

Open source 2.0 for content management systems

Embracing open source technologies to increase savings and achieve other advantages

ABOUT THIS PAPER

Today's content management system (CMS) is no longer simply a business tool, but has become a core part of the enterprise. As with most enterprise applications, the increased dependency on content management systems has come with a price tag—a steep one. Most enterprise CMS implementations run in the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars. In a climate where businesses and governments are trying to cut operational costs more aggressively than ever, these price tags can be tough to swallow.

A solution to today's exorbitant CMS costs is open source technology. Open source projects have advanced from simple software solutions to complex enterprise systems, including content management systems. This paper explores the rise in open source content management systems, along with the main arguments for and against their adoption. It also summarizes how one financial institution—Scotiabank—has benefited from its transition to an open source CMS.

Open source: Ready for primetime

There have always been trailblazers to fuel IT innovation. Recent pioneers have bucked the general consensus by embracing open source software to power their enterprises. A revolution is taking place—an open source software revolution ignited by the latest generation of technologists. It's a revolution that is changing the way software is adopted and used.

For decades, developers have been sharing ideas and collaborating on projects within open source communities, laying foundations to build upon and developing frameworks for customization and extension. The result has been the advancement of many open source projects, starting with Linux and continuing on to cover the full range of software, including content management systems.

These open source CMS solutions not only rival, but in some cases, surpass their commercial competitors. Indeed, in the CMS world, a handful of mature solutions, including Drupal, Liferay and DotNetNuke, have stirred up a great deal of debate when it comes to measuring the value of free versus licensed software.

Developers have united. The next generation of IT professionals has joined the workforce, and their mantra is "let's do it together." Open source CMS software—once considered too limited for use in real applications—has surprised the IT world by powering some of the most visited Internet sites.

The reality is that open source technology and open standards have become the perfect pairing. This pairing is providing cost effective solutions that meet many needs "out of the box" while remaining flexible enough to be customized to meet complex business needs.

Rebutting the critics: Open source CMS is viable and proven

Of course, not all open source content management systems are ready for prime time, but there is a good selection out there with enough depth and breadth to compete with traditional software vendors.

However, that old saying about "nothing in life being free" is true in the case of open source software. Even though you don't pay for the software, there are plenty of other areas where costs creep in, such as hardware, staffing and customization, to name a few. In some cases, the savings gained from open source software may be limited to licensing and maintenance costs, but these savings can be substantial.

While there are plenty of open source critics, their arguments are subject to debate and rebuttal, as you will read below. Any enterprise considering a CMS investment should carefully consider both sides of the argument.

Argument #1: Open source isn't secure

Is it better to rely on a vendor with limited resources to issue new releases to fix security holes? Or, is it better to rely on a large community of volunteers to issue fixes in a just-in-time model? In the CMS world, many of the popular open source CMS solutions have a proven track record of security and offer sites for reporting security issues, along with resources such as developer handbooks on developing secure applications. In addition, many companies such as CGI are experienced in configuring open source CMS software to have appropriate security levels based on client requirements.

Argument #2: Open source has no real support

For many smaller open source projects this assertion may be true. However, for widely supported open source projects, there is a wealth of information out there. In the open CMS world, Drupal is a good case in point. The Drupal community has hundreds of thousands of members dedicated to all manner of initiatives. There are manuals, tutorials, forums, blogs, videos and more for just about every aspect of the system, from installation and extension to administration. As with security, there are also a number of companies, including CGI, that offer professional services for many popular open source content management systems.

Argument #3: Open source isn't scalable

The success of Linux, Apache and MySQL has shown that mature open source products can scale to an unlimited extent. Open source CMS solutions power some very large websites. They often provide a flexible architecture that allows developers to "plug in" a solution (such as a cache manager) to address scaling issues, and for those unfamiliar with the options available, the open source community is quick to offer advice.

Argument #4: Open source means I have to give everyone my source code

Licensing models for open source software are not any less convoluted than those found with vendor or partner agreements. For projects that follow the GNU GPL licensing model, the requirement to make the source code available to everyone only applies if you choose to distribute your work. It does not, however, say that you must release any code you develop back into the community. In fact, source code needs to be provided only to the individual groups to whom you distribute your product or enhancements.

As with all technology investments, any enterprise considering an open source CMS investment should carefully consider all sides of security and support. Organizations should turn to experienced open source CMS integrators such as CGI to develop the appropriate standards, to help choose and implement a solution that is scalable, and to provide any needed proprietary customizations and enhancements.

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ABOUT CGI

At CGI, we're in the business of satisfying clients. A leading IT and business process services provider, CGI has 31,000 professionals operating in 125 offices worldwide.

Working in partnership with clients for 35 years, CGI has extensive experience in all aspects of IT management, from consulting and systems integration services to the full management of IT and business functions (outsourcing).

In the area of content management systems, CGI offers a full range of services—including consulting, systems integration, and application maintenance and hosting—and has experience implementing secure and scalable solutions. CGI invests in open source technology and is an active contributor to open source communities. Based on our experience and commitment, CGI helps organizations improve performance while reducing costs.

To learn more, visit us at www.cgi.com or contact us at info@cgi.com.

Case in point: Scotiabank

Given the numerous commercial and open source solutions available, choosing the right CMS software can be a bewildering and frustrating experience. Scotiabank turned to CGI to help it find the right CMS solution to consolidate and improve the management of numerous costly and redundant micro-sites.

The bank had created a collection of marketing micro-sites to serve particular groups of individuals or lines of business. The challenge for its IT group was supporting the many different technologies used to support these sites. Additionally, because of a lack of reusability, the cost of building these sites remained relatively constant despite their overlapping functionality.

CGI was asked to help the bank address these issues by establishing a platform that could be used to accelerate its time to market and reduce costs by leveraging reusable components across the sites. To meet this need, CGI chose the Drupal (v6.x) platform.

To date, CGI has built several sites using the platform with a mixture of community based and custom built modules. The underlying theme for the initiative has been to maximize reusability by drawing parallels between the sites and abstracting them into generic modules that can be reused with simple configuration. So far, CGI has built several reusable components such as a standard registration form and a contest engine.

The real success behind this story is the significant reduction in the bank's cost of developing these sites. Development cycles have been reduced to as little as three weeks, thanks to the reusable custom components built by CGI and the vast number of community modules that are available for Drupal.

CGI continues to partner with the bank, and the bank's value proposition is increasing with each project as CGI expands the reusable toolkit and lowers overall project costs.

Conclusion

The "2.0" days of open source content management systems have arrived. An increasing number of companies are embracing open source technology for content management not only because of the cost savings, but for the security, support, scalability and other advantages open source CMS affords. How quickly we reach "3.0" depends on how we continue to use and contribute to open source development.