

Spread too thin? Use it or lose it!

The Little Ship Club on the World Wide Web

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## Spread too thin? Use it or loose it!

### Management Summary

The Little Ship Club must decide what it will do with its web presence.

In the recent past club officials have not fully utilised the current web site believing that it was difficult to operate. Member traffic to the site had all but ceased. Member and committee contributions to the site have been infrequent and ad hoc.

The club has not found it easy to manage a web platform and has allowed the site's platform become dangerously insecure. There are no robust processes for content maintenance.

In an attempt to change the conditions of operation but with unrealistic expectations of what is possible certain committees have tried but not succeeded to define an alternative site nor to write or commission the static copy to populate this site.

In an attempt to reduce administrative workload and increase revenue the club has tried but not succeeded to define and commission additional functionality but has not considered fully the processes to support this or if the value of investment will be realised.

The club has misinterpreted issues with its venue hire site as a web issue whereas this report finds this a site marketing issue.

There have been many projects run by many people without any sufficiently briefed and capable teams to support them. Some of these projects conflicted with each other.

Some investment and much more time has been wasted without achieving very much. The club has tried to do too much over too wide an area and without the capability or time resources required to succeed.

Given the lack of achievement under the current strategy a new strategy is required. To deliver a great site the club should:

- make the best of what it has and learn how to use it, invest small amounts in realising this, appoint and empower key leaders who are accountable for realising the value of investments we have already made
- devise and run a programme to change members and cttee habits so that they form a bedrock of contributors to the site
- put the site at the centre of its communications efforts so that all mailings bring traffic to the site and every document that the club publishes has a primary web presence, thus building traffic and usage habits
- prioritise future web development tasks and implemented these at a viable pace

The alternative is to abandon the site leaving simply current venue hire site and diary which is perfectly viable but could be made much more visible with thoughtful marketing.

## Use it or lose it!

This brief report summarises research on some parameters impacting the Little Ship Club web site. It was undertaken in September and October 2009. It presents the findings of that research and makes some recommendations based on the findings.

### **Context & Scope**

The Rear Commodore Membership is accountable to the main committee for the web site and requested this report.

In the spring of 2009, under a previous RC membership, a plan had been developed to reengineer the web site using a different software platform and to split off a 'static' site without a content management platform that will contain a variety of information that was considered to need little maintenance.

This static information broadly covers the three categories: membership information, club history and venue hire, which correspond to existing sections of the current site. In addition to the static site a completely new platform would develop 'social networking' capability.

A project plan was developed for this transition that envisaged a transfer to the new platform in July 2009. However this plan was not achieved.

RC Membership presented a document to Committee on 12th August 2009 that briefly and realistically accounts for the history leading to the current situation and the issues facing the club. (Appendix 1). According to the RC membership these are:

- Lack of consensus about the scope and intention of the site
- Lack of agreed procedure for managing the site and updating content
- Unrealistic expectations about member commitment to contribute to the site
- Lack of detail specification for site developments

- Lack of management and maintenance of the existing software platform
- Inability to complete projects

The RC Membership wanted to validate her conclusions and to understand why, if they were correct, the club was facing the difficulties it was experiencing. She approached the author to review them. After discussion with the Membership Committee we agreed to carry out a piece of work that would

- Review the current processes and costs of developing and contributing to the site
- Review the capability of the current and proposed software platforms to deliver the site
- Take an exemplar content, specify this and use the current site to deliver it
- Synthesise conclusions from the research and propose a way forward

For the purposes of this report the term 'web site' refers to all the club's electronic communications as most of these use the site platform as a generator and are designed to push traffic to the site.

## **Research Notes and Findings**

### **What's wrong with the current site?**

I've asked this question of about 30 members. The most consistent response is that there is no content. Members noted that even the diary, which is well maintained so far as dates are concerned, has inconsistent content below the simple event listing. Other than the Commodore and the RC Membership no members mentioned the lack of pictorial content though this could be encompassed in their generic no content comment. Very few members mentioned that they thought there were issues with the look and feel of the site. Most felt this was 'modern' and 'clean'. Some members mentioned that the navigation was 'too complicated' and that they couldn't find their way around. When pressed on this issue it became clear that these members were usually

looking for content that did not exist (e.g. a regalia page). No members had used the site plan to find content. (This is probably just as well as the site plan page bears little resemblance to current reality. It has now been removed).

Members who had been exposed to various club web initiatives, or who represented a communications function on a sub committee, said that they thought that it was very hard to upload content. When pressed they could not explain how they had formed this conclusion as none had been trained to do so. Most eventually said that someone had told them that this was so.

Whilst these are interesting responses, they do not necessarily represent fact. It is clear from the site logs that the number of members actually logging in each month recently can be counted on the fingers of one hand. With the exception of the office and Wild Strawberry, two members logged in during August and five in July. There is consistent traffic from non-logged in users, but the vast majority of this traffic uses the venue hire pages. A small number of non-logged in users also use the what's on pages. There is almost no traffic to the membership information pages. It is clear that new members do come to the site almost as soon as they have been registered and look at many of the available pages. What's also clear is that they rarely return – at least they rarely log in again. The fact is that members are just not using the site and their competence to judge what is wrong with it is therefore suspect.

**It is hard to avoid concluding that either a) members do not need or want a web site or b) that they don't find the current site useful or engaging.**

It is also worth noting that **the venue hire pages seem to be working well for those that find them**. The office supports this saying that they receive venue enquiry mail from the site and phone calls about venue hire that mention having used the site.

Traffic to the venue hire site could easily be increased using an affiliate marketing scheme, though it is questionable whether the cost of investment in developing the traffic would be justified by an increase in conversion of enquiries into contracts. I do not know whether the venue

sales team has a sufficiently segmented their target market to be able to experiment with affiliate marketing. I have already made some changes to the Meta tagging, which I hope will increase search engine relevance but do not take account of segmentation.

**To summarise the answer to what's wrong with the current site seems to be a) no traffic and b) no content.**

Whilst site usage has been at an historic, low previous experience with the club's site has demonstrated that it is possible to build member demand and site traffic by providing relevant content and focussing on providing routes to the site for particular segments of the membership.

This was done in 2003/4 for the skippers & crew section using frequent content change on the member home page, and building colourful skipper boat pages and detailed crew listings as relevant content and a series of mailings and web-centric Tuesday evening sessions to renew attention on the site. After a winter of activity member logins had risen to over 150 per month with many members logging in two or three times.

A recent traffic spike has already been initiated by creative use of the eBulletin by Wild Strawberry, highlighting some automated password retrieval processes and 6 or 7 new pieces of content available.

The club could aim to build on this spike by extending the relationship with these returned users offering them consistently new material. Just a short effort by a small number of people has shown that the site is not yet dead.

### **Working with the current web software platform**

The current site uses Drupal as a content management platform. Drupal is a fully featured open-source (i.e. free) modular web platform that uses MySQL (also open source) as its database engine. Our system utilises a Unix-based serving environment and is delivered by the Apache web server. The choice of platform seems to have been made by David Lantry. I had not used Drupal before looking at the LSC site.

Best practice is to document implementation in order to allow others to operate the site.

However, having gained administrator-level access to our Drupal configuration, most of the site's immediate configuration is easy to understand. Having also gained access to the hosting environment I have examined the undocumented MySQL implementation. Whilst the architecture can be seen easily the lack of documentation of the database means that it is not simple to review the overall data structure and the SQL queries. However the database can be manipulated after some investigation and with care.

Our Drupal platform was last maintained in late 2007 and there have since been some 15 updates of this software. Whilst this does not impact the functionality each of these updates fixed minor bugs and addressed security issues as they arose. Our platform is therefore liable to attacks by hackers or cyber-criminals using known and now well-documented attack methods.

This has important security and legal implications – dealt with in Security below. Suffice to say, if we continue to use it **Drupal must be updated immediately.**

This requirement would be the same for any serving environment. All software is vulnerable and regular updates are part of the maintenance programme in just the same way as home PCs update their Windows Operating Systems regularly. Nowadays, all software needs updating regularly to keep it safe and secure.

The Club must continue to keep the platform up to date and regularly carry out other essential housekeeping and maintenance tasks. It is likely that this will have to be paid for, as we do not have a willing member with PHP and SQL skills to undertake this for us.

In the process of learning to use Drupal I have authored a number of new stories and pages as well as made some basic changes to navigation whilst clearing out some of the old content and making the site a little more user-friendly.

Notwithstanding the above, I am pleased to report that the basic design by David Lantry appears coherent and robust. Some of David Lantry's site design is well known to LSC web users although behind the existing published design there is structure for further sections but these are not populated with content. It may be that the lack of content has been a consistent issue from the outset.

Drupal presents a site's authors and editors with a WYSIWIG (what you see is what you get) content editor using the JavaScript TinyMCE editor. This content editor will be familiar to any of the tens of millions of bloggers, eBay users and members of a variety of community sites as the editor they use to manage their pages. So they should find it easy to use. For example both Microsoft forums and WordPress use this interface as does BOONEX – the alternative proposed content platform.

The editor's feature presentation is configurable by the DRUPAL admin so that different groups can be presented with as much (or as little) functionality as is necessary for their capability and to enforce the site's style guidelines. Users are assigned particular roles and these roles influence how their editor is configured. This means that capable editors can be assigned more functionality than other groups of users.

**It should be possible to train Little Ship Club members to use this editor for story writing in less than 1 hour. A 'help' document is required to support this training.**

Drupal structures content into a variety of pre-configured content types. The main types of content of interest to the Little Ship Club are called 'Pages', 'Stories' 'Newsletters' and 'Events'. The configuration of these content types can be varied to support a site's style guidelines and the behaviour of the types allows them to be automatically presented in their appropriate place in the navigation system. Thus writers and editors do not need to be trained in the structure of the site and placement of the content they create within, as it is located automatically.

For example, Anne Billiard has been creating 'Events' of the type 'Tuesday Club Night' all year and these are automatically incorporated into the diary and presented to viewers in the overall diary and in the Club night diary. I do not know who trained Anne but it is clear that she

has not needed support since that time and that this skill has enabled her to promote her Club night series of. Val also creates 'Events' and 'Newsletters' as well as managing 'Pages' content when she updates the menu each week.

Ordinary users can also create certain content types. For example 'Crew request' and 'Berth request'. Over 70 users have so far successfully created berth requests and eight skippers have created crew requests. I do not know whether any training was required for members to make these pages but the site instructions should be easy to follow. Nevertheless the Skippers & Crew team feels that **a 'help' documents is required to support this activity.**

Less easy, but still relatively simple to implement, is the facility for skippers to create a 'boat page'. All members could do this and can upload photos and graphics, tables, links and copy to create a personal description on the site. An example is [here](http://www.littleshipclub.co.uk/?q=atv-preparing-cowes) (<http://www.littleshipclub.co.uk/?q=atv-preparing-cowes>). The Skippers & Crew team has now been trained in the creation of boat pages and hope to persuade more members to create them during their cycle of winter Tuesday evening events. They would like **a 'help' document to support skippers.**

If we continue to use Drupal then **there are some configuration changes that should be implemented with these pages.**

Newsletters are used by Val to create ad hoc member mailings and by Wild Strawberry to create eBulletins. If we continue to use Drupal **the newsletter configuration and style needs amendment.**

I have enabled two further content types during the course of this research. These are 'Blogs' and 'Forums'. Now every ordinary member can keep a blog and upload photos to it. An example is [here](http://www.littleshipclub.co.uk/?q=blog/573) (<http://www.littleshipclub.co.uk/?q=blog/573>). Blogs can be aggregated into a side block that shows recent activity.

Members can also contribute to forums where they can follow a particular subject that many members are discussing. I hope that this functionality might be useful for Skippers & Crew and also for distributing photos of rallies. The Forums home page is [here](#)

(<http://www.littleshipclub.co.uk/?q=category/forums/conversations>).

These can also be aggregated into a block showing recent activity.

Both these two types of content address the requirement in the high-level specification repeated by the RC membership for 'social networking functionality'. It remains to be seen how many other members want to be involved in social networking functionality. If we continue to use Drupal **we should configure the buddies module**, which will allow members to build groups of users whose content they are interested in and alert them to changes in that content. This cannot be done until the site platform has been updated.

Drupal allows the easy management of site navigation. The existing site's navigation is confused and has been inaccurate. This seems to be due to the site being designed to hold more content than is currently available. However the information architecture is still confused. I have already made two set of changes to the If we continue to use Drupal then **further navigational changes will be required** however I have not yet completed the architectural analysis and some changes will depend on commitment to future management of the site.

Drupal allows the detail configuration of each page using a series of 'blocks' around the main page content. These allow pages to be finely wrought and series of pages to be presented with a variety of related content. So far our use of blocks has been unrefined, as we have included most blocks on most pages. **There is scope for a much finer use of blocks** but this requires a thoughtful architectural overview of the site as a whole as well as a stable navigation system to be in place.

Drupal allows administrators to configure a variety of search options for the site. I have implemented a simple search and created navigation to this. This function allows users to search for both content and for other users. **There is some technical work required to finalise the search function**

Whilst there is absolutely no traffic to the Sailing News aggregation pages and the links pages I have made the two pages feed from one link, tidied these up, and brought the site feeds up to date. This page now provides an RSS feed of sailing news and members could subscribe for this in their RSS readers. The links page has not been maintained

and several of the links were out of date. I have removed those that I have found but there may be more. **These pages should probably be managed by the librarians and** could provide, for example, a detailed meteorology resource that would be of significant use to skippers. Several other pages have been RSS enabled including all the blog and forum pages.

Whilst I had never used Drupal before I have been considerably impressed by its capability, its simplicity and its scope. **Drupal offers all the functionality that the club could possibly need in the coming years** (but still needs some configuration changes and continuing management).

**Drupal already has the capability to deliver both the static content envisaged by the Commodores' site sketch, the envisaged roster of stories and events, a range of social networking functions**

Should we decide on pursuing a member management database, booking and ecommerce, there are existing Drupal modules to support and extent the current platform

I have also reviewed the capability of the proposed **Boonex** software platform (appendix 4). It is fair to say that **the two platforms are very similar** in that they are both front ends to manage a series of PHP libraries. Both use TinyMCE as the content editor. **The main difference is that Boonex is a proprietary solution (we have to pay a license fee)**. It is simpler to administer (from a technical point of view) but will still require expertise outside existing club member capability. We will therefore need to pay for technical administration for both Boonex and Drupal. In my opinion (and supported by Jon Knight's proposal see appendix 2) **Boonex would not manage and serve well-designed and detailed 'static site' covering membership info, venue hire and club history**. Boonex is not intended to be a generic serving platform. If we adopted Boonex we would have to pay for the creation of that static site and for content maintenance to it (as it is not proposed to make this site using a content management system). I am not clear how much maintenance the site would require but I suspect it will need more than we currently think.

**We have a considerable amount already invested in Drupal.** (10 days of content porting were suggested in the transition plan). The high-level spec for the new site contains little that isn't within the current site architecture and nothing that isn't within the capability of Drupal, which will also manage the static site. Neither Boonex nor Drupal will manage the CRM, ecommerce and booking functions without extension. So either solution will incur additional cost for these developments.

Considering these factors **I can find no justification for a platform change at this time.**

### **So why is there no content?**

The sad fact is that making an engaging web site requires work. Stories do not write themselves nor do photographs take themselves. They are not uploaded to the site by magic nor do they magically disappear when they are old.

Whilst there is no shortage of members who would like to comment on how the web site should be and what our strategy ought to be, members do not seem prepared to actually do the work nor is there a management system to commission and support them.

During the short course of my research I have tried to give impetus to content development and have requested content and feedback from about 20 members however very little has emerged. This has to change if we are to have the web site that we say we want.

If we are to have a site that changes regularly we need to have regularly copy. That means gathering news about members all the time and watching the wider sailing press for news that will affect members. It means writing in more detail about each Tuesday night event. It means getting photographs of club events in circulation quickly. It means writing about club developments and club initiatives promptly. It means encouraging members to contribute to the site on their boat pages, forums, blogs and berth searches and a host of other content initiation activities.

We could not possibly afford to pay Wild Strawberry to do all these tasks (though we may anyway need to pay for some more management) so we must do it ourselves. Many members are busy. Our web site ambitions are large and unfocussed. Whilst it seems obvious to me it is worth stating that **no amount of changing the platform and extending the functionality will make a better site if we don't have content**. The most important task is therefore generating content.

#### **We therefore need to**

- **Concentrate all our effort on the most important tasks**
- **Break these tasks down into manageable chunks so that no single member is overloaded**
- **Instigate a change programme that co-opts members into writing for the site**
- **Train members to upload and format content**
- **Focus on developing traffic from members**

Only when we have a set of processes that will deliver content that works should we think about extending functionality or changing the way the site is served. This seems to me to be the only viable strategy

## Site management

I can find no evidence of any concerted efforts to manage to site since its release in 2007.

Moreover, despite numerous 'web development initiatives' there are no clear goals for the site and as a result any strategy for its management.

The Commodore and the main committee do not lead by example by producing copy and ensuring that it is published on the site. Whilst the site is nominally the responsibility of the membership committee no member of that committee has overall responsibility for the site and so there is no single overview of its current status. There are very few processes for the regular development of copy for the site, its quality

control, accuracy, placement and removal. Certainly there are none that effectively engages with the club's members, sailing or social activities.

It is nobody's job to write copy. There has been no attempt to take down out of date copy. No body is checking whether any regular uploads are happening. Nobody is trying to encourage the sub committees to contribute copy about their activities. The main committee doesn't publish its minutes nor do any other sub committees. There is no reliable process for uploading flyers. These are just the simple and obvious tasks. The list could go on...

In the absence of capability or strategy it seems that almost all responsibility for the site has been devolved by default to Wild Strawberry but they have no clear brief as to what they are to do (and indeed not to do) nor any instruction for prioritisation of the tasks allocated to them. We do not manage Wild Strawberry's performance of the contract. Indeed, neither the club nor Wild Strawberry is clear about what they should be doing. But **we have not contracted Wild Strawberry to manage the site overall and indeed they could not do so within the time allocated to the current contract with them.**

I believe we have contracted Wild Strawberry to develop stories and eBulletins but much of the time we pay for is spent on low value tasks such as uploading documents, taking down old stories and providing support for the secretariat and for ad-hoc members who have contacted them because they don't know whom else to talk to.

This is a waste of resource and cannot have been our intention when we contracted them. Moreover since they have no direct link with members, no single point of contact at the club who is responsible for the site nor clear leadership that promotes the web we make their task much harder than it should be. Nobody thanks Wild Strawberry and encourages them.

In the course of some of the 'web development initiative' some sub committees have appointed 'web liaison' nominees. However these people do not know what is expected of them, how to do whatever it is and how frequently they are expected to do it. They also don't know whom they should give whatever it is that they do or make or what

should happen next. It seems that some sub Cttee chairs think that they have fulfilled their web requirements with these appointments but this is not so. Chairs (or one of their cttee members) should be responsible for ensuring that they are communicating with and responding to members. The technical, editorial and architectural capability of secretariat is not well developed and they cannot provide support for cttees in this area.

A web site cannot function without management and in the absence of management it will atrophy and die. **If the club wants to publish a web site with content then they must find a person who will be the single manager/editor of the site.** This is an onerous task. The role must have wide authority within a broad brief and with clear goals set by the relevant Committee. This brief should be reviewed no more frequently than bi-annually and the site manager/editor should not be distracted by short-term changes of direction and tactics.

To be clear this person's role is NOT to write all the copy though they will write some. It is to manage the site's overall presentation, content balance and relevance by securing input from a wide variety of sources and ensuring the processes for delivering these inputs and reviewing their impact are in-place and working. In the course of developing and implementing this role it is possible that some of the tasks could be sub-contracted – perhaps to Wild Strawberry – but the need for an engaged member remains. **The site editor would become the manager of Wild Strawberry's delivery of web related work.**

The club should also seek out and **appoint a picture editor** whose role would be the maintenance of high quality graphics and imagery across the site.

## **Technical management & security**

The management of the web software platform since the site's launch has been non-existent. There does not seem to have been any awareness that the platform might need maintenance. Mail to the Webmaster has been ignored since late 2007 resulting in over 300 mails remaining unanswered.

We have been fortunate (probably because the level of traffic and administrative change has been so low that there has been no stress on the site) not to encounter an incident that requires a level of technical expertise beyond our capability that results in site unavailability or even data loss.

There is no support plan and no crisis plan and no scenario planning. If something were to go wrong nobody would know what to do. Even if advised what to do it is unlikely that anyone could do whatever is required.

A similar level of ignorance applies to the web-serving environment (and indeed to the club's mail server – though this is outside the scope of this report but exists in the same environment). This issue is structural across the club, which has no IT strategy and management. This does impact the relationship (or lack of relationship) between the club's database and the web server database.

There is also a lack of understanding by the club's representatives about the technical capability of our web platform.

These circumstances have three serious outcomes.

Firstly, because our serving platform has not been maintained, it is open to a variety of well-documented attacks that could threaten the security of member data. We are in breach of our requirement under the Data protection Act to take all steps to secure our member data. Regardless of our future plans, now that I have alerted the Cttee to the issue, **we must either update the platform or take it down.**

Secondly, because our representatives do not understand the capability of our platform they use communication processes that infringe our privacy policy both technically and in spirit. This renders liable to action (though this is unlikely) and also risks damage to our reputation and could threaten member retention. **We should brief our officials on web capability and communication processes as soon as viable**

Finally, because our secretariat has not understood our technical capability nor have we developed processes and policies for technical management, the club wastes valuable secretariat time undertaking tasks manually when automated processes already exist. In addition to the cost of such waste, this also reinforces member dependence on the secretariat to complete task they should manage for themselves. **We should brief the office staff on web management processes as soon as we can.**

Going forward and whatever platform is eventually chosen we should **appoint a webmaster/technical manager** who will be responsible for managing, maintaining and updating the software platform, for training the site editor/office in using the technical facilities of the site, for second-line support for the editor and the office and for third-line support in the event of a crisis. **This role is a different from the editor role.** They need expertise in the platform and from time to time they will need to maintain and write PHP code and SQL. It is unlikely that we have a member who is capable and prepared to do this and therefore likely that this role will be outsourced. Because the capability required is at two different levels (a) platform and b) PHP/SQL) it may be that there are two different relationship.

## **Web Development**

Such web development documentation as has been found in the course of this research illustrates several notable issues

Firstly there is not a clear consensus as to what the web site should be or do, whom it is for and what position it should occupy in the club and members' communications repertoire. Nor is there agreement about how much should be invested and what value might emerge from that investment.

Secondly, there is little understanding of the role of the web in the current life of many ordinary people, the capability of the web and electronic communications more broadly nor the way in which these might integrate with organisational processes.

Thirdly, representatives have approached the planning of web development from a personal point of view instead of using the disciplines of user-centred and process-centred design. There does not seem to be any understanding of what these disciplines are or why they might be more useful or valuable.

Finally, there seems little understanding of the requirement for detail specification before commissioning expensive external development work. The lack of any visible prototyping and the difficulty obtaining any feedback illustrates the distance between wishes and delivery. There does not seem to be an understanding of the work differing work requirements of different proposals nor is there clear prioritisation of the developments that are proposed.

These factors together are almost certainly the principal reason why the club's web development has not resulted in effective and deliverable plans.

No web site can remain static. There will be a need to develop further scope and functionality for the club's site and a new process needs to be devised to specify and deliver this.

**The club should appoint a member as web development director** reporting to the RC Membership. This role is distinct from the Editor and the Webmaster role. The person appointed should have sufficient business analysis experience to be able to define and redefine business processes and sufficient technical knowledge to be able to brief software developers and have experience in project management.

Whatever development process is devised it should be not be subject to short-term change requirements. The scope of the role is to acquire change requests and prioritise these according to policy then specifies them in terms of the clubs processes as paper prototypes. The development director would then commission and manage software development, manage the implantation of new function in the architecture of the platform and train relevant users and operators.

The RC membership, The editor and the development manager form the web management group which should meet quarterly to review web operations, agree policy, future actions and priorities and report back to the Membership Cttee. The main Cttee has already devolved accountability for the web to the Mem Cttee.

### **Currently proposed additional functionality**

A number of documents have talked about the need for additional functionality that should be provided by the site. A high-level web site specification draft has been prepared that calls for booking and e-commerce functionality and both this and the Commodore as well as the RC membership has talked about but not specified 'CRM functionality'.

It should be remembered that the web site already manages most member mailings and whilst some small changes are needed to the style sheet and formatting functions it already provides a very effective tool for managing member contact and potentially for manually segregating members into sub groups (such as 'skipper'; 'crew'; 'South Coast' and the like.

I remain to be convinced either that the club's systems are ready to be codified with the amount of specificity that a machine driven process requires or that there is the capability and/or time resource available in the club to do this.

For example booking for a rally. Isn't the number of spaces at a rally dependent on the number of boats that eventually register? A rally organiser cannot 'specify a number of places' (as the high-level spec calls for) because this is a flexible number. If a member books a space do they have the right to expect a place on a yacht? If not, how would this be made clear? Do members sign up for rallies before they know whether they have a space on a yacht? (I don't know...). To make this system work somebody need to think through the entire process and specify every eventuality and then translate this into a stepped process. This is not a 'web' task; it's a 'business analyst' task. At the moment the club's 'systems' manage to 'fudge' these issues and there are a variety of ways that rally bookings happen. Rallies happen. Money is collected.

Another example is merchandise and regalia. Whilst the current system is not very efficient it does not require the specific stock control that is required by an automated system. If we allowed members to purchase items online we would need to be sure that we had the correct colour and size in stock before accepting the order. Are the club's stock control systems robust enough to ensure that the web site's stock database is always completely correct? It is possible that allowing online regalia purchase would actually increase the office workload from the current system. It's also possible that a system is designed with a particular process in mind that, if not followed to the letter, could result in charging members for stock that does not exist. This would contravene the payment services contract and could result in the club's entire payment services contract being withdrawn. Who will specify these systems? Who will manage the quality control that their operation will require?

The exact functions of 'CRM functionality' have not been written down so far as I have been able to determine. At present the club operates an Access database managing member information. The web site is run on a SQL server dataset. The two systems do not interconnect. Running two databases is certainly running one too many.

But were we to move the current access database to the SQL server database several important questions arise. Does the Access database do exactly what we want? If not who will specify in detail what changes are to be made? At present, whilst Access is old and poorly featured, we can at least manage it. Were we to move the Access functions into SQL server (in a remote environment – as it needs to be near the web server) who would administer the SQL server database? (SQL server does not have the 'form-friendly' front end that Access has so this would need to be written). Whatever database changes are required to deliver the unspecified 'CRM functionality' the detail specification requires careful thought and management and I am not sure the club has the capability or time to effect this at present.

There are a couple of tasks on which the office currently spends time trying to keep the databases in sync. It may be possible to automate the creation of new member records on the web site (the principle office task that is duplicated). It may also be possible to export email address

changes made by members on the site to the access database (though this would present more problems). But is this necessary? Were the web site database were used to manage or provide the source for all member mailings, (as it's capable of doing), then the accuracy of the Access database for the email field would not be an issue. This would alleviate the other onerous office function of updating member email on the web site.

It certainly would be possible as a one-off task to port over other Access fields (such as Address; Telephone; Joining date; and any other) to the SQL server database. This would possibly offer a reduction in administrative time as these could then be member maintained. If the web database were to hold more member information and this were made searchable it would be possible to automate member categorisation. However this would need 2-3 days of office time to manually effect the port as well as a 1-2 days of developer time to craft the new fields in the member record and any SQL searches required. Any further commentary on the Access database would require me to re-familiarise myself with its data structure and is outside the scope of this report.

**However it is essential that the items referred to in the Security section be completed before holding any further member data in the web database.**

**Any other development should not be considered until April 2010 for delivery in October 2010.**

## Site Costs

The cost of running the site currently is:

Site Hosting	~£250 per annum
Additional domain	~£20 per annum
Editorial	£4200 per annum
eBulletins	£450 per annum

## Conclusions and proposed strategy

The club has tried to do too much with too few resources. Management of what to do and how it would be done has been insufficient. In the absence of regular content updates members have deserted the site. Officials have concluded that there was a technical issue that needed to be solved but have been unable to solve it.

Given the lack of achievement under the current strategy a new strategy is required. To deliver a great site the club should:

- make the best of what it has and learn how to use it, invest small amounts in realising this, appoint and empower key leaders who are accountable for realising the value investments we have already made
- devise and run a programme to change members and cttee habits so that they form a bedrock of contributors to the site
- put the site at the centre of its communications efforts so that all mailings bring traffic to the site and every document that the club publishes has a primary web presence, thus building traffic and usage habits
- prioritise future web development tasks and implemented these at a viable pace

The alternative is to abandon the site leaving simply current venue hire site and diary which is perfectly viable but could be made much more visible with thoughtful marketing.

## Proposed Additional Costs

Upgrade Drupal 5.050 to 5.2	£250 one-off
Webmaster	£200 per month
Additional Editorial support (Wild Strawberry)	£350 per month
Configuration and new SQL	£2000 before April 2010

## Detailed Proposals

The following list of tasks is exemplary and not yet complete. They do illustrate a series of tasks designed to deliver a strategy of making best use of the platform that already operate and ensuring that awareness and usage of the facilities that the club offers to members on the web is increased.

Find and appoint

- Web Editor
- Picture manager
- Webmaster (external)
- Web Development director
- Forums moderator
- Links page editor

Establish Web management team of Editor, development Director and RC Membership.

Establish web operations team of all of above + Wild Strawberry

Brief Main Cttee and office on web capability and requirements from them.

Renegotiate with Wild Strawberry

Devise change programme for Novembers – April run either by editor or (if one can be found) an experienced change manager (N Carney has declined this role)

- Change programme to include
  - Prep list of devolved responsibilities
  - Management of the delivery of those responsibilities
  - Prep of help docs
  - Develop further help pages on-site
  - Identification of web liaison members for s-cttees
  - Training workshops for these liaison members
    - Using the Drupal editor
    - What is news, what do our members want to read
    - How to write for the web
- Devise regular schedule of content e.g.
  - Commodores monthly newsletter
  - VC South and East newsletter quarterly
  - RC S&P programme development and announcement
  - Instant reports from fast cruise
  - Photos from fast Cruises
  - More detailed Tuesday night stories with links & Photos
  - Other club events
  - Member news stories – how to find these?
  - External news
  - Cttee and s-cttee minutes
  - Library, News/RSS & Links pages integration
  - Boat show mini site for membership

- Fast reports from early rallies next year
- Find evangelists/writers for forums and a blogger or two
- Write and implement traffic development plan
- Use logs to review and develop traffic
- Refine meta-tagging
- Possible affiliate programme for Venue site
- Spring web relaunch Tuesday night with webby sailor
- Spring web and sailing Tuesday Meteo/Gribs etc Singleton
- Spring making a boat/crew page Tuesday eve workshop for ordinary members

### **Technical development**

- Stabilise site navigation
- Update Drupal to 5.2 and stabilise
- Update Drupal to 6.n and prototype
- Changes to Drupal
  - Configure html email
  - Reconfigure search function for ordinary members
  - Configure buddies module
  - Increase fields in member profile to include
    - Address
    - Phone
    - Mobile
    - Date first joined
  - Remove member since and replace with joined date
  - Port member data from Access to Drupal based on membership number
  - Create special content type boat page and automate placement
  - Create special content type crew type and automate placement
  - Remove last years S&C listings from view
  - Keep S&C listings current from 'today'
  - Other items from web management group

## Glossary

**RSS** – Really Simple Syndication – a method used by many people to have changes in web pages relayed to them directly using an RSS reader such as Google. In this way they do not have to check the site regularly as they are automatically alerted as a site changes.

**CMS** – Content management System – A software suite that allows the creation and placement of web content by people with no technical skills.

### **Drupal – Mission**

Modular and extensible. Drupal aims to provide a slim, powerful core that can be readily extended through custom modules.

High quality, elegant, documented code is a priority over roughed-in functionality.

Standards-based. Drupal supports established and emerging standards. Specific target standards include XHTML and CSS. Low resource demands.

Excellent performance, Drupal puts a premium on low profile coding (for example, minimizing database queries). Drupal should also have minimal, widely available server-side software requirements. Specifically, Drupal should be fully operational on a platform with a web server, PHP, and either MySQL or Postgresql.

Open source. Drupal is based on the open source philosophy of collaborative free software development and is licensed under the GPL. Drupal is itself open source and builds on and supports other open source projects. Specifically, Drupal is coded in the open source scripting language PHP and supports as primary data sources the open source database formats MySQL and Postgresql.

Supported by an enormous pool of developers. Documentation of the CMS is very good at the [Drupal site \(http://drupal.org/node/35172\)](http://drupal.org/node/35172) and

there are numerous books that could be read by members taking a deeper role in the site.

### **Boonex - Mission**

BoonEx is all about uniting people. We want people to collaborate in reaching global and personal goals. We believe that the entire world can be turned into a compassionate, humane and caring community. BoonEx can do it. BoonEx does it.

This is a big, global mission, which was very difficult to achieve in the past, but now we are in the age of global information exchange, the age of the Internet; and we now have truly effective tools to establish common values and change the world.

BoonEx is excited to be in the vanguard of this initiative. By creating online communities and providing community software to like-minded people, we bring people closer - we teach them to be friends again, en masse.

Moreover, BoonEx builds and powers communities on all stages - we build community sites; we give out community software; we create a community of community sites' webmasters; and we are a community ourselves.

A global community just can't be bad, by definition. A united world can save the Earth, can stop wars, and can heal itself.

You also have an opportunity to be a part of our noble mission by making a contribution. Your contribution (any kind of contribution: donations, elaborations, etc.) will help us to develop and improve our products. By making a contribution, you become a member of the big "Unite People" movement. You come first and we acknowledge you as our front row co-fighter!

Support is limited at the site. Documentation is poor. There are books about Boonex.

## Appendix 1 RC Membership memo to main Cttee

### LSC website situation

#### Current LSC website

- No active webmaster
  - We rely on Wild Strawberry who are contracted to undertake a day a month for loading up news content. Having spoken to Chris Smith, a former voluntary webmaster for the Club site, it took circa 7 hours a week, i.e. four days a month so the current provision is not enough to maintain the content and the look and feel of the site.
- Due to a serious illness of the past (voluntary) webmaster, at the time the site was about to be launched (2 years ago), there are a number of ongoing problems and challenges with the site as follows:
  - Software platform is based on a free to use software and then highly customised by the then volunteer webmaster
  - The highest level access of administrator is not known and so updates are not possible as it stands at the moment.
  - As a result, the site is now in danger of becoming outdated compared to other alternative software options which is hard to confirm without a specialist looking at it
  - Due to the reasons above there is only a limited number of people with knowledge and access to the content management system to be able to update the diary or add news content
  - On the positive side the site is very easy to update when people are trained on how to update it. It also has a large amount of functionality which we cannot currently access. (KN has been trained by Wild Strawberry on uploading content)
  - Current website navigation is 'clunky' and information is not always readily available within two or three clicks, so an overhaul of navigation is required whatever route is selected moving forward.
- Currently no written down procedure or processes for updating content or for managing the website with no one willing to take overall responsibility.
  - Nominally it is currently the Rear Commodore Membership's responsibility with support from the Club office but given the above issues it is not operating clearly or smoothly and has not been for a while.
  - High expectations by other Club committees for the website to work without the resultant commitment by those committees to assist in the process e.g. requests for copy for their sections of the website not responded to and a very limited response to the

request for a nominated website representative from each committee. This limited response is also likely to be due to there being no clear process or timing plan within which they see what is required of them.

- There is an urgent need to holistically consider the website moving forward and how we wish to harness technology to ensure that we maximise the opportunity any changes can bring the club. It maybe that not all our 'wish list' is possible immediately due to budget or resource issues however it is important that a holistic view is taken of the website and this is only likely to happen by appointing a working party on it and not relying on one or two members to make it all happen, all on a voluntary basis.

### **Proposed new LSC website**

- Commodore's view is that the current site lacks animation or energy and he had proposed that a 'brochure' type front end should be redesigned with clearer copy. This would be maintained by a professional on an ongoing basis, plus a back end section for 'members only' section working as a social media structure where members can email each other and create special interest groups etc.

This was being organised by Silke Zimmermann as the outgoing RC Membership at the time and Jon Knight, a club member active in developing websites professionally. Both had agreed to project manage overall and build the back end social networking elements respectively. A beta site for the social networking element has been developed but without an agreed process only Skippers & Crew have actively engaged in developing the beta site further. Meanwhile, another member has set up a Face book page for Little Ship Club which is currently unused but would easily be activated.

- Given the current challenges the Club faces with the costs of the Clubhouse etc, the development of the website is definitely a priority not only to maximise the interest it generates to drive new members to the Club but also to alleviate the burden of administration that the Club office is currently under to just deliver basic member administration.
- Added features that would add to the current site functionality could include, opportunity to download applications forms for both membership and training. Consideration of ongoing and active Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) development, attractive, easy to send email newsletters, ability to book the club for venue hire and Club events at the Clubhouse / rallies online, all of which would need to tie up with an integrated, common content management system and database of members in a secure environment.

It needs to be noted that all of the above are now available

as standard and the Little Ship Clubs needs to be abreast of these developments in order to maximise the relevance of the site to our members and to prospective new members moving forward.

- Whilst there has been some progress in moving to the development of a new website it has generally been piecemeal and uncoordinated with no overall proper consultation, limited specification of requirements with no process agreed or currently being implemented.
- On a positive note a budget had been allocated and a list of technical requirements has been written up, however, due to limited consultation, it is my view that not all requirements have been fully considered (likely to be developed in a modular fashion) and there is the danger that we will just end up with the same challenges and problems that we are currently facing with the current site after a lot of time and money has been spent on a new site.

### **Proposed actions moving forward**

- Due to the challenges that we are encountering with the website, I propose that the committee considers the need for a new role that reports directly to the main committee entitled, 'Website & IT officer'.
- It would be their responsibility to create and recruit a website and IT steering committee. This is likely to be made up of representatives of membership, Sail & Power, Skippers & Crew, Regalia, Social, South Coast, East Coast, Club office, HPO Officer, Jon Knight (as technical knowledge) etc
- The steering committee would then develop and decide the following:
  - A proposed strategy for the site to include factors as highlighted in the previous sections
  - This strategy shared with the all the committees within the Club ie membership, Sail & Power, Skippers & Crew, Social, South Coast, East Coast, Club office etc for proper consultation and feedback.
  - A full and extensive brief developed that needs to reflect the challenges we face re a full specification that would need to cover such elements as:
    - Navigation
    - Overall look & feel
    - Ongoing maintenance of the site
      - Technical support including SEO and Google analytics

- Content management re dynamic and static copy
- Content management re picture library and continual refreshment of pictures with new ones
- Agreed, workable process for content management
- E commerce options
- IT integration with the office e.g. a common database that can be updated via the web / record purchases made by members etc
- Communication capabilities re HTML email newsletters that are attractive, easy to send and which can track number of members opening them with links to the web
- Need for a written manual /online to ensure that all knowledge is not lost should relationships with suppliers or if key members become inactive over time.

## Appendix 2

### Web Site Requirements Document by Jon Knight

#### **Little Ship Club Web Site Requirements**

#### **DRAFT DOCUMENT**

#### **Overview**

This document provides a high-level overview requirements for the Little Ship Club website. The club will be approaching vendors to discuss options for the set up and maintenance of this website.

#### **Business Objective**

Although a not-for-profit organization, the club needs to attract active new members, while at the same time retaining the existing membership. The web site is seen as a core part of this strategy.

#### **Contributors**

This document was based on input from the LSC Membership Committee, LSC Office and LSC Skippers & Crews Committee.

#### **Public Content**

Public functionality is any content which is accessible by non-members and club members alike. However, creation of this content is of course restricted to certain authorised club members.

#### **Club Content (occasional updates)**

Content regarding the club, and its activities should be published on the web site. This information would include, but not be limited to, the following sections:

##### **The Club**

Content about the Little Ship club and its history; famous members etc.

##### **The Club Premises**

Content describing the club premises on Bell Wharf lane, facilities available to members such as the cabins, bar and restaurant, and links to the our caterers for hire of the venue.

#### **Membership Content (occasional updates)**

Content concerning the various membership packages offered by the club, together with the benefits of membership. This section would also functionality to register for membership online.

## Membership Details

Detailed content of the specific membership deals available.

### Join On-line

An on-line web form allowing users to enter their personal details and either

1. Join the club immediately, and pay for their membership on-line using the on-line payments gateway or
2. Register their interest, and be invited to a guests evening.

### News

The News section of the web site would allow authorised members to upload news articles using the content management functionality of the site. These news articles should be displayed in “blog” style with Headline + Summary paragraph + thumbnail photo, on an index page, which, when clicked on, would open a dedicated news article page.

The web site should support RSS subscription to both members and non-members.

### Events (non-member read only)

Non-members will be able to view details of upcoming club events, but not subscribe to them.

Further details for events functionality are outlined later in this document.

### Training

Non-members will be able to view details of upcoming training events but not subscribe to them. The training and event management functionality will use the same engine, with “events” categorised as either Training events or Club Events.

## Member Functionality

### Update Personal Details

Members can update their own personal details once logged in to the site. These personal details would include:

- Name
- Address
- Email address
- Password reset
- Date of birth
- Photo

## **Events & Training**

The site should support an Event Management engine, allowing authorised users to create event. The event engine should support the following attributes

### **Event Dates**

Start date / time and end date / time, including multiday events

### **Event Category**

An event should be allocated to a specific category, such as:

- Training Courses
- Social Events (in club)
- Rallies
- Fast Cruises

These categories should allow the filtering of event listings allowing for different pages on the web site to display different event categories.. i.e. training page, Fast Cruise page etc.

### **Event Spaces**

The organiser can enter a maximum number of available spaces available for a specific event. Once the maximum number of attendees has been specified, no further registrations will be accepted.

## **Event Registration**

Members can choose to register for an event. In addition to their own attendance, they will also be able to reserve spaces for guests. Some of these guests may or may not be existing members of the club.

For paid events, the member will be redirected to the payment engine, where they will pay the event for all attendees.

## **Skippers & Crews**

The Skippers & Crew functionality of the LSC web site, allows matching of crewing opportunities to available boats.

### **Member Profiles**

In order to match members to crewing opportunities, members will need to complete their member profile. This profile will be accessible through their general profile page and will allow for the inclusion of custom attributes:

- Sailing Experience
- Qualifications
- Crewing Availability (dates & location)
- Dietary requirements

### Boat Profiles

Members owning boats (skippers) will be able to complete a profile of their boat, including attributes such as:

- Vessel Name
- Registration Number
- LOA
- Home port

In addition to this, they will be able to specify requirements for crew. It is possible that this functionality could use the Event Management engine. These requirements will include the following attributes:

- Start date to end date
- Location
- Number of places
- Crewing experience required
- Other requirements

### Matching Crewing Opportunities to Crew

In order to facilitate crew finding opportunities and vice versa, the web site should support the following types of matching:

#### **Crew Search**

An ad-hoc search of crew /opportunities where users can enter any number of relevant search fields, and see matches listed.

#### **Saved Crew Search**

An ad-hoc search can be saved, and the site will then automatically generate notifications to members of any relevant crewing matches via email.

#### **Membership Renewal & Payment**

Members pay membership fees on a monthly, quarterly or annual basis. The web site should facilitate this process by allowing members to set up

recurring payments from a credit or debit card via the Payment Service functionality.

### **Member Content**

Members should be able to contribute content to the site. This content will be restricted to access via other members and not accessible to non-members.

Functionality for member content should include:

#### **Blogging**

Allowing members to post articles and stories on their home pages.

#### **Photo Galleries**

Allowing members to upload photos of recent related events to their home pages. This functionality should ideally support some form of bulk upload.

#### **Friends**

Some form of social networking functionality allowing members to link to other members.

### **Club Merchandise**

The site should support simple ecommerce functionality, allowing members to purchase club merchandise on-line. As many items for sale come in different sizes, the ecommerce functionality should support size selection.

The ecommerce engine should also support shopping basket functionality, as well as payment via the Payment Service gateway.

### **Restricted Functionality**

#### **Office Functionality**

The LSC currently have a number of full-time staff who are responsible for the smooth running of the club on a day to day basis.

Send HTML emails to all members/selected groups of members

Take payments

Direct Debit

Credit cards

Use Sage for financials

Add to web site

Create membership card & letter

Warrant

Data mining

## **Technical System Requirements**

### **Site Hosting**

#### **Payment System Support**

The web site must support a common Payment service gateway and shopping basket for all relevant functionality detailed in the sections above.

It is recommended that the club will select Paypal as a preferred payment service provider, due to the excellent card coverage, and simple integration.

However this may not be the case. In any case, the payment service engine must support:

- Mastercard & Visa debit and credit cards
- No storage of credit card numbers on web site's database
- Support for Verified By Visa and Mastercard Securecode
- Support for Chargeback management

#### **Advertising**

The club are open to the possibility of advertising by approved third parties on the web site, on the basis that this generates revenue for the club, or offsets the cost of supporting and running the website.

The web site should support all relevant ad management including tracking of clickthroughs, managing impressions etc.

#### **Creation of Rich Content**

All content editors on the site should be consistent and support full HTML text and graphics including:

- Text formatting such as bold, italic, underline, bullet points
- Images, with upload support and automatic thumbnailing

#### **Searching**

All pages on the website should include a simple search box that will perform a site-wide search of a given set of keywords.

### **Search Engine Optimisation**

The site should support the relevant metadata for appropriate indexing by the top 5 search engines. Would also be interested to have ongoing SEO for certain key words

### **Security**

The site should support granular role-based security.

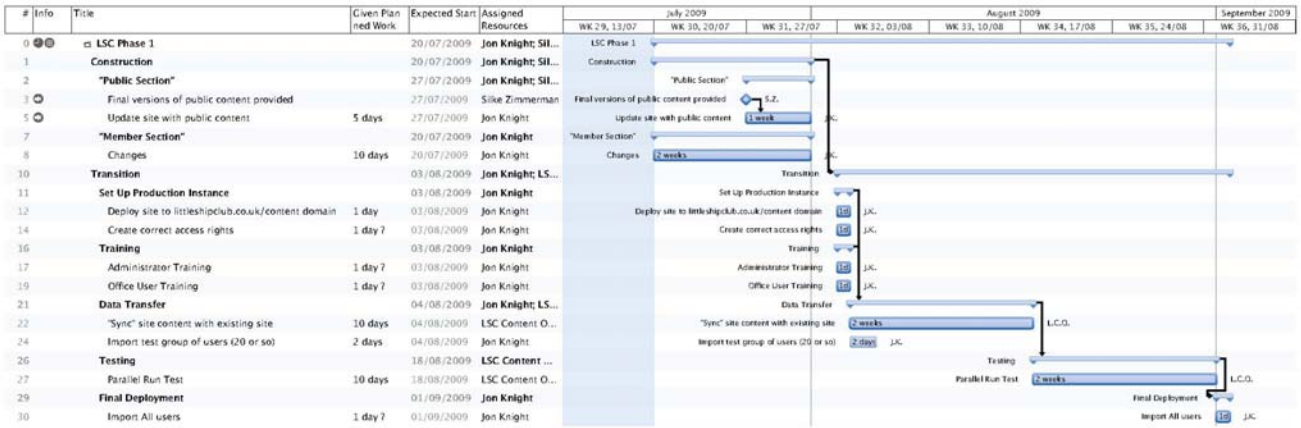
### **Support Requirements**

#### **Support**

The site should be hosted and maintained by a single vendor, responsible for both operating system, web server, database support as well as support for the content management system

Access to the Support services should be ideally available to all club members who have content generation permissions for the site.

## Appendix 3 – Plan to migrate to Boonex



Criterion	Boonex	Drupal 5.n
License	Proprietary (\$299) to remove branding	Open Source GPL license
Primary Purpose	<p>YouTube, MySpace, Odeo, Flickr, Match and Facebook - all in one, customizable and under your full control. You're limited only by your imagination - not by the software. Dolphin Smart Community Builder is a universal, free, open source software that allows you to build any kind of online community. With a huge variety of features &amp; options, you can quickly launch your own very unique and successful website.</p>	<p>Drupal is a free software package that allows an individual or a community of users to easily publish, manage and organize a wide variety of content on a website. Tens of thousands of people and organizations are using Drupal to power scores of different web sites, Drupal meets the needs of different types of web sites from community to news portals, from corporate sites to educational institutions, from media sites to international sites.</p>
Will serve whole site?	Probably not in the current format	Yes
Platform complexity	Simpler	More complex
Overall simplicity	Probably easier to manage but still requires SQL to extend	Needs SQL/PHP for more complex functions
Our ability to manage tech	Unkown - depends on member skills but if none then requires external support	Will need external support
Layout Flexibility	quite flexible	very flexible
Support	Forum, hosting deals, External developers	Forum, hosting deals, External developers
Continuing development	Developed by central team and community	Developed by central team and community
Extending functions	MODs are often licensed	Modules are free
External functions	Will integrate with many PHP/MySQL packages	Will integrate with many PHP/MySQL packages
Editor for content managers	TinyMCE	TinyMCE
Use of pics/graphics	flexible	flexible
Use of multimedia	A strength of Boonex	More flexibility in Drupal 6 and 7
Ease of in-package configuration	Easy to configure	Easy to configure
Stability	Best in specialised hosting	Best in specialised hosting...but we have been without this for 2 years