



Understanding  
**Creative  
Management  
Platforms**



Part 1  
**Removing the pain**  
of digital advertising

# Index

## What is a Creative Management Platform?

- But how did we get here?
- The origin of the Bannerflow CMP
- Part 1: Removing the pain of digital advertising

## Chapter 1 - Building your banners

- Producing master creatives efficiently
- Building a master creative without a CMP
- Why did Bannerflow create a banner builder?
- Banner production with a CMP

## Chapter 2 - Scaling

- More banners, more conversions
- Producing all the banners for a campaign without a CMP
- What made Bannerflow focus on scaling?
- Scaling with a Creative Management Platform

## Chapter 3 - Translating

- Translation management cannot be overlooked
- Translating banners without a CMP
- Why did Bannerflow make translation management a priority?
- Translation management via a CMP

## Chapter 4 - Rich media

- Innovative design that converts
- Creating rich media banners without a CMP
- Why was a solution for rich media a priority?
- Producing rich media banners with a CMP

## Chapter 5 - Collaborating

- Optimising your workflows for better performance
- Team collaboration without a CMP
- Why put collaboration at the heart of a CMP?
- Team collaboration with a CMP

## Chapter 6 - Publishing

- Publish with ease, everywhere
- How to publish display campaigns without a CMP
- The reason Bannerflow added real-time publishing
- How you publish campaigns with a CMP

## Conclusion

- Moving beyond the basics

# What is a Creative Management Platform?

It's a description that has grown within digital advertising circles but what exactly is a creative management platform, or CMP?

In its simplest form, a creative management platform is cloud-based software that allows in-house teams to produce, distribute, and measure the performance of digital advertising – particularly digital display.

It is essentially a range of advertising technologies all rolled into one easy-to-use platform. Most CMPs will offer the following capabilities:

- A builder tool to design creatives
- A scaling tool to mass produce creatives
- A publishing tool with network integration (banner builders won't offer this!)

However, that's not enough for today's digital marketer. The more premium CMPs shine by empowering users further through:

- A builder tool to design creatives
- A scaling tool to mass produce creatives
- A publishing tool with network integration
- Collaboration being at the heart of the platform
- The capability to work across multiple markets
- Analytics, and optimisation tools for all campaigns
- The ability to schedule and publish in real-time
- Enabling live, data driven dynamic content

In some ways, CMPs act as an in-house agency for brands, reducing time, maximising production, and enabling marketing teams to create better advertising. They remove complexity and provide centralised, transparent control, resulting in reduced costs, improved collaboration, and simpler workflows.

They are ideal for brands looking to shift digital advertising in-house.

## But how did we get here?

Thanks to advances in digital technology, such as programmatic advertising, it became possible to buy and sell adverts online with ease. However, the incredibly fast development of media buying was not matched with advances in production and distribution technologies.

The development of the CMP is a direct response to this tech mismatch.

Indeed, although it is possible to buy an impression and serve your advert in seconds, it can still take weeks to build a banner campaign.

Sadly for up the majority of digital marketers the old way of working – without a CMP – is still the reality of digital advertising.

Bannerflow's founders set out to eliminate complexity and in doing so, introduced creativity and innovation back into digital marketing.

## The origin of the Bannerflow CMP

Every company has an origin tale and Bannerflow is no different. Each component of our CMP is a direct solution to a problem encountered by a frustrated Swedish designer.

Daniel Jacobsson, the original founder of Bannerflow, began his career as a Designer at a well-known organisation in Malta, in the late 2000s. Fresh off the boat, he was looking forward to creating innovative digital advertisements. Who wouldn't?

The reality couldn't have been more different for Jacobsson. Not only was he overwhelmed by the heat and bright sunlight of the mediterranean, but he soon discovered that much of his day to day work involved tedious repetitive design tasks.

Day-in-day out he would spend his working hours coding, copy-pasting, and optimising. As well as taking screenshots of hundreds of banners. There was little opportunity for creativity.

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But then something happened, a switch was flicked and he started to imagine ways to make his life as a banner designer less monotonous. He began to design tools that simplified time consuming tasks, and removed wasteful repetitive design processes.

Methodically, he set to work. The result: creating thousands of banners, for multiple markets went from weeks to days. And over a

period of a few years, Bannerflow was born.

For each pain point, and for every designer, marketer, or CMO producing campaigns the old way, there was a solution to be found. A new way of working.

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Trapped in the same routine and on the other side of the office was Daniel Fahlén, Marketing Manager, and future co-founder of Bannerflow. Like Jacobsson he too was wasting valuable time on poor processes. He found himself part of chaotic email threads and endlessly opening zip files. He also knew there had to be a better way.

Instead of analysing and optimising display campaigns he was stuck doing the basics. He wanted to do more, try new strategies, and improve ad performance.

Needless to say, he and Jacobsson were kindred spirits. Joining forces, they saw the opportunity to design further features to benefit how he and countless other marketing managers worked.

High-performance in-house digital display advertising was about to become a reality.

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Daniel Fahlén

Daniel Jacobsson

## Part 1: Removing the pain of digital advertising

The creative management platform they created (our CMP), resulted from their frustration with the broken status quo. As you will discover, not only do CMPs improve performance, but they have also ushered in new forms of advertising, as well as dynamic strategies.

At the core of all CMPs are better workflows, easier distribution, and the opportunity to create remarkable creatives.

From Flash to HTML5, from animation to video, from live feeds to dynamic creative, the best CMPs continue to push boundaries.

### Introduction

In the following six chapters we will identify and compare how a CMP removes the pain points and inefficiencies of the “old way” of digital marketing. Exploring how the standard features of a CMP help to optimise in-house ad production.

Part 1 of our series will explain how a CMP eliminates repetitive design tasks and improves production workflows.

From the designer wasted on repetitive tasks, to the marketing manager coordinating campaigns all via a spreadsheet, to the CMO bored with opening countless email attachments: this e-book explains how there is a better way to work.

# Chapter 1:

## Building your banners

### Producing master creatives efficiently

Producing the master creative for any campaign is key. It sets the tone for an entire display campaign. The easier it is to produce an optimised banner – the quicker you can publish. It's why a banner creator or builder – even one not associated with a CMP – is such a popular tool for online marketers.

Moreover, for an advertiser to have effective digital advertising they must be able to work across formats, devices, and have the freedom to customise messages. This means producing HTML5 ads quickly and in high volume. Undertaking a programmatic campaign with less than 10 different sizes is meaningless!

### Building a master creative without a CMP

Creating the first banner of a campaign was far more complicated than it needed to be.

Once a marketing manager planned a campaign – with (or without) a media agency – they would decide where and to whom each campaign should be placed or run. This set the requirements for banners produced in terms of weights, sizes, and formats, etc.

The production agency, or in-house team, then produced the creative material. Normally, a coder and graphic designer were required. If the ads were technically advanced they may have required both frontend and backend developers.

For each display campaign, a designer would use their skills to produce a master creative and two standard sized banners. Yet for the subsequent 493 they would be reduced to a human robot.

This essentially means copying and pasting from excel spreadsheets, taking 1500 screenshots to create fall-back images, before manually uploading each banner one by painful one to the affiliate platform's banner gallery. For a large, complicated campaigns this could take weeks of back and forth using different software "solutions".

Furthermore, if a banner design had a file size that was too large to be uploaded to an ad network, the designer had to go back and optimise all the banners to meet the set requirements. A painful exercise that wasted precious time.

In fact, the designer would need to optimise every single banner as there were strict file size regulations. Some networks would only allow 40kb – certain platforms 70kb.

There were specific font families and typefaces to use too – and these had to be imported. Along with every single graphical element, which again needed to be optimised. Being good at Photoshop and knowing how to code is very handy when building a master banner from scratch!

## Why did Bannerflow create a banner builder?

When Daniel Jacobsson began his career in design he envisioned creative free-reign; the ability to create stunning and innovative imagery for every banner campaign. The reality couldn't have been more different, with strict limitations, and time consuming processes reducing creativity.

The tipping point for Jacobsson came when he embarked on his biggest

affiliate campaign yet. 20 markets, 2000 flash animations, and 2000 fall-back images manually created and optimised.

It was ludicrous.

Needless to say Bannerflow's banner builder has remained at the heart of everything we do.



### Bannerflow fact:

Our CMP originally began life creating and scaling flash ads. Thanks to Steve Jobs that quickly changed! Web designers that once created flash banners had a struggle moving to HTML5 too. Lack of coding knowledge being a big issue.

## Banner production with a CMP

Using a banner builder tool in a CMP eliminates the worst pain points of ad creation for designers. For one, there's no need to individually code every HTML5 element, or copy and paste each function into a new banner size.

Some CMPs, like Bannerflow, have a user interface so intuitive and simple that anyone can use it to create complex HTML5 designs. Meaning designers can do what they do best which is design. But be warned! Some CMPs just offer template options limiting design and function.

Another bonus with using a CMP is that your creatives are hosted in-platform. This makes it possible to edit and refine live banners, in real-time, without the need to re-publish them each time.

Fall-back images are also created automatically. So no need to create GIF animations from a sequence of manually grabbed screenshots!

From a designer's viewpoint, the most beneficial aspect of using a CMP is that it optimises every creative element in a banner automatically. All files are resized and optimised: with the use of font subsetting to the cropping of images. While polite loading means an advertiser can use high-res images – and video – without exceeding file size restrictions set by a publisher.

What's more, all your brand's assets can be added to the banner builder tool: logos, fonts, everything you need to build your display advertising campaigns – saving massive amounts of time.

Combine a builder tool with a scaling feature in a CMP and making all the different variations needed for a campaign can go from weeks to days, or even hours.

Designers the worldover can finally have lunch!

# Chapter 2:

## Scaling

### More banners, more conversions

Producing all the banners you need for a campaign is crucial. Campaigns need to perform across all devices. By 2020, global ad spending on mobile alone is set to reach \$247.4 billion (Digiday). Being able to scale all your messages, from the smallest screen to the biggest is essential.

Successful campaigns come in all different shapes and sizes, with an average of at least 50 HTML5 banner sizes. Programmatic creative, or dynamic creative optimisation (DCO), also require the creation of many more ad variations, which, if done manually, are a designer's living nightmare!

### Producing all the banners for a campaign without a CMP

Scaling without a CMP was a tedious and repetitive process. Once you've designed your master creative it became a matter of copy, paste, repeat.

For each new size in a banner set, every design element, from code to graphics, had to be individually copied and pasted into a newly labelled banner.

Invariably tweaks and adjustments had to be made for the new sizes and the whole process took hours, even days, to complete. The more complicated the master banner, and the more devices you wished to serve an ad to, the longer it inevitably took.

Next, even after producing all the different sizes and versions needed for different markets, fall-back images still remained. This involved screenshotting one still image for each frame of your banner ad. For a HTML5 banner campaign of 500 animations that might require 1500 screenshots.

Entire banner sets also required optimising for different ad networks and publishers. Each with different banner size and weight

requirements. All of which made manual scaling a difficult and tedious process.

What's more, the more repetitive manual tasks you endured, the more likely you were to make simple errors too. With hundreds of copies it became easy to use the wrong click-tags or forget them entirely. Imagine having to pull-down an entire campaign and double check all 500 tags because of one simple error!

## What made Bannerflow focus on scaling?

Every Monday morning Jacobsson would be greeted with an unending spreadsheet. On it was all the banner sizes and translation requests for his next campaign. This meant hundreds of hours of copy, pasting, and screenshotting.

For every campaign this was an astonishing 167 hours.

He wanted to design better banners but because he was spending so much time on repetitive design tasks he couldn't.

Hence the development of a smart scaling tool as an integral part of Bannerflow.



### Bannerflow fact:

A wee bit of maths for you. Each banner would take Jacobsson about 20 minutes to reproduce, times that by 500 and you have 10,000 minutes – or roughly  $\frac{1}{3}$  of all the allotted time in an entire football season – per campaign.

That's even before you add 500 fall-back images to the equation!

## Scaling with a Creative Management Platform

With a CMP repetitive tasks are a thing of the past.

It's simply a matter of creating your master banner and the CMP takes it from there. Select your required size by ticking a box, make minor adjustments to the design, and continue to the next format.

With unique algorithms, a CMP can use its smart scaling function to produce creative in seconds. In fact, the more banners you build, the easier the process becomes as the platform learns your preferences.

Moreover, with easy scaling you can create variants of your adverts with little difficulty. You are no longer restricted to one image, copy, and layout for each campaign.

Finally, the job of a designer is realised! They can get paid to do what they do best, which is design – not code, not copy and paste times infinity.

Even better, a CMP automatically includes the click-tags when you publish to your chosen platform. Removing any margin for human error.

In its entirety, the reproduction process can take minutes, not days.

# Chapter 3:

## Translating

### Translation management cannot be overlooked

It doesn't matter which industry you're in, whether it's e-commerce, iGaming, or finance, talking the language of your customers is a priority. Creating relevant campaigns that connect with viewers in their own language, or versions of ads tailored specifically for differing groups is part and parcel of modern marketing.

At the heart of this process is streamlined translation management and access to talented multi-lingual copy editors. With some brands requiring up to 30 different banner variations per campaign, it is a complicated task to produce the necessary ads.

### Translating banners without a CMP

Until you have translated a banner campaign for over 20 different languages you do not know the pain.

But how was it undertaken without a CMP?

Well, should a campaign run in more than one language, translators would be contracted by a production agency, or in-house translation manager.

A project manager at the production office would then be the main point of contact for all the different translators. Everything would then be coordinated via excel sheets, and via different email chains for different markets.

Like when scaling a campaign, a designer would then have to open each ad size, duplicate the file, and replace existing copy with new alternative copy from one of many complicated excel sheets. There was no way to coordinate translators in one place nor did they have direct communication with the designer.

Each banner would have to be amended to fit the new copy; each small tweak and adjustment having the effect of adding hours to a

designer's workload. Additionally, a designer might have to totally rebuild all the ads associated with complicated languages such as Finnish.

Oh, and the translator would have no idea what the ad looked like either, so any contextual input would be completely lost. Leading to costly mistakes, rewrites, and further design tweaks.

For a typical global campaign, the whole process could involve 10-20 languages – lengthening an already complicated production process by weeks.

Once the translated campaign was published that would be that. Returning to the ad, or updating the copy, just wasn't worth the time and effort.

## Why did Bannerflow make translation management a priority?

Well, it was simple really: with potentially over 20 languages, a translation manager, and multiple spreadsheets, a simple tweak could derail a whole campaign. Potentially, taking anything from 2 days to 2 weeks to resolve.

Similar experiences across the entire Bannerflow team burned their collective memories. In-banner translation management was the solution – the designer and translator finally working in harmony.



### Bannerflow fact:

Unabhaengigkeitserklaerungen, freundschaftsbezeugung, rechtsschutzversicherungsgesellschaften: some examples of lengthy German words. The team wasn't that fond of some copy translations. We can't understand why...

## Translation management via a CMP

Translation has been at the heart of the Bannerflow CMP from the very beginning. From its earliest iteration to today, easy translation management is a key component.

With a cloud-based CMP, translations can be applied in-banner by translators who see their copy in different banner formats. They work collaboratively with designers to edit, and revise banner translations – with instant feedback.

There's neither messy spreadsheets nor overly complicated workflows.

It's now simple to translate ads into all the languages and variations you need. With built-in translation management, simply select a banner set and share it with your chosen in-house translators or translation agency.

Plus, with automatic optimisation, repetitive design tasks are avoided. You simply add the translated copy to the master creative and the CMP automatically injects it into the entire banner set.

And the cherry on top? A CMP allows for the easy optimisation of translated copy in live banner ads – no back and forth, no waiting, no need to republish. Refining complicated, multi-market campaigns is a given.

The ultimate result: it's possible to translate digital advertising in minutes instead of weeks.

# Chapter 4:

## Rich media

### Innovative design that converts

Boring banners don't convert. In the age of digital advertising, competition is high, and your brand needs to stand out.

Rich media ads are one way of catching the eye of viewers. Interactive, animated, and innovatively designed display ads are weapons that all marketing teams must have at their disposal.

Yet, many brands fail to realise this. Afraid that coding complicated designs means a more tedious production process – which in the past was true. However, with the right tools, such as a CMP, every designer can create brilliant HTML5 rich media banners.

### Creating rich media banners without a CMP

Rich media was too complicated. If scaling banners and creating all the different variations needed for a basic campaign put heavy restrictions on creativity, then rich media banners added intricate coding requirements to the process too.

Creating exciting digital display ads just wasn't worth the time and energy. To code each design element required patience and knowledge. For advanced features, skilled HTML5 coders would need to step-in.

The unfortunate reality was that it was hard to find talented designers armed with both design and coding skills. While, tearing developers away from key projects to design intricate banners wasn't rational.

To make matters more complicated, you would have to adhere to file size restrictions when creating rich media ads too. Often features would be trimmed to fit publisher weight requirements. Another blow to making awesome banners.

Something as simple as a font could destroy a banner. Even worse, aggressive image compression was a necessary, but regrettable fact of

life. And as such, superfluous design features were a luxury few could afford.

Animations or complex interactive banners, for campaigns that spanned all of a brand's markets were avoided. Sure, it was possible to produce rich media campaigns but scaling those campaigns in a realistic time-frame was impossible.

Given all the factors required, only very few brands innovated with rich media.

## Why was a solution for rich media a priority?

Back in the day, Bannerflow co-founder Jacobsson found himself in charge of 90% of his company's banner ads. He looked forward to experimenting with animations and new interactive features.

Unfortunately putting these ideas into reality was tough. Without

the technology we take for granted today, he was limited to producing predictable formats. His bosses wanted more, he wanted more, who wouldn't want more?

Together with the Bannerflow team he developed an innovative solution.



### Bannerflow fact:

For some basic CMPs templating is seen as the way to go. But this has the effect of placing limits on designers. Instead Bannerflow developed widgets and in-built optimisations that freed creators and cemented our place in design Valhalla.

## Producing rich media banners with a CMP

The beauty of a CMP is that it makes creating rich media banners routine.

No longer do you have to consider the time it takes to code each and every individual banner. Or for that matter how long it takes to reproduce an entire rich media campaign. It lets brands move beyond the everyday.

You can now scale innovative banners in minutes, with no coding bottleneck. There is no restriction on creativity! Banner designers are finally free!

Innocuous but incredibly powerful features mean designers can move beyond thinking file size and optimisation, and instead work on solving their next design challenge.

With the Bannerflow CMP, there are customisable widgets that do the heavy lifting. From graphic effects, to sign-up forms, to product galleries; these widgets reduce the process of adding HTML5 interactive features down to a simple drag and drop.

Relying on developers to create the necessary coding is over.

Plus, reaching your audience with video display ads on any page, in any ad size, is easy with in-banner video. Producing boring banners is now inexcusable – display advertising has moved on.

Ultimately, improving campaign performance through stunning, interactive designs is easier than you think.

And one more thing... with a CMP you can move beyond rich media and start to contemplate dynamic banners.

Rich media is just the start of the creative journey with a CMP.

# Chapter 5:

## Collaborating

### Optimising your workflows for better performance

Collaboration is at the heart of all display advertising productions. The simpler the workflows, the easier the communication between individuals, the faster a campaign can be produced. It should be easy – but it's unlikely that many campaigns ever meet these criteria.

In fact, good collaboration and efficient workflows are rare. And it's something that costs brands big time. Marketing managers are frustrated by stalled productions, designers sit on their hands, and data just isn't ever used. There has to be a better way? Surely?

### Team collaboration without a CMP

Part of the the problem with collaboration – before the arrival of CMPs – was that it was the victim of endless email chains. You know the kind: the kind where you quickly lost track of who sent what, and where an attachment disappears – never to be seen again.

Without the ability to comment, view, and approve in one place, there was a completely separate process for feedback and design. Like translating banners, the editing process was a disaster.

At no point in campaign production was there a stage where managers, marketers, and designers could easily share feedback and directives. Display advertising worked in silos. It was slow and the opposite of agile working.

For example, a designer would email the marketing manager a zip with each individual file. Their marketing manager would then have the tedious task of opening each file in their browser one-by-one.

In order to give feedback, the marketing manager would then have to create a separate document individually labelling and commenting on each ad variation, before emailing this back as an attachment to the designer.

Oh, and this would be for the first edit.

The upshot of this exhausting and tedious process meant that communication was blunt and straight to the point. To the designer, on the other end of this feedback, it could seem dismissive and vague. It also meant banner designs were limited in potential.

A world of constant feedback and optimisation was unimaginable to all members of the production team.

Instead it was a tiring and tedious process hated by everyone.

## Why put collaboration at the heart of a CMP?

Co-founders Jacobsson and Fahlén, as well as a young Bannerflow team, made it their mission to improve collaboration.

Nightmarish experiences of receiving each banner one-by-one, made Fahlén cringe. While, mismatches in design

were common thanks to manual scaling. It was tedious work for Fahlén, and hours of work for Jacobsson, matching feedback to design.

Hence the creation of in-platform commenting and approval.



### Bannerflow fact:

It was the request “500x500\_spanish, move the CTA button left by 1 pixel” that finally broke the camel’s back – or in other words, our poor designer – Jacobsson.

## Team collaboration with a CMP

Things are different with a CMP.

Thanks to being cloud-based, collaboration between all team members takes place directly in a creative management platform. All processes are completely transparent, with no files sent – and all stakeholders involved.

All advertising and creative material is accessible in one place. Thus everyone in a project sees everything, and comments in-platform; providing instant contextual feedback.

The production process is efficient, workflows are improved, and there is no limit to campaign ambition. Designers are freed to do what they do best and produce remarkable advertising. While marketing managers can simply approve via a box tick.

You can work globally, with colleagues anywhere, in any market too. Via a single preview link, all team members can view all the different sizes, languages, and versions of creatives. Teams become agile, and marketers can embrace the moment.

Using a CMP means marketing teams act quicker across all production workflows – big or small. The ultimate end result is the death of long complicated email chains (at least in display advertising production).

# Chapter 6:

## Publishing

### **Publish with ease, everywhere**

Publishing campaigns should be simple. Easy publishing benefits all display advertisers. Not only does it improve campaign production and scheduling but it frees up resources and enables agile advertising practices.

Programmatic buying should be quick – transactions occur in milliseconds. But from a human perspective, the process can be clunky and cumbersome. Until now.

### **How to publish display campaigns without a CMP**

Before the days of CMP integrations, publishing campaigns was a hassle.

It would begin with either an external media agency, or internal colleague being contacted by a campaign manager. They would then work to ensure that all banner tags for the campaign worked with the third-party systems used for the ad purchase. It was a time-consuming process.

Each file would then be manually uploaded to each system – most likely by a designer. Ads would – again – have to be adapted to the ad specifications of the third parties involved. This could take days to load and test.

This process involved uploading zip files to ad networks and publishers; it was repeated every time a campaign went live. And its impact was many unnecessary man-hours, with too many stakeholders. The result: what should have been a simple process, wasted time and budget.

Publishing the old way was a tedious and lengthy endeavour.

Plus, without the ability to amend post-publication – in real-time – any adjustments would require dismantling a campaign and re-uploading all over again.

What's more, any issues with spelling, design, click-tags etc, meant beginning from scratch. Recreating designs and scaling entire campaigns – again. Entire weekends could be lost over a small error in a translation.

It was horrific.

Perhaps understandable, but shocking by today's standards, was that publishing was once considered the final step of a campaign. Without real-time updating, there just wasn't the option to tweak design, refine copy, or even A/B test.

Optimisation of campaigns was unheard of. Along with it any hope of improving ad performance! If you managed to get a campaign live within a 'reasonable' time-frame that was achievement enough.

Having already taken weeks to build and then distribute; any extra resources wasted on the publishing processes could destroy a campaign's return on investment.

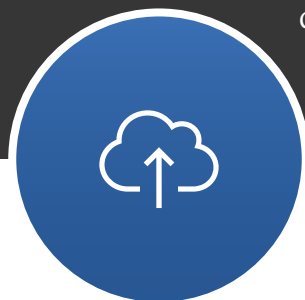
## The reason Bannerflow added real-time publishing

The sun and sea of Malta is the last place you want to waste hours correcting mistakes. Yet Daniel Jacobsson found himself in exactly that position, again and again.

For example, after completing 600 gruelling bingo banner ads he was ready to relax one Friday evening. Alas, this

was not to be. The ads had gone live, but there was a spelling error across all the Spanish versions. Cue: frantic rebuilding, optimising, scaling and republishing.

Haunted by the memory of that weekend, he set out with the Bannerflow team to develop an improved way of working.



### Bannerflow fact:

Publishing – from beginning to end – involved one long, hated, email chain. It would include at least 5 different people all working in different offices, across time zones. To pull-down a campaign, or re-publish, was lengthy and frustrating.

Bringing all stakeholders together in one place was a priority from day one.

## How you publish campaigns with a CMP

All takes is a few clicks. Yes, really it does.

With a CMP, publishing networks are integrated into the platform. Rather than sending neverending zip files back-and-forth, the publishing process is done by one person, in one place, in one moment.

How is this possible? All banners are hosted and accessible via a CMP; allowing marketing managers and designers to amend banners in real-time.

Which combined with a design process that's so simple, means you can adjust copy without the drama and see results almost instantly on your publishing network.

While, thanks to click tags, publishing becomes an almost ongoing process. Managers receive analytics data in minutes rather than weeks, meaning campaigns can be optimised on the fly.

Waiting till the next campaign is a thing of the past.

Optimising, and A/B testing isn't something you learn about and never do, it's something you all the time. It's ingrained in your campaigns.

After all if your brand isn't doing it, you can sure bet your competitor will be.

# Conclusion

## Moving beyond the basics

Creative management platforms help digital marketers to eliminate complexity and nurture creativity. They help everyone in the production chain move beyond tired workflows and less than transparent practices.

Part one of this bold new world of digital advertising is about embracing innovation. For every designer, marketing manager, or CMO tired of a broken system a CMP holds the answer.

Rapid ad production, powerful scaling, translation management, easy collaboration, and simple publishing were once just a dream – now they are reality.

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## Part 2: Mastering your digital campaigns

But that is only the beginning. In Part 2 we move beyond the basics and explain how premium CMPs enable true performance marketing.

This will include how analytics, combined with other unique features, such as dynamic creative, is helping to shape in-house digital advertising as we know it.





[www.bannerflow.com](http://www.bannerflow.com)