INFO RHINO LIMITED

WHITE PAPER ON SELECTING THE RIGHT CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

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ABOUT INFO RHINO'S WHITE PAPER ON CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (CMS)

We know the challenges clients face when trying to keep their website's content relevant. At Info Rhino, we have a process in place to ensure clients get the right kind of website for their needs and to ensure they are targeting the right audience. We hope you will find this document useful.

We have experience on a wide number of CMS's and wanted to make you aware of not only their benefits but the downsides to a CMS and let you know of alternative ways to allow content to be dynamic.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with installing your own CMS and getting started but as with most things – maintenance can quickly get out of hand. You will read in the following pages, Info Rhino and their partners can help you with getting the most out of a CMS to guide you through the pain.

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WHAT IS A CMS?

Before looking at what a CMS is, we need to think in terms of website content most of us are familiar with.

TYPES OF WEBSITE CONTENT

STATIC

Static content reflects text, pictures and possibly videos put on a website, created once and pretty much left as is. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this - Info Rhino's own website are relatively static. We don't want content to change that much because we want to tell a consistent story. We still use a CMS though.

DYNAMIC

Dynamic websites reflect content that can change more frequently. More pages can get created and removed, navigational structures can change, videos and images can get added. Importantly, content can often be user driven, maintained by people, or fed from other systems.

SO WHAT PROBLEM DOES A CMS HOPE TO SOLVE?

A CMS hopes to allow users to maintain their own content. This is a very powerful alternative, allowing the client to take responsibility for their own content to shape their own brand.

WHY DOES A CLIENT WANT TO MANAGE THEIR OWN CONTENT?

- It can be expensive to keep asking website developers to update content.
- Clients don't always know everything they want on the website at the point of commissioning development.
- Content can be adapted to recent events.
- New products and services can be added, and old ones removed.
- Grammatical errors and other mistakes can be rectified.
- Content can be added as per the client's customer's wishes.

WHY DOES PROFESSIONAL WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT COMPANIES LIKE CLIENTS TO MANAGE THEIR OWN CONTENT?

- Updating and maintaining content isn't what website developers are best spent doing - it is better to let clients maintain their content.
- It reduces back and forth agreeing amendments to content.
- In many situations, letting clients set up parts of the site is a good prototyping strategy.

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS FROM CLIENTS MANAGING THEIR OWN CONTENT?

There are significant risks to letting untrained professionals use a content management system. Managing CMS's can require significant expertise to manage and a knowledge of certain programming languages. Here are some risks worth highlighting;

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- Without suitable knowledge, significant and irreparable damage can be done to a CMS's content.
- Maintaining CMS content can be time consuming.
- Security, deciding who gets to change what - authorization, is a challenge.
- A lack of a professional eye can detract from the brand and message.
- Without the right skill to create the correct navigability and content, sites quickly turn off users.
- Websites need to be search engine optimised (SEO), certain content edited without SEO in mind can make pages hard to find. SEO is not something Info Rhino claims to be experts in.

Most people have managed to maintain profiles on LinkedIn, Facebook and Google plus without creating disasters but there are risks to CMS self-maintenance.

Some of the dangers should be concerning to many and this is why Info Rhino produced this white paper on CMS's to give an overview on how they work.

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TOP FIVE CONSIDERATIONS WHEN SELECTING A CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

These are our top things to consider when selecting a content management system, consider this like a summary.

1. Purpose of the website?
   It is vital to understand what the website is for, who it is for? Sometimes a company wants to simply have a means for people to understand more about their business. Other times we want to sell products directly like e-commerce? Other times, we are publishing data. Once you understand the purpose, the rest falls into place.

2. What types of content will your website feature?
   What is the content you need to change, versus which content is more static? Will your website need dynamic components such as shopping lists, image galleries?

3. Do you have a need for interactive functionality?
   Do you require users to have their own secure area or portal? Does the site intend to handle payments from customers? Are you requiring maps or other advanced displays?

4. Site management.
   Who will manage the website – are you intending to do it, would you employ somebody? Are you willing to keep paying the company to keep maintaining the site? Is it possible, just small parts of the website would be maintained by you?

5. Choose the CMS and provider
   The rest of this article contains more information about the components of a CMS and how to select a CMS. Take a look to find out more.

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DECIDING WHAT TYPE OF WEBSITE YOU WANT

A CMS is still just a website. You may be requiring a highly specific website which needs developing and cannot be something you maintain yourself no matter how good the CMS is. Alternatively, a CMS may cover most of your requirements and a small amount of development is all that you need to get the desired output. We will simply list a few examples:-

- A member website with profiles, pictures and contacts.
- An E-commerce website.
- A publication website where your organisation creates information and content for your users – news websites are an example of this.
- A blogging website.
- An events management member site – perhaps you sell tickets for events.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT CMS

Choosing a CMS is not something a non-technical person should do but it is important you are engaged in the process. As a software consultancy, too often, we find clients who have chosen their products that look great but from a technical perspective stink.

HOW EASY IS IT FOR YOU OR YOUR STAFF TO MAINTAIN?

Assuming you are going to want to maintain your content, your chosen CMS should be something you are comfortable managing. Sometimes you may decide certain parts of the CMS need to be maintained by certain roles to avoid just about anybody updating (and breaking) parts of the website.

PLUGINS AND FEATURES

A CMS allowing new plugins to be installed can be a good thing, photo editors, QR code generator, mini shopping carts, blogs are vital to allow features to be added easily.

PORTABILITY

Sometimes you decide to move to a different CMS, at that point a lot of manual work to try and replicate what was on your older website will be required or you will need to employ a data migration expert. This may seem not relevant; how can somebody know they want to upgrade to another CMS at the point of choosing a specific CMS and the answer is sometimes a client knows they will start with a simple CMS and only get a more expensive CMS when their business grows.

HOW EASY IS IT TO USE DIFFERENT STYLES WITH THIS CMS?

We use Twitter Bootstrap for our web layout – you sacrifice precise control for a well-designed, interactive and attractive layout. Many CMS systems have their own design and once you decide to move this content elsewhere, the entire style and layout can change. For this reason, simple CMS systems can be better or use a good software supplier who can recreate the look and feel on different websites.

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HEADLESS CMS

Many find it essential to use a headless CMS. A headless CMS delivers content to different consumers. It means the content is delivered to a web page and the web page decides what to do with it. Not only a web page, different applications can use this content. This means you can maintain content in your CMS portal, but let different applications use that content.
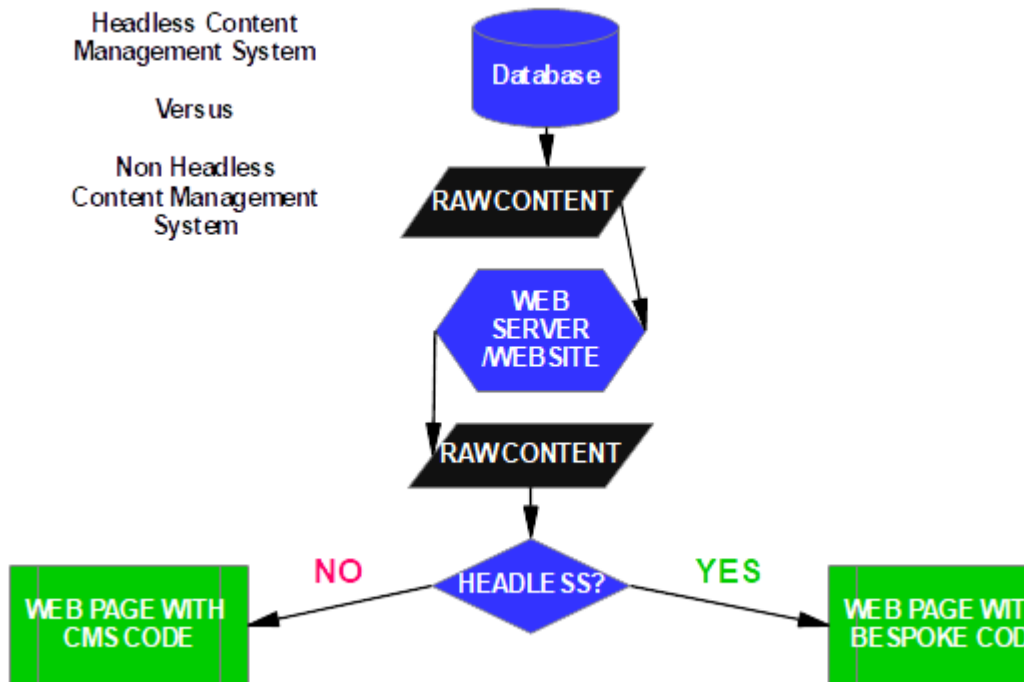
SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA READINESS

We will be publishing a separate paper on this. SEO is inextricably linked to social media and gaining attention to your site and your business. Some companies can now function without having a social media page altogether.

UNDERLYING TECHNOLOGY AND APPETITE TO UPGRADE

This is one more for the professionals, but most CMS's are open source and at some point, interest in their upkeep wanes. This happens with proprietary software (stuff you pay for) too. It is always important to consider whether the market is moving in a different direction and whether this CMS is moving with this technology or staying put.

BACKWARDS COMPATIBILITY

Sometimes, it just isn't possible to upgrade underlying technology and make the software compatible. Other times, website browsers change, and this can make certain plugins obsolete and third party authentication

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such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google may eventually change to the point your CMS won't work with them. Always try to have a bit of an understanding on this.

PLUGINS

Does the CMS allow plugins, or is the CMS flexible enough to allow plugins to be developed and added to the website? You would need to identify your needs and talk to experts on this.

SECURITY INTEROPERABILITY

We consider this an essential feature for many CMS's. This is how you want your website to be accessed by different users – Authentication is the mechanism by which you verify the identity of a person and authorisation is the method by which that authenticated user is authorised to use different functions of an application. Users don't like having to remember countless logins for different sites but sometimes you may be validated in maintaining your own authentication layer.

EXTENSIBILITY FOR DEVELOPERS

No CMS can provide everything. At this point, more development may be needed. New types of pages and content maybe needed, and developers will prefer a CMS capable of being extended easily.

HOW IS THE CONTENT SAVED?

This is important, always be mindful of the database or how the source files are saved for content as you may need to get that content into another format. Many times, a company will use one CMS and then decide to use a different one.

OPEN SOURCE OR PROPRIETARY CMS

At Info Rhino – we find it hard to justify paying additional license fees for a CMS created by a vendor. This is because we select open source CMS systems we can extend.

Some clients will want to have the confidence of having support from a vendor.

We are happy to work with both kinds.

SITE DISASTER RECOVERY – BACKUPS

Your website needs to be backed up to avoid complete disruption to the delivery of services and content to your audiences. Similarly, if a website development company went out of business – what happens to your website?

ABUSE IDENTIFICATION

You run a small company, are on holiday for a couple of weeks leaving the business with your staff but unknown to you – a disgruntled customer has written lots of abuse on your website. Tools to highlight (prevention is difficult) can help maintain the image of your company. This can involve Natural Language Processing.

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HEAVINESS/LIGHTWEIGHT

Software Engineers term software as lightweight when it is felt not to be too;

- Cumbersome.
- Convoluted.
- Slow.
- Inflexible.

It is always worth considering whether you want a lightweight or feature rich CMS.

DATA STORAGE TECHNOLOGY

All CMS systems will store the information you set up somewhere. Most times, this ends up in a database, sometimes in a file. At Info Rhino, we have put significant extra functionality into our CMS offering meaning we stick with SQL Server because we are experts in this database technology.

Often, it makes sense to understand where the data is being saved and whether the skills exist to manage it and enhance it.

WILLINGNESS OF THE CMS PROVIDER TO MOVE TO LATER VERSIONS OF SOFTWARE

It may be known - Info Rhino specialise in .Net and .Net Core technologies. Without going into technicalities, .Net has undergone a huge amount of change. We cannot claim .Net has seen incremental improvements. Some software clients refuse to upgrade to newer versions of technologies because the newer technology is inferior.

Point being – it is not always true that newer technology is better.

However, if certain CMS platforms stay on older versions of technology, it may suggest they are not able to keep up with improving technology. It may not, but please keep this in mind.