



Why you must use a Website Content Management System

Release date	June 2012
Document version	1.0
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Released to	Public

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Introduction

Content is the heart and soul of your website - it connects you with your prospects, customers and other interested people. It captures their attention and interests them by describing your products and services. It establishes your credentials and creates the trust required to move towards a sale. It also provides the means for search engines to understand your website and rank it in their search results.

In today's fast-paced world, your **content** will be changing continuously - sometimes monthly, weekly, daily or even hourly, depending on the nature of your business. Customers love to see a dynamic website - it keeps them coming back. The same is true of search engines.

So it is absolutely vital that you take charge of your website content in-house and avoid being reliant on others who charge for their time, may not understand your business and may not be able to react as quickly as necessary.

With the proliferation of tablets and smartphones, all capable of displaying your website, **mobile optimisation** is essential to ensure that your content is represented appropriately across popular devices.

These factors are the crucial components of a good Website Content Management System (WCMS).

We begin with a brief reminder of the purpose of a website content management system, it's obvious benefits and a quick explanation of how we go about building a content-managed website.

We recommend a couple of website content management systems.

To help you to decide what functionality you might want, we have brainstormed a list of website content management system features.

Finally, we explain how content management works with smartphones and other mobile devices.

The Basics

A website content management system (WCMS) allows non-technical users to edit websites. A WCMS requires a little more investment when building a website but this is offset against not having to pay programmers to make changes further down the line. It is also much faster to make your own changes than to schedule someone else to do them.

Inevitably structural changes need to be made to a website occasionally. With a WCMS, often these can be made in a single place and then automatically propagated throughout the website. This saves time and money.

The process of producing a content-managed website normal goes something like this:

1. Understand what the business wishes to achieve from the website
2. Agree elements that will appear on each type of page (template)
3. Produce a creative design
4. Write a WCMS specification which details how content areas will be managed plus any custom functionality
5. Build the templates and test them in common browsers (including mobile devices)
6. Integrate templates into the content management system
7. Set up the content & test
8. Go live!

Which System?

Our favourite WCMS is Umbraco. It gives us complete flexibility to build whatever our clients require. Fast. We never end up wasting hours trying to shoehorn requirements into a solution that does not quite fit the bill. The support is great and we have had good experiences with our clients picking up the user interface very quickly. There are nearly 90,000 sites using Umbraco around the world - from small retailers to global companies including Vogue, Heinz, SanDisk and Microsoft. Check out our [Umbraco demonstration](#).

Our second WCMS of choice is WordPress. We use this either because our client is used to using it and has data already set up or when specific plug-ins are required. Over 73 million sites use WordPress. This number includes a lot of small blog-sites but it is also used by UPS, Dow Jones, Time, CNN, CBS and many other huge organisations.

Features to look out for

Websites

- Ability to host the same website for multiple domain names.
- Ability to host multiple channels e.g. standard and mobile.
- Support for multilingual versions of the website and the WCMS

Templates

- Logic should be built into templates which can then be reused with different content on multiple pages.
- With no programming effort, create new fully-functional, laid out pages based on existing templates.

Editing

- What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG) editor for easy content editing. Easy copy/paste from Microsoft Word. Page preview.
- Store images, documents and movies in a central repository, ready for use on any page that supports them. It may be appropriate to insert these items amongst text content using a WYSIWYG editor.
- Easy to learn.
- Documentation, support and regular updates to fix issues and release improvements.

Structure

- Automatic generation of the hierarchical website navigation structure, with breadcrumb trail. Also a sitemap of website navigation.
- Withhold published pages from the navigation e.g. those that only appear in the website footer.
- Create search-engine-friendly URLs and metadata

Workflow

- Approver-users to endorse content changes made by editors. Approvers receive emails to notify them when a change needs to be approved.
- Content managers may have different roles. A role will give different types of access to pages. Some pages may have specific permissions for a particular user.
- Store a version history of changes to pages

Features and Plug-ins

- Shopping cart
- Discussion forums
- Blog
- Wiki
- Image gallery
- Contact us
- Subscribe to newsletter
- Send to a friend
- Search
- Dynamic navigation with breadcrumb trail
- Related links
- Customisable input forms
- Search engine optimisation tools
- Statistics on who is looking at the web-pages
- Integration with social networks
- Private area (accessible by login)
- Make content available to other websites through RSS syndication.

Mobile devices

The Boston Consulting Group tell us that global internet users will double over the next few years - and most will be mobile. They predict four times as many mobile internet connections as fixed line internet connections. Gartner concur and explain that in a few years the number of mobile devices will dwarf the number of PCs by a similar ratio. ([source](#)). It is therefore becoming more important for companies to have a mobile-optimised website.

Designing a website for much smaller screens usually demands a much-simplified layout and less content. It is often therefore not a good option to simply restyle your standard website to fit onto a phone. It is often appropriate to host separate websites. Jakob Nielsen agrees - read his [comparison between mobile and standard websites](#).

However this does not always mean that content needs to be duplicated. Using the content management system we can set up content items (e.g. a news story) that can be utilised on both websites but entered only once. Try managing mobile content on our [demo website](#).

Content Management for offline mobile apps

Apps should not be used in place of corporate websites. Apps are useful to achieve a particular goal rather than disseminate general information about an organisation. Last year we wrote about some of the [choosing between apps and mobile websites](#).

One of the primary reasons we are asked to build apps for our customers is because mobile websites may not be accessible due to restricted internet access while travelling. For example a sales rep with a tablet travelling in a rural area. Or an overseas traveller may require information without paying mobile roaming charges.

The obvious solution is to build an app that can be installed and viewed without an internet connection. But at the same time you would also like to be able to periodically update the content on these offline apps. That's where there work becomes a little more involved(=expensive).

We have devised a simple alternative solution that is the best of both worlds. This is actually a mobile website, but all pages are still viewable without an internet connection. The only provisos are that the website must be simple and that your users must access the website once before they go offline.