

# Report on BDFPA database access issues

December 2017 - January 2018

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## ***2 December 2017 – 28 January 2018: members' database issues***

This is a report on the database access issues reported by BDFPA members between 2<sup>nd</sup> December (when the 2018 membership option went live) and today, 28 January 2018. I say 'reported' advisedly, because we cannot know whether there were other members or potential members who failed to renew or to join because of difficulties in accessing the online registration process.

### ***The numbers***

- 500 members have joined the Association or renewed their membership via the online registration option in this time period.
- 36 members have contacted the Membership Registrar about difficulties with operating the online registration option.
- As of this morning, 6 of the members who made contact about their difficulties, some of them as long as a month ago, have still not proceeded with their membership.
- 8 members have joined using the paper registration form, because after multiple tries they could not manage to access the online registration process.

### ***The nature of the difficulties***

1. The most frequent report was not being able to log in to renew.
  - a. Sometimes this was because people did not look carefully at the pages. One member sent me a screenshot to show that he couldn't log in. The screenshot showed that he had logged in, but he didn't see that the next step was to click on 'Registration Renewal'.
  - b. However, it is clear that the problems were sometimes genuine. A typical example is a member who had their Username and Password, and said, '*I've tried cutting and pasting and entering manually and it just disappears when I hit login*'. Most of these members managed to register in the end by trying with a different device, or a different wifi network, or a different browser. There was no pattern to this; for example, some people said they had tried with a Mac and when that didn't work, they were successful with a PC; some just the opposite. Many people reported difficulties using their phones. I have tested the system with a Mac, a PC, my iPad and my iPhone, and have accessed my personal record unproblematically on all of these, but I do not doubt for a moment that many of the 36 people who wrote to me were not making mistakes, but were having problems accessing the system. When someone emailed me to say they could not log in, what I did was to log in as them, using their details, and then send them screenshots to show that their Username and Password were working, inviting them to try other devices / places with stronger connections (as well as sending them the 'paper' form as an option).
  - c. Worryingly, some members who were having problems got misleading messages from the system. Two members send me screenshots that they got when they input their valid Usernames and Passwords that said 'Username and/or Password Not Valid). I know that they were using the right

Username and Passwords, and I was able myself to log in using the same details.

2. Some new joiners said that when they input their Division, they got sent back to 'Division'. This may have been because one of the choices in the 'Division or Club' drop-down menu is the Division again – which should be chosen by members who do not belong to a Club. On the other hand, it may be another genuine problem, although again, I was not able to reproduce the issue myself by trying to register as a new member.

### ***The implications***

1. My prime concern is that the Association may be losing renewals and new members. We have definitely so far got six people who have not renewed / not joined because of these difficulties. Of course I have offered them the paper option, but they have not taken that up. What we don't know is how many other people have just given up in the face of difficulties and not contacted me.
2. What I have told members is what I have been told, that is: *'The secure website where our database is lodged requires a strong internet connection, so if you have a problem it may be because of connectivity varying - you could try in a place with better wifi, with a different device, or with a different browser'*. But I can't help wondering why this is so difficult, when people undertake secure transactions every day with Amazon, American Express, PayPal...
3. Of course this has taken a lot of my time, but that rather goes with the territory. Obviously, I have tried to automatise the tasks as far as possible, with standardised emails and so on, but it is still time consuming. When Wednesday passes, and people who have not renewed can't automatically access their database entries to renew, it will take even longer, as I will have to answer emails asking why they can't log on and then search for old entries and merge them with the new ones. OK as long as you've got me in this position. Not an easy job description to pass on, the day I go under a bus, unless my bench press gets a lot better and I can lift the bus off.
4. It also means that I have a growing list of people who have registered on 'paper' – hard copies or emailed scans. Aside from my having to carefully copy or check all their details onto the database, I have to manage these memberships separately and specially for the whole year, because these are classified as 'unfinancial' in the system. This means they will not show up Excel sheet queries, that I have to be especially careful to check that list manually every time there is a competition, and so on. This is a possible source of errors that bothers me.

### ***Questions for National Council members:***

1. Regarding the persistent underlying problems, is there a conversation to be had with the database managers? Are you happy with my contacting them with this information and perhaps booking a phone call to discuss the issues?
2. If I can't get anywhere with this conversation, is it time to start thinking about changing systems? Wild Apricot and MemberLeap review well, and pricing looks comparable.
3. Regarding the problems arising from people's problems with the system, are you happy for me to create a fictional member on the database and to make screen-capture videos going through the steps of application and renewal? Pete, if this went ahead, could we link it to the Membership page of the website? I \*think\* I can delete the fictional member after I make the videos, but you never know with this system, so we might have to live with an inactive member called, say, Delphine Angua von Uberwald.