Martech Buyers Guide:

Digital Asset Management

bizibl marketing

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Content is the central tenet of modern marketing - from video, ebooks, or advertising copy - right through to product photography, logos, and briefing documents. But orchestrating content creation at scale, then personalising it, and delivering it to consumers via a huge number of channels and devices, has become increasingly complex.

Digital Asset Management is an established technology that helps organisations do just this - but many marketing leaders underestimate its capability, thinking of it primarily as a file-store. Utilised properly however, a competent DAM system can dramatically reduce costs, improve performance, and deliver better customer experiences, making it more relevant now than ever before.

Whether you're upgrading, or looking to implement your first DAM platform, this guide will help you explore the true potential of DAM, and identify the opportunities that matter most for your brand. Whether it's workflow management, reducing the time spent by staff searching for files, or a myriad of other valuable applications, DAM can deliver significant value to your organisation.

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Leader by censhare:
Welcome to the Buyers Guide for Digital Asset Management

by Alina Marginean, DAM Specialist, censhare UK

Welcome to the Buyer's Guide for Digital Asset Management. Ahead you'll find some essential advice from the experts here at censhare, aimed at business leaders looking to implement a DAM solution, or considering replatforming. At censhare, we believe that DAM plays a critical role in enabling scalable and resilient digital business, so we're pleased to partner with Bizibl to bring you this key technology buying guide.

censhare's Universal Content Management is a single platform that solves the pains that organisations typically experience with conventional digital asset and content management software, as well as product information management software. Bringing all content and asset types together in one system, we apply an integrated content management approach with a powerful and scalable DAM at its core.

Now, product information, service descriptions, photos, price lists, user guides, infographics, logos, articles and other content can be used quickly and efficiently to create marketing campaigns that are more effective than ever.

With censhare, you can efficiently manage your marketing processes to generate personalised content for your customers and push it to the channels that matter:

- Customers can be reached with the right content on their preferred channel at the right time

- Resources are used efficiently, and time is saved

- The full value of content is achieved

- Sales opportunities can be addressed as soon as they arise

- Errors can be avoided and the quality of your campaigns improved

- Costs are reduced and campaigns become more effective

Collaboration tools provide an easy way for colleagues to work together on any digital asset or object and create notes, assign new tasks, and streamline the collaborative process.

Every aspect of our semantic database technology helps reduce time and costs. All content is interlinked, bringing every image, video, document and file under complete control. Everyone is connected to the platform enabling a smoother, more collaborative production process while greater automation in content management allows a rapid response to new opportunities.

Working with leading global brands and their creative agencies to help accelerate content, improve and automate marketing operations, and streamline brand management, we have fully experienced the challenges in managing complexity and the frustrations in siloed organisations. Traditionally, customers were engaged separately by the marketing, sales and service departments, with limited interaction between the functions at each step. Many organisations are still using such silo systems and processes today, preventing a holistic customer experience as well as their ability to realize the full value of their digitised content. With silo systems, they continue to waste time, valuable resources and the value of content, miss sales opportunities, lose control of costs. Fixing complexity while eliminating silos to accelerate content automation revolves around a solid, scalable DAM at the heart of the enterprise.

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The Coronavirus pandemic has exposed serious cracks in the martech stack of many organisations. The high demand for basic DAM implementations all the way to more complex content hub initiatives have all shown that the responsiveness to customer demands is critical to business sustainability while finding ways to counteract the impact of the pandemic and safeguard productivity goes back to the roots: having a functional DAM in place. Brands have a real challenge on their hands and many are realising the absolute necessity of having total control of their information at all times.

And, as we come to the end of a lockdown heavy year, the pandemic's influence is still felt in many quarters. So what learnings are companies taking with them into the year ahead?

The Need for New Efficiency

The centralisation of information and the ability to interact with it in real time, drawing upon accurate, up-to-date assets whenever, wherever employees needed them, is of a distinct advantage during times of crisis. Thankfully, it is also the defining characteristic of a Digital Asset Management (DAM) solution.

During the first lockdowns of 2020, companies across the globe in every sector moved online as much as possible and the need to efficiently manage every type of digital content was paramount. Workers needed to collaborate remotely while still performing often complex tasks that would normally have involved many physical interactions. Speed was also of the essence as conditions were changing rapidly.

As the year progressed, cost too became a factor. With customer spending suppressed, savings had to be made while customer communication and support needed to be not only maintained but in many cases ramped up. For those brands with some form of Digital Asset Management in place, the central storage of digital assets and associated process automation will have stood them in good stead for achieving important cost efficiencies without impacting quality of output. In fact, as many companies who used DAM solutions pre-COVID can attest, implementing this solution doesn't just preserve output quality, it improves it. Swiss grocer Migros uses DAM to manage 14 weekly variants of its customer magazine in 10 regions, with the content in each specifically tailored to each audience.

Supporting the New Era of Ecommerce

Digital assets are more than just product information. Companies today need to ingest assets that include videos, customer recommendations, user generated content from social media, editorial and more. This range of assets and information needing to be efficiently housed, processed, delivered, and managed, may now become even more important, as the long lasting implications of the pandemic continue to affect the way we shop online.

Consumers are now going online at all stages in the purchasing journey. As a result, brands need to deliver content that inspires and entertains, as well as informs. It means an explosion in digital assets, but also assets that are changing all the time. For companies to keep on top of this tsunami of information and resources, DAM can be the key solution.

DAM solutions have been managing huge volumes of assets for leading brands: BSH manages 11 million different assets via its DAM; Spark44 makes 300,000 assets available to its client Jaguar Land Rover across 18 countries and 10,000 users. Slimming World manages 5,000 recipes and 30,000 images across its publishing arm and customer base. And again, critically,

the increase in volume and variety of assets needn't lead to an increase in costs. Spark44 saved £55 million in less than 10 years for Jaguar Land Rover, through the use of a DAM, while Hearst UK saved 3,000 hours and 5% of page costs in a year.

Beyond 2021 with DAM

For such companies, lockdown and 2020 as a whole was the final proof that they had made the right decision to invest in a DAM solution, as they transitioned seamlessly to a work from home scenario without incurring costs or delays. For others, it revealed just how much such a solution was needed.

But as the globe makes steps towards recovering from the COVID pandemic, this need will not go away. Instead it is likely to intensify as the economy slowly makes its way back to a healthier and securer state. In addition, customers now live online more than ever, and situations where companies need to drive efficiencies or react quickly will recur. An investment into the right digital asset management solution for your organisation can well be seen as an investment into the future of your business.

Modern DAM: An Introduction

At its most basic, a DAM platform is software which allows organisations to store, organise and locate files.

Sounds simple enough, but without a fit-for-purpose DAM, the more an organisation grows, the more time can be wasted in exactly these areas - hunting through emails, searching cloud drives, or scouring local servers - often turning up wrong or outdated versions, or indeed nothing at all.

This kind of waste can have serious consequences, ranging from visual inconsistency, duplication, and compliance breaches, all the way to licensing disputes - not to mention the inevitable impact on staff time, leading to frustration and demotivation, reduced productivity, and loss of creative time.

Additionally, in order to call itself fit-for-purpose, a DAM platform needs a variety of specialist core features to support collaboration and handle the complexities of modern marketing.

But modern DAM has a much bigger part to play - in fact, it's the lynchpin of modern marketing. To understand why, you'll need to take a close look at your business, conducting careful discovery, and working to ensure you understand the needs of your stakeholders, chief among whom are the day-to-day users.

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Analysing Your Business

To ascertain what you need from a DAM platform, the first thing you need to understand is your own business. How does your marketing team actually go about creating content - and how does that content reach your consumers? Beyond the marketing department, which departments create or use digital assets? These broad questions will help you to map the business processes involved.

As an example; imagine you're a marketer for an automotive brand, and you're running a campaign focused on a new model. Such a campaign might require a number of outputs, including a TV sponsorship spot, full page print newspaper ads, some online banner ads, a brochure, and a microsite.

Let's briefly examine just one; the brochure. Even a modest brochure will contain a reasonable number of sub-assets, such as photos, text copy for each variant, hero imagery for the front cover, slogans, a general introduction, your logo, and more. That's all before getting into discussing issues such as the placement of logos, brand guidelines for color, style, fonts, tone-of-voice, etc.

So, having worked with creative colleagues (both inside and outside the organisation) to generate the assets required for the brochure, you're likely to be left holding a number of files, some of which you'll need to review (or seek approval for), some will have multiple versions, and some may have licensing restrictions. Next, you'll need to pull the files together (ensuring you have the correct versions), write a briefing document, supply brand guidelines, logos and more, so that your designer can begin to lay out the brochure. Design being an iterative process, there will almost certainly be more versions, and multiple stakeholders to engage before the finished product can be signed off. There might then need to be translations, a responsive web version, localisations and more.

As most marketers will be well aware - even within this tiny microcosm, there are a large number of files, many high-importance decisions, opportunities for errors or duplication, compliance risks, and more. Multiply this by the number of assets required for this campaign, and the workload for a campaign manager is already looking untenable. Multiplied again to every member of the marketing team, in every local market (particularly in distributed environments), and you're beginning to see the scale of the problem.

Managing these challenges is the core function of DAM platforms - unlike an amalgam of cloud drives, email attachments, and legacy file-servers. Specifically addressing the issues above, competent DAM platforms are designed to quickly and easily ingest assets, make them highly available, share them securely, manage detailed real-time meta information (such as licensing periods, review information, or approval details), and make it easy for marketers to manage project assets.

Workflows

Of course, assets don't spontaneously spring into existence. As we've already mentioned, the process of creating an asset can itself be very complex. This diagram illustrates our brochure example.

Happily, helping marketers purposefully design and operate workflows to support the systematic creation of assets is a key strength of modern DAM platforms. Using a graphical user interface (GUI), users can create and manage flows for small tasks (such as creating blog posts, or editing an image) or longer, more complex ones - like the creation of a brochure! Such workflow tools will typically feature notification, assignation, dependency, and monitoring functionality out of the box
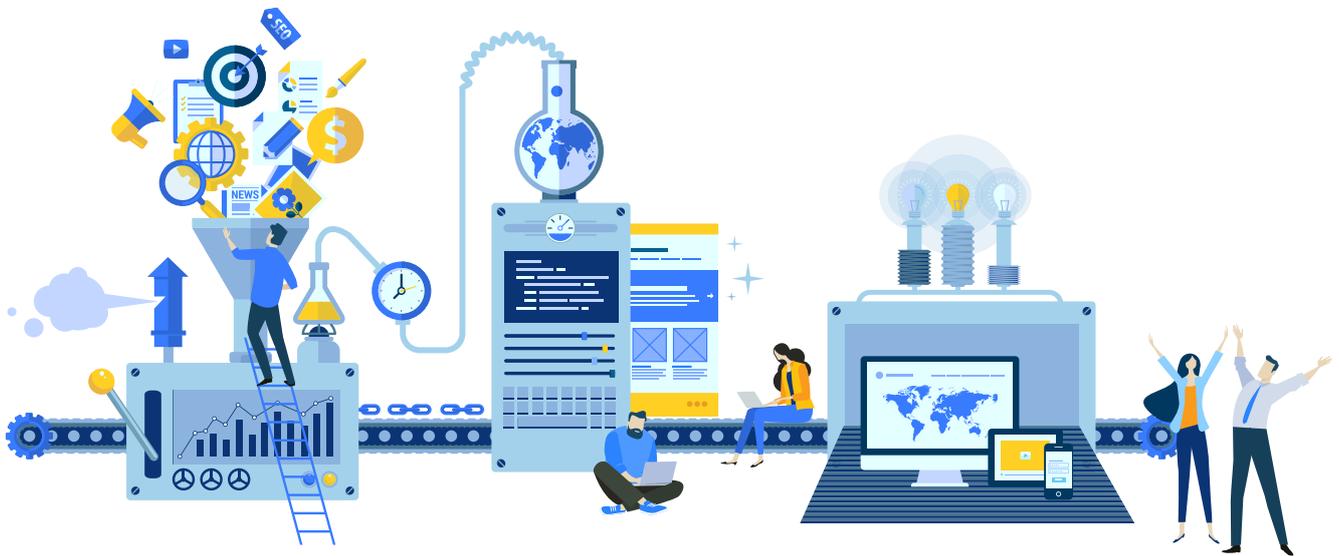
Integrators

If you're struggling to find the time and resources to analyse and map your own business processes, there are organisations who can help.

Vendors themselves, or third-party integrators, know the DAM landscape and can help you avoid the pitfalls of choosing and implementing a platform. They can also offer a useful outsider's perspective, which is particularly helpful when evaluating existing processes.

Delivering Customer Experiences

Marketing assets don't exist in a vacuum! As we've touched on, in years gone by, a DAM platform was predominantly a file-store, with some additional productivity and management tools. When you wanted to put your assets in the hands of your consumers, you were largely on your own. Modern DAM however, has evolved significantly.

Most enterprise-grade DAM systems offer highly available integral content delivery networks (CDNs), and in the majority of cases, are either intrinsically linked to a variety of specialist modules by the same vendor, or can be integrated seamlessly with partner technology that connects content and consumer.

The most common (but by no means the only) modules include; marketing resource management (MRM), product information management (PIM) for eCommerce, digital rights management (DRM) typically for media owners, and content management systems or content experience management (CMS or CXM) for generalised content delivery.

This kind of deep integration has significant benefits. Firstly, it gives teams a much greater degree of surety and control over content - if changes need to be made, or content needs to be depreciated, there's a single point of origin, rather than a plethora of different properties that need to be tracked down and managed on a one-by-one basis. Secondly, it gives individual digital assets context, by relating them to others, showing usage information, and showing users other meta information - making them much more useful. Thirdly, it eliminates many of the requirements (and subsequent bottlenecks) of publishing content. Some simple illustrations of this are;

1. **Retail PIM (Product Information Management)**
   Retail product updates - from clothing size or color changes, to food ingredients, general availability, linked products, and more - are complex, especially with interlinked systems.

2. **Banking literature updates**
   Ostensibly simple changes, such as to current account terms and conditions might need to be reflected on the web (via CMS), in flyers and brochures, in apps, and much more.

It's a truism that modern customers expect context-aware experiences, optimised for their devices. Supporting this expectation requires the blend of dynamic content transformation, robust content delivery, and integration we've discussed here. As such, DAM buyers should expect platforms to be equipped to support this from day one.

DAM's Place in the Tech Stack

As is no-doubt becoming obvious, Digital Asset Management should sit right at the heart of modern marketing, bridging the gap between content creators, content, and customers.

But enterprise technology stacks can be a complicated mix of new and legacy systems, rarely planned from the outset, so delivering on these aims can be onerous. From a content standpoint, this often leads to a steadily increasing requirement for manual intervention and human administration tasks - just to present a unified front to customers.

In recent years, the concept of a content hub has emerged as a solution to this, seeking to unify disparate content and act as a centralised portal for users and customers alike.

Every organisation's needs are different, but the content hub concept is the same - by closely integrating DAM with other core technology, such as MRM and PIM, enterprises can take a holistic approach to content creation and delivery. This way of working helps to overcome the natural silos that develop within organisations, and even inside the marketing department. Buyers should carefully assess platforms' out-of-the-box integration capabilities, to ensure that a content hub is achievable.

Clear Objectives

By implementing a DAM platform to address the issues we discuss in this guide, a myriad of benefits can be realised. In fact, these can be assessed as potential objectives from the outset of any DAM procurement project. They include:

- **Content Output - Quality and Volume**
- **Brand Governance and Consistency**
- **Risk, Compliance, and Licensing**
- **Organisational Silos and Software Proliferation**
- **Cost Reductions**
- **Content Speed-to-Market**
- **Transformation and Localisation**
- **Collaboration**
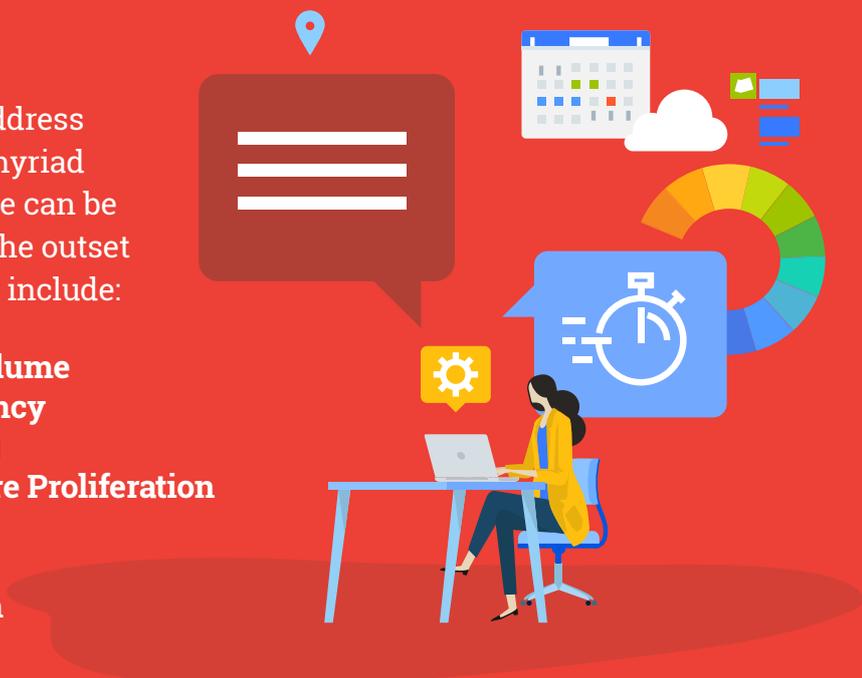
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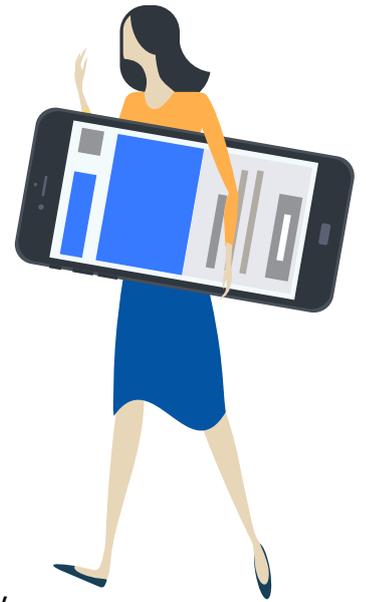
As we're already discussed, comparing specific vendors, and making pronouncements about the quality or suitability of certain features is a tall order, especially given that different companies' needs will vary, and that many platforms operate a rolling-release cloud platform, which is constantly evolving.

That said, there certainly are common considerations, which buyers should evaluate closely as part of any procurement process:

The User Interface (UI)

The UI of DAM systems really can be a make or break factor. Clear, intuitive user interfaces will encourage user adoption, minimise training requirements, and speed up day-to-day tasks.

Digital assets are often visual by their nature, so well-designed, engaging user experiences are essential, and simple mechanisms to upload, share, edit, review (and more) are a must.

Collaboration & Software Support

Whether internally, or with 3rd parties (such as agencies), access control at granular level is important. As an example, you might wish for your team to be able to edit or replace core assets such as logos, whereas agencies only need to be able to view them.

Consider whether you need to facilitate secure file transfer to non-users (such as temporary contractors)

Depending on your own use-case, examine how well platforms support specialist software, such as publishing industry favourite InDesign. Specialised platforms can often offer valuable enhancements, like in-browser previewing or editing of proprietary files, saving time, and even licensing costs in some cases.

Price and Value

It goes without saying that buyers must scrutinise upfront and ongoing costs, typically annualised licenses, support, and per-user seat charges.

Counterintuitively, it's important to stress that cheaper is not always better - in many cases, the right system can offer significant value. Particularly where platforms offer features that would allow systems consolidation, and enable efficiencies, ensure that cost is not the only factor.

Service Level Agreement(s) and Support

No matter how great platform demonstrations look, it's easy to forget that you actually have to live with DAM in the real world. Pay close attention to support options and onboarding/training requirements,

For business critical applications like DAM, reliability, resilience, and support SLAs are key, so be sure to investigate carefully.

Search

Search and browse are pivotal capabilities for DAM - after all, if users can't surface the content they've created, the system has very much fallen at the first hurdle! As such, we recommend careful testing of keyword search and filtering capabilities, which typically include the ability to search by meta information, such as published date, campaign association, owner, and more.
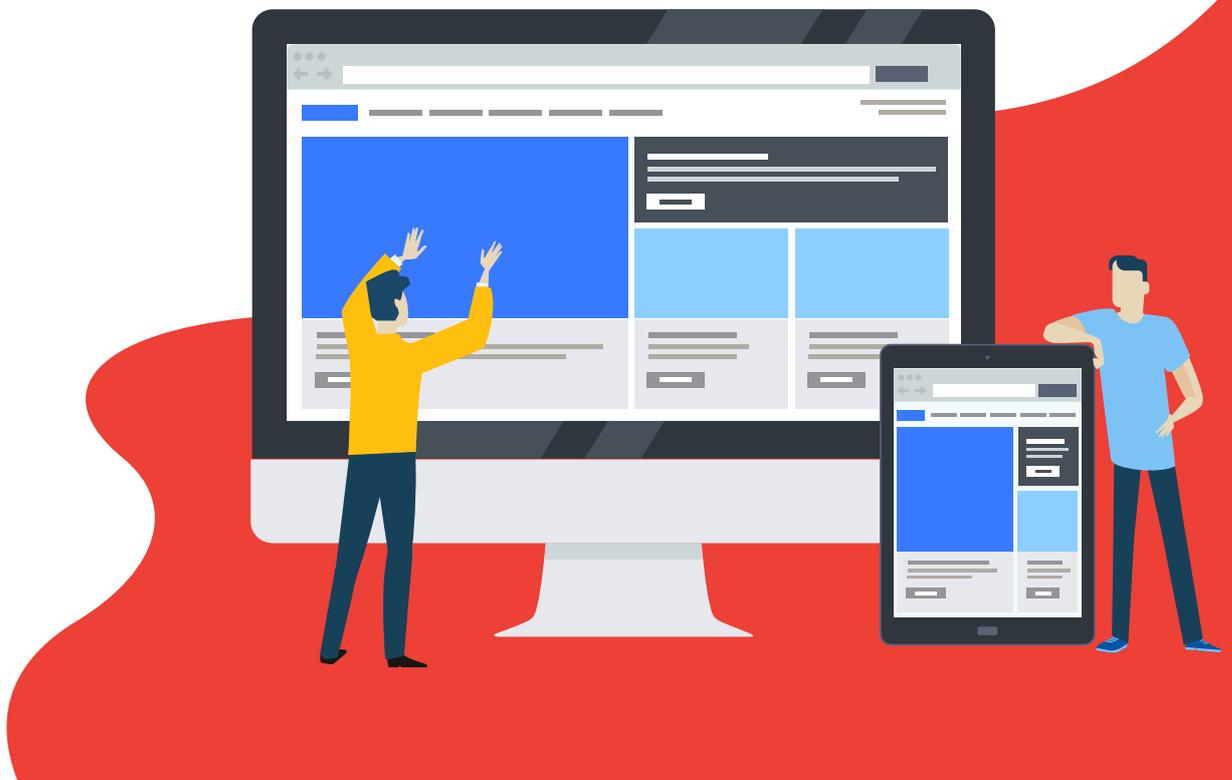
Additionally, mature systems are usually able to support custom taxonomies, with some beginning to support image recognition and even the ability to search inside rich media.

Scalability and Expandability

Firstly, explore whether your providers infrastructure (and policies) allow for expansion - this would typically include any limitations on bandwidth, storage, number of users, and the elasticity of customer-facing content delivery services.

Secondly, as we've examined throughout this guide, integration is a critical factor in any DAM implementation. In many cases, vendors offer a combination of natively integrated modules such as PIM and MRM, which can offer significant savings versus bespoke integrations with existing tools - so much so that it may be appropriate to expand the scope of a project.

Where integrations are not native, conduct a full appraisal of relevant API's, and/or third party plugins which provide integration services. Involve specialist colleagues as necessary.

An oft-overlooked angle to any technology procurement project is the future - so ask yourself, can your platform grow with your business? Also, are there features which might become more important in the future? If so, investigate these with vendors now - a typical example of this is translation capabilities to support expansion into new markets.

Getting Technical

Finally, when evaluating business technology which interacts with other critical business systems, handles customer data, or contains sensitive business information, there are some basics that must be considered. Each of the following is worthy of its own paper, but warrants listing here, for detailed evaluation.

- **Delivery method (cloud, on-premise, hybrid)**
- **APIs**
- **Platform and data security**
- **Physical location and data processing agreements and jurisdictions**
- **Data ownership and portability**
- **CDN and customer-facing availability**

In Summary

Whatever your current level of maturity, if you're assessing DAM, our key take-aways are; firstly, that you must understand your own business needs, and secondly, that it's imperative you conduct a detailed and thorough procurement process - hasty decisions can have far-reaching consequences.

As the integral component of your content operation, DAM really is that promised lynchpin of modern marketing, enabling creators, and acting as the reliable distribution and control platform you need to support content-first marketing strategy.

As such, implementing your first DAM, or migrating to a modern platform can bring significant opportunities for efficiency, cost-reduction, and overall customer experience.