

Sesame Workshop employs on demand digital asset management to further its mission.

Overview

■ Challenge

The limitations of its digital asset management system impeded Sesame Workshop in its efforts to maximize partnership and revenue opportunities—which support its mission to create innovative and engaging content that maximizes the educational power of media to help all children reach their highest potential.

■ Why become on demand?

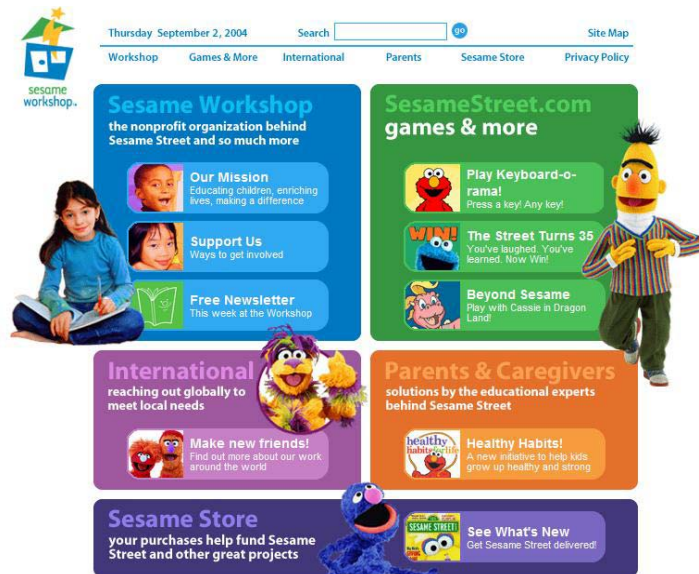
For the Workshop to become more responsive to licensing opportunities, its digital asset management systems had to provide strong support for decision-making. Ambitious growth plans made the ability to ramp up capacity key. To stay focused on its mission, the Workshop sought to avoid the expense of building and managing a large-scale system.

■ Solution

The Workshop turned to IBM for a fully integrated digital content management system—delivered as a service over the network—that makes content instantly accessible. Usage-based pricing enables the Workshop to focus resources on its mission.

■ Key Benefits

- Streamlined asset management workflow expected to shorten the content creation/distribution cycle by more than 50%.



Founded in 1968, Sesame Workshop has grown to provide children's programming in 120 countries through 20 region-specific co-productions of Sesame Street.

Sesame Workshop (the Workshop) is a nonprofit educational organization making a meaningful difference in children's lives around the world. Founded in 1968, the Workshop (www.sesameworkshop.org) changed television forever with the legendary Sesame Street. Today, the Workshop continues to innovate on behalf of children in 120 countries, using its proprietary research methodology to ensure its programs and products are engaging and enriching. The Workshop is behind award-winning programs like Dragon Tales and Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat and ground breaking multi-media productions in South Africa, Egypt

“IBM and its Business Partners are delivering to us one of the most complete systems we have seen. The new technology will integrate with what we have already and will allow us to manage our content in open-standards-based formats and provide on demand access for ourselves and our partners.”

– Sherra Pierre, Vice President of Information Systems, Sesame Workshop

On Demand Business Benefits

- Streamlined asset management workflow expected to shorten the content creation/distribution cycle by more than 50%.
- Efficient digital distribution expected to lower shipping costs by more than 60%.
- Centralized asset repository expected to reduce content duplication costs by more than 30%.
- Improved responsiveness to partner inquiries leads to more mission-based opportunities realized.
- Integration of metadata improves ability to target offerings globally.
- Leveraging IBM's software-as-a-service model eliminates upfront hardware and software licensing costs and promotes efficient staff resource allocation.

and Russia. These are among many Workshop endeavors recognized for their deep understanding of children's development needs and the most effective ways to address them.

Like the media industry in general, the Workshop has faced both increased competition and a growing array of opportunities. With the number of competing content providers on the rise, it has never been more important for the organization to generate new, fresh programming to maximize its audience and support its mission. That's where the opportunities come in. As a nonprofit educational organization, the Workshop's vitality depends on its ability to fully leverage its extensive content portfolio and its global brand to support its international projects. Along with the growing number of content outlets has come a commensurate increase in worldwide partnering opportunities. In a typical example, other content providers may approach the Workshop about developing a series of books, videos or games featuring Sesame Street characters, some or all of which would repurpose existing digital assets such as images and video segments. These proposed materials may also relate to a specific theme, such as safety, outer space, nutrition or the letter "E." To fully capitalize on these partnering opportunities, the Workshop needs the ability to look into its base of digital assets and get a clear picture of what it has that fits the partner's criteria. Equally important is the Workshop's ability to respond to partners' inquiries by facilitating the review of these materials *before* licensing agreements are struck. Assets that are cataloged, gathered and presented in an optimal way make it more convenient for partners to access them—resulting in faster time to market for the products and realization of opportunities.

Slowed by fragmented infrastructure

The Workshop, with 36 years of content across a variety of media, saw its existing digital asset management infrastructure as a potential impediment to long-term success. Content was stored on media islands across the organization. Video sat on tapes, encoded with and stored on proprietary technology. Artwork sat on disks and desktops. To generate a proposal in response to a partner's idea, staff had to confer with many different divisions within the organization, including the technical operations group (which controls the content library), research (which drives creative content for all brands) and talent specialists (who control contractual issues such as residual payment requirements). Because prospective business partners had a limited ability to view content online, they generally received it on CDs and DVDs via parcel delivery. This made it challenging for the Workshop to optimize its procedures.

“If you can connect critical information to your digital assets—beyond just size, format and type—you have the opportunity to optimize the way you leverage those assets.”

– Sherra Pierre

After assessing the situation, the Workshop formulated a two-part vision for improving its digital library. The first and most basic element of its vision was to tackle the issue of fragmented asset storage by establishing a single virtual repository for content of all types. The simple rationale was that by spending less time locating assets, the Workshop could spend more time creating. But providing seamless access was just a starting point. The Workshop also envisioned a more far-reaching digital asset management solution built on end-to-end process integration from the start of the cycle (content creation) through the partner engagement process all the way through the secure fulfillment of content. The key to this expanded vision was the interweaving of asset information into the identification framework that would allow the Workshop to make more informed decisions through all phases of the asset management process. Consider, for example, a partner's request for content on a particular subject, such as the character Grover. The Workshop could not only aggregate all the assets that fit this criterion, but also analyze them by curriculum goal (such as counting) and by geographic region. The system would also support the business side of decision-making by providing a view of the underlying rights associated with each asset as well as data on which media—for instance, books, videos, toys—have most often incorporated this content. This vast improvement in access would not only support strategic decision-making and improve speed to market, but also provide proactive, tactical project support by facilitating the creation of project plans and presentations.

To create a truly integrated system, the Workshop also saw the need to address the “bookends” on each end of the asset management process—content creation and distribution. On the content creation side, its vision called for a retooling of this process, encoding the content during the initial phase to allow for more efficient and tightly integrated asset management. On the distribution side, which was the genesis of the entire project, the Workshop sought to give partners the ability to not only search and view its content library using advanced indexing tools, but also enable various self-service capabilities, such as contracting. Rounding out the distribution was the need for tight security to protect the assets from unauthorized use, and strong support for open standards to keep the system flexible.

Pulling together a complex solution

As she moved to make this vision a reality, VP of Information Systems Sherra Pierre operated with two bedrock assumptions—first, that the solution would require a range of applications and technologies, and second, that since integrating and managing these technologies would exact a heavy toll on her department's limited resources, third-party hosting was the way to go. After evaluating numerous point-solution providers, Pierre selected IBM. “IBM is unique in its ability to not only deliver all the elements we would need, but also serve as the overall integrator,” says Pierre. “Its depth and flexibility as a provider puts IBM in a class by itself.” This flexibility is

Key Components

Software

- IBM DB2® Universal Database™
- IBM DB2 Content Manager
- Ancept Media Server
- Telestream Flip Factory

Servers

- IBM eServer™ xSeries®
- IBM TotalStorage® 7133 Serial Disk System

Services

- IBM Global Services e-business Hosting™
- IBM Digital Content Management Service

Business Partners

- Ancept, Inc.
 - Telestream
-

embodied in the new system's hosted platform—the IBM Digital Content Management Service—which enables the Workshop to pay only for the services it uses, and to avoid upfront equipment and software licensing costs. Running on IBM eServer xSeries servers, the system stores the Workshop's digital assets on an IBM TotalStorage disk system. IBM DB2 Universal Database and IBM DB2 Content Manager manage the assets and underlying metadata. Elements from IBM Business Partners were also critical, including Ancept's Media Server and Telestream's Flip Factory transcoding tool.

The solution has enabled the Workshop to fully transform its asset management process, and with it the foundation of its business model. A redesigned workflow has shortened the cycle from content creation to digital distribution by more than half, with the immediate benefit of faster time to market with new offerings. Top-line performance is further enhanced by the solution's flexible cataloging and distribution capabilities, which encourage a richer stream of partnering opportunities. Improved efficiency will also benefit the Workshop for years to come. For instance, since

many assets will no longer need to be distributed by courier, shipping costs will be reduced. More strategically, the Workshop's ability to leverage the knowledge embedded in its asset portfolio enables it to optimize its offerings within specific geographic regions, increasing partnering opportunities and—most importantly—furthering the company's mission of using the power of media to help children reach their highest potential. With the Workshop's sights set on an increased number of international projects, Pierre saw the choice of a utility-based delivery model as ideal to support that work while staying focused on the mission. "With the utility model, I don't have to think about managing our technology for the future," says Pierre. "The fact that IBM has accountability for that lets us focus on the best ways to meet the ever changing needs of children everywhere."

For more information

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