



white paper

Choosing the Best Web Content Management Solution

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Executive Summary

In recent years we've watched the Internet transform into a strategic medium for organizations of nearly every ilk, as healthcare, financial services, entertainment, non-profits, and others joined e-commerce in leveraging the channel to generate additional revenue, reduce operational costs, develop a deeper relationship with customers, and broaden the reach of the brand. Today that evolution continues with the explosion of social media and the proliferation of mobile devices—both of which are transforming the way people access and interact with the web.

Clearly, the business value inherent in this digital medium will continue to grow. And just as clearly, organizations will continue to struggle to maximize the impact of their web efforts while keeping pace with the opportunities presented by the constantly transforming medium. Gone are the days when a company could get by with a brochure-ware site. The key to the game these days is engagement—taking advantage of the medium to initiate a dialogue with customers that spans multiple channels and adapts and evolves as they interact with the site, the company, and the brand. The challenge comes in providing and promoting that seamless engagement in a way that doesn't overtax either business or IT users. The answer lies in a web content management solution (CMS).

A good web CMS can mean the difference between a static underachieving website and a dynamic and flexible one that adapts to visitor needs, converts prospects into customers, and strengthens the brand. But how do you begin to choose among the sea of content management solutions available today?

In the end, the best web CMS is the one that's right for a particular organization—now and into the future. This guide provides an overview of the web CMS choices available today, discusses the requirements both IT and marketing/executive decision makers should consider when selecting a web CMS, and includes advice for ensuring a successful evaluation process.

Introduction

Focus on the User Experience

In 2010, Internet visitors topped 2 billion, mobile phone subscriptions reached 5 billion, and mobile Internet traffic grew to more than three times the amount of total Internet traffic just ten years prior.^{1 2}

With numbers like these, it's clear that the Internet continues to be the world's largest marketplace. But it's also one that's evolving rapidly. To succeed in this marketplace, companies need to move from offering just a window into their world—via static “brochure-ware” sites—to providing a wide-open doorway that invites visitors in to engage, interact and learn.

From providing dynamic multimedia content to supporting browsing on mobile devices, success on the web means adapting quickly to changing user expectations. It also means capturing visitors' attention, holding it and engaging them in an on-going dialogue for a web experience that reinforces brand, enhances customer loyalty, responds to changing market conditions, and integrates seamlessly across all customer touch points—from websites to stores, e-mail, social media, and more.

Hurdles to Optimizing Web Business Value

As the Internet continues to evolve, so too does its usage. Nowhere is this more evident than in the proliferation of users accessing the web via mobile devices. With analysts predicting that mobile web use will exceed desktop Internet use by 2015, companies need to make their mobile web presence more than an afterthought.³ And this involves more than just optimizing websites for smaller screens.

It means taking into consideration how people use mobile devices, what information they're likely to pursue on them, how that information can be best displayed, and how they can make their sites rise to the top of local search results. Companies that don't optimize their web experience for mobile users will quickly see their customers flocking to competitors that do. Likewise, sites that don't fully support all major browsers or are not accessible for people with disabilities stand to miss opportunities to deliver a compelling user experience to all customer segments.

Sometimes, however, even organizations with clear web strategies fail to deliver dynamic websites. Typically, this is because technology deficits prevent them from executing on those strategies. Outdated and disparate systems result in outdated, difficult-to-navigate sites that turn up low in search engine results and fail to promote business or inspire brand loyalty. As a result, companies fall short of their business goals.

The Importance of a Web Content Management Solution

Imagine delivering the most useful content and features to your visitors dynamically—giving them exactly what they need, when they need it, and on whatever device they want to access it. Now, imagine using insight into

1 “UN: Worldwide Internet Users Hit Two Billion, Cellphone Subscriptions Top Five Billion,” Donald Melanson, AOL Tech, January 28, 2011

2 “Cisco Visual Networking Index: Global Mobile Data Traffic Forecast Update, 2010–2015,” Cisco, February 1, 2011

3 “New Study Shows the Mobile Web Will Rule by 2015,” Jolie O'Dell, Mashable.com, April 13, 2010

visitor behavior to constantly improve your web presence—testing, measuring, and updating your website to drive marketing results and increase operational efficiency.

You can do all this and more with the right web content management solution. Critical to website success, the web CMS is more than an enabling technology. The correct web CMS can help you achieve business goals while providing a solid foundation on which to build and leverage your online presence. It will help you expand your online community, increase brand loyalty, engage your customers, and create the type of integrated marketing campaigns that lead to higher conversion rates and happier customers. And it will do so while offering stellar ease of use to customers, employees, and developers—*if you choose wisely*.

Narrowing Down the Number of Web CMS Choices

The need to create and manage web content has given rise to hundreds of solutions across a variety of categories. To narrow your selection and come up with a more manageable list of potential solutions, you need to make some key decisions up front.

Open Source or Commercial

If your organization has little or no experience with open source, there are several things you should know. First and foremost, you need to understand that open source is not synonymous with *free*. While there are no license fees per se, you may need to pay support fees to achieve the level of availability you need. In addition, development and maintenance costs can be substantially greater with open source than with commercial software because you will need to develop much of the capabilities you need on your own and then maintain and expand them as needed.

You also need to consider whether you're willing to forego commercial-grade support, training, and enhancements.

If you consider your website a key strategic component of your business, an open source solution may not deliver the performance, security, reliability, and functionality you need to sustain a high-quality, compelling customer experience.

Enterprise Content Management or Web-Specific

Enterprise content management (ECM) can be a boon to organizations—boosting productivity, reducing manual processes, and speeding access to critical documents. But what's ideal for the internal business processes of an organization may not necessarily be the best solution for the public-facing website.

The problem is that although many ECM solutions deliver basic web publishing capabilities, they're primarily structured around document management. This means that unless your website is a static brochure-ware site, ECM solutions won't be able to offer the capabilities available in a structured content solution. A structured-content web CMS, in contrast, enables non-linear navigation and fine-grained control of individual pieces of

Key Decisions to Narrow the Field of Potential Solutions

- Open source versus commercial web CMS
- Enterprise content management (ECM) versus web CMS
- Based on Java or Microsoft .NET

content—all necessary to deliver a dynamic, optimized site that enables maximum flexibility and scalability without the complexity inherent in page-oriented ECMs.

Unlike ECM solutions, the web CMS is specifically designed to deliver an optimal user experience to website visitors. Providing a valuable marketing tool, the ideal web CMS allows sites to adapt rapidly to changing market conditions, accelerates time-to-market, improves search engine rankings, and offers tight integration with web marketing analytics and tools—all capabilities generally lacking in out-of-the-box ECM solutions.

Java or Microsoft .NET

Another area of importance when considering a web CMS is whether your IT organization has standardized on Java or Microsoft technology. Microsoft solutions use a framework called .NET, which can be considered a more modern version of the initial Java technology developed primarily for Unix systems.

While some organizations run both Java and .NET solutions, others have a committed policy or significant investment in one or the other of these foundational technologies. If your organization has standardized on one, you'll need to choose a web CMS that supports it.

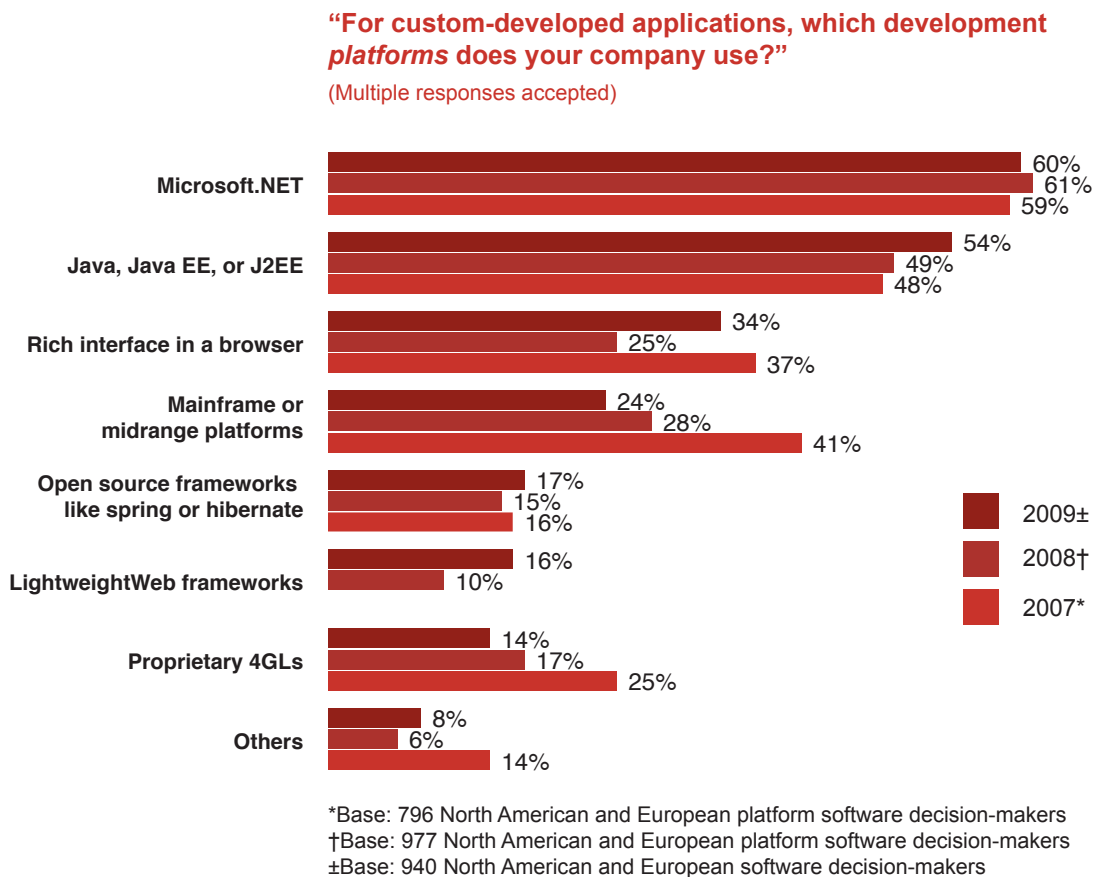


Figure 1: Enterprise Usage of .NET Versus Java⁴

4 “Java is a Dead-End for Enterprise App Development,” Mike Gualtieri, Forrester, November 23, 2010

Beware of web content management solutions that attempt to straddle this line of demarcation. Often, products that accommodate both Java and .NET are either deficient in one area or require far greater overhead to run. For instance, solutions that support both Java and .NET may require your organization to install both technologies in order to implement the full capabilities of the product—potentially adding to your software costs and maintenance overhead. To keep operations streamlined and training requirements reasonable, choose a vendor with a product fully implemented in either Java or .NET, not both.

What about PHP?

PHP is a general-purpose scripting language for web development. It is also used in some open-source CMS offerings. Because it's easy to learn, PHP is often used by small companies for simple websites. Medium and large businesses however, are much more likely to choose .NET for its compatibility with Microsoft technology and because their developers are already trained in .NET.

What to Look for in a Web CMS

Beware the Classic Web Publishing Approach

Until recently, web publishing revolved around linear, document-oriented concepts. Page-oriented web content management solutions were adequate for the typical brochure-ware sites where content seldom changed. But as websites have evolved and their focus has shifted to user experience, it's become imperative that branding, structure, content, and user interface all be rapidly revisable to meet changing user needs and preferences.

To meet that requirement, organizations need a web CMS that applies a fundamentally different approach. Today's web CMS must deliver the enterprise-scale flexibility, scalability, and adaptability required of dynamic websites. To do so, it must employ a structured content approach—managing content as discrete content components for a highly granular and flexible system. In addition, a web CMS must serve as both a strategic business tool for marketing and an effective technology foundation for developers.

Evaluating a Web CMS from the Business/Marketing Perspective

Choosing the right web CMS represents more than just a technology decision; it's also a key business decision. For this reason, business users must play an integral role in its selection. To ensure that the corporate website is able to meet current and future business objectives, business users and decision makers should consider the following when choosing a web CMS:

- **Ease of Use.** The web CMS solution needs to be intuitive for both marketers and editors. This means that everyone from “power editors” to casual content providers should be able to add and edit online content quickly, while maintaining complete control of the online brand. The solution should let users edit content right on the page, without having to know HTML or even be technically savvy.
- **Control.** Putting website control into the hands of online managers or other content owners (without requiring them to learn programming) is the central goal of the web CMS. Many solutions allow regular

marketing users to make page-oriented content changes while leaving branding, navigation, and other components of the user experience in the hands of website owners. Ensure that the web CMS you select empowers your marketing users to be able to make rapid changes without programming.

- **Integrated Digital Marketing Capabilities.** Incorporating the full spectrum of online marketing capabilities, the web CMS should serve as the central hub from which you manage, control, and optimize your website and engage your customers.
 - **Email marketing programs.** The web CMS should integrate email campaign management, testing, and optimization to maximize campaign and site performance, drive higher conversion rates, and improve marketing return on investment.
 - **Marketing automation.** Your website serves as the heart of your online presence. As such, all of your online marketing activity begins there—and much of it can be automated. Offering substantial benefits in the areas of customer segmentation and campaign management, marketing automation capabilities can help you eliminate repetitive tasks and streamline your marketing efforts around everything from email campaigns to landing pages, lead scoring, and integration into your customer database. With a good marketing automation solution, all of these functions should become second nature to your website.
 - **Website monitoring and analysis tools.** Ensure the solution you select includes advanced analytics capabilities to leverage the close relationship between the web CMS and visitors' browsing history. You should also make sure that the web CMS can be easily integrated with third-party analytics technologies such as Webtrends and Google Analytics to enable you to take informed actions.
 - **Social media integration.** With mobile browsing on the rise and social media driving much of that growth (more than 600 million people are expected to use their mobile devices to tap into social networks by 2013), any web CMS you choose should include a strong social media component.⁵ The right web CMS should make it easy to establish—and maintain—a dialogue with your customers through blogs, forums, polls, and integration with social media sites like Facebook and Twitter.
 - **Real-time personalization.** A good web CMS can transform an already dynamic website experience into a completely fluid one by allowing your site to adjust content in real time as a visitor moves through it—constantly offering the most relevant content and features. Best of all, the web CMS accomplishes this not with a roomful of coders but through sliders, checkboxes, rules wizards, multivariate and A/B split testing, and dialogs that let you develop detailed visitor profiles.
 - **Search optimization tools.** The web CMS should integrate SEO with the publishing process so that keyword-rich content and meta-data, search-friendly URLs, and other SEO tactics are consistently and automatically implemented.
- **Integration with Business Data.** Insist on the ability to easily integrate any and all of your line-of-business applications such as customer databases and CRM and ERP systems. Look for prebuilt integration with leading enterprise software packages. You should also look for the ability to connect to databases and web services without complex programming.

⁵ eMarketer, 2009.

- **Flexibility.** The web CMS needs to enable a dynamic experience for the user regardless of language, device, or type of content. Look for a solution that supports multiple languages and optimizes for different device types without having to re-render the site for each variation.

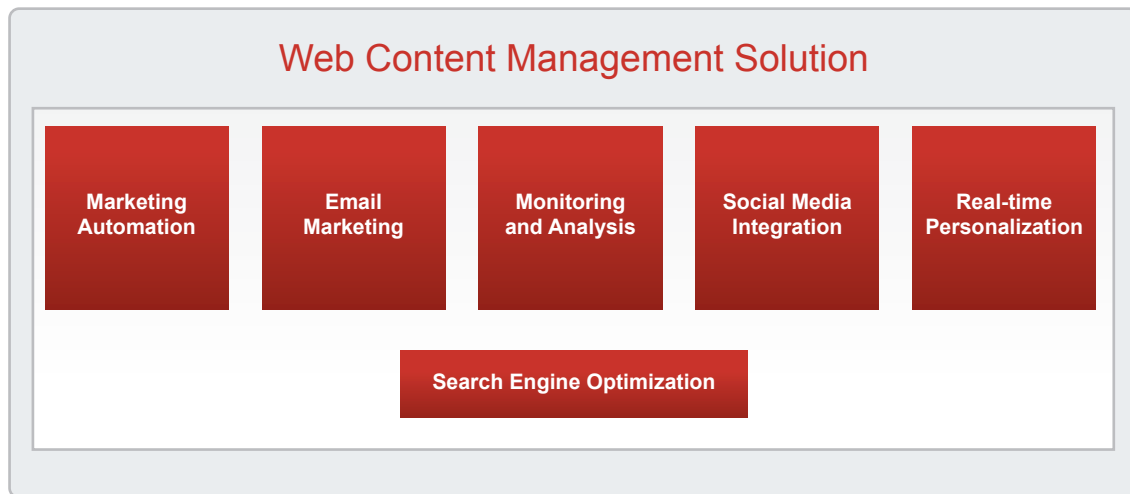


Figure 2: Web CMS with Integrated Marketing Capabilities

From the IT/Developer Perspective

While marketing/executive decision makers should focus on the usability, power, control, and flexibility of the web CMS solution, developers and IT should evaluate solutions based on the underlying infrastructure, development tools, and capabilities. In addition to determining whether the solution should be based on Java or .NET, your organization should consider these critical aspects:

- **Architecture.** Page-oriented web content management solutions will require additional development efforts to support the needs of marketing. Look for a marketing-oriented web CMS that takes a structured content approach and separates the content from the presentation. Specifically, the web CMS should dynamically create each web page by assembling each piece of “data” or content for that page. This means that the content presented on one page can easily be reused and redisplayed on dozens of other pages, and that content can be displayed in a different way or combination of ways, as appropriate. This can be text, images, video, tables, or other content format. In this way, the content is separated from the presentation for ultimate flexibility and scalability.
- **Developer Productivity.** Look for a web CMS that streamlines development and maintenance with easy-to-use tools, controls, and capabilities. Seamless integration with tools such as Visual Studio enables developers to make best use of their existing skills.
- **Design Flexibility.** To reduce programming effort and ensure flexibility, the web CMS should enable site designers to create page layouts for the site without coding.
- **Built-in Support for:**
 - **SEO optimization.** A truly marketing-oriented web CMS will optimize automatically for SEO tactics, including generating SEO-friendly URLs, avoiding redirects, and delivering inline SEO tools.

- **Security.** The web CMS should provide permission management to grant rights to users, groups and roles. It should also support external authentication and authorization systems without requiring extensive coding and integration efforts.
- **Multiple sites, languages, and devices.** Select a web CMS that supports any number of domains mapping to different web properties, as well as flexible sharing of content and code between logical sites. Ensure that the solution enables many-to-many language support to avoid creation of extensive new data structures when supporting multiple languages.
- **Navigation.** Pick a solution that provides automated functions such as navigation and breadcrumb tools that simplify new page, section, or site creation. Ideally, the solution should enable IT to give as much or as little control and flexibility to site editors as you wish.
- **Scalability and Performance.** The web—and the ways in which we use it—will continue to evolve far into the future. Thus, it’s essential to understand the performance and scalability implications of any web CMS you’re considering. To keep maintenance and ownership costs low, choose a solution that will let you deploy multiple websites on a single system. And for the ultimate in scalability, look to cloud computing, the technology Gartner analysts put at the top of their 2010 list of technologies that will have a “significant impact” on the enterprise over the next three years.⁶
- **Cloud Deployment.** Choose a web CMS that can leverage the cloud infrastructure to rapidly deploy and scale servers to handle increased website traffic and enter new markets—without requiring additional investments in hardware. A good web CMS will let you retain on-premise control of your core databases and content editing servers while turning over your public-facing servers to the cloud for one-click global deployment by your site administrator.

Ensuring a Successful Evaluation Process

Consider Getting Expert Advice

If your budget allows, or if you already retain their services in your organization, ask an analyst with a leading firm such as Gartner, Forrester, or Butler to provide insight into web CMS vendors. As renowned advisory services for technology and its implementation, these firms can help you understand which solutions are appropriate for your business requirements.

Your organization may want to consider retaining the services of a specialty advisor—one with specific expertise in web CMS software and implementations. Consultants and websites specializing in website content management include CMS Wire as well as interactive agencies and web development partners with extensive CMS experience. Some of the websites offer valuable information at no cost, while others offer reports to purchase or vendor selection services on a fee basis.

⁶ “2011 Tech Predictions: Cloud Computing, Tablets and Social Communications Top the List,” David Roe, CMS Wire, October 27, 2010

Include Your Developers in the Evaluation Process

Before you make a final decision, ensure that your development team has the opportunity to become familiar with the web CMS software. Steps to consider as part of the technical evaluation include:

- **Demonstrations:** The entire team, including marketing, content editors, and developers, should participate in comprehensive demonstrations. While the initial meeting may be mixed, allow different groups ample time to have their own sessions with the vendor where they can ask questions, at their level, that address their business or technical requirements.
- **Installation:** Request that the web CMS vendor install a clean/out-of-the-box version of its product for your development team. Demo systems are highly configured and don't necessarily give you a clear view of the complexity of the product. With a clean installation, your organization can see how easy or difficult it is to get started right out of the box.
- **Test Website:** Ask the web CMS vendor to build a simple website from scratch for your development team. This will reveal what functionality ships with the product, as distinct from customizations that may have been included in the demo system.
- **Vendor Training:** Strongly consider sending your developers to the web CMS vendor's technical training class. They will gain a clearer perspective of the product's capabilities and shortcomings, potentially saving your organization significant time and money in the long run. The web CMS vendor should be willing to provide free training prior to purchase.
- **Developer Community:** Determine if there is a vibrant developer community that your team can tap into. The community, as well as support from the web CMS vendor, is important in getting started and growing your website capabilities successfully.

Conclusion

In today's connected society, failing to maximize on the potential of your corporate website is akin to hanging a Closed sign on the door of your business. Companies need to be ready to engage with customers via their website whenever, wherever, and however those customers decide to interact with them. But providing the dynamic, flexible, and scalable sites that can do this—without a roomful of programmers working in the background—can prove tricky. A good web content management system can provide the solution.

Choosing a web CMS, however, is not a task to be undertaken lightly. Since this single tool will likely spell the success or failure of your Internet strategy—which in turn represents a key component of your business plan—its choice should require participation from more than just IT management. Business stakeholders, content owners, and developers should all be involved, and the selection should be evaluated from a number of angles. Choose wisely, and your corporate website will engage your customers and drive your success—generating revenue, improving customer service, raising brand awareness, and promoting customer loyalty.

About Sitecore

Sitecore redefines how organizations engage with their customers online, powering experiences that can sense and adapt to a customer's needs to increase revenue and customer lifetime value and satisfaction. Sitecore was the first Web Content Management system (WCM) to incorporate marketing automation, intranet portal, e-commerce, Web optimization, social media and campaign management technologies into a cohesive, integrated open platform. Sitecore's software makes it easy for businesses to identify, serve, engage and convert new customers online.

Sitecore's broad choice of capabilities enable marketing professionals, business stakeholders and information technology teams to rapidly implement, measure and manage a successful website and online business strategy. Its powerful development platform, integrated marketing automation tools and intuitive editing workspace enables successful websites of all types.

Thousands of public and private organizations have created and now manage more than 27,000 dynamic websites with Sitecore including ATP World Tour, Beiersdorf, FrieslandCampina, Heineken, ISS, Lloyd's of London, Microsoft, Nestle Australia, Omni Hotels, Siemens, Thomas Cook and The Knot.

Connect in the Sitecore Community to experience Sitecore's success and that of its customers, partners and developers.

For more information about Sitecore CMS, visit www.sitecore.net.