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Joomla!

By Ryan Goodrich

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Joomla has become one of the most popular [content management system software](#) applications out there. This application has proven itself incredibly flexible in terms of configuration and customization, and it offers an unparalleled level of user management. With this release of version 1.6, you can create a complex hierarchy of contributing writers, editors, publishers and site administrators, each with their own set of permissions.

This application is also well known in the CMS world due to its large community of contributing developers. You can make your website fulfill a variety of functions, from eCommerce to posting news and sharing various multimedia. Plugins, components, modules, templates and other types of add-ons are available in surplus that will help you create a truly unique website for little cost. All you need is web hosting and you're ready to go.

Joomla is nearly perfect with the features built in to the original download. After installing this CMS to your [web server](#), you are given a number of basic and complex tools to create a website that will fulfill a wide range of capabilities. Due to the high level of customization this application provides, you can create corporate sites, intranets, eZines, eCommerce sites, small business sites, personal blogs and more. The possibilities for what you can do with your site are endless.

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In this CMS system, an article is defined as written information that you want to display on your site. We felt that it is comparable to a blog entry, in that you can include some text and pictures and other types of content. Joomla originally existed on a somewhat restrictive system of categories and sections that users were required to use to divide the scope and topic of articles and other website content. Older versions of this CMS included sections and categories with which you could filter articles. This method of sorting articles was quite restrictive for sites containing multiple levels of content sub-categories. With the release of the latest version, you can now create an unlimited number of sub-categories within any current category. This allows even greater freedom to administrators who are trying to categorize large quantities of content.

After your first time going through the publishing process, Joomla will seem quite intuitive. We found that before you can post an article, you need to create article categories. Each article you create needs to be placed within its respective category for the purpose of

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navigation and content filtering. After creating a category, you can simply click to create a new article, enter a title and the content body, select the category and then hit publish.


SEO options are available in multiple areas. You can add meta tags, descriptions and more to the site itself and each individual article.


Quite honestly, this is where we spent most of our time. Add-ons, or extensions, are where Joomla really shines. Commercial and free extensions are available in abundance that enable you to reach a higher level of customization to meet your personal or company's needs. This CMS is open source, which means that anyone and everyone can contribute extensions to enhance the look and feel of websites created using this CMS. Through the CMS website, you can access a library of downloadable extensions on any topic.

While the vast majority of these add-ons are free, you will often find that the best add-ons are commercially licensed and might cost a pretty penny. Extensions are available by the bucket load that gave you immeasurable possibilities for where your website can go. We found extensions for forums, photo galleries, social media feeds, newsletters, mobile apps, article comments and more. It was beyond fun to just browse through the many add-ons developed by third-party programmers.

Extensions are available for Joomla users to deal with a plethora of needs. For example, one of the most popular extensions is JCE, which is an improved and configurable WYSIWYG editor that handles more advanced images, media, files and links. Another popular extension we found is the Community Builder, which is an extension that is intended to improve the user management portion of this CMS. It allows you to create a more personalized profile, establish workflow management and create user lists. Each of these can easily be installed and used immediately for your site.

An added benefit of the add-on service is how easy it is to create extensions of your own for personal or community use. If you have a knack for coding in PHP, you'll be able to tweak current extensions or create your own for immediate use.

Joomla offers much in the way of site management. Add-ons are available to fulfill a wide range of duties in this regard, though they are not necessary. The benefit of this CMS is you don't need to know any HTML code to use many of its features. This [software's](#)  templates, or themes, and translations are both web-based. Web stats are available as a plugin; if you are running any kind of business online, you will want to know the daily, weekly and monthly visitor statistics for your site.

Many management tools are available for your use. The most basic of these is the Media Manager that allows you to upload media, create folders for [storage](#)  and more. The Content Manager assists in overseeing articles created for your site. As an administrator, you will have free reign over all of the articles written. You can search through current content, filter it based on a number of fields and make changes that can immediately be put live on the site.

The Extension Manager handles all add-ons to the CMS and is quite easy to use. When you download an extension of any kind, it will typically be contained within a ZIP file. Don't worry about extracting the contents, because this CMS needs it in that format. To install an add-on, simply download to your computer, load the Extension Manager in your web browser, browse for the ZIP file that contains the extension and click the Install button, after which Joomla will do all the work.

User management has improved drastically with this latest version of Joomla as well, allowing you to create multiple types of users and assign granular permissions. Rather than simply relegating access to your site to visitors and administrators, you can create users with varying levels of access to control the goings-on of your site better. You can create accounts for writers who can post new articles but can't edit anything other than their own posts.

After installing an add-on, you need to activate it. Simply navigate to the manager of the file type you installed (e.g., component, plugin, module, template and so forth), edit the add-on, and then click to publish it. It is now operational and will appear on your website. Customizations are provided so that you can set where it will appear on the webpage and on what portions of the site it will appear. If you have one add-on that should only be available to users who are logged in on your site, then you can specify that.

Security is something that can be addressed quite easily depending on the extent you need for your site. You can customize Joomla with your own security measures or install a number of add-ons that improve the security measures on your site. These can simply consist of IP bans, account authentication, access control and site backups.

The current security measures included with the Joomla installation are quite standard, and allow you to enable SSL protections throughout your site. In addition, you can monitor login history and require content approval to prevent potentially damaging content from being released to the public without your knowledge.

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Setting up Joomla is quite straightforward if you install it through paid hosting. Simply upload the installation files to your root directory, open your browser and go to your website's future URL. This will put you at the start of the installation process. You will need to know the FTP and MySQL login information because this CMS uploads files directly to your hosting server and needs FTP access. It also requires you to set up a database. If you've already set up an FTP account and MySQL database, then you'll breeze through the installation process. After the installation is complete, the software will ask you to delete the installation folder from your hosting server before you can load the administrative interface and start putting your website together.

The interface is quite simple and user-friendly, allowing for easy navigation through the back-end of the site. The benefit of Joomla is that not only can you post new content from the back-end administrator interface, but you can also do this from the front. As mentioned before, once you have gone through the process of publishing content the first time, every time after that will be a breeze.

Joomla offers an extensive library full of documentation. The library is incredibly comprehensive and full of step-by-step instructions for setting up your installation, utilizing different features of the CMS and other support-related content.

Joomla does not offer phone or email support, but its community forums are quite active and will quickly help put you on the right path. Something that is growing more and more typical among CMS communities is the lack of phone and email support. Keep in mind that the developers only created the framework CMS and that the community has done most of the work in developing such a comprehensive product. The Joomla staff doesn't have nearly enough time to help with the majority of support issues, which means you'll need to rely on the community at large to help answer your questions. Odds are they'd be able to respond to your issue faster than most support departments.

Overall, **Joomla** is another great collection of poetic code and features that is used by more than one and a half million websites. It has been described by some as "the designer's CMS" because of the ease with which you can use it to create unique-looking sites. This [content management](#) system software offers developers a stable platform from which to cast plugins, modules and other components, but it also provides plenty of functionality for less technical users who want to create feature-rich sites. Users consider it one of the easiest CMS products to use right "out of the box." With these factors contributing to its success, it's no wonder that there is such a large contributing community to support this project.

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