VATSIM Board of Governors
Quarterly Meeting Minutes – 30 March 2008

Governors Present:
Michael Bevington (MB)
Norman Blackburn (NB)
Ross Carlson (RossC)
Roland Collins (RolC)
Florian Harms (FH)
Richard Jenkins (RJ)
David Klain (DK)
Ruth McTighe (RM)
George Papanikolopoulos (GP)
Kyle Ramsey (KR)
Michael Zazula (MZ)

Richard Jenkins called the meeting to order at 1906z. Ruth McTighe took the minutes.

1) VATSIM website
RM reported that the work on the new website by herself, Joel Lesser, and Nick Partridge has been discontinued as it is felt that VATSIM needs to develop a CMS based site. This will be discussed further in FH's marketing report.

RJ reported that VATSIM has leased a new web server to replace the current one. The content is currently being moved over. The new server has updated software, and can run programs we have been unable to use before.

2) Charitable Fundraising
The agreed new process has been piloted with the Chicago ARTCC fundraising for Angelflight. This worked well. This now needs to be publicized to the membership. The form and guidance will be in a downloadable package.

GP joined the meeting at 1909z.

Further discussion took place regarding how to publicize and store in an accessible manner "unofficial" policies and guidance that are not part of the CoR and CoC. DK will collate a FAQ consolidating the information, and linking to the documents. This can be filed in the library. The library also needs updating, and RM will liaise with RJ about getting access rights to do so.

3) MITRE project
RJ reported that outstanding issues regarding the NDA and VVL have been resolved. Following the first two events MITRE appear keen to continue to work with VATSIM. Results from the Las Vegas events should be available shortly.

4) Continuity of Operations
DK is finalizing a document setting out how VATSIM is organized, and who can do what in terms of hardware, software, and access permissions for mailing lists, CERT, etc. In most cases there is some level of redundancy (two people having access), but there are some weaknesses. The document will be available to the BoG shortly.

5) VATSIM – Central America/Mexico/Caribbean Region

RolC reported that there has been limited progress, and the region continues to be somewhat fragmented. He pointed out that the real world has only 6 regions, and that it might be better to realign the divisions into the same 6 regions. It was agreed that it is important to consult with the regions and divisions before making any changes. RolC will canvas the three potentially affected regions for their opinions, with a NOTAM in both English and Spanish to encourage feedback from the membership.

MB joined the meeting at 1930z

6) Global Ratings Policy

RolC has circulated a report on the progress of implementation of the GRP. There are no undue issues at present.

DK raised the issue of whether there should be a similar GRP for Instructor Ratings. RolC felt that while it was important to have global standards for controlling, there should be more local flexibility about both instructors and mentors. DK said that the need for local flexibility was used as an argument against the original GRP. There is also the risk under our present regulations that those granting controller ratings might not have the necessary expertise themselves. RJ reported that recently there have been some instances of members achieving instructor ratings within 90 days of joining VATSIM which gives cause for concern.

It was agreed that this should just be monitored at present, and that RDs and DDs should be alerted about the issue. RolC confirmed that no-one should be assessing competence unless they have the competencies themselves.

There is a problem with the current VATSIM rating structure, as a member can be "promoted" to an instructor rating from an S3, with no way of recording that they do not have CTR competencies. RM reported that the S3 to I1 promotion is used occasionally in the UK for people who are exceptionally skilled in instructing on TWR, but have chosen not to personally progress to approach and en-route controlling. RolC pointed out that the progression up the ratings, other than to C3, is not a linear one e.g. members may "jump" to I1, SUP or ADMIN which are roles rather than controller levels. There are also controllers with real world expertise, who may be rapidly appointed as instructors.

Further discussion took place about how the ratings system could be changed to reflect the difference between controller ratings and roles. This would require changes of both the database and the FSD software. RossC said this would be a good time to make changes as work was being done on the servers and the software. RolC also proposed changing the name of the controller ratings to reflect their competencies e.g. TWR, TMA, en-route. MB felt a division between controller ratings and roles could also apply to the proposed pilot ratings. RossC said that it would also be possible to allow controllers to choose whether or not to log on as a supervisor at the same time as actively controlling. He could easily modify VRC, and can discuss with the developers of ASRC and Euroscope if they could do the same.

RossC, supported by DK, will draft an outline proposal for BoG consultation in the next 30 days. Following this he will discuss implementation with Richard Critz and produce a detailed implementation plan.

7) Supervisor issues

MZ apologized that, due to domestic commitments, he has not had time to prepare the discussion on downgrades and upgrades. It was agreed that he will present these via the BoG mailing list by mid April. MZ expressed his disappointment that after asking RDs to put forward names for supervisors there was very little response. This is a particular concern for those regions which are under-represented on the Supervisory staff. MZ would like to revise the Supervisor regulations to allow the VP Supervisors to be able to nominate candidates directly. He has been contacted by a number of members about applying for supervisor posts, and some of the applications have been very good, but his actions are limited by the present requirement for him to wait for RD nominations.

Governors felt that where RDs do not put forward sufficient names, then the VP Supervisors should be able to propose names, and it would be up to the RDs to show just cause why they should not be appointed. MZ will draft new guidelines for BoG consideration.

8) Marketing

FH has tabled a marketing plan. Issues highlighted in the meeting included
- the importance of vACC websites and forums in recruitment
- how websites and forums are presented
- ensuring links to regional/divisional websites are up-to-date
- a standardized graphical language/style for regional/divisional websites
- ability to e-mail specific groups of members outside the NOTAM system
- communication with the members
- developing a new vatsim.net website, with wide editorial access at appropriate levels
- a VATSIM online magazine
- viral marketing e.g. using other flight-sim forums to make people aware of VATSIM and respond to people's questions
- separation of administrative functions of the VATSIM servers, such as the membership database, from the main website
- using members who speak languages other than English to become involved on external forums
- there are many members who are able and willing to get involved

The recommendations cover
- development and use of a VATSIM logo and graphical schemes for all websites and marketing structures
- development of a new website
- development of the VATSIM magazine project

GP left the meeting at 2029z

RJ asked all governors and their departments to consider the implications for their sections of VATSIM, how they can key in to the plan, and offer suggestions, improvements and alterations.

FH stressed the role of marketing is to set the platform for the information, and deliver the information to the customers in a way that the customers identify themselves with VATSIM.

Governors commended the document. All governors will review it, and then FH will put the recommendations up for a vote.

FH would like an early decision, particularly about the recommendations regarding the VATSIM logo. Concerns have been expressed by some founders outside of this meeting about changing the logo and branding. The founders are the owners of the logo, so the BoG will need to recommend any changes to the founders for their approval.

9) Recruitment of VATGOV7 (VP Communications)

There were a lot of applications, which have been reviewed by FH, RM and DK, and a shortlist drawn up. The shortlisted candidates will be asked to respond to a list of written questions, and a "short" shortlist will then be interviewed.

10) Use of the VATSIM data-feed

There has been discussion among BoG members about the use of the VATSIM data-feed and the list of "approved utilities and data connections", particularly regarding the need for approval. RM has been unable to trace any agreed policy. There are currently 17 "approved" utilities on the list in the VATSIM library, and we do not know how many other utilities are using the feed. There is no policy on the use of the feed in programs that may charge for their use.

RolC identified a difference between use of the data-feed internally by VATSIM groups, and use in external products. RJ spoke about the value of the feed as a marketing tool e.g. in ServInfo, but this must be balanced against the cost of the high level of bandwidth that is used. Richard Critz has advised that it is important that VATSIM defends our copyright in the data, so that if it is misused we have the power to have something done about it or deny access to it. If we don't defend the copyright we will lose it.

NB remembers seeing the policy on the Approved Software page at one stage. We will attempt to trace the original document.

11) Server migration

RossC reports that the move to the new data server is going well, and it is currently running in parallel with the old server. The next major action is to migrate the data to a new database schema on the new server. Tim Krajcar is leading on this and writing the user interface; Michael Evans wrote the new data-server software. If all goes smoothly it should be complete in late 2008.

RJ reported that the founders have leased a new web server. It is more robust, has more bandwidth, and with up-to-date software opens up more development possibilities, especially around CMS. Richard Critz is carrying out the migration and hopes to complete this in the next few weeks.

FH will work on a new CMS-based website so that it is ready to transfer to the new server.

RolC left the meeting at 2120z

12) Pilot rating

MB spoke about the need for membership database support to record pilot ratings. This would link in to the earlier discussion about ratings and roles. He would also like to be able to update the ratings from the Moodle pilot training software, and to have access to e-mail addresses without requiring pilots to re-enter this data into Moodle. The alternative would be to set up a separate PRC database, but this would have security issues. RJ confirmed that it would be feasible to link to the membership database, and to create a pilot rating field. This needs to be

included in the current discussions about updating the database. RossC advised that once the data is migrated to the new server, he can work with Richard Critz to take on more of a role regarding the development of the database to meet the Pilot Rating requirements.

MB reported that the pilot training software is now being developed in Moodle and Mediawiki. He will continue to host this on his server, with appropriate arrangements to ensure continuity of operations for VATSIM.

MB then opened a discussion on rating types, in particular whether VFR and IFR ratings could be done in any order, rather than requiring VFR to be done first. Governors' initial views were almost equally split between VFR first, direct access to IFR, and undecided.

MB will be liaising with existing VATSIM pilot training programs and looking at recognizing their ratings under the new system. He will also look at how VA training programs could be recognized by VATSIM.

The planned ratings are:
        P0 - entry level, no training
        P1 - basic knowledge of flying online (about 20 minutes of reading)
        P2 - VFR
        P3 - IFR
        P4 - VFR and IFR
        P5 & 6 - more complex e.g. transatlantic flying

The incentives for the ratings are personal achievement, and the visibility of the ratings to others e.g. in flightplans, ServInfo, and on forums.

RJ left the meeting at 2156z
DK took over the role of chair.

Further discussion took place on the possibility of using flags for different skills rather than a linear progression, similar to real world pilot type-ratings/endorsements.

MB summarised the discussion – pilots will be able to go direct to IFR training if they wish, but in order to progress to the more advanced ratings they will need both VFR and IFR qualifications. The VFR training is quite short. RossC raised the possibility of higher level VFR qualifications. Again this could be effectively implemented using flags/endorsements. RossC stressed the importance of agreeing the ratings and endorsement system first, and the programming will follow from this.

13) Cross the Pond
FH expressed his appreciation for the excellent Cross-the-Pond event. However he is aware of comments made that not many governors were flying. RossC reported that the Boston controllers thoroughly enjoyed the event.

DK closed the meeting at 2230z.

Ruth McTighe
26th May 2008