

## **CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS; ARE THEY YOUR BEST CHOICE?**

Keeping your website up-to-date is not easy for a small business. Few business owners will want to go to the bother of learning how to edit their own web pages so even a minor update, such as changing a price can be costly. Some people choose to pay their web developer a monthly fee to look after the minor updates, while others have chosen to have their websites created with a content management system built into them. Others choose to limit the information in their website to the basics and only include information that is not likely to change. This is the cheaper option, but it makes them less useful to your users.

Content Management Systems are very useful, especially in the following circumstances:

- managing the content of large sites when you have multiple authors
- large catalogue or inventory that changes frequently
- frequently changing prices
- frequently changing information, such as a newsletter area.

Not all Content Management Systems are equal. Many have drawbacks, some are just prettied up tools that were originally created to make a web developers life easier. Some are incredibly expensive, while others are fraught with bugs that are not likely to fixed anytime soon.

### **WHAT IS A CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM?**

In its essence a content management system is one where you can manipulate the content of a web page that resides in a database through a user interface. A content management system puts together information and creates a web page from the various elements when required. A web page created through such a process is called a dynamic page.

A dynamic page is created on the fly; and its content is specific to the request made by the user. This makes a lot of sense when you are managing large volumes of data that needs to be seen in different ways by different users.

Lets consider a real estate website for a moment and look at how a user might like to view the information contained in it. A buyer may want to look at some of the properties on offer through a particular real estate website. To make the job easier they will use a search facility that narrows in on the properties that match their requirements. The website may offer the following search criteria to assist the user.

1. Postcode/Suburb/Area
2. Price
3. Apartment/House/Unit/Flat/Town House/Land Only
4. Auction/Private Sale/Tender
5. Double Brick/Brick Veneer/Weatherboard/Concrete/Steel

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You can imagine that the page displayed after making a search through this process will give the user a page of information that is very specific to their needs.

A dynamic website provides advantages to both the user and the website authors. It saves everyone time and effort.

A shopping cart is probably the most common example of a dynamic website it obviously has a few more smarts incorporated in it, but it is essentially the same as all content management systems in that it keeps information in a data base and only brings it together and displays it on a web page when asked by the user.

#### THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU INVEST IN A CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

**Ease Of Use.** Some content management systems can be just as difficult to learn as a normal web authoring tool. So if you are considering going down this path you should see what training is required and supplied and how difficult it is to learn.

**Are You Being Locked In To Your Developer Or Hosting Company?** You should also find out what technology sits behind the content management system. Is it a proprietary system that is only supported by your web developer? Is it portable across web hosting companies and does the system cost more to host than a standard html website.

**Is It Search Engine Friendly?** Not all content management systems are search engine friendly. Although Google is now capable of spidering addresses containing question marks and equal signs ("?", "="), there is a limit to how far it will venture into such a site. Some search engines will not index dynamic sites at all.

Your content is key to improving your performance in search engines and it is not a good idea to hide your content away from search engines. Doing this will limit your capacity to attract new, interested visitors to your website.

Remember that search engines do not utilise your search facility.

**Cost.** Content Management Systems can be found at almost every price point and it is a good idea to shop around before making a decision on a product. Don't forget to do your sums against what it would cost to have your website maintained by your developer using a standard web development tool like Dreamweaver, or the cost of having someone within the business trained up.

#### WHAT IF YOU ALREADY HAVE A CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

If you already have a Content Management System your greatest concern probably lies with search engine optimisation. How can you overcome the limitations that the system is placing on the search engine spiders? The first place to start is with your web developer.

Ask if they have already addressed this issue. If this draws a blank here are a couple of suggestions.

#### **CREATE A HTML SITE**

This might sound like overkill, but it is often not as large a job as it may seem. There are programs that can make html from the information stored in databases. This process is sometimes called cooking pages. Once the pages have been created you can use these to create a site map. See the resource [Site Maps and Search Functions For Larger Websites](#). Having a simple site map accessible from all your web pages is a valuable feature for search engines and users.

#### **REMOVING QUESTION MARKS AND OTHER SPECIAL SYMBOLS FROM YOUR ADDRESSES**

This is a rather technical issue and so we will not go into to much detail here, but it is important to know that your web developer may be able to use modules such as "mod-rewrite" on an Apache server, or a program called ISAP rewrite for an IIS server to remove the offending symbols from your web addresses.

Doing this means you can be serving up the sort of web addresses the search engines like to index.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Content Management Systems certainly have many advantages for the website owner, developer and user. Sadly issues regarding search engines are often not thought of until later. If you plan your website and consider the importance of search engines from the beginning you will find it possible to utilise the full functionality of your content management system and do well in the search engines. It is just a matter of identifying the content that is most important to your search engine ranking and ensuring it is available to the search engines through a series of search engine friendly addresses