

Datasheet 002. Digital Asset Management

Introduction

Standing out from the crowd in competitive markets has never been harder. Marketers know they need to use every ruse at their disposal to get their messages noticed and understood by their target audiences. And then there are new media coming on stream to offer yet more ways of reaching and influencing the market.

The saving grace of this digital maelstrom is that the media are converging technologically and it is now an easy and routine process to recycle and reuse material originated for one specific purpose in new, opportunistic ways. The benefits of this are obvious but to make the idea a practical reality we need a new way of storing, accessing and distributing all of the rich content assets.

Enter Digital Asset Management.

Let us consider what this is, how it works and what it means in real-world situations.

What is Digital Asset Management?

Digital Asset Management describes a system and protocol that allows diverse collections of digital material to be held, categorised, searched, shared and managed by a geographically widespread hierarchical group of people.

This means the creation of a distributed resource of digital material that might include, at one end of the spectrum, logos and logotypes along with usage guidelines on how to use them correctly to complement the corporate identity. At the other extreme the system might include digital video version of advertisements, audio streams of presentations and artwork for brochures and sales collateral.

Most organisations, perhaps without realising it, have hundreds if not thousands of digital assets. These include photographic images, video, quality assurance documents, standard documents and contracts, information sheets, specifications and presentations. These can be in any of around four hundred media file types: JPEG, Postscript, Quark, Photoshop, PDF, Real Audio, Flash, DV et cetera ranging in size from text files and web quality images of a few kilobytes to lengthy video streams or high quality artwork of many megabytes of data.

Many of the assets will have been expensively created for a particular purpose. It makes good business sense to work those assets harder by reusing them in ways that are complementary to the original application. For instance product images produced primarily for printed sales literature are easy to reuse as part of the web service and the sales collateral itself can be offered in the form of a downloadable PDF file via the Web too.

How does Digital Asset Management work?

Digital Asset Management systems are powered by centralised databases which store and organise the disparate range of material that will form the library and search index for the resource. Each asset can be assigned into categories or families that group material of similar types together. The groupings will vary depending on the markets and products in which the organisation is involved.

The database will also store information about technical aspects of the material such as resolutions for images, whether the material is in vector or raster format, languages and character sets required and the native software needed to manipulate the material.

The shelf-life of material can also be automatically controlled by setting embargo and expiry dates for assets that are time sensitive. The underlying database engine enables this information to be queried so that users can find material that could be reused saving time and effort.

Typically Digital Asset Management systems have a hierarchy of user authorisation levels with compartmentalised access to subsets of the material in line with the likely requirements of the user and the trust relationship. This allows system managers to define who can use the library, add or remove material and who administers the service. These systems are often accessible as both extranet and intranet services to diverse groups of people inside and outside the organization as well as being offered as a chargeable service to clients.

Who Needs Digital Asset Management?

Virtually every organization has thousands of digital assets, perhaps without even realising the fact. The list of assets might include:

- Your product catalogue and all the images in it
- Your logos, fonts and corporate identity guidelines
- Your sales collateral and product photos
- Merchandising materials and Point of Sale
- Brochure artwork
- Merchandising display designs and plans
- Exhibition materials, posters and displays
- Trend information and market intelligence
- Product demonstration videos
- Training videos
- PowerPoint sales and conference presentations
- Digital video and audio advertisements

This range of material might then be complicated by the existence of some material in languages other than English. Most companies do not have a method for managing these assets despite the fact that they represent a substantial investment of time and money. Because there is no mechanism for helping people to reuse the assets, each time material is needed it has to be reinvented afresh. More time; more money. The problem is compounded by the imperative to share material with external organizations such as design, marketing and PR agencies who need the assets to do their work for their clients. Huge savings and efficiencies are available by making your digital asset work harder for you. Savings on staff time wasted in reinventing these wheels and the improved consistency of image and design that results from better management are enormous benefits.

If any of this rings a bell then the answer to the question "Who Needs Digital Asset Management?" is Probably You.

The North Star Solutions Approach Digital Asset Management

Although the precise requirements of clients vary considerably from project to project we find that the issues are constants:

- Large, unstructured collections of material
- Multiple, diverse locations of storage
- Difficult access and poor search facilities
- User access control and security shortcomings
- Ownership of the resources
- Consistency of image and branding

We have developed not only a set of technical solutions to these issues but also and perhaps even more importantly we have the experience and expertise to help you to design new operational procedures and implement the new working practices.

Our package of services is comprehensive from a detailed analysis of a client's current practices, consideration of access and security, system set up and implementation, training requirements and delivery and support.

If your digital assets are giving you the run around call North Star Solutions and we will help you restore order.

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