

I know what you *didn't* do last summer

and other reasons to invest in digital asset management systems.

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In today's media environment, any marketing worth doing is multichannel marketing. The fact that consumers are connected on dozens of social networks, paying for TV subscriptions that get them more content than they can ever watch, and using keyword news feeds to get their information from sources in cities they've never even heard of—well, all that means is that, if you want to reach them, you need to be in all those places, too.

When consumers see your campaigns in print, social media, web, Internet video, television and... wherever else they see them, they seldom think of what they saw in all those media as comprising disparate messages. On the contrary, though a message is consumed in different contexts, the goal of any effective campaign should be to influence behavior on Facebook as effectively as on newsstands, and vice versa.

To the consumer, it's one picture, one video clip, one slide show, one Web site, one catalog. That is to say: one brand.

But any marketer worth his or her weight in coupons knows that achieving that kind of cross-platform brand and message consistency requires the simultaneous and coordinated execution of vastly different strategies. And those strategies require that you employ assets that are as diverse as the media they're bound for.

What digital assets are to a marketer

To a marketer, all those files (the logos, the product images, the video clips, etc.) are tools. The job at hand and the materials you're working with go a long way in determining which of those tools you use. It's not just a matter of knowing that a message needs to be pounded in, either. It's a matter of knowing your toolbox well enough to choose between a hammer and a mallet.

Similarly, an image is not just an image. Deciding what you want your audience to see is great, but you can't maximize the potential of a visual without giving some thought to file format, resolution, color, dimensions, and medium.

And then there's the issue of permissions. There's a reason kids shouldn't be in tool sheds unsupervised (bad things happen when children have unrestricted access to sharp things). In much the same way, any digital asset's value relies on its being used by someone who knows what they're doing and has been authorized to do it by someone responsible for coordinating a campaign. Conversely, bad things happen when the wrong people gain access to your assets—even with the best intentions.

In short, digital assets are the tools of a marketer's trade. And considering that each of those tools can come in virtually limitless forms, a marketer's toolbox can be practically bottomless.

Digital assets in branding, revenue growth, and competitive positioning

To have such a large arsenal of digital assets at their disposal is advantageous to marketers—necessary, even. After all, marketing savvy gets you nowhere if you don't have the tools to produce and communicate a message effectively.

But managing and tracking those digital assets can become a chore more time-consuming than what marketers are, ostensibly, paid to do. Still, without a system in place, amassing a large library of files can mean members of your marketing team are forced to spend more time maintaining, updating and policing your filing systems than they do communicating your message.



As with any of an organization's other assets, the idea should always be to find the most cost-effective means to manage and distribute your digital tools, so that the people using them can do so in the most cohesive, effective and nimble way possible. Anything less is bound to hurt an organization's bottom line and the return it gets on its marketing investments.

Plus, an absence of effective digital asset management protocols can result in an organization's allowing others in the market to gain a competitive edge. If marketers are fumbling with filing and scrambling to figure out version control on the fly, there's a good chance the competition is spending that time marketing. What's more, management of assets isn't easy without a robust system built for just that purpose and tailored to your organization's unique workflow needs.

How DAM systems boost the value of digital assets

There may be many good reasons to implement a DAM system within your organization, not the least of which are identifying, centralizing, and making accessible valuable assets for use and reuse within your organization. More importantly, those assets can then be re-purposed for a variety of marketing activities and distributed globally, within your organization or externally. Your DAM system becomes the digital backbone of those marketing activities by facilitating the management of asset integrity, supporting the overall equity of your brand and maximizing the value of rich media assets.

It behooves any organization to step back and realize the power of an effective DAM implementation. In order to begin to understand the business case for DAM solutions, you need to place immediate value on how they impact the speed, efficiency and consistency of marketing activities; DAM saves time, and DAM saves money. Know your assets—and their value!

Here are some DAM good questions to help you measure what you have and, more importantly, what you do not:

- How fast can you launch a new product in the marketplace with a marketing campaign using your existing process?
- Do you know where your assets are?
- Do you know how many assets you have?
- Do you know what your assets are?
- Do you have rich, descriptive layers of metadata associated with your assets?
- Do you know how your assets have been and will be used?
- Do you know who has access to your assets?

Let your assets out of the shadows! It is to your advantage to identify weaknesses and start working on strengthening the processes & systems you have in place to support your brand assets. Implementing DAM solutions will be the best first step you can take.



How DAM systems increase efficiency

Digital Asset Management may be understood as a workflow device that assists in the marketing operations or other operational management critical to your organization. Some have invested in DAM solutions to speed up workflow, and potentially generate bigger profits. Now is the time to identify and map out the workflow process of your department or organization.

You probably don't know enough about your existing workflows. Case in point, do you know what goes into the following tasks and activities? Do you know how much time is spent on each of them at your organization?

- Locating a digital asset
- Converting digital assets to different format
- Organizing assets for easier access
- Transferring assets to others in your organization
- Searching for (not retrieving) digital assets
- Recreating assets when they are not found
- Creating and delivering CDs internally and externally

You need to understand these factors to understand the business case for DAM solutions. Having a DAM system will significantly reduce the amount of time your team manually searches for assets, leaving you more time to spend on development (which DAM solutions can also streamline).

Similarly, many of the steps included in your workflow may be automated via DAM software making it easier from asset ingestion to metadata description to search and retrieval. And greater still, DAM systems encourage the reuse of valuable creative assets, thereby impacting the speed, efficiency, and consistency of your organization's marketing.

Justifying investments in DAM and measuring ROI

If familiar truisms like "time is money" and "timing is everything," ring true for you and your organization, DAM solutions are worth considering, as they bring profitable speed to marketing operations. In essence, DAM becomes your organization's one-stop shop for creating and executing marketing activities. It's your "brand central", where brand assets are waiting to be used in multiple media. Without a doubt, DAM systems save not just time, but money! You need to know what assets you have, where they are and what they can do for you and your organization. Consider the following costs:

- Think of the soft and hard costs associated with recreating assets that might already exist. Think of the waste of labor, effort, and time associated with this redundancy.
- Think of the soft and hard costs associated with using the wrong asset or the wrong version of an asset for a marketing activity. How expensive an exercise would it be to redo a campaign because faulty assets were used the first time around?



- Think of the soft and hard costs associated with using assets that have not been approved for use. Think of the potential legal costs associated with this blunder and the damage these mistakes could do to your brand.
- Chances are you just had a genuine “a-ha” moment or two that made you reflect on your organization’s current protocols and what you need to do to improve them. Remember that DAM solutions save not just time, but money as well.

Where to go from here

Adopting a DAM system is pivotal to the stability of any organization, but it alone cannot meet all of your brand’s needs. Your brand defines your entire organization. It is the promise of product and the consumer’s hope. It is the answer to the question “Who are you as an organization?” What’s more, the need to answer that question is universally important: from the Fortune 500 to the freelance writer, the need is the same.

We can understand even complex organizations’ branding needs by drawing analogies from our environment. A brand is a system comprising many pieces to form a concrete whole, yet those same pieces can exist independently.

For analogy’s sake, imagine our solar system: eight planets (alas, poor Pluto, we knew thee) held in orbit by our main gravitational body, the Sun. Think of the Sun as our core brand, and of each orbiting planet as a sub-brand. All are similar in shape and orbit, but each is unique in build and purpose. Our sub-brand is Earth; it’s here that we live and thrive. Yet, without knowledge of, appreciation for and insight into the Sun (the core brand) or any sub-brands, our world would quickly become irrelevant. Viewing brand in this manner makes the intangible easier to grasp.

If the description of a solar system can accurately portray the concept of brand, then the organisms within the brand are analogous to assets. An asset is a tree, the bird that sits in the tree’s shade, and the worm the bird is eating. Assets are our relevance. Without them, the brand has no purpose. It is no longer a brand but is mere thing floating aimlessly. What good is the idea of an ad without the ad itself? All of the marketing plans in the world are vainly contrived without the means to share them. In this way, assets in any form truly are the lifeblood of an organization. From either view—whether the macro of the solar system or the micro of the habitat, the concern is one and the same. We live in complex systems in which every component must be understood and accounted for.

Proving and meeting the need for your organization

If Digital Asset Management can be understood as a workflow device, then it can also be considered as the protective agency, the education system and the workforce behind an organization, in both the macro and micro view. It is the DAM system that gives confidence and assurance of the video. It is the DAM system that enables the use of that video throughout each and every channel of output. It is the DAM system that is able to re-purpose and re-use on the fly, without the need for costly internal processes and personnel restrictions—the best of which serve as obstructions, and the worst of which embody torrential winds, tearing the organization apart from the inside out, no matter how well-intended they may be. It is for these reasons, (and many more) that DAM is an essential piece to the longevity and success of the brand.



Without the proper DAM solutions, assets die and brands fail

For those whose role it is to formally ensure the brand—the sellers, the marketers, the developers of experience—managing assets should be a primary concern (though it is indeed the role of each individual within the brand). That said, it should not be a burden. Searching for and recreating assets should not take the bulk of your time. If it is no more than an exercise in the application of complicated metadata schemas and permissions controls, the point is lost. The brand fails.

The sum of a brand derives its value from that of its parts. Ergo, assets themselves have intrinsic value. It might come as a surprise to most that they sit upon financial troves—tens of millions of dollars in unevaluated assets. Yet monetary values only tell a fraction of the tale. What about organizational history and memory? What about the documentation of successes and failures, of lives or events that can never be recaptured? If organizations truly do have millions of dollars worth of assets stored away, how can their worth be proven? First, we approach the matter monetarily. An average asset value can be assumed at \$600. This amount fluctuates depending upon the organization, but the sum is derived from activities that most entities or environments take part in. This includes employee pay, equipment purchase or rental, agency costs, subscription fees, etc. Through a bit of rudimentary math, we discover that an organization that holds 1,000 assets (a rather small number) has an asset value of \$600,000.

Now arise the obvious objections:

Well, our assets aren't that good.

We do all of our work in-house

Well, we're not professionals, we leave the hard work to them.

Such thinking only serves to sidestep the issue. If your assets truly “aren't that good,” chances are that your brand is no good. Time to rethink your strategy. If your answer is, “our work is done in-house,” understand that good assets are good assets, regardless of where they're created. If the answer is, “we're not professionals,” what is it, then, that you profess? Are any of these statements true and firm justification for not addressing the issue? Certainly not. What they are instead is an attempt to devalue. Consider the following as you begin estimating a hard- and soft-dollar ROI.

Your ad campaign requires a set of photographs—a series of ten unique images to be used throughout a new campaign. Depending upon the shot, the shoot requires a photographer, assistant photographer(s), a location, models, props, lighting, etc.—all of which can be line-itemed to heart's content. The shoot total is \$8,000 (a modest sum compared to the fees for some stock image sites). Per photograph, the quantitative value is \$800, a sum that says nothing about licensing fees and restrictions, or anything beyond that dollar total.

Now, take one of them away. Pretend that it's lost in the woods, never to be seen or heard from again. How much capital is lost? \$800? No. The capital lost is \$800, plus the cost of duplicating the shot, plus the cost of internal or external staff attempting to locate the lost asset, plus the cost of trying to figure out who drove the thing to the woods and let it out of the car without a map. It isn't a matter of making another .jpg and sticking it online. This was an integral piece of the campaign. And that's a static asset. What about video or audio? What about compound production files?



On to the qualitative. Imagine that the lost asset had captured an important event in your organization's history—a new sub-brand launch at a gala event. This same lost asset wasn't simply a file, it was the documentation of history and memory with the promise of use in print, video and interactive media. Now, it's gone. It has an immediate negative value. Its future potential as a means to garner capital has vanished. Irretrievable. Irreproducible.

Sustaining the future

The point is not to cast fear. It is to address it head-on; to understand what you have at your fingertips and how very fragile those things are; to understand how valuable an asset is to itself and to the life of the brand; to understand that brands without assets are no brands at all; and to understand that when assets are poorly managed their potential is unrealized and your organization's sustainability is at risk.

Consider what you now know. Visualize your brand—your solar system. Consider your tool box and your ability to choose wisely. Consider your soft and hard costs. Consider the wealth of value that exists in your stockpile of assets, and value them accordingly. Consider DAM solutions as key to meeting your organization's need of fulfilling its promise. Then, consider who your brand could become.

Assets are the windows to the brand. They show the world who we are.



About the Authors

About John Horodyski

John Horodyski is Principal at DAM Education (<http://www.dameducation.com>), a consulting agency focusing on Digital Asset Management education & training. He is also the Manager of Digital Programming and Product Development at the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) and serves as Director of Marketing and Business Development for Wrinkled Pants, an educational software studio focused on the development of education and literacy apps for the iPad. John teaches a graduate course at San José State University's School of Library & Information Science in Digital Asset Management and has published professional articles and presented at numerous conferences on digital media, metadata and taxonomy design.

About Lee Stadler

Lee is a designer, writer and collegiate educator working in the fields of higher education, fashion, photography, and others. As a designer and creative director, Stadler specializes in rebuilding brands through nationwide multi-channel campaigns, publications, branding briefs and identity packages. He also teaches photography, design and production, utilizing custom curricula that promote a thorough cross-discipline approach to design and problem solving. Stadler's passion for solving organizational need through theory and information visualization has led to the development of WEPRO, a new method for data and information navigation; Modular Axes, a new system for visual layout; 120hours, a guided internship program; and Pocket Snapper, a photography primer for beginning and advanced practitioners.

About DigitalAssetManagement.com

DigitalAssetManagement.com is an educational resource designed to help professionals seeking to learn about or shop for DAM systems make the most informed possible decisions. The site offers resources valuable in estimating ROI, understanding the DAM needs of particular organizations and staying up to date on what products in the DAM market are capable of. The site is owned and operated by Widen Enterprises.

About Widen Enterprises

Based in Madison, Wisconsin, Widen has honed its more than 60 years of experience in premedia services and color management specifically for assisting customers with building brand equity and supporting consistent brand representation across print and Web communications. Through its inventive suite of Web-based digital asset management applications, Widen software services provide marketing networks with real-time, Web-based access to clients' digital asset libraries, subsequently eliminating manual search and file preparation time, costs related to replacing images and videos that cannot be located, and added costs for hardware, software and upgrades. For more information, visit: <http://www.widen.com>.

