



# The Open Government Directive and Open Source Social Publishing

How Drupal Empowers Citizen Participation Through Online Innovation

## The Open Government Directive

From the day he took office, President Barack Obama made it absolutely clear that he would lead major change in how the agencies, departments and offices of his administration would interact with the citizens whom they serve.

“My Administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government... Public engagement enhances the Government’s effectiveness and improves the quality of its decisions... Executive departments and agencies should offer Americans increased opportunities to participate in policymaking and to provide their Government with the benefits of their collective expertise and information.”<sup>1</sup>

1 President Barack Obama, “Memorandum on Transparency,” January 2009.

He articulated three principles to heads of his executive departments and agencies, and directed them to implement accordingly. The principles are:

1. **Transparency:** “Transparency promotes accountability.”
2. **Participation:** “Public engagement enhances the Government’s effectiveness and improves the quality of its decisions.”
3. **Collaboration:** “Collaboration actively engages Americans in the work of their Government.”

President Obama clearly saw the Internet and the government’s websites as one of the first places to focus attention. And the President has set an example for his senior staff by mandating the overhaul of [whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov) in order to align with the Open Government Directive (OGD).

The explicit purpose of the OGD is to improve citizen interaction and engagement. Realizing the intentions behind the directive will require significant website innovation for many departments and agencies. Many public sector sites today are based on legacy, static web technologies. What content is available is often out of date, and citizens have limited, if any, ability to interact<sup>2</sup>.

Some sites have chosen proprietary web content management products to improve publishing productivity – addressing the transparency principle – but few are “state of the art” with regard to social interactivity (participation and collaboration).

Achieving this mandated interactivity with citizens will require new and existing government sites to implement *social publishing* capabilities – because participation and collaboration can only happen if citizens can share both their feedback on actions taken by their government, and contribute their own ideas to the process.

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2 <http://www.commerce.gov>

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## Containing the Costs of Implementing the OGD

Only five years ago, a mandate to overhaul the website infrastructure of the entire executive branch of government would have sent shivers through the bodies of agency CIOs.

The same mandate would have had proprietary software vendors' federal sales teams giving "high fives" all around.

Why?

Because back then the license and maintenance costs, plus the professional services fees would have amounted to budget-busters for the CIOs, and career-makers for the software vendors.

Today, however, there is a solution which allows agency CIOs to sleep at night. This solution threatens the livelihoods of those once-giddy proprietary software reps, but it is *very much* in keeping with the spirit of the Open Government Directive.

## Open Source Social Publishing

Open Source products are the result of global collaboration by thousands of technologists to create solutions, which will be made freely available to anyone who wishes to use them. They are the very essence of transparency, participation, and collaboration.

The Drupal Open Source project, for example, has (at this writing) 611,000 members. The software has been downloaded 2,500,000 times. It is approaching its seventh major release. The technology is the power behind over 400,000 websites – including [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov).

Successful Open Source projects, like Drupal, spur the formation of entire industries to meet the service and support requirements of its users, and to drive rapid evolution and innovation in the Drupal platform. Acquia is the premier provider of enterprise-class support for Drupal users. Acquia ensures that Drupal deployments proceed smoothly and swiftly by providing technical expertise from

Drupal experts through its Acquia Network offering. Acquia also offers Acquia Drupal, a distribution that accelerates time to market of new social websites, and remote administration and hosting options to address a wide variety of customer deployment requirements.

Beyond Acquia, partners specializing in web development, system integration, graphic and user interface design – over 130 at this writing – are also ready to bring those skills to Drupal projects as they are needed.

The learning and contribution of each member of the Drupal community feeds the growth and expansion of the community overall – driving a rigorous cycle of continuous innovation.

Twitter was launched on March 31, 2006. By January 26, 2007, a Twitter module for Drupal was available for distribution. This example demonstrates the speed, flexibility and recognition of innovation indicative of Open Source communities – attributes that simply cannot be matched by proprietary product development.

## Proprietary Products: Slow to Acquire, Slower to Innovate

In today's environment, government leaders want to announce new initiatives often, and have a complete, highly interactive site to support that initiative ready to roll out to citizens immediately. Lengthy bidding cycles and procurement processes are antithetical to the spirit and vision of the OGD. So, too, would be the choice of technology which cannot support flexible and swift expansion, and keep pace with a high rate of innovation and change.

With traditional proprietary software products, such as ERP or Content Management solutions, license and maintenance fees for large public sector projects can demand substantial taxpayer dollars. Projects with taxpayer costs of that magnitude trigger government procurement processes and drawn-out, complex bidding cycles that can last months or even years.

Furthermore, proprietary vendors eventually struggle to keep pace with expanding product requirements from demanding customers. Their limited

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**Proprietary vendors struggle to keep pace with expanding product requirements. Limited resources force trade-offs that leave customers' demands unmet.**

resources (when contrasted with established Open Source projects) force trade-offs that inevitably leave certain customers' demands unmet.

Such firms have periods of success, but more often than not they falter, and are ultimately overtaken by market behemoths such as Oracle, Microsoft, and IBM. Plans are announced which translate into either a forced migration to a new technology, or the gradual death of their investment through post-acquisition neglect.

**Open Source offers a reliable platform for agile development, free of the lock-in typical of proprietary vendor technologies.**

## The US Department of Defense on Open Source

In October, 2009, David M. Wennergren, Department of Defense CIO, issued a memorandum entitled "Clarifying Guidance Regarding Open Source Software:"

1. "Continuous and broad peer-review enabled by publicly available source code supports software reliability and security efforts"
2. "The unrestricted ability to modify software source code enables the Department to respond more rapidly to changing situations, missions, and future threats"
3. "Reliance on a particular software developer or vendor for proprietary restrictions may be reduced by the use of OSS"

The memorandum goes on to outline additional benefits to Open Source, including cost and deployment flexibility aspects.<sup>3</sup>

It appears that an Open Source option for social publishing is safe and secure – even in the view of the most safety and security-minded agency in the public sector. Summarizing his findings, Open Source offers a reliable platform, for agile development, free of the lock-in typical of proprietary vendor technologies.

<sup>3</sup> "Clarifying Guidance Regarding Open Source Software," David M. Wennergren, ASD(NII)/DoD CIO, October 16, 2009

# Ten Reasons to Select Acquia Drupal for Open Source Social Publishing

Open Source solutions eliminate license and maintenance cost elements completely. Drupal is backed by a large, growing, and passionate community, which drive capabilities forward in line with market needs. Open Source in general, and Drupal in particular, therefore present a compelling option, especially in today's economic environment. Circumventing this cost and procurement bureaucracy means Open Source projects can be initiated immediately. And if the right platform is selected, those sites can be built, tested and deployed in keeping with the principles of the OGD.

Here are ten key factors supporting the claim that Drupal is the strongest choice for Open Source social publishing, and for meeting the challenge of the OGD:

## **Rapid Website Assembly**

Build internal and external-facing websites in a matter of hours, with minimal custom programming. Interactive sites supporting new agency or department initiatives *can* be launched simultaneously with program launch announcements.

## **Thousands of Add-on Modules**

With more than 4,400 contributed modules, the vast majority of your site's requirements can be addressed with Drupal core and available add-on modules. Focus your efforts on building great websites, not re-creating well understood features available elsewhere.

## **Modular, Extensible Architecture**

Drupal's PHP architecture is designed for extensibility - offering your developers the freedom to address a wide range of site requirements. Create custom content types, views and user experiences to increase engagement across your web properties. Drupal sites can be easily integrated with enterprise applications, authentication and data systems.

## **Social Publishing Infrastructure**

Drupal provides a unified technical foundation for a broad range of collaboration patterns including public affairs, transparency, data mash-ups, intranets, and directories, simplifying training and adoption for people using the system.

## **Powerful UI Customization Options**

Drupal's presentation layer allows designers to create highly usable, interactive experiences that engage users and increase traffic. Drupal themes can range from simple to complex, support rich customization without requiring Dreamweaver or custom HTML and can be deployed to different sites on a multi-site network.

## **Multi-site Network Management**

Employ a single codebase for multiple websites, enabling administrators to centrally maintain and upgrade code while serving similar or different content to different websites on different domains. Streamline site management while delivering a broad palette of social publishing capabilities to your users.

## **Thriving Development Community**

With more than 700 contributors to the Drupal 6 release and 4,400 contributed modules, the Drupal developer community is very active and growing rapidly. This community drives the innovation that makes Drupal the preferred social publishing choice for web developers and site owners.

## **Zero Software Acquisition Cost**

Stop wasting valuable dollars on proprietary software licensing costs, which often result in unproductive, expensive vendor audit and compliance programs to meet onerous licensing rules. Acquia's Drupal distributions will be available to you at zero cost, saving money and freeing you to invest in value-added services that benefit your unique deployment requirements.

## **Cross-platform Web Stack**

Drupal takes advantage of the scalable, secure and proven LAMP and Windows stack of Open Source technologies - GNU/Linux, Apache, MySQL, and PHP or

Windows MySQL, IIS, and PHP. Your web developers can access the source code, simplifying development processes and offering unrivaled flexibility.

## Proven Security Track Record

With a large, thriving developer community and thousands of sites with years of use, Drupal offers a mature, stable set of security capabilities for authentication, authorization, and protection against security threats. The Drupal community takes security seriously and marshals its vast resources against new threats in real time.

Drupal offers all of these capabilities in a unified social publishing platform. Free of license fees, supported by a massive global community, and with skilled professionals available in plentiful supply. Proprietary alternatives rarely, if ever, offer the functional breadth, are unable to compete with the mass and momentum of the Drupal community, and the personnel costs associated with skilled services are on average 25 to 30% higher than Drupal-skilled staff<sup>4</sup>.

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## Drupal Beyond US Federal Government

Though Drupal has been selected for highly visible projects in the US Federal government, the platform has been used at the State and local level, and in public sector projects on all continents.

The New York State Senate has adopted Drupal, allowing each State Senator to create a highly interactive website for enhancing constituent services.

Innovate.direct.gov.uk is a Drupal site designed to build community between technologists and the government to identify innovative uses of technology and to showcase “citizen focused app[lication]s.”

The official citizens’ portal of France is built on Drupal. The Belgian and Australian Prime Ministers websites are on Drupal. So are dozens of public agencies in all three of those national governments.<sup>5</sup>

There’s a pattern here.

<sup>4</sup> See TCO for Open Source Social Publishing: Going Beyond Social Business Software, Acquia

<sup>5</sup> For a list of Drupal sites in Government, visit <http://groups.drupal.org/node/19885>.

## Drupal: the Obvious Choice for Public Sector Social Publishing

The mood in the public sector now is to transform citizen perception of government by adhering to the principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration across the executive branch of government. Clearly this spirit extends to the State level in the United States, and is inspiring government agencies and leaders around the world to overhaul their online presence to improve citizen interaction.

There's another mood in the public sector, too. Cost and budget-sensitivity has brought heightened scrutiny to massive, multi-year, high-cost IT projects in government.

Open Source technologies have emerged as a highly credible alternative, particularly where time-to-market and innovation requirements are high. Where those projects are focused on improving citizen interaction and participation in government – Open Source social publishing technologies can offer a clear solution.

Whitehouse.gov is sharing several demonstrations of its results of working with Drupal, including:

1. Demonstrating transparency through the **IT Dashboard**:  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/open/innovations/it-dashboard>
2. Inviting participation through the **Open for Questions**:  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/open/innovations/OpenforQuestions>
3. Fostering the power of collaboration through the **Development 2.0 Challenge**:  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/open/innovations/Development-2-point-0-Challenge/>

Drupal is the clear global leader in Open Source social publishing. Government leaders and public sector agencies around the world have already voted. Exercise your right to bring transparency, participation, and collaboration to your public sector project – choose Drupal.

## About Acquia

Acquia is a commercial Open Source software company providing products, services, and technical support for the Open Source Drupal social publishing system.

With over two and one half million downloads since inception, Drupal is used by web developers worldwide to build sophisticated community websites. Diverse organizations use Drupal as their core social publishing system for external facing websites and internal collaboration applications.

As a member of the global Drupal community, Acquia helps accelerate Drupal usage by contributing to the advancement of the core technology and offering products, services and technical support to simplify the deployment and management of Drupal websites.

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