



Fact Sheet No. 10: Content Management Systems (CMS)

Overview

A Content Management System (CMS) is a Web-based workspace used for creating, modifying, and archiving information resources and group documents in an organized repository. It includes tools for publishing, formatting, editing, indexing, and search retrieval. Additionally, a CMS usually gives users a forum to discuss the content of the documents, which can be a useful tool in both the learning and editing processes for which a CMS is often employed.

Key Considerations

- Content Management Systems are extranet solutions with security: they can be accessible outside of the office and require a login name and password in order to prevent unwarranted access.
- CMS are ideal for geographically-dispersed groups who need to collaborate often. CMS reduce travel time and expenses and allow users to access information on their time, so time zones are not a factor.
- CMS work well for tight-knit groups that need to work collaboratively on certain issues.
- A CMS is more searchable than a network hard drive, allowing for easy document retrieval.
- Some CMS software provides automatic update (via e-mail or RSS) to notify group members of additions or changes to the online workspace. (This liberates users from having to monitor the site for updates.)
- CMS are effective learning tools for preparation prior to “live” meetings, whether the meetings are face-to-face or online via Webinar.
- Many working groups can operate under one Content Management System. Most CMS platforms facilitate the designation of private areas for each working group.

Some challenges

Old habits are not easily broken.

New users tend to revert to e-mail and other back-channel methods of discussion, rather than conversing openly on the CMS platform. The benefits of open dialogue (e.g. decreased repetition

of questions and comments; group learning; more efficient progress tracking) must be demonstrated through good communications and training prior to the CMS launch.

Tutorials and Training.

Online and in-person tutorials should be used to ease users into the CMS environment. Training should not only address tool functionality, but also the development of leadership roles in virtual teams and communities.

People Power Required.

Early adopters agree that looking after the CMS (i.e., encouraging participation, prompting response to new content, organizing the document “library,” etc.) can be a full-time job. Human resources requirements should be addressed when assessing CMS feasibility.

Go, team!

Even a gradual rollout of CMS use within a group or department should begin with well-defined roles, responsibilities, and processes. Updates may be needed as the rollout branches into more areas of the organization. Here are some of the commonly-defined roles within a CMS team:

Executive Sponsor – Acts as the champion for the community.

Facilitator – Fosters and facilitates group member interaction

Community Leaders and Team Leaders - Guide the community's and/or individual team's purpose and strategic intent.

Subject Matter Experts – Knowledgeable and experienced members of the group who ensure that the information the group is using is accurate and complete.

Content Managers (aka “Cybrarians”) - Ensure that workspace content is current, relevant, representative, and well organized.

Application

Content Management Systems are most effectively employed when they are used in the latter stages of online consultation when the process is already underway. They can, however, be used in the early stages to inform and educate participants regarding how the system will be used to provide continuous and accurate information. In practice, a CMS should be used to involve, engage, partner, and consult participants.

CMS are also effective tools for use in ongoing consultations. They are, for example, effective tools for facilitating collaborative document authoring.

Examples of Use

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) currently uses the CMS, "Collaboration," for both internal projects--such as the hosting of online communities of practice--and external projects--such as those involving collaboration with other Government of Canada departments and public stakeholders. The CMS is mainly used by INAC for communication and analysis. Members can raise, discuss, and clarify issues prior to face-to-face meetings to ensure that everyone is briefed and prepared for efficient, in-person decision-making sessions.

Through the deployment of a CMS, INAC has realized:

- ❑ Travel expense savings
- ❑ Process and productivity enhancements, such as: a streamlined federal approvals process, and reduction in lost travel days
- ❑ Enhanced information management
- ❑ New capabilities, such as: geographically-dispersed teams, telecommuting
- ❑ Improved knowledge capture
- ❑ Easy status tracking
- ❑ Engagement of fully external project teams without having to provide office space or access to internal systems

The Canadian Cultural Observatory (Culturescope.ca) is an initiative of the Department of Canadian Heritage. Launched in November 2003, the site provides free online space for cultural policy researchers, planners, managers, and decision makers to form collaborative communities.

Each community can post documents and resources and host discussions on its area of focus. Users can automatically stay up-to-date on their group's discussions and resource additions by subscribing to a list that gives automatic e-mail notification of any new forum activity.

Complementary Tools

Webinars

Real-time interactive seminars, usually with voice and chat capabilities. Mirrors in-person meetings because most providers offer capabilities for slide presentations, white-boarding, and group document revisions.

Web-based Discussion Groups

Many CMS platforms come packaged with an online discussion board option. Participants can post questions, feedback, comments, etc. pertaining to the documents in the CMS "library."

Live Chat or Instant Messaging

Live chat or instant messaging coupled with CMS enables quick correspondence between project collaborators and facilitates community-building conversation. Also, technical support via live chat or IM can help speed up the troubleshooting process.

This Fact sheet presents ideas from the Innovatec Conference "Policy Development in the Networked World: Online Agenda Setting and Internal Decision-Making Systems," held September 2004. A full report is available from the:

Online Consultation Technologies Centre of Expertise

www.onlineconsultation.gc.ca

