

CM Pros: A Way Forward

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Executive Summary

This document represents an analysis of the state of the Content Management Professionals organization and outlines a set of solutions and initiatives to move the organization forward.

The Problem

CM Pros has become fragmented and without clear purpose. The organization has dropped paid membership some time ago and currently exists only as a (closed) LinkedIn group and nominal website.

Membership of this group is over 25,000, but none can be considered “members” of the organization in any traditional sense. We can derive no demographic information from LinkedIn, so the only connection they have to CM Pros is the logo on their LinkedIn profile. Discussion volume is fairly low (3-4 legitimate discussion posts per week), so the vast majority of group members have no participation whatsoever with CM Pros.

There is considerable disregard for the organization among members of the industry. It has historically been ineffective and vague, without clear goals, purpose, or initiatives.

One of the core problems was that the original member base pool was very broad. The title of “content management professional” meant too many different things to too many people. Did it refer to content planners, developers, vendors, web managers, etc.?

Anyone working at any stage of the content lifecycle could conceivably refer to themselves as a “content management professional.” If they joined the organization hoping it would have some relationship to their position, they were invariably disappointed as – even if the organization was showing activity – it couldn’t cover every base, so the new member would quickly become disillusioned and drop out.

Over time, the original purpose of the organization has been usurped by other aspects of the industry. In particular, the content strategy movement has siphoned off a large segment of the potential member base, as have other non-technical areas such as web management, information architecture, and governance. Potential members in these specialties have found association with other groups.

The fuzziness of the member definition and the migration of potential members into other disciplines has resulted in a lack of identity among potential members. People identify as a “content management professional” only while they are actively working with content management. There is no “stickiness” of this identity. Compare this to other disciplines like content strategy, design, and information architecture in which the title becomes a career identity.

Developers, in particular, tend to identify as people who happen to be working with content management. Their association with the discipline and industry of content management is secondary to their association to the discipline of development.

These factors have, over time, reduced interest in the organization to a minimum. This has caused a positive feedback loop where – as interest declined – leadership became detached and the organization did less and less. As the organization did less, membership continued to decline, and so on.

The Short-Term Solution

There are three imperatives to correct the course of CM Pros:

1. We need to accept that large sections of the originally-intended audience have found professional identity elsewhere. We need to **drastically narrow the mission** and the potential audience to a very tightly defined core.
2. We need to **develop a comprehensive governance** model which provides for well-defined roles, responsibilities, and reporting channels.
3. We need to **launch a specific set of well-defined, concrete initiatives** to serve our newly-defined mission and bring value to the membership.

The New Mission

CM Pros must exist to **cultivate a unique identity for the content management professional**.

A CM Pro is a professional who works in the content management field now, *and plans to continue doing so in his or her next position and beyond*. This is a professional who envisions their career continuing in the content management field, throughout multiple jobs and assignments. For this professional, the thread of content management is central to their career path, and it transcends the specific job they happen to be working in at an one time.

To reinforce this, we need to **elevate content management as a super-set of generic information management**. We need to identify and promote the differences between managing content opposed to generic information or data.

We need to **identify specific training opportunities** for content management learning and provide access to methods for a professional to reinforce their position as a content management specialist.

Finally, we need to **promote common core of content management knowledge** both as a resource for the content management professional, but also as a concrete representation of the knowledge that sets this professional apart from those in mere information management.

The Initiatives

The following are specific, concrete projects the organization will pursue in 2014.

Immediate

These initiatives will launch in January 2014.

1. A shared vocabulary is often the most unifying thread in a community. As such, the content management field is in need of a **comprehensive glossary of terminology and concepts**. Terms like “content modeling” and “templating” mean vastly different things to different people in the field. By putting some accepted definition around these terms, we can begin to solidify the identity of the content management professional.
2. Formal educational resources exist to expand a professional’s knowledge of the content management field, however there is no single repository of this information. We need to develop a **lightweight database listing relevant degrees and degree programs**, college-level classes, and online courses that would be relevant to a professional working in content management.

Future

These initiatives are planned for 2015 and beyond.

1. **Education:** after the establishment of the glossary of content management and a the survey of formal education opportunities, CM Pros would be in a position to develop and offer online and in-person courses and seminars in content management-related related topics.
2. **Certification:** given enough courses and educational opportunities, the obvious next step would be a certification process whereby a CM Pro could have proof of their educational accomplishment in the field.
3. **The Journal of Content Management:** while CM information is in abundance on the Internet, it mainly exists as informal blog posts. There is a distinct lack of a peer-reviewed repository for CM information. Other related disciplines have done this with some success – there are several formal journals on the web, in addition to “journal-ish” publications like Contents Magazine and A List Apart.

The Obstacles

Several obstacles loom large:

- **Governance:** The governance of the organization has broken down. The key to making progress on any defined initiatives is to develop a strong set of groups, roles, and reporting channels. Additionally, we need to address the state of the current officers – we have a board of three (down from four) and a president, at the moment. We need to determine who is staying on, who is leaving, and who will be replacing them.
- **Funding:** The organization needs modest funding. For the first year, a budget of just \$10,000 might be enough to handle various costs. This funding will have to come from vendors in the content management industry, as individuals have no reason to support the organization at the moment.

- **Evangelism:** The new charter of the organization needs to be accepted and evangelized among the community. The existing history of the organization needs to be wiped clean and the community needs to be convinced that this is a fresh start under new circumstances with a high probability of success.
- **Legalities and Resource Recovery:** The organization is in legal disarray. It presently has lost both its incorporation and non-profit status with the State of Maryland. After a lengthy search, the initial legal documentation was recovered, but core resources such as the mailing list and the Google Docs credentials are missing.

Next Steps

While there are likely a dozen different ways to approach these goals, the most direct seems to be to begin on one of the goals in order to provide evidence of purpose and momentum.

As such, **I have been actively recruiting for the glossary project and have amassed a group of a half-dozen professionals prepared to commit to that project.**

The glossary can be considered a bellwether for the future of the organization. We can build on initial success here to put the other pieces in place by the end of 2014.