

Content Management Subgroup

**Report and Recommendations
for the Web Advisory Committee**

February 15, 2008

Executive Summary

The effective management of web content has the potential to play a key role in improving UW's web presence. Effective content management results in information that is accurate and timely and can create efficiencies not only for our web efforts, but also for all our communications initiatives.

The survey results help us to identify issues related to time constraints, task distribution and technology that have an impact on our collective ability to manage web content.

Based on our discussions and the survey results, our recommendations focus on better ways to make use of the tools at our disposal, on evaluating how we distribute web tasks and use web technology, and on exploring longer term solutions which may render more substantial positive impacts for all involved in creating an effective UW web presence.

I. Subgroup Members

Content Management (CM) subgroup members are:

Sarah Forgrave (Science), Guillermo Fuentes (Arts), Chris Gray (Library), Jaymis Goertz (MUR), Megan McDermott (CPA), Adam Hewgill (Housing), Pat Lafranier (IST), Isaac Morland (CS), Penny Pudifin (Graduate Studies), Gary Ridley (MFCF), Sean Van Koughnett (Graphics; Chair), Heather Wey (IST)

II. Definition

Within our examination of web content management, it is important to attempt to define the term content management system (CMS). There are many definitions, but one simple definition is as follows:

A content management system (CMS) is a system used to manage the content of a website. Typically, a CMS consists of two elements: the content management application (CMA) and the content delivery application (CDA). The CMA element allows the content manager or author, who may not know HTML, to manage the creation, modification, and removal of content from a website without needing the expertise of a Webmaster. The CDA element uses and compiles that information to update the website. The features of a CMS system vary, but most include web-based publishing, format management, revision control, and indexing, search, and retrieval. (NETA.org)

In this context, the most common tools used at UW (Dreamweaver/ Contribute) are primarily web page editors that include some of the functions of both a CMA and a CDA. Contribute is designed to provide an editor with CMA functionality and to reduce the technical expertise required of the user. Neither tool (even in combination with the optional Contribute Publishing Services component) represents a comprehensive content management system. The adoption of these tools has helped staff who are responsible for maintaining web pages, but it should be noted that there is a difference between managing content and editing web pages.

III. Key Survey Findings

From the survey results, three key findings were identified that help inform our recommendations. In short, 1) many staff feel they do not have enough time to perform their web tasks; 2) web responsibilities are often decentralized across the Faculty/unit; and 3) overall, people are satisfied with the content management tools that they are currently using.

1. Time

In our initial discussions, lack of time was identified as a key issue that affects the ability of web content managers and maintainers to do their jobs effectively. The survey results appear to confirm this opinion.

In answer to the question, “What issues limit your site’s ability to meet the needs of its audience?”:

- “Not enough time to maintain content” was identified as the most important issue by 31% of respondents and as the 2nd most important issue by 33% of respondents.
- “Not enough time to assess and refine website organization and design” was identified as the most important issue by 9% of respondents and as the 2nd most important issues by 25% of respondents.

It is beyond the scope of this report and of the survey to determine why this perceived lack of time exists; a combination of issues most likely contribute to this situation, including excess workloads/other job responsibilities, inefficient work practices, lack of expertise etc.

It is also interesting to note that survey respondents do not perceive budget (1% most important) and training (0%) as issues that limit them from effectively meeting the needs of their audience.

2. Distribution of Content Management Tasks

Eighty percent of survey respondents indicate that “maintaining web content is only part of a person’s job responsibilities” in their units, meaning that either 1) there is no one person whose only job is the web or 2) the web is their primary job, but they’ve also been given other non-web responsibilities.

This result is not surprising given the decentralized nature of content management in most units; survey respondents indicate that in 55% of cases, content is updated directly by those responsible for it.

There were different viewpoints about decentralized versus centralized models of content management. Many favoured the centralized model because staff who specialize primarily in content management will presumably give a higher priority to web tasks and will also develop a greater degree of proficiency with content management tools. Others felt that content management tasks should be decentralized because the content author is best suited to maintain that content in an accurate, timely fashion.

There is most likely a place for both models at UW, depending on the needs and requirements of each area.

3. Satisfaction with current technology

The feedback received from the survey does not point to a widespread call for change in the content management tools used across campus.

- 52% of respondents are satisfied with the software they are currently using (27% are somewhat satisfied)
- 49% believe the use of Dreamweaver templates and Contribute are working well and should be supported
- Only 13% believe other approaches such as Content Management Systems should be considered

In addition, only 7% of survey respondents indicate that the #1 reason they can't meet the needs of their audience is because the tools they use are too complex.

Although we need to take note of these findings, some members of the subgroup felt that satisfaction levels could be greater if users were exposed to better alternatives/ options. Others felt that Contribute is an effective, simple tool that allows basic users to edit web content, and that there may not be any better tool.

The consensus was that even though the survey results show a relatively high degree of satisfaction, this should not prevent us from exploring alternative tools or systems that might better serve the needs of UW's web content managers.

IV. Recommendations

We need to make better use of the technology that we currently have at our disposal, with a specific emphasis on efficiency.

- 1. *Web Advisory should compile and distribute a list of content management best practices to help others make the best use of their CM tools.***
- 2. *Faculties/units should evaluate areas where content management activities could be streamlined/automated and should evaluate whether the CM tool they use is a good fit for the user (ie Contribute is better than Dreamweaver for 'basic' users)***
- 3. *Web Advisory and IST should develop a plan for making their expertise available to help with #2.***

Although there is an acceptable level of satisfaction with our current tools, we need to explore whether or not tools exist which may prove to be an even better fit.

- 4. *Web Advisory should develop a plan and make a recommendation to Web Steering about how to proceed with an investigation of Content Management Systems.***

It should be strongly noted that a CMS is not a panacea for some of the issues identified in this report. A CMS will not solve problems related to excessive workloads or lack of expertise.

The profile of the web and of web-related tasks needs to be improved. As a first step towards this objective, staff who have been given web content management roles should have job descriptions and performance appraisals that reflect this fact.

- 5. *Web Advisory should discuss with Human Resources a plan for ensuring that web tasks are reflected accurately in job descriptions.***

A final note: The profile and importance of the web, and of the resources and expertise required to develop and maintain a strong web presence, needs to be enhanced across campus. Senior leadership is essential in moving our web presence forward. The Executive Council task force on Marketing Coordination and the formation of the Web Steering Committee are positive developments, and the hope is that these groups place a high priority on the UW's web. Clear vision and direction from senior leadership will allow the efforts of those 'on the ground' to flourish.