



Choosing a Headless CMS:

THE 36-POINT CHECKLIST

The headless CMS market
is getting cramped;

which is a good thing, as well as a bad thing,
for brands looking to go headless. So to help
you, **we've created this 36-point checklist to
guide you** with your headless CMS purchase.



What is a Headless CMS?

To understand what a headless CMS is, let's first take a look at how a traditional CMS works.

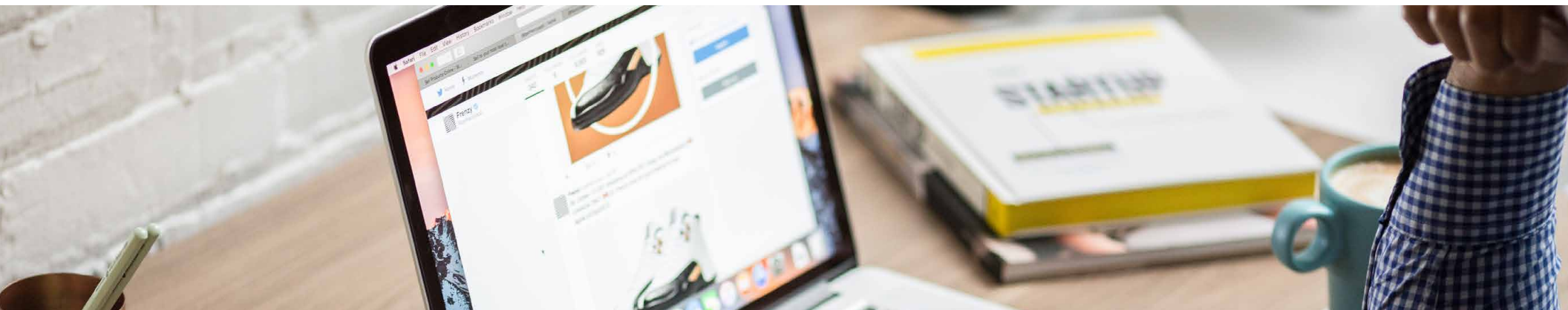
A conventional CMS comes with a predefined front-end presentation layer to help brands publish content on websites.

For example, **WordPress gives you templates and a WYSIWYG editor to design and publish content.** Traditionally, this concept was genius. Today, it doesn't cut the mustard for brands looking to engage their customers on the latest technologies.

Back when we were all using monolithic systems, everything was siloed. The technology, the teams, the tools and the data were all isolated on a single stack that struggled to adapt and adjust. Since everything was in one place, it was logical for marketers to bring in a suite solution (like Adobe, Sitecore and even IBM) to help execute

a multitude of functionalities, whether it be content management, workflow, or record management.

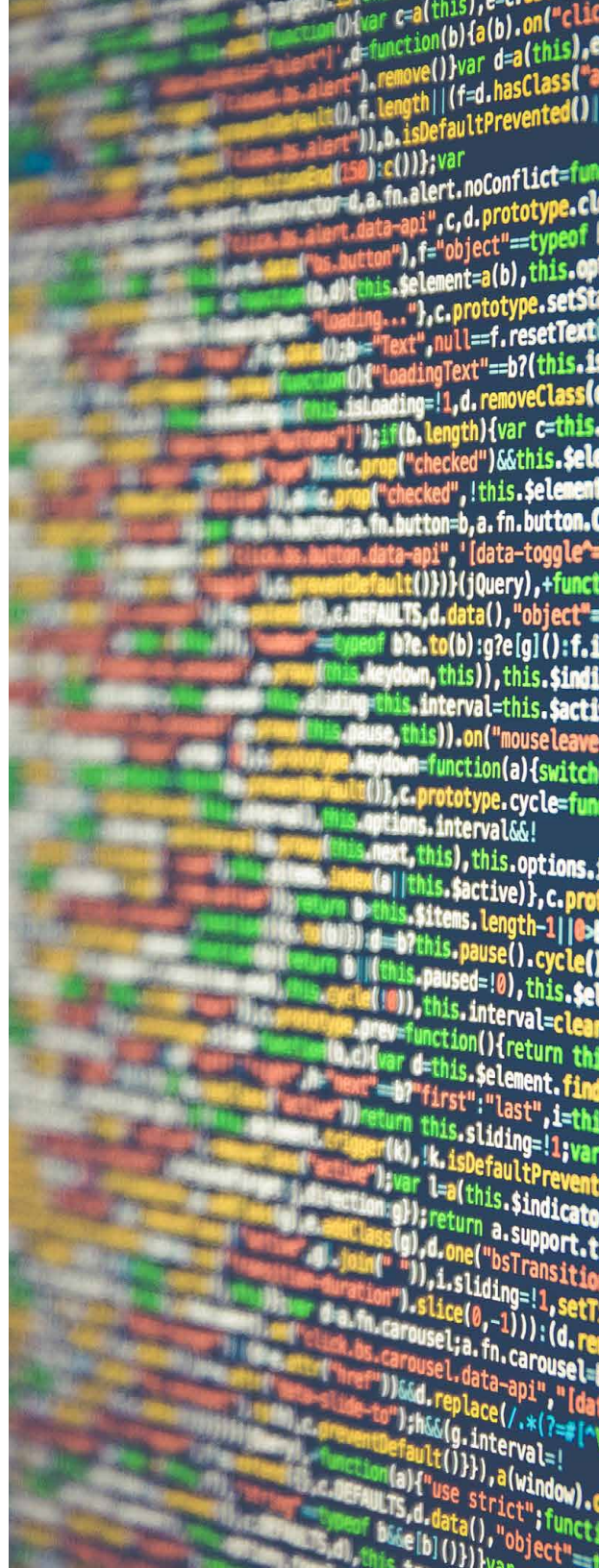
But those suite solutions had a heavy dependency on IT resources — shackling marketing teams to their respective IT departments. The result? **Slower time-to-market, decreased marketing agility and less marketing autonomy.** This sluggish performance hindered business outcomes such as conversions, customer engagement, and customer retention.



A pure headless CMS on the other hand, decouples content from the front-end delivery layer.

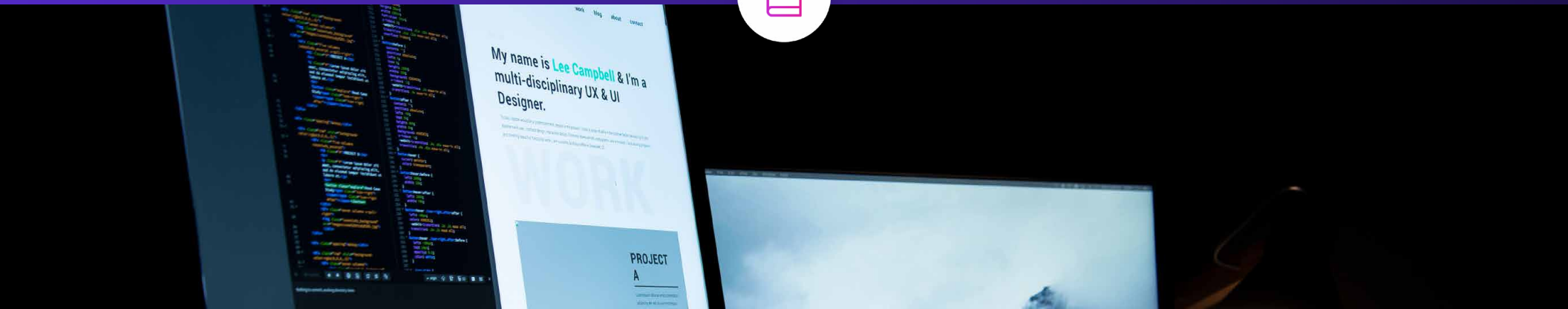
That means you have no templates or editors — just your content and some APIs to let you deliver that content to any device on the market. So, the term headless emerged to describe this concept, as your content can have any “head” you like, since there is no predefined head in place.

A pure headless CMS also helps brands avoid the traditional vendor lock that customers get with a suite solution. The IT team can develop their front-end applications in the framework of their liking (AngularJS, Node,



and React are leading at the moment) where not only Single Page Applications (SPAs), but even entire websites can be built. Some of the digital marketing hang-ups that users encounter with suite solutions may even be resolved (marketing agility and for some, time-to-market), but some headless solutions still hold unsolved challenges with a major aspect of content management: the authoring experience.

The only problem here is that **marketers are left out in the cold**. It's up to front-end developers to design and organize content so it displays and conveys correctly on websites, apps, voice-enabled devices and wearable technology. The role of the marketer in this publication process is limited since there is no editor, live previews or drag-and-drop interfaces.



What is a Hybrid CMS?

As mentioned, headless content management was the CMS world's answer to the growing number of devices and screens flooding the market — it made sense to **decouple the content from the delivery layer so that the content could potentially be delivered anywhere**. It was brilliant, except for the fact that it left marketers in an even deeper rut where they had to work with front-end developers and new content delivery layers to simply author content correctly.

A hybrid CMS (also called a decoupled or head-optional CMS), **is the antidote to this problem. It's a combination of both the headless CMS and the suite solution.**

It provides the flexibility of a headless CMS regarding **omnichannel content delivery and gives you the ability to integrate with one or more suite solutions** without having to circle back to the IT department for every decision. Additionally — and perhaps more importantly — a hybrid CMS addresses the issue that

headless content management brings about; content authoring.

As previously mentioned, marketers and content creators are often left high and dry by headless CMS, because there is no marketer-friendly author experience. There is no WYSIWYG editor, no drag-and-drop, and code is everywhere. But that's not the case with a Hybrid CMS, which manages content headlessly, but doesn't strip away the **authoring experience that marketers depend on**. Basically, a hybrid CMS gives you the best of both worlds.

[**Learn More About Hybrid vs Headless CMS.**](#)



Checklist Elements Guide



Things to Consider



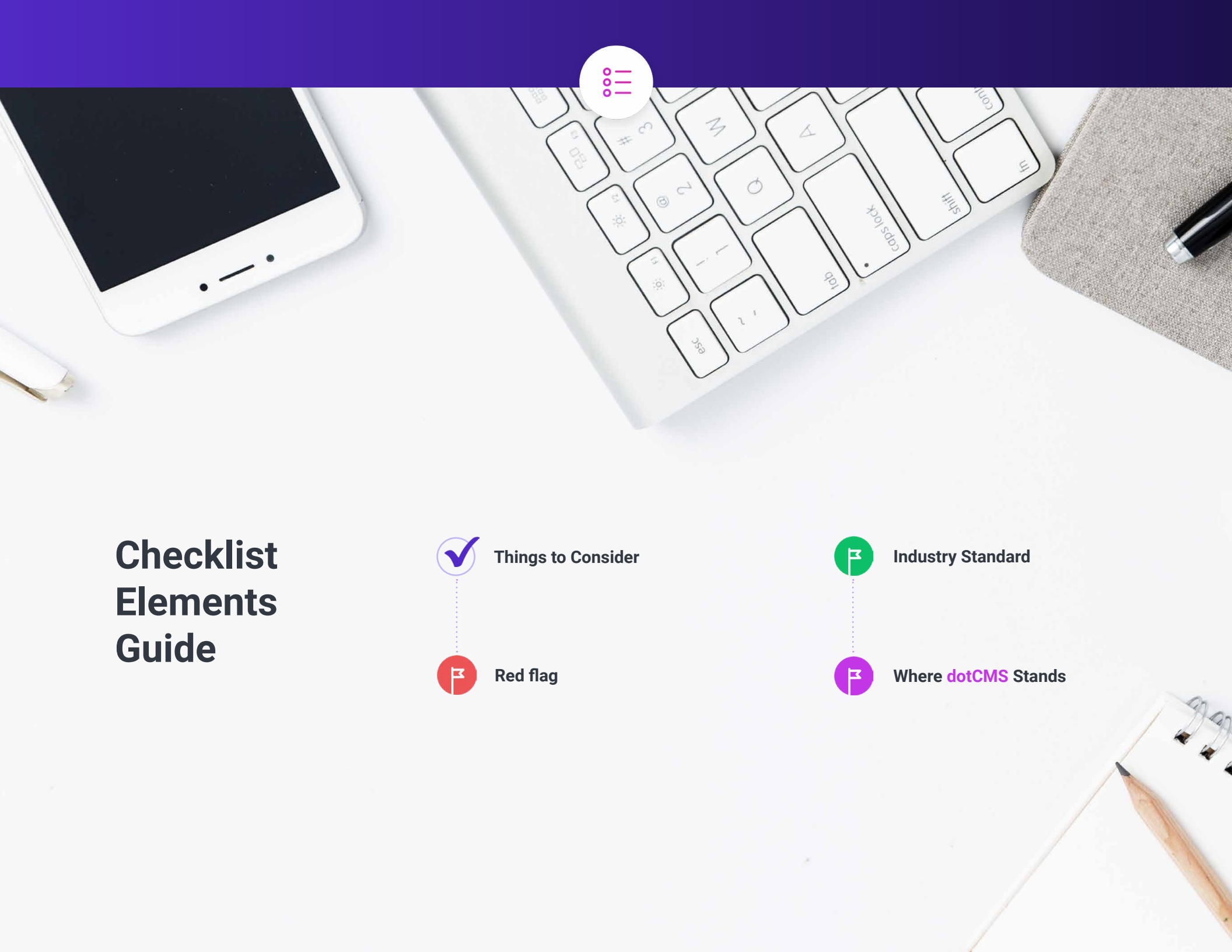
Red flag



Industry Standard



Where **dotCMS** Stands





01. TCO (Total Cost of Ownership)



- **Pricing is variable**, based on metrics than may fluctuate from month to month (for instance, additional fees for API calls over and above a certain amount).
- **Hidden fees** are discussed at later stages in the sales cycle.



- There are **multiple pricing options** to choose from and there is a clear breakdown of what features are available in each option.
- Additional fees, if any, are **clearly outlined**.



dotCMS enterprise packages are not based on usage, which means your total cost of ownership is predictable, and does not fluctuate from month to month.



02. ROI (Return of Investment)



Will the onus be your IT team to create an experience from scratch? If so, it could lead to a **higher total cost of ownership (TCO) and a slower time to market**.



A headless CMS that delivers a healthy ROI should **give marketers more control** in how they want to use the platform. It must come with a host of **user-friendly features** that allow any non-technical person to create experiences on their own.



dotCMS has been built from the ground up to **reduce operational IT costs** from a range of angles. This includes; lowering and consolidating license fees thanks to a multi-tenant architecture, a cost-effective cloud hosting solution and the ability to use dotCMS in a containerized environment. [Learn More.](#)



03. Deployment



Can only be used as **either cloud or on-premise**, not both.



Have the flexibility to be **used on-premise, in the cloud, or both**.



dotCMS can be installed either on-premise or you can opt to utilize it as a hosted solution or you can adopt a hybrid model.



04. Pure Headless vs. Head Optional



A pure headless solution has no frontend out-of-the-box. Marketers are left in the dark, and would need to rely on highly skilled developers to make their frontend applications.



A head optional headless CMS comes with a set of **frontend tools** that marketers can use to create websites, microsites, and landing pages on their own. But it also provides developers the **freedom and flexibility** to create their own applications.



As a Hybrid CMS, dotCMS helps organizations manage, integrate, and deliver digital content across all channels. dotCMS's marketer-friendly authoring environment enables business users to create and modify content without depending on IT. Further, all content is manageable and accessible via REST APIs, allowing dotCMS to act as both a headless and decoupled CMS. [Learn More.](#)



05. Open Source vs. Closed Source



Closed source solutions lack transparency and offer little room for customization and interoperability.



Open source systems give clear visibility to what is happening in the core codebase, which **can be adjusted to fit business** objectives and requirements.



dotCMS is an open source Java CMS. With the codebase available on GitHub, our platform has been built in line with feedback from our clients and community. As an open source CMS, dotCMS is also **easier to customize and extend using third-party integrations.**



06. Suite vs. Best-of-Breed



Suite solutions risk firms from being trapped in a **vendor lock-in**. Suite solutions are also rigid and do require certain levels of readiness with different departments.



Best of breeds **provide more scope and flexibility**. It enables brands to utilize the best tools on the market and easily remove any tools when not needed.



dotCMS wasn't built to be an all-in-one solution, it wanted to work with the best. dotCMS's robust API architecture helps you take advantage of best-of-breed so **your brand can use the best technologies** in marketing automation, CRM, eCommerce and AI platforms on the market.



07. Proven Flexibility / A Wide Range of Use Cases



Limited to delivering to certain digital experiences, like website and mobile apps.



Capable of supporting a **range of website and application types**; from directory websites to eCommerce websites, to intranets.



dotCMS has been used to deliver a wide range of digital experiences, including; corporate websites, intranets, extranets, customer portals, and Alexa Skills.



08. Extensibility



Has a limited plugin directory or each plugin install takes up a lot of resources, resulting in a sluggish performance.



The plugin architecture should be robust and provide plenty of flexibility to customize the platform based on your needs and requirements.



dotCMS's robust plugin architecture makes extending and customizing the platform easy. Dynamic OSGi plugins can be deployed at runtime and published across environments. Static plugins are used to manage configuration and to literally override and extend any file, class, feature or function of the dotCMS. The dotCMS plugin architecture also helps you to separate customizations from the core codebase and maintain a clear path when upgrading dotCMS between versions.



09. Database Compatibility



May only allow you to work with the **built-in database** which is not compatible with other external databases.



You should be able to set up search queries that draw upon **multiple database types**. And you should have to option to work with your preferred database.



Because dotCMS abstracts away all data access, the resulting **code is extremely portable across a multitude of databases**. dotCMS currently supports: Oracle, PostgreSQL, SQL Server, MySQL, Ms SQL, Amazon RDS and H2 (recommended only for testing).



10. Multi-site & Multi-tenancy



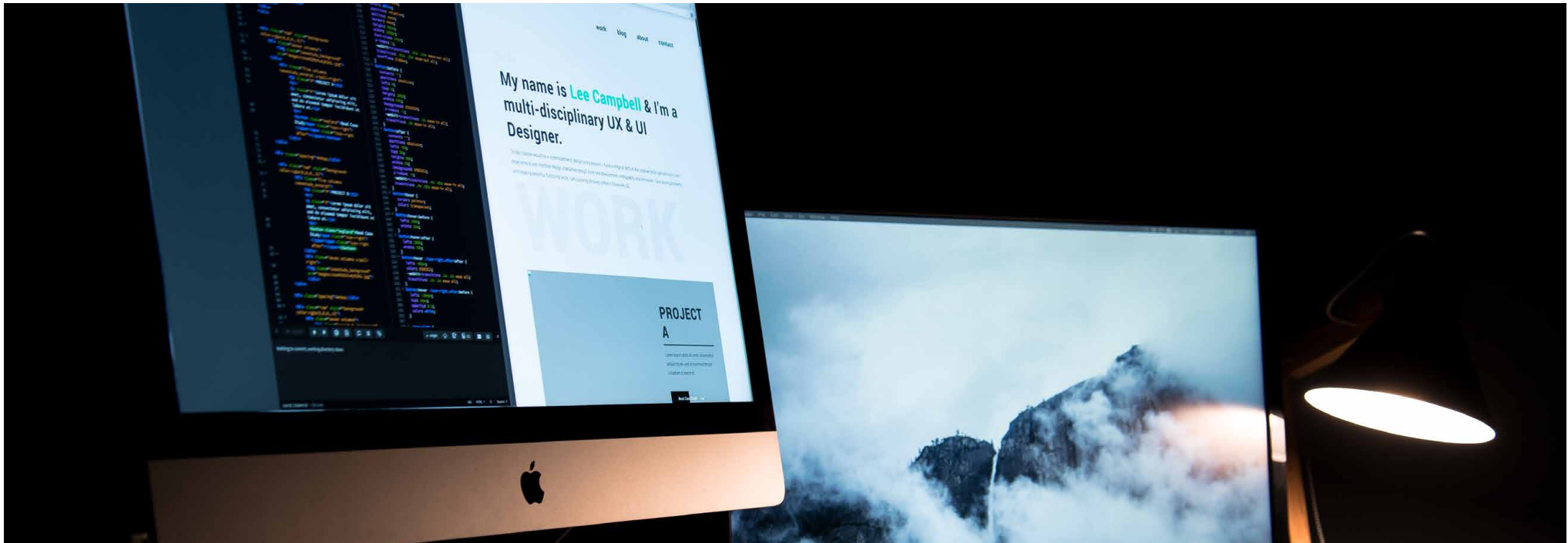
A platform that can only let you create **multiple sites, each with its own content repository, would lead to content duplication**, and would require more time and resources to manage and create content for each of these sites.



Multitenancy, on the hand, lets you managed multiple sites which **all share the same resources**.



Manage hundreds or even thousands of sites and channels from one centralized system. Easily copy & launch sites & channels, while sharing content across your ecosystem to reduce redundancy and inconsistencies, creating better customer experiences. dotCMS also allows you to tag an independent or shared repository that each of your sites can use. [Learn More.](#)



11. Push Publishing



Only provides a content editor which **only lets you add content to the central repository.**



Has a UI that not only lets you **deliver content directly to another server, but also to assets, files, folders, and users.**



You can easily publish sites, content, and code between authoring and production environments as well as publish assets, files, or even entire sites to CDNs for high performance. Push publishing makes it simple to schedule pushes, updates, and invalidate content, all from an intuitive UI. Plus, it helps you keep your distributed servers in sync across geographical regions, helping you to easily expand and grow.



12. Pre-Built Integrations



You are only limited to using the pre-built integrations.



You have the option to utilize the pre-built integration but you can also have the ability to integrate with other tools.



Brands today have invested countless hours and resources into implementing technologies like marketing automation systems, CRMs, eCommerce, AI platforms, and more. Built with a robust API architecture, **dotCMS** **helps you take advantage of best-of-breed technologies investment with seamless integrations.** Like HubSpot, Marketo, Magento, Salesforce, and [more.](#)



13. Personalization



There's no built-in user tracking capability. And you can only deliver personalization based on what the user has explicitly specified.



Built-in user tracking comes as standard. The analytics gathered from this user-tracking function can be used to **deliver relevant and contextual experiences**.



With dotCMS's powerful Rules Engine, you can personalize content for different users. You can assign Personas and Tags to visitors as they browse through your site. With this feature, you spend less time managing your channels and can **focus on building hyper-personalized experiences** that are engaging and memorable.
Learn more about [Content Targeting & Personalization](#) and [Hyper-personalization](#) in dotCMS.



14. WYSIWYG Editing



No WYSIWYG editing prevents marketers and editors from previewing how their content will appear to their end-user.



WYSIWYG editing should be **intuitive and** should come with **a host of customizable elements** that does not require coding.



dotCMS's WYSIWYG editor allows users to create content with “word processor-like” formatting. All changes made on the editor will be similar to how they will be on shown to the end-user.



15. Drag-and-Drop & In-Line Editing



Page templates developed via custom coding slows time-to-market considerably.



Marketers can create **simple page templates without code**.



dotCMS's Edit Mode gives marketers and business users power in a headless environment. Features include:

- Drag-and-drop page
- Content and layout management
- NoCode workflow modules
- NoCode content type builder

[Learn More.](#)



16. Content Versioning



If you made amendments to your content, **can you revert back to the previous version?** If not, then you may have to rewrite the content again.



You can revert back to previous revisions each time you saved a draft of your content.



All the content stored in dotCMSs central repository stores and maintains a change history which lists all the previous versions of the content. Giving the user the option to revert back to a previous version if desired. In addition, using dotCMS **TimeMachine** marketing can go into the past as well into the future to preview content.



17. Workflows



When multiple departments or stakeholders are working together and there is **no collaborative environment**, there will be conflicts and everything will become siloed.



By having a **straightforward workflow**, you can set up an approval process that allows for a smoother content creation process.



dotCMS's **NoCode Workflows** make it simple for marketers and business users **to build and manage workflows, as well as to:**

- Collaborate on content
- Streamline approval processes
- Ensure accountability with easy checklist capabilities.

dotCMS you can quickly build multi-step workflows with features like four-eye approval, AI translations, and third-party integrations.

[Learn More.](#)



18. Asset Management



No organized structure to managing and maintaining all your media assets.



Stores all your assets that your applications can draw upon.



With dotCMS, you can **centralize all your content assets in one place** and you view all your assets in a single table. You can assign **each content item a Content Type**. [Learn More.](#)



19. Roles & Permissions



Without user permissions, **you risk your content** from being accessed by members of staff that shouldn't be on it.



Basic user permissions with two or more pre-set tiers or user roles.



dotCMS allows you to create and set customizable roles and permissions to keep your content secure and your team members productive.



20. Efficient & Global Content Delivery



Single language content delivery limits your global expansion.



Multi-language capabilities.



dotCMS allows you to set up authoring and publishing environments across geographic regions and in different languages for a globally distributed publishing network. With static and dynamic publishing options, dotCMS gives you the flexibility to scale with confidence. [Learn More.](#)



21. Security



Lack of information on security could lead to your brand becoming vulnerable to malicious threats.



Clearly written documentation on the CMS **platform's security protocols**.



Security is of utmost importance to dotCMS. They regularly review their platform and roll-out fixes, patches and updates as and when. dotCMS has all the relevant processes in place to ensure any issues are promptly addressed and to keep customer exposure to a minimum. Learn more in [dotCMS' security guide](#) whitepaper.



22. Experience



Lack of customer testimonials or client portfolio.



Has evidence of **social proofing and customer testimonials**.



dotCMS is trusted across industries and used by leading brands including Reuters, Honda, Avery and Ipsy.



23. Reputation



No recognition whatsoever.



Should be **recognized by analysts** such as Gartner, Forrester, and ARS Logica. A status with CMS-focused publications is also worth noting.



Besides being trusted by leading brands, it also **recognized by many leading publications** including CMSWire, CMS Connected and SalesTech Star. It also **recognized by analyst** firms such as ARS Logica.



24. API-readiness



Requires manual decoupling to make it API-ready.



Check that the CMS supports API-based importing, management, and delivery for programmatic content control.



dotCMS's REST, JSON and GraphQL APIs allows integration with various external databases and seamless delivery of content to a multitude of devices, channels and touchpoints.



25. Documentation



- Little or lack of documentation on the **headless CMS** provider's site.
- Documentation not kept up-to-date.



Has a decent amount of document that is relatively up-to-date.



The documentation provided by **dotCMS** is clearly written, and provides **detailed instructions and screenshots** on how to take full advantage of the platform. Older versions of the documentation are also available.



26. Support



- Professional support **not explicitly stated**.
- Or only **community support** available.



Professional support is available.



Both **dotCMS cloud and Enterprise editions are monitored** by dedicated engineering and support teams **24/7/365**.



27. Enterprise Adoption



Little introductory material. Users have to learn how to use the system through self-teaching (i.e. searching online) or refer to the community.



Plenty of documentation available as well as community support.



dotCMS delivers hands-on onboarding with ample documentation, webinars, and guides to streamline the deployment process.



28. Dev Tools



Support limited SDKs.



Supports various SDKs.



Is framework agnostic, meaning **developers are free to use their preferred development frameworks and programming language.** dotCMS natively support the Apache Velocity, a server-side coding language. dotCMS also provides training on how to use Velocity. [Learn More on our API tools.](#)



29. Containerization



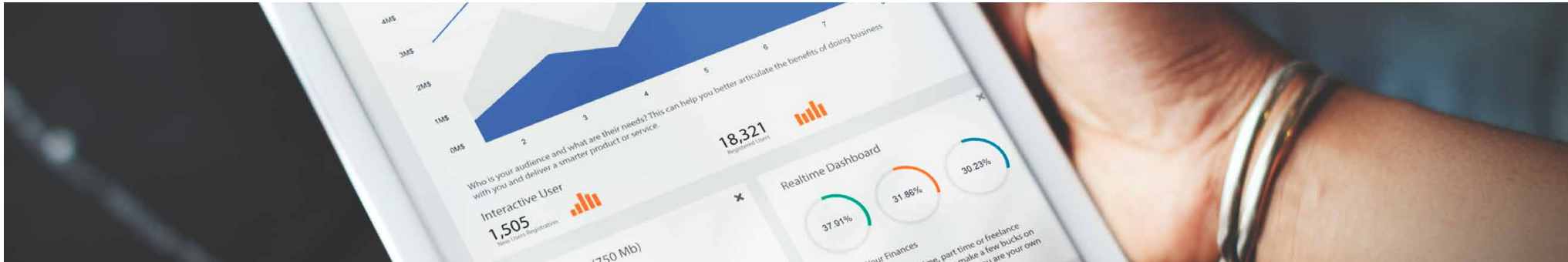
No support.



Container-ready, but without documentation or guidance on containerizing the CMS.



The latest version of dotCMS now has enhanced container support. dotCMS provides its very own Docker Image that can be used with any container orchestration platform. [Learn More.](#)



30. Analytics



Has no built-in analytics dashboard, difficult to integrate with third-party analytics tools.



Built in analytics dashboard with limited insights. May have built-in integration with **Google Analytics**.



dotCMS's Analytics and Reporting Module provides actionable insights to content marketing and business teams in order to optimize organic traffic as well as page and content performance. dotCMS also integrates with **Google Analytics**. [Learn More.](#)



31. Community



Little or no community.



Strong, active community with the community and vendor-driven content being published regularly.



dotCMS has a very active community forum which is intended to **answer any questions** concerning dotCMS' platform **and share announcements.**



32. SEO Friendliness



When managing multiple sites, SEO becomes a challenge. No built-in SEO tools will result in lengthy codework to fully optimize all your instances.



- **Limited SEO tools** that help you fill in **META tags and apply headers** to individual pages.
- All other SEO work must be done via code.



The platform lets you have **full control of headers, title tags, and URL construction.** It also auto-generates tags for documents, assets and images. [Learn More.](#)



33. Service Level Agreement (SLA)



No SLA means that if anything were to go wrong, **the provider will not be held accountable.**



Vague SLA that requires heavy tweaking and negotiation.



If you decide to opt with dotCMS Cloud or Enterprise, you will be provided with an **SLA trusted by international brands including TELUS, Fitbit, Honda, Wiley, and others.** [See dotCMS Clients.](#)



34. Partner Ecosystem



No agency or implementation partners.



Small partner ecosystem consisting of young or inexperienced firms.



dotCMS has a global network of certified partners who can assist you with implementing websites, intranets, SPAs, and other digital experience. [Learn more dotCMS partners.](#)



35. Vision



No clear vision or mission statement.



- What is the **main purpose** of headless CMS provider?
- What is their **long-term goal**?
- What should you expect in future releases?



dotCMS aims to deliver Content Foundation as-a-Service, enabling enterprises to build digital experience platforms to **deliver a connected, trusted, and continuous customer experiences** along every touchpoint of the customer journey.



36. Demo Availability



No demo or video content showcasing the system.



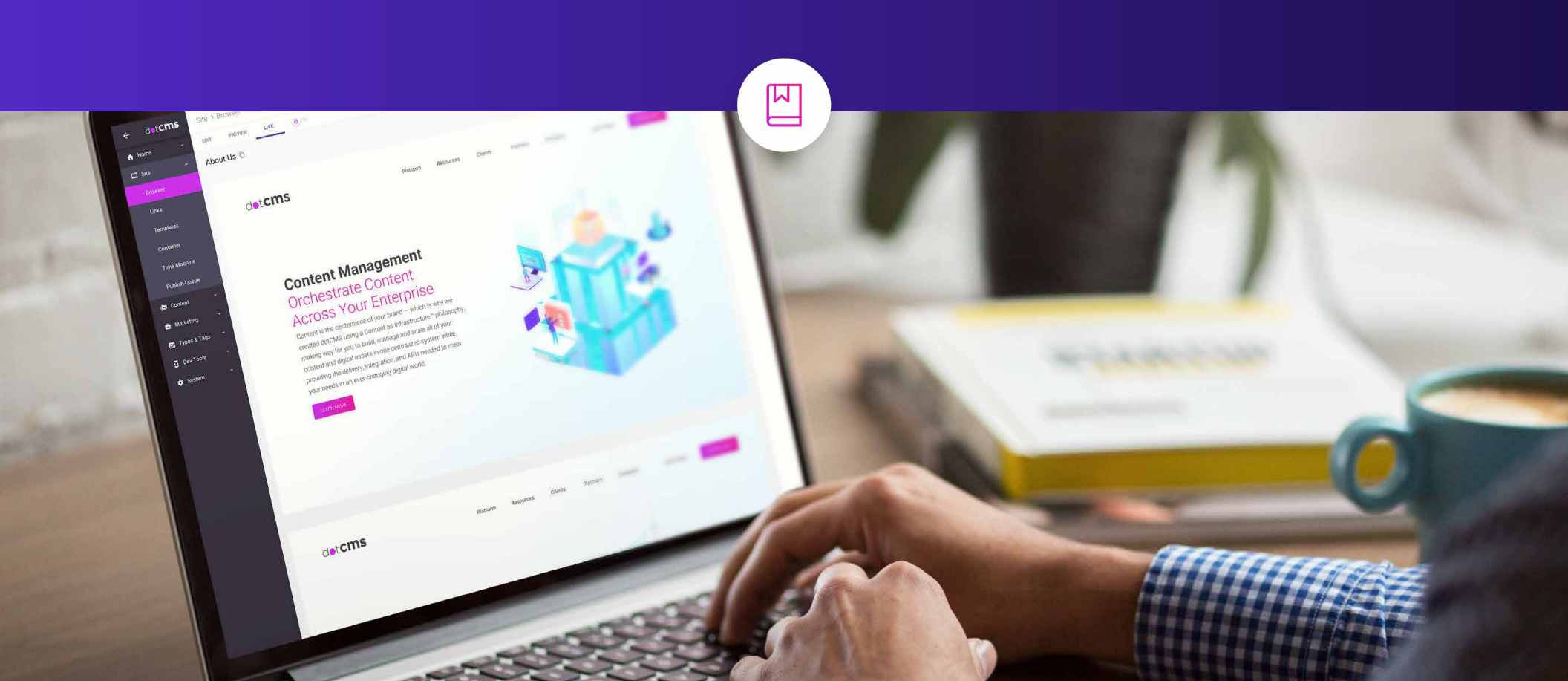
Demo by appointment only.



Prospective dotCMS customers can access the demo site to **get a first-hand look and feel on how to use dotCMS**. The demo site lets you experiment with **key features** including:

- Structured content
- Personalization
- Integrations with third-party APIs.

dotCMS also provides an [**on-demand demo webinar**](#).



dotCMS Ticks All the Boxes—and Then Some

Choosing the right headless CMS shouldn't be seen as a straightforward task. There are many considerations to keep in mind. **With the above checklist, you have the added reassurance that you can select the right the headless CMS that fits for your business.**

As you can see, dotCMS not only ticks all the boxes above but it strives to be the best headless solution on the market.

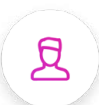


**For more
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