CMS or DXP: Which is best for your digital strategy?

SQUIZ

The digital foundation you choose can make or break your strategy. So how do you pick the right one?

Should you stick with a straightforward Content Management System (CMS), or is it time for a more powerful Digital Experience Platform (DXP)?

A CMS is perfect for small-scale projects – think basic websites, personal blogs, or local businesses that want something straightforward and easy.

But if you're managing multiple brands across various channels, sites and portals, or you're juggling complex content, and need everything to work in sync, you're likely in DXP territory.

In this guide, we'll compare the two options, helping you figure out which one will make the biggest impact on your digital experiences.

A quick CMS vs DXP snapshot
(Get the full, detailed comparison here ⊙)

Feature	Traditional CMS	Low-code DXP
UI/Ease of Use	✓ No-code interface with WYSIWYG editing	✓ No-code interface with WYSIWYG editing
Developer Reliance	✓ Low – Uses pre-built templates	✓ Low – Comes with pre-built components
Speed to Market	✗ Slow when scaling	✓ Fast with reusable components
Integration Capabilities	✗ Basic plugin system only	✓ Wide range with low-code platform
Multi-channel Publishing	✗ Limited to CMS sites	✓ Easy publishing across all systems
Personalization	✗ Limited capabilities	✓ Real-time with data from any source
Framework Flexibility	✗ Prescribed by CMS	✓ Supports multiple frameworks
Security	✗ Vulnerable to plugin issues	✓ Enterprise security with built-in tools
User Experience Consistency	✗ Can be inconsistent across touchpoints	✓ Ensures consistency at scale
Total Cost of Ownership	✗ Lower initial but higher long-term costs	✓ Higher initial but predictable scaling costs

The key questions that will help you decide

Q: How Complex Are Your Digital Needs?

For a simple site - like a blog or a basic business page - a CMS is perfect. But if you're managing multiple sites, need interactive content, pulling in content from a wide range of platforms or want to connect with a suite of scalable business tools like CRM systems, analytics, or marketing automation, only a DXP will provide the integrated control and flexibilities you're looking for.

Q: What's The Size And Structure Of Your Organization?

For a small business, a CMS can handle day-to-day operations well. But if you're managing multiple brands, departments, or locations, a CMS will quickly become unmanageable. A DXP pulls everything into one place, making content easy to manage and scale, getting rid of repetitive tasks, and keeping every brand and department aligned.

Q: How Important Is Scalability To You?

If you're planning to grow, a CMS will soon start to hold you back - adding new sites, features, or personalisation will become a struggle. A DXP, on the other hand, is built to grow with you. Whether you're adding new sites, handling higher traffic, or scaling up services, it keeps things smooth and hassle-free without forcing a platform change every time.

Q: What Kind Of Technical Resources Do You Have?

A CMS often means your developers are on call for every update or integration, which is a drain on resources. A DXP gives your non-technical teams easy no-code tools to manage content and make changes themselves. It also keeps everything secure with automated updates, saving your developers for more important projects.

Q: How Crucial Is Personalization For Your Strategy?

If personalization is important, a DXP is your answer. It allows you to craft tailored experiences using real user data and behavior insights - something a CMS just isn't built for without significant, costly custom development.

Do you need a CMS or DXP?

Complex Digital Needs?
— Yes → **DXP**
- Multiple sites
- Interactive content
- Integration needs
- Business tool connections

— No → **CMS**
- Simple blog
- Basic business page
- Single platform needs

Large Organization?
— Yes → **DXP**
- Multiple brands
- Multiple departments
- Multiple locations
- Centralized control

— No → **CMS**
- Small business
- Single team
- Simple operations

Need Scalability?
— Yes → **DXP**
- Growth ready
- Easy scaling
- Future-proof
- Flexible expansion

— No → **CMS**
- Static size
- Fixed requirements
- Limited growth needs

Limited Tech Resources?
— Yes → **DXP**
- No-code tools
- Automated updates
- Non-technical friendly
- Resource efficient

— No → **CMS**
- Developer available
- Technical team support
- Custom development ok

Need Personalization?
— Yes → **DXP**
- Advanced personalization
- User behavior tracking
- Data-driven decisions

— No → **CMS**
- Basic content delivery
- Standard experience
- No personalization needed

What's The True Impact Of A DXP?

A DXP goes way beyond content management.

It's your command center for handling a complex digital ecosystem.
Here's where it really starts to outshine a traditional CMS:

Unified Digital Control

A DXP pulls all your sites and channels into one centralized system. You get consistent brand elements across every site, faster content updates, and the ability to easily coordinate campaigns. Everything is cohesive and easy to manage.

Seamless Integration of your Tools

Forget all about the frustration of disconnected systems. A DXP brings together your CRM, analytics, marketing automation, and other business tools. Data flows smoothly between systems, keeping your insights connected, your workflows streamlined, and your teams in sync.

Sweat-Free Scalability

A DXP is built to grow with you. Whether it's managing sudden traffic surges, launching new sites, or adding services, a DXP keeps everything running smoothly without any re-platforming or downtime.

No-Code Tools that Empower Marketing Teams

Forget all about the frustration of disconnected systems. A DXP brings together your CRM, analytics, marketing automation, and other business tools. Data flows smoothly between systems, keeping your insights connected, your workflows streamlined, and your teams in sync.

Tech that Frees Up Developer Teams

DXPs give developers their time back while providing a solid technical foundation, handling the mundane aspects of content management and allowing developers to focus on more complex and interesting technical challenges.

Security at Every Step

Protect your digital presence with a DXP's built-in security. Enterprise-level protocols, automated updates, and centralized permissions make absolutely sure your data and platform stay secure and your risk is low even with tens or even thousands of content editors.

Invest Upfront, Save Long-Term

A DXP might require more at the start, but the long-term savings are clear: predictable expenses, fewer developer costs as marketing and digital teams can build and edit pages fast, and a clear ROI when scaling complex digital environments.
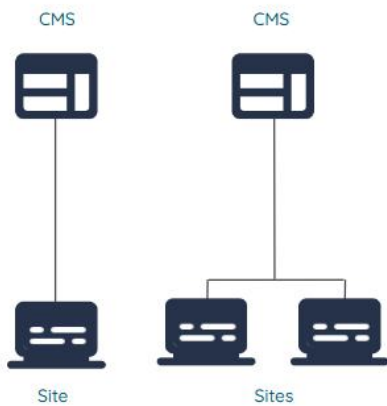
Future-Proof your Digital Foundation

A DXP is built to adapt quickly, helping you scale, add new features, embrace AI, and stay agile for whatever comes next.
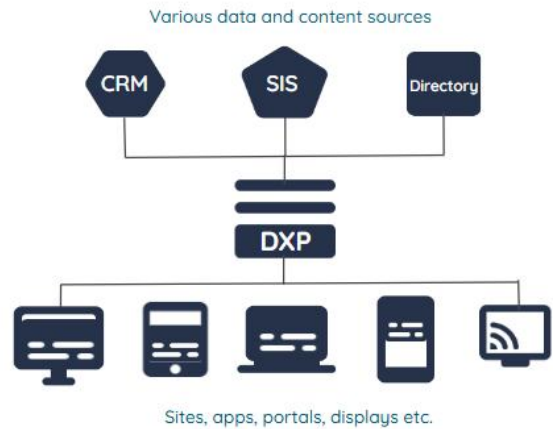
Traditional CMSs no longer cut it

CMS vs. DXP

CMS — Best for managing a website(s)
CMS — Site
CMS — Sites

DXP — Ideal for managing multi-channel digital experiences
Various data and content sources
CRM | SIS | Directory
DXP
Sites, apps, portals, displays etc.

Three real-world examples of a DXP in action

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Doubling Lead Conversions for a Property Data Company

A leading property data company operating across Australia and New Zealand needed a serious upgrade to their web presence. By partnering with Squiz they quickly leveled up their entire environment:

Lead conversions skyrocketed

Sessions turning into leads went through the roof with a 100% increase in conversion rates.

Higher user engagement

Visitors stayed longer and interacted more, cutting bounce rates by 53%.

In-house capabilities boost

Their lean team was empowered to handle improvements in-house, reducing reliance on external resources.

Their Website Product Owner summed it up best:

"The big win for me is what we can now do in-house. Although we're a really lean team, we can do our own enhancements – be they accessibility or SEO improvements, or developing new features, ourselves."

Unifying 100+ Websites for a Healthcare Network

A healthcare organization with over 100 websites across 16 health districts was struggling with some big challenges – their user experiences were inconsistent and disjointed, they had security issues everywhere, and managing content across all those sites was a nightmare.

After implementing a design system with Squiz, they saw real, measurable improvements:

⊘ Easy content management

Content management was pulled together for all web properties, bringing consistency to what was a bit of a mess.

⊘ Faster launch timelines

Projects that used to take an age were now delivered at pace, with sites and campaigns going live much faster.

⊘ Full in-house ownership

The team gained control over site management, massively reducing costs tied to external developers.

⊘ Better user experience across all sites

Each health district now offered a consistent, high-quality online presence that better served its community.

Their Director of Online Services sums up the difference like this:

"Without a design system, the answer is either you can't or you can, but you'll do it poorly and very slowly."

Increasing Community Connection and Reducing Costs for a City Council

A large city council partnered with Squiz DXP to completely overhaul their digital services, making it easier for residents to find what they need and slashing the team's reliance on outside help:

Engagement boost

Website visits grew by 16.6%, reflecting a much-improved connection with the community.

Better navigation

Visitors were finding more of what they needed, faster, with bounce rates dropping from 56.36% to 34.7%

Cost reduction through smarter UX

That better user experience led to fewer calls to the council's contact center, cutting down operational costs.

Independence achieved

The team gained full control over their digital assets, freeing themselves from their reliance on costly external agencies.

As their Customer Experience Channels Manager said:

"The old days of putting in a monolithic system that just does its job over its lifetime are fading. It's more about picking the right technology with enough flexibility to scale and grow with the business."

The common threads in these DXP success stories

Across each of these three transformations, it was big wins in the same four areas that made all the difference:

The kind of efficiency that drives real progress

Forget endless waits and complicated processes. Every organization took control—managing more in-house, cutting down developer reliance, and launching faster. Operations were smoother, content management was easier, and everything moved without tech headaches getting in the way.

Big-time cost savings

Efficiency doesn't just feel good day to day, it also saves money. By taking development into their own hands, these teams dramatically cut costs, whether it was on pricey agency fees or keeping developer bills down. Real savings were a common thread across every project.

A user experience people actually love

Making life easier for your audience is what it's all about. In every story, improved UX was key: better navigation, consistent branding, increased engagement, and smart personalization. Users found what they needed, stuck around longer, and enjoyed a cohesive journey from start to finish.

A readiness for whatever came next

None of these changes were just about quick wins. Each organization built a foundation for the future - a DXP framework that scaled and adapted as they grew, letting them add features and make improvements without starting over. Future-proofing meant they could respond to whatever the digital landscape threw their way.
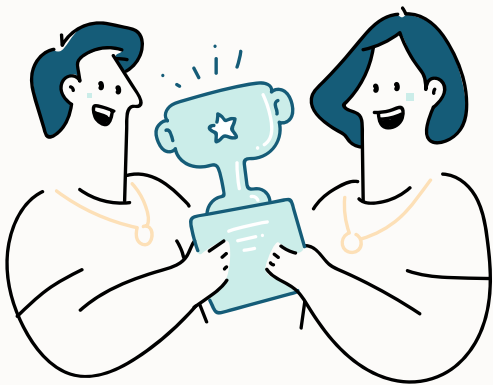
These stories show what's possible when you go beyond basic content management and invest in a powerful DXP. Whether you're in healthcare, education, government, or the private sector, the results speak for themselves: smoother operations, more control, lower external costs, happier users, and the flexibility to keep growing.

A DXP helps you take full control over your digital strategy, solve real problems for your organization, and build a future-proofed foundation for wherever you want to go.

Full feature comparison: Marketer experience

	Traditional CMS	Headless CMS	Low-code DXP
Easy-to-use UI	✓ No code interface, WYSIWYG editing.	? Often don't have WYSIWYG tools (only structured form fields).	✓ No code interface, WYSIWYG editing.
Low dev reliance	✓ Build fast with pre-built, designed templates	✗ Requires front-end dev to implement design for all channels.	✓ Build fast. Some DXPs come with pre-built components/ templates in a design system.
Speed to market	✗ Slow when scaling across channels and for basic sites.	✗ More initial setup time and cost. Content edits often need dev help.	✓ Fast, with reusable components that scale across sites and platforms.
Flexible integrations	✗ Basic plugin system, limited to out-of-the-box connectors.	✓ Wide range of integrations with API integrations.	✓ Wide range of integrations, with a low-code integration platform that unifies your tech.
Unify content from any source	✗ Basic plugin system, limited to out-of-the-box connectors.	✓ Enabled via API integrations.	✓ Break down content silos with a low-code integration platform.
Multi-channel publishing	✗ Limited to sites on your CMS.	✓ Enabled via API integrations.	✓ Easily create, manage and publish across all your systems.
Personalization	✗ Limited to sites on your CMS.	✓ Enabled via API integrations. Requires custom dev.	✓ Real-time personalization with data from any source.
Optimization	✗ Limited optimization capabilities, typically SEO-focused only.	✓ Better optimization through API-first approach.	✓ Advanced optimization with AI/ML capabilities and A/B testing.

Full feature comparison: Developer experience

	Traditional CMS	Headless CMS	Low-code DXP
Minimal time spent on content updates	✓ Marketers self-serve content management.	? Marketers often need dev support for content edits.	✓ Marketers self-serve content management, personalization, A/B testing, page-building.
Use the frameworks of your choice	✗ Prescribed by the CMS.	✓ Freedom to choose your front-end tech.	✓ Supports multiple frameworks. Provides pre-built components and accelerators.
Easy to integrate with other tools	✗ Limited to available plugins and modules.	? API-based approach requires ongoing dev to maintain.	✓ Pre-built connectors and a centralized, low-code integration platform help you manage it all as one.
Security	? Regular updates needed. Vulnerable to plugin security issues.	? API-based approach may need custom security implementation.	✓ Enterprise security with centralized governance, automatic updates, and built-in compliance tools .
Developer Environment	? Monolithic setup, local environment challenges.	? Microservices architecture, API-first development.	✓ Comprehensive development tools, integrated DevOps.

Full feature comparison: End user experience

	Traditional CMS	Headless CMS	Low-code DXP
Consistent experience across touchpoints	⊗ Different systems can lead to inconsistent experiences. Unable to serve multiple touch points effectively.	? Enables consistency through API, but requires coordinated front-end implementation across touchpoints.	✓ Design systems and reusable components ensure consistency at scale.
Personalization	⊗ Difficult to make consistent across all touchpoints .	✓ API-enabled personalization, requires custom dev.	✓ Multi-channel personalization with unified customer data.
Find answers fast, no matter the source	⊗ Siloed data means users don't always find the most relevant content.	✓ Fast content delivery via API. Custom dev and additional platform needed. Multiple systems may not work as one.	✓ AI-powered search unifies data and helps users find the content they need, no matter the source.
Remarketing	⊗ Limited to basic plugin capabilities.	✓ Available with integrations. Some require custom dev.	✓ Users receive tailored content based on previous interactions and known preferences.
Improved customer service (e.g. chatbots, help centers)	⊗ Basic, one-size-fits-all support experience. Generic FAQs and third-party chat widgets.	✓ Modern support tools, but users may need to repeat information when switching between support options.	✓ Seamless, personalized support experience where help content and chatbots adapt to the user's history and context. Consistent interactions across all channels and devices.

Full feature comparison: Business commercials

	Traditional CMS	Headless CMS	Low-code DXP
Total Cost of Ownership	⊗ Lower initial cost. Higher long-term maintenance and ongoing developer costs. Limited scalability costs.	⦿ Medium initial cost. API consumption costs. High Development costs for front-end.	⊘ Higher initial investment. Predictable scaling costs. Included maintenance and updates.
Summary	Simple and easy to use for basic websites but become limiting as needs grow.	Flexible and offers developer freedom but requires more technical expertise.	The most comprehensive feature set. A cost model to suit your business and consumption.