Why Media Logistics Matters

Accelerating your Content from Concept to Cash

This white paper considers the value of media logistics and why it’s critical to the video workflows of today and tomorrow.

The mandate for great and profitable content has never been higher. The world of video is rapidly transitioning from traditional television to digital over-the-top (OTT) platforms. In fact, a report from Digital TV Research revealed that global OTT TV and video revenues are expected to surpass $51 billion by 2020, almost double the $26 billion forecast for 2015.
Yet video has also never been more fraught with risk. In this environment, content costs and volume have skyrocketed, distribution has decentralized, and consumption has fragmented across the mobile device landscape. Meanwhile, production workflows have shifted to digital, non-linear software methods. With all of this going on, creators may wonder how to:

• Get to market faster to meet a tight film release schedule
• Produce a new daily series for TV, web and mobile devices all at once
• Prep content for legal and compliance review without losing any of it
• Plan 12 different versions of soccer highlights in 12 different languages
• Stay within a post-production budget when production does not

To put it another way, content creators everywhere are now faced with a core challenge:

How do we efficiently produce and distribute personalized, multi-screen video experiences—optimized for our audiences, content strategies, internal processes and business models?

A platform that manages the lifecycle of video assets is one big key to solving this.

The “birth” of a video starts before it is even created—with just a script on a page or an idea or moment yet to be shot. That’s why video supply chain management—or in more modern terms, media logistics—is such an essential component. Media logistics begins upstream of a traditional online video platform (OVP) ingest point and takes that new video from conception to consumption as quickly and profitably as possible. It includes the optimal planning, introduction, control and analysis of each video asset and its data throughout sequential production and distribution workflows.

A good media logistics platform is the workhorse of a content provider’s entire video ecosystem—and has now become a strategic imperative. Cohesive, agile technologies and modular workflows with data at their core can position organizations for success now and in the future—when content platforms, delivery mechanisms and audience behaviors will inevitably change further.

THE BUSINESS ISSUES

Content companies are faced with three main video production issues today. They must:

• manage unprecedented volumes of content across a multitude of formats
• integrate a patchwork of legacy and modern video systems
• transition to complex digital production and distribution processes

The rise of multiple video screens and emergence of digital OTT video producers has brought a proliferation of video content to the landscape, as Vox noted last year, pointing to FX Networks research on scripted original series growth over the last several years. It’s an almost overwhelming amount that viewers now demand and broadcasters must support. Audiences want more flexible and individualized video experiences across devices and platforms. Reruns don’t cut it any longer with all the strong new content available.

As a result, production companies, studios, broadcasters and other content producers are under pressure to rapidly create and manage more compelling, personalized and monetizable content at scale just to keep up—and to keep their viewers. This strain has led to higher programming spends and costs at various media companies, Advertising Age recently reported. Consequently, many companies are experiencing a downward pressure on revenues and profits.

In addition, many firms now struggle to deliver large amounts of traditional linear and OTT content simultaneously. At the same time, they are dealing with the rapid pace of new product offerings and technologies, alternative business models, and advanced formats like virtual reality and 4K. Their legacy, on-premise operations are often manual and inefficient, having been originally designed for a singular and static TV platform.

It’s a vast challenge to manage, distribute, analyze and scale content across many platforms, so these producers are faced with larger production outlays and slower deployment times. Newer entrants to the video content scene, including brands and digital publishers, are not immune to these problems. As a consequence, integrating legacy and modern systems has become a core challenge to overcome.

Further, a complex transition is at play. Content planning, formats and standards, and production and distribution processes have changed (and will continue to do so). The industry has moved to digital, non-linear and software-based asset workflows; the old tape-based, linear hardware ones no longer work within this new paradigm. Tasks that were once manual, siloed
or outsourced must now be quickly integrated and automated. Assets that used to be buried in multiple systems must now be easily retrieved and visible in real-time. And understanding asset data is now a critical component every step of the way for preventing operational inefficiencies and making better business decisions.

Access to new, more streamlined workflows has leveled the playing field for content creators. They can now bring their ideas to market more rapidly and in a less expensive way, with increased cost efficiencies and more adaptable systems going forward -- for a greater return on content (ROC). However, accomplishing all of this work seamlessly, in a specific operational environment, now requires tighter teamwork around multiple operations and often across many locations.

A NEW SET OF NEEDS

These issues have led to several key content producer needs:

- Integrate and automate linear and digital workflows
- Increase deployment speed and efficiency
- Reduce risk and costs and expand ROI
- Distribute large volumes of personalized video to multiple end points
- Manage varied tasks and formats in a digital, software-based world
- Maintain real-time content access
- Regain asset visibility and streamlined control
- Minimize process breakdowns and errors
- Build team and partner collaboration
- Analyze performance
- Adapt quickly to change

In light of all this, media logistics has become a strategic imperative—a means of overcoming all of these complexities with a single solution that helps creators successfully meet these demands and grow within the dynamic content marketplace.

MEDIA LOGISTICS: A NEW WAY OF DOING BUSINESS

Smart content producers recognize the value of media logistics to manage the costs and complexities of their video supply chain today and ensure they are ready for future industry changes.

The old linear workflows are not designed for a non-linear OTT world. Siloed approaches to content creation, editing and distribution without collaboration and modularity are history. Content providers must be first to market amidst increased competition and pressures to reduce CapEx and OpEx costs. They require flexibility and innovation to meet ever-changing consumer demand for personally-delivered video content. And, they have to do all of this while trying to integrate legacy systems that don’t carry their weight in a digital-first world. They’re not only in a fight to stay ahead of the pack but in a fight for their very survival.

How will they win? With a new way of doing business.

This new way is what media logistics is all about. A cloud-enabled, collaborative, automated and open approach to building united video workflow systems—from content commissioning to syndication. Companies will win by how they innovate; they will excel by smartly managing and improving video creation and distribution in this new data-driven, fragmented, personalized and multi-platform world order. The control, visibility, efficiency, and agility that media logistics provides will help get them there.

CONTENT CREATION AND THE CHAIN OF PAIN

Media logistics platforms help prevent system hiccups that can occur at every point of that content conception to consumption cycle. They cover processes starting at the earliest stages of ideation, pre-production, and commissioning of content, when production planning begins. For example, when production tools and file delivery systems are set up. During physical production, and when assets move to file ingestion for editing, streamlined asset management and data capture are central activities.

Continuing through to post, teams also rely on business management systems to prep content for legal and compliance review, licensing, formatting and distribution. Review hubs help eliminate email approval as a requisite to get projects completed. Archiving and storage operations then require hierarchical storage management for future video use, such as for trailers or EPK clips. Finally, in syndication, automated playout systems take over to distribute content to its various intended end points, such as theaters, SVOD services or owned websites.
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Media logistics offers several core attributes that meet these needs throughout this entire cycle, including:

- End to end (E2E) workflow design [commissioning through syndication]
- Production integration throughout the full workflow
- API integration
- Enterprise asset ingest and management
- System modularity to fit any operational structure
- Automation and flexibility of controls
- Cloud-enabled infrastructure
- Team and process collaboration
- Content distribution
- Data continuity, integrity and analytics

A WORKFLOW FOR SUCCESS

A successful media logistics platform enables organizations to transform their production operations and ultimately, elevate their entire video ecosystem. Let’s take a deeper look at some central platform features that set up a winning video workflow:

Speedy Integration with Existing Systems

A media logistics platform should sit underneath to support and meld with existing systems, not replace them via a complex, costly and time-consuming operation. In this way, and with little risk, the platform can rapidly and efficiently begin orchestrating assets and finding places to optimize them across a producer’s entire video solution. This is true whether those solutions are tape-based or digital, owned or partner-based, on-site or in the cloud. It is also true whether organizations use media logistics to support one production workflow component or their entire, E2E content creation and distribution cycle. Modularity and composability are paramount, allowing producers to easily configure the platform to meet their individual needs, work with partner APIs, get to market faster, and react quickly to changing market forces and technology advances.

This structure creates scalability, adaptability and order across existing disparate and legacy systems. Organizations may have a hard time identifying system bottlenecks and repetition across both machine and human tasks, but the very nature of these different entities creates massive discontinuity. The existing systems may have been purchased at different times in the technology lifecycle, and, therefore, may address media and codecs in various ways. Media logistics helps optimize the best system in place that is currently available to do the job in a “best of breed” fashion. In addition, it supports work with third parties, such as asset prep work done by an outside production house.

Asset Management

Managing video assets at every production stage is a central tenet of media logistics, as there are many points along the way where things can go sideways. Losing visibility of where specific elements are in their life cycle or media workflow is a prime breakdown point for time-sensitive productions. Because many behind-the-scenes tasks like script revisioning or gaining production releases may still be manual, crews often have difficulty tracking jobs without directly querying two or three systems to identify at which stage of the process a particular piece of content currently stands.
Conversely, media logistics platforms can provide enterprise-level asset support. Customized dashboards allow staffers to visualize information in real time and pivot quickly. Team members can receive alerts at every mission-critical process point. Instead of finding out too late that an item is not ready for playout or quality control or syndication because someone or something broke down in the middle of a task, groups can stay one step ahead. They can react to changes instead of having to proactively and continually look for them. This time saved in production means that costs can be reduced, more money can be put back into creating great content, and more content can be pushed through the system and launched that much faster. Ultimately, revenue can be gained sooner for every video asset.

Another issue is finding and cataloging assets across media systems; many groups are running as many as 15 systems in parallel. This tends to prevent transparency; assets need to be searched for when a production changes or needs editing or transcoding. Multiple media systems, renditions, and formats open the door to mistakes, version control loss, and major disconnects between the mezzanine file (original high-resolution file) and the original’s derivatives.

However, by connecting disparate systems, media logistics enables real-time searches and permissions-based asset controls. Manual operations can be automated. Subsets of classifications can be created that describe an asset based upon its provenance or parent data, and just as importantly, its current location and position in the workflow. Teams can shorten the time for asset searches and raise their productivity.

Approval Collaboration

With the archaic method of manual, disconnected production, firms manage dailies, clip reviews, and cross-department approvals by sending files around as attachments or FTP downloads. This is an highly unwieldy procedure, with the potential for mistakes or gridlock due to people being out of the office or simply not reading their emails or even not having enough bandwidth to send or receive a file. All of this can stop productions dead in their tracks.

In the modern world of streamlined media logistics, time-coded feedback from multiple stakeholders can be collaboratively managed, moved and compiled in one central review hub, and sent to an editor for one edit instead of several. This helps minimize time, errors and headaches—and improves communication for all.

Distribution of approved content is often a challenge, too. By using traditional OVPs, companies may need to organize their content in the cloud with systems that were not designed for asset search, management and approval workflow. Media logistics simplifies this procedure for rubber-stamping and distributing large volumes of content assets to multiple endpoints, such as VOD distributors. This all goes a long way in helping to lower content costs and drive content ROI.

Data Continuity and Tracking

Data has become an essential component of video today—not only in tracking how video is consumed or monetized but in how it is created. Without it, producers, post production supervisors and distributors are flying blind in a world where decisions are now made based on facts and results. Media logistics promotes the continual capture and flow of metadata on every asset and allows for increased visibility and timely reporting—for every stage of production and distribution.

By using media logistics analytics tools, firms can gain operational insight on the average time a specific task took or the number of jobs that went over schedule. Content producers can preserve data integrity and compliance by building in business rules, such as grouping R-rated cuts separate from PG-rated ones. They can blend 3rd-party information, setting up two-way communication with external systems for constant data flow. And they can prevent data loss by receiving ‘single source of truth’ metadata throughout a program’s episode, season, series and international versioning lifecycle.

In addition, time-coded data applied to assets enables easier clip searches to make new content using them. Data can also help creators determine what future content to make. With data continuity in place and analytics incorporated throughout the entire value chain, content makers can see how a change in production operations could ultimately result in an uptick in audience consumption. And, budget and licensing data offer a methodical way to capture and track information that is important to the business. In using the wealth of information available to monitor the quality of operations, creative companies can uncover problems and opportunities every step of the way.

Media logistics can create workflows for success in ways that are, quite simply, endless.
CONCLUSION

Content companies using media logistics platforms today see many benefits:

- Lower costs and higher efficiency
- Support for existing systems
- More automated and transparent processes
- Extensibility, agility and elasticity for growth
- Better asset management and control
- Stronger collaboration
- Faster time to market
- Deeper analysis
- Broader reach and scalability
- Happier audiences

The costs and complexities of video content creation, management and delivery demand new ways of thinking. A successful video platform today starts with media logistics for optimal video asset workflow and ends with higher profits and more engaged viewers.

CASE STUDY

When ITV Studios, the biggest production company in the UK, wanted to cut production costs for its entire content catalogue, they set out on a major Production Modernization programme. They chose Ooyala Flex, the cloud-enabled media logistics platform, to help them centralize workflows, automate data and asset management tasks, and streamline their production processes. Ooyala Flex integrated with ITV’s existing technology tools without disrupting its daily operations. The result: a reduction in costs per production. As a bonus, ITV Studios also saw reductions in human error and production time and better collaboration across its organization.

Streamline your video production and distribution from end to end with Ooyala Flex. Automate workflows, manage assets from commission to syndication, gather insights, drive down costs and get content to market faster.

To learn more, contact sales@ooyala.com.

Ooyala helps deliver content that connects. A US-based subsidiary of Telstra, Ooyala’s comprehensive suite of offerings includes one of the world’s largest premium video platforms and a leading ad serving solution. Built with superior analytics capabilities and a strong commitment to customers success, Ooyala’s industry-leading end-to-end solutions help large-scale broadcasters, operators, media companies, enterprises and brands build more engaged and more profitable audiences. Some of the most successful and innovative media companies in the world — ESPN, Univision, Sky Sports, Foxtel, NBCUniversal, RTL Germany, and Singapore’s Mediacorp — rely on Ooyala.