CIO Insight

This DAM thing ...

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INTRODUCTION

Saul Alinsky was a social activist who organized the poor, the disenfranchised, and the scattered voices of discontent and unified them to action within American democracy in the mid-twentieth century. He was very good at going into a community and empowering different groups to effect change. A believer that conflict is the omniscient force driving change.

Change means movement. Movement means friction. Only in the frictionless vacuum of a nonexistent abstract world can movement or change occur without that abrasive friction of conflict.¹

Digital asset management (DAM) hasn't become part of mainstream corporate culture. It is a movement, a subculture, misunderstood and scattered. Yet today, companies of all sizes are making significant capital investments and dedicating countless hours to digitize their assets to find a way to systemically organize and distribute them. Some have reaped the benefits of integrating a digital workflow into their environment reducing costs, increasing productivity, and monetizing their assets. Most have failed.

The reality is that you cannot implement DAM without much investment of time and capital — the former, by far, the biggest investment — and a good dose of conflict. It won't happen any other way, not yet. So if you aren't willing to endure a long journey full of barren deserts, plenty of mirages and scorpions nipping at your toes, then don't waste your time or your company's money. DAM is a journey not a destination.

In any journey you need to know where you're going: you can't fly by the seat of your pants. You need a good map and a compass — the map is your plan; the compass is your business conscience. In this paper, we're going to grab a snapshot of the DAM journey.

The move to digitize, organize, and distribute media began more than a decade ago, predominantly in print production and it now covers all rich media including audio, video, and online content. Driven by the desire to produce and distribute content faster and cheaper and potentially create new revenue streams, the digitization of media arguably makes sense. DAM is the system that pulls it all together.

There are basic phases to a DAM implementation. They rarely happen the way they should and when an investment in DAM misses any of them or they are not executed effectively problems occur, often terminal.

The key phases of DAM integration are: *executive sponsorship, getting intimate with the business, designing your digital workflow, the business case, the integration, quality assurance, and the future.*

EXECUTIVE SPONSORSHIP

Before getting started you have to present the concept of a DAM solution to the key operational decision makers in your organization. Organizations are different in size and structure but the key players are typically in the form, or some form, of the COO, CFO, and CIO. These are the key individuals needed to get things rolling.

A common mistake here is that a great sell job

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is made for DAM. Executive sponsorship is overwhelmingly received, monies are set aside based on the unsubstantiated snowball you threw at them and the disaster begins. In reality, this is a necessary first step but the most insignificant.

At this point, executives will typically press you on how much *this DAM thing* is going to cost. You can't buckle under the pressure. Getting support from the key executives is your pass to get into the trenches and learn the business. You want to get their support to learn the business — get time from the key business groups and clearly identify the costs, the opportunities, and whether or not this DAM thing is right for your company. A way to get around that pressure is to provide DAM case studies of what similar companies have done.

GETTING INTIMATE WITH THE BUSINESS ... TOYS LATER

This is the phase of the journey we typically don't do a good enough job at on a couple of fronts. First, we don't learn the business well enough to fully understand the cultural changes needed to implement a successful DAM solution. We tend to gravitate to the groups and people we prefer to work with and not the ones that are difficult to work with. We learn the business as it relates to software functionality as opposed to learning the business and designing a holistic solution that is people and workflow centric — the technology being an invisible aspect of it.

Secondly, we don't learn the business and develop a DAM solution that fairly considers changes and the evolution in the business.

Getting intimate with the business, inside of it, is how you make it work. Intimacy is not a quickie. And it is important to note you can't source out intimacy. Consultants have their place. They are there to consult, not own and not do what *you* should be doing. In fact, in any of the parts mentioned, consultants should advise and augment, at most.

Finding the "ultimate asset" in your company is the starting point. The ultimate asset is what your company produces and what every DAM system should be built upon. In book publishing it's a book; in advertising, it's an ad (print, TV, radio are secondary properties). Understand what the ultimate asset is; what the workflow is that produces it; what the ancillary pieces are,

what the costs are and what opportunities there are for efficiency in the production of that asset. This process may also generate new revenue opportunities.

A good tactic to avoid these pitfalls is to make no technology considerations during this phase. It's okay to get an understanding of the players in the DAM space but that's it. It is almost the norm that companies during this phase make some investment in DAM software and hardware which inevitably leads to problems later on. "We just want to go out and buy the software to get our feet wet" or "I don't want to lose the monies that have been set aside for DAM." If you are responsible for approving the monies for DAM in your organization, don't do it!

Another important piece of getting intimate with the business is getting grass-roots support. You have to evangelize DAM to the people who will mostly be affected by it. Getting executive and management support is not good enough — in fact, it's a recipe for hardship and often failure (I know, I've made that mistake!). You may discover that there are key people who are unconvertible and will be major roadblocks to successfully implementing DAM. This is when you need to get the support from management to put those individuals on course or remove them. It sounds harsh but if the champions of DAM are the technologists in your organization and not the business groups who will be mostly affected by it, frankly, it's better not to do it.

This is the most important phase of a DAM implementation. If it is done correctly it is a win-win — regardless whether your company invests in DAM. In learning the business, you get the various departments interacting; you find inefficiencies in the workflow and duplicate costs that no one was aware of; you discover new revenue opportunities and you begin to transform a culture's way of thinking into a new and better way of doing things. All without spending one dollar on software or hardware. How's that for ROI!

DESIGNING YOUR DIGITAL WORKFLOW

Designing your digital workflow aka redesigning your workflow is probably the best way of putting it. Once you've achieved a good

level of understanding and have documented what it takes to produce the ultimate asset along with the costs and opportunities you are ready to design your new workflow. The startling revelation that you will discover is that the better job you've done at studying your business, the easier and faster the remaining phases will come. The worse job you have done, the longer the other phases will take. It is an amazing correlation that holds true in every instance.

During this phase, you're finding where technology fits and where it does not. You're really digging into the technologies and what investments are going to be required. You're establishing the vision and have a clear understanding of how to achieve that vision. Remember to start small and think big. You have to set your standards high. Ultimately, a successful digital asset management system has to produce the ultimate asset cheaper and faster. The bonus is making money.

THE BUSINESS CASE

The business case is underrated and misused. I've seen business cases that read great, proved a case in words and did not come close to matching up to reality. Often they are prepared by the wrong individuals, are deceptive and make good kindling for the fireplace.

A business case is not a template you fill in; it's a narrative of what your world is all about. It's an autopsy and a resurrection. It's a collaboration in its preparation, delivery, and approval. It is objective, unbiased, and the apparatus to measure how good of a job you've done.

Let's leave it at that. There will be much to detail on building a successful business case in future articles.

THE INTEGRATION

It's game day. Start small and think big. You are really integrating a new way of doing things. You are changing a culture — remember that change brings conflict. DAM is about changing the way people work, not integrating software. The better a job you've done on the previous phases the better chance you've of experiencing an evolution at this stage as opposed to creating a revolution.

Several pieces are key in this phase: a solid project plan, the project team, the steering committee, and regular communications.

There is much to cover in this phase but we'll save that for future articles. The one thing that should be highlighted is that the integration must have a solid project plan. The project plan is a contract between the project manager and all of the parties involved in the integration. It is built by the team; it is not done without their input and commitment. This way everyone knows what is expected of them, when it has to be done and why. This way, withstanding an act of God, you never miss a deliverable date.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

A quality assurance (QA) practice needs to be put in place to measure the system's performance, the integrity of the data and ultimately the user experience. In fact, effective quality assurance is built upon the present and evolving user experience.

Quality assurance is the most common piece completely neglected in DAM integrations. The result of not having good QA leads to data integrity problems that snowball and systems that do not evolve with the changing business. Ultimately, this results in antiquated, unusable systems that have to be scrapped.

THE FUTURE

We see where DAM is today and it's hard to ignore that opportunities are boundless. When asked where I see DAM headed, the one inevitability is that in the next three to five years DAM software vendors, as we know them today, will not be around. DAM software will be modules in enterprise resource planning (ERPs). It will be tightly integrated into the accounting systems and core business systems, as it should be, and offered by the major ERP vendors. Several of them have made failed attempts at DAM in the past because they built a standalone solution as opposed to one that is tightly integrated.

This DAM thing isn't going away. Whether you become casualties of the battlefield or victorious DAM warriors, it's exciting to watch and be a part of this moment in history. Like it or not, the world of media is changing. The way

we produce and deliver all types of content will differ dramatically five years from now. There will be those that resist change and those that push it forward and somewhere in between good things will happen. In everything you do, keep your feet planted in the present and your eyes fixed on the future.

I'll close with a quote from someone that many consider to be man of all men and

leave you with a thought, a humbling one at that:

Life is tough. It's tougher if you're stupid.

John Wayne

Reference

1. Alinsky, S. (1971) "The Purpose", *Rules for Radicals*, Vintage Books, New York, NY.