How key social contracts are fraying in the move from WCM to DXP

Preston So • Feb 8, 2021 • Boye and Company member call, Feb 2021

Welcome!

Preston So is a product architect and strategist, digital experience futurist, innovation lead, developer advocate, three-time SXSW speaker, and author of *Decoupled Drupal in Practice* (Apress, 2018).

A globally recognized voice on headless content management systems (CMS) and decoupled Drupal, Preston is Senior Director, Product Strategy at Oracle and Editor in Chief at Tag1 Consulting.

Preston has led product, design, engineering, and innovation teams at organizations like Acquia, Time Inc., and Gatsby.

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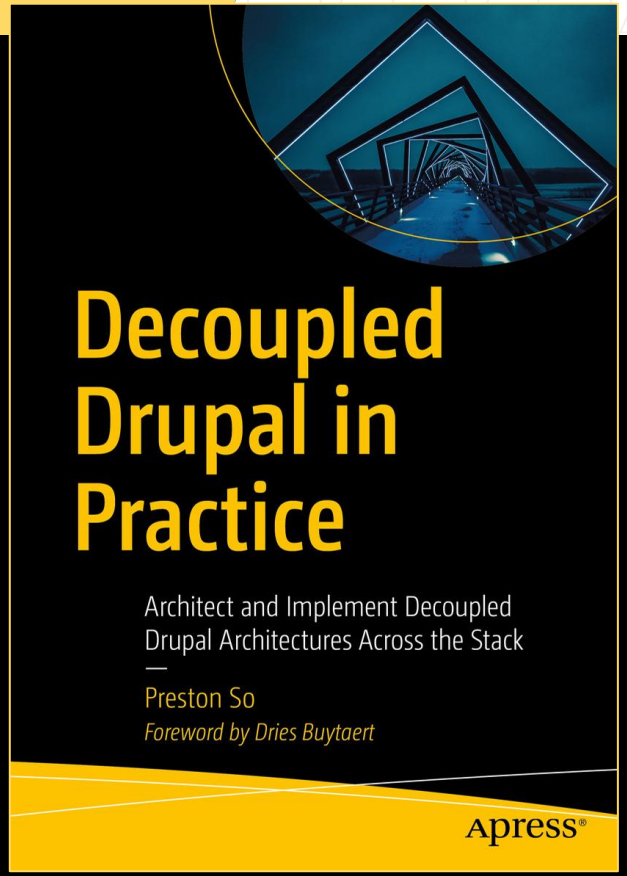

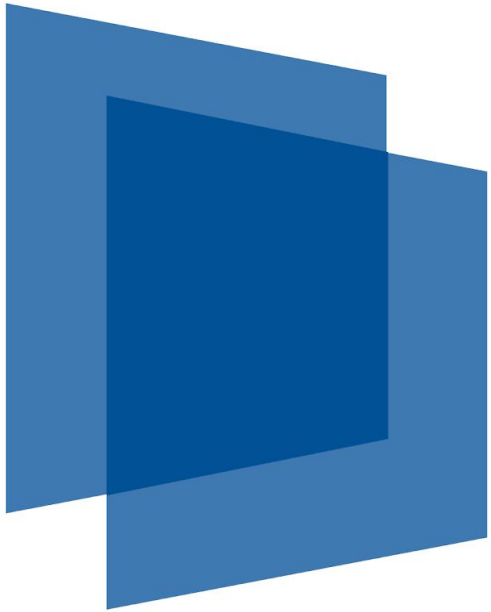

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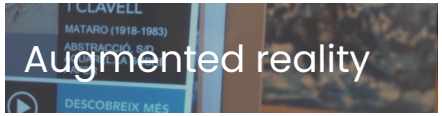
What we'll cover

- Revisiting the new grand compromise in CMS
- How WCM forged multiple early social contracts
- Breaking the social contract of digital experience management
- Breaking the social contract of no-code content preview
- Epilogue: “Black box” issues in digital experience platforms

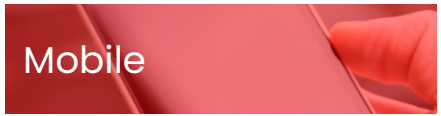
1

Revisiting the new grand compromise in CMS

Marketers and content editors want control over non-web experiences



Developers



Websites

Responsive

Marketers
Content editors

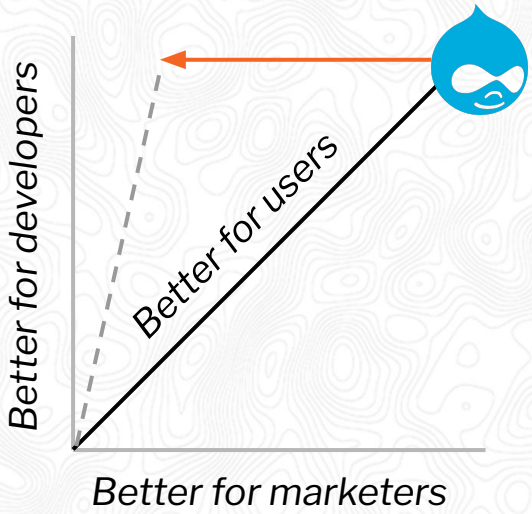
The incongruity of content management today

The CMS has always been built on an uneasy alliance between personas

Not all CMS personas are treated equal anymore

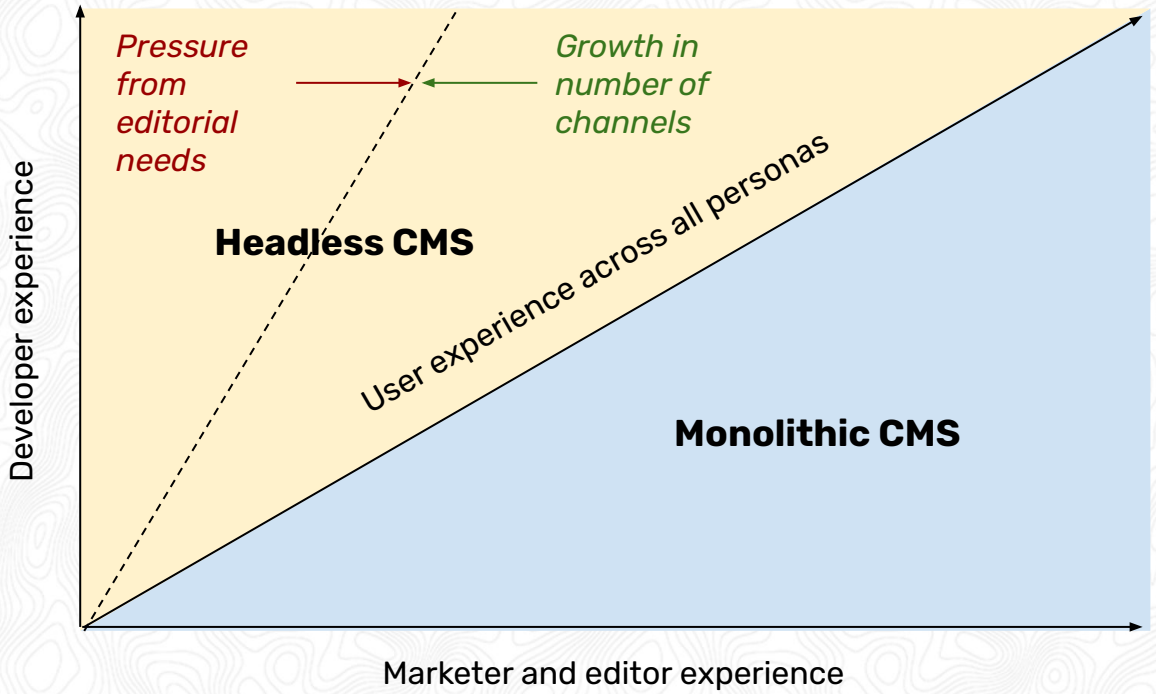
This is the fundamental problem facing content management today

The developer–user axis



The marketer–user axis

DrupalCon Vienna 2017



The incongruity of CMS

From WCM to DXP

Inherent to the new idea of the DXP is the notion of many, not one digital experience.

- **Happy developers, unhappy marketers.** Content must look different on every channel, but marketers have no control over channels beyond the web.
- **Is site building dead?** How does a carefully templated, copiously perfected landing page translate to mobile or smartwatch? What happens to a list of related articles when the only way to access it is through voice?

The Holy Grail of DXP

The Holy Grail of digital experience management is **presentation management**.

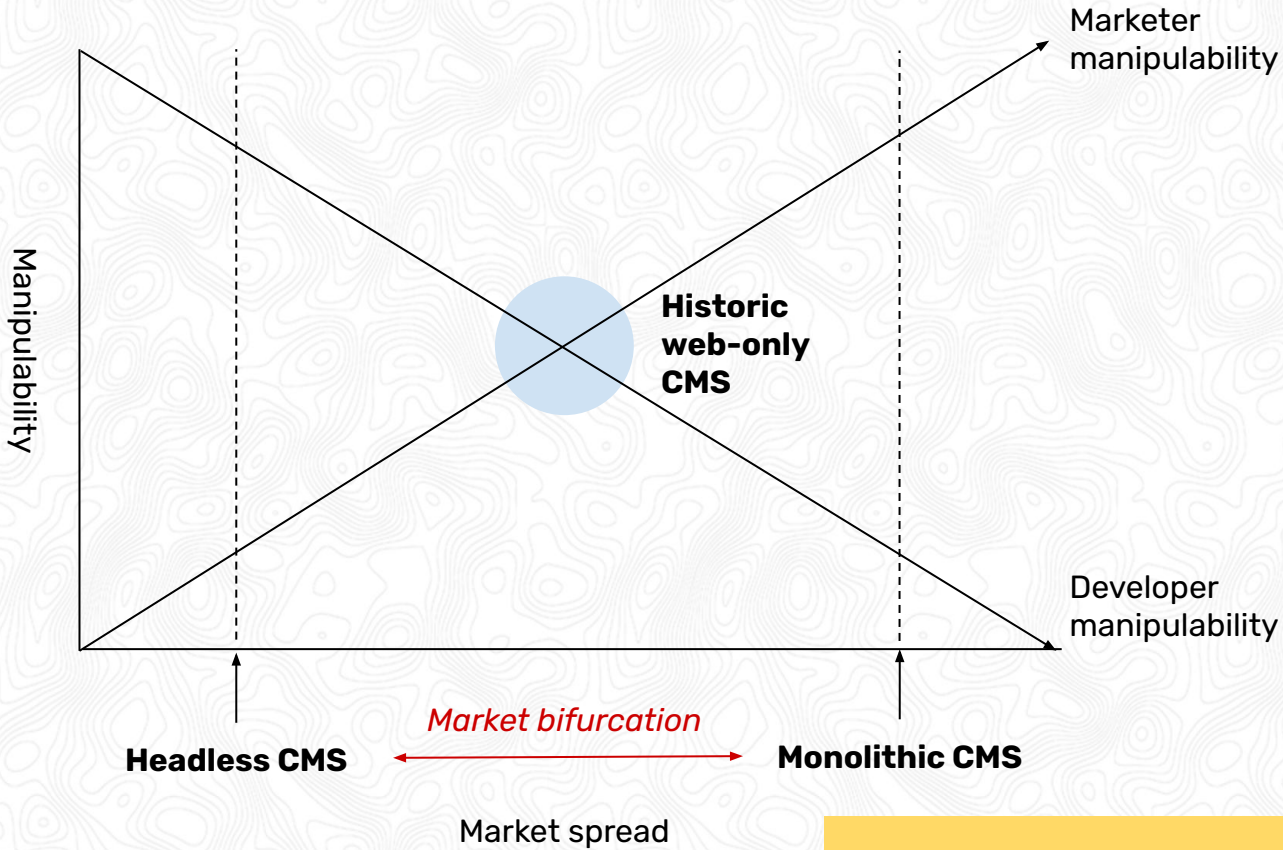
- This is not just the ability to manage how content is displayed in terms of how items are sequenced or how a template is spliced into cards on a smartphone.
- It is also about how to create a compelling developer experience that makes the evolving relationship between the marketing team and engineering team as frictionless as possible.

Digital experience management must aim to restore the balance

The challenge is how to ensure both developer teams and marketer teams are satisfied

How do we help in situations where marketers feel left behind?

How do we help in situations where developers feel left behind?



CMS market bifurcation

2

How WCM forged multiple early social contracts

The first early social contract was digital experience management

Single-site vs. multi-site WCM

- Among the first decisions WCM vendors needed to make was whether to enable **single-site** or **multi-site** management.
- Because **websites** were the only digital experiences at the time, shared infrastructure and technology made this an easy proposition.
- But today it’s not that simple.

Traditional WCM only dealt with:
Should we be single-site or multi-site?

The second early social contract was **no-code content preview**

Traditional WCM only dealt with:
How should we enable no-code content preview?

This social contract quickly expired with the advent of novel channels

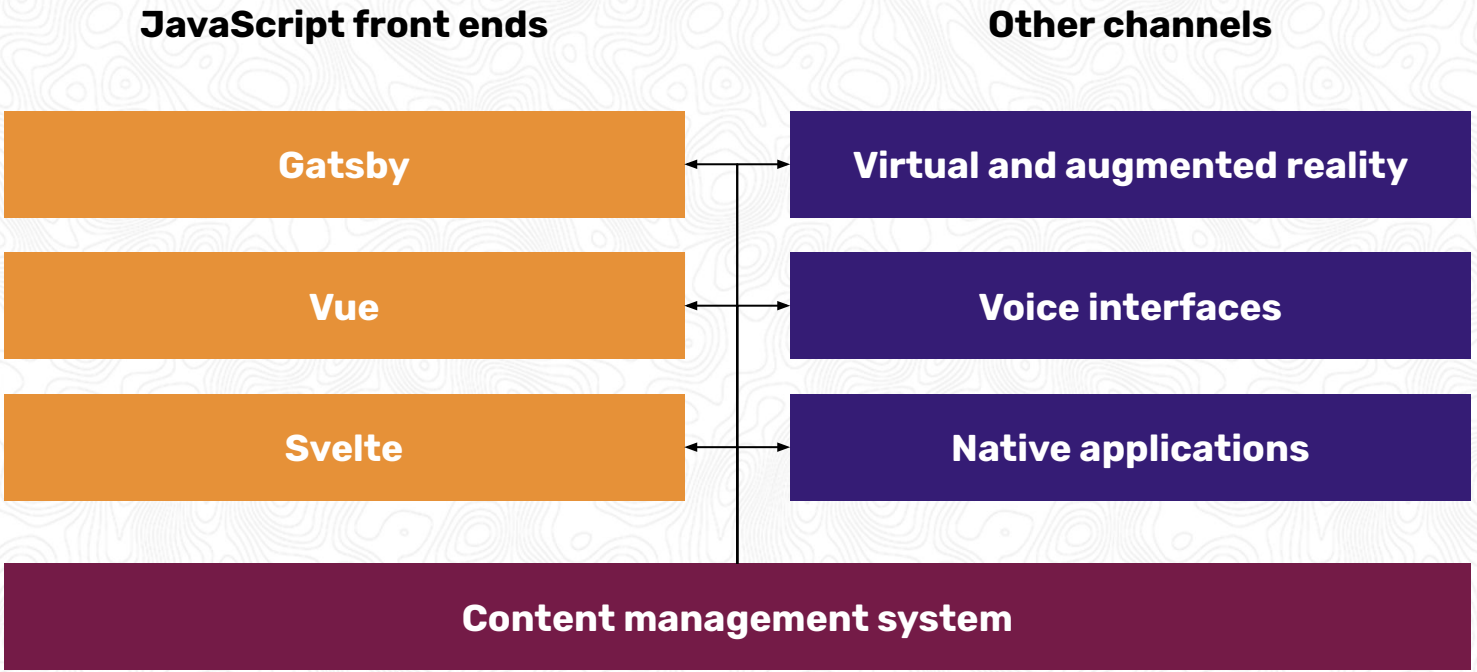
Today, a common customer refrain:
“It used to be so easy; why is it so much harder now?”

New digital experiences

- Data needs to end up in more than just websites, and those content consumers need to be first-class citizens too.
- The headless CMS upended the CMS market owing to its fairly successful argument that it's simply impossible to manage digital experiences writ large in the same way we manage individual websites.
- Shrouded in the promises of developer freedom is the disenfranchisement of editors who see yet more of their power stripped from their key roles.

3

Breaking the social contract of digital experience management



Proudly rendered elsewhere

JavaScript-driven rendering is now encroaching on traditional CMS server-side rendering

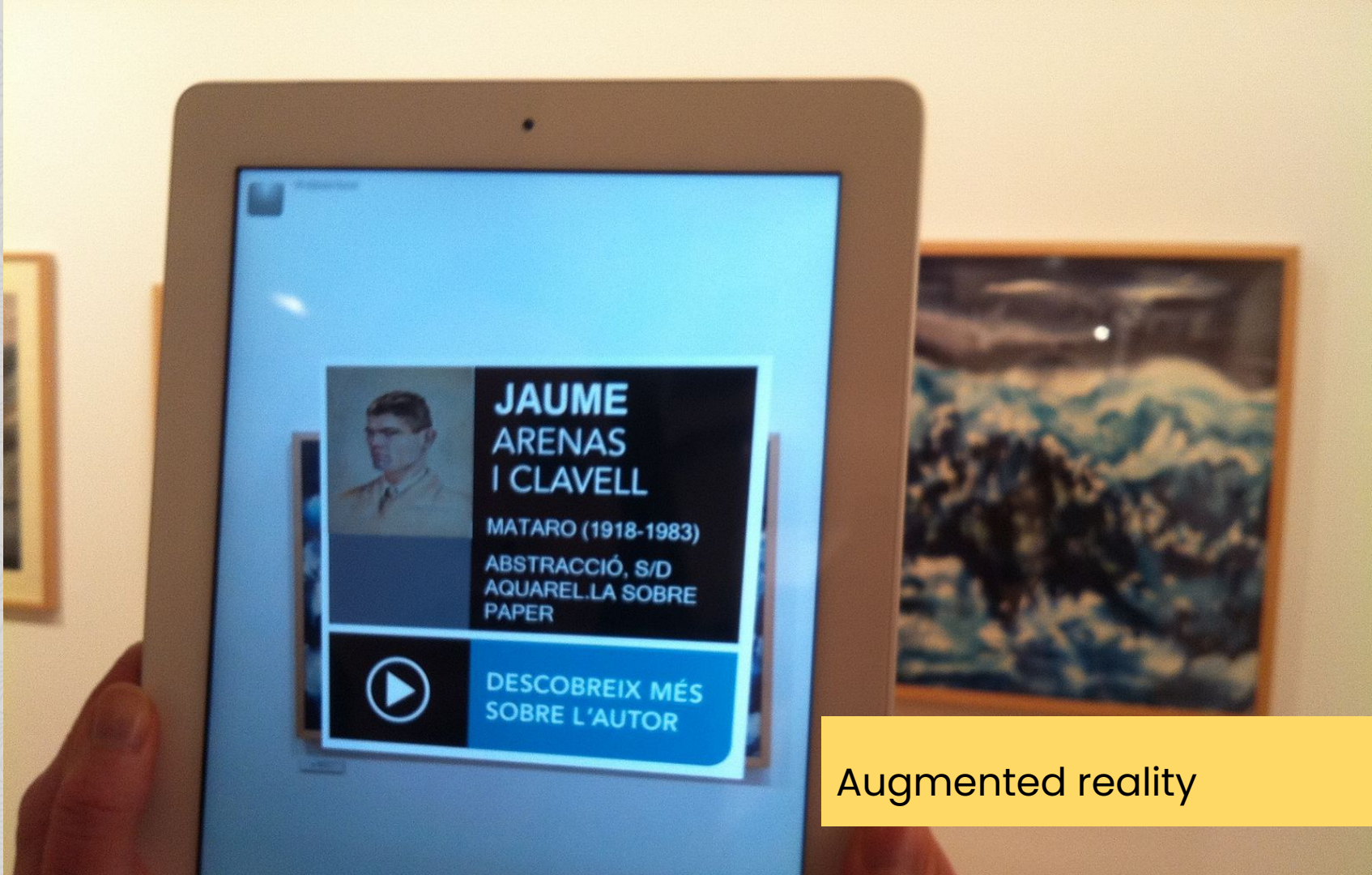
Cambrian explosion

Mobile applications

Set-top boxes

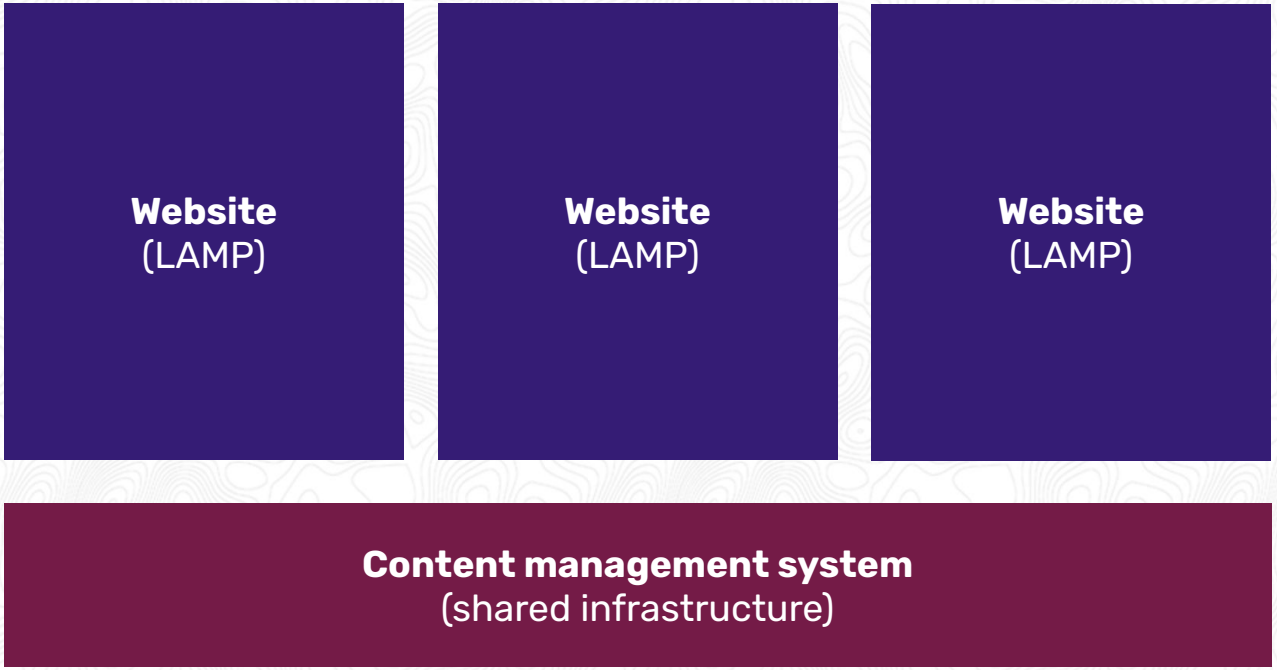
Wearables

Digital signage

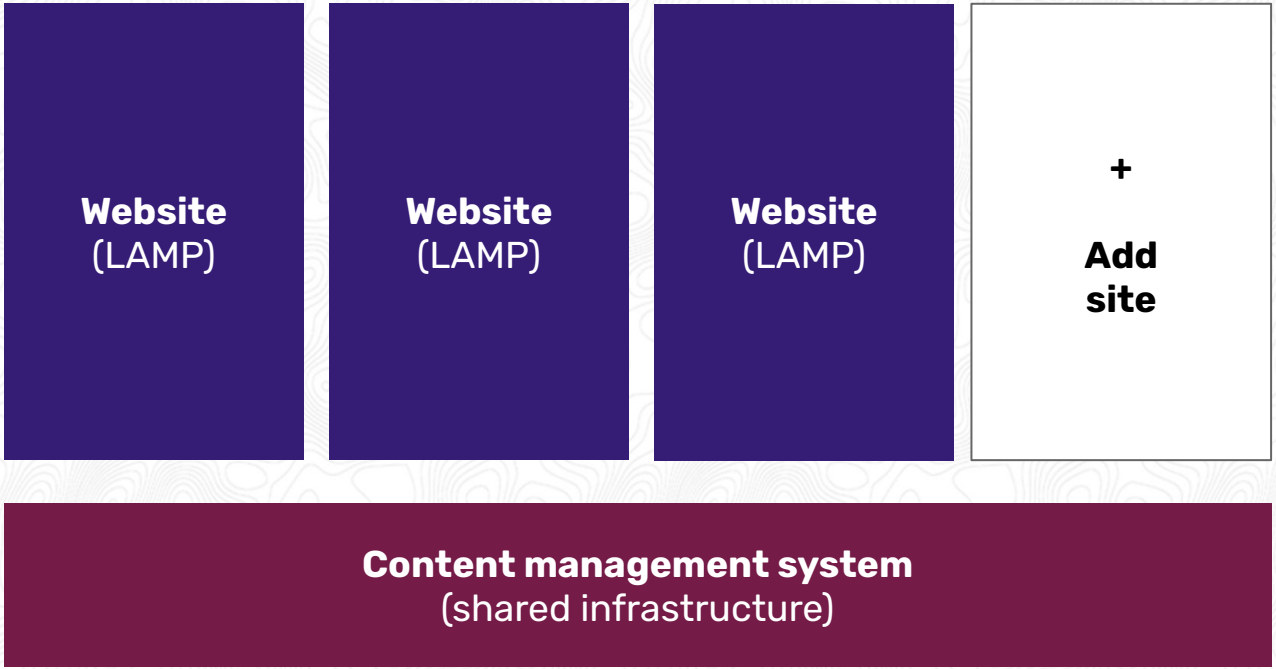


Augmented reality

Conversational interfaces



Before: Just websites



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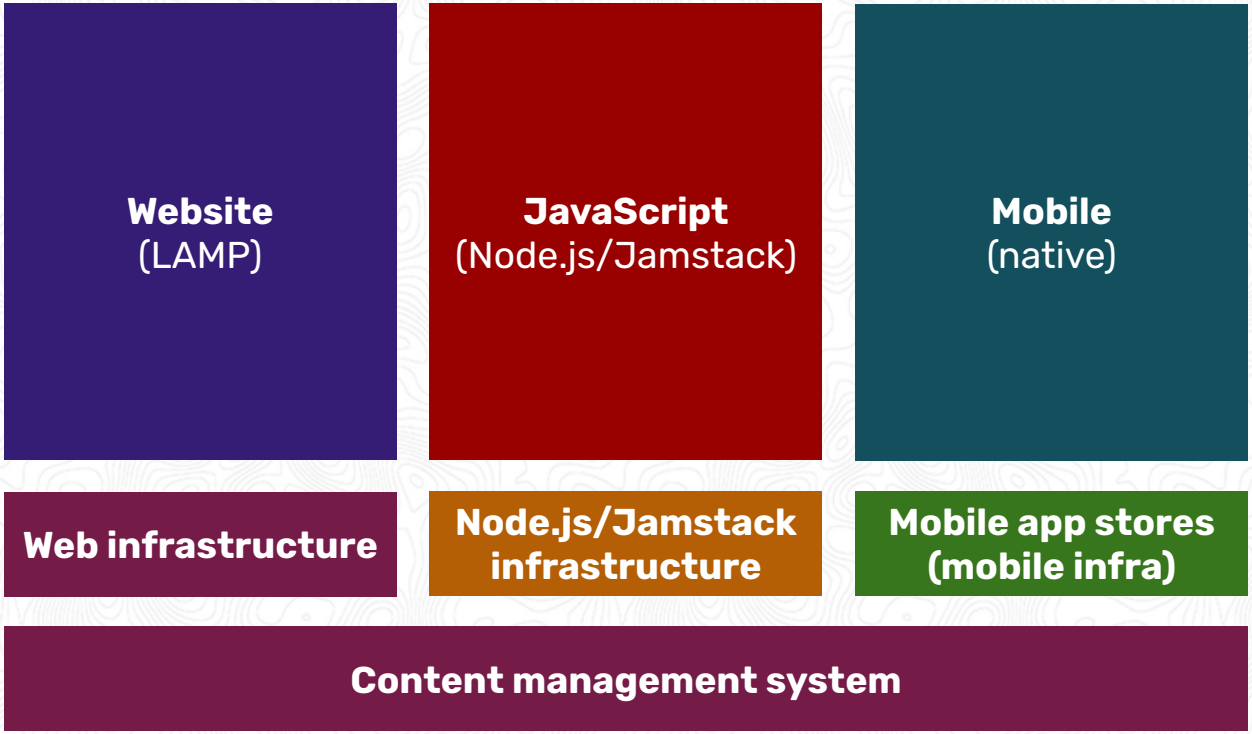
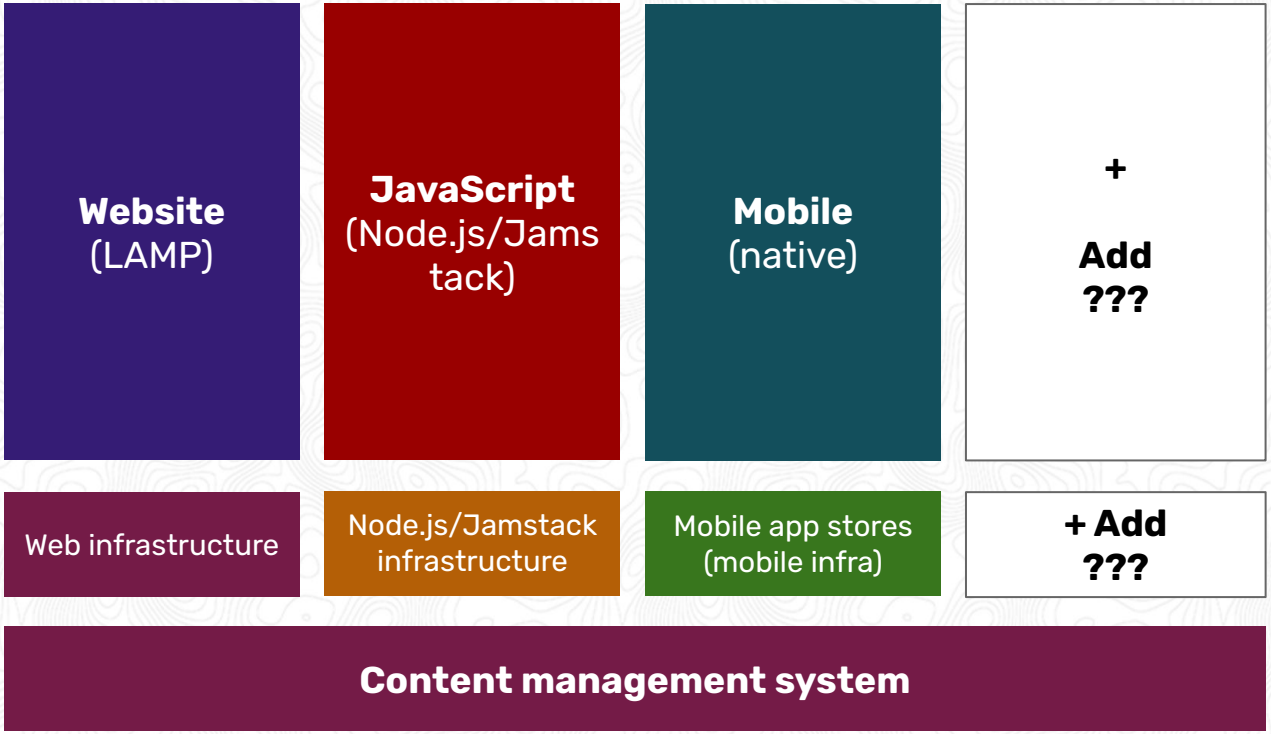


After: Distinct infrastructure



After: Distinct infrastructure

“Why is it so hard now?”

- In my conversations with enterprise organizations and small businesses alike, I hear a common refrain: “It used to be so simple. Why is it so complicated now?”
- DXP vendors seem besieged from all angles by the same personas they used to serve effectively:
  - product managers want more digital experiences
  - content strategists and editors want more visibility into those experiences
  - developers continue to want freedom to build

“Why is it so hard now?”

- For architects and developers who decry the emphasis on digital experience management as opposed to channel agnosticism, look at the problem for a moment from the editor’s perspective.
- For many years, all site builders had to do was install a CMS, add some templates and a theme, and voilà! A fully built, production-ready website.

As infrastructures diversify,
we need a paradigm shift in digital experience management

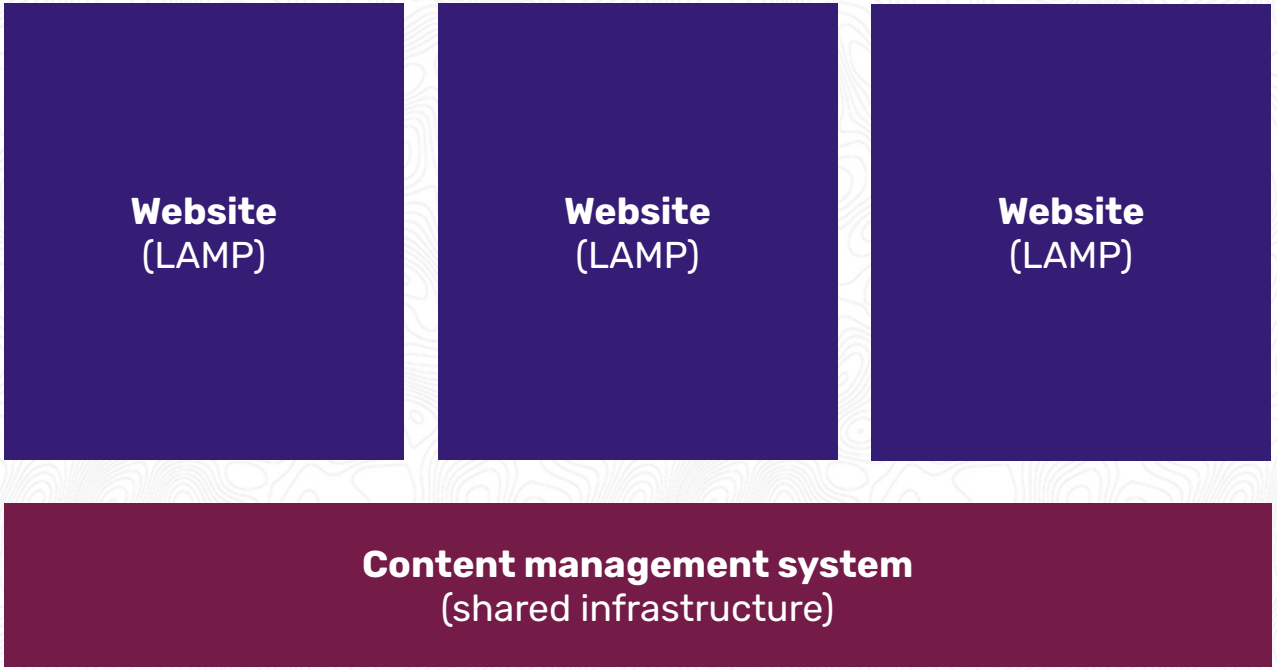
4

Breaking the social contract of no-code content preview

As infrastructures diversify,
we need a paradigm shift in no-code content preview too

No-code preview

- WCM made a promise: “No matter how you build your site, there will always be a no-code approach to content preview available for you to check it before it goes live.”
- Preview in digital experience platforms is the single feature that has led to both unprecedented innovation in the CMS market but also unmitigated frustration among our customers.



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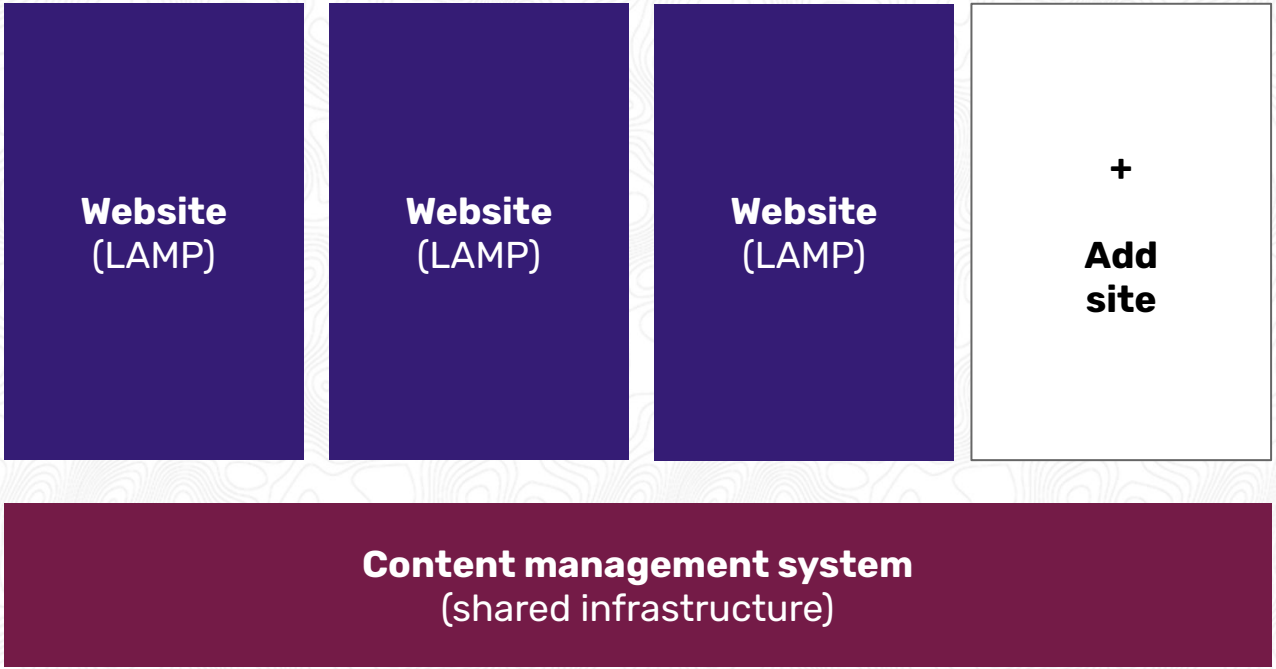

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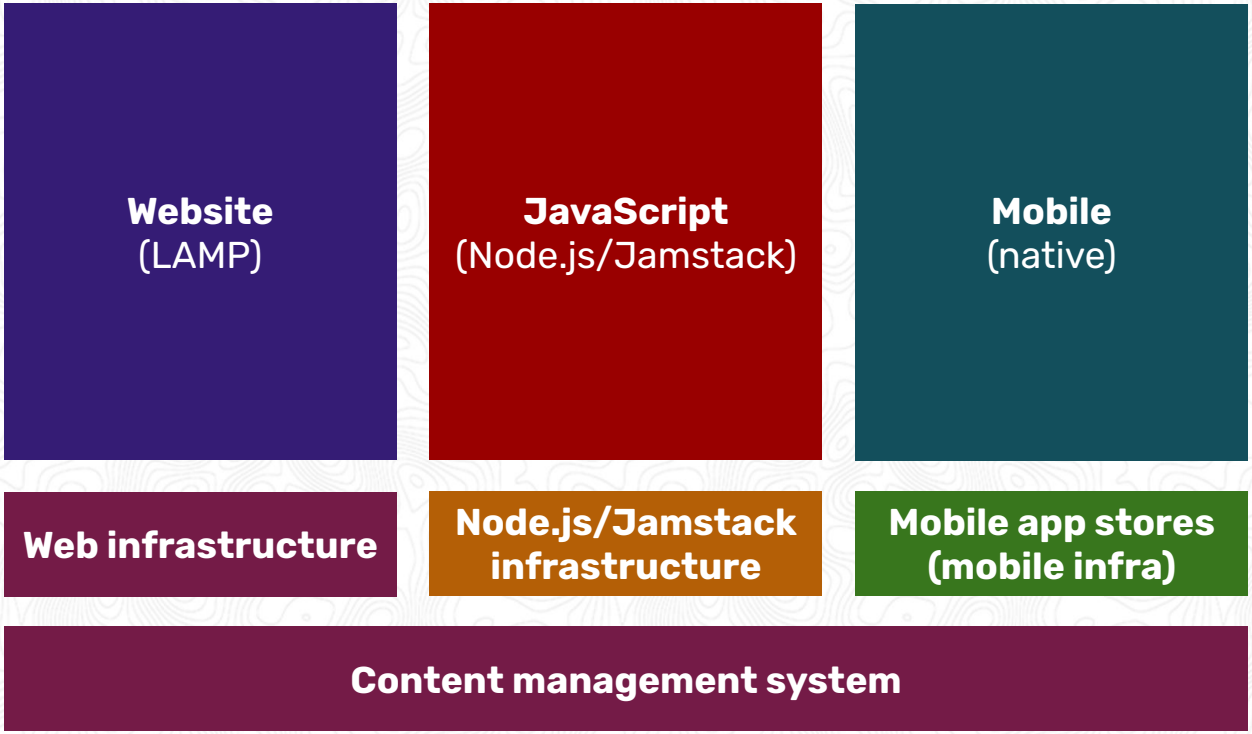

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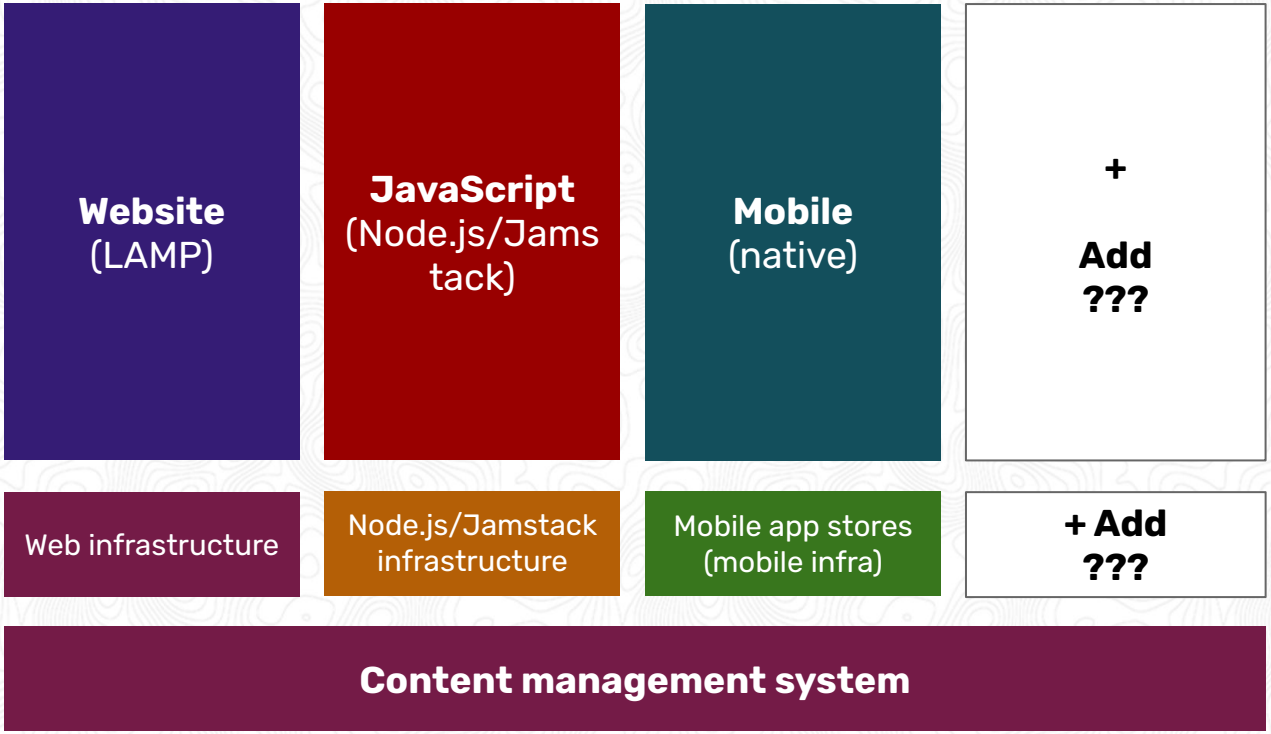

After: Distinct infrastructure

No-code headless preview

- Preview in digital experience platforms is the single feature that has led to both unprecedented innovation in the CMS market but also unmitigated frustration among our customers.
- Most vendors provide either a hodgepodge of integrations with infrastructure providers or preview buttons provided via plugin.
- Others have “single-page app editors” that are so custom-built they virtually guarantee vendor lock-in.

No-code headless preview

- Are marketing teams everywhere destined to lose out on all the benefits of the channel explosion by handing all of their needs to technical teams that might care much more about performance enhancements than supporting no-code preview?

5

Epilogue: “Black box” issues in digital experience platforms

When digital experiences are no longer tangible, viewable entities, they become black boxes, unreachable siloes, developer-only playthings, and editorial orphans

When editors can no longer interact with their digital experiences as richly as before, they become convinced they are playing a losing game

The DXP must never lose sight of its past as a multi-persona enabler and democratizer

Thank you!

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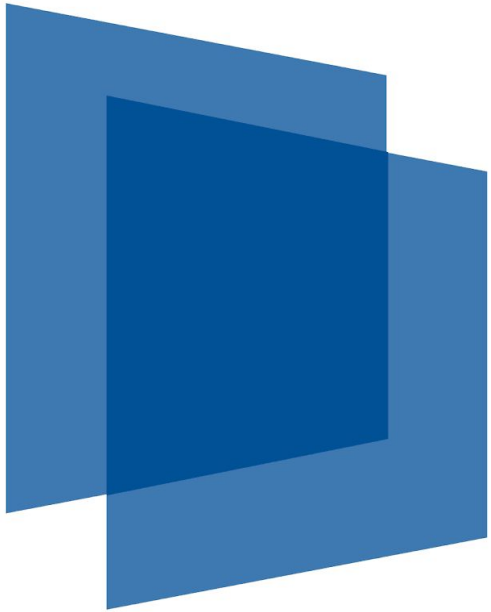

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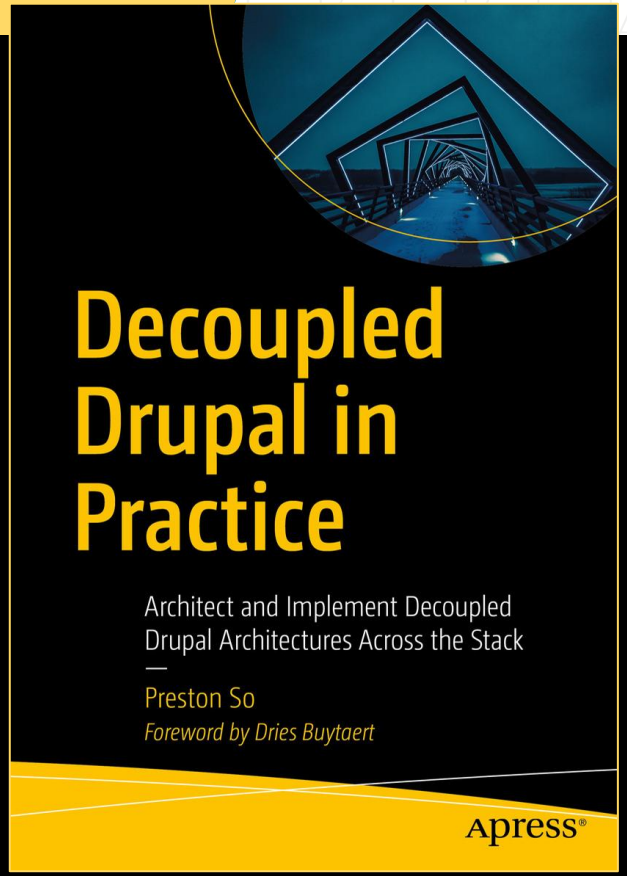
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