

# Editor's Note



Welcome to *AccountAbility Forum's* special issue looking at 'Technology and Transparency', taking a particular focus on information and communications technology (ICT): everything from blogging to radio frequency identification (RFID). As ICT becomes a more and more dominant part of how we work, relax and relate to all sorts of different groups, from governments to friends, it seemed a timely moment to pause and invite reflections on where ICT is leading us.

Of course, as many of our contributors rightly point out, there is a more complex relationship developing between the invention of technologies; our dissemination and evolution of them; and their effects on our societies and economies. We're particularly pleased in this issue to have two exclusive interviews with senior leaders in two emblematic organisations: Jean-Philippe Courtois, President of Microsoft, and Elliot Schrage, Vice President of Google. Jean-Philippe kicks us off with a very wide-ranging set of responses to our questions on how the world looks from his extraordinary vantage point at Microsoft. Our profile of Elliot Schrage offers a valuable chance to step back again and get an important perspective from one of the most interesting companies of the 90s' dot.com frenzy, just as Google examines the transparency and 'corporate responsibility' agenda.

Focusing at greater length on particular issues, Timothy Ryan of AOL explores how the Internet itself enables users to engage with that technology's extraordinary capacity for interactivity. His article on AOL's online */discuss* forum shows the shape of things to come as Internet service providers experiment not just with content provision but also with creating semi-structured conversations for users/consumers to populate as they will. Critically, he picks up on a theme also in Jean-Philippe Courtois's article on the need to engage Internet users on their *own* online responsibilities.

Armgard von Reden takes us in deeper to some of the privacy problems surrounding emerging ICTs. Her lesson is well taken: it is only a permanently evolving mix of legal, technical *and* human solutions that can respond to the privacy challenges latent or explicit in ICT.

Bob Langert brings a welcome beginner's perspective from someone outside the ICT sector experimenting with how to get blogs to work: a frank article,

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the challenges of which will be recognised by all those who have managed online debating fora.

David Bonbright and Buzz Schmidt take us out of a corporate context to reflect on how civil society is responding to the reach and mobilising possibilities ICT offers. Graciela Selaimen's article exemplifies both the great opportunities and the significant challenges of mobilising David and Buzz's vision in her Brazilian context.

Finally, Becky Hogge rounds things off with a lucid account of how the Internet has developed, and lays down some serious challenges for our strategic development of it in the future. She picks up and develops that earlier theme about our own responsibility to make of the Internet what we will: a good place to draw things to a close.

Given that much of AccountAbility's work addresses 'corporate responsibility', it's worth noting how few of our contributors actually work inside those departments or have 'Corporate Responsibility' titles. This is only partly coincidental. Much of the interesting experimental work with interactive ICT engagement, virtual learning and community building is not necessarily happening inside those networks. The sorts of experimentation described here offer challenges, ideas and inspiration to those working on corporate responsibility agendas who are keen to understand what ICT can do beyond downloadable or online information.

Also, a word about the format of this issue. We have tried to experiment a bit more with our article formats. The 'Members in Conversation' and the 'Leaders in Profile' formats are new and we hope you like them. The 'tape-recorded' conversation between David and Buzz is something we've not done for a while. And with Bob Langert's article we've spliced real chunks of his blog text with his analysis of how it worked: a valuable chance to think about how to get blogs to work. We hope you enjoy them; do let us know. Finally (and appropriately), we can also announce that AF's own online accessibility is shortly to improve with articles or issues available as downloadable PDFs from Greenleaf's site ([www.greenleaf-publishing.com](http://www.greenleaf-publishing.com)). This will be up and running in the autumn.

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