

Choosing Content Management Technologies

For those working in libraries, archives, museums, galleries and other cultural institutions there is an increasing amount of software and hardware available to manage, catalogue, edit, store, retrieve, display and publish their content.

How can organisations choose a management system that's right for them?



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Organisations may use one or a combination of the following systems:

Collections management system

An organisation holds all of the original objects along with extensive and detailed metadata relating to description, provenance and conservation information. Popular collections management systems include Adlib, CALM and CollectiveAccess.

Content management system

A computer application, hosted by a third party, that allows the creation, editing and publishing of digital content online. Popular web CMSs include WordPress, Drupal and Joomla.

Digital asset management system

An organisation holds its digital assets, or the digitised surrogates of its physical objects. As well as images relating to the collections, the DAM might hold digital images such as organisational logos or photos of the gallery or museum. Examples include Gallery, Digital Collections GmbH and ResourceSpace.

2



Open Source v Proprietary Content Management Technologies

OSS, or Open Source software, is computer software developed in a collaborative way by a community of programmers using openly published code, and which is available for anyone to use. Proprietary software is computer software with protected code, which is licensed privately by commercial companies.

Open Source:

- Open Source Software (OSS) is often free, or subject to inexpensive licence fees.
- Help or technical support can often be found through an online community of volunteers (although an increasing number of OSS projects offer paid support).
- Because the source code is openly available, it is easier to adapt the software to suit your organisation's needs, as long as appropriate technical support is available to your organisation.
- The user can potentially fix problems or bugs immediately without having to wait for the next release of commercial software.

Proprietary:

- Proprietary software requires the payment of licensing fees which are generally higher than those associated with Open Source solutions.
- Proprietary software generally comes with a single, dedicated source of technical support, making it easier to contact someone if anything goes wrong.
- Proprietary software may be appropriate for organisations where staff lack technical skills and experience, especially in regard to implementation and maintenance.

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Requirements checklist

Draw up a list of requirements. Every organisation has different needs and it is important to understand these fully before committing to any one system over another. When your requirements gathering and analysis is complete, you should have the following:

Existing Legacy Data and Systems



An assessment of any legacy systems you may need to integrate with – for example an existing CMS or legacy cataloguing done in Excel spreadsheets or an Access database.



A decision on whether your new system will need to integrate with any existing software in your organisation or whether the new system can replace it entirely. The fewer systems deployed on site, the more effective a support team can be.

Organisational Support



A budget for the project.



An awareness of the level of IT support in your organisation, and whether staff time will be available to help set up and administer the new system.



An awareness of the IT and cataloguing skills of the potential users of the new CMS, and whether they will require training.



An understanding of the duration for this software choice (is it a short-term or long-term commitment by your organisation?). In the case of a short-term commitment, an exit plan will also be necessary.

Functionality of the new system



A list of the types of collection you will be managing with the new system, and the potential file formats you will need it to support (images, documents, audio-visual formats, etc.).



A decision on whether you need your software to be internal, public facing, or both, and whether it requires a web interface.



An overview of which metadata standards your new system should support.



An awareness of the potential number of users of the new system (this may affect the number of licences required for proprietary software).



A decision on whether you will need to export your data and metadata in standard formats, for example to allow interoperability with DRI or Europeana.



An assessment of the security and back-up solutions required for your data.



A decision on preferred hosting options for the data, whether local, third party or cloud, and how control and IP of the data are influenced by your choice.

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Research checklist

Undertake thorough research on the systems that are available. A great deal of information is freely available through software websites and wikis, community forums, Twitter, online journals, blogs and through other people working in your domain. When researching, some questions to consider are:



And finally, consider feeding your own experience and findings back into the community to help inform other organisations' research.

