



FROM CREATIVITY TO CONTENT

The Role of Visual
Media in Impactful
Brand Storytelling

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INTRODUCTION

At this point in digital marketing's evolution—especially with the rise of social media—there has been a massive shift toward using visual media to better connect with and engage consumer and business audiences alike. Without visual media, including photos, graphics, illustrations and video, many marketers feel they simply could not fully tell their brand's story. However, it would seem from the findings of a study conducted by the CMO Council in partnership with Libris (by PhotoShelter) in the second quarter of 2015, many are overlooking the explosion of media assets being generated and managed across their organizations and the effect it has had on their content planning and development processes.

What emerges is a fundamental chasm between the acknowledged importance of visual assets to brand storytelling and how internal silos, priorities and processes are preventing these assets from being leveraged to tell the best story possible. Consider the top learnings from the 177 senior marketing leaders that provided their insights:

- 65 percent of senior marketing executives surveyed believe that visual assets (photos, video, illustrations and infographics) are core to how their brand story is communicated.
- The majority believes the importance and use of visual assets (50 percent for photography, 60 percent for infographics and 79 percent for video) will only grow in the future.
- Only 27 percent have a process in place to aggregate, organize and manage the visual assets being used across marketing (and even non-marketing) teams.
- Nearly half (42 percent) say that the dialogue for centralizing these assets isn't happening because of competing priorities.

Despite the criticality of visual assets to customer engagement and brand storytelling, it would seem that these critical assets are being viewed as accents to the engagement process and not core to how we engage with and activate our customers. Marketers are virtually ignoring process inefficiencies that will only multiply as the content ecosystem continues to grow at lightning speed.

CONTENT, ENGAGEMENT AND THE CUSTOMER DEMAND FOR A MORE VISUAL EXPERIENCE

Customers are defining where and how their buying journeys with brands progress. Marketers are, in turn, responding by investing heavily into content marketing strategies to reach across an ever-increasing number of channels in a variety of ways that will resonate accordingly. Some 71 percent of marketers intend to increase their content marketing budgets in 2015 (eMarketer) in order to capitalize on the customer's search for relevant content and experiences.

This budget boost has created a virtual avalanche of content. According to the Content Marketing Institute, 69 percent of marketers are creating more content now than they did one year ago, and 70 percent of B2B marketers will be creating even more content this coming year. There are more than 27 million pieces of content being shared each day (AOL and Nielsen), and there are no signs that the content generation machine will be slowing. Consider this: Infographic production increases by 1 percent (Zabisco) every day.

This has created a crowded and cluttered arena that asks the customer to identify the most resonant content. So to cut through the noise, visuals are added to capitalize on the fact that 40 percent of people will respond better to visual information than plain text (Zabisco).

It is apparent that marketers are acknowledging the importance of visual storytelling and are rising to the occasion by providing more engaging visual content for their customers and prospects. But are organizations maximizing the potential to reach and engage their most valuable prospects and customers in a unified, effective manner? Are they maximizing how the visual assets they are investing in and creating are being leveraged and used across the entire organization?

Through the course of this study, what becomes clear is that while marketing has a keen awareness of the importance of visual assets to their content marketing strategies, optimizing operations to ensure collaboration, centralization and automation tends to fall behind a number of items on the priority scale. But to successfully capitalize on the customer's reliance on visually stimulating content and stories, organizations will need to take a step back to rethink how they enable and empower the organization to elevate the role of visual assets. In order to tell a more impactful story, organizations must look to break down the silos in visual asset production and create a seamless process for sharing, accessing and managing assets in order to create more engaging experiences for customers.

WHAT THE RESEARCH MOST DISTINCTLY REVEALS IS THAT AS MARKETERS, WE HAVE BEEN REMISS IN APPROACHING THE VISUAL ASSET DIALOGUE AS A STRATEGIC PART OF THE CONTENT MARKETING AND DEVELOPMENT LIFECYCLE.

Methodology

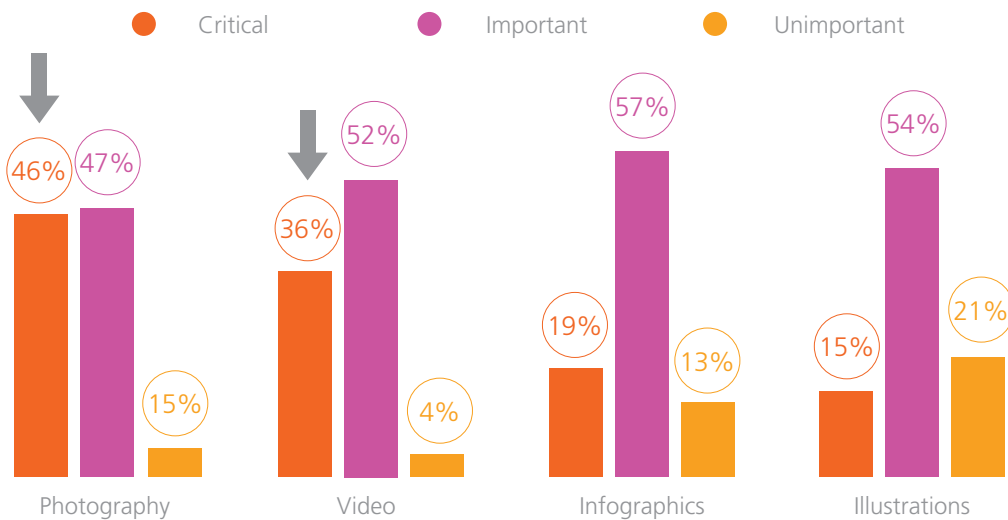
- Online survey of North America-based senior marketing leaders fielded in the second quarter of 2015
- 177 total respondents
- 52 percent from B2B organizations, 18 percent from strictly B2C organizations and 30 percent from hybrid organizations selling B2B2C
- 25 percent from organizations with more than \$1 billion (US) in annual revenue
- 41 percent hold chief marketing officer, head of marketing or SVP of marketing titles

KEY FINDINGS

THE ROLE OF VISUALS: PRESENT AND FUTURE

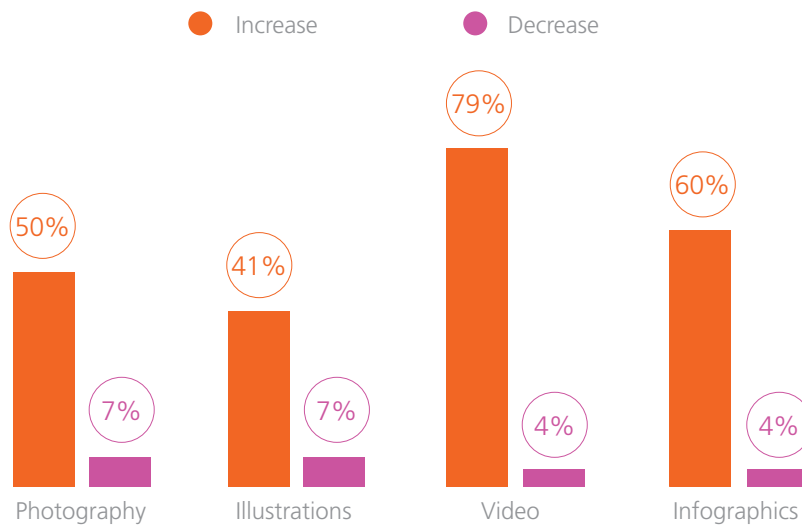
Seeing is believing, or at least this is what senior marketing executives note about their customers when it comes to content consumption and engagement. Nearly half of survey respondents indicate that the use of photography (46 percent) and video (36 percent) is critical to their current marketing and storytelling strategies. While illustrations and infographics are seen as important, they pale in comparison to the importance of dynamic visual assets like pictures and videos. In fact, only 2 percent of respondents do not use photography as part of their storytelling efforts, and only 5 percent said that images were simply unimportant.

Figure 1: The Importance of Visuals



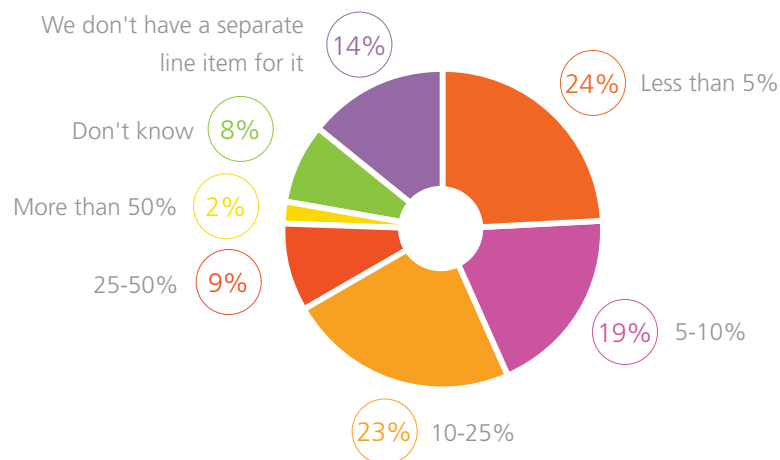
Looking beyond today and into the year ahead, the importance of impactful, compelling and relevant visual assets will only grow. When asked to identify any shifts in importance, 50 percent of respondents indicated that the importance and use of photography will increase while 60 percent believe the use of infographics will increase compared to last year. The greatest shift will happen with video, a visual asset that 79 percent of marketers surveyed believe will increase in importance (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Shifting Importance in the Future



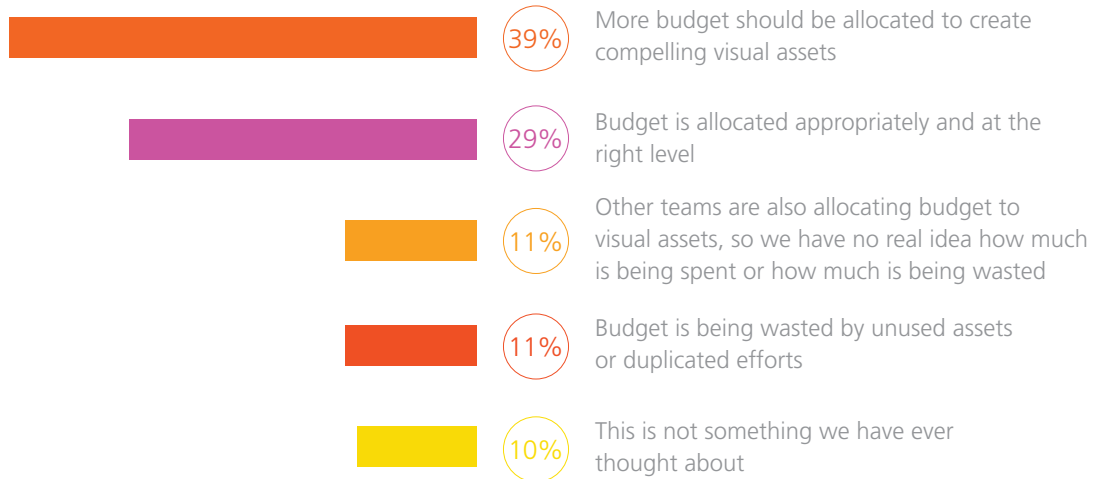
The trend is further emphasized in budget allocated to the creation, procurement or development of assets (including the fees associated with rights, royalties or licenses). For 2015, an impressive 32 percent have earmarked between 10 and 50 percent of their marketing budgets. This is no small piece of the marketing budget, especially when 31 percent of marketers believe that more than half of their content actually includes some visual element.

Figure 3: Percentage of 2015 Budget Allocated for the Creation, Procurement or Development of Visual Assets, Including the Cost of Rights, Royalties or Licenses



The budget picture gets even more robust as marketers look into the future. Thirty-nine (39) percent of marketers believe that more of their budget should be allocated to the acquisition or creation of compelling visual assets (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: When Thinking of the Budget Your Organization Has Allocated Toward the Acquisition or Creation of Visual Assets, Which of the Following Do You Feel Is Accurate?



Visual assets are also used for a variety of purposes. A key theme centered around the use of imagery as a critical piece of storytelling, with 65 percent of respondents indicating that visuals were core to how their brand communicates and tells its story. Meanwhile, 60 percent of respondents also felt that visuals added excitement to content that helped capture attention and ensure engagement with their customers. Forty-six percent said that visual assets are also used to showcase products or innovations in a clear and quick manner, and more than half (52 percent) stated that visual assets aided in demystifying or explaining complex facts, issues or elements of their brand story or narrative.

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES OF INTEGRATING VISUAL AS PART OF THE CONTENT STRATEGY

Despite the clear importance of visual assets and the significant budget being allocated to the creation and acquisition of these assets, marketers are facing key obstacles and challenges in maximizing them to further engage their audiences and tell a cohesive, consistent story that will be the most impactful one possible.

Figure 5: Top Challenges to Maximizing Investments in Visual Media



Until this happens, justifying additional investment—and even the ability to get full ROI out of their current investment—in visual assets is out of reach. Other reasons include lacking technology to facilitate management and collaboration with assets as well as the inability to really understand the full investment in visual assets across the organization.

But let’s dig into the issue of raising the strategic importance of visual assets within the organization.

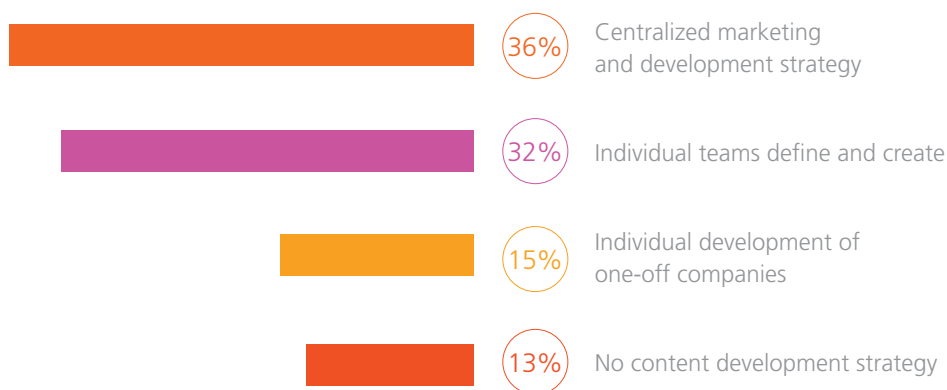
WHERE THE BREAKDOWN OCCURS: CONTENT STRATEGY AND ORGANIZATIONAL SILOS

A key piece of being able to develop a strong visual storytelling platform is the centralization of the overarching content development strategy. This is a structure in which a singular strategy defines the content and messaging that is created, and individual teams then develop content products to meet the expectations of the audiences—and channels—for which they are responsible. However, our survey indicates that just over one-third of marketers have achieved such a system.

Unfortunately, this leaves some 60 percent of marketers fending for themselves, with individual contributors defining their own content marketing strategies and establishing their own development cycles in a silo.

Thirty-two (32) percent of this group relies on individual teams to simply create content as it is needed in order to engage with a specific customer segment or group. All too often, this can create a vacuum within the organization where content is constantly being generated based on individual need (or whim), with little understanding of investments that may have already been made in the overall content itself or in key visual assets being leveraged to elevate the experience or engagement.

Figure 6: Content Development Strategy

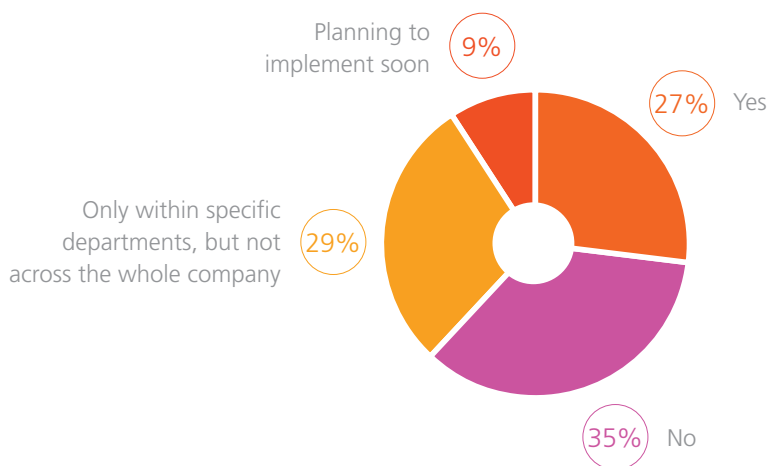


These silos are a reality for many organizations. In fact, they are a natural result of content production demands and the multi-channel, always-on engagement with the customer—across all internal departments, not just within marketing. When asked to identify the key stakeholders

and teams who regularly touch, use, manage or create visual assets, this concept was reinforced. The list included many familiar teams, including marketing, marketing communications, public relations, creative, web and social media teams. But notably, new voices like field sales, IT, engineering and HR were also included.

Most interesting in the stakeholder roundup is the involvement of outside resources—including web design and development agencies, advertising and marketing firms, and external partner and channel teams—that are now part of the content development and visual asset ecosystem.

Figure 7: Do You Currently Have a Process or System in Place to Aggregate, Catalogue and Manage All Visual Assets Across Your Entire Organization?



Although these stakeholders may not be accustomed to collaborating or sharing a holistic content strategy, it is the complexity of the network of stakeholders itself that demands it. Without it, the brand cannot bring storytelling to life in a way that is accessible and impactful to customers, internal content originators and partners alike.

WHERE THE BREAKDOWN OCCURS: CREATIVE ASSET PRODUCTION, ACCESS AND DISTRIBUTION

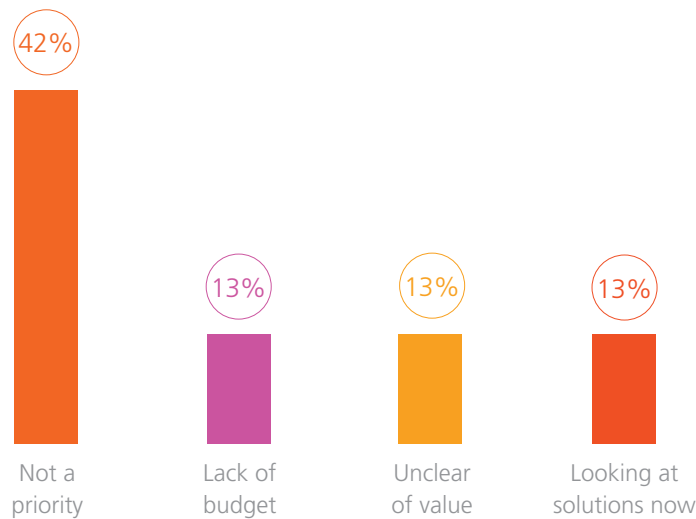
Core to the process of facilitating a centralized content strategy—and cohesive story in the marketplace—is the ability to automate the aggregation, accessibility and distribution of these critical assets across the entire content ecosystem. However, a full 35 percent of marketers surveyed indicate there is currently no process in place to aggregate, catalogue and manage visual assets. Some 29 percent admit that typically, visual asset sharing only occurs within specific departments and not across the entire company.

35 PERCENT OF MARKETERS SURVEYED INDICATE THERE IS CURRENTLY NO PROCESS IN PLACE TO AGGREGATE, CATALOGUE AND MANAGE VISUAL ASSETS.

Beyond connecting within an organization, only 23 percent of marketers have systems in place to share assets with internal teams as well as external stakeholders, including channel partners, vendors and agencies. Thirty-nine percent have no systems while 36 percent say that it depends on the partner or stakeholder.

The selective sharing of visual assets likely extends beyond graphics, videos and illustrations and impacts all other forms of content, representing an area of potential waste as teams invest in costly content development cycles within their protected silos. From a customer experience perspective, this can create fragmentation in brand vision and messaging, confusion in the marketplace and a disconnected experience. From an operational perspective, it creates waste in the form of duplicated assets and squandered budget dollars.

Figure 8: What's Stopping Centralization?



When asked why this system of selective integration is the norm, 40 percent of marketers indicated it was because of functional silos beyond the marketing team that make any level of unification difficult. Interestingly, the second most frequent answer is also one that likely poses a significant challenge: consolidation and unification of assets are simply too difficult to achieve.

While the process may be difficult, and while functional silos have further stymied the process, perhaps the greatest challenge facing marketers who are looking to centralize their visual asset repository is the changing face of marketing itself. The overwhelming majority of marketers (42 percent) believe that the top reason they have not embarked on any level of transformation in aggregating and consolidating their visual asset repository is that it is simply not a priority at this time.

When one considers the complexity and vast territory now impacted by the marketing machine, this is not a shocking answer. However, the significant portion of budgets being dedicated to the acquisition, design, management and ongoing use of visual assets and the leaps in investment that visual assets like photography and video will likely receive in the near future clearly demonstrate a risk in the continued de-prioritization of this strategic discussion.

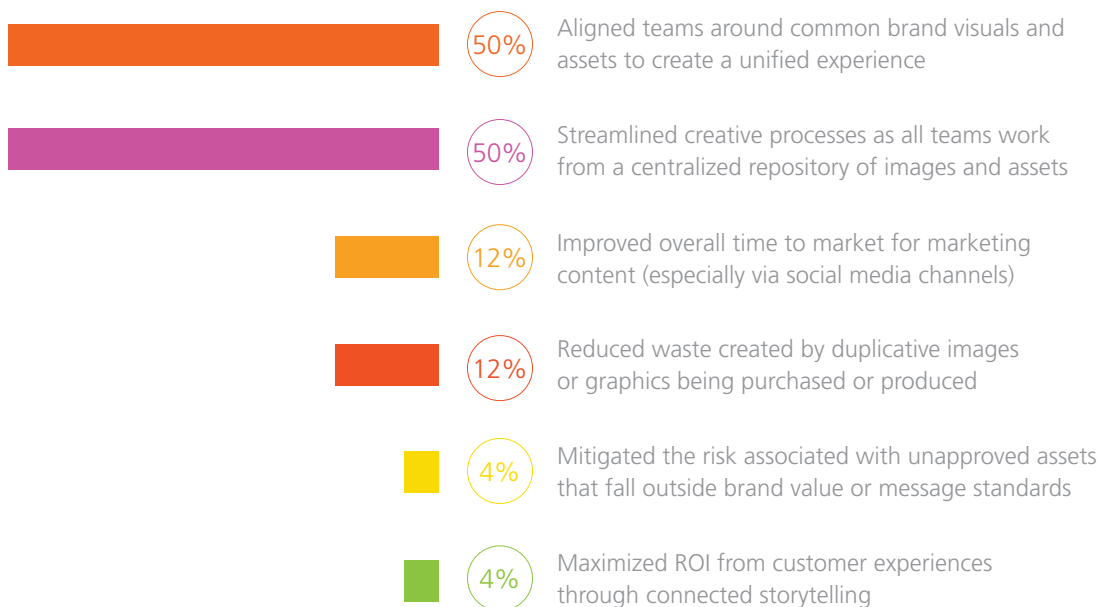
HOW CENTRALIZING VISUAL ASSETS PROVIDES AN ORGANIZATIONAL ADVANTAGE

Even though the majority of survey respondents revealed that visual assets were key in telling their brand story, 13 percent admitted that they were unclear of the connection between visual asset centralization and the impact it could have on the success of their marketing and content strategies. That lesson can be learned from those respondents who have already taken steps to establish processes and systems to aggregate, catalogue and manage visual assets across the organization.

While the just 27 percent of respondents have the centralized visual asset management system in place, 33 percent of this group says that their systems have helped to align teams around a common, unified experience that is powered by common visual assets and directions. Nearly one in four indicates that their system has actually helped to streamline the creative process as all teams across the organization are able to work from a centralized source of assets. A full 16 percent pointed to a reduction in cost as teams were now able to avoid duplicate costs from asset development and procurement.

What is important to note is that this centralization is not a new form of instituting the “brand police”—the overlords of brand conformity—as only 2 percent said that the primary benefit of a collectivized creative asset system was the mitigation of risk associated with unapproved brand assets. That said, systems for managing assets can mitigate risk by managing and displaying usage rights as a central point of reference for all those leveraging the assets—another message that still seems to allude senior marketers.

Figure 9: What Has Been the Greatest Business Impact That This Process or System Has Brought to the Organization?



Other key best practices and points of differentiation emerge as you look across the findings of only the respondents who have already aggregated and collectivized their visual asset repository. Most notably, those with a centralized repository seem more likely to have a centralized content marketing and development strategy that defines what content is created for specific audiences or campaigns and enables teams to develop content accordingly.

Figure 10: Visual Assets and Connected Strategies



This is just a further point of connection that demonstrates the importance of both a centralized content strategy and a centralized process for visual asset management to the overall success of visual storytelling efforts.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Marketing leaders have some significant challenges to face, most notably breaking down the internal silos that cripple collaboration, to begin to maximize the impact of visual asset investments. But mindset might be the greatest hurdle to overcome: We must shift away from the one-off campaign view of visual assets and embrace a more holistic and strategic dialogue around storytelling.

Three core mandates emerge thanks to the insights from best-practice leaders:

1. Establish a holistic, organizationally embraced content development strategy that recognizes the customer experience vision across all touchpoints and channels.
2. Prioritize around the customer: As customers demand access to more visually stimulating experiences, organizations must prioritize strategies that enable and empower critical stakeholders to nimbly access the content they need to craft the most relevant and rewarding experiences.
3. Measuring investment and return across the organization to truly understand the total connection between visual assets, content strategy and customer engagement

What this poll most readily reveals is the need to elevate the once-comfortable subject of photos and illustrations to a strategic-level dialogue that takes engagement, impact and collaboration into account. Brands must be able to engage with end consumers in a uniform and connected manner while watching both the top and bottom line. From the waste created to the impact on customer experience, visual assets can no longer be seen as the last item in a long list of marketing priorities or managed by a single team.

In the end, marketers must also remember that customers are demanding visual queues and experiences to help advance and enhance the buying journey. And the demand for imagery isn't just stemming from traditional marketing channels. Other internal stakeholders must be able to tell the brand story. And, ultimately, it will require a process for employment of visual assets that is embraced and shared across the organization—one that emphasizes collaboration and consistency—in order to truly capitalize on the value of every customer interaction. If done well, every event, engagement and interaction will drive home the brand's story and result in the impactful storytelling the marketing set out to create from the start.

SPONSOR CONTRIBUTION

BUILD YOUR VISUAL ASSET ECOSYSTEM



By Andrew Fingerman, CEO of PhotoShelter

You've told us that visual assets are more important than ever across your integrated marketing efforts, but we hear the same issues every time—there are too many roadblocks that stand in the way of elevating visual assets as part of the overall content strategy and development process. Silos (functional or political), competing priorities, lack of a photo/video team or individual content owner, and stacks of orphaned assets that have been hoarded within local hard drives, misnamed shared folders, Dropbox, third-party agencies or even email inboxes all gang up to make it feel downright impossible to take on such a project.

But the consequences of avoiding this fundamental piece of the marketing puzzle must not be overlooked. You waste time in the hours that your people spend tracking down image assets that are spread across various systems. You waste money in producing or purchasing new assets when older ones may be available for reuse. You waste opportunities to engage your audience when great assets that fit a trending social media topic cannot be found (or the usage rights are unclear). You miss out on brand exposure and sacrifice consistency in the marketplace as teams feel compelled to find and create their own assets.

While the issue may not feel like a top-five priority right now, the repercussions will only be magnified moving forward as content continues to build and build. The effectiveness of your marketing and visual storytelling will fall victim.

The silver lining?

There are lightweight systems that you can employ to better manage your visual assets, whatever your organization's unique workflow and set of internal stakeholders may be. Such solutions—now cloud-based and very powerful—do not require tech or IT integration, multiple layers of approvals or significant budget outlays. So despite your organizational hurdles, you can easily build a visual asset library and offer your team an effortless process to search, gain quick access to and seamlessly collaborate with your key visual assets. Libris by PhotoShelter is one such solution.

We've seen Libris help more than 100 leading brands get their visual content quickly organized and centralized, which results in massive efficiencies across the marketing effort. At price points that start out around \$5,000–\$6,000 annually with zero IT infrastructure required, a team can be up and running literally in minutes, and stakeholders can gain access to images from any location (with appropriate log-in credentials). Cutting-edge design, fast site performance and client-focused support make it easy to collect your most important assets and commit to start fresh from there.

Some other advantages include:

- **Control.** Grant permissions to view and download on an asset-by-asset or user-by-user basis. You can even set the file type and size at which the asset is downloaded or a date at which the access expires for a particular user or group of users.
- **Easy asset ingestion and searchability.** A strong platform can handle terabytes of data quickly and efficiently. It will also allow for uploading of accompanying metadata and editing of keywords to make the assets searchable for anyone who has permission to see them.
- **Team collaboration.** A raw set of selects from a photo or video shoot can be uploaded, and using a Lightbox feature, teams can weigh in on their favorites or make comments. The project owner can see these instantly, make final selections and re-upload the final copies, tagged as approved for use—all in one place.

What speaks better to a solution like this is a real-life case study, so let's consider the Baltimore Ravens. After their 2012 championship win, the Ravens were inundated with requests for imagery of the team and game. When other outlets could deliver images more efficiently, they would lose valuable traffic to their website and other online properties. Libris has allowed their digital marketing team to upload, approve and access photos virtually in real time (even during games). They can also quickly locate requested images and, with just a few clicks, automatically resize an image and send it off to media, sponsors and the social audience. It's been game-changing for the Ravens—and for more than 100 other clients who use our platform.

For more information on Libris, visit www.getlibris.com or give one of our business solutions consultants a call at 212.206.0808. Let us help you get back to creating some awesome visual stories!

AFFILIATE PARTNERS



PR NEWSWIRE

PR Newswire is the premier global provider of multimedia platforms that enable marketers, corporate communicators, sustainability officers, public affairs and investor relations officers to leverage content to engage with all of their key audiences. Having pioneered the commercial news distribution industry 60 years ago, PR Newswire provides end-to-end solutions to produce, optimize and target content—from rich media to online video and multimedia—and then distribute content and measure results across traditional, digital, mobile and social channels. Combining the world's largest multi-channel, multi-cultural content distribution and optimization network with comprehensive workflow tools and platforms, PR Newswire enables the world's enterprises to engage opportunity everywhere it exists. PR Newswire serves tens of thousands of clients from offices in the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia-Pacific, and it is a UBM plc company. To learn more, visit www.prnewswire.com.



QUALTRICS

For a long time, the only people with access to Qualtrics survey software were our closest friends and a bunch of Scott's MBA students. It was our research clients who pushed us to open up the system and gave us the feedback needed to make it both the easiest to use and most sophisticated research suite on the market. www.qualtrics.com.

ABOUT



CMO COUNCIL

The Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Council is the only global network of executives specifically dedicated to high-level knowledge exchange, thought leadership and personal relationship building among senior corporate marketing leaders and brand decision-makers across a wide range of global industries. The CMO Council's 9,000-plus members control more than \$400 billion in aggregated annual marketing expenditures and run complex, distributed marketing and sales operations worldwide. In total, the CMO Council and its strategic interest communities include more than 35,000 global executives in more than 110 countries covering multiple industries, segments and markets. Regional chapters and advisory boards are active in the Americas, Europe, Asia-Pacific, Middle East, India and Africa. The council's strategic interest groups include the Coalition to Leverage and Optimize Sales Effectiveness (CLOSE), Mobile Relationship Marketing (MRM) Strategies, LoyaltyLeaders.org, CMOCIOAlign.org, Marketing Supply Chain Institute, Customer Experience Board, Digital Marketing Performance Institute, GeoBranding Center and the Forum to Advance the Mobile Experience (FAME). For more information, visit the CMO Council at www.cmocouncil.org.



Libris enables organizations to tell their visual stories, offering the simplest visual asset management solution available. With 10 years in the cloud and more than 250 million assets managed, our cutting-edge software helps hundreds of top universities, pro sports teams, travel brands and organizations of all sizes easily organize, collaborate on and share their photos and videos. It's a powerful media library that will centralize your team's assets and change the way you communicate visually. Libris is a business unit of PhotoShelter and is based in New York, NY. For more information please visit www.getlibris.com.