
The Mandela Portal – past, present and future

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Abstract

The article is an analysis of the development of the Mandela Portal conceived and managed by the Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF). The article's methodology approach is a historical analysis of a series of events that led to the development of the Mandela Portal and how it has changed over time. This is the first published article to outline the history and development of the Mandela Portal offering a rare glimpse into much of the work undertaken by the NMF that has gone into the Portal's development.

Keywords: archives, content management, Nelson Mandela Foundation, portal, website

1 Introduction

This article has two main sections. The first section provides background information to the Mandela Portal, outlining the various phases of its development as well as providing information on a comparative study conducted during the development process. The second section briefly describes plans for the Portal's future development as well as providing concluding remarks.

2 Historical background to the Mandela Portal and phases of development

The Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF) was established in 1999 as the post-presidential office for Mr Nelson Mandela upon his retirement as South Africa's first democratically elected president. Mr Mandela had promised to serve only one five-year term, and upon retirement felt that he needed to continue working to promote social justice. He was actively involved in the work of the NMF for the first five years, but in 2004 announced he was "retiring from retirement" (Mandela 2004). His stepping away from public life, and from direct involvement in NMF operations, sparked a review of the organisation's mandate, vision and mission. The review was completed in 2006, and adoption of the review report by the NMF Board of Trustees introduced a five-year transition process designed to transform the NMF into the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory. The Mandela Portal was developed initially to provide web presence for the NMF, but has grown to become the premier communication platform for the nascent Centre of Memory.

¹ The views expressed in this article are those of the author and should not be attributed to the International Monetary Fund, its Executive Board, or its management.

This article provides background information on the Portal's history through three phases of its development, as well as providing insight into a benchmarking exercise that was carried out during the course of the second phase of its development. Additionally, this article provides various snapshots of what the Portal has looked like over the course of the years of its development.

The Mandela Portal has had a decade-long history dating back to 2001, when the current and most well-known domain (<http://www.nelsonmandela.org>) was first registered. Subsequently other domains have since been registered including <http://www.nelsonmandela.com>; <http://www.nelsonmandela.org.za>, <http://www.nelsonmandela.co.za> and <http://www.nelsonmandela.biz> while others are still in the process of being acquired.

The Internet Archive, which is a project that has collected page prints of web sites, has, since 23 March 2002, taken snapshots of the Portal using its WayBackMachine. Figure 1 shows a representation of the pages collected over the years (Internet Archive 2011a).

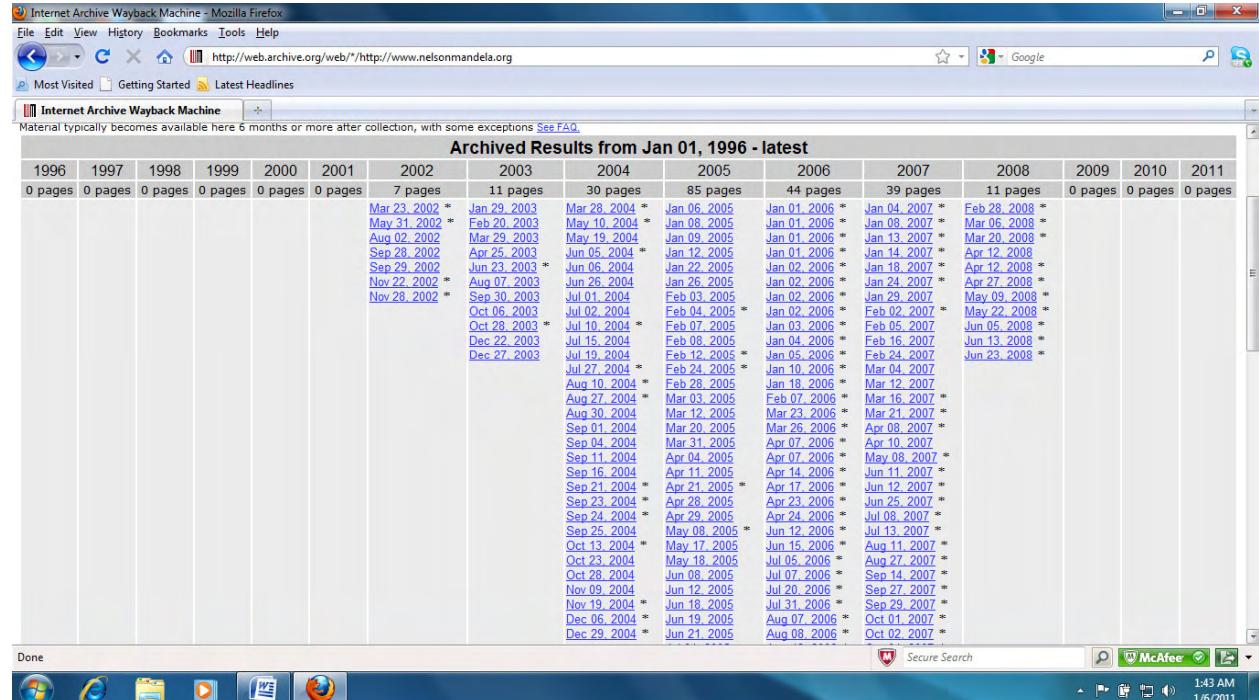


Figure 1: Archived copies of the Mandela Portal between 2002 and 2008

The representation on the Internet Archive may suggest a linear development of the Portal. However, as is mentioned above, the NMF developed the Portal in three distinct phases. The first phase began in 2001 and lasted until 2005. The second phase started in 2005 and lasted until 2007, whilst the third began in 2007 and has run until the present time (2011). While these phases remain distinct, there have been significant changes during the course of each phase, and particularly within the third phase to warrant mention.

2.1 First phase of Portal development

This first phase began in 2002 with a very simple site and basic features on the Portal. During the course of the three years until November 2005, the Portal contained information such as institutional press releases, as well as a limited number of the founder's speeches.

Additionally, an innovation in the form of a webcast was tested on the Portal, with limited success. Figure 2 provides a representation of what the Portal's home page looked like in September 2004 (Internet Archive 2011a).

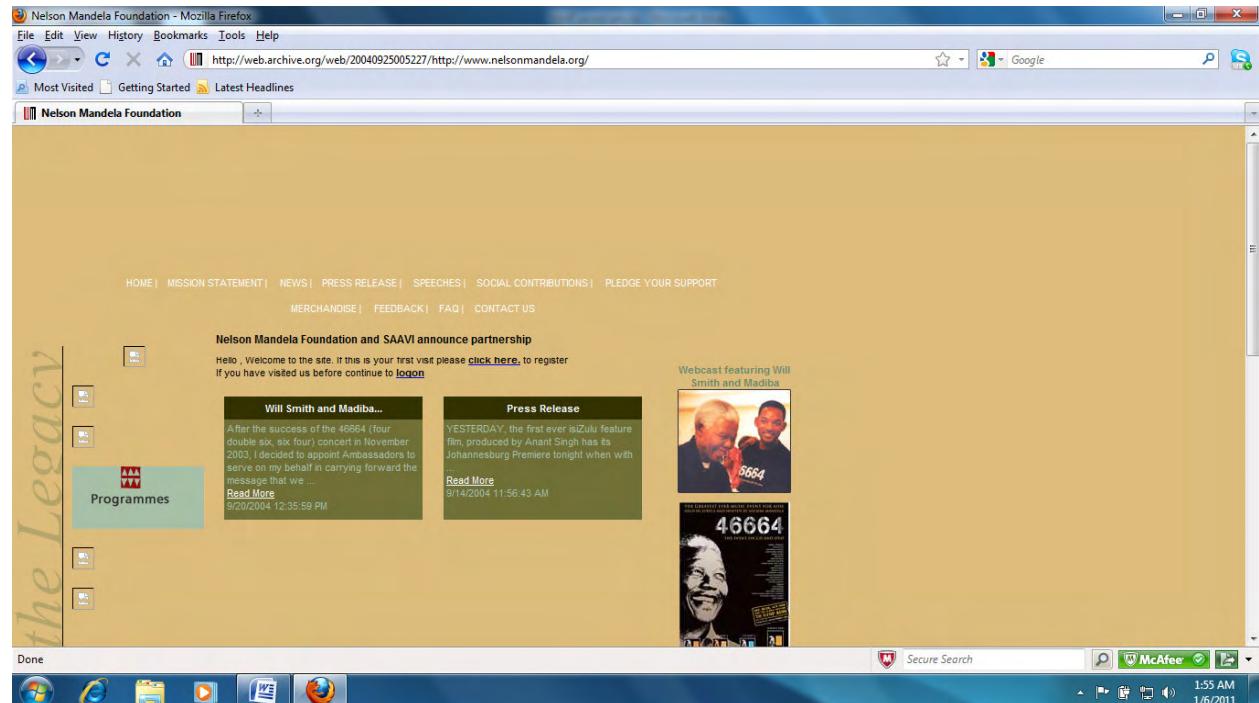


Figure 2: Diagram showing the Mandela Portal as it was in September 2004

2.2 Second phase of Portal development

The second phase of the Portal ran from November 2005 until July 2007. During this period, the NMF made significant changes to the Portal, including ensuring that it ran from a content management system, with an image gallery and a search facility. The content management system ensured that the Portal could be managed in a systematic way: the creation, management, storage and deployment of content of each of the web pages were managed using specific procedures by means of a workflow process. Figure 3 provides a screen shot of the Portal in December 2005 (Internet Archive 2011b).



Figure 3: Diagram showing the Mandela Portal as it was in December 2005

A few months into the launch of the second phase of the Portal's development, the NMF embarked on the organisational strategic review process mentioned above. This process identified the need for a benchmarking exercise to extract best practice and other institutional lessons from organisations with similar mandates, visions and missions. An important element of the inquiry involved determining the extent to which these other organisations had used and operationalised their web presence.

The benchmarking exercise was conducted as a two-step process between May and September 2006. In the first step, the NMF conducted a general desktop research survey of global institutions that are founded by or in the name of a prominent individual. In all, more than 75 institutions were surveyed. Table 1 provides a listing of some of the institutions that were surveyed, grouped according to where they are located.

Table 1: showing institutions around the world for the benchmarking exercise

Country	Institutions
Argentina	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Che Guevara House Museum• Evita Perón Historical Research Foundation• Primer Museo Histórico, "Ernesto Che Guevara"
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site• Anne Frank Centre• Banting House• Bethune Memorial House• Diefenbaker Canada Centre• Glenn Gould Foundation• Ken Saro-Wiwa Foundation• LM Montgomery Institute• Marconi National Historic Site• Nellie McClung Foundation
China	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ho Chi Minh Museum
Cuba	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Centre Ernesto Che Guevara• Conjunto Escultórico Memorial "Comandante Ernesto Che Guevara
Ethiopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Haile Selassie Foundation
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gandhi Information Centre
Iraq	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Iraq Memory Foundation
Israel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Albert Einstein Archives• Ben Gurion Archives
Kenya	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Foundation
Nigeria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ken Saro-Wiwa Foundation
South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Desmond Tutu Peace Centre• Helen Suzman Foundation• Nkosi Johnson Foundation
Tanzania	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mwalimu JK Nyerere Museum• Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Churchill Centre• Gandhi Foundation• Tutu Foundation
US	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• African Presidential Archives and Research Centre• Albert Einstein Institution• Allen Ginsberg Trust• Andy Warhol Museum• Anne Frank Centre• CS Lewis Foundation• Ernest Hemingway Foundation• Gandhi Institute of non-violence• Gandhi Memorial Centre

Country	Institutions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JFK Presidential Library and Museum • Jimmy Carter Library and Museum, Carter Centre • Malcolm X Memorial Foundation • Malcolm X Museum • Margaret Thatcher Foundation • Mother Teresa of Calcutta Centre • Ronald Reagan Presidential Library • Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development • Rosa Parks Library and Museum • The Dalai Lama Foundation • The Hemingway Preservation Foundation • The King Centre • William J Clinton Presidential Library and Museum

The second step narrowed down the research to institutions that most closely embraced the memory-dialogue nexus, with the following eight being identified for closer scrutiny:

- Desmond Tutu Peace Trust
- Franklin D Roosevelt Presidential Library
- Helen Suzman Foundation
- JFK Presidential Library and Museum
- The Carter Centre
- The King Centre
- The Mahatma Gandhi Foundation
- William J Clinton Foundation

While all these prominent individuals have one or more institutions carrying their names and promoting their legacy, two of them, former President Jimmy Carter and former President Bill Clinton, had institutions whose Internet presence was most instructive for purposes of benchmarking in relation to the Portal. They both share with Mr Mandela the experience of being former presidents. Each of the former US presidents has two institutions bearing their names; Clinton Library and Clinton Foundation for President Clinton, and Carter Library and Carter Foundation for President Carter.

The four institutions connected to the two former US presidents were divided into two groups. The first group belonging to the Presidential Library system, the Clinton Library (National Archives and Records Administration [United States] 2011b) and Jimmy Carter Library (National Archives and Records Administration [United States] 2011a). As part of the Presidential Library System that is managed by the US National Archives, the Presidential Libraries are both funded by the federal government and staffed by professional archivists, museologists and education professionals considered part of the federal workforce reporting to the US National Archives Agency.

The second group of institutions are not-for-profit organisations, the Bill Clinton Foundation (William J Clinton Foundation 2011) and the Carter Centre (Jimmy Carter Foundation 2011) with independent governance structures and do charity work around the world.

The NMF saw itself as a post-presidential archive with limited collecting and custodial roles but strong emphases on research, documentation, user support and education

programming akin to the presidential libraries in the US. In addition, it is also a social interventionist organisation akin to the not-for-profit institutions set up by the former presidents Clinton and Carter. The challenge for the NMF and by extension the Mandela Portal was to reflect both these roles being played by one institution.

Three key aspects were identified with regard to the presidential libraries. First, unlike the NMF, the Presidential Libraries are federally funded and, therefore, had a much wider access to financial and infrastructural resources with the requisite support from similar institutions. Second, the libraries had a comparatively much bigger collection of documents, photos, artefacts and audio-visual material and yet had very few core professional staff. Lastly, it was evident that the institutions were still grappling with the intellectual property challenges of providing access to their collections.

In comparison, the NMF, being a not-for-profit organisation, relies entirely on raising its own funds and its archival collections are comparatively much smaller. In South Africa, the responsibility for Mr. Mandela's archives has historically devolved around several players including the State, the African National Congress, which is the political party he belongs to, his large extended family and the NMF. However, the NMF had taken deliberate measures to provide access to information on collections sourced outside the NMF. For example, the Portal began and continued to provide access to a speeches database (<http://www.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/memory/resources/speeches/>), with the speeches sourced from various places. These sources include the archives of the African National Congress, the Mayibuye Archives at the University of the Western Cape, the archives at the University of Fort Hare, as well as Historical Papers at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Three aspects were identified with regards to the social interventionist institutions. First, the American institutions had between two and four key areas of intervention and targeted several dozen countries around the world. In comparison, the NMF worked, at that time, on various issues simultaneously including HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention advocacy, school construction, rural education, memory and heritage, access to information, and dialogue intervention. Furthermore, it worked primarily within South Africa and to a limited extent in the rest of the African continent, hoping to use the Portal to reach the rest of the world virtually. Secondly, both the Carter Centre and the Clinton Foundation had several hundred staff members and annual budgets that ran in the hundreds of millions of US dollars. In comparison, the NMF had less than three dozen staff members and an annual operating budget that has ranged between 32 million to 110 million Rands over the last few years (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2011a). Thirdly, unlike the Clinton and Carter institutions, the NMF has and continues to be part of a family of civil society institutions founded by Mr Mandela – the others being the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, the Mandela Rhodes Foundation, and the Nelson Mandela Institute for Education and Rural Development. In this context continued inter-institutional liaison was and continues to be imperative.

All these observations informed the work undertaken on the Portal in the third phase.

2.3 Third phase of Portal development

The third phase began in July 2007 and has undergone a number of significant iterations since. During the first iteration, the Portal had a simple home page very similar to those in the previous phases, but behind the scenes it developed a sophisticated architecture that would provide the framework to support an ever growing Portal. Figure 4 provides a screen shot of the Portal as it was in August 2007 (Internet Archive 2011c).



Figure 4: The Mandela Portal as it was in August 2007

In November 2007, the NMF opened an account with Google Analytics in order to comprehensively monitor web traffic. Between July 2007 and May 2008, not only was the underlying architecture of the Portal developed but also aspects of the Portal's homepage began to change in fundamental ways. This included the introduction of several sections including featured sections, videos, site map and frequently asked questions (FAQs). One of the key innovations of the first half of 2008 was the development of the first Portal mini-site known as Nelson Mandela at 90. A mini-site is a special section in any site that is a collection of pages dedicated to a particular subject. The Mandela at 90 page was developed specifically to provide information on his then upcoming 90th birthday celebrations. Figure 5 provides a screenshot of the mini-site (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2008a).



Figure 5: the Mandela at 90 mini-site

Since then several mini-sites have been developed such as the online UDF virtual exhibition that was developed jointly with the South African History Archive (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2008b). The virtual exhibition was launched in August 2008 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the launch of the United Democratic Front, which was a critical political mobilization force during the 1980s period of the fight of liberation in South Africa. Another example of a mini-site was developed in early 2009 in preparation for the dialogue session known as the Promise of Leadership (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2009).

Between June and December 2008, the NMF conducted its first comprehensive review of the Portal by collecting views from staff and other key stakeholders, as well as analysing data collected from Google Analytics. One of the key findings of this review process was the fact that it was imperative to develop different visitor paths to the vast amount of information available on the Portal. This became evident from two perspectives. Information about new visitors to the Portal showed that many, as much as 85%, spent very little time on the home page, presumably looking for relevant information and not having found it, then left. Additionally, even for those familiar with the Portal and the work of the NMF, including NMF staff, navigating to specific points in the Portal was becoming very difficult. A strategy was developed to provide a three-way path to the Portal.

The first path would provide access to the work of the NMF as an organization, including its vision and mission, governance data and Founder's office matters. The second path would provide access to the work of the Memory Programme, including information such as speeches by Mr. Mandela and databases of archival material. The third path would provide access to the work of the Dialogue Programme. The latter would include information on community conversations on various issues such as HIV/AIDS, the Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture, and an array of other dialogue interventions. Figure 6 provides a mock-up of the homepage as it was designed in March 2009.



Figure 6: The Mandela Portal as it was in March 2009

Between 2009 and 2010, the Portal grew exponentially from fewer than 2000 pages of content to more than 6000 pages. In hindsight, the review process on the Portal conducted in 2008 led to the provision of ample architecture to support the now content-rich Portal. Figure 7 provides a screenshot of the home page as accessed in January 2011 (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2011c).

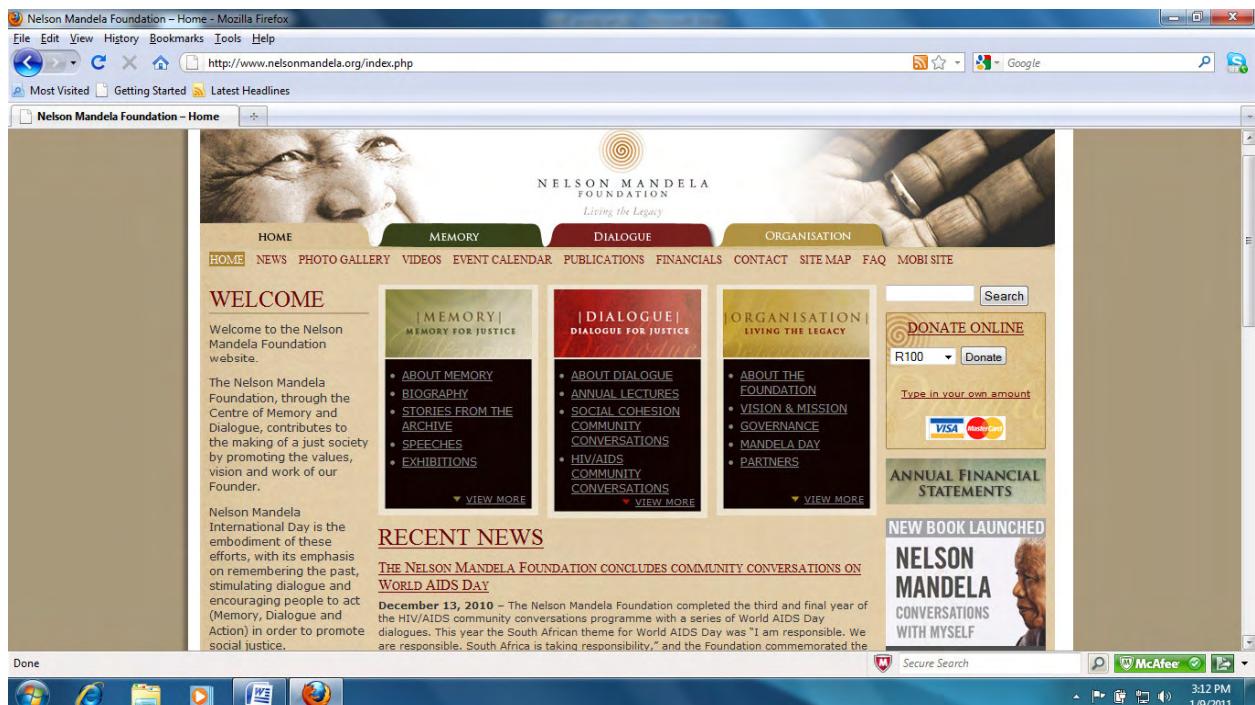


Figure 7: The Mandela Portal as it was in January 2011

3 Conclusions

This article has discussed the history and development of the Mandela Portal from its beginnings until 2011. Throughout this history, there have been challenges that have primarily been the result of organisational changes. In 2006 a five-year strategic plan was adopted to transform the NMF from a post-presidential office into a human rights based non-governmental organization focused on work in the memory-dialogue nexus. Much institutional energy was devoted to exiting from programmes and projects falling outside this remit, restructuring business processes and resources, and testing memory and dialogue functionalities, models, methodologies and partnership options. In the first quarter of 2011 the NMF's Board of Trustees decided to make 'memory' the core business of the organization, with the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory as its vehicle. A concomitant major restructuring of the Portal is on-going to culminate in early 2012.

In terms of future development of the Portal, at the time of publishing this article, the NMF was doing preparatory work on a new five year (2013-2017) organizational strategic plan, which would set key goals for the Portal over that period. It was envisaged that two dimensions will be the main shapers: the social media and digitization. In April 2011 the NMF launched Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr platforms, and are directly fundamentally impacting Portal use. In two months the Twitter account had generated over 20 000 followers and together with Facebook occupied third place in the listing of sites that refers visitors to the Portal. A Google grant has enabled the NMF to embark on a digitization programme aimed at ensuring that all non-digital archival resources are digitized within a five year period (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2011b). The bulk of this digitized content will be made available through the Portal.

This article has outlined the development of the Portal from its nascent beginnings in 2001 until its current state through three phases of its development. While there is a lot that has been achieved throughout the decade-long history, there is still much room for improvement.

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