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## Original Article

# How engaged customers are evolving DAMs and the channels they serve

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**ABSTRACT** Companies today are facing the stark reality that despite all the insight through many of their other listening avenues, they are missing out on the holy grail of information – information obtained through real-time streaming of assets from their digital asset repositories to the engaged customer and back. Without a clear understanding of how or why to leverage existing digital asset management systems to create this strategic advantage, companies preparing to embark and engage in today's highly Evolved MediaSpace will have no chance of succeeding as truly engaging brands and also fail in their primary and sole objective as a company, to attract and retain their own customers.

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## INTRODUCTION

Some of the characteristics of how companies communicate to customers don't seem to change – the types of channels used, the non-collaborative product development and even the lack of customer engagement. It's no wonder why companies are having a difficult time transitioning to an engaging brand that has a two-way stream of communication outside its own corporate walls.

As these characteristics stand, they are no match for today's engaged customer: a customer who controls the very essence of a brand's success or failure in today's marketplace. Having a framework for becoming a customer-focused brand is the pinnacle for operating in today's fully engaged marketplace. Customers from all walks of life want content at virtually every instance they desire and for this very reason,

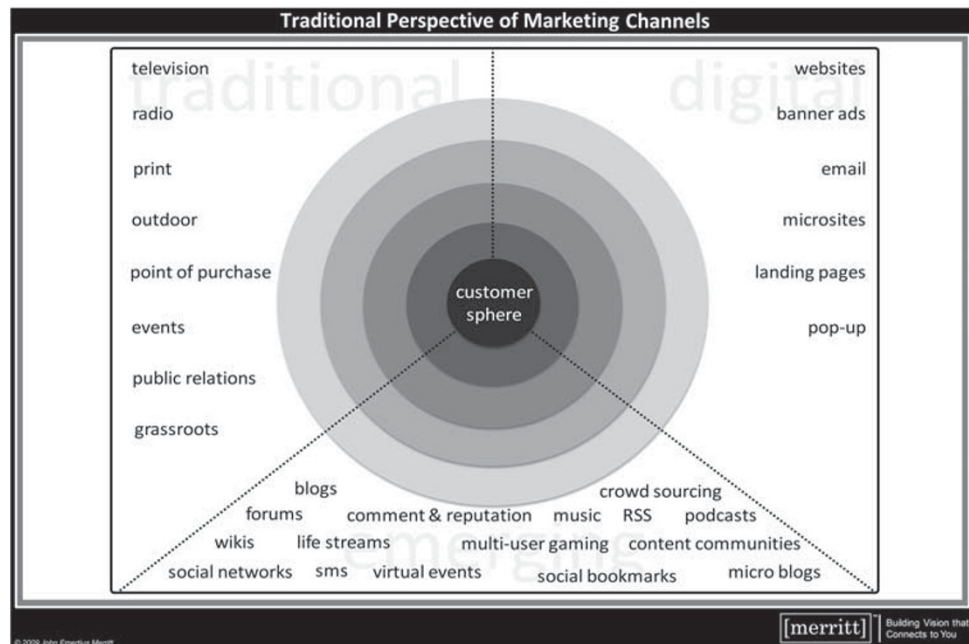
revolutionizing the operational frame of mind in engaging customers has to evolve from the previous strategies, to an engaging strategy that starts with a company's digital asset management (DAM) solution.

## THE MEDIASPACE LANDSCAPE

As the marketing arena has made some advancements and leveraged technology, the MediaSpace went from a single traditional set of channels (print, TV, radio and so on) to digital channels that literally rocketed the messages to each person's inbox, site with a popup or even as they were browsing and saw some of those banner ads. Now as media continues to evolve, emerging media seems to have enhanced the marketer's capabilities with new, innovative and very inexpensive channels. See Figure 1 to view

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**Figure 1:** Traditional MediaSpace Perspective.

what I refer to as the traditional MediaSpace perspective.

From this MediaSpace and the drive from today's engaged customer, the landscape has evolved from a disjointed, siloed and structured set of marketing channels to a highly collaborative, fluid and robust stream of communication, content and inter-twined channels. This is what I refer to as the evolved MediaSpace. Traditional, digital and emerging channels all converging in a framework of complete agile and fluid content streaming back and forth make up this MediaSpace. Channels such as wikis, forums, microblogs and social networks directly impact and work hand and hand with TV, radio, newspaper, direct mail, Public Relations (PR) and much more.

The evolved MediaSpace adopts the three primary channel classifications from the traditional MediaSpace. Traditional, digital and emerging media channels typically come to mind when you hear about the typical marketing channels. There are roughly six segments to today's MediaSpace. Three of these segments are the typical channel areas (traditional, digital and emerging) and three are combinations of two types of channel areas

(traditional-digital, digital-emerging and emerging-traditional).

With such diverse and blurred marketing channel types, companies are dealing with a new mode of marketing operation and campaign strategies. They must evolve their overall process, procedures and metrics to tie into their prime and key assets stored in their DAM system to meet existing and future-engaged customer interactions. The DAM is the key for gaining that engaged customers' attention. More about the evolved MediaSpace can be found under the TEAMS' transformational framework section.

## **DAM LEVERAGED A NEW WAY**

It's not surprising that the DAM is the prime component of any marketing operation. What is surprising is that it is the technical framework that can also help the organization to evolve by using it in a more robust way. By leveraging agile processes and XML, a company can easily stream its assets out via web and drive traffic to its engagement structures. However, this is not the only piece to truly evolve. If a company creates a two-way stream via fluid and agile production processes coupled with XML that allows the content to freely stream out while

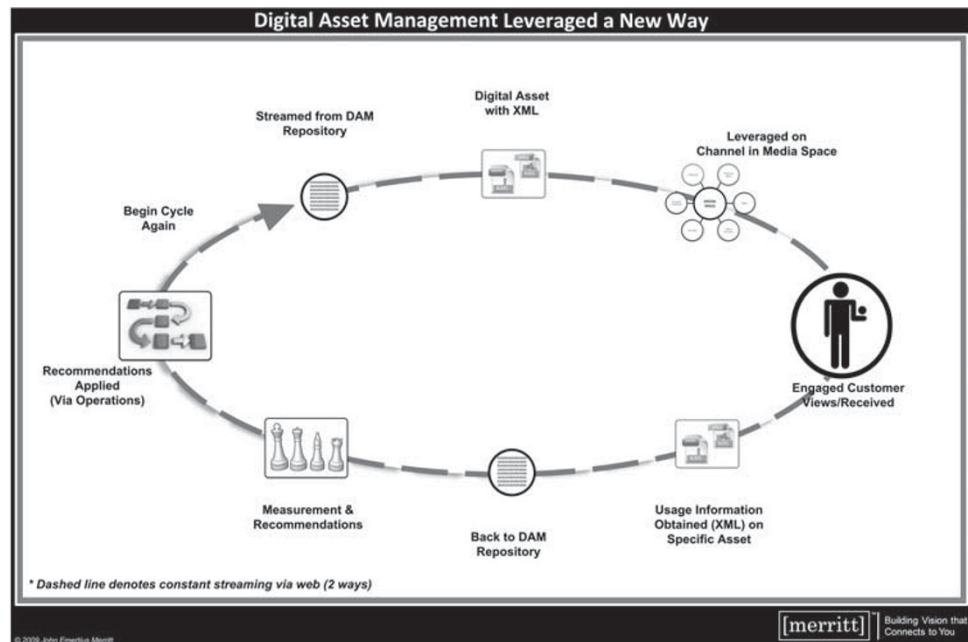


Figure 2: Digital asset management leveraged a new way.

capturing usage information, a company can leverage key first hand findings without even lifting a primary research finger. These findings can then be leveraged in ways such as asset usage, or channel asset was acquired or even sociographics and psychographics that can potentially enhance marketing campaigns in ways never thought possible. Even more ideas may include enhancing searching features or even how people understand things. Maybe a simple understanding of the most popular cross-referenced channels that a company may not have metrics for might be a valuable strategic advantage. The possibilities for leveraging this approach are endless.

Taking these very ideas and putting it in practice, a company can effectively leverage those not so measurable channels which its engaged customer uses in ways never thought possible. Draw your attention to Figure 2 to see what this typical flow may look like.

If an overall messaging strategy revolved around a structure like in Figure 2, key information, asset usage and even uncanny insights about an engaged customer can be easily obtained. Here the key is a framework that can be implemented in variable circumstances.

## TEAMS' FRAMEWORK

Lets take a page from Thomas Edison's successes. Edison is widely known for developing the light bulb. He gave the world light from a simple bulb with a very robust understanding of the vision as a whole. Not only did he develop the bulb, but he also envisioned the framework that would use such an innovative and ingenious device. Edison developed the framework to enable the success of the light-giving invention from start to finish and ultimately gained great support from some of the largest names to skyrocket his invention into mankind's greatest achievements. While many of his counterparts focused on developing the smaller pieces of the problem and succumbed to defeat, Edison triumphed with the whole perspective on how the customer would use it and what framework would be needed to support that use.

So what does Edison's insight and vision mean for evolving DAM to meet engaged customers? It means just slamming or tweaking the DAM software without a strategic framework can spell disaster for the engagement structure. Approaching DAM in a new way requires a new framework that can be leveraged

across the board with the vision and insight Edison had when developing the light bulb.

A framework, much like Edison's, can be leveraged for such a challenge in DAM. For this challenge, I have developed the TEAMS' transformational framework shown in Figure 3. This framework consists of five interdependent categories that support the evolved MediaSpace our engaged customers thrive in. These five interdependent categories are (1) the engaged customer; (2) an Evolving MediaSpace; (3) alignment to operations; (4) maturing technology infrastructure; and (5) strategic relational value. A framework such as this takes into account the entire TEAMS' life cycle where the process from start to finish can also be viewed in Figure 3.

## TEAMS' FIVE INTERDEPENDENT CATEGORIES

The TEAMS' transitional framework runs far deeper than what is outlined in Figure 3. Let's take a dive deeper into each area and understand more about each area.

### T – The engaged customer

The engaged customer refers to a new and constantly evolving breed of consumer who is not only informed, but actively engages the brands and corporations that this consumer tends to purchase and/or use. The consumer engages at multiple levels and these level of engagement spans from communicating publicly as well as directly with the brands about products, services, experiences and/or ideas to offer something better. Engaged customers tend to leverage all lines of communication and materials from these entities, to be more specific the digital assets that are distributed out into the digital realm. The engaged customer also actively evaluates, as a second nature sense, the feelings and brand sentiment that they have with particular channel, messaging and other contributors to posted and/or streaming media. These all could potentially be captured in the TEAMS' framework in Figure 3.

In terms of where the engaged customer resides in the TEAMS' life cycle and alignment to DAM, the engaged customer would typically be at the beginning and the end. Depending on the varying level of interaction a company has with engaged consumers can affect what other

categories that they can impact. In some cases, the engaged customer can impact virtually every part of the TEAMS' life cycle and could potentially have a direct impact on the kinds of file naming, taxonomy, metadata, Pay Per Click (PPC), Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and other related areas that DAM systems have to account for and/or consider.

When the XML and agile/fluid processes are thrown into the mix, the two-way streaming information can directly impact information needed for campaigns, types of channels to leverage, amount of budget to spend and even the kind of files streamed out into those channels. Having the steady stream that evolved DAM solutions can provide and potentially create a strategic advantage that is unrivaled in the market today. Also, it can meet those high demands of the emerging media channels – citizens media in specific. The value that this kind of DAM allow the engaged customer can bring in these areas is just the beginning.

As it is companies responsibility to attract and retain customers, the engaged customer/consumer is an even greater sought after asset that can directly help companies to meet these critical responsibilities. The engaged customer has the propensity to provide insights from angles and perspectives not previously known to the brand. With this said, this engaged customer can also be evolved into something known as Word of Mouth (WOM) Agent. These terms are not to be confused with loyalty or loyalists as the loyalty-related consumers are typically attached to a brand by some marketing mechanism related to offers, pricing, programs and/or more. WOM Agents transcend this general notion with their perspective on personal experience, actively engaging people in their sphere of influences and much more. See Figure 4 to understand what I mean about WOM Agents.

### E – Evolving MediaSpace

Much like the MediaSpace mentioned in the beginning of this article, the Evolving MediaSpace identifies the overlapping between the three typical channels that have made new hybrid classifications of marketing channels. Consisting of six different channel segments, the Evolved MediaSpace focuses on the holistic

## TEAMS Transformational Framework

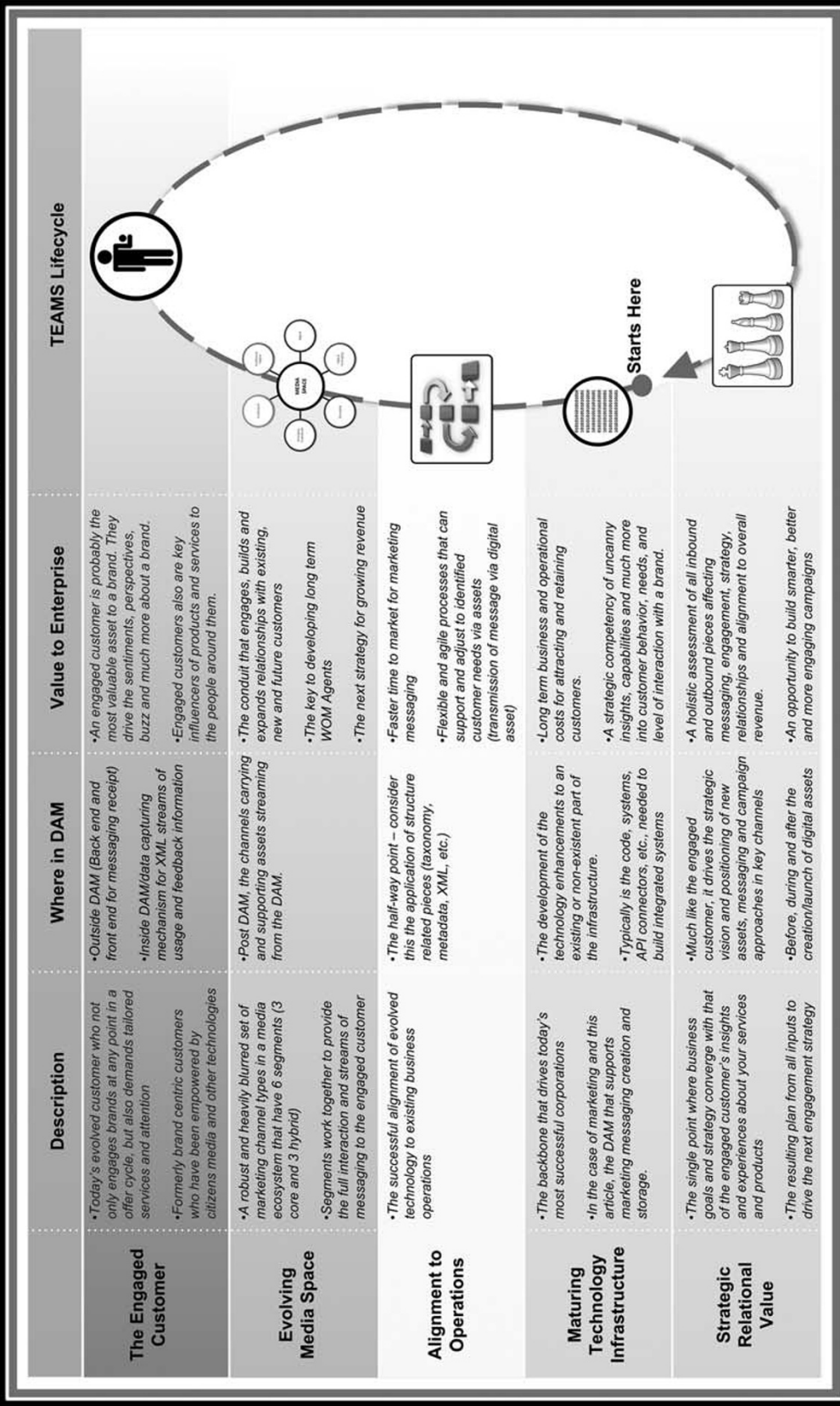
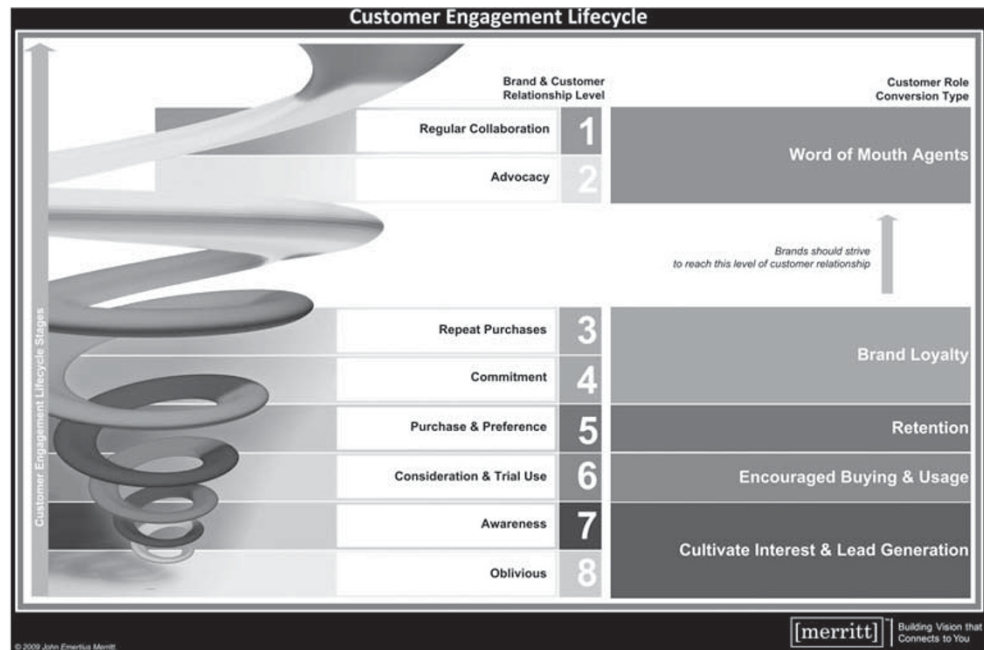


Figure 3: TEAMS' transformational framework.



**Figure 4:** Customer engagement life cycle.

nature of marketing messaging and the variable channels across multiple channel segments. The six divisions can be seen in Figure 5.

With the number of channels that can be leveraged across multiple types of channel segments, its pretty clear that marketing executives at virtually every company might be thinking about considering a better way of leveraging their existing tools to meet the level of engagement that customers display today.

If we consider the TEAMS' life cycle the strategic flow of an asset's usefulness, the Evolving MediaSpace would be one of the last points before reaching the engaged customer. It is the conduit by which marketers push messaging out to the world. The MediaSpace is critical to effectively position and communicate a message via a digital asset to the target customers and even the engaged customer. Every single aspect from cross-referencing to cross-channel marketing relies on the effective assessment, use and proper leveraging of every aspect of your industry's respective MediaSpace.

The value associated to leveraging your industry's respective MediaSpace is the primary key to developing and growing profits in today's society. Taking customers from the oblivious to regular collaboration with your brand is the direct catalyst for any profits received by a

company because of the varying degree that each customer has for their trusted influencers. The Evolved MediaSpace of today is the primary ingredient impacting relational marketing across disparate channels.

### **A – Alignment to operations**

Taking the capabilities realized in the maturing technology infrastructure and building a core competency that has a direct impact on your bottom line is what alignment to operations is all about. Think of this like an enhancement to processes, lines of communication, positioning of brands and even the distribution of digital assets from your repository.

Typically, when aligning to operations, this is a point in the overall life cycle where the operation truly starts evolving, but not before understanding the long-term impact on the consumer. Much like an impact assessment for marketing channels to customers/personas, aligning operations to the evolved competitive advantage is as equally important. Think of it this way, if you send out a message or digital asset down the wrong channel in a much shorter timeline when no one is receptive, you have essentially wasted your marketing dollars. So regardless of the maturing technology infrastructure, your dollar value is not fully

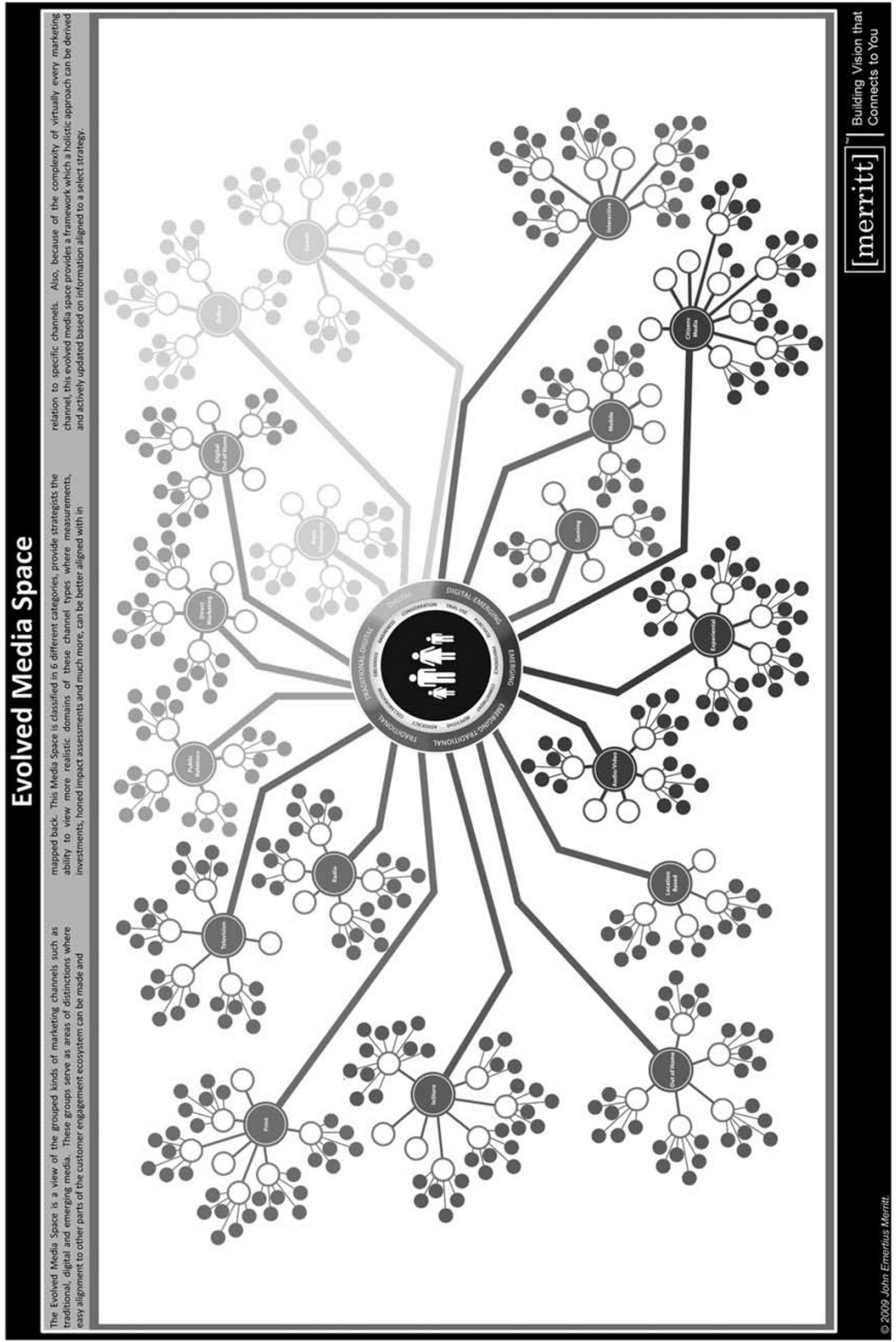


Figure 5: Evolved MediaSpace diagram.

realized. It becomes far more valuable to a company when the backbone of the marketing ops and the marketing ops come together to discuss how to best leverage the information for future campaigns.

When operations and strategic technological enhancements are aligned, it tends to result in reductions that can very well be positive to the organization as a whole. In the case of marketing channels, it means faster time to market, possibly better real-time information and possibly superior crafted customer 360 models from all that real-time information. Simply put, less marketing dollars yield a greater return and less of an impact from the law of diminishing returns. Aligning marketing operations to that infrastructure the newer DAM capabilities creates a win-win situation for everyone including the engaged customer.

### **M – Maturing technology infrastructure**

The maturing technology infrastructure is the backbone that drives today's corporation. As advances are made in this area, these advances are considered for operational implementation across selected areas in the multi-unit enterprise. As companies consider this area, it can become one of the two things to that company: an unstoppable force to be reckoned with or the silver bullet that makes them perish.

Remember a time when IBM announced the 386 machines as the latest and greatest but cost an arm and a leg way back then, while the latest and greatest was constantly being introduced into the market shortly thereafter? Well, think of the infrastructure of a company much like that. If a company thinks the last technology implementation, process enhancement, supply chain enhancement and so on is the last which they ever have to do, then they will succumb to the harsh realities of losing ground in their respective industries. Why do you think that is? Its because the cost of doing business becomes more and more costly for them owing to not taking these enhancements into account.

As companies evolve, their entire operational infrastructure has to evolve – not just one area. Let's think of the maturing technology infrastructure as the beginning of the DAM. Assume its either a system being put in, or in

the process of being revamped to meet existing operational needs. The system has to be crafted to meet not only today's needs, but the future advancements needed to meet basic operational capabilities. Now take it a step further.

Suppose your current tag cloud or taxonomy is not being easily leveraged in today's growing market space of twitter, facebook, youtube and so on. What do you think will happen if you do not constantly refine or evolve your nomenclature, taxonomies, metatags and metadata? You may experience the same fate what many of Edison's competitors did – extinction and ultimate loss. This by far is the most important of all the pieces in the TEAMS' framework – its the bread and butter of truly engaging and gaining real insights into what your customers are doing, looking for and wanting to interface with you at.

While there are up-front costs, its the sole structure that provides a window from the corporation to open to the engaged customer on outside. The cost piece should never be an issue – the value and vision of the investment should be focused more on the prolonged capabilities it provides to your company and how it has impacted the bottom line. Having a constantly evolving and maturing technology infrastructure in terms of DAM is a healthy evolution of operations in marketing as a whole. You've got to keep current if you intend to impress or grab the attention of a customer in a highly saturated and evolving MediaSpace.

### **S – Strategic relational value**

Think of this as your business plan aligned to your brand pillars, strategic goals and overall operational target goals. It is the single point where insights are leveraged to create a vision for the long haul. In engaged customer terms; is the soapbox with an audience of leadership hanging on their every word. In operational terms, it is the development and recommended advancements in your marketing campaigns that creates a highly viable and competitive weapon that operates in stealth mode.

In terms of the TEAMS' framework, If a DAM is in place, then it is a vision of leveraging from a system's point of view. If not in place, then it may consider the DAM as a strategic investment.



Well, every organization needs a plan. While each organization may have some kind of approach, that organization may lack the conduit of real-time and past/active points of engagement from the customer. The strategic relational value is the culmination of past, existing and constant insight from the whole perspective of the marketing operation (inside and out). Feeding this vision is the insight from the agile and fluid processes working at variable times throughout a campaign life cycle. The unrestricted information streams back and forth between customer and company is a critical input for the constant evolution of leveraging the DAM in a new way.

## **CONCLUSION**

Changing the characteristics of how a company communicates to its customers relies heavily on its understanding of how its customers interface with it and how to leverage those insights to build better relationships. Having a solid vision of your framework to support the smaller vision, just as Edison did, quickly leaves all competitors in the dust. The ones who can successfully leverage existing capabilities in their DAM systems to meet heavily engaged customers, will be the ones who will be capable of navigating in today's constantly Evolving MediaSpace.