What Does a Sanity Partner Agency Actually Do?

It's not what a typical website agency does. The distinction matters more than you think.

When most companies hear "website agency," they picture designers making mockups and developers turning them into pages. That model worked when a website was a collection of static pages managed through a WordPress dashboard. It doesn't work anymore. Your website is now one output of a content system that also feeds AI search engines, mobile apps, internal tools, and whatever channels emerge next.

A Sanity Partner agency is certified by Sanity — the platform that Figma, Nike, Shopify, Cloudflare, Condé Nast, and AT&T use to manage their content. Sanity GitHub 2025 The certification means the agency has demonstrated expertise in Sanity's specific architec-

ture: code-based schemas, the GROQ query language, Content Lake infrastructure, and Studio customization. But the certification is just the entry point. What actually separates a Sanity Partner from a typical web agency is what they spend their time doing.

What does a typical web agency actually deliver?

To understand what a Sanity Partner does differently, it helps to be honest about what most web agencies actually deliver. A typical agency engagement follows a familiar pattern: discovery meeting, wireframes, design mockups, development, content upload, launch. The deliverable is a website. Specifically, it's a collection of designed pages that look good and function correctly on the day they launch.

The problem is what happens on Day 31 and beyond. The design is beautiful, but the CMS is a rigid set of templates that only developers can modify. The marketing team wants to publish a case study, but the page builder doesn't have the right layout. The CEO wants to add a new service line, but it requires a developer to create a new page template. Content updates that should take minutes take weeks because they require a developer ticket, a design review, and a deployment cycle.

This is the fundamental limitation of the page-centric approach. **When a web agency designs pages, the deliverable has a shelf life.** The moment business needs change — new service, new market, new content format — the site needs developer intervention. Forrester found that developers on traditional CMS platforms spent up to 40% of their time managing infrastructure and content requests rather than building features. Forrester / Vercel TEI 2024 That's not a technology problem. It's a design problem — the content wasn't structured as data, it was trapped in page templates.

What does a Sanity Partner deliver instead?

A Sanity Partner delivers a content system. The distinction isn't semantic — it changes what the agency spends 70% of its time on during a project.

The content model is the primary deliverable. Before any frontend code is written, a Sanity Partner designs the content model: every content type your business needs (articles, team members, services, locations, case studies, FAQs, testimonials), every field

within those types (title, body, image, category, related content), and every relationship between them (which author wrote which article, which service belongs to which location, which testimonial maps to which case study). In Sanity, these are defined as code-based schemas written in TypeScript — version-controlled, testable, and deployable just like application code. Sanity Docs 2025

This matters because the content model determines everything downstream. It determines what editors see when they open the CMS. It determines what data the API returns to the frontend. It determines whether content can be reused across web, mobile, and AI channels. It determines whether your schema markup is generated automatically or has to be hardcoded into every page. A well-designed content model means your marketing team can publish a new case study in 10 minutes without touching a developer. A poorly designed one means they're still filing Jira tickets for content changes a year after launch.

The Studio is the second deliverable. Sanity Studio is the editorial interface — the dashboard your content team uses every day. Unlike WordPress's generic admin panel, Studio is built in React and is fully customizable. Pagepro / Sanity Guide 2025 A Sanity Partner designs the Studio experience around your team's actual workflows: custom input components for specific content types, real-time collaborative editing, live preview that shows exactly how content will appear on the live site, and role-based access that gives editors freedom without exposing developer-level settings.

The frontend is the third deliverable, not the first. This is the biggest difference from a traditional agency. The Next.js frontend is built to consume the content model, not the other way around. Because the content is structured data delivered through APIs, the frontend is one presentation layer among potentially many. The same content model can feed a website, a mobile app, a digital signage system, or an AI assistant — without duplicating content or maintaining separate systems.

What does the actual engagement look like, phase by phase?

A Sanity Partner engagement is structured differently from a typical web project because the priorities are different. Here's what each phase involves and why it matters.

Phase 0: Content Audit & Discovery (2–4 weeks). Before any design or development begins, the partner audits your existing content ecosystem. This means cataloguing every content type on the current site, mapping every URL for redirect planning, documenting every integration (forms, analytics, CRM, email, payment), inventorying editorial work-flows (who creates content, who approves it, how long does it take), and identifying content that can be restructured versus content that needs to be rebuilt. This phase produces the migration plan and the first draft of the content model. It's the phase that most general web agencies skip entirely, and it's the phase that prevents the most common failure modes.

Phase 1: Content Model & Studio Design (3–4 weeks). The content model is designed in TypeScript, reviewed with both developers and editors, and iterated until it accurately represents the business's content reality. Simultaneously, the Sanity Studio is config-ured: custom editing interfaces, preview configurations, asset management, role-based access, and any custom plugins the editorial workflow requires. Editors test the Studio with real content and provide feedback before frontend development begins.

Phase 2: Frontend Development & Migration (4–8 weeks). The Next.js frontend is built to consume the content model via Sanity's GROQ queries or GraphQL. Content is migrated incrementally — section by section, not all at once — to minimize SEO risk and allow testing at each stage. Webhook-based revalidation ensures that content changes in Sanity appear on the live site instantly, without manual deployments. JSON-LD schema markup is generated automatically from the content model, making the site AI-readable by default.

Phase 3: Launch, Training & Content Operations (ongoing). Launch includes compre-hensive CMS training for the editorial team — not a 30-minute walkthrough, but structured sessions where editors practice creating, editing, and publishing every content type. Post-launch, the partner provides ongoing content operations: performance monitoring, content model refinements as business needs evolve, new content types as the business expands, and continuous optimization of editorial workflows.

How is this different from hiring a freelancer or general agency?

The comparison isn't about quality of developers. Plenty of talented React engineers work at general agencies and as freelancers. The difference is in **what the engagement is**

designed to produce. A general agency is structured around delivering a visual design. A Sanity Partner is structured around delivering a content system. The former produces a website. The latter produces the infrastructure that makes websites, mobile apps, and AI visibility work from a single source of truth.

There's also the platform access dimension. Certified Sanity Partners have direct relationships with Sanity's engineering and partnerships teams. When an edge case arises during implementation — and on enterprise projects, they always do — a partner can escalate to Sanity's team directly rather than relying on community forums and documentation. This access alone can save weeks during complex migrations.

Why does the content model matter so much?

The content model is emphasized repeatedly because it's the single highest-leverage decision in any Sanity implementation. If you get the content model right, everything else becomes easier. If you get it wrong, everything else becomes a workaround.

Sanity's philosophy is to model content for meaning rather than presentation. Sanity Docs — Structured Content This means a "Team Member" content type isn't a page template — it's a data structure with fields like name, role, bio, headshot, department, and social links. That structured data can then be rendered as a team page on the website, a speaker card on an event page, an author byline on blog posts, and a structured Person schema for search engines — all from the same source. Change the person's title in one place, and it updates everywhere simultaneously.

Sanity's own team has described their approach to structured data as deliberate separation of content from presentation: **model your content to reflect its meaning, then transform it into whatever format each channel requires at render time.** Sanity Schema.org Discussion 2025 This is why Sanity Partners spend weeks on the content model before writing frontend code. The model isn't just a database schema — it's the contract between your content team and every system that consumes your content.

The AI visibility angle makes this even more critical. Structured content stored in Sanity's Content Lake is inherently machine-readable. Sanity Content Lake Docs 2025 When your content model includes explicit fields for summaries, key statistics, expert quotes, and FAQ pairs, the frontend can automatically generate JSON-LD schema, Open Graph

metadata, and AI-extractable content blocks without manual intervention. Unstructured content in a WordPress WYSIWYG editor can't do this. It's the architectural foundation that makes a site "AI search-ready" — not a plugin or a checklist, but the way content is stored at the database level.

What does ongoing "Content Operations" actually include?

The most undervalued part of a Sanity Partner engagement is what happens after launch. Most web agency relationships end at launch or transition to a basic maintenance retainer covering bug fixes and security patches. A Sanity Partner's post-launch work is fundamentally different because the system is designed to evolve.

Content model expansion. As your business grows — new services, new markets, new content formats — the content model expands with it. Adding a new content type (say, "Market Report" or "Office Location") means designing the schema, configuring the Studio interface, building the frontend rendering, and connecting it to the existing content graph. This is ongoing work, not a "Phase 2 project" that requires a new SOW.

Editorial workflow optimization. The way your team creates and publishes content will evolve as they get comfortable with the system. A Sanity Partner refines the Studio based on real usage patterns: simplifying frequently-used workflows, adding custom input components for repetitive tasks, implementing approval chains as the team scales, and configuring scheduled publishing for time-sensitive content.

Performance and AI optimization. Content velocity improvements are measurable and compound over time. Monitoring GROQ query performance, optimizing image delivery through Sanity's asset pipeline, refining schema markup based on search console data, and updating content structures as AI search engines evolve their citation patterns are all ongoing optimization tasks. Storyblok's research found that 61% of companies switching to headless CMS experienced increased ROI, and that ROI tends to grow over time as the content system matures. Storyblok State of CMS 2024

Integration management. Sanity sits at the center of your content ecosystem, connected via APIs and webhooks to your frontend, analytics, CRM, email platform, and whatever new tools your business adopts. Managing these integrations — adding new ones,

troubleshooting existing ones, updating API configurations as third-party services change — is ongoing operational work that requires Sanity-specific expertise.

How do you evaluate whether a Sanity Partner is the right fit?

Not all Sanity Partners are the same, just as not all certified professionals in any field deliver the same quality. Here are the specific questions to ask when evaluating a Sanity Partner for your project.

Ask about their content modeling process. Can they walk you through how they'd model your specific content? Do they design the model before or after the frontend? Do they test the model with editors before development begins? The answers reveal whether they understand that the content model is the primary deliverable or whether they treat it as a technical detail.

Ask about migration experience. Have they migrated a site from your current platform (WordPress, Wix, Webflow) to Sanity before? Can they explain their redirect strategy? Do they migrate incrementally or big-bang? Migration expertise is the difference between preserving your SEO equity and destroying it. Companies with strong system integration achieve 10.3x ROI from digital initiatives versus 3.7x for those with poor connectivity. MuleSoft Connectivity Benchmark 2025

Ask about post-launch support. What does the ongoing engagement look like? Is it just bug fixes, or does it include content model expansion, editorial workflow refinement, and performance optimization? The best Sanity Partners generate more value in the year after launch than during the build itself, because that's when the content system starts compounding.

Ask about their client's editorial teams. Do editors at their previous clients actually use the CMS independently, or are they still dependent on developers for content changes? This is the ultimate test. If the agency built a system that editors love and use daily without developer intervention, they understand what a Sanity Partner is supposed to deliver. If the editors still file developer tickets for content updates, the agency built a website, not a content system.

Frequently asked questions

What does a Sanity Partner agency do?

A Sanity Partner agency designs and builds content infrastructure using Sanity CMS and modern frontend frameworks like Next.js. Unlike a typical web agency that focuses on visual design and page layouts, a Sanity Partner specializes in content modeling (structuring data for reuse across channels), editorial workflow design (building the publishing experience your team uses daily), schema architecture (making content AI-readable and SEO-optimized), and ongoing content operations.

How is a Sanity Partner different from a regular web agency?

A regular web agency builds websites focused on visual design and page templates. A Sanity Partner builds content systems. The core difference is in what they deliver: a web agency delivers pages, a Sanity Partner delivers a content model that determines how every piece of content is structured, related, queried, and delivered across web, mobile, and AI channels. Partners also have direct access to Sanity's engineering team and enablement resources.

What is content modeling and why does it matter?

Content modeling is defining every content type, every field within those types, and every relationship between them. In Sanity, this is done through code-based schemas in TypeScript. The content model determines the editorial experience, API output, multi-channel delivery capability, and long-term maintainability. A poorly designed content model is the most expensive thing to change after launch because it requires restructuring the database, rewriting queries, and updating the frontend.

Do I need a Sanity Partner if I already have React developers?

React developers can build the frontend, but Sanity implementation requires specialized skills: content modeling, GROQ query optimization, Studio customization for editorial

workflows, webhook-based revalidation, and migration planning. Over 99% of headless CMS migrations reported improvements (Storyblok 2024), but those outcomes depend on implementation quality. A Sanity Partner ensures the content architecture matches the ROI the platform can deliver.

What does a Sanity Partner engagement look like?

A typical engagement follows four phases: Phase 0 (Content Audit, 2-4 weeks) catalogues every content type, URL, and integration. Phase 1 (Content Model & Studio Design, 3-4 weeks) builds schemas and editorial interfaces. Phase 2 (Frontend & Migration, 4-8 weeks) builds the Next.js frontend while incrementally migrating content. Phase 3 (Launch, Training & Operations) provides CMS training and ongoing content system management.

How much does working with a Sanity Partner cost?

Enterprise-grade builds typically range from $30,000-$80,000, followed by monthly retainers of $3,000-$8,000 for ongoing content operations. Forrester TEI studies found headless CMS implementations deliver 264-582% ROI over three years with payback periods under six months. The investment is in content infrastructure that compounds in value, not a website that depreciates.