

Case Study: McGraw-Hill/Glencoe Current Events  
<http://events.glencoe.com>

### 1. The Situation.

In today's web-centric world, textbook publisher McGraw-Hill often supplements their printed materials with online tools and information. The Glencoe division of McGraw-Hill, responsible for Social Studies materials, has for sometime provided a microsite directed to elementary, middle, and high school student pertaining to current events. Web affords them the ability to have the up-to-date information that a textbook simply cannot, a great way to add value for their customers.

At the end of 2008 Glencoe made the decision to retire their old current events site. The main reason they cited for deciding to do so was difficulty to update. Updates to the old site could not be preformed by the on-staff content writers. Rather, they had to go through technically skilled individuals in charge of maintaining the site. Due both to time and cost of an update they could only manage two updates per year in what was already an expensive system. Not the best way to keep content accurate for a current events driven site.

### 2. What they needed.

In the fall of 2008, McGraw-Hill/Glencoe sought vendors to provide them with a new current events site that could be managed internally in a cost-effective way.

The following parameters defined what they were looking for in an updated current events site.

- A way for their editorial staff to easily update the content on the site.
- The ability to include audio, video, and images along with the current events articles.
- A way to attach a wide variety of metadata to each article.
- The site to work like an online magazine displaying the newest articles first and archiving the old ones.
- The site to include three different skins, each for a different grade level audience.
- The site to be housed on McGraw-Hill servers.

We were brought to the table by our local partner Sync Creative ([www.synccreative.com](http://www.synccreative.com)) to provide web strategy and web development on the site.

### 3. What we did

Despite the fact that they were seeking vendors to build a custom-designed CMS tool from scratch, we recommended WordPress. We sat down and went through the list of parameters a couple of times. The RFP screamed WordPress, so, we developed a proposal based on implementing the latest version from WordPress.org.

It certainly took some convincing. We were faced with the basic uneasiness of using open

source. There seems to be a general stigma surrounding open source software, that it's not stable and secure enough for enterprise. We responded by offering the facts regarding the number of people using WordPress and the history of the project and security. We informed them that WordPress can be installed on in-house servers, and it takes a single click to update to latest version or grab any security patches. Plus, we demonstrated that The New York Times, CNN, Ford, The NFL, and Yahoo all use WordPress.

We installed WordPress on a McGraw-Hill server and, working with our partner Sync Creative, we built Glencoe a custom theme for their new Current Events site. The theme included various ways of displaying and featuring posts, ways of attaching not only metadata but also images and video to a particular post, and the use of many interactive plugins.

Finally, we developed technical documentation and offered on-site training on how to use WordPress along with their custom theme. They were off and running armed with the ability to update their new site in real-time.

#### 4. The Result

The project was a success launching on January 20th, just in time for the inauguration. After the initial training session, the McGraw-Hill editorial staff has been soaring on WordPress updating the site's content regularly. Over the past three months they have posted 24 current events articles and more than 30 pages of supplemental content thus meeting their success criteria which were as follows:

- higher frequency of updates,
- updates handled by editorial staff,
- low cost of update.

But, what's also important is the fact that they did not break their bank to build the system. Certainly we could have custom built the system to their exact specification and company workflow, but the architecture, planning, and implementation would have cost many times what we spent on a WordPress install. Sure, there is still plenty of costs in strategy, theme design, project management and customization of WordPress, but we no doubt realized significant savings in timeline and in budget because we were working with an established code-base.

Beyond that, our implementation has earned some recognition. In a March 21 article, the New York Times discussed the site and its regular content updates as providing immediate value to students for information on Obama's Inauguration.