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Joanna Jackson: all right. Well, we'll go ahead and get started here. So hello everyone, and welcome to the Pantheon and Sandstorm Webinar "The CMS Showdown: 10 Key Questions When Making Your Choice". My name is Joanna Jackson. I'm a UX Researcher and Designer at Sandstorm, and I am your host today. My pronouns are she/her. I have blonde hair. I'm a Caucasian female, and I'm wearing a red sweater.

Joanna Jackson: Today we're going to be exploring some CMS options. Some of the different ways that you can align your preferences with the options that are out there today, and how they'll best suit your needs when making those decisions. If you do have questions for the speakers, please submit them in the Q&A. Channel we're going to address as many as we can for general comments feel free to share those in the Chat channel, and if there's anything that you would like for us to expand on or talk more about in our next sessions. Please let us know we're always looking for ways to help you and your team have the tools that you need to succeed.

Joanna Jackson: Today's presentation will have audio captions, and the session is being recorded. Next week we'll provide a human corrected transcript and a link to the recording. But immediately after the presentation we will share today's deck. Thanks so much for attending. We're so excited that you're here! Over to you, Amanda, Emily and Seb.

Amanda Heberg: Perfect thanks, Joanna. Hi, everybody! My name is Amanda Heberg. I'm the VP of Business development here at Sandstorm. My pronouns are she/her, I'm a Caucasian woman with blonde hair and glasses, wearing a black blazer.

Emily Kodner: And I'm Emily Kodner. I'm VP of Client Delivery at Sandstorm. I'm a white woman with dark blonde hair and a Burgundy sweater and braces.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Hi, everyone! I'm Seb Rodriguez. I'm a Strategic Partner Manager with Pantheon. My pronouns are he/him, I'm a Latino man with black hair and a black t-shirt.

Amanda Heberg: Thanks Emily, thanks Seb. So a little bit about Sandstorm before we dive into the specifics today: For those of you who don't know us, we're a digital experience agency. And what that means is we get to build design and test websites and web applications specifically for mission driven organizations. We work with a lot of associations, nonprofits, higher ed and healthcare organizations. So we like to say that while we're not saving babies, we do create the digital experiences that do. And so UX and accessibility is really at the heart of the work that we do every day.

And through that work we've amassed over 4,600 hours of in-depth user research and usability testing, so deep understanding of human behavior. And since the sites that we build and we

create have to be highly performant and have to be highly secure, we work closely with Pantheon who's our preferred hosting and managed services provider for many of our clients. They're the backbone for the work that we do in the infrastructure. So I'll turn it over to Seb.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Thank you. Amanda. Hi, everyone. Let's talk a little bit about Pantheon at a high level. We are a hosting and operations platform built on the Google Cloud. We are ultimately an all in one open source platform, providing the modern infrastructure, advanced workflow, governance, and tools that teams like yours likely need to operationalize your open source assets to deliver the exceptional digital experiences that modern audiences demand nowadays. As Amanda mentioned, we provide agencies like hers, with the tools to more efficiently develop, and for their clients to be able to maintain things, keeping things up to date, and manage their complex portfolios, be it an agency with a lot of clients, or specifically any user that has any any number of sites from one to hundreds.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): With that in mind, over 700,000 Wordpress, Drupal and Nextjs sites. Trust Pantheon, due to our enterprise-level security. We're built on the Google Cloud platform. Our platform is a managed platform. So we take care of all the background infrastructure stuff so that your team can focus on what really matters and what really brings results back to you. And we offer more with that. Let's take it back to you, Amanda.

Amanda Heberg: Thanks, Seb. So what's our plan today? Why are we here? Right? So let's just sort of reset or kind of level set for for everyone on the call. What we want to take a look at today is really looking at leading licensed and open source CMS or DXP digital experience platform options, right? And so understanding who is sort of in the in the landscape, who the major players are, what are our options are, working through and understanding what the differences, and even some of the nuances are to each of those platforms. Then also giving you some guidance, some questions to ask yourself, considerations, and even some proof points for making a decision, for making a switch, or even just validating the decisions that you've made.

Amanda Heberg: And, as mentioned. We've been doing this a long time. So we've been building a lot of sites, many, many sites for plenty of decades now. So we've actually seen it all. So we've seen the good. We've seen the bad. We've also seen the ugly. And so really, what we're sort of in a position to do is kind of take in a lot of insights in terms of content admins, developers, and teams who are really responsible for managing these sites and applications.

Amanda Heberg: So we've worked with groups that are have very simple needs to those that are super complex. But, the thing that we're always asked for is some guidance, right? So as we're working with organizations, and they're thinking through options. Or they're about to embark on a redesign. What should we be looking at? What should be the consideration? So really, what we want to walk you through today are the 10 key questions you should be thinking about asking yourself again, as you would be, you know, sort of considering a shift in strategy, shift in platform, re-platform redesign. What are those things? What's the evaluation criteria that we should be thinking about?

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): And that starts with the 1st question: Open source or licensed when looking at a CMS?

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Well, this is going to depend on your philosophy in the matter. And here's a good analogy to get us started. If we were to compare Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia with the Britannica, a well-known publication. With Wikipedia and open source CMSes are alike. You have an unlimited number of contributors. This means a lot of brains, a lot of eyeballs, and a lot of activity. Constantly bringing new content up to date, constantly checking other people's content, and constantly making sure that you have the most relevant information as soon as possible.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): But, you rely on the community for governance structure and to enforce quality standards

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): with the Britannica or a licensed model, you have a closed group of authors, and one publisher who ultimately controls the quality and the timeliness of the information. While both are imperfect, and this is a very oversimplified analogy of how these things work, both have their perks and their drawbacks. And at the end of the day it's up to you as a user to decide which one feels more effective to your specific needs.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): So let's dive in into some details.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Starting with high, level and open source. With open source, you have a limitless number of contributors, extending functionality, identifying bugs and vulnerabilities, and constantly innovating. But with that you do not have one number to call, or one company to hold accountable for the core application. You are more dependent on your infrastructure that you've built, and that you yourself maintain, which we'll talk a little bit more about in a minute

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): A perk of that though is that there are no licensing fees. However, this does not mean free, as there are still implementation and maintenance costs associated, which we'll also discuss more in a little bit. Now let's take a look at licensed.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): At a high level licensed CMSes give you one throat to choke per se. One accountable company with that future development is driven by this company and therefore market demand and this company's ideal of profitability.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): With that, you are also held to licensing fees that you don't necessarily control, which can translate to price increase or pricing structure changes outside of your control.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Now let's look at a quick fun fact about CMSes.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Did you know that open source CMSes actually power over 45% of the web? Right now. The interesting bit about this being that WordPress makes up about 43% of this statistic while Drupal only accounts for about 1.8% of it. These are the 2 most used open source CMS's. And a lot of this discrepancy can be due to the fact that there are a lot of misconceptions about Drupal's complexity and user friendliness, which we'll also dive into a little bit more in a bit.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Now let's zoom out a little bit and take a look at the ecosystem where this applications would reside. Let's talk about the DXP or the open source approach. All in one? Or best of breed?

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): A way that I like to see this is to visualize your brand as your identity. Maybe your outfit for a big day, if you will.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Would you rather go to target, Macy's Nordstrom's, or any fancy off the shelf store for a fancy suit or a dress for your wedding? Or would you rather have a tailor work with you, based on your specific style, body type, and preferences, to have your outfit fit it and designed around your specific needs?

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Ultimately, there's a lot of factors to consider when making this decision. But a good way to make this comparison would be looking at having an infrastructure built off the shelf versus tailored to your specific needs.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Let's dive on in a little bit more.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): The DXP concept: DXP stands for digital experience platform, often combining the functionalities of a content management system, also known as the CMS, with other tools like analytics, personalization, marketing automation to count a few into a fully integrated suite that allows you to manage digital experiences across multiple channels.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Because these tools are often part of the same ecosystem from the same vendor, it helps you unlock advanced integration of all these tools. However, with that

implementation costs and timelines, might be a little bit heftier, because you're not just implementing one product at a time you're bringing in a bigger ecosystem at once.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Often seen as a perk of this, though you have an all-in-one solution, and again, one throat to choke.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Now, looking at the next level, let's talk about the composable stack, also known as best of breed, which means leveraging handpicked tools and systems to create a comprehensive and an efficient technology stack built again around your specific needs. Often enabling faster integration, greater efficiency and flexibility.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Often this can also lead to lower implementation costs as well as implementation timelines.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): One way I like to look at this is: Would you rather have a team of people that are known to be really good or good at everything that they do? Or would you rather pick a team of people that are specifically known as the best in their fields?

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Where the comparison to make there, and with that, when we're looking at a composable stack, one of the biggest perks for most people going in this direction is that there is no vendor lock-in. You're open to make a change at any time, and you're not dependent on a single vendor.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Now let's talk a little bit about ownership

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): When comparing these options, it is very important to be mindful of the levels of ownership that matter to you.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): If you need to make a change or cut costs tomorrow, what are your options? Are you on a contract for 2 more years with a vendor for your ecosystem? Or are you able to start evaluating changes to your tech stack as soon as possible?

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Do you control your data? Where is this stored? And who has access to it? If someone who owns the application where your data is stored, are you dependent on their security measurements? And what happens if they have a breach? Alternatively, is your team capable of taking ownership over your technology?

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): This means keeping your stack up to date in order to ensure security. You're not dependent on 3rd parties following proper protocol, but you are responsible for your own protocol and how you manage your data.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): A couple of things that are important to keep in mind there. Well, now, let's move up into another fun fact about the DXP ecosystem.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Did you know that Adobe Experience Manager is the most used web DCP with over 35,000 sites currently online? This accounts for about 1.5% of the sites in the previous study I mentioned for WordPress and Drupal.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Some additional interesting context around our research: According to Builtwith, there are over 104,000 sites that have at some point also leveraged Adobe Experience Manager for their live domain. However, their live domain is no longer connected to this technology.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Now let's pass it over to Amanda for more.

Amanda Heberg: Thanks. Seb, so let's dive in. Let's talk more specifically about who the contenders are, who the players are in terms of who's leading in the market. And some of the options that we want to consider here.

Amanda Heberg: Another fun fact: There are over 800 content management systems. So that number sort of blew me away. And it's a long list. But the good news is we're gonna focus and kind of narrow in on some of our evaluation for today.

Amanda Heberg: Just to set the stage, what we are going to focus on are needs of organizations who require custom sites, flexibility in terms of their content, and their layout.

Amanda Heberg: What we're actually seeing here are more specialized options, right? So things like kind of pre-built sort of you know, site builders, things like Wix and Squarespace. We're all familiar with those where you can again sort of spin up a site within a few hours, e-commerce solutions that also have content management baked into them. And then there are obviously the sort of headless options around things like Contentful and Storyblock as well as static generators like Gatsby and Nextjs. While we'd love to dive into those that actually could be its own webinar. A lot to unpack there. But what we are going to focus on are really what we call enterprise level options. So these truly are kind of the core. Kind of the meat of what we're talking about in terms of these stats. Those sites that really have complex content governance, scalability and integration requirements.

Amanda Heberg: So I'm sure for a lot of us on the call, some of these these logos are looking familiar, right? So in that sort of open source. PHP, kind of category: Drupal, WordPress Joomla make up a good sort of portion of that open source market share license.

Amanda Heberg: We often see kind of what we call mid market players, specifically, Sitefinity and Kentico, and then also more on kind of that custom, very enterprise, large big complex types of sites. Solutions built in Sitecore as well as Adobe or AEM, as Seb had also mentioned.

Amanda Heberg: While we'd like to boil the ocean with all of those for purposes of today. We're really gonna hone in on 3 key players. So WordPress Drupal Sitefinity. So again, these are well suited for those complex content needs we talked about as well as really well suited for organizations, nonprofits, associations, higher ed, and specifically healthcare.

Amanda Heberg: So, WordPress, we've seen it. We heard it, I'm sure all of us know or have worked in it, most of us right? So it is truly the most accessible CMS on the market. Right? It has the biggest ownership of the market. It's really accessible from a content management and development standpoint as well.

Amanda Heberg: And then next, we've got Drupal. So this is really well suited for sites that have structured data that have big content needs really flexible, really adaptable. It can kind of take the shape of just about anything. It's very, very powerful.

Amanda Heberg: And then finally, Sitefinity is a really feature rich CMS. It's a really great and strong what we call midmarket .net option. What folks like about it the most is that it has that best of kind of all in solution with robust personalization. What we'll call kind of lighter marketing automation capabilities all baked into the platform. So again, very attractive from a price, from an overall accessibility standpoint.

Amanda Heberg: Alright. So let's talk a little bit about market share. And also, why does that matter right? So market share is really good indicator of the available resources, talent, the long term viability of the product sort of that roadmap, right? And that ongoing support. So those things do matter when we're really thinking about sort of the longevity of the investments that you're gonna make in your tech stack.

Amanda Heberg: And also, how easy is it to find someone to help me. So when you make this decision, you want to be able to be in a position to have plenty of choices to choose from. So we like to say at Sandstorm that we want you to choose to be married to us, not forced to be. So we want you to have plenty of choices, no matter what option you choose, whether you want to bring in in-house talent.

Amanda Heberg: Whether you want to find a new partner, whether you want to hire contract or freelance resources. We want to make sure that you can, you're able to tap into a strong community.

Amanda Heberg: And really, what else? You know, what is going into the investment? What does the R&D roadmap look like? Because again, we're making investments now that we want to sustain us for many, many years to come. And so big consideration is really, how much is that company investing what that looks like? Our recommendation always is that there's a transparent and available roadmap that you can tap into that. And you can see what's happening and what's sort of coming down the pike.

Amanda Heberg: Also just keeping in mind, too, from an R&D perspective, that that investment's different, based on an open source, which is more community and more ecosystem driven versus proprietary, which again naturally would be driven solely by that company by that vendor, and again is very centralized. So again, just some differences there, when we think about the R&D roadmap and popularity. Right? So we've talked a bit about WordPress is sort of, you know, ownership or kind of stake in in terms of the market.

Amanda Heberg: But again, Drupal continues to maintain a really strong presence in the market, particularly among high traffic enterprise level sites, has a very large and vibrant community. Then Sitefinity really caters to some specific niches right? Offering more robust features. But again, good, active community supporting that platform.

Emily Kodner: Right. So Amanda just kind of covered the momentum and the amount of resources behind each. But where are those resources being directed? So let's look at what each roadmap for these options are.

Emily Kodner: So they each have a a proclaimed target audience. WordPress is famously for everyone this shares out in their reach. How many folks have firsthand experience with it? How many of your current and future employees are likely to have touched one?

Emily Kodner: For Drupal, they specifically target and are consciously positioning themselves for ambitious site builders. It maybe requires a little more training, but maybe it can deliver a little more. That's that's sort of the promise they're making.

Emily Kodner: And for Sitefinity, they're clearly talking to companies. Companies that are large enough to have dedicated marketing. You're not going to spin up a Sitefinity site for a blog or one off microsite. It's going to have that more enterprise driven purpose.

Emily Kodner: And then I really think it's important. You know, we're gonna share some of the highlights of the roadmap with you. But, it's important that this is this is something that you stay current with, that you understand what the direction is for the product. Because when you choose the CMS, you're not making a choice for a year. You're hopefully not making a choice for 3 years or 5 years. It's hopefully a long term commitment because you're gonna develop expertise, you're gonna get very familiar with the offerings. So you wanna have an idea of where it's going and if that's aligned with your needs.

Emily Kodner: So for WordPress and Drupal, they each have their big, global or national conferences. These can be great opportunities to hear from their founders and the leaders that are sort of corralling the community involvement for WordPress. They call it "The State of the Word" is the keynote name and and you can look at the most recent Wordcamp. There's a link

on their site. If you just look at WordPress.org/about/roadmap. You can read the full, latest and greatest.

Emily Kodner: In that roadmap they're going to be laying out: What are the areas that we want the community to be working on? And where are we leading those open source efforts? For Drupal, That's the DrupalCon Driesnote. Dries being the the founder and and leader of of the organization. And you can stay current on the website and also going to any DrupalCon or camps.

Emily Kodner: For Sitefinity, it's going to be a little bit more controlled and closed in terms of the messaging. But you can read the release notes. And they also have the community where you can get some more peer based feedback.

Emily Kodner: Okay. So to give you the sort of reader's digest version of those roadmaps. That I'm sure you'll go read yourself as well. Wanted to highlight some of the areas where there's some momentum for each of these.

Emily Kodner: So WordPress has recently released a playground which is a place for prototyping and innovation for their content editor experience. The emphasis is on collaborative editing and enabling more workflow features.

Emily Kodner: On the performance front, they have something called speculative loading. And this is not WordPress specific, but a technology that they're looking to leverage where you kind of hover over something, and it starts loading that page that they think you might be going to.

Emily Kodner: There's also some improvements to theme management. They have a interface called Style Book, which is the tool that gives transparency to the design patterns and helps with the theme management and all 3 of these options are rapidly rolling out, obviously, a lot of AI support options for their content editors. So for WordPress that's more within the experience helping some content creation helpers.

Emily Kodner: And then there's also some security enhancements around by password caching for Drupal. The headline is a big focus on lowering the the barrier to entry and the cost of ownership. There's sort of this recognition that it has been a more developer focused audience previously. So they're working to make it a little more approachable to their marketers, to their folks that are, you know, just out there, looking to create a website, making it possible for you to just create a Drupal website without even the intervention of a developer.

Emily Kodner: So they recently launched a Drupal CMS, which is a version of Drupal that you can install with a couple of clicks so you can try it out on your own, and and it has a lot of tools where you can say "I want an event site" or can create sort of a pre-built option to lower the the barrier to entry there. They're also adding recipes which are features that allow you to make development more repeatable by saving something you do for one site and making it available for the community or for another site that you're working on. Also a trend towards automated

updates and a theme library. So doing. Some of those things that are, you know, maybe borrowing some of the trends in the WordPress space, but making it a little easier for folks to reuse and making the cost of ownership lower.

Emily Kodner: There's also a lot of emphasis on making the best layout and content editor experience. So we're gonna talk a little bit more about Experience Builder later. But that's where there is a ton of community involvement.

Emily Kodner: And also an AI assisted administrative experience. So using AI for things like content but also for site building.

Emily Kodner: Finally, Sitefinity. They recently released an AI service add on. So it's sort of a packaged up option to add AI support throughout the system. They have an integrated customer data platform called insights for personalization.

Emily Kodner: And then also an Azure AI translator integration, so that it can basically suggest some of the translations you're doing for your content in place.

Emily Kodner: The next consideration that we want to talk through is an area where there's a little more daylight between the options. This is: How do they manage extending that the core application.

Emily Kodner: So, looking 1st at Wordpress.

Emily Kodner: This is one where it has a very large universe of plugins, and they trend towards an all in one approach. If you want a calendar, it's gonna be "Here's a calendar". And it's got the calendar functionality. It's got the calendar display. It's got an event. It's gonna have a lot of pieces baked into it. And there's gonna be maybe 10 different calendar options for you to choose from.

Emily Kodner: Though that can be really great for quickly adding functionality to your site, there's also a lot of variability in the quality you really have to look at what you're adding. And this is an area we'll talk about on the security front as well.

Emily Kodner: For Drupal: They're very opinionated on this front. It's a framework approach. Drupal maintains a lean core. They work very hard to be stingy about what goes into core, and you extend that with modules. Modules are granular. They're meant to be this small piece of functionality, so that you're not getting 10 other things that you don't need. And it's strictly for functionality. So you're not gonna get the look and feel with it. You're gonna manage that in a completely separate layer.

Emily Kodner: and then with Sitefinity. Again, this is a completely different approach because the universe of extensions is fixed. You don't have other people creating things that might add

on to it. And there's usually additional charges. So there'll be your core application functionality. But if you're gonna add something like the AI system, you're gonna purchase that separately. But the good news is the quality and consistency is very good. It's the same people working on the core application. It's the same process of vetting any of those options.

Emily Kodner: I also love a good analogy like Seb, and so if I were to compare this to how you might go about preparing a meal: Wordpress would be unlimited frozen dinners, you know. You can get a frozen dinner for anything. It is what it is.

Emily Kodner: For Drupal. It's a grocery store. You go out, you buy the ingredients that you want, and you make your meal.

Emily Kodner: and for Sitefinity you get a box, and it's got some ingredients for the meal that they decided that you're having that night, but again nicely curated and put together.

Amanda Heberg: So let's talk a little bit about what we like to say "Quality of life" right? Particularly these choices. How popular will they be with your content editors? This is probably one of the most important considerations in any sort of implementation or transition to a different platform, and what we often see is that our content editors are the forgotten stepchildren, and that often it's just so easy to focus on the shiny object. The "what's new" in terms of feature set, outward facing enhancements, and improving the user experience. And you know, those types of things. So it is truly in everyone's best interest to satisfy those content editors and admins, making them happy, easing their burden, reducing their friction.

Amanda Heberg: So let's start with Wordpress. Lots of goodies here. Right? So again, we've talked about accessibility of it. It is familiar for many. It's rare when we talk to someone, any of our clients and prospective clients who have not touched Wordpress, or had some experience with it in a past or former life.

Amanda Heberg: So this is information, sort of insights that we've gathered through just not only our own experience, but those of our clients as they're working within different systems. And what have they liked? And where have they found? Some challenges, but again, the good is that it's very accessible. It's easy. It's intuitive. There's tons of "Googleable" resources and information.

Amanda Heberg: And we did want to build upon what Emily just mentioned in terms of the AI roadmap. Looking at the lens of it through the content admin or editor, there's plugin abundance, right? Lots of modules and plugins being created specifically in the WordPress community for page building, content creation for the content editing process, in addition to other things around workflow, etc. There is certainly highly contributed and very robust.

Amanda Heberg: So because of that, there is a heavier reliance on the 3rd party plugins to Emily's point. You sort of get it all right? And there's a lot of options when you're looking

potentially for a specific solution. So with that comes some added cost in terms of whether you're opting for pro or additional subscription fees. Those are things that we need to factor into the consideration.

Amanda Heberg: And recently we worked with an association of physicians. Neurosurgeons. And when we started working together they were on a very old version of Sitecore. They were having a lot of challenges in terms of just generally updating the site.

Amanda Heberg: Features were sort of not enabled. It was very antiquated. And so the experience was just really not suiting their needs. We went through a process to help them make some decisions around their CMS. Ultimately, they landed in WordPress. One of the comments from the stakeholders was that it was very infinitely "googleable", as we've said. So I can figure out almost anything in WordPress. As mentioned, it's sort of abundant in terms of resources and information.

Amanda Heberg: But I would also say to that we see this pretty commonly with organizations. Maybe on older versions, or you know, some proprietary system in this particular case. The whole idea when organizations may buy or purchase those platforms at the time is "Let's get this up and running. And then let's push some things to a phase 2. We're gonna roll out personalization. We're gonna roll out this new feature or this new enhancement."

Amanda Heberg: And then the reality sets in. So they've bought a full solution. But staff turnover happens. Budget changes. Staffing is constrained, so they haven't been in a position to be able to roll out those features as they had intended when they purchased the product. So that's another consideration here, too. You know that folks are in some cases using or have access to a solution or a tool set that they're not taking full advantage of.

Amanda Heberg: So let's talk Drupal. The Good: It's a very, very rich content admin experience. So it's well suited, as we mentioned, for sites that have structured data, structured content, complexities around that content. You have a use of taxonomy. So that's really what it's built for. The good is that again, you've got menu management coupled in with the content editing experience, which really makes it a nice experience from a publishing perspective.

Amanda Heberg: Tons of flexibility. And again Emily touched on this, but from an AI roadmap perspective, really baking in AI into that core rather than completely relying on additional modules for that and really moving away from what WordPress had embraced: more of a plugin, dependent model.

Amanda Heberg: And again, things around enablement for content creation, editing, contextual recommendations, page building. So there's a lot being baked into the Drupal application.

Amanda Heberg: And the "Meh" Not So Good: Emily touched on this earlier: A bit of a higher learning curve. Because of that rich editor experience, the feedback that we've definitely gotten

is there can be a little bit more time that's needed to learn it. And it can be considered a little less intuitive.

Amanda Heberg: As an example, another client shout out: we actually worked with one of the largest software companies in the world, so you could maybe guess a handful of those right? We could probably guess.

Amanda Heberg: At the time, they had sponsored a site, and they were really focused on staying in a .net lane, and so we were looking at both Kentico as well as Drupal. As we got through the design process, it was clear that they had very high needs around structured content and a really robust taxonomy experience.

Amanda Heberg: So we ended up scoping both the efforts and the overall cost, both for licensing and implementation, and Drupal easily and quickly emerged as the lower cost and better fit option. Coming in with sort of a predisposed "We're gonna do this". And then going through this process really opened up their eyes and they were able to make an informed decision.

Amanda Heberg: And let's talk Sitefinity right? So The Good: Very intuitive drag and drop capabilities. The interface really allows for users to easily be able to interpret where everything lives. Which has been considered easier than in some other applications. And again, a very easily identifiable site content structure, as I mentioned. So that's definitely the pros. And from an AI roadmap. Again, just mentioning what Emily had mentioned. We've got some generative AI capabilities baked in with that additional module opportunities for translation as well. So again, charting down that path for sure, and making AI much more accessible within the content editing experience.

Amanda Heberg: and the "Meh": the admin experience can actually feel a little bit outdated, even though that orientation of where everything lives is great.

Amanda Heberg: That's definitely been some of the feedback that we've received. The separation between the content and the presentation can feel a little bit disconnected, so meaning that structured content may actually live in forms and fields rather than residing directly on the page. So again, just some considerations from a content admin perspective.

Amanda Heberg: And then again, creating structured content or templates would mean that you have to clone a model page, and then rely on widgets to bring that to life.

Amanda Heberg: In probably at least half a dozen cases, we've worked with clients on their existing Sitefinity sites. And in those cases there's been really good rationale for staying on the platform. What we've seen more so than not is that they're satisfied with the product. They've actually built a fair amount of in-house resources, expertise, and just general familiarity with the platform. And really, where these organizations are at, is just looking to leverage its feature set even more. So leveraging some of those new capabilities, new features, those types of things.

And in those cases it's really worked well. It's made all the business sense in the world to stay within the Sitefinity platform.

Emily Kodner: Okay, so staying on the same general topic, but digging a little deeper into layout management more specifically. We're talking about any of the page building tools or layout management where I'm not just filling out a list of fields, but I'm deciding that I need a more engaging layout. Maybe I need to put something that is a different number of columns. So let's look at the solutions for each.

Emily Kodner: WordPress. So your native feature, built into WordPress is blocks that leverage Gutenberg, the default editor. This is where there's a lot of focus in the community and developing additional features, and with the next iterations it's more more focused on that collaborative editing. This is customizable with code knowledge.

Emily Kodner: Often times people are also working in some sort of plugin or theme based page builders. So WP Bakery is one of those. It can be very powerful. What we find is, it can also be very difficult to maintain. With great power comes the need to manage your own consistency. So I might be able to set the padding for this block on this page, and that means that I have to set the padding for that block on that page, and I need to remember to keep that consistent throughout

Emily Kodner: Divvy and Elementor are similar. They have some similar fields for this but they are tied to the theme so they can affect more changes. It can be a fine option for sites that don't need a lot of customization. Where you're looking to just get something out the door and be able to do most things without the need of a developer. But with any of those options, we often find people looking to make a change from Elementor or WP Bakery because of that need.

Emily Kodner: When they're talking to us, they're usually working on a more enterprise level site, and they want a little bit more consistency and centralization of some of those choices

Emily Kodner: Drupal. Layout Builder is the current core functionality. For managing this, it lets you define the number of columns page with you can add custom blocks and a drag and drop interface. Paragraphs are sort of the competing option. That's more of a contributed module base.

Emily Kodner: It allows you to add custom elements within the regular page editing experience. And the big thing that the community is working on right now is Experience Builder. So that's coming hopefully next year. And that promises to marry the best of Layout Builder and paragraphs and creating the ultimate content editor experience with a built in design system and AI features. So a lot of excitement around that, and a lot of things for what is still to come. But a lot of power in that Layout Builder feature today.

Emily Kodner: And then finally, Sitefinity. So this is one where the options are fine. It makes sense. You use widgets to create a layout. It's a little bit less scalable or maintainable in that

you're creating "Here's my model page. I'll clone that page. Here's how I use that layout going forward". That's how you're enforcing consistency. So, we always like to think about a migration path going forward. These are all kind of one-off choices in this instance. But you do have a drag and drop editor for all of these options. The content editor is near and dear to our heart, because they're often our client, but they're also often us. So I did do some polling of all of our folks who are called on to do content editing. And on paper, they all look very similar. For WordPress, people have had exposure. They've been in that site before and they can mostly figure it out. In Drupal, there's probably the best votes in terms of layout management. On that one. The Layout Builder Experience has been the most popular. On Sitefinity, and in comparison to some other .net options in particular, it's fine, and it works well, and it's easy enough.

Emily Kodner: So there's your color commentary in addition to the bullets that all look very similar.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): And now let's jump into another question, which is: What about security?

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): As you're looking at potential solutions for your needs, it's always very important to be mindful of security.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): When we're discussing licensed solutions such as Sitefinity, things can be pretty straightforward. So let's jump into some preconceptions about open source, starting with: "Open source, is inherently risky. Anyone can view the source code so hackers can easily find vulnerabilities."

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Well, yes, but while transparency allows for people to have this sort of visibility, it also allows for thousands of developers and security experts to inspect tech and patch vulnerabilities often releasing security patches quicker than proprietary platforms. The power of community. Now let's look at our next preconception.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): "If the Plugin is open source, it must be trustworthy."

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Well, not all Plugins are created equal. Some are poorly coded or abandoned, introducing vulnerabilities, even if the core CMS itself is secure.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): This is why it's especially important when working with open source to be vetting, updating, and limiting plugin use while you're building your infrastructure and also being aware of what's going on in current trends and a lot of other fun stuff around it which reflects back on taking ownership over your tech stack. Let's zoom out a little bit and take a look at the security landscape.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Now I'm not gonna recite every box in this diagram. But while we're looking at this landscape, it's important to note that some of the security measurements can

vary highly with WordPress and Drupal or open source in general depending on the expertise of the team or agency building.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): The application, the selectiveness over which plugins are being used. And, as I mentioned before, your organization's ability to take ownership over your tech stack, be it having your internal team updating your instances and keeping things up to date, or by establishing a maintenance and support relationship with experts like Sandstorm.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): with Sitefinity, much like most proprietary applications, things tend to be a little more straightforward as everything comes off the shelf, and it's maintained by the provider. But again, you are reliant on their cycles, on their teams, and how they want to manage these things.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): The discrepancy in open source, something to be aware of when considering it. Though it might seem free at a glance, there are a lot of responsibilities involved with maintaining an open source application much like adopting a puppy.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Let's take it back to Emily to elaborate on that.

Emily Kodner: Nice segues. So what is the cost of ownership? This is never a consideration, right? When making your choice. Probably one of the top considerations for many folks.

Emily Kodner: But the unsatisfying answer here is that it depends. And it depends on if you're picking the right fit for your needs, or if you're going to do a lot of work to customize that solution for your needs.

Emily Kodner: But, as Seb says, you know open source is free, like a puppy. This might just be an excuse to have a picture of my puppy up here.

Emily Kodner: You're not starting off with the license fee, but you're gonna need to feed it and train it. It probably won't chew up any of your belongings, but it will need that care to make it what you need.

Emily Kodner: On the other hand, it's nice to control where you're making those investments. You know, you're gonna pay for your solution somewhere regardless. But it can be nice to say "This is the feature I need, and I would like to have it built exactly for my needs".

Emily Kodner: And it can also be nice to not be, you know? You want to have freedom like we mentioned earlier. If you need to make a change tomorrow, if the budget outlook looks different tomorrow, what are your options?

Emily Kodner: If a company decides to raise their fees tomorrow. What are your options? And that comes in the case. It's the license for the product. It's your hosting. It's the partner that you're working with. It's any of the 3rd party options you're looking at. You want to know "If I need to make a change. What are the levers that I have, and how much control? How much foresight will I have to know when something's going to change?" A lot of the license options actually have an option for you to purchase. To have a locally hosted version where you've purchased the software. With that option, you've got a little more control over the cost. But you typically do still need to pay for security updates for taking care of it.

Emily Kodner: And a lot of them also have a cloud-based option where you just have that monthly fee. If you stop paying that fee, you don't have that product anymore.

Emily Kodner: Okay, so this is the the bringing it all home, the summary here. We've talked about a lot of different aspects and the questions are the things that you're gonna want to think through for not only your choices, but for your organization. And to to give you some sort of qualitative look across the options here. For Wordpress, it's a popular choice for ease of use for content administrators.

Emily Kodner: And if you're looking to do DIY development, it's probably the easiest option to do that. Sometimes that's the right solution. And sometimes that's not the right solution. Depending on how business critical your website is, how controlled you need to be with rolling out changes, and how expert you want somebody to be in working on it.

Emily Kodner: The cons are that it's not necessarily built for scale or complexity. It can be used for things that need scale and complexity, but you're typically bending it to do that. You're gonna do a lot of work to get to the same output that you're going to need or that you would get with a solution that was built for that.

Emily Kodner: But, there is that large market share which breeds a lot of innovation, the con being that it makes it a popular target for security threats.

Emily Kodner: On the Drupal side: Great for structured content, for taxonomy, for permissions, for management of layout, security first approach from the community.

Emily Kodner: The cons are that it will require developers. I know that a lot of the movements they're making right now are to reduce that need. But at the moment, you still need to talk to people like us to make some of the changes on the site.

Emily Kodner: And it's typically going to be a new thing for many content administrators to learn.

Emily Kodner: On the Sitefinity front: This can be a very good option if you have .net skills in-house or an organizational preference for licensed software. We still talk to a lot of clients who still are like "I want that one number to call". So this can be a good option for those folks.

Emily Kodner: The cons are that it's an okay content editor experience, I would say, maybe mediocre, maybe not as flashy as some of the other options. You will have those recurring licensing fees. So there's fees for everything. But that's sort of out of the gate, the fee that you're already gonna pay.

Emily Kodner: And there's a fixed development path and universe of plugins. So you won't be controlling what those features are, except through the feedback that you're giving the company.

Joanna Jackson: Alright. So now we are going to take the last about 9 minutes here to answer some questions that we've seen come in. And we got a decent amount of questions that came in. If we aren't able to get to all of them today in this call, we can address them separately and in a write up after the call as well. We wanna make sure all the questions get answered one way or the other. Question number one, "How does an agency, someone like Sandstorm, work with more of a hosting partner like Pantheon?"

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): So for those of you who don't know me, I'm a Partner Manager at Pantheon. So I actually oversee relationships with agencies specifically, Sandstorm who works directly with Pantheon.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): Sandstorm and Pantheon working together basically offers the full picture of support for working with our clients. Sandstorm is the partner that designs, builds, supports your website or application at the application level. And Pantheon is the hosting platform for this application. But we also provide Sandstorm and your team with the tools to efficiently build, deliver, and maintain your site. As we mentioned, there are things about Wordpress and Drupal when you're looking at open source that require a little bit more involvement, and we make it easier to have that level of involvement without burning resources, just to keep things safe or keep the lights on.

Amanda Heberg: And I would just add to in terms of hosting versus sort of agency. We're typically working with clients to address once we design or launch a site, we're supporting them. We're fielding ad hoc requests. We're helping with training. We're helping with enhancements. We're making sure we're applying things like security updates and then working with Pantheon to ensure that infrastructure is highly performant, highly secure, on any organization's behalf.

Amanda Heberg: And we love them. They're great. They're just great partners in this, and they're all in it with us in terms of the way that we can support our clients, and just wanting to make sure we've got very satisfied folks that we get to work with.

Joanna Jackson: Alright, we've got another one here. "Between WordPress, Drupal and Sitefinity that we discussed today what kind of organization tends to be the best fit for each?"

Amanda Heberg: I would say, and Emily jump in here, too. But I would say it's a little less about the type of organization. But it's actually more around the complexity of the content. As we've

talked a lot about through this webinar, it's about your process around governance, around how you publish and manage your content. How complex are you from a taxonomy, from a process perspective? What are the complexities of the organization and the site that you need to deliver?

Amanda Heberg: Like Emily mentioned, mission business critical versus something that is needing to be maybe less on. I would say that that is less of the case with most of the organizations we work with. But, it's really more around those kinds of parameters rather than "Oh, it's this type of a nonprofit versus a healthcare organization."

Emily Kodner: When organizations are looking for the right fit, you're often battling some preconceptions about each of these platforms. So for WordPress, a lot of people have familiarity with it, but they have familiarity of it for the site that they worked on for their side gig or for a blog. And so that is sometimes applicable to the organization they're going to and sometimes not. But if your site needs to deliver a lot of articles, WordPress is really good at that or if it has some more standard use cases, WordPress is a great option. There's no reason to go more complex. There's no reason to necessarily look at any of the options like Drupal. If you've got an organization that's got events and articles and different types of articles, and that you want to have. Maybe you have a lot of bios you have like these different content objects that naturally have different fields associated with them.

Emily Kodner: It's going to be a great option for you. And then, like we said, Sitefinity, if your organization wants .net, if they want proprietary, that's a reason to go down that path.

Emily Kodner: We find that a lot of organizations, you're starting with that licensing fee. And then you're adding on different options. But with all 3 options, you're basically starting with a very similar core, it really comes to what additional features you're gonna want to add on to it, to look at the the cost and the suitability.

Emily Kodner: Is there anything else you want to add in Amanda or sub.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): I think you covered it pretty well. Yeah.

Amanda Heberg: I wish that we could all come out of this with the magic bullet answer. But it is unfortunately a little bit of "it depends". But I think just trying to give you some guardrails for trying to make that decision, and truth be told, more around how do you justify that investment? How do you articulate that up in and up right? And what is the business case that you have for whatever choice you're making. That's really what it's about.

Emily Kodner: And one more aspect is the staffing that you have to support.

Amanda Heberg: Yeah, that's a good point.

Emily Kodner: We talked about Adobe Experience Manager like you're gonna need trained people who are specialized in that. And if you're an organization that has room to have people be trained and specialized in that, it might be a good solution for you. But if you're in an organization where your content editors are wearing a lot of hats, you're probably gonna want to look at something more approachable.

Joanna Jackson: So staying on this theme of open source platforms, folks that are looking to maybe move away from them: "What are some of the biggest misconceptions you often hear about open source platforms?"

Emily Kodner: That security one, right?

Emily Kodner: That's where we have definitely been in calls where they're like "Oh, but you can see the code. How can that possibly be secure?" But I think it comes back to like Seb's point on the Wikipedia or the Britannica. In your heart, which one do you trust more? Do you want the one that's got unlimited editors on it? And that, maybe I don't trust that the data there, somebody can introduce something today, and if it's only been up today, then I maybe I don't trust it yet. But if it's been up for a month. It's been seen by a lot of people, and vetted by a lot of people, and it's true. But that's not comfortable for everyone.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): With that, too it also cycles on that level of ownership piece that we talked about. Like being able to have either someone in-house, a platform and agency to help you maintain your application and staying up to date, but also select the right plugins. Basically, someone who can be selective about what the best thing for you is is the perk of custom building, but also a risk that you're taking when you're pursuing the open source trends.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): It's the comparison too. If you're dependent on a vendor on the other side of things, vendors mess up too. It's rare, but it can happen. Last year, CrowdStrike, not to speak badly of anyone, but there was a massive incident that they called it the Y2K23.

Seb Rodriguez (He/Him): So it is important to balance these conceptions about either option as you look into it and make sure that the level of investment and the level of ownership that you, as an organization, are ready to take aligns with the with the solution that you're going towards. It's important to have meaningful conversations with people in your industry or agencies, or people who have built these applications before to understand things that come up as you're building this ecosystem.

Joanna Jackson: Awesome. Well, that put us just about perfectly at time. So thanks for all those great answers, and thank you to everyone following along for great questions. As we wrap up today, feel free to slide into the DMs of all the lovely people that you're seeing on the screen right now. They all want to help you and are very knowledgeable. We've got their LinkedIn and their emails on this slide. We will be sharing out this slide deck shortly after this presentation. Be sure to just go through it again. Take a look. There are a lot of great links in there, as well as

we'll be dropping some additional resources that are going to help you come to those decisions on on what the right CMS is for you.

We'll be sharing out some additional recordings and corrected transcripts next week, and we just want to say thank you again so much for hanging out with us today as we go through this presentation and help you make the right decision.

Amanda Heberg: Thanks, everybody.