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Introducing the Project — mbrdesigncorp.com at a Glance

This chapter introduces the project that is going to be developed throughout the book. The concept behind `mbrdesigncorp.com` (a fictitious name) and this entire book is to provide a well-rounded education of DotNetNuke (DNN) and teach you how to use DNN thoroughly for your own website development. It provides you with the tools to make your everyday use of DNN much more efficient and successful. While following along, keep in mind that this website, like any other DNN website, can easily be modified to meet the needs of your own real-world requirements. As the focus of this book is directed at showing you how to leverage the power of DNN's extensive feature set, the book goes into great detail showing how to take advantage of DNN's functionality, thereby giving you a strong foundation for using it to develop your own feature-rich, professional website solutions.

This book follows a “Problem-Design-Solution” approach in each chapter: The Problem section explains the business requirements for the information designed in that specific chapter, the Design section is used to develop our roadmap for meeting those requirements, and the Solution section is where we write our code to implement the design. This is unlike traditional computer books because the focus is not on teaching basic concepts, but rather showing you how to apply your knowledge to solve real-world business requirements. If you are new to DNN, then this book will give you a good jumpstart to get immediate results. If you are a beginner-to-intermediate user and generally familiar with the basic concepts of web development with DNN, and you want to learn more about the DNN framework, then let's move forward!

Problem

Everywhere you turn on the Internet there is a proliferation of web design companies offering a multitude of similar products and services. It seems there are new companies cropping up every day that offer web design in some shape or form. Whether good or bad, it goes without saying that

competition is constantly increasing. And while many web design sites are nothing more than brochure-ware displaying portfolios of work, companies must do more to distinguish themselves from others and give themselves an edge to be taken seriously as a professional organization worthy of being contacted and secured for business. While it is important for a web design company to have a nice-looking website with an impressive portfolio, successful websites also build and foster virtual relationships. They do this by providing visitors with up-to-date, fresh information about their company or the products and services they offer. DNN makes it possible in many ways to communicate with site visitors and/or registered users and deliver new content (such as information about new projects, news articles, and updates regarding new product releases) quickly and efficiently, using a myriad of built-in functional choices that set it apart from other content management systems.

Design

The Design section of each chapter is devoted to discussing the problem and designing a solution. This typically means gathering a list of business requirements and desired features to implement, as well as ideas for the overall look and feel of the site and content structure. At the beginning of the project we start by thinking about the needs of our website, and how we might use DNN to facilitate those needs. I expand on those needs using DNN's built-in functionality. As I have already discussed, our sample website solution in this scenario is `mbrdesigncorp.com`, the website that's going to be built as I demonstrate many key features of DNN that you should find very valuable as you work with the application on a day-to-day basis. I'll begin by compiling a list of features below that our modern, dynamic, content-based website should have, and touch upon how the use of several everyday, real-world techniques can help you to create your own DNN projects much more efficiently and successfully.

- ❑ A successful content-based site needs a great-looking, intuitive user interface. Appearance is important, especially for a web design company. It's the first thing users notice — well before the site's functionality or the products and services being offered. In short, if our website doesn't look appealing, visitors aren't going to take it seriously enough to even consider your products and services as a design firm. Therefore, information on the site must be well-organized and easily navigable. The ability to change a site's look and feel, independent of its content, also helps to keep the site fresh and alive in the eyes of users. The ability to create great designs and convert them into complete DNN skin packages puts this power squarely in your hands.
- ❑ A successful, content-based site needs to have a fresh supply of content to make users want to come back often, especially if new products are constantly being offered. As is the case with all websites, if the content becomes stale, visitors lose interest and stop visiting. This means less revenue as reduced traffic means less interest in the products and services being offered through the website. To facilitate a constant stream of new, dynamic content, the site needs a mechanism that enables the site administrator(s) to easily update it. Furthermore, if you have content editors that are not technical, the site administration must be straightforward for non-technical users. As an added bonus, the ability for site administrators to assign start and expiration dates provides added flexibility when applying content that is tied to a specific promotion or timeframe. As you learn some of the techniques for customizing certain aspects of pages and modules, I'm confident you'll find that the new skills you acquire as a result, will make day-to-day content implementation/updates much more straightforward.
- ❑ A successful content-based site doesn't stop with the ability to add different types of content and manage that content easily. A successful content-based website also allows administrators to easily change design attributes based on, for example, user feedback, without having to go back

to the original designer and ask for code changes. Furthermore, after your site has been built, you've added content, and you're ready for a successful launch, you may want to apply some tweaks in the form of textual color changes, font size, or even the width of your site as it is displayed in a browser. DNN sites that have properly taken advantage of CSS can make all of these examples extremely trivial.

- A successful content-based site that sells web design products and services owes its success to its users and customers. To build a community of active members and returning customers, users have to have a unique identity that distinguishes them from other members/customers. For this reason, the site needs a registration feature as part of a larger user authentication/authorization infrastructure. This will also be used to define roles and grant and/or restrict access to certain content/areas of the site. When you learn about Security Roles, understand the process of securing content/pages based on permission levels, and implement the techniques contained in this book for locking down content, you greatly increase your site's level of interactivity by a huge degree.

To recap everything briefly, `mbrdesigncorp.com` will be created using some key core feature sets that you will most likely adopt as a regular part of creating your own DNN website solutions. First, you implement a professional, easily changeable design layer that is separate from content and function. Next, you learn all about content administration and new techniques that will allow you to take advantage of some of DNN's key feature sets, while becoming more familiar with implementing various types of content. You also learn how to customize your content and define beginning and expiration dates. Finally, you learn about roles-based security, which allows you to define and implement all types of security for users or groups of users within a DNN website.

Although the sample project is built around a fictitious website, within the list of requirements you'll recognize some of the common functionality typically expected from websites you'll find today — sites you'll develop as a result of this book, or sites you are already developing.

Solution

The Solution section of each chapter will contain the instructions and actual code for implementing all of the features and requirements outlined and designed in the previous sections. For the first chapter, however, I provide a more detailed description of exactly what the following chapters will entail, so you can get a good idea of what the final result will be like.

In Chapter 2, you learn how to install the DNN framework in various scenarios. Depending on your environment, you'll choose the scenario that is right for you. In some cases, you may want to learn how to install the DNN framework in a live server environment or on your local computer, so you can develop without the speed constraints of your Internet connection and/or server.

Chapter 3 focuses on overall design for the DNN website. The objective of this chapter is to get readers thinking out-of-the-box and dispel the myths that a DNN website has to have a certain look and feel. This chapter examines the limitations and best-practice guidelines when creating or converting website designs for DNN. By the end of this chapter, you'll have a good understanding of what is possible with design as it relates to DNN websites.

In Chapter 4, you build the site's design, including the graphics, HTML, XML, and CSS files. You begin by examining a Photoshop (PSD) file that includes the design for skins and containers. (It is assumed

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that you have some basic working knowledge of Photoshop.) You learn how to organize a PSD file using layers and layer sets, create slices, and save images to be used in HTML skin and container files. Then, you learn the concept of Tokens — placeholders for dynamic content — and focus on building the HTML, CSS, and XML components/attributes of HTML-based skins and containers. By the end of this chapter, you'll be able to build all of the necessary components required for an HTML-based DNN skin package.

In Chapter 5, you learn how to package the completed skins and containers into a single skin package that can be installed on your DNN website. You learn the differences when uploading skin packages at the Admin level and at the Host level, and which option is appropriate for different situations, how to preview skins and containers, how to delete skin packages, and how to apply skins and containers to our website. When you have finished this chapter, you'll be able to comfortably package, upload, and apply skins and containers to a DNN website.

In Chapter 6, you start building your website pages in preparation for content. You learn how to add top-level and sub-level pages, create hidden pages, preview pages, move pages around the site, copy pages, delete pages, define page properties, apply/change skins, and define start and expire dates for displaying pages. By the end of this chapter, you'll know just about everything there is to know about configuring pages within your DNN website.

After you have created the site structure, and you have learned how to work with pages, you are introduced to the concept of modules in Chapter 7. This chapter provides an overview of modules and explores some of DNN's regularly used, key built-in modules in detail. You learn how to install modules, add new modules to a page, add existing modules to a page, move modules to different locations on a single page, move modules to other pages, delete modules, apply containers to modules and customize module settings and properties. In this chapter, you learn how to implement, in detail, the Text/HTML, Media, Announcements, Links, Survey, and FAQ modules. At the end of this chapter, you'll be able to get a great deal more use out of a few key core modules that will become part of your normal arsenal of the modules you use for all of your DNN website implementations.

In Chapter 8, you learn about DNN's CSS hierarchy and how DNN uses CSS to control page components and attributes of dynamic items. You learn about the default CSS styles used by DNN for display and how to eliminate unnecessary CSS code. Moreover, you learn how to change website attributes by customizing the default CSS styles using `skin.css`, which should be used as the overriding style sheet for the site. You also learn how to create your own custom skin and container CSS styles and apply them to elements within your DNN website.

In Chapter 9, you learn all about Security Roles. You learn about DNN's membership provider and methods for creating and deleting users, verifying login credentials, changing passwords, and more. This chapter provides in-depth information about defining the type of registration for your site, specifying fields for registration, creating and editing user accounts, creating Security Roles and Role Groups, applying Security Roles to user accounts, and adding define permissions at the page and module level. By the end of this chapter, you'll be able to create secure content that is locked down and available only to users with the appropriate permissions you specify.

Finally, Chapter 10 includes a summary of the additional techniques and resources that will help to make your DNN website implementations successful. And last, but certainly not least, you learn about what you should expect to see from DNN in the near future.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of an aggressive plan to develop a highly functional content-based website that will show you how to use a great deal of DNN's built-in functionality. I painted a broad picture about what will be discussed, designed, and implemented throughout the remainder of the book. In each chapter, you'll learn something new about DNN, and at the end of the book you will have acquired the necessary skills to create a professional, real-world website solution and take advantage of several DNN features in ways you didn't even think of. Furthermore, the site you'll develop throughout this book will most likely provide a great deal more functionality than any site you've designed in the past. And I am certain you'll learn how to do more than you ever thought was possible with the DNN framework, and probably in a smaller amount of time, too.

