

Drupal adds Community Features to your Web Site!

By June Kaminski, RN MSN PhD(c), 2008

Drupal is a sophisticated open source content management software that you can use to create dynamic, information rich communities on your web site. If you are looking for an easy to install content management system for your site, Drupal is a wise choice. This is a software that I personally use and recommend for community building - it is so robust and usable, it's a software that every web designer needs! If you have Fantastico bundled in your administration area, you likely already have Drupal on your server, ready to install. The Drupal developers are very busy folk - the software is continuously improving. Right now version 6.2 is the most commonly installed version, but version 7 is already in the works.



TAKING A LOOK FIRST & INSTALLATION

To view the program in action, the main Drupal site features a working demo of the software that you can access online at <http://opensourcecms.com/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=132> (User is admin, and password is demo).

The interface that you can view within the software is supported by efficient PHP, Apache and MySQL databases, which can store the modules and themes that you choose to install. The choice is quite delightful, ranging from job databases, to publication links and uploads, to featuring your daily weather forecast. Other useful modules include, video, Flash, youtube, image and other multimedia embedding, quotes, stories, "books", forums, messaging, recipe swapping, image galleries, blogs, guestbooks, announcements, polls, questionnaires, forms, and so on and so on. The variety is really quite astonishing and freely available at <http://drupal.org/project/Modules>.

THE ADMINISTRATION AREA

Within the administration area you can set up the users who will be granted access to your project area. Roles and duties can easily be assigned to each user so that you can protect files that should not be viewable by all, and allow easy access to whatever you want each user to be see or use.

CUSTOMIZING THE LOOK

Files can be uploaded in a variety of formats and are organized according to content type. The Drupal community offers several wonderful themes to customize the look of your community. You can use a ready made theme, such as the Four Seasons one featured below, from one of the communities I developed. This theme is available for download on the Drupal site, courtesy of designer, Jochen Meyer from <http://drupal.org/project/Themes>.



Click to see Theme in Action

Or, you can customize a theme and even create your own from scratch (there are several modules available from the Drupal site that will help you design your theme as well). An example, is the screenshot of a community I built for an educational site, viewable below.



Click to see Theme in Action

ANOTHER SHINING STAR IN OPEN SOURCE

This program really is a great application that will please many web site owners looking for a reliable and professional looking community building system for their site . The main site also offers a lively support forum where you can ask questions and find answers at <http://drupal.org/forum> The authors deserve both kudos and a reward for such an amazing program..especially since they are offering it free, as open source software. To sum the program up in their own words, the authors state, "Equipped with a powerful blend of features, Drupal supports a variety of websites ranging from personal weblogs to large community-driven websites." I urge you to try out this software - I am certain, you will get hooked!