PIXELITA

CMS Showdown:

WordPress Versus CMS Made Simple

White Paper Prepared By:

Joni Mueller, Founder & Project Manager

Pixelita Designs
6601 Sylvan Road | Houston TX 77023
(713) 703-2553 | hello@pixelita.com
www.pixelita.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Whitepaper – CMS Shootout: WordPress Versus CMS Made Simple

Content (Management) Is King

If you are a web designer, you are no doubt familiar with the vast array of content management systems (CMSes) available today. WordPress has become the darling of the CMS and web design crowd and has been for quite some time now. Its large and active user and developer community has a lot to do with that. Even if you are a novice web master, you may find yourself turning to WordPress to drive your site because of its popularity and the wide selection of free and premium themes and plugins available for it. In this way, even a neophyte can have a web site up and running in 10 minutes or less.

But WordPress isn't the be-all, end-all of CMS existence. There are several other content management systems out there that are just as popular and have just as loyal a following. But because we work closely with WordPress and CMS Made Simple, I've chosen those two for a comprehensive comparison, face-off and duel to the death. Well, not so much the death part. But it just goes to show that you have more than one option depending on your clients' individual requirements. I'll take an in-depth look at each one, post some resources to help you further, and summarize my findings in a handy chart in **Appendix A**.

Why Use A Content Management System?

WHY REINVENT THE WHEEL?

Sure, you can create a custom CMS from the ground up. But why should you when there are already so many well-coded CMSes out there that just need a few expert tweaks to shape them into exactly what your client needs?

HAND CONTROL BACK TO THE CLIENT

Why *not* use a CMS? Especially if you are a web designer/web developer offering services to your clients. Empower them by letting them take control of their web site, add their own new content, and make their own changes. I've seen many a web site die on the vine because the client didn't update the site either through lack of training or lack of funds to hire a web developer to do the updating for them. Using a CMS is a step in the direction of self-maintenance and client empowerment.

CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS THAT ARE UPDATED ARE MORE SECURE

Most CMSes are database-driven and even those that aren't are created with security in mind. As long as you (or the client) update the system regularly, security breaches can be kept to a minimum.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF FEATURES THAT LET YOUR SITE GROW WITH YOUR BUSINESS

There are no shortage of plugins, modules and extensions for most of the popular CMSes out there and new ones are being developed every day. You just have to imagine a feature and if it's not already available, someone will likely create it if there's interest. Most CMSes offer basic features such as calendars, RSS Feeds, blogging capabilities, social media integration, forums and much more.

No site is too small to make good use of a CMS. There are several lightweight CMSes available that don't overwhelm, including Get Simple CMS, sNews and Chyrp, to name a few.

When asking which CMS is right for you or your client, just think about what you want to do with the site. And beyond that, think about the future, what you *might* want to do down the road. But most importantly, try several out and find the one that you are most comfortable with. Because let's face it, if updating your web site, if adding and changing content (let alone changing the design elements) are chores that fill you with dread, your entire web site will end up so much web lint.

What This Review Covers

The areas for review of each CMS are:

INSTALLATION AND UPGRADE

How easy is the system to install? And more importantly, how easy is it to upgrade? Server requirements, if off the "norm," are listed.

BACKEND

How user-friendly is it for an unsophisticated user (read: non-programmer) to navigate, add and edit content, and upload photos and other materials?

DESIGN

How easy is it to fit an existing design to the CMS and how easy is it to apply themes?

TEMPLATES

How easy is it to alter the templates to allow for custom features and functions?

NATIVE FUNCTIONALITY

What native functionality does the CMS offer before you have to start looking at extensions/plugins/modules or custom coding? What can it do for you "straight out of the box"?

EXTRAS

What functionality can be added to the CMS by way of extensions, plugins, modules, add-ons or additional coding/programming?

LEARNING CURVE

What kind of learning curve is there for a designer or developer? And what kind of learning curve is there for the end-user?

CMSNAPSHOT

Putting all the pieces together.

CMS SHOWDOWN: CMS MADE SIMPLE

History

CMS Made Simple (http://www.cmsmadesimple.org) ("CMSMS") was founded in 2004 by Ted Kulp, who was looking for a solution to drive commercial, small business web sites, rather than just support bloggers or be a portal. Thus, CMSMS was born. And it remains today one of the best solutions for a small business or non-profit web site due in large part to its intuitive backend and elegant presentation of online documents for end-user download and its Smarty-based templating system which is very easy for a web developer to master.

Installation and Setup

CMSMS is a database-driven program so you will need to set up a database (and user) for it to begin the installation process. It will do a "Pre Flight" check to make sure your server settings are adequate for its needs, and unless you have some really offbeat server settings, you should be fine. Once you upload the installation files to your server, you simply point to the installation script and CMSMS does the rest.

You can choose to have CMSMS populate your new site with canned text. If you are a CMSMS neophyte you might want to do this, as the populated text is actually some very good information about how to get CMSMS off the ground. If you are a CMSMS veteran, you may choose to start with a blank canvas.

Once you're cleared for takeoff, so to speak, CMSMS walks you through several screens while it prompts you for database and site information. Then you're invited to login to your new backend and start poking around under the hood. This is where the fun, the sheer joy, begins.

NOTE: Before you dive in, be sure to delete the /install folder as a security precaution. (But if you forget to do so, CMSMS will remind you when you login as an admin.)

Upgrading

CMSMS will alert you when a core upgrade is available when you login to your system backend. Upgrading can be done in two ways, by using either the full version of CMSMS or the differential file if the upgrade is not a major one. This lets you work with the smallest set of files possible to quickly upgrade your site.

Unlike WordPress (supra), you cannot simply upgrade the core system with a mouse-click (as you can the CMSMS modules). Rather, you must download the distro from the web site and FTP the files to your server and perform the upgrade process from your site URL once that's done.

Prior to upgrading, you should backup your MySQL database and all your site files and folders. You should also clear the cache from within the CMSMS dashboard. Then you can proceed, via FTP or SSH, to upload the distribution files and continue with the upgrade.

Your modules will also alert you, when you click the Module Manager tab, that there are upgrades available. Unlike with upgrading the core, you can upgrade your modules from within the CMSMS dashboard. *See* OUTSIDE THE BOX: MODULES, *supra*.

Portability: Moving The Site To A New Server

Moving the site to a new server is very easy, as long as the new server has the same or higher versions of PHP and MySQL. Just backup the database, empty the cache (via the CMSMS dashboard), export your forms to XML, export your theme, FTP your site down to your hard drive, then install the same or higher version of CMSMS on the new server, set up a user and database, FTP the files up to your new server, invoke [your/path/to/CMSMS/]upgrade.php from the browser URL, fill in the database information, import the *.SQL file from the old server, login, check modules and other functionality and you are good to go.

Backend

One of CMSMS's big draws for our clients is its very user-friendly backend. It's well laid out, with tabs for Content, Layout, Users & Groups, Extensions, Site Admin and My Preferences. There's drop-down navigation for each of these sections, and native and add-on items are delineated by a light gray (native) versus a dark gray (add-on) background to each navigation item. There are two default admin themes to choose from, plus several third-party admin themes in the CMSMS theme repository. It's also not very difficult to customize the admin theme to brand it to your website's look and feel for use by your clients (although links to CMSMS should remain in the footer; branding is just for seamlessness).

Design

Designing for CMSMS is a breeze. There's a great video tutorial available that demonstrates how easy it is to take an existing design and port it to CMS Made Simple

(http://www.cmsmadesimple.org/uploads/media/mint_chocolate.htm). This intuitive CMS also has several built-in menu systems, both horizontal and vertical, and they allow for several levels of nesting (once again, you are in the driver's seat here and you can decide how many levels of menus you want to display).

Using the Theme Manager module, you can export your theme as an XML file. This is handy if you are creating a theme to share with the CMSMS community or if you are moving a site from one server to another. It makes packing up the theme and all its stylesheets and templates a snap. Really hand if, like us, you generally develop on your own server and pack up the site for migration to its permanent home on the client's server (which in our case is never the same server as our development server now that we don't offer web hosting to our clients any longer).

Templates

You can create any number of custom templates; you decide which page uses which template. You can create any number of stylesheets for a variety of reasons. Perhaps you want a seasonal look. You can create spring, summer, fall and winter stylesheets and change them out at will. I usually create a master stylesheet for my design, then create supplemental stylesheets for some of the modules, such as News, Bookmarks, Calendar, Events and so forth. There's also a print stylesheet and an accessibility stylesheet built right in.

Another handy feature of CMSMS are its "Global Content Blocks." These are snippets of text, code and Smarty tags that you can use as building blocks for your templates. I tend to create global content blocks for my header, sidebar and footer items. Anything that is going to be common across several templates can usually be put into a global content block. That way, if you have to edit an element, you don't have to edit it in more than one place.

CMS Made Simple runs on the Smarty' templating system so it's easy to create some of your own functions and modules and UDTs (User-Defined Tags) once you figure out how Smarty works. (Hey, if I can figure it out, anyone can!)

Native Functionality

CMSMS is pretty hardy right out of the box. It ships with several default modules, including the powerful News module. With that, you can create events and timelines and even something resembling a blog, sans comments and trackbacks. (But CMSMS does have several blog modules if you need that functionality, supra.)

Built in is an image uploader, forms module, news module, a mailer (for receiving site mail), a module manager (for handling modules and their upgrade), and several user/group and admin tools.

CMSMS ships configured with three distinct user groups: Admin, Editor and Designer. This way, you can assign users to groups and control who has access to edit content or muck around with the site's design. This is a boon to non-profits and small business who rely, respectively, on

volunteers and variously-skilled staff to maintain the web site. And you can tailor each group's access rights without the need for a plugin.

Outside The Box: Modules

There are myriad modules for CMS-MS that let you have all kinds of features, such as an online booking module (for vacation rentals and B&Bs for example), a Company Directory, inline music players, video players, voting buttons, file uploads so that you can serve up various documents to your site's viewers. Using the FEU (Front End Users) module, you can create a membership portal to serve private content to certain groups of users. This has been revamped recently and is even more easy to deploy than ever before. (Thanks, CalGuy!) There are several blog modules, several e-commerce and shopping cart solutions. The forms module lets you create all kinds of interactive forms. A handy language module (Babel) lets you offer up the site in several different languages, seamlessly. You are only limited by your imagination as to what CMSMS can do for you.

Modules can be uploaded using the Module Manager, which lists all the modules currently available in the CMS Made Simple module repository, known as the "Forge." The modules are generally available as a zip file or an XML file. And you can export all your existing modules to XML format for use later as well. The Module Manager will let you know which modules need upgrading and will offer to upgrade with one mouse-click. Modules that depend on other modules to function will refuse to install unless they detect that those dependencies are installed so no chance of blowing up your site in that way.

Recommended Modules

See a list of Pixelita Designs' recommended CMS Made Simple modules at **Appendix B**.

From The Client's Perspective

Our clients love it because the backend, where they will be adding their content, is intuitive, plus there are several WYSIWYG editors you can use, and you can set those on a user-by-user basis. Plus you can take advantage of pre-defined User Groups (Administrator, Designer, Editor) to keep certain groups of folks out of areas they don't need to be in. This is handy if your client has staff that will be inputting content.

So if you're looking for something that's easy to design for and work with, client/user-friendly, Open Source, and solidly built, look no further. Check out CMS Made Simple. It could very well be your life made simple.

CMS Made Simple Resources And Links of Interest

http://www.icms.info – Step by Step Tutorials on how to Create a Site Using CMSMS by Sofia Hauschildt.

http://www.i-do-this.com – CMSMS Resource for Tutorials and Code Snippets curated by Goran Ilic.

http://www.welovecmsms.com – CMSMS Showcase curated by Pixelita Designs.

CMSnapshot

Founded – 2004

Founder – Ted Kulp

URL – http://www.cmsmadesimple.org

Current Version (as of 06/10/14) – 1.11.10

Community – http://forum.cmsmadesimple.org

Official Theme Repository – http://themes.cmsmadesimple.org

Official Module Repository – http://dev.cmsmadesimple.org

License – GPL

Award(s) – Packt Publishing 2010 Best PHP Open Source CMS: 1st Place

CMS SHOWDOWN: WORDPRESS

History

WordPress (http://www.wordpress.org) began as a fork of the blogging system B2 Cafe Log (which is still being developed under the name B2 Evolution). It got a jump start by then-top dog blogging system Movable Type when Movable Type changed its licensing structure causing a mass exodus of users away from Movable Type to WordPress. From there, things just snowballed and WordPress is today the top CMS/blogging system with over a million downloads of its latest version, 3.9.1.

Installation And Setup

Like CMSMS, WordPress is a database-driven program so you will need to set up a database (and user) for it to use. However, it's so popular that many web hosts have "one-click"

Whitepaper – CMS Shootout: WordPress Versus CMS Made Simple

installations of WordPress available through Fantastico/cPanel. DreamHost also has a proprietary one-click installation of WordPress available to its customers. It truly is a five minute install this way. You are simply asked where you want WordPress installed, in the site root or a subdomain or subdirectory, give it a username and desired password, a site name and voila! You're good to go. Unlike CMS-MS, WordPress does not do a server check. It's up to you to determine if your server settings are compatible with WordPress. And like with CMS Made Simple, unless you have some really offbeat server settings, you should be fine.

If you are doing a manual installation, once you upload the distro files to your server, you simply point to the installation script and WordPress will do its thing.

Upgrading

WordPress will alert you when a core upgrade is available when you login to your system backend. You simply click the button and WordPress will perform the upgrade. Of course, you should always backup your MySQL database before doing so. Using a handy plugin such as WP Backup will make this a simple task.

Your plugin manager will also alert you there are upgrades available and you can choose to upgrade all the plugins at once or selectively upgrade them.

If you prefer to upgrade WordPress manually, via FTP, we recommend just deleting the /wp-admin and /wp-includes folders, and all *.php files (except wp-config.php). Do not delete your .htaccess or robots.txt files if you have them. Then upload the upgrade distro of WordPress. By deleting the old core installation files, you're assured that there aren't any overwrite glitches.

Portability: Moving The Site To A New Server

As with CMSMS, moving your WordPress site to a new server is very easy, as long as the new server has the same or higher versions of PHP and MySQL. Backup the database first of course. You can then, from within the WP dashboard, export an XML file that contains all your plugin settings, pages, posts and comments. Or you can do it "old school," and export a SQL dump of your WP database. Once you've done that, just FTP down your themes and plugins, then install the same or higher version of WP, set up a user and database, FTP the files up to your new server, invoke your site. WP will discover that it needs to be installed/upgraded. Once that's done, you can either import the XML file or import the *.SQL file from the old server.

Backend

WordPress's backend has undergone a significant overhaul in its last several releases. There's now a static dashboard toolbar that you can opt to keep open whenever you are logged into your WordPress site. This gives you quick access to various often-used features of the dashboard. Also, the dashboard is modular and you can drag and drop and reorganize it to suit your working style.

8

Design

There are no shortage of great WordPress themes out there, both free and premium. But if you want to design your own, that's easy enough to do as well. There are myriad excellent tutorials out there to get you started, as long as you have a grasp on the concepts of HTML and CSS. Taking a premade theme and customizing it is a good way to start. And some of the newer, more intricate themes make it unnecessary for you to even touch your design code, since they allow you to swap out logos, header graphics and edit styles (fonts and colors mainly) right from their option panel.

Templates

One thing that makes WordPress easy to design for is its templating system. Since it's constructed in a modular format, with header.php, sidebar.php, footer.php, index.php and page.php straight out of the box, along with some other default templates, you can customize each template, add new templates and call one template into another.

We cannot mention templates without mentioning another great boon to the busy web developer: WordPress Frameworks. Some of our preferred frameworks, which allow design freedom, but take the tedium out of crafting the backbone of the site, are:

Genesis by StudioPress – http://www.studiopress.com

Headway – http://www.headwaythemes.com

Thememetic by ThemeShaper – http://www.themeshaper.com/thematic/

Native Functionality

WordPress doesn't really begin to shine until you enhance it with plugins, IMHO. But if you are handy with PHP, you can make it jump through a few hoops just using templates. WordPress ships with a responsive new theme, Twenty Fourteen, and it's fairly flexible and user friendly on its own. Like CMSMS, there are levels of users, but they aren't designed to be restrictive in the way that CMSMS's user levels (groups) are. Out of the box, with a few tweaks in Settings – Reading, you can turn your WordPress site from a blog to a full blown web site.

Outside The Box: Plugins

As with themes, creating WordPress plugins is a niche market. If you want a particular function and WordPress doesn't already do it, chances are someone has created a plugin that will do exactly that and more. A majority of the plugins are free, but quite a few (particularly ecommerce and forms plugins) are premium, but most of those are well worth their cost in terms of time savings to you, especially if you are a WP designer or developer. Most of the plugins available let you tweak your sidebar, engage social media, beef up your recent posts, recent comments, etc. Some of them let you create custom forms with ease, while others let you turn

your site into a membership site or a company directory. With tools like BuddyPress, you can have a full blown Facebook-like social experience.

Recommended Plugins

See a list of Pixelita Designs' recommended WordPress plugins at **Appendix B**.

From The Client's Perspective

You get a lot of bang for your buck with WordPress and since it is so popular, there is no shortage of help via official WordPress channels and elsewhere. The backend is fairly intuitive and the one-click upgrade of both WordPress itself and all its plugins makes keeping your WordPress-driven site up-to-date, but more importantly, secure.

WordPress Resources And Links of Interest

http://www.welovewp.com – WordPress showcase.

http://www.wpview.com – Showcasing the best examples of WordPress being used in new and imaginative ways. Blogs need not apply!

http://www.wpinspire.com – WordPress design inspiration.

http://www.wpcandy.com – WordPress resource.

http://www.wordpress.tv – WordPress video tutorials as far as the eye can see.

CMSnapshot

Founded – 2003

Founder – Matt Mullenweg & Mike Little

URL – http://www.wordpress.org

Current Version (as of 06/10/14): 3.9.1

Community – http://www.wordpress.org/forum/

WordPress Codex – http://codex.wordpress.org

Official Theme Repository – http://www.wordpress/extend/themes

Official Plugin Repository – http://www.wordpress/extend/plugins

License – GPL

Award(s) – Packt Publishing 2009 Open Source CMS, 1st Place; Packt Publishing 2010 Hall of Fame CMS, 1st Place

10

APPENDIX A: COMPARISON CHART

COMPARING THE BASICS

Feature	CMS Made Simple	WordPress
URL	cmsmadesimple.org	wordpress.org
License	GPL	GPL
Latest Version (as of 06/10/14)	1.11.10	3.9.1
Platform	PHP	PHP
Database(s)	MySQL	MySQL
User Levels	Yes	Yes
WYSIWYG Editor	Yes	Yes
Themes/Skins	Yes	Yes
Admin Themes/Skins	Yes	Yes
RSS Syndication	Yes	Yes
Multi-Site	No	Yes
URL Rewriting	Yes	Yes
XHTML Compliant	Yes	Yes
Auto Upgrade	No	Yes
Auto Upgrade Add-ons*	Yes	Yes
Link Management	Add-on	Yes
Community Resources**	Yes	Yes
Blog	Add-on	Yes
Support Forum	Yes	Yes
e-Commerce	Add-on	Add-on

* The term "Add-on" refers to plugins in the case of WordPress; and modules or plugins in the case of CMS Made Simple.

** Each has an active support forum and user groups on LinkedIn (several for WordPress; just one for CMS Made Simple); WordPress has more WordPress-specific help sites than CMS Made Simple does.

A

APPENDIX B: RECOMMENDED MODULES AND PLUGINS

RECOMMENDED CMS MADE SIMPLE MODULES

ACE EDITOR

http://dev.cmsmadesimple.org/projects/aceeditor

Ace is a standalone code editor written in JavaScript. The goal is to create a web based code editor that matches and extends the features, usability and performance of existing native editors such as TextMate, Vim or Eclipse. Ace is developed as the primary editor for Cloud9 IDE and the successor of the Mozilla Skywriter (Bespin) Project.

CG-GOOGLEMAPS

http://dev.cmsmadesimple.org/projects/cggooglemaps

Especially with a service-oriented web site, Google map interaction is an often-requested feature. CG Google Maps is one of the better Google map modules around, as it's built in the "CalGuy" style which means it's solidly coded and works well with other modules, making it that much more extensible.

CGSMARTIMAGE

http://dev.cmsmadesimple.org/projects/cgsmartimage

A simple image processing tag for smarty.. Supports image filtering, watermarking, cropping, resizing, etc., supports caching of processed images, and embedding generated images directly into the web page (smartly).

FORM BUILDER

http://dev.cmsmadesimple.org/projects/formbuilder

This is on our short list of modules we install on every CMSMS site. You can have as many on your web site as you want and they can be as simple or as complex as needed. Aside from the standard contact form, we've used these as client intake forms for an attorney's web site, for requesting a presentation/safety demonstration on a fire department web site, and everything in between.

GB-FILEPICKER

http://dev.cmsmadesimple.org/projects/gbfilepicker

You can use this module in conjunction with the {content_module} tag of the CMSMS core. Just place this in your template to get an additional content block that shows a filepicker in the backend when editing a page. Very useful if your client has a need to upload different images for different pages.

OWNER'S MANUAL

http://dev.cmsmadesimple.org/projects/owners_manual

This module is exactly what its name implies. It's an online owner's manual for your client's CMSMS web site that you write and customize to your client's exact needs. When I first learned about this module, I practically did a backflip. There is such a need for this, and leave it to a

B

CMSMS module developer to think it up. There are plans in the works for a multi-page manual. This should be in every CMS-MS developer's module arsenal.

SNIPPETS

http://dev.cmsmadesimple.org/projects/snippets
This module allows you to create some snippets to integrate it in your templates.

SOCIAL BOOKMARKING (PLUGIN)

http://dev.cmsmadesimple.org/projects/socialbks
Submit links of pages and/or modules to up to 90 Social Bookmarking sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Myspace, Google+1 and many others.

UPLOADS

http://dev.cmsmadesimple.org/projects/uploads
This is another module that is in our core arsenal of CMSMS modules. It is so flexible and configurable, there are many ways it can be used.

RECOMMENDED WORDPRESS PLUGINS

DAGON DESIGNS FORM MAILER

http://www.dagondesign.com/articles/secure-form-mailer-plugin-for-wordpress/
The best form builder around for WordPress, and it's free! (But donate to encourage further development; it's a very worthwhile plugin!)

OBFUSCATE EMAIL

http://coffee2code.com/wp-plugins/obfuscate-email/
This plugin automatically munges email addresses, keeping them safe from marauding spambots.

SIMPLE SOCIAL ICONS

http://wordpress.org/plugins/simple-social-icons/
This is the best social sharing plugin out there, in our opinion.

WP DATABASE BACKUP

http://austinmatzko.com/wordpress-plugins/wp-db-backup/
If you install no other plugin, install this one. It lets you backup your MySQL database from within the WP Dashboard.

W3 TOTAL CACHE

https://wordpress.org/plugins/w3-total-cache/
I discovered this great plugin at the Austin WordCamp in December 2010. best tool to manage server load and page caching. Good for high traffic sites as well as low traffic sites; keeps database calls to a minimum.