How DAM supports the localization of international marketing communications

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Keywords: *metadata, international roll-out, print collateral, DAM, language management, automatic pagination, workflow management*

Abstract In our search for more accountability in marketing and marketing spending, we constantly look to the cost-effectiveness of centralizing marketing responsibility. But centralization in an international context also means less local communication, or at least less localization. Is this the price we want to pay? Ideally, we need a local, controlled feel for global managed brands. Previously, the necessary technology wasn't available, and this was still a dream. However, integration between the most powerful DAM systems, workflow management tools, and automatic pagination, is now at a stage where these dreams can come true.

INTRODUCTION

How can digital asset management (DAM) help you in the localization of your business message? And what are the problems a DAM system has to solve? Let's have a look into the global marketing communication challenge and how to localize it into the different parts of the world.

GLOBAL VERSUS LOCAL

Looking at the marketing of corporate brands, globalization has been the major trend of recent years. Globalizing brands means building global corporate identity and global management teams. The more we globalize, however, the more we see the benefits of localization,

such as cultural identity and strength.

Global means optimizing cost, enhanced control, and maintaining brand unity. Global can also mean less responsive to local needs, however, hence less localization of assets and processes and not fitting seamlessly with local markets.

As local marketing highlights respect for local culture, local flavors, languages, and specificities, should we therefore return to the trend for "local?"

Do we live with the paradigm between local and global, as a yo-yo going first to global and back to local until the next trend for global? Or, can we solve this contradiction and have the best of global and local worlds?

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Yes, by managing the digital supply chain we can! A DAM system integrates users, assets and workflow in such a way that the central level can set the premises and degrees of freedom. A DAM system also integrates processes between corporate marketing divisions, agencies and printer. Scaling this to international level, means scaling to multiple possible collaborations. Enterprise DAM solutions will keep control by tracking users, content and processes. Local teams take responsibility for the localization, but headquarters sets the rules. Together, they will have a fast and performing localization of company HQ marketing.

Let's examine the consequences of localization: going from global to local means managing complex structures of countries, languages, product sets, technical requirements and cultures.

Every international roll-out of marketing materials or product sets, runs through a process of labor and cost-intensive localization: product sets are selected or modified from a master product set. Image material, brochures and catalogues are translated and reprinted — every item being manually re-worked at local sites.

As a result of all this manual work there is a huge throughput time, a tremendous cost, and often-important lost opportunities due to late arrivals of the materials at one of the many stages in the process. Since corporate headquarters impose the necessary rules to safeguard the integrity of corporate identity, the localization goes through a massive amount of validations, signatures and paper or mail workflow. This complex workflow merely consists of sending lots of files for validation to different players in the process.

Often, the whole cumbersome process

is partly duplicated to meet the needs of today's multi-channel marketing environment.

The basic functionality of every DAM system provides the ability to organize assets and users. But is this enough to manage the overall roll-out processes? To manage the tension between corporate control and local needs? In order to manage a full and controlled roll-out, we will need more from our DAM system: resources management, resource control and dashboard functionality.

Let's examine the basics of a roll-out: rolling out means pushing your digital master through the digital supply chain. Creation forms the first link of this digital supply chain, archiving the results in your asset management system the immediate next link. Driving your digital supply chain means driving to the end of the output channels (see Figure 1).

All individual processes start with the creation of the master material — a process, described by Michael Moon of GISTICS, as forming your *digital master*. This digital master is driving the process of reuse and represents the long-term value of your product, product line or company. So, what characteristics of a

Figure 1: Driving the digital supply chain means driving to the end of output channels

DAM system should we include for international roll-out and multinational management, to support all the links in the chain and enable diverse players to work to deliver a common but localized message?

Certain basic features should be present before using your DAM as the platform for your roll-out. To support your international presence, your DAM system should include the following features, *as a minimum*. Although seemingly obvious, not every DAM system includes these in its basic functionality.

- *Dictionary management to ensure consistent presentation:* though English drives the software market, it doesn't drive employees all over the world. And if you want to be sure that an asset with the metadata "strawberry" is found by a French employee, there should be an automatic link to "fraises" — the French word for strawberry — when this search string is used.
- *Support of international character sets:* as the USA and Western Europe share the same character set, it is easy to forget that Eastern Europe has something like five or more different character sets. Managing international marketing roll-out should at least include the correct printing of local character sets. And what about Japanese, Chinese or Arab character sets? Does your system support these?
- *Platform and client independence* is perhaps the last "obvious" one, but if your system requires client software, it will also be high maintenance, and cost-intensive. And if your DAM system doesn't work transparently on both Mac and PC, it will have the greatest difficulties to be your well-respected single source roll-out platform.

Assuming these basic features are present, we can return to our supply chain for international roll-out. This supply chain is driven by its content, the users of this content, the process itself and the dashboard we build to follow up on the process. Rolling out HQ-materials into local offices means that the DAM system allows users to reuse HQ-content (your digital master) through a certain process while HQ keeps control of it.

Using DAM technology for managing roll-outs means that content, users, processes and dashboards should be digitized. If we can bring these four items into our DAM system, we have a management system allowing us to drive and scale our international roll-outs.

Let's look in detail to see what our DAM system should be able to handle before you can make it the leading platform for international roll-out:

- *Content issues:* storing and archiving content in an international context will require specific system features and processes to safeguard the content availability for non-native speakers.
  - *Does it allow any file format?* Roll-outs exist for multiple types of assets, eg brochures, video clips, catalogues, etc. The fewer formats supported, the less probable the system roll-out will gain management support. DAM systems should accept any file, any format, and any extension.
  - *Does it make previews and thumbnails of all existing and future formats?* If not, your system will not easily gain user acceptance as the leading and overall system for starting and managing the digital supply chain. More than a description, the thumbnail and preview form the

- basis of browsing information and finding the right asset.
- *Are you free to key in any metadata you want?* Or, do you live with limits in metadata information, text strings; can you extract metadata for translation and import into your dictionary? International metadata have a tendency to become long lists of unstructured information, so can you restrict the choice of metadata to a preset catalogue of metadata? And can you point to a dictionary for metadata information instead of keying in all the single key words in every single language? Will your “strawberry” tag come up, when someone is searching for “fraises?” And vice versa: when this multi-lingual content is uploaded to the dictionary, is every preset meta-keyword transparently available for any user in any of the defined languages?
  - *Is your system scalable?* Scalable on servers, processors, users, records, attributes per records, databases etc. International enterprise systems have more users to manage and have a tendency to go to more attributes per record, more metadata per record, etc. Do you have such a scalable system?
  - *User issues:* looking to worldwide asset management means taking into account that the countries where the fastest growth is localized do not have English as their mother tongue. Even if management does, the daily operational system users will certainly not. Your system should have a multilingual setup. Further, it should allow you to integrate new languages easily, without significant costs.
  - *Language management:* more or less every software system allows you select your language during your profile definition. Is this as far as you can go, or do you have the flexibility to manage the interface linked to its profile, the mail and error messages; and if so, can you independently manage the metadata? Or is metadata of one language locked into the profile of the user? Being German, can I find our “strawberry” asset, using the French “fraise?” A number of companies use a specific vocabulary where certain words no longer have any direct link to the parent language. These words should still be available in the dictionary for everyone. Language management is key for worldwide acceptance. But with an incorrect set-up, it will cost you huge amounts of money to manage users’ profiles, interfaces, and metadata and menu structures.
  - *Profile management:* rolling out your digital master through your multinational company will mobilize the same profiles and functions in every country. Can you manage them as a whole group? Attributing the rights to the complete profile instead of the individual user? In an international context, you might want to centralize the profile creation, but leave individual user management to your local organization.
  - *Delegation of user management:* can you delegate user management? Can you separate profile management from user management? Can you centralize the profiles and delegate the user’s management? Does your software integrate with other systems, already providing user management? Can you finally

integrate your asset system to a more global single sign-on?

- *Process issues:*

- *Auto-pagination:* assets are the basis of every pagination process. Classifying these assets should allow you to integrate them in an auto-pagination process, included in, or integrated with your DAM system. There are two, basically different, processes: catalog pagination and brochure making.

Catalogs are more straightforward and allow you to choose one master template for a whole set of data. The process in itself can be completely automated. Compared with the manual workflow, layout and pre-press costs vanish. On an international scale, your DAM system should allow you to select your dataset for the region and the template for the language you want. To create an attractive catalog, you should use a powerful scripting language to manage empty spaces, moving boxes, floating text, etc. Avoid using a proprietary software system, where the final output of the DAM system cannot be opened with InDesign or Quark, as this will make it impossible to add the eventual finishing manual touch.

Brochure making is in itself less complex, but the process allows for more variables: do you start from an existing ID/QXD file? If so, which are the boxes and text, which can be modified? And which user profiles can be modified? With or without pre-selected assets to choose from? The whole process can be driven through a web interface, avoiding the need for InDesign or Quark competences in your (operational)

marketing department. Changes in the brochure are changes in boxes, assets and text, where the pagination is managed by the system in the background. The output of the system can be supplied to the printer via FTP.

- *Workflow management:* the automation of the workflow itself is an often forgotten step. If you want HQ control for worldwide roll-out, these processes should not only be defined, but also quite rigidly embedded into your software system, preventing users from freely manipulating your corporate identity and digital master. To have this workflow as a benefit and not as a hassle, it should be fully automated and integrated with your DAM system. With an automated and predefined workflow, people should have less work, not more. Workflow management, such as keeping track of actions and logging them on dashboards for later display, should be invisible for the operator. The workflow is a play between users and assets, both known to the asset system. Effective automatic tracking and tracing activity on this level, will greatly facilitate the subsequent retrieval of data on deadlines, assets derived from the digital master etc.

- *Dashboards:*

- *Managing the digital supply chain means managing virtual processes.* As a manager, you don't want to hear "I will be ready," "I'm taking care of ..." "Oh, I am very busy ..." etc. You want to hear factual information. Good dashboards, built on users known in your DAM systems, content organized in your DAM system, and processed, traced

and logged in your DAM system will provide you with all required information at any detail or level. Dashboards are maybe the easiest part in the DAM system, as long as your DAM system allows logging at any level. Not only are records of assets are archived, but all the moves of the users, the changes of status of assets, the history of an asset, the version management, etc. Any known user, manipulating a registered asset in a traced process should result in highly detailed dashboard at any management level.

GOING FOR COMPANY BENEFITS

Whatever the name of your system, whether digital asset management, marketing asset management, marketing resource management, it should help you to achieve the company goals faster and in a more efficient way. Bringing your graphical supply chain to a digital supply chain, is about decreasing time to market, elimination of costs and enhanced management control from headquarters to more locally.

- *Decreased time to market.* The decrease in time to market is not only due to automated processes as such, but also due to enhanced control. At every level and every moment, one can check where a process is stuck and what the reason may be. The invisible hurdles become very visible in an automated process flow. And if you can gain a week for a product with a one-year lifecycle, you increase your revenues by 2 per cent!
- *Elimination of operational cost.* Automating the pagination processes and digitized

distribution will reduce operational cost. In addition, changing from graphical expert user to a standard office user, working through a browser on a Quark or InDesign file, will drive down the cost of full-time staff required.

- *More control on the digital master.* By restriction and logging of use, you have perfect HQ-control on who has used the digital master, and how. By restricting access to only the few people really needing access to the high-resolution files, and by managing automated processes, it is possible to restrict use to template-driven procedures. With a pre-selection of images, operated through a web browser interface, you can prevent original images being touched. This is particularly interesting for managing dealerships, needing marketing information and wanting the freedom to define their own marketing materials. You can push them to a web-driven interface, with pre-selections. You give them the choice for the templates and the final asset, but your HQ keeps control of the master template and the web-process driving the composition of brochures, flyers and subsets of catalogs.
- *More budget available for creativity and development.* Cost savings on administration procedures and labor-intensive tasks, will open new horizons on budgets available for creativity, better branding and better campaigns. The purpose is not to cut marketing budgets, but to allocate funds to the more revenue generating tasks: better branding, better presentation, and better communication.

Let's not forget that cost-cutting doesn't drive our businesses. Innovation on products and their branding does!