.

There are currently 19 staff in these areas of Vicnet.

State Library Victoria has advised 17 of these staff that they are surplus to requirements and will not be employed beyond 30th June.

2. GO Vic

GO Vic is a Victorian Government initiative to give Victorians, especially those in regional and remote areas, better access to the information they need to use the Internet in their everyday lives.

The GO Vic Roadshow, with its computer-laden, Internet-enabled van, travels throughout Victoria and the outer metropolitan area, helping Victorians:

- understand what the Internet can do for them in their day to day lives.
- access information on government through the Internet
- locate online resources of interest to them and their community.
- find out about where to get free or affordable Internet training
- find out about where to access the Internet in their community.

This service will be cut entirely.

3. Call Centre

The Vicnet Call Centre receives 10,000 calls per year from public libraries and community organisations needing technical support.

More than half the call centre staff are to be cut. 7 staff will be cut to just 3.

Demand on line VICNET services and visit www.cpsuvic.org to assist the campaign

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Conclusion

Tools for forming online communities, associated training, and funding grants will all be affected.

Because the original aim was to establish a mass of internet expertise within Victoria, its impact will be economic in a direct and indirect way. Groups won't be getting funding, so jobs will go. The numbers that go onto establish businesses and do e-commerce will no longer increase.

Intercommunity contact will be affected.

There are a number of contracts the SLV Board has entered into with community groups which run until the end of 2005. These groups are unaware that SLV will not be able to meet their contractual obligations as a result of these cuts.

Confidential advice on sensitive issues is provided in support forums operating on mc².

Cuts to this service will impact on the viability of the groups and the well being of the members of those groups.

Skills.net Roadshow and GoVic are being cut. They provide training and information involving government services and internet use. Trainers do training on site. It is community focused. It is a resource that can and has been more generally mobilised for government use, e.g. mobilised during the bushfires, enabling firefighters to contact their families during the crisis.

There will be cuts to Vicnet infrastructure and call centre. The call centre supports Skills.net, mc², the Vicnet website, and the new Department of Human Services program to provide kindergartens with Internet connectivity and training. The ability of Vicnet to support those things will be compromised.

Vicnet hosts thousands of websites. The websites will stay, but the support will be limited and the training will be non-existent.

Public Internet access in Victorian libraries has been the most successful public Internet access rollout of all the states. Cuts will create danger of operational failure.

The number of call centre staff being cut is 4, from 7 to 3. There will be less people to deal with the enquiries and calls. Less people available to trouble shoot and fix problems.

There has been no consultation with staff or stakeholders, no risk assessment has been undertaken, and the SLV brains behind the proposal have published the organisational chart on staff bulletin boards highlighting the names of those staff who will be sacked. Red if you're sacked, green if you're staying.

KAREN BATT
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