CMS Utilization & Recommendation

An evaluation of available Open Source Content Management Systems for acquisition & use by Lynnwood Bowl & Skate

This report presents the research and recommendation of available Open Source-based Content Management Systems (CMS) for use by Lynnwood Bowl & Skate as a web development and CMS management tool.

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March 14, 2013

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Management Summary

The client, Lynnwood Bowl & Skate, (LBS) is small business located in Lynnwood, WA. In addition to offering a bowling and skating venue for the local community, it offers a variety of other entertainment services including: rock wall climbing, event hosting and lounge & dining options.

This report is in response to a request by the client, Lynnwood Bowl & Skate, to identify and evaluate several of the predominant Content Management Systems (CMS) available. The client has also requested a recommendation, based on that analysis, of the CMS that should be utilized as a website development and CMS management tool for their business website. This goal of this report three-fold:

1. Provide a broad overview of the client's website and CMS business requirements (sidebar). These parameters will serve as the basis for the criteria of the analysis & recommendation.

2. Evaluate three of the predominant Open Source CMS' for suitability of use as the website & CMS development tool.

3. Based on this evaluation, make a recommendation to client of the CMS most suited to meet their requirements.

In the conclusion, I state my opinion that, based on the goals, criteria and subsequent evaluation developed through this report, my recommended option for a CMS is Wordpress.

Criteria of client website & CMS requirements
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The website and CMS business requirements of the client are primarily informational: The primary goal of the client is to provide information about the various recreational services they offer.

In addition, to information about bowling & skating, they wish to include functionality for a calendar of events, a blog and photo gallery detailing customer's experiences, forms for making reservations & joining a mailing list to receive information about special events & coupons, info regarding event hosting, a schedule of upcoming lounge entertainment, and the lounge menu.

Content Management Systems Evaluated

Because of the client's expressed preference for Open Source CMS applications, this report focused solely on those applications. There are a large number of open source CMS options available. This report limits its evaluation to the three most widely used and well developed; *Drupal*, *Joomla!* and *Wordpress*.

Other applications; such as *Radiant CMS, Concrete5, Xoops*, were investigated and would, in all likelihood, meet the client's needs. However, these smaller systems generally offer fewer module options as well as documentation that is less developed and comprehensive therefore they were deemed less suitable for the client's needs

Drupal – www.drupal.org

According to their website, Drupal is currently in use by nearly one million people worldwide. It has over 24,000 developers, 20,000 modules and 1,600 themes[1]. The primary advantage of Drupal is its robust ability to build complex sites. Organizations that require complex data coordination; community platforms that hosts multiple users and online stores are good examples of those for whom Drupal would be a good option[2]. In addition, Drupal is supported by an excellent documentation and a vibrant user/professional support[3].

Unfortunately, like most powerful tools, the ability to agilely program within the Drupal framework requires some expertise and experience. Were the technical requirements and coding skills of the client more advanced, Drupal might be a good option. However, given the limited requirements of the web/CMS, the limited skillset of the client and their lack of budget for contracting a professional programmer. Drupal is probably too complex for their needs & abilities.

Sample website: http://www.fastcompany.com/

Joomla! – www.joomla.org

Joomla is an award-winning[4] content management system (CMS)[4]. Joomla's website claims that it has been downloaded more than 35 million times[5]. Like Drupal, it offers thousands of extensions and designs and is backed by a strong user committee. Although less complex than Drupal, Joomla! is none-the-less a powerful application that offers the ability to create complex sites with a "relatively uncomplicated installation and setup" and a correspondingly smaller investment of effort to master its structure and terminology[2]. This combination has made Joomla! the most popular Web site software available[6].

Joomla! would be an excellent choice and would be a likely candidate as a recommendation. Like Drupal, Joomla! does offer functionality in terms of e-commerce options. However, this is functionality that the user is unlikely to require. Additionally, there is still a learning curve -- albeit smaller one -- to be overcome, and taken with the client's stated desire to avoid coding requirements in the management of the CMS, Joomla! is be my secondary recommendation.

Sample website: http://www.ihop.com

Wordpress – www.wordpress.org

Begun in 2003, the original focus of Wordpress was as a tool for designing and developing blog sites[7]. Although that is still a major focus of the project, the Wordpress application has expanded greatly to include the development of a wide variety of website types. Although the number of users is quite large, the corresponding diversity of functionality is more limited than either Drupal or Joomla!. One great advantage of employing Wordpress is that it is explicitly designed for the technical novice. No programming or coding experience is assumed or required in order to build and manage a WP-based website[2]. For example, text can be 'cut and paste' from a Word document directly into a Wordpress site. This ability is more difficult with Drupal and Joomla[2].

Sample website: http://www.nasa.gov/centers/ames/home/index.html

Estimated CMS Setup and Maintenance Costs

An additional and important factor when considering the implementation of a web development and content management system is the cost, both in terms of initial setup and ongoing maintenance costs. Although the selection of an Open Source system does reduce – but not necessarily eliminate – the cost of system acquisition, costs associated with system setup and management must be evaluated.

Below is a table developed by comentum.com showing the estimated setup and average monthly maintenance cost of each of the discussed CMS applications[8].

Average Setup Cost and Maintenance

Below are average setup and maintenance cost for Drupal, Joomla and WordPress:

	Drupal	Joomla	WordPress
Average Setup and Customization Cost*	$5,000 - $50,000	$2,000 - $20,000	$250 - $15,000
Average Monthly Maintenance Cost*	$1,000 - $2,000	$500	$250

* depending on the level of customizations to the Core Modules or the design complexity

As can be seen from the table, there is a high degree of variability in the setup and maintenance costs of all three of the CMS applications, both in terms of the range within an individual system as well as between them. Of course, this variability is highly dependent upon the complexity, functionality and scale of the anticipated website and its requisite CMS needs. The upper ranges of these estimates correspond to systems far more complex that the one anticipated for the client. However, even at the lower end, the differences in the initial and ongoing costs between the systems are substantial.

Conclusion & Recommendation

In this report, I have attempted to identify the functional system requirements as well as the technical and budgetary constraints outlined by the client. I have provided a brief discussion of three of the most likely and viable CMS options available to meet the clients needs, and presented a broad overview of their relative advantages and disadvantages.

It is clear any of the three of the discussed options would more than satisfy the functional requirements of the CMS as established by the client. However, given the limited functionality requirements of the proposed website and the relatively low technical skillset of the web manager, it is my opinion that Wordpress may offer the most appropriate option as a web development and content management tool for the client.

This option has two key advantages over the others, namely:

First, the Wordpress application has been specifically designed to allow technical novices the ability to develop and maintain websites similar in sophistication to the one proposed for the client. This means

that the learning curve required to successfully navigate the system is substantially lower than in either of the other options. Additionally, through the use of add-on modules, the functionality of the existing site can be extended should the client wish to expand the requirements of the site beyond those currently desired, and;

Second, the relative cost of the system setup and ongoing maintenance is much lower. This addresses the other important constraint on the system deployment, the client's project budget.

It is my hope that you will find the information presented herein helpful in your decision process. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Research sources:
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1   Drupal – Open Source CMS, drupal.org/home
2   CMS Comparison: Drupal, Joomla and Wordpress,
     http://www.rackspace.com/knowledge_center/article/cms-comparison-drupal-joomla-and-wordpress
3   Adobe Edge: April 2008 – Review of open source content management systems,
     http://www.adobe.com/inspire-archive/april2008/articles/article4/index.html?trackingid=CAFWA
4   2011 Open Source Awards | Packt Publishing, http://www.packtpub.com/open-source-awards-home
5   Joomla! The CMS Trusted By Millions for their Websites, www.joomla.org
6   Top 12 Free Content Management Systems (CMS) | SpyreStudios, http://spyrestudios.com/free-
     content-management-systems/
7   WordPress > About, wordpress.org/about
8   Drupal vs Joomla vs WordPress – Open Source CMS Comparison, http://www.comentum.com/drupal-
     vs-joomla-cms-comparison.html

     *   All information utilized from the websites referenced above was accurate as of March 14, 2013.