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What a CMS is, and which one to choose for what you want to build

Joomla, Drupal & Other CMS

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What a CMS is, and which one to choose for what you want to build

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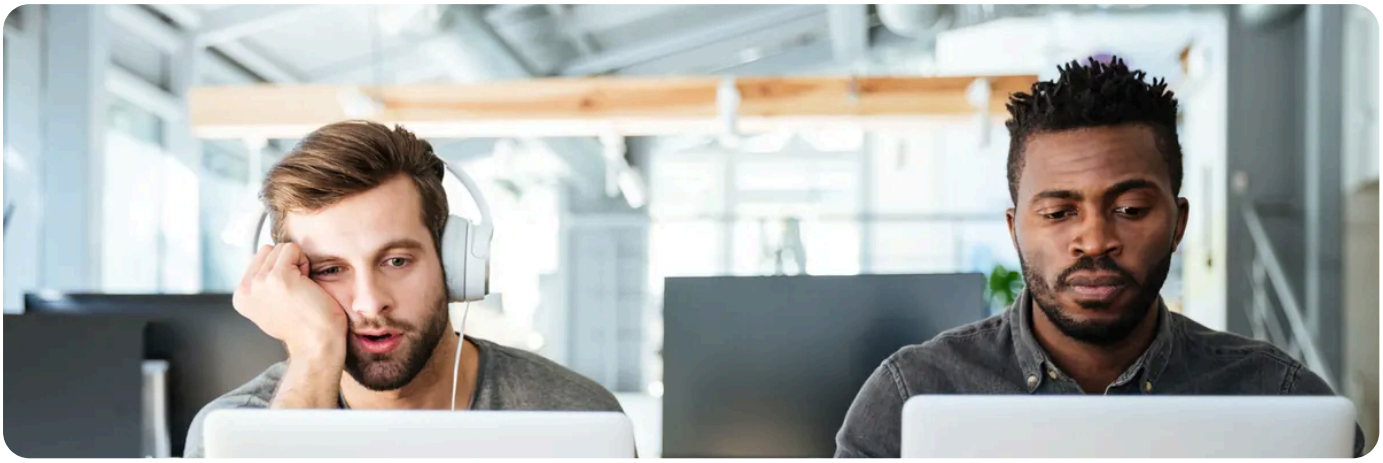

A **CMS** is a *content management system*: a program that lives on your hosting and gives you a panel, inside your browser, where you write pages, upload photographs and rearrange menus **without touching code**. You type; it builds the page and keeps everything in a database.

Without one, every change means editing a file by hand and uploading it again. With one, it is a button. That is the whole difference, and it is why nearly every site you visit runs on top of one.

What actually changes

Task	Without a CMS	With a CMS
Publish a news item	Copy a page, edit the HTML, upload by FTP, fix the menus by hand.	Write it, pick a category, publish.
Change a price or a sentence	Find every file it appears in and edit each one.	Open the record, change it, save.
Give a colleague access	Hand over the FTP password and hope.	Create a user with exactly the permissions you want.
Add a feature	Write it yourself.	Install an extension and configure it.
Security updates	There are none: the code is yours.	They are published and installed from the panel.

A CMS is code too, and out-of-date code is how almost every compromised site we see got compromised.
A CMS left alone for months is more dangerous than a set of plain HTML pages. Whoever installs it takes on the job of updating it.

The ones you can install here in one click

Your cPanel has the **Softaculous Apps Installer**, under **Software**. On the day this article was written it carried **485 applications** ready to install. These are the ones most people will care about:

Application	What it is for, and who it suits
WordPress	Company sites, blogs and small shops. The most widely used, and the one most people already know. See **how to install it**.
Joomla	Sites with many sections, several languages and users in different roles. More structured than WordPress out of the box. See **installing Joomla**.
Drupal	Large sites with content types you invent yourself and permissions down to the field. It asks more of whoever builds it, and pays that back. See **installing Drupal**.
OpenCart	A simple, light shop that goes up quickly. See **installing OpenCart**.
PrestaShop	A shop with richer catalogue and promotion tools than OpenCart. See **installing PrestaShop**.
Magento	A big shop, many products, many rules. The heaviest of them all. See **installing Magento**.
Moodle	Distance learning: courses, cohorts, quizzes, grades. Also heavy. See **installing Moodle**.
Flarum	A modern, light discussion forum. See **installing Flarum**.
Mautic	Marketing automation: campaigns, segments, forms. See **installing Mautic**.
Laravel	Not a CMS: the foundation for writing your own PHP application. See **getting Laravel running**.

Choosing without regretting it

1. **Start from what you will publish**, not from the technology. Pages and news? WordPress. A catalogue with a basket? A shop. Courses with students and grades? Moodle. Conversation between members? A forum.

2. **Count the people who will touch it.** If it is only you, take the simplest. If it is five people with different jobs, Joomla and Drupal already solve that for you.

3. **Check who can help you later.** An obscure CMS means fewer tutorials, fewer extensions and fewer people willing to quote for work on it next year.

4. **Weigh the weight.** Magento and Moodle use far more memory, processor time and files than the rest. On a small shared plan you will notice quickly.

5 **Install somewhere that is not live.** A test subdomain costs you nothing and stops you learning on top of a client site.

Trying is cheap; switching later is not.
Install two candidates on a subdomain, load half a dozen real pieces of content into each, and decide by the end of the afternoon. See **how to set up a test site**, then delete the loser.

What each installation costs your account

A CMS does not only take disk space. It takes **files**, and the number of files in an account (its *inodes*) has a ceiling. Magento and Moodle each arrive with tens of thousands of files. Three heavy installations in one account reach that ceiling while the disk still looks half empty. Read **the limits of your account** before filling a plan with experiments.

If the project is already large on day one, a shared plan is not where it should start. See **how to choose** and compare with our **hosting plans**.

NEED A HAND?

Tell us what you want to publish and for how many people. We will tell you which of these fits, and on which plan.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **Hosting plans and what each one includes** →
- **Pricing** →
- **Frequently asked questions** →

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