Questioning your Users

A CM Domain White Paper

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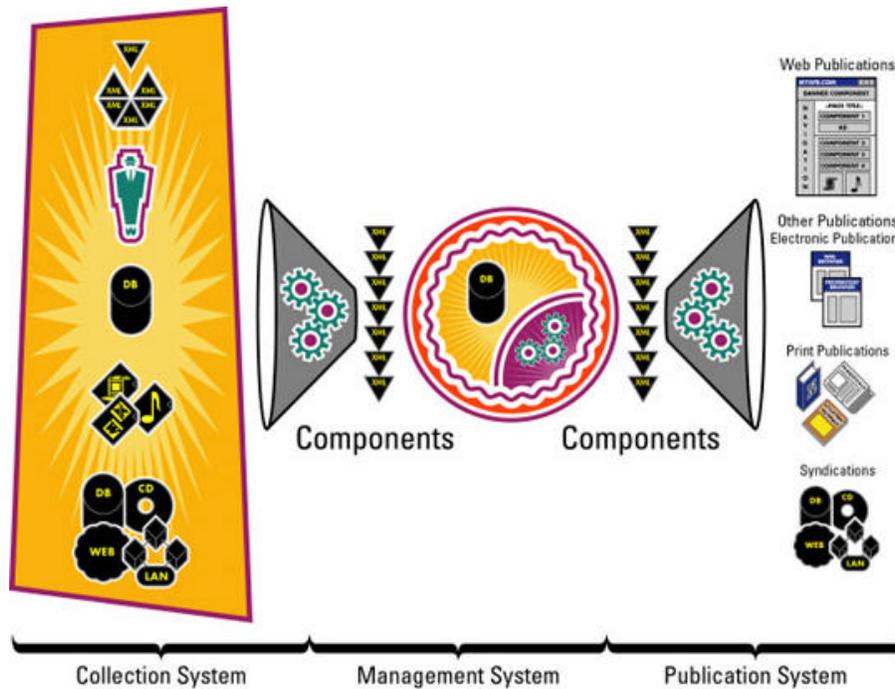
Collection System   Management System   Publication System

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Abstract

This paper includes the portions of a CMS audinece analysis that you might inlcude in a user survey for any software application.

Audiences and users

I've never heard programmers use the word *audience*, but as they talk about users, programmers are using the same concept. *Users* are the consumers of computer applications.

Users access an application through a user interface. To be successful, a user interface must be usable. Usability testers recruit representatives of user groups and watch them use the application to see whether it works well for them. What are these user groups if they're not audiences?

Today's hot design process *Unified Modeling Language* (*UML*) makes the link to audiences even more tangible. Programmers use UML to model the way that you use an application before they put any effort into programming it. UML defines roles as the types of people who're likely to use an application. In UML, you create a set of "use cases" that define what a type of person wants to accomplish and how you may expect to go about accomplishing it.

For an electronic publication, audiences are users. In fact, I call audience members *users* throughout this white paper as I discuss people interacting with Web sites and other electronic publications. Thus application usability, user groups, and use cases literally apply to much of what a CMS produces.

In fact, I carry the notions of usability and use cases forward into my discussion of CMS audience analysis. As part of the audience analysis that you do for a CMS, you can define a set of use cases and usability concerns for each audience.

Identifying Your Users

Begin your analysis by charting the main identifying characteristics of your audiences. Come up with a response to the following audience design constraints to help you keep track of and rank your audiences:ID Assign each audience a unique identifier so that you can later use it in the CMS for profiles and rules.NameChoose a descriptive but memorable name for each audience so that the staff accepts the name and uses it consistently in conversation.RankGive each audience a priority rank. You rank audiences relative to each other if possible. (Members are priority one, for example, and in-country staff are priority two.) If you can't reach agreement on relative ranking, rate them all according to an external scale. (Members and staff are high priority, for example, while the press is a low priority.)Key member For each audience, identify an exemplar to whom you can point to give a concrete example of the group. The person may or may not be available to your group on an ongoing consulting basis, but you should at least meet with the key member once to get a solid feeling for what people of this audience are like. If your audience is in more than one locality, can you get a key member from each main locality?