Strong opinions. Candid advice.

Should you buy a DAM system from your agency or integrator?

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Today I was speaking with one of our Brand & Digital Asset Management research subscribers about their DAM selection process, and part of the discussion was about resellers and integrators. "We've also been talking with resellers and integrators," they asked, "So whom should we buy from?"

This is a question that comes up during every product selection process. As is so often the case the answer is, "it depends." In some but not all cases, it does make sense to buy a system via an agency or coupled with the services of an integrator. You should not, however, let your existing creative agency or integrator dictate which technology is the right one for you. Typically an integrator's or agency's best interests (and flow of contracts) depend on just one or two vendors' technologies, with whom they have tight partnerships.

Though tight partnerships between vendors and integrators have existed for decades in the document and web content management world, they are comparably new to DAM. Given how sparse skilled DAM services people are, and the small size of most vendor's in-house professional services teams, the rapid adoption of DAM systems over the past several years has caused an inevitable talent crunch, leading to pain for you, the buyer or implementer.
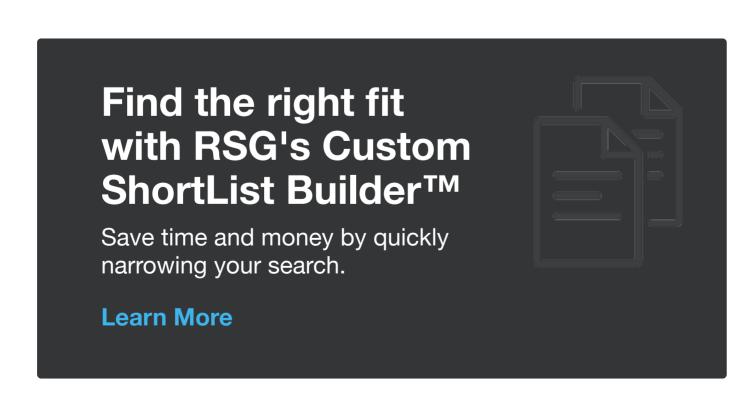
Here's a few representative examples of agencies and integrators who have stepped up to fill the gap:

-- Cognizant has developed AssetServ - a hosted (but not multi-tenant) cloud service for their customers built on top of Media Beacon's R3volution DAM system. Their work with consumer product companies and pharmaceutical companies, in particular, led them to tailor MediaBeacon's offering specifically towards corporate marketing teams and brand management needs. Then they bundled in Signiant Media Exchange for file transfer & acceleration, JasperSoft for reporting, and Appian BPM software for complex workflows and collaboration. To the end-user, it's all one service. Customers pay one monthly fee for the software package and support.

-- The much smaller and niche agency firm, DigitalXpress out of Århus, Denmark, offers a hosted DAM called XMedia - which under the covers is actually ADAM's .NET-based DAM platform, with a customer user interface designed by DigitalXpress's creative team. Like many ad agencies, the company wanted to be able to offer a service to house and manage their customer's assets and digital media. Given that ADAM offers no services of their own, adopting their DAM system means you can do-it-yourself, license an agency hosted package like this one, or work with an experienced, certified integrator who can set it up in-house for you, such as Stylelabs or Hinttech.

Still, I always have to caution customers when they immediately think the 3rd-party offering via an agency or integrator will prove much easier than going directly to a vendor. It's not, necessarily. It depends on how much you want to rely on your own technical team, what sort of support you need long-term, and if you want to be contractually hooked into your agency or integrator as well as your DAM vendor.

If you're asking yourself what's right for you, we're happy to help you analyze the situation and take the approach that's best for you.

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