



Your Website Coach



CMS and You – 9/28/06

CMS. That is an acronym you'll be seeing more and more as the World Wide Web becomes even more firmly integrated into our businesses. So what is a content management system (CMS) and do I need one? To answer the first question; a CMS is a framework that allows a non-programming person the ability to modify the pages of their website. What can Steve, owner of www.widgets.com modify on his site? Whatever was defined as "editable" by the web developer who built his website. If www.widgets.com is known as the information depot of widgets **and** Steve likes to post a new tip on widgets every two weeks **and** he wants to be able to update it himself, then it is quite likely the web developer will want to place his widget tip page within a CMS framework. Likewise, a business whose website displays a catalog of products (not necessarily e-commerce) would need an easy way to update the product database on which it sits.

So do you need one? Yes, and if you have a website, you already have a CMS although it may go by the name of "web developer". If your site is constantly changing, and by that I mean weekly updates, you may very well want to consider some sort of CMS. Clearly, you have more control when you can maintain all or part of your site, and it is less expensive in the long run because you are not paying your web developer to make these changes. Another benefit is you can update your site when **you** get the urge – you don't have to wait until you can fit into someone else's schedule. You may wonder "why would anyone pay a developer to maintain the site?" The answer is: time. Although a CMS allows you to make your own changes whenever you want, you must make the time to do it. In the past, I've seen website owners decide they want to maintain their site after it is built, but they don't seem to fare well with carving out a regular time to actually do the work.

If you are having a new site built, you can request a CMS component. For an existing site, there are packages that can be purchased as off-the-shelf software or found as open source programs (free-ware) off of the Internet. Either way, if your website does not already employ a content management system, there would have to be some retro-fitting of the CMS in order to integrate it into your current website. This can be fairly tricky, so I recommend hiring a pro in the latter case.

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