Cycle Time

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SUPPLY-CHAIN STRATEGIES FOR CONTENT

This column will extend our examination of digital asset management (DAM) as a cornerstone for executing digital supply-chain strategies for enterprise content.

In the previous column, we addressed how the application of DAM to national intelligence agencies (eg MI6 or CIA) speeds the transformation of digital multisensor intelligence assets into finalized end-use insight packages. In particular, we analyzed a digital supply-chain strategy for automated signal acquisition, format standardization, content analyses and delivery of multisensor intelligence packages to battlespace commanders, homeland first responders and strategic decision makers.

Let's start with the definition of supply-chain management and extend it to digital content. Supply-chain management strategies pivot on a simple idea: the weakest link in the chain constitutes the primary constraint to success, ie on-time, at budget transformation of raw materials and knowledge into finished goods that meet or exceed customer requirements.

Content supply-chain strategies

identify and resolve various constraints to success. Figure 1 depicts four common, persistent constraints to revenue production among publishing and content commerce firms.

Each of these factors contributes to a revenue suppression system, an unwitting but real "default" strategy that typically bubbles up from individual workgroups and political fiefdoms. A supply-chain strategy for digital content constitutes a systematic, integrated approach for integrated "good" workgroup automation with a unified technical infrastructure and business strategy.

Weak processes entail the lack of end-to-end process integration of supply (raw materials, media assets, copy text, etc) to customer requirements and market demand. The lack of uniform line-item detail reporting of workflow activities, collaborations, hand-offs and transactions results in overall process blind-spots: stuff happens and no one know what, when, where, who, or how it happens. Consequently, process owners have little or no process quality-control data by which to identify weaknesses, nor when to act in a proactive fashion. In the end, weak processes promote no

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Figure 1: Four common, persistent constraints to revenue production among publishing and content commerce firms

accountability for achieving desired or expected business results.

Insufficient collaboration among key contributors produces delay and work of lower quality, reflecting the nature of large, geographically distributed teams that must nonetheless coordinate myriad production activities. Coordination entails hundreds or thousands of peer-to-peer interactions and communications, which is difficult to achieve across multiple time zones and locations. Extensive reviews, commentaries and approvals of work-in-process become the primary “speed bump” or constraint on productivity, resulting in time delays, overtime and staff burn-out due to pressured deadlines and late night catch-up.

Orphan content constitutes digital files that an organization has lost or misplaced, demanding that potential users spend extra time searching servers and CD-ROM libraries, or abandoning the search and recreating the needed graphic or template. Orphan content highlights insufficient centralized collections of media assets, templates and

referable final-form content, as well as inadequate search technologies capable of retrieving pre-existing media assets or templates. These inadequacies compound a larger, more expensive problem: version control and the ability to maintain parent–child relationships between a source file and its derivatives and renditions. Orphan content results in massive duplication of effort, needless direct expenses and inconsistent one-off expressions of the brand voice.

Islands of automation entail the legacy of bottom-up workgroup and departmental technical systems that maintain proprietary interfaces, formats and file standards. These workgroup and departmental systems do not often interoperate, sharing process and activity data. Consequently, when one system breaks down, problems cascade downstream, often requiring extensive manual intervention, the need for physical monitors and needless costs. The largest hidden cost of these nonintegrated systems lies in lack of responsiveness to market opportunities, missed sales and disappointed customers.

STRATEGY MARSHALS SCARCE RESOURCES FOR MAXIMUM ADVANTAGE

Classic management theory states that strategy constitutes the practice of marshalling available resources for maximum competitive advantage.

The internet has dramatically expanded the number and diversity of resources available to a firm. Consequently, strategists have had to expand their notions of strategy to include managing these internet-based or enhanced resources. Interactive customer relationships have altered several market dynamics, expanding the scope of competitive advantage to include lifetime customer value, share of wallet, lifecycle requirements and preferred communication modes and formats. Auction and secondary market platforms such as eBay have stretched brand equity to include the economic-utility lifecycle of consumer or industrial goods — where increasing numbers of customers buy early in a product lifecycle, use it for a few months and offload the slightly used product in an online auction market for 50 per cent of its purchased price. To summarize the impact of the internet: customers demand more and want to pay less; product lifecycle continues to shrink; worldwide innovation drives the collapse of product lifecycles; small, nimble business operations attack historically high-margin markets without mercy; larger firms must counterattack or die a death of 10,000 niches (pun intended).

Figure 2 depicts a comprehensive framework for an enterprise content strategy, emphasizing how to marshal content resources for maximum competitive advantage. This strategy holds for both primary content firms

(media, entertainment, publishing, e-commerce) and secondary content firms (products and services).

Execution of an enterprise content strategy maximizes revenues and valuation through four value drivers. Supply-chain management of enterprise content constitutes the primary objective of IT resources.

Faster cycle time entails producing higher quality content with less time, effort, mistakes and costs. *Time to market* emphasizes how quickly a firm can identify aggregated or individual customer requirements, develop an appropriate offering and bring it to market. This speed often requires that a firm master the art and science of collaborative solutioneering — how to collaborate with existing and prospective customers, as well as key third parties, consultants and trade partners.

For most firms, the product launch has emerged as the defining event for marketing and product management — where investments in new products and market creation become most evident and political. For these reasons, an enterprise digital services platform must support an entire content supply chain and the capture, codification and propagation of best practices for reducing time to market for major launches.

Time to synchronize multichannel resources at various brand touchpoints and buying opportunities emphasizes how best to facilitate buying decisions. The synchronization of “land, sea and air” assets of a marketing campaign means that the single voice of a brand spans the entire spectrum of the media and channels used. In practical terms, this synchronization often requires the collaboration of marketing managers

Figure 2: A comprehensive framework for an enterprise content strategy

and their channel partners as they develop point-of-sale experiences that help customers buy a featured product or service. Often, collaboration now means giving channel partners access to a marketing portal, self-service tools and final-form marketing content.

Time to customerize emphasizes the technical capacity and logistical capability to transform content and digital services into brand stories, promotions and channel provided self-service satisfactions of customers. This

process may include rapid localization of content and digital services to a particular culture, language or ethnic group. It may also include the customization of content and digital services to a particular distribution channel, season or marketing opportunity, such as a trade show or exhibition. Finally, it may entail personalization of content and digital services to individual customers, using data from customer information or accounting systems to personalize

photos, illustrations, proposals, order forms and presentations.

Operational transparency entails better controls of all workflows and processes, using statistical process control data and analysis-driven management-process disciplines. In previous columns we discussed this in greater detail, suggesting that the DAM master adopt a manage-process framework such as capability-maturity model integration. In the case of a digital supply chain for enterprise content, operational transparency emerges from a process engineering discipline widely practiced in the chemical and petroleum refinery business.

Fuller market coverage entails more extensive cross-media publishing workflow-automation and the provisioning of on-demand version to individual customer or just-in-time production of publications driven by late-breaking news or new market insights. In future columns we will examine this in a more comprehensive fashion.

Supply-chain management starts with the integration of core publishing processes. Integrated processes yield data and analysis-driven insights leading to

vendor consolidation and strategic sourcing of direct and indirect costs, including spot-market labor.

A well-executed enterprise content strategy maximizes revenues and overall valuation of the business operations by increasing an organization's utilization of its physical and digital assets, reducing operating costs, producing new revenues and enhancing customer value.

In this column we expanded on previously discussed ideas of digital supply chains and the role played by DAM. We emphasized the role of an enterprise content strategy in the identification of sales prevention fixtures of publishing and content operations. The successful execution of an enterprise content strategy begins with DAM and related automated publishing workflow technologies. Taken to its logical end, enterprise content strategies bring forth supply-chain management of content, emphasizing systematic, ongoing reduction of content cycle times and costs, while maximizing coverage of multichannel markets.

Digital supply chains will be explored in depth in Volume 2, Number 4 of this Journal.