

CMS Recommendation – Doug Vickers

Management Summary

Lynnwood Bowl and Skate gave me the task of researching Content Management Systems, and to recommend one that would work for its needs to add content to its website, as well as edit, delete, and otherwise manipulate its website easily and effectively. I am to present three options, recommending the one that I feel would be most applicable.

I researched the web, gathering as much information as I could to make an intelligent recommendation. I decided to look at three avenues:

- 1) A commercial CMS
- 2) An open source option
- 3) A design from scratch

To become familiar with many of the CMS options available, I looked at the site 'cmsmatrix.com' to evaluate several different CMS side by side, comparing features and benefits, as well as determining pitfalls. After careful analysis, I chose Drupal as a viable open source option and ExpressionEngine as its commercial counterpart, and then explain the in house build.

Report Detail

Drupal is an open source CMS that is free, flexible, and robust and constantly being improved by the many developers in the open source community. Of course, it needs to be adapted to Lynnwood Bowl and Skate's needs, but that adaption would be a minimal cost. Being open source, you have control over the site structure. It is relatively easy to adapt to your environment, as well as has the ability to manage your website, including adding content, updating and editing current pages, payment processing, reservation taking, and many other applications, all the basics you need. Because it is constantly being improved upon and added to by all its contributors, there are many modules and probably one that fits your needs with little modification. Another advantage is that you are not tied to a specific developer or a proprietary design. The main drawbacks are that it is somewhat difficult to learn, not backward compatible as it is relatively new, and sometimes slow loading, depending on the performance of your computer. From an expense perspective, the only monies involved are in the initial adjustment to your needs.

ExpressionEngine is a proprietary option that combines a commercial product with an open source framework that allows you to add or create for your site. It is a top rated CMS that has many modules to choose from with plug-in options that open all kinds of possibilities. There are many administrative features that are easy to use and understand, and the software handles your data securely and safely. One very nice feature is that it is non-technical friendly. You do not need to know anything about web development to use the CMS to manipulate your web site. There is plenty of support, with a technical staff at Ellislabs, as well as an online community of developers, to answer any questions. One of the disadvantages to this CMS is that it does not integrate to software outside of expression engine such as JavaScript, Flash, video, etc. It also has a weak search engine. Like Drupal, there are initial costs for set up, but also an annual fee of \$299 for the software, some say worth the expense for what you get.

An in house build is a third option. A CMS could be built from scratch to meet the particular needs of Lynnwood Bowl and Skate, specifically targeting all things pertaining to you. It can be built using technology that supports both front end and back end website needs, catered to you and your customers. Who better to design a system for your company's web site than someone intimate with its every need and desire? One thing to consider is the time it takes to develop. Do you have the time available? Another thing to consider is where you plan to go in the future and the foresight to develop a scalable system. The expense would be greater with this option, but you would have a CMS that fits your company like

a glove with the enhancements for expansion in place. There is also the possibility of selling the CMS to other similar companies to recoup the expense back and possibly more.

There are several items to consider no matter which route is chosen, that may help in the decision process, both technical and non-technical. Below is a matrix that identifies various categories of importance when deciding on a CMS, relative to the above summaries:

Category	Drupal	ExpressionEngine	Custom Built
System Requirements	Apache server, MySQL database, PHP, Platform Independent	Apache server, MySQL database, PHP, Platform Independent	Any decided upon server, database, language, and platform
Security	audit trail, email verification, login history, and session management	audit trail, email verification, login history, and limited session management	can have decided upon security included
Support	training, online help, community support, third party developers	training, online help, community support, third party developers, and company technical professionals	limited support from proprietary developers, with general help available from tech savvy community
Ease of Use	drag and drop capabilities, limited prototyping, friendly URLs, limited wizards, WYSIEYG editor	drag and drop capabilities, extensive prototyping, friendly URLs, limited wizards, WYSIEYG editor	limited capabilities, but design specific and to ease of use recommendations
Management	advertising and asset management, no clipboard, inline and online administration, web statistics, style management	advertising and asset management, clipboard, inline and online administration, web statistics, style management	management tools implemented to meet needs
Built in Apps	too numerous to mention to include blogging, chat, contact management, photo galleries, search engine, etc.	too numerous to mention to include blogging, chat, contact management, photo galleries, search engine, etc.	any can be added to meet needs
Expense	free to use and access open source, fee to set up and implement based on desired attributes	\$299 / year, fee to set up and implement based on desired attributes, professional factory support	fee to set up and implement based on desired attributes

For the needs of Lynnwood Bowl, it seems the open source CMS 'Drupal' would be a good choice. It is a proven system that is easily adaptable to your needs with minimal time and expense.

Report Summary

There are advantages and disadvantages to any CMS a company might choose. The goal is to look at what you are trying to accomplish with your web site, weigh each plus and minus against that, figure what the expense is expected to be, within your budget, and make the best decision. In doing that, utilizing the given information, Drupal seems to have the greatest advantages with minimal disadvantages; many of those disadvantages would not come into play with your needs and uses. This route is also the least expensive, fitting within your budget. Therefore I recommend Drupal as the CMS for Lynnwood Bowl and Skate.

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