# DAM and PIM: Creating Highly-Compatible and Quality Customer Experiences

How DAM and PIM technologies work together to create meaningful conversations with customers, and anchor customer experience success

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EXPERIENCE DIGITAL FREEDOM
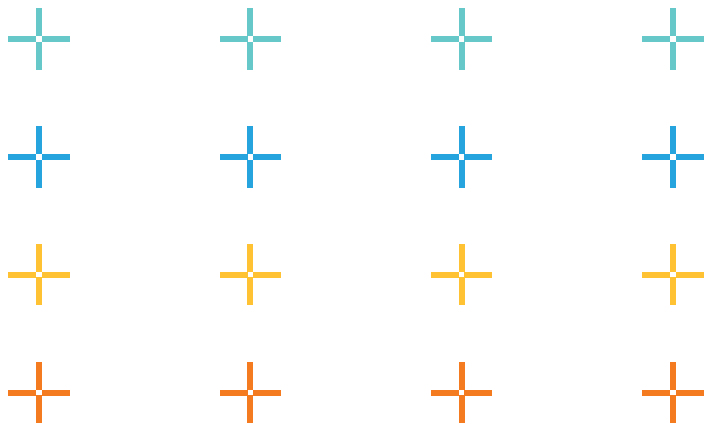
Do you have DAM and PIM software as part of your core marketing stack? If you don't, you may be missing out on the most important part of delivering differentiated digital experiences.

"Now, wait a minute," you say. "How is that possible?"
Well, let us explain.

Extraordinary customer experiences are like great conversations. After each is done both parties feel fulfilled and heard, and a valuable, personal connection has taken place.

Whenever people meet and a conversation begins, two factors determine the quality of that interaction: the compatibility between the individuals, and the quality of the conversation.

Interestingly, we typically assess the first factor within seconds. Psychologists call this "thin slicing." We make very quick inferences about an individual with minimal amounts of information.[1] Career experts have found that it can take only three seconds for someone to determine whether they want to do business with you.[2] Princeton researchers have found that we make judgments about attractiveness within 100 milliseconds.[3]

And, for brands, it's even faster. Studies have found that consumers make their first impression judgment on what they see on a screen within 50 milliseconds.[4]

So, it's the second factor – the quality of the conversation – that truly gives us the biggest chance to affect the value of the interaction. Put simply: it's fairly straight-forward to create a first impression. We have wonderful designers and talented copywriters that allow us to put our best foot forward at first contact. But becoming a great conversationalist is another thing altogether. It takes a sustained effort. It's like seeing a person you admire at a party from afar. On paper, they are impressive – and make a great first impression. But once you actually start talking with them, you immediately wish you could find your way to the exit.

# Listening is only half the conversation
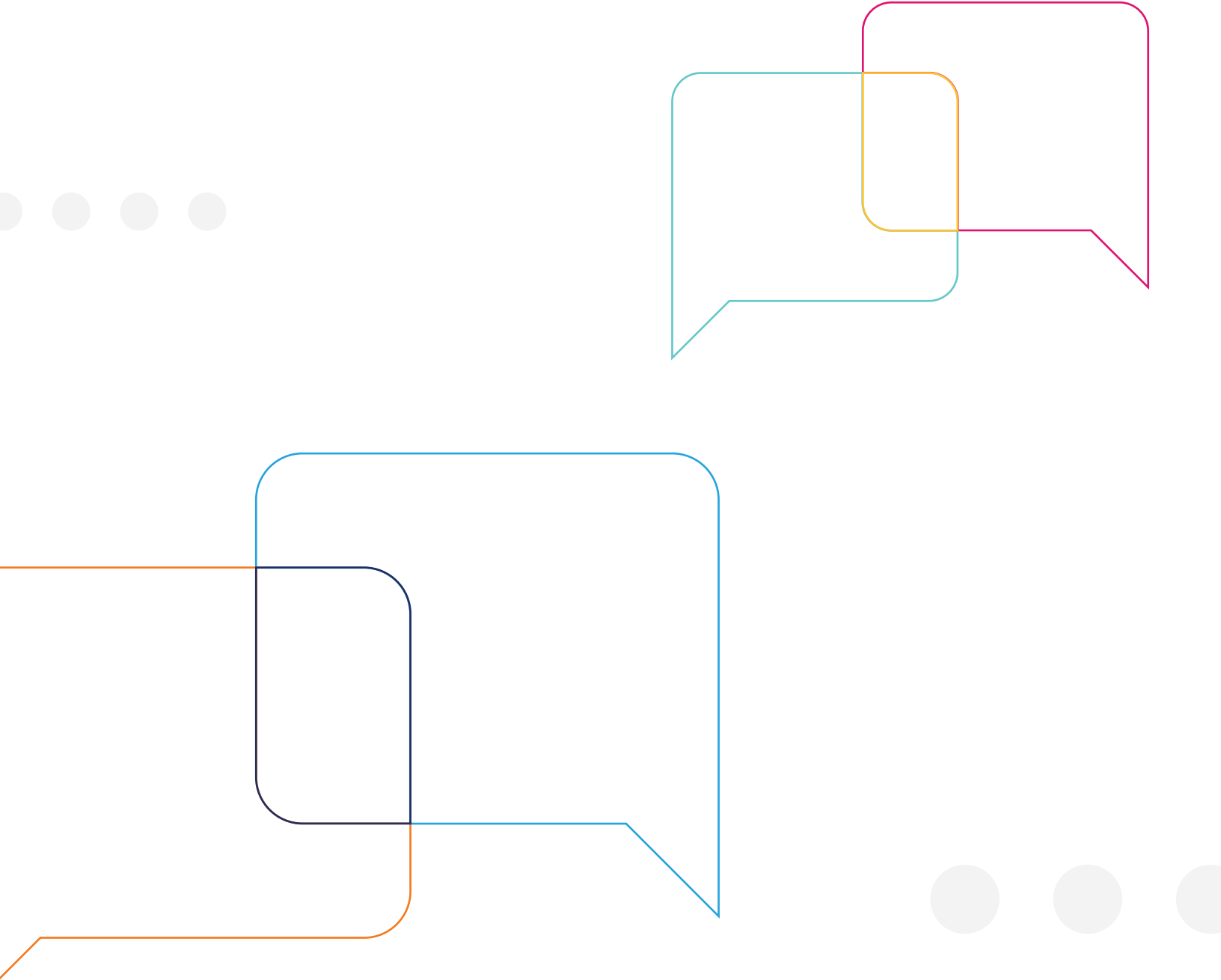
In today's modern marketing, businesses often turn first (and sometimes only) to the technologies that watch how consumers behave as the core means of serving up the content they perceive the consumer is looking for. Businesses will employ external analytics, personalization engines, or other experiential platforms that gather the data generated by interaction with content assets.

While these tools are undoubtedly important, like the proverbial quality conversation, it misses half of the context needed for great interaction. Using only behavioral data to drive digital experiences is the equivalent of being a great listener, but with no means to deliver either the accurate, relevant information to continually demonstrate compatibility, or even know if we have the creative content that will sustain a quality conversation.

Quality interactions are anchored in knowing what to say, and how to say it.

DAM and PIM enable compatibility and quality
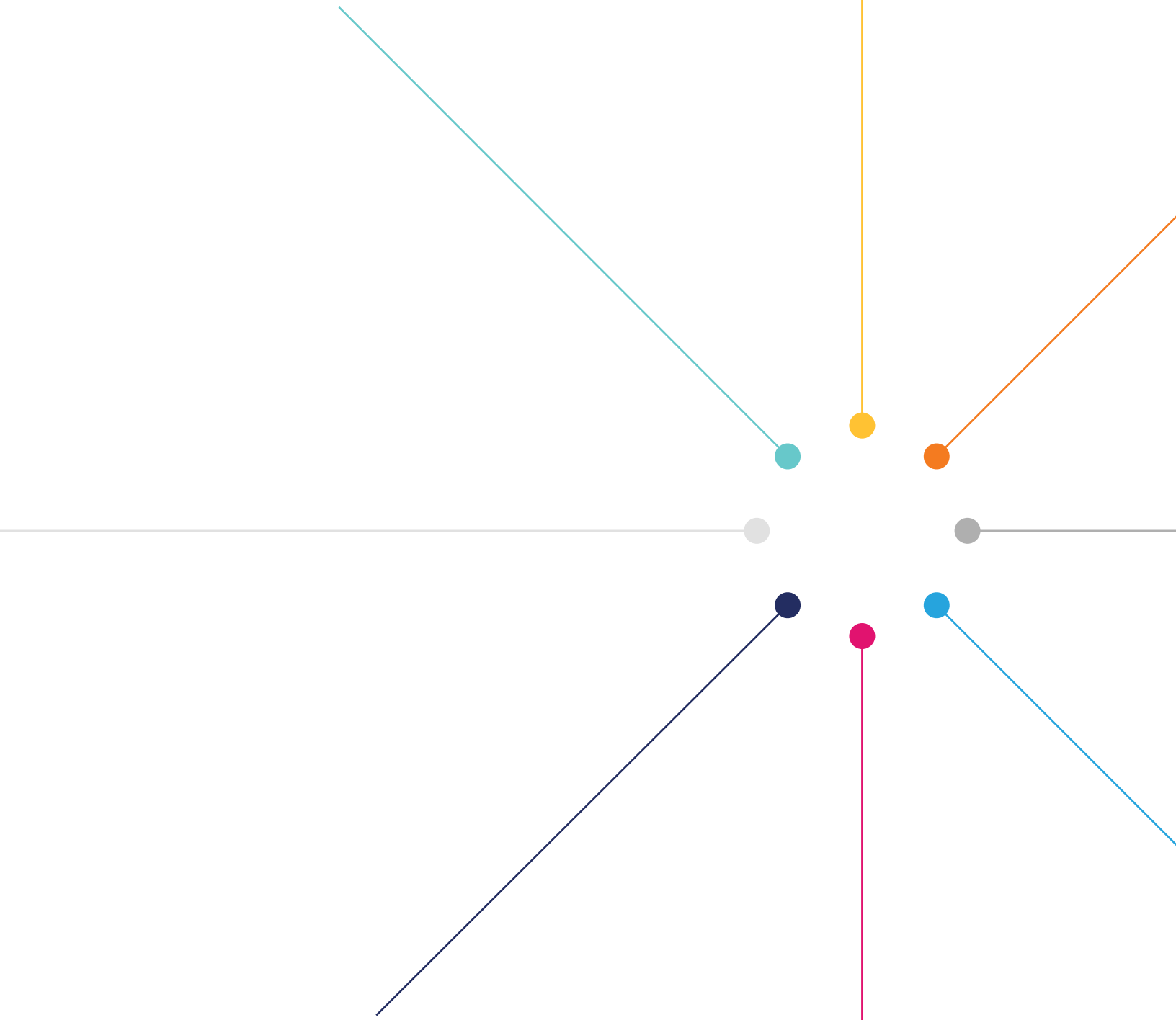
The entire vocabulary of a business's digital interactions with customers is the sum of its digital content assets. Therefore, a brand must have the organizational capability to connect all of these digital assets and information through metadata. This connection is the "nervous system" that enables the business to comprehend how, where, and when to use this vocabulary to present the most relevant and compelling communications/conversations.

DAM (digital asset management) solutions help businesses harness their creative voice and vocabulary for delivering cohesive customer experiences. DAM solutions manage, package, and can optimize the various digital assets that describe the brand's offering. They handle digital assets such as images, logos, videos, or even snippets of marketing copy that are then expressed into complex, and often completely separate digital experiences.

PIM (product information management) solutions, on the other hand, are the key to establishing relevant, accurate information about what services and/or products are available. It is a single source of the truth for product-oriented information – helping to manage rich, and meaningful data that describe all the facets of a brand's offerings. PIM systems operate as a brand's conscious awareness of all it has to offer its audiences. It helps manage and syndicate everything from product data such as price, size, and features, to descriptions, product images, usage or maintenance information, or even geographic availability.

For example, if the product is a sunscreen lotion, the PIM attributes would describe things such as the varying milliliters of product sizes, its SPF level, its ingredients, and perhaps a product description. It could also be home to more technical data that is not surfaced as any part of a marketing campaign. The DAM system would then store videos of the product being applied, 360° spinset images, sales collateral, or social media ad content.

So, it should come as no surprise that as companies deploy more and more audience-centric digital experiences, that both DAM and PIM solutions have become key partners in delivering great audience interactions. As Amanda LeClair, an analyst at Forrester Research has said, PIM is "breaking out of its operational roots, and playing a much bigger role in higher enterprise priorities such as driving customer experience."[5]

And as our research at Content Marketing Institute found, DAM technology adoption has almost doubled in the last three years, with 26% reporting it as a core piece of their content strategy in 2017, versus 41% in 2020.[6] And research firm Gartner found in their 2019-2020 CMO Spend Survey, "content creation and management" is set to be one of the top five of most vital capabilities over the next 18 months.[7]

# The connection of DAM and PIM across the whole experience
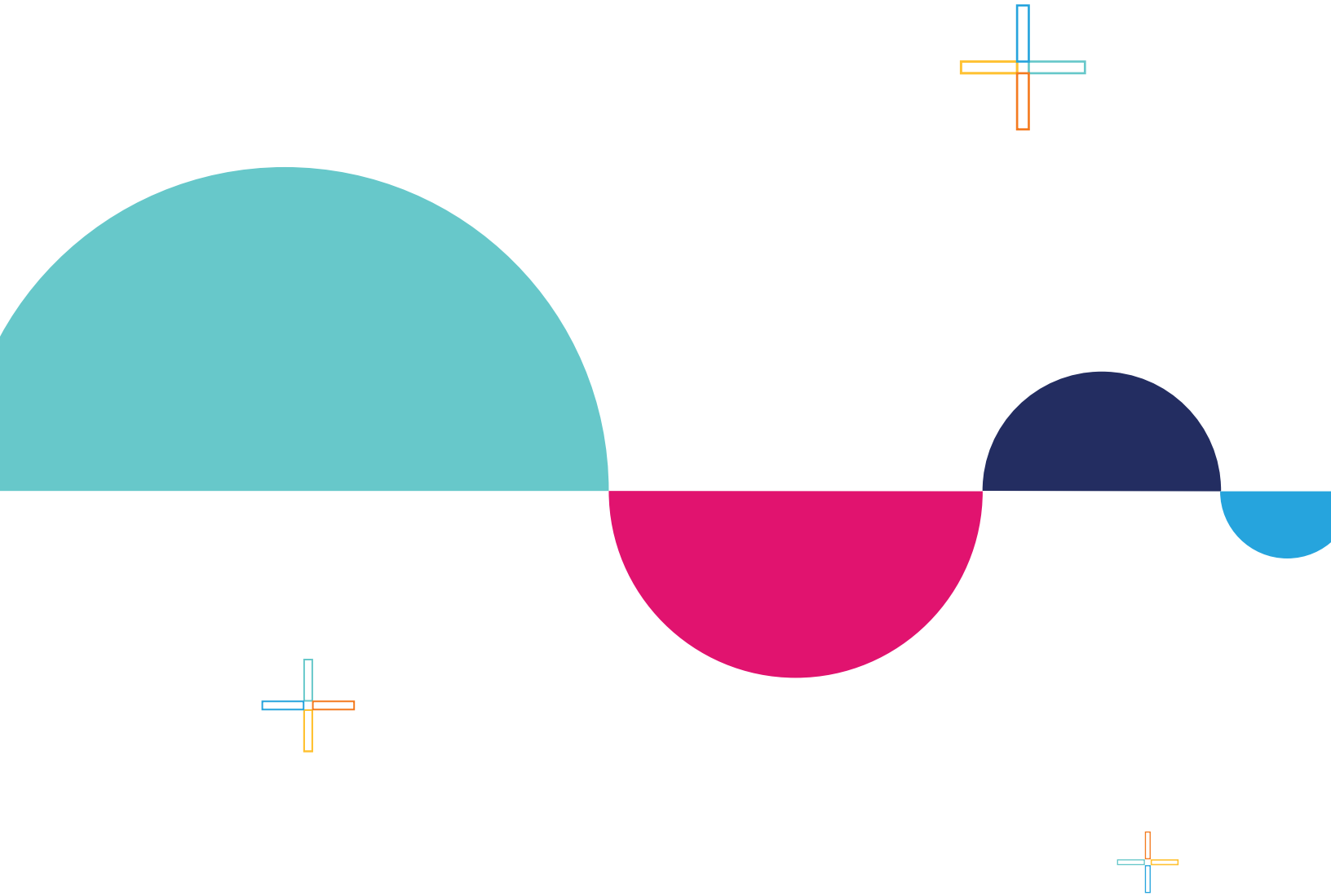
It would be extremely awkward for you to run into the same person who agreed yesterday to give you some information and, when you see them today, has no recollection of your interaction, or ability to provide it. Yet, this is the challenge so many digital experiences face these days. Customers have a wonderfully valuable, and personal experience on a site one day, then upon returning to that site the next day, there's no context from the previous day's interactions and it's as if they never happened.

The real magic of great brand conversations, and quality interactions, comes when DAM and PIM systems are tied together with consumer behavior data and then sustained across all of the customer journey. Brands cannot simply lean on having one part of the customer journey optimized for quality interactions. They must connect all of the digital experiences from the beginning of the customer's journey through to servicing the customer after purchase, and beyond.

There is an important lesson here for marketers. It is too simplistic to say that we are only going to optimize the "e-commerce" part of the customer journey. But it is just as easy to fall into the trap to say that we must have DAM and/or PIM integration capabilities at every step.

Bottom line…when we step back and look at the challenges of connecting digital experiences to generate more relevant and personal conversations with customers, capturing behavioral data from customers is the way we need to listen to make those improved interactions happen. Managing and optimizing our digital assets is the way we know how, and when, to say exactly the right thing back. But it's also important to realize that it is not an all-or-nothing proposition. Brands can, and should, make choices about where, when, and to what degree to integrate DAM and PIM information into customer experiences.

A playbook to be prepared
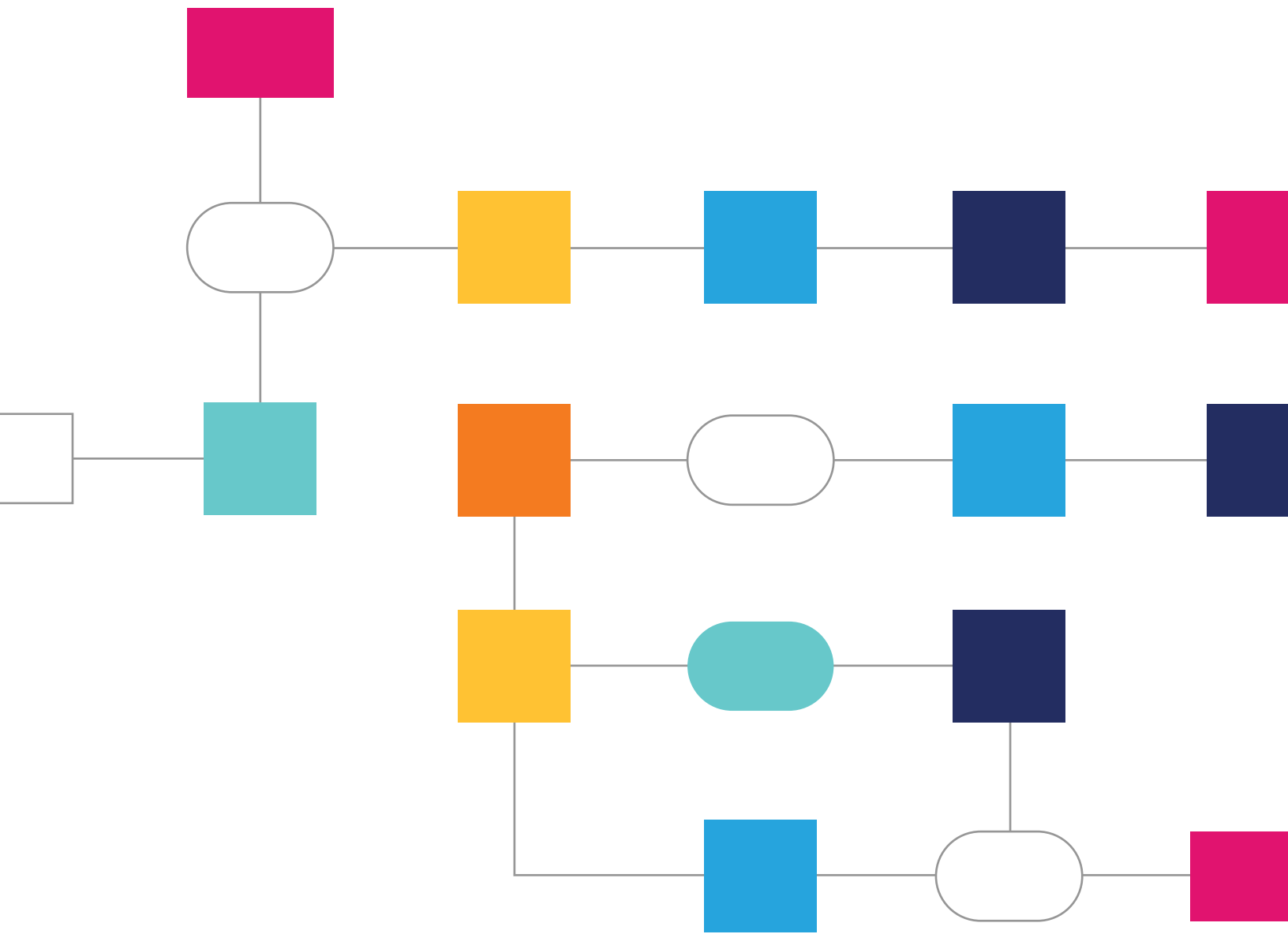
The Content Advisory's recommended approach is for businesses to begin looking at their martech stack in a more holistic, prioritized view to be able to deliver what we call "intelligent experiences" throughout the customer journey. The core of this is integrating DAM and PIM as critical components of the modern martech stack – one that connects to what we call the "desired customer experience" (DCE).

DAM and PIM solutions have proven to be foundational elements to connect the desired customer experience with a network of touchpoints that enable the comprehension of the whole conversation and enable engagement in a better-quality interaction.

This playbook will help you set the stage for creating better conversations. It outlines an approach for modern businesses to architect and design a foundational model to prepare for your DAM and PIM technology to deliver a connected and automated network of content-driven digital experiences.

This playbook identifies three discrete, sequential steps to follow to develop your foundational model.

1. **Audit your desired customer experience**
Review and grade the organizational capabilities and needs to deliver optimized content experiences against three (or more) foundational customer experience and/or business challenges

2. **Architect a layered approach**
DAM and PIM systems, along with other data repositories, are considerable investments. Look at them as a foundation to connect to the broader customer behavior and conversation stack that may be made up of more component-based technologies.

3. **Activate a phased charter**
Pick one step along the desired customer experience and create a project plan with an achievable scope for the first initiative. Detail the needs to connect the experience, and then the one that precedes and/or follows. Build your way up and down the customer journey.

Step one: audit your desired customer experience

The biggest challenge most marketing teams have with digital experiences isn't deciding what needs improvement, but rather, what is fine as it is.

Creating, activating, and measuring a desired customer experience begins by acknowledging and auditing the existing journey against the overarching needs and capabilities of the targeted audience. These challenges don't typically lie in any one team or individual but are missing organizational capabilities. Knowing where the core capabilities and needs lie will help the business understand where gaps exist in the operating model and where those gaps may be filled with new skills, approaches, or technology solutions.

When looking at the needs of integrating DAM and PIM capabilities, even if the marketing team is small, taking only modest steps, or hasn't acquired any of the technology needed, the team should take the time to first understand the entire dynamic of the customer's journey. A good start is to examine and score at least three types of attributes (there may also be others) as it pertains to building the foundational elements of a DAM and PIM integration.

Need for information versus imagination

A DAM system is primarily utilized to manage and serve up digital assets that support marketing efforts including photos, videos, and PDFs. This may include all the imaginative ways the marketer wants to convey a particular message. PIM systems, on the other hand, are primarily designed to manage and serve up accurate attributes associated with an in-market product. This may include price, sizes, ingredients, etc., and can include regulated or technical information, and other non-marketing related details.

Understanding if, when, and/or where in the desired customer experience we want to leverage PIM-stored information versus DAM-housed creative assets in the experiences we want to create, is critical to knowing to whom, when, and where access should be made available.

For example, if we again look to a skincare company, the brand may choose to create a website experience that calls for discussing the best skincare to use while traveling. They may wish – in only this context — to automatically, and only, include all the skincare products that have a specific size container and ingredients that carry no scent. In this case, access to DAM and PIM content and data is important to deliver this very specific content.

The question to ask as the team maps the designed customer journey is, can we meet this challenge at all of the stages of the journey that we need to?

Requirements for content as a service

The governance and availability of customer and consumption data will define the organizational capability to improve the brand's owned media experiences and will almost assuredly remain "inside" the company. However, the brand needs the ability to serve up digital assets and some product information to external properties (online retailers, mobile applications, or even some publishers).

Assessing the need, and the capability to send this data (along with which data is necessary) will be a critical part of mapping the desired customer experience for these external experiences.

Needs for automation and rules

Many DAM and PIM systems offer methods to serve different "templates" or product information through different channels. For example, there may be unique product attributes available to some online retailers, publishers, or even the company's owned media experiences. Or there may be automated timing needed for campaign-style management. A brand may have a different set of product images, as well as "how-to" videos that need to be updated to a new version as a new product launch campaign goes live on a certain date.
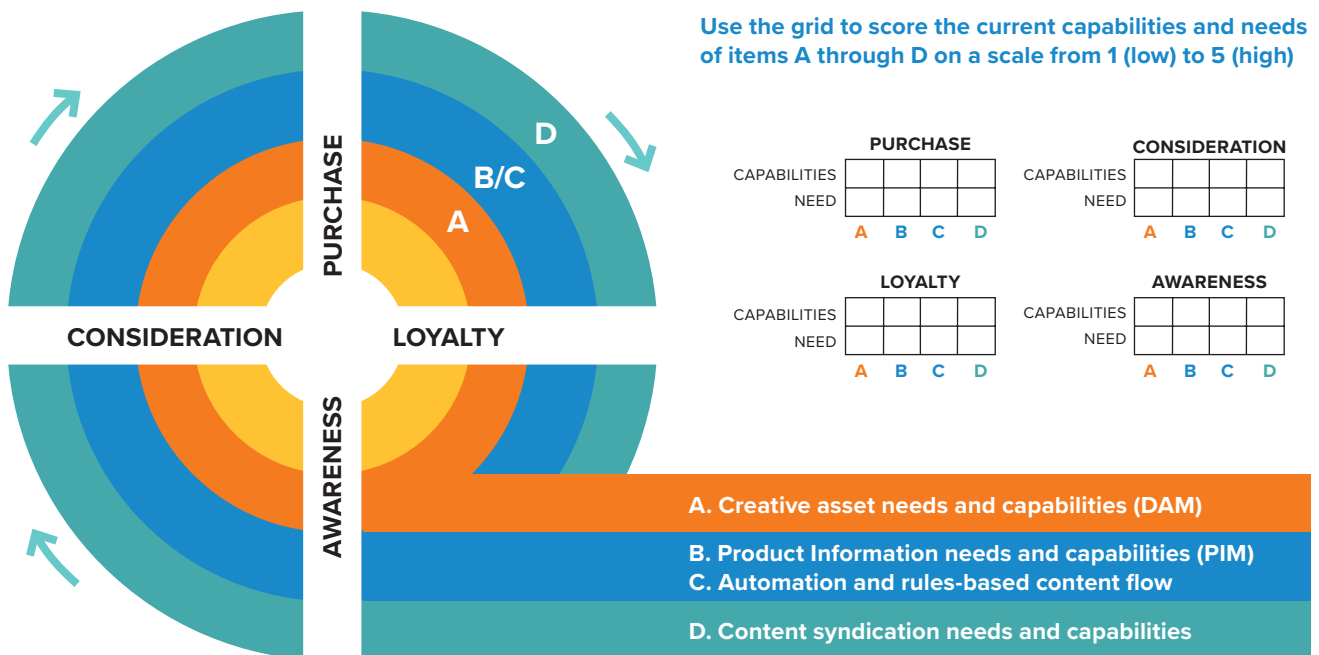
When your DAM and PIM systems work together, you can help to ensure that the combination of this product data and creative digital assets stays consistent and is managed via a templated set of business rules.

But first, you should assess where in the journey and/or channels this will be, or will become, an important factor.

Use the scorecard below to determine and assess the current state of:

A. Creative asset needs and capabilities (DAM)

B. Product Information needs and capabilities (PIM)

C. Automation and rules-based content flow

D. Content syndication needs and capabilities

The team can score the capabilities and needs of each on a scale of one to five, where a one is a low need or low capability, and a five is a high capability or a high need.

Use the grid to score the current capabilities and needs of items A through D on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high)

PURCHASE			
CAPABILITIES			
NEED			
A	B	C	D

CONSIDERATION			
CAPABILITIES			
NEED			
A	B	C	D

LOYALTY			
CAPABILITIES			
NEED			
A	B	C	D

AWARENESS			
CAPABILITIES			
NEED			
A	B	C	D

A. Creative asset needs and capabilities (DAM)

B. Product Information needs and capabilities (PIM)
C. Automation and rules-based content flow

D. Content syndication needs and capabilities

Again, the purpose of this exercise isn't necessarily to build the rules, or detail the technical requirements, or even decide which information should go in the DAM and/or PIM system. Those decisions can come later and will be informed by this assessment. The key is to understand what is possible today, what will be important to have tomorrow, and (maybe most importantly) what is fine as it is – so that you can ensure that you are not over (or under) architecting the technology requirements.

Ultimately marketers can view this audit/assessment across two lenses:

1. The sum of scores by channel across the entire journey. This will help to identify a prioritized need for the category of technology.

2. The sum of scores across the challenges at each marketing and sales touchpoint. This can help the team understand which digital experiences should be addressed as a priority.

For example, an e-commerce team may be planning to create a mountain of content — say 50% more — for external retailer sites in the middle of the customer's journey. While product-oriented data is already being delivered to the online retailer, connecting it to the correct DAM content will be a critical piece of ensuring the optimal customer experience on that platform.

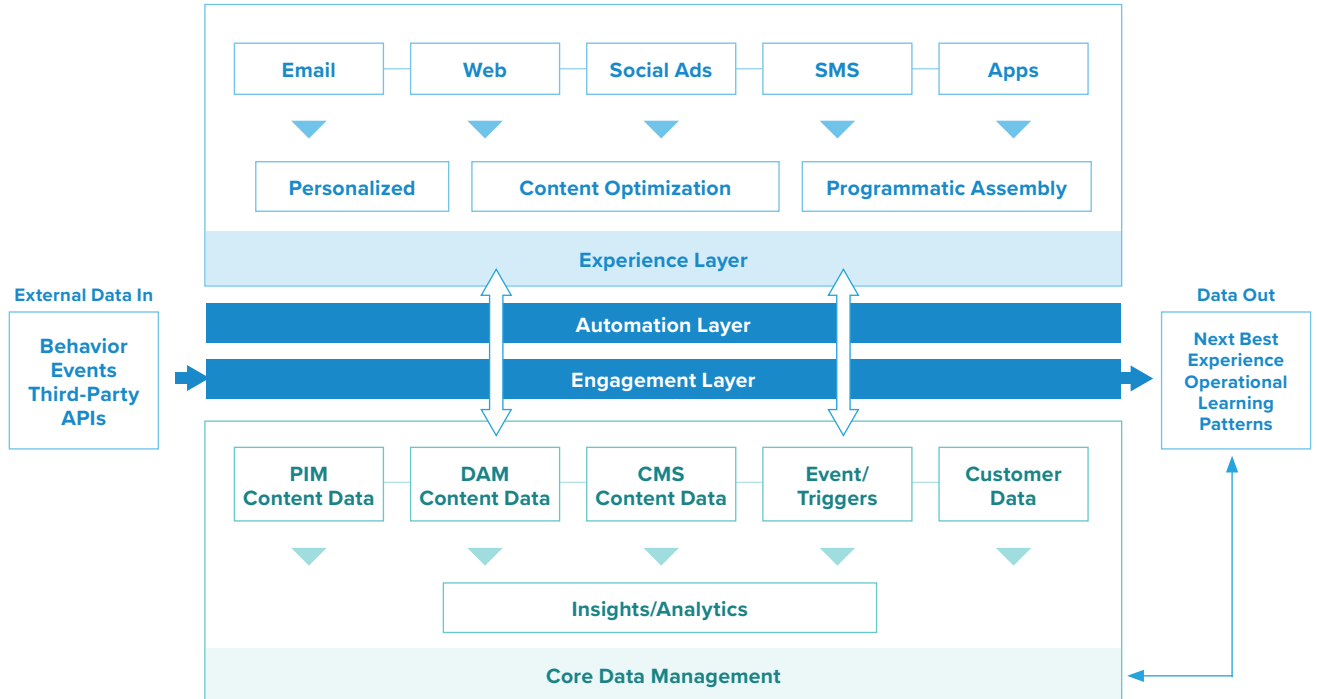This brings us to the second step.

Step two: architect a layered approach

In most cases, there will be no singular customer experience that serves as the anchor point for all audiences. Conversely, any singular experience can be a failure point for any audience. Therefore, it's critical to have a seamless interaction of data, content, technology function, and measurement across the connection points of the desired customer experience (and thus the technologies powering them).

Marketers can ask, do we have a self-learning system that can enable the organization to move faster to improve any one experience? Do we have empowered, connected teams that can improve each experience, and connect every customer no matter their entry point?

Successful companies are architecting a layered approach to technology that has a foundation of DAM and PIM content and data, as well as customer data, as a singular source of the truth. These organizations typically scale and provide consistent experiences across several departmental silos and external channels. Some do this with one provider offering a suite of solutions at each level, while others use multiple vendors integrated together. The key is that this "intelligent experience" tech stack is designed as a layered architecture around a connected network of experiences with purposeful data collection and storage.

As the figure below illustrates, the storage of assets and associated data in a DAM and PIM solution can become the method to drive more personalized, targeted, and dynamic customer experiences. The storage and use of consumer and behavioral data will become the listening method to inform which experiences are delivered. And leveraged together, will inform analytics and measurement technologies that can provide insight into the business.

Email	Web	Social Ads	SMS	Apps

Personalized	Content Optimization	Programmatic Assembly

Experience Layer

External Data In

Behavior Events Third-Party APIs

Automation Layer

Engagement Layer

Data Out

Next Best Experience Operational Learning Patterns

PIM Content Data	DAM Content Data	CMS Content Data	Event/ Triggers	Customer Data

Insights/Analytics

Core Data Management

Step three: activate a phased charter

A key benefit of beginning with a mapping of requirements and data connections that span the entire desired customer experience is that this enables the final piece – building (or improving) the infrastructure that can help optimize the critical parts of the journey.
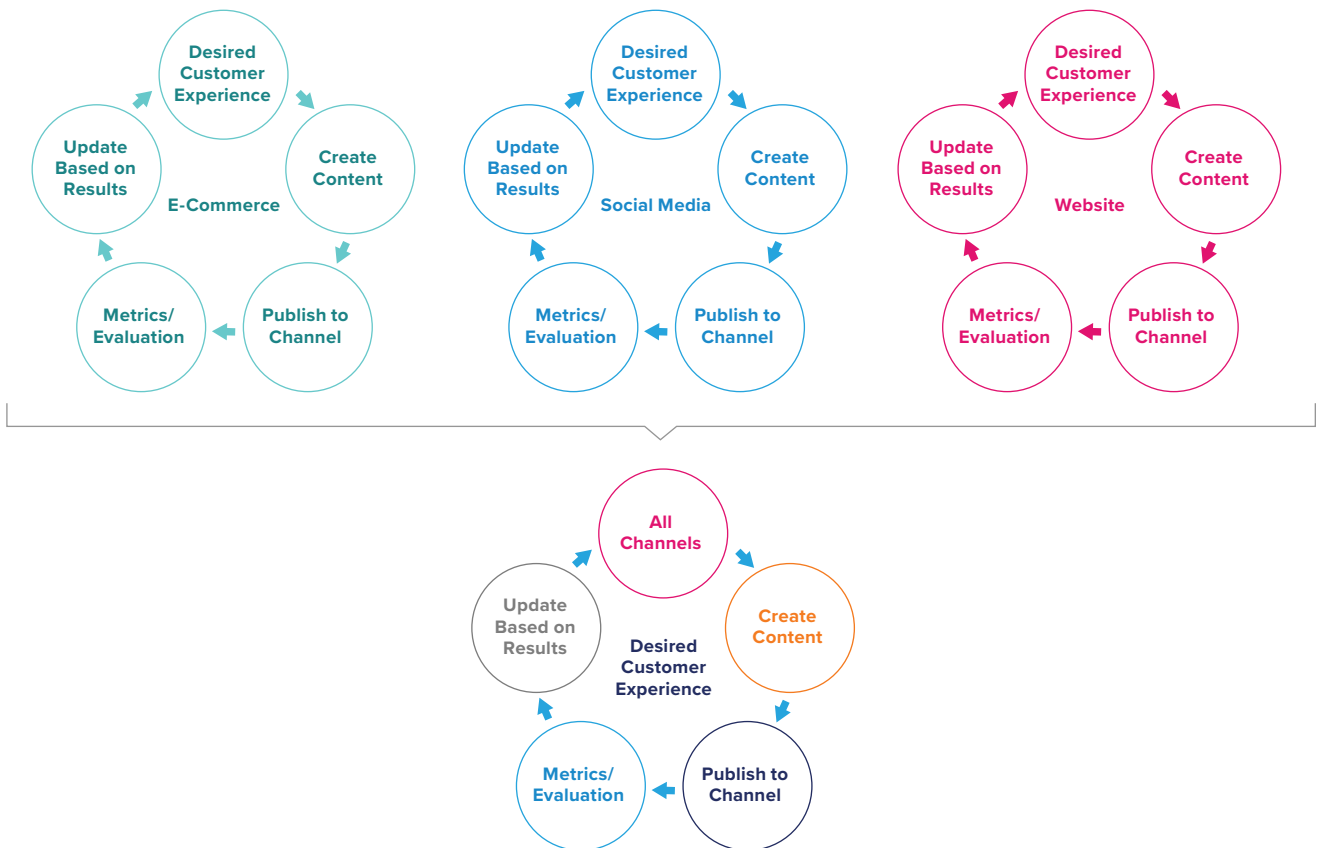
The team now should have a very good idea of not only what data is needed, but what data is and isn't available, or may need to be created or managed in a better way.

More likely, however, is that after this analysis the team will uncover a prioritized need to re-architect the current infrastructure to support any new experiences. The irony is that while most marketing teams get to this place, some have to first reach their breaking point with siloed, disparate experiences that cannot be easily integrated.

The next step for the team is to decide which technologies, if any, need to be acquired or integrated. Once that is determined, the team can then begin with a small, phased, charter to focus on one part of the desired customer experience (likely the most-needed experience as identified by using the outlined playbook above). Only then can the team start to work up and down the journey as prioritized to make improvements.

So often, companies manage their digital content experiences based only upon the insight they've been able to glean from the experience that precedes it:

- The e-commerce experience is only fueled by the data gleaned from the web site

- The website is only improved by data gleaned from Google search

- Social engagement is tweaked based only on what is liked/retweeted/etc.

E-Commerce

- Desired Customer Experience
- Create Content
- Publish to Channel
- Metrics/Evaluation
- Update Based on Results

Social Media

- Desired Customer Experience
- Create Content
- Publish to Channel
- Metrics/Evaluation
- Update Based on Results

Website

- Desired Customer Experience
- Create Content
- Publish to Channel
- Metrics/Evaluation
- Update Based on Results

Desired Customer Experience

- All Channels
- Create Content
- Publish to Channel
- Metrics/Evaluation
- Update Based on Results

It's an easy trap to fall into, particularly when each of these experiences is managed by different silos or teams. By following the approach outlined in this playbook, teams — regardless of reporting structure — can end the vicious cycle of undesirable and disjointed customer experiences driven solely by what data is available, versus what the customer actually values.

Starting the conversation

By prioritizing and connecting DAM and PIM systems, the brand can begin to think of this complete architecture as a central nervous system that joins the digital content experiences like the five senses. Each digital experience sends information, and our DAM and PIM systems, working together, can comprehend those signals and react to deliver the next best communication to any of our audiences.

The most important thing about being a great conversationalist is starting. If no one starts a conversation, then there won't be one. A strategy that combines DAM and PIM technology into the ability for brands to start, and maintain, meaningful conversations can provide a vital piece to your customer experience.

And the best way to begin is to well…start a conversation.

Notes

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About The Content Advisory

Founded in 2010, The Content Advisory (TCA) is the consulting, research, and education group of The Content Marketing Institute. Our clients rely on us for valuable insights on the topics of content strategy, content marketing, digital transformation, data privacy and consumer experience. Since our launch, we've worked with more than 200 organizations, including 15 of the Fortune 100. We've consulted directly with organizations such as Capital One, NASA, Microsoft, LinkedIn, Facebook, CVS Health, 3M and The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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