**Multilingual Content Management Systems: Paid or Open Source?**

**It's tempting to go with an open-source Content Management Systems (CMS) when you receive a proposal from one of the enterprise CMS providers with lots of zeros in the right-hand column, but is the investment in an enterprise system worth it?  In this article MYL's Technology Director, <u>Anton Strydom</u>, gives us his view.**

For any modern organization, its website, whether accessed from a desktop or mobile device, is the face of the business. It conveys its value proposition, its mission and what differentiates it from other organizations. It provides a way for the business to communicate directly with its customers.

As of <u>June 2018, 55%</u> or approximately 4.2 billion users have Internet access. *<u>Only 25.4%</u>* of those users read English, with approximately 20% being Chinese reading users.  In a globally competitive business world, no business can afford not to have their web and mobile site in multiple languages.  So how best to achieve this goal?

## Enterprise Software vs. Open Source

Developing or modernizing an existing site should start with the underlying technology in mind. The CMS that the website will use might be the most important decision that will be made in this regard.  The CMS is the platform or framework that the website is built on. It defines how it will be updated, translated, how it interacts with third party SaaS providers, CRM, online sales, back office ERP systems and so on.

Choosing the right CMS usually comes down to four key things: your business requirements, budget, internal technical skills and technology preferences.  With so many CMS systems available, a key choice is whether to use an *open-source solution* or paid *enterprise solution*.

Open-source means the underlying **program code is freely accessible** and can, in principle, be easily edited by developers. Users are given the opportunity to makes changes, improvements, and extensions, and to adapt the CMS to individual requirements.

Alternatively, you can choose **enterprise software**. This is where a CMS is developed by a company and distributed as a commercial project. **The source code is not available to users and comes at a price**.

In terms of technological developments, established open-source CMS systems stand-up to most enterprise solutions, but without the dedicated support, security and maintenance. There are however high-level developer communities behind some of the best known open-source providers, such as *WordPress* and *Drupal*. Refer to Fig 1. below for our rankings on the core elements of budget, functionality, security and support.

**Fig.1**

| CMS | Budget | Functionality | Security | Support |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sitecore | High | Very High | Strong | Strong |
| Adobe Experience Manager | High | Very High | Strong | Strong |
| Drupal | Low | High | Above Average | Weak (Community) |
| Word Press | Low | High | Average (Due to 3$^{rd}$ party plugins) | Average (Community) |

## Sitecore Enterprise CMS

- **Price**: Although not publicly shared, it has been reported that Sitecore's licensing fee starts at US$40,000 and is another US$8,000 for each additional year. The implementation cost starts at US$65,000, and support and other licensing fees cost around US$10,000 each year.

- **Technology**: Built on Microsoft's .Net technology stack. Sitecore provides customer experience management software that is automated and flexible.

- **Installation**: Normally professionally installed and configured by Sitecore itself or licensed agencies/professional services companies.

- **Translation**: Offers translation connectors, but typically requires integration cost of approx. US$15,000 per annum.

- **Advantages**: Fully integrated, full marketing suite of tools for interactive content management functions. Enterprise focussed. Worldwide support focus.

- **Disadvantages**: Expensive, requires professional set-up.

## Adobe Experience Manager (AEM)

- **Price**: Although not officially published. Adobe said during one of their recent partner summits that the average deal is US$450,000 in license terms with the total implementation cost of over US$2m. Adobe's focus is squarely on very large multinational companies.

- **Technology**: AEM is Java based. Close integration with Adobe's rich set of Design & Media suite of tools enables companies to create a design rich, media driven online experience.

- **Installation**: Professionally installed and configured by certified Adobe business partners or Adobe themselves.

- **Translation**: Has a Translation Integration Framework, with default integration into Microsoft's machine translator engine. For professional human supported

translation a connector is required, typically at additional cost of approx. US$15,000 per annum.

- **Advantages**: Creates fully integrated, personalized and targeted user experiences, storing and re-purposing digital marketing assets for any multichannel campaign. Design and implementation targeted, localized marketing campaigns, further enhanced by real-time analytics and marketing optimization.

- **Disadvantages**: Expensive, requires professional set-up and maintenance. Stronger emphasis on North American and European markets.

## WordPress Open Source CMS

- **Price**: Free

- **Technology**: The most popular CMS in use today. Based on PHP & MySQL it includes a plug-in architecture and a template system. It is most associated with blogging but supports other types of web content. Highly flexible via plugin and templates.

- **Installation**: You can download and host it on your own servers, or use a third party managed hosting provider. There is also the option of hosting directly on WordPress' official cloud solution.

- **Translation**: Requires a translation plug-in at a cost of approx. US$120 per annum.

- **Advantages**: Extremely flexible, widely used, SEO friendly, multi-lingual via plug-ins (WPML), E-commerce via plug-ins (Woo Commerce), large developer base and well documented.

- **Disadvantages**: Third party plugins and themes can cause compatibility and/or security problems.

## Drupal Open Source CMS

- **Price**: Free

- **Technology**: Drupal is full featured PHP based CMS capable of powering large, complex websites.

- **Installation**: You can download and host it on your own servers if you have the internal skills available, or you can use one of the many managed hosting providers available on the official Drupal website. Perhaps slightly more technical to set-up than WordPress and with fewer plug-ins as it has a smaller market share.

- **Translation**: Multilingual support built-in, but for seamless translation; plugins are available at approx. US$120 per annum.

- **Advantages**: Flexibility, advanced taxonomy, SEO friendly, good security, multi-lingual built-in, Drupal Commerce, large developer base.

- **Disadvantages**: Steeper learning curve than other open source CMSs like WordPress, fewer existing template/theme choices.

## Conclusion

In Summary, for large multinational companies, we would recommend they take a close look at the reputable enterprise CMS solutions, as the speed of technological development, security and support is generally superior to open-source alternatives. However, if budget is constrained, WordPress and Drupal both offer a strong and reliable option and may come down to company specific requirements or skills available.