Cycle Time

Benchmarking DAM workflows

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In this Cycle Time, we will examine the role of benchmarking workflows and, in particular, the DAM workflow, making the case that every professional DAMster should master a workflow benchmarking practice or discipline.

Let's start with a definition. Benchmarking entails identifying accurate historical data about a process, product or service against a uniform or usable data set that enables one to compare the current performance with the past and future performances.

Many professionals also know benchmarking as an aspect for continuous measurement of a process, product or service compared to those of the toughest competitor, to those considered industry leaders, or to similar activities in the organization in order to find and implement ways to improve it. Benchmarking constitutes one of the foundations of both total quality management and continuous quality improvement. Internal benchmarking quantifies the performance of similar processes within the same organization, measuring progress toward a goal at intervals prior to the anticipated attainment of the goal.

In our consulting practice we use a number of tools to gather benchmarking data, usually in face-to-face interviews with one to three users per session. We have found that online or remote data collection does not work well with most users; they often lack context or misread even the most explicitly stated assumptions

about why, what, how and who wants to know. Our typical face-to-face interview takes about one full-hour and two interviewers, one asking questions in hedgehog fashion ("Okay, exactly where do you find these product photos? Okay, how about CD-ROMs from your agencies or photographers? Memory sticks? How about photos buried in your email inbox folders? How about FTP servers at printers?"). The second interviewer diagrams the locations and flows of digital assets stored, found, moved, lost and sent.

The (Figure 1) depicts one of our basic inventory tools for assessing marketing communications or marcomm assets, emphasizing these key features:

- *Basic types of marcomm assets* that a particular user or manager needs over the course of a typical month.
- *Identification of the most troublesome marcomm assets*, enabling the consultant to come back at a later time and examine these problematic assets with greater depth.
- *Places that users most often find* marcomm assets.
- By location, the number of marcomm assets that the users finds per month.
- *The averaged amount of time spent finding* a marcomm asset by location.
- *Percentages of marcom assets by location* that:
 - They can use the asset "as is".
 - They need to change or edit an typical asset.
 - They reject the asset and/or request a fix.

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Where do we find marcom assets? How much time does it take to find one item? Of those items found, what percentage of the time do you use them "as is" or do you change or reject them?									
Use for items most trouble	I need to FIND it!	Use X for most used	Places you find items you need	Number of ITEMS you find min month by PLACE	Average TIME to find an item	Percentage of items you USE without change it	Percentage of items you CHANGE in some way	Percentage of items you REJECT, requesting a fix	Percentages indicating primary PROBLEM SOURCES in file-retrieval
	Ads								No visual thumbnails
	Advertorials (publication-produced)		PC, desktop						No file exists
	Booth graphics		PC, portable						Wrong size
	Direct mailers		PC, memory stick						Wrong version
	Event photos		PC, external drive						Wrong expression
	Event signage and banners		DVDs/CDs						Unknown WIP status
	Event-sponsorship support videos		Shared drives						Unconfirmed clearance
	Event-sponsorship-sampling program kits		FPP, internal						
	Newsletters		FTP, external					%	Percentages of your DAILY WORK taken in file-retrieval
	Online, partner promo content		Image portal, internal						Found it 1st time
	Online, product and corporate content		Image portal, external						Got it on 1st personal request
	Online, streamed ad spots		DAM, internal						Got it right on 2nd request
	Packaging artwork		DAM, partner						>3 requests
	Packaging contents		DAM, other					100%	
	Product logos		Videotape/cartridges						
	Product manuals		Scan it						
	Product screen shots								
	Product use and lifestyle B-roll VIDEO								
	Product use and life style PHOTO library								
	POP merchandising collateral								
	Trade catalogs, sell-sheets and take-ones								
	TV ad spots, Agency-produced promotions								
	User-generated videos								

Figure 1: Marcomm Asset Worksheet

This worksheet prompts interviewer to ask the user to estimate problem sources in finding marcomm assets, including:

- *no visual thumbnail* of marcomm asset (requires open file the a graphics or media tool);
- *no file exists* of the desired marcomm asset;
- *wrong size or format* of marcomm asset (requires editing tool and skillful user);
- *wrong version* of marcomm asset (missing some or all of the changes or cosmetic enhancements);
- *wrong expression* of marcomm asset entail inappropriate colorspaces (three-color RGB versus four-color CYMK) or resolutions;
- *unknown status of work in process (WIP)* that may require follow-up by telephone, voicemail, fax, email, SMS or instant messaging.
- *unknown clearance status* by legal or risk officers that may entail unnecessary, duplicated follow-up by telephone, voicemail, fax, email or overnight freight.

Finally, this worksheet prompts the interviewer to ask the user to estimate the success rates in finding marcom assets on the first, second or third request or session. This worksheet tracks the heavy use of email and other typically

inefficient ways of requesting and retrieving a variety of files.

The (Figures 2 and 3) depict completed worksheets from two different types of users, an administrative marcomm staff user and a media professional. Using this worksheet, the interviewer starts with the bottom role, asking the marcom or media production staffer to estimate the amount of time he or she spends in seven areas of a DAM marcomm asset workflow. Then the interviewer asks the staffer to put these DAM activities in a larger context of the staffer's job. The top six items represent tactical or administrative tasks; the bottom five activities represent strategic or high add-value work.

The next steps in benchmarking DAM workflows entail visual depictions of the current operating condition as well as one or two depictions of possible future conditions. For example, one future might depict a DAM repository with extensive annotation and mark-up capabilities, precluding the need to move large files around, print them, take a meeting about what the changes mean or who needs to do what, etc. Another, more sophisticated future condition might depict DAM repository with extensive annotation and mark-up capabilities,

With respect to the performance of your job, in which of the following activity areas do you spend the bulk of your time?			
Notes about this OFFLINE activity	ACTIVITY	Percentage to Activity	Notes about this ONLINE activity
Filing, filling out forms	Administration & office	5%	Filing, filling out forms
Fax, letters, memos	Correspondence	5%	Email
Telephone, mobile	Communications (live)	5%	IM, SMS, Skype
DVD/CDs FedEx'd	File transport	10%	Email, shared server, FTP, other
Onsite and offsite	Meetings, administrative	0%	Webconferencing, online meeting rooms
Onsite and offsite	Meetings, production	10%	Webconferencing, online meeting rooms
Onsite and offsite	Meetings, strategy & learning	5%	Webconferencing, online meeting rooms
Onsite and offsite	Meetings, industry events	5%	Webconferencing, online meeting rooms
Hardcopy	Reviewing & commenting	40%	Softcopies
Magazines, newspapers, books	Researching & reading	5%	Websites, newsletters, blogs
Sketching, drafting	Researching & reading	10%	Sketching, drafting

How would you summarize the portion of your day spent in these activities?							
How many hours do spend weekly?	ASKING for artwork and files	SEARCHING for artwork and files	DOWNLOAD-ING artwork and files	COMMUNICATING & MEETING re: artwork and files	EDITING-ENHANCING artwork and files	REVIEWING-COMMENTING re: artwork and files	SENDING artwork and files to someone
	2	4	6	8	4	8	1
Notes							

Figure 2: These benchmark data represent a typical administrative user in a DAM-less marcom department

plus visual real-time collaboration, screensharing, on-the-spot final edits and color matching and corrections.

Most marcomm staff and media production users find it difficult to envision doing anything but what they currently do. Visual depictions of a DAM-enabled workflows not only supplements their ability to put themselves into a future context, most marcomm staff and media production users will push against any aspect of the future context that breaches “it does not follow” logic of their work environment. Celebrate these pushback comments; they reveal the essential refinements to the user experience and training hurdles for a larger rollout.

This basic data gathering exercise and visual depictions supports a spreadsheet calculation, summarizing the current amount of lost productivity and likely productivity gains from a particular DAM-enabled workflow. This shifts the conversation within an organization away

from “What’s the real problem around here?” and towards “How much does inaction about solving our workflow productivity problem cost us each month?”

For our readers who already have a well-established and operational DAM, how does benchmarking DAM workflows help? With a bit of imagination, we can modify these basic worksheets to benchmark current levels of productivity and time-expense around these common and known areas of inefficiency:

- publishing user-generated video;
- synchronizing new print collateral and web pages;
- localizing websites and print collateral;
- launching microsites;
- provisioning office furnishing and materials for new storefronts;
- customizing magazine content for each of 400 branch offices;

With respect to the performance of your job, in which of the following activity areas do you spend the bulk of your time?			
Notes about this OFFLINE activity	ACTIVITY	Percentage to Activity	Notes about this ONLINE activity
Filing, filling out forms	Administration & office	10%	Filing, filling out forms
Fax, letters, memos	Correspondence	40%	Email
Telephone, mobile	Communications (live)	0%	IM, SMS, Skype
DVD/CDs FedEx'd	File transport	5%	Email, shared server, FTP, other
Onsite and offsite	Meetings, administrative	0%	Webconferencing, online meeting rooms
Onsite and offsite	Meetings, production	2.5%	Webconferencing, online meeting rooms
Onsite and offsite	Meetings, strategy & learning	1%	Webconferencing, online meeting rooms
Onsite and offsite	Meetings, industry events	5%	Webconferencing, online meeting rooms
Hardcopy	Reviewing & commenting	40%	Softcopies
Magazines, newspapers, books	Researching & reading	1%	Websites, newsletters, blogs
Sketching, drafting	Thinking & planning	0.5%	Sketching, drafting

How would you summarize the portion of your day spent in these activities?							
How many hours do spend weekly?	ASKING for artwork and files	SEARCHING for artwork and files	DOWNLOAD-ING artwork and files	COMMUNICATING & MEETING re: artwork and files	EDITING- ENHANCING artwork and files	REVIEWING- COMMENTING re: artwork and files	SENDING artwork and files to someone
	0	1.5	1	4	20	12	2
Notes							

Figure 3: These benchmark data represent a power user in a media production role in a DAM-less product development department

- customizing in-store promotions and merchandising aids for each dealer or reseller;
- versioning banner ads and promotions by behavioral profile and time to day.

Feel free to call or email with your ideas or examples of tools that have proven useful. Until then, carpe data!