

Sigmer Technologies helps International Save The Children

THE INTERNATIONAL SAVE THE CHILDREN

ALLIANCE fights for children's rights and delivers immediate and lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide. It is the world's largest independent global organisation for children, with member organisations in 29 countries around the world and with representatives in over 100 countries. The International Save the Children Alliance Secretariat, which co-ordinates the work of the



Alliance organisations, wanted to realise a global internet strategy, taking advantage of the large number of people who could contribute valuable content to the various websites within the organisation. However, while the Secretariat wanted to provide members with an element of autonomy regarding web content, it also wanted to maintain the brand image and core site design. A content management system that would control the brand message content, but save authorisation time by providing members of the Alliance with the ability to change certain types of web content, would fulfil this requirement.

The Requirement

The previous website content management system used by the Alliance was not sufficiently flexible or scalable to realise its global Internet development plan for member organisations around the world. A new system was required that would provide a quick and easy to use interface, with a priority on producing accessible web pages and standardising design.

The Secretariat wanted to enable a variety of people in the Alliance to be able to update content, rather than limiting editorial capabilities to individual webmasters. In the past, the complicated task of an Alliance member requesting additions to website content often deterred them from making as many updates as they would if they had the ability to edit the content themselves. Providing users with editorial capabilities would mean experts in specific fields could quickly update certain areas of a website. This would eliminate the need to spend time updating content via a webmaster, who might also be in a different time zone.

Another requirement the Secretariat had was that the new system could support a number of languages, due to the international scale of the Alliance.

Sigmer Technologies was approached to fulfil these needs.

The Sigmer Solution: Scribe

Sigmer Technologies created a high featured web content management system called Scribe, which allows users to update a website with minimum technical expertise. Scribe enables the user to separate website content from design. It also allows the user to update content on a regular basis, so that the Alliance member organisations can communicate information dynamically with their supporters.

Scribe is a server-based technology; its functionality is delivered to its users through a web interface in their web browser (MS Internet Explorer or Netscape). Scribe is based on two cross-platform technologies (PHP and MySQL), which means it can be installed on a number of different server platforms.



(Photo: lorettaflame@morguefile.com)

Sigmer Technologies made the pioneering decision not to base the new content management system on the usual database model, but rather base it on a managed file system. In this way, pages could be displayed to the end user at a much faster rate than with any database-driven model. In addition, less load would be placed on the server, and the content of the website would not be locked into the content management system. This made Sigmer Technologies' task more complicated than the database-driven alternative, but users enthusiastically received the final result.

If Scribe was going to allow non-technical individuals to edit content, Sigmer realised it had to build a system that was very easy to use and functioned in a similar way to a programme that a non-technical user would recognise. Users of Scribe can navigate a site, create new pages and click on areas of a page they want to edit. The system interface looks not unlike Microsoft Explorer and Word; users can select where they want to add or change text, type in the new text, see a preview of the changes and then simply click 'update' and the content immediately becomes live on the site.

While providing users with autonomy over web content, the Secretariat also wanted to have some control over the sections and type of content users were allowed to edit. Sigmer therefore developed a hierarchical approach to the systems interface, creating a layered security model. This would mean that 'normal' users would be limited to the areas of a website they could view and modify, while webmasters would have further editorial functionality. Webmasters are able to edit templates, such as site headings and static content, which could include background company information or archived information.

For the purpose of managing multiple users of Scribe, Sigmer has created a user group functionality, which defines a set of permissions to apply to a certain group. Users can

easily be added or removed from a group, but when they join a group, their personal editorial permissions will not apply to the rest of the group. This conservative approach prevents users from gaining access to functionality that they shouldn't be able to access.

There was also a need for users of multiple languages to have access to Scribe and although the system's interface is in English, the editor supports any Latin (non-Cyrillic) languages.

Once the new content management system was up and running, the Alliance Secretariat then needed to migrate content from the previous system. This was performed by a simple copy and paste method, using the embedded web page editor.

The Result

The International Save the Children Alliance Secretariat, as well as members of the Alliance that are now users of Sigmoid's Scribe, are working very well with the new content management system. They are particularly impressed by how it provides users with autonomy, while at the same time, the hierarchical structure of the system ensures the look and feel of the websites remain firmly in keeping with the Save the Children Alliance brand.



(Photo: Virenda Nyberg. vnyberg@morguefile.com)

Becky Marshall, Webmaster of the Secretariat commented, "The content management system has enabled staff in Save the Children organisations across the world to promote their work online easily and quickly. Sigmoid is extremely professional and it is refreshing to work with a flexible company that listens and is focused on solutions. The system has met our needs well, giving us the ownership and flexibility to manage all aspects of our websites, and creating accessible web content."

Future roll-out to other alliance members

A number of Alliance members have embraced the new system and are happy to have the ability to assign different users with different editing powers. There are a number of members that currently still maintain their own website management systems, but Sigmoid has developed the technology to be scalable and support the roll out of the system to a large number of members' websites within the organisation.

Save the Children. www.savethechildren.org/

Sigmoid Technologies. www.sigmer.com