BU | Center for Digital Imaging Arts

WEB DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM

WD108 WordPress 1 - CMS

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A web content management system (CMS) is software. The software has a user interface (UI) that allows users to manage a website workflow in a collaborative environment. To break it down a little further, a CMS is an easy interface through with a person(s) can maintain their web presence. The CMS itself is thus a series of functions that act in concert to create this user experience (UX) – the UI, the templates and the database.

Why Use One?
As web designers and developers in today's market, we often have clients who want a website built for them, sure we can do that! Once built though, clients do not want to have to pay someone to change content or add pages. Hum, that is a problem. Of course the average client does not know HTML, CSS, JavaScript, PHP, etc, hence the client seeking you out … So what do we do? Set their site up in a CMS of course! The solution that you provide for them should provide a pleasant UI that is comfortable and familiar as well as easy to use. Enter CMS!

How it Works:
Up to this point we have been building pages. There is a home page (index.html), there is an about page (about.html) and so on. In the world of content management, we no longer have "pages" as we know them, rather we have page templates that hold a set of rules that dictate how content should appear in our browsers and what content should appear when a specific URL query is submitted.

For example if you were to visit a content managed website and type the URL "http://mysite.com/?p=1", the content management system will be loading "index.php" (a template file) that tells the browser (based off of the query string (?p=1)) what content to extract from the database and how to display that information in a HTML document. Thus it the CMS is "building" the page on the fly.

The major take away here is that "pages" don't really exist in content managed websites. Rather you have templates that tell content how to display and a database that holds the actual content. These two pieces together dynamically generate content on demand when a consumer makes a URL request to your website's server.

What is Available?
There are lost of options available for and in general these fall into two categories: Open source and Proprietary (Adobe Contribute, Oracle, Titan, Cascade, etc.). We will be focusing out attention on the first of the two, open source CMS (free).

Pros
- Free! No licensing fees.
- Any LAMP programmer should be able to develop with it
- Flexible: Since it is open source, we can (if we want) rewrite the actual CMS software files, giving us ultimate control over every aspect.
- Community: Most open source CMS softwares have really good communities around them (due to the fact that the software is free). Because of this there are more add-ons, bug reports, and updates them with a proprietary solution.

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Cons
- Security Risk: Since everyone knows the source of your software, because it is "open source", you are more susceptible to security attacks.
- No direct support: Since this is all open source and free, you don't have a company that is there to tend to your every need. Development tends to be more of a shared responsibility with in the community (out of the kindness of peoples' heart).
- Documentation: Since you are relying on other people to develop for free, the documentation can be very hit or miss, depending upon the specific developer(s).

Open Source Options: these are just a few of the "most popular" ones out there.
- **WordPress** (WP):
  - How Popular: This is the most popular blogging software.
  - Editor/Admin Usability: This is the most user friendly CMS on this list.
  - Can it handle 2000 pages: Easily…
  - Common Development: Plugins and Themes, there are lots of good ones and bad ones out there, so be careful.
  - Flexibility: Very flexible. At its core, WP is just a loop based blogging CMS, so it is not the most flexible on this list.
  - SEO: WP has the best out of the box SEO and with Plugins is just that much better!
  - Dev Needs: Upfront dev and then no further maintenance cost.
  - Sites Using WP:
    - http://ebayinkblog.com/
    - http://ycorpblog.com/
    - http://stylenews.peoplestylewatch.com/
    - http://www.samsungusanews.com/
    - http://blog.mozilla.com/
    - http://business.blogs.cnn.com/
    - http://www.benjerry.fr/blog/
- **Joomla**:
  - How Popular: Not that popular. This is definitely a niche market.
  - Editor/Admin Usability: This one is the worst on the list…
  - Can it handle 2000 pages: yes, though it gets complicated on the admin to find and administrate them…
  - Common Development: themes and plugins, though not as many are readily available and the ones that you can find are really not all that good.
  - Flexibility: flexible, though due to the confusing development requirements, limited developers, and limited out of the box functions it is pretty limiting.
  - SEO: Not good… Even adding plugins, it still really does not get there.
  - Dev Needs: Upfront dev and then continual maintenance
  - Sites Using Joomla:
    - http://porsche.com.br/
    - http://nikoninstruments.com/
    - http://mx.yamaha.com/
- **Drupal**:
  - How Popular: Probably the second most popular CMS on this list. This one is a big favorite of developers.
  - Editor/Admin Usability: not that good, though it is usable.
  - Can it handle 2000 pages: easily

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- o Common Development: themes and plugins, though there are not as many available as there are for WP.
- o Flexibility: The most flexible on this list.
- o SEO:
- o Dev Needs: Upfront dev and then weekly/monthly maintenance
- o Sites Using Drupal:
  - ▪ http://www.bestbuymobile.com/
  - ▪ http://mcdonalds.com.au/
  - ▪ http://appsbeta.wireless.att.com/login
  - ▪ http://fedex.com/
- **Expression Engine** (EE):
  - o This one is NOT free…
  - o How Popular: Niche popular. Those who use it love it! It does not really have any advantages over WP.
  - o Editor/Admin Usability: About on par with Drupal, so a step behind WP.
  - o Can it handle 2000 pages: easily
  - o Common Development: themes and plugins, there are the fewest available for EE of any on this list.
  - o Flexibility: Very flexible, few limitations... it is pretty comparable with WordPress
  - o SEO: not that good out of the box, but with plugins can make it decent, though probably falling behind WP and Drupal.
  - o Dev Needs: Upfront dev and then weekly/monthly maintenance
  - o Sites Using EE:
    - ▪ https://www.gop.com/2012ChangeDirection/2012ChangeDirection.htm
    - ▪ http://www.topgear.com/uk/
    - ▪ http://blogs.cisco.com/

A few other interesting options include Cushy CMS, Radiant CMS and Contao. At the end of the day it really comes down to personal preference and what your client needs. With that said, we will dive into WordPress as this is currently in the highest demand globally and is a great tool for all developers. WP does a great job of introducing the ideas and principles of CMS, which will build a solid foundation to then tackle one of the other existing options (if you should so choose).

Theory:
Keep your clients needs in mind. In general you want to be sure that you are giving your client the access that he/she needs and no more beyond that. If you give someone access to a feature or to edit some aspect of a site, assume that that person **will** use it. Similarly you don't want the maintenance of content to be complex! Your client is paying you to build a CMS so that he/she does not need to know code. Don't let limitations in your knowledge be the reason that you give your client extra access, thus leaving the site vulnerable to "damage" by unknowing/inexperienced hands. Try to plan for every possible situation that your client may attempt. Create bullet proof code. It sounds hard and time consuming, well it is! If it were easy, then the client would not need you to do it, right?

Read More?

http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2009/11/08/getting-started-with-content-management-systems/
http://coding.smashingmagazine.com/2010/11/22/designing-for-content-management-systems/