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Digital Experience Platform (DXP) Reality.

**A guide to total cost of
ownership (TCO) for digital
enablement**



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Introduction.

When you're sizing up a Digital Experience Platform (DXP), it's easy to only focus on the headline licence and implementation costs.

But if you're not factoring in the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO), you're only seeing part of the picture.

Choosing a platform without fully understanding the long-term financial implications can set you up for years of frustration, wasted spend, and a tech stack that actively holds your business back.

Get the decision right though, and a good DXP will supercharge your ability to connect with audiences, fast. Relevance, speed, and precision become the norm.

This guide is built for marketing decision-makers defining a new DXP path. It gives you a breakdown of what really drives cost and value so you can make a fully informed choice - especially if you're weighing your current setup against Optimizely's pricing and delivery model.

Understanding Your DXP Needs.

Before you do any cost modelling, get clear on what your DXP actually needs to support.

- ☐ Does your organisation support a large-scale content supply chain?
- ☐ Is your content structure complex, with detailed metadata or interrelated content that affects presentation and ongoing maintenance?
- ☐ Do you have a dedicated team for content marketing that includes editors, creators, compliance reviewers, and technical support?
- ☐ Do you need to meet localisation rules - languages, legal, or cultural?
- ☐ Do you have overarching rights issues (e.g. image licences or geo-restrictions)?
- ☐ Does your content marketing platform handle tools like calculators, modellers, retail, or customer service integrations?
- ☐ Are you currently personalising content (or planning to do so)?
- ☐ Are you publishing content to more than one digital channel beyond your primary website?

If you tick multiple boxes, a DXP will likely pay off in the long run. They evolved from CMSs to handle exactly this sort of scale and complexity.

DXP Delivery Models.

DXPs evolved from CMSs to manage cross-channel content experiences at scale. But not all DXPs are created equal. Here's how they break down:

SaaS DXP

SaaS DXPs bundle together a lot of functionality, and handle upgrades for you. They can reduce operational drag but usually require you to own more of the frontend via headless tools. Costs are typically usage-based (visits/services), but you'll need to factor in ongoing management of those headless elements. Flexibility can be limited.

PaaS DXP

PaaS DXPs are often built around a core CMS hosted in the cloud or on-premises. With skilled developers, they're highly configurable. You can mix and match features (some delivered as SaaS components), choose integrated or headless frontends, or blend both. Strong platforms like Optimizely also support composable backend features - worth discussing with vendors, as not all platforms offer the same flexibility.

Composable DXP

These promise total flexibility. You plug in or unplug capabilities as needed. But complexity is high - you're responsible for integration and upkeep. If your needs are light, composable might be cost-effective. But if you scale up, managing upgrades, dependencies and versioning can become a constant (and costly) job.

Leading DXP providers such as Optimizely and AEM feature a PaaS product. Some providers, such as Optimizely and Sitecore, also offer a SaaS product.

Very few, like Optimizely, offer both SaaS and PaaS with headless or hybrid capability. You can bring your own composable elements to the table if your preference is to integrate them, or if there is a key piece of functionality that the DXP cannot deliver. Or you can utilise native and integrated functionality.

True Cost Breakdown.

What to look for.



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Licensing Fees

Look for: Transparent cost thresholds based on actual consumption.

Look for clarity around what functionality is included in each component or module. Be clear on current traffic to your site and model future traffic. If the intended activity is to generate more traffic, don't get caught out with a restrictive model.

Most consumption models operate within burstable bands. When you are setting licencing levels, make sure that there is sufficient room between the consumption level you are on and the next available band.

Be cautious of: Cost models that have accumulators in subsequent years.

Cost models that go up when consumption goes up are understandable, but be cautious of models that leave you paying substantially more in the future for the same product. Check what happens to licence costs in year 2, 3 and 4, beyond inflation, as some vendors have cost escalations based on the assumption that you will be getting increased ROI in subsequent years.

Be cautious of any lack of clarity over burstable traffic levels. If your platform costs include hosting then this is a key cost for the supplier and will need to be recouped. Make sure there is a gap between your current traffic level and any perceived future goals.

You should also check for the following:

- Clarity on what functionality is and isn't included at the licence level you are aiming at.
- Make sure you understand what metric is being used to measure traffic volumes, page views, unique visitors or another metric. If your goal is to increase page consumption across unique visitors, make sure you have accounted for this in licencing costs.

Hosting and Infrastructure

Look for: A clear understanding of hosting costs.

Make sure your calculations include:

- Licencing for additional environments, Dev, Staging etc
- Any hosting for headless features that your solution will require.
- CDN (Content Delivery Network) and Edge server provision to support local content delivery.
- Surge protection without the need to upscale or accept additional costs.
- Any additional hosting for external databases or composable tooling.

Be cautious of: Unexpected surge costs.

Be clear with the vendor on your traffic patterns. If 90% of traffic is in one month, will this affect hosting costs?

Make sure you call out additional line items like external tooling, external databases or CDN and Edge provision.

Upgrades and Maintenance

Look for: Clarity on your platform's upgrade cadence.

How often do patches and upgrades arrive?

Look at the resources and time needed to keep your platforms up to date. This is less relevant in the SaaS world, but upgrades on some platforms can cost hundreds of thousands of pounds with high frequency. Make sure this is budgeted or look at platforms that prefer small frequent upgrades, which can be applied incrementally to keep you up to date.

Ensure the versions you are licencing are on the latest versions of any underlying software to minimise the risk of major upgrades being required in the near term.

Ideally, investigate whether a SaaS route would minimise your organisation's exposure to upgrades. Small and often is preferable to a major breaking upgrade every year. If your business requirement suits automatic updates and adjustments can be accommodated, SaaS may deliver a route forward.


If your integrations and customisations require a managed upgrade, look at the time involved in upgrading and calculate if there is any opportunity cost with downtime of code freeze windows.

Be cautious of: Sunset timing for the version you're moving onto.

Look at the opportunities to upgrade smoothly to later versions. Check that your DXP vendor has a clear roadmap and a track record of producing forward compatible software.

Be cautious around availability of licenced and certified developers. Can your platform can support a healthy ecosystem of developers and implementors? Or could you be left with more limited options?

Scaling Costs

 **Look for: Evidence that your new DXP will outperform your old one.**


Can your platform seamlessly scale? Are there pinch points within some components or services, which will limit your ability to scale? Be particularly careful around composable elements where problems may choke further development within the platform.

 **Be cautious of: Charges for traffic spikes.**


Look for inclusive hosting plans that will cover your high and low periods. Review all components in detail. Do you have provision across your entire new stack for current and expected traffic levels?

Look at developer day rates and availability. Will you be held to a dwindling number of qualified developers or is there a healthy ecosystem of implementors and developers?

Personalisation & Experimentation

 **Look for: A clear roadmap around adoption and delivery of personalisation.**

As your organisation develops maturity within your DXP, are there clear progression points where you can deepen and develop your use of personalisation to engage your audiences?

 **Be cautious of: Personalisation tooling that isn't integrated and available.**

Is it possible to run personalisation directly within the editing/admin interface, or will you need additional developer resources to initiate and run personalisation and experimentation campaigns?

Development Costs

Look for: A ballpark view of costs

Find out what initial implementation costs will be, and also what will be required to deliver ongoing enhancement and upgrades for your platform. Also factor in the internal costs for the governance, migration, and UAT activity needed to deliver an effective result.

Be cautious of: Development time

Look at how long a typical development time would be for a project of the scale and complexity of your website. Some platforms can take more than 2-3 years to fully implement an MVP. This can lead to you requiring Capital Expenditure over a long period of time. It can also stifle your ability to react to market change while you devote resources to replatforming.

Ensure you account for implementation time as an opportunity cost in any TCO calculations.

Look at developer rates and numbers of partners to understand the strength of the ecosystem surrounding your platform.

Training & Support

Look for: Upskilling for your team

Is the platform intuitive to use? Can you see how all platform components will work together to ensure processes can be managed by your team? Is there any technical skill or developer activity required to execute frequently needed activities?

Be cautious of: The levels of developer and user support that your teams will need

Be clear on who is supplying this and the rates involved.

Time to Value

Look for: Realistic development timelines and a product roadmap that front-loads value realisation

Implementing any platforms into your content supply chain will require investment, but look to your implementation partners for a mindset that realises value throughout the implementation process. When you understand with clarity where the value-gains are for your organisation, it is easy to be clear with your partner and build an implementation plan that realises value fast and continuously.

Be cautious of: Inflexible implementation approach

The lead time-to-value will vary between organisations. But be cautious of long lead times.

Look at the fundamentals first. What do you need to start realising value? There will be upfront costs - ensure you understand what these are, and that they will be offset by value gains down the line.

Be aware of software licencing models that have cost accumulators built in which favour the vendor rather than you. Once you have made the initial investment you will be locked into the plan for a period of time.

Understand the window that you will have before you must make further significant investments. Delve into your vendor's upgrade roadmap to understand how long you will be operational before you must make significant upgrades.

Try to understand from your implementer how extensive they expect upgrade work to be.

Platforms like Optimizely will have more than one route to adoption. Build your plan to deliver value across the lifecycle.

Consider the entire lifecycle

What are the costs of sunsetting your platform? Can investments made in calculators or customer experience be retained if and when you move platform?

If your platform supports headless or hybrid delivery of components, you may be able to retain and reuse certain investments.

Be cautious of platforms that require your front end to be deeply integrated. These will limit your opportunity to retain investments in UX components down the line.



Hidden Costs You Need to Budget For.

Many businesses will look at the headline implementation cost for a DXP migration and underestimate the hidden costs that come with a large platform like Sitecore, AEM or a composable stack.

Here's what you should factor into your budget:

1. Licensing Fees

Does the licence you're paying for match what you actually need?

- DXPs bundle in all sorts of tech – make sure you're not overpaying for things you won't use, or missing essentials you will.
- Are things like site search, language support, surge protection, and extra URLs included – or are they hiding in the small print? These often get overlooked and come back to bite later.
- Have you checked for annual price hikes? Look at the vendor's track record. Have costs crept up year-on-year?



Optimizely Solution

Costs are based on usage. Depending on the solution this could be page views or users. Do the work up front to ensure that your licences match not only your current but future usage. Will your team grow? Will your page views rise or fall given the nature of your work?



2. Hosting & Infrastructure Overheads

- Is hosting included in your costs – and does that cover everything you need? That means headless environments, your CDN, and your dev/staging setups.
- Are you clear on what scaling will cost you? It might seem edge-case now, but if you grow – think multi-instance deployments, multisite features, or spikes in traffic – do you already have the provision in place?
- Will performance optimisation costs bite as traffic grows? Make sure you're not storing up a nasty surprise as demand increases.



Optimizely Solution

Utilises Azure alongside Cloudflare and Vercel. If you require additional hosting for Databases or have your current system in a shared tenant, look at how this impacts your overall costs.

3. Costly upgrades & Maintenance

- How often will major version upgrades land – and how much dev time will they eat up? Make sure you're not trading platform progress for product delays.
- Is your current platform carrying legacy tech debt? If your underlying systems are creaking, are you heading for expensive rebuilds just to stay operational?
- Will upgrades trigger a domino effect across your stack? Think patches, fixes, and rework to keep integrations and other composable bits playing nicely.



Optimizely Solution

Continuous updates favouring 'small and often' to minimise disruption.

4. Development & Implementation Costs

- Some vendors require significant development work for integrations, enhancements, and updates. Get a sense of what this picture will be. Are there Marketplace integrations available that can minimise your costs? What developer support is available for upgrades and what is their cadence?
- Personalisation and testing require developer intervention. Look at your functionality roadmap. What features are available within your stack from the outset? Will you need additional search tooling? Will search results need integrating with your personalisation strategy? What platform support is available to support segmentation and experimentation? What functionality is available within your platform within your licence.?
- Get a sense of the platform implementation times from other customers. This is a great question to ask if you are taking up vendor references. Don't just focus on the initial MVP implementation but also next stage enhancements and fast follows. Longer implementation cycles delay time-to-value.



Optimizely Solution

Out-of-the-box integrations, with personalisation baked in, and additional AI-driven personalisation integrated with other Optimizely One features such as experimentation, commerce and content marketing tooling.



5. Training & Support Expenses

- Is the application intuitive to use – and will the user interface remain consistent once all configurations and development are complete. Ensure the final experience aligns with what was demonstrated.
- What level of training will be required to support your teams? Consider how easily new team members can be onboarded, and whether an ongoing training programme will be necessary to maintain capability over time.
- Have you accounted for ongoing support costs, including troubleshooting, maintenance updates, and break-fix coverage? What level of SLA will your business need to operate effectively? And is the vendor's standard support sufficient? Or will additional provision be required?
- Is there a healthy and accessible developer ecosystem for the platform? Evaluate the availability of skilled implementers and developers, as well as the relative cost of resourcing compared to other platforms.



Optimizely Solution

User-friendly UI, built-in support, and faster onboarding.



How Much Could You Save By Switching?



Cost Savings Example.

Let's say a mid-sized enterprise spends £300K/year on a DXP across licensing, hosting, upgrades, and maintenance.

Scenario 1 - Sitecore

Our experience shows that an organisation using Sitecore could save up to 20-40% annually by moving to Optimizely's model, through minimising:

- Infrastructure expenses
- Unpredictable upgrade and maintenance fees
- Development overheads for ongoing product development
- Additional licensing for required features.

Scenario 2 - Adobe Experience Manager

Our experience shows that an organisation using AEM's model, could save up to 20-30% annually by moving to Optimizely, through minimising:

- Infrastructure expenses
- Opportunity costs from a longer development cycle and initial implementation
- Development overhead for ongoing product development and additional licensing for required features.

Scenario 3 - Composable stack

Our experience shows that an organisation using a highly composable stack could save up to 10-30% annually by moving to Optimizely's model, through minimising:

- Feature and tooling licencing expenses
- Development overhead for ongoing product development
- Support and upgrade costs across a wide feature base
- Opportunity costs from a longer development cycle and initial implementation.

Final Thoughts.

If you want cost certainty, faster go-live, and tools your marketers can actually use, Optimizely stacks up. You get predictable pricing, lower upgrade and support costs, flexible delivery (SaaS, PaaS, hybrid, headless), built-in AI personalisation and experimentation, strong developer ecosystem and faster time-to-value.



Stephen Gillespie – Optimizely Consultant

Stephen is a strategic digital transformation consultant with twenty years of experience. He is well-versed in crafting commercial strategies that transform the impact and breadth of business operations. His experience has seen Stephen work collaboratively with senior teams in the UK and internationally to create and deliver effective solutions. His specific sector specialisms include Travel, Retail, Utilities, NFP, Sport and Finance.

Stephen's experience has been earned working in and driving technical agencies across the UK, Europe and the US. He works with large organisations to ensure they have the technology and technical capability they need to succeed.

Glossary

CDN Content Delivery Network

CMS Content Management System

DXP Digital Experience Platform

Martech Marketing Technology Stack

MVP Minimum Viable Product

PaaS Platform as a Service

Replatforming Migrating to a new platform

SaaS Software as a Service

SEO Search Engine Optimisation

TCO Total Cost of Ownership



Get in Touch.

Want a personalised TCO breakdown? Contact us to book a consultation.

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