

BWEA's role in public information

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Abstract

As the representative body for the industry BWEA has a well-established role in information provision, both to and on behalf of its members, acting as a conduit between industry, Government, regional bodies, local authorities and other agencies throughout the UK. An equally important aspect of BWEA's work is media and public communication.

As targets for renewables increase, BWEA asks if there is evidence for a growing need for public information on the key issues surrounding climate change and the role the wind industry can play in mitigating this, examines the success rate of the Internet as a method of information provision, and opens the floor on how BWEA could better implement future public information.

From its early beginnings in 1978 as a professional association for those involved in wind energy research and development, the BWEA has expanded to take on different roles, as the industry itself has expanded into a mainstream generating technology, one which is no longer an 'alternative'. BWEA now serves as the trade association for the industry and the business this presents. We now have 190 companies in membership – a four-fold growth since 1997. BWEA acts as the industry voice, co-ordinating information and intelligence for dissemination to Government, regional bodies and local authorities throughout the UK. BWEA regularly presents evidence to Select Committees and other agencies, and contributes to several on-going dialogues concerning the further development of the industry, not least of which is the offshore sector.

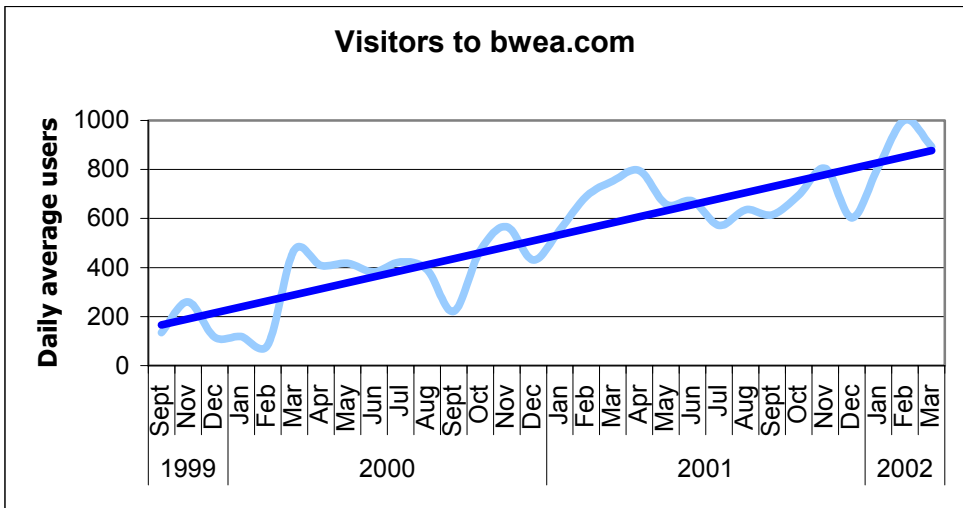
People know who we are; business, government and of course, media and the public. People know to come to us for the answers to their questions and the first place they look for these answers is at www.bwea.com

Public information provision at BWEA is primarily achieved through our websites: we are an electronic organisation. This is a rapidly growing industry, and while the UK may not have been growing as rapidly as some of our European counterparts (Germany installed 437MW in the first three months of this year in comparison with the UK's 27MW), relevant information becomes dated quickly – for example policy measures, guidelines, wind turbine technology and even wind farms themselves – and is therefore easier to update through websites. And of course, more environmentally friendly!

But how useful a tool is the Internet in information dissemination?

BWEA websites

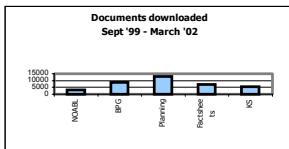
[Bwea.com](http://www.bwea.com) is a website the industry can be proud of; this is the 4th most-linked site on wind energy on the world wide web, and has some impressive statistics on analysis of who's been using the site.



This is an analysis of total numbers of visitors to the site – not hits, but people who visit the site for ten or more minutes, who spend time there and who request information from the website.

The trend is definitely on the increase; from just under 200 daily average users 30 months ago in September 1999 when web stats analysis began, now over 800 people visit bwea.com every day.

And what is it they're looking for when they go there? One way is to log the number of documents downloaded:



NOABL BPG Planning Factsheets KS

Total	2993	865113088	7125	5622	37479
Monthly	100	288	436	237	187 1250

Overall, an amazing 37,479 documents have been downloaded in 30 months – equivalent to 1250 every month, and this is only certain key documents – we have many, many more at the site. On average:

Wind speed database – 100 people every month are checking their wind speeds

Best Practice Guidelines – 288 people want to find out how to build a wind farm

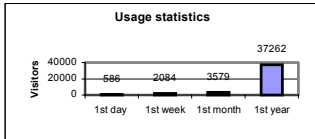
Planning for wind energy – well over 400 copies of the BWEA strategy report are downloaded every month, unsurprisingly most by planning offices and local authorities

Standard factsheets on noise, economics, energy statistics and environmental benefits are downloaded at the rate of 237 every month

Key Stage booklets for schools - consistently high level of interest at 187 per month.

Whether we take these numbers as more people wanting to find out about wind energy, or simply more people becoming aware of the website, it's clear that this is an incredibly useful tool in information dissemination, and one which is cheap, easily accessible and should be made more of.

How does this compare with the performance of BWEA's sister site offshorewindfarms.co.uk? This was launched on 5th April 2001 to coincide with the announcement from the Crown Estate of the release of eighteen potential seabed sites.



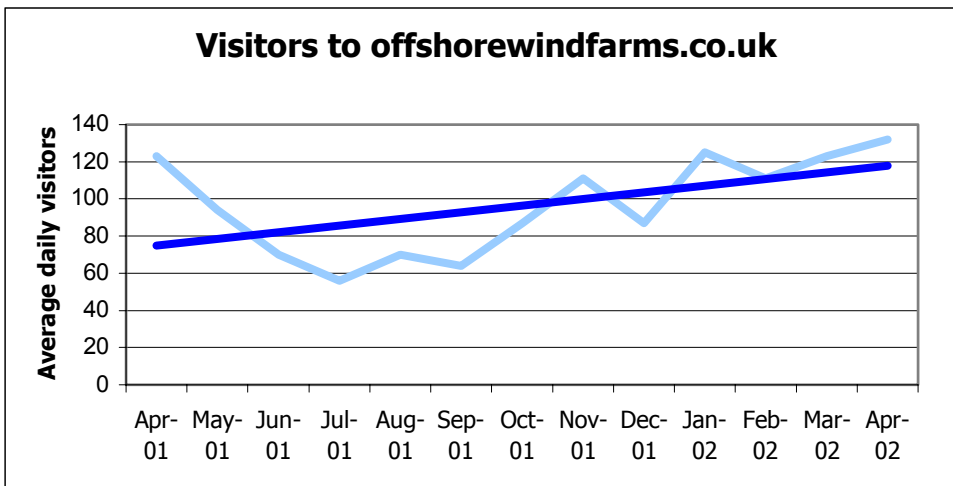
Hits Visitors

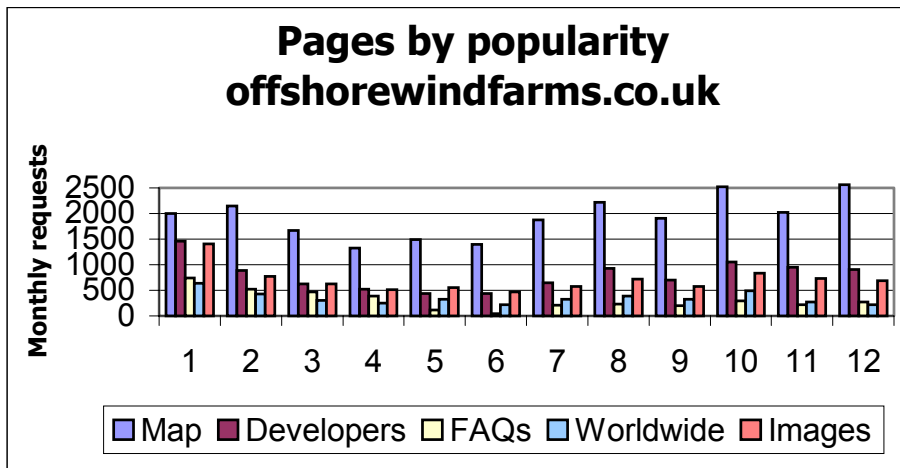
The first day 12,478 hits with 586 people who spent time at the site. By the first month 2084 visitors had spent more than 5 minutes at offshorewindfarms.co.uk and just under 40,000 sessions have been logged during its first year.

1st day	12478	586
1st week	38264	2084
1st month	60286	3579
1st year	540299	37262

Looking over the course of that first year, we can see that the initial interest following the Crown Estate's announcement waned over the following months but has picked up towards the end of the year and has reached an all time high now, with the publication of the PIU report acting as a trigger.

Overall, again we can see an increase in the trend of numbers of average visitors, from under 80 to over 120 every day.





Map	Developers	FAQs	Worldwide	Images	Blyth	Film	OWEN
1925	795	309	347	704	160	121	67

Unsurprisingly, the most popular page is the location map of the 18 sites; and the trend is that more people are looking at that page. Developers awarded a lease was another popular page, but far less popular were the 'Frequently Asked Questions' page and details of projects worldwide.

What is perhaps more worrying is that visitors were more interested in looking at images of offshore wind farms than the FAQs or the wider global picture.

And that's where the representation starts to go wrong. Can we really say that information provision is good enough when people don't seem interested in the information that we as an industry would class as important?

Is the right message out there?

A recent RSPB survey December 2001 revealed the levels of public support for renewable energy:

- Almost all of the interviewees had heard of climate change and three quarters of them, 74% were concerned about its effects.
- Over half the public interviewed (55%) had heard the term 'renewable energy', and there was high approval for solar, wave / tidal, and hydro-electric power.
- Interestingly, only 3% of the interviewees were opposed to building on-shore wind farms in Britain.

Good solid results, you might think, but unfortunately 'probably not' has to be the answer to the question. The same opinion poll asked a trick question:

In your opinion which, if any, of these sorts of electricity power station should be built in Britain during the next 10 years?

The red herring was 'vacuum' power stations. Of those interviewed, 4% had heard of this technology, 2% said it should be built in Britain, 2% said it should not be built in Britain and in a demonstration on the NIMBY principle at it's finest about a technology that doesn't exist, 11% didn't want one within 3 miles of their home!

Also quite worrying was the 10% of people who said they didn't want an offshore wind farm within three miles of their homes – presumably then they are aware of the possible rise in sea levels due to climate change and are staking their NIMBY claim early!

People want to do more

A survey by the Energy Savings Trust Energy Advice Bureau, published in October 2000, showed that 28 per cent of those interviewed thought they were buying energy from a renewable source, but only 17,000 people had made the switch to a green tariff - less than one per cent of all UK households.

People want to know how to do more

The results of a more recent Energy Savings Trust were published to coincide with the PIU report: National Opinion Polls research demonstrated that the public wants more information:

- 73% say they want more information about *why* they should save energy
- 77% say they want information on *how* to save energy

This survey also provides the perfect illustration of why people need to know more as the questionnaire didn't use the term 'renewable energy' as NOP said no one would understand it.

So, over 70% of people are concerned about climate change, but only 55% have heard the term 'renewable energy'. If you were to go outside and conduct a straw poll of people on the street about what renewable energy means and why it's important, I can guarantee that less than 55% would be able to give you an answer.

So how can we help the public help us?

The time has come for BWEA to make more of the message; to take a more active role and to get rid of the myths and misconceptions about wind power.

We're working from a strong base, wind power has never been more popular, and public opinion is a powerful tool. Echoing the words of the Greenpeace film preview in the video release of Bridget Jones' Diary, lets '**spread the message**'.