

Week 9 Discussion #2

Examine some popular e-commerce sites and try to determine on which standards they're based. Are those standards linked to the sites (lack of) reliability? (The clues are in the URLs, which contain embedded links to application components and usually follow standard naming conventions).

A well-designed e-commerce or other professional site does well to hide its architecture from the public. I cannot determine anything from investigating the URLs of sites like Amazon.com, Buy.com, and Walmart.com hide their file extensions with URL-masking, which also makes links to parts of their sites easier to remember (Bontrager, 2009).

For instance, the open-source blogging software, Wordpress, runs on PHP and a MySQL database, which we can see from looking at the source code and architecture (Wordpress, 2009); however, when we go to wordpress.org or wordpress.com, the filenames being accessed are hidden using URL-masking, where the URL for a file looks like a subdirectory, but the server knows that when someone accesses that subdirectory on the server that it is supposed to access a server-side script of the appropriate name. The open-source software that runs Wikipedia, MediaWiki, also runs PHP with MySQL (MediaWiki, 2009); however, Wikipedia also masks its URLs so the ".php" extension is not visible.

Interestingly enough, Microsoft and PHP, I expect purposefully, make no attempt at URL masking. Instead, when I access a link on Microsoft's site, the "default.aspx" is clearly visible, despite the fact that most e-commerce sites would want to avoid cluttering their URLs with what is the default file accessed in the server settings, and therefore usually hidden from visitors. PHP.net does not display the "index.php" part of their URL, but every other page on their site proudly displays the ".php" file extension.

I was able to learn that Barnesandnoble.com uses ASP, because they do not hide even their default index files, which are "index.asp." When I access links on their site, I can see their query strings, which are the series of characters following the "?" in the URL. Some sites that fail to properly secure their content can accidentally expose their content to visitors who figure out their query string strategy.

As these are all reliable sites, Wikipedia, Amazon, Wordpress, BarnesandNobel, and WalMart, their choice of architecture has little to do with their services. Coldfusion, ASP, .NET, PHP, or JSP can all run stable, enterprise application systems. Google, which uses Linux running a variety of languages (Hoff, 2008), has had two recent embarrassments (Beaumont, 2009), so it's all in how the application is implemented.

Claudine Beaumont, *Google Gmail crash 'fixed'*, The Telegraph, Feb 2009. Retrieved from telegraph.co.uk on Mar 10, 2009 at:

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