



Sitefinity CMS Compared to Open Source Solutions

Choosing a Content Management System (CMS) for your website is a long term decision that will make a strategic impact on your organization. During CMS evaluation, you need to think about the growth potential of your business and what additional website features will be needed. Your CMS should be able to grow as your organization grows. Any good CMS solution should not be a “boxed product” but rather an open framework, which can be extended and customized according to your specific project requirements and possible future needs. You should never choose a CMS that temporarily satisfies your web content management needs. In the long run, you will end up migrating your website to another solution. According to a recent survey¹, companies scrap their CMS systems every 3 years on average because they cannot keep up and adapt to their growing business needs. You can spare yourself the unpleasant and costly experience of CMS evaluation, implementation, and learning of a new system every few years by utilizing an open CMS framework that a leading software vendor continuously improves and supports.

Furthermore, the usability of the CMS solution for the end-user should be taken into account as well. Having a CMS implies that all content management will be carried out by business people, such as your marketing department, who typically have limited technical knowledge. Hence, a CMS solution not only has to be an open framework, but it also should have a very intuitive and user friendly interface. Highly usable systems increase productivity, encourage engagement, produce better results and ultimately increase the return on your investment.

With usability and an open framework in mind, the first kind of CMS solutions that come to mind are open source solutions. What could be a more open framework than an open source solution? Those solutions are free to download, but there are many hidden costs associated with managing and supporting them. Free does not necessarily mean cheaper. It is important to take into account all project development costs, account for dealing with issues along the way without dedicated support as well as end user training costs, CMS performance, future upgrades, etc.

¹ Survey by J. Boye (<http://www.jboye.com/blogpost/a-new-cms-every-3-years>)

Another option is to select an open framework CMS solution that is also backed up by a leading software vendor. Telerik's Sitefinity CMS is a robust open framework content management system based on Microsoft .NET technology. This provides unmatched productivity for both developers and end users. Some of the biggest advantages of Sitefinity over open source solutions are its innovative open-framework architecture, well thought out built-in features and functionality, elegant and intuitive user interface, ease of use, and unlimited extensibility. Sitefinity ships with other award-winning Telerik products such as the ASP.NET AJAX RadControls, and is backed up by Telerik's exceptional support services.

Cost of installation and deployment

The installation of Telerik's Sitefinity CMS is straight-forward and there are very detailed step-by-step bullet-proof installation guides that guide you through the installation and deployment process regardless of a user's level of technical knowledge. Once installed, Sitefinity provides several web site templates that enable users to quickly get a web site up and running. These template web sites are perfect for evaluating Sitefinity features and functionality. Telerik offers a fully featured and functional trial version of Sitefinity can be used both for evaluation and development purposes.

On the other hand, open source solutions are much harder to install and deploy due to their complexity and lack of detailed documentation. The installation costs are much higher since a greater degree of expertise is required for installing and deploying those solutions onto local environments. As a result, a greater amount of time is required to develop a sample proof of concept project using an open source solution. The lack of detailed and organized documentation for the product slows this process further.

Support

Open source software gets its support from volunteers. Forums, Marketplaces, and Blogs act as support centers for open source CMS solutions. It is not unusual for questions to go unanswered because the open source community does not have an incentive to answer those questions. In many cases people are forced to figure it out themselves or hire the

services of third party developers. The lack of formal support increases the CMS investment costs and reduces the return on the CMS investment.

Furthermore, as an organization's website needs evolve, open source projects can cease to address its current challenges. This kind of software is typically self-supporting. It is up to volunteers to decide which new feature requests are to be implemented and critical requirements will frequently go unaddressed. Sometimes the open source community does not think that a known issue should be fixed within the standard product distribution because someone had figured a workaround that resolves it. When known issues and workarounds become more than just a few, which is often the case, completing development of a project gets out of hand and becomes an enormous and tedious task, making it impossible to complete the project on time and on budget.

Telerik provides industry-leading and award-winning technical support to all of its customers. Telerik offers both community and dedicated technical support from the Sitefinity product development team, whereas open source projects rely solely on support from volunteers. Telerik guarantees a turnaround time on technical inquiries via its online support ticketing system. The system allows tickets to be shared among developers who can be working on the same project from different parts of the world. Telerik provides the necessary assurance and guarantee that all inquiries will be addressed adequately and on time. The Sitefinity Support Engineers are also very active in the forums on the website and all forum posts get addressed, whereas some open-source community support may result in no turnaround at all. Telerik's Sitefinity team is not only very active in the forums, but they also offer a wide array of free videos, webinars, KB articles, developer blogs, and expansive documentation for both end users and developers. Telerik is also committed to continuously extending and improving this vast amount of publically available resources.

Telerik releases new Sitefinity features and product updates frequently throughout the year and it is proactively seeking customer feedback, which is quickly turned into actual product enhancements. The Sitefinity CMS architecture is designed in such a way that it allows for upgrading a website to the latest Sitefinity release without impacting any customization that has already been implemented. Moreover, work-in-progress projects can be upgraded to

the latest version of Sitefinity without affecting already completed work. This allows developers to leverage the latest software features while finishing the rest of the project.

On the other hand, open source solutions rely on volunteers to come up with new features and improvements that are not on anyone's schedule. With open source, if people do not do it themselves, they are at the mercy of a disjoint community of developers. There is no single entity backing up the product and this makes it almost impossible to rely on any kind of a product roadmap.

Integration

Open source solutions have a poor integration with Microsoft products because these solutions tend to be created by people who are not big fans of Microsoft and their technology. Such solutions poorly integrate in a Microsoft environment and they do not make full use of the powerful productivity tools and features offered by Microsoft. There are also other open source solutions that are based on Microsoft technology, but even these solutions tend to require additional work and customization in order to make them work with standard Microsoft tools such as Visual Studio. Those solutions also do not work with standard ASP.NET controls and do not follow standard ASP.NET developer practices.

On the other hand, Sitefinity is a native Microsoft .NET application that fully integrates with Visual Studio. Telerik has built Sitefinity CMS on top of the .NET framework and all features available in the .NET framework are also available within and supported by the CMS. Moreover, it is possible to create custom controls, modules, themes and master pages right out of the popular Integrated Development Environment. Then those custom components can be easily integrated with Sitefinity. Developers can work on custom modules in separate projects, separating the code and making it easier for a team of developers to work together on one or multiple Sitefinity projects.

Sitefinity CMS is written in the C# programming language, but it also works with any other programming language supported by the .NET Framework. Anyone with good fundamentals of the Microsoft .NET Framework would find Sitefinity easy to learn, use, and customize. Sitefinity gives developers the utmost freedom to customize the CMS and

implement their desired features and functionality without the steep learning curve that many open source CMS solutions are known to have. The open architecture and fully-exposed API make Sitefinity endlessly extendable, be it through custom controls, modules, services, or through a third-party application that is integrated with it. Developers can reuse existing Sitefinity functionality, extend or combine it, while designers have unprecedented flexibility in styling public pages and the appearance of the administration area of the CMS itself. Many people have switched from an open source CMS solution over to Sitefinity because they found it too tedious and difficult to get the professional website look and feel they were going for.

In addition to built-in applications that Sitefinity ships with, the Sitefinity Marketplace is a gold mine for developers and users who are looking for third-party solutions that can be real time savers. The Marketplace also offers a great opportunity for both developers and designers to further leverage their work and knowledge about Sitefinity. Everyone can, and is encouraged to submit their work to the Marketplace and share it with the Sitefinity Community through a free or paid download. The Marketplace was unveiled in September 2009 and has quickly taken off since.

Furthermore, the industry best UI Components for ASP.NET AJAX that ship with Sitefinity add additional value to the CMS by allowing developers to increase their productivity and create an elegant look and feel to a Sitefinity website. The UI components suite includes controls with proven reliability and high performance. From the leading Data Grid control to the HTML Editor used even by Microsoft, the suite provides all the building blocks for creating rich, SEO-friendly, cross-browser compatible, and high-performance enterprise-level Sitefinity websites.

Interface usability and user friendliness

Open source content management systems are designed by engineers for other engineers. People with technical background have a very good knowledge about the underlying technologies used to build the CMS. Therefore, engineers will usually find an exemplary CMS task easy to perform and self explanatory, but this is certainly not the case if a non-

technical user were to perform this very same task. Engineers assume that everyone possesses a basic level of technical knowledge, therefore for them user friendliness and intuitive interface are not high on the priority list. Hence, the usability of an open source CMS end user interface is low, which lowers content editors' productivity and the IT department continues to make some of the website content and structure updates.

Unlike many open source solutions, Sitefinity has separate back-end editing and site configuration interface, which allows for better control by content managers. The Sitefinity interface is very intuitive, easy to navigate, and offers quick access to all functions of the CMS. A contextual help system has been integrated into the back-end interface allowing users to quickly reference help topics explaining the information available on their screen.

Web pages in Sitefinity are created through an extremely convenient drag-and-drop interface. There is a dynamic sitemap that shows the order of pages in a convenient hierarchical tree view. The drag-and-drop feature empowers end users to quickly organize the website's page structure. Users can drag different content elements from the Sitefinity toolbar dropping them onto content regions on a page and quickly filling the page with content elements. The page editing interface is identical to how the page will look on the public website allowing editors to feel confident that the content will be presented the way they had envisioned it. There is also a page preview option enabling content editors to quickly preview their work prior to saving any changes.

Upgrade to newer versions

It all boils down to the old saying of "there's no such thing as a free lunch". The primary advantage of open source is its biggest disadvantage. People can change it, and once they change it, they are stuck with it. It is hard to move all changes forward as the codebase changes, which soon forces people to re-develop their website in order to have it reflecting the natural growth of their organization. Furthermore, the constantly changing codebase makes it impossible to upgrade existing projects to new versions of the software because there is no backwards compatibility.

On the other hand, Telerik has a coherent strategy and vision for the product upgrades and

backwards compatibility of the Sitefinity CMS product. Telerik follows a tight roadmap for releasing quarterly updates. The upgrade to a new version or service pack can be done in no time. Telerik also has a hotfix strategy. When there is a need for a fix to a critical issue Telerik can provide a hotfix that changes just the code that was causing the issue without affecting the rest of the system and already made customizations. This easy upgrade process is made possible due to the innovative Sitefinity architecture that Telerik has developed.

Standards Compliance

Open source solutions tend not to comply with standards because the volunteers behind the product do not see value in spending time on making the product standards-compliant when they can spend this time on building small features that can solve their irritating daily problems. This is understandable, but this is also one of the biggest open source challenges – having product consistency and being standards-compliant. It requires focused efforts and a long term vision for a CMS product to have a great architecture, design, usability, and to be standards-compliant.

Telerik understands the importance of standards and has made Sitefinity to be cross-browser compatible and fully XHTML and W3C compliant. Sitefinity also uses the award winning Telerik RadEditor as its HTML (WYSIWYG) editor. That HTML editor is more powerful and has more features than any other HTML editor in the industry. The Sitefinity HTML editor has dialogs for inserting flash files and templates, an integrated spell-checker, and it allows pasting content directly from Microsoft Word without losing formatting. Moreover, the editor is equipped with a powerful toolbar that could be fully customized, out-of-the-box XHTML output, full keyboard accessibility, and industry-best cross-browser support.

Furthermore, Sitefinity is compliant with Section 508 Accessibility Standards of the United States Government and Telerik has prepared a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) response, which can be obtained upon request. Telerik, as a leading software vendor, is committed to supplying standards-compliant software and it is constantly working on ensuring that Sitefinity complies with all widely accepted industry standards. Being a standards-compliant and robust framework has led to the wide adoption of Sitefinity as an underlying content management system powering more than 10,000

End user training and productivity

Open source CMS solutions, as previously mentioned, tend to be written by engineers for other engineers, which makes them really difficult to use by non-technical users. Therefore, a great amount of end user training is required to teach non-technical staff how to manage web content with such complex and non-intuitive CMS. The training is not the only issue though, the end user productivity plays a much bigger role in the content management process because it affects all daily CMS activities and it is hard to be productive with something that is complex to use and not intuitive.

Telerik not only offers professional Sitefinity CMS training through its partners, but the Sitefinity interface has been designed to be so intuitive and friendly that it does not require extensive training for users to jump right into their tasks of managing their website's content. The Sitefinity learning curve for both end users and developers is very shallow allowing those people to quickly become productive and start delivering results right away.

Return on Investment

It will always be the case that people get what they have paid for no matter what CMS solution they decide to invest in. Conducting a three year return on investment (ROI) analysis for open source solutions, indicates that these solutions cost as much, if not more, than what a commercial product costs. There are neither guarantees nor warrants for open source solutions.

Furthermore, since the entire source code of an open source CMS is exposed, organizations are at great security risk because as any cryptographer would say, once your adversary knows your source code and your mechanism they have a big leg up on compromising your system. Telerik does not expose the source code of Sitefinity and follows security best practices during the product development process, which prevents hacker attacks on a Sitefinity website. Sitefinity is also very well tested against common security threats such as SQL Injection, XSS, and validation. In addition to that, all security mechanisms provided by Microsoft .NET are adopted in the CMS making it a very secure and reliable system.

With open source solutions organizations are also exposed to intellectual property theft issues and there is no assurance whatsoever that the underlying source code and architecture has not been stolen from its rightful owners or has not been created illegally by people who are violating a non-disclosure agreement. Telerik owns all intellectual property rights for its products providing its clients with assurance that a couple of college students will not all of a sudden file a law suit against their organization for using a software that someone else claims to own the rights to. With an open source CMS there is no such warranty and everyone is on his own.

Conclusion

Open source CMS solutions tend to claim that they have many more features than Sitefinity, but in reality they have much less features and capabilities. This is because most features of an open source CMS solve very specific problems and the system as a whole has not been engineered to serve as a platform that has a well-designed architecture, which can be built upon and extended in the future.

Overall, Sitefinity CMS is incredibly easy-to-use from an end user's point of view and it is also a very robust and powerful framework from a developer's vantage point. Unlike open source products, Sitefinity is standards-compliant and natively integrates with Visual Studio and other Microsoft solutions. Telerik also continuously improves the look and feel of its products while adding new features and functionality on quarterly basis making Sitefinity one of the best and widely adopted content management systems on the market.

About Sitefinity

Sitefinity is a modern CMS platform designed to help organizations pursue their online goals. Today the system powers over 10,000 websites worldwide across various industries- from Financial and Government Services, to Communications, Retail, and Entertainment. Thanks to Sitefinity’s flexible architecture and scalability, you can create successful commercial websites, community portals or intranets. Sitefinity offers a revolutionary easy-to-use interface, simplicity, scalability and unmatched performance – everything you need, beautifully crafted in one product.

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