Chapter 1

Maximize Your Web Potential

In This Chapter

▶ Discovering member and security roles

▶ Getting to know content modules and design

▶ Collaborating with DotNetNuke: Permissions and special roles

▶ Finding help is only a hyperlink away!

DotNetNuke revolutionizes common notions of consumer-oriented Web publishing by putting enormous power, affordably, into the hands of regular people. Whereas most tools for creating Web sites just let you type a little text and change a few colors and graphics, DotNetNuke makes it possible for anyone to secure private information, host interactive content, and transact real business.

One of the great things about the Internet is that it levels the playing field when it comes to competing with the big boys. Whether you are a private individual, a sole proprietor, or a small business owner, an interactive Web site that engages your audience can project an image of professionalism previously achievable only by a much larger company. However, the inverse of that statement is also true: Many Web sites of large companies, even international conglomerates, are so woefully sleep-inducing that nobody will remember where they are, much less care to return to them.

If the Internet is teaching us one thing, it's that value is vastly increased through interaction. That means that your Web site should not only share your own information, but make it possible for others who share interest in that information to expand upon it, comment on it, rate it, add to it, subscribe to it, e-mail it, and so on.

The good news is DotNetNuke.

Don't worry; despite its name, DotNetNuke won't blow up! Most computer geeks can glean a bit of understanding from the name *DotNetNuke*. However, for those of us with jobs that involve actually interacting with customers, selling goods and services, or otherwise getting out of a cubicle once in a while, don't worry, there is some rhyme and reason to it!

In its earliest incarnation, now many generations past, DotNetNuke had many features in common with some open-source applications that ran on the Linux platform. The most popular of those had names that included the term "Nuke" prefaced by some acronym or word describing aspects of the technology the solution was based on (for example, phpNuke, PostNuke, and so on). Internet applications that run on a Microsoft platform utilize a technology called .NET (pronounced "dot net"). Hence, the name DotNetNuke was born.

DotNetNuke Is More than Web Publishing

DNN offers online editing rather than push-publishing, which means it allows you to create and manage Web pages and their content by using a Web site browser. Instead of building a Web site by creating Web site pages on your computer and then uploading these pages to a Web site server, DNN allows you to build and maintain your Web site live on the Internet — simply by logging in to the Web site and adding your changes.

Throughout this book, we refer to Web sites as *portals,* and when you are logged in as the host user, you'll see that DNN refers to Web sites as portals too. The terms *portal* and *Web site* are interchangeable.

DotNetNuke is a Content Management System (CMS). The online encyclopedia Wikipedia (`www.wikipedia.com`) defines a CMS as "a computer software system used to assist its users in the process of content management. A CMS facilitates the organization, control, and publication of a large body of documents and other content, such as images and multimedia resources." Sounds right to us!

The main benefits of a CMS are that it helps you organize your content and gives you ideas of what you should add to your Web site. It's kind of like the difference between having built-in cupboards versus a stack of cardboard boxes. If you have a pile of boxes, everything is just crammed in together and that's that — you need time, intuition, and luck to find those red socks again. But if you have custom-built cupboards, you're likely to remember to store them in the sock drawer. With the assistance of a good CMS, you quickly find how to organize your content effectively and, more important, your Web site visitors can easily find information.

The tag line for DotNetNuke is "It's community, It's content, It's collaboration, it's the vibe of the thing," which defines the key concepts of DNN.

DNN Is Community

Historically, Web sites were viewed by many people as an easy way to access company information such as contact details or product information. A visitor would come to a Web site, look around and then leave again — a bit like an armchair tourist. However, as Web sites evolve, it has become clear that their power and popularity lie not in the "look, but don't touch" sphere of brochure Web sites, but with Web sites that connect people who have common interests and that enable people to share their thoughts and wares with each other.

At the time of writing, the latest community Web site to take the world by storm was `http://youtube.com`. YouTube members can upload and share their videos worldwide, view thousands of videos, join interest groups, vote for favorite videos, and more. YouTube enables everyone to be a movie star, and the Web site offers free content and a devoted community. The good news is that DNN enables you to build a Web site just like this — with lots of members who can communicate, join groups, upload movies or photos or documents, write content, and much more.

Of course, YouTube is just one example of a large and popular community — it doesn't necessarily reflect the kind of community you want to have accessing your DNN Web site. Perhaps you want to build a community that is restricted to the staff of your company, customers of your business, or just your family. All of this is possible with DNN because you control who can join your community, what information they can access, and how they interact with the Web site. When you manage a DNN Web site, you really are the king of your domain. You can even choose to be the only member of your Web site if you like: Be a lone ranger!

Registered users: Members and non-members of your Web site

Access to different areas of a DNN Web site can be controlled through membership and roles. This is one of the key concepts behind DNN. Two basic categories of people can access your DNN Web site:

✔ Non-members (also referred to as visitors or unauthenticated users) who can only look around the publicly accessible areas of your Web site.

✔ Members (also referred to as registered users, or authenticated users, or users) who have logged in to the Web site and can access member-only areas and tools. Members can manage their own details such as password, name, and contact details.

Authentication refers to whether a person is logged in to the Web site or not. If a person is logged in, they are called an *authenticated user*; if they are not logged in, they are called an *unauthenticated user*. An unauthenticated user may actually be a member, but, until they log in, DNN doesn't know who they are and just treats them like a stranger.

Security roles: Sorting your members into groups

After a person has become a registered user (member) of your DNN Web site, they can then access a wide range of member-only pages and content. They can join chat groups, post to members forums, subscribe to services, manage a photo gallery, share files, or any number of other things that you choose to let them do. You have full control over which members can do which things on your Web site through the creation of *security roles* (also referred to as *roles*), which permit or restrict access to view, add, edit, and delete content on your Web site.

A *role* is a member's group that you create on your Web site. You can create as many roles as you like. After you have created these roles, you add members to one or more of these roles, or you can set up your Web site to allow members to add themselves. For example, you might create two roles on your Web site, one called Friends and one called Travel Buddies. Because Sam and Grace are your friends, you add them to the Friends role. Sam is also a Travel Buddy, so you can add him to that role as well. This means that when Grace logs in to your Web, site she can not only see the publicly available pages of your Web site, but also any special pages and content that is restricted to the security role called Friends, such as your Events diary. However, when Sam logs in to your Web site, he not only can see your Events diary for the Friends role, but he can also browse through your holiday photo gallery, which is available to members of the Travel Buddies role.

Roles are not only used to control access to different areas of your Web site, but they also control what members can do in each area. Using the preceding example, say you change your mind and decide you want to allow members of both the Friends and Travel Buddies roles to view your holiday photo gallery. You have also decided that you want to let your Travel Buddies add their own holiday snapshots to the gallery. Not a problem! You just need to check and uncheck a couple of check boxes, and then your Travel Buddies will be able to add their own snapshots, as shown in Figure 1-1. Yes, it's really that easy!

To find out more on how to register members and add members to roles, see Chapter 4.

Figure 1-1:
The Security
Roles page,
where you
can view,
add, and edit
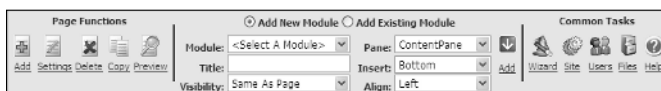your Web
site roles.

DNN Is Content

After you create your DNN Web site, you need to add something for visitors to look at or do. Web sites consist of one of more pages with either static or interactive content on each page. In DNN, Web pages are called pages and the content on those pages is maintained through building blocks called modules.

DNN Web pages

A DNN Web site consists of as many pages as you like. A page in DNN consists of a skin that controls the look and feel of the page and modules that display the content of the page. Skins and modules are covered in the next two sections, "DNN modules," and "A designer's delight." To add a new page, simply click the Add button on the left side of the Control Panel shown in Figure 1-2 and fill out the form. Your new page is now added to your Web site and you can now add modules to it to complete the page.

One of the best features of a DNN Web site is that when you add a new page, it is automatically added to the navigation menu of the Web site. If you have ever built a Web site before, you may have had the experience of the wasted time that occurs when you add a new page to a Web site and then need to also change the navigation menu on each Web page to include the new page. This manual system can cause people to avoid changing their Web site, which leads to a stagnant and boring Web site. Not so with DNN. You can add, edit, hide, and delete pages at any time and the dynamic navigation menu is always up-to-date.

DNN modules

The content of a DNN Web site is displayed on each page by using modules. A *module* is a discrete piece of functionality that you can add to a page to show content. For example, if you want to show a list of documents on your Web site, you simply select the Documents module from the drop-down list in the center of the Control Panel (refer to Figure 1-2) and click the Add button next to it. This adds the module to your page in the pane you have selected and you can now add documents to your Web site.

After a module has been added to your page, it can then be configured by Administrators and, where they have been given the necessary role access, by members. DNN ships with 27 ready-to-use modules (some of which work together to achieve a single goal). Many more are available from the DotNetNuke Marketplace (`http://marketplace.dotnetnuke.com/`) and from independent third-party vendors. Many of these modules are for sale, and most vendors also have some free modules or free versions of their commercial modules. Each module is designed to manage a particular type of content or address a particular business need. There is a module for display- ing movies or images (the Media module), a module for displaying a list of hyperlinks (the Links module), and a module that enables people to e-mail comments (the Feedback form).

The layout of your Web site is designed by adding one or more modules to a page. By combining different modules, you can create an endless number of unique pages. Modules are great because they are not tied down to a page. You can move a module to a new position on the page, move it to a new page, display it on all pages, copy it onto another page, or delete it from a page altogether and then add it back to another page later by retrieving it from the Recycle Bin.

Another benefit of modules is that they display information attractively and consistently on your Web site pages. For example, DNN comes with a Documents module that displays a list of documents. Say you want to allow all of your staff members to add new documents to your Web site. If you give your staff access to add documents to the Documents module, they can complete a simple form, click Update, and then the document is displayed on the Web site in a uniform manner. Your staff doesn't need to worry about how it will look and they don't need to know anything about how to build Web pages. The task is simple and the result is consistent and professional.

Not only is it very easy to discover how to add new documents or announcements to a module, but it's also very simple to edit existing items in the module. If the module is one that has many items in it, such as the Documents module, you can edit an existing document record by clicking the edit icon next to the record, as shown in Figure 1-3.

If the module is one that only has one record, such as the Text/HTML module, all you have to do is mouse over the Module menu and click Edit Text, as shown in Figure 1-3 on the right.

Figure 1-3:
The Documents module on the left displays a list of documents in a consistent and professional format. The Text/HTML module on the right shows how easy it is to edit the content of a module with one item.
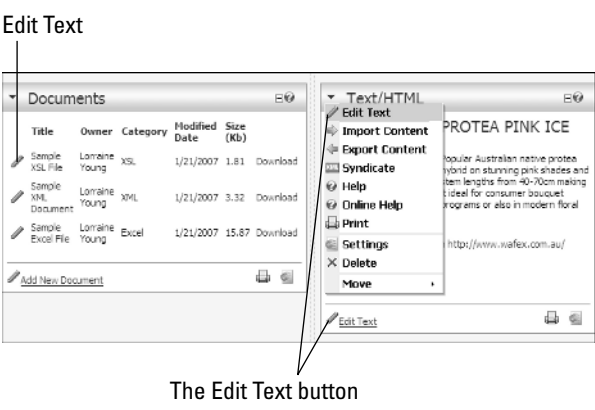
Edit Text

The Edit Text button

A designer's delight

One of the central purposes of a good Content Management System is to keep the design of the Web site separate from the content that is added to the Web site. Achieving this separation enables the content to be changed at any time without modifying the design; likewise, you can modify the design without affecting the content. DNN is an absolute winner on this front.

If you have ever collaborated on a document, you know how difficult it can be to keep a standard look and feel. One person makes a heading large, another uses Styles to control the headings, and yet another person makes the headings bold. By the end of the process, the document can look like a dog's breakfast and any sense of professionalism or corporate branding has left the building. For this reason, separating the design from the content is the right way to go. If people cannot fiddle with the design, they will simply add their information and get back to their work. There are many examples of Web sites on the Internet that look cheap and tacky because they don't have a consistent design across the Web site.

Design in DNN is called *skinning*. When you want to add a design to your DNN Web site, you simply slip a new skin onto it, and voilà! A skin sets the layout of the page, controls the colors of the page, and controls the standard colors and sizes of text and headings on the page, as shown in Figure 1-4. A skin is made up of an HTML file, a Cascading Style Sheet (CSS), some images, and maybe a configuration file. When these files are packaged up into a skin, which comes as a compressed .ZIP file, you can install these skins onto your Web site with a few clicks. A skin package has two main elements: One or more page skins and one or more module containers. A *page skin* is the design for the whole page, and the *module container* is the design for a single module.


Figure 1-4: This image shows a DNN Web site page with different module containers set on each module.

DNN skinning is completely mix and match. You can have the same page and module container design across all pages and modules on the Web site, you can have the same page design with different module container designs for each module, or you can have a different skin for every page of your Web site. It's all up to you! Because design is separate from content, you can change your design at any time. For example, if your Web site is celebrating its anniversary, you can change the module container design on the Home page to a special anniversary design, or you might like to change the design for the whole Web site. All of this is possible with only a few clicks. Here are some other features of skins:

- ✔ Skins have one or more panes that modules can be added to.

- ✔ When you are logged in as the administrator, you can view the layout of the skin, which is displayed as a gray dotted line table with the name of each pane displayed at the top of each pane, as shown in Figure 1-5.

- ✔ The names of the panes show up in the drop-down list of Panes in the Control Panel, as shown in the center of Figure 1-2.

Figure 1-5:
This skin has five panes available to add modules to; however, only two panes have modules added to them.
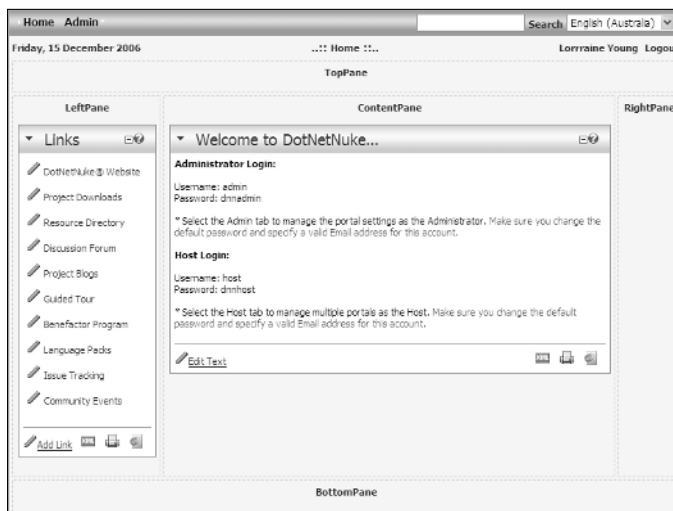
DNN Is Collaboration

In the "DNN Is Community" section earlier in this chapter, we discuss the concept of allowing members to join your Web site to create a community and how, by adding those members to one or more roles, you can control access to pages and modules.

Here's how to set permissions to a page:

1. **Log in to your Web site.**

   See "Logging in to your DNN Web site" later in this chapter.

2. **Click the Settings button or link in the Page Functions area of the Control Panel.**

   This opens the settings page for this page, which is called Page Management.

3. **Select or deselect any role in either the View Page or Edit Page columns of the Permissions section, as shown in Figure 1-6.**

   This is how easy it is to change access to pages of your Web site. Note that you cannot remove the Administrator permission; otherwise, you won't be able to manage your whole Web site.

4. **Click the Update link.**

   These new permissions are now set. See Chapter 3 for more details on working with pages and modules.

Figure 1-6:
Every page and module has a Settings page that enables you to maintain which roles are able to view or edit the page or module.

Special roles: Administrator and host roles

Roles not only control what visitors and members can see and do on your Web site, roles also provide members with access to do more powerful things on your Web site such as add new pages, manage communities, change the design of a page, or even manage the whole Web site. Roles can either provide members with just a little bit of access or a whole lot of power— and it's all up to you!

One of the special roles on your Web site is the Administrator (also known as the Portal Administrator, Site Administrator, or Admin). Most of this book is written from the perspective of the Administrator, so chances are that if you are reading this book, you may well have administration rights to a DNN Web site. Administrators have full access and absolute power to build and modify all pages of a DNN Web site. DNN Web sites are created with only one Administrator, who is then able to assign more members to the Administrator role if they choose.

As you can see in Figure 1-7, DNN offers lots of tools to help you manage all aspects of your Web site. These tools are explained in detail throughout this book, but here's a quick explanation of what each of the tools allows you to do:

- ✔ **Site Settings:** Here you can do things like change the title of your site, enter keywords and a description for search engines, change your skins, and set your default time zone.

- ✔ **Pages:** Pages lets you manage your navigation menu by moving pages around. You can also access any of your pages directly from here.

- ✔ **Security Roles:** Add, edit, and delete your user groups here. You can set whether your users can subscribe to a role and you can set the cost for a subscription.

- ✔ **User Accounts:** Here you can add, edit, and delete users on your site. You can also access the profiles of your users, manage their passwords, and look after which security roles they are members of.

- ✔ **Vendors:** DNN has a cool system for allowing you to manage advertising on your site. You do this by managing your vendors, banners, and affiliates here.

- ✔ **Site Log:** DNN records heaps of information about who is using your Web site, when they are using it, what pages they got to, and what sort of browser they are using. You can access 12 reports about the use of your site here.

- ✔ **Newsletters:** Part of managing a Web site is keeping in contact with your members. Newsletters allows you to easily send e-mails to your members with a few clicks.

- ✔ **File Manager:** Content is what your site's about! The File Manager gives you a familiar way to manage files and folders on your Web site.

- ✔ **Recycle Bin:** Whoops, didn't mean to delete that? The Recycle Bin will save the day and allow you to restore modules and pages.

- ✔ **Log Viewer:** Want to know what's going on behind the scenes on your site? The Log Viewer records 47 different events that occur on your site.

- ✔ **Skins:** Upload new designs to your site and easily apply them on the Skins page.

✔ **Languages:** You can change the words that describe anything on a DNN site here. If you want to change the word Cell on the registration form to Mobile Phone, this is where you do it.

✔ **Authentication:** If you are using DNN in an intranet, this is where you can set up Windows Authentication.

Figure 1-7:
When you log in to your DNN Web site as the Administrator, you can see all the tools that enable you to build and maintain your Web site.

If an Administrator is the queen of her Web site domain, the superuser or host is the mistress of all domains. There is only one Host Account for the whole of your DNN installation and, like the Admin, the host can add new superusers. The host can build whole new Web sites within the one DNN installation, manage files that can be shared across all Web sites, and can control what types of content and files are available on a Web site.

Figure 1-8 shows the extra tools available to superusers. These tools are explained in detail throughout this book, but here's a quick explanation of what each of the tools allows you to do:

✔ **Host Settings:** See Chapter 3 for a rundown on the host settings.

✔ **Portal:** Add new Web sites to your DNN installation and manage existing sites here.

✔ **Module Definitions:** See what modules are currently installed and what version they are here. You can also install new modules and get new versions of modules here.

✔ **File Manager:** This is the very similar to the File Manager in the Admin menu, except these files are for the superuser.

✔ **Vendors:** Here you can manage vendors just like under the Admin menu, except these vendors are available to every portal in your installation.

✔ **SQL:** If you know how to write SQL, you can execute it here. Be careful with SQL: It's a very powerful tool and, used wrongly, can break DNN.

✔ **Schedule:** DNN has some tasks that run in the background that look after the database for you. Here you can see how they are going by checking the History of the item.

✔ **Languages:** This is a more powerful version of the Languages tool under Admin.

✔ **Search Admin:** Manage how you want the DNN search to work and show its results.

✔ **Lists:** Many parts of DNN use lists to give you options. Here you can look after those lists of information.

✔ **Superusers Accounts:** This is a separate list of users who have access to every feature of DNN, including the host menu tools.

✔ **Skins:** Manage the skins that are available to all sites in your installation here.

Figure 1-8: When you log in to your DNN Web site as the host, you can see more of the tools that enable you to build and maintain all the sites in your installation.
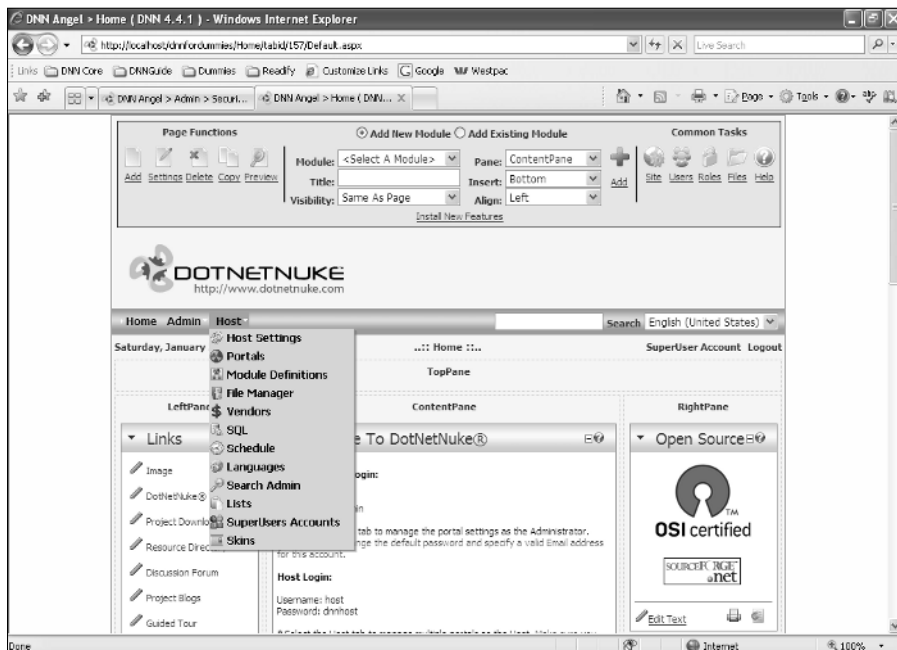
Logging in to your DNN Web site

If you have a DNN Web site already installed, you can log in now and see how the look of the Web site changes based upon your role access.

1. **Click the Login link.**

   This link is usually located at the top of every page, usually on the right side.

2. **Enter your username into the User Name text box.**

   The out-of-the-box username for the Web site Administrator is Admin. Unless you have been given a different username, this is what you will enter here.

3. **Enter your password into the Password text box.**

   The out-of-the-box password for the Web site Administrator is dnnadmin. Unless you have been given a different username, this is what you will enter here.

4. **Click the Login button.**

   You are now logged in as the Administrator of your Web site. As the Administrator, you can build and maintain all pages, all content, and all settings for this Web site.

After you are logged in, you will see that the page has changed significantly. At the top of the page is now an Admin bar, which has frequently used tools to add pages and content. Also on the page you find small upside down triangles that display popup menus when you mouse over them. The popup menu details the features of the module. You will also see dotted lines around the panes of the skin and the names of those panes.

TIP If you don't see these things but you know that you are logged in because the words Admin Account are visible, click the Preview button on the top left of the page to turn off Preview mode. The Preview button hides these things so you can see what the page would look like if you weren't logged in. This feature is very helpful during construction of your site.

Changing your login credentials

The first time you log in to your DNN Web site by using the default logins, you should change your password to prevent others from logging in to your Web site and adding or deleting your work. Here's how:

1. **Log in to your Web site.**

2. **Click the Admin Account link.**

This is located wherever the <u>Login</u> link was before you logged in. This displays the user account for the Web site Administrator.

 3. **Enter your e-mail address into the E-mail Address field.**

 This enables you to receive any e-mail notifications from the DNN system, such as when you request a password reminder.

 4. **Click the <u>Update</u> link.**

 5. **Click the <u>Manage Password</u> link.**

 6. **Enter your current password into the Current Password field.**

 7. **Enter a new password into the New Password and the Confirm Password fields.**

 Note that passwords are case-sensitive.

 8. **Click the <u>Change Password</u> link.**

 Your new password is now set.

If you get an error that says the e-mail couldn't be sent, go to the site and host settings pages and update the SMTP details and the e-mail addresses. See Chapter 3 for more on for this.

REMEMBER

If you also have access to the host role, you will need to change the e-mail address and password for this account too. Follow the same steps as in the preceding list. The default host login username is host and the default password is dnnhost.

DNN serves applications, not just online brochures

With all this power to have members on your Web site, to provide different levels of access to the Web site based on roles, and to distribute the maintenance of content and the building of the Web site among many people, it's no surprise that the power of DotNetNuke goes well beyond the ability to build a five-page Web site that give basic information about your business. Depending on your goals, you can use DNN for a multitude of purposes, ranging from simple static text to robust Web-based business applications. DotNetNuke Web sites don't just sit there: They do stuff!

DNN out of the box delivers most of the functionality required to build and maintain a dynamic Web site, but you are not limited by this initial offering. As well as being able to purchase modules from third-party vendors and the DNN market place, you can also enlist the services of a DotNetNuke developer to build you a module custom designed to suit your needs. This could be a module that interacts with your existing business systems, provides an online quotation system for your products, or anything else you want. If you can dream it, DNN can deliver it!

DNN is used for many large Web sites across the world for all sorts of businesses, including national sporting Web sites (`www.bigpondsport.com`), transportation Web sites (`http://www.transperth.wa.gov.au`), corporate Web sites (`www.readify.net`), and small to medium businesses (`www.wafex.com.au`). From these examples, you can see that DNN can deliver all kinds of information to all kinds of businesses — no matter how large or small.

DNN gives you N for the price of 1

DNN is not just a tool that enables you to build a fabulous Web site — it is a tool that enables you to build 1, 2, 3, 10, 20, 30, or even 100 completely different and unique Web sites!

For developers, this means you can manage multiple portals on a single code-base, with a single IP address. For those of you with an interest in running an online Web site design business, this means you install DNN just once and build all of your customers their own Web site by using the same instance of DNN. And for those of you who have more modest aspirations, it means you can host your family Web site and your small business Web site from the same installation. Any user can create new Web sites quickly and cheaply. You can create templates from existing Web sites and use them to stamp out new Web sites. You can even export the content from a module on one Web site into a module on another Web site.

REMEMBER

Members are unique for each portal. Joining one Web site doesn't give you access to log in to another Web site in the same installation. All settings are unique from one Web site to the next.

Plug in to Open Source

Open source means that the code used to build an application is freely available to be distributed and modified as desired within the limitations of the license. Anyone can go to the DNN Web site, download the code, and use it to build their Web site without having to ever pay one cent back to the DNN Corporation. Amazing, huh?

The philosophy behind open source is that when a large group of people come together and develop and freely share their ideas, knowledge, skills, and time with each other, the quality of the application as well as the rate at which it develops and evolves is exponentially faster than any other method of doing so. It's like having thousands of free developers working on your application day and night.

Unlike with a commercial application, which you buy or have developed for your business, the culture of open source is one of sharing, helping, and community.

DNN is developed and tested all year-round; however, the code is generally released to the public three times each year. That means that three times every year, thousands and thousands of hours of development work are neatly packaged up and available for you to download — all for free!

One common myth about open source is that it isn't secure because anyone can look at the code. People who are new to open source often have fears surrounding the security of the code. How can a Web site be safe from hackers if they can readily look through the code and find its weaknesses? Probably the most honest answer is that nothing is ever 100% secure! However, open source has many advantages over closed-source projects. Because the philosophy of open source is one of sharing and caring, it isn't typically a place where hackers go to make mischief. Instead, the golden orbs of hacking are closed proprietary code, or perhaps unethical global businesses. Hackers are generally supportive of open source and the philosophy that it represents. A hacker who is proud that she has found a security leak is more likely to use that information to help secure DNN, rather than hack into millions of DNN Web sites. Another advantage here is that the DNN community openly shares information, including any limitations. Unlike buying software from a business that wants to keep their limitations quiet for fear of losing profits, the DNN community is all about improving its wares for the greater good.

To find out more about open source, the Berkley System Distribution (BSD) license that DNN uses, some of the benefits for choosing open source, and a business case study of open source, see `http://opensource.org/ index.php`.

Yes, it's free!

There are a number of different open-source licenses in existence, but DNN uses the BSD license, which is one of the most liberal licenses around. Essentially, the BSD license enables you to modify and redistribute DNN at no cost. How is it free? It is made possible by the generous license and a synergy of contributors.

Making the switch to thinking in an open-source mindset can be confusing for many businesses, especially Web development companies that ask themselves, "If it's free, how can we make money?" The answer is through building and maintaining Web sites for your customers as per usual; however, by choosing DNN, you are able to save an enormous amount of time by not having to develop it all from scratch. Instead, you have a robust and well-tested platform that you can use straight out of the box and that grows and improves at an incredible rate. After you have used DNN and understand its full potential, you're more likely to ask, "How did we ever make money without it?"

A second question businesses may ask is "Do I have to tell my customers?" And the answer to this is "No, not unless you want to." Using DNN to manage your Web sites can be your own little secret if you like. The copyright is in the code, not in any visible portion of your site. The truth is that most people who run a business don't care from where or how you get the answers they need — so long as you get them!

WARNING!

Watch out for "resellers"! DNN is free, so you don't need to buy it. You need to buy hosting and you may need to buy designs or custom-built modules, but you don't need to buy a license to use the code.

Based on Microsoft muscle

When people talk about open-source software, they are usually thinking about platforms like Linux, Apache, MySql, PHP, or Python. When you put all these applications together, you get what is called the LAMP stack. This set of applications has been used for a long time on the Internet to host millions of Web sites around the world. These applications are popular and cover a large percentage of the hosting market because they are "free" and stable. ("Free" is not really free: One of the reasons these applications are so stable is that they are quite lightweight, which inherently makes them difficult to manage, which in turn means you need dedicated technical staff to manage these applications.) One of the great things about Microsoft products is that they build a lot of management tools into their applications, thus making them easier to manage and requiring less staff to run a hosting center. To combat the "free" argument, Microsoft has reduced the cost of their server applications and also introduced a pay-as-you-go licensing system that has allowed a lot more hosting companies to offer Microsoft platform hosting. This is a great thing for DotNetNuke because DNN needs four Microsoft Server products to function.

The base product is called Windows Server 2003. This operating system now runs some of the largest Web sites and networks in the world and has proven itself to be stable, reliable, and also easy to manage. Windows Server 2003 is now used in many large-scale Web sites that serve millions of pages an hour and has shown that it can scale out and up to massive size and still be easily managed by a small team of staff.

The next product needed to host a DNN site is called Internet Information Server (IIS). This is the Web server part of the stack and is the product that receives the requests for Web pages and then creates the HTML to send back out to the Web browsers. You can have a look at the IIS on your home computer if you are running either Windows XP Professional or Windows Vista. You can install it under Windows Update Components on the Add/Remove Programs dialog box. IIS is quite simple to use and makes it easy for a hosting company to provision new Web sites quickly and with a minimum of effort.

DotNetNuke is written in a programming language called ASP.NET, using the Visual Basic language. For IIS to be able to understand these instructions, the .NET Framework needs to be installed on the server. DNN comes in two flavors: DNN3.x.x for the .NET 1.1 Framework and DNN 4.x.x for the .NET 2.0 Framework. .NET 2.0 is a progression from .NET 1.1 as is DNN 4 from DNN 3. DNN 3 has been "sunsetted" and no further development is occurring on that code base.

Now that we have an operating system (Windows Server 2003), a Web server (Internet Information Server), and an application framework (.NET 2.0), all we need to finish off our stack to run DNN is Microsoft SQL Server 2000 or 2005. This product is a database server: It stores the data for your sites and allows users of DNN to easily add new pages, modules, and content to their Web sites. SQL Server is an enterprise-level database and is capable of storing huge amounts of data while still remaining responsive to the user. Microsoft has spent a large amount of money improving the performance of SQL Server because it forms an integral part of many applications. There is also a free version called SQL Server Express edition that you can download from the Microsoft site to try out if you like.

The pay-as-you-go licensing Microsoft has introduced is called SPLA (Service Provider License Agreement). This method of licensing is designed to encourage hosting companies to provide Microsoft hosting solutions. The license allows them to pay monthly on a per-user basis, which means there is no upfront cost and they can be profitable from the beginning.

A thriving community

By choosing DNN, you are joining a thriving and rapidly expanding ecosystem of users and suppliers. Each time a new user joins DNN, this adds to the demand for newer and improved features — which in turn spurs more innovation that attracts additional users.

The DNN community is a friendly bunch of people from around the world with a common interest in using and building DNN Web sites. DNN community members have a range of different needs and skill levels. Members range from individuals who just want to use DNN for their own personal Web site, to IT professionals who are using DNN to manage Web sites as part of their paid employment, to IT professionals who are using DNN as their Web development or Web hosting businesses. And the good news is that everyone is welcome, so don't be shy!

It is often commented on in the DNN online help forums that the DNN community is one of the most friendly and helpful online communities in the technology field. It is rare to find people being sarcastic, angry, or unkind. As such, DNN is the perfect tool for beginners because you quickly find out that no question is too small and no reasonable request is too large.

Blink and the world isn't likely to change too much, unless it's the DNN world! There are two main sections of DNN — the core framework and the add-ons that are essentially content modules and design skins. The DNN framework comes with 27 (and growing) high-quality free modules developed by the DotNetNuke Corporation itself, as well as a small number of basic skin designs.

There are also many more to be had from other providers, both free and fully commercial. This ability for development houses to build custom modules is a popular business model in the DNN community and is one of the many ways people choose to make money.

Every day someone out there in the DNN community has an idea for a new module they want to build or a skin they want to design. These may or may not be given away for free — depending on who the person is or why they were created — but every day across the wide world of DNN, something new is being developed. The good news is that these resources are always available at very affordable prices. See Chapters 12 and 13 for some examples.

TIP

Be careful when you are interacting with the DNN community: It can become very addictive when you get started! Soon you may find yourself answering questions rather than asking them and giving back just a tiny slice of your own time to the community that makes life so easy. Please do!

Finding Help Only a Hyperlink Away

There are a number of ways that you can receive help for DNN. One great way to get started with DNN is by taking the DNN Guided Tour, as shown in Figure 1-9. The Guided Tour is a very simple-to-understand 20-page Web site that will assist even the freshest DNN beginner to understand the principles of pages, modules, and the basics of using a DNN Web site (`www.dotnetnuke.com/guidedtour/`).

DotNetNuke provides free online help service on their Web site, shown in Figure 1-10, which is regularly updated. This is a great resource that includes how-to tutorials on nearly every function in DNN. Furthermore, the Online Help is also available in a downloadable PDF format for a small fee `http://dotnetnuke.com/About/DotNetNukeOnlineHelp/tabid/787/Default.aspx`.

The DotNetNuke Web site runs a wide number of forums where you can ask questions about how to install DNN, how to use DNN and its modules, and how to develop for DNN, as shown in Figure 1-11. A number of other forums enable community members to find out about the future direction of DNN, to share information about resources and cool DNN Web sites, and lots more (`http://dotnetnuke.com/Community/ForumsDotNetNuke/tabid/795/Default.aspx`).

Figure 1-9:
Take the
free DNN
Guided Tour.
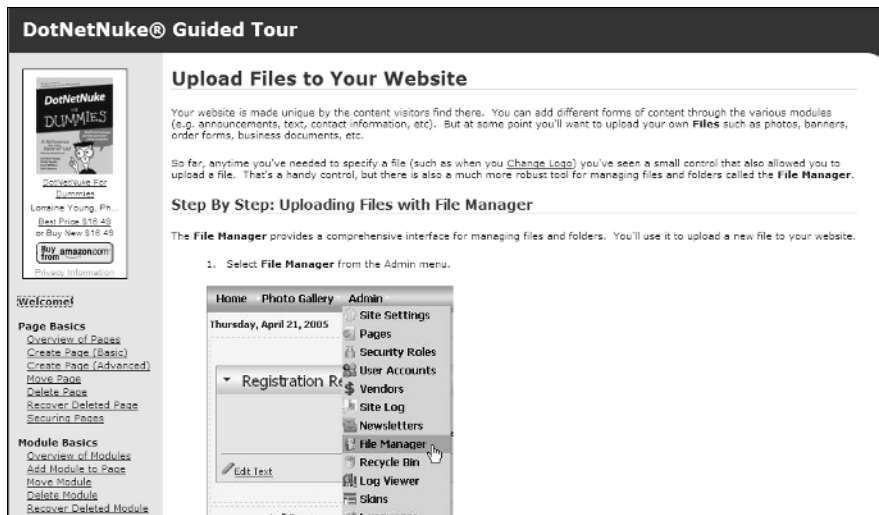
Figure 1-10:
Read a
tutorial by
using the
DNN Online
Help.
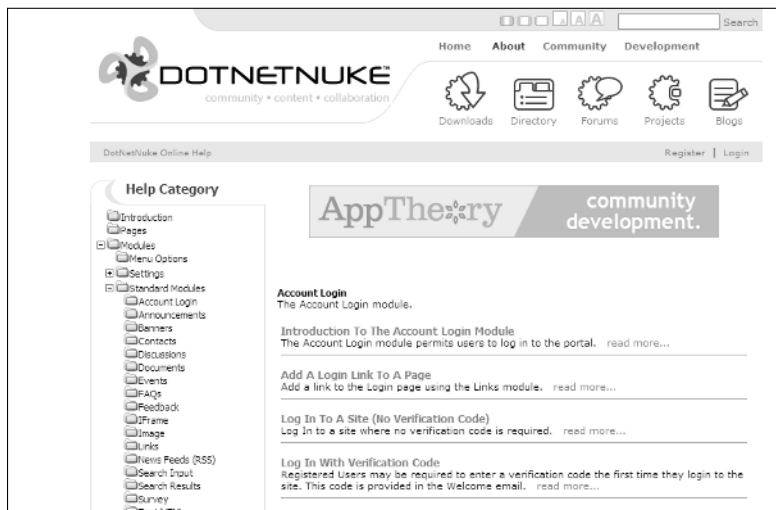
To make it really easy for new users to try out DNN, there is a demo site where you can sign up for your own DNN site, as shown in Figure 1-12. An online demo gives you the opportunity to experiment with the DotNetNuke Web application framework in your own virtual sandbox. Try it out at `http:// demo.dotnetnuke.com`.