

Who is choosing the new CMS?

Having been involved in many content management system (CMS) selection projects, we've seen a number of common causes of delays arise.

Of these, the biggest stumbling block is a lack of structure around the selection project: who is doing what, when will it happen, and how are decisions going to be made?

There are three main groups involved in the CMS selection project:

- steering committee or senior sponsor
- stakeholder group
- evaluation team

Of these, the evaluation team is the most critical, and the membership of this group must be defined very tightly from the outset of the project. Failure to do this will slow the pace of the project, as well as generating uncertainty at the key points of decision-making.

Steering committee or senior sponsor

At the top of the chain of decision-making is the steering committee or senior sponsor who will sign off the final decision.

This group or individual is unlikely to be involved directly in the selection process, and their role is to endorse the recommendations of the evaluation team.

This group will also typically be the source of funding for the content management system, plus supporting professional services and internal resources.

Stakeholder group

The content management system will touch many areas of the organisation, either directly or indirectly.

A range of staff will be authors, publishers and approvers. They will be regularly using the CMS, on a daily or weekly basis. They have a vested interest in getting a CMS that is well-designed and easy to use for common tasks.

Key business areas such as communications, and IT are also major stakeholders for the CMS, along with any group who owns a significant amount of content that will be maintained using the CMS.

The stakeholder group brings together these players, and provides them with an opportunity to give input into the initial CMS requirements. They will also be consulted during the evaluation process, although they will not be making the actual decisions.

Evaluation team

The evaluation team is the core project group who do the actual work throughout the selection project. This includes:

- developing the CMS requirements
- finalising tender documentation (or equivalent)
- determining the initial list of vendors to go out to market
- reading written vendor responses
- determining the final short-list
- participating in vendor demonstrations
- conducting any follow-up evaluation activities
- choosing a preferred solution
- making a recommendation to the steering committee or senior sponsor

All of this takes time, and evaluation team members should expect to spend no less than five to six full days on the project, across the duration of the selection process.

This will immediately help determine who should be on the evaluation team: only those with clear value to add, sufficient time, and the necessary interest will be prepared to commit this length of time.

Evaluation team members will not be senior managers, and even middle managers will struggle to find the time. Instead, the team is often drawn from on-the-ground practitioners, including current site managers (web or intranet team), the communications team, a dedicated project manager or business analyst, representatives from IT and a representative author (end user).

Ensure the composition of the evaluation team is finalised early on, and involve this team throughout the project. This will ensure that the project has a core group of decision makers who will drive the evaluation process.