

Long-Term Effects of Neglecting Your Creative Assets

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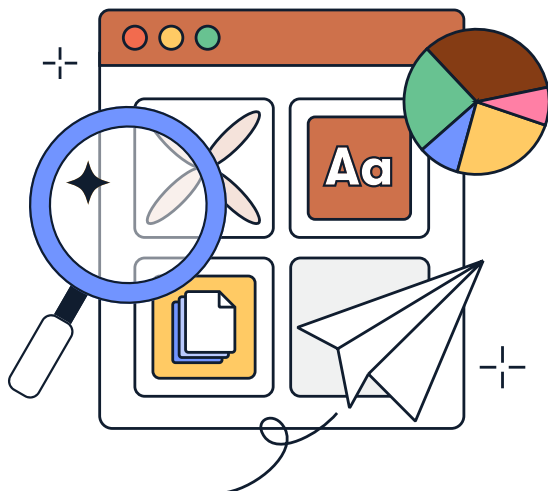
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In the modern era, creative work simply doesn't get done without digital assets. From fonts to photos, video files to logos, assets have become inextricable from the creative process itself.

While ideas are at the vision for a campaign, execution and assets are what brings a concept to life. And a final project can be considered as an asset in its own right — a single sparkling concept condensed into video, print, and web assets.

However, in the race to bring ideas to life, it's easy for assets to be pushed to the wayside or not treated with the level of care they require. Over time, this can lead to serious collaboration issues, wasted time, confusion, and even litigation. This guide will help you to understand the long-term effects of neglecting your creative assets. You will come to understand how immediate issues are compounded over time, and how as neglect continues, there are more opportunities for very serious problems to arise.

This guide will also highlight some best practices and help you visualize what your optimal creative asset care plan looks like.



1. Fundamentals of Healthy Asset Care

Before we can get into what can go wrong with improperly managed assets, it's important to understand the basic principles of effective asset care within the four core pillars of the asset workflow.

Organization

You know what they say, a place for everything and everything in its place. Enforcing a strong system or organizational practice will make everything clearer.

There are different ways to organize your files, but perhaps the most classic is a nested — or “pyramid” — folder structure. General folders contain increasingly specific subfolders, which contain specific assets. While team members may not always knowingly follow a path laid out by your organization, the structure itself ensures assets don't slip through the cracks, and periodic review is always hassle-free.

Oversight

We're not just talking stock photos, fonts, or finalized creative documents. We're talking everything. Asset management should include in-house creative assets as well as third-party creative assets used as design elements — fonts, stock photos and illustrations, client logos, etc.

It's crucial that all of these assets are sorted with accurate information attached that explains when they should and should not be used.

Clarity

Which asset version is final? Like, really final — even after the client approved it, but then sent over a 2am email wanting a different stock photo? When drafts are not labeled efficiently, they can sneak into the workflow and cause confusion. Clearly labeled and sorted assets ensure that your team can grab the latest and greatest — not an unapproved draft — without triple-checking.

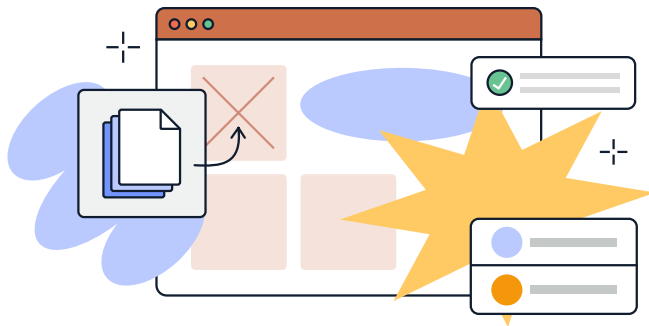
When it comes to design element assets, permissions and licensing are of the utmost importance. Team members should be able to easily distinguish whether or not an image or font can be used in a given project, and when to flag issues. One way to manage this is by providing a well organized spreadsheet that users can refer to. An even more effective route is to use a tool which allows you to tag assets with licensing information.

Accessibility

Having well organized creative assets is great, but can your team actually get to them? Whether it's through an on-premises server or a cloud-based platform, it's important that creatives can grab assets as needed. And even if your team is fully on-site, remote access is still beneficial when team members travel.

The catch with strong accessibility is that a vast swath of assets can confuse or even overwhelm users. If your process allows, consider using work groups and user permissions to limit access as needed.

These are great goals to set, but let's face it — under tight deadlines, demanding clients, and collaboration woes, asset management can fall to the wayside. Here's what happens when creative assets are neglected.



2. Short-Term Effects Of Neglect

In the short term, neglect leads to issues associated with incorrect version usage. These issues are inconvenient, and major issues are usually easy to catch and resolve before they spiral out of control.

Duplicates

Multiple file versions of the exact same asset may exist in multiple locations. While this may ensure that folks have access, it eats up storage. Duplicates present another major issue when it comes to third party creative assets — higher costs.

It's not uncommon for a team's font or stock imagery collection to include duplicate assets. Generally, this happens because the assets were not easy to find, and it was actually faster to simply repurchase them. This leads to clutter, confusion, and inflated spend.

Improper Assets Used As Drafts

Tagging in another team member or upcycling an older asset can be crucial to meeting tight deadlines. The issue is that when multiple drafts are being stored, the most recent version isn't always grabbed. Often times, a version that was not approved or even unfinished is used as a working draft.

This leads to unnecessary work for your team. It also provides an opportunity for errors and incorrect design element assets making it into the final deliverables.

Improper Assets In Final Deliverables

From copy that the client had a huge change of heart about, to fonts that can't be used for a web page, the wrong assets being submitted for final approval can upset stakeholders and even present compliance risks.

If these mistakes are caught in time, the work often needs last minute urgent care, which requires extra hours.

Wasted Time

Neglected assets can lead to serious problems, but the most common issue is simply wasted time. Team members need to spend more time searching, confirming which assets to use, and redoing work if the wrong asset is selected.

Busy work is frustrating for everyone, but did you know that the average creative team member spends a full hour weekly just searching for the right asset to use? That's 2.5% of the work week, and doesn't include hours wasted producing work that will ultimately have to be redone because of errors.

All of these short term effects tend to arise quickly, within just a few weeks or months of assets being neglected. Now, let's explore what happens as these effects are compounded over several months or even years.



3. Long-Term Effects of Neglect

Financial Cost

In the long term, that slight budget stretch for duplicates we mentioned earlier becomes overstretched because multiple licenses for the same assets are purchased. Inherent disorganization also leads to compounding mistakes, which require more hours to fix. Even if your team members are salaried, the amount of time required to fix mistakes limits the hours they could bill for other clients, and can rack up unwanted hours from your freelance employees.

Poor Morale

Long hours can wear your team down. But even when creatives understand "agency life," it's very disheartening to spend more and more time on busy work, editing instead of creating, or watching hard-won projects fall to the cutting room floor.

As employees feel that their time and talent are being wasted, they're more likely to pursue other opportunities. As people talk with their connections, your organization may earn a reputation for having a disorganized work environment, which can also make recruiting more challenging.

Bad Reputation

Having a bad reputation amongst the local talent pool is one thing — far worse is a bad reputation amongst clients. Word of mouth travels fast when clients discuss pushed deadlines and errors.

You may fail to attract new clients at the rate you desire. You may even lose clients due to their frustration.

Litigation

It's easy to think that an in-house project was created entirely from scratch, but remember, those design element assets (such as fonts) have strict licensing. As assets are neglected, increased opportunities arise for their licensing information to be dismissed. Work gets really chaotic under the pressure of tight deadlines and demanding clients. Add chronic disorganization and disregard for licensing to that equation, and assets are bound to get used incorrectly.

Some stock imagery suppliers will use AI to track down where their images exist online. Some font foundries have sued big brands over font licensing noncompliance — **with epic seven-figure price tags.**

Talent and vision can only carry a team so far. If the very tools you rely on and produce are not maintained, you risk losing money, team members, clients, your reputation, and the opportunity to grow.



4. Get Back On Track

No matter how badly the train has derailed, never fear, it's not too late to get back on track!

Get The Whole Team Onboard

Changing habits requires conscious dedication, and the whole team must commit in order for change to occur.

We recommend a team meeting to address the situation at hand. By showing your understanding of the problem, you can show creatives that you understand their frustrations. Be open to feedback and recommendations regarding process, roles, and tools.

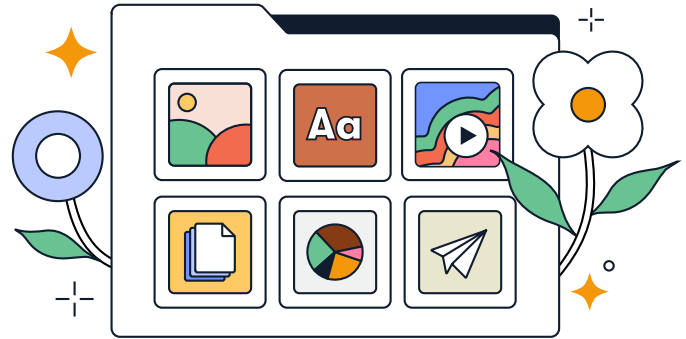
Audit Your Assets

If your collection is overflowing with drafts and duplicates, an audit is the first step toward reducing the total number of assets. Once you've cleared out the clutter, you can organize accordingly.

Gather team members with appropriate bandwidth to help with the audit. Set clear and reasonable expectations about which assets should be audited within single or multiple timeframes. Unnecessary assets can be purged. Assets that have been purchased, created, and subsequently approved—as well as assets active in current projects—can be organized accordingly. If you have historic work which was not approved but may provide inspiration or utility for a future project, you may consider saving and sorting these as well, perhaps as reference assets.

We recommend using a nested folder structure and tagging assets to ensure your team can find exactly what they're looking for in the future.

Check out – 5 Tips For Setting Up An Organized Folder Structure Like A Pro.



5. Reconsider Your Tech Stack

Since you are working with digital files, the digital tools you use can make a huge difference. By optimizing your tech stack, you can automate a lot of asset management. This will cut down on busywork for your team and reduce the opportunity for human error in saving and sorting files as well.

Stashing everything on a server? Cloud-based solutions are more flexible and easier for your team to access remotely. They're more secure than ever, and when you consider the cost of server maintenance, cloud-based storage for creative assets tends to be considerably more affordable.

Half-empty asset drafts cluttering asset collections? Use a prototyping tool to get layouts approved faster and easier. Also, make a rule that outlined files are to be considered drafts, and can be deleted once deliverables are approved.

If your overall collaborative workflow has been impacted by asset neglect, using a tool like Asana, Monday, Trello, or Jira can help! If you already use a solution like this, study best practices and revamp your process, or upgrade to a tool that better supports your needs. Refine your process and set clear expectations for how files should be named and used in production.



6. Care For Assets Holistically With Extensis Connect

You may benefit from a platform specifically developed to meet the asset management needs of creative teams and media organizations. Connect is a two-fold solution that supports creative teams in managing their most significant – and tricky – digital assets.

Connect Fonts provides top-shelf font management that benefits all members of creative organizations. Designers and other creative professionals can automatically activate and access/share fonts, as well as receive automatic suggestions for fonts to use. Account managers and project managers can distribute client or project fonts in real-time. Operations experts can use robust reporting and insights to understand how fonts are being used, slash font spend, and ensure compliance.

Connect Assets is a cloud-based repository for creative and digital assets that supports creative workflows. Teams can declutter document dupes and ensure that everyone always has access to the most recent version of a document. Creative element assets such as photos and illustrations can be tagged with licensing, campaign, client, and purchasing information to ensure that best practices are followed.

The two tools work in tandem, empowering you to effectively care for your assets and optimize collaboration for your whole organization.

[Discover Connect](#)

7. The Long-Term Effects Of Caring For Your Assets

It can feel like a lot of work to rein in the chaos, but it is absolutely worth it.

Your team has more time to focus on actual creative production. You're clear and confident on licensing permissions. You're saving on storage and billable hours. You have a reputation for delivering flawless work. Even last-minute approval fire-drills are less stressful.

However, asset care is an ongoing process. Once you have raised the standard of care for assets, it's important to uphold it. Reviewing and cleaning up asset data should be an ongoing effort. The good news is that over time and with proper care, this routine maintenance gets easier and easier.

Your team, your clients, and your business will appreciate it.

