

Creating a Website using a Desktop Content Management System (CMS)

Creating a Website - no matter whether it is a small or a complex one - which is based on static HTML pages, is in most cases not a good choice due to the massive amount of manual work that is required. Even small maintenance tasks like making a modification to a navigation menu can require changes to dozens of HTML files. Nevertheless static file-based Websites also have a big advantage: Because the Web server on which the site is hosted does not have to process the files but only delivers the plain files to the client/browser the result is a very good loading performance. Even if the site is hosted on a less powerful and inexpensive server (e.g. shared Web hosting systems that are very common, not only in the low price segment), still a lot of users can request the Website without experiencing any problems or slowing down.

The opposite approach to creating a Website based on static HTML pages is to use a Web content management system (WCMS). This is a piece of software that has to be installed on the Web server. It is accessed from a browser-based administration front-end over the Web. Typically WCMS are written in a programming language like e.g. PHP and are executed directly on the server. This can cause slow page loading or even worse, major problems if the server hardware is not powerful enough.

By choosing a content management system like Typo3 or Joomla which are quite popular, maintaining a site becomes easier (though the creation process without any specialized knowledge about the CMS in use is often almost impossible!) but the Web server has to spend a lot of CPU shares and memory, even if only simple pages are requested by the browser. This often leads to a bad performance and may cause many potential visitors to leave the site after a few clicks.

Most people tend to ignore this performance issue but scientific research has proven that long loading times and a slow performance of a Website are the main reasons why visitors leave a Website, even if the content provided matches their interests.

The easiest but also the most expensive way to solve this problem is to use a more powerful Web server. But for small, cost-sensitive Website projects this is very often not an option at all.

Another solution to overcome the problem of bad Website performance caused by resource hungry Web content management systems and the complexity of manually maintaining a Website that is based on static HTML pages is using a Desktop content management system (DCMS).

A Desktop CMS is installed and executed on a local computer instead of the Web server. All maintenance tasks concerning the Website are performed on the local computer. Afterwards the Desktop CMS generates the complete Website as a set of static HTML pages and other files (e.g. images, etc.) and automatically transfers the files to the Web server. This approach has many advantages: Due to the fact that the CMS is not a Web-based application, the installation is much simpler and working with the CMS is much faster and far more comfortable because of the rich user interface that is available on Desktop. The system also handles the complex task of generating the actual Website which consists of static HTML pages.

A very powerful Desktop CMS is "Web Architect 9" from mirabyte (<http://www.mirabyte.com/>). Web Architect actually combines two products in a single one: A flexible Desktop CMS as described before and a powerful, source code-based Web/HTML-Editor. Therefore it can not only be used to create and maintain complete Websites but also to edit HTML pages, CSS style sheets, JavaScripts and PHP Web applications.

The CMS feature of Web Architect follows a template-based approach: This means that the design of the Website is separated from the content as a set of page layouts that can be applied to the individual pages of the Website. Web Architect has some ready to use templates included so that a quick start is possible. But the real power of the template engine unfolds when it comes to creating custom templates: Virtually ANY HTML page (which includes any existing Web page that can be saved using the browser on the local hard disk) can be used to visually create a new template. Simply by clicking on the parts of the Web page that are supposed to become containers for the content (e.g. menus, text boxes, columns, etc.) the new template is defined. All required files (e.g. images, CSS files, JavaScripts) are included automatically.

The final Website is generated by Web Architect by combining the template and the content that is defined with the application as well. To speed up the publishing process which also includes transferring the generated Website to the remote Web server using FTP or Secure FTP, Web Architect has a built-in intelligent synchronization mechanism which only transfers those files that are really necessary.

In contrast to other Website generators, Web Architect offers a lot of flexibility and does not limit the design or the functionality of the Website. It is also possible to include static HTML pages or even PHP files into a Website. The integration of third-party Web applications like open source ecommerce applications or social applications like forums, feedback forms or picture galleries can easily be accomplished.

Web Architect from mirabyte is a unique software application that combines a flexible Desktop CMS with a powerful source-code based Web/HTML editor that was designed to support all relevant Web standards and languages such as valid (X)HTML, CSS, JavaScript PHP and many more. Web Architect is available as a fully functional trial version from the mirabyte Website: <http://www.mirabyte.com/en/products/webarchitect.html> . Free online

support is and a support forum is also available.

About the Author

He is a software specialist at mirabyte and works mainly on Web Architect, a Web editor with an integrated CMS (Content Management System):
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