

GUIDE

The case for a marketing content hub

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Transforming digital marketing: The case for a content hub

Your customers expect memorable moments at every brand touchpoint. And when you have websites, social pages, blogs, and mobile content to consider, it can feel impossible to deliver everything with quality and speed. That's why 97% of marketers say producing enough content to meet their organization's needs is their biggest concern. Yet, stitching together the systems, data and processes needed to manage content creation and delivery at scale across channels is a daunting task. And with today's content personalization mandate layered on top of this work-stream, the daunting task becomes a full-blown crisis.

Incremental improvements in efficiency and scale with legacy tools are no longer a viable solution. New thinking and paradigms are called for, and nothing short of a marketing transformation built on a new class of systems and processes is needed.

This new foundation has a simple name, yet its power is transformational–we call it a "Content Hub." In this guide, we'll explore the case for this solution and explain how it can help you supercharge your marketing operations.



It's more than Digital Asset Management

Most marketers get introduced to the concept of a Content Hub through a DAM system. It's now an established category and, as a consequence, marketers often label projects in their back office as "DAM." That is, at least until we start digging into the underlying business case, use cases, and specific requirements. More often than not, the project then takes a different turn.

While a DAM is usually present in some form, we often find that customers are dealing with serious challenges around content marketing and omnichannel delivery. This is far beyond the traditional scope of DAM.

But in scenarios like this, a seemingly minor mislabeling can have major consequences. By the time the RFP is released, the project has been locked in the DAM mold. Short lists have been made of DAM vendors. Budgets have been matched to DAM implementations. Internal stakeholders, sponsors, staffing, and governance are all expected to match a DAM business case.

"A more accurate project label might read, 'We have serious challenges around content marketing and dealing with omnichannel.'"

Fixing these issues in-flight can often be complicated and costly. In the end, companies are often left with a compromised project that fails to adequately address the business problem. Not only that, time, money, and momentum have all been lost.

To educate future clients and prospects—and to anticipate and avoid the pitfalls described above—this guide describes the business case for a Content Hub, and compares it with both the traditional DAM business case and the situations we most often encounter when we enter through the DAM door.

¹ Econsultancy and Sitecore: Reinventing Commerce 2019:

nttps://www.sitecore.com/en-gb/resources/index/analyst-reports/reinventing-commerc

Over 80% of global respondents say that 'relevant content is what gets customers to come back.'¹

Where is the CMO?

Around the time larger organizations began replacing their "starter" DAM platform with a second-generation solution, attention quickly turned toward the other end of the marketing operations chain. Analytics and user-experience management were there to expand the expectations and aspirations of Web Content Management (WCM) systems.

The most interesting development to emerge was that, for perhaps the first time in marketing technologies' history, the CMO began paying attention. At long last, customer-facing technology offered a means to measure the impact of all those expensive and complicated marketing production processes. In this age of cost efficiencies and struggles to secure investment for digital transformation, quantifiable metrics were precisely what the CMO was looking for.

"For perhaps the first time in marketing technologies' history, the CMO began paying attention."

From a strategic angle, most companies are now focused on content marketing and omnichannel reach. Content marketing implies that the marketing message is built around fact rather than fiction. Omnichannel means that a company wants to ensure their message is consistent across every customer touchpoint, and that the full potential of every channel is leveraged using the richest media and content possible.

This is where the CMO can be found these days.

Success as an ecommerce business depends on the ability to create compelling customer experiences, according to over 80% of marketing leaders.¹

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The Content Hub

To turn the ideal of content marketing and omnichannel into reality, we have to connect the dots of fragmented infrastructure and martech applications that create disjointed digital experiences.

Over 75% of executives say that content is the strategic key to growing customer lifetime value.¹

Enter the Content Hub. But let's size up the challenge first.

Marketing content is all over the place. Literally. It can sit on hard drives. In Excel files. We have even helped clients who were not certain about the physical whereabouts of the server. But mostly, bits and pieces of marketing content can be found in platforms that are, or are not, owned by the marketing organization.

"We're so focused on creating more and more content, we feel like we don't have enough time, or budget, or we lack the business priority to focus on it."

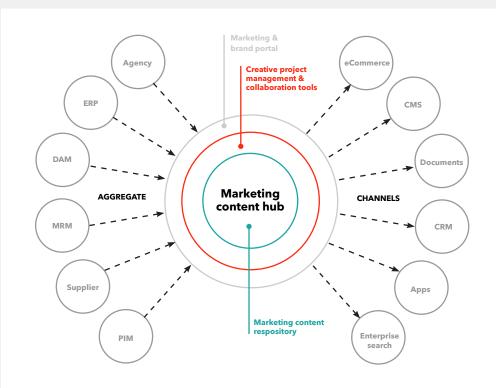
Robert Rose Chief Strategy Officer, Content Advisory





Where is your content hiding?

Let's identify some of the usual suspects that hold pieces of content we can use in our content marketing.



ERP

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems are owned by the older, more serious, and well-established layers of the organization. They are designed primarily to hold financial and logistical information. ERP platforms are generally unsuited to accommodate typical marketing information, such as, commercial product benefits in 17 languages. And in the rare cases ERP systems are able to accommodate such information, a release cycle of 12 months is usually a poor match for a marketing organization that needs to respond swiftly to ever-changing conditions.

Nevertheless, with respect to best practices in master data flow, ERP is the origin and owner of some pieces of marketing content that must flow downstream to ultimately end up in a publication channel. Typically, you will want ERP to provide product structures (e.g., brands, product families, SKUs, organization of products in a catalog) and the availability of products to markets or retail customers.



PLM

Product Lifecycle Management (PLM) systems support product development from R&D to industrialization, management of versions, and changes to processes or specifications, down through the phase out. PLM systems are often smart, relatively complex systems that form the backbone of many of the industrial processes in product-oriented organizations. From a taxonomy and data model point of view, there is definitely something to be learned here. PLM systems usually have technical product specifications that we can leverage, including technical documentation.

PIM & PCM

Product Information Management (PIM) or Product Content Management (PCM) is PLM's smaller and more frivolous brother, and leans toward the marketing organization. Although it fills a very real need in product-oriented organizations, we've always felt that the DAM-PIM coupling was a very awkward and artificial thing–but more on that later.

DAM

DAM is generally owned by the marketing organization, and the scope is roughly that it holds media files, including product images. DAM is one of the most mature, and therefore most valuable, repositories for marketing content in most organizations.

MRM

Marketing Resource Management (MRM) platforms, also known as campaign management platforms, are a special guest here. These platforms are generally used to support and measure the overall marketing cycle–from strategic planning around budgeting, media planning, creative, review and annotation, to execution, dropping final materials into the DAM, and measuring impact in the publication channels.

In reality, unfortunately, most implementations we encounter are poorly executed. At best, the MRM platform gives insight into the marketing calendar and brings some structure to the high-level process. But more often, we have seen clients use MRM platforms for small sub-processes such as regulatory approval or even creative review.

Even in an organization where processes are mature and implementation into the MRM platform is elegant, there is usually still a major element missing: the way content-both data and files and the associated metadata-is handled, stored and made available downstream.

Creative review

Creative review tools cover the upload of drafts of creative artifacts such as layouts or video, and annotation and commenting by stakeholders. This is a very useful and well-defined scope of purpose that lends itself perfectly to a subscription-based software-as-a-service (SaaS) offering.

Marketing content is all over the place. *Literally*.



This category is of particular interest because it is usually one of the first places where marketing departments go rogue-there are so many good and relatively affordable offerings out there that take away all the hassle with just a small investment. It allows marketers to become involved in all sorts of misbehavior, like avoiding CAPEX procedures and investment freezes, and not going through the IT department for procurement.



Nearly half of all marketers say it's 'difficult for them to create the volume of content needed across personas and products.'1

Agency

Agencies are, for a number of clients, an important and surprising source of master data. In our experience, some-though not all-agencies are better organized than their clients. Those agencies tend to keep track of the marketing content they create or apply and store it in their own internal libraries or platforms.

"Agencies can be a surprising source of data."

The traditional business model for agencies used to be to take a fee on media space buying and cover up operations in the guise of a creative studio. After the advertising crisis, some agencies have rethought their added value. That's the type of agency that has silently stored and organized your content for you. The downside is, it's their added value and client retention tool, so letting go will be either expensive or ugly.



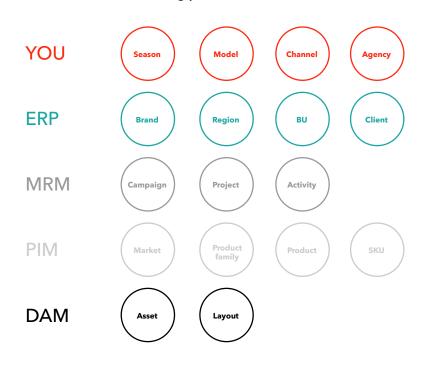


Bringing it all together

Having identified the different places marketing content lives, we need a plan to bring it together. In order to carry out our plan, we need to introduce an idea that is central to our way of looking at marketing content: The Domain Model.

Building the skeleton

The Domain Model is a concept taken from the IT world. It is built around Entities and Actors. Actors are the different types of users that touch your marketing content. Entities are the structuring concepts around which your business is organized.



If we look at the source platforms that bring marketing content to the table, we find clues to Entities. DAM will traditionally bring media assets and layout; PIM or PLM will bring market, product family, product, and SKU; MRM will bring campaign, project, and activity; ERP will bring brand, region, business unit, and customer.

Marketing platforms and entities



On top of that, there may be some Entities missing; stateless Entities that currently have no dedicated platform on which to live. We'll accommodate them–season, model, channel, agency, and whatever else turns up in the way you discuss your business.

Entities are data, not just metadata. They have content of their own, can turn up as both search criteria and search results, and can have their own detail page.

What's important here is that we skip domain models that are imposed by technology. We are designing the way we want information to be structured, searchable, and linked based on the way you do business-not the way the vendor database was designed.

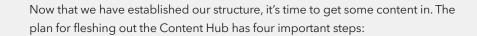
Also, we're superposing, mixing, and matching domain models that traditionally belong in segregated silos and industry categories. Content managed by DAM and PIM and MRM and ERP is all related – so it doesn't make much sense to keep it separated.

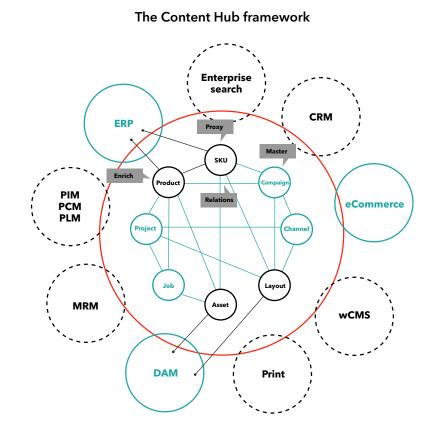


We are designing the way we want information to be structured, searchable, and linked based on the way you do business-not the way the vendor database was designed.



Fleshing out the Content Hub





The Content Hub is designed to configure and operate as a unified platform.

Aggregate

Content from the different platforms is aggregated in the Content Hub. Master data ownership for aggregated Entities typically stays with dedicated platforms. These Entities are aggregated as proxies–a live-linked instance, so to speak.

Enrich existing Entities

Entities that are proxies can be enriched with additional data or metadata. Oftentimes, an Entity is owned by another platform, and it is perfectly logical to keep master data ownership with that platform. However, from a marketing point of view, additional content on that Entity may be required. Consider, for example, translated benefits for a product. This is a typical case where the Content Hub will enrich an existing proxy Entity with additional data.



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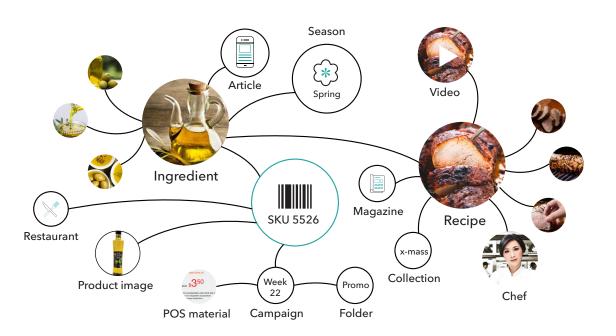


Add new Entities

Entities can be aggregated and enriched based on proxies. If new Entities are defined, the master data ownership can be assigned to the Marketing Content Hub. This is a flexible scheme that allows for an unobtrusive architecture while at the same time permitting the planning of changes without risk, such as the introduction of new platforms and the phasing out of others.

Document relationships

Once we have aggregated, enriched, and defined new Entities we can also document and articulate relationships between these Entities-relationships that were not available or visible before. This is one of the strongest features of establishing a central Content Hub as it not only brings content together, it also allows you to see and explore the relationships of that content.



Relationships between entities optimize content

For the next era of marketing, data can't live in the traditional rows and tables of a relational database. Rather, data needs to be fluid and organic, shifting like a neural network, allowing different business users and end consumers to experience content in ways that make sense for them.



Sourcing inspiration externally

Content does not end with the content you own. Imagine, for example, you are an upmarket food retailer, and your central strategic marketing organization is setting up seasonal campaigns. The upcoming campaign for next summer is all about vegetables - think heirloom tomato salad with a balsamic vinegar dressing. You probably own some content about your products, maybe some recipes. If you're already a bit more mature in the content marketing approach, you'll have some content available on that small family-owned farm in upstate New York that supplies you with local produce.

But when it comes to inspiring all of those marketers, agency creatives, copywriters, photographers, and that group of freelancers who operate far from your strategic cell, there is more out there. This might include Wikipedia information, recipes from Bing Food & Drink, artwork from stock photo suppliers, Pinterest, blogs about seed swap events, and farmers' markets that nicely complement your offering. All of this turns your DAMgone-PIM-gone-marketing portal into a mood board of sorts.

How's that for inspiring your marketing community?

65% of commerce professionals agree that 'combining content with personalization is the best way to compete with global marketplaces like Amazon and Alibaba.'¹



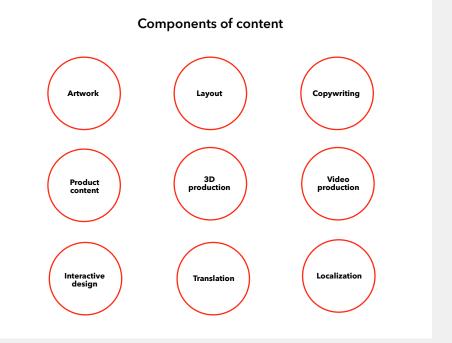
Herding cats

Bringing content together and enriching or creating new content is a process. Having a place to store that content and make it available is paramount. However, supporting and streamlining some of the underlying processes is equally important.

To a certain extent, the marketing professionals and their creative suppliers we meet have one thing in common: a deep-rooted aversion to procedure, rules, and structure. It's the last stronghold of stylish anarchy in most corporations.

But there is growing pressure. With CMOs that want insight into their operations, structure is becoming inevitable.

Marketing content project management and collaboration tools are the first supporting layer that is added to the core asset repository functionality.



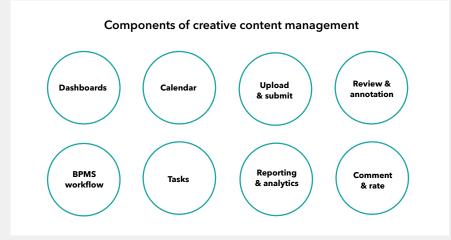
Workflow

Lots of clients ask us for the remedy of workflow to fix the diagnosis of chaos. Frankly, it's the type of medicine that might cure the disease, but is sure to kill the patient at the same time. Workflow, in the sense of a fixed sequence of events, hardwired into a defined flowchart is something fit for a factory, not for a creative process.



Creative project management

Instead, we believe that the notion of project management should be central when looking into creative and marketing processes. The project manager brings the main theme of experienced human judgment that we can complement with tools to support both the project manager and the team.



The marketing professionals and their creative suppliers we meet have one thing in common: a deep-rooted aversion to procedure, rules, and structure.

Project management tools

Tools for the project manager should focus on the ability to add structure and to gain insight. A template approach can reflect the best practices provided by the organization and can be complemented by the ability for the project manager to tweak the course of events when defining the project, or even on-the-fly. High-level milestones can be included to enable insight into progress.

Collaboration tools

Marketing users and their external suppliers who participate in marketing content creation can be supported with productivity tools focused on collaboration. This includes the ability to upload, preview, comment on, rate, and annotate files; ask questions; and manage task lists.



Producing and publishing personalized digital content faster or more cost effectively is a priority for over 95% of global marketing leaders.¹



Speak to the crowd

A second, outer layer around the marketing content repository is the marketing portal. This is our most attractive asset. Essentially, it is web content management (CMS) functionality that allows us to embed the application in a website.

This site is not the final publication channel for content, nor a consumer-facing site. It is the marketing portal that is targeted at the extended marketing community of strategic and production marketers, agencies, product managers, sales staff, and anyone who works on or around marketing content.

Editorial content and context

The marketing portal serves two main purposes. Where the marketing content repository deals primarily with structured data, the marketing portal allows you to add other types of data. It adds editorial content and context. A good example of context for structured data is a conventional brand or corporate identity guide. Instead of just providing company and brand logos, visuals, and graphical devices, they are introduced through their conceptual background and accompanied by instructions on how to properly use them. Editorial content is the content that fits the form of text and web pages rather than data or files in a metadata structure. Good examples are news items, blog posts, or even microsites describing upcoming campaign concepts.

Set up a dialog

The second purpose is to set up a dialog with your marketing community. Now that you have a channel where marketing people gather, you should use it. The dialog can be a very practical one, but we prefer to focus on the more inspiring part–remember the mood board we discussed earlier. This is the place where we can challenge and inspire marketers and agencies that operate far from the central marketing organization or the cradle of marketing strategies to benchmark their work and learn from peers.



39% of marketing leaders say budget is their biggest barrier to delivering more personalized digital content.¹



Getting it out there



The first part of the puzzle to solve is what set of content needs to go where, and in which formats. Now that we have all of that beautiful, consolidated, enriched marketing content available in our Content Hub, it's time to put it to good use. Making it available through the marketing portal UI is one way. This covers human users that can browse and download information and potentially supply it manually to other users or processes that consume this information.

Next up are structural integrations to systems, platforms, and processes that are subscribers to the Content Hub.

Channel management

When publishing to downstream systems, the first part of the puzzle to solve is what set of content needs to go where, and in which formats. Typical downstream systems can include ecommerce, websites, CRM, and apps, as well as external sites or processes. This is handled through channel management. Every subscribing downstream platform is registered in the Content Hub. A filter is created that covers the slice of content that will be available to this platform. This functionality can easily be compared to what would be a functional security configuration for users. A second piece of the filter is to decide on the practicalities on how content–both files and data–is delivered. This is pretty close to the order processing options on the basket in the human user use case.

Connectors and API's

Key to the Content Hub concept is that it should have a can-do attitude when it comes to connecting. The primary feature for connecting other platforms is an API. We have set the standard at a full CRUD, Hypermedia, Richardson level III API. Let's elaborate on that.

CRUD (Create-Read-Update-Delete) means that the API supports both reading and writing entities or data to the repository.

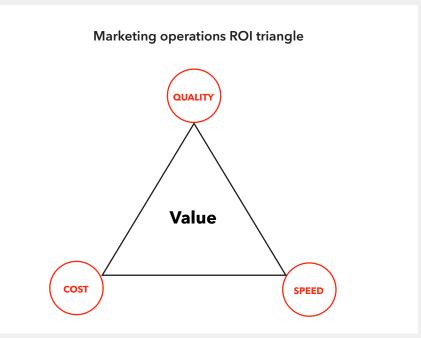
Hypermedia–or RESTful–APIs use URLs to connect other platforms, much like one would navigate a browser to a webpage. The Hypermedia API is to enterprise software platforms what USB is to electronic devices. You can reasonably expect other platforms to be able to connect to it.

The Richardson maturity level III means that the data in the repository is fully discoverable through the API. This has the important quality that third parties working on integration points need little or no introduction to the capabilities of the API because they can simply see what is available.



Where the value is hiding

We may not always find the CMO in the same place, but you can bet your bottom dollar that the CMO is always where the value is. Now, let's figure out where the value is in the Content Hub.



For starters, simple return on investment (ROI) optimizations are most likely to be found in marketing operations. In marketing operations, the number of parameters you can influence is not overly complicated. As with many processes, it comes down to cost, quality, and speed. Together, they make up what we usually represent as a triangle to emphasize the correlation. This triangle is the foundation for influencing ROI and eventually value. More on that later.

Quality

Although quality seems like a parameter that's harder to quantify, let's just look at some examples. Better briefings, more efficient review and validation rounds are easy paths toward better quality and higher effectiveness in marketing deliverables. On another level, more accessible brand guidelines and assets, welldefined localization processes, and access to validated marketing content and source files prevents improvisation and leads to a more consistent end result.



Better briefings, more efficient review and validation rounds are easy paths toward better quality and higher effectiveness in marketing deliverables.

Speed

Time to market is the operational parameter that reflects the agility of your marketing organization and the ability to turn innovation or market insight into revenue. The Content Hub supports, streamlines, and structures the entire marketing creation process with tools that organize your strategic marketing efforts, production, and publication.

Cost

Cost is the most direct and visible parameter when ROI comes to mind. With tools to take the friction and inefficiencies out of your marketing processes, both internal and external costs are immediately reduced. After the initial production, costs are again reduced by providing a place to efficiently store, find, distribute, and reuse valuable marketing assets.

Operational excellence and value

The key approach to ROI provided by the Content Hub is balancing and optimizing the triangle of quality, cost, and speed through optimizing marketing operation. We call it "operational excellence" in marketing operations.

With operational excellence in sight, your marketing organization is ready to contribute value to the company. Shareholder value directly related to the marketing domain includes brand value, corporate image, support for revenue growth, as well as contributions to corporate governance aspects in the marketing domain.

Over 40% of commerce professionals say that managing their content workflow, production and approvals process is challenging.⁷

Strategic value

Gains through a better ROI are great. Adding value to the company is even better. But operational excellence can also allow you to succeed in strategic goals that transcend both. Knowing your speed to market with a controlled cost and quality level can allow leadership to make informed decisions to undertake certain initiatives or strategies. Balancing cost and quality means that scaling out marketing operations becomes predictable. This is where operational excellence becomes a tool in the decision making process in the boardroom.



The case for change



After exploring what can be done and what benefits it brings, the remaining question is, how does all of this translate into a business case?

Just as we explored how the Content Hub emerged from DAM, let's begin by taking a closer look at the typical DAM business case.

The DAM business case

The DAM business case we encounter with most clients looks more or less like this:

Our organization needs a repository to store and retrieve media files. Introducing a DAM will bring benefits of quality, cost, and speed to marketing operations processes that are consumers of these assets.

From a functional point of view, a typical DAM project will cover a relatively manageable scope of use cases: upload, store, and add metadata to files; review and validate; manage the lifecycle; search and preview; transform and distribute. That's it.



When we look at the value it brings, there is certainly a clear and undeniable ROI in a DAM project. But the scope is too narrow to catch all of the value. And what's worse, it misses most of the strategic value we discussed above.

What the DAM business case is missing

Let's summarize some of the elements we elaborated on earlier that touch on the additional aspirations or challenges we usually hear in the margin of typical DAM projects:





Signs you need to switch your foundation from DAM to a Content Hub

There are three main categories of concern here: dealing with content marketing and omnichannel; making collaboration more efficient; and creating and setting up a dialog with a marketing community.



Content marketing and omnichannel

The scope of content marketing obviously goes beyond media files. It is about all kinds of content, both file based and non-file based. On top of that, primary marketing content is usually scattered throughout the organization, and marketing has a tough time finding a place to store new content.



This is where the Content Hub's capabilities kick in to aggregate content, enrich it, store new content in a client-driven domain model, and document relationships between all of the Entities. Entities themselves are channel agnostic, which helps to create cells of content that are well-structured and classified, but generic enough to be reusable.

The channel management functionality then allows you to get that content out to downstream systems, complementing the UI driven search and download option, or the automated layout of documents.

Collaboration

There is still a lot of friction and excess in marketing creation and publication processes. Traditional tools focus on work in progress, mostly with annotation tools for media files, or on rigid BPMS-driven workflows. In our opinion, marketing first requires project management tools that offer insight and overview to the marketing project manager, as well as productivity tools to empower the marketing team.



44% of global leaders say a lack of speed is their biggest barrier to delivering effective personalized content.⁸

Dialog with the marketing community

An impressive community is out there, collaborating around your brand or marketing campaign. Bringing them together and setting up a dialog is the foundation for launching conversations with both practical and strategic goals.



The case for the Content Hub

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Finally, we are ready to formulate a case for the Content Hub. We believe this is a business case that can build on the traditional DAM business case in many ways - and eventually replace it altogether.

The Content Hub supports and guides your marketing organization to reach operational excellence.

Operational excellence provides practical and tangible benefits in your marketing operations ROI.

Optimizing the triangle of cost, quality, and speed creates the conditions for your marketing organization to add value to the company.

Apart from these incremental benefits, the Content Hub can help your marketing organization develop insights that allow your leadership to make informed decisions and realize strategic goals for the company.

What is important here is that there is something that aligns with the perspective and responsibilities of every stakeholder.

Operational

Operational marketing teams are empowered with tools and best practices that provide guidance. Their work will become more effective and their daily jobs will become a bit more fun at the same time.

Management

Marketing management will be able to deliver straightforward optimizations, value and success in strategic projects. Management will also be able to measure and report all of this to leadership.



Leadership

Leadership will have the insight to make decisions with the knowledge that management will be able to execute them. This puts marketing in a position where it can be part of the solution when dealing with strategic challenges.



IT

The selected platform leverages proven yet modern approaches and technologies, has a convincing scaling and integration model, and can accommodate corporate standards for hosting either on-premises or in the cloud.



The final word: How Sitecore can help

We strongly believe the Content Hub business case is a good baseline for most clients in industries involved in marketing and creative production. One of the concerns we hear voiced a lot is about change management and how all of this will impact your organization.

As a parting thought, we'd like to address that question.

Introducing a Content Hub can be a catalyst for change-one that doesn't impose or snub your marketing organization's operational teams, management, leadership or IT, but instead facilitates, empowers, and points the way toward operational excellence. And that, in the end, is the type of impactful change every stakeholder can rally around.

To learn more about how the Sitecore Content Hub can streamline your content marketing operations, visit sitecore.com.

About Sitecore

Sitecore is the global leader in digital experience management software that combines content management, commerce, and customer insights. The Sitecore Experience Cloud[™] empowers marketers to deliver personalized content in real time and at scale across every channel–before, during, and after a sale. More than 5,200 brands–including American Express, Carnival Cruise Lines, Kimberly-Clark, and L'Oréal–have trusted Sitecore to deliver the personalized interactions that delight audiences, build loyalty, and drive revenue.

About Alpha Solutions

Alpha Solutions is a leading Sitecore Implementation Partner with responsibility for some of the largest and most complex Sitecore installations worldwide. We make Sitecore work with best-of-breed technologies, at the same time as we leverage our client's current IT portfolio (ERP, CRM, PIM, etc.). With offices in New Jersey, Dallas, Los Angeles, Copenhagen and Oslo, Alpha Solutions is well positioned to serve our client base.

Contact us at info@alpha-solutions.us or +1 (347) 338-2220

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