

Choosing a CMS That's Right For You

That is exactly the deciding factor for choosing a particular content management system for e-commerce and business websites. You can find a ton of articles, reviews, pros and cons lists and quick tutorials about Joomla and WordPress, because these are easily the two most popular and widely used CMS platforms. Whatever pros and cons there may be about each one is not what is most important, despite the popularity of articles that spell each one out. The best approach to discovering which CMS is best is to review the features, advantages, possibilities, and types of websites most commonly used for each one.

Joomla Overview

The biggest difference between Joomla and WordPress, as stated by many who have reviewed these two content management systems, is that WordPress was originally designed as a blogging platform that later acquired CMS capabilities for more than just blogs. Joomla, however, has always been a true content management system.

Many users and developers swear by Joomla's potential to basically do anything that a user wants, especially when add-ons are used to their full extent. This isn't completely true, because there are CMSs with much deeper capabilities, layers and multi-multi-level menus and tons more modules. However, if strictly compared to WordPress, Joomla does have a much, much deeper module core, even in its default, out-of-the-box package.

What webmasters need to know initially is that it is probably not a CMS they can install themselves. Joomla has a learning curve set at a much more technologically-oriented level. In other words, it's easy for developers and designers to install, but not for just anyone. It can be learned, but it would take weeks or even months for most people without web design, development, or related skills. What this means, essentially, is that while WordPress can be installed by

pretty much any webmaster/site owner, those who opt for Joomla will most certainly need to hire a developer to install the CMS initially. Then the webmaster will also need to decide whether or not to keep the developer on board for future add-ons, changes and developments, or whether to have the developer teach the system management for independent self-maintenance. Either way, do not assume because Joomla is open-source and free to install, that there will be no costs associated with it. The costs do not come directly from Joomla, but initial investment and start-up costs will be necessary to set it up. Cost amount will depend upon things like depth of extensions, multi-level applications, source code customizations, etc. There will also be ongoing fees for maintenance and management of site development, with or without hiring a developer on a continued basis.

Joomla Extensions: Functions and Features

Moving onto the most noteworthy features and functions of Joomla, broken down into subcategories. There are four types of extensions in the Joomla CMS. These are the core skeleton of a CMS, and there are four types of extensions:

Templates

Not everyone considers a template to be an extension, but templates are what give a website its theme and overall appearance and style. These are important for defining a website as a professional business site, an e-zine or news publication, or a social networking site. They apply built-in custom looks to components and modules, and general html text. They also determine where modules are placed on a web page – top, left, right and bottom. While templates apply general custom looks to basic features of a web page layout, they do not customize a specific component or module that a developer has programmed into the Joomla CMS. The developer must provide its own stylings or use those already built-in. Plug-ins can also be installed to customize placement of modules on a template.

Components

Components are essentially like entire applications that are added or installed to a Joomla CMS website. Examples of components that are often installed include a photo gallery, a forum, or community system. It is a bit like the

different applications on a Windows task bar, and each component can be loaded only one at a time. A Joomla CMS menu is basically just a view of each component and access to switch from one to another.

Modules

Modules add information, usability or more functions to an existing extension, application or component. Where components can work as a solo system (such as a website that is just a photo gallery, or just a forum), modules would not make sense as a single system, but rather increase functionality or options. Examples of modules are user menus, log-in modules, tabs and slides, and so forth.

Plug-ins

Plug-ins are what really release the potential of a Joomla CMS. The more plug-ins that are added, the deeper and richer the functionality and usability of a website. However, some developers advise against using too many plug-ins, as they can slow down the system. Examples of plug-ins include a shopping cart plug-in for an e-commerce site, or smaller plug-ins like an image or photo modifier, text editors, currency converter, or foreign language plug-ins.

Joomla Key Features

Customized Solutions

Nearly any module, application or extension can be customized and developed with Joomla. Joomla extensions are seemingly endless, and have been developed, modified and perfected over time, as Joomla has always been a CMS.

Joomla community developers and programmers continue to improve and create extensions that make Joomla so appealing to those who need customized solutions and features.

When developed by a skilled programmer or developer, both extensions and plug-ins can be optimized in their own ways. Extensions are customized along with the main core of the CMS by the developer, but are often unique to a

particular website, depending upon the kinds of modifications made to it.

Flexibility

Because it was made from the beginning to serve as a CMS, it has had the development time and modifications necessary for Joomla to build its customizable, application rich platform. Web designers like to use Joomla because it

can create both fantastic looking websites, complete with multi-level, collapsible menus, and modules that can be placed anywhere on the site, similarly to widgets.

Developers like Joomla because it has a powerful API, so that it can easily integrate into other systems, additional or pre-existing software, and applications from other software manufacturers. This alone easily creates endless

possibilities, when you consider how many different types of software can be combined with Joomla applications for unique site features and functions. Joomla can also integrate with other websites and user systems. This gives

websites and business owners a clear advantage for more complex options, which is ideal for businesses who need to customize products, product categories, menus, and so forth.

Drawbacks of a Joomla CMS

One of the biggest drawbacks of a Joomla CMS is that it lacks SEO friendly URLs and code. While SEO plug-ins can be added to make a Joomla CMS more optimized for search engines, not everyone will know to do this, nor will the

plug-in compare to a CMS that is internally designed to be SEO friendly. This is not a small detail. Regardless of how fantastic a business website is, or how many bells and whistles it has – if Google can't find it, then consumers

can't find it. Another potential drawback is that even if an SEO-plug-in is added to a Joomla CMS, it may require a lot of manual changes in addition to what the plug-in modifies. Additionally, most SEO plug-ins only deal with one or

two aspects of on-site SEO, such as page titles, meta descriptions or meta-data, and URLs. This means several plug-ins would have to be installed in order to really optimize a website for the search engines.

The other drawback for some webmasters and small business owners would be the installation and regular upkeep of the CMS. Because Joomla is not a CMS that anyone can install without prior web design or development

knowledge, it usually requires hiring a developer or designer. Depending upon the custom solutions desired by a business, costs for initial Joomla installation range between \$2000 to \$20,000, and monthly servicing is estimated at

around \$500. This kind of budget may not be affordable for a lot of small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Who and What Joomla Works Best For

As previously stated, Joomla is probably not the best idea for very small businesses with only one to several products, and does not need the multi-leveled, multi-layered functionality and customized solutions of Joomla. Joomla is best used by larger organizations or businesses, or by websites that are based upon a community environment. Examples are sites comprised of community networks and membership areas, or interactive content, feedback and contribution sites with a separate newsroom or water cooler area. Essentially, if you think your website is bound to be popular and pull in some very heavy traffic, and needs room for growth, then Joomla is probably a good idea. If you have a small business, one to a few products, or a simple business service – then a simpler, more user-friendly CMS like WordPress is probably a better idea.

WordPress Overview

As stated several times, WordPress was originally designed as a blogging platform, which later evolved or took on features that enables it to work as a full CMS. It's pretty well widely agreed that because of how it developed, WordPress does not have the application depth or as many possibilities to create customized features as Joomla. What most WordPress CMS users agree upon as its greatest advantage is the user-friendly advantage. Joomla is easy for developers and those with design or developing experience, but not for just anyone. WordPress, conversely, can be installed and run by anyone, whether they know a thing or two about CMS operations or not. In regards to the user-friendly applications, there are several key factors that contribute to the overall ease of navigation and use of this particular CMS.

Blogging Platform Champion

Hands down, WordPress is the best CMS to use for blogs and websites mostly made of text content. An easy to understand user interface makes it a readily available system for anyone to know how to post pages and content after an hour or two of introduction. Websites can be fully functional on WordPress, with impressive blogs and intuitively structured pages that make it easy for webmasters and site traffic alike.

WordPress Pages and Content

As stated, pages and post options enable non-blogging content to be easily managed through the WordPress interface. Pages like "about us," or "contact us" and so on, can easily be created and published.

Any changes made to content, template files or other tweaks and changes, are immediately reflected on the website, without having to regenerate static pages. In other words, if a user decides to change something cosmetic on a template, he or she will not have to re-produce the content on that page as well.

SEO Friendly, Right Out of the Box

Especially from a marketing and business perspective, the SEO friendliness of WordPress is a big plus. Its URLs are made by the administrator/content writer, so instead of getting a CMS generated URL like this:

`http://www.mywebsite.com/page.php?w=data%c=seloff#m?`, URLs are generated more like: `http://www.mywebsite.com/about-us.php`.

One complaint about Joomla is that out of the box, the first example of URL above, is the kind of URLs it generates for web pages, and it requires several different plug-ins in order to correct it. WordPress, on the other hand, has URLs and code standards that Google loves. So, right out of the box even SEO novices will have an upper hand in being found in the search engines.

Huge Community and Strong Support System

Because WordPress is so widely used, it has a community of support that is pretty unparalleled. WordPress forum has a huge database of questions and answers. All it takes is a simple search for a solution or answer to a problem,

which most likely, you will find right there. There are also a specialized team of developers who have been working non-stop to increase the security and advancement of WordPress as a CMS, which has led to spam protection,

options for password protected posts, updated security features, and more.

Multi-Level Access and Authors

A very appealing element of WordPress for a business, business service, or any professional website- relates to the need to add plenty of valuable content to stay on top of SERP, especially considering the recent Panda updates.

Ideally, content is added in several categories, such as blogs, recent news, advice/tips, solutions, and other categories that would draw traffic and retain customers. WordPress is oriented toward content-adding – which is now the

single most important component of on-site SEO. As such, it has some great perks in this area.

WordPress features multiple level authorship, which allows up to 10 levels of users/authors, each with their own administrator-configured level of user access privilege, in relation to publishing and editing content, content options, and

access to other users' contributions. This is ideal for speeding up content additions, while maintaining high and useful quality.

A common example for this scenario is a small team of writers, who are directly under a few copy-editors, who in turn are directly under a head content manager and/or editor. The multiple levels of author and user access is a fantastic

way to increase the amount of new content going on up on a site, without compromising its quality, and without the security risk of administrative access to too many users.

The multiple authors feature is reinforced with a workflow feature, which enables certain users the access to write drafts, but not to publish them. This would be a great way to have content written at its highest quality, when combined

with one or several supporting and managing editors who could approve and publish content. This kind of streamlined, organized content writing system is a superb approach to using the Panda updates to your advantage, and gain a

competitive edge. It would certainly help boost a website's SERP.

A few plug-ins that further optimize this set-up are the WP-CMS Post and User Access Manager, which are plug-ins that provide much more control over content creation and privatizing pages, sections, groups and user access.

E-commerce on WordPress

There are a few shopping cart plug-ins for WordPress platforms, such as WP E-commerce. However, this type of shopping cart is not really practical for large e-commerce sites with very large product stock, or sites that need a lot of more complex and application rich features, such as community areas, social media features, forums, and other multi-level websites.

WordPress Disadvantages

The most common disadvantage mentioned by users who opt for Joomla or another CMS, is the inability to change the source code to really customize it, without causing multiple problems with configuration. Because WordPress was not originally intended to be a general CMS, the source code is not nearly as flexible. It cannot produce a truly customized site via custom source code changes. Users argue that plug-in additions enable a great deal of features with customized options, but plug-ins do not provide nearly the application richness and multi-level functionality that a flexible CMS source code does.

Along the same line, adding too many plug-ins on a WP CMS causes problems. More than a few dozen plug-ins for those that attempt to create a customized experience, are much more likely to slow down the system, cause errors and bugs, and overwhelm the WP system.

Essentially, the appeal of WordPress CMS is its user-friendly, SEO-friendly simplicity. When users attempt to bury it underneath 50 different plug-ins just to obtain a certain level of functionality and application depth, this is when WordPress ceases to be the best option. Much like the simpler shopping cart platform and plug-ins that best serve small to medium business websites, the same applies to WordPress. If a business or service website needs multi-level usability – news feeds, forums, community areas, social networking, or portals, such as those often used by corporate or education sites – then WordPress is not the best choice, because it cannot support these complexities.

Conclusions About Joomla and WordPress

Again, there is no right or wrong CMS in the general sense. There is only what is best for your business and your website. For large corporations or businesses that need room for growth, customizations, flexibility and multi-level user access in various website areas, Joomla might be the better way to go, so long as website managers take the time to apply SEO where necessary, since Joomla does not come optimized for search, right out of the box. For those who want to self-manage their CMS, need a certain level or network of administrative users, organic SEO friendliness, and can benefit from the simplicity it offers, WordPress is the way to go.

If you need specific coding or functionality for Joomla or WordPress, or how to decide which CMS is best for your business model, contact us today. We can help.