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Introducing Drupal

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER:

- History of Drupal
- Drupal's community
- How to find and participate in the community, including: IRC, Meetups, Camps, and Drupal conferences
- Professional Drupal support
- The Drupal Association

What is Drupal? If this is your first time using Drupal, you're probably trying to answer this yourself, and you may have heard conflicting answers. Often Drupal is described as a content management system, whereas other times, it's called a content management framework. So is it a system or a framework? Here's a simple definition:

Drupal is an open source software application that manages the content of and builds websites and web applications. It can be used to create a web blog, e-commerce store, photo gallery, or social networking website.

That seems straightforward, right? In fact, it sounds a lot like Joomla!, Wordpress, Zope, and many other content management systems (CMSs). So why do people use the term content management platform or content management framework?

The use of the terms *platform* and *framework* is an attempt to describe Drupal as a base or a foundation onto which you build your desired websites or web applications. Out of the box, Drupal can be used to instantly create a website with users, articles, blogs, comments, and a forum. With a few modules from <http://drupal.org> it can be transformed into an e-commerce site, a group photo gallery, and more. Drupal is also built around a modular core and a strong

application programming interface (API) so you can quickly and easily extend Drupal to build the site of your dreams. This leads to the following, more technical definition:

Drupal is a modular framework written in the PHP scripting language that contains a CMS, a module system, and an API for rapid development of websites and web applications.

An example I've used often is Lego systems. You can purchase the race car Lego set and build the provided example race car. You could also build a luxury car with the same Lego set. If you purchase the rocket ship Lego set, you could combine the two and build a luxury rocket race car. After all, it's only a set of blocks that you put together using your imagination. Drupal is built on the same idea — it's a set of modules that you mix and match to build your perfect website or web application.

HISTORY OF DRUPAL

In 2000, Dries Buytaert, a student at the University of Antwerp, needed a method to communicate with his classmates and friends. He built a small web application so that he and his friends could leave notes for each other. After Dries graduated he moved the software over to `drop.org` and used it to experiment with new web technologies such as syndication, rating, and distributed authentication. Dries also made the software freely available and licensed it under the GPL. It didn't take long before the software's unique modular structure gained notice and attracted a community of developers and users.

Why is the Name Drupal?

When searching for domain names Dries accidentally misspelled the Dutch word `dorp` (meaning village) as `drop`. Accepting his mistake he registered and started to use the `drop.org` domain. In 2001 the project officially adopted the name Drupal. The Dutch word for drop is `druppel`, which changed to Drupal (pronounced “doo-puhl”) for easier pronunciation.

Who is Drupal?

As of this book's writing, thousands of developers have contributed to the Drupal project. Many have contributed by adding modules and themes, providing support on `drupal.org` and the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channels, and participating at meetups, DrupalCamps, and conferences around the world. Drupal has been recorded as having a developer base in almost every country in the world. It truly is an international open source project.

THE DRUPAL COMMUNITY

Drupal is not just software — it's a community! The Drupal community is one of the largest and most supportive communities in the open source world. In fact, the community is so strong that it should be a major deciding factor when you're choosing whether or not to use Drupal. Imagine building a site that requires a certain piece of functionality. You found a module that does 90

percent of the work but isn't quite right. You can decide to code this functionality on your own or you could work with the current module owner to modify and build in the functionality you need. If you code it yourself, you will have to maintain it in perpetuity, but if you work with the current module owner and the community, you are sharing maintenance with the community. The latter result is a more sustainable, longer lasting website and web application.

There is no formal agreement with the community. The agreement is much more tacit. A user providing support one day may expect to receive support another day. Likewise, other module developers will maintain their module if you maintain yours, so that everyone's site can grow and expand.

You do not have to be a developer to participate in the community. There are groups of designers, users, administrators, and others at all levels working together to build great sites. The worst thing you can do when starting out with Drupal is to ignore the community.

WHERE IS THE COMMUNITY?

The Drupal community meets online and, better yet, in the real world. Here are a few places where you can find them:

- Forums on Drupal.org (<http://drupal.org/forum>)

Installation, configuration, migration, translation, upgrading, and module development are just some of the topics covered in the forums. Forums are a great place to start when first learning about Drupal and its community.

- IRC channels

Because it functions in real time, IRC can provide the fastest support, communication, and collaboration. IRC can be accessed using IRC software such as Mirc (Windows), Colloquy (Mac OS X), or xChat (Linux). The server is `irc.freenode.net` and the top three channels are (note that many more exist):

- `#drupal-support` — Provides general support for installation, configuration, and site administration. When starting out with Drupal this is the channel to use.
- `#drupal-themes` — Provides support for the creation and modification of Drupal themes (most often on custom themes).
- `#drupal` — Hosts high-level development discussions on Drupal core and modules. Once you have used Drupal for a while and are developing modules, use this channel to collaborate with other developers.

You can find more channels and the rules to IRC etiquette at <http://drupal.org/irc>.

- Drupal Groups at <http://groups.drupal.org>

The Drupal Groups website is the Grand Central station of the Drupal community. Like-minded users and developers meet and collaborate on common topics and projects on this website. Regional groups from New York City, Paris, Wisconsin, Peru, and Texas schedule regular meetups. Topic-based groups such as High Performance and Drupal in Education are great for finding others who are in similar situations as you. At the time of this writing, there were over 360 active groups. Find a local group and get involved!

➤ Regional and language-based websites

There are several regional websites that enable users to communicate in their local language or connect within a geographic region. Examples include drupalchina.org, drupaltaiwan.org, drupalitalia.org, and ladrupal.org. Language-based communities can be found at <http://drupal.org/language-specific-communities>, and geographic communities can be found at <http://groups.drupal.org/groups>.

➤ Camps and conferences

Drupalcon brings together developers, designers, users, and other Drupal professionals from all over the world. Currently Drupalcon is held once a year in Europe and North America but is quickly expanding to other parts of the world. Check <http://drupalcon.org> for the latest event schedule.

Drupalcon may be the biggest Drupal-based conference, but it is not the only one. DrupalCamps, meetups, and other community-organized events happen daily around the world. Check <http://groups.drupal.org/events> for the most recent events.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

The Drupal community forums and IRC channels are filled with wonderful volunteers working day and night to help each other build and troubleshoot their websites. Although working with the community is the best way to learn Drupal quickly, you may or may not have your questions answered or problems fixed in a timely manner; these channels can require patience. Fortunately the companies of the Drupal community are there to help you.

Drupal is a software application that runs on a server platform, meaning a host. For this reason support packages are divided into three general categories: Drupal-only, server-only, Drupal + server. Many hosting companies provide server-only support and do not support the Drupal software, whereas Drupal professionals may provide Drupal-only support. When purchasing support it is best to ask what is and what is not supported to find the right combination for your project and budget.

You can find a list of hosting companies that specialize in Drupal at <http://drupal.org/hosting> and a list of companies providing support, consulting, and development at <http://drupal.org/services>. To help get you started here a few of the more popular options:

➤ Acquia Drupal

Created by the founder of Drupal, Dries Buytaert, this company provides a distribution of Drupal that bundles some of the most popular contributed modules and a custom Acquia module to connect your website to Acquia's automated monitoring and support network. Because Acquia's distribution is built on top of Drupal, it is 100 percent compatible with all of Drupal's modules, themes, translations and other items, including every exercise in this book. In fact, you can use Acquia's Drupal distribution with this book.

Acquia Drupal can be found at <http://acquia.com>.

➤ Hosted Drupal solutions

A hosted Drupal solution is different from a regular host. A hosted Drupal solution is a host that installs, configures, and fine-tunes Drupal for you. Often these companies will continually monitor your installation for updates to Drupal and its modules. Although Drupal is

compatible with many hosts the difference is the specialty in Drupal, which you'll appreciate when your site goes down in the middle of the night. Many other Drupal companies will only host sites they build or help you build. But a hosted Drupal solution takes your site, your code, and your system and makes sure it's rock-solid.

Check out the following hosted Drupal solutions:

- Hot Drupal (<http://hotdrupal.com>)
- Workhabit (<http://workhabit.com>)
- Acquia Drupal (<http://acquia.com>)

For high availability, high traffic websites check out Acquia, Four Kitchen's Pressflow Drupal distribution (<http://pressflow.org>), Pantheon, an EC2/Cloud computing distribution (<http://getpantheon.com>), or Firehose at <http://stationindustries.com>.

You can browse many more hosted Drupal solutions or Drupal-compatible web hosts at <http://drupal.org/hosting>.

➤ Drupal professionals

The Drupal community is teeming with dedicated professionals that are ready to help you build your website, provide a bit of custom development, or give you advice. Companies exist for customers with nearly any budget, from the hobbyist to the Fortune 500 enterprise customer. If you choose to hire a professional be sure to inquire about their launch and on-going support options.

You can browse a list of Drupal professionals at <http://drupal.org/services>.

Confused? Don't be. The community is there to help you. If you have questions simply log into IRC channel #drupal-support, ask your question in the Drupal forums at <http://drupal.org/forums>, or pick up your phone and talk to one of the many Drupal professionals listed at <http://drupal.org/services>.

Of course you don't need to hire a professional to build, support, or even host your website. Keep reading to become your own Drupal professional.

THE DRUPAL ASSOCIATION

Standing to the side of the community and directed to support and protect your rights as a community member is the Drupal Association. Originally created to purchase hardware to support the drupal.org infrastructure, the Association quickly became a defender of the Drupal trademark from an erroneous claim against it. This all community- and volunteer-run nonprofit works to ensure that Drupal continues to be free and available for everyone to enjoy. A few of the activities that the Association performs are:

- Purchasing infrastructure (servers, etc.) that the drupal.org websites use
- Protecting the Drupal trademark
- Defending Drupal against GPL infringements
- Working with the community to organize the annual Drupalcon conference

- Redesigning and creating functional upgrades to the drupal.org website
- And many other supporting activities!

The Association does not write or maintain the Drupal software or control the content on any of the drupal.org websites. The Drupal project is solely owned and run by the community. As a community-run organization all users are able and encouraged to participate in the Drupal Association to help Drupal continue as one of the greatest open source projects!

The Drupal Association can be found at <http://association.drupal.org>.

SUMMARY

It should be clear that Drupal is much more than great software; it is also a great community. The Drupal software, built upon a modular architecture, allows you to build great websites with relative ease. And the community of users, designers, and developers, as well as great Drupal companies, are all there to help you support your website both now and in the future. You need no special skills or invitation to join the Drupal community, just a bit of time to participate in it. Drupal is more than software. Drupal is you!

Welcome to the community!

In the next chapter you'll explore Drupal's installation process and begin your Drupal journey.

EXERCISES

1. What website can you use to connect with other Drupal users, developers, and professionals with similar interests or located near you?

2. Where can you communicate with other Drupal users or developers in real time over the Internet?

3. What nonprofit organization helps to protect the Drupal community's code from GPL copyright infringement, protects the Drupal trademark, and supports the <http://drupal.org> infrastructure?

4. Drupal is a great CMS, but developers also love it because of its great ____? (three letter acronym)

Answers to the Exercises can be found in the Appendix.

► WHAT YOU LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

- Drupal is not only a CMS but also a framework and an API for building great websites and applications.
- Drupal's modular structure allows you to plug in the pieces you need to build the website of your dreams.
- Drupal is pronounced "droo-puhl" and comes from the Dutch word for drop.
- Drupal is not just software. It is a living and thriving community of developers, designers, and users.
- The Drupal community meets online in the drupal.org forums and IRC channels as well as in-person at locations around the world. Find out more at <http://groups.drupal.org>.
- From the hobbyist to the Fortune 500, companies exist at all levels to give you professional service.
- You are now part of the Drupal community!

