

Paradise Music Goes From Simple Store to Online Community

Maryjean Zarick just wanted a simple Website to sell books. Little did she realize how fully she'd come to use the power of the Joomla site she was getting.

When Glen Chancy first introduced Maryjean Zarick of Paradise Music to Joomla, she listened politely. She wasn't really interested though. She was only being polite. What she wanted was a simple shopping site to sell the harp music collections she wrote and published. It was nice that the system she was buying could do more, but she didn't really need all those functions.

A year later, her site had grown into a full-fledged community with paid subscriptions, online video harp lessons, harps for sale, an additional domain name, and sheet music for download. In this case study, we're going to step through the process of how Maryjean got to where she is with her site (www.paradiseharpmusic.com).

Paradise Harp Music 1.0 – The Original Static Site

Prior to working with Corfun, Maryjean had a typical static HTML site. She had worked with a Web designer who used Microsoft Frontpage to code up a few static pages. Maryjean had no way to update those pages, and so had to deal with her site being constantly out-of-date. The site featured a shopping cart which she also couldn't update. The shopping cart cost her a monthly licensing fee, which drove up the carrying costs of her site.

Maryjean had some harp ringtones that she gave away to folks who were willing to sign up for her email list. The only way her original Website could handle that was to ask people to fill out a contact form. When the contact form was submitted, the thank you page for the form had the download links to the files.

This process had at least a couple of drawbacks. First, the form results were emailed to Maryjean. She then had to manually compile a mailing list based on the registrations. She was very unhappy with this process and would have much preferred to have her registrations logged in a data-base. Second, users could grab the URL of the download page and pass it around among themselves. There was nothing to prevent someone from going directly to the page and downloading the ringtones without signing up for the email list. This lack of security meant that it was inevitable that her main goal, gathering emails of potential customers, was going to be compromised.

Maryjean was also unhappy with the look and feel of the site. It was a very basic site, with muted colors and a basic system of navigation. She wanted more flash, but didn't know how to get what she wanted.

Paradise Harp Music 2.0 – A Joomla Powered Site by Corfun

The initial design worked out with Corfun was fairly simple and straightforward. Here are the major things Maryjean wanted, and how we used the power of Joomla to get there:

Look and Feel – Joomla uses a template structure to provide the look and feel for the site. The great thing about Joomla is that there are literally thousands of templates that do really interesting things visually. Many of these templates are available through Corfun for free as part of a project. Maryjean liked the look of a transparent template which features white lettering across a picture of a tropical island. It is definitely artistic, giving an impression very distinct from other harp sites.

A site she could update – Joomla allows non-technical people to publish changes to Web pages quickly and easily. After building the site with the pages Maryjean requested, she received about three hours of training on how to publish articles on her site and how to keep her products updated in her shopping cart. Since then, she has been updating her site with fresh content about twice a month. That has made a huge difference in her traffic level, as people know to check back often to read her updates.

Member registration – Maryjean wanted to build a mailing list in an automated fashion. The Joomla system comes equipped with membership built-in. Corfun simply set up a registration page so that people could register with the site. All the registration information was written to the data-base, and newly registered members had access to the members-only area of the site. Non-members could not access the registration required areas of the site.

File downloads – At first, Maryjean had only ringtones to give away which were mp3 files. But, anticipating future growth, Corfun went ahead and installed a full-blown file download manager called DocMan. Files of any type could be easily uploaded by Maryjean, organized by category, and made available to members for download. The download system installed right inside the Joomla framework, was easy to set up, and was simple for Maryjean to learn.

Newsletters – Maryjean wanted to use the email addresses she captured as part of the registration process to create newsletters to further market her books. Corfun installed the Acajoom newsletter component integrated with Joomla to allow Maryjean to send regular HTML updates to her members.

Shopping Cart – The Virtuemart Shopping Cart system integrates with Joomla to provide a seamless shopping experience. With the Virtuemart system, Maryjean was able to load new products and manage existing ones. After only a couple of hours of training, Maryjean was handling her online store on her own.

That set the stage for Maryjean to go live. But quickly, Maryjean began to see other opportunities as well for her business to expand.

Paradise Harp Music 2.1 – Multimedia and Subscriptions

To drive more traffic to her site, and to support her music instructions, Maryjean first wanted to provide online video lessons. She shot the videos, uploaded them to her Joomla-powered site, and then embedded them in content using a Joomla tool called MgMedia. Users of her site can read the lesson, then click on the link to the Media player to watch the video portion of the lesson.

Because her site was Joomla powered, the lessons were completely secured. To see them, guests of her site had to register to gain access. This gave Maryjean valuable marketing data.

The next idea Maryjean came up with was to start giving away sheet music downloads in exchange for a donation. Maryjean had done some harp music arrangements for rock anthems such as Stairway to Heaven. Sensing their popularity, she wanted to make them available to members of her site, and also ask them to support her site while she wrote more of them.

To make it possible, all we needed to do was upload the PDFs of the sheet music to the document manager that was already installed. Maryjean was able to do that herself! Next, Corfun installed a PayPal donation gateway on the site to automate the giving process.

The experiment was so successful, that Maryjean quickly found herself with hundreds of new members of her site. It was at that point that Maryjean hit upon her final idea – subscriptions!

Maryjean has a catalog of video harp tutorials and a nice collection of sheet music for download. These are things that harpists are willing to pay to access. Maryjean picked a pricing point for her subscriptions, and then Corfun set to work. We installed the Account Expiration Component (AEC) software on her Joomla site. We then configured it to work with her PayPal to process payments for annual subscriptions. We took the functionality live, and Maryjean's site quickly began to sign up subscribers.

Conclusion

People often ask us, "What is the primary difference between a Content Management System and a site built with a tool like Dreamweaver?" The biggest difference is that an HTML site kicked out of a tool like Dreamweaver can never do more than be an online brochure for your business. It will show your location, services, etc. But that is all. A system like Joomla from Corfun is a framework that not only publishes pages, but can do a whole lot more besides.

Just like Maryjean, many businesses start out with a limited view of the Web and what it can mean to their businesses. They are tempted to go with a limited solution. Corfun encourages companies to invest in a system that can be expanded as necessary. Throughout all of the additions we made to Maryjean's site, not once was the site offline. All of the new functions were added without disturbing her existing site. And, they were all made quickly, and cost-effectively.

In short, a system based on Joomla is something your business or non-profit should seriously consider.