

Communities coming together to share their history

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By Charlotte Knight

- Education

*A closer look at NT100 2013 project, Historypin
by Nick Stanhope, founder of [Historypin](#) and CEO of [We Are What We Do](#)*

[Historypin](#) was launched in 2011, after two years of R&D and beta testing, with a mission to help bring people together, from across different generations and cultures, to share and explore the history of their communities

Nick Stanhope, founder of [Historypin](#).

With the support of Google, Nominet Trust, and inclusion in the Trust's [Social Tech Guide](#), [Historypin](#) has established a good profile and a core community of users that harnessed its tools, which allow users to map, curate and tell stories with images, documents, audio and video, from intergenerational projects at schools to opening up archival collections at major museums.

Over the last three years, over 55,000 individuals and 1,700 libraries, archives and museums from around the world have contributed 350,000 materials and memories and run hundreds local projects. Many of these projects, run with partners such as [Reading Museum in 2011/12](#) and [Fujitsu, GLOCOM and the British Council in Fujinomiya, Japan, in 2013/14](#), have been thoroughly measured for their impact on participants and their communities, and demonstrated a tangible and sustained effect on inter-generational connections and local civic participation.

As [Historypin](#) has been developing, the non-profit company behind it, [We Are What We Do \(WAWWD\)](#), has been evolving and refining its approach to behaviour change and product design quite rapidly. Our current [partnership with the Nominet Trust, which supports WAWWD's R&D work over three years](#), has allowed us to reflect these changes in the way we work, including the establishment of a dedicated research and evaluation team and new strategic and product management experience in the technical team. This new lens and more rigorous process have combined with considerable data gathered over the last three years to help us plot a clearer path into the future.

The best structure for describing this path is through a set of innovation criteria

that we've been working on with the Nominet Trust over the last year. These criteria define good social tech development through three strands of value: social value, user value and financial value. These strands are so useful for early stage social innovators like us because it's easy to neglect one or more of these strands of value and fail to establish strong, balanced foundations for new services.

Historypin's social value

The most important progress we have made by applying these criteria to Historypin has been in reassessing and redefining its social value.

The early ideas for Historypin, in 2009, emerged from research into the extent of the divide between older and younger generations and the effect of this divide, particularly on social isolation. More inter-generational contact and less social isolation would flow, we suggested, from better access to more mutually compelling, naturally collaborative activities, such as community archiving and storytelling.

Despite seeing evidence for these outcomes, in different forms and to varying degrees, we undertook a new phase of impact assessment and research in 2013. We sought to establish a singular, measurable intended outcome that could be more clearly linked, through our evidence and others, to a core Historypin behaviour or narrow set of behaviours.

Through this fascinating work, led by our Research and Evaluation team, we have found that Historypin generates its strongest social value in local communities, through the growth of local groups and networks that collaborate to create a shared local asset with high perceived value.

Therefore, Historypin should focus on the generation of social capital at a local level by equipping and supporting local organisers to run flourishing and sustainable local community archiving groups. The more that Historypin, through its brand and technology and its effect on these organisers, adds purpose and energy to these groups, the more diverse they become and the more rewarding participants find them. In turn, the stronger this diversity and the greater these rewards, the more that we can see and measure the effect on issues such as social isolation and health.

Historypin's user value

This renewed focus has considerable implications for the ongoing creation of user value. We have shifted our focus from participants in local heritage activities to those that organise them. A focus on supporting these community leaders, who already make up the majority of Historypin's active community, allows us to achieve greater scale, as they are helped to grow and sustain their local groups and networks. Ultimately, these users have more specific needs and we have to provide a different sort of value for them. A new set of tools that will be launched this summer, initially targeted at local organisers running First World War Centenary community activities, have emerged from this more

focused brief.

We'll use these tools and other new prototypes to try and answer some complex, challenging questions about the role of technology in generating offline behaviours and community. Millions of people participating online isn't our ultimate purpose. However, it's clear from our own work and others that online communities have huge potential to boost, sustain and provide a focus for offline community collaboration. Furthermore, the right technology can energise and help facilitate local activities themselves.

Historypin's economic value

Historypin has established solid financial foundations, with a balance of income streams across grant funding, business-to-business services and partnerships with academic and cultural institutions. However, as with many social ventures, it has lacked investment in the core product. Over the last three years, while a commercial venture would likely have capital investment structured to provide headspace for core development, we have taken on over 80 different income-generating partnerships. These have come with over 80 sets of partner deliverables and accounts to manage.

Our ambitions for much stronger strands of user and social value demand considerably greater attention and resources for core product development. Our revenue strategy reflects these needs, with a much narrower scope for partnerships, a move towards off-the-shelf services and the active pursuit of social investment for core development.

Historypin is still going strong, five years after its conception and three years since its launch. It has a great team, financial stability and a clear, focused strategy for increasing its social and user value. The next two years will be crucial for demonstrating its potential to deliver this value at real scale and with genuine sustainability.