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## In Web with Nicky Jurd
## Taking Off The Shackles

**A content management system allows a business to update its own website through a web-based software program.**

A content management system, or CMS, can be liberating for business owners through its ability to make quick and easy changes to their website. However, a CMS can also be a marketing nightmare with non-technically trained staff making changes of which they might not realise the implications.

## How do they work?

Most systems work in a very similar way. After logging into a website the page to be updated is selected. The interface uses controls very similar to those in Microsoft Word, so most people familiar with word processing software will be able to easily identify how to select and change text. There are all the formatting tools you would be used to such as bold, italic, underline, bullet points, and the ability to change fonts and colours.

You may also be able to insert media such as photos, documents, PDFs and videos. Most content management systems will have a feature where you can save your work as you go, and then publish it onto your website once you're happy with it. This is a tricky feature though, as it's easy to

lose all your changes if you forget to save regularly and then your internet drops out when you do press save. It is better to keep a current copy of each web page in a text document, and then copy it into the CMS.

This also gives you the added bonus of using your word processing software's built-in spell checking facility prior to adding the new text to your website.

## CMS Pros

For any website owner who has had a frustrating relationship with their web developer, the advantages of being able to control your own website content will be obvious. Most business owners use their content management systems to quickly change their website text. Changes are instant, and incur no web development costs.

The convenience of being able to update the text on your website at any time is great for companies who run regular specials, or wish to keep an online news page current.

But the advantages extend beyond convenience. A content management system empowers businesses to keep their website

fresh and dynamic — something that many businesses may want to achieve, but find their web development cost overhead prohibitive. Tweaking the wording on a page is suddenly easy, quick and an absolute pleasure.

## CMS Cons

While there's no need to have a technical understanding of how a website works, with a CMS it is easy to make far-reaching mistakes impacting the overall success of your website.

For example, when each page of a website is constructed by a website developer, they will put in place optimisation to ensure your website will perform at its best in the search engines, as well as ensuring your website text is suitably written for optimal rankings.

Most business owners aren't aware of what it takes to have a website rank well in the search engines, and as a result it would be easy for them to accidentally take away the parts that are ensuring strong traffic to a website.

Perhaps the darkest side of a CMS is that it gives users too much control over their website, and often leads to people making visual decisions that would make most graphic designers cringe. Self-managed websites often lose their professional edge because unsuspecting business owners

have made changes that damage the integrity of their website design.

Aesthetic mistakes such as using non-standard fonts, unreadable colours, poorly rendered photos and sloppy formatting drag down the credibility of the offending website. It is for this reason many web developers steer their clients clear of owning a content management system, and not the reasons of income protection as one might expect.

Adding photos to a website is a feature most CMS owners look forward to using, but unfortunately formatting photos brings with it a learning curve of its own. They are quite tricky to place in an exact spot, but anyone who has tried to format photos in Microsoft Word will have experienced similar frustrations! Furthermore, web developers will carefully optimise photos for sharpness, colour, clarity and download speed before adding them to a website; consequently, photos uploaded through a CMS will often lack the visual appeal of those added by an experienced web developer.

Business owners looking to manage their own content should still develop a close relationship with a web designer who is familiar with the content management system they're using and undertake regular consultation and critique to ensure their website remains professional and appealing to customers.

## Costs

There are many content management systems available. Some are publically available free of charge, and many more are commercially built and incur a monthly or yearly fee to use.

Most businesses will need a CMS custom integrated by an experienced web development company in order to match the look of their current website.

If you're starting a new website with a content management system you could expect a setup cost of around $5000, depending on the size and features of your website. Retrofitting an existing website will likely cost a little less.

If you are a creative person or a keen writer you will love the control that having a content management system brings.

Similarly, if your business has information that frequently changes, a CMS will save you money over the life of your website.

However, if you frequently grapple with your computer, and technical concepts make you feel small, it's probably not the right decision for your business.

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