Blogs, CMSs and Wikis:

What the heck are they and how do you know when you need one?

We're often asked which is better, a Blog, CMS or Wiki. It's not that either is better or worse than the others, but what each does best compared to the others. In this article, we'll take a look at what each is and what to consider when choosing the best system for your needs.

a. A **Blog** is a blend of the words "Web Log" (a *portmanteau*, if you will). Blog sites generally consist of entries that are made in journal-style and displayed in a reverse chronological order. All Blog systems that are "worth-their-weight-in-salt", have the capability for readers to post comments to the entries making it very easy for a site to expand its content with user participation. Some Blog owners take advantage of this feature, others find the feature annoying (it can attract "blog spam" or they just don't want people commenting on their ideas) and they simply turn this feature off.

> "Your organization and site's size is the main factor to consider when choosing between a Blog system and a CMS.

b. A **CMS** is an acronym that stands for: Content Management System. A Web CMS facilitates the organization, and publication of a large body of html documents and other content, such as images and multimedia resources. It also eases the collaborative creation of these documents and resources.

c. A **Wiki** is quite a bit different from a Blog or CMS and almost in a realm all its own. Its like a CMS for the entire world. The word "Wiki" is Hawaiian for "fast" and the creator of the first Wiki named it so because of this meaning and that it sounded better than "quick web". Many people also assume Wiki is an acronym for **"What I Know Is..."** as most Wiki sites are set up to be large repositories of information.

I can manage my entire site with a blog system?

> "Consider using a Wiki to help you improve time management and productivity by simplifying your documentation process.

Yep. These days, Blogs and CMSs are increasingly melding into cohesive packages that are comparable. Most major Blog tools like WordPress now include the ability to manage "static" pages (pages that are not dated blog entries) as well as including extensions or plugins that allow you to manage many of the items mentioned above: from **photo galleries** to **event managers** and **shopping carts** (again, you name it, your Blog package can probably handle it). At the same time, CMS packages like Joomla and Drupal all now include the ability to manage blogs within their structures and/or have plugins to easily bring in existing blogs that are managed with Blogger or WordPress into them so that they can be managed via the CMS's admin panel in addition to the original admin tool.

This means, between choosing between a Blogging system and a CMS you have a very wide (and overwhelming!) range to choose from. We recommend using the following guidelines to help assess which is better for you:

No time to read? Skim this:

If your site is **small to medium sized** with only **one** to a **handful of contributors**, a Blog system like WordPress is probably best. If all you want to manage is a Blog and *not* a "full" web site, then you also might want to look at Blogger.

Large sites with **many contributors** to manage may benefit from using a full CMS like Joomla! or Drupal.

Wikis, like MediaWiki are great ways to **easily collect** and **manage group knowledge** like **processes** or **how-to documentation**. Read the full article for more details on the pros and cos for each and feel free to contact us with your questions.

Got the system? But no design?

We can create clean, all CSS driven template designs created to work with any open-source Blog or CMS application. Talk with us today and find out how your existing website tools can be leveraged and expanded to generate the site of your dreams.

Blog vs CMS guidelines:

What's Your Budget?

First off, your budget really won't impact the final decision between a robust Blog system and a CMS nearly as much you'd think. You should go for the kind of system that can fully accommodate the size of your site and amount of contributors you have. Once you've decided on a Blog system or a CMS you'll be able to work out something in your budget from there.

Let's just take a look at costs: if you're a **small business**, **freelancer** or not-for-profit organization, your best budgetary bet is to go Open Source. This will save you money as, depending on how technical you are, and the type of services your hosting provider offers, you might be able to do a lot of the initial set up and content importing yourself. You'll also be able to find another small business or freelancer who can help you install the system for a reasonable price and assist you with any learning curves required to get going on it. If you're a **medium** to **large commercial business**, going Open Source can still save you money, as you can probably afford to bring in a full-time person with experience in your site's system to be the key administrator and assist the other contributors. However, some organizations in this range may choose to go with a **commercial system** because they'd rather pay to have a package provider who can "roll it out" for them and help them maintain and support it, they feel like paying for it up-front will save them head aches down the road. Another reason to use a commercial system is if your organization is already using commercial web-server technology like a **Windows** server using **.Net** or **ColdFusion**. Open Source systems tend to be only be built for Open Source platforms like **Linux** servers using PHP.

The Blog and CMS systems we recommend and discuss in this article are Open Source and work with Linux servers using PHP and MySQL databases. A quick Google search will provide you with many, many names of the leading Blog systems and CMSs in both Commercial and Open Source industries for all sorts of platforms, scripting languages and databases.

How Big is Your Site and Organization?

A full CMS like Joomla! or Drupal is best used within an organization that has or plans to grow an incredibly **large web site**. They have **many different people** collaborating over a **wide range of content** and **media** resources that need to be managed and **updated regularly**. We have found that there is a pretty **decent-to-high learning curve** for organizations migrating to or starting out on one of these CMSs. However, as the site and organization grows, this investment becomes well worth it (*depending on how large the site is and how many people are involved, using a **Wiki** internally to document how to use the CMS and its publishing procedures is also a good way to **manage the learning curve** - more on that in a bit*).

A Blog, like WordPress, is best for a **small to medium sites** with **one to a few collaborators** and editors. The **learning curve is lower** as you can easily manage your entire site via a fairly simple and straight forward administration panel. Despite the simplicity, you can also assign multiple editors and administrators in order to collaborate with multiple people on the site. Plus,as we just mentioned, many Blog tools include the capabilities to do more that just maintain blogs. For example, you can extend your WordPress site with all sorts of plugins which dramatically extend its capabilities.

By taking into account the size of your organization and site and what you feel its focus is (if it is intended to primarily be a blog, then you might as well use a Blog system) you'll be better able to assess your needs in the sea of Blog and CMS possibilities out there.

Wait. What About the Wiki?

A typical Wiki web site allows visitors to add, remove, edit content, and link pages together very quickly and easily, generally without the need for registration as an editor, writer or administrator. Like with Blogs and CMSs, there are many Wiki systems to choose from, MediaWiki is a popular, easy to install Open Source choice.

While you can limit the number of users and require registration, enabling you to use a wiki almost like a normal CMS, your best bet is to use the Wiki as intended - to easily collect a body of user or community knowledge. Unless your site is going to be centered around a concept like this, such as Wikipedia, you'll find a Wiki most useful as an **additional supplement** to your site or organization, rather than, the system you'd use to manage your actual web site.

We recommend some clients use Wikis to provide customers with robust FAQ systems for products (again, you can make it so only your customer service people can edit the Wiki) and/or use Wikis internally to aid in **time management** and **productivity** by easily documenting proccesses and procedures for all your various business functions.

You can use your Wiki to document anything from how to reload the fax machine with toner and paper to documenting complex procedures for handling customer and vendor contracts. Wikis tend to be better than the traditional "handbooks" or "technical docs" that get dropped on new employees desks or emailed out, because they're more easily accessible and key word searchable (as opposed to being lost in their email in box or dropped in the bottom of a drawer).

By setting the Wiki's editing permissions so your organization can edit and add content, they can easily add new information to existing documentation, share insights, tips and tricks and fix incorrect or outdated information themselves (if you're worried about mis-information or vandalism happening on your Wiki, there are security protocols you can set up and every edit and change is logged either by IP or user name (your choice), this alone discourages most people from mis-using, especially an internal documentation Wiki there are other security protocols you can set up on a Wiki as well).

Imagine not having new people sit around waiting for your lone tech guy to come and get their computer connected to the printer network because they were able to follow the 4 easy steps listed on the organization's Wiki. Imagine having your lone tech guy be able to do really cool things for your Web server because he doesn't spend over half his day running around handling issues that most people would be happy to take care of themselves if they only knew how. Same with sales and customer support people not having to wait for one manager to show them where a form is or how to fill it out because there was a detailed example on the Wiki, same for website contributors and editors who are initially overwhelmed by the CMS's administration panel, the uses of the Wiki go on and on.

Depending on the size of your organization you may just choose to have one Wiki or it might be wise to give each major department its own Wiki.

Thanks for your interest in our services. If you have any questions, please contact us: http://hyper3media.com/contact