

Ad Delivery and Asset Management

A white paper on the integration of two environments.

Author: Alan Darling
Date: February 28, 2007
Version: 1.1
Contributors:

Table of contents

1 INTRODUCTION 3

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3

3 THE AD SUPPLY CHAIN..... 3

4 THE METADATA 4

5 INTEGRATING THE ADS INTO THE ASSET MANAGEMENT SYSTEM..... 5

6 INTEGRATING BUSINESS METADATA 5

7 CONCLUSIONS 6

1 Introduction

In traditional ad production workflows, an ad file can be handled by as many as ten different enterprises on its travels from concept to appearing in a printed page, or, nowadays, on whatever medium that ad is destined to appear.

Many ads are re-used by advertisers from one issue to the next or from one publication to the next.

Historically, this has involved much manual intervention at the publications, or the prepress shop that is handling the ad reception and preprocessing. This is a process that is begging for normalization of the data and the application of modern technology to streamline the process.

This will drive cost and inaccuracies out of the whole process and allow publications to integrate their ad production into whatever asset management system they choose to integrate.

2 Executive Summary

Ad production is process control gone wild. The number of staff and the amount of time and money that is invested in this process is not commensurate with the returns – yet the process is perpetuated at the vast majority of publishers as a necessary evil.

Much of the pain involved with ad management can be alleviated by getting the ad materials into some form of asset management system where the ads that are either in production or are archived can be managed, tracked and even shared with the Ad Supplier as a value-added service.

Asset management systems are commonly found at publishing sites for editorial work – and rightly so, too. It is logical consider using these same data repositories for the associated advertising assets.

The barrier to achieving this goal is the fact that the publisher, until now, has had no way to normalize the reception of advertising material without the “necessary evil” of a slow, manual ad production process.

The use of digital information gathered upstream will allow the publisher to manage, control and even automate much of the ad production process while leveraging the capital investment made in the editorial production asset management systems.

This white paper describes the strategies and technologies that can be deployed to achieve this goal.

3 The Ad Supply Chain

The key to the efficient implementation of this kind of strategy is to understand the supply chain and move as many processes upstream as possible. This obviates the time-consuming and error-prone task of re-keying information that appears on paperwork as it moves from enterprise to enterprise.

Until recently, the “Supply Chain” was called “The Ad Reception Workflow” and consisted of the “last hop” from the enterprise that performed the production prepress for the ad file and the ad production staff at the publication.

It generally entailed the delivery, probably by courier, of the CD containing the ad with its accompanying paperwork to the publication. Here, it would be opened, preflighted, quality checked, maybe corrected, or at least have its format checked, sized and then be ready to put into the page.

Once the magazine was run, the ad file might be put on a file server, or maybe put onto tape, or maybe even burned onto another CD. If the tasks were performed by a service provider to the publication, that enterprise might charge a premium to the publication to store the ad for future retrieval.

If we now modernize the view of the supply chain, we now see it extending into the ad agency studio or the agency prepress shop the advertiser or marketer who creates their own ads (the Ad Supplier). The

Supply Chain can also be extended into the media buyer, with user interfaces into the actual advertiser where necessary.

The scope of this document is to deal with the delivery of ad materials and their subsequent processing, but **Section 6 – Integrating Business Metadata** touches on the prospect of broadening the process to include media buying and selling.

So, for the purposes of this section of the document, the ad materials start their lives in the agency studio.

AdSEND has tools for the creative groups to track their ads by campaign and publication through an ad fulfillment database. This replaces the current trafficking of ads in manila folders.

It also means that information about the ad size (fixed by the media buy), the destination and delivery dates are now captured digitally at the sender's site.

When the ad is ready for the release, the production person at the agency clicks a release button that starts a process that accesses the destination publications AdSEND ad portal. Within the portal, the ad can be sized (to ensure it meets the publication's mechanical specs), preflighted (to make sure that it meets the publication's ad file specs) and soft proofed (to set the sender's color expectations).

The final step of this process is to create a job ticket for the ad delivery.

In this modern supply chain, all the information about the file and its history through the process has been captured digitally – this is called “metadata”. The metadata is transferred, along with the ad file, through AdSEND's Digital Workflow Suite to the publication where it is processed as described in **Section 5 – Integrating the Ads into the Asset Management System** below.

4 The Metadata

As mentioned above, the data that is digitally captured through the production processes at the Ad Supplier's enterprise is referred to as metadata.

In this context, metadata can be thought of as the information that would have typically been captured on the paperwork. That paperwork would have been couriered in the package that the Ad Supplier provided that also contained the CD with the ad on it.

The beauty of capturing this data digitally is that the publication no longer has to re-key this information, which is time consuming and error prone.

It also opens the door to automating the processes that typically required a lot of human intervention at the publisher's site.

AdSEND encodes this metadata in at least three ways:

HTML Job Ticket is a human-readable form of the metadata that can be viewed by any operator who has access (and privileges) to the data with a workstation, a network connection and a browser.

JDF Job Ticket is the metadata that is required for the production process. It contains items such as the file's pathname, its preflight status, any disclaimers selected by the Ad Supplier (e.g. type in the type safety area). This is encoded in the industry-standard JDF (Job Definition Format) format for ease of integration with other production systems. (For more information visit <http://www.CIP4.org>)

AdsML Job Ticket is the metadata that is associated with the business information about the ad that has been entered by the Ad Supplier. This is encoded in another industry-standard format, AdsML (Advertising Markup Language). (For more information, visit <http://www.AdsML.org>)

While it is possible for AdSEND to encode the metadata in other forms, it is strongly suggested that these industry-standard encoding schemes are adopted. This means that any systems that the metadata touches will be “future proofed” in that, if a decision is made to change any of these systems, the format in which the metadata is presented to the system does not have to change. Anyone who has been involved in the replacement of a system will immediately recognize the value, in time, pain and money that NOT having to recode the inputs and outputs of a system brings.

Finally, part of the AdSEND DWS solution includes the ability to direct any of the metadata files to different locations. For example, this is to allow the JDF metadata to be sent to the production system, the AdsML metadata to the booking/billing system and a mixture of both to an asset management system.

5 Integrating the Ads into the Asset Management System

In the flow through Ad Digital Supply Chain that we have described above, the actual ad file has arrived at the publisher's site with the appropriate metadata.

It is at this stage that the "Work in Progress" and "Archive" processes may be determined.

The "Work In Progress" process applies to the ads that are destined for the current publications, and traditionally involves the ad production function at the publisher (or at their designated prepress service supplier) to prepare the ad for integration with editorial, and actually place it in the publication.

The "Archive" process applies to the ad once it has been determined that it is correctly processed and is ready to be made available for pick up. This has traditionally been performed by the ad production group and can range from burning the ad file to CD with the page number and issues in which it appeared, to importing the ad file into an asset management system and completing the keyword entry manually.

The time in the workflow at which these processes will be applied will be determined by business rules at the individual publisher's sites.

Some publications place the ad into an asset management system as soon as the ad arrives, and both the ad production group and archivists use that asset management system.

Other publications like to process the ads through the production system and then move the files into archive once the publication is off press.

There are many permutations to this decision process.

Fortunately, because of the encoding of the AdSEND metadata and the flexibility of AdSEND DWS, the metadata can be incorporated into any workflow scheme.

The important point to note here is because of the AdSEND metadata being present with the ad file, and tightly associated with it, the metadata file can be presented to the asset management system and can be used to automatically populate the asset management system of choice at the publisher's site WITHOUT operator intervention. This is important in terms of accuracy, dependability, speed, auditability and staffing issues.

While AdSEND offers MediaScope as a hosted asset management solution, it is obvious that there are many other commercially available asset management solutions. AdSEND is actively working with several asset market leading suppliers and is prepared to work with any legacy systems at the publisher's site.

6 Integrating Business Metadata

As mentioned above, AdSEND views the Ad Digital Supply Chain as encompassing the media buyers, the ad sales department and even the advertiser. In order to accommodate these trading partners, AdSEND has played an active role in AdsML and its application in the AAAA (American Association of Advertising Agency) ebiz for media initiative. This is a scheme to digitize the insertion order process, and will eventually lead to electronic billing, proof of publication and other manual processes in the whole ad insertion process.

The aim is to make it easier for the ad buyer to buy space and have it accurately tracked and billed through the whole process – DIGITALLY.

7 Conclusions

In the descriptions in this document, we have seen how the current ad production process can be radically improved by:

- a. Having the Ad Supplier validate their files upstream
- b. Capture the relevant metadata in industry-standard format
- c. Digitally deliver sized, preflighted and proofed ad files to the publisher
- d. Use the captured metadata to populate publisher-side ad asset management systems

All of this happens without anywhere near the human intervention that is currently required and also takes time, errors and cost out of the ad production process.

These criteria can be quantified and used to justify this approach.

Using metadata-based techniques, publishers can also look to digitizing and automating business processes in a similar manner.

AdSEND is uniquely positioned with tools, processes and experience to assist publishers in their quest to streamline their Ad Digital Supply Chain.