



# Seven Challenges of Implementing a Content Management System

An Author-it White Paper



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# The Seven Challenges of Implementing a Content Management System

**By Paul Trotter, CEO, Author-it Software Corporation**

The term “double-edged sword” may have been created with content management systems in mind. On one edge, there is great promise for organizations especially for their ability to create and manage content that is more accurate, less costly to produce, and more consistent in appearance and message. On the adjacent edge, they can present a myriad of challenges and barriers, ranging from implementation to acceptance of those using and purchasing them.

## Challenge #1: Control & Management

Perhaps the primary challenge with managing content (which, for the purposes of this article, is defined as an organization’s “human readable” information, representing about 80% of a company’s total information base), is that there is little to no control around creating it in the first place. Content is produced by a wide range of people at every level of an organization, where there is typically no control mechanisms in place.

Another issue is the way content has been traditionally managed over the years. From one perspective, it is instructive to examine the way financial information has been handled. Years ago, people began writing out their financials longhand on paper, then in ledgers. This was followed by the first generation of software that produced spreadsheets, simulating the experience of writing in a ledger. Soon thereafter, the second generation of software was developed, allowing users to manipulate information far more creatively, followed by sophisticated financial management software. The evolution of financial information systems over 15-20 years ago has yet to take place for content.

The fact is, the majority of common-use tools to create and manage content (e.g., Word, Frame, etc) have never moved away from the “paper simulation” stage. The first word processors replicated the function of typewriters, albeit on a screen

instead of on paper. Since then, word processors have become more visual and offer more features, but fundamentally do the same thing: storing information as linear documents. CMS's have been instrumental in moving content creation out of the paper simulation phase into the database stage, which cannot be duplicated in a paper format. The revolution surrounding how content is managed mirrors the evolution of financial software.

## Challenge #2: Migration

Migrating all of the existing information in an enterprise into this new format, represents a significant investment in time and labor. To complicate matters, the sheer volume of content is overwhelming compared to what it would have been 20 years ago when financial information was being converted. The importance of the migration phase cannot be overestimated since this content represents 80% of all data in the organization.

In the end, migration requires a technological solution. Some CMS's are more adept at allowing people to import content quickly, and in the most popular formats. Unfortunately, successful migration involves other factors, specifically the formatting of the original document. The less structured a document, the more difficult it is to import it into the CMS. For instance, a manual created by a writer in the technical publications department will be relatively straightforward, since most technical writers are meticulous about style and formatting.

Conversely, a manual written by a different department may present a different set of issues. For example, we have seen documents created by human resources where the writer came to the end of a line, hit the Return key then used the spacebar to line up the next paragraph. Importing a manual with this lack of style involves more labor and effort.

CMS vendors who do not have technologically advanced migration capabilities may very well propose that a company simply create all new content. The reality is however, many companies have already invested millions of dollars into their content and cannot continue to give up so blithely. Of course, many of the same vendors are willing to provide migration assistance at a substantial cost- sometimes as much as 15 dollars per page.

One way around this dilemma is to migrate only the content that is absolutely necessary. There is no need to migrate manuals for products that are no longer manufactured or for procedures that have long been discarded. The amount of content that can be left on the side of the road is often voluminous.

## Challenge #3: Gaining Approval

The approval process for a CMS is an all- too familiar barrier. While the verbal representation of this issue is, "I cannot get the budget to do this," the real obstacle is convincing people that there is a good business case for investing. In many ways, it is a generational issue: many executives in their 40s and 50s do not see the value of managing information. The challenge in gaining internal endorsements face arguments that involve hard ROI. This is most evident in situations where there is a high volume of customer-facing content or a possibility of realizing significant savings in actual, out -of-pocket translation costs. However gaining internal approval can be difficult if the only issue is to make life easier.

The answer? Where there is a great deal of customer-facing content or translation, a strong case can be made easily. Where neither item is a factor, a good point can be made through the value of producing content that is consistent, graphically uniform, and ultimately quicker to create.

## Challenge #4: The People Factor

Another obstacle to overcome are the people themselves. In our experience, our main competitor for a CMS is not necessarily another vendor, but rather the presence of apathy. Oftentimes people who are using Microsoft Word to create their documents are comfortable using Word and do not care enough to try anything else-even if the program is more suitable for managing their content. Areas within a company that are welcome to change are those who toil over creating and managing content. For instance, product documentation can be extremely tedious because it is driven by deadlines, quality and other factors that do not affect many other departments in the organization.

Sometimes the opposite is true. Company executives frequently ask how the CMS can help on a more company-wide basis, while writers wonder how it can help them specifically. In many cases, the true benefits of a CMS are realized downstream from the actual writing (workers from different departments drawing on each other's work, greater consistency and efficiency). Getting writers to alter the way they work purely for the sake of others or other processes can be a hard road to hoe.

In the end, the CMS is a two-part sell: the CMS vendor must demonstrate value to the organization at large as well as to the individual. It is critical to ensure that every person in the process will see some improvement in the way they work.

## Challenge #5: Fear of Obsolescence

An additional challenge in terms of people is personality problems with individuals who have played crucial roles in a group because of their expertise. Perhaps there is one person that everyone comes to when they have a problem, particularly with a piece of software. Once a CMS has been implemented, that person is essentially no longer needed. Where people were once focused on the entire final project, they are now focused on a particular job. Therefore a growing sense of obsolescence stems from people foreseeing a loss in their value. They have successfully positioned themselves as being indispensable, while the organization wants to do just the opposite.

Unfortunately this obstacle is rarely overcome. Often, people who perceive themselves as indispensable must be left behind in order to utilize a better system. Other times, however, it is possible to make the person "indispensable" in a different area.

## Challenge #6: Document Ownership

There can also be a problem with people who are accustomed to working on a document by themselves. When the transition is made to content management, the task of writing becomes a "team sport". Many times, writers in an organization may

be viewed collectively as a team, but share nothing in common other than their location. They may consult with each other about writing guidelines and styles, but when it comes to an actual writing, writer A is working on Manual A and someone else has sole possession of Manual B.

When moving into content management, especially the component-based variety, you immediately have components you need to share, so a person's manual is not really "theirs". It is going to be the effort of all the individuals that contribute to it. This can create conflict within a team between individuals who may feel threatened or unsatisfied by the work of other writers.

What some writers fail to realize is that this process can help them focus on a specific niche in which they have particular expertise. We have found people who might be writing entire manuals but they have a particular aptitude for writing procedures. A good CMS product will allow them to concentrate on an individual specialty.

Creating documents in a CMS also necessitates that the users display some flexibility. Writers are normally able to work on their documents when and where they want. When the move is made to a CMS, it is not as simple. The document is stored in a centralized system made up of thousands of components which can be difficult to access from remote locations. However, the new Web-based systems do address this issue effectively.

The most effective way to address personal problems is through education. It is critical to get the entire team excited and involved in the process, rather than just dictating the implementation of the new product. There are a variety of techniques for accomplishing this goal. Often we explain that this is the way of the future, that you can increase your job skills and solidify your job security. There will always be some individuals who will leave because they are reluctant or unwilling to go along, but that is always the price a company pays for advancing its technological capabilities.

## Challenge #7: The IT Department

If a specific CMS product does not fit the current "buzz" of the ideal technical solution, IT can get in the way. Reluctance comes from the fact that IT can be

unwilling to support or install software that will require maintenance and support. They are certainly willing to do it for a professional writing group that is producing technical documentation, but they are far more reluctant to go through the exercise for the entire company.

It should be noted that the presence of new Web-based CMS products are a real boon in this area, since the application simply requires installation on the company servers. Additionally, by and large, IT departments are quite supportive Web-based applications. The real key, however, is to involve the IT department as early as possible, getting their buy-in on the process and specific CMS product.

In the end, there are few obstacles or challenges for which education and training are not the key-not just product training but training in how to write in a component-based fashion. Some CMS vendors offer this form of training on how to write in a component-based fashion. Some CMS vendors offer this type of training, while others require you to find a third-party solution. Some vendors even run “train-the-trainer” programs to continue training in-house once the CMS implementation is complete.

However, there has to be buy-in from management, not just monetarily but from the perspective of continuous improvement. Management has to provide all of the requisite support and must remain focused on getting results so that the entire company is motivated to achieve the corporate goals together.

## About the Author

Paul Trotter is the founder and CEO of Author-it Software Corporation. He is a popular speaker at events all over the world and a well-known expert on the subjects of single sourcing, component content management, collaborative authoring and localization.