

Content management systems; Taking a closer look.

Content management systems allow the owner of a web site to manage its content internally. These tools are very powerful and work effectively to eliminate expensive (and often slow) web designers and developers.

On the other hand, content management systems come with a high price tag! Rest assured that like any other product that sounds too good to be true, content management systems “come up short” on a number of fronts.

Throughout this article we will explore the short falls of content management systems and provide you with information and some “pointers” to keep in mind when purchasing or implementing a content management system.

Template or no template?

Many content management systems are pre-developed and provide little alternative to using a template based web site. To put it to you simply; you select a template, they throw in your logo and corporate colours, you throw in the content and You are off and running! However, you now have a web site similar to hundreds of others in style, design and functionality.

Alternatively consider this case scenario: You have a web site, into which you have invested considerable time and money and you are reasonably happy with. It is important to note that many of these pre-developed systems or templates we have been discussing, will require you to “abandon” that very web site into which you have invested considerable time, money and are reasonably happy with. Basically you must start the process all over again!

Thus, lets be reasonable. If you have already invested substantially in your web site, this is not a viable option. So, the lesson learned; Keep your eye out for content management systems that specify “Easy and fast integration over existing web sites”.

Are you going to use all the bells and whistles?

Content management systems come with loads of functions, but have you stopped to ask yourself: Do I really need a system that requires 5-6 levels of approval before a document is released onto my web site?

If so, then sophisticated content management systems are perfect for you!

If not, it is important that you review all the functions provided in a given content management system and assess whether you, your employees and your company would utilise them. Keep in mind that all the functions, even those, which you have decided, will not be of any use to you, will contribute to the overall price. Do ask the provider of the web management tool, if they can remove functions you feel will not be utilised.

Are you leasing or buying?

One of the biggest concerns with content management systems is whether or not the provider is leasing or selling the system to you. Be aware, as there is an immense difference between the two!

Many content management systems need to run on special configured servers and the provider will often require you to host your web site with them (this involves changing your domain name). If this is the case, you can be sure that you are only leasing the content management system. Thus, if this is the case, consider the following; If your relationship with the provider was to sour or they ceased trading or alternatively you needed to move on, you would not be able to take the system with you. Essentially, this means that you would lose all functionality, time and money invested in training not only your staff but also in setting up processes and procedures. Do discuss this with the provider and read all agreements very closely.

Do not be disheartened, but do be aware that the above arrangement is very popular with web management tool providers. The reason being that, it allows them to develop one system for many customers, and let's face it, the annual or monthly fees it generates make for a good income! It also ensures that your options and choices are limited. Do be very careful with this type of arrangement and make sure you are comfortable with the agreement.

Do you really need to manage every page?

Did you know that utilisation of Content management systems is extremely low? Consider this, how often do you really need to change your "About us" section of the web site? I can guarantee that the investment in a full-scale content management system would not be justified.

Therefore, "do you really need to manage every page?" Answer this question honestly, and if the answer is "No" consider looking for a content management system that allows you to manage the most visited and important areas of your web site. The most visited and most important page is your web sites homepage (by default!). Another very important area of your web site would be the news and events/specials page, as users would be expecting updates here.

By limiting your content management system you can get an insight into the power of these tools without investing ludicrous amounts of money. This will allow you to take a staged approach to full management of your web site if you get to a point where you can justify the need.

What about training?

Training is always last on the "to be discussed list" and as a result, often discarded or forgotten. Please note and action the following; If you are going to invest in a content management system make training a high priority! If you really want the content management system to benefit your business you must invest in having a skilled user run you and your staff through the entire system. Make sure you thoroughly question the

trainer on all aspects of your new system. Training should only be considered complete when you are comfortable that all aspects of the systems have been explored and your company knows how to operate each aspect.

To reiterate the issues/areas of concern let's start with; Most content management systems have been created for very large web sites and for very large budgets. Therefore, identify your needs and requirements and then use this knowledge to match these to a content management system suited to you. Most content management systems will promise the world, however, why would you want the world when all you need is a content management system that will address your specific requirements!

Finally, content management systems are indeed powerful and no business should be without one. Once your business has implemented one you will wonder why you never did it sooner! However, do find a web management tool that suits and meets your specific business needs and requirements.