



Dynamics of Empowerment

By John Reiss

Marketing directors throughout New England believe that their company's Internet presence (e.g., Web site, intranet, or extranet) is one of the most valuable components of their marketing strategy, according to a recent survey conducted by Barrett Communications.

Visitors to your sites—whether they're customers, prospects, partners, employees, investors, your sales force, or the press—are seeking the most current and accurate information about your company and its products or services. Therefore, it is extremely important that the information be updated regularly.

If the information on your Web site is processed the traditional way, then all requests for deletions, additions, and updates from numerous departments (e.g., HR, PR, IR, sales) are funneled through one or more webmasters, who need to make the necessary changes page by page and then upload the files to your Web server. Depending on the size or growth rate of your company, these requests pile up and result in a so-called "webmaster bottleneck." This backlog can cause delays and confusion—and could thus jeopardize the integrity and accuracy of your site.

Avoiding the bottleneck

For businesses experiencing this Webmaster backlog, a content management system (CMS) is a cost-efficient and flexible solution. It gives authorized individuals the ability to perform simple Web-based publishing tasks and requires little or no HTML knowledge. Often referred to as dynamic or data-driven publishing, a CMS allows Web content (text, images, audio, video, etc.) to be added, deleted, and edited—securely and expeditiously—from any location with Internet access.

Why a CMS?

Data-driven sites are extremely malleable and efficient. Web pages are pulled together on a designated server by combining custom graphic templates with editable content files, and delivering them to the end user's browser as a seamless Web site. As a result, content updates can be applied to any number of pages throughout the site.

In addition to flexible and easy up-to-the-minute content updates, the benefits of a CMS include:

- *Improved ROI.* Web development costs are significantly reduced because updates require less time and can be handled in-house by numerous staff members (not just webmasters).
- *Accuracy, integrity, and control.* Password-protected workflow stages and clearly defined user rights ensure content accuracy and integrity.
- *Personalization.* Opt-in data or cookies are used to customize content on-the-fly according to end user preferences, while tags and metadata permit browsing and searching capabilities
- *Scalability.* Servers can be programmed to host an infinite number of content pages and support multiple levels of traffic volumes.
- *Mobile editing.* Allows your traveling sales teams and various office locations to post updates from any Internet connection.



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Which CMS is right for you?

There are many content management systems available today; finding the right one can be challenging. When reviewing your options, compare the benefits of an off-the-shelf package to those of a custom system—and beware of hidden charges, annual licensing agreements, and third-party requirements. Pay specific attention to workflow capabilities and site scalability—often the difference between an inexpensive and a valuable CMS. Most important, make sure all of your needs have been addressed.

Barrett Communications builds individual CMS systems from the ground up. There are no packaged prices or discounts to draw you in. Cost is simply determined by your goals and objectives, and the level of functionality required. The following questions are important in determining cost:

- How many editable sections and/or pages are needed?
- What level of editability is required? In addition to content updates, do you want the ability to add, delete, and modify entire sections?
- What degree of workflow capabilities do you need? Do you need a simple staging environment for content approval or a devote computer system that allows for multiple checkpoints and versioning?

“Content, content, content.” It’s a phrase that is often used to remind us of what is most valuable on our Web sites. The process of managing Web content affects the bottom line of every company. If you’re currently experiencing webmaster bottleneck and would like to learn more about content management systems, Barrett’s interactive department can prescribe a custom solution designed to meet your needs and budget.