

Effective Web Content Management: Different Sites, Different Methods

By Lisa Welchman

Today, more than ever, there are a number of different products and strategies available for getting your Web content development and production processes streamlined and under control. This article will define some basic criteria that should be used to help you determine which Web content management products and strategies may be a good match for your business.

The process of migrating content from an exiting Web site into a Web CMS can be arduous and expensive. For a medium-sized business, a Web CMS solution can cost anywhere from 30K – 300K. For a larger enterprise, that solution can run into the millions. You have to know what and why you are buying before you sign that check. It won't do to sign on the dotted line, only to find out, post-installation, that you have made the wrong choice. Given the cost in capital and human resources, the likelihood of migrating to a new system anytime soon is small. Once you have made your selection, you'll be working with that system for years to come.

Every Web site is unique...unique in its production process, unique in its content, unique in its value to the sponsoring business—sometimes it is the entire business. For this reason, every Web CMS solution will, to a certain extent, be a custom solution. Still, there are three basic issues any business should explore when beginning the search for a Web content management system:

- **Type of Web Site**
- **Web Production Demographic**
- **Level of Business Commitment to the Web**

Type of Web Site

E-commerce Sites

Sites whose primary function is to market and sell products to consumers and/or other businesses.

Information Sites

Information sites disperse information to anyone as a service.

Service Sites

Sites that market and provide services to a consumer or another business.

If, at first glance, it appears that you have more than one of the types of sites listed above, you need to do a little research to determine your site's primary business driver. Frequently, the Web team doesn't know what the site's primary business driver is. It is very easy to get bogged down in the day-to-day activities of a site, where getting that new application live, keeping the servers up and running or getting those new pages active seems to be the primary business driver. Ask a marketing person what the business driver is. They'll know.

Correctly determining your type of site is important because each site type has a different production dynamic. Different production dynamics require different production and content management strategies.

Your Web Production Demographic

Your Web Production Demographic is the state of affairs of your Web site. It should be expressed in a report that contains, at the very least, the following:

- **Your site production process**
- **Number of Web production personnel**
- **Number of content contributors**
- **The size of your site**
- **Content Maintenance Strategy**
- **Web Operating System definition**

This report is a key piece of information to have *before* you begin speaking to Web CMS vendors. Not all Web CMS can solve all Web production problems. If you do not understand your Web Production Demographic, then the vendor will impose one upon you in order to sell their product. You'll find out too late that you don't work the way they said you do.

Level of Business Commitment to the Web

How important is your Web site to your business' bottom line? Your business probably falls into one of the following categories:

DotCom – A Web company that gets almost all of its revenue from selling goods and/or services via the Web.

Clicks and Bricks – Generally a company that was around pre-commercial Web but which also has a strong business commitment to the Web.

Vanity – A company that has a Web site because they think they ought to, but they are not sure how they want to utilize the Web in order to increase revenue or provide services.

As much as the Web team would like to argue against it, the selection of a Web content management system is not just about the technology. It's also about dollars and cents. Web techies on the product selection team need to be prepared to build *business* arguments that support their need for the system. As it relates to Web CMS product selection, the level of a business' commitment to the Web will be most strongly reflected in the amount of money that your business is willing to spend on the Web CMS. If the company's Web site is a vanity site, which does nothing to increase the profits of the business, then they probably aren't going to want to invest 600K – 1M in a Web content management system—no matter how good the technology fit or how many problems it solves.

A Web content management system should have a strong and positive effect on the day-to-day work lives of your Web production team and Web content creators. Taking the time necessary to understand these three areas will ensure that your Web CMS product selection will result in a product that solves your existing Web content management problems instead of creating new ones.

Originally published in 2001 at webcms.org