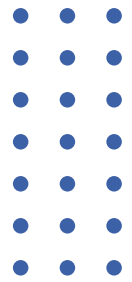


WHITE PAPER CASE STUDY

Delivering a Promotional Execution Centre of Excellence Transformation at Kroger

with the Aproove Work Management and Online Proofing platform



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1. Introduction to the Case Study

This White Paper Case Study was commissioned and published by [Aproove](#) following an extensive transformation program with [Kroger](#) and [PureRED](#) in North America.

Aproove commissioned [Team6ix](#), a wholly Independent Consultancy specializing in Marketing Technology Strategy and Transformation, exploring the end-to-end transformation journey, the value it delivers for Kroger, and future vision for the transformation journey.

The scope of this Case Study encompasses all aspects of a marketing content operations and work management transformation program led by the Promotional Execution Strategy Team within Kroger USA.

The Case Study articulates the program's strategic vision, key challenges, and issues addressed. It examines how Kroger, together with its strategic partners, PureRED, Aproove, and the Aproove Work Management and Online Proofing platform, has driven demonstrable business benefits and value for Kroger through a multi-phased, structured, marketing technology transformation approach.

1.1 Brief Background to Kroger, PureRED and Aproove

About Kroger



Kroger's history dates back over 130 years and started when Barney Kroger invested his life savings of **\$372** in opening a grocery store at 66 Pearl Street in downtown Cincinnati. Now with nearly 2,800 stores in 35 states, under 22 banners brands, and annual sales of more than **\$121.1 billion** (2019), Kroger today ranks as **one of the world's largest retailers**.

Kroger is also one of the largest food manufacturing businesses in America. It operates 35 food manufacturing facilities that make thousands of products ranging from bread, cookies, and milk to soda pop, ice cream, and peanut butter. About 40% of private-label items found in the company's stores today are made at Kroger's manufacturing plants and with Kroger Brands accounting for around 26% of total store dollar sales.

Today Kroger offers a store format for nearly every shopper, including supermarkets, multi-department stores, marketplace stores, price-impact stores, and fine jewelry stores. With stores ranging from an average of 76,000 square feet to 161,000 square feet, they include thousands of items ranging from grocery to organic, natural foods,

ready to eat, while operating more than 2,255 in-store pharmacies, floral shops, installed fuel centers in more than 1,545 locations.

Mergers have played a key role in Kroger's growth over the years. In 1983, Kroger merged with Dillon Companies Inc.; however, the biggest merger in Kroger's history came in 1999, when the company teamed up with Fred Meyer, Inc., in a \$13 billion deal. In 2014, Kroger finalized its merger with Harris Teeter and Vitacost.com, one of the largest pure e-commerce companies in the nutrition and healthy living market.

The company's e-commerce platform accelerated Kroger's presence in that space by several years, giving it the ability to serve customers through ship-to-home orders and expand Kroger's reach into all 50 states and internationally. In late 2015, Kroger merged with Roundy's in Wisconsin, adding Pick' N Save, Metro Market, and Mariano's stores in Wisconsin and Illinois to the Kroger family.

Throughout its rich history, Kroger has served as an innovator and pioneer in the retail food industry. Innovation is also at the heart of Kroger's sustainability efforts to improve today to protect tomorrow.

With dozens of manufacturing facilities and distribution centers around the country, Kroger also has one of the largest privately-owned truck fleets in the country. Trucks moving merchandise and supplies among stores, warehouses and manufacturing plants log nearly 329 million miles annually.

The business principles that made the first Kroger store successful in 1883 – service, selection, and value – continue to guide the company's operations today. More than a century ago, Barney Kroger laid the foundation for what today ranks as one of the largest companies in America from one tiny grocery store in Cincinnati more than a century ago.



About PureRED



For over 54 years PureRED have created customer-led solutions for some of the largest retail companies in the world. As a leading Marketing Service and Technology Partner, PureRED create and deliver digital content and customer experiences at the scale, speed, and precision required by large enterprise retailers and top consumer marketers.



Currently operating with over 500+ experts in Technology, Strategy, Creative, and Digital Production, PureRED work in partnership with 14 of the largest 25 retailers and many iconic consumer brands in North American and are dedicated to:

PureRED skills, services, and products reach across traditional and digital marketing to deliver what their clients need to compete more effectively in today's increasingly digital marketplace.

The core of PureREDs market-leading position and outstanding client services is its strategic approach to harnessing marketing technology-centric products and services and ensuring the PureRED future vision and investment roadmap is tightly aligned to the rapid growth and opportunities within the marketing technology arena.



Having been at the forefront of marketing technology and data innovation for decades, a primary focus for PureRED has been developing and nurturing long-lasting and mutually beneficial strategic partnerships with many forward-thinking, innovative marketing technology vendors across the PureRED ecosystem. PureRED have also developed an impressive and robust suite of homegrown and constantly evolving technology capabilities. Their in-house tools include a professional entry-level Digital Asset Management (DAM) platform, which PureRED deploys for clients looking to outsource DAM features vs. manage this entirely in-house.



Against this professional background, PureRED evaluated and subsequently recommended Aproove as the best-in-class vendor to meet and exceed the exacting requirements of the Kroger Promotional Execution transformation program.

PureRED Client Partnerships include:



About Aproove



Aproove is a privately owned company first incorporated in Belgium in 2004. Aproove USA opened in 2017.



In the beginning, Aproove started as a solution provider serving the graphic arts industry with leading software and hardware solutions fully integrated and supported by Aproove.



In 2008 Aproove identified a gap in the software market around Online Proofing that could cater to large corporate companies with complex and regulated procedures. Aproove pivoted to become a software development company and launched the Aproove Online proofing solution in 2008 to fulfill this need.



Early adopters were using the product from 2009, and in 2012 Aproove started seeing its first international customers. Initially, Aproove launched a feature-rich, Enterprise-class, Online Proofing tool designed specifically for Marketing Teams, Brands, and Enterprise companies.



As Aproove continued to work on large projects, the application became more feature-rich, and it was clear that Aproove was doing much more than just Online Proofing. Aproove had evolved into a «Work Management» platform.



Since its launch, the Aproove platform and Professional Services Team has advanced significantly, delivering some of the most complex and challenging Enterprise-class use cases within the Work Management domain. Aproove is now a highly configurable, holistic Work Management Platform with complex functionality that delivers six functional capabilities (see below).



These core capabilities have been adapted and orientated to a wide range of business verticals and scenarios for a broad client base, spanning Retail, FMCG, Luxury Fashion, Financial Services, Public Sector, and Marketing Agency Networks.



At the heart of the business is a relentless focus on customer success. This is what elevates Aproove from being a useful enterprise tool to being a business-critical, value-driving platform providing clients with immediate and long-term benefits in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, customer experience, and employee engagement.

Key solution areas offered within the Approve Work Management Platform



Approve Client Partnerships include:



1.2 Situational Context

Today, Kroger runs a highly scaled marketing content operations function, led by the Promotional Execution Team, with 1000+ Kroger users currently accessing the Aproove platform (June 2021). The user base is on target to accelerate to 2000+ by December 2021.

On average, the Kroger teams handle over 600+ content versions per week across 22 differentiated Brands operating as distinct businesses, leading to the orchestration of up to 42,000+ proofs and associated notes per month.

The Aproove platform is technically handling over One Hundred Million sets of permissions across hundreds of thousands of tasks to enable this high volume of content traffic.

Kroger Teams orchestrate

 22

Different Brands

 600+

Versions weekly

 42k

Proofs monthly

1.3 Case Study focus areas

Against this background, this case study provides the reader with a detailed understanding of:

- The Promotional Execution Team challenges and transformation requirements
- How Aproove was assessed, evaluated, and selected as the best-in-class platform vendor
- How the Kroger and Partner teams deep capabilities overcame significant challenges
- How the teams across all three companies contributed to the program's successes
- How the "can do" attitude of PureRED and Aproove shaped the customer-centric approach
- The significant benefits and value Kroger are experiencing from the Aproove platform
- The program phases of discovery, design, infrastructure deployment, and user adoption
- The critical importance of Professional Services to navigate to successful outcomes
- The next phase for the Kroger transformation program and future vision

Implementing Aproove has dramatically reduced errors, increased motivation and satisfaction across the teams and importantly, saved the operation significant hard costs. - Kroger PE Leadership Team

2.0 Business Challenge & Opportunity

Transforming Advertising and Display, Work Management Content Operations at Kroger with best-in-class Marketing Technology and Operating Models

Kroger has been steadily delivering an Enterprise-wide transformation program across the Kroger merchandising teams, borne out of a partnership with [Boston Consulting Group \(BCG\)](#). BCG recently conducted a business analysis of transformation opportunities within Kroger's core overhead processes, primarily investigating the merchandising back-end processes and systems. From this analysis, BCG formed recommendations on best-in-class process design to create the optimal merchandising sales outcome across the business divisions and provide a blueprint for the people structure to deliver and drive the optimizations.

A key opportunity within the merchandising transformation program was to change the capabilities supporting the Promotional Execution (PE) function (led by Jennifer Schmitz). Promotional Execution is a business function at Kroger comprising all the Teams and Operations that manage and support the highly detailed and fast-moving, consumer-facing promotional content. This encompasses (though not limited to) in-store Displays, Signage, Banners, Weekly Advertising, Circulars, Direct Mail, Brochureware across the 22 brands within the Kroger business.

Alongside the merchandising transformation program, Kroger has also focused on a business-wide technology and systems modernization. The objective is to provide the Category Management and Promotional Execution teams with upgraded systems and tools that improve complex Advertising and Display technology capabilities and operations. This program's essential requirement was to stand up a suite of centralized promotional execution scheduling and proofing capabilities in a single place across the Kroger and PureRED teams.



The work management & proofing transformation workstream is a key and critical part of a much broader Kroger Merchandising Transformation. This workstream will step-change the efficiency and effectiveness of work management and proofing at Kroger. - Kroger PE and Change Teams



2.1 Improving Work Management Process Steps

In terms of the scale, there are in excess of 1000+ primary users across Merchandising, Advertising, and Display planning user communities, with each community having differing needs and interests across the end-to-end Advertising and Display cycle, orientating toward:

- Ensuring the Enterprise Advertising and Display Plan is managed and materializes
- Supporting each of the 22 Brand divisions promotional differentiations
- Managing complex versioning and proofing tasks
- Managing customer-facing details in promotional content
- Category and Commercial management validating ROI on all Enterprise Plan actions

Looking at the broader Kroger ecosystem, there are teams and user communities that have different requirements to understand and track the Enterprise Plan, with some users being further downstream in the process, such as

- Pricing integrity
- Procurement
- Associate communications
- Division Teams and Stores
- Planning, ordering, scheduling

Before the BCG outputs, the PE and Merchandising Teams investigated ways to evolve their existing proofing and work management tools. Previously Kroger worked with IBM on proofing tools that were components of wider IBM merchandising systems within Kroger.

The existing IBM proofing tools did not possess the key features and workflow capabilities essential for the Kroger teams to become more effective. IBM had also decided to sunset vital elements of their proofing and work management tools. This decision factored into the initiative to search for best-in-class Work Management and Online Proofing alternatives.

As a result of these business drivers, PureRED was asked to provide a complete market and vendor technology review that encompassed Kroger's technology and system security requirements at a deep technical and business level. Given PureRED's extensive Retail client base and marketing technology vendor and sector experience, they were perfectly positioned to provide a maturity benchmark and vendor recommendation for the market review.

3.1 Selecting a best-in-class Work Management Platform Partner

PureRED partners and works with a broad range of marketing technology vendors and possesses deep experience in selecting and appointing strategic partners to tackle any client solution. That could be an Enterprise scale client such as Kroger or an emerging start-up brand. At the center of the strategic partnering approach, a refined set of criteria aims to rigorously assess the suitability and compatibility of the client engagement and a potential partner, whether project-based, short, or longer term.

Once the PureRED project team had gathered detailed requirements from all the Kroger and PureRED stakeholders (including the operational SMEs most impacted by a Work Management and Proofing Platform), PureRED next needed to identify any prospective vendors who could future proof Kroger's Promotional Execution Centre of Excellence capabilities.

PureRED undertook a series of processes and market evaluations to create a shortlist of best-fit vendors, followed by a structured selection program with a request for proposal (RFP). This process resulted in a refined list of 3 key vendors, including Aproove. The next stage in the selection process was a series of demonstrations and systems deep dive with each vendor to further assess each vendor's suitability for Kroger's transformation needs.

3.2 Market and Vendor Maturity Assessment

At a high level, the critical evaluation themes that the platform and vendor needed to offer to be within the consideration set were:



At a detailed requirements level, to be considered within the RFP process, the platform and vendor needed to demonstrate the following criteria:

3.3 Work Management & Proofing Features

- Metadata driven set up and templating of complex proofing projects and campaigns
- Set up of cross-function and partner user groups with multiple internal and external users
- Stakeholders and hierarchies to receive automated email/SMS notifications when they are required to make approvals and/or interact with proofs to add notes or update comments
- Complex version management with multi-function comment and thread annotations
- Streamlining existing proofing process, reducing 'steps' for each process workflow
- Flat plan and flipbook print simulation to view and review all digital views of content outputs
- File naming convention support that automatically creates viewable sections which only display to the appropriate teams/regions
- Deep zoom and rapidly responsive visualization, critical to checking small print, pricing, images, and icons, etc. (NB: no existing internal tool to date had provided this feature)
- Note, proof, and section tags that allowed filtering of notes, proofs, and sections based on author or content

3.3.1 Technology, Infrastructure, IT and Data Management

To offer a highly advanced and robust Work Management and Proofing Platform that could replicate existing processes and future proof operational processes. In addition, non-negotiable criterion was any work management platform must:

- Be able to be hosted **outside** of Amazon Web Services (AWS) (NB: Amazon and Kroger's sector competition meant it was important that Kroger retained independence in their choice of data management and web hosting providers)
- Be able to meet and comply with Kroger's Information Security (InfoSec), Data Management, Technical Infrastructure, Security, and Access requirements, such as Secure VPN, Single Sign On (SSO) (SAML 2.0), and 2 Factor Authentication (2FA).
- Pass the stringent cybersecurity penetration testing assessment (based on Network and Open Web Application Security Project 'OWASP' vulnerabilities) carried out by PureRED's cybersecurity partners [Passpoint Security](#). This was a pre-requisite due diligence step for any vendor.

3.3.2 Enterprise scale and complexity

Historically Kroger's experience with Work Management and Proofing platforms had either been with capable platforms that were not performant at scale or unsatisfactory platforms in terms of complexity, e.g., JPEG only, with no future roadmap. The sheer scale, complexity, and speed of operations meant only proven, Enterprise scaled platforms could be considered.

- Each week, Kroger produces over 600+ versions of Promotional Content across 22 brands with non-integrated operations, generating around 42,000+ proofs with comments per month.

Intrinsically linked to the SSO SAML 2.0 features would be the ability to seamlessly and transparently “auto-provision” the onboarding and activation of 1000+ users across the diverse Kroger business estate, comprising many Departments, Functions, Groups, Teams, and individuals. Then over time, deal with the naturally occurring levels of granular change with these entities and the dependant and associated user level workflow processes (including business leavers).

- Possessing the flexibility to manage the complex onboarding and access control needs of the business through the Kroger identity provisioning (IDP) active directory solution and to do this without human desktop support was a “must-have” for any platform provider.

3.3.3 Culture and compatibility in relationships

With a focus more on the ways of working dynamics and the transformation experience of vendors, there were three key criteria in this area of the assessment:

- *Compatibility in working* across the strategic partner teams program workstreams was at the forefront of the evaluation lens. Establishing a mirror image of cultures meant the teams would work effortlessly well together, and seeing previous use case evidence of this in practice in clients, agency, and vendor relationships was vital to the PureRED and Kroger assessment. Specifically, the Kroger Team knew how important it would be for any new Partner team to:
- *Lean into the Kroger User Experience* and culture and get down into the detail of Work Management platform users experience and translate this into workflow steps and processes that would align to the business “right-first-time ethos”.
- *Listen and be responsive* to enhancements or configurations requests that could make the process better and/or simpler for Kroger teams and associates—doing this in a pro-active, positive, collaborative, rapidly iterative, and productive way.

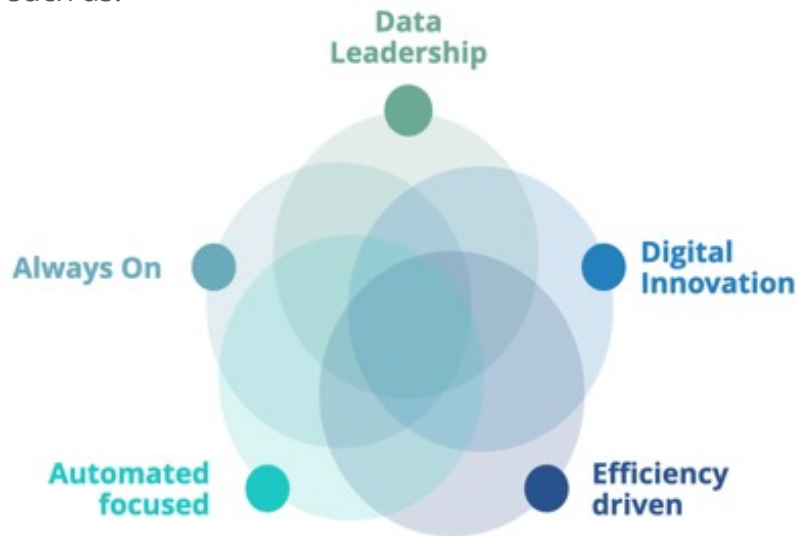
3.3.4 Expert Transitioning

Risk mitigation was at the forefront of the evaluation considerations throughout the entire process, and each vendor needed to demonstrate experience of on-boarding Enterprise clients into the Work Management platform in the last 6-12 months:

- *Showing a clear depth of knowledge* and proven track record in the seamless migration of significant, complex, marketing content operational and proofing projects with large, disparate user bases and teams.

3.3.5 Optimisation and futureproofing

Kroger and PureRED needed to ensure seamless replication of the existing services, processes, and methodologies from day one. It was also essential to understand how a prospective vendor would partner and offer advances in Work Management, Proofing, production technology, and techniques, and how they could potentially deliver improvements to Kroger over the course of the relationship, specifically in areas such as:



3.3.6 Final selection of the Aproove Work Management Platform

Before presenting vendor options to the broader Kroger PE Team, PureRED wanted to ensure only genuinely viable options were taken into the final selection process to optimize the team's time and provide valid comparisons of relevant platforms and use case demonstrations.

Over a condensed two-week period, PureRED invited the selected potential vendors to conduct a series of use case example demonstrations to key Kroger and PureRED stakeholders and decision-makers.

The final decision to choose Aproove as the strategic Work Management and Online Proofing solution was unanimously reached using a balanced scorecard assessment, combined with the due diligence checks results.

The difference between Aproove and other MarTech SaaS proviers is Aproove are a SaaS company with a Soul. We get to know and work directly with the people behind the Aproove platform. - PureRed Team

Aproove workflows were a feature we really liked when evaluating. It's so valuable to the end user customer, as its completely invisible, it is just how the system works for a user once we have defined the flows for each business case. - Kroger PE Team

4. Transformation Program design and phases

The Aproove implementation and adoption program design was a distinct step within the critical path. The Professional experience across each team was fundamental to crafting a program design and plan to deliver optimal value in the short and long term. The deployment must mitigate risk to the existing operation and simultaneously exploit the profound capabilities of Aproove to provide the prerequisite organizational change and training of the large, distributed user base.

The Kroger transformation program team designs and drives organizational change management, training activities, and user adoption of any new technology that requires process change supported by their change management partner [Tier1](#). The transformation program team collaborated with the PE stakeholders, shaping the program design and phases. The critical program themes and principles the Teams agreed upon were:

- Simplify the proofing processes and pull value forward while the merchandising technology upgrades continued to roll-out
- Reduce duplicated effort wherever possible, e.g., re-reading of comments, the volume of interactions with a content version
- Reducing the number of systems that users need to access to complete tasks
- Make it easier and faster to conduct content reviews across teams and groups
- Overall, reduce the number of errors on content at every layer of production
- Eliminate workflow steps wherever this is possible
- Fast track and speed up projects and campaigns, content and tasks lifecycle

The program team agreed upon a three-phased program to mitigate and realize objectives:

Phase 1 - Replication of existing operation, focused on Kroger Food Advertising content. The objective was to deliberately not expand into the full capabilities of Aproove, much more to replicate the existing operational process, getting the Aproove system in place, integrated, and infrastructure optimized. Hence, it worked smoothly for the Proofing Centre of Excellence Teams (PCOE) from the outset. As part of this phase, the following resources, processes, and procedures were tackled:

- Deep dynamic integration between the Kroger scheduling system and Aproove that enabled a human error-free, scheduling based, Aproove workflow for each of the 600+ content versions per week (with different milestones, stakeholders, due and delivery dates for each version)
- All Aproove templates were set up with test systems, then subject to User Acceptance Testing
- Aproove templates were committed to live production and locked down with user permissions
- On-line proofing of Food Ad content went live in Aproove
- Workflow designs, steps, stages, and change control process involving the designated Kroger and PureRED stakeholders were all set up
- Establish strict quality control processes and governance to enforce these processes
- Training of Phase 1 user groups was carried out against pre-defined Aproove training and process guidelines by the change team
- The PCOE Team checked all live work to ensure all training guidelines were being followed

One advantage of bringing the PCOE teams onboard early was the opportunity to capture workflow optimizations and configuration improvement through continuous early feedback.

There are now so many ways I can search for proofs and versions, e.g., If I need to see 1st proof of version xyz and I can key in the text to find that proof within a proofing cycle, Aproove goes straight to it, it's really simple. - Kroger PE Team

Phase 2 – Focused on the General Merchandising Advertising content to grow utilization of Aproove across the expanded user base. General Merchandise Advertising is a slightly different process to the Food Ads content, and the differences created the opportunity for adding additional Aproove functionality, and advanced functions and features in the workflow processes.

The Aproove 'Compare' feature is huge for us, given the vast numbers of pages we proof, having the compare safety net to look for unexpected changes means we are preventing mistakes. - Kroger PE Team

Phase 3 – Expanding into all Kroger Merchandising Teams is the current phase. This enables all Merchandising Teams to use Aproove, critically allowing them to add comments, notes, and tags directly into Aproove proofing cycles, eliminating significant manual and duplicated effort across the proofing process, and contributing directly to the reduction of errors.

In addition, Phase 3 is where further new Aproove features would be released, taking in learnings and feedback from previous Phases, so that Phase 3 would continue to be a significant contributor to delivering against the overarching program principles, and specifically be reducing “steps” in the end-to-end process, making it easier and faster to review content and fast-tracking workflow lifecycles (further detail in section 8.2 Reflection, learnings, and next steps).

It's great not having to flip across systems to find proofs and version to add comments; now we can just view and add comments directly from Aproove. - Kroger Mechanising Teams

Being able to put the comment exactly where it needs to go has improved follow-through immensely. - Kroger Mechanising Teams

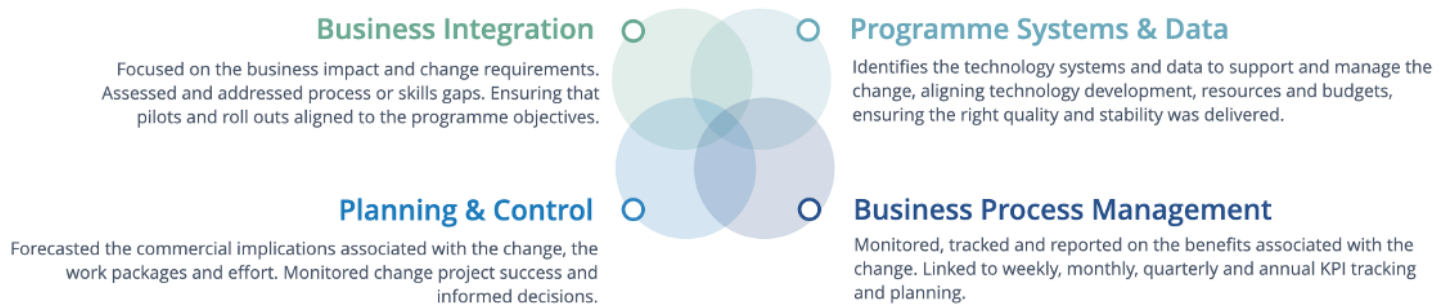
I like that comments can be checked and resolved all at one place. - Kroger Mechanising Teams

4.1 Strategic Change Team

One of the critical activities needed to drive the strategic transformation was defining and articulating the “to be” target end state for the Promotional Execution Aproove transformation. This meant establishing clear anchor points for the program workstreams within the wider Kroger mechanizing transformation program and providing a roadmap to refer to when agreeing or setting priorities and evaluating the Aproove program phases and progress.

A pre-defined “task force” approach facilitated and enabled the three program phases. This drove the change roadmap and provided critical evaluation, the agreement of priorities, and trackable progress both during and following the Aproove phases, focusing on four key transformation pillars and adhering to pre-defined success factors within each pillar.

Strategic Change Centre Approach



An important output of the operating model design work was the formation of the Aproove and PureRED service and technical support model. Agile methodology was used to build service support themes, epics, and stories to reach a service design where Kroger’s helpdesk platform routes all user queries and issue tickets to PureRED for 1st line triage and response, with Aproove providing all 2nd line and Application support, either via PureRED or directly to Kroger dependant on need and severity.

“
My team field many questions! And we have always been supported by Aproove and PureRED to help us provide front line support to new and existing users throughout the rollout phases. - Kroger Change Team

“
If we were trying to do this transformation on our own at Kroger, without the collaboration of the Professional Services Teams at Aproove, PureRED, and Tier 1, it would not have gone as smoothly. - Kroger PE Team

The Aproove configuration for Kroger focused on creating simple, intuitive navigation that essentially just did what users expected it to do. Careful planning and design thinking went into the initial iterations of User Interface (UI). Throughout phase 1, structured feedback was collected, synthesized, and defined into a series of change requests that improved the overall experience for users. At Aproove, this process does not stop. There is a relentless and continuous focus on structured enhancements and cyclical releases for the Kroger team.

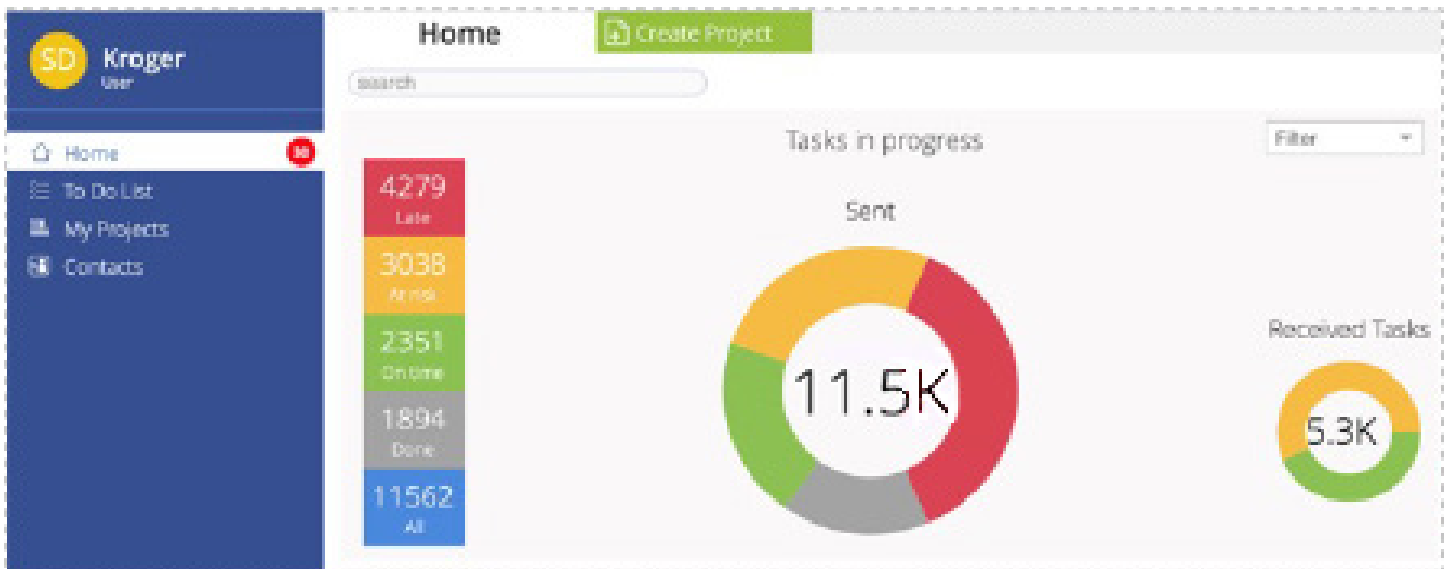
“

One of the areas we were really impressed with is the User Interface (UI). The UI is extremely easy to consume; it does not feel like a 'code or a database,' it just delivers intuitively what the end-user would expect it to. - Kroger PE and Change Teams

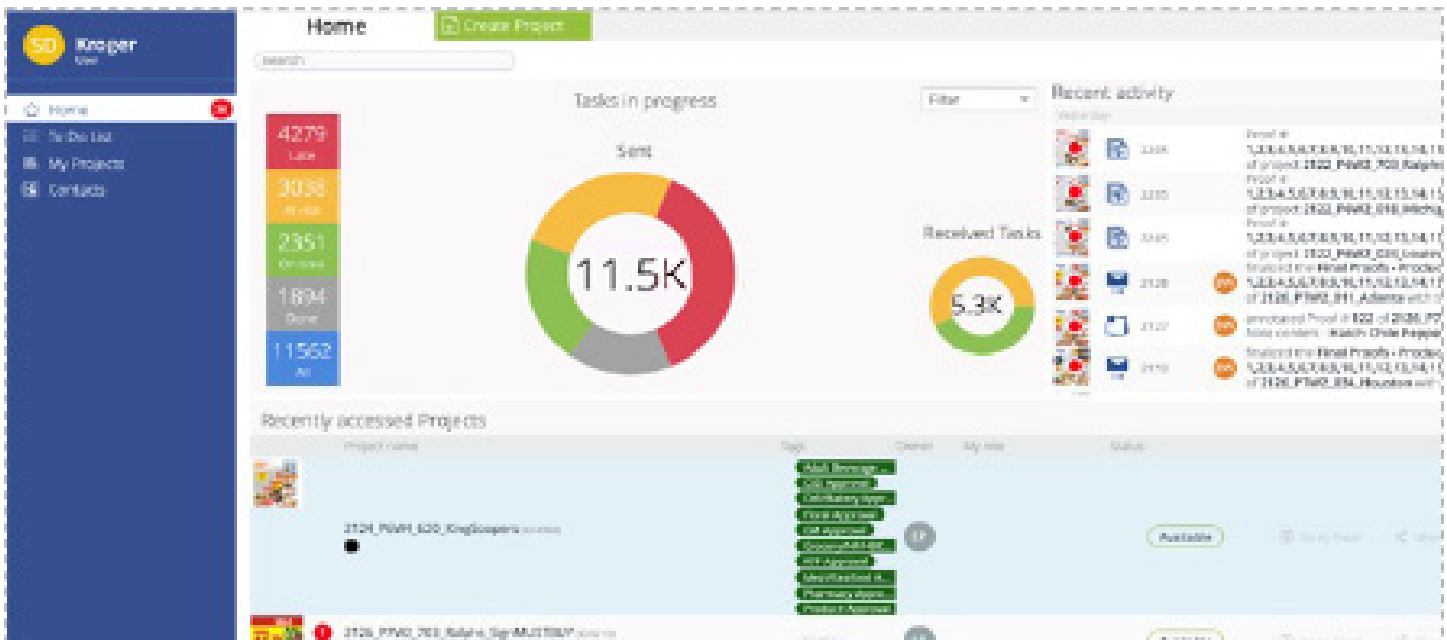
”

Selected examples of the Aprovee Work Management and Proofing function highlight how valuable and easy Aprovee is to use for the Kroger Teams:

5.1 Kroger Aprovee Home Dashboard provides a quick and easy-to-understand view of all activities relevant to a user profile, such as the number of tasks sent, received, completed, on time, at risk. The most recent activity for projects, proofs, comments, etc.



Kroger Aprovee Home Dashboard (extract)



5.2 Projects Menu provides quick access to rich visualizations of all projects associated with the user, along with all details and critical data points, such as the number of tasks sent and status, proofs in progress and status, creation and deadlines dates, and much more through the double click drill down navigations.

Project P...	Creation date ↓	Project name	Owner	Task status	Project Size	Proof status	Deadline
	2021-07-16 17:13	2126_P7W2_706_Smith... gnMUSTBUY (ID:5227)	LP	28	93.95 MB	10	2021-08-22
	2021-07-16 17:12	2126_P7W2_705_QFC_SignMUSTBUY (ID:5226)	LP	28	61.97 MB	9	2021-08-17
	2021-07-16 17:11	2126_P7W2_660_Frys_SignMUSTBUY (ID:5225)	LP	28	170.42 MB	14	2021-08-21
	2021-07-16 17:10	2126_P7W2_615_Dillon... gnMUSTBUY (ID:5224)	LP	28	168.57 MB	12	2021-08-19
	2021-07-16 17:09	2126_P7W2_034_Houst... gnMUSTBUY (ID:5223)	LP	28	94.51 MB	9	2021-08-18
	2021-07-16 17:06	2126_P7W2_029_MidAt... gnMUSTBUY (ID:5222)	LP	28	95.75 MB	9	2021-08-19
	2021-07-16 17:05	2126_P7W2_016_Colu... gnMUSTBUY (ID:5221)	LP	28	114.27 MB	11	2021-08-20
	2021-07-16 17:05	2126_P7W2_025_Delta_SignMUSTBUY (ID:5227)	LP	28	73.4 MB	8	2021-08-19
	2021-07-16 17:02	2126_P7W2_014_Cindn... gnMUSTBUY (ID:5219)	LP	28	91.52 MB	9	2021-08-18
	2021-07-16 17:01	2126_P7W2_011_Adant... gnMUSTBUY (ID:5218)	LP	28	95.1 MB	9	2021-08-21
	2021-07-16 16:37	2126_P7W2_016_Columbus-01 (ID:5217)	LP	28	975.74 MB	37	2021-08-30
	2021-07-16 16:33	2125_P7W1_016_Columbus-01 (ID:5216)	LP	28	24.7 MB	1	2021-08-30
	2021-07-16 15:16	2128_P7W4_701_FredMey...IP_114213 (ID:5215)	LP	21	18.41 MB	1	2021-09-05
	2021-07-16 15:15	2127_P7W3_701_FredMey...IP_114212 (ID:5214)	LP	21	16.71 MB	1	2021-09-05
	2021-07-15 18:50	2126_P7W2_703_Ralph... gnMUSTBUY (ID:5213)	LP	3	479.65 MB	25	2021-08-20
	2021-07-15 18:49	2126_P7W2_630_KingS... gnMUSTBUY (ID:5212)	LP	3	357.95 MB	32	2021-08-18
	2021-07-15 18:48	2126_P7W2_035_Dallas... gnMUSTBUY (ID:5211)	LP	3	358.24 MB	54	2021-08-18
	2021-07-15 18:46	2126_P7W2_026_Nashv... gnMUSTBUY (ID:5210)	LP	3	388.41 MB	94	2021-08-16

Project P...	Creation date ↓	Project name	Owner
	2021-07-16 17:13	2126_P7W2_706_Smith... gnMUSTBUY (ID:5227)	LP
	2021-07-16 17:12	2126_P7W2_705_QFC_SignMUSTBUY (ID:5226)	LP
	2021-07-16 17:11	2126_P7W2_660_Frys_SignMUSTBUY (ID:5225)	LP
	2021-07-16 17:10	2126_P7W2_615_Dillon... gnMUSTBUY (ID:5224)	LP
	2021-07-16 17:09	2126_P7W2_034_Houst... gnMUSTBUY (ID:5223)	LP
	2021-07-16 17:06	2126_P7W2_029_MidAt... gnMUSTBUY (ID:5222)	LP

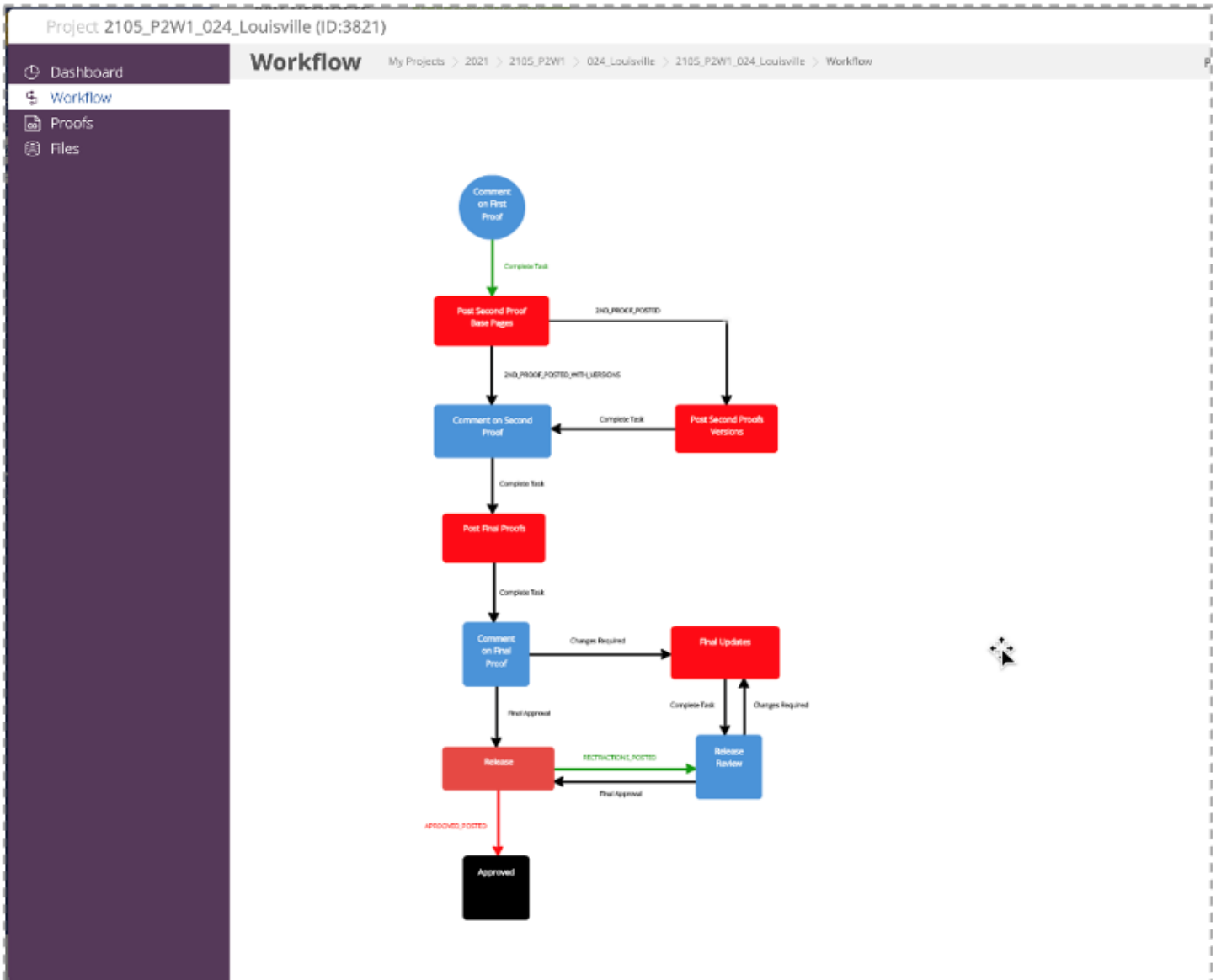
Task status	Project Size	Proof status	Deadline
28	93.95 MB	10	2021-08-22
28	61.97 MB	9	2021-08-17
28	170.42 MB	14	2021-08-21
28	168.57 MB	12	2021-08-19
28	94.51 MB	9	2021-08-18
28	95.75 MB	9	2021-08-19
28	114.27 MB	11	2021-08-20
28	73.4 MB	8	2021-08-19
28	91.52 MB	9	2021-08-19
28	95.1 MB	9	2021-08-21
28	975.74 MB	37	2021-08-30
28	24.7 MB	1	2021-08-30
21	18.41 MB	1	2021-09-05
21	16.71 MB	1	2021-09-05

“
One of the features we really like is Aproove has a keyword search capability, so we use that to search and find anything in our projects and content. - Kroger PE Team
 ”

5.3 Workflow Designs are straightforward to build, as this simplified example of a Kroger proof workflow illustrates, breaking down each step into a set of tasks, actions, interactions, and decisions. With Aproove's powerful workflow builder, Kroger has been able to map workflows and then easily configure each workflow stage according to each business case need.

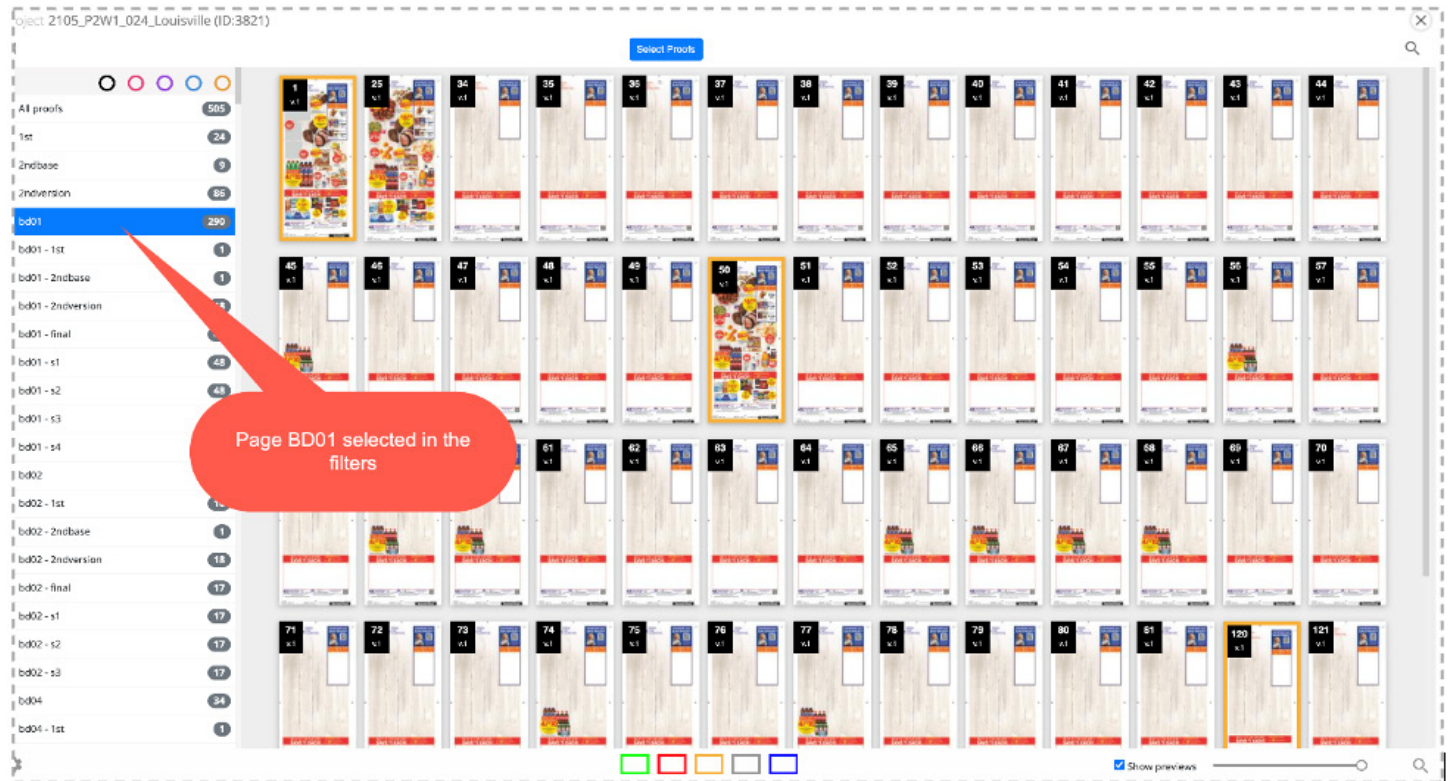
Aproove workflows were a feature we really liked when evaluating. It's so valuable as it's completely invisible to the end-user customer; it is just how the system works for a user once we have defined the flows for each business case. - Kroger PE Team

Workflow builder

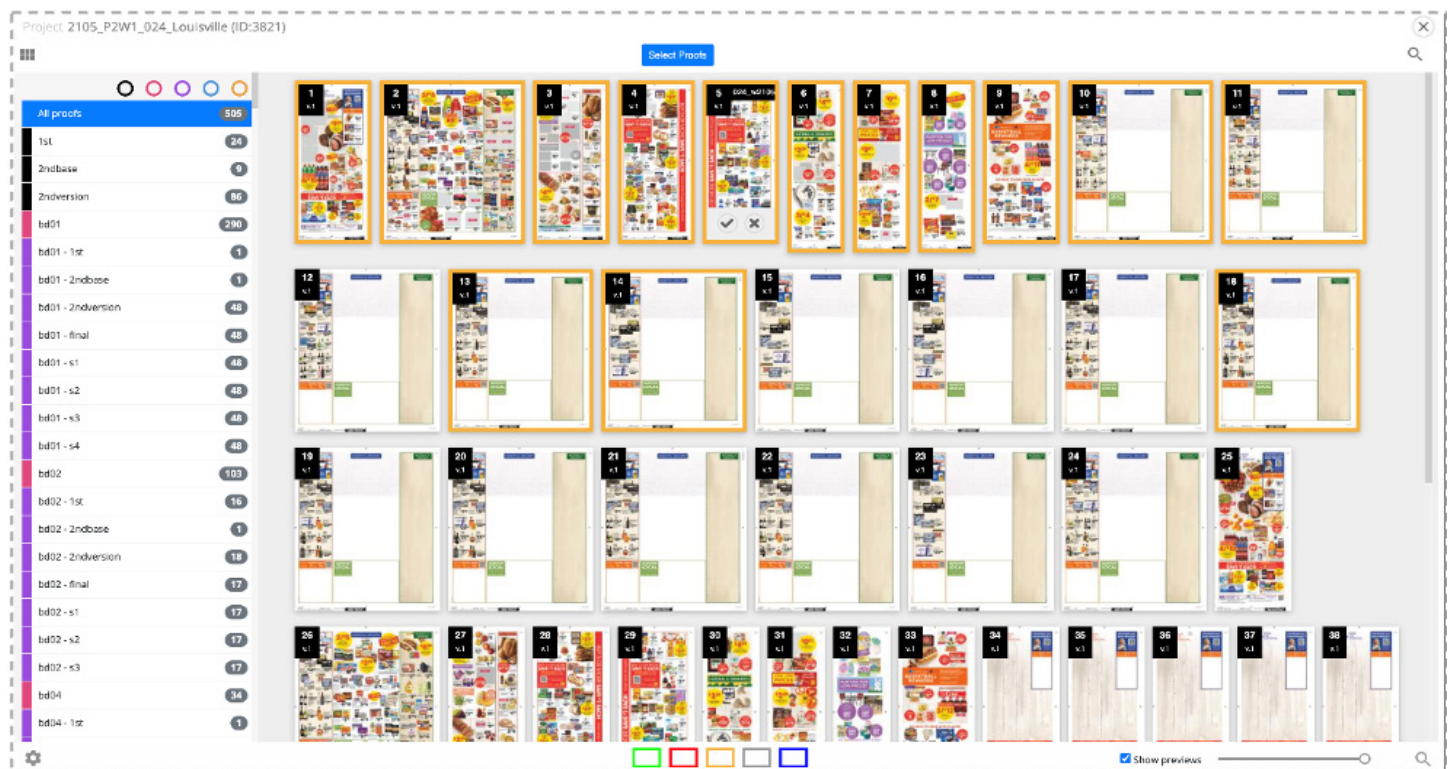


5.4 Flat Plan Proofing view with keyword search is just one example of the multi-functional navigation options available to instantly search and identify specific content versions for review and action within live or historic proofing cycles.

Flat plan view with filtering

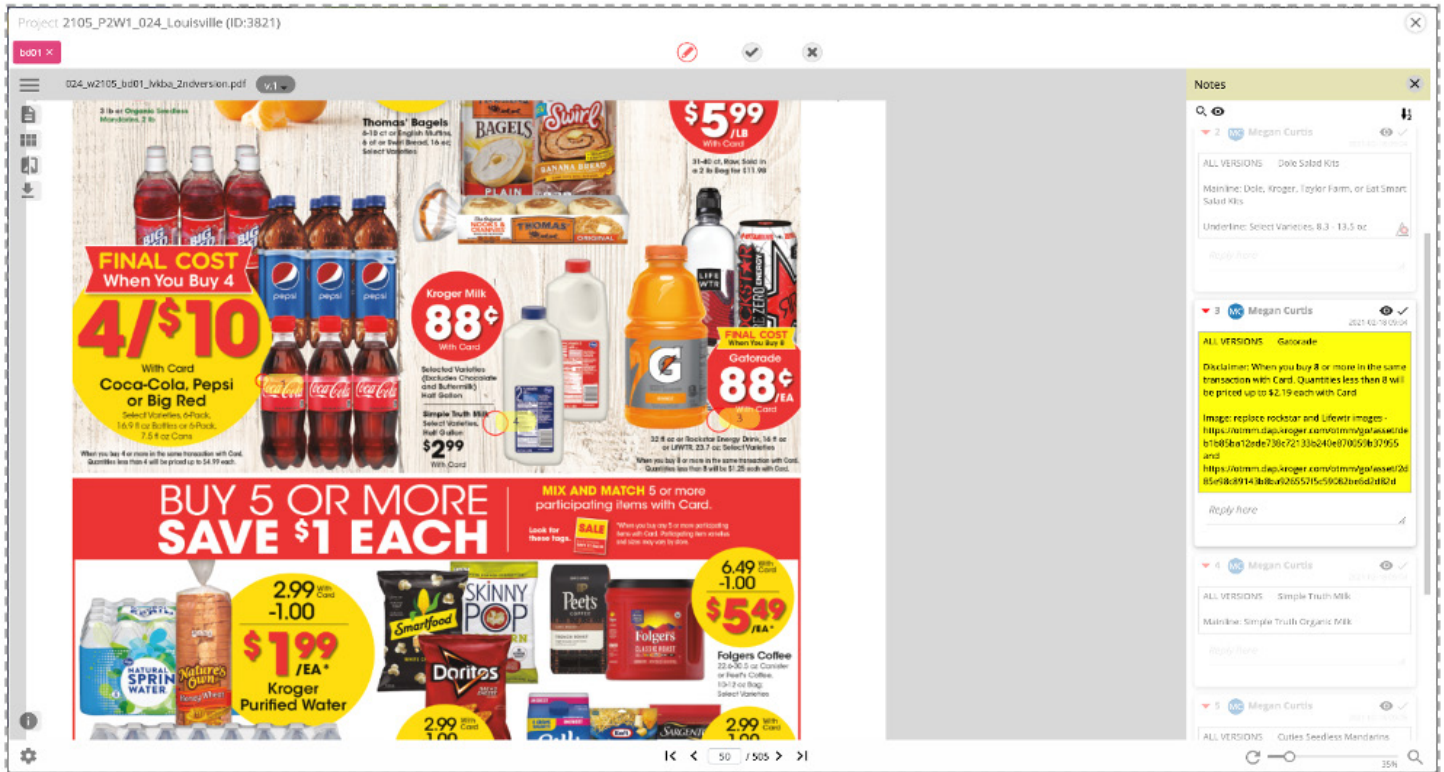


Flat plan view with sections

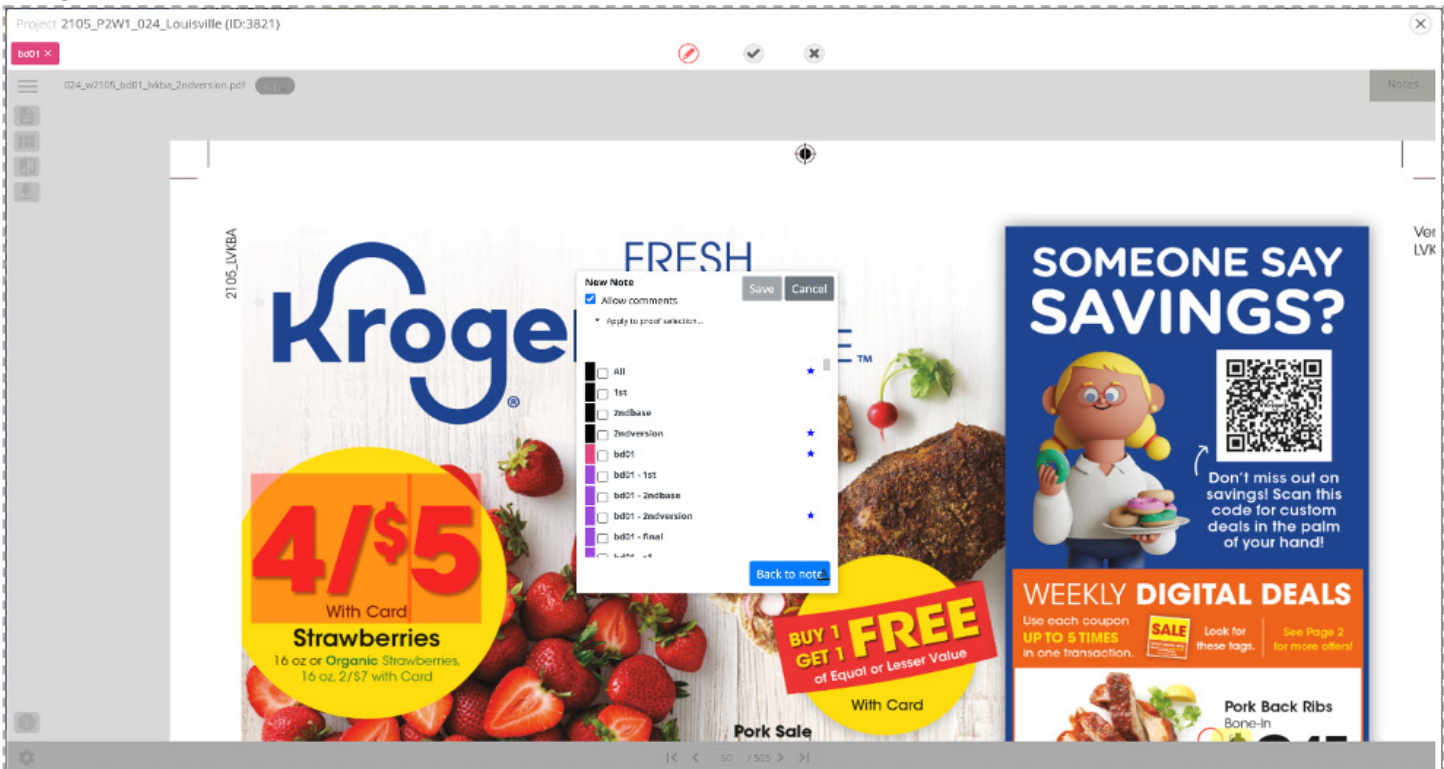


5.5 Deep Zoom with notes and annotation with real-time responsiveness allows the critical evaluation of each component and layer of the proof that gets examined with notes, annotation, tags added for specified users to comment on or progress to the next action step.

Notes, annotation and history

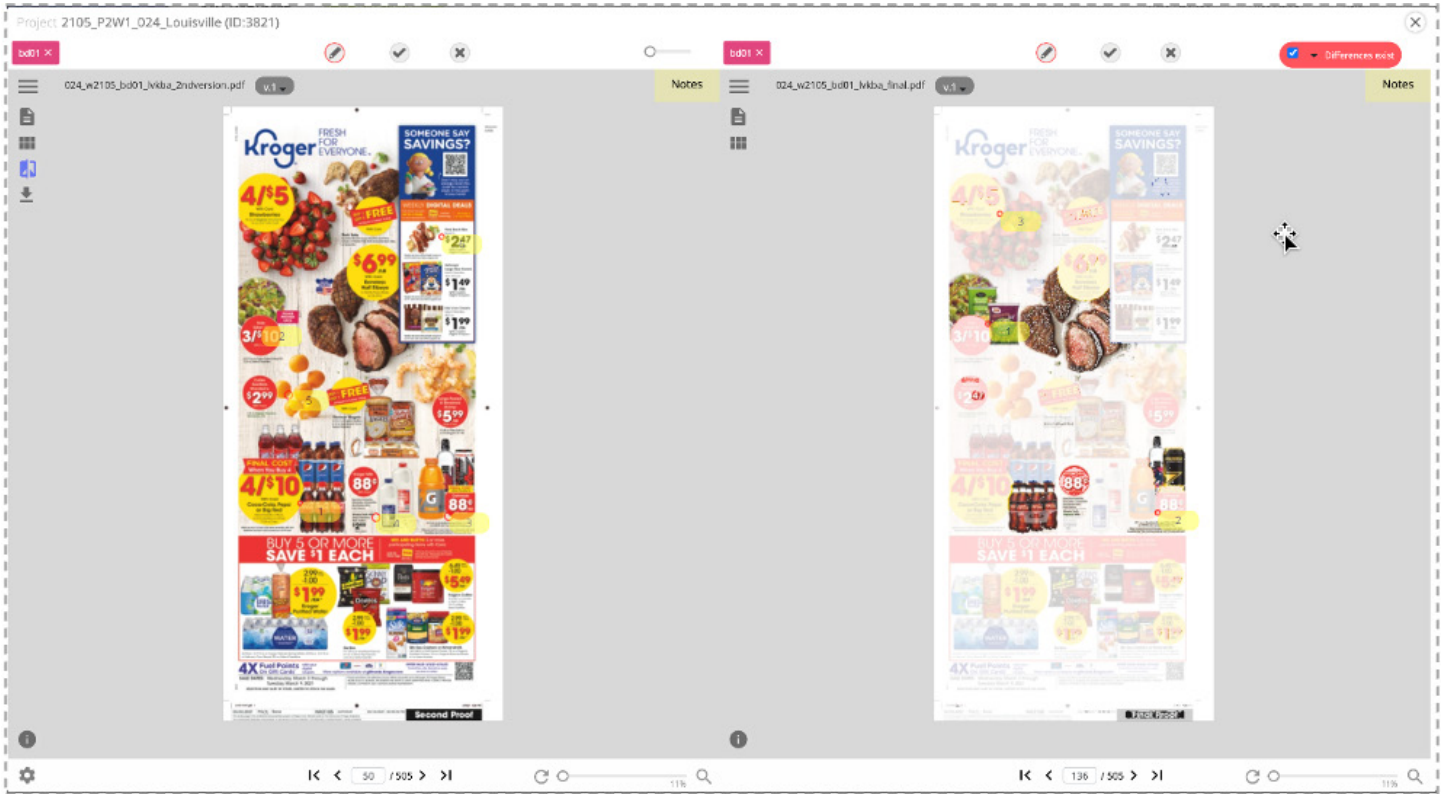


Deep Zoom



5.6 Compare and contrast (ghosted) feature allows users to focus on and isolate the specific changes between proof versions. Anything that has changed comes to the forefront, and anything that has not changed is «ghosted.» This speeds up the review and amends process and reduces the possibility of error when there are many details and proof iterations to work on across the volume of pages the Kroger Teams are handling. This feature, coupled with the «changed» flag showing only the proofs that changed between versions, dramatically reduces proofreading time.

Side by side “Ghosted” comparison



6. Key results and successes

The Aprovee implementation continues to increase value across Kroger’s Promotional Execution eco-system. Aprovee Work Management combined with the strategic partnership between Kroger, PureRED, and the Aprovee teams have increased outputs while dramatically reducing the volume of re-work and the overall amount of comments on the proofs. The result is productivity increases across the Advertising and Display end-to-end processes.

Consequently, the Aprovee Work Management platform has reduced Kroger’s operating costs. The substantial process efficiency gains have led to an accelerated speed to market in a hyper-competitive retail trading environment.

6.1 Success measures

One of the program's most significant areas of success has been a dramatic reduction in the number of comments the teams need to make on promotional content. When this happens, it means higher overall throughput for Promotional content. When Promotional content such as weekly Ads are released on time, to plan, and do not go beyond execution deadlines, there are many business benefits for Kroger; critically, these are:

- A dramatic reduction in the hard dollar \$ cost of not paying late press charges (typically up to \$1000 per hour to hold pre-booked press slots). This is a key metric for the PE team and tracked weekly as a cost to the operation's success and a benchmark of operational performance variances
- When Ads have fewer comments, Kroger research has shown there is a direct correlation to a reduction in the number of errors. This reduces operational costs and directly impacts the motivation and job satisfaction of the team and people involved. The accuracy of their work drives sales and improves the Kroger customer experience.
- In terms of efficiency, speeding up the content lifecycle, throughput, and reducing errors and re-work means people can quickly move onto the following tasks or start something new.

Implementing Aproove has dramatically reduced errors, increased motivation and satisfaction across the team and importantly, saved the operation hard costs by reducing late charges on Press Ads'. - Kroger PE Team

6.2 Reflection, learnings, and next steps

One of the vital learning conclusions from the program phases was bringing the rollout to the Merchandising Teams in Phase 1&2 instead of Phase 3. The feedback and scale of improvements could have given quicker rewards, but the change management and business forced a more cautious approach as usual during the technology transition. This essential learning is being taken forward into future phase planning.

The next steps for Aproove are to continue the phased rollout to all Mechanising Teams. The aim is to complete adoption across all 22 Brands (Phase 3) and further expand the depth of utilization of the incredibly powerful Aproove functions and features, focusing on enhancements that continue delivering against the program objectives and principles. The critical feature enhancements include:

- **Expanded "tags" functionality:** This is an essential new feature meaning Kroger users automatically get a "department" tagged on any notes users make, e.g., tags added by the Food Ads teams, like Meats, Dairy or by the PCOE teams, etc. means each team can now see what team commented, such as the Merchandising team or a Department group.

- **Tag Filtering & Reporting:** As well as improving the speed of locating tag creators, this feature is also a great help throughout the amend cycle as tags can now be filtered upon. Users can also filter pages in the flat plan view by selecting what note tags appear on which of the pages. This feature is also essential for reporting on operational metrics, e.g., looking at what % of notes are made, in what amend round, department etc.
- **Tag Automation:** Tags are also being used to establish “triggered” automation capability. Extracting information like note creators, tag creators, or tag note outcomes such as “rejected” can all be used for triggering actions. For example, when a note is tagged with a “rejected” tag and a comment made by another user, this action prompts the rejector to submit the reasons why. This also notifies the original note creator via email that the note was rejected and why.
- **Structured information capture on every note:** users have the opportunity to fill out predetermined forms that capture multiple data facets. The structured form captures business logic such as price point information, pack sizes, images links, etc. And these data are used to capture accurate business reports that route the corrections to the appropriate production teams and gives management vital statistical information (see illustrations).

Project Management view of Department Tags

The screenshot displays the Aproove project management interface for Project 2124_P6W4_620_KingSoopers (ID:4964). The interface includes a navigation sidebar on the left with options like Dashboard, Workflow, Proofs, and Files. The main content area shows a dashboard with various metrics: 1 Late, 0 Arch, 1 On time, 35 Done, and 37 All. A 'Tasks in progress' gauge shows 37 tasks. A summary bar indicates 64 Approved, 60 Archived, 8 Rejected, 141 In queue, and 273 Done. Below this, a table lists department tags with columns for status (e.g., Pending, Canceled, Final Approval), user initials, and a 'Post Final Approved on' date. A red callout bubble points to the 'Department Tags From Project manager view' section.

“*One of the things I really liked about the collaboration with PureRED and Aproove is they really lean in to listen to the end-suer experience and been very responsive to changes, in a very short timeframe, to make the process better. This is unusual for a Technology company.* - Kroger PE Team

Project Management view of Department Tags

Project: 2124_P6W4_620_KingSoopers (ID:4964)

Department Tags from flat plan view

Select Proofs

273 All proofs

1st 14

2nd 28

bd01 73

bd01 - 1st 1

bd01 - 2nd 18

bd01 - final 18

bd01 - s1 18

bd01 - s2 18

bd02 46

bd02 - 1st 8

bd02 - 2nd 10

bd02 - final 11

bd02 - s1 11

bd02 - s2 11

bd04 41

bd04 - 1st 1

bd04 - 2nd 8

bd04 - final 8

bd04 - s1 8

bd04 - s2 8

bd04 - s4 8

dk01 42

Show previews

Predetermined data capture forms from notes

Project: 2124_P6W4_620_KingSoopers (ID:4964)

15 CASSIE ADDRESS Grocery/NSA/BC Edited by Joanna Goldstein on 2021-06-24 15:15

Merch Change Form

Mainline: Handi-Foil Pans Retail

Underline: Image

Other: remove pink box

Note 15

PLEASE VERIFY OFFER 3.49 With Card -1.00

\$2.49 /EA* Handi-Foil Pans Select Varieties, 1-4 ct

46 fl oz or Arm & Hammer Liquid Laundry Detergent, 122.5-150 fl oz or Power Paks, 40 ct or all Liquid Laundry Detergent, 88-100 fl oz or all MightyPacs, 45 ct: Select Varieties -1.00

\$4.99 /EA*

Deadoflex Select Varieties, 2.6-3 oz -1.00

\$3.99 /EA* (NOTE RESOLVED)

PLEASE VERIFY OFFER 3.49 With Card -1.00

\$2.49 /EA* Handi-Foil Pans Select Varieties, 1-4 ct

Suave Shampoo or Conditioner 12.6 fl oz or Car 36-60 ct or Stayfree pads, 14-24 ct: Select Varieties -1.00

\$1.99 /EA*

Down Dishwashing Liquid 16.2-19.4 fl oz or Febreze Air Freshener, 8.8 oz or Febreze Small Spaces Air Freshener, 0.25 fl oz: Select Varieties -1.00

\$1.99 /EA*

Crest Toothpaste 3.4-4.1 oz or Dentyne Deodorant Spray, 3.8 oz or Aftershave Lotion, 12 fl oz: Select Varieties -1.00

\$6.49 /EA* (NOTE RESOLVED)

HOME, HEALTH & EVERYTHING ELSE

As with many features within Aproove, the expanded Tags functionality can flexibly be applied at Proof, Section, and Project levels.

Further features released in Phase 3 for Kroger Users include:

- PDF Export enhancements: Admin users can set multiple “pre-defined” PDF Export settings, add the ability to sort proofs in an exported PDF, informing users when exports will be blank.
- Dashboard enhancements: Personal dashboards can be set up, with many new details such as project tags in details view, section tags in project details proofs view, add filters in the section list of the project details view, display keywords in project details, show Project Version number, display keywords and tags in the recently accessed projects data grid, display keywords and tags in “my projects” data grid, visual display to show a user why the file name does not match the required naming convention, ability to define a localized error message when the file does not match the required naming convention.
- Single-Sign-On (SSO) enhancements: SSO Settings for Company and Description fields.

6.3 Business Adoption Indicators

6.3.1 User growth

APROOVE USER GROWTH > PHASE 1 TO 3



“
Though I was hesitant about the transition from ARC comments to having comments entered directly into Aproove, I have found it much more efficient, and I like it a lot. -
Kroger Mechanising Teams

The business adoption approach was structured to strike the optimal balance between realizing the objectives of each phase while also mitigating operational risk and receiving the benefit of the enhanced Aproove capabilities.

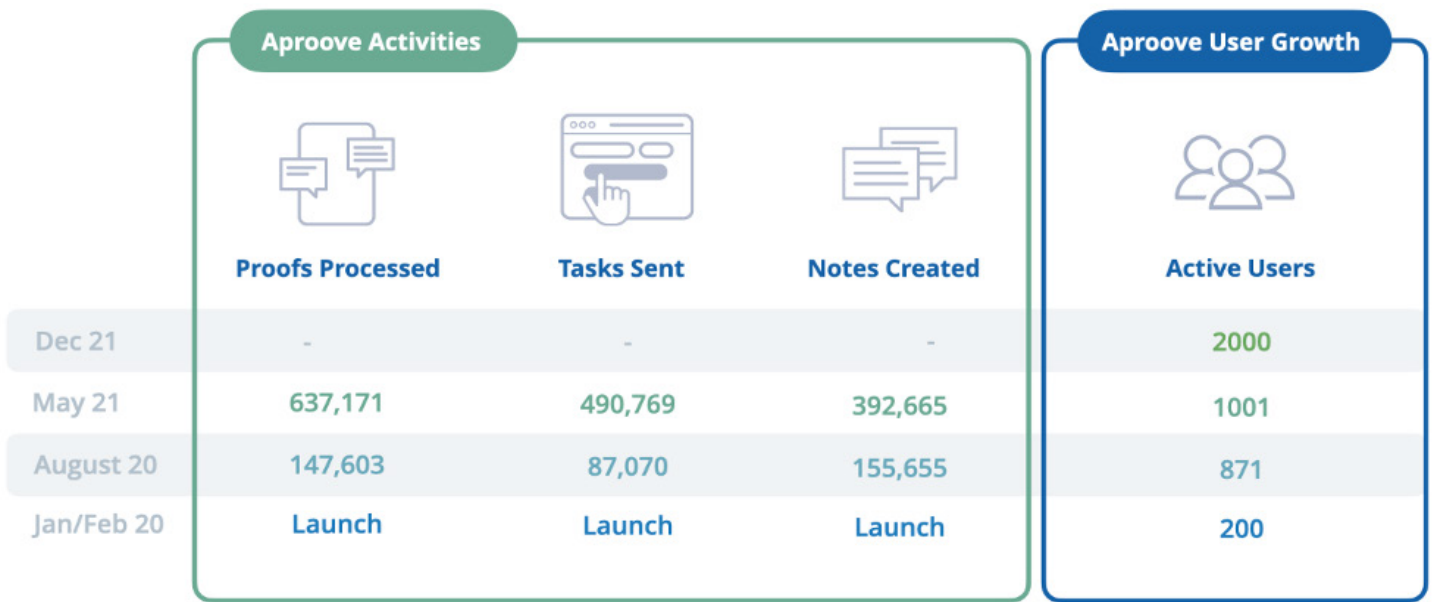
Against this background, user growth has steadily progressed from **approximately 200 users at launch, rising to 871 by August 2020 and 1001 by May 2021**. The current forecast is growing to **2000+ users across Kroger and PureRED teams by the end of 2021**.

In line with the structured user growth across the phases, Promotional Content volumes managed in Aproove have increased steadily across the three indicators of operational adoption – *Tasks Sent, Notes Created, and Proofs Processed* - with proofs and tasks seeing this highest rate of growth. An expected outcome

of Aproove is that the volume of notes and tasks will begin to slow down as the intrinsic efficiency of Aproove reduces the overall interaction levels for each proof.

“
I love Aproove! - Kroger PE Team

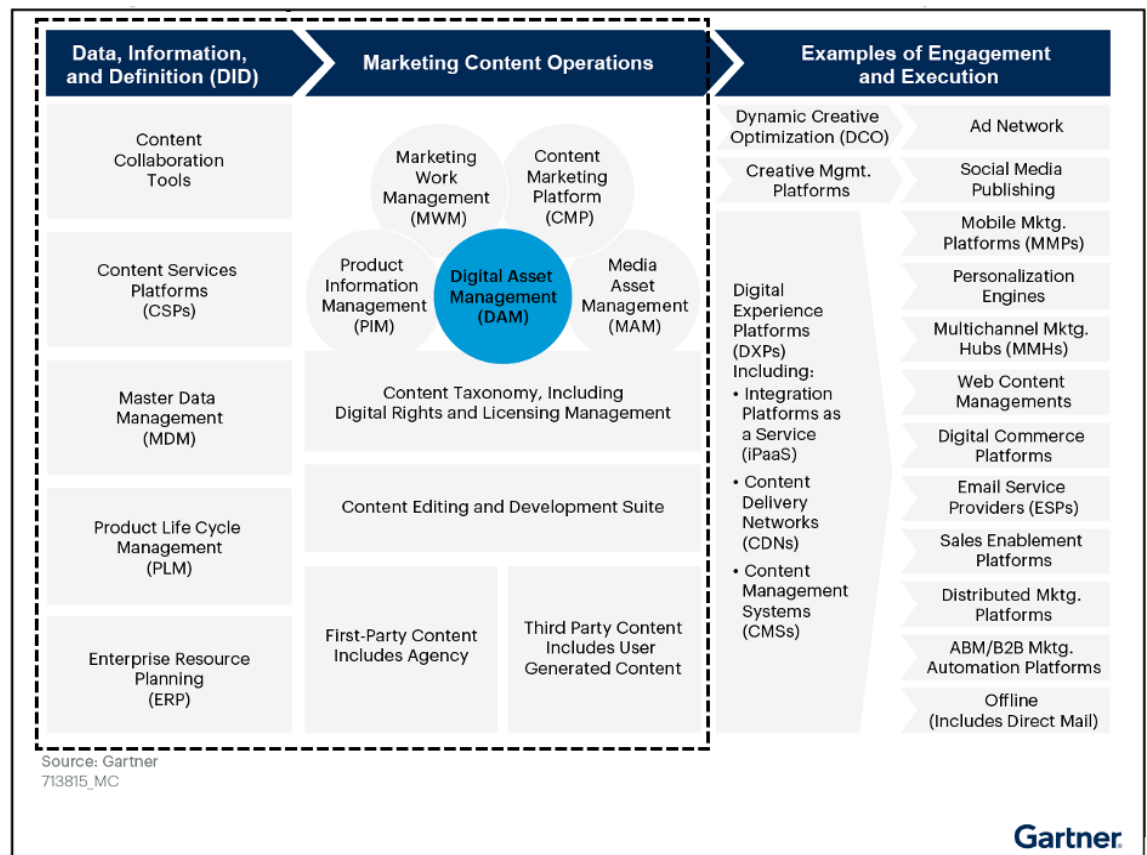
6.3.2 Promotional content volumes – January 2020 to May 2021



7. Kroger, Aprove, PureRED - Technical Infrastructure Overview

The Aprove platform enables and connects within the Marketing Content Operations layers within Kroger’s Martech Ecosystem, primarily supporting Data Information Definition and Marketing Content Operations capabilities (*as depicted in the Gartner model below).

Aprove is a critical business system in its current configuration that provides a central hub for Kroger’s bespoke Marketing Work Management and Proofing requirements and touches many parts of the Kroger user communities that sit within the dotted lines of these eco-systems.



*Source: Gartner Market Guide for Digital Asset Management 2021

Kroger, PureRED, Approve System Context

The Approve infrastructure has been configured for the Kroger, PureRED bespoke architecture, with prerequisite adherence to all Kroger Technology, Infrastructure, IT, and Data Management protocols and policies. One of the infrastructure design objectives was to manage peaks throughout certain times in the Promotional Execution lifecycles and scale up in real-time with no impact on technical process performances.

Approve is unique in that Enterprise customers have dedicated hosted environments, which means Kroger could have a dedicated login portal where they retain control as the Identity Provider (IDP), with Approve acting as the service provider (SP). Auto-provisioning makes it easy for Kroger to add/remove and allocate users to Approve roles.

The clustered infrastructure design for Kroger allows for substantial user growth that could not be achieved in a typical multi-tenant SaaS environment.

Figure 1. Kroger Phase 3 Infrastructure

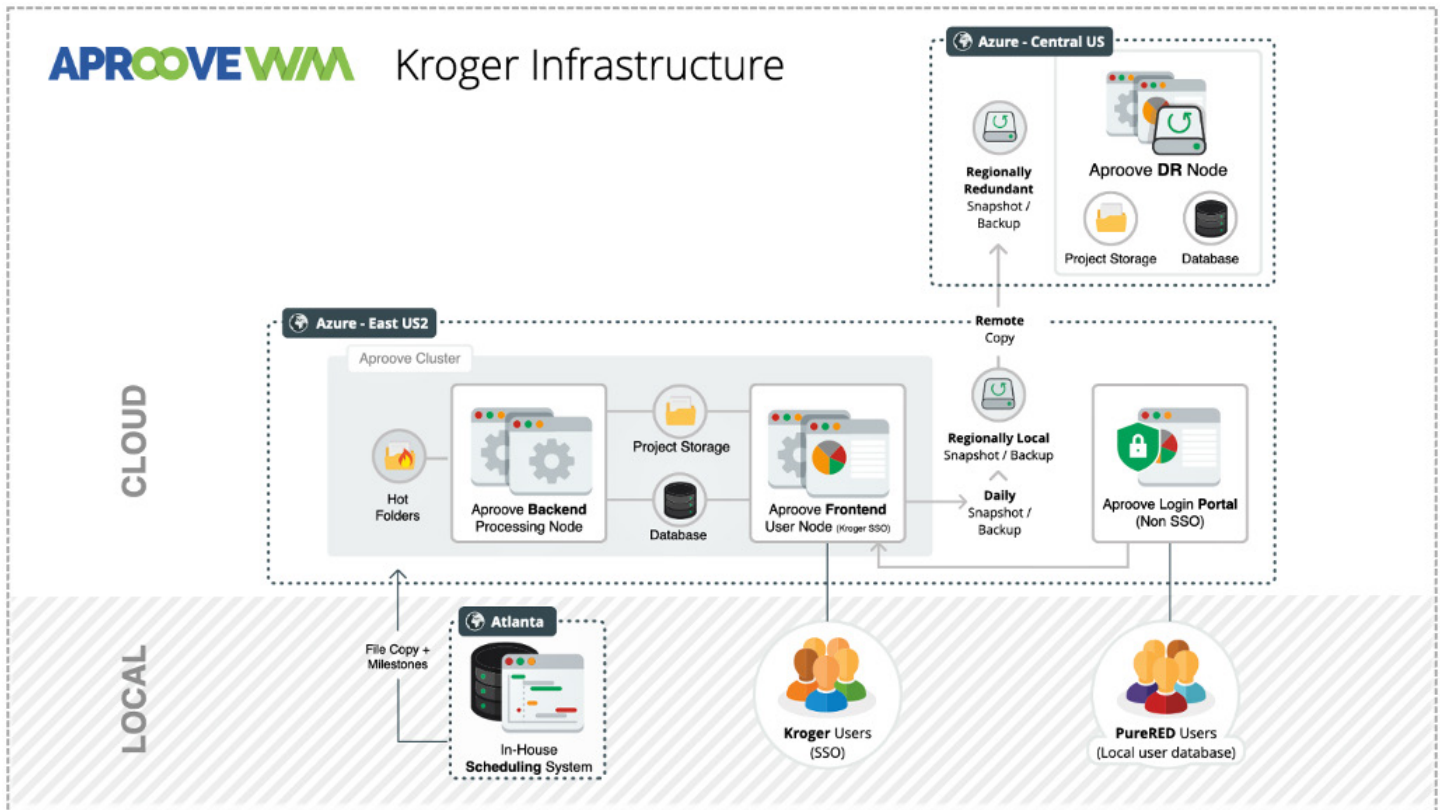
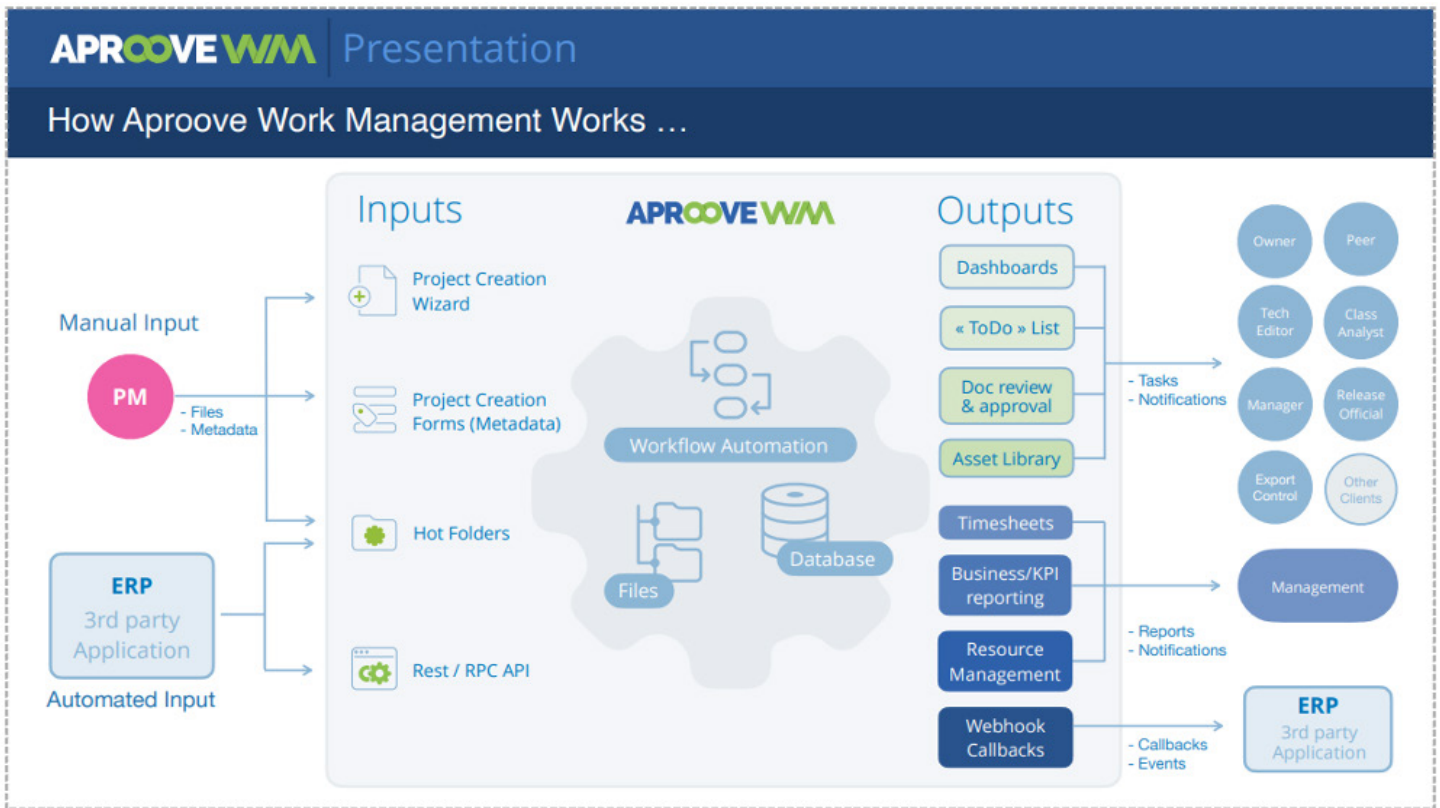


Figure 2. How the Approve Work Management Platform Works - Generic High-Level Enterprise Architecture

At a broader level, the Aproove platform architecture is highly configurable and has many client options depending on technical opportunities and constraints for each client situation.



8. Appendix and references

Data Sources:

This case study combines independent reviews of vendor and product demonstrations of the product functionality to validate details of product capabilities. Along with structured interviews, question and answer sessions, reference calls, and surveys with a representative stakeholder group across all relevant Kroger, PureRED, and Aproove Teams.

References

Source: Gartner Market Guide for Digital Asset Management 2021

Data Tables:

Aproove Activities and User Growth

Aproove Activities	Feb-20	Aug-20	May-21
Tasks Sent	-	87,070	490,769
Notes Created	-	155,655	392,665
Proofs Processed	-	147,603	635,171

Aproove User Growth	Feb-20	Aug-20	May-21	Dec-21
Aproove Active Users	200	871	1001	2000