Learn what a headless CMS is, how it differs from traditional content management systems, and why you might choose a headless CMS for your project.

What is a Headless CMS?

A *headless content management system* or *headless CMS*, is a CMS in which the data (content) layer is separated from its presentation (frontend) layer.

Content management systems, such as [WordPress](#) and [Drupal](#) store content in a database, and use a collection of HTML-based template files to manage how that content gets presented to visitors. Many of these content management systems deliver content via [server-side rendering](#), which can hurt load times and slow down a site visitor's experience.

Headless content management systems, on the other hand, return structured data via an [API](#). When your content is available as structured data, it's available to any client or application that can consume that data whether a [Jamstack](#) application, or a mobile device. Rather than merging templates (the presentation layer) and content (the data layer) to create HTML, a headless CMS returns JSON or unstyled XML which can be compiled and optimized by frontend frameworks like Gatsby for faster performance.

With a headless CMS, marketers and content creators still use an WYSIWYG-like editing interface to add content to a headless CMS - it looks very similar or exactly the same as a backend like WordPress. But when the [backend](#) management of the site's content is *[decoupled](#)* from the [frontend](#) that displays it, developers can use the tools they love to create flexible, beautiful interfaces. They are free to use tools like React and GraphQL and a Git workflow to create fast, secure, scalable sites.

Benefits Of Headless Architecture

Speed

Decoupled frontends offer superior speed to monolithic systems by combining deep performance optimizations with a smaller server-side footprint.

Security

Headless systems present a smaller attack surface to malicious attacks since they have fewer open connections to open servers or databases.

Scalability

Traditional CMS's are prone to getting knocked-off line with too much traffic. Decoupled frontends can be served statically on a CDN, which can handle millions of requests per second with little to no problem.

Flexibility

Create powerful digital experiences by combining content from several different data sources or use a central CMS to send content to several different websites.

Headless Content Management Systems & Gatsby

With plugins, Gatsby supports several [headless CMS](#) services, including [Contentful,](#) [Ghost](#) and [Prismic.](#) If you use WordPress, there's no need to switch. You can use WordPress' [REST API](#) as a headless CMS, so that your content team can continue to use the editing tools with which they're familiar.

Learn More

- [What is a Headless CMS and How to Source Content from One](#), from the Gatsby docs
- [3 Free Headless CMS's for Your Next Project](#), from the Gatsby blog
- [Building Sites with Headless CMSs](#), also from Gatsby blog