Silicon croft

Evaluation

# Assessment Outline

## Assessment Brief

The assessment brief was to create a small website for a client by the name of Maria Bell which could later be extended and, source and implement a hardware and software platform for the website to run on. The project had no available budget and so free software and hardware solutions had to be found, the website had to be responsive and work on a large range of devices while looking as desired on these devices. Some of the staff that will be adding to the website in the future have little or no experience in software/web development and so easy to learn software packages needed to be used and a handbook was created to teach them how to add content to the website. The first step was to clarify the requirements of the project then I could identify, source, and implement a suitable hardware and software platform, install and configure the software, set up a website prototype which the company will later extend and, finally, create the handbook to teach staff how to add content to the website.

## Comparing the Solution to the Original Requirements

##### Website is responsive and functions on a wide range of platforms

The website has been created using WordPress with a responsive business focused theme, it has also been tested on multiple different kinds of device with varying viewport sizes and has been found to scale properly, function as expected, be easily readable and look as intended on all devices and so meets this requirement in full.

##### Non-technical staff must be able to add content to the website

The website has been created using WordPress. WordPress provides easy tools for adding content to the website, it is one of the most popular content management systems on the internet and as such it is much easier to find solutions to any problems you may run into. A handbook has been created which gives a simple example/tutorial on how to create a blog post and send a newsletter email to subscribers. Although I think more steps could be taken to help non-technical staff learn how to add content to the website, I believe the requirement has been met as much as possible under the time constraints observed.

##### Creation of the website prototype

As there was a significant limitation on the amount of time available to implement the project the website was kept to a fairly basic specification but does provide a good prototype to be added onto and extended by the client and functions very well with no known outstanding bugs or issues. For this reason, I believe the project meets this requirement to an acceptable level.

##### Implementation of a suitable hardware and software platform

As there was absolutely no budget allocated to the project finding a suitable hosting solution was a very difficult task, fortunately the college was willing to provide a hosting solution for the project for free and this solution was significantly superior compared to other free hosting options mostly due to the limitations typical of free hosting solutions such as minimal backing storage, limited uptimes, limited support, etc. Due to time constraints, it was decided that using the pre-installed software platform on the servers provided by the college would be the best way forward as they were very up-to-date, Linux (or another free operating system) was already a requirement due to budget limitations and, I had experience with them. One caveat to using the college provided hosting is that it is clearly not a permanent solution for the client, and they will need to move to another hosting solution at some point in the future, however, given the constraints I was working with I believe it was the best option available to me and meets the requirement as much as possible.

# Strengths and Weaknesses

## Sitemap

* The sitemap uses a simple colour scheme and layout, this makes it clear and easy to understand immediately.
* The sitemap is somewhat unnecessary due to the simplicity of the website and the fact that all pages can be navigated to from all other pages with the use of the menu at the top of the page thus meaning that a user can see what pages are on the website simply by accessing any page on the website and will not need a sitemap to help them navigate.

## Website

* The website is fully functional and does everything intended in the original plan to a high standard.
* The website is simple and has a clean look, it is easy to navigate, and it is responsive functioning well on a wide range of devices.
* The website could not incorporate all features envisaged by the client and although this is quite common due to client’s continuously tacking on new features and ideas to their plan as they think of them, in this case more features could have been implemented if there was not such a constraint on time.

## Hosting Solution

* The hosting solution was completely free which was a very strong constraint on the project as there was no budget and so this made it a very attractive option.
* The server provided with the hosting solution came pre-installed with an acceptable software platform and so did not need any setup to be performed.
* The hosting solution is unfortunately not a viable permanent solution for the client as the college is unwilling to provide free hosting to the client on a permanent basis.

## Handbook

* The handbook provides an excellent guide on how to create a simple blog post using text and image blocks with WordPress and shows the reader how to send emails to subscribers using the Noptin Newsletter plugin that was added to the WordPress installation.
* The handbook does not however give a very good overall guide to using WordPress as there were significant time constraints and so it was decided to only include the essential information to allow non-technical users to get started with WordPress and be able to create content for the website.

# Recommendations

## Virtual Cuppa

It was mentioned by Maria Bell in the initial meeting that she would like a virtual cuppa feature on the website however due to the complexity of such a feature and the time constraints in place it was decided to cut this feature from the final product. Maria has expressed that she is still interested in developing this feature which would function very similarly to how help desk chat windows function on websites that provide technical help allowing a visitor to communicate with a member of staff involved with Silicon Croft. I think this would be an excellent feature to implement during any future development of the solution.

## Moving to a paid hosting solution

As mentioned earlier in this document there is a significant caveat to using the college provided hosting. It is clearly not a permanent solution for the client, and they will need to move to another hosting solution at some point in the future as the college is not willing to provide free hosting to a private company on a permanent basis. An alternative free solution could be found but I believe based on the amount of traffic expected to be received by the website and the heavy limitations often placed on free solutions that it would be very difficult to find a viable free solution and that a paid solution will have to be considered.

## More Content

While the website is functional and has some content related to the Silicon Croft initiative it is rather sparse and there is no content that is clearly intended for separate user groups as was indicated by the client at the beginning of the project and so future development time should be put into the creation of content and assets to really flesh out the website and provide more information about the initiative. It would make sense to create separate pages for the different indicated user groups to make it easy for them to find the information related to them and make these pages easily accessible from the home page so that these user groups can find information that is pertinent to them as easily as possible.

## Similar Sites

It was mentioned in the original brief by Maria that there are other local initiatives with similar aims: the Central Belt and Dundee have a number for example, and that a section of the homepage could be used to display and promote these initiatives, however, Maria stressed that Silicon Croft should be seen as different to these and that it caters for a specific region of Scotland with its own talent, needs and identity. This feature was not implemented due to a lack of information on which initiatives should be promoted and a lack of time to implement any solution derived from this information. I would recommend implementing this if more development is performed as it would be a fairly simple feature to implement once the necessary information was gathered.

# Modifications

## Lack of modifications

Generally speaking, very little modification was made to the original plan during the implementation stage as there was a significant time constraint on the project and so there was little time for experimentation and conversation with the client which could have provided some basis for additional features. Also due to the time constraints the implementation was done with a focus on speed and accuracy in order to provide the deliverables on time and in a good-working order.

## Noptin Newsletter Plugin

As the client has indicated in the initial meeting that they will be adding blog posts to the website in the future I suggested to them during the implementation stage that they might wish to add people who are interested to a newsletter service that they can then use to notify those people when a new blog post is created. The client agreed that this was a good idea and so a suitable newsletter plugin was identified, chosen and installed.

## Personal Circumstances

Personal circumstances played a significant role in how the project progressed for me. The original project was scheduled to run for 18 weeks with an extra week if needed, the first 8 weeks were for planning, the next 8 weeks for implementation and the final 2 weeks for the evaluation stage, however, 6 weeks into the project I experienced some personal problems that meant I was not able to work on the project for 10 weeks leaving me with 3 weeks to complete the project. I allowed 1 week to finish the planning stage, 2 weeks to do the implementation and a final week to do the evaluation stage. Overall, this created a significant time constraint for the project and meant that features had to be cut back aggressively to ensure the project could be completed on time.

# Knowledge and Skills

## Agile Development Method

During the last couple of weeks of the project I was introduced to the Agile software development method which is a method of planning and executing projects used fairly extensively in the software development industry and although it is typically used in teams of people there are definite ways it can be helpful as an individual so I believe if I had known about this method at the beginning of the project I could have tried to adopt it’s techniques into my own processes and it would have improved the process.

## Professional Writing

This assessment has required a lot of professional writing in the form of: A formal plan, a detailed account of the implementation decisions, details and process and this document evaluating the process and the final products. Through the process of writing these formal and professional documents my ability to write in this style has significantly improved. I believe that if I were to perform the entire process again, I would be able to write the documents much faster than I did originally while maintaining or exceeding the level of quality.

## Time Management

Due to the significant time constraints on the project it quickly became very important for me to use my time efficiently and remove any unnecessary tasks from my schedule and I believe I improved in this way significantly as I am historically something of a perfectionist and procrastinator and really struggled at first with the sudden increase in workload while not being able to take my time on it but quickly became much faster working while maintaining the quality of my work at a high level.