10

CRITICAL FACTORS

For Selecting a Future-Proof CMS

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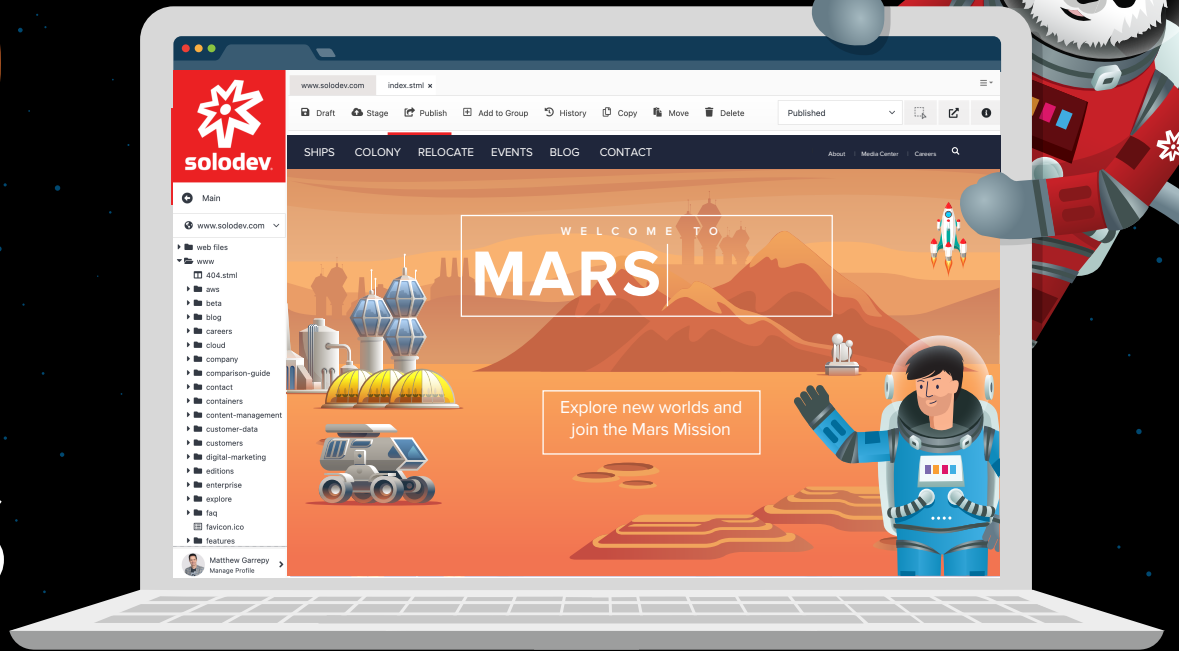
MISSION
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In the Early Days of CMS Exploration...

Choosing a CMS was easy. Well, *easier.*

Back then, organizations had a limited spectrum of choices and only a handful that delivered true enterprise capabilities. There were fewer integration requirements, a smaller stack of third-party plugins, and features like personalization were still lightyears away.

Even at the most advanced level, a Content Management System was focused on doing one job really well: managing content.

Fast-forward to 2019 and selecting the right CMS has become downright murky. Open source has opened up the market, making thousands of widgets cheap and easy to customize. Consolidation and "sunsetting" are impacting thousands of users, and even established CMS leaders are becoming rapidly commoditized.

Thanks to the modern cycle of warp-speed innovation, it's hard to know what CMS platforms are truly future-proofed, which disruptive technologies are gamechangers, and what newcomers are just a flash in the pan.

Hang on. There's some tech turbulence ahead.

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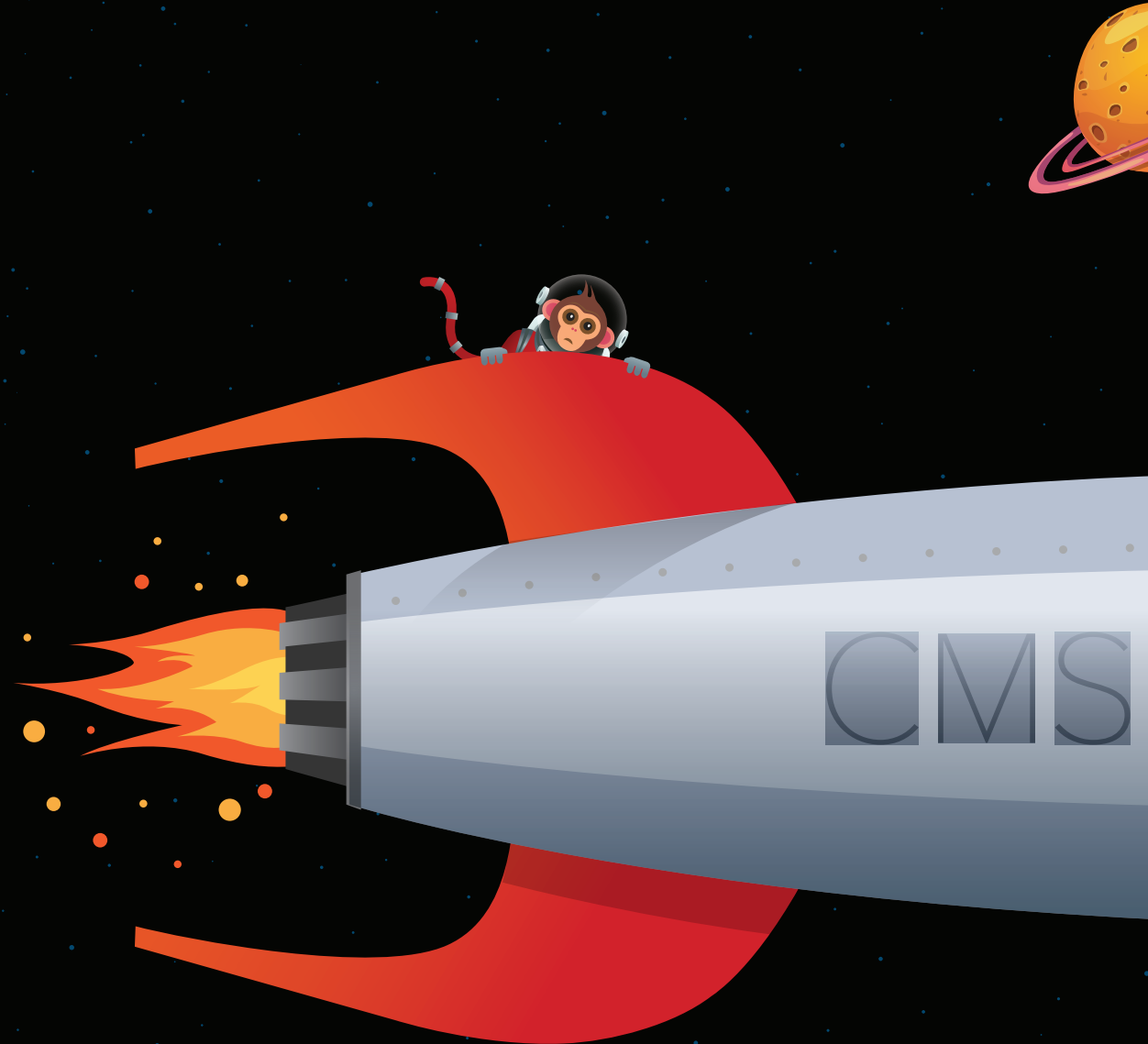
Too Many Choices

In case you haven't noticed, there's been unprecedented "sprawl" in every direction of the martech universe.

According to an annual study conducted by Scott Brinker of ChiefMarTech, there are now almost 7,000 technologies across the digital landscape, with hundreds in the CMS and Web Experience category alone. With so many choices and dozens of new platforms added each year, it's hard to make sense of it all.

As digital marketing technologies have evolved, so too has the role of the CMS. For the last decade, leading platforms have raced to expand their offerings, adding feature after feature to leap ahead or just stay in parity. While open source platforms like WordPress have exploded, providing a "free" and relatively easy solution, enterprise players have adopted a more robust one-stop approach for advanced capabilities like built-in DAMs and other bells and whistles.

Sure, having a single "digital experience platform" sounds great. But these solutions have become expensive, code-bloated, challenging to implement, and slow to shift to a Cloud-first world. On top of that, many organizations are paying astronomical fees for rich, expansive, all-in-one platforms with features they simply never use.

THERE ARE NEARLY

7,000

TECHNOLOGIES ACROSS THE MARTECH LANDSCAPE

(SOURCE: CHIEF MARTEC.COM, APRIL 2018)

Data is the Center of the Digital Universe

Once again, the game has changed. Customer data has become the true center of the digital universe, and best-of-breed CMS platforms have pivoted to "plug in," leveraging open APIs to build custom solutions with greater control and expanded capabilities.

Today, marketers are looking to blend newer, best-of-breed technologies to their web strategy—challenging the CMS to integrate seamlessly and focus on doing what it does best: managing content.

Most legacy enterprise platforms have struggled to adapt or evolve. As a result, the more nimble, extensible solutions are writing the future roadmap for CMS—and the next odyssey of web and digital experiences.

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1. CLOUD FIRST

If you're not already hosting your website in the Cloud, you're probably thinking about it. And if you're considering a new CMS, it should be the first decision you make on your journey. How you choose to deploy can have a huge impact on everything, now and in the future.

The Cloud is all about control. It's about expanding your power over capacity, scalability, security, and redundancy. The Cloud is helping organizations trade CAPEX for OPEX, breaking the 3-5 year cycle of hardware replacement and eliminating the responsibility over managing infrastructure. There are fewer limits, and you pay as you go only for what you need.

Your CMS shouldn't only be hosted in the Cloud, it should be built for it. That means having all tech designed around the infrastructure and services that your Cloud provider offers—from CDN to storage to recovery.

Due to governance or licensing, some websites and applications are required to live on-prem in a managed environment. Having a CMS that can manage a "hybrid" configuration can help meet this requirement while providing a long-term path

to full cloud deployment. These "pilot light" environments also provide a stand-by disaster recovery solution for a wide variety of workloads, maintaining uptime during a datacenter outage.

How a CMS would interact with a Cloud hosting solution is the foundation of the rest of your website's success. A CMS should ideally work hand-in-hand with any Cloud hosting solution. That intimate connection gives a team more control over server performance and scaling. Cloud resources within the CMS gives you the power to grow capacity for your website instantly, quickly react to spikes in traffic, or autoscale whenever needed. A Cloud system baked into a CMS lets your team manage these capabilities in a variety of areas, with fewer pieces to juggle.

What does the future look like? In a word: choice. With the Cloud, you now have the ability to deploy in different architectures that meet your specific needs. In fact, some CMS platforms are now being deployed with containers, allowing you to launch a CMS in minutes and start building your website or application with continuous deployment and no long-term contracts.

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2. SECURITY, SPEED, REDUNDANCY, SCALABILITY

Any sturdy house needs strong columns to hold it up. For a CMS platform – and your website – the four key pillars are security, speed, redundancy, and scalability.

Security

More information online means more data for hackers to crack. Popular open source platforms like WordPress are notorious for having the most frequently compromised websites of any CMS. They often need extra third-party plugins to stave off attacks, and it's only a matter of time before those are cracked.

Your CMS should uphold the integrity of your data. While any website can be hacked, some platforms are more secure than others. Do your research to ensure the source code is sound, that testing and patching are part of the support plan. Consider platforms that warranty their code and services. And ask what protocols are in place in the event of a hack, from 24/7/365 critical care to SLAs.

If you're heading to the Cloud, the infrastructure should also be a key part of your security posture. Best-of-breed platforms like AWS provide SOC layers and virtual private clouds that insulate a CMS and its storage, database and file systems.

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Speed

When it comes to a CMS, "speed" can be a confusing measurement. It could mean how fast the system is to install, setup and configure or deploy your first website. Is that hours, days, weeks, or even months?

Another key factor to consider is page load speed. For example, how fast does the CMS render your content? How long before your audience can view your changes? Not all CMS platforms operate the same way, and the more "code bloat" some platforms have in their backend, the slower the overall performance. Ideally, you want a platform that compiles and minifies everything—eliminating duplicate HTML and removing extraneous code.

Redundancy

Accidents and major events happen. Downtime with your website may be unavoidable, but redundant systems can help minimize the impact. Think of it like a GPS system. If you come across an accident, a savvy GPS will divert you to another path. Rather than being immobile in traffic, you're able to bypass the issue with minor inconveniences and still get to your destination. A good CMS will be built to handle those "redirect" moments with relative ease. Having the right infrastructure can help amplify your redundancy, from caching your website on a Content Delivery Network (CDN) to automatically backing up and restoring to the Cloud.

Scalability

Whether you're hosting your website in the Cloud, on-prem, or a bit of both, a reliable CMS should allow your website the ability to scale freely and handle unexpected swings in traffic. Having a highly-integrated solution with auto scaling and load balancing capabilities can trigger alerts at the first sign of trouble, and immediately meet the increased demands. Make sure your CMS is designed for these kinds of configurations, so you can maintain uptime and deliver a great user experience.

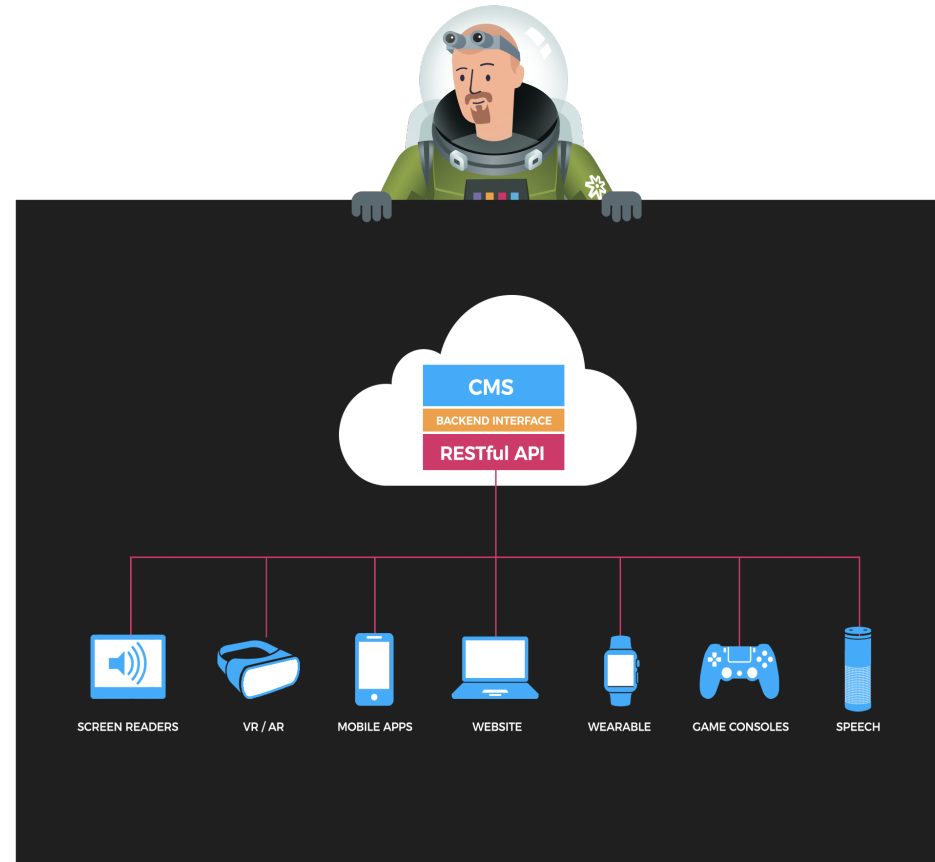solodev

3. HYBRID TRADITIONAL AND "HEADLESS" CMS

It's easy to lose your head when choosing a CMS, especially if you're thinking about going "headless." If you're like most people, this new breed of CMS might sound confusing and exotic. But it's actually a more powerful and extensible way to manage your content through APIs and expand the universe of touchpoints where you can connect with data.

Unlike traditional "monolithic" platforms that have a website's presentation layer baked into the CMS via themes and templates, a headless CMS is a decoupled architecture. In layman's terms, that means the CMS is free to evolve, giving users greater flexibility to experiment and refresh a website's design without rearchitecting the CMS itself. With greater control over the user experience, a headless CMS helps to future proof your website strategy

Organizations wanting to move information across different platforms might find consistency a struggle without some sort of headless solution. The promise of decoupled CMS is that the function isn't limited to or defined by frameworks that represent the frontend of a website. A headless or decoupled CMS gives you the freedom to share data or access analytics across channels, and connect everything with the power of a RESTful API.

Imagine giving visitors the same experience online as you would a mobile app. This could include customers ordering your services through Alexa or voice-driven gadgets. Headless gives your website the ability to exist today while preparing for the devices of tomorrow—everything from wearable tech like smart watches to screen readers for the visually impaired.
At the same time, you want to have the ability to host the templates and

CMS
BACKEND INTERFACE
RESTful API

SCREEN READERS   VR / AR   MOBILE APPS   WEBSITE   WEARABLE   GAME CONSOLES   SPEECH

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frameworks for your website right alongside your data-driven apps. Hybrid CMS platforms put one foot in the freedom of headless and the other in the stability of the templates and frameworks your website needs. Many CMS solutions are either one or the other – traditional or truly headless, but why choose? If your goal is to be future proof, then select a cloud-based hybrid solution that gives you the best of both worlds.

4. ADVANCED API INTEGRATIONS

Your organization needs features native to the CMS. However, there's also something critical about having a CMS that seamlessly connects your organization to technologies your team is already using—Marketo, MailChimp, Tableau, analytics tracking and more.

Today's digital experience landscape includes thousands of technologies. Understanding which ones to pick is hard enough; but how do you get them to work together? The CMS is a cornerstone (Rosetta stone) of your digital stack, and it should help orchestrate data across different channels. That means seamlessly integrating with the most advanced applications on the planet like Salesforce CRM, Microsoft Dynamics ERP, even exotic platforms like Humanetics to manage blood donation data. The possibilities are endless—and your CMS should be the hub for it all.

When considering the API capabilities of a CMS, find out if it has documented out-of-the-box integrations. Are they committing their APIs to libraries like Swagger UI? How easy is it to build your own integrations in the future? The best CMS solutions will answer "yes" to all of the above.

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5. EASE OF USE

Any organization familiar with a CMS understands there's a learning curve when adopting any new software. But it's easy for a CTO to be convinced during a demo that everyone on his or her team will be up to speed and productive in just a "short" period of time. However, a worthwhile CMS is easy enough to teach the least technical user on a team in just a few hours. It's also still robust enough for developers to successfully customize the platform for an organization's need. An intuitive CMS gives both groups an element of control and shouldn't require additional IT support, third-party developers or other support just to update content assets.

6. BEST-OF-BREED CMS FEATURES
INCLUDING MULTISITE AND PERMISSIONS

Why settle for less when you can have best-of-breed features that make creating content easier for the whole team? From spell check within a text editor to auto-saving drafts, your creative team knows what features it needs to survive.

When evaluating CMS platforms, review what features and functionalities come with the product and if they meet the needs of your organization—especially those who will use the platform most often. This saves you money on third-party plugins and integrations for what should be standard functionality.

Ideally, a CMS offers users the freedom to customize features as if they were able to go to a marketplace and get whatever they needed. This is far better to do within the platform rather than load a CMS with plugins. If your CMS already provides a breadth of plugins, there's no need to risk the security issues that come with third-party solutions. Focus your search on CMS platforms that give you the freedom to design data-based managers and custom applications within the system, and avoid the pain and open source challenges of third-party plugins that aren't well supported, are prone to failure, and might be expensive to fix.

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When it comes to open source versus managed code, the security risks are enormous. Open source platforms like Wordpress are constantly encountering issues that are expensive to remediate. That said, having open source features and standards (like using Bootstrap for mobile responsive design) can be beneficial while still protecting your data.

Native Multisite

Within these best-of-breed features is the ability to handle multiple websites under the same CMS umbrella. Most organizations manage more than one or two websites. Even mid-sized businesses have several sites to manage. Enterprise companies have hundreds or even thousands of pages under their care. It's important to have a CMS capable of handling the needs of those sites rather than having multiple sites managed on multiple platforms.

Having all your websites on a single platform means your entire team can work from a single interface to develop and manage content. This means more efficient training and better use adoption. It leads to smarter hardware use and ultimately lower hosting fees.

A single platform also makes it easy to spin up new sites by making clones of an existing site. Users can also share the same piece of content or other assets across all your sites. This promotes consistent template governance across your sites and ensures your brand is presented the way you want it to be no matter how many websites you have.

Permissions

Not everyone on your team needs access to manage content across all these websites. A CMS with granular permissioning ensures that members of your team have the editorial capabilities they need. It gives you total control over who can access what, yet still allow you to work together with common workflows that enable sharing and teamwork.

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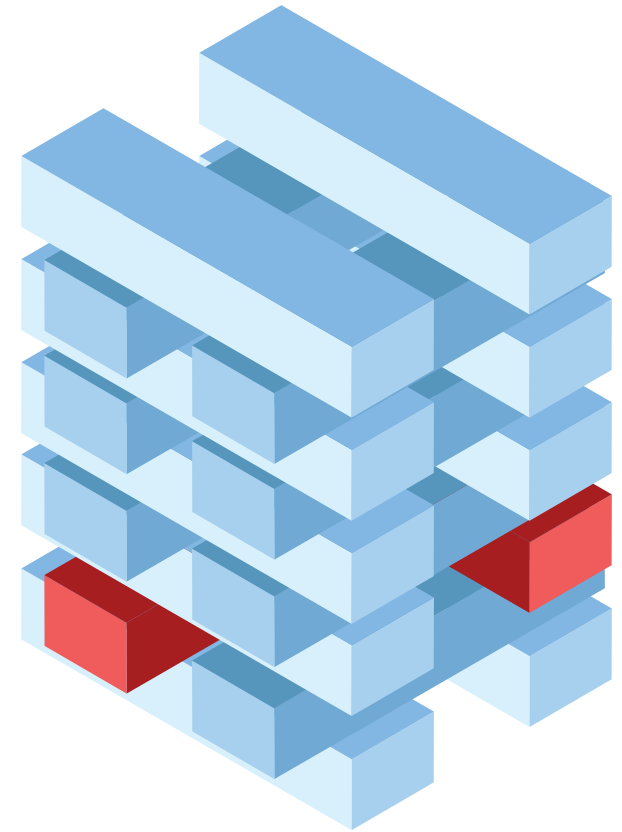
7. TOTAL DESIGN FREEDOM

Have you noticed a lot of websites today have an eerily similar design or look to them? In a world of cookie-cutter websites, it's more important than ever for your website to stand out from the crowd. A CMS should give both frontend and backend designers freedom to bring your website to life. Systems with pre-built templates and themes can force designers to make compromises around their vision, and ultimately eroding your brand's ability to differentiate in the digital world.

UX / UI Design

User experience (UX) continues to have a critical role in the success of your website, and any quality CMS should give your designers the ability to create with your users in mind. If your platform has templates, they should be highly customizable – from colors to layouts – and managed seamlessly with CSS. But the platforms that deliver the most freedom allow designers to create with responsive HTML and move into the CMS without significant restrictions.

Mobile First Design

It's no longer enough to be "mobile responsive." With increasingly more users browsing websites on their smartphones and tablets, you must adopt a true "mobile first" strategy—where the mobile experience is thoughtfully designed from day one. Likewise, you need a CMS that understands this shift, and provides a foundation for building, testing and launching world-class mobile experiences.

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8. TRAINING, SUPPORT & SLAS

Know who will be there for you after you go live. Not all CMS platforms come with support options. For example, many open-source applications don't offer direct access to support teams. Typically they develop security patches and software upgrades you have to download and install yourself. Organizations lacking an IT infrastructure or manpower to handle manual updates might benefit from a CMS that assists with any software changes or issues. And while you might go to sleep, your website won't—particularly if it generates global traffic. Know any potential CMS's support response time and the availability of those support options.

Any new software application will have a learning curve. A savvy CMS company offers training to bring your team up to speed, answer questions, and address any concerns your team might have. Some platforms actually require training to use their help desk services, and those training costs are included in the overall pricing.
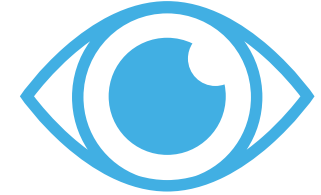
9. COMPLIANCE AND DATA PRIVACY

The Internet might feel like the Wild West, but there are a bevy of regulations that every website should follow. From ADA Accessibility, WCAG 2.0 compliance, GDPR, HIPPA, and more, your new CMS should take important governance and compliance rules into consideration.

Arguably one of the most important regulatory requirements of any website is accessibility. Every web experience should deliver "digital equality" to its visitors, regardless of their disability. Unfortunately, the realm of ADA compliance remains largely misunderstood. Accessibility isn't a "set it and forget it" endeavor; it requires both achieving and vigilantly maintaining the standards.

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As the Department of Justice issues more legal suits against public and private institutions, it's critical for all organizations to monitor their ADA posture and develop the best practices for managing compliance. A good CMS should leverage a structured data foundation, enabling pages to be easily scanned by screen readers. Additionally, it should integrate seamlessly with best-of-breed platforms like SiteImprove to scan for violations on a regular basis.

But technology is only part of the answer. With ADA, people are essential. Make sure you partner with a CMS vendor that has ADA expertise on staff – well-trained personnel that can read the reports and remediate properly. Work with your partner to acquire the right internal training for your organization, so you too can be a proactive part of the solution.

10. CHOICE OF DEPLOYMENT AND PRICING

Any CMS platform is an investment, and cost is one of the biggest factors in determining whether a company will make any sort of investment. "Is what I'm getting from my investment worth the money, time, and effort I put into it?" The answer to that for any decent CMS platform would be yes. A handful of popular CMS platforms promise "free" capabilities, but is it really free when your organization has to consistently invest thousands of dollars in third-party development options? Or would you rather pay for the plugins your team needs with a reliable support infrastructure in place?

Cost doesn't only refer to money, however. How much is your organization willing to wait for needed changes to your website? How much time can you afford to take to bring your website to life? If you're seriously considering a CMS, that answer is probably "not much." With the modern era of CMS providers, any good CMS should offer customers a rapid timeframe to migrate or build. What used to take 18 months should take 90 days or less. Out-of-the-box native capabilities should streamline the build and a CMS should easily integrate with your company's existing stack.

This era of expanding CMS choices brings along a transformation shift in how organizations can pay for their CMS platforms. Most companies only use a fraction of the functionality in their software when it

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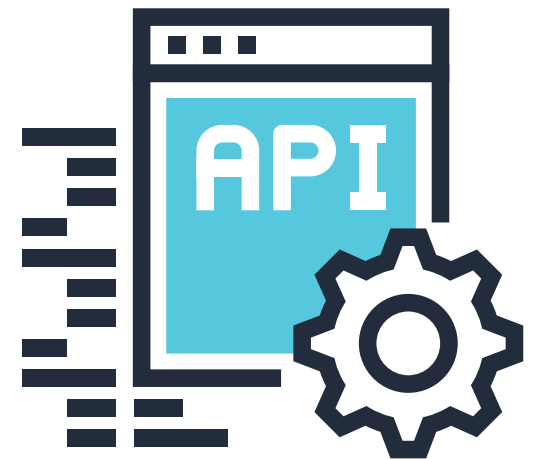
comes to what's utilized. By giving you payment choice, you're buying nothing more or less than what you need. The same is true of your underlying infrastructure. With advancements in cloud-based orchestration, you can deploy less expensive but highly secure CMS platforms that fit your exact needs—and allow you to pay for only what you need.

A few key considerations when thinking over pricing, especially regarding deployment:
- What choices do I have in buying, deploying, and implementing the CMS?
- Does my team understand it?
- Do I have a choice for unlimited users as an enterprise service, making it more efficient and cost-effective?
- Do I have the opportunity to buy month-to-month on a subscription?
- What are the migration options?
- Does my CMS partner handle everything turnkey, or do I need to find an implementation resource?
- Is there an enterprise self-service option?

Costs shouldn't limit your ability to have a best-of-breed CMS, but it should give you the choice on how you pay and deploy your CMS. You tell them how you want to use and buy their product, not the other way around.

CONCLUSION: COMPLETENESS OF VISION

The right CMS platform for your organization is one that fits with your current and future needs and helps you achieve success. If you need help making the right CMS decision, there are plenty of places to turn. You can speak to local developers in your area or engage CMS experts for larger projects. In any event, make sure you choose wisely and test drive the software first. If possible, download trial installations and evaluate systems using consistent criteria. The decision you make could affect the health of your organization for a long time to come.

CMS OPTIONS CAN BE OVERWHELMING. TALK IT OVER WITH US: 800-859-7656

ABOUT SOLODEV

Solodev is a leading enterprise website Content Management System (CMS) that empowers organizations to create amazing websites and engaging digital experiences in the Cloud—all with total design freedom and control. Built from the ground up for Amazon Web Services (AWS), Solodev provides unparalleled security, scalability, and redundancy with 24/7/365 U.S. based support. Solodev has been listed as one of Inc. 5000's fastest growing companies for the last three years and recognized as a High Performing leader on the user-driven G2 Crowd Grid. Winners of the 2017 AWS "City on a Cloud" Innovation Challenge, Solodev is an AWS Advanced Technology Partner with competencies in Education, Government, and Marketing & Commerce. Solodev's self-service CMS can be purchased on demand in the AWS Marketplace or through the GSA Contract. Learn more at www.solodev.com.