



the whitepaper series

#5

MRM... the ultimate TLA in MSP

“ Hangar Seven has an asset management system. We also have workflow systems, project management systems & a brilliant sample & image management system. ”

193

At the last count (admittedly, it was us who counted) there were more than 193 different digital asset management (DAM) systems available off-the-shelf.

They come in all shapes and sizes ... locally installed or cloud-based, SME versions and full enterprise level applications. And, just in case the choice was not wide enough, there is an even larger number of process and workflow suites with which to complement the DAM of your choice. In fact, add one to the other and, hey presto, you have an MRM (Marketing Resource Management) system ... don't you?

In our survey, each system we looked at claimed to be the answer to our every prayer. The features list was, invariably, tick after tick after tick. No tock, but lots and lots of tick. And the choice of how to buy was equally varied. A simple monthly payment (with upgrade options of course), per Gb of storage, outright purchase, lease or HP. Some are even free ... but with a charge for this or that click and another for this or that "action".

Most of the DAMs that we reviewed were designed and built by software companies. Some were the product of a marketing agency's clever internal systems, now applied to the market at large. Still others were born of earnest academic toil by august institutions. And the "best" were those developed by large DAM specialists.

What more could we want – we asked ourselves. Why look or think any further – we cogitated. The market's well-served and there's plenty of choice. Everyone will be able to find exactly what they want and it won't take them long to do so.

“ WE CAN SAVE MONEY BY KNOWING WHERE OUR ASSETS ARE, NOT HAVING TO RE-ORIGINATE THEM WHEN THEY ARE LOST AND MAKING THEM INSTANTLY ACCESSIBLE ACROSS THE BUSINESS. ”

And, if they can't, there are some specialist marketing production companies who will happily rent space on their systems. Thereby, in their view, locking in customers with what's often commonly called a "sticky" software application.

So there you have it. If you need a digital asset management system, just go to Google and ask. There's all the choice you could ever need.

Is choice a bad thing – we hear you ask. No, it's not, but it is often a costly thing. We tried the experiment for ourselves and after three weeks of solid researching, an expert in the field could not find a DAM that did exactly what we needed it to do. Some came close, some had features that sounded great, but did not really fit what we had in mind. Others offered lots of bells and whistles. But none did precisely the job we needed.

Worse still was the issue of configurability, so often the Achilles heel of many DAM systems. As well as there being a plethora of system choices, within each one there's a legion or more of configuration options.

At first encounter, this often seems like a real bonus. But, when one gets down to actually trying to use the system, the extensive options list often proves to be a barrier to effective set up. Simply put, too many choices tends to lead to decision paralysis. Or worse, the "we must have that" syndrome, which delivers such an overblown and over-engineered outcome that user paralysis swiftly follows.

Where is the 37signals of the DAM and MRM space?

37signals created Basecamp, a beautifully stripped back and "mind bendingly simple" cloud-based project management toolkit. If you've not heard of them before, then you should get to know them, if only for their eight basic business principles. Their first is: "Bells and whistles wear off, but usefulness never does. We build useful software that does just what you need and nothing you don't."

We like that thought and we like their style. Visit www.37signals.com to find out more.

For us, simplicity means not having to do anything. It means a system that will work, out of the box or off the shelf, without all the decision making and messing around that so often seems to be a core requirement. This may be idiotically idealistic, but we don't think it's as far from being achievable as one might think.

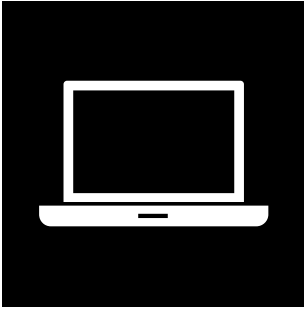
Here's the rub. Installing a DAM or MRM system represents, most often, about a tenth (or less) of the true cost of populating and operating the system. The proposal for an MRM system often starts with "We can save money by knowing where our assets are, not having to re-originate them when they are lost and making them instantly accessible across the business."

All that is true, but it won't happen without a huge amount of effort on your part. And, as we know, effort = cost.

In his paper entitled "Metadata Strategies for DAM"¹, Ralph Windsor perceptively states: "Once a DAM has been committed to and installed ... one of the most common unintended consequences is Garbage In Garbage Out. The trajectory taken to get to this all too common scenario runs something like this: Everyone starts to assemble all the marcomms collateral that colleagues are always asking for.

Then there is the next task: who is going to catalogue all our assets? Most staff are likely to be over-stretched and already working at maximum capacity – that was why a DAM system was bought to begin with. To discover that as well as money, staff time will need to be committed is an unwelcome surprise and it is at this point that staff motivation, to use the new system, will begin to decline."

Mr Windsor goes on to postulate that there are seven main reasons why metadata strategies are often inadequate which, in turn, leads to implementation failure, either in whole or in part.



Brand Central, Hangar Seven's own Digital Asset Management system is used by many of our clients.

Underlying the majority of these seven main reasons is a lack of time and a lack of training among the audience that has to use the system.

Will a DAM or MRM save you money in multiple areas of your marketing and communications functions? Answer: a resounding yes. But will it save you money from day one? ... Answer: a definite no. The OPEX cost is the most often overlooked and under-estimated "hidden" cost of getting the system to a place where it makes a meaningful contribution over and above the initial capital outlay.

Should any of the above put you off exploring the benefits of an MRM system for your business?

We hope not, because there are enormous benefits. Ultimately, as well as the simple benefits such as being able to find and use a file quickly (saving time) and not having to pay for a copy from your supplier (saving money) the best planned and implemented DAM and MRM systems can help you with:

- Automating repetitive processes: which has the effect of reducing labour costs of many marketing functions. And, critically, meaning they can be carried out with much lower cost labour – whether by you or your marketing supplier
- Automating asset production: which cuts out the middle man (often the ad agency) and allows you greater control of budgets and significantly reduced costs
- Asset control: enabling you to have a much tighter handle on how and where your brand assets are deployed, and by whom. This delivers tangible benefits and real ROI when it comes to brand consistency which, in turn, means marketing pounds deliver more bang for their buck
- Speed up your route to market by cutting down on process inefficiencies and improving production accuracy
- Creates a much more collaborative means of working among all your internal and external stakeholders

So, where's the best place to start with your DAM or MRM search? In our view there's no better way to embark on a project like this than by a little (well, a lot actually) navel gazing. The MRM system should, ideally, become your servant and not your master. To achieve this with the least disruption and the least downstream cost, you should conduct a detailed assessment of your marketing workflow. Once this is codified you stand a reasonable chance of assessing where best a system can fit into your existing business model, with the least unnecessary change and in a way which delivers the fastest benefit.

This might sound like Nirvana, but it is possible. Getting a system to work the way you want to work and to encompass all relevant stakeholders can be achieved with adequate forethought. And getting stakeholders involved early will pay dividends as well. If your ad agency, marketing production supplier, printer, photography studios, PR consultant et al are all brought with you on the journey, you'll find it much easier to widely distribute the work involved, thereby avoiding bottlenecks and obvious increased costs.

And you should use the navel gazing opportunity to see what you can automate while you're engaged in the project. Product or sample management, marketing project briefing, image management, marketing production process, asset change management, versioning, localisation and much more can all be mechanised ... if you set things up properly in the first place.

Declaration of Interest: Hangar Seven has an asset management system. We also have workflow systems, project management systems and a brilliant sample and image management system. But we don't sell systems. We're happy to lend them to any of our clients and to offer practical advice about how our clients can benefit, but we won't sell an off the shelf system to anyone. Why? Well, we want to make sure that the benefits you seek are delivered.

To learn more about the approach we take, please contact Simon Peers on 07775 432450 or email at simon.peers@hangarseven.co.uk. Richard Beadle on 07808 366588 or richard.beadle@hangarseven.co.uk