

CHOOSING A CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

HOW TO CHOOSE A CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

ORGANIZATIONS CAN SAVE MONEY BY USING A CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM TO MANAGE THEIR PUBLIC WEBSITE, INTRANET, CATALOG, AND/OR CUSTOMER EXTRANET.

This white paper is meant to inform readers about content management systems (CMS)—what they are, benefits, how to choose one, and the implementation process.

WHAT IS CONTENT MANAGEMENT? For the purposes of this document, a “content management system” is a website with a system built into it that allows a non-technical administrator to easily update the content on the website. A CMS can make updating a website, even a large and complex one, as easy as using email.

For example, think of your organization’s website. Choose one of the pages, such as the “About” or “Company” page that almost all websites have. If you want to make a change to this page, such as correcting a spelling error in the text or uploading a new photo for the CEO, how do you do it? Do you have to send a request to another department or employee? Do you do it yourself by using an HTML editor and an FTP program to upload the modified file? Or does your organization outsource web production, requiring you to send changes not just down the hall, but to an entirely different company? With a content management system, you would simply log into your website, choose the page you want to modify, and change the content as easily as though you were changing a Word™ document.

Although a CMS can be fairly simple to operate, they can also include powerful features for managing the creation and management of content. Some systems allow an organization to assign various levels of control to different employees. An employee can take a leading role and use the system to give assignments to other content-producing employees. In turn, those employees can be given permissions within the system to update specific sections of the website but not others.

Many companies have websites that are very large, containing tens of thousands of individual pages. In these cases, a content management system needs to be complex, feature-rich, and scalable enough to handle all the situations for which it is needed, without making the process more complicated than it’s worth.

DO I NEED A CMS? Almost every organization can benefit from a CMS. Even a company with a small website can use a CMS to update press and news releases and general content on their site. Organizations that choose the right CMS and implement it successfully will realize a score of benefits.

REDUCED BURDEN ON IT STAFF. A CMS allows those employees who control content (product managers, marketing directors, HR admin, etc.) to control those parts of the site for which they are responsible, thus freeing IT staff to focus on other duties, rather than performing content updates on the website.

EASIER UPDATING. A website that is updated frequently increases the level of credibility and relevance that site visitors feel. And a CMS makes it easier for employees to update the site on a regular basis. Higher credibility among site visitors gives an organization more influence over the groups it targets with its website.

A CONNECTION WITH CUSTOMERS, EMPLOYEES, AND OTHERS. Organizations that use a CMS to place manuals, books, press and news releases, or brochures online are able to reach the users of that media more easily. This can improve relationships and, in the case of potential customers, increase the likelihood of positive purchasing decisions.

SAVINGS OF TIME AND MONEY. A manufacturing company with 3,000 employees and 10,000 customers can save money on printing costs by converting their corporate magazine to a web-based CMS instead of a print version. A software firm with 20 product marketing teams and one web team can keep content on the corporate website more up-to-date by allowing product teams to change content for their products instead of pushing it through the already overloaded web team. A CMS is a facilitating technology for organizations looking to increase the efficiency of their website production and maintenance, and this can directly impact the bottom line.

WHICH CMS IS THE ONE? There are at least 200 viable CMS products on the market. The three main areas to focus on when choosing a CMS are cost, features, and support.

COST. The real focus here is on total cost of ownership (TCO), not just the sticker price. Implementing a CMS is not always, but can be, a huge drain on the internal resources of a company. In addition to tangible costs there may be intangibles that make the difference between a project being worth it or not.

The sticker price of a CMS can range from free to millions of dollars. Most credible systems cost between \$100,000 and 250,000 for a license, and then approximately two to six times that for the implementation by a systems integration firm. There are a few viable CMS options in a lower price range, and some are offered on a subscription basis, where a monthly fee is paid for as long as the system is used. Using a subscription model can save an organization tens of thousands of dollars in start-up costs.

Beware of free or very inexpensive CMSs. The sticker price may seem attractive, but there may be hidden costs and a distinct lack of functionality or features that may not become evident until well into the implementation. When it comes to purchasing a CMS, you really do get what you pay for.

FEATURES. You know your organization better than any CMS vendor. Make sure to find a CMS that not only has the features you need, but doesn't charge you for a lot of features you don't need. If your organization wants to manage a subscriber database and interact with them through an email newsletter system, make sure this is a standard feature of the system. If your organization doesn't require a system that provides personalization features (the ability to customize information on a website based on stored information about a particular visitor) then don't pay for it unless you have to. The following are some basic features that almost every CMS should include:

WEB-BASED EDITING. A web-based interface enables the "content expert" in an organization to have direct control of their respective portion of a website without having to go through a "webmaster" or "web team." By enabling individual departments, product teams, and marketing professionals to update the website without the need for technical skills, companies can lighten the load for overtaxed IT departments, control costs, and keep website content fresh and up to date with greater ease.

FLEXIBLE WORKFLOW. A flexible workflow matrix allows you to define workflows to match your internal processes. And a workflow can be modified while work is in process.

USER MANAGEMENT AND SECURITY. Different rights can be assigned to different users, and groups can be created to speed the creation of new user accounts. Administrators can be given full control, while standard users may be given restricted abilities within the system. A good CMS will also provide automatic email notifications for users when they are assigned new tasks or changes are made to their account.

SITE SEARCH. A site search feature should be accurate and allow users to filter search results based on date range, type of content, and keyword combinations.

ONLINE PUBLISHING. A CMS should allow for instant as well as scheduled publishing of content, and should apply formatting to all content to maintain a sense of uniformity across the site.

SUPPORT. A CMS is not an "out of the box" solution and can require substantial training, maintenance, and support. Even an ideal CMS implementation will require changes down the road as the organization using it changes and new requirements surface. For that reason and others, it is important to verify that a company has the staying power necessary to be around to support the product.

IMPLEMENTATION. The process an organization goes through en route to full implementation of a CMS can vary greatly, depending on the CMS it chooses. In every case, a CMS is not an "out of the box" solution that can be installed and be up and running in a few minutes. A CMS is a complex application, and in almost all cases requires a system integration or web development firm to perform the implementation.

Before implementing a CMS, an organization must decide whether it wants an in-house or outsourced solution. For example, some organizations want total control of a CMS so they host it at their site of business. Other organizations want the benefits of a CMS but would prefer to have someone else take care of the details so they use an outsourced CMS that is built, hosted, and maintained by another company. In any situation, there are certain steps to be taken if a CMS implementation is to be successful:

DISCOVERY. Some systems are customized to fit an organization, while others require that the organization fit the system. Both types of systems have their merits. In both cases, there is a discovery period either for the firm doing the implementation, or for the organization trying to fit their processes to match the system.

PLANNING. A detailed plan should be adopted before diving into the implementation and customization of a CMS. An organization should know what employees will be involved, which responsibilities fall to the firm doing the implementation vs. internal employees, what milestones will be reached and when, etc. Planning ahead can save countless dollars and time later on.

DEVELOPMENT. If planning is done well the implementation of a CMS and customizing it should be relatively simple and straightforward. Many companies make the mistake of brushing aside discovery and planning so they can "dig in" and start getting something done. This approach seems to get things moving faster in the beginning, but causes a multitude of problems later. The development stage ends up taking longer than it should, much rework needs to be done, and sometimes the implementation can become so bogged down and disorganized that management decides to terminate what could otherwise have been a successful project.

TRAINING. It's not enough to just implement a CMS if no one knows how or is willing to use it. It is important to train employees in the use of the system. It is even more important to involve employees in the discovery and planning stages so that a sense of buy-in is created and by the time the system is finished employees already feel a sense of ownership and enthusiasm about the new system.

CONCLUSION. A CMS is a complex web application that allows organizations to more easily update large websites. Organizations that understand why they need a CMS, how to choose a CMS, and take steps to manage a successful implementation can achieve a positive return on investment in a short period of time.