

TO: Kristin Lindlan, CC:DA Chair  
FROM: John Attig, CC:DA Webmaster  
SUBJECT: The future of the CC:DA Web site

As you may be aware, ALA implemented its new Web design and Content Management System (CMS) on April 7, 2003. The ALCTS offices did not convert the CC:DA pages, as they were aware that some of the structure of our documents would be lost in the conversion. They preferred that this task be undertaken by the CC:DA Webmaster.

Due to the short timeframe available before the ALA site went live, Kristen Lindlan, Matthew Beacom and John Attig proposed, and Charles Wilt accepted, a set of compromises:

1. All of the CC:DA pages will be removed/unlinked from the ALA site *except* a revised version of the home page.
2. The home page will be maintained by ALCTS staff until the CC:DA Webmaster can be trained to use the new CMS and has accepted it as an appropriate working environment. Until that has happened, the CC:DA Webmaster will communicate any changes to a designated contact at ALCTS for updating.
3. All of the links on the CC:DA home page will be replaced by links to the appropriate documents on the Penn State server. Thus, initially, only one CC:DA page will exist on the ALA server.
4. The CC:DA home page on the ALA server will contain links to the public-oriented material — announcements, how to submit a rule revision proposal — and a link to the “Committee home page” on the Penn State server. This allows the most important outreach activities of the Committee to be supported at least indirectly on the ALA site, but the internal working parts of the site to be maintained directly by the CC:DA Webmaster on his local server.

This plan has been implemented. So far, no updates have been made to the page on the ALA server, but there will be some changes posted in conjunction with the ALA Annual Conference (agenda, revised announcements).

The future of the CC:DA Web site on the ALA server is in doubt. CC:DA’s highest priority should be to keep the site up to date in order to support the internal working of the Committee. CC:DA cannot work without the Web site, and that site must be current. I have only limited time that can be devoted to this work, and my highest priority must be the maintenance of the working site. This leaves very little time that can be devoted to converting the site to the new CMS and the new ALA design.

There are good reasons for the CC:DA site to be fully a part of the ALA site. The most important is that only pages on the ALA site can be searched using the ALA site search engine; given the complexity of the CC:DA site alone, it is difficult to find documents without such a search capability.

On the other hand, it is not clear that it will be possible to use the CMS. The CC:DA site has some unusually strict requirements. It contains some highly structured, complex documents, many of which must be in HTML rather than PDF in order to allow hyperlinking. Moreover, documents on the CC:DA site must conform (in part, at least), not only to the ALA Web style, but to the style of AACR2, the document CC:DA is charged to maintain. This imposes some serious challenges.

In addition, I have my own requirements, based on my experience maintaining the site and on the procedures I have developed to do so efficiently:

1. I need to be able to create and edit content offline on my own computer.
2. I need to be able to test the files locally on a server to which the files can be loaded directly. This testing needs to include hyperlinks. Therefore hyperlinks need to be independent of the CMS context; the links need to work in any directory structure.
3. I need to be able to mount the files on a server that is not part of the official ALA site, in order to get approval for changes before they are posted.
4. I need to be able to post pages to the ALA site by sending complete files either directly to the ALA server or to someone who can load them onto the server.
5. I need to have complete control over the design of the content of each page within the frame of elements that are part of the ALA style. This is necessary in order to support the need for structured documents that conform (when appropriate) to the AACR style.

There are signs that ALA's CMS will not be able to meet these requirements. The following is information provided by Kirsten Ahlen, the ALCTS expert on this system:

The content management system is a database. Each bit of content on a page (link, image, text) is an individual record in the database. Thus, in looking at the CCDA Announcements & Reports page (<http://www.ala.org/alcts/organization/ccs/ccda/210-ann.html>), you would have content record for the agenda, powerpoint slideshow, report of the meeting, JSC meeting report, and every other item you link to. Then, you would create a record of all the text in that page. Then, you would add the links to the objects mentioned in the text.

This is a tedious process and it is just one of the reasons I am pushing for a revision in the look of your content. For example, on your CCDA homepage, I would not link to all those documents. I would create individual navigation items and keep the content within those navigational items. For one, linking is a pain. Secondly, the CMS doesn't have any way of checking links. You have to manually keep a record of every link created. If you move one

record from navigational category A to category B, you have to manually go into every place you mentioned a link to that object and change it.

The CMS is not an easy beast to conceptualize initially. You really can't think of it in terms of an html site.

At this point, I am trying to keep an open mind and to find some time (probably in August) to learn how to use the CMS. I am hopeful that the system can be made to work in a way that meets the requirements stated above. In particular, I have urged that (a) CC:DA be allowed to implement its own style sheet in addition to the ALA style sheet, in order to support additional formatting features not available in the latter; and (b) the style sheets be applied only to the higher levels of the CC:DA site (the Committee and Task Force home pages, perhaps agendas and minutes), but not to individual documents — or to retrospective documents, which would take forever to convert with little benefit to anyone.

If the CMS cannot meet the requirements, CC:DA needs to have a contingency plan. It seems to me that the options are (a) find somebody who is willing and able to take over the maintenance of the CC:DA site working within the CMS; or (b) continue to maintain the CC:DA site on the Penn State server, independent of the ALA site, but connected to it through the single, abbreviated home page.

Please note that, while I am willing to continue to maintain the CC:DA Web site, under the requirements stated, I obviously cannot do so forever. At some point, CC:DA will need to make other arrangements. They should consider whether this is the right time to do so.

If CC:DA decides to continue to maintain the site on the Penn State server, I will talk to our local IT staff about some enhancements. I believe it should be possible (a) to use a shorter, simpler URL, and (b) to add a search engine that would search the content of the CC:DA pages.

These contingency plans are not for immediate action, only for CC:DA to begin considering. The action that I would recommend at this time is for CC:DA to ratify the requirements listed above and to ask the CC:DA Chair to inform the CCS Executive Committee of the issues involved and of CC:DA's position on these issues.

John Attig  
CC:DA Webmaster