

CAMPUS TECHNOLOGY

Digital Asset Management

Cashing In

- By Matt Villano
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Last year, higher education institutions flocked to digital asset management systems to keep data straight. This year, they're using the tools to drive new revenue streams.



TO SAY THE AMERICAN ECONOMY is in a precarious mode would be the understatement of the century. Banks have foundered, American industry is looking for federal bailouts, and belts are tightening everywhere.

Not surprisingly, higher education officials at private institutions are wondering which students will be able to afford ever-escalating tuitions. Public school and community college administrators worry about affording the construction of new facilities for burgeoning enrollments as they pick up the runoff from independent institutions and prepare for laid-off workers looking to retool for new careers. Now more than ever, it seems, colleges and universities are desperate to find new revenue streams quickly. But some-- including **Cornell University** (NY), **Northwestern University** (IL), and **Arizona State University**-- already have. They're uncovering dollars via the digital asset management (DAM) systems they rolled out just months or years ago.

The programs at these schools are diverse, but they all capitalize on DAM. Theresa Regli, principal analyst for [CMS Watch](#), a Maryland-based market research firm that covers content-oriented technologies, says that while this approach may fly in the face of the traditionally open philosophy of higher education, it has proven to be a successful strategy for bolstering revenue at a time when coffers are running low.



THE CORNELL UNIVERSITY Photo Image Library has allowed the Photography department to become a profit center for the school, boasts Corey Chimko, digital resources coordinator.

"In these tough times, nobody can argue with innovative approaches that help colleges and universities make money," says Regli. "Whether you're charging for streaming course content or

you're selling something else, doing anything to increase profits is probably a good thing."

Will Shoot for Money

Some schools are capitalizing on what they already have in place. At Cornell University, for instance, where each year photographers affiliated with the Communications department shoot about 45,000 high-resolution photos of academics and research, campus life, and special exhibits and events, officials have created the [University Photo Image Library](#), a small-scale stock photo agency from which any number of internal and external customers can order images for a fee.

According to Corey Chimko, digital resources coordinator for the University Photography department, the initiative is seen as a "cost-recovery" strategy; a way to add cash to school coffers on a regular basis. While Chimko declined to share exactly what kind of income the system has realized to date, he notes that the department handles roughly 1,300 photography jobs each year, and that revenue generated from these sales can reach into the thousands of dollars in busier months.

"This system has allowed us to become a profit center," he says, noting that some orders have come in from as far away as Japan and England. "The revenue we generate goes back into providing the services that we do for the university."

The two-year-old image library combines 4 or 5 terabytes of storage with DAM technology and a basic eCommerce engine, both from [NetXposure](#). Any time school photographers shoot images for outlets such as the campus calendar, the alumni magazine, or the campus newspaper, Chimko and his colleagues tag the raw images with metadata, create low-resolution versions of these images and drop the thumbnails directly into the data repository. With this information, customers from inside and outside the university can browse the repository and search for photos with different keywords. From a selection of images, users choose the items they want, and the mode by which they want the images delivered (either in print or a variety of electronic formats). From there, the eCommerce engine works like a standard online shopping cart: It provides prices, collects payment information, and submits each order online.

Still, the system isn't entirely automated. Chimko says every order is vetted by a post-production person who takes the raw images and prepares them in the manner each customer requests. While this step might seem antiquated to some, Chimko insists the process enables the university to hold on to the raw images itself, and retain copyrights for those images indefinitely.

"We didn't want to just give out raw files, because in that scenario, we wouldn't have control over what someone is going to do with that file," he says. "In order to maintain quality, we wanted to maintain an intermediate stage where we have final say."

Cornell has been intelligently exploiting the success of the library, and also has big plans for the next 12 to 24 months. During the 2007 holiday season, the [Photography department](#) opened an online store offering greeting cards, postcards, and journals that feature archived images. And the department has started using the service to offer promotions around student graduation portraits and reunion photos-- promotions that enable students and alumni to order as many images as they wish. Chimko says early indicators suggest the store was a hit among holiday shoppers-- an encouraging

sign for increasing the number of product offerings in the coming years.

DAMDOLLARS

Based upon the success of **Cornell University's** (NY) image library, the university has opened an online store serving up greeting cards, postcards, and journals that feature archived images. The Photography department is using the library to offer promotions around student graduation portraits and reunion photos.

Lectures for Dollars

At the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University, officials at the Prosthetics-Orthotics Center (NUPOC) have capitalized on different kinds of digital assets: online course materials. Since 2006, the school has relied on Mediasite from [Sonic Foundry](#) to capture and deliver lecture content to students and faculty in its blended distance learning program. In September, however, the NUPOC program began to make this same material available to a group of select users-- for a fee.

The initiative is an integral focus of the brand-new NUPOC Alumni Association. Jodi Fox, NUPOC's director of distance learning, says the endeavor enables alumni and their employers to pay for ondemand access to web-based versions of lectures, presentations, and a number of other multimedia offerings. Instead of charging these users per download, the school charges annual membership fees that range from \$50 (for medical residents) to \$625 (for organizations of up to nine users).

"My idea was to add something very specific to our program, where people can connect with each other and provide this content," says Fox, who was hired specifically to run the NUPOC's distance learning program. "To me, it's not about making a million dollars, but instead about offsetting some of the costs of the program, supporting new technology initiatives, and being able to offer great things to people in the prosthetics/orthotics industry."

Currently, the program works like most on-demand web services: Once members sign up, they log on to a website and can access lecture and online course content as they wish. Fox says she employs a handful of helpers who are available "at all hours of the day and night" to support users on the system. She adds that it's perfectly normal to receive e-mails or text messages from users seeking help in the middle of the night.

While it's too early to determine exactly how much money this membershipbased initiative could generate, Fox says it's doing "well enough." Down the road, she envisions an even bigger system through which members (and potentially nonmembers, for that matter) log on, sign up, and fork over cash to use class-capture, streaming, and hosting services in the Feinberg School's smart classroom.

Overall, if NUPOC's digital asset management revenue initiative were to realize \$50K in new income each year, Fox notes those funds would meet nearly 80 percent of IT support costs for the entire program. She adds that any amount of revenue the school can generate through this new

program is money in the bank.

"It doesn't take much revenue to make us feel that the program is worthwhile," she says. "Anything we can do to offset the expenses of pioneering technology is wonderful."

DAMDOLLARS

Since 2006, educators at **Northwestern University's** (IL) Prosthetics- Orthotics Center (NUPOC) at the Feinberg School of Medicine have captured and delivered lecture content to students and faculty in the center's blended distance learning program. In September, the program began to make this same material available to interested alumni and their employers-- for a fee. Down the road, members and nonmembers will log on, sign up, and fork over cash to use class-capture, streaming, and hosting services in the Feinberg School's smart classroom.

Taking Instruction on the Road

Technologists affiliated with the Ira A. Fulton School of Engineering at Arizona State University are using the same Sonic Foundry technology to capture similar types of content, but they're selling it to a completely different audience. There, according to Octavio Heredia, associate director for extended education, the school uses Mediasite to capture for-credit course lectures and presentations; then a technologist cleans up this content and repurposes it as non-credit material to sell to private-sector clients on a per-use basis.

Most class content is delivered over the school's [Blackboard](#) content management system. Many private-sector customers (the school has roughly 15 in all) use the material as part of professional development courses for employees. Heredia says this relationship offers something positive for everyone involved: Company workers (and therefore, their employers) benefit from receiving the expertise of ASU faculty members, while ASU benefits from turning an archived resource into a revenue generator.

"From the company's perspective, instead of putting together a three-day seminar and bringing those folks onsite, which would bump up cost, this is smarter," he says. "Besides, their global workforces now can access the content-- something they wouldn't be able to do if there were an on-site seminar in one location at one time."

By way of example, Heredia mentions one Fortune 500 customer that calls upon ASU to provide its employees with classes in electrical engineering. Company employees access the course material on-demand over their corporate intranet, and the company pays ASU per enrollment. While employees do not receive college credit for taking the class, at work they can move up the salary scale more quickly with every course they take.

Heredia and his colleagues at ASU declined to share information about how much money they earn through this program, but note that the revenue was "significant," and that the income largely enables the Extended Education department to be "self-sufficient." To demonstrate the impact, Heredia offers some numbers: For the 2008 fiscal year (which runs July 1 through June 30), the school's noncredit or professional development portfolio supported 512 students across three

different continents, and for the 2009 fiscal year, the enrollment forecast was 650 enrollments for the same curriculum.

"We see this as something we can scale to meet demand over time," he says, admitting it has been tough to hire enough people to get class lectures ready for distribution. "As long as companies want our professors' expertise, we'll be ready to deliver it."

Challenges Ahead

If capitalizing on DAM technology is such a no-brainer for these three university programs, why aren't more colleges and universities doing it? There are a multitude of reasons: For one, an overwhelming number of higher education technology experts believe that the notion of charging academic-oriented users to access digital assets goes against the very spirit of education-- an institution that prides itself on openness and information sharing.

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Marianne Colgrove, deputy CTO at **Reed College** (OR), for instance, says that while the [Reed Digital Collections](#) contain hundreds of art and art history images, the school is licensing and digitizing these images for instructional uses within the college, and offers them free of charge. "It's not part of our culture to do chargebacks, particularly with something like a grantfunded project," she says. "If we have assets we want to make public, it's because we want to share them for scholarly purposes."

Gail Scanlon at **Mount Holyoke College** (MA) agrees. Scanlon is the director of access and technical services for the college's Library, Information and Technology Services department, and notes that her school has utilized tools from [Cdigix](#) to digitize and store more than 400 course videos including *Nanook of the North*, *Raise the Red Lantern*, and more.

Last semester, Scanlon chaired the campus group Digital Assets Management Planning Task Force (DAMPTF). The task force was charged with recommending a coordinated plan to capture, manage, preserve, and make accessible college-born digital and digitized intellectual capital. But in a December report with recommendations to the CIO, group members did not recommend charging users for access to this material.

"[Capitalizing on our assets] goes against the very basic definition of an academic library: to support the school's curriculum and to support the research of the college's faculty and students," Scanlon explained in a recent e-mail. "We have built the cost of the service into our annual budget and see it as a routine part of providing access to course materials for our students."

Another obstacle for colleges and universities looking to capitalize on digital assets is the fact that it's challenging to identify which assets can be shared, and which assets need to be protected. Regli, the analyst from CMS Watch, says this boils down to an intellectual property issue, and notes that the last thing a professor wants is for a colleague at another school to pay for access to lecture notes, then have that colleague co-opt them as his or her own.

To overcome this problem, Regli suggests a solution similar to the one Cornell has adopted for its photo library: a pay-per-use system that retains control of raw data but grants customers onetime use of those same data prepared in a particular format. Specifically, she says schools should place most original content beyond a firewall, and only grant access to certain aspects of the data after each transaction is complete.

"There's got to be some sort of authentication or log-in process every time a customer wants to purchase or use the data," she says. "Without [that precaution], digital asset management is no better than a search engine, and we all know you can't even think about charging for that."

::WEBEXTRAS ::

[DAM-ing the Digital Flood](#)

[Watch Your Assets](#)

[Managing Graphic Assets at Cal Poly](#)

About the Author

Matt Villano is senior contributing editor of this publication.