*Guide to buying a better*

# WEBSITE

build create

# OVERVIEW

## *Introduction*

# INTRODUCTION

**Buying a website is an ever-evolving task.** Technology changes, best practices get updated, and design trends come and go. Asking the right questions, however, never goes out of style.

By asking the right questions we can get a wealth of relevant information without having to stress over technical details or nuance. **Think of it like a litmus test.**

# PART I: WHICH CMS IS RIGHT FOR ME?

*The goal of every Content Management System (CMS) is the same:* make it possible to manage your site's content, and—in most cases—add additional functionality as well like contact forms, photo galleries, etc.

*Of course, some do it better than others.*

- *Well supported!*
- *A plentitude of developers available to work on it*
- *More third party plugins/themes to choose from*

## The State of CMS in 2018

When it comes to popularity and market share, WordPress is a clear winner. With hundreds of thousands of plugins and themes available and conferences happening around the world in any given month, WordPress has catapulted to the forefront of the CMS marketplace in recent years.
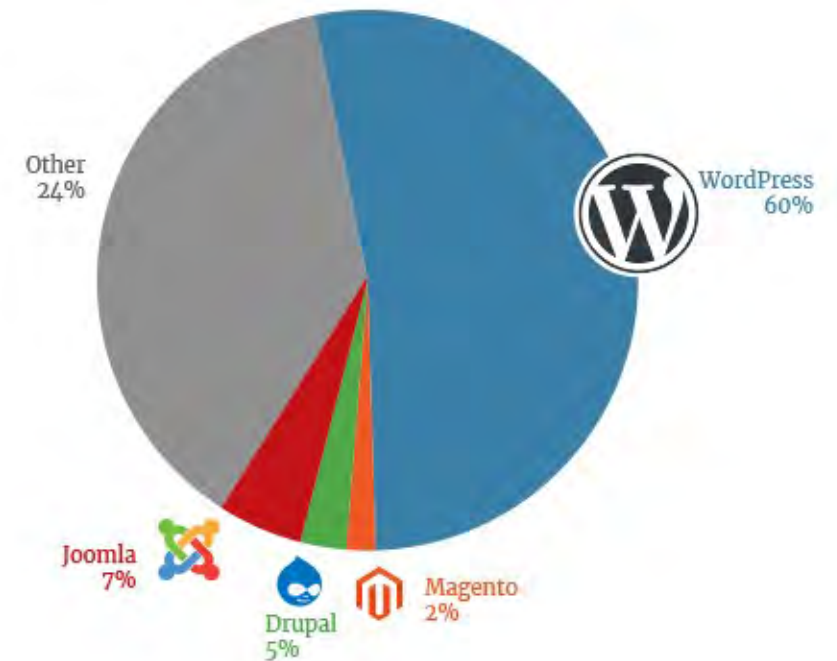
While Drupal is still a mainstay among certain large scale websites such as educational institutions, its market share has waned significantly in recent years with the majority of website-seekers.

Joomla has hovered around 7% for some time—declining slower than Drupal, but still in a downward trend due to lack of developer support.

Basically at this point WordPress is the first-choice CMS for most websites, but it's important to know that others do exist!



Other 24%

WordPress 60%

Joomla 7%

Drupal 5%

Magento 2%

# PART I: WHICH CMS IS RIGHT FOR ME?

*Make an informed decision* *by keeping these questions in your back pocket next time you're talking to a developer or agency about what CMS they use!*

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### WHICH CMS DO YOU USE?

This seems obvious, but on the off chance that the answer is "none" or "one we built ourselves," you'll be glad you asked so you can quietly excuse yourself from the meeting and escape through a side door.

Referring to the chart on the previous page, you're probably going to hear WordPress, Joomla, or Drupal.

If it isn't one of those, that's a red flag, and you're probably going to want to walk away.

### CAN YOU GIVE ME A DEMO?

**Seeing is believing!** If you plan on managing content yourself, rather than rattling off list of detailed questions, have them give you a guided tour of the CMS administrative interface and workflow.

You'll see for yourself how easy it is (or isn't), and see how familiar your prospective developer is as they navigate through the system. *Just because they use a good CMS doesn't mean they know how to use it to its potential!*

### CAN IT DO ECOMMERCE?

If you need ecommerce, make sure the CMS you're evaluating can handle it, and that the developer has experience working with it!

Ecommerce is a different animal—managing it in WordPress is a far cry from how it's done in Drupal. A great developer will do great work with any well-supported CMS, but talk through the specifics and ask for a demo to get a better idea of whether it will meet your needs long term.

# PART II: CHOOSE THE RIGHT DEVELOPER

*Competent developers should have no problem answering these 3 questions. Try them next time you're interviewing a development team:*

## HOW DO YOU STRUCTURE CONTENT?

This has everything to do with usability, user experience, and how well you'll get along with your website as it ages.

Your developer should be able to tailor their chosen CMS to your content needs, so everything goes in its right place. A competent web developer can explain how they do this to you in a way that makes sense and puts you in charge of your own content.

*If they can't, that's a red flag.*

## CAN YOU CONNECT TO MY OTHER WEB SERVICES?

Your organization probably has accounts with a few different third-party service providers, like a CRM database, file sharing service, or event manager. Does the developer know what to do with these to help create a seamless experience for you and your users?

An expert developer will have no problem integrating with third-party services which provide an interface for doing so. Less experienced developers will look more like a deer in headlights.
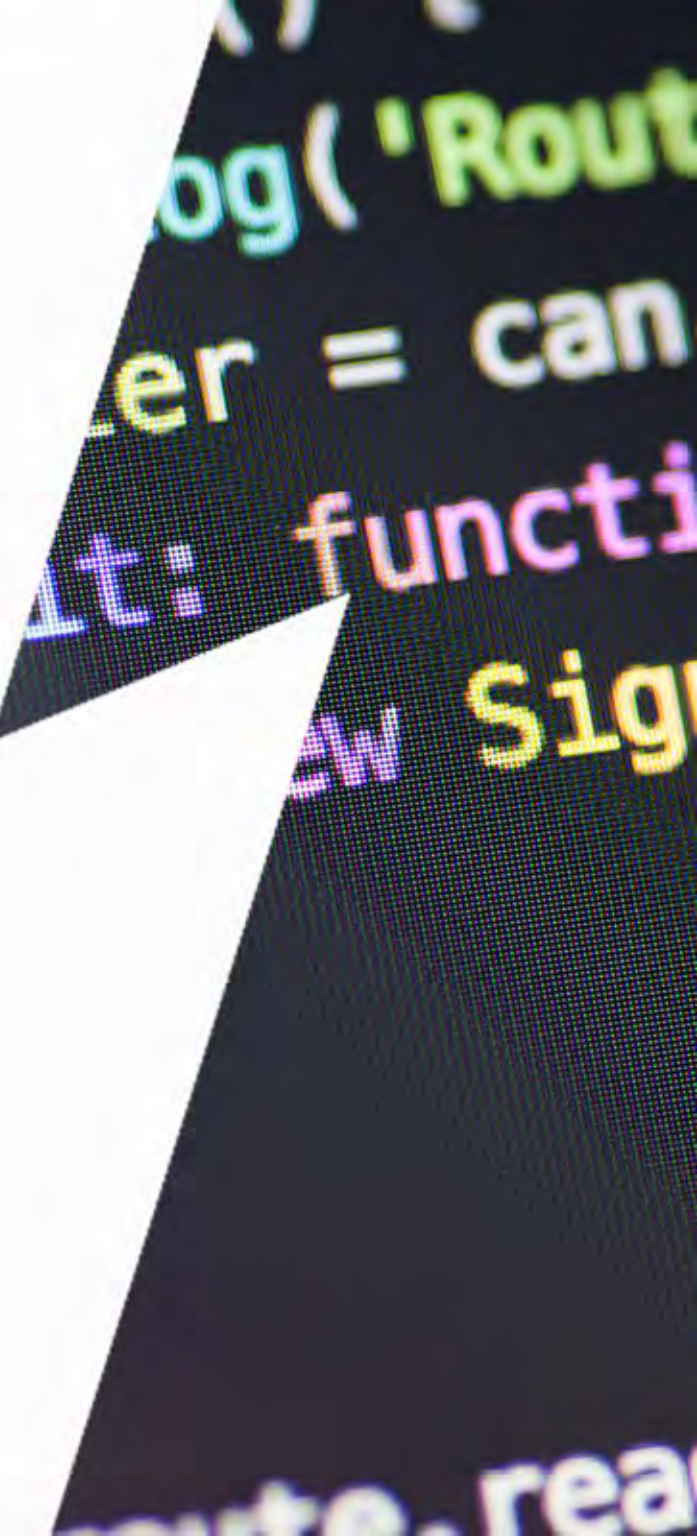
# **PART II:** CHOOSE THE RIGHT DEVELOPER

*Custom or Off-the-Shelf?* **The eternal question. Each approach has advantages to consider and pitfalls to avoid. But which one is best for you?**

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### CUSTOM OR OFF-THE-SHELF?

CMS's offer a lower point of entry for developers and it's important to test their competency.

Ask them if they've developed their own themes and plugins or modules, or if they build on existing frameworks.

If they don't build their own, that's a red flag. Folks who are able to develop custom work can build a website tailored to your business or organization.

### OFF-THE-SHELF SOLUTIONS
*Ex: Wix, Squarespace, weebly, Shopify*

A turnkey solution that's ready to use with a minimal investment of time can be a great solution. If this is the hurdle keeping you from launching a website for your small business—do it! When you need to get something up fast, this is often the only option —even if it's just a stopgap until you can devote time to a custom solution.

**The trouble comes when you want to add or change too much.** Every off-the-shelf product has its breaking point, where all you hear is a litany of "no." Are you ready to face that inevitability?

### CUSTOM WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT WITH CMS
*Ex: WordPress, Drupal, Joomla*

**A custom-developed website powered by a CMS is the highest-cost option, but has the highest return on investment.** You get a beautiful design tailored to your brand and purpose, customized content management that makes it easy to manage your sitemap, and an easy way to add new features.

The sky's the limit in terms of what your site can do, but the same goes for the price point, as adding features increases cost and development time.

# PART III: DEMYSTIFYING WEBSITE HOSTING

*Hosting is an aspect of your website that's shrouded in mystery, and often intentionally left vague. We're going to pull back the curtain.*

### SHARED, VPS, OR DEDICATED?

Shared hosting is the cheapest option, and it's worth every penny. It's like carpooling: you're all stuck going the same speed, and if one person gets sick, you're all getting sick.

Virtual private server, or VPS, hosting is a good middle ground that suits most clients. It keeps you safely isolated from other people's sites, gives you your own dedicated resources, and offers limitless customization.

Dedicated hosting is for when you hit the big time and need a lot more bandwidth, server resources, and storage. Unless you're a major corporation or hosting an application, this won't apply to you.

### DEMAND EXCELLENT SUPPORT.

A website host with a history of excellent support and a good live chat system will become your best friend.

These are the guys that can help you solve some website problems even if your developer isn't around to do it. And as a partner for your developer, they are an extension of the team that's making your website a reality.

### KNOW YOUR HOSTING.

While you don't necessarily need to have your name on the account, it's important to have access to your hosting and understand where your site is.

*Things you want access to:*
*Your Domain*
*cPanel*
*FTP Access*

# PART III: DEMYSTIFYING WEBSITE HOSTING

*Making your website live to the world is a process full of moving parts and boxes to tick– having a thorough checklist is critical!*

### PRE-LAUNCH

✔ Cross-browser & mobile testing

✔ Verify all content styles are present

✔ Check site for broken links or redirects

✔ Is your favicon present (?)

✔ Do you have a 404 page (?)

✔ Install & configure security measures

✔ Test all email (contact) forms

✔ Is your SEO checklist complete (?)

✔ Back up old website (if this is a redesign)

### POST-LAUNCH

✔ 301 redirects up and functioning if needed (?)

✔ Install Google Analytics

✔ Verify Google Webmaster Tools

✔ Test payment processing on live domain

✔ Test all email (contact) forms on live domain

✔ Are all the development passwords disabled (?)

### BONUS: OPTIMIZE IT!

✔ *Is the DNS on CloudFlare or another hosted DNS service* (?)

✔ *Set up on-site caching to reduce server load*

✔ *Enable HTTP compression on the server*

✔ *Install an image optimizer*

✔ *Minify all assets—CSS, JS, and HTML*

✔ *Host assets on a CDN (Photon, AWS, etc)*

# IN CONCLUSION

Tech changes every day. It's hard to stay on top of it.

The trick is knowing how to ask the right questions that will cut straight to the heart of the matter.

Questions for us? Reach out: info@buildcreate.com