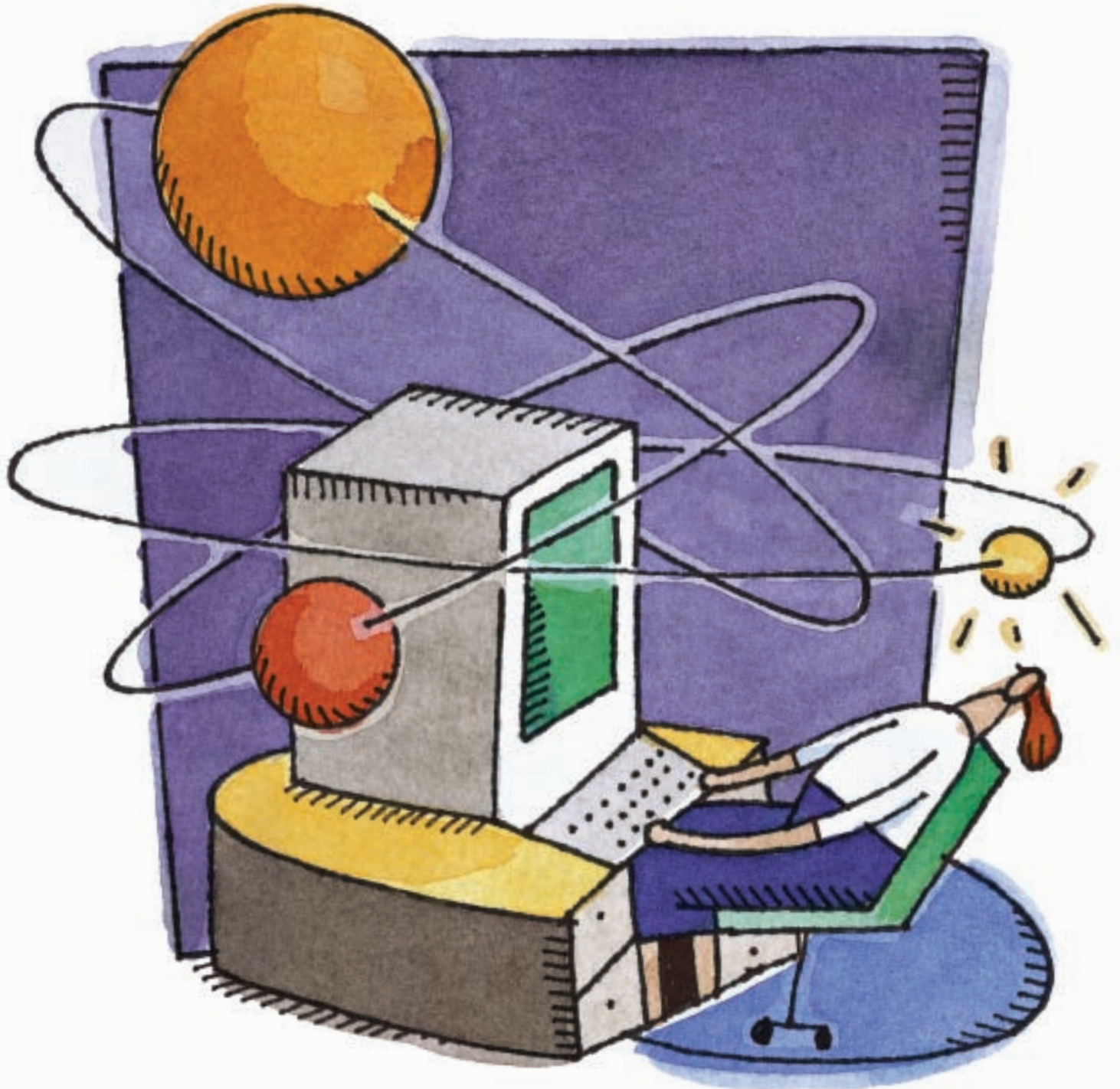


# YOU'VE IMPLEMENTED A CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM ... **NOW WHAT?**

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR OPERATING YOUR WEB SITE



By Sherry Budziak

While assisting organizations in finding the right technology for their Web site strategies, I spend much of my time guiding them through tough questions such as:

- “How do we effectively manage the Web site?”
- “How do we establish and enforce standards?”
- “When and how should we train staff?”
- “Who should be responsible for the Web strategy?,” etc.

In the past, organizations have managed their Web sites in an ad-hoc manner by leveraging the experience of a few skilled knowledge experts and technical resources. While this tactical approach has been somewhat effective in keeping sites up and running, organizations are now encountering problems with inaccurate content, broken links, poor architecture and, sometimes, even legal liability. As we move into a second decade of disseminating content, providing member services and selling products online, it is essential for organizations to gain a better understanding of and control over their Web sites. In order to manage a Web site effectively, there has to be a shift in thinking within the organization.

## IT'S A PROCESS, NOT A PROJECT

The Web site should not be considered a project with a start and completion date. It should be viewed as an indispensable communications and transactional tool, and should be incorporated into the strategic planning process and overall operations of the organization.

To get started in operating your Web site effectively, consider a few guiding principles:

1. **Identify the strategic objectives for your site** by articulating an online value proposition and content goals. The value proposition clarifies the unique value your site will bring to visitors, and the content goals clarify the objective of making your information available. The Web value proposition and content goals for the Web site will be driven, in large part, by your identified target audiences. Decide how much content you should publish (based on your audience's needs), how frequently it should be made available and in what format it should be delivered.
2. **Set a Web site governance strategy** to support your strategic objectives. The purpose of Web site governance is to ensure appropriate structures are in place for managing a site in a controlled and orderly way. Web governance describes how decisions and policies get made and implemented with respect to content published on a Web site. It also can include policies for advertising and legal standards.

3. **Identify the most effective way to deliver content, data and applications** to your users. This includes setting standards for how content is written, developing taxonomy (how things are labeled), defining personalization requirements, writing policies for outdated content, clarifying graphical standards and identifying an editorial process. Such determinations are usually part of a formal workflow process that addresses the organization's preferred writing style and branding standards, ensuring consistency among site pages and support of the organization's overall image.
4. **Identify a managing editor for the site.** Your content strategy should become a central part of your business strategy. You would not consider having a publication without a managing editor, so why is the Web site any different? A talented online editor can provide far more value than any CMS because he or she is responsible for the quality of Web site content (creation and management) as opposed to its distribution (production and delivery). This person will be responsible for fine-tuning, implementing and evaluating your organization's content strategy.

Your managing editor should have experience in all the key media your company publishes (Web, e-mail newsletters, etc.). This person also should bring significant experience with managing projects, people and schedules. Of course, if you have deployed a CMS, the managing editor must be able to use the technology.

5. **Decide on the appropriate mix of technologies** to support your Web site and its content-delivery objectives. Once you have determined your online value proposition and have determined content needs for each of your audiences, you must decide on the best way to disseminate the information. With the vast amount of collaboration tools available, your decision may not simply be to post the content on the Web site, but instead provide your audiences with opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing.
6. **Establish a knowledge management strategy.** Determine where your knowledge assets are being retained and how they will be disseminated to your audiences. What types of data are stored in your association management system? How are documents managed? Who knows the most about the business of the organization, and how is this information captured? Answering these questions will allow you to funnel the most value to your Web site on an ongoing basis.
7. **Spend time training your staff prior to deployment.** One of the most important parts of Web site management is the ability for your subject matter experts to be able to update

content, yet training is normally overlooked or limited. People are the key to a successful Web site — staff should be trained during the implementation process and be involved with testing. After the launch, employees should have the opportunity to take formal training, be provided help with documentation and have a venue to collaborate and share knowledge. Develop a training strategy that includes a point person who is responsible for ongoing training management, formal product training, informal internal training, documentation support and communication. Ongoing evaluation also is critical; periodically review the gap between the current level of expertise and the desired skill level to ensure high-quality output regardless of staff turnover.

## STAY THE COURSE . . .

Continue to remind yourself of your online value proposition and key content goals. Sometimes, the dazzle of sophisticated features can tempt you to lean toward more technology. Stay focused! Remember: The content and the people supporting it, not the system, are what matter most.

“In preparation for our transition to a content management system, we’ve had to evaluate what role our staff and members will play in content development and maintenance,” says Jen Swanson, director of communications and operations for the American Student Dental Association. “Because the system’s

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tools will encourage collaboration, more people will be involved in creating content that will be published on the site. We’re currently developing a workflow strategy and creating instruction manuals for staff and members who will be involved in the site’s maintenance and oversight.”

The principle benefit of good governance and a clear strategy is that team members can remain focused on their goals. Instead of wasting time in political debates about what is or is not allowed on the site, or what goes on the home page, contributors know to stay within their area of expertise, allowing the governance system and Web site editor to make final strategic determinations.

## . . . BUT MAINTAIN A VISION

Having a strong foundation in process and oversight allows the Web site editor and other organization leaders to easily implement new online technologies and quickly implement new programs to meet the needs of your users.

“After revamping our approach to managing the AAE Web site and developing a good support system, we’re finally able to explore some newer online functionalities and features,” said Harriet Bogdanowicz, assistant executive director for communications for the American Association of Endodontists. “We may not be able to use all the trendy things that are available today, but we have a definite idea of what our members find valuable, and we’re going to leverage advanced technologies to make sure we deliver what they want, now and in the future.”

The Web site is just one piece of your organization’s communications plan. In the same way that business strategies evolve to respond to changes in the environment, your Web site strategy also needs to change to meet the dynamic demands of your constituents. Taking action in a manner that is controlled, consistent, but flexible will ensure your success. ■

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