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How Digital Asset Management Helped a Videogame Manufacturer Efficiently Market Its 1,000 Titles

by Laurie Lande

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Company: Ubisoft

Location: Paris, France

Contact: Allen Adler, Vice President of Creative Services

Industry: Retail

Annual revenue: \$981,000,000

Number of employees: 4100

Quick Read:

Paris-based Ubisoft develops and distributes entertainment products globally, including more than 1,000 videogame titles. Keeping track of the marketing collateral for such a huge inventory was a challenge for the US-based marketing team, which found itself spending more time finding and organizing old assets rather than developing new ones. Installing a digital-asset management system to organize audio and video files, photographs, and advertisements was the first step in solving this problem.

The second, equally important step was getting geographically dispersed users to be comfortable using the system system. To do that, Ubisoft managers gave the software a fun name and launched it with an internal awareness and trivia campaign that offered workers clues about how it would benefit them. That approach helped garner widespread employee participation, and now the creative and marketing groups have embraced the software.

As a result, Ubisoft employees are much more productive with their marketing campaigns, because they no longer waste valuable time chasing files. This has cut down the time needed to launch marketing campaigns for new titles, allowing the department to be more efficient in its marketing and in its external coordination with Ubisoft's many retail partners.

The Challenge:

Paris-based Ubisoft is an international developer, publisher, and distributor of interactive entertainment products. It has subsidiaries in 23 countries and distributes its products in 50 nations. Its main videogame inventory is huge: It produces over 1,000 titles, including Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell, which has sold an impressive 18 million units. So Ubisoft's creative team is under constant pressure to produce eye-catching marketing content to support the promotion of new and existing videogames.

"It was a challenge managing such a diverse set of creative assets for all our marketing materials across a multitude of channels," said Allen Adler, US-based vice-president of creative services. "When people internally would ask us for the most up-to-date version of a file, promotional materials, or packaging, we often had to scramble to deliver it, and our team would lose valuable design time simply chasing files."

As simple as it sounds, organizing its digital assets is crucial for Ubisoft's marketing and advertising campaigns. "We would need to get files or photographs to the press of one of our retailers, and I had highly paid artists burning a CD, " said Adler. "It felt as though we were spending more of our time finding old assets instead of creating new ones."

The Campaign:

Adler knew that there had to be a more efficient way to manage his company's vast marketing and creative materials. Together with other company leaders, he hired an enterprise content management expert to conduct a companywide survey. Based on those results, the expert recommended three possible digital asset management firms; Ubisoft took proposals from all three. The entire process took almost a year.

Ubisoft eventually chose Interwoven's MediaBin, which helps geographically dispersed employees and partners manage, distribute, and publish the thousands of customer-facing digital assets used to promote products and brands. These assets could include photograph, logos, audio and video files, data sheets, and advertisements.

Once Adler decided to use MediaBin, he realized that it wouldn't meet his goals unless his whole team was comfortable with the new system: "We knew we could convince certain individuals to use the solution, but we wanted to create buzz within the company so that everyone would want to use it."

Adler and his team re-branded the MediaBin software internally as "FindIt!" and launched an email teaser campaign to generate excitement about what the new product would do. Emails went to employees asking trivia questions about how digital asset management could benefit them.

At the same time, Anthony Trask, head of Ubisoft's project management office team, coached specific user groups in key countries in FindIt! to ensure that a core team of power users were ready to go at launch. "We created a user adoption campaign that involved rebranding MediaBin as FindIt, and also conducted extensive training," Trask said.

One employee from the project management office is still heavily involved in training and trying to "evolve" the system, Trask said. Overall, he and Adler are pleased with how they were able to create demand for FindIt!

"On the first day (implementing FindIt!) we had 150 users in three countries across seven departments, with dozens of others wanting to get their hands on it," said Adler.

Adler is happy to see his employees become more self-sufficient in answering internal queries. "What used to take the creative department several days to process now takes seconds or minutes," he noted. "At least 70% of the requests are now self-serviced, with internal people helping themselves to accurate assets."

Ubisoft's retail channel is feeling the impact as well. "The process for getting assets to our retail partners used to be manual and time-consuming. It involved tracking down approved assets, converting them to retailer specs, and sending them out to each retailer. Now, it's automated, instantaneous, and consistent, via secure external access to our FindIt! system," said Adler.

Results:

By installing Interwoven's MediaBin digital-asset management (DAM) product, Ubisoft has been able to ensure that the right design assets are synchronized across all of its marketing materials for launching its videogames to market. This has cut down the time needed to launch new-title marketing campaigns, also allowing the department to be more efficient in its marketing and in its external coordination with Ubisoft's many retail partners.

After 18 months of using FindIt!, Ubisoft's creative and marketing teams are now much more efficient. "Our creative and marketing teams have gained hundreds of hours of productivity, and our internal clients and external partners now have access to the information they need the moment they need it," Adler said.

Moreover, hundreds of assets that used to be unavailable because they couldn't be found are now again in use.

Having seen the success of the MediaBin initiative in the US, Ubisoft's European offices have begun using it, and it's being rolled out in the company's remaining offices worldwide.

Lessons Learned:

- * Recognize when your marketing group needs help managing your assets. Although Ubisoft has a sophisticated global marketing team, Adler recognized that it would be difficult for even the best-run department to handle the vast amounts of digital data involved in supporting 1,000 video titles.

- * Be aware that the process doesn't end after installation of the software.

Ubisoft has engaged in continuous training of employees in the DAM system while studying ways to improve it. More than 18 months after installation, the project management office still has an employee whose main duties involve training others in FindIt!

* Be prepared to re-evaluate your IT infrastructure. "Rich media files can be very large, and you want to store them efficiently," noted Adler.

Related Links:

* www.ubisoftgroup.com

* www.interwoven.com

Note: Ubisoft's annual revenue is 680 million Euros; the \$981 million amount noted above is based on current exchange rates.