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2012 Review of Thomson Reuters' Web Builder CS, Powered by Emochila

Dustin Wheeler • Jul. 27, 2012

Thomson Reuters — Web Builder CS, Powered by Emochila

CS.ThomsonReuters.com/web-builder

Best Fit: Tax and accounting firms that either want a customized design or want to build a site based on a template. Since the product is owned by Thomson Reuters and contains a template for a client login page to NetClient CS, as well as a basic file exchange portal and integration with NetClient CS, it could be considered by firms using the CS Professional Suite.

Strengths

- Templates have attractive designs, and it is easy to switch between templates.
- The tax tools, news, and financial guides provide plenty of helpful information and resources for website visitors.
- Easy interface within the administration page for managing a site's page structure and menus.
- Online appointment requests, referral submission forms, and client testimonial collection tools.
- Technical support and website edits (except custom design changes) are included in the monthly service fee, so firms don't need to learn the back-end administrative tools.

Potential Limitations

- Built-in blogging system is proprietary. While it is simple and easy to use, it does not contain advanced features of other blogging software (such as WordPress). However, third-party blogging platforms can be integrated.
- No mechanism to prevent webform spamming, but firms must approve testimonials before they are posted.

Since 2003, Emochila has been one of the leading website builder service providers to tax and accounting firms. On December 9, 2011, the Tax & Accounting business unit of Thomson Reuters acquired Emochila. Not to be confused with Thomson Reuters' previous website builder software, the current product offered is known as Thomson Reuters Web Builder CS, Powered by Emochila (however, throughout this review, I will refer to it as simply "Web Builder CS"). Since it is built on the Emochila platform, it is completely different than the former Thomson system.

Web Builder CS has client firms with both hands-on and hands-off approaches to their websites. For the "hands-off" firms, custom website design services are provided for an additional fee. Firms can contact the technical support team to handle minor edits (such as text changes), which are included in the monthly service fee.

Though only about 29 different templates are offered, they are very distinctive. Some have large images for the home page while others have more text. Users can easily switch templates by clicking on a thumbnail image. Compared to its competitors, Web Builder CS has one of the easier interfaces for managing the page structure (creating a splash page, adding subpages, reordering submenus, etc). For editing page content, both a WYSIWYG editor is available with an interface similar to a word processor and an html code editor is provided for advanced users.

Technical support is available both by phone and e-mail, and an online knowledgebase can answer many frequently asked questions. Thomson Reuters also offers the ARNE Community, an online peer-to-peer support system through which professionals can share tips and advice on all products in the CS Professional Suite.

Search Engines

On-page search engine optimization is included in the monthly fee. Within the settings, users can change the website's name, title, meta keywords and meta description. There is also an area within the administration page to enter a tracking code for Google Analytics. Additional search engine optimization is also available.

Domains

The client firm always maintains ownership of its domain. Firms can maintain the DNS records for the domain if they wish, or Web Builder CS is happy to handle it for them.

Hosting

The main servers are in a San Francisco facility monitored 24 hours a day with triple-threat lockdown security, and checked hourly for temperature, humidity, and optimal running conditions. The data is mirrored at a second facility in Las Vegas with the same specifications. Both data centers are SAS 70 certified, and administration is done over SSL. Web Builder CS offers client portals that are 256-bit SSL encrypted.

Email

Web Builder CS offers up to ten e-mail addresses for the firm's domain with 7 GB of storage each. However, firms using Web Builder CS to host a site aren't required to use the e-mail service and can maintain their own Exchange or other server.

Newsletter Marketing & Content

Web Builder CS features both a monthly newsletter and a daily news feed. Web Builder CS automatically publishes the newsletter monthly on its firms' websites and automatically sends the newsletter to all of their clients via e-mail. The e-mail newsletter uses each firm's header and colors so that the branding matches. Firms can also use their own generated content for the newsletters. Firms can create and manage mailing lists within the program.

Other Features

Web Builder CS includes a proprietary blogging software built into the application. Simple and easy to use, the blogging interface contains options for categorizing posts, formatting text, adding images, and choosing an author name. However, it does not contain features that writers experienced with other blogging software may be used to, such as saving drafts, adding tags, and setting later dates for posts to go live. Web Builder CS users can link to social profiles, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Yelp. Firms using the blog software can automatically populate blog posts to any and all social media platforms.

Unique to its competitors, Web Builder CS offers page templates for testimonials and referrals. After a website visitor fills out a testimonial or referral, the administration page collects the information entered and allows firms to have the information sent to an e-mail address. Firms must approve testimonials before they are posted.

Summary & Pricing

It will be interesting to see the Enochila platform develop as it further integrates with the Thomson Reuters CS Professional Suite. Its combination of solid web design, marketing tools, and user friendly interface helps thousands of tax and accounting firms build an online presence. Pricing starts at \$70 per month, which covers the hosting, content, features and support. There is no up-front setup cost, and the template designs are free. Custom design work ranges from \$500 for a logo, \$1,250 for a custom designed site, and \$2,000 for a fully animated designed site. Interested users can try the product free for 30 days.

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