

## ALL ABOUT CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (CMS)

There has been more and more talk about Content Management Systems as organizations decide that they need direct control of their websites.

Once they have this, many soon learn that the technology also allows them to change and improve their internal workflow, processes and procedures for acquiring, filtering, organizing, and controlling access to information and create an intranet and / or extranet too.



Creating an intranet and / or extranet thus giving staff, suppliers etc secure, remote, 24/7 access to information has been shown to increase turnover, reduce costs and improve profits because the right data is communicated to the right people at the right time.

After all what is an intranet or extranet other than a restricted-access network that works like the Web, but isn't on it?

An intranet and / or extranet enables a company to share its resources with its employees, customers, suppliers etc without confidential information being made available to everyone with Internet access, it can share organization policies and procedures, announcements or information about new products – anything that can be held in electronic form.

### What is a CMS?

So what is Content Management (CM) and what are Content Management Systems (CMS)?



A CMS is a system used to manage the content of a Web site. Typically, a CMS consists of two elements:

- Content Management Application (CMA)
- Content Delivery Application (CDA)

The CMA allows anyone without HTML skills to manage the creation, modification, and removal of content from a Web site. The CDA automatically uses and compiles that information to update the Web site. The features of a CMS system vary, but most include

- Web publishing. Page templates and other aids help authors to produce high quality pages and documents that can automatically be reused and co-ordinated.

- Format management. In many authors can publish automatically in a format suitable for Web publishing such as HTML or PDF.
- Version & revision control. Multiple authors can update files and yet the changes traced to individuals for security purposes.
- Index, search & retrieval. For data to be valuable, it must be relevant, accessible and timely. Web content being electronic is easy to index search and retrieve.

### **CMS benefits**

The benefits of a CMS can be dramatic; for example amongst others:

- You are in control. No longer do you need your web designer just to put on new pages. You can spend that money on more important things such as search engine optimization and pay per click marketing.
- Customers can find what they need – you are in control so you also can control the navigation so that it continues to make sense as a site grows and changes. Design and layout is templated properly so all pages fit your brand image.
- The site is kept up to date easily and therefore quickly. Whether a price list, a product description or a photo needs updating you don't have to rely on IT or your web designer; just about anyone can do it.
- Version and revision control makes it easy to roll-back the site or a document to the 'correct' version.
- Database driven - products, articles and news may all be separate but CMS' have databases that can allow for associations between various content elements on a site.
- Controlled access. You can control where files are and who gets access to them. So content can be tailored to the specific groups with different access such as staff, suppliers etc
- Approvals and authorities. Good CMS provide the ability for content managers to approve and validate content before it goes live. They can also control the time a content element goes live, the day and time it is removed from the site, and the locations on the site that the content element appears.



## Specifying your CMS

You need to consider a number of factors when you decide to invest in a CMS. They range from "corporate solutions" that have everything and cost an arm and a leg to free 'Open Source' tools you can set up and maintain.



Do a requirements specification. State your business needs don't try to design the CMS. Do not get wrapped up in too much detail, if you and an 'outsider' can understand it your requirements specification is there.

Do not expect a CMS to meet every single one of your requirements perfectly, you'll never find one or spend huge amounts of money on customization.

Think about changing the way you work to match the way the CMS does it. Many CMS have sensible, well-established workflow systems. If you're working differently from most people perhaps you should look at why that is.

Consider your entire organization and all its systems (infrastructure, other applications, range of your electronic data, etc.) when you determine the requirements for your CMS. It's not going to be working in isolation, so it ought not to be defined in isolation.

Don't buy what you don't need but do buy something that gives you room to change and expand.

Finalize your requirements. If you change requirements during the project your chance of failure increases exponentially. You can make changes, but understand that every change is going to result in higher costs and a longer schedule.

## Buying a CMS

So, now that you have a good idea of what you need what next?

- Ask friends, colleagues and a man in the pub what they think might work?
- Check competitors. Find out what systems competitors use.
- Pick one with a pin. This might work, but it is difficult to justify to your boss or bank manager.
- Hire a consultant. This can work. OR..... [more likely]
- Contact us on + 44 (0) 1 225 840 490 or ... if you have the time ...
- DIY!

**To DIY:**

1. Start with a long list and compare offered solutions to your requirements; remove the 90 percent you can see aren't going to work by checking Web sites, reading reviews and using your intuition.
2. Look at the remaining systems. Download product information sheets and whatever else is available. Take a longer look at how these systems' features compare to your requirements.
3. Contact potential suppliers. Sending them your requirements specification and any other information you think might be important. You need to be confident that the CMS will meet most of your important needs. Ask for demos, in-house presentations, or whatever it takes to be sure their solution meets your requirements.
4. Check for government grants.



Just one minor caution, having CM and a CMS does not solve everything overnight with no hassles. You also need training staff and develop different processes and procedures for how you handle web based content whether that be on the internet, intranet or extranet.

But, once you have one, you will never look back.