Online Committee Report from the Online Committee — Feb 2, 2020 (Kurkoski)

**Background** Expenses for our current web site have been high. Due to custom code for custom features, we spent $70k in 2018–19 on an incomplete upgrade, developer asked for $25k to $33k more. Decisions which made sense 10–15 years ago make less sense today.

**Where we are now** The Online Committee is now investigating moving our web site platform from Plone to Drupal. Drupal is a widely-used web system with a large community of developers. Drupal can support itsoc.org without custom code. Brian Kurkoski has interviewed three developers and is working on a prototype Drupal site. See next page for detailed report.

**Where we plan to be in June** Detailed specification of the new site is complete, have a data migration plan, have a developer to move the prototype site to production and for on-going maintenance. Will make a budget request to BoG, target is $30k.

**Input from BoG** A redesign of the website is the best time to add new features.

- How can we improve the current site?
- What new features would be useful to members? Send comments to kurkoski@jaist.ac.jp
Summary: The Online Committee is currently investigating moving our web site itsoc.org to a new developer. At the BoG meeting in June 2020, we will make a proposal including a budget request (estimated to be $30k), either Plan A (move to a new developer) or Plan B (stay with our current developer), below. This report is for information and discussion, and we have no request at this time.

Details: The ongoing costs of maintaining our web site itsoc.org have been high. A major reason is that our current site has a lot of custom code. In 2018, the BoG approved $70,000 to upgrade the CMS (content management system) from Plone 4 to Plone 5. Six Feet Up, the developer for itsoc.org, could not complete the upgrade and asked for $25k to $33k more to complete this upgrade. The Online Committee did not request this budget from the BoG in 2019, thinking that it is prudent to first consider other approaches.

The Online Committee is now investigating moving our web site platform from Plone to Drupal. Drupal is an open-source CMS, which emerged as one of the dominant CMSs — drupal.org reports more than 1 million Drupal installations. Drupal itself is free, and there is a large community of Drupal developers. Drupal can support most of the current functionality of itsoc.org WITHOUT CUSTOM CODE. Brian Kurkoski has past experience using Drupal.

Plan A: Re-deploy itsoc.org using a developer experienced with Drupal. Developer provides end-to-end development using no custom code for site building. Developer provides a theme (i.e. the site’s appearance) which is customized. Current content on itsoc.org will be migrated to the new site, to the extent possible.

+ Advantages
- Disadvantages
+ Reduced ongoing costs. With no custom code, new features can be added more cheaply. Minor problems can be fixed and minor improvements can be made by the Online Committee, rather than paying the developer.
+ An improved itsoc.org site. The Online Committee is aware of many of the complaints about the current itsoc.org, and these can be addressed. For example, the new site will simplify submission of announcements and simplify uploading content for BoG meetings.
+ Freedom to change developers. With a large number of Drupal developers and no custom code, we can more easily change developers, in the event we become dissatisfied with our developer.
+ Ease of adding new features, within reason.

- Uncertainty of finding and working with a new developer.
- Migration of old data to new site is an additional expense. While moving old content onto the new site should be straightforward, the challenge is to organize it. We must deal with dead links (our current site has many) and linking to files. Perfect migration is unlikely, but something highly useful is expected.
- Possibly higher upfront costs. Ideally, we will deploy the new site for the same $25k-33k that Six Feet Up is asking to complete the upgrade. This may be possible, but the price is hugely variable, depending on things such as where the developer is based (e.g. North
America vs. India) and how much preliminary work we can do ourselves (e.g. provide the developer with a prototype site which expresses our desired functionality). Brian has been talking to developers, and rough estimates range anywhere from $10k to $70k.

- Some site features (e.g. chapter maps) will not be ported if their implementation requires custom code.

**Plan B:** Keep itsoc.org with Six Feet Up and complete the upgrade from Plone 4 to Plone 5. This upgrade is needed because Plone 4 is based on Python 2.7 and Python 2.7 is no longer receiving security updates.

+ Stability of the current site
+ Plone 5 is expected to be stable through 2024
+ Relatively predictable expense of $25k-33k

- Further improvements are expensive, as they have been in the past. Some "buggy" aspects will be left in place, due to the expense of fixing them.
- We don't have much leverage to reduce the price.

- Going forward, custom code will still need to be maintained.