



Media release: 20 April, 2009

NEWS.COM.AU LETS USERS CREATE THEIR OWN NATIONAL BUDGET

Launches the InstaBudget

National news website *news.com.au* today launched its InstaBudget (www.news.com.au/instabudget) – an interactive game that lets users create their own national budget in the lead up to the announcement of the 2009-2010 Federal Budget on May 12.

After users have created their budget, *news.com.au* generates a personalised story outlining whether they made the right decisions and giving them an idea on what the media would report if they were the Federal Treasurer.

Editor of *news.com.au*, David Higgins said the InstaBudget is a fun way for people to understand budget processes.

“The federal budget is a complex beast that is not easily explained with text articles alone.

“*news.com.au* has built a reputation for creating interactive multimedia features that bring complex stories to life.

“For instance the Vote-a-matic, which we created in 2007 to explain the federal election policies of the major parties, was completed more than 400,000 times. This year we’ve focussed on the federal budget.

“You can still read all the important Budget stories on *news.com.au* – but our InstaBudget will bring new meaning to how and why a government Budget is created.

“It also allows a unique insight into the Budget priorities of everyday Australians. We will be reporting on comparisons between the public’s priorities and the announcements made by Wayne Swan on the night.”

The InstaBudget is divided into 14 sectors that users can allocate a certain number of funds. These sectors are:

- Defence – relating to Australia’s military commitments
- Education – relating to national education programs and institutions
- Health – relating to hospital funding through a deal with the states
- Social Security and Welfare – relating to special assistance for underprivileged Australians
- Housing/Community Amenities – relating to housing assistance
- Recreation and Culture – relating to the operations of historic buildings and local sports and Olympic programs
- Fuel and Energy – relating to Australia’s energy supply
- Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing – relating to the support for farmers and growers
- Mining/Manufacture/Construction – relating to the protection and investment in jobs

- Transport and Communications - relating to major infrastructure projects and the rollout of digital TV and broadband services
- Public Order and Safety – relating to federal police services
- General Public Services – relating to those working in the public service, also foreign aid
- Piggy Bank – part fighting fund, part safety net
- Petty Cash – relating to national debt and disaster relief

Users are given a budget surplus balance to begin and then go on to choose which sectors they would like to allocate funds to and how much they would like to give that particular sector.

Users also have the option to increase or cut taxes in order to adjust the amount of money they have to spend.

After users submit their budget, a relating story is generated based on their budget decisions.

Mr Higgins continued: “We are very excited to be launching the InstaBudget. By putting our users in the treasurer hot seat, we hope this enables them to have an increased knowledge and understanding of the budget and how it affects them.

“Our goal at *news.com.au* is to educate our readers on issues affecting them in the easiest way possible. The InstaBudget definitely provides users with a head start on understanding implications and processes surrounding the Federal Budget.”

The InstaBudget will continue to be live until May 12.

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