



# Old Saw *Articles*

The Newsletter of the Guild of New Hampshire Woodworkers

by Jim Seroskie

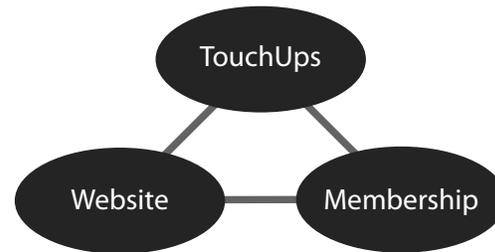
## Digital Infrastructure

There was a time when Guild operations depended on The Old Saw, a database and the occasional postcard. The newsletter was our “GoTo” means of communicating with the membership. Sending out postcards were a backup to the newsletter and a reminder to pay our dues. We kept the post office busy.

I maintained the database for a couple of years (2001-2003) following many years of service by Roy Noyes. The position wasn’t called a membership chair then. All applications and checks went directly to the Treasurer. The original paper forms were later sent to me for input into the database.

The big step forward was when DJ Delorie put this database online using a server he maintained at his home. This made the list accessible to more people. It was replaced with a paid membership service (Wild Apricot) in January, 2010.

**TouchUps**—Another piece of infrastructure was the introduction of TouchUps shortly thereafter. This weekly email has effectively become our digital newsletter. We use a popular service with a funny name for this—MailChimp. It is free to organizations like ours with fewer than 2,000 “subscribers” and 12,000 emails per month. After a trial period, we began using MailChimp for TouchUps exclusively in April, 2013. Each



week, the email list is manually exported from Wild Apricot and then imported to MailChimp.

**Public Website**—The Guild’s public website ([www.gnhw.org](http://www.gnhw.org)) serves two audiences—prospective members and current members. This site includes classified ads, galleries, videos, document archives, a wide variety of blog posts, advertiser info, symposia and Sunapee postings, and so on. There is also general information on who we are, what we do and a little about our history. When a prospective member wants to know more about the Guild, this is where we send them.

In a way, TouchUps is a set of teasers with links to more in-depth information. Many of those links are to the public site. Web traffic on our site almost always jumps by two to three times on the day TouchUps comes out.

**Public Site Moved to Drupal**—In early 2013, the public site underwent a major upgrade by converting to Drupal open source software. This strengthened the infrastructure and administration behind



the site and prepared the way for an eventual merging with the Guild member site.

After a year of experimentation and development, the core technology was moved from Wordpress to this more general purpose platform. The Drupal site now holds roughly 1,700 content records.

Drupal powers some of the busiest sites on the web. It runs a little over 7% of Content Management System (CMS) based websites. It can be found in many rich content government, political, higher education, corporate and non-profit applications. Well known sites like the White House, Small Business Administration, Tesla, the MFA in Boston and the Louvre in Paris are built on Drupal. This more general purpose CMS made the content management task of the site easy relative to past approaches.

**Long Term Support**—Although Drupal is not the simplest system with which to design a website, once past the learning curve, I find it is better organized, easier to make design changes and the whole result less confusing than our past systems (including the very popular Wordpress CMS).

Maintaining content is straight forward on a Drupal site. If you want to add an advertiser, upload an Old Saw or add the latest IRS report among many other occasional tasks, just fill out a simple form designed for each job—nothing to remember, no obscure codes to look up, no FTP transfers and no HTML code to tweak. And it all automatically ends up in the right place(s) on the site and in the correct format. It still feels a little like magic.

However, without long term support, how does the site get security updates and design modifications? In other words, where do we get technical support? Being dependent on a single individual like me for design and backend maintenance is not a great long term plan. In searching for someone that could provide near term expertise and long term support, we found a local company with broad experience and Drupal expertise who would host the site,

#### Google Analytics—12 months through June, 2015

	Public Site	Member Site
Visits	32K	10K
Page Views	140K	52K
Pages/Session	4.4	5.0
Avg Duration	3:09 min	3:39 min
Operating System		
Windows	52%	55%
iOS	24%	20%
Mac OS	15%	19%
Android	7%	4%
Linux	<1%	<1%
Device		
Desktop	68%	74%
Tablet	18%	17%
Phone	14%	9%

provide startup support and do any task we needed in the future.

In December 2012, we began working with CommonPlaces (now located in Manchester, NH) going live in mid-March, 2013. The site is hosted on a virtual private server (VPS) and is noticeably faster than the shared hosts we have used in the past. The site is set up using a version control system so that updates are less risky and CommonPlaces could take over technical management when needed.

I expect to continue doing the content and design maintenance for the foreseeable future, but we have backup now and are covered long term. Guild member Gonzalo Plaza has also volunteered to perform backend admin.

**Membership Site Moving to CiviCRM**—The Guild's member website ([gnhw.cloverpad.org](http://gnhw.cloverpad.org)) is provided by Wild Apricot through which we maintain our membership data and processes along with the Guild's calendar. There are currently 20 members with administrative rights with the majority managing the various subgroups. It has served us well but as a service, if something doesn't work to our liking or fit our needs, we are out of luck. My Wild Apricot issues list now stands at over 40 items. About 40% affect the membership experience. The remainder impact administrative complexity.



I have long wanted a single unified site. The plan is to replace Wild Apricot with an open source, Drupal compatible application (CiviCRM) installed on the same server as the public site—one website with a single login.

CiviCRM acts as a membership backend. This is where all of our contact information will be stored including the “roles” you are permitted after login. Roles can include member, web author, full admin, events admin, membership admin and others.

The CiviCRM design is perhaps 60% complete. With help from CommonPlaces, we are making a push to finish the design and go live by the end of the year.

CiviCRM is used by many large NGOs including Amnesty International, Creative Commons, the Free Software Foundation and the Wikimedia Foundation (i.e. Wikipedia).

**A Final Note**—We are not captured by CommonPlaces when this is done. Although there is no plan to do so, the entire combined site could be extracted from their server and moved to another.

There will be more about this combined Drupal/CiviCRM website in a coming issue of The Old Saw. This has been a major commitment in time and resources for us, one which I believe will be worth it. ●



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