Original Article

Managing the fast moving (digital) currents: How DAM can help emerging rapid response media centers

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ABSTRACT This article explores the sources of the growing pressure to de-couple DAM (Digital Asset Management) from its typical departmental origins and develop a centralized/enterprise office for DAM – a Digital Media Center. The article further explores the role that DAM can play in a ‘Digital Rapid Response Center’, where digital assets are quickly deployed for either fast-paced social media management, or in response to a volatile crisis situation.

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A quick scan across the headlines of any contemporary news source – online, on-air, or in print, reveals how important the ability to repurpose digital assets has become. Extending this idea slightly further, corporations, governments and non-profits find themselves with accelerating needs to find and re-use digital assets. Examples of this include a corporate focus on proactively monitoring social media, or a product liability situation, governmental response to a natural disaster, or a museum’s incorporating exhibition materials to a visitor’s immersive experience. Regardless of the particulars, an organization’s ability to manage the fast moving *digital* currents of today’s world is increasingly important. It’s a safe assertion, and a conservative one, that an organization’s

ability to ‘respond and navigate – digitally’ ties to profitability, efficiency and overall reputation. This article presents the idea of a ‘Digital Rapid Response Media Center’ as an approach to preparing for success in achieving these goals – whether for profit, or not.

Digital Asset Management (DAM)’s historic roots, starting with the basic idea of liberating content from its production technologies, paved the way for today’s much more sophisticated conversation about ‘create once, use many’. DAM began with text-based workflows, and the quaint-seeming idea of taking published textual content and creating CD-ROM’s as well as allowing for subsequent reprints and revised editions. As the early crank start versions of publishing to the web began, the ability to

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incorporate the early further reach of image and what now seem like primitive video transformation technologies became a part of DAM's DNA. Today the power and reach of the transformation engines within DAM give content and brand producers ready confidence to disseminate their digital assets.

But, the workflows that most organizations have developed around DAM grew out of various – and completely understandable – departmental, or parochial needs. Magazines and others needed image archives; the studios needed quick electronic press kits for global consumption; brand companies needed a toolkit of logos, press releases, product shots and executive biographies; museums needed art imagery and often-exquisite hi-resolution photography; universities and federal labs needed slow motion videography and finite stop-motion image capture to investigate and document complex research rich media assets; publishers wanted to answer the famous 'where's my books' question that was first asked by (then) Time Warner Trade Publishing. The metadata, taxonomy, storage and archive strategies, for the most part, followed these more narrow-defined needs, which led to most of the DAM installations to date. There are exceptions, of course, but a majority of DAM installations – quite logically – follow this path.

By implication, the budgetary allocations for staff, along with information technology (IT) 'footprint', followed a reactive path. A department would naturally create the initial justification for 'DAM Project #1'. Or maybe #1 through #4. Based on this, staffing determinations would be made, even if the DAM projects were quite far-reaching, such as the highly regarded 'MARS' project originating at Warner Bros., or the Open Text Media Management implementation at Random House or General Motors. As we survey the staffing patterns for DAM, we sometimes find that DAM is managed from a central librarian. We often find it within marketing departments, and then again, perhaps the IT group. What is most often missing though, is the central management of this now, more than ever, mission critical application.

The departmental approach to DAM has resulted in a mostly fragmented, silo'd DAM landscape. There is a smile here, of course, at the irony of this statement, because DAM is, of

course, the 'anti-silo' application with its ability to be content-type neutral and house the corn as well as the oats. The pressure, though, is now building on the organizational structure to be centrally ready with digital assets to serve the enterprise – with departmental needs parallel or subservient to this. As assets are de-coupled from a silo'd approach, the enterprise will be better served.

Let us examine and expand the general idea. The concept of a Digital Media Rapid Response Center, in general, is to centralize and codify organizational intelligence for the use of digital assets in responding to everyday and urgent events. It is to acculturate an understanding of using rich media and socialize across executive and divisional managerial layers. It is to staff a digitally savvy team who understand service in terms of their mission to both routine and crisis situations. And to educate less-familiar colleagues with the power that digital assets – and especially video – can provide. At the risk of either awakening bad memories or starting another dicey acronym, we could call this 'digital enterprise resource planning'. It's got strategy and operational components, whether devoted to deepening central management of overall DAM operations and institutionalizing this, or serving as a Digital Media Rapid Response Center. We will focus more in this article on how digital assets can – and will – become central to a quick digital response culture.

Today, most 'rapid response' reaction teams are drawn from a corporation's internal Public Relations staff, an external company or some mix. For emergency preparedness, entities, such as the National Transportation Safety Board, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Center for Disease Control and a host a food safety teams are drawn upon. The vernacular of rapid response is also found in some IT support business models as well as medical care and other social service delivery organizations.

Although a generalization, these 'teams' (to use the phrase with varying accuracy) are rarely 'digital rehearsed'. Although they are increasingly prepared for a crisis, it is more stylistic in nature (containment and management approach) and not inherently disciplined in how DAM can help.

On the corporate setting, DAM can help pro-actively with using digital assets to assert deeper value in a company's social media monitoring. In a well-publicized article in the Wall Street Journal (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703466704575489673244784924.html>), a reporter was given access to Gatorade's center for monitoring social media. Gatorade, like many companies, monitors social media activity using Radian6 or other similar tools. In this case, management recognized that even a well-designed dashboard is two-dimensional and 'flat'. Social media demands, so to speak, a three-dimensional 'heads-up' display. At Gatorade, along with exhaustive site monitoring, the staff of four full time employees, drawn from Gatorade and their agency, can use digital asset in support of their mission. As an example from the *Wall Street Journal* article, 'Gatorade says Mission Control is improving its marketing. The company extended an 'Evolve' 60-second ad tune into a full-length track available for download in response to frequent questions like 'Who sings that song?' Quick access to digital assets, through search tools drawing on excellence in metadata and file transformation tools, enable the staff to use rich media assets like this song clip, or something more basic, such as a downloadable coupon.

In a more serious situation, DAM can play a diversity of roles in watching for the 'weak signals' of a pending crisis. Imagine, if you will, when the initial reports of tread separation with the Bridgestone Tires on Ford Explorers started to trickle in, if Ford, or Bridgestone, had been staffed to receive images via e-mail and had staff to monitor them in their customer service centers their Quality Assurance Teams and so on, and they had seen the patterns in these images. Although we cannot hypothesize if this would have changed their corporate reaction, such a workflow would certainly have the potential to accelerate an understanding of the situation, and potentially, to stimulate remediating it. Yet, it is even rare today to find a customer service site that encourages a consumer to submit an image of a problem along with the 'send us an email' HTML form or even as an attachment. With a digital media response center, staff would encourage and expect this type of consumer interaction.

In reacting to a crisis, Rapid Response Center staff would be aggregating and ingesting content related to the crisis. This could include executive interviews favorable and unfavorable press, prepared statements, and videos wherever possible and so on. The team should have the authorized response materials 'at the digital ready', cleared and indexed, for correct and rapid use. Putting digital assets to this use will help crisis management experiences be managed as best they can. Several studies have shown, not surprisingly, that there is shareholder value impact from the competence with which a company responds to such an event.

One of the foremost-recognized studies conducted on the impact of a catastrophe on the stock value of an organization was completed by Dr Rory Knight and Dr Deborah Pretty (1995, Templeton College, University of Oxford – commissioned by the Sedgewick Group, cited in Wikipedia). This study undertook a detailed analysis of the stock price (post impact) of organizations that had experienced catastrophes. The study identified organizations that recovered and even exceeded pre-catastrophe stock price, (*Recoverers*), and those that did not recover on stock price, (*Non-recoverers*). The average cumulative impact on shareholder value for the recoverers was 5 per cent plus on their original stock value. So the net impact on shareholder value by this stage was actually positive. The non-recoverers remained more or less unchanged between days 5 and 50 after the catastrophe, but suffered a net negative cumulative impact of almost 15 per cent on their stock price up to one year afterwards. One of the key conclusions of this study is that 'Effective management of the consequences of catastrophes would appear to be a more significant factor than whether catastrophe insurance hedges the economic impact of the catastrophe'. The expectation of a digital society will be, increasingly, for a thoughtful and planned digitally aware response to a crisis.¹

For other both crisis and operationally oriented Digital Media Center teams, they become the clearinghouse on putting DAM to work throughout an organization. In addition to

envisioning their role as a trained internal technical and training team, they can coordinate user groups; software and features rollouts; take support questions, and instantiate best practices. The executive mandate for this, and the concurrent operational budget, must be clear. And central digital operations *are* like payroll – the specifics may vary if there is a Union involved, or hourly versus managerial employees, but no one really does payroll at the department anymore. And DAM is not a library function anymore – it's the circulation and lifeblood of an organization. This is where DAM is going.

The digital era compresses time. In the highly regarded and award-winning historical work entitled 'Paul Revere's Ride' (Oxford University Press, 1994), historian David Hackett Fisher recounts how the knowledge about the 'shot in round the world' from the Old North Bridge 'quickly' made its way down what was in the very process of becoming the eastern United States. He carefully notes (and illustrates) the slow crawl of news over the month following 19th April through early May of 1775. Its course could be documented as the epochal nature of the event – a version of paralyzing time like Kennedy's Assassination,

the Challenger Disaster, or 9–11 – led to the naming of numerous towns called 'Lexington' up and down the east coast! Newspapers, pamphleteers, journalists and letter writers noted when they heard this news.

Just over 100 years later, in August 1883, the volcano known as Krakatoa exploded in Indonesia. Simon Winchester, in his book 'Krakatoa: The Day the World Exploded' (HarperCollins, 2003), documents this event – the loudest sound ever heard in the world. He illustrates how barographs, the British fascination with scientific instrumentation and recently completed trans-oceanic telegraphs led to this being the first ever 'same-day' world reported news event. It foreshadows the rapid digital dialogue of today – a kind of early 'digital diet for a small planet'.

In our digital era, we have taken that concept of knowledge travelling in a month, or a day and compressed it to a minute – or less. By centralizing DAM, or, for most organizations, charting this as a strategic goal, we recognize how to plan for this immediacy of communication.

Note

1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_management.