

How to Survive the Modern World

An International On-line Community and Advice Centre

Summary

Introduction

There are now more and more people questioning whether they feel truly happy or at home in the modern world, and whether it really enables them to live the sort of lives they want to lead. They may be questioning the lack of time we have, the inequality in the world, vacuous celebrity culture, the power of advertising or any of the many other annoyances of the modern world.

Those of us who feel this way can often feel isolated when the modern world is dominated by this thinking and the majority of people around us don't seem to 'get it'. But we know that lots of people *do* 'get it' and in this site we want to build a massive virtual community of these people and organisations, and help them all to live the lives and seek the future they really want. Essentially, it is creating a new, alternative society.

The majority of the community's content will be developed by members sharing their ideas, insights, information and simply interacting with each other, as they would in any other community.

There are many elements to the SMW community – you can find out about other people, ideas, articles, ethical shops, organisations, books, events and a wide range of other things. The site isn't simply devoted to 'ethical' things either – it is about anything that members feel is missing from mainstream modern life, so this may include cultural events (art, music etc.), community projects, intellectual output, nature, loafing or simply things that are fun!

The community model can be likened to 'MySpace', although it has a specific constituency and a different emphasis that will bring out different features.

On another part of the site, we at SMW will add to the web of ideas and thinking by giving our own advice and insights and also asking well-known thinkers to contribute their thoughts.

Overall Aims

The overall aims of the site are:

- To build a community of people and organisations who feel disenfranchised by the modern world, in order to provide a sense of belonging for these members and enable them to build up substantial shared information resources on various areas and a thriving on-line community;
- To offer advice, insight and expert opinion to help people understand, survive and live the lives they want within the modern world.

1. The Community

Membership

The community consists of members who register with SMW and each set up a profile. This profile includes the usual personal information associated with networking sites, but also includes the ability to present other things to the community. Listed below is a non-exhaustive range of

functions that members could use the SMW community for:

- Networking
- Posting Articles, tips, opinions, observations, ideas
- Signposting and recommending events – from lectures to walks to gigs
- Signposting and recommending interests – including music and books
- Signposting and recommending local groups
- Signposting and recommending campaigns
- Signposting and recommending organisations or schemes
- Car Sharing
- Classified ads

Members are split into individuals and organisations. It is free for individuals to register and create a profile. Organisations have slightly different profiles from individuals. Organisations are split into not-for-profit groups, for whom registration is free, and profit-based companies, who are charged a registration fee and a fee for each hit they receive within the site.

Searching

An important feature of SMW is the user's (members and visitors alike) ability to view the community in two ways:

1. To look at the profiles of individual members, which will include their articles, links, events, ideas etc.
2. To run classified searches on some of the things that members have put in their profiles and made available for searching. For example, articles. A search facility will enable users to search all articles written by members, classified by topic, date, member ratings and various other categories. This aspect of SMW has the potential to become a 'people's think tank'. Users will be able to search on many other things in this way (such as organisations, schemes, campaigns, music recommendations, events etc.), and some of these will enable SMW to become a comprehensive signposting and noticeboard function for both the community and other site visitors interested in finding out about these things. Thus, the more the community contributes, the more it attracts new members and promotes its cause.

Ratings

Almost everything on SMW can be rated by members – except other individual members! Members are able to rate organisational members, articles, events, and various other items on the site. This function provides another means of distinguishing between the large number of options in a busy community.

Local Groups

One longer term possibility for SMW beyond the virtual community is to enable members to set up local groups which meet regularly, either simply as social events (see the 'Green Social' idea at www.changestar.uk/initiatives.htm) or to reflect one or more of the other functions of the SMW community (nature, intellectual pursuits, political campaigning, culture etc.). SMW will encourage members to set up local groups and networks from the start – the longer term possibility may be for SMW to set up an official network of local groups.

2. SMW Resources

Summary

SMW itself will provide a number of resources on a section of the site separate from the community. These resources will consist of articles, ideas, insights and advice from members of the SMW team plus other parties who have been invited to contribute. They may also include schemes (such as 'just think...' – see www.justthink.org.uk) to help users live the lives they want.

Below are some examples of areas on which resources might be provided:

- **Perspective** – tools, information and ideas to help people develop perspective on their lives and the world;
- **How the world works** – accessible analysis and information to show how various aspects of the world function (political processes, energy supply, marketing, food production etc.)
- **Surviving the modern world** - advice on how to build and retain your intellectual independence, how to be 'you' at work, how to manage your thinking in order to be happy etc.
- **Articles** – features from guest writers on issues of interest to the community, including philosophy, politics, nature, culture and many other things.
- **Moan Blog** – documenting aspects of the modern world that are annoying or affecting SMW people – e.g. service stations, celebrity culture, 4x4's, advertising, boring conversations, rudeness etc.
- **Praise Blog** – documenting aspects of the world that SMW people are enjoying – e.g. a walk in the hills, a lie-in, a pint, a farmer's market etc.
- **Events** – at some point, the organisation might wish to run social events (both local and national), courses (e.g. 'just think...' and Perspective Weekends in which people are given the chance to 'stand back from their busy lives and gain perspective)

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www.changestar.co.uk