

The new IOS Website – communicating our mission

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At the 8th Inter-Congress in Bonn, May 2009, an overhaul of the existing IOS Website was discussed. In the past decade, the website had been updated and enlarged several times. During these years, the communication behaviour on the Internet and the expectations of visitors to a website have changed considerably. Based on an analysis of today's requirements, further readjustments did not seem appropriate and a complete redesign was decided.

For an organization, a website is a powerful tool of external and internal information, communication, and organization in support of its objectives. For the IOS mission '*to promote the study and conservation of succulent and allied plants and to encourage international collaboration amongst those interested in them*', the website needs to make available relevant publications, promote collaboration between members, facilitate and support work of appropriate organizations and individuals, and support organizing 'Reserve Collections' of living plants, herbaria, and reference libraries as a resource for research and conservation.

These challenging goals require significant efforts of the members. Their identification with major goals, key values and a vision of some desired future state are promoters for success. In its 60-year history, IOS has produced results with which one can identify. Uniting botanists, students, curators, horticulturists and dedicated amateurs is a major goal that makes IOS special amongst hundreds of other groups studying amongst their own kind. This pooling of specialized and complementary skills has yielded synergetic results like the consensus classifications for Cactaceae and for Crassulaceae and lately the *New Cactus Lexicon*. Moreover, IOS leaves no doubt about its values: IOS became the first plant organization to publish a *Code of Conduct*, initiated the Conservation Action Plan that set standards in the IUCN's Species Survival Commission, compiled CITES checklists for Cactaceae, for *Aloe* and *Pachypodium*, and for succulent *Euphorbia*. The planned collaborative development of a network of 'Reserve Collections' carries the potential to complement the continuing success in research, systematics and taxonomy. Both the goal to collaborate and the values of conserving nature, forge the vision of the future state of "many experts collaborating to increase knowledge and contribute to conservation of biodiversity." The IOS Website must clearly communicate this mission to both, the public and the members.

As IOS is all about collaboration, the organization has to compete with other options for cooperation. Today, many researchers have developed flexible networks on the Web to suit this purpose, and the need as well as the disposition to enter into a formal commitment like a membership is generally declining in the global village. However, there is a big difference between a cross-linking in virtuality and relations in real groups. This difference needs to be recognized and also communicated. On the Web, collaboration with reduced personal contact and weak social bonds bears a high potential for misunderstanding and distrust. Cooperating largely in anonymity and with short-term horizons, promotes the natural behaviour of players to take more than to give, which fosters a non-cooperative attitude and in turn lowers the probability for future cooperation. This is an ambivalent ground for researchers who have to cope with the potentially conflicting issues of cooperation on one side and job-related competition on the other. Best results are still achieved in an atmosphere of trust, transparency and stable social relations. In fact, the group sharing interests and values and creating an atmosphere of respect and good

will is the appropriate frame to cooperate and compete and achieve best results in a long-term perspective. Thus, IOS has not lost attraction. There are plenty of qualified people that would wish to co-operate if they knew about the possibility to begin with and could develop a clear idea of what to expect on an informative website. If their enthusiasm can be maintained, the IOS mission is not at stake.

Against this background, the IOS Website history and the members' expectations of an Internet presence were evaluated. From the very beginning, members argued for a functional interactive website with links to other relevant pages and presentations of IOS documents like statutes, by-laws, and the *Code of Conduct*. The website should be used as an educational and communications tool. On one hand there is the continued request for substantial information for members and on the other hand the repeated demand for enhanced internal communication. Over the years, internal communication needs seem to have outranked external information requirements. Since sufficient information and good communication are fundamental for achieving IOS goals, a member forum was incorporated in the website to provide an efficient communications platform and facilitate internal coordination and collaboration.

All collected information was brought in line with IOS declared goals and the intended means to achieve them, and from this perspective a website concept was derived. We followed the 'one content per page principle' to focus the attention on one larger subject each. Accompanying images are intended to indicate the variety of succulent plants and not to distract from the text. Photo galleries will be established later.

Special attention is drawn to the menu point 'International projects'. It is intended to facilitate cooperation by offering an overview of running and planned projects in the international community (IOS and others). We hope for the willingness of researchers to provide information about their activities and to support the idea of bringing proper partners together. On this page, the interested individual can identify suitable opportunities to coordinate or collaborate. It should also encourage the serious amateur to get into contact with the respective project manager.

Emphasis is also placed on describing the complexity of the steadily growing global networks of organisations fighting for species survival. We think it will be helpful and educative to offer navigation to succulent plant related issues in these networks. These pages are abstracts of some dozens of Web pages, for quick information in one place.

The IOS Website is still under construction and will probably remain so for some time. More pages and modules will be added as needed.

The new website has been checked with different analysis tools and was functioning properly with the browsers Firefox, Opera, and Safari. There might be problems, however, with browsers that do not follow the internationally accepted standards agreed upon in the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).