

A hand with light blue nail polish holds a silver pen, pointing it towards a donut chart. The chart is composed of several segments in yellow, blue, and teal. The text "2022 | Q2" is positioned to the left of the hand.

2022 | Q2

# CREATIVE MANAGEMENT REPORT

How In-House Brand  
and Creative Teams  
are Evolving



# Executive Summary

After four years of publishing an annual Creative Management Report, this year we decided to change to a quarterly cadence. Why the change? We want to provide timely insights to support our global community of in-house brand and creative teams. To that end, and after seeing the lightning-fast changes that have been occurring within in-house teams over the past two years, and how teams continue to evolve, we decided it would be most impactful to share new data more often.

Last year's report revealed a noteworthy change in the data. For the first time in four years, **"being seen as a strategic contributor"** dropped out of the top three challenges for creative teams. **Only 48% of creative teams cited this as a challenge in 2021 compared to 63% in 2020.** Since then, creative teams have been building up their internal expertise and capabilities, evolving from production studios to influential in-house agencies valued as strategic partners to the business. That is why we focused the theme of this quarter's report on "evolution."

This quarter's report looks at how in-house agencies have grown and evolved over the last 12 months, the related impact across their Creative Lifecycle, and how teams have responded.

Key findings show that **38% of teams experienced growth** over the past twelve months and a similar number expect similar growth over the coming year. The capabilities they expect to grow the most include:



**31%**

**Creative Strategy**



**19%**

**Marketing/Comms Strategy**



**16%**

**Brand Management**

These strategic services will continue to move brand and creative teams toward an in-house agency model that includes increasing strategic work. For example, **57% of teams shared that they are already regularly involved in strategic work and original concepting, up 14% from 12 months ago.**



Team growth and new strategic responsibilities are exciting developments for brand and creative teams that will greatly benefit their businesses. This will, however, introduce some complexity that teams must address.

Starting with organizational alignment, **64% of teams shared that stakeholders do not entirely understand their group's value proposition.** So, teams must establish better alignment with clients regarding when, why, and how they should work with the in-house agency. Doing so can produce cost savings from less use of external agencies, lower effort to produce the same volume and quality of work, and clear justification for budget and hires that in-house brand and creative teams will need to support their developing strategic services.

Related to satisfying stakeholder needs, the following are the top challenges faced by in-house brand and creative teams:

- Tight timelines
- Unclear or incomplete requests
- Unexpected changes to work that is almost complete
- Keeping up with the volume
- Changing priorities

In-house agencies aiming to become strategic partners with their clients need timelines that allow the proper space and time for strategic discussions, advising, and decision-making to occur. They can recommend such process improvements to help their team and clients work better together, but clients will need to adhere to these processes. Unfortunately, **61% of teams shared that they either have low to no client adherence** to their process or are actively working on it. From our view, this all points back to the need for organizational alignment.

We believe growing and evolving in-house agencies will need to focus much of this year on refining their value proposition to reflect their growth and new capabilities. And they will need to reset internal expectations for how clients and stakeholders should work with their in-house agency going forward. These two steps are foundational for brand and creative teams to do their best work and deliver better content to clients.

We hope our analysis helps inform your growth decisions and contributes to your team's evolution in delivering top-notch content to brands. We look forward to sharing our Q3 report with you soon.

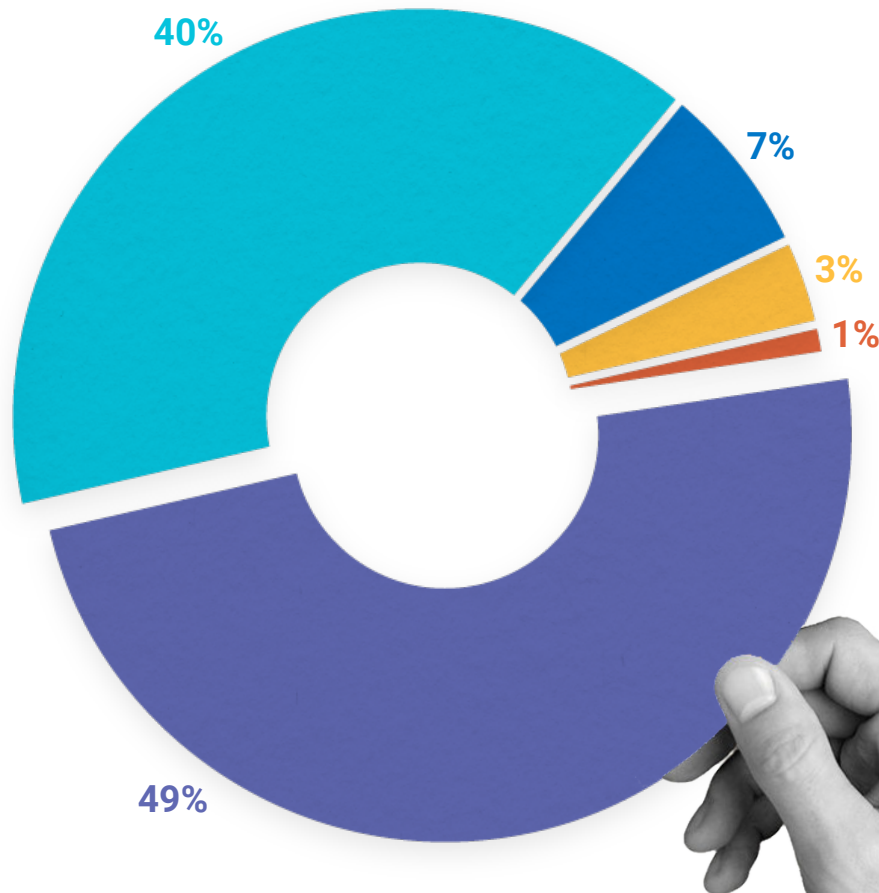
# Respondents' Profile





# Respondents' Role

**89%** of respondents consider themselves to be part of a creative role verse **10%** marketing role.



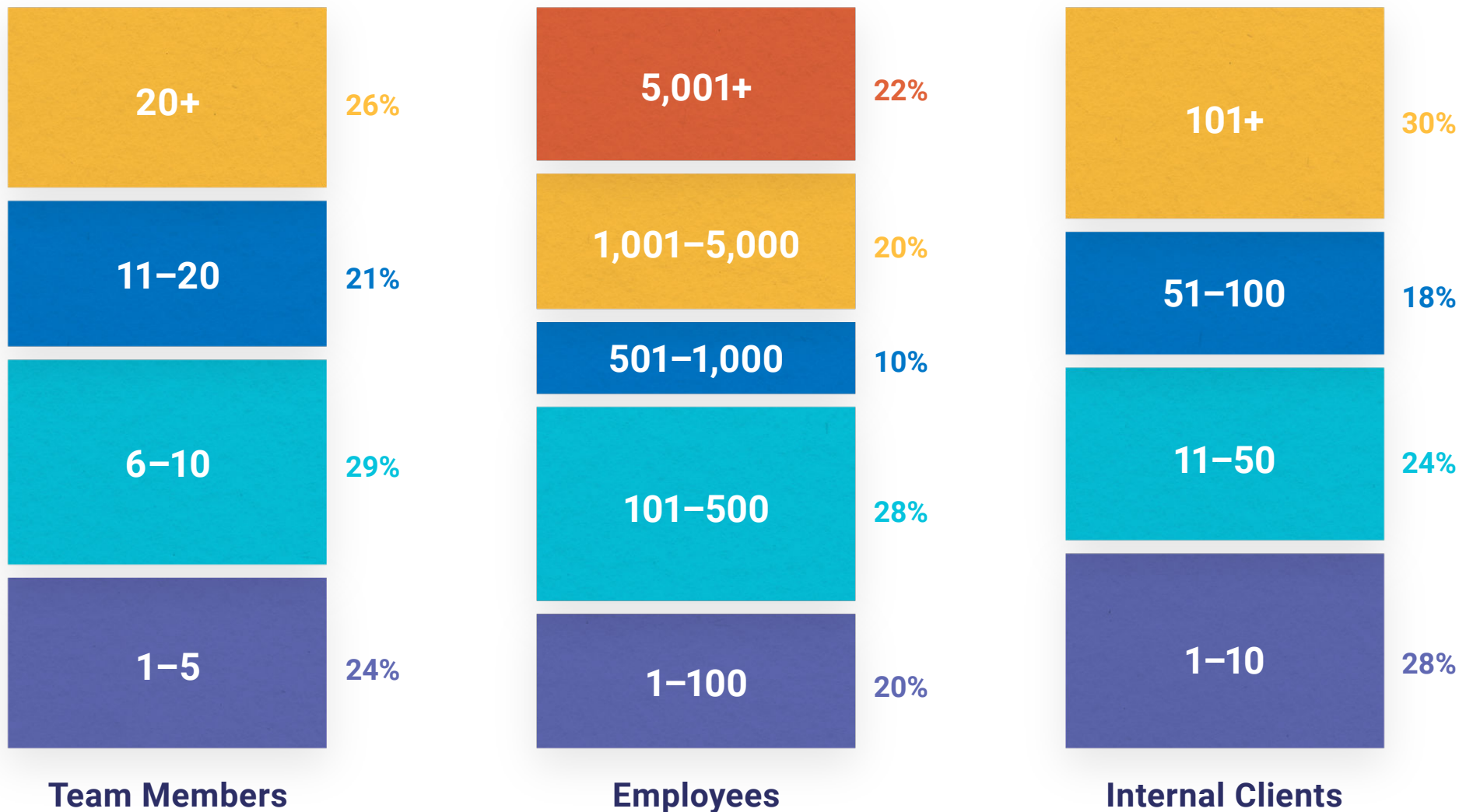
**56%** respondents were in a management role.

- Creative Manager
- Creative
- Marketing Manager
- Marketing
- Project Manager / Operational Support



# Respondents' Team and Organization

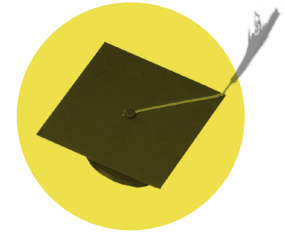
A diverse distribution of team size, organization size, and the number of brand and creative team clients was represented in the survey answers.





# Respondents' Industry

Respondents represented a wide range of industries.



**13%** Higher Education

**6%** Health Care

**9%** CPG

**5%** Hospitality

**8%** Tech

**5%** Insurance

**8%** Manufacturing

**3%** Retail

**7%** Financial

**3%** Primary Education

**7%** Government

**19%** Other

**7%** Non-Profit



## MEET THE EXPERT



**Erica Fresh**  
Creative Operations Director at Zagg

Erica Fresh possesses a proven track record in implementing agile approaches for creative teams in the consumer electronics sector. Erica is an expert in marketing strategy, creative solutions & operations, and operational excellence.

## The Evolution from Production Team to Content Creation Team

The pandemic pushed brand and creative teams toward drastic changes in the way they operate. This was especially true for businesses that sell physical products, such as Zagg. They were forced to move away from using traditional print collateral, sell sheets, and product packaging to inform their retailers about their products and instead shifted their focus to digital channels and content creation. That kind of adaptation led to restructuring, new hires, new workflows, and an emphasis on creative work for online use more so than ever before. In Erica's case, as she explains, her team evolved from an order-taking production team to a strategically-minded content creation team.

Erica leads a brand and creative team as the Creative Operations Director at Zagg. Prior to COVID-19, her group was very production focused with the goal of making sure retailers had the information they needed about Zagg's products. Her team would produce collateral to educate buyers on the technology and analytics behind their products. But last year, as she observed the need to be nearly all online, she declared that 2021 would be the year of content creation and began to reposition her team as content creators instead of a production team.

**The creative team began to rethink their purpose by asking themselves the hard questions – “what do we stand for as a company?”, “how do we evolve our value proposition?” and “how do we stay true to who we are?”** To deliver on their renewed focus, Erica went to work on getting the right new talent on the team.

The result? Her creative team went from shooting content once every 2 months to twice a week. They also shifted the type of content they shoot – **“long-form content is no longer relevant”, Erica opined, “so we’re focusing on specializing in those short special moments with consumers.”** Erica wanted the creative directors she hired to bring continuity to the videos produced – a few new, conceptual thinkers that will bring a fresh perspective: “Our production team is great, but with years of focusing on the same thing comes stagnation. Getting new hires helped mix things up and freshen up our content”.



Looking back at how they implemented the new model and related workflows, Erica recalled she just went in and quickly shifted everyone to the new model. The old model was siloed and limited the background information her team would receive for the content they needed to create, meaning they always had to dig deeper and repeatedly ask a series of questions about target audience(s), delivery dates, keywords, strategy, etc. After recent adjustments, her creative team now receives requests way ahead of time. For their latest campaign, they have been given a notice of 7 months – a huge improvement on the previous tight, 3-month timeframe they had to work with. The creative team is now involved in every step of the process and is in touch with all departments, producing more accurate, on-brand and on-strategy outcomes for the company.

When asked about the challenges team members struggled with the most, Erica mentioned her marketing people had a hard time understanding how to brainstorm tactics and channels before they received a visual proposition. The team would regularly want to default to the old model, under which creative concepts would always come in first and then marketing would come up with tactics, so Erica had to help them break this habit. But the patience and persistence eventually paid off: “Now, the team starts with the tactics they will follow driven by a strategic and analytical point of view, so the creative content that gets created is backed by data, not from ad hoc ideas.”

In addressing the common industry debate about whether content should be creative- or data-led, Erica rejoiced, saying: “The beauty of this is that it’s the happy medium. The tactics are data-led but with creative ideation around how and where they will be executed so that we can prioritize the right budgets and distribute our creativity in the best places. Now, we can get this information and make better decisions, break the information down into

content pieces, and each member does their part”. The teams do the content mapping – determining which content will go where – and then gets to create that content. She also stresses that it’s okay for her team to fail; they learn and grow from their failures, and they embrace the likeliness of failure as part of the process. If there needs to be adjustments, they reorganize to fulfill that need.

Sharing her advice for brand and creative leaders and teams that are considering similar changes, Erica urges to think about everybody involved or invested in the effort in order to gain the support you’ll need to see things through. Make sure that, as a creative leader, you’re a quarterback for your company, your team, and your stakeholders. She sends a challenge to her peers to figure out how to be a great mediator between teams and business units to prevent an “us vs. them” mentality from ever rising in the first place. **“If you create a shared purpose, then everybody will rally behind it”** she concluded.

When discussing the challenges she faced in implementing this new way of working at Zagg, Erica distinguishes between leadership and creative team challenges. In leading a creative team that’s suddenly facing a roadblock, she recommends switching mindsets – from “how do I solve this on my own” to “who can support me in this?” In successfully addressing your creative team’s challenges, **Erica urges creative leaders to stand in their team’s shoes and figure out what it is that they don’t understand. She finally urges you to ask your team what is difficult about their assignment, and to let them know you want to help them and be there for them to help them understand what you need them to do and give them the tools to think in the way you need them to. “Learn to speak your creative team’s language.”**



# How Teams are Changing Their **Focus, Size, Capabilities,** and the **Value** They Provide



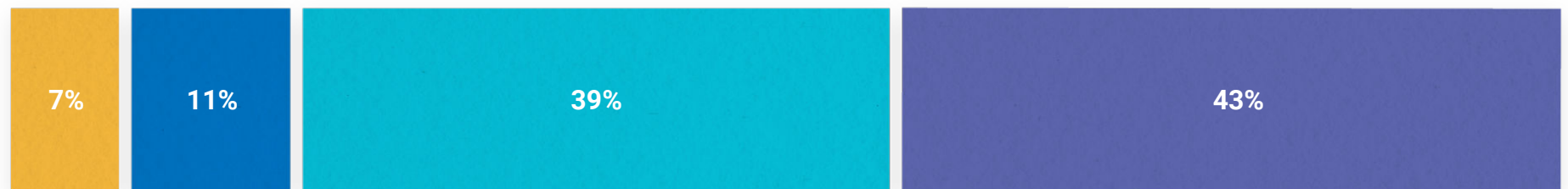


# Team Focus

Teams are moving toward an in-house agency model where they are more regularly involved in strategic work as well as tactical work.

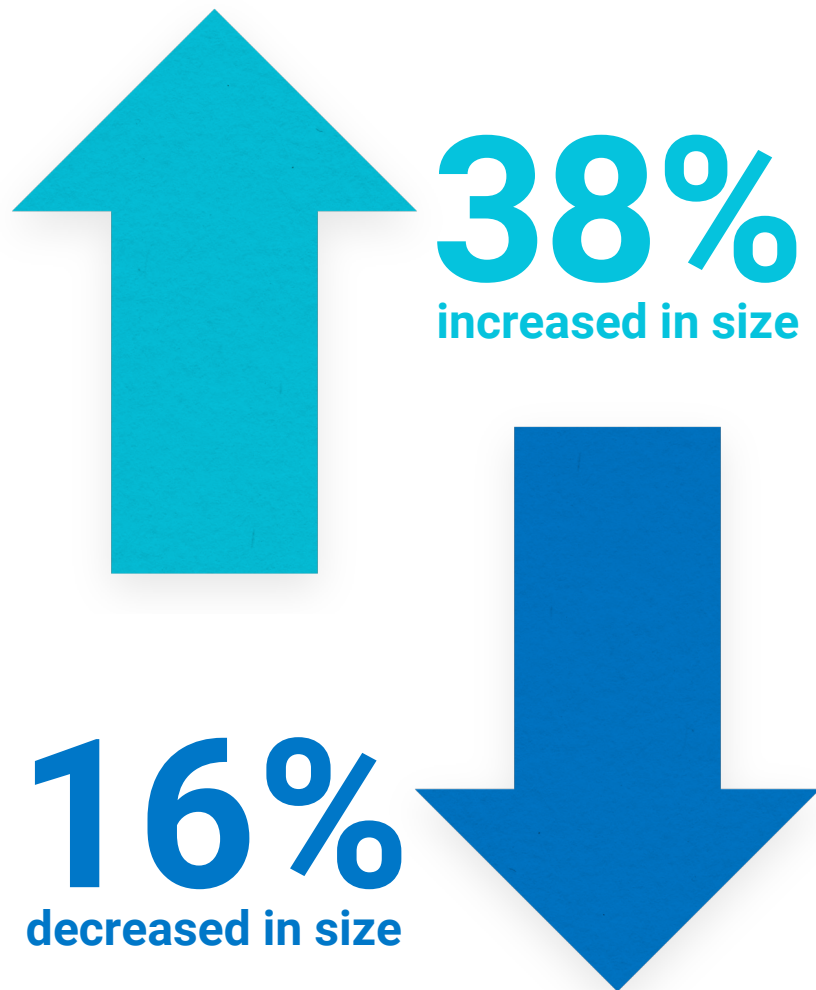


Current State



12 Months Ago

- **Pure Strategic Services** – Only strategic work. We direct external agency partners on original conceiving and tactical/production work.
- **Pure Production Services** – All tactical/production work. We receive all strategy and direction from external agency partner.
- **Evolving In-House Agency** – Mostly tactical/production work with some strategic work and original conceiving.
- **In-House Agency** – Regularly involved in strategic work and original conceiving, but still some tactical/production work.



The increase in creative strategy, marketing/comms strategy, and digital strategy may be illustrative of the shift teams are making toward a more regular mix of strategic as well as tactical work, as shown on the previous page.

## Changes in Team Size and Capabilities Over the Last 12 Months

Teams are more likely to have experienced an increase in size over the last 12 months with growth in traditional and digital capabilities.

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### Top Traditional Capability Growth

**26%** Creative Strategy

**22%** Marketing/Comms Strategy

**19%** Graphic Design

### Top Digital Capability Growth

**17%** Digital Design

**14%** Social Media Design

**11%** Digital Strategy



# Expectations for Changes in Team Size and Capabilities Over the Next 12 Months

Teams will continue to grow in size and capabilities.

## Top Traditional Capability Growth Expected

31% Creative Strategy

19% Marketing/Comms Strategy

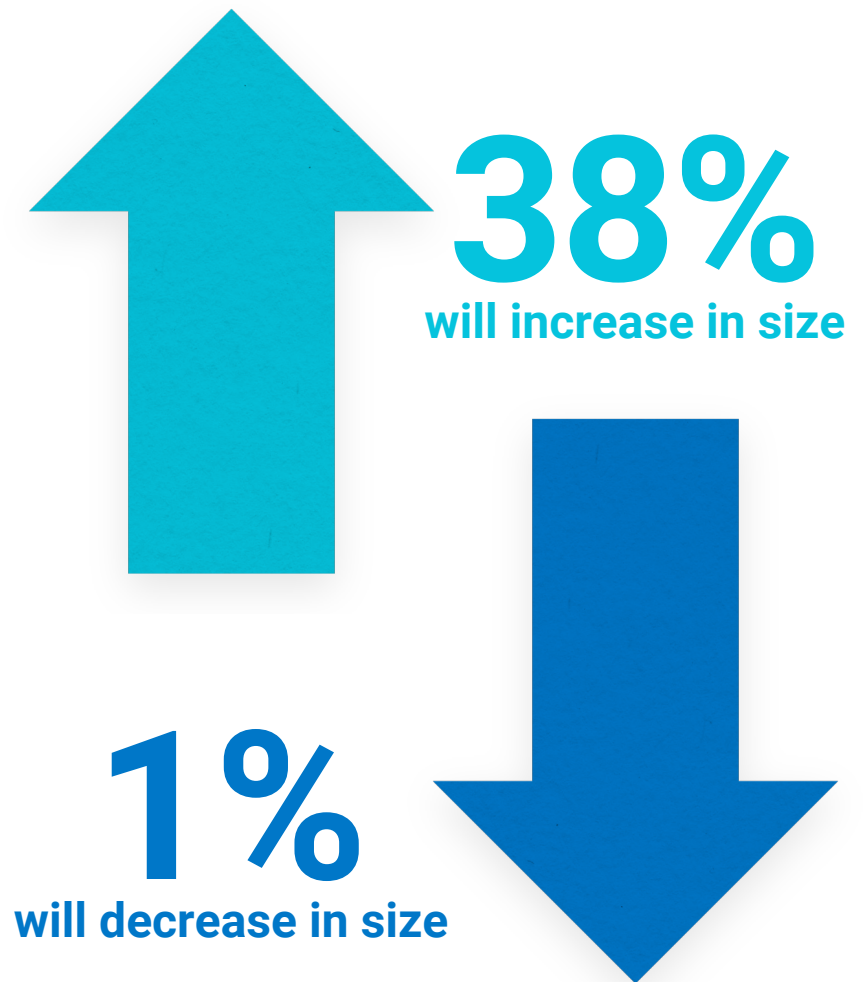
16% Brand Management

## Top Digital Capability Growth Expected

15% Digital Design

12% Social Media Design

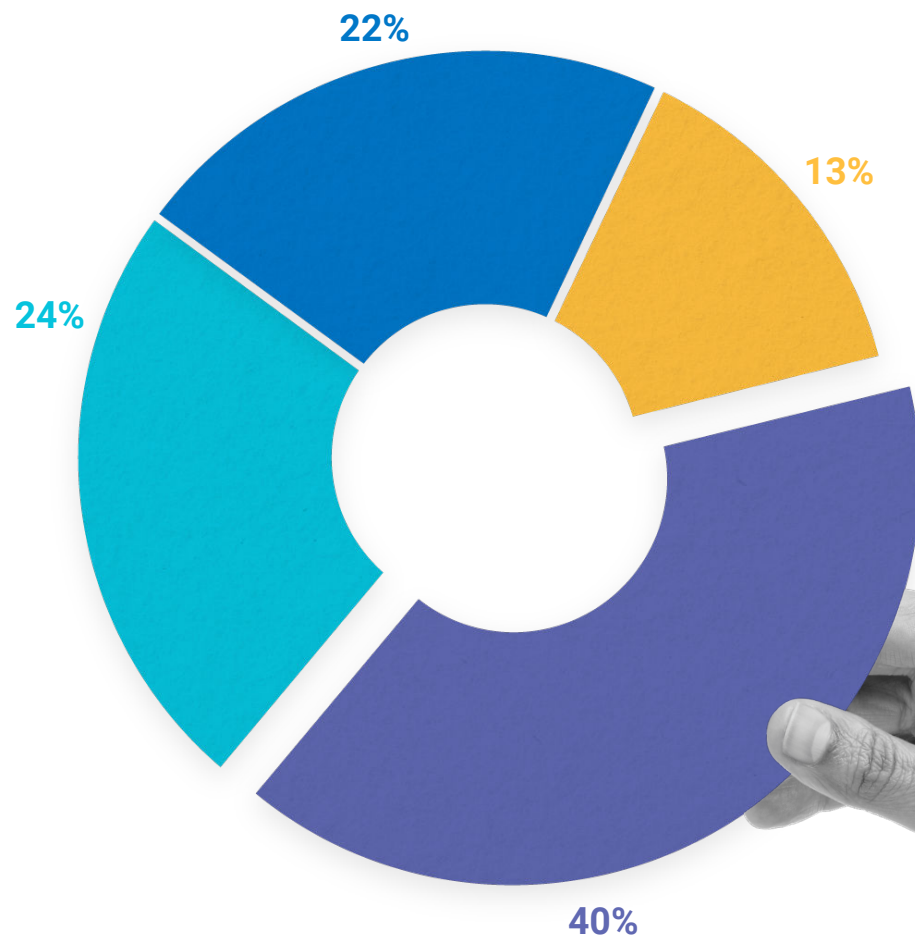
8% Web Design



Brand management is a strategic capability in how it helps companies align marketing execution with brand strategy. As teams play a greater strategic role, they will likely take more ownership over their brand and so, we would expect to see this capability continue to grow.

# Value Proposition

Even though in-house teams are becoming more established, more work is needed to help stakeholders understand the value they provide to their organizations.



Do stakeholders understand your team's value proposition?

- Almost, it's something we're working on now
- No, it's something we need to work on
- Yes, this has been true for more than a year
- Yes, this has become true within the past year

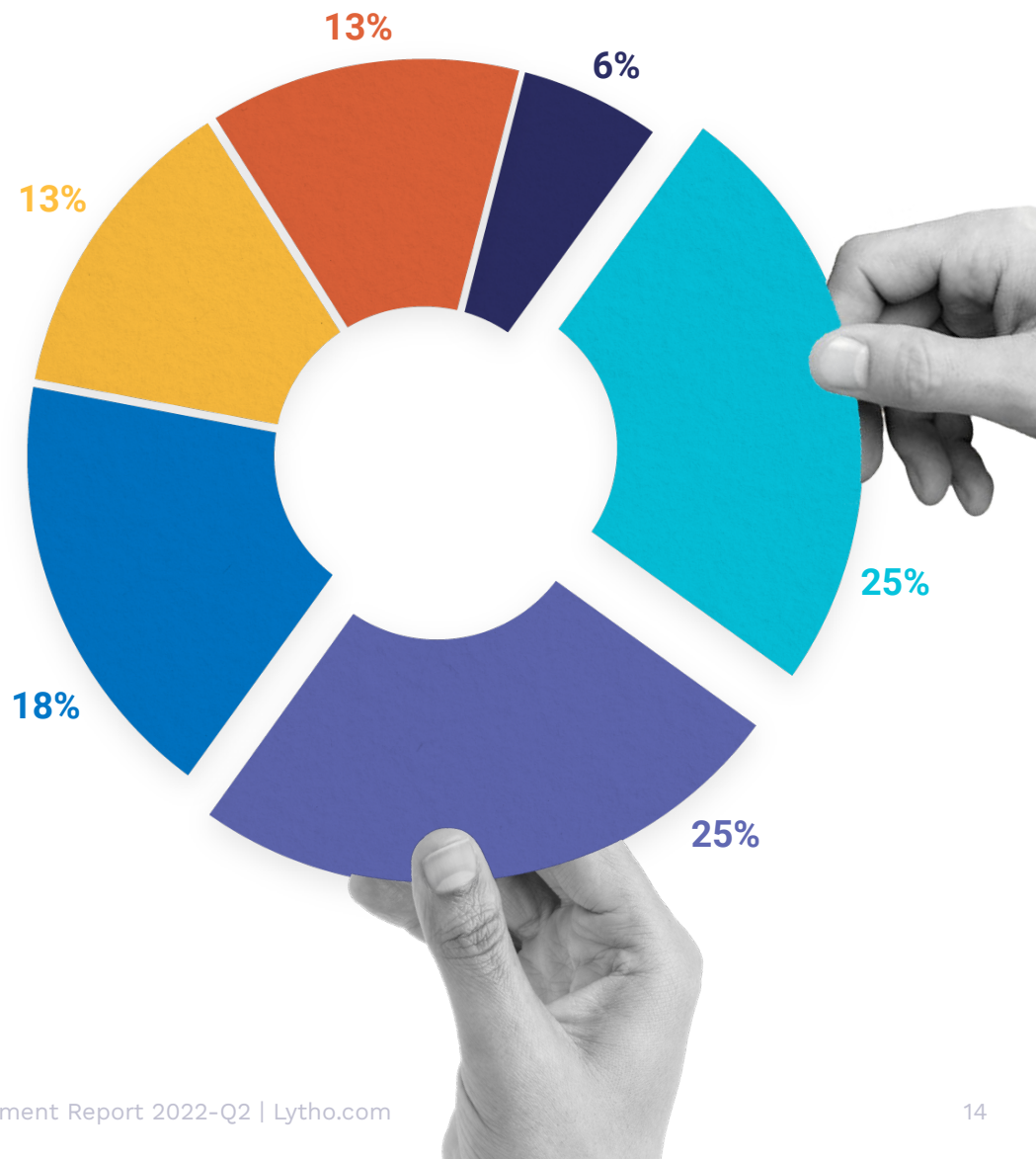


# Value Proposition

When stakeholders understand their in-house team's value to the business, the team can experience several operational benefits.

## How In-House Teams can Benefit From Aligning Stakeholders on Their Value Proposition

- Less effort to produce the same volume and quality of work
- Justification for new budget/hires
- Lower costs compared to external agencies
- Ability to deliver a larger volume of work
- Fewer internal mistakes
- Other



## MEET THE EXPERT



### Katherine Kane

Marketing Services Manager at Blue Cross Blue Shield

Katherine Kane is a Marketing Services Manager with years of experience in operational management, project management, employee development, communication, customer service and database management.

## Reorganizing Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina's Approach to Marketing – from Strategy through Execution

Katherine knows all there is to know about in-house agency evolution having been part of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina's (Blue Cross NC) redesign of its overall approach to marketing. A year ago, marketing and sales teams were under the same executive leadership together. The sales team worked with marketing to support sales needs, but in that structure, marketing wasn't positioned to effectively contribute from a strategic perspective. As Marketing Services Manager, she and others were given an opportunity to reimagine the approach to their work in order to support a recent new direction for the company.

The driver behind Blue Cross NC's changes? A sharp conviction that the company can only propel itself to a successful future if it learns to adapt to the marketplace. After the recent restructuring, Blue Cross NC places consumers and their needs first. Katherine shared that, "Instead of us being oriented around the different needs of our internal business areas and having three of the same sales campaigns or two of the same member campaigns because different business units wanted to say different things, we're now oriented around the phases of our customer journey. This helps us ensure that our messaging and our strategy is consistent for customers along those journey phases."

And there's more work to be done as the company is still going through the transition and aiming for even better alignment. Its key business leaders worked with marketing to establish a 6-point marketing process. To introduce this framework, they generated introductory training and detailed presentations of how operations will change. The desired outcomes by the end of the transition period include:

1. **Better Analytics** – Blue Cross NC has strengthened their measurement capabilities to so they can respond more quickly to optimization. Having analysts now aligned with each creative team along the customer journey will allow the teams to quickly optimize their work once it's in the market. Previously, they didn't have such timely access to analytics so they would just move on to the next project.
2. **Message Alignment** – Blue Cross NC also had too many messages, sometimes conflicting ones, in the market at the same time. As a company, we want to limit market confusion by developing cohesive market plans.

**"We don't want our teams to wait for a manager to give them permission to make a decision. We want a team that will make a decision with the information you have and then adjust if you need to."**

For Katherine, making this work comes down to the environment that her and her team have created and the reassurance she gives them. **"We must have space to fail as a company and as a department. It's all about fostering an environment where failure is viewed as an acceptable occurrence and that the learning process is continuous. And it helps that you and other leaders are also transparent about their efforts that recently failed and what they learned."**



And the results? The company is starting to see the benefit from these efforts. Still in its infancy, messaging strategy is becoming more collaborative, and team members can respond faster to optimization requests.

Organizing teams around the customer journey has also created better visibility for business owners and a more manageable workload for teams. Teams work from established backlogs for each point of the customer journey. Blue Cross NC's account managers prioritize the backlog based on business goals and then work begins as the team becomes available. The teams are able to keep a better eye on all work in progress and be more upfront with business partners about capacity and the time teams need to deliver on their strategic goals

To guide their team structure, they used data from Lytho to determine how many people would be needed to support each customer journey point. They looked at the related number of projects, deliverables, and associated hours of work. With the structure now in place, they are analyzing the data to learn if or how they should redistribute team members to strike the right balance of workload and capacity.

Marketing Leadership developed 4 guiding principles to inform the initial concept of the current structure:

- Grow
- Simplify
- Align
- Optimize

Hiring dedicated account managers for each department was crucial to the restructuring's success, admits Katherine. "Our account managers represent our different divisions in the company. They're embedded in our business and are advocates for the business. They're the ones working to prioritize work for marketing. This has given us consistency and has taken us out of the race of who's the loudest."

Currently, the company's biggest challenge is adequately educating its business centers so they can adapt to this new way of working. **"There's a lot of comfort in the status quo, some like the experiment, some don't like it, some have struggled"**, Katherine noted. Everyone reacted

to the shift differently. Some drastically felt its effects while others saw no difference in their day to day, but she admits that she was pleasantly surprised that people on all sides took the shift much more positively than she expected. **"We wanted to stay competitive, so we evolved"** she emphasized.

In opening up about her expectations and the challenges the marketing organization has faced, she mentioned:

- When getting ready for the new working model, she thought it was going to fall into place much quicker than it did, but it actually occurred in a more gradual way.
- The team initially thought they would need to create new documentation in preparation for the shift but soon realized they would still be able to use much of what already existed. "There is so much of what we did before that is still present", she added.

Pondering the future of the team, Katherine emphasized she wants there to be a strong feeling of comradery and she wishes to improve the work-life balance of all teams involved in the strategy, creative, and production process so they can produce better work and improve their performance metrics with efficiency and excellence. **"We want our teams to work in an environment that makes them feel successful and to be able to make their own decisions and feel supported."**

When asked for any advice she may have for other brand and creative teams if they should feel any pain from their current ways of working, she said:

**"Work with your team every step of the way, use your principles as a guide, and be open to continuous evolution through feedback from your creative team. Practice being comfortable with change. To prevent change fatigue, make sure to change what isn't working immediately, even if it's a small thing. Establish guidelines in a way where they can be changed, shaped and formed according to your team's evolving needs."**



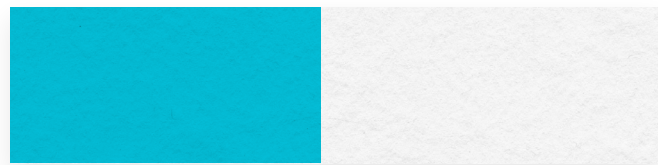
# Challenges and Improvements





# Top Challenges

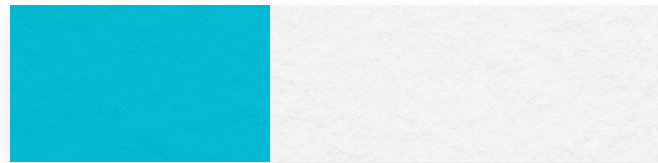
Three challenges rose above others for in-house teams aiming to satisfy stakeholder needs.



**Tight Timelines**

**48%**

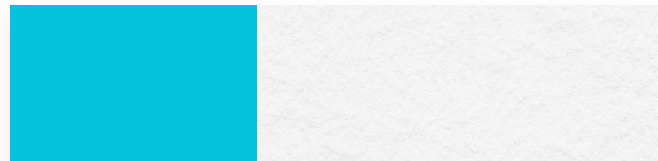
If timelines do not allow for strategic thinking and discussions, in-house teams will have difficulty providing satisfactory strategic support to stakeholders.



**Unclear or Incomplete Requests**

**40%**

Unclear requests and unexpected changes to work create more work for in-house teams during already-tight timelines.



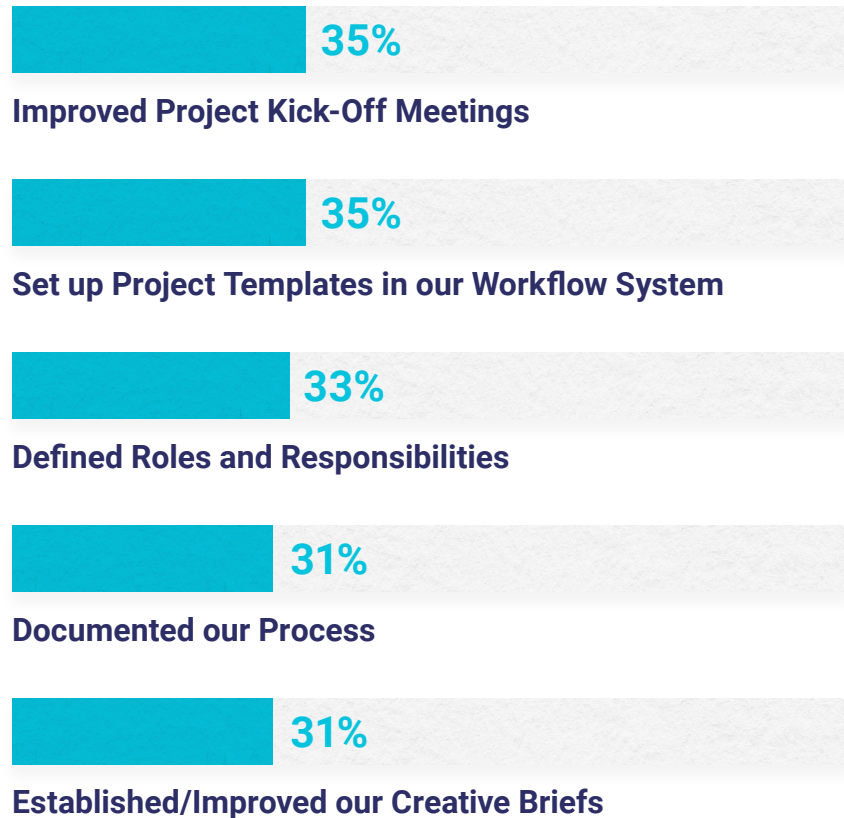
**Unexpected Changes to Work That's Almost Complete**

**38%**

As stakeholders begin to form a better understanding of their in-house team's value proposition, this may help alleviate these top three challenges.

# New Process Improvements

## Made in the Last 12 Months



Over the last 12 months, in-house teams focused on internal process improvements that will support their growth, new capabilities, and scalability (Project Templates, Roles and Responsibilities, Documented Process). They also focused on stakeholder-facing improvements (Kick-offs and Creative Briefs) that will help address the top challenges on the previous page.

## Planned in the Next 12 Months



The following 12 months will be similar, but with stakeholder-facing improvements and reporting coming in at a higher priority than internal processes.





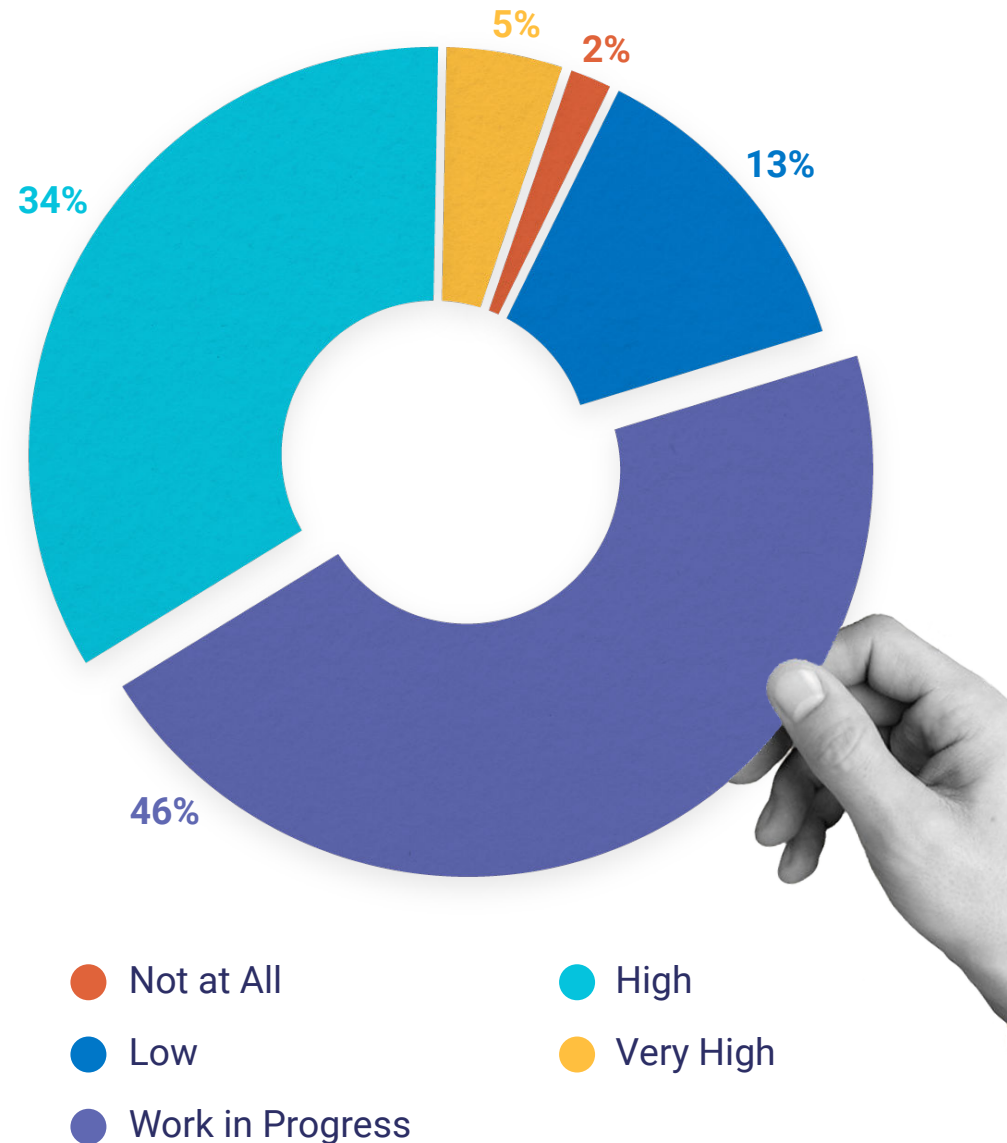
# Process Adherence

Overall, teams are seeing lower adherence to recommended processes.

This could stem from more work needed on socializing the in-house teams' value to their organizations.



To what degree do your stakeholders (requesters, reviewers, and approvers) consistently follow your team's recommended processes?



## MEET THE EXPERT



**Karrie Sanderson**  
Chief Marketing Officer at Typeform

Karrie Sanderson leads all core marketing functions including brand strategy, advertising, demand generation, product marketing, viral, SEO, and the Typeform website. Karrie also oversees the internal creative studio as well as Typeform's PR, internal communications, DEI, and Social Impact efforts.

## The Challenges and Successes of Transforming an In-House Brand and Creative Team into Strategic Decision-Makers

The future of in-house creative teams is rapidly evolving into one where the creatives themselves are driving strategic decision-making – and Typeform is a prime example of how that's being done, thanks to the work of Karrie Sanderson and her team. Typeform is a SaaS company that specializes in online form building and online surveys. When the company was smaller, the creative team worked in a model where designers and copywriters were embedded into different business teams throughout the organization – a matrix reporting structure. Admittedly, this model could not carry the company through the significant growth that it was undergoing – it didn't scale and made it difficult to maintain creative control. "So, we pulled our creative team into a flexible and centralized core creative studio, what we call the colony model, where individuals work on their craft but still gain expertise in different business areas," said Karrie.

Karrie explained how the business also leveraged external agencies – a strategic creative agency, and a production agency. They pull in these groups when their own in-house team does not have capacity or possess certain needed skills. "The Typeform in-house team has always delivered great work but has always had

too much to do," admits Karrie. The company's culture has always been to rely on a creative in-house team exclusively. However, they saw as they grew and scaled up that they also needed to bring in an external production agency to take care of all the lather, rinse, repeat work. "They handle the day-to-day. We've turned into a we're-all-owners-of-the-business type of model."

**"This model works wonders for both sides," exclaimed Karrie, since internal and external teams are not threatened by each other; internals build the strategy and externals build the stuff. It's a partnership.** Their most recent brand campaign, Hello Typeform, was a co-thinking process on the creative concept. The creative direction came from the in-house team. **"Part of why we went external was to get that supporting expertise, but we needed to get the expression Typeform is known for right".** Karrie admits that a lot of trust is required from the business itself to successfully work with external agencies.



This is not the only front that requires significant trust to work well. Karrie had to place a lot of focus on building trust between Typeform's in-house creative team and the agencies with which they would be collaborating. The key to this was the company's great onboarding. They included the external agency in their meetings, and they presented the agency as a member of their team, and vice versa. "Next", Karrie continues, **"we set up very clear lines of responsibility on who owns what to avoid confusion. Good ideas come from everywhere, but when it's time to deliver we know who owns that."**

When asked about her approach to make this system work, Karrie stressed the importance of holding regular prioritization meetings with their business leaders. "Everyone can see the full spectrum of work asked to be done by our creative teams, and the business leaders are the ones helping make prioritization decisions, instead of putting that on the creative team", Karrie reasoned. By shifting the weight of such decisions to the business leadership side, you can liberate your creative team to focus their mindpower on delivering great strategic creative work instead of trying to coral everchanging business priorities.

When discussing the business challenges with implementing this model, Karrie first cited having to break the business teams' habit of assuming creative capacity is always there and wanting work to happen instantly. She also had to align with every department, as most had their own brand expression through their own channel, which made results less than consistent. "Now, everything goes through a single lens of brand expression, no matter what channel it's on. Quality and process are now consistent" she commented.

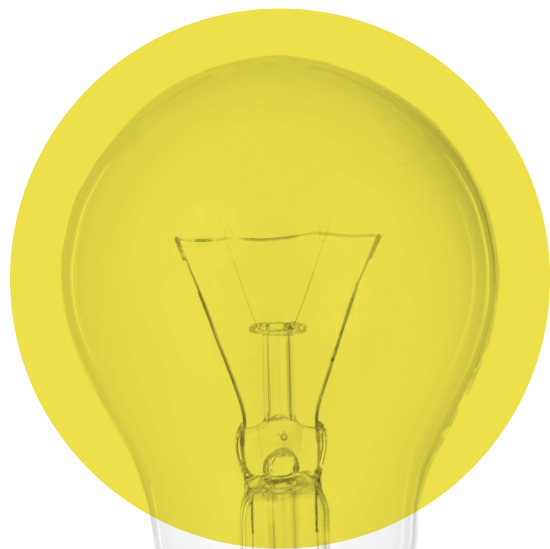
Creative tools also began to play a larger role to help Karrie's team maintain consistency, as they now leverage them very often. Typeform is currently implementing a digital asset management system and taxonomies to help the company manage digital assets.

Karrie was hopeful that switching from a matrix model to a centralized colony model would work out as planned. "The devil is in the details though" she said. We also needed to think about how to be flexible if an unexpected high-priority opportunity came in, so we made sure to leave space for those "cut-to-the-front-of-the-line" events. It was also important to carve our time for the creative team's personal development. **"Creatives need time to work on their craft – they cannot just be a production studio".**

In sharing her advice for creative leaders going through a similar transition, Karrie emphasized the importance of hiring a strong creative lead and warned against pulling creative teams out of an old model and into a new one before they're ready, as this can jeopardize operations, especially in the event of an emergency. She then stressed, once again, the importance of treating your dedicated in-house creative team and the external agency as part of the same team. In avoiding us-vs-them scenarios, it's crucial to make it clear from the beginning that we're all working towards the same goal. We're all striving for the same results.

Karrie concludes that while Typeform is able to achieve a definite level of brand excellence by having an in-house team, having an external agency working with the team side-by-side presents fantastic growth opportunities that both groups can benefit from.





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