

Barrow in Furness Dog Training Club



I wanted to write about our web site and our club and the support we received from INDIANCAMP.

At first it seemed like everyone else in dog agility had a website, so we needed to have one. I took over the running of an existing website, which had been set up by one member on his own and never felt like it belonged to the club. We wanted something different. I had seen professional websites and knew what I liked, but this felt like taking a step in the dark. We didn't have the technical expertise required to create a website, and we were worried that we might end up with something quite amateurish or if we used someone we might end up with something that would be too complicated for us to keep going.

We turned to INDIANCAMP. Our two main concerns were, would we be organised enough to work out what the content of the site should be and would we be able to manage the site once it was built or would it be too complicated and take up too much time.

INDIANCAMP expertise was invaluable. A significant role they played was at the design stage where they made us stop and think what the site was for. It was fantastic to have someone asking us questions that *really* made us think what we wanted to achieve and not just what we wanted the web site to look like. They helped us get our ideas in order. They really made us work out for ourselves what the site should be about. It was very exciting as the ideas came together.

It was interesting that the bit we thought would be most difficult – the content management system, was really easy to get to grips with and needed just a little knowledge – if you can use a word processing package it's easy with support to start you off.

We were given a content management system to look after the website. As part of the design phase we discussed how the website would run and getting to grips with the content management was really quite easy. This was key to the successful running of the website – without their support and expertise we could not have turned our ideas into the realistic result.

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One word of caution would be 'Graphics' – everyone thinks they can design great graphics. This is not the case. My advice would be to keep things as simple as possible. INDIANCAMP helped us come up with the graphic design that we could look after without too much trouble but still meant that we could have lots of photos, which the members love. The message is 'Keep it Simple'.

Until we started with the new website I don't think any of us realised its potential. But suddenly people started to take an interest. It was a place for everyone to show off their accomplishments and share what was happening.

People can use the website to find out what our club does and get a flavour of the club's atmosphere. Some new members have said that they knew they would enjoy being part of the club when they looked at the website. We have built up our membership because a number of people have made contact through the web site.

It is also interesting how many people outside the club use the web site. We are always being contacted by people locally who want help with dog training, have problem dogs, want to walk dogs or in one case a national charity contacted us to provide someone to walk a dog as the owner was ill. It seems that through the web site we are building a positive profile in the local community. It is also great that people in the agility world in general use our site and find it helpful. It feels good when club members are told 'I saw it on your web site'

When we designed the website INDIANCAMP persuaded us to have a forum on it. We weren't really sure what its benefits were in the beginning, we had never used one and it looked very complicated! We were wrong – it has been brilliant. The important thing with a forum is to make sure people get the right support, especially at the start. Even though it is simple to use, the technology aspect can feel a little daunting to begin with. It has created a network of discussions, allowing those who run the club to support club members, and the members themselves to contribute in a useful way. People come up with ideas and it allows a more open approach to discussing them, with decisions made more easily and openly. We knew it was working when people started saying 'Oh, I'll put it on the Forum.'

From an administration perspective it has reduced the amount of work required to keep everyone up to date. We all know that if we put something on the website most club members will read it and take notice. For those who don't have access to the Internet I only have to print the relevant pages and post them. It has made everything much more simple and much more open.

Members now expect the information to be up to date and they know they don't have to wait for it. They love seeing what other club members are up to, they can also get information on what is happening in the agility world. We can provide so much more information which is also of higher quality.

Now the website is a living thing in its own right. We don't think about the technology anymore, and just focus on the website and what it does for us, our members and the community. When you have the right technical support it is not a problem.

We know a lot about agility and we thought building a club website is something someone does for you. Not true – you need to create it yourself, with the right support. What we got from INDIANCAMP was help in making our ideas a reality, sorting out what was really important to put on the site, of course, doing all the building of the site and practical advice about how to keep it all going. Most importantly they talked in a language we could understand. We are very grateful to them but the web site belongs to us and we make good use of it!

Why don't you have a look – www.inyourowntime.co.uk

Frances Jordan

Secretary – Barrow in Furness Dog Training Club