How to select the right digital asset management solution.

The expectation for hyper-personalised experiences from digitally savvy consumers has spawned an ever-increasing demand for content creation. The number of customer segments that successful businesses need to target with personalised content has grown from a handful to hundreds or thousands — and it shows no sign of stopping. And the job of creating digital experiences has expanded beyond the realm of marketers to include creative teams, IT, analysts and others. That's why investing in the right digital asset management (DAM) solution is mission critical. Every organisation is at a different point in their ability to achieve the content velocity needed to deliver personalised experiences to their ever-expanding customer segments. Likewise, every organisation has a different level of familiarity with relevant requirements and capabilities to look for in a DAM solution.

Wherever you are in your DAM journey, investing in a new solution is a pivotal decision that will have significant short-term and long-term impacts on your content creation, optimisation, delivery and management efforts. Reaching the best decision for your organisation will take considerable time and effort that will likely involve you engaging in substantial research and evaluation. To help you in that process, this guide covers some of the most important questions you should ask and issues you should carefully investigate. It also provides tips for navigating the information and targeted marketing you'll encounter along the way to help you make informed, objective assessments of the solutions you evaluate.

1. Asset integrity and efficiency.

With the exponential increase in personalised content proliferating throughout your organisation, maintaining asset integrity becomes more challenging than ever. Everyone across an organisation needs to be working with the most current, approved version of an asset. Key to meeting this need is investing in a DAM that provides central control and visibility

over assets in a way that gives you a single source of truth. A DAM that can deliver a true single source of truth prevents asset inconsistency and unauthorised changes from spreading throughout your organisation.

While many, if not all, DAM providers claim their solutions offer a single source of truth, most fall short due to an inability to support all the groups within an organisation that need to touch, use and interact with content. Supporting all of these groups requires a DAM that can inject efficiencies into every stage of the asset lifecycle. It needs to automate workflows and tedious tasks for every team with asset responsibilities in order to justify widespread adoption of the DAM as the organisation's definitive source of truth.

Too many solutions focus only on creating efficiencies in the realm of asset storage and management. For example, if a DAM can't seamlessly surface desired assets into the tools that creative teams use, creatives will go back to their old methods — whether that's storing assets on local drives or using their own cloud storage accounts. Similarly, to sustain the promise

of a single source of truth, the DAM needs to inherently enable personalisation within its own environment. If you have to send master files to an external content delivery network (CDN) or another solution to perform personalisation and optimisation, you lose central control as those solutions create multiple versions of each asset outside the protection of the DAM.

Ultimately, the DAM needs to be holistic and ensure integrity across every team that touches an asset and at every stage of an asset's lifecycle. This empowers you to enforce consistency of experience and brand across all customer segments, geographies and devices.

Questions to ask:

Does the solution eliminate asset-related workflow inefficiencies across your organisation? Will certain individuals and teams fall back to previous asset storage methods to keep or gain the efficiencies they need?

POTENTIAL GOTCHA:

DAMs that require integration with several different external solutions to accommodate the complete asset lifecycle not only increase the burden on your IT team, they also degrade asset integrity while increasing the number of potential points of failure that can halt your marketing efforts.

A DAM should be flexible enough to integrate with a variety of systems.
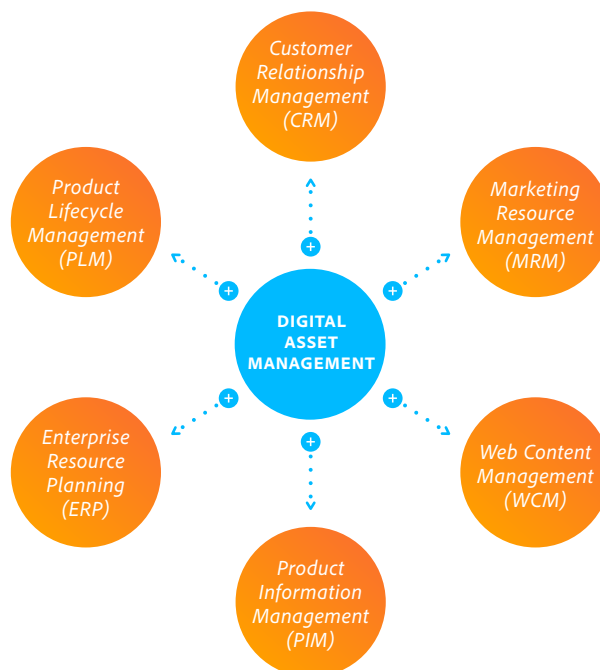
2. Experience delivery.

In order to deliver relevant experiences when the moment is ripe, a DAM must be able to automate the optimisation and delivery of dynamic and rich media. The first characteristic a DAM needs for that is the built-in capability to use one master image file and then automatically resize and reuse that image across all screen sizes and devices. This frees up marketers to focus more time on maximising the impact of segment-specific offerings. But more importantly, if you can't automate optimisation and personalisation, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to achieve needed content velocity. For example, if a certain moment of relevancy only lasts two days, but it takes two weeks to create, optimise and personalise all needed variations of that experience, you can't capitalise on the opportunity.

At a basic level, automating optimisation and personalisation requires a DAM to have integrated CDN capabilities. This allows the master file and image variations to remain within the DAM, where they can continue to be centrally managed, maintained, performance-tracked and optimised. But basic CDN capability isn't enough. The best DAM solutions take customer experiences to a higher level by automating next-gen interactive functionality. For example, 360-degree interactivity allows

visitors to spin a displayed product around to see it from several different views and angles. Hot-spot callouts let visitors interact with an image by clicking on certain sections to zoom in to the image or view details of a promotional offering.

Some of the most powerful and timesaving interactive capabilities require specialised artificial intelligence (AI) — as is the case with smart cropping. AI-driven smart cropping can automatically detect the correct focal point when resizing an image, eliminating the need for human interaction in the process. Compare that to manual cropping, which is so time intensive that some organisations employ full-time employees whose sole job is to manually crop images. Manual image cropping is labour-intensive and can take an organisation several months to prepare for an event like a new product launch. But with AI-driven smart cropping, such tasks can be completed in minutes.

The right AI can also enable smart-swatch capabilities in a DAM. So instead of having to create and store pictures of every possible colour, texture and fabric variation for every product SKU you sell, the DAM can dynamically generate those variations to easily create more engaging shopping experiences for visitors, while saving significant time for your creative teams to focus on more strategic efforts.

Questions to ask:

Is content delivery an inherent aspect of the DAM or does it require you to add on another solution?

Can the experience-delivery capabilities in the DAM detect low bandwidth on a device to allow it to automatically decrease image file size without quality loss, ensuring a fast-loading and great-looking experience?

POTENTIAL GOTCHA:

Some DAM vendors promote the power of their solution's AI but fail to mention that it does little to enhance, optimise or automate creative or marketing efforts, such as smart cropping or smart swatching.

3. Rich video engagement.

Video is becoming an increasingly important aspect of the digital experience. But video assets are far more complex to manage and deliver than image assets. That's why it's important to look for a DAM solution that facilitates the paradigm shift from channel-centric authoring to audience-centric authoring of dynamic media. Personalisation at scale in a channel-centric model doesn't work for video, because authoring for both device and audience is too time-consuming. But a DAM that lets you author a video experience that simultaneously works across channels and devices increases your agility and speed in delivering personalised and optimised dynamic video experiences for different audience segments.

If AI-driven smart cropping is essential for images, it's even more critical for video optimisation. With video, you can't assume the focal point will stay in the centre of the frame. Whether it's a snowboarder, hip-hop dancer or a child at play, where there's action or movement, the focal point can dynamically shift from left to right, top to bottom or corner to corner. So any optimisation of video requires a DAM solution intelligent enough to dynamically follow the focal point's movements across each frame to automate cropping. If you have to optimise video manually to get it right, your experience-delivery slows to weeks or months, sabotaging your content velocity and relevancy.

Another dynamic media capability to look for in a DAM is the ability to easily add a layer of interactivity to a video. This can enable shoppable video, which allows a customer to click on a spot in the video to pause it and then pop up a product spec sheet or reveal purchase details. In another aspect of video interactivity, a DAM that automates and facilitates management of 360-degree video across device types can open the door to delivering virtual- and augmented-reality experiences.

Requirements for a new world.

CREATIVE & MARKETING WORKFLOWS

Native connection to creative tools

ENTERPRISE ASSET MANAGEMENT

Proven scale & governance

DYNAMIC MEDIA TRANSFORMATION & DELIVERY

Get to market faster

CONTENT INTELLIGENCE, AUTOMATION & EXTENSIBILITY

AI automation & IT flexibility

4. Marketing-specific AI.

Some DAM solutions come with very powerful AI engines, but too often they're wasted on generic capabilities that do little to benefit marketing-specific activities. When evaluating a DAM's AI, it's important to determine if it can address practical use cases specific to your marketing needs. Some of these have already been discussed, such as smart cropping and 360-degree interactivity for images and videos. But there are a few others to watch for that can also have a significant positive impact on your marketing efforts.

When dealing with dynamic media, it's critical to have a DAM solution that removes the complexity from adding much-needed metadata to your videos. Trying to tag one 30-second video can be like tagging hundreds or thousands of consecutive images. A solution that automates that process with AI-driven smart tagging — that you can train to understand the unique aspects of your product line — in addition to automating your other dynamic optimisation needs, saves you significant time and helps maximise the productivity of your creative and marketing teams.

Another powerful AI capability to look for is intelligent translation that eliminates the high cost and time requirements of manually translating your metadata schema into multiple languages. With intelligent translation, the DAM's AI can detect the language of an entered term and automatically translate it to the native language of the metadata schema. For example, an entry of the Italian word *cavallo* could automatically search for assets tagged with the English equivalent *horse*.

POTENTIAL GOTCHA:

The quality and capability of metadata tagging varies greatly among DAM providers. Some only offer manual tagging. Others provide smart tagging for images, but not video. A rare few offer smart "custom" tagging for images, which allows you to train the AI to employ custom tags specific to your product line and marketing needs.

empowers the marketer to quickly make data-driven decisions about which assets to use without ever having to leave the comfort and familiarity of the DAM environment. It also helps marketers improve asset reuse, enabling the organisation to take greater advantage of high performing assets. It can be a game-changer for creatives too, since they can easily get understandable and highly valuable performance insights that can inform future asset creation efforts.

5. Insights on asset performance.

Organisations can get robust insights on the performance of their assets from a variety of analytics solutions, but those insights can be of limited use to marketers as they evaluate which assets from their DAM they should employ. First, marketers typically don't have direct access to performance data on their assets. Often, they have to send an email requesting it from their analytics team and then wait for a response. This requires the analyst to stop what he or she is working on and take the time to translate performance data into a format the marketer can understand and act on. And if the analyst happens to be out of the office or just too busy to respond to the request, the marketer could be waiting days or weeks.

It's not uncommon for a marketer to simply make a decision on which assets to use based on a gut feeling, rather than waiting on the information they need to make informed, data-driven decisions. This is especially true when they have a small window of opportunity to deliver a relevant experience. To try to solve this problem, an organisation can simply give the marketer login access to their analytics solution. But as savvy as your marketers might be, they're not data scientists, and uncovering the insights they need in the analytics interface often won't be straightforward and easy. Even if it is, forcing marketers to leave the familiarity of the DAM and shift context to a foreign analytics platform disrupts efficiency and productivity.

A better option is to invest in a DAM that surfaces asset performance information directly within the interface of the DAM. It's a good first step if the DAM can integrate with your analytics platform and grab the latest performance data. But to be truly useful to your marketers, it's best if the DAM can summarise that data into easy-to-understand insights. That
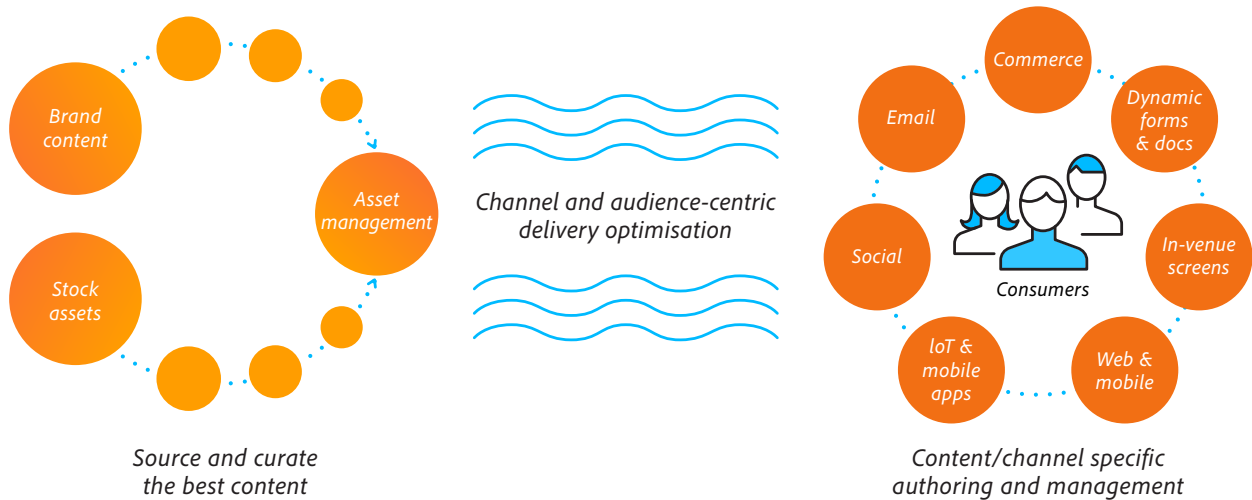
6. Connect with creative tools.

Just like it's best for marketers not to have to leave the DAM to get insights on asset performance, creatives shouldn't have to leave their creative tools of choice to access the assets they need to work on. A DAM that provides seamless connections to those creative tools can eliminate the need for creatives to log into the DAM, download the asset, shift back into their creative tool to make necessary changes and then upload the modified asset in the DAM.

To make sure that connection is truly seamless, there are a few important attributes to look for. First, can creatives search the DAM from within their tools of choice for finished assets? Can they search for work-in-progress assets that haven't yet been stored in the DAM? When they find the desired asset, does the DAM provide a check-out mechanism that locks the asset so no one else can work on it and introduce version control problems? Can creatives use the same credentials to access the DAM that they use to access their creative tools? When updates occur to the DAM or creative tools, will any connections be disrupted or will creatives have to wait for an update to restore direct access to the DAM?

DAMs play a critical role in a fluid experience ecosystem.

Brand content

Stock assets

Asset management

Source and curate the best content

Channel and audience-centric delivery optimisation

Commerce

Email

Social

Consumers

Dynamic forms & docs

In-venue screens

Web & mobile

IoT & mobile apps

Content/channel specific authoring and management

POTENTIAL GOTCHAS:

Some DAMs have integrations to their creatives' tools of choice, but they lack the seamless nature of native connections.

This reduces creative adoption of the solution and, in turn, negatively impacts a DAM's ability to become a single source of truth.

Recognised DAM leader.

As a Leader in the *2018 Forrester Wave for Digital Asset Management,* Adobe Experience Manager Assets is the only DAM on the market that can inject efficiencies into every aspect of the asset lifecycle spanning creation, optimisation, delivery and management. With the addition of Adobe Sensei, it also offers marketing-specific artificial intelligence and asset workflow automation that maximise your content velocity. And as the only DAM provider with a native connection to Adobe Creative Cloud, it streamlines creative workflows by exposing assets in creatives' tools of choice.

To learn more about what Adobe Experience Manager Assets can do for your business, visit *https://www.adobe.com/uk/marketing/experience-manager-assets/digital-asset-management.html.*