



State of the Headless CMS Market 2021.

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About Kontent.

Kontent by Kentico is the world's leading cloud-based headless CMS platform. Robust APIs, webhooks, and flexible content models give developers full control over the structure of their content and how it's delivered to their websites and applications. The APIs deliver clean, structured content that can be pulled into any experience and technology stack.

On top of this headless foundation, Kontent includes an intuitive authoring experience that lets marketers focus on content creation and business workflows without requiring developer involvement. This frees developers to focus on what they do best—building engaging online experiences that look great in every channel.

Companies across a wide range of industries have built their online experiences on top of Kontent, including Vogue, PPG, Oxford University, AC Milan, and Konica Minolta. Additionally, Kontent by Kentico is regularly included in key industry reports published by Gartner, Forrester Research, and G2.

The rise of Headless CMS in the enterprise world.

If you're about to read this report, it's likely you've already heard of headless content management systems (CMSs). And, according to our annual State of the Headless CMS Market survey, you're not alone! Another year has passed, and I am proud to welcome you to the third edition of this report.

Every year, we examine the headless CMS market and interview both developers and content professionals to find out how familiar they are with the headless approach and how much experience they have with headless CMSs.

This year's report is based on a global poll of over 1,600 respondents, marketers and developers from Asia, Europe, North America, and Australia.



Content is at the heart of every customer experience

We at Kontent by Kentico have been on the headless CMS market for five years now, and it's been such a ride! I do believe the market has already moved far away from "early adopters" and will continue to expand rapidly in the following years.

On the one hand, the number of people who have experience with headless CMSs grows every year (see the results below!). On the other hand (and more importantly), omnipresent digital transformation constantly generates new business use cases for headless.

Just think about the recent Covid pandemic and what it meant for some industries like retail. They needed and still need to digitalize their operations at the speed of now—customers very quickly moved online and expected their demands to be fulfilled right away. How does content fit into this?

Well, the truth is, content is at the heart of every customer experience, and future leaders are those who understand their customers and find an effective way to manage their content across all customer channels.

Traditional monolithic systems can't keep pace with current digital transformation, and that's why the future of headless is more than bright!

The next-level headless CMS: Creating a bridge between IT and content teams

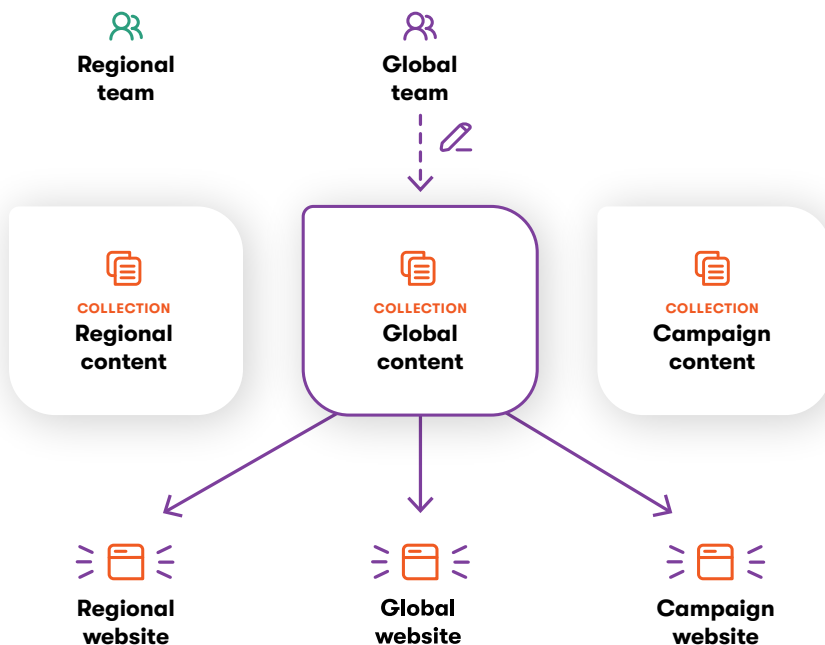
Despite the undeniable digitalization trends, what are the main reasons so many large organizations continue to miss the opportunity to drive their growth through meaningful and engaging content?

- They manage their content in silos across teams, departments, regions, or brands, which results in content duplication and inconsistencies.
- They rely on legacy systems that take months to deploy.
- They don't have an omnichannel content strategy.
- They lack content governance and still rely on Word and Excel documents, with no one knowing which version is the latest.

How could Headless CMS help with these struggles? For a long time, headless CMSs have been perceived as technical platforms created by developers to meet their web & app development needs.

However, in order to be fully adopted across large multinational organizations for their complex projects, Headless CMS must also meet the needs of marketers. Some of the most innovative headless CMSs are already addressing these issues by:

- Letting enterprises manage all their content in a single repository, freeing it to be shared across teams, websites, and channels without losing control
- Introducing multiple workflows that are fully customizable across roles, teams, and projects
- Allowing business users to collaborate in real-time



The next-level CMS will simply create a bridge between IT and content teams by empowering the business users as well as meeting the technical demands of developers.

Enterprises will drive further headless CMS market growth

From the struggles and solutions that I outlined above, it's clear that the capabilities of the most powerful headless CMSs are a great fit for the complex content needs of enterprise companies, and their growing demand will further drive the growth of the headless CMS market.

The results of our research and our own experience prove that large organizations are becoming increasingly aware of Headless CMS.

It's evident that enterprise-ready headless CMSs such as Contentful, Kontent, or Contentstack are now standing toe-to-toe with traditional enterprise CMSs such as Sitecore or Adobe.

I am fully convinced that Headless CMS will hold a stronger position on the overall Enterprise CMS market in 2022, but we'll have to wait and see if that is the case. For the time being, enjoy the read and let us know what you think!

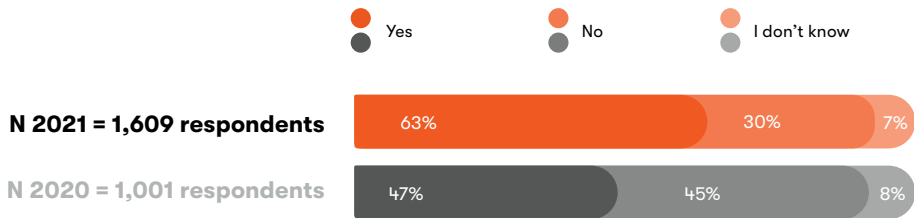


Vojtech Boril.
VP Growth & Marketing, Kontent by Kentico

The Headless CMS survey results.

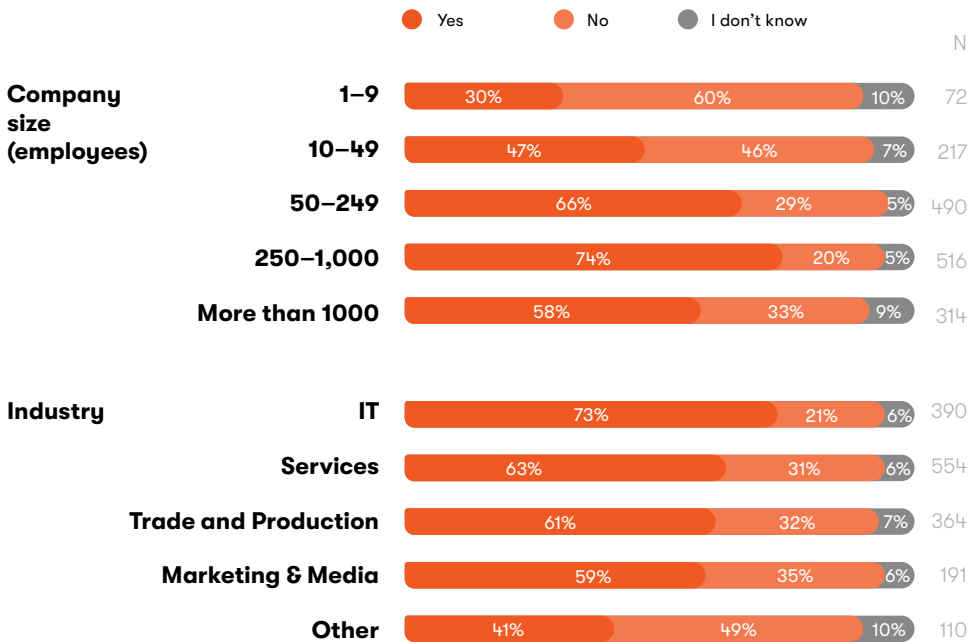
1 Have you ever heard the term “Headless CMS”?

Respondents could choose only one answer.



According to the results, 63% of respondents have heard of Headless CMS, which is 16% more than last year.

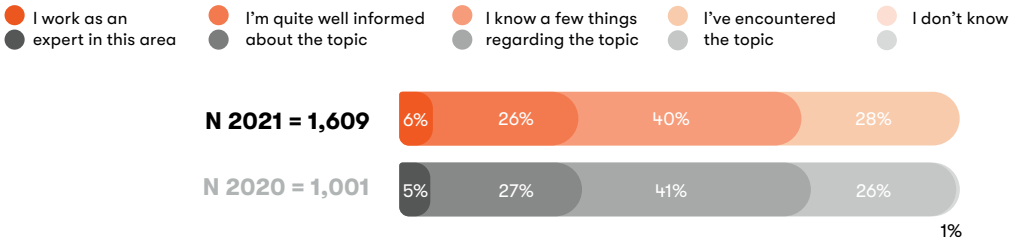
As in the study from last year, respondents aged 25 to 44, those working in medium-sized companies (250–1,000 employees), and those in the IT field are more familiar with the term.



N = 1,609 respondents

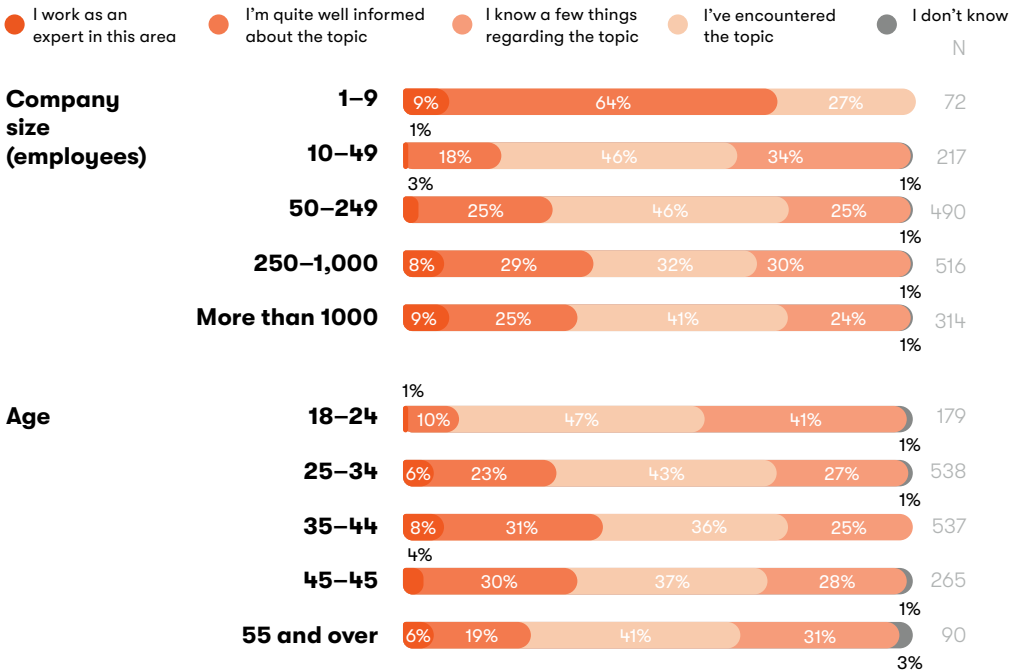
2 How much do you think you know about “Headless CMS”?

Respondents could choose only one answer.



32% of respondents consider themselves experts in this area or quite well informed, which is a similar result to that of last year.

Respondents aged 35 to 54 years together with those working in large corporations (250–1,000 employees) and enterprises (more than 1,000 employees) seem to be most knowledgeable. On the other hand, respondents working in small businesses don't believe they know much about this topic.



N = 1,609 respondents

“

The reason behind the Headless CMS trend is to focus on content operations; it is a step toward a composable concept when tools are combined to achieve an ideal technology stack. With the focus on content, companies try hard to get content creation, localization, and distribution under control with a vision to achieve effectiveness in fragmented content operations and get content value to customers faster.

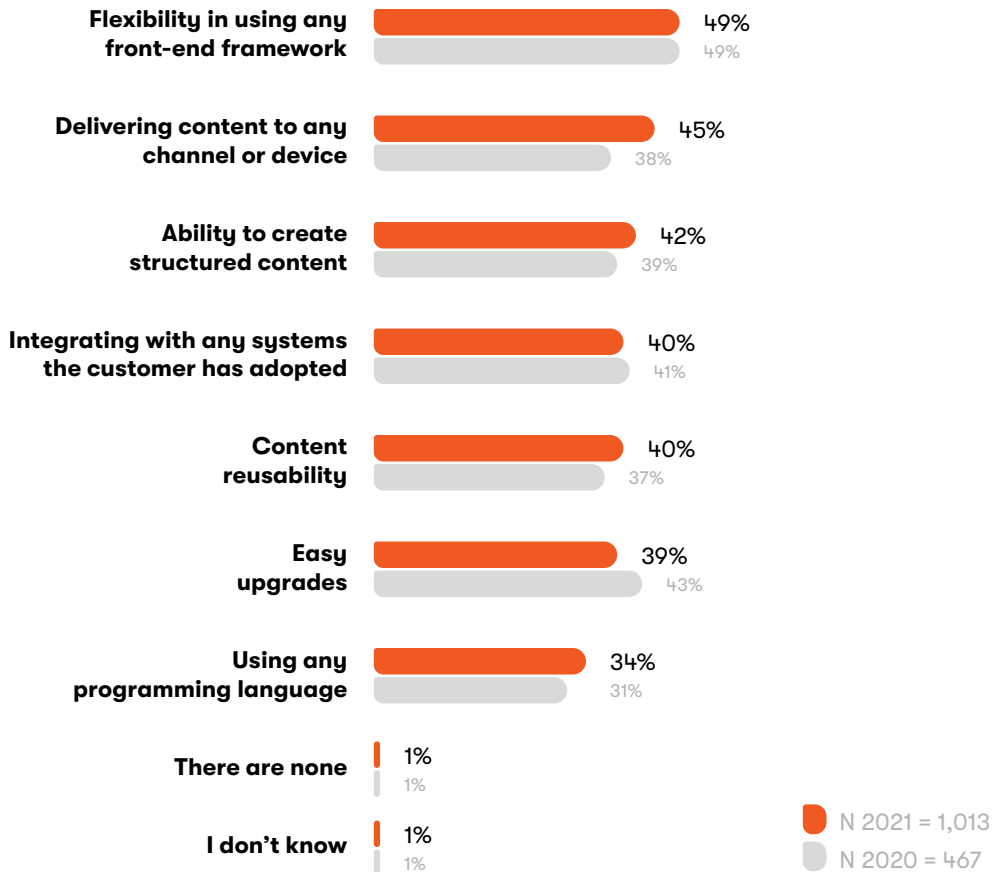


Ratibor Libal.

Managing Partner, ACTUM Digital

3 In your opinion, what are the advantages of headless CMSs (compared to traditional CMSs)?

Respondents could choose more than one answer.



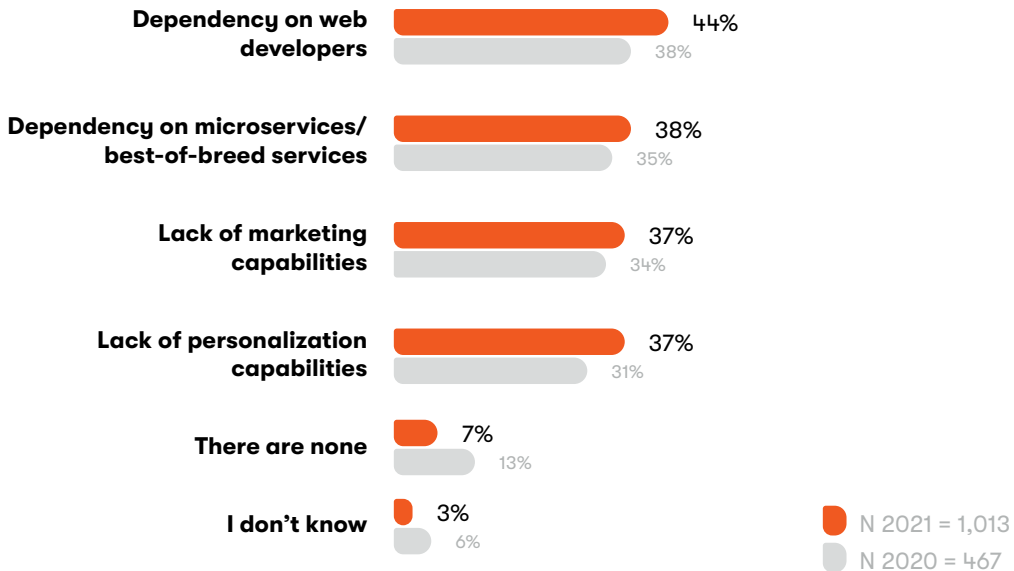
N = respondents who've heard the term Headless CMS before

Same as last year, the freedom to utilize any front-end framework is perceived as the primary advantage of Headless CMS by half of those who are familiar with the concept.

In addition, 45% of respondents value the flexibility of being able to distribute content to any device.

4 In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of headless CMSs (compared to traditional CMSs)?

Respondents could choose more than one answer.



N = respondents who've heard the term Headless CMS before

According to the new study, respondents are more concerned about the drawbacks of headless CMSs than they were in the previous survey. However, this can be caused by the larger number of participants and their different profiles.

Being dependent on web developers is still seen as a major drawback of the headless approach.

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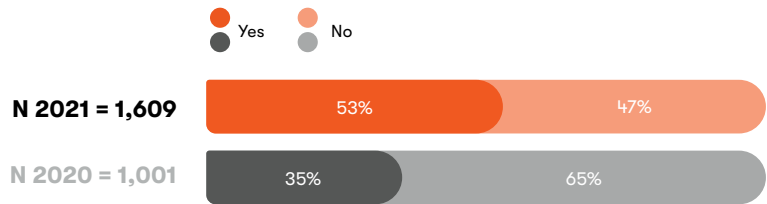
Headless CMS is no longer a buzzword or exciting new technology; it has become a key part of modern enterprise architectures. Decoupling content management from traditional monolithic platforms unlocks the potential for more modern and flexible architectures such as Composable DXP, combining best-in-class services with benefits such as reduced cost, increased security, performance, and scalability.



Andy Thompson.
CTO, Luminary

5 Have you ever used any headless CMS product (e.g., Contentful, Contentstack, Kontent by Kentico, Prismic, etc.)?

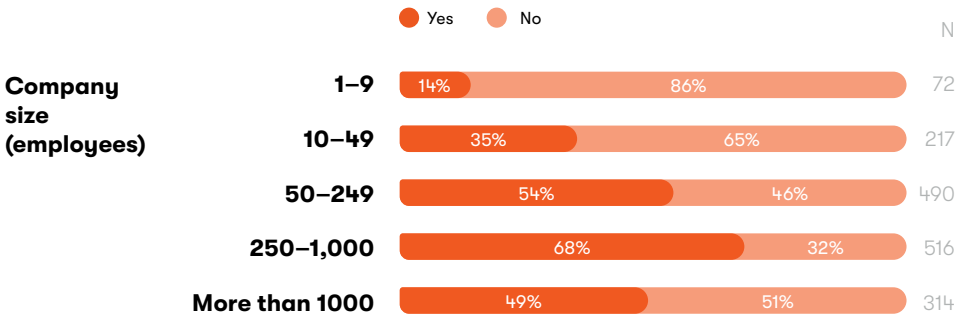
Respondents could choose only one answer.



N = all respondents

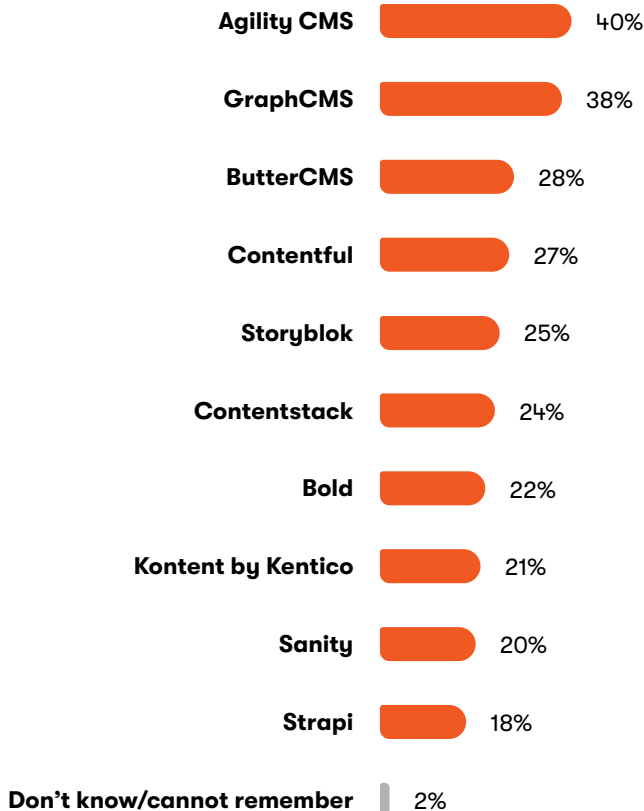
53% of all respondents have experience with using headless CMSs; the rate of use has increased by 18% since 2020.

The number of respondents having prior experience with using headless CMSs rises in direct proportion to the company’s headcount, peaking in organizations with 250 to 1,000 people.



6 Please select all the headless CMS products you've ever used.

Respondents could choose more than one answer.



N = 859 respondents who've used a headless CMS before

Note: The survey in 2020 offered fewer options, so the results were not compared.

Agility CMS (40%) and GraphCMS (38%) appear to be the most often used headless CMS products.

“

The Headless CMS has quickly moved to the head of the class for our team at Konabos and provides a fast, lightweight, and highly flexible SaaS-based solution.

We have been able to select best-of-breed technologies that fit our customers' requirements and long-term goals, using modern open frameworks and an architecture that can seamlessly scale globally to meet growth and demand. We vastly reduced the overheads of managing and upgrading their Digital Experience Platform (DXP), reduced associated infrastructure, and removed the dreaded “vendor lock” that hamstrings a solution's agility.

The content-first API-based approach, which forms the cornerstone of a Headless, Composable DXP philosophy, also allows for content to be loaded, developed, and deployed whenever and wherever we need it. As a result, solutions are less rigid and are much easier to develop, maintain, deploy, and use. They're also much easier on the wallet!

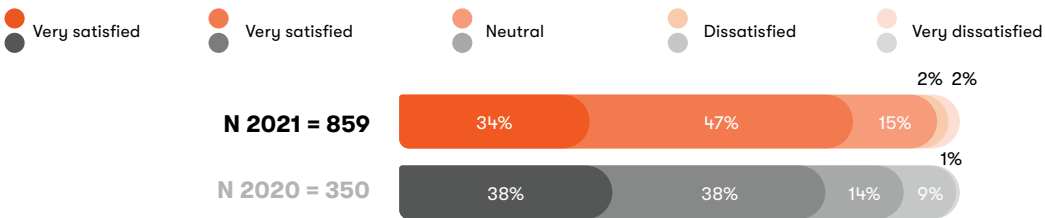


Akshay Sura.
Partner, Konabos Consulting

7a Based on your previous experience, how satisfied are you with Headless CMS in general?

Use the scale from 1 to 5; 1 means very satisfied, 5 means very dissatisfied.

Respondents could choose only one answer.



N = respondents who've used a headless CMS before

Note: The instructions were slightly different in 2020. The scale ranged from “very interesting and usable” to “very uninteresting and unusable,” and the question was: “Based on your experience, how would you rate headless CMSs?”.

Overall, 81% of respondents with prior experience said they're very satisfied or satisfied with headless CMSs in general, which is 5% more than last year.

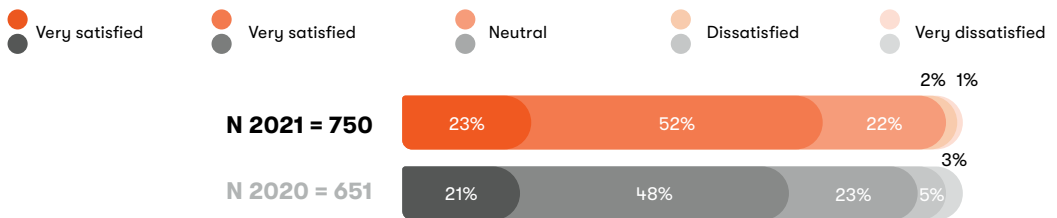
Furthermore, only 4% of respondents stated they're dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with these modern content management platforms in 2021. Last year, 10% rated Headless CMS as “(very) uninteresting and unusable.”

7b You said you have never used any headless CMS product.

Here is a brief description of what a headless CMS is:

Traditional content management systems were built for websites only. However, people have started consuming content on many different channels and devices. The term “headless” means that the “head” (the front end, i.e., a web page) is separated from the “body” (the back end, i.e., the content repository). Headless CMSs, therefore, make the presentation layer more flexible as they eliminate the front-end part.

Respondents could choose only one answer.



N = respondents who've never used a headless CMS before

Note: Last year, the scale ranged from “very interesting and usable” to “very interesting and unusable.” After discussions with UX researchers, we decided to focus only on one aspect instead of two.

Headless CMSs were rated as (very) interesting by three-quarters of respondents who have no prior experience, which is 6% more than in the survey last year.

Compared to last year, both individuals who have used headless CMSs before ([Question 7a](#)) and those who haven't (this question) seem to perceive them in a more positive light.

“

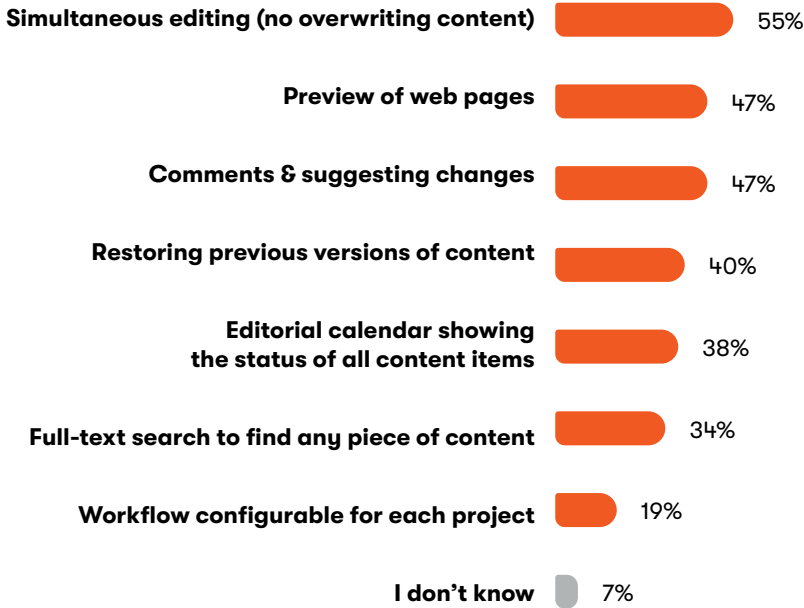
We are seeing increasing sophistication of how headless CMS is being used by our clients to power multichannel customer experiences across app and mobile. Headless is at an inflection point where we will soon see mass adoption among the enterprise tier major corporates, with many of our larger clients having successfully moved beyond the proof of concept phase.



Will Leach.
Principal Engineer, UserCentric

8 In your opinion, which features should headless CMSs offer to ease content production and collaboration for people in your organization? Select the three most important ones.

Respondents could choose more than one answer.



N = 1609 (all) respondents

Because Headless CMS is no longer only about developers, we asked our respondents to choose which features could ease content production and collaboration for people in their organization.

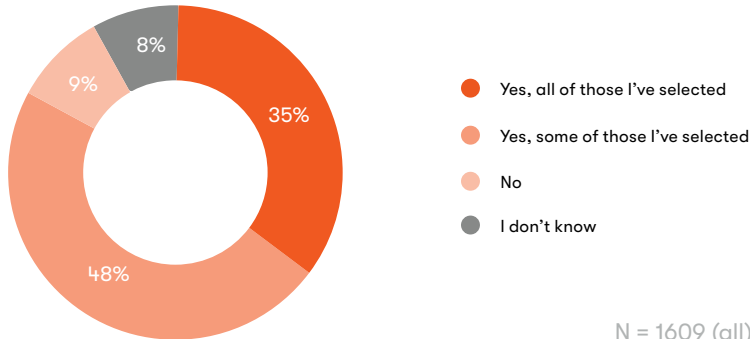
Respondents most often selected simultaneous editing (55%), previewing web pages (47%), and comments & suggestions (47%).

Did you know? Kontent by Kentico already offers all these features for marketers. Try the headless CMS where modern digital experiences are made.

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9 Do the CMS or the tools for creating and managing content used in your organization offer these content management and collaboration capabilities?

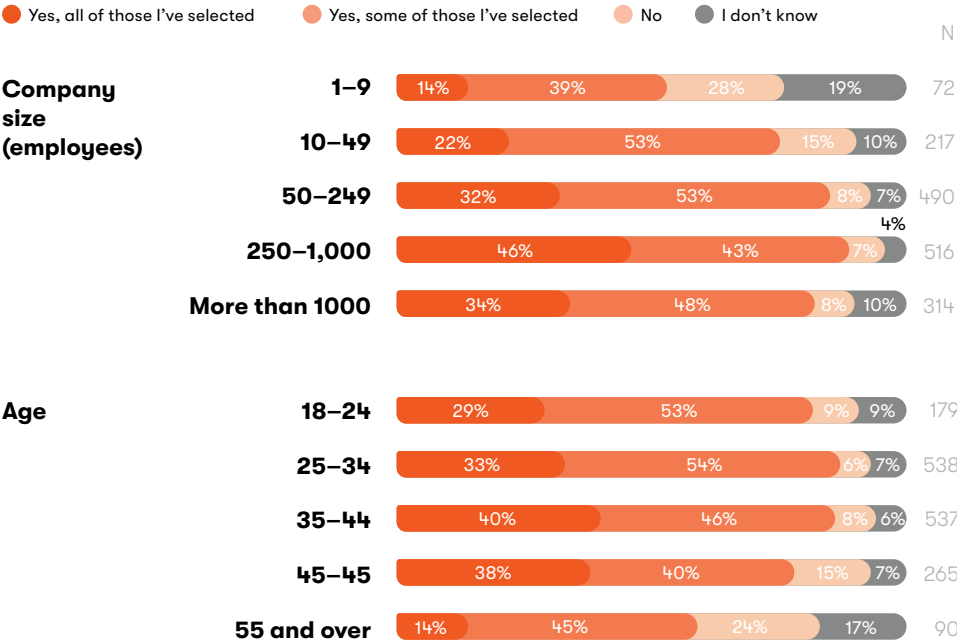
Respondents could choose only one answer.



N = 1609 (all) respondents

35% of respondents stated that their CMS or the tools they're using for content creation and management offer the capabilities they'd selected in [Question 8](#). 48% said that their tools offer at least some of the features that could ease content production and collaboration.

The answer "yes" was more frequently chosen by respondents aged 25 to 44 and those working in large organizations.



“

Kontent by Kentico comes with high-quality APIs, solid tooling, well-maintained GitHub repos, useful boilerplates, and excellent SDKs. Why does this matter, you might ask? The answer is simple; it shortens the learning curve to going headless. My team and I at BizStream feel that Kontent is leading the charge for developers who want to embrace a modern API-first architecture.



Brian McKeiver.

Co-Owner and Kontent MVP, BizStream

10 In your opinion, which of the following areas could your company improve by using better tools/CMS? Select all that apply.

Respondents could choose more than one answer.



N = 1609 (all) respondents

Nearly half of those who took the survey (47%) believe that their organization might benefit from using tools that would streamline the way they're updating content on their websites.

44% stated their company could enhance their multichannel content distribution by using a better content management system and/or better tools. Sharing content within the organization (43%) and content consistency (42%) were also often selected as areas that could be improved.

Only 3% of respondents thought there was no room for improvement.

“

Getting a CMS that is friendly for both developers and content editors is like baking a cake; you need to get the right balance of ingredients. It's no easy task, but Kontent by Kentico have nailed it: there is fantastic documentation, chat support, and easy-to-use SDKs for developers, while content editors have Web Spotlight to perform visual inline editing with ease. Together, this creates the perfect balance when working on a headless CMS.



Ilesh Mistry.

CMS Specialist and Kontent MVP, MMT Digital

Conclusion.

There's no doubt that platforms enabling businesses to attract and retain customers online are on the rise. It's now more important than ever to be able to **quickly produce engaging content** and **effectively manage it**, which is why many organizations are turning to CMSs that can keep up with the evolving customers' expectations.

The number of people who've heard of Headless CMS has increased since 2020—63% of respondents said they know the term while only 47% were familiar with it last year.

It probably comes as no surprise that **flexibility in using any front-end framework** and **omnichannel content delivery** are still perceived as the most significant advantages of Headless CMS. In addition, 81% of those who've tried working in a headless CMS are very satisfied or satisfied with it.

On the other hand, dependency on web developers is still seen as a key disadvantage of using a headless platform.

Interestingly, only 3% of respondents think there's nothing to improve regarding their content operations. Nearly half of them believe using better tools could enhance updating content on their websites, multichannel content delivery, sharing content within their organization, and content consistency.

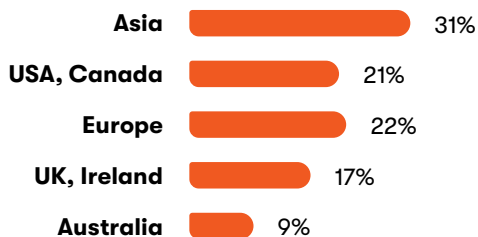
What about you—do you also think that a better technology stack could streamline your content operations? Let us know, and **thank you for** downloading this report! We're already looking forward to the 2022 edition.

Overview of our respondents.

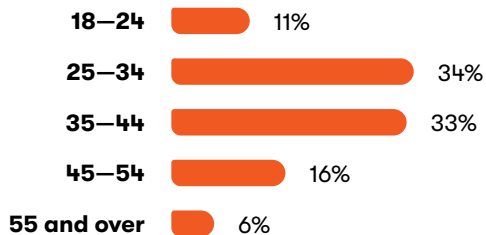
Position



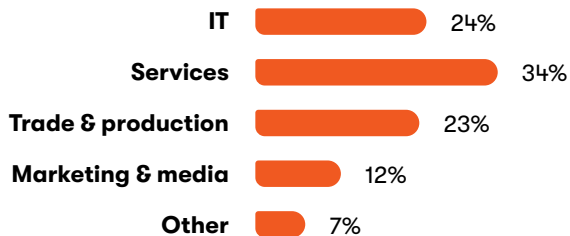
Country



Age



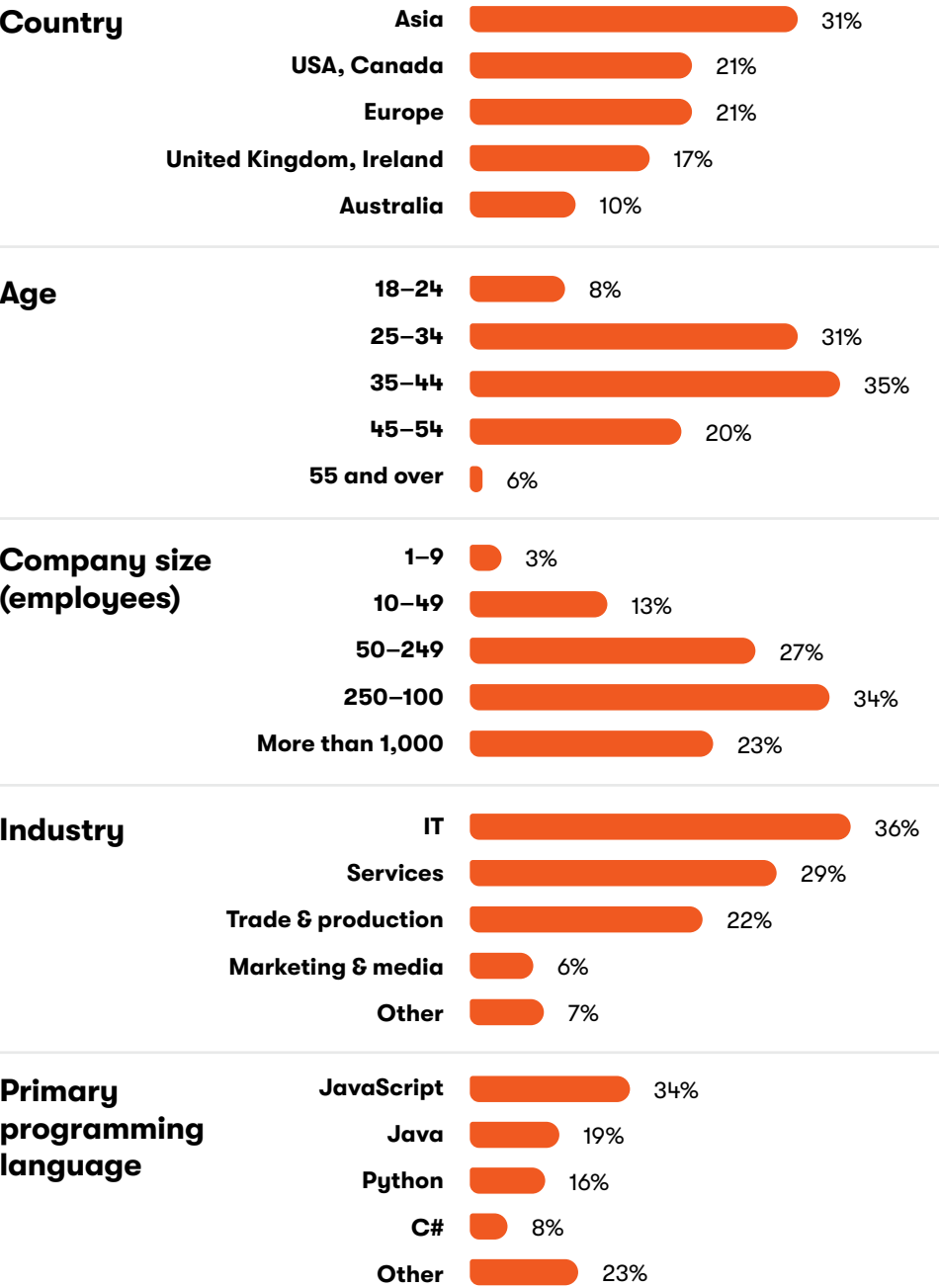
Industry



N = 1,609 respondents (769 developers and 840 marketers)

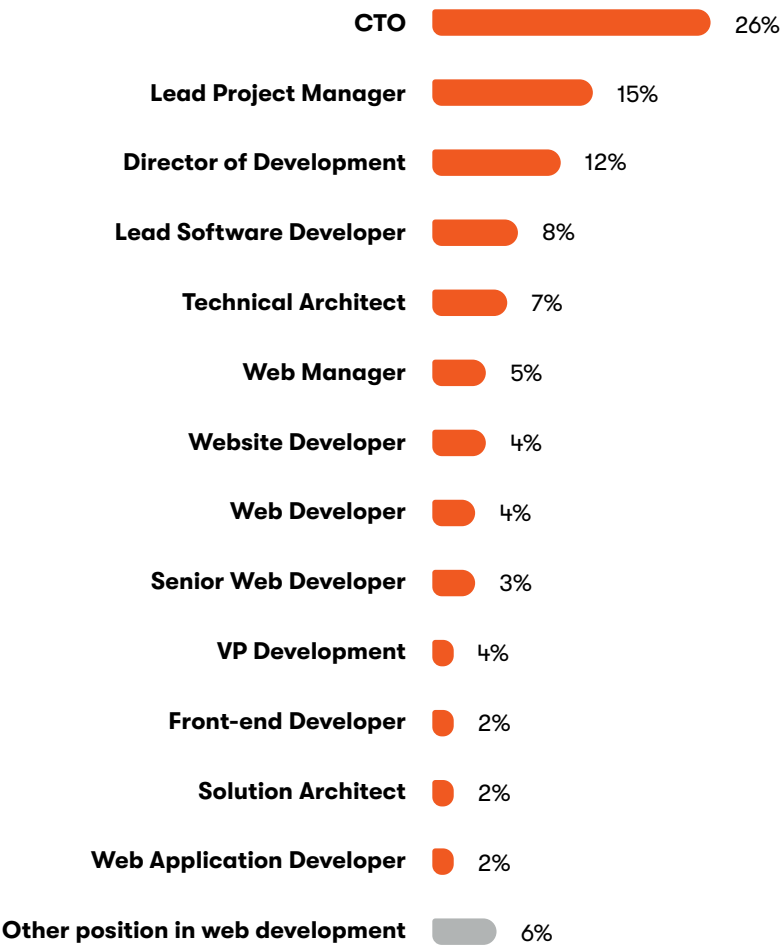


Developers



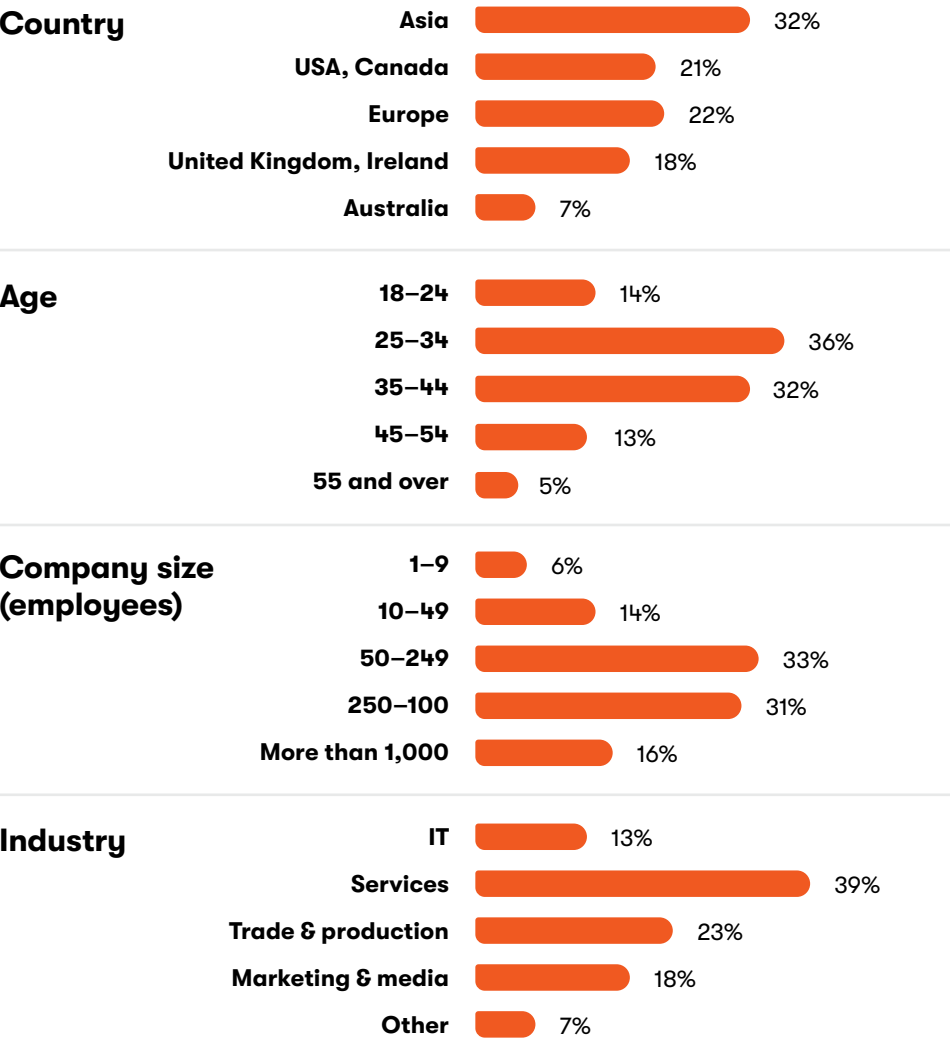
N = 769 developers

Job title



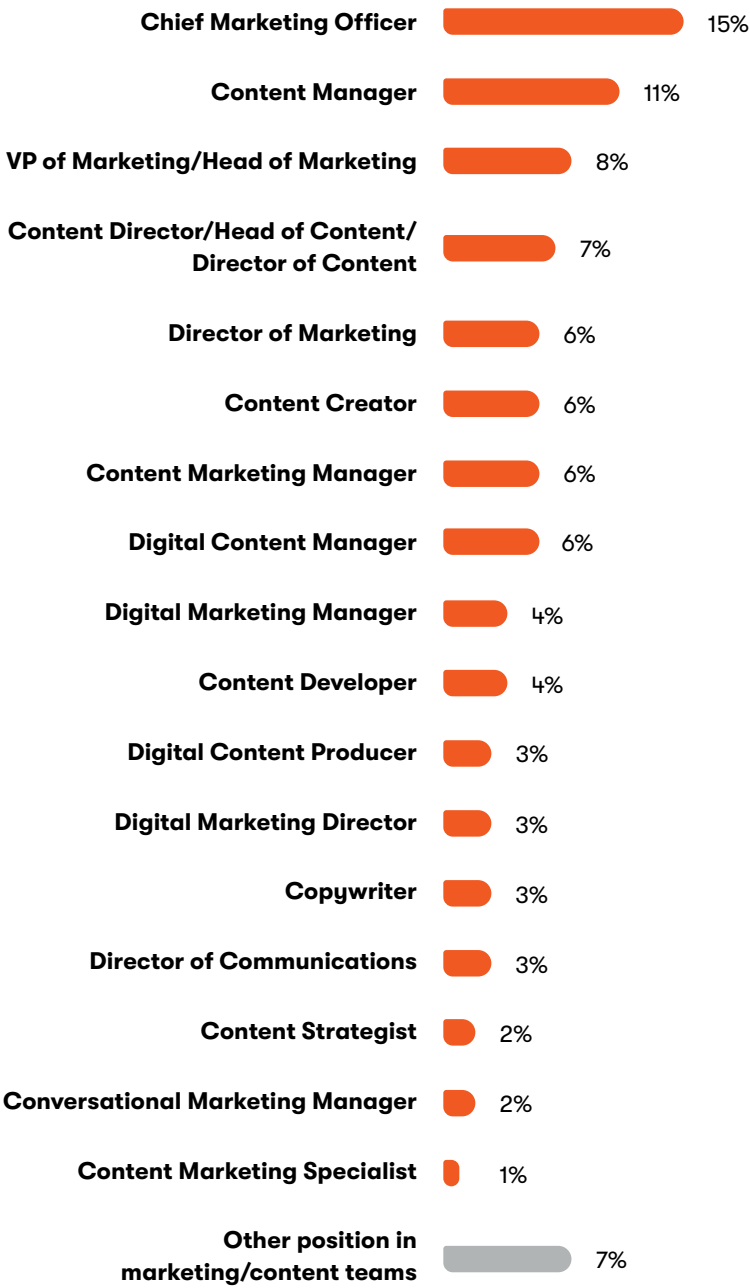
N = 769 developers

Marketers



N = 840 marketers

Job title



N = 840 marketers





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