

# The Total Cost of Your Company Website

A data-driven guide for digital leaders





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# Introduction: Balancing performance & investment

*Insights from a global study of 1,700+ digital leaders  
on the real costs of maintaining your website*

The tools you use to build and manage your digital presence are more than just line items in a budget. They're long-term investments in performance, security, and scalability.

Too often, however, businesses underestimate the true cost of digital ownership, leading to unexpected expenses and inefficiencies.

Infrastructure fees, security vulnerabilities, maintenance overhead, and performance optimizations all contribute to the [Total Cost of Ownership](#) (TCO) of your digital footprint, yet many organizations focus primarily on upfront costs, failing to account for long-term financial impact.

Obviously your contracts and statements of work should outline these appropriately. And as this article is not legal advice, you'll definitely want these documents and agreements reviewed by your legal counsel.

At a time when IT budgets are under increased scrutiny, these challenges are even more pronounced.

To better understand how organizations are adapting, WP Engine commissioned an independent research study.





The study revealed that large, scaling businesses and established enterprises are facing longer evaluation cycles (**averaging ~11 months**), tighter budgets, and greater demands for cost efficiency.

Decision-makers must now prove that their digital investments will not only deliver ROI today but remain sustainable for years to come.

### So, how can businesses take a more strategic approach to digital costs?

This guide, based on insights from the global research study, provides a data-driven framework for understanding and optimizing the full financial impact of your digital presence—from the content management system (CMS) you choose to the tools and integrations you select.

In the following chapters, we'll explore:

- **Current CMS usage trends:**  
The solutions businesses are using and why.
- **The full cost of digital operations:**  
A breakdown of direct and hidden expenses.
- **What decision-makers value most:**  
How CIOs, CTOs, and marketing leaders assess digital investments.

We'll also examine the financial implications of DIY infrastructure, the true costs of security and scalability, and how strategic migrations can eliminate inefficiencies before they become costly burdens.

By the end of this guide, you'll have a clearer understanding of the true cost of digital ownership—and how to optimize for predictable expenses, peak performance, and long-term success. Let's dive in.

### *Are you paying for problems you haven't identified yet?*

Many organizations don't realize how much inefficiency is already baked into their CMS investments. Slow performance, unpredictable infrastructure costs, inconsistent uptime, security risks, and maintenance overhead can all silently erode budgets without clear visibility into their long-term impact. If your team is spending more time reacting to issues than optimizing for growth, your CMS may be costing you more than you think.



# The current state of CMS use: A shifting landscape

As the pace of innovation continues to accelerate, medium-to-large organizations and enterprises are reassessing their digital strategies to balance cost, scalability, and long-term efficiency.

In the early days of CMS adoption, businesses often took a monolithic approach, [standardizing on a single platform](#) to manage all digital properties. Large, scaling companies and enterprises typically relied on proprietary solutions, such as [Adobe® Experience Manager®](#) (AEM) or [Sitecore®](#), which offered centralized control but carried high licensing fees, complex architectures, and resource-heavy maintenance.

Additionally, this model often saw open-source systems like [WordPress® and Drupal](#) used for smaller projects, departmental sites, or non-mission-critical applications.<sup>1</sup>

More recently, however, the CMS landscape has become more fragmented. Instead of committing to a single, all-encompassing platform, businesses have begun selecting CMS solutions based on specific use cases, operational priorities, and regional challenges.

Against this backdrop, open-source platforms have also moved into the mainstream, with WordPress leading the charge.



While this shift is due to myriad factors, including financial considerations and the maturity of open-source solutions, it also reflects a broader trend toward [composable architecture](#), in which organizations integrate multiple tools—open-source, [headless](#), or proprietary—into a flexible ecosystem that best meets their needs.

[Freeman](#), a global event management company, made this transition by leveraging modern WordPress development as part of its digital strategy, optimizing for flexibility and scalability [while maintaining a seamless digital experience](#).

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*Taking a more modular, composable approach to digital management is something we've seen unfolding for a few years, but now it's really starting to accelerate. Businesses are moving away from one-size-fits-all platforms in favor of flexible ecosystems where best-in-class tools integrate seamlessly. WordPress has become a key player in this shift—not just as a CMS, but as a foundational component in composable web architectures, offering the adaptability, extensibility, and cost efficiency needed to future-proof digital strategies.”*

**Ramadass Prabhakar**  
Chief Technology Officer  
WP Engine



This focus on composability, alongside the mainstream embrace of open-source solutions, has, in turn, led to the consistent growth of [multiple CMS use](#), with the number of businesses using more than one CMS increasing year after year.

## Understanding primary vs. secondary CMS use

As organizations move toward more diversified digital strategies and begin using more than one CMS, the distinction between primary and secondary CMS use has become more defined, reflecting the growing need for flexibility and scalability.

At a high level, a primary CMS serves as the core platform for critical business operations, while a secondary CMS complements it by addressing specific use cases or accelerating time to market.

- **Primary CMS:** The central platform used for managing the majority of a company's web properties and digital experiences. This typically includes corporate websites, eCommerce stores, customer portals, and brand hubs.
- **Secondary CMS:** A complementary system deployed alongside the primary CMS for specific functions, such as microsites, campaign pages, knowledge bases, or regional sites. Secondary CMS platforms often provide added agility, cost efficiency, or niche capabilities that the primary CMS may lack.

A hybrid approach allows businesses to [optimize their digital investments](#), leveraging multiple systems while avoiding the high costs and limitations of proprietary CMS platforms.

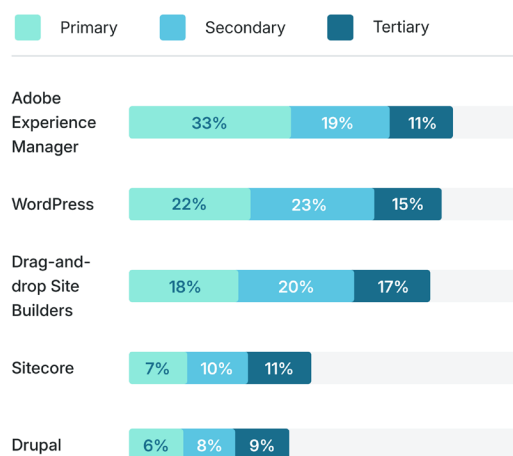
## Evolving CMS adoption trends

More businesses are strategically combining primary and secondary CMS platforms to balance flexibility, scalability, and cost efficiency. [This allows enterprises](#) to retain legacy systems for core digital operations while integrating more agile solutions to accelerate time to market and support specialized use cases.

Our research reflects this shift, with emerging as the dominant players in both primary and secondary CMS use.

While AEM remains the top choice for enterprises managing large-scale, proprietary digital sites, WordPress leads as the most widely used secondary CMS—valued for its flexibility, ease of use, and ability to support everything from micro-campaigns to content-driven marketing initiatives and mission-critical sites.

### CMS Usage (All Markets)



*AEM, WordPress, and drag-and-drop site builders like Shopify and Wix are the most widely used CMS solutions, followed by Sitecore, Drupal, and others. While AEM leads as the top primary CMS, WordPress dominates as the most-used secondary CMS.*

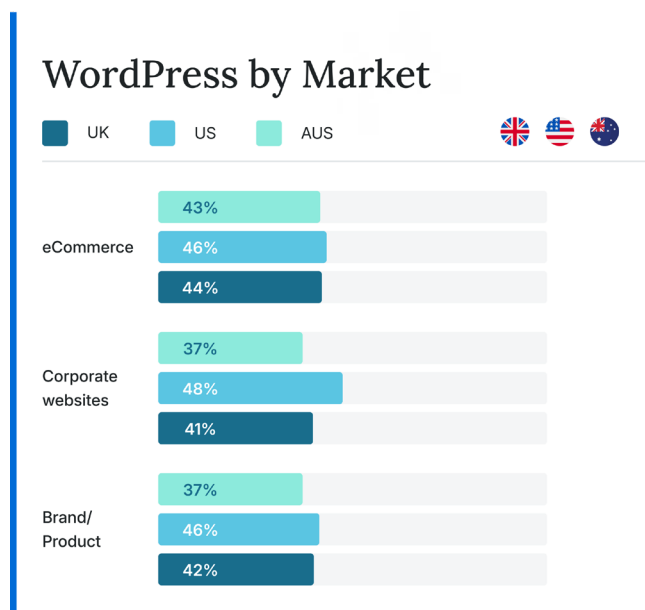


This trend highlights the growing preference for hybrid CMS strategies, where businesses integrate open-source, adaptable platforms like WordPress alongside proprietary systems. By doing so, they gain the agility and speed needed to deploy new digital experiences without the constraints of monolithic platforms like AEM and Sitecore.

While legacy CMS solutions still hold a share of the enterprise market, their high licensing and maintenance costs are prompting more businesses to explore different site architectures and open-source and hybrid CMS models that offer greater flexibility and cost efficiency.

## How businesses are using WordPress

The top use cases for WordPress among medium-to-large organizations and enterprises highlight its versatility, scalability, and cost efficiency across industries. Here are just a few of the ways businesses are putting WordPress to work:



Whether used as a primary or secondary CMS, WordPress provides businesses with

the [flexibility to meet a wide range of digital needs](#).

From eCommerce and corporate websites to marketing hubs and content-driven experiences, enterprises leverage WordPress to streamline workflows, reduce costs, and accelerate time to market.



## eCommerce

Thanks to its vast ecosystem of plugins, themes, and API-based integrations, WordPress has become a preferred choice for growing online stores that need flexibility and scalability. WordPress' open-source extensibility allows large businesses to enable advanced functionality such as personalized shopping experiences, automated inventory management, and multi-channel selling.

Additionally, unlike many proprietary eCommerce platforms, WordPress's integrations allow businesses to scale their stores without incurring exponential licensing fees or development constraints. As a result, it has become a go-to solution for retail brands, direct-to-consumer (DTC) companies, and B2B marketplaces seeking a customizable yet cost-effective commerce platform.



## Corporate Websites

For corporate websites, WordPress provides a flexible, cost-efficient alternative to proprietary CMS platforms, making it a natural choice for businesses focused on brand storytelling, lead generation, and stakeholder engagement. Enterprises leverage WordPress for its user-

friendly interface, enabling marketing and content teams to quickly publish and update content without heavy reliance on developers. Additionally, built-in [SEO-friendly features](#), security enhancements, and multilingual support make it a powerful platform for global enterprises managing multiple regional sites while maintaining brand consistency.

WordPress is used for brand and product websites **12% more often** than Drupal, trusted by eCommerce sites **5% more than** Sitecore, and leads in blog CMS adoption by approximately **10% over** platforms like AEM and Sitecore.



## Product & Brand Marketing

In an era where content-driven experiences [play a critical role](#) in brand engagement, WordPress has emerged as a top choice for product and brand marketing sites. Businesses use it to create dynamic landing pages, digital campaign hubs, and immersive multimedia content that resonate with their audiences.

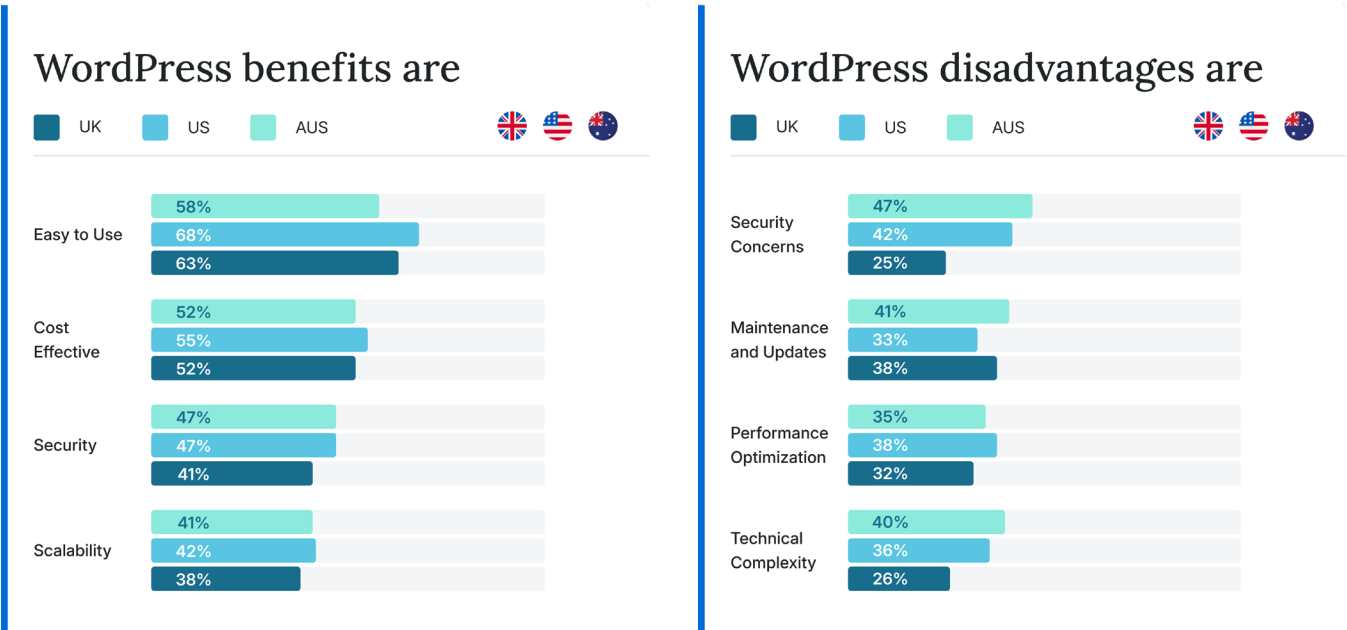
For companies focused on high-impact digital campaigns, WordPress provides the flexibility needed to support marketing agility. Forward-thinking home builder [New Home Co. leveraged WordPress to create an immersive content experience](#) that fueled lead generation and customer engagement.

Whether launching new product microsites, influencer campaigns, or thought leadership content, enterprises rely on WordPress to rapidly deploy and iterate marketing initiatives while maintaining cost control.

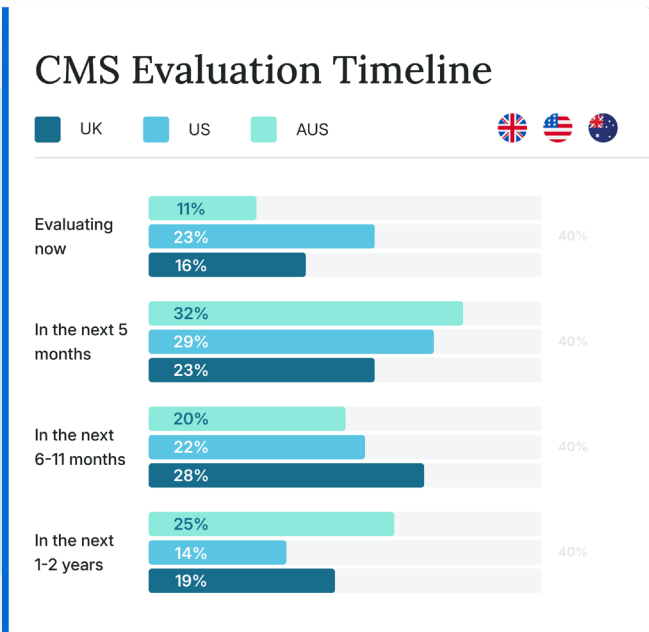


# Regional CMS adoption

Despite WordPress’s growing enterprise adoption, medium-to-large organizations and enterprises face region-specific challenges and priorities that influence CMS selection, investment, and evaluation timelines.



While ease of use (up to 68%) and cost-effectiveness (over 50%) are widely recognized as WordPress’ greatest strengths, concerns around security, scalability, and maintenance remain key factors in regional decision-making.



At the same time, CMS evaluation timelines vary by region, with enterprises in the UK taking the longest (11.88 months), followed by Australia (11.44 months), and the US moving the fastest (10.71 months). These differences highlight how businesses in different markets approach digital investments, with some prioritizing speed and agility, while others take a more deliberate, risk-averse approach.



## United States & Australia: Security is a top factor

- ✔ Security concerns are the biggest barrier to WordPress adoption in both the U.S. (42%) and Australia (47%), making it a top priority in decision-making.
- ✔ Businesses in these regions place a strong emphasis on built-in protections, compliance capabilities, and proactive security measures.
- ✔ However, WordPress is already recognized for its security (38-47%), suggesting a perception gap that could be addressed with better education on enterprise-grade security features, managed hosting, and compliance capabilities.
- ✔ The U.S. has the shortest CMS evaluation cycle (10.71 months), indicating a more competitive and fast-moving digital environment where security concerns must be addressed quickly to avoid slowing down adoption.

## Australia: Scalability is key

- ✔ 47% of Australian respondents cited scalability as a major concern—the highest of any region.
- ✔ Enterprises need CMS solutions that can handle growth and traffic surges without excessive costs or complex infrastructure demands.
- ✔ While WordPress ranks highly for scalability (38-41%), businesses may require more education on high-performance architectures, scalable hosting solutions, and headless WordPress capabilities.

- ✔ Australia's CMS evaluation timeline (11.44 months) suggests that scalability concerns are a key factor in prolonged decision-making.

## United Kingdom: Maintenance and management drive decision-making

- ✔ 41% of UK respondents cited maintenance and updates as a major challenge, making it their top concern.
- ✔ Many enterprises are looking for CMS options that reduce complexity, minimize ongoing management requirements, and lower total cost of ownership (TCO).
- ✔ With 58% of UK businesses citing ease of use as a top priority, and over 50% valuing cost-effectiveness, the demand for managed solutions is rising.
- ✔ The UK has the longest evaluation cycle (11.88 months), indicating a more cautious, risk-averse approach to CMS adoption, where reducing long-term management burdens is a significant factor in decision-making.

**These region-specific challenges illustrate why businesses must be strategic in their CMS investments, carefully balancing cost, security, and scalability.**

# Total cost of CMS platform management

As businesses continue to diversify their CMS investments, cost efficiency remains a critical factor in decision-making.

The adoption of open-source solutions like WordPress alongside proprietary platforms reflects a growing need to optimize TCO. However, the [true cost of managing a CMS](#) extends far beyond the initial investment.

While upfront pricing may seem straightforward, businesses often underestimate the [long-term financial impact](#) of maintaining, securing, and scaling their CMS over time. Factors such as infrastructure, security, development resources, and ongoing optimizations all contribute to TCO, which varies significantly depending on the platform and hosting solution chosen.

While some costs are easy to anticipate, others emerge over time, leading to budget overruns and operational inefficiencies if not properly accounted for. By analyzing these cost drivers and comparing different CMS and hosting solutions, businesses can make more informed, cost-efficient decisions that support long-term growth.

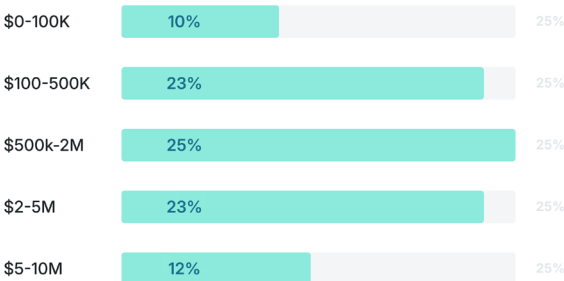


## Software licensing & platform costs

Proprietary CMS platforms often come with high licensing fees, creating a significant cost barrier for businesses.

### Total CMS Cost

in 2024



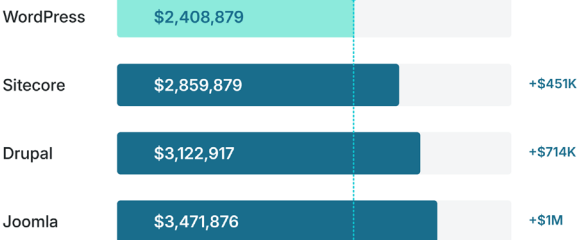
### Breaking down CMS cost drivers

The total cost of managing a digital presence is shaped by several interconnected factors, including software licensing, web development, hosting, and ongoing infrastructure needs.

### Total CMS Cost

(WordPress vs. Others)

Mean Spend



*Top narratives: While distribution of the spend varies, we can draw a narrative conclusion when comparing the mean spend. WordPress is ~20% lower cost to operate than Sitecore, Umbraco, and drag-and-drop options, 30% lower than Drupal, and 40% lower than Joomla.*

These savings stem from the lower licensing fees and more flexible infrastructure options compared to proprietary platforms that require businesses to commit to high-cost, closed ecosystems.

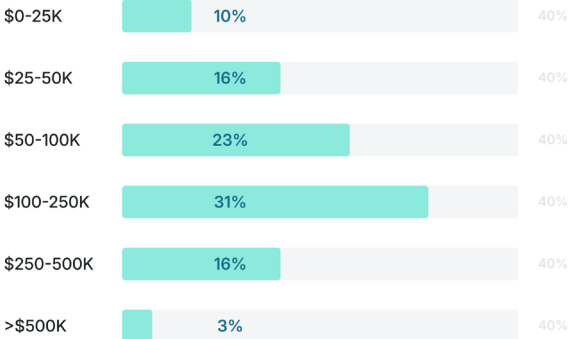


## Development & agency costs

Beyond licensing, businesses must consider the cost of ongoing development and maintenance, which varies depending on the platform's complexity. Organizations using proprietary CMSs often require larger, specialized development teams, while WordPress offers a more accessible developer ecosystem with lower associated costs.

## Developer & Agency Cost

in 2024

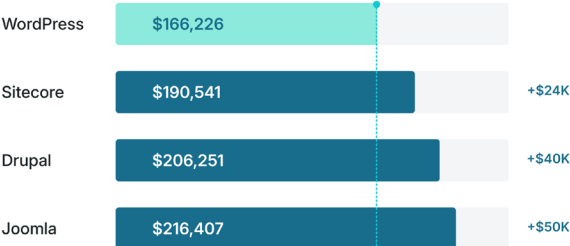


Top narratives: One-third of the US respondents reported that they spent \$100-250K for developer and agency fees in 2024. Mean \$ spend is at: \$162,075.65

- ✓ The average cost of development and agency support for medium-to-large organizations is \$160K per year.
- ✓ Businesses using WordPress spend 15-30% less on development and agency support compared to proprietary platforms.

## Developer & Agency Cost

WordPress vs. Others (mean spend)



Top narratives: When looking at the agency/developer spend by CMS, WordPress is 15% more cost-effective than Sitecore, 25% more than Drupal, and 30% more than Joomla.

This cost advantage is driven by WordPress's larger talent pool, extensive plugin ecosystem, and lower barriers to entry for customization and integration. With a broader range of development resources available at competitive rates, businesses can achieve greater flexibility and lower long-term costs.







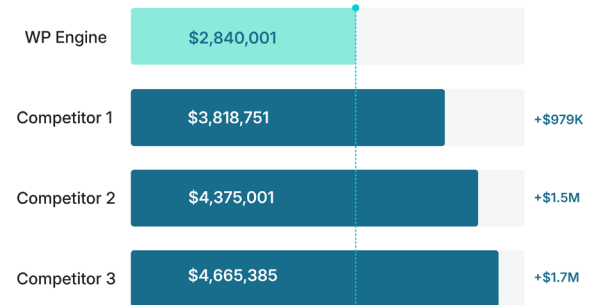
## Hosting and infrastructure expenses

While the CMS itself is a major cost factor, hosting and infrastructure play an equally critical role in determining overall spend. Many organizations rely on a mix of self-hosted, generic hosting, and managed hosting solutions, with costs varying based on traffic volume, performance needs, and security requirements.

When comparing providers of managed hosting for WordPress websites, WP Engine offers a compelling balance of performance, security, and cost efficiency.

### Total CMS Cost

WP Engine vs. Others (mean spend)



For businesses looking to balance cost predictability with high-performance capabilities, investing in a managed hosting solution with built-in optimizations can eliminate unexpected infrastructure costs while maintaining enterprise-grade reliability.

**Managed hosting** also helps prevent hidden cost overruns by bundling critical security, performance, and scalability features into a predictable pricing model. Instead of facing surprise expenses for emergency security patches, downtime recovery, or performance optimizations, businesses benefit from a streamlined approach that reduces the operational burden on IT teams.

### How businesses can turn cost insights into smarter investments

The key to cost efficiency isn't just spending less—it's spending strategically. By aligning CMS investments with long-term business

goals, organizations can reduce unnecessary costs while improving scalability, security, and performance.

For decision-makers, the goal isn't just reducing costs—it's making CMS investments that drive sustainable digital growth. A strategic approach to CMS investment can lead to significant ROI.

**WP Engine is up to 64% more cost-efficient than major competitors offering comparable products and services — outperforming them by 34%, 54%, and 64%.**

*(Competitor names omitted for compliance with fair market regulations.)*

# What decision-makers value in CMS purchases

Choosing a CMS is no longer just a matter of selecting a platform with the right features—it's a strategic decision that impacts an organization's performance, security, scalability, and cost efficiency over time.

As CMS evaluation cycles lengthen and IT budgets come under increased scrutiny, decision-makers are prioritizing solutions that deliver long-term value rather than just upfront cost savings.

Our research highlights the key factors driving CMS selection for medium-to-large organizations and enterprises, providing insight into how CIOs, CTOs, and marketing leaders approach these critical digital investments.

## What drives CMS decision-making?

Organizations evaluating CMS platforms must consider a complex set of requirements, balancing business needs with IT constraints.

According to our research, four factors consistently rise to the top of decision-making criteria:

- ✓ Performance: Fast-loading, high-performing websites are essential for user experience, SEO rankings, and customer retention.
- ✓ Security: With growing concerns around data privacy, compliance, and cyber threats, businesses seek CMS solutions that offer built-in security protections rather than requiring expensive third-party add-ons.
- ✓ Scalability: As traffic demands fluctuate, organizations need a CMS and hosting solution that can handle growth without excessive costs or infrastructure complexity.
- ✓ Cost-efficiency: Decision-makers are under pressure to justify digital investments, making TCO a key factor in CMS selection. A cost-effective platform must deliver value without sacrificing security, performance, or flexibility.





## How WordPress aligns with these priorities

WordPress has emerged as a leading CMS for enterprises because it can address these priorities while maintaining a lower TCO than proprietary alternative.



### SEO performance matters

SEO performance is a key decision-making factor among WordPress users, given its impact on organic traffic and visibility. The platform's flexible architecture, customizable metadata, and fast-loading capabilities give it a competitive edge for content-driven businesses.



### Security and compliance are non-negotiable

Security remains a top concern, particularly in the U.S. and Australia, where businesses prioritize data protection, compliance frameworks, and automated security updates to mitigate risk. Managed hosting solutions like WP Engine enhance security postures by

bundling Web Application Firewalls (WAF), SSL enforcement, and DDoS protection into their offerings.



### Scalability for growth

Australian enterprises rank scalability as one of their biggest concerns, reflecting the need for infrastructure that supports traffic surges and evolving business needs without requiring expensive overhauls. Managed hosting solutions with built-in caching and CDN integrations provide a scalable foundation without unpredictable cloud costs.



### Integration and extensibility costs

Decision-makers are also prioritizing next-gen CMS capabilities, with planned 2025 investments focusing on multi-language support, AI-driven personalization, and automated updates to reduce maintenance workloads and enhance customer experiences.



## Aligning CMS strategy with business priorities

For businesses to maximize the value of their CMS investment, their strategy must align with the evolving priorities of decision-makers and IT leaders. Selecting a scalable, secure, and high-performing CMS is only the first step—choosing the right hosting and support ecosystem ensures long-term cost efficiency and reliability.

Choosing the right CMS hosting solution is about more than just pricing—it's about total cost predictability. See how WP Engine compares to leading alternatives:

| Feature            | WP Engine                               | Self-Hosting                         | Proprietary CMS                 |
|--------------------|---|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Security</b>    | Built-in WAF, DDoS Protection           | Requires manual setup                | Included, but costly            |
| <b>Scalability</b> | Auto-scaling feature                    | Requires additional cloud investment | Enterprise-grade, but high-cost |
| <b>TCO Savings</b> | Predictable pricing, 30-50% lower costs | Unpredictable maintenance costs      | High licensing and infra fees   |

With CMS budgets increasing in 2025, businesses must balance cost efficiency with performance, security, and scalability. Understanding what decision-makers prioritize allows organizations to choose a CMS and hosting solution that meets both current and future needs.



# Looking ahead: CMS investment in 2025 and beyond

CMS investments are no longer just a technical decision—they're a business strategy. As digital experiences become more integral to customer engagement, revenue growth, and competitive differentiation, IT and marketing leaders are prioritizing cost-efficient solutions that also deliver long-term value.

At the forefront of this shift is a growing focus on [automation and AI-driven efficiencies](#). From predictive analytics to automated content optimization, businesses are actively seeking low-maintenance, high-impact solutions that reduce overhead while improving digital performance.

Here's what's shaping CMS investments in 2025:



**Budgets are increasing, but efficiency is key.**

IT and marketing teams must justify every dollar spent. Platforms with built-in AI automation and security optimizations are becoming a top priority to minimize manual overhead and long-term costs.



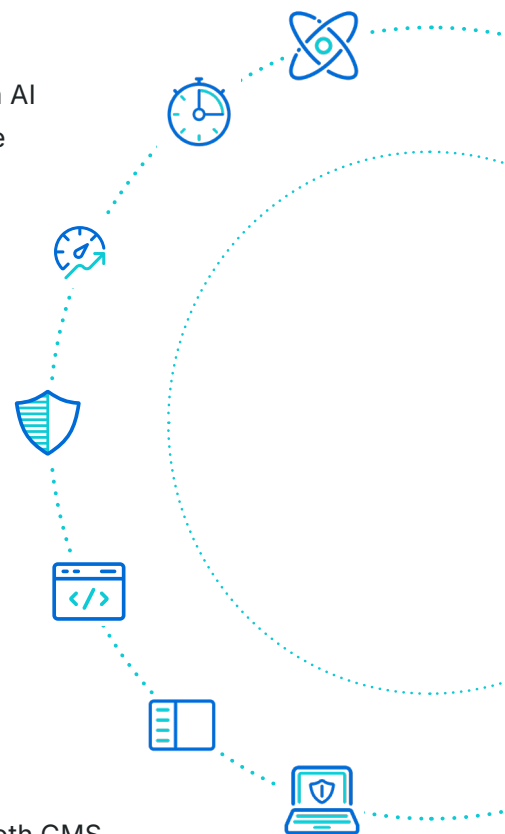
**Security and performance can't be compromised.**

Across all regions, these remain top decision-making priorities, influencing both CMS selection and hosting choices. Businesses are investing in proactive security measures, automated patching, and compliance-driven solutions to stay ahead of risks.



**AI and automation are reshaping CMS capabilities.**

Across all regions, these remain top decision-making priorities, influencing both CMS selection and hosting choices. Businesses are investing in proactive security measures, automated patching, and compliance-driven solutions to stay ahead of risks.





## The role of IT leadership is growing.

This means platforms must meet both technical and business requirements, offering scalability, security, and clear cost savings.



## Marketing leaders demand flexibility.

SEO, omnichannel distribution, and content agility remain top priorities for marketing teams. Organizations are prioritizing CMS solutions that integrate seamlessly with marketing automation tools while allowing for low-code/no-code content creation without IT dependencies.



## Scalability is a non-negotiable.

Enterprises are moving toward modular, composable architectures that allow them to scale efficiently while integrating best-in-class AI tools, automation, and advanced analytics into their workflows.

These trends signal a fundamental shift in how CMS platforms are evaluated for rapidly growing large businesses and established enterprises.

## How WP Engine aligns with these trends

As CMS budgets grow, businesses need a technology partner who can support cost efficiency while driving innovation and long-term value. [WP Engine](#) is well-positioned to address these key investment priorities by providing:

## Predictable cost structures and TCO savings

- ✓ WP Engine's [managed hosting solutions](#) reduce unexpected infrastructure and security costs, ensuring businesses can scale without cost uncertainty.
- ✓ Compared to competitors, WP Engine provides [enterprise-grade performance](#) at a lower total cost while eliminating the need for costly third-party security and optimization tools.

## Future-proof security and performance optimizations

- ✓ Built-in Web Application Firewall (WAF), DDoS protection, and proactive threat detection [reduce security overhead](#) while aligning with compliance requirements.
- ✓ WP Engine's [Global Edge Security](#) and advanced caching ensure high performance across all regions, directly supporting U.S. businesses by prioritizing speed and reliability.

## Built-in scalability for enterprise growth

- ✓ WP Engine's autoscaling architecture allows businesses to seamlessly [manage traffic surges](#) while keeping infrastructure costs under control.
- ✓ Scalable [multisite](#) and [multi-language](#) capabilities make it easy for organizations to expand into global markets without complex, high-cost implementations.

By choosing a future-ready platform like WP Engine, businesses can maximize ROI, reduce operational complexity, and stay ahead of evolving digital demands.



## Conclusion: Making data-driven CMS decisions

As businesses continue to expand their digital operations, the decisions they make today will directly impact their long-term cost efficiency, scalability, and security posture.

The TCO of a CMS is more than just an initial investment—it's an ongoing financial commitment that evolves over time. Understanding how platform choices, infrastructure costs, security measures, and development resources factor into the bigger picture allows organizations to make more strategic, cost-conscious decisions that support sustainable growth.

Through this ebook, we've explored the key cost drivers of CMS management, the factors influencing decision-making, and the role of agencies and emerging technology trends in shaping the future of digital platforms.

The research is clear—businesses that take a proactive, data-driven approach to TCO can significantly reduce costs, improve scalability, and strengthen security.

By understanding the true cost of digital ownership, decision-makers can move beyond reactive spending and make strategic investments that drive long-term value.

Whether you're evaluating your CMS, planning a migration, or looking for cost-efficient ways to scale, the key is choosing a platform and partner that aligns with your business goals.

### How does your CMS investment compare?

Get a personalized TCO assessment with [WP Engine](#) and uncover key cost-saving opportunities, security enhancements, and performance optimizations tailored to your business. Future-proof your digital presence.

**Start your assessment today**





WP Engine empowers companies and agencies of all sizes to **build, power, manage, and optimize** their WordPress websites and applications with confidence.

Serving 1.5 million customers across 150+ countries, the global technology company provides premium, enterprise-grade solutions, tools, and services, including specialized platforms for WordPress, industry-tailored [eCommerce](#) and [agency](#) solution suites, and developer-centric tools like [Local](#), [Advanced Custom Fields](#), and more. WP Engine's innovative technology and industry-leading expertise are why 8% of the web visits a WP Engine-powered site daily. Learn more at [wpengine.com](https://wpengine.com).

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