

Forms in CMS

Now that BUCS have determined Google docs forms are a security risk (August 2013), we may have to create web forms in-house. Having recently created a number of web forms for the ELC, I've been weighing up the pros and cons of hand-cranking web forms in HTML, or using the Open CMS web form builder.

Hand-coded HTML

Developing forms by hand is a time-consuming and fiddly business, but does offer the advantages of controlling markup, as well as look and feel.

Pros

- Markup can be made semantic - something hard to control with web forms, which usually place elements inside table rows or divs
- Look and feel is much easier to control - labels above inputs etc

Cons

- Fiddly and time-consuming
- Difficult/unwieldy to maintain - changes would have to be made by the Digital Marketing & Communications team/Faculty Web Editors
- Difficult to maintain consistency - there is currently very little CSS for web forms

Actions

If this is the way to go, then:

- web form standards need to be developed/update
- much more comprehensive css (with classes) needs to be written

Web form builder

Quicker (although not entirely straightforward) to develop and easier to maintain, but ugly and with hideous markup.

Pros

- Structured content makes it easier to create and maintain form elements
- Consistent (if ugly) look and feel

Cons

- Ugly look and feel
- Semantically poor markup - field elements are inside table rows, which is poor for accessibility and responsiveness

Actions

If this is the way to go, then:

- A new template is required
- CSS needs major modifications
- Hacking of the form builder code to restructure without tables would be desirable