

Head to Headless

Visual headless: 1,000 CMS users share their thoughts on the next level of content management and digital experience design



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Introduction

With the recent explosion in demand for headless content management systems, you could be forgiven for thinking that headless technology is something new. In reality, we at Magnolia have been offering a headless CMS for over 15 years.

During this time, Magnolia has helped many large organizations manage their content via a centralized CMS, only to distribute it via REST APIs to bespoke applications. Years ago, we called this technology “head optional” – a precursor to today’s, more streamlined, headless CMSs.

So, given this technology has been around for so long, why the sudden resurgence in interest?

For most businesses, it simply comes down to a renewed focus on customer experience. Whether you’re a business leader, marketer or IT professional, delivering a great customer experience is now key to building a successful brand. When developing these great customer experiences, the right content management technology is vital. Businesses must choose technologies that help bundle data, distribute content and deliver services across an ever-wider variety of customer touchpoints. At the same time, customer expectations are rising, with today’s enterprises being expected to deliver high quality, personalized content, quickly and at scale.

In the face of these new demands, more and more businesses are turning to highly integrated, headless (and hybrid-headless) solutions for their content management approach.

Despite this rising interest however, there remains a lot of confusion about the use of headless technologies – both among marketers and IT teams. The absence of a visual user interface has made marketers particularly reluctant to adopt headless CMSs, feeling that they cannot visually create and manage content in the way that they’re accustomed to.

At Magnolia, we wanted to address this confusion by providing a clear, straight-talking guide to the benefits of headless content management and its current state of adoption. We also wanted to understand how brands are adapting to the lack of a visual interface and how new hybrid “visual” headless CMSs are evolving to bridge the divide.

Who we surveyed?

500

senior
marketers



500

IT
professionals



USA, UK, Germany, Spain and Singapore

Digital experience, driving the push for headless

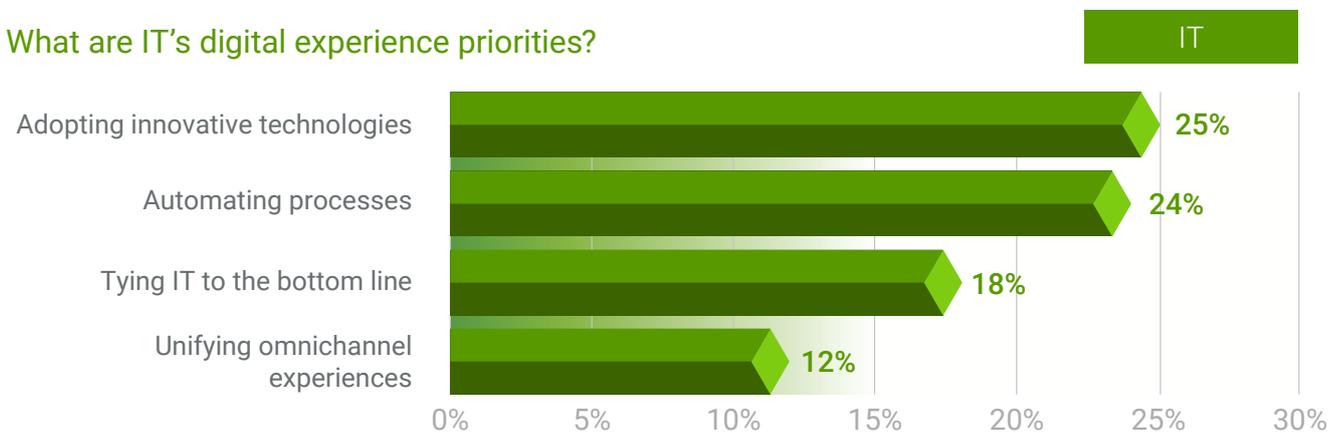
For both marketers and IT teams, customer experience — and in particular, digital experience (DX) — has become a key consideration.

When asked about their long-term DX goals, IT professionals identified the adoption of new technologies, automation of processes, and linking IT to their business’s bottom line as key in the year ahead.

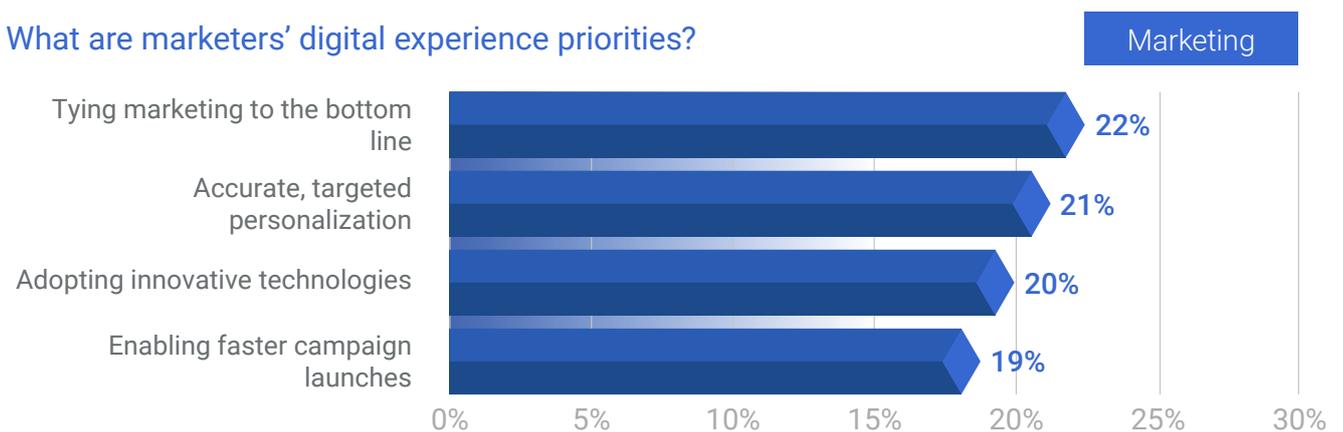
For marketers, linking their efforts to the bottom line was also a clear priority, along with providing accurate, targeted personalization and increasing the speed at which campaigns are launched.

When it comes to choosing the right content management system, such digital experience considerations are vital for today’s businesses. Technology for technology’s sake simply won’t cut it. Instead, both marketers and IT teams are on the hunt for content management solutions that support their long-term DX goals.

What are IT’s digital experience priorities?



What are marketers’ digital experience priorities?

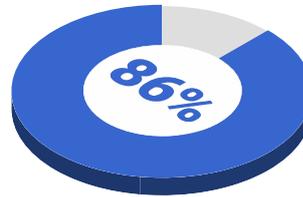


Traditional CMSs aren't delivering

As the digital experience goals of both marketers and IT teams evolve, many are finding that their "traditional" CMSs don't match up to their new expectations.

While traditional CMSs might be sufficient for companies that have limited content to manage, they cause larger and more content-rich organizations to struggle while trying to fulfil their digital experience goals.

For those looking to manage content across tens of different platforms or hundreds of different pages, manually editing this level of content simply isn't realistic.



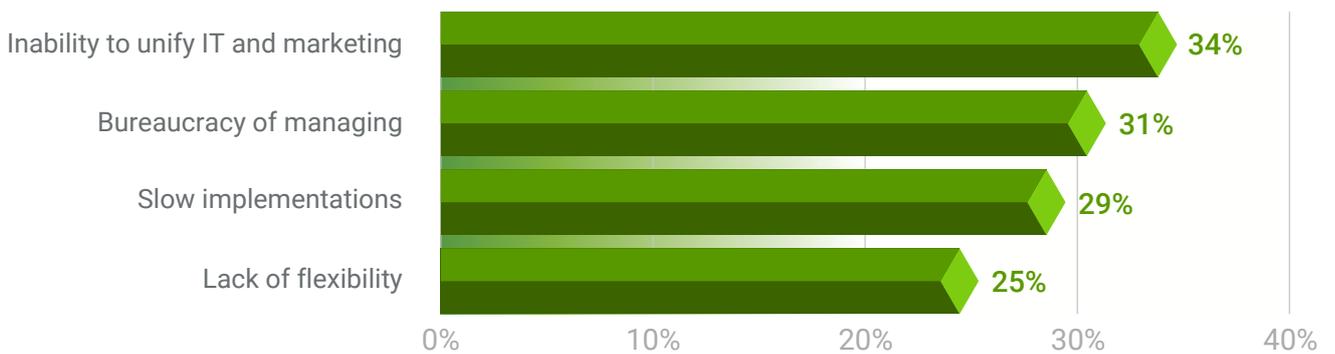
86% of marketers at large enterprises have grown frustrated with traditional CMSs

Traditional CMSs have become a point of frustration, lacking the speed, flexibility and support these organizations now require. In fact, where 68% of brands say they are happy with their CMS, this drops to only 52% for organizations that have a significant volume of content to manage.

As organizations produce ever more content, targeted across a greater variety of platforms, interest in headless technologies has inevitably risen.

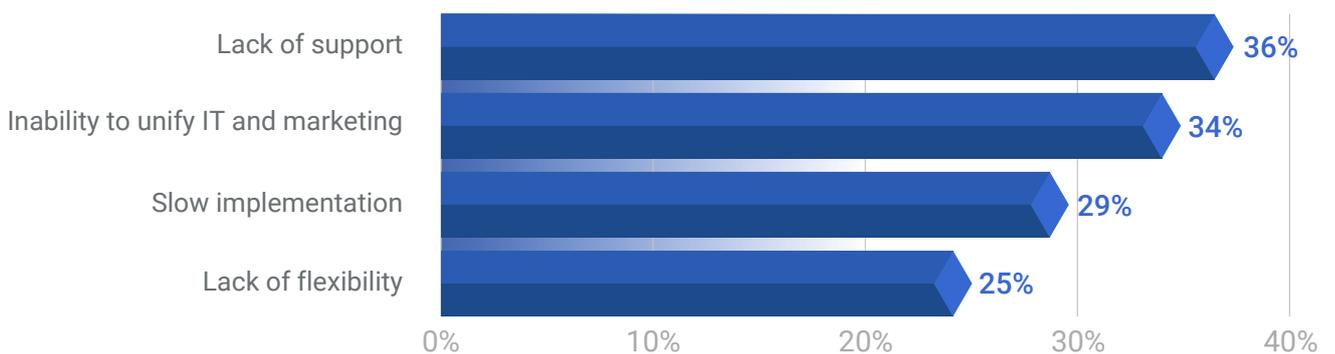
Where do traditional CMSs fall down for IT teams at large enterprises?

IT



Where do traditional CMSs fall down for marketing teams at large enterprises?

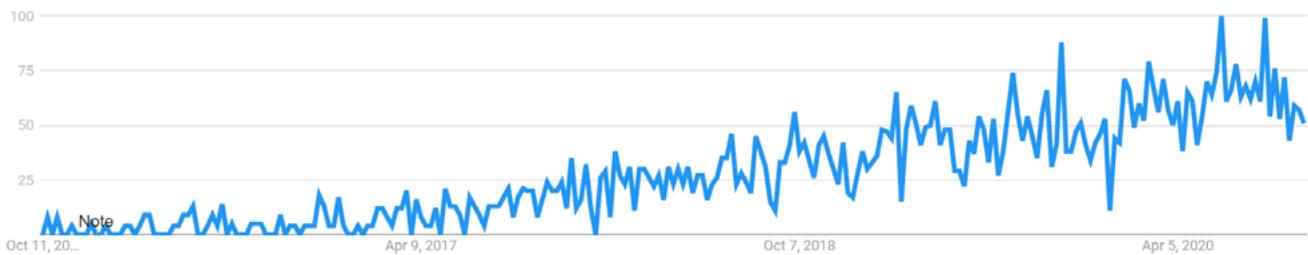
Marketing



Headless adoption is on the rise

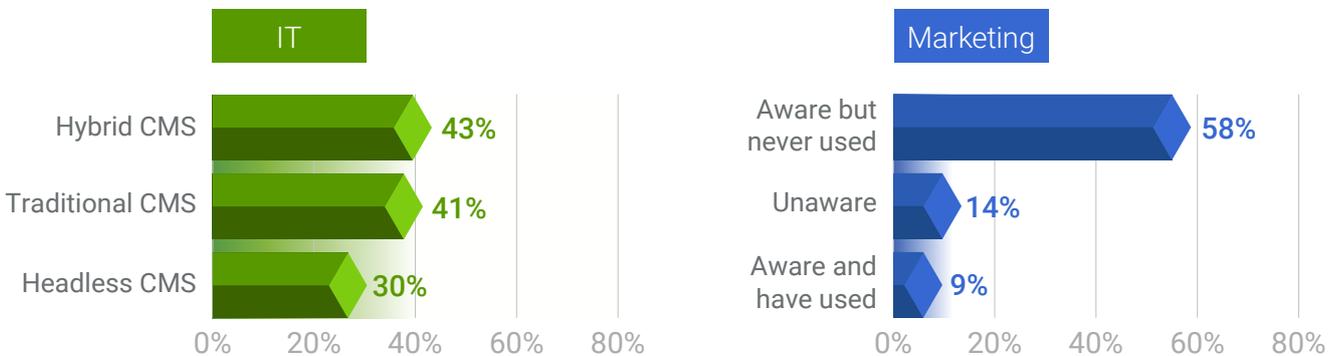
As ever more businesses search for new technologies to support their digital experience goals, a growing number of marketers and IT teams have turned to headless content management systems.

According to Google Trends, searches for 'Headless CMS' have more than doubled over the last two years. Similarly, 30% of IT teams have now switched to a headless CMS, while 45% say they have plans to switch within the next 5 years.



Web search traffic for 'headless CMS' has risen dramatically over the last five years, as businesses turn to this technology to improve their digital experiences

While IT is driving the charge for headless adoption, marketers are also seriously considering the switch. As it stands however, while 58% of marketers are aware of headless CMSs, they are yet to use one. That said, 51% are in the process of researching or discussing the switch to a headless CMS.



Adoption rates of headless technologies have risen dramatically over the last few years, with 30% of businesses now running a Headless CMS and 43% running a hybrid solution.

The majority of marketers have heard of a headless CMS, but have never used one, while 14% are still completely unaware of the term.

While headless adoption is rising sharply, this doesn't mean that businesses are completely abandoning their traditional CMSs. For many, the lack of a visual interface remains a cause for concern, encouraging 43% of brands to adopt a hybrid approach.

In brief: Headless vs hybrid headless CMS

Unlike a traditional CMS — where the frontend and backend are deeply coupled — in a headless CMS the two are separate. The 'head' (frontend) has been removed and all that remains is a repository to store and manage content. With a headless CMS, brands can create content centrally, quickly and with great flexibility, making it available to be used by any platform or channel via its APIs.

A hybrid headless CMS, on the other hand, blends headless technology with the traditional full CMS experience, giving developers and marketers the best of both worlds. Content can still be created, distributed, pulled, and re-purposed without limits — yet marketers can benefit from user-friendly drag-and-drop interfaces, WYSIWYG editing, content previews, author collaboration and workflow management.

[Read more on headless and hybrid headless CMSs.](#)

Headless CMSs allow IT to be fast and flexible



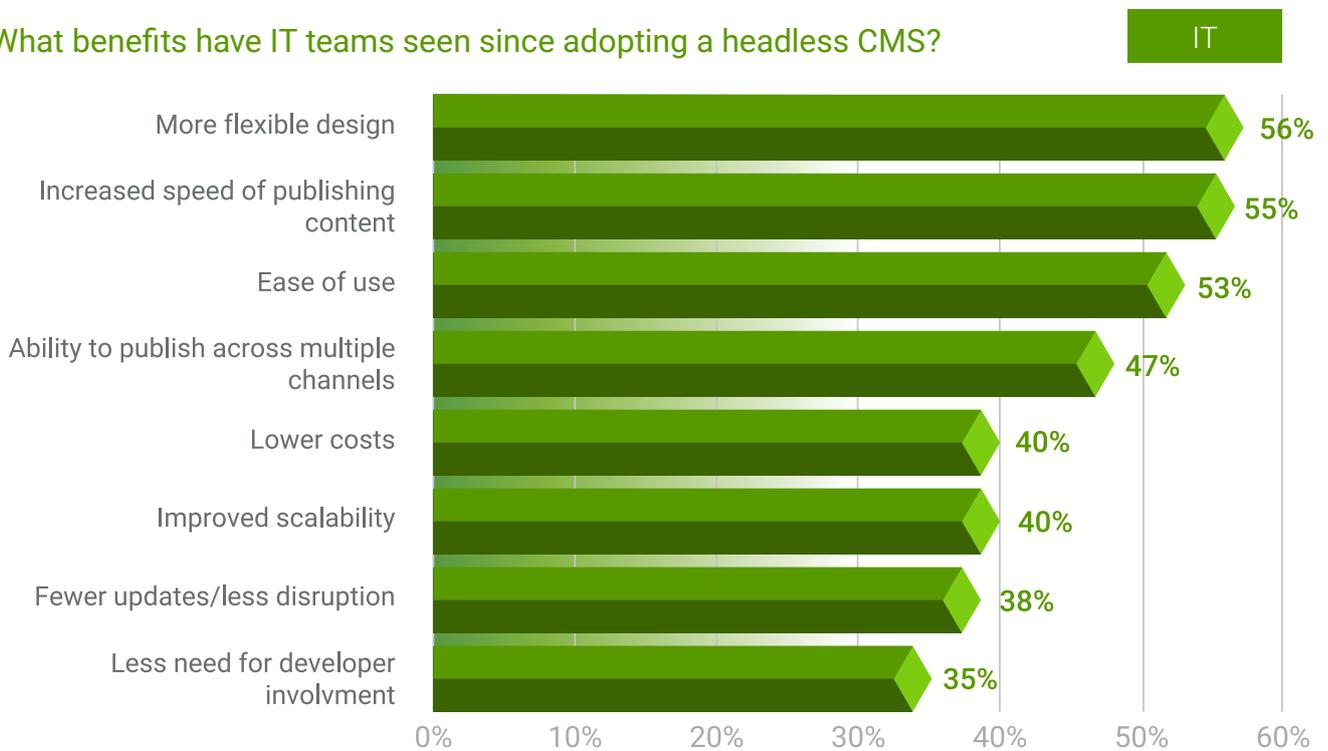
99% of IT teams who have adopted a headless CMS report seeing the benefits for their organisations

As content requirements expand and businesses feel that their older CMSs no longer meet their changing needs, the headless approach offers a number of benefits.

Headless CMSs provide IT teams with a secure backend infrastructure, while offering the flexibility to choose a front-end framework that is right for them.

Of IT professionals who have completed their transition to a headless CMS, 99% agree that their businesses have seen the benefits. Of these, more than half say that they can now offer greater flexibility and have been able to increase the speed at which they develop and publish content.

What benefits have IT teams seen since adopting a headless CMS?



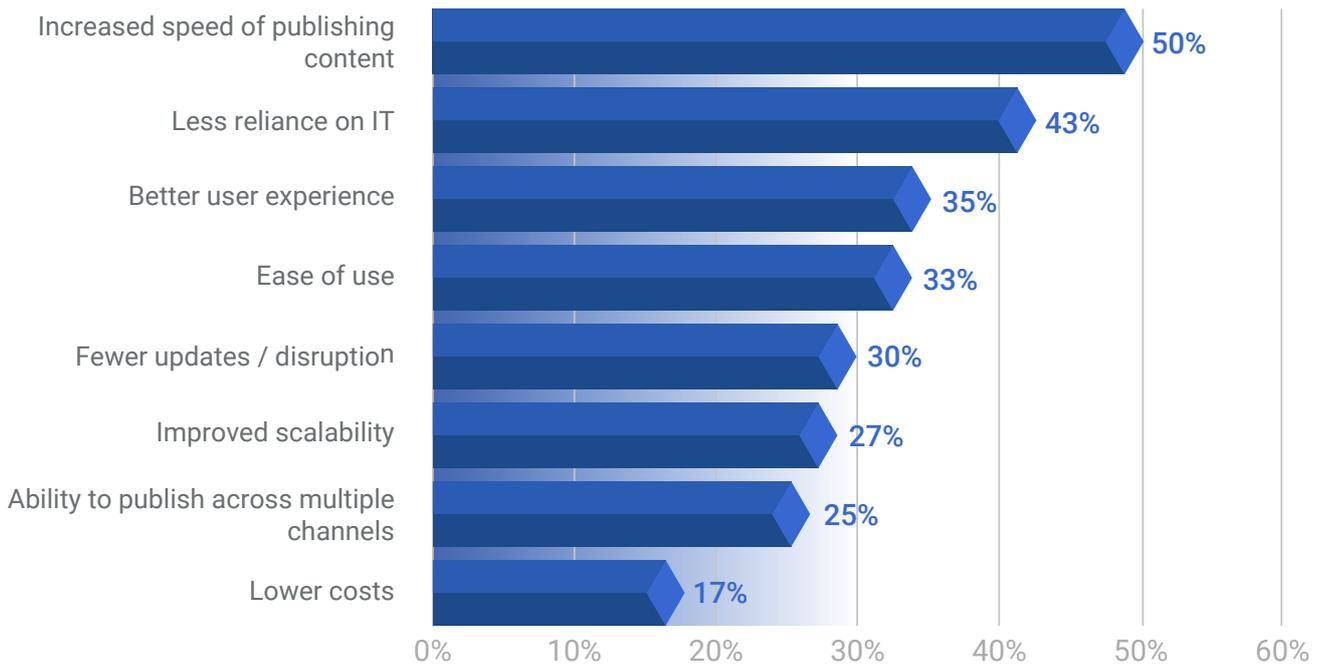
Headless CMSs make marketing faster

While fewer marketers have instigated the switch to a headless CMS, those who have, have been quick to recognize the benefits. Half of the marketers surveyed stated that they have been able to increase the speed at which they publish content and create new experiences for their customers. 42% also feel that they're less reliant on IT since making the switch.

This said, many marketers are still unsure about the move, with only 1 in 3 finding the headless architecture easier to use than their traditional CMS. More often than not, this comes down to not having a visual interface – something which causes significant confusion for marketers.

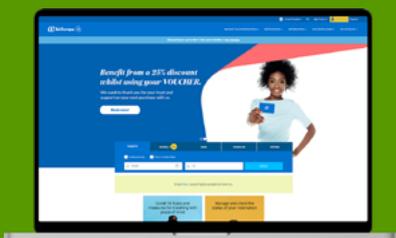
What benefits have marketers seen since adopting a headless CMS?

Marketing



Case Study

Air Europa: Digital revamp boosting direct sales



[Read the full case study](#)

As Air Europa’s website quickly grew to become its main sales channel, the need for a new, more modern technology was clear. Using Magnolia as a hybrid headless CMS, the company’s broad range of needs including multi-language, multi-market, multi-device and multi-site management are all met by one content platform. With better customization capabilities and the ability to work independently from IT, Air Europa’s marketing team also performs much faster.

Headless interfaces still cause confusion

While both marketing and IT teams are interested in the potential benefits of headless CMSs, there remains a lot of confusion around this technology.

While 82% of marketers are confident in their understanding and use of a traditional CMS, this drops to only 42% for headless CMSs. This is due to the lack of a clear, visual frontend, making it harder for marketers to visualize exactly how their content will appear once published.

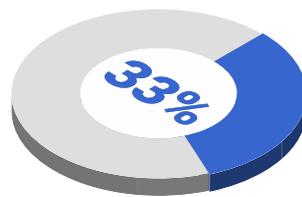
Marketing



of marketers feel confident in their understanding of traditional CMSs



of marketers are not confident in their understanding of headless CMSs



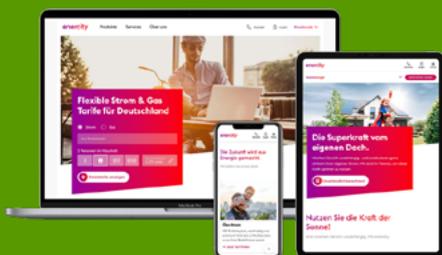
of marketers are not confident in their understanding of single-page apps.



of marketers are at least aware of the term "headless".

Case Study

enercity: Go headless, but stay visual



[Read the full case study](#)

enercity, one of Germany's largest energy suppliers, offers bleeding-edge user experience with the help of modern front-end technologies, while preserving absolute creative freedom for its marketing team. Using Magnolia's headless technology combined with a visual editor, enercity's marketing team works with original React.js components inside the CMS having the full authoring experience, creative control and preview of a traditional CMS. It's headless – the modern way.

Usability drives the push for visual interfaces

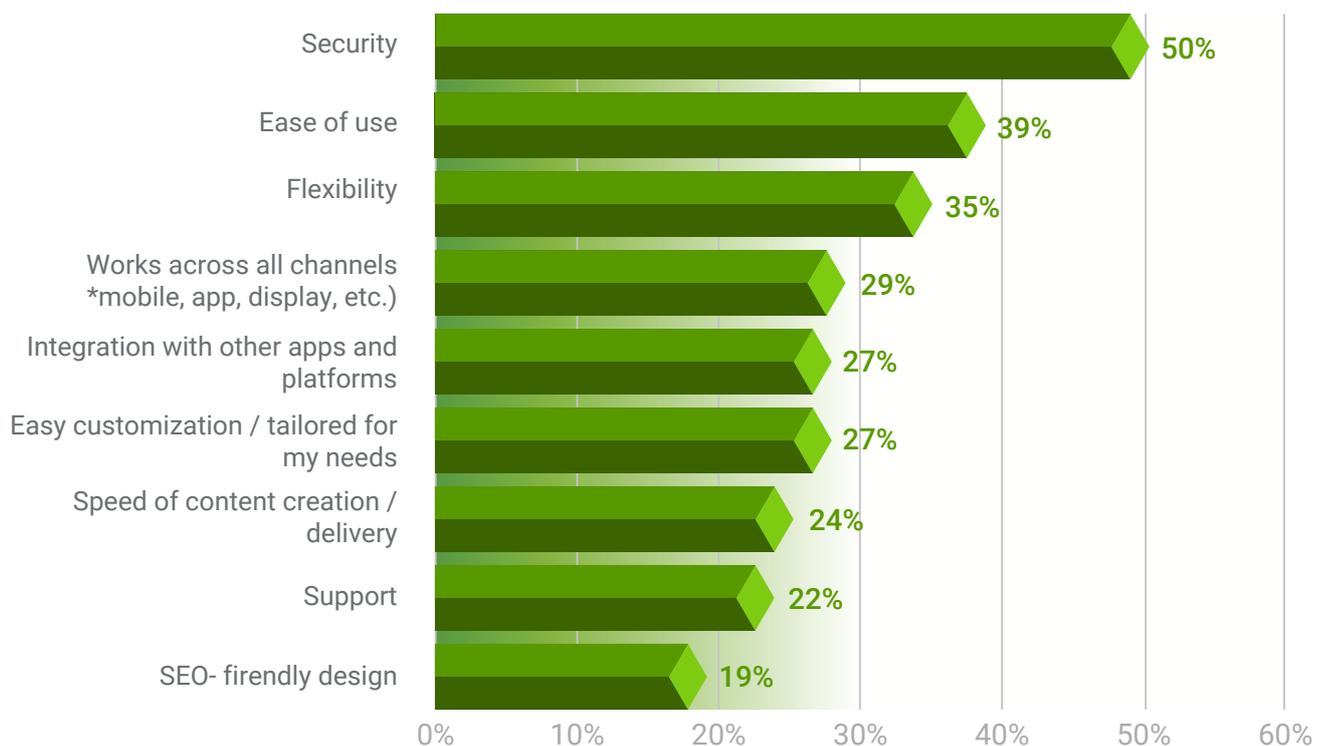
Much of the confusion around headless tech comes down to usability. For marketers, the most vital consideration for a CMS is that it's easy to use. This is closely followed by the need to support cross-channel campaigns and to be able to rapidly develop and launch new content. For IT teams, ease of use is also a top priority, along with the need for strong security and flexibility.

While the need to create cross-channel content is driving the adoption of headless CMSs, the heavy focus on ease of use is a serious sticking point for purely headless technologies. In fact, only 1 in 3 marketers find their headless architecture easier to use than a traditional CMS.

This is why many brands are now turning to more visual, hybrid solutions, as marketers find it both challenging and time-consuming to produce content without a visual interface.

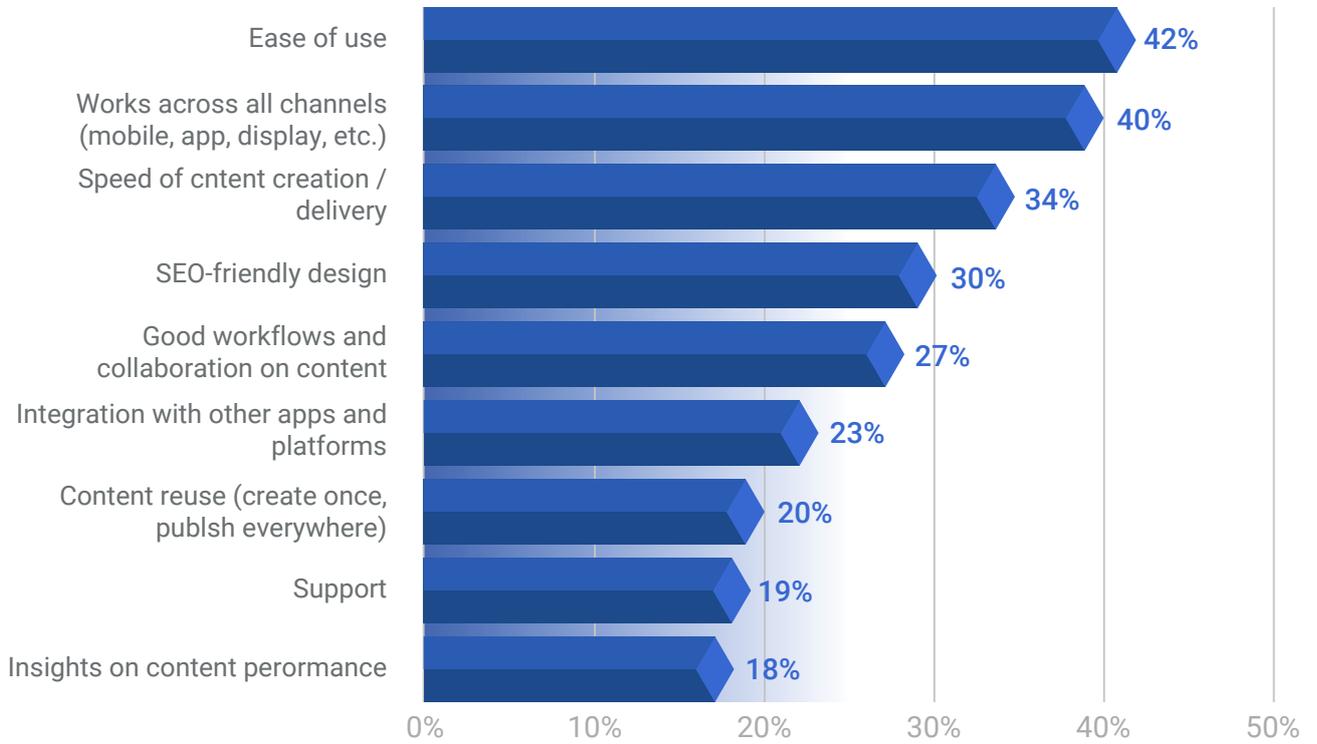
What do IT teams look for in a CMS?

IT



What do marketing teams look for in a CMS?

Marketing



Headless + Visual: The next-level CMS

Whether you're a marketer or an IT professional, if you're reading this guide, you've probably considered the possibility of switching to a headless CMS.

Hopefully this report has provided you with insights into how others are approaching this decision, along with the benefits — and challenges — they've faced.

Headless CMSs offer a fantastic opportunity to improve processes and meet your long-term digital experience goals. By allowing marketers to manage content centrally they save time on content creation and re-use.

At the same time however, the lack of a visual user interface to design and preview content is proving a significant challenge for marketers. Brands want the flexibility offered by a headless CMS, but they don't want to lose control over their content's final appearance. They need a "best of both worlds" approach. Magnolia takes this approach and offers a unique visual editor for single-page applications (SPA) to complement its headless CMS. The SPA editor provides a visual preview for marketers and content teams, while retaining the flexibility of a headless CMS. It allows marketers to view and manipulate the presentation to the user, yet work with clean, structured presentation-independent content.

This hybrid technology helps to bridge the gap for marketers by providing a headless CMS architecture, while also giving authors the context and creative control of a traditional CMS. Equipping both marketers and IT teams with the tools they need to build great digital experiences takes content management to the next level.

Whether you are still exploring your organization's readiness for a headless approach, or are already on the lookout for the right technology solution, our guides will help you make the right decisions in your headless journey.

Still exploring headless?



[Download whitepaper](#)

Ready to select the right solution?



[Download whitepaper](#)



Magnolia is a leading digital experience software company. We help brands outsmart their competition through better customer experiences and faster DX projects. Get full headless flexibility and seamless workflows across best-of-breed digital experience stacks. Global leaders such as New York Times, JetBlue, Avis and Atlassian all rely on Magnolia for maximum reliability, high speed project implementation and exceptional omnichannel experiences.

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