

Waste not, want not

LCC and Freecycle are just two movements harnessing the power of the internet. *Jon Marks* looks at how the web has made it easier than ever to be green

The internet has made the world a smaller place, bringing strangers with common interests together. The cycling movement, along with the broader environmental lobby, were both quick to harness the power of the internet to help raise awareness of green issues.

The Freecycle Network is a non-profit internet group started in Arizona in 2003 by Deron Beal. Working for a non-profit recycling organisation, Beal noticed just how many businesses were throwing away perfectly usable items like furniture, telephones and PCs. His approach to the problem was to set up an email subscription list, and spread the word about it to friends, family and colleagues. Three years later, that original list has mushroomed into a movement with more than 2.5 million members worldwide.

Each group is run by local volunteers and membership is free for individuals, businesses, schools, charities, etc. Rather than throwing it away, when someone wants to find a new home for something they no longer want or need, they send an email offering it to their Freecycle group. If they're looking to get something for themselves, they can reply to another member's offer. One main rule: everything posted must be free, legal, and appropriate for all ages.

Freecycle is cashing in on a trend LCC was quick to acknowledge: email is a powerful tool.

LCC uses the web to reach members and non-members alike, says Charlie Lloyd, LCC cycling development officer.

"As with Freecycle, it has been the humble email list that has done most to enhance the way LCC operates," he says. "At first there was an open discussion list, urbancyclist-uk, about 10 years ago. Soon local cyclists formed their own lists and LCC set up a network to gather ideas and spread them about.

"The greatest benefit has been the access



Freecycle and LCC member John Gilbert brings together the worlds of cycling and recycling

to members' expertise. On almost any topic we can gather the best advice available, very quickly and cheaply. This enables us to lobby authorities more effectively and professionally than ever before."

The web is the perfect place for meeting others who might be members of e-groups whose aims can complement each other. One comment I hear regularly at Dr Bike

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sessions is that getting into cycling can be a confusing and costly proposition for those new to cycling, or for those who want to see if cycling's for them after years out of the saddle. Judging from both 'offered' and 'wanted' posts on Freecycle, there are plenty of cyclists or potential cyclists on the membership list.

A prime example is Jim. "I wanted a bike to ride between Waterloo and my office in Farringdon, but I didn't want it to look good enough to tempt someone into stealing it," he says. "I responded to a posting on Freecycle and was lucky enough to get a 1970s Raleigh Wayfarer. It was quite rusty, but with a couple of hours' work getting rid of the rust, and cleaning and oiling it, it's perfect for what I

wanted. I've been using it for three weeks now and leaving it in the bike racks at Waterloo station. The only money I spent was buying a new bell."

John Gilbert, a member of both Freecycle and the Hammersmith and Fulham Cycling Campaign, also uses the internet in his involvement with Pedal Power London (PPL), a non-profit group in Hammersmith which promotes cycling by offering bikes cheaply to its members.

"I'd stockpiled a mountain of bikes in various states, and was looking for constructive uses for those that couldn't be repaired," he says.

"Freecycle offers a forum for people to think laterally about what can be done with bicycle parts – artists using frames for sculptures, perhaps.

"I hope many of those bikes which can be put back on the road might be utilised by PPL, but I've got so many that Freecycle can provide a home for any that go

untaken. I feel that it is important for Londoners to be getting on their bikes so the message goes out around the world that cycling is a viable alternative to the car culture that places such as China and India are embracing. Without the Western world using cars less, we can hardly preach to others about destroying the planet."

CONTACT DETAILS

Freecycle London,

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/freecycleelondon/>

London Cycling Campaign,

www.lcc.org.uk. The site has local email list information and links to local groups

Pedal Power London,

www.pedalpowerlondon.org

Re~Cycle (ships secondhand bicycles and parts to Africa), www.re-cycle.org

Recycle for London (plenty of info for Londoners), www.recycleforlondon.com