Credibility factors and content management for commercial web sites

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Abstract

The Web presence of a company has become a necessity for its information dissemination, public relation, promotion, and transaction processing. While a lot of research deal with issues of Web site building, not many explore the issues of Web site maintenance. Content management systems refer to systems that can manage and maintain the content of Web sites. There are off-the-shelf software packages for content management tasks. Companies can also build their own customized content management systems. This research investigates the relationship among Web site credibility factors, company size, Web site complexity, and content management adoption. We first hypothesize that the bigger a company and the more complex a Web site, the more likely that a content management system will be adopted. Second, we speculate that different emphases on Web site credibility factors may affect the adoption of content management system. Third, there may be a correlation between Web site credibility factors and company size as well as Web site complexity. Our survey results indicate that only the first hypothesis is partially supported. The two significant variables which are positively correlated to content management system adoption are (1) the number of Web pages and (2) the existence of database connection and customer relationship management systems. Interestingly, company size has no effect on Web content management system adoption. In addition, survey results show that when a company has a content management system, if its net income is high and its Web site has many pages, it tends not to update its Web site manually. On the other hand, if its Web site has many visitors and many Web servers, it tends to update its Web site manually.

Keywords: Web Site Credibility, Web Site Content Management, Company Size, Web Site Complexity, Web Site Maintenance

Introduction

As more businesses are launching their Web sites, simply having the existence of a Web site is no longer a novelty. It takes more to attract the attention of a business's target market than just having the presence of a Web site. To attract visitors and potential customers of the company's products and services, the information content on the company's Web sites must be current. Terterian from the Internet Operations Center puts it this way: "Nothing will make a user close a window faster than something that's way out of date." (Sandlin, 2001) Therefore, Web site content management is an important topic in Web site maintenance. This research focuses on three sets of factors for Web site maintenance: (1) Web site credibility factors, (2) content management systems, and (3) company size and Web site complexity. We carried out a survey to explore the interrelationship among the variables in the three sets of factors. The research results shed light on the importance of some company size and Web site complexity variables on the utilization of content management systems.

Literature Review

In order to understand the important factors for maintaining a successful Web site, one must ask the question "what impact does the Web site have on its customers or the company's image if it is well maintained or poorly maintained?" It is a Web site's positive or negative impact that determines what a business should consider as the important factors in managing its Web site. The literature has suggested the following factors as requiring significant consideration when maintaining a successful commercial Web site. These factors include maintaining the credibility of the site, managing the site's structure and contents, managing security, and the allocation of resources to maintain the Web site, both in terms of personnel and budget. In this research, we focus on the issue of maintaining credibility.

Web Site Credibility

Credibility on the Web ranges from highly reliable to highly deceptive. For example, stock investors use the Web to get up-to-the-minute stock information to make transactions that are worth thousands or even millions of dollars. Since it is much easier for people to publish information on the Web than in print, it becomes more difficult for Web users to decipher which pages on the Web to believe and which to disregard. This leads Web users to become skeptical of the information posted on the Web. This skepticism creates a bigger challenge for businesses to increasingly enhance and maintain the credibility of their Web sites (Fogg et al, 2002).

According to a 2002 study by the Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab and Makovsky & Company, there are a number of factors that diminish the credibility of a business's Web site. The study lists the increasingly significant factors as follows (Fogg et al, 2002):

- The Web site makes it difficult for users to distinguish advertisements from Web site content.
- The Web site's content is rarely updated.
- The site has advertisements that automatically pop-up.
- The pages have broken links or have links to sites which are not credible and/or the site is difficult to navigate.
- The site has typographical mistakes and/or the site is occasionally unexpectedly unavailable.

- The site's domain name does not match the company's name and/or the company is having financial or legal problems.
- Web pages take long time to load.
- Others: the site requires a paid subscription for access, has one or more advertisements per page, provides comprehensive information without giving the source of the information, is hosted by a third party (such as AOL), has a commercial purpose, and requires a registration before being able to log in.

The most enlightening point we note from the list above is the fact that sites with a commercial purpose have credibility problems. So, being a business in itself creates a credibility challenge on the Web. The top three items that enhance a Web site's credibility are (Fogg et al, 2002):

- The user found the site useful before and/or the site represents an organization that is well respected.
- The site provides fast response to customer inquires.
- The site posts the organization's physical address and/or was updated since the user's last visit.

Web Content Management

As the popularity of e-commerce Web sites grows, the size and complexity of Web sites also grow and more resources are needed to maintain them. Some researchers in the industry estimate that the number of Web pages on large Web sites double each year (Reynolds and Kaur, 2000). We usually need the following supports for growing Web sites. Web sites have to encompass other areas such as business-to-business relationships, multilingual sites, and intranets that integrate with suppliers and business partners. The number of different content contributors increases. These content contributors may have different authoring and delivery methods. There is a demand for personalized content and increased functionality on Web sites. Finally, different media types need to be managed besides text and images (Friedlein, 2003). Therefore, managing the content of a Web site becomes a mandatory priority.

However, with the increasing complexity of e-commerce Web sites, it becomes more difficult to manage Web content effectively. Inconsistent or inefficient management processes drive the company's maintenance costs up. The inefficiency may be due to poor coordination efforts, lack of repeatable processes, and the use of incompatible tools. Furthermore, the publishing of inaccurate or untimely information leads to customer dissatisfaction and ultimately may cause loss of customer confidence, leading to poor public relations. There have also the legal ramifications when misleading information is published. Web content management encompasses a broad scope, yielding a variety of definitions. Currently, there is no industry accepted definition of content management (Friedlein, 2003; Reynolds and Kaur, 2000). The main reason is that the definition of content depends on its context. Generally speaking, contents in a Web site include the following (Reynolds and Kaur, 2000):

- Everything that is shown on a Web page, including text, graphics, controls, multimedia, banner advertisements, and scripts. The above is the simplest type and is sometimes referred to as creative content.
- Application components, which interact with the Web pages, are another item that needs to be maintained on a Web site. Since the industry is moving towards application architectures

that become more reliant on a middle-tier to perform business rule validations and enforcements, it is becoming essential to effectively manage these components.

- Another type of content, known as transactional content, also requires regular maintenance. Transactional content is used to enable dynamic generation of Web pages, to provide information such as products, orders, shipments, and promotional offers. This information is often stored in databases.
- Other applications, batch processes, and company "support Web pages" could also be considered as content. Support Web pages are those pages that a company uses to support the e-commerce operation, such as customer relationship management (CRM) systems. These Web pages usually retrieve information as live data that customers see on the company's Web site when ordering products.
- Also, downloadable files that are available on a business's Web site are also considered content. This may include Microsoft Word documents, PDF files, image files, and other file types.

We adopt the definition of Web content management by Ashley Friedlein (2003, p. 80) as follows:

> "Content management as a discipline is the set of processes, technologies, concepts, and practices having to do with developing, collecting, managing, and publishing content."

Using a Web content management system does not always solve the challenges of managing and maintaining Web content. Successful content management starts at a more fundamental level, change management. Often, companies may rush into adopting a Web content management system without evaluating their change management processes and find that the system doesn't deliver a return on investment. A Web content management system is a technology that helps enable the efficient management of content, but it alone cannot solve the problem of managing the content. Solid change management processes, procedures, and documentation should first be addressed before deploying a Web content management system (Friedlein, 2003).

Research Methodology

Figure 1 shows the research model used in this study. We design a survey to investigate the interrelationship among the three sets of factors including Web site credibility, company size and Web site complexity, and content management system adoption. The partial question list of the survey is presented in Appendix A. **Company size** is represented by number of employees, revenue, and net income in questions 1 – 3. In questions 4 – 8, **Web site complexity** is represented by number of Web pages, number of visitors to the Web site per day, number of Web servers dedicated to the Web site operation, and Web components (graphics, scripts, controls, application modules, multimedia, transactional content, banner advertisements, downloadable files, database connection, customer relationship management system, etc.) used in the Web site. **Content management system** adoption is a simply yes or no question. A response of yes can be a customized content management system developed in-house or a piece of third-party off-the-shelf software bought for Web content management. In question 9, **Web credibility** is measured by the difficulty distinguishing advertisements from bona fide Web site content, update frequency, advertisement pop-up, broken links, navigation difficulty,

typographical mistakes, and site unavailability. Question 10 asks how frequently content management system adopters manually update the Web site content. The answer to question 10 will give us some insight on how useful content management systems are. We have the following three hypotheses for this research study:

H1: The bigger a company and the more complex its Web site, the more likely that it will adopt a content management system.

We expect that the bigger a company, the more resource it can devote to maintaining a Web site. The complexity of a Web site also demands a full time and professional maintenance system. However, there can also be the reverse argument that small companies may rely solely on their Web sites to operate their business, which in turn demands a sophisticate Web maintenance system.

H2: There is a correlation between Web site credibility factors and company size as well as Web site complexity.

Large companies with complex Web sites may perceive Web site credibility factors differently from smaller companies with less complex Web sites. We speculate that the selection of important factors can vary substantially among companies with different resources and Web requirements.

H3: There is a correlation between Web site credibility factors and content management system adoption

Different perception of Web site credibility factors can determine whether a company adopts a content management system. We speculate that there may be some critical credibility issues that prompt a company to adopt a content management system.

Questionnaire Design

To start the process of designing the questionnaire, we did a phone interview with a Web site manager who is familiar with various issues of Web site maintenance. During the phone interview, our contact spoke about his opinion of the critical factors that cause credibility problems for Web sites. He believes that the most important thing about a commercial Web site is the presentation and navigation of the Web site. If it is not organized and presented in an appropriate format, then it would lose its viewers fast. He also mentioned that the factors that cause credibility problems were different for different Web sites, depending on the purpose of the Web site. For example, having advertisements that intermingle with a Web site's content will be much worse if the Web site is a news or magazine publication site versus a Web site for selling tangible products. The former will be worse because it makes the publication content more difficult to distinguish from advertisement content. He believes that the most important cause for credibility problem is the impression that the content was put together carelessly. One example he gave was spelling mistakes. He said he has seen "nasty" emails to others from customers for careless mistakes on a Web site. Combining our contact's input and information from the literature, we drafted a preliminary questionnaire which was given to several colleagues

for improvement purposes.

Sampling Procedure

The initial desired population was companies with a physical presence in the United States and have a commercial Web site. However, we expanded the population to include companies anywhere in the world that have a commercial Web site. We expanded the population because there were only a limited number of replies received from the original population. The survey subjects are the employees of companies in the population who have expertise in Web management and maintenance, and are taking part or have recently taken part in managing their Web content change control process. Since our research hypotheses have to do with usage of a content management system, at least some companies surveyed would need to have implemented a Web content management system in order to evaluate the hypotheses.

Different methods were employed for soliciting prospective survey respondents. First, we tried to contact co-workers and other acquaintances we knew who might have networking connections to potential qualified survey respondents. A total of 45 acquaintances were contacted through email, instant messages, and in-person. This method of contact produced a total of four actual surveys returned (including the interview response), and it consumed much more time than expected. After experiencing this time consuming effort without a promising survey return rate, we used online chat rooms and other such methods to find email addresses of IT professionals in the Web site management field. The resulting response rate was much more than we had hoped for. Using the Google search engine, we searched for Webmaster forums and chat places where email addresses of Webmasters and other Web management professionals were available. We did several checks to filter out contacting people who did not match our respondent criteria. First, we checked the person's profile to make sure he or she has a physical location. This automatically eliminated the task of contacting the majority of the people in each forum because most users left their profile locations blank. Second, we checked that the person's occupation/specialty, if available, was "Webmaster" or something related. This also automatically eliminated most people who didn't have occupations listed in their profiles. And third, we checked that the person's Web site link, if available, linked to some kind of commercial Web site. So, care was taken to eliminate managers of non-profit or non-commercial Web sites, such as churches, universities, government agencies. If a user's email address wasn't available through the forum, but he/she passed the above three checks, we tried to obtain the appropriate contact email address through his/her Web page link.

After it became difficult to find further contacts using the filter methods discussed above, we later went back and relaxed our contact criteria. People who did not have location fields filled out and also people from other countries were included. Additionally, people with no occupations listed in their profiles were also included in our list of people to contact. Another way of trying to obtain additional legitimate contacts from these forums came from reading through the Introductions sections of the forums. This gave us some idea about people's backgrounds, and sometimes contact information or links to their Web sites were given in their introductions.

The following forums/sites provided the majority of the email addresses we contacted, in the order from most to least; however, it does not include all actual forum Web sites used:

- http://www.internet-marketing-research.net/forums
- http://www.ozzu.com

- http://www.techsupportdude.com
- http://www.hostcompanies.com/forums
- http://www.Web-mastery.net

The rest of the email addresses that were contacted came from random searches on various commercial Web sites. On those Web sites, we tried to search for the email addresses of the Webmasters or of other appropriate contacts.

An additional six attempted solicitations were made through filling out online forms to try to contact the companies. These were attempts made to contact large companies, such as NEC, Wal-Mart, and Samsung. It was worth the try; however, no real personal replies were received back from these attempted solicitations.

In summary, we contacted 45 personal acquaintances, sent emails to a total of 618 addresses found on the Internet, and submitted six contact request forms through the Web. In addition, we contacted two additional people whose email addresses were referred to us by some of the people found on the Internet who replied to our emails. This brings the total number of contacts to 671.

Questionnaire Administration

Once we got the email address of a prospective respondent, we sent an email informing them how we found his/her email address, briefly describing our research, asking whether they fit the profile of our prospective respondents, then asking for his/her help in answering a questionnaire and whether we may send him/her the questionnaire form. If a recipient replied to our email and agreed to complete the questionnaire, we would immediately reply back, attaching the questionnaire form and expressing our appreciation for their reply.

To track the status of the prospective respondents, we created a spreadsheet with name, company, email address, the location where their email addresses were found, response status (such as whether the email bounced, whether a reply was received, whether they stated that they did not meet the respondent criteria, and whether we actually received a survey return from them), among other notes. Care was also taken not to send a solicitation email to the same email address more than once by using the "Find" command (Ctrl-F) to search that the new email address was not part of the existing list.

Once a respondent returned the completed survey form, we replied back immediately thanking them for their time and effort taken to complete the questionnaire. When a non-qualified respondent replied, we would immediately send a reply back thanking them for their response in letting us know.

For those respondents who had agreed to help fill out a questionnaire, but who had not actually returned a completed questionnaire, a follow-up email was sent to them approximately one week after their initial response. If no response was received after this follow-up email, we did not try to contact them again.

There were three respondents who stated that they would try to further help us by contacting some colleagues they knew that fit our survey respondent criteria and seeing whether those colleagues would be willing to complete a questionnaire. Since no email addresses were given to us, we thanked them sincerely for their willingness to further assist us and left the rest to them. However, we did not hear back from them or from any of their colleagues about this. And therefore, these additional potential respondents (the colleagues) were not included as part of our total persons contacted count or total surveys received count.

Of the total 671 persons contacted, 128 replied, including 39 of the 45 personal contacts we initially contacted. Of all those who replied, 57 of them were not qualified to take the survey, including 30 of the personal contacts, leaving 71 qualified persons. The number of emails that bounced and remained undeliverable because either the email address did not exist on the destination system or the mailbox was full totaled 59 emails. Therefore, the non-contact rate was 8.79%. Of the 71 qualified people who responded, there were 44 people who actually sent their completed surveys back. However, three of these surveys received were invalid, leaving 41 survey responses that were usable.

Research Results

This section presents and discusses the survey results. We adopted logistic regression and linear regression models as the statistical tools for data analyses. For hypothesis 1, whether a company has a content management system, either build or buy, is the dependent variable. The company size and the Web site complexity are the independent variables. We fitted the data to a logistic regression model and the results are given in Figure 2. The model significance is 0.124, and the two significant independent variables are **number of Web pages** (significance of 0.077) and **database connection/customer relationship management system** (significance of 0.065). Both variables are from the Web site complexity factor and both have a positive effect on content management system adoption. In other words, the more Web pages and more complex a Web site is in terms of database connection and customer relationship management system, the more likely that the company will adopt a content management system. None of the variables for company size has any significant effect on content management system adoption. The above findings partially support hypothesis 1.

For hypothesis 2 and 3, we computed an index for company size and Web site complexity respectively. The company size index was computed by averaging the responses from questions 1 - 3. As for Web sit complexity, we first converted the responses from questions 7 – 8 into the range we have for questions 4 – 6. Then we averaged the responses for questions 4 – 8 to arrive at the Web site complexity index. The company size index and the Web site complexity index were used as the dependent variables in linear regression models. The choices for question 9 regarding Web credibility issues are used as the independent variables in the models. None of the regression models involving Web credibility variables is significant.

Finally, we did a linear regression analysis using a subset of the data to determine whether company size and Web site complexity have significant effect on the frequency of manually updating Web content for those companies with content management systems. The data set has 9 cases which have adopted content management systems. The above regression results are given in Figure 3. The model is highly significant at 0.01. The significant variables include **net income** (significance 0.015), **number of Web pages** (0.002), **number of visitors** to the Web site (0.048), and **number of Web servers** dedicated to the Web site operation (0.051). The net income and number of Web pages have a negative effect, but the visitors and Web servers have a positive effect. The negative effect between manual updating Web sites and net income as well as number of Web pages means the higher the net income (i.e., bigger companies) and the more Web pages a Web site has, the less frequently there will be manual updating for Web maintenance. This phenomenon can be attributed to the effective functioning of automatic content management systems, which eliminates most of the manual updating. On the other hand, the more visitors and Web servers a Web site has, the more frequently there will be manual

updating for Web maintenance. We guess that the frequent manual update may be due to visitors' posting of inquiries or feedback. Answering visitors' questions more or less requires a real person's responses. The situation of more Web servers leading to more frequent manual update may be due to the nature of Web servers. When there are more Web servers, they can be dedicated to some specific functions such as database, customer relationship modules, emails, or logging functions. It can happen that those special functions require the monitoring of real persons. The above regression results indicate that content management systems have their limitations. There are some tasks which just are not delegable to automated processes.

Conclusion

This research study carried out a survey to investigate the interrelationship among Web site credibility, Web content management system adoption, company size, and Web site complexity. Our survey results show that only the number of Web pages in a Web site and the presence of database connection/customer relationship management systems have significant relationship to the adoption of content management systems. Company size has no effect on the adoption decision of content management systems. This finding reflects the innovative role of Web sites in the business world. Small companies can use their Web site presence to compete with large companies. When small companies identify a niche in the markets that can fully utilize the Web as the delivery and communication channel, Web sites become the most important resource small companies have to manage and maintain. Then, using the best available tool to maintain a company's most important resource seems to be a logical decision. Following this logic, it may not be surprising to find out that the expense/revenue ratio spending on maintaining Web sites in Web-driven small companies is much higher than large companies. Then, there may be the need to develop different Web maintenance models for companies with different Web objectives. Our second finding is for the usage of content management systems. Even when a company has a content management system, there is still the need to perform manual update. The frequency of manual update is significantly driven by net income, number of Web pages, visitors, and Web servers. Net income, as an indicator for company size, is associated with a low frequency of manual update for Web sites. This can imply that small companies take care of individual visitors' needs more than large companies by investing person-to-person communication in their Web sites. This possibility points back to the Web-driven business models for small companies. Overall, this research study has revealed some interesting relationship among the three sets of factors in our proposed research model. Though the small sample size in this research cannot warrant much generalization, the results give insight to follow-up research regarding the usage and utility of content management systems for Web site maintenance.

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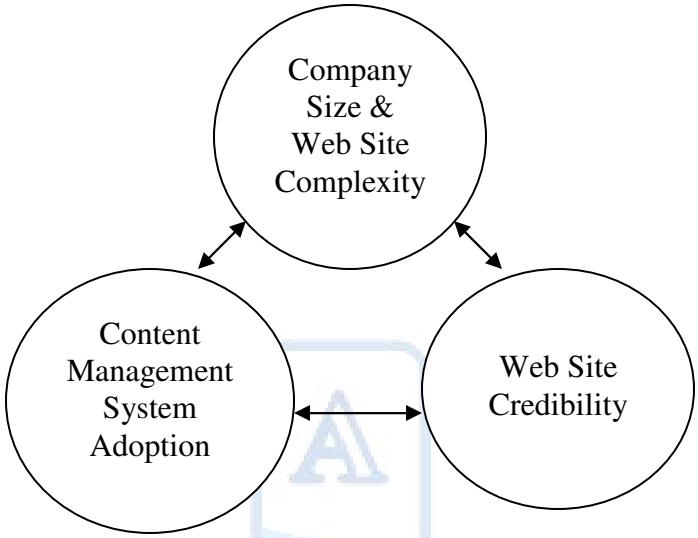

Figure 1: Research Model

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
	Model	12.673	8	.124

Classification Table

			Predicted		
			CMS		Percentage Correct
	Observed		0	1	
Step 1	CMS (no)	0	30	2	93.8
	CMS (yes)	1	5	4	44.4
	Overall Percentage				82.9

Note: The cut value is .500

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1	Employees	.783	1.781	.193	1	.660	2.189
	Revenue	-1.184	2.313	.262	1	.609	.306
	Net Income	1.481	2.759	.288	1	.591	4.399
	Web Pages	**1.095**	.620	3.121	1	**.077**	2.990
	Visitors	-.627	.733	.733	1	.392	.534
	Web Servers	.229	.514	.198	1	.656	1.257
	Components	.170	.332	.263	1	.608	1.185
	DBCRM	**1.743**	.944	3.406	1	**.065**	5.712
	Constant	-6.895	3.107	4.923	1	.026	.001

Figure 2: Logistic Regression Results for Company Size and Web Site Complexity Affecting Content Management Adoption

Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.989	.979	.944	.25000

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	8.701	5	1.740	27.844	.010
Residual	.187	3	.062		

Coefficients

	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
(Constant)		6.530	.007
Employees	.376	1.906	.153
Net Income	**-.928**	-5.059	**.015**
Web Pages	**-1.260**	-10.304	**.002**
Visitors	**.420**	3.248	**.048**
Web Servers	**.461**	3.162	**.051**

Figure 3: Regression Results for Company Size and Web Site Complexity Affecting Frequency of Manually Updating Web Sites for Companies with Content Management Systems

Appendix A: A Partial List of Questions in the Survey

Section 1: About your company:

1) How many employees work for your company?
   - ( ) 1 to 25
   - ( ) 26 to 100
   - ( ) 101 to 1000
   - ( ) 1001 to 5000
   - ( ) More than 5000

2) How much revenue did your company generate last year?
   - ( ) Less than $1,000,000
   - ( ) $1,000,001 to $50,000,000
   - ( ) $50,000,001 to $500,000,000
   - ( ) More than $500,000,000

3) What was your company's net income last year?
   - ( ) Less than $500,000
   - ( ) $500,001 to $25,000,000
   - ( ) $25,000,001 to $250,000,000
   - ( ) More than $250,000,000

Section 2: About your Web site:

4) How many Web pages (how many physical files) does your Web site have?
   ( ) Less than 50
   ( ) 51 to 200
   ( ) 201 to 500
   ( ) 501 to 1000
   ( ) More than 1000

5) How many visitors visit your Web site per day?
   ( ) Less than 500
   ( ) 501 to 1000
   ( ) 1001 to 10,000
   ( ) 10,001 to 100,000
   ( ) More than 100,000

6) How many Web servers are there actively supporting the Web site (including servers for redundancy, but excluding backup servers that are not accessed by Web site users)?
   Enter number of servers: _____

7) What types of components are included in the Web site? Check all that apply:
   ( ) Graphics
   ( ) Scripts
   ( ) Controls
   ( ) Application components (such as ones to validate business rules)
   ( ) Multimedia
   ( ) Transactional content or other content retrieved from databases to generate dynamic Web content
   ( ) Banner advertisements
   ( ) Downloadable files
   Others (please list):
   _____
   _____

8) What kinds of components does the Web site integrate with? Check all that apply:
   ( ) Database
   ( ) Customer relationship management (CRM) system
   Others (please list):
   _____
   _____

9) From your experience and knowledge, rate the factors and add any additional factors that you believe should be among the top factors that contribute to the loss of Web site credibility. Use integers for rating, starting with one (1) as being the biggest factor.

__ The Web site makes it difficult for users to distinguish advertisements from Web site content.

__ The Web site's content is rarely updated.

__ The site has advertisements that automatically pop up.

__ The pages have broken links or have links to sites which are not credible and/or the site is difficult to navigate.

__ The site has typographical mistakes and/or the site is sometimes unavailable unexpectedly

__ Other: _____

__ Other: _____

__ Other: _____

__ Other: _____

10) Do you currently have workarounds to fill the functions/features that your current Web content management solution does not provide?

( ) Yes. What missing functions/features do these workarounds provide?
_____
_____
_____
( ) No.