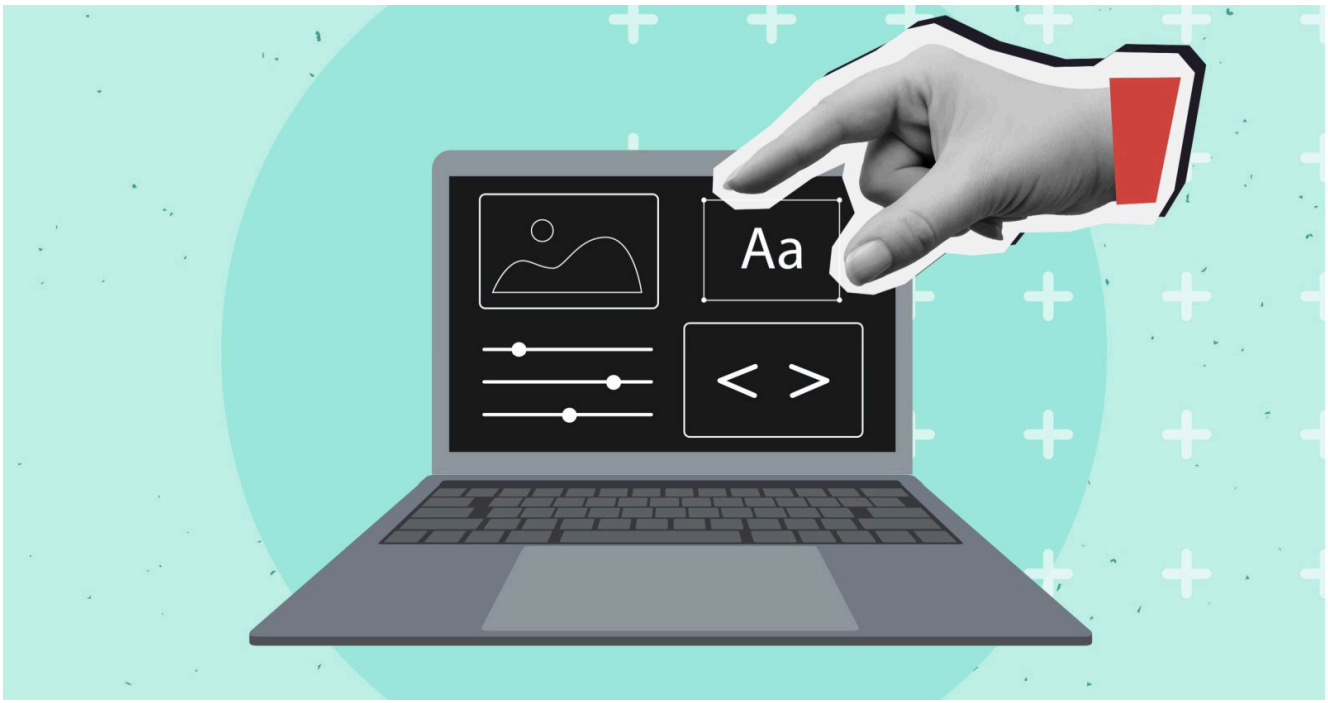
3 CMS Platforms Control 73% Of The Market & Shape Technical SEO Defaults via @sejournal, @MattGSouthern



Chris Green helped analyze 17 million websites and co-authored the latest SEO chapter for the Web Almanac, and his conclusion should matter to anyone who does SEO for a living.

Green said the data showed that individual SEOs have “minimal” web-wide impact compared to CMS platform defaults.

He wrote:

> *“If you are really determined to have an impact outside of your specific clients … you need to be nudging WordPress or Wix or Shopify.”*

We’ve been tracking CMS market share at Search Engine Journal since WordPress crossed 39.5% of all websites. Back then, the story was WordPress growing, while everyone else fought over

scraps.

The story is different now, and Green’s finding is why I wanted to trace the full 10-year arc. A handful of platforms quietly took control of how most of the web handles technical SEO. This article looks at how that happened and what the Web Almanac found when it looked under the hood. It also looks at what the data means for the people who do this work every day.

How Three Platforms Took Control

In 2015, WordPress held 23.3% of all websites, Shopify had 0.3%, and Wix had 0.1%. Most of the web (61.7%) didn’t use a CMS at all.

By 2022, WordPress had nearly doubled to 43.2% of CMS-using sites and 65.2% of market share. Then its growth stopped. WordPress fell to 43.3% of all sites and 60.7% CMS share by October 2025, a 4.5-point drop in CMS share and its first sustained contraction in over two decades.

While WordPress plateaued, three platforms grew at rates it never matched. Shopify rose from 0.7% to 7.2% (a 929% increase, with growth hitting 32.6% in the year ending October 2025), and Squarespace climbed from 0.5% to 3.4%.

Joomla and Drupal paid for it. They once held roughly 14% of the CMS market combined and now hold less than 3%. Joomla fell 79%, and Drupal fell 80%, both overtaken by platforms that barely existed when they were in their prime.

One number caught my attention. According to W3Techs’ yearly usage trends, 61.7% of websites were not detected using any CMS that W3Techs tracks in 2015. In W3Techs data, that figure had fallen to 28.9%, meaning WordPress’s share of all websites is now larger than the share categorized as “None.” In about a decade, the web went from mostly unmanaged to mostly platform-driven, and people in the industry didn’t stop to think about

what that means for who controls the technical foundations.

WordPress, Shopify, and Wix now control about 73% of the entire CMS market, and all three are well-funded operations.

Shopify posted $11.56 billion in 2025 revenue, up 30% year-over-year. Wix hit $1.99 billion and posted its second consecutive year of GAAP operating profit. Squarespace surpassed $1 billion in its final year as a public company before Permira acquired it for $7.2 billion in October 2024. Combined 2025 revenue for Shopify and Wix alone topped $13.5 billion, and that money funds engineering teams whose default settings govern SEO for millions of sites at once.

The math has changed, too. A decade ago, building a website meant WordPress or Drupal, and you needed a developer. Today, AI builders generate sites in minutes, and ease of use wins for small and mid-sized businesses.

Where The SEO Actually Happens

Green called it “perhaps the biggest surprise” from the Web Almanac data. Platforms and their plugins drive many baseline technical SEO defaults across a large share of the web.

According to the Almanac report, canonical tag usage has risen to 68% of desktop pages (up from 65% in 2024), and meta robots usage grew to 47% (up from 45.5%). Those gains track with CMS adoption rates, not with a wave of site-by-site optimization.

Yoast SEO runs on 15.96% of all desktop websites and accounts for nearly 70% of all identified SEO tool usage. Yoast applies index,follow as its default robots directive, and the Web Almanac recorded follow directives on 64% of desktop pages and index on 69%. Both are technically unnecessary since search engines default to indexing and following anyway. The most likely explanation for their prevalence across the web is one plugin’s default setting running on millions of sites nobody

individually configured.

Adoption of the llms.txt standard makes the point even sharper. The Web Almanac found 2.13% of sites now have a valid llms.txt file, which looks like early adoption of a new standard for AI crawlers. But 39.6% of those files were auto-generated by All in One SEO as a default feature, and another 3.6% came from Yoast. The Web Almanac Notes it can't be sure this "is always a conscious act or endorsement of the llms.txt standard."

Most of what looks like intentional adoption is a plugin running on autopilot. We covered this finding when Green's article published, and it stuck with me because it shows exactly how invisible the platform hand is. In many cases, adoption appears to come from plugin defaults rather than an explicit decision. A checkbox in a settings panel can enable it.

Structured data follows the same pattern. Homepages receive manual attention with consistent JSON-LD markup, while inner pages run on CMS templates where the platform dynamically handles structured data. That template-driven process sometimes duplicates homepage-specific schema onto inner pages where it doesn't belong.

Image optimization is similar. Deliberate lazy loading using loading="lazy" clusters among sites where developers actively added it, while 68% of images across the web rely on browser defaults. Most sites never made a choice about image loading, and their platform made it for them.

Robots.txt validity has improved to 85% of files returning a valid 200 status, driven by CMS platforms generating valid files by default. But the actual contents are overwhelmingly the wildcard catch-all. A valid file exists, and nobody configured what it says.

Wix shows how far platform-level SEO can go. According to

Wix's SEO settings documentation, the platform automatically creates Local Business structured data markup for a site's homepage when a business name and location are added, and the user doesn't need to know what structured data is. Compare that to WordPress, where many site owners never add structured data at all without explicit guidance or a plugin they found on their own.

No platform publishes data on how many users override these defaults. A third-party scan of 21,327 Squarespace homepages by SEOSpace turned up an average SEO score of 40.5 out of 100, with 66.4% missing alt text and 47% running multiple H1 tags. If those numbers are representative, the platforms' default settings are the whole game for most sites.

Green didn't hedge, writing:

> *"A lot of SEOs believe that Google owes us because we maintain the internet for them … I also don't think we have as much impact perhaps at an industry level as maybe some like to believe."*

The Performance Paradox

The Core Web Vitals numbers add an element that's hard to explain if you think better defaults equal better rankings.

WordPress has the lowest CWV pass rate of any platform at 45% on mobile, while Duda leads at 85% and Wix hits 75% after gaining 14 percentage points year-over-year. Wix also scores a perfect 100 on Lighthouse SEO, the only platform to do that two years running. WordPress scores 92.

And yet a Rankability analysis of 59,000 top-ranking domains found that WordPress accounts for 49% of the sites using a CMS, making it the dominant platform among top-ranking domains. Wix and Shopify are nearly absent from the top 10,000 sites by traffic, while Drupal, with less than 1% overall CMS

share, holds 6-7% among the highest-traffic sites.

We've been watching this develop across several years of CMS market share reporting. Top WordPress sites invest in premium hosting and careful optimization and perform well, while average WordPress sites run on shared hosting with unoptimized plugins and drag the platform average down. Half fail CWV due to poor server response times alone.

Managed platforms produce more consistent results because they control the entire stack. The Web Almanac concluded that "platforms with more tightly managed environments see the largest gains." Wix and Duda don't allow the variability that creates WordPress's long tail.

Shopify complicates this further. Despite being an ecommerce platform, traditionally the heaviest category for performance, it achieves a 77.95% good CWV rate. But Shopify has structural SEO limits that no amount of default optimization can fix, including mandatory URL prefixes (/products/, /collections/, /pages/), duplicate content from collection-path URLs, and a 100,000 redirect limit that requires human expertise to navigate.

Platform defaults set the floor and the average, and expertise sets the ceiling. That gap is where consulting still earns its keep.

WordPress At A Crossroads

According to W3Techs data, WordPress's contraction started in 2022 due to market saturation and growing competition. Then, the WP Engine dispute in September 2024 added a governance crisis on top of it.

Matt Mullenweg called WP Engine "a cancer to WordPress" in a September 2024 blog post. Days later, Mullenweg wrote that "WP Engine no longer has free access to WordPress.org's

resources.” Search Engine Journal reported the change blocked many WP Engine customers from updating or installing plugins and themes.

In October 2024, Automattic seized WP Engine’s Advanced Custom Fields plugin, the first forced takeover in WordPress’s 21-year history. WP Engine sued, and a court granted a preliminary injunction in December 2024. Litigation continues into 2026.

BlackRock marked down its Automattic shares by a cumulative 63.5% according to The Repository’s reporting on fund filings. Automattic lost 159 employees through a voluntary “alignment offer” in October 2024 and cut roughly 16% of its remaining workforce in April 2025. Development took the biggest hit. The Verge reported that in January 2025, Automattic cut its open-source contribution hours from roughly 3,988 per week to 45. The Repository noted that Automattic had historically been the largest contributor to the WordPress project.

Five for the Future updates from May 2024 showed Automattic-sponsored hours made up about half of tracked sponsored contributions. WordPress shipped two major releases in 2025 instead of the typical three, and the proposed 2026 schedule targets a return to three.

Between December 2024 and December 2025, WordPress contracted 2.9% while Wix grew 22.4% and Squarespace grew 6.2% in market share. No mass exodus, because switching costs are too high. But the dispute exposed a concentration risk. When 43% of the web depends on a platform whose development pace can be cut by one company’s decisions, that’s a risk most practitioners haven’t priced in.

Joost de Valk, Yoast SEO’s founder, was removed from the speaker lineup at WordCamp Asia 2025 after Mullenweg declared him “persona non grata.” De Valk had called for governance changes that would reduce Mullenweg’s unilateral control over

the project, and twenty veteran core committers signed an open letter calling for “community-minded” governance. Mullenweg partially reversed course in mid-2025 by lifting bans and resuming contributions, but community trust hasn’t recovered.

That dispute didn’t cause the market decline, which started two years earlier. But it made clear what happens when control over 43% of the web’s platform layer sits in too few hands, and for anyone advising clients on platform choices, that’s worth factoring in.

What This Means For Practitioners

For millions of sites on managed platforms, baseline technical SEO is handled at the platform level now. When Wix ships an improvement, it touches millions of live sites at once. Individual consultants work at a different scale entirely.

What we’re seeing in the data and in our coverage is that the highest-value work is moving toward the edges. Migration consulting is high-risk and high-value because Shopify’s 100,000 redirect limit alone creates demand, and complex CMS migrations carry real traffic risk.

Auditing platform defaults matter more now, too. Knowing what Wix does out of the box versus what Shopify leaves to the user is platform-specific knowledge that earns its value when a client is choosing between them or migrating from one to the other.

The Squarespace scan turned up a 40.5/100 average SEO score across 21,000+ sites. Even on platforms with decent defaults, there’s optimization work to do.

AI visibility is the newest layer. GPTBot mentions in robots.txt grew 55% year-over-year according to the Web Almanac, and ClaudeBot nearly doubled. Green warned that businesses cutting bot crawling to save server costs “might

desperately impact your AI visibility.” Balancing crawl budget, AI training exposure, and AI search visibility is a call platforms can’t make for their users. Practitioners still own that one.

Looking Ahead

When I started covering CMS market share at Search Engine Journal, the story was WordPress dominance and a fragmented field of small players. Ten years later, three platforms control 73% of the CMS market, and their engineering teams set the technical SEO defaults for most of the web.

Individual SEO professionals still matter at the site level. But engineering teams at a handful of companies now hold more combined sway over technical SEO than the consulting world does on its own. Whether the industry has caught up with that reality is the unanswered question.

Green’s closing line from his Web Almanac analysis bears repeating. “If you are really determined to have an impact,” he wrote, “you need to be nudging WordPress or Wix or Shopify.”

More Resources:

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https://www.searchenginejournal.com/3-cms-platforms-control-73-of-the-market-shape-technical-seo-defaults/568185/