



VIGNETTE[®]
*Bringing content to **life***

The Web Content Battle

Managing Pages Vs. Content – Which One Is Better For You?

WHITE PAPER

Page-Centric? Or Content-Centric?

Both have their place in today's dynamic Web

A modern Web imperative: You must deliver engaging content, all of the time.

Engaging content, all of the time. It's what makes today's most dynamic Web sites successful. Often at the center of these sites is a powerful, automated Web Content Management (WCM) system, delivering current and relevant information to users. Obviously, the optimal WCM system achieves this goal while decreasing content deployment efforts and reducing maintenance costs. But, buyer beware - not all approaches to WCM reduce operational efforts and costs. One of the primary considerations is whether your Web presence is best served by a page-centric or content-centric approach to management.

Page-centric or content-centric. What's the best way to manage your online presence?

Do you have multiple pages that require simultaneous management and updates? Do you consistently re-use content? Do you require the utmost control over every content item on every page? Does your Web site offer personalized views of information for each user? Considerations such as these must be taken into account when determining the type of content management approach that will work best for your sites. In order to help you consider all of the options, let's explore the primary differences between content- and page-centric management.

Content-Centric: Old School, but Still Powerful and Effective.

Historically, most WCM systems store content separately from the page layout information. This layout information contains all the control data – how the content looks (font size, color and more) and where the content is placed on a page. This approach is called “content-centric” because content is managed independently of the actual content presentation.

Advantages

Easy to re-purpose content – With content-centric WCM systems, content is easily re-used and re-purposed across multiple sites and even multiple devices, such as an iPhone, Blackberry and the traditional laptop/desktop.

Allows you to personalize pages – A strong benefit of content-centric WCM is that it enables you to present pages that can be personalized to each user, no matter the size of your Web presence and even if the content is from multiple sources. By keeping content separate, you can build pages from many different assets that are uniquely targeted to the viewer based on segmentation, preferences, and/or promotional business rules; keeping their experience relevant and valuable.

Example: A financial Web site presents the content that is unique to each user; different users may see completely different loan rates, quotes and even individual stock sales information.

Facilitates easier branding changes – To change the “look and feel” of an entire site utilizing a content-centric WCM approach, you simply need to create new templates for page types.

Example: A small to mid-sized software company has a 250-page corporate Web site and three micro sites, one for each of their core products. To change the site's branding, there is no need to address coding on each and every page. Presentation templates can be created once and re-used across multiple pages and sites. To put it simply: the content doesn't care what the end pages look like, it just needs to know what spot to fill in the templates.

Challenges

No end-to-end view limits ultimate control – Since each page is built on-the-fly based on the user’s unique logon or interest, content managers can never have a complete picture of what will appear on a page together. Without that “set in stone” view, it is difficult to restructure or edit content to ensure that every item complements the whole. Additional training and steps are often needed to deal with that challenge.

Example: On a news site, a journalist can never be sure what other items will appear on a page featuring his or her story since pages are built from content based on each user’s preferences or profile. In the same vein, the content manager can never be fully sure if non sequitur information or advertising will be displayed with a featured item.

Key Take-Aways

As organizations increasingly rely on their Web sites to garner new business and deliver customer support, the complexity and size of sites tends to increase. Many companies are finding that they need multiple sites, each addressing the requirements of a separate target market. With this type of growth, it is far more cost-effective and efficient to rely on a content-centric WCM solution.

Page-Centric: The New Kid that Offers More Control Over Each and Every Page.

To give some small business users (and even some larger organizations) more direct control over how things appear on their Web sites, a newer approach, called “page-centric” WCM, was developed. In page-centric solutions, content is created from, and managed within, separate formatted pages that are managed as static items.

Advantages

It reflects the way people view Web sites – People see your Web presence as groups of pages, not as headless content.

Enables quick site additions – Since pages are set in their layout and presentation, new ones can be added quickly.

Pages are instantly viewable as they will appear on the site – Again, since the format and content is set, you know exactly what the user will see when they click on a particular link or URL. This solution offers a true WYSIWIG (what you see is what you get) environment that speeds and simplifies Web site management.

Less specialized skills required to manage – By putting business users in control over content creation and presentation, page-centric WCM significantly reduces the need for skilled Webmasters and HTML programmers.

Challenges

Dynamic personalization of content is more costly – Because each page is defined before it is served, Web sites that are page-centric cannot tailor their content to the preferences of the audience with ease. In order to provide customized content, the content managers need to create many variations on a page, hoping that one of them will be the right fit for their visitor, resulting in duplication of effort and less granular targeting.

Limits to usability as sites grow – Once a site grows beyond 100 pages, labor and content management challenges render page-centric WCM costly and inefficient.

Reusability of content a challenge – With page-centric WCM, extensive re-use of content across multiple pages and multiple sites is burdensome because the content items are tied to individual page context and layout. In other words, a page-centric approach implies a site is relatively static in layout and personalization capabilities.

Key Take-Aways A page-centric approach is attractive for small or medium-sized organizations where the person creating the content is also responsible for the Web page layout. That makes page-centric WCM ideal for:

- Micro sites
- Static sites
- Sites with less than 100 pages

While it is true that some re-use is possible with manual cut and paste techniques, managing content across an increasing number of pages is difficult at best. This may not be an issue for small or static sites where content is not changed frequently or might be short-lived. But for most companies, changing content is what Web sites are all about—updating content and adapting presentations to meet the changing needs of their business.

Which approach should you choose?

Should you enable dynamic, personalized Web pages for every viewer or maintain tight control over the layout of every page? Rarely are an organization's Web needs 100% one way or another. That is why it is advantageous to build your Web infrastructure on a WCM platform that can support both approaches. For example, a product manager responsible for a micro site may choose to rely on a page-centric model, while the PR manager may choose to manage pages on the corporate site with a content-centric strategy.

Right Approach: Choose Both

Enterprise organizations need a solution that is flexible enough to meet the needs of content- and page-centric use cases. The alternative is using two separate WCM systems which leads to increased costs, support challenges, increased training, multiple infrastructures, etc. and no one wants that. The Vignette Content Management solution meets the needs of the business by being flexible, future-proof and scalable.

How does Vignette technology manage this?

With something called “templating.” Presentation templates that specify the layout of a Web page are created once and can be used many times. The templates even contain intelligence about when to automatically retrieve content and from where. Separate presentation templates might be created, for example, for press releases, white papers, product datasheets or corporate information. In addition to the actual body of content that appears on a Web page, these entry forms specify content attributes such as the headline of a press release, the author of an article, product name or relationships to other pieces of content. A datasheet about a new product, for example, may be linked to content that discusses optional add-ons to that product. Independent of the presentation templates, the content is stored in a repository and each content entry is assigned to a specific “content type.” These content types are then specified in the presentation template and each time that template loads, the most updated content is pulled from the repository to populate the page.

Content, attributes and relationships are managed independently.

A press release headline may be associated not only with the release itself, but also with the content displayed on a home page presentation box called “News.” Each time a new press release is added, this area is automatically updated. Similarly, if an add-on product is no longer available, content dependencies previously associated with the product datasheet are modified appropriately—without changing the actual Web page. Or, if a staffing change occurs, the contact person changes are easily and automatically updated across the different Web sites.

Flexibility is key, no matter what approach drives your site.

If a page-centric approach is most appropriate for your business today, but you are worried about future flexibility, Vignette's WCM solution is tailored to grow with your business. If you subsequently decide that a greater degree of re-use is required, you can always update your templates and migrate to a content-centric approach without replacing your solution. This migration can even be done incrementally, preserving a page-centric approach for certain pages and a content-centric approach for others.

Consistency is maintained, no matter the scale.

Regardless of which approach is utilized, pre-established presentation templates and automated approval workflows ensure that all pages comply with corporate standards. Furthermore, with its robust content-centric engine, every time content items are changed on any page, every use of that content across the entire Web environment is automatically updated. This approach ensures content consistency, even as Web sites scale, for all sites and pages managed by Vignette's WCM system.

No Matter Your End Need, Choose a Solution that Ensures the Most ROI.

For many credible reasons, business users prefer to manage their Web pages and sites themselves, rather than outsourcing this task to IT. By relying on a powerful, flexible and user-friendly WCM solution, such as Vignette's, organizations can cost-effectively create and maintain dynamic Web sites reflecting the changing information demands of their users, without having to wait on IT to respond.

To achieve this objective, companies should choose a solution that:

- Enables business users to manage Web pages the way they want
- Supports both page-centric and content-centric approaches to WCM
- Facilitates content and presentation re-use
- Independently manages content, its attributes and relationships with other content
- Supports scalability and is cost-effective

Vignette's time-tested Web Content Management solutions are helping some the world's best known brands to create compelling and valuable Web experiences. If you'd like to learn more, please visit <http://www.vignette.com/us/Solutions/Web-Content-Management>.