MEMBERSHIP SOFTWARE REPORT

IASPM-US Executive Committee
Jarek Ervin

Overview:

IASPM-US is currently restructuring its approach to membership management and communications. As part of this process, I have written a report on potential platforms we can use to manage our membership. I have filtered through dozens of the top *membership services*, and have generated a list of diverse options that account for a number of possible concerns, such as price, conference registration, and types of integration into our current website, a WordPress.org platform. I did this work by looking at reviews, *best of* lists, and the promotional materials for each platform. As part of the process, I excluded options that did not have overwhelmingly strong reviews, and ones that did not include any form of WordPress integration. My recommendation includes five options, each of which is described in terms of its strengths and weaknesses.

Membership Management Software (MMS) describes a platform that provides a number of features designed to support an organization. Their core function is to maintain a member database and corresponding financials such as fee collection, subscriptions, or event registration. All should have the basic capacity to allow people to register as members of IASPM-US and for IASPM-US to manage our membership. These platforms vary in terms of how many additional features they offer beyond their basic database, with some features that might be a potential draw for new members and some that will help make our lives easier.

Event Management features are worth a particular note. These categories allow organizations to maintain event calendars and organize registration for any type of event. This feature would make it possible for members to quickly and easily register for our annual conference right from their home page, and allow us to further integrate our conference into our preexisting membership and website projects. This seems like an important feature to consider since it could significantly automate the process of preparing for our conference and administering registration. As I am sure everyone knows, prepping for our conference each year is one of our most time-consuming tasks.

As it turns out, there is a great deal of variance in scope and cost of MMS platforms. While standard software platforms typically run around 100-300 dollars, full services that include Event Management capabilities alongside of membership services typically run from 500-6000 dollars. I've attempted to find a few low end options from that tier of programs.

In what follows, I have given a basic run down of some of the features we should consider, followed by a breakdown of the five services I've selected. My general recommendation of these services is:

Without Event Management: Paid Memberships Pro, which offers the strongest range of support and features.

With Event Management: Membee, which offers event support with a strong range of features and a competitive cost for its price point.

Features of Management Systems:

Membership Restrictions: A paywall, the ability to offer restricted content to members. While this partially poses the possibility of offering incentive-style premium content, this also is the simple option to have a "members" home page. Since this is the primary function of this software, all options include this feature. But deeper platforms make it possible to have more dynamic content behind a paywall. One nice feature along these lines is tiered memberships, which would allow us to offer student rates, low-income/sliding scale, lifetime memberships, and similar features.

Payment integration: the inclusion of a feature that allows people to pay for registration, membership, or additional services. These features vary in how many forms of payment (e.g. direct credit card payment, Paypal) are accepted. My impression is that beyond a few of the major platforms, a particularly deep pool of payment options is not urgent—many of the supported payment forms are relatively niche.

Analytics: the ability to measure statistics, from member registration rates to site usage. Basic analytics will be crucial for the web editor and treasurer to keep track of membership numbers, and will be helpful for making decisions about promotions and membership retention. I think this feature would offer great synergy with the broader analytics approach we have developed for our website and social media.

Event Registration: The ability to integrate registration for our conference into membership. This would make it possible to collect payment right from the site, and it will be integrated into our membership database.

Support: the availability of tech support, forums, etc.

Newsletters/Email: the ability to contact our membership. I think having a feature like this one will be urgent for communications. Some sites support commonplace listservs or forums such as Mailchimp, a function that might potentially replace our Yahoo listserv—something I would very much like.

WordPress Integration: the ability to link our MMS to our website. This strikes me as all-but essential, given that we are going to be using WordPress for at least a few more years. I've cut all options that are incompatible with WordPress. I've marked the ones that are full-blown plugins for WordPress, or have partial integration (usually through an add-on plugin). I think either option is fine.

Add-Ons: Many of these services distinguish themselves—or inflate the price—by charging for additional features. This could be anything from simple standard features (e.g. the ability to accept payments through PayPal) to a feature that auto-generates membership cards for our members. In general, we will need to pay for the professional version of software, given that we will be handling a decent volume of members and will need more features than just restricted access.

Service Breakdown:

[Member Press](#)
Cost: $119/yr
WP Integration: Full
Event Management: None

Description:

Member Press is the most affordable service, and offers solid membership services. It has full integration into WordPress, good analytics, a number of restricted features like forums, and seems easy to use. This is the cheapest option, and would be adequate.

[Restrict Content Pro](#)
Cost: $249/yr
WP Integration: Full
Event Management: None

Description:

This is probably the most bare-bones membership service. It offers solid registration services and a basic email service. My impression is that its analytics are actually the most detailed, and in terms of data management is one of the best. It also has consistently strong reviews, so if we want simple and hassle-free, this is one of the best options.

[Paid Memberships Pro](#)
Cost: $297, $197 annual renewal
WP Integration: Full
Event Management: None

Description:

PMP is the most feature-laden service that doesn't offer event management.
From RSS feeds to personal member websites, some of its features are attractive
but potentially not necessary. The Plus version—what we would need to
purchase—offers detailed analytics, a paywall, and a strong Newsletter service. It
is distinguishable from Member Press because it contains a giant list of add-ons,
such as broad payment options and support for paywalled content. It also allows
for customization, and has generally acclaimed support. If we forego event
management, this is the strongest option.

[Membee](#)
Cost: $55/month
WP Integration: Partial
Event Management: Full

Includes great event management, analytics, and member restrictions with tiered
membership costs. Lots of cool additional features like Social Network Login (the
"log in through facebook" buttons). For full-blown event management services,
this is the most affordable. I have investigated their support services, and they
seem really excellent and responsive.

[Wild Apricot](#)
Cost: $70/mo
WP Integration: Partial
Event Management: Full

Description:

Without breaking into the $3000+ tier of super-corporate software, Wild Apricot
is probably the best option on the market. It has the broadest list of features, and
looks like it generally would be the most consistent, trouble-free service. Support
is top-rated in the industry. I don't know if any of its core features are ones that
we couldn't get with cheaper services, though.