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701 E. Chocolate Avenue, Suite 200, Hershey PA 17033, USA
Tel: 717/533-8845; Fax 717/533-8661; URL-http://www.idea-group.com

Chapter III

Developing a Distributed Web Publishing System at CSU Sacramento Library:

A Case Study of Coordinated Decentralization

Juan Carlos Rodriguez
California State University, Sacramento, USA

Andy Osburn
California State University, Sacramento, USA

Abstract

This chapter introduces the steps that were undertaken at the California State University, Sacramento Library in moving from a centrally managed, static, and disjointed Web site to a efficient, collaboratively managed, database-driven Web site utilizing an easy-to-use customized Web content management system developed by the library. It discusses the

decisions and actions taken during the various stages throughout the design and implementation of this Web publishing system. The authors introduce the methods and some of the Web-based technologies used, and present the issues encountered and how they were addressed during the development and implementation of the locally created Web publishing system.

Introduction

Just after 3:00 p.m., a member from the Reference Department called the Systems Department complaining that she was unable to get her Web page to look right. After the Web developer looked at the HTML code, he realized that the problem was that there was a missing ">" in one of the HTML tags. At that moment, another reference librarian walked into the Systems Department looking for someone to help him create several Web pages. The librarian was familiar with MS Word, but the process of creating Web pages seemed daunting. Shortly thereafter, he received another call came from the Circulation Department Head, informing him that the hours on the Web site were incorrect and that one of her newly hired staff members was not listed on the staff directory. Once the hours had been updated and the staff member was added to the online directory, he remembered that he had several dozen e-mail messages and phone calls reminding him of tasks that needed to be completed by the end of the day. It was almost time for him to go home for the day, and there appeared to be no end in sight.

The Web developer had only been working for the library for several weeks and he had quickly realized that the current model of Web site maintenance would not work in the long run, especially if he wanted to keep his sanity. Something had to be done. Wouldn't it be great if those involved in the creation of the content could also develop and maintain their own Web pages without the need to know HTML, thought the Web developer. He had remembered discussing this issue with some of his colleagues on several online discussion lists. Many had shared their experiences on using databases to manage the creation and maintenance of Web pages. The process didn't seem too difficult. He already possessed the experience in developing databases, and extending this to the Web seemed fairly straightforward. He also realized that there had been several librarians who had been involved with the library Web site from