

# Chapter 1

## Essential Joomla

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Discovering Joomla
  - ▶ Viewing some example sites
  - ▶ Knowing what content management systems do
  - ▶ Finding out why Joomla is so popular
  - ▶ Preparing to use Joomla
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**T**he head Web designer walks into your sumptuous office and says, “We landed the MegaSuperDuperCo account.”

“That’s good,” you say.

“They want you to design their new Web site.”

“That’s good,” you say.

“They want to use a CMS.”

“That’s bad,” you say.

“What’s the problem?” the head Web designer asks.

You shift uncomfortably. “Well, I have no idea what a CMS is.”

The head Web designer laughs. “That’s no problem. It’s a content management system. You know — like Joomla.”

“Like whomla?” you ask.

The head Web designer tosses a folder on your desk. “Take a look at these sample sites. Joomla provides an easy framework for managing the content of your Web site. You type in the content, and Joomla takes care of displaying it for you.”

You pick up your cup of coffee as the head Web designer leaves and start leafing through the pages. Some of the Web sites are snazzy. Then you turn to your computer and start entering URLs. Welcome to Joomla!

## *What Joomla Can Do for You*

As the head Web designer said, Joomla is a content management system (CMS), which means that after you set the site up, you (or your clients) are responsible only for entering text and figures. Joomla arranges the content, makes it searchable, displays it, and generally manages the Web site. You need little or no technical expertise to create and manage your own sites.

Setting up a cool site from scratch is not easy — especially if you want to keep that site updated. A person who runs a newspaper site with about 6,000 visitors a day once came to us utterly exhausted. It turned out that he was formatting his entire site from scratch, using HTML, which meant that he had to get up at five every morning to enter the news stories in HTML tables and format them for his Web site. He still had his day job (he wanted to quit, but the news site's advertising was just ramping up) and found that he was working a total 14 hours every day.

Joomla was the answer for him. Now all he has to do is copy and paste the stories into Joomla's Article Manager and click a few options. The stories are published — no fuss, no muss.

## *Sample Joomla Sites*

A great way to get to know Joomla is to take a look at what it's capable of, which means taking a look at some Joomla-powered sites. The following sections introduce a few examples.

### *City of Longwood (Florida)*

First, check out the City of Longwood Web site at [www.longwoodfl.org](http://www.longwoodfl.org) (see Figure 1-1). The home page has a navigation bar of drop-down menus across the top and a menu of quick links on the right, some nice photos, a custom logo, and even a search box.

The site is well balanced, giving the impression of professionalism, and it's powered by Joomla, which is operating behind the scenes. You can't tell just by looking that the content of the page — the text, photos, and menus — is actually stored in a database. Joomla handles all the details.

**Figure 1-1:**  
The official  
city Web  
site for  
Longwood,  
Florida.



### ***NZMac.com***

Another Joomla-powered site is NZMac.com, which caters to the New Zealand Macintosh community, at [www.nzmac.com](http://www.nzmac.com) (see Figure 1-2).

This site is another good one, with a top menu bar, a login box, a Main Menu box, and even a Recent Topics box. This site is also powered by Joomla, even though it looks different from the City of Longwood site. This difference is one of the strengths of Joomla: It's easy to customize.

### ***Royal Oak Public Library***

Now take a look at [www.rop1.org](http://www.rop1.org), the Royal Oak (Michigan) Public Library site (see Figure 1-3).

This site is another well-designed one, with plenty of fresh content. Joomla excels at keeping site content up to date and makes the process easy.

### ***Jenerate and Everything Treo***

Two other good examples are Jenerate.com at [www.jenerate.com](http://www.jenerate.com) (see Figure 1-4) and Everything Treo at [www.everythingtreo.com](http://www.everythingtreo.com).

All these Web sites look professional, and they also look different. Yet they all use Joomla as their content management system. So just what is a CMS, and how does it work?

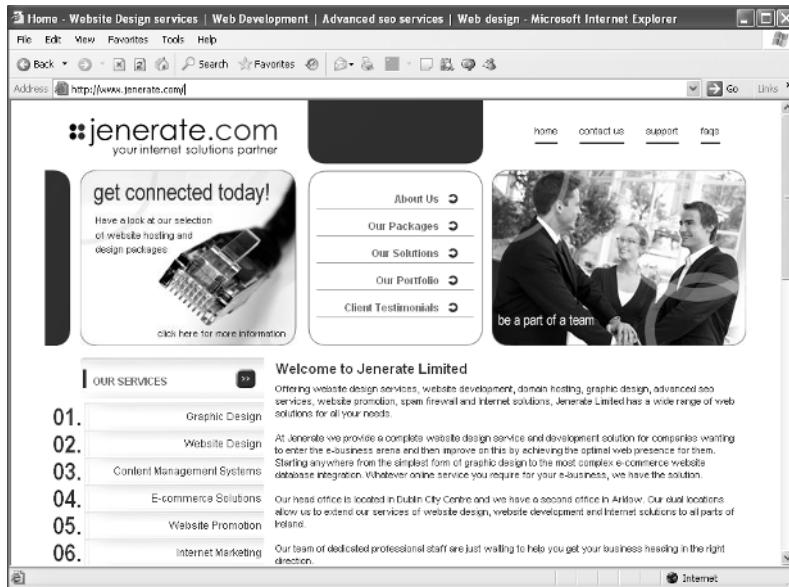
**Figure 1-2:**  
The New  
Zealand  
Macintosh  
community's  
Web site.



**Figure 1-3:**  
The Royal  
Oak Public  
Library Web  
site.



**Figure 1-4:**  
The  
Jenerate.  
com Web  
site.



## All about Content Management Systems

When the Web was young, static Web pages were all that anyone needed. These pages could be hand-entered in HTML for display in a browser, like this:



That kind of page served its purpose well for small sites. It gave people a Web presence and allowed them to display some images or maybe even add a little JavaScript to bring the page to life.

But as the Web grew and pages got larger and larger, people discovered an inherent problem: They had to mix the HTML that handled the visual presentation in a browser with the data that was displayed. This mix made Web pages hard to maintain and update, because site owners were working with both text data and HTML.

## *Good: Web pages with CSS*

To handle this issue, Web designers created Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). CSS became primarily responsible for presenting the data in a Web page, although that page was still written in HTML, as follows:



Now the presentation details were separated from the formal HTML structure of a page — tags such as `<html>`, `<head>`, and `<body>`. But the actual content of the page was still wrapped up in the HTML; site owners had to format the content by putting in the HTML tags. In other words, the addition of CSS removed the presentation details from the rest of the Web page but hadn't yet separated the content from the HTML.

## Better: Dynamic Web pages via CMS

```

Content | CSS |
from templates |

}
}
V V

CMS |
generates the HTML |

}
}
V

Browser |

```

In this scenario, you're responsible for only the content of your Web site; the CMS handles all the presentation details. That's the way things should be. Content should be king.

The upshot is that you end up writing what you want to say on your Web site and format it as you like, making text italic, large, small, or bold, just as you'd see in a word processor. The CMS takes what you write and displays it in a browser, using the Web-page templates you've selected and making hand-coded HTML and CSS obsolete.

Pretty cool, eh?

## *Reasons to Choose Joomla*

The CMS of choice these days is Joomla. When we wrote this chapter in the summer of 2008, Wikipedia listed 86 free and open-source CMSes ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_content\\_management\\_systems](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_content_management_systems)), and Joomla was the most popular of them in terms of number of installations. A Google search on *content management system*, also done in the summer of 2008, returned Joomla first (following two generic Wikipedia articles), and a Google search on *Joomla* produced a mere 101 million hits — making this CMS more popular than *apples* (50.6 million hits) and *oranges* (20.1 million hits) put together.

### *Loyal users*

What makes Joomla so popular? One reason is that it's free — but you can find dozens of free CMSes. Another reason is that it's been around for a long time — but dozens of other CMSes have been around for years as well.

No, the real reasons for Joomla's popularity are its reputation and loyal user base, both of which it has earned. All over the world, you'll find dedicated Joomla people who have created a very strong community. That community in turn has created thousands of items to extend Joomla — templates, components, modules, plug-ins, and so on — just waiting for you to use. This thriving community also specializes in providing help to novices.

### *Ease of use*

Joomla is super-powerful, easy to use, and loaded with tons of extras (and even more tons of extras are available for download). Using Joomla



makes creating a professional Web site nearly as easy as printing a word processing document.

## *Minimal learning curve*

Although Joomla involves a learning curve, after you master a few basic skills, you're up and running. The technical expertise you need is minimal compared with the requirements of other CMSes.

## *Other advantages*

Following are some other advantages of Joomla:

- ✓ Intuitive interface and management panel
- ✓ What-you-see-is-what-you-get (WYSIWYG) editing
- ✓ Rich formatting capabilities
- ✓ Thousands of downloadable page templates
- ✓ Full text searches
- ✓ Plug-ins for commercial sites, including complete shopping carts
- ✓ Search-engine optimization features (still rare in CMSes)
- ✓ Scheduled publishing

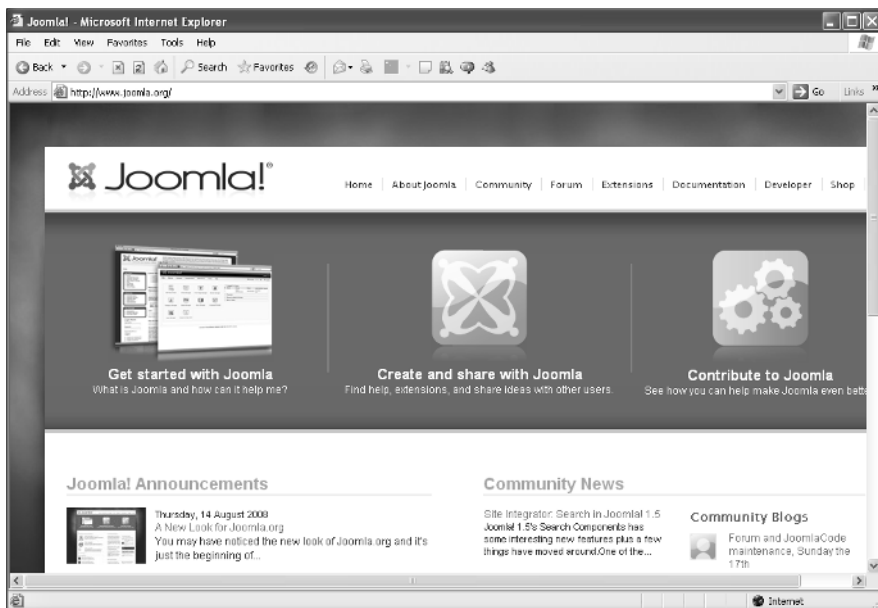
## *Where to Jump into Joomla*

The main Joomla site is [www.joomla.org](http://www.joomla.org) (see Figure 1-5). This site is where you'll get your copy of Joomla; it's also your source for downloads and a great deal of help.

When you install Joomla, you get the default Web site shown in Figure 1-6, which is populated with all kinds of sample content.

Our job in this book is to help you understand and customize what you see in this figure so you can create stunning Web sites.

**Figure 1-5:**  
The official  
Joomla Web  
site.



**Figure 1-6:**  
The default  
appearance  
of a Joomla  
site.

