The Government recently published an interim report on the Digital Britain initiative, its project "to secure the UK's place at the forefront of innovation, investment and quality in the digital and communications industries".

Digital Britain is based on the belief that the digital economy can outperform the rest of the market in terms of providing jobs, developing skills and generating income. The report contains more than 20 recommendations, including eye-catching proposals for "universal broadband connectivity" - getting every household online and using broadband by 2012. There are hurdles to overcome to realise this ambition, not least those of supply (some areas currently can't get broadband at the 2Mbps speed the report recommends in order to upload and download information efficiently) and demand (only 59 per cent of households currently have broadband).

However, the Government clearly feels these obstacles are surmountable, so charities need to consider what this might mean for them. The year 2012 is not that far away. In its simplest sense, the challenge can be broken into three areas: content, visibility and digital literacy skills.

If 100 per cent of homes have broadband, old media consumption will continue to decline. A strong online presence will therefore become even more important than it already is.

It's no use having great content if nobody knows who you are, so make sure people can find you through internet search engines and that your site is easy to navigate. Good branding, design and a recognisable online profile matter if you want your organisation to stand out.

Charities should also ensure that their staff and, in many cases, beneficiaries have the skills and knowledge to benefit from a fully digital Britain. No doubt the BBC, government, schools and others will all play a role in developing these skills, but many people will inevitably be self-taught. Charities should therefore encourage their staff to follow them on a digital journey so that the whole organisation is in a position to understand and benefit from the potential of universal broadband. Those who don't risk being left behind.

George W Bush once asked: "Will the highways on the internet become more few?" That's a difficult one to answer, but the direction of traffic is clear. Where we're going we don't need roads, but it looks like we're all going to need broadband. So buckle up and get ready for the ride.

Digital media

Broadband becoming essential

Damian Radcliffe is the manager for English regions at Ofcom and writes in a personal capacity

Medium and message

Skin cancer charity Skcin created a hoax website to warn people about the dangers of too much tanning

Tan-tastic: the site tricks users into a free 'tanning session'

Skin cancer charity Skcin has created www.computerfan.com, a hoax website for sun-worshippers that claims to turn the "electrical impulse delivered to your PC into radiant factor-free UVC rays" to give visitors a suntan through their computer screens. Visitors are invited to start a free online 'tanning session' by a presenter strutting through a busy office. If they accept, bars resembling lamps from a glowing sunbed appear on screen. After a few seconds the bars are replaced with images of cancerous lesions and the warning: "Don't be fooled. UV exposure can kill."

Visitors are then directed to the charity's main site and given the option to "hug a friend" by forwarding the hoax site's address.

The site is part of Skcin's most recent campaign to educate people about skin cancer. An advertising agency helped create the website, and flyers and adverts promoting the free online tanning sessions were distributed across London.

Richard Clifford, founder of the charity, said it wanted to target 16 to 34-year-olds, the demographic most at risk of damaging their skin through exposure to the sun. "This target audience is notoriously difficult to engage," he says. "The campaign embraced new media in an engaging way. It was humorous, communicated a serious issue and enabled us to reach people quickly."

Almost 500,000 people visited the website in its first week and the campaign was covered by BBC News, The Daily Telegraph, The Sun and Fox News in the US.

Tamara Hinson

Site Visit www.breastcancercare.org.uk

Organisation Breast Cancer Care
Agency Enable Interactive
Spend £100,000
Accessibility No W3C accessibility rating

Breast Cancer Care provides medical and emotional support for people affected by breast cancer. It relaunched its website in February.

Development

The charity carried out research among women affected by the disease to identify what they wanted from the new site. It was then designed to include integrated discussion forums and support networks.

Design and content

The home page is clear and colourful, and visitors are immediately invited to join the community by registering, joining forums and setting up messaging accounts.

Large tabs to the left of the page provide users with links to information on breast health, diagnosis and treatment and living with breast cancer.

At the top of the page is a series of smaller links that allow users to find out more about the charity, donate, make press enquiries and find out how to get involved in fundraising activities. There are also details of Breast Cancer Care's clinical team and its latest research and publications.

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Innovation 3
Content 4

Each section has the same layout and format as the home page, which makes it easy to navigate and explore the content.

Special features

Information about the disease is always accompanied by handy links to related support services, including relevant discussion posts, video clips and media articles. There is also a link to 'ask the nurse', where users can request a response from a health professional.

Breast Cancer Care says:
"By far the most used and useful part of the old site was the online community section. We felt that by making the community the central point of our new digital strategy, we could provide the best possible service to people affected by breast cancer".

Sarah Townsend