



Find and Control Your Digital Assets

The vice president, marketing for CrownPeak explains what to look for when evaluating collaborative process tools.

Okay, so I'm watching "American Idol," and I'm reading "The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century" by Thomas L. Friedman during the commercials. You can do this, of course, because the commercial breaks are 45 minutes long – but I digress. It hits me that Simon, Randy, Paula and the gang are really a great example of Friedman's argument – a disparate, yet collaborative collective (in this case regular ol' Americans) empowered to change the way that we (in Paul Simon's words) throw another hero up the pop charts.

So, I figure if it's happening with "American Idol," it must be happening with us as digital marketers, right? I mean, isn't it always about us?

But in all seriousness, it *is* true. We're now managing our marketing efforts across many more disparately located teams. While we're in Los Angeles, the PR and ad teams are in San Francisco, and the Web and technology teams are in New York and India.

The process of creating, managing and archiving digital marketing assets across all these teams has also become a real challenge. Whether it's moving a new banner campaign through an approval process, or trying to wrangle the international offices into using the newest approved digital assets, the online marketer's desktop is just this side of anarchy. Finding a way to control and organize all of our digital assets can be a full-time job in-and-of itself.

Thankfully, there are a number of technology solutions out there today that can not only help us centralize all of these digital assets but can also help us create processes by which we can organize the movement of assets from draft all the way to archive. Whether you look at something as simple as [Flickr](#), or something as complex as [Documentum](#), there are a number of solutions that help you empower your disparate teams, while retaining the control you need to manage your marketing campaigns effectively, creatively and expediently.

The key is simplicity

With so many digital asset/content management tools available today, the choice can be somewhat overwhelming. Given that we've all been through old bloated DAM software installation, we're petrified of buying something that will be inefficient, ineffective and take six months to get working. So, as you start to consider software solutions to tackle this challenge, take a page from another explosive trend – the simply featured, easy-to-use, basic set of tools. Tools such as [Flickr](#), [Basecamp](#), [Writely](#) [Gmail](#) and others are truly redefining the software space with what I call the "20/80 rule." That is, they leave out 80 percent of the features because they aren't needed.

Now, certainly, core feature sets will be unique to your own business needs. But as you look at the tools, consider a small set of important functions that will be important for your collaboration. All of the solutions you examine should have these basic sets of organizational and workflow related features.

Organization – so that it's easy to find the DAM thing

- ▶ **Categorization & Taxonomy:** You may not need sophisticated hierarchical taxonomy to manage your digital assets, but ensure that you have the ability to categorize and tag your digital assets so that they are easily grouped and searched by anyone needing them.
- ▶ **Asset Audit & Versioning:** Too many times sales materials go through revision after revision until they are so watered down that they either aren't effective any longer, or (with images) the quality is so bad (resized copy after resized copy) that they damage the brand. Make sure that a solution you choose has the ability to audit, version and rollback any version of the digital asset that existed.
- ▶ **Image Sizing and Posting:** If you're posting out different versions of images for your team to use, then look for a solution that allows you to manage one image but automatically make different versions (e.g. sizes) of that image available. That way, if you change that image, they all change automatically.
- ▶ **Permissions:** Often times all the marketing assets are simply just uploaded to some central network drive, and it's a free-for-all in terms of what's getting used. Take the time to figure out the process for allowing different users different levels of access to the digital assets. For example, do sales people really need access to the branding folder?
- ▶ **Searching:** Of course if you go to the trouble of creating a wonderfully descriptive categorization for your digital assets you'll want users to be able to search for the assets they need. Look for solutions that allow you to present canned searches as enhanced navigation (e.g. "What's New to the Site", "Most Popular Sales Presentations" et cetera).
- ▶ **Centralized Location:** This might be the most important aspect of managing digital assets. I still know marketers that use email to organize their digital assets and some that even use CDs and Federal Express to communicate with their remote offices. The time for creating a centralized, searchable marketing asset repository is here— whether that's creating a published global extranet that you make available to your team, your partners and your agency, or a dedicated section of your intranet only available to select users.

Work flow – so you can move the DAM things around

More and more digital marketers deploy asset management workflow systems these days. There are fantastic solutions on the market that allow you to work with your agency and your remote offices more effectively and efficiently by putting process around your assembly of creative and campaigns.

For example, let's say you send out a monthly newsletter with your digital agency and there are five different versions of that newsletter (and image assets) based on different parts of the country (e.g. a Southwest version, a Northeast version et cetera). Solutions that offer flexibility in the workflow can create extraordinarily efficient processes for moving your projects through the approval chains. Choose software tools that can match the steps, approval processes and notifications that work for your team rather than trying to force your process into some pre-determined workflow capabilities. When combined with the organizational features mentioned above, it provides a way to audit, version and centralize the newsletter process so that all of your remote participants can participate.

Look for solutions that have customizable and configurable workflows and provide you with interfaces for managing the different steps, approval processes, and the email notifications and calendars to create your own unique processes.

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As you start to flatten your own marketing world, remember that it's not only about control, but it's also about empowering your team to work better. Whether your team members are across the cubicle, the city or the globe, online collaboration will become critical to your marketing process. Simple is better. Easy-to-use is better. And, most importantly, tools that help you focus on your campaigns, your creative and your business are better. Accomplish that and you'll be the Marketing Idol!

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