



CLOUDSWITCHED

FREE RESOURCE — CMS COMPARISON GUIDE

CMS Selection Comparison Guide

WordPress, Shopify, custom-built, headless CMS and Webflow — compared on cost, capability, performance, security and fit. A structured framework to match the right CMS to your business, with a fillable scoring matrix at the back to keep the shortlist objective.

5

CMS OPTIONS
COMPARED

10+

FEATURE
COMPARISON
ROWS

UK

SME COST
BENCHMARKS

/70

CMS SCORING
MATRIX

OPTIONS

FEATURES

DECISION

SCORING

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How to use this guide

The CMS you choose decides almost everything that comes next — how content is edited, how fast pages load, how secure the site is, how much it costs to run, and how easy it is to grow. Picking the wrong platform creates technical debt that takes years to unwind. This guide walks you through the five mainstream options, the features that matter, a plain-English decision framework, and a fillable scoring matrix to record your shortlist.

Work through the five sections in order — an overview, a feature-by-feature comparison, a decision rule for each option, a requirements checklist, and a scoring page where you record marks out of 10 for up to three platforms. The output is a single weighted number per CMS so stakeholders can compare like-for-like rather than arguing taste.

WHY CMS CHOICE MATTERS

The CMS shapes cost, performance, security, flexibility and maintenance burden for the life of the website. UK SMEs typically refresh a CMS every five to eight years — choosing the wrong platform means living with the wrong tool for the next half-decade or paying twice to rebuild.

COMMON MISTAKE

Picking the CMS your last agency knew, not the one your business needs. WordPress is everywhere because it is generalist, not because it is right — an e-commerce shop usually belongs on Shopify, a brochure site with regular design changes often belongs on Webflow, and a high-traffic editorial platform may belong headless. Match the tool to the workload.

The five sections

- **01 CMS Options Overview** — the five mainstream choices, what they are, who they suit, and UK SME cost bands.
- **02 Detailed Feature Comparison** — ten capability rows scored across WordPress, Shopify, Custom and Headless.
- **03 Decision Framework** — "choose X if..." rules to match your situation to the right platform.
- **04 Feature Requirements Checklist** — tick the capabilities your project genuinely needs before scoring.
- **05 CMS Scoring Matrix** — fillable /10 scoring across seven criteria for up to three CMS options, plus sign-off.

01

CMS Options Overview

Five mainstream choices dominate the UK SME market. Each has a clear sweet spot — matching your workload to that sweet spot is the single most important decision in this guide. The cost bands below are typical UK SME build prices in 2026, excluding ongoing content production.

CMS	TYPE	BEST FOR	BUILD (YR 1)	ONGOING / YR
WordPress	Open-source CMS	Blogs, brochure sites, content-heavy marketing sites	£2k-15k	£500-2k
Shopify	Hosted e-commerce	Online retail and product-based businesses	£3k-20k	£2k-10k
Custom (React/Next.js)	Bespoke build	Complex web apps, unique requirements, dashboards	£15k-100k+	£3k-10k
Headless CMS	API-first (Contentful, Strapi, Sanity)	Multi-channel, high-performance editorial sites	£10k-50k	£2k-8k
Webflow	Visual builder	Design-led marketing sites, in-house marketing teams	£3k-15k	£500-3k

WHAT "ONGOING" ACTUALLY COVERS

Hosting, platform fees, security plugins, third-party tools and a small ringfence for content / theme updates. It does not cover marketing spend, content production, or major redesigns — budget those separately. The headline per-user rate is rarely the fully-loaded number.

COST-TO-FIT RULE OF THUMB

WordPress and Webflow are the cheapest to build but only if your needs genuinely fit the template world. Shopify pays back fastest when transactions are the goal. Custom and headless cost more up front but save money long-term when content scales past a few hundred pages or pushes to multiple channels.

02

Detailed feature comparison

Ten capability rows scored across the four platforms most UK SMEs shortlist. Webflow sits closest to WordPress for marketing sites and is covered in the decision framework on the next page. Use this as a sanity-check against any vendor pitch — if their slide deck contradicts the table below, ask for evidence.

FEATURE	WORDPRESS	SHOPIFY	CUSTOM	HEADLESS
Content editing	Good (Gutenberg)	Excellent	Depends on build	Good (visual editors)
Design flexibility	High (themes + custom)	Medium (theme-limited)	Unlimited	Unlimited
E-commerce	Via WooCommerce	Native (excellent)	Custom integration	Custom integration
Performance potential	Medium (plugin-heavy)	Good (hosted)	Excellent	Excellent
SEO capability	Excellent (Yoast / RankMath)	Good (built-in)	Full control	Full control
Security	Moderate (needs hardening)	Good (managed)	Full control	Depends on architecture
Scalability	Moderate	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
Plugin / app ecosystem	Massive (60,000+)	Large (8,000+ apps)	None (custom only)	Growing
Developer availability	Very high	High	Moderate–high	Moderate
Hosting flexibility	Any host	Shopify only	Any host	Any host

WORDPRESS SECURITY WARNING

WordPress powers 40%+ of the web, which makes it the single largest target for attackers. Unmaintained WordPress sites are routinely compromised within months — the platform itself is fine, the unmaintained plugin estate is not. Budget for ongoing patching, a WAF, a security plugin and managed backups from day one, or expect to pay it later in incident response.

03

Decision framework

Match your situation to a CMS using the five rules below. If two rules apply, take the higher-scoring option on the matrix at the back — the second-place rule usually points to an integration, not a platform switch.

Choose WordPress if: you need a content-rich website with a blog, you want a wide plugin ecosystem, you have a moderate budget, and you are committed to ongoing maintenance and patching.

Choose Shopify if: selling products online is the primary goal, you want a managed platform with built-in payments and PCI handled for you, and you do not want to worry about hosting, scaling or security.

Choose Custom (React/Next.js) if: you have complex, unique requirements no off-the-shelf CMS handles, you need maximum performance and flexibility, and you have the budget for bespoke development and ongoing engineering support.

Choose Headless if: you need to deliver content across multiple channels (web, app, kiosk, in-store displays), you want decoupled front-end and back-end, and your team is comfortable with modern web development.

Choose Webflow if: your marketing team wants to make design changes without developers, you want a visually-designed site with good performance out of the box, and e-commerce is secondary or absent.

MATCH THE WORKLOAD, NOT THE TREND

Headless gets the conference talks, WordPress runs the internet, Shopify wins online retail and Webflow is the in-house marketing favourite. None of that tells you which fits *your* workload — the requirements checklist on the next page does.

THREE-YEAR COST LENS

Score on three-year total cost of ownership, not Year-1 build. A £5k WordPress build with three years of patching, hosting, plugin licences and a small annual refresh sits around £12k all-in; a £15k Webflow build with the same lifespan often lands lower because there is less maintenance to pay for.

04

Feature requirements checklist

Tick every capability your project genuinely needs. The pattern of ticks usually tells you the answer before you score the matrix — product catalogue plus checkout means Shopify; multi-channel content delivery means headless; visual editing without developers means Webflow. Be honest about what you need versus what sounds useful.

Content & editorial

- ☐ **Non-technical content editing** — marketing or operations staff can publish without developer involvement.
- ☐ **Blog or news section** with categories, tags, scheduled posts and author profiles.
- ☐ **Multi-language or multi-region** content with localised URLs and hreflang handling.
- ☐ **Approval / workflow** — draft → review → publish, with named roles and audit trail.

Commerce & conversion

- ☐ **Product catalogue with checkout** — payments, taxes, shipping, fulfilment, PCI compliance.
- ☐ **Lead-capture forms** with CRM / marketing-automation integration (*HubSpot, Pipedrive, Mailchimp*).
- ☐ **Customer accounts or membership area** with gated content or paid access.

Performance, security & scale

- ☐ **Sub-second page-load** on mobile, with Core Web Vitals in the green band.
- ☐ **Managed security** — platform handles patching, WAF and DDoS, not your IT team.
- ☐ **Multi-channel delivery** — same content powers web, mobile app, kiosk or screens.
- ☐ **Custom integrations** with internal systems (*ERP, finance, bookings, line-of-business apps*).

IF YOU TICKED 8+ IN ONE COLUMN

You almost certainly have a clear winner. Use the scoring matrix on the next page to confirm and to record the decision — the matrix is for the audit trail and stakeholder sign-off, not to talk yourself out of the obvious answer.

05

CMS scoring matrix

Score each CMS out of 10 across these seven criteria to create an objective comparison. The total out of 70 gives a single headline number for stakeholder review. The fields below are interactive — type your scores directly in any modern PDF viewer.

EVALUATION CRITERIA	CMS A	CMS B	CMS C
Content-editing ease	_____ / 10	_____ / 10	_____ / 10
Design flexibility	_____ / 10	_____ / 10	_____ / 10
Performance & SEO	_____ / 10	_____ / 10	_____ / 10
Security & maintenance	_____ / 10	_____ / 10	_____ / 10
Total 3-year cost	_____ / 10	_____ / 10	_____ / 10
Developer availability	_____ / 10	_____ / 10	_____ / 10
Scalability & integrations	_____ / 10	_____ / 10	_____ / 10
TOTAL	_____ / 70	_____ / 70	_____ / 70

Notes

PREPARED BY

DATE

APPROVED BY

Need help choosing — and building — the right CMS?

Cloudswitched advises on CMS selection and builds websites on the platform that genuinely fits your business. We score every shortlist against this matrix line-by-line, with evidence.

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