A Scalable MarTech Stack Starts with a Solid DAM Foundation

Evaluating a DAM to Maximize ROI and Growth

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Marketing Technology Today

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Digital transformation has undeniably been a hot topic of conversation in recent years, with data now showing that over 70% of organizations are already undergoing some form of it ([Source](#)). During this evolution, the star of the show is your marketing technology stack. Having core technologies as lead actors that are both scalable and adaptable ensures you're enabled for growth and ongoing improvement, as well as set up for digital transformation success.

No matter what phase you're at in a digital transformation, at the centre stage of all modern and highly adaptable marketing stacks is a digital asset management (DAM) system. It's now clear that DAM is no longer optional – it's a critical component of the technical foundation that supports and enables all highly-productive and adaptable marketing and creative teams – not to mention the departments, vendors and partners that they interact with and support on a daily basis.

The necessity of DAM is especially true in today's dispersed team environment. It's no longer about solving one or two specific pain points – it's now about accessibility, security and productivity for entire organizations.

DAM: When Improvising Has Run It's Course.

It doesn't make sense to have multiple CRMs, marketing automation platforms and similar tools, yet often you see organizations that have, at minimum, dozens of content silos. An on-premise server, multiple file management systems, and

sometimes even more than one DAM solution – all in the same department of the same organization – is not a rare occurrence. In short, many organizations are having to improvise to get by.

Think about your own organization and where your hard-earned assets are today. Those assets your team has spent hours, days, weeks, even months creating...where are they? Are they on hard drives, in personal or team Dropbox accounts, or maybe held by your ad agency, photographers, and videographers? None of these options are truly acceptable when you consider that those assets are your intellectual property – and how expensive they were to create.

To ensure the success of your digital transformation and enable your business to scale efficiently and cost-effectively, it's critical to stop improvising and start identifying asset silo locations and aggregating them into a central system. When implemented well, a DAM can – and will – manage, control and protect your high-value assets – the photos, videos, design files, presentations, etc. that represent your brand, as well as the data around those assets, from ideation to archival across the *entire organization.*

Establishing a Scalable MarTech Stack Begins with a Timeless Star – DAM

In today's highly fluid business environment, organizations worldwide are looking for flexibility. To maximize the value of a DAM within your organization, it needs to act as the foundation of your technology stack. A truly valuable DAM should feed into every other platform available, to ensure that every user, department, campaign, etc. is using the same set of approved assets.

It's important to note that not all DAMs are created equal, and not all will be able to scale the way you need them to in order to maximize ROI and future-proof your organization. We suggest evaluating DAMs using two components, to ensure the solution you're assessing will pass the test of time:

1. Architecture and technical capabilities; and

2. Go-to-market approach of the vendor.

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Evaluating Vendor Technical Capabilities

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The current business climate sees organizations and technology advancement constantly shifting. Too often, organizations will select a DAM without taking the time to consider their future needs.

Spoiler alert, the organizations that don't consider the "big picture" quickly find that they've outgrown the DAM they selected within a couple years (sometimes even months), so they need to upgrade sooner than expected. It's important for your DAM to continuously evolve with the technology and environment around it.

When looking at a DAM, consider if the technical capabilities of the vendor are available to continually scale, pivot and adapt to deliver what you need to thrive long-term. From a technical perspective, this means looking at the vendor's approach to:

- Metadata limitations

- User permissions

- Integration flexibility

- Library security

- Platform compatibility

- Performance

Metadata Limitations

At surface value, one of the key benefits of a DAM is asset discoverability, specifically, the additional metadata that organizations can take advantage of like keywords, attributes, filters, etc., to power their search. The challenge that encroaches when organizations try to scale is that their keyword structure doesn't scale well to thousands or even millions of assets. Often there are just too many assets to justify manually tagging one-by-one. If left to their own devices, this can lead to lazily or even untagged assets that then get lost in your DAM.

> *It's critical to consider how you'll utilize metadata in order to scale your DAM over the long term.*

Artificial Intelligence

One of the first, and most clear solutions to tackle metadata is artificial intelligence (AI).

Artificial intelligence capabilities can range, depending on your use cases or ability to develop AI models. If you're looking for a quick solution, out-of-the-box packages are available, offering auto-tags for common objects, colours, text and more. If you're able to undertake a larger AI project and need tags more specific to your business, you can also train your own AI models to recognize logos, objects, people, etc., as well as transcribe and translate videos. The opportunities truly are endless with custom AI.
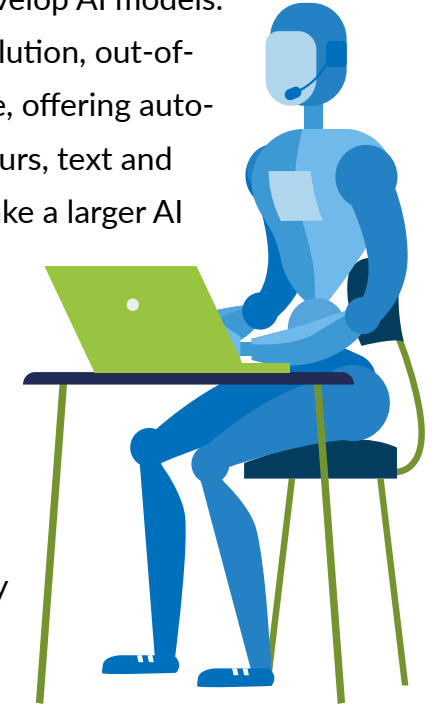
> *MediaValet provides custom and out-of-the-box AI packages, so you can infinitely scale and automate metadata creation.*

Cascading Categories

While AI is one element of scaling metadata, it often doesn't solve all keywording scalability issues – either because the tags don't provide real business value, or custom AI is too much of an undertaking. This is why cascading categories are so important to a scalable, long-term DAM.

With cascading categories, each category title associated with any given asset is viewed by the DAM as a keyword and part of a cascading keyword chain that associates it with all categories above it. For example, if an asset is categorized as United States > Washington > Seattle, the system will automatically add each of these categories as a keyword. When this feature is available, organizations can use cascading categories as their main source of searchable metadata, enabling them to scale quickly without needing to individually keyword each asset.

MediaValet provides cascading categories, ensuring every asset is discoverable - no matter the size of your library.

User Permissions

Another critical component to scaling is limitations on the number of users and groups you can have, as well as the permissions available for each of those groups.

It comes down to math – the more people, departments and partners that can get value out of a single system – the faster you can scale and achieve ROI. Where organizations often run into trouble with their DAM is when there are limitations in place, either with user and group caps or the price per user, that make it nearly impossible to make the DAM accessible to everyone.

It's critical to choose a DAM that offers unlimited users and user groups, including administrators, so that you can add as many as your business needs. When organizations can set custom permissions for each group, including capabilities (who can download, upload, etc.) and category access, it enables the ability to create custom libraries for each department and partner. At the corporate level, it gives a complete view of all assets and their usage across your entire organization.

MediaValet offers unlimited users and user groups, so you can roll your DAM out to as many departments as you like without restrictions or concerns.

Flexibility

Many organizations will choose a DAM based on out-of-the-box integrations. While these kinds of integrations are incredibly helpful for a quick set-up, it's critical to also ensure the vendor has a clean, easy-to-use application programming interface (API). One integration today can quickly become 10 tomorrow – and only in very rare circumstances will one single vendor offer integrations into your entire tech stack. Even if you don't use or need it right away, having the ability to build integrations internally, and connect them into your DAM via an API ensures you're never reliant on the vendor to achieve your business goals.

For simple extensibility requirements, such as Office 365, it's very likely that an out-of-the-box integration will work. But if you are trying to integrate systems such as a customer relationship management (CRM) or marketing automation system, these have their own configurable workflows. These workflows will differ from one implementation to another and may use DAM functionality that other vendors may not even consider. This is where an API comes into play – enabling you to create an integration that's custom to your workflows.

The two key questions to evaluate a DAM's integration capabilities are:

a. Does every functionality within the DAM portal that you see have a corresponding API endpoint? In other words, can every function in the DAM be done within another application by calling the API?

b. Does the DAM allow a third party application to subscribe to events in the library? If an asset gets uploaded or moved from one category to another, will the DAM be able to notify the integration? This is very important because not all integrations call APIs.

MediaValet provides an open API, which allows you to build integrations around your existing workflows and use cases.

Library Security

Your high-value assets are mission critical, and as such, need to be protected. With this in mind, security, privacy and accessibility can't be afterthoughts with your DAM.

When it comes to security, you need to make sure you have the compliance and features needed to keep your assets covered – now and in the future. While encryption-at-rest has become an industry standard security feature, don't assume that all vendors follow it. You need to do your research and verify that the DAM encrypts assets in cloud storage.

The storage subsystem is the cornerstone of the DAM. You need to make sure that the DAM runs on a storage fabric that is infinitely scalable. This means that neither you or the vendor have to worry about running out of space - no matter how much storage you consume. Additionally, you need to have the confidence that if a file gets corrupted, you have a locally redundant file system that will self-heal the corrupted file. If by any chance the entire data centre where the file system lives goes down, you should also be protected by geo-replication.
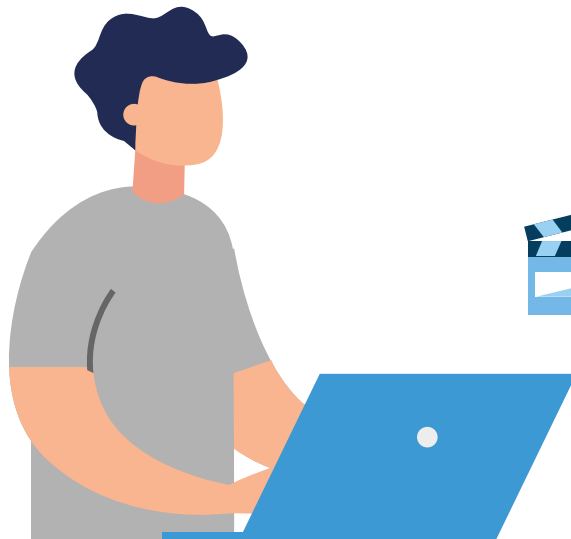
Other factors to consider with regards to storage are data residency, as well as industry and regional compliance requirements. For example, in highly regulated industries, like finance or government institutions, data needs to reside within the country, so when you geo-replicate data, both the primary and the backup data centres have to reside within the same country.

While security may not be top-of-mind now, regulations are continually changing – especially regarding customer data. Establishing the correct security standards from the start ensures that you won't need to rip-and-replace your DAM down the line if it doesn't comply with your organization's standards.

MediaValet offers enterprise-grade security and compliance for all organizations, keeping your assets safe, secure and compliant with industry standards.
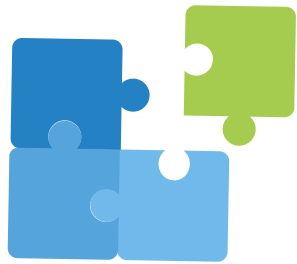
Platform Compatibility

Another consideration for scalability is platform compatibility - how well the vendor's cloud platform fits into your overall IT or MarTech strategy. For example, if your organization is using Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, Teams, Active Directory, etc., DAM vendors using Microsoft Azure would be a great fit, as it aligns with your Microsoft strategy.

When your DAM platform is aligned with your overall tech strategy, scalability concerns that you have previously addressed are also carried over into the DAM. If you're the DAM administrator, imagine trying to manage 10,000 users in your DAM on your own. Since your IT team is already managing all these users in Active Directory, you can easily scale the reach of the DAM to all the users within your organization as needed – and in a matter of minutes.

Once you've deployed the DAM at scale to all users in your organization, adoption becomes your next concern. Users work with productivity software, like Word, wPowerPoint,

Teams or Slack, all the time. Instead of teaching your users to use yet another piece of software, the best way to enable them with your brand assets and corporate media assets would be to surface them within the apps they use day-to-day.

> *MediaValet is built on Microsoft Azure, making it a great fit for organizations with a Microsoft strategy.*
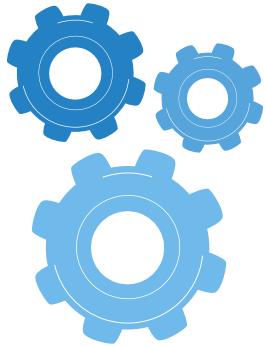
Performance

While the next section gets a little more technical, it's an extremely important consideration for enterprise companies - especially, when considering scalability.

Scaling a DAM in terms of volume and storage footprint can be measured by its ability to ingest. Ingestion not only covers uploading, but also includes the generation of asset previews, the extraction of metadata, the cataloguing of attributes and the indexing for browsing and search.

Performance factors in the DAM relevant to scalability boil down to two activities: ingesting and querying.

Ingestion Times

The ingestion process is triggered once an asset is uploaded to the DAM. So, the first question to ask is: What are the ingress rates of the DAM? Cloud storage accounts should be able to handle up to 5 gigabytes per second (GBPS) for a geo-redundant solution and 10 GBPS for a

non-geo redundant solution (for peace of mind, having geo-redundancy is the best option).

Once it's in the DAM provider's storage, the next question you should be asking is: How many processing engines are available? Physics is physics. Given the same number of processing engines and the same type of asset, you will get the work done in the same amount of time no matter which DAM provider you choose. The important question is how many of these engines can you get the DAM provider to give to you – not only during the onboarding phase, but after, as well.
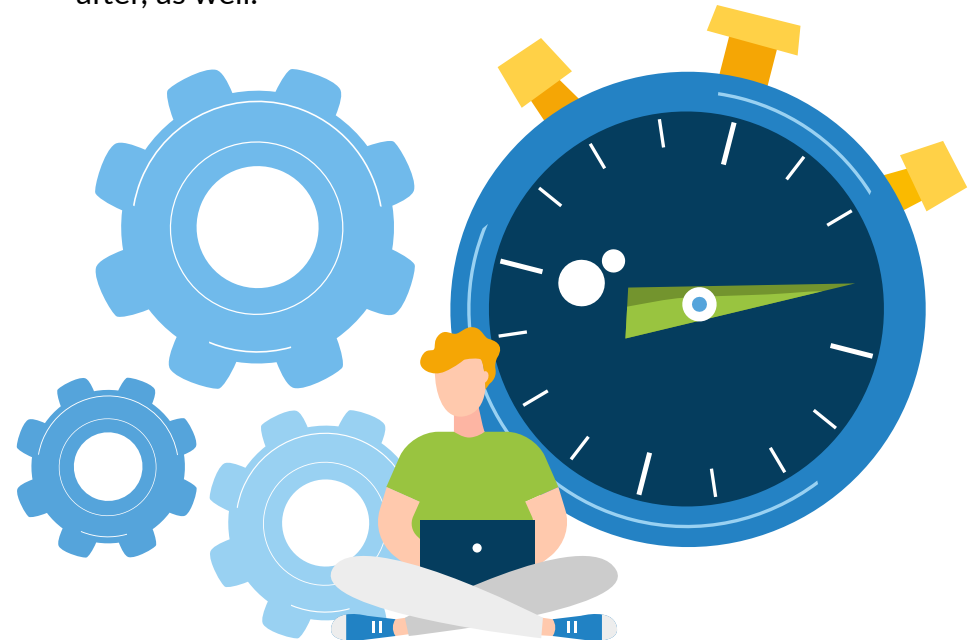
You should not get a theoretical answer here, but instead get details of an example workload and how many processors were used simultaneously. If you have a large workload, then the DAM provider should be able to scale hundreds of processors to get your assets ingested in a timely manner. In fact, a good DAM provider should be able to profile your workload and provide you with an estimated ingestion timeline.

> *MediaValet leverages Microsoft tools and infrastructure to ingest your assets and metadata as quickly and smoothly as possible.*

Querying Times

Once the asset is fully ingested, the other concern relating to scalability is query performance. If you have a DAM with 5,000 assets, are you going to get roughly the same query time when you grow to 5 million assets? Again, don't accept a theoretical answer. Ask for an example workload of a customer with millions of assets and what the response times are. The response times should be similar to what your demo accounts are showing.

> *MediaValet utilizes Microsoft search capabilities to power fast and accurate results, no matter the library size.*

Evaluating Vendor Focus

Evaluating Vendor Focus

To the chapter above, what works today will likely change in the coming years. To have continued success with DAM, you need to ensure your vendor's vision and road map match with your growth strategy.

A good vendor will provide the software to help you step out of your business and look in – and continually maintain and upgrade software as required. Software is always changing, so you need to choose the right partner– one who listens, adjusts and adapts with you in mind.

What does a great solutions partner look like? From our perspective, you as a customer should look for, and demand, these three things:

1. Customer involvement in the product roadmap

2. Investment in your success

3. Aligned product focus

Customer Involvement in the Product Roadmap

Every software vendor is continually updating their products. Some once a year (usually more traditional, legacy vendors), and others, two-to-five times a week (usually cloud vendors).

As a customer, it's important to make sure you have a seat at the table to give feedback and opinions on your vendor's product roadmap. If you don't have that

seat, you're missing a huge opportunity to help align the software you're using with the changing and ongoing needs of your business.

But what does this look like? Depending on how much you want to be involved, it can be weekly, monthly, quarterly or annually – via email, web calls or in person. The important part is to ensure you have the opportunity to communicate the features that are important to you and, more specifically, how they'll help your business.

This last part is key. Sharing specific use-cases and pain points with vendors will help them determine how solving your issues will do the same for other customers. The more customers the solution will help, the faster it will often be developed. When doing reference checks, be sure to ask how well vendors listen and how quickly they act. A good vendor will be open to all feedback – regardless of your subscription level or brand name.

> *From discovery to design, MediaValet gets customer input for every new feature release.*

At MediaValet, any new feature released includes a significant amount of customer input – from initial discovery to design. In addition to ensuring that customers are happy with the product, it also provides insights into use cases and features that would otherwise have been bypassed.

Investment in Your Success

Your vendor should be a solution (not platform) provider. What this means is that your vendor should be offering creative solutions to your key DAM and MarTech challenges – not just a set of static features. It also means that they'll be invested in your long-term success, providing training and guidance well after initial onboarding.

> *MediaValet is invested in your organization's long-term success, offering unlimited training, customer success and support.*

This is one of the reasons MediaValet offers unlimited training and technical support to customers. When speaking

to successful partners, they attribute training and customer success to their ongoing achievements. Those that take advantage of the program often experience a significant increase in adoption, usage and expansion.

Aligned Product Focus

The last thing to consider is your vendor's product focus. DAMs are growing considerably – and taking on other areas of the market. Generally speaking, there are two types of vendors.

First, there are "one-stop-shops". These vendors focus on delivering a family of products, like workflow, product information management, content and brand management, production services, etc. This focus is great for organizations that want to work with a single vendor and don't need deep capabilities with any one product.

Alternatively there are DAM vendors that focus on delivering a "best-of-breed" solution – where all their effort and resources go into producing a single product with extremely deep capabilities – from ideation to archival. With a best-of-breed approach, you use integrations and

APIs to connect to other best-of-breed solutions in the technology stack. This approach is often considered more scalable, as every piece of technology acts as a single "unit" that can be replaced at any time. It also ensures you aren't paying for add-ons that you don't use.

MediaValet is a best-of-breed vendor and provides a deeper level of expertise in a few key areas.

Look at the Big Picture and Expect More

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The critical mistake organizations make when implementing a DAM is that they look at it simply as a shared folder or file management system – but when its features are evaluated and optimized, it can be so much more. Taking the time to implement a DAM well, while addressing scalability considerations, will ensure you won't be stuck between a rock and a hard place – trying to scale with a solution that isn't a good fit.

When your core DAM capabilities are working optimally, it will scale infinitely and seamlessly connect with your marketing technology stack with ease.

About MediaValet

MediaValet is a leader in cloud-based digital asset management that helps marketing, communication, video production and creative teams easily manage, collaborate on and distribute their digital assets and content, improving productivity and increasing the ROI on their marketing investments. With unlimited users, support and training, teams worldwide can access the content they need, whenever and wherever they need it.