

"WHERE'S THE BEEF?" > CONTROLLING DATA MANAGEMENT

WORDS BY PAT HUNT

Everyone who has ever watched TV recognizes the adage, "Where's The Beef?" Where is the heart of the sandwich, that element that holds it together? Where is the core that makes the whole thing taste right? That metaphor for food is not far removed from modern-day business issues, if rephrased as: "Where's the data?"

In this digital era, when companies of all sizes are working from computer and web-based applications, how do they track, manage, label, download, catalog and archive all their assets in order to locate, reuse, resell, tabulate, share and measure every aspect of what the company



is doing? This is a particularly timely question for all companies handling their own in-house marketing, advertising, graphic design and image licensing for products they produce. The never-ending volume of information - that contemporary "information overload" we all suffer from - must be controlled.

Companies need to protect and manage all their creative assets. Through accessing digital assets efficiently, productivity will be enhanced, brand consistency will be controlled, workflow will be improved, collaboration among departments will be facilitated, and archiving will be accessed. All of this sounds easy, but taking the multi-level steps to accomplish these goals can be disruptive and costly at the start.

Fourteen very busy companies responded to a survey about how they structure their data asset management system (DAM). All of the following companies produce or license the rights to use stock photography and illustration for their graphic design needs. Focusing on what some of these companies have done to address that particular niche will offer some insight into the current problems and solutions of the day.

All companies were asked if they have a data asset management system in place. Amazingly about one third of them said "No," or a qualified "No," meaning they have something in place, but not nearly comprehensive or useful enough to address all their issues.

When asked which needs their system must address, all companies agreed to image tracking, image licensing, keywording, captioning, pricing, metadata, invoicing and cataloging.

New York Graphics Society www.nygs.com states, "In addition to those items, our business requires records of royalty schedules, expiration dates of licensed images, territories licensed and internal inventory information." **Aramark** www.aramark.com adds, "In our situation, we needed a way to catalog past files, since we are requested to revisit them frequently. We use

Extensis Portfolio, which allows us to search by file name. We currently have about 135 DVDs with over 45,000

files cataloged. We haven't yet cataloged our stock photo library. We are in the process of researching that right now."

Cook Communications Ministries

www.cookministries.org breaks down their needs in more detail. "For royalty free images, we would want to track which product(s) an image was used in, how many times it has been used, credit line information, and keyword search capability. It is the same for full-rights images we own. It would also be helpful to have available, at a glance, the scope of the rights we purchased for Rights Managed images." **Rodale Press** www.rodale.com adds, "Model releases and freelance photography agreements are also scanned and linked to each photo. With the increased quality of digital photography, the systems would need to be able to handle an increased number of images being entered, in a shorter period of time."

Houghton Mifflin www.hmco.com has different concerns. "Image tracking is key. As a company, we have had many conversations about addressing licensing, but we have never been able to get very far. Mostly what we try to do is get helpful and accurate descriptive metadata (to aid in searching). We do not address pricing (not relevant), official captioning, sales or origin (we only catalog images to which we have complete ownership)."

Almost every company surveyed has amassed

some quantity of imagery to which they own the copyright. In addition to that, all companies have purchased the rights to use a body of Royalty Free imagery, most of which is stored on a selection of CDs. **Weekly Reader** www.weeklyreader.com offers, "We do not have a large collection of owned imagery yet. We are just beginning with art buy-outs and in-house photo shoots. The majority of the collection right now is hundreds of Royalty Free CD-ROM purchases." **Scholastic** www.scholastic.com and Houghton Mifflin, on the other hand, have an in-house studio with a staff photographer. Scholastic states, "Everything in our DAM has been created under a work-for-hire agreement, and we have full rights to use it. The imagery might be marketable, but it's also confidential so I think it's unlikely we would market it."

All of the companies do their design work on Mac computers, and do their administration on PCs. "The art department works on Macs," states NYGS, "while the balance of the company is PC-based. Ideally, our operating software needs to be dual-platform so that information can be accessed and updated by all necessary areas."

These companies view the issue of cost savings and efficiency in a number of ways. **Cigna Healthcare** www.cigna.com states the advantages are "easy access to assets, improvement in brand consistency, reduced time to market and elimination of asset re-creation." NYGS adds to this "reducing manual labor and human error by automating every aspect of dealing with licensed imagery."

Grand Circle Travel www.gct.com has adopted *Canto Cumulus* as their tracking system. "Since everyone involved in making our catalogs has access to *Cumulus*, we only have to communicate the image ID number to each other for each photo instead of sending the high-res file and image preview to the designer and the photo description to the copywriter."

Pearson Education www.pearsoned.com has a system known as *PAL*, the *Pearson Asset Library*. This system has been developed over the last few years and is considered to be the "Star Wars" of contemporary systems. It is configured to provide easy access for all Pearson companies to digital assets contained in its library. It also has a cost estimating system to

aid in controlling spending on projects.

Houghton Mifflin, on the other hand, looks at the cost issues from a completely different direction. **John Brigham**, Manager in the Publishing Technology Department, offers this on cost savings and efficiency: "In theory, the idea that art can be found and re-used makes it cheaper than re-creating it. However, we've found it difficult to support that theory with concrete facts. Images can quickly get out of date and are often created for very specific purposes, and so may not lend themselves to re-use."



In trying to find an enterprise system that will work and can be customized, the failing has been that the numbers do not support it. The imagery for the School Division is not good for the College Division, and vice versa. If they are not getting a reuse of images, the company will not support the software. They are now taking a modular approach as their core product development needs are "layout pages" that must move from editorial to design to production. Financial would be a separate system, but all systems will have to "talk to each other." The modules involved are: "test permissions" (which function on *Forth Dimension software*), "publishing" (encompassing the layout pages), "specs" (researching, rights and permissions) and "financial."

All of this will have to sync with "Title Maintenance," which is the database system that tracks the metrics of publications like the authors, title publication dates, copyright dates, ISBN numbers and inventory titles. John says they keep reinventing the wheel, because of ownership changes and the fact that the size of the company (3000 employees) prevents such large projects from moving quickly. To coordinate all of this with Corporate IT will be a huge challenge. Training is also a big issue, as Houghton Mifflin has seven different divisions in other locations. As John says, "it makes so much sense on the surface!"

One of the companies most proud of their progress in the area of data management is **Jones and Bartlett Publishing** www.jbpub.com. Its Corporate Headquarters are located in Sudbury, MA, with sales offices in

twelve different countries. By the time they installed *Media Bank* by **Wave Corporation**, they had a terabyte of files on their servers that they needed to access more efficiently. However, they feel the new system allows them to better manage the files that relate to their books, and to manage all versions of manuscripts, art files, Quark documents, Royalty Free tracking, contracts, costs and budgets.

Philip Regan, Manager of Media Services, and **Anne Spencer**, VP of Production & Design, both say that they appreciate the flexibility that *Media Bank* gives them, but they have had to let go of historical systems, and file structures have been hard to change. According to Anne, "Developing a flexible taxonomy and naming scheme has been key to our DAM success. In addition, *Media Bank* gives us the tools to enforce these structures."

It was important to get a "buy in" from their Information Systems Department. Since they have an in-house IT department and in-house server, it was key to get their approval. IT endorsed it because it will allow them "flexible and dynamic systems growth." Their network storage is doubling every year so they had to keep buying and managing more space, and worry about adequate backup. "Digital Tape Library" is a device that will work in tandem with *Media Bank* to archive published books; this was purchased at the same time. Philip and Anne say that the most important point when buying a DAM is what other hardware and software you will have to buy along with it.

Speaking of the future, this is what some of the companies foresee. Grand Circle Travel uses *Cumulus*, which "doesn't search quickly once you get close to 20,000 assets." **Sarah Miley**, Picture Editor, states, "We recently added a third database (one for Grand Circle Travel, one for Overseas Adventure Travel, one for photos sent in by our travelers) to take care of this problem. That creates another problem, however, in having to switch between different databases when searching for images."

Weekly Reader projects, "Companies will want to organize Royalty Free or owned artwork for maximum usage potential. Publishers may request more flexibility with images being reused in multiple products; or they may want less expensive reuse fees for additional rights." The Cigna Representative offers another pearl of wisdom. "At this stage I see a range of capabilities - from online information access to electronic books to print-on-demand boutiques. High-volume traditional publishers will remain,

but we'll see diminishing business volumes. Low-volume art publishers should persist. Regardless, content will be managed by something akin to an ISBN number."

Getty Images www.gettyimages.com offers Media Management Services in addition to licensing still and moving imagery. "Our digital asset management service provides clients with tools to create, manage, share and monetize their digital imagery and other assets." It can be tailored to the customer's needs through web-based management tools. According to Getty Images, the functionality is divided into three major areas - End User Tools, Publishing Tools and Management Tools.

Index Stock Imagery www.indexstock.com created its *Image Management and Licensing System (IMLS)* to help its large customers manage their images. According to **Bahar Gidwani**, CEO of Index, "Index absorbs images from its IMLS customers into its database and allows their staff to view and download their own images. This immediately saves money for the customers, and Index is able to process (keyword, rights manage, color adjust, etc.) images for much less than the IMLS customer would have to pay with other systems. Index is also able to market the customer's images through its worldwide distribution network."

James West, CEO of **Alamy** www.alamy.com, a UK-based company, states that Alamy is considering ways of storing metadata in their images so that it will be retrievable by the client's asset management system. "They, along with a number other photo agencies, are contributing to a PACA (Picture Archive Council of America) initiative to standardize information such as captions, copyright and dates of image production. The long-term objective of this project is to work with leading software companies to agree on a common method of capture and display of image metadata throughout the digital image workflow."

So "Where's the Data?" turns out to be a broader question than some might have imagined. However keywords like productivity, efficiency, branding, workflow, access and cost savings are the search terms of the day. Every company will be required to tackle a system that meets their needs sooner or later. My guess is "the sooner the better!"

Author, Pat Hunt, is VP of Corporate Relations at Index Stock Imagery, and a writer for various photographic publications. pat@indexstock.com