

One Size Doesn't Fit All

Tips for Selecting a Content Management Solution

This white paper:

- *examines the key questions any organization should ask in determining the scope of content management requirements*
- *provides an overview of the vendor categories*
- *recommends resources for researching vendors*

Is my organization a candidate for a content management solution?

Chances are, if your organization has a Web site today, you've likely experienced at least some of these common pain points:

- ✓ stale, inaccurate or hard-to-find content
- ✓ the inability to control or maintain the look and feel throughout the site
- ✓ no process for approving content before publication
- ✓ little or no control over who sees what content (security and personalization)
- ✓ the dreaded content bottleneck, with only a Webmaster or other technical staff able to update content

If any of these symptoms sound familiar, you're a likely candidate for a content management solution (CMS).

But what exactly *is* content management, and how can it help you solve the problems outlined above?

While a CMS can provide a wide range of functionality, at the core it should enable non-technical staff to create, edit and publish content (such as text, graphics, images, video, etc) to the Web. It should also provide controls such as security and templating, to ensure a consistent appearance and solid control over who can edit and view content, and depending on your business process requirements, should also provide workflow and approval processes. However, with literally hundreds of content management providers with products ranging from simple shareware editing tools to enterprise-level solutions that cost several million dollars to implement, wading through the options can be confusing, time consuming and frustrating. How do you make sense of the dizzying array of content management options available, and hone in on the features your organization actually needs?

With limited technology budgets, IT departments are increasingly being asked to do more with less. It's critical to define and prioritize your requirements, and carefully compare vendor options. If you do, you'll be more likely to choose a solution that provides just what you need, rather than overpay for unnecessary bells and whistles. Ultimately, a solid understanding of your organization's tactical and strategic objectives will help to ensure a successful implementation of a CMS.

How much content management do you need?

Recognizing you need a solution is just the beginning. Scoping your requirements is the next important step. This list of 20 questions should help get you started:

Content

1. How much content do you have on your site?
2. How frequently does the content on your site change? (Would the answer change if you had a tool to update the content easily?)
3. Do you want to reuse the same content in different places on your site?
4. Do you need to repurpose content for other devices (e.g., wireless devices)?
5. How do you plan to manage digital assets and documents?
6. How much of the content is structured vs. unstructured data? Static vs. dynamic?
7. What is the risk to your organization of stale or inaccurate content?
8. Do you need to support sites in multiple languages?

Contributors

9. Who will be responsible for updating the site?
10. Do you want to allow non-technical users to publish directly to the site?
11. Who needs to approve content before it is published? Will you need to implement a workflow process for publishing content?

Security, Personalization, Integration

12. Do you need to provide secure access to members-only content?
13. Do you need to authenticate users against an outside database?
14. Will you need to personalize the site, or present different content depending on who the user is, e.g., customers, employees, partners and/or others? Do you want to target certain content to specific audiences?
15. Will a CMS system need to integrate with other databases or applications, such e-commerce, discussion forums, calendaring, event registration, collaboration, etc.?

Technical and Site Requirements

16. What technical requirements (operating environments, programming languages, hardware) will influence your options?
17. What internal technical resources are available to implement the CMS, and manage the site on an ongoing basis?
18. Do you have any special or difficult requirements? (e.g., federal government or specific industry regulations)?
19. How often does your site's look and feel change? Do you need the ability to centralize these changes in one place?
20. Do you need to provide a search mechanism on the site?

As you can see, there are many considerations when assessing your needs. While the list above is not exhaustive, your answers should help to determine which features are most important to the success of your Web site, by separating the “must-have” features from the “nice-to-haves.”

Ideally, the timetable and budget for your implementation will be derived *after* you have analyzed your requirements, but often these are pre-determined based on factors outside your control, and may gate your options. If you can wait to define a timetable and budget until you’ve completed at least an initial analysis, you’re more likely to get better results.

Build or Buy?

Most organizations confront the challenge of determining whether to build or buy technology when solving business problems. It may seem appealing to seriously consider building a content management application, rather than purchasing a packaged solution. But before charging off to write code, here are a few considerations to keep in mind when evaluating whether to build or buy:

- Is software development a core competency for your organization?
- What internal resources are you prepared to apply to the following key tasks:
 - Requirements definition
 - Drafting of specifications
 - Software development
 - Quality assurance
 - Documentation
 - Training for end users
 - Software enhancements
 - Software support
- What happens when any of those key staff leave the firm, or become otherwise unavailable?
- What opportunity cost would you be giving up by deploying internal resources towards building a custom application?
- What happens when your requirements exceed your internal development capabilities?

Packaged solutions typically offer the following advantages over home-grown applications:

- You get the benefit of countless man-hours of development and quality assurance
- Products are feature-rich, and continually enhanced
- Dedicated support resources are available to assist with questions that arise
- Training is available for developers, administrators and business users
- Documentation and other knowledge-based resources are available

Research resources

If, after considering these questions, you determine that a packaged solution may better fit your needs, there is no lack of solutions on the market today, ranging from inexpensive ASP offerings to high-end enterprise options. Taking the time to research alternatives that meet your requirements is a critical step in ensuring the success of your project.

- ✓ Good sources of information include **content management-focused web sites** like www.cmswatch.com and www.content-wire.com, publications focusing on content management and document management such as www.transformmag.com and www.econtentmag.com, and list serves and discussion groups that focus on content management.
- ✓ Obtaining **professional and customer references** from industry peers and/or feedback from industry associations can also be very helpful in assessing a vendor's strengths and weaknesses, and their ability to understand your requirements.
- ✓ Taking time to view **detailed product demonstrations**, and obtaining evaluation copies of the CMS software can provide valuable insight. By getting "under the hood" so to speak, you can better assess feature functionality and ease of use of the products.

In short, there are many resources to help educate you on the relevance and benefits of CMS features, and point you to a short list of vendors.

Requirements Summary

A requirements summary such as this can help you to develop an RFI or an RFP, should you wish to go that route, or simply provide a checklist against which to compare vendors.

Ease of Use

- Ease of use for non-technical content contributors
- Time to implement – will it take weeks or months?
- What kind of functionality is available out of the box, and how many of your requirements are met by that basic functionality?

*If the product's interface is intuitive and easy to understand, you'll **increase the likelihood of adoption** among non-technical users, and should expect **lower training and implementation costs**.*

Technology and Budget

- Technical fit - Do the technical requirements of the system fit with your organization's skills and abilities? What databases and operating environments are supported?
- Does the system use a standard, open operating environment and hardware, or is it an endangered, obsolete or proprietary technology?
- Are the skills necessary to maintain the application and the

- underlying technology both readily available and affordable?
- Total cost of ownership (TCO) - how does the system's TCO compare to other options? How much will you need to budget for additional expenses such as customization, consulting, implementation services, training and support?

Features and Functionality

- Use the list of 20 questions above to prioritize those features most important to your organization, bearing in mind factors like number of contributors, amount and type of content to maintain, security, scalability, performance and site requirements

Implementation and Beyond

- What kind of administrator and end-user training is available and required to get up and running?
- Will the implementation require extensive customization or consulting to meet your needs? How will that affect your budget and timetable?
- What support and maintenance services are available? What is the vendor's reputation for handling support?

This requirements summary list is not exhaustive, but should give you a sense of how to look at the various options available. So what can you expect from entry level, mid-market and enterprise solutions?

Vendor Overview – Market Breakdown

Entry level/Open Source. Entry level solutions typically provide basic WYSIWYG editing tools to enable non-technical contributors to post content to pages, and may offer some basic, but generally inflexible templating tools. These tools are fine for managing a single, static site with limited amounts of content, no requirement for workflow, security or personalization, and few authors. Prices generally range from \$1,000 to \$10,000. Vendors in this space include Ektron, UserLand and Infosquare. These solutions are often right for small organizations or those with very limited budgets, but many companies migrate to more sophisticated solutions as their requirements exceed the capabilities of offerings at this level. Open source solutions include Zope, OpenCms, and Midgard, and have the advantage of being free and publicly available – but are not supported, and will generally require substantial integration.

Mid-market. The mid-market is the largest CMS category today. You can expect to find more sophisticated features in these offerings, such as templating, versioning, workflow, security, personalization, custom metadata, object-oriented design, ability to re-purpose content using XML and other technologies, site administration tools, dynamic publishing and multi-language support. The scope of features offered by mid-market vendors is quite diverse, and increasingly, a number of these players are providing much of the functionality of high-end vendors, for a fraction of the cost. Prices generally range from \$15,000 - \$150,000. Examples of mid-market players include Divine, Microsoft, PaperThin, Percussion, Red Dot, and Stellant.

Enterprise. Higher-end solutions offer the ability to scale enterprise-wide with production/development environments, and deliver features such as content syndication; integration with portals; support for very high numbers of sites, contributors, site traffic; and more sophisticated capabilities. Prices start around \$200,000, and implementations can often exceed six figures depending on the scope and complexity of the sites. Fortune 1000 organizations, multinationals and others with very complex requirements are more likely to seek the scope of features offered by vendors such as Broadvision, Documentum, Interwoven and Vignette, the well-known companies at this level.

In assessing content management vendors across all categories, in its first annual “Ideal CMS” report, CMS Watch recognized **PaperThin’s CommonSpot™ Content Server for Best Overall Value.**

CommonSpot Content Server (www.paperthin.com), provides all of the mid-market features mentioned at the left, as well as high-end features generally found in enterprise solutions, such as scalability, content replication, easy customization and the ability to maintain separate development and production environments – all out-of-the-box.

Pricing for CommonSpot starts at under \$20,000, and full-scale deployments can frequently take place within a six-week time frame.

Conclusion

Regardless of your budget, you should always aim for a solution that is:

- Easy for non-technical staff to learn and use
- Fully featured out-of-the-box – offering rapid implementation
- Able to leverage existing technology skills or those easy to acquire
- Easily customizable
- Scalable
- Affordable – not just for the software, but providing a low total cost of ownership

Solutions that meet these criteria are more likely to be deployed quickly, adopted easily and adapted effectively over time, to meet the changing needs of an organization. Remember to factor in implementation costs when considering solutions – some applications require extensive customization and professional services to get up and running, which can increase the cost and time to implement significantly, compared to solutions that provide more out-of-the-box functionality. These extra costs can balloon quickly; be sure you understand what costs will be involved in a full implementation before finalizing your decision.

PaperThin, Inc., helps organizations of all sizes to significantly reduce the time and expense involved in creating, updating and managing Web content. PaperThin's flagship product, CommonSpot Content Server, powers Internet, intranet and extranet sites worldwide for organizations of all sizes, including the AFL-CIO, Baptist Healthcare System, Cornell University, Mayo Clinic, National Park Service, Stanford University, The Gillette Company, and Turner Sports (PGA.com). CommonSpot Content Server has won numerous industry awards including "Trend-Setting Product" by KMWorld and Best Content Management Tool by the ColdFusion® Developer's Journal.