

Our member firms came to us with a laundry list of requests for their Web sites. Within the first week it became apparent that we needed a CMS, even though at the time we knew little about it. The community function in the Percussion CM System did for us what we would have had to do manually in any other CMS system. That was a big deal. Using Percussion is the only way we could provide our member firms with this Web site service.

➤ Neil August
Project Manager
M Financial Group

Building 40 Member Web Sites ... with Minimal Dedication of IT Staff

M Financial's staff includes August, the project leader, one person who does Percussion CM System design and development 25% of the time, one person who creates graphics, marketing staff who help with developing content and proofreading, and a few IT infrastructure people. Without having even a single full-time dedicated IT person, M Financial Group has used the Percussion CM System to develop six different reference designs to implement 34 different Web sites to date.

"Our first reference design took five months, including training and climbing our learning curve," recalled August. "But after that, each one was successively shorter. We built the templates to use interchangeable components, so each one involved less new work than the previous. The fourth and fifth designs went fast—only about 3 weeks each."

M Financial Group is well on its way to its goal of having 40 member firm Web sites up and running by the end of 2004.

M Financial Group Relies on Percussion to Achieve Online Goals of Member Firms

Nation's Premiere Network of Organizations Serving the Financial Needs of Affluent Individuals and Companies Builds a Community of Web Sites for Its Member Firms

Empowering Member Firms to Manage and Share Content

Established in 1978, M Financial Group is one of the nation's premier financial services distribution companies, serving ultra-affluent individuals and Fortune 1000 companies through an exclusive network of over 100 of the nation's most successful and innovative independent financial services firms. Member Firms are independent but work together toward a common goal: to offer a broad range of solutions designed to help their clients — affluent individuals, corporate executives, entrepreneurs and Fortune 1000 companies — meet their financial goals. The Member Firms share a common focus on customizing wealth accumulation and preservation plans for those whose unique lifestyles and substantial investments demand more sophisticated financial solutions. This focus gives M Financial Group the industry expertise and the market influence to offer a broad range of solutions to its clients.

With the collective experience of over 100 Member Firms, M Financial Group possesses unique expertise to address the needs of its clients. Each Member Firm can tap into a shared knowledge base in a variety of ways to better serve their clients - and to successfully grow their business. Using this expertise, M Member Firms offer creative solutions in the following areas: Wealth Building and Transfer, Estate Planning, Executive Compensation and Benefits, Investment Management, Business Planning, Charitable Planning, Disability Income Protection, Employee Benefits, Group Life and Health Insurance and Long Term Care Insurance.

M Financial Group's decision to purchase a CMS (Content Management System) grew out of a company initiative begun in 2002 to provide new services for clients. "We were not trying to move an existing M Financial site into the CMS; instead, we were starting from scratch and wanted to build individual sites for all our member firms," said Neil August, M Financial Group's Project Manager. "At the same time, we wanted to provide a way for them to maintain their own Web sites and share content with each other, while providing each with their own look and feel. We needed a CMS that could handle every member with their own system, plus our own."

An extensive, five-month evaluation process focused on the ability of 15 different CMS vendors and solutions to meet their needs, with the assistance of an independent consultant. Major criteria for evaluation included ease-of-use for quick adoption by each member firm's content authors (most of whom had no technical background); flexible, customizable product functionality; cost-effectiveness; and ease of ongoing site maintenance.

In choosing the Percussion Content Management System (CM System), August said that Percussion was selected over the other finalists due in part to its unique support for content communities. "The community function in the Percussion CM System did

M Financial Group's Environment

- ▶ Percussion CM Server: Microsoft® Windows 2000
- ▶ Database: MicrosoftSQL Server 2000
- ▶ Web Environment: Dell PowerEdge® 1650, Intel® Pentium® III Processor 1.13 Ghz, dual processor, 2GB RAM, 18GB HDD (mirrored), dual power supplies, dual NICs, running Microsoft IIS 5.x on Microsoft Windows 2000.
- ▶ Output formats: HTML and XML

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for us what we would have had to do manually in any other CMS system. That was a big deal," August explained. "As implemented by Percussion, 'communities' gives us the best of both worlds. As you would expect, we use it to separate the content of each Member Firm, so they don't get confused or have to see content that doesn't apply to them. At the same time, we use this to help the Member Firms share content with each other. And, we can use this feature to tailor the user interface. It's a very powerful capability."

From a user perspective, the people at each member firm maintaining the Web sites are not technical people. This means ease-of-use for content creators was essential. "We liked the Active Assembly interface - we had to have an interface like that," stressed August. "These users are insurance and financial people, not techies."

M Financial Group also was very comfortable with Percussion's stability as a supplier. "Our consultant at the time was worried about how vendors might be impacted by the CMS market shakeout that was being predicted. But we were very comfortable with Percussion's long-term viability. Pricewise, they were highly competitive. The De-Coupled Delivery model worked well for what we needed to do, and offered licensing fees we could afford."

A Unique Community of Web Sites to Help Member Firms Better Serve Their Clients

M Financial Group member firms, which are geographically dispersed throughout the country, share information through their Web sites. In addition, each offers a different set of specialized services, providing them with many opportunities to partner with one another. "We have created a library of content the member firms can tap into," explained August. "They can use it as is, or modify it, without having to spend a lot of time on developing it." Sharing product and service information helps the member firms to partner more efficiently and provide better customer service to clients.

The member firms also use the content to streamline and shorten their sales processes. "With our member firm audience, you have people who especially appreciate it when you can save them time," noted August. The member firms often use their Web site content to provide information that is typically covered during the first meeting with a client, leaving more time to build relationships and discuss how the member firm can help the client. "They're not using it to prospect for clients, but to enable prospects to learn about them without having a meeting," added August.

As for M Financial Group's own Web site - www.mfin.com - it is also powered by Percussion. The Portland, Oregon-based company's site is not aimed at clients, but designed for the local networks of advisors, such as CPAs, lawyers, and other professionals, who provide referrals and whose clients need the services that member firms provide.

Streamlining the Implementation Process with Percussion

Without so much as a single full-time IT person dedicated to the Percussion project, M Financial Group has used the Percussion CM System to develop six different reference Web site designs to implement 34 different Web sites to date. "Currently we have 18 more sites in development," said August. "We never expected to have all 104 member firms make use of it, although it now looks like more than half will. Our goal is to have over 40 sites done by the end of 2004."

One person is trained on Percussion at each member firm. Most firms have fewer than 20 employees, and many don't have any IT staff. In those cases someone in Marketing or a technical area in the firm who is familiar enough with the Web

is chosen for the training and content duties. Some firms have branch offices or separate lines of business, in which case there may be more than one person involved with maintaining content in Percussion.

August and his team guide the member firms through the implementation process. The member firm selects one of the various reference designs, then August's group builds the initial site, and gets their URL moved over to the site. "Then we train them on Percussion and they take over management of their content going forward. We're controlling the Percussion CM Server, and we provide all the hardware infrastructure and software infrastructure," explained August. "None of them could afford a CMS on their own."

In the course of rolling out the initial group of member firm sites, August and his team documented a 14-step implementation process that averages approximately 100 to 120 hours to complete. The sites have averaged six to eight weeks to roll out, based on the amount of time his team was able to devote while handling about seven sites at a time. "Of course, one of the biggest factors in implementation time was variation from site to site in the amount of content," August pointed out. Some had a lot. Some were able to go live in 3 days, while others took as long as 14 months. But this varied mostly based on their ability to devote resources on their end for the content creation and on their own internal decision-making processes."

THE ROI ON Percussion

According to August, the member firms all had proposals of between \$12,000 to \$20,000 from local Web developers to create their Web sites. "We went to them and said, 'we'll give you 80 percent of that. You just need to write your copy and create the content you want - which you'd have to do anyway - and we can give you more than a stand-alone Web site. We'll enable you to easily reuse content from other member firms and benefit from how they're growing their business.' Once we announced that we had gone live with Percussion, within two weeks we had 15 member firms waiting in line for the service. It cost a fraction of what they would spend on their own, since most of their costs were all covered in their membership in M Financial Group."

"As far as the ROI on Percussion, we don't look at it in the traditional way, since our goal was not to reduce existing CMS headcount or costs per se," said August. "We had none at the outset. We needed a CMS that could support the type of community of Web sites we envisioned for our member firms, and we required an ease of use for the content authors that our members' staff could handle. We found all this with Percussion. The ultimate payback comes when our member firms work more efficiently and effectively with each other, win more clients and serve those clients better."

"If we hadn't gone with a CMS," added August, "we'd have had to build the system from scratch and had a whole staff of web developers using Dreamweaver or some similar tool. But we still needed a way to have the member firms maintain the content without training them in HTML or XML."

"M is owned by its member firms. We manage the system for them; they manage the content. We provide them with assistance and recommendations. It's really quite impressive what we've been able to do without a dedicated Percussion group here."

"Right now we are still working on implementing more member firms," concluded August. "Last year, the Percussion CM System occupied 60 percent of my time, and this year, it will be 50 percent. So right now we are not looking for other ways to use Percussion. However, we will be looking at this for 2005."

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