NOTES ON BUILDING A CLUB WEBSITE

Trentham Golf Club was one of the first golf clubs in Australia to develop a web site. The first version went online in 1996, aiming to take advantage of the fledgling role that the internet could play in information provision, communication and marketing to both members and green fee players.

The first web site used basic HTML (hypertext markup language) and consisted of a small number of pages with information about the course layout, location, green fees and membership.

As the website developed, a number of guiding principles have been adopted.

Trentham Golf Club website, 1996

1. '**Open Source' minimises costs**. As a smaller rural golf club with limited resources, it was recognised that sites offered to larger golf clubs (e.g. by MiClub and Micropower) were unaffordable given the total turnover of the club. The ideal site would use capable open-source software while still providing some of the capabilities larger clubs enjoy.

2. **Content is king**. Good content drives interest, search rankings and search engine optimisation. The site needs to be news and content based, with information of interest to members, visiting green fee players and the general golfing public. The site should also enable members of the club to do things simply and easily, such as pay their subscriptions, enter events and look up the yearly program.

3. **Updating needs to be regular and current**. A website needs to keep people coming back and viewing it, rather than containing stagnant information. There is nothing worse than looking up a club website that is weeks or months out of date. It reflects badly on the management and organisation of the club.

4. **Efficiency and cost reduction**. The website (and social media) needs to take up roles that are more efficiently done electronically than through printing and postage, thereby saving costs -- such as member contact, member news, golf program look-up, tournament entry and membership payments.

5. **Integration with sponsors and the local community**. The website needs to integrate with local community information, accommodation and businesses in a partnership arrangement to provide information about what the local area offers, rather than just the golf club promoting itself.

6. **Usage of social media**. The website must integrate with social media, such as a Facebook page.

Implementation

Since 2012, the Trentham web site has used the Joomla open-source Content Management System (CMS). There are a number of popular and free CMS offerings available, including Joomla, Wordpress and Drupal. All have the advantage of being very manageable and powerful.

A CMS-based website can be contributed to and updated by anyone with a defined access level, from any device with a web connection and appropriate security. Professional templates that control the design and feel of the site can be purchased inexpensively. They do take considerable time to learn, although it is worth it for the power, ease of use and flexibility.

Capabilities

Most popular CMS have in-built components, or downloadable extensions, that enable the capability of the website to be enhanced and developed into a responsive rather than just a static website. These are often free or inexpensive (generally less than A$50). For example, extensions have been added to the Trentham website that have enabled it to include:

- The ability for all new members to join and pay online (the club has established a Paypal business account that also allows payments by Paypal, Visa and Mastercard).

- Provision for member's renewal payments and instalments.

- A log-in members section that limits private or in-confidence data to members only

- An online tournament entry system, with a 'shopping cart' for multiple event entries. Nearly 50% of tournament entries are now taken using this system, even when advertised in the traditional way through a printed brochure.

Trentham Golf Club website, 2015

- Sponsors' banner advertising that changes every time a member or visitor re-visits the website. It also records the number of views and click-throughs so the club can give feedback on effectiveness.

- Payment forms for sponsors and advertisers to pay their accounts.

- Import to web pages from Excel spreadsheets (or .csv files) to simplify yearly program lists and tournament result reporting.

- Contact forms that are context sensitive to the page being viewed and that are directed to appropriate people to manage a response.

- Categories (for example 'Newsletters' or 'Results') that accumulate articles into a blog-like format.

In the future, the club would like to develop a cloud-based system for green-fee bookings (to replace the manual 'book' system) and instal a membership extension to handle the membership database with contact information, invoicing and payments.

Recently the Trentham website has moved to a virtual private server (VPS), that will enable the club to host web sites for members, earning extra income. The VPS has also increased the speed of the web site traffic by providing more disk space and throughput.

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