OGA Website Launch, ORC Conference Jan 7th 2010

Why redevelop the website?
Original site relies on someone with technical know-how to update it.
Become obvious that without paying a small fortune, this did not give us the flexibility nor responsiveness needed to keep it fresh and currant.
Our somewhat 'after the horse has bolted' response to the fsa report also revealed a need for a communication hub which members could instantly contribute too. This would help gauge opinion, generate considered response and foster a sense of community and shared purpose.

After some consideration of adding a forum onto the original site it was decided that we would redevelop the entire site for the following additional reasons:
- Provide online purchase of membership and magazine back issues
- Create a more accessible CMS so that the committee could easily manage content themselves
- Enable members to have access to online information, networking and support

How has it been done and why
The big issue = £cost.
Once we had made the decision the tender was put out and after several reality checks, a steep learning curve and lots of discussion we decided to use Green IT. He agreed to meet most of our requirements within budget, was sympathetic with the aims of the alliance and in addition proposed solar powered hosting and open source (community lead) software.
The original site is great on design but with poor functionality, to achieve the functionality we required within budget some compromise on design has been made.

Drupal
Drupal is a free software package that allows an individual or a community of users to easily publish, manage and organize a wide variety of content on a website.
Drupal is open-source software (ie free to user) distributed under the GPL ("GNU General Public License") and is maintained and developed by a community of thousands of users and developers across the globe.
Drupal can support a variety of websites ranging from personal blogs, corporate brochures and large community-driven websites.
We value: Flexibility, simplicity, and utility in our product; Teamwork, innovation, and openness in our community.
Ie. Built and maintained by GOOD GEEKS across the world

How Green is the Internet?
The Internet gives us the ability to be connected and to share information instantly with the potential to dramatically reduce our need for travel; thereby reducing the amount of CO_2 emissions we produce. But, how much CO_2 is the Internet itself producing? It's estimated that globally it takes about 868 billion kWh of electricity per year to run the Internet, of this, about 112.5 Billion kWh are used to power 'data centers', which are the servers that store all the websites.

Solar Energy Host houses it's servers in North Americas only public 100% solar powered data center. No greenhouse gases are produced to power these servers.
During the day, solar panels feed more energy into the grid than is taken out during the night. Therefore they call their data center 100% solar powered.

Why Green IT
We currently use technology in a very inefficient way and on average use just a small proportion of the capability of say for example a desktop computer. By using only what we need we can drive down our energy bills and reduce pressure on an already highly strained energy infrastructure, reducing our carbon emissions and therefore impact on the environment. By buying only what we really need we can reduce the amount of raw materials that need to be mined from the earth and reduce the need to over harvest the earths natural resources and the energy needed to extract them.

To make one desktop computer it takes at least 240 kilograms of fossil fuels, 22 kilograms of chemicals, and over 1500 kilgrams of water. The total fossil fuels used to manufacture 1 computer, for example, amount to 9 times the weight of the actual computer, compared to only one or two times for a car or a fridge." Source: Computers and the Environment, Understanding and Managing their Impacts, Ruediger Kuehr and Eric Williams (Eds), United Nations University

"Whilst many think that ICT is the hero of environmental action and indeed, it has the potential to be so, currently it is one of the villains, since ICT-related CO2 emissions rival those of the aviation industry." Source: (Socitm)

"ICT equipment currently accounts for 3-4% of the world's carbon emissions, and 10% of the UK's energy bill. The average server, for example, has roughly the same annual carbon footprint as an SUV doing 15 miles-per-gallon! 86% of ICT departments surveyed for the report do not know the carbon footprint of their activities and less than 20% even see their energy bills." Source: (Global Action Plan)

What do we have?

www.organicgrowersalliance.co.uk

Non-members will be able to view the following:
- Welcome page
- Calendar – diary and events
- OGA objective and constitution
- Image Gallery
- News
- Links
- The Forum
- A categorised list of technical articles available to members
- Contact form

Non-members will be able to purchase:
- Annual membership
- magazine back issues (low res' pdf)

For Members, key to how the new site works = creation of individual accounts.
Subscribed members will have a username and password enabling them to contribute to the site. This will double up as a profile so you can create a page of information about yourself and what you do including photos, website links and a blog which other members can view.

Once an account is created you can use the forum, access technical articles, view other members' profiles and send them messages. In the longer term members will receive the magazine as a low-resolution pdf as well as the high-res. posted paper copy.

You will receive an annual subscription reminder and if you default on payment your account will be rendered dormant (ultimately deleted) until payment is received.

Using the new site –

At this moment the interactive facilities are still in a test stage, the committee are setting up accounts, trying out the forum, uploading content and working with our developer to iron out a few teething problems.
As soon as this phase is over existing (subscribed) members will receive an email containing their username and password that will enable them to set up an account.

This is where the forum will help, information has been posted and further posts will be added, giving full instructions on setting up and using your account. Anyone experiencing problems can use the contact form (click <contact> in the top left menu) to send a message to admin, this does not require you to have an account and will be dealt with asap.

It is also likely that a guide to setting up an account and using the site will be mailed out with the next issue of the OG mag, ensuring everyone has the information they need.

Potential of the website – Where could it go?

Promting the OGA, increasing membership, spreading information, garnering opinion, facilitating networking, peer group support and generally spreading the word.

We want to develop a substantial grass roots network, get our voice heard and be seen as credible. A vibrant website should help with the first 2, credibility will speak for itself!
Anyone on the internet can view this site, only members can contribute. We would like the forum to draw people in. When you key in terms to the Search engine (eg. Google) results depend on the number of relevant terms/key-words being on the site, it then place links in order of popularity. If the forum contains lots of relevant information, whether it be technical, political or ideological, if it is being used it will come up when the relevant search is entered.

It's success will depend on people, us. It is down to the committee and IT team to ensure the site is up to date and operates smoothly.
It is however down to members to use the facilities and influence the direction of this new project. If only half of the members finds the time to have a quick check just once a month and leave a couple of questions, comments or responses, that's 2400 posts per year.
Should this be the case we could justify upgrading the forum facility to enable better categorisation of subjects and priorities. Perhaps provide regional links between growers and even the public.

At the moment there is a relatively small amount of really good info relevant to uk growers online. There should be more because we have the knowledge, skills and experience.
Googling 'organic' 'growing' or 'fresh produce' all to often brings up companies selling gimmicky, chinsy bollocks and selling the dream of 'grow your own' or 'organic/local wherever possible' with a price tag to match.
When people ask questions we need to find a way of being there to answer them, that's got to be a step towards improving credibility, popularity and perhaps, eventually, the marketability of our produce.

Please grab this opportunity and utilise it, if you have any technical problems or have ideas about the evolution of this site, please let us know.
This project depends on everyone's input and feedback. Give us another month then please, let rip!!!