



Chapter V

ScratchPad:

A Quality Management Tool for Library Web Sites

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Abstract

This chapter describes the planning, development, and implementation of a quality management tool for an academic library Web site. It explains the impetus for the project, presents the rationale for developing the tool, and describes the system components. The tool balances the needs of Web contributors with the assurance of a professional presentation of the organization's Web site by offering a systematic workflow from development to production, with appropriate quality oversight prior to public posting. Implementation outcomes are discussed, especially as they relate to staff engagement and solving post-production issues. The authors hope that technical staff in other libraries will consider implementing a quality control tool to manage their Web sites.

Introduction

The Libraries at the University at Albany have developed a quality management system for their public Web site. The system, called ScratchPad, is composed of three components. MockWeb is the development site that the staff uses to create, test, and maintain their pages. WebReview is the application that makes possible the quality review and synchronization of MockWeb and the production site. The third component is the production site viewed by the public. This case study will cover the system implementation from concept through its first two years of operation. ScratchPad is freely available for public use.

The impetus for this project came from the lack of oversight of the work posted to the libraries' Web site by its many staff contributors. Errors in content and design were finding their way onto the site. The process of finding these errors and getting them fixed was time consuming and haphazard. The search for a solution led to the development of ScratchPad using existing servers, software, and staff expertise. The model that evolved split the site into a development and a production site, mediated by an application that generates a list of new and newly modified files for review prior to their transfer to the production site. With this new workflow in place, most issues are resolved on the development site. This has enhanced the quality of materials viewed by the public.

Background

The University at Albany (UA) is a public institution located in Albany, New York, managed under the auspices of the State University of New York (SUNY). The institution was founded as the New York State Normal School in 1844 and now encompasses three campuses. The University Libraries serve two of these campuses. The main campus, situated at the western border of Albany, was constructed in 1963 and is served by the University Library and the Science Library. The campus of the Nelson A. Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy is served by the Thomas E. Dewey Graduate Library. More than 17,000 students attend the UA in both undergraduate and graduate programs.

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