

# Creating a Better Web User Experience for Intranets & Portals

## MOVING TO A CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Websites are usually moved into a content management system (CMS) for a couple of reasons. The new CMS usually provides a much better user experience for the person editing the site, often called the site author. When it's easier to add new pages, update text, and add photos, you get a more frequently updated site with better content.

And usually, a move into a new CMS usually is accompanied by a new design and reorganization of the site's content. This improved experience makes it easier for a visitor to find what need more quickly and easily. These days, most new designs are also responsive, providing a first-class experience to the visitor, whether they are using a smartphone, a tablet, or a PC.

This may sound pretty basic. The trend of improving public-facing websites and adopting a CMS has been going on for years. As a consultant and developer within the Adobe Experience Manager (AEM, formerly CQ) web content management system, I've worked on these types public-facing websites for a variety of types of clients, from universities to automakers to software companies.

These types of internal sites are often forgotten and become outdated, both in terms of the code powering them and the content they contain. They often provide an inferior user experience, sometimes fractured across multiple platforms, custom applications, wikis, and other collaboration tools.

But why invest the time and money to improve these sites if they "work" already?

## A BETTER EXPERIENCE FOR THE VISITOR

If you're building a public website to promote your brand or to sell your products, you want to reach as many people as possible, regardless of the type of device they're using. So, why should your customer portal be any different? If a customer can log in and update their account information whenever it's convenient—like when they're sitting on their couch with their smartphone in their hand—it may save them from calling your helpdesk and doing it over the phone.

### AUTHOR

Travis Estell, Web Developer and Consultant for 6D Global

*Travis Estell is a CMS web developer and consultant at Six Dimensions. He has led complex content management integrations and implementations using the Adobe Experience Manager platform for over five years.*

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If a visitor to your public-facing site searches for information and can't find what they want, they'll often give up and go to a competitor's site. But when an employee searches your intranet, they often can't access the information they need anywhere else. If employees are spending extra time digging through poorly organized information to in the course of performing their job, this inferior web experience is wasting your company's time as well.

## A BETTER EXPERIENCE FOR THE AUTHOR

Modern content management systems offer a great user experience for the person creating web content. These platforms allow authors to add new pages, drag different types of components onto the page, rearrange them, and add photos and videos. It makes the process of editing a website as simple as editing a Word document.

Often, the experience of working with custom-built internal applications is not as nice.

Q: "How do I change the text labels next to the form fields on the 'Edit User Profile' page?"

A: "Edit this XML file and FTP it to the server."

Q: "How do we add a new employee survey to our intranet site?"

A: "Put in a request to I.T. and wait a couple of days –they'll deploy it during the next change management window."

In order to provide a great experience for the site visitor, the site author must have the ability to update the site easily and publish the changes quickly. Wouldn't it be nice to use a CMS, and be able to make a change, hit "publish", and see it on the site in just a few moments?

## WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?

Fortunately, the same tools that power great public websites can also be used as the foundation for great internal sites. And the same care that is taken to create a great-looking design for a public site can be put into an intranet or portal as well. If improving those often-neglected internal sites is a priority, it can be done.

Content management systems often have built-in security features that can limit certain websites (or sections of them) to different types of users. User profiles can be pulled from directory services. There are even connectors that can link the CMS with external document management tools, product catalogs and inventory systems, so content already created on those platforms can continue to be leveraged.

Of course, it will take time and money to design and develop the new sites in a CMS. You may need to develop new connectors to custom backend systems you are already using. You may need to rework much of the content. But if the user experience is significantly improved, you'll find that the end result is worth the investment.

## Top 5 Considerations for Moving Internal Sites to a CMS

### 1. How are visitors using the site now?

If vendors can only use a specific browser and OS to access your portal, they may be calling you rather than using your portal. If employees can't collaborate using your intranet, they may be trusting sensitive materials to third-party sites like Dropbox or Google Drive.

### 2. How do visitors want to use the site?

Employees may be more likely to check the company intranet if they can easily pull up useful information on their smartphone when they're on the go.

### 3. What technology will meet your needs?

The content management system being used for your public website may be a good foundation for intranet and portal sites as well.

### 4. How will access control be handled?

Can different resources be restricted to different types of employees, or different types of customers? Your CMS may already have the necessary access controls out-of-the-box.

### 5. What integrations will be needed?

Can your CMS be connected to an existing user profile system or product catalog? What other connections will be required to meet the site's needs?