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Guidance on Content Strategies,  
Practices and Technologies

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## Content and the Next-Generation Portal Experience

Achieving employee and web visitor engagement through  
the seamless integration of web content management

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# Portals and Web Engagement

## A Website is the Front Line of Customer Service

The website of any organization is now much more than a brochure that visitors flick through at their leisure. The digital marketing business imperative is for organizations to engage visitors, to grab their fleeting attention and ensure that they make the most of the opportunity. Often, though, the visitor is not on the website to talk to sales and marketing. Today a website is the first port of call for anyone who wants to interact with that organization for any reason. The visitor may be on a mission to achieve a goal: to find some information, to buy a product, or interact with a service.

As consumers increasingly reach for the web as a customer service channel, giving the web visitor a service-orientated experience has a tangible business benefit. A high-quality web experience raises customer retention and satisfaction rates at a fraction of the cost of traditional customer service channels like call centers and e-mail. Self-service is not just for external consumers. The productivity benefits of an engaging corporate intranet as an employee knowledge hub and service center have long been well understood. An intranet is the classic use case for surfacing a diverse range of back office services to a visitor within a consistent web experience.

In embracing the concept of a website as the front line of customer service, organizations quickly discover that the business imperative for web engagement is not limited to sales and marketing, but is increasingly pervasive throughout the organization, as it touches customer service, technical support, customer records and the product supply chain.

## A Relevant Blend of Content and Services

A blend of content and services is recognized on intranet implementations as essential to engaging and enabling employees. We need to apply this thinking to engage our customers and citizens. Web engagement is not just about content regardless of the business relationship we are serving with the web property, be it an intranet, extranet or Internet. It is about serving relevant content and services, and in a seamless and coherent way. This seamless experience is important as the visitor moves between getting information and transacting. Bouncing increasingly web savvy visitors between URL's, exposing them to subtle changes in branding, quality of content and user interface is disconcerting, giving the impression of a disconnected organization to the detriment of visitor satisfaction and levels of engagement.

## Enter the Portal

To provide web-based services to the visitor, organizations are now looking at leveraging their existing portal infrastructures. Portal frameworks are technically built for the purpose of quickly adding new functionality to the web experience, with shareable componentized development – the ideal capability in the fast-paced innovation of the social web. This long-held portal concept of shareable components is often supported by large communities and commercial libraries that organizations can quickly leverage to add value to their own web properties.



With web-based self-service now a permanent element of the operational landscape, leading organizations are recognizing an opportunity to shift their portals from internal workhorse to contemporary services interface, offering self-service that transforms an experience by providing relevant services as well as content.

## The Content Challenge

In some cases, the decision to implement a portal comes at the price of fresh, regular, relevant content. Whether it's an intranet, an extranet or an Internet site, the lack of content impairs the visitor experience. Our research suggests there are a number of reasons for that.

## The Author Experience, User Adoption and the Content Bottleneck

When applying content management to solve a business problem, we consistently see that the key to success in achieving the business objectives of the project is engaging content authors and encouraging adoption of content management tools within an organization. There are similarities between the pressure on marketing and communications groups to deliver content that engages a web savvy audience and the pressure organizations should feel when delivering authoring tools to an authoring community.

The expectations that authors have for the capabilities and usability of enterprise content tools are shaped by their use of blogging tools and social media websites as well as the more traditional word processing tools. Unfortunately, leading portal infrastructure products were not built from an authoring-centric perspective. Consequently, they lack features that a user of a contemporary WCM system would take for granted (like WYSIWYG editing, in-context preview, link sharing or image manipulation). They often expose the author to a technical, sometimes complex process to get the content published on the site.

When content authors in a portal environment look to do more than basic content updates—changing the structure and navigation of the site, for example—the task moves from them using a complex user interface to a call to IT. In many cases, users of contemporary WCM systems would be familiar with more advanced tasks and could make progress without the delay of joining a queue for the much in-demand services of their IT departments.

The portal interface can therefore stand in the way of content author adoption. The task of adding and updating content never breaks out of the small group of specialists, creating a bottleneck that constrains the publication process. Most global companies can no longer operate in such a limited fashion. Websites must evolve quickly in response to news and market changes and to provide the more personalized and relevant content that will meet audience expectations.

## Web Governance and Content Quality

The focus of a portal is on providing a display framework for a diverse set of content sources and services. The content deployment process within a portal often has more to do with moving and displaying data than with the core principles of user-driven content management functions, such as collaboration, approval, audit history, version control content, re-use, localization, corporate, brand and



accessibility adherence. The governance functionality around web content is often sparse, which means that maintaining the quality of the content can become a time-consuming manual process.

## Content Re-Use

Content consumption is no longer just taking place on corporate websites; increasingly, content is being re-purposed and re-used across multiple web properties, devices and other syndicated channels. Content that is created within a portal is often tied to a single context, making it difficult to pull items together for a different purpose or to create sophisticated content relationships, such as displaying related items together.

## Adding Web Content Management

In order to overcome portal shortcomings related to content, the ideal solution is to integrate a contemporary web content management system with a portal infrastructure. This gives organizations the opportunity to deliver to the site visitor and the content authors an experience that captures the best of both solutions. But the devil is in the detail, and this strategy itself has some risks; fail to do this properly and the business users can find themselves confronted with multiple interfaces and a complex content publication processes. In order to be successful, there are some key areas that organizations need to be cognizant of when considering and implementing a WCM to augment a portal delivery infrastructure.

## Content Structure Integration

The objective of bringing these technologies together is to create a coherent visitor experience, with consistent branding and navigation that offers a blend of relevant services and content. With that in mind, the content management solution needs to provide a level of portlet integration deeper than a simple RSS feed of content.

In order to avoid the potential adoption barrier of exposing authors to multiple publishing steps and interfaces, organizations should ensure that the depth of WCM and portal integration enables the content author to make changes to the site structure and navigation. The integration must present to both the portal and content author a shared understanding of the context of the content, where it is on the site, its relationship with other content and how it is classified and presented.

## Unified Search

When offered a complex website, visitors are more likely to navigate through search than the site navigation elements. In his book *Don't Make Me Think*, widely regarded web usability expert Steve Krug refers to "search-dominant users," who almost always look for a search box as they enter a site. Organizations need to ensure that the WCM content and the portal services appear in search results together in a seamless way.



## Shared User Profiles

One of the technical and business benefits of a corporate portal implementation is a layer of visitor and user profile management. This functionality is essential for service-focused web applications, providing common authentication across multiple back-office systems and user profiles that are shared across them. A good example of this is an intranet implementation that utilizes the employee's profile, stored in the corporate authentication system, to offer services and content that are relevant to the visitor's department, role, location or language.

When evaluating a WCM to augment a portal implementation, organizations should examine how the content from the WCM can leverage this profile information to deliver relevant content. They should look at how tightly the web content authoring process and delivery can be integrated into this visitor profile, and how content is tagged in the WCM and related to these visitor attributes. This is an addition to the more basic requirement for the content authors to be able to login to the WCM system with the same familiar authentication details that they use for the portal and other corporate systems.

## Author-Driven Publishing Process

As we have already identified, aside from the visitor experience it is also essential that the proposed WCM/portal integration addresses the needs of the content author to drive the publishing process. Organizations should take a close look at the individual steps and the interfaces required for a content author to publish to the portal. In some cases, this may mean carrying out some tasks in the WCM and others in the portal, exposing the content author to multiple interfaces, but also perhaps more crucially, different publishing concepts. The ideal experience for the author is to be completely unaware that there are two products at work. The authoring environment provides them with a seamless user experience through the entire publishing process and content administration functions.

## Integration Track Record

In the area of portal integration, vendors can convincingly talk about the art of the possible and the simplicity of how to implement code against portlet standards. But clearly the proof is in the vendor's track record and client success. Our advice here is to look closely at each of the areas above and talk to client references about each of them.

## The Final Blend

The primary business benefit of implementing a web application using a portal infrastructure with a specialist WCM solution is to gain a deeper engagement with the visitor. The metric for measuring the success of visitor engagement varies from organization to organization, as each has its own engagement objectives. They may include a reduction in call center volume, increased sales, response to call to action items, or social media impact analysis. Whatever the objective, the benefits we observe when organizations integrate a contemporary WCM solution with their existing portal infrastructure include:



- **More content.** Unlike a standard portal infrastructure, a contemporary WCM is built around the business user and usability. This increases user adoption, the amount of content created and its diversity and relevance.
- **Better content.** Improved content quality and adherence to web, brand, accessibility and corporate standards through WCM functionality and governance.
- **Content agility.** By empowering business users and removing publishing bottlenecks, an organization can quickly react to external events, market changes, new product launches and news.
- **Business empowerment.** Publishing content on a portal is often left to IT specialists, with limited adoption by the business user. Improving tool adoption within the business frees IT from content publishing, enabling focus on providing innovative web functionality.
- **Improved web experience.** The points above result in a better experience for the employee or web visitor.
- **Web operational efficiencies.** As we've observed previously, providing a seamless WCM and portal experience for the content author encourages the business users to create and manage content themselves, reducing the need for expensive specialists, external agencies or the IT department.
- **IT department efficiencies.** Implementing a new system or integrating existing systems clearly requires some investment, not just financial, but also in terms of the time required from the often stretched technical resources within an organization. Our observation here is that IT departments should strongly consider making the time investment as there is a significant return that can be realized when IT resources are no longer on the critical path of regular content publication.
- **Marketing innovation.** Freeing up the technical resources from IT or the budget for external agencies from doing everyday content management tasks enables organizations to use those same resources to build differentiated web application functionality. It changes the relationship between the technologists and marketing, as IT moves out of the high pressure, tactical, immediate need of being on the critical content publication path. IT can take a more strategic role and focus on new visitor functionality and innovation. As we have already observed, a portal framework is ideally suited to supporting this as a platform for continuous componentized web development.



## Conclusion

The requirement for the website as a customer service channel is to provide more than a “contact us” form. Websites need to give visitors the ability to interact, to transact and complete their mission. This drives a requirement to link the back office with the audience-facing web property. Portal technology has a great track record for providing that.

Unfortunately, a portal often comes at the expense of good content. The reason organizations often cite for this is a constrained content publishing capability that is in the hands of a small group of IT or specialist users. This bottleneck is caused by poor business user adoption, a lack of devolved portal management, and difficulty related to content contribution. This is borne out by content authors using the portal who cite a lack of functionality offered in other content authoring tools, office products or social media web applications.

To overcome this, organizations should consider adding contemporary web content management and blend the best of both technologies. This strategy itself has some risks; fail to do this properly and the business users can find themselves confronted with multiple interfaces and a complex content publication processes. The business benefits of user adoption are never realized. A loosely coupled integration also impacts the visitor experience as it fails to provide a seamless integration of service and content. We therefore encourage organizations to look carefully at the depth of the integration between their portal infrastructure and the WCM solution, the track record of the vendor in doing this, and the post implementation user and visitor experience.





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