

Recommendations from the Website Working Group – July 2011.

Note: at the time these recommendations were written Drupal appeared to be the more likely platform we would use. Feedback and further thought has made WordPress appear to be an equally good alternative. Once formed, the web development group will choose which platform to use. (Interim board Sept. 2011)

1. Preamble

Building or developing a website is much like building a house. There is the design--how the house will *look and feel*--and there is the content which is primarily, but not exclusively, the text. Both elements need to grow in tandem for there to come about something that is visually appealing while at the same time truly useful to people who visit. This is true during all stages of development and especially so over time. It is all too easy to consider the house *finished* when in practice it never is. The paint on our present site is peeling and the content somewhat dusty from lack of attention. We hope that what we propose will result in a place which people will increasingly regard as their home to return to, on the internet.

We have said little about the *look and feel* of the site. One would hope it possible to convey what we are at heart, and that would be a significant element in why people would be drawn to visit and return regularly. A visual sense of quiet simplicity, of stillness and humility coupled with a lively and positive involvement with the stuff of daily living would be a start in terms of communicating the essence of our Order to those on a first visit. As at the temple door, so also on entering the site; we are welcoming, kind, compassionate, approachable and friendly human beings. That, then, would be the *tone* of the site. The tone together with the twin elements of *look/feel* and *content* come together to inspire visitors at all levels of interest and involvement. Hopefully this particular window on our practice and teachings will stimulate a resonance with what we term ‘the important thing’.

The foundation we recommend (Drupal) has the potential for supporting timely growth in terms of content to be added as it is written (Page 5, Proposed Site Content) and to have built into the foundation itself both the strength and the flexibility to grow and change as we do. Significantly Drupal allows, given the necessary permission, for non-technical people to work behind the scenes to edit and add content, while not messing up the look and feel of the site! Looking now at the bigger long-term picture, there in the foundations will be the potential to allow individuals and groups to enter specific areas of the site, contribute content where permissions have been granted, and not compromise security. We stand by what we propose in this document, knowing that Rome was not built in a day. What seems good now will invariably change in response to our evolving sense of what is good for the Order to offer in this medium.

Sequencing the development of this site, as with building a house, is conditioned by a number of interlocking factors including people with the necessary skill and knowledge to write content, the timely coming together of the elements of the site into one coherent whole (no small task), and the skill and sensitivity to maintain the appropriate overall

tone within the development of the site. All of this is set within the background context of the necessity for decision-making. Initially there is likely to be an unremitting need for decisions and later, after the foundation is in place, with a couple of floors constructed and the front door opened, decisions become more routine.

Clearly no one person can take in hand what we have laid out in this document. We have suggested a team approach to both developing the site and its eventual management. The members of these teams will need to be identified and chosen with great care, taking into account more than just technical know-how. The interim board together with the head of the order, and with consultation within the wider order, must surely be able to bring about this creative way of passing on that which we have, and are.

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2. Introduction and purpose

The website working group was set up with the following purpose "to evaluate the current site and identify clear needs for update; gather input from across the Order on what the site could additionally include that would be of support and help across the Order; evaluate all ideas, ...draft a proposed site outline that would include immediate needs for initial site, further possibilities that are broadly supported, a list of ideas to hold for future inclusion, and ideas that currently seem inappropriate or problematic." (www.obcinterimboard.org 15th Dec, 2010).

This report aims to fulfil this brief by

- a. Presenting the conclusions of our survey and evaluation of the current site;
- b. Proposing that we develop the site as a resource for the OBC community, using the content management platform called Drupal.
- c. Providing some detailed outlines for the content of the site for use by a site designer and a site content development team;
- d. Suggesting ways in which the development of the site can be, now and potentially in the future;
- e. Suggesting practical next steps for the website.

3. Conclusions of our survey and evaluation of the current site.

A survey of users of the www.obcon.org site was carried out this February and a questionnaire was answered by around 49% of monks and 40% of Lay ministers, as well as 7 Meditation groups. The survey showed that monks and lay ministers only made occasional use of the site, with few visitors coming to it through search engines such as Google (about 20%). The stated reasons why it was used so little were mainly because it contained nothing that wasn't already on the local temple sites, and that it was seen as out of date in both look and function. When asked "What might prompt you to use [the site]?" the priority was for regularly updated material, and that the site become a better communication hub for the Order. Further detail on feedback about what people would like is available in our survey report.

4. Site Development Proposal

The proposed new OBC website is designed for a broad audience that includes OBC monastic's worldwide; OBC lay ministers worldwide; Buddhist trainees identifying themselves with OBC practice and teaching, including but not limited to those who have taken Jukai within the OBC, local congregations, and friends; general inquirers and seekers, those interested in Buddhism in general and in Serene Reflection Meditation as transmitted through RM Jiyu-Kennett and the OBC. The site audience also includes people who know very little about Buddhism and would like to know more; people who know very little of Zen and would like to know more; people who know very little of our tradition and would like to know more; and people who come to us through other links.

It is clear that at the moment the current site only serves this broad audience in a limited way. We believe the site's limitations can be overcome as listed below

- a. By redesigning the look of the site to bring it up to date with current web standards.
- b. By expanding information about the Order including the Order's history and lineage, teachings, organizational structure, and detailed and current order wide contact information.
- c. By providing a wider range of Dharma content in different formats. We recommend that the Dharma content of the site (see detail below) be partly a 'magazine' section of shorter articles that are easily read as web pages, but also include longer articles and recorded talks in different formats.
- d. By integrating the current www.obcjournall.org into the site.
- e. By using the web development platform of 'Drupal' as the technical ground of the site, expand the flexibility to create customized pages, and to organize data that allows users to search the content. Drupal also has translation modules for different languages and access via Smartphones is supported. We have some experience of using Drupal within the Order and it would make integration with the OBC Journal site a lot easier. (The current Interim Board website, bright moon and the www.obcjournall.org site use Drupal.)
- f. We recommend that, ultimately, a site administrative team be created who will be responsible for the administration of the site. It would be helpful if this team were created to be involved with the initial site development. But it could be formed later in the process. This team would be composed of at least two people who would ensure compliance to site guidelines and standards and who could assign user permissions to others based on their function. They would ensure that the basic structure of the site works and consult with RM Haryo (or his designated representative) and would keep in touch with the developer and hosting company to fix any problems. Most importantly, this team is responsible for keeping the information on the site current and accurate.
- g. By encouraging a wider sense of direct participation and involvement by

members of the Order. This can be built up incrementally as we set up procedures for contributing content via editors, and according to need. The Drupal platform allows us this flexibility. Once the site has been designed by a professional web developer the new pages, changes to the basic menu structure and content revision can all be directly managed by the administrative team rather than programmers. By developing a site that enables some types of content to be posted by members of the Order (with the supervision of the site editors) we ensure that the site remains relevant to members and friends of the Order. Regular postings also ensure that the site is easily found on search engines.

- h. We recommend that the site be hosted by a professionally recognized host able to meet our needs, including providing routine maintenance, such as updating the Drupal core and modules, and usage reports, preferably at page level for the most used sections of the site. Reports should be available to Order officers and all concerned with the site's maintenance. It is foreseeable that with increased usage the site could benefit from virtual private hosting.
- i. The site would be funded by the OBC (it could be helpful in the future to designate an annual budget to be administered by the site administrative team.) It's reasonable to expect that with increased site usage and the opportunity for users to make online contributions through PayPal and other payment services, donations to the OBC will increase to help support the site.

5. Proposed Site Content

We propose that the site content be organized around a primary menu of eight headings detailed below. Not all sections need be included in the initial site development but could be added at a later time.

- a) Home
- b) About
- c) Community
- d) Teaching
- e) Magazine
- f) Diary/Calendar
- g) News
- h) Donations

Note: Contact forms and login information will be available on each page.

Drop-down menus under each of these headings provide the access into content. Where appropriate, there is the ability to log in, filter geographically (select all OBC, country or temple/meditation groups) and by dates.

A. HOME

Provides a welcome to the OBC with a brief description of what the Order is and does. Notice of special announcements and events would be displayed so that the most recent announcements appear at the top of the page.

B. ABOUT

1. The Order
 - a. Purpose
 - b. History
 - c. Structure
 - d. Ranks and qualifications
 - e. Ethics policy

2. Who does what?
 - a. Head of the Order
 - b. OBC Officers
 - c. Working Groups and Standing Committees
 - d. OBC monks
 - e. Lay Ministers

3. Order Organizational Information
 - a. Policies (such as confidentiality, ethics, and others as good to post)
 - b. Order Rules
 - c. Order By-Laws

4. Order Financial Information
 - a. OBC Activities Trust Link Charity commissions web site.
 - b. Public financial reports

5. Contacts and Links
 - a. Headquarters with addresses, phone numbers, email
 - b. OBC Activities Trust - British Charity
 - c. Advisory Board with addresses, phone numbers, email, and link
 - d. Interim Board with addresses, phone numbers, email, and link
 - e. Interim Board Working Groups with addresses, phone numbers, email, and links
 - d. Other websites as appropriate

C. COMMUNITY

Each temple and meditation group of the Order would be assigned a 'page' on which provides information on physical access - locations, directions, Google maps, local web pages and such. In the future these pages could be expanded to become a priory or temple's primary web presence if they wish. And they could be set up to allow editing by the groups themselves.

D. TEACHING including Beginning Practice

Dharma Teaching is provided in a range of formats: text, audio, video, with links to downloadable files or to the url (web page) where the talk is hosted. The OBC Journal archive would be incorporated here (with the permission of the author) by categorizing past articles according to the headings below. A more detailed Journal archive searchable by specific topics (such as Dogen, Keizan) and author will still be available.

Topics would include, but not be limited to

- *Introduction to SRM Practice,
- *How to meditate
- *Aspects of lay practice
- *Home altar
- *Questions about practice (can include practical things like care of a Wagesa)
- *Becoming a Buddhist
- *The Buddhist Precepts
- *A Beginner's Glossary
- *Soto Zen Teachings and Scriptures
- *Practice in relation to gender/sexuality issues and politics

Also included here would be storage facilities for materials and teaching for monks and lay ministers in the Order, including but not limited to posters, outlines of talk, and such. They can be made accessible only to particular user groups.

This section may need to be put in place in a subsequent phase.

E. MAGAZINE

Shorter features and articles that would fit one or two web pages, including previously published OBC Journal articles.

F. DIARY/CALENDAR

This section will consist of two basic structures:

- A general calendar* - either annual or monthly - for temples and meditation groups.
- A special event calendar* with “one off” special event dates with appropriate information and links.

This section could be added at a later time.

G. NEWS

In the News Reports on important upcoming dates or significant past events and people, with pictures as appropriate.

This section could be added at a later time.

H. DONATIONS

1. Provide an explanation, and importance, of *dana* or donations in our tradition.
2. List opportunities to support the general work of the OBC, including
 - a. one time donations, check, cash, credit card through PayPal (or other secure server)
 - b. regular on-going donations check, cash, credit card through PayPal (or other secure server)
 - c. professional skills, including legal, financial, editorial, and other skills as needed
3. List opportunities to support specific projects of OBC temples and individual monks
4. List opportunities to support particular OBC temples and/or individual monks
5. Provide information on legacies and bequests to OBC.

Items 3, 4, and 5, could be added at a later time.

6. Next Steps

The original 'Development plan for the OBC website' as posted on the Interim Board website (see <http://www.obcinterimboard.org/content/development-plan-obc-website>) envisaged a three step process. We have somewhat simplified this into a two step process, partly in order to speed up development, but also because we have been able to use professional advice within the OBC Sangha. We have therefore presented above a detailed outline of menus as a basis for moving onto step three as posted: *interim board appoint/hire website development team. The team itself would put forward an outline and timeline for the site development and approval. That outline would likely include something like the following: submission of three or more visual and navigation designs; design selection and approval; development of basic site using approved design; content development, editing, and approval; website testing and feedback; revisions/refinements; final launch of new website."*

We would like to offer these suggestions as a way forward:

1. The Interim Board and Rev. Master Haryo review our suggestions. We would be happy to answer any further questions.
2. A website development team be created whose function will be to
 - a. Solicit bids in a timely way from at least 3 web developers/designers. Information requested includes, but is not limited to, costs for site design and initial development, estimate for ongoing site maintenance, and site development timeline.
 - b. Present the estimates and recommendations to the interim board and Head of the Order.
 - c. OBC sign a contract to commission the website development.
 - d. Website development team oversee the site development as agreed upon in the contract. This team refers to the non-technical people who can do the behind the scenes work recommended here.

Acknowledgements and thank you.

We would like to acknowledge the help of all those we consulted in making up this report including those who responded to the survey, those who responded to our inquiries on technical questions and the Interim Board members who gave us advice.

The main report was written by Rev. Berwyn, Rev. Helen and Iain Robinson and the preamble by Rev. Mugo. This report is the outcome of four months of working together and talking to people.

With bows,

The Website Working Group, July 2011.