

The CMS Builder Cookbook

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WHAT IS CMS BUILDER AND HOW DOES IT WORK? - Mar 23rd, 2015

CMS Builder is a PHP based Content Management System (CMS) that lets non-technical users update the content on their website using a simple browser based interface, without learning any HTML or programming skills.

From the web designers perspective CMS Builder allows us to design web pages that rely on an on-line database to store their content. It also facilitates the retrieval of that information from database records and the insertion of that information into specific locations on a web page.

From the end user's perspective, CMS Builder facilitates the modification and addition of content to both the database record and web pages by means of a simple, browser based interface. Modifications to existing pages can be made from any computer that has internet access. Information is modified using any web browser (Internet Explorer, FireFox, Safari, etc.), and no special software is required on the home computer.

WHAT'S PHP?

PHP, which is an acronym for Hypertext PreProcessor, is a general-purpose scripting language that's especially suited for web development.

CMSB uses PHP to both populate pages and to access a MySQL database and manipulate the acquired data to render dynamic, client controlled web pages.

A major strength of PHP is that it's server side scripting, so the end user has no access to the actual PHP code. It can be embedded into HTML coding and interpreted by the web server, which renders the output as HTML.

PHP was originally created sometime in 1994 or 1995 by the Danish/Greenlandic programmer Rasmus Lerdorf, but has since been improved and updated by a group called the PHP group.

As your skills and your curiosity grow, you can learn a lot more about PHP at:

<http://www.php.net>

HOW DO I IMPLEMENT CMS BUILDER?

Once you've installed CMS Builder following the really simple instructions on the Interactive Tools web site, you'll probably want to dive right in and create your first web site. I would urge you to wait until you've watched the videos on the Interactive Tools website, and until you've read at least the introductory chapter of this cookbook. I'd also suggest that you follow the creation of the 2 sample pages later in this chapter.

In order to use CMS Builder effectively, and to minimize the frustration that's common to all first timers, there are a few new concepts that you'll have to get your head around.

TYPES OF DATA BASE INTERFACES USED

CMS Builder uses 2 basic types of database interfaces to manage web pages.

1) A single record interface, for information that may be changed but only exist in one form at a time. Examples of this type of information would be an "about me" page, "contact information" and the directions to a specific location.

2) A multi record interface for information about a series of items that have the same basic informational structure, (name, address, description). Examples of this type of information would be a list of images, a calendar of events, and a list of products.

The multi record interface manages 2 types of pages. "List" pages that show a listing of either image thumbnails, event titles and dates, or products, and "details" pages that shows detailed information about a specific item in the list.

SECTION EDITORS

In CMSB, the database record interface that you'll create is called a section editor. A section editor contains the menu of fields that will be used to organize the content of your web page. It is where you will set up certain restrictions regarding the type of data that can be entered (only certain file types, certain characters), how much information can be entered (300 characters, 12 images), how that information is processed and displayed (show or hide the record on a certain date), and in some cases who is allowed to enter the information (the administrator only, or the original author).

You can create either Multi Record editors or Single Record editors depending on the type of data they are to manage, and create a menu structure that contains the types of fields that suite your application.

You can also choose from a set of preset menu structures, and even use copies of your own editors to create additional editors for use on the same or different sites.

FIELDS

Once you've created either a basic single record or multi record section editor, you can add a number of types of fields to that editor's menu structure to facilitate the entry of various types of information.

The simplest of these fields is a "text" field, which is a one line field that can only accept text as it's input.

The next type is the "text box". A text box is similar to a text field, but it can accept multi line text entry.

If you need a greater degree of flexibility in entering their data, you can create "WYSIWYG" fields that present a WYSIWYG editor interface, either allowing uploads or not, your choice.

There are "list" fields that can take their input from either single or multiple entry pull down lists or radio buttons.

There are "checkbox" fields that output different values depending on whether they're checked or not.

There are "upload" fields that allow users to upload documents, images and even flash, video and audio files. Upload fields have a great deal of flexibility attached to them and are among the most complex.

There are also some "special" fields that can let you show or hide a record from a web page, enter a date and sort or control your records using those dates, decide when to publish a record to a website or when to remove or un-publish that record, and other special functions that help to customize your implementation.

Once you understand these few basic tools that are in your arsenal, you can begin to implement CMSB into your web design.

QUALIFIERS

PHP and MySQL offer a full range of qualifiers and search criteria including if, then, else, and, not, equals, where, limit, and others that can add complex functionality to your pages.

GENERATING THE PHP CODE REQUIRED FOR YOUR WEB PAGES

After you've created your section editors and included various fields to enter your data you'll need build web pages to display your data. The good news is that the basic code to accomplish this can be automatically generated by the code generator that is built in to CMS Builder.

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