Exponential for web framework developers

What Exponential is when you look at it with the eyes of a Symfony, Laravel, Django or Rails developer - a PHP application framework with a content model, permissions, templates and a server built in - which parts feel...

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This page is for developers who know a web framework and want a first, honest picture of Exponential. Its README describes it as "a professional PHP application framework with advanced CMS (content management system) functionality", and both halves of that sentence matter: there is a framework underneath (front controller, routing to modules and views, templates, a database layer, settings, a console), and on top of it a content model with versions, translations, permissions and an administration that you get without writing code.

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In one paragraph

Exponential 6 is a PHP code base with a long history: it was developed from 1999, first under the name eZ Publish, which its creator discontinued after almost 18 years; 7x continued it, and the product has been called Exponential since August 2025 (Who is 7x?). It is installed with Composer, runs on PHP 8, stores data in SQLite, PostgreSQL, MySQL/MariaDB, Oracle or MongoDB (Database support), and is served by Apache or nginx with PHP-FPM, by Exponential Velocity (a persistent-worker server written in PHP that is part of the product as of 6.0.15) or by FrankenPHP (Velocity is part of Exponential 6.0.15).

What feels familiar

You know	Exponential has
A front controller (`public/index.php`)	`index.php`, which builds `ezpKernel( new ezpKernelWeb() )` and returns its content
Routes to controller actions	modules and views: `/<module>/<view>/<params>`, declared in `module.php` (Routing)

You know	Exponential has
A template engine	the template language (`.tpl` files compiled to PHP by `eZTemplate`) (The view layer)
An ORM or active record	`eZPersistentObject` for your own tables, and the content API for content (ORM)
A console	`bin/php/console` with `exp:*`, `ext:*` and `cron:*` commands (Command line)
Packages	extensions, installed as Composer packages (Packages)
Configuration files	INI files in layers (Configuration)
Tests	PHPUnit, most suites without a database (Testing)

What is different

- **Content is a first-class model.** Most data an editor touches is not a table you design, but a *content class* (a type with attributes) whose *objects* have *versions* and *translations* and sit at *nodes* in a tree. You define classes in the administration and get editing, history, permissions and search for free (The content model for ORM users).
- **Siteaccesses instead of one application config.** A request is first matched to a *siteaccess* (a site, a language version, the administration), and the settings of that siteaccess are loaded before routing (Siteaccesses).
- **No general dependency injection container.** The legacy kernel finds classes through INI settings, naming conventions and a generated class map. When it runs inside Symfony through the legacy bridge it can receive Symfony's container, but the kernel itself does not define services in one (Dependency injection).
- **Templates are overridden, not extended.** A design chain and `override.ini` rules decide which template renders a view; there is no block inheritance as in Twig or Blade (Template resolution).
- **Permissions are data.** Roles made of policies (module, function, limitations) are stored in the database and assigned in the administration; your module declares the functions, administrators grant them (Authorization).
- **Schema changes are not migrations classes.** Tables are described in database-neutral `.dba` files; upgrades are scripts you ship (Migrations).

Where things live

From Architecture for application creators:

```
kernel/, lib/      the kernel: modules, classes, the template engine, the database layer
autoload/          the kernel's class map (autoload/ezp_kernel.php)
extension/         extensions: your application lives here
design/            designs: templates, stylesheets, images
settings/          shipped settings; settings/siteaccess/ and settings/override/ hold yours
var/               runtime: caches, logs, storage, the SQLite database
bin/php/console    one entry point for every command
cronjobs/          the scripts runcronjobs.php runs
index.php          the front controller
```

How you add code

You never edit `kernel/` or `lib/`. Everything you write goes into an **extension**, the unit that plays the role of a Symfony bundle, a Laravel package or a Django app: modules (your routes and screens), classes, templates, settings, datatypes, workflow event types, cronjob parts and console commands. **Setup > RAD** (`/setup/rad`) lists every extension point and writes the boilerplate for most of them (RAD tools, Extension points).

Where to go next

1. Concept dictionary: your framework's words and their Exponential counterparts.
2. The request lifecycle: what happens between `index.php` and the response.
3. Task: build a small CRUD module: the whole path once, by hand.
4. The coming-from pages: Symfony, Laravel, Slim, CodeIgniter, Yii, CakePHP or Laminas, Django and Rails, Express and Spring.

Related pages

- Web framework developers: start here
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