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Web Content Management And Open Source

Answers To Frequently Asked Questions

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As organizations embark on next-generation Web content management (WCM) initiatives, they want to avoid the mistakes made in earlier, more costly WCM projects. As a result, information and knowledge management (I&KM) professionals increasingly show an interest in open source WCM as a way of controlling software costs and increasing their access to product-specific expertise in the marketplace. This document answers frequently asked questions about the role that open source plays in the WCM market.

QUESTIONS

1. Which vendors offer relevant open source WCM solutions?
2. What do I&KM pros think about their companies' open source WCM implementations?
3. What are the common characteristics of teams implementing open source WCM?
4. How should organizations evaluate open source WCM?
5. How will open source impact the WCM market?

ENTERPRISES SHOW INTEREST IN OPEN SOURCE WCM

Numerous open source WCM offerings exist in the marketplace as open source vendors, projects, and communities try to capitalize on dissatisfaction with commercial, vendor-driven, first-generation WCM initiatives.¹ Many organizations have perceived past WCM initiatives to be high-cost, low-business-impact projects. Dissatisfaction, plus the perception of low value in their outdated or highly customized systems, has many organizations contemplating heading down the open source WCM path. But I&KM pros should keep the following questions in mind when thinking about open source WCM.

1. Which vendors offer relevant open source WCM solutions?

The key word in this question is *relevant*. For an open source WCM vendor to be relevant, it must have a satisfactory product offering, proven enterprise-level implementations, and a large — and passionate — community of developers and service providers. Currently, enterprises interested in open source should keep an eye on two offerings — Alfresco Software and Drupal — because:



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- **Both have taken pages from the commercial vendors' playbooks.** Alfresco has a pedigree — former executives from EMC Documentum and Business Objects co-founded it — and it has recruited senior staff from commercial WCM vendors Interwoven and Vignette. It also recently secured \$9 million in funding from the venture capital arm of SAP, giving it some momentum relative to other open source vendors.² Unlike Alfresco, Drupal was not funded by a sole commercial vendor, but startup company Acquia has secured \$7 million in funding to bring a commercial version of Drupal to the marketplace.³ This will allow it to offer some of the advantages typically associated with commercial vendors: support, scalability, experienced sales teams, and user conferences.
- **Technologists praise the product architectures.** Unlike some of its commercial counterparts — which have been ported to different languages with mixed results — Alfresco's WCM solution was Java-based from the beginning, and technologists like the fact that it is not the product of a re-engineering process. Drupal's proponents praise the product's open architecture, which has facilitated the authoring of literally thousands of community-written add-on modules that provide features like blogs and community discussion forums. The potential for interoperability with other software solutions is also appealing: One IT director using Alfresco said: "We felt that it would not disrupt our other platforms, whereas commercial vendors want to sell you the big product stack and lock you in. We were just interested in WCM with no dependencies — something we could integrate well with our other systems. We have the option of being able to do things ourselves."
- **Both have strong professional communities.** One CTO using Alfresco commented on the enthusiasm of its professional community, which he investigated before making a vendor selection. He stated: "Part of the reason we have an open source strategy was community. We needed to find out not only whether or not the community was strong, but whether the community would support us if we became a member. We monitored the discussion boards to find out who was posting, and there were plenty of posts from both the customer and the vendor side." A development manager using Drupal spoke about the abundance of code sharing in the Drupal community, declaring: "It's amazing how many different [community-authored] modules I can find. There are thousands of developers of contributing modules — they keep coming out and astound me."

2. What do I&KM pros think about their companies' open source WCM implementations?

Responses from I&KM pros who have been involved in open source WCM implementations were mixed. They said that open source WCM:

- **Works for pilots and prototyping, but broader rollouts require extensive experience.** Some of the I&KM pros involved in WCM open source pilots indicated that they will move back to commercial offerings for full-scale rollouts. They note that a lack of support, weak out-of-the-

box functionality, poor to nonexistent documentation, and an overall lack of functionality road maps prompts them to play with open source but move forward on commercial solutions. Those who have had the most success with enterprise-scale rollouts of open source WCM have a common characteristic — the presence of IT veterans with extensive open source *and* content management deployment experience. They have become intimately familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of open source and have been able to properly set expectations within their enterprises, as well as mitigate against risks.

- **Meets the needs of intranet and static sites but isn't ready for persuasive content initiatives.** I&KM pros using open source WCM have had the most success with intranet initiatives — departmental Web sites — and relatively static customer-facing sites. A lack of support for personalization, segmentation, campaign management, and other business-user-facing support keeps many I&KM pros from pushing open source WCM into their persuasive content initiatives.⁴ Usability can also be an issue, and one eBusiness manager explained: “We want to give these tools to non-techies to manage. But there are no tool tips or help on the tools.”
- **Lacks sufficient documentation and support.** Some open source customers complained that the products they use lack strong documentation. One customer said: “The documentation isn't really well integrated and isn't always marked well for the point releases. It's designed more for engineering staff than for customers.” Another customer commented: “Some open source vendors act like mom-and-pop shops — that doesn't work. They claim that they know what their problems are and they're trying to solve those issues. But you really do have to push to get attention. They don't do a good job of giving you feedback on the status of a problem.” One CIO advised: “When people tried to treat the unpaid community as paid support, there was really a clash. How do you motivate someone who is unpaid? So I hired an integrator to mitigate against that, and the SI [systems integrator] acted like a commercial vendor would — they would get on a plane if I needed them to.”

3. What are the common characteristics of teams implementing open source WCM?

Open source remains in the domain of technologists. IT staff members have had success with other open source technologies such as MySQL (for databases), Linux Online (operating systems), and Apache Software Foundation (application servers). So, technologists — not staff from lines of business — primarily recommend open source solutions. These technical audiences often use open source WCM to pilot or prototype Web initiatives to help make the case for larger investments in WCM initiatives. For example, big-box electronics retailer Best Buy developed an internal social networking application — using Drupal as a foundation — to allow its employees to exchange ideas and discuss best practices.⁵

However, WCM has become a business solution as opposed to a technology solution, as organizations focus on customer experience, using Web sites to reach out to customers and prospects. To gain more widespread adoption, open source WCM vendors need to reach out to

business and marketing professionals — who increasingly call the shots in the WCM vendor selection process — and develop their core functionality accordingly.

4. How should organizations evaluate open source WCM?

I&KM pros should evaluate open source WCM exactly the way that they would evaluate a commercial WCM offering — by comparing features, user interfaces, authoring tools, architecture, vendor strategy, product road maps, and the number of trained resources available. This also includes having the vendors implement proofs of concept, if possible. In particular, I&KM pros should:

- **Determine who will help with implementation and support.** Understand the number of trained resources available to help you, either from the vendor itself or from a systems integrator. Systems integrator support proves particularly important when selecting an open source solution that doesn't feature commercialized professional services or support.⁶ And be aware that support for community-authored add-on modules can be dicey: These unpaid authors may be unresponsive to bug reports or slow to make the modules compatible with product upgrades.
- **Speak to a number of customer references.** Be sure to have conversations with a good range of people and organizations using the product — not only those that the vendor suggests but those that you find independently in the community. These resources can give you a good idea of the product's strengths and weaknesses. Speak to a number of systems integrators as well, especially if you're contemplating an open source solution that doesn't have commercialized support.
- **Understand that reducing licensing fees may translate into higher implementation costs.** Keep in mind that money saved on license fees may need to be spent on developing features that commercial vendors offer out of the box or on documentation and training to encourage user adoption. One IT director said: "People are kind of hopeful that there is a cost saving, but that shouldn't always be a major driver. You get a baseline of functionality, but at the end of the day, it's a framework with an API, and whatever isn't there can be made. You have to pay for that."
- **Be sensitive to scalability issues.** So far, mostly midlevel and departmental WCM initiatives have had success with open source WCM. Success stories at the true enterprise level remain less common, so understand the risk involved in using a product that has not been widely proven to be scalable. One CIO reflected: "I should have put more emphasis on performance testing of the product, rather than giving too much value to what the vendor said about scalability. I should have put performance criteria somewhere in my plan, and it was a lack of foresight on my part. I was more familiar with our infrastructure and our performance needs than they were."

5. How will open source impact the WCM market?

We believe that open source will impact the WCM market by:

- **Commoditizing basic WCM for departmental initiatives.** Open source WCM will eat away at commercial vendors' share via smaller, departmental initiatives that just want to get a Web experience up and running. Organizations with less complex WCM needs — including departments within larger enterprises — will gravitate toward open source alternatives, especially if they have technology-savvy people within the organization willing to pilot or prototype it.
- **Helping free capital to fund what matters: the implementation.** Organizations don't always blame their WCM technology or vendor for their dissatisfaction. In fact, our data suggests that half of organizations dissatisfied with their current WCM implementation point to poor implementations, not the technology.⁷ The lower upfront costs associated with open source WCM solutions will help organizations spend more on their implementations. Organizations that do not use license savings to fund their implementations will likely share the same dissatisfaction as those using commercially available WCM products.
- **Driving commercial, proprietary vendors into higher-value persuasive content areas.** Commercial vendors will move to protect their market share and customer bases by emphasizing strengths in areas that I&KM pros view as open source weaknesses. Commercial vendors like FatWire, Interwoven, SDL Tridion, and Vignette will continue to form relationships with systems integrators and interactive design agencies to increase the amount of product expertise in the marketplace and create referral opportunities. These same vendors will likely make an effort to strengthen their own communities to increase avenues for support and code sharing. And these vendors will continue to emphasize their ability to help customers deliver persuasive content, with features such as personalization, Social Computing, and reporting and analytics.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Forrester surveyed 129 Web content management decision-makers to discover their future priorities and plans for WCM, and they indicated that using WCM to improve customer experiences on externally facing Web sites has become a high priority. See the October 3, 2007, "[Interest, As Well As Dissatisfaction, In Web Content Management Remains High](#)" report.
- ² Forrester evaluated 11 enterprise content management (ECM) suite vendors — including Alfresco — across approximately 60 criteria. See the November 9, 2007, "[The Forrester Wave™: Enterprise Content Management Suites, Q4 2007](#)" report.
- ³ Acquia secured \$7 million in financing to fund a commercially supported version of the Drupal Web publishing platform to the market. Source: "Acquia Receives \$7 Million Series A Financing," Acquia press release, December 19, 2007 (<http://acquia.com/about-us/newsroom/press-releases/acquia-receives-7-million-series-financing>).

- ⁴ Persuasive content is defined as that which influences the behavior of an external constituency, such as a prospect, customer, or business partner. Examples include multichannel marketing, lead-generation initiatives, eCommerce sites, customer self-service, in-store kiosks, and dealer extranets. See the December 21, 2005, “Transactional, Business, And Persuasive Content: A Better Way To Look At Enterprise Content” report.
- ⁵ Best Buy employees created their own internal social network to allow them to communicate with each other as well as executives. See the April 25, 2008, “Corporate Social Networks Will Augment Strategic HR Initiatives” report.
- ⁶ WCM projects require a wide range of skills for successful implementation, but I&KM pros who undertake these complex initiatives don’t always have in-house access to all the expertise needed for WCM project success. See the February 14, 2008, “Understanding Who To Call For Help With Your WCM Projects” report.
- ⁷ Forrester surveyed 129 I&KM pros with WCM decision-making power, and they revealed that they have rampant dissatisfaction with their current WCM implementations. See the October 3, 2007, “Interest, As Well As Dissatisfaction, In Web Content Management Remains High” report.