

The Digital Data Game: One Company's Approach

The need to manage assets and projects digitally to streamline workflow has become apparent, but companies also need to leverage asset management to create the greatest benefit to their clients as well as to their own bottom line.

BY GARY SUTULA

We're all familiar with the old adage, "Too many cooks spoil the broth," a warning our mothers often gave us when attempting to nose our way into an issue already under the helm of other people's guidance. However, many graphic solutions providers find themselves unwillingly facing this situation time and again when managing countless client projects and their accompanying components each month, leading to worker frustration, high costs, longer production times, and fewer opportunities to capitalize on new business opportunities.

For most companies, program management demands are intense. Working across various time zones, with multiple parties and large quantities of data and demands, project teams are tasked with managing everything from campaign concepts, design and copywriting to print and digital production. Moreover, project deliverables may include everything from HTML Web pages to presentation, graphic creation for printed collateral

and direct mail pieces. So what is a solutions provider company to do? Take a page from the book of Vertis Communications, one company that has taken the challenges involved with digital data and project management and turned them into corporate successes.

Common Road Blocks

As a market leader in applied database solutions, Vertis Communications understands that the workflows for a production facility, an ad agency, a consumer packaged goods company, a creative shop, and a brand with dealer channels are all different. Managing data and assets digitally involves much more than simply putting graphic files in a database. Workflow challenges often include:

- ▶ Managing workflow of integrated mixed-media campaigns, from planning through delivery;
- ▶ Managing HTML and print formats;
- ▶ Coordinating remote teams and activities while striving to meet all varying deadlines;



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Today's graphic solutions' client desires seamless, end-to-end solutions to streamline every aspect of production—from strategic planning to flawless delivery.

- ▶ Collaborating with partners;
- ▶ Ensuring security and data protection under complex conditions and roles; and
- ▶ Maintaining a solid bottom line.

Companies that desire seamless, end-to-end solutions to streamline every aspect of production, from strategic planning to flawless delivery, often turn to Vertis Communications. The company has vast experience easing these challenges and can offer solutions that are both flexible and robust enough to accommodate the production management of complex, integrated campaigns requiring close col-

laboration between a company and its partners. Addressing these challenges head on, Vertis often recommends that clients:

- ▶ Stay flexible;
- ▶ Anticipate the next move;
- ▶ Centralize resources to boost productivity; and
- ▶ Manage assets digitally for ease and efficiency.

Stay Flexible

For most companies, on-time delivery of a project depends upon juggling variable workflows and schedules. However, with possibly hundreds of

ongoing projects taking place each month, the need for tracking and assigning various tasks across the board arises. Vertis tackles this issue with a digital marketing resource management (MRM) solution delivered through flexible workflow functionality, letting its clients manage tasks at any level of frequency and detail.



The MRM solution breaks projects into individual tasks—think creating a design or approving a proof—which are then sequenced into digital workflows. As a result, project managers can initiate projects quickly and simply by choosing a defined workflow setup for the project type. Here's how it works. Project managers:

- ▶ Complete a brief online form to define the project,
- ▶ Attach documents such as creative briefs or design concepts,
- ▶ Assign the team,
- ▶ Choose a flexible workflow, and finally set a start date for the production process.

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Anticipate the Next Move

Since Vertis Communications' clients consist of companies that provide creative solutions to hundreds of their own clients across the globe, Vertis understands that these companies cannot afford to face needs and issues of their own. Having a smart solution to manage client data is critical, and the digital data management solution in

place should be strong, smart and able to anticipate every next move.

The company's digital MRM solution drives workflow while helping managers monitor the ever-changing status of many concurrent projects. When the workflow gets underway, as each task is completed, the next becomes active and is routed automatically to the right workgroup or person. Automatic email alerts flag active or overdue tasks. Project managers can even prompt actions, such as

uploading a proof, when necessary. As conditions change, managers can easily adjust both tasks and schedules and even analyze the impact on workload.

Gaining this level of control and insight has proven to be an enormous benefit to many clients. Many feel that being freed from burdensome production details allows attention to be focused on the larger, strategic issues of a project's completion or promotion—or on new business opportunities that arise. Being able to extend business into greater markets while maintaining focus on current projects at hand is often key to a company's success.

Centralize Resources to Boost Productivity

Project resources that are within reach are essential to increasing a company's productivity and decreasing overall production time—always a challenge during project completion. Vertis offers solutions that provide easy, around-the-clock Web access, while packing each project under a virtual "job jacket" to unite all information, plans, collaborative notes, documents, designs, proofs and numbered revisions. A project manager can add content such as a creative brief or budget, and authorized participants (who are immediately notified of the addition) can either download or view content online.

This highly accessible, Web-based management solution provides the necessary capabilities for streamlined team collaboration. However, collaboration needs often vary depending on the project or client. Understanding this, Vertis creates several types of customized collaboration features on a case-by-case basis. For example, one client possessed marketing projects that constantly depended on a complex supply chain of multiple external creative contributors and vendors. To improve resource management, Vertis delivered a digital, role-based solution tailored to the client's specific operations. Vertis Communications worked closely with the client to not only understand all functional areas of responsibility, such as the creative directors or digital production artists, but also to understand interactions between various workgroup members. In the end, this analysis helped guide role definition, task assignments to roles, and determination of security needs for each task.

Another example of a highly customized collaboration solution implemented on behalf of a client was when a company turned to Vertis for a simple,

reliable way for its marketing services group on the West Coast to share content with marketing executives in various locations across the United States.

Vertis worked with the company to help conceive a creative review feature—a Web site for easy, direct viewing of creative documents and other project data—that would allow for a more collaborative environment between geographically dispersed project groups. Now during conference calls, the company's marketing service managers can direct reviewers to this site, where they can all access the documents digitally and simultaneously.

Manage Assets Digitally for Ease & Efficiency

The need to manage assets and projects digitally to streamline workflow has become apparent, but how exactly can companies leverage digital asset management to create the greatest benefit to not only their clients, but also to their own bottom line? Digital asset management is crucial to significantly reducing time and infrastructure costs associated with data and asset management. Vertis continuously offers and educates its clients on the digital management process, so they can review, comment, transfer, download and archive all images, page files, and other important resources with powerful digital solutions.

The company's asset management solution provides easy online access to digital assets—anytime, anywhere—for instant review, file sharing, and more time-efficient page layout. This has proven to significantly streamline project workflow and make the creative process more effective and productive. Additionally, digital data management such as the type Vertis offers will assist companies with the following critical needs:

- ▶Simplifying review of photography and final pages for more efficient and concise collaboration between reviewers and creators;
- ▶Facilitating file transfers between client and creative provider, saving time and effort;
- ▶Protecting valuable brand assets by controlling user access;
- ▶Expediting retrieval of images—users can search by specific criteria or they can browse to view all of the content;
- ▶Allowing companies to specify the type of data—such as photographer name, keywords, ownership and comments—stored with a client's assets and used as search criteria;

▶Enabling easy collection of components and files for layout and design programs such as QuarkXPress® and InDesign®, then downloading them straight to the user's desktop;

▶Using an efficient, time-saving FPO workflow, allowing the ability to email, print out, and work with much smaller graphics files; and

▶Providing the ability to quickly download high- or low-resolution images or to “drag and drop” image previews directly into QuarkXPress documents.

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Sure They're Solutions, But Do They Work?

While Vertis Communications offers its clients configurable digital asset and project management solutions, concrete evidence of added client-side value is paramount to their success. Clients indicate that using the company's digital MRM solutions have had an immediate and significant improvement in their production workflows—and overall productivity. Equally as important, companies that implemented Vertis' digital solutions indicate that the transfer process is seamless and causes no extra downtime.

Vertis Communications is committed to continuous development and support for each of its clients. In fact, the company provides each digital workflow client ongoing support from dedicated workflow specialists to ensure their continued successes in marketing and creative services. Periodic solution enhancements ensure that each client remains on the leading-edge of their ever-changing workflow needs.

As a marketing and solutions provider for many of today's Fortune 500 companies, Vertis Communications leverages its vast experience in managing large, complex, time-sensitive assignments in order to turn its clients' marketing and creative ideas into realities. 