

# Ten critical questions to ask before selecting a CMS





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## What you need to know before making a major change

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Most companies look for a new CMS when they start hitting the limits of their current CMS. They look for solutions that will eliminate pain points and take their digital products to the next level. Unfortunately, the digital landscape is changing so quickly that it's hard to predict where the next level of digital products will be.

"Many content and digital marketing teams seem perpetually stuck in a software selection or implementation cycle," writes Robert Rose, founder and chief strategy officer of The Content Advisory, in "[How Tech Debt Is Bankrupting Content Marketing](#)." As a result, teams struggle to do work for the business because they are continually interrupted by the next new technology implementation, according to Rose.

Perpetual CMS upgrades are expensive and kill business momentum as key staff are pulled into selection and implementation processes. Features and content are frozen for weeks or months. Companies need to identify future-facing content solutions that remove limits – even those they haven't hit yet – and scale seamlessly to protect against the cost of continually upgrading or adding CMSes.

One of the greatest value differentiators for CMSes is their ability to prepare you for the future.

In this white paper, we'll look beyond the standard questions about cost, security and required features to help you identify content solutions that will empower your business to be first to market with digital products.

**"Many content and digital marketing teams seem perpetually stuck in a software selection or implementation cycle."**

— Robert Rose, Founder and Chief Strategy Officer of The Content Advisory



# 1 How will the CMS integrate with and leverage your existing tools?

The ease with which a new CMS integrates into your current technology stack and preferred workflows can provide valuable insight into how it will integrate with emerging technology. If a new CMS struggles to integrate with existing platforms or requires compromises in your editorial workflows or development tools, how quickly will it be able to adapt to new technologies?

Discussing integration capabilities can also shine a light on how much investment redundancy the CMS will introduce.

With traditional all-in-one CMSes, businesses pay for features they might not need and then have to invest time in learning new interfaces and migrating historical data. What's more, a CMS that does everything is unlikely to be as good as individual tools that are best-in-breed and designed for seamless integration.

If the CMS can be integrated with your (or your developers') favorite tools and languages, it is important to drill down to understand how that integration will be accomplished.

Can the CMS integrate with your customizations, or will some elements be lost or prone to breaking? Will you need to compromise on functionality or implementation time, and how will integrations be impacted by future CMS releases?

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Before choosing a new CMS, map out the current processes and costs associated with digital product development, from proof of concept through ongoing content and feature updates. Make note of the technologies, distribution channels and programming languages that your teams use or wish they could use.

A future-proof solution should unify content from and deliver it to all of your current distribution channels. It should be able to do this without limiting your ability to change channels, tools or workflows in the future.

Look for solutions that can easily connect with the technologies your teams prefer instead of those that require custom integrations. Integrating with different platforms and technologies should be straightforward so that you don't have to go back to the CMS vendor every time you make a change or add something new.



## 2 Are there exceptions to what content can be managed in the CMS?

Can this CMS replace all existing CMSes and repositories to unify fragmented content? Does this include elements such as microcopy, navigation and custom pages that are often hard-coded and maintained by developers?

Every piece of content that is managed outside a central content hub is going to add extra work. When content is siloed or hard-coded, it muddies the workflow and can escalate internal politics as editorial teams are forced to depend on developers to push updates.

Copying content from one platform to another is more time consuming than it sounds. Douglas Karr, CEO of DK New Media, found that it took him all day to import events into a WordPress site and it took his team hours to upload content for social media.

"We have all the tools available to execute impactful campaigns, but more often we find incompatible or non-existent import and integration capabilities," he writes in the blog post ["You're Probably Spending More Time Managing Data Than Marketing."](#)

Tension between teams and feeling like your talent is being wasted on mundane tasks can lead to job dissatisfaction. Writers, marketers and developers want to create new things, not waste time copy-and-pasting the content in multiple places.

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Look for a solution that can provide one content hub for your whole portfolio of digital products. All content should be easy to upload and update from one location and readily available for use in any digital application: websites, apps, digital signage, wearable tech, etc.

The editorial interface should empower editors to upload, edit and publish content without relying on developers. Minor edits shouldn't require a workflow that passes the request from editor to developer to production, and so on. Developers, in turn, should be able to easily pull content into any digital application.

Ask for examples of customers who manage all of their content with a single CMS that can handle all content types or end distribution points.

## 3 What features of the CMS support a good user experience for editors and developers?

Has the CMS put the time and effort into understanding what's important to editors and developers who will use the CMS daily, or is the CMS just selling to managers and C-level staff?

No CMS is going to propel a company to the top on its own. It's the developers, content creators and editors using the CMS on a daily basis who make the difference. Empowering them with tools they

actually love to use keeps them happy, productive and propels a company forward.

"A master-level web developer will almost certainly produce an all-around better website than a mediocre developer, regardless of any underlying platform used," writes Jim Dee, principal of Array Web Development, in ["Forget the CMS Wars: There's Something More Important to Consider."](#)



While skills will always be a factor, technology tools will ultimately determine the productivity of people at any skill level.

Developers should be able to focus on developing new products using the frameworks and technologies they prefer. They often have strong opinions about CMSes and several popular CMSes made the list of developers' most dreaded platforms in [Stack Overflow's 2018 Developer Survey Results](#).

Editorial interfaces should reduce complexity, empowering editors to publish more content faster without requiring development.

Content and development teams should be able to work in parallel so that digital leaders can set goals and priorities without worrying about interdependencies, such as a content team interrupting developers to push updates.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Look for a content solution with features that enable editors to easily update, preview and post changes. The CMS should support collaboration, translation and distribution across channels, products and devices with editorial interfaces, roles and permissions that can be customized to fit each team's preferred workflows.

Developers should be able to get started quickly with self-serve resources and a supportive developer community. Be wary of CMSes that require extensive developer training or developers who are product experts to fully leverage the CMS's potential. This can be a long detour on the road to actually implementing the product, wasting time and slowing speed to market.

Look for case studies, like this one from [Trunk Club \(Nordstrom\)](#), where unifying multiple CMSes helped improve workflows and eliminate interdependencies between editorial and development teams.

Ask the CMS vendor to review the editorial, developer and marketing interfaces and workflows. Better yet, let your teams try the CMS and look for excitement on their faces when they see the interface they could be using.

# 4

## How does the CMS enable you to reach new and emerging markets?

It's hard to predict what the next digital channel will be or what new opportunities will unfold. Understanding how the CMS extends your current reach can help you gauge its ability to support future opportunities.

Consider features that support multinational teams, such as integration with translation tools, collaboration tools and increased delivery speeds. Can local content be managed in the same content

hub as global content? How does the CMS manage design elements? Will local websites have to copy over global info that will soon go out of date?

Think about all the places you could use digital content: digital billboards, in apps, in wearables and across the internet of things. How will this CMS support those channels, and what features will make managing content across devices easier?



## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Look for content solutions that have anticipated and addressed many of the challenges inherent to delivering content on multiple channels in different geographic locations. There should be clear solutions for how they handle common issues such as translation, image resizing, different devices and delivering global content to local markets.

Ask how they roll out support for new channels. Will you need to wait for a new release or does the CMS empower its customers to lead the way into new channels and digital applications? You should feel inspired and be able to see the potential for new products.

# 5 What competitive advantages will we gain in terms of speed?

Companies are using agile development and continuous shipping to constantly iterate on digital products. How does the CMS support and build on these practices to help you ship faster?

Most companies know what they plan to develop on a new CMS. Make sure the solutions you consider have a track record for accelerating that development cycle. Document any areas where your current CMS performs well to ensure that new content solutions preserve or build on those gains.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Ask how fast other customers complete comparable work with the CMS. Request examples or case studies of customers who significantly reduced development, and go-to-market times. Contentful, for example, has customers who credit their new content infrastructure with [reducing deployment time by 98%](#) and [launching new products 14x faster](#).

# 6 What is the expected implementation timeline for this CMS?

When selecting a CMS, consider the speed of transition, not just the speed of shipping software once it's implemented.

Let's face it. The period between choosing a solution you are excited about and getting to actually use it can drag on and on. Long implementation times take resources away from revenue-generating work and enthusiasm can fade into doubt if unexpected challenges delay the go-live date.

## Key areas to consider are:

- **What resources are needed?** It is important to understand the time and expertise staff will need to implement the CMS. In some cases, businesses need time to hire product experts or consultants. If the implementation requires product experts, how big of a risk is turnover? Could you be left with a configuration that is difficult for other developers to use?



- **What will the learning curve be?** Ask about support and training for developers, editors and other potential users. Find out how proficient users are after the training and what ongoing support is offered.
- **How complicated will it be to configure the CMS to your business needs?** Find out what impact different requirements will have on the CMS configuration. Are some options mutually exclusive? Will customization make the CMS less stable, run slower, or create challenges as updates come out? Do you have unusual requirements that might take longer to set up?
- **How will be content be migrated?** Document the amount of content involved and ask what is needed to include that content in the CMS. Will data need to be converted? Will your business need to freeze content and feature updates?

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Look for solutions that listen to your business needs and can explain how those will be addressed and what impact they have on implementation. They should be able to give examples of similar implementations and speak to what challenges can cause delays.

Ask what the expected timeline is between choosing the CMS and shipping your first digital product. What factors might increase that timeline? What parts of the implementation have the biggest impact on the timeline?

# 7 Can you start small and scale up once the CMS proves itself?

Starting small is one way to avoid the risks of long implementation times and to see if the CMS performs as expected before you fully commit.

Nobody really knows if a particular CMS is a good fit until they start using it. For some CMSes, that means hiring experts, migrating content and learning new interfaces in the hopes that the CMS will live up to expectations. That's asking for a lot of faith and can make it hard to sell internally and push through procurement and other approvals.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Cut to the chase and ask: What is the minimum investment needed in terms of time, money and developer resources to implement a working version of the CMS?

Look for solutions that go beyond letting you into a staging or demo version and actually let you test

the product with your own content. For example, Contentful makes it possible for developers to start building without any red tape. Developers can build a proof of concept before recommending a bigger investment.

See how [Nike took just three days to develop a prototype](#) for a large-screen, multi-touch application for their flagship stores, freeing their team to focus on creating a memorable interactive experience.

Customers who start with a small pilot and expand use of the CMS to other digital products are a stronger measure of satisfaction with a CMS than length of use or popularity. Companies might continue using a CMS because they've invested so much into it, but that doesn't mean they love it. The fact that many companies still use multiple content solutions suggests that they haven't found the right one.





## 8 What is your vision for the future of content management?

When your business is ready to build a new digital product, expand into a new channel, or launch an innovative campaign, you want your CMS to empower you to move forward at speed, not set the pace.

The CMS needs to be prepared for the future of content management and already building infrastructure to support that vision.

Waiting for new features and tying developers up in upgrading and patching the CMS slows a company's ability to continually iterate and ship. How will this CMS put new capabilities at your fingertips before the competition with minimal disruption?

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Look for a CMS that can describe where content infrastructure is heading and how they are already supporting that future. Do they have a history of unveiling innovative features, or are they playing catch up with their competitors? Are features continuously updated, or are they released in upgrades that require work to install?

You and your team should feel inspired by the possibilities the CMS opens up, not just relieved that it will solve some of your current pain points. If it's only solving today's problems, it's not going to put you ahead of the competition.

## 9 What value does the CMS offer beyond just solving existing problems?

Choosing to upgrade a CMS is about more than saying goodbye to current problems; it's an opportunity to implement a content infrastructure that opens your business up to new possibilities.

Depending on where you are in your content journey, many CMSes will satisfy your current requirements. The differentiator will be how that content solution separates itself – and by extension its customers – from the competition.

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Look for solutions that come to the table with innovative examples of how they will add value today and can speak to how their solution prepares your business to adapt to the future.

Do their customers talk about ways in which the CMS impressed them with benefits or business advantages that went beyond their requirements? Do their case studies leave you wishing your business could see similar results?





# 10

## How does this solution think outside the CMS box?

For some companies, the answer to current CMS limitations might not be a CMS at all. Traditional CMSes are monolithic systems that compete on the number of features they can list, according to Phil Hawksworth, developer relations at Netlify, in [“Off with their heads – the rise of the modern CMS.”](#)

The end result is monolithic systems that do a lot of things, but don’t do them well, he says. Plus, all those extra features make user interfaces more complex, even if a business chooses not to use them.

These sit in stark contrast to a modern web stack that pulls together best-in-breed cloud services to create leading digital products. If your business is already using microservices such as Stripe, Optimizely, etc., then a solution that puts content on par with the rest of your technology stack might be the answer.

Instead of buying a bigger CMS box, consider microservice solutions such as Contentful. These solutions empower companies to invest directly in their content infrastructure instead of investing time and money into platform-specific tools and experts.

With Contentful, companies can manage and ship content anywhere – websites, digital billboards, IoT, etc. – faster and without limits. [Click here to see what’s possible.](#)

What’s more, Contentful is fully scalable. Businesses can start small and pay for what they need. It’s language agnostic and includes software development kits. Developers can begin building immediately in whatever language they prefer – get started with [this guide](#) or [sign up for a free trial](#).

Developers and editors love the user interfaces that can be customized to each team’s preferences and workflow needs. Plus, teams can work simultaneously, without the interdependencies of traditional CMSes.

[Talk to one of Contentful’s solution engineers](#) today to learn how Contentful goes beyond your current needs and helps you usher in the future of digital content.