

Digital asset management

Formulating a digital asset management strategy

Is your organisation getting maximum value from the images, music, video and software distributions that it owns and uses? If not, it's time to think about putting that situation right.

THERE IS a common misconception that digital asset management (DAM) is only of concern to certain types of company: publishers, broadcasters, record companies, film studios and other 'media creators'.

That may have been true at one time, but these days, many non-media companies are also benefiting from better management of their digital assets. In fact, we'd go as far as to argue that any company that uses graphics or media needs at least to be thinking about DAM.

As analysts from IT market research company Gartner point out: "Enterprise DAM is for everyone who uses graphics or media at all, and every web page uses graphics. Such organisations are not necessarily engaged in the creation or sale of graphics or media as a product; they include nearly all those with a web presence or any investment in brand or corporate identity assets in any medium."

In fact, the Gartner analysts argue, a lack of focus on managing digital assets can quickly become costly for organisations that have substantial hidden investments in web graphics and design. Photography and graphic design are expensive, and audio or video production more so. Although many corporate workers have the skills and responsibility to create corporate text documents, media creation is a special skill that is often provided by expensive contractors or a limited in-house staff.

By Nigel Atkinson and Giles Blackburn

You will increasingly find yourself reading about digital asset management (DAM) as it transitions from a system add-on to a strategic IT solution. This workshop introduces digital asset management as it applies to the enterprise and offers a strategic review framework for establishing and meeting the needs that your organisation has in this area.

Defining DAM

We shall begin by clarifying what we mean by enterprise digital asset management. But before we can do so we must first define what we mean by a digital asset.

Investopedia.com provides the following definition for the word 'asset':

"A resource having economic value that an individual, corporation or country owns or controls with the expectation that it will provide future benefit."

This definition clearly highlights the three core attributes of an asset: economic value, ownership or control; and the expectation of future benefit (see *figure one*).

A digital asset is an asset that exists only as a numeric encoding expressed in binary form. Or, to be slightly less abstract, as computer storage files. Images, music, video and computer software distributions are all examples of digital assets.

It is important to note that, in enterprise DAM, we are only concerned with managing the finished product, the asset. Works in progress are better managed by domain-specific management solutions.

Enterprise digital asset management is about gaining maximum value from these valuable resources, with the key aims being to:

- maintain a record of ownership and location of digital assets;

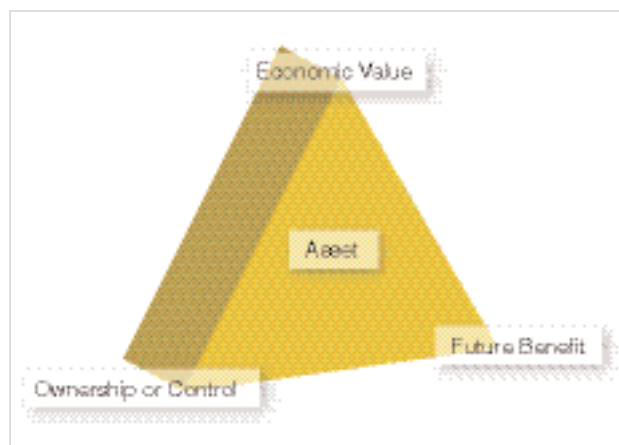


Figure one: Anatomy of an asset

- protect the economic value of digital assets and rights;
- maximise the future benefit of digital assets and rights.

Digital asset management infrastructure should be distinct and complimentary to related systems, such as web content management, document management and publishing systems. Integration between systems can, in many cases, optimise the value of an enterprise DAM solution (see *figure two*).

Is this something that you should be considering for your organisation? The answer to that question is certainly yes, if your organisation:

- Cannot say for certain that it is not paying a number of times for the rights to use a particular asset;
- Does not know if it is breaking licence agreements by using assets in ways that it does not have the right to;
- Does not know if its own assets are being used by others without agreement/payment;
- Does not keep track of where particular assets are stored;
- Is not able to easily find digital assets that it owns or has rights to in order to re-use them;
- Does not know how much it is costing to store and manage the same assets many times in different places;
- May lose valuable digital assets in the event of a major systems failure.

If any of these statements apply to your organisation, then you should consider whether there is a business case for DAM through a DAM strategic review process. There are four stages to this.

Phase 1: Classify your organisation

The first phase in this review process is to classify your organisation according to its interactions with digital assets. The digital asset ‘eco-system’ is made up of four different classes of organisation. However, a single organisation may fall into multiple classifications (see *figure three*).

Asset creators are content producers: design studios, record labels and film

studios. This type of organisation creates new assets and feeds them into the eco-system. Digital assets are often the core business of this class of organisation, so DAM may be a business critical function.

Asset creators are likely to focus on these areas of digital asset management:

- Syndication;
- Rights distribution tracking;
- Access control;
- Version control;
- Metadata management;
- Storage management;
- Disaster recovery.

Asset agencies, meanwhile, broker content. These include stock image agencies, online retailers and film distributors.

This type of organisation manages and distributes assets within the eco-system. Digital assets are the core business of this class of organisation, so a centralised digital asset management system, integrated with commerce, procurement and accounting systems, is vital to cost-effective operation. Asset agencies are likely to focus on these areas of digital asset management:

- Asset acquisition management;
- Rights ownership management;
- Access control;
- Syndication;
- Rights distribution tracking;
- Metadata management;

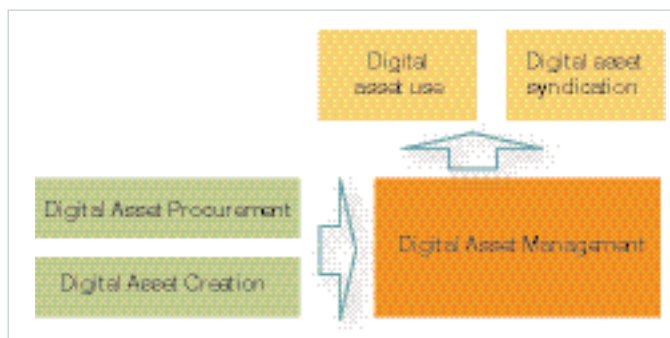


Figure two: The enterprise digital asset management landscape

- Storage management;
- Disaster recovery.

Asset consumers use content: marketing agencies, broadcast production companies and movie theatres. This type of organisation is an end-point in the asset value-chain within the eco-system. Digital assets are critical to the core activities of this class of organisation and the ability to quickly locate assets is essential. Asset consumers are likely to focus on these areas of digital asset management:

- Rights ownership management;
- Asset acquisition management;
- Asset access;
- Access control;
- Version control.

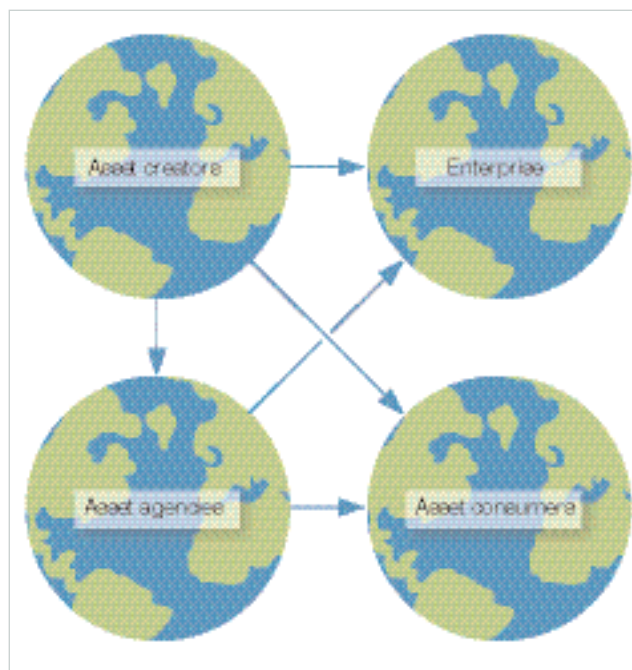


Figure three: Digital asset ecosystem

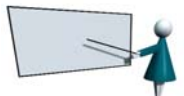


Figure four: Key functions of enterprise digital asset management

Finally, most *enterprise organisations* consume assets. However, asset consumption is generally a function of secondary activities, such as use in promotional materials. This type of organisation deals with low volumes of high-cost and high-value assets. Enterprise users are likely to focus on these areas of digital asset management:

- Asset acquisition management;
- Corporate guideline enforcement;
- Asset access;
- Access control;
- Version control.

Classifying your organisation according to this simple scheme enables you to focus your review on the most appropriate DAM functions (see *figure four*) and to determine the most likely asset related external interactions for your business.

After all, each of the classes of organisation within the digital asset ecosystem has slightly different DAM requirements. These requirements may be satisfied through a combination of these key digital asset management functions:

- Infrastructure management
 - Syndication: The mechanisms through which assets are syndicated in digital form;
 - Storage management: Management of storage requirements for the digital asset archive;
 - Disaster recovery: Tracking of assets to ensure that they are recoverable after planned-for disaster scenarios.
- Archive management
 - Asset acquisition: Management of the addition of assets to maintain archive quality;
 - Metadata management: Ongoing management of asset metadata to support external processes and systems;
 - Asset access: Systems, such as search engines and taxonomies, facilitating access to support people and systems seeking specific assets for re-use;
 - Asset version control: Maintenance of multiple versions of assets, where required.
- Compliance
 - Rights ownership tracking: Tracking of rights to managed assets to ensure that they are not used in a manner inconsistent with rights owned;
 - Rights distribution tracking: Tracking of rights transferred to third parties to ensure that assets are not unlawfully exploited;
 - Access control: Ensuring that assets are only made available to authorised individuals;
 - Corporate guideline enforcement: Helping to ensure that corporate standards and guidelines are adhered to by centralising control of corporate assets.

Phase 2: Identify needs

The second stage in the strategy review is to examine each of the DAM functions suggested by the classifications into which your organisation falls. This should be a consultative process, involving

stakeholders responsible for IT, business and legal functions.

A helpful and tangible starting point for this review is to perform an inventory of existing DAM systems or system components used within the organisation.

Many content management systems offer asset and image libraries; design and branding agencies frequently provide online brand books; and there are probably numerous intranet or shared drive based resource libraries deployed across your organisation (see *figure five*).

It is important to make this inventory as comprehensive as possible; the organisational DAM strategy can easily be undermined if it is not capable of replacing or integrating existing systems and processes. The inventory should describe the capabilities, users and contents of each existing system.

The output of this review is a comprehensive set of needs that must be met by the DAM strategy. These needs should be quantified in terms of direct benefits, such as potential cost savings and new or enhanced revenue opportunities. Less easily quantifiable benefits, such as licensing compliance and the enforcement of corporate guidelines should be prioritised and, where possible, a monetary value attributed to each.

Phase 3: Detailed business requirements

At this stage, having defined areas of need within the organisation, we begin to build a picture of the detailed business requirements. The process of defining business requirements must be driven by consultation with the personnel who will ultimately interact with any resulting DAM implementation. The requirements will not address technology issues at this stage, but should detail key functional requirements, interactions with existing systems, soft issues, such as the technical competence of staff, and use cases for key tasks and processes.

The complexity of business requirements for each function should then be weighed up against the value projected earlier in the process. This provides a useful 'reality check',

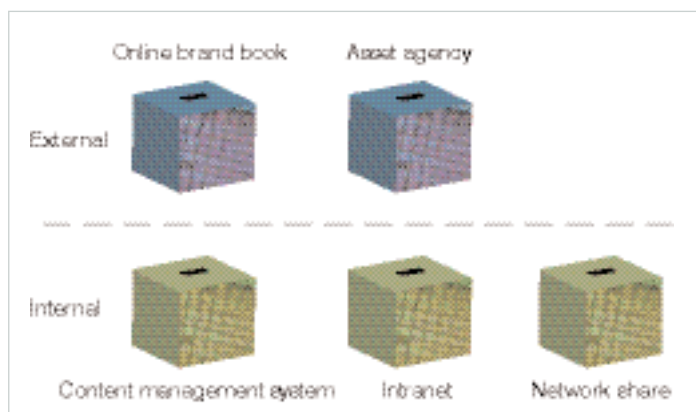
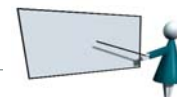


Figure five: Common digital asset repositories

highlighting functions that require a high degree of complexity while offering little value to the business.

The outcome of this phase is a value-prioritised list of detailed DAM requirements for the business. This report is one of the key inputs into any future system design process prior to the implementation of a DAM solution.

Phase 4: Planning for the future

The final phase of the strategy review examines how organisational DAM requirements will change over

expected changes in asset usage and syndication requirements over the selected period. Ideally, this review should be performed with reference to the organisational IT plan for the same period. While this review is unlikely to forecast major new technical requirements, it can be helpful for capacity planning and may help inform integration options.

When making forecasts over this relatively long period, it is often helpful to perform a review of a similar historical period. This can give an indication of key

time. For most organisations, this is best looked at over a three- to five-year period. Asset agencies and some asset creators may also wish to take a longer term view.

The study will quantify rates of asset acquisition and creation, and detail any

rates of change and levels of innovation in technology.

The conclusion of this strategic review process is a business case for an investment in DAM within your organisation. The business case will clearly outline the position of your organisation within the digital asset ecosystem; define DAM needs, requirement complexity and value to the business; and provide a forecast for future requirements. ■

Nigel Atkinson is a director of NeoWorks, a software development and consultancy company that has worked on content and collaboration management projects for such clients as Channel 5 Broadcasting, Royal Doulton, Levi's Europe and Walkers Snack Foods. He can be contacted at nigel@neoworks.com.

Giles Blackburn is head of the digital media consultancy practice at CVL, a business development and technology delivery company. CVL has undertaken projects for a range of large retail and media companies including Argos, Entertainment UK, the BBC and UKtv. He can be contacted at giles.blackburn@cvl.uk.com.

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