

Report on the Website Task Force

Presented by JF Lepage, Deputy President

SUMMARY

At the IFATCA Annual Conference in Singapore in April 2024, the Directors approved the creation of the Website Task Force (WTF). Under the responsibility of the Deputy President (DP), the WTF is in charge of the overhaul of the website, as recommended by the IFATCA 2030+ Task Force, and as approved by the Directors. This working paper presents a progress report of the task force.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The WTF is responsible for assessing business needs and opportunities with respect to the website, benefits, risk, costs, technical solutions, timescale, impact on operations, and organisational capability to deliver the project outcomes. If and when a project is worth doing (and once the form it will take will be identified), the WTF will be in charge of defining the goal, identifying what obstacles may be faced, evaluating how much change is required, and determining if the proposed solution will achieve the targeted goal.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1. At present, the WTF is chaired by IFATCA's DP, and composed of the following members: Hosni Bona (Philippines), Nejc Ferjan and Samo Mandič (Slovenia), Frank Sendowooza (Uganda). The group is quite small, but works effectively, taking into account the time zones and the fact that we are all active controllers, with the rostering constraints our job implies. We nevertheless would never say no to extra talents, so should anyone be interested in joining the group, please get in touch with jf.lepage@ifatca.org.

2.2. Chronologically, the Expression of Interest (EOI) was published after summer last year, and the task force was officially formed during the Fall. Again, while the number of members is small (5), the group is composed of very smart and knowledgeable people. The "gap analysis" and feasibility study has been completed, all members providing their view on what we should keep, what we should change, what is missing, and also starting to work on potential ways to achieve that.

2.3. Current State

- 2.3.1. Our website is currently hosted on Digital Ocean. It has backup capabilities, but this hasn't been used consistently since the last migration. Digital Ocean offers a cloud feature that would allow for storing a snapshot of the website, which can be useful for a future migration. The current iteration is built using WordPress and the theme used is Foxiz. While regularly updated and reasonably flexible, other themes should be explored to offer a more modern look and feel (menus, colours, tabs, buttons, etc.).
- 2.3.2. The website already has the possibility to accommodate a membership feature, but this has not yet been used. It can also support integrated payment options. Overall, the website is deemed responsive, and just by changing the theme, it could give it a much fresher appearance. However, that wouldn't be sufficient to meet all the requirements set out by the 2030+ taskforce. The current builder, Elementor, is easy to use and allows for rapid page design, however it lacks flexibility.
- 2.3.3. Some of the features that could be challenging to implement in WordPress include advanced user authentication, customized membership dashboards, real-time applications, forums, and payment solutions. While WordPress plugins can extend functionality, they can be difficult to override and are limited to the scope and maintenance of their authors. Additionally, excessive plugins can slow down the site and introduce security vulnerabilities. This would have to be considered.
- 2.3.4. WordPress sites can be visually appealing, it's just a matter of design. The key benefit is that the page administrators does not need to have coding expertise. If the website had to be rebuilt from scratch, without using Wordpress, it would require significant time and effort, and the entire group would have to (re)learn many aspects of web development. Even after completion, the site would still require maintenance by someone with coding experience.
- 2.3.5. Speaking of speed, the current server is hosted on a managed WordPress platform provided by Namecheap, most likely on a shared hosting environment, and this can be the cause of the recurring 429 too many request errors that can be seen occasionally. A single shared hosting server may not be able to handle high traffic or resource-intensive features reliably. For flexibility, implementing advanced features would be difficult without relying on numerous plugins (see previous comment regarding speed). A different server might need to be considered.

2.4. Recommendations

- 2.4.1. Given the requirements and the budget, it is the group's opinion that an "enhanced" WordPress solution is the best way forward. It would fit within budget constraints and reduce the need for the team to get familiar with a different platform. WordPress offers the option to enhance the website with some PWA features. It is also supported by a large community of developers. The implementation could be done faster than with a new platform, and for future needs, plugins exist for pretty much anything.

- 2.4.2. Modern frameworks exist with WordPress, such as Sage or Bedrock. Most plugins available would be sufficient to fulfil our needs. Custom-developed ones could be envisaged for specific needs, but not at this stage. Adequate security protocols and regular, automated backups would obviously have to be implemented.

2.5. Considerations regarding the different options

- 2.5.1. Unless we suddenly have unlimited resources to build a large production like the existing site from scratch, it is the group's view that it could cost a small fortune to go this direction. Why? Because any development of a custom site and its added features will require highly technical developers, not forgetting training of those people who will need to maintain and update the website once live.

- 2.5.2. Initial estimations show that a budget of \$20,000 may be sufficient for a company or group of freelancers to develop a site using modern tools. However, it depends in which country it is done, and someone would also need to be hired for ongoing maintenance and further development, which means significant additional costs in the future, costs that are almost impossible to predict or foresee. For the scope of IFATCA's website and the kind of users, the team believes it is very beneficial (if not essential) that the administrators of the site are people with knowledge of IFATCA, which doesn't exist outside the Federation.

- 2.5.3. There are several issues that have been identified by the team with respect to a full rebuild:
 - 2.5.3.1. Learning Curve - editors and administrators familiar with WordPress will need some training to adapt to the new interface and workflows.
 - 2.5.3.2. The shift from Elementor's visual page builder to a different stack/builder may feel less intuitive initially.
 - 2.5.3.3. Development time and effort will be higher compared to simply updating WordPress, especially for a full rebuild.
 - 2.5.3.4. Data Migration Complexity - migrating existing content and media from WordPress to a completely new platform requires careful planning to preserve data integrity.

- 2.5.3.5. Hosting on other cloud platforms (possibly necessary with a more complex and larger website) may involve higher ongoing costs compared to shared hosting.

2.6. Summary

- 2.6.1. The preferred option at the moment and as decided by the team is to take advantage of the fact that editors and administrators are already familiar with the WordPress interface and workflow, reducing the need for training and the time to rebuild.
- 2.6.2. Changing the theme or customizing an existing WordPress template can be done quickly. Premium themes are affordable and can be purchased from platforms like ThemeForest, offering a variety of pre-designed options. Or a new theme can be designed from scratch (to be decided).
- 2.6.3. As regards the functionalities, a lot of plugins are available to extend functions such as payment solutions, e-commerce, etc. Some functionalities requested by the 2030+ taskforce are already available, they just need to be activated.
- 2.6.4. Data Integrity of existing posts, pages, and media remains intact, minimizing the risk of data migration issues. WordPress is really known for its reliability and the ease of use allows non-developers to make updates and manage content (avoiding bottlenecks and single points of failure).
- 2.6.5. WordPress with Elementor can be resource-intensive, leading to slower page loads and higher server resource usage. A different builder may need to be considered. Or moving the server to a different hosting platform, as shared hosting environments may struggle to handle high traffic or resource-heavy features.
- 2.6.6. Over reliance on plugins for advanced functionality can introduce security vulnerabilities and reduce flexibility. This must be taken into consideration.

2.7. Next steps

- 2.7.1. The group will now focus on the implementation phase, which may end up being one of the following options: a revamp of the existing website, creating a new website inhouse, outsourcing the creation of a new website. Pros and cons will be balanced, and a decision is to be expected soon. However, the general sentiment of the group is that a full revamp using WordPress, possibly with new plugins, a new theme, a new host (maybe) would be the easiest, fastest and most efficient way to go. A verbal update will be provided during Conference, as appropriate – the task force is meeting shortly after the deadline for working papers.

2.8. Recommendations from Singapore 2024

2.8.1. At the Singapore Annual Conference in April 2024, the directors endorsed the following recommendations, as contained in Working Paper No. 43¹:

4.1. The Executive Board shall form a working group/task force that will facilitate the development of the website platform.

4.2. This working group/task force, in collaboration with the Executive Board, shall appoint a professional website designer and manage the development and implementation thereof.

4.3. EVPF shall identify the most appropriate reserve fund budget, or create a new fund, to enable the development of the new website platform.

4.4. The initial allocation of funds shall not exceed USD 20,000 without seeking further acceptance from Directors.

4.5. The website platform should be completed by the 65th IFATCA Annual Conference in 2026, with an interim report by the working group at the 64th IFATCA Annual Conference in Abu Dhabi in 2025.

The directors also noted the content of Working Paper No. 44, proposing guidelines for the creation of an IFATCA Progressive Web Application (PWA)².

3. CONCLUSION

3.1. While a full rebuild with more modern design tools would offer more scalability and flexibility, it would undoubtedly require significant development time and ongoing maintenance. Given the team's experience and knowledge, the budget and the timeline, it is the view of the group that we should redesign the current site and implement the required features using WordPress. The group firmly believes that this way forward would be optimal from the time, effort and financial aspect.

3.2. This doesn't mean that the website would simply undergo a small, superficial makeover. On the contrary. This means retaining the same "methodology" and tools to build, to facilitate (and accelerate) the process, but the new website would be fundamentally different in terms of architecture, functionalities, conviviality and visual signature. The idea is to retain the content that is relevant and interesting, but offer our membership a totally new experience, by making the website more appealing, more palatable, and easier (and more pleasant) to navigate.

¹ IFATCA. (2024). WP No. 43 – *Developing the Requirements to Restructure the IFATCA Website*. Retrieved from <https://ifatca.org/wp-content/uploads/WP43.pdf>

² IFATCA (2024). WP No. 44 – *Guidelines for the Creation of an IFATCA PWA*. Retrieved from <https://ifatca.org/wp-content/uploads/WP44.pdf>

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1. It is recommended that the report contained in this working paper is accepted as information.
- 4.2. It is recommended that the Directors of this Conference approve that the WTF decides what avenue shall be pursued with respect to the design of the new website (in house, outsourcing, or hybrid).
- 4.3. It is recommended that the Directors of this Conference allows some flexibility to the WTF with respect to the deadline of 2026 to deliver the final product, and agree that a progress report shall be presented to the next Conference in 2026

--END--