



Selecting a CMS based on Ease of Use

It's as "easy as pie", or so the expression goes. This expression is confusing because creating pies isn't easy, just as creating web content isn't easy, but every Content Management System claims to make web content management easy.

However, is web content management "ease of use" worth considering during the CMS selection? Is a CMS even necessary for Content Management?

Content Management without a CMS

The ingredients required to create web content include: a web server, an Internet connection, an IP address, a domainname, DNS and an HTML document. Other ingredients can be added, but these are the basics. Arranging these ingredients takes a lot of expertise and time.

It's entirely possible to create web content without a CMS. There are many people who manage their web sites using only a UNIX text editor. However, if all web content needed to be created from scratch, most people would be excluded from online publishing.

Content Management Systems make web content creation accessible to a wider audience by removing complexity from the process. Consequently, ease of use is the primary requirement of any CMS. The easier a system is to use, the more adoption it will gain within the organization.

Evaluating Ease of Use

Measuring CMS ease of use requires an understanding of the tasks that will dominate (and thus define) day-to-day web site management. Tasks are made easier by reducing the amount of training, effort and time needed to achieve maximum results.

Before selecting a CMS, make a list of frequently reoccurring tasks. During CMS evaluations, ask the CMS vendor to demonstrate, in real-time, how these tasks are performed. These tasks can also be tested using software trials or online demos.

Counting clicks or using a stopwatch won't tell the whole story, but it helps gauge the pain involved in a process. Painful processes will be avoided by everyone.

Killing Adoption with Features

The Content Management System is the vehicle for your web site's success. An easy to use CMS will encourage widespread adoption and accelerate the web site's evolution. However, this acceleration creates new problems, specifically steering & braking.

For example, modifying a web page is a basic CMS task. Here is a sample process:

Step 1: Browse to the web page

Step 2: Click Edit

Step 3: Modify the content in the text box

Step 4: Click Save

It's hard to imagine an easier scenario for editing web content. This process is usable by almost anyone and encourages widespread adoption. However, there is no security in this process; anyone can edit content. To counter this risk, security and approvals must be added. Furthermore, to make content discoverable, taxonomies must be used to organize content.

Addressing these challenges require a new process:

Step 1: Browse to the web page

Step 2: Click Edit

Step 3: Login with the required security credentials

Step 4: Modify the content in the text box

Step 5: Explain the motivation for the content edit

Step 6: Update the taxonomies associated with the content

Step 7: Send content for approval

Step 8: Manager receives an email with the proposed draft

Step 9: Pending changes are pushed to production

Step 10: Original editor is notified of approval

This process provides control and oversight, but the number of steps has doubled.

As complexity grows it will become increasingly difficult for anyone to summon the will to engage with the web site. People in the organization will adopt a “don’t rock the boat” attitude. Web site engagement will be a short-lived reaction to high-level manager initiatives.

Painful processes will kill your web site’s momentum. Steering & brakes are useless without momentum.

Keep it Simple and Stupid

Albert Einstein’s maxim was “everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler”.

Introducing additional management steps as a web site evolves will be necessary. However, these new steps should be viewed with extreme caution. Alternatives should be considered and attempted before complicating the core process. For example, inappropriate content edits might be prevented through conversations and training rather than multi-step workflows.

“Any intelligent fool can make things bigger and more complex... It takes a touch of genius - and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction.” – Albert Einstein



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About the Author

Gabe Sumner works as an Evangelist at Telerik, with a focus on the Sitefinity CMS. Gabe has a decade of experience working with web technologies and a passion for helping others understand how to work with these technologies. His long technology career has exposed him to many industries, and he now focuses on sharing these lessons with others.

About Sitefinity

Sitefinity is a modern CMS platform designed to help organizations pursue their online goals. Today the system powers over 10,000 websites worldwide across various industries- from Financial and Government Services, to Communications, Retail, and Entertainment. Thanks to Sitefinity's flexible architecture and scalability, you can create successful commercial websites, community portals or intranets. Sitefinity offers a revolutionary easy-to-use interface, simplicity, scalability and unmatched performance – everything you need, beautifully crafted in one product.

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