

Specialized is Riding High With Digital Asset Management

THE ORGANIZATION

Specialized Bicycle Components, commonly known as Specialized, is a leading American manufacturer of top-quality bicycles. Founded in 1974 and still headquartered in Morgan Hill, California, the company revolutionized the world of cycling with its 1981 introduction of the first mass-produced mountain bike. Today the Specialized brand graces all styles of bicycles for all kinds of riders, from commuters and weekend riders to competitive cyclists and triathletes. Specialized products are sold worldwide at independent bike shops through a network of exclusive distributors and wholly-owned subsidiaries from Belarus and Israel to Mexico and South Africa.

With so many far-flung outlets responsible for disseminating the Specialized global brand, Senior Global Marketing Manager Chris Matthews is charged with communicating marketing strategy to hundreds of employees, vendors, subsidiaries, distributors and enforcing brand consistency across multiple media platforms, languages, and cultures.

THE SITUATION

Matthews joined the corporate marketing team in 2005, a time of rapid global growth for Specialized. He quickly realized that the department was relying on old technology to meet the new, and expanding, challenges of distributing time sensitive, brand compliant material and product photography to a global constituency. "We were sending CDs with important digital assets like ads and catalogues to all corners of the globe by FedEx," recalls Matthews. "A week later, the files could have changed. A month later, the office may have misplaced the disc. There were dozens of ways things could go sideways."

Furthermore, Specialized lacked a single online repository for approved digital assets like logos, product photography, and ad templates. His staff wasted considerable time and money recreating and repurposing assets so they could be provided again. And to make matters worse, in some cases offices would skirt corporate standards and create their own materials. In summary, Matthews says, "There was no tracking, no cataloguing, no accountability" for digital assets. "We were between a rock and a hard place – we needed



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to hold our disparate stakeholders accountable for brand consistency, yet we didn't have a mechanism to let them do the right thing."

And so, with help from Ray Dzek in Specialized's IT department, Matthews began a search for that mechanism; a technology solution to provide secure online access to approved Specialized digital assets any time, anywhere.

THE EVALUATION

The search for a Digital Asset Management (DAM) solution led Specialized to two contenders: Microsoft SharePoint and celum imagine. Matthews admits he approached the evaluation with limited knowledge of what a DAM solution could even do for Specialized. "It was a bit like leaping and hoping there was a net," he recalls.

Selection Criteria

Matthews determined there were a few "musts" the winning product needed to do:

- Provide a single, web-based home for all approved Specialized digital assets
- Ensure instant global access to digital assets by authorized Specialized employees, agencies, distributors, and subsidiaries
- Enable communication between corporate marketing staff and global stakeholders

The celum imagine Advantage

With the selection criteria in mind, Matthews and his team put SharePoint and celum imagine through their paces. SharePoint is a comprehensive product that enables collaboration across the entire enterprise. Specialized installed SharePoint for a trial run and experimented with its utility for Digital Asset Management. Feedback from the field was mixed. Adoption of the solution was slow; SharePoint certainly met Specialized's evaluation criteria but it felt cumbersome and difficult to use.

Specialized then tried out celum imagine, which they had also installed on their servers. Matthews reports that "the difference in the adoption rate was immediately clear; it was easy to understand and easy to use." He adds, "It had all the features we needed and was so user friendly, we quickly decided to deploy the solution."

IMPLEMENTATION

Specialized implemented celum imagine in stages, starting with company employees. "We deployed the solution around content types," explains Matthews. "For example, when the 2005 catalogue was completed we released the files on celum imagine for access by all employees worldwide. We did the same for new product photography, web site files, and other digital assets as they became available." Specialized also



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loaded existing digital assets which could be searched by such metadata as bike model, part number, photo style, and video content.

Employee training was a mix of online tutorials, PowerPoint decks, and user manuals, with on-site training as Chris Matthews visited Specialized offices in the United States and abroad. “Most offices were able to get up-and-running without any handholding, which made that part my job pretty easy” he reports.

MOVING TO THE CLOUD WITH MAJORTOM

As Specialized added more users and content, it became apparent that its network could not accommodate the additional worldwide traffic. This requirement brought them to Aquent On Demand – a cloud business partner – that provided cloud storage in a SaaS (software as a service) model under the name MajorTom. “The beauty of MajorTom and the SaaS model for us is that we don’t have to manage servers, databases, and bandwidth – its all done for us,” says Matthews. “And with an email or a phone call, I’ve got access to as much storage as I need – it’s virtually unlimited.”

MAJORTOM IN ACTION

Now, using MajorTom, all of Specialized’ users, including its global subsidiaries, are able to “self serve” themselves. “This was especially beneficial to our subsidiaries, as we were asking them to up their game with regards to brand image and marketing, so it was only right to provide them with the tools to do their jobs,” says Matthews. Subsidiaries make greatest use of promotional web site copy, spectacular product photography, and templated print ads for local customization.

Digital assets are also made available to outside resources using MajorTom’s unique PIN Code functionality, which grants temporary access to specific assets. Matthews says the PIN Code feature is “indispensable to our operation. If a magazine needs a Rockhopper Pro 29er shot ASAP, we simply provide one-time access to the exact files; our staff saves time, the editor quickly gets the image. Done.”

Ads that used to be sent with fingers crossed on CDs are now posted in minutes. Specialized alerts its users months in advance to the pending ad, simplifying the media scheduling process. Users are notified through MajorTom of the asset’s arrival and directed to the appropriate folder, where the ad can be downloaded and converted “on the fly” into multiple sizes and formats.”



THE RESULTS

Since deploying celum imagine and then MajorTom, Specialized has more than doubled in size. While Matthews doesn't credit the DAM with all that growth, he does point out that his team is managing twice the assets with the same number of people. "There is no way we could have handled the growth and maintained our brand without celum imagine and MajorTom," says Matthews. "We have almost eliminated opportunities for branding problems to arise and our brand image is consistent and so much more under control."

Matthews leaves the best comments to Specialized employees. "When we first adopted the solution, whenever I visited an international office, they'd comment on how helpful the tool was for them to do their jobs. Now, it's simply an essential part of the environment, people don't consider what it would be like without it. We're always pushing to find ways to make it better and more useful, and the incremental enhancements that are provided are great. The key is that our whole organization uses it, and relies on it daily. We'll never go back to being without a DAM system in place."

It turns out that bringing all of the disparate international constituents together to collaborate with MajorTom has had an unforeseen effect on the Specialized culture. "MajorTom became one of the catalysts for a huge cultural shift around international integration," Matthews observes. "It's been a cultural beacon, opening the door to a lot of other conversations that needed to happen."

