

Is there a strange smell as you read this newletter? There soon could be if Telewest Broadband approves trials of a new technology add-on – scented emails! While it may sound ‘gimmicky’ at the moment, there is respected research that indicates adding a third sense to the internet will help to humanise cyberspace as smell is one of the most primitive of human communication methods. Advertisers are particularly interested in the technology, imagine viewing a holiday advert and smelling the sea or an alpine meadow. Also mentioned in the article in The Times: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/newspaper/0,,173-1006845,00.html> is the idea of being alerted to emails by the smell of freshly roasting coffee or baking bread... sorry, my mouth’s watering just thinking about it, must go!

Intranets and CM

**Column Editor: Martin White, Intranet Focus Ltd;
e-mail: Martin.white@intranetfocus.com**

Just at present I seem to be making a reasonable living sorting out organisation that have found themselves entangled in the tentacles of a content management software (CMS) application for their intranet and/or web site, so perhaps it’s time to demolish a few myths about content management, though in no particular order.

We can save money by using open-source software

The software will be free, or nominal cost, but then who is going to pay for all the development work. Not only will the CMS have to be customised for your particular application but you will need to continue to develop the software to meet new information needs. One of the benefits of commercial CMS applications is that product upgrade costs are spread over the entire client base.

Our web agency can build a CMS for us.

Would you ask the garage where your car is serviced to build you a car? I may be pushing the metaphor a little but web agencies do many things well, but building a CMS for a client is not one of them. They may well have one that they use to manage their own site, and perhaps those of customers, but building and continuing to support a product they are selling to someone else is a different proposition.

With a CMS we will easily be able to change our site if we don’t get it quite right at the beginning
CMS applications are certainly able to facilitate making changes to a site, but not without a lot of work. If the content metadata is not well thought through then how will the CMS be able to identify the content that needs to be relocated? Major site changes will also mean rewriting all the associated links, and the extent to which the CMS can do this varies quite considerably.

We will be able to add content straight from Word documents

Two myths in one. First the way in which different CMS products handle content being cut and pasted in from Word files needs to be looked at quite carefully. In many cases organisations do not have consistent Word styles, and most CMS products will need consistency to be able to render the document in HTML. If that was not a big enough problem you will then find that the documents are written to be read on paper, and have not been written for the web. There is a big difference in terms of structure, paragraph length and heading consistency.

<http://www.useit.com/papers/webwriting/writing.html> is a good place to start, or have a look at <http://www.writingfortheweb.co.uk/artlist.html> from Malcolm Davison.

A budget for the software has been agreed

But by who, and on what basis. If the IT department has phoned round for a few quotes you have a big problem. As a rough rule of thumb the cost of the consulting work that will be needed to implement the CMS software will be at least the software cost in addition, and for high-end systems that are effectively tool-kits it could be three or four times the basic licence fee. It is also easy to forget about the maintenance fee (typically 20%) and the cost of training.

Once we get content in more quickly intranet hits will increase rapidly

They may do, but for the wrong reason! First adding content to an intranet is only part of the battle. People still have to find it, and that requires a blend of good information architecture, metadata and link management and a search engine. Second, measuring intranet use just by hits as the sole metric is very dangerous. Ideally you should be looking to minimise the number of hits because you have brought the heavily used content up to the top of the intranet hierarchy. Too many organisation just see a CMS as a way of reducing the web-master bottle neck, and end up increasing the total percentage of staff time spent on both contributing and finding relevant content.

We don’t need a search engine because the CMS has one built in

The search engine that comes with the CMS is there to enable content contributors to locate content in the repository that they can then repurpose into a new document. Often the functionality is quite limited, and the license only extends to the CMS server. If you want to use the search engine for other purposes you will almost certainly need to upgrade the license.