How to Select a DAM

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
WebDAM works with the world’s best brands, providing the leading platform for managing, controlling and sharing creative files such as images, logos, graphics, docs, presentations, videos and more.

www.webdam.com 1.877.408.4888 sales@webdam.com
How to Select Digital Asset Management Software

So now that you’re well-acquainted with what DAM is and determined whether you and your organization can benefit from implementing a DAM platform, there’s the new challenge of figuring out which DAM vendor to choose. There are so many options on the market today, ranging from tiny startups to very large, enterprise-grade offerings — it’s important to find the solution that most closely fits your digital asset management needs and helps you work better, more efficiently and improve your business’ overall performance.

First off, tackle the project of selecting a DAM vendor as just that — a project. If you apply standard project management techniques to the selection process, it will end up being smooth and efficient for your whole organization to…

The first step to choosing the best DAM is to quickly understand your organization’s specific needs and DAM requirements.

If you don’t have a needs or requirements document, start with this one — derived from the most common needs and features organizations typically want.

As we’ve discussed before, digital asset management can be a very generic term that means a lot of different things to different people. Start by gathering feedback from all of your stakeholders — the team members that will be interacting with the DAM system most often. Then, form a committee that involves key players and end-users from each department that will be influenced by the DAM project — this could include marketing, design, photographers, sales, distributors, communications and IT. Usually, it’s best to focus on the end-users first and foremost. With today’s preference in cloud technology, more often than not, DAM projects are 100% driven by marketing and creative teams. Once you have your committee identified, collectively determine a list of requirements that a DAM vendor must fulfill. If you don’t know where to begin with the list, start here.
Once you have a team in place and meet to identify the “perfect world” with DAM, ensure that all opinions are heard. It’s important to have really effective communication at this stage so everyone’s on the same page about what’s needed from a DAM vendor. In addition, depending on the complexity of the organization, you might want to identify 3rd party applications or processes that the DAM will interact with. To discuss process changes, schedule another meeting. Your DAM meetings should be focused on requirements and selecting the right DAM. And remember, time is money. Your goal is to clearly define requirements, locate the vendor and get a demo or trial for the real fun.

Once you have your DAM requirements identified, it’s time to present to prospective vendors. It’s important to base these requirements on use cases, desired end-user experience and workflows you see for the DAM system, not just individual features you would like to see in a DAM platform. This is to ensure that whatever system you decide on ends up addressing your organization’s actual needs, not just adding tech for tech’s sake.

After this is completed, it’s time to put together a list of vendors to research and talk to. It’s a good idea to keep your list to fewer than 10 prospective vendors. Decide at this time what type of DAM service you prefer: today's popular web-based DAM platforms or legacy on-premise DAM software driven by IT. Both of these options offer very different services for digital asset management, so decide early on which direction you want to go in. To learn the major differences between web-based DAM software vs on-premise DAM software, go here.

Once your entire committee has reviewed your list of DAM software vendors and each department has given its input about different needs and use cases, it’s time to narrow down your options to a short list. The smaller the better. You might be lucky with a list that is only one or two vendors long. Regardless, now comes the fun part. It is time to demo DAM software.

When you reach out to the DAM vendors, have a general idea of the dates/times that you’re available for a live demo. The best DAM software vendors will get back to you fast and accommodate your needs. If you are fast-moving organization, be weary of a vendor who is reluctant to provide a demo or trial, or takes more than a day or two to respond to your inquiry. This is usually a red flag. In fact, record how long it takes for a human being to respond to your inquiry. This can provide valuable insight on the professionalism and dedication towards customer experience.

Once your demos are scheduled, if you’re evaluating more than one vendor, be sure to have the same team members evaluating all DAM vendors. You want to make sure that everyone is on the same page.

Another key point to remember during demos: make sure you’re applying the products to the specific tasks and use cases that you would be implementing the DAM system for regularly. Don’t allow yourself to just discuss features. Discuss how they will be used with your unique workflows and users. Many times, a sales representative will just feature-dump on you to avoid your unique needs. It’s much more effective to apply demos to realistic workflows and use cases rather than trying to extrapolate the usefulness of a service from a rehearsed demo. To move fast and avoid wasting days, weeks or even months, make sure your whole project committee is sitting in on product demos so everyone’s on the same page when the time comes to make a final decision.

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Most likely, you’re going with a cloud-based DAM. Be 100% sure that it is multi-tenant. The world’s best cloud platforms are built with multi-tenant architecture — think Salesforce, Facebook, Amazon, LinkedIn, Box, etc. All are multi-tenant. Get what you pay for.

Get a clear picture of the end-user experience with the interface and features. If a DAM is not easy to use, it will create headaches and limitations in your organization.

Learn exactly what is included in the setup fee, annual subscription, support and deployment of the DAM system.

Be sure the DAM plays nice with others. By integrating a DAM with other applications, organizations can streamline even more processes.

Does the service take a “turnkey” approach? What does that entail, exactly?

What are response times for support and the sales experience you’re having?

Be clear on the differences between “customization” vs “configuration.” Quite often, customization means you’ll waste a lot more money on professional services, get stuck down the road and spend even more. Configuration means the software is already smart, modern and flexible enough to meet all your unique needs, without limitations.

Outline specific goals for the DAM implementation, which means getting a timeline of the deployment and what exactly is needed from the client’s end. Find out how long the average deployment takes and how long the shortest and longest projects took.

If you’re still on the fence, ask for references.

Once you have these answers, lay your final options side by side, compare and contrast your trial account experiences and make a decision. Then, step back and watch how DAM can help propel your organization’s marketing efforts to a whole new level!