DIGITAL ASSET MANAGEMENT | ARTICLE

THE INNOVATOR'S GUIDE TO STRATEGIC DAM REPLACEMENT OR CONSOLIDATION

Hyland™

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In the beginning, digital asset management (DAM) systems were little more than digital filing cabinets. They were a place to put completed media assets such as photographs, graphics, maybe a few animation files and even the occasional short video clip.

The content stored there had been carefully — and often expensively — crafted. Under the purview of the marketing department, the DAM was a place to curate these long-lasting assets in one place.

Over the years, most DAM systems have been able to deliver on these needs — as long as all you wanted to do was store assets for use and distribution by the marketing department. More recently, there were attempts to enable online collaboration, but it has been a slow process, especially with large files involved.

However, the world has changed and continues to change at what seems to be an increasingly rapid rate.

In the most forward-looking and successful companies, DAM is no longer just about marketing. Rich-media assets are now recognized as a foundational component of the digital supply chain that stretches across the whole enterprise. Content itself is becoming more ephemeral in nature.

Handcrafting each new asset from scratch as an individual work of art is being replaced by increased reuse of assets and a rise in system-generated assets. Video has become mainstream and new types of online media are emerging, such as 3D models, virtual and augmented reality, and even holography.

As business requirements change and new challenges emerge, your traditional digital asset management system is probably at its breaking point or has been circumvented by various ad-hoc workarounds. Without taking action, the value of your assets will remain locked in isolated systems, where they will wither away rather than make a measurable contribution to business growth.

It's time to step into the future »

EPHEMERAL CONTENT AND PERSONALIZATION DEMANDS

Digital asset management is no longer just about marketing. Content is everywhere, and people across the organization need to search, find, work with and publish content, without having to migrate everything into one system. The "single source of truth" approach is no longer tenable.

Nearly every forward-looking company has some sort of personalization objective in place to help drive customer experience improvements. While the details of "personalization" may differ from one company to another, there is one underlying commonality: The need for more modular content delivered across multiple channels — including social media platforms and mobile apps — that serves a specific need at a specific moment in time. This has replaced the more traditional long-form semipermanent content that is associated with websites or print assets.

The ephemeral content approach required for personalization inevitably leads to more content, more variants and more reuse that needs to be tracked, stored, found and recombined into something new. The only way to deliver this is with a modern DAM.

TRADITIONAL DAM FALLS SHORT

The traditional DAM is sometimes referred to as "the place where assets go to die." Despite the initial promise of collaboration, many older DAM platforms have limitations that render them unusable.

The following list explores some of the practical limitations of a traditional DAM:

- Poor to no integration with corporate permissions directory, making access to assets for anyone outside of marketing difficult

- Incomplete and inconsistent results because it relies on manually entered tags, keywords and metadata (which also affects search engine optimization when the assets are used on the website)

- Poor, or lack of, integration with web content management systems (WCMS) makes it impossible to share assets from the DAM within the CMS

- Cannot share assets with external partners, often causing the creation of duplicate assets

- Limited or no reporting functionality, causing rights management issues, compliance challenges, asset expiration date inconsistencies, etc.

- Size restraints on video and lack of video management capabilities such astranscoding, automatic tagging and playback difficulties

- Manual processes for tracking and recording of stock imagery from a third-party source and reliance on users to record and archive correctly

- Inability to bulk upload assets, causing massive backlogs, usability issues and incomplete collections

- The inevitable development of individual "workarounds" and an overreliance on other storage systems

Unfortunately, many traditional DAM platforms continue to impose complicated and time-consuming processes on the users, despite how the types, volume and accessibility needs of content has evolved.

In such circumstances, it's no surprise that users "go rogue" and create ad-hoc processes to bypass the limitations of the DAM system. When users create their own paths, they do so out of desperation. They want systems that let them find, use and produce content easily, but that's not what they have. Your DAM system's policies and procedures are designed to keep your content secure, as long as everyone follows them to the letter and handles the assets as prescribed.

When users are forced to use a DAM that's cumbersome, inconvenient or makes it difficult to complete their tasks, they'll find a workaround. But imposing more policies on outdated technology won't keep the floodgates closed.

While DAM technology has grown exponentially over the last few decades, many of the issues users face today are essentially the same — only they're a lot bigger. The way we access information has become increasingly intuitive, and the desire for speed and accuracy in virtually every aspect of work has morphed into outright demand.

Today's modern DAM technologies have finally begun to fulfill the promises of 20 years ago, with scalable content services architecture that can handle a full range of digital assets, even as asset types become larger and more complex, with more complicated metadata.

INTRODUCING THE NEXT GENERATION OF DAM

What is a next-generation DAM?
A next-generation DAM could be outlined in simple terms as meeting the following requirements:

- Cloud-native architecture
- Platform-based
- Low code
- Scalable
- API-first
- Artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities
- Integrated workflow

Next-generation DAM systems have the potential to fully power the content factory at scale.

Cloud-native architecture

Several traditional DAM vendors, especially those that target larger enterprise organizations, have recently ported their applications over to the cloud in an attempt to move away from the old on-premises, perpetual license model. While this is admirable because it moves the burden of system maintenance away from the customer, it's a flawed approach in that the architecture was never designed for the cloud — which can cause major operational issues.

True next-generation DAMs are those that are cloud-native, meaning they have been designed to be delivered via the cloud; have a modular, scalable architecture; and provide incredible performance and cost-saving benefits.

Platform-based

In today's fast-moving world, one in which content is becoming more complex, the traditional DAM-only application is too restrictive. Assets of all types need to be fully managed, and systems need to be integrated. The next-generation DAM will be based on a content services platform (CSP) architecture that allows for content handling along a sliding continuum that ranges from pure DAM at one end to enterprise content management (ECM) at the other. The reality is that every company's real needs lie somewhere along that continuum.

Low code

While traditional DAMs offer decent out-of-the-box functionality, it doesn't take long before the limits are reached and users want to do more. This invariably means customization that can only be achieved by lengthy, expensive, specialist development projects.

The next-generation DAM is designed to be configured rather than customized. A separate design and configuration environment is used that incorporates the ability to set up the DAM via drag-and-drop design, preconfigured actions and the ability to add new business logic with minimum use of code. It again follows a modular approach so that previous configuration models can be reused and revised to speed up the overall development time, leading to faster implementations that deliver real value.

Scalable

Content is exploding. The growth curve is almost exponential in nature with the proliferation of more asset types and more channels. Traditional DAMs are limited by the size of the servers they are connected to. With a cloud-native next-generation DAM, storage can be scaled up (or down) as required. Business rules can be built to manage the movement of little-used assets to less costly, specialist archiving services. A next-generation DAM will grow with you as your needs change and expand.

API-first

DAM has become the foundation of the digital supply chain across the enterprise. Inevitably, that means it needs to be integrated with business systems as diverse as human relations, training, legal approvals, regulatory review, product information management, sales and customer data platforms, as well as multiple delivery channels including web content management systems and a plethora of social media platforms.

To be fully integrated, the next-generation DAM platform needs to have an open and documented application protocol interface (API) philosophy that allows connectors and data bridges to build a true enterprise content ecosystem.

Artificial intelligence capabilities

Handling and understanding the vast amounts of content being generated has reached the point where purely manual processes cause significant delays, errors and compliance issues. Next-generation DAMs incorporate AI and machine learning (ML) to enable programmatic cataloging and metadata creation based on what's found in the assets. However, generic AI services, while a good start, are not enough. Businesses need the ability to easily build, test and adjust their own ML models based on their specific needs, and methods for introducing a human-in-the-loop process to check and refine the ML results by leveraging subject matter expertise.

Integrated workflows

Traditional DAMs require all users to work the same way. Yet that rarely matches the reality of a company's operational processes. Most companies, even those within the same industry, or even different groups within the same company, will work slightly differently. The next-generation DAM will include the ability to design and implement your workflow within the platform, but also seamlessly integrate with other workflow or project management systems that may already be in use.

WHEN DO YOU NEED TO MOVE ON TO THE NEXT-GEN DAM?

Your DAM should provide the foundation for the digital content supply chain across your enterprise. If your DAM works independently of the other applications your teams depend on to use assets both upstream and downstream of the creative processes, or if you spend too much time, effort and money to integrate those applications into your DAM, then it's time to reconsider replacing it.

The right DAM system should make your teams more efficient. Modern DAM technology automates repetitive, time-consuming processes and integrates features that make collaboration simple, direct and enjoyable. Few things kill creativity and engagement like tedium.

But it's not just about how your DAM system integrates into your ecosystem that makes moving to a next-generation DAM an important consideration.

Risk identification

Risk identification is another area where legacy DAM products fall short of today's needs — particularly as more companies look at incorporating and reusing user-generated content. With a traditional DAM, each potentially risky scrap of content must be manually moderated before it can be added to your system. You need a more programmatic way to auto-ingest and correctly tag such content.

A move to next-generation DAM doesn't change the concept of the DAM system as a single source of truth for all assets where control is easily maintained. But it does move away from the idea that all the assets need to be stored within the DAM system itself. A modern DAM should be able to search and index assets located in any associate systems. That way, users are able to easily find all the iterations of an asset, complete with the information most relevant to them, no matter where theyare physically stored.

Content creation and reuse

Creating content is no longer a simple endeavor with a few basic channels and a small number of active brand assets. Even the biggest companies want to connect with personalized content that speaks directly to the needs and identity of the individual customer. The pursuit of real-time personalization across channels at scale is a key challenge to organizations managing marketing assets in a changing technological landscape. A next-generation DAM will allow the management of this more atomic content, its relationships and its derivatives for delivery across different channels.

Think about how assets can be broken up and reassembled. To empower people to reuse, rework and automate content production at scale, think about how your systems can leverage individual components of compound assets — like the individual shots in a 360-degree product view or the original InDesign file of a PDF brochure. If you're creating content for the web, social and print, where are you storing text, HTML and CSS in a way that can be recombined and reused within and across these different systems? Asset management is about much more than images and video.

Video

The use of video in the enterprise is proliferating, and it's not just about marketing messages anymore. Video is used extensively in training and onboarding, in product and customer support, and then there are all those recorded video conferences. How will you manage those?

The growth of video is not going to slow down any time soon. The video wave is indeed rising and will soon grow into a tsunami that will smash through existing content management paradigms. Yet too often, videos get treated differently out of necessity because of size and complexity.

The downside is that video content (and the teams that produce video content) end up siloed and disconnected from the rest of the organization. If your company is moving toward a more omnichannel content delivery approach and/or needs to manage video side by side with other content like documents, image files and 3D models, requiring teams to manage all of this across multiple systems is a recipe for disaster. A next-generation DAM that can address the unique needs of video management is becoming essential.

Derivatives and relationships

Remember that assets are all often chained together in complex relationships, and many assets are derivatives of others (e.g., a Facebook ad derived from a web banner), or are inputs to a compound asset (e.g., text, image and logo combined into a brochure). Properly characterizing and maintaining these relationships is critical to avoid getting bogged down in updating the logo on 1,000 assets or scrambling to find every video that featured your celebrity influencer who just had a meltdown and became a liability.

Business objects and data

When it comes to considering if you need a next-generation DAM, make sure you're managing what's important (hint: It's probably not just images and video). Unless you're in the content business, images and videos aren't the core thing you are trying to manage. Instead, it's products, campaigns, projects, customers, deals, stores and more. Make sure you're able to represent, track, process and automate all the critical business objects that matter to you. You need to treat content and data with equal importance.

Data is the connective tissue that holds your business together. Think about how every team works with every other team when they work manually. They ask each other questions like:

- When was this made?

- Where can I use it?

- Is it available in a different size, format or length?

- Who's in it?

- What's it about?

These are all data questions.

And the data that matters to your photo studio is different than the data that matters to your campaign team, your product designers and the web team.

Each needs their own contextual data (metadata) to be represented, their own key systems (product information management, master data management, talent management, web content management, etc.) to work hand in hand with your core content system on their own terms (with their own data models).

So, the content system needs to be flexible enough to integrate and sync data in a variety of forms and contexts.
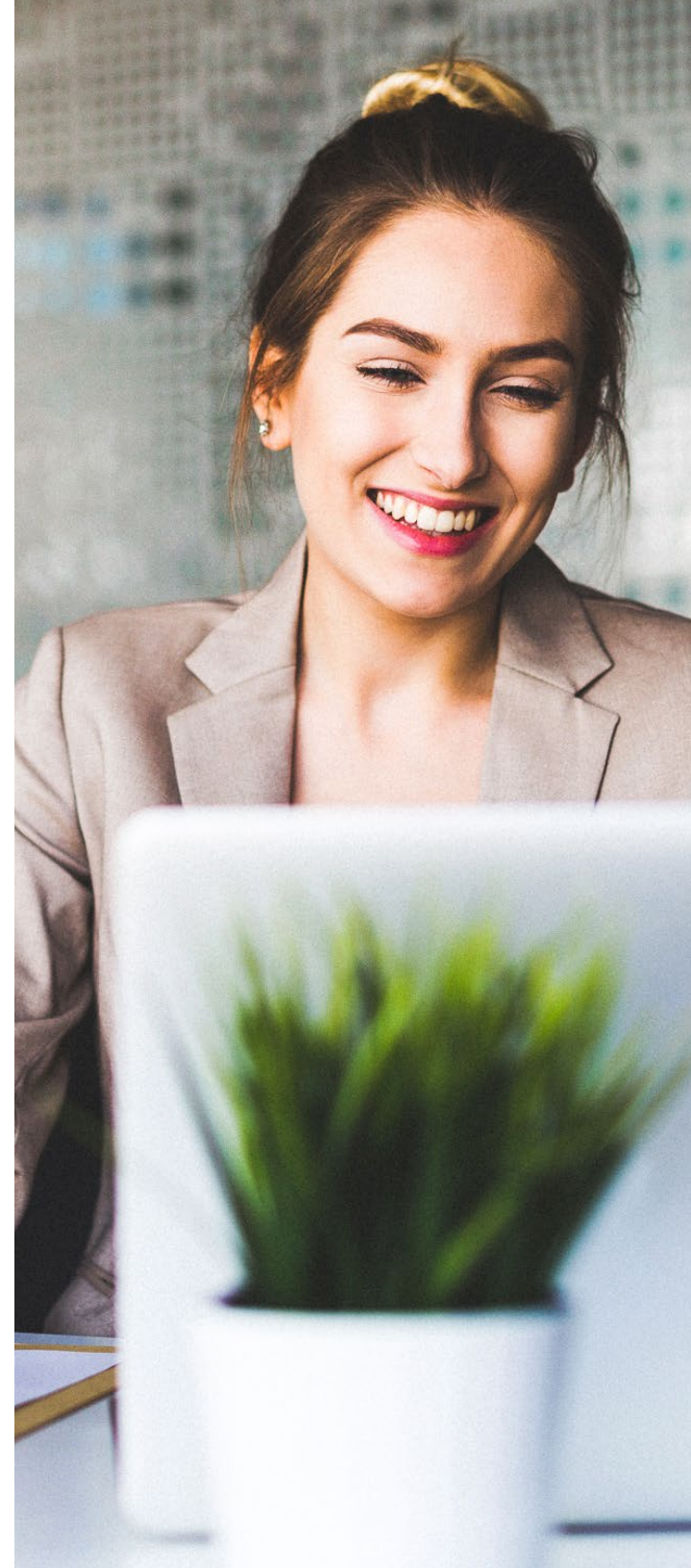
YOUR CHECKLIST

10 considerations for your next DAM:

✓ Can it manage content across multiple systems?

✓ Can it be used as more than a repository for final assets?

✓ Can it connect upstream creative and business processes to downstream distribution channels?

✓ Was it built for the cloud from the ground up (not an older application simply ported over to the cloud)?

✓ Is it based on a content services platform that can accommodate a number of different content management use cases beyond images and video?

✓ Can your needs be addressed through upfront configuration rather than expensive one-off customization efforts?

✓ Can the DAM adjust to your future storage needs? Will it scale both up and down? Make sure it has an archival strategy.

✓ Does it have a documented API, and can it only be integrated with applications from different vendors?

✓ What corpus of images does AI get its knowledge from? Can you train it on your own image library to develop your own business-specific learning models?

✓ Does it have flexible workflows that allow you to work the way you want to with the tools you want?

ABOUT THE NUXEO PLATFORM

From advanced search to enterprise scalability, flexible metadata models and configurable taxonomies, Hyland's Nuxeo Platform is ideal for complex, enterprise DAM applications where out-of-the-box solutions fall short.

The Nuxeo Platform makes it easy to build smart content applications that enhance customer experiences, improve decision-making and accelerate products to market. Legacy systems designed to manage content in an earlier era don't address today's needs for agility, global scalability, omnichannel delivery, and automated processing and enrichment. We're committed to showing the world a better way.

Its cloud-native, low-code platform has been deployed by large enterprises worldwide. Customers like Electronic Arts, TBWA, ABN AMRO and CVS have used Nuxeo Platform technology to transform the way they do business.

Learn more at **Nuxeo.com/DAM**

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