"Visitor 2 Buyer" module for Joomla!

User's Guide

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this module is to implement a simple idea, to treat new visitors differently than returning ones. It's can increase the number of people who subscribe to your RSS feed, newsletter and generally help you to make people come back to your site.

The idea is implemented in a rather simple manner: new visitors are presented with a message of your liking. After they have visited your site for a few times (you can set how much is that) the message disappears. The counting is done using cookies set on your visitors' browsers, or storing data on the database record of their Joomla! User account if they are registered users.

The main difference of "Visitor 2 Buyer" to cmsmoz.com's free "What would Seth Godin do?" module is the advanced features of this module, including – but not limited to – WYSIWYG editing of the message and eye-catching methods of message presentation. Both modules are developed by the same author, however there are no plans to further maintain "What would Seth Godin do?".

2 Installation

You can install this just like any regular Joomla! module. Log in to your site's administrator section, click on the **Extensions → Install / Uninstall** menu item. Click on the **Browse...** button, select the module package (ZIP) file and click on the **Upload File & Install** button.

3 Visitor 2 Buyer and Joomla! Caching

Depending on your Joomla! caching settings, it might seem that Visitor 2 Buyer is not working properly. The short answer is that while V2B works properly, Joomla! caching options are a bit obscure. There is an [excellent explanation in the Joomla! forum](#), by Anthony Ferrara, a core developer of Joomla!.

To cut a long story short, you must **disable** the "System - Cache" plug-in for V2B to work as expected.

In order to do so, please go to your site's back-end, click on the Extensions → Plugin Manager menu, type "cache" (without the quotes) in the Filter field, hit Go and unpublish the "System – Cache" module.

To give you a better idea of what's going on, Joomla! has two caching mechanisms. The first one is what you configure in the Global Configuration. This caches "objects", that is all the bits that make up your web page such as fully rendered article text, module content, menu items, Joom!Fish translations etc. This is what you *really* need to speed up your site and eliminate redundant database queries for mostly static content.

The other caching mechanism is the "System – Cache" plug-in. It caches whole pages, for non logged-in users. This works well if your site consists of infrequently updated static content (articles) but behaves extremely bad when there is dynamic content, dependent on session data, such as shopping carts, internal advertising (banner ads) or Visitor 2 Buyer's messages! If you have any of these dynamic items, you **must** disable this plug-in. This is an obscure, ill-documented feature of Joomla!.
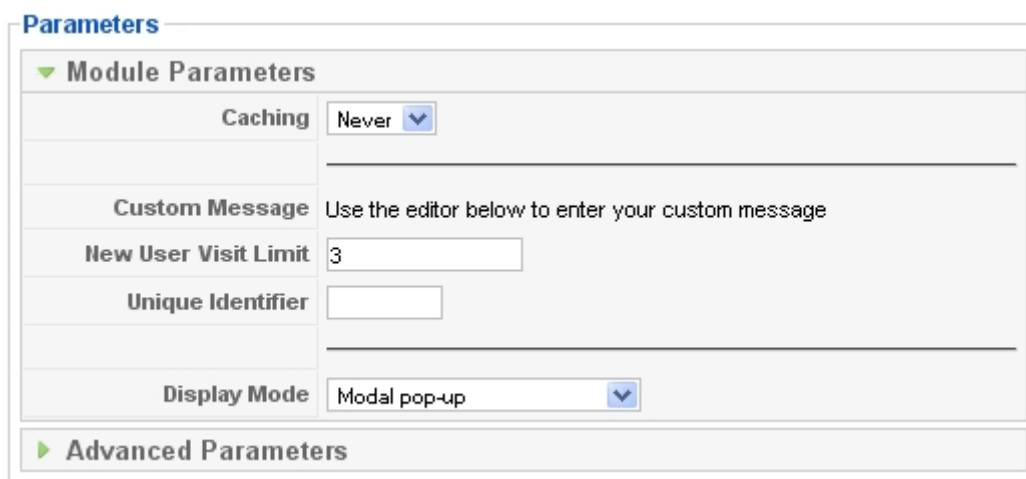
4 Configuration

The module configuration can be performed with the standard Joomla! manner, that is by using the **Extensions → Module Manager** menu and directly editing the "Visitor 2 Buyer" module instance(s).

4.1 Module Details

On the left hand side of the module editor page, you will find the standard Joomla! "Details" section. It is very important to **prevent displaying the title**, by setting the **Show Title** option to *No*. Otherwise, returning visitors will see the module's title, but no module content. This will be confusing for them! The same thing will also happen if you use the modal popup or catfish display modes, which take the message content out of the normal flow of the web page; you'd end up with a module title without any actual module content.

Another important aspect of the Module Details is to use the "Public" access level. You can fine-tune the module display options in the basic module configuration options, presented in the next section.

4.2 Module parameters (basic)


Picture 4.1: Module parameters (basic)

The basic parameters can be found on the right hand side of the module editor, under the "Module Parameters" pane heading. They are:

Module Class Suffix. The standard Joomla! module option which allows you to append a custom CSS class for individual module styling. Do note that this is only meaningful if you are using the Default or Yellow Bx display modes. The eye-catching Modal and Catfish modes use a completely different approach for delivering the message, using Javascript and a CSS styling of their own.

Caching. This is always set to "None". It instructs Joomla! To not cache the contents of this module, as it has to be calculated upon each and every page load. Make sure you have also read the "Visitor 2 Buyer and Joomla! Caching" section above!

Custom message. Please use the WYSIWYG text area on the bottom of the page to enter your custom message. It can be found by scrolling to the end of the module editor page. You can write your message just like you would enter any other article. This means that you can use full formatting, insert pictures and embedded objects or use any content plug-in you have installed on your Joomla! site. V2B will render the message as if it was an article.

The WYSIWYG editor looks like this:
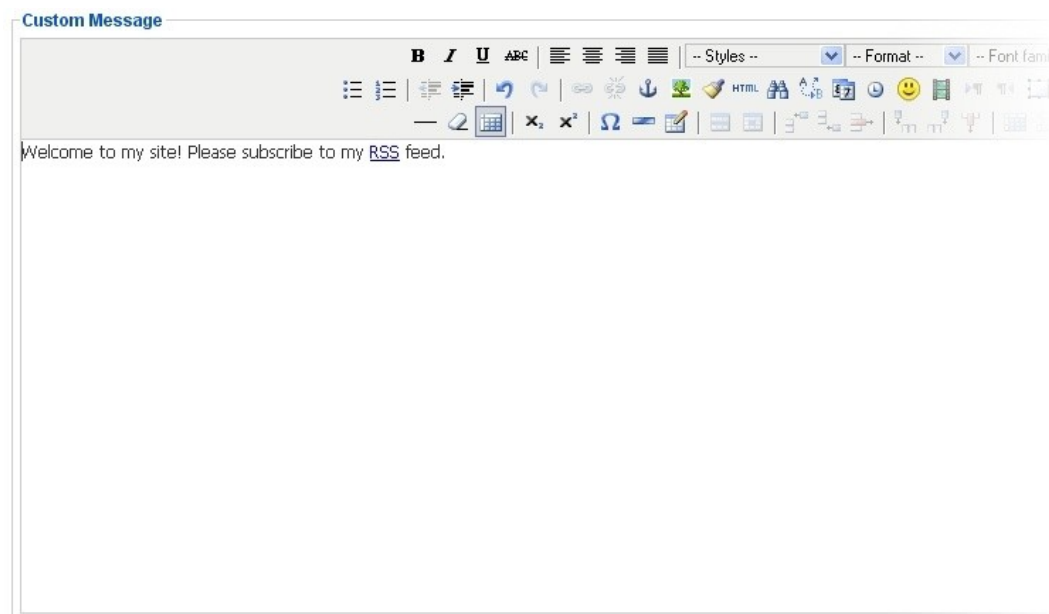
Picture 4.2: The WYSIWYG (visual) editor for the custom message

New user visit limit. This options determines up to how many visits on your site V2B will consider a user "new" and, therefore, display him the message. This number is inclusive. For example, if you enter "3" here, the first three times a user visits your site he will be considered "new" and shown the message. The fourth time he comes back to you, he won't be shown the message.

A note on visit limit counting is in order here. Multiple visits performed in the same calendar date (according to your site's server clock) and within the same visiting session[1] do not count towards this limit. For example, if someone visits your site 5 times in, let's say Monday, 2 times in Wednesday and 4 times in Thursday, he will only be counted as having performed 3 visits, not 11 visits. This is on the grounds that most people might find you from a search engine, visit your site, accidentally wander off your page and re-visit using the search engine's link or their browser's back button. As they haven't really had the chance to familiarize themselves with your site, counting this behavior as two visits would make your message disappear too soon to be effective.

For guest users – those who have not yet logged in – their visiting and session information is recorded using cookies on their browsers. When these cookies expire, or if they clean up their cookies or even switch a computer/browser, they will be considered new users. On the other hand, logged in users have their visiting information recorded in the site's database, along the rest of their user data. As a result, their visiting information never expires and persists between different browsers and computers.

Unique identifier. This is an advanced option which comes in handy should you need to use more than one module instances. You can enter any text here, acting as a unique "identity" for this V2B instance. V2B module instances with the same unique identifier share their visiting data.
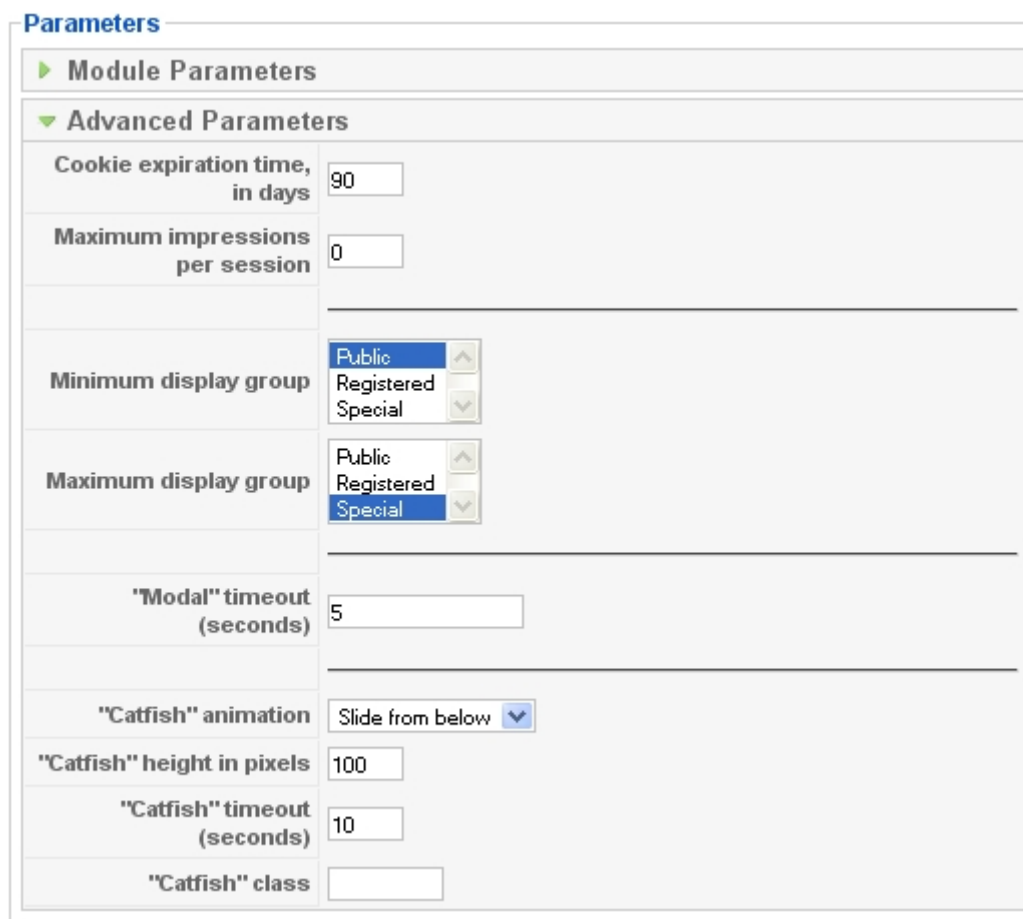
An example works better. Let's say you want to have two unrelated V2B instances, one for your articles area and one for your downloads area, each one with a different message. You want someone who has visited your downloads area ten times but not your articles area yet to be shown the articles area message, prompting him to subscribe to your articles' RSS feed. In this case, you can create two V2B module instances. The first one will be used in the articles area and you will use

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1   Strictly speaking, Joomla! starts a session upon visiting the site for the first time. The expiration time of the session is set in the Global Configuration. If the session expires between subsequent visits within the same day, these visits *will* count towards the New user Visit Limit.

a unique identifier of "articles". The other one will be used in the downloads area and you will use a unique identifier of "dlarea". Presto! These two modules will work and track visiting information independently.

Display mode. This setting determines the way the message will be formatted and delivered to your site's new visitors. Please take a look at the "Display modes" section for more information.

4.3 Advanced parameters

Picture 4.3: Advanced parameters

The Advanced Parameters can be found on the right hand side of the module editor, under the "Module Parameters" pane heading.

4.3.1   General settings

Cookie expiration time, in days. The visiting information tracking cookie is sent to your users' browsers with an expiration date. This means that if someone hasn't visited your site for at least that much days (by default it's 90 days, about three calendar months), they will be considered a new user and shown the custom message. This setting has *no effect on logged-in users*, as their visiting tracking information is stored in the database, not in browser cookies and, therefore, does not expire.

Maximum impressions per session. This setting defines the number of times the custom message will be displayed on each user's visit. If you leave it blank, or set it to zero, the custom message will

be displayed on each and every page the user views during a browsing session. If you set it to a non-zero number, the custom message will be displayed in the first x pages during a user's session, where x is the setting of this parameter. For example, if you set it to 3, the custom message will be displayed in the first 3 pages a user views during his browsing session on your site. If he visits a fourth, fifth, etc page, the message won't be displayed.

Do not that the "*New User Visit Limit*" setting takes precedence over this feature. Simply put, if a user is not considered a "new user" he won't be displayed the message anyway.

4.3.2   User group settings

The Visitor 2 Buyer can be configured to display the custom message based on the user belonging to either of the three Joomla! User categories: Public (non logged-in users), Registered (users with front-end access) and Special (users with back-end access).

With the basic module parameters it is possible to display the module to at least one of those groups. So, if you assign a module Public access, everybody will see it, including guests, users with front-end access and users with back-end access. In our opinion, this is very restrictive. Many times you'd wish that the message would be displayed to your guests only, but not your registered users. This can be accomplished with the "**Minimum display group**" and "**Maximum display group**" settings.

The **Minimum display group** defines the lowest user category to view the custom message, whereas the **Maximum display group** defines the highest user category to view the custom message.

Let's say you want to show a message only to guests. Set both options here to "Public". If you want to show a message to all users *except* guests, set the minimum to "Registered" and the maximum to "Special". If you want to show a message to everybody, no matter what, set the minimum to "Public" and the maximum to "Special".

4.3.3   jQuery loading options

JQuery library source. V2B is using the jQuery Javascript library for delivering its eye catching Modal and Catfish display modes. Depending on the setting of this option, the library can be loaded from a variety of places:

- **Google AJAX API**. Loads jQuery 1.3.2 from Google's AJAX API content delivery network. The benefit of this approach is that many other sites do likewise, so there is a good chance that your user's browser cache already contains this file, speeding up the load time of your site.

- **Local**. Uses the local copy of jQuery 1.3.2 distributed with V2B. This is the recommended setting because the included jQuery library is automatically put in "compatibility mode" so that it doesn't interfere with other Javascript libraries, e.g. MooTools which is widely used core Joomla! extensions, as well as several Joomla! templates. If your site seems to have "broken" Javascript-related functionality after activating a VMT module, make sure you have selected this option!

- **None**. Does not attempt to load the jQuery library. You must use this if and only if there is another Joomla! extension which has already loaded jQuery beforehand. If you select this option and your custom message doesn't get displayed, you have to select either of the other two options.

4.3.4   Modal display mode settings

Modal timeout (seconds). When using V2B in the modal pop-up display mode, it is possible that your visitors will get confused when they see the site content grayed out and the message in the center of the screen. When you set this option to a non-zero value, the modal dialog will automatically close after this amount of time has elapsed since it was first displayed. For example, if you set this to 5, then five seconds after the modal pop-up dialog is displayed it will automatically close and your visitors will be able to work with your site. Set this option to 0 to force the visitors to manually close the pop-up by clicking on its "X" button on the top right corner.

4.3.5   Catfish display mode settings

"Catfish" Animation. Controls the animation when displaying the catfish banner. The possible options are:

- **None**. No animation, the catfish simply appears in view.
- **Slide from below**. The catfish banner slides into view from the bottom of the browsing window. Recommended.
- **Fade**. The catfish banner gradually fades into view.

"Catfish" height in pixels. Controls the height of the catfish banner. By default it's 100 pixels. Do not set to anything lower than 50, as there must be enough room for your message and the close button. If you have a big message, or tall content (e.g. an image), you can increase it. You may have to apply some trial and error to get it "right".

"Catfish" timeout in seconds. The catfish banner, by default, stays into view as long as your visitors are on your site's page, unless they click the "Close" link on its lower left corner. If you set this to a non-zero value, the banner will automatically disappear after this amount of time has elapsed. Leave blank or set to zero to disable auto-disappearance of the catfish banner.

"Catfish" class. For advanced users only. The banner itself is rendered as an HTML `div` element. If you don't like the default gradient look, you can apply your own CSS class. Do note that the height – and only the height – is automatically controlled by the height setting above; any override in the CSS class definition will be disregarded.

4.4 Display modes

Visitors 2 Buyer allows you to deliver the message in an assortment of display modes. They vary from subtle to obtrusive. You can choose the one which better fits the purpose of your site. The following sections will explain and showcase how each display mode affects the presentation of the message.

All of the following examples display the default message (stock V2B installation option), on the a default site created with the Joomla! 1.5 sample content. The module was set up to be displayed in the `user1` module position, without a title. No custom formatting was applied.

4.4.1   Default

The "Default" display mode is the simplest of all. It just outputs your custom message, exactly as it appears in the WYSIWYG editor, without any special formatting. It is mostly suggested for custom-formatted messages, including rich media or output from other modules/plug-ins. Otherwise, it might be too subtle to be noticed.
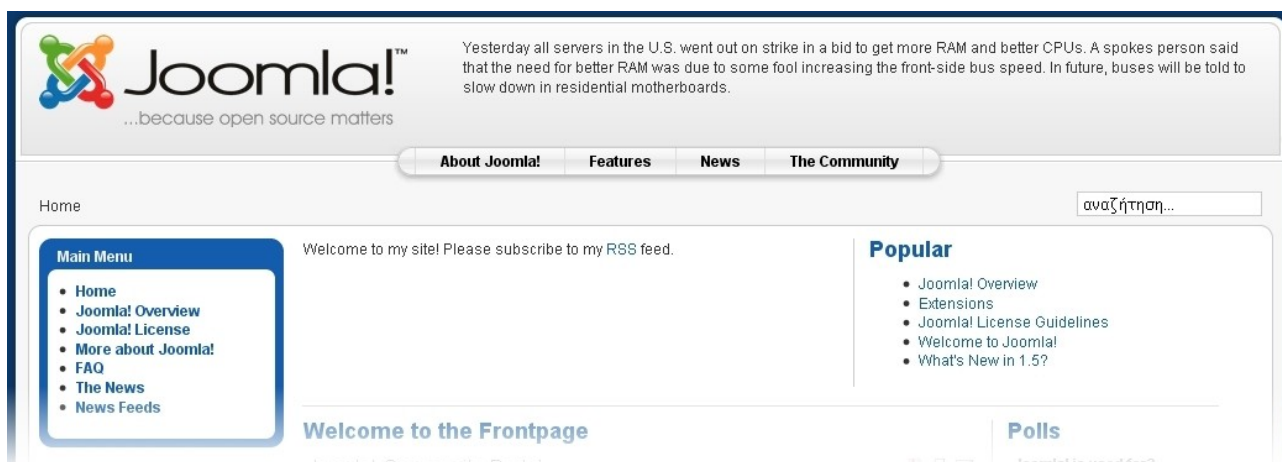
Illustration 4.1: The Default display mode

As you can see, the default message is barely noticeable below the site's top menu, just to the right of the Main Menu.

4.4.2 Red box with yellow background

This display mode is a high visibility layout, useful for easily catching they eye of your visitors without being too intrusive. It delivers your message wrapped inside an HTML `div` element with a yellow background a medium thickness red border. This resembles the color combination used in traffic warning signs and works best with light themes and simple custom messages which do not include images or output from other modules.
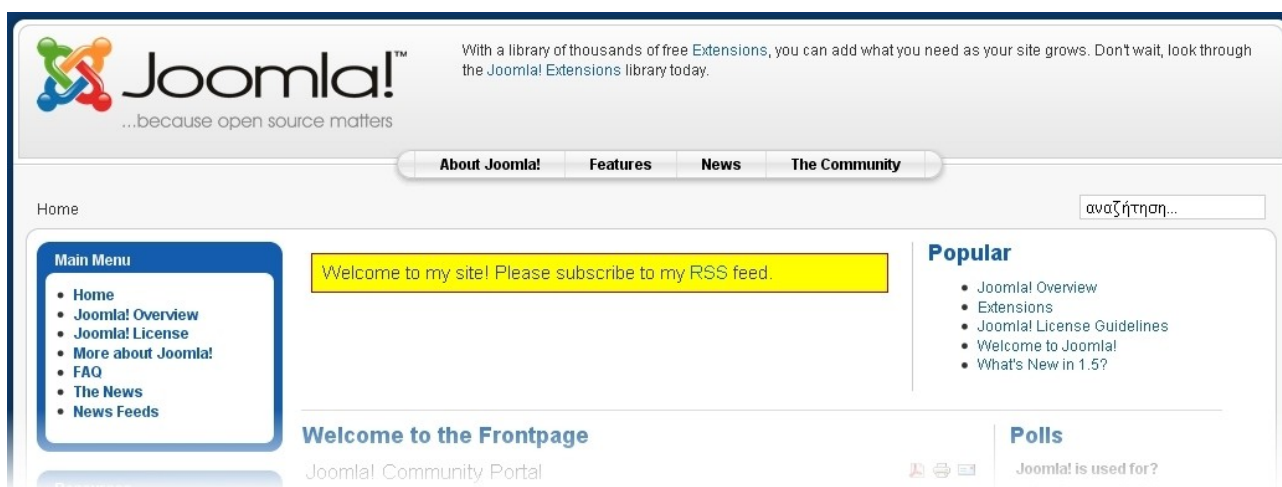

Illustration 4.2: The "yellow box with red border" display mode

4.4.3 Modal pop-up

The Modal Pop-up display mode is a very effective – and obtrusive – way to deliver your message. As soon as your page loads, the message appears in a so-called Lightbox effect. This means that the site's content is faded out and a pop-up box, with your message in it, appears in the center of the browser content area. Depending on your settings, the modal pop-up can either close by itself, or require the user to click on the "X" button on the top right-hand corner of the box.
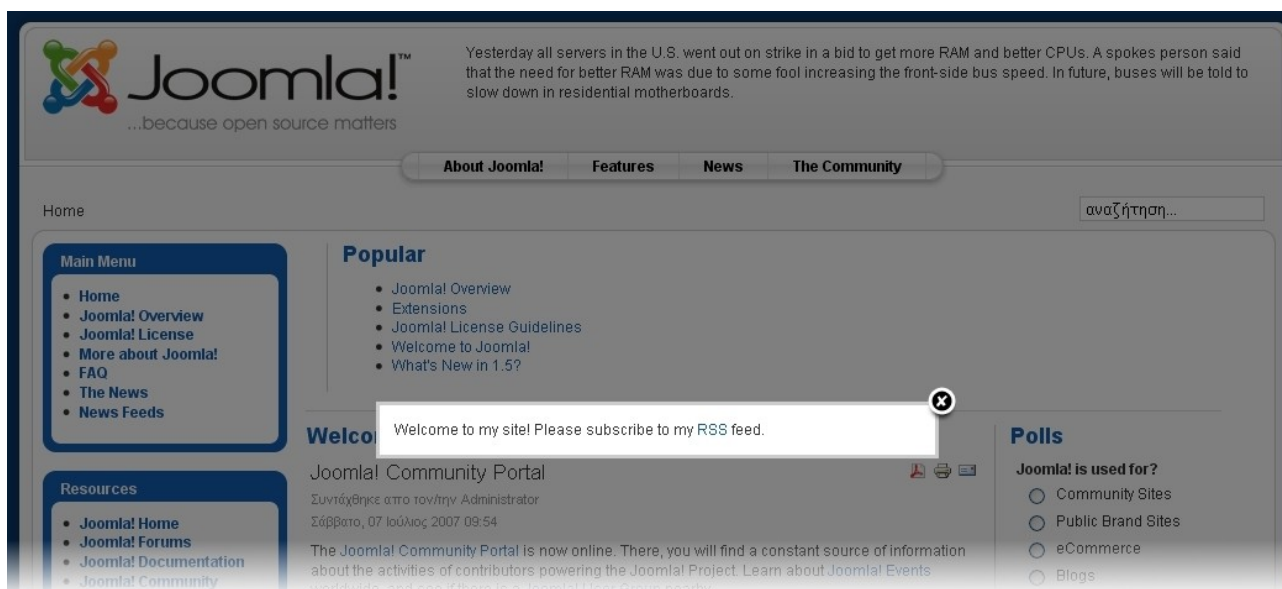
Illustration 4.3: The "Modal Pop-up" display mode

If you use this option, it highly recommended it to use the auto-close feature and limit the number of pages this message will be shown, using the "Maximum impressions per session" option.

4.4.4   Catfish

The "Catfish" display mode delivers your message in a subtle, yet highly visible, banner stretching at the bottom of the browsing window. Unlike a footer, it can't be scrolled out of view; it's stickied in place. This works best for messages prompting the user to perform an action – for example register in a newsletter – or for messages about special offers on your site.
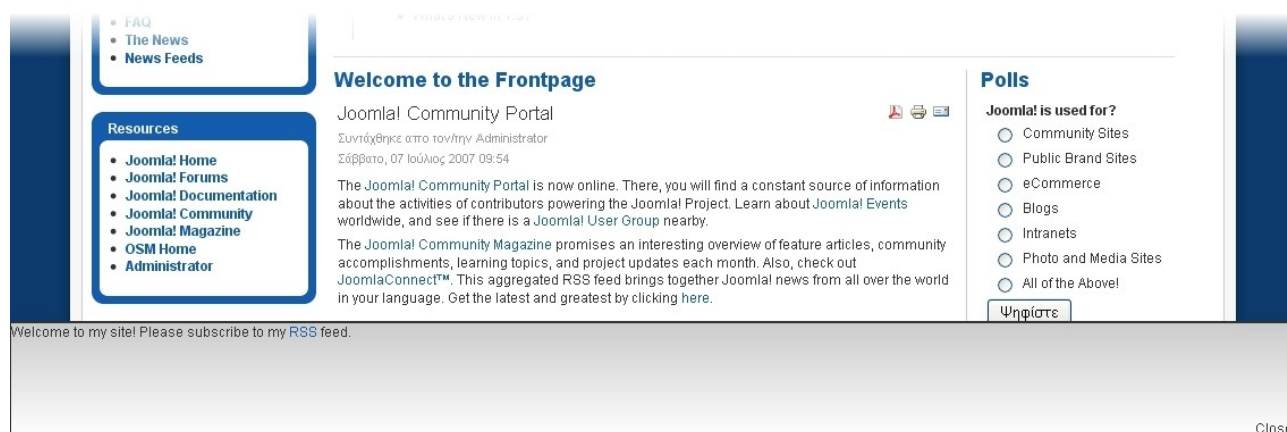

Illustration 4.4: The "Catfish" display mode

We highly recommend you to spend some time on formatting your custom message to better integrate with the default Catfish banner's background, or design your own style and enforcing it with the "Catfish class" module option.

5 License

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5.1 Copyright Notice

"Visitor 2 Buyer" module for Joomla!, version 1.1

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6 About us

6.1 About the author

Nicholas K. Dionysopoulos is a Greek 28 years-old Mechanical Engineer turned PHP developer, specializing in Joomla! extensions. He is the architect and lead developer of the now-famous Open Source JoomlaPack site backup component. In his spare time he enjoys spending time with family, doing geeky stuff on his Linux boxes, talking politics and playing the guitar. You can always reach him through the JoomlaPack Forum, by sending a PM to user "*nicholas*".