

BOF Internal Communications

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1 Introduction

This paper has been produced as a result of an initiative to ascertain the views of the orienteering community about how communications between them and “BOF” should work.

In this content, the orienteering community includes BOF employees and officers, regional representatives, club officers and individual orienteers. Communications reflects a two way dialogue, not just the passing of views and information from BOF to the other groups.

The author was approached by the BOF Chief Executive in May 2005 about the possibility of conducting a study and preparing a report and, following discussions and a proposal, the report was commissioned in July 2005. The research behind the report was carried out between August and October 2005 and a draft report was submitted at the beginning of November. Following review by the BOF Management Committee, this final report has been prepared for submission to Council.

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2 Executive Summary

The findings and recommendations made in this report are based on the views submitted to the author by various members of the orienteering community.

A study was carried out, with questionnaires being sent to all individual members and to club secretaries. The views of associations, BOF officers and selected individuals were sought by Email, telephone and face to face meetings. The findings are summarised below and detailed later in this report.

The author would like to thank all individual orienteers, club secretaries and association representatives who responded to requests for information and to BOF staff and officers and others who took the time to meet face to face.

As well as looking at the communications requirements of the community and its satisfaction with the status quo, the research also tried to gauge overall satisfaction with BOF generally. These findings are also described in the report along with an indication of how overall satisfaction with BOF can be affected by the perceived quality of internal communications.

Although there is no 'magic wand' that can be waved to achieve perfect communications and total member satisfaction, there are a number of pragmatic and achievable steps that can be taken to improve matters. These are described later in this Executive Summary.

There were a number of clear requirements that were uncovered by the research, as well as a number of areas where there was less unanimity. The main findings were:

- A desire for more news and more information, delivered in a timely manner
- A demand for significant improvements in the usability of the website
- Better support for associations and councillors in the form of faster production and dissemination of minutes of meetings
- More background information wanted
- More good practice information wanted
- The new format of Focus is generally welcomed
- Very widespread use is made of the web site
- Generally, a desire for more use to made of electronic forms of communications

Orienteers, overall, had a neutral opinion of BOF and its workings, with those who were very critical balanced by those who were very satisfied. There was a strong correlation between individuals' perceptions of BOF and how well they felt BOF was communicating with them.

There is no single recommendation that can, at a stroke, improve BOF's communications and the perception that members have of BOF. However, there are a number of things that can be done with, hopefully, positive results and these recommendations are detailed in the report. Main areas of recommendations include:

- A move to a multi-channel method of delivering information directly to individuals, using a combination of Email and the web
- Continuing the development of the new format Focus, but expanded in certain areas
- A policy of making virtually all information available on the BOF web site
- Significant and urgent redevelopment of the BOF web site
- Introduction of moderated BOF member only forums
- More emphasis on informing the wider orienteering community about what BOF does and what it stands for
- Provision of more good practice guides and training
- More timely production of meeting minutes

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Details of these recommendations are set out in Section 8.

Naturally, implementation of these recommendations will raise a number of practical issues. To help understand the fundamental recommendations and to facilitate the production of a costed implementation plan, a summary of the main recommendations and the detail of the associated practicalities, which are also laid out in Section 9, are detailed here.

No timescale is suggested as this will largely depend on the number of recommendations adopted by BOF and any priorities placed on them. Similarly, in most cases it is not feasible to provide cost estimates as these are dependent on the split of professional and volunteer work employed, existing systems, etc.

Recommendation 1

BOF should undertake to make all documents of public interest (except those relating to staffing matters) available on its web site.

The main issues to be addressed here are:

- The will to do this
- The design of the web site
- The resource to handle a larger number of web site updates

The first issue is one for BOF Council to take a lead on.

The second issue is part of a wider need for a redesign and restructuring of the BOF web site. This is discussed in more detail in Recommendation 2, below.

The resource required to handle the greater volume of web site updates is one that cannot be estimated at this stage. It will be dependent on the number of updates required and on the technology behind the BOF web site. Certainly, the BOF web site should be implemented in such a way as to eliminate any need for technical involvement to post new and amended documents (this is already the case). Although more document postings will inevitably involve more work, it is possible that savings made elsewhere by reducing paper based distribution will more than compensate,

Recommendation 2

The BOF web site needs to be fundamentally restructured to make it easier to navigate and to make it easier to find and search for relevant information.

This is a web design issue. Costs and timescales cannot be estimated at this stage and will depend largely on whether professional or volunteer resources are used.

The BOF web site fulfils and must continue to fulfil a number of roles. In the context of this paper we are most concerned with the web site as being an information and communication resource for orienteers and BOF officers. However, the web site also needs to act as an external communications resource for non-orienteers: those interested in taking up the sport, the press, potential sponsors, funding agencies, etc.

Although outside the scope of this report, any redevelopment needs to take into account the needs of these constituencies and should consider a better differentiation between member and external content. The external content could, perhaps, benefit from improved presentation, more use of pictures etc.

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Recommendation 3

BOF should implement an Email based system of news bulletins.

There will be an amount of technical development required to implement this capability. However, the author understands that the current BOF membership system already goes a long way in providing the facilities needed and could form a good basis for providing this enlarged capability, if required.

Costs for implementation of this capability need to be obtained from the developer of the membership system. It is recommended that he is involved in the detailed specification of requirements at an early stage.

The second issue is obtaining and maintaining Email details of BOF members. Currently, BOF has Email addresses for some 65% of its members, although there is some doubt as to the currency of this information. Clubs appear to have a better record of these addresses and it may be possible to obtain this information from them.

An attempt should be made to get up to date Email details at the next membership renewal cycle. This attempt should be accompanied by an explanation of why the information is wanted and the benefits that the Email bulletin service will bring to all members.

The third implementation issue that needs to be considered is the effort in producing the various bulletins and where the responsibility for this lies. If the final stage in the process of loading a news item/ document onto the web site is to create an item entry in the appropriate bulletin, then the process of producing the bulletins can take place 'on the fly.' It may even be that this is incorporated into the web based transaction screens that are used to update the web site.

Recommendation 4

A fully searchable fixtures list, linked directly to event notices, should be provided.

This development goes hand in hand with the web site redevelopment referred to above, and the same comments apply.

Recommendation 5

Focus should continue in an extended version of its current form.

The costs of extending the scope of Focus need to be validated. Should Compass Sport fold, the implications of this on the future direction of Focus need to be fully investigated.

Recommendation 6

BOF hosts a number of moderated members-only Forums on its web site.

The implementation of web forums is probably best considered as part of the overall web site redesign as the sign in procedures will require access to the BOF membership database (or to an extract of it). Once signed in, however, the forum services can be provided by off the shelf software, for example vBulletin, available at little or no cost.

The main operation issue is recruiting moderators. These have to be interested in the subject matter and available to regularly review postings so that incorrect postings can be challenged quickly and offensive ones removed before they are too widely viewed.

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Recommendation 7

BOF takes steps to actively inform orienteers about what it does.

Additional BOF information on the web site and a 'glossy' (but PDF) electronic report are not resource intensive or expensive items to achieve.

The regional seminars will require officer and/or professional staff input and will involve both preparation time and travel costs. However, a schedule that involves visiting each region on, say, a 2 yearly cycle should not prove over-onerous.

Recommendation 8

All communication from BOF to clubs should be in electronic form.

The main issues surrounding implementing this recommendation are:

- a) obtaining the support of clubs; and
- b) obtaining Email addresses for secretaries.

The first issue is one of selling the benefits (more regular information; less paper to file/plough through; easier forwarding of information) and ensuring that the information provided accurately meets club secretaries' requirements.

BOF currently has Email addresses for approx. 55% of club secretaries and this has been put forward as a reason for not using Email to communicate with clubs. However, as all but two of the secretaries who responded to the club survey held Email lists for some or all of their members, it seems likely that the use of Email among club secretaries is extremely high and, as these individuals should be motivated to supply their contact details to BOF, this should not be a practical issue.

Recommendation 9

BOF should publish a calendar of when its club Emailings will be distributed. This calendar should always be available for at least the next 12 months.

No foreseen implementation issues.

Recommendation 10

Develop a standard for good practice guides, chose and prioritise a number of headings to be covered, and develop comprehensive good practice guides for these in a 12 month time scale.

The only issue here is one of resources!

Recommendation 11

After further research into clubs needs, develop a small range of courses which can be delivered throughout the country

Again, the major issue here is one of resources.

Recommendation 12

BOF should publish a calendar of when committee and council meetings will be held. This calendar should always be available for at least the next 12 months.

Recommendation 13

BOF should ensure that meeting agendas and background documents are made available to association representatives at least 6 weeks prior to the meeting.

Recommendation 14

BOF should ensure that minutes are made available soon after meetings

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These recommendations largely reflect policies that have already been agreed by BOF. The only change is that these policies need to be implemented and stuck to. Implementation may, however, involve a reappraisal of priorities within the BOF office.

Recommendation 15

A summary of the meeting, couched in laymen's terms should be produced following Council meetings

Again, the major implementation here is identifying someone with suitable 'journalistic' skills to produce these summaries. A process of obtaining approval, probably from the meeting chairman prior to publication, needs to be agreed with a target of publishing these popularised minutes simultaneously with the main draft minutes.