

Mambo Open Source 4.5

Real Management

Designing, creating and managing a complex, content rich website has never been easy. With Mambo Open Source 4.5 it is now.

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Mambo Open Source 4.5 [1] is a Content Management suite, which runs on any platform that supports Apache, MySQL and PHP.

Mambo OS is designed to handle the largest of websites with all content pages being dynamically generated from a MySQL database.

With the latest release, Mambo Open Source has progressed a long way from its early days as a proprietary application. Floundering on the Internet, Rob Castley spotted the re-release under the GPL license. Seeing opportunity where others saw none, Rob has galvanized a group of core developers that work together to produce Mambo OS 4.5.

This collaborative development process has allowed Mambo OS to develop at an astonishing rate. New features have been added on an almost weekly basis. The majority of these new or improved features have been in response to requests from users.

Unlike many Open Source website creation packages, Mambo OS is not portal software. It isn't designed to create a portal where visitors leave comments on your content, like phpnuke et al. Instead it is targeted at the corporate internet/intranet market.

Mambo OS is the engine behind your website designed to simplify the creation of content.

The look and feel of a Mambo OS site is defined in the template and all your content, menus and navigation tools are displayed according to the rules of the template.

Mambo OS comes with several predefined templates, but designing your own or using one of the growing number of community created templates could not be easier. If you can't decide on your favourite design why not let your website visitors decide.

A common criticism of website software is that all of the sites look the same. With Mambo OS that doesn't have to be the case. Just look at *www.yops.de*, *www.swm.com.au* and *www.zoobies.net* to see how different they can look.

Easy change

One of the many tools that are provided with Mambo OS is the template chooser. One click of the mouse and the user can change the look and feel of your site. Whilst this may be of use for the terminally indecisive designer, its strength is in prototyping your site with different layouts before making a final decision. This has the benefit of being able to provide low or high bandwidth versions of the same site. It can also be used to



provide a high contrast version for those with visual impairments.

Adding content to your site is often a collaborative effort with many authors. The site administrator can easily give anyone author access. All your author needs to know is how to use a basic word processor or a text editor.

There is no danger of an author destroying your lovingly created web site, as they do not need access to the administrative back-end. You can even set Mambo OS so that an author's work must be approved or even edited before it is published.

One of the most substantial additions is the introduction of an advanced access control system. The site administrator can restrict access to the facilities according to the level assigned.

Public users can view some content, Registered users can view all content, Authors can add content, Editors can add content and edit other authors work, Publishers can do all of the above and "publish" or approve content for inclu-

sion. These user groups perform their tasks without resorting to access to the administrative back-end. In addition, there are three different levels of access to the back-end. From a web site designer's perspective, this means that access can be provided for content management, without giving access to system/site management.

Mambo OS does the hard stuff, freeing you to concentrate on the content.



Figure 1: The Zoobies site showing a different look

RSS Syndicated News, a highly configurable newsfeed system, integrated search engine, complex metadata support, newflashes, mass mailings to registered users, visitor statistics and a banner advert management system are all provided as standard.

One of my favourite features is the provision of automatic publishing and expiration of your content based on the date. When you add content that is time sensitive on your site, why should you have to remember to publish/remove the article when you can set it all at the time of creation. See figure 3.

Ensuring that your website is fully indexed and highly ranked on the “search engines” is an essential requirement for most websites. The best way to achieve this is not by paying for placement. Ensuring that your site provides the most accurate metadata, the hidden keywords in your website, is. Mambo OS provides the opportunity to insert custom metadata for each content item.

Another, highly contested method is the use of “Search Engine Friendly” (SEF) URLs. Many of the search engines do not fully index dynamically generated websites like Mambo OS. By using the Apache mod_rewrite engine Mambo OS can produce more SEF URLs. This may not be available to many sites hosted on shared servers as many ISPs do not enable this engine by default.

However, initial reports by those who have implemented SEF URLs claim improved search engine rankings.

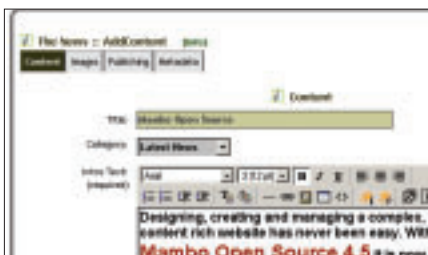


Figure 2: Editing content is easy

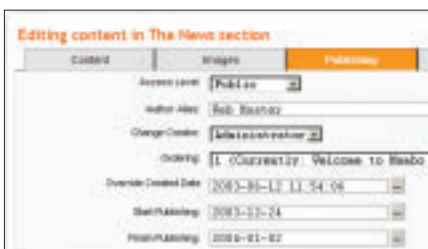


Figure 3: Date setting for time sensitive pages



Figure 4: Changing the metadata

Many web site visitors will use the search facility on your site to jump directly to the information they want. But did they find it? You’ll never know. Mambo OS has the option to log all searches and the results provided. This search logging is a great way of determining what your customers are looking for and perhaps identifying gaps in your product range or information.

The decision to accept advertisements on your website is a hard one, but once made, you need the tools to manage the clients and adverts. Once again Mambo OS provides them. Is there anything Mambo OS does not do?

Banner adverts can be grouped by advertiser and each advert can be set to display either indefinitely or for a pre-determined number of page impressions.

Content Management Software (CMS) Checklist

Content Creation

- Integrated authoring environment
- Separation of content and presentation
- Multi-user authoring
- Metadata creation
- Non-technical authoring
- Ease of use & efficiency

Content Management

- Version control & archiving
- Workflow
- Reporting

Publishing

- Stylesheets
- Templates
- Extensibility
- Usage statistics

Presentation

- Usability
- Accessibility
- Cross browser support
- Speed
- Valid HTML
- Effective navigation
- Metadata



Figure 5: Managing your banner adverts

Statistics on the number of advertising displays and “click throughs” are also provided to produce essential feedback to your advertisers.

Power and Speed

Mambo OS has the power and speed to handle websites of any size and complexity. The Bosnian site (www.superbosna.com) receives over 200,000 unique visitors each month and handles almost 40,000 content items. The Developer Shed Network (www.devshed.com) has transferred to Mambo OS. The site receives 3 million hits per month.

Mambo OS’ modular and open design provides the kind of tools that allow you to create your own components as part of a major system upgrade.

Many components are then fed back to the Mambo Community [2]. Recent additions include an image gallery, a help desk, an e-commerce facility, and an estate agency solution.

The majority of 3rd party components [3] and templates are developed either for the programmer’s own use or for fun. A growing number of companies now offer custom Mambo OS components and designs on a commercial basis.

Mambo Open Source is a shining example of what Open Source software and community led development can produce when it works well.

Mambo OS is available in over 30 languages and there is an active forum where users share tips & techniques. With several Mambo OS user sites for people whose first language is not English, Mambo OS users are a true community. With Mambo Open Source 4.5 the power is in its simplicity. ■

INFO

- [1] The main Mambo OS site: <http://www.mamboserver.com/>
- [2] The Mambo OS community forum: <http://forum.mamboserver.com/>
- [3] A source for 3rd party add-ons: <http://www.mamboportal.com/>
<http://www.mamboportal.de>