

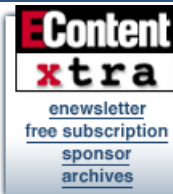


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It's a Digital World, After All: Options in Digital Asset Management

by Bill Trippe

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October 2001 | It's hard enough learning a new subject even when it's only a single acronym. But when it comes to the subject of managing digital assets, the industry can't even seem to get comfortable with less than three or four acronyms, starting with DAM (for Digital Asset Management), MAM (for Media Asset Management), and DMM (for Digital Media Management). DAM seems to be gaining the most ground, so we'll stick with that, despite its rather unfortunate pronunciation (in front of my mother you best be saying "Hoover" before that word).

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Yet the proliferation of acronyms is revealing. There are many approaches to the problem of Digital Asset Management, and many interested parties, from the giant storage-focused vendors, such as IBM and EMC, to a long list of "end-to-end" and niche DAM vendors specializing in areas, such as video, audio, and graphics management. Many blue-chip customers, including cable and broadcast networks, such as CNN, have partnered with more than one vendor to solve their DAM needs, beginning with the need for high-speed storage and networking and moving right out to the front lines where content is digitized and indexed for storage and retrieval.

Indeed, if you have recently begun looking at the issue of managing digital assets, you will encounter a blizzard of terminology and acronyms on data storage, networking, analog-to-digital capture and encoding, metadata, indexing, and distribution. One research report consulted for this article included a 12-page glossary of terms and a table of over 100 technologies that fit somewhere in the DAM mix. And that is only on the technology side. The other important consideration here is the business case for using such technology, and adopting processes and workflows that will maximize such an investment.

Going from Analog to Digital

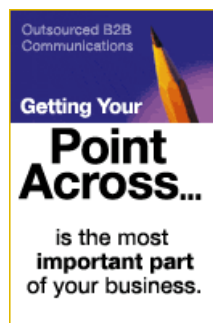
The world is going digital, as we all know. The production and management of new text, audio, and video material are increasingly digital, and new media like the Web are constantly raising the question of whether existing assets should be digitized. This is true for companies whose first business is communication, such as entertainment companies, networks, and publishers, as well as any business with a growing need to communicate with customers, employees, and other partners.

If your organization has a need to communicate, educate, promote a brand, or sell (and it probably does several or all of these), it has a need for digital assets that can support these processes. Moreover, you likely have already felt some pain from not having your assets in digital form, or, even if they are in digital form, not managing them appropriately. Consider the last time you had to provide a digitized photo and biography of your CEO, or a product brief in electronic form, or a press release in several formats. Chances are, there was some scrambling to make each of these things happen, some additional manual work, a few phone calls, and, voilà, a few hours or a day or two later, the work was done. Wouldn't it make sense to predict such needs, plan for them, make the materials available in the correct formats, and put them, for example, on a server where the right people could find them and access them?

That, in a nutshell, is the DAM problem and solution. For the average company, it affects such areas as sales, marketing, public relations, and investor relations. It can cut right to issues like the length of the sales cycle and the ability of the company to promote shareholder value. For the company that owns significant creative assets, such as a broadcast company, television network, or publisher, it goes right to topline questions like what assets are available for selling, and bottomline questions like the cost of product development.

Because DAM is right in the middle of such important issues for organizations, it is no surprise that so many vendors are looking to claim this space. The research and consulting company GISTICS focuses on the DAM market, and is projecting sales in this market to grow to over \$4 billion by 2004.

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Understanding your DAM Needs

For a company, such as Los Angeles-based Sekani, understanding requirements for DAM technology begins with developing a clear, documented sense of what your organization needs from its digital assets. Sekani has long been involved with the licensing and management of digital assets, and has expanded its business to help entertainment companies assess and document their needs for Digital Asset Management (See page 58 for a [Profile on Sekani](#). -Ed.). The first step for companies, says Sekani founder and executive vice President Armistead Whitney is to develop a "blueprint" for why and how they will use DAM. "Companies need an overarching strategy for technologies, such as media asset management," says Whitney. "They need to decide what products they want to be marketing and who their key partners are."

Sekani would argue that the DAM process begins with inventorying and evaluating the assets on hand. Many companies are tempted to plunge right into the digitization process without much consideration of precisely what should be digitized. For an entertainment company or publisher of such an inventory, consideration should be made of the normal parameters of supply and demand, what value an asset may have in digital form, what opportunities there are to market it, and so forth. For other organizations' inventory, the focus should be on how the digital assets can help in core areas like sales, marketing, and customer education and support.

Once such a plan is in place, you would need to begin the technical steps of digitizing and managing the assets. You may well face the need to digitize and manage an array of materials, including text, graphics, multimedia, and streaming media, with a goal of being able to easily access, repurpose, and distribute these assets at any time. End-to-end solution vendors, such as Artesia, with its TEAMS product, talk about the need to have a DAM product that can "ingest, index, categorize, secure, search, transform, assemble, and export" content in as many forms as you require.

Artesia's list is a good one. Once content is digitized, it needs to be made widely available to many people and processes along a variety of workflows, from the simple to the long and complex. An organization may have individual components, such as photos and sound files, as well as compound documents in word processing and desktop publishing formats, and finished goods in formats like PDF. The DAM system should be ready to ingest, store, and index these assets in such a way that they can be later found, modified, reassembled, and eventually exported.

Once exported, the assets need to be distributed, and vendors like ArtMachine focus on the distribution side of the DAM problem. According to Grant Slade, VP of marketing at ArtMachine, while some products are "very deep" in areas, such as storage and management, "We think the point is really distribution." For Slade, the DAM issue certainly involves finding, converting, and managing assets, "but the real goal is to then get the assets in the hands of the people who need them." Slade cited examples like the clothing manufacturer who needs to distribute flyers, point of purchase materials, and advertising with each seasonal turn of the clothing lines. The timely distribution of these materials can be what makes or breaks the season for both the stores and the manufacturer. Eventually, Slade sees the manufacturer moving to a self-service model where the stores will know where to go for all such materials.

So the DAM problem extends to all kinds of organizations, not just the entertainment or publishing company. Investment firm Bear, Stearns, in a report on the DAM market, wrote, "Currently, the biggest users of these solutions are media and entertainment groups, but the technology extends to any enterprise that derives benefit from automation of content-sharing workflow processes. We expect corporations, universities, healthcare organizations, governments, and other enterprises to become a larger market opportunity as the digital transition continues."

Why would these other companies move to DAM solutions? Both Bear, Stearns and GISTICS point to lower costs, faster product development cycles, reduced labor costs, and opportunities for increased revenues through additional licensing opportunities. Indeed, once an asset is digitized and properly managed, it is available for repurposing and reselling in ways not before possible. The enterprising company can develop whole new markets for products that had been effectively dormant or at least under-utilized.

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Range of Approaches

As mentioned earlier, there are many vendors with product, service, and mixed product-service offerings for Digital Asset Management. Larger, storage-focused companies, such as IBM, Sony, and EMC, offer customizable solutions and services that center on their hardware and networking solutions. Between them, these larger companies have significant installations at blue-chip customers, such as CNN, Entertainment Tonight, and Starz Encore Group. Sony and IBM, for example, installed an asset management system at CNN, allowing CNN to begin the process of digitizing over 120,000 hours of its video archive.

After the large storage-focused companies, there are a number of DAM-only companies that offer either "end-to-end" or more niche solutions. Among the "end-to-end" offerings, Artesia stands out as the most full-featured product, with support for both rich media and also a wide range of text formats, databases, Quark files, and finished goods formats, such as PDF. TEAMS is also a highly extensible product, suitable for enterprise deployment, with flexible support for many things that IT organizations are looking for like Java, XML, and contemporary programming interfaces based on approaches like CORBA.

Artesia has some significant entertainment and publishing companies among its customer base, including Time Warner, Random House, and HBO, but has also won business from product-focused companies, such as General Motors and Herman Miller.

Another company with a broad offering is eMotion, with its MediaPartner product. MediaPartner boasts enhanced features for "ingesting" and archiving assets, with a natural language search engine and project management tools to support a flexible, open workflow. North Plains Systems, with its TeleScope product, tracks, manages, and retrieves a wide variety of files. TeleScope is integrated with several commercial databases, including Oracle and Microsoft SQL server, and also offers "I-Piece" plug-ins for specialized requirements, such as digital rights management and watermarking.

More typically, though, products focus on a particular medium, and do it exceedingly well. Convera's Screening Room, for example, manages video content, and continues to add more and more features to an already impressive list. (Convera is the company resulting from the merger of Excalibur and the Interactive Media Services group at Intel.) Like many DAM vendors, Convera offers both a product and a hosted service. Toronto-based Bulldog is another attractive offering for managing video content, and integrates well with Virage's VideoLogger, which is a best-in-breed tool for cataloging video content.

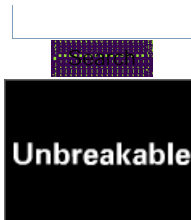
Keep in mind that many of these technology companies offer hosted services, and some companies, like ArtMachine, focus almost exclusively on the hosting end of the business. Also, many of the vendors work together to provide a "total solution," with Artesia teaming with specialized companies, such as Virage, and content management vendors, such as Vignette and Interwoven, and Bulldog integrates both Virage's VideoLogger and Convera's RetrievalWare search engine.

If you have done as a company like Sekani suggests and articulated both your business goals and your blueprint for DAM technology, you should be able to understand which offerings will be helpful to you and which will not. And no matter what you do on the technology side, the logical first step is to first inventory and understand what assets you have, and what business use you may have for them.

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What DAM Does

When all is said and done, DAM products offer some or all of the following features, for one or more of the media types you require.

- Asset Capture and Digitization**
 Includes things like converting assets, encoding them, and logging them into the system. These can also include the tools involved in the original creation and editing of the assets.
- Asset Management**
 Includes core features, such as storage, indexing, and retrieval, but can also include more sophisticated tools for security and Digital Rights Management (DRM). Storage should be flexible, allowing for the repurposing of assets over time.
- Asset Distribution**
 Includes appropriate people inside and outside the firewall, across the Internet, and people using all manner of client devices (PCs, wireless devices, etc.), as well as Content Distribution Networks like those from Akamai.

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