



Which CMS Is Right For Me?

| A guide to evaluating the various CMS options |

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Table of Contents

Executive summary.....	3
Why a Content Management System?.....	4
Making the Selection.....	5
The CMS Marketplace.....	5
Custom CMS: Reinventing the Wheel.....	6
Open-Source: the Low Cost Option?.....	6
Installed Solutions: Is Bigger Better?.....	8
Software-as-a-service (SaaS): Benefits without the Costs?.....	9
A Quick Head-to-Head:.....	11
Conclusion.....	13

Executive summary

The content management market has exploded in size in recent years with the availability of platforms like Open Source and SaaS giving way to scores of solutions in a variety of sizes and complexities. While companies are spoiled for choice, the unprecedented volume of solutions makes selecting the right content management system (CMS) for an organization an increasingly difficult task.

One side effect of the growing volume of the market is an increasing sense of dissatisfaction among many firms that have been burned by their first and, in some cases, second choice of CMS solutions. Stories abound of companies stuck with inefficient content management systems that they are unwilling to migrate from due to the voluminous investments made in the first place. Even firms willing to make the migration are in a bind as deciding between hundreds of traditional-installed, customized, open source and Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) CMS solutions is proving too difficult a task.

Through this whitepaper, one of the main points we want to highlight is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach because content management is a process rather than a product. Understanding what your internal business requirements are as well as the basic pros and cons of each type of system will give you a starting point in understanding which CMS is right for your organization.

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Why a Content Management System?

The subject of why you might need a CMS in the first place is the logical starting point before even considering which type of CMS you might need, but this whitepaper will not go into this in depth. It must be mentioned, however, that online marketing revolves around the Web and the Web revolves around content. This now makes every company's Web site it's most important public face, and companies that do not efficiently manage their public face get lost in the sea of marketing noise that fills the Internet today.

At its most basic form a CMS is designed to create, manage, publish and retire content on a corporate Web site, but the days of a company having a single online fingerprint are over. Enterprises now offer content in ways that are most digestible by their users: through content syndication, creating multiple landing pages and microsites for online campaigns, optimizing Web properties for Search Engine Optimization, and publishing in multiple channels for mobile or RSS. The point is that a CMS is managing more than just your single Web site. It is managing your entire online presence.

Even the largest, frontline organizations in the sector struggle with the task of providing users with relevant, up-to-the-minute and need-specific content. As one goes further down the ladder, the task grows in complexity for small and medium businesses with IT staff and budgets strained to the limit. The access to and automation of information that a content management system provides can prove invaluable in such a scenario. Online marketing, compliance, media management and report management - an effective content management solution covers it all.

No wonder then that research firm Gartner estimates that Enterprise content management adoption will grow at a compounded rate of 12.9% till 2011, by which time, over 60% of companies will have adopted at least base-level content management system.

However, getting back to the topic at hand, companies must be wary of selecting a CMS solution without adequate research as this could either result in firms sinking large amounts of funds into a product they use little of, or worse still, buying a product that does not satisfy the specific requirements they are faced with.



CMS: Some Benefits

- ▶ Assures information relevance, currency and accuracy
- ▶ Efficient management of Web site content
- ▶ Automated end-to-end processes for content creation, publishing, reusing and more
- ▶ Collaboration, compliance, media management and report management
- ▶ Refined online marketing campaigns that can be continuously tracked and improved

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Making the Selection

One of the first things to remember about selecting and implementing a CMS solution is that it takes time. Again, we won't go into this in detail, but if you'd like more information on the selection process please check out our CMS Pocket Guide: A guide to evaluating, implementing and deploying a content management system, which can be found in the CrownPeak Infocenter. The point we do want to make here, however, is a key component to selecting an efficient CMS solution is knowing exactly what your company requires from its CMS. A recent 2008 Content Management Systems Satisfaction Survey conducted by the Nonprofit Technology Network revealed some interesting requirements among its own community:

- ▶ User friendly or intuitive interface design
- ▶ Ongoing support after sale and implementation
- ▶ Delivering on promises
- ▶ Understanding the customer organization and requirements
- ▶ Valuing the relationship

Of course, establishing what a company requires beyond these basic factors is next to impossible as each organization has unique needs and there is no 'perfect for everyone' content management solution. Indeed, the approach followed by most organizations of choosing a CMS solution is based on features and little else. The question one should ask of any CMS is not "what features do you have", but rather "how can your CMS solve my business problem." Thus, the first place to look in the process of selecting a CMS is within the organization, and sufficient time and energy must be spent in consulting with stakeholders about what the organization requires of its CMS.

The CMS Marketplace

It cannot be said enough that the content management marketplace has grown so bewilderingly large that choosing the right CMS solution is overwhelming to say the least. So to make this process more manageable in the context of this whitepaper let's put them into 4 major buckets for further discussion:

- ▶ Custom built or homegrown CMS
- ▶ Open Source CMS
- ▶ Traditional installed CMS
- ▶ Software-as-a-Service CMS

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Custom CMS: Reinventing the Wheel

At first glance, the continued emphasis on requirement-based selection would make a custom-built CMS solution seem the most logical. After all, what better way to have all your requirements met than to sit down with a developer and have the CMS tuned exactly to your organization's needs? This approach had its heyday in the early years of content management, where the only choices available were exorbitant solutions from large internal IT organizations, systems integrators and consultants. As the market matured, that scenario changed, with commercial vendors offering more functionality that can be customized to almost any organization.

The disadvantages of custom-built CMS solutions are apparent in such an environment.

- ▶ Content management systems must operate in a continually shifting landscape and it is much harder and less efficient to keep one-off systems up-to-date. Popular commercial and open-source products on the other hand, have a much larger community of users, and hence the opportunities to receive support, upgrades and at the last resort migration assistance are greater.
- ▶ One of the key dangers with custom-built solutions is the high turnover in IT, which is an unchanging fact of the industry. Thus, with custom-built solutions, the chances of subsystems or even entire applications or projects becoming redundant due to the non-availability of the original developers are very high.
- ▶ Even where programmers in the IT department could build a CMS from scratch, the long development cycles and significant manpower investment mean abysmal ROI on a labor-intensive process.

As one commentator estimates, it costs a minimum of \$5 million to create a functional CMS solution that "meets the standards". At such high costs to create a functional CMS, it definitely makes far more business sense to purchase a product that someone else has already invested significant amounts into creating rather than tying down your own money unnecessarily.

Open-Source: the Low Cost Option?

Although the need for developing custom CMS solutions definitely has its place in certain, albeit very limited situations, the popularity of open source solutions has definitely caused a shift among developers from custom coding to using CMS options where the source code is completely open and available for customization.

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There is no doubt that open source offers some very significant advantages:

- ▶ The primary draw of open-source is the low investment involved since the source code is either available free or at an extremely low license fee. This means that a major portion of the budget for the CMS can be earmarked for services such as integration, usability testing, training and content restructuring among other things.
- ▶ Customers also have the option of further customization using local developers. Moreover, when this customization can be coupled with open platforms, integration to other programs becomes relatively easier.
- ▶ With open-source CMS solutions, what you see is in fact what you get. Customers do not have to be wary of being taken in by snazzy demos that promise things that the actual product does not deliver.
- ▶ Open source provides customers with the advantage of community support, which takes away the uncertainty of issues with single, commercial developers.

The very fact that open source is a community is its biggest advantage as well as its biggest disadvantage. Open source solutions suffer from the problem of unpredictability, as typically no iron-clad contracts and service-level agreements exist. Some of the many problems of open source solutions include:

- ▶ Lack of support: Since all support comes from the developer community rather than from contractually bound vendors, support can be either very good or very bad depending on the specific nature of the community at the time one encounters a problem.
- ▶ Open source isn't free: Although the software itself might be "free", open source CMS solutions depend on consultants for design, implementation, maintenance and hosting, all of which come at a price that is not always low. An open source CMS is typically a template or a shell that needs to be customized for each individual organization and requires the same amount of development time, and of course cost, as any other type of CMS. And where you really start to see costs pile up is in the maintenance of this type of system. Because of the constant activity in the developer community, open source products are upgraded and patched much more often than installed solutions adding costs for resources to upgrade as well as the increased likelihood that upgrades will break the current implementation and integrations.

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- ▶ Low maturity and lack of end-to-end functionality: The intense competition in the CMS sector is driving innovation among commercial developers that is far too difficult for open-source products to match, lacking as they do the scale of investments being pumped into commercial products. Moreover, open-source products are most suited for small-scale implementations requiring a few specific features rather than the end-to-end functionality that commercial solutions provide.
- ▶ End user adoption: Open-source has historically been more concerned with technical and architectural concerns to the detriment of usability. What this means is that open source solutions might not always be adopted by end-users even if they do seem tailored to an organization's needs. Add to this the lack of proper documentation and support information, which is generally a labor and resource intensive task, and you find that most open-source solutions come with significant gaps and holes that need more investment to fill.

Installed Solutions: Is Bigger Better?

While many small and medium organizations might still choose an open-source solution, there is a general agreement that commercial solutions are the way to go... no one ever got fired for buying IBM right? Let's look at some of the main advantages of installed content management systems:

- ▶ The main advantage of installed solutions comes from the fact that the entire software resides with the customer; so there is a certain feeling of control and security by having the application on site.
- ▶ Installed solutions carry a reputation for having the most mature and polished services, as well as the widest range of core functionalities.
- ▶ With the year-on-year drop in prices, installed solutions are not as unaffordable as they used to be.

Installed solutions, in general, however, are showing signs of decline due to a variety of reasons, including:

- ▶ High costs: At the end of the day, virtually all installed solutions lie outside the budgets of most small and mid-size organizations, and even large enterprises that have many application projects competing for budget. The combined costs of licensing, software and hardware quickly add up. And as with open source and custom built solutions, there is the cost to manage and maintain the CMS over its entire lifetime.

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- ▶ Life after launch: Most of the work in implementing a CMS comes in when the CMS goes live. This is when templates need changing, Web sites need redesigning, workflows need restructuring, and employees need training. In a strange turn of coincidence, this is exactly the stage where providers of installed CMS solutions hand over the software to your IT staff and wish you good luck; unless, that is, you're willing to pay for further professionals service time.
- ▶ Resource drain: Besides the almost 20% of original cost that companies must invest in annual maintenance, installed CMS solutions also require constant labor inputs, as keeping the system running is solely the concern of the customer's IT department. Thus, the upgrades, patches, day-to-day maintenance and troubleshooting still require a dedicated IT presence that not all organizations can afford.

Software-as-a-service (SaaS): Benefits without the Costs?

Another type of CMS that has challenged some of the old guard of custom-built or installed solutions is SaaS. As with open source, the popularity of this model isn't limited to just content management; in all software services sectors, SaaS solutions are expected to rise at an explosive rate, reaching a total market share of \$19.3 billion by 2011, according to research firm Gartner. So let's look at why SaaS is becoming so popular:

- ▶ SaaS solutions eliminate the need for installed software, extra hardware or infrastructure to manage and maintain. This means that the costs of a SaaS solution are significantly lower than a homegrown or installed solution. Additionally, this also means that the organization does not need to dedicate significant IT resources (which in most cases it does not possess) to the maintenance of the CMS.
- ▶ Accessible through your Web browser, the SaaS model offers easier availability to the application for decentralized organizations.
- ▶ Dedicated support services come as part of the standard package. Unlike installed solutions that additionally charge for any extra services provided after the initial implementation, SaaS solutions typically come with dedicated account managers that are responsible for the account during the entire lifecycle of the account.
- ▶ Service delivery is guaranteed since all payments for a hosted solution are predicated upon service delivery. Accountability is what the entire SaaS sector is built on, because if not you can simply discontinue the service, so SaaS vendors are typically more driven to make your site successful.

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- ▶ The solution is deployed with greater speed than either open-source or installed solutions, since every step of the process is fully managed by the vendor, and there are no software installations or infrastructure upgrades involved.
- ▶ The customer organization undertakes a much lower level of risk since solutions are purchased as services rather than as physical assets that could later turn into liabilities. In addition, SaaS solution customers are always on the most current version of the software, adding upgrades, patches and features at no additional cost.
- ▶ The level of features and functionality with SaaS solutions is the same and in most cases superior to enterprise-class installed solutions at a fraction of the cost.

Of course, the fact that SaaS vendors have not yet taken over the market shows that SaaS is not a magic bullet. Some of the disappointment that exists in the market about SaaS is because SaaS solutions have just had too much hype to live up to. There are issues with SaaS solutions that must be considered, primarily due to the external nature of the solution:

- ▶ Some organizations find it very difficult to give up control and trust third parties to manage their applications and data.
- ▶ For some organizations, whether for compliance or regulatory needs, SaaS solutions may not be a good fit because information needs to live outside of the corporate firewall.
- ▶ Since you access the CMS via your Web browser, your access to the application is only as good as your Internet connection.

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A Quick Head-to-Head:

We've definitely covered a lot of information for consideration on your part so here's a quick chart with the pros and cons of each type of system:

CMS Solutions	Pros	Cons
Custom-Built	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Features tuned exactly to company requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Long development cycles ▶ Cannot compare with commercial solutions in functionality ▶ High risk of losing system experts due to turnover ▶ Heavy drain on developer resources with low ROI ▶ Cumbersome Web update processes that result in information bottlenecks ▶ Development of such a system is not core to the business – thus the danger of very little ROI
Open Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Cost-effective and safe on the surface ▶ Code base is free and easily accessible ▶ Large development network available for customization ▶ Less of the marketing fluff ▶ Community support with the potential for better service than single developers ▶ Broader installation base 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Software is 'free'; but there are hidden costs coming from development, support and maintenance fees, and upgrades ▶ Lack of contractually bound support resources ▶ Not as feature and function-rich as more mature products ▶ Low end-user adoption ▶ Implementation risks and smooth functioning rests on the shoulder's of the business ▶ Accountability for "free" products is usually minimal ▶ Not often developed by professionals – which also means non-professional testing

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CMS Solutions	Pros	Cons
Commercial, Installed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ More mature and polished services with wider range of core functionalities ▶ More control of immediate software environment ▶ Can 'plug in' to an existing system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ High cost due to the combined investment needed for software licenses, hardware and infrastructures ▶ Lack of vendor support while going live, as responsibility of maintaining the CMS post-implementation is with the customer ▶ Resource drain in terms of necessary investment for annual maintenance as well as labor inputs for daily maintenance and trouble-shooting ▶ More difficult to have decentralized users of the CMS ▶ Requires a large amount of system administration ▶ Complicated end-to-end packages that can drastically increase site operation costs ▶ Migration process from old content
Software-as-a-Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Lower costs as there is no need for installed software, hardware or infrastructure ▶ Vendor assumes full responsibility for set up and streamlined functioning ▶ Dedicated support services with an account manager responsible for the account during its entire lifecycle; access to top-of-the-line expertise at low cost ▶ Better service delivery as the entire sales model is built on accountability ▶ Greater speed of deployment since every step is managed by the vendor ▶ Easy upgrades – handled by vendor ▶ Much lower risks for the customer since no assets are bought ▶ Easier access to the application for a decentralized workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ There can be issues of control and trust with a third party (CMS provider) ▶ Concerns of security since the applications and data live outside the firewall ▶ Access to information is limited by Internet connection ▶ Continuous co-ordination with an external team

Conclusion

In choosing a content management system, the old adage of “knowledge is power” applies. Selecting the right system for the organization’s needs requires a little homework to make sure you’re going to get what you pay for. Every company should employ a number of strategies -- including seeking advice from vendor-neutral consultants, examining a variety of online sources for current information on content management issues, consulting performance and user-satisfaction reports released by reliable research agencies, learning from the experiences of similar organizations and consulting with all stakeholders within the organization before making such a crucial selection. We hope you found this information useful and wish you luck in your CMS search.

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