Project Brief

onCourse CMS redesign

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Introduction

This document outlines the functional, design and user requirements for the new onCourse CMS. It aims to explain the problems with the current system, what we aim to achieve and who we are designing for.

Who are our users?

A small profile of who our most common users for the CMS are.

- Company type – Small to medium organisations

- For the majority of organisations who use our product, the website is their primary public-facing point of contact.

- # of users – Typically the number of users who use the CMS is a fraction to those who use the actual onCourse client.

- Those who have access to the CMS are usually admin staff, or owners/operators if it's a smaller organisation, and even external designers.

- The level of technical skill amongst our users is low to medium. They can use a browser and understand more advanced concepts like editing text boxes. Level of HTML/CSS knowledge is non-existent in most case, but there are a number who know and understand basic HTML.

- Those responsible for using the CMS are often doing these tasks while they are doing other admin work and are often working with limited resources (i.e. time, skill, attention)

What tasks are our users doing?

- Editing informational pages (content that won't change often; policy information, terms and conditions etc.)

- Updating marketing pages (content designed to promote their services. Updated on a regular basis)

- Adding new content (news updates, newsletters, events and special offers. Updated frequently – images and text)

- Modifying the navigation structure of the website

- Some of our more advanced users would like to do more than just add content to an empty page. Feedback from users and from my own observations, people are wanting to do more and more complex things like present information in a table, add video/sound, add images in a more complex manner.

What are some of the problems with the current system?

While the current CMS works well generally, there's a number of problems that users have and a number of things that I've observed from using the system:

- Designs "break" when viewed in admin mode. This means users often need to have 2 windows open (one logged-in window, one regular window) to view the changes made.

- No WYSIWYG (a design choice, not necessarily flaw – is there anything that can be done to achieve a more WYSIWYG-like experience?)

- UI inconsistent. Tabs are mixed in with buttons, prone to unpredictable behaviour (buttons and actions moving around)

- Layouts are not flexible. Can only achieve complex sites by adding custom HTML.

- Error messages are unclear and often user hostile – "There's something wrong with this page. Do you want to save anyway?"

Design Principles

I.   Make the frequent tasks easy to achieve

II.   Make the rare tasks accessible

III. Make it a joy to use

These design principles should help guide to the decisions we make about the user interface and functionality. Frequent tasks like browsing and selecting pages, editing content (images/text) should present no significant barriers to the user. Ideally, the interface should be self-explanatory enough to allow people to achieve these tasks without a great deal of effort.

Rarer tasks, like modifying the nav structure, adding themes, and deleting pages should be kept out of the way but still accessible for people to use.

When I say the CMS should be a joy to use, I mean we should be providing an overwhelmingly positive user experience. People should not have to refer to documentation to do basic things. The use of jargon should be minimised and error messages should be non-threatening. Form fields are big and clear enough for people to select and type. Actions are clear and obvious, and only appear when it's appropriate.

One of the underlying goals we're trying to achieve with this redesign is to reduce the amount of support needed for onCourse Web customers. If we can empower the user to be able to make design/content changes themselves, while minimising the potential for people to break their site, it would be a real boon.

Design Inspiration

A lot of the problems we're trying to solve have already been thought about, so it makes sense to take cues from existing blogging/cms web applications. Such software includes:

- Unify – http://unify.unitinteractive.com/

- Tumblr – http://www.tumblr.com/

- Drupal – http://drupal.org/

- Concrete5 – http://www.concrete5.org/

These are excellent examples of a great user experience, or an interesting implementation of functionality.

What are we wanting to achieve?

This is a list of things we're aiming to achieve with CMS redesign. Some are loose and others are more specific and measurable.

- Make content creation easier.

- Reducing support load for website related tasks.

- Allow for flexibility in creating layouts. Give users a way to manage the styling themselves, beyond initial deployment.

- Improved rich text editor. Interface for adding markup and smart tags.

- Media management. Being able to easily add video/audio/images to a page.

- Creating dynamic content (e.g. news, blog entries, blocks etc.)

- Improved menu building

- Giving users an overall view of their site (improved sitemap, dashboard, analytics)

- Global preferences. Allowing users access to options currently available in WillowAdmin (mailing list, etc)

How do we achieve this?

For early versions of the app, we want to focus on creating and editing pages.

Creating and editing pages

The process for creating a New page within the CMS is.

- Select "New Page" from the dropdown menu

- Assign it a name, hit "Create Page"

- Screen will now refresh to a copy of the page, with content areas highlighted for editing (Yet to be designed)

The search is the other primary feature of the CMS. Aside from browsing the site proper in order to get to pages that a user wants to edit, the search aims to quickly recall pages for editing. The search is activated as soon as text is entered into the input field. The results slide down and are separated by their content type.

Theme creation

The purpose of the theme creator is a way to define unique styles on a per-page basis. These can range from simple; going from a red background color for the front page, to a green for content pages; or the complex; creating a single column directory layout for the front page, 3-column layout for landing pages and 2 columns for content pages.

These themes are not defined by the user. In our initial prototype, we had this idea in mind, but we're scrapping it now.
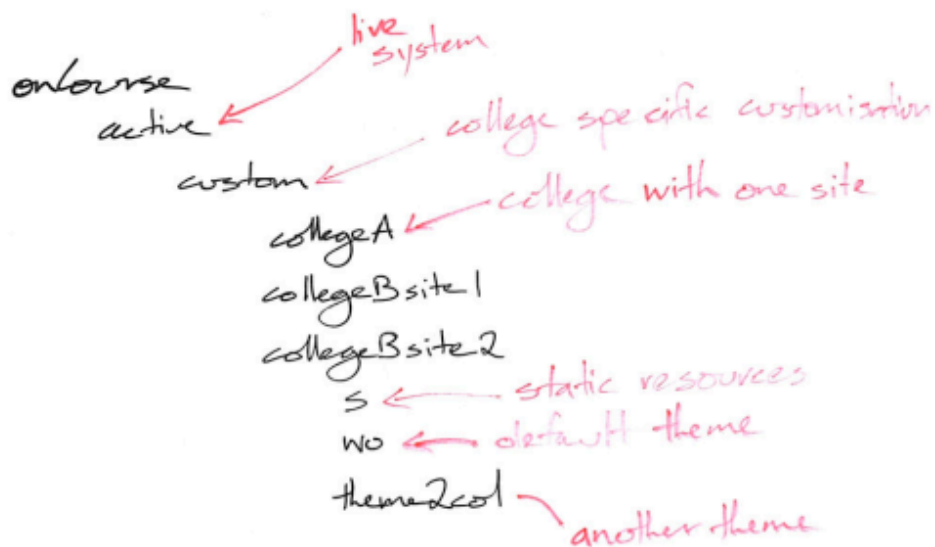
This is the proposed file structure on disk for college level overrides. It will work in a similar way to how it does, with additional themes living under the college directory. All themes will share the same static resources (CSS, Images, Javascript).

Blocks

This will come at a later date.