Scalable Digital Asset Management for Maximum Digital Media Maturity

By embracing a powerful Agile deployment framework, organizations can save significant time, money and effort implementing enterprise DAM systems.

Executive Summary

It's easy to overlook the scalability needs of an enterprise to justify short-term costs when planning to build a new digital asset management (DAM) system or replace an existing one. If your organization already has a DAM system, scaling it to address your growing business needs can present several challenges. Scalability requires a highly evolved asset management capability, in addition to the ability to onboard new users at any given time. Moreover, as business units (BUs) migrate onto the system, mutually exclusive priorities can complicate the effort.

In addition, external users actively engaging the system daily can add significantly to internal transaction volumes, especially during peak holiday seasons or when launching key marketing programs. In these cases, system performance may lag and outages can occur. There are three use cases that may directly impact operational efficiency:

- **Digital content creators**, such as ad agencies or media production houses, ingesting new assets.
- **Vendors** submitting digital product images for e-commerce.
- **Distribution partners** using the system to access marketing content.

Building and scaling an enterprise DAM system requires not only meticulous project planning and execution, but also a proven model that enables organizations to deliver greater business benefits and increased return on investment.

Rather than building a solution that attempts to meet all enterprise needs at the time of launch in one “big bang,” we recommend that organizations consider an incremental, iterative approach that can yield ongoing benefits throughout the process while facilitating the flexibility to adjust as the solution takes shape and form.

This white paper explains our Build, Expand and Run (BEar) framework for creating a truly scalable enterprise DAM solution that can meet an enterprise’s evolving business needs.

Strategic Factors Impacting DAM System Scalability

The challenges in scaling a DAM solution are not merely technical, but also strategic. While planning to scale a DAM solution to the needs of the enterprise, decision-makers should consider the following:
• **Go-to-market timelines:** Each BU may have different levels of urgency to go to market, driven by an operational deadline, such as meeting peak customer demand for a holiday season, or a strategic imperative focused on gaining competitive advantage, which can result in a direct impact on revenues and market position. In such scenarios, the flexibility of a program to meet deadlines would be of utmost importance.

• **Consensus-building with BUs:** Although there may be a significant overlap of needs across BUs within the enterprise, the ability of a DAM system to meet specific BU requirements can influence the participation, interest and eventual consensus among BUs in supporting a DAM program.

• **Budget constraints:** Each BU participating in a DAM expansion should consider the projected cost to scale the system in light of available budgets. Having a cost avoidance model in place can help to justify budget spend by communicating costs the unit may avoid by adopting the system.

• **Onboarding external vendors and partners:** It's not uncommon for a digital enterprise to work with hundreds, even thousands, of external vendors and distribution partners that regularly upload assets to the DAM system. The cost of onboarding so many new users on the system can be significant. Think creatively. Perhaps, integrating the DAM system with vendor portals can spell relief, allowing vendors to submit their digital assets more conveniently.

• **User adoption:** Don’t be surprised if some divisions within your enterprise resist the program, challenging the initiative on the grounds of conflicting strategy or territorial beliefs. For example, e-commerce vendors and digital wholesale partners may push back, preferring their established business processes and legacy systems to a more streamlined,

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**Digital Media Maturity Curve**

An enterprise DAM system should be flexible enough to meet the evolving organizational demands. Our BEaR framework provides organizations with a process to realize quick wins, while still moving up the digital media maturity curve.

*Figure 1*
updated system. Resistance to change should be expected.

- **Technology:** Setting up a new DAM system, or making changes to an existing one, typically requires IT departments to evaluate the current infrastructure, which may have an impact on IT plans and budget. Before choosing a particular DAM software solution and designing the system, evaluate metrics such as:
  - Number of users and projected growth.
  - Concurrent users that can be supported by the application service.
  - Storage requirements for assets and accompanying metadata.
  - Internet bandwidth requirements.
  - Performance requirements.

**Traversing the Media Maturity Lifecycle**

Different industries and companies within segments are at various inflection points in their media lifecycle journey (see Figure 1, previous page). Your organization is not alone. The complexity and size of digital assets, automated workflow and publishing needs are growing significantly. Your organization may be one of many forced to reevaluate its DAM strategy in light of new digital formats and the complexities of omnichannel distribution, or due to compounding compliance requirements for highly regulated business such as life sciences.

**Enter the Build, Expand and Run Framework**

Building and scaling an enterprise DAM solution presents its own implementation challenges.

**Journey to Build an Enterprise DAM**

Traditional software deployment methodologies cannot address the rapid go-to-market and digital expansion criteria today’s business environments pose. Assuming a three-year digital roadmap is in place, your organization can adopt an incremental approach using our BEaR framework to build and scale a DAM system. This framework enables your organization to expand the DAM system in phases, with workflow and support structure aligned strategically and effectively to meet existing and future business needs.

**Laying the Groundwork for a Foundational DAM Solution**

A foundational DAM solution is the minimum, viable product (MVP) an enterprise should address in meeting immediate short-term business needs. Our suggested MVP approach:

- **Gather business requirements:** Considering that your organization and every BU in it often have different use cases to onboard a DAM solution, it is imperative to understand unique business requirements and create alignment across functions. How your organization accounts for unique user experiences – such as branding – or the ability to efficiently search and retrieve assets using a well-defined taxonomy and metadata depends on specific requirements.

![Figure 2](image-url)
• **Choose the right solution:** To build an effectively scalable DAM system, perform due diligence before choosing a solution. Companies that fail to choose a solution capable of scaling to their business needs are often forced to replace their DAM system within the first year of launch. DAM system selection is especially critical due to the ever-changing nature of digital content. In the rapidly expanding digital world, content is growing in size and complexity, at an exponential rate. The right solution should not just address immediate requirements, but should also forecast what new possible requirements may arise during this new digital age.

• **Implement MVP:** The key factor in building a foundational DAM system is designing a fool-proof, scalable architecture that can be expanded easily over time. Plan for those bottleneck scenarios where your organization may need to accommodate many concurrent users, or where large-size digital assets may have to be processed given limited bandwidth. Once the MVP is implemented, your organization can begin adding functionality and onboarding new users.

**Scaling the Foundational DAM System Using the BEaR Model**

The BEaR model provides your organization with the ability to onboard new BUs in a timely and efficient manner. The model also allows your organization to continuously improve its DAM solution via a feedback looping mechanism. This includes:

• **Build:** Before your organization sets out to build a foundational DAM system, consider the following best practices in devising your strategy.
  
  > **Conduct exhaustive up-front planning:**
  > - Pay careful attention to metadata models, security models and search engine configuration.
  > - Define support, training, governance and operational models.
  > - Consider implementing in phases (avoid the “big bang” approach).
  > - Understand that your organization’s DAM implementation project is 60% business planning and 40% technology implementation, as our client experiences show.
    - Assemble a business and IT executive steering committee. Gaining alignment on both sides of the table will be critical to your organization’s success.
    - Create a roadmap, and update it on an annual basis to align with your business needs. Your stakeholders should all understand that achieving a scalable DAM solution is a journey, not a destination.

During the actual building of your organization’s system, create a backlog of requirements based on user feedback, and associate the unmet business requirements to the new users onboarded for any specific business criteria.

**The BEaR Framework**

![The BEaR Framework diagram](Image)

**Figure 3**
Once this information is gathered, implement the functionality to add onto your current DAM capability.

- **Expand**: In this step, users from new BUs or external users will begin adopting the system. Before expanding further, your project team should plan for the following:
  
  > Understand your business use cases:
  > - Your organization may need to create custom user experiences for specific business groups.
  > - Integrate these with necessary internal, downstream and upstream systems.
  > Factor in adequate time for data migration:
  > - This is especially important when moving from an unstructured to a structured data model.
  > - Legacy content causes problems in current systems.
  > - Metadata and security transformation can be complicated.
  > When conducting enterprise expansion, follow the asset lifecycle or workgroup rollout model:
  > - Pick the most common asset type and deploy it to the global user base.
  > - Select a workgroup and deploy BUs one at a time, taking all their asset types into account.
  > - Ensure your organization has a cost avoidance model in place that can be referenced as the system is used and is expanded:
  > - This ensures long-term support for the program at the executive level.
  > - It helps you determine the ROI of onboarding a new group or use-case.
    - Ensure priorities are set and the business is engaged in setting expectations; expect new use cases to arise as you demonstrate success.
  > Conduct comprehensive, quality training programs:
  > - During rollout, this is vital for all stakeholders.
  > - Ongoing training sessions are a must.
    - Empower champions from each BU with training materials they can use to train other team members.

- **Run**: Monitor the operations of the system and provide operational support to the user community. Any major pain points encountered at this stage can be noted as feedback, which may be looped into the next build.
  
  > Review content to determine what should make it into the new DAM system. Remember, “junk in = junk out.” The ability to search for assets will depend on the metadata users add to the asset. If an asset cannot be found, the asset can never be repurposed, which defeats the purpose of the system.
  > Align the support model to accommodate change management and quick configuration updates. Expect a flurry of support needs during the period immediately following go-live.
  > Evolve your metadata models, workflows and security policies over time. A successful DAM solution is never stagnant.
  > Understand specific product limitations. While your organization’s DAM system should support your entire enterprise’s digital media lifecycle, it is not a single technology stack that supports every digital need in the organization. For example, the system should not be extended into product information management (PIM) or a master data management (MDM) system.

**Creating the BEaR Team**

There should be a dedicated team for any small or medium-scale enhancements. Typically, organizations use their existing support teams, but often these teams are unable to focus on the DAM system, due to competing priorities; therefore, a dedicated team is highly recommended.

For large-scale enhancements to the system, your organization might consider ramping up a flexible team for specific project execution. Alternatively, you can use our Daikibo model, which is a large-scale Agile/Scrum framework.
Laying out a Governance Model

Once your organization’s DAM system has been implemented, it’s time to address business process changes that require a new DAM governance organization. In most situations, having a DAM system in place requires diligence in ensuring that the assets are correctly managed. Here are some examples of new processes that should be planned for after implementation:

- **Metadata model governance:** Chances are, prior to implementing an enterprise DAM system, your organization had different nomenclature for different assets. As your BUs adopt the system, the metadata models should be cohesive, enterprise-wide. Thus, any updates to the metadata model should be analyzed and decided upon by a special committee that ensures consistency and agreement across the organization.

- **Security model:** With various BUs accessing assets, new security policies should be adopted. Often, there is a struggle with legal and IT about securing assets as tightly as possible, which can effectively limit asset usage by the wider user base. A governance team should be created to manage new security concerns and make decisions in these cases.

- **Asset integrity:** As your system expands, many users will begin using it for various reasons, some in line with your overall vision, some not. For this reason, you must ensure that digital assets enter your system according to its business intent. For example, some organizations may want to put only final assets into the system. In order to manage this correctly, a governing body must be created to monitor uploads and audit transactions periodically.

Taking the Next Step

As your organization looks to improve its DAM maturity, consider using a BEaR framework to scale the DAM system by taking the following steps:

- Prioritize those business requirements that need a quick, go-to-market approach for both business value and competitive advantage.

- Create an onboarding plan to bring additional BUs onto the system in the most efficient manner.

- Identify a team that can drive the BEaR approach.

- Define a governance model that allows for the successful management and development of standards and practices for your DAM system.

- Put a cost avoidance model in place to gauge progress as you expand and operate the system.

For more information regarding the BEaR approach to DAM system implementation, please visit www.cognizant.com/customer-relationship-management

Footnotes

2. www.cognizant.com/InsightsWhitepapers/Agile-Scrum-Implemented-in-Large-Scale-Distributed-Program.pdf
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