Compass Guide to WCM, Q1 2019
Evaluation of GX Software XperienCentral 10.23

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GX Software XperienCentral Product Evaluation

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ARS LOGICA POSITION

GX Software is an industry leader in many of the functional areas of WCM and customer insight. For the business user, the platform offers excellent ease-of-use (co-ranked first among all platforms tested for UI quality) and top-tier enterprise tech stack leverage. For the technologist, XperienCentral represents an extremely scalable (co-ranked third among all platforms tested), flexible, and easily-administered CMS with robust development tools. In our view, the only real product/vendor liability is limited market/mind-share. Organizations would often do well to shortlist GX Software, though its name is not recognized by many.

NOTES & RESOURCES

Sources of Information
Some company and product information contained in this report was collected via Ars Logica's 172-item vendor questionnaire. Vendor responses were independently verified through customer interviews, implementation monitoring, product documentation, Ars Logica's knowledge base, and hands-on product testing.

Platforms Included
The Compass Guides include the platforms that Ars Logica considers to be the most significant in the WCM market. While scores on our business and technology scorecards vary widely, each platform evaluated will be a best-fit given the right use case, and may therefore prove worthy of shortlisting.

Customer Interviews
Ars Logica has interviewed users of every product covered in the Compass Guides, including GX Software XperienCentral.

Implementation Monitoring
Since the 1990s, Ars Logica founder Tony White has kept close tabs on ongoing WCM implementations. Some of this knowledge is represented in the Compass Guide reports.

No Vendor Influence
Ars Logica retains complete editorial control over the Compass Guides and receives no funding in their production.

GX Software Vendor Overview

GX Software is a Dutch technology vendor offering a refined WCM/digital experience platform currently in its tenth major release. When combined with BlueConic (now operating as a separate entity), the platform also takes a market leadership role in the customer-insight arena. In its early years, XperienCentral (named "GX WebManager" before 2015) was championed primarily by IT departments, but by overhauling the UI and demonstrating an extreme commitment to supporting the business requirements of marketing personnel, the vendor now boasts very high user adoption rates among marketing managers. The vendor has sold primarily to European markets. Since 2008, GX Software has maintained a U.S. presence, but market penetration has proven slow. We believe that GX stands to gain significant market share in both Europe and North America with its top-notch WCM and customer insight products, but the vendor's potential has not been well tapped to-date.

Our description of BlueConic as a "customer insight" platform implies a heavy component of behavioral analytics. We chose to use "customer insight" instead of "behavioral analytics" because of the added *actionable* aspect of the product that allows marketers to *do* something with user data collected across channels that "behavioral analytics" does not contain. Essentially, what BlueConic does is to give marketers an understanding of customers' individual needs by continuously monitoring customer activity and combining it with existing profiles across channels (website, e-mail, call center, portal, social media, kiosk/store) and back-end applications (CMS, CRM, ERP, e-commerce, marketing automation, et al.).

Company Profile

Year Founded: 1998
Headquarters: Nijmegen, The Netherlands;
         U.S. Headquarters: Boston, MA
Employees (or FTE equivalents): 110
Geographies: Europe, North America
Revenue: $20 million (estimated)
Product Types Offered: WCM, Customer Data
         Platform, Interactive Forms Engine
Commercial or Open Source: Commercial
Strategic Implementation Partners: Atos,
         Incento, Sogeti, Techonomy
Top Competitors: Adobe, Sitecore, SDL,
         Open Text, BloomReach
Key Vertical Industries: Financial Services,
         Government, Insurance, Telecom

Product Profile

Product Names: XperienCentral, InteractiveForms
Version: 10.23
Next version release date: Q3 2019
Market segment: Enterprise
Average Sales Price (License Only): $100,000
Technology Platform: Java
Key Strengths: Usability and interface quality;
         leveraging complex technology infra-
         structures; platform scalability and flex-
         ibility; robust SDK; ease of administration;
         headless and hybrid/in-context options
Key Limitations: Limited market/mind-share
Highest-Value Use Case: Large enterprise seeking
         a Java-based WCM platform with cutting-
         edge customer-insights capabilities

Vendor History & Product Evolution

Founded in 1998 in the Netherlands, GX Software, for the first two years of its existence, primarily developed a series of highly technical point solutions for Web developers, which eventually reached critical mass as the first version of WebManager. This early focus on technical buyers as customer targets partly explains the strength of the company's developer network in the Benelux region. In 2005-2006, GX Software recognized that future growth depended on unifying its myriad point solutions into a coherent whole. As a result, the vendor added business-oriented feature-functionality and developed UI's that would appeal to non-technical users. Executing this project took the better part of 2006-2007, at which point GX WebManager was ready for mainstream use outside of the technical community, including LOB managers. The product thus reached functional maturity at a time when some were beginning to ask whether WCM was becoming a commodity. In Ars Logica's view, WCM will remain uncommodotized for quite some time. For although roughly 60-70 percent of its core features are available in most viable CMS products, the remaining 30-40 percent vary widely among vendors and provide a tremendous amount of business value to customers. In GX Software's case, the highest-value use cases result from the integration of XperienCentral with third-party enterprise applications (CRM, e-commerce, social, etc.), along with BlueConic as a data/customer insight and engagement platform. While perhaps a little late to the game in delivering such value above and beyond WCM, GX Software has now done so in a dramatic way. BlueConic's cutting-edge analytics capabilities can also be leveraged as a completely GX-independent enterprise application. As it currently stands, GX Software's solution stack is one of the industry's richest in terms of overall feature-functionality -- and with no serious technical drawbacks.

While improvements to XperienCentral will continue in upcoming releases, the product is functionally mature. GX Software and BlueConic now operate as separate entities, but both companies' products play an important role in the highest-value use case. Though the market offers few product combinations of this kind, Ars Logica sees significant demand for a unified view of consumer behavior across channels -- especially as the headless CMS and e-commerce platform markets continue to heat up -- and the overlap between WCM, e-commerce, analytics, and multi-channel marketing will continue to be one of the hottest spots in the software market over the next year. GX Software holds a very competitive position.

Key Recent Developments

As mentioned in the previous Compass Guide, recent XperienCentral releases have focused primarily on strengthening back-end APIs and improving usability (top-ranked product in the Compass Guides in this category). GX's current product roadmap focuses on improved cloud offerings, staging options, mobile editing, and administrative tools for optimizing post-upgrade system performance. Very worthy of note is that the headless and hybrid/in-context functionality (which some customers were already using "unofficially") has been officially productized as of version 10.23.

Profiling the Ideal Buyer

The ideal buyer of the XperienCentral product set is a large company with: (1) enterprise-wide deployment plans, (2) WCM requirements on the complex end of the spectrum, and (3) a need to understand consumer behavior for the purpose of improving online conversion rates across a large number of channels. There are other prospective buyers who should consider GX Software, such as the mid-sized company looking for a stand-alone CMS solution or the large enterprise with a satisfactory CMS, but with needs for separate, multi-application, customer-engagement capabilities. As mentioned in other parts of this report, GX Software is a Java-based platform. So those considering XperienCentral (or BlueConic) would ideally be committed to J2EE-based technologies.

Although WCM and analytics applications are horizonal by nature (i.e. they are used by companies in all industries), GX Software's installed based in financial services, government, insurance, and telecommunications is particulary strong. Prospective customers in these industries will benefit from the vendor's relevant implementation expertise.

- **Large Enterprises Looking to Understand Consumer Behavior Across Applications/Channels**
  GX Software's customer-engagement technology sets it apart from most other CMS vendors and make the platform a good fit for enterprises with demanding digital conversion requirements.

- **Marketing Organizations Supporting E-Commerce Initiatives that Require Advanced Analytics**
  The synergies between XperienCentral and BlueConic make the combination useful to online marketers whose livelihood depends on the ability to personalize the online buyer's user experience.

- **Prospective CMS Buyers with Complex Application Integration Challenges**
  The platform's clean, SOA-based architecture and rich API set facilitate straightforward application integration in complex IT environments.

XperienCentral Will Not Be a Good Fit, If...

GX Software's products will not be a good fit for small organizations with basic WCM requirements and no need to understand customer behavior across multiple channels. XperienCentral is an enterprise-tier platform. Although it can be used in simpler implementations, we recommend doing so only if plans over the next 2-3 years include, (a) rapid evolution of the need for online analytics, e-commerce, and personalization, or (b) replacing an existing CMS with integration into complex infrastructure. GX Software will also likely not be a good fit for .NET or PHP-centric IT organizations. However, to companies of any size for whom best-of-breed development is important, we advise considering this "enterprise-only" platform.

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Key Product Strengths

GX Software produces a platform with formidable strengths in all of the functional areas of WCM. They start at the front-end user interface, where XperienCentral's usability and interface quality co-rank first among all the products we've tested. Business users with no technical expertise commonly report that the design of XperienCentral (arrangement of menus, layout of the user interface, and simplicity of completing tasks, e.g.) is intuitive and easily absorbed. Perhaps more interestingly, marketing personnel report that GX Software's cross-application analytics allow them to generate and use customer data in ways that quickly increase their online conversion rates ("conversion rate" here meaning causing the website visitor to engage in a desired behavior such as purchasing a product or clicking an advertisement). High scores in ease-of-use alone would not be terribly surprising, but they become so when you consider that XperienCentral is simpler to use than some entry-level products.

On the level of platform architecture, GX Software's continued strict SOA approach results in a technology stack that ranks second for flexibility among all WCM platforms evaluated. GX's product modules can often be easily swapped or integrated into other vendors' solutions, and vice versa. (SOA is an architectural approach in which each product component is self-contained and interoperable with all other components. Solutions based on this principle offer the highest degree of platform flexibility.)

FIGURE 1   GX Software XperienCentral, Key Product Strengths and Limitations

Below are several key product strengths and limitations that potential buyers should keep in mind when assembling vendor shortlists.

KEY STRENGTHS	KEY LIMITATIONS
Superb usability and interface quality (co-ranked first of all platforms evaluated)	Limited presence in North America
Industry-leading customer-retention functionality (requires BlueConic)	Market's unawareness of combined XperienCentral/BlueConic value proposition
Robust leverage of enterprise tech stacks	Need for substantial marketing investment for vendor to achieve the next level of sales success
Headless and hybrid/in-context options	Strength of partner network
Excellent ease of administration (ranked third of all platforms evaluated), given the high scalability and flexibility of the platform	

Source: Ars Logica

Sources of information: product testing, product updates, customer interviews, vendor questionnaire

With most enterprise WCM platforms, the relationship between scalability and flexibility on the one hand, and ease of administration on the other, is normally inverse. That is, when scalability and flexbility are especially high, ongoing administration can prove quite labor intensive. For this reason, the "best" WCM products can normally be spotted quickly by the strongly negative slope of the line from scalability and flexibility to ease of administration in Figure 3. GX Software is one of two notable exceptions in this regard (the other is BloomReach). Among platforms Ars Logica has evaluated, XperienCentral ranks second and fourth for flexibility and scalability, respectively, and third for ease of administration. GX Software leads the market in its average score in these three categories.

One final strength worthy of attenion is XperienCentral's ability to leverage fully the range of applications in typical large-enterprise technology infrastructures -- partly a by-product of the platform's best-of-breed design, and partly a result of XperienCentral-BlueConic's highest combined value proposition: cross-platform customer insight.

Key Product Limitations

While there are feature-functional areas where GX's platform ranks as high as first among the products we've evaluated (Usability & Interface Quality -- see Figure 2), there are -- to be frank -- no serious corresponding technical limitations in the product. Perhaps the most serious drawback of the overall GX Software solution is the vendor's limited market presence relative to its competitors, especially in North America. While we have not heard any specific complaints about the level of customer support, customer service response times, or language barriers among technical support staff, etc., these are the types of problems we've encountered with other European vendors with limited U.S.-market presence. But as just stated, we know of no current issues in any of these areas. On the contrary, in our conversations with customers, we have found a very high level of satisfaction with GX's customer support.

Another limitation for GX Software in the current market is that the full value proposition (the synergies, to be precise) of best-of-breed WCM, combined with best-of-breed analytics, is often not well understood by potential customers. Of course buyers understand the *basic* value of online behavioral data (users' preferences, purchasing history, etc.), but the actual number of enterprise-wide WCM implementations that assimilate user behavior across channels and expose it to cutting-edge customer-insight technology is somewhat limited. Ars Logica normally sees such use cases implemented mostly at the high end of the market, and GX Software has had a difficult time drawing attention to itself and its products in this market segment. We believe the XperienCentral/BlueConic combination represents one of the most robust WCM/customer-insight platforms available -- one that offers the possibility of this type of implementation at a lower-than-usual price point.

Vendor/Product Report Cards

The features, functions, and technical underpinnings of WCM products vary considerably, as do the customer requirements they are intended to satisfy. For this reason, the only reliable way to assure the best product fit for a particular client is to spend anywhere from several weeks to several months assessing the client's specific needs and analyzing product capabilities line by line. Still, Ars Logica is frequently asked to rate products in categories such as those in Figures 2 and 3. In using these ratings, please take care to weight each category in accordance with its importance to your needs. While the average scores across these categories might be the same for two products, proper weighting will likely cause the scores to diverge -- often significantly.

**FIGURE 2**   GX Software Report Card for the Business User

Figure 2 shows Ars Logica's rating of XperienCentral in four WCM categories of critical importance to business users. Refer to Page 11 for an explanation of the evaluation criteria.
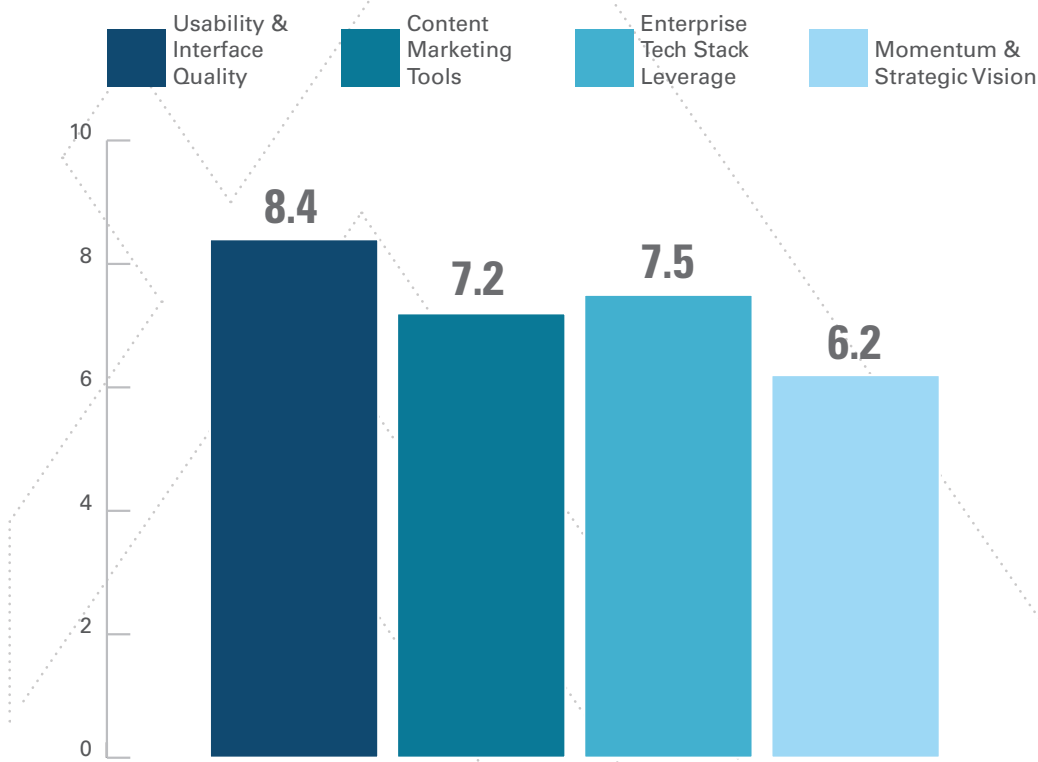
Sources of information: product testing, product updates, customer interviews, vendor questionnaire

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FIGURE 3   GX Software Report Card for Technologists

Figure 3 shows Ars Logica's rating of XperienCentral in four WCM categories of critical importance to technologists. Refer to Page 12 for an explanation of the evaluation criteria.
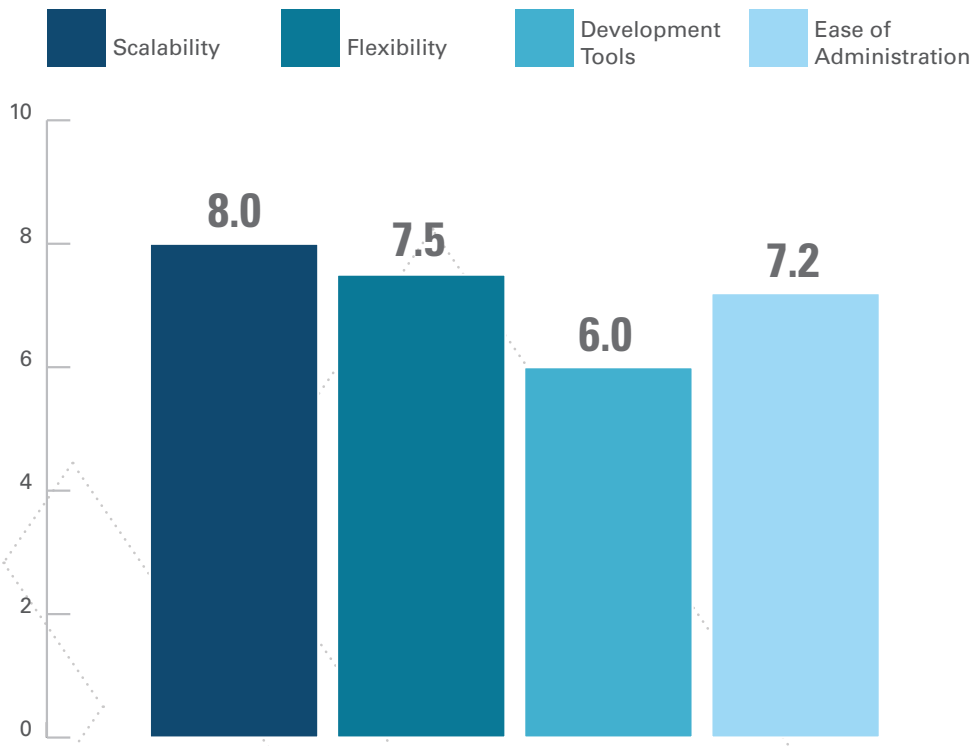
Sources of information: product testing, product updates, customer interviews, vendor questionnaire

Report Card Evaluation Criteria

In the process of analyzing WCM solutions, Ars Logica has established a set of evaluation criteria, which at the highest level can be separated into four categories for non-technical business users and four categories for technologists. Scores in these categories represent averages of a large number of detailed criteria, and are meant to be used as a means of quickly comparing products within the same market segment.

Criteria for Business Users

- **Usability & Interface Quality**
  Usability refers to the relative ease of learning and using a WCM application. For non-technical business users, factors contributing to high scores in this category include intuitive and consistent user interfaces, streamlined task completion (i.e. minimal number of steps to complete a task), integration with the desktop and between product modules, contextual editing capabilities, and documented high user adoption rates among a vendor's customers.

- **Content Marketing Tools**
  Marketers needs tools within WCM platforms to improve sales conversion rates, increase average transaction amounts, draw customers back to their websites, analyze online behavioral patterns, and deliver unique customer experiences. This category rates the presence and quality of such tools, including segmenting, targeting, testing, personalization, site optimization, and mobile support.

- **Enterprise Tech Stack Leverage**
  This category assesses a product's ability to integrate with and leverage the data and functionality of essential enterprise technology platforms such as CRM, ERP, marketing automation, e-commerce, portal, analytics, and social media management.

- **Momentum & Strategic Vision**
  This category represents a combination of a vendor's market momentum (current market share adjusted for acceleration or deceleration over the past 24 months) and the completeness of its market strategy, which includes commitment to technology and implementation partners, meaningful evolution of WCM products, and support for marketing programs.

Criteria for Technologists

- **Scalability**

  Scalability refers to the ability of a product to function well as system demands increase. Factors contributing to scalability are database size, query efficiency, bandwidth consumption, ease of system management, caching efficiency, load balancing, and mass content deployment capabilities.

- **Flexibility**

  Flexibility denotes a product's ability to integrate easily with existing enterprise infrastructure, including operating systems, Web servers, databases, directories, development tools, and other enterprise applications such as ERP, CRM, e-commerce systems, search, portals, and so forth.

- **Development Tools**

  This category describes the quality of a product's integrated development environment (IDE), the technologies that the IDE incorporates, and overall ease of customized application development. Although this category refers primarily to development frameworks, other ad hoc tools are also included, such as page- and site templating, alternate interfaces, scripting tools, configuration utilities, pre-defined coding functions, mobile development accelerators, and any other functionality that enables or eases the installation, development, and customization of WCM implementations.

- **Ease of Administration**

  Some WCM products require significantly more work to administer than others. This category rates the relative resource intensity required to keep the system running smoothly, where higher scores reflect less work. Roughly speaking, higher scores also indicate better coordination of application components due to more methodical system design.

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SERVICES

Advisory Services

Ars Logica is a vendor-neutral analyst firm helping companies evaluate their digital experience requirements and select appropriate software. To address clients' questions and concerns that arise throughout the year, Ars Logica offers unlimited direct analyst access through its Analyst Anytime advisory services. These annual, subscription-based services provide guidance by phone or e-mail within 24 hours on a wide range of issues. The number of inquiries submitted throughout the year is not limited.

Software and Technology Selection

In our technology selection engagements, Ars Logica maps clients' functional, technological, and strategic requirements to potential software solutions and identifies the vendors whose products best satisfy these requirements. We maintain a continuously-updated comprehensive matrix of the feature-functionality of most digital experience vendors' products and solutions. We receive frequent briefings from these vendors and have in-depth conversations and consulting engagements with their customers, ensuring that we always understand the actual state of vendors' offerings as well as their forward-looking strategic directions.

Custom Engagements

Ars Logica's expertise in technologies such as web content management, digital experience management, digital asset management, marketing campaign management, enterprise search, and portals, gives us the open-ended ability to help clients on a wide range of projects, including: building internal business cases, assessing technology requirements, analyzing software products and vendors, selecting and assembling software solutions, crafting digital strategies, and running corporate educational seminars. We also assist vendors in developing strategic roadmaps, and we present our view of the digital experience market at industry conferences and end-user events.

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