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REDESIGNING THE WEB PRESENCE OF AN ORGANIZATION

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ABSTRACT

The Finnish Footbag Association is a non-profit, registered body for the players and promotion of the sport of footbag in Finland. Administering the footbag.fi domain, the FFA launched a project in the fall of 2009 to renew their website. By the end of the year, however, the voluntary effort had stagnated; as member of the organization, I received permission to take it over for my thesis work.

Two primary goals were defined for this development project. The first one was to create for the commissioner new web pages that [1] looked better, were [2] more up to date in terms of content and [3] easier to maintain than the old ones. To tackle all three aspects, an open-source content management system was deployed; the WordPress publishing platform is introduced in the theory part of this report. Revising textual and image content was work out of the scope of this thesis, except for my part in delegating it to others.

The second objective was to connect the new footbag.fi website with relevant online social media and networking services. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Picasa were selected, the accounts and profiles created in each, and syndication of content between them routed. Together, the renovation of the pages and the embarking upon the realm of social web warranted the title of this thesis, constituting a thorough redesign of the web presence of the FFA. As an aside, the association was rebranded *Footbag Finland*—for the reasonable prospect of international audiences in the third-party services.

The work was done in successful cooperation with the FFA board and the team of members initially signed up for the project. Preliminary requirements elicitation was conducted via an online questionnaire, and discussion ensued on a project-specific mailing list. A practical tool facilitating everyday web development was SSHFS, a Secure Shell client providing the local file manager seamless access to the server-side file system.

As a result of this Bachelor's thesis, the Finnish Footbag Association has a new website, at the time of writing in public BETA at http://reema.fi/ffa/. Parts [1] and [3] have been fulfilled, but content revisions are still being written. Nevertheless, web presence is already building up through the aforementioned services. The commissioner's expectations have been satisfied with the work.

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Suomen footbagliitto on voittoa tavoittelematon rekisteröity yhdistys, jonka tarkoitus on tukea footbagin pelaajia ja harrastamista sekä tehdä lajia paremmin tunnetuksi Suomessa. Syksyllä 2009 SFL päätti uudistaa verkkosivustonsa www.footbag.fi vapaaehtoisvoimin. Tehtävään valitut eivät kuitenkaan löytäneet kunnolla aikaa hankkeelle, ja liiton jäsenenä minulle tarjoutui mahdollisuus ottaa se opinnäytetyöni aiheeksi.

Projektille asetettiin kaksi päätavoitetta. Ensimmäinen oli laatia toimeksiantajalle uudet verkkosivut, jotka olisivat vanhoja [1] paremman näköiset, [2] ajantasaisemmat sisällöltään sekä [3] helpommin ylläpidettävät. Kaikkiin näihin kolmeen päätettiin pyrkiä sisällönhallintajärjestelmän avulla: avoimen lähdekoodin WordPress-julkaisualusta esitellään raportin teoriaosuudessa. Varsinaisen teksti- ja kuvasisällön uudistaminen päätettiin rajata opinnäytetyön ulkopuolelle, lukuun ottamatta rooliani tuon tehtävän delegoinnissa.

Toinen päätavoite oli nivoa uusi sivusto yhteen keskeisimpien sosiaalisen median ja verkostopalvelujen kanssa. Toimeksiantajalle luotiin profiili Facebookiin, Twitteriin, YouTubeen ja Picasaan, joissa julkaistavaa sisältöä tullaan kierrättämään sekä palveluiden kesken että itse sivustolla. Yhdessä sivujen uusi ilme ja kytkös sosiaaliseen mediaan perustelevat työn otsikon, sillä niiden myötä Suomen footbagliitolla alkaa viimein olla aitoa "verkkopresenssiä" (*web presence*). Kansainvälistä internetyleisöä ajatellen sekä sivusto että yllämainitut profiilit brändättiin uudella nimellä *Footbag Finland*.

Opinnäytteen työosuus sujui hyvässä yhteistyössä SFL:n hallituksen ja projektin alkuperäisjäsenten kanssa. Alustavaan vaatimusmäärittelyyn käytettiin verkossa toteutettua kyselytutkimusta, ja keskustelu jatkui projektia varten perustetulla sähköpostilistalla. Käytännön työkaluista sivujen kehityksessä mainittakoon SSHFS: SSH-yhteysohjelma, jolla palvelimella sijaitsevat tiedostot sai kätevästi paikallisen resurssienhallinnan piiriin.

Tämän opinnäytetyön tuloksena Suomen footbagliitolla on uudet kotisivut, joskin vielä kirjoitushetkellä BETA-julkaisuna osoitteessa http://reema.fi/ffa/. Kohdat [1] ja [3] on toteutettu, mutta tekstien uudistaminen on vielä osittain kesken. Edellä mainitut palvelut on kuitenkin otettu jo käyttöön, ja ne ovat myös alkaneet kerätä seuraajia. Toimeksiantaja on ollut erittäin tyytyväinen työhön.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Finnish Footbag Association

Finnish Footbag Association is a volunteer-run, non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of the sport of footbag and its various disciplines. It is also the official governing body and parent organization for local footbag teams across Finland. Founded in the spring of 1995 in Helsinki, the FFA currently boasts some 3,000 members, although the true number of active practitioners is unknown (Finnish Footbag Association, retrieved 26. 3. 2010). I have been a member of the FFA since 1998.

Finnish Footbag Association organizes tournaments, shows, and training opportunities for footbag players of all skill level (ibid.). The Finnish Championships are held every year, among a number of smaller competitions. Success in official tournaments qualifies for membership in Footbag Team Finland, which represents the country in international events, most notably in the European Championships and the World Championships. Finland is one of the most prominent European countries in the international footbag scene, together with Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic.

A registered association, the FFA is overseen by an annually elected board of directors. The board assigns committees for specific tasks and names representatives for each discipline—footbag net and footbag freestyle are the two main competitive varieties. The head of the board organizes meetings and acts as the primary spokesperson for the association. This position is held by Justin Sexton, a co-founder of the Finnish Footbag Association and a long-time national team coach.

1.2 Project commission and initial status

Finnish Footbag Association administers the footbag.fi domain. The version of their official website screenshot in *FIGURE 1* went online in 2001, and has since been subject only to minor modifications (Sexton, discussion 14. 3. 2010). In the fall of 2009, during an association meeting I missed, the FFA decided that it was time to renovate the pages more thoroughly, and a number of members volunteered. However, none of them really took charge, and a deadline was not set. Consequently, by the time I first learned about the project in mid-December, it had all but come to a standstill.

FIGURE 1. The starting page of the old FFA website (Finnish Footbag Association, retrieved 4. 4. 2010)

After a few days of consideration, and with my thesis topic still open, I sent an email to selected members of the board, asking their opinion on whether the project could be re-

assigned. With their immediate consent, I then wrote to the group of initial volunteers, explaining my interest in taking over the project. To my delight, the response was equally approving. Following the topic approval by the Oulu University of Applied Sciences, a cooperation agreement was signed with the commissioner in January.

Although not a lot had been accomplished by the original project team, I did not need to start everything from scratch. I received all the relevant email correspondence that had taken place, and was provided with credentials to the footbag.fi server, where a test installation of Drupal was running. The team had decided to deploy an open source content management system, but a different one from what I had in mind. Yet from the discussion in the emails I gathered that that particular platform was by no means a fixed requirement, and that I would be free to change it at will. The point, rather, was to introduce any system that would make it easier to update and maintain the site content.

I initially intended my thesis project to encompass all the online services of the Finnish Footbag Association—not only those offered via the World Wide Web, but also member email addresses, the use of mailing lists, and the #footbag.fi IRC channel. Later, in discussions with the commissioner, and considering the time limits imposed by the schedule, I came to the conclusion that it would be better to focus on the core task, the renovation of the website itself. This had been the main interest of the commissioner all along, so the adjustment of topic happened in mutual understanding. For extra flavor, the concept of web presence—building brand awareness through online social services—was included, and constitutes the first half of the theory section in this report.

Also due in part to schedule limitations, it had been agreed that I would not need to produce much of the new textual or image content on the pages. Instead, I was authorized to delegate some of the work to other association members, in order to be able to concentrate on designing and building the platform. The team supporting me consisted of both old and new volunteers to the project, acting as editors, photographers, graphic designers and beta testers, and their contribution was extremely important during the course of the project. A dedicated mailing list proved to be the most useful channel of communication, but face-to-face discussions also took place during training sessions.

2 FROM WEB PAGES TO WEB PRESENCE

2.1 Definition of web presence

Web search results sometimes reveal interesting semantic evolution in progress. The older the article on "web presence", the more likely it is to use the term simply as a synonym for a website (Google Search, retrieved 26. 3. 2010). Some vintage online dictionaries also use the two concepts interchangeablyy, such as the Whatis.com IT encyclopedia in its definition of web presence as "a collection of Web files on a particular subject that includes a beginning file called a home page" (TechTarget, retrieved 26. 3. 2010). More recent results, however, suggest a far wider perspective on what it actually means to *be present* in the World Wide Web. In the words of Brauner (retrieved 26. 3. 2010):

> Once upon a time, a business would put up a website with its contact information, and that was the beginning and end of its web presence. Those days are long gone. Savvy marketers today are very aware that a multidimensional approach is essential if one hopes to build a strong and responsive web presence. […]. Social media and SEO are two of the most important aspects of building a presence on the web.

Websites are still important for the online presence of organizations, but they are increasingly considered only a part of "being present on the Internet in multiple places to promote your name or brand in a positive way" (Kubus, retrieved 26. 3. 2010). A company website might act as a hub to which visitor traffic is directed from other sites and by offline promotion, or it may be just one node in a network of sites, each tailored to a different segment of the target audience. Either way, effective brand management can no longer be limited to the pages hosted by the organization itself; it is not just the content you create that matters, but, in some cases even more importantly, what others say about you (Belshe, retrieved 26. 3. 2010). In that sense, web presence "covers every single point of mention" of an organization online (ibid.). As a matter of fact, strong web presence can be achieved completely without hosting a website, relying on social media services alone (Hughens, retrieved 26. 3. 2010).

2.2 Why having a website is not enough

Cutting-edge digital agencies no longer build websites for their clients. Instead, the vocabulary in their line of business is trending toward "web presence development ser-

vices" (Google Search, retrieved 5. 4. 2010). This angle of approach is emerging probably in response to ever-fiercening competition and the fact that, by now, virtually every organization has a website: an Internet address printed on a business card no longer brings any degree of competitive advantage. Furthermore, as affordable professional web developers abound, every organization already has a *great* website—or at least about as good as that of its neighbors. Put in terms of the traditional marketing mix, the focus seems to be shifting from the product and price to the place and promotion.

To explain what "place" and "promotion" stand for in this context, and why they are important, some statistics are in place. First of all, the World Wide Web is more crowded than ever: by the end of 2009, there were 234 million websites online, of which a staggering fifth, some 47 million, were added during that year alone (Pingdom, retrieved 4. 4. 2010). The indexing bots of Google, Yahoo! and Bing do their best to keep up with the figures, but websites that completely neglect search engine optimization might well be lost in the ocean of domains and never found.

No site is an island, and an important aspect of SEO is ensuring that the pages are well connected to the rest of the web. Your "place" in an internetwork of millions of pages is defined by these connections, in practice represented by the hyperlinks leading to and from your site. Of course, there are means of artificially creating more incoming links, such as keyword-targeted search engine marketing, but to the overall link karma the so-called organic promotion by referrals from related sites tends to have a more important and longer-lasting effect (Hallan, retrieved 3. 5. 2010).

On the other hand, the web is also crowded with people. In September 2009, there were approximately 1.73 billion Internet users worldwide—an 18 % increase from just a year earlier (Pingdom, retrieved 4. 4. 2010). What is more, with the advent of Web 2.0, these people are not merely passive consumers of online content, but active producers, editors and reviewers of it. 50 million tweets, 570 000 blog entries and 1 300 new Wikipedia articles published *every day* effectively ensure that brand managers have plenty of "points of mention" to keep track of (Weil, retrieved 5. 4. 2010; Zillman, retrieved 5. 4. 2010; Perez, retrieved 5. 4. 2010).

Word of mouth spreads—for better and for worse—more rapidly than ever before, but that should not scare organizations from participating, or from letting their audience

participate, online. On the contrary, the production power of enthusiastic users can be harnessed to create marketing success stories, such as Nike crowdsourcing the design of their new sneaker (Piller, retrieved 5. 4. 2010), or PepsiCo with their popular "Design Our Pepsi Can" campaign last year (Storace, retrieved 5. 4. 2010). While these are somewhat grandiose examples, the core idea is there for any organization to take on.

Finally, just as in the marketing of physical products, the "place" of online content also encompasses its distribution. Modern web content is increasingly independent of the URL it is originally published in, and is—or should be, at least—able to travel to where its readers are. This type of *web syndication*, the "placement of content on multiple destinations, as opposed to a single Web site, gives it a greater chance of being found by interested users" and effectively tackles the fragmentation of online audiences (ICSC, retrieved 5. 4. 2010). Web feeds are the main enabling technology, providing standard formats like RSS and Atom for content transfer, and allowing users to subscribe to web pages just as they would to a regular newspaper. Feed aggregators are web applications or desktop software that, in turn, compile the syndicated content in a single place, comparable to the user's physical mailbox, or the inbox of email applications.

2.3 Online social networking for organizations

Teeming with roughly a quarter of the world's population, the Internet has evolved from a technology into a social platform. Online social media and networking sites have become a breeding ground for user-generated content, and they enable sharing it in ways even more convenient than the syndication via feeds discussed above. What these services have truly added to the picture, however, is the control over whom the users can and wish to share with. The possibility to mimic real-life social relationships by connecting friends to a personal profile, forming groups with other users, and joining fan clubs, is a primary ingredient of the popularity of such general-purpose networking sites as Orkut, MySpace and Facebook. There is also a myriad of services built upon specific types of content: Vimeo for online video, Flickr for digital photography, or the Last.fm Internet radio are but a few examples of social platforms designed to bring like-minded people together regardless of their relationship, often non-existing, in the real world.

Which of these networks is it, then, that organizations should embrace? Considering the purpose of this thesis, what are the strategies for non-profits in particular? The first im-

portant thing worth noting is that most online social networking services are, in fact, still quite marginal in Finland—some despite a vast global user base. For example, recent estimates of the number of Finnish Twitter users vary between 4 000 and 10 000, but the rate of activity per user is typically quite low (Lonka, retrieved 6. 4. 2010; Manninen, retrieved 6. 4. 2010). The growth of Twitter has been anticipated for some time already, but it seems like everyone is still waiting for everyone else to join.

Earlier this year, Google tried to step in to the social networking business with its Buzz micro-blogging service. Somewhat similar to Twitter, it allows users to publish updates, post links, or share almost any other kind of short content directly via the Gmail interface. While there have been both technical and privacy-related issues suspending the wider adoption of Buzz, the substantial number of Google account owners out there makes the endeavor interesting, to say the least, and its development worth keeping watch on. (TechCrunch, retrieved 3. 5. 2010.)

In addition to sheer numbers, the *quality* of the potential user community should be considered. IRC-Galleria is currently the second largest online social network in Finland, with about 500 000 registered users, but its target audience is a young and comparably narrow demographic, less than 21 years of age in average (IRC-Galleria, retrieved 6. 4. 2010). To an extent the same "teen spirit" also applies to MySpace, as up to one third of its users are under eighteen years old (Pingdom, retrieved 3. 5. 2010). While no country-specific figures are officially available, on a global scale the popularity of MySpace has been, during the last two years, totally eclipsed by the growth of Facebook (Clean Cut Media, retrieved 3. 5. 2010).

In a sense, it is a blessing for organizations that there exists one general-purpose social networking service that should be enough for most. At the end of March 2010, Finland had 1 649 300 active Facebook users—a 31 % penetration of the total population and an astonishing 57 % increase to the figure just twelve months earlier (Burcher, retrieved 3. 5. 2010; Tilastokeskus, retrieved 3. 5. 2010). Furthermore, what started as a college student community now serves a distinctively even age distribution; in the United States, for example, the average Facebook user is 38 years old (Pingdom, retrieved 3. 5. 2010).

For organizations, Facebook essentially offers a marketing medium free of charge, with a reach none of the traditional channels—including newspapers, radio, and television—

can even begin to compete with. People that are fans of your brand or product in real life are able to explicitly 'like' them also on Facebook, thus becoming associated with the corresponding Facebook pages. Known as fan pages until April 2010, these profiles can be created by anyone, although Facebook discourages the establishing of "unofficial" pages by users with no formal connection to or consent from the brand owner. The page creator, as well as assigned administrators, can broadcast messages to all fans, publish information or moderate the discussion on the "wall", and as a paid service, promote the page with an ad.

Photos and video can also be published on a Facebook page, but if there are tremendous amounts of relevant media content, or if the technical quality of it is important, an organization should perhaps consider hosting it on another service. For most social media sites, a Facebook page integration option is available, for automatically publishing links to recently uploaded content. YouTube offers it for video, as do Flickr and Picasa for newly uploaded or updated photo albums. In non-profit organizations, the limitations of free accounts need of course be evaluated—or prices compared, if necessary—when selecting between the services. Flickr, for example, limits the number of displayed photos to 200 per free account (Flickr, retrieved 3. 5. 2010), while Picasa can hold a maximum of 1 000 albums or 1 024 megabytes of images without a paid upgrade (Picasa Help, retrieved 3. 5. 2010).

When creating online presence on Facebook, or on any other similar medium, organizations should try to avoid the "island" effect by actively building connections to and from each of these services, just as they should with traditional websites. However, the syndication of content should be planned in such a way that cross-posting to multiple "walls" will not become a nuisance for the audience—after all, repetition seldom makes news any more interesting. One possible strategy is to select a master site, the hub to which traffic is directed from other hosts. The advantage of running your own site on a content management system is that most of them, including WordPress, offer a range of technical means to implement that strategy, and to automate the syndication process.

3 THE WORDPRESS PUBLISHING PLATFORM

3.1 Introduction and origins

WordPress is an open-source web application for the publishing and management of on-line content. Although designed specifically for blogging, it also allows for and is exten-sively used in the building of non-blog websites (Shearer, retrieved 3. 5. 2010; Cristache, retrieved 3. 5. 2010). WordPress is free software, published under the GNU General Public License, letting anyone use, make copies of, or modify the source code, or redistribute their own versions of it under the same license. (About WordPress, re-trieved 6. 4. 2010; Free Software Foundation, retrieved 6. 4. 2010.)

WordPress is actively being developed by hundreds of volunteers around the world. Au-tomattic, Inc. is a company operating the WordPress.com blog hosting service, among a number of other closely WordPress-related projects, and they currently employ some of the key developers of the software (Automattic, retrieved 6. 4. 2010). Despite of that, the WordPress software itself remains purely free and open-source, maintained by the community at WordPress.org.

The idea for WordPress was conceived in January 2003 by Matt Mullenweg who was, at the time, using a software called b2 to publish his personal weblog. b2, also known as cafelog, was a PHP-based blogging tool written by Michel Valdrighi who for some rea-son seemed to have abandoned the project. Fortunately he had licensed it under GPL, so that Mullenweg was able to "use the existing codebase to create a fork, integrating all the cool stuff". (Sabin-Wilson 2009, 15; Mullenweg, retrieved 19. 4. 2010.)

That cool stuff has since turned into the most popular blog publishing platform used on the Internet. In March 2010, WordPress powered about 2.1 % of all websites and about three fourths of the blogosphere (BuiltWith, retrieved 19. 4. 2010). In 2009, it received the Overall Best Open Source CMS Award in a competition where Drupal and Joomla!, often considered its main rivals, had been numbers one and two, respectively, the year before (Packt Publishing, retrieved 19. 4. 2010). Add thereto the fact that cutting-edge web-tech blogs like TechCrunch, ReadWriteWeb, and Mashable all run on WordPress, and you start to have enough reasons to suspect real advantages to be attributable to the platform (Himanshu, retrieved 3. 5. 2010).

3.2 Requirements and installation

WordPress is a web application, so it needs a web server environment to run in. As it is written in PHP and uses a MySQL database, these two components have to be present on the server. More precisely, the minimum requirements for a working WordPress installation are PHP version 4.3 and MySQL version 4.1.2—which most any hosting service provider these days will meet. Apache is recommended as the server software, since there are some advanced features of WordPress that take use of its mod_rewrite module. (WordPress Codex, retrieved 19. 4. 2010.)
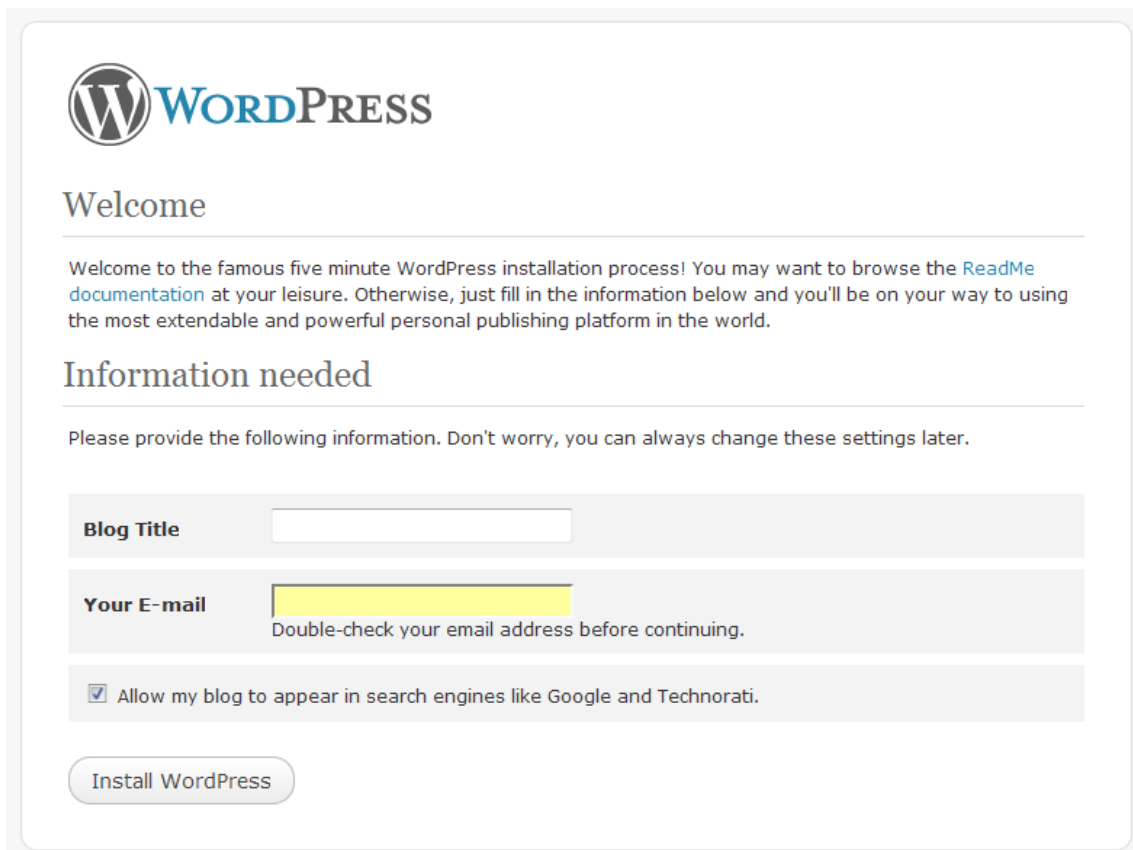
The latest stable version of WordPress, 2.9.2 at the time of writing, can be downloaded from the WordPress.org website. The installation process is not very complicated, but it does require basic text editing and file transferring skills. Provided that a database is already setup, as most often is the case for a regular user, only four steps are included:

1. downloading and unzipping or untarring the package
2. filling in database details to a .php configuration file
3. uploading the files to a desired location on the server
4. running the installation script, or wizard, in a browser

A simple FTP client will do for the file transfers, but steps 1 and 3 can also be omitted entirely if the user has SSH access to the server. After logging in and navigating to the desired destination folder, the user can fetch the installation files and unpack them directly to the remote server with the following command:

```
wget http://wordpress.org/latest.tar.gz && tar -xzvf latest.tar.gz
```

The two-step installation wizard will be located at the-installation-folder/wp-admin/install.php, and is run by typing the address into a web browser. During the first step (see *FIGURE 2*) the user needs to provide a title for the site and a valid email address, although both of these can be edited later. The user can also select whether to have the new site publicly listed, e.g. in blog directories or by search engines. However, unchecking the box will not make the site hidden from others, or prevent normal visitor traffic. The second step (see *FIGURE 3*) is there to confirm that the installation has been successful, and to present the user the administrator username and password. These login credentials are also sent to the email address that the user specified in step one.

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FIGURE 2. The first step in the WordPress installation wizard (WordPress Screenshots, retrieved 19. 4. 2010)

FIGURE 3. Step 2: WordPress has been successfully installed (WordPress Screenshots, retrieved 20. 4. 2010)

3.3 The administration dashboard

After signing in for the first time, the user is directed to the WordPress dashboard (see *FIGURE 4*). The dashboard is the front page of the back-end, i.e. the gateway to all the site's administrative functions. It consists of the main navigation column on the left, the larger work area on the right, and two dark-shaded panels for the header and footer.
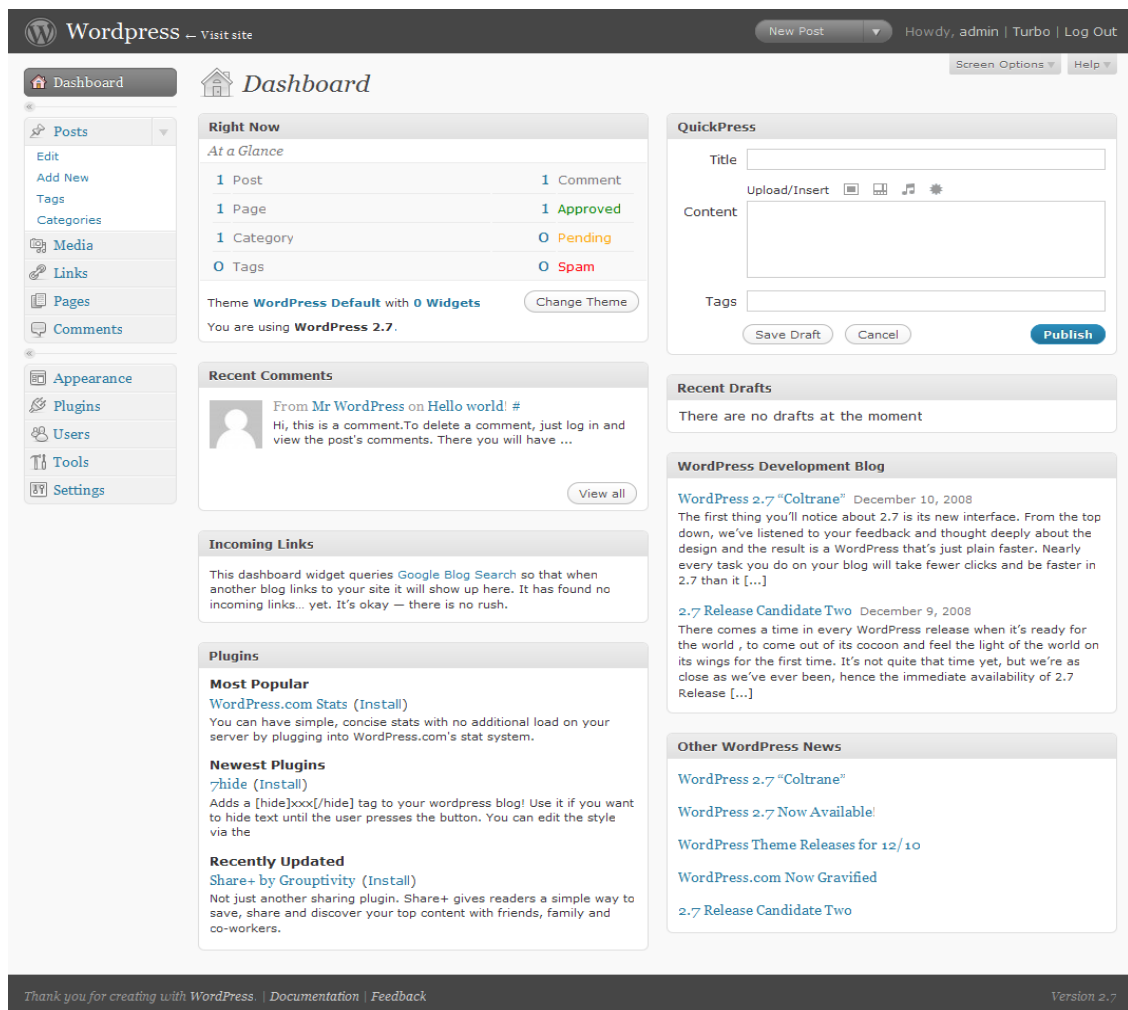
FIGURE 4. The WordPress administration dashboard (WordPress Screenshots, retrieved 20. 4. 2010)

The contents of the work area depend on the selected panel or sub-panel in the main navigation. Several customizable modules populate the work area in the dashboard home view: for example, the Right Now module (top-left) presents a quick overview of the site content, while the QuickPress module enables instant post publishing. The header panel at the top of the page contains e.g. links for visiting the site front-end, for viewing the profile of the signed-in user, and for logging out.

The names of the panels in the left-hand navigation menu suggest the kinds of content a WordPress site can host. *Posts* and *pages* are the two main types, both of which can also include comments, by the author as well as by others. Posts are used for blogging and for any news-like content for which the date and time of publishing is not insignificant. In a sense, it is content that can "grow old", whereas pages usually contain more time-enduring information. On a corporate website, for example, posts could be published about product offers, upcoming events or career opportunities, while pages might in turn contain the company profile and contact information.

WordPress sites, and blogs in particular, tend to network with each other by extensive mutual hyperlinking. The *Links* item in the navigation menu denotes a list of these related or favored websites, often placed in the navigation sidebar. Apart from this "Blogroll", as it is referred to in the WordPress jargon, links can also be inserted into posts, pages and comments, like any other HTML elements. Images, audio and video can be inserted via the *Media* library, or by deep linking to web sources elsewhere.

Finally, two core concepts of WordPress visible in *FIGURE 4* are *tags* and *categories*, found underneath the Posts heading. Posts can be tagged with keywords and categorized into groups and subgroups, to assist the reader in finding and filtering content; clicking on a tag or the name of a category will display all the posts that have the same tag assigned to them or belong to the same category. (Custom implementations may, of course, differ from the default behavior.) The difference between the two concepts is subtle, but there: categories organize, tags describe. In other words, categories represent the taxonomy of content, while tags are descriptive labels that do not have a hierarchy. Consequently, there are usually far fewer categories than tags. Neither is enabled for pages by default, but there are plugins (cf. 3.5) that extend the native functionality of tags and categories to work with pages, too.

3.4 User roles and capabilities

As mentioned before, not all WordPress sites are used for personal blogging. To enable community collaboration in content management by WordPress, access to the administration dashboard can be granted to an unlimited number of users. There are five different levels of access, called *roles* in the WordPress terminology, that a user may be assigned (WordPress Codex, retrieved 21. 4. 2010):

- Administrators — super-users with access to all the administration features
- Editors — can publish and manage content, including that created by others
- Authors — can publish and manage posts created by themselves
- Contributors — can write and manage their posts but not publish them
- Subscribers — can only manage their own profile, not publishable content

The blog owner automatically assumes the role of **administrator** during setup. An administrator has access to all the functions related to the site's management, and is the only role in which other users can be added, or their roles changed. It is advisable to have only one administrator account per blog, to keep things under control and avoid conflicting site configuration (WordPress.com, retrieved 21. 4. 2010).

Editors are able to manage all the content—posts, pages, and comments—that is published on the site. It is not unlike the role of editors of traditional newspapers, although there can be several instead of just one. This is the role recommended for efficient community collaboration, but it requires good trust among the editing users, and a common understanding on e.g. the quality criteria of the content to be published.

Authors of a WordPress blog can also publish and edit content, but they can not touch posts created by others. Neither do they have the right to edit pages or comments, like editors do. **Contributors** are "guest authors" without the right to publish on their own; their posts first need to be accepted by an editor or an administrator. Furthermore, after a successful review the post contributor can no longer edit the entry (ibid.).

The role of **subscribers** is a debated one (WordPress Ideas, retrieved 21. 4. 2010). What is left below the rank of a contributor is simply not much: a subscriber can not produce any content, nor see more of it than a random visitor to the site would. Subscribers can access the dashboard, but the only function available for them is to manage their own profile. While there are tweaks and plugins written to enhance the limited role of subscribers (Taylor, retrieved 21. 4. 2010), for example the WordPress.com blog hosting service has dropped it entirely (WordPress.com Forums, retrieved 21. 4. 2010).

3.5 Extending with themes and plugins

A key principle in the design of the WordPress software has been to keep the core code

itself as light as possible—the installation files take less than eight megabytes of disk space—while providing as much extensibility as possible (WordPress Extend, retrieved 22. 4. 2010). The idea is to let the users decide for themselves how they want to use the software, instead of force-feeding loads of functionalities most would find no use for. Extensibility is also an efficient means of outsourcing the development effort, empowering the community to build all the extra features they want. Anyone with the skills needed may write a piece of code for an extension, and submit it to the WordPress.org repositories for everyone else to download and benefit from.

WordPress can be extended in two different ways: *plugins* exist for additional functionalities, and *themes* are installable page design templates that govern how a site looks like. Both come in the form of PHP files—themes most likely accompanied by some CSS— and are installed by copying the files to their respective folders within the installation. To take effect, extensions have to be activated in the administration dashboard. At the time of this writing, there are 9,253 plugins and 1,192 themes available for download in the community resources alone (ibid.). Numerous other websites also offer extensions, and while most do so in the spirit of free software, business is also thriving on premium WordPress themes and plugins (Google Search, retrieved 22. 4. 2010).

Kubrick is the blue-and-white default theme shipped with all versions of WordPress since 1.5 in 2005 (Heilemann, retrieved 22. 4. 2010). Exemplar of the nature of WordPress as a community project, it was originally just another user submission to the theme repositories; however, the key developers happened to like it so much that they integrated it to the default installation. The previous default, Classic, is the other theme that comes pre-installed, but the common procedure is to utilize the free themes directory at WordPress.org, when designing what site should look like. The directory is accessible within the dashboard, and for most themes a preview or a live demo is available. (That is, users need not install the themes just to see if they like them or not.)

WordPress comes with only one pre-installed plugin, the Akismet spam filtering service. If a site owner prefers to enable reader comments on posts, this plugin—or other similar means of protection—should be activated in the very beginning. Well-protected WordPress sites are, in my own experience, not very susceptible to spam robots, but the list of automatically filtered comments is worth checking from time to time for false positives, i.e. real human comments misinterpreted by the plugin as spam.

4 REDESIGNING FOOTBAG.FI

4.1 Project goals and objectives

The main purpose of this project was to redesign the web presence of the Finnish Foot-
bag Association. To accomplish this, the project was initially divided into three separate,
yet equally important phases:

1. Redesigning the visual appearance of footbag.fi
2. Restructuring and, in part, rewriting the site content
3. Connecting with external services (creating presence)

It was also agreed early on that the site should deploy a content management system, to
enable easier site maintenance. Because of that, phases one and two overlapped quite a
bit during the implementation, and the visual part became more a matter of themes eval-
uation, selection and tweaking than pure graphic design. No formal restrictions regard-
ing the appearance were imposed by the commissioner, but most people I talked with
off the record seemed to prefer keeping the blue-and-white color scheme of the old
pages—confirmed as the general opinion by the requirements questionnaire (cf. 4.3.1).

A thorough revision of content was necessary for several reasons. First of all, the origi-
nal texts contained outdated information about the sport and the association itself.
Adding to the problem, the articles did not provide the reader with a date of publication
or last edit (apart from the news). Second of all, link rot was rampant, and most of it
was due to deleted or moved *local* content. A brief look at the public root folder of the
footbag.fi server was enough to explain: over the years, it had become a warehouse of
data, and to tell which files and folders were actually needed was practically impossible.

The third major content-related issue, already discussed in the emails by the initial
project team, were images. The photographs used on the site were outdated in terms of
both content and quality: some were scans of ancient newspaper stories, others taken in
dark lighting with low resolution digital pocket cameras; even the official national team
photo dated back to the 1999 Worlds. An important goal of this project was to replace
all of these images with newer and better ones, although it was out of the scope to actu-
ally go and shoot any. Rather, the material would be collected from the members' hard

drives and web albums, and into an image bank accessible at least to the site administrators, if not all members of the association.

The final phase of the development project was to integrate the renewed site with the relevant social media and other web services. The objective was to extend the web presence of the commissioning organization outside the borders of its own domain, bearing in mind all the "single points of mention" on the Internet that an online presence consists of. The FFA had a lone YouTube account to begin with; the task was now to evaluate the need for a Facebook fan page, a micro-blogging account, or public galleries in a photo sharing service like Picasa or Flickr, and possibly establish the accounts deemed worthwhile. At the start of the project, Wikipedia entries about the Finnish Footbag Association were also missing in all languages, although the Finnish article on footbag did contain a link to the association's website (Wikipedia, retrieved 23. 4. 2010).

Two specific goals could be named that were not directly related to any of the three phases described above. Firstly, the old footbag.fi website did not incorporate a discussion forum. Instead, during recent years, the forum of one local team in Helsinki had become the de facto standard communication channel and discussion platform for FFA members. For a number of reasons, I felt it would make sense to migrate this service under the official domain. Secondly, update routines and maintenance responsibilities should be properly established: for example, footbag.fi contains a prominent section for news, the publishing of which should be well planned, scheduled and assigned. The CMS backend also requires some attendance, e.g. whenever updates to the software are available.

4.2 Development methods and tools

WordPress, the free and open source publishing platform and content management system described in chapter 3, was deployed for the construction of the new site. The advantages of the CMS approach in general, as opposed to manual coding, are overwhelming, but the strongest argument for WordPress, specifically, was that I had more experience in using it than of Drupal, Joomla! or other open source platforms. Therefore, it was the most time-conserving alternative, not having to familiarize myself with an entirely new environment.

The old version of footbag.fi did not take use of any CMS software but, like WordPress, it was written in PHP and used a MySQL database. In other words, the prerequisites for a WordPress installation were also present. The Finnish Footbag Association subscribes to Nebula web hosting and domain name services, and physically the footbag.fi domain files and folders are located at the shadow.nebula.fi server. I received credentials to both the web server and the mysql.nebula.fi database server right in the beginning of the project, and was able to put the first development version, a plain installation of the WordPress platform, straight up to the final server. The installation path http://footbag.-fi/beta was password-protected using .htaccess, to prevent search engines from indexing it prematurely.

For transferring files to and from the web server, I turned it into an automounted Secure Shell file system (SSHFS) on my own computer. What it means, in practice, is that the web server root folder—or what appears as root for the logged-in client—is integrated into my local file system at every startup. I can browse and edit the server-side file and folder structure just as it was contained on my personal hard disk. This technology is an absolute life-saver and something that I use in all web development, as it virtually obsoletes the need for a separate SSH client, let alone FTP.

For editing the source code, mainly PHP and CSS files, I used gedit, the default text editor shipped with Ubuntu Linux. For the small amount of image editing that was needed, gThumb and GIMP were my trusted software. Mozilla Firefox 3.6 was the default rendering reference used, but a virtual installation of Windows XP Pro, running on VirtualBox 3.1, came in handy while doing on-the-go cross-browser compatibility testing. For a more thorough comparison before publishing the site I used the BrowserShots service at http://browsershots.org/.

Most of the communication among all the project parties, school included, happened via email. As mentioned in the introduction, a mailing list had been set up for the project, where discussion had been going on since well before my own subscription. I also consulted the association board members by personal email, and during our weekly training sessions. For putting together the requirements gathering questionnaire, described in detail in the following chapter, I used the forms wizard in Google Docs. I had never tried this particular tool before, but it proved impressively user-oriented and easy to learn.

4.3 Phases of the development process

4.3.1 Requirements gathering questionnaire

The first step in the actual thesis project, excluding initial scheduling and other preparative meta, was to elicit ideas and requirements from the future users of the new website. To accomplish this, an online survey was conducted: in the end of January, 32 members of the Finnish Footbag Association received via email the link to a ten-item questionnaire (see APPENDIX). Instead of taking a random sample from the association member register, I hand-picked a selection of the most active people in the scene, whose opinions I thought should matter the most. Another purpose of the questionnaire, at least as important as documenting the requirements, was to involve people in the project. I felt that if members could participate and have their say right from the beginning, the result should feel less like the work of one person and more like a community website.

During February, a total of 14 people responded. While the response rate of 43.8 % was a little less than expected, I was extremely satisfied with the quality of the answers: the respondents had obviously taken time to consider each question, and their open answers, as well as comments related to multiple-choice questions were verbose. The tone of the questions and the multiple choices was overly informal precisely because I wanted the respondents to feel relaxed about their own writing. They were also allowed to answer in Finnish, or any other language, although apart from the cover letter the questionnaire was entirely in English.

The first three questions concerned the visual appearance of the FFA website. Eleven out of fourteen respondents, or 78.6 %, were either mildly content with or die-hard fans of the blue-and-white color scheme of the old site, while only three respondents wanted it changed. Among the comments, the colors of the national team were mentioned as the basis of and grounds for keeping the site blue and white. With six votes against two the old left-aligned layout was to be replaced by centered content, although another six felt that the alignment did not matter all that much. Likewise, typography was not an important issue for 64.3 % of the respondents; however, the tiny font size of the old pages was favored as a "trademark of classy websites" by five respondents. This was somewhat surprising, given the dominant trend in web design towards larger and larger fonts (Heritage™ Internet Technologies, retrieved 25. 4. 2010; Eri Design, retrieved 25. 4. 2010).

Question number four attempted to discover what was considered to be the most essential role of the footbag.fi website. In a sense, this was the single most important question in the survey, as the result of it would basically have an impact on all of the design details later on. The members were asked whether the upcoming site should primarily be a

- source of information for the general public about the sport of footbag,
- a source of news, photos, and contacts for the media and sponsors, or a
- platform of services for and communication between the FFA members.

To sum up, I had named these alternatives "the info desk", "the business card", and "the club hub", respectively. A clear majority of 73 % selected the first option, but the open comments to this question revealed that there was actually more ambiguity related to the matter. The importance of all three roles was recognized, and the "club hub" was repeatedly brought up as the most neglected aspect. Four respondents specifically stated the need to target new players, prospect members of the association, with the future site.

Questions five and six dealt more concretely with the content of the pages—what kind of material was missing, and was there something useless that could be dumped? A wish shared by many was that there were more photos and embedded video on the site, and a few suggested the enabling of user-generated galleries for achieving this. An e-store of footbag equipment was called for by two respondents, possibly unaware that the FFA already runs one—albeit via a third-party service platform on a different domain. A section of the old site "downvoted" most often was the one for local clubs, the number and activity of which has dwindled during recent years.

The seventh question was specifically about the introduction of a discussion forum into the footbag.fi domain. More than three fourths (78.6 %) considered the idea worth pursuing, while three respondents were a bit more hesitant without knowing further details. One planned detail was that only signed in FFA members would be able to participate in the forum discussions. Other potential uses of a member login system were probed in question eight; on the old site, members were able to sign in, but there was not much to gain from doing so. Interestingly, there seemed not to be as many ideas storming from this question as from the earlier ones. A reason might be that people simply do not like having to sign up and sign in to every site they visit. As one respondent put it, "we should get rid of unnecessary logins, and instead enable rapid access to all content".

The purpose of question nine was to recruit more people to the project reserve. Five out of fourteen respondents declined; another five agreed to offer their opinions and technical help, but hoped not to be signed up for any hands-on tasks. Most highly valued were the answers of four people willing to "see what they could do" for the project in any respect. Nine wanted to either begin or continue receiving the sivut@footbag.fi list emails. The commissioner had provided me with credentials to their email administration system, so that I was able to add the new addresses, including my own, to the list.

The last question was reserved for feedback on the questionnaire itself, and for possible comments that had not fitted in earlier. Apart from a couple of respondents that had expected more talk about the visual appearance, this part did not really stir up discussion.

4.3.2 Installing and configuring the platform

The WordPress installation itself, as described in chapter 3.2, is a somewhat simple and straightforward operation. However, it is the mere beginning in creating complete, multifunctional websites unique in appearance. Site-specific settings should be configured, the layout designed—or, more conveniently, selected from the thousands of ready-made WordPress themes available online—and a number of plugins installed and activated. In principal, content is not required at this point, but having at least some articles in place, either in real or placeholder text, is generally a good idea. After all, many plugins operate on posts or pages, and you can get a better idea of the theme being applied if there is more content for it to render than the single default post. Content migration overlapped heavily with platform configuration also during this project, despite the two being discussed here in separate chapters.

The settings panel in the WordPress dashboard contains eight subheadings, under which the configuration for each specific function (writing, reading, discussion, etc) is managed (see *FIGURE 5*). Some of the general settings for footbag.fi, such as blog title and URL, were already configured during setup, but others—the tagline and timezone, for instance—needed adjustment. For facilitating the joint effort of content revisioning, the "Anyone can register" box was checked, and the default role of new users set from Subscriber to Editor (cf. 3.4). Note that this was only for the period of time before publishing the site, with temporary .htaccess credentials in place for the project group members; later, the default role would naturally be reset.
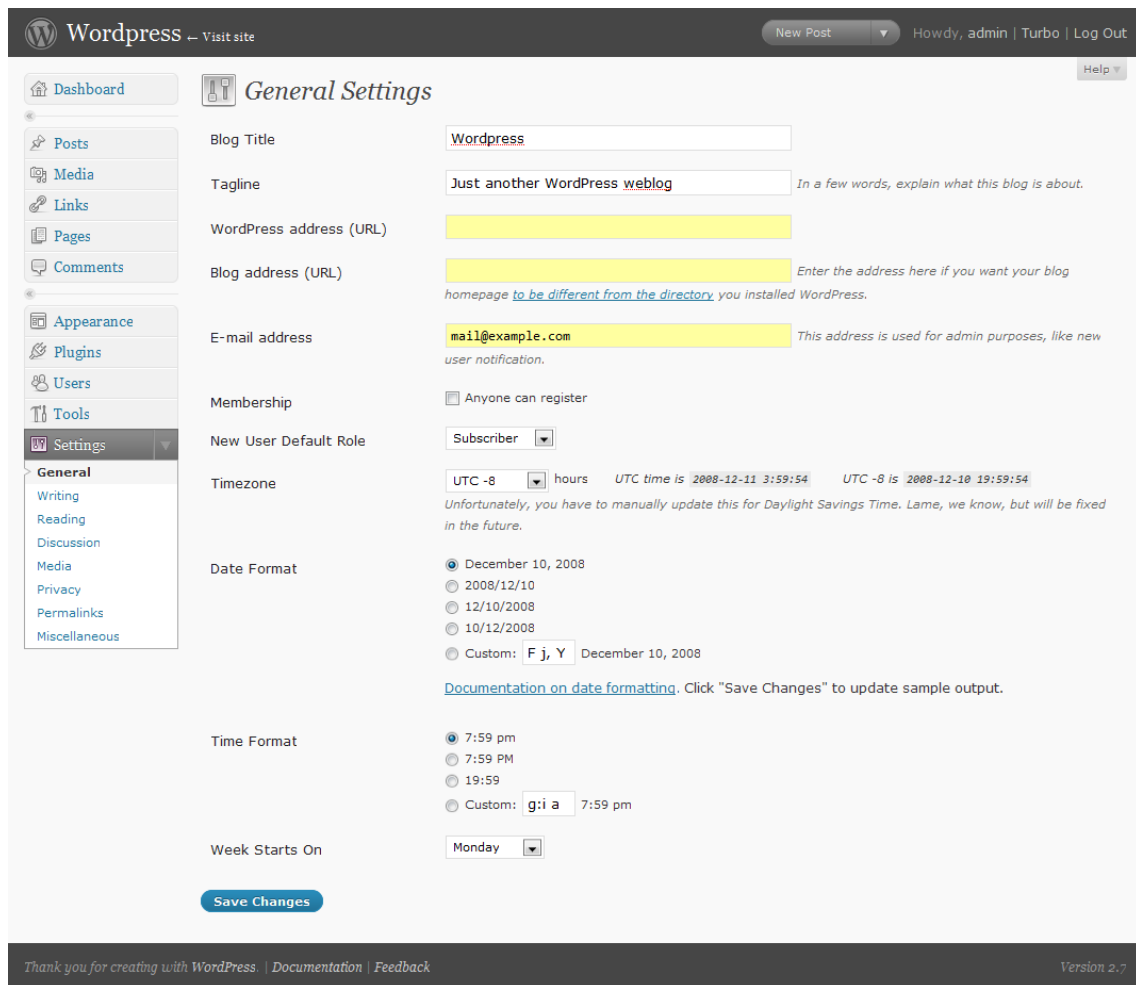
FIGURE 5. The General Settings of WordPress (WordPress Screenshots, retrieved 20. 4. 2010)

Settings related to writing and reading were basically left to their default values. Discussion settings, quite permissive in WordPress by default, were adjusted to allow only signed-in users to leave comments. A change also suggested by the commissioner, the commenting of pages was disabled entirely (actually not a dashboard setting but a theme feature).

As one of the more significant final touches, permalinks settings were edited. Permalinks are, as the name would suggest, permanent links—they enable precise, time-enduring references to be created from other sites. For example, a link to the front page URL of a news site will lead the user to quite different content a week than a year from now, which is why individual news stories have each their own address to link to. By default, WordPress generates URLs of the form http://footbag.fi/?p=123, in which the number acts as a unique identifier of the post or page. While certainly unambiguous, these ad-

dresses are not very friendly to search engines. As recommended by de Valk (retrieved 27. 4. 2010) and others, the permalink structure should be changed to something more readable. Of the four other options available, the http://footbag.fi/2010/05/title-of-post/ format was selected, whereby the month of publishing will distinguish between news articles that happen to have the same title.

Theme selection is perhaps the single most important decision in setting up a WordPress site. It is not an irreversible one, though, as illustrated among others by this very project: about halfway through the development of footbag.fi/beta there came an abrupt switch of course that involved a completely new theme design being applied. For a month or so I had experimented with this great plugin called BuddyPress, that introduces a number of social elements (friending, groups, forums, likes, etc.) to a WordPress blog. It had a lot of advantages to it, but one of its drawbacks was a limited number of compatible themes. Moreover, since BuddyPress is quite recent software—the first stable version was released only a year ago—other plugins compatible with or designed specifically for it were still scarce. Not only did I become frustrated with the things I could *not* do with it, I started to wonder if all the things I *could* were actually needed.

Despite having already successfully demoed the development version to the commissioner, I decided to build a fork without BuddyPress—from scratch. Incidentally, I had just (during an entirely different project I was working on) discovered a freemium blue-and-white theme called Traction that looked perfect for the purpose of this re-redesign. To cut a long story short, the original beta was soon dumped for the new, sleeker version, by unanimous comments on the project mailing list.

At the time of writing, four extra plugins are installed to the new site. Flexo Archives is the simplest one of them, less than 500 lines of PHP and JavaScript code to display the monthly news archives as nifty, expandable–collapsable menus, instead of static HTML. The SexyBookmarks plugin adds underneath each post a set of icons (see *FIGURE 6*) for sharing the story in the social service of choice. It is an extremely popular plugin, with a quarter of a million downloads from the WordPress.org plugins repository alone, and supports 86 different sharing services (WordPress Plugins, retrieved 27. 4. 2010).
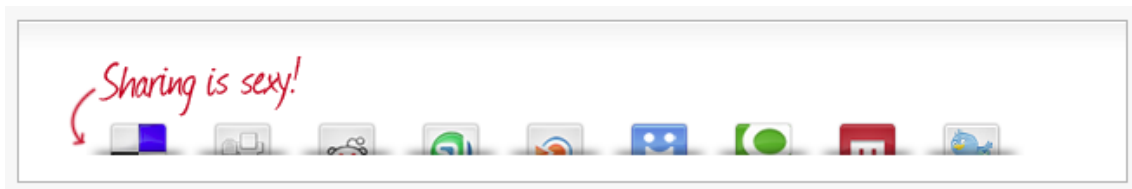
FIGURE 6. An example set of the SexyBookmarks sharing icons (Shareaholic, retrieved 27. 4. 2010)

Sidebar Login is a plugin that obsoletes the default WordPress login page, replacing it in functionality with a simple form in the theme's sidebar. It allows for users to sign in without leaving the page they are currently browsing—alternatively, the plugin can be configured to redirect to a specific page after login.

Finally, the most prominent extra feature enabled by a plugin on the new site is the discussion forum. The WP Forum Server software powering it was the third forum plugin I installed, after Simple:Press had proven too complicated to configure and bbPress, the forum plugin also integrated in BuddyPress, simply failed. WP Forum Server was easy to set up and extensively customizable; for the forum page design, there were several skins, or stylesheets, to choose from, and one of them even happened to match the color scheme of the Traction theme without tweaks.

WordPress plugins most often, and themes without exceptions, introduce additional text elements to a site. These strings are usually in English and need to be translated into the language of the WordPress environment. There are two ways of doing this, the easier solution being to simply open the PHP files that make up a plugin or a theme and replace all the original texts with corresponding translations. This will work up until a new version of the extension becomes available, and you want to upgrade—it could be a security patch you can not afford not to. Unfortunately, replacing the files with new ones will now erase all the hard-coded translations.

The recommended alternative is to take use of text domains, string parameters coded into most extensions, in creating external translation (.mo) files. Since the FFA runs a Finnish website, both the Traction theme and the last three plugins described above needed to be translated from English. The details of the translation process itself will not be delved into—apart from mentioning that Poedit was the single life-saving software used—but the overall outcome was that now, whenever a theme update or a new

plugin version is around, it can safely be installed. Any new, or altered, text elements they may contain are simply added, or updated, to the already existing translation files.

4.3.3 Importing content from the old pages

A main goal of the project besides the new visual appearance was to restructure and, for the most outdated parts, rewrite the informational content. The intention was not to start every page from scratch, but to first migrate all the text material from the old pages, and then work on it. Basically there were three kinds of content to migrate, news, pages, and media, and for each a slightly different strategy was applied.

News articles were published on the old site using a PHP/MySQL based system, whereby the title, excerpt, and the body text of each article where written in separate rows in a table. Since WordPress also uses a MySQL database to store posts in, in theory it could have been possible to bulk import all the news from the old system to the new. After some investigation, however, at least two reasons appeared for preferring a more manual approach: the articles contained HTML tags that would have needed escaping, and there was also a tremendous amount of broken links. On the other hand, copying, pasting and editing each story individually would have been way too time-consuming—the news section had been around since February 2001. Compromising, I collected the articles published during this and the previous year, stripped off the link rot manually, and posted them in WordPress with the original publication date intact. I also added pictures to some of the latest headlines, to enliven the front page of the new site a little, and created a few basic categories, such as "events" and "results", to attach posts to.

Pages were also copied and pasted individually without any hyperlinks or pictures. The original page structure was mimicked only to some extent; in compliance with the results of the requirements questionnaire, e.g. the local clubs section was jettisoned. As discussed in chapter 3.3, pages in WordPress cannot be assigned tags or categories, but unlike posts, can be placed in a hierarchical order. The hierarchy of the footbag.fi pages at the time of their BETA publishing is presented in *FIGURE 7*. Note that the sub-pages of the discussion forum, dynamically created by the Forum Server plugin, are excluded, as well as the WordPress meta pages for signing in, registering, and password retrieval.
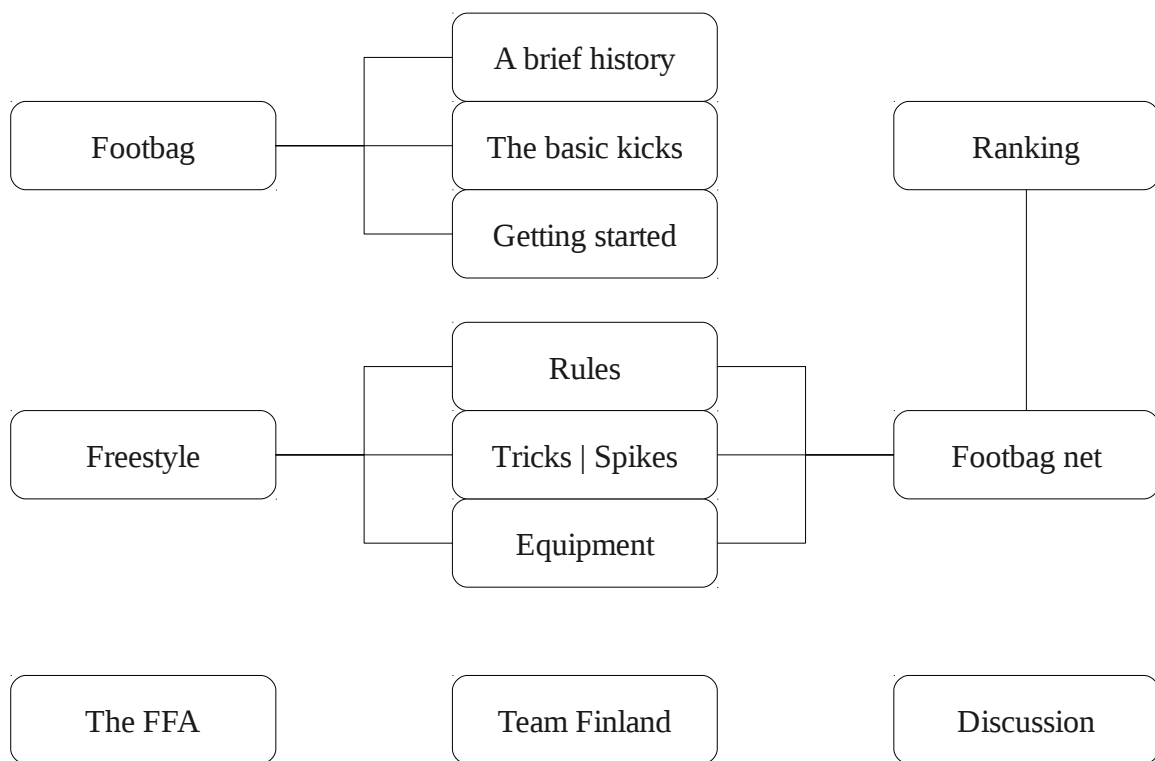
FIGURE 7. The hierarchical page structure of the new footbag.fi in BETA *(original page titles translated from Finnish)*

As mentioned earlier, the majority of images used on the old site were to be replaced by more recent, better-quality photos. As it turned out, there was no shortage of material at the footbag.fi server; hundreds of image and video files lay scattered in dozens of different folders, most of them not used on the site at all. In order to sort the wheat from the chaff, the process of migrating the media needed to start from reorganizing it meaningfully. The built-in media library in the WordPress dashboard proved not very useful with such an amount of files, so I decided instead to use the popular Picasa software. The prime advantage of it was that it allows for creating online galleries to which invited people can upload—a perfect solution for crowdsourcing the collection of photos. Like many Google services, Picasa also offers tagging with keywords, a feature effectively replacing traditional folder structures and mitigating the risk of duplicate content.

In the very earliest plans, the migration of the old discussion forum was also considered. A new forum platform was already in place, but the contents—the database of users, topics, and individual messages—still resided in the old system. Hosted on the proprietary ProBoards service, the forum did not natively support exporting any of its content,

and there appeared to be no third-party web spiders available specifically for the task. Alarming the commissioner at some point to these technical difficulties, I made the suggestion that only the forum topics would be "imported", and that users would be politely redirected—first in writing, then automatically—to the new forum. The commissioner not only agreed, but pointed out the entailing benefit of refreshing the user base.

4.3.4 Design customization: a child theme

As explained in 3.5, themes that govern the visual appearance of WordPress sites are mostly made up of plain, accessible PHP and CSS files. Although themes usually work out-of-the-box, tweaking their behavior to better suit the needs of a specific client project is not uncommon. For someone that can read and write PHP and CSS, customizing how an active theme renders a site is quite simple: editing the files is even enabled directly within the WordPress dashboard. In this particular project, however, I preferred a desktop editor, since the remote file system was at such an easy reach via SSHFS.

Similarly to the translation of themes, however, there is a recommended alternative strategy for customizing the design of a site. Directly editing the original theme source has the same disadvantage as hard-coding translations into it, namely that the changes are likely to be erased by a future update. Enter child themes, a clever solution based on the inheritance capabilities of PHP and CSS. A child theme is a kind of development branch forked from the original, or parent, theme. At the very minimum, it consists of one style.css file whose contents override some design detail declared by the parent. On the other end of the scale, every single PHP file of the parent might have a tweaked replica in the child theme folder. (WordPress Codex, retrieved 29. 4. 2010.)

A child theme was bred also from Traction, the dark, blue-and-white theme selected for footbag.fi. Named Addtraction ("add" is footbag terminology for difficulty points awarded from tricks) in honor of its parent, the custom interface is screenshot in *FIGURE 8*. Not a great deal of customization was actually required, but there were some elements to the Traction theme that seemed better suited for a personal blog than the type of site this project was aiming at:

- *The right-aligned top margin area listed pages*. In personal blogs, the primary content is usually posted in articles, while pages either contain some secondary meta-

level ("About") information or are omitted entirely. Hence quite understandably, the area intended for a page listing was a subtle grey one somewhere in the marginal—untenably unnoticeable considering the important role of pages on footbag.fi.

▪ *The gradient blue navigation bar contained post categories*. While this was not a problem in itself, now that the pages were in need of a more prominent spot, I decided to make room for them here and place the category listing to a sidebar widget (visible in the bottom-right corner of *FIGURE 8*). Conveniently, pages and categories both support hierarchical structuring, so the code of the drop-down menu needed no attendance.

▪ *The insert area beneath the navigation displayed featured posts*. Or was designed to, at least. The parent of Addtraction is a freemium theme, meaning that some of its advanced features, including the "Featured Posts" slider, were disabled in the non-paid version. This made it handy to turn it into an actually more useful display of static content, an ever topical introduction to the sport and to the Finnish Footbag Association.

All of these features were implemented in PHP, so what I needed to do was to first copy the specific files (e.g. header.php, index.php, and page.php) from the Traction folder to the child theme's directory, and then modify the copies. Note that I only needed to copy the files that were going to be tweaked, since WordPress can tell whether the active theme is a child and, if there are PHP files missing, look for them in the parent. For stylesheets the technique is a bit different: to begin with, all the parent CSS is imported, in this case using the following statement at the start of the child theme's style.css:

```
@import url('../traction/style.css');
```

Stylesheets are read from top to bottom, meaning that of conflicting definitions the bottom-most will prevail. Only minor details were overridden by additional declarations in the Addtraction style.css, namely the decoration and spacing of lists, the style of thumbnail images within posts, and the layout of image captions. For the most part, however, the imported CSS of the parent theme did the job just fine. The color scheme was blue-and-white, compliant with the requirements, albeit on a dark grey background instead of the white of the former pages. The body text font was not much larger than before, but it used embossing, a narrow white letter shadow, to nicely enhance contrast.

FIGURE 8. The starting page of the new footbag.fi website, as rendered by the Addtraction child theme

4.4 Connecting to the World Wide Web

The final phase of the project, when the redesigned pages of the Finnish Footbag Association started to be ready for publishing, was to decide and deploy the third-party services the site would be connected to. An important first question was that of the name under which the accounts and profiles should be established. The footbag scene is very international, and although the main target audience of the web presence was going to

be Finnish, we also wanted to consider the non-Finnish fans and affiliates, especially in online social media. The official Finnish name of the organization, *Suomen footbagliitto ry*, might not have been the easiest one for foreigners to remember, but neither was it considered very sexy by the FFA members themselves (Kärki 28. 4. 2010, email).

Related to this, a convention discovered trending in other countries was to simply combine the name of the sport with the name of the country. In the wake of Tennis Ireland, Volleyball Canada, Badminton England, and others, it was suggested that the commissioner assume *Footbag Finland* as a sort of a brand name to be used throughout its web presence and in offline promotion, while Finnish Footbag Association would remain the official name for subsidy applications and other bureaucratic purposes. The idea was widely applauded and soon applied, starting from the title of the new website itself.

The four social media and networking services selected for building up presence for the Footbag Finland brand were Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Picasa. For the latter two, a Google account was created, which brought along with it a number of other tools. The potential of Buzz, for instance, would be evaluated at some point, if it catches on in popularity. The sharing features in the Google Reader feed aggregator might later be looked into, as well.

Picasa

The Picasa photo service deployed in 4.3.3 for storing images collaboratively also incorporates other social aspects. For example, people can be tagged in (and be notified of it), become fans of, comment on, and 'like' photos in ways most Facebook users are already familiar with. To facilitate name tagging, the Picasa desktop software even supports automatic face recognition since version 3.5 (Bogdan, retrieved 1. 5. 2010). Users will become fans of Footbag Finland by adding it to their favorites. Of course, for the commissioner to benefit from any of these features, public albums need to be present in addition to the invite-only image bank used for site illustration.

YouTube

The Finnish Footbag Association had its own YouTube channel long before the start of this project. Created in July 2009 with the name SFLry, it had not, however, been managed nor promoted very actively: ten months later, the channel only had two uploads and three subscribers (YouTube, retrieved 1. 5. 2010). Taking over the account and re-

viving it would have made the most sense, were it not for the annoying limitation of YouTube that usernames, also used as channel titles, cannot be edited (YouTube Help, retrieved 1. 5. 2010). Therefore, a new channel was established under the FootbagFinland account, and the videos from the old channel, together with the cream of the crop in the archives of footbag.fi, were uploaded.

Twitter

A Twitter profile was deemed worth setting up even though the number of active twitterers in Finland is not that high. Tweets would be particularly convenient during tournament events, for updating results on the spot, but also in directing traffic to the news on the official Footbag Finland site, to new videos uploaded to YouTube, or to any other topical content. The French Open footbag tournament in January, for example, harnessed Twitter as a pre-event information channel for players, publishing updates on schedule changes, tips for accommodation, etc. (Twitter, retrieved 1. 5. 2010).

Facebook

The Facebook page would be crucial to the binding together of all the aforementioned services and the official site. Utilizing various applications, it will essentially collect and display in a single location all newly uploaded Picasa photos and YouTube videos, Twitter updates, and news articles posted on footbag.fi, as described in chapter 2.3. The goal is for it to become the single most important promotion channel of the Footbag Finland brand—internationally in particular, since the English version of the official pages were not going to be ready for the public launch.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Self-assessment of effort and success

Conducting this thesis project took approximately five months in total, starting with the commissioner contact in late December 2009, and complete after the thesis delivery on May 13th, 2010. For the most of February I was off the project due to other assignments, whereas in March and April I worked the bulk of the hours—about 81 and 94, respectively. The two main assignments included were the actual development project, and the writing of this thesis report. However, while outlining the thesis process in January, I was able to divide it into in all five different phases of

[1] initiation — commissioner contact, topic approval, cooperation agreement;
[2] preparation — scheduling, ToC, collection of references and requirements;
[3] implementation — putting up the new website, establishing web presence;
[4] reporting — writing the thesis report, the three-step seminar process; and
[5] finalization — thesis delivery, formal self-evaluation, maturity exam.

The topic that was approved in [1] in January was actually not that of the thesis delivered in [5]. The concept of "web presence" came along about half-way through the course of the work, replacing "online services" in the original thesis title. I made the adjustment to narrow the topic down a bit, in part to avoid running out of time, but also to get rid of some slightly uninteresting parts of the content. In particular, the use of mailing lists, IRC and instant messaging gave way to the integration of online social media and networking services.

The preliminary schedule and table of contents drafted in [2] were both subject to quite intense modification along the way, but that did not undermine their role as an important roadmap for the process. The pre-study and collection of references, on the other hand, proved almost entirely useless, as I ended up using none of the intended printed sources, and only one web article bookmarked by the opening seminar. A good idea was to develop and send the requirements questionnaire sort of ahead of schedule, in the end of January—thus, while I was busy with other schoolwork in February, the project was still inching forward with each response submitted.

According to my original plan, phases [3] and [4] would have overlapped the way that, by the time the implementation part was finished, around half of the report would have been written. Unfortunately, other projects were still keeping me busy in March, and delayed the start of the implementation to actually concur with the writing of introductory chapters to the report. Work delegated to others, such as text revisions and the design of the Footbag Finland logo, also took (and are taking) more time than expected and, although were out of the scope of the thesis itself, delayed some aspects that were not. For example, the establishment of the various online profiles had to wait for the logo, which I wanted to use not only on the footbag.fi website itself but consistently as an all-purpose profile image, an *avatar*, throughout the web.

In hindsight, it is easy to say that I should have scheduled more time for this part of the project. However, in collaborating with peers in a voluntary organization, setting deadlines and being strict on meeting them proved far harder than I had thought. Consequently, I quite often ended up doing things I had planned to delegate by myself, rather than writing that polite email asking if someone else had the time. I also had to set deadlines for my own work, such as for finishing each chapter of this very report, but had no serious trouble in meeting them.

Nevertheless, the last three weeks before the due delivery date were the busiest, as expected. Fortunately, the commissioner was not pressuring me to finish the site any sooner—members of the board of directors were extremely supportive throughout the project—and the workload of other school assignments eased up towards the end of April.

5.2 Ideas and plans for future development

The revision of content—rewriting the texts and reillustrating the pages with fresh photos from the image bank—is the last item on the to-do list holding the new site in beta. It is far from being the last item altogether, though. Development work will continue after this thesis, and after the final publishing of the pages, most importantly in the following three areas:

▪ *Translations*. The old footbag.fi featured only a limited amount of content in English for the occasional foreign visitor. An ambitious goal for the new version is to provide both English and Swedish translations of all the static pages, and of the most im-

portant news articles to be published in the future. There are people already volunteered for this task, which is to start right after the Finnish revisions are complete. The international WordPress community has come up with several plugins to facilitate the translation of pages and posts; some of the more advanced add-ons even support the multi-linguality of themes and other plugins (Qin, retrieved 5. 5. 2010).

▪ *E-commerce*. The Finnish Footbag Association currently operates a small e-shop selling footbags and related equipment via a third-party service, at footbag.suomalainen-verkkokauppa.fi. The visual design of the site is limited by the non-free platform, and consequently akin to neither the old nor the new layout of footbag.fi. A task perhaps worth another project would be to integrate the option of online shopping to the self--hosted WordPress installation; unsurprisingly, there are plenty of free plugins available for that, too (SpeckyBoy, retrieved 5. 5. 2010).

▪ *Documentation*. As the constructor and to-be webmaster of the new footbag.fi site, I am personally acquainted in depth with how it works. However, to ensure that it does not stay on my responsibility alone and forever to update and maintain the pages, instructions should be written on the usage of WordPress, the Addtraction theme and the relevant plugins applied. Originally in the scope of my thesis project, this task also includes drafting guidelines on what to publish and when (cf. 4.1), and should be prioritized; the documentation of the old site, for bad example, was postponed for the whole of nine years it was online.

Other ideas for future improvements include importing more articles from the old footbag.fi news archive, and, while at it, introducing a better categorization scheme. Moving all the login-related content, including the login form, to the top margin would contribute to the usability of the site and make room for more interesting content in the sidebar. A free (of charge) web analytics tool, most probably Google Analytics or Piwik, will be deployed for collecting site traffic statistics, based on which search engine and other optimizations can be made.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this thesis work was to redesign the web presence of the Finnish Foot-
bag Association. An active member of the commissioning organization myself, I had the
opportunity to step into a web design project already initiated by others, but in standstill
due to poor project management. The WordPress publishing platform was selected for
the construction of the new site, and to meet the objectives of a consistent visual appear-
ance and more easily updateable content.

Web presence was defined as a brand management concept much broader than in its tra-
ditional meaning of online property. Redesigning it within the scope of this thesis did
entail renovating a website, but it also included establishing profiles in relevant online
social media and networking services. Four such services were harnessed to reinforce
the web presence of the FFA outside the footbag.fi domain; whether the particular selec-
tion of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Picasa accounts will be successful in building
awareness of the new Footbag Finland brand, is perhaps too early at this point to tell.

Certain parts of the project, such as updating some of the informational content migrat-
ed "as is" from the old pages, were plannedly delegated to members of the supporting
team. Due to unscheduled delays in delivering these revisions the new site is, at the time
of this writing, still in beta. However, commissioner representatives have already ex-
pressed their satisfaction with the new version, and consider the requirements defined in
the beginning of the project fulfilled. Web presence is building up for Footbag Finland.

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REQUIREMENTS QUESTIONNAIRE   APPENDIX

1. *The current blue-and-white color scheme is*

    ○ absolutely gorgeous. Don't you dare mess with it.

    ○ OK, I guess. But I would not mind a new one, either.

    ○ regretful. Please do something about it and quick.

    Your comment:
    [a textfield]

2. *The main content of the future website should*

    ○ float to the left and have a fixed width, like the current version.

    ○ be centered and have relative width, for different screen resolutions.

    ○ do whatever floats your boat. I don't think it matters all that much.

    Your comment:
    [a textfield]

3. *Which of these opinions on typography could be yours?*

    ○ Tiny font size is the trademark of classy websites, so please keep it as it is.

    ○ Apart from Comic Sans, any font will do. Do not increase the size too much.

    ○ I like big fonts and I just can't lie. Sites like the Oatmeal have got it right.

    Your comment:
    [a textfield]

4. *Websites serve different purposes for different target groups. What do you think is the most important function of the FFA website? Should it primarily be a*

    ○ source of information for the general public about the sport of footbag ("the info desk")

    ○ source of news, photos, and contacts for the media and sponsors ("the business card")

    ○ platform of services for and communication between FFA members ("the club hub")

    If you consider all of these aspects equally important, which do you think is most neglected at the moment? Any ideas for how to improve it?
    [a textfield]

5. *This perhaps overlaps with the previous question, but can you think of something else that is clearly missing from the current site but would be great to see in the new version?*
   [a text field]

6. *What about stuff that is totally useless, and might just as well be dumped?*
   [a text field]

7. *The discussion forum at footbag.proboards.com has become quite an important channel of communication. Technically, the service could be migrated under the footbag.fi domain, and the forum user management fused with FFA member administration. How do you feel about this idea? Is it worth pursuing?*

   ○ It would be great. I hate the ads on ProBoards, plus you could have a consistent look and feel with the rest of the site.

   ○ This one is a bit tricky. I see pros and cons, but can't really decide without knowing the details.

   ○ If it works, don't fix it. The current system is perfectly fine, so why bother?

   Your comment:
   [a text field]

8. *Again, some overlap with the previous question, but can you come up with other ways of utilizing the present member login system?*
   [a text field]

9. *This project will obviously require quite a lot of work, and I would be pleased to be able to divide and delegate at least some of it to others. Do you want to join the effort?*

   ○ I would love to, but I am waaayyy too busy. Hope my answers above contributed a little.

   ○ I can offer opinions and technical help, but don't sign me up for any tasks.

   ○ Ask me anything, I will see what I can do.

   Would you like to join the discussion on a dedicated mailing list?
   ☐ Yes, add my email address to the recipients of sivut@footbag.fi (if it is not already there).

   Your comment:
   [a text field]

10. *What else should have been asked in this questionnaire? Feel free to write any ideas, questions, or comments you have in mind.*
    [a text field]