

ATMOS website status

This report is a short summary of some CIA Online Contest Working Group member's testing of the www.atmos.aero website (portal) over the past year. Some comments may be influenced by personal affections and therefore be not very subjective. Still the success of such a portal will, at the end, depend on the general user experience, the touch and feel, as well as its usability. Portals live from and with their users. And a social network, full of information and activity can only build on the right technology.

The following topics will give an opinions on more detailed and technical aspects of the portal itself.

1. Website

Generally the portal is based on a simple graphical design, which increases its acceptance, at least visually. The layout is kept in light colors and graphically neutral.

The ATMOS project description and explanations need to be written to fill the portal's empty space before releasing it officially. Many explanations on the use of the portal are also missing.

Some participating airports may already have important information (competition rules, status report, communications) to be published. This should be possible through a simple CMS system configured to allow airport administrators or coordinators to post this information in an easy way.

2. Registration

The registration being one of the main items on the entry page, it is easy accessible and should not be a problem to find.

All registration data fields must be filled correctly. Red notes will show up to help with incorrect entry. Fields should nevertheless be marked with an asterisk to show it is mandatory.

A second registration under the same email, name, first name or birthday is not possible. Nevertheless, multiple users can have identical names, or birthdays.

Registration was not always possible. First reports date early March. After the CIA plenary in March, some pilots were able to register, as myself. During summer (I can not find the exact dates) the accounts were deactivated. This was apparently due to server changes. My account was reactivated and worked for some weeks. Then it was deactivated again, but Naviter was unable to reactivate it. Nor was I able to create a new account, numerous errors were shown. Naviter did only confirm they were not working on the portal anymore and did not help in this issue. Further tests were nearly impossible, as a login was refused.

3. Login

As described under the previous paragraph, logging in with an early activated username was not possible due to an activation problem. This should be considered basic functionality.

4. Flight claim and management

As the last flight claim was done month before writing this report, I can only recall partly how it was done. Generally upload was possible, but under some few formats only. As many softwares do support many different formats nowadays, why should a portal, that stands for all airports, not do the same?

The management interface was very basic. Although simplicity is good, in this application it seemed to be because of very basic and simple technology being used.

General Note: Without having had a close look at the “behind the scenes”, it seems to me that the portal itself is build on simple, but no advanced web technologies. This does not mean insecure, but better user interfacing is possible today. And this portal should be build for the future...

5.Score/Ranking publication

The publication of scores and results did not work in some cases. It was agreed to start testing this with more tracks being uploaded. As already the first tracks did not give any results at all, testers were discouraged and quit uploading to soon.

Scoring of the ballooning competitions was not dependable on number of tracks submitted. One track should have given a result already.

The results are shown in a simple ranking. Sometimes “less is more”! So no problem to that. Nevertheless, the flight detail and especially the track shown on the map is too unattractive (“not very sexy”, as some might say) Indeed, in times of “Google maps” being a standard even down to (i)phones and other mobile applications, a track should be shown in an interactive map, with zoom, pan and other functionalities. Many technologies are available today, and even simple to implement. A company selling mapping software was expected to give good practice examples.

Data property and copyright is also to be considered. Track files should only be available for download for registered users, upon authorization, through a personal portal setting, by the pilot.

6.Support

A general support section helps with regular user problems. This was of course inexistent at this stage in the project, but is an absolute must to help users, even if only testers, to get around and find their way with the functionalities.

Links to the support section of the portal should be disposed at all important points of the users navigation through the portal.

Such support section should integrate FAQ and a user forum for further problems, moderated by the portal managers. A contact form is always a help for other general inquiries.

The “Lost password” link ended up in a page with good intentions, but not working properly.

7.General Conclusion

So far the Atmos.aero portal was mainly a disappointment to many test users, which explains their early leave off.

Generally the existent may be a good start, there is a lot of work to do.

Even if the backend architecture of the portal is sound and usable, an overhaul of many user related interfaces as well as designs are needed.

After some recent email exchange, Naviter does not seem to be interested in going in debugging nor continuing development of the portal.

And so far I have not seen talking about application interaction with external softwares like other mapping softwares or portals, through webservice, plugins, feeds and more. This is vital to the success of a modern portal and it's community.

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