

# Enhancing Photoradar.com with Social Publishing



## Company Summary

- Organization: Future plc
- Industry: Entertainment/ Amateur Photography
- Type of Drupal Site: Social Publishing/Reference

## Building a Drupal-based Community Site for Photography Enthusiasts

Launched by Future, the creators of Digital Camera and PhotoPlus magazines, PhotoRadar.com is quickly building a reputation as the premiere online destination for experienced amateur photographers. PhotoRadar.com provides tutorials, reviews, industry news, and an online photo-sharing community where registered users can upload, share, comment, and rate photographs. With more than 100,000 members already sharing and commenting on photos, PhotoRadar.com has used Drupal successfully to deliver a substantial online destination for high-volume, user-generated content.

### Hitting the Proprietary Ceiling

PhotoRadar.com's predecessor site had been using a proprietary software platform. While there was some community photo sharing, the site was unable to support many valued, newer features of a social media site, such as the ability to tag photos and rate the photographs of other members.

PhotoRadar.com depends on advertising revenue, which allows it to provide services free of charge to its member community. Future determined that it could better attract and retain members if Photoradar.com could introduce some of these advanced community features. In turn, member retention and growth would increase opportunities to provide more targeted advertising, and those advertising transactions would be worth more to sponsors.

Future decided to look for a social publishing platform. The intent was to procure a platform that would allow for a building-block approach to features and functions. As part of this strategy, the company decided to examine open source options. "We had lived with the limitations of proprietary software for several years," said Future's Digital Director, Richard Foster "It is more valuable to have in-house talent and contractors who are skilled at solving broad technology challenges, rather than somebody who is trained to narrowly support proprietary technology from a specific vendor."

## Seeking Solutions and Delivery

Future set about reviewing and standardizing on an open source social media platform, and selected Drupal. “Drupal was an easy decision for us; it has a huge number of customizable modules to meet our immediate needs and potential future projects. It also has a very active community of developers, which was important. The community is valuable to us; it provides a resource, not just for modules, but for peer guidance as our developers look to improve or build new functionality.” said Richard Foster.

### Challenges

- Proprietary CMS had no flexibility to grow
- Site could not offer important functionality
- Limitations on site placed a limit on ad revenue growth

Future drew up a plan that depended upon internal day-to-day management of the site, while leveraging a contractor for initial deployment and assistance with larger ongoing projects. This plan allowed Future to optimize costs for a strong return on their investment. Just as importantly, the budget associated with supporting the site was more strategically invested – instead of paying maintenance costs for an “as-is” product, Future could pay on-staff site managers and a contractor who would be capable of both reactive support, and proactive additions to site functionality.

Tim Deeson, Director of Deeson eMedia, states that sound Drupal expertise was fundamental to the final selection of Deeson eMedia as the delivery partner. “We were required to build a test version of the site, to meet two important criteria. First, we had to validate to Future that Drupal was capable of meeting their specific requirements for functionality and visual standards. Second, we needed to establish that we had the expertise to deliver a stable implementation in a way that was timely and cost effective.

“Being an Acquia partner gives us access to services that make managing large scale sites much easier. Acquia lends us brand equity through our association, and provides a level of security to our customers.”

## Rebuilding PhotoRadar.com

Future had three important requirements that had to be addressed. It was adding a substantial amount of new functionality that would have to work seamlessly to satisfy users. It also had exceedingly high visual standards. Future has almost 25 years of history as a market-leading print publisher – and their print standards are held against any Internet projects. Finally, with more than 100,000 registered users and 15,000 uploaded images, scalability was also a pointed concern.

The implementation took 12 months, including several testing, development and beta stages, and the import of over 50,000 articles from their legacy proprietary implementation. Because of the proprietary nature of the CMS platform, Future made a hard decision not to migrate the hundreds of thousands of images over to new user accounts. While it was difficult not to preserve those images, Future feels much more comfortable using an open-source platform to house content. “A concern that makes open-source favorable, is content ownership,” said Tim Deeson “When a client uses a proprietary system, there is a layer of ownership over content that is peeled away.

Content can become inaccessible, or may not be reasonably transferrable; the legacy photo resources being a prime example. With open-source, the level of ownership is more complete – the content isn't dependent on the system to remain available."

Deeson eMedia worked closely with the internal team to ensure they would become competent stewards of the Drupal site, once Photoradar.com launched. This included scalability tests and validating both the specific scalability of Drupal, and the overall scalability of using a LAMP architecture. After rigorous testing, Drupal turned out to handle the volume quite well in benchmark tests, and only minor hardware tweaks were needed.

Deeson eMedia was actively involved with the Drupal community site during development. The community was consulted for technical guidance; Deeson eMedia also contributed some patches and fixes to modules during the rollout.

After the initial architecture and testing was put in place, a beta version of the new site was rolled out to select member invitees. Feedback was collected for further refinements. It was fundamental to Future that the migration be a smooth transition for members, resulting in an experience they like. "We have a site with an advertising-driven revenue model," said Richard Foster. "If our users are frustrated or unhappy with the appearance, content, or new features, they won't come back. It was vital that our relaunch was successful."

## The New PhotoRadar.com

The new site launched in September 2009 to over 100,000 users. Photoradar.com offers tools that make membership a more active experience. Photographs can now be given descriptive tags and rated by peers. Photo tagging also allows members to easily find photos and topics of interest, which promotes a viral-driven sharing model. Members can inspire one another and provide feedback to solve problems or suggest alternative techniques. Using Drupal modules, top-ranked photos can be displayed in prominent locations – which creates further incentive to upload and share images.

Because users can spend more time looking at photos of interest, they are spending more time on the site. With more tools to share and promote content, users are coming back more frequently. With more users and greater usability, users were searching for content much more frequently; increased search demand was met with the Sphinx search engine module.

By crawling photo tags on a specific page, advertisements can become more customized and relevant. These are resulting in a cumulative increase in the exposure time to advertisements, their interest and relevance to members, and the value of PhotoRadar.com's ad space.

The success of the PhotoRadar.com launch is measurable by the volume of member traffic and activity, positive member feedback, and the increased effectiveness of the advertising model. Future manages the site internally to keep costs low, while occasionally taking advantage of Deeson eMedia's expertise. This allows Future a flexible services model that can balance their site maintenance budget against

### Benefits

- Members are visiting site more often
- Members are spending more time on site
- Advertisements are more targeted and interesting
- Ad space has become more valuable

## From the Partner

“Being an Acquia partner gives us access to services that make managing large scale sites much easier. Acquia lends us brand equity through our association, and provides a level of security to our customers.”

available bandwidth. As a certified Acquia partner, Deeson eMedia ensures that it has access to the best resources to remain current and engaged as Drupal subject matter experts. Future and Deeson eMedia continue to work together towards streamlining the site, and collaboratively planning new features and functions that will continue Photoradar.com’s growth.

## About Acquia

Acquia is a commercial open source software company. We provide a valuable set of software and network services for the popular Drupal open source social publishing system. At Acquia, we maximize the potential of Drupal-powered solutions through our annual subscriptions for software and services. For more information about how Acquia can transform your community driven web investments, contact Acquia Sales at [sales@acquia.com](mailto:sales@acquia.com), 888-9-ACQUIA or +1-978-296-5250.

## About Deeson eMedia

Deeson eMedia has been developing, designing, hosting and providing content for websites since 2001. Deeson eMedia is part of the Deeson Group, a publishing and communications agency established in London in 1958. Deeson eMedia provides Drupal services including consultancy to Fortune 500 firms, full site builds for UK non-profits and outsourced module development for other leading web agencies.