Lessons from Intersect’s Engagement Experience

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\textbf{INTRODUCTION}

Over the last three years Intersect has grown from a single employee to approximately forty. One constant during that period is that every non-trivial project and service we have provided has been based on highly interactive engagement with the research community: approximately one quarter of our staff are dedicated to engagement, and are embedded across our member organisations. Even within that constancy, we have tried many approaches, both strategic and tactical, to engaging the research community. We’ve learned many lessons – some confirming our suspicions, some confounding our expectations. This presentation summarises the lessons we’ve learned, with a view to sharing our experience with the wider eResearch community.

\textbf{SOME LESSONS WE’VE LEARNED}

The following topics will be covered (albeit briefly), with answers to the following questions\textsuperscript{1}:

- Distance makes the legs grow weary: Intersect is a distributed organisation, with eResearch analysts on campus in Lismore, Armidale, Wollongong, Newcastle, Penrith and the Sydney CBD? How do you maintain a sense of team, share workloads, re-use effort and not go mad in airport terminals?
- If you build it, they won’t come: Why do some eResearch projects seem to be greeted with enthusiasm, and others lie unused? (A.K.A Why technology-driven eResearch is almost certainly a waste of time).
- One size fits some: Each of Intersect’s members fits on a spectrum in terms of the eResearch support for their researchers. Determining the best model of engagement is a challenge in its own right. How does one devise a unifying model that strikes the right compromises and refinements.
- Anytime recommencement: The most important person on a project is the product owner. What do you do while your academic is overseas for a month?
- Outsiders, inside. Being an external organisation wholly owned by your members brings all of the disadvantages of being both an outsider and an insider. What advantages does it bring?
- Embedded Reporting. How close should your eResearch Analysts get to their researchers and institutions?
- The gift that keeps on giving: what kinds of engagement leads to the best value for both the university, and to an eResearch service organisation?

\textbf{ABOUT THE AUTHOR}

Dr Joe Thurbon is the Member Services Manager at Intersect, as well as the eResearch Analyst at Southern Cross University. He has a research background in logic and diagrammatic reasoning, and has practiced software engineering for almost 20 years. For the eight years prior to joining Intersect, Joe worked at CISRA, Canon’s Australian R&D company, researching and developing machine learning approaches to image processing problems.

Joe has a BSc (Hons) from the University of Sydney in computer science and psychology, and a PhD in computer science from the University of New South Wales.

\textsuperscript{1} No guarantees about the correctness of the answers!