



What is a Content Management System

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Your website consists of two major elements: the design and graphics of your site (the pictures), and the content displayed within that design (the text, and sometimes photos). A web Content Management System (CMS) is a software tool that gives non-web-developers the ability to edit their own website content without having to rely on a professional.

Is CMS a good solution for you?

The answer depends on the purpose of your site. Consider these two cases:

Case #1:

John has his own business, ABC House Painters, that is exactly what it seems – interior and exterior house-painting. The service John provides is clearly defined and not likely to change. The purpose of John's website is to:

- tell people what ABC House Painters does
- tell people what geographical area they serve
- let people know how to contact them for a quote.

They can't provide quotes online, they are not selling anything online, and they are not interested in developing any kind of membership database.

ABC House Painter's website is fairly static. They may update photos from time to time, but John has no interest in learning how to do that himself, and since the need is infrequent, is happy to send new photos to his web developer and have her take care of the updates..

Case #2

XYZ Financial Services operates in an ever-changing reality, particularly this year. They provide financial planning and investment advice to a broad demographic ranging from retirees to young professionals. The services provided vary from group to group, and they need to be in constant communication with their clients. In addition to providing information on their company, XYZ uses their website to:

- constantly update information related to financial and investment services
- allow visitors to subscribe to XYZ's newsletter
- allow clients to log in to a secure client page to access financial and investment tools available only to clients

XYZ Financial Services' website is very dynamic, and it is updated at least on a weekly basis, and sometimes daily. Changes have to become live "as they happen" and more than one person in the company needs to be able to change different things on the website. XYZ needs a content-managed system, because it would be too cumbersome and costly to depend on their developer to update their website.

How does it work?

Although you could opt to have a content-managed website system custom designed, it would be extraordinarily expensive, and there are a number of open-source (meaning no-cost) software tools available for CMS, with [Joomla](#) and [Drupal](#) being two of the more popular systems. You can download the software, but your website still has to be hosted, and your hosting server has to be able to support a CMS. Typically, the hosting requirements for a CMS are greater than for a non-CMS website and the hosting cost may be greater. Most of the open-source CMS programs come with some pre-defined web templates from which you can build your website, but they also allow for some customization, and you may wish to use the services of a web developer to initially set up your website and design the structure. Unless you are already web-savvy, though, know that there is a definite learning-curve in being able to install and use a CMS. So if you are opting for that route, give yourself lots of time, be patient, and consider using the services of a CMS-experienced web professional to help you get started.