

# **Content Management System Comparison**

**Compiled by Michael J. Smith  
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## **Section 1 - Introduction**

Comparing content management systems is not a quick and easy task because each one has a lot of differences that fall into the realm of personal preference rather than actual advantage or disadvantage. Ask four web developers which platform is the best and you will get four different answers.

Ultimately, any CMS should be able to provide the functionality that we seek. The issues lie in the level of difficulty of set up, the work required to develop the functionality we desire, and the ease of use for those unfamiliar with the CMS. Each CMS has unique advantages and disadvantages as they relate to our current situation with SunshineWeek.org.

It would appear, however, that at the starting point, DNN would have the advantage simply because it's what's currently powering the site. But, is the fact that we're using it now enough to say it makes sense to keep it going forward? This comparison seeks to provide the considerations needed to answer that question.

## **Section 2 - DotNetNuke**

DNN is an open source platform used for building dynamic websites using Microsoft's .NET technology. Modules and skins are used to customize the look, feel and functionality of the DNN website. Modules are used to add functions to a website (i.e. photo galleries, web applications). Skins separate design and content, allowing designers without knowledge of .NET to develop skins.

### **Pros:**

- Site currently exists on this platform.
- Majority of our users understand this platform.
- Redesign of site could be done using this platform and existing skins/modules.
- Site changes can be made visually on pages, which could be less daunting than coding changes required on other platforms.

### **Cons:**

- New DNN releases are not always backwards compatible, which means with a new release some modules may not operate correctly.
- The updates for the Community Edition (which we use) are not tested, or certified by DataSprings, which means there is the potential for issues with new releases and very little support to fix them.
- Moving an item on the page can throw off entire balance of page (not sure if this is true across skins or just our current skin.)
- Design aspects of most skins appear outdated compared to current sites using other CMSs. (Many free skins come from generic templates.)

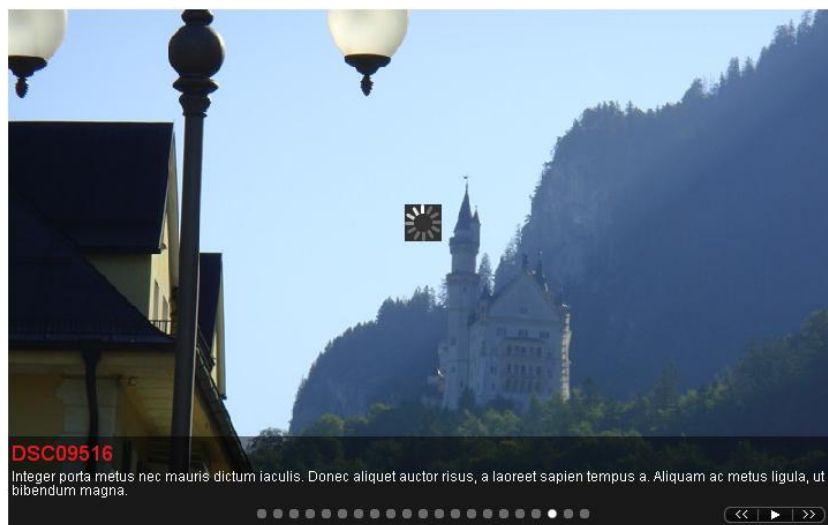
It appears that there is a module that would allow us to add a better scrolling content box to the website. We currently have DNNArticleSlider in the left pane of the site. This allows content to scroll, but it is text-based. An image-based content box would be a more visually appealing feature.

## Section 2.1 - Ultra Media Gallery 6

[Ultra Media Gallery 6](#) could possibly be used to create the scrolling content gallery. It features 20 customizable flash and HTML views. It could theoretically be used to create a scrolling image gallery, and a tabbed box with daily headlines, two elements that would enhance the design of the site.

We would probably want to use the Default setting of UMG6 for the scrolling content box. There's another type of gallery setting, called Title-Top, which would probably be a good way to feature our daily headlines, press releases, and other non-image content.

**Cost: \$69.95**



**Figure 1. Default UMG6 Gallery**

### Pros:

- Could fulfill two of the design suggestions of the mockup (scrolling content, latest headlines).
- Can be used to feature videos.
- Support and documentation is available (not sure how great it is, though.).
- Compatible with latest versions of DNN.
- Looks relatively simple to use.

## Cons:

- Cost.
- Can only use this on one DotNetNuke Installation (may or may not be an issue).
- May be difficult to set up (might require knowledge of JavaScript).
- To add videos, it seems you'd need another module: [Ultra Video Module 4](#) (an extra \$84.95).

There also seems to be a skin that might fulfill some of the design suggestions of the mockup.

## Section 2.2 - News Portal DNN Skin

The [News Portal DNN Skin](#) by Coding Staff could possibly be used to create a more visually appealing layout of the site. It's based on pure CSS, which should make changes relatively easy with a minimal understanding of CSS.

The skin description says it features a video player and image gallery, which may eliminate the need for UMG6, listed above. But, when attempting to purchase the skin, it says that the modules used in the demo are *not* included with the standard installation. The price is nearly doubled with the needed modules.

**Cost: \$83.95 (\$163.95 w/ modules)**

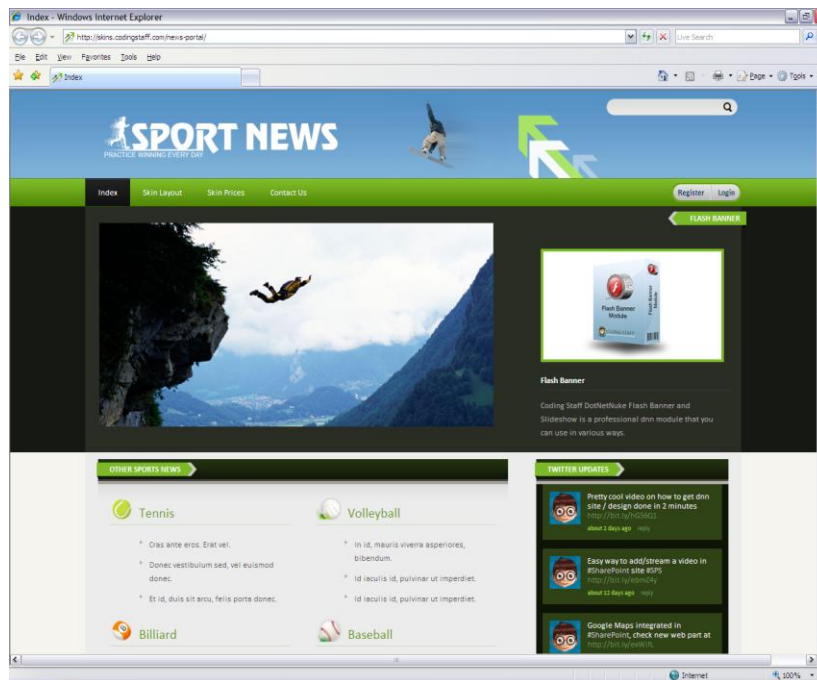


Figure 2. News Portal Skin

**Pros:**

- Would enhance the visual appeal of the site, as per the mockup.
- With the right modules, can be used to feature videos, image galleries.
- Installation support is available.
- Supports all major browsers, meaning every user should see the same site.

**Cons:**

- Cost.
- Can only use this on one DotNetNuke Installation (may or may not be an issue).
- Modules for video, image galleries cost extra.
- Moving an item on the page may throw off the entire page as current skin does (not sure if our current skin or the way skins are designed causes this issue).
- The green color is intertwined in the site so much that changing it may be difficult.
- There's a small chance that this skin will not be supported by our web host, meaning we might not be able to use it. (Microscopic chance.)

Forms modules also exist for DNN. These may have some value for SW.org because they allow us to create our own forms. Depending on the form module purchased, you could create surveys, questionnaires, and quizzes. These modules could allow us to create our own online submission form for the local heroes contest, or a quiz for members to take for fun.

[NukeFlow Dynamic Forms & Workflow 4.3](#) seems like a decent one. But, it is best used/viewed in IE, which could create problems for Firefox, Chrome, Opera and Safari users. And, it costs \$85.

DataSprings also makes one called [Dynamic Forms 3.4](#). At \$180, though, it's quite pricey.

There are other, cheaper ones, should we decide to go that route. There are so many that randomly picking one for our comparison here would not be beneficial. If we do, however, decide to go that route one day, we should certainly compare them.

**Section 3 - WordPress**

Wordpress is an open-sourced content management system powered by PHP and MySQL. Plugins and themes are used to customize the look, feel, and functionality of a WP website. Plugins in WP are used similarly to modules in DNN. They add features (galleries, contact forms, etc) to the site. Themes allow users to pick from existing designs for their websites, and are as easy to download as plugins in most cases. Themes are the WP equivalent of skins in DNN.

**Pros:**

- WP is easy to learn or use and requires no knowledge of PHP or CSS/HTML (though it helps to know them).
- WP has integrated link management, which makes it search engine-friendly.
- Plugins exist for virtually any functionality – and are free.
- Updates are seamless and can be run with one mouse click.

**Cons:**

- If SW.org does not live on a MySQL server, moving it could require a lot of work
- WP is unfamiliar to majority of our users, which means time would need to be spent learning new platform.
- Heavy customization of themes requires knowledge of CSS and PHP.
- Security could be an issue because of existing WP vulnerabilities.
- Installing certain WP themes and plugins involves uploading directly to server, which requires knowledge of how to do that.
- Many of the better WP themes are not free.

To achieve most of the design elements from the mockup, there are a few WP themes that would get us pretty close.

### **Section 3.1 - Gotham News Theme**

The [Gotham News](#) theme by WooThemes could possibly be used to create a more-professional feeling site. It features a large slot for a featured story or information that we want to highlight.

A quick look at the source code tells me that it has a separate stylesheet set up for IE, which means all users should see the same site when they visit. (IE is usually the browser that gives the most trouble.)

**Cost: \$70**



**Figure 3. Gotham News Theme**

**Pros:**

- Simple layout should make information easy to find for users.
- Inner pages feature sidebar, so visitors coming from Twitter/Facebook can find more information and click through to other info on our site.
- All users see same site, regardless of browser.
- Support documentation available.

**Cons:**

- Cost.
- Very good chance that it uses a thumbnail generator.\*
- Would require strategy to determine information structure (posts vs. pages^).
- Changes would likely need to be made in CSS and PHP.

*\* I've worked with two thumbnail generators in WP and both times, I've run into a boatload of issues. (Thumbnail generators are scripts that create a thumbnail every time you upload a picture.) The issues seem to stem from security problems or scripting errors within the theme. Solutions can be found but they are very time consuming.*

*^ For WP, we'd want static content to live as pages and updating content to live as postings. The issue I've encountered is that some themes are designed using both in menu bars, which could be a bad thing if you don't want those items to be displayed. (I can explain in more detail in a meeting, if necessary.)*



## Section 3.3 - eNews Theme

The [eNews](#) theme by Elegant Themes is another potential candidate for the site redesign. It is compatible with all browsers, and features valid XHTML and CSS. It also features a scrolling content gallery. It also looks less like a blog than other WP themes.

**Cost: \$39 (for access to all 52 of Elegant Themes' themes.)**



**Figure 4. eNews Theme**

### Pros:

- Scrolling content box is prominent on the page.
- Valid XHTML and CSS mean that there are no major coding issues, which is a very good thing.
- Inner pages feature sidebar, so visitors coming from Twitter/Facebook can find more information and click through to other info on our site.
- All users see same site, regardless of browser.
- Support documentation available.
- Theme is set up for plugins making installation and use even easier.

### Cons:

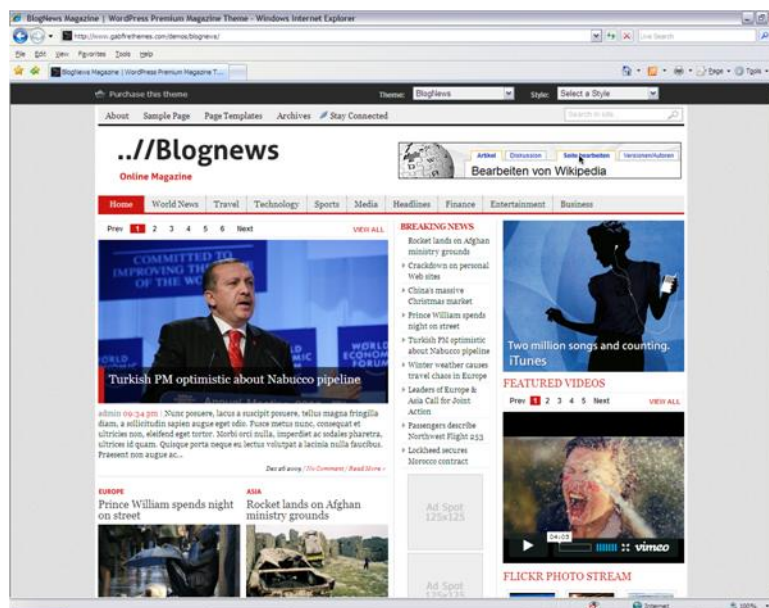
- Design intricacies of site might not impress all and would be difficult to change if we don't like them.
- Very good chance that it uses a thumbnail generator (see note above).
- Would require strategy to determine information structure (posts vs. pages: see note above).

- Changes would likely need to be made in CSS and PHP.

### Section 3.4 - BlogNews Theme

The [BlogNews](#) theme from Gabfire Themes could also work for the site. It has a built in scrolling content box and built in Flash video functionality. It's SEO optimized and compatible with all browsers.

**Cost: \$59**



**Figure 5. BlogNews Theme**

#### Pros:

- Built in scrolling content box and flash video ability.
- Professional-feeling layout and decent design characteristics.
- Features two inner article sidebars, which means a lot of content for users to click through (could result in content overload, though).
- All users see same site, regardless of browser.
- Support documentation available.

#### Cons:

- Several different areas to display content; could make users feel information overload.
- Very good chance that it uses a thumbnail generator (see note above).
- Would require strategy to determine information structure (posts vs. pages: see note above).

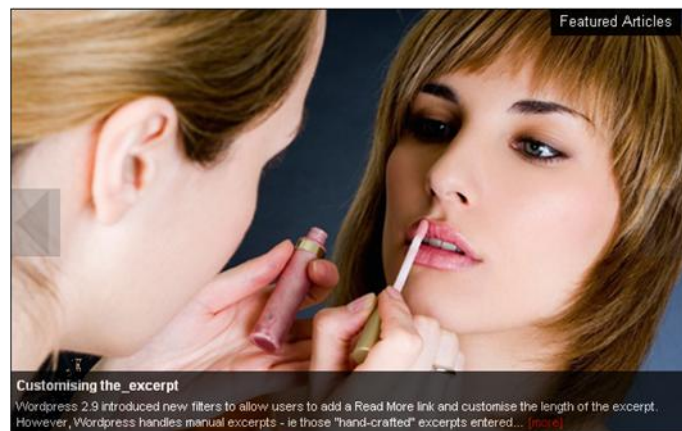
- Changes would likely need to be made in CSS and PHP.

Should we decide to use a free WP theme that does not include a scrolling content box, we can add one relatively easily at no extra cost.

### Section 3.5 - Dynamic Content Gallery Plugin

The [Dynamic Content Gallery](#) plugin by StudioGrassHopper is a plugin that allows users to add a scrolling content box to any WP website relatively easily.

**Cost: Free**



**Figure 6. Dynamic Content Gallery Plugin**

#### Pros:

- Free.
- Support documentation is available.
- Easy to install and use (generally).
- Attractive feature to add to a website.
- Fully customizable (allows you to set length of time before item scrolls; how many options appear).

#### Cons:

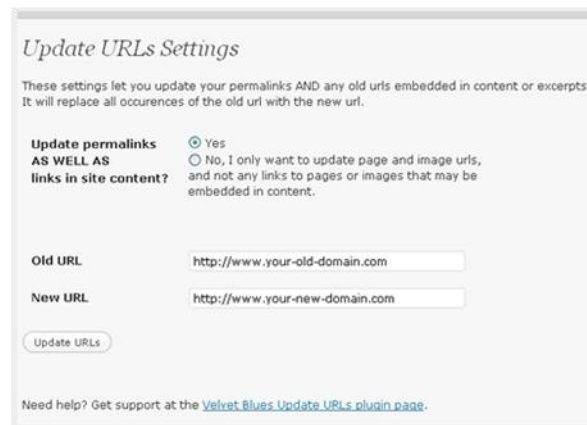
- Requires a coding change to get it to work (easy for people with CSS/PHP experience, could be difficult for those without).
- Users have to click the middle of the picture for the link to work; otherwise they'll just scroll the item through quicker. (Can provide further explanation/demonstration if necessary.)
- Because it is free, support may go away.

Moving the site could create problems for embedded links currently in the site. Because DNN and WP use different link structures, any links in the body of page that reference internal content will not work once the move is complete. WP, however, has a plugin addresses that issue

### Section 3.6 - Velvet Blue's Update URLs Plugin

[Velvet Blue's Update URLs](#) plugin automatically updates the permalinks or URLs embedded in the content.

**Cost: Free**



The screenshot shows the 'Update URLs Settings' page. It includes a title, a brief description of the plugin's function, and two radio button options for updating permalinks and content links. Below the options are input fields for 'Old URL' and 'New URL', both containing placeholder text. An 'Update URLs' button is at the bottom, along with a link to the plugin's support page.

**Figure 7. Update URLs Plugin**

#### **Pros:**

- Free.
- Support is available.
- Easy to use and automates one of the most tedious tasks of site-moving.

#### **Cons:**

- Not sure if the plugin supports a move that only changes the CMS not the directory (this could be **BIG** issue).
- As with any free plugin, support may stop.

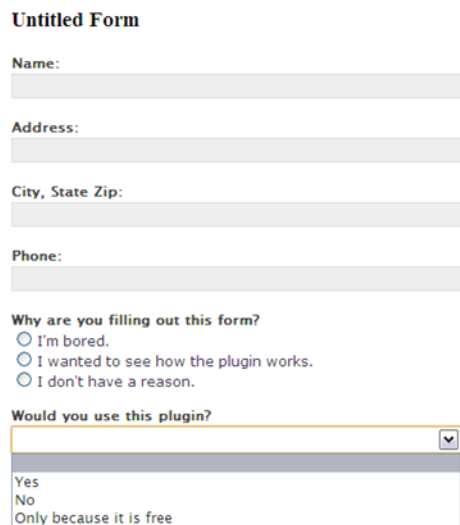
One of the main issues mentioned was that the local heroes online entry form would need to be rebuilt entirely, if a switch were to occur. In WP, there are several ways to do this, but the one that seems to make the most sense is using a plugin called Formidable.

## Section 3.7 – Formidable Plugin

Formidable allows users to easily create forms where site visitors can enter information, or select from various options. There is a Pro (read: pay) version that allows you to create forms that are more dynamic. For example, you could make questions display based on answers to other questions, or you could have some of the fields populate automatically depending on other answers in the form.

**Cost: Free (Pro: \$37)**

(Submit button is blocked by the expanded dropdown menu in this example, just FYI)



Untitled Form

Name:

Address:

City, State Zip:

Phone:

Why are you filling out this form?

I'm bored.

I wanted to see how the plugin works.

I don't have a reason.

Would you use this plugin?

Yes

No

Only because it is free

**Figure 8. Form Generated Using Formidable Forms Plugin**

### Pros:

- Simple to use; drag and drop – anyone can build a form.
- Easy to change, update, or create new forms.
- Responses are sent to an email address (this may not be a pro, though. I don't know.)
- Can be used with existing WP plugins to eliminate/minimize spam responses.

### Cons:

- Cost of pro version.
- Would require moving site to WP.
- Without testing it, there's no way to foresee issues that could arise from use (though, the Pro version should offer some support).
- Some functions don't work correctly in IE on the backend. (Doesn't appear to affect user experience on front end.)

## **Section 4 - Drupal**

Drupal is a free, open-sourced content management system that, like WP, uses PHP. Drupal uses contrib modules to alter the functionality of a site. Contrib modules are the equivalent of modules in DNN and plugins in Wordpress. Themes serve the same function in both Drupal and WP, and are the same as skins in DNN.

Drupal offers installation profiles, which allow users to install “pre-customized” sites, without having to find contrib modules or themes. Each installation profile comes with a collection of modules, themes, and configuration settings that allow us to set up Drupal in a way that suits our needs. An example profile would be OpenPublish, which is geared toward online publishers.

### **Pros:**

- Installation profiles may make installation quick and easy.
- Redesign of site could be done using existing installation profiles.
- Support is available.
- SEO friendly out of the box.
- Runs on Windows, like DNN, so move might simpler.

### **Cons:**

- Some aspects of admin interface can be confusing for people learning it.
- Some users say mastering Drupal is difficult; many modules have overlapping features which could overwhelm people learning to use it/set it up.
- Drupal does not work to be backwards compatible, meaning themes and modules could lose functionality/usability when new version of Drupal is released.
- Users report Drupal pages load slowly.
- Larger sites find adding servers to handle growing visitor traffic very difficult.

To achieve the design aspects of the mockup, we would probably want to use OpenPublish or ManagedNews installation profiles. For our purposes, OpenPublish looks a little more trustworthy (read: secure).

## **Section 4.1 - OpenPublish Installation Profile**

[OpenPublish](#) is an installation profile package that is designed specifically for the online news industry. It has several features like featured content, advertisements, and social bookmarking integrated. It’s SEO optimized and comes with most if not all modules needed to make the site functional.

**Cost: Free**



**Figure 9. OpenPublish Drupal Installation Profile**

**Pros:**

- Cost.
- Professional sites like the New Republic and the Nation use it, giving it credibility.
- Allows users to create “gated” content, which for us could be a way to give people extra incentive for joining the coalition (access to more content).
- Comes with RSS feed and social bookmarking functionality.

**Cons:**

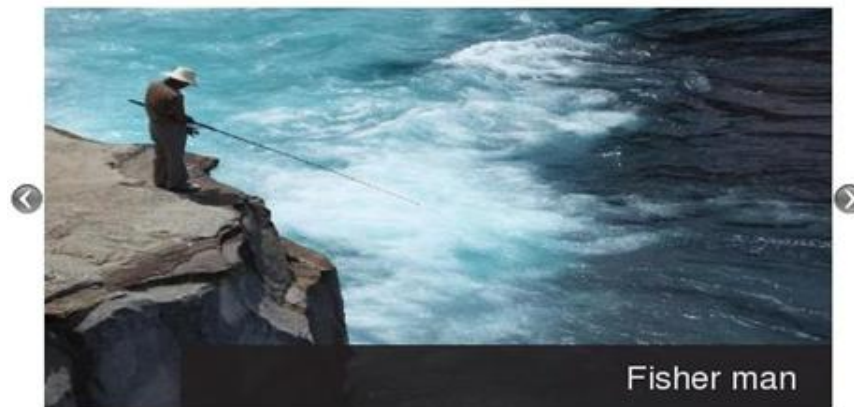
- While the admin is walked through a wizard-like process for installation, I get the feeling it is difficult (requires the admin to know the API keys, for example.)
- Installation may be easy, but configuring could be hard, even with do-it-yourself tutorials. Keep in mind the comments above about users finding it difficult to master.
- Requires installation of PHP 5.2.

To achieve the scrolling content box on Drupal, we could use the Scrollable Content contrib module.

**Section 4.2 - Scrollable Content Contrib Module**

Scrollable Content adds scrolling functionality to a web site, much like the other modules and plugins listed above. You can change speed, interval, rotation, and the number of items in this module.

**Cost: Free**



**Figure 10. Scrollable Content Module**

**Pros:**

- Cost.
- Would achieve one of the visual enhancement goals of the new website.
- Fully customizable.

**Cons:**

- Very little to no testing performed, which means bugs have to be reported by us and we have to wait for solutions.
- Updating module seems somewhat complex for someone without prior knowledge of how to do it.
- No idea how easy or difficult it may be to install and run.

One issue with moving to Drupal appears to be creating a local heroes online submission form. It appears that there are modules that may help do this, but finding out which one is best, or easiest to use is proving difficult. Many of the existing Drupal form modules are not supported anymore.

Furthermore, if we were to find one that seems to work best, it appears installation would be difficult and would probably require the services of someone with extensive experience with PHP and/or Drupal, which translates into higher cost.

## **Section 5 - Conclusion**

Right off the bat, based on what I found, I think we can eliminate Drupal. While it does run in a Windows environment, it doesn't seem like moving from DNN to Drupal would be as easy as it seems.



It also appears that we would need to get someone with more experience with that platform to set up and configure the site; meaning we'd be stuck if we ever wanted to change the design or if an upgrade resulted in the loss of a certain crucial function.

Adding that with the fact that Drupal users have complained about how difficult it is to learn makes Drupal the worst of the three choices.

That leaves Wordpress and DNN. As I mentioned in the introduction, choosing between these two is not so cut and dry. I'll try to break it down into several different areas you should consider when making this decision.

### Section 5.1 - Cost

When you compare the costs, head-to-head, it would appear that Wordpress would be less expensive, no matter which of the options you select above. With that said, the cost of WP does not include any unforeseen costs associated with moving the entire site to WP. It also doesn't factor in the money saved in (wo)man-hours by not moving the site.

Wordpress	DotNetNuke
\$76 - \$107*	\$164 - \$169

**Figure 11. Head-to-Head Cost Comparison**

\* See note in paragraph above about hidden costs with using WP.

I've found several people who have moved from DNN to WP. The most cited reason seems to be cost. While DNN is open source, third-party modules and skins often are not. The bulk of Wordpress plugins are free. And there are plenty of free, professional themes, so you don't have to pay if you don't want to. There are far fewer options for free professional skins on DNN.

### Section 5.2- Ease/Difficulty of Moving

Because DNN uses .NET framework, my guess is that is that SW.org is running on a MsSQL database, and is hosted by Hostgator.com. (I may be wrong about this, though.) There's a small chance, however, it could be running on a MySQL database.

If it is running on a MySQL database, then theoretically, it should be easier to move from DNN to WP. If it is running on an MsSQL database, however, moving it could be very, very difficult and time consuming. It would also require the use of an additional IT contractor.

Because I don't know the server structure of SW.org, it's hard to say anything definitively. If, for example, SW.org is run on HostGator servers, then there's a good chance they will be able to tell

us how easy it would be to move the site. And, there's a pretty good chance that they would be able to move it for us, since they employ staff to maintain and troubleshoot their servers.

If, however, the SW.org server is located in the office on one of the Windows machines, then moving it to Wordpress could be difficult and time consuming and would involve an outside contractor.

### **Section 5.3 - Developers' Comments**

The biggest problem I'm finding in comparing to see which is better is that whomever you ask; you'll get a different answer. It's a matter of preference.

Proponents of Wordpress think it is better because PHP is more common; WP is easier to use and less modular than DNN; sites designed in WP are visually better than DNN; and you can add more functionality to a website without additional cost in WP than you can in DNN.

Proponents of DNN think it is better because MS technologies provide higher efficiency and faster development. (I'm not sure this affects us because we're not building modules, we're only using them.) Also, most people report that ASP.Net sites load slower than comparable PHP sites, and they say that development in DNN moves at a much slower pace than that of WP.

One thing to note is that for updates, DataSprings does not test or certify updates for the version we use (Community). The reason this is important is that with any update, we'd be susceptible to bugs that haven't been found in testing. If a bug is uncovered, there's no guarantee that DataSprings will fix it. And, if they do, it could be a while before they actually do so.

I've personally been through five updates with WP and have yet to encounter this issue. But, the potential probably exists there as well. I believe WP has better support simply because they don't offer a pay version. In other words, they support all customers the same, while DNN has to cater to their paying customers first.

The one thing I seem to find consistently is that WP is easier to use than DNN. It seems that even people who use DNN say that they found WP easier to use and learn.

WP has a very, very simple user interface. And, with a small knowledge of PHP and/or CSS you can do a lot of customization. Having that ability is nice, but if you're unfamiliar with PHP/CSS then you won't be able to do as much, which is a big drawback.

A lot of users say DNN is better if you're running an ecommerce site or if you're a developer. If you're posting and publishing content, it seems WP is superior because it's easy to use, many developers say.

### **Section 5.4 - Final Thoughts**

At the end of the day, both DNN and Wordpress will help us achieve our goal of a re-designed, more-professional site. Both have advantages over each other and both have disadvantages to each other.

Having worked in both platforms (though I am not as familiar with DNN), I find WP is much easier to use and learn for. It feels cleaner than DNN, and a new user using it would be much more comfortable with WP because it is much more intuitive than DNN's admin interface. But, of course, these are just my opinions.

There's a lot I don't know about SW.org's backend or servers, and that information is crucial when determining whether or not to move the site. So, ultimately, someone with that knowledge should look at what I present here and make a decision based on the complete picture of the structure of the site and planned changes.