

Software for the Agile Business.



Web content production streamlined at Microsoft Australia

Company Profile

Microsoft is a worldwide leader in software, services and Internet technologies for personal and business computing. The company offers a wide range of products and services designed to empower people through great software – any time, any place and on any device. Building on the popularity of the Windows® operating system and the Office productivity suite, Microsoft is now focused on developing technology for the next-generation Internet. The company's .NET platform will enable businesses to collaborate more effectively to offer an unprecedented range of integrated and customised solutions – solutions that enable their customers to act on information wherever and whenever they need it.

Business Scenario

Until 12 months ago, production and maintenance of the Microsoft Australian Web site was outsourced to a Web development agency. Page change requests were passed to the agency via an internal content manager whose responsibility was coordinating workflow. In addition to managing outgoing material, the content manager monitored returns from the agency to ensure that they met the required schedule, as well as checking and approving the content, and finalising it for live publication. The manual mark-up process conducted by the agency was expensive, slow and resource intensive, and the content manager at Microsoft was primarily occupied with forwarding emails between interested parties. Mark Baartse, Online Platform and Operations Manager at Microsoft Australia, explains the inefficiency: "When a Web site update was needed, an internal brief was sent to the agency for review and scheduled into an available time frame. The process was required for all changes, whether they were relatively minor, such as product or price updates, or major such as complete page redevelopment. Turnaround time could take up to two weeks or more depending on the volume of work and it was costing us a substantial amount of money. We very quickly came to the conclusion that we needed a more effective solution for the organisation."

Whilst the Microsoft Web team were searching for a content management solution (CMS), Microsoft acquired ownership of Ncompass, a company that produced a content management product called Resolution. The timing presented an ideal opportunity for the team to evaluate the product as a potential answer to the issues they had been facing with the Microsoft Australia Web site. The Web team ran a pilot rollout to investigate whether this product could interoperate

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Alison Dodd,

Director of the Central Marketing Organisation,
Microsoft Australia.

Organisation

Microsoft Australia

Web Site

www.microsoft.com/australia/

Industry

Information Technology

Business Scenario Summary

Production of the Microsoft Australia Web site has traditionally been outsourced, with page change requests passed to the development agency via an internal content manager. The process was inefficient, as it was required for both small- and large-scale changes. Turnaround time was up to two weeks and production costs were high.

with the existing architecture. "The initial pilot confirmed that there were a number of sites that would benefit from moving immediately to CMS. These included sites that had regular, small, incremental changes as well as those that needed a complete overhaul," Baartse explains.

Business Solution

Ncompass Resolution, restructured to meet Microsoft standards and renamed Microsoft Content Manager Server 2001 (CMS 2001), passed through the Web team's pilot phase in a mere two weeks, with design and implementation handled by a single developer. The product had proven to be not only a sophisticated content management solution but also a valuable rapid-development platform that met all the needs of the organisation. Microsoft Australia engaged the services of Brisbane-based Codify Pty Ltd to develop a system based on CMS 2001 to meet the full requirements. "At Microsoft Australia, Web content falls predominantly into two categories: software for downloading; and information generated for activities such as events, product releases or technical support. In addition, there are strict global brand guidelines for content, graphics, style and colour, which must be adhered to. We needed to develop a suite of custom templates using CMS 2001 that would enforce these guidelines, and enable non-specialised users to add and manage content in an efficient and timely manner," says David Connors, Managing Director at Codify.

In consultation with Microsoft Australia's online marketing manager and Web designers, three key templates were developed: a Web site front page; an information page; and a detail page complete with bullet points, sub-headings and feature layout. The templates include the corporate Web image, as well as standard menus and components used for selection and navigation on Microsoft Australia sites. "CMS 2001 has a powerful, high-level programming interface that enables us to build the sort of features that normally require specialised technical development on each page. But by building these features into the template, they are automatically inherited when users add a new page to the Web site. This means that the content management process becomes non-technical, enabling staff with a minimal software skill set to add and change content quickly and easily," Connors says.

By building on the base features of CMS 2001, a tailored solution could be constructed rapidly to meet the needs of the organisation. As Connors states: "This gives us a huge amount of leverage into the powerful capabilities of CMS 2001. Because you can customise the product to suit a business so easily, this in itself substantially reduces the total cost of ownership of the solution to the business."

Managing information effectively

When users choose to create content, the system presents them with a choice of templates in which they can structure the required information. Once a template has been selected, content can be added by typing, or copied from other HTML-format source documents. The templates support rich editing capabilities so that text can be formatted as required, and hyperlinks can be created to other pages within CMS 2001 or to external documents on the Web. With the addition of embedded images and attached documents such as those in PDF format, a full-featured Web site can be constructed easily.

Business Solution Summary

CMS 2001 formed the basis of a customised solution that used templates to encapsulate design technicalities, and workflow policies to control content approval. The solution enables non-technical users to add and manage content in an efficient and timely manner.

CMS 2001 supports integration with Windows 2000 Active Directory™ Services, allowing usernames and passwords to be sourced directly from the existing Microsoft user database. This enables users to be logged on transparently, and also forms the basis of workflow management functionality built into the solution. “We used Active Directory Service permissions to determine the workgroups, decide content management authorisation and control the workflow pathway. Users simply browse to the CMS 2001 design page to examine their authorised content areas and their permissions determine their ability to modify content. For example, the Microsoft Australia media team can only work with press releases whilst the Events management team can only add or modify event schedule and location pages. So that each time has complete control over their own content and don't need to be worried about it being modified or changed without driving themselves,” Connors adds.

Online management streamlines processes

The workflow capabilities of CMS 2001 have distributed the task of editing and authorising content to staff within the business units. When content is created or changed, it is automatically delegated to the nominated content editor for editing and approval. A hyperlink is provided to all the relevant pages so that changes can either be approved or declined. Reports listing content awaiting approval or content that has changed in a given time period can be generated, and if a page is deleted, the owner of the page is automatically advised by email.

Ensuring Success with a Microsoft Partner

As the development partner for applications on the Microsoft.com/australia Web site since 1999, Codify Pty Ltd, a software engineering consultancy, offered the right combination of skills and experience to develop the CMS 2001 solution. The company has been in business since 1996, and has also undertaken projects for the Microsoft corporate head office in the USA.

Benefits

For Microsoft, the Web is one of the most important parts of their information strategy, and therefore the speed and efficiency at which the system operates is critical to the ability of the organisation to respond to market and audience needs rapidly and proactively. Now that users are responsible for their own content, and the approval chain is automated in CMS through workflow policies, Web page updates can be done almost instantly. This has dramatically improved the ability of individual business units to publicise information in response to urgent media issues or update changes to event schedules within critical time frames.

Achieving more effective time management

With content management conducted according to strict corporate standards enforced in the application, and the review and approval process managed by nominated editors, senior site management responsibilities are minimal. The result has been a 50 percent reduction in the workload of the content manager, allowing time to focus on other work priorities. Now that page construction is owned within the business, the publication process has become dramatically simpler and page production time reduced from weeks to several hours.

Partner Details

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Benefits

Improvements in the speed and efficiency of Web site production have enabled the organisation to respond to market and audience needs more rapidly and proactively. The approval chain is automated in CMS workflow policies and Web site management overhead has been reduced by 50 percent. Template design enables site changes to be implemented automatically when the Web site is republished. The template system is so robust that users have complete flexibility to design pages within the site without a technical skill set.

As the entire Web structure is based on a system of carefully designed templates, global changes such as base colour schemes or fonts can be changed in the template and the site will automatically reflect these changes when it is republished. Now this can be achieved in a matter of hours rather than the historical experience of days or even weeks.

The way to build Web pages

The template system is so flexible that users can design pages without worrying about corrupting the technical features of the page such as scripts and HTML programming. Pages can therefore be produced with little or no knowledge of HTML and so the solution is accessible to the broadest possible spectrum of users. The technicalities of publishing content have also been resolved to such an extent that that staff now only have to focus on content creation. With the templates also controlling corporate image, the Web team is ensured of a consistent design across a large number of users, producing a high volume of pages.

Technology

Microsoft CMS 2001 has extensive site management features that make Web sites cost-effective to develop, deploy and maintain. Server administration is done through a Web interface that supports multiple virtual sites resulting in any time, anywhere administration. Content is stored in a Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 database so that when a site is republished, all the components that have been assembled by site owners are readily available. CMS 2001 users are drawn from the existing user directory system stored in Windows 2000 Active Directory Services.

Maximising Success

The CMS 2001 solution has proven to be a success in the Microsoft Australia corporate environment. Business owners, not technical staff are in control of content production and administration is managed in the solution design via workflow policies. The organisation is now able to produce and publish content quickly and efficiently without the need for external assistance. The resulting flexibility enables Microsoft Australia to maximise the freedom that the solution provides, by creating low-cost, high-volume, high-quality Web content.

The Future

To date, the development has passed through two main phases: establishment and operation of basic CMS 2001 templates; and building additional tools to enable enhanced navigation of content. In the short term, future development will focus on integrating the local solution with tools used at Microsoft Head Office in the USA. Baartse sums up the medium-term strategy by saying: "The plan is to utilise CMS 2002 in developing a global content management solution for all Microsoft subsidiaries. The rapid deployment capabilities of the product mean that, for the first time, not only is this possible, but it may well be a reality in just a matter of months."

Microsoft Technology

- CMS 2001
- Windows 2000 Server
- SQL Server 2000
- Active Server Pages
- Active Directory Services
- Internet Explorer 6
- Internet Information Server 5



For more information

For more information about Microsoft products or services in Australia, contact Microsoft on 13 20 58. To access information via the Web, go to www.microsoft.com/australia/business

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