

## Web Thesis Project - Draft Research Report

# Equine Design

- Incorporating Volo Sport Horses -

## Overview

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## 1. Elevator Pitch

**Strap Line:** Modern web design for the equine industry.

**URL:** [www.jenabirch.co.uk/equine-design](http://www.jenabirch.co.uk/equine-design) & <http://www.volosporthorses.com>

In the past, sport horses were mainly advertised on the showground or in magazines and newspapers, but over the last few years many professional riders, owners and dealers have begun to realise the tremendous benefit of advertising their horses online.

*Equine Design* will offer a modern, stylish and practical solution for professional riders, owners and dealers who wish to showcase their horses for sale on personal websites. Advertising online offers 1) the opportunity to market horses to an unlimited national and international audience, 2) the ability to display multiple pictures, videos and bloodline information and 3) the opportunity to build a strong, recognisable brand.

*Equine Design* will help sport horse dealers to increase their sales by creating eye-catching, professional and functional websites that draw in potential buyers from all over the world.

## 2. Initial Brief

### Aims of the Project

The main aims of this project are 1) to develop my web design skills to a professional standard and 2) to create an identity for myself as a web designer by focusing on creating sites for a niche market.

In order to achieve these aims, I plan to re-design an existing website, [Volo Sport Horses](#) (VSH), and then use the re-designed site as an example of my work. I also plan to create a portfolio site (*Equine Design*) to showcase VSH and any similar projects that I undertake in the future.

### Equine Design

Many professional riders are unable to earn a living through prize money and/or sponsorship alone, so the majority of their money is made through horse sales. As a result, many professional riders compete with the view to selling their horses on for a profit, so the way that their horses are advertised is very important.

Only five years ago, it was rare to find a rider, owner or horse dealer who utilised the potential of the internet in order to advertise their horses for sale. Most horses were sold through magazine or newspaper advertising – a costly practice that was only ever able to reach a limited market. However, as specialist magazines, such as [Horse & Hound](#) and [Horse Deals](#) began to publish adverts online as well as in print, the internet became far more prevalent as a marketplace for those seeking to buy horses.

Having spoken to some of my contacts in the equine industry, it is apparent that many professional riders and horse dealers are now keen to have an online presence (and the opportunity advertise their horses on their websites). I currently run three sport horse websites and each client has said that their site is integral to their sales, especially when they are marketing their horses internationally.

Under the name *Equine Design* (which will exist as a sub-folder on my personal website, <http://www.jenabirch.co.uk>) I would like to offer high quality, professional web design to stables who would like to advertise their horses online. Most importantly, I would like to set up these websites with CMS, so the clients can be in control of putting new horses online and updating their content.

### Volo Sport Horses

[Volo Sport Horses](#) (VSH) is one of the most successful show jumping stables in Norway, selling high quality, high value sport horses both nationally and internationally. Their existing website is a little old fashioned, poorly coded and in need of a complete re-design.

I would like to help VSH to differentiate themselves from competitors' sites by creating an eye-catching, modern, standards-compliant design that effectively represents their brand, their image and the price and quality of their horses. Installing a CMS will be integral to the re-design because it will give VSH the opportunity to upload new horses quickly (this is vital because it allows potential clients to see the horses before they fly over to view them in Norway).

VSH would like the site to be viewed in both English and Norwegian. I have been looking into using [Joomla!](#) for the CMS, and I believe Joomla! features an optional extension called [GTranslate](#) which I may potentially use to power the site translation.

### Timescales

During the course of the Masters I aim to re-design and fully implement [Volo Sport Horses](#). I also plan to create the *Equine Design* portfolio site (if only as a prototype).

### The Future

I have noticed that one stable (Stud Gajos) has set up an [iPhone app](#) which features horses for sale and details of their yard. I am sure that other stables will be interested in doing this - so my long term plans include the possibility of designing iPhone apps for my clients.

### 3. Competitor Websites and Comparable Productions

- i. Horse Deals
- ii. Horse & Hound
- iii. Benny de Ruyter Stables
- iv. Bowen Sport Horses
- v. Adrian Blyth Specialist Cars

- i. Horse Deals

<http://www.horsedeals.co.uk>

Horse Deals, which was first launched in 2001, is the leading monthly equestrian sales magazine in the UK, offering 'a competitively priced, tailor-made expert service package for print and online advertising' ([Horse Deals, 2010](#)).

Page Rank	4/10	<a href="#">PR Checker</a> , 02/12/2010
Site Traffic	2956 per day	<a href="#">Statbrain</a> , 02/12/2010
Demographic	Mainly females, aged 35-44	<a href="#">Alexa</a> , 02/12/2010
Sites Linking In	28	<a href="#">Alexa</a> , 02/12/2010
#1 Search Query	"horses for sale"	<a href="#">Alexa</a> , 02/12/2010

The screenshot shows the homepage of Horse Deals, a website for equestrian sales. The header includes the site logo 'HORSE DEALS THE NO.1 HORSE SALES WEBSITE' and a banner for 'LAUNDRY MACHINE LTD' advertising a horse rug washer. Below the header is a navigation menu with links to 'All Categories', 'Search', 'News Forum Features Videos Photos', 'Manage Adverts', and 'Place Advert'. A secondary menu lists categories: 'items for sale', 'horses for sale', 'horseboxes for sale', 'trailers for sale', 'property for sale', 'stallions at stud', and 'business directory'. The main content area is divided into several sections: a 'Place an Advert from £15' and 'Place a Business Advert' button, a 'Search' form with various filters (Keywords, Section, Category, Price, Region, Height, Age, Colour, Sex, Breed, Terms), and three main content blocks: 'Latest Horses' (featuring four horse listings with details like '13.2 hh 4 Yrs Gelding'), 'Latest Horseboxes' (featuring four horsebox listings like 'LEYLAND DAF 7.5 TONNE'), and 'Latest Video Adverts' (featuring four video thumbnails like 'Coeur De Cents'). On the right side, there are several advertisements for 'Barlow Trailers', 'Ifor Williams Trailers', 'Equine Chaps', 'BLUE GRASS', and 'RIDE-AWAY'. The page also includes a 'Login / Register' link and a 'Home' button.

Screenshot: 02/12/2010

### Business

Horse Deals benefits from three major revenue streams. Firstly, private sellers can advertise their horses, horseboxes or equestrian property (amongst other things) by purchasing a single advert which then features in the magazine and online for a certain period of time. Secondly, business adverts of various sizes can be purchased to feature in the magazine and online, and thirdly, banner adverts can be purchased to feature on the website.

### Commodity

In terms of functionality, users are able to create accounts, allowing them to place single adverts or business adverts online. There is a search function allowing you to refine your search choices. There is also an online community with news, features, a forum and an online gallery. Horse Deals have also begun to make good use of social networking, featuring links to [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

### Firmness

The Horse Deals website is built with XHTML 1.0 Transitional, CSS and Javascript/JQuery. The functionality of the website seems to be fairly good, but there are a few things that could be improved. A bottom scrollbar appears when I view the website in Firefox and Opera – this can be quite annoying. Also, the homepage is overflowing with information to the point of confusion. The main navigation is clear but there are hundreds of links down the left hand side that I feel may be totally unnecessary (the search bar and drop down menu above the main navigation would definitely suffice).

Unnecessary material on the homepage results in huge XHTML file and a long loading time (rated *very slow* by [Alexa](#), at 3.716 seconds). Websites that are slow to load may be penalised by search engines, which not ideal from an SEO point of view.

### Delight

Despite this site's popularity and functionality, as a user I do not experience any real sense of delight. There is a general sense of confusion and unease, with an overload of links and boxes and some inconsistent use of padding. I feel there is too little whitespace – there is just no space to breathe!

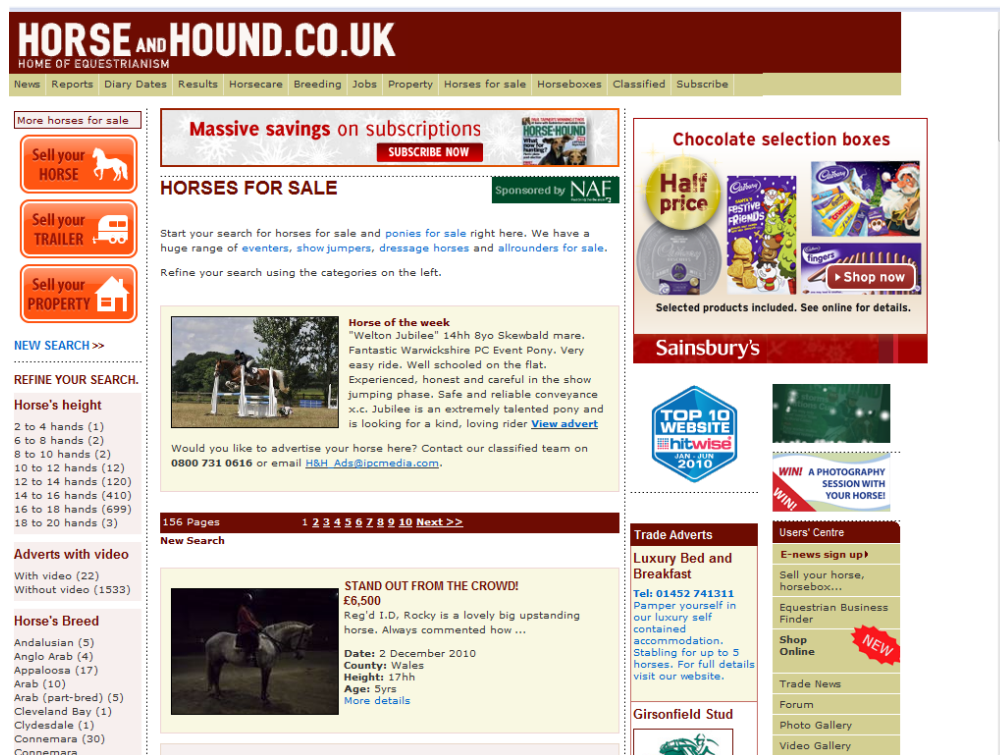
The colours are fairly safe and professional, but I just feel that this website would benefit from a little more artistic flair to create interest for the user! One positive point is that the Arial body copy is easy to read, which is excellent from an accessibility point of view.

ii. Horse & Hound

<http://www.horseandhound.co.uk>

According to [IPC Media](#), Horse & Hound is the UK's leading equestrian magazine brand, with a readership of 257,000. Horse & Hound offers equestrian news, articles, an online community and 'a vast range of classified adverts' ([Horse & Hound](#), 2010).

Page Rank	5/10	<a href="#">PR Checker</a> , 02/12/2010
Site Traffic	8502 per day	<a href="#">Statbrain</a> , 02/12/2010
Demographic	Mainly females, aged 35-44	<a href="#">Alexa</a> , 02/12/2010
Sites Linking In	446	<a href="#">Alexa</a> , 02/12/2010
#1 Search Query	"horse and hound"	<a href="#">Alexa</a> , 02/12/2010



Screenshot: 02/12/2010

Horse & Hound is a large publication, so in order to keep the research relevant to this project I will be looking at their classifieds section in particular.

Business

Horse & Hound's three main revenue streams are almost identical to those of Horse Deals. Firstly, private sellers can place adverts which feature both online

and in the widely distributed magazine. Secondly, businesses may place trade adverts which feature online and in the magazine, and thirdly, banner adverts can be purchased to feature on every page of the website. These banners are sold on a “cost per thousand” page views basis ([Horse & Hound, 2010](#)).

### Commodity

Horse & Hound’s advert booking facility is excellent. You do not have to sign up or become a member to place an ad (unlike Horse Deals), which would definitely be appealing to potential customers. One function that I like in particular: underneath an individual horse’s advert, there is the option to ‘tweet’ on Twitter or ‘like’ on Facebook. I feel this is a particularly clever way of promoting horses for sale on the most popular social networking sites.

### Firmness

The Horse & Hound website is built with XHTML 1.0 Transitional, CSS and Javascript. The functionality of the website appears to be quite sound, but in terms of usability, several improvements could be made. The main navigation has been placed in a prominent position under the masthead, but the links are so small that they are barely noticeable. If you fail to notice the main navigation, your eye travels straight to a cluttered, three column layout full of news articles, links, search facilities, dynamic adverts, polls and anything else you can think of.

The ‘mini’ horse search facility on the [Home Page](#) is good, but on the [Horses for Sale](#) page there are hundreds of links down the left-hand side which I feel are potentially unnecessary and make the page look somewhat cluttered and confused. As with Horse Deals, [Alexa](#) rates Horse & Hound’s loading speed as *very slow* (3.393 seconds) which can be frustrating for users and damaging in terms of SEO.

### Delight

In general, the Horse & Hound website looks quite cluttered and disorganised. The information architecture could do with a complete overhaul along with the design. Funnily enough, even though the main website inspires very little delight, the [advert booking facility](#) is excellent. It looks as though it may have been a recent addition to the site because it is modern, clear, concise and very easy to use and understand.

## iii. Benny de Ruitter Stables

<http://www.bennyderuiterstables.com>

Benny de Ruitter Stables is the website of a well established Dutch sport horse dealer based in Holland ([Benny De Ruitter Stables, 2010](#)). This website has very similar content to the website I am planning to re-design, VSH.

Page Rank	3/10	<a href="#">PR Checker</a> , 02/12/2010
Site Traffic	105 per day	<a href="#">Cubestat</a> , 02/12/2010
Demographic	/	/
Sites Linking In	9	<a href="#">Alexa</a> , 02/12/2010
#1 Search Query	“stables”	<a href="#">Alexa</a> , 02/12/2010



Screenshot: 03/12/2010

### Business

The Benny de Ruitter Stables website does not appear to have any direct revenue streams. There are some [link partners](#) but these are likely to be reciprocal links rather than advertising space which has been purchased by other businesses. This website has been set up to advertise Benny de Ruitter's services and sport horses for sale, clearly with the intention of attracting international clients.

### Commodity

The usability of the website is fairly good. The main navigation is clear and obvious on the left hand side, and the content is clearly defined. In terms of functionality there is a selection bar above the horses for sale which is quite useful. It allows you to narrow down your choices by gender or discipline. I like this a lot – it is simple but effective and definitely something to consider for VSH.

### Firmness

This website has been built with XHTML 1.0 Strict, CSS and some Javascript. The functionality of the website appears to be okay, but using the [WC3 Validator](#), you can see that the markup is fraught with errors.

### Delight

The first thing that strikes me with this design is a complete overload of the colour brown. Different shades of brown can look sophisticated when used sparingly or in conjunction with contrast colours or white, but this design almost looks a little too drab and creates feelings of it being old fashioned (and possibly a little boring). The verdana body copy is easy to read but the curly, serif font used in the navigation is a little too small and somewhat difficult to decipher.

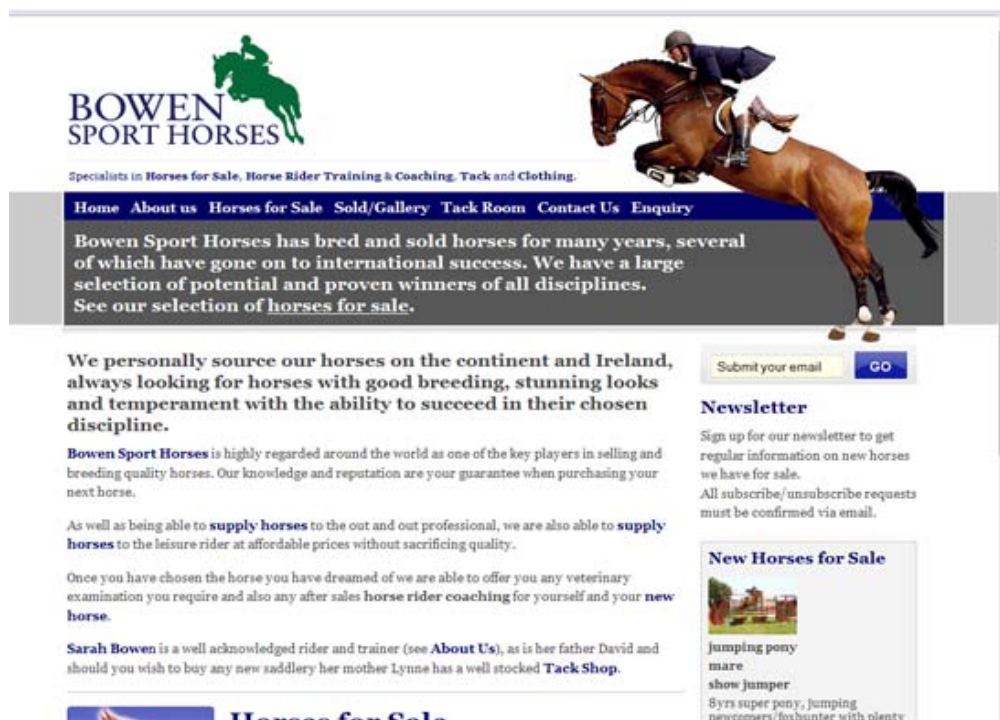
I feel that this design would vastly benefit from some form of masthead/branding at the top. There is a drop shadowed outline of a horse in the top left, but this does not link to the homepage and it is not accompanied by any text. When browsing any page on this site other than the homepage, it might be easy to forget which site you are actually visiting – this is certainly not ideal when trying to attract potential customers (or for SEO purposes).

#### iv. Bowen Sport Horses

<http://www.bowensporthorses.co.uk>

Bowen Sport Horses is a prolific show jumping and sport horse dealing stable based in Preston, UK ([Bowen Sport Horses, 2008](#)).

Page Rank	1/10	<a href="#">PR Checker</a> , 03/12/2010
Site Traffic	20 per day	<a href="#">Statbrain</a> , 03/12/2010
Demographic	/	/
Sites Linking In	3	<a href="#">Alexa</a> , 03/12/2010
#1 Search Query	“equestrian products royston”	<a href="#">Alexa</a> , 03/12/2010



Screenshot: 03/12/2010

## Business

Like Benny de Ruiters, the Bowen Sport Horses (BSH) website does not seem to have any direct revenue streams. There are no adverts on the site or reciprocal links. The site exists purely to promote BSH's services and sport horses for sale

## Commodity

The BSH site is easy to use and navigate, with a prominent navigation bar below the company logo. In terms of functionality, there is an attractive "submit your e-mail" form in the right hand column which remains constant on most pages of the site. I think this is a good idea as e-mail can be a good way to notify potential clients of products or horses for sale that may be of interest to them.

Above the horses for sale, BSH also has a mini selection bar which enables you to narrow down your choice of horses according to gender and discipline. The site also features an [enquiry form](#).

## Firmness

This website has been built with XHTML 1.0 Strict, CSS and some Javascript. The markup is semantic and there are only a few minor errors when checked with the [W3C Markup Validator](#). The main navigation bar has been created using simple text links and there are some sub navigation links on the main page to create interest.

Delight

This design has so much potential, but there are many little oversights which unfortunately let it down. Firstly, on some of the pages, the horse's feet do not line up with its legs. This could be easily fixed, but gives a slightly unprofessional, unpolished feel to the site. Secondly, on some pages, the strap-line under the logo spills onto two lines and overlaps the navigation bar, making it difficult to read, and thirdly, the size of the text is incredibly inconsistent.

Georgia is used throughout the site – this could be an excellent font choice because it is an attractive serif font that was specifically created for the web, but within this design it is overused in its bold form and there are too many different sizes. The inconsistent font sizes make it difficult to identify the most important information.

## v. Adrian Blyth Specialist Cars

<http://www.adrianblyth.co.uk>

Adrian Blyth Specialist Cars is a well established performance car business based in Surrey, UK. They have been trading for over 25 years and sell a selection of used Lotus, Porsche, Mercedes and other sports and performance cars ([Adrian Blyth](#), 2010).

Page Rank	3/10	<a href="#">PR Checker</a> , 03/12/2010
Site Traffic	184 per day	<a href="#">Statbrain</a> , 03/12/2010
Demographic	/	/
Sites Linking In	4	<a href="#">Alexa</a> , 03/12/2010
#1 Search Query	“car image”	<a href="#">Alexa</a> , 03/12/2010



Screenshot: 03/12/2010

### Business

The Adrian Blyth Specialist Cars website does not appear to have any direct revenue streams. The site advertises performance cars for sale in order to attract customers to the garage.

### Commodity

This site features a variety of performance cars for sale. The cars are grouped together by make and linked to from the main navigation. The site is fairly user friendly but it may benefit from a search function on the homepage – this would limit the amount of links necessary in the main navigation and allow for easier expansion in the future. This site might also benefit from utilizing some of the popular social networks – perhaps incorporating the facility to “like” a car on Facebook, such as Horse & Hound have done with their classified adverts.

### Firmness

This website has been created using XHTML 1.0 Transitional, CSS and [Joomla!](#) The classifieds section of the website is powered by [EZ Autos 5.1.6](#), which is a motor vehicle listing component for Joomla! CMS. It may be appropriate to use a similar component when considering the redesign of VSH. The main navigation has been created with CSS – it is easy to use however the information could have been presented in a more efficient way – perhaps a single “Cars for Sale” link leading on to further options or a simple search facility.

### Delight

The blue, monochromatic colour scheme is inoffensive albeit a little uninspiring. Slick, professional colours are appropriate for a business of this nature, but I can't help thinking that a little more black, silver or "chrome" effect might add some interest to the design – especially if the target market is male.

The dark blue Helvetica body copy is easy to read on the pale blue background but a little more contrast in font size and weight would be appropriate to set the headings apart from the body copy.

## 4. Project Plan

As mentioned in the initial brief, the main aims of this project are:

- 1) To develop my web design skills to a professional standard
- 2) To create an identity for myself as a web designer by focusing on creating sites for a niche market.

In order to achieve these aims, my primary task will be to re-design the [Volo Sport Horses](#) website to a high standard.

### Business

At the moment it seems unlikely that the VSH website will generate any direct revenue streams. The clients would like the site to be set up purely to advertise their services and their sport horses to national and international customers. If the site begins to generate a significant amount of traffic in the future, then I may suggest that they consider inviting businesses to place banner adverts. Equestrian businesses based in Norway might be interested.

From a personal point of view, I will be charging a fee for the site re-design, and I may continue to charge monthly for any site maintenance needed or costs incurred for use of a CMS.

### Commodity

The main navigation on the VSH website will include a maximum of 5 links and some will lead onto further sub-pages. The structure is likely to be something like this:

- Home
  - Introduction
  - Latest news
  - New horses for sale
  - E-mail sign up
  - Contact details
  
- About VSH
  - Team Volo
  - Terms of Sale
  - Investment opportunity
  
- Horses for Sale
  - Search function
  - Horses grouped by age/gender/discipline/price
  
- Our Services
  - Training
  - Stabling
  
- Contact
  - Phone & e-mail
  - Location
  - Google map

I would like to place great emphasis on usability of the site. Many of the websites I have researched for this project feature an abundance of unnecessary links – not only are these unattractive and bad for SEO, but they are likely to confuse the user. VSH need their customers to be able to find what they are looking for as quickly as possible in order to maximise their chances of making a sale.

I do not think the creation of a community or use of a forum would be particularly useful for a site of this nature, but I may encourage the clients to utilise the most popular social networking sites. It may be beneficial to set up a VSH Facebook page (featuring pictures of new horses and snippets of news) as well as a Twitter account. I might also look into including the “like” on Facebook facility under each horse for sale.

### Firmness

The VSH site will be built using XHTML 1.0 Strict, CSS 2.1 (with elements of CSS 3 where appropriate) and Javascript/JQuery.

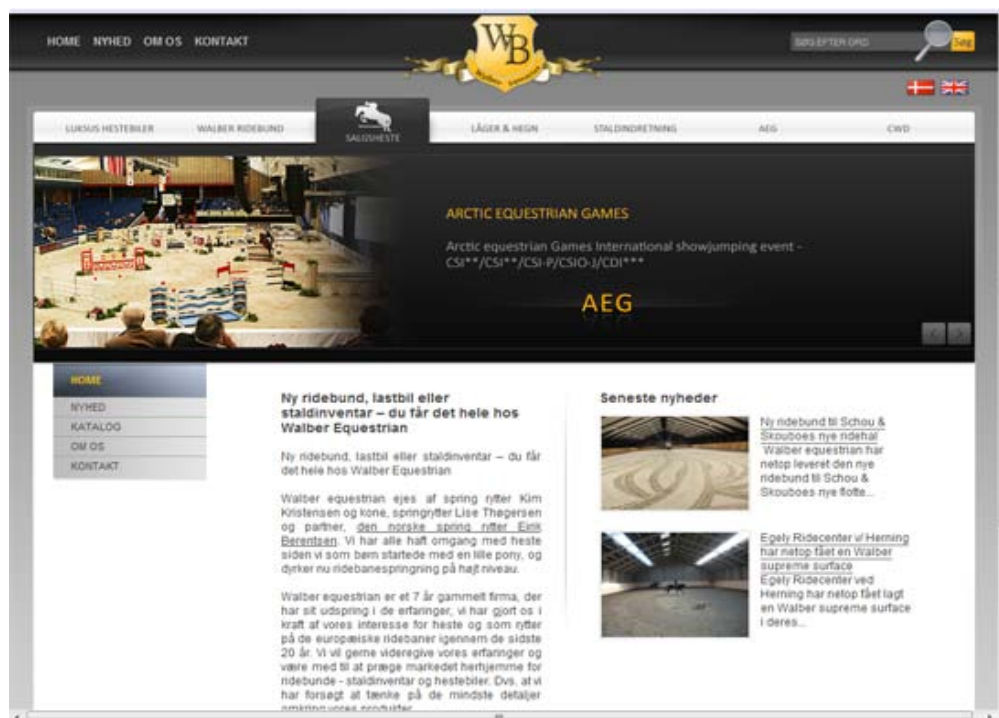
I would also like to incorporate an 'off the shelf' content management system to allow the clients to manage some of their own content. At the moment I am considering using Joomla! because it possesses excellent functionality and some extensions (such as EZ Autos and GTranslate) which might be very useful, however, I am also looking into other options.

### Delight

I would like the VSH website to look very clean and professional with appropriate typography and some eye-catching graphics. In terms of colour scheme it is likely to be based around blue, white and grey as these are VSH's 'colours' but I might try and incorporate an accent colour as an interesting design feature.

VSH sell high value, high quality sport horses so the look and feel of the website must reflect this. A professional, beautifully designed, functional website will inspire confidence in potential customers - which is essential.

[Walber Equestrian](#) is one of my favourite equestrian site designs.



Screenshot: 03/12/2010

The colour scheme is demure and sophisticated, there is an abundance of clean whitespace and the tabbed main navigation features some lovely graphics when clicked.

[Braaten Gard](#) is another equestrian site that I admire. It is modern, interesting, and attractive and sets itself apart from many other sport horse websites.



Screenshot: 03/12/2010

## 5. Further Research

8<sup>th</sup> December 2010 - 12<sup>th</sup> January 2011

- Research further comparable projects (cognate & non-cognate) to gain more ideas for the Volo Sport Horses re-design.
- Discuss re-design extensively with clients. I need to ascertain exactly what they are expecting from the new design. We will need to discuss content, information architecture, possible layout ideas, colour schemes etc.
- Look into content management systems. I need to do more research into Joomla! and possible alternatives. I also need to establish which content will be managed by me, and which content will be managed by the clients.
- Contact other show jumpers and sport horse dealers to talk about what they expect from their own websites – what they like and what they dislike about competitors' sites.

- Market Research: Contact riders who use online sites to browse sport horses for sale. Discuss what they look for in usability terms. Any sites they use most frequently when seeking to purchase a new horse.

## References

Adrian Blyth, 2010. *About Us* [online] Available at:

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