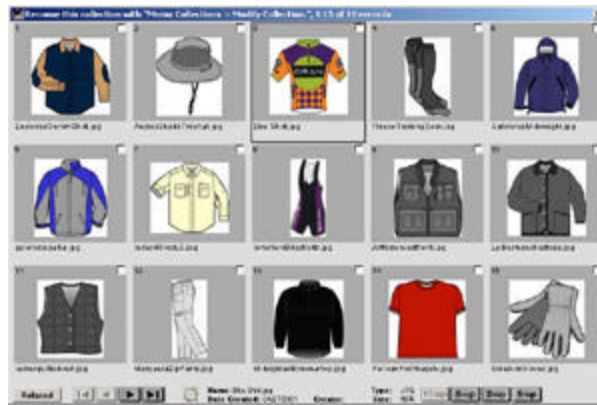




## Digital Asset Management Systems Getting from neat idea to implementation

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The volume of digital assets in the corporate world continues to grow and consequently so does the challenge of managing them. The good news is that putting a system in place to manage your digital assets, such as photos or your products or CAD (Computer Aided Design) files, can lead to both greater responsiveness and reduced costs. And there are a lot of uses for these assets once you have them under control and can locate them in a quick and reliable fashion.



Put all of your digital assets at your fingertips

Following are some questions that we are frequently asked and some thoughts on the answers.

*I am in the (insert your department here) Department. How can I justify the expense of creating and maintaining a Digital Asset Management (DAM) System?*

### Justifying Your DAM System Investment

There are many ways to justify the expense of a DAM system, but let's take a look at them by department and you will start to see how many departments in your organization will benefit from a DAM system.

**Design** - In the design department, the obvious advantage is the time saved in finding existing assets and in greater use and re-use of those assets, but the benefits don't stop there. With a DAM system you can effectively capture ideas for future designs and place them in the DAM system for later retrieval so your company's creative energy is not lost. Catalog designs that have been purchased, but not placed into production, can also be managed online with a DAM system. Note: Make sure that the cost to catalog new designs is included in the justification for the acquisition so that you have the funding to get the designs into the database.

**Production** – You can use your DAM system on the production floor to verify that the production equipment is running the correct patterns and correct colors. Just place a networked PC on the production floor, scan the barcode or enter the product number on the production order, and immediately get a visual confirmation of the job. This feature can also be used to visually validate the direction of application for a textile.

**Marketing** – By maintaining your DAM system, Marketing has instant access to quality images of all of your products. They can keep past catalogs and manage the development on upcoming catalogs. They also have instant access to most product information and digital images that they can use for advertisements and brochures. They may want to use the system to help them track advertising materials as well. Extra fields in the database can be used to help track key digital documents such as brochures and product specification sheets.

**Sales** – Create instant catalogs to review with Sales management or provide “digital catalogs” for outside and inside sales personnel at the click of a couple buttons within your DAM system at a fraction of the cost of producing paper catalogs or sample books. If the catalog needs to change, a few mouse clicks will configure a new catalog. Working on the Spring 2002 catalog and want to see what you did in 2001 or 2000? It is all online and immediately available. The ability to review patterns and colors with customers on the database greatly reduces sample costs. For samples out of stock at the moment, send a high-resolution digital photo or file. And with a DAM-based catalog, there is no limit to the number of “samples” from which to choose, increasing the odds that customers will see something they want in your product line.

It is also easy to create “selective” catalogs on a per customer basis on the fly. If a pattern you do not want to show or cannot offer a customer is on a card with other fabrics you are stuck with tearing it off or not showing the other fabrics - not a good choice either way. This feature also lets you quickly share all of the patterns that your large hotel or restaurant customers use.

**Customer Service** – A customer calls up and wants to check on availability of a pattern. Your DAM system can be connected to your inventory system, as many systems support ODBC calls (a standard for sharing information between database and applications). An even better approach is to use all of the data that you have placed into your DAM system to populate your Web site and let your distributors or customers find the textiles they are looking for, check availability, and place an order.

**Management** – Management is always looking for a way to improve processes and efficiencies. DAM systems aid all departments in the sharing of information, tracking product release, and product changes. An important asset for textile companies and design firms is their catalog of designs. The key to reusing past designs and updating them is being able to find the original images and the specifications that went with them. DAM systems provide great archives and instant access to this information. As the database grows, so does the opportunity to take advantage of existing products or designs that have never been produced.

*My management team has heard horror stories from their peers about failed DAM system implementations. How do I overcome these issues?*

Every information management system implementation has the potential to be a nightmare. Failures in IT implementations have more to do with a lack of planning, commitment from management, or a lack of clear business objectives than anything else. From the start, make sure that key players in Design, Operations, Management, and Marketing/Sales are involved in the decision process and that it is clear to everyone what the value of the system is. These team members must agree on what it will take to be successful and how to measure success.

### Digital Asset Management System Pitfalls

**Data Entry** – One of the greatest tragedies in implementing DAM systems is failure to keep the data current and not getting new products into the system after you have made the investment in the system. Populating a DAM system takes time, energy, and the commitment of your organization. Make sure that you have a plan for managing the data after you install the system and someone responsible for making it happen. The more advanced DAM systems can import data from your production database, spreadsheets, or other electronic venues. Your DAM vendor can also set up cataloging tools to reduce the time it takes to manually enter data. Service bureaus are another source of resources for building and maintaining your data if you do not have enough work to employ full-time resources in this area.

**Data Quality** - The old computer adage, garbage in, garbage out, is true for DAM systems. If members of your organization cannot trust that the data in the system is accurate and complete, they will quickly turn to alternative methods of getting this information, and support for the maintenance of the system will quickly disappear.

**\*-Limited Access** – As highlighted in the previous section, almost everyone has uses for a well-maintained and populated DAM system. Make sure that these people have ready access to the system (access can be password-limited if appropriate). The greatest way to leverage your investment in buying a DAM system and maintaining it is to let as many people benefit from it as possible.

**Limited data** – This is a common Catch-22. The new DAM system is installed but no one is using it, because there is not enough data in the system to justify the time it takes to learn the new system. On the flip side management won't invest any more in cataloging until the system proves to be worthwhile and employees are using it. Avoid this problem - agree on which data is required in the system from the start and spend the money up front to load the system. Get the buy-in from the various functional groups that will use it, and fund temporary employees, a service bureau, or overtime help to get the system loaded.

**IT department with a “Not invented here” attitude** – Many companies go through a painful learning process when it comes to DAM systems and their IT departments. The IT group looks at managing digital assets and thinks that it is a straightforward proposition to develop a home-grown system. They convince the organization that they can create a DAM system tailored to the organization's unique needs - that is when the fun begins. Most IT groups are not great at

defining customer requirements and even fewer have the resources to develop a full-blown DAM system and then constantly improve it. Creating a user interface and a data structure that promotes fast and effective data access takes a level of database and image management expertise that most IT departments lack. Many companies spend tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars only to fail in the end. Existing commercial DAM software has been installed and used by multiple customers and has features built in for storing, finding, printing, and displaying your digital assets. IT groups will spend a lot of time to provide just the basics and only a few will produce a world-class system. Advanced DAM systems also have tools to quickly import, export, or update data automatically, and some vendors will provide custom programs to meet any unique needs that your organization may have.

**Poor Image Quality** – Spend the time and money required to get quality images for your DAM system. Everyone from your boss to the end customer could see these images and use them to judge you and your products. Some planning and the proper equipment or a good service bureau can make all the difference. Here are some important questions to answer before you get start capturing digital images of your products:

- What size image will the DAM software display?
- Will the image contain a full repeat?
- Will the image be full size; if not, what will the scale be?
- Will the scale be the same for all images or will the scale be noted?
- If you do not show a full repeat on your standard image (typically because you are showing all of the images in the same size and to a standard scale), will there be a second image that does show the full repeat?
- What are the other uses for these images? If you are using them for advertising or catalogs, you may want to save a high-resolution image in addition to the lower resolution that will be accessible over the Web or intranet (you have a lower resolution image to display on the Web so that you do not burden the network and your PC).
- How will you deal with the various colorways of a pattern? Will all be maintained in the database? How will they be displayed? Together? Separately?
- Will you be rendering the images onto surfaces? This will require special photography and planning.
- Will you be printing these images and, if so, what will the output device be?
- How will you deal with that fact that the color of your assets will appear differently on different computers and in different lighting?

**Poor planning** – DAM implementations require the coordination of a lot of data and people to be successful. If the database is not current or images are not available, the system will not be used. If the system does not accommodate everyone's needs, the effort will likely run into continued resistance, or worse yet, efforts to sabotage the system. There are a lot of questions that must be answered during the planning process. Here are a few that should be considered (reputable DAM vendors and consultants can help you answer these questions):

- How many records will your DAM need to archive and how many will be added per year?
- What will the size of the average image be?
- Where will the images be stored?
- Where will the database be stored?

- How will it be backed up?
- Does the software have the ability to restore the work that was done before 2:30 today when a whole bunch of records that were cataloged today were deleted?
- How will you share images and data with employees, distributors, or customers that do not have access to the system?

*Ok, a DAM system sounds great! How do we make it happen?*

To make this happen, someone has to be a catalyst in the organization, evangelizing the benefits to all of the different groups in the organization, explaining to each of them “what is in it for them” as any compelling sales pitch does. Management support is critical, as the organization will typically need that support to get the resources required to implement and maintain a DAM system. Combining the benefits that the DAM system brings to the entire organization generates the financial returns that management can get excited about and support (see the Digital Asset Management, The Art of Archiving article for numbers to use in your financial justification). The great news is that increasing the number of uses and users increases implementation costs only moderately, while providing much larger benefits and financial returns at a much faster rate

Getting a definition of your company’s requirements and then getting buy-in is the greatest challenge, but definitely worth the effort. The financial returns to the organization and the reduction in stress and wasted time from being unable to place your hands on what you need when you need it are great incentives for moving forward.

In the end, a best-in-breed Digital Asset Management system is a great asset and compliments the current Materials Planning, Design, and Sales systems in your organization. It leverages the people and processes that are already in place and enables the organization to do more with existing assets. When a Dam system is implemented with proper planning, organizational support, and the right product, the organization becomes more efficient and more responsive internally and externally, and that has a positive impact on both morale and the organization’s bottom line.

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