



PROJECT

RICOCHET

△ ————— STREAMLINING ————— △

# CONTENT INTEGRATION IN DRUPAL CMS





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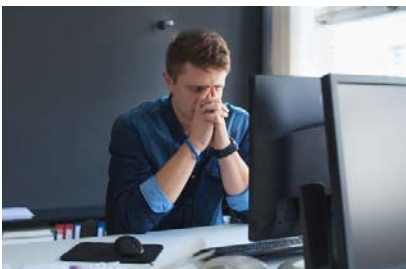
## Why Not Make Your Next Website Implementation Less Painful?

It's unfortunate, but a poor website implementation can happen more frequently than you'd think. We know, because sometimes we're called in to help a client straighten things out after an initial band of developers has packed up and moved on.

### THE CHALLENGE

During our first discovery meeting with Digital Coast Solutions\*, what we heard clearly signaled their team members were dealing with a website that hadn't adequately addressed their long-term goals. The existing site was too difficult to update, manage, and administrate. Simple tasks had become a big source of pain for many of their internal departments.

**An example of what they dealt with on a daily basis:** The marketing department spots an opportunity to leverage an upcoming holiday for a clever promotion. On its face that should be simple to coordinate; Just request a few hours' time from a content editor so the site can be updated. Right?



Not so fast. For DCS, modest requests like these regularly became contentious, stressful projects demanding large swaths of time from designers, developers, content editors, and more. Sound familiar?





Digital Coast Solutions couldn't respond to customers in a timely manner. They were hampered from testing new product ideas. Maintaining their site had become a huge drag on overall productivity – so they weren't competing at full capacity.

## SATISFY MANY CONSTITUENCIES AT ONCE

How your content will ultimately present on a website is often shaped by decisions from several stakeholders – who can sometimes have wildly conflicting agendas. Do the responsibilities of your team members coincide with some of the following roles?

### Main Roles For Complex Projects:

#### Directors/Managers

Directors/Managers set the overall terms for success and probably determine budgets.

#### Marketers

Marketers outline kinds of campaigns they want ability to launch and may oversee content production.

#### Designers

Designers establish branding guidelines and generate the visual elements for each page.

#### Developers

Developers carefully assemble the code that will make all the above work.

#### Content Editors

For web-based projects, often there are also content editors. Content editors typically log into the CMS through a web browser and add the copy, images, videos and other content into the system so it can populate to pages as needed. Since the success of a site might depend on regularly adding fresh content, this is an ongoing task.

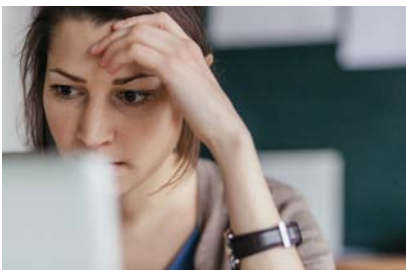
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## BREAK THE CYCLE OF CRISIS

As a result of many similar quandaries, Digital Coast Solutions asked for help to implement a new site that would allow a non-technical staffer – perhaps even on the level of an intern – to manage and post updates. The previous content interface had been too complex to practically allow that. Updating pages, posts, and publishing new promotions had become an ongoing “all hands on deck” situation for too many of their valuable internal resources.



We understood that on a deeper level, DCS really needed to “break the cycle of crisis.” Their existing site wasn’t much of an asset anymore. Dealing with updates and requests had become more of a liability. Any new site they invested in would have to address those issues from the very beginning.

## SELECT TECHNOLOGY THAT ALIGNS WITH HOW YOUR BUSINESS OPERATES

Clients regularly come to us with various concerns over committing to a particular Content Management System (CMS). Posting via the Drupal content editor interface may require a bit more skill than a consumer blogging solution would. But there are many compelling reasons a business will want to use Drupal for their CMS. No doubt, this is why we’ve developed so much expertise in the platform.

**Specifically, Digital Coast Solutions raised some common concerns about the framework, including:**

1. Is Drupal right for our long-term strategic needs?
2. Will leveraging Drupal help us complete our new site on-time and on-budget?
3. Can the process of adding content be simplified so a non-technical person can manage it?





## ALWAYS BE PREPARED TO FACTOR "ONE MORE THING"

"It would take some clever planning ... to help make these things a reality for the client"

Essentially, Digital Coast Solutions asked for a website solution with a content editor interface that featured a combination of "consistency" and "intuitive usability." Despite the fact those qualities aren't inherent to your average, off-the-shelf Drupal implementation, we were absolutely confident we could deliver what they needed.

But DCS had an additional request. They wanted to have much more control over page layouts. Their team needed the flexibility to repeat certain pre-designed visual elements and preview the results before posting.

Again, not impossible. But it would take some clever planning and development work on the part of Project Ricochet to help make these things a reality for the client.

Briefly, here were a couple potential approaches for customizing the content interface for Digital Coast Solutions:

### A. Customize The Interface For Content Editors?

Programming WYSIWYG elements into the template itself was a direction we had to consider. What if the content editors could leverage a simple, visual interface to preview various layout combinations before committing to them?

Unfortunately – from both a technical and practical standpoint – that option was far from ideal. First, it would be difficult to allow for all the various visual elements that might be used. Second, it would partly defeat one of the main advantages of using a content management system.





As a web development platform and CMS, Drupal is excellent at helping you index and categorize all the various bits of information you have. The more accurate and descriptive you can be with each piece of data as it is entered into the system, the better results you and your customers will get from your site over the long term. So you really don't want to compromise there at all, if you can help it.

## B. Deliver A More Developer-friendly Content Editing Interface?

Another way to resolve the challenge could have been to leverage specific Drupal tools to customize the code. At first, this may seem attractive from a development perspective. Developers can tap into vetted, open source solutions that shouldn't take too long to implement.



Make no mistake, the Project Ricochet team does this all the time – and with stellar results. But in regard to the content interface itself, this approach would result in a solution that wouldn't be very easy for your typical content editor to use. The specific elements that complicate this are called Blocks, Panels, and Views, but the upshot is they need to be edited within a special Drupal interface. That creates a situation where content editors aren't really able to move forward on their tasks without constant assistance from a developer.

### AS A CLIENT, CONSIDER THE IMPACT ON YOUR RESOURCES GOING FORWARD

Clearly, there were a number of real barriers to helping Digital Coast Solutions achieve the results they wanted for their website project. Like any business, DCS would stand to gain a great deal of agility from a solution that would reduce dependencies on other specialists within the organization.





It just wasn't obvious at first how to do it in this case. Management, marketing, design, and the developers certainly all have their own unique requirements that must be accounted for in the final product – and there was clear confidence we could address those. The real challenge here focused around the role of the content editor.

## FOR BETTER ANSWERS, IT SOMETIMES PAYS TO RE-EXAMINE THE QUESTIONS

After considering several options including variations on those outlined above, we thought the template element itself must be a key to solving this puzzle. Generally, a template helps structure any given web page and can be used over and over again to present specific, editable content for many different pages that follow its format. The trouble for a content editor is there are all sorts of barriers to customizing the layouts of these pages – especially from within Drupal itself.



**So finally, we adjusted the question for our challenge:**

“What if the client had the ability to generate various different templates themselves, independent of conventional Drupal constraints?”

That new focus on the template led our team to theorize we could develop a “Build Kit” for the client. Simply put, this build kit would include many interchangeable components that the DCS team could use to create their own individual, customized pages.

After further consultation with the Digital Coast Solutions team, that's precisely what we set out to do. Leveraging the Paragraphs module within the Build Kit became a clever way to retain top-level site styling and functionality while giving our clients more freedom to create





unique pages. It also freed them from having to rely too heavily on developers going forward.

## GREAT RESULTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

Once the build kit components were created and implemented, the client was able to select specific page components within the content interface and order them how she or he saw fit. The content editor could add multiple instances of each component with different content in each.



This essentially allows anyone in the content editor role to create a completely unique page from a single place within Drupal. Instead of each unique page having an overall template, each component had its own component template and style specifications. Fonts, colors, sizing and more styles were all consistent within these component templates.

Now, layout options were available for the person entering or editing content – even if they didn't have programming skills. Specific content could still be updated and the style would remain consistent.

## SELECT A DEVELOPMENT TEAM WITH YOUR INTERESTS IN MIND

It was clear from the start that DCS needed a website solution with a simple, consistent content interface that almost any authorized staffer could navigate. Digital Coast Solutions didn't just want a whizz-bang, shiny new site that ended up being difficult to manage. They needed a solution that was carefully planned and implemented as a long-term, strategic investment.







The solution Project Ricochet proposed and delivered enabled any of their content editors to easily enter content in a structured, organized way – yet also gain more control over visual elements as needed. Key internal experts were freed from having to constantly address new technical challenges on an ad hoc basis. Marketing gained more latitude to test different promotional ideas quickly – and without being overly dependent on other company resources. Above all, the engagement resulted in a website far better positioned to deliver a return on the client’s investment.



Perhaps just about any development team would be happy to take on your next website or web application project. But it pays to collaborate with an agency that has your long-term interests in mind.

The vast experience accumulated by the Project Ricochet team in creating customized Drupal solutions has uniquely prepared us to resolve difficult challenges like this. The expertise we’ve amassed over the course of many years delivering hundreds of websites continues to provide great insight on what will be practical, useful, and profitable for a business like yours.

\*Company name withheld with respect for the client’s competitive environment.

### CONTACT US TO LEARN MORE

Questions about this case study? Would you like to hear more about how Project Ricochet can help you implement a strategy that best leverages Marketing, Design, Content, and Engineering with regard to Drupal in your organization?

If so, please reach out via phone (800) 651-3186 or email [info@projectricochet.com](mailto:info@projectricochet.com).

