Adobe

QUICK GUIDE

Wrapping your head around a headless CMS.

A guide to what it is and how it can help your business.

The number of digital channels has never been greater. Yet as the options have grown, so have consumer expectations. Consumers now expect to interact with brands on websites, mobile, social, IoT, voice, and more—and have their experiences move seamlessly with them.

While that's great for consumers, it means brands are under increased pressure to be wherever their customers are—with a constant stream of cohesive and app-like experiences that are fresh, relevant, and highly personalized. And that's a big ask for IT departments, especially those with legacy or disparate content management systems.

Because a traditional content management system (CMS) locks content in channel-specific silos, assets need to be re-created again and again. This not only consumes a lot of time and resources, it also requires already overburdened developers to deliver and deploy code faster.

To solve this challenge, more and more IT departments are moving to a modern CMS with headless capabilities.

$1.62B The headless CMS software market is projected to reach more than US $1.62 billion by 2027.

## Understanding headless vs. traditional content management.

Unlike content delivery with a traditional CMS (also known as a "headful" CMS), a "headless" CMS allows you to create content once and reuse it everywhere, delivering the same experience quickly and easily to any channel with a single push. And with the right tech stack, you can make it highly personalized.

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That said, some enterprises may continue to use a traditional CMS because it gives them a single solution for managing both the content and the front end, simplifying the management of large applications like corporate websites. But with a headless, API-first approach, you have a lot more options for easily delivering content to more channels and devices.

A head-to-head comparison

Traditional CMS:	Headless CMS:
In traditional content delivery, the CMS manages the content and presentation logic, and outputs fully formatted HTML.	In a headless CMS, content is decoupled from the presentation layer (the head), creating blocks of content that can be delivered in a channel-neutral format to power any channel or experience.
Content is combined with a layout to deliver an HTML-based web front-end experience.	The same piece of content can be used in an email, mobile app, webpage, digital billboard, social post, and more.
A traditional CMS makes it easy to publish to a single channel, such as a website. But it isn't designed to manage content for multiple channels, where content presentation is vastly different across each.	Headless makes it possible to scale content almost infinitely without losing the personality of your brand or requiring new code for each platform.
Every piece of content requires its own code, resulting in each asset being re-created again and again, which consumes more time and resources.	A headless CMS exposes content as JavaScript Object Notation (JSON) through well-defined APIs. Developers can access content from the CMS using APIs and then render it in their customized applications, like a single-page application (SPA), IoT, or mobile app.

Traditional vs. headless content delivery
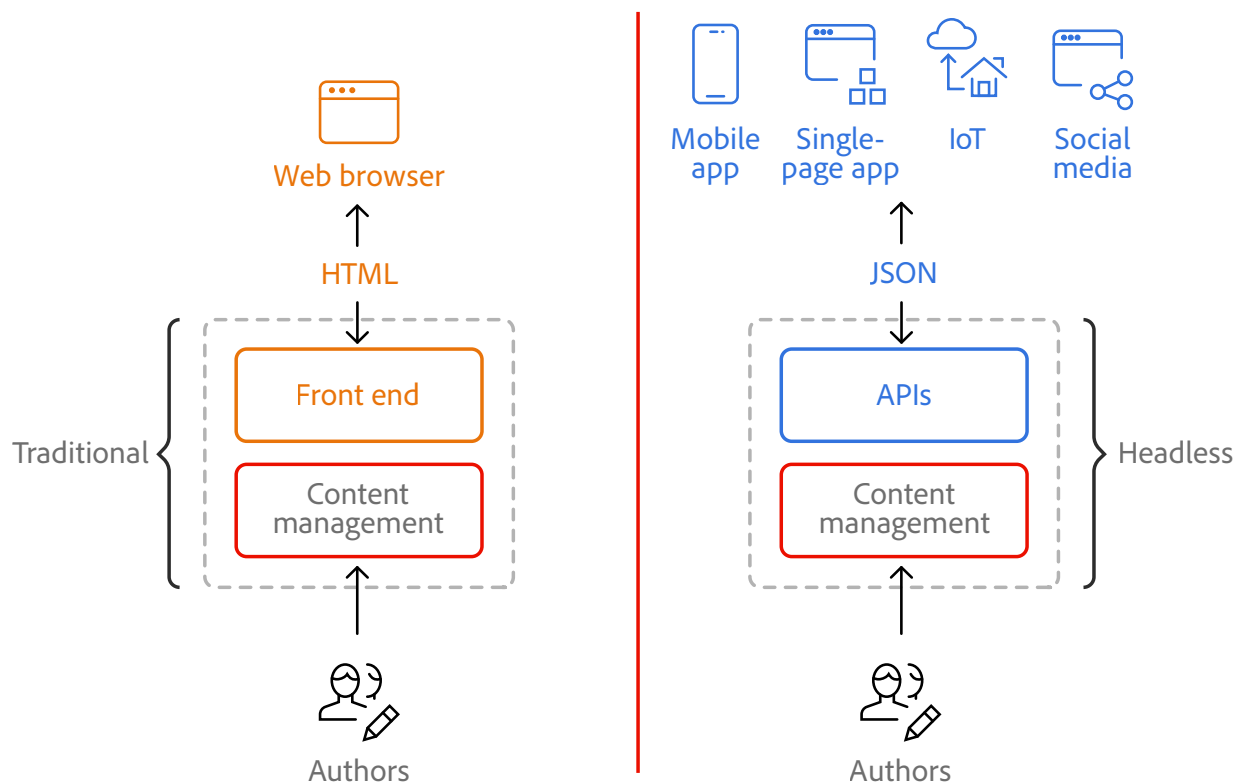
Go headless and get ahead of demand.

The power of a headless CMS lies in its flexibility, scalability, and omnichannel capabilities—all must-haves for gaining a customer experience edge. And both IT and marketing teams can benefit.

Key business benefits.

Choice. Developers can define the content and the structure within the headless fragment, using the development frameworks they prefer to build custom presentation layers for any channel.

Flexibility. Using APIs, the same piece of content can be rendered in different applications, such as SPAs, mobile apps, IoT devices, social, and other channels outside of web and mobile—without the manual programming typically required with a traditional CMS. This lets you deliver content to a wider variety of channels.

Speed. Low-code and no-code content delivery APIs allow you to push the same piece of content to multiple channels at once. This means development teams will spend less time managing content infrastructure and more time innovating.

Reusable content. Because headless lets you "atomize" your content—or create it in fragments—every piece of content is easily reusable on the seemingly endless array of channels.

Better customer experiences. When your marketing team doesn't have to create new content for every platform, you can publish and update content across channels and platforms simultaneously and in real time. This means marketers can focus on creating truly memorable and personalized experiences—and delivering them at the right time and place.

Faster time to market. The ability to easily reuse content fragments across the entire customer journey without all new coding means you can keep up with consumers' demand for continuous content—while ensuring your brand experience stays consistent.

Top use cases for headless.

Headless is a great delivery method for any brand looking to deliver omnichannel experiences. Consider, for example, the retail industry, which needs a strong web presence but also needs to be on social media, non-owned web channels, mobile, digital signage, and more. Separating the content from the presentation layer makes it easy for brands to update product offerings with new seasonal arrivals, price changes, and more while also adding new editorial content across all channels.

For industries like financial services, healthcare, and the public sector, which have a web presence and widely used mobile apps, headless makes it easy to respond to constantly evolving market changes. They can quickly publish new content to their primary website and easily reuse it on their mobile app.

Less re-creating. More connecting.

To build your brand and increase engagement, you must connect with your audience through relevant and personalized content, and that's where a headless CMS really shines. It allows marketing teams to rapidly distribute personalized content variations at scale, manage them more easily, and ensure a consistent experience across all devices and channels in the customer journey.

Yet it's important to recognize that headless content delivery could change how marketing professionals work—and how they collaborate with their IT departments.

Marketers may be hesitant to give up the WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) editor features in a traditional CMS that allow them to quickly create web pages. And while that's understandable, moving to headless means they won't have to re-create the same content over and over. Instead, they can focus on creating great new content, while IT teams create the frameworks to quickly distribute it to all the right channels.

Furthermore, today's modern API-first technologies can give marketers the power to tweak both the content and presentation when needed.

Since developers spend less time managing delivery, content velocity and the consistency of the brand experience go up.

The key is for IT and marketers to work together to determine what level of control is needed over the experience, the goals for each digital experience use case, and what can be added to the tech stack to help empower both teams.

How headless and AI can keep the pipeline flowing.

A headless CMS allows brands to publish more content more quickly and adapt it for a wider variety of users and needs. But if the content isn't easily accessible, bottlenecks can occur.

To take full advantage of headless for delivering omnichannel experiences, you need an efficient content pipeline. This can be achieved with an AI-powered CMS. These automate metadata tagging, search, and content creation renditions so marketers can quickly find, create, and manage personalized content at scale.

With the right tools and the right data, content creators can stop worrying about asset management and focus on creating more personalized content for ever-expanding audiences and channels.

Putting it all together.

By now, most large brands will have made an investment in a broader technology strategy and martech stack. This

often includes elements for personalization, digital asset management, audience segmentation, analytics, email marketing, and more.

To implement headless effectively, and to provide benefits for both developers and marketers, it's important to ensure headless is tightly integrated with these other elements of your existing tech stack. This will boost the flexibility, agility, and scalability headless offers. And that will help you achieve your overall digital experience goals.

Adobe can help.

Adobe Experience Manager Sites can address your current needs for headless content management while building a foundation for future growth. Experience Manager Sites is a modern, cloud-native content management system that gives you a full combination of rich headless capabilities, comprehensive traditional CMS modes, and powerful single-page application (SPA) tools to deliver immersive experiences everywhere.

Developers get full flexibility to deliver content headlessly while marketers can accelerate content velocity to more channels, maximize reuse, and ensure tailored experiences. To learn more about how Adobe can help you manage and deliver headless content, read our guide *API-First Immersive Omnichannel Experiences*.

Get details