Why Content Management Should Be Part of Every Organization's Global Strategy
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Why Content Management Should Be Part of Every Organization's Global Strategy

To meet the challenges of creating, using, and sharing content in a global marketplace, organizations should consider a content management system

Suzanne Mescan

For many organizations, the challenges of surviving in today's global marketplace often seem overwhelming. One of the most time-consuming and costly tasks a company faces when "going global," or competing in the global marketplace, is translating all its Web and print documents for international use.

It is not uncommon for a company to have thousands of pages of stored content, including Web site text, graphics, marketing collateral, training materials, technical documentation, and internal documents. Often these files are stored in many different places. When a company decides to go global, all this content must first be organized and then translated into multiple foreign languages. This is no small task – translation is expensive and time-consuming – and if a company has no system in place to track duplicate content, it will pay to have that same text translated multiple times.

On top of the translation costs are general production costs. For each document or Web site a company has in English, a separate translated copy will need to be produced for each language spoken by the company's target markets.

At the Core

This article
- discusses the benefits of a content management system
- examines different types of content management systems
- provides tips for choosing a content management system

Finally, there is the challenge of protecting brand integrity. Maintaining control of a corporate message when files are being stored in multiple locations is challenging in one language, but it is nearly impossible in multiple languages. For organizations that are going global, a good content management system can help overcome these challenges.

Choosing a Content Management System

There are many different kinds of content management systems available today and they all claim to do different things. These systems can be placed into five general categories:

- *Web Content Management* – These systems are typically what most people think of when they hear the phrase "content management." Web

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content management systems help manage Web site content, but they do not address managing content for any other media channel.

- *Digital Asset Management* – Digital asset management systems create a central repository for graphics, allowing them to be archived, searched, and retrieved. These systems are not designed to manage text, however.
- *Document Management* – Document management systems are designed to manage whole documents rather than individual graphics or paragraphs of text.
- *Enterprise Content Management* – Enterprise content management is the latest buzzword in the content management arena and has yet to be firmly defined. Several sources, including analyst firm Jupiter Research, define it as a strategy rather than a solution.
- *Single-Source Content Management* – Instead of saving whole documents, single-source content management systems, sometimes referred to as component-level content management systems, store individual "chunks" of content – paragraphs of text, graphics, sound clips, and multimedia clips – to a central repository. The content is then available for reuse and re-purposing to multiple media channels, such as print, Web, and CD-ROM. This is the most efficient type of system for managing large amounts of multilingual content.

The main task of a content management system is to centralize content in one repository so it can be better organized, shared, and tracked throughout an organization. Content is stored in the system once and reused many times, making the editorial process more efficient.

Employees who work in a home or remote office can access the content, allowing them to complete research or reuse content that was created previously by someone else in the organization. Because of this, content management systems can save an organization thousands of dollars in duplicated writing efforts, research time, production, and translation costs.

Through its tracking and reporting features, a content management system can provide a complete history of the various versions of a file or piece of content: who made changes to it, when it was changed, and what the changes were. Previous versions can even be reinstated if necessary. This is especially important for organizations in terms of complying with various government regulations.

Content management systems are available in several different applications, including:

- *Client/Server* – provides licensed users with access to the system from their desktop
- *Web application* – allows organizations to access the system from global offices, remote locations, intranets, or home-based offices; applications are highly scalable and can be purchased with any number of Web seats, as needed
- *Application service provider* (ASP) – allows authorized users to manage content from any location via a Web browser while the vendor hosts the software and content storage on a subscription basis

Global organizations often find the Web application or ASP models to be the best suited for their needs because they allow users to access the system from remote locations, improving efficiency and fostering collaboration.

The main reason why single-source content management systems are ideal for managing multilingual content is that they save all their content once in a centralized repository. For example, if an organization were to define a technical term in an instructional brochure and then decide to reuse that same piece of content on its Web site, the definition would be saved in the system only one

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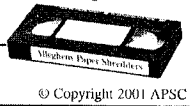

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time. When it came time to update that definition, the company would only have to make the change once, and then the system would update the definition everywhere else it is used.

Of course, any content management system that is going to be used for global content should have Unicode support. Unicode allows unique character sets to be displayed, such as in the Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic languages. This enables the system to store both the multilingual content and the English content in the same repository.

Maintaining security is especially important for global organizations because so many people are involved in managing content. A good content management system should allow the organization to control who has access to which files as well as track who made what changes and when they made them. For most systems, user privileges are assigned by the system administrator, ensuring that only authorized staff members can access the content using their unique IDs and passwords. This is also part of the system's workflow capabilities. Many content management systems have automated workflows so that, for example, when a translator finishes a section of text, his or her editor can be automatically notified by e-mail that the translation is complete and ready for review.

Minimizing the Challenges of Managing Global Content

A single-source content management system with multilingual capabilities can help companies save money on translation costs. For example, if a change is made to a piece of text, the content management system will update all English instances of that text. Then the system will flag the exact section that needs to be re-translated in all the multilingual instances of the text. This saves translators from repeatedly re-translating whole pages of text just to make one small change, and it drastically lowers translation costs for an organization.

A single-source content management system can also enable the easy production of new materials. Because all content is stored in a central repository, it is easy to put it together in new ways to create new resources, such as using existing text and graphics from a technical manual to make a marketing brochure, or using files from a marketing brochure to create a Web site. By repurposing existing material, there is less editorial work, saving time and money. Plus, regardless of how many materials are created, they are all coming from the same central repository – changes only need to be made once and all the materials are updated. This helps to ensure that all the messaging is consistent, ensuring content accuracy.

Global companies often have offices spread all over the world; this can cause problems if an employee in Hong Kong needs to access an instructional manual that is being stored on a computer in New York. Obviously, e-mailing an entire instructional manual back and forth between Hong Kong and New York is not the most efficient way to do

How to Choose a Content Management System

- **Identify Pain Points** – Where are the trouble spots in your content management process? Make them as quantifiable as possible by calculating hours of lost time or cost of extra staff. This will provide an accurate map of your processes as well as help to justify the cost of purchasing a new system.
- **Set Business Goals** – What do you hope to accomplish by implementing the system? Some goals may include: reducing production schedules, shortening time to market, eliminating redundancies, improving content integrity, or lowering translation costs. This will help you draft an RFP and allow vendors to provide an accurate cost estimate.
- **Develop a Technical Solution** – What do you want the content management system to do, specifically? What is your content's life cycle? Does it take place internally or does it involve remote users? What authoring tools do you use now? This list will provide a set of features that you would like your system to have.
- **Shop Around** – There are many places to find information about content management systems. Trade shows can expose you to many different vendors but can result in information overload by the end of the day. Talking to colleagues who have already implemented systems can be helpful, but remember that every solution is tailored to fit individual needs, so what works best for them may not work for you. Vendors provide industry expertise, but they often possess in-depth knowledge only of their own system. Industry consultants have a vast knowledge of different solutions, but they are not always product-neutral. Shopping around will help you become an educated buyer.
- **Pilot Program** – Once you narrow the field down to the top two or three systems, consider taking your first choice on a test drive before you invest in it. Most vendors will allow you to essentially rent the software for an agreed-upon period. This will enable you to get a feel for the software and, just as important, for the vendor's customer service.

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business. A content management system allows users to access the system from remote locations. A Web application or an ASP model content management system can save all of an organization's content into one central repository and allow users to securely access that information from remote locations, creating an efficient and collaborative work environment, despite the many challenges of working in separate locations.

Meeting Global Goals

Implementing any new system, no matter how wonderful it is, presents challenges. It can be intimidating for staff to learn to use a complex new system, especially if they have never encountered a content management system before. To help alleviate their fears, managers should work with their vendor to make the adoption and training processes as smooth as possible. A select number of vendors integrate with extensible markup language (XML) authoring and editing tools so that their systems are even more user-friendly for non-technical staff members. These integrations enable users to access the content management system through a tool bar menu item, allowing them to take advantage of the system without leaving the familiar environment of their favorite XML authoring and editing tool.

Because a content management system is a significant capital expenditure, it is also important to determine if it will be implemented for one department, one division, or the entire organization. For a successful implementation, it is often wise to start small with one group or division and work out any kinks or new procedures before expanding the system organization-wide.

A single-source content management system can help a company grow its global client base by enabling the easy production of new multilingual marketing materials while protecting brand integrity. It also can help a company tap into the global workforce with multilingual internal documents and training materials that can be painlessly updated.

A company may decide to go global to achieve any number of goals. Having a good content management system in place to help manage its multilingual content makes those goals much easier to reach. ■

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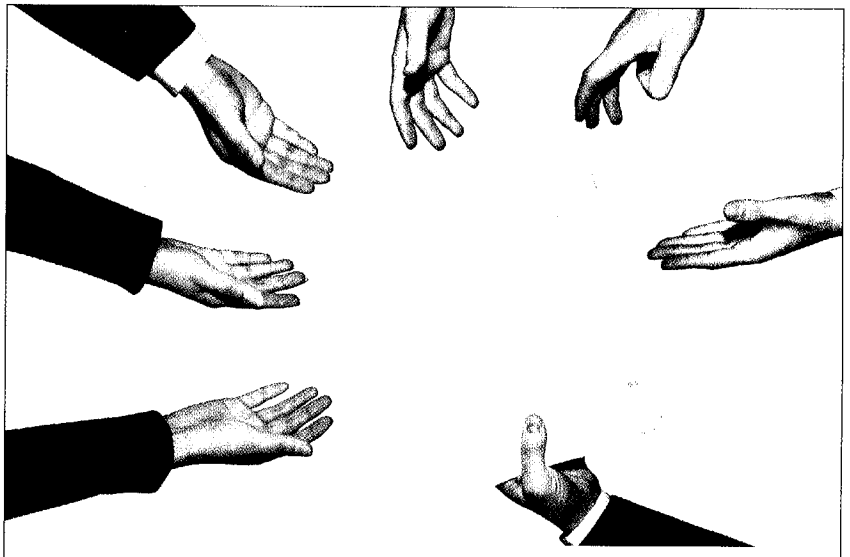

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