WebBox®

Content Management Systems

helping **you choose** the right solution **for you.**

What is a Content Management System (CMS)?

Before we delve into the benefits of using a CMS and comparing some of the top CMSs available to you, let's define what a CMS is.

A content management system (CMS) is a web application that is used to allow non-technical users to manage content and media on their website or web platform. Content in a CMS is typically stored in a database and displayed in a presentation layer (frontend) based on a set of templates.

The following are the basic features of a CMS:

- Content creation (allows users to easily create and format content).

- Content and media storage (stores content in one place, in a consistent fashion).

- Workflow management (assigns privileges and responsibilities based on roles such as authors, editors and admins).

- Publishing (organises and pushes content live).

What are the benefits of a CMS?

Total Control

CMS tools give you complete control over the design and content published on the site. You can make changes at will, without having to depend on the services of the developer. It requires no coding or graphic design skills.

Multiple Users

Business websites are usually managed by different teams from those updating the products and services details to those who publish the blogs. CMSs allow multiple users to work on the site irrespective of their location.

Security

Content Management Systems have state-of-the-art security features that protect your content and database from all kinds of malicious attacks. You can easily restrict access to your content via a permission-based system.
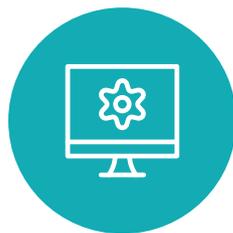
Updates & Upgrades

CMS ecosystems are highly flexible and hence you can easily update and upgrade your site to be in sync with the latest demands in the world of technology.

Modular Development

Content Management Systems allow modular development where every feature and element in the site acts as a module which can be added and removed easily. This makes your website highly scalable.

What to look for in a CMS

Before choosing a content management system, it is beneficial to evaluate your company's internal workflow and overall business goals with respect to the publishing of content.

You will need to begin by making a list of the business problems you are trying to solve as well as any specific requirements you may have. Furthermore, you should consider potential future website developments as these might influence which option is best suited for you.

This will help you choose the right content management system — the one that supports your business requirements — rather than the most popular or well-liked.

CMSs come in all shapes and sizes, each with its own set of features and benefits. Some are ideally suited for blogging; others may be tailored to eCommerce sites with features for pricing and accounting functionality. Therefore, we recommend that you consider your business requirements and choose a CMS which is best suited for that particular application.

Here are some questions to consider in the evaluation process:

- What business operations do the CMS need to support?
- What technologies does the CMS need to support or integrate with?
- How easy is it to create and edit content?
- How many different groups of users will there be?
- How does the platform aid in making the website Search Engine friendly?
- Does the CMS have a license fee? If so, does this align with your budget?
- How large is the developer community?
- Is the CMS open source? Can the CMS be transferred to another provider?
- Are there minimum hosting requirements for the CMS?

By considering these aspects, it will help you start to narrow down the vast number of choices available to you. Remember, there's not a one-size-fits-all approach to choosing a CMS, but it's important that your chosen CMS fits like a glove rather than being shoehorned into your requirements.

What business operations does the CMS need to support?

Does your company need to publish hundreds of new videos a day? Change prices on thousands of SKUs per day? Integrate with other business systems?

What technologies does the CMS need to support or integrate with?

If your company already uses a CRM, ERP or web analytics program, you'll need to consider a CMS that integrates with these platforms. Alternatively, do you have any technical restrictions that must be considered?

How easy is it to create and edit content?

The ease of content creation and management is paramount when considering a CMS. We would recommend that the person/team who will be managing the website's content should assess the ease of use, as they will be the ones using it day in day out. Ideally, the system will be intuitive, with features like a WYSIWYG editor, and also come with a guide/manual for future reference (this is helpful for new starters too!).

How many different groups of users will there be?

Another consideration should be the various different levels of administration privileges that are required. Consider the various user roles, including the role of editors to write content, managers to review content and administrators to make site-wide changes.

How does the platform aid in making the website Search Engine friendly?

Ensuring the website is optimised for search engines is paramount to most businesses. Therefore, you will likely want a CMS that automatically handles basic on-page optimisations such as the creation of title tags, short and obvious URLs, alt tags on images, and a sound internal linking structure.

Does the CMS have a license fee? If so, does this align with your budget?

Some CMS are open source (free to download) and others are commercial (licensed by installation or number of users). It's worth checking this early on in the process, as some CMS license fees will exceed your budget without even considering the costs of design, development, project management and everything else which comes with a web project.

How large is the developer community?

Some of the CMS, particularly WordPress and Symfony, come with very large developer communities. The advantage to a sizable community is the amount of online help and documentation you will find on most aspects of customisation. This is also a good sign of how popular the system is!

Is the CMS open source? Can the CMS be transferred to another provider?

Some organisations will only work with open source systems, rather than proprietary systems, so this may impact your choice of CMS. More so, you will want to know whether the CMS can be transferred to another hosting provider or agency, should the need arise.

Are there minimum hosting requirements for the CMS?

It's fair to say that some CMSs are known for their heavy use of server resources, and others are light on resources. Knowing this upfront will allow you to provide the correct hosting environment for the chosen CMS, which might, in turn, affect your budget to cover additional server resources from your host or agency.

CMS Deep Dive

Let's take a look at some of the leading CMSs available to you, and reveal 'the good, the bad and the ugly' parts of each one!

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WordPress

With around 35% of websites using WordPress, it is the most-used open source CMS worldwide. Originally conceived as a blogging platform, this system has become one of the most popular CMSs for a multitude of purposes. WordPress boasts over 55,000 plugins to extend the out-of-the-box functionality with ease.

Pros

- Open source / free to download
- Over 55,000 plugins to extend the functionality with ease
- Large developer community
- Simple integration of plugins and other extensions
- Intuitive user interface
- Transferrable to most hosts and agencies
- Drag and drop interface.

Cons

- Customised layouts are hard to use
- Frequent updates (often causing conflicts)
- Third-party plugins and other extensions are not directly supported by WordPress
- Not secure by design (plugins required)
- Reputation for being vulnerable to hacks and malware installation
- It doesn't store complex data in a clean database structure.

Magento

Magento is a leading eCommerce platform and extends beyond the shopping cart for every shoppable experience, including email, mobile, in-store, and more. Now, as a part of Adobe Experience Cloud, Magento joins the only integrated platform for analytics, advertising, content creation, and commerce — everything you need for customer experience management.

Pros

- Open source (Magento Open Source edition only)
- Large developer community
- Around 3,500 extensions to extend the functionality
- Scalable for starts up through to enterprise-level solutions
- Specifically designed for eCommerce businesses
- Drag and drop interface.

Cons

- Whilst the Open Source edition is free to use, the enterprise editions attract licence fees
- User interface is counter-intuitive
- Third-party plugins compatibility differs between Open Source and Enterprise editions
- Magento is known to be 'heavy' on server resources
- It can be difficult to find Magento developers.

Symfony

Symfony is the leading PHP framework to create websites and web applications. Built on top of the Symfony Components - A set of decoupled and reusable components on which the best PHP applications are built, such as Drupal, phpBB, and eZ Publish.

Using this powerful PHP framework, WebBox has developed many CMSs on top of it, to harness the unrivalled power of the technology and deliver an industry-leading user experience (UX) to the CMS interface.

Pros

- Open Source
- Large developer community (600,000+)
- Intuitive CMS user interface
- Scalable for starts up through to enterprise-level solutions
- Bespoke to your requirements
- Secure by design
- Stores complex data in a clean database structure.

Cons

- Unable to add plugins/extensions through the CMS
- It can be difficult to find Symfony developers
- The CMS must be developed, as Symfony isn't a CMS out-of-the-box
- This system would be considered over-the-top for basic requirements.

Prismic

Prismic is a headless Content Management System. Also known as an API CMS or a content platform, it acts as an advanced hub for all of your content. The developer or agency can then choose the most appropriate technology, framework, and language to display this content on a website, web app or platform.

A headless CMS — a CMS with an API — is an alternative to a traditional CMS. There's no frontend in a headless CMS. It doesn't know and doesn't care how you'll display words and pictures in pages and views. With a headless CMS, the frontend of your project is not a part of the CMS any more. A headless CMS has no control over the way the content is presented.

In other words, you don't get a website out of the box with a headless CMS. It might sound like it's a bad thing, but in fact, it isn't. Unlike a 'traditional' CMS (like WordPress or Magento), a headless CMS focuses exclusively on 1) content management workflows 2) content accessibility through code 3) content storage and delivery.

Pros

- Large developer community
- The developer or agency can choose the most appropriate technology, framework, and language to use
- Scalable for starts up through to enterprise-level solutions
- Outshines other options when it comes to multi-site and multi-platform projects.

Cons

- Proprietary, not open source
- The platform does attract licence fees, based on the number of repositories
- You cannot host the Prismic platform on your own server
- This system would be considered over-the-top for basic requirements.

eZ Platform (by ibexa)

eZ Platform is a leading PHP CMS based on the Symfony framework. Open source and enterprise grade, eZ Platform provides your developers with unmatched flexibility to build, extend and scale websites, apps and other digital products. With eZ Platform, you can accelerate development and dedicate more time to creating new features and services that bring business value.

Pros

- Open Source
- Large developer community (600,000+)
- Intuitive CMS user interface
- Enterprise level solution
- Bespoke to your requirements
- Secure by design
- Stores complex data in a clean database structure
- Granular user permissions.

Cons

- License fees apply (includes regular updates)
- Unable to add plugins/extensions through the CMS
- It can be difficult to find eZ Platform developers
- This system would be considered over-the-top for many basic requirements.

Comparing apples with apples

Now that we've considered the benefits of using a CMS, and reviewed a number of leading CMSs, let's compare them side-by-side.

	WordPress	Magento	Symfony		Ibexa
Intuitive user interface	✔	✘	✔	✔	✔
Plugins/extensions library	✔	✔	✔	✘	✔
Scalable	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Regular updates	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
eCommerce as standard	✘	✔	✔	✘	✘
SEO features	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Light on server resources	✔	✘	✔	✔	✔
Multi-lingual as standard	✘	✘	✔	✔	✔
Multi-site as standard	✔	✔	✔	✘	✔
Open source	✔	✔*	✔	✘	✔
Free to install	✔	✔*	✔	✘	✘
Large developer community	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔

*Dependant on the edition

CMS Finder

So, let's get practical! Below, you will find a template to help you on your way whilst choosing the right CMS for your business.

What best describes the application?

i.e. brochure website, eCommerce website, portal, Extranet, Web App, web application etc.

What business operations does the CMS need to support?

i.e. change prices on thousands of SKUs per day, integration with internal systems etc.

Does the CMS need to integrate with a third-party service?

How important is it that the CMS is open source and can be easily transferred to another provider?

To consider whether commercial CMSs are available to you, please share the budget for the project?

How many different groups of users will there be?

i.e. Author, contributor and user.

Does the CMS need to feed content to multiple frontends?

i.e. a website, an app and an intranet.

Do you currently have a CMS? If so, what are the pain points with using this system?

What are your future plans that will affect the CMS?

i.e. are you considering adding an eCommerce section to the site, or integrating a portal?

We're here to help!

Why not send the completed sheet to WebBox and we'll take a look over your responses and offer a no-obligation, brutally transparent suggestion of the best CMS for your requirements.

Simply send this to contact@webboxdigital.co.uk and use **'CMS Guide — Can you advise?'** in the subject line.

WebBox®

User fixated. Client obsessed.