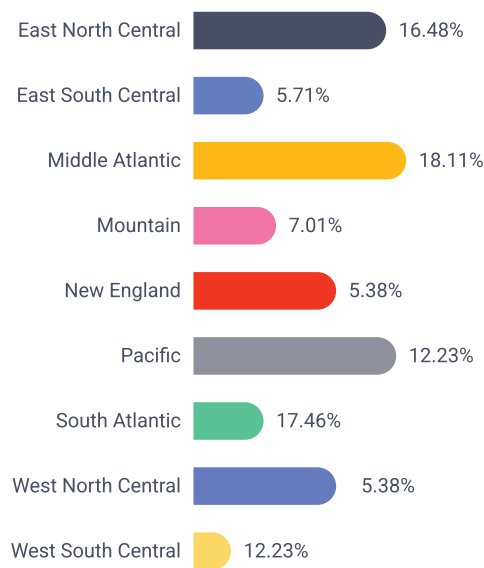# The State of CMS 2023: United States

INTRODUCTION

Content management systems (CMSs) are at the heart of any modern business. They connect digital brands with relevant audiences and support the day-to-day operations that come with running a successful organization. As the core of a company, it's not enough for a CMS to do the bare minimum. In a world of high customer expectations, systems as well as their users must constantly evolve to create the best possible experience.

Usage habits in the United States continue to develop, ranging from which types of teams interact with the CMS to how many they're juggling at once. Even the core technology itself has gone through significant developments: the once universal monolithic CMS with a tightly coupled front and backend no longer holds a monopoly over users. Headless technology – systems that separate the two ends – has changed the game, transforming what users can expect from their content management system. Keeping up with unfolding patterns like these is key to understanding the current and future state of the industry.

That's why Storyblok has compiled the State of CMS 2023: United States report. We set out to take stock of the modern user's needs and behavior: what makes one CMS worth using and another worth abandoning? How has the headless revolution affected their company's performance? How are they reaching their current audience, and how will that strategy change in the coming years?

To find the answer to these questions and more, we've collected data from users around the region to understand their choices – and in turn, what role CMSs play in the constantly changing American market.
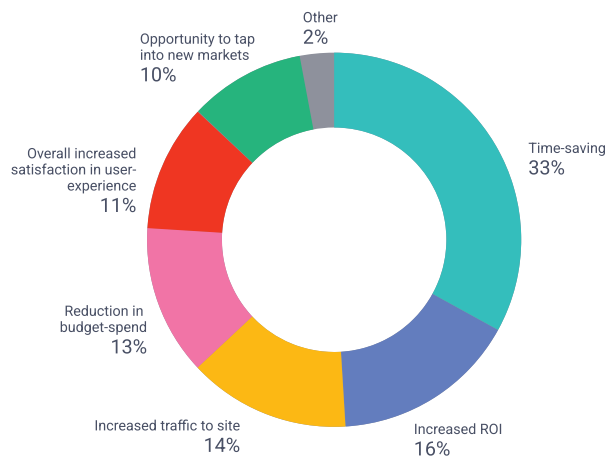
Region	Percentage
East North Central	16.48%
East South Central	5.71%
Middle Atlantic	18.11%
Mountain	7.01%
New England	5.38%
Pacific	12.23%
South Atlantic	17.46%
West North Central	5.38%
West South Central	12.23%

Total respondents (624) per Region

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

1 The majority of users (**56%**) need more than 1 CMS just to maintain their content operations, with **14%** using **4** or more CMSs.

2 **Mimimizing delivery risk and need of a new technology stack/legacy** are the main reasons behind having more than 1 CMS in place - a direct result of the legacy architecture of traditional CMS solutions like WordPress, Adobe Experience Manager, and Webflow.

3 **Time-consuming processes, difficulty in needing to learn a new system/skill/tech stack,** and **security issues** are the **3** main reasons why businesses change their CMS.

4 **23%** of respondents believe their current CMS workflows are difficult or very difficult.

5 In the vast majority of businesses (**72%**) multiple teams use a CMS on a regular basis, making proper workflows and collaboration capabilities even more important.

6 **22% of businesses** already use a Headless CMS to manage their content from one central hub and publish simultaneously on any channel.

7 **An overwhelming majority (75%)** of businesses report improved KPIs, revenue growth, and productivity since using a headless CMS.

Other
2%

Opportunity to tap
into new markets
10%

Overall increased
satisfaction in user-
experience
11%

Time-saving
33%

Reduction in
budget-spend
13%

Increased traffic to site
14%

Increased ROI
16%

Reported improvements since using a headless CMS

The State of CMS - United States

Content management systems have been essential tools for organizations for around 25 years. As technology continues to evolve, so does the general understanding of what a CMS is and what it can do. However, knowledge and use of these systems are not necessarily universal, and not every team member comes into direct contact with them on a day-to-day basis. It's important to make sure that we're assessing the state of CMS based on the choices made by active users.

As such, we started off the study with a screening question to make sure respondents were familiar with how their organization manages content:

> **A Content Management System (otherwise known as a CMS), is a software application that allows users to build and manage a website without having to code it from scratch.**

BASED ON THE DESCRIPTION ABOVE, ARE YOU CURRENTLY USING A CMS AT YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Those who answered "yes" continued on with the study, while those who answered "no" were excused. This ensures that all our participants were operating within a company that uses a CMS.

Our results revealed the following:

Yes	36%
No	64%
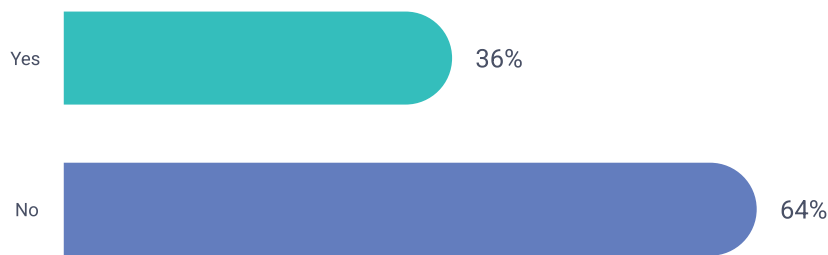
A majority of respondents (**64%**) indicated that they currently **do not** use a CMS at their organization. That left **36%** that could accurately respond to the following questions. This brought the qualifying sample from **624** to **226**.
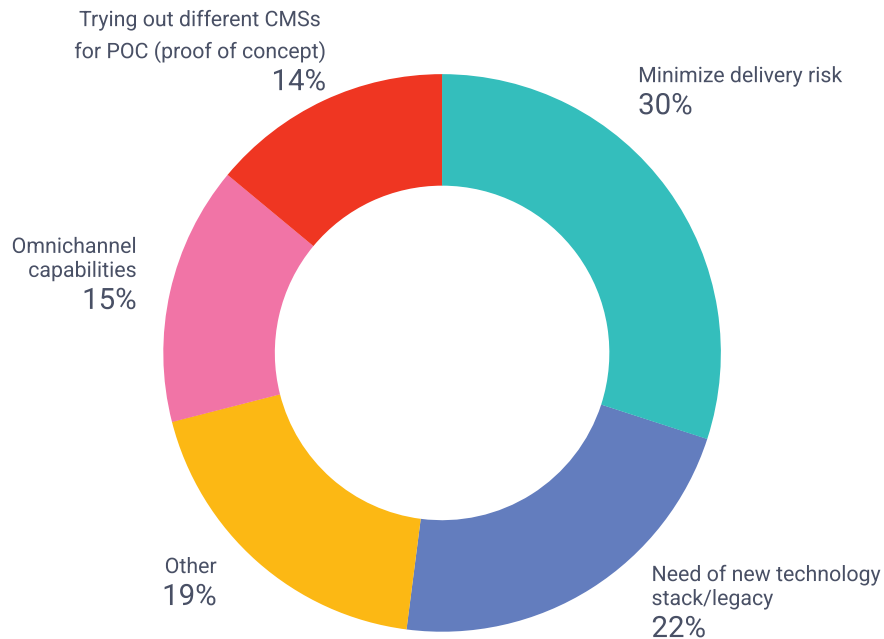
Survey Results

1 How many CMSs do you currently use at your organization?

more than 5
6%

4 to 5
8%

Only 1
44%

2 to 3
42%
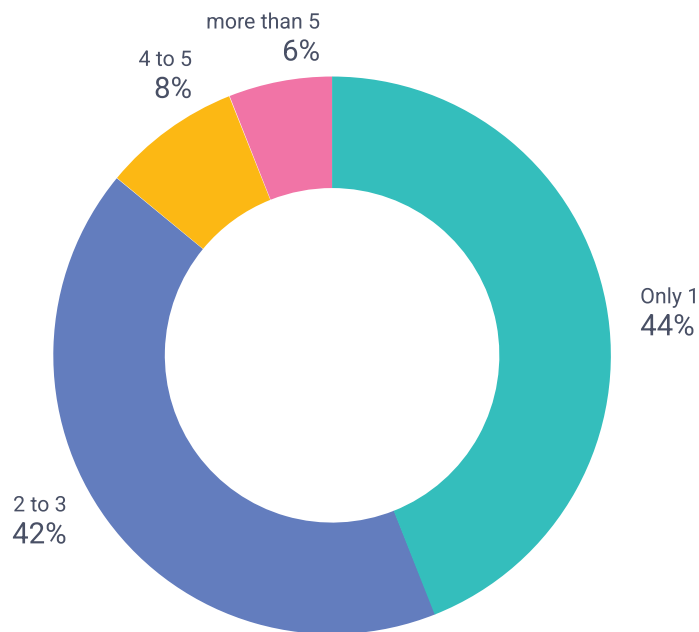
Most respondents (44%) used only one CMS in their organization. The number of respondents using 2-3 was just short of a tie at **42%**. **14%** of respondents reported using 4 or more CMSs, proving that many companies still struggle with a central solution to their content management strategy.

2 **If you use more than 2 CMSs at your organization, please select reasons why you are using more than 2 CMSs at your organization:**

Trying out different CMSs
for POC (proof of concept)
14%

Minimize delivery risk
30%

Omnichannel
capabilities
15%

Other
19%

Need of new technology
stack/legacy
22%

The use of multiple CMSs is not always wise: it can lead to issues such as disorganized workflow, content siloing, and communication issues. Thus, it's important to understand why some users continue to operate several CMSs regardless of these downsides.

The top-listed reason for using more than 2 CMSs was to **minimize delivery risk**. This could be the result of having backups, or perhaps using multiple CMSs to serve multiple frontends.

The second reason behind using more than two CMSs was to satisfy the **need for a new technology stack/legacy**. Monolithic systems are not built to be adaptable. The all-in-one, tightly connected nature of the technology makes it hard to change things or add new programs. It can be a costly, difficult process that carries the risk of crashing the entire system should a failure occur. As such, users who need additional capabilities may find it easier to simply use an entirely new CMS. Unfortunately, this is not a sustainable solution.
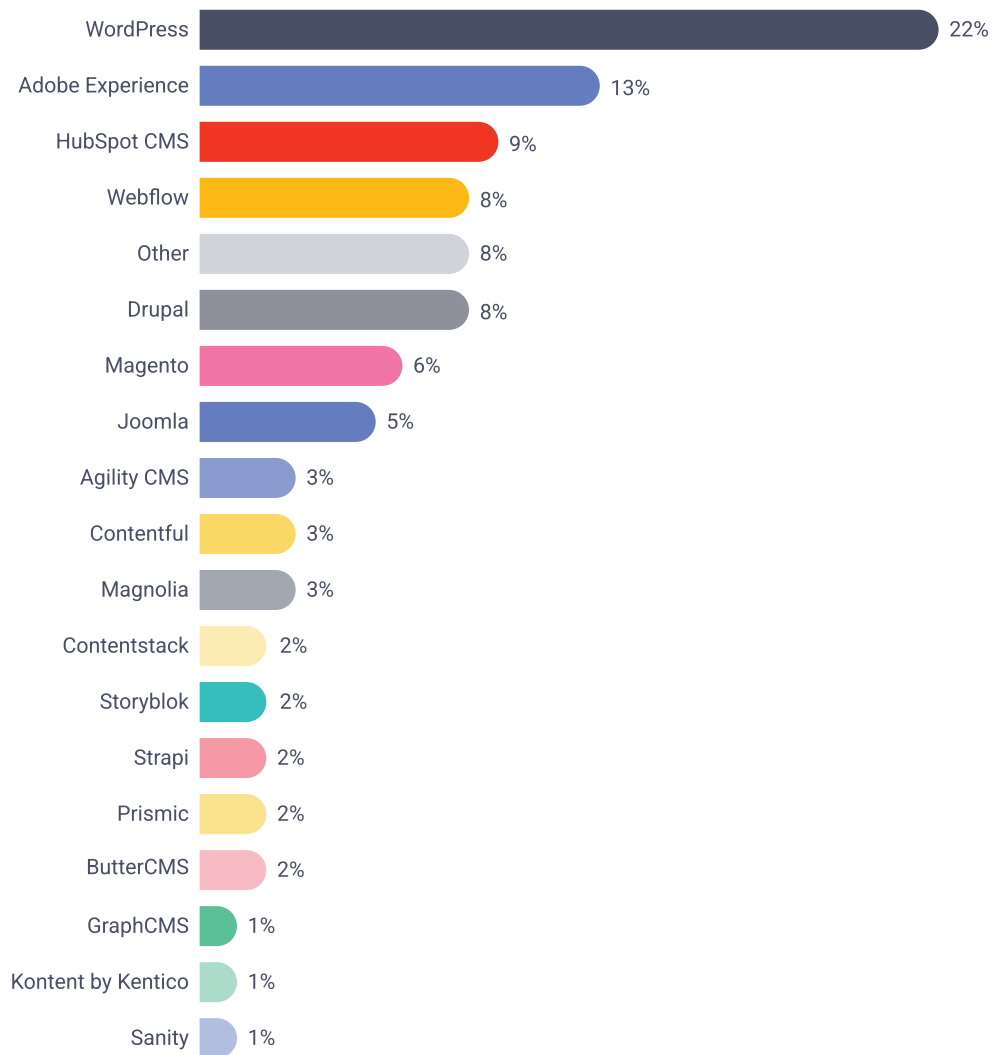
Further down was the need for **omnichannel capabilities**. Omnichannel strategies are an essential part of modern marketing. Customers expect to be able to access content across a huge number of channels, one that will only continue to grow. However, monolithic systems are not suited to providing omnichannel experiences: the backend is tied to a single, inflexible frontend, meaning getting content on multiple platforms is extremely difficult. This may be one reason that users resort to a multi-CMS ecosystem.

Finally, **14%** of respondents said that they used multiple CMSs in order to **try out new systems for proof of concept**. This apparent experimentation may indicate that the participants could be looking to change their technology ecosystem, perhaps as a way to resolve pain points that are covered in Question 5. Additionally, American respondents were slightly more likely to indicate trying out new systems than the global average, which might suggest that companies in the United States are more likely to actively seek out new solutions.

3 **Which CMSs are you currently using?**

CMS	Percentage
WordPress	22%
Adobe Experience	13%
HubSpot CMS	9%
Webflow	8%
Other	8%
Drupal	8%
Magento	6%
Joomla	5%
Agility CMS	3%
Contentful	3%
Magnolia	3%
Contentstack	2%
Storyblok	2%
Strapi	2%
Prismic	2%
ButterCMS	2%
GraphCMS	1%
Kontent by Kentico	1%
Sanity	1%

The most commonly used CMS platform in the sample is WordPress. The top 6 specifically named CMSs by the number of users alone in the sample were all monolithic solutions: WordPress, Adobe Experience Manager, Webflow, Drupal, Magento, and Joomla.

Monolithic — 48%

Headless — 22%
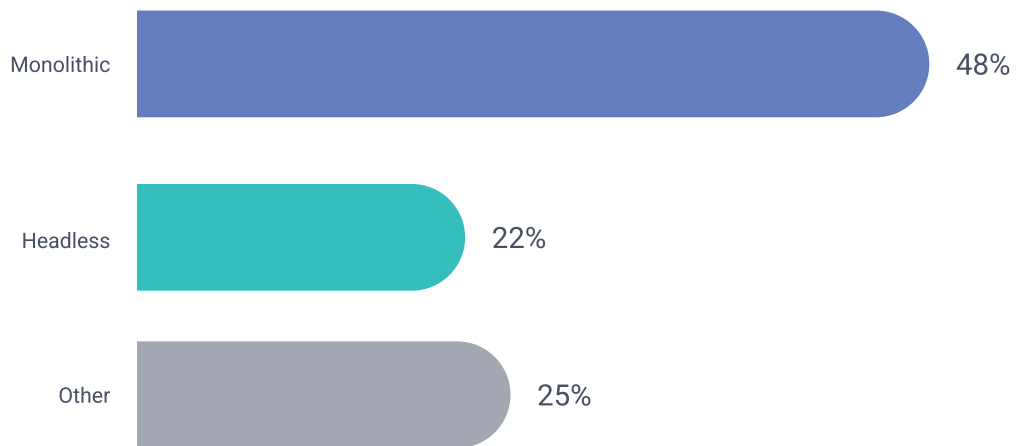
Other — 25%

Monolithic systems made up the majority of the sample at 53%. 22% of respondents reported using a headless system, with a slightly higher 25% reported using something else (such as page builders, web apps, and custom CMSs).

When compared to the global State of CMS 2023 report which indicates an international headless usage of 36%, these numbers are quite different. The exact reason for this disparity remains unclear. One possible explanation could be that American users are still uncertain of the benefits that headless can offer their organization.

This is supported by data in Question 2 suggesting that those in the United States are more likely to be trying out new proof of concept CMSs than the global average. Given that this testing phase is more common, it might be the case that American users are still in the process of learning about headless. If this theory holds true, next year's State of CMS report may show a spike in new headless users.

4 **How would you rate your team's/organization's processes prior to using a CMS? - 1 being very difficult and 5 being very easy**

1 - very difficult — 4%
2 - difficult — 19%
3 - fair/moderate — 57%
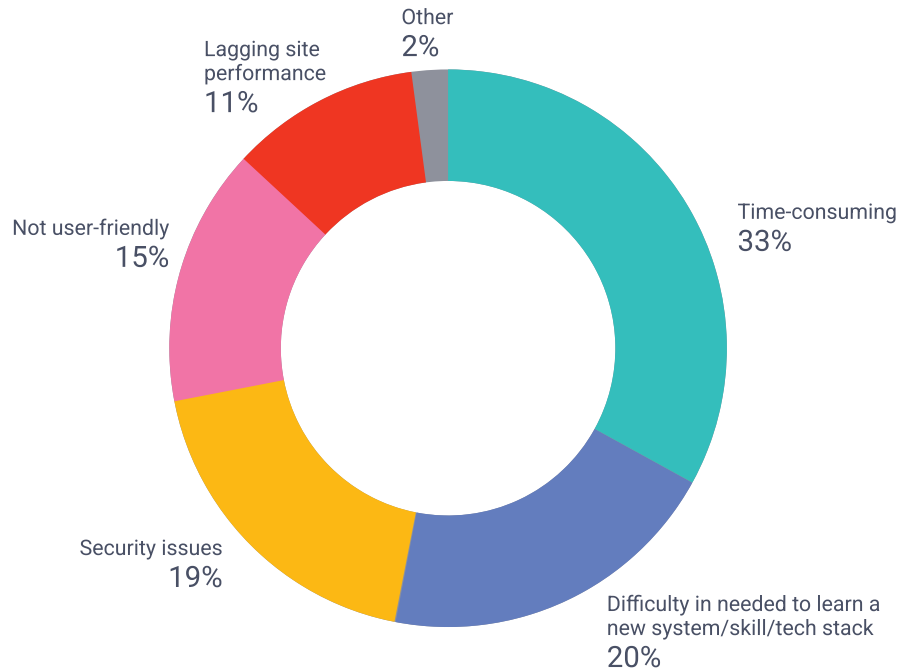4 - easy — 14%
5 - very easy — 6%
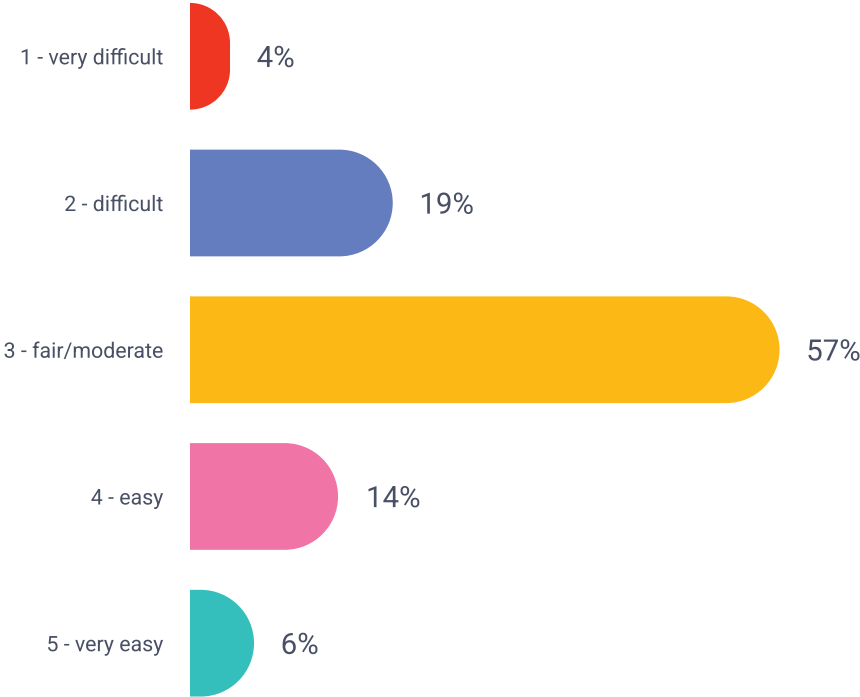
CMSs often bring big changes to organizations, making the contrast between the prior and current experience interesting to investigate.

In this case, the majority of respondents reported that their organizational processes prior to using a CMS were Fair/Moderate. 23% cited that it was either difficult or very difficult. **Overall, only a small minority of 20% saw their processes prior to using a CMS as either easy or very easy.**

5 **What were the pain points and/or missing features that made you migrate to a platform?**

Other
2%

Lagging site
performance
11%

Not user-friendly
15%

Time-consuming
33%

Security issues
19%

Difficulty in needed to learn a
new system/skill/tech stack
20%

It's unlikely that users switching to a new platform have only a single pain point to cause such a change. As such, users were able to choose multiple options for this question. **The most common pain point by an impressive margin was that the old platform was time-consuming.** Better time management impacts every part of the content pipeline and improving it can be an essential way to optimize an organization's performance.

The second most commonly cited pain point was **difficulty in needing to learn a new system/skill/tech stack.** Keeping up with constantly evolving markets means keeping up with technology as well, and systems that make it hard to swap and integrate programs can be a major issue. It may cause users to fall behind as competitors are able to be more agile.

The third most common pain point was **security issues**. Security threats to a CMS can lead to serious consequences for the organization: lost revenue, stolen data, and a huge blow to customer trust. This is one reason why many users choose a headless CMS. The use of APIs means that each program is naturally quarantined, so a security risk in one area cannot spread to another. Threats are contained immediately. This is opposed to a monolithic system, where one security breach has the potential to take down an entire system.

How Storytelling Scales

Storyblok is the headless content management system that empowers 110,000 + developers and content teams to create better content experiences across any digital channel.

TRUSTED BY

NETFLIX · adidas · OATLY! · T · Pizza Hut · ŒF · RALEIGH · AUTODESK · DECATHLON · upc

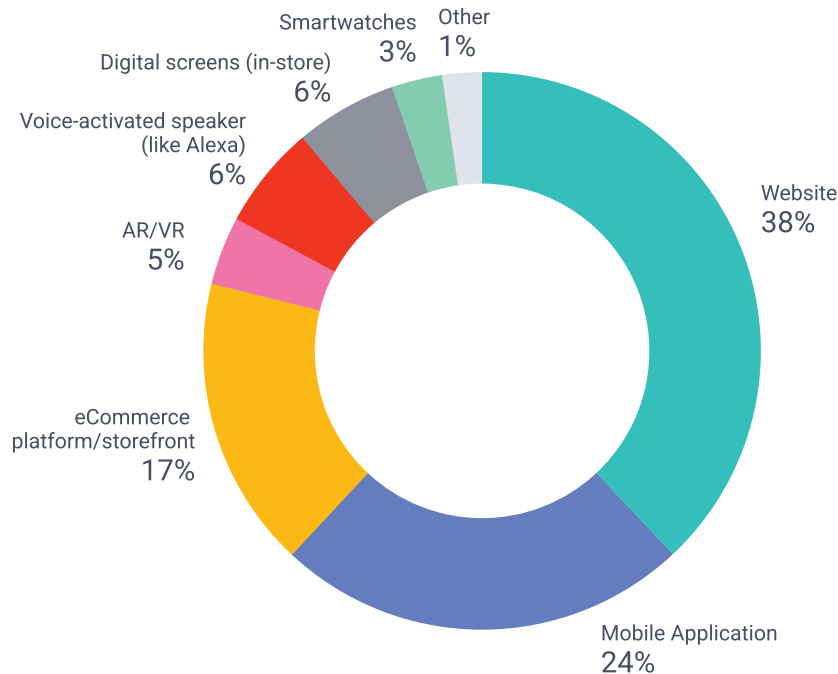| **STRONGER**	**MARC O'POLO**	**WÜSTHOF**	**UPC**
123%	**14 days**	**50%**	**3x**
traffic increase within 6 months	full implementation of Storyblok	revenue growth in 60 days	faster website performance

To learn more about how Storyblok helps companies provide next-generation digital experience, read our case studies.

6 **Which platforms and channels do you currently serve with your CMS?**

The most commonly reported channels served by CMSs were **websites, mobile applications, and eCommerce platforms/storefronts** in that order. Given that these are typical channels for modern organizations, this is not surprising.
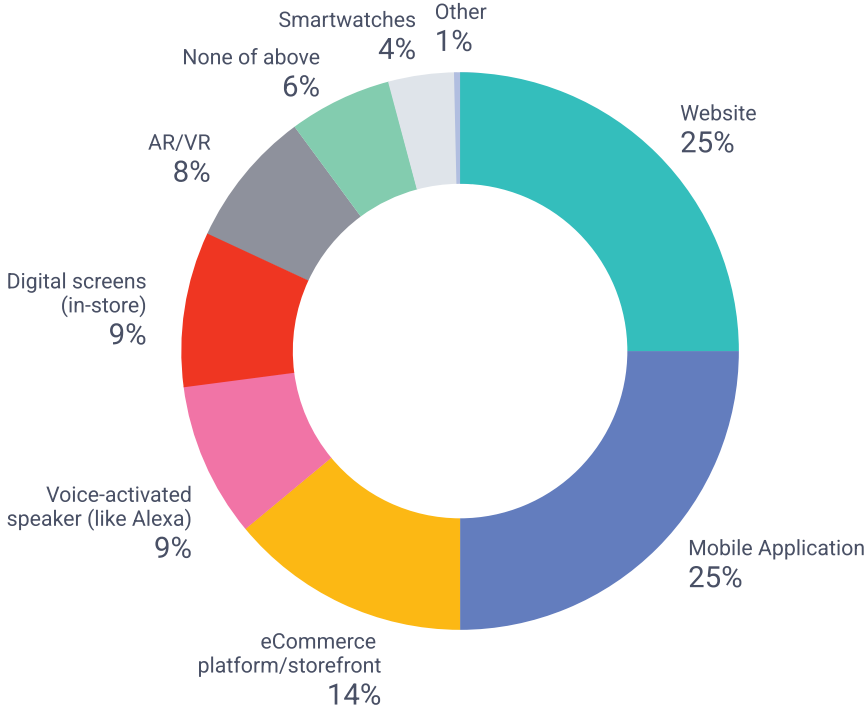
By contrast, the Internet of Things (IoT) options were not nearly as popular. The number of respondents using in-store digital screens, voice-activated speakers, AR/VR, and smartwatch channels combined were still less than those using websites.

Interestingly, respondents in the United States region were more likely to report using websites, mobile applications, and eCommerce platforms than the global sample. By the same token, they reported using IoT channels less. This suggests that American CMS users are less likely to embrace multiple omnichannel routes than the international average.

One potential cause of this could be the second most commonly cited pain point discussed in Question 5: difficulty in learning new technologies. IoT options are still relatively new and require omnichannel capabilities that many monolithic systems – those which make up the majority of this study – aren't capable of. We may see these numbers increase as the usage of headless CMSs does.

7 **Which new platforms and channels do you plan to serve with your CMS in the future? (Check all that apply)**

Smartwatches 4%
Other 1%
None of above 6%
AR/VR 8%
Digital screens (in-store) 9%
Voice-activated speaker (like Alexa) 9%
eCommerce platform/storefront 14%
Website 25%
Mobile Application 25%

Websites, mobile applications, and eCommerce platforms/storefronts were once again the top-ranking choices. However, the percentages were a bit lower. This can likely be attributed to the fact that respondents who already use these channels may not have checked them in this question as it is currently being used, not a plan to use them in the future.

However, the percentages that increased tell an interesting story. For American respondents, there was a clear intention towards using more IoT channels: namely, a 3% increase for Voice-activated speakers, Digital screens, and AR/VR. This is also supported by the data in Question 2 that indicated Americans are more likely to use multiple CMSs as proofs of concept than the international sample – they have future plans to grow, even if these plans are proceeding slower than the global community.

(8) **Rate your satisfaction with your current workflow process with your CMS on a scale of 1 to 5 - 1 being very difficult and 5 being very easy**

|	
1 - very difficult	2%
2 - difficult	11%
3 - fair/moderate	53%
4 - easy	27%
5 - very easy	7%
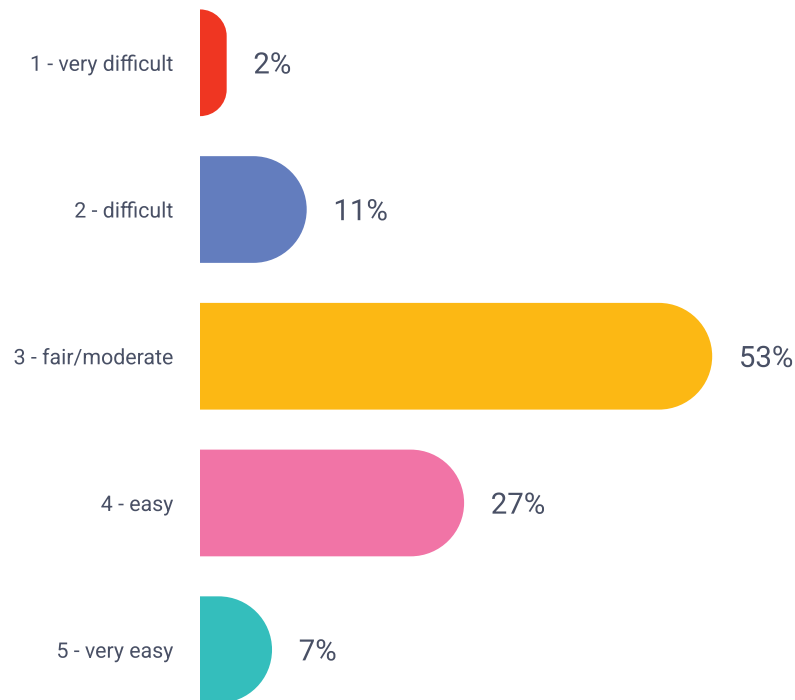
The majority of respondents (**52.7%**) described their current workflow processes to be **fair/moderate**. **34%** described it as easy to use or very easy, and just 13% cited it as difficult or very difficult.

This is significantly different from the answers to Question 4 regarding ease of use: the number of respondents citing their workflows as difficult or very difficult dropped an impressive **10%**, while those citing it as easy or very easy jumped by **14%**. This emphasizes how big of a difference the right CMS can make.

9 **How many different teams currently use the CMS at your organization?**

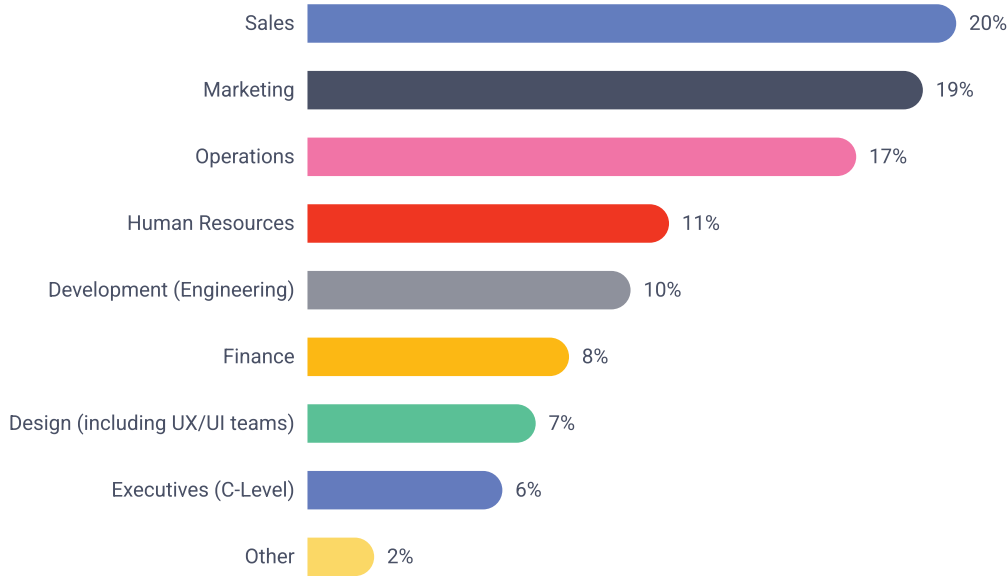|	
Only 1	29%
2 to 3	39%
4 to 5	20%
6 or more	13%
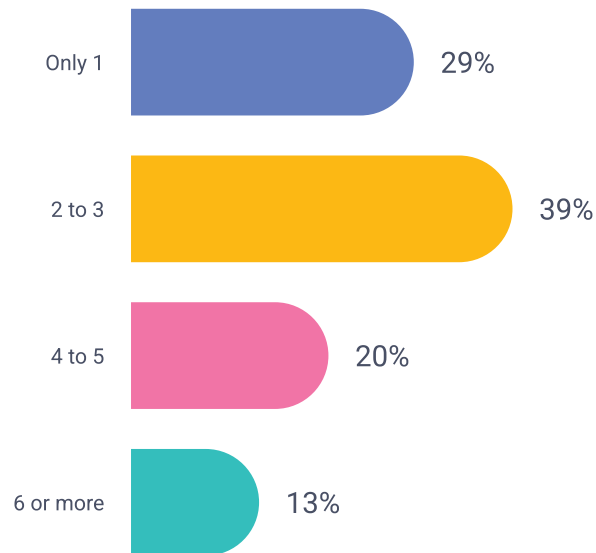
39% of users stated that 2 to 3 teams currently use the CMS at their organization. 6 or more teams using a CMS was the least common choice, with only 13% indicating that they do so.

As for the 29% of respondents using only one team with their CMS, this may be explained by the type of system. Monolithic CMSs often present issues where they're trickier for non-technical teams to use. This may lead to only one team – perhaps developers – using it. However, this may also mean developers have to handle content responsibilities such as uploading and editing, which can be an inefficient use of their time and make the lives of content creators harder.

10 **Please tick which teams are currently using a CMS at your organization**

Sales — 20%
Marketing — 19%
Operations — 17%
Human Resources — 11%
Development (Engineering) — 10%
Finance — 8%
Design (including UX/UI teams) — 7%
Executives (C-Level) — 6%
Other — 2%

Sales was the team most likely to use the CMS, followed closely by Marketing. The two teams least likely to use it were Design teams and executives.

Developers made up only 10% of the sample. One explanation for this relatively low number may be the wide usage of monolithic CMSs in the region. Monolithic CMSs are generally restrictive in terms of technological flexibility. Thanks to this, developers might not interact with them as much simply because there's less that they're able to do with such simple systems. This unfortunately will limit the potential of companies using these traditional CMSs.

Another reason for this might be that monolithic CMSs often lack robust collaboration tools. Without proper communication in-engine, developers might find it easier to work with each other and content creators through external tools. Unfortunately, this adds unnecessary steps and roadblocks to the workflow. This theory is further supported by Question 5's indication that time-consuming processes were the most commonly cited pain point.
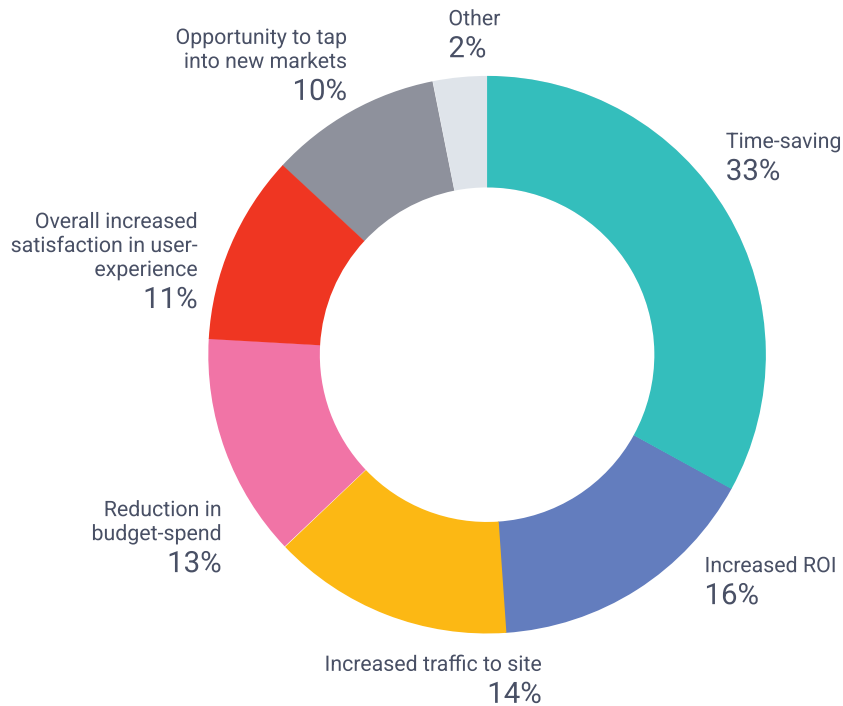
11 Would you say there have been improvements in terms of time-saving, budget, productivity, increased revenues/growth, meeting your KPIs since using a headless CMS? Have you seen any improvements?

No
25%

Yes
75%
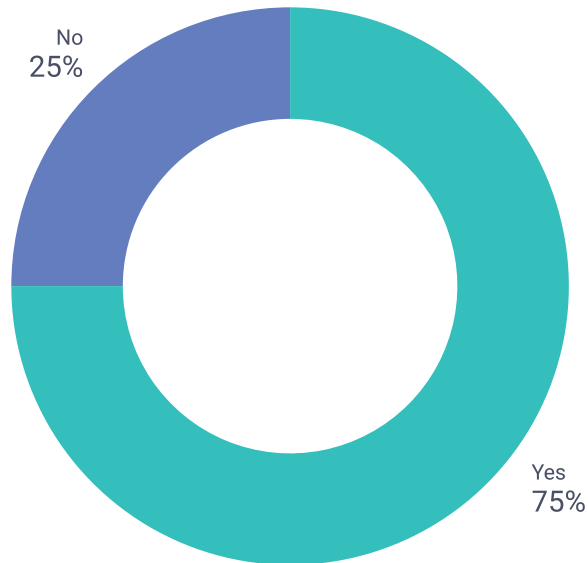
An overwhelming majority of 75% found that switching to a headless CMS improved their content operations. This high rate of improvement could be attributed to a number of benefits offered by headless systems. Better performance, technical flexibility thanks to best-of-breed architecture, and increased ability to personalize are all possible motivators.

12 **If yes, please choose one or more following improvements you have seen since using a headless CMS**

Other
2%

Opportunity to tap
into new markets
10%

Time-saving
33%

Overall increased
satisfaction in user-
experience
11%

Increased ROI
16%

Reduction in
budget-spend
13%

Increased traffic to site
14%

After switching to a headless system, **33% of people saw time-saving improvements**. Considering that this same region demonstrated time-consuming operations as the main pain point leading them to seek out a new system, this suggests that **switching to a headless CMS can be the solution to the most common content problem**. Additionally, **16%** saw increased ROI after adopting a headless system, and **14%** saw increased traffic to their site.

13 **Do you think your current CMS will be effective for the next several years?**

No
15%

Yes
85%
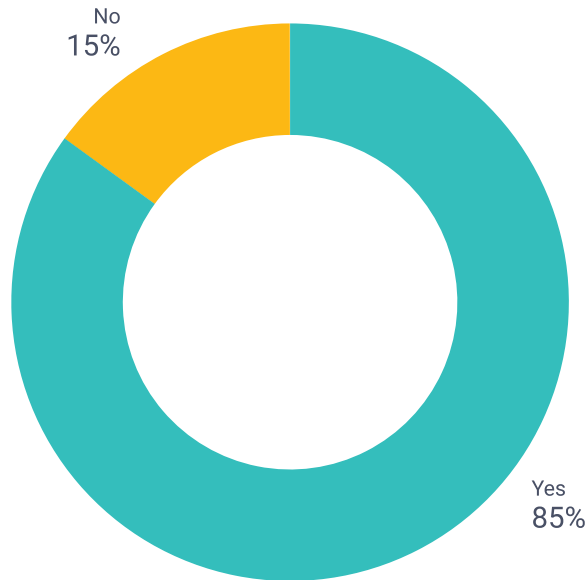
An impressive **85% of users believe that their current CMS will remain effective in the coming years**. This reduces the likelihood that they will consider switching for future-proofing reasons. However, this does not mean that they will not switch: earlier cited pain points may still affect this decision.

Key Takeaways

While most content management users in the United States are not currently using headless, other data from this survey suggests they may be soon. Their interest in trying out new CMSs as proofs of concept and expanding to more IoT channels in the future indicates a sort of discovery phase as they learn more about headless CMS.

This is further supported by the overwhelming majority of respondents who switched to headless reporting improvements in their organization. They report it directly addressing earlier reported pain points, such as a better user experience, more efficient use of time, and increased site performance. Awareness of such benefits may also contribute to the relatively high percentage of users who reported they currently use a headless system.

Overall, the data found in the United States State of CMS suggests that Americans are on the edge of a period of growth. They appear to be learning more about the shortcomings of monolithic systems, and conversely, more about the benefits of headless. It's reasonable to conclude that as time goes on and users explore their options more, this region will demonstrate increased usage of headless CMS.

ABOUT STORYBLOK

Storyblok is a next-generation headless content management system revolutionizing how storytelling scales. With an API-first approach, it helps users create and scale content to any digital channel. Features like the visual editor and digital asset manager mean content creators can work independently. The power of headless's best-of-breed approach also means that developers can build a perfectly customized tech stack, all protected by Storyblok's ISO 27001 security certification. Add the benefit of Storyblok's advanced collaboration suite, and all these teams can come together to work together directly within the CMS.

In a constantly changing world with more user experience demands than ever before, brands such as Netflix, T-Mobile, and MindValley trust Storyblok to provide secure, personalized experiences to their users.

Ready to see how Storyblok can take your content management to the next level?

TALK TO ONE OF OUR SPECIALISTS

Want to try Storyblok for yourself?

TRY IT FOR FREE TODAY

storyblok