



It's all in the way we listen.

## PSC White Paper:

# Building a Website that is Built to Last

In the late 1990's, at the height of the Internet boom, everyone scrambled to build a website. If you didn't have a website, pundits would predict your demise as smaller "dot.coms" with more efficient business models drove you out of business. With the exception of the travel industry, it certainly seems as though the analysts were a bit too aggressive with their enthusiasm.

For those of us who preached moderation and common sense during this period, there was great suffering as our viewpoint was considered "old" and "behind-the-times." In retrospect, however, we're pretty happy with the outcome. It's nice to see common sense prevail every once and a while.

### Real Value

Although the hype behind the Internet boom has subsided, few question the importance of having a website. Even in today's challenging economic landscape, websites have become as ubiquitous as phone numbers. The reason for having a website is now much more rational as the features that are being included are weighed by how much benefit they bring to the bottom-line.

Today's websites provide instant access to product catalogs, allow for customer self-service, and serve as useful distribution points for customer and field information – real value that used to require small armies of internal support personnel in the days before web self-service. More advanced sites allow for real-time order status, shipment tracking, and two-way channel management for all kinds of businesses and industries.

The value of the Internet is clear and it is certainly not hype. Those who have invested wisely have reaped the benefits of having a world-class website – reduced costs and increased revenues.

### Website ROI

The problem is that many sites are on their second or third generation. This is an expensive proposition. A properly conceived and implemented website is not a small project. In order to reap the benefits, though, the website has to have a lifespan that allows it to generate a return on investment.

The issue with this, however, is that the web is a very dynamic environment where information needs to change rapidly; and the perceived value of any website is predicated on that very fact. The perceived value of a website is similar to the value of a daily newspaper – If the headlines and all of the articles are not different each morning, there is very little incentive to read or purchase the newspaper.

While your company's website may not need to have content refreshed with daily frequency, the nature of the web, and the expectations of web visitors, do demand higher refresh rates than most websites maintain.

Hence, the conundrum – how do you keep a website stable enough to generate a return on investment while also supporting the requirement for fresh updates and frequent changes?



In other words, how can you build a website that is built to last?

### Content Management

This is where the concept of web content management comes into play. Web content management [WCM] is an offshoot of content management systems [CMS] that allows for easy content creation and website updates.

So what... who needs another acronym. Isn't this what "dynamic" websites are supposed to do? This is a logical question and one whose explanation clearly defines the benefit of WCM.

Over time, two things typically change with a website – the site content, and the design. Site content changes on a regular basis (daily, weekly, monthly, etc.) and site design typically changes on a 2-4 year cycle.

Historically, changing the site data or content required authoring by subject matter experts (marketing, HR, etc.) and then site updating by a technical person such as a Webmaster. The flaw with this model is that it creates a bottleneck for all changes (the Webmaster) and it creates artificial planning cycles to make changes that parallel what is done in print media. This is inefficient, time consuming and ends up discouraging the frequent updating that is appealing to end users of your website. This process also defeats the single

greatest advantage of a website – the ability to change content on the fly without being subject to rigid publishing schedules.

The answer to this problem used to be the “dynamic” website. Dynamic websites are almost exclusively programmed to take data stored in a database and then process it with a program to present a formatted web page.

This process, shown at left, allows users to update the data in the database and automatically have that new information show up on the website.

There are a couple of issues with dynamic websites. One problem is that roughly half of these solutions do not allow for easy data entry by non-technical personnel. As with older static websites, this does not facilitate quick and frequent web updates.

Some dynamic websites do have the ability to allow non-technical personnel make changes to the web content, but these still do not solve the second flaw inherent in nearly all dynamic websites.

The second flaw is one that is now coming to light as companies begin to make design changes to their websites as is typically done every 2-4 years. Most dynamic websites were programmed so that the design is tied very closely to the program that fetches the data and displays it to the web browser.

This means that a design refresh, which is intended to update the graphics, improve navigation or just give a different appearance, becomes a difficult task to achieve. Furthermore, the design change does not just incorporate the cost of hiring a designer, but also the cost of hiring a programmer to put the new design into the display program. In the end, many extra funds are required to rebuild functionality that is not new and needs to be re-tested.

This is why Gartner Research says “Content management is one of the hottest technology areas for enabling efficient Web sites and workplaces.”

Content management is a means to separate the data from the presentation. In the context of this white paper, the best way to explain this concept is with the picture at the top-right. Frequently, though, the value of CMS hits home only after a live demonstration.

CMS systems allow mildly skilled users to define what data is required without ever having to have a technical person work

with the database.

Designers create standard templates to determine how the web pages should look, and then subject matter experts can enter the data that end users desire.