



Websites, Web Applications and Web Productivity Tools

What are they? Which one is right for you?

Although all websites output pages that can be viewed on your browser, there are important differences in how and why these pages are created. Understanding these differences is key to understanding what kind of website you need for your organization.

Static Websites

The simplest form of website serves static pages to the World Wide Web. Static pages are written up and laid out in advance using HTML (or a program that can output HTML, such as FrontPage or Dreamweaver®). They are then simply stored on the web server like any computer file, and the server hands the pages out to viewers on request. Once you have the web content ready, the website-building project comes down to graphic design and layout.

Static websites are essentially an economical form of publishing. So long as your content remains relatively constant, they are easy to bring up and maintain. The most common form of business site, the brochure website, is an example of this. Such websites contain a finite set of pages describing the business and its offerings to potential clients.



Too many businesses do not think beyond the limitations of the brochure website, however. The Internet is an interactive medium, but the brochure website is not interactive. It is a one-way conversation, in which you push information to the user, but get nothing back. As with a magazine ad or flyer, you have little idea of what, if anything, happens with the information you pass out.

Web Applications

A Web Application is a special form of website that serves dynamic pages. These web pages are not laid out in advance and saved as computer files. Instead, special software is used to create web pages on the fly based on parameters that vary from visit to visit.

In some cases, the parameters are determined by databases whose contents change too rapidly to make regular updates of static files feasible. In other cases, the parameters are provided by the user, who interacts with the website using forms and other inputs.

The number of different pages that can be served from a web application can be practically infinite, depending on how many parameters go into generating the pages. Obviously you cannot store an infinite number of static files on the web server, so instead the web server uses programs that know how to make web pages based on those parameters. Creating a new web application is therefore a software development project, and not a graphic design project as many mistakenly assume.

Some familiar web applications include web-mail (e.g. HotMail), online shopping systems (e.g. Amazon), auction sites (e.g. eBay), and Search Engines (e.g. Google).

Web Productivity Tools

Many businesses that develop their first web applications do so as an extension of their brochure website, and simply attempt to make it a more sophisticated sales and marketing tool. But the Internet is not always an appropriate sales medium, and there are other areas to which it can be leveraged with much better effect.

Web Productivity Tools are a special category of Web Application, in which the intended user is not a sales prospect. Instead, the system is designed to be used by your organization's employees and existing customers, to simplify their communications and information exchange.

Rather than simply generate sales, web productivity tools cut costs, improve efficiency, and provide better service. They do this by automating content management and

electronic communications, reducing your reliance on technical consultants, managing widely distributed workgroups, providing self-serve help, and giving 24-7 access to other useful services.

Familiar examples of web productivity tools include online customer support systems, online courses, and conference registration tools.

Which One is Right for You?

If you can count the number of pages you need, a simple static website may be good enough. (If the content will change often, however, you may want to consider some kind of content management system to ease site maintenance.) If the number of permutations and combinations of pages is bewildering, you will probably need a dynamic web application to do the job.

If the Internet is an effective medium for promoting and selling your product or service to potential clients, then it may make sense to target your website to potential customers. A "super-brochure" or online shopping system may be a suitable web application for your needs.

If, on the other hand, communication efficiencies are your primary requirement, a web productivity tool targeted toward your own people and existing clients may be a more effective web application.

There is no reason why a particular website cannot be more than one of the above – for instance some static promotional pages for your products or services, along with an online purchasing system and an online support system for communicating with those customers afterward. Understanding these different faces of your website is important to managing the task of developing the most effective web presence for your business.

About Exware

Exware Solutions helps organizations turn their websites into powerful productivity tools. Specializing in web-based management applications, Exware can rapidly prototype and develop custom applications that save clients time and money while streamlining internal operations.



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