

What seems to get lost with the focus on technology is the content. Not just any content, but **useful** content.

We've all heard of the age-old phrase 'garbage in, garbage out'. Never more than before, this applies to many content management solutions.

### Installing a CMS

Most large organisations are now installing a content management system (CMS).

This is driven by the growing recognition that businesses generate huge volumes of information, and this must be made available to staff, when and where they need it.

A content management system also underpins most large corporate websites, which have grown into huge storehouses of information.

### Requirements?

Few organisations ask themselves the question: what do we want to achieve by installing a CMS?

The fundamental challenge being addressed is: how to get the right information to the right people, at the right time.

This leads to two specific questions:

- What information does the business need?
- What technology should be used to manage this information?

Most CMS projects only look at the second question, and completely overlook the first.

#### About the author

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Why spend millions on managing content that no-one understands or needs?

### Garbage in, garbage out

Large organisations are awash with printed manuals sitting on dusty shelves, and hastily written word documents. Typically, a CMS is seen as a way of more efficiently publishing this onto the intranet or website.

What does this gain? If the printed manuals were serving their purpose, there would be no need for a CMS. Likewise, most documents written are unreadable, or of little interest.

Simply pouring this material into the 'in tray' of a CMS decreases organisational efficiency, instead of improving it.

### What about the content creators?

Without content creators, there would be no need for a CMS. Yet surprisingly, this user group is often the worst served by a new content management system.

Most large content management systems provide extensive support for versioning, workflow, job tracking and publishing. Unfortunately, the tools provided for authors are limited and weak.

This is a critical problem. After all, if creating content isn't easy and efficient, it simply won't happen.

The problems with inadequate authoring support grow exponentially as content is added.

### Solutions

#### Identify business needs

What is the system actually for? Implementing a content management system is not a business goal in itself, merely a means to an end.

Don't take a single step in the project until you have identified what business problems the CMS is meant to solve, and what strategic benefits it will help to achieve.

## Some simple, practical steps will ensure that you get the best business benefits out of your new CMS

### Talk to your users

This is the simplest and quickest way to find out what your staff need: ask them!

Once you prove that you are willing to act on their feedback, you will find them an invaluable source of information on the real information needs of your organisation.

### Rewrite content

Plan to rewrite all of your existing paper manuals. This is a large job (potentially several man-years of work). It is also the biggest source of productivity and process improvements.

### Professional writers

Use professional technical writers and editors.

This cannot be overstated: writing well is hard. You would not enlist end users to create code; why should you expect them to write polished, effective content?

### Quality not quantity

In many organisations, users are so overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information available, they are unable to find the single fact they are looking for.

There is a simple solution: give the users **less**, but **better**, information. Most of the information on large corporate intranets is junk. Delete or archive it.

Distil and summarise the useful information, and present this in a succinct form: a hundred pages can replace a thousand.

### Structure and navigation

How will your users find the piece of information they need? A thousand pages of content are worthless if there is no structure or navigation.

While a search engine provides a partial solution, users require consistency and extensive cross-linking.

Use an information architect and professional indexer to construct a workable structure for your content.

### Workflow and review

There must also be a sufficiently rigorous workflow and review process to ensure quality. This is vital when there is legal exposure in every page published.

This can be simply achieved if there is a single dedicated authoring team. There are many other benefits in setting up such a structure.

If a 'decentralised' authoring process is implemented, the challenges of ensuring quality and consistency grow markedly.

Ensure workflow and review processes are in place before your CMS goes live. Once errors creep into the information repository, it is very hard to identify and eliminate them.

### Support your authors

Provide your writers with a powerful, efficient, and easy-to-use authoring environment. Highlight this as a requirement during the initial product selection phase.

Authors should not be required to understand HTML, or any other technical information. The CMS must provide all the tools necessary to manage thousands of pages of content, published to different platforms and formats.

In a decentralised authoring approach, a large number of your staff will be using the CMS. This makes ease of use particularly important. Sufficient training will also need to be provided to all users.

Authoring support in CMS is often weak, so be prepared to spend extra effort setting this up.

## Make it easy for authors to help your users

### Avoid technology quick-fixes

Computers are stupid compared to humans. Be wary of salesmen promising 'silver bullet' solutions to content challenges.

Examples include automatic classification systems and 'natural language' search engines.

These are appealing due to their fixed purchase price, and 'set and forget' operation.

Evaluate these systems against your business needs, and ensure that the results they produce are meaningful and useful.

In the end, the money may instead be spent on a human who will do a better job for less cost.

### **Beyond implementation**

When a CMS is purchased, there is a **project** to design, implement and deploy a solution. This is a short-term activity with clearly defined goals.

Just as important is what follows on from the project.

A permanent **process** must be put in place to ensure the continued accuracy and coverage of your content. This must be given resources, staff and time.

The CMS must become an everyday part of your business' activities. If this is not the case, it will languish the moment focus shifts to the next project.

The CMS will then become obsolete and be abandoned within 6–12 months.

(Users will not admire a CMS that delivers inaccurate and out-of-date information, however efficiently it does so.)

### **Practical processes**

The process of creating content is well-understood (there is even an Australian standard on it). Goals can be concrete and measurable.

Moreover, the process of content creation is perfectly suited to standard project management processes, such as design, scoping, deliverables and milestones.

If the skills don't exist within your organisation to manage the content creation process,

obtain the services of a contractor or consultant. Demand from them the same level of professionalism and rigour you would of any other project manager.

**A CMS project is in equal parts:  
technology, content &  
processes**

### **Real benefits**

There are very tangible benefits to be gained by ensuring quality content. These can be defined, tracked and measured.

Benefits may include:

- Reduce legal accountability, by ensuring information given to customers is consistent and accurate.
- Reduce training costs.
- Improve call centre response times.
- Improve help desk efficiency.
- Eliminate printing and distribution costs.
- Improve staff productivity.
- Support process improvement, by accurately documenting current processes and issues.

### **Conclusion**

Putting in place a CMS to manage content is admirable. Without keeping the focus on the content itself, however, your money will be wasted.

In order to meet business goals and objectives, it is critical to ensure that the information managed by the CMS is what your staff require.

Thankfully, this is not an impossible goal. By putting in place the right people, resources and processes, it is a straightforward exercise to guarantee that your CMS will meet your business needs.



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