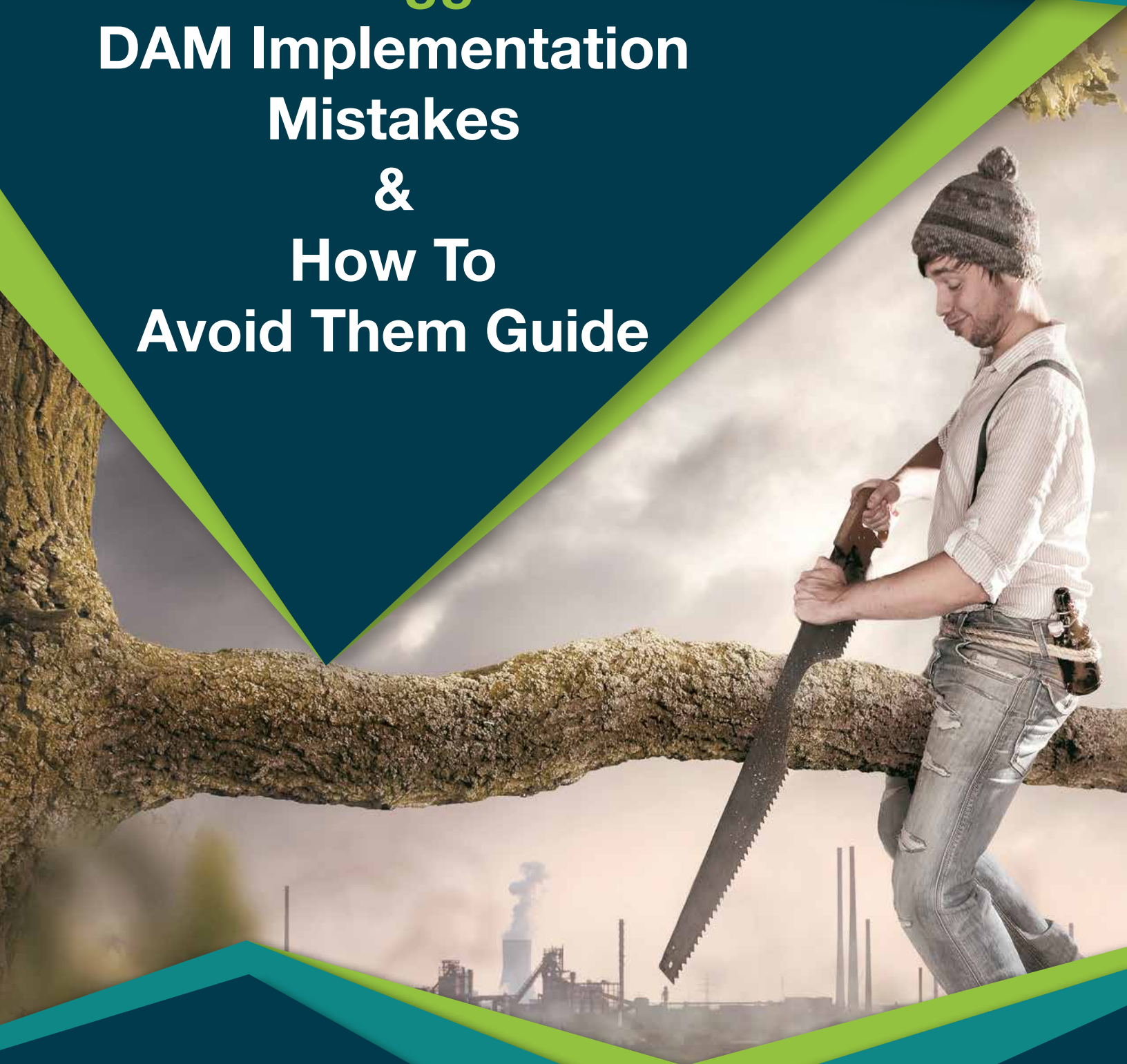# The Biggest
DAM Implementation Mistakes
&
How To
Avoid Them Guide

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So, you're interested in purchasing a digital asset management system or have just recently bought one for your business and have yet to start the implementation process. That's great! At this point, you may feel a bit overwhelmed in knowing where to start as there are a ton of things to consider before successfully deploying. And while every organization will have different performance criteria, there are some tried and true warnings you can learn from so that your DAM doesn't become a gory battle from *Game of Thrones.* Pre-implementation planning and being aware of the most common mistakes others have made can certainly help you avoid your DAM morphing into a war zone.
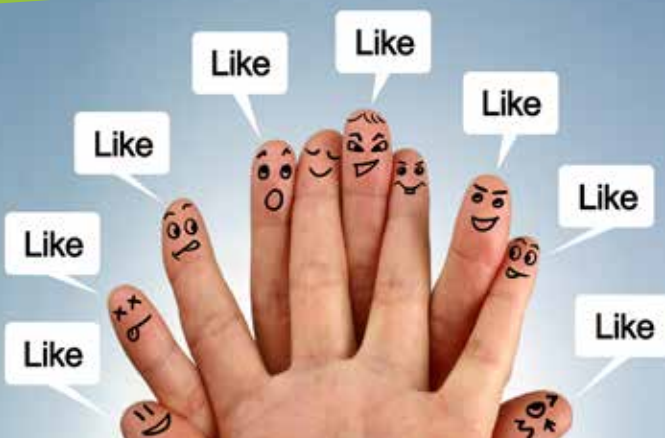

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1

MISTAKE #1:

BEGINNING THE IMPLEMENTAION PROCESS WITHOUT ENDORSEMENT FROM YOUR TEAM

Let's face it, change is scary for many people. Humans tend to be more confident in things that are routine since they don't have to think too hard in completing the task itself (even when the routine behavior might not be the best or most effective way to go about their day). Routine is comfortable. So, the idea of ripping it out in pursuit to improve the entire business flow could bring anxiety and dread among your team. At the end of the day, if you haven't convinced your main users that implementing a DAM is the best path forward not only for your business, but for them as well, you may see inconsistencies when it comes to system adoption and adhering to the best practices you set forth.

Before implementation begins, you need to spend some time planning out how you're going to get your team excited about DAM because it will indeed be a culture shift for them. Slowly plant the seed and gradually build up the enthusiasm instead of going the, "Hey, we have a new system we're going to put in place, and this is happening tomorrow, so get excited. Woot! Woot!" approach. If you can, make your team feel like they're involved in the process from the get-go as they will be the ones navigating the ins and outs of your system most aggressively and on a daily basis. In addition, you should come to the board prepared to answer many questions. Do your due diligence and prepare to answer them as clearly and as thoroughly as possible with complete transparency. You really need to ensure your team feels heard and that any concerns they have are noted.

Another important tip is immediately finding another (preferably a few) DAM champions that work closely with and have the respect of your main user group(s). If your team has someone who understands the challenges and processes on their level advocating for the switch to DAM, then it may be a smoother sell to the rest of the flock.

You should guarantee that one of your DAM champions is not so high up on the totem pole that it will make the rest of your users feel isolated. Part of making your team feel heard is appointing someone they can relate to in order to help lead the charge. For most end users, digital champions will be the face of the project from start to finish. They'll help gather requirements, assist in testing, and most importantly, lead the training and roll-out within their groups.

Spending the proper time planning an ideal DAM solution for your organization should naturally lead to employees actually using the system. Designing solutions with everyone and their workflows in mind should ease any issues that surround user adoption, and help you avoid comments like, 'It doesn't do what I need it to,' or 'That isn't for my department.' If planning wasn't successful, it's likely that user adoption won't be either. It's therefore critical that no matter the DAM project, every user's needs are considered in terms of how he or she will interact with the system.

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MISTAKE #2:

BEGINNING IMPLEMENTATION WITHOUT A PLAN

As with any other business process, properly implementing your digital asset management service means having a vision for what that service should do for your business and the teams involved. The strength of digital management is in its precision results. However, the concept of "garbage in, garbage out" still applies. Get your plan together first, or it won't matter if you have the most cutting-edge, sophisticated digital asset management solution working for you around the clock, ready to install.

First, you need to set goals. What specifically are you trying to accomplish and how will you measure whether or not you will meet those objectives? For instance, which workflows should be streamlined by the DAM? How should the DAM help foster brand consistency across channels? No matter what, you need to make sure you put SMART goals in place. They need to be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely.
Some SMART goals could include:

- Reducing the amount of time it takes to find and retrieve digital assets from X hours a week per user to X hours/minutes a week per user in the next year.

- Prevent accidental use of assets that are off-brand or outdated by X% in the next year.

- Increase the speed of content production to delivery by X% within the next year.

You may also want to consider making your plan more official by putting it in writing. A formal business plan outlines what the DAM system should accomplish- its value to the organization-quantifies it, and then justifies the investment. The starting point is documenting the way things have been done in the past and what it had cost in terms of time, effort, and resources. With this as a baseline, you can project any cost-savings when the DAM is officially deployed. A business plan maps out where you are at, where you are going, how you will get there, and serves as a blueprint for the entire project.

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MISTAKE #3:

NOT EFFECTIVELY DETERMINING YOUR MINIMUM SOFTWARE REQUIREMENTS

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU?

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

There's rarely a 'one-size-fits-all' solution for digital asset management and a careful analysis of organizational needs, wants and requirements must be conducted before any technology should be implemented.

Don't make the mistake by not listing your top functionality priorities (in fact, this step should really be completed way before you actually choose a vendor). By listing out your top software requirements upfront will help avoid them becoming bloated or too expensive to deliver down the road.

To do this the right way, again you need to survey all your user groups to ensure that you are taking into account how different users will be working in the system from a technical perspective. This includes involving your IT department. For example, if you need your DAM to be 100% HIPAA-compliant, what are the technical requirements needed to guarantee that?

Also, make sure you don't make the mistake in waiting until after you purchase your DAM to bring up customization must-haves. First and foremost, some vendors don't even allow customization requests of their software. So, if you have complicated needs that are imperative for your team to successfully adopt the DAM, these needs and their timeline of delivery must be agreed upon with your DAM vendor way before deployment.
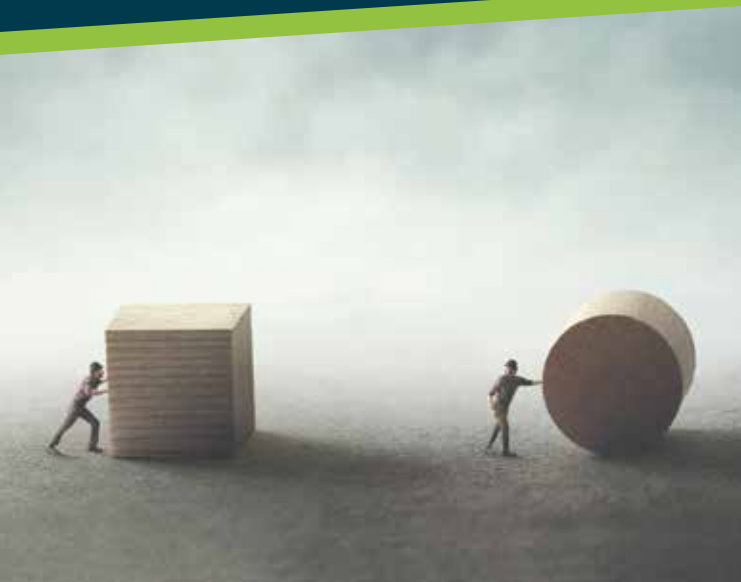

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MISTAKE #4:

MAKING THE PROCESS MORE COMPLICATED THAN IT NEEDS TO BE

The next mistake in DAM implementation has very little to do with the software at all. Companies, in attempts to save money or in ignorantly underestimating the complexity of installation, will sometimes take on more than they can chew in-house.

Proper delegation is usually an essential part of a successful DAM implementation, and it's quite normal to delegate large responsibilities to a consultant or break out the implementation in phases.

For a successful implementation, make sure you discuss all of your intentions with your vendor. Work with your partner directly to avoid having to do everything at once. Always make sure that your most important needs are being addressed. Again, start by figuring out the priorities, and plan on taking small bites over a period of time. Compared to a broad, enterprise-wide roll-out, this approach provides opportunity for the DAM team to work closely with each user group, build a solution that works, and learn valuable lessons with each step. The main point here is just to keep it simple at first. You can always tweak what is and isn't working later on in the process, but only if you have the baseline of your DAM fully intact and molded into the rest of your infrastructure.

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MISTAKE #5:

POOR TRAINING

The same DAM system implemented at two different companies can leave behind two completely different outcomes based on the training of the people who are working most directly with it. This team should first understand the focus of the DAM. The appointed manager must be properly trained in the DAM from the perspective of key performance metrics.

Systems must be properly tested in house, and users must be involved in the testing process as well as in the rollout. This is the only way to truly understand if the training has been successful. Companies may fool themselves into thinking a process has been successful because it hasn't been properly vetted through a real sales cycle. This is also true of training procedures that forego in-house testing. Putting these tests in place will almost ensure that what is outlined in the project plan and the requirements set forth are being fully examined.

Here are some best practices to ensure that training is up to standard:

Personalized assistance

Before implementation you should be ready to deal with technical and non-technical users. There may be some people who are quick to pick up on the DAM tech and familiarize themselves with the inner workings, and there may be others that take longer to get accustomed to it. If these are linchpins within the company, all of them need to understand the DAM on a similar level. Assistance must be customized to the various personalities that are in front of the operation and how different user groups may be utilizing the system.

Sustained assistance

Implementation can be quite a drawn-out process based on the size of the company and the complexity of the DAM itself. Your DAM project managers should be prepared for the long haul, because teetering out at the end of a training does a company no good in terms of a successful implementation that can be sustained over time. Your teams and user groups need to be consistently trained and communicated to when elements of the system have been updated, new features have been incorporated or there have been changes to processes. Also, consistent (or at the very least periodical) training helps reemphasize the importance of the DAM to your business's overall objectives.

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Proactive assistance

When outlining your training plan, your vendor is a great resource to help you foresee any issues with the training itself or user adoption as they have tons of experience helping other companies get up and running. In addition, training is not about putting out fires after errors have created huge problems. This will always create issues of prioritization that will naturally slow down implementation. Proactivity is about steering away from those potholes because you see them coming from a mile away and leveraging the relationship with your vendor will help you plan for possible hiccups and ensure your team is prepared for those as well.

Customized Training

Preliminary system training is not over until DAM processes are successfully established consistently in the real world. This will require your project managers to work closely with your vendor to structure out a training model that is tailored to your organization's specific uses for the DAM. This gives end users a convincing reason to pay full attention and to do their homework as it applies directly to their productivity. And, their swift progress towards increased productivity reflects nicely on the entire user group.

Learning the importance of information

The importance of metadata and how to use it can't be underestimated. The training process must end up with at least one expert in metadata and how to use it properly for your business. It's imperative to train your users not only on how to navigate the DAM itself, but also on its strategy. You need to teach your users how the content within the system should be managed, who will have access and in what scenarios, and what other processes will be such as approvals and workflows.

6

MISTAKE #6:

NOT BUILDING OUT AN EFFECTIVE METADATA & TAXONOMY STRUCTURE

Building on the previous point, it's essential to understand that metadata is one of the most important aspects of implementing a new DAM otherwise your DAM will quickly go amuck. In terms of digital asset management, there are a variety of metadata models. The model used will likely depend on context as the intended use of the content will likely affect the type of metadata assigned to it.

First, it's important to understand the types of metadata that you'll be dealing with in the world of your new DAM so you can stay organized.

Structural metadata

This is the data that will tell you how digital assets are organized. For instance, the structure of the notes that comprise your OneNote notebook can be quickly communicated to you through its structural metadata. This type of metadata also tells you if a certain asset is a part of one or more collections. It helps you facilitate how information is presented and how it navigates within an electronic resource.

Administrative metadata

If you're looking for the technical source of a certain asset, you are looking for its administrative metadata. This type of data includes information such as the time of creation, the file type and how it was created. This metadata gives you insights as to the intellectual owner of certain assets and usage rights. Administrative metadata tells you how a piece of data can be used within the auspices of a certain license as well.

Descriptive metadata

This is perhaps the most important type of metadata for identifying digital assets. You might denote descriptive metadata as the "demographics" of a piece of data. This information includes the author, title and keywords of a particular asset. One early example of descriptive metadata usage is the ISBN system.

Understanding the different types of metadata is only a step in helping to ensure that your DAM is properly implemented. You need to understand which types of metadata your company will be using most frequently and how in order to maintain tip top organization. However, there are other best practices that you must consider about the management of this data. Below are some best practices that you can count on to be more successful in building out your metadata and taxonomy framework.

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① Building Out Your Fields

Define what type of information (fields) you need to capture within your content. This should be done in context of how people will be searching for and using the content you've added. You may already have a metadata model and there's a good chance it's at least partially based on the IPTC metadata specifications. In defining your metadata model, you should think about how metadata travels with content that's shared with other users.

② Partnership between metadata suppliers and consumers

Think about how your users will search for content long after it's been imputed into the DAM. There's often a huge disconnect between the people that populate the DAM with content (suppliers) and those that want to use that content (consumers). A partnership between these different groups is important so that a common vocabulary is used.

③ Controlling the metadata & maintaining consistency

If you don't have a team in place whose responsibility it is to control metadata, then you'll have trouble collecting and accessing this data down the road. To apply consistent metadata, you need to think about file-naming standards, defining keywords, caption or description styles and other controlled vocabulary that specifically define how information is assigned. If a company uses a taxonomy structure for metadata tagging, then digital asset managers must be trained in the structure of keywords that will be used to organize metadata. The incorporation of a good taxonomy structure is one of the best ways to establish a tagging process that is clearly defined, which will allow end-users to conduct

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proper searches for digital assets instead of having to find them in random or haphazard ways.

The proper establishment of the structure should also include prioritizing the end user, establishing consistent conventions for naming files, setting clear rules to format times and dates associated with data and guidance on keywords.

4 Overlooking automation

Maintenance of any sort of data can become burdensome to accompany over time. Metadata is especially susceptible to this type of problem. As a business grows, the flow of data also grows. It's difficult to maintain scale here manually. Utilize any auto-tagging feature in your DAM as often as possible. This will help limit the manual drudgery in applying metadata ad hoc to the content you upload.

5 Access to metadata

The entire purpose of metadata management is the ability to reach that data quickly and easily. If there's difficulty in accessing the repository, then the whole reason for upgrading to a DAM is defeated. Don't make things harder for your team by not making metadata as accessible as possible from day one.

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MISTAKE #7:

NOT HAVING A USER BEST PRACTICE AGREEMENT & LACK OF USER COMPLIANCE

Lack of compliance (or varying levels of compliance) can be another stumbling block to whether or not your DAM implementation is a success or not. In all honesty, system users can be lazy and without any sort of corporate accountability policy, the DAM won't function properly, nor will it talk nice with the rest of the tools, programs, software and systems it integrates to. It will take the entire village to keep all users accountable and to always adhere to best practice.

Every company must adopt standards for metadata, asset tagging and keyword attribution; build out unique identifiers, naming conventions, asset registries and make standardizing your digital assets a priority for all users. This will better ensure that your database is clean, always up to date, and that everyone is adhering to the same best practices.

Any company that doesn't have a set of best practices should take a step back to create them. The company must be clear about why adhering to it is crucial for every user. If best practices are in place but people still seem to be going rogue, get management involved to address poor behavior and have them help outline possible consequences to a continuous lack of compliance. Hopefully at that point, those cowboys will listen!

The entire point of digital asset management is to serve as a system that doesn't require going rogue in order to get things done in an organized way. Keep in mind that most of your cowboys are behaving this way because of a stacked bureaucracy. No one likes to wade through red tape to get something done when an easier process is staring everyone in the face. The point here is that you need to prepare for potential user laziness. Call out bad habits or behavior as well as promote good management practices.

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LACK OF LEADERSHIP BUY-IN & NOT SETTING UP TO PROVE ROI

Yes, you will need a leader who is well-versed in the technical aspects of DAM to champion the cause. Executives have a nose for telling if you know what you're talking about. However, they get bored easily. After you've proven your mettle with the technical stuff, you need to switch very quickly into how your DAM solution will positively affect the important key performance metrics of the company.

Case studies are a great way to convince decision-makers about the importance of a good digital asset management service. If you know what other organizations have been able to accomplish with a solid system, you can quickly begin talk to C-suite employees on their level. Just as importantly, you should be able to provide hard data on the cost savings that you'll bring to the company. After all, you're dealing in data– this should be a breeze as long as you take the time to crunch the numbers. One of the biggest cost savings is in optimizing the IT department. Whether you're consolidating the license fees from legacy software or reducing the company's need for in-house IT support and reliance on hardware with infrastructure costs that are through the roof, this is where you can shine because the comparisons here are usually so polarizing.

Another huge aspect of business that modern executives are concerned with is data security. You know exactly how DAM can help protect your organization, but the other executives in your company may not. Let everyone know exactly how managing data can help to create secure hierarchies for license agreements or gated content and help the company avoid lawsuits through more efficient and easily tracked paper trails. Sell DAM as if you are bringing the best business insurance possible on the market.

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9

MISTAKE #9:

NOT COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR DAM VENDOR REGULARLY

Some companies may choose to outsource various parts of DAM implementation to a third-party vendor. Regardless of the exact things that are outsourced, users staying in contact with the DAM account manager (vendor) is essential to a successful implementation. There will likely be aspects of the software that aren't immediately accessible to the layman or to the new upstart. Attempting to decipher a new process while implementing is often too much for even the biggest, most tech-savvy companies. We often see businesses just stay in their own zone and try to deal with everything themselves. Your vendor is your best and most helpful resource if you start going down this road!

Look forward to at least a one-year investment in your DAM implementation process. This investment must be maintained regardless of industry changes or employee turnover. Until then, your vendor should be available to help with strategic challenges, updates, tech support and other issues.

Talking to your DAM vendor is even more important once you have more precisely determined how the new upgrade will function within your infrastructure. As tweaks are being made to mold the DAM into the crevices of your system, your company may need vendor assistance more than in the beginning. Think of implementation like digging for diamonds – drilling down creates more pressure. The deeper you go, the more help you might need, although you may be closer to the goal.

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10

MISTAKE #10:

NOT BUILDING YOUR DAM WITH SCALABILITY IN MIND

When it comes to DAM implementation always think longer term. Just because you have 10,000 assets ready to go today, doesn't mean you will next year or even five years from now. Also, as your company grows, so will your processes. When building out a DAM, many companies forget to think how the DAM will need to evolve with the changing tides of your business- It should never lose functionality. If the way in which you built out your DAM or if the product itself is not scalable, then it will be difficult to realize the value of the DAM later on.

During implementation, you should work with your vendor and IT team to ensure permission, workflow, speed and storage requirements can be scaled appropriately to fit your business's changing needs. This is crucial and should not be overlooked if you don't want to have to go through the entire implementation process again within the next few years because your DAM solution is no longer the best fit.

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MISTAKE #11:
UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

No matter how sophisticated or efficient your digital asset management solution is, all technology has its limits. There is no piece of tech that will work like a company wants it to 100% of the time as every company operates differently. However, if there are aspects of your current DAM system or its setup that is bottlenecking daily business workflow, then the company should have a conversation with the vendor post haste.

Before the conversation with the vendor, a company must prioritize between the must-haves and the nice-to-haves. Keep in mind that no vendor will be able to multi-task every product request at the same time. It's also possible that your vendor may not always be willing to accommodate your requests for customization.

Your company's best bet is to be patient. Customizations will usually take time for the vendor if the customization requests are specialized or unique. Be realistic and flexible and help your vendor prioritize what is most important to your business. It's part of their job to help make your DAM experience a success, but they can only do this if you have a clear vision of what you absolutely need! For instance, if you're expecting your DAM filtering or permissions structure to perform in a more personalized way, then make sure you're clear with your vendor about this from the beginning. Keep in mind that some baseline systems may not support everything that you need. The first customization may also not meet all of your expectations out of the box - do not overlook the possibility of multiple iterations.

With the above in mind, the question of customized work should occur during the sales process of buying a DAM. A company should know up front if a vendor is open to taking on custom work. If so, understand that those requests may come at an additional cost. If you believe that aspects of your DAM are not behaving properly, always bring it up with your vendor. The shortcoming could be a technical bug. However, you'll never know unless you communicate with them about what the software can really do.

12

MISTAKE #12:

NOT CHOOSING THE RIGHT DAM SOLUTION TO FIT YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS

Choosing the right DAM vendor for your business is vital to a successful DAM launch. Again, some systems may not support everything or meet all your expectations out of the box.
If you have customization needs, I really hope you were clear about those needs before choosing a vendor. If not, you may soon have a wakeup call if you find out your vendor can't accommodate the customizations you require to be successful.

However, let's say you have yet to choose a vendor and have a clear vision of what a DAM solution should do for your company. How should you pick between the products on your short list? Here are a few things to consider:

Understanding your company processes
Does your company have processes based around projects or brands? Take stock of how things happen in your bureaucracy and pick the DAM type that corresponds with your basic company processes.

Great vendor customer service
No company should have to move through the implementation phase by itself. Any DAM solution worth its salt is simply too much for a layman (or even a team of laymen) to tackle with the day to day responsibilities of a company to manage as well. The vendor knows its solution better than anyone. It only makes sense to pass that knowledge on during setup than to deal with trial and error methodology after a faulty introduction. No modern customer base will wait around for the company to get it right, especially if any of the errors created end up being customer facing. Your DAM solution must quickly become a sustainable aspect of your workflow.

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Meeting basic technological needs

1 Does the solution you're considering support your company's current operating systems? If your DAM doesn't integrate from the start, you undermine the entire reason for the DAM. Individuals will be able to gain access to and even produce new assets without passing through the DAM.

2 Is file size an issue? Whether or not your company has an animation render farm is an important consideration here.

3 What Internet browsers is your company using? If the chosen DAM doesn't support them, you have the same issue as with an unsupported operating system.

4 How many users does your company have? You need a DAM that can handle the total number and the hierarchies that your company has set up.

5 What other components of your infrastructure are relevant? Your DAM will probably need to integrate with your web CMS, design tools, etc.
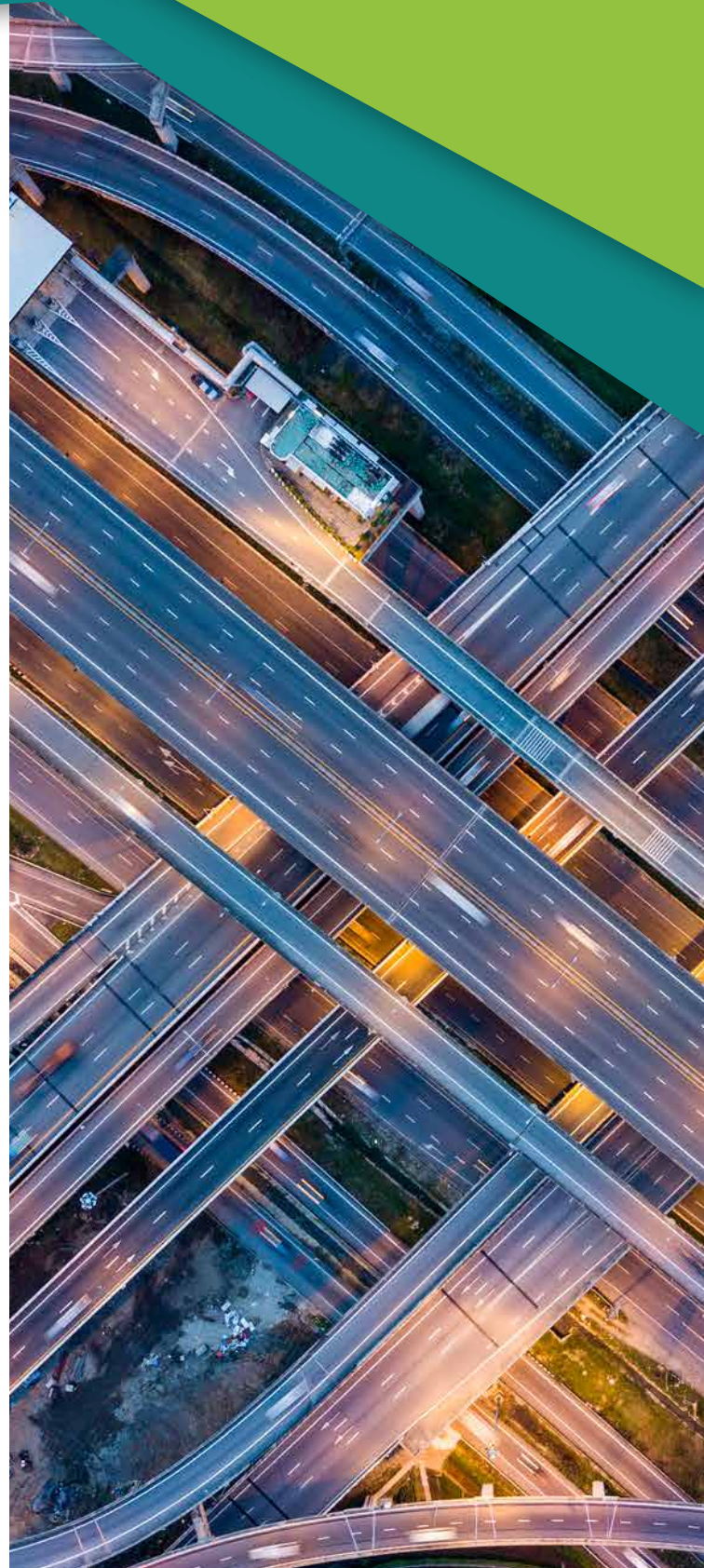
Ensuring critical features are present

All companies are certainly slightly different in terms of the features they need from a DAM.

Self-maintenance or managed solution

A managed solution that is hosted through a partner company gives you a lower cost option. You may give up some of the customization options for the lower price, however. Maintaining your DAM on site allows you to cultivate it to your company's exact specifications.

The level of customization

Every company will have to evaluate the level of customization that is needed. You need to make sure that your chosen DAM can handle this level of personalization and what your in-house administrators will need to do in order to accomplish it.

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DAM IMPLEMENTATION CHECK LIST

If not properly executed, it can quickly seem as though your DAM project is an utter waste of time, resources and money. Let's rehash the most common mistakes in a checklist format to be a reference for you later on.

- ❌ No plan
- ❌ Not sticking to plan throughout the process
- ❌ Project scope too big or unrealistic
- ❌ Lack of success criteria and ways to measure it
- ❌ No thorough analysis of what specifically is needed
- ❌ Lack of dedication to best practice compliance, data integrity and metadata consistency
- ❌ No content consumers and suppliers involved in planning
- ❌ Workflows does not pair well with business procedures
- ❌ Not a complete understanding of what DAM actually is and is not
- ❌ Underestimated complexity
- ❌ Overestimated skill sets available
- ❌ Lack of resources to manage the project
- ❌ Not collecting the most appropriate metadata
- ❌ No metadata or taxonomy structure or standardization
- ❌ Gap between IT and actual DAM users
- ❌ IT not involved in preliminary stages of project scope
- ❌ Underestimating technical requirements needed to support project successfully
- ❌ No dedicated champions or internal DAM super users
- ❌ Having lofty expectations about benefits and functionality
- ❌ Lack of buy-in from leadership team
- ❌ Too much focus on customizations or non-core issues
- ❌ Not communicating with vendor regularly
- ❌ Not being transparent with vendor about expectations from the get-go
- ❌ Not building the system with scalability in mind

By avoiding the above most common mistakes, you'll be in great shape to start a seamless DAM implementation.

Interested in learning more about how DAM can help transform your business? Contact us today at **info@merlinone.com.**

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Logan Fleck is the Marketing Director at **MerlinOne**, a digital asset management solution that helps organizations like the New York Times, NASA, Northwestern University, ABC, Make-A-Wish, and more accelerate their content production and help boost their marketing productivity. **Logan's** work in digital asset management and marketing technology is informed by her deep understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities that marketers face in an ever-changing technological environment.

Logan has her undergraduate degree in Communications from Marymount Manhattan College and her master's degree from Columbia College Chicago in Media Management with a focus in Marketing. A Chicagoan at heart, **Logan** is not embarrassed to admit that she's a strong advocate for deep dish pizza and hot dogs with all the fixings except ketchup.

About MerlinOne

MerlinOne's proven, consistent, feature-rich and powerful software has been the mission-critical DAM for the most demanding content environments for +25 years.

A centralized hub, allowing you to simply, painlessly and securely manage your business digital assets, Merlin supports content teams to seamlessly govern their assets to streamline internal communication, shorten project timelines, and increase overall content efficiency and performance.

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What we're about.

Our values.

"All of our customers receive the white glove service no matter how big or how small. The dedication we have to them is unquestionably the MerlinOne competitive advantage. "

David Tenenbaum
CEO MerlinOne

Empower

Passion

Integrity

Reliability

The Merlin difference.

We're not just your standard out-of-the-box DAM solution, we're your partner. Your grievances are our grievances. It doesn't matter what the climate is like, we're in the trench with you every single step of the way.

60K+
users world wide

135+
companies served

30M+
assets managed

Countless
happy customers

Where all the magic happens.

Contact info We're here to answer all your questions! Feel free to drop us a line any time.

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