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White Paper

# Are You Asking Your CMS Vendor the Right Questions?

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Choosing the right Content Management System (CMS) for your web project at first could appear to be a momentous task. However, if you ask the right questions before you get too deep, your whole project will come together more easily than you can imagine and you'll be well on your way to a successful launch. Here are ten things you can ask of the CMS vendor to help you choose the right modern Web CMS.

1. How does the CMS help me to improve website projects?

2. How does the CMS support team collaboration in the project and later?

3. How does the CMS affect my business case?

4. Is the UI easy to understand and use without training?

5. How does the CMS deal with customer experience?

6. Where is the limit in visitors/users/transactions per month for the CMS?

7. Is the CMS limiting my ideas for the web project?

8. What does the CMS do to support SEO?

9. What does the CMS offer to ensure fast page loading times?

10. Is there a need to involve the IT administration?

# 1. How does the CMS help me to improve website projects?

When it comes to selecting a CMS in today's modern environment, you really have three main choices to pick between. First, you can choose to go with a basic but functional CMS like WordPress. Secondly, you can choose to utilize a more advanced CMS framework on the other end of the complexity spectrum, with Joomla being just one of many examples. Finally, you may choose to implement the needed CMS functionality on your own accord.

In order to be sure that you're making the right decision, you need to look out for a few key characteristics. The CMS you choose needs to yield instant results through the entirety of the project lifecycle, from the first pitch to its eventual launch. Any high quality CMS deployment should also have on-demand availability. You shouldn't need to install any software, manage any upgrades on your own, look for available plug-ins and more. You certainly shouldn't need to purchase any additional hardware for your business to get the CMS off the ground. You should be able to load up your browser, sign in and start working.

The CMS vendor that you choose should also be able to display the flexibility that you will need moving forward. It should be easy to integrate and even easier to extend this functionality on an as-needed basis. Your CMS should also have a high degree of useful, prefabricated templates and widgets and support the integration of popular web frameworks like Bootstrap, for example.

Finally, your CMS solution should be able to grow and evolve as your business does the same. If you need to be able to reuse certain components from other projects, be they third party elements or your own, your CMS should allow you to do that. Most importantly, your CMS should require minimal operating effort through all stages of the project to truly allow you to create the high quality content that you're after.

# 2. How does the CMS support team collaboration in the project and later?

Nowadays, you rarely can limit access to a system to a fixed set of physical locations. You need to be browser-based, permitting access from anywhere. How does the CMS support this while supporting the division of work between an arbitrary number of editors, designers, and programmers? Is there a concept of an editorial team where you have workspaces and previews before being released to the masses? Does the CMS detect conflicts deriving from concurrent editing and how does the CMS support the resolution of such conflicts?

# 3. How does the CMS affect my business case?

When choosing a CMS, you typically want something with a low cost to get started. You may want to create a proof of concept project to help get buy-in from the company, but you want a low cost and minimal investment for this early stage project. Is the system pay-as-you-go or does it require dedicated hardware and server software? Can you get started without having to add new IT staff or fixed data center fees? The higher the up front cost, the higher the risk in choosing a CMS. Everything might look great on paper, but if you can't kick the tires a little, you'll never know for sure if the choice is right, if the startup costs are exorbitant, and you need upper management approval to take the costly risk.

# 4. Is the UI easy to understand and use without training?

Some personnel balk at the concept of adding a CMS to their everyday project workflow. If they have to take a week of training before they get started, not only are users behind a week but they quickly learn why they needed that week of training. The system may just be too complicated and requires a long ramp up time. A Drag and Drop WYSIWYG system will get a team up and running much more quickly.

# 5. How does the CMS deal with customer experience?

A website run by a CMS requires some extra work to ensure users can find and use the content, but potentially more importantly, the search engines can find and read the content. Is there internationalization, localization, and personalization support available? What about SEO support? How much of the meta tags can be configured and how much of the support files can be automated? This also deals with responsive design if your users can come through from multiple platforms and devices. You don't want to lock out mobile users and deal with them in version two of the system.

# 6. Where is the limit in visitors/users/transactions per month for the CMS?

Is the CMS size constrained? If your project takes off in popularity, do you have to change CMSs because you've outgrown infrastructure limitations? Are there upper limits for traffic? Obviously, something like Twitter and Pinterest require some level of customization given their current sizes. But, in their early days, were they flexible enough to handle their instant growth patterns? Is scalability an option? As rich content assets like videos or high-res images become more and more popular, is the CMS limited in the number of content objects or in the size of these objects?

# 7. Is the CMS limiting my ideas for the web project?

Does the CMS restrict you from doing what you want with the web site or are you constrained to do everything within the CMS? Is the CMS an open framework, offering the building blocks for a successful system or a closed environment? You don't want the CMS to get in your way as you expand beyond your initial needs.

# 8. What does the CMS do to support SEO?

Being found by search engines is important for most websites. A CMS might have a feature checkbox for SEO support, but what exactly does that SEO support involve? Does it have support for a full set of features for on-page optimizations? Is the URL structure SEO friendly? Is there XML sitemap creation support? Does it avoid Flash? Are there tools for editors? The more help you can get from the CMS, the better optimized a site could be. You don't need to use all the features immediately, but you want them there.

# 9. What does the CMS offer to ensure fast page loading times?

Loading times are incredibly important in today's modern environment. Studies have shown that users will typically only spend three seconds or less waiting for a page to load, at which point they will almost certainly go somewhere else to find the information that they're looking for. As a result, load times should always be one of your primary concerns and the CMS that you choose needs to reflect that idea.

When searching for a CMS, you should be looking for one that not only offers automatic load balancing, caching and fast loading times via a CDN, but other advanced features at well. Instead of shunning multimedia elements like rich media or video in fear of what they might do to your load times, you should be instead searching for a CMS deployment that will allow you to incorporate these elements and still have the lightning fast page that you can depend on.

Your CMS should also include support for an elastic infrastructure, meaning that it should be able to scale content, users and workspaces as the needs of your site continue to change. Instead of planning for the infrastructure that you think you're going to have tomorrow, elastic infrastructure and CMS in general can help you account for the specifically needed demand of the present. This will ultimately create a much more functional, higher quality site as a result.

# 10. Is there a need to involve the IT administration?
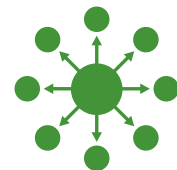
Lastly, how much need is there to involve the IT administration? Beyond just hiring staff who understands the intricacies of the CMS, you may need to have to add more security and backup requirements. With a software as a service (SaaS) approach, there are no software packages that need to be installed and maintained, and no additional IT infrastructure is needed. The number of questions you should ask before choosing a modern Web CMS is endless. These ten should provide a good basis for you making the right decision for your company.

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