Digital Asset Management
# Vendor Evaluation Guide

tenovos

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Vendor Evaluation Guide

Digital asset management (DAM) has been around for 25+ years now, so you'd be forgiven for thinking you know all there is to know about selecting a vendor. The industry has come a long way since then, and if your only exposure to DAM has been the legacy vendors, you're in for an exciting journey as you evaluate new platforms.

This guide is designed to help you answer a few questions leading up to your selection process so you can choose the vendor that's right for you. If you're just here to learn more about vendors and how you should approach the selection process, skip ahead to chapter 2. If you're new to the space and want to make sure DAM is right for you, then keep reading!
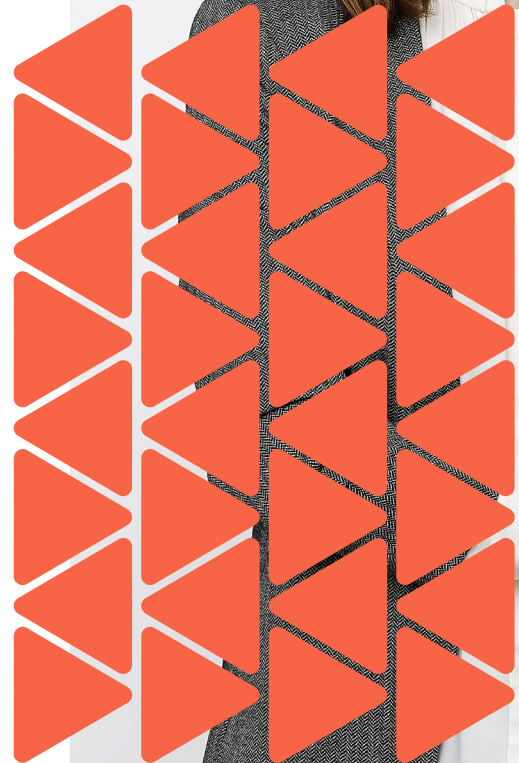
Content

Chapter 1: Do I Need a Digital Asset Management Platform?

The chances are pretty good you're evaluating DAM platforms for one of the following reasons:

Boost productivity and efficiency
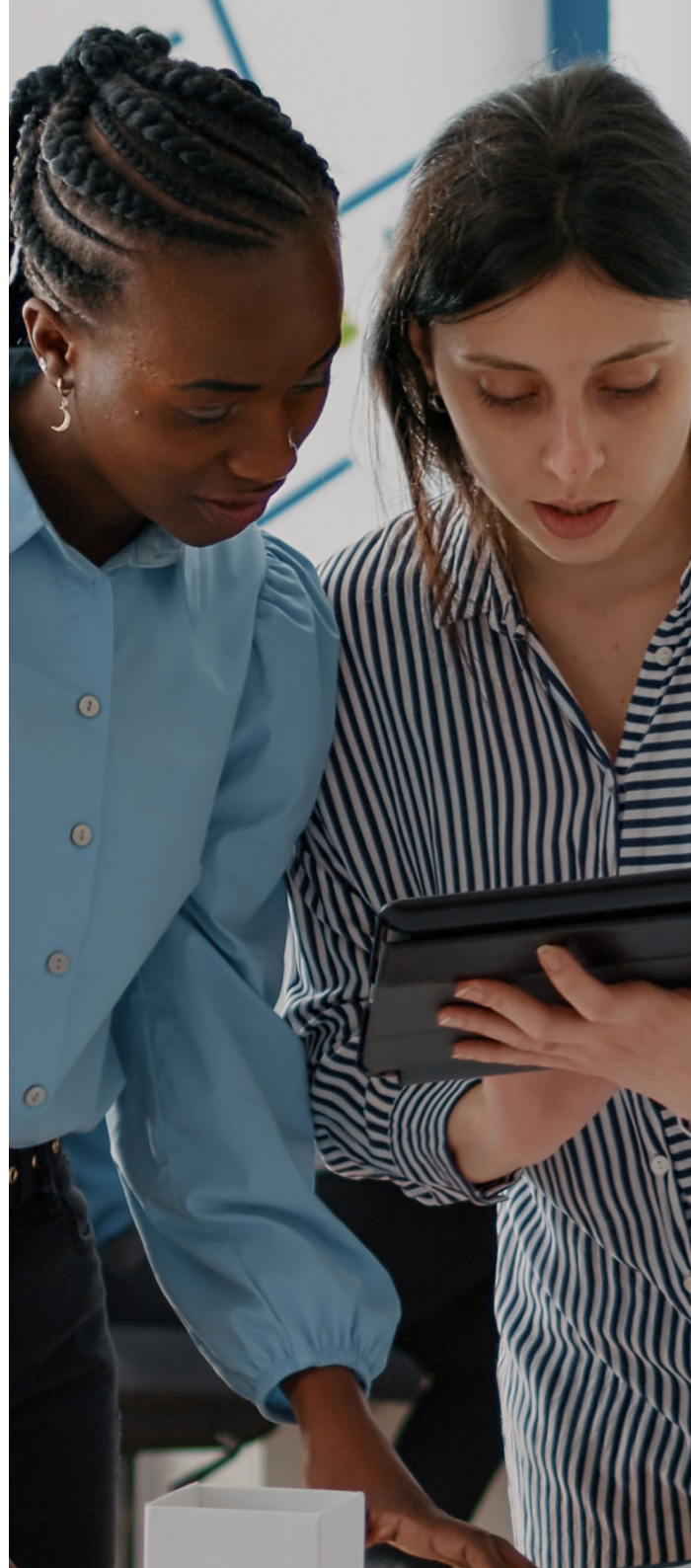
Improve brand integrity

Streamline content distribution

Track your content usage

Honestly, you may not need a DAM platform to achieve these things. Productivity gains can be realized in a number of ways.

So, why DAM?

Simply put, DAM systems allow you to manage your creative assets at a scale not possible through other tools. Modern DAMs like Tenovos go even further, facilitating workflows and helping you push content to your various marketing channels. If you're part of a global enterprise with multiple teams that work together on creative assets, then you're looking in the right place for help. Modern digital asset management platforms empower you by:

- Centralizing large volumes of assets and content in one place

- Organizing content and using metadata structures to make it searchable and accessible to the right users

- Managing asset rights and user permissions so the right content goes to the right people, in the right places

- Integrating with your tech stack to seamlessly share content and data across systems

- Orchestrating creative workflows and review processes across departments, teams, and sometimes organizations (like agencies and retail partners)

- Tracking content both internally and externally so you know where your assets are being used

- Distributing and publishing your content to the partners, places and channels it needs to go

**Now, ask yourself:** does this sound like the kind of system that's going to ease my pain?

If the answer is yes, keep reading and we'll help you choose the right DAM vendor for your business.

Chapter 2: What's in a DAM? Legacy vs. Modern Digital Asset Management

As we stated in the previous chapter, DAM systems have come a long way over the last 25 years. There remains a number of vendors from the early days of DAM that have tried to keep up with the times through acquisitions. However, acquiring technology doesn't make you an expert. In a space like digital asset management, sometimes the oldest name isn't necessarily the best one.

In this chapter we're going to break down some of the core functionalities that every DAM needs in today's fast-moving digital world. Then, we'll outline some of the key differences between legacy and modern DAMs, so you can choose the right platform for your business.
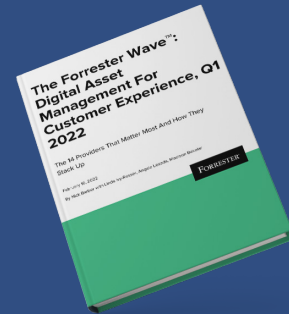
Interpreting the Forrester Wave

In 2022, Forrester published its wave on Digital Asset Management for Customer Experience. In it the firm evaluates vendors based on a number of essential criteria.

This report can be a lot to take in at once, so we published a blog to help buyers like you interpret the Wave in order to make the best choice for their business.

Read the blog

Setting Table Stakes: Key Features in Digital Asset Management

If you're looking for a DAM vendor today, it's because you have a pretty well-defined set of challenges with your content and creative assets. Any vendor you evaluate should have these basic features to address those challenges:

Content Management

- Create & ingest content
- Content sharing between users
- Manage & categorize content
- AI-driven content tagging and metadata application
- AI image recognition
- Store / archive content
- Advanced content search (filters, keywords)
- Support metadata structures, tags and keywords
- User-based content permissions
- Analytics & reporting on in-DAM content usage

Workflows

- Workflow automation for asset review and approvals
- In-system content mark-up/ notation for reviews
- System notifications for users
- Workflow rules and processes
  - Note: you'll often see these built through coding and with IT involvement, which make it hard to update afterwards

System, Infrastructure & Integrations

- Creative suite integrations
- Cloud-first and Cloud-native
- Role-based user interface
- Single sign-on (SSO)
- Mobile compatible

The previous list has been true of DAM platforms for a decade, if not longer than that. Every DAM on the market will have these, or some variation of these, features, and it will be up to you to evaluate one against the other to see which you prefer. However, the modern DAMs that have come forward in the last few years are built differently, and include some new functionalities not found in legacy systems. These may include:

- **Built-in global rights management capabilities**
- **Cloud-native**
- **Native, or integrated, content delivery networks (CDNs)**
- **Open API to fully integrate with your enterprise tech stack**
  - **Product Information Management (PIM) integration**
  - **Content Management System (CMS) integration**
- **Workflow software integrations**
- **And more**
- **Role-based user interface**
- **User-optimized experience to lessen training requirements**
- **Configurable workflows with no IT or coding requirements (all done through the system by users)**
- **Content recall from channels**
- **Tools and templates to personalize dynamic content by channel (social, web, etc)**
- **Adheres to the MACH principles**
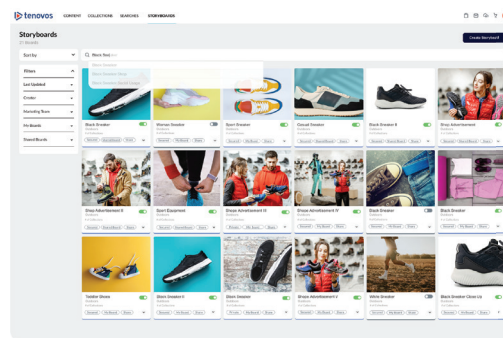
What Is the
MACH Alliance?

The MACH Alliance is a non-profit organization on a mission to "future proof enterprise technology and propel current and future digital experiences."

The group advocates for an open and best-of-breed enterprise technology ecosystem, one that is "agile, nimble and always up to date."

The idea is relatively straightforward. According to its website, MACH technologies are:

Microservices based: Software built with 'modular' services or functionalities to increase flexibility, rather than large code blocks with sometimes unnecessary features.

API-first: Software that focuses on its core purpose, while providing ways to connect to other essential tools in the tech stack.

Cloud-native: SaaS that leverages the cloud, beyond storage and hosting, including elastic scaling and automatically updating.

Headless: Software that does not have a front end, and can be integrated with other technologies into a front-end application in order to create a custom system.

Learn more about the MACH Alliance:

Read the blog

Multi-product vs. DAM-only Solutions

Some of the vendors you're evaluating may offer their DAM as part of a larger suite of products, or as one product within a long line of others. Adobe, for example, sells Adobe Experience Manager Assets alongside its more popular (and prioritized) Creative Suite. They aren't the only ones. OpenText DAM is only one of many other software products sold by the company.

Many DAMs are packaged alongside creative suites, other media asset management tools, and a variety of martech solutions. This comes with its benefits, and also its drawbacks.
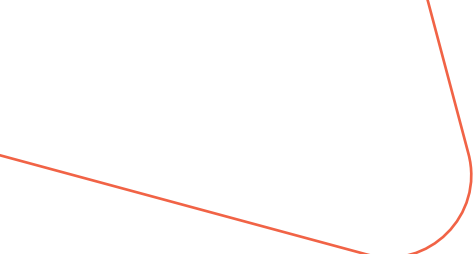
You may hear people say these large solutions are great because these companies have near unlimited resources to develop the product. And while this is a well-perceived benefit, it comes with significant risk. As a

DAM buyer, you could find yourself at the mercy of a software development schedule that does not prioritize your specific needs.

For example, if a creative suite is more important to the company's bottom line, that solution could receive many more resources (money and dev cycles) to keep it up to date.

That could leave the DAM portion of the suite stagnant in terms of its development, and those users left waiting countless months for even the most basic upgrades. A company's resources, no matter how unlimited they are, are of no use to the buyer who doesn't see any of that come their way.

Another perceived value of these suite solutions is that they create a single ecosystem for all of your technology. But once again, this provides challenges:

- **You're often buying software as part of the suite that you'll never use, which is a waste of your resources.**

- **It's not true that these suites natively integrate better with one another than an outside platform connecting into the suite. In reality, DAMs that have a purpose-built, optimized integration with a certain technology will often provide a better user experience.**

- **You can easily find yourself stuck within a massive contract and software you can't escape from, because all of your technology is dependent on that suite. That means you're unable to take**

advantage of more innovative technologies if you want to. In effect, it can limit your choice and ability to choose the best system for your needs.

None of these are outright reasons to ignore the larger, multi-product DAM vendors on the market. But these are important factors to consider when evaluating the DAM that is right for you.

The other type of vendor you'll run into are the **DAM-only solutions.**

Full disclosure, these are companies like Tenovos, whose sole purpose is to build and deliver the best, most innovative DAM solution possible to our customers.

The benefits of these types of solutions are clear.

- Innovation is DAM-focused

- Onboarding takes weeks, not months

- More affordable than multi-product options

- Tech is more usable without major customizations during deployment

- Not tied to one vendor to support your martech ecosystem

- Easier to use versus complex systems

- Motivated to innovate

- Microservices-based (pay for what you need)

However, just like the multi-software type vendors, there are possible negatives. The DAM-only vendors tend to be a little smaller in size, meaning fewer resources. They're also often forward-looking, aiming to build the best DAM for tomorrow. This can mean split development between features you use today versus the ones that will bring you value in the future; delays not everyone wants to deal with.

Ultimately the question comes down to whether you want a DAM that's part of a larger offering, and the security that comes with those larger organizations, or if you'd rather purchase the best-in-class and innovative, yet smaller, DAMs that deliver the best experience at the cost of some stability in terms of roadmap.

With that said, let's move on to your goals.

Chapter 3: Selecting the Right Vendor

By now you've had a chance to think about what a DAM can do for your organization, and to debate internally the different types of vendors you could select from. But before you go any further, it's important to define exactly what your goals are for this platform you're about to buy.

DAM Committee, Assemble!

If you haven't already, now is the time to stop and gather your DAM Committee. A DAM Committee is a group of stakeholders within your organization who are either going to use the DAM, or be part of its implementation/maintenance. These team representatives will play a vital role in selecting your DAM, because without their buy-in you will not get strong user adoption of the system, and it will fail.

How do you get buy-in? A common best practice is to fill out a project brief that outlines key requirements of your new DAM.

DAM Project Brief

No successful DAM implementation happens on its own. It takes the collected effort of a group of stakeholders to align on priorities and requirements for the DAM before vendors are evaluated, in order to ensure the selected platform meets the needs of the business.

Don't have a project brief handy or know where to start? Don't worry, we've built one for you.

Download the project brief

With your project brief completed, you'll have a list of priorities that any DAM vendor is going to have to meet to be considered for your project. It sounds straightforward, but this one step is one of the most common oversights during the evaluation process, which can cause a massive waste of resources and time. Not to mention, it looks bad on the team responsible for selecting the DAM in the first place.

Instead, let this process be a career boost for you by answering some key questions at the outset, and buying a DAM platform guaranteed to bring value to the organization. Some things you might consider are:
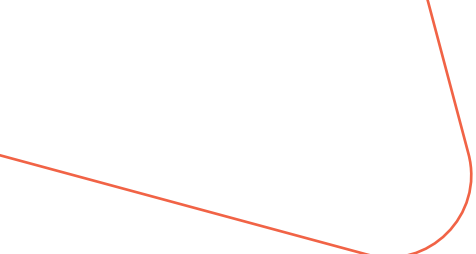
Archives vs. Activation

What's your priority for the DAM? If you simply need a place to put your content and organize it, that's ok. Many traditional DAMs are excellent content archives… but that might be as far as they go.

Instead, if you're looking for a DAM to help you push content to the right people and places, 'activate it' (publish) to your social channels, or even surface insights into what assets are working the best for you, then identifying that early is going to eliminate a lot of vendors from your search.

Productivity

Digital asset management platforms can boost productivity in a number of ways:

- Better content search saves time looking for content, promoting content reuse

- Metadata and keyword tags makes finding content easy

- Workflows and automation streamlines process

- Integrated systems keeps your team in one system, rather than jumping through a whole suite of software

Take the time to think about how your team's productivity will be boosted the most by the DAM, and prioritize those types of features in your evaluation. Or, if productivity for your creative team isn't important to you, then make sure whatever DAM you purchase facilitates processes that won't hamper productivity instead!

Innovation & Roadmap

This sounds like a no-brainer, but it's worth some consideration. In the previous chapter we discussed how different vendors focus product development in different areas and ways. Specifically, we explored innovative, build-for-tomorrow development versus the more safe approach of improving existing features. So, here's where you decide what's important to you.

Most companies will say innovation 100% of the time, but then, what does that innovation look like? Is it better integration, is it more exciting ways to activate content, or maybe content tracking across social channels? Identify some key areas you'd like to see improvements in, that you believe will be important to your business in the future. Then, make sure you address those during product roadmap discussions with your vendors during the selection process. The last thing you want is to select a vendor whose vision of the future is the opposite direction of where your team is going.

Internal vs. External Users

Who is going to be in your DAM? Is your DAM purely for internal teams to store, access and manage their assets? Or, are you making content available to external parties, like retail partners or agencies?

If the latter, there are certain important requirements you'll need to evaluate (or your IT team might have a freak out). Things like user access management and platform security jump to the fore. But then, your marketing team is also going to ask how you protect branded assets when sharing externally, and what, if any, abilities external users have to manipulate content within the DAM. Your DAM managers might worry about maintaining organization and metadata processes when third-parties are involved, too. These are all questions that you can ask vendors during the selection process, but you'll know which one to ask if you take the time to identify these priorities.

You see now why filling out the project brief, alongside your DAM Committee, is such an important step in the vendor selection process. Having a clear understanding of goals and priorities for this project, and buy-in on the selected vendor as a result, is essential to successful implementation of your DAM.
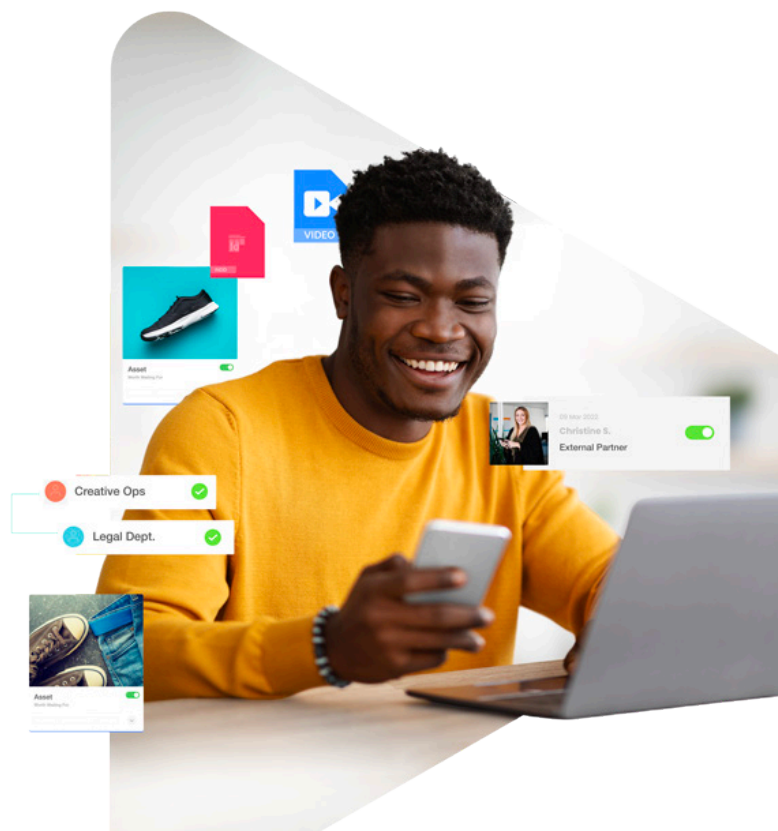
Chapter 4: Understanding the Buying Process

Let's start this chapter by acknowledging every company has their own process for buying software. Just like no two vendors are the same, no two buyers are, either. With that said, there are some common themes we can share to help set your expectations and, ideally, give you some ideas to improve your selection.
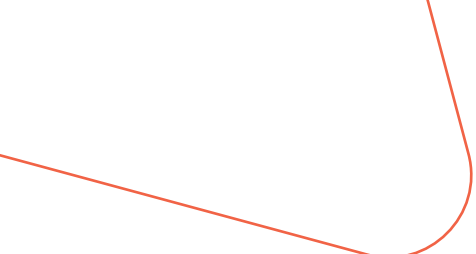
Where do I start?
The short answer is that you already have. Research is the best way to get started in a vendor selection process. Many buyers will start by looking to the large analyst firms like Forrester to get an idea of the vendor landscape, and see what the experts have to say about it.

Download the Forrester Wave for Customer Experience, 2022 report.

Download Now

In 2022, Forrester published their Wave for Customer Experience, in which Tenovos was named along with other vendors and evaluated against certain analyst-defined criteria. This report has a lot of value for buyers who want to understand what's happening in the market. But they don't always tell a complete story. If you've read the Wave and want insights into how you can best interpret the report, you can read our blog on Interpreting the Forrester Wave.

You can also use Google to pull up some of the most common vendors. Just take the time to go past the first page of results. The first page for DAM searches is dominated by legacy DAMs that have been in the market for at least a decade. You could miss out on important vendors if you rely solely on this method of research.

While you're conducting your research, you should leverage the project brief we discussed earlier in this guide to start working out your RFP questionnaire. We've built a template you can use if you don't want to make your own, as well.

Download the DAM RFP Template

Download Now

How long does it take?

Vendor selections can take anywhere from a month for smaller organizations to six months or even a year for larger enterprise companies. It's a long process due to the often large sums of money that are involved, the technical evaluations that need to be done to ensure compatibility with existing technologies, security evaluations, and the list goes on.

What does this mean for you?

Go into this process with your eyes open and set clear expectations with your stakeholders on the timeline. You don't want to rush into buying a DAM because they can be hard to change down the road, especially if you're contracted with a large suite-type vendor.

You can also get ahead of this if you know ahead of time what types of requirements your stakeholders will have during the evaluation phase. For example, you may ask any vendor up front to provide their security documentation, API specifications, and user management functionality outlines in order to satisfy your internal IT team that their requirements will be met. You want to avoid multiple demonstrations, back and forth with each vendor, and so on.

Don't forget to ask your vendors about implementation timelines. If your review process takes six months, but you have another six months of implementation, that could be too long for you and should eliminate vendors early in the process.

What should I expect to pay?

There are different business models for digital asset management. You may run into the following cost models and additional charges, though this list is not exhaustive:

- Total # of users

- Total users by type (power users vs. consumer users, for example)

- Pricing based on number of concurrent users

- Total number of nodes (where a node supports X concurrent users)

- Additional charges for API access (more cost per integration)

- Additional charges based on volume of assets being stored

- Additional services/features

- Managed implementation

Vendor Selection: How Strong Vendors Will Support Your Process

Digital asset management vendors know the process of selecting a new DAM can be challenging. That's why the best, or strongest vendors exhibit a few key behaviors that build trust with buyers throughout this process.

Willingness to Show How the Product Works for You

Every vendor will offer you a demo of the product. But some vendors aren't comfortable really letting you see how the platform works. You'll notice things like jumping between windows rather than navigating through the platform during the demo, or having to stay 'on the rails' during the demo and not being able to show/address questions directly in the platform as they come up.

These shouldn't always be deal breakers for you, but should raise a flag as something you'll want to follow up on. Why couldn't we see that feature in action? Don't be afraid to ask those questions, and ensure you have a good understanding of how the software works before you assume its functionality will meet your needs.

You should also expect a vendor to show you how the DAM is going to work for you, in your specific context. If the DAM is as flexible as they say, they should be able to pull in some of your assets to showcase, or otherwise tailor the demo and environment to what you would see as a user. If the vendor is really listening to you, then they should be able to show you (not just tell you) how their product is going to address your pain.

Proactivity in Addressing Your Concerns

Seasoned vendors know what it takes to get a new DAM approved internally. They should be able to address a lot of internal concerns, such as security and user management from an IT perspective, up front rather than wait for you to ask for it. They should also be able and willing to address those concerns directly with the stakeholder groups that have them.

The best vendors are going to help you sell the platform internally and gain buy-in, not force you to do all the work. This proactive approach is a positive indication of what you can expect from their customer teams after the platform is live.

Transparency on Roadmap

Not every vendor is going to show you the entirety of their product roadmap, but you should have some idea from them what to expect in terms of development over the coming months to year. Don't expect every roadmap item to be on there, but you want a vendor who can tell you that in Q3, you'll be getting that new feature you were told about during the sales process. Or that improvements are coming to reliability in December, which will address some of your concerns.

It's rare to find a DAM platform that has every feature you're looking for. But if you can find a vendor willing to work with you, and be transparent about the development of the product, they'll make for a good partner as your relationship grows over the term of the contract, and beyond.

Customer References

This sounds like another no-brainer, but customer references are vitally important when selecting any software, let alone a DAM. This is a large invest-ment for your company in time and re-sources, and the platform is going to be an important piece of your tech stack. Don't take chances.

Good vendors will be able to provide you the references you're looking for, either from clients in your space or with similar use cases. Now, don't expect to be able to pick from their website customer list like you would a menu at a fast food restaurant... enterprise level references don't really work that way. But you should be able to get exciting references from the vendor without any struggle.

Strategic Support

Digital asset management is complicated. New innovations in the space are adding new layers to existing metadata and taxonomy strategies, for example, while bringing in whole new considerations like content publishing and tracking to think about. You should be able to rely on DAM vendors for support in terms of developing strategies that will work for your business. Good vendors will walk you through the steps needed to not only get up and running with a DAM, but optimize that DAM using best practices proven to drive results.

Buying Your Next DAM

The DAM selection process can be long and sometimes difficult, but if you follow the guidance in this book you should find yourself with a platform that meets the needs of your organization as a whole, and a vendor that is transparent and positive to work with.

If you'd like help kicking off your RFP process, download our RFP template to get started. And if you'd like to learn more about Tenovos and how we stack up against some of the other vendors out there, please visit our website at www.tenovos.com