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GUIDE

Which CMS is right for my business?

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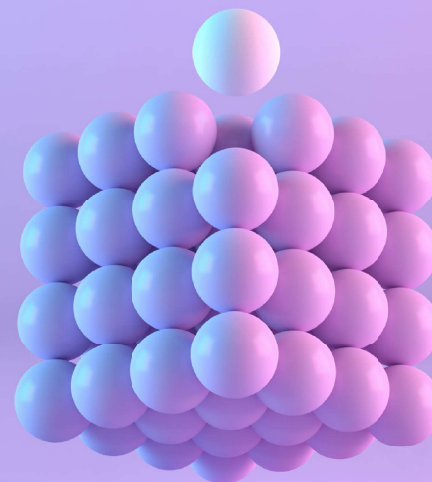**connecting services & solutions**

Introduction

This guide is designed to help you better understand the value and capabilities of the different types of content management systems (CMS) available and help you choose the right software for your organization.

It is aimed at Marketing and IT teams – and anyone else involved in assessing and selecting CMS software.

In this guide you will learn about:

- The different CMS and hosting options for your organization
- The capabilities to look for from modern CMS software
- The advantages and disadvantages of different CMS options
- How you should approach buying CMS software

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Contents

What is a content management system (CMS)?

Content Management Systems (CMS) have revolutionized the way businesses create, manage, and distribute content across all digital platforms.

The CMS has become a critical part of a modern marketing tech stack for companies looking to establish a strong digital presence, engage customers, and drive growth.

But choosing a CMS is not a simple case of one-size-fits-all. Different businesses have different commercial needs and objectives; different organizational and operational structures; different tech stacks and roadmaps; and different levels of digital maturity.

On top of all that, the CMS market is evolving rapidly. What was once just a product designed to manage your website is now often a solution expected to manage content across thousands of digital touchpoints.

This guide is designed to help you navigate the complexity of the CMS landscape and work out which CMS is right for your team and business.

It looks at three main categories of CMS: monolithic, headless, and hybrid. We'll guide you through the buying process to help you identify the right solution for your business.

Understanding the different hosting options

Before we get into comparing the different types of CMS, it's first important to understand the different hosting options.

These include on-premise, SaaS (Software –as –a-Service), PaaS (Platform –as –a-Service), virtual private server hosting (VPS), dedicated server hosting, and managed hosting.

On-premise hosting and SaaS are two of the most common options you'll come across for hosting CMS software. Below we briefly cover the benefits, considerations, and use cases of each.

On-premise hosting

With on-premise hosting, the CMS software is installed and managed on servers located within your organization's premises or data centers. This gives you full control over the infrastructure, software configuration, and security.

Benefits: Complete control and customization, data security, compliance with specific regulations, and the ability to integrate with other on-premise systems.

Considerations: Higher upfront costs for hardware and infrastructure, increased maintenance responsibilities, and potentially slower scalability.

Use cases: Large enterprises with strict regulatory requirements that necessitate in-house control over data and security, or organizations with unique customization needs or intricate integration with existing on-premise systems.

SaaS hosting

In a SaaS model, the CMS software is hosted and provided by a third-party service provider over the internet. Users access the CMS through web browsers without needing to manage the underlying infrastructure.

Benefits: Quick setup, automatic updates, scalability, reduced IT management burden, accessibility from anywhere, and lower initial costs.

Considerations: Less customization compared to on-premise solutions, potential dependency on the service provider's infrastructure, and data security concerns depending on the provider.

Use cases: Small to medium businesses seeking hassle-free CMS management without extensive technical expertise, or large enterprises looking to increase scale and agility and build a composable SaaS tech stack.
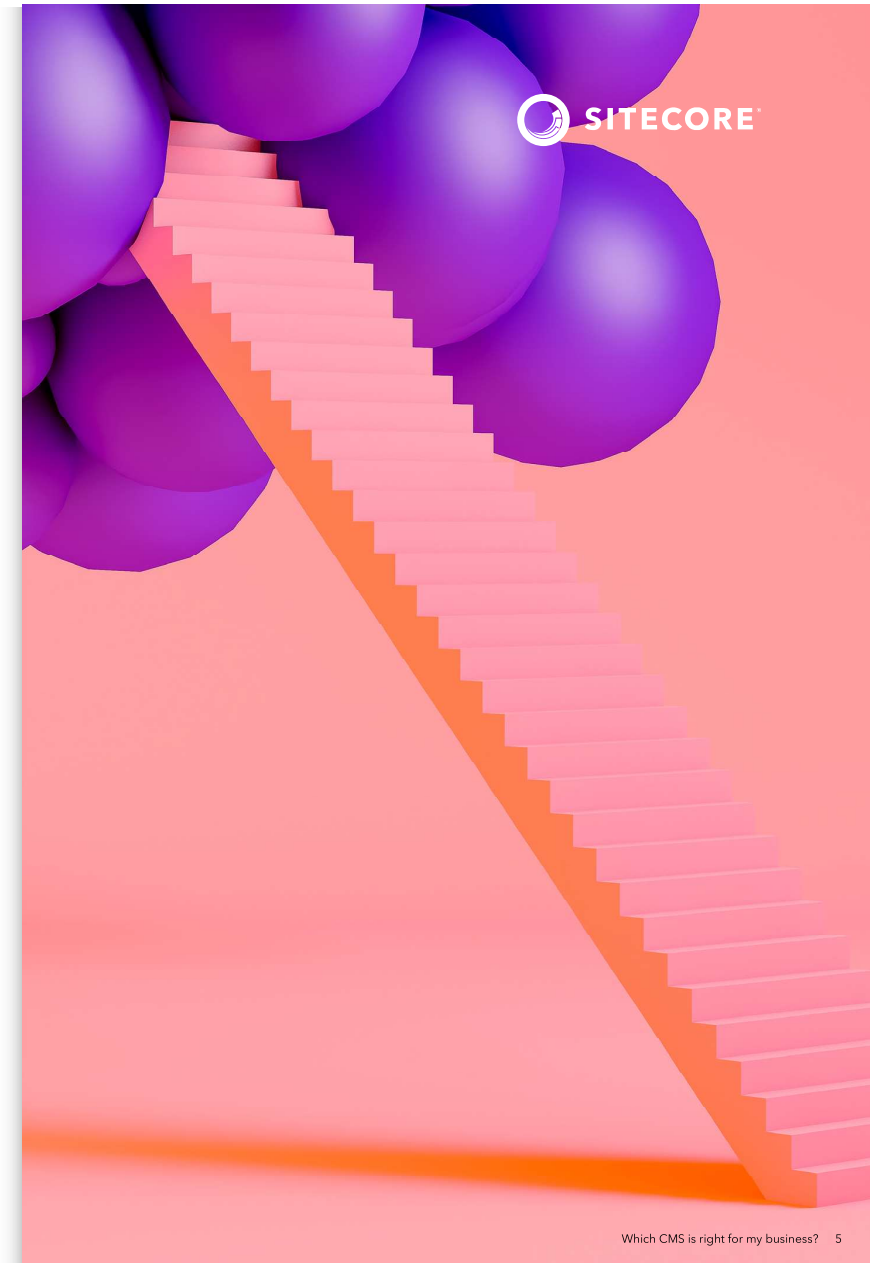
Understanding the different types of CMS

Monolithic CMS

For smaller websites or businesses without complex requirements

A monolithic – or traditional – CMS combines both the back-end content management functionalities and the front-end presentation layer in one cohesive unit. This means that the content creation and editing tools, the database for content storage, and the templates responsible for displaying the content on the website or application are all part of a single, unified system. This makes it easier to manage an entire website in one place, but the architecture is restricted to one channel.

Hosting: Typically on-premise

Three key features

- **Integrated functionality:** A monolithic CMS offers a comprehensive suite of tools and features within the same application.
- **Built-in templates:** Typically, monolithic CMS platforms come with pre-designed templates that users can customize to create the desired look and feel of their website.
- **Unified interface:** Content creators, editors, and administrators can access all the CMS functionalities through a single user interface, simplifying content management processes.

Advantages of monolithic

- **Ease of use:** The all-in-one nature of monolithic CMS platforms makes them relatively easy to set up and manage, particularly for smaller websites or businesses.
- **Integrated workflow:** With content management and presentation tools in one place, users can streamline their content workflow and publishing process.
- **Familiarity:** Many monolithic CMS platforms offer intuitive interfaces, resembling word processors or simple website builders, making them accessible to any user.

Disadvantages of monolithic

- **Limited flexibility:** Monolithic CMS platforms can be less flexible when it comes to customization and integrating with other third-party applications or systems.
- **Scalability concerns:** As a website or application grows in complexity and traffic, a monolithic CMS might struggle to handle the increasing load efficiently.
- **Update delays:** Upgrading or adding new features to a monolithic CMS often depends on the vendor's development timeline, potentially leading to delays.

Hybrid CMS

For businesses seeking a balance between control and flexibility

A hybrid CMS is a combination of traditional and headless CMS features, offering both structured and unstructured content management capabilities. It allows users to manage content in a structured manner, like a traditional CMS, while also enabling them to deliver content to multiple channels and devices through APIs, similar to a headless CMS.

Hosting: SaaS or on-premise

Three key features

- **Structured content management:** A hybrid CMS provides a user-friendly interface for creating and managing content with predefined templates and fields.
- **Omnichannel delivery:** Enables content to be delivered across various platforms and devices, such as websites, mobile apps, social media, and more.
- **Flexibility:** Users can choose to use templates for faster content creation or have more control by customizing the presentation layer through APIs.Advantages of monolithic

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Advantages of hybrid

- **Unified content management:** Allows content editors to work with structured content while developers can create unique front-end experiences.

- **Brand consistency:** Content can be seamlessly published to different platforms and channels, ensuring a consistent user experience.

- **Best of both worlds:** Offers a compromise between the rigidity of a traditional CMS and the flexibility of a headless CMS.

Disadvantages of hybrid

- **Complexity:** The combination of both structured and unstructured content management can make the system more complex to set up and maintain.

- **Learning curve:** Users need to understand both traditional CMS concepts and headless CMS approaches to make the most of a hybrid CMS.

- **Integration challenges:** While a hybrid CMS offers flexibility through various integrations, managing multiple systems and components can be challenging.

Headless

For businesses wanting a personalized, omnichannel user experience

A headless CMS is a back-end-only content management system that focuses solely on content creation, storage, and delivery via APIs. It decouples the back-end content management from the front-end presentation layer, allowing for more flexibility and seamless delivery across various platforms.

**Hosting:** SaaS

Three key features

- **Content modeling:** Focuses on structured content modeling, enabling content to be used across multiple channels and devices

- **API-driven delivery:** Content is delivered through APIs, allowing developers to build custom front-end experiences for different platforms.

- **Multichannel content delivery:** Content can be published to websites, mobile apps, IoT devices, and more.

Advantages of headless

- **Front-end flexibility:** Developers can use any technology for the front-end, enabling them to create unique user experiences.

- **Content repurposing:** Allows content to be easily repurposed and delivered to various platforms and devices.

- **Collaboration:** Content editors can work independently of developers, speeding up the content creation and publishing process.

Disadvantages of headless

- **Technical expertise:** Working with a headless CMS requires more technical knowledge and development skills.

- **Higher complexity:** The decoupled architecture can be more complex to set up and manage compared to a traditional CMS.

- **Higher costs:** May have higher implementation and maintenance costs due to the need for custom development.
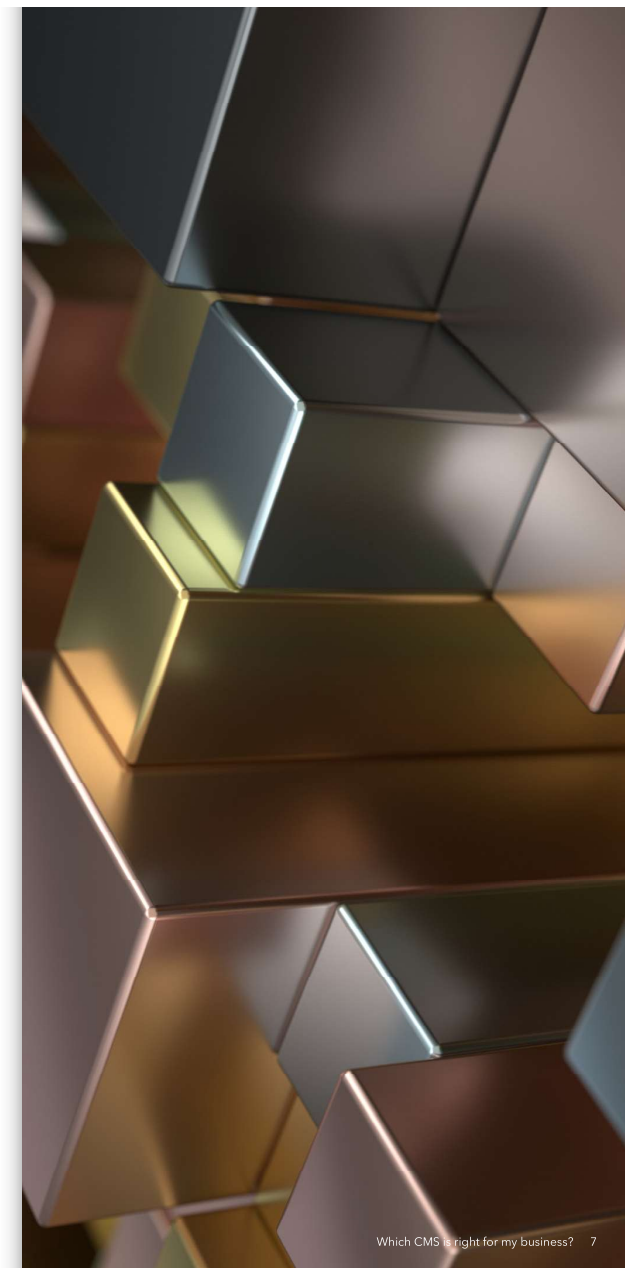
Monolithic vs. headless vs. hybrid: Comparing capabilities

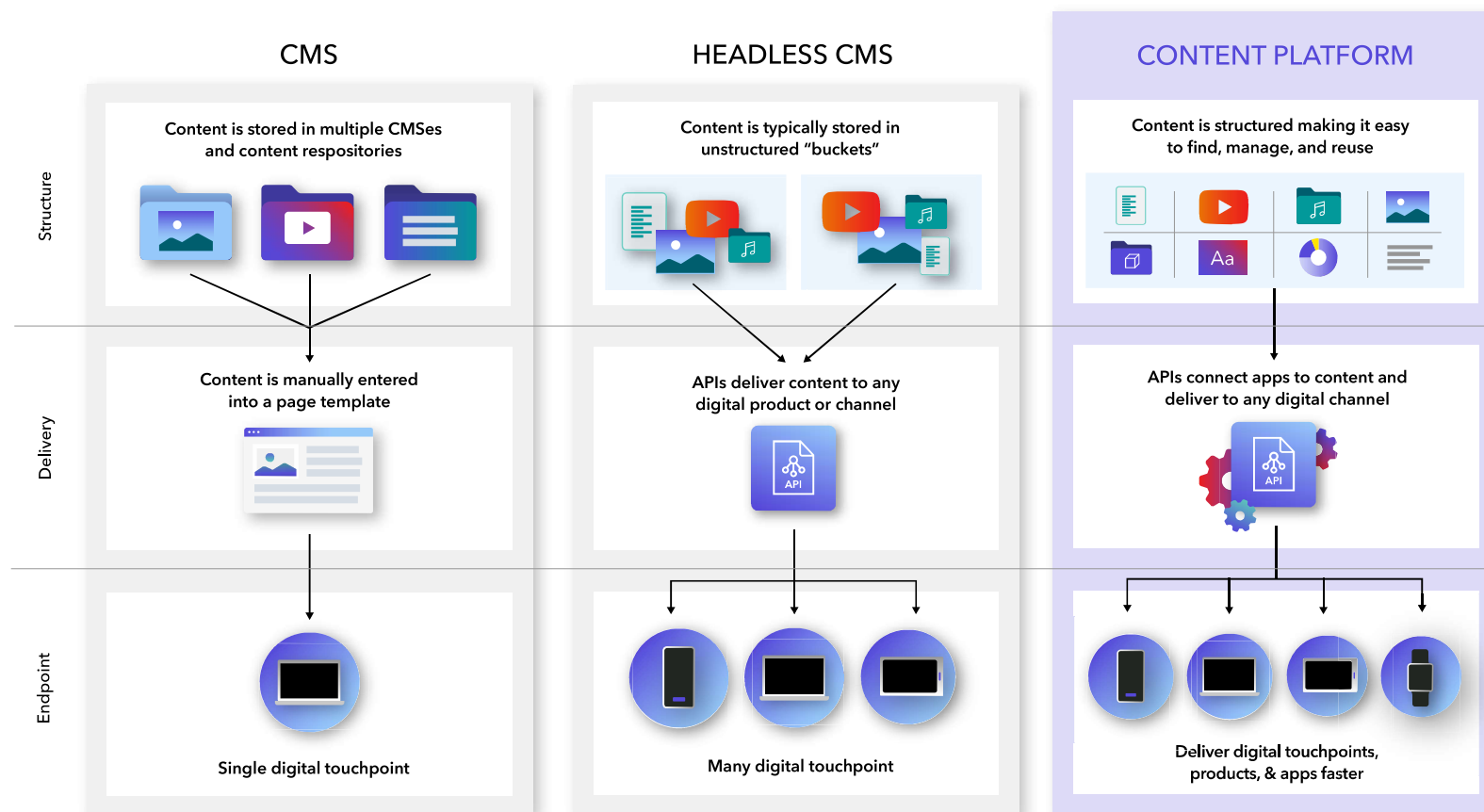Below we explore the different capabilities of the three different types of CMS.

Capability	Monolithic	Hybrid	Headless
Content management	✓ Integrated within the same application	✓ Structured content management	✓ Structured content management
Presentation layer	✓ Integrated within the same application	✓ Integrated within the same application	✗ Separated from the back end via APIs
Front-end flexibility	✗ Tightly coupled with the back end	✓ Partial flexibility through customization	✓ Complete flexibility to use any front-end technology
Omnichannel delivery	✗ Limited or requires extensions	✓ Built in support for multichannel delivery	✓ Built in support for multichannel delivery
Learning curve	✓ Relatively easy to learn and use	✓ Moderate learning curve	✗ Requires development expertise
Customization	✓ Limited customization options	✓ Customizable templates and presentation	✓ Complete front-end customization
Collaboration	✓ Collaboration within the same system	✓ Collaboration within the same system	✓ Decoupled workflows for content and presentation
Scalability	✗ May face limitations as the system grows	✓ Scalable with separation of presentation	✓ Highly scalable due to decoupled nature
Implementation and maintenance	✓ Generally easier to set up and maintain	✓ Moderate complexity in set-up and maintenance	✗ Can be complex to set up and maintain

Monolithic vs. headless vs. hybrid: Comparing architecture

Below we analyze the typical architectures of our three CMS types, and what that means for content creation and delivery.

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CMS

Structure

Content is stored in multiple CMSes and content respositories

Delivery

Content is manually entered into a page template

Endpoint

Single digital touchpoint

HEADLESS CMS

Content is typically stored in unstructured "buckets"

APIs deliver content to any digital product or channel

Many digital touchpoint

CONTENT PLATFORM

Content is structured making it easy to find, manage, and reuse

APIs connect apps to content and deliver to any digital channel

Deliver digital touchpoints, products, & apps faster

Choosing the right CMS: Key considerations

When buying a CMS, there are several important questions to consider to ensure you choose the right solution that meets your specific needs and aligns with your business goals.

Here are six of the most important considerations:

1. Business size

Small, medium, and large enterprises have distinct operational demands and budgets. While a monolithic CMS might offer simplicity and cost-effectiveness for small businesses, larger organizations often require more robust and scalable solutions.

2. Business structure

Organizational structure, whether centralized or decentralized, influences how content creation and publishing workflows are managed, making it crucial to adopt a CMS that seamlessly integrates with existing processes.

3. Objectives and roadmap

Business objectives play a pivotal role in CMS selection. A headless CMS might be ideal for companies focused on omnichannel and personalized user experiences, while a hybrid CMS could suit those prioritizing unified content management and streamlined operations.

4. Industry and compliance requirements

Certain industries, such as healthcare, finance, or government, have stringent regulatory and compliance demands. Choosing a CMS that complies with industry-specific regulations and security standards is essential to safeguard sensitive data.

5. Tech stack and digital maturity

Companies with high digital maturity may benefit from a headless CMS, enabling seamless integration with existing systems and rapid development of new features. Less mature businesses may find a traditional CMS more accessible and easier to maintain.

6. User needs and processes

Efficient collaboration among teams and well-defined user roles are essential for smooth content management. A CMS should provide role-based access control and collaboration features, catering to the specific needs of everyone involved in the content lifecycle.

Choosing the right CMS: Buyer checklist

Below are some starter questions to consider when approaching the buying process for a CMS. They include questions about what your organization needs from a CMS and questions about any CMS tools you're assessing. Tweak and add to them to cover all your needs and challenges.

Assessing your content needs

- **What are my specific content management needs?** Consider the types of content you'll be managing (text, images, videos, etc.), the frequency of updates, and the complexity of content structures.

- **Do I need multichannel content delivery?** Determine if you require the ability to deliver content to various platforms, such as websites, mobile apps, social media, IoT devices, etc.

- **Is support for multilanguage content necessary?** If your website or application targets a global audience, consider if the CMS can handle multilingual content management.

- **How far do you want to go with your content strategy?** Think about your current roadmap and whether you want to layer on advanced options like omnichannel personalization or AI-powered website search.

Assessing CMS capabilities

- **Does the CMS integrate well with existing systems?** Ensure the CMS can seamlessly integrate with your current tech stack, such as CRM, ecommerce platforms, and marketing tools.

- **Does the CMS provide good user access control and permission settings?** Consider if the CMS offers role-based access control to manage user permissions effectively.

- **What are the migration and backup options for the CMS?** Ensure that the CMS allows for easy content migration and has adequate backup and recovery mechanisms.

- **How scalable does the CMS need to be?** Consider the future growth of your website or application and whether the CMS can accommodate increased traffic and content volume.

- **Does the CMS offer analytics and reporting features?** Check if the CMS provides essential data on content performance and user engagement.

Assessing CMS suitability and usability

- **Is the CMS vendor reliable and established?** Research the reputation of the CMS vendor, read customer reviews, and check their track record for support and updates. G2 or Gartner Peer Insights are good places to look

- **Is the CMS user-friendly and easy to learn?** Request a demo or trial to evaluate the CMS interface's usability for your team members, and what training might be required.

- **What level of customer support does the CMS vendor offer?** Find out about the vendor's support options, response times, and ongoing assistance.

- **What security features does the CMS provide?** Security is crucial for protecting your content and user data. Check if the CMS has robust security measures and adheres to industry standards.

Building your business case

- **What is my budget for the CMS purchase and implementation?** Determine how much you are willing to invest in the CMS software, as well as any additional costs for customization, integration, training, and ongoing support.

- **What level of technical expertise does my team have?** Assess the technical skills of your team members who will be using and managing the CMS to ensure it matches their capabilities.

- **What is the projected TCO for the CMS?** Estimate the long-term costs beyond the initial purchase, including licensing, maintenance, updates, hosting, and potential scalability expenses. Consider both direct and indirect costs.

- **What is the potential ROI for the CMS?** Calculate the potential ROI by estimating increased sales, reduced marketing costs, improved customer engagement, and streamlined workflows facilitated by the CMS.

Learn more

To continue your evaluation process, take a look at the latest DXP and CMS analyst reports from [Gartner](#) and [IDC](#).

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About GM Servizi

GM Servizi is one of the most experienced Sitecore Solution Partner in Italy with several projects delivered with success (two Sitecore Awards) during more than 15 years of activity.

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