

the PANOPTIC CMS

{ Considerations for Selecting a *Content Management System* }

JESSICA BROWN, JONAH COHEN, LEON FAYER

Content Management Systems (CMS) have become one of the most powerful Internet-related products. What once was a gadget for web developers and technology geeks is now a must-have tool for multiple business units. Because of the pace at which the world of Internet technology changes, and the high demand for up-to-the-minute content, there are thousands of products (commercial and open source alike) that offer myriad features to companies in need of a solution for publishing their content.

Unfortunately, over the past decade, the term "CMS" has become a buzz word, a commodity if you will. Almost everything web-related has been rolled into those three characters. Originally (loosely) defined as a web application to create, edit, store and publish online content, CMS has transformed into a much more far-reaching instrument: among the functionalities of today's CMS are e-commerce inventory management, SEO and workflow creation.

Content management systems are meant to increase productivity, either by reducing the need for involvement by the technical staff, streamlining the time it takes to publish content (articles, offers, news items, photo galleries), or by simply reducing the cost of site operations.

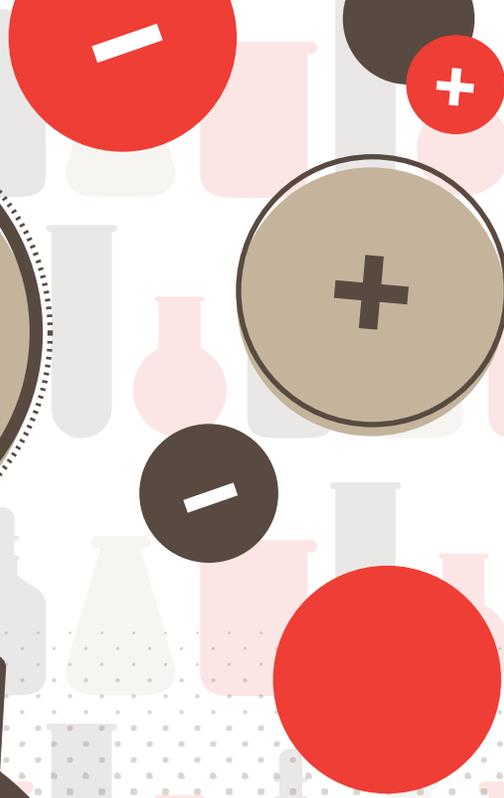
There are numerous "How To Choose CMS" articles out there, all written from different perspectives, starting from a designer's usability view and ending with the CFO's financial point of view. This paper is not one of those! The goal here is to get you thinking about what you really need, now and in the future. We will review foundational questions you should ask as you formalize your business work flow so that you will be successful regardless of whether you choose an off-the-shelf product or build a custom system.

Atom-Splitting

QUESTIONS

{ YOU SHOULD ASK YOURSELF WHEN }

CONSIDERING A CMS



IS PERFORMANCE A CONCERN?

MYTH

Off-the-shelf CMS products will meet your editorial and content publishing workflow out of the box.

TRUTH

In almost every case, the product has to be modified. This may also increase deployment time and costs.

COMMENTS

Does your site include user-generated content?

REVIEWS

RATINGS

Do you have to make real-time updates to content on your website?

Is your site asset-heavy with images and other media?

Does your site experience traffic spikes during the weekend, or with sales promos or announcements?

MUST THE SOLUTION ACCOMMODATE A UNIQUE WORKFLOW?

Will you be doing multi-channel publishing?

Will you publish to mobile or social networks?

Do you want to translate your offline business protocols to the web?

Do you need to implement an approval process for content?

Will you need a system that notifies users automatically about content review?

Do you have a need for incremental publishing?

(scheduled content, multiple editors working on the same content)

DO YOU MANAGE CONTENT THAT REQUIRES A CUSTOM DATA STRUCTURE?

MYTH

You won't need technical staff to support your CMS.

TRUTH

Almost all businesses make modifications to their CMS over time. Modifications require maintenance. If you do not have technical staff in place, you will need support to integrate & maintain changes.

examples of **STANDARD DATA STRUCTURES**

ARTICLES BLOG POSTS IMAGES PRODUCT LISTINGS

examples of **NON-STANDARD DATA STRUCTURES**

SPORTS SCORE TABLES PRICING MODELS DYNAMIC GAMES

ARE CUSTOM USER ROLES NECESSARY?

VENDORS?
USERS? FREELANCERS?
REPORTERS?

Do you accept content from contributors outside of your company?

MYTH

Custom systems require a longer learning curve.

Will different departments be using the system?

Does each need a different level of access?

Will you have to grant temporary access to the system?

TRUTH

Custom systems are built for your business' specific work flow. Since they often mirror existing practices, the learning curve can be kept to a minimum.

HOW FLEXIBLE A SYSTEM DO YOU NEED?

Do business processes change often?

Do you launch web initiatives?

Do you manage multiple sites?

MYTH

The CMS purchased will carry your business into the future.

TRUTH

The road map for the product you're purchasing may not follow the same road map as your business. Be sure that features your company needs (today and in the future) will be supported or created in the CMS product you are purchasing.

Custom systems typically require fewer modifications when adding or creating new features than off-the-shelf systems.

WILL ANY CONTENT COME FROM OR GO TO EXTERNAL SYSTEMS?

Will you integrate it with a CRM tool?

Do you use outside content providers, such as syndicated news feeds?

Will your system interface with product fulfillment vendors?

Does the system connect with e-mail campaign managers?

Will your system interface with payment providers?

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH by LEON FAYER ANATOMY OF BUSINESS DRIVEN CMS

There are two primary functions that you should consider when evaluating CMS: the “**engine**” and the “**workflow**.” You should analyze the impact and importance of each when selecting a system to support your business.

The Engine

The main purpose of a CMS is to publish and serve content: publishing content is easy. Publishing and serving the **right** type of content **consistently**, is a bit more challenging. All of the CMS products out there today have addressed this with varying success. Ultimately, the selection comes down to two simple questions: “will the product run in my infrastructure?” and “will the product perform well, based upon my current traffic, and scale with my business?”

Although the engine is just a tool to support your business on the web, its selection is critically important. Too often, the cart is put before the horse by comparing product features instead of evaluating the compatibility of the systems with the business needs and the architecture in place. When selecting the engine consider:

- **Scalability:** handling current and future traffic patterns
- **Integration methods:** protocols available for integration—for both user-facing applications and “the workflow”
- **Technology stack:** compatibility with the current architecture and the skill set of the staff
- **Extensibility:** integration with third-party business applications and support for business-specific data models
- **Content delivery:** support for the strategy of the business

Lack of Subject Matter Expertise

The Internet has changed. It's no longer a medium for wiki-style information; now content is dynamic, personalized; and more importantly, it's not uniform. And everyone knows it. Yet, people routinely buy a “one size fits all” CMS. We see this in working with clients every day—the off-the-shelf product that promised flexibility and ease-of-use ended by hampering content publishing and creating volumes of work for editors.

Trends are shifting just a little recently with the emergence of e-commerce specific CMS products. I envision that in the near future we'll see a surge of vertical-specific CMS products (finance, sports, travel) led by the experts in those fields. Until then, unless your business overlaps closely with the media angle of the available CMS, consider building a tool that's right for your business.

The Workflow

The workflow, however, **is** your business. And that's where available products can fall very short of the mark, no matter how much “flexibility” and “usability” is pitched. No matter how intuitive and usable the interface and the flow may be in the off-the-shelf product, chances are it will not match the flow that's intuitive for your business.

Catering to everyone means catering no one. Every CMS, no matter how flexible it strives to be, can cover every use case—even for a single type of business. If it was possible, there would be one, all-purpose CMS used by everyone. Non-specialized CMS try to cover the use cases that are most significant to generic business flows. “Generic” is just that—generic—a level of modification of the core product will be needed. Then you must consider, for example, issues of maintenance costs, skilled staff needs and upgrade path.

Consider the product's roadmap in choosing an off-the-shelf system. The feature set of the product is the vision of the creator(s). That vision may not include the features you need in the next release, either because of a change in product direction or simple lack of demand. Consider the effect on your business if a core feature—a driving force behind your business and a reason for selecting that product, is discontinued.

about the *authors*



Jessica Brown is a senior user experience designer at OmniTI, where she assists clients with delivering superior user experiences that drive valuable outcomes. Equally as excited by well-balanced typography as she is by well-written code, Jess joined the design team at OmniTI to develop intelligent interfaces and learn from a group of coding masters. Jess believes the most challenging part of design is letting go of what you like and embracing what works.



Jonah Cohen is a web designer at OmniTI, where he uses his visual and interaction design skills for clients, specializing in advanced interfaces and high-end design solutions. Jonah works on both front-end development and mobile applications. Jonah is the designer behind Photosmith for the iPad, and has created mobile interface customizations that are downloaded and applied daily to mobile devices worldwide. He is an avid fan of his craft, constantly researching and working to keep himself in tune with advances in the field.



Leon Fayer is Director of Engagements at OmniTI, where he is responsible for the overall growth and profitability of complex and highly visible engagements, overseeing multiple, mid-size projects and large integration efforts. Leon brings with him years of experience in working with Internet technology. His expertise lies in designing dynamic, web-based applications to enhance end-user control of a system's work flow.

He was one of the architects behind what is now IBM's premier enterprise content management platform, and led teams through the architecture, design and development of CMS, CRM and workflow systems for entertainment, media and sports event clients. Leon leverages his deep experience with modern Web frameworks, open-source technology and proprietary software to develop complex online systems with easy-to-use administrative control tools.



about *OmniTI*

Founded in 1997, OmniTI focuses upon solving the world's most difficult technical challenges in managing and monetizing data associated with hundreds of millions of users in time-critical operations. A consultancy in practice and an incubator of new companies, OmniTI designs, builds and operates Internet-centric solutions, from web site design through custom applications development, to the ongoing support and management of large-scale Internet databases and operations for B2C companies looking for stable, scalable mission-critical infrastructures.

VISIT

<http://omniti.com>

in Maryland
& New York

or CONTACT US

hello@omniti.com

+1 443-325-1357