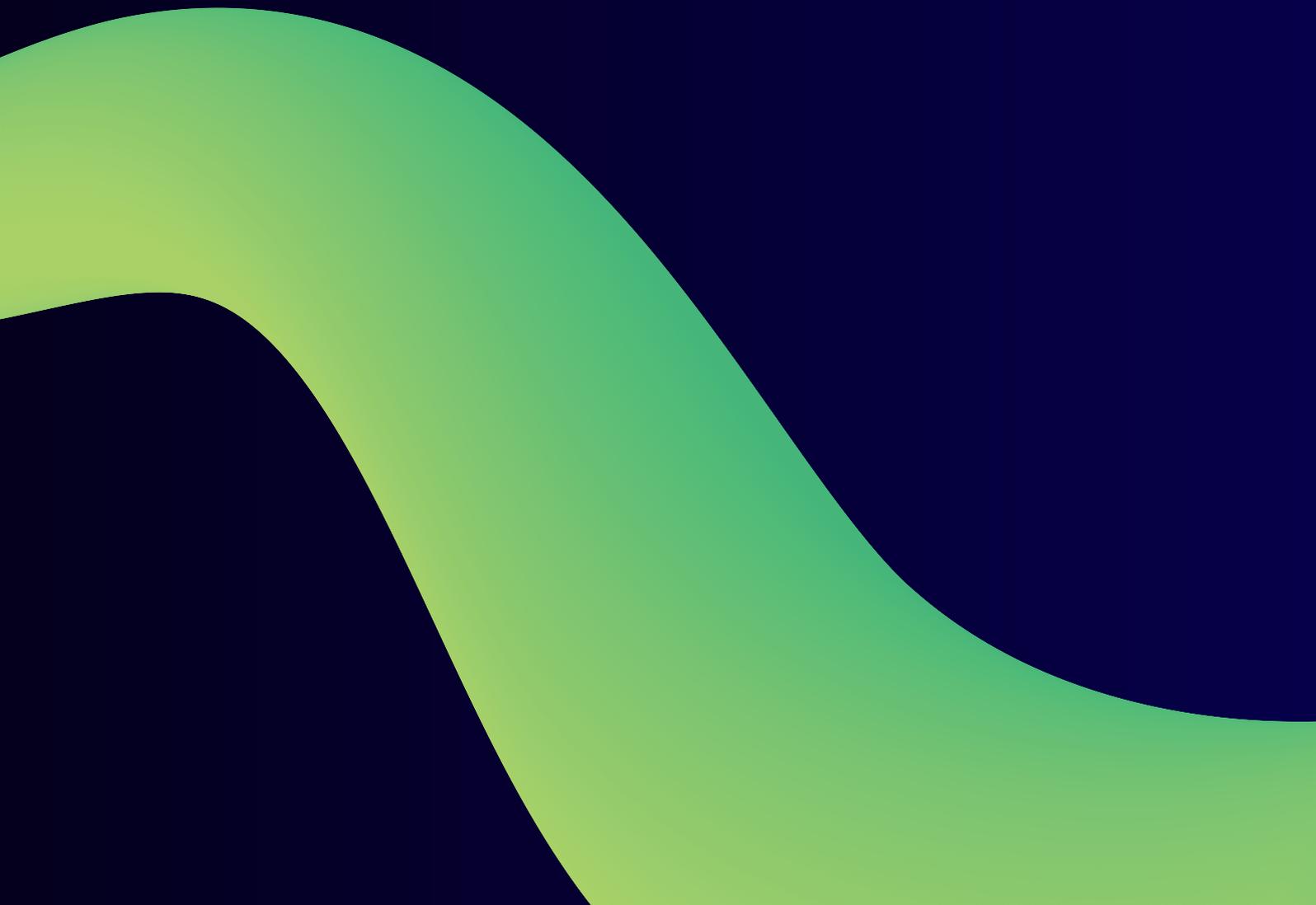# WebBox®

The Ultimate Guide to Choosing a CMS

Helping you choose *the right solution for you.*

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What is a Content Management System (CMS)?

Before exploring the advantages of using a CMS and comparing some of the leading systems available today, let's first clearly define what a CMS is.

A Content Management System (CMS) is a powerful web application that enables users without technical expertise to effortlessly manage, create, and update content and media on their websites or digital platforms. In a CMS, content is typically stored in a structured database and presented through customisable templates on the frontend.

The following are the basic features of a CMS:

- Content creation and editing – A simple interface for writing, changing, and formatting website content without needing to know coding. This typically includes an editor that shows you exactly how your content will look.

- Content organisation and storage – Ways to group, label, and arrange content in a sensible order, with search tools to help you find things quickly when needed.

- User management and permissions – Controls to decide who can create, change, publish, or view different types of content, with different access levels for different team members.

- Template and design management – Ready–made designs that control how your content looks, keeping your website consistent while letting you focus on the words rather than the appearance.

- Publishing and workflow tools – Features that let you schedule when content goes live, get approval from colleagues, track changes, and switch back to older versions if needed.

What to Look for in a CMS

When choosing a CMS for your website, consider the following factors:

Business Operations

Does your company need to publish lots of videos daily? Change prices on thousands of products? Connect with other business systems?

Technology Integration

If your company already uses customer management or analytics software, you'll need a system that works with these tools. Do you have any technical limitations to consider?

Ease of Use

How simple it is to create and manage content is very important. We suggest letting the people who will use the system try it out. Ideally, it should be intuitive, with easy-to-use editors and come with instructions for future reference.

User Access Levels

Think about the different access levels needed – writers to create content, managers to review it, and administrators to make website-wide changes.

Search Engine Friendly

Making your website show up in search results is important for most businesses. Look for a system that automatically handles basic search optimisation like page titles, simple web addresses, image descriptions, and good internal linking.

Cost

Some systems are free to download, while others require payment based on installation or the number of users. Check this early on, as some license fees might exceed your budget before even considering design, development, and project management costs.

Developer Support

Some systems, especially WordPress and Symfony, have large developer communities. This means more online help and guides for customisation. It's also a good sign of how popular the system is!

Open Source and Transferability

Some organisations prefer open source systems rather than proprietary ones. Also, check whether you can move your website to another hosting provider or agency if needed.

Hosting Requirements

Some systems use a lot of server resources, while others are lighter. Knowing this upfront helps you provide the right hosting environment, which might affect your budget for server resources.

What are the Benefits of a CMS?

A CMS offers numerous advantages for businesses and individuals looking to manage their website efficiently:

1. Simplified content management – People without technical skills can update the website themselves, cutting out the middleman and reducing costs while giving marketing teams the power to make changes when they need to.

2. Consistent brand appearance – Ready–made templates ensure your website looks the same throughout, no matter who adds the content, keeping your brand looking professional even with multiple people contributing.

3. Improved workflow efficiency – Built–in approval steps, scheduling tools, and team features make content production smoother from start to finish, reducing mistakes and getting new content published faster.

4. Cost effectiveness – By not having to rely on developers for everyday updates, a CMS saves money over time while making your website last longer through easier upkeep and improvements.

5. Scalability and flexibility – As your business grows, a CMS can handle more content, more users, and changing business needs without requiring your website to be completely rebuilt or extensively modified.

Before choosing a website management system, think about how your company handles content and what your business aims to achieve with your website.

Start by listing the problems you want to solve and any specific needs you have. Also, think about future website plans, as these might affect which system works best for you.

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This helps you pick the right website management tool, one that meets your business needs, rather than just choosing the most popular one.

These systems come in many varieties, each with different features and benefits. Some work best for blogs, while others are better for online shops with pricing and accounting tools. We suggest looking at what your business needs and choosing a system that fits those needs.

CMS Platform Comparison

Let's explore some of the top content management systems available for your website project and provide an honest assessment of each platform's strengths and limitations to help you make an informed decision. The comparisons begin on the next page!

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WordPress

WordPress powers approximately 43% of all websites on the internet, making it the world's most popular content management system. Starting as a simple blogging tool, it has transformed into a versatile platform suitable for anything from small business websites to enterprise portals and sophisticated e-commerce stores. Its user-friendly approach, combined with powerful capabilities, makes it an excellent choice for organisations of all sizes.

Pros

- Free and open source
- An ecosystem with 59,000+ plugins for nearly any functionality
- Large, active community of developers and users for support
- Regular updates and improvements to core functionality
- Beginner-friendly interface that non-technical staff can quickly learn
- Works with nearly all hosting providers

Cons

- May require regular maintenance to keep secure and updated
- Performance optimisation is sometimes needed for larger sites
- Quality varies among third-party plugins and themes
- Some advanced customisations might require developer assistance
- The database structure can become complex with many plugins active

Craft CMS

Craft CMS is a flexible, content-focused content management system aimed at professional developers and content creators. It provides a clean slate approach rather than a template-heavy system, allowing for highly customised website building.

Pros

- Content-focused with excellent editing experience
- Highly customisable content structures
- Clean, intuitive control panel
- Built-in image editing capabilities
- Strong security track record
- Good performance even with complex sites
- Allows for flexible content blocks

Cons

- Higher learning curve for non-technical users
- Requires developer involvement for setup
- Fewer plugins compared to larger systems
- License fees for commercial use
- Smaller developer community
- Fewer pre-built templates are available
- Can be overkill for simple websites

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Open Cart

OpenCart is an e-commerce focused content management system designed specifically for online stores. It provides a complete solution for businesses looking to sell products online with minimal technical knowledge.

Pros

- Free and open source
- Built specifically for e-commerce
- Includes payment processing integration
- Product and inventory management
- Customer account management
- Mobile responsive design options

Cons

- Limited content management for non-product pages
- Less flexibility for non-ecommerce features
- Can be slow without optimisation
- Basic themes require customisation
- Extensions are often needed for additional functionality
- Admin interface is less intuitive than some alternatives

Prismic

Prismic is a headless CMS that focuses on content delivery rather than website building. It stores your content and delivers it via API to your website, allowing for greater flexibility in how content is displayed.

Pros

- Headless architecture for flexibility
- Frontend can be built with popular frameworks like React or Vue
- One content source for all platforms
- Clean, simple interface for content editors
- Customisable content types
- Good for teams with content workflows

Cons

- Requires front–end development skills
- Not a complete website solution
- Steeper learning curve
- Subscription–based pricing
- Smaller community compared to traditional CMS
- Requires additional technology for website display

Headless WordPress

WordPress can function as a headless CMS, separating the content management backend from the frontend display. This approach combines WordPress's familiar admin interface with the flexibility to deliver content to any digital platform, creating a powerful hybrid solution for organisations wanting both ease of use and modern development capabilities.

Pros

- Familiar WordPress admin interface for content editors
- Frontend can be built with popular frameworks like React or Vue
- Leverages existing WordPress knowledge and resources
- Access to WordPress's robust user management system
- Can use plugins for additional backend functionality
- Perfect for content across multiple digital platforms
- Lower learning curve than pure headless systems

Cons

- Requires developer knowledge to implement the frontend
- Some less-maintained plugins may not work well
- Additional hosting considerations for a separate frontend
- Potentially higher maintenance than traditional WordPress
- May require custom development for complex features

Custom CMS – Symfony

A custom CMS built with Symfony provides a tailored solution using one of the world's most respected PHP frameworks. This approach delivers an engineered content management system that matches your exact business processes and integrates seamlessly with existing systems while maintaining enterprise-grade security and performance.

Pros

- Tailored precisely to your business requirements
- Strong security architecture and regular updates
- Frontend can be built with popular frameworks like React or Vue
- Excellent performance and scalability
- Direct integration with your existing systems
- No unnecessary features or bloat
- Highly optimised for your specific needs

Cons

- Higher initial development investment
- Longer implementation timeframe
- Requires specialised developer knowledge
- Ongoing maintenance commitment needed
- No built-in marketplace for plug-and-play features
- Requires technical knowledge to modify

Custom CMS – Laravel

A custom CMS built with Laravel provides a tailored solution designed specifically for your unique business requirements. Unlike off-the-shelf options, a custom Laravel CMS can be built to match your exact workflow and integrate perfectly with your existing systems.

Pros

- Fully customised to your specific business needs
- Optimised performance for your specific use case
- Frontend can be built with popular frameworks like React or Vue
- Streamlined features without unnecessary bloat
- Direct integration with your existing systems
- Complete control over security implementation
- Scales with your business requirements

Cons

- Higher initial development investment
- Requires ongoing maintenance and support
- Longer setup time compared to existing solutions
- No built-in plugin marketplace
- Requires technical knowledge to modify
- Development costs for new features

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Feature	WordPress	Craft CMS	OpenCart	Prismic	Custom CMS (Laravel/Symfony)
User-Friendly Interface	✅	❌	✅	✅	✅
Highly Customisable	✅	✅	❌	✅	✅
E-commerce Ready	✅ (via Plugin)	❌	✅	❌	✅
SEO-Friendly	✅	✅	(Basic SEO)	✅	✅
Multilingual Support	✅ (via Plugin)	✅	✅	✅	✅ (if required)
Third-Party Integration Support	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅
Security Features	✅ (via Plugin)	✅	✅	✅	✅
API/Headless Ready	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅
Multi-Site Capable	✅	✅	✅	–	✅ (if required)
Budget-Friendly	✅	❌	✅	❌	❌
Scalable for Large Sites	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅
Open Source	✅	✅	✅	❌	✅
Large Community Support	✅	–	✅	–	❌
Developer Flexibility	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅
Suited for Complex Logic and Functionality	–	✅	❌	–	✅

CMS Selection Questionnaire

Let's get practical. The template below is designed to guide you in selecting the most suitable CMS for your business needs. By answering the following questions, you'll gain a clearer understanding of your requirements and priorities.

1. **What type of application are you building?**
   For example, brochure website, eCommerce store, client portal, Extranet, web application, etc.

2. **What key business operations must the CMS support?**
   Consider tasks such as bulk updates to product pricing, managing complex workflows, or integration with internal business systems.

3. **Does the CMS need to integrate with any third-party platforms or services?**
   Think about CRMs, ERPs, payment gateways, marketing platforms, or other external tools.

4. **How important is open-source flexibility and provider portability?**
   Would you prefer a CMS that can be easily migrated or supported by different agencies in the future?

5. **What is the allocated budget for the CMS and the overall project?**
   Providing a budget range will help determine whether commercial or open-source solutions are more appropriate.

6. **How many distinct user roles will the CMS need to accommodate?**
   For example: authors, editors, administrators, end users.

7. **Will the CMS need to distribute content to multiple platforms?**
   Such as a website, mobile app, internal system or intranet.

8. **Are you currently using a CMS? If so, what limitations or frustrations are you experiencing?**
   Understanding current pain points will inform what features or improvements are necessary.

9. **What future developments might impact your CMS needs?**
   For instance, plans to add an eCommerce section, implement a secure portal, or expand into new content channels.

We're here to help!

Why not send the completed sheet to WebBox, and we'll take a look at 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.

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www.webbox.digital
contact@webboxdigital.co.uk
02920 09 19 29

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