Cycle Time

Here comes on-demand DAM platform-as-a-service

Michael Moon

Journal of Digital Asset Management (2010) 6, 133–137. doi:10.1057/dam.2010.18

CYCLETIME

In this installment of Cycletime, we will re-introduce digital asset management (DAM) for those new readers and, for the experienced DAMsters, develop a forward-looking roadmap of the future of DAM and, in particular, DAM in marketing. Next column, we will do the same for DAM in media, entertainment and publishing.

WIKIPEDIA ON DAM

In the broadest application, DAM constitutes a *productivity-enhancing practice* that speeds the retrieval, reuse or transformation of digital media files into the most useful or fungible form.

As defined in Wikipedia, DAM consists of *management tasks and decisions* surrounding the ingestion, annotation, cataloging, storage, retrieval and controlled distribution of digital assets – digital photographs, animations, videos and music.

DAM entails the use of *specialized systems* that aid in the downloading, renaming, backing up, rating, grouping, archiving, optimizing, maintaining, thinning and exporting digital files.

Generally an ‘asset’ represents a *digital file* and *description* of the contents and *property rights* of associated with the digital file.

The term ‘essence’ refers the content of a digital asset and generally constitutes the highest resolution and fidelity representation. The term ‘metadata’ refers the description of an asset; the description depth may vary depending on the needs of the system, designer or user.

Metadata can describe the actual content or file properties, the subject matter of the content, the means of encoding/decoding (for example JPEG, tar, MPEG 2), the provenance or its history to point of capture, ownership, rights of access, as well as the file’s compliance with

predefined standards and template for metadata such as Dublin Core and SCORM.

DAM IN MARKETING

DAM in marketing continues to evolve from its humble roots multimedia database and file manager (1993), delivering progressive greater value through systems such as

- Departmental content portals using client-server technologies (1997 onward)
- Enterprise DAM repositories (2000 onward)
- Media service platforms (2003 onward)
- DB-publishing (web to print) workflow platforms (2006 onward)
- Enterprise marketing content-process management platforms (2009 onward)

The years spanning 1999–2005 represented the greatest level of adoption of DAM in medium to large enterprises, numbering more than 2500 installations worldwide of the following:

- Department content portals
- Enterprise DAM repositories
- Media service platforms

Today, many medium to large enterprises still use a DAM system originally installed in the halcyon years of 1999–2005, satisfying business requirements then understood and addressed. In many cases today, these same firms seek *new DAM options*, beyond a simple upgrade; in some cases, marketing groups today seek systems that go beyond the basic assumptions of DAM: database-publishing of print and web pages, integrated multichannel content-process management for enterprise marketing (websites, microsites, social networking sites, newsletters, circulars and direct mail).

DAM CAPABILITIES FRAMEWORK

Table 1 indicates *six basic system configurations*. Many firms have tried to use *Marcomm intranets* to serve as their DAM, learning that they needed a true DAM system – an *Image and Content Portal* or *Creative Workflow Repository*. The Table also depicts the evolution of DAM systems into DAM PLUS and managed supply-chains for marketing as well as the five steps of optimizing any focused capability (for example, creative workflow repository).

Many of the terms represent self-explanatory items. A few need explanation. In particular, *3D CGI photo* replacement represents the use of 3D CAD models, rendered in photorealistic detail, to product 2D product images – fast, infinitely modifiable and way less expensive than professional photography.

Marketing claims databases represent a managed repository of ‘good to go’ copy-written text (product claims, slogans, features and benefits, product descriptions, user directions and so on), suitable for automated publishing workflows.

MRM stands for *marketing resource management* and entails applications and workflows for automating a marketing operation: budgeting, planning, scheduling, project management, sourcing, process benchmarking, database-publishing and financial governance of advertising and creative agency expenditures.

Managed supply chains entail end-to-end integration of scheduling, collaboration, transaction, project management and digital asset data across all contributors to integrated, multichannel, pan-regional campaigns, creating full visibility of the entire marketing team and their specific contributions to revenue, profit and return on marketing investments.

The enumerated sequence indicates *five basic modes of managing* any operations or process (see Table 1). In any particular organization, one might say: (1) we’re *ad hoc* in managing our digital assets, (2) we’re currently organizing our assets, (3) we’re currently measuring the use of assets and users, (4) we’re currently analyzing asset-activities and payback, or (5) we’re currently optimizing operations for next-phase innovations.

EVOLUTION OF DAM FOR MARKETING

Most of the initial deployments of enterprise DAM repositories and media service platforms

historically emphasized the management of *static images* and content for *printed materials*: ads, flyers and so on.

As the web emerged as a strategic communications channel in the early-2000s, modern DAMs evolved to manage source files for *rich-media content*: animations, video clips, web page elements and downloaded content (PDFs and webcast movies).

In some cases, the *web operations* deployed a DAM to support their websites and portals, populating the DAM with content and assets largely purpose-built for publishing online. The web operations rarely understood the rigorous technical requirements for printed material (fonts, color management, single-pixel precision and so on) or they did not care (‘Hey, that’s not *my* job!’).

Often, this web-centric DAM frustrated the marketing or marketing communications group, prompting marketing teams to secure their *marketing DAM system*, such as

- smaller departmental *content portal* using packaged software with pre-defined functions and capabilities;
- *online DAM* provided by their advertising agency, printer or hosted DAM service provider.

In most cases, these marketing DAMs provide a basic library and self-service function to internal marketing users and external field marketing teams and partners.

As direct communication and digital services continue to grow in prominence in enterprise marketing, the marketing and media mix continues to evolve in three dimensions:

- Marketing incorporates a growing number of media types.
- Marketing works with burgeoning array of specialist agencies, creative partners and independent contributors.
- Management requires marketing to provide greater visibility and accountability for marketing expenses.

DAM-PLUS EMERGES

Looking to the future, most of the new or enhanced DAM (Table 2) systems will

- enable creative partners and individual contributors of *integrated rich-media*

Table 1: DAM Service – Capabilities Model

Focus	Project portal		DAM systems		Distributed rich-media services (DAM PLUS)		Managed supply chain
	1. Marcomm intranet	2. Image and content portal	3. Creative workflow repository	4. Distributed media workflows	5. Smart Marcomm operations	6. Federated marketing operations	
Business requirements	Share files and collaborate within team Sharepoint, Basecamp, @task, Lotus Notes	Find marketing content and reusable media components using simple keywords and nested folders	Streamline creation and production processes for artwork, 3D CGI photo replacements, collateral, packaging, POP displays and multimodal customer-engagement packages	Provision content and media applications to users across enterprise and partner, creating process benchmarks Lower agency switching costs and service interruptions	Speed delivery of brand-consistent multimedia materials through structured online processes Lower sourcing costs of creative, content and production	Synchronize global product launches and integrated multichannel campaigns using multiple centers of excellence in marketing communications	
Key functions	Browser or desktop access to intranet or public portal	Structured catalogs with basic metadata and search	Integration with creative tools, works of process and approval workflows	Multiple user classes, faceted taxonomies and dynamic imaging Full integration of project management	MRM capabilities: planning, campaigns, strategic sourcing of creative services and analytics	Pan-regional execution of print, broadcast, online, mobile, and in-field promotions and customer engagement	
Pivots	—	—	Marketing claims databases	Database-publishing of collateral and banner ads (smart artwork)	Ad agency governance systems	Outsourced localization services	
Progression sequence from maturity to the next 1. Ad Hoc > 2. Organize > 3. Measure > 4. Analyze > 5. Optimize							

The table above depicts the evolution of DAM Systems into DAM PLUS and Managed Supply-Chains for Marketing as well as the five steps of optimizing any focused capability (for example, creative workflow repository). The enumerated sequence indicates five basic models of managing any operations or process. In any particular organization, one might say: (1) We're ad hoc in managing our digital assets, (2) We're currently organizing our assets, (3) We're currently measuring the use of assets and users, (4) We're currently analyzing asset-activities and payback, or (5) We're currently optimizing operations for next-phase innovations.

Table 2: DAM in marketing evolving in process management support

Focus	Evolution on DAM capabilities in marketing operations					
	Basic tools	DAM frameworks	Packaged software	Hosted DAM App	SaaS DAM	DAM PLUS
	On-premise software			Off-premise software		
Marketing supply chain management	—	—	—	NA	NA	—
Marketing operations management	—	—	—	NA	—	—
Marcomm management	—	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Point solutions (below) evolving into process management platforms (above)</i>						
DAM services groups	—	Most DAMs	—	—	—	—
Marcomm content portals	—	—	—	—	—	—
Creative workgroups	—	—	—	—	—	—
Creative desktops	—	—	—	—	—	—
Consumers	—	—	—	—	NA	NA

The table above depicts the evolution of DAM capabilities in marketing operations, migrating on-premise DAM software to off-premise DAM PLUS capabilities. The table also depicts the evolution of focus in marketing operations, migrating away from single-focus point solutions and towards integrated MOM-DAM process management.

NA in this context denotes 'not applicable' or non-existent capabilities of the systems in 'focus' (left column).

workflows to create self-tagged digital assets, requiring tight integration of DAM systems with an array of creative tools and desktops;

- store *product information, marketing claims and communications* (vetted and approved copy-written text) and *user-generated content* as digital asset types, using industry-standard XML schemas to publish structured data and unstructured information with rich media assets;
- automatically generate and place *banner ads* into web content management or ad network systems as well as produce *printer-certified PDFs* for inserts, flyers, coupons and POP materials;
- coordinate a comprehensive *approval management* process, speeding the review and commenting of ideation and sketches, work-in-process versions, finished digital goods and localized versions;
- use easily configured forms and to create and publish market plans, campaign analytics, budgets, calendars, project plans and forecasts to the same underlying database of the DAM, thus creating a consolidated *marketing information database*;
- link items of the marketing information database, such as *marketing plans* and *creative briefs*, to all designated contributors of rich-media workflows as well as to individual assets, including comps and sketches, work-

in-process versions, finished digital goods and localized versions; and

- deliver the end-to-end process management of *Ad Agency Governance*, standardizing the procurement of creative services, content development, uploaded and tagged digital assets, and production and logistics from a global network of suppliers.

NEW BUSINESS REQUIREMENT FOR DAM IN MARKETING

A comprehensive reassessment of DAM as a business strategy or business-process enabler for marketing reveals five new requirements that are as follows:

- *consolidate web and marketing content*, unifying reuse and sourcing standards;
- *migrate existing orphan content and digital assets* now held by agencies, creative partners and other departmental or hosted DAM systems to a consolidated DAM system;
- *recertify and clear intellectual property rights* for worldwide use in all mediums;
- *drive enterprise-wide reuse existing content and digital assets*, pre-empting rouge procurement of 'dumb' content (untagged or difficult to repurpose); and
- *integrate DAM and Content Operations to core marketing processes*: budgeting, planning, scheduling, project management, sourcing,

process benchmarking, database-publishing and financial governance of advertising and creative agency expenditures.

Our recent client work reveals another interesting if not transformational conclusion: many core processes, databases and applications

will continue migrating into the 'cloud', riding the innovation curves of Moore's Law (and others); everything becomes 10× faster or 10× cheaper in 5 years.

Thus, many marketing organizations will stampede into on-demand DAM platform-as-a-service.