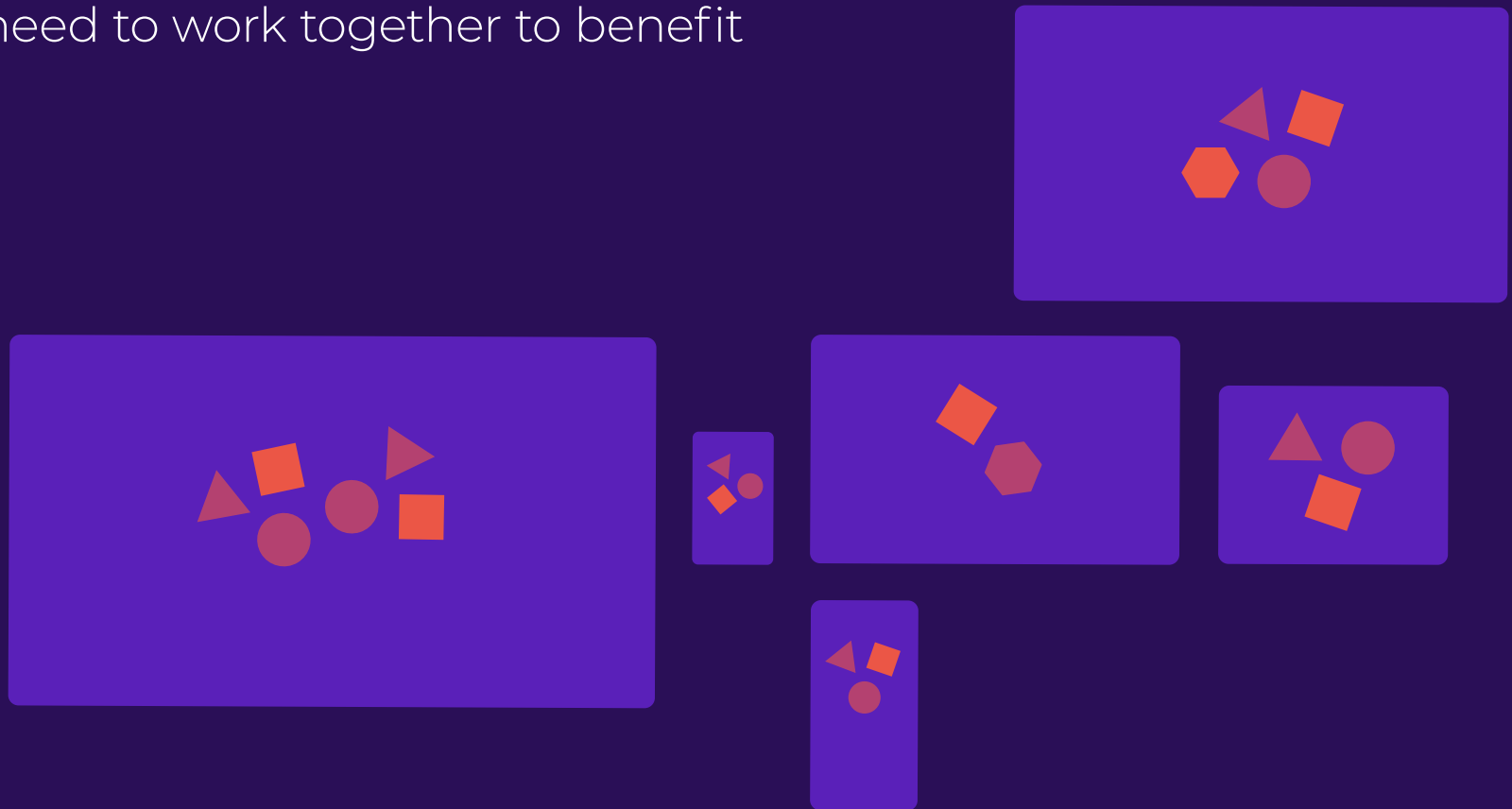


# Taking a New and Improved Approach to Content Delivery

Headless agile CMS improves customer and employee experiences, but IT and marketing teams need to work together to benefit



# Introduction

The world has changed, thanks in no small part to the proliferation of digital technology and a global pandemic that accelerated digital transformation by a decade or more. With the customer buying journey having been radically altered by these events, many best practices previously used to attract and retain consumers no longer work. The number of channels consumers use to interact with brands has exploded and companies need to change their approaches if they hope to deliver true omnichannel experiences and reach customers where they are. Content needs to evolve from generic to personalized, from static to dynamic. And of course, all of this needs to happen at speed.

Among this backdrop, content management systems (CMSs) have come under scrutiny as being potential roadblocks for meeting customers where they are. This is especially true for the legacy CMS, designed for a kinder, gentler internet and potentially unable or unsuitable for delivering content to all the channels consumers frequent. In this scenario, agile or headless content management systems have emerged as alternatives to traditional legacy systems. Over the past several years, headless has become a mainstream concept and is the direction the industry is headed. A headless CMS can clear the digital backlog, let experts be experts and reach audiences better than legacy systems.

Earlier this year, CMSWire partnered with Contentstack for the Headless CMS Awareness survey. We polled executives for their familiarity with the headless CMS, explored pain points with their current CMS and uncovered the challenges and outcomes of moving to a headless solution. We discovered that headless is here to stay, and it offers exciting new ways to connect businesses and consumers — but only if all invested parties work together.

## Key Findings

- **Omnichannel support** and **making content reusable** are key drivers behind changing CMS or exploring new CMS options
- The most common pain points respondents encounter with their current CMS are the **need to constantly upgrade** and **difficulty integrating their CMS with adjacent tools**
- The most important feature teams want in a CMS is an **improved user experience**

## Demographics in Brief

See Appendix for full demographics information.

The **Headless CMS Awareness** survey received 402 responses; 58% of survey respondents are at or above director level.

# Understanding the Benefits of a Headless CMS System

Headless content management systems provide a different way to author content from traditional legacy systems. The traditional CMS typically has only one output for content — usually a company website. Headless CMS systems work differently by providing content in the form of APIs to any external destination. Where a traditional CMS is usually coupled and self-hosted, a headless CMS is similar to a decoupled system and can be either hosted or available as Software-as-a-Service (SaaS). This allows content to be pushed to any number of channels, whether it's the website, a mobile app, social media or IoT-connected device.

How does this help? What are the perceived benefits of a headless CMS? Using a headless CMS can provide a host of benefits for improving both the customer and the employee experience. Many respondents turn to a headless CMS to help them improve both the customer and

employee experience, innovate their outreach and increase the speed at which they build new functionality (Figure 1).

## Getting departments to work together

Given the varied benefits of using headless one might think switching to this system is a no-brainer, but it doesn't always work that way. There's a constant tug of war going on between business and technical audiences regarding technology that persists no matter how much these departments try to work together. Both business and technical users believe the other side understands what their specific needs are, but despite this they don't want to work together to make decisions about what technology or tools to adapt and use. This could be due to each department having different agendas or a conflicting understanding about the speed of business.

Whatever the reason, getting business and technical users to work together is a persistent issue, one that should be resolved as effectively as possible. While IT and Marketing teams both understand the advantages of a headless system, they don't always trust the other to make purchasing decisions.

Digging deeper into where users don't want to work together is a key first step in bringing them to see eye to eye. With IT and Marketing departments both having a vested interest in CMS, it's no wonder we see this interdepartmental tension coming through when the time comes to choose new tools. A majority of each group would prefer to choose the CMS without the involvement of the other. While IT is slightly more likely than Marketing to want to go it alone with their CMS purchases, both groups aren't too keen on wanting to involve the other in decisions surrounding a new CMS.

### Why Go Headless?



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### If given the option, would we prefer to select the CMS without the involvement of the other side?

65% of IT respondents say

YES

51% of Marketing respondents say

YES

## Successful omnichannel marketing demands collaboration

One of the main reasons technical and business leaders need to work together is due to the rise of omnichannel marketing. Thanks to the proliferation in areas where consumers can engage with brands, omnichannel has become the default way to engage with consumers.

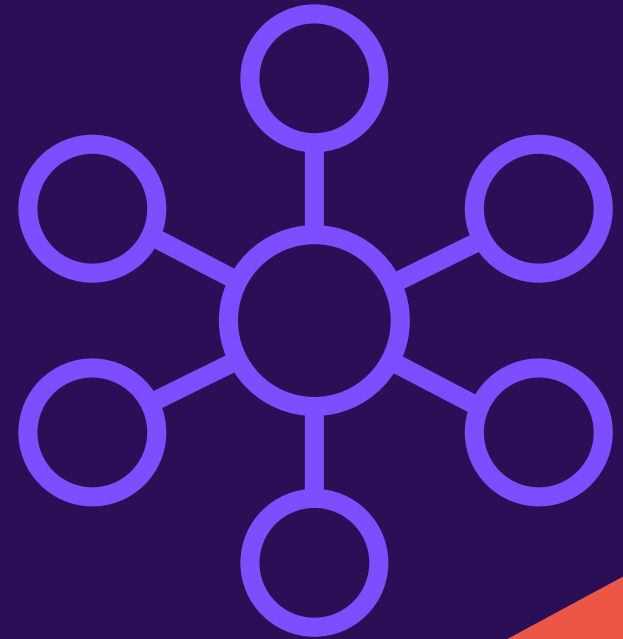
### Consumers these days interact with brands by:

- Shopping at physical stores
- Ordering products online
- Interacting with a company's social channels
- All of the above

Successful omnichannel marketing means going beyond the company website and mobile app to engage with consumers on their terms. Companies will need to reach consumers through nearly every device imaginable — desktop, tablet, mobile device, smartwatch and many, many more.

Reaching consumers this way will require a headless CMS, which means your teams will need to work together to implement and use this new technology. It is possible to solve the needs of your technical developers without sacrificing the needs of your business users. Equality matters, and there's no reason to think that both sides can't be happy.

Consumers are already interacting with brands across devices and platforms. According to research, 59% of consumers research products online before making an in-store purchase, while omnichannel strategies drive incremental store visits by as much as 80%. Bottom line: omnichannel is here to stay and is the key driver of digital strategies. To improve omnichannel support, IT and Marketing teams should work together and meet consumers where they are.



## The Pain Points of Using a Traditional CMS

Where do teams struggle with using their legacy system? Knowing the pain points departments face with their current CMS is necessary when evaluating potential replacements.

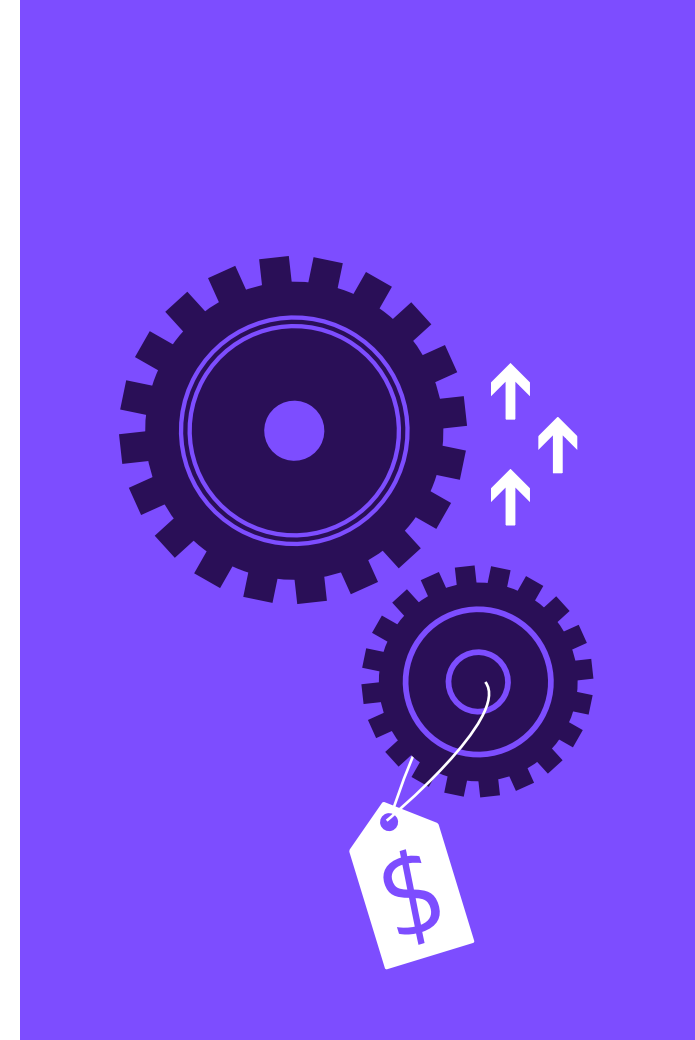
Top pain points include a total cost of CMS ownership that is too high coupled with a perceived inability to develop new functionality quickly enough. These are common issues with legacy systems that weren't necessarily designed for the quick agile measures that today's content requires.

Another consistent pain point for many users of current systems is the perceived difficulty in upgrading the CMS. Upgrades are painful and frequently take weeks. This is one area where headless has an advantage over legacy systems. Because headless systems are often SaaS and cloud-based, their upgrades happen faster than with a locally hosted system. Cloud upgrades are seamless and always on, making upgrades one less thing to worry about.

### Common pain points include:

- High cost of ownership
- Slow ability to develop new functionality
- CMS needs upgrading
- Difficulty integrating with adjacent tools
- Need to consolidate multiple CMSs

Integration is another pain point with legacy systems and another area where headless has an advantage. Legacy systems might not have been purpose built for easy integration with other tools in a martech stack — instead being limited to the systems' own suite. But today's marketing is made up of stacks, not suites. Today's teams want best of breed solutions and they want everything to talk to one another. Its ease of integration with other systems is a key advantage for a headless CMS over traditional systems. Headless is usually designed using MACH architecture (employing a microservices base, API first, cloud native and headless system), allowing companies to have a headless best-of-breed approach and exceptional digital experience.



**FIGURE 1: Top reasons for sticking with the current CMS** (all respondents)



# Evaluating Headless' Ability to Achieve Operational Goals

When evaluating a new headless CMS solution, companies need to understand what they want to achieve with any new technology solution and evaluate how headless will help them achieve that goal. Knowing what your teams hope to accomplish is critical for ensuring success.

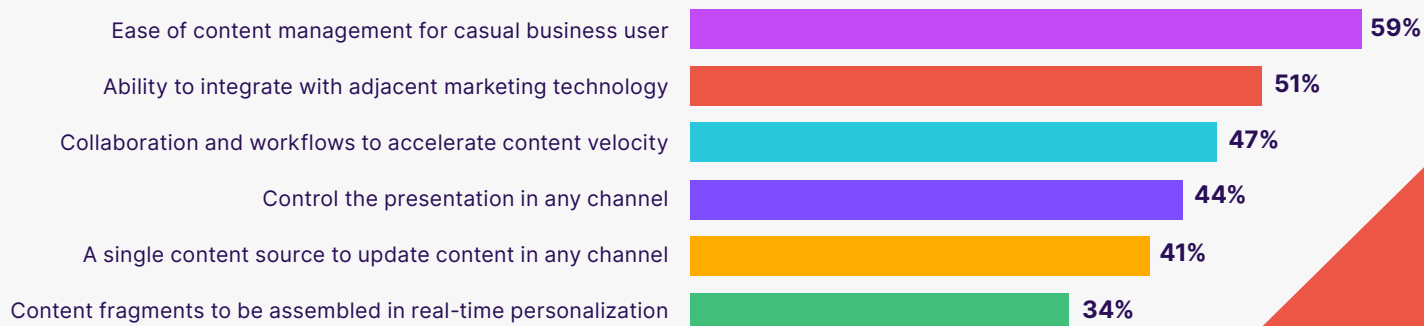
According to survey respondents, one of the most important features in a CMS is improving the user experience. The employee experience also matters and it goes beyond your developers — your business teams will be using the tool as well and they need the experience to be as painless as possible. Your headless CMS should be easy to use on both sides.

## Objectives and drivers of moving to a headless CMS

Among survey respondents, those who plan to move to headless say the primary drivers are improving customer experience (57%) and the ability to innovate (56%). There's also some differences between IT and marketing teams in their motivations for moving to a new system. IT teams are more likely to want to move to headless to improve the customer experience, while marketing teams want to move to headless more for the ability to innovate.

**IT teams want to move to headless to improve the customer experience; marketing teams want the ability to innovate.**

**FIGURE 2: CMS capabilities critical to achieving organizational goals** (all respondents)

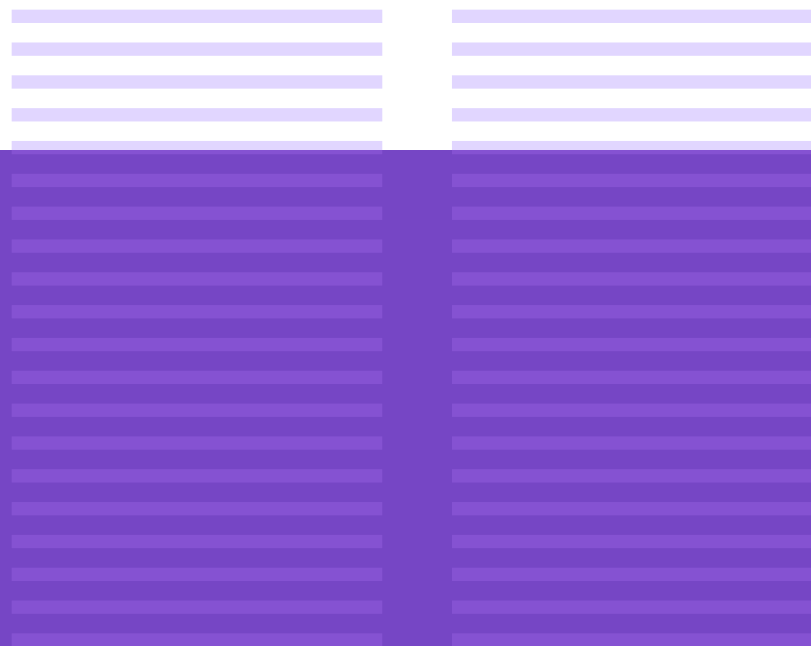


# IT and Marketing: Competing Perspectives on the Pros and Cons of a Headless CMS

When it comes to making the switch from a traditional to a headless CMS, your two main sets of stakeholders are your IT and marketing departments. But as we've seen elsewhere in the survey research, the two groups don't always see eye to eye regarding the direction a CMS upgrade should go. For example, IT teams are more likely than marketing teams to call a headless CMS "the inevitable direction of CMS technology in the future." IT teams are also more likely to believe that a headless CMS is great for developers.

On the other hand, marketing teams are more likely than their IT counterparts to insist that a headless CMS is the only way to power true omnichannel experiences. Given that traditional CMS was purpose built for websites and might not be best equipped to deliver content to the myriad of channels where customers interact with brands, marketing teams may be on to something (Figure 3).

**52%** of IT teams call the headless CMS the inevitable direction of CMS technology.



**FIGURE 3: Opinions on a headless CMS** (by department)

A headless CMS is...	IT	Marketing
The inevitable direction of CMS technology in the future	52%	39%
Great for developers	41%	31%
Too immature a technology	31%	15%
The only way to power omnichannel experiences	16%	23%

## Why make the switch? Different departments, different answers

In addition to their differing opinions on the state of the headless CMS, IT and marketing teams are equally divided in their concerns switching to a headless system. Marketing teams are more like you say that a headless system is too technical for business users — although IT teams seem to have more faith in their marketing counterparts than the marketers themselves. For their part, IT is more likely to be satisfied with their current CMS, believe that transitioning to a headless system would be too time-consuming and hold the opinion that the headless CMS is too new to be robust enough for their needs. This aligns with IT's earlier statement that headless is not mature enough of a technology for their liking (Figure 4).

When viewing the research by department, it's clear to see that IT and Marketing teams have widely divergent pain points with their current CMS.

### For example, IT teams:

- Shopping at physical stores
- Are more likely to feel that their current CMS needs upgrading
- Believe that it's too difficult to integrate their current CMS with adjacent tools

### On the other hand, marketing teams:

- Are more likely to say that their current abilities are too slow to reach the market effectively
- Feel unable to control the customer experience across every channel (Figure 5).

**FIGURE 4: Organizational concerns about switching to a headless Agile CMS** (by department)

Concern	IT	Marketing
Too technical for business users	31%	37%
Too new to be robust enough	31%	24%
Satisfied with existing CMS	31%	26%
Too time-consuming	22%	15%



**FIGURE 5: Pain points with current CMS** (by department)

Pain point	IT	Marketing
Our current CMS version needs upgrading	36%	25%
Our content velocity is too slow	19%	25%
Integration with adjacent tools is too hard	33%	24%
We cannot control our content and experiences across every channel	9%	17%





## Conclusion

As long as the internet has existed in its modern form there has been a need for content management systems to manage every asset and content piece found on the web. In both traditional and modern content management, the content management system is at the center of a technology ecosystem.

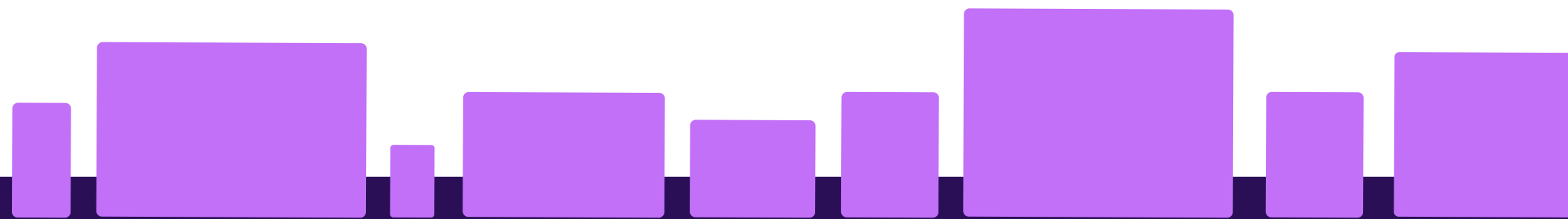
So what's changed? These days there's a need to reach customers on a variety of different channels that go beyond the company's web page. With many legacy CMSs purpose-built for a simpler internet, they often aren't equipped to handle today's omnichannel experiences that consumers expect. A headless CMS that deploys

**The legacy CMS isn't equipped to handle today's omnichannel experiences that customers demand and expect.**

content through APIs is better equipped to handle the speed at which companies need to get new content to potential customers.

We're entering an age where stacks, not suites, are the future. While you need to solve the needs of your technical developers, it can't come at the expense of your business users. Equality matters, but there's no reason to think that both sides can't be happy. By giving full attention to both technical and business users, your company will be better equipped to evaluate the headless CMS and determine if it answers the needs of your stakeholders and can help deliver your content to meet your customers where they are.

The legacy CMS isn't equipped to handle today's omnichannel experiences that customers demand and expect.



# Appendix

## Demographics

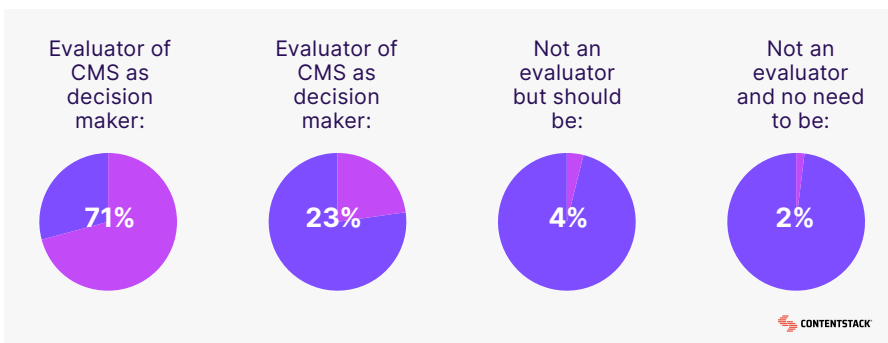
**Name of survey:** Headless CMS Awareness

**Survey dates:** May-June 2021

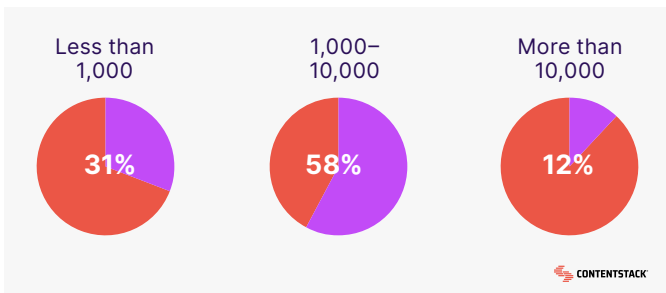
**Respondents:** 402

**Functional level of respondents:** 58% at or above director level

**Evaluation duties of respondents:**



**Organization size:**



Statistics may not total 100% due to rounding.

# About



**Contentstack®** – the pioneering Agile Content Management System – empowers marketers and developers to collaborate around content like never before. Together, they can orchestrate superior customer journeys and deliver dynamic digital experiences across channels, audiences, brands and regions. Companies such as Chase, Express, Mattel, McDonald’s, Mitsubishi, Holiday Inn, Icelandair, Riot Games, Sephora and Shell trust Contentstack to power their most critical content experiences. Famous for its **Care Without Compromise™**, Contentstack has the industry’s highest customer satisfaction.



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Our obsessions: next generation digital customer experiences, navigating the r/evolution of work and advancing enterprise learning.