



## Managing Web site content - alternatives and options

Guest Editorial

A while back, an organization made a huge impression on clients and potential customers if it had its own Web site and printed the URL on its stationery. In times when a forward slash and tilde separated the host's domain and the organization's name (www.host.co.za/~organization), it was even more remarkable when the organization's URL consisted of its name followed by a 'dotcom' or 'dotcoza' ([www.organization.com](http://www.organization.com)).

Apart from people asking 'Have you seen their Web site?' not much attention was given to Web sites in terms of keeping them updated. Because the organization's history, vision, mission and contact numbers hardly ever changed, nobody realized the need to update the Web site.

Six or seven years later things have changed drastically. An enormous amount of hype surrounds magnetism, stickiness and eyeballs. Without proper content, services and facilities, a user will not be attracted to the Web site. Companies also have to add value to the user's experience when accessing the Web site and using the content, services and facilities, otherwise he or she will not return to the Web site.

### The content challenge

The question about how to manage Web site content and to ensure that users return to the Web site is often asked. When concentrating purely on updating the content and ignoring all other aspects such as uploading the new Web pages to the server, a couple of options exist. However, depending on the organization's budget, not all options would suit all organizations.

The popular what-you-see-is-what-you-get (WYSIWYG) editors would allow a person with very little experience of Web design to update and maintain Web content. The limitations associated with WYSIWYG editors include their tendency to include their own formatting in Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) by changing fonts and colours, as well as a lack of experience to successfully create and present professional and corporate content and images.

Hiring an experienced Webmaster would solve the problem, but the organization is faced with additional expenses in terms of salary, pension and medical aid. And what happens when the Webmaster takes leave? Could the organization afford for the Web site to remain unchanged while the Webmaster visits an exotic destination for three weeks?

The alternative to this would be to outsource the maintenance of the Web site. For a monthly fee, a service level agreement is drawn up and the Web site is maintained close on 365 days of the year. When one takes the hourly charge-out rate into consideration, which may vary between R100 for the one-man organization to R360 for large organizations with tremendous overheads, this could be an expensive alternative.

### The solution?

A possible solution is to have the Web site developed where the content is captured into a database and not the Web page itself. This content is merely read from the database and displayed whenever a Web page is accessed, a process which is transparent to the end-user. An access-controlled administration Web site provides access to the database to update and maintain the content by means of simple input fields, something even the inexperienced person would be capable of performing. The organization could rest assured that the Web site design, layout and formatting would remain the same.

With the advent of Extensible Markup Language (XML) and Extensible Stylesheet Language (XSL), the process of maintaining and updating Web site content may become even easier to manage within the broad scope of Web site management.

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