

Content Management Systems

What is a content management system?

A content management system (CMS) is an easy-to-use piece of software that enables you to manage the contents of a website and/or intranet. It allows people with little or no knowledge of web programming to add and update online content easily.

A CMS enables an authorised user to upload new content, edit, delete, copy or move existing content using standardised templates and following approval processes.

The benefits of using a CMS

- Most CMSs use Microsoft's Web browser, Internet Explorer (IE), as the means of accessing and using the software. Since most people have surfed the Web using IE, it is easy to learn how to use most CMSs.
- As most users have IE on their computer, there is no additional software to install.
- Access to the CMS is via Internet Explorer and a username and password, so no matter where a staff member is located: at home, at any desk in the office or elsewhere, so long as they have access to the Internet and can remember their username and password, they can access the CMS and upload new content or edit existing content on the site.
- A CMS has an in-built style guide governing all pages of the website. Even though a passage of writing may be created in Word in a particular font or format, when cut and pasted into the CMS its style will be altered automatically to comply with the style guide. This prevents individuals from making personal choices about font type, colour and size, line length and spacing, and position of images on the page. This provides a consistent look and feel across the whole website. The parameters can only be changed by someone with appropriate access and training in editing the style guide – eg the web developer.
- A CMS provides tools for the establishment and monitoring of work-flow practices and quality control procedures. For example, before new content is uploaded to the website, the quality control feature of the CMS might demand that certain content be checked by a second person for typographical errors etc before it is uploaded to the site.
- A comprehensive CMS will also keep an audit trail of when content was uploaded or edited on the site and by whom. It will enable date or time dependent publishing of content such that content can be uploaded to the site but not become public until a specified day and time. Similarly, content can be automatically removed from the site at a pre-specified day and time.
- A good CMS will also impose compliance with Australian Government website publishing standards, such as compliance with the AGLS metadata rules, and the World Wide Web Consortium's accessibility guidelines.
- A CMS is designed around a database which can also be used to manage a variety of content such as external links, PDF documents and the usual day-to-day uses of databases such as contact details, directories etc.

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