



Case Study: Complex ExpressionEngine to Craft CMS Migration

How a UK Design Agency Saved Its Largest Education Client with Zero Data Loss and a 40% Speed Boost

The Client

A 50 person branding and digital agency in the UK. Their top client a large higher education institution was running a 15 year old ExpressionEngine site that had become slow, insecure and nearly impossible for the internal marketing team to update.

The agency had deep design and UX talent but no one on staff who could safely migrate the 8,000+ pages, custom content types and complex user permissions from EE to a modern Craft CMS install.

The Challenge

- **Legacy architecture:** 15 years of accumulated custom hacks, an EE version no longer supported and undocumented database changes.
- **Zero-downtime requirement:** The university's admissions cycle was live, the site couldn't go down during the migration.
- **Data integrity:** Every article, event, faculty profile and media file had to survive the transition. No exceptions.
- **White label constraint:** The agency needed to present the entire project as their own. The end client could never know a third party developer was involved.

The Solution

I was brought in as the agency's silent backend partner. Over a 10-week fixed-price sprint, I:

- **Audited and mapped** the entire EE database structure, identifying orphaned content, broken relationships, and security gaps.
- **Built a custom PHP migration script** that transformed EE's native data model into Craft's content architecture preserving fields, categories, and multi-site relationships.
- **Recreated 100% of the front-end functionality** using Craft's Twig templating, including custom modules for the admissions portal, faculty directories, and event calendars.
- **Conducted daily Slack standups** with the agency's project manager during overlapping UK morning hours, and delivered transparent progress via shared Jira boards.
- **Tested on a staging environment** for two weeks with real content, then executed the final migration in under four hours with zero downtime.

Everything was delivered under the agency's brand. The university never received a single email from me. They still don't know I exist.

The Results

Metric	Before (EE)	After (Craft CMS)
Average page load time	4.8 seconds	2.1 seconds (56% faster)
Time to publish an article (staff)	12 minutes	Under 2 minutes
Security patches per quarter	8+ (critical)	0
Server resource usage	92% at peak	41% at peak

Beyond the numbers the agency retained their largest account and expanded their scope with the university adding ongoing UX work and a mobile app they could now pitch because the CMS foundation was future proof.

What the Agency Said

“We were terrified of losing this account because of technical problems we couldn’t solve. The migration was smooth, the client noticed nothing except a faster, easier to use site. We now bring this dev partner into every CMS project we touch.”

— **Technical Director, UK Design Agency (anonymised)**

How I Can Help Your Agency

If your team is facing a legacy CMS migration or needs a reliable backend partner for Craft, ExpressionEngine or complex WordPress builds. I work as your invisible technical arm.

- 9 years deep in PHP CMS architecture
- White label retainer or fixed price engagements
- Karachi based, working UK/US/EU timezones

Let’s talk about your next project.

[BOOK A 15-MIN DISCOVERY CALL](#)

[CONNECT ON LINKEDIN](#)