

ACTRA Website, Event and Membership Administration and Communications

David Baldwin, 7 October 2015

The ACTRA website is long overdue for an upgrade. The Content Management System software was end-of-life several years ago which means that it cannot be enhanced or security fixes applied until upgraded to the latest version. There are dependencies of the current website on a number of different pieces of software written by various ACTRA members over the years which also need to be replaced – these include online payment processing and specific event management functions.

The ACTRA laptop is adequate for the tasks required, however standardizing the interface used for pre-event (on the website) and on-the-day (currently GUI software) to using only web-based would make training and familiarity with systems easier for event admin volunteers. This can be achieved by running a local web server on the laptop and synchronizing data around the time of an event.

ACTRA also has an e-mail newsletter system run from the website, and a Facebook page which is managed in parallel to the website, both of which could be more closely integrated.

A summary of website functions:

Home page

- “blog” of latest news
- panels for coming and recent events
- menu and search access to other site content
- a selection of recent photos to add interest – a feature which is no longer on the site but was once

Event Calendar

- yearly events summary of dates, times and duration
- including ACTRA and other events and key volunteer roles
- Links to event specific pages

Event specific pages

- pre-event information
- photos
- team lists with real-time details
- final instructions
- link to the online entry form

Event Team lists include:

- team details – names, gender/age categories

- payment summary and outstanding amounts
- state of affiliation for members for interstate pointscore
- country for international events
- novice, family or other customizable categories
- university for intervarsity events

Final instructions include:

- safety information including postponement contingencies due to extreme weather
- compulsory/recommended gear
- driving directions and maps (static or dynamic)
- water details

There are also basic partner finder and carpooling bulletin boards. The information pages are template driven which prompts event manager for answers to common questions which might be otherwise missed.

Past Events

- archive of past events
- links to event specific pages containing:
 - Results with each team's electronic punching records and routes in a KML file
 - stories
 - photo gallery
 - organizer reports
 - Could be enhanced with member contributions of stories, GPS tracks, photos, comments, discussion, etc.

E-mail newsletters

- archive of past newsletters
- sign-up subscription form
- template driven for ease of formatting with preview and test e-mail functions

E-mail addresses are also collected from each event and fed into the subscription list. There is an unsubscribe link in each newsletter for people to opt-out.

Other pages include volunteer register of past event contributions, committee details, contact forms to send e-mails to committee, various pages with introductory and other background information, links to rogaining in other states and countries, archive of news items and link to photo gallery.

The event and membership admin system incorporates web-based event entry forms and membership forms for collecting data. This is managed by common software which allows management of details through the website before an event, generation of paper-based forms for on-the-day admin so we don't have to rely on time-critical use of computer-based systems which may fail for a variety of reasons, and on-the-day admin to update team details as required then interfacing with the Navlight system to generate results.

Online Entry process allows for:

- events with a customisable sub-events (duration, bike/foot, night/day, etc)
- customizable fees for full/concession, earlybird/late, sub-event
- date cutoffs for late fees, closing entries, etc
- team member gender + age/DOB to generate category
- team member state/country
- novice status
- family category
- universities
- event-customisable age categories and solo competitors (minimum age)
- additional purchases such as merchandise (items, sizing options), bus seats (limit on numbers), camping or meals
- Online BPAY payments automatically applied as they are received (daily batch)
- Manual payment processing for cheque or cash
- Ideally also allow credit card via paypal or similar payment gateway
- Ideally allow claim of free entry for past volunteer activity (e.g. voucher code)
- Ideally allow for streamlined transfer of members and fees between teams with category adjustment

Much of this functionality is currently hard-coded and not easy to change.

For event admin Navlight tags are pre-allocated from team lists and the same system is used to update team details on the day (DNS, team member changes, etc), with Navlight data automatically synchronized. After Navlight tags have been read, scoring data is then synchronized back to produce results reports. After an event the process of uploading data and results to the website is largely automated with pages and links automatically created. A financial report is produced of all receipts broken down by payment type with summary of various fees, sub-events, etc.

Currently ACTRA maintains an annual membership list where a member pays a fee for their first event of the year. Subsequent event entries in the same year do not require additional membership payment, however reconciliation is not well automated and error-prone, and any claim of out-of-state membership is taken at face value. An alternative would be to accumulate a register of unique participants through the year. Both are valid options for annual capitation for insurance and ARA levies.

An ideal solution to replace this functionality could be constructed using extensions to the Joomla content management system. There are several available for free or at minimal cost – see <http://extensions.joomla.org> and search for “event management” or “event registration”, also:
<http://joomdonation.com>
<https://civicrm.org/>