



The Web Content & Experience Management Evaluation Report

Excerpt of Comprehensive Product Evaluations

Sample Edition, Sample License

I. Vendor at a Glance

Specsheet	Adobe: AEM Sites
Geography	Global
What's New	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New digital project management features • The promised framework for delivering content as a service deferred to pending service pack
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The underlying infrastructure is standards-driven, atop a mature content repository • Has above-average multisite management capabilities • Flexible content deployment options: coupled, decoupled, or hybrid; as well as cloud deployment options • Large and increasingly active customer community • Personalization, targeting, social, and mobile modules (optional) add value • Adobe continues to exhibit strong technical vision and innovation, with interests going beyond core WCM competency • Recent editions boast improved integration with Adobe Analytics

Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The variety of user interfaces can be unpredictable, awkward, and click heavy, particularly for casual, in-context contributors • Adobe appears to have overemphasized the touchscreen management interface to the exclusion of desktop-based experiences • Many functional services (like mobile, social, and DAM) have been moved to pricey add-on products • Inspiring technical visions are not always matched by similar quality on the operational and services side; Adobe can be highly disorganized • Quite expensive, effectively ruling out AEM for simpler scenarios since the company focuses increasingly on very large customers • The scarcity of partners and independent experts who know how to implement the system adds chronic uncertainty to implementation schedules and costs • The lack of a module ecosystem forces customers to rely on Adobe for all innovation • Recent roadmap meandering has unnerved the customer base and created some future uncertainty
Delivery Model	Managed Cloud - Single Tenant, On Premise
License	Commercial
Scale	1 or 2 large properties with dozens of contributors/managers, Collection of digital properties with dozens of contributors/managers, Global set of digital properties with hundreds of contributors/managers
Pricing	Base (without modules) starts at US \$120,000 for one authoring server plus one production server, but Adobe tells partners that the average licensing deal size is \$450K, with 4X to 6X implementation costs.

II. The Real Story on Adobe: AEM Sites

- The WCM system — formerly known as CQ — became part of the Adobe software conglomerate via the 2010 acquisition of Switzerland-native Day Software. Under Adobe, the product is positioned as part of the overarching Adobe Marketing Cloud, and has been through a slew of rebrandings throughout its history. In its newest incarnation, the WCM platform is called AEM “Sites,” to distinguish itself from other AEM offerings.
- Adobe has been focusing on integrating AEM Sites with 20+ siblings of the larger Adobe family — starting with SiteCatalyst and Test&Target personalization and targeting products — with somewhat mixed results.
- Sites is an architecturally advanced Web CMS aimed at Global 2000 customers that seek a rigorously standards-driven approach to content management, with active clustering, hot failover, decent workflow, developer-centric extensibility, and flexible delivery and deployment options. However, despite its infrastructural elegance, many of its pieces feel one-off and obscure to workaday Java developers, and AEM business users seem relatively unimpressed with its usability
- As you might expect of anything engineered in multilingual Switzerland, AEM is particularly rich in internationalization and localization-oriented capabilities needed to build and manage multiple sites in multiple regions, with functionalities designed to enable international workflow, automatic use of localized text and images coupled to different presentation skins, and a localizable user interface for content contributors (among other capabilities). However, it pales in comparison to SDL in managing multiple global properties on a long-term basis.
- While AEM is overkill for simpler and most mid-range scenarios, it’s a potential match for larger enterprises with unusually complex or diverse needs. Bear in mind however, that an Adobe solution will be anything but inexpensive — even before you start adding extra modules (e.g., “Social Communities,” “Multi Site Management,” and “Apps”).
- Given a relative scarcity of implementation talent, you will pay dearly for outside help. This is a high-end system with a high TCO to match. However, if you’re prepared to do some custom development and require a WCM platform with a highly extensible architecture and rich set of potential capabilities, AEM could be a good match. As always, weigh your requirements carefully — and be honest about your ability to deal with the complexities and costs of Java EE middleware. In addition, know that Adobe has not yet proven that the vendor and its partners can consistently deliver the necessary expertise to the complex projects this tool seems to attract.

III. Scenario Fit

Consider Adobe AEM Sites for only the most complex scenarios, especially those with high-traffic volumes.

Use Case	Rating	Analysis
Complex		
Advanced Personalization		The only problem is the sheer number of different personalization options.
Content-enriched Applications		The decoupled nature technically supports this, but the vendor's API approach is off here and Adobe seems to want to deliver your sites and applications as well.
Mobile-optimized Experiences		There are some good features, especially around preview.
Multilingual Digital		Adobe increasingly targets this scenario; it's not as good as SDL Web, but it's not bad.
Omnichannel Engagement		In theory, this is an important use case; in practice, it's very developer-oriented.
Simpler		
Basic Digital Marketing		This is overkill for this scenario.
Campaign & Microsites		The platform can perform this scenario.
Digital Workplace		Adobe boasts some intranet customers, but it is not a strong suit.
Informational Sites		This is overkill for this scenario.
Online Communities		This can be done reasonably well if you license the optional AEM Social platform.

IV. Strategic Considerations

AEM technology is much stronger than Adobe the company, and the ecosystem around Sites.

Consideration	Rating	Analysis
Vendor		
Customer Support		Adobe is very inconsistent here; make friends at the firm.
Strategy		Adobe's strategy seems to rely less on acquisitions now.
Vendor Professional Services		Adobe has focused more on delivering services in recent years, but has struggled to execute effectively.
Viability & Stability		Adobe isn't going anywhere, but the company tends to make lurching decisions about its products.
Product		
Roadmap		Adobe plans to integrate more with other Adobe tools.
Technical Modernity		Adobe uses relatively modern technologies.
Value for Money		This is an exceptionally expensive offering that becomes an invitation to spend substantially more on implementation.
Ecosystem		
Channel Professional Services		The partner channel is wide, but not particularly deep. Truly experienced AEM architects are hard to find— and expensive.
Community Strength		You'll find an increasingly active customer community, with national and regional gatherings.

Third-party Add-ons		There are few third-party modules are available.
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V. Conclusion

As a platform, AEM boasts a strong technical vision and a dedication to technical standards around content management. Few WCM solutions can claim to offer AEM's combination of extensibility, experience management potential, and enterprise readiness (in terms of connectivity, scalability, security, and other common IT requirements) — built on an elegant architecture. Finally, it has an increasingly deep and broad cloud story.

However, this is a product that's comparatively quite expensive and frequently difficult to use, sold by a highly disorganized vendor with a very thin track record of supporting enterprise server software. This is accompanied uneasily by a consulting partner channel that tends to be highly stretched and situationally under-experienced.

If you decide to pursue AEM, be sure to put a strong program management team in place and make sure your devops regime supports consistent dollops of custom code; you'll probably end up having a lot of it. Remember, licensing costs are only the beginning of your AEM outlay, and implementation costs will be your larger investment by far (4x-8x the licensing fees). If you deploy on-premise, don't underestimate your hardware needs, especially if you plan to use AEM DAM. Run the TCO numbers carefully.

Cost may not present an issue for some AEM licensees, "We go to large customers with public-facing, brand-sensitive sites," explained one Adobe sales person. Large customers value architectural flexibility, but your digital marketing manager may like this complex product less than your developers do. Baked deeply into the culture of the AEM team is a priority on improving the lot of WCM engineers — not WCM users. Your agility suffers as a result.

A comparatively high number of Adobe customers struggle to gain full value from their WCM investment. The level and sophistication of the resources required to achieve success with AEM should never be underestimated. Adobe makes things worse by arrogant and meandering product management in the 6.x era, along with a seemingly in-bred tendency to blame customers when things go wrong. To be sure, with enough time, money, and expertise, you can make almost anything possible with this highly extensible platform. Just be careful that the vendor doesn't pull the rug out from underneath all the custom code you'll need to write.

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Paul Whittle, Web Manager, Memorial University

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“The Web CMS Research allows me to save time and obtain a far better understanding of the market.”

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