Leveraging Viewership Data in Asset Management
By Kendra Chamberlain

With the rise of IBM’s Watson, Amazon, Google and Facebook, it’s clear we’ve entered into the era of Big Data. Indeed, data now seems to drive many business decisions across industries and sectors, powered in no small part by the internet and its two-way communication.

For broadcasters and content owners, one of the big benefits of IP distribution is the return path for data: information about how the content was consumed, generated by the end user devices. That’s given the likes of Facebook and Amazon a huge advantage over traditional content providers and distributors, which they now compete with for eyeballs and advertising dollars.

“If you look at the FANG community – Facebook Apple Netflix Google – they all have a common instance in their life cycle where their valuation and their ability to grow and deliver product is triggered by them consuming data about how the system being used, and applying that data back to their own infrastructure,” said David Cole, CEO and CTO of media asset management (MAM) vendor IPV.

Broadcasters, of course, have spent the past 70 years or so building businesses around a one-way communication network. But as more content distribution moves to IP-based technologies, broadcasters, content owners and media companies are eager to begin using viewership data to their own advantages.

“Analytical data is critical for the future of the MAM and PAM [production asset management] market,” said Cole. “It generates an enormous amount of very interesting and very valuable data that needs to be captured. It needs to be analyzed and presented back to both the business owners and also the business drivers.”

Broadcasters’ Big Data Opportunity
In past years, broadcasters struggled to adapt their legacy infrastructure, content supply chains and business models to the fast-paced world of IP distribution. But today, most major content owners

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and media firms have begun moving more of their distribution online, and have begun moving more of their internal infrastructure to the cloud.

“At the base level, people are moving towards digital. That flows all the way through the supply chain,” Cole said. “The net result is that now you have more digital assets to manage, you have to look for modern ways to handle those assets.”

Video streaming and multi-device distribution – coupled with the trend toward direct-to-consumer video services – have given broadcasters and content owners the opportunity to take a peek at viewership data and begin to think of ways to best utilize that data for their benefit. And these shifts in content consumption have given broadcasters an opportunity to rethink the television experience.

“The traditional broadcast model is, some guy sits in a room and puts up titles of shows on a list and says, ‘This makes a good Thursday night,’” said Jason Friedlander, director of product marketing at Verizon Digital Media Services, explaining that what works for “a majority” doesn’t cut it anymore in a world full of personalized content. Indeed, VDMS launched a content intelligence platform earlier this year to address these shifts.

Going online means broadcasters can now know more about which programs resonate with which viewers, and can use that data to deliver more personalized viewing experiences, which will help keep viewers engaged with the channel.

“If the goal is to keep people watching longer so I can serve them more ads, I should serve them the content they want,” Friedlander said. Viewership data can help shed light on what content works and what doesn’t.

Friedlander pointed out that this is essentially how Netflix rose to prominence. It first built up a library of licensed TV shows and films, and then collected lots of viewership data about how its subscribers interacted with that content. Using that viewership data, the company has been able to develop an impressive data-driven content production strategy that’s helped it attract new subscribers and keep its existing subscribers engaged.

“Now they’re producing content specifically for the people they know are buying their subscriptions. They are the perfect example of someone who is using data to actually drive their content decisions,” Friedlander said. “It’s not linear, but I’d say that’s the next progression in this.”

Netflix uses viewership data to determine what kinds of content it should create.
Content Analytics

The ability to capture end user data has given rise to a whole new world of content analytics for broadcasters and content owners to explore. And it’ll give traditional broadcasters a leg up in competing with the league of OTT services that have helped to fragment audiences.

“There’s a whole raft of very exciting things happening in the marketplace about analyzing that kind of data,” IPV’s Cole said. “I think it’s critical that media asset management vendors take that data seriously and embrace it and use it, and also contribute to it.”

But data collection is only the first step. Content owners must then be able to put that data to work by informing content, production and distribution decisions.

“That piece is really important. Everyone is thinking about ‘how do I incorporate data in the context of my content,’” said Jarrod Gingras, managing director and analyst of digital workplace and marketing technology at the research firm Real Story Group. “This is true with DAM [digital asset management], and MAM, with everything. We’re seeing it in terms of helping to inform future decisions.”

What types of decisions can content owners make using data? The goal is to better understand the value of the assets by looking at how specific pieces of content perform with specific demographics, and why.

“We want to know things like what assets are in flight and how are they used? How regularly are they used? What type of asset is used more frequently than another asset, and how do users engage with those assets?” Cole said. “Are there trends that we can optimize the business process for? Are there processes that assets go through that make them more valuable, and can we make it repetitive, can we automate those processes?”

By collecting reams of viewership data, content owners can feed that data back into the asset management systems and content supply chain to understand which assets in the library have value and for which viewers.

“One example is video length: Everyone’s attention spans seem to be decreasing these days, everyone’s looking for the sweet spot of video length,” Real Story Group’s Gingras said. “There are stats that can be pulled in, analytics that can be pulled in. Where are people dropping off in terms of viewership? OK, let’s try this size, based on that data.”

There are likely millions of conclusions that can be drawn about asset creation, value and distribution that can be gleaned by looking at viewership data. And in fact, vendors are now creating AI applications to do just

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**Leveraging Data For Asset Management**

But as with any big data application, the challenge is in getting all the right information about content creation, distribution and viewership – which is oftentimes siloed across disparate technology stacks – into the same place.

“The challenge is that the analytics is happening somewhere else, it’s happening in some sort of other distribution layer, whether it’s on a website or television. Most of the time, it’s really how well do [MAM systems] integrate with another interaction layer, and can they pull that data back in,” Gingras said. “The APIs are there, they’re building them, but it’s hard to connect these systems and tie it back in. Everyone’s trying to find a way to make sense of that.”

Traditional MAM systems are typically more focused on media archiving, and not distribution or business decisions, and rely on metadata about the content itself to make those decisions. And what’s more, legacy MAM technology stacks can be disparate and siloed systems that don’t make larger, supply chain-wide analysis very easy.

“When you have different systems and analytics coming in from different sources and data being stored in different places, you have content coming in and being stored in different places, it’s so hard to converge all that data into a single place and take advantage of what that data can actually do for you,” Friedlander said.

But as more broadcasters and content owners begin to transition more pieces of their content supply chain to IP, they can begin to adopt systems that are more flexible and agile. And as the world of streaming video continues to grow, content owners will likely be moving towards more cohesive, converged platforms for managing both traditional broadcast and streaming workflows.

“As broadcast of traditional media converges with online media, it only makes sense that you should not have to manage two ecosystems,” Friedlander said. “It’s a headache. You need to be able to pull in your analytics and all the data you have around a piece of content, from creation to distribution, into a single source, so that you can better your business in the long run.”

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