Evaluation of The Shed Online

Summary report

Beyond Blue Limited (beyondblue)

December 2012
Background

*beyondblue* appointed Deloitte Access Economics to undertake an evaluation of The Shed Online (TSO), an online platform for men (particularly those over 55 years) to socialise, learn and share skills as well as providing information on health and well-being.

With a view to providing recommendations for *beyondblue* to inform future provision, the evaluation of this public health initiative has two main objectives:

- To examine user experience of TSO; and
- To assess the performance of TSO against its stated objectives:
  - to create a social and interactive online community that strengthens wellbeing;
  - to provide access to information about health and the health system;
  - to increase awareness of depression and anxiety;
  - to decrease levels of stigma of depression and anxiety; and
  - to encourage men to seek help.

The purposes of this evaluation are to:

- highlight areas where TSO can improve its performance to better meet its objectives, as well as feedback on what aspects are working; and
- provide recommendations as to how to retain Shed Online members and increase the number of members, visitors and interactions.

Methodology

In line with the objectives and purposes, this evaluation was designed to comprise four complementary methodological components:

- **Web analytics and analysis of member demographics**
  Demographic data for members were extracted from a membership database by *beyondblue*. Other website statistics were extracted from Google Analytics with access granted by *beyondblue*. The observation period for website statistics was between 1 March 2012 and 31 August 2012. A range of web metrics was examined in this analysis.

- **Qualitative thematic content analysis of forum discussion**
  Content analysis was conducted on a select set of forum discussions under the topic areas of “Lifestyle, family and relationships” and “Physical and mental health”. Wall posts were extracted and coded by themes, for the purpose of descriptive quantitative and qualitative analyses.

- **Semi-structured telephone interviews with current and past members**
  This part of the evaluation was to gain an in-depth understanding of interviewees’ experience with using TSO and to inform the development of an online survey.

- **Online survey of user experience**
  This cross-sectional survey invited participation from all registered members of TSO and other visitors to the website. The survey measured the characteristics of survey participants; their involvement with the TSO website; their experience with using TSO, including the discussion forums; and their suggestions to improve TSO.
Major findings

Coverage of TSO

There is evidence that TSO’s reach extended beyond the target male population (those aged 55 or over and those in non-metropolitan areas). While web analytics data and survey responses indicated that the target group were in the majority, a smaller but substantial proportion of members were aged below 55 years of age (Table iChart i) and from a metropolitan area (Chart ii-b). This suggests that an online platform was beneficial for a broader group of men than those in the target group.

Chart i: Age distribution of TSO registered members

There appears to be scope to expand membership and visitor coverage in certain geographic areas. Coverage of TSO membership and website visits was broadly proportional to the population of men in different jurisdictions, and in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas (Chart ii). However, there were geographical variations, with a lower reach in areas such as Western Australia and the Northern Territory and in areas outside of Brisbane and Hobart (not shown).

Chart ii: Distribution of TSO registered members by (a) jurisdiction and (b) remoteness

Key: NSW – New South Wales; VIC – Victoria; QLD – Queensland; WA – Western Australia; SA – South Australia; TAS – Tasmania; NT – Northern Territory; ACT – Australian Capital Territory.
Awareness about TSO

The TSO users learnt about the website through a range of sources, but the primary sources were through the internet and the Australian Men’s Shed Association (AMSA) (Chart iii). According to the online survey, 53.8% were members of the AMSA. Referrals from other organisations were much less, with 12% of respondents reporting awareness gained through beyondblue, 4% from Movember and a small number of website referrals from other partner organisations (Chart iii-a). The lower referral to TSO from Movember may be a reflection of the misalignment in target populations: the latter generally appeals to younger men whereas TSO is targeting men’s over 55 years.

Chart iii: (a) How survey respondents became aware of TSO (b) Web referral to TSO from another webpages between 1 March 2012 to 31 August 2012

Reasons for visiting TSO and lack of involvement

The primary reasons for individuals to visit TSO were to seek information on a broad range of issues affecting men, and to join an online social group with other men (Chart iv).

Chart iv: Initial reasons for visiting the TSO
There is evidence that TSO was meeting the needs of a large majority of users: high overall level of satisfaction (Chart v) and satisfaction to the website content and accessibility (Chart x, page 7), and high frequency of visits (Chart vi). Importantly, participants felt a strong sense of support as a community.

**Chart v: Respondent’s level of commitment to recommending TSO**

**Chart vi: Frequency of visits for those who had not visited in the last three months**

Main reasons for lack of involvement among some participants included: inadequate representation of the broad interests of men, with a focus on trade-based activities and over focusing on mental health issues which has been perceived as dispiriting and lacking celebration.
Webpage utilization

Between 1 March 2012 and 31 August 2012, there was a substantial increase in the number of website visits (Chart vii) which grew from an average of 382 visits per day in March to 898 per day in August. There were ‘spikes’ of high frequency visits (marked as red lines) approximately twice a month. The increase in website visits and spikes are explainable by the promotional activities of TSO during this period.

The web analytic data indicated that, excluding the homepage, “Discussions” (i.e. discussion forums) and “Activities” were the most visited webpages in TSO (Chart viii-a). 17% of web traffic on the homepage was directly channelled to the discussion forums. These statistics indicated that participation in the discussion forums was one of the primary reasons for visiting TSO. For the “Activities” section of the website, the subsections on “Games” and “Men’s Sheds” were particularly well utilised, which accounted for 35% and 29% respectively of all visits to the “activities” section.

Chart vii: Number of visits to TSO between 1 March to 31 August 2012

Chart viii: Webpages visited in TSO and the visit duration
“Blog” was the least visited content area of TSO with an average visit duration of 23 seconds (Chart viii). This indicates that blogging may not be of interest to most of TSO’s users. Other lower utilised webpages included “Events” (2%), “Chat” (3%), “News” (3%), and “Health & Lifestyle” (3%). Low engagement levels in the “Chat” section may indicate that live chat was not a preferred method of interaction for TSO users, or that a ‘critical mass’ was not reached to keep up with a meaningful and spontaneous discussion.

Outcomes of participation

A significant proportion of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their participation in TSO resulted in them feeling “part of a supportive community” (51%) and understanding that there were “a lot of other men who experienced similar issues” to them (58%) (Chart viii). Furthermore, survey findings indicated that:

- TSO has raised awareness among respondents about depression (40% agreed or strongly agreed), anxiety (36%) and other issues affecting men (54%);
- TSO appeared to have reduced the stigma associated with depression and anxiety among a considerable group of survey respondents (29%-39% agreed or strongly agreed, and 11%-13% disagreed or strongly disagreed to the survey statements relating to stigma); and
- 41% of survey participants agreed to the statement that they knew “how to take action to deal with depression or anxiety” if they need to.

Chart ix: Respondents’ level of agreement to statements relating to the potential benefits of TSO’s participation

Depression, anxiety and other mental health issues dominated the forum discussions. Forum participants connected socially and supported one another primarily through sharing personal experience or advice. Four types of social support were observed from
the wall posts – informational support, instrumental support, companionship support and emotional support. This has led to relief and comfort as well as personal empowerment.

Survey respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the statements relating to the functionality of TSO. In terms of content, respondents felt that they could rely on TSO to obtain trusted information and generally found the content on depression or anxiety useful (Chart x).

**Chart x: Respondents’ level of agreement to statements relating to TSO’s website functionality and content**

In order to gauge the relative importance of different content areas, the questionnaire posed a series of hypothetical scenarios where a broad content area was removed from TSO and respondents were asked whether they would miss it or not. The level of attachment was relatively strong for the sections on “Health and lifestyle”, “Discussion forums” and “Activities”, with 42%, 37% and 37% of respondents respectively indicating that they would definitely miss it. Consistent with the low webpage visits (see Chart vii-a), respondents indicated that they would not miss the “Blog” and “Chat room” and awareness rates were not high for these content areas.
On the discussion forums and moderation process

A considerable proportion of the survey respondents had visited the discussion forums. However, most of the forum participants played a passive role by reading other people’s posts without contributing regularly themselves. A majority of evaluation participants thought the moderation process was both necessary and beneficial to the quality of discussion (Chart xii). However, they were divided about whether the forum should be moderated by health professionals external to the TSO community or members of TSO, with some expressing concerns about the level of intervention and the lack of transparency and consistency in the current moderation process. One suggestion was a separate discussion area for those who were in a highly vulnerable mental state where only approved members could provide advice.

Chart xii: Respondents’ level of agreement to statements relating to discussion forums
Respondents’ suggestions to improve TSO

Respondents’ suggestions for improvement were largely related to four themes - website content, future development of the website, greater partnership and networking with other organisations, and specific website functional features. Some suggestions are listed below:

- **Website content**
  - TSO should balance the depression/anxiety “bandwagon” with broader interests and issues on the wellbeing of men;
  - TSO appeared to overemphasise woodwork and metalwork, and should promote broader areas of interests;
  - TSO should prioritise some topics according to the prevailing needs for the target audience and cover with greater depth.

- **Future development of the website**
  - TSO should allow the online community to go through “controlled evolution” on the basis of its members meeting a minimum set of rules of participation and under minimal guidance from the website administrators.
  - TSO should provide more information on how to use different website features or having an “induction process” for first time users.
  - TSO should be “regionalised” so it can be used by participants as a platform to connect and socialise with other “local” participants in a particular geographic region, potentially outside of TSO.

- **Greater partnership and networking with other organisations**
  - TSO should promote greater links with local Men’s Sheds and better linkages with fitness groups and mental health support groups.

- **Specific website functional features**
  - TSO should display the most recent posts in the discussion forums first rather than last.
  - TSO should introduce a search function or presentation by geographic location.

**Conclusions**

TSO has successfully achieved its aim in creating an interactive online community for men to socially connect with other men with similar interests. Through TSO, users received social supports in the forms of informational support, instrumental support, companionship support, and emotional support. The enhanced connectivity and supports provided by TSO appeared to enhance the wellbeing of a majority of users, especially among those who participated in the discussion forums.

TSO appears to provide adequate access to information about health and the health system, but the website’s content did not fully resonate with many users, in particular, the focus on depression and anxiety which some found dispiriting. Meeting the information needs of a diverse group of users will be an ongoing challenge.

TSO has increased the awareness and appeared to have reduced the stigma associated with depression and anxiety in a considerable group of TSO users. However, a substantial
proportion of users may not yet feel comfortable to socialise or to talk about depression or anxiety. This suggests that TSO and beyondblue more broadly may need to further refine its messaging and approach to and continue its efforts in addressing the stigma associated with depression and anxiety among men. Similarly, ongoing effort is required to enhance help-seeking behaviours. Other options would be to state the target audience on the site, or have a specific web section just for men who wish to focus on information and discussion relating to depression and anxiety.

The objectives of TSO may not have adequately aligned with the objectives of partner organisations, and the expectations and preferences of the website users. The website’s focus on men’s mental health and trade-based activities did not resonate with a considerable group of users. For these reasons, TSO would need to clarify and understand its target audience to refine promotion and uptake of the website, including through engagement with current and future partner organisations.
Limitation of our work

General use restriction

This report is prepared solely for the internal use of beyondblue. This report is not intended to and should not be used or relied upon by anyone else and we accept no duty of care to any other person or entity. The report has been prepared for the purpose of an evaluation of The Shed Online. You should not refer to or use our name or the advice for any other purpose.
Contact us
Deloitte Access Economics
ACN: 49 633 116
Level 1
9 Sydney Avenue
Barton ACT 2600
PO Box 6334
Kingston ACT 2604 Australia
Tel: +61 2 6175 2000
Fax: +61 2 6175 2001
www.deloitteaccesseconomics.com.au

Deloitte Access Economics is Australia’s pre-eminent economics advisory practice and a member of Deloitte’s global economics group. The Directors and staff of Access Economics joined Deloitte in early 2011.

Deloitte refers to one or more of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, a UK private company limited by guarantee, and its network of member firms, each of which is a legally separate and independent entity. Please see www.deloitte.com/au/about for a detailed description of the legal structure of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited and its member firms.

About Deloitte
Deloitte provides audit, tax, consulting, and financial advisory services to public and private clients spanning multiple industries. With a globally connected network of member firms in more than 150 countries, Deloitte brings world-class capabilities and deep local expertise to help clients succeed wherever they operate. Deloitte’s approximately 170,000 professionals are committed to becoming the standard of excellence.

About Deloitte Australia
In Australia, the member firm is the Australian partnership of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu. As one of Australia’s leading professional services firms, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu and its affiliates provide audit, tax, consulting, and financial advisory services through approximately 5,400 people across the country. Focused on the creation of value and growth, and known as an employer of choice for innovative human resources programs, we are dedicated to helping our clients and our people excel. For more information, please visit our web site at www.deloitte.com.au.

Liability limited by a scheme approved under Professional Standards Legislation.
Member of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited
© 2012 Deloitte Access Economics Pty Ltd