Brandfolder
by smartsheet

The digital asset management maturity guide

The hidden cost of asset sprawl

The great invisible anchor

Brands today generate several times more creative assets than they did ten years ago. Content fuels nearly every department — and almost everyone has the power to generate, alter, and share it digitally. It's freeing. But it also creates a systematic and growing risk for companies and, more importantly, their brands. Without the capacity to store, share, manage, and collaborate on these assets, employees produce streams of digital clutter. Most marketing, brand, sales, and creative teams are drowning in it.

At many companies:

- Individuals struggle to locate assets
- People can't find the right version of files
- Companies pay massive fees for violating creative licenses
- Teams struggle to secure or enforce asset approvals
- Brands have difficulty sharing content with external partners
- Creatives waste time and resources duplicating assets

> Asset management is undergoing a renaissance as marketing leaders face new challenges in managing the growing volume, variety and velocity of content assets.
>
> Gartner, 2018

Asset sprawl is an invisible anchor that weighs on every department. Every day occurrences like losing attachments in the labyrinth of your inbox, not understanding the logic behind how coworkers name files, and receiving restrictive "you can't access this document" notifications take their toll:

Wasted time: Brand managers each spend hundreds of hours per year looking for assets and responding to requests.

Wasted effort: Teams take twice as long to complete tasks, which puts employees at risk of burning out.

Lost profits: Expired assets and licenses lead to fines, lawsuits, and brand risk.

No insight: 78% of assets go unused and are essentially wasted.

Brand inconsistency: Incorrect or outdated assets get used.

Reduced campaign performance: Suboptimal assets are used in campaigns.

These effects multiply as businesses grow. But if your company is among those grappling with digital asset sprawl, it's not alone and there's plenty you can do about it.

Note: This guide will help you discover how productive your brand is when it comes to managing digital assets, so you can take action and make your teams more effective.

State of flow
Efficiency gains

Tools: F-Drives, WeTransfer, Email, Thumb Drives, FTP
Overheard: "Do you still have that logo saved in your email?"
Description: Document access depends on tribal knowledge
Impact: Sprawl weighs heavily on the business

Central source of truth
No impact

Tools: Google Drive, Dropbox, Box
Overheard: "Did they just use the wrong logo publicly?"
Description: No approvals, processes, or ability to manage distribution
Impact: Easy sharing reduces friction somewhat

Band-aid solutions
Light impact

Tools: Photo management tools, DAM-lite
Overheard: "The campaign failed because the entire segment saw the wrong image."
Description: Time-consuming workarounds because team has adopted inadequate tools
Impact: Inadequate tools reduce overall efficiency

Moving to the cloud
Moderate impact

Tools: DAM
Overheard: "The team saved 18 hours last month by eliminating asset requests."
Description: Team finds what they need, when they need it
Impact: Tools begin to reduce workload

Asset anarchy
Heavy impact

Tools: DAM with enterprise-wide deployment
Overheard: "The system says these are our top creative opportunities for next quarter."
Description: Team gets everything done because DAM helps streamline and automate routine tasks
**Impact:** Tools free employees to do their jobs

How the spectrum works

On the left side of the spectrum, employees within a company struggle to complete basic content-related tasks, like sharing files. Administrative time eats up a significant portion of their day and most work must be done manually. On the right side, content management is virtually friction-free and people not only find what they need when they need it, but the systems they use also provide recommendations and automate routine tasks. This allows them to accomplish the jobs they were hired to do in less time.

Marketing and creative teams on the left side of the spectrum can't keep the brand consistent, collaborate well with partners, or measure performance. Well-paid people spend a lot of time duplicating assets that already exist, and the organization moves slowly. On the right side, teams are free to invest their mindshare in creative and strategic tasks and rely on systems to help execute their vision.
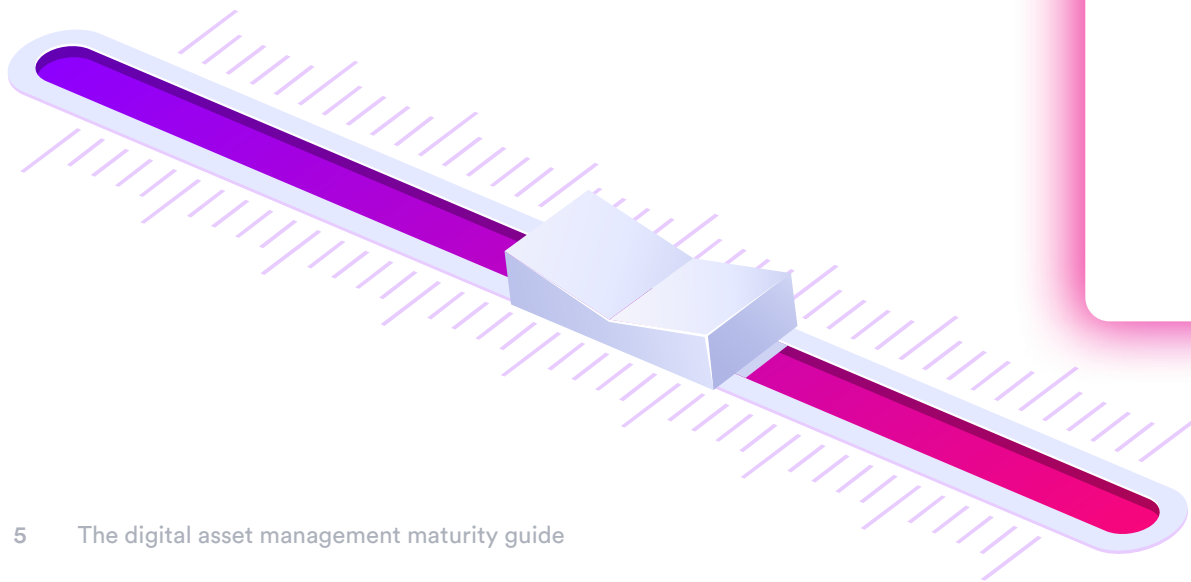
The four components of productive asset management:

Access:
Do the right people find the right version of the asset they need, right away?

Control:
Can you manage who gets what, and revoke or update it automatically?

ROI:
Do you know where your assets are and which ones perform best?

Automation:
Does the system handle routine, administrative tasks or do employees?

How do I move up?

What tasks keep employees from doing the jobs they were hired to do?

To increase your productivity, you have to know where your company stands today. The first step is to listen to chatter around the office. What do employees complain about? What tools frustrate them? What tasks keep them from doing the jobs they were hired to do? These irritations map to one of the five stages, which are explained in detail in the following chapters.

Once you know where your brand stands, you can determine where to invest in new (and often, fewer) sharing and storage technologies, and how to improve your end-to-end digital asset management workflow.

Keep in mind that brands don't have to move through the stages in order. With the right approach and technology, it's possible to leapfrog phases and catch up on years of organizational neglect in a matter of months.
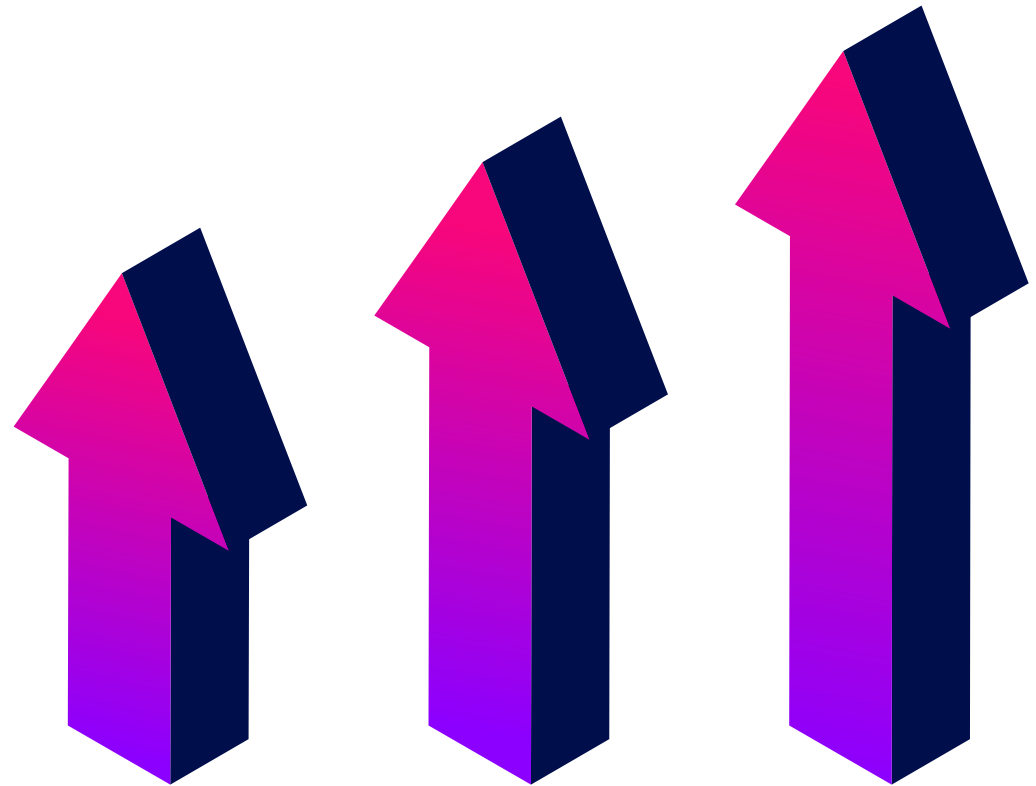
Note: Over the next five chapters, this guide examines each stage of the spectrum in detail.

Level 1: Asset anarchy

Goal: Unleash employees to do the jobs they were hired to do
Barrier: Ineffective sharing tools lead to procedural anarchy

In this phase, assets are shared, but poorly and in a limited fashion. Employees use a variety of consumer solutions such as WeTransfer, thumb drives, servers, and archaic network attached storage devices (NAS). If a file isn't named properly, or if the person who created it is out for the day, it's as good as lost, which means someone else can't do their job. Employees waste precious time interrupting each other in search of materials, and there's little chance that marketing campaign assets are personalized.

The biggest trouble in this phase is the lack of discoverability: Assets that belong to the business are restricted to particular individuals or folders, and can't be found and used by others, which limits their utility and value. External collaborators must often search Google for assets like logos, or recreate them manually. Much of the money the company invests in producing creative is effectively wasted.

How to know if you're here:
- Employees bring their own storage tools to work
- It's difficult to resize or convert files
- Teams struggle to share large files, such as videos
- There is a lot of Googling about how to share things
- Conga line syndrome slows the team down: Employees ask someone for something, and that person asks someone else

Tools used:
F-drives, WeTransfer, Email, Thumb drives, NAS, FTP server

Danger: Teams under pressure run the risk of adopting the first new storage solution that presents itself. If it's a poor fit, it only compounds their issues. But if the team exhibits restraint and runs a proper vendor evaluation, they can leapfrog to higher stages of productivity.

Pain points

- Brand inconsistencies negatively impact brand image
- Employees struggle to transfer files, especially over 25MB
- Access to documents is dependent on tribal knowledge; many go unused
- Difficulty sharing with external stakeholders, like agencies or clients
- Marketers and creatives are occupied with unending requests for assets
- No idea what documents are being used or where
- Unaware of the glaring privacy and security risks all this poses

How to increase productivity

Teams at this stage should invest in a centralized cloud storage tool, ideally a digital access management tool, or DAM. This solution will ensure that all marketing content is housed in a single location, making it easier to find and share securely with both internal and external stakeholders.

What's a DAM?

Short for digital access management tool, DAM is a broad term for tools with superior functionality to cloud storage tools like G-Drive. But with so many quasi-DAM solutions out there, not all tools that call themselves DAMs offer greater productivity.

Learn how to compare DAMs.

Case study:
Small marketing agency punches above its weight

Standardized storage, role-based access

The 30-person marketing agency Aplos has been around for 10 years and began with just the sole founder. They added people, but not process, and it was previously difficult for teams to share files with clients or to make revisions without throwing off project timelines. Each account manager and producer had their own way of doing things. Eventually Aplos hit an impasse: They were excluded from a valuable RFP because they couldn't address a Fortune 500 company's privacy and security concerns. It was time for the team to get organized and scale with their clients' growing demands.

With a full DAM solution, Aplos is now able to standardize storage across the organization, enforce lightweight but effective role-based access to projects, and make assets within collections searchable. Most importantly, the DAM solution reassures enterprise clients and gives the team a shot at earning their business.

Level 2: Moving to the cloud

Goal: Help employees work more efficiently and earn a return on creative spend
Barrier: Simplistic storage tool — it's too easy to move, alter, and lose assets

Companies in this phase have implemented a cloud storage system such as Google Drive. But while it keeps assets together, it often grows into a jungle of folders. Each department does things its own way, so each new employee must learn how the different teams they work with manage content — a particular challenge for marketing and creative teams with even a modest turnover rate.

Cloud storage tools also suffer from brittle architecture. Moving a source file often means it's either duplicated or deleted. It's surprisingly easy to expose files to the open web and not know it. Plus, the tool produces sprawl by design: If a designer wants to share assets with two different contributors, unless the sets of files are exactly the same, they must duplicate everything and organize the assets into folders for each person.

How to know if you're here:
- Impenetrable silos: Every department has its own methods, tools, and conventions
- The team spends several hours a week sending the same content to the same people
- New employees struggle to find assets without training
- There are many duplicates of the same asset floating around
- Employees have no idea which asset is the true latest version
- Each person's content folder structure and tagging strategy is unique
- No ability to manage asset lifecycle; outdated logos keep surfacing in odd places
- There is no concept of what metadata is or how to use it

Tools used:
G-Drive, Dropbox, Box

Consider: During this phase, an increased ability to share creates new risks. Assets can be hidden or deleted just as easily as they're created. Documents fork off into multiple concurrent "final" versions, resulting in a messy, inconsistent brand image. To improve, teams need a tool with more expansive organizational features that permits sharing with control.
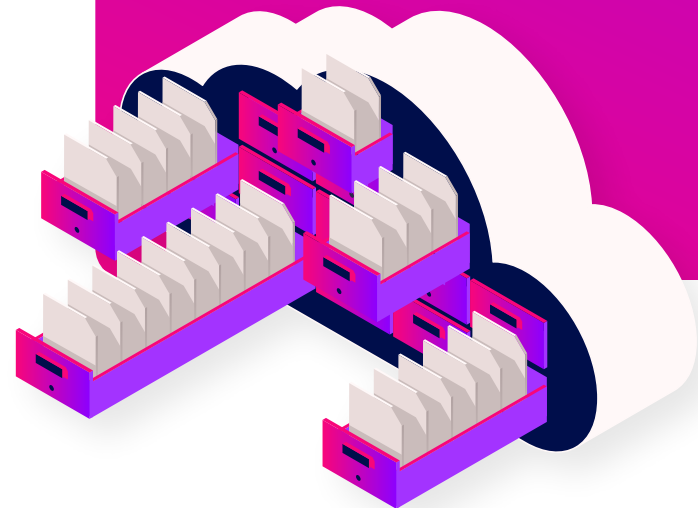
Pain points

- Inability to find what you need when you need it
- Creative and marketing teams waste time fielding requests for duplicate assets
- Most contributors have the power to delete and destroy
- No insight into what's being used, who's using it, or where it is
- Use of outdated, incorrect assets damages brand image
- Approval process is unenforceable
- Risk exposure is now the size of the internet

How to increase productivity

New procedures and tools like DAM drastically increase content usage and ROI through standardized organizational structures and robust tagging functionality such as automatic metadata extraction. Not only does this make the right assets easier to find and share securely with the right people, but housing all approved content in a single, organized location also minimizes duplicates and version control issues.

Case study:
Midsize sports team packs more stadiums

Auto-tagging, sharing, brand management

The Springfield Panthers weren't selling season tickets nearly fast enough. The flyers, billboard skins, digital ads, and radio spots were caught up in a marketing logjam after an ownership change forced them to revise every visual asset. This exposed how poorly organized their Dropbox files were. Each team member used their own naming convention, files were lost from season to season, and the new owners had no sense of where the old name and logo were still being used.

With a full DAM solution, every asset the team uploads is now auto-tagged and organized into collections based on marketing tentpole, season, and type. Today, every contributor has access to the right collections based on their team — apparel, advertising, or otherwise. And the owners are able to identify when sports writers use the old name and logo so they can quickly correct the issue.

Level 3: Band-aid solutions

Goal: Help employees work more efficiently while minimizing risk
Barrier: Inadequate tools enforce a draconian level of process

The band-aid solution stage isn't a great place to be. Companies here have outgrown their cloud storage tools, but have added one or more ill-fitting ancillary solutions that have ironically made them less efficient. For example, many companies designate a niche software, such as a stock photo management tool designed for brand teams, as the file storage tool for the entire company.

These tools bill themselves as digital access management tools (DAMs), but their UIs are clunky and they lack crucial features, such as asset lifecycle controls. Many also lack integrations with the team's existing editing and publishing tools, lengthening the time it takes to complete common tasks. There are little or no analytics, so teams have no insight into whether their creative endeavors actually pay off.
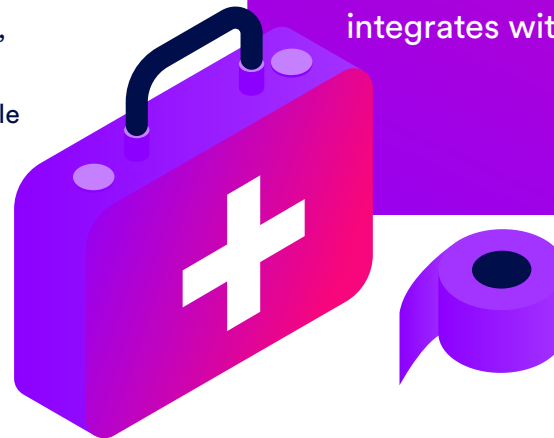
How to know if you're here:
- There is one "official" company-wide tool, but still variation among teams
- The quasi-DAM requires a significant amount of time to manage
- The quasi-DAM lacks integrations with existing tools
- To edit assets, individuals must download them and use another tool, then re-upload them to the original
- Assets are still lost or duplicated when someone moves the source file
- Limited visibility into asset lifecycle
- Insufficient controls to manage hundreds of users or edge cases

Tools used:
Quasi-DAM solutions,
Photo management tools
(Canva, Photoshelter)

Consider: Band-aid solutions often introduce time-consuming workarounds. For instance, the tool might lack user permissions and teams might use additional, unapproved cloud storage tools for things like working with contractors. To graduate from this phase, organizations need an intuitive, purpose-built tool that fits the use cases for multiple business units and integrates with existing systems.

Pain points

- Workarounds require significant added effort
- Little or no analytics or insights, so no ability to measure asset ROI
- Time wasted hopping between tools and downloading/uploading content
- Requires a lot of training and resources
- Added risk because it's difficult to grant or revoke external collaborator access
- Poor product experience because the tool wasn't intended for this use
- Expensive tools are underutilized because the team can't invite all contributors
- The team experiences junk drawer syndrome: Old assets pile up and create clutter

How to increase productivity

A purpose-built, intuitive DAM platform meets the asset management needs of the entire organization, including external stakeholders. Cloud-based brand guidelines and curated Collections and portals ensure that your brand is accurately represented no matter who is telling your story. Pre-built integrations with solutions like HubSpot, Salesforce, and Slack eliminate the need to manually download and upload assets between platforms, saving teams time, minimizing human error and version control issues, and providing visibility into asset performance across channels.

Case study:
High-growth startup scales its marketing

Central control, A/B testing, drive pipeline

The high-growth startup Fullstack just unlocked new funding, but its advertising and marketing operations weren't keeping pace. The team used thousands of assets across an expansive MarTech stack, but stored most of them in a photo management tool that didn't offer integrations. The ad and content teams spent so much time downloading, editing, and reuploading images that they rarely ran campaigns on time and didn't generate enough pipeline.

With a full DAM solution, Fullstack's assets are now stored in one central hub from which individuals can edit, share, and revoke access to contractors as needed. The ad team in particular is able to gather creative from the social media team to run vast A/B tests and generate more leads on less budget, offering a plausible path to get back on target.

Level 4: Central source of truth

Goal: Employees can do their jobs and earn the greatest return on creative assets
Barrier: The right tool is in place but isn't used to its full capacity

Companies reach this phase when they deploy a full DAM tool that's modular and fits their use case. The DAM tool is the standard for creation, storage, management, and distribution across all departments. It enforces a lightweight process with a UI so intuitive that even franchisees, vendors, and distribution partners can use it without training. It automatically ingests metadata such as the date, time, and name of the individual who created the asset, and offers an intelligent search feature that corrects misspellings and helps individuals find what they're looking for, fast. A true DAM also features a flexible API and integrations that eliminate routine tasks such as transferring files.

Although they've already begun experiencing the significant benefits of better asset management, companies in this phase are still working toward understanding and implementing all of the sophisticated features that their purpose-built DAM has to offer. These are usually related to artificial intelligence and automations that maximize efficiencies and free teams to focus on the most meaningful and strategic work.

How to know if you're here:
- Multiple departments use the DAM: Ecommerce, website, creative, marketing, PR, advertising, agency relationships, third parties, etc.
- System is easy for anyone to use without training
- Individuals find what they need, when they need it
- Individuals know that they always have the latest version
- System integrates with the tools that each team uses
- Easy to share with mixed internal-external working groups
- Team has analytics and full insight into the asset lifecycle, from creation to expiration
- Team still spends time on certain administrative or routine tasks
- Non-creatives lack the ability to customize assets and self-serve

Tools used:
A true DAM (like Brandfolder)

Consider: Not all DAMs are equal. Companies that wind up installing an outdated or overly-complicated DAM must invest heavily in change management and team-wide training to compensate. To grow beyond this phase, teams must use an intuitive DAM that offers the cutting-edge functionality necessary to take marketers and creatives to the next level.
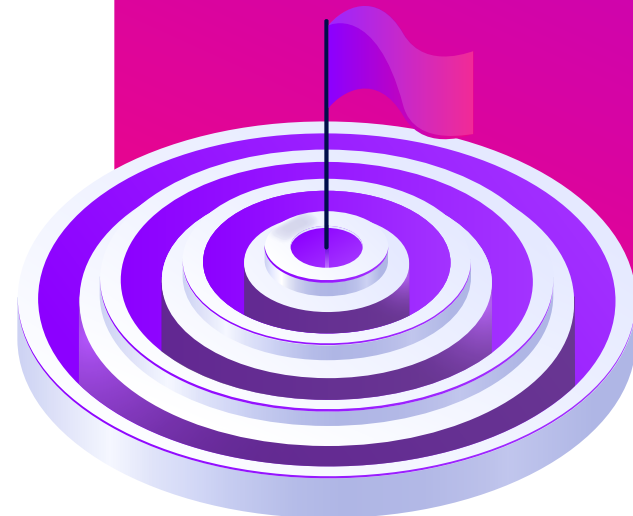
Pain points

⬡ Team isn't using tool to its full capacity

⬡ Old habits die hard: Employees must get acclimated before culture sets in

How to increase productivity

Use the DAM tool to its full capacity and turbocharge your team's productivity by exploring features like automatic asset expiration and AI-powered tagging. Functionality such as a smart content delivery network (CDN) enables teams to publish, update, and expire individual assets across dozens of channels via a single link. Content automation empowers non-creatives to personalize and customize assets at scale via flexible on-brand templates.

Case study:
Retailer streamlines its global sales machine

Centrally updated assets, analytics, image recognition
The European clothing retailer Lathe & Loom employs tens of thousands of individuals across the globe and has a marketing team divided into five regions. Thousands of product, merchandising, and marketing employees draw on hundreds of thousands of digital assets each week, and make changes and updates based on sales and season. Lathe & Loom recently rolled out a new, company-wide DAM. When looking at DAMs, they knew they needed:

- A UI so simple that even store managers with no training could use it
- The ability to embed assets directly from the DAM on any digital channel
- Analytics that alert merchandising teams to style trends
- Intelligent image recognition that can automatically tag assets

Level 5: State of flow

Goal: Maximize ROI by empowering teams to do the work they love and deliver top-performing content at scale
Barrier: None

Even better than an innovative, flexible DAM tool is excellent technology that's embedded in the entire company's workflows. In this phase, employees have learned to use the DAM to its full capacity and automate processes such as revoking access to expired assets — even if they exist on partners' sites. Users rely on the DAM to recommend asset tags, populate Collections with the appropriate content, empower non-creatives to self-serve, and so much more.

Brand consistency approaches 100% as every stakeholder, internal and external, has seamless access to the proper assets for any situation. Content is disseminated across a variety of channels via API and CDN directly from the DAM. The DAM integrates performance data from a variety of marketing channels to deliver predictive asset scores that are used by the creative advertising teams. Every employee understands how to use the DAM to find what they need quickly, and everyone has the right level of access.

How to know if you're here:

- People locate assets even faster with an intuitive UI, AI-generated metadata, and machine learning recommendations
- Cross-functional teams automate routine tasks
- Team has and sustains excellent organizational hygiene
- Internal asset changes propagate through the CMS and online properties via a CDN
- Asset life cycles are fully managed with native digital rights management functionality
- Team relies on AI analytics suggestions for creative based on usage and performance

Tools used:
A true DAM (like Brandfolder)

Pain Points: New challenges will continue to arise as the business grows and evolves. Be sure to consistently evaluate and update your content-related processes, and stay up to date on the latest DAM features and functionality.

Overheard around the office:

The system does that for us.

Our main retailer pulls that content directly to their site via our API.

Turn that into a template so the sales team can customize it on their own while remaining on-brand.

Swap out that asset in Brandfolder and it will automatically change everywhere via the CDN links.

How a DAM increases asset efficiency

An intuitive DAM enables teams to achieve more with less and ensures t hat companies get the biggest return on their content possible.

Simplify the existing workflow

- Integrate everything:
  1. Creative workflow tools (e.g. Workfront) to deliver finalized content to the DAM
  2. Communication tools (e.g. Slack) to send asset lifecycle notifications
  3. Marketing automation and CMS platforms (e.g. Marketo, Contentful) to publish assets
- Organize assets across all storage systems (Dropbox, Box, G-Drive, F Drives) while assets remain where they are
- Quickly provision new users with single sign-on

Scale content creation and usage

- Automatically tag assets based on what's inside an image or text document
- Empower non-creatives to customize content via templates
- Auto-invite contributors based on who should have access
- Edit a master asset and changes propagate to all existing copies across the web
- Embed files on any digital property directly from within the DAM
- Scale to unlimited concurrent users and files
- Ensure total privacy and security

Automate decisions and asset creation

- Auto-score assets and predict performance by channel and audience
- Get automatic alerts when assets are misused
- Auto-group assets by product, product line, and collection
- Get system-suggested tags and taxonomies based on team's search habits

Case study: CPG giant streamlines worldwide operations

Measure asset ROI, make better predictions

The Fortune 500 consumer packaged goods giant General Foods has six consumer brands with more than 200 product lines, each with an ever-changing collection of hundreds of thousands of assets. When cross-promotion campaigns require product lines to work together, they speak different languages. The company's legal team was constantly receiving notices that stock photos with expired licenses were being used and a lot of expensive creative was lost because it wasn't searchable.

With a full DAM solution applied across all brands and product lines, the teams became interoperable. Every asset is now automatically tagged using computer vision models custom built to the brand's needs and grouped into categories. Assets updated or revoked in the system propagate throughout the CDN, and the legal team is able to ensure compliance at scale without added effort.

Centrally, the brands are each able to measure asset performance and ROI across all product lines, while the system makes recommendations that improve sales, help creative teams anticipate trends, inform channel partners, and manage the lifecycle of each asset.

Achieving peak performance

Climbing the curve to full digital productivity means freeing your team from unnecessary administrative work to accomplish more of what they were hired to do. Marketing teams drive more pipeline. Creatives have more time to innovate. Brand teams launch more hits. Sales teams close more deals. Product teams have more successful launches. And IT enjoys the rare privilege of a full night's rest.

**Want to achieve peak performance?
Click here to schedule a demo.**

Get your assets in gear

It's time to make the most of your brand's investments in digital asset management and distribution. Watch our video on how Brandfolder's industry-leading DAM platform can deliver long-lasting ROI for your brand.

WATCH NOW

Brandfolder

by ☑ smartsheet
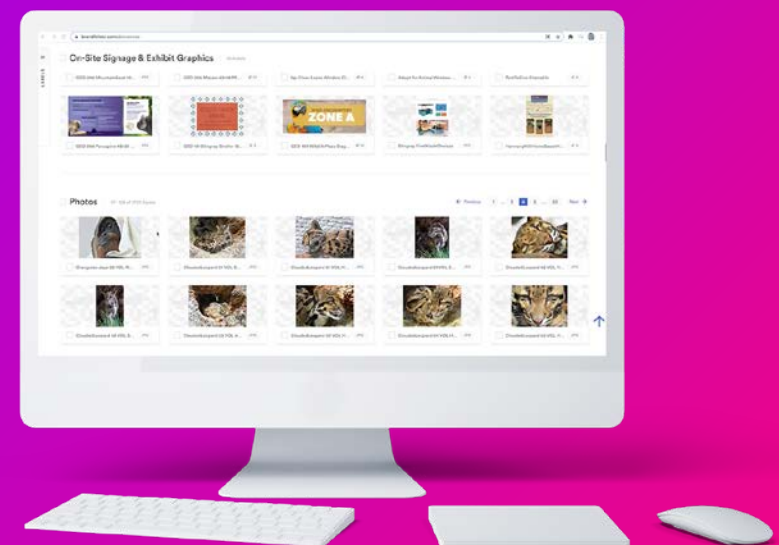
brandfolder.com ● hello@brandfolder.com