Entertainment Production's Missing Execution Layer

How exploding creative supply and hybrid AI workflows are exposing
a gap in the infrastructure needed to create and manage modern productions
…and how other industries have solved similar challenges

by Showrunnr, Inc.
2026

Executive Summary

Entertainment production is one of the most complex operational environments in the modern economy. Every production must assemble a network of talent, suppliers, facilities, and technologies under compressed timelines and significant financial risk. For decades, this coordination has relied largely on relationships, phone calls, emails, and spreadsheets.

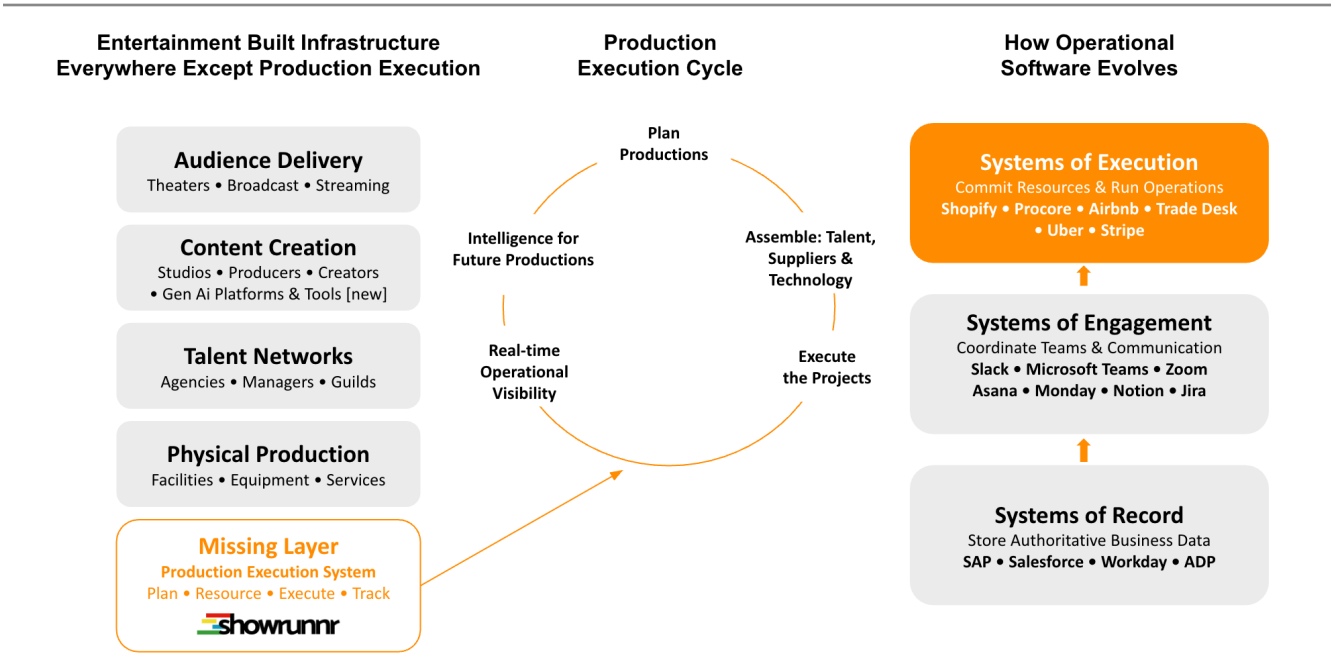
Today the environment surrounding production is changing rapidly. Creative supply has expanded, fueled by global talent networks, decentralized creators, and an exploding ecosystem of AI-driven tools.

As capabilities multiply, the challenge is no longer access to resources - it is the ability to assemble the right combinations of talent, technology, and services at speed in a systematized way so data generated during execution can be used to refine how productions are resourced, created and brought to market more effectively. In other words, the advantage is shifting from scarcity to execution.

Other industries have faced similar moments of complexity and scale. As they matured, new categories of operational software emerged to manage the commitments that activate real work. These systems - often referred to as execution platforms - govern the moment where plans turn into resource commitments and outcomes.

Entertainment production historically developed infrastructure around payroll, talent management, services, and distribution. What it never built was infrastructure for how productions themselves are executed. As production becomes more global, technology-driven, and increasingly hybrid - combining human talent with AI capabilities - the need for execution infrastructure becomes more acute.

This paper examines how execution platforms emerged across other industries and why entertainment production is now at a similar critical inflection point.



How Infrastructure Emerged in Entertainment

For more than a century, the entertainment industry has concentrated its capital and attention on the creation and distribution of content.

Studios, production companies, and financiers deploy capital to produce individual projects or larger slates of productions designed to generate commercially successful works. The central activities of the industry therefore revolve around:

- Developing content
- Financing productions
- Distributing finished work

Operational infrastructure has rarely been the focus of strategic investment. Instead, it emerged organically through third-party organizations that solved recurring coordination problems.

Over time several forms of infrastructure became structural components of the ecosystem:

Talent aggregation - talent agencies
Payroll & compliance - payroll companies
Production capability - studios, facilities, equipment providers
Distribution infrastructure - theaters, broadcast networks, streaming platforms

Distribution infrastructure became particularly sophisticated because it required coordinated industry standards and long-term capital investment.

The industry relies on systems of record for:

- Payroll
- Accounting
- Budgeting

It also uses engagement systems such as messaging platforms and project tools.

What has never existed in a unified way is a platform governing the commitments required to assemble productions themselves from planning through completion.

The Rise of DIY Systems in Production

As discussed previously in our paper “From DIY Sprawl to Connected Intelligence,” in the absence of unified operational infrastructure, production teams have often built their own systems using general-purpose tools. Over the past two decades, spreadsheet and no-code platforms have become common operational foundations:

- Excel and Google Sheets
- Airtable and Smartsheets
- Monday.com and Notion

These tools have allowed coordinators, production managers, and department teams to build systems tailored to immediate needs. However, this flexibility produced an unintended structural consequence. What began as tactical solutions gradually evolved into fragmented ecosystems consisting of hundreds of spreadsheets, custom trackers, and improvised workflows maintained by production teams themselves.

These systems solve immediate coordination needs but introduce significant limitations:

- Fragmented production data scattered across spreadsheets and personal tools.
- Non-standard operational data created as each team builds its own tracking systems.
- Institutional knowledge trapped in individual documents and trackers.
- Fragile workflows dependent on a handful of individuals rather than shared systems.
- No structured production data foundation for intelligent tools to operate on.
- No shared execution environment where human and AI-driven workflows can interact.

In effect, DIY production systems fragment the very data and workflow context that modern intelligent tools require.

A Changing Production Landscape

For many years, this decentralized approach has been workable. Experienced production teams compensated for the limitations of their tools through relationships, institutional knowledge, and improvisation.

Today the environment surrounding production is changing dramatically. Creative supply is expanding rapidly as global talent networks, independent creators, and new production companies enter the landscape. At the same time, advances in artificial intelligence are introducing powerful new capabilities across every stage of the production process - from writing and pre-visualization to visual effects, localization, and post-production.

These developments are transforming production from a relatively contained industry into a far more dynamic ecosystem. Established studios, streaming platforms, production companies, service providers, and independent creators are now operating alongside a rapidly growing array of AI-driven creative tools and production technologies. The result is a production environment where new capabilities, collaborators, and workflows are constantly emerging. In this environment, the competitive advantage increasingly lies in how effectively teams can assemble these capabilities into productions that reach audiences successfully.

Modern productions must coordinate increasingly complex networks of participants:

- Global crews and distributed talent
- Specialized vendors and suppliers
- Emerging AI-driven creative tools and platforms
- Creator-economy talent and productions
- Facilities and post-production services
- Visual effects and virtual production pipelines

Production timelines and budgets have compressed while the number of projects, collaborators and tools has expanded. The result is a coordination environment significantly more complex than the one the industry historically managed.

How Operational Software Evolves in Other Industries

Many of the forces reshaping entertainment production today are unprecedented. Creative capabilities are expanding rapidly in real time, even as the range of participants continues to grow. As a result, production teams must now coordinate a far wider network of collaborators, technologies, and workflows than before. While the creative context may be unique, the underlying coordination challenges are not entirely new. When other industries reached similar limits in their ability to manage increasingly complex operations, new kinds of operational systems emerged to support the work being done.

Enterprise technology analysts and researchers have long observed this pattern. Frameworks used by organizations such as Gartner and Forrester describe several categories of operational systems that emerge as industries scale and digitize their operations. While terminology can vary slightly, the structure is widely recognized across enterprise software.

Understanding these layers helps clarify the types of infrastructure required to support complex operational environments.

Three Layers of Operational Software

These layers are commonly described as:

Systems of Record	Store authoritative information and business records.
Systems of Engagement	Coordinate people and communication around work.
Systems of Execution	Govern operational commitments where resources are allocated and work begins.

1. Systems of Record *(The first wave of enterprise software)*

Systems of Record store authoritative business data. They provide a reliable source of truth for information such as financial transactions, employee records, inventory, or customer accounts.

These systems are designed primarily to **capture, store, and report on information**. They answer questions like: *What is true and what has already happened?*

Examples include:

- **SAP** tracking financial and operational data for large enterprises
- **Salesforce** storing customer and sales data
- **Workday** managing employee records and payroll
- **ADP** payroll systems

These platforms ensure that organizations maintain accurate records, but they typically focus on **documenting activity rather than coordinating operational work.**

2. Systems of Engagement *(The SaaS wave of the 2000s–2010s)*

Systems of engagement help people collaborate, communicate and coordinate work.

Examples include:

- **Slack**, **Microsoft Teams** and **Zoom -** supporting meetings and communication
- **Asana**, **Monday.com, Notion**
- **Jira** and similar coordination tools

Systems of Engagement improve communication and collaboration across organizations and allow teams to coordinate activity more effectively.

While these tools improve coordination between people, they do not manage the operational commitments that allow complex work to be executed.

---

3. Systems of Execution *(platforms that enable operational work)*

Systems of Execution enable and manage operational actions that allow work to occur - and coordinating many parties required to deliver an outcome. They govern actions such as:

allocating resources
initiating transactions
confirming operational workflows

Examples include:

- **Shopify** executing online commerce transactions
- **Procore** coordinating the execution of large construction projects
- **Airbnb** executing accommodation bookings across a global marketplace
- **The Trade Desk** executing digital advertising purchases
- **Uber** coordinating and executing transportation networks
- **Stripe** executing payments

Unlike systems of record or engagement tools, execution systems sit at the **operational moment when decisions become real commitments** - resources are allocated, transactions occur, and work moves forward.

Together, these layers form the operational software infrastructure that allows complex industries to function at scale.

In practice, these categories are not rigid boundaries. Modern platforms often span multiple layers of this infrastructure. In many industries, additional layers have also begun to emerge on top of these foundations - systems that coordinate activity across multiple organizations or orchestrate increasingly complex workflows. Advances in artificial intelligence are accelerating this trend, enabling software and agents to participate more directly in operational processes.

Yet these higher-level capabilities depend on a critical prerequisite: a system capable of enabling the underlying operational work to be managed and carried out.

The Missing Execution Layer in Entertainment Production

Entertainment production has adopted many digital tools over time - financial systems, payroll platforms, and communication tools that help teams collaborate. In other words, the industry developed **systems of record** and **systems of engagement**, much like other industries did as they digitized their operations.

What never emerged, however, was a shared **system of execution** capable of coordinating the operational work required to assemble and manage productions.

Instead, the commitments required to secure talent, technology, suppliers, and services against production schedules continue to be coordinated through fragmented tools and manual workflows.

The Production Execution Loop

Production operations typically follow a recurring cycle:

1. Plan productions
2. Assemble talent, suppliers, and technology
3. Execute the project
4. Monitor progress
5. Learn from outcomes

In industries with mature execution platforms, this operational loop is managed inside software that coordinates commitments and captures the resulting operational data. When execution occurs inside a structured system, each step generates information that improves how future productions are planned and resourced.

Where Showrunnr Fits

Viewed through this framework, the structural gap in entertainment production becomes clear.

Showrunnr introduces the **execution platform** the industry has lacked - a system designed to coordinate the operational commitments required to assemble, manage and track productions.

Within the platform, teams can:

- **Plan** productions and maintain slate visibility
- **Assemble** the talent, services, and technologies required to execute projects
- **Coordinate** commitments across collaborators
- **Track and learn** from execution progress in real time
- **Bring productions to market** with greater speed, precision, and commercial impact.

Because these activities occur inside a shared system, they generate operational intelligence that compounds across productions.

Over time, this execution layer becomes the foundation for more advanced capabilities - including automated workflows, intelligent coordination, and AI-driven operational assistance.

Conclusion

Entertainment production has long relied on relationships and improvised operational systems to assemble complex projects. For decades this model worked. But the scale, speed, and technological complexity of modern production environments are now pushing the limits of manual coordination.

Other industries faced similar moments of operational complexity and responded by building execution platforms that govern the commitments where work actually happens.

Entertainment production is now approaching the same turning point.

The emergence of execution infrastructure will fundamentally change how productions are assembled, coordinated, and improved over time.