

What is Digital Asset Management?



WHAT IS DIGITAL ASSET MANAGEMENT?

A business process for organizing and managing rich media and digital assets...

Digital Asset Management, referred to as DAM, is an increasingly important tool for organizations that are serious about protecting and growing their brands, controlling the costs of creating and distributing their rich media content, and maximizing the return from their digital media assets.

DAM is quite simply a business process for organizing rich media assets such as pictures, images, video and audio for storage, retrieval and distribution. Many organizations rely on DAM offerings to provide the much-needed centralization, workflow optimization, virtual collaboration and digital media management and distribution solutions that are becoming an increasingly demanding requirement.



DAM is Forever!

This is the main differentiator between DAM and other content platforms such as enterprise content management (ECM) and enterprise marketing management (EMM). With DAM, the value of digital assets is realized over time, unlike more traditional digital content such as standard documents and records that have a limited lifespan.

A significant distinction is that DAM solutions specialize their function in support of rich media content as well as significant support for the management of related metadata and workflows.

DAM essentially acts as the foundation technology, becoming a "digital hub," providing files to the rest of the enterprise applications that use them.

A defining factor of DAM systems versus other enterprise applications is that the software is primarily employed by creative users, such as artists, photographers, video editors, marketing and advertising professionals. Therefore, DAM systems must integrate seamlessly with creative authoring applications, allowing the user experience to be streamlined, simplified and easy to use. This leads to a unique design where system complexity is hidden as much as possible and great lengths are taken to ensure minimal impact in the creative workflow.

At the same time, however, the value to the enterprise of the content being managed means that features found in traditional enterprise applications, such as rights and permissions, data validation and auditing are still required.

What Are the Benefits of DAM?

Organizations that have installed a DAM system typically receive benefits. Once adopted, the benefits are large.

Digital media management and distribution. DAM systems provide organizations with a central repository for all digital assets in a single department or across an entire organization, enabling the efficient organization, indexing and distribution of digital assets. Advanced DAM systems provide a distributed architecture and multisite asset storage, as well as the ability for multiple repositories to self-synchronize both the asset as well as information about the asset (metadata). Archiving, indexing, search and retrieval, ingest, browsing, annotation, repurposing, collaboration, display and transport of rich media are all features of a comprehensive DAM solution.

Security. A robust security model ensures all data is stored safely. Features here include secure file management, watermarking and LDAP support all of the purposes of controlling access to the high-value rich media files of the enterprise. Cost savings. ROI gained through the ability to locate files instantly instead of spending time manually searching or being forced to create the file again from scratch.

Entirely new revenue streams may become apparent, such as providing high-value content to other businesses or consumers via a Web portal (online libraries), or building new business opportunities around the storage of customer content (ad agencies).

Consistent messaging and branding. With built-in revision controls, asset repurposing and approval processes, DAM systems enable organizations to maintain consistent use and re-expression of all material, from brochures to corporate videos to content posted to the company Web site. A DAM system is the most cost-effective way to ensure consistent and real-time expression of graphical elements, documents and messaging across multiple departments or external communities.

Global Web-based access. Organizations looking to distribute content via the Web, whether for internal or external use, can use DAM systems to provide browser-based access to digital masters or other types of licensed assets, ensuring global 24-hour access to content. Advanced DAM systems also provide additional asset ordering and fulfillment modules and can easily integrate via XML gateways to existing e-commerce or transaction servers.

Asset licensing. DAM systems can provide self-service access for internal and external users to order digital assets, eliminating the administrative efforts needed to distribute content.

Digital rights management. By setting user privileges and release dates on content, organizations can limit asset leakage and control usage rights and restrictions based on the assignment of roles and asset groups, thereby providing effective digital rights management. Advanced DAM systems provide both asset and user level privileges and can also support event and time-based triggers that can dynamically change security settings as project or user parameters change over the life of an asset or collection. Some DAM systems provide a complete "cradle to grave" audit history that tracks every transaction of modification of assets or user. In addition, DAM systems can support external watermarking or asset encryption technologies.

Content creation. DAM systems provide efficient review and approval cycles for new and updated content, including immediate distribution once an asset receives final approval and dynamic updating to assets as they are changed or retired. Advanced DAM systems also support a host of third-party transformation engines, which automatically create multiple renditions or proxies from a single digital master. Many organizations recover their return on investment on DAM systems from the simple but financially compelling elimination of unnecessary or redundant asset reproduction.

DAM Implementations

A robust, comprehensive and flexible DAM solution should provide customers with the ability to customize and deploy a solution that supports a wide variety of uses, including:

- Marketing content management,
- Brand resource management,
- Broadcast automation and post-production workflows,
- Sales force automation,
- Media enhanced e-learning,
- Video-on-demand repository,
- Multi-channel publishing,
- Personalized publishing on-demand, and
- Preservation and archive management.

Type of DAM Solutions Available in the Market

Enterprise DAM Systems

The largest and most comprehensive type of DAM system provides complete, enterprise-wide support with a broad range of functionality and configurability. Typically these DAM systems are configured uniquely to support specific customer workflows, provide branded user interfaces and integrate seamlessly with other enterprise systems such as fulfillment systems, authentication systems, transaction servers or Internet portals.

The DAM system is installed on a customer's hardware and has dedicated administrators ensuring its smooth operation. What separates these DAM solutions from departmental systems is the ability to support multiple databases or distributed repositories as well as distribute specific application services on dedicated servers in multiple locations.

Workgroup DAM Systems

The second type of DAM system is best suited for both smaller organizations and departments, and organizations with specific requirements (such as a distribution portal or digital media archive). These DAM systems tend to cost less and are easier to configure. In general, they can only support one database and therefore lack the ability to scale, distribute application resources or support multiple repositories associated with larger enterprise systems. DAM systems that are positioned for departmental use, but lack a database, secure file system and/or rely on desktop-based file sharing should not be used for mission-critical data.

Hosted (ASP) DAM Systems

The third type of DAM system is a hosted, Web-based system provided via an application service provider (ASP). ASP-based DAM systems are hosted on the provider's hardware and administered by the provider. The initial startup cost for an ASP-based DAM system tends to be lower, but represents an ongoing financial commitment to the customer and typically requires a 12-month minimum contract. When considering a hosted system, another important criteria to consider is whether the data and metadata can easily be migrated to other systems and/or whether the hosted environment can be easily and cost effectively converted to an installed software platform.