

*DAM in 2026:  
6 Trends to Watch in an AI-Driven World*

Jarrold Gingras

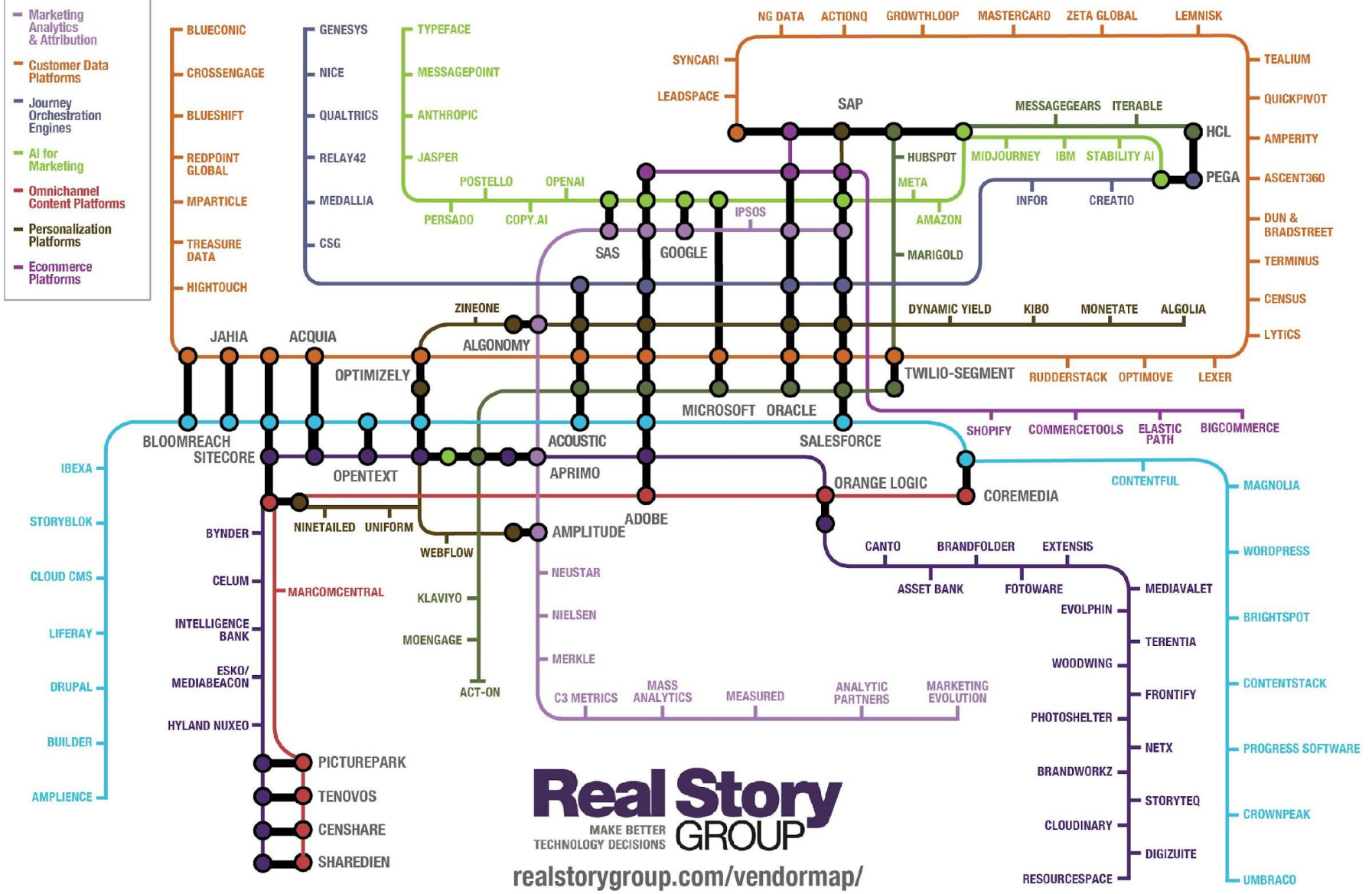
Managing Director & Analyst

# MARTECH STACK VENDOR MAP

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- KEY**
- Web Content & Experience Management
  - Digital Asset Management
  - Outbound Marketing Platforms
  - Marketing Analytics & Attribution
  - Customer Data Platforms
  - Journey Orchestration Engines
  - AI for Marketing
  - Omnichannel Content Platforms
  - Personalization Platforms
  - Ecommerce Platforms



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# A Different Kind of Analyst Firm



Relentlessly independent



25+ years



5000+ clients in  
60+ countries

Independence Factors	Real Story Group	Other Firms
Consult to Vendors?	NO	YES
Speak at Vendor Events?	NO	YES
Accept Expenses & Hospitality from Vendors?	NO	YES
Write Papers for Vendors?	NO	YES

# Three Offerings

## Vendor Selection Advisory

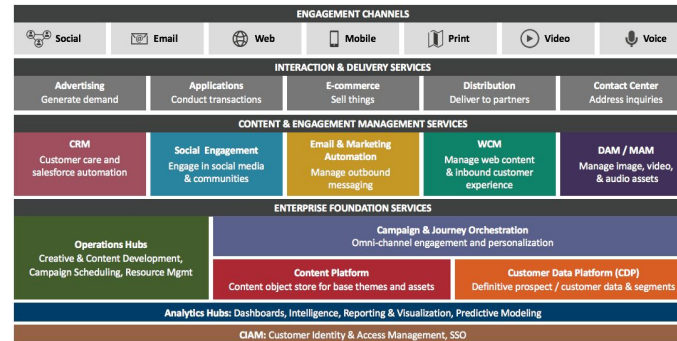
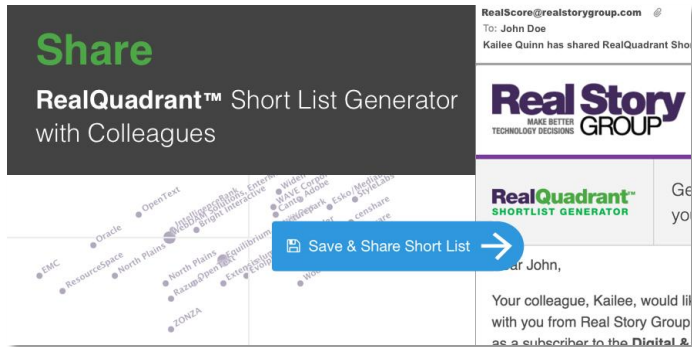
- Inform and empower tech selection teams with critical research and candid advice

## Omnichannel Stack Advisory

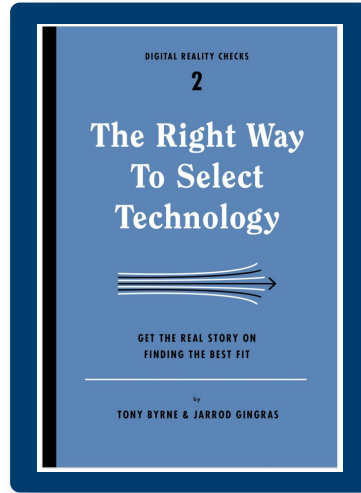
- Advise stack owners on strategic decisions and technology choices

## Council-level Membership

- Host executive leadership council for peer support to omnichannel stack owners

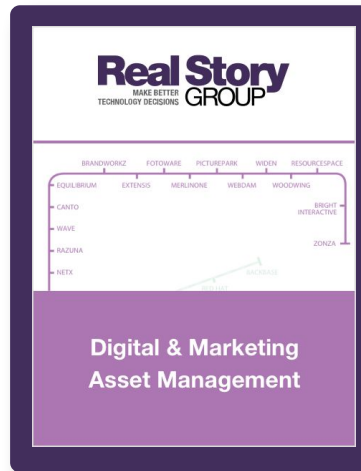


# About Jarrod



Author of book about applying design thinking to the tech selection process

<http://rosenfeldmedia.com/books/right-way-to-select-technology/>



Lead DAM analyst  
Evaluating 30+ DAM vendors

<https://www.realstorygroup.com/Reports/DAM/>



Podcast host  
YouTube, Spotify, Apple, etc...

# Our Vendor Sponsors

Commissioned by...

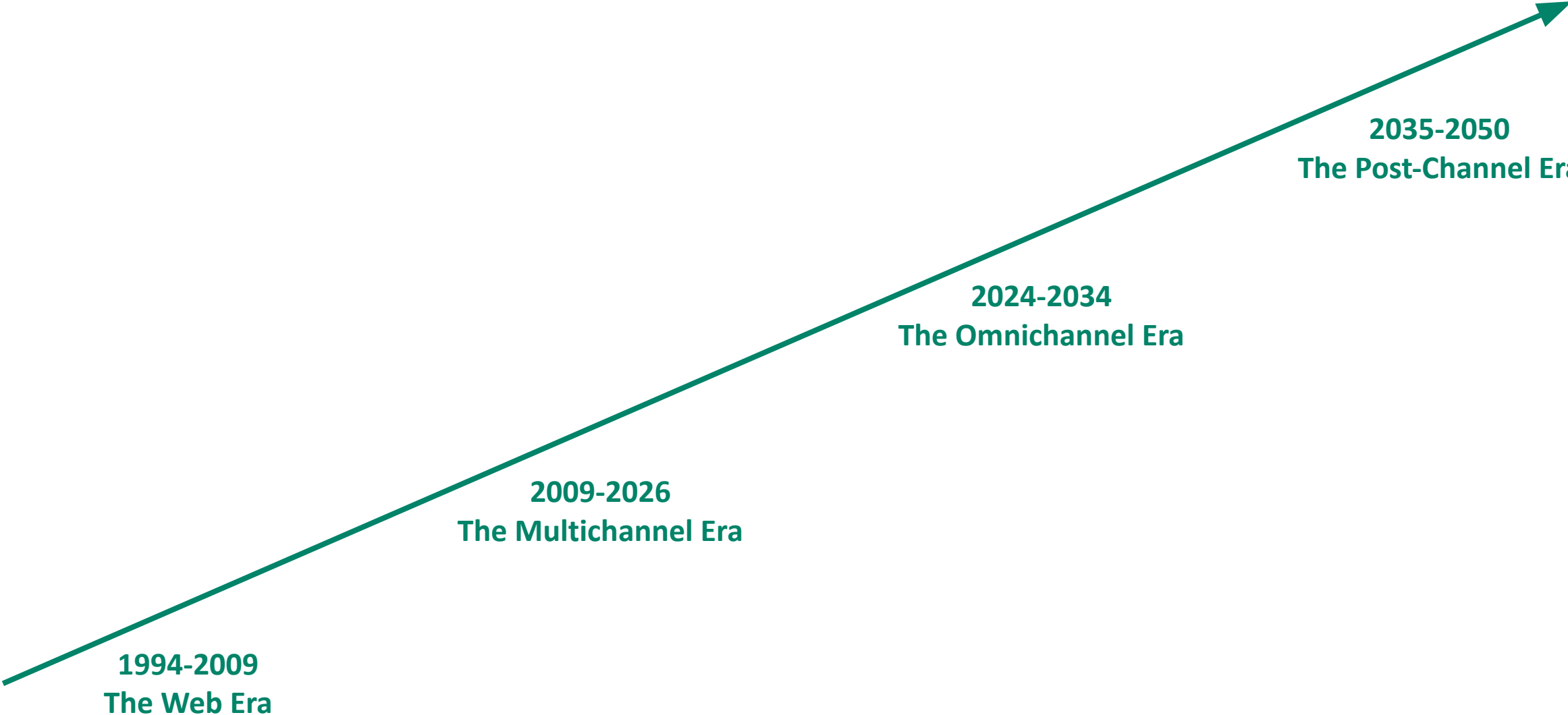
In partnership with...

Co-branded...

Custom research...

Analyst validation...

# Eras Tour: Content in the AI Era





# AI Feature Frenzy is a Distraction for Many

Trend #1



# Feature Frenzy

Vendors investing heavily in demo-friendly in-product features:

- Enrichment (metadata)
- Transformation (asset manipulation)
- Governance (brand standards)
- Compliance (legal)
- Automation (tasks)

Not a bad thing, but... at what cost?

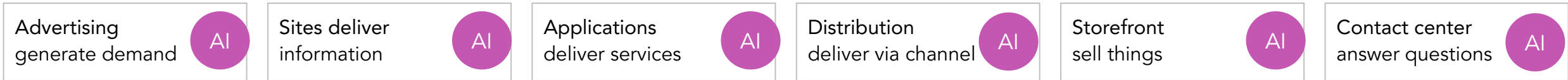


# MarTech Services Reference Model: B2B

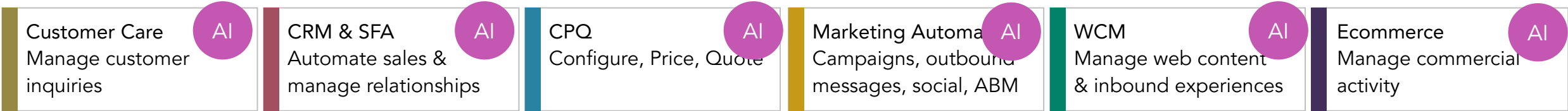
## ENGAGEMENT CHANNELS



## INTERACTION & DELIVERY ENVIRONMENTS

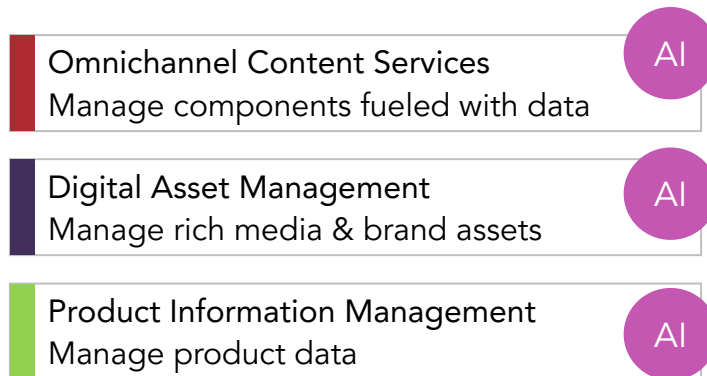


## ENGAGEMENT SERVICES

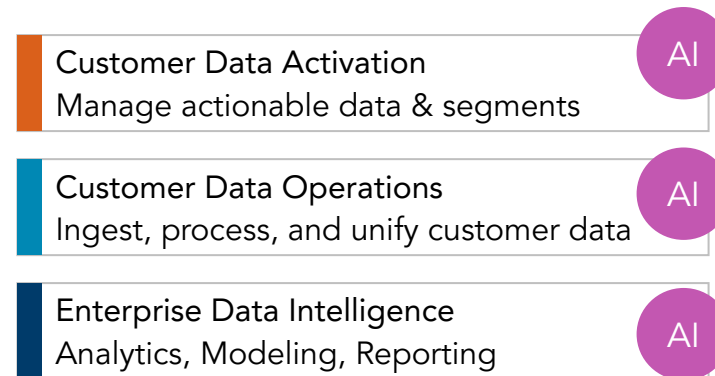


## ENTERPRISE FOUNDATION SERVICES

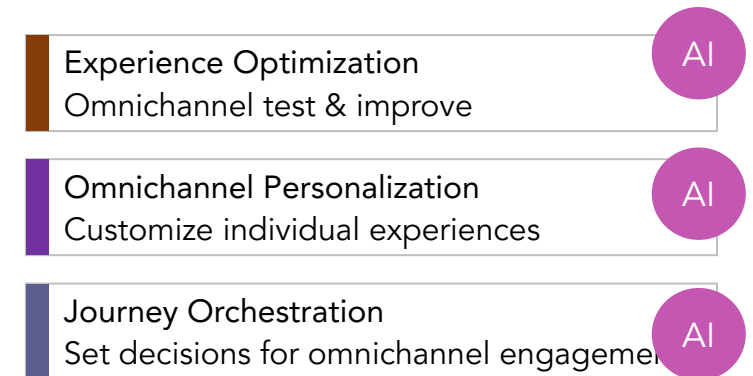
### CONTENT & INFO



### DATA



### DECISIONING



# Boardroom Directive for Content

Trend #2

# DAM Decision Makers



Director of  
Global Digital  
Product  
Management



VP of  
Creative  
Services &  
Operations



Senior  
Director,  
Marketing  
Technology



Senior  
Director,  
Global  
AdTech



Global Head of  
Corporate Affairs  
and  
Communications



General  
Manager,  
Marketing  
Technology &  
Innovation

# BIG ideas Need CONTENT



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Global Digital  
Product  
Management

VP of  
Creative  
Services &  
Operations

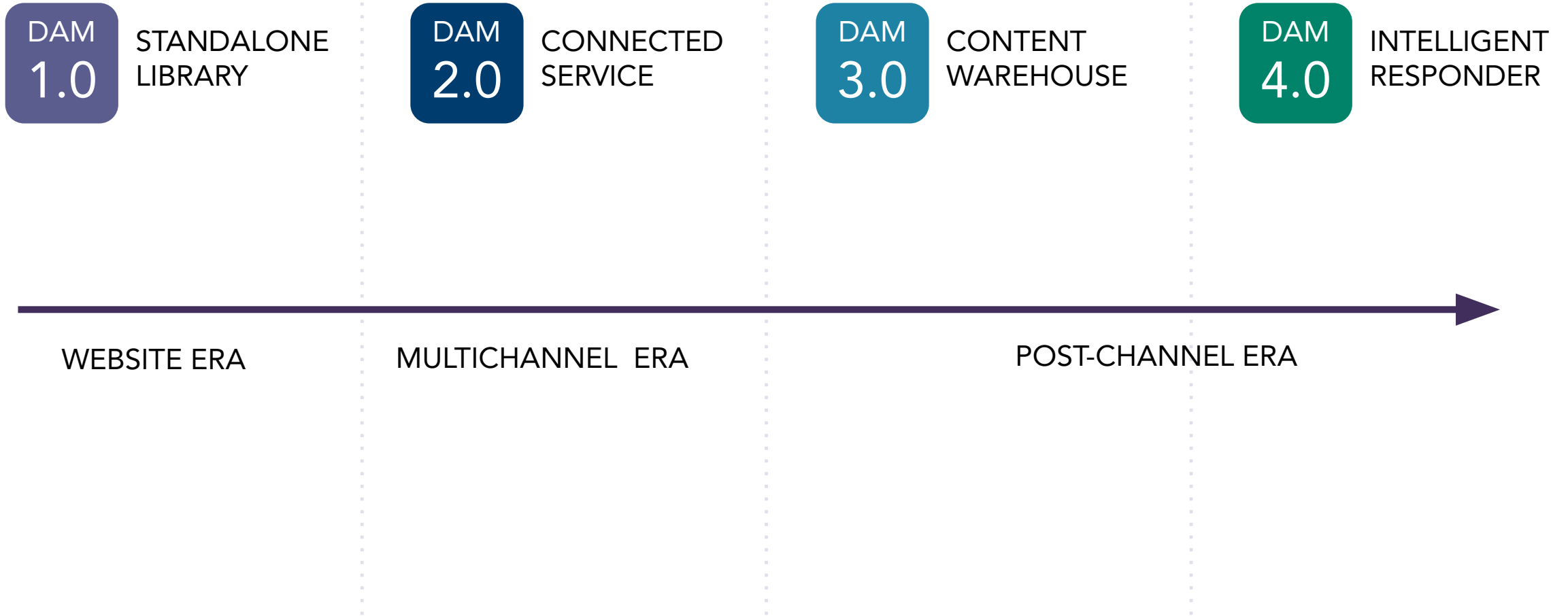
Senior  
Director,  
Marketing  
Technology

Senior  
Director,  
Global  
AdTech

Global Head of  
Corporate Affairs  
and  
Communications

General  
Manager,  
Marketing  
Technology &  
Innovation

# DAM 4.0 Framework



# DAM 4.0 Framework



STANDALONE LIBRARY

Single repository managing images, video, audio files through their lifecycle

Step up from shared drives or cloud file-sharing platforms

Disconnected from larger technical stack

Centralized *destination* to store and retrieve assets



CONNECTED SERVICE

DAM recognized as part of a connected stack

DAM is a critical part of cross-team workflows

Upstream (creative ops) and downstream (engagement channel) integration

One-way flow of image and media assets



CONTENT WAREHOUSE



INTELLIGENT RESPONDER



# DAM 4.0 Framework

Most enterprises want to be here

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## DAM 4.0 INTELLIGENT RESPONDER

Streamlined supply chain with AI

Focus on "demand chain" enablement, responding to customer in context

Responds to humans and agent demands alike

Real-time experience adaptation at the edge

Answers complex questions with structured and unstructured information

Machine learning to suggest and AI to create better performing assets

Most enterprises are here

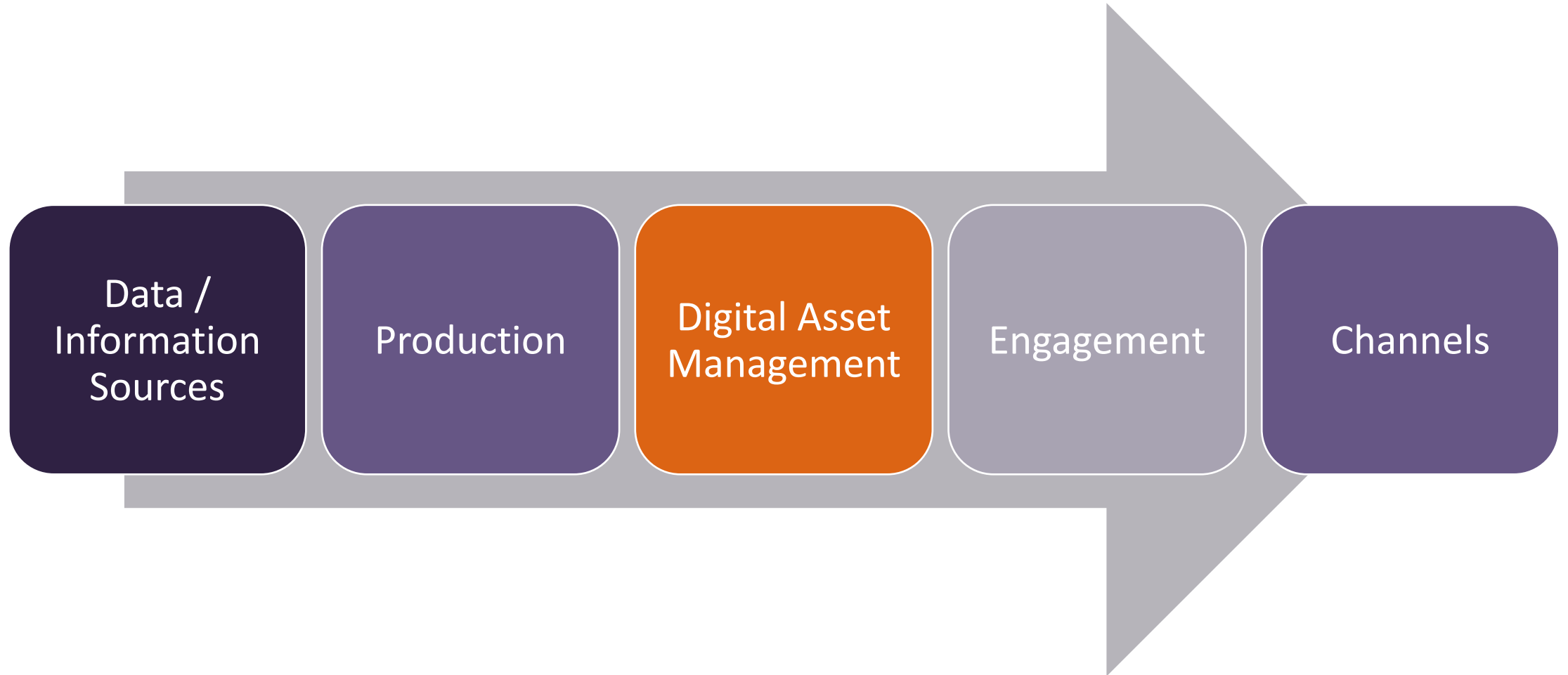


# Need to Support a Content Demand Chain

Trend #3



# Content Supply Chain



# Content Supply Chain

0. Operations: Planning / Workflow / Management

Asana / Workfront / Monday / etc..

1. Sources

PIM / PLM

2. Production

Creative Cloud

Figma

Canva

Video

3. Digital Asset Management

Brand

Product Category

Copy

Campaign

Product

Rights

Digital Asset

Content Analytics

4. Engagement

Web CMS

Commerce

Social

CRM

Email

4. Channels

Ads

Print

Web

Chat

Email

PoS

Mobile

Call

Social

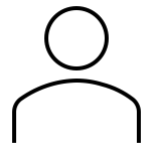
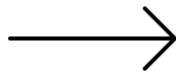
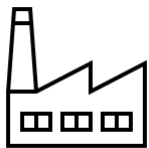
? TBD

# Content Supply Chain & Demand Chain

## Content Supply Chain

The traditional model of content operations: focused on creation, workflow efficiency, and getting assets from idea to delivery.

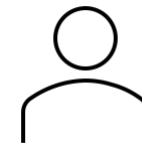
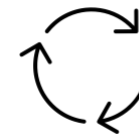
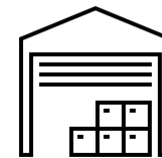
- Creative briefs and production workflows
- Asset management and approvals
- Channel publishing and distribution
- Measurement occurs at the end — often disconnected



## Content Demand Chain

The emerging model: focused on listening, adaptation, and real-time response to content performance and audience context.

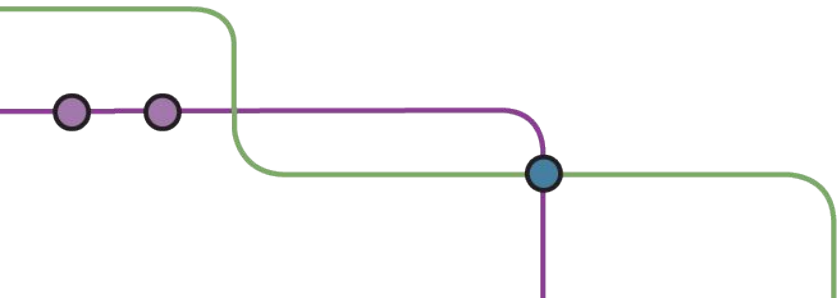
- Feedback and engagement drive new creation
- Metadata and analytics integrated with assets
- AI insights recommend variants and optimizations
- Continuous loop between delivery and improvement





# Rise of the Content Warehouse

Trend #4



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## DAM 2.0 CONNECT SERVICE

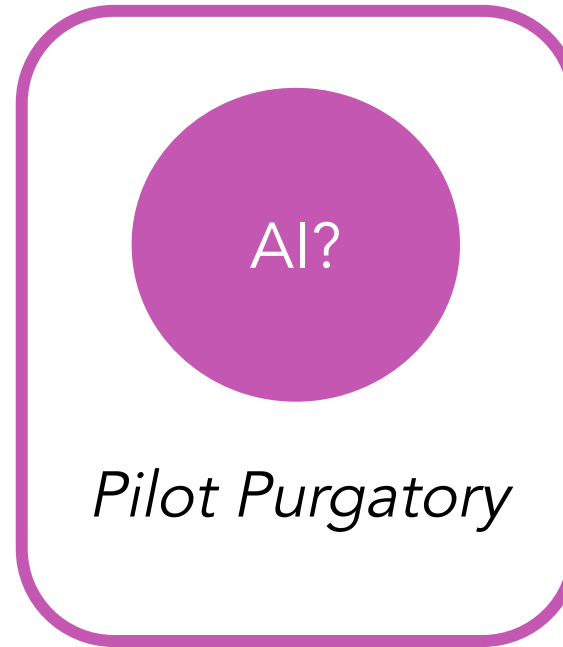
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One-way flow of image and media assets

## DAM 3.0 CONTENT WAREHOUSE



## DAM 4.0 INTELLIGENT RESPONDER

Streamlined supply chain with AI

Focus on "demand chain" enablement, responding to customer in context

Responds to humans and agent demands alike

Real-time experience adaptation at the edge

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## DAM 3.0 CONTENT WAREHOUSE

To reach 4.0 at scale, you need a Content Warehouse.

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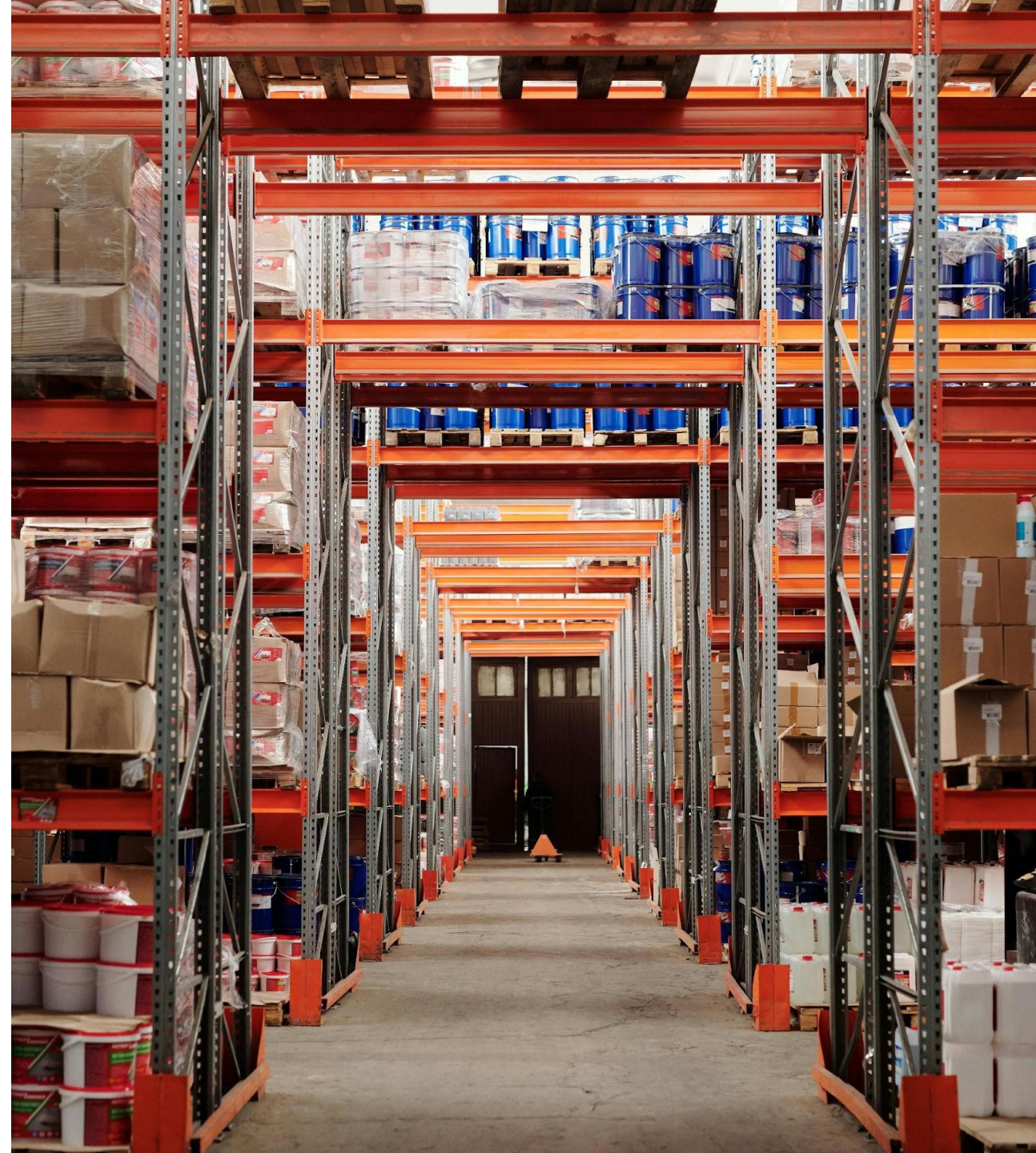
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# DAM 3.0: Content Warehouse

- Core media, narrative, and data all managed as first-class objects within a graph model
- Component-level management for omnichannel activation
- Sophisticated, compound, mixed-media content assembly
- GenAI creates sibling variants for personalization
- 2-way flow of information, including usage and channel-derived variants
- Effectiveness measurement beyond traditional campaign analytics



# Beyond Assets: Entities

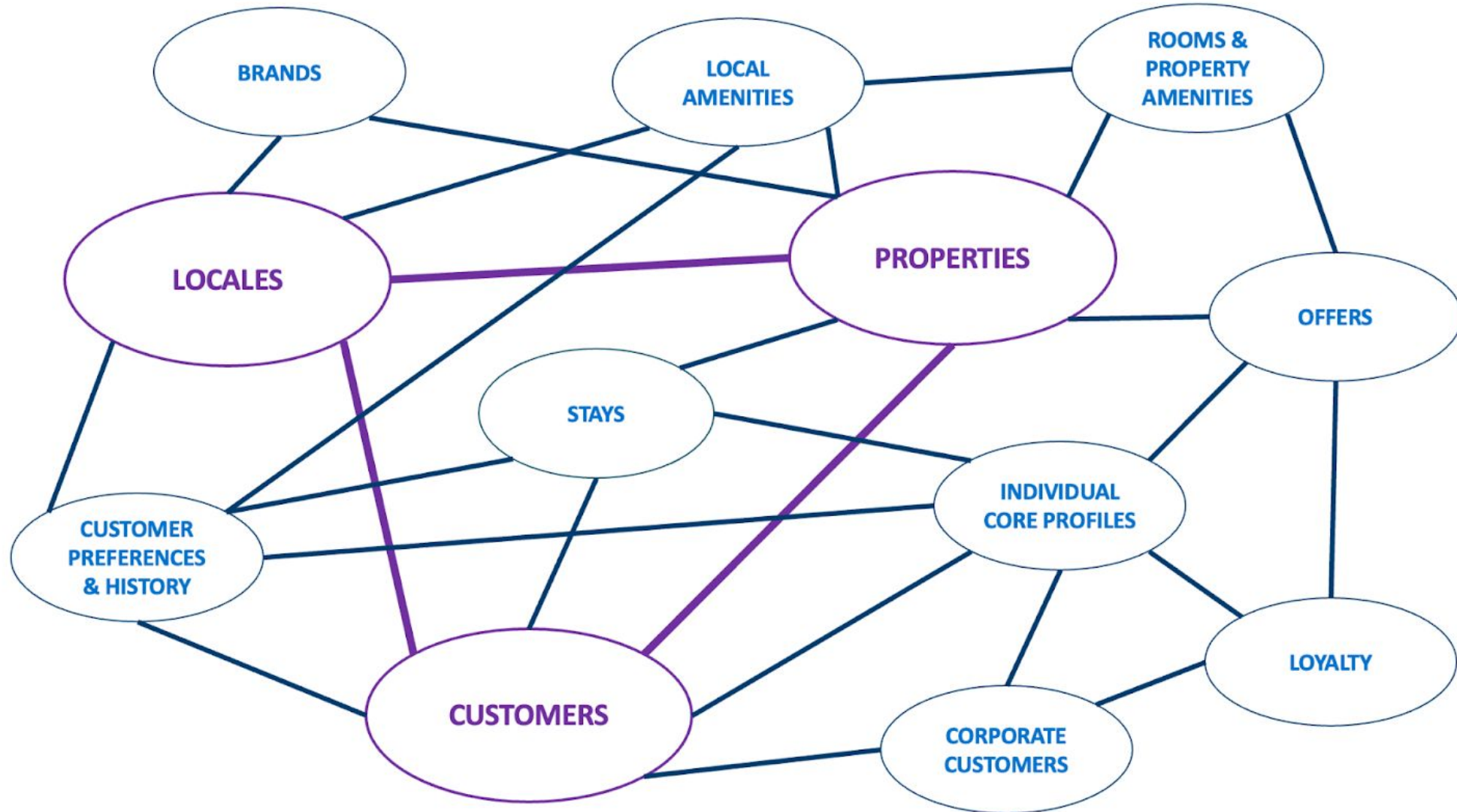
- Products & SKUs – Link assets to specifications, pricing, lifecycle
- People & Contributors – Photographers, approvers, stakeholders, rights
- Brands & Sub-brands – Guidelines, variations, market positioning
- Campaigns & Initiatives – Timelines, budgets, performance metrics
- Rights & Licenses – Terms, expirations, usage limits, costs
- Channels & Touchpoints – Specifications, publishing requirements
- Markets & Geographies – Compliance, localization, cultural rules

"All Product X assets for Europe with expiring rights in 90 days"

"High-performing campaign assets and their shared characteristics"

"Total licensing costs for all e-commerce site assets"

# High-level Entity Graph for Hospitality Chain



# Beyond Assets: Taxonomy

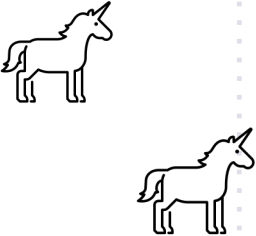
- Organize AI training data at scale
- Improve AI model accuracy and predictions
- Enable semantic understanding beyond keywords
- Power knowledge graphs and entity relationships
- Reduce bias through explicit categorization
- Enable AI system interoperability
- Make AI decisions explainable and auditable
- Optimize search and recommendations
- Bridge human expertise with AI capabilities



# DAM Vendors Circa 2026

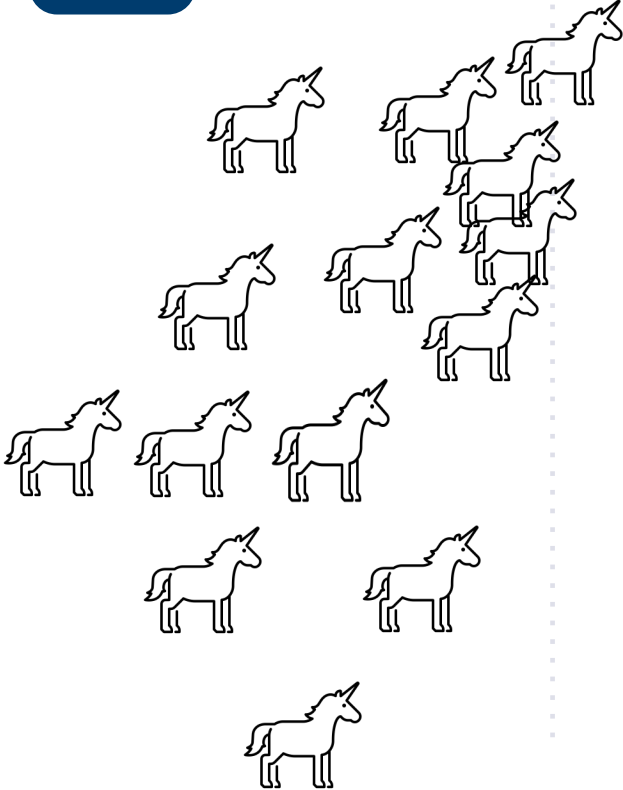
DAM  
1.0

STANDALONE  
LIBRARY



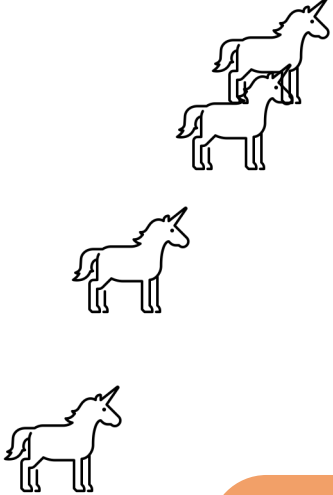
DAM  
2.0

CONNECTED  
SERVICE



DAM  
3.0

CONTENT  
WAREHOUSE



DAM  
4.0

INTELLIGENT  
RESPONDER

Not just DAM vendors...  
Data Warehouses, Web CMS,  
CRM, Content Ops, PIM...

# Preparing for More Loss of Control

Trend #5

# Portability

- Brands no longer control where experiences happen
- Social platforms, marketplaces, influencer channels, AI assistants, partner ecosystems

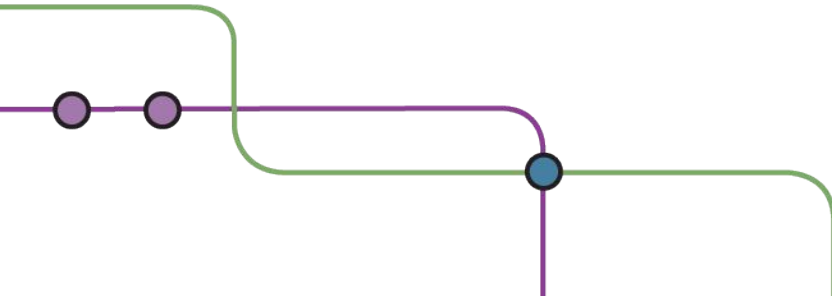
## What True Portability Requires:

- Semantic metadata travels with assets (rights, product data, usage constraints)
- API-first architecture for programmatic access
- Ability to control access to segments of your content (product line, brand graph)
- Format-agnostic definitions that generate platform-specific renditions on-demand
- Automated distribution and synchronization across all endpoints





# Smarter Storage Decisions


Trend #6



# Volumes Forcing Smarter Storage Decisioning

 • Hot Storage – Active assets (current campaigns, brand guidelines) → instant access, premium cost

 • Warm Storage – Moderate use (recent projects, seasonal content) → balanced cost/performance

 • Cold Storage – Archive (old campaigns, compliance files) → minimal cost, slower retrieval

- Automated Intelligence:

- Age-based transitions (move to cold after 12 months)
- Access frequency monitoring (demote unused files)
- Project lifecycle rules (archive completed campaigns)
- Metadata-driven policies (custom business logic)



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# 6 Trends to Watch in 2026

- 1 AI Feature Frenzy is a Distraction
- 2 Boardroom Directive for Content
- 3 Need to Support a Content Demand Chain
- 4 Rise of the Content Warehouse
- 5 Preparing for More Loss of Control
- 6 Smarter Storage Decisions

# Thank you

Stay in touch!

- @realstorygroup
- @jarrodgingras
- jgingras@realstorygroup.com

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DAM, AI for Marketing, AI Agents

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