

# ***ponabana.com - discussion document***

We now have the French and English versions of the site.

The development and delivery structure is in place - development site, staging site, live site.

Since the original launch, last November, traffic has been modest - a total of 10,500 individual users having visited. Subscription - for me the key to how well a site is performing - is extremely low: around 270 subscribers.

The following are what I see as discussion points for the key areas of the site.

## **1 -Strategic Objectives**

A written roadmap needs to be in place of short term and long term goals as well as specific communications objectives.

Thought needs to be given to to the Community & Capacity Building aspects of the site and how it should function.

I have very specific personal criteria for what a site should be - for me it should not presume that it's primary function is as a "destination" for people to visit.

Certainly it can and should be this. But from experience, no matter how "good" a site is, people will tend to visit once, then occasionally if ever, come back.

Just taking a look at the Google Analytics data for the site history will confirm this:

36% Returning Visitors

64% New or First time Visitors.

The site needs to function as a hub - pushing out it's content to where people are: Facebook, LinkedIn, email box etc. I know this is being done manually, but this is not an efficient way to do this.

The site can be set up to automatically distribute any content to any network. Key to this is the subscription process. Getting first time/one time visitors to the site to subscribe should be one of the key goals: it opens the door to sending out not just a general newsletter, but all kinds of targeted subject specific communications. Interested in the work of "Enfants Reporters"? - subscribe to get content related to their work...

What is really disappointing since initial launch, is the low subscription rate - only around 270 people. Given you have a built in audience of 7000 likes on Facebook, getting audience buy-in is being badly missed.

## **2 - Maintenance**

I have moved Maintenance up to the top of the list of what is required.

No site can exist without a maintenance plan. What the public sees on the screen delivered through Wordpress is just the end result of a complicated set of files, repositories and databases - all needing regular maintenance, backup and updates.

We have three sites.

the development site, **ponabana.dev**, where I develop and create elements,  
the staging site, **staging.ponabana.com**, which allows for developing new ideas  
(such as we are doing with the English version)

the live site, **ponabana.com**, together with the **ponabana.info/.org/.net** domains  
which re-direct to .com

They are all synchronised to each other, as well to the central file repository hosted  
at GitHub.

All three sites are backed up both to GitHub and Dropbox on a daily basis to preserve file changes and the MySQL databases are backed up both to the server and Dropbox on a daily basis. Theme files and plugins are regularly scanned - plugins are the key entry points for spam and malware attacks. The site templates and plugins need to be regularly updated to maintain viability and remain secure.

The multi-language functionality is accomplished by a suite of tools from WPML - Wordpress Multi-Lingual. As well as providing the structural tools to accomodate different language versions of content, it also has full translation management functionality - allowing for translations to be sent out to volunteers and managed within the system. The one year license for WPML has expired - the tools will continue to function but we are locked out from upgrades and support.

### 3 - Content

Content needs to be developed that furthers the strategic & communications objectives - the presumption here is that content is coming from within and outside the organization.

What is not being utilized at the moment, is the true built-in capability within Wordpress for designated users to contribute content directly into the system, have it edited and approved then scheduled for publication.

As I understand it from talking with Adrien, contributors are supplying content via email or different document types, then Adrien or Justine are editing and cleaning up the content and assigning the "correct" author. There are technical , logistical and strategic problems with this:

**Technical** - content coming from other documents -Microsoft Word for example - brings with it its own invisible code, which when copy & pasted, is incompatible with the code being used in Wordpress. The result is bad formatting and technical errors with the worst case scenarios of malware and viruses being embedded.

**Logistical** - If the knowledge of how to enter and format rests only with two people, I presume a lot of their time is being taken up with the sheer mechanics of entering content and cleaning up and formatting.

Advantage needs to be taken of the systems built-in editorial process, where content can be entered, edited, sent for approval (and now translation) and scheduled for publication. There are built in roles for Contributor, Author, Editor and Translator that can be integrated into a true editorial process.

**Strategic** - while I can appreciate the political and administrative concerns of encouraging direct login and participation in the system, what is not understood is that there are numerous third party tools out there that allow for direct contribution and editing from desktop and e-mail **without logging in to the Wordpress system**.

To be clear, I am not talking about content going out live without approval. I am talking about tools that reside on desktop or in e-mail programs that allow a user to contribute their material directly in draft form that then waits for approval in the editorial process.

These tools are easy to use and offer a genuine, direct way for contributors to deliver their material while avoiding the copy & paste approach. They also provide the first step in building a true pool of contributors who can start to learn how the system works. It can be the first step in building a genuine outreach in the direction of contributions and capacity building.

## 4 - Creative Development

The existing structure needs to be evolved to provide a true set of destinations to do justice to the content and strategic objectives.

Different types of content can benefit from different types of delivery.

At the moment, everything is created as a “post” a short news story about a topic, searchable and organized by categories.

This is an ok starting point, but there are many possible ways to design and deliver content outside of the context of posts. True photo or video stories that can be shared, interactive timelines showing the progress of initiatives, interactive maps that give a sense of the “where” things are happening.

For me the problem at the moment is that we have only a chronological listing of content - this is fine as one way of seeing the latest entries, but there is no mechanism for placing the content in the context of when, where and progress is being made with issues.

Particularly the pages for “Our Themes” - if indeed these are the key themes, each should be a solid landing page, effectively working as a minisite within the site, to aggregate and give context to relevant supporting content.

While photography, video and documents are being used to “illustrate” posts, each should automatically reside in its own searchable library.

Slideshare for presentations, Issuu or Calameo for documents, Slideshowpro for photography - all offer a way to centralize specific media and make it available within the site, but as important, as a destination of its own.

There needs to be the capability within the web team to interpret the Strategic objectives and content provided to **design, develop & program solutions** that will ensure it is being delivered in interesting, attractive and effective ways.

I am including both design and programming capabilities here.

## 5 - Optimization & Distribution

Site activity is tracked through Google Analytics. Analytics can let us see literally anything we want to know about the site and visitors. It gives a true picture of what people are actually doing on the site versus what we think they are doing. Where do they arrive from? Where do they go within the site? What technology are they using?

All can be answered through Analytics and the results used to modify and refine what the site is trying to do. Understanding Analytics and how it connects with Strategic Objectives is key to establishing near and long term goals for the site.

Management needs to understand the role and capabilities of Analytics - it is an active tool, not a passive report.

Following on from the notion that the site should be viewed not just as a destination, but as a distribution hub, it is important to create distribution mechanisms to send information and content to where people will see it - social networks and their e-mail box.

Subscription is the key to the process. You can liken unsubscribed visitors to window shoppers - they may come by once, they may even think the site is great and intend to return, but the reality is most one time visitors will forget about the site's existence.

Getting people to actively subscribe is the key to being able to follow up with them and remind them of initiatives. Subscribers are actively saying "yes, I am interested in this, I want to know more, keep me informed."

At the moment there is only one "general" newsletter, and subscription is really low - around 270. As mentioned earlier, with a captive audience on Facebook alone of 7,000 this needs to be optimized.

Subject specific subscriptions can be easily offered - for each major theme for example. The current newsletter format, as well as seriously underutilized, gives too much content - the analytics built into Mailchimp, the delivery tool reveal that on average of 270 subscribers, about 100 open the email and only about 20 click on an article to view the site. Why? For me, too much content - no need to click as I can just scroll the email and scan the content here.

A more focused, targeted approach is needed with subscriptions - we have 10,000 window-shoppers and 270 subscribers. Different subscription options in different locations both on the site and elsewhere -Facebook, LinkedIn - will allow for developing and delivering content and building a dialog where it is wanted and needed.

Lastly, SEO - Search Engine Optimization - is essential and quite straightforward. There is none in place at the moment, so anything being registered within the major search engines is incidental as opposed to systematic. The site is essentially sitting there as a repository of information, but there is no implementation of getting the information out.

## 6 - Training

People need to know how to use the system, and indeed a system needs to be in place and formalized.

We have Wordpress itself, now the translation process, Mailchimp, and Google Analytics. All interact with each other but at the moment I am the only person with a clear understanding of how they work and their connected roles. The process needs to be formalized and laid out in a manual so that as new people are brought in to the process there are guidelines. Knowing how to write a post in Wordpress is the bare minimum.

Specifically what is needed:

### **Overall Training in the Built In Capabilities of the Wordpress System**

To date, what we have done as best we can, is explain how the system works via Skype and e-mail. This is just scratching the surface. There are so many different ways to use the system and different skill sets to learn to implement those ways, that focused hands on training is needed. This should be for key staff, but also a process and methodology for third party contributions.

### **Training, Instruction and Guidelines for Image Preparation**

There is an ongoing problem for example with the treatment of photographs on the site. I understand the need and desire for a lot of images, but it is crucial they are prepared properly for upload. At the moment the home page takes up to 30 seconds to load in certain regions depending on connection speed. Preparing images isn't just about the dimensions - it is knowing how to compress the file correctly so that it downloads as quickly as possible. Currently images on the site are up to 3X larger than they need to be, which translates into 3X longer for each one to load. Eventually things will grind to a halt.

### **Training In Ways to Automate and Track the Distribution Process**

People need to be aware of the built in systems for distributing content automatically to Social Media and how to track and read the resulting data. An active plan needs to be in place to define the specific Social Media goals and objectives - likes in and of themselves mean little. What are the conversions goals?

### **Translation Production & Management**

The whole translation module is a system within itself. We have done the basic configuring but there is still a lot to be done in terms of the management modules. If the direction is to build a pool of volunteer translators, then an understanding is needed of how the management modules function and can be customized to fit the workflow.

### **Documentation**

With any system, if the acquired knowledge resides solely in the hands and heads of the people involved today, then when they move on, the system falls apart. Clear documentation and guidelines need to be developed to ensure hand-off and evolution of all systems for managing the site. As opposed to traditional documentation, one way to do this is through the creation of a WIKI - a living document that can start off with the system as it is today, but be added to and grow as processes evolve.

## Conclusion - Key Take Aways

- ◆The site should not presume that it's primary function is as a "destination" for people to visit.
- ◆The site needs to function as a hub - pushing out it's content to where people are
- ◆Key to this is the subscription process. Getting first time/one time visitors to the site to subscribe should be one of the key goals.
- ◆No site can exist without a maintenance plan.
- ◆Content needs to be developed that furthers the strategic & communications objectives
- ◆There needs to be the capability within the web team to interpret the Strategic objectives and content provided to **design, develop & program solutions** that will ensure it is being delivered in interesting, attractive and effective ways.
- ◆Search Engine Optimization - is essential. There is none in place at the moment, so anything being registered within the major search engines is incidental as opposed to systematic.
- ◆People need to know how to use the system, and indeed a system needs to be in place and formalized.