ereview / June 2005

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R·I·T Printing Industry Center

Digital Asset Management: Part 2

(Read Part 1 here.)

In the previous column we looked at the features of data asset management (DAM) systems, and discussed how they can solve data storage and retrieval problems in printing businesses. Here we review four case studies—two small graphic design firms, and two studies regarding the use of technical metadata in the newspaper industry—that were also part of the RIT research report entitled "Digital Asset Management—A Closer Look at the Literature" (PICRM-2004-08) by Franziska Frey et al.

Using DAM in Small Graphic Design Firms

There are two ways in which graphic design firms can make more money: they can handle more jobs or they can increase prices. Charging higher prices depends on consumer demand. But handling more jobs is within the control of a firm. That is where DAM can help. In a 2002 *American Printer* article, GATF reports that almost 50% of an average creative person's time is spent searching for files. Designers, even in small firms, can benefit from a good asset management system.

At the first design firm we studied, the owner was initially reluctant to purchase asset management software because of the price. She works with many freelancers, and when she needs to search for a particular file, she has to scroll through her master file list in InDesign. While she would not expect others to work with this system, she originally felt she was too busy as the single operator of the design firm to spend time on file management. Since her work is stored in so many different folders, she knows it would take a long time to reorganize them.

However, after learning that the current price of asset management is reasonable, this designer admits that the increasing volume of digital assets in general is making versatile asset management systems necessary. She is currently starting another design company, and wants to establish a consistent naming system, set up a central server space that other designers can access at any time, and develop a solid asset management system.

Another design firm we interviewed, located in upstate New York, currently has a terabyte of storage space on its network, and has had to double this storage capacity every year. To manage their digital assets, the designers use a combination of two proprietary software products and a naming convention that suits their workflow, which is described. Although the firm's DAM system is critical to the workflow, clients are not charged for DAM services unless a design project itself involves a heavy amount of asset management as a contingency for its completion. Quarterly

Center Spotlight

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DIGITAL ASSET MANAGEMENT: System Selection Criteria

DATE: June 28, 2005
TIME: 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Eastern

PRESENTED BY:
Franziska Frey, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, School of Print Media, RIT

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system check-ups are performed by outside technical support, and the firm serves as a beta-testing site for the time-tracking software that it uses.

The lead designer of this firm feels that there is a lack of education in asset management for graphic designers. He is convinced, however, that asset management is now an integral part of the profession.

While technological improvements have made it easy to create digital assets, designers need to be sure that they can still access assets that are stored on older media, since data migration is another important issue.

Technical Metadata in the Newspaper Industry

Although there has been an increase in the capability of digital devices to capture technical *metadata* (a valuable resource in image reproduction, management and archiving), its use in the digital imaging workflow is not widespread. A universal open encoding scheme and a uniform set of technical metadata standards are required for the technology to deliver what it promises. The following two case studies were designed to explore how well known technical metadata are in the newspaper industry.

USA Today headquarters in McLean, Virginia, transmits pages electronically to customer print sites, which in turn distribute printed newspapers to end consumers. It is estimated that only about 5% of *USA Today*'s hundreds of thousands of yearly photographic images (from photographers, news service providers, and broadcast captures) are saved, and even fewer are published. The digital imaging workflow at *USA Today* is explained in detail in the full research report.

Steve Terrillion, director of prepress operations for *USA Today*, feels that versioning is probably the best method of tracking changes in a busy newspaper environment. Asked to speculate on the usefulness of technical metadata, he remarked that the more information there is about an image, the better, but that there may be limitations due to the digital overhead of carrying technical metadata in an image file. He also spoke extensively about the use of metadata for advertising images. “An ad might have multimedia functionality built in that you don’t see on the printed page, but when it goes out in electronic format [it] might have some of those options,” he said. Advertiser access to information is considered an area of ongoing research.

Kevin Conner, quality assurance manager for the *Washington Post*, estimates that about 32,000 digital images are entered yearly into the organization’s Merlin system, and that this represents only about 20% of all captured images. An examination of the *Post*'s use of technical metadata, classified as Basic Image Parameters, reveals that the organization uses file type, file size, compression, and color space. The *Post* diligently tracks the amount of image compression its photographers use. Staff photographers compress images to speed transmission, and, at times, the subsequent reduction in image quality is at odds with the *Post*'s desired reproduction quality. The *Post*'s digital imaging workflow is briefly described in the full monograph.

Conner and Tim Fitzsimmons, engraving foreman, both think that

Mailing Address:
Printing Industry Center
at RIT
College of Imaging Arts
and Sciences
Rochester Institute of
Technology
55 Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, NY 14623

Phone: (585) 475-2733
Fax: (585) 475-7279

About the Center

Dedicated to the study of major business environment influences in the printing industry precipitated by new technologies and societal changes, the Printing Industry Center at RIT addresses the concerns of the printing industry through educational outreach and research initiatives.

Support for the Center comes from:

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image creation metadata could be useful for improving reproduction quality. But, like other organizations, the *Post* now uses versioning as the primary means of keeping a record of the change history of an image. Conner did not express strong feelings about the potential usefulness of technical metadata in the future. The *Po*st is, however, actively pursuing alternative channels of distribution for its news.

Conclusions

While many have used DAM successfully, others have tried and given up, for the following reasons:

- Limited bandwidth availability
- Lack of enterprise integration
- Concern about return on investment
- Lack of needed skills within the current workforce
- Limited availability and ease of use of needed standards
- Lack of preparation of company structures for DAM

As technical barriers are removed, future research will concentrate on human factors such as the skill sets needed at both workforce and management levels, and the company structures and culture needed for a successful DAM integration.

Get some practical information on DAM system selection criteria: participate in a webcast presented by the researcher of this study.

2004 Research Monographs:

To read about this research in detail, download the monograph from: http://print.rit.edu/pubs/picrm200408.pdf

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