

SUMMARY: how do you manage documentation?

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To: <sunmanagers@sunmanagers.org>

Sunmanagers,

Thank you for all of the expert opinions! All of the suggestions look like excellent applications. All of them could probably be adapted to our needs with varying degrees of effort. My focus is on finding something that provides most of what we need with the least amount of installation, configuration, and customization effort.

THANKS TO:

Tom Grassia FAQ-O-Matic

Carl Ma MS-SharePoint

Andrew Hall Docbook

Anothony D'Atri RCS a webtree

NO UCE Owl

Alan Pae <http://alanpae.tripod.com/index.htm>
<<http://alanpae.tripod.com/index.htm>> (then drill down)

Ric Anderson DokuWiki

VEGH Karoly Wikipedia

David Talkington TWiki

Clive McAdam wiki

Lars Hecking Apache module mod_dav, DAVexplorer

Tim Chipman myDms

BRIEF SUMMARY:

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Based on our specific needs, list feedback, and what we've read so far, the front runners *at this point* are Owl, OpenCMS, and Wiki-derived. All suggestions received are outlined farther below.

Owl

<http://sourceforge.net/projects/owl/>
<<http://webmail.thecregroup.com/exchweb/bin/redirect.asp?URL=http://sourceforge.net/projects/owl/>>

Pros: existing docs can remain in native format, user logins, version control

Cons: need to setup MySQL or Postgresql

OpenCMS

<http://www.opencms.org/opencms/en/> <<http://www.opencms.org/opencms/en/>>

Pros: existing docs can remain in native format, WYSIWIG input, familiar Explorer-style viewing, per-project/topic input forms

Cons: WYSIWIG support in IE only, need to setup search engine

MediaWiki, DokuWiki, TikiWiki

<http://wikipedia.sourceforge.net/> <<http://wikipedia.sourceforge.net/>>

Pros: Popular tool with many add-ons, widely used for content management, it's fun to say "wiki wiki wiki"

Cons: overwhelming, may have too many features and add-ons, PHB's may need to learn formatting syntax, not sure is it can manage legacy docs.

BTW: My favorite response from [an anonymous writer] shared the following insights: "I don't create documentation for others to use. I put everything on a personal apache webserver that runs out of my home dir. So when I'm fired and 'userdel -r username' hits me, all evidence of my presence is obliterated. They can hire me back as a consultant when they want to know how it works." Yes, they were joking.

ADDITIONAL SUMMARY:

Most people agreed that a central folder with subfolders will sprawl and become unmanageable. The infamous intranet site will never get updated if people are expected to manually update static html pages. Converting all information to [SGML | XML | SML | other] sounds neat and provides great publishing options. Probably works great if starting fresh, but converting existing assets can be time consuming. Others echoed my concerns that PHBs just aren't going to learn the markups.

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Obviously, there's a problem with legacy documentation stuck in Word, Excel, Visio, and other proprietary formats. Integrating these assets into a DMS/CMS is inherently difficult. As one of the list members gently suggested: "MS-word .docs are a blight on the flesh of humanity." Here's a weblog that captures the essence of why Word docs suck for collaboration:

<http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/wlg/3793>
<<http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/wlg/3793>>

Additional resources I found included:

<http://www.cmswatch.com> <<http://www.cmswatch.com>> CMS reviews, summaries, and more. They suggest there are over 1000 products that claim to manage web-accessible content. I believe it! They focus on the top 40. No necessarily the best 40, but the most significant players. Focused on commercial products, but does have an open source section.

<http://www.la-grange.net/cms> <<http://www.la-grange.net/cms>> List of open source content management systems. Not an exhaustive list, but a good place to get ideas.

BTW: Alan Pae's site (<http://alanpae.tripod.com/index.htm> <<http://alanpae.tripod.com/index.htm>>) has an enormous list of tools in some way related to the Solaris world organized by categories. I'll definitely be going back to this site for the wealth of other links. The documentation tools listed (that I found) seemed to be more focused on collecting highly technical system information. These might be great for feeding into the DMS we envision, but don't seem likely to support our overall needs for general content management.

Below are the other tools suggested by list members. Please note: Any pros/cons are based on a cursory inspection of the tool's web site with a focus on the needs of our specific environment.

FAQ-o-matic

<http://faqomatic.sourceforge.net/fom-serve/cache/1.html>
<<http://faqomatic.sourceforge.net/fom-serve/cache/1.html>>

Pros: mature, easy to add text content, small/quick/easy to deploy

Cons: input is text centric; therefore, doesn't consume proprietary files

Docbook

<http://www.docbook.org/> <<http://www.docbook.org/>>

Pros: geared towards technical documentation, O'Reilly uses it, generates documentation in multiple styles

Cons: Existing docs must be converted to SGML or XML, doesn't consume proprietary files

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myDms

<http://dms.markuswestphal.de/about.html>
<<http://dms.markuswestphal.de/about.html>>

Pros: claims to have many of the features we need

Cons: looks like a 1 guy development team, can it consume proprietary docs?

Track web content with RCS

<http://www.gnu.org/software/rcs/rcs.html>
<<http://www.gnu.org/software/rcs/rcs.html>>

Pros: RCS is already used at this site for code management

Cons: doesn't consume proprietary files

Apache module mod_dav, DAVexplorer

<http://www.webdav.org/> <<http://www.webdav.org/>>

Pros: attractive to engineers managing web content

Cons: appears immature, last release was 2001, may require extensive customization

Sun's Configuration and Service Tracker

<http://www.sun.com/download/products.xml?id=3fcdb0dd>
<<http://www.sun.com/download/products.xml?id=3fcdb0dd>>

Pros: Continuous tracking of h/w and s/w events on Solaris hosts, historical data automatically maintained, could be used to feed our DMS

Cons: no provision for manually created documents

Borland's StarTeam

<http://www.borland.com/starteam/> <<http://www.borland.com/starteam/>>

Pros: I'm familiar with it, robust, enterprise level

Cons: probably overkill for our needs, not free

MS–SharePoint

<http://www.microsoft.com/sharepoint/> <<http://www.microsoft.com/sharepoint/>>

Pros: Integrates into MS environments, user–customizable portals,

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Cons: no MS–Windows servers at this site, not free

Matrix One PDM

<http://www.matrixone.com/> <<http://www.matrixone.com/>>

Pros: robust, enterprise level, pretty marketing PDFs

Cons: probably overkill for our needs, not free, too many buzzwords

HTH,

–John Christian

ORIGINAL POST

I'm looking for suggestions on a centralized documentation management system that would be shared by a team of 5 sysadmins and a few PHB's. There are some similar threads in the archives, but they're a few years old. I'm interested in the latest trends used by list members and their experience with actually using a particular tool/approach over time.

The documents would include server build recipes, backup/restore procedures, inventory spreadsheets, meeting notes, good PDF's, outage calendar, and other documentation related to the IT department. The documentation that currently exists includes files such as Word, Excel, Visio, txt files, e–mails, and more. We would like to have a central repository that includes most of the following features:

runs on a 'nix

browser accessible

searchable

login password

revision control

easy to upload new content

menus self update with new content

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We've considered:

a shared folder with topical subfolders (too much dir sprawl, no revision control)

internal web server (updating html code and FTPing new docs sucks for PHBs)

TikiWiki

OpenCms

convert everything to XML (cool, but probably not gonna happen)

Borland StarTeam (spend money on s/w instead of beer? yuck!)

Pros, cons, and any suggestions are very welcome. Will summarize.

sunmanagers mailing list

sunmanagers@sunmanagers.org

<http://www.sunmanagers.org/mailman/listinfo/sunmanagers>