

## Dreamweaver/Contribute vs. DD-CMS

I've been looking at Contribute v4 and it seems to be a fairly nice product. I did notice quite a few of the posts in the user forums on Adobe's site were along the lines of 'I can't get help like I did before Adobe took over...'. I'm not sure if it's just an organizational lag and it will work itself out or if Adobe support isn't what it should be.

I think the main differences come down to how much knowledge is required to maintain the website and how much control and time the website editors are to have. The initial apparent difference in price between the two may be misleading, depending on the software the customer already has and the level of expertise they possess. Each copy of Contribute will cost about \$150. If they have a number of different people that need to edit the site, or need to be able to edit the site from numerous computers then the license cost for Contribute can rise, or the convenience of using the product can suffer.

Another hidden cost is that of setting the site up in Dreamweaver to be used by Contribute. In order to maintain control over the look and feel, as well as layout of the site, the templates and the Contribute settings need to be set up correctly. This requires a fairly robust knowledge of Dreamweaver templates, and in my experience, a very good knowledge of HTML/CSS/Javascript as Dreamweaver can be difficult to use for all but the simplest of page layouts. If the customer does not possess the necessary knowledge to set the site up correctly then very little will be gained in the area of control of the site and they would be better off not purchasing Contribute in the first place as there are several good, cheap to free, HTML editors available.

One of the downsides to the way that Dreamweaver/Contribute manages users and permissions is that any controls apply only to Dreamweaver/Contribute. If an editor has the ftp information for the site, then all control is effectively lost. A page can be opened and edited by any text editor with no regard for any of the safeguards put in place. The controls may also be removed from a page or template in such a manner, either accidentally or intentionally.

The CMS editing controls are built in to the CMS and only the site administrators can change them. There is no need for any of the editors to ever have the ftp information, nor can the ftp information be discovered for the site. Even though Contribute has a 'Connection Key' available to hide the ftp information, a disgruntled or malicious user could discover the ftp information that it uses simply by logging it's network traffic on connection.

If the customer does not possess the knowledge necessary to set up the site, then they will have to pay to have that done. Most of the base cost of the CMS comes from setting up the templates to be used on the site. So the price difference would shrink considerably in that case. Also, while changes to the site managed by the CMS may well involve an additional programming cost, a comparable cost would be incurred if the site was managed by Dreamweaver/Contribute. Even if the customer possesses the knowledge of Dreamweaver and the ability to make changes to the site, the cost of Dreamweaver itself would need to be considered at about \$400 for a new version and \$200 per upgrade per computer.

Any dynamic content additions, such as automatically updating event calendars, would likely cost more to add to a Dreamweaver/Contribute site simply because of the overhead involved in setting it up. Most of the basic functionality for managing dynamic content is already available in the CMS, so this would not have to be redeveloped for the CMS managed site. Also, if the customer has the knowledge necessary to customize the way the CMS works, many fine tools to do that are available free of charge.

Contribute does offer a richer user interface than the CMS. This is mainly due to the different missions of the two approaches. The CMS is designed to be a no-frills, get in and get out type of website manager where the look and feel of the site is strictly controlled. It's designed to make it easy to add a page, edit a page or move pages around. It automatically takes care of link updates, changes to external files such as images, pdf documents, audio and video files. Almost all of the control for the look and feel of the site is built into the CMS. On the other hand, Contribute is built to allow changes to the look and feel of the site, based on permissions set by the administrator. With this extra freedom comes extra responsibility, both for the administrator of the site as well as the site editors. A misstep in Contribute or in the underlying template could result in a page that does not reflect the goals of the site design, or does not display properly.

Most activities performed in the CMS are logged in a central location and the user management and permission controls are set in a central location. Adobe does offer the Contribute Publishing Server application that performs these tasks also. If the customer does not own the server the site will be hosted on then this option is more than likely unavailable. Even if it is a viable option, it adds an additional cost of about \$88 to each installation of Contribute used to access the site.

The decision of whether to use the CMS or Dreamweaver/Contribute really boils down to a few questions:

1. How much expertise/time does the customer have to devote to managing their site?
2. How much editing control does the customer want the editors of the site to have.
3. How much expertise/time do the editors have to devote to the site?
4. How much creative freedom do the editors need to have?
5. How much of an investment do the customers already have in Dreamweaver/Contribute?

No one tool is right for every occasion. The Dreamweaver/Contribute combination can be the perfect tool for the job, but it can also be the perfectly wrong tool depending on the customers situation.