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Effective Web Content Management: Empowering the Business User

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Abstract

Managing a Web site in the companies, with today's increased content demand, is challenging. Due to the high visibility of Web sites, a lot of information is being published on the web. With this ever-expanding horizon of the web, the increasing numbers of Web authors, the growing number of visitors, and the growing complexity of the technologies used, content management has become a prime concern. Another factor is the growing need to update the content of the site to keep people interested in coming back.

Content management (CM) solutions can help companies increase the number of repeat visitors and ultimately increase revenues, by offering timelier and more valuable content. Content Management solutions offer Web authoring, editing, and publishing capabilities. These CM solutions are designed to help Web creation and to assist with planning, coordinating, and tracking site changes.

1   Introduction

A Web site is a visitor's first and sometimes, the only exposure to a company or an organization. If the information is incomplete, out-of-date, or just plain boring, visitors may go to a competitor's Web site. As there is a saying in the web industry, "The competitor is just a click away."

Many Web sites have out-of-date content because it is too time-consuming, complicated, or expensive to update. Companies need an affordable and user-friendly Content Management (CM) solution to be successful online.

2   Appropriate Centralization vs. Decentralization of tasks

With the correct CM solution in place, companies can centralize and decentralize tasks by giving the Web developer, systems integrator, or Web site administrator the ability to:

- **Consolidate the storage of data (e.g., all Web site data stored in a database):** A consulting company can build a central database of best practices drawn from its global staff.
- **Decentralize the management of information:** Respective Product development managers can easily provide their product information.
- **Restrict access to some types of knowledge/information:** The Human Resource Department can limit access to employee performance information just to those who "need to know."
- **Permit widespread access to other types of information:** All employees can have access to sick leave policies, messages from the CEO, company newsletters, and similar information.

3   Benefits of using a content management solution

- **Anytime, anywhere Web publishing:** Dynamic Web sites with CM solutions let employees and other contributors change content whenever and wherever necessary. Coordinating a manual updating is difficult

when contributors and Web professionals work at different locations with different schedules.

♦ **Faster updating:** Updating content is faster on a dynamic Web site. Employees in all departments can create new material and then update Web content themselves. Also, business users don't have to learn HTML or other Web scripting languages.

♦ **Audit trail and user authentication:** CM solutions should create audit trails of changes made to the Web site content and also include a user authentication function (e.g., restricting the editing of information to the some users).

♦ **Efficient workflow management:** With a CM solution in place, companies have a mechanism to control authoring, workflow, publishing, and document management functions. New content comes from both content contributors (e.g., content professionals, information publishers, departments, routine updaters, executive messaging, outside sources) and existing corporate databases.

♦ **Eliminate content bottlenecks:** A good content management solution extends the responsibility of updating Web site content to business users. As a result, new content is no longer piled up for Web professionals to publish, thus eliminating an overwhelming content bottleneck.

4   Implementing a content management solution

Companies' collecting content from different sources need new ways to make authorized changes automatically to Web content. With a CM solution, a dynamic Web site, and input from many sources, content is fresher, and timely.

4.1   STATIC WEB SITES

Changing the content of static sites is difficult since text, graphic, and multimedia content usually reside in multiple files (i.e., HTML pages), not in databases, making it cumbersome to change the content on multiple Web pages simultaneously. For example, a company had to change the copyright message at the bottom of 800 pages on its site! Also, attempting to change a static Web page could lead to overwriting of the file or corruption of important non-content areas of the site, such as security code or navigational sections.

Web professionals are usually the only people who can format and control the content on static sites. If business users were allowed to make changes, they might accidentally use a format that was inconsistent with the Web site's format.

4.2   DYNAMIC WEB SITES

In a dynamic Web site once a format is created, content contributors can change the text, graphics, audio, and video content. Companies can first separate the look and feel (structure) from the actual content by storing the content in a database and by using a Web application server to generate Web pages. See Figure 1.
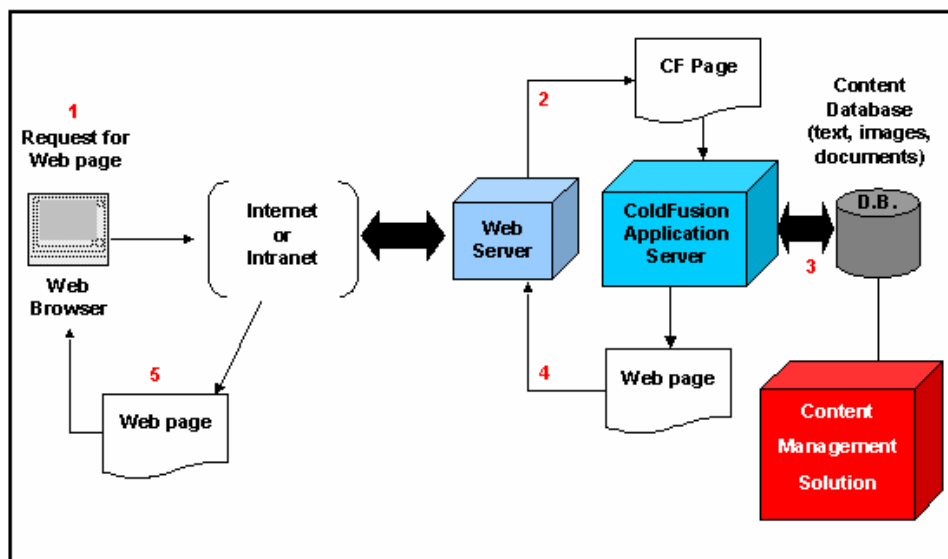

Fig.1: Dynamic Web site with Allaire's ColdFusion application server

The dynamic Web site process in Figure 1 begins with requesting through a Web browser (1) for a Web page through the network either Internet or Intranet. The request is passed through the Web server (2) with a ColdFusion (CF) (template) page being sent to the CF application server. The database (3) content is queried. Next, the CF application server generates a Web page (4) essentially by merging the CF template page with the content and sending it back to the Web server. The system then sends the modified CF page back through the network, serving it as an HTML page (5) to the browser who requested the Web page.

The combination of a CM solution with a dynamic Web site empowers business users to update the web site by putting a workflow and publishing process in place, using standard network components. They can view and evaluate the modifications as and when they make the changes. Web site administrators assign user privileges such as, create, edit, delete, restore, view and publish to various sections of the site, while enforcing a standard look and feel across the Web site.

5   Benefits of using a content management solution

5.1   COMPANY BENEFITS

- Increased involvement of the employees in Web site publishing throughout the company.
- Reduced risk of losing customers, because of updated Web content.
- Increased productivity, resulting from quicker access to essential information and documents.
- Increased collaboration and teamwork, by providing an effective mechanism for presenting multiple points of view.
- Easier access to latest information.

5.2 BUSINESS USER BENEFITS

- **Zero learning curve:** Allows update of content using Web browser interface e.g., Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator.
- **Access to instant publishing:** Allows people to make changes and publish live within minutes.
- **Site consistency:** Enforces compliance with corporate publishing standards such as layout, font size and background color.

5.3 WEB DEVELOPER BENEFITS

- Eliminates workflow bottleneck by shifting responsibility from overworked IT staff to non-technical people.
- Provides "anytime anywhere" access for administration of content management solution.
- Reduces time and cost for training content contributors.

5.4 WEB SITE VISITOR BENEFITS

- Provides visitors access to a timely and valuable content.
- Encourages repeat site visits because of updated content.

6   Conclusion

Businesses and organizations currently using a dynamic Web site (or planning to upgrade their static site to dynamic) can consider implementing a CM solution. With an appropriate solution in place, employees and vendors can contribute content, and Web professionals maintain the site's look and feel.

The objective is to provide a process, whereby timely and updated content encourages visitors to stay longer and make frequent repeat visits to the site. Content management solution provides up-to-date and relevant Web content, which increases the customer's satisfaction and loyalty.

7   Reference

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