# Bristol: the world's first open city

Bristol is the biggest digital hub outside London, attracting industries in high-tech, clean tech, digital and creative industries. The city is seen as a 'testbed' for the Internet of Things, and is the world's first open, programmable city region. Its winning approach is based on learning from the best examples, sharing own experiences and constantly looking for innovative and inventive ways to operate. Besides leadership from the top, the city's digital transformation closely relies on the entrepreneurial attitude and cooperation between local champions.

Bristol has long been at the forefront of digital transformation. This position stemmed from the realization that the services provided by the council to the citizens were based on old-fashioned and suboptimal technologies, and they could be potentiated and revolutionized through the use of digital technologies and the Internet of Things.

This led the council to rethink the city's digital infrastructure, focusing specifically on the identification of new innovative ways to enable citizens to interact with the council and benefit from public services. This subsequently contributed to shape the city into a fertile environment for the development of creative digital technologies.
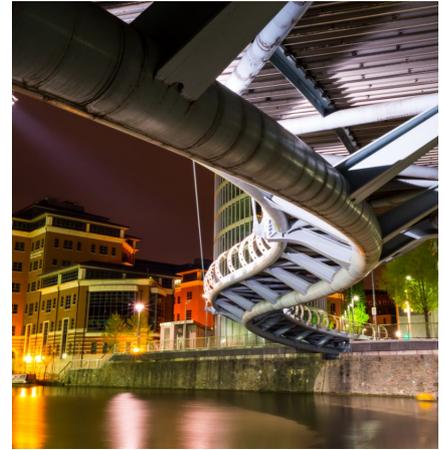
© Jacek Wojnarowski/Shutterstock.com

Key initiatives

In order to make the city smarter and more tailored to the needs of the citizens, Bristol has recognized the need to encourage Bristolians to make use of public open data (such as traffic management data) to develop new products and services, contributing to the creation of a more 'livable' and creative digital city.

This vision is enabled by the presence of successful businesses, state-of-the-art digital infrastructure and support from City leaders, ultimately allowing the Bristol and Bath region to pave the way towards the growth of the UK's creative industries, and become an international example of a creative hub.

Specifically, the collaborative approach between universities, chambers of commerce and incubators, as well as strong public-private partnerships, ensures the success of the city as a testbed for digital innovation. Consequently, Bristol has attracted major international corporations, and boasts the highest retention rate of university graduates.

In this context, 'Bristol is Open', announced in 2015, is the city's flagship initiative, aiming to concretize and make open data a reality.

Bristol is Open

Bristol Is Open, a joint venture between the University of Bristol and Bristol City Council, is funded by the local, national and European governments, both with academic research funding, and by the private sector.

The project delivers R&D to equip the city with the latest sensors, which will supply the three new 30 Gb/second fibre broadband networks with a wide range of information (e.g. air quality, energy and traffic flows). This will allow to understand how big data can be a means to solving issues such as air pollution and traffic congestions, thus ultimately contributing to the development of a smart city based on the 'Internet of Things'.

BRISTOL IS OPEN
open programmable city region

Bristol also prides itself on the social dimension of its digital transformation, which relies on the use of creativity, media and digital technologies to inspire people, particularly youngsters, and solve social issues in the most deprived areas. Good initiatives in this respect include the Knowle West Media Centre, which also provides training courses to develop skills in digital manufacturing equipment and technologies.

Similarly, Digital Bristol Week 2016, produced by the BBC in partnership with local actors (including the University of the West of England, Bristol City Council, the University of Bristol, the Pervasive Media Studio, EngineShed and the Creative Skills Hub) is a week-long series

of workshops, panel sessions, masterclasses and networking events, aiming to foster the creation of digital skills, new ways of developing and innovating current businesses and reinforce cooperation in the creative industry.

DIGITAL CITIES 2016
Digital Bristol Week • 9–15 May
#digicities • bit.ly/dbw2016

Social entrepreneurship is also an important element in the activities of Bristol's many incubators, such as the Bristol SETsquared Centre. The Centre provides coaching, mentoring, workshops and access to professional service firms and services to early-stage and later-stage businesses with up to 10 people, as well as corporate and university spin-outs.

The SETsquared Centre is also an instance of the city's collaborative approach to digital transformation. Indeed, the Centre's ecosystem consists of local universities, complemented by start-ups, SMEs and larger corporations, as well as the 4 local authorities in the region. Owing to this approach, SETsquared has successfully helped develop Oracle's small local office into a major centre for client support, resulting in the creation of new jobs and contributing to the social dimension of digitalization.