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Michael Kay :: W1391090
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The Pros and Cons of CMS

GCOM 360

What Are The Pros and Cons of Using a CMS?

When making a comparison between the two main ways to produce web page content; writing web code vs. producing web code through CMS page builders, there arise two important distinctions to make when evaluating the benefits of each. While user experience certainly weighs in high with regard to evaluating how effective a website author will be in producing viable web content through the CMS UI, web security is another highly important consideration to be measured if one is to fully evaluate the pros and cons of each web authoring technique, for despite relative ease of use, CMS remains highly vulnerable to a variety of malicious web-based malware and hijack attacks.

HTML Security

Websites written in HTML, CSS and JavaScript (let's just say HTML site) are fairly straight forward with regard to what the code is calling the website to do. Since web developers are able to look at web code and understand precisely what is being executed, the security benefit of an HTML site will be high and threat level low. Security threats to HTML sites generally consist of mere [data breaches and DDoS attacks](#). This remains true despite the fact that the great majority of web developers authoring HTML sites today simply obtain a template with all the web code already written and JavaScript plugins pre-installed. WordPress plugins and theme files, by contrast, host thousands of deeply embedded executable PHP scripts which can easily conceal and obfuscate malicious code therein.

The Many Vulnerabilities of WordPress CMS

The world of [WordPress security vulnerabilities](#) is vast and ever growing. WordPress related vulnerabilities saw a [30% increase in 2018](#) compared to the previous year climbing from 418 to 542. This figure represents verified script vulnerabilities and the figure for actual compromised WordPress installations worldwide could be far greater. [ZDNet estimates](#) that over 20,000 infected WordPress sites may be vulnerable due to bad plugins, while [Threat Post estimates](#) the count of vulnerable WordPress installations to be upward of one million due to website owner/manager failure to update faulty plugins. But due to the stealth nature of zombie bot operations working via [SQL injection](#) backdoors without website owner awareness, the amount of compromised WordPress installations may be unknown and perhaps far greater than anyone imagines.

Managed Hosting

While CMS provides the opportunity to create a fully functioning website with little to no web coding experience, the risk of malicious exploitation of a WordPress CMS [continues to grow with increasing sophistication](#). Although there are many useful security plugins available to mitigate WordPress CMS attacks, proper configuration of the many security features is daunting and incorrect configurations can accidentally disable important WordPress features or even [lock the administrator out of the website](#). A website owner may neither be willing nor able to deal with security and/or other web development complexities. For them another web hosting solution is available. [Managed Hosting](#) as an optional service available whereby the hosting provider takes on management of the back end maintenance needs of the WordPress installation. With managed hosting, the webhost assumes responsibility for the security of the website.

The HTML vs. CMS Shootout

CMS offers web content creators the ability to build websites with little or no coding skills, but security risk management is in the details and is certainly high. Managed hosting is available to take care of all the back end details including security but the dollar cost is high. WordPress CMS is clearly a worthy option for those with no coding skills seeking to create a website, but if content creators don't have the big bucks to shell out for managed hosting and don't want to get hacked, it will be required to stay hands on with ongoing back end maintenance including regular plugin updates and security systems management through the chosen WordPress security plugin. [Online web building platforms](#) are another seemingly viable option. The on-screen drag and drop editors provided by these web-based CMS platforms are an easy to use solution but come at a price of limitations in appearance, feature and function of the website.

And the Winner Is...

In the final analysis, I believe that it is for those who can read and write a little HTML, CSS and JavaScript that will have the best of both worlds available to them to work with. There are some strong advantages in going with an HTML site on a shared hosting platform over the WordPress CMS option. The price will be lower; the security threat level will be nil and the peace of mind factor will be high in knowing that one's web creation is not going to be turned into an online hack attack zombie bot via Blind SQL Injection. Moreover, those WordPress plugins require constant updating so you will be able to budget lower long term maintenance overhead into your hand coded HTML site since no plugin updating is required. With the ready availability of [pre-built fully responsive HTML website templates](#) and [JavaScript plugins](#) (as well as online JavaScript CDN's), the costs of an HTML template will be about the same as a professional WordPress theme. The benefits of going CMS or HTML as a coder are going to be something subjectively based upon the skill and inclinations of the website creator, and of course, a choice ultimately made according to the desires of the customer, if we are being commissioned to create a website for hire. Since in the end the choice may be up to the paying customer, the best option for the web developer is to know both how to build both HTML and CMS websites, and then leave it up to the customer make the final decision.