

The ROI of Smart Brand Management

Harnessing the power of digital systems for a stronger brand

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By Simon Ward

For organizations of all kinds, consistency in brand expression is one of the most important benchmarks for success. As touchpoints increase and consumers become more sophisticated and perceptive, brand managers play an increasingly essential role by ensuring a cohesive experience at every stop along the customer journey.

With this in mind, Interbrand and its digital asset management systems specialist, BrandWizard, conducted research into what brand managers felt they were missing from their current systems and what sort of improvements they longed for. What resulted was a thorough discussion on exactly what consistency is and how digital asset management (DAM) systems can help them achieve it.

Getting it right the first time, all the time

Consistency is defined as the degree to which a brand is experienced without fail across all touchpoints and formats. In a perfect world, a brand is expressed the exact same way in New York City as it is in New South Wales. In reality, implementation is a constant challenge, sapping both time and budgets as mistakes are fixed, best practices are put into place, and employees are trained on the importance of staying on brand. When a company operates in multiple categories and geographies, the chances of an inconsistency hurting brand value rise exponentially.

What's in the toolbox?

Guidelines and templates have been the brand manager's traditional allies, providing official standards to ensure the legacy color always matches and the paper stock delivers the right impression. Unfortunately, with an ever-expanding catalog of touchpoints, these tools often lack the flexibility needed to guarantee a consistent experience wherever the brand is encountered.

Brand managers have learned that the simpler it is to access and navigate an online platform, the more likely users are to embrace it.

In a recent survey, Interbrand approached a number of brand managers about their current asset management systems; nearly half said they were less than satisfied and saw significant room for improvement. The survey clearly showed that most managers fully appreciate the importance of effective systems to maintain a consistent brand.

In response, more and more brand managers are looking to DAM systems for help. Similar to a company's intranet, these online platforms provide a centralized resource for employees at every level of an organization to learn about the brand and access the tools needed to deliver on it efficiently and effectively.

Sideline mistakes

It takes years of effort to build value in a brand, but only moments to diminish it. Something as seemingly minor as using a previous version of a logo or the wrong typeface in a piece of signage can suggest a company that lacks discipline and doesn't pay attention to the details. In a world rich in backlash through blogs, Twitter feeds and photo-sharing sites, the damage can be instantaneous and immense.

DAM systems are designed, however, to prevent mistakes like these and countless others by providing a central repository of the latest identity assets, as well as guidelines and templates on how to use them. Easy to access and navigate, these platforms can provide valuable assistance by eliminating guesswork and freeing brand managers from fielding countless questions on what is approved and what is obsolete. With less policing and fewer mistakes to fix, brand managers can then realize significant savings to their budgets while having more time to maximize the value of the brand.

The right proportions

With each organization's unique needs, there is no such thing as one-size-fits-all, or even one-size-fits-most. The advantage of a digital asset management system is that its size and structure can be precisely tailored to the needs of the brand. By eliminating unnecessary sections and functionality, users find it easier to navigate

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content and locate only the assets they need for their project or their role. As a company expands its portfolio or moves into new markets, the system can scale proportionally to meet a greater range of needs and assist more employees in delivering a consistent brand experience.

For companies launching or re-launching brands on a global scale, DAM systems can be essential to ensuring rollout is seamless and by the numbers, saving precious resources and extending implementation budgets further.

Think about who's using it

Traditionally, online tools have been designed around functionality and developed to include the maximum number of features, leaving the user experience a secondary concern. Not surprisingly, this approach often leaves less-savvy tech users intimidated and looking for ways to avoid logging on.

As DAM design has progressed, a smooth, easy-to-engage interface has become a critical component equal in importance to content and functionality. Brand managers have learned that the simpler it is to access and navigate an online platform, the more likely users are to embrace it. Because better-designed DAM systems feature the same look and feel and ease of use as popular websites, employees are more comfortable with the system, meaning a higher rate of adoption, a better return on investment and a more consistently delivered brand as a result.

Stay focused

A well-implemented DAM system can fundamentally change the way employees work by providing a centralized workflow

management tool. By hosting essential documents, tracking project phases, updating delivery schedules, monitoring resources and more – often on a minute-by-minute basis – it can become a master resource that focuses every employee's efforts.

With this greater transparency, it is easier to spot inefficiencies – and with them money-saving opportunities – meaning a brand can get to market faster and enjoy a significant advantage over the competition.

Now with more value

Many brand managers are using DAM systems for more than storing files and documents. They are also using them to deliver content in multiple formats and therefore extending its value.

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For example, a DAM system can be instrumental in managing a piece of collateral by making it easy to track versions and provide access to the document, as well as facilitate communication between the relevant groups.

One example is an employee's original thought piece written on behalf of the brand. The draft of the article is entered in its original form into the DAM system where versions are tracked, and other groups, such as editors, web specialists and designers, can easily access the document. By also facilitating communication between these various groups, the DAM system makes it simple to translate the collateral across media, from journal to web to case study to archive.

Rather than an asset repository, many brand managers are thinking of these platforms as content delivery systems, and inviting various groups in their organizations to use them as such. In the process, they reach more people and realize more value than they could before.

What it adds up to

With more effective systems in place – systems that take into account the exact needs of the brand and employee usage – brand managers foresee a dramatic rate of adoption and with it, greater consistency in their brand expressions as a result.

One of the benefits, of course, is a stronger, more authoritative brand, one that is clearly differentiated from its competitors, and whose offerings are preferred in the marketplace, in short a brand worthy of the loyalty of its customers.

But there are more immediate benefits as well, especially ROI. Through a well-designed DAM system, process and output efficiency can increase dramatically, preserving operational budgets from the constant drain of traditional implementation and management strategies.

Once in place, a DAM system can even bring about cultural changes by promoting internal understanding of the brand, its goals and how to deliver on it. With the brand playing such a central role in everyone's day-to-day work, it becomes easier than ever for brand managers to ensure the consistent expressions that are so critical to a successful brand. ■



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Like most of us, Simon uses technology every day, interacting with friends, colleagues and brands. Merging this personal experience, brand consultancy background and BrandWizard technology knowledge, Simon's a strong believer that businesses and marketers could harness technology far more effectively for strategic brand growth.

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