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You are here: [Home Page](#) » Digital-asset management: Process over product

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In the rush to benefit by repurposing digital assets, users often buy DAM products without considering basic issues that will impact their choices and results dramatically.

In planning for the deployment of a DAM system, a facility must consider many familiar in-house processes. A large, multichannel distributor may require a complex solution, but even smaller enterprises that require a less sophisticated system need to spend time planning the DAM before adopting and implementing it.

What is the ideal product for an asset-management solution? The answer is that DAM isn't a problem to be addressed by purchasing a product. Asset management actually comprises several processes within the facility that the station needs to deconstruct and understand. The first step is to identify the material that the facility values as an asset.

Caution, pitfalls ahead

There are several reasons for approaching DAM in this way. Purchasing a product without first analyzing internal processes and business objectives often results in the product defining, and thereby limiting, workflow. The proper technology should support and enable current practices as well as offer flexibility for future expansion.

Adding DAM technology without first analyzing facility workflow for redundancies and faults can be destructive. Technology will amplify a bad practice as well as a good one — automating an existing bad practice reinforces it.

Analyzing internal workflow can help a station improve existing processes before it chooses a DAM system. One challenge a facility faces is a lack of clarity regarding its existing asset-management practices.

Facilities usually introduce digital technologies piecemeal into the workflow and, as a result, asset management becomes ad hoc and haphazard. As the work environment has become a hybrid of traditional and digital technologies, asset-management practices have failed to keep pace.



KQED-TV's new, digital master control and automation system provides feeds to up to 10 channels, requiring comprehensive asset management.

Asset management in the film-centric environment was as simple as attaching descriptive notes to strips of film, which users could readily access and understand by holding up to the light. With the advent of videotape, users began writing notes or titles on the videocassette to identify its contents.

The move to digital files and server-based systems marked the beginning of an entirely new paradigm for asset management and, not coincidentally, more than a decade of confusion for operations managers and librarians. For the first time, users were forced to standardize naming conventions for their assets. A commercial or TV program was no longer contained on a videocassette that could be stored in the vault. It existed as data spread across 50 disks. Likewise, the move to server-based systems challenged traditional ways of tracking assets. If the writer slugs his story “automobile accident” and the editor writes “car wreck” on the tape, a machine-based system without significant intelligence simply can’t make the connection. Because of this, standardized language has become a necessity. SMPTE is currently developing a metadata dictionary to provide consistency.

Defining the puzzle

Many users find themselves hard-pressed to know where to begin the multifaceted task of choosing a DAM system. The best way is to think of a DAM solution as a puzzle. First, define a starting place from which to build. Identify all the pieces and “edges” of the solution. Know what the end solution looks like before putting the pieces together. Forcing a piece into place early on won’t allow the other pieces to fit in smoothly as the solution progresses. See [Figure 1](#).

The first step toward understanding DAM is to ask some basic questions. What are the in-house materials that have value? How are they valued? What are the facility’s current practices in naming them, cataloguing them and tracking their use? How does the facility keep track of when the asset creates or expends revenue?

How will the asset be viewed? Unlike videotapes, which are identified textually by a label on the cassette and box, digital assets can and should be identified not just by a text description, but by viewable proxies, ideally at different resolutions for multiple uses across a network.

The second step is to document the facility’s workflow. Follow the journey of a commercial at the TV station, step-by-step, from the moment it arrives until it goes to air. What are the processes it goes through? How is it QCed? How does it interface with the billing and traffic systems? How does the facility determine if it’s no longer in use?

If the station has dozens of copies of one commercial, it’s wasting storage space and tracking time. The same is true for versions. Re-versioning content will become increasingly important as multicasting comes into play. If assets aren’t identified early on — even before they’re produced — it may be impossible to find them or keep track of how, when and where they’ve been used. If a facility doesn’t know how to name and find an asset, its value is diminished. Identifying and naming assets early on becomes even more important with the trend of commercials and other to-air footage arriving at the station or facility electronically, rather than as physical media.

It’s also important to identify business objectives for a facility’s assets. Analyzing current and future

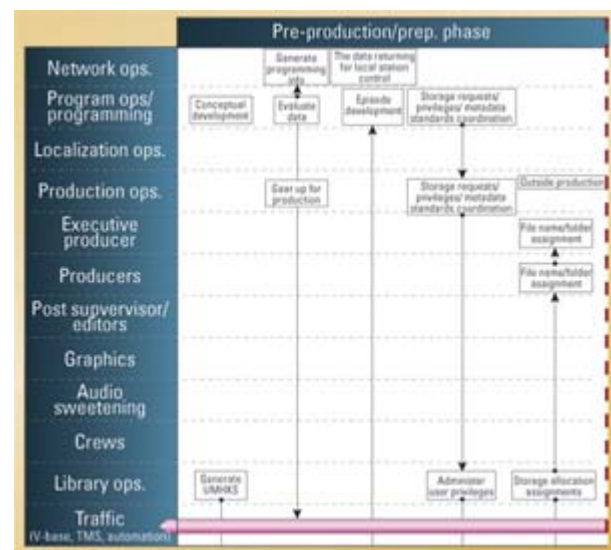


Figure 1. A diagram like the one shown here can help you visualize what might be a complicated or suboptimal workflow inconsistent with current business objectives. [Click here](#) to see an enlarged diagram.

objectives for monetizing assets, developing a roadmap for asset growth, and determining the best strategies to use will help a facility to implement a strong and scalable infrastructure.

Solving the puzzle

Once a facility identifies its assets and workflow processes, it will be able to improve the process by eliminating redundancies and streamlining its ability to track and store media. Then the facility can overlay the current workflow on the business plan and perform a gap analysis to create a conceptual solution.

Choosing a DAM solution requires a consensus among all those involved in using the assets. Several departments may struggle over the ideal workflow, redesigning it more than once. See [Figure 2](#).

Adding DAM software is an expense that has to be justified by its returns. If a station simply implements DAM as a way to automate, it misses out on realizing the full potential of its assets. In a competitive market with more and more channels available, he who knows where his assets are and can make use of them will reap the highest benefits and profits. The minute a competitor values his or her library properly, the value of yours falls.

A good knowledge of assets not only helps the bottom line in terms of cost savings, it also helps to open up new revenue streams. With potential revenue-creating applications such as interactive television, the ability to easily use assets allows for an inflow of new revenue.

Finding the right solution

Now the time has come to shop for a DAM solution to meet a facility's particular workflow needs. Does the vendor understand the station's business? Look for experience among its staff. Is it financially secure, i.e., likely to be around when needed? Does it have the staff to accommodate the facility's schedule? Are there hidden costs? Does it provide added value? Can it exceed expectations? Technology demos are good, but visiting a site with a working solution is better. Learn about the company's successes, but also learn about its failures. The vendor should be able to name the failures, describe what went wrong and what it has done to prevent such failures from happening again.

There is no shrink-wrapped solution for DAM. Solutions are complex amalgams of well-thought-out plans, networks, hardware and applications. When successfully brought together, DAM solutions save money through efficiency and increase the value of the creative content through reuse and repurposing, thus driving new revenue streams.

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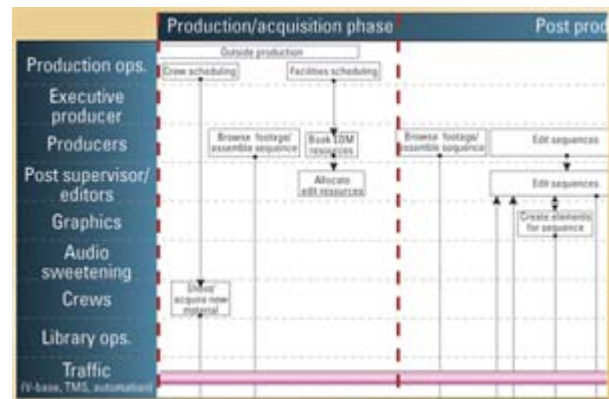



Figure 2. The workflow diagram will indicate the various stakeholders involved in defining enhanced workflow and the application of an asset-management solution. [Click here](#) to see an enlarged diagram.

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