

Custom Ink & Clouinary: Making Personalization Look Easy

Streamlines management for hundreds of thousands of images to improve user experience

Seamless integration with existing Google and Adobe-based workflows

New branded video controls keeps visitors on-site

Families, clubs, teams, businesses, and other groups visit **Custom Ink's** website to find and design distinctive t-shirts and branded items.

After more than two decades in business, however, the company had stockpiled hundreds of thousands of visual media assets in its on-prem DAM solution that had become too unwieldy for its creative and marketing teams to manage. Now, by switching to Clouinary's DAM, the company is working more efficiently and saving huge amounts of internal time. Also, Clouinary's integrations with leading content delivery networks (CDNs) are drawing praise across Custom Ink's many departments. This is because of the lightweight, scalable capability for hosting video content with closed captioning and transcripts.

**INDUSTRY**

Retail & E-commerce

SIZE

2,000 employees

HEADQUARTERS

Fairfax, VA, United States





“One of the many benefits we gained from switching to Cloudinary was the opportunity to clean up. There were lots of fields in our old DAM that people just weren't searching for. With Cloudinary we worked right from the start with much better metadata, leading to much more efficient search.”

—**Andrew Albosta, Multimedia Production Associate, Custom Ink**

ABOUT

Custom Ink: fostering connection through fun

Based in Virginia, Custom Ink is the leader in providing custom apparel, gear and accessories that helps all types of groups to celebrate achievement. Its fun, easy-to-use Design Lab let customers design custom products that foster connections with colleagues, loved ones, and friends, in-person and at-a-distance. Established in 1999, the privately held firm now has 2000+ employees.

THE CHALLENGE

Shaking off the On-Prem shackles

'Inkers', as Custom Ink's staff like to call themselves, pride themselves on offering the very best custom clothing, mugs, branded notebooks and fun 'swag' possible. Veteran Inker and multimedia production leader Andrew Albosta, explained that such items have the power to bring people together and strengthen a sense of community - whether the group is the neighborhood softball team, work or professional colleagues, or a big family reunion.

Delivering that experience depends on a great website that offers superb imagery so users get exactly what they want after every visit. But, as Albosta's colleague, Sam Worthington, Director of Photography notes, "22 years of doing so has created a huge library. I can't tell you how many millions of photographs we've taken up to now," he says. "Being able to keep track of them and get them to the right people at the right time is essential."

Keeping track of these millions of images and videos had been handled by On-Prem software that was starting to show its age. Albosta and his team were expected to manage it on their own. "Truth be told, it was getting really difficult for us to do that," he explains. "We were constantly behind on upgrades, which meant the system was getting increasingly buggy."

THE CLOUDINARY SOLUTION

Fitting right in with the way people want to work

Custom Ink decided that the best way forward was to move to a SaaS-based DAM with Cloudinary. The company also valued Cloudinary's unique content delivery network (CDN) integration that could help it manage heavily-used product images for marketing emails, landing pages, and other promotions.



"Making the business case for SaaS in the shape of Cloudinary was so much easier than I thought it would be, because our tech teams did not have the time to be dealing with any more 'DAM' problems"

—**Sam Worthington, Director of Photography, Custom Ink**

Moving to Cloudinary's DAM has solved all these problems and more. A key benefit has been how seamlessly the DAM integrates with the company's custom workflows. "Our production process means we need to have a mix of both finished and unfinished assets ready for our team to change the designs," says Albosta. "Cloudinary does a much better job at previewing things like Photoshop files than Google Drive, so it's a lot faster for us to search and scroll through images to see what's there."

Cloudinary's easy integration with Google Drive and Gmail, as well as specialized photographic tools like Adobe Lightroom and Bridge, has also been a bonus, as these tools remain central to the Custom Ink workflow. Cloudinary's ability to duplicate folder structures, for example, makes it very easy for a designer to find something in either system.

The structured metadata Cloudinary provides also significantly streamlines the search process. That's particularly useful given the immense size of the catalog, Albosta adds. "When spinning up the system, I asked the reporting team to load every product name active on the website into Cloudinary as a structured dictionary of terms. We can now ensure consistency and know that we will never accidentally tag something incorrectly."

THE RESULTS

Moving to Cloudinary's DAM delivers improved efficiency—across the board

"For me, it's really all about the amount of time our designers and the people on my team in Photography are saving," enthuses Worthington. "Just being able to save all of these different file types all in one place and preview them has been so beneficial!"

The multimedia production side that Albosta leads has benefited from being able to properly organize the Custom Ink's key digital assets, from folders to tags to better structured metadata fields.

But it's not just technical Inkers who love DAM in the cloud.

Custom Ink established 'Collections' that let people cherry-pick items they want to share, either internally or outside the Cloudinary system with vendors, outside salespeople, customers, and others.

"We even extended a collection to the photo editors at Newsweek, which was doing a story on us," said Worthington.

Another big endorsement came when Custom Ink's VP of Finance was looking for specific imagery for a board deck and Worthington was able to quickly put together a collections page with seven or eight different images.

The next day the VP of Finance enthused about how easy the normally cumbersome process was, as Worthington relates: "He said that when we made the business case for Cloudinary that was one thing – but when he actually saw it in action he said it was awesome!"

Cloudinary's integrations with leading CDNs are also drawing praise across Custom Ink's many departments. This is because of the lightweight, scalable capability for hosting video content with closed captioning and transcripts.

As Worthington explains: "A lot of consumer brands handle video by just embedding YouTube in a page, but that's far from ideal. Putting YouTube as a video player on a web page is very easy, but it's not yours and doesn't have your branding, YouTube's autoplay and suggested video features actually draw people away from your own website."



About Cloudinary

Cloudinary's mission is to empower companies to deliver visual experiences that inspire and connect by unleashing the full potential of their media. With more than 60 billion assets under management and 10,000 customers worldwide, Cloudinary is the industry standard for developers, creators and marketers looking to upload, store, transform, manage, and deliver images and videos online. As a result, leading brands like Minted, Atlassian, Bleacher Report, Bombas, Grubhub, Hinge, NBC, Mediavine, Peloton, and Petco are seeing significant business value in using Cloudinary, including faster time to market, higher user satisfaction and increased engagement and conversions. For more information, www.cloudinary.com