



Building The DAM

A simple, defined workflow is essential for digital asset management.

By Matt Kinsman

Digital asset management is a process in which a secure central repository helps streamline the creation, management, organization and monetization of digital assets. As publishers pursue a multimedia approach, the distinction between “print” and “online” content grows blurrier—an element that’s used in the magazine one month may be perfect for the magazine the next.

But organizing that data so it’s immediately accessible by all approved users, and not scattered across proprietary servers for “edit,” “sales,” “marketing,” etc., requires a shift in workflow process that is a software (read: philosophical) issue, not something that can be solved simply with the latest DAM technology.

“There are two aspects to DAM: the technology and the business process,” says Matthew Bennett, director of strategic publishing operations at Hachette Book Group. “The business process is more challenging. Most of the technology is pretty turnkey and not much customization is required. The tough part is getting a workflow in place around the business. Where in the process does art need to start exposing their work to the rest of the world? When do we allow a manuscript to be released? Do your printers put the final assets into the system or do you do it yourself?”

Establishing a Process

[Meredith Corp.](#) produces about 41,000 pages of content and 200,000 images each year. While the publisher re-uses many of those assets, it didn’t have a reliable system to track its assets and approximately 20 percent to 30 percent of its content and photos “were left on the cutting room floor,” says chief technology officer [Tina Steil](#).

In 2003, the publisher implemented a five-year plan to develop a “creative library.” Meredith allotted total capital investment of \$3.7 million as well as a plan to break even in one year and see a positive return on the library within three years. “The library is an ever-evolving thing, just like the industry as we bring on new platforms and try to take the traditional publishing mindset into the new world,” says Steil.

And new content like video adds complexity to the asset management process because video is a composite asset, with pictures, audio and even rights issues around music featured in the videos. “Initially, it was more like situating cover assets and having them available for work in progress but over last few years focused on getting more upstream in that process and providing more best practices,” says Steil.

Hachette Books has used DAM provider [North Plains](#) since 2000 and has creating a final asset repository it calls “The Final Truth.” “That means we can take an asset and put it in a final repository so end users down the road can get to it easily,” says Bennett. “Previously, we had things on CDs, we had things on share drives and on local drives. Now we have everything in one place and it’s Web accessible. Now any user who needs a cover for a fax sheet can go in and grab it and they know it’s the latest approved cover image. The whole thing is so we have real control over what assets are available. If you don’t have that final repository and you have an element that’s under embargo, that’s not going to be visible to the general audience.”

The most successful implementations are the ones that are the most simple. “Never underestimate the change in the management business process element of this,” says Bennett. “DAM will turn your world upside down, whether it’s Day 1 or Day 3,000. There are so many different ways people can work with it that you really need to nail it down with standard operating procedures. If people don’t update metadata correctly, nobody else can get at the data. If you don’t have a properly controlled vocabulary, people don’t know what they’re looking for.”

Make sure management sees the big picture with DAM implementation. “Senior management is always looking at asset security and wondering is everything in the right place at the right time, can I recover if there’s a disaster, and thinking about whether they’re ready for the digital future,” says Bennett. “But when trying to convince these guys to do this stuff, the real questions are, how many phone calls a day do you get? How many phone calls can you reduce, how much time can you spend doing your real job rather than acting like a librarian? That’s when the process change comes in. How do you get people to do what they’re good at while allowing other people in the organization to do self-service.”