

IS WORDPRESS RIGHT FOR ME?

WordPress began as a popular blogging platform that morphed into something bigger. This white paper explores whether some organization's choice to use WordPress helps or hurts their ability to manage a secure, well-functioning website.



Is WordPress Right for Me?

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WordPress emerged as a dominant force in casual blogging and open-source content management in the early 2000s.

Many individuals, entrepreneurs, and small businesses love its simple design and large, open, user community. Other organizations, typically those with more complex sites, diverse user bases, and functional requirements are initially drawn to the no cost aspect of WordPress but are later frustrated by several factors that negatively impact their experience.

In this piece, we'll discuss the ins and outs of WordPress to help you determine whether it's the right choice for your organization.

We have also included helpful stats and information about content consumption, digital marketing, and changes in web design that may influence your approach to content management. No matter which CMS you choose or currently use, we hope you benefit from this information.

This white paper covers:

The product and its history

The allure of 'free' open source systems

The reality of managing sites with WordPress

Alternatives for organizations with robust content management needs

IS WORD PRESS RIGHT FOR ME?

IT DEPENDS

CHAPTER 1:

The Product & It's History

WordPress boasts a large, global user-base and is even behind some popular websites you may know. While this information can certainly help build your case for using WordPress, it only tells half the story about the system. Under the right circumstances, WordPress can be a great tool that meets the needs of certain organizations. However, different circumstances and resources almost certainly leads to different outcomes.

Learning more about a system's history, evolution, and current capabilities can provide more context for brief marketing messages or one-sided bullet points. In this section, we'll discuss a bit about WordPress, its history, and the impact both have on the product's performance.

SECTIONS

How WordPress works

More about WordPress' history

How WordPress and other open source systems can impact organizations

How WordPress Works



Did you know?

70% of Wordpress sites are vulnerable to attack due to issues caused by Plugins and Themes

WordPress is an open-source software system anyone can download for free and use to build websites and manage content. Individuals can choose from pre-built template themes to establish the look and feel of their site or import custom code to get started. Numerous plugins and widgets add functionality to the base product, but must be updated regularly to avoid issues in the future.

WordPress' DIY approach to site creation, management, and security can be an attractive proposition to organizations with ample resources to support sites. Those with limited coding capabilities, time, or patience may find that WordPress isn't the right solution for them.

WordPress to Users:

BRING YOUR OWN EVERYTHING



SUPPORT: The WordPress support team offers general fixes but is nowhere near as big as it needs to be to support its millions of users, let alone enterprises that rely on the system. Subsequently, if large organizations don't also have a large web staff available to manage WordPress, they may be forced to hire one of many expensive consultancies to help them manage sites.



CONTENT REUSE: WordPress makes sharing content across sites unnecessarily cumbersome, and charges a fee for the privilege. This can be an issue for those managing several related sites or integrated messaging platforms.



SECURITY MEASURES: While WordPress offers base level security measures and some remediation efforts following attacks, users must plan to protect their own sites. Why? Because more than 70% of top WordPress sites are vulnerable to attack. Insecure Plugins and Themes are often to blame, though using outdated versions of WordPress can also cause security issues.

WordPress' History

Founders Matt Mullenweg and Mike Little created WordPress to make personal publishing simple for individuals. Over time, WordPress transformed into a larger system with more features and functions that change how it can be used. While these modifications help make WordPress functional for large, more complex organizations, many continue to view WordPress as a tool better suited for blogs rather than enterprise websites.

4 Things You Must Know About WordPress

WordPress was created in 2003

WordPress was built on PHP and MySQL

WordPress is self-described as the 'largest self-hosted blogging tool in the world'


WordPress is community-based and supported as an open-source project

How WordPress & Other Open Source Systems Can Impact Organizations

Organizations with several sites or more complex content management needs typically employ large internal teams to manage WordPress or employ expensive consultants to do the same. Those that do not have sufficient internal capabilities or budgets to support external teams are left creating patches to make sites work with varying degrees of success.

Now that we understand more about WordPress, its history and how using WordPress can impact organizations, let's explore why some companies choose it instead of proprietary CMSs. In the next chapter, we'll look at some of the main reasons organizations implement WordPress. We'll examine each potential benefit to discover how it may help or hurt teams.





CHAPTER 2:

The Allure of Free, Open Source Systems

Perceptions around cost, control, and functionality make WordPress and other free, open-source solutions seem better than their proprietary counterparts. Often, these perceptions are based either on insufficient information. In this chapter, we will explore why some of the main reasons people love open-source systems may not apply to certain organizations.

SECTIONS

A 'no cost' system

The desire for control

Simple user interface

Speedy deployment

A 'No Cost' System

When budgets are tight, most organizations' knee-jerk reaction might be to seek solutions that help them run their businesses more economically. While price is certainly an important factor for any purchase, it must be weighed against outcomes and performance. In some instances, selecting no, or low-cost options can end up costing companies a great deal more than anticipated. This is especially true when price overshadows performance, functionality, and support.

There are no licensing fees associated with the use of WordPress. This is likely a huge motivator for budget-conscious organizations. The trade off, in many cases, is a free software system that often requires intensive (and expensive) maintenance in order for the site to function. Many overlook this and fail to consider how ancillary costs related to the creation, maintenance and support of sites add to the overall cost of owning--or in this case using--a CMS.

+
COSTS THAT
COME WITH
FREE
OPEN-SOURCE
SYSTEMS

Per Site Cost of
Supporting WordPress
with Consultants

\$1788

Average Cost for Site
Development for
WordPress

\$26,400

Average Salary of Web
Developer

\$64,970

The Desire for Control

No organization wants to entrust the complete reliability and security of their websites to unknown entities. Sadly, when companies use WordPress, or other open-source systems, that's exactly what they're doing. Under the guise of maintaining control and security, some opt to keep software maintenance and security completely in house either by using a proprietary system, open-source solution, or no CMS at all. Although this solution certainly achieves control, it also presents new challenges for sites and the internal teams that maintain them.

A Challenge for Sites:

WordPress was built for blogging so remnants of its foundations present barriers for site development. Users must find and implement themes, plugins and other modifiers to gain the same functionality they'd see in base versions of other products.

Examples:

- Sites may be unavailable to users due to maintenance errors
- Missed or incomplete updates frequently cause issues with site functionality
- There are a whole host of common errors that can hinder site performance

Plugins, Themes & Vulnerability

While users are not required to use Plugins or Themes on sites, many do to enhance sites and offer features most users expect. WordPress' more than 50,000 Plugins help users provide forms, analyze site data and translate their sites into various languages. Here's what they risk by doing so.

54%

WordPress Plugins
vulnerable to attack

31.5%

WordPress Themes
linked to security
issues

14.3%

Vulnerabilities linked
to outdated versions
of WordPress

A Challenge for Teams:

Instead of allowing web teams to focus on how technology can add value to their offering, improve customer experience, or outperform the competition, organizations that use WordPress focus their teams on maintaining and updating websites.

Considering how competitive the market is for attracting and retaining top tech talent, this approach may not be an effective strategy. Talented individuals should use their skills to tackle complex issues, not on rote tasks that can be automated.

Examples:

Regular individual updates for each plugin

Configuration of plugin updates with theme updates or changes

Hiding deactivated plugins to avoid issues or site failures

Simple User Interface

In 2003, when WordPress was introduced, few systems rivaled it in the market and even fewer were accessible to non-technical users. However, these days many CMSs offer a modern, intuitive user interface that makes content creation easy and simple regardless of end-user ability. Convenient features like drag-and-drop file uploads, native image editing, and WYSIWYG content fields are common features of open source and proprietary systems.

Viewing WordPress as a leading system because of its UI ignores more than a decade of technological advancement in content management. Today's leading systems not only offer a simple UI, but also in-system collaboration, engagement triggers, and customization options that help teams publish fresh content faster.

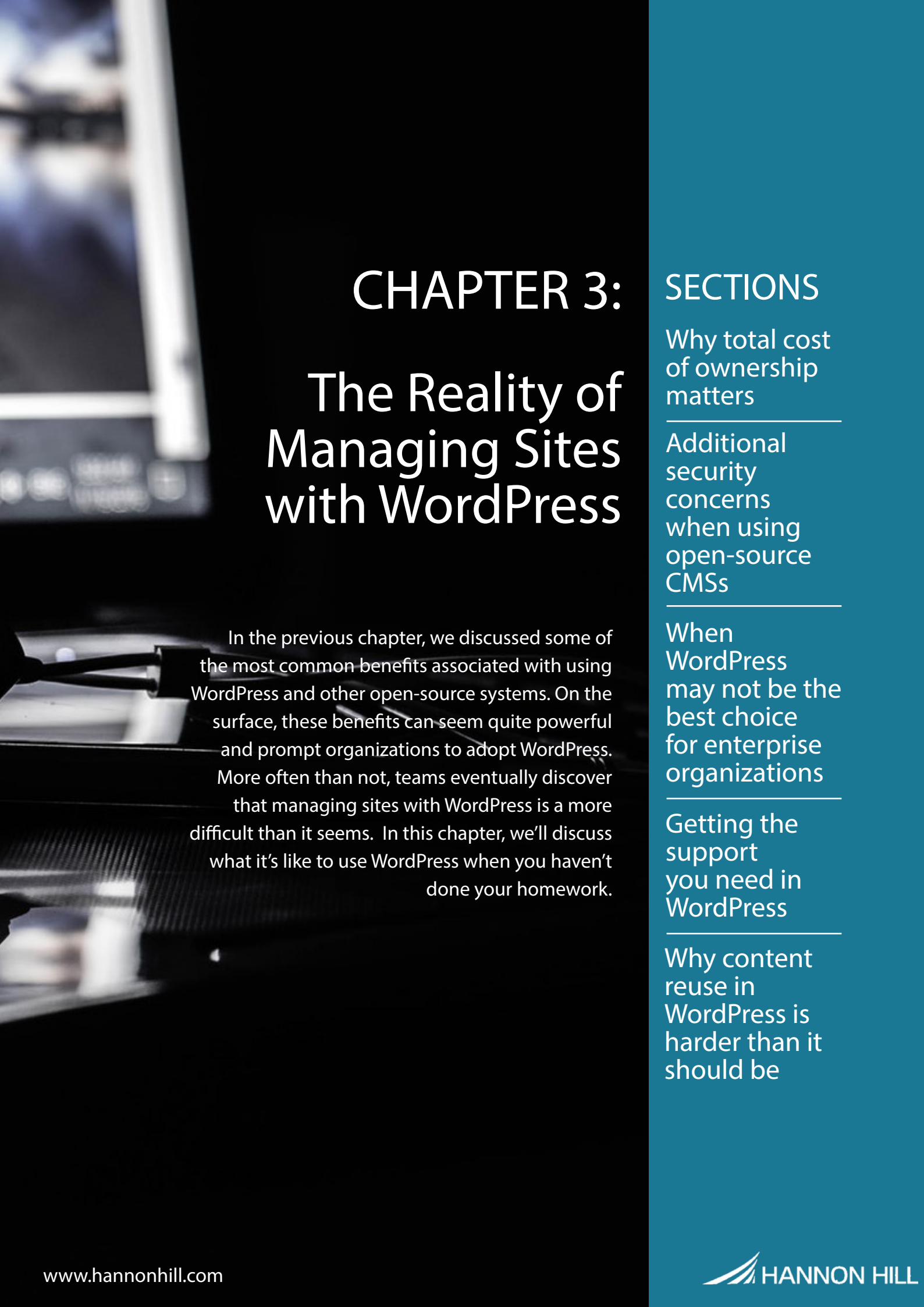
Speedy Deployment

WordPress advocates regularly tout the speed at which new sites can be deployed as a leading benefit for the system. While this is surely a plus for small business owners itching to establish themselves online or lean organizations pressed for time, it does not necessarily apply to large organizations who prefer to develop a more extensive strategy and make decisions more carefully. Sure, developing new sites or redesigning existing ones can't drone on forever, but adequate time must be invested in ensuring appropriate site functionality.

Prioritizing the speed at which new sites are produced over their ultimate performance is not a viable strategy for most organizations. Inconsistent branding, poor user experience and other issues can reflect negatively on your ability to serve customers. Investing time in planning, designing, and testing sites is essential for large organizations.

In the next chapter, we'll look at what it is like to manage sites in WordPress for large organizations.





CHAPTER 3:

The Reality of Managing Sites with WordPress

In the previous chapter, we discussed some of the most common benefits associated with using WordPress and other open-source systems. On the surface, these benefits can seem quite powerful and prompt organizations to adopt WordPress. More often than not, teams eventually discover that managing sites with WordPress is a more difficult than it seems. In this chapter, we'll discuss what it's like to use WordPress when you haven't done your homework.

SECTIONS

Why total cost of ownership matters

Additional security concerns when using open-source CMSs

When WordPress may not be the best choice for enterprise organizations

Getting the support you need in WordPress

Why content reuse in WordPress is harder than it should be

Why total cost of ownership matters

There's no denying that the cost of any software plays a major role in how it is evaluated and whether or not it is adopted. At first glance, WordPress, and other no-upfront-costs, open source solutions may be free but what other costs do you stand to incur implementing and maintaining the system?

As noted in the previous chapter, there are several additional costs associated with creating and maintaining a website with WordPress. Failing to anticipate and account for these additional expenditures may inhibit your organization down the road. It's always good to these and other potential costs impact how much you pay to use a 'free' system.

What to measure when calculating the total cost of ownership:

- Web Hosting
- Site design
- Added security and backup measures
- System maintenance
- Product support costs
- Training

Additional security concerns when using open source CMSs

As a global open-source platform, WordPress is often the target of various cyber attacks that can disrupt site functionality, prevent user access, or change your site's appearance. In April of 2017 alone, cyber criminals targeted Wordpress sites in over 137 million attacks. These attacks are mounted by cyber criminals from around the world and exploit vulnerabilities in Wordpress' Themes and Plugins. Without additional security measures to protect your information and brand identity, your organization is vulnerable to any number of issues associated with the platform. WordPress was built for blogs and can work for other site types. That said, just because it can function for other purposes, doesn't necessarily mean it should.

Know Before You Go Open-Source:

What's The Total Cost of Ownership?



DESIGN



SECURITY



MAINTENANCE



TRAINING



WEB HOSTING

When WordPress May Not Be the Best Choice for Enterprise Organizations

Every business has unique needs and challenges that impact how it interacts with customers. Solutions that are customized to meet these needs can bridge the gap between what companies need and what software systems deliver. Solutions that were built for complex sites and large organizations offer so many features to meet the demand of these companies. Teams benefit by spending less time finding work arounds and more time improving their business.

Getting the Support You Need in WordPress

Even if you have the technical skills needed to get your WordPress site up and running, you'll still need to determine how to support it. WordPress offers modest first-line support options to all users but the quality of support you receive can vary. WordPress' large global user base and countless sites inhibits their ability to quickly resolve individual issues. These service and support limitations may prompt some users to seek help elsewhere.

The unique expertise associated with supporting and maintaining WordPress sites has given way to a niche of expensive consultancies to fill the void. The themes and plugins alone create substantial work. Because WordPress plugins are open source, each one is updated independently and can cause problems within your site if not carefully managed. This issue is complicated by the lack of a dependency manager to help users track and schedule updates for plugins to avoid site issues.

Why Content Reuse in WordPress is Harder Than it Should Be

WordPress' design requires each site to be self-contained. That means that there is no easy way to share or distribute information across sites. This can present a major challenge for large, distributed organizations that need to leverage content reuse to achieve their goals.

To facilitate content distribution, WordPress users either have to:

1. Manually distribute content across sites: opportunities for human error
2. Implement and maintain modules or connectors that link sites and share information

Now that we understand some of the real challenges associated with managing sites in Wordpress, let's review alternatives.

CHAPTER 4:

Alternatives for Organizations with Robust Content Management Needs

Content management systems have evolved a great deal within the last decade. Hundreds of vendors from around the world have developed systems that suit everyone from individual bloggers to multinational conglomerates. The sheer number of systems available means organizations have their pick of vendors, products, and specialized functions to choose from. This can be a gift or a curse, depending on your ability to navigate a crowded product market.

In this chapter, we'll learn more about the various alternatives available to those considering WordPress. We explore a bit about the power of choice, the merits of specialized systems, and review some of the changes that define contemporary systems.

SECTIONS

The power of choice

The merits of specialized systems

Features that define leading systems

The Power of Choice

In recent years, the volume and variety of CMSs has exploded. According to one study, the total number of marketing technology products has surpassed 5000 individual systems. CMSs account for more than 200 of those products and are expected to continue growing as more businesses and individuals establish a presence Online.

Tech startups, communication companies, and media

conglomerates have created solutions that help users engage with complementary tools. As a result, companies and individuals have hundreds of options to choose from to help them create attractive and engaging websites. These systems offer many of the same benefits of WordPress like ease-of-use and customization with fewer headaches (site security, constant updates/patches). Open user forums

and feedback channels offer important insights about product functions that save users time and energy when reviewing products. Savvy decision makers can use these resources to help them navigate the crowded CMS market. Free trial offers and 'freemium' service options provide critical opportunities to test out systems before committing to one.

The Merits of Specialized Systems

Different companies have different customers that also have different needs. These needs impact how their websites must function to attract customers and drive business. Some CMSs are built with specific industries or organizations in mind and can help them achieve their business goals better than generic solutions.

Features That Define Leading Systems

As we learned earlier, CMSs have changed a great deal since the early 2000s and many can match or best WordPress in many important areas. Some of WordPress' key differentiators no longer apply as they are hallmarks of many modern systems.

Web administrators, editors, content contributors and the like have long driven product development in this area, and they expect more from CMSs. The process of continuous improvement has led to the development of dynamic systems that offer teams new ways to achieve better results. Often, organizations can leverage their new CMS to create better content more quickly while allowing their technical resources to focus on more challenging initiatives.

COMMON FEATURES OF LEADING SYSTEMS

Intuitive User Interface

Unlimited Support

Customizable Dashboards

Task Management

Robust Base Functionality

In-system Collaboration

Built-in Safeguards

Campaign Management

Advanced Security Measures

Personalization

Best-of-breed Storage Solutions

Custom Groups and Roles

SUMMARY

No matter what draws you to WordPress, it's always good to review several systems before determining which one is best. Some CMS providers roll out product updates several times a year and include new features in each one. Chances are, older versions of systems you may have demoed in the past have changed a great deal and may have something substantial to offer your organization.

As you learn more about the various types of CMSs and what they can do, try to focus on the key benefits and outcomes that are important to your team. Different features appeal to different users and that is why it is so important to review several systems. No software is the right fit for all situations, but completing thorough, informed reviews will help you determine which solution is most appropriate.

If you're ready to learn more about Cascade CMS, contact us today for a quick conversation. Our team is ready to answer your questions about the features and options we offer to help your team excel.

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ABOUT CASCADE CMS

Cascade CMS is an award-winning content management solution that brings more flexibility to the creation, management and syndication of web content. Cascade CMS helps administrators, developers, marketers, and contributors throughout large, distributed organizations create and maintain better websites with specific features designed to empower each group. To learn more about how marketers, contributors and organizations win with Cascade CMS, visit our website. We offer case studies, testimonials, and plenty of examples of how clients do more with Cascade CMS.

ABOUT HANNON HILL

Hannon Hill is the creator of Cascade CMS an award-winning content management system that takes enterprise web strategy to the next level. Cascade CMS powers more than 24,000 sites and servers and provides support to over 90,000 users around the world. Hannon Hill partners with leading organizations across industries to support dynamic websites focused on their users. Hannon Hill is a leading provider of CMS software in higher education. We are proud to support leading institutions from around the world. To learn more about Hannon Hill, visit www.hannonhill.com or email us at info@hannonhill.com.