Demystifying DAM

An Introduction to Digital Asset Management and Digital Workflow

Should You Care About DAM?

This is an introduction to the topics of **Digital Asset Management** (DAM) and **Digital Workflow**. If you feel that you don't understand what they are and worry that you need to, then this is for you.

Most likely you are setting out as a professional photographer and want to establish your workflow early on. Perhaps you already have a large but unorganised photo library with thousands, or tens of thousands of images and know you need to create structure but don't know where to start.

This introduction will start you on your way by explaining simply what DAM actually is, and challenge you to examine different aspects of your photography to get you thinking about asset management. Whether you intend to deal with DAM on your own, or recruit an expert like Offwidth Images to help you, this article will help you prepare.

Digital Asset Management (DAM) Principles

DAM is a set of principles that guide how you create, collect, process, store, protect and output your images.

Digital Workflow Definition

A workflow is the set of processes and tools that you use to implement principles of DAM. As such your workflow should address these areas of your work:

image capture -> ingestion -> processing -> storage -> output

DAM is many things to many people

There is a large variety of software and hardware available to you to implement DAM. The workflow you design is typically constrained by several factors.

- Your budget
- Your existing practices
- What you need/want to produce
- Your domain knowledge
- Availability of your time

So finding the right workflow for you is a balancing act, where you decide which mix of factors give the optimum result for your current needs.

You could qualify a good workflow as one that balances your requirements and needs with the cost and effort required to implement and maintain it, such that you are satisfied with, understand, and accept the risks presented by catastrophic failure.

DAM as an evolving process

Implementing an adequate DAM solution should be an ongoing process where you make incremental improvements that mature your tools and processes. It should not be a one-off set of instructions cast in stone.

If a strong workflow embodies more of the DAM principles than a weak one, then by making small targeted changes and investments over time you can transform a weaker workflow into a stronger one that works for you and for your business.

The challenge then is in analysing your methods and identifying the weak links in the chain.

DAM as a measurable business impact

As a digital photographer your workflow efficiency directly affects how and where you invest your time, and so ulti   mately impacts your profitability. A well considered photography workflow would allow you to spend less time in front of the computer and more time on your business. Critically, a good workflow will ensure that your digital assets are safe in the event of disaster.

Characteristics of a strong workflow

A strong workflow will typically display some of these characteristics:
- Most common tasks are automated
- Every image goes through the same process - no special flows
- You complete images only when they really need to be (time is money)
- Backups are simple to make and are automated
- Is supported by good flexible tooling
- Non-destructive image editing

Be warned, the pursuit of a perfect workflow can be never ending and so pragmatism is required. You don't generally need the perfect solution. You need the solution that is good enough in balancing your business needs.

Preparing for DAM

It's clear to see that the more you understand your needs and requirements, the better prepared you are to mature your workflow. To help clarify requirements consider how you would answer the following questions.

- How many finished images do you have in your library currently
- How often do you rework an existing image to produce a new version?
- How often do you hunt through or search for specific images in your library?
- How frequently do you add images to your photo library?
- How many photos do you add with each import
- What variety of subjects do you shoot?
- How many images are you actively 'processing' at any time?
- What are the different uses that you put your images to?
  (editorial submission, online client galleries, photo sharing websites, print/album production, stock submissions, etc.)
- What value do you place on the images in your collection? (What is the cost of losing some/all of your images)?
- How many shoots do you undertake each week/month?
- Is there a set of images that are more important right now than the rest?

All of these questions, and more like them, will help you identify the nature of your work, describe the scope of the asset management problem you face and perhaps highlight which parts are most important. It's likely that in answering these questions you'll create many more. Don't worry; this is just about helping clarify the nature and dimension of your work.

As you start to gain clarity and understanding over your problem domain you can use this knowledge to continuously challenge your existing solution and make focussed changes to further evolve your workflow.

If you think your workflow isn't working for your business, or you want to understand more about the principles of good digital asset management please get in touch with us. Offwidth Images would be happy to provide practical support to your photography business.