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Drupal - a Boon for Ecommerce Designers by [Josh Goodman](#)

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In the advanced media age, a professional-looking website with multiple interlocking functionalities is essential to drawing visitors. Drupal, a content management system (CMS) and framework can help businesses achieve just that with seemingly endless options for site enhancement. However, be forewarned that often programs as powerful as Drupal come with the cost of a steep learning curve. It is possible to go about it on your own, but hiring a professional can save you time and a headache. ATAK Interactive, Inc. regularly helps its customers to maximize the potential of systems such as this one.

The basics: How does it work?

Drupal essentially is a bare bones framework that can ultimately be created into a website rich with all of the features and functionality that one can imagine. This is great for programmers who are familiar with building websites with complex functionality, but in turn can be overwhelming for beginners without much experience. Installing Drupal is fairly easy; you download it to your computer, upload it to your FTP host, and run the installation wizard which will install the script. Once you have the framework installed, the makeup of the website is essentially what Drupal calls "modules".

About "modules" and how to use them

Modules are basically the building blocks of your website. The nearly 6,000 modules on Drupal.org are typically free and shared throughout the Drupal community, meaning that programmers create modules for the usage of Drupal users. If your business is a doctor's office, there are many modules that you can include on your site. For example, you could add a module that allows patients to create a membership to your website. You could then integrate other modules that allowed patients to schedule appointments, keep track of existing appointments, and send messages to their doctor for non-urgent questions. If the physician was a dermatologist for example, an ecommerce module could be included with skincare products to save the patient a trip to the office.

The good

Hands down, the best part about Drupal is the flexibility. The system really gives you the ability to create a complete, multi-functional website welcoming to your target audience. You can use snippets of PHP code to add your own skins (website appearance) and, unlike many other content management systems out there, you can view the front and back ends simultaneously. Another positive Drupal feature is that it produces reports that inform you of the overall status of your website and alert you to any coding or other errors. Another positive of Drupal is that it is completely free to download and install with unlimited usage.

The bad

Although immensely useful, Drupal also has some down sides. First, because it is so bare-boned, not only is it typically daunting to beginners, it also takes a good deal of effort to bring the page up to its ideal functionality. On average, it typically requires a minimum of 20 modules handling various capabilities to create a basic functioning page. Within the modules, you may run into problems with some appearing unlike what was intended or not appearing at all, a problem that is easily caused by certain blocks within the module being turned on or off, or another feature with unintended settings hindering its full function. Drupal users may also find that knowledge of MySQL is a must when

setting up and using the system. If you are a beginner without MySQL knowledge, you will likely experience some frustration here. Another downside is Drupal's poor WYSIWYG editing and image handling capabilities. A module can be downloaded to alleviate this problem, but it still adds an extra step in the process.

In a nutshell, Drupal is a powerful, complex program that can do great things and make life easier for many, but the catch is that this is only true if the user is a professional or has programming experience. Consulting with an experienced professional such as those at ATAK Interactive, Inc. can help to get your site started and desired modules put in place which you can then manage on your own. This way, you can save time and aggravation while having a cost-effective, great-looking website.

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