Implementing DAM as a creative driver for multi-channel retail operations — Interview with BJ Gray of Victoria's Secret

BJ Gray

is a marketing resource management specialist with 15+ years' production and operations experience. Expertise in producing 2-D and 3-D projects, developing workflow solutions and managing complex and multifaceted projects. Known for process innovation, creative integrity and value engineering, skilled in leading multifunctional and cross-cultural teams, leveraging large budgets and delivering profit optimization for leading industry players such as Victoria's Secret, Oracle, and Saatchi & Saatchi.

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Abstract Implementing an Online Digital Asset Management System — it is everyone's dream to have every image, every shot and every retouched image in one place. Having assets archived properly not only protects them from loss or corruption but it helps drive time and cost efficiencies as it expedites the photo selection for upcoming creative projects. However, it is an even bigger dream to have all of that *plus* a DAM system that can be accessed from anywhere and has a robust set of tools to drive more efficient workflow — rights management, image selection, approvals and distribution. To implement a creative "hub" for all your images and projects not only connects various organizations but your external business partners as well.

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MM: Okay. Let's begin with a short introduction to you, BJ, and a little bit about your job function and company.

BG: Okay. I'm BJ Gray. I work at Victoria's Secret in the "store's channel." I'm the head of the marketing operations department — the tactical side of the marketing department. We manage all the stores projects from inception to execution, including POS for windows, in-store, PR, Advertising, CRM, Retouching, DAM, and process management and implementation. My team also oversees all master marketing calendars and the entire annual marketing budget.

MM: Could you give us a little background in terms of the various operations within Victoria's Secret, and then those in particular that you have direct responsibility for?

BG: First, Victoria's Secret is part of Limited Brands. Victoria's Secret generates the most

revenue for Limited Brands and consists of two channels: the Victoria's Secret store channel and Victoria's Secret direct channel (online store and catalog). I am responsible for the Victoria's Secret store's channel.

In particular, the marketing operations — process improvement, budget and production.

MM: In terms of relative importance, how large in percentage is the direct and web channel versus the store?

BG: The store's channel is double the size of direct. The store's revenue was 3.6 billion last year and the direct channel was around 1.7 billion last year.

MM: Yes. So stores are actually the primary revenue driver, and direct and web is an important but secondary channel.

BG: Yes. We have 1,000 storefronts throughout the US and sell primarily intimate apparel

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where the direct channel sells more swimsuits, apparel and shoes.

MM: About how many product SKUs are in your overall mix? Whether store or online?

BG: That's a giant number for me to try to figure out. Let me think.

MM: It's a pretty big list. Right?

BG: It's huge. We have at least 60 different styles of bras that come in about eight colors in multiple sizes and we have over 380 panty styles. The direct channel would have a greater assortment, plus apparel.

MM: So that means on an annual basis, you probably create lots and lots of high-resolution color-touched, color-corrected photographs.

BG: Yes, hundreds. In 2007 the store's channel retouched 969 images alone.

MM: Do you have any idea how many photographs you either have on inventory now and/or create on an annual basis?

BG: The stores channel has at least 10 photo shoots a year that probably generate about 1,000 shots a year. Right now the stores channel has 6 terabytes of assets stored in the DAM dating back to 2003.

MM: About how many items does that represent of individual assets?

BG: I'd say roughly 86,000. Lots of images. Not as much as direct, but lots of images.

MM: Yes. Direct, because it's a broader line, would probably have as many as two or three times that number.

BG: Yes, it's even 5–10 times as many.

MM: With respect to your journey of DAM or through DAM, could you take us back to when you first started to think about "Gee — we need a better way of doing something." Were you part of that initial kickoff?

BG: No, I was not part of the very first kickoff. I came to Victoria's Secret two years ago and one of my new direct reports was struggling to start a DAM system. He was challenged for a good three years by the creative director to get the many hard drives into some sort of digital library so that we weren't losing images and they were easier to find.

At that point, asset management hadn't evolved and didn't have as many options as it does today. He couldn't find an independent company that would host the asset management. It was going to be one of our big printers that

wanted to build our asset-management system. That's kind of limiting when it's the printer that's actually hosts the asset management because other vendors may not be able to load into it.

So he never got it off the ground. When I got here, the creative director approached me and said, "Can you really try to find some sort of way to catalog all of our images?" She really didn't even speak in terms of digital asset management. She just spoke of, "We need a better way to find our images and catalog our images."

So I started digging in. I started investigating several companies, learning about their capabilities and whether we host it or they host it. What the contracts were, etc. Then eventually, I came up with a company that we wanted to work with.

MM: If you could, just review some of the buying criteria that you applied in sorting through those four or five vendors.

BG: One of the big considerations was that it should be web-based and not put onto Victoria's Secret servers — not licensed. It would be quicker to get up and running if it were web-based. If not, I would have to go through IT at VS, and that would've really slowed the project down or completely made it come to a halt. That was a huge criteria.

Also, I didn't want to have to be charged or have to re-engage with the company if there were improvements to the DAM application. I wanted to have those updates supplied to us. So if a new version came out we'd just be able to use them without having to pay for it.

AS: Could you clarify what you mean by "without having to pay"? Do you mean "not having to pay for an upgrade"?

BG: Not having to pay for an upgrade or new enhancements to the DAM application.

MM: Right.

AS: This is a classic case for what is now referred to as SaaS, Software as a Service, which frees the customer from having to worry about IT infrastructure, allowing them to focus on their business. This concept is generating a lot of buzz across the software community and the practice is beginning to live up to the hype.

BG: Another criteria — I didn't want to be constrained to a contract with the providing company, in case it just didn't work out, or we

needed to have more companies latch onto the system. I really wanted to find a company that wouldn't expect a usage contract out of us.

MM: By a "contract," you mean a subscription where you're signing up for a year? Or you just wanted something on a month-to-month basis?

BG: Yes, right now I am very much at free will to stop using the service if need. Most companies I talked to offered two- to four-year contracts.

MM: Right.

BG: Next, I wanted to find a company that wasn't just supplying me with their software that they developed and I'd have to conform to how their system moves, and the language they put into it. I wanted to find a company that would be flexible to making the system work around our needs, our language and our workflow. Our vision. Someone to partner and brainstorm with, more than just buying a big massive pile of software applications that would be installed and they'd walk away from.

I wanted a really good partnership with a vendor so that we could keep developing and brainstorming together on things that we needed.

AS: A strong customer/vendor partnership and iterative dialog is critical to a successful DAM implementation. This particular relationship is a compelling example of the benefits generated by such collaboration.

MM: So, BJ, does that also mean that they had a professional services capability that could come in and develop and run and deploy a new project? Or did you just simply want somebody who was more open to your ideas in terms of how to move this into a better fit for your organization?

BG: I wasn't looking for a professional services team. And I was not looking for the most hi-tech answers to all my needs. That wasn't a requirement. I just needed a company that would be able to listen to my vision and give me a tool that would work. And Industrial Color did a really great job in doing so. After our initial talks they tailored their system to fit our specific needs.

MM: Right. That means that they had a system that was flexible enough to accommodate your evolving set of requirements and needs?

BG: Correct.

MM: What other criteria did you use in selecting a vendor?

BG: That their interface be user-friendly and aesthetically pleasing to the creative eye and — as I say — "Apple-esque." It's a very creative atmosphere, here. If you put some really boring software enterprise solution in front of these designers, they're not going to want to use it.

You want these designers to try the system and see how easy it is. So I really wanted a cool interface.

AS: This is an important point. There is a direct connection in creative environments between user-interface and system utilization. Enterprise solutions seeking to expand into media content workflows will need to place a higher importance on improving the state of their system's usability.

BG: I also wanted a company that was using the latest and greatest technology out there to build their *DAM application*, so that we weren't always a step behind of what was being offered by others. Like *high-speed file transfer*, etc. I wanted a company that was on the cutting edge of their industry.

MM: What would've been some of the cutting-edge technologies that you wanted to make sure this provider or vendor incorporated in their offering?

BG: One would be that they were using XMP. Building their system with XMP, so that it was open to connect with other systems.

MM: XMP meaning the Extensible Metadata Platform and an open standard championed by Adobe? That's a way of capturing metadata and putting it into the actual file. So when the file or asset leaves the repository, the metadata travels with it.

BG: Correct. I am not a tech person but I also understand that if it's built on XMP, and if another system I have here is built on XMP, it's an open interface for us to try to figure out how to link them together if they need to share information with each other — maybe link them by project number, or by file number.

AS: Thereby enhancing workflow connectivity by supplementing, or possibly even substituting, system integration with file-based metadata interchange.

MM: So we're not just talking about being able to send a file — an asset — from one

system to another. XMP also provided the basic architecture for two systems to share metadata and assets in some sort of collaborative or reciprocal process.

BG: Correct.

MM: What other technology did you want to have in terms of considering a state-of-the-art platform?

BG: XMP encompasses part of what is needed for the metadata, but the other part was a company that was developing flexibility with the metadata schema. Metadata drives what we are doing — drives the rules of how our system works based on detailed (loaded) search capabilities and image rights expiration. All the importance is on the metadata so we needed to be able to have lots of functionality when updating, changing or viewing the metadata.

The high-speed file transfer technology came about while I was working with the company. I did not think of needing it upfront but now I can't imagine not having it. High-speed file transfer is a huge, huge plus.

MM: Tell us a little bit more about that.

BG: It's developed by a vendor called Aspera. Aspera is partnering with the company that built our DAM, which is Industrial Color. The DAM application is called GLOBALedit. Using Aspera allows the images to upload or download in minutes or seconds versus hours. Like using an FTP site, a big image from an FTP site could take a long time to pull down and could hold up someone's computer. Aspera's high-speed file transfer makes images download or upload super fast. It saves so much time on the vendor's side when they pull massive amounts of images down for retouching or printing. It's just incredible. An example would be 1 GB file downloads in about 7 seconds with a 20 Mbps connection. So it's really, really fast.

MM: It probably also keeps track of who transferred what to whom, by time of day and user ID?

BG: I don't think Aspera does. I think that's just a total high-speed highway. But the tracking of images is available in our DAM workflow system. That's something that I wanted.

Actually, that brings up a good point. A lot of the systems that I was looking at did not have different reporting formats. They only had one way to pull the reports, and only one kind of

report you could pull. I wanted a system that could pull reports by user, image, and day, and hour and week. To get how many terabytes or megabytes were being transferred.

Instantaneously, I wanted to be able to pull reports. Who was using it the most? Who am I saving the most time for? So I could report back to the executives about what kind of return on investment we were getting. I really wanted a robust reporting-and-tracking system.

MM: So they gave you a really robust reporting-and-query system that allowed you to correlate and collate various aspects of the activity journal into higher-level business information. You're saying that was part of the system? Or was that added to the system, but they integrated it for you?

BG: You know, I really can't remember what was offered at the onset. We started exploring all the needs for the system in such an organic way that parts of the reports were theirs and some were my vision.

MM: Fabulous. How does management use the information that they're getting from your reports?

BG: Because we just turned it on in February and we just on-boarded 68 users to the system, we're very much in the infancy stage of making sense of all the reports. I'm just pulling the reports to see how many people are on the system at this point — accessing it and figuring out how many assets they are actually downloading. We have so many different teams in the enterprise that are using this system. Which ones are really using it the most and finding efficiencies with their time?

Right now, I'm more curious to see how this adds up as far as expense on a weekly and monthly basis. So right now, it's really high level — just getting the information out of it.

MM: That's great.

One of the things that we've seen from other users with similar kinds of business issues is, they have what we've sometimes called an *ROI dashboard* or a *payback dashboard*. It's hosted on the internet. People log onto it and there's a little admin panel. It basically says, "Here is the total volume" to-date, year-to-date or whatever. "We estimate that it eliminated 595 DVDs at a fully burdened cost of \$74.00 to burn and ship and receive."

It precluded x-amount of money or x-number of hours in reworking or redoing

preexisting pieces that they couldn't find. This would've been based on historical baseline information that you would've gotten prior to deploying the system.

BG: Before moving forward, I worked up a return on investment, obviously, to sell it to my boss — so that I could embark on this venture. Although our main goal at the onset was for protection of assets, a library that held everything and was accessible to finding images for layouts, etc. I did, however, think that it would save designers time and I wanted to put a value to it. After asking several people throughout VS how much time they spent tracking down hard-drives, looking at web-native systems we came up with the fact that about a fifth of their time each week was spent searching for images. This was the case for many people in the company. So if it was a 50-hour week, maybe 10 hours a week could be saved.

I also put a cost savings to the many downloads that we get charged for from vendors and FedEx shipments, which probably ends up being \$350,000 a year in savings.

MM: Cool. As you begin to look at some of the baseline data that you gathered to build your business case, that will probably help inform what kind of reports you'd like to have on an ongoing basis.

BG: Yes. Agree.

MM: One of the other things that we've learned, BJ, from other people in situations similar to yourself, is setting up *departmental scorecards*. In terms of basic asset reuse as well as who creates more reusable stuff as opposed to less *reusable stuff*. It's just simply a report card for your asset creator communities, in terms of who creates the more reusable stuff. That kind of starts to set up a game to create more reusable stuff.

In some cases, we've seen companies put incentives in place for asset creators to want to create more reusable stuff as a function of how they do layers and PhotoShop files or Illustrator files. How well they've done meta-tagging, etc, etc. As you were talking about some of the technologies that you really appreciated in a state-of-the-art DAM platform, you mentioned the XMP metadata piece. The flexible user interface. The high-speed data transfer and the reporting functions. Were there any other features of a DAM system that you wanted to have?

BG: I think the workflow capabilities were something always in the back of my mind. A couple of the vendors that I looked at had workflow capabilities built in, but it wasn't my initial criteria for going out and embarking on building an image library. If they had workflow services, it was a plus.

AS: DAM customers are increasingly realizing that having a secure yet accessible content archive is only a first step. There is a growing premium connected to the availability of integrated tools and services that drive and optimize key workflows.

MM: I take it that the GLOBALedit system that you have today has some enabling services for workflow?

BG: Yes. The workflow starts from the very beginning — the photo shoot. We can do image capture at the photo shoot, move the selected images from the photo shoot to retouch vendors with comments attached and move them back into DAM system into retouched folder; then also, flowing them back out to the end-users or the printers. It has a pretty comprehensive workflow capability.

MM: In that workflow specifically, does your system really support online review and approval of the asset? Or is the review and approval process kind of an overlay to the asset?

BG: Yes, the approval and select process can all be done in the workflow within the DAM. You can select or kill and use a star rating for the images that are selected. Different designers and creative directors can go in and pick which ones they want to select and then they can be reviewed or approved by the chief creative. There is a way to track who selected the images or rated them and then who killed or approved them.

AS: BJ, you might want to talk about the evolution of your vision — since the project kickoff for the central library into how it's evolved. I think that's an important point.

MM: That was really more of just a basic library function. Right?

BG: True. Very basic library function. My thought at that point was, "Once we get this library up, wouldn't it be great when everybody can connect to it, all our cross-functional partners?"

Victoria's Secret is broken up into different sub-brands. There's a sub-brand called "Beauty"

and a sub-brand called “PINK.” Then we’ve got several cross-functional partners — a real estate team and another creative team that’s at the Limited Brands level. I was thinking, “Wow! Once I get this library done, I’ll be able to share this library, and everybody will see how useful it is. They can now have access to look themselves for images that Victoria’s Secret specifically — the store channel — had created.”

While meeting with Industrial Color about GLOBALedit, I heard more about the GLOBALedit functionality and the workflow capabilities, and then the intent of what I wanted the system to do really evolved.

That’s when we got into creating an online tool for the designers to use for image selects and approval, where they could review the images, approve them or kill them. Having it web-based was a huge plus as many of our creative directors are out of the office: at photo shoots or working from home. Having easy access to review images saved time in getting the images in play to work on.

In addition, many, many requests come from the VS enterprise for the same high-resolution images that are completed through retouching because they’re going to be deployed for multiple uses. For instance, for each campaign our production team sends the images out to many different print vendors they work with, so the same asset might go to ten different vendors to be printed in a digital format or an offset format. I really wanted a tool that those images could just be moved in and out of so we didn’t have to ask or get charged by the retouchers each time we needed a download of final images. I wanted those final images to be ingested back into the DAM, and then pushed out from the DAM by us.

Then for the front end I wanted the workflow to be in place so that the photographers could easily upload their images from the photo shoots. This would make all the difference in the time it takes to edit and select the images. Because there are thousands of images taken at the photo shoot, editing down the images instantaneously or each night — on GLOBALedit — would be such a lifesaver.

We’ve really increased our efficiency in getting projects done and images selected. We’re not in the dinosaur ages anymore of moving the images on a hard drive — having the art

director upload them onto her screen — picking which ones she likes. It’s really being done instantaneously on GLOBALedit.

As we thought about putting all the images up the art buyers started getting really nervous about “Well, then everybody can download these images at any time. They might not have rights to download them. We may not have bought enough usage rights for those images or they are expired.” We needed to build in some sort of image rights approval workflow for all the images. In the XMP compliant metadata, we set the expiration date for that image. So the expiration date would determine whether the user gets approval to download or needs to request access to the expired image. Part of the workflow is that the requests are generated in the DAM and sent out via e-mail to the image rights managers, who will approve or deny.

This was a big thing that we talked through. It took a long time, processing through how an image would flow through the system automatically to get approved — either via the art buyer or the library manager. This became part of the evolution of developing the DAM.

Which brings up another challenge to figure out — the Metadata Schema. We wanted to create a simple metadata schema that would make sense to the users. How are they going to want to search for images? What key words are they going to use in the search? Let’s make those words part of the metadata and enable the user to search using metadata. I wanted the metadata to be the working tool for finding the images.

I think that’s about it. Those were the main things that came about, as we started brainstorming. They really enhanced the system from a basic library and actually put a lot more exciting energy into the product.

MM: What do you anticipate as the next step of your journey?

BG: It’s like opening Pandora’s box, now.

MM: Why do you think they call it Victoria’s Secret?

BG: I know.

I think the next part of the dream would definitely be to get the web and catalog channel’s content posted up to the GLOBALedit DAM.

We have so many images that we actually share between the two channels. I really would

like to see them play on the system so that we have quick, easy access to each other's assets.

MM: Do they have their own system at this point?

BG: They do. And it's offline. Part of it is at their print vendor. It's kind of embedded into their print workflow.

MM: That's over at Quebecor, as I recall. Right?

BG: Yes. I think it's built into their publishing. I do not believe they post all of the images from the photo shoots there.

MM: No. They only post production items. Production photography. I think that reflects also on the billing relationship that Quebecor/World Color or what used to be the old World Color Group.

BG: Right. I am quite sure that they also have an interim DAM system that is on their server up in New York. So they kind of have a two-folded DAM system.

MM: As I recall, that was a Xinet system, wasn't it?

BG: Not sure. They have tried a few.

MM: Sure.

BG: The dream would be to have us all on one. They are looking at it, which is pretty exciting. They are right now meeting with Industrial Color, and at least talking about letting it be their base library. If they have to connect out to their own asset-management systems at their printer, that's fine.

The second dream is to have greater metadata functionality. A little more automated workflow for the metadata. If you make a change in the metadata, it would be easier to undo it — have more individual field control. Just a little bit more ease for the library managers to work with the metadata. It's the tool that we're basing our whole system on so you want it to be the most robust.

We are also working on putting custom watermarking on our images, so that we prevent unauthorized reuse of our images.

MM: Is that visible watermarks? Or invisible watermarks?

BG: They are developing a visible ghosted watermark.

MM: Sure. Have you been identifying particular vendors for that? Is it something that you also want to have as a service, or specifically tracking unauthorized uses of images once they leave your website or firewall?

BG: I haven't thought about it and I haven't been told that we could track our images after they've left the system. At this point, I do not really have a desire to track them. If they were downloading something that was expired, or they didn't have the rights to the high-resolution and used the low-resolution, then this watermark would show up that would be the indicator that they violated the use. That should make them feel bad enough for now.

MM: Kind of a time-sensitive marking device that would message or indicate that this image is now expired. In terms of proper use.

BG: Yes. And if PR or somebody put it up on e-Entertainment's website and there was a ghosted little mark on it, I think that would be a big red flag. I haven't been told that we could track our images after they've left the system. I don't know if our DAM system has that built in yet.

MM: None of the DAM systems have that built in. Usually it's an add-on or a bolt-on type of service. For example, a company up in Oregon called DigiMarc offers something like that.

BG: Okay.

MM: There are other firms, like Cyveillance, that kind of track brand images as a function of a Google-like spider that crawls through all of the websites and blogs and forums and looks for your stuff.

BG: That's really interesting. I'd possibly be interested in looking at that. I'm not sure how much time we have to be the police of it.

MM: You don't have time. You'll have more than your hands full just managing bringing your direct web group on.

BG: Yes. Oh, an other thing that we are looking at including in the DAM workflow is being able to send someone or a vendor a collection of images, and them being able to download them in bulk, versus one at a time. Our vendors are getting eight or nine images at a time to retouch. It'd be nice if they didn't have to download them file by file. Even though they have the high-speed file transfer with Aspera to make it fast, it would be nice to be able to download that folder in bulk. That's something that we're looking at developing now.

MM: The function can be as simple as staging and provisioning assets in a DAM...zipped up as a package and placed into this "hot" folder.

When the vendor logs on, they see their stuff in their own folder.

It looks like it's a scripting function on the DAM side, but it uses a zip file or stuffit file to compress them all into one nice package. That also seems to make it a little less prone to getting corrupted in the file transfer process.

BG: Not being the most technically savvy about all that, I don't know if we need to do that — zip them up and put them into some "hot" folder. We create the folder in the DAM and then e-mail the link to the suppliers.

MM: It's the same idea, but the point is that by putting all these assets in a folder and zipping that into a package, you've reduced the size of the package considerably, and you've also done essentially the bulk transfer in terms of being able to move five or six or ten really large files economically in one transaction or one interaction.

BG: I wouldn't even think about that kind of integrated technology. I know that Industrial Color is fantastic. I think they would probably already be looking at that if it were going to make the GLOBALedit system foolproof and not lose data. I'm sure that they'd be zipping that up.

MM: In the grand scheme of things, it's a pretty trivial technical problem to solve.

They should probably have an easy fix to that.

BG: Ok, good. A further challenge of having an integrated DAM with the direct channel is if there is an image we both used. Let's say we picked up from their photo shoot, then we would have different image rights usage for that one image. Usage rights for the direct channel may be six months, and we may only buy it for two months. So now, what do we put in the metadata as the expiration date? Can the metadata track on two levels? Which one is it going to refer to when it expires an image? I don't even think we know how to tackle that yet.

MM: There are a couple ways you can approach that. You can do it with the *facilities of a DAM* — to manage multi-class permissions. Or you can then say, "Look. Let's have the DAM do what it's really supposed to, which is manage metadata and the workflow."

We'll bring in a *policy server* such as the *Adobe LiveCycle* and that will be the way by which we

will be able to link an asset to a policy library or a policy server. Depending on who's touching the asset, there will be a policy in place to then tell them exactly what they can or can't do.

Again, while it may not necessarily be cheap, it's a fairly straightforward, easy thing to do. Especially if you're already using the XMP. Because XMP will have the ability to put embedded links in it. Specifically an embedded link back to a policy server.

So while conceptually it looms large on your horizon, from a technology perspective it's a fairly straightforward integration. It's a "Do it now — get it done," sort of thing.

BG: Fantastic.

BG: Up until now I have kept this project under the radar and didn't have to invest a lot of money in developing the DAM, buying software, etc. I want to try to keep it that way for now so I will see if we can figure out something within GLOBALedit or come up with a new internal process between VS and VSD.

If you say this policy server is quite expensive...

MM: You could *rent it*, as well. There are ways. The technology is called a "policy server." There are lots of different ways to get it into your organization. Including going back to your organization Industrial Color, and saying, "Hey — I need a *policy server*. Go get one, and I'll rent it from you."

BG: Exactly. There's a creative way. Thank you!

MM: Yes.

BG: Sad to say, but we want to keep IT out of our projects, and we want to keep our executives out of our budgets.

MM: BJ, that really underscores the whole value proposition of 'software as a service.' That's "I don't have to *deploy anything*." You call it a web service, but it's hosted on the web. It's not just hosted on the web, but hosted to multiple clients from the same code base.

BG: Yes.

MM: That means that if I make an improvement here, then everybody who's using the system gets the improvement.

BG: Yes. Just how life should be!

MM: Well, increasingly, that's going to be how life is.

BG: Right.

MM: One of the things that's really given you the ability to fly under the radar has been taking this software as a service route, trusting that your vendor would manage these assets in a way that was trusted and secure and certain.

Generally, that's the hump or hurdle through which a lot of people need to go — called “Can I really trust a company to manage these assets?”

It seems that the other critical element of trusting these companies is whether the company hosting the system is really an independent service provider, as opposed to part of your print supply chain.

BG: Agree.

MM: Then all of a sudden if it's simply a service as part of the print supply chain, you're kind of locked into a transaction model that can get expensive.

BG: Yes. Unless they're flexible with how you run your system. If they don't feel threatened by other competitors working in their system.

MM: I suspect that was one of the primary reasons printing firms spun off a hosted DAM — to lock in their customers, and to create an emotional if not physical barrier to switching.

BG: Yes. Correct.

MM: So I think your choice was spot-on by going to an *independent DAM services company* that wasn't trying to make money as a function of selling printing or color retouch or any of the other prepress services.

BG: Yes. It's been a great choice for staying flexible with the people I want to work with.

MM: A couple of last questions.

To what degree have your creative teams integrated their desktop tools — Creative Suite or Photoshop or whatever — to the DAM directly? Or are they working through a browser?

BG: They're working through the browser.

AS: Is this an integration you'd like to see, BJ? Or is the browser enough?

BG: I would have to understand better what the benefits are to having the tools connect to the DAM. If it changes the way the creative team builds their files, and disrupts their routine with no benefits then I would think working as we do today is fine.

AS: You might see, though, that the metadata in the creative suite is the same metadata

framework as in your DAM system. So you do have an entrée at the asset level.

BG: Right, but I wonder what the benefits are. I see having that technology available is new and interesting but what is the pay off or win.

MM: Another question I have with respect to your system: you really talk about an image library and an image workflow where photograph is king. Clearly, in a marketing operation, there are things like documents — be they catalog pages or sales sheets or direct mail pieces, etc.

AS: ... such as video.

BG: Right.

MM: How have you integrated, if at all, the document publishing workflow into this GLOBALedit workflow that you have today?

BG: I have a two-part answer to that. The first part of the answer is how we are doing it right now, and the second part is where I'd like the system to evolve and the challenges with that vision.

MM: Sure.

BG: The first part is, we are storing final marketing documents in the DAM project folder. JPEGs of the final in-store signs, advertisements, CRM and PR. I definitely wanted to capture all the marketing materials that we created with these images, and post them to the DAM system so everyone could reference what was done from our end with those images. A comprehensive library of the project.

MM: Yes.

BG: The second part is this: currently we do more of the publishing workflow and project tracking in a software application called Adtrax. The creative job jackets are here where the copy team writes in the system, schedules are kept here, e-mail notifications are sent with updates, and we keep legal boilerplates here. The system works really well.

The challenge for Industrial Color is to come up with a way that GLOBALedit and Adtrax share information or link. I would like it to be either by job number or some sort of code that makes them link. So if you're in a job folder in Adtrax you will be able to connect to GLOBALedit and see the images that are being used for that project.

There is not only appetite to have the two be able to link, but even further than that is “Can

Industrial Color build out a project-management tracking system to work with the image asset workflow system?" It would be interesting to be in one big system that is web-based. I have to give it more thought to see if it makes sense because if it's not their expertise then I don't want to go down that path. We won't get the best product.

MM: Right.

It seems to me that the route to that integrated system will probably be through your catalog and web team.

The reason I say that is because the point of integration oftentimes is an editorial copyrighting workflow that precedes the actual publishing process — be it print or online. So the point of integration would be, "How do we have one kind of Marcom editorial platform, database and project management platform? So that as we finalize copy, it can flow down any number of publishing tracks? Be it retail operations, print or web."

BG: Yes. Agree.

MM: At least in large global brands that we've either studied or interviewed, that's what they tell us or that's what we've seen. The editorial workflow. Upstream from that is the marketing plan and the creative brief. They tend to be the coordinating function for all the stuff that cascades out of that.

Another thing we've discovered, curiously, is that the messiest and most inefficient part of that whole Marcom operation tends to be the piece between strategy and creative execution. I'll characterize that as ideation.

BG: It is here too. It's the messiest part.

MM: Yes. What makes it messy is that it's circular and iterative. Therefore, it's not linear and sequential. It has a fundamentally different kind of focus in terms of knowledge worker interactions. Its primary focus entails discovery: "Ah! That's what we need to do!"

So there's a whole bunch of communication, interaction and collaboration that goes into the big "Ah-hah!" once that "Ah-hah" then crystallizes into a strategy and a marketing plan, the next bridge is a scheduling piece. Not project management, but something that happens prior to project management, which we're characterizing as scheduling.

The best way to think about the scheduling piece is like an air traffic control system. You've

seen these on CNN or one of the cable news networks, where you see 20,000 airplanes in the sky. Somebody's keeping track of all of those, and keeping them in their own kind of swimming lanes or traffic lanes.

They're coordinating their landing at any number of airports. Think of airports as vendors and/or operation groups. There needs to be a certain number of landing gates with ground crew to be able to deplane folks. Those are all the worker bees in various operating groups that do stuff.

Part of an overall planning or scheduling tool is to make sure that as we launch new products and/or launch and/or create new material, throughout the entire supply chain, there are people ready, willing and able to do something with that. To do their job within a particular set of time and financial constraints.

Those tend to be the big issues, when you move upstream.

BG: Agree. We have a different department outside of marketing that manages that entire process holistically called business strategy and execution. They map the project from product design, to testing, determine time of year to launch, to planning sales and merchandise orders, then to marketing strategy and creative. So you are saying that the challenge is getting those discoveries upstream communicated or cascaded to all the other teams working on the launch. How do we keep them informed? Is there a central portal with all this information?

Hmm, we are not there yet on the retail channel side.

MM: Ideation is really kind of about workspaces. Instant workspaces for instant *ad hoc* collaboration. The next piece is scheduling. That's "How do we manage a whole bunch of different conversations with our supply chain?" That goes into the editorial copyrighting workflow management system.

If you do it right — which is to say, if you think about it as tagged XML data or tagged XML content... so the content is going... all the copyrighting is happening as tagged XML content within a database or a data structure. Then you also get the delicious opportunity of being able to pour liquefied editorial content into print, online and POP formats, as well as being able to speed the localization — which is the translation and regionalization of stuff.

BG: Yes, essentially we are flowing the copy from Adtrax into designer layouts. But as you mentioned, we are not making catalogs full of copy.

MM: I'm not sure that localization is a big deal for Victoria's Secret now, but I'm sure it's something that will be.

BG: It will be; we are expanding next year internationally.

MM: Exactly.

So the point that you might want to put into your future roadmap is, "How do we get a marketing content platform with an emphasis on market plans, creative briefs and editorial copy workflows?"

BG: Yes. Will do.

MM: That's my riff for the day.

BG: Noted.

It's very, very interesting how we work here. It's like no other place I've ever been. What you just mapped out in is something I could see happening at other companies I've worked at. CKS — a design firm — or Apple or Oracle. I can easily see that. Especially Oracle because its marketing is localized in so many countries. They have a more traditional setup for the marketing department.

MM: I understand. And it's retail.

MM: With respect to the Henry Stuart DAM and MOM Symposia... I take it you've been there before.

BG: Yes. To the New York one last year, and to the LA one in November.

MM: What was your experience of being there as an industry peer?

BG: New York — I really went to observe, listen and meet people. So I got a lot out of the New York show. I thought it was great. I met some really interesting people from MRMLogiQ, which is a marketing resource management company over in Europe.

The LA show — I came in just to speak on Andrew's panel. I think my whole energy was just focused on being on that panel and getting out. But I did hear the LA show was really interesting and went well, from friends of mine who had attended and had booths there.

MM: What would've been a couple of takeaway "A-hahs" or insights that you would've gotten from either of the shows?

BG: Well, being that I am not very technical and that show — the New York one — was

heavily weighted in the technical realm of building a DAM... So I've met companies that have explained more about the technology of DAM and not as much about how you go about getting one started.

There were a few sessions I attended where they were actually too technical and I didn't understand. And a few sessions where they discussed a little how they got their DAM systems off the ground. I took away a few tools to use to get mine off the ground, and to do it under the radar. Those are my biggest "A-hahs."

MM: Sure. I want to again thank you very much for the interview. Any last comments you'd like to say about our interview today?

BG: To expand on that last comment about the Henry Stewart... Since those two Henry Stewart conferences, I have spoken with many people from Fortune 500 companies who after attending the shows still can't figure out how to start their DAM system. They are at the stage I was at a few years ago but they can't even figure out where to begin to build their asset management system. I still feel that the conferences are really good technically; however, they could be even more helpful if they take it back a notch, to my level. Not so technical, and give them small steps to follow for starting.

People want to go out and wrap their arms around every part of their business, and get everybody involved and onboard with DAM. Then it just gets confusing because everybody has different needs — different people they want to work with. Right? You get stuck on how to start, where to start and who to use. You just can't get it off the ground. At that point, they probably think they need IT. Yikes!

If I would've gone out and tried to get the direct channel onboard with me it would have been really confusing. Our uses, needs and workflow are different. I never would've gotten this off the ground. Now, it is easier to loop them in and layer on their needs and workflow after our channel is up and functioning.

I stay in touch with those companies that have not started yet and although I'm not technically savvy, what I'm saying to them helps. I think that those shows need a couple of courses more for people who are coming there to want to know how to get it started.

MM: Perfect.

In the course of specifying the system, IT says, “Oh — we’re going to build it ourselves.”

The last thing that you want an IT person or department to do is to create a rich media DAM. Of course, they don’t believe in anything called Macintoshes. So everything gets dumbed down to Soviet-quality media-production standards. Then they’re surprised that nobody uses it.

That was the perfect lead-in to what we’ll be launching this spring. It’s a social media portal

called “Masters of Digital Assets.” It’s going to have an academy section to it of certified consultants. It’ll also be a place where we’ll be able to append interviews like this, or portions of them anyway. So as to tell the journey of DAM, from the point of view of a practitioner such as yourself, as opposed to reading it from a journalist’s point of view.

BG: Yes. That would be fantastic.

MM: Well, let’s wrap it up, here. Thank you very much BJ, and Andrew.