

PRESS RELEASE

16 June 2012



Digital Unite Founder named in Queen's Birthday Honours list 2012

Emma Solomon, Managing Director of [Digital Unite](#) and Founder of [Silver Surfers' Day](#), has been named in this year's Queen's Birthday Honours List. Her OBE has been awarded for services to digital inclusion.



Emma started Digital Unite in 1996 driven by her passion to give people access to the opportunities the internet and digital technology provide, especially those who may find gaining that access harder. The company is one of the UK's main providers of digital skills learning and offers a range of products and services to support people on their digital journey, from the complete beginner to the more experienced user.

In 2002 Digital Unite launched its award-winning [Silver Surfers' Day](#) campaign, a national initiative that encourages and supports local organisations all over the UK to open their doors and give older people a taste of what modern technology has to offer them. Taking place each spring, venues have included church halls, libraries, classrooms, museums, communal lounges and even fish and chip shops. Digital Unite supports event holders with marketing material, learning guides and online games and activities to help organisers maximise the success of their events.

The first Silver Surfers' Day in May 2002 saw 40 events held, ten years later, in both 2011 and 2012 nearly 2,000 events were held with up to 50,000 older people engaging with computers and the internet. In 2011 the campaign was extended from a day to a week under the banner of Spring Online helping more people than ever to get online and was awarded a [Nominet Award](#) for Building a Networked Nation in recognition of its impact and tenacity over the years.

Digital Unite has also delivered numerous digital inclusion programmes, most recently via [Get Digital](#), a government backed initiative which sought to promote, develop and sustain digital literacy and awareness among residents in sheltered housing schemes. Digital Unite delivered comprehensive and face-to-face tuition for hundreds of residents across 196 schemes and managed a website providing learning support and resources to enable hundreds of other sheltered housing schemes to replicate the Get Digital model.

It is estimated that, as a result of Get Digital, over 500 schemes were supported with digital learning activities and around 15,000 older people living in sheltered housing were engaged with computers and the internet.

Since 1999 Digital Unite has run a quality assured [tutor network](#) across the UK delivering personal tuition to older people in their own homes. The tutors are experienced computer users and teachers or trainers and have helped thousands of people to get started and build confidence in the world of digital technology.

Digital Unite's recent activities include developing ways to support and equip individuals, organisations and communities to deliver and sustain their own digital literacy initiatives. Its newly relaunched website, www.digitaluite.com, offers an unrivalled free resource of hundreds of [learning guides](#) to help people with all aspects of digital technology, from [handling a mouse](#) and [a keyboard](#) to [using the internet](#), [Skype](#), [smartphones](#) and [tablets](#).

Digital Unite has also developed [courses](#) to train others to be Digital Champions and promote, embed and sustain digital literacy in the communities in which they live and work. It currently has two courses on offer. The [Digital Champions ITQ](#) is an in-depth e-learning programme to help people develop their digital skills and teaches them how these skills can be applied to engage others with modern technology. It leads to a level 2 City & Guilds qualification. As well as covering a wide range of topics such as Google, social media and blogging the course covers promoting and sustaining digital learning in communities, working with partners and practical issues such as online safety. Support and assessment is given throughout by Digital Unite's team of tutors.

The second course, [Quick Start – Helping Beginners Get \(and Stay\) Online](#) is an informal, self-study online programme designed for those with a basic computer knowledge who want to help others get started with using the internet. Seven comprehensive learning sections cover how to create the right learning environment for beginners, what hardware, software and websites to use and how to create and maintain learner interest. Information about both online courses is available at www.digitalunite.com/academy.

Beyond spearheading the development of the company itself, Emma actively participates in events and conferences across the country to galvanise engagement with key stakeholders on the issue of digital inclusion and the need for delivering real solutions to help the 8.1 million people* who are still digitally excluded. She currently chairs the Age Action Alliance's Digital Inclusion group on behalf of the [Department for Work and Pensions](#).

Emma said: "I am both delighted and overwhelmed at being named in the Queen's Birthday Honours list. It is an enormous privilege. For the last 16 years I have always tried to ensure that everything Digital Unite does makes a tangible difference to people and that our products and services are innovative, appealing and useful!

"Digital exclusion is still a significant issue, and by that I mean not just those who are not online and who have never been online, but also those who are still not totally comfortable in the digital world because they lack the skills, knowledge and/or support to get more out of technology. I'm really interested in, and inspired by, the potential of supporting and skilling people with some digital capacity and an inclination to help others to do just that - better. Technology is not an end in itself, it's a means to an end; we should never forget that people are the most important part of it all. There is still much more work to do and I remain resolutely committed to using the experience we have gained to tread new ground and achieve more. This award is a huge boost to me personally and to everyone at Digital Unite.

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported me along the way, from friends, family, colleagues (past and present), our tutors and peers to our wonderful and tireless Spring Online and Silver Surfers' Day event holders and all the other organisations and people we work with to deliver our work."

Ends

Editors' notes:

For interviews, photographs and further information contact Katharine Teed, Communications Manager on 07801 138383 or email katharine.teed@digitalunite.com.

Further information about Digital Unite is available at www.digitalunite.com

*ONS quarterly updates, Q1, 2012