IDM
IMAGE & DATA MANAGER

It's in the make-up

Avon's turning around stacks of catalogues.
By Mark Chillingworth

MANY organisations are still considering moving their assets into the digital arena. Those that have a plethora of digital content may be struggling with how to manage it. But if your organisation thrives on a catalogue, digital assets and digital asset management is almost mission critical.
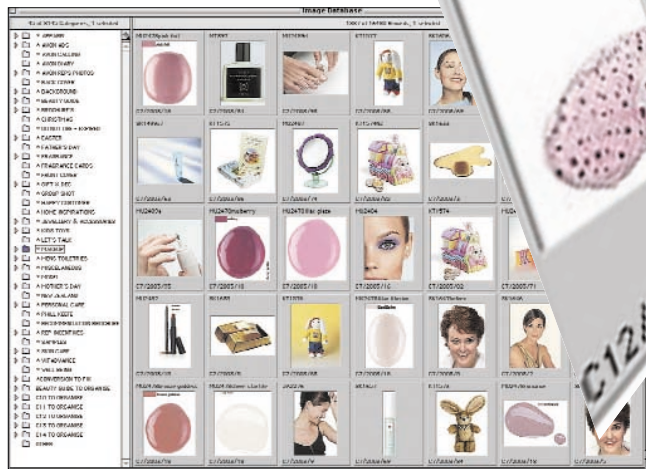
Avon Products, famous for its Avon Ladies has to produce a new catalogue every three weeks. The Australian branch office is no stranger to digital asset management and uses digital asset management (DAM) to control a vast archive of images as well as new images from their US headquarters and local photography sessions.

A team of 15 reprographic operators create the wealth of Avon catalogues on Quark XPress operating on Apple Macintosh's new OS X operating system. Avon is continually delivering new products and sales initiatives, which is why the team has to produce a new catalogue every three weeks.

"This is our main focus, it is our shop window," says Glenn Garrard, Senior Reprographics Operator for Avon. Production cycles include the main catalogue, as well as special clearance sale catalogues and an internal newsletter to inform the sales teams of the offers coming up.

Image management

Avon is the world's largest direct sales company in the beauty industry, with sales in 143 countries and they claim to have 3.9 million Avon Ladies around the world. Avon catalogues rely heavily on imagery, with high quality product shots, pictures of models and an increasing range of offers branching outside of the traditional beauty products they are famous for.

Avon's head office in New York supplies all the photography with models in to the global group.

"We take these shots and put them in our own database so we don't have to keep going and getting the shots," says Garrard. Once the shots are in the hands of Avon Australia, they are added to the Cumulus digital asset management application that Avon use. Garrard says the Australian branch has its own naming system for the DAM program. Currently Avon Australia has up to 16,000 images on its library. A further 150 new images are added to the DAM system at the beginning of each three week cycle.

As well as the new shots, Garrard says that he and his

team regularly have to use shots that are two years old. He says, "They are often needed for advertisements that just feature a new addition to an existing range. Products can exist for three to four years and we need to constantly re-visit these shots."

Avon doesn't just use the digital asset management application as some form of digital sheep dog; the metadata that each image in the system contains enables Avon to improve business processes. Each image has a metadata table, which can be called up. This delivers information to the user that can be used for the production of the catalogues. A section called Long Copy stores the pictures captions, thus ensuring continuity in the catalogues. Increasingly, as markets move towards digital assets, there is concern about how digital assets, copyright and other rights are protected. Most of the digital images with models in are from the US and come with strict rights management constraints. The metadata field has this information captured so that users can instantly view these and ensure that the image they are using is not going to contravene any agreements Avon has with the models.

The digital asset management system also reduces the load on the computer and applications. Users can view a large picture of each digital asset without the need to open applications such as PhotoShop, Cumulus has a preview window.

Storage of these digital assets can also be managed much more efficiently. Garrard says that Avon used to be restricted to storing just the last two catalogues on its systems, whilst all previous issues had to be stored on Magneto Optical disks. Now the team has a storage area network (SAN).

"We are connected to a SAN so that the images are online. We will then have a terabyte of storage which we can put the last four to five years worth of digital assets on," Garrard says.

Avon went digital 10 years ago, with all their photography being done digital now so that all image production is digital and the entire workflow of cat-

Modern look

AVON is famous for its Avon Ladies direct marketing approach. Although the Avon Ladies are still as much part of Avon today as they ever were; the company has moved with the times. Its British division launched a new Web site last year that acts as a public e-commerce site and supply chain tool for the famous ladies.

The British Avon site acts as a central portal for both Avon consumers and 160,000 Avon Ladies the company claims to have in Great Britain. The site was launched in 2001 just prior to the company closing its manufacturing division in Britain in favour of cheaper workers in Poland.

Avon customers can shop online for the full range of Avon products including cosmetics and lingerie or they can instantly demand the attention of an Avon Lady with a 'Contact Me' button. More traditional shoppers can request the famous the Avon catalogue to be delivered.

Avon Ladies can use the site as business tool for their direct marketing activities. The latest product information is uploaded to the site, which has secure access for the ladies. Avon has given the ladies direct access to their central supply chain for placing orders, managing accounts and making transactions over the Web.

In constantly mobile Japan Avon is delivering information and services to its Ladies using the I-Mode wireless network from NTT DoCoMo.

alogue production digital until it lands on paper.

This is the first true digital asset management application that Avon has used in Australia. Prior to adopting Cumulus, Avon used a digital picture management application ImageAxs. This system was dropped when the vendor withdrew support for the system and Avon was looking for a system that would enable them to have Web access to their digital assets.

Like all migrations, just because content is digital, it doesn't mean the migration will be easy. An Apple Script had to be written to move the images from the old system onto the new digital asset management application. This script had to extract the content and the metadata, change the metadata to suit the new digital asset management application and upload it. Scripting and integration was carried out by Creative Folks, a specialist in graphical applications and digital asset management.

Avon has customised the information window of Cumulus, as most users do, to suit their user methods. Navigation can also be customised, which Avon has

done to ensure that images are only saved to the system once, but can be found by users in a multiple of folders. This is done through the metadata which will add an image to folders on models, hair products and a plethora of other areas that a user may look for an image under.

Meta data can be added to an image file in the digital asset management application, or in Photoshop using International Press Telecommunications Council (IPTC) standards.

Currently the digital asset management system is only used by the creative team in Reprographics at Avon, but the cosmetics company hopes to integrate the Web Publisher Pro application from Canto in the near future; this will enable other areas of the business to access the system. Users in Marketing and other departments will be able to use the database of images on the digital asset management application to collect and use images for their own purposes. **IDM**

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