Guided Tour under the Hood of our Website

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In this article, we will chart the history of the Association's website, present statistics on hits, or visits, to it, and provide observations we've made over the past five years.

We hope that our comments might also guide other organizations having needs similar to our own in setting up a website.

HISTORY

From our *Chronicle of twenty years : Defining events,* Jean-Louis Bertrand extracted the following deliberations of the Board concerning the establishment of a website:

- March 8, 2004, at the 3rd Board meeting, Secretary J. Brian Timperley records that he will inquire if members would like to receive e-mail correspondence from the Association. He will also look into the possibilities of establishing a website for us.
- March 20, 2004, at the Annual General Assembly, Brian declares : a website is under construction.
- September 21, 2004 at the 10th Board meeting, the question of postal mailings, as well as the website creation are again revisited. No decision.
- February 8, 2006, the Board adopts the creation of a website in its annual program.
- August 2, 2006 7th Board meeting. Brian Timperley is tasked with contacting J. Eldrige in order to create a website and to determine the costs for such a project.
- January 16, 2007, after much discussion, the Board decides to abandon the website project for the Association, by reason of cost.
- October 7, 2008: in November, Bernard Sansoucy will call specific members for the development of a website for the Association.
- Finally, on March 10, 2009, Serge Normand volunteers to design our website. October 2009 is considered a realistic target date for launching the site from concept design to building, with revision by the Board included.

- Our site is launched on September 24, 2010 to the enthusiastic cheering of 81 members gathered to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Association.

Humoristic photo of the Web server presented at the website launch, in 2010

Thus, in 2009, we were entrusted to investigate the question of a website and to propose a mode for development and creation that would provide the Association with a new means of communicating with its members.

EXPRESSED NEEDS

Essentially, the Association sought to announce its activities using an on-line bulletin board and to communicate efficiently with its members. As well, the Association possesses a wealth of printed documents and archived photographs which would likely be published.

To set up a website, it was then necessary to :

- Find a way to capture and *encode* the information for distribution on the Web;
- Find a *Web host* for the site;
- Identify the *person(s)* to develop and maintain the site.

TO CAPTURE INFORMATION AND EDIT THE CONTENT

The growing popularity of the Internet over the past years has resulted in new tools and computer interfaces that greatly facilitate the addition of all types of on-line content.

Previously, one needed time to master the language codes of HTML (HyperText Markup Language) necessary to publish content on the Internet. As an example, to display

Potton Heritage Association

in red bold face type as shown, the following special codes had to be used to tag the text:

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<p><span style="color: #ff0000;">
<strong>Potton Heritage
Association</strong>
</span></p>
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That same operation is now performed using a software interface reproducing the capabilities of a word processor: the Content Management Systems (CMS) specialized in formatting content for publication on the Web. They have evolved as open source software, with the considerable advantage of free access.

In 2010, we considered ten or so CMS and chose WordPress, already very popular with public bodies, private firms, and thousands of individuals world-wide. User communities formed to offer wise advice for system control and operation in various languages.

For example, Table A shows how the WordPress community presented this tool.

After five year's experience with WordPress, we can attest that the product advertising is true. Frequent up-dates insure the security and stability of the system, and the user-community continuously proposes modules (themes and extensions) rich in possibilities for varied needs and to polish the presentation of a website.

THE MOST POPULAR CMS IN THE WORLD

WordPress: simple and elegant…

- Free
- Respectful of standards
- Ergonomic
- Quick to install

WordPress is a Content Management System (CMS) that permits the creation and overall easy management of a website or only a blog. Free and open sourced, WordPress may be personalized by numerous themes and plugins. Furthermore, there is a solid user-community the whole world over.

Table A

We will more thoroughly explore the structure of our contents after having looked at the choices for a Web host.

TO FIND A WEB HOST

The operation of a website necessitates the registration of a domain name and finding a Web host that will assure the link with the World Wide Web. We therefore reserved two domain names to respect the bilingual character of our Association, those being:

www.patrimoinepotton.org
www.pottonheritage.org.

We retained the following criteria and chose a Web host listed among the best top five on the Web:

- use of unlimited band width;
- unlimited storage;
- unlimited e-mail addresses;
- cost of $7.00 per month;
- easy access to technical assistance, when needed.

Our choice has proven a good one, considering that in five years of use, we have never experienced a technical breakdown, have never needed technical support because answers to our questions were available via an on-line interface with the Web host. Experience has thus proven that, for around one hundred dollars per year, we can be present on the Web with two domain names.

WORKING WITH WORDPRESS

In WordPress, content is entered using templates called either *pages* or *articles (posts)*. Pages are those on which static information is entered, and are those most often accessible from menus. As for content placed in articles, they scroll automatically much like a news wire and lend themselves to functionning like a blog. Even if we have put information in articles, we have no need, for the moment, to activate the blog function on our websites. WordPress offers, as well, a media library module where textual documents and audio visual materials may be recorded and saved.

Table B sumarizes the number of elements that make up our websites as of February 2015.

Once these elements of content are saved, one may present them in WordPress by using pre-defined display templates, called themes, and thereby vary display styles without having to redefine a particular coding. The overall functioning of WordPress resides, as well, on the addition of multi-use dedicated modules: to manage a calendar for the announcement of some activities, to manage photo albums, to ease downloading of on-line documents, to insure back-up copies of our data base, to insure site security, to calculate the number of site visits, etc.

These modules, called extensions or plugins, are creations that the user-community have added to the array of unrestricted open source software available. There are thousands of them. Here are the statistics displayed on the WordPress site as we write this article : 36, 315 plugins – 857,422,837 downloads!

These impressive figures illustrate well the popularity of this software interface. In order to develop our website, we explored a vast gallery of plugins and retained about twenty which met our needs.

Categories and elements	Site www.patrimoinepotton.org (Number)	Site www.pottonheritage.org (Number)
Pages	87	66
Articles	70	54
Images and photo albums	761	46
Media Library	121	90
Files for downloading	53	48

Table B – Categories and number of elements on our websites

Capture of Screen C – Welcome page

The capture of screen C presents the Welcome page of the English language website. The display template was created by a theme, 2010 Weaver. Notice the different components that are in place with the help of pages, articles and plugins:

- Under the logo, a menu bar which scrolls to give access to pages of content.
- In the centre, is an article entitled **Next Excursion**; which may scroll with other articles according to the chronology of publication. When used in the context of a blog, articles are also called *posts* to which visitors may respond by commenting; but remember that we have not activated that function on either of our websites.
- To the right of the screen are the different modules, created by plugins, which allow among others to display headings one by one, to consult the schedule of activities, to research the content by clicking on keyword, etc.

And voilà, a functional website!

THE AUTHORS

WordPress identifies categories of users who are given specific permission to interact with the website and to add content. Between the administrator who has all rights and the visitor who may leave comments on a blog, is the editor who, for example, may write and modify articles.

For five years, the management of our websites has been the sole responsibilty of the Webmaster, a member of the Board of Directors, and consequently aware of the different needs for processing information. He participates in the editing of our publications and manages communications with our members. Over the course of the last two years, we have also digitized the Association's brochures and leaflets, in addition to editing

our *Histoire Potton History* magazine, published twice a year. We estimate that from 500 to 800 hours are devoted annually to the development and management of our websites and to related tasks.

VISITOR STATISTICS

We registered our sites on the World Wide Web by authorizing their indexation by current search engines. Visits have grown from the very beginning, to the point that now we receive around 900 hits a month. Web surfers from all continents continue to search for *something*: useful information or an attempted cyber attack? Our sites are as secure as possible and we regularly take back-up copies, just in case! We notice that since *Potton d'antan – Yesterdays of Potton* has been put on-line, it receives much interest, notably from Eastern countries. Could we theorize that this is pedagogical material for learning French?

In November 2014, we added the option of a counter to register the number of times our public documents are downloaded.

The figures in table D demonstrate visitors' interest in our publications. More than 2000 downloads occurred since that date.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The ever expanding popularity of social media has made us also question if we should be present on this platform. Such a need has yet to be expressed by the members; and so, for the same reasons that we have not activated the blog function on our websites, we see no reason to communicate via social media at this time. E-mail communication with our 200 members and the established links to our websites seem adequate. Nonetheless, to avoid any misappropriation of our name, we have created a Facebook page on which the list of our excursions is displayed, as it does on the calendar of the Municipality of Potton.

Téléchargements - *Downloads*

Depuis novembre 2014 - *Since November 2014*

Revue HPH			Total
HISTOIRE POTTON HISTORY VOL. 1 NO 1 PRINTEMPS 2013			50
HISTOIRE POTTON HISTORY VOL. 1 NO 2 AUTOMNE 2013			112
HISTOIRE POTTON HISTORY VOL. 2 NO 1 PRINTEMPS 2014			9

Brochures	Français	English	Total
INCOMPARABLE POTTON, 2013	34	54	88
LE PATRIMOINE BÂTI DE POTTON, 2013	46	69	115
LES PAYSAGES DE POTTON - UN BIEN CULTUREL COLLECTIF, 2014	46	52	98
UN CANTON À DÉCOUVRIR - POTTON, 2008	37	76	113
UNE PROMENADE AU VILLAGE DE MANSONVILLE, 2011	42	48	90

Dépliants - *Leaflets*	Français	English	Total
DUNKIN, 2011	43	64	107
GRANGE RONDE DE MANSONVILLE, 2014	53	61	114
HIGHWATER, 2011	71	90	161
KNOWLTON LANDING, 2010	49	132	181
LE PATRIMOINE RELIGIEUX DE POTTON, 2011	62	84	146
MONASTÈRE RUSSE, 2010	70	70	140
OWL'S HEAD, 2010	57	159	216
PONT DE LA FRONTIÈRE, 2009	47	56	103
VALE PERKINS, 2011	84	137	221
VOROKHTA ET CHAPELLE UKRANIENNE SAINT-JEAN-BAPTISTE, 2010	52	77	129
	Français	English	Total
Total	793	1229	2193

Table D

CONCLUSION

At the risk of seeming to promote WordPress, we have described herein the experience of developing and managing a website, as entrusted to an experienced computer user. As a volunteer, he put in the time necessary for the Potton Heritage Association to be present on the World Wide Web at the least cost.

SOURCES

- Bertrand, Jean-Louis. *Chronique des vingt ans*, Potton Heritage Association, 2010.
- WordPress Francophone, http://www.wordpress-fr.net/ , 2015
- WordPress Organization, https://wordpress.org/plugins/ , 2015