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Between Creation and Consumption:

The “Muddle in the Middle”



Video has always been an immensely powerful medium. But until recently, there's really only been one channel available for delivering it: **broadcast TV.**

For brand marketers, that meant expensive TV ads. For media and content owners, it meant a tightly managed channel to market controlled by a few power players. However, recent advances in consumer devices and ubiquitous broadband have changed this. Today, there are numerous ways to get content in front of viewers and a large number of business models to play with.

At one end, content creators have increasingly powerful and sophisticated tools at their fingertips and at the other end, consumers are hungry for more and more high quality entertainment. The range of outlets through which audiences consume content has also grown and diversified with new technologies and devices allowing them to watch and listen anytime, anywhere. This recent explosion of new channels and business models has led to an equally dramatic influx of innovators, disruptors and challengers – all competing for a finite resource: the time and attention of consumers.

On the surface, everything seems fine, however many content owners, distributors and marketers responsible for getting their content to market are unable to make the most of what should be a golden age. The tools and systems currently being used to manage and distribute content belong to the past. They are expensive to run, often add unnecessary bureaucracy to everyday processes, limit commercial and creative agility and usually rely on third parties to execute requests.

Fortunately, it doesn't have to be like this. If, that is, the industry recognises that its traditional ways of managing and distributing film and TV content are no longer sustainable in today's multi-platform world. If content owners are to regain control of their own destiny, they need to embrace new technologies and platforms to eliminate the friction and inflexibility imposed by the old ways of managing media. Consumers are demanding ever more flexibility in the ways in which they consume and control content, shifting constantly between different screens and devices.



Why is so much of the content services industry stuck in the past ?

Manual Labour vs. Automated Media

The content sector isn't alone in having to confront new commercial pressures and radically change its ways of operating. Over the last two decades, many other industries – such as manufacturing, telecommunications, transport and logistics – have had to speed up the rate of innovation in their products and supply chains, driven by increased competition and fast changing customer demand.

The companies that survived only did so by introducing advanced IT and communications technologies; developing new relationships with partners, suppliers and customers; and creating new business models. All focused on changing craft-based, human-intensive processes to ones where workflow became as automated as possible and traditionally rigid boundaries with customers and suppliers could be broken down to form new dynamic partnerships.

The end result was the creation of closely interlinked communities, each participating company able to link into and support the wider value chain in seamless and synchronised ways. The rest – and management textbooks are full of examples – failed to innovate successfully and lost market share; or worse still, disappeared without trace.

If we look at today's world of content creation, management and distribution we see a very similar picture. Whether companies have built their own management and distribution systems, make use of a solution from a third-party vendor, or outsource these activities entirely, many systems and suppliers that they trust are now seriously showing their age.

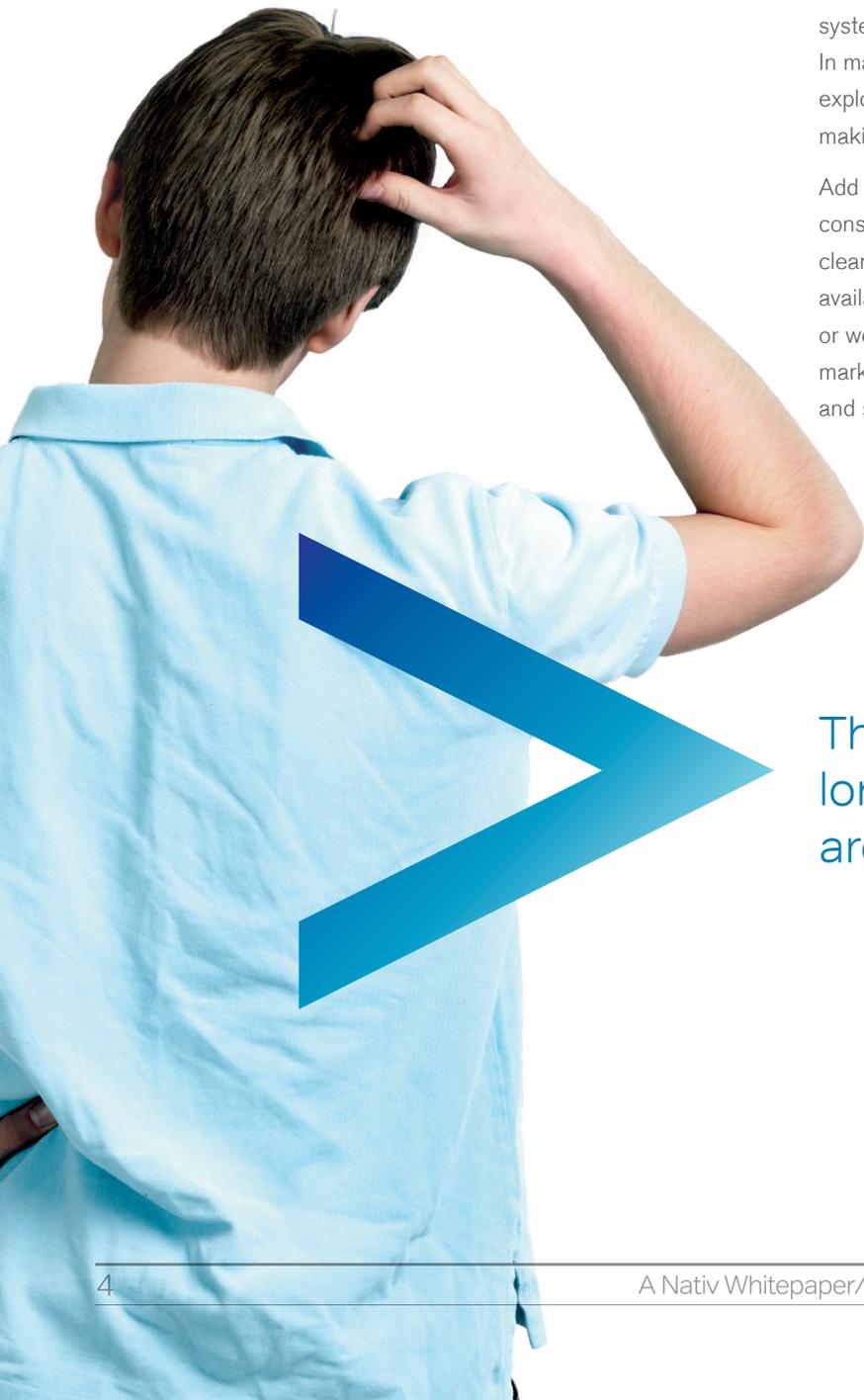
They were designed for a much more stable, linear and slow-moving, tape-based world. As a result, they're unable to deal with a far more interconnected and transparent business environment that's now running at a much faster rate and demanding fully automated workflow processes to manage the huge amounts of data involved.

Without a proper platform, many media management suppliers simply cannot afford to lower their costs to the level demanded by content owners and still remain in business.

Conversely, content owners feel locked in to spiralling costs that are hard to justify, lack content visibility and are unable to respond quickly to changing consumer demands.

What's more, because of limitations in old systems and processes and the fact that little money has been available to reengineer them, media services companies have been unable to expand their offerings to deal with the new world. The end result has been stagnation in much needed R&D and a failure to exploit the potential of new developments in software, hardware and communications technologies.

All too often, they're 20th century solutions trying to deal with 21st century customers and audiences.



Where media services companies have attempted to incorporate new technologies and media formats, the solutions have just added another silo to an already over-complex matrix of platforms, systems and processes. It should not be forgotten that the costs of integrating a new platform with existing systems can be more than the cost of the software itself. On top of this, there are of course additional overheads involved in retraining staff or requiring partners and content owners to change their own systems and ways of working for little or no immediate reward. In many cases, customers have found themselves trapped in exploitative and rigid contracts that penalise them heavily for making extra requests or changes to their ways of working.

Add to this the fact that uncertainty about demand and consumption is an integral part of the media industry and it's clear that access to media management services must ideally be available at the click of a mouse – with no attendant penalties or workflow bottlenecks. Content owners, distributors and marketers must be able to take back control of their own destiny and stop relying on archaic platforms and business relationships.

This problem has been a long time coming, so where are the solutions ?



The need for a platform:

Other industry sectors have faced exactly this same problem. In most cases, a key element of their strategies for transformation has been a simultaneous use of two major developments in IT and telecommunications. Firstly, there has been the creation of open, industry-wide hubs that can be used by the different players involved to smoothly and securely integrate their operations and processes to create seamless, low friction workflows. Secondly, there has been the rapid evolution of the 'software as a service' model - based on cloud computing technologies - where users are able to purchase storage capacity, processing power, and applications on demand.

The key to exploiting this new content marketplace is to bring together the right content, business model, process and partners for each and every opportunity – whether it's a pay-per-view channel, a mobile subscription service or an ad-funded, web-based video aggregator. Content companies need to scale investment to their opportunities, re-use resources and stay agile so they can get content to market faster and at a lower cost.

For the most part, the growth in online media consumption has not yet been matched by a growth in revenue. So, while companies need to be involved in a wide range of video channels and models, they can't throw money at every play. However they also cannot afford to miss a trick.

In some industries, back end systems and processes are just that: non-core, low-impact housekeeping functions. In online media management and distribution, back end operations like media management often determine success or failure. Trying to exploit new channels using manual processes and service-specific silos not only extends your time to market, it also raises the 'threshold of viability' for each new service and channel. That's the fast track to failure. Today's agile video content business or marketing department must depend on lean, streamlined and largely automated content delivery.

Delivering high-quality video experiences across all channels means rising to five key business process challenges:

- 1. Centralising all assets -**
In-house and externally managed content in one central place and in the right format.
- 2. Managing video and audio assets -**
Tagging, linking, storing, versioning and structuring every asset so it can quickly and easily be found, sliced, diced, previewed and manipulated.
- 3. Automating workflows -** Creating streamlined workflows that match real world processes, with as few manual tasks as possible.
- 4. Repurposing and distributing for every service -** Automatically generating the best format for each channel and delivering it on time at the highest possible quality.
- 5. Measuring the impact -** Working out which video is the most successful and which channels and platforms work the best.

The new world of multi-channel TV calls for new processes and new technologies and it's a clear case for a single, centralised platform that solves the five big challenges, from creation to consumption.

The benefits of a platform approach to media management are compelling for even the simplest operation:

- > **Drive down costs** by removing silos, automating processes and minimizing errors.
- > **Access all content in one place.** Know exactly what's available and then monetize it.
- > **Collaborate with offices and people all over the world 24 x 7.**
- > **On-board suppliers anywhere in the world** and take advantage of cheaper labour costs for manual tasks.
- > **Get to market faster** without re-inventing the wheel for each opportunity.
- > **Track every element of media management life-cycles.**
- > **Reach the widest possible audience** with simple connectors to new services.
- > **Scale up to meet high-growth demand** without sagging under the large file sizes and spikes in usage.
- > **Re-use and revise workflows** building best practice into the operation.
- > **Bring visibility to the entire operation** so you can see where content is, what's working and why.
- > **Avoid integration nightmares** caused by stitching together point solutions not made for each other.

An open, integrated platform is the natural choice for any operation supporting complex workflows, many services and a variety of business models in a dynamic, unpredictable market environment. The idea is simple: streamline and automate processes; re-use the same platform and processes as much as possible; and retain flexibility to exploit new opportunities.

The control of workflows must be put back into the hands of the content owners and distributors, giving them the ability to respond to new opportunities on a truly global basis. As such, it helps the content community reach more audiences, faster and for less money, satisfying both content creator and consumer.

Removing the “Muddle in the Middle”

In summary, the challenges the content sector faces are huge – but very similar to challenges that other industries have had to go through in the face of remorseless technological change, globalisation and financial pressure. What’s required now is a real platform that can be used in creative and trusted ways to build a secure and cost-effective ecosystem for the content creators and distributors alike.



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control of your content**

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