

# How to Select a DAM

Learn how to choose the right  
DAM in four steps.



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Digital asset management (DAM) systems are becoming a key part of marketing operations infrastructure. As marketing organizations work to keep pace with digital lifestyles, their communication programs have to move faster and connect to more and more channels. The typical marketing organization is now churning out marketing assets at an unprecedented pace. DAMs are the central hub around which distributed marketing teams, as well as their agencies and partners, operate.

Evaluating DAM solutions has gotten tricky for a number of reasons.

- There are more choices as the category grows up.
- Boundaries separating DAM from adjacent categories are blurring.
- Deployment options now include on-premise, private cloud and Software-as-a-Service.

This guide will help you sort through the alternatives to find your best solution.

### The Early Years of DAM

Flatbed scanners found their way into mainstream business use in the late 1980s. And, as with any new technology, when you solve one problem you often create a new one. What do you do with all those digital files you create when you scan images? Digital asset management systems soon emerged as the solution.

Early solutions from companies like Canto and ADAM provided a central repository for digital image files. Since DIM (digital image management) wouldn't make a very good acronym, they settled on DAM (digital asset management), and a new software category was born. It took off quickly.

Based on the ruling architecture of that time, DAM systems were client server solutions managed on-premise. DAMs were largely viewed as middleware that provided a place to put all the files that came first from scanners, and later from design solutions like InDesign and Photoshop. DAMs were purchased and managed by IT.

These DAM solutions weren't typically very user friendly. They didn't have to be. Creative workflow and adjacent processes were managed in other environments. But that changed quickly during the next phase of DAM category evolution.

### Expanding Use

As DAMs became central to creative and marketing processes, customers found more ways to use them and began to demand more functionality from them. On-premise DAMs today have dozens of features that satisfy lots of different use cases.

But the underlying architecture remained. DAMs were on-premise systems run on in-house hardware. They remained IT solutions even though they were used primarily by marketing and creative teams. DAM software updates were managed by IT, and new hardware required for expanding DAM use was typically paid for with IT budget and bought on IT timeframes.

### How to Choose the Right DAM

- 1 Uncover critical requirements
- 2 Set measureable objectives
- 3 Select appropriate deployment option
- 4 Evaluate the best solutions



## DAM in the Cloud

A new DAM era was ushered in with the emergence of cloud computing. Enterprise systems no longer had to be managed on proprietary hardware. You could buy software and computing infrastructure as a service. Marketers, no longer dependent on IT, could take a more decisive role in buying solutions.

As a result, DAM split into two categories of solutions: on-premise software and SaaS offerings. Traditional on-premise providers trying to provide some of the benefits of SaaS have created a third option – private cloud – by offering their single-tenant software in a cloud environment.

### DAM deployment options include on-premise, private cloud and Software as a Service.

	On-Premise	Private Cloud	SaaS
Pros	Best for heavy customizations	Equipped for moderate customizations	Fast implementation
	Data on-premise	Data in cloud	Data in cloud
	Feature-rich	Security/control	Lowest IT dependency
	Mature software	Minimal IT dependency	Auto upgrades
	Security/control	Relatively fast to implement	Accessibility
	Local performance	Lower start-up costs	Low start-up costs
	Integration flexibility	Somewhat scalable	Scalable
		Accessibility	Resilience/failover
		Basic resilience/failover	Low total cost of ownership
			Low risk
Cons			Easy integrations
			Best multiple-location performance
	Limited accessibility	Responsible for maintenance	Limited customization
	Responsible for maintenance	Responsible for upgrades	Data off-premise
	Responsible for upgrades	Data off-premise	Web-dependent
	IT-dependent	Usually work with third parties for hosting	
	Deployment time	Web-dependent	
	High start-up costs		
	Not easily scalable		
	High risk		

## Selecting the Right DAM

As marketing organizations adapt to take advantage of all the new ways they can interact with their customers, many are taking a new look at their digital asset management system. Some are replacing home-grown solutions based on shared file servers or cloud storage. Others are looking to update an on-premise DAM with a cloud solution. No matter the situation, selecting a DAM can have far-reaching consequences and deserves careful consideration.

So how do you choose? Here's a four-step process that will help you choose the right DAM.

### Step 1

#### Uncover Critical Requirements

DAM systems are used by lots of constituent groups. Start by gathering feedback from all of your stakeholders. These are different for every company, but often include marketing, design, photographers, sales, agencies, distributors, communications and IT. Identify the most common challenges end users face, and focus on the end users first by developing a list of requirements that a DAM solution must meet. It's helpful to understand the use cases and then prioritize requirements so that the really important things receive more influence than the nice-to-have things. Forced ranking exercises can help. Give stakeholders a point budget and ask them to spend their points on the things that are most important to them.



### Step 2

#### Set Measurable Objectives

There are a number of ways to measure the impact of a DAM – improved productivity, increased effectiveness, faster cycle times, reduced operational costs, etc. These high-level objectives need to be turned into specific, measurable targets to evaluate success. So if the goal is to speed up creative cycle times, how long do current cycles take? And how fast do they have to be for the project to be considered a winner? Make sure every high-level goal has a clear, quantifiable outcome.

## Step 3

### Select Appropriate Deployment Option

As described earlier, there are several architecture and delivery models for DAMs. You must choose the best option to support the vision you have for a DAM system and, of course, conform to the IT reality of your business. Some industries – financial services and government, for example – have historically had a strong preference for on-premise software. But even these industries are beginning to convert to SaaS. You'll also need to decide whether integrations with other enterprise components will be necessary and determine how these will be accomplished.

## Step 4

### Evaluate the Best Options

This is where things start to get really interesting. Since not every DAM vendor offers every deployment model, you can narrow the field based on service architecture – on-premise, private cloud or SaaS. Use references, objective analyst reports or product reviews to narrow the field further. Some non-product criteria like company size and location can also be considered to get to a list of finalist candidates.

Run your short list of vendors through an evaluation scorecard to see how well they do against the criteria you have determined are necessary for your vision and your team's needs. We have assembled a **Requirements Checklist** you may want to use. Based on our experience with hundreds of customers, we believe these are criteria you should find in best-in-class DAM solutions.

### DAM Requirements Checklist

See how your preferred DAM vendors measure up in an apples-to-apples comparison by downloading this evaluation worksheet.

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### ABOUT WEBDAM

Webdam, a Shutterstock company, is a leader in digital asset management, changing the way marketing and creative teams manage the world's brands. Founded in 2005, the Webdam cloud-based platform connects the visual content that drives impactful brand experiences and allows brand-building activities to scale across the enterprise and consumer touchpoints. Over 500 of the world's leading brands rely on Webdam to accelerate their marketing operations. For more information, please visit [webdam.com](https://webdam.com) and follow Webdam on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).