The Quello Forum (TQF) or Quello User Forum (QUF) or …

Putting a Spotlight on Changing Policy and Practices Important to Users

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The James and Mary Quello Center is establishing a neutral and independent forum for identifying, illuminating and communicating the most critical issues for users of the Internet and related information and communication technologies and services. Among the constituencies served by the forum will be households (especially those with children, seniors and the disabled), small and medium sized business enterprises, corporations, governments, and other public and private institutions.

The Forum's purpose is to stimulate and inform debate in ways that support and help reconcile the goals and priorities of:
1. policy and regulatory communities, including both governmental and non-governmental entities;
2. private citizens and organizations whose daily activities increasingly rely on a rapidly evolving and sometimes confusing mix of digital technologies and services, including the mobile Internet, the Internet of Things, and an expanding range of networked devices and interactions;
3. private companies and governmental agencies that deliver products and services using networked digital platforms that rely on exchange of often-sensitive information subject to concerns regarding privacy, security, transparency, ease-of-use and other factors;

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[*] This draft evolved through discussions among the co-authors based on a concept suggested by Meredith Jagutis at the ComArtSci and Jeremy Wilson at A-CAPP.

4. suppliers of hardware and software that support this expanding networked digital infrastructure and whose functionality influences and is influenced by public and private policies.

The Quello Forum will be tied to and staffed by the Quello Center at Michigan State University, which will ensure its integrity and independence, support its ability to convene a wide range of users, and help communicate these discussions in a concise, informative and constructive manner to users, industry and governmental policy and regulatory officials in the US and worldwide. The Center will support the Forum through its research, staff support, in-house and networked expertise, and role as independent and neutral convener. However, the Forum will be led, organized and driven by users – those who depend on the use of digital media and related communication and information technologies. To design and support this user-driven model, the Center will work closely with advocates and other representatives of particular user groups, including senior citizens, youth, disabled citizens, small businesses, etc.

Examples of issues that might be a focus of the Forum include:

- How can users manage 9-1-1 requirements into the mobile era?
- What can households and other organizations do to enhance their cyber security capacity?
- What do different kinds of users need to know about social media and related digital media, such as what is (un)ethical use of social media, email and the Internet?
- How can users protect and manage their privacy in an age of digital surveillance, such as improving on 'notice and consent' practices in the online world?
- What are essential services – and should broadband access be the new universal?
- How can citizens and residents better interact with government through online platforms and proxies in cases of those not online?
- What do users need to know about new policy and regulatory initiatives, such as network neutrality or municipal broadband, and how do they affect users and producers?

- ….

The Problem and the Approach

There are many sources of information and support for users of the Internet and related digital media and communication technologies. The Internet itself is a major resource in this regard, with online forums and instructional videos focused on specific problems facing users as citizens and consumers.

However, this proposal is based on the assumption that there are many major and emerging issues that would benefit from discussion among informed and interested users with ongoing access to the expertise, research and consultation available through the Quello Forum. And while the Forum will invite input from a wide range of public and private entities, it will be independent of any regulatory body, service provider, and/or specific industry, issue or user group. This independence will be key to the Forum's ability to serve as (and be perceived as) an unbiased source of information and advice and convener of discussion and debate, including on controversial and contentious issues. In today's world of information overload and the blurring of boundaries between factual information and marketing messages, a key challenge facing users is who to approach (and trust) with particular problems and issues. The need for an independent forum enabling users to identify and prioritize the issues to be addressed, obtain unbiased expert advice and assistance, and reach out effectively to other users, is the main assumption underpinning this initiative.
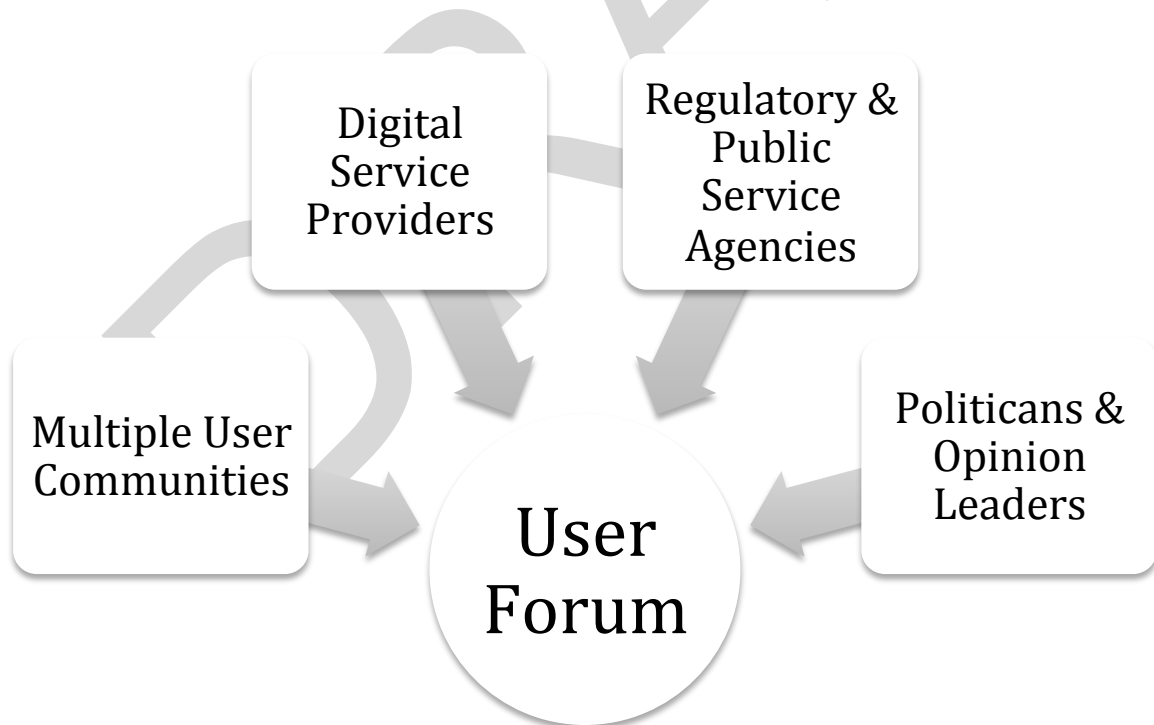
Management

The Forum will be managed by a board comprised of ten to twenty individuals representing key user groups and organizations. The Board will determine the key mechanisms for selecting issues, eliciting discussion of selected topics and issues, designing the format of discussions--such as through face-to-face meetings, at

conferences, and online--and helping to frame reports on the themes and findings of the Forum. One of the first roles of Quello Center staff will be to work carefully and energetically to recruit a mix of board members likely to make the forum successful in facilitating balanced, thorough, respectful and constructive discussion of a broad range of important digital-age issues facing users.

Outreach

While the Forum will organize meetings of the board and the specific user communities they represent, it will also use the Internet and social media to attract participation across an expanding range of users, geographies and issues. On specific topics, the Forum will solicit position papers from notable experts to help jump start discussion in targeted areas. An early priority of the Forum will be the construction of an innovative online platform to support the forum's activities, such as through moderated online forums on issues within specific sectors.

Digital Service Providers

Regulatory & Public Service Agencies

Multiple User Communities

Politicans & Opinion Leaders

User Forum

The activities of the Forum will be tailored to the specific issue addressed. In some cases, the Forum might produce a report for public discussion and dissemination. In other cases, it might suggest the need for informal learning, such as through online resources, or for shaping formal education, such as in education about social media at various levels of schooling. The Forum will avoid any one size fits all mentality. Instead, it will devise a set of activities that best fit the need to address a particular issue or reach a specific user community.

Impact

A key goal of the Forum's activities will be to inform the choices and responses of users in relation to key issues of the digital age. Toward that end it will shine a spotlight on key changes in policies and practices (of both public and private entities) effecting users, and facilitate communication, mutual understanding and constructive dialog among different stakeholders, such as between users and providers of key services. Its activities will be designed to foster a better understanding of key issues that is anchored in the experiences of users and the best available evidence from academic and other research communities. It will not be a lobbying or advocacy group, but rather a mechanism for enhancing learning and discussion of issues foremost in the minds of users. And while it will seek and integrate input from digital industries, governmental agencies and regulators, its focus and resource allocation will be driven by the concerns and priorities of end users, solicited and identified through the activities of the Board.

Independence + Expertise

Unlike consumer forums supported by and responsible to corporate, governmental or regulatory agencies, the Quello Forum will be independent of any single agency, company or industry. This independence will allow it to quickly and impartially address

emerging issues that might challenge conventional wisdom and accepted policy and practice.

And while there exist independent online forums that enable end users to air complaints and share potential solutions—often in relation to a single issue, company or set of industry practices—the Quello Forum will extend well beyond these platforms in the breadth of its coverage (and its Board), and the level of expertise and mix of discussion formats and participants it brings to bear on a complex and constantly evolving set of digital-age issues.

Support

The Quello Forum will be self-sustaining, working on the resources raised to support its activities. The financial support for the Forum will be raised through four primary sources:

1. Sponsorship of this initiative by users, business and industries involved in the Internet, media and related communication and information sectors, and individual sponsors;
2. Gifts from individuals, business or industry to the Quello Center designated to support the Quello Forum;
3. Yearly subscriptions for membership of the Forum, such as for organizations representing large user communities, such as elders, small businesses, universities, children, or parents; and
4. Grants or contracts awarded to the Forum for specific research, meetings, or other Forum activities, such as in education.

The support will be administered and used by the Quello Center to staff and otherwise support the forum's activities, hold meetings, locate experts on particular issues, and provide outreach, including the drafting of reports of the forum.

Benefits to Members and Sponsors of the Forum

Sponsors and members of the Forum would have open invitations to meetings, early access to reports, and opportunities to review and comment on all Forum reports and planned meetings, such as in suggesting speakers and people who should be invited to attend. They would also have opportunities to propose subjects for study or discussion at a Forum, although the priorities of the Forum would need to be set by its Board.

Board and Chair of the Board

In the first two years of the forum, the Board will be chaired by NAME. At the end of this term, the chair will be nominated by the Board with the advice and consent of the Quello Center at MSU. The Chair and Director of the Quello Center will jointly agree on the composition of the initial board.

Creating a Kickoff Event

The Forum would be launched through a "kickoff event" that stands on its own, or dovetails with an otherwise planned Quello event or conference focused on one or more major issues facing users in the digital age. This kickoff event could be planned to align with early sponsorship opportunities that could begin funding development activities focused on key issue areas.

If you have an interest in being involved in, or supporting the Quello Forum, please contact the Director of the Quello Center, Professor Bill Dutton, at Quello@msu.edu