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Leveraging Your CMS
to Help Contributors Create Better Content

INTRODUCTION

Leveraging your CMS to help contributors create better content

Organizations like yours are investing more time and resources in content creation than ever before.

With competing content only a click away, it is crucial to become as effective as possible when it comes to creating, maintaining, and optimizing web content.

You likely have a content management system in place to distribute the responsibility of creating and publishing content. And while some users may be great writers for print, they might not understand how and why writing for the web is different.

Providing continuing education to your contributors is necessary, but there are certain things you can do right now within your CMS to help contributors create better content.

This whitepaper outlines how to set up your content management and content marketing tools to help contributors create more effective web content.

This guide from Hannon Hill covers:

CONTENT OWNERSHIP
ACCESSIBILITY
CONTENT EFFECTIVENESS
CREATE ONCE, PUBLISH EVERYWHERE
QUALITY ASSURANCE

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CONTENT OWNERSHIP

It all starts with the concept of content ownership

In order for contributors to be more mindful about their content, it's important to introduce the concept of content ownership.

If everyone is responsible for a piece of content, no one is responsible. This can result in inaccurate information, broken images, spelling errors, and other issues that negatively affect SEO, the visitor experience, and conversion rates.

Introducing content ownership is the first step towards greater accountability and better quality content.

Content ownership will help you notify the appropriate contributor of any problems with their pages including outdated content, broken links, spelling errors, and more.

HOW TO FACILITATE CONTENT OWNERSHIP

If your content management system allows managers to assign ownership to pages, take advantage of this whenever possible. Try searching for unassigned pages and attaching an owner, both individually and in bulk.

It's also a good idea to teach users how to update content ownership to avoid issues if someone leaves the organization or moves to a new role.

If your CMS does not have the ability to assign content ownership, you can operate under the assumption that either the person who first created the page or the last person to edit the page is the owner.

An alternative approach is to capture an inventory of your organization's web pages and assign ownership from there.

Visit **freecontentaudit.com** to generate a complete inventory of the indexed pages within your organization's website.

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ACCESSIBILITY

Remove barriers and promote a culture of inclusion

Creating web content that is accessible to everyone promotes a culture of inclusion—and it's simply the right thing to do. In a general sense, accessible content is easily consumable for everyone, regardless of disability or device type.

When considering accessibility, most people first think about vision-impaired people consuming content via audio and screen readers. But accessibility comes in many different forms.

For instance, people who are hearing impaired should have a way to read any type of audio-based content on your site. Additionally, creating content at a high reading level can cause accessibility issues, as close to 10% of the population has difficulty reading (including those of average and above average intelligence).

The ultimate purpose of accessibility is to make your content optimally available to your audience, regardless of their challenges. And that is one reason why every content contributor needs to learn how to write for the web.

HOW TO FACILITATE ACCESSIBILITY

The first step to facilitate accessibility is educating content contributors on the topic. What is it and why is it important? In terms of the legal aspects, you may point to resources that list web accessibility cases.

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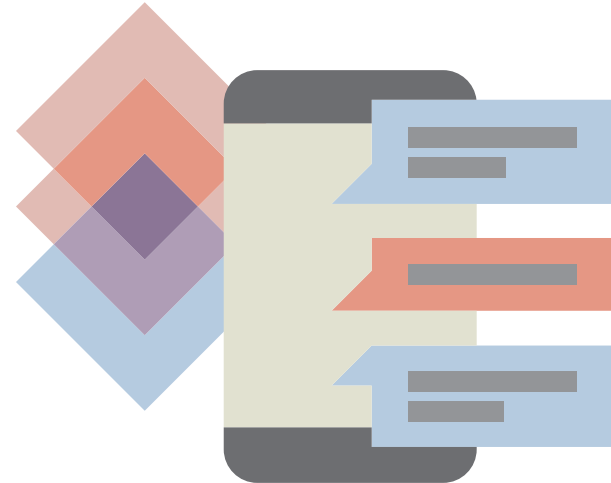
Top three techniques to ensure website accessibility

1. USE ALT TAGS

Alt tags pertain to images and specify the attribute within the IMG tag. Make sure all non-decorative images have an alt attribute for screen-reader users.

It's actually quite challenging to find good alt text on the web. Most people don't spend enough time thinking about alt text, so you'll see something like "students in lab" rather than "Hannon Hill University students experimenting with new ways to improve content health".

One guideline is to think about alt text as a tweet.

Another thing to keep in mind is alt tags don't just apply to images. Always describe your visual and video media using alt tags. CMS administrators need to make sure that alt text for images are mandatory. If you allow users to embed video, provide them with a text fields to add the alt text.

2. RUN AN ACCESSIBILITY CHECKER

Before integrating HTML templates into your CMS, be sure to run an accessibility checker. There are many available for free, including WAVE and AChecker.

Checkers can alert you to accessibility issues such as color contrasts, missing labels for input fields, incorrect header order, and duplicate id attributes.

So why run the checker prior to implementing your templates in your CMS? Because it ensures that all accessibility best practices—especially those that content contributors can't control—have been implemented.

For example, in an effort to maintain consistent branding, most organizations don't allow end users to change things like font colors and background colors. Therefore, you want to lock in those colors via CSS.

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3. OPTIMIZE SEO EFFORTS

Search engine optimization refers to the techniques used to rank as high as possible on search engine results pages.

Because search engines constantly update algorithms, optimizing for mobile, answering relevant questions, and being accessible are more far more important than keyword stuffing. Let's take a look at four things you can do to help content contributors with SEO:

1. Include relevant links. Educate contributors on creating relevant links within their text. Instead of having "click here" links, try writing out the name of the destination. "Click here" provides no search engine value, and it is an accessibility issue.

If you're setting up your CMS, don't automatically generate links that say "click here" or "read more". Instead, provide a text field in which users can enter custom link text, and provide clear instructions to help them choose appropriate text.

2. Utilize keywords. Keywords, just like links, are an important aspect of both SEO and improving the user experience.

Always use keywords that visitors are looking for.

For example, a college may offer financial aid, but refer to the office and process as "financial assistance". If your users call it "financial aid", so should your website.

Your keywords should be used both in the body of a page and the header metadata. If you're using a CMS, show users how to enter keywords into the appropriate fields so they can be included in the headers.

3. Include metadata information. Metadata is information about your web content intended to facilitate searches and filtering of content. Keywords, headings, summaries, author information, publish date, and tags are all forms of metadata.

The most important metadata fields are title, description, and keywords.

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Title metadata is displayed as page titles at the top of a browser window. Every title on your site should be unique, descriptive, and brief. As a CMS administrator, make sure metadata entry fields are front and center for content contributors—and remember to educate them on what makes a title effective.

Description metadata is a textual description of a web page that is used on search engine results pages. It should be both concise and appealing, as the goal is to entice your audience to click on the link to visit your site. The description should be between 15 and 25 words.

Keyword metadata is the search phrases that people type when they want to find your page. And you'll want to include a variety of phrases. But don't get greedy! If your list becomes excessive, the browser may completely ignore the data.

As a general rule, keep keyword metadata to six to eight phrases, with each phrase consisting of one to four words. Avoid keyword stuffing because it's not just detrimental to the user experience, it can also lead to your content being ignored by search engines.

4. Keep content fresh. Search engines are placing increasing importance on content freshness, so it is crucial to frequently publish relevant, and original content—and keep existing content up to date.

When coming up with topics for new content, consider a question-based approach. Write down questions that each segment of your target audience might have, and create new content pieces that answer those questions.

If your CMS has a built-in field to capture review dates, great! If your system includes a content up for review report or a content freshness report, even better! Be sure to leverage those features and alert content owners when content is about to go stale.

If your CMS does not have a built-in review field, chances are you're able to create a custom field to set a review date. You can use the system's API to generate reports on content assets that need to be reviewed or updated.

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CONTENT EFFECTIVENESS

What works, what doesn't, and how to improve

According to Content Marketing Institute's 2017 Benchmark Report:

Only 37% of content marketers think they're effective in their efforts.

And, even more concerning, only 23% think that they are successfully tracking their ROI.

Of course, without the ability to determine what works and what doesn't, it is impossible to improve. Some content management systems have a Google Analytics connector to provide an overview of how many pageviews a particular page received in a specific amount of time. While this data point is certainly better than no data at all, it only gives you an indication of traffic generated, and not really content effectiveness.

Data points that provide a deeper understanding of content effectiveness include: time spent on page, clicks on calls to action, and conversion rates.

HOW TO FACILITATE CONTENT EFFECTIVENESS

Depending on the technology you're using, it may not be feasible to provide all of the aforementioned data points for each piece of content. But periodic overviews of the most effective pages, along with an analysis of what those pieces have in common, are a step in the right direction.

In his article "7 Web CMS Trends for 2016 and Beyond", Tjeerd Brenninkmeijer summarizes, "CMS systems differentiate less on their ability to make it "easy" for non-technical people to publish content, and become engines for content and marketing performance that teams can utilize to derive actionable insight about their customers and for their content marketing strategy."

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CREATE ONCE, PUBLISH EVERYWHERE

Scale your web presence with assets that can be published to multiple locations

As the name indicates, the goal of create once, publish everywhere (COPE) is to eliminate duplicate content by creating an infrastructure that allows users to manage a single piece of content in one place and publish it to as many different platforms, in as many different formats, as necessary.

With new platforms and devices emerging everyday, COPE is the only sustainable way to manage your content.

COPE can be accomplished by using APIs and other methods like RSS feeds. Ideally, content is housed in the same system, although it is possible to implement COPE with different content types managed in different systems that talk to each other.

For example, certain information like HR data might be more suited for a specialized system, not your CMS.

Because content needs to be displayed on many different devices, it is stored in its raw form (XML), separate from the presentation layer.

HOW TO FACILITATE COPE

Separate content from design. To output content in any format and any platform, it is necessary for contributors to start divorcing themselves from the urge to style their content. If your current CMS lets users preview content in a multitude of browsers, consider turning this functionality off. Instead, minimize the ability to style content so contributors will pay more attention to the actual content, and consider the different platforms to which it will be delivered.

Use small, reusable content chunks. In order to implement COPE, a paradigm shift needs to occur. Traditionally, in order to pacify non-technical users, the approach has been to let contributors enter most of their content into one big WYSIWYG editor. However, storing your content in those monolithic blobs means you are unable to push smaller parts of your content to other pages, sites, devices, and platforms.

A COPE-conducive approach is to break content entry fields into smaller, more reusable chunks.

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QUALITY ASSURANCE

Ongoing monitoring to ensure content effectiveness

Creating accessible, effective, and sharable content is one of the best things content contributors can do to increase the effectiveness of a site. But there are important ongoing tasks that need to occur for continuous optimization.

Frequent QA is important because things like broken links and links that take too long to load negatively affect both the visitor experience and SEO. Similarly, broken images negatively impact the effectiveness of your content. And spelling errors can hurt your reputation and reduce trust.

It is more important than ever to QA your content. But, as you may know from experience, proofreading your own work can be challenging, so it may be helpful to put mechanisms such as workflows and collaboration tools in place.

HOW TO FACILITATE QUALITY ASSURANCE

Most content management systems have built-in tools like spell checkers and broken link checkers that are triggered when a page is submitted. Some CMSs also have site-wide checkers that can run at any time. Be sure to pay attention to them and either point specific groups to those reports or, if your technology allows it, notify content owners of content to be corrected.

Workflows. If you have the appropriate resources in place to edit and approve content before it is published, consider implementing workflows in your CMS. Depending on your web governance policies, customize those workflows for certain types of content in order to avoid bottlenecks.

Ad Hoc Collaboration. Depending on the number of pages and content contributors in relation to content approvers and editors, rigorous workflows for each single page might not be feasible. This is where the ability for contributors to leave comments on assets comes in handy.

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Some content management systems allow users to simply write quick notes to the content owner, and for the owner to respond. Similarly, the owner can send a message to another user, asking for feedback.

Task Management. Another CMS feature that can assist with continuous QA is the ability for users to create tasks for themselves and others. For example, if you're in the Marketing and Communications department and you come across a broken link, bad alt text, or content that doesn't seem to be easily understandable, you can create a task for the content owner, which will then show up on their dashboard.

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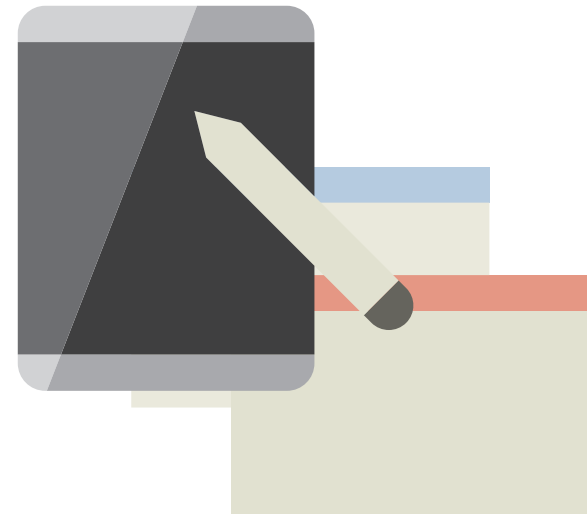
SUMMARY

Leveraging your CMS to help contributors create better content

When it comes to web content, your audience's expectations are only getting higher. With competing content just a click away and constantly-evolving search algorithms, it is crucial to help content contributors become experts in creating effective web content.

It all starts by introducing the concept of content ownership. Assigning an owner to each piece of content is the first step towards fostering accountability and making contributors more mindful about their content.

Another important step is enabling contributors to focus on the actual content, not styling. Worrying about brand guidelines is not only costing contributors valuable time, it distracts them from the things they are empowered to do.

Let contributors focus on content and avoid showing things they can't control.

Additionally, understanding content effectiveness remains to be one of the main challenges for content marketers. Pageviews are not always the best indication of the success of your content, so take a look at time spent on page and conversion rates of calls to action, emails, social posts, forms.

Another key component to setting your organization up for success is implementing a COPE strategy. Stop managing the majority of content in one big WYSIWYG editor and start replacing it with multiple content entry fields for managing content in smaller, reusable chunks.

Finally, while it is wonderful to consistently publish new content, taking time to QA existing assets is an important aspect of any successful site. Consider implementing QA tactics like workflows, commenting functionality, and task managers in your CMS.

In summary, as the requirement for better content grows, it is increasingly important to implement your CMS in a way that promotes content ownership, accessibility, content effectiveness, COPE, and quality assurance.

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Whether your intention is to better leverage your existing CMS or you're looking for a new system, keep the concepts of this whitepaper in mind.

If you have any questions or comments about leveraging your CMS to help contributors create better content, we would love to hear from you.

Drop us a line at **info@hannonhill.com** or call **678.904.6900** to start a conversation.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

Cascade CMS, Hannon Hill's award-winning content management system, takes enterprise web strategy to the next level. With built-in tools to eliminate stale content, increase digital outreach, and ensure the best possible site audience engagement, it's no wonder Cascade CMS powers more than 25,000 sites and supports 100,000 users across the globe.

Spectate from Hannon Hill is an inbound marketing software platform that enables you to track, optimize, and measure your company's website, content, and visitors.

LEARN MORE

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