



# 10 critical questions to ask when selecting a CMS

How to identify the right content solution for your scaling business



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## INTRODUCTION

Most companies look for a new content solution when they start hitting the limits of their current CMS or it's no longer supported. When this occurs, smart business leaders know to start looking for solutions that eliminate pain points *and* scale with their business. Replatforming to maintain the status quo isn't enough – growing brands need technology that supports and accelerates digital experience delivery and helps to acquire, engage and retain customers, partners and suppliers.

Perpetual technology upgrades, common among monolithic solutions, are expensive. They kill business momentum and pull teams into lengthy selection and implementation processes that freeze development and content creation for weeks or months.

By identifying future-facing content solutions that remove limits – even those they haven't hit yet – companies can scale seamlessly and eliminate costs associated with continual upgrades.

Even more frustrating are upgrades brought by end-of-life announcements – when a software provider decides that they'll no longer offer support, bug fixes or security updates for a particular version. This event is outside a business's control and forces it to choose between two evils:

1. Staying with the original software – which requires increased support costs and assumes security risks or
2. Replacing the outdated architecture and migrating custom functionality and content to a new platform.

Procuring and implementing a new solution slows down critical projects as business leaders are pulled into lengthy selection and approval processes. Once a solution is identified, development and other resources will shift to migrating content, rebuilding custom functionalities and integrations, and training team members on how to use the new system.

One of the greatest value differentiators for any new technology is its ability to prepare you for the future and avoid the pain of future upgrades.

In this white paper, we outline content solution features necessary for brands to deliver winning content and experiences today and tomorrow – no matter how large their team grows or what new markets they reach. Each section highlights a critical factor to consider and includes a checklist for use while shopping for your next content solution.



#### QUESTION ONE

## Does the content solution support multisite management and quick builds?

In 2020, [51% of CMS users reported using more than one CMS](#). The inability to manage multiple channels and sites slows down teams and invites inconsistencies in user experience. Businesses can't expect to provide a seamless, connected user experience efficiently if their backend systems are siloed and disconnected.

[SumUp](#), a company powering card readers for small business, hired globalization professional David Pillon to lead localization efforts for a new product launch in 20 European countries – which meant supporting content in multiple languages. Light investigation revealed serious challenges. Each of SumUp's five offices had their own content hubs and lacked any process to ensure consistency across channels. To support content transparency and consistency, SumUp reached for an API-first content platform. The solution centralized content and offered features and integrations to maintain brand consistency and accelerate new launches.

When thinking about multisite support, it's also important to consider if multiple versions of content are needed. Businesses may find they want to replicate content when entering new global markets or for hypertargeting, personalization and optimization efforts. While each task can benefit from centrally managed brand elements, they'll also require unique integrations like data analytic features, personalization tools, translation tools, and security add-ons, among others.

Think about all the places digital content can live: digital billboards, apps, wearables and online. How will this content solution deliver content to those channels, and what features will make managing that content across devices easier?

[Learn how to localize and personalize content within Contentful.](#)

## Multi-site management checklist

- Can local and global content be managed in the same hub?
- Can content be reused on multiple sites? If so, does the solution function as a single source of truth for content updates and distribution?
- Does the solution encourage brand and design consistency?
- Are there capabilities that simplify common tasks such as translation, image optimization and adhering to country-specific legal requirements?
- How quickly does the solution make updates to support new channels or changing legal requirements?
- Can the solution integrate with preferred personalization, optimization, translation and collaboration tools?





## QUESTION TWO

# Does the content solution accelerate speed to market?

Digital leaders, developers, content creators and marketers are all eager to use better tools to do bigger things. Choosing a content solution that enables these builders to create and iterate quickly with tools that stretch their imaginations maintains momentum. Alternative tools can introduce a game of hurry up and wait, which dampens the fire of innovation.

Atlassian recognized this and opted for an API-first content platform. Their solution enables editors to [publish content in five minutes](#). Atlassian's content now moves to market quickly and is not reliant on developers.

Companies looking to introduce agile development and continuous shipping to iterate on digital products need tools built to support fast sprints. These tools are reliant on structured content that is easy to find and reuse across products and channels, modular design elements and integrated tools. Switching from a traditional CMS to an API-first content platform accelerates content creation and development while supporting workflows that maximize productivity.

[See just how easy it is to build with structured content and the right tools.](#)

## Speed to market checklist

- Does the solution have a track record for accelerating development cycles?
- Does the solution fuse with and improve existing workflows?
- How fast are current solution customers completing comparable work?
- Does the solution support content structured for easy reuse and deployment across channels?
- Tip:** Consider requesting examples or case studies for each content solution you're considering.
- Does the solution improve page load times and decrease downtime? Does it support variations in traffic and API calls without impacting speed?
- Is the solution an API-first platform that supports integrations with your existing or future tech?



### QUESTION THREE

## What opportunities does the content solution open up?

Choosing to upgrade a CMS is about more than saying goodbye to current problems – it's an opportunity to implement technology that invites new possibilities into your organization. When your business is ready to build new digital products, expand channels or launch innovative campaigns, you want a content solution that helps you to move forward at whatever speed you choose, not one that sets the pace.

Depending on where you are in your content journey, there could be many attractive solutions that satisfy your requirements. The way to differentiate the right solution from a good solution is to look at how the technology meets present-day requirements and then builds off those to help you gain new digital capabilities down the road.

As you evaluate options, consider not only what the content solution offers, but how it inspires and supports digital builders. Are your developers itching to get their hands on a free trial? Is your marketing team excited to finally break down silos and launch truly multichannel campaigns?

### Modern content solution checklist

- Does the solution offer innovative examples of how it adds value today and how it prepares your business to adapt to the future?
- Do their case studies leave you inspired and eager to experience similar results?
- Does the solution support a modern tech stack including the following features?
  - [Microservices/stack architecture](#)
  - [Structured, modular components](#)
  - [Multichannel distribution](#)
  - [API-first extensibility](#)
  - [Enterprise-ready to scale](#)
  - [Pay-as-you-grow options](#)



#### QUESTION FOUR

## Can the content solution meet you where you're at and then scale?

Nobody knows if a particular content solution is a good fit until they start using it. Each company's content journey is unique so there is no one-size-fits-all solution – despite what monolithic suites want you to believe. To avoid the risk of investing in a CMS that only looks good on the surface, seek content solutions that meet you where you're at with a low threshold for entry and enough extensibility to scale.

A low threshold for entry can take many forms. Starting with a proof of concept and expanding to more projects, teams and, eventually, enterprise-wide adoption is best practice. Contentful, for example, offers a [free Community plan](#) with full features. You can access the GraphQL API and introduce enough users, records, content types and sandbox environments for developers to start building legitimate digital experiences. There's no time limit for using this plan, so you can take the content solution for a spin without the red tape of a long procurement process.

A low threshold can also mean the content solution easily connects with the legacy systems you'll rely on during migration. CMSes that demand hired experts, manually migrating content and learning new interfaces before teams can start building are asking for too much faith and commitment far too early. This can make them hard to sell internally. It can also leave you high and dry if the solution becomes a poor fit.

Equally important as the threshold for entry is the ability to scale. You don't want to halt momentum by rebuilding your tech stack during growth.

[Download this white paper](#) to learn about the seven dimensions of scale every business should consider when adopting new, future-proof technology.



## Investment and scalability checklist

- What time, money and developer investments are needed to implement the solution?
- Can you start with just the features you need and pay as you grow?
- Does the solution make it easy to migrate content and functionalities from your old systems?
- Does the solution offer a trial? Will you be able to build a proof of concept with the features and time provided?
- How future-proof is the solution? Does it support an API-first stack approach or will you be locked into preferred vendors?
- Does the solution have a history of unveiling innovative features, or are they playing catch-up with competitors?





#### QUESTION FIVE

## Are there restrictions to what can be managed in the content solution?

[Our 2020 survey](#) of CMS users revealed an interesting disconnect between what digital leaders thought their content solutions could do and what content creators were experiencing. While 74% of digital leaders said their CMS enabled control of all content across digital channels without developer assistance, only 34% of content creators agreed.

When content is siloed or hard-coded, teams have to create workarounds. Content creators might find themselves spending hours copying and pasting content across systems. Simple updates that should take minutes can sit for days in the developer queue.

Content solutions with strong import and integration tools unify technologies with seamless, shared content at the center of the stack. This type of content hub aids in federating and managing content across digital experiences. It enables teams to spin up pre-made stacks for new projects, while pulling content from a reliable location. Content management becomes sleek and its reach expansive.

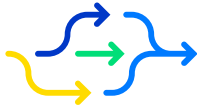
In short, a modern content solution with a central hub actually does what most digital leaders think their current CMS can (but fails to) do.

[Learn more about the benefits of having one content hub to rule them all.](#)

### Unified content management checklist

- Can the solution replace multiple content repositories to unify fragmented content?
- Can content be created, managed and updated from one location?
- Does the solution allow you to add microcopy, navigation and custom pages without coding or developer assistance?
- Does the interface empower creatives to upload, edit and publish content independently?
- Does the solution enable you to pull from and deliver content to current distribution channels?

## QUESTION SIX



### Does the content solution integrate with and enhance your existing technology?

The ease with which a new content solution integrates into your current tech stack and preferred workflows offers valuable insight into how it will integrate with emerging technology. Problems integrating a CMS with existing platforms, workflows and development tools are likely to resurface every time you add new tools to your stack. These integration headaches become speed bumps on the road to innovation and growth.

Integration capabilities can also shine a light on how much investment redundancy the content solution will introduce. With traditional all-in-one CMSes, businesses are forced to pay for features even if they have existing tools they prefer to use. This can reduce return on investment and add a layer of complexity to implementation as teams migrate data and workflows from the tools they prefer to the new system. What's more, a solution that tries to do everything is unlikely to be as good as individual tools built for a specific job.

Seamless integrations extend the value of existing technology investments and offer more flexibility in how you build your tech stack. Instead of trying to be an all-in-one solution, an API-first content solution simply sits at the core, anchoring and connecting all your tech needs and content. With this setup, digital builders – developers, content creators, marketers, and anyone creating customer-facing solutions – can experiment faster and with more freedom.

[See how Contentful eliminates vendor lock and makes integrating easy with our App Framework.](#)

#### Extensibility checklist

- Does the solution integrate with preferred and existing tools and customizations?
- Does the solution limit your ability to change channels, tools or workflows in the future?
- How easy are integrations within the solution? Do they affect functionality or extend implementation time?
- Will connecting the technologies your team prefers require vendor support?
- Will solution updates impact integrations and future customizations?



## QUESTION SEVEN

# What is the implementation timeline for the content solution?

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

When selecting a content solution, consider the speed of transition to the new platform, not just the speed of shipping software once it's implemented. This will help you evaluate options based on time to value and accelerate your return on investment.

[See how solutions and technology partners can help accelerate time to value.](#)

### Implementation checklist

- What is the expected timeline between choosing the solution and shipping your first digital product?
- Are some configurations mutually exclusive? Do you have any unusual requirements that might take longer to set up?
- Will you need to hire product experts or consultants? If so, are these people difficult to hire or retain?
- How is content migrated? Will your business need to freeze content and feature updates?
- Is the new solution difficult to learn? Will your team have access to training, documents and support services?
- What parts of the implementation process often impact timelines or cause delays?
- Does the vendor have partners capable of filling gaps and accelerating time to value?



#### QUESTION EIGHT

## Does the content solution offer a good user experience?

No content solution is going to propel a company to the top on its own. It's the developers, content creators, marketers and other team members creating, coding and promoting the content with the solution that impacts business goals. Empowering digital builders with the tools they love keeps them happy, productive and focused on adding value for customers and your company.

Editors and content creators want less complexity and more autonomy. Editorial interfaces should be streamlined and empower editors to publish more content faster – zero development needed. This requires new content solutions built for the digital-first era we are in.

Unfortunately, many traditional content solutions leave their largest users frustrated. Traditional CMSes weren't built to manage the volume of content and the reach that companies need today. One piece of content can spawn dozens of variations as it's optimized, translated, localized and personalized. And, because every variation needs to be tracked, managed and kept up to date, multiple CMSes (and silos) enter the equation. This leaves creative types buried in inefficient, draining operations.

### What challenges are digital builders facing?

**49%** say they spend too much time maintaining content

**51%** are using multiple CMSes and **41%** are updating content individually in each CMS

Only **65%** say they can reuse content across multiple digital channels

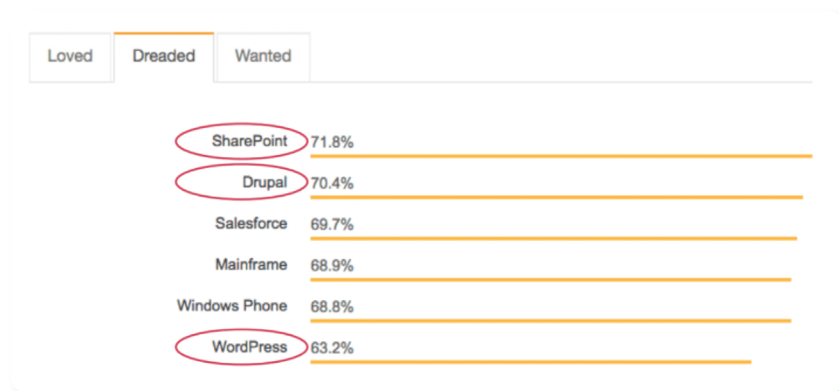
Only **57%** say they can control all content on their digital channels without developer assistance

Dig into even more data [in our report](#) on the gap between traditional CMSes and modern content platforms.

When content solutions fail to deliver editorial autonomy, developers are tasked with plugging the holes. Forty-five percent of developers in our 2020 survey report that managing a CMS pulls them away from their core function and two-thirds of developers tie a CMS to their job satisfaction.

Developers are in high demand: three out of four respondents in our survey said the ability to hire skilled developers for their current CMS was a problem. And [Stack Overflow's 2018 Developer Survey Results](#) reveal strong opinions among developers about the content solutions they use:

Three of the top six most dreaded programming platforms are CMSes, according to StackOverflow's developer survey.



## User experience checklist

- Does the solution understand and account for what's important to editors and developers?
- Does the solution support parallel workflows?
- Are there additional tools available to support content creators and other non-developers?
- Does the solution enable editors to easily update, preview and post changes independently?
- Can developers use the tools and languages they love?
- Will the solution lock you into certain tools or coding languages that might become outdated?

## QUESTION NINE



### Can governance and workflow features of the content solution support diverse needs?

Good governance and efficient workflows are vital to developing a content strategy that scales. While a central content platform ensures consistent content, employing reusable content within this platform supports enterprise-wide content reuse. With all your important content in one place, it's important to implement guardrails that prevent it from being managed by or distributed to the wrong people. Governance helps with this.

The permissions you need will change as your company grows and evolves. Platforms that are configured with rigid permissions can hinder your ability to organize and reorganize teams to meet changing business needs. Granular permissions that can be updated at the individual or team level make it easier to adjust access as teams change and ensure that content governance is consistent as you scale.

Look for content solutions that give you the ability to organize and reorganize how users interact – something that helps you streamline workflows and adjust permissions. For example, Contentful supports multi-space architecture, which is a great option when you cater to multiple markets, and have different business or digital units. The same platform can bring cross-functional digital teams together and support parallel workflows.

[See what multi-space architecture looks like](#) on a content platform or [read our blog series](#) on organizing people into scalable digital teams.

#### Governance and workflow checklist

- Can permissions be set at the individual and team level?
- Can workflows be customized for different teams?
- Is it easy to reorganize permissions and workflows as your organizational structure evolves?
- Will the governance and workflows scale as you add users?
- Does the solution have defaults or limits that could restrict your ability to create and customize governance or workflows?



#### QUESTION TEN

## Does the content solution offer enterprise-level security and reliability?

Even when starting small, it's important to look at the security and reliability features a content solution offers. This is an area of risk where things can be fine for a long time and then suddenly they aren't. The last thing you want is for your site to crash in the middle of a big product launch or to delay launch into a new market because your security standards fall short of that country's requirements.

### Security and reliability checklist

- Does the solution provide a detailed overview of how they manage security and reliability? [See an example.](#)
- Does the solution have security certifications, such as ISO 27001 or those through AWS, showing independent audits of their security practices?
- Do all content solution components meet your security standards?
- What is the promised uptime and how does the solution ensure it?
- Is content replicated between multiple servers and backed up frequently?
- Does the solution have a secure global delivery network to support expansion into global markets?
- What is the process for notifying customers of a security incident?



# Download and print the complete content solution checklist

Choosing a new content solution is an exciting opportunity to resolve old pain points, streamline processes and deliver bigger, better digital experiences. We've compiled the small checklists in each section into one master checklist you can use to compare options.

[Download it now](#)



## What's more?

We've done a [quick comparison of Contentful vs. WordPress vs. Drupal](#) to get you started.