

## Connect, engage, benefit

Socitm members tell us that one of the biggest benefits they get from membership is the opportunity to meet and engage with other members. Not just for the formal business of their professional society, but also to network informally, obtain information and swap stories.

It used to be the case that networking required physical meetings. Regional groups, special interest groups, annual conferences and one-off special events facilitated this. However, these are limited by members' ability to get time out of the office and travel. The world is quickly changing today, with geographical, time and resource limitations being overcome by very effective online complements to physical meetings. Socitm is embracing this change and we strongly encourage our community of members and partners to do likewise; so let's connect together and engage around common interests to mutual benefit.

### **Connect**

Socitm's primary purpose is to serve its members. In order to find out how best to do this, there is a formal consultation and reporting structure: the Socitm Board, the Member Advisory Council, the Research Steering Group, the Technology Board, local meetings across twelve regions and three Annual Conferences. All of these require members to travel in order to participate, taking up both time and money.

Such a conventional structure ends up discriminating against those who are time or resource poor, and those who are distant from London and other national or regional centres. Yes, other vehicles are used to engage widely and less formally - like the regular broadcast emails and surveys of the membership - but these are very much one-way communications originating from Socitm outwards. They don't help members network at the person-to-person level.

One immediately thinks of how we solve similar problems in our wider social and professional lives using social networks, such as Skype, Facebook and LinkedIn. So why don't we do more in a similar vein within the Socitm community? We could tap into the obvious opportunity to engage with many more members and increase the volume and quality of outcomes for all.

### **Engage**

We have created a new Socitm Network within the already well-established online Knowledge Hub service ([www.khub.net](http://www.khub.net)). This network comprises a suite of groups that members can access according to their membership type.

Groups can be made open to all Knowledge Hub users. This encourages the widest membership and engagement on the topics that group members choose to share, e.g. the Socitm Open group. Other groups can be task or topic-oriented and

restricted to specific sets of people if need be, e.g. the Socitm Member, Insight Research and Benchmarking groups.

Each group has a set of standard functions available to it:

- group activity log with notifications
- forum service
- library service
- blogging service, with any member able to start a private or shared blog
- wiki service
- events calendar
- ideas log
- group member directory.

Members can get to their groups directly from the dashboard view that opens up after signing into the Socitm website ([www.socitm.net](http://www.socitm.net)). Alternatively, Knowledge Hub's own sign-in process ([www.khub.net](http://www.khub.net)) takes you to your home page in the network.

### **Our plan for the Socitm network**

We are working with Knowledge Hub to more deeply integrate with the Socitm website. We want to make one seamless online experience.

We also want to add access to the Socitm Network via the Socitm Android and iOS apps for smartphones and tablets. We see this as critical to making use of the online groups a natural and effective membership benefit.

### **Benefit**

Here are some examples of benefits particular to online engagement:

### **Real-time experience and information sharing**

In the Open group, Nick O'Reilly, Director of Information Systems at Derby City Council and Socitm Vice President, has been real-time blogging his organisation's cloud journey in 18 episodes covering June 2013 to the present day. This is a good example of valuable shared content that is emergent over time. There is no need to wait for a formal Socitm publication of a case study to be learning from their experience right now. A summary review publication may follow in due course, but real time access to the source now is precisely the kind of thing that social networks excel at facilitating. It is quick and effective.

### **Bottom-up activism instead of top-down initiatives**

In the Women In IT group, Nadira Hussain, Customer Services Transformation Manager at London Borough of Tower Hamlets and Socitm President, is organising and galvanising a programme of activity focused on empowering women in a digital world. We all know there is

a serious skills shortage and general gender imbalance in the IT profession. Various top-down initiatives have failed to seriously dent these problems in the past, but there are new means of bottom-up, network-based activism in the online tools available now. Anybody with an interest can engage by contributing an opinion or highlighting something they have found or seen. There is a new channel here to find and give mutual support in an area that can be personally and organisationally difficult to handle.

### **Wider Research Steering Group participation**

Socitm's policy and research activities are guided by consultation with members channelled through the Research Steering Group. The group is a small number of member volunteers and Socitm Research representatives who meet in London three times a year. Meetings are informed by the results of periodic surveys of members' interests and current issues, e.g. the IT Trends questionnaires.

We plan to complement this meeting pattern and limited, formal engagement with wider, informal interaction facilitated by a new online Socitm Research group in the Knowledge Hub. Participants will be kept informed of the developing research agenda and have opportunity to voice opinions and make suggestions directly to the Research Steering Group. Geographic, time and resource constraints need no longer be a barrier to participation in setting the agenda. The results will be even more relevant and timely by letting the policy and research agendas develop more organically in this fashion.

### **Rome wasn't built in a day: proactive facilitation and participation needed**

A quick reality check: we spend more time per day at work engaging electronically by email and email attachments than by other digital means - true? Email dominates, despite its drawbacks as a networking tool, because of its ubiquity. We need to make social networking complements to email ubiquitous too.

Experience with online communities time and again (re-)discovers a 3-part recipe for success:

1. Communities reward individuals through the **co-creation of value**.
2. There is **a sense of ownership and a plan of activity**; somebody wants to work to make this a success.
3. The **technology doesn't get in the way**; if it isn't easy, people will not use it, unless it is so valuable that they will use it no matter what the cost.

It would be unreasonable to expect the Socitm community to suddenly start moving en masse to the Socitm Network on Knowledge Hub. As per the recipe, we are encouraging participation by adding groups to serve important and useful purposes that help us co-create value.

Socitm will take the lead in some group ownership, facilitation and activity driving. But it does not have to be Socitm all the way. We can now encourage any member who feels moved to put their hand up and kick off a new group or an activity stream within an existing group. It is by tapping into the synergy of (1) and (2) above that the very best outcomes will be achieved.

As for (3) above, as mentioned before, developers in Knowledge Hub and Socitm are working to clear the pathway. We know already that there is much that we can do to improve matters, but do not let that stop you getting involved if something is not right, just plain clunky or could be 'So much better if...'. As per (2) above, if a good number of us show we care enough, then action will follow all the more quickly.

### Joining in

All Socitm members are entitled to use the Socitm Network on the Knowledge Hub platform. If you haven't had a look yet, why not do that next?

<https://www.socitm.net/help/knowledge-hub-login-process>

### Closing remarks

The world is changing to one where online networks of colleagues and peers are becoming an essential mechanism for collaborating and sharing resources, and for co-creating new ideas and knowledge.

Socitm is embracing this change and we want to bring you along. We hope you agree that this is the correct direction of travel, and we hope to see you online in the Socitm Network and getting benefit from being active in it.

If you disagree, please let us know why; but can we be a little bit cheeky and ask you to do that via a post in the Socitm Members group? Registration is free and easy for Socitm members!

[khub.net/group/socitm-member](http://khub.net/group/socitm-member)

### The view from Knowledge Hub

# Knowledgehub

With 115,000 active users from over 450 UK public sector organisations, spread across 1,700 groups, Knowledge Hub's vision is to connect the global public sector by enabling its service users to work together, regardless of traditional organisational or geographical boundaries.

The most successful communities on Knowledge Hub are those that come together to solve common challenges and have clear purpose. Their success can be measured by longevity and engagement levels, driven by relevance; creating a common place to engage with like-minded people and making a difference to the day job. The [Planning Advisory Service](#), the [Web Improvement & Usage Community](#) and the [GeoPlace Authority Contacts Group](#) are all good examples. In time, the new Socitm Network community should become one also.

We know that when collaboration in communities works well it generates cost savings, avoids duplication of effort and supports better employee and stakeholder engagement. However, we also know that building communities takes time and commitment, which is why we at Knowledge Hub provide help and support on building online communities for organisations like Socitm.

The community is the heart of Knowledge Hub and the interactions between members are its life-blood. We will work hard to ensure Knowledge Hub's support for the Socitm Network stays relevant and continues to bring value based on real and relevant feedback from its members; **we welcome your feedback.**

The power of the network is critical to future success, so we encourage you to join today and to encourage your colleagues to join too. You can access the Socitm Network on the Knowledge Hub service using your Socitm website log in via your Socitm member's dashboard. (If you haven't already registered on the Socitm website to access your member's dashboard, please do it now.)

If you are already registered on the Knowledge Hub, search for the Socitm Network and ask to join it there.

### How do we do it?

We provide a free to use service by tapping into the significant digital advertising market spend; specifically, from those supply side organisations wishing to engage with Knowledge Hub service users.

We enable subscribing organisations, like Socitm, to gain access to a new revenue stream through the Knowledge Hub income-share model.

You can read more about [our plans](#) here.

### Your feedback and sharing additional information

We encourage members to share any feedback or additional information about the subject of this briefing via the *Insight* group in the Socitm Network at: <https://khub.net/web/socitm-insight>

If you have not already signed up for the Knowledge Hub and enabled system notifications of *Insight* group activity (by user-selected periodic email to your inbox), then please do so or contact the Socitm office for assistance if you are having difficulties getting onto the Network.

*Insight* publications are published via the Socitm *Insight* Group in the Socitm Network on Knowledge Hub.



Socitm *Insight* is a subscription service to which over 400 local authorities and other public and private sector organisations now belong. It identifies and encourages good ICT management practice.

Socitm *Insight* has produced a series of comprehensive and detailed guides on all major ICT themes linked to the critical issues of the day, which provide valuable advice and support for ICT practitioners and all involved in application of ICT.

#### **Socitm *Insight* Programme**

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