

CEREBRAL PALSY ALLIANCE

Case Study

The Client...

Cerebral Palsy Alliance

The Sydney-based Cerebral Palsy Alliance is a world leader in the development and delivery of cerebral palsy support services. Since inception more than 65 years ago, the organisation has been committed to enhancing the lives of people with cerebral palsy and enabling their full participation in the community. Today, Cerebral Palsy Alliance provides direct services to more than 4,000 children, teenagers and adults and funds breakthrough research into cerebral palsy. Much of its information and communication related activity occurs over the Internet, where the organisation has maintained a strong presence for more than a decade.

Cerebral palsy refers to a group of disorders that affect movement. It is caused by injury to the developing brain and is a permanent condition with effects that range from mild to severe. In Australia it is estimated that there are approximately 33,000 people with cerebral palsy.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Cerebral Palsy Alliance website. At the top left is the logo, which includes a stylized brain icon and the text "Cerebral Palsy ALLIANCE" and "Formerly The Spastic Centre". To the right of the logo is a search bar and social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Below the logo is a navigation menu with links for Home, About Us, About CP, Our Services, Research, Support Us, and a prominent orange "Donate" button.

The main content area features a large banner image of a young boy and a woman. Overlaid on the right side of the banner are several call-to-action boxes: "Cerebral Palsy Challenge Register Now", "Jobs With Us Join the Alliance team", "Research Breakthroughs Meet Professor Nadia Bawa", and "Every Australian Counts Please join the Campaign". Below the banner, there are four large, colorful icons representing different areas: a question mark for "About Cerebral Palsy", a map of Australia for "Support Us", a hand for "Services", and a brain for "Research".

On the right side of the page, there is a "News" section with a "Sign Up" button. It lists recent news items: "Pain Study 17 June 2011", "Mick Campbell's Race Across America", and "actionPACT Learning 31 May 2011".

At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with a grid of links organized into columns: "About Us" (Governance, News, Membership, Our History, Live with Us, Contact us), "About CP" (Basic Guide to CP, My Child - Parents), "Our Services" (Children & Teenagers, Parents & Families, Adults, Schools, Service Providers), "Research" (Research Foundation), "Support Us" (Ways to Donate, Events, Corporate Partnerships, Volunteering, How Your Donation helps, Bequests), and "More" (Facebook, YouTube, Blogs). The footer also includes the UCP logo, contact information, and a footer bar with social media icons and a "Web Content Management System by Spilo" notice.

Growing the online presence...

In 2007 Cerebral Palsy Alliance was using a popular off-the-shelf software package to design and build websites but its rapidly growing library of content was becoming hard to manage. Maintenance and scalability problems were beginning to emerge and, as Robyn Cummins, Cerebral Palsy Alliance's Manager, Communication Design Services Team, explains, "We had to work smarter just to maintain business as usual but we also wanted to take advantage of some of the really exciting things that were starting to happen on the web."

As plans began for a new organisation-wide intranet capable of handling the organisation's vast number of information resources, forms and procedures began to coalesce, it was apparent that a more comprehensive web solution would be required.

"We maintain close to 200 policies and 600 forms, all of which involve tight governance especially around service delivery. We had to find a way to manage and deliver this content, to filter by topic, document type and disability service standard. We expect our staff to adhere to these policies and procedures so we needed to make it easier for them to access the documents"

Robyn Cummins

Manager, Communication Design Services
Cerebral Palsy Alliance

Managing content...

Cummins decided to deploy a content management system (CMS), one that would allow re-use of content across multiple sites and that would simplify the job of updating and maintaining content. After evaluating the market alternatives, she selected Matrix from Australian software developer, Squiz.

“The features of Matrix were that it was very robust, very stable and flexible. We knew our needs would grow and the product appeared highly scalable. The price was right and we really liked that it had a very large Australian user community. The fact that so many government departments had purchased and were using Matrix gave us reassurance that the company was a large enough operation to deal with our needs.”

Other factors that helped sway her decision included Matrix’ ability to code to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines as set down by the World Wide Web Consortium, and the inclusion of training packs and support with the software implementation pack.

Implementation occurred in early 2008 and after a brief delay due to competing organisational demands, work on the intranet followed. Forms and policies were uploaded onto the internal site and new content was prepared. Extranet access was added to allow staff to use the information even while away from the office or when working from home.

One of the most eagerly awaited functionalities was a “People and Places” staff directory. Built in Matrix, linked to Google Maps and using data drawn from Cerebral Palsy Alliance’s human resources system, it allows users to easily search the organisation’s 1,000 staff members and 70 locations by site, first name, surname, or team.

Cummins suggests that one of the biggest benefits of Matrix is the freeing up of her team’s time. Another is the organisation’s improved ability to load and edit content quickly. In the past for example, if a form needed to be updated, responsibility fell to one of her team. Now, with just a small amount of support, the staff member responsible for policies and forms maintains that section of the Intranet.

In addition, due to the software’s ease of use, much of the routine content maintenance is managed by a part time administrative staff member. This has allowed other Communication Design Services staff to focus on particular business or service needs.

A multitude of websites...

Concurrent with the intranet project Cummins' team developed www.Packforce.org.au, a small web site to market the services of a packaging and assembly operation run by Cerebral Palsy Alliance and which employs a number of the organisation's clients. One month later the team delivered their next site built in Matrix, www.AusACPDM.org.au. Designed for the Australasian Academy of Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine, the site provides the latest scientific information for clinicians and parents.

When the organisation decided to rebrand – from The Spastic Centre to Cerebral Palsy Alliance - Matrix was used as the foundation for the new primary external website. Work on the project took just six months.

In mid-2011 a jobs sub-website was unveiled. Used to advertise positions vacant within Cerebral Palsy Alliance and as a landing page for externally advertised positions, it will eventually include a bridge to facilitate automatic uploading of information to popular job advertising sites. A site dedicated to cerebral palsy research is next on the agenda.

In the future Cummins plans to develop mobile sites for use with tablets and smart phones.

“We couldn't manage all of this without a CMS. Wherever possible we use Matrix. It means we can store re usable content, and create snippets that are used across the site but which only have to be updated in one spot. What Matrix has given us is the ability to develop multiple additional sites without the need to increase our human resources,”

Accessibility...

The common factors across all Cerebral Palsy Alliance sites are Matrix, standards compliance, usability and accessibility. The latter requires making content as available and accessible as possible to people with disabilities such as blindness or vision impairment, deafness or hearing loss, learning disabilities, problems with movement or speech. It's an understandable focus for an organisation such as Cerebral Palsy Alliance.

"For us accessibility is a given," Cummins says. "It's socially responsible and it increases the reach of our website to our core user group. We feel very strongly that we should lead by example, so we have aimed for WCAG2.0 AA compliance on our new website. What we've found is that good usability principles such as clear architecture, large 'targets' for people using tools like a track-ball mouse or the new eye-gaze technology make it easier for everyone, not just people with a disability.

Cummins notes, "some CMS solutions are so restrictive that you can't help but build an inaccessible site. While Matrix won't stop you from building a poorly designed website, it has the flexibility to allow you to build to good design principles and to enhance accessibility if you choose to do so."

CPA's commitment to accessibility in its websites is generating enthusiastic interest from Matrix developer, Squiz. The company is keen to develop an understanding of the issues of all types of impaired users and is now building best practices into its project lifecycle in an effort to encourage other site developers to keep the human face of accessibility in mind at all times.

With help from CPA, Industry experts and government, Squiz has launched an 'Accessibility Audit' service that reviews existing web design and site content. The audit provides recommendations to meet W3C WCAG2.0 standards. CPA provides support for this service through usability testing by people with motor impairments. 'We are very impressed with Squiz's mission to elevate accessibility and are keen to support this on an ongoing basis' Cummins says.

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