

Content Management Systems - Why bother?

It's a question that gets asked quite a bit, being in the business of Content Management Systems! And it's a pretty good question too. The fact is, there are some great reasons to adopt a CMS, but on the face of it there are some fairly convincing reasons not to bother with one as well... Read on to find out!

Content Management Systems - Commonly Asked Questions

"I hardly ever update my site... so it doesn't take long to change the content of each page of my site, on the rare occasions that I do have need to update them."

For some people, there may be fundamental reasons why their web presence is not considered key to their business plan. For example, where the site is merely used as a contact page, an address locator, an online business card if you will, for an otherwise face-to-face organisation. But even in those situations where the data does not have need to change very much, it is still important to be able to change it easily when the time comes.

This response, though perfectly acceptable on the face of it, does beg the question why bother having a website anyway? Nothing ages faster than a website... just a few months with the same data on a page can be a lifetime in cyberspace. And the ultimate punishment from visitors expecting something new? Taking their mouse and staying away.

If you are running a small business, chances are your lifestyle is already pretty hectic. A CMS can help you to work smarter not harder...all you need is a web connection and a web browser!

The bottom line is, if it is accepted that there is a need for your organisation to have a website, then it makes sense to make use of a CMS when the time comes to easily update that ancient website... (and for ancient, read "anything over about 3 months")

"I only have three pages"

You only have three pages now, but who knows what is round the corner for your website? There could be a need for a whole load more data on those pages, or a requirement for several new pages, when your business website (or hobby website for that matter) has to switch direction to keep up with changing trends. There are plenty of other reasons to have more pages than the bare minimum. For example, having lots of pages with good, relevant content can be a great help in getting good placements in the Search Engine listings.

Every page that you create is potentially visible to the search engines. So, the more pages that you have available with content relevant to your product or service, the more chance that your site will show up in the search engines. Of

course, if your product is absolutely unique then you may only need 3 pages to showcase it...

"I have learnt enough HTML to get by, so I don't need a WYSIWYG editor"

Although it can be comforting to stick with what you know, sometimes its best to strike out into unknown territory to discover more benefits. Adopting new technology is a good case in point. If you can realise the benefits of adopting the latest technology - without actually having to spend time wrestling with the finer points, then the end most certainly justifies the means!

Put another way, 'point and click' can be your friend. A CMS should allow you to edit details on your site, without having to learn any new programming language, so does it matter that you are not utilizing your HTML knowledge? Chances are its probably outdated knowledge anyhow... Fear not! For those diehard coders out there, any CMS worth its salt will also offer the ability to switch to 'hand code' view.

"I have no web skills... will I really be able to use a CMS?!"

Of course! If you can type text into a document using a word processor like Microsoft Word, then yes, you will be able to use a CMS. Making clean, great-looking webpages is possible by doing little more than some basic typing. Mark a title as bold, add a couple of links, maybe add a list... it really is that easy!

You can start with simple changes, and then use some of the more advanced features when you are more familiar with the system. With a CMS, its easy to make changes to your site, without needing to know any HTML or have any design skills. The site style (colors, fonts, layout, etc.) is all fixed by the site template, so when you make updates to the site, your work is displayed within the style of the site. With a Content Management System, its easy to separate content (the words, pictures, lists, tables, forms, etc. that go to make up the main body of your website) from style.

OK, I am interested, what is a CMS?

So, hopefully you are now thinking a CMS isn't necessarily a bad or complex thing. So, what exactly IS a Content Management System? Well, it can loosely be defined as a series of tools that allow you to manage (add, edit, or delete) a website's data. The key point here is that this can be achieved in isolation from the style of the site. This means that a non-designer can easily update a website, without having to worry about what color looks best with that contact form, or what layout will suit this table of figures etc.

The template controls the color palette that can be used, the fonts, their sizes, the style of headings, tables, forms... and in fact every single facet of the look and feel of the site. Because the style of the site is fixed by the chosen template,

a non-designer can build great-looking content, and the template takes care of how that content looks to the website visitors.

As the look and feel of your new website is dictated by the template, it makes sense to adopt a system that gives you plenty of options in the first place. When it comes to template-based design, duplication can be the nature of the beast unfortunately.

To avoid having a website that has the same template as someone else's (maybe even your competition) it is vital to choose a site builder that has lots (hundreds of thousands or more) of available combinations. Then, once you put your own mark on your chosen combination with your own logo, you could have a unique website, easily updated at your own convenience, at a fraction of the cost of commissioning a web company directly.

Which CMS is for me?

There are basically two types of CMS - online and offline. An offline one has to be installed like any piece of software. This is installed at the server end, and so can require a good deal of technical know-how to get it up-and-running correctly and safely. The other type is much easier to begin working with - the online CMS. As the name suggests, the online CMS is a system that is accessed directly from a website, from within a standard web browser.

This means that there is no installation required - as the system is already installed on the server. Unless you consider yourself a 'techie', your best bet is to stick with an online CMS as it will make your life easier! The other great benefit of an online CMS is that the system can be accessed from anywhere, at anytime. Basically, because the system is not installed on your PC, you don't even need your own PC to access it.

Any computer, anywhere in the world will do... empowering you to work on your website at a time and location that suits your lifestyle. And if you are running a small business, chances are your lifestyle is already pretty hectic. A CMS can help you to work smarter not harder...all you need is a web connection and a web browser!

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