

ZAPTHINK ZAPNOTE™

PERCUSSION SOFTWARE: RHYTHMYX *XML-ENHANCED ENTERPRISE CONTENT MANAGEMENT*

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Abstract

Rhythmyx offers a low total cost of ownership (TCO) for enterprise-class content management system by using XML, standards, Rhythmyx Accelerators, extensible "engines" for core system function, and Active Assembly and Dynamic Workflow to control how content is entered and used on Web pages.

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Enterprise-class Content Management Systems

Content is the essential requirement of all e-Business. As content continues to be developed at a staggering pace, challenges have emerged for managing its creation, publication, and distribution. While much of this content is online, its nature has changed dramatically in the past four years. Four years ago, a typical administrator oversaw a single static Web site, but currently an organization may manage dozens of Web sites all having complex dynamic functionality.

In the past, solutions to the challenge of managing content have taken the form of using online databases and dynamic scripting languages to dynamically generate Web site pages. However, the use of a database alone is not sufficient enough to be called a "Content Management (CM) System," since it doesn't solve many of the key problems related to content production and publication. Databases excel at storing relational data, such as product pricing and attributes, but have difficulty managing complex documents containing granular text and image elements.

As a result, many organizations have built their own CM systems from scratch by cobbling together various different content creation and storage components. However, as the scope and number of users exponentially expanded, the systems have collapsed under their own weight.

In this vein, enterprise-class CM systems have brought an element of robustness, reliability, and full functionality to organizations striving to manage and assist in the process of content delivery. Key features of CM systems include:

- Content production
- Versioning
- Archiving
- Personalization
- Syndication
- Workflow and approval
- Distribution to different device types

Rhythmyx™ Content Manager: "From Anywhere to Everywhere"

To solve these problems and provide robust functionality, Percussion Software produced Rhythmyx Content Manager. Rhythmyx offers a low total cost of ownership (TCO) for enterprise-class content management by using XML, standards, Rhythmyx Accelerators™,

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extensible “engines” for core system function, and Active Assembly™ and Dynamic Workflow™ to control how content is entered and used on Web pages.

Part of the Rhythmyx approach is to manage content at the “element” level rather than at the “document” level to facilitate Web site changes and reduce skill requirements. New features in Rhythmyx Version 4.0, the latest release, include:

- Content Hubs and Publishing Hubs - new scaling options for additional contributors and content publishing
- Easier management of users and roles
- Active Assembly
- Rhythmyx Accelerators

Rhythmyx Content Manager works by normalizing content sources into a set of customer defined XML representations, providing a means for free-form definition. Content elements are defined as Rhythmyx “items” that are focused on the author of the content rather than the output format. Finally, XSLT is used to assemble content pages and to translate pages into snippets, which are then published to various destination end-points. This decoupling of content elements and output format gives users a “many-to-many” capability for content and publishing. The system supports incremental as well as entire site publishing.

Publishing in Rhythmyx is accomplished through a Web Services (SOAP) interface as well as a proprietary client as a means to transfer and command control between their publishing system and the end distribution points. The system has a flexible workflow engine that allows an unlimited number of contributors to control workflow and identify bottlenecks through a graphical system that supports parallel-based approval processes. The system can also be extended with its included Java API.

Rhythmyx can also handle content natively in formats such as Microsoft® Word through a drop-down “Save As” menu selection. This allows content editors to create items in Microsoft Word or other applications. The system provides check-in and check-out functionality for simple version control and allows content to be re-used in multiple methods without having to recreate it on multiple pages, as would be required in a template-based system. Rhythmyx supports personalization and customization features and allows users to add related content to existing content, add links to other articles, and add images to items.

Returning Ownership to the Content Contributor

Most CM systems provide functionality from the Webmaster’s point of view: a central administrator creates templates that are then used by content contributors. This poses usability and convenience challenges to the authors and contributors. For example, if information is on more than one page, a user needs to cut and paste from one template to another.

Instead of this approach, Rhythmyx uses an assembly engine rather than a page-based system. With this methodology, content contributors define the arrangement of content, its sorting, and what needs to be where without giving up control. In this vein, Rhythmyx returns content ownership back to the content contributors and their customers. This means that the business units control content, while letting technologists own technology.

Templating and Active Assembly

Percussion allows users to create templates with any Web design tool, and allows embedding of templates within templates. The use of templates allows users to update look and feel without reworking multiple templates. The final result is generated using the XSL-based Rhythmyx Assembly Engine. For template designers, Rhythmyx offers Percussion’s XSpLit™

technology, which allows templates to be designed in HTML rather than in XSL. An XSpLit user identifies which areas of the HTML are content through a tagging system. XSpLit takes the tagged HTML documents and generates XSL templates that can reproduce the HTML when new content is introduced.

The concept of Active Assembly extends this concept to allow line-of-business users to reorganize their own pages without involving IT staff. Active Assembly allows these users to change arrangement (but not look and feel) of content as it appears on a site. This facilitates a lower total cost of ownership, which is dominated by ongoing, hidden costs whenever changes are necessitated. Most CM systems require massive updating when Web sites change since templates need to be redesigned. This happens when Web sites go through complete evolutions in architecture and layout as well as when they undergo expansion.

Active Assembly allows users to manipulate page content while maintaining branding and style, to easily locate and reuse related content, to receive email notification and alerts, and to set escalating reminders to keep projects on track.

Rhythmyx Accelerators

Percussion provides Rhythmyx Accelerators with the product that serve to accelerate e-Commerce and other application development and deployment. While not facilitating the runtime components of e-Business, the system enables content development and delivery for critical e-Business components such as catalog delivery systems for e-Commerce. These accelerators provide pre-built integration and services that serve to accelerate deployment time (rather than runtime speed). The Accelerators also include specific metadata field sets that work with e-Business initiatives such as portal and other application servers.

Competition

There are quite a few CM system vendors in the market including Interwoven, ePrise (now divine), Documentum, and Vignette. However, Percussion differentiates itself from these other solutions by virtue of being lower priced and by having shorter initial and ongoing implementation cycles to address evolving Web sites. In general, most of the features in Rhythmyx are also available in the other CM systems, but it is Percussion's opinion that their lower TCO will be a deciding factor for many organizations. In addition, their approach of allowing the content editor to be able to manage their own content and separating the content entry from the organization and format of the content on Web sites will be key competitive differentiators.

As a result, Rhythmyx is positioned in the "mid-market", where CM decisions are tactical and not strategic in nature and where integration with other systems is very important. In addition, they don't see themselves competing with the Portal vendors (such as Epicentric, Plumtree, and DataChannel). Rather, they see portal vendors as a destination for content supplied by CM systems such as themselves.

Release History & Customers

While development started in early 1998, Rhythmyx was first released in Oct. 1999 as an XML application server and was later released in March 2000 as a content management system. Release v3.0 was out in Dec. 2000, and v3.5 launched in June 2001. In order to "jump start" a CM system, Percussion will actually create one part of a customer's Web site with their internal staff and then transition the work to their customer's internal IT department.

Key Conclusions & Recommendations

- Customers looking at an XML-enabled Content Management system should investigate Rhythmyx along with other offerings.
- Percussion should investigate increasing support for Web Services and emergent XML CM technologies such as WebDAV, ICE, and PRISM.
- End users should be aware of the differences between Portal and CM vendors and the possible overlap of functionality and/or convergence of markets in the near future.

Profile: Percussion Software	(January 2002)
Date Founded: 1994	
Funding: Privately-held	
CEO / President: Barry Reynolds	
Profiled Products:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rhythmyx Content Manager• Rhythmyx XSpLit	
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Related Research

- *XML in the Content Lifecycle* Report (ZTR-CL100)
- *Corel* ZapNote (ZTZN-0118)
- *HyperVision* ZapNote (ZTZN-0249)
- *Userland* ZapNote (ZTZN-0125)

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About ZapThink, LLC

ZapThink is an IT market intelligence firm that provides trusted advice and critical insight into XML, Web Services, and Service Orientation. We provide our target audience of IT vendors, service providers and end-users a clear roadmap for standards-based, loosely coupled distributed computing – a vision of IT meeting the needs of the agile business.

ZapThink's role is to help companies understand these IT products and services in the context of SOAs and the vision of Service Orientation. ZapThink provides market intelligence to IT vendors who offer XML and Web Services-based products to help them understand their competitive landscape and how to communicate their value proposition to their customers within the context of Service Orientation, and lay out their product roadmaps for the coming wave of Service Orientation. ZapThink also provides implementation intelligence to IT users who are seeking guidance and clarity into how to assemble the available products and services into a coherent roadmap to Service Orientation. Finally, ZapThink provides demand intelligence to IT vendors and service providers who must understand the needs of IT users as they follow the roadmap to Service Orientation.

ZapThink's senior analysts are widely regarded as the "go to analysts" for XML, Web Services, and SOAs by vendors, end-users, and the press. They are in great demand as speakers, and have presented at conferences and industry events around the world. They are among the most quoted industry analysts in the IT industry.

ZapThink was founded in October 2000 and is headquartered in Waltham, Massachusetts. Its customers include Global 1000 firms, public sector organizations around the world, and many emerging businesses. ZapThink Analysts have years of experience in IT as well as research and analysis. Its analysts have previously been with such firms as IDC and ChannelWave, and have sat on the working group committees for standards bodies such as RosettaNet, UDDI, CPExchange, ebXML, EIDX, and CompTIA.

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