

Projects on the Move



Drupal and WordPress often hog the spotlight, but other content management systems offer impressive performances. This month, we look at the latest Joomla release and check out **concrete5**. By *Rikki Kite*

Although I wouldn't call myself a web designer, over the years I've managed websites running on eZ Publish and Drupal, and I've created several sites running WordPress, which I think is the most user-friendly site to hand off for non-technical clients to maintain. Recently, I started using Joomla, which powers the advancedclustering.com website. At first, I found Joomla to be less user-friendly than WordPress, more inviting than eZ Publish, with a learning curve comparable to Drupal (although newer versions of eZ Publish are pretty Drupal-like). In short, Joomla is *different* from other content management systems, so it takes some getting used to; however, it is feature-rich, has an active community, and comes with excellent documentation.

"Each CMS has its own unique strengths and weaknesses, but for me Joomla's unique strength lies in the breadth of the community and the range of available extensions – over 8,000 – that give site builders unrivaled versatility with the type of websites that they can build," says Brian Teeman, co-founder of Joomla.

Joomla 1.7 rolled out in July and was the first release on the new six-month release cycle [1]. In addition to security updates, the new release offers the option to specify the site name before or after the page title, a "remove installation folder" button as part of the installation process, and the ability to add a background image to the custom HTML module.

To test Joomla without installing it, users can create a demo account, which includes 30 days of free hosting, video training, and support [2]. The Joomla site also

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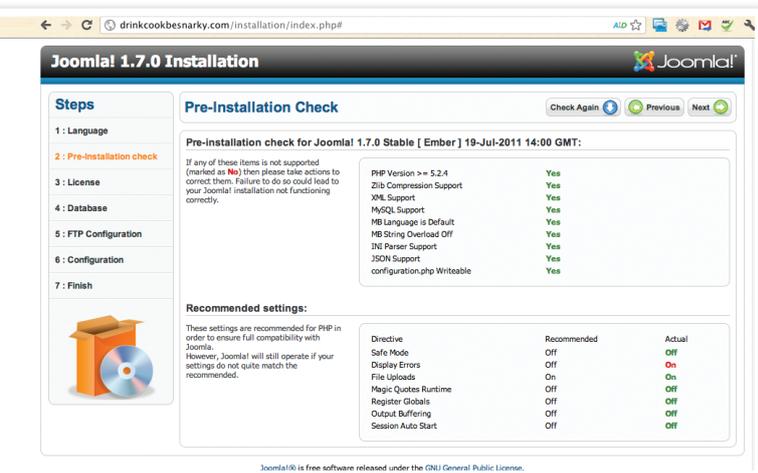


Figure 1: A systems check before takeoff.

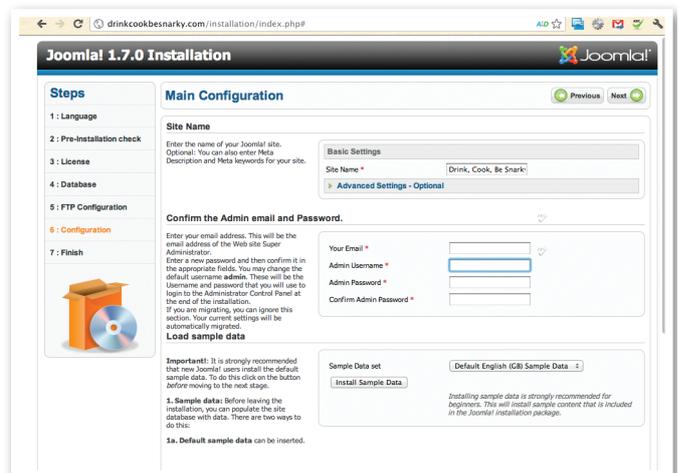


Figure 2: Enter your site name and admin details.

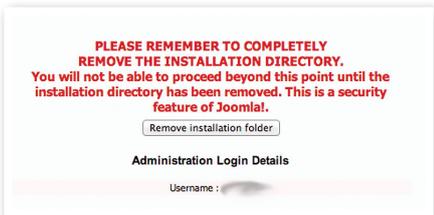


Figure 3: Install complete; the installation directory is ready for removal.

provides detailed install manuals, videos, documentation, and a Joomla online magazine [3]. During the Joomla install, the first screen offers the option to choose a language, and the next screen provides a pre-installation check and recommended settings (Figure 1).

In the next three screens, you will add your database configuration, FTP configuration (optional), and your main configuration, which allows novices to install a sample data set to get started (Figure 2). After congratulations for a successful install, the next screen offers the new button to remove the installation directory (Figure 3).

Clicking the *Site* button takes you to your new site with the sample data set (if you chose that option). The sample data set offers guides for beginners, upgraders, and professional users (Figure 4). Clicking the beginners tab opens a page with links to information about extensions, components, modules, templates, plugins, and more. The bottom, left-hand corner of the sample page offers the login and admin options (Figure 5). After you log in, the fun begins because you have finally found the admin panel.

The sample data already populated on the site allows you to play with all the admin options and get a feel for Joomla before you tweak the theme or add extensions (which is beyond the scope of this article). Clicking the *Menus* option in the top tool bar opens up the sample menus, which I promptly deleted (with the exception of the *Main Menu*). To edit the sample articles, click on *Content* in the top menu (Figure 6). *Banners* under the *Components* tab show up in the bottom of the sample site as the three *Support Joomla!* boxes (Figure 4).

Under *Extensions*, you can manage extensions, add modules, and manage plugins, templates, and languages. The final option, *Help*, in the administration tool-

bar, provides links back to the Joomla documentation and community.

Whether you are a novice or an experienced web designer, Joomla is packed with features, well documented, and powered by an international community of contributors. The learning curve can be a bit intimidating, but the extensive documentation, active community, and a little hands-on experience will help you get your personal or business site up and running quickly.

concrete5

Released in 2008, the open source concrete5 content management system is the offspring of Concrete CMS, created by Portland developers Franz Maruna and Andrew Embler [4]. The project site says that concrete5 is a CMS made for marketers but built for geeks.

How does concrete5 compare to other well-known content management systems, such as Drupal, WordPress, eZ Publish, and Joomla? “As a website editing tool, I think concrete5 compares exceedingly well to everything you mentioned,” Embler says. “They all have their strengths; ours is in-context editing: you navigate your website as normal, and change content right from the page on which it appears.”

Embler says that concrete5 is also great as a framework for building interactive websites with custom components and evolving requirements. “If you’re certain your site will never be more than a blog, a store, or a community news archive and your design requirements aren’t that exact, other software will probably meet those needs with less tinkering,” he says, “But if you wish to add some or all of these capabilities in an elegant way to a website that looks good, concrete5 is a great choice.”

Although concrete5’s e-commerce add-on is full-featured and capable, Embler says that he’d probably choose a

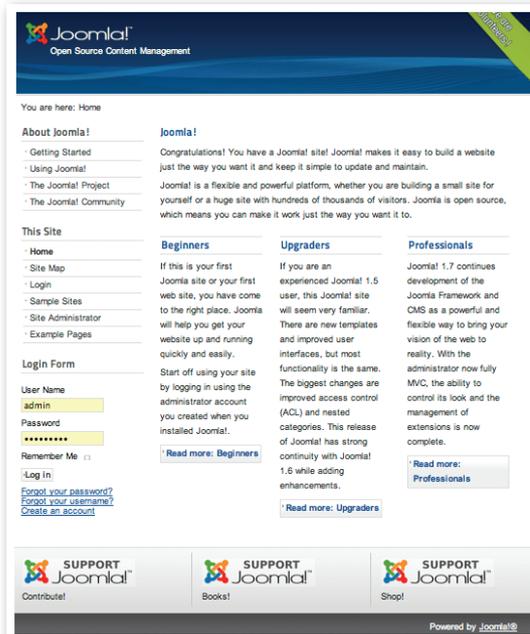


Figure 4: Sample data offers beginners a preview of Joomla in action.

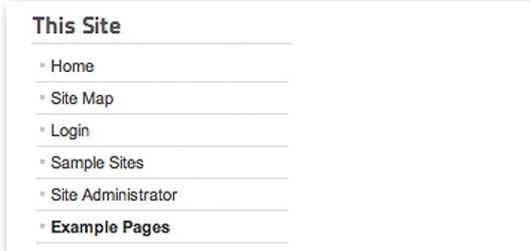


Figure 5: Click *Login* to dig into the configuration fun.

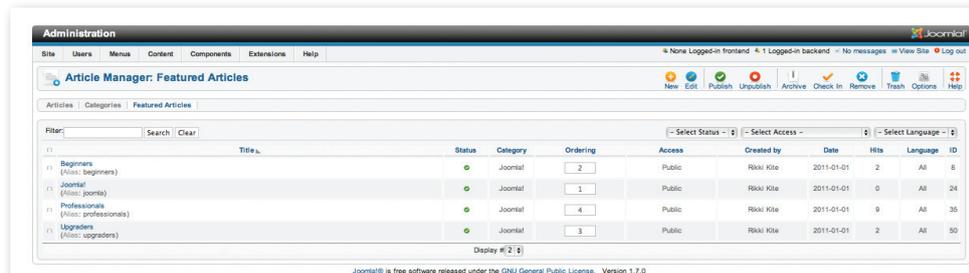


Figure 6: Sample feature articles also offer handy, practical tips for using Joomla.

Community Notebook

Free Software Projects

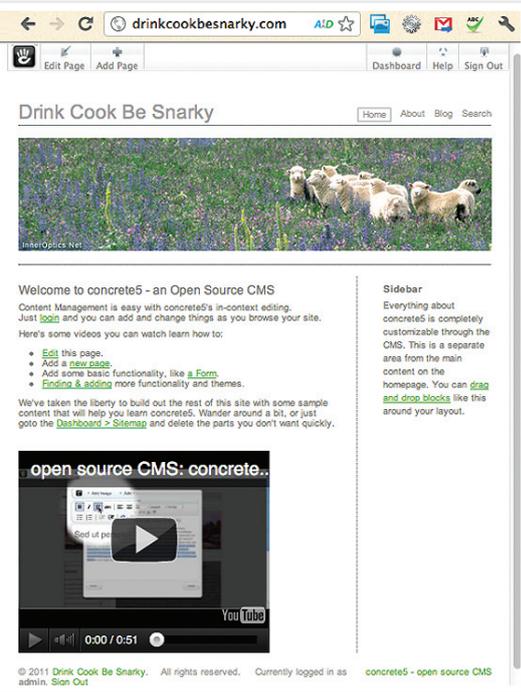


Figure 7: concrete5 installed and ready to roll.

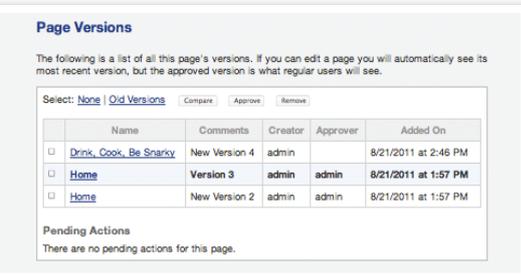


Figure 8: See previous versions of your website pages.

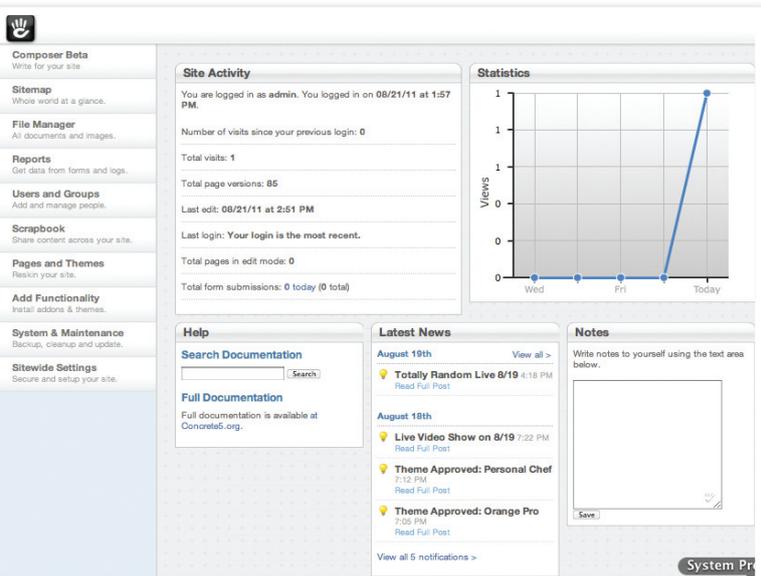


Figure 9: This well-organized CMS won't require a lot of head scratching.

different application if he were building a large e-commerce website with tens of thousands of products. "If I were building a custom web application without a lot of content management, I'd choose a dedicated framework like the Zend Framework or Symfony," he says, "We're also not a good fit if you're building a site where every single page has a significantly different design footprint, or if your site is built for Flash."

To try concrete5 without installing it, set up a demo install on the project site [5]. If you would prefer to install it, you can download concrete5 from the website, where you will also find documentation, forums, add-ons, themes, and installation help.

My concrete5 install was pretty straightforward and any questions I had were answered by searching the project website. I chose to install with sample content, which brings up a welcome page with helpful links, video, and a streamlined toolbar (Figure 7).

Clicking *Edit Page* in the top-left hand menu opens an expanded toolbar with *Properties*, *Design*, *Permissions*, *Versions*, and *Move/Delete* buttons. *Properties* opens a window with fields for the site name and description. *Design* opens a window with options for page layout and theme selection, including a link to get more themes; however, you'll need to connect your site to the concrete5 community site before you can access add-ons and themes.

You can select the *Permissions* button to set user permission levels and use the

Versions button to see page version archives (Figure 8).

Selecting *Dashboard* in the top-right side of the screen opens a window with a file manager, reports, user and group management, a scrapbook, pages and themes, an option to add functionality, backup and update options, a sitewide settings option, and an overview of your site activity (Figure 9). Clicking on elements within your web pages opens up windows for editing (Figure 10).

concrete5 version 5.5 should be released before the end of 2011. "It should include a number of performance improvements, improved role-based permissions, a significantly redesigned dashboard and installation experience, and a few things we'll probably keep secret for a little while yet," Emblar says.

I enjoyed the clean, minimalist design of concrete5 and the intuitive interface. If Joomla, Drupal, WordPress, and eZ Publish are overkill for your needs and you want something fresh and functional, try concrete5. ■■■

INFO

- [1] Joomla: <http://www.joomla.org/>
- [2] Joomla demo: <http://demo.joomla.org/>
- [3] Getting started: <http://www.joomla.org/about-joomla/getting-started.html>
- [4] concrete5: <http://www.concrete5.org/>
- [5] concrete5 demo: <http://www.concrete5.org/about/trial/>

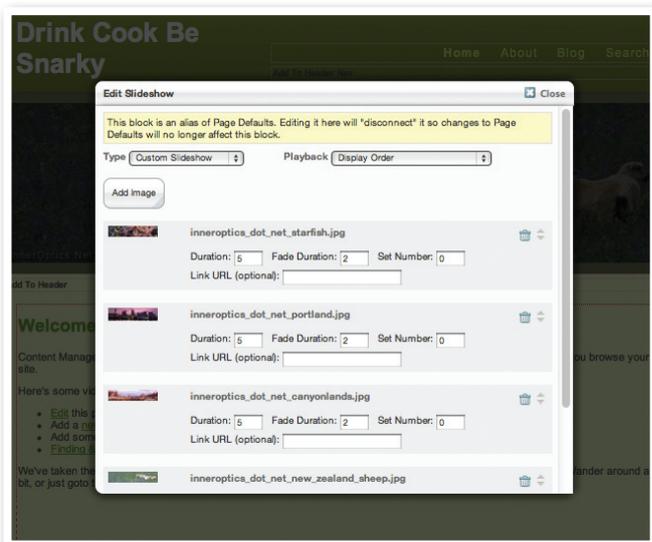


Figure 10: Editing content is easy when you can just click on it and open a new window.