Chapter VI

Website Maintenance Workflow at a Medium-Sized University Library

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Abstract

Currently, more than half the library staff at a medium-size academic library maintain large numbers of static Web pages using Web editors, rather than content management tools. While not optimal in the technical sense, this process does maximize the individual's creative contributions to the site. Because of this flexibility, feedback about this process has been primarily positive at an individual level. However, a growing number of challenges in the areas of content, priorities, technical skills, and workflow exceptions have cast doubt on this system's long-term prospects. This chapter discusses the balance between individual and group needs, and the true cost of a purely technical solution to the problem of Web maintenance.

Introduction

The creation of a Web site is much like the birth of a child. It is a thrilling achievement, one that is certain to change your life forever. New experiences and milestones wait around every corner. Maintenance is decidedly different. "While creating a Web site is exciting, maintaining one often comes to seem a chore" (Cox, Yeadon, & Kerr, 2001, p. 414). There are no pats on the back and hearty congratulations for each diaper change, each broken link fixed. Maintenance can seem dull, routine, and unending. No one seems to appreciate or notice daily maintenance work, unless it is forgotten. No wonder new Webmasters and parents alike suffer from burnout, stress, or fatigue.

As Shropshire (2003) states, "It is essential that there be adequate respect for the dynamic nature of this beast, because maintenance is not part of the problem-it is *the* problem" (p. 99). While site creation is certainly critical, it is those smaller day-to-day decisions that shape and direct the bigger picture. In exploring the topic of site maintenance, one must realize that the concerns of site maintenance differ from those of site creation. A new site may be created by a small team or individual, but a larger group best supports long-term maintenance for several reasons. First, site creation often occurs during a finite compressed timeframe, while maintenance is ongoing. Second, while an individual or smaller group helps keep the site creation process focused, a narrowly focused gatekeeping group that persists into the maintenance phase may inhibit the site's growth, creativity, or flexibility. Finally, creating a basic site structure is simply less work than creating all the details to support it. It is the difference between simply outlining a picture and shading it in beautiful colors.

The special concerns of Web maintenance have only multiplied with the increased size and complexity of many library Web sites. Not only does the single Webmaster model no longer work for most libraries, but the static HTML page is also in jeopardy. Many overworked Web librarians dream about the instant content updates possible with database-driven site or content management software. But while these technical solutions save staff time, they demand a fair amount of compromise. In an academic environment where individual, not team, drive and creativity are most highly rewarded, these technical solutions do not seem feasible.

This case study describes an environment where a large percentage of the library staff maintain one or more static Web pages on the library site without any content management software. A Web librarian provides supervision and

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