

## **Heroes of the Web**

A white paper addressing the extraordinary efforts made by those individuals responsible for maintaining content on higher educational web sites, and the critical role these institutional sites play on the World Wide Web.

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## Just Look in the Mirror

You, the college web content manager, are the hardest working web content manager on the planet today.

Your efforts are significant, extraordinary, and in many ways downright heroic.

Consider this. According to Google, there are approximately 8 billion web pages on the World Wide Web today. Those pages are served by about 50 million different web sites. That's an average of 160 web pages per web site.

*According to Google, your site has 250 times more pages than the average web site.*

Now, consider only higher education sites. According to Google, there are about 200 million web pages representing approximately 5,000 higher educational web sites (.edu sites). That's an astonishing 40,000 web pages, on average, per higher education site, or approximately 250 times more pages than the average site on the World Wide Web.

Higher education web sites make up less than .01% of all web sites, yet they account for over 2.5% of all web content.

Using these facts and figures, and excluding only the largest e-commerce and media related web sites, it's clear that there are no harder working web content managers than those at colleges and universities today!

*The Content on your site is vital to your visitors, your institution, and the world.*

But the measure of the volume of content managed by higher educational institutions only tells a part of the story. It's critical to note that the content being maintained is vital to those who visit the higher education web site, to the institution itself, and quite possibly, to the world.

How so? Think of it this way. When you exclude the largest news and ecommerce sites you're left with a vast variety of Web sites ranging from small businesses "brochureware" to Jimmy's Unusual Pets dot com – and of course, your institutional site.

While visitors to "Jimmy's Unusual Pets" dot com are looking for pictures of Jimmy's famous three-legged rabbit, your visitors are:

1) Looking for an institution and an education that will affect their entire life and allow them to change the world,

*Your visitors are looking for information that will change their lives and greatly impact your institution.*

2) Researching findings published by your faculty that will lead them to discover the next medical miracle,

3) Investigating the process by which they might make a contribution to the college from which they graduated 30 years earlier.

The information that visitors find on your web site, will change their lives and, quite possibly, the world.

### **So Much Content, So Little Time**

But the Web is more than just a collection of information; it offers transaction services as well. Visitors to the Web expect on-line services for transactions of all types, just as much as they expect information for research and discovery. Indeed, the Web has become an important supplement, and in many cases a complete replacement, for information dissemination, research, and transactions. College web sites, and those who manage them, are expected to offer an unprecedented volume and variety of information and services. Unlike even the largest transactional sites such as Amazon and eBay, college and university web sites are also expected to provide virtually every kind of communication method and transactional system the Web has to offer, and many that are completely unique to the higher education environment.

*Your web site is expected to market, persuade, sell, teach, and more...*

The key word here is “expected”. Your web site is increasingly expected to market, persuade, sell, teach, inform, and provide transactional services for everything from online teaching and learning to secure online alumni giving systems. It is expected by both the visitors of your site and the board of trustees. It is expected by the parents of new students who are helping evaluate educational options as much as it’s expected by your own admissions staff who are trying to communicate the right messages to those same prospective students. It is expected by your students looking for course descriptions, grades, and financial aid information as much as it is by your faculty and staff who are trying to reach those students.

*Your web site has become the most critical institutional communication channel, period!*

The expectations of all the stakeholders in this little monster your institution unleashed (with the first web page probably over 10 years ago) are enormous. Your site has become the most critical institutional communication channel, period! Whether you know it or not, your site is the first place your students look to find information, and the last place your prospective students look when they click away because they didn’t find what they needed to

know. Whether you like it or not, your web site is being compared to the very best, most accurate, most up to date, most informative sites your students visit daily. And, it's expected to be just as good.

### **So Much is Riding on Your Web Site**

*If your web site fails to meet the expectations of those who visit, then the institution itself is failing.*

Without argument, the stakes are high. If the institution is to succeed in fulfilling its basic mission of providing opportunities, inspiring research and learning, creating and communicating knowledge, and reaching out to alumni and the community; then the web site must be an accurate reflection of that mission. If the web site fails to meet the expectations and demands of those who visit its contents, then the institution itself is failing. Unless your institution was present during the advent of paper, or the introduction of the printing press, there has never been a more significant communication revolution in its history.

The quantity of content and services provided by your institution's web site, and the unparalleled importance of the role it plays, add up to an unprecedented responsibility to those who are tasked with its development, expansion, and maintenance. You, and your colleagues who are responsible for your institution's web site, are indeed the heroes of the Web.

*Without the proper tools, your institution cannot hold web content managers responsible for sustaining the level of excellence expected by increasingly savvy visitors.*

Without the proper tools, your institution cannot hold web content managers (heroes as they are) responsible for sustaining the level of excellence expected by an ever increasingly savvy population of visitors to the Web site. The maelstrom you see around you today is literally "the perfect storm" in the making. Colliding forces include 1) a surging proliferation of new services and innovative technologies for teaching and learning, 2) an exploding population of young adults who have actually grown-up on the Web and expect accurate, timely information at their finger tips, and 3) let's just call it a "mountain of content" to manage. This is a storm that could actually leave institutions broken in its wake. Fortunately there are tools available today that allow institutions to capture the power of this perfect storm, and turn it into the perfect opportunity – and many colleges have already figured this out!

*A framework is needed to ensure sustainability, and allow for scalability.*

To ensure that your institution's web site is able to keep up with the surge of new services, the explosion of demanding young adults, and the mountain of content; a framework must be put in place that allows the site to be sustainable, leveragable, and ultimately scalable. This framework will not only help today's heroes become super-heroes, but it

will also create opportunities unlike any that have come before. The framework includes technology, and perhaps more importantly, a process shift that involves the participation of additional stakeholders in the institution. Of course this must be done in such a way that the technology and framework do not, in and of themselves, become impediments for sustainability or growth.

### **Sometimes Even Heroes Need Help**

The framework is commonly referred to as “Web Content Management”. While Content Management has been touted as a technology to save us from an avalanche of digital content since the dawn of personal computing, Web Content Management is focused on the unique characteristics of content for the Web. Because most Web Content Management systems were designed initially for the complexities of news media publishing and ecommerce, most systems sold to higher education fail to solve the immediate problem – and often compound the problem itself. Careful consideration must be taken of the unique needs of the higher education environment as this is truly different than virtually all other segments of the World Wide Web.

*Most Web Content Management systems were not designed with the needs of higher education in mind.*

Key characteristics that make higher education web sites unique include the fact that institutional sites are not purely transactional or article based. They don't serve homogeneous content from a database – nor should they be forced to do so. They don't offer services to a cookie-cutter audience of consumers, or offer transactional services to businesses. They are not maintained by professional authors, and techno programmers. Selecting a Web Content Management system must consider these factors as well as the unique human elements that characterize the institution's staff and various parties that provide content to the web site. Usability is the key – or the killer. Acceptance and use is driven primarily by ease of use. The return on investment of new technology is zero if no one accepts or uses it.

*Ease of use is the killer or the key to new technologies on campus.*

With these factors in mind, the search for technology and a framework of best practices is fairly straightforward. Look at what's working for other institutions that have already cut a path through the jungle. Choose systems that work best in the unique environment of higher education. Stay away from systems that were designed by engineers who focused on the needs of ecommerce or news/media sites (typically high-end database driven systems). Look for systems that fit-in with the diversity of people and assets

*Look for systems that have been proven successful at other institutions.*

*Web Content Management is a framework that includes people at its core.*

that make up the institution. For example, don't choose a system that forces a migration of legacy content into a sophisticated back-end data repository database driven schema when straightforward static page editing is all that's needed for such content. And, don't settle for systems that require re-inventing the wheel for serving Web content, or proprietary methods of designing or storing information. Web standards should be embraced to ensure long-term scalability.

But, most importantly, look for systems that are brutally simple to use by end users and administrators. Web Content Management is a framework that includes people as much as it provides technological solutions. If your people cannot, or will not, participate, then the framework is worthless. Choose a system that understands the diverse needs of your most valuable resource – the people who will use the system. Keep this in sharp focus, and you will succeed in fulfilling the primary mission of good Web Content Management, and ultimately, the mission of the institution itself. As a side benefit, your status as “hero” will be elevated to “super-hero”.

### **The Do's and Don'ts of Selecting Web Content Management**

**Don't** fall into the trap of the cookie-cutter database approach.

**Do** go with a system that supports open standards.

**Don't** select a system because it has every wiz-bang feature you've ever heard of.

**Do** select a system that emphasizes the single most important feature – if you're like most institutions, that's ease of use.

**Don't** be convinced by vendors of systems designed for general business content management that your site can “fit their model”.

**Do** select a system that's been proven and accepted by higher education institutions just like yours.

**Don't** select a system that's easy for you and your technical staff to understand and use without getting a buy-in from those who will use it.

**Do** select a system that your users will find so easy to use, they'll actually use it!

**Don't** put off the purchase of a web content management system another year. If there are budget issues, look into a low cost pilot program while resolving the budget issues. **Do** what's right for the institution; support your site with a powerful framework that will lead to more accurate, up to date, and relevant content.

### **The OmniUpdate Advantage**

*A web site is only as good as its content...*

*...your content is only as good as the web content management system that supports it.*

It's been said that "a website is only as good as its content". As your visitors become less tolerant of content that's out of date and inaccurate, that statement has never been more true. The corollary to that statement is "your content is only as good as the web content management system (and people) that supports it." That's why colleges and universities across the country are using the OmniUpdate web content management system. OmniUpdate was designed to allow a wide range of content editors, with a diverse set of skills, keep your institution's web site up to date and accurate.

OmniUpdate was designed with an understanding that the needs of your institution are indeed different than that those of other businesses. The proven system has been used by institutions just like yours to update over 2 million pages of content. OmniUpdate can handle the needs of the largest most demanding sites, but most importantly it's easy to use.

To find out more about how OmniUpdate can support the needs of your institution, and make you a super-hero, visit [www.omniupdate.com](http://www.omniupdate.com), or call today to schedule a presentation (800) 362-2605.

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