



CHOOSING THE RIGHT DAM

How to determine if a DAM will meet your needs,
keep your users happy, and help achieve your business vision

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INTRODUCTION

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It's becoming conventional business wisdom: **every company today is a media company**. At the centre of this new paradigm is content. A lot of it.

Demand for content is growing, and companies are searching for reliable and cost-effective ways to expand their output, streamline their production processes, and distribute their images, videos, and text more efficiently. The digital asset management (DAM) platform has emerged as an elegant solution.

But companies looking for a DAM face a varied landscape of designs, features, and configuration options when they begin talking with vendors. As a buyer, it's important to enter these conversations with a sense of what you're looking for. Choosing a system that conforms to your business' processes is critical. The degree to which you do this well will determine whether you realize the potential that a DAM has to offer or suffer the pains of lacklustre adoption, or in a worst case scenario, a failed implementation.

This eBook will help you to assess your needs and evaluate DAM options. It provides a perspective that will enable you to navigate the DAM market and confidently select a solution that will meet your company's requirements, achieve wide adoption, and contribute to realizing your business vision.

We'll look at how to evaluate DAM systems through three lenses:

- **Strategy:** How to choose a DAM that complements your business strategy.
- **Users:** How to satisfy various DAM stakeholders to ensure successful adoption.
- **Configurability:** How to ensure DAM features align with current internal processes.

We'll sidestep feature-for-feature comparisons, and focus only on the major elements that lead to successful implementations and help achieve real business outcomes.

Table Stakes Features for DAM Systems

User controls
Metadata management
Search function
Asset interaction audit histories
Asset version histories
Rights management
Workflow and approvals features
Reporting tools



STRATEGY

STRATEGY

The motivation to begin exploring DAM solutions often arises because something broke down within the company. The volume of content has overwhelmed the search and approval processes that worked in the past. A folder was deleted, leading to a catastrophic loss of assets at a critical moment. Whatever the scenario, something has to change.

While the acute pain of that problem might be top-of-mind when you're evaluating DAMs, it's important that you also look beyond it and remain mindful of how solutions will fit with your company's foundational strategy and contribute toward achieving your broader business goals. The more a DAM aligns with your technical and business strategies, the smoother the integration will be and the more value you'll realize from the system.

Regarding the strategic alignment of a DAM, there are two major considerations:

- the suitability of an on-premises platform vs. a software-as-a-service (SaaS) platform
- potential for scalability

ON-PREMISES PLATFORMS VS. SAAS PLATFORMS

These represent the two primary deployment options, and each has its own criteria for suitability.

An on-premises DAM is installed on your organization's hardware and is managed and maintained by your IT department. The department will be responsible for all support, updates, and implementation of new features, as well as backups, georedundancy, and any hardware additions required for scale.

This deployment is most appropriate for organizations that:

- have legal requirements to keep their assets within their own data centers;
- have custom security or integration needs; and
- have the IT bandwidth and expertise to manage the system and its associated activities.

A downside of running a DAM on your own hardware is that it will likely result in capacity

underutilization that leads to a higher total cost of ownership than a storage-on-demand SaaS model would. An on-premises system will also put a new load on an internal technical team whose attention may already be split among many IT-related responsibilities, and who probably don't have deep DAM expertise, let alone expertise in video and rich media asset formats. This limits the depth of support that your users can expect.

A SaaS DAM solution is hosted in the cloud by a service provider, typically for a set-up fee and monthly or yearly subscription fees that correspond to storage requirements or user numbers. SaaS DAM features are usually configurable, but not customizable. The provider is responsible for storage, updates, and back up, meaning there are no internal hardware or software requirements for the buyer. The cloud-based DAM is not completely hands-off though. It requires ongoing management of taxonomy, permissions, and data and asset quality programs.

A cloud-based solution is most suitable for organizations that:

- do not require a customized solution;
- employ geographically-dispersed teams that distribute, communicate, and work on shared assets;
- require the ability to scale asset storage and users on demand;
- do not want to strain IT resources; or
- desire specialist support and on-going training.

A shorthand way of determining whether an on-premises or SaaS solution is most suitable for your company is to gauge where your priorities lay on the **three Cs**:

- cost
- customization
- complexity

Generally speaking, a SaaS solution is lower in all three categories. Understanding your priorities in these terms will help guide this foundational DAM decision.



SCALABILITY

A DAM's ability to scale is a critical selection factor for organizations in which:

- a large volume of new content is continuously being created and likely to increase;
- new users will be added as the organization grows or as external partners - including clients, resellers, and agencies - are brought on board; or
- new contracts create temporary peaks and troughs of work, users, and stored assets.

If any of these apply to your organization, then it's prudent to make inquiries about two scalability-related factors: **the impact of scaling on speed** and **the suitability of the subscription model**.

SCALE AND SPEED

Every organization – whether opting for a SaaS or on-premises DAM – has to manage the trade-off between software security and performance.



Here's why: as assets and users increase, the number of permissions the system needs to account for does too. When a DAM houses hundreds of thousands or millions of assets, it takes time to go through them all to determine which users have permission to view, edit, or download each asset.

When evaluating DAM systems, delay is a deal-breaker (as we'll discuss in the Users section). **DAM buyers should favor solutions that enable assets and speed to scale in tandem.** Users need the confidence that assets are going to load, render, and download just as quickly whether the DAM stores a hundred assets or a million.

Fortunately, solutions to this security-performance trade-off exist. One common solution is role-based asset control. This involves multiple users being batched in one or more roles, with each role providing permissions to specific assets. When a user requests access to an asset, the system checks the user's roles, confirms whether the role has permission to access the asset, and executes appropriately. It's an elegant solution that reduces the volume of information the system must review and enables scale without adverse effect on speed.

When it comes to DAMs, you can have both security and performance. You don't have to settle for a trade-off. In your conversations with vendors, don't be shy to inquire about the solutions they've designed to address this challenge.

SUBSCRIPTION MODEL

Another inquiry DAM evaluators should make relates to SaaS DAM subscription models and how scaling affects fees. Subscription models are typically based on one of two things: **storage or users (or both)**. Each has implications when it comes to scaling.

Storage-based subscription models mean that a company only pays for the space that their assets require, regardless of the number of users accessing them. This model provides predictability for organizations that know how much content they will produce. It also provides the flexibility to extend the DAM's reach to more users within the organization and partner organizations without increasing the fees it pays.

User-based pricing models are based on the number of users that have access to assets stored in the DAM. This model works for organizations that are certain that the DAM use will be limited to only one or two departments, both today and going forward.

When evaluating subscription models, explore whether your organization may derive value from having a number of departments, or external partners, such as agencies, share access to a DAM and consider this when determining the most appropriate fee structure for your system. While many implementations begin as a solution in a single department with a limited number of users, they often get extended to others.





USERS

USERS



The success of your DAM implementation hinges upon adoption by those you expect to use it every day. Because adoption depends on user satisfaction, the interests of these users are paramount when evaluating platforms.

Users typically fall into three categories: creative, technical, and business users. Each group has its own set of needs and expectations.

UNDERSTAND YOUR CREATIVE USERS

The fate of your implementation lies largely with the power users in your creative department. For this crucial group of stakeholders, one thing matters above all: speed.

Today's creative departments often face production demands that stretch them to the edge of their ability. With the ongoing proliferation of content distribution channels requiring tailored content, the pressure is only increasing. It's understandable then that creative users have no tolerance for unnecessary disruptions to their processes. **No matter how sophisticated or feature-rich a DAM is, their judgment of it boils down to one thing: Does it interrupt their workflow?**

Neglecting this concern is a mistake you don't want to make.

Creative users commonly develop their own idiosyncratic ways of storing, sharing, and accessing assets and works-in-progress. This often involves a convoluted mix of personal computers, network drives, email accounts, and social networks - whatever they feel is most convenient and will allow them to create on the fly as quickly as possible. But as content demands grow and the number of users requiring access to assets rises, this haphazard approach breaks down. Assets are duplicated, folders are lost, and users in other departments can't confirm whether a final version is *actually* final. Your organization can end up in a situation in which it has a wealth of assets, but none can be implicitly trusted as finished or approved. In a worst case scenario, your users simply don't know what they have and can't find what they need.

DAMs are designed to bring order to this chaos. But no matter how well a DAM organizes assets, if it slows down a creative user's day, you'll end up back at square one with creatives defaulting to their own preferred processes. To be blunt: you'll end up with a failed implementation.

To ensure that this doesn't happen, your DAM provider has to solve a very sticky problem: physics. A large image file or video raw file requires time to render when it's downloaded from

the cloud. The latency isn't long by most standards – only a second or two – but these seconds aggregate over the course of a user's day, and it's time that creative professionals don't have to lose.

Thankfully, there are ways to address this latency problem.

Here's an example drawn from our own solution, Creative Spaces. The solution caches assets on a local server, enabling users to access them repeatedly without the rendering delay that comes with downloading from the cloud. Any changes to the asset automatically and continuously sync with the cloud, so users can experience high velocity while still benefiting from the global reach and accessibility that the cloud provides.

If content development is an intrinsic element of your business model, it's critical to ensure that the vendors you've shortlisted have technology in place to minimize or eliminate any delays the DAM may cause for your creative team.

UNDERSTAND YOUR TECHNICAL USERS

Your company likely has a technical strategy related to a cloud provider like Microsoft, Google, or Amazon. Aligning a DAM solution with your technical strategy will streamline implementation, integration, and maintenance. Overall, it will just make your IT team happy.

Your first question may be: How do I know if I have one? Look at your suite of applications. For example, if your organization uses Microsoft Office, your company likely has a Microsoft strategy. Microsoft applications are typically backed up on Microsoft cloud infrastructure and provide access to its cloud storage service, Microsoft Azure. Any other SaaS application or system that you employ that's also hosted on Azure should easily integrate with your Microsoft

To understand how alignment with a technical strategy enhances seamlessness, consider Active Directory, the directory service for the Microsoft Windows operating system.

Using Active Directory, an administrator can manage all of an organization's users, passwords, and other login-related information. To understand the service's utility, imagine this: An individual has just left the company. This former employee had access to several systems and business applications, and a system administrator is responsible for removing all of the former employee's permissions. Because Active Directory manages all logins, the admin doesn't have to enter each system to remove the departed user's permissions. The admin can simply remove the user from Active Directory and the job is done.

With a DAM hosted on Microsoft Azure, the organization can manage its users in their own Active Directory. With Microsoft Azure being a common denominator between the company's operating system and its DAM, integration between the two services is seamless.

applications.

This alignment with a technical strategy also streamlines implementation from a security perspective. Since your information security professionals will have already audited your current cloud provider for your other cloud-based applications, they know the security of the cloud platform well. This familiarity can fast-track your implementation and speed-to-value.

UNDERSTAND YOUR BUSINESS USERS

Business users are the marketers, communications professionals, salespeople, and external partners that need to be able to easily find content for their PowerPoint presentations, product briefs, campaigns, or promotional material. While they aren't power users, they remain one of the most important DAM stakeholders. Like creatives, business users value the ability to download any file format, size or resolution on-demand so that they can concentrate on hitting their deadlines.

However, the greatest value a DAM can provide to these users is the ability to facilitate asset discovery and ideation. These users need to be able to quickly find what they're looking for through an intuitive, reliable, and user friendly search capability. This allows business users, who are sometimes geographically distributed, to be able to independently find the assets they need at any time. It also enables them to stoke their creativity. An easy-to-use search function can provide the ability to quickly browse large volumes of available assets, fostering imagination and sparking ideas for new campaigns.





CONFIGURABILITY



CONFIGURABILITY

Determining whether a DAM's feature configuration options enhance your organization's processes and workflows should be another important step in your DAM evaluation. Two of the most important features are the **library configurations** and **search function**.

THE LIBRARY

Before beginning the evaluation of whether a DAM platform has the library configuration options required to fit your needs, ask these two questions about your organization and current workflows:

- Will different departments or groups use the DAM? If so, does each need autonomy?
- Will the same taxonomy be used throughout our organization? (Or will different departments have their own ways of naming and classifying products and assets?)

If the answers to both of these questions is no, then your requirements can be satisfied with the standard configuration: a library with one level of administration and one taxonomy.

If the answer is **yes** to either question, then you'll need a solution that elegantly manages the permissions and taxonomies of different groups.

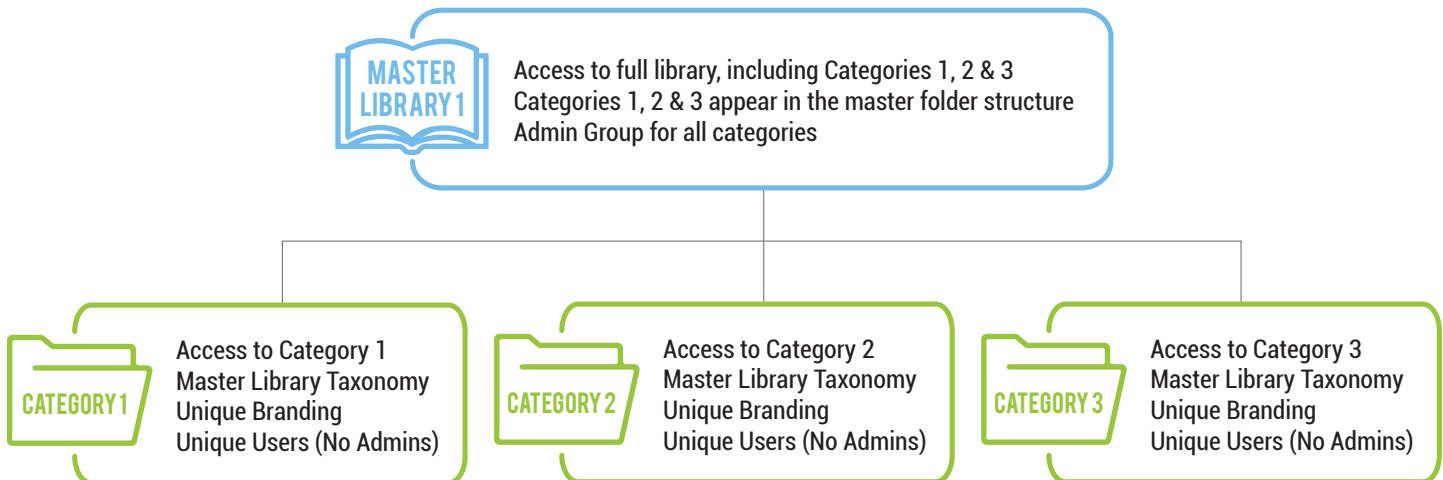
One way to do this is through a 'hub-and-spoke' library model. In this design, the hub is an administrator that oversees the entirety of the library. The spokes are separate libraries that are subordinate to the master library. These spoke libraries can be distributed among different groups, departments, and external users, and can have their own unique taxonomies and library-level administrators. To illustrate, imagine a retail conglomerate that owns a dozen different brands. The corporate office implements a DAM and provides exclusive sub-libraries for each brand. Each sub-library has a designated administrator team and unique taxonomy that corresponds with its products. The corporate office oversees all brands and is the DAM's master administrator, which means it has access to each brand's assets. In this case, the corporate office is the **hub**, and each brand is a **spoke**.

The value of this design is its flexibility. There is a variety of ways to configure hub-and-spoke libraries to meet an organization's permissions and taxonomy needs.

We can demonstrate this flexibility through library configuration options:

CENTRAL CONTROL AND A SINGLE VOCABULARY

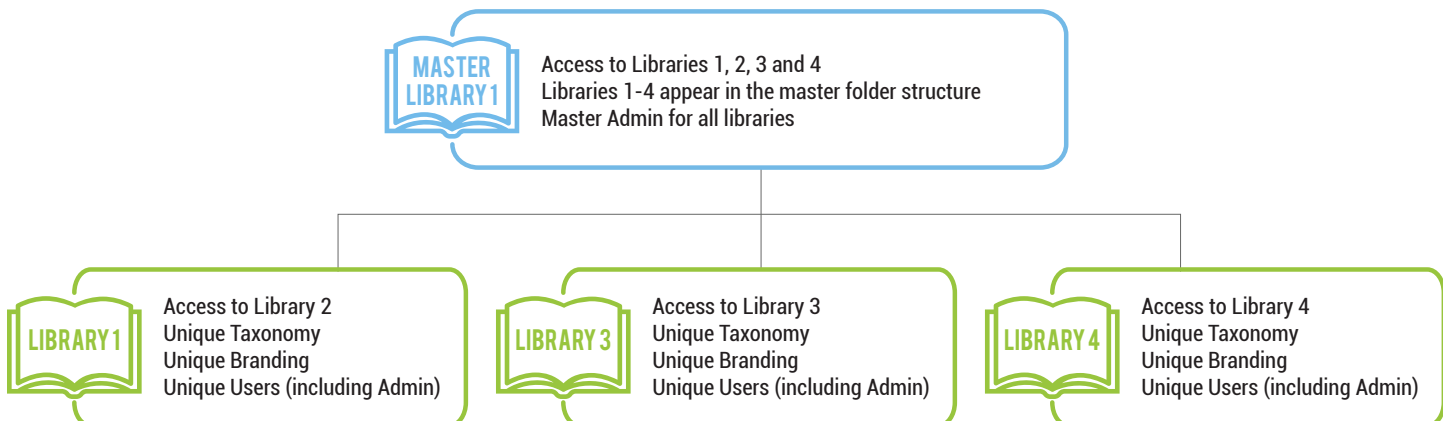
In this configuration called **category control**, a number of sub-libraries are designated to different groups, but administration of all permissions is executed at only one level – that of the master library. This format is designed for organizations with departments that need to view and access assets pertinent to them, but do not need distinct taxonomies.



INDEPENDENT CONTROL OF SUB-LIBRARIES WITH UNIQUE VOCABULARIES

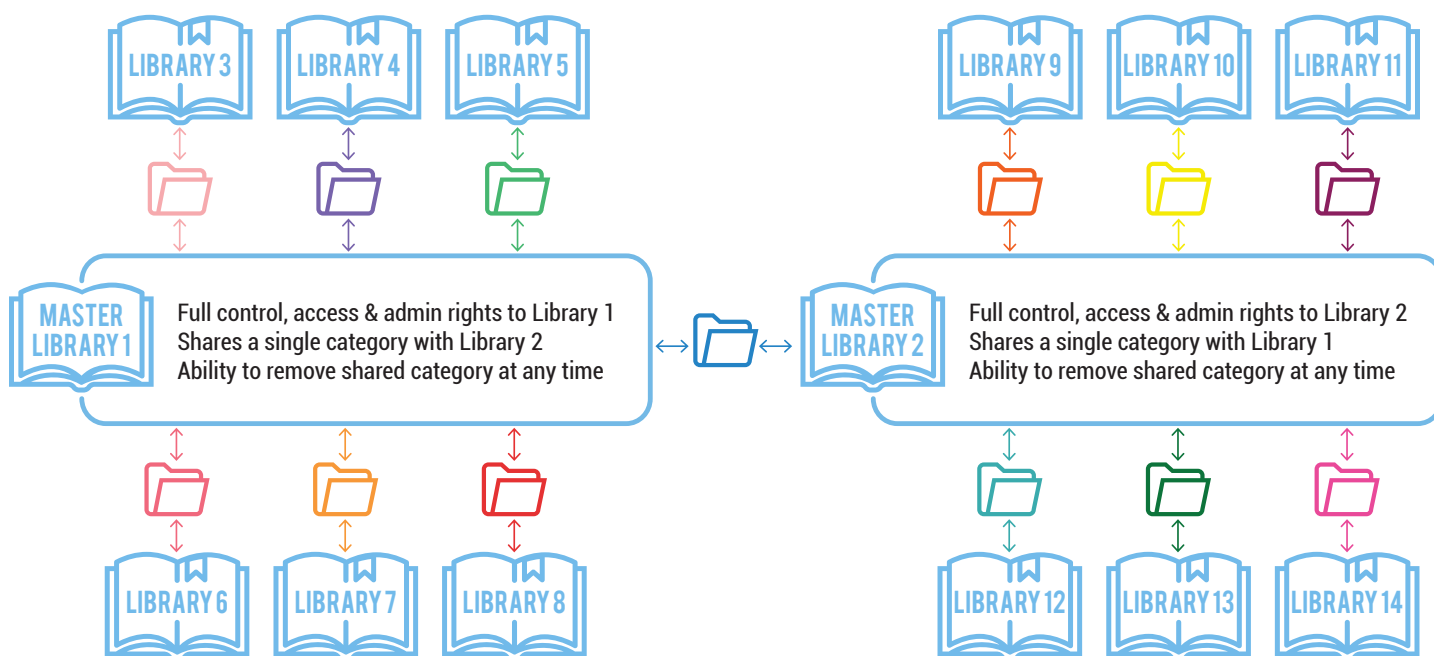
In this configuration named **master control**, an organization can assign administrators to the master library and to the various sub-libraries. This is ideal for organizations whose departments use unique taxonomies, metadata, or product names. For example, the communications department and product marketing department may use two different names for the same asset, simply because of unique department languages.

The utility of this configuration isn't limited to one organization. For instance, a marketing agency may administer a master library that oversees all of its clients' assets, while each client administers its own respective sub-library with its own assets and taxonomy.



SHARING ASSETS BETWEEN INDEPENDENT ENTITIES WITH INDEPENDENT DAMS

This configuration, dubbed **multi-control**, is suitable for two entities that each require control over their own assets and permissions, but need a place to share access to certain assets. This could involve an agreement between a large brand retailer and an advertising agency. Both have DAM solutions, both need access to each other's assets, but it's neither desirable nor practical for either to give up control of their own master libraries. In this case, a folder is made accessible to master administrators from each entity. Each administrator can populate the shared folder without giving away control or providing permissions to unrelated assets that should remain internal to their respective companies.



Having the option for sub-libraries, in addition to a master library, provides flexibility for an organization and reduces the scope of change management required when different departments use distinct vocabularies.

The search function

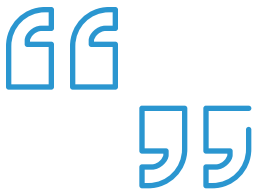
Another feature that can boost productivity and a DAM's value is a well-designed search function.

Imagine a scenario: a marketing manager wants to see every photo uploaded by a particular photographer with release forms that have been signed in the past week. The manager creates a string of search terms, and every asset tagged with metadata related to those terms instantly comes up. With a configurable search function, this search string can be saved, named, and shared to repeat the process.

The saved search string, combined with the DAM capabilities and proper training regarding metadata and the asset tagging, provides a tool that can support a new business process. Once

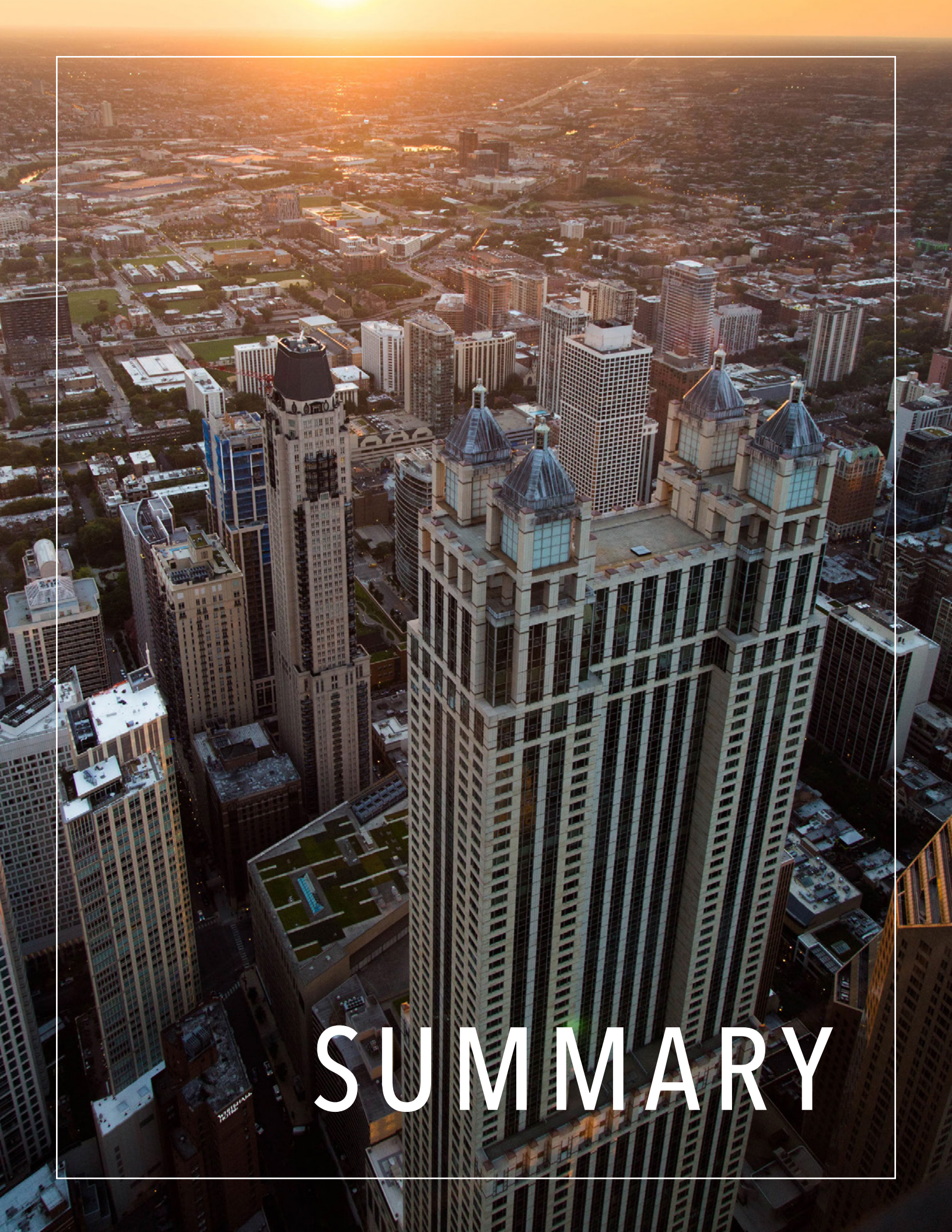
per week, the saved search can be run to return images for approval. With this configured search functionality, organizations can batch dozens of different cumbersome tasks together and execute them quickly. Many burdensome and time-consuming activities – search, evaluation, approval – are made easy.

These configuration abilities not only enable you to smoothly maintain current internal processes as you insert a DAM into your marketing technology stack, but offer the potential to discover new time-saving processes.



My advice would be to not get distracted by all the bells and whistles. Cool features are great and they should be a key factor in any decision but definitely the biggest roadblock to rolling out any new technology and gaining adoption is users and processes already in place. As a DAM has far reaching capabilities within the business it is critical to know all of your stakeholders, what their current processes are and their biggest business challenges to ensure you pick best DAM for your business.

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SUMMARY

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Evaluating DAM options as they relate to your organization's strategy, users, and processes will help ensure that you choose a system that meets your needs.

However, there's one other important point to keep in mind: no DAM is a set-it-and-forget-it platform. It's a solution that requires ongoing management from dedicated internal users. For this reason, it's critical to have a trusted partner during implementation, asset migration and operation. Ensure that the vendor you choose will provide the ongoing specialist support that you require to make adjustments quickly and to minimize the maintenance demanded from your internal team.

With your organization's needs articulated and addressed, and the right DAM partner on board, you'll be well on your way to successfully implementing the system and maximizing the considerable value a DAM has to offer.

