

Whatever the National Magazine Company has achieved thus far in implementing new publishing systems the company is clear about one thing – this is just the start.

In the last three years, the consumer magazine publisher of 20 titles and one of the UK's foremost luxury magazine publishers, has undertaken change in its workflow processes, with censhare's software – digital asset management and editorial and production workflow all rolled into one – at the heart of it.

Sean Briggs, NatMag's group publishing systems manager, is unequivocal: "censhare is the hub now. That's how we always saw it, but it was only when we started lifting the hood that we realised it was a workflow system, not just a publishing system. It feels like we have made all the big ticks, but there is such a lot left to do."

The search which led the Hearst Corporation subsidiary to censhare began in 2006. The company was looking for something that it rapidly came to the conclusion didn't exist in the marketplace: a photo library, an asset store, editorial/publishing workflow and production workflow – all within a single solution.

Briggs recalls: "We went to the market and looked at all the usual systems out there. Every time someone said they had a DAM, we went and had a look. We were looking for this all-encompassing solution and there wasn't one, so we had pretty much decided that we needed to start looking for two systems to work together. That's what the newspapers were doing: getting workflow and a photo library and tying the two together."

When NatMag came across censhare, a German software developer, it sounded, says Briggs, too good to be true. Fact finding trips to Germany to see how publishers such as Condé Nast, MVG and Vogel were using the software proved instructive. While Condé Nast only had the editorial workflow, MVG the photo library, the implementation at Vogel was closest to what NatMag had in mind. NatMag also checked out how BMW was using censhare in Germany to control a global, multi-language production schedule.

Natmags' workflow and DAM grail

Natmags' search for its ideal workflow solution has been long and frustrating – but now it feels it has discovered a system that gives it everything required to meet the publisher's future needs



"The sophistication of the workflow caught our eye," says Briggs. "Each time we saw censhare we felt more confident that it could give NatMag those three things – asset management, publishing workflow and production workflow."

At the same time, the publisher had a requirement to digitise all of its print transparencies and keep them in a repository – a project that amounted to more than 100,000 rights managed images. Briggs knew there were a number of systems that could handle such a job, and censhare said it could also.

"It wasn't their core competence but we thought it would be a really

Sean Briggs, Group Publishing Systems Manager, The National Magazine Company

good test for censhare," he explains. A small, server-based system was quickly set up and within six months the photo library was created and high res images could be stored in it. It was centrally controlled but remote users were able to log in, upload images and tag them with metadata. It was quick and because it was Java-based, it was secure, says Briggs.

Over the course of about another year, the system gradually developed at NatMag, as censhare tailored the system around the publisher's needs.

"Out of the box it was pretty rudimentary, but they kept adding things, tailoring it," Briggs remembers. "It gave

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us the confidence that they could deliver. They said: 'you have the basic system, just play with it, set up a test magazine.' We did that and it came together quite quickly after that."

This point in the timeline was about 16 months ago now, and it coincided with wider change at NatMag, as the company had already started taking its repro in-house. It was therefore getting used to producing its own print-ready PDFs,

Company magazine took on the responsibility of acting as the pilot for censhare inside NatMag. "It took three months to get the workflow right; a three month pilot "Briggs says. "After that though, we had a system that delivered exactly what we wanted"; cover pages, editorial pages, display and classified were all being handled within censhare for the magazine.

Briggs continues: "We had to be careful with hooking censhare into legacy systems. censhare looked at how our ad booking system prepared its data and hooked in remarkably quickly. I think they have just used so many different ad booking systems in Germany, so they were prepared. The booking system feeds ad information into censhare, and censhare sits waiting for the ad to arrive. We use OneVision Asura for preflighting and that's hooked into censhare as well."

"Company is now on its ninth issue using censhare. In six months we've got 14 out of our 20 magazines inside censhare, and we're averaging two magazines per month. The magazines themselves are responsible for checking the technical quality of the files, and production is monitoring performance, so we have file control where it counts. It's our responsibility; it's not being handed over to a third party."

The live flatplan within censhare is the beating heart of the software, allowing everyone to see progress as pages and publications are built, while pages can be moved around simultaneously, and re-folioing is taken care of automatically (a small feature, but hugely significant). As long as the page is refreshed, the up to date flatplan is right there on the screen.

There are many other areas where censhare is already proving its worth to NatMag. It looks after disaster recovery, and provides numerous automated features, such as the re-folioing already mentioned, but also time saving processes such as ensuring images are in the right file format, colour space and resolution before they get to the art teams.

"It's only three little steps, but before censhare it was three little steps that the art team had to do. Whenever we see those little gaps we are pretty sure that censhare can do it," says Briggs.

Also, instant archiving of publications that have gone to press is an automated process. censhare is configured to keep text files, the final InDesign document of each page and the print version of the PDF. It also stores each original image and the final manipulated version. These are all linked and stored automatically, while any other interim versions are wiped away.

The image workflow can still be improved in other ways also, Briggs explains: "It does what we set out to do

but it could be better. We're now on a treadmill of getting images on, so we have not had time to finesse it. That will happen in October, when all the magazines are on.

"The real problem is that on a digital shoot there will be 50-100 images, and you might only use five of them. But do we put them all in censhare and tag them? censhare is also responsible for rights management which is important for future ways of working."

Rights management was certainly an important consideration for NatMag in moving to censhare. With censhare, the rights information has to be uploaded at the same time as the image itself. There's no way round that. Having the rights data with the image ensures that everyone knows how a picture can be used, including the digital teams taking images for the web that have already been automatically converted for such usage.

"It's a small thing but it means that the web designers don't have to go into Photoshop to convert it themselves. These little time savings are everywhere in censhare," says Briggs.

Things can certainly still be improved within censhare itself, Briggs believes. For a start, the interface feels old and simply functional; it's not the type of interface that creatives enjoy. The criticism has been passed along to censhare, and Briggs reveals: "They have shown us version 4, and it looks like an Apple product - it's beautiful. So we know censhare is

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Natmags Project Team: Bob Bousfield, Amber Maher, James Naylor, Sean Briggs, Patrick Renner, Sue Rice and Timmie Steele



Above: Company magazine working with censhare

Below: censhare flatplan

addressing it, but we want it now.”

Editorial teams were involved right at the start, to define the scope of the system that was required. The team on Company magazine was so positive and so keen to grab the control that censhare promised that it was happy to be the guinea pig.

NatMag’s General Manager, Simon Horne says: “censhare is an important part of the company’s strategy to take complete control of content production and management right through to the creation of print ready PDFs. It will provide our business with opportunities to work in more flexible ways and for us to mobilise our considerable content assets across multiple distribution channels”.

Sean Brigg’s best tip for other publishers looking at the workflow areas of their business is to recognise that censhare is incredibly extensive. If they want only a small aspect, other systems

might be more suited. If they want asset management with very sophisticated publishing and production workflow and more, such as approvals, tracking and control, and disaster recovery, on top, censhare could be the one.

“It’s really hard for publishers to get their heads around what we show them because it’s so all-encompassing. If we showed them just the editorial workflow, or just the photo library, they would get it – but this is everything.”

NatMag is looking ahead, says Briggs “It feels like we are much better set up for the future. We are ready for it now. We have no idea what that future will look like, but we have the tools in place. Having this flexible workflow tool makes life easier and means we can react and use any kind of media with the same kind of control.”

Rupert Firmstone, CEO, censhare (UK) says, “The Natmags project is of global significance due to its scale and

complexity. Everyone involved should be proud of this achievement and for the smoothness of the transition, which was largely due to the strength and openness of Natmags and its teams. Just like many other censhare customers, Natmags is now prepared for the future with a defined way of working for everyone involved. Content is organized in a structured way that is accessible to everyone and many previously manual processes are now being automated. Natmags is a flagship for censhare and I very much look forward to helping other companies prepare for the future.”

About censhare

censhare is a leading provider of knowledge and expertise to the global publishing industry, specializing in the development of the innovative censhare Publishing System, an end to end solution for managing and producing content across all media channels.

The company encourages businesses to work more efficiently with integrated ways of working. censhare offers the most up-to-date technological advancements along with specialist experience at both a strategic level

and at project delivery level.

Clients include many major international companies including Condé Nast, Bauer, Dyson, BMW, General Motors, Siemens, Swiss Reinsurance Company and McCann Erickson.

censhare has offices in London, Zurich, Verona with headquarters in Munich and clients based in Europe, USA and South America.

- www.censhare.co.uk



Rupert Firmstone, CEO of censhare (UK)