Original Article

A global DAM strategic planning methodology – FirmCo: Business strategy and goals

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ABSTRACT The following article is an actual Use Case and Strategic Plan to support a research and marketing company, the company name has been replaced per their request. The information included in this article was used to define the actual case for the development and implementation of a global DAM strategy. The firm has global multi-line product offerings with both direct to consumer and indirect sales channels. The global environment included multiple production sites that were required to work closely together to build brand consistency, efficiency gains and increase revenue worldwide by reducing time to market. This required a concerted effort by all parties to restructure the organizations to meet the demands of collaborative global production. The research took approximately 15 months with a multi-year roll-out strategy.

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OVERVIEW

Introduction

The regional leaders of marketing communications at FirmCo have recently established a new vision for a global MarComm community that will incorporate the diverse range of creative and production teams devoted to meeting the marketing communications needs of the company. In its initial phase, this community will encompass MarComm operations in the Americas, Asia and Europe. Subsequently, it will be extended to emerging international markets such as India, China and Japan. Digital Asset Management (DAM), as a global business strategy, is one of the primary enablers that will support the creation and operations of this community. This document describes the recommended approach to DAM for FirmCo as well as the key goals that will be

pursued in the implementation of this global strategy.

Within the DAM strategic planning methodology, this document ('Business Strategy and Goals') provides a summary of the strategy and goals that are driving this global initiative for FirmCo (Figure 1). As such, it is meant to provide high-level direction and business rationale behind the recommendations regarding implementation steps that will be made in the Roadmap and Implementation Plan.

Purpose

The commitment to a more tightly integrated global community by FirmCo MarComm leadership recognizes recent economic and cultural shifts that impact the current situation of the company. These shifts include the recent rise in FirmCo revenues from international markets, the emergence of a more unified

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Figure 1: Strategic planning methodologies.

‘flat earth’ global economy and the maturity of global technological and communications networks (such as the Web) with the potential to connect regional FirmCo teams in new ways. One key to ensuring that FirmCo’s global revenues continue to grow will be to meet increasing demands for high quality, brand-consistent marketing materials in international markets over the next several years.

With this in mind, the primary objective for FirmCo in the DAM implementation will be to:

Speed the transformation of Marketing Communications into a more efficient, effective global operation.

What do we mean by this?

An effective global MarComm operation will provide MarComm teams with the tools and processes necessary for:

- synchronized releases of marketing communications in support of global concurrent product launches;
- reduction in delays or lapses in MarComm support for products in international markets (throughout product life cycles);

- creation of high-quality assets for global use that are consistent with FirmCo brand standards.

Today, FirmCo MarComm teams possess a wide range of specialized skills and talents for the creation of high-quality marketing communications. However, these talents and resources are not currently functioning as a unified operation. At root, there is a lack of systems and processes in place to support the ability of these teams (no matter how talented and dedicated) to execute global integrated marketing programs. This is not to say that there have not been significant efforts made by MarComm teams to address these issues. Rather, that the labor-intensive manual systems and processes currently in place are not capable of overcoming the logistical challenges inherent in the goals described above.

In order to achieve these goals (concurrent launches, elimination of delays, global brand consistency), a new generation of tools and processes must be made available to the global community. In essence, these tools must be capable of addressing:

- delays in the supply of global marketing communications (during product launch and throughout life cycles);

- duplication and cost inefficiencies in the production of global marketing communications;
- lack of brand consistency and quality standards on a global basis.

Although these goals will be difficult to achieve, they are capable of producing significant financial benefits for the company. Chief among these will be the continued growth of the brand and business in expanding international markets around the world.

It is important to recognize that achieving these goals through an incremental approach to changes in the current operations of FirmCo marketing communications is unlikely to succeed. Indeed, it is the recommendation of SEW Consulting that achieving these goals will require nothing less than the transformation of MarComm to a new global footing. Analysis of the current state conditions that point to this conclusion and keys to supporting creation of effective global MarComm operations with improved digital infrastructure are the subjects of this article.

Business rationale

From a corporate perspective, the transformation of MarComm into an efficient global operation supports a range of high-level business goals for FirmCo as a company, which are as follows:

- To support continued growth of FirmCo in an expanding number of international markets.
- To realize greater efficiencies (in terms of time and costs) in MarComm operations.
- To minimize exposure to legal liabilities created by digital marketing content.
- To support on-going corporate initiatives focused on:
 - globalization;
 - information security;
 - process visibility, compliance and control;
 - global brand equity.

Tactical MarComm goals

In order to attain the high-level business benefits referenced above, global MarComm operations must first achieve a more tactical set of near-term goals, which are as follows:

- To synchronize releases of MarComm outputs for global concurrent product launches.

- To eliminate late promotional support of FirmCo products in international markets (in launch and throughout product life cycles).
- To minimize duplication of effort in the creation of MarComm materials in different regions.
- To efficiently execute integrated marketing programs on a global basis utilizing the full array of MarComm vehicles in support of FirmCo products and initiatives:
 - Broadcast
 - Print
 - Online
 - Direct
 - Event
 - In-Store
 - Mobile
- To improve productivity of day-to-day MarComm teams by reducing manual, time-consuming and redundant tasks and logistical workarounds currently used to collaborate across regions and functional areas.
- To ensure proper use and reuse of licensed content and media assets.
- To increase global brand consistency in customer-facing MarComm materials.

Ultimately, achieving these goals will require the transformation of currently independent and fragmented MarComm groups into a more unified community capable of functioning on a global basis.

Guiding principles

In developing this recommendation for FirmCo, the following principles were applied:

- Supply chain management, as a model, offers significant insights into the current barriers and potential solutions for globally distributed production of marketing communications.
- Leverage current systems (where possible).
- Limit change (and disruption to FirmCo staff and operations) to those areas where it is necessary for achieving business goals.
- Create recommendations grounded in a detailed analysis of the current situation and key trends occurring at FirmCo.

CURRENT STATE

Current MarComm operational structure: USA, Europe/Asia

Today, FirmCo global MarComm operations consist of a diverse array of loosely connected teams in markets throughout the world. These teams are comprised of very talented creative and production staffs. However, there is limited and inconsistent coordination of activities among these groups. Attempts to collaborate and coordinate across the main regions (USA, Europe, Asia) and across functional areas within MarComm (for example, print, A/V, online, direct, PR and so on) rely on manual communications and time-consuming work processes (Figures 2 and 3). Examples include (a) attempts to gain visibility into assets recently created or 'in-progress' in other regions, and (b) processes for sharing the latest versions of rich-media assets across regions.

- In the first example (a), staff devote considerable time to 'working the grapevine' to gain awareness of active or recent creative work occurring outside of their own immediate areas. This is particularly important when the resources and release dates of downstream teams (such as Online and International teams) are dependent on the scheduled completion of creative outputs upstream. In addition, visibility needs often extend beyond the asset itself to associated metadata and/or specifications. For example, if a creative asset contains licensed media (such as a photograph or film clip), this will often require an additional set of inquiries

into the legal usage rights associated with an asset.

- In the latter example (b), this process typically involves the manual collection of assets (including verification of their status as 'final' versions), transfer of assets to physical media (disks) and shipment to colleagues in international locations. Upon receipt, these assets often require transformation into usable file formats that are compatible with local graphic or A/V applications. In some cases, recipients may encounter problems using rich-media files and need to re-request them in a different format (for example, flattened Photoshop files).

To date, attempts to collaborate and coordinate activities across the main geographic regions (USA, Europe, Asia) and among functional teams have fallen short of the vision set by MarComm leadership for global operations. In essence, each of the three main regions fulfills the bulk of its needs for MarComm materials independently. Other regions (such as India, China and Japan) frequently utilize outside suppliers in the creation of MarComm materials. This results in significant duplication of effort and lack of brand consistency in the customer facing MarComm materials. For example, creative MarComm outputs such as product catalogs, brochures, in-store materials, displays, print advertising and promotional videos are created independently on an annual basis in the United States, Europe and Asia. As the business and the FirmCo brand continues to expand in international markets, the demand for these types of materials is expected to increase.

Figure 2: Current MarComm operational structure: USA.

Figure 3: Current operational structure: Europe/Asia.

It is worth noting that the structure of the MarComm teams in the different regional theaters has been shaped by distinct client needs over the years. Europe and Asia have primarily focused on fulfilling the needs of subsidiaries, sales teams and distribution partners for a wide variety of communications. In this sense, these regions frequently have a more ‘distribution-focused’ orientation to their operations. In contrast, the CorpComm teams in the United States work frequently with Product Marketing teams from the business divisions as well as a variety of sales channels. In addition, direct marketing operations in the United States are highly developed and sophisticated whereas their counterparts in Europe and Asia are nascent operations.

Given the fragmentation among MarComm regions and functional areas (for example, print, online, A/V, direct, PR and so on), it is illogical to expect that this diverse collection of teams (as currently structured) will be able to function as an efficient global operation. When seeking to operate globally, today’s team leaders and individual MarComm staff are hampered by a set of tools, processes and policies designed for regional rather than global operations. First, these teams must become members in a global community that is supported by the appropriate tools, processes and policies, then they can be expected to deliver global performance and results.

MarComm process overview

In the current MarComm workflows (Figure 4) there are five basic phases of activity:

- Planning
- Concept development
- Creative execution
- Production
- Distribution

In order to serve the needs of FirmCo product divisions and sales channels, approximately 2500 MarComm projects move through these workflow phases in a given year. On the basis of a review of available project management (PM) data in the United States, there were approximately 1500 projects in PM over a recent 12-month period. Total project volume for Europe/Asia combined is estimated at 750–1000 annually.

Each of the five workflow areas (Planning, Concept development, Creative execution, Production and Distribution) involves numerous sub-processes among the approximately 175 internal FirmCo MarComm staff. These processes typically include interactions with a wide range of personnel from other FirmCo departments and external vendors (creative agencies, production houses, technical suppliers, printers, shippers, content distributors, publications and media firms, translators and so on). The work in each phase of activity

Figure 4: Marcomm process overview.

generates large volumes of documentation along with the actual rich media assets that range from photography and three-dimensional renderings to video, audio, Flash, composite layout files and so on.

In total, there are approximately 35–40 types of MarComm creative outputs (in which these rich media assets are used). During production processes, these outputs are typically converted into hundreds of different formats to meet the specifications required for use in publications, broadcast, online, direct marketing, outdoor advertising, events and in-store settings (Figure 5). These production specifications vary considerably by regions and media type. In aggregate, there are thousands of possible

combinations of specifications employed in the production and distribution of FirmCo marketing communications outputs.

In fulfilling the demand for these MarComm outputs the functional teams are currently burdened with numerous manual processes and significant logistical workarounds. Examples include the following:

- Time spent searching for assets in a myriad of local storage sites (share drives, disk libraries and caches, local team repositories) in order to fulfill requests for specific versions of assets.
- Time spent re-editing and re-proofing creative work owing to the reoccurrence of

Figure 5: Current creative output categories.

- copy errors or outdated phrasing that can persist in creative outputs over a period of months or years.
- (c) Difficulties ensuring that outgoing assets comply with specifications and licensing restrictions before (mass) distribution.

For operations within functional areas and within regions, these are primarily latent pains that FirmCo MarComm staff overcome through sheer talent and hard work. However, when the organization seeks to execute integrated campaigns on a global basis (involving extensive, time-sensitive coordination among different regions and functional areas), the pains created by current systems become more acute.

Given the anticipated future growth in international markets and the fact that executing 'integrated' campaigns is a powerful marketing technique without which FirmCo will be at a competitive disadvantage, we expect that this problem will only grow in magnitude if left unaddressed.

In that scenario, key barriers to global efficiency and effectiveness will persist:

- How will we coordinate our schedules globally in order to minimize delays or lapses

in MarComm support of products in international markets?

- How will we create high quality marketing communications that work for the world, but are not made generic in a way that compromises their effectiveness in regional markets?
- How will we mitigate legal risks from the proliferation of digital rich-media?

In the current environment, MarComm teams have not been able to overcome these problems. The potential negative consequences from these issues come into focus through an examination of the composition of MarComm projects completed in a given year. On the basis of a recent sample over a 12-month period, 20 per cent of MarComm projects were related to new product launches and the remaining 80 per cent focus on 'life cycle' marketing. (*Note:* It is likely that the percentage of Launch-related projects will be higher in future years, depending on the level of new product activity in the company.)

Among these 2500 projects, there are frequently 'time critical' dependencies related to the delivery of MarComm outputs by a scheduled deadline (Figure 6). For example, in a concurrent product launch scenario or in seasonal marketing activities, failure to meet scheduled delivery dates has significant adverse

Figure 6: Time critical projects.

consequences for the success of the project. A conservative estimate would be that approximately 50 per cent of all MarComm outputs have a 'time-critical' nature.

In the context of global marketing initiatives (such as new product launches), the mandate to avoid these negative consequences produces the following outcomes:

- International MarComm groups are forced to chart an independent course of action and to create duplicate versions of MarComm outputs to satisfy client needs in their region (these outputs may or may not be aligned with brand positioning and messaging in other regions).
- Localization and production time lines for International teams seeking to re-use assets are extremely compressed, resulting in:
 - the treatment of outputs as 'rush' projects in which the FirmCo high quality standards are compromised in order to satisfy client needs in the region;
 - inability to efficiently manage labor and supplier costs in the region.

It is important to note that Marketing and MarComm teams are currently evolving and improving processes for global product launches in an effort to better align schedules across regions for the development and release of marketing communications (Figure 7). It is the goal of the DAM initiative to support and extend the success of these new processes. In particular, the DAM application infrastructure will be designed to extend process efficiencies deeper into creative

development and production workflows on a global basis.

FUTURE STATE

Role of DAM

Given the high volume of projects and wide array of processes occurring within MarComm, we expect that the goal of transforming MarComm into a more effective global operation will be a complex, multi-year process. If pursued strategically, DAM can function as a catalyst for regional MarComm teams to fully embrace the vision of MarComm executive leadership for a more effective global community.

Stages for community development

In the long term, the FirmCo may choose to deploy a far reaching digital infrastructure. However, given the current state of the marketing communications at FirmCo, it is recommended that the initial stages of community development focus on achieving the following (Figure 8):

- The creation/launch of a global MarComm repository for rich-media asset management.
- Provisioning MarComm teams with digital tools for conducting globally integrated campaigns. This will include real-time global visibility into
 - projects, schedules, work-in-progress assets, specifications.
- Digital services that support more efficient localization and on-demand fulfillment include
 - translations processes;
 - portals for self-service access and distribution:
 - dynamic assembly and adaption of creative outputs for subsidiaries, distributors and dealers;
 - in some regions, this may include ordering of assets utilizing SAP for transactional processes.

When viewed on a process maturity scale from 'Laggard' to 'Best in Class', the development of these core capabilities in a 3-year time frame will elevate FirmCo global

Figure 7: MarComm activities missed opportunity.

Figure 8: Stages for community development.

MarComm operations to a mid-point on the development scale (Figure 9).

Future content creation processes

A principal tenet of the future MarComm Community (as envisioned by the global

leadership) is the ability to collaborate on a global basis in the content creation process. The role of the DAM, in the near term, will be to enable community to achieve the level and form of collaboration defined by MarComm leadership (Figures 10 and 11).

Figure 9: Community maturing scaling.

Figure 10: Future global content creation process.

Global MarComm community development

On the basis of the vision established by MarComm leadership, the global community will initially encompass operations in the Americas,

Asia and Europe. Subsequently, it will extend to emerging international markets such as India, China and Japan. The transformation of global MarComm operations to this new global footing will require a range of work that extends well

Figure 11: Further regional content creation process.

beyond the implementation of DAM applications and technologies. This community-building process will also encompass:

- organizational changes;
- emergence of new functions and new processes within MarComm operations;
- development of community policies and guidelines;
- best practices, training and application support;
- shifts in relationships with other FirmCo departments;
- measurement, analysis and reporting.

In particular, the launch of a Content Services Group and a traffic function will be important elements in the community-building work. The table and chart given in Figure 12 introduce a range of high priority areas that will need to be addressed. (Note: A more detailed framework and sequence for community-building project work is covered in the companion 'Roadmap' document.)

Best practices, guidelines and policies in the future state

In the early stages of community-building, MarComm's global leaders will need to regularly

Figure 12: Community framework.

convene (for example, through global summits) to exchange ideas, develop global creative solutions, innovate and refine effective workflows, codify best practices (Figure 13). These ideas, solutions and best practice guidelines must then be leveraged to engage personnel in the current ‘loosely connected array of MarComm teams around the world’. In effect, the ideas become a primary means of motivating ‘global thinking’ and ensuring a high-level of participation in the global community.

Given the challenges inherent in frequent global travel, it is recommended that the exchange of ideas and development of best practices be supported by using Web-based tools (such as Web 2.0 portal functionality). As new ideas emerge, these types of Web-based tools will be instrumental to codifying and

converting them into the raw materials needed for training and education. The global DAM system itself and a dedicated global training function will provide the two primary avenues for disseminating these best practices, new workflow processes and policies of the future state.

Additional near-term capabilities

Without a DAM platform, an effective means of global collaboration and synchronized MarComm creation and distribution processes will be extremely difficult to attain. However, the potential benefits of a DAM system are not limited to enabling collaboration and process improvements. The range of capabilities gained from implementation of a global DAM can be summarized through the CIMDM model given in Figure 14: Create, Ingest, Manage, Distribute

Figure 13: Best practices-future state.

and Measure. It is important to note several of the more tactical benefits:

- Efficient access to shared assets: MarComm teams currently lack a central repository that provides efficient access to hundreds of thousands of assets. This includes effective search tools for retrieving and re-using digital assets as well as the ability to maintain master versions of assets that reflect the latest work and creative development.
- More effective management of usage rights and other legal clearances associated with assets: MarComm teams often lack information about the rights and legal clearances for the use of an asset. Without this information, there is significant risk of legal liability. The global DAM platform will mitigate the misuse of assets by providing users with a means of efficiently retrieving contractual information and high-level metadata associated with specific assets. This

will also include electronic embargo of digital assets as needed and watermarking or tagging of assets with electronic disclaimers as required by US and local entities.

- Ability to apply metadata to sets of assets through automated practices (minimizing manual input of metadata). The need for associating metadata with assets extends beyond rights and licensing issues. Lack of access to other forms of metadata (such as production specifications, schedules, budgeting information, media placement information, recent usage and so on) also plays a significant role in the inability of MarComm teams to effectively manage assets and work together on a global scale.
- Ability to efficiently move assets across organizational (network) boundaries: MarComm teams frequently encounter difficulties in both distributing and receiving assets from colleagues, partners, suppliers and clients. Key boundaries include:
 - movement of assets to and from one functional role to another (for example, from Electronic Media to CorpComm to Online);
 - movement of assets to and from international regions (USA, Asia, Europe, Latin America and so on);
 - movement of assets to and from external suppliers such as production vendors, printers, media firms and so on.
- Transformation of assets into usable formats in local environments: A contributing factor in the inability to share assets across functional/ regional boundaries is the issue of technical/ creative formats. The need to re-format digital assets to different file formats and sizes limits their re-use. Currently, graphics applications are not standardized among internal MarComm groups, much less among external partners, suppliers and clients. This creates the need for transformations to a wide variety of file formats invoking the needs for global standards.
- Enhanced visibility of routine PM processes, such as schedules, approvals and real-time status of assets. This includes utilization of electronic job jackets to collect and disseminate specifications for assets in development.

Figure 14: CIMDM modeling.

- From a business requirements perspective, the key capabilities to be gained from DAM fall into the best practices frameworks as given in Figure 14.

Near-term benefits realization

Quantifying the full impact of benefits from the global DAM will require reliable metrics in three areas:

- Efficiency gains
- Cost avoidance
- Incremental revenues

Efficiency gains

In estimating the efficiencies to be gained from a DAM platform, routine processes and frequent interactions among functional roles were analyzed through in-person research conducted directly with 20 different functional MarComm teams in the United States, Asia and Europe. Participants included core creative and production roles as well as more specialized teams (for example, translations, PR and so on), high volume suppliers and in-house legal counsel. Estimated benefits from efficiency gains

and reductions in the duplication of creative content are based on the current output volumes (no increases in the volume of work were factored in). Benefits that required too many assumptions to generate a reliable savings estimate were excluded.

On the basis of this analysis, the efficiency gains in the United States, Asia and Europe are estimated at US\$9 000 000 over a 6-year period. Efficiency benefits for other targeted areas (India, China and Japan) have not been formally analyzed to date and are not included in this estimate.

Cost avoidance

In terms of cost avoidance, there are two primary benefits:

- A reduction in the financial exposure to legal disputes.
- Elimination of the need for MarComm departments in international locations to invest in additional regional DAM projects, extranets and possible personnel.

Legal disputes resulting from the use of assets (such as photography, movie clips, audio clips and so on) without clearance by legal occur

with varying frequency. Over the past year, approximately 6–7 disputes of this nature have arisen. The financial penalties from each dispute ranges from very minor settlements to extensive ones (not including personnel costs or any additional fees for outside legal counsel). Owing to the unpredictable nature of this benefit, it was not included in financial benefits estimate in the ROI calculation.

Similarly, the cost savings that will be achieved by addressing existing technology needs for DAM and extranets in Asia, Europe and other regions were not included in the *Total Benefit* estimate. Nonetheless, before the global DAM initiative both Asia and Europe were in the process of actively planning to expend significant resources in implementing regional solutions for DAM and extranets. Moreover, Europe and Asia have readdressed their plans to invest in local DAM and extranet solutions in light of MarComm's global approach and their support to this initiative.

Incremental revenues

We believe that the product divisions and sales channels around the globe will benefit from improving 'time-to-market' and the timely availability of strategically aligned creative outputs. In essence, global DAM-based access to rich-media assets will yield higher financial return on the creative outputs developed by MarComm teams.

One example of this surfaced in initial conversations with India in early 2007. At that time, India's visibility MarComm's creative assets were estimated at 20 per cent. It was also estimated that, with greater access to MarComm assets, India would be able to refresh the look of their stores more frequently and benefit from increased foot traffic and enhanced perception of the brand. Revenue growth resulting from a global DAM was estimated at 0.5 per cent of sales in China and India. The financial impact of this revenue (plus savings from decommissioning existing servers) was estimated at \$600 000 annually.

Another area of financial benefit is in the global equity of the FirmCo brand. On the basis of the most recent Corporate Consumer Research study focusing on global brand equity, *brand consistency* is a key factor in the company's

ability to influence consumer behavior and the choices that buyers make in the marketplace. The report cites 'Brand Stewardship', 'Maintaining FirmCo Essence & Values' and the ability to integrate a wide variety of media types into marketing campaigns as key important contributing factors in achieving strong brand equity among consumers on a global basis. Any financial benefits resulting from improved brand consistency were *not* included in the financial benefits estimate.

Additional benefits

Finally, there are several active initiatives at FirmCo to which DAM can be a significant contributor, such as the Confidential Program. The asset protection provided by DAM for rich media information sources will provide the Information Technology team with a powerful tool in support of confidentiality. Another initiative that will be positively impacted by DAM is the development of Print On Demand/Integrated Fulfillment services. Legal contract management (currently under consideration) is another area in which DAM may be useful. Finally, the integration of DAM with SAP offers opportunities to leverage the company's investment in this enterprise technology in the near future. These additional benefits were *not* were not included in the financial benefits estimate.

On the basis of the anticipated Technology Strategy and architecture for DAM, the estimated expense over a 6-year period will be \$6 000 000. As the Technology Strategy is finalized and the key components of the technical architecture are identified, the total expense estimate will be adjusted based on the needs for IT infrastructure, software licenses and hardware, maintenance and professional services. Additional costs resulting from the need to retain new FirmCo staff will also be included in the total investment estimate. Finally, the total investment requirements will be subject to the specific capitalization and expense strategy that FirmCo employs.

On the basis of the total benefits estimate and the investment requirements described above, this initiative will yield an Internal Rate of Return (IRR) of 26 per cent for FirmCo. The basis for this ROI analysis was developed with direction from FirmCo corporate finance members.

Figure 15: Long-term vision.

Long-term vision

Until this point, the focus of this article has been intentionally limited in scope to the development of FirmCo MarComm in the next 3 years. It is worthwhile to review the development path for FirmCo MarComm given a longer time horizon.

Beyond the 5-year window, the development path for FirmCo MarComm lies in overcoming a set of limiting factors that are technological and organizational in nature. Breaking through these barriers will enable FirmCo to more effectively leverage the talent and resources in its global MarComm community (Figure 15).