10 Signs That it's Time to Find a New Sitecore Partner

What you should expect from your Sitecore Partner

When you hire a Sitecore Certified Partner, you trust that their precious metal partner status and all their Sitecore MVPs means that they know what they're doing, that they'll deliver what they promised, and that they're committed to putting your needs first and helping you get the most value out of the platform.

Unfortunately, that is not always the case.

The reality is that some Sitecore Certified Partners, feeling the pressure of unrealistic deadlines and an irresistible urge to grow, will slap together a "B Team" or even a "C Team", or outsource your work to a team of overseas contractors just to close another deal and maximize their profit margin. You are just another deal to them, and when your first project comes to a close, it becomes immediately obvious. They are all about quantity, not about quality.

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If you think you might have a problem, and you're looking for some evidence, we've compiled 10 telltale signs that your Sitecore vendor isn't putting your needs first and didn't follow best practices when they implemented your site.

1. Your site was implemented without a Sitecore Architecture Document

If your vendor does not create a Sitecore Architecture Document for every project they do for you, then you've got a problem.

A proper Sitecore implementation, whether for a new site or an enhancement, should always begin with a thorough Sitecore Architecture Document.

This vital piece of documentation spells out every detail of how the content will be structured, what modules will be created, and what content will be editable within Sitecore. It ensures that you, and everyone involved in the delivery of your project, is

on the same page, which means there won't be any unpleasant surprises along the way, and most importantly at launch time.

When an implementation is rushed, or your vendor decides to cut corners, this vital piece of documentation is often skipped. This can have a devastating impact on the project at hand, and your implementation as a whole. The absence of a Sitecore Architecture Document can lead to miscommunication around intended functionality, poor design fidelity, difficulty managing content within Sitecore, and many bugs found during the QA process.

An experienced Sitecore Partner knows that comprehensive discovery and planning, a detailed SOW, and a thorough Sitecore Architecture Document, are all necessary ingredients to ensure that your projects are completed exactly to spec and the right way, the first time.

2. Your site is slow to load

If you're measuring page load times in seconds, instead of milliseconds, then you've got a problem.

There are many issues that can cause a site to load slowly, but all of them can be addressed. If your vendor says they've done everything they can, they may not be willing or able to fix the underlying issues. Search functionality and menu generation are common culprits behind poor site performance.

An experienced Sitecore Partner will solve your performance problems using their in-depth understanding of Sitecore's performance features and optimization techniques, front-end performance best practices, server configuration requirements, and performance monitoring and benchmarking tools.

For the best results, always insist on beginning this Performance Optimization process with a thorough Sitecore Implementation Audit.

3. Your deployments have unforeseen side-effects and bugs

If you've had a deployment that "didn't go according to plan," and we mean "really didn't go according to plan," with inexplicable delays, unforeseen side-effects, or a bunch of obvious bugs, then you've got a problem.

Code should always be well tested and verified before it is deployed to a live environment. If your Sitecore Partner is following best practices, they will first deploy to a test or QA environment where new code is tested, verified and accepted by stakeholders before it is promoted to the live environment.

If you often experience problems when code is deployed, that is a good indicator that your Sitecore Partner's QA process is insufficient. This means they don't have the necessary experience and knowledge of Sitecore Best Practices to properly manage your site.

An experienced Sitecore Partner, with good attention to detail, will have implemented a thorough QA process, work with your stakeholders to verify acceptance before going live, and will work to catch and prevent bugs before they get to a live environment where you, or your visitors will find them.

4. You can't manage content on your own

If you're dependent on your Sitecore Partner to manage and update content on your site, and you don't want to be, then you've got a problem.

If your vendor has not given you the ability to manage your own content, then they've completely defeated the purpose of investing in a CMS. It might seem self-evident to some, but it's amazing how often this happens. Sitecore is designed to give marketers the freedom to manage any piece of content on their site - that's what you're paying for.

An experienced Sitecore Partner will ensure that you're able to manage your own content by:

- Implementing a modular content structure
- Making adding and editing content easy

- Configuring the site to use Experience Editor so that inline editing and the addition and assignment of content modules is simple
- Configuring proper user roles to ensure the right people are managing the right content
- Configuring workflows to ensure proper review and approval of content before it reaches a live environment

Perhaps most importantly, your Sitecore Partner should deliver thorough, step-by-step illustrated training documentation that is specific to your site and the individual needs of your team.

5. You can't build out new sections of your site on your own

If you're dependent on your Sitecore Partner to build out new sections of your site, and you've requested that they give you the freedom to do that on your own, then you've got a problem.

Sitecore is designed to give your marketing team the flexibility and the freedom to build out new sections of your site, any way you like, all on your own, by simply selecting a layout and assigning a variety of reusable modules.

Even if you have some ability to do this, but you find that you can only place certain modules on some pages, or the content that you have at your disposal is limited, then you may still have a problem. This is a serious indicator that your Sitecore Partner didn't follow Sitecore Best Practices, didn't properly think through and get sign-off on your Sitecore Architecture Document, or they didn't have the necessary experience to implement things properly.

An experienced Sitecore Partner will work with you to ensure that you have a library of components that you can make use of across your site, giving you the tools you need to create the content you want. They will always begin by creating and getting sign-off on your Sitecore Architecture Document, which will outline how the content will be structured, what modules will be created, and what content will be editable within Sitecore.

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6. You can't manage content using the Sitecore Experience Editor interface

The Sitecore Experience Editor interface allows you to edit your content in-line as you browse through your site, and see exactly what the page will look like while you're working on it. If you can't do this, then you've got a problem.

Years ago it was common practice among Sitecore vendors to implement sites without leveraging the Sitecore Experienced Editor interface, previously called the Page Editor. This was typically done to keep implementation costs to a minimum. These days, implementing a site to be Experience Editor-compatible is just basic Sitecore Best Practices.

If your site was implemented on Sitecore in the last couple of years, and you haven't been trained on how to use the Experience Editor, or it wasn't specified in the SOW or your Sitecore Architecture Document, then chances are your site was not implemented to work with the Experience Editor.

The good news is that in many cases, this can be fixed.

An experienced Sitecore Partner knows that this a basic requirement for any Sitecore implementation, and will provide you the proper planning and training you need to ensure you have a great content editing experience.

7. You can't conduct A/B and multivariate tests on your own

If you requested that your Sitecore Partner give you the ability to set up and run A/B and multivariate tests on your own, and you have no idea how to do this, then you've got a problem.

The Sitecore Experience Editor is Sitecore's preferred interface for managing A/B and multivariate tests. Being able to do this requires one part proper implementation and one part proper training, but provided your vendor has provided both of these ingredients, you should be able to run tests and optimize content, on any page of your site, on your own.

An experienced Sitecore Partner will work with you to clarify whether or not this is a priority for you, and if so, provide you with the proper training you need to take full advantage of this functionality.

8. You can't personalize a component on your own

If you requested that your Sitecore Partner give you the ability to personalize individual components, on your own, and you're not sure how you'd do this, then you've got a problem.

The Sitecore Experience Editor is also Sitecore's preferred interface for configuring Sitecore personalization rules and managing the associated content. This ability requires proper implementation and proper training.

Due to the wealth of personalization options at your disposal, this may be a little daunting at first. As such, you'd be wise to have a team of experts on-call and ready to help when you get stuck or feel "a little in over your head."

An experienced Sitecore Partner will work with you to determine your personalization needs and how they impact your business goals. Then they'll provide you with the step-by-step support you need to personalize these all on your own.

9. You haven't been properly trained to use your site

The key to self-sufficiency is receiving personalized training from the Sitecore vendor who architected and built your site. If that didn't happen, and you feel ill-equipped and unprepared to do your job, then you've got a problem.

No two Sitecore sites are alike. When Sitecore is implemented properly, it's custom tailored to reflect your unique information architecture (IA), user experience (UX), content management requirements, business processes, and more.

You should expect to receive a step-by-step illustrated training guide with screenshots of your own site, that explains in detail how to do what you need to do, within your specific site.

In terms of the training itself, we always recommend that you opt for online training. Online training is cost effective, compared to on-site training, and it's much easier to record the dialogue for future reference and on-boarding.

An experienced Sitecore Partner will insist on providing you with personalized training. They will build it into the SOW, and ensure you've been trained and feel prepared to do your job, before your new site or enhancement goes live.

10. You're frustrated with how much you spent and how much you got in return

Here's the bottom line: If you feel like you're being overcharged – and deliverables take longer than expected, don't meet the requirements that you specified in the SOW, or don't reflect the UX and functionality you were expecting – then you've got a problem.

This warning sign is a little more subjective. It's important to recognize that when it comes to Sitecore, you can find "resources" all over the globe, but experts are not a commodity. You should expect to pay a premium if you want to work with the best and brightest, especially if they're a pleasure to work with.

That said, many Sitecore Partners tend to take it too far– with outrageous "minimum spend" requirements, nickel and diming, overcharging and under-delivering. You should expect to start each project with a clear, mutual understanding of what you will get for your budget, and, most importantly, you should get what you expected every time they deliver.

Building trust and providing good value, makes good business sense for both parties. It allows the buyer and the seller to create a long-term relationship, which is necessary if you want to advance your digital maturity and get the full value out of Sitecore.

An experienced Sitecore Partner will work with you to keep costs within your budget, and will be prepared to deliver on time and on budget.

Have concerns about your current partner? Here's what to do.

Trust your gut and go explore your options.

If any of these warning signs have raised red flags for you, and you want to assess whether your implementation is following Sitecore Best Practices, a Sitecore Audit will provide you the actionable information you need to make decisions and move forward.

At Engagency, we offer a comprehensive 180+ point [Sitecore Implementation Audit](#), conducted by our team of Sitecore Certified Architects and Developers with 10 years of Sitecore experience. This assessment is designed to help your organization assess the current status of your Sitecore site, uncover hidden bugs, and determine what corrective actions need to be taken to meet your goals for today and tomorrow.

Let's chat.

We look forward to discussing how we can be of service to you.

[Click here](#) to schedule a time to talk.
help@engagency.com
888.303.7332

Landing Page Intro

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In this free whitepaper, we cover the top ten most common issues that affect Sitecore customers, and prevent them from getting the most value out of their investment.

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