Joomla!

(templates)

Angie Radtke

Joomla!® Templates

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Joomla!® Templates

Angie Radtke

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A Message from Open Source Matters

Since Joomla! launched in September 2005, it has grown to become one of the most popular content management systems in the world. As this book goes to press in July 2012, Joomla! has been downloaded over 32,000,000 times and provides support for 64 different languages. Joomla! has received multiple awards, and estimates indicate that approximately 2.8% of all Internet Web sites are using Joomla!.

The key to Joomla!'s success has always been the help and contributions freely given by a large and diverse group of volunteers from all over the world. The Joomla! project isn't backed by venture capital firms, and it isn't led by a single individual or corporation. It is volunteers who write the code and then test it, translate it, document it, support it, extend it, promote it, and share it.

Volunteers are also continually planning and organizing events all over the world where people come together to learn, connect, and share about Joomla!. These events include hundreds of local user groups, as well as national and international conferences. The first Joomla! World Conference will take place in November 2012 in San Jose, California (go to *http://conference.joomla.org* for more information).

Work is underway on many improvements and new ideas aimed at keeping Joomla! on a path of continued growth and innovation. Our community is open to all. If the idea of working alongside a diverse group of bright and passionate volunteers from all over the world who are helping to make Joomla! better sounds fun and rewarding to you, then I invite you to join us. To learn more, please go to *http://www.joomla.org*.

Best regards,

Paul Orwig
President, Open Source Matters

Open Source Matters is the nonprofit organization that provides legal, financial, and organizational support for the Joomla! project.

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Introduction

Joomla! is one of the best known Open Source content management systems with many hundreds of thousands of applications in the most varied areas of use. It offers the best possible conditions for implementing a comprehensive and accessible Web presence. Thousands of extensions for almost any purpose are freely available. The developer and user community is huge. On the Internet you can find many different platforms for exchanging information with other users and developers. That's an advantage you should not underestimate! But a Web site without individual design is inconceivable. After all, it's not just the content that makes a Web site truly unique; above all, it's the individual design. This design is the job of the Joomla! templates. In addition to the design aspect, they are also responsible for structuring the content. They create the framework and are basically a template for the content. So they control not only what something looks like but also where the content is located within the document. Joomla! template designers are responsible not only for the design but also for the architecture of the information. When designing a Web site, you need to take into account all requirements of the client as well as the expectations of the visitors.

A small, but important part of these requirements is accessibility. With Joomla!, it's really easy to create accessible Web pages.

To develop Joomla! templates, you need some knowledge of different areas of Web technology, much of which has little to do with Joomla! itself. In our time of increasingly manifold technical possibilities, it is difficult to be an expert in all available Web technologies, so we tend to specialize in certain areas. For instance, you have the front-end developer who knows all there is to know about HTML and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), the designer who can use Photoshop with all its functions, the PHP specialist, and the JavaScript expert. To develop Joomla! templates, you need some of all this specialized knowledge.

Why This Book Is Unique

This book does not replace a specialized reference work on usability, CSS design, information architecture, PHP, JavaScript, accessibility, or HTML5, but it discusses certain aspects of these topics and others. The aim of this book is to give you the required basic knowledge you need to develop Joomla! templates.

I offer you a readily comprehensible guide that makes it easier for Web designers and programmers to develop their own Joomla! template by working through practical examples. All topics mentioned in this book are condensed to their essence, which was

particularly hard to achieve because I could easily have written whole books on each topic. I hope I succeeded and that you find my book helpful.

How This Book Is Organized

My first aim is to show you how Joomla! templates are constructed and how you can create an accessible, standards-compliant template by using the technical possibilities offered by Joomla! in combination with the most modern forms of technology.

In the opening chapters of the book, you will find general basic information on the individual Web technologies, comments on design, and a list of helpful tools. In principle, the things I describe in this part are the basic requirements you need to build a template in the first place. They are meant to help you get started with these topics. If you are a Web designer, you will probably already be familiar with most of the information contained in this part. In that case, you can move straight on to the second part.

The subsequent chapters discuss the technical background of constructing templates. Using concrete examples, I show you the technical options and internal interrelations.

The final chapters are more practical and presented in the form of a workshop. I demonstrate how to turn a template created in Photoshop to a Joomla! template, step by step.

As happens with any vigorous, ongoing project, Joomla! is always evolving. This book contains the most recent information available at the time of publication but see *informIT.com/title/0321827317* for bonus chapters on future releases.

What You Need to Know Before Using This Book

This book is not a "click instruction" but aims to explain contexts and encourage working independently. It is not a CSS book either, although CSS is an important component in building your Joomla! template and is discussed frequently. Photoshop, JavaScript, and PHP are also important tools for your Web design. This book doesn't provide tutorials on these tools, so you may find it helpful to consult textbooks on these topics.

When you start reading this book, keep these hints in mind.

- As an Open Source project, Joomla! is subject to constant changes. In some chapters I refer to code by specific line numbers. It may well be that these lines move about a bit during the development, because code sections are inserted or removed. I added the references anyway to help you get close to the right place. So if you look something up and it's not on the specified line number, please just look a bit above or below it.

  The potential changes that affect the line references usually result from new features being integrated or old ones removed in different Joomla! versions. Most of what I describe here should apply to older versions as well, and major changes are not expected in the newer versions. But please do not be surprised if there are some slight differences.

- To get the most out of the book, you should install Joomla! (with the sample data that comes with it) onto a Web server. You need to have full access to the file system. The best option is to install a local Web server on your computer, such as XAMPP (*www.apachefriends.org/en/xampp.html*). This is especially important by the time you get to Chapter 8, "Now for the Details: A First Look at Templates."
- You will also find it very helpful if you can work with Firefox and install the extension Firebug, which will make your work much easier. You can find out what Firebug is and where to get it when you get to Chapter 7, "Tools."

Joomla! templates is a wide topic. I have tried very hard to cover all the important points in sufficient detail, but I may have missed something. If you do notice anything, I would be grateful if you could get in touch. Just e-mail me at a.radtke@derauftritt.de.

I hope you have fun reading and working your way through this book!

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Acknowledgments

In 2010, Joomla! was at the center of my creative activities. I spent much time using—and greatly enjoying—Joomla!. Working with the templates and the default output has helped me both professionally and personally. I have learned so much and am happy with the outcome of my work. This book was created as a result of it.

Those people with whom I spent a large amount of my time chatting on Skype were also involved. We worked out concepts, made plans, and contrived specific solutions. This includes the always prepared Jean-Marie Simonet, whose commitment I can only admire. Then there is Andrea Tarr, who turned out to be a fellow campaigner for accessibility. There is also Elin Waring, who never seems to sleep. My gratitude goes to Mark Dexter, who always remains calm, and Bill Richardson, the good spirit of bug tracking, who sometimes had to test my patches twice. And I should not forget to mention my "rubber ducky," Sam Moffat, who was able to solve my problems just by listening to me (maybe he has magic powers?). I also owe thanks to Mahmood and Ofer, who took care of the RTL-CSS of the templates, and to Henk van Cann for listening, to Ian MacLennan, Andrew Eddy, Louis Landry, Jennifer Marriott, and many others.

Special thanks to my colleague and friend Michael Charlier, who supported me with many helpful tips and important advice. I would also particularly like to thank my friend Biggi Mestmäcker for having the *patience of a saint, for providing the linguistic fine polish, and for the fact that she still answers the phone when I call*. Also I would like to thank the editor of the German edition, Boris Karnikowski, for his encouraging words and his trust in me.

I am very happy that my book has also been translated into English and would like to thank the U.S. team at Pearson for their wonderful work. Special thanks are due to Almut Dworak, the translator, whose valuable feedback has certainly helped improve this edition significantly.

But my biggest thanks go to my family. I am very grateful to my husband, Markus Kummer, for having strong nerves and quietly suffering my temper. I would like to apologize to my daughters, Malou and Joelle, for not listening to them and sometimes not being quite sure what I just agreed to. And last but not least, I want to thank my parents-in-law, who always made sure that I also got a bit of the Sunday roast.

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About the Author

Angie Radtke, along with her colleagues at her communications agency, Der Auftritt (*www.der-auftritt.de*),has been conceiving, designing, and implementing targeted communications solutions since 1999, primarily in the areas of Internet and print. She specializes in marketing-oriented, accessible Web presences and tends to use the open source content management system Joomla!, depending on the customer's wishes.

Appealing design, accessibility, and use of a content management system are not mutually exclusive, and therein lies the basis of Radtke's work. She invests a lot of time and energy in further developing Joomla!. Radtke was actively involved in promoting accessibility in the previous version, Mambo, and her dedication continues today. She developed the two default templates, Beez 2.0 and Beez 5, and she sees herself as an interface between Joomla!'s program logic and its actual output of contents.

Radtke is increasingly involved in passing on her knowledge to others—for example, in training sessions, presentations, and workshops on Joomla! and through accessible Web design. In 2006, she and coauthor Michael Charlier published *Barrierefreies Webdesign: Zugängliche Websites attraktiv gestalten* (München: Addison-Wesley), a book on designing attractive, accessible Web sites.

Angie Radtke is married, has two children, and lives in Bonn, Germany.

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Now for the Details: A First Look at Templates

You are using Joomla! now and would like to know more about its template functions. This chapter gives you an overview of the structure of the templates—knowledge that will help you develop your own individualized template based on the default templates.

Templates determine the general structure of a page. Apart from the design, they determine where the content is within the document, where and when certain modules are shown or hidden, whether to use your own error pages, and which HTML version you should use.

The standard version of Joomla! currently contains three templates for the front end and two for the back end. The frontend templates are two versions of Beez and one Atomic template. In the back end are the standard template Bluestork and the accessible template Hathor by Andrea Tarr. We are going to ignore the backend templates for now.

First and foremost, the frontend templates should be captivating. You can adapt templates according to how you want your Web site to look and feel to the outside world. All templates differ not just in their visual design but also in their range of technical functions. Here is a brief overview of the frontend templates.

Atomic

The focus of the Atomic template is on using the Cascading Style Sheet (CSS) framework Blueprint. Prepared CSS classes help you create complex layouts. If you select this template in the back end and look at the page, it initially seems to have no design. It only appears this way, though, because it is not designed to work with the current sample data. Once you adapt it, you will have a very nice design. More on Atomic a bit later.

beez_20 and beez5

A template usually contains more than you can see at first glance. Apart from the design, it distinguishes itself by how it is implemented in technical terms.

You may be familiar with the Beez template version 1.5. When I created it, I wanted to build a standards-conforming, easily accessible and adaptable template. I chose to use the color purple to make it obvious that you were meant to customize the template to fix your style rather than use it as it was. I hoped that many designers would use the code, modify it creatively, and make it available for free use. I was counting on a multitude of new templates. Sadly, this has not happened. Many users did not understand how to modify the template, and many others did use the code but did not publish their templates.

I made another mistake in not communicating clearly what I had in mind. The output was structured in such a way that almost any design could be achieved with it, simply and without complications. Easy modifications could also be made in the CCS code. I have kept to this principle with each new version of Beez, while making some important changes. There is now more accessible JavaScript. beez5 has a small portion of HTML5, and beez_20 manages without template overrides because the default output has been adapted to the output of the old Beez templates, so overrides are not required.

In beez5 you will find HTML5 code in the overrides.

The Template Manager: Styles

The Template Manager in the back end has the task of managing existing templates in an organized way. It shows you the installed and available frontend and backend templates in a clear list. You can find the template manager in the back end at Extensions → Template Manager.

If you open the Template Manager, you will first notice the selected (in-use) styles of the installed templates, as shown in Figure 8.1. Styles are variations of the same template.

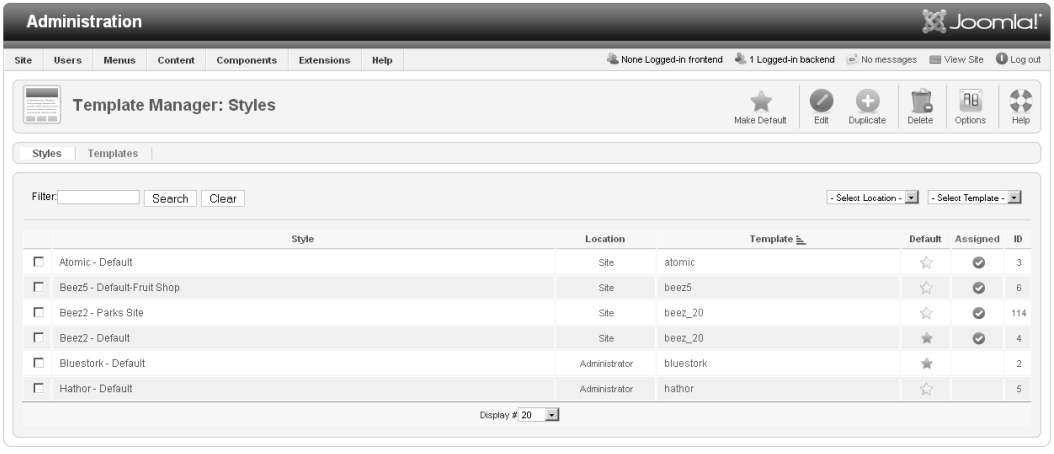

Figure 8.1 Template Manager in the back end

The term *style* is probably confusing for some people. Style here refers to different versions of the same template. These versions may differ in both CSS styling and HTML markup. The use of styles is further explained in Chapter 11, "The XML File and the Template Parameters." But let's get back to the Template Manager.

In addition to viewing the selected styles, you can use the Template Manager to see whether it is a frontend or backend style, which template the selected style relates to, or if it has been assigned to specific page areas. The gold star indicates the selected, and therefore currently active, default style.

By clicking on the checkbox in front of each style and selecting Make Default at the upper right, you can change the default style.

At the top right are also two checkboxes for filtering styles. This function is helpful if you are using many different styles and different templates. The styles can be filtered through the front end or back end or by the template they belong to.

Each template can have different properties, called parameters, that can be configured. By copying a style, you can assign it to different pages or areas with different properties. You can do it both in the Template Manager and via the menu items.

Here is a little example to make things clearer. In the beez_20 template you can choose between two different design variations: *Personal* and *Nature*. Personal is the default display option with the blue header image. Nature is in all green. Both variations differ only in that they use a different CSS file for certain elements of the template.

If you want to use the default variation on some pages and the green version on others, you can do so very easily. You can copy the styles from the Template Manager and save them under a different name.

If you then click on the style beez_20, you will see the image shown in Figure 8.2.

Tip

Creating multilingual content was not yet possible in Joomla! version 1.5. Now, Joomla! offers a small but smart method of managing content even in different languages. The solution offered is not appropriate for all cases. Sites with a lot of content must fall back on external solutions. But for smaller pages, it is a simple and quick solution.

On the right you can see the parameters, here called Advanced Options. The selection of parameters actually constitutes a style. You have a range of selection options. At the bottom under Template color are the styles *Personal* and *Nature*. Here you can make your selection and choose the desired display variation.

Under Details you will find the name of the relevant style. You can choose any name, but you should make sure it's a meaningful title to avoid confusion later. The name will help you distinguish between styles, especially if you are using several copies of a style.

You can also see which template the selected style relates to, which unique ID it has, and whether it should be used only when a certain language is selected.

Below the Details panel you will find the Menus assignment panel. Each menu item is listed there, and the style can be assigned to the relevant menu item by enabling

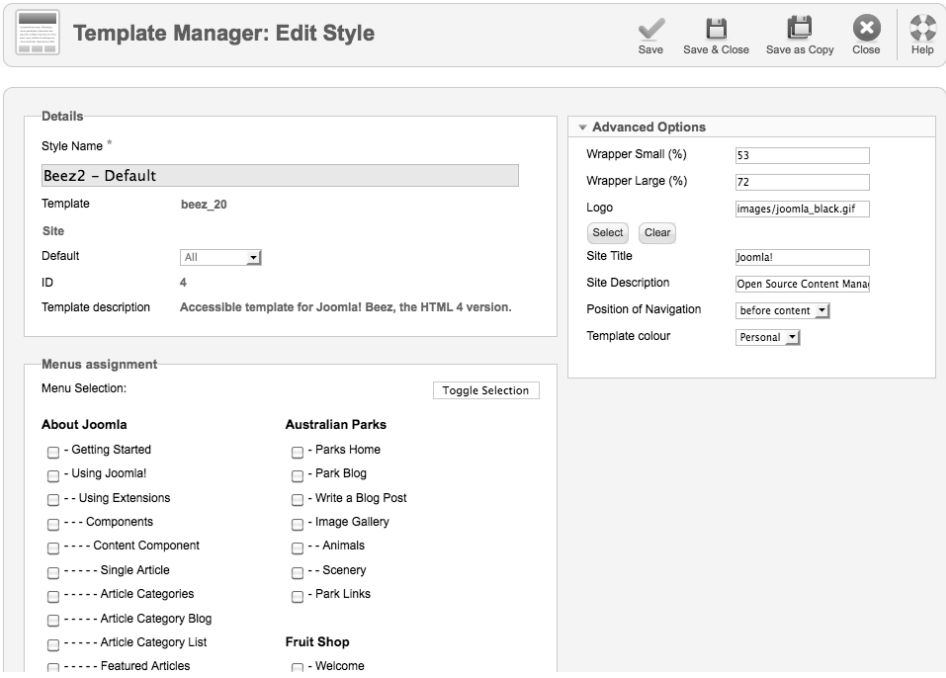

Figure 8.2 Default style beez_20

the corresponding checkbox. By selecting Toggle Selection, you can disable all the checkboxes.

Once you have made your selection, you can save your style by clicking on Save as Copy at the top right. Joomla! automatically creates a copy of the default style with the options you have selected. And that's it!

Here is a summary of all the steps.

1. Select default style.
2. Change title or name of style.
3. Adapt parameters to your preferences.
4. Assign menu items.
5. Save template as copy.

The Template Manager: Templates

If you select the tab Templates in the horizontal navigation, you will get straight to the installed templates, as shown in Figure 8.3. At first glance, this view does not seem very spectacular, but it is clearly a very different picture than in Joomla! version 1.5.

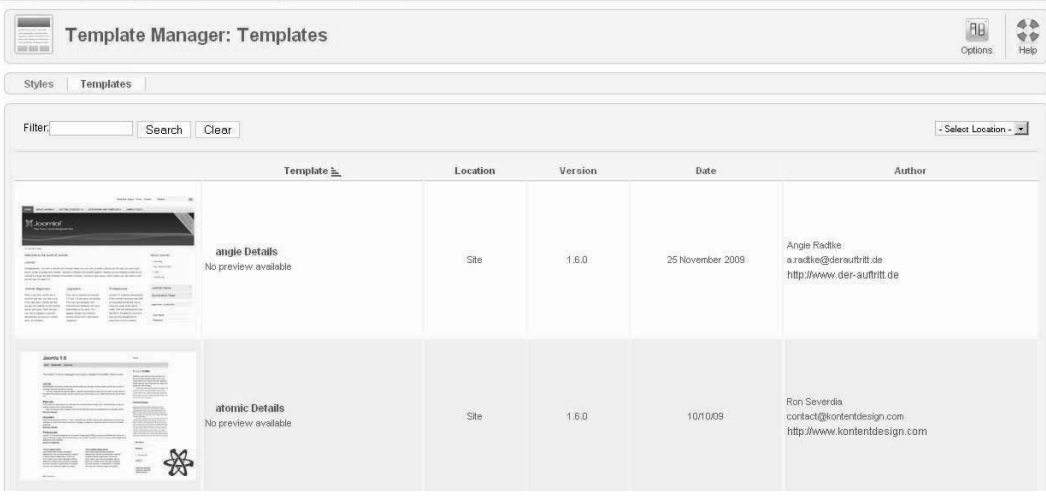

Figure 8.3 Template Manager

The templates are still listed with a screenshot, their name, their location (site for front end or Administrator for back end), their date of creation, and their author. By clicking on the template name, you get to the really interesting information.

The Template Preview

You will notice that under the template name in Figure 8.3 there is a note that says "No preview available." If you have already been working with Joomla!, you know that you can assign modules, which usually output dynamic contents, to certain positions. In the template itself you control where a module should be placed within the document. Its position is then determined by using CSS. The template preview gives you an overview of the position used for the module.

For security reasons, you have the option of enabling or disabling the preview. You can find the Template Options in the top right corner. When you click on the Options icon, you will see the screen shown in Figure 8.4.

Here you can enable the preview function and configure the permissions management. Once you enable the preview function, you will see, as shown in Figure 8.5, that the preview is now available.

Where in Figure 8.3 it said "No preview available" under the template name, you will now see "Preview," which is a link that takes you directly to the preview (if Preview does not appear after you change the options, try reloading the page). If you then click on Preview, a new window pops up with the preview. All module positions assigned in the template are displayed clearly.

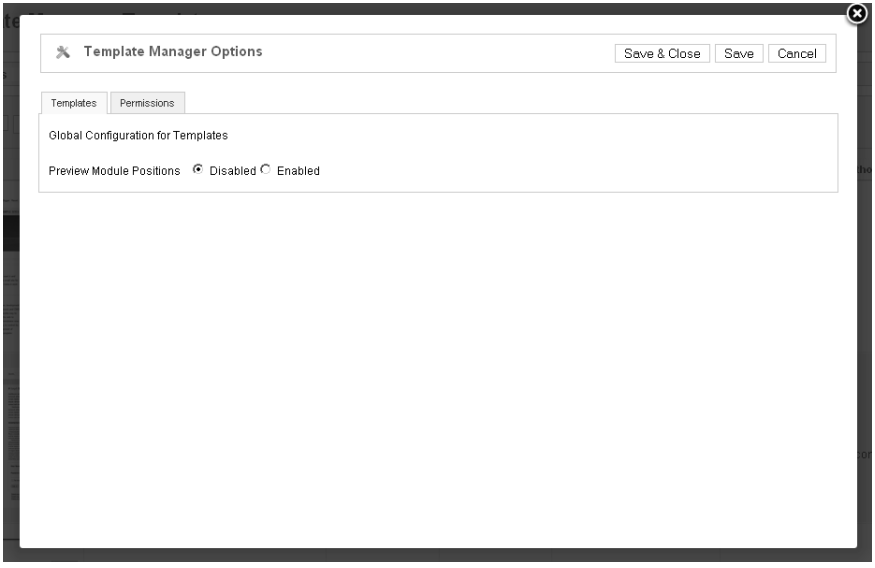

Figure 8.4 Template Manager Options

Figure 8.5 The preview is now available.

The latter part of the URL is particularly important: *tp=1&template=beez5*. This helpful function can be used not only in the back end but also in the front end, where it is even more helpful. See Figure 8.6.

Particularly with large sites, you may see a module displayed in the front end but, for the life of you, cannot remember which module position it uses. In the Module Manager, modules can be sorted by type and position, but sometimes you still cannot find a specific module.

If you now go the relevant page in the front end and append *?tp=1* to the URL, you get a preview (of the assigned template) of the corresponding page, which tells you the position of the module you are interested in. This is shown in Figure 8.7.

You may wonder why you can enable and disable this rather useful function. Wouldn't it be great if it was available all the time? The flexibility of the function makes it necessary to have the option of enabling and disabling it, because anyone who knows about

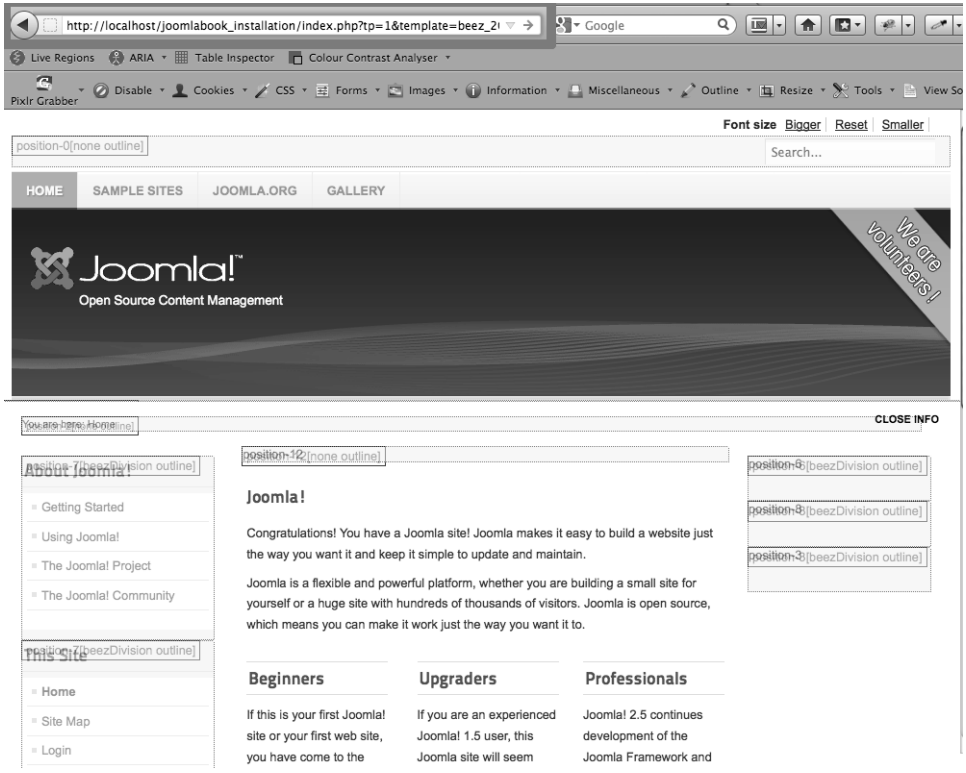

Figure 8.6 Template preview

this method can look up this information. And only rarely would you want them to. So, if you require this function: *enable, look it up, disable!*

Template Details

As you can see in Figure 8.8, the Template Details view also differs slightly from the previous version of Joomla!.

On the right is a list of all CSS files used in the template.

With just one click, you can edit from the administrator back end. The same goes for the internal control files in the template. Here you can edit the index.php file, the heart of the template, the error page, and print preview.

This function is useful while running the operation if you want to change something quickly. But I have to admit that I prefer editing these files directly in an editor and then uploading them to the server via FTP.

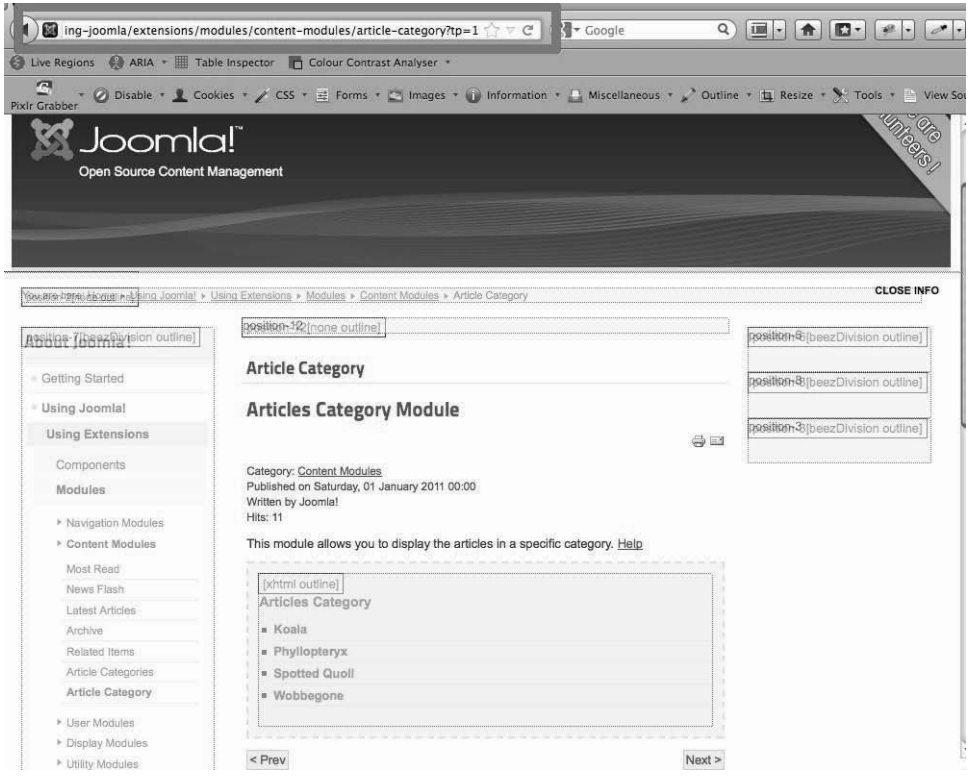

Figure 8.7 Preview in the front end

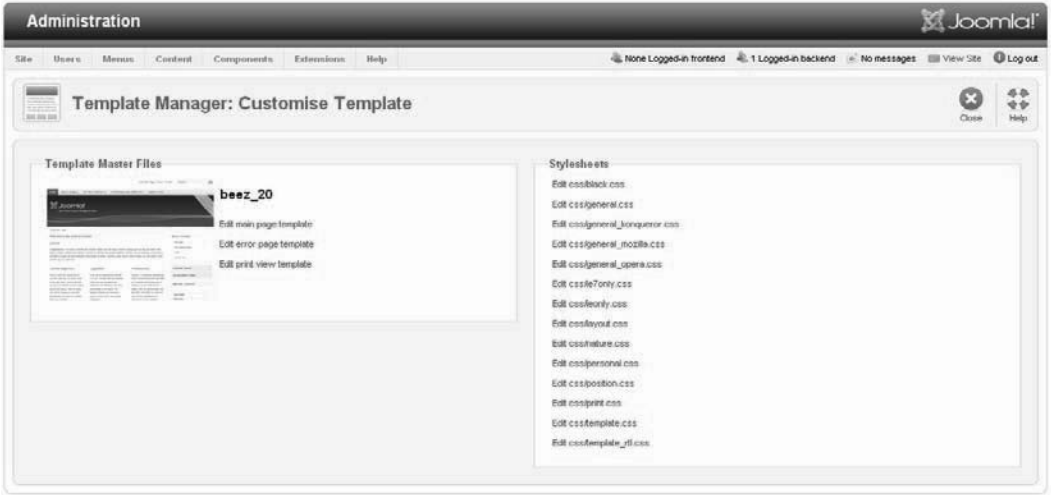

Figure 8.8 Template Details gives access to template page HTML and CSS files.

Installing Templates

When people start getting into Joomla!, they often do not build their own template right away but instead use one of the many templates available on the Internet and adapt it to their needs. Quite a number of templates are now available. In addition to free templates, various templates can be purchased on the Web. The templates differ not just in their design but also in their range of functions, quality, and price.

If you are considering one of these, you should look at the templates very closely. Most of them offer a whole range of functions in addition to the pure design and try to be as generic as possible to fulfill as many wishes as possible. For that reason, these templates are often very hard to adapt, because the more complex they are, the more complicated they are to change.

Now that Joomla! 2.5 has been out for a while, the number of templates offered is extensive.

Templates are managed by Joomla! in the same way as any other extension; that is, they are installed in the same way as any other extension, via the extension manager. Your template is probably in the form of a ZIP archive. You can install this archive, as is, via the extension manager. Joomla! takes care of unzipping the archive. How to create such archives yourself and which rules you need to follow are explained in Chapter 11, "The XML File and the Template Parameters." So to install a template you go to Extensions → Extension Manager on the Install tab, as shown in Figure 8.9.

If the template is well formed and follows all the Joomla! guidelines, there should not be any problems in the installation, and the template should appear in the Template Manager.

Starting with version 1.6, there has been a considerable change in template handling: they are now stored in the database. In version 1.5 you were still able to simply copy templates into the Joomla! template folder. They were fully functional and automatically detected by the system. This is no longer possible, which does not necessarily mean that it is more complicated. The Extension Manager's *Discover* function, shown in Figure 8.10, is available to help.

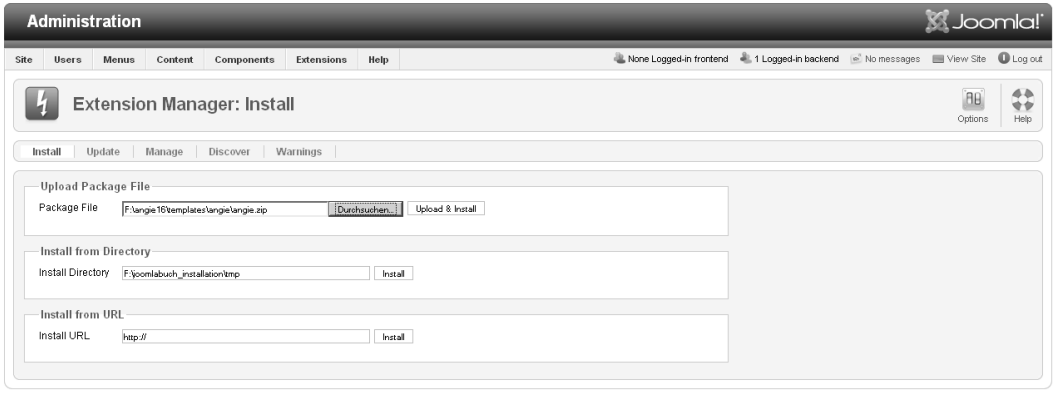

Figure 8.9 Extension manager

Figure 8.10 The Template Manager's Discover function

Once you have manually inserted the template into the Joomla! template directory, go to the Extension Manager on the Discover tab. Click the Discover icon, and the system will detect your template. Check the box in front of your template and click the Install icon. It will then be listed in the Template Manager next to the default templates.

Of course, the question is why the templates are now saved in the database. Templates have, as previously mentioned, parameters: properties that can change under certain circumstances. Like the template name, these properties are also saved in the database, which in turn enables extensions such as modules or components to directly access these properties. This method of storage makes it possible to design a very flexible template.

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