

# Best-of-breed vs Suite

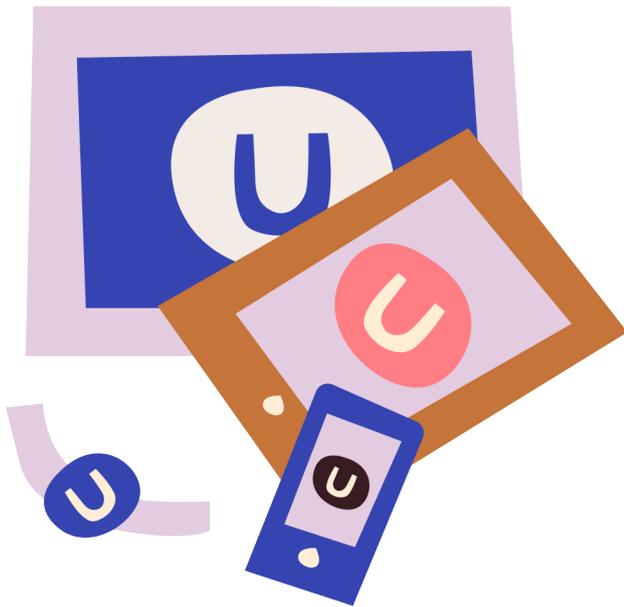
A whitepaper to help with  
your CMS selection process



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## Why is this even a question?

The key to any good digital strategy nowadays is a focus on content. More specifically: how to get it to the right people, at the right time, with the right message. And if you want to make this process as smooth as possible, you will probably need some sort of a content management system (CMS for short).



If you ever had to choose a CMS, you probably came across the terms Best-of-breed and Suite (you might have also stumbled on these terms when picking a dog or an Airbnb, but we will try to stick to the CMS today). The debate between best-of-breed and suite solutions has been lengthy and ever-changing, but today we would like to help shine some light on it and help guide you towards the best solution for your strategy.

## What is a Best-of-Breed CMS?

”Best-of-Breed” is the approach of choosing the best possible tool to perform one specific function. These products are developed by providers with a high degree of domain expertise. This means that you can expect more specialized features from a best-of-breed than you can from the same type of product in a suite offering. Aside from offering a lot of flexibility and convenience in development, it also provides more focus on specific business problems. While process and data integration may take additional development time, it is far outweighed by the overall time efficiency, lower cost and smaller scope.

It’s not uncommon that vendors who are domain experts will notice a possible gap in the market for products related to their current offering. This leads to the development or acquisition of new solutions to add to their best-of-breed product and offering the whole package as a CMS suite. And while the additional products might not be the best in the market, the pairing is convenient.

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## So what exactly is a CMS suite?

A CMS suite is your classic all-in-one type of content management platform. It’s usually made up of multiple product segments that you can mix and match, but you buy them all from the same vendor. And while these solutions are different technologically and function-wise, there is an underlying promise that they have the same look and feel across the board and integrate seamlessly with each other.

## What are the risks to consider when choosing?

When we are talking about best-of-breed vs suite, we are basically talking about a risk of underbuying vs the risk of overbuying. If you choose a best-of-breed, you might realise that you need to implement multiple 3rd party applications just to get the full functionality that you're after. This means more development time and even harder data synchronization.

However, when buying a suite you can run into problems on the other side of the spectrum: you will have a bunch of solutions that you paid for but do not need, and you can't exactly ask to give them back. Just imagine trying to force an entire marketing department to switch over to a less optimal email marketing solution, just because it came bundled with your enterprise client. We are in fact seeing a trend with large companies, who are trying to build their own marketing software stacks instead, to try and maximize efficiency/agility within the different departments.

Many factors contribute to the choice between a best-of-breed or a suite solution. Everything is based on the digital strategy of your company and even that will eventually have to change over time. We have gathered some of the main factors that you might want to consider when making your decision.

Integration	Best-of-breed	Suite
How easily does it integrate with other solutions?	A best-of-breed product typically doesn't work very well with other solutions in the same environment, however, it has a way bigger flexibility towards other outside integrations.	It is quite common that a large number of the products in a CMS suite have been obtained through acquisitions instead of being built by the suite provider originally. The different products are then given a brand and UX makeover and are made to fit into the overarching process. While this process guarantees that the products integrate very easily internally, external integration is usually poor or nonexistent.
Onboarding	Best-of-breed	Suite
Is it easy for our staff to start using it right away?	This approach provides a more condensed functionality and feature set which helps speed up the adoption process. Thanks to its smaller scope and lower cost, it can be specifically chosen from the get-go or further modified based on the priorities of the business.	Completely switching your staff over to a new suite solution might take a few months. It can be extended even further if the departments are forced to change their processes to fit with the suite solution, sacrificing efficiency at the cost of following the digital strategy.
Navigation	Best-of-breed	Suite
Is the software user friendly?	While a streamlined and straightforward interface is to be expected in a best-of-breed product offering, it will most certainly feel different from the competitors in the space. This can be attributed to the user experience most often being a unique selling point for this type of software.	One of the biggest pros for the suite approach is a similar user interface across the entire product offering, which greatly helps with the adoption. Once you learn how to navigate one part of the suite, the others should seem straightforward enough.

Architecture	Best-of-breed	Suite
Does it fit with our current system architecture?	The best-of-breed product can be specifically chosen to fit within the existing architecture to fulfil the business strategy. Integration into other systems might require some development time and sharing data across different platforms might prove difficult.	While the architecture can be overly complex and inflexible, it is a fair trade-off for the level of consistency that it provides, which can be taken advantage of by the developers or the IT department.
Risk	Best-of-breed	Suite
What is the risk associated with this solution?	While the switching cost to a best-of-breed product is significantly lower, new version updates and integrations can put a strain on development time. Smaller disruptive companies or challenger brands also might have trouble sticking around in the long term.	When choosing a large vendor with an extensive product suite, you should be aware of the possible high switching cost, both time and money-wise. On the other hand, large suite vendors are more often than not, well-established companies that will be able to keep providing the service long term.
Enterprise licensing	Best-of-breed	Suite
Can the vendor support the needs of an enterprise client?	Vendors of best-of-breed software are often small companies that might not be able to fully cover the needs of enterprise-level clients, but are inherently built to be used in conjunction with other software.	Most of the suite systems are built with enterprise-level clients in mind and therefore should have no problem covering large orders. But with high volume purchases like this, your company might end up with access to products that it will never have a use for and only pays for because they came bundled in with the rest.
Update speed	Best-of-breed	Suite
How often can we expect the product to be updated?	Faster updates thanks to a limited focus. Able to quickly adapt to changes in the competitive market. Can be updated without affecting the other systems, and vice versa. Open source products can be updated and customized at your leisure, development does not depend on the vendor.	Features and updates are provided by the vendor and "nice to have features" might take a long time to be implemented (if at all). Even smaller bugs might sometimes have to wait for a suite-wide update.
Value over time	Best-of-breed	Suite
How much value does the solution provide over time?	Best-of-breed products can have a large impact on the business over a short amount of time. Thanks to faster development cycles, updates/fixes can be rolled out immediately. Over the long term, it might prove unable to scale with the needs of the company and might have to be replaced by an enterprise-level software solution.	As previously mentioned, there might be a steep adoption curve that can last months or years. But once the solution is implemented and fully adopted into the process, it can make up for the long onboarding period over the long run in terms of cost, efficiency and growth potential.
Cost	Best-of-breed	Suite
What is the value to money ratio in each situation?	Lower cost, you get to choose a product that matches all the requirements and discover features you might not have even considered. Switching cost is usually very low or non-existent.	The costs of suite solutions can sometimes be truly astronomical but thanks to volume purchasing and enterprise plans you can lower your costs or get a discount over time. The switching cost can become so high that most companies just choose to stay with an already implemented suboptimal solution. Bundled-in software that you won't use might drive up the cost as well.
Security	Best-of-breed	Suite
How secure is the solution overall?	Security updates and patches can be implemented outside normal development cycles and without affecting other systems, effectively making for a faster response time.	Security in suite software is indeed top-notch, sometimes with whole departments fixing problems and solving breaches around the clock. But if a security flaw is found in one part of the software, it may extend to the entire suite, making the overall solution more vulnerable.

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## In-Closing

Every company is different in the way that they carry out their digital presence. Circumstances change, new strategies need to be implemented and pivots are made, but the need for content management is a permanent one. When picking a CMS you will have to weigh in the needs of the developers, the content editors and the decision-makers who are going to have the final say, but we hope that after today you will have a better idea of which approach might suit you best. To recap:

**Choose best-of-breed if** you need a solution that will solve a specific business problem immediately, has a low startup and switching cost, fits within your current architecture and has quick onboarding and a quickly understandable user interface.

**Choose a suite solution if you** need a large solution that will become the base of your digital strategy over time, which includes a wide array of tools that share data and processes seamlessly and have a common look and feel.

But while you are still here, have you considered if there might be an approach that takes the best of both worlds?

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## So how about an open source CMS?

How do you fix most of the cons in a best-of-breed product? You make it open source. Just like we did with Umbraco.

Our aim with Umbraco has always been to make things simpler, faster and more intuitive. But perhaps most importantly, we try to ensure that it doesn't get in the way of your code. We provide you with a neat, clean start and then you can configure the site just the way you want. No extra, unnecessary code and no limitation as to where you want to take it.

But of course, there is much more to a digital project than just a CMS. And that is why we're thrilled that there are more than 300 extensions available for you to use with Umbraco. So rather than being limited by a vendor who claims to be experts in everything, we want to give you the freedom to combine the expert tools that works perfectly for your site and your needs

