

DATABASE BY DESIGN, INC.

When do I need a database driven web site?

Database driven web sites are powerful and flexible! **Imagine...**

- Make **lunch reservations** on line and view today's special.
- Keep visiting your favorite sites containing **calendars of upcoming events**.
- **Find ship dates** of items you ordered last week.
- Order customized items and **view an instant "proof"** of the item.

What will a database powered site do for me?

It will manage, organize, serve, and retrieve information located in your web site. Typically, databases power sites that offer e-commerce or business-to-business (B2B) transactions, or in situations where several web pages need to be efficiently managed.

If your site doesn't offer E-commerce or B2B, would database integration be helpful? Here are additional examples showing when database integration makes sense:

Data Gathering - You collect information from visitors to your web site.

If you are collecting a limited amount of **simple** information from site visitors, your web site developer can often meet this need by using software called PERL Script or other non-database related software. The software allows the web site visitor to enter information and the script will e-mail the information to you.

However, many organizations **need to collect more** than just a few pieces of simple information. Here are examples of the kinds of things demanded of web sites today:

- ✓ **Collect orders from customers** - Similar to e-commerce and B2B, but for instances where money isn't necessarily part of the transaction. Many times it is easier for someone to utilize specially designed web pages, powered by a database, to submit information for a quote or special order.
- ✓ **Registrations for events** - When a site visitor registers for an event where the visitor makes choices regarding dates, times, and options, a database driven site is an ideal choice to manage your site's data. A database driven registration system can also provide you with more detailed reports about your site users and can offer event tracking capabilities.
- ✓ **Project collaboration** - If your organization coordinates with other organizations about various projects, a database driven web site can provide several benefits. Many people use e-mail to communicate the status of various tasks. However, e-mails don't offer a consolidated overview of the entire project at any given time. By submitting information via database driven web pages, the database automatically manages and organizes the information. It can also be designed to send out e-mails to people when information has been updated or when a deadline is about to pass.

Dynamic Site - Your site draws visitors using frequently changing information.

If your site presents information that changes often, updating web pages by hand would be impractical. Here are effective applications of database-driven web pages for dynamic sites:

- ✓ **Order status for customers** - Putting your customers' order status on your web site is frequently requested, if not expected. Your clients get up to the minute status whenever they need it. You receive fewer customer service calls, which saves you time and money.
- ✓ **Reference materials** - If your organization produces reference and research information for its members, consider putting it on the web. Save time by using a database to manage the material. The system can also include a search feature for members that is customized and more effective than simple word matching search engines.
- ✓ **Courses, Seminars, and Events** - Many organizations offer seminars as a way to raise the awareness of their services or of a particular concern. Maintaining up to date information for the public is important for keeping the web site fresh and accurate. Minimize the amount of time you spend updating your site by using a database driven one.

How do I get started?

A great way to integrate a database into your web site is to start by adding just one database driven feature. After it is implemented, listen to the comments of your site users and adjust the site as needed. Once the new feature becomes a valued asset to you and your web site users, it will be easier to discover what new features should be added to the database driven portion of the site.

How do I update information on a Database Driven Site?

Depending on the kind of information that the database driven site manages, there can be different methods of updating the information in the site. The developer that is working on your site can help you identify which method is best for you:

Type	How It Is Used	Comments
Web-based administration pages	Password authorized staff update the site via special administration pages.	Most common method of updating information.
Export to HTML	Some programs have export features that enable you to create the web pages for you so that you can upload them to your web site.	Often used in project management programs and calendar programs. The main drawback is that you are forced to use the program's format for the web page.
Export to XML	XML works a lot like the programming used in your current web site (HTML). You would upload this file just like the 'Export to HTML' method above.	When this page is combined with your HTML templates, the exported information has the same look and feel as the rest of your web site. XML is a very flexible method of sharing information.
Database-to-database connections	An internal database connects to the database at your web site and transfers the information automatically.	Saves a great deal of time and eliminates multiple entry.

Are you using your web site to its full potential? If you would like someone to help you assess options for powering your web site with a database, we would be happy to be a resource for you. At Database by Design, Inc., we can help your web site do more for you!

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Next Month's Topic: Can we talk? - How to connect various databases together for information sharing.