



# Content Cache

Every distributor has it: a hodgepodge of potentially insightful, highly disorganized information. Content management technology can help

By Jack Shaw

**P**roducts don't sell themselves. It is the information about the products that generates sales for distributors — whether that information is conveyed by a salesperson, a product catalog, marketing collateral, advertising or the company's website. And yet most distributors fail to invest even a fraction of the time, effort, or expense of managing their product inventory on effectively managing their equally important "information inventory."

All of a business's accumulated information comprises its "content." Because of the sheer amount of content generated by an individual company and its customers, some method of managing it is essential. Strictly speaking, content management is not a system, it is a process, and one that requires thought and commitment on a company's part. Content management systems (CMS), in turn, are technology used to automate key parts of the content management process.

Content management came into being about five years ago, when people realized that by automating their Web and print publications and products, they could improve the efficiency of their processes dramatically.

Every sanitary supply business has some form of a content management system. The question is how well does that content management system work, does it meet the company's needs, and are they sure that their content management system is securing productivity, revenue growth and profits?

## What is Content?

**C**ontent management is the process of collecting, managing, and publishing "content" — information that is used in catalogs, websites and price lists. Then that information is manipulated into a desired format to fit an audience, whether it's individuals within an organization, specific departments, or even external trading partners, such as customers and suppliers.

Managing content includes organizing, categorizing, and structuring information resources of various types so that they can be stored, retrieved, published, distributed and reused in multiple ways. To do so requires a sound vision of the user's needs. If those needs are identified, a loose collection of information resources can be converted into information assets.

An information asset is a single source of content, which can be used in a variety

of ways depending on needs. Information assets are easy to find: they are accurate; they are updated on a continuous basis; and they are complete in that they stand alone, even though they are linked to other relevant information assets.

## Information Overload

**T**here is a tremendous amount of information in an organization, an amount that seems even more staggering when we consider extracting all that information from printed documents and moving it to Intranet or Extranet websites or portals.

Enterprise content management systems are designed to manage all of the information in an organization, whether it is on the Web, in print form or in some other form such as wireless distribution, such as CD ROMs and even DVDs and multimedia.

Enterprise content management systems allow those who are experts in the information (or content) to design and create it. The process is typically a joint effort between two very different areas — those in charge of print publications and those in charge of Web management. There is often a lack of synchronization in coordinating between teams.

Most organizations focus on getting one information source complete first, then they move on to the other. This often causes synchronization problems and delays. Historically, companies updated their print publications first and then moved on to their website. In the past couple of years, many companies have done it the opposite way. Companies realize that it's easier to update their websites first; however, then their employees and customers are often stuck with outdated print materials.

Content management is a form of quality control. It ensures that information is accurate, and it dramatically increases the productivity of the authors, the creators and the business people who are providing the information, not to mention the efficiency of the overall process. It makes certain that content that needs to get out to clients or prospects can

get there quickly and accurately. This improves customer service and provides a better way for customers to help themselves.

Each piece of content needs to be designed, created, managed, deployed, distributed, analyzed and eventually retired. This is the content life cycle. One of the most frustrating things for organizations is being inundated with outdated, misleading information. Even if a particular document is outdated, some of the information in that document may still be accurate and may serve another purpose. Or a document may need to be archived rather than deleted.

## Who Does What?

One of the challenges of content management is that, as information assets are developed, multiple versions pop up. And it's time-consuming to figure out what is the latest or most appropriate version with which to work.

The solution to this problem can require expensive manual edits and reviews. If you skip them, you could end up with problems. For example, a compa-

son B's changes. Suddenly we have multiple versions, which can be very confusing.

Content management systems' workflow abilities will automate the review, approval, circulation, deployment and distribution of content. It allows people to manage the workflow by content type. For instance, it can monitor who can change the content, who needs to be notified and who is authorized to even see new content

### KEY FEATURES OF CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (CMS):

- They separate content and presentation
- They support Web and print publication
- They have templates that make it easier to organize information
- They handle multiple versions of content
- They manage the workflow required to create and approve content

while it's being developed. For example, in most cases, we don't want to put competitive analyses into the hands of people outside of the enterprise.

In her book, *Content Management for Dynamic Web Delivery*, Joann Hackos points out that the content management process in an organization is much more than just the implementation of a content management system. Successful content management starts with a sound information model. That information model is managed with the appropriate technology. Content is maintained in a well-structured repository. As a result, you can deliver information to users via multiple media in a dynamic way that allows them to be innovative in how they utilize that information.

The information model is a framework for organizing content and response to user needs. Development of the information model begins by asking:

- What information do our users need (those within the organization as well as external trading partners)?
- How do they need it presented?

In his book, *The Content Management Bible*, Bob Boiko emphasizes that internal people, the sponsors and the project team, have to agree on several things, including the information management problem, the changes that need to be made, the extent of the problem, the situation's current status, the current plan of action, and also, who is responsible for a solution.

The sponsors, the project team and the audiences have to agree on a couple of key things: the types of information and functionality that are most important; and the kinds of publications that are going to be used to distribute content most effectively.

## Use It to the Fullest

Every distributor has a content management system in place today. Chances are it's being underutilized in managing your information assets. It's worth the time and effort to look at your business from an information management perspective.

Once you recognize this, you're already over the biggest hurdle. From that point on, successful content management

in your organization will start with further educating yourself. It will then move on through the classical change management steps: analysis, recommendations, and effective implementation of appropriate changes. But it all starts by recognizing that you can no longer afford to be content with your content. **SM**

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### WHEN TO INVEST IN CONTENT MANAGEMENT

If any of the statements below apply to you, you should look into implementing a Content Management System (CMS):

- Distributing information is a bottleneck that holds down sales (e.g., unable to get new price sheets out to salespeople as fast as the competition)
- Only a few people in the company are technically proficient enough to update the company website
- Those responsible for updating the site can't keep up with changes
- Customers often can't find the information they need
- Some content is old, redundant, unauthorized or inaccurate
- Unable to customize the site for customers, employees or other site visitors

### TYPES OF CONTENT YOU NEED TO MANAGE MAY INCLUDE:

- Product specifications and prices
- Product features and benefits
- Product illustrations
- Production information
- Product categories
- Product availability
- Special promotions
- Support information
- Press releases
- Jobs available
- Office addresses, maps and directions

ny may discover that it was listing equipment that costs \$1,000 on its website for \$10 because the decimal was in the wrong place. These incorrect versions can be costly and may even have legal implications. They also make consistent branding difficult.

Workflow is about managing the different versions of content. Problems arise when three different people have to look at a document. Person A looks at it and passes it on to person B, who makes some slight changes. Meanwhile, Person C also makes other changes without seeing Per-