

Not all aspects of a content management system (CMS) project are equally easy. While some elements can be installed ‘out of the box’, others have proved difficult to implement.

The greatest source of project risk is *uncertainty*, generated from a number of sources, such as a limited understanding of business requirements, variable product capabilities, or a poor track record of implementation.

In the context of limited budgets and timetables, organisations must identify the most uncertain aspects of a CMS project, and concentrate management efforts on them. This makes the most effective use of available resources, reduces project risks, and maximises overall outcomes.

The starting point for improving the management of CMS projects is to recognise the sources of uncertainty, and how these affect project outcomes. Future articles will then explore how best to manage these uncertainties.

## Sources of uncertainty

Common sources of CMS uncertainty include:

### Difficulty in determining concrete business requirements

It may be difficult to determine the detailed business requirements for specific CMS functionality within the scope of the evaluation process. This is often an issue when there are strong time constraints on the requirements gathering or selection process.

*Example:* the need for ‘content reuse’ can often be difficult to discern in detail during a rapid requirements-gathering process.

### Unknown future business directions

Insufficient information may be known about the strategic directions of the organisations to be confident that the CMS will meet future needs. This is a key issue in organisations that are undergoing rapid change or innovation.

*Example:* the future need for e-commerce on the website might be related to a review of business activities that will not be completed until after the CMS has been selected.

### Widespread implementation difficulties

Some aspects of content management systems have proved difficult to successfully implement in past projects, due to a range of reasons (only some of which may be technical in nature).

*Example:* workflow is often stated as a primary reason for obtaining a content management system, yet many organisations are now ‘unrolling’ it due to failed deployments.

### Highly-variable product capabilities

There is a large degree of variation between vendors in how specific features and capabilities have been implemented. With each approach having a unique mix of strengths and weaknesses, this can be a major cause of uncertainty during implementation.

*Example:* many organisations need to integrate existing web-based applications into the CMS, so that a consistent page layout and formatting is applied across an entire site. Vendors, however, have tackled this issue using many different approaches, and not all will match the specific needs of the organisation.

### Complexity of requirements or implementation

Some features and aspects of a content management system are very complex to identify or implement, and will remain so for the foreseeable future regardless of product upgrades.

*Example:* integrating with other business systems is rarely simple or easy.

### People issues

Content management is not a technology issue. While a content management system is typically deployed as part of the project, there are many supporting activities that have an equal (or greater) impact upon project success. Managing these ‘people issues’ introduces complexity into CMS projects, and broadens their scope.

*Example:* decentralised authoring requires the active participation of authors to be successful. For a range of reasons, this has proved challenging in many projects, and is not always successful.