

Alfresco Case Study: FOX

As one of the nation's four largest and most influential television programmers, Fox Broadcasting Company (FOX) is a major player in the media and entertainment business. FOX's Web site, FOX.com, is a central destination for television viewers for content and a significant amount of video on its popular primetime FOX shows such as House, Bones, Fringe, The Simpsons, and Family Guy.

Business/technical Challenge

David Maharaj, Vice President of Technology at FOX.com described their pre-Alfresco implementation as a "Frankenstein monster" that comprised a disparate stack of technologies. In addition, the system lacked a code repository and web content management. Editorial changes to content in this architecture was a lengthy and woefully inefficient process.

Content authoring required a complex choreography among content authors, producers and a very resource-constrained engineering team in order to create or modify virtually all content no matter how minor that change may be. This hours-long process was further compounded by the fact that every FOX show has its own "microsite", each requiring regular updates to content such as character profiles, episode guides, videos and news.

Mr. Maharaj's goal and vision was therefore to design and implement a new, cleaner architecture that employed a consolidated technology stack, leveraged open source technologies and streamlined the content authoring process so that producers could manage the different sites without requiring engineering involvement. Selecting the WCM that fit the needs best was an important foundation to the entire system.

Why Alfresco was Chosen

The company undertook an evaluation of commercial and open source WCM products. Alfresco was selected for its out-of-the-box features, open standards architecture, flexibility, scalability and cost-savings. Although Alfresco is a Java-based solution, it's design did not force that FOX adopt an entirely new web development methodology or programming language. This afforded FOX the flexibility to apply a traditional and inexpensive LAMP (Linux, Apache, MySQL, PHP) stack, which went a long way towards simplifying the production architecture. Finally, Alfresco's WCM did not require that FOX undertake a prohibitively expensive migration process, rather they were able to implement a new technology foundation that facilitated the development of new "microsites" while allowing for existing sites to be ported to the new infrastructure over time.

"Our priorities were ease-of-use and programmability, along with straightforward migration of legacy content," said Mr. Maharaj, "In addition, we wanted to have the flexibility for content authors and producers to be able to directly manipulate templates to exponentially speed up the content update process."

Implementing Alfresco WCM offered FOX a solution in which the editorial environment (content creation) was decoupled from the front-end Web servers (content delivery). This was important because it gave FOX the capability to apply different style sheets to the same content and output it in many different formats such as HTML and XML. Pages didn't need to be written in a dynamic language. It facilitated the transport of content between systems so that FOX could, in the future, tie-in a search engine to an XML content data source and be able to query and surface content.



Project Detail/Highlights

Alfresco's solution allowed FOX to incrementally shift the control of content changes from the developers to the show producers and from a manual to an almost completely automatic process. Using Alfresco's WCM capabilities, FOX was able to come up with an easy-to-use model to give its producers the ability to quickly publish and create and manage content and sites based on templates that were designed and pre-configured in Alfresco.

As an example, the FOX.com home page normally required 2-3 hours per day (over 8 hours per week) to update. By applying an iterative development methodology, the team began to consistently reduce the amount of time required for such updates until arriving at a more manageable 15-20 minute process each day. FOX has also implemented workflows for content review and approval and once complete the content is automatically delivered and published to the Web site.

"We needed to remove the dependency on the Engineering team to manage content and enable the site producers to directly control the process themselves. With Alfresco, the producers can edit show content at any time, preview for correctness and schedule for publishing without needing an engineer-in-the-middle. Engineering could then focus on building web sites."

Alfresco's decoupled approach to WCM meant that FOX's authoring environment, where Alfresco resides and the production Web environment, could be kept separated while still running on an 100% open source LAMP stack. As Alfresco can support multiple delivery languages, FOX is able to run a PHP web application and use Alfresco to deliver that content.

Benefits of Using Alfresco

As a result of the Alfresco implementation, FOX was able to more efficiently and cost-effectively manage its Web site content. In particular, FOX was able to:

- Consolidate and simplify the technical architecture built on a 100% open source stack
- Ensure scalability from both an authoring and performance perspective;
- Achieve substantial cost savings
- Apply common templates and assets to maximize re-use where applicable
- Improve ease-of-use and productivity by enabling producers to make content changes directly and dramatically speed the time to publish new content
- Reduce reliance on engineering resources so they can focus on maintaining and improving the underlying infrastructure for its Web site

"We are very happy with Alfresco. It met our requirements from a financial, architectural and feature perspective. With its open architecture, we were able to obtain significant value from our WCM solution to our company."



Alfresco Software Inc.
Executive Suites, 2975 W
Executive Pkwy, Ste 174
Lehi, UT 84043, USA
Telephone: 877-238-4651

Alfresco Software, The Place,
Bridge Avenue, Maidenhead,
Berkshire, UK
Telephone: +44 1628 876 500
Fax: +44 1628 876 501

info@alfresco.com
www.alfresco.com

Fox1109