



OPEN RIGHTS GROUP

Prospectus

May 2007

For more information, contact:

Open Rights Group

+44 (0)20 7096 1079

PO Box 48872, London, WC1H 9WR

becky@openrightsgroup.org

www.openrightsgroup.org

www.releasethemusic.org

The Open Rights Group

The Open Rights Group is a fast-growing non-profit organisation focused on raising awareness of issues such as privacy, identity, data protection, access to knowledge and copyright reform.

Founded in 2005, ORG is a UK-based community of enthusiastic volunteers and renowned technology and policy experts, assisted by a small team of core staff and funded by small grants and donations from supporters.

We help technology experts enter the public debate, with the aim of improving both understanding and policy around the digital rights issues that affect us all. By publishing expert commentary and putting the media and politicians in touch with experts able to explain ideas clearly, we are able to help clarify problems and steer decisions in the right direction.

ORG's beginnings

ORG is unique in the way it was founded. After a panel discussion at the OpenTech conference in July 2005, digital rights activist Danny O'Brien set up a pledge on the then fledgling grassroots action website, Pledgebank.org. The pledge said:

“I will create a standing order of £5 per month to support an organisation that will campaign for digital rights in the UK but only if 1,000 other people will do the same.”

By the end of the year, more than 1,000 people had signed the pledge. The result is a grassroots organisation that is supported by the very people it represents.

What does ORG campaign on?

As well as day to day work with the media, politicians and partner organisations, ORG picks out specific campaigns on which to focus its attention. When an issue is presented to ORG, it needs to pass four tests before we will take action.

Firstly, is it a digital rights issue? Is technology affecting civil rights, human rights or consumer rights? If so, ORG can act.

Secondly, is anybody else already taking action? The digital rights community

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1 in the UK is small, but there are a number of highly experienced groups working in areas which overlap with ORG's very broad remit. If another organisation is already raising awareness of a particular issue, then ORG will support their work, not replicate it.

Thirdly, can we take effective action? Some issues are brought to our attention too late for us to mount a campaign, for example, legislation that has already been enacted. Other issues require resources we do not have, such as lobbyists in Europe or at international trade organisations. ORG only acts where it sees a real potential for change.

And finally, how important is it that we take action? How many people are affected? What are the consequences? Some issues must be monitored over time so that we can more accurately assess how important they are, but an organisation with limited resources must prioritise and inevitably some things cannot be addressed. ORG's Advisory Council and supporters help us decide upon which issues we must focus.

ORG's success

Considering its relative youth as an organisation, ORG has made great strides since it was founded in 2005. It is now an established voice in the media, with dozens of appearances in both the specialist and mainstream press every month.



Members of the recording industry debate copyright term extension with academics and practitioners at an ORG Release the Music event

Mainstream publications as diverse as the *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and the *International Herald Tribune* have looked to ORG for comment, and ORG works regularly with broadcasters, guiding their researchers towards a variety of relevant spokespeople for radio and television packages.

In 2006, ORG scored a major success with its *Release the*

Music campaign to keep the copyright term in sound recordings to 50 years. ORG and its partner organisations were faced with a formidable campaign to extend term, led by the recording industry and fronted by household names such as Sir Cliff Richard. Despite this, ORG succeeded in communicating its message to the media, the public and the policy makers.

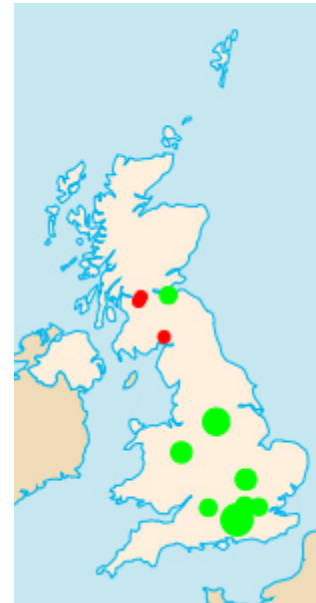
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As a result of ORG's campaigning work on this issue, which was supported by a small grant from the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, the independent Gowers Review of Intellectual Property commissioned a study into the economics of copyright term extension. The conclusion of that study – that extending the copyright term would not result in any meaningful economic benefit – will have an impact way beyond the Gowers Review's own recommendation that no copyright term should ever be extended retrospectively.

Our campaign, *Don't Hack My Vote*, centres on the government's electronic voting pilots in the May 2007 local elections. Disturbed by a seemingly unstoppable momentum towards flawed e-voting systems, e-voting activists urged ORG to act. We responded with several events in February this year designed for international activists to share their experiences.

ORG then approached the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, who funded a six-month campaign to raise awareness of the threat e-voting presents to our democratic system. We put a call out to volunteers to help observe the elections, and as a result will be fielding at least five observation teams around the country.

The results of our observation missions will be fed into an Electoral Commission report on the pilots. We will also be taking our findings to each of the major party conferences in the autumn.



Map showing current confirmed missions

The future

We want the Open Rights Group to last for decades. Financial contributions from our supporters and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust mean we can take on several large-scale campaigns each year, selecting issues not because they are popular, but because they are important.

We are currently building our volunteer corps and widening our network of experts, activists and organisations so that we can run more campaigns. We are also improving our supporter database so supporters can edit their subscriptions and participate more easily in our activities.

In its first two years the Open Rights Group had a bigger impact than anyone would have expected from an organisation so small. Our challenge now is to raise additional funding to support our growth and expand our influence on government policy and press coverage of digital rights issues.

The people behind ORG

Board members

Chair

Louise Ferguson

Company Secretary & Acting Treasurer

James Cronin

Suw Charman

Rufus Pollock

Danny O'Brien

William Heath

Ben Laurie

Executive Director

Becky Hogge

Operations Manager

Michael Holloway

Evoting Campaign Co-Ordinator

Jason Kitcat

Advisory Council

Paula Le Dieu

Cory Doctorow

Kevin Marks

Desiree Miloshevic

Tom Coates

Ben Hammersley

Richard Clayton

Jonathan Zittrain

Keith Mitchell

Nick Bohm

Owen Blacker

David Weinberger

Alan Cox

Grahame Davies

Wendy Grossman

Stef Magdalinski

Lilian Edwards

Dave Rowntree

Ian Brown

John Buckman