

# CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

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Improve your search rankings and encourage readers to explore your site by using a well-built CMS.

YOUR MAGAZINE'S WEBSITE IS NOT a luxury item. You need your website to represent your magazine online, and you need it to be relevant today in order to build your reader and advertiser bases of the future. When a potential reader Googles your magazine name or enters a query that pertains to your magazine's specialization, you want your site to appear at the top of the search results. You also want your site to be so interesting and relevant when they find it that they bookmark it, refer it to their friends and take out a subscription. If your website is not well constructed, or you offer little original online content, chances are your magazine's website won't rank highly in searches.

You can improve your search rankings and site "stickiness" by using a well built content management system. A CMS is basically a set of online forms that are filled with content by people who have been given accounts in the system (such as your staff). This content gets saved into a database and is finally reassembled by customized templates into the HTML pages, RSS feeds and images that make up your website.

A CMS can increase productivity and ensure standardized output because content is stored separately from the structure of the website. This means if you decide to change the look of your website, your CMS will ensure this change is reflected across your whole site immediately. You won't need to spend time hand-coding updates of individual HTML pages.

The ideal CMS should feature the following elements:

- Version control—the ability to track and manage multiple versions of a single instance of content
- User permissions for specific roles
- Customizable content structure—the developer should be able to define new types of content with specific fields
- Timed publishing—you should be able to set a time to publish or unpublish a story from your site
- Ability to store and serve different kinds of media such as images, video and audio—meaning the CMS should be able to upload and embed this media in site pages
- Customizable workflow—tasks for collaborative creation, often coupled with event messaging so that content managers are alerted to changes in content
- Customizable output—the same content (story titles and summary paragraphs for instance) can be output as HTML, RSS, XML, podcasts and so on by using customizable templates

If some of these terms don't make sense right away, not to worry. There is much written on these subjects online and in book form. Spending time familiarizing yourself with these

concepts now will serve you well when you do decide to hire a web developer or develop an online strategy.

If your magazine doesn't have the staff expertise or budget to build a CMS, don't despair—there are resources to help you. Take an incremental approach. Try something easy and free first. First identify staff who have an interest in the web and assign them the job of setting up your first free blog on a site like [tumblr.com](http://tumblr.com), [wordpress.com](http://wordpress.com) or [blogger.com](http://blogger.com). Give them the resources to buy books, join mailing lists and attend conferences on this subject. As well it would be wise to compare notes and potentially share technical resources with sister magazines.

As you develop your online chops and start comparing CMS on sites like [cmatrix.org](http://cmatrix.org), [cmswire.com](http://cmswire.com) and [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_content\\_management\\_systems](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_content_management_systems) you'll notice most of the popular CMS are built with a Free and Open Source (FOSS) licensing structure ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free\\_and\\_open-source\\_software](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_and_open-source_software)). This is software whose source code is published and made available to the public, enabling anyone to copy, modify and redistribute the source code without paying royalties or fees. So that mean you get the code base for free and are allowed and encouraged to make improvements to the code base thus "giving back" to your chosen Open Source CMS community.

Some of the most popular magazine CMS are as follows.

More complex, bigger learning curve but also most customizable:

- Bricolage (FOSS) <http://bricolage.cc>
- Drupal (FOSS) <http://drupal.org>
- Ellington (Proprietary) <http://www.ellingtoncms.com>
- Plone (FOSS) <http://plone.org>
- Typo3 (FOSS) <http://typo3.org/>
- Expression Engine (Proprietary) <http://expressionengine.com>

Less complex but faster to set up and better for just blogging out of the box are:

- Textpattern (FOSS) <http://textpattern.com>
- Moveable Type (FOSS and Proprietary versions) <http://www.moveabletype.org>
- Wordpress (FOSS) <http://wordpress.org>
- Joomla (FOSS) <http://www.joomla.org/>

Know that which ever CMS you do chose, chances are you will be upgrading it to a newer version or switching CMSs completely in a few years as your website needs expand or change. What should remain constant is your magazine's commitment to training and retaining staff that enjoy working on the web and who will help guide the tandem development of your paper and online versions.

The HotSheet Series provides tips and advice to small magazines from people working in the field. The series is produced by Magazines Canada and is funded by the Canada Council and the Canada Magazine Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

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