

How to Set Up & Use Joomla!

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Contents

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	3
<u>ABOUT JOOMLA! CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM</u>	7
<u>EXTENSIONS</u>	12
<u>BENEFITS</u>	15
<u>COMPARISON WITH OTHER CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS</u>	17
<u>WHAT'S IN IT FOR THE DEVELOPERS?</u>	21

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Introduction

A decade ago, having a webpage was cool. Today, not having a webpage is almost primitive. Through a blog or a wiki or a webpage, everyone these days is present on the web, one way or the other. There are websites on gossip, websites on politics and websites on sports and so on. Why, there are websites on websites as well! Does that mean everyone who wants to be on the web has to be a geek? No. All you need is a Content Management System.

Wait, did I mention CMS? Well, not any CMS would do. What you need is Joomla!. It's a revolutionary open-source system that is just as cool to work with as it sounds. If you have a webpage that needs some working on all the time, Joomla! is your best friend. Download it and forget about coding, programming, designing. Sit back and let Joomla! do all the hard work. Be it updating your design template or setting up a forum on your website, you can do it all through a browser-based interface. Joomla! is easy to set up and operate. It also provides demo for various extensions helping you understand software better.

In this book, I have tried to pack in as much information as I could about Joomla! and the wonders it can work for you. Read on and explore more.

How it all began

Joomla! is a one-of-its-kind freely available, open source Content Management System that launched its first version of Content Management System on September 16, 2005. The idea was conceived during the Mambo Project, commissioned by Miro Corporation, Australia. The team of core developers quit the project owing to 'ethical' differences in August, 2005. They went on to create Joomla!, a word that means 'all together'. At the risk of sounding clichéd, the rest was history. Today, Joomla! is a pet project for thousands of developers and community members. Not to mention the thousands of end-users across the world.

Joomla! Versions

Joomla! follows a three-tier pattern in releasing its versions. It releases its versions in three categories - Major, Minor and Maintenance, each of which consist of three numbers.

Major – it is symbolized as x.1.1 where an upward movement in the major number (here x) refers to drastic change in the version compared to the previous major version. The change may be in terms of rework or rewriting of the code base.

Minor – it is symbolized by 1.x.1 where 'x' is the minor number. An increment upon that number shows considerable change in architecture and functionality, giving rise to a new version. It may have some similarity with the previous modifications in Minor.

Maintenance – 1.1.x symbolizes Maintenance. Any increment in the maintenance number 'x' means addition of new features and/or improvements from the previous ones.

Some of the areas where Joomla! can be useful include – personal home pages, corporate websites, e-commerce, intranets and extranets, portals, newspapers and magazines, organizational websites, Government applications, and many more.

How has the market received it?

Joomla! was formed with the support of 1000 members who joined the core development team to form Joomla!. Today it is as large as more than 90,000 members in its community. Its global core team is located across 11 countries. The product itself has evolved and now supports 40 languages. End users, content writers, translators, developers, designers, systems administrators etc form the part of the Joomla! community.

Various working groups are also operational to take care of the growth and development of Joomla!, which was previously handled by the core team. These groups have a group leader who serves as a communication link between the group and/or community members and the core team. They are assigned tasks and responsibilities pertaining to a specific area of Joomla! Content Management System. These working groups deal with different aspects like Design and Accessibility, Development, Documentation, Quality and Testing, Site and Infrastructure and Translation to enhance Joomla!.

The Foundation Working Group looks after marketing and media, legal issues, events, funds, OSM etc.

About the Joomla! Content Management System

Features

Joomla! is packed with features that address multiple content management issues. It has basic functions like updating content on a webpage as well as more advanced features like enabling RSS feeds or archiving a high volume of data. Some of the very basic features include.

- Articles
- Blogs
- Calendars
- Forums
- FAQs
- Image Library
- Language Internationalization
- Links
- Newsflashes/News
- Page Caching
- Polls and Surveys
- Printable page versions
- Web Indexing
- Site Search and more...

Plus, you have ready-to-use templates to design or modify your website. Layout preview allows you to have an idea about how the actual website will look using the template or any of the other features of Joomla! If you want to earn through website advertisements, there is a Banner Manager feature.

For all this, you just need to have a php pre-processor, MySQL database and a web server (preferably Apache, though Microsoft IIS is also acceptable).

Add-ons and Templates

Joomla! has a thriving community of developers who work towards adding value to the core CMS offering. Thus, Joomla! has several add-ons and templates to choose from. With frequent releases of new add-ons, Joomla! users never run out of options.

Joomla! Add-ons may take the form of commercial software as well as open source software that are aimed to enhance your website's functionality. They may be the components or integrated solutions provided by third party providers. However there may be certain risks (legal or in terms of security) associated with using such third-party add-ons.

Generally Joomla! add-ons may be grouped in three main categories -

Joomla! Forums

Joomla! Galleries

Joomla! Blog

Joomla! Forums

Forums are no longer a fancy addition to the overall website. With the business environment dictating more customer interaction, forums have emerged as an important customer service tool. Forum members also look at it as a potential marketing tool for their own website/products/services. Adding forums on your website can make your website more interactive. It can bridge the gap between you and your customers, forum members or website visitors.

Joomla! provides you with multiple options to incorporate a forum, discussion boards or bulletin boards on your website. Joomla!-SMF, Joomla-phpBB, Joomla!-SimpleBoard and Joomla!-vBulletin are some of its components that may be required to integrate a forum to the website.

Joomla! Galleries

“A brand new Harley Davidson jacket up for sale at a 30% discount”.

When was the last time you saw a text ad like this and reached for your credit card? I know you've never done that and you never will. Why? Because you can't see the product. How do you know what the jacket looks like? Now, imagine the same advertisement, replete with pictures on ebay. Would you react differently? That's why visual appeal is so important for the sale of a product. And it's not just the visual appeal. If it's an online music store, you may want to listen to a trial version before downloading an album. Similarly, you may want to see a short 'how-to-use' video before buying electronic equipment.

All those needs are addressed by Joomla! Galleries. They cover images, audio-visual files, pdf files and more. Joomla! Galleries offer various extensions which allow you to store, add, edit, delete and manage your online galleries. Each of Joomla! Gallery extensions, which are developed and set afloat by community members, may vary in their functionalities.

Joomla! Blog

Joomla! Blog helps users integrate a blog to their website. With this component, you can organize your blog content as per your preferences. It includes numerous useful features like RSS feeds, filter blog posts on certain criteria, dashboard, image browser, community builder integration, Joomla!Content Mambot Integration, etc.

There is much more you may add to the list of add-ons or components. Calendar, Comments, Guestbook, Hosting Customers, Redirect, ODT Indexer, YaNC (yet another newsletter component), Blocklist, etc.

Joomla! Templates

Joomla! Templates offer more design options for users who want to break the clutter with a unique looking site. There are a number of websites formed by the Joomla! Community or working group members (former or present) -developers, designers, technicians etc. These websites offer a range of readymade XHTML/CSS based web designs. All you need to do is choose one, download it and you have an attractive design for your website. You can also manage the text and graphic content on your site so as to gel with the template. Still not convinced? Check out the live demos to get a better idea about how your site would actually look in a particular template.

Joomla! templates fall into several categories. This includes Agriculture, Animals, Architecture, Business, Restaurant/Café, Hotels, Computers, Education, Books, Fashion, Entertainment, Food and Beverages, Church/ Religious organizations, Law, Media, Online Casino, Science, Sports, Medical, Real Estate, Travel, Politics, Military, Society and Culture, family, personal, etc.

You may get these templates for free or at a nominal cost. But then, it's worth the money when you know the kind of value it adds to your website.

Difference between Mambo and Joomla!

As we have seen in the earlier section, Joomla! is the extended form of Mambo. The core development team of the Mambo project resigned from Miro Corporation, Australia in August 2005 and came up with a similar product Joomla! in September,2005.

Joomla! made its foray into this area with its first version Joomla! 1.0. It was a refined form of Mambo version 4.5.2.3 with certain additions like bug fixes and security patches. Joomla! 1.5, the latest version of Joomla! provides language internationalization facility and uses the 'ini' format while Mambo 4.6 uses 'gettext' format for translation files.

Add-ons, components, templates, modules, mambots etc. for Mambo 4.5.2 will also operate in Joomla! 1.0. It may also run on Joomla! 1.5. However add-ons for Mambo 4.6 version may not work for Joomla! 1.5 and vice versa.

Some other additional features of Joomla! 1.5 include authentication models – LDAP, Gmail, etc., XML-RPC client-server support and also support of UTF-8 character set.

EXTENSIONS

The dynamic developer team of the Joomla! constantly strives to give you a satisfying customer-experience. This includes giving you a wide range of extensions and sub-extensions. Let's take a look at the kind of extensions on offer.

Joomla! has released 18 extension categories, each containing sub-categories. These categories correspond to the different requirements of a web content management project. These categories are broadly listed as –

- Admin Tools – include add-ons for backup, reporting, file management, statistics, etc.
- Banner Ads & Affiliates – include advertising banners and classified ads.
- Calendars – provide for your needs related to events (birthdays, event calendar etc.) and reservations (primarily useful for hotels or guest houses etc)
- Communication – provides for chat, comments, forums, polls, guestbook, newsletter, mailing list etc on your website.
- Content & News – this category of extension helps you include blog, clock, weather, quiz, news, RSS, e-cards, ratings and reviews, tips and notes etc in the website.
- Core Enhancements – group access, categories/sections, cache, credits, security etc. are the categories you may find here
- Documentation/Document Management – this extension provides for FAQs, glossary and dictionary, bibliography, Wiki and downloads.
- e-Commerce – the extensions under these category are those pertaining to shopping cart, auction, payment systems, donation, electronic data interchange and Amazon.

- Extension Specific Plugin – These plugins can be used only when certain extensions are already installed as the plugins are for specific extensions. E.g. if you want to install BannersManager Plugins, then you need to install Banners Manager extension first. Other such plugins include AdsManager Plugins, Community Builder plugins, dcsFlashGames plugins, VirtueMart Plugins, DOCMan Plugins etc.
- Forms – this extension helps you create various kinds of forms (e.g. forms for surveys, guestbook, polls etc)
- Gallery & Multimedia – the extension category includes sub-categories like gallery, podcasting and streaming Media. These primarily help in adding pictures/images, audio and videos, providing radio and video streams etc.
- Intranet & Groupware – CRM, Contacts, LDAP, Project and task Management are the areas addressed by this extension category. It contains address book, blogs, calendar, organizers, etc.
- Languages – Languages extension is designed to help you with translation and also provides the option of multi-lingual content.
- Miscellaneous – help desk, religion, quotes, recipes, portfolio, sports/games, etc are the sub-categories included in this extension category.
- Search & Indexing – it comprises of Search, Site Map, Google and Directory.
- Vertical Markets – Vertical markets extension contains categories such as education, real estate, auto and vehicles, boat and yachting etc.
- WYSIWYG Editors – it helps manage editor profiles for the users, manage content, images, links, etc.

BENEFITS

Community Support

Joomla!'s resounding success is well-reflected in its thriving online community. If you have any doubts with using Joomla!, the Joomla! Community is your best bet to find answers. These communities consist of domain experts like designers, developers etc. You may share your CMS problems/questions on board (forum). With thousands of members in the Community, you can be assured of a reply in the least possible time. All this without spending a dollar!

Continual Development

The online world is changing rapidly and so are your CMS needs. Joomla! has now marked the tradition of releasing upgraded versions to meet your varying needs and expectations. In not more than two years of time, Joomla! has brought in numerous helpful versions. The core development team works in tandem with the community members to upgrade Joomla! and release newer versions. As a result you get advanced knowledge and systems to stay ahead in the online marketplace.

Components and Module

As discussed in the previous section, there are numerous Joomla! components or add-ons and modules that you can get as per the requirements. Often these modules and components are developed by the community members or third party entities. You can download it for free or by paying a small amount. Some of them may be bound by License regulations. These components, when added to your website and CMS, can enhance the functionality of your website.

Templates

Templates make it easier for you to design your website without having to rely on a web designer. Joomla! templates, are designed to give a fresh, attractive look and feel to your website. There are a number of web designers (either community members or third party teams) that provide you with Joomla! templates. They are easy to install and integrate with your CMS.

Other benefits

It's -

- An open source CMS, free of cost and does not come with a licensing fee.
- User friendly, easy to use, flexible, scalable and customizable.
- Provides editable sections. Allows authors to add topics/sections.
- Search Engine Friendly

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COMPARISON WITH OTHER CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

There are numerous Content Management Systems available in the open source domain as well as the commercial domain.

Open Source software and commercial software are different in various aspects. Cost being the primary differentiator may play a vital role in your choice of a CMS. Open source CMS comes at no or marginal cost while Commercial Software are relatively higher priced.

It is generally believed that the commercial CMS provide better post-installation assistance in documentation, training, stability, security issues etc. as their support staff may be available when needed. This may not be possible in open source CMS which primarily runs on the support of volunteers and not regular staff. However, Joomla! is a pleasant exception!. With thousands of developers on the project, it has built a reputation for its prompt and effective customer service. Moreover, with a strong volunteer-base, Joomla! can boast of continual development resulting in timely upgrades and new releases.

You may look at your specific CMS requirements, business conditions, available resources and client requirements while choosing a CMS. Factors like price; implementation; documentation, training and support services and customization opportunities should not be overlooked.

Some of the *Free and Open Source CMS* include – Joomla!, Mambo, Drupal, PHPNuke, Post Nuke, Plone, TYPO3, e107, Open CMS, MODx CMS, WordPress, XOOPS and Zope.

Some of the *Commercial Software* include – Vignette, Alfresco, RedDot CMS, Interwoven Teamsite, Tridion, Microsoft CMS, Oracle portal, Immediacy CMS, GOSS iCM, Hot Banana and Fatwire Content Server.

Comparing Joomla! with other open source CMS

Joomla! is comparable to most leading CMS systems in terms of its features. Joomla! and Mambo provide an in-built contact management application and captcha (for challenge-response test) while Drupal, Plone and TYPO3 offer the same as a free add-on. There are features which they all provide as a free add-on – like job posting, guest book, chat etc.

All open source CMS are distributed under GNU GPL and may gel well with any of the operating systems. What sets Joomla! apart from the others is a strong developer community. This reflects in its highly efficient and consistent development program. The following chart tries to compare leading open source CMS based on a few important parameters.

	Programming Language	Database	Web Server	FTP support	UTF- 8 support
Joomla!	PHP	MySQL	Apache	Provided as free add-on	Limited support available
Drupal	PHP	MySQL, PostgreS QL	Apache, IIS	Limited FTP support	Available
Mambo	PHP	MySQL	Apache, IIS, any PHP enabled web server	Not available	Available
Open CMS	Java 1.4	MySQL, PostgreS QL, Oracle, MSSQL	Tomcat, Apache	Not available	Available
PHP Nuke	PHP	MySQL, PostgreS QL, mSQL, Interbase,	Apache, IIS	Not available	Not provided

		Sybase			
Plone	Python	Zope	Apache, IIS, Zope	Available	Available
TYPO3	PHP	MySQL, PostgreS QL, Oracle, MSSQL	Apache, IIS	Available	Available
WordPre ss	PHP	MySQL	Apache, mod rewrite	Available as a free add-on	Available
Xoops	PHP	MySQL	Apache, IIS	Available	Limited Support

As compared to open source CMS like Joomla!, commercial CMS are distributed under commercial or proprietary licenses. They may use diverse databases but Oracle and Microsoft SQL server are common. Also the programming language they use varies a lot. This includes PHP, Java, Java Script, .NET, XML, XSL, JSP, Perl, etc. Unlike open source CMS like Joomla!, commercial CMS may require specific operating systems for implementation. Vignette prefers Windows XP/2000/2003 while Oracle supports Windows, UNIX and LINUX. Like Joomla!, the web servers Apache and IIS are common in commercial CMS also.

Other than these technical specifications, there are many other factors for comparison. Features, built-in applications, support, commerce, flexibility, interoperability, management, performance, ease of use, security, etc are just some of them. Joomla! scores high on all of those parameters. Its growing popularity just underlines this fact.

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WHAT'S IN IT FOR THE DEVELOPERS?

There is a strong reason that draws developers to the Joomla! project. Be it working on an add-on or an extension, developers have held this project in high regard.

If you want to contribute towards the future development of Joomla! content management system then Joomla! provides you the platform to demonstrate your knowledge and expertise in this field. It gives you the opportunity to develop extensions and add-ons for users.

Joomla! gives considerable importance to its developer network and serves as a resource bank for them. You, as a developer, can get the required content and resources like code samples, technical overviews, core team updates, documentation etc. from this Joomla! Developer Network. Let me tell you that these resources are absolutely free. If you have a vision and are willing to play by the rules, Joomla! is your dream project. Being associated with it means having worked on one of the very best CMS product.

JDN provides in-depth resources to its members through developer blogs, working groups, framework overview, framework API, documentation wiki etc. JDN members can build e-commerce systems, inventory control systems, business directories, custom product catalogs, application bridges etc.

How you can contribute

You may become a member of the Joomla! development community and contribute towards its development. You can start with simply sharing the news, articles, reviews and stories by posting them on their news portal. Alternate ways of contributing include reporting bugs, submitting patches, joining developer forums and/or working groups etc. Development, Quality and Testing, Sites and Infrastructure, Design and Accessibility are some of the working groups you may join. Joomla!, now heading towards internationalization, allows you to submit translations (in any language you want) in predetermined methods. You may also rectify wrong translation, if you find any. But then how to go about it all? Well, Joomla! provides you with all the guidance you may need while contributing to it.

Where to find the License Agreement

Joomla! offers the CMS software under GNU General Public License (GPL). It protects the right of the licensees to use, copy, modify and distribute the programs or any part thereof. Also it passes on this benefit to those who purchase the programs or carry out any work based on that program. Simply put, a user at any level can get a license from the distributor along with the program purchased.

You may distribute the program for free or a fee, the choice is all yours. It is advisable to inform the recipients about the free and open source nature of your program and that they can copy it, change it and redistribute it as they want under GPL. Another advantage with GPL is that it deems all further modified programs or versions thereof to be of same free, open source nature.

Forum

Forum is the place where you may get in touch with thousands of members of Joomla! including working group members. It is like a gateway for your queries, suggestions, feedback, replies etc. It helps you get solution for your CMS related problems from number of experts/members. Members may benefit from your useful suggestions and opinions about any version and its future development. Besides the above mentioned aspects of the forum, it also provides a platform to the members to discuss developmental issues of Joomla!. It facilitates knowledge sharing. And all it takes to get into this inner circle is a simple registration.

Now, didn't I tell you that Joomla! is revolutionary? Like many other successful products, Joomla! is work in progress. In due course, it may pack in more features and functionalities. I have tried to simplify it and accommodate as much information as possible. If you have any questions or feedback about this book, shoot me an email right away. If you have your Joomla! experience to share or if you feel there is something I should know about Joomla!, feel free to get in touch with me.

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