

Internet Forums for Coordinating Groups and Teams

Introduction

Increasingly, teams and working communities are scattered between different offices, companies and different countries and time-zones. Using email to coordinate these teams and team tasks is problematic. To work effectively a more robust and controlled environment is needed. This can usually be best provided by secure Internet Forums. These have many benefits, including:

- It is easier to support individuals and teams through a process
- Knowing exactly what all people can see and access
- All communications can be easily found and don't become lost users' inboxes
- Messages never get lost "in the system" or spam filters
- Past communications, decisions and document status can easily referenced and audited
- Information can be viewed and structured in different ways to help manage and navigate through information as it builds up over time
- It is easy to incorporate other decision making tools.



What is the Best Internet Forum?

Well... there are many options, and indeed most have distinct advantages over email. However, the real answer to the question is that it depends upon what sort of interaction you want to encourage and how you want to manage the process.

The Centre for Networked Learning has a range of "free to use" forums to suit almost any purpose. In most cases a secure, password protected forum is needed to enable confidential discussions and project work. However, in some cases, you may need to extend your private forum to provide a public space for dissemination and external input.

What else do you need?

Of course, you need more than just the forum software to make the project a success. The Centre for Networked Learning has a range of services designed to make it all work:

- **Secure Hosting.** CFNL is able to host project forums and associated tools on a secure, reliable, fast access Internet sever, with all the necessary services such as backup, performance monitoring and usage statistics.
- **Trained Facilitators.** CFNL is able to provide trained facilitators, or provide face-to-face or remote training and support for your project chairs and facilitators.
- **User Help.** CFNL is able to support users with an email and telephone technical helpdesk to help people use or access the forums, including firewall issues and reminding or resetting passwords.
- **Forum Management.** CFNL is able to provide forum management services, or advice to enable such things as archiving, restructuring or splitting groups as content grows and the group evolves.
- **Additional Tools.** CFNL is able to provide additional standard or bespoke functionality to meet project needs, such as:
 - Surveys
 - Approval processes for anonymous public posts
 - Integrating podcasts or other media



More?

If you wish to find out more about providing and supporting Internet forums, please contact Matt Dower at Centre for Networked Learning at matt@cfnl.co.uk.