

# How to not be a headless chicken

Tips for embracing decoupled content architectures

Phil Hawksworth, Netlify



# These slides and links

[findthat.at/chicken](https://findthat.at/chicken)



**Why this talk?**



**9 years as  
Technical Director  
at agencies**

**Clients**



A photograph of two men sitting in the front seats of a car, looking out the window. The image is dark and moody, with a blueish tint. The man on the left has a beard and is wearing a grey hoodie. The man on the right is bald with a goatee and is wearing a dark hoodie and a gold chain. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

# Mo clients, mo problems

(Mo clients, mo architectures)



**Old challenges**

**Timeless challenges**

**Large investments**  
**(Time, money, emotion)**

**The result**

# Code smells



**CMS *smells***

I CAN SMELL YOUR  
~  
CMS

@PHILHAWKSWORTH

■R/GA



**Who is this talk for?**



**Not to persuade you  
that headless CMS  
are a great choice**

**Help you  
recommend a  
headless CMS to  
your clients /  
stakeholders**

# How to not be a headless chicken

Tips for embracing decoupled content architectures

Phil Hawksworth, Netlify

**Phil Hawksworth**

**Director of Developer Experience, Netlify**



**@PhilHawksworth**

**Director of Developer Experience, Netlify**



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[findthat.at/interesting](https://findthat.at/interesting)

# Let's talk

1

The old skool  
and the shift

2

Objections to  
overcome

3

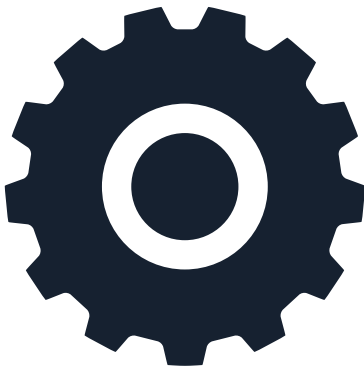
A few of  
the benefits

1

# The old skool and the shift

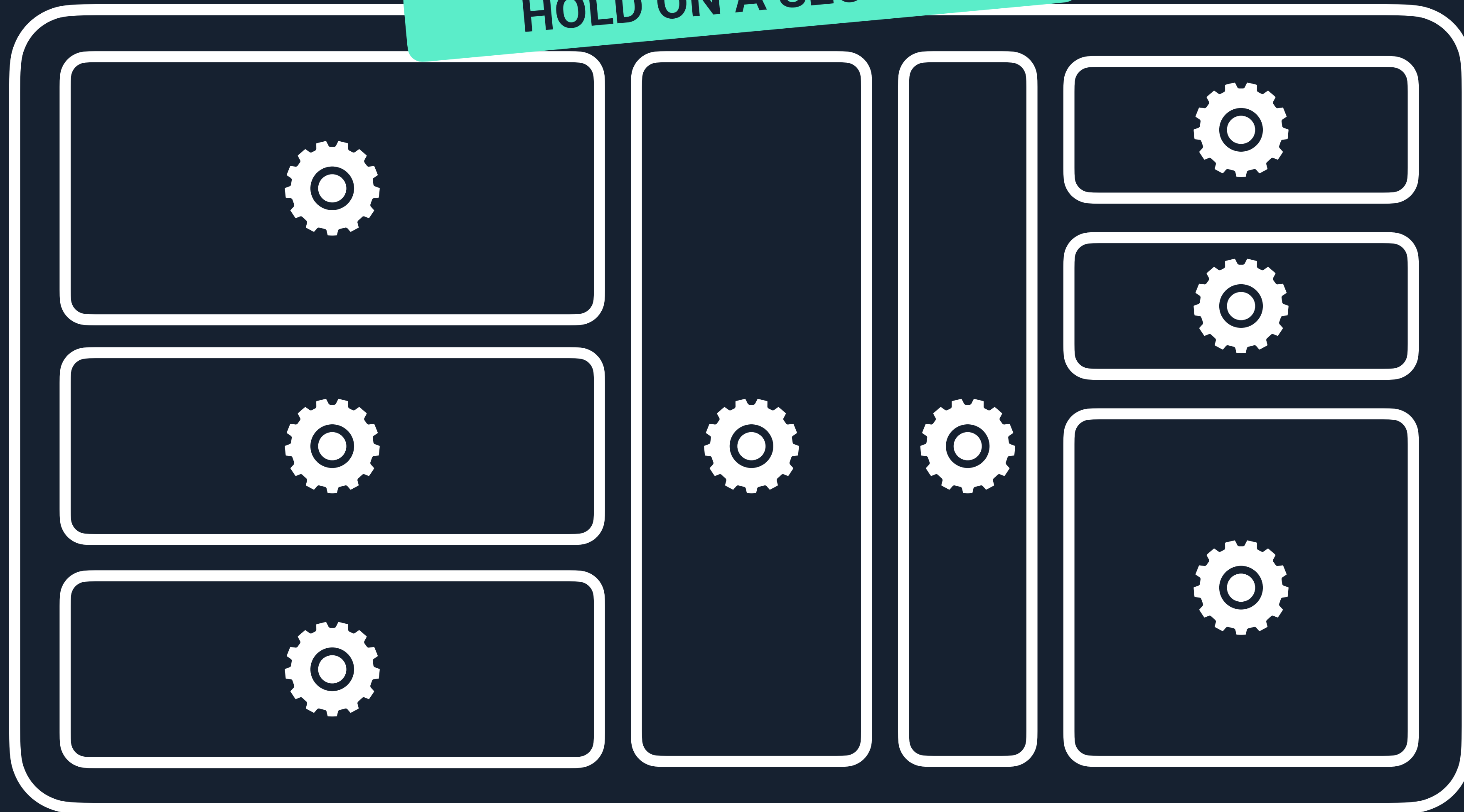
# The magnetic attraction of the monolith

**HOW BEAUTIFULLY SIMPLE**





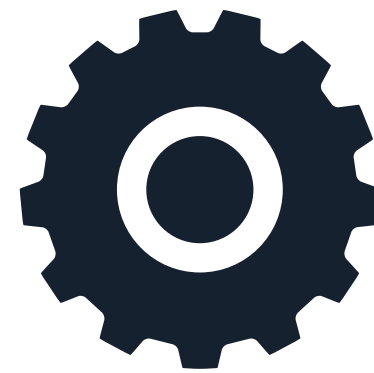
**HOLD ON A SECOND**





**EXPENSIVE MAGIC**

THINGS



THINGS

# Tight coupling

Often not well understood

# A product of evolution

# An evolving product

# Experts required

And available for those with the budget

# One-stop-shop

# Loooooooooong feature lists

**Industry standard, best in  
class, enterprise grade,  
globally recognised,  
reassuringly expensive**



**Nobody ever got fired for  
choosing [ \_\_\_\_\_ ]**

**Except they did**



A person wearing a dark hoodie is shown in profile, looking down. The scene is dimly lit with warm, low-key lighting, creating a somber and melancholic atmosphere. The person's face is partially obscured by shadow, and their hands are tucked into their hoodie. The background is dark and out of focus, with some faint light sources visible.

# Sad agencies



# Ability to execute

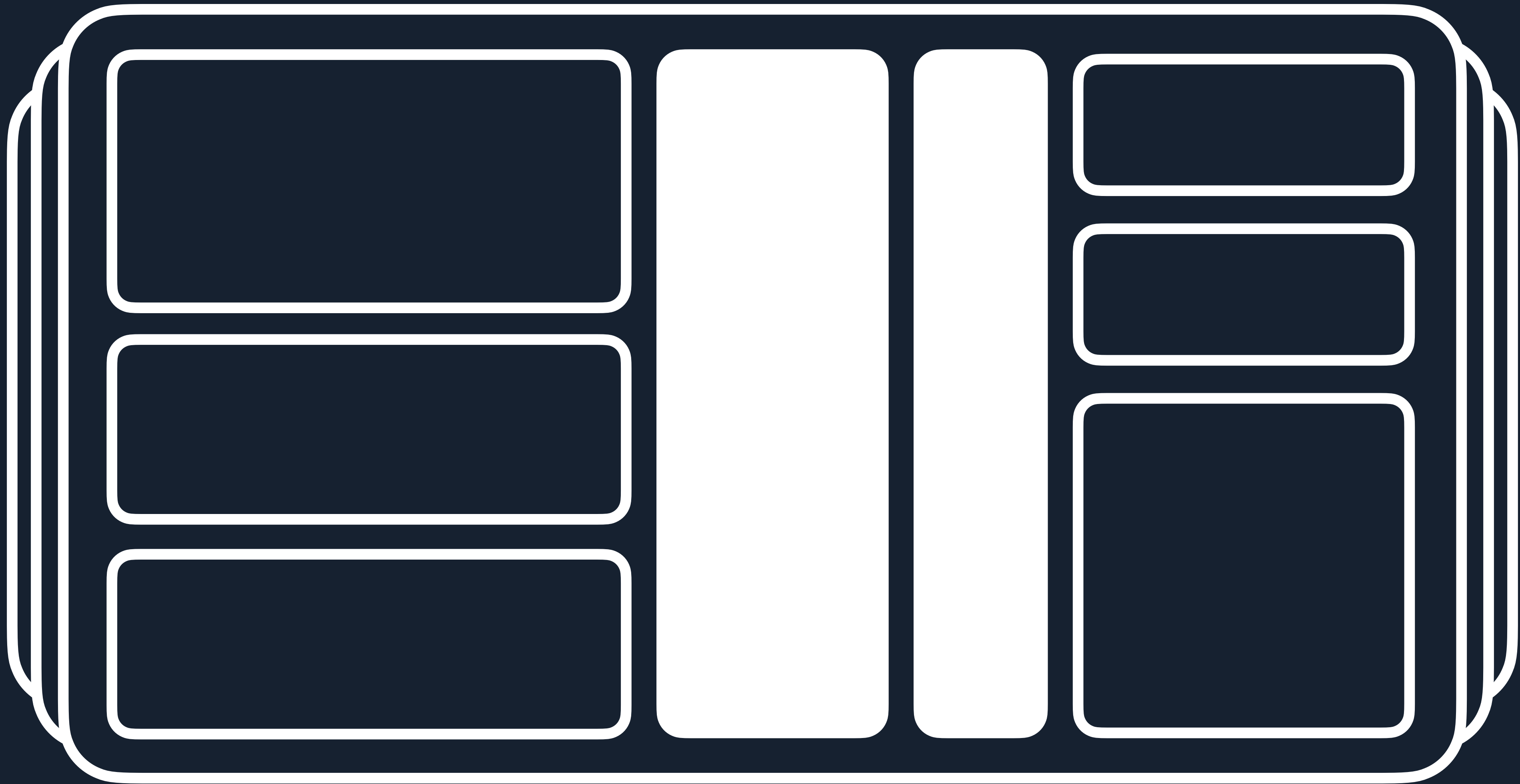
**The CMS became the  
biggest obstacle to  
successful delivery**

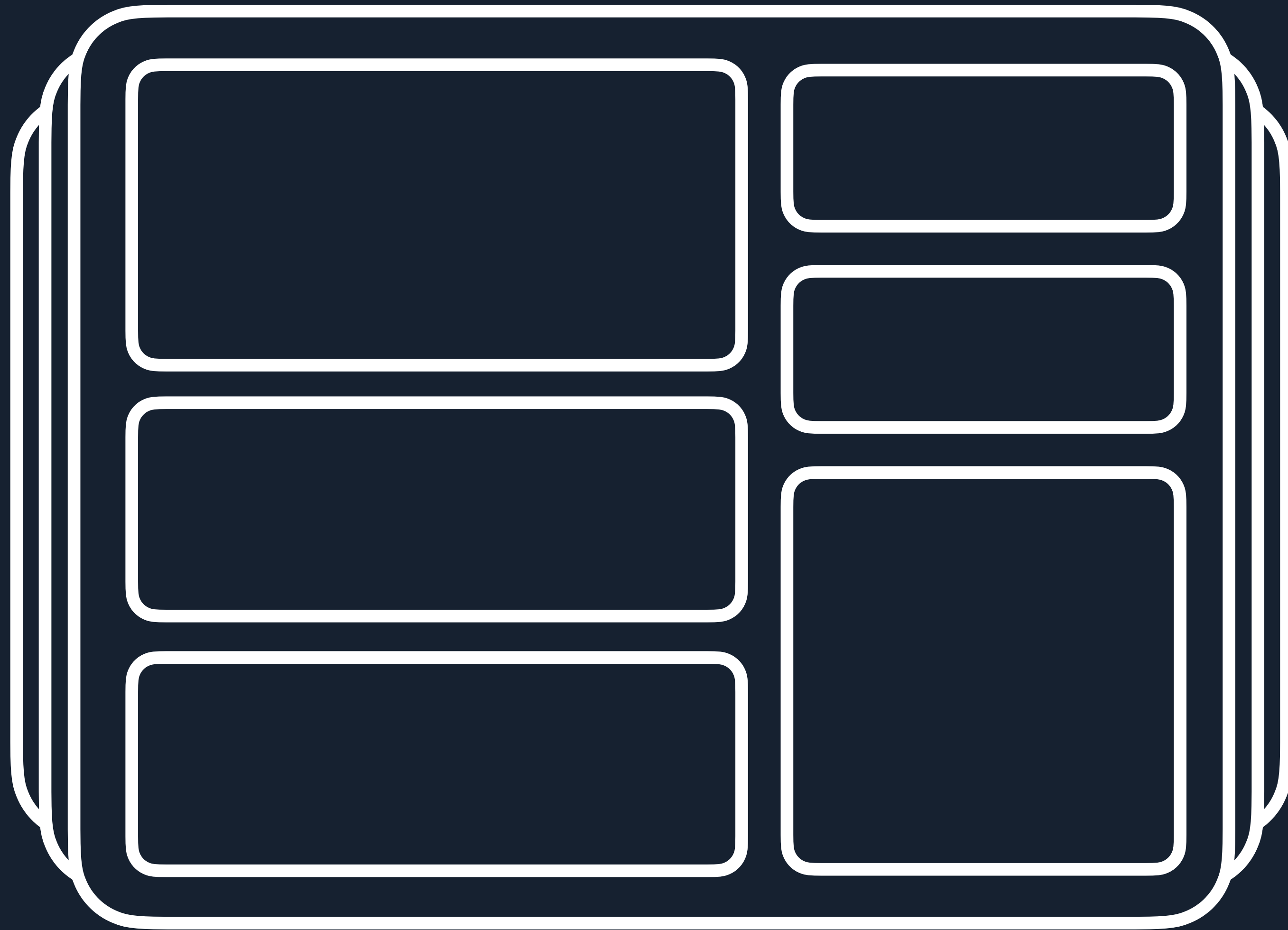
**I found myself seeking,  
work arounds and  
shortcuts**

**As did customers**









**Workarounds became  
common and formalised**

**Results of workarounds  
outperformed core platform**

If your CMS does **not** have an  
API in 2021, perhaps you  
shouldn't be using it

— Knut Melvær

July 26th 2021 (at about 6:51pm)





2

# Objections to overcome



**Moving from a monolithic  
to a decoupled architecture  
can be **daunting****

**All these dependencies  
add too much risk**

**What if they go away?  
What if they break?  
Can they be trusted?**

**All these dependencies  
add too much risk**

Their entire business depends on their continued good standing of this specific service.

Their success demands dedicated domain experts.

What team would you allocate to each of these capabilities?

**Using lots of services will  
impact performance**

This is going to run like a dog

**Using lots of  
services will impact  
performance**

There is likely to be far more dedicated engineering and infrastructure for each dedicated service than you'd be able to dedicate.

A service which is "nearby" isn't necessarily faster.

**We can't let this content  
out of our control**

**You're suggesting we give  
away the family jewels**

**We can't let this content  
out of our control**

Each vendor is likely to have more strict and established compliance and regulations than you'd be ready to commit to yourself.

Look for certification and compliance when selecting vendors.

Decoupling can also mean leveraging first party APIs.

**Using these services  
will lock us in**

What if we want to make  
some changes?



**Using these services  
will lock us in**

Using APIs demands that you have clear delineation and build to defined integrations.

You'll probably have looser coupling and greater flexibility than building everything together in-house.

The headless CMS  
category is **exploding**

3

# A few of the benefits

# Decoupling

**Time to market can  
drastically improve**

**Let alone time to dev environment!**

**Your** feature roadmap  
is not in lockstep with  
a that of the platform

**Your services  
operated by experts  
so you can build and differentiate**

The skills you need  
are **widely** available



**Front-end** code is  
no longer limited to  
being a product of  
a **back-end** system

**Your results  
Are back under  
your control**

# To finish

**DO YOU?**

**Have difficulty providing environments in time for project deadlines?**

**Have frustrations about time to market or the freedom to build what you envisage?**

**CAN YOU?**

**Try this architecture on an  
internal or ancillary project?**

**Resource a project which  
would need devs versed  
in front-end and APIs?**

# Courage & confidence



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# Thanks

@philhawksworth

# Jamstack Community Survey 2021

[findthat.at/jamstack/survey](https://findthat.at/jamstack/survey)

This Wednesday  
jamstacklondon.com

July 28, 2021

# Searching and structured content services

Jamstack London returns as a free online event with a new platform and plans for a sociable time and talks from fantastic speakers.

Register for the meetup

Join the online event

July 28 at Jamstack London

Sarah Dayan, Algolia

Search tools and your favourite web development framework



July 28 at Jamstack London

Kapehe, Sanity

Your content is portable, so use it everywhere. Intro to Portable Text



## Event schedule (times in UTC)

- 17:00 — Doors open with social time in the lounge
- 17:35 — Talk 1: Sarah Dayan
- 18:00 — Talk 2: Kapehe
- 18:20 — 90 second

[findthat.at/chicken](https://findthat.at/chicken)



# Thanks

@philhawksworth