

The Future of Content Delivery

Why Headless CMS will change how we view and create content



Where we are and where we're heading

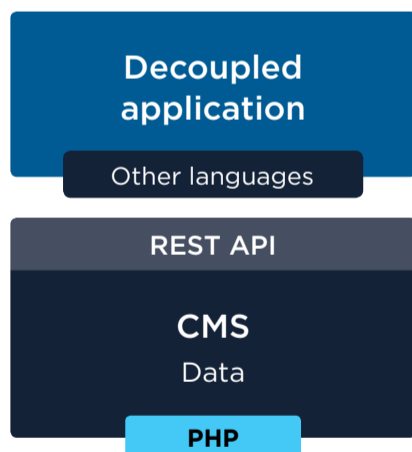
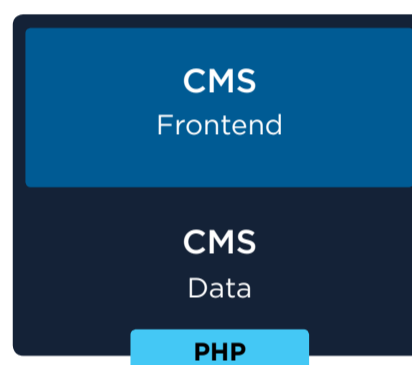
The way we manage and distribute content today is set to get a real shakeup in the coming years. We're starting to see a shift in how content is being distributed on the web and how it's consumed by audiences. In this ebook we'll take a look at where content syndication is now and where it's going. We'll then lift the veil on those technical terms you may have heard when it comes to distributing content and data. Finally, we will consider the benefits and challenges of using a Headless CMS for marketing teams.



Current content state

As CMS users, we are familiar with the relationship between creating content in the CMS and publishing it to a website. Content is loaded into the CMS admin panel and once published live, is displayed on the website for the world to see.

This is how the vast majority of content is created on the web today but we are now seeing this approach struggle to keep up in the fast paced world of content distribution. This fixed approach to publishing content, locks us into publishing our content from the CMS to a single website. For this reason, multi channel communication is not easily supported by a traditional CMS in an environment which demands content to be everywhere simultaneously.



Where content distribution is heading

Publishing content to a single website or source is no longer enough. Audiences consume content across a plethora of devices and channels and so as content authors, we really need customised presentation solutions that service all frontends for our audience to easily consume.

The future state of a CMS will allow content authors to easily publish their content to a wide variety of channels and frontends, allowing for greater audience penetration and a reduction in the time and money required to do so. In this scenario, content becomes another resource within your organisation—letting you choose how you want to use it.

What does this mean for content delivery teams?

Content delivery that is not bound by one channel or written in only one frontend development language means one thing—freedom.

Communication and content teams will operate in a highly tactical and nimble way, with the ability to create content once for multiple channels and mediums. This lets teams utilise content as a resource that can be placed anywhere on web and mobile.

Developers will have the freedom to choose the tools they like best and will not be forced to structure content as defined by the CMS.

Designers will be able to do what they do best with the freedom to come up with custom user experiences and designs for content.



Unpacking the underlying terminology



One of the underlying technologies that enables content and data to be shared, are a set of transactional tools called APIs. APIs help to deliver data from backend systems to frontend systems and underpin the concepts of the Decoupled CMS and Headless CMS.

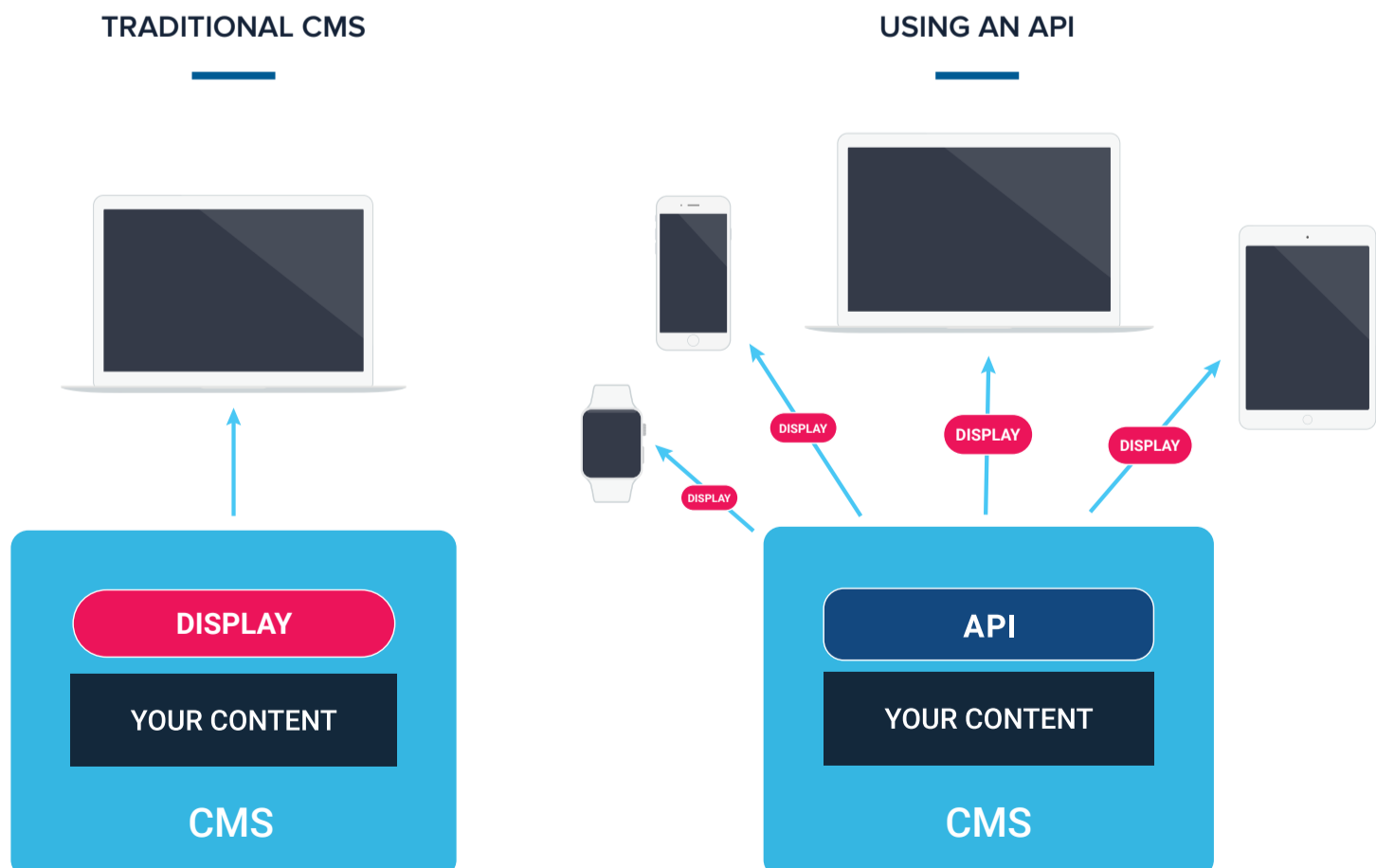
Let's now look at those terms a little closer to help us develop an understanding of how this all works.

What is an API?

APIs power the connectivity on the web, facilitating how web applications send and receive the information we produce and consume at scale. API stands for Application Programming Interfaces, which are a set of tools for transacting and sharing data between websites. In short, a website 'calls' another website's API when it wants to receive specific data. The API then sends a 'response' back to the website containing the 'called' data. This means that only the data that is needed is sent.

How do APIs relate to a CMS? Frontend devices where audiences consume data have changed considerably. With mobile devices, wearable tech and the Internet of Things movement, we now consume content everywhere possible.

This is where APIs come in handy, they structure data in JSON/XML rather than in HTML, making it possible for any type of frontend device to consume it however they want. This means greater performance as only the data that is needed is being requested and sent.



Decoupled CMS

Firstly, a Coupled CMS is where the CMS and frontend are coupled together, meaning when content is published via the backend, it is automatically published on the frontend. A Decoupled CMS however is when there is an API layer in between the CMS and the frontend. Unlike a Headless CMS, where the system is agnostic to how the content is displayed, a decoupled CMS still cares about where and how the content will be displayed on the frontend.

A Decoupled CMS approach makes the most sense when content is being targeted at specific frontend channels.

Headless CMS

When we talk about a Headless CMS, the headlessness is referring to the frontend display channel being separated from the content management backend. When content and data are published on the web via a Headless CMS, the content is not automatically rendered by a frontend channel but is instead there waiting to be consumed by any frontend channels that might want it.

A truly Headless CMS has no concern where content should be displayed on the frontend, but simply makes the content available for any frontends to consume it.



How APIs help CMS users



Cross-platform publishing:

Your CMS doesn't need to know how to feed data into a mobile app, or work with a voice assistant.



Performance and scalability:

API driven content delivery tends to be a more streamlined user experience for audiences.



Future proofing:

Your website or app implementation is more likely to transfer to another CMS backend if content is cleanly decoupled.



Speed of updates:

Frontend teams can move at their own pace when developing with APIs as they are independent from any backend deployments, which means faster fixes and design updates.



Personalisation:

Digital experiences are rarely created from one content source alone. Flexible content delivery via APIs allows combining multiple information streams in the best tools for the job.

What does this all mean for Marketing teams?

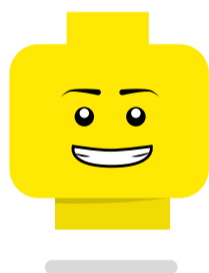


How does a Frontend approach to content delivery fundamentally change the way marketing teams work?

A modern marketer with Headless tooling will be able to effectively:

- Engage with audiences in real-time and in context, across channels
- Publish personalised blog posts and content across multiple devices and views
- Craft content for conversion-optimised landing pages alongside designers and developers
- Configure hyper targeted website overlays and Calls To Action
- Deploy microsites rapidly

Going Headless means a focus on content, not technologies or channels. It enables frictionless workflows between team members, making it faster and easier to customise content that will reach the right customers on their preferred platform of choice very quickly.



Where's your head at?

Let's now look at some examples of how marketing teams could implement Headless into their workflows:

Multi Channel publishing

Marketers working for large organisations with many channels are familiar with the time required to build, manage, and publish content for each of them. With a Headless CMS and the right content strategy, marketing can build **one set** of content to then have it distributed across all channels: the web, mobile, print, IoT devices... you name it, a Headless CMS can handle it.



A marketing team in a bank can push messages to their website, online banking platforms and personal finance apps from one central place to maintain consistency and increase efficiency.

Aggregating Content

Some marketers have content spread all across the web, both on their own websites and on 3rd party sites. With a Headless CMS they can store it and manage it easily in one place. Marketers can also aggregate content from other sources, and organise by keywords or other means, to crowd-source additional content.

Collaborative Content Management

When two businesses or organisations come together to create content, a Headless CMS can be a wonderful facilitator. Instead of creating static pages of content, dynamic "content modules" can instead be created by each organisation, tagged for developers and then implemented so the right blend of content from each organisation is served to each user accordingly.

Here at SilverStripe, we're starting to put that power into the hands of any team, by providing a GraphQL API that lets you (and others) interact with your content across the web.

Challenges ahead

With great power comes great responsibility. It's important not to stretch marketers too thin with these new technologies.



Perceived risk

As greater flexibility is given to marketing teams, the perceived danger for something to go wrong will also increase. Relationships between content and development teams need to run like well oiled machines to combat situations when things go pear shaped.



Analytics

When your content and data is being consumed on another website, how do you track and report on its performance? Marketing teams will need a fresh approach to analytics when using a Headless CMS in order to measure relevance and acquisition.



Open

Is having your content and data accessible and reusable by 3rd parties always a good thing? There will always be some instances when having content consumable by others is not desirable. Content teams need finer control over when, how and what content is being used by others.



Grammar

Structural rules governing the composition of clauses, phrases, and words need to be strictly agreed on. For example, content written in first person but presented to a site written in third person could be jarring for the reader and damaging to your message.



Workflow

How do organisations work together to make a Headless CMS work for all stakeholders? In the example of two government agencies collaborating on a project, who owns the Headless CMS, who accesses what data and who controls where it is shared? In this case we can solve the problem from a technical standpoint but organisationally, we can't predict how this will play out.

A roadmap to going Headless

It's an exciting time for content and marketing teams with most of us wanting the ability to leverage these tools as soon as possible. Structured content, together with a flexible, modular content platform like SilverStripe, will give you the agility to push content to new digital platforms in a short period of time, and in the right format for each individual platform.

But you don't have to uproot your legacy systems to ensure your content is read, heard, seen and experienced across a breadth of new customer touchpoints. An approach that involves

small, measurable experiments and iterative development is undoubtedly the best way to start learning about new these concepts and processes.

The question is not whether a Headless CMS is here to stay, good or bad, but more if it is the right fit given the context and business need. It's time to start having these conversations with team members, developers and decision makers in your organisation to see how you'll be positioned for success in the future.

Like the idea of going Headless? Talk to SilverStripe.

solutions@silverstripe.com | +64 4 978 7331



SilverStripe