

Acquia™

The Three C's of Modern Web Site Management



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A New Era of Consolidation, Convergence, and Collaboration in the C-Suite

The idea that modern companies have a single web site has become an anachronism. There is no such thing as monolithic entity made up of a single code base and file directory operating under the control of a single Webmaster. Twenty-first century organizations have tens, if not hundreds, of web sites. Managing them on a one-off basis has become a massive challenge.

This situation came about for several reasons. Different goals and circumstances led many companies over time to deploy different content management systems (CMS) for different web properties. At other times, a particular web application required a specific CMS. Or even more likely, via the process of merger and acquisition the organization wound up with multiple CMS products and technologies to manage.

As a result of deploying multiple CMSs based on fragmented sets of technologies, the properties and domains that make up the company's web presence have become costly and difficult to manage. This is because each CMS generally requires a dedicated specialist to manage it, which, along with all the extra software licensing costs, drives the total cost of managing multiple points of presence ever higher.

No one is really to blame for this state of affairs. The challenge now, however, is to find a way to effectively rationalize all the diverse components that make up as your company's web presence in a way that sharply reduces costs without compromising any functionality. Achieving that goal requires a more platform-centric approach to managing content that, once in place, should not only reduce costs, but also speed time to deployment while allowing the company to more easily extend the services being provided on the web.

A New Cloud Era of Consolidation

For the better part of the last decade individual web properties have tended to be managed by dedicated specialists within the marketing department. That approach was valid in an era where the internal IT organization was focused on other issues and there wasn't much available in the way of web expertise. Since then, however, the amount of web expertise available has exponentially increased in direct proportion to the growth of the size of the company's presence on the web. In fact, it's this growth that is propelling many marketing organizations to reevaluate who should be managing what within their organization. There's no doubt that marketing should be in charge of the content on the company's web strategy. But managing the physical IT infrastructure should best be left to the internal IT organization that has developed the processes and skills needed to work with IT service providers that can manage the required servers and storage systems at scale.

These days it's not uncommon to see chief marketing officers (CMOs) and chief information officers (CIOs) sitting around the same table discussing how best to optimize the online experience of their customers. When you really think about it that division of labor probably should have been in place from the beginning. With recent changes to the economy, there's now an opportunity to fundamentally realign management tasks. After all, reduced budgets mean that marketing departments need to concentrate limited resources on driving new sales opportunities, while IT departments need to expand their portfolio of responsibilities as part of company-wide efforts to optimize IT spending.

From an IT perspective, the first order of business should be to eliminate the capital expenditures associated with managing the servers and storage systems required to support the company's web strategy. The simple fact of the matter is that a cloud computing platform based on standard open source CMS technologies makes it easier to deploy and manage the web properties that make up the company's web strategy.

The next order of IT business then becomes making sure that there is a content management platform in place that allows multiple functions to be managed via a common framework. Over time, most companies have added any number of CMSs to make up for one deficiency or another; the end result is usually of hodgepodge of poorly integrated web applications that are not only difficult to manage, but needlessly expensive.

From the perspective of the marketing department, it's become exceedingly challenging to coordinate marketing activities on the web. It's difficult to react in real time to what's happening in a specific area of a site that is managed by an isolated application. A modern CMS not only reduces the cost of managing multiple web properties, it increases the ability to dynamically share content across those properties, which should ultimately increase the amount of time people spend interacting with content on your sites.

This level of integration gives the marketing department unprecedented levels of control in an era where customers expect instant gratification on the web. In fact, the ability to respond to those issues will do more to define the brand of your company than any number of marketing campaigns combined.

Perhaps more importantly, marketers will be able to see all the relevant interactions taking place across multiple web properties, which should make it easier to apply more sophisticated web analytics software that identifies more business opportunities. That, of course, can't happen when all the relevant data is bottled up in a series of poorly-integrated web properties.

The Business Benefits of Collaboration

Historically, the CMO and CIO within many organizations have been at loggerheads. CMOs typically complained that the IT organization was too slow in terms of keeping up with the rapidly changing dynamics of the web. But time and technology marches on. IT organizations today have at their disposal a rich array of virtualization and automation tools that reduce the time it takes to provision servers in the cloud to a matter of seconds. That means internal IT organizations are much more responsive to the needs of the business as part of a general industry-wide focus of increasing the agility of enterprise IT organizations.

When coupled with a state-of-the-art CMS, that increased emphasis on agility allows the IT organization to meet the challenges facing the marketing department without forcing the marketing department to invest in a duplicate set of IT infrastructure. Instead, the CMS makes it possible to cost-effectively eliminate redundant applications, resulting in fewer licensing fees and a reduction in the number of people needed to manage the environment.

At the same time, a consolidated environment gives the marketing department greater visibility into what is actually happening on the site, which is priceless information when it comes to optimizing the digital sales funnel.

Acquia uniquely makes all this possible by delivering a CMS based on the code developed for the Drupal open source project that provides an integrated framework for managing a web site and all its associated communities. Not only is the need for expensive third-party web applications sharply reduced, the total cost of managing the environment becomes substantially less. At the same time, productivity rises because staff is spending less time managing content, which creates more time to optimize the web customer experience.

The Digital Lifeblood of the Business

It's hard to imagine a scenario that make two C-level executives look good to the rest of the company at the same time. But, as marketing on the web continues to become the lifeblood of the business, the board of directors is increasingly looking to the CMO and CIO to cooperatively bring their areas of expertise to bear on the problem. This can only happen when both marketing and IT are jointly bringing their expertise together to minimize costs while simultaneously maximizing revenue.

As marketing continues to become more of a science, actionable intelligence generated by data collected by IT has never been more critical. But managing the huge volumes of data involved is not the core expertise of the marketing department. By standardizing on a common web platform such as Drupal, the expertise of the IT organization can come to bear in a way that gives the marketing department more time to analyze real-time trends that they will now have more time to discover. Investing in analytics, however, costs money, which marketing departments can only really free up by leveraging the skills and expertise of the IT department to manage the company's web presence using an integrated platform.

The more closely the marketing organization is able to work with the IT department, the more competitive the company becomes. The challenge is finding a framework for managing content that not only allows this to cost-effectively happen, while ultimately making the company's web platform more responsive than ever to the rapidly changing requirements of the business.