
Web Content Management Software: your lawyer's best friend

Can you really afford to ignore the content of your web site past or present?

Uffe Lindahl, Marketing Director at digital asset and web content management specialist, Picdar, explains that such technologies are in increasing demand – not just for their traditional workflow and cost benefits, but also to act as an important archive facility.

If someone mounted legal proceedings against you or your organisation as a result of the content of your web site or the capability of your e-commerce operation, past or present, how confident are you that you are equipped with the appropriate information and technology to deal with it effectively?

Like any other legal dispute, you would need credible, tangible evidence to successfully defend yourself and your company. As experienced publishers and printers, you already understand the legal connotations of presenting information in print, and many of you now also replicate some of your printed material on the Web, or have a general company web site. Online, many of the copyright and trading issues are actually the same, but don't seem to be as closely policed...yet.

We all recognise that the modern business environment is continuing to evolve. The paperless office is fast becoming reality with information already presented, stored and communicated electronically for many of us day-to-day. In addition to this, more and more of our organisations' most important assets are now digital - from images and data to marketing collateral, packaging designs and of course, the content of your web site.

Having an effective, accurate, timely and well maintained web site or e-commerce operation has become par for the course these days, with the days of online brochureware largely coming to an end. Corporate web sites, online news services and other publishing sites are updated very regularly. Try to imagine the enormous volume of information, different updates, amendments or transactions that have passed through your web site since its inception.

I'd wager that at least thousands-of-days-worth of cyber time have already been broadcast, and even with strict quality control measures in place, how realistic is it to expect that there has never been an editorial or 'publishing' error in that time? A simple typing mistake, information reproduced from other sources in good faith, or even complete misinformation? Can you imagine the implications of broadcasting someone's private phone number on your web site by mistake? Believe me, it has happened, with frightening consequences. The Data Protection Act is there to protect people's personal data in such circumstances, and the penalties, if not the adverse publicity, are severe.

Existing laws that govern sales of products and services apply equally to on-line trading, so imagine the implications of publishing incorrect pricing information. If we

reference the Sale of Goods Act, we can see that consumers also have basic statutory rights relating to goods they buy, and many more of them are doing it via the Internet, or at least referencing information on the web before they make a purchase. Copyright and defamation are equally important issues for the same reason.

These issues have extremely worrying ramifications for every organisation – not only in terms of the cost of dealing with any potential legal proceedings in real time and money, but more importantly in the reputation of your organisation. As a marketing man, I know the importance of maintaining a reputable brand, particularly where the web is concerned. In the publishing industry, you will understand the importance of accuracy and the ability to check sources of information better than most - and the web significantly increases the margin for error.

It has never been more important to employ some kind of web content management solution, or at least a web archive to control the content publishing lifecycle, including the assembly, publication, and expiry of content. An effective site control system should provide an audit trail of all changes to a site or even a single page that could prove essential to successfully defending yourself in legal circumstances, or at least arming you with the appropriate facts before disputes get that far. Good web content management software will also allow your site to be viewed and navigated, as well as providing site access statistics, key wording, size control, go live/dead dates and automatic revision roll-over. It will be critical to be able to reference what has previously appeared on your web site and over what period it appeared. In addition, it will be important to access this information quickly and easily.

Spanning the entire gamut from asset storage and control, through intelligent content delivery, to site administration and monitoring, the good web content management software should turn the whole jigsaw into a set of perfectly matched pieces.

We've certainly seen a rising priority for it from our customers who consider it a false economy to go without, and our web content management suite does all of these things. Content is managed and re-purposed using our Active Content Layer, which can power bespoke web applications or provide "traditional" page composition using templates and separate content. Site design is completely flexible, and our extensive range of Application Building Cogs (ABCs) provide ready-built tools for everything from shopping baskets to e-commerce. Being channel-neutral, it can deliver to, for instance, WAP and DiTV, as easily as the more traditional WWW.

Site administration and monitoring is handled by our Site Control System, which allows every site to be managed from one place. Site development is further aided using best-of-breed authoring tools such as Adobe® GoLive® and Macromedia Dreamweaver. Designed to work together, all of the elements of the suite provide an end-to-end solution to web content storage, management and delivery.

At the hub of the web content management suite is our digital asset management system, which stores text, pictures and any other kind of digital asset. This hugely scalable system has a proven track record with major blue-chip companies and allows assets to be stored centrally, or distributed reliably across multiple sites. Assets can be accessed from anywhere, but the built-in security system ensures that only those authorised can do so.

A great example of web content and digital assets well managed is the Mirror Group of Newspapers. Uk-press.com, which is hosted by us, contains a fully searchable text database of own-copyright articles from The Mirror, The Sunday Mirror, The People,

the Daily Record and The Sunday Mail. However, they not only archive and manage their digital assets exceptionally well, but they treat them as a commercial opportunity. Through the recently re-launched Mirrorpix.com they've created an enriched on-line image database that benefits both commercial and consumer buyers of images. Mirrorpix.com hosts an extensive picture library containing close to 300,000 images that can be purchased on-line for either business or private use. From cartoons to e-postcards, selected assets from right across the Mirror Group have been made available to the public for just a few pounds...via the Web.

Whatever your specific business, can you really afford to ignore the content of your web site past or present? It should, and can be managed exceptionally well as a matter of priority. Although it may sound like a daunting task, with the right advice it can actually be quite straight forward, and a very reassuring and rewarding process – in many ways.

Picdar – Rediscover everything you have

Established in 1984, Picdar is the market leader in Digital Asset Management (DAM) and Content Management systems. Whether for conventional or new media publishing, Picdar's solutions help companies to benefit from the efficient management and re-purposing of digital rich media.

With Picdar's systems, customers can optimise internal processes and resources in addition to achieving significant reductions in the time spent searching for files. Picdar's systems allow users to reuse digital assets for original and new purposes - for example in media for which they were not initially created.

Picdar remains committed to excellent customer satisfaction through superior product performance and exceptional service. It has a blue chip customer base that includes Trinity Mirror, The Telegraph, The Economist, Thomson Travel Group, BBC and Hasbro.

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