

## DAM Unlimited: Charting the First 20 Years of Digital Asset Management



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What does it mean for digital asset management (DAM) software to be future-ready? What will DAM look like in 20 years?

No one can see into the future of digital asset management, but there's one good place to look for a hint: the past — and how much the world has changed since then.

Strap in, because we're taking a trip in our Nuxeo Time Machine ... all the way back to 1998.

### The Digital World-20 Years Ago

Let's get re-oriented with the world of 1998. Cell phones looked like this:



But you probably don't use them for most phone calls, because long-distance and roaming charges (remember those?) can send the per-minute cost through the roof. Even "bargain" plans charge \$90 for 600 minutes per month. And, of course, calls drop all the time — "can you hear me now?" won't be a slogan for another four years.

A brand-new, much-hyped Mac had just been introduced — one that is about to be used by huge numbers of creative professionals for years to come. The \$1300 iMac contains a 233-MHz G3 processor, 4GB hard drive, 32MB of RAM, and a CD-ROM drive:



You could catch the Seinfeld finale on your CRT TV with a maximum resolution of 720 x 480 pixels, and you might be able to snap a 1024x768 photo of yourself watching on a brand-new digital camera — but it won't be called a "selfie" yet, and you'll have to upload it to an AOL chat room, not Facebook.

Expect your photo upload to take a long time, and have a short reach: only 41% of American adults have gone online in the last year, and most people access the web with 56k modems that make their phone line ring "busy." Broadband connections of up to 384 Kb/second are available for true techies and connected businesses.

If you want to search for something on the "world wide web," your options are limited. Yahoo offers a directory with categories and sub-categories so that you can navigate the Internet like a file system. Altavista is the best available search engine, but searches take several seconds to perform — you could just barely use Google this year, but even your favorite geeks won't know about it until next year at earliest.

### The First Known Digital Asset Management Conference

Organizations twenty years ago faced new challenges precipitated by the rapidly-evolving digital landscape.

More information than ever was being recorded digitally — but how could that information be stored, accessed, and managed? What organizational challenges needed to be overcome for effective DAM deployment? And where was all this technology headed, anyway?

During March 23, 1998, a group of archivists, researchers, marketers, attorneys, and tech executives gathered at the Ritz Carlton hotel in Marina del Rey, California for **the first known conference on DAM**.

Just a few short years after the dawn of the world wide web, digital asset management technologies were still in their infancy, but already, the conference tracks — from Intellectual Property to Asset Representation in the Creative Process — **show that many of today's problems and use cases were already being considered 20 years ago:**

- Entertainment executives talked about the potential for DAM to resolve headaches caused by **rights management** — from minimizing the potential risk to studio relationships if a likeness was used without permission, to reducing the length of time it took to ensure that a clip was clear to use.
- Bill Rosenblatt, a panelist from Sun Microsystems, discussed the need for DAM to incorporate **workflows management**, as well as **integrations with creative applications** like QuarkXPress and Adobe Illustrator. He foresaw a split between enterprise class DAM products and purpose-built solutions, as well as a potential market for content management specific to websites.
- Sandeep Divekar, a tech CEO, described **a world made possible by the digital asset management technologies of the future**: paying bills online, seeing the view from your seat before buying an event ticket, or being able to see a video of IKEA furniture assembly if the provided diagrams proved daunting. He noted that the audience seemed "skeptical" of the feasibility of these ideas.
- Randy Anderson from the Bulldog Group mentioned storing assets in multiple places for fast retrieval, and **the need for scalability**, given the increasing size of digital assets. "We know that as people put things into digitized format, the growth rate increases at least four to five times faster than most people would anticipate."

While the specifics may have changed, these are problems and solutions that should be familiar to most DAM users today. Even in 1998, DAM vendors had started to understand the implications (and the potential) of a world in which information transcended physical borders to become more accessible than ever before.

### Extrapolating the Future of Digital Asset Management

Taking a close look at the world of the Annenberg DAM Conference in 1998 reveals a market in its infancy, grappling with problems that went beyond the capabilities of 20th century technology.

Today, the DAM market has matured significantly, but many of the pain points experienced by today's enterprises across all sectors are the same: disorganized content, a lack of visibility into data that could have business value, and the need to re-use content for maximum efficiency.

With so much technological development taking place in every area of our lives in the last 20 years, how can so many of the problems of the world's first DAM conference remain unsolved twenty years later? The solutions built decades ago were built on legacy architecture that scaled only to a point, causing slowdowns and performance issues with large numbers of files or high file sizes. Metadata has become more complex, and SQL databases like those used by legacy systems don't provide the flexibility or scalability to solve the biggest problems described at Annenberg.

**Bottom line: the blue-sky use cases of tomorrow have become today's can't-live-without technologies, and some of 1998's biggest challenges are still tough for legacy vendors to overcome.**

Today's modern DAM technologies have finally begun to fulfill the promises of twenty years ago, with scalable content services architecture that can handle a full range of digital assets, even as asset types become larger and more complex, with more complicated metadata.

For more information on how a modern DAM architecture can scale limitlessly — with over a billion assets tested — read our Nuxeo benchmark report, [Scalability by Nuxeo](#).

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