

Topic | Website

Tutorial 15

What Is A Content Management System?

This tutorial will provide you with extensive information on content management systems.

Reading time: 10 minutes

Prerequisite: None



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1. What is a content management system?

A content management system (CMS) is a program that lets you edit your website's content and add pages without needing to know any programming language. It is a must-have for all businesses.

If you have built your website yourself, you might be familiar with Adobe Dreamweaver, Microsoft FrontPage or Microsoft Publisher. These programs are not content management systems but are used by (often novice) web developers to build the code of your website. In order for you to edit your content, your web developer will need to add a content management system.

Some small business owners may want to use programs like Dreamweaver to try and build or edit their own websites. However, they will require a solid knowledge of technical expertise in order for the result to meet the expectations of both their audience and search engines. Most times the results are disappointing and small business owners get very frustrated after having spent many hours trying to build their site. It is better to work with a professional to design and program your website and for you to **focus on the content**. The programmer will build a content management system into your site, which you will be able to access from any computer.

CMS are much easier to use than the likes of Dreamweaver because they are tailored to non-tech savvy users.

2. Do I need a CMS?

Yes. If you want to be competitive in today's online space, you cannot do without a robust platform that will allow you to update your content and access hundreds of plugins to enhance your web presence.

Having a content management system will save you money as you won't need to pay a web developer every time you want to modify the content of your website. It will also add agility to your online business by letting you add plugins (often called modules) such as photo galleries, blogging, shopping cart etc very easily to your website.

You will not be able to configure a CMS on your own and will need to ask your web developer to do so when they program your site.

3. Which CMS are the most popular and reliable?

There are many CMS on the market. **Free open-source CMS are very popular because they allow programmer to adapt the code to suit your website requirements and benefit from the improvements other programmers have made to the system.**

Open source CMS, even though they can be downloaded at no cost, will require to be installed on your website by your programmer. You will generally pay a set fee for them to install it. In many instances, it is also possible to install a CMS on an existing website.

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Open source CMS that are highly recommended by the web developers and users community are:

- Drupal (<http://drupal.org>)
- DotNetNuke (www.dotnetnuke.com) *
- CMS Made Simple (www.cmsmadesimple.org)
- Joomla! (www.joomla.org)
- SilverStripe (www.silverstripe.com)
- WordPress (www.wordpress.org)

*DotNetNuke is a CMS that requires to be hosted on Microsoft servers

Your web company will have a favourite CMS that they recommend to their clients. The section below will assist you with making sure it meets today's requirements. Remember however to take your CMS for a test drive and see if you can and enjoy driving it.

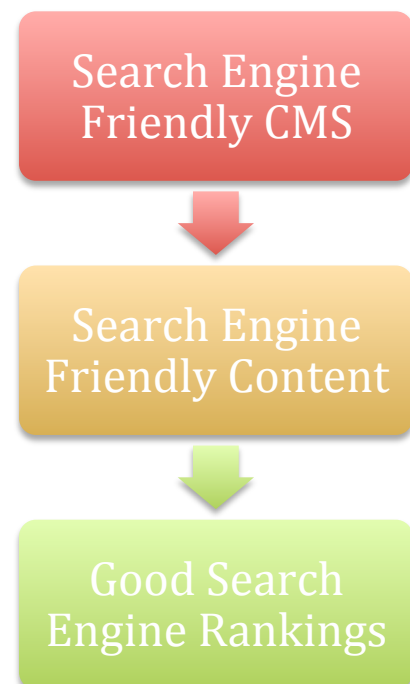
4. Content management system requirements

a) Key components a CMS should have

GOOGLE SAYS: IF YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT HIRING A SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION (SEO) CONSULTANT, THE EARLIER THE BETTER. A GREAT TIME TO HIRE IS WHEN YOU'RE CONSIDERING A SITE REDESIGN, OR PLANNING TO LAUNCH A NEW SITE. THAT WAY, YOU AND YOUR SEO CONSULTANT CAN ENSURE THAT YOUR SITE IS DESIGNED TO BE SEARCH ENGINE FRIENDLY FROM THE BOTTOM UP.

Since a content management system allows you to edit the content of your site, it is crucial for it to respect key search engine optimisation principles. Below are a few points to help you assess if the content management system your web developer uses meets today's requirements:

- Needs to be web-based and doesn't require to be installed on each computer
- Allows you to not only change but add/remove text, images, videos
- Allows you to edit the page titles, descriptions (meta tags) and URLs (address of the page)
- Allows you to create/delete new sections and pages on your website
- Allows you to edit the "Alt" tags of the images. Since search engines cannot read the content of the images, it is crucial they have access to the image's description (the "Alt" tag). You need to be able to edit this description every time you upload or change an image



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- Allows you to create redirects to pages using the 301 standard
- Change the text of your navigation bar

Building a website without keeping the above requirements in mind will negatively impact your ability to increase traffic and conversions.

b) Hosting requirements

Your CMS will have specific requirements that will need to be met by your website's hosting package. One of these requirements is a database (e.g MySQL).

As your existing hosting package might not be suitable (if you already have a site), your web developer should ensure that your host meets the minimum requirements of the CMS. If this isn't the case, you might be able to upgrade to another package. If not, you might need to change hosts.

5. Can't I just use Dreamweaver, FrontPage or MsWord to change my site?

We suggest it is best to use a content management system instead of a program such as Dreamweaver to make changes to your site. CMS will not only prevent you from damaging the look and feel of the site but they will also save you a lot of time and headaches. For instance, a new webpage can be created in one click. They are purpose-built for non-techies.

If a web developer or company recommends you to purchase a WYSIWYG editor instead of a CMS, look for another web company.

6. Can a CMS be added to a site that is already live?

Definitely! Your programmer should be able to do this for you easily. If your site is dated, they might recommend re-programming the site using standards-compliant code and integrate the CMS at the same time.

7. Key learning outcomes

- Buying a website that doesn't have a content management system is comparable to buying a car without having a license
- Shop around for a user-friendly and search engine friendly content management system and take it for a test drive before signing on the dotted line
- Dreamweaver, Contribute and FrontPage shouldn't be referred to as content management systems.

8. Related material

a) *Related tutorials*

- Organising hosting for my site
- Domain name: advanced

b) *Related websites*

- SEO considerations for your content management system:
<http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/4221/Website-Redesign-Important-SEO-Considerations-for-Your-Content-Management-System.aspx>
- Choosing the right content management system: www.seomoz.org/blog/choosing-the-right-cms-platform-for-your-website-from-an-seo-perspective
- Open source CMS award winners: www.packtpub.com/open-source-cms-award-previous-winners