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THE 2025 PULSE OF MARKETING REPORT

Bridging the gap between marketing work and business impact

Insights from 1200+ marketing professionals

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Contents

Executive summary

Marketing and creative professionals are key players in any modern business. They bring brands to life through compelling content that engages audiences and drives action, while adapting quickly to meet shifting campaign goals in a fast-paced market. However, they're often also expected to demonstrate how their work is driving business impact, which adds pressure to prove their strategic value within an organization.

To better understand the challenges marketing and creative professionals are facing when demonstrating their value as strategic partners, Smartsheet commissioned a survey of 1,242 marketing and creative professionals. The findings highlighted that despite growing pressure, many still face significant challenges when proving their strategic value. The research also revealed some key insights that will better equip marketing and creative professionals to demonstrate business impact and be seen as strategic partners in 2025.

Proving the impact of marketing and creative work has always been a challenge, but in today's fast-paced business environment — where strategies are constantly evolving to keep up with disruption — it's become even more difficult. In this report, we explore how to bridge the gap between marketing initiatives and measurable business outcomes, offering insights into how teams can better demonstrate their value in an ever-changing landscape.

Key Takeaways

Pressure is rising: 83% of professionals feel pressure to demonstrate the business impact of their work, with 60% noting the pressure has increased in the past year.

Recognition as strategic partners is lacking for many: Only 51% report that their marketing team is viewed as a strategic partner by the organization.

Shifts in strategy are making it more difficult to prove impact: 95% attribute their difficulties in demonstrating impact to changes in company strategy.

Proving impact is hard, and technology can help: 87% believe better tools would help them work more efficiently, with project management tools and AI being top priorities.

Standardized processes and visibility are crucial: Improved processes and visibility into project and campaign data are key to enabling better decision-making and demonstrating impact.

In the report, we'll uncover answers to questions, such as:

What challenges do marketers and creatives face when they need to show the impact of their work?

Do marketers and creatives have access to the technology they need to do their job effectively?

What tools do marketers and creatives need to do their job more efficiently?

Pressure's on: The growing need for measurable value

Marketers and creatives feel a lot of pressure to demonstrate a positive business impact

Work can be hard! The pressure that marketing and creative professionals feel at work can come from various places. Not only do they have to do their work, they have to ensure that their management and peers understand their contributions.

Employees who feel pressure at work are not alone. The research shows that this is normal — 83% of marketing and creative professionals report they feel pressure to demonstrate that their work supports a positive business impact. Notably, this includes 63% who characterize the pressure they feel as "constantly" (24%) or " frequently" (38%).

How often do you feel pressure to demonstrate that your work supports positive business impact?

- Occasionally
- Rarely
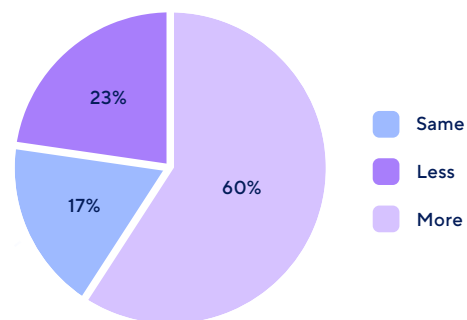- Never
- Constantly
- Frequently

2%
15%
24%
20%
38%
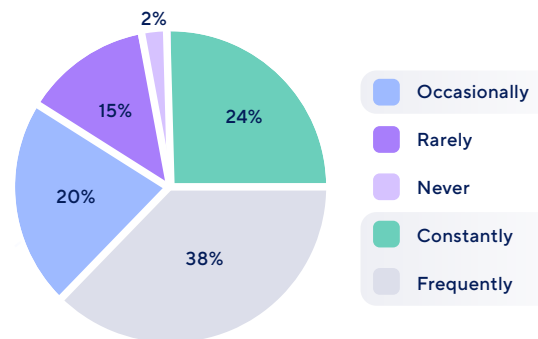
n = 1242 (All)

Pressure to demonstrate a positive business impact is on the rise

With the new reality of being asked to "do more with less," marketing and creative stakeholders feel an increase in the pressure to demonstrate their contribution to business outcomes, with more than twice as many saying they have felt more pressure in the past year than those who said they felt less pressure in the past year.

Intensifying that pressure, marketing and creative professionals often feel they're being evaluated unfairly against other teams. More than three-quarters (78%) feel they have to prove that they add value to their organizations more than other departments or roles do.

How has that pressure to demonstrate that your work supports positive business impact changed in the past year?
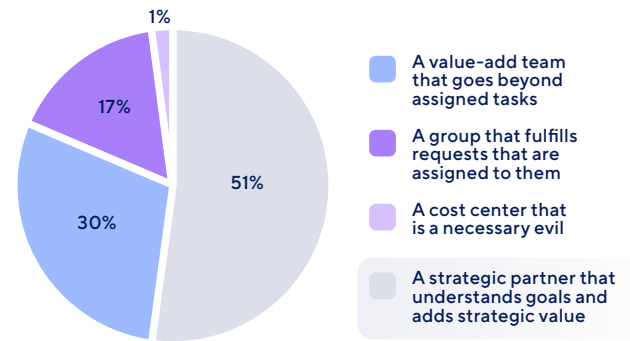

- Same
- Less
- More

23%
17%
60%

n = 1218 ("Never" feel pressure not asked)

Only half of marketing teams are perceived as strategic partners in their organization

There are many different variables that affect how marketing employees are able to demonstrate their business impact, including how their team is perceived within the organization. Only half (51%) of marketing and creative stakeholders feel their organization views the marketing team as strategic partners.

Which of the following statements best describes how the marketing team thinks they are perceived at your organization?

1%
17%
51%
30%

- A value-add team that goes beyond assigned tasks
- A group that fulfills requests that are assigned to them
- A cost center that is a necessary evil
- A strategic partner that understands goals and adds strategic value

n = 1242 (All)

> "Marketing sits in the background of our organization. A lot of times people don't even know the names of the people who work in our marketing department because it feels a lot like one of those support services that just magically takes place in the background."

Angie Badgett
Global Project Management and Strategic Solutions, Celerion

> "The perception of the Marketing Team is varied across the organization and I think that's indicative that there isn't really a clear way for us to show what we do across the company in a quick, easy, efficient way."

Sara Cook
Director of Brand Management & Content, Homecare Homebase

The hard truth: The challenges of quantifying the results of your work

Shifting strategies and competing priorities are some of the top challenges marketing and creative professionals face when it comes to demonstrating the business impact of their work. A lack of visibility and access to key data also complicates decision-making, revealing the need for better tools and centralized information to help these teams showcase their value effectively.

Marketers and creatives struggle to demonstrate their personal business impact

Being able to showcase the contribution your work is making to business outcomes isn't always easy. The vast majority (94%) of marketing and creative professionals say they face challenges when they need to demonstrate the business impact of their work. Why? Shifts in strategic plans (46%) and limited internal resourcing (42%) top the list. The other top challenges that marketing and creative teams face include disjoined workflows between teams (38%), lack of access to centralized data (37%), management doesn't understand what I do (30%), and unsure of how my work connects to business objectives (28%).

What challenges do you face when you need to demonstrate the business impact of your work?

Legend:
- Shifts in strategic plans
- Limited internal resourcing
- Disjoined workflows between teams
- Lack of access to centralized data
- Manager doesn't understand what I do
- Unsure how my work connects to business objectives
- None
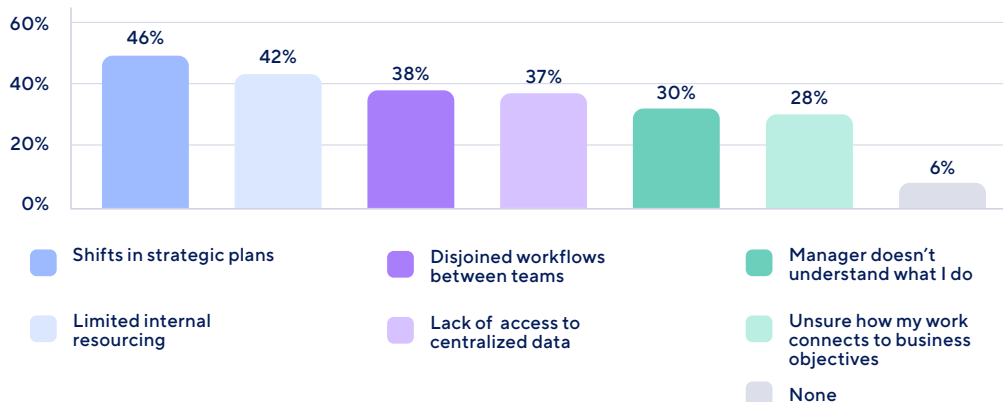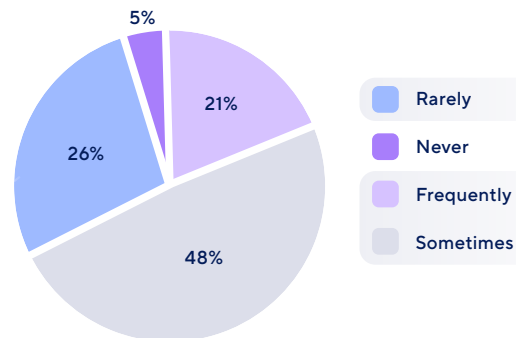
n = 1237 ("Not applicable" excluded)

Shifts in strategy make it more difficult to prove impact

What happens when company priorities shift and strategies are constantly changing? For many marketing and creative teams, this is a reality — and it definitely has an impact. The vast majority (95%) report that changes to priorities and strategy result in their organization not realizing the full business impact of their contributions, with almost a quarter (21%) saying this happens "frequently."

Interestingly, the research revealed that marketing and creative stakeholders who feel pressure to demonstrate business impact are also the ones who have their priorities changed most frequently (54%). This constant shifting of priorities not only heightens pressure but also disrupts teams' ability to consistently demonstrate their impact in a meaningful way.

How often do changes to priorities and strategy result in your organization not realizing the full impact of your work?

- Rarely
- Never
- Frequently
- Sometimes

5%
21%
26%
48%

n = 1238 ("Not applicable" excluded)

Competing priorities lead to increased pressure

There are many types of pressures that any professional must deal with. When pressures are coming from multiple directions, it can be particularly burdensome. In addition to the increase in pressure to demonstrate business impact that we discussed above, marketing and creative professionals also face pressure with changing strategies. Half (50%) say they have felt increased pressure in the past year to deal with competing business priorities.

Although they will typically collaborate on projects, marketing and creative professionals have different experiences when it comes to feeling the effects of pressure. Marketers are notably more likely to report feeling pressure to deal with competing business priorities (53%) than their counterparts in creative roles (43%).
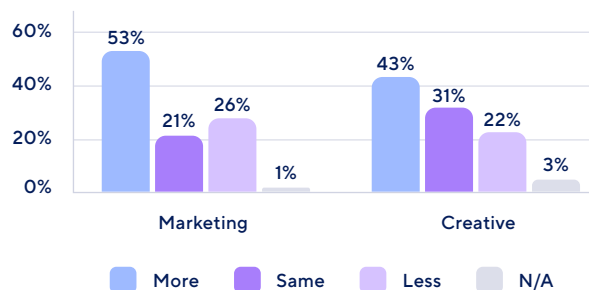
How has that pressure you feel to deal with competing business priorities at work changed in the past year?

2%
25%
50%
24%

- Less
- N/A
- More
- Same
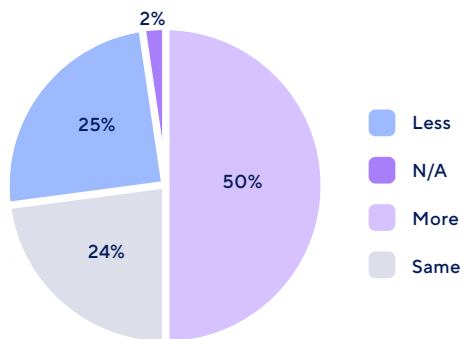
n = 1242 (All)

How has the pressure you feel to deal with competing business priorities changed?

By job function in the past year

Marketing: 53%, 21%, 26%, 1%
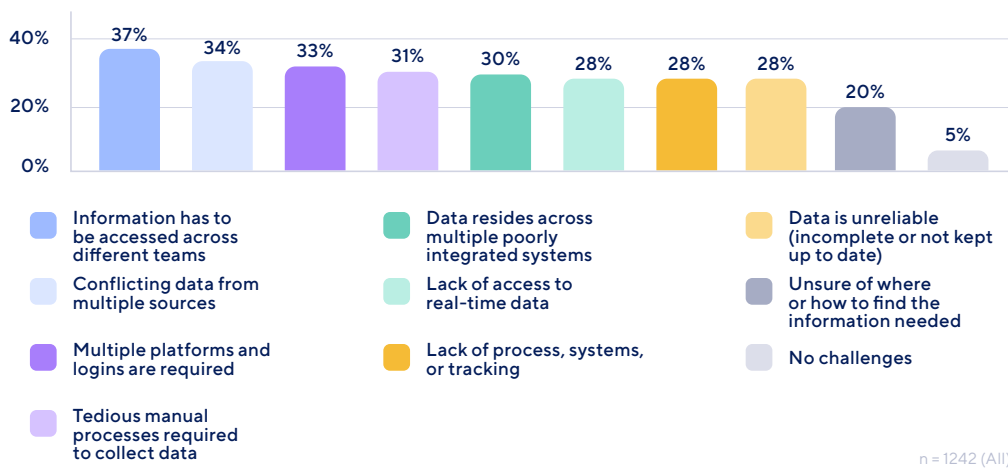Creative: 43%, 31%, 22%, 3%

- More
- Same
- Less
- N/A

n = 1242 (All)

Marketers and creatives cite a wide range of challenges when making decisions

Having access to the right information to make business decisions is critical for marketing and creative professionals. However, 95% say they face challenges when they need to make business decisions. The biggest challenge reported is that information has to be accessed across different departments or teams (37%). Conflicting data from multiple sources (34%) and the need for multiple platforms and logins (33%) also top the list. Other challenges include having tedious manual processes required to collect data (31%), data resides across multiple systems that are poorly integrated (30%), lack of access to real-time data (28%), data is unreliable (28%), and unsure of where or how to find the information needed (20%) were also reported.
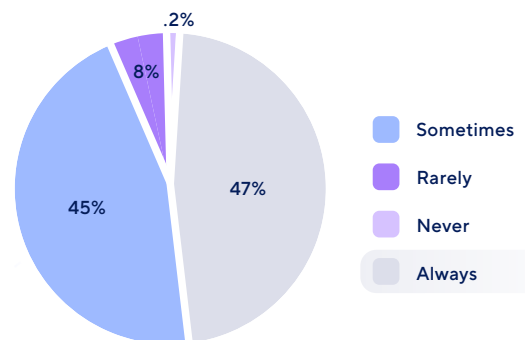
What challenges do you face when you need to make business decisions?

Bar chart values: 37%, 34%, 33%, 31%, 30%, 28%, 28%, 28%, 20%, 5%

Legend:
- Information has to be accessed across different teams
- Conflicting data from multiple sources
- Multiple platforms and logins are required
- Tedious manual processes required to collect data
- Data resides across multiple poorly integrated systems
- Lack of access to real-time data
- Lack of process, systems, or tracking
- Data is unreliable (incomplete or not kept up to date)
- Unsure of where or how to find the information needed
- No challenges

n = 1242 (All)

Visibility into data would enable better and more informed decision-making

It is imperative that marketing and creative stakeholders have visibility into the right information related to campaigns and projects to make business decisions, yet over half (53%) say they lack this.

How often do you feel you have visibility into the right information when you are making business decisions?

Pie chart values: 45%, 47%, 8%, .2%

Legend:
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Always

n = 1241 ("Not applicable" excluded)

Larger companies (more than 10,000 employees) report having less visibility and say they feel more pressure to demonstrate business impact "frequently" or "constantly."

The pressure to demonstrate business impact increases with company size. While over half (58%) of marketing and creative stakeholders working at companies with 200-2,000 employees say they feel the pressure to justify their contributions "constantly" or "frequently," this same number increased among those working for companies with 2,000-10,000 employees (64%) and jumped again among those working for companies with more than 10,000 employees (69%).

How often do you feel you have visibility into the right information you need when you are making business decisions?

By company size

n = 1241 ("Not applicable excluded)
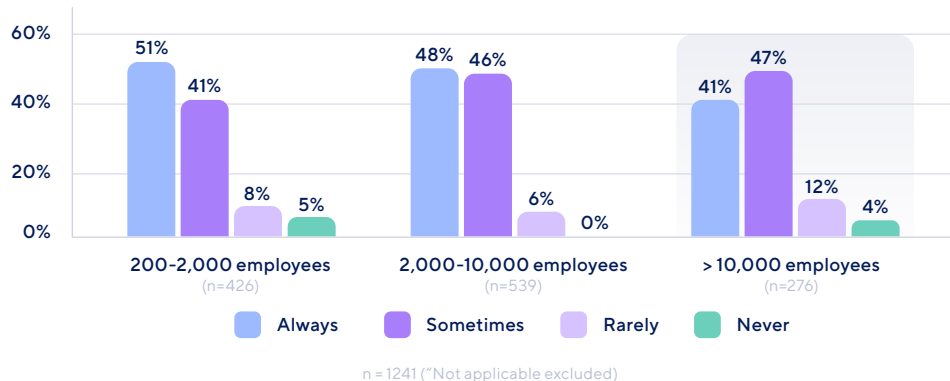
Would better visibility into project or campaign data solve the challenges reported that create barriers to effective decision-making? Marketing and creative professionals think so, with the vast majority (94%) saying having better visibility would enable them to make better business decisions.

The desire to have better visibility into information to make better business decisions is consistently high among companies of different sizes and is particularly high at smaller companies. Almost all (98%) companies with 200-2,000 employees say better visibility would enable them to make better business decisions, far higher than their counterparts at companies with more than 10,000 employees (86%).

This research indicates that having access to high-quality data significantly enhances team reputation. There is a strong correlation between employees who say they "always" have visibility into the right information when making business decisions and those who say the marketing team is perceived as a strategic partner (57%).

Would having better visibility enable you to make better business decisions?

By company size

n = 1225 ("I don't know" excluded)
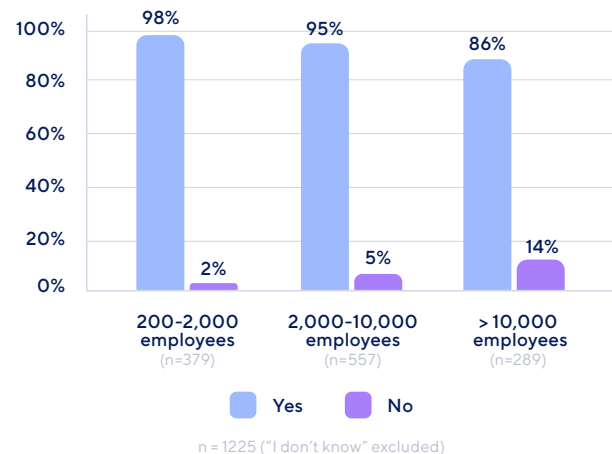
# Tech-driven innovation: The key to proving your impact

Inadequate tools and fragmented data are some of the main challenges marketing and creative professionals face in proving the business impact. Technology, particularly AI and project management tools, such as Smartsheet, offer a solution by streamlining workflows, improving efficiency, and enabling teams to better demonstrate their strategic value.

Marketing and creative stakeholders want access to better tools

Technology is not only key for employees to have visibility into project or campaign information in order to make business decisions, but it also helps them demonstrate their impact. Unfortunately, half (51%) of marketing and creative professionals report that they don't have access to the tools and resources they need to demonstrate their business impact.

However, there is room for improvement because 87% of marketing and creative professionals say they could use their time more effectively if they had access to better tools.

"My team does not have the tools and resources we need to demonstrate the business impact of our marketing work."

49% 51%

- Agree
- Disagree
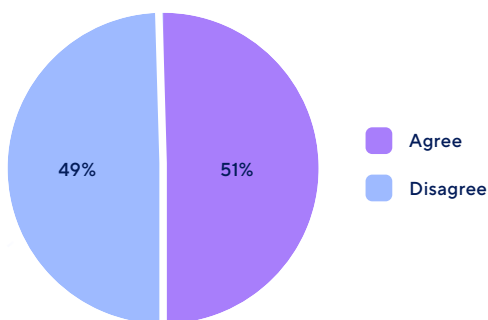
n = 1237 ("No opinion" excluded)

If you had access to better tools, could you use your time more effectively?

13%

87%

- Yes
- No
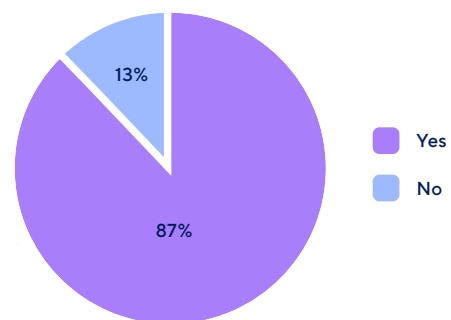
n = 1231 ("I don't know" excluded)

Teams are wasting valuable time switching between tools

Organizations often use a variety of tools to complete different tasks. This can require employees to have different logins to use multiple platforms to accomplish a single task. This is an imperfect system that leaves room for error when there is conflicting data or requires additional manual work to deliver a project or campaign. Almost three-quarters (72%) of marketing and creative stakeholders report wasting five or more hours a week switching between tools to complete tasks, with an average of 7.3 hours lost per week. In the context of demonstrating value, more than two-thirds (68%) say tedious tasks, like switching between tools, makes it difficult to prove their impact effectively.

How often do you feel you have visibility into the right information when you are making business decisions?

5% 1% .2%

16%

27%

50%

- 4 or less hours
- 5–10 hours
- 11–15 hours
- > 15 hours
- None
- N/A

n = 1242 (All)
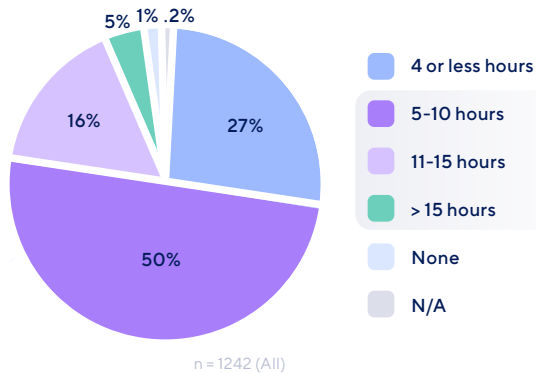
"Tedious tasks like switching tools make it difficult to effectively prove my impact."

32%

68%

- Agree
- Disagree

n = 1231 ("No opinion" excluded")
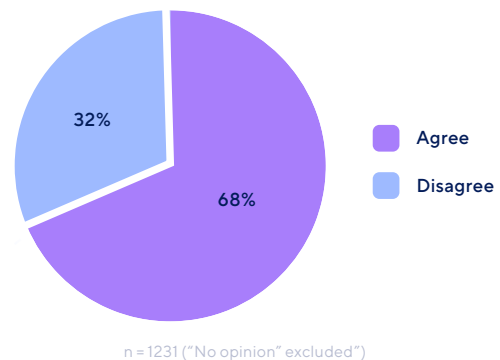
7.3 HOURS

On average, more than seven hours are lost per week switching between different tools to complete tasks.
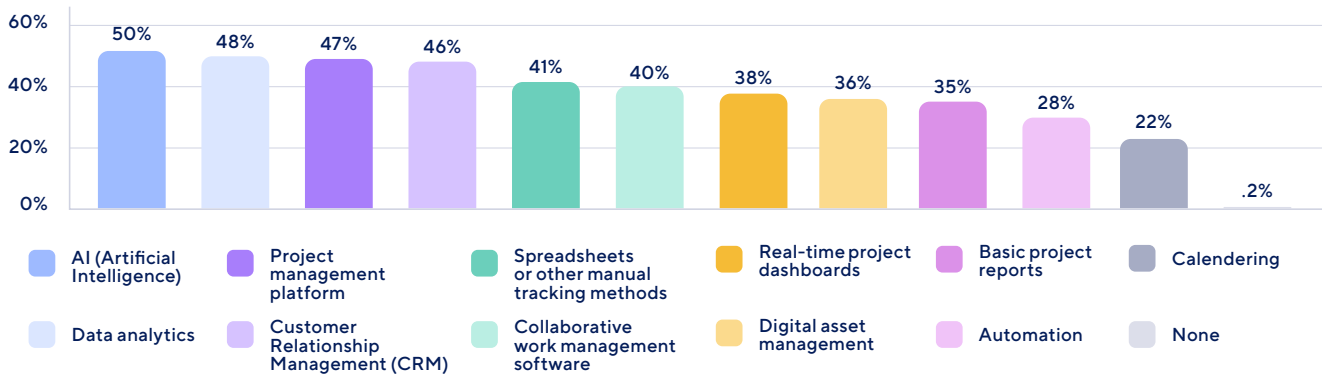
Tools are used ubiquitously to demonstrate business impact

What are the tools (reporting, project tracking, etc.) that marketers and creatives use to demonstrate the business impact of their work to management and colleagues? The research shows that tools are used ubiquitously (98.8%) to demonstrate the business impact of work.

AI has emerged as the most widely used tool for demonstrating business impact, with half of marketing and creative professionals relying on it to showcase their contributions. Alongside AI, tools like data analytics, project management platforms, and CRM are commonly utilized to provide evidence of impact.
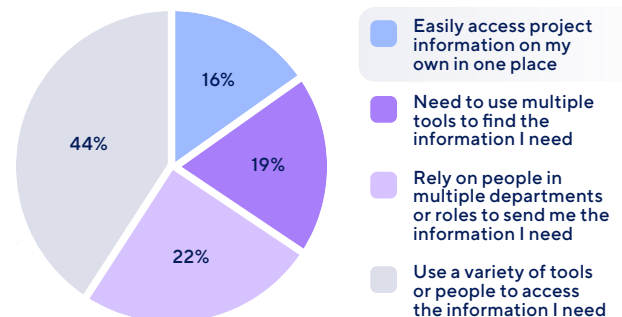
What types of tools are you currently using to effectively demonstrate the business impact of your work to management and colleagues?

Bar chart values:
- AI (Artificial Intelligence): 50%
- Data analytics: 48%
- Project management platform: 47%
- Customer Relationship Management (CRM): 46%
- Spreadsheets or other manual tracking methods: 41%
- Collaborative work management software: 40%
- Real-time project dashboards: 38%
- Digital asset management: 36%
- Basic project reports: 35%
- Automation: 28%
- Calendering: 22%
- None: .2%

n = 1241 ("I don't know" excluded)

The inability to easily access information about projects or campaigns to make business decisions is an obvious problem. Astonishingly, only 16% of marketing and creative stakeholders say they can easily access information on their own in one place to make business decisions. Having to use multiple tools, rely on people in various departments or roles, or use a variety of tools or people to access information is a burden that organizations need to understand.

Which of the following best describes your ability to access project information in order to make business decisions?

Pie chart values:
- 16% — Easily access project information on my own in one place
- 19% — Need to use multiple tools to find the information I need
- 22% — Rely on people in multiple departments or roles to send me the information I need
- 44% — Use a variety of tools or people to access the information I need
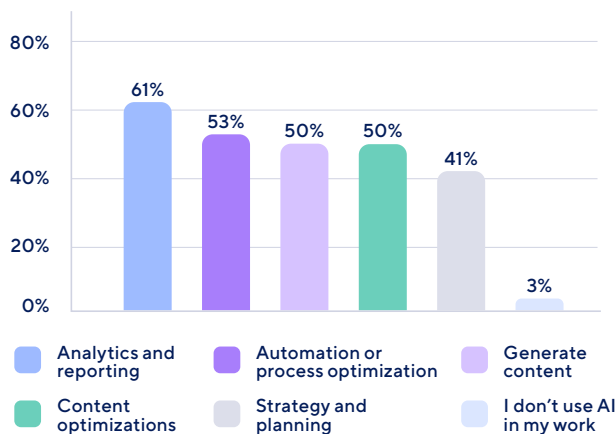
n = 1239 ("Not applicable" excluded)

AI is broadly used by marketing and creative stakeholders

Using AI in the workplace is becoming more and more common as it is integrated into new and existing tools that can be used in a multitude of ways. We saw above that AI is the top tool used to demonstrate business impact. In addition, marketing and creative professionals say they use AI to support their efforts in many different ways, including using AI for analytics and reporting (61%), automation or process optimization (53%), generating content (50%), content optimizations (50%), as well as strategy and planning (41%).
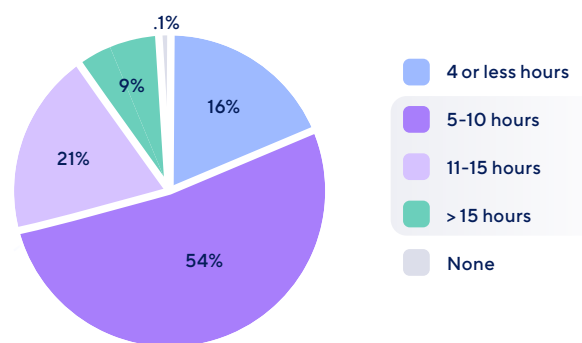
AI is having a huge impact on productivity

There is often a combination of fear and excitement associated with using AI, but the benefits are clear for marketing and creative professionals — AI is having a positive effect on productivity. This research found that marketers and creatives save an average of more than nine hours per week using AI at work. The majority (84%) report saving approximately five or more hours per week using AI at work, including 30% that save more than 10 hours per week.

Which of the following tasks do you use AI to support your efforts?

61% Analytics and reporting
53% Automation or process optimization
50% Generate content
50% Content optimizations
41% Strategy and planning
3% I don't use AI in my work

n = 1239 ("I don't know" excluded)

On average, approximately how many hours per week do you think you save by using AI at work?

- 4 or less hours — 16%
- 5–10 hours — 54%
- 11–15 hours — 21%
- > 15 hours — 9%
- None — .1%

n = 1205 ("I don't use AI in my work" not asked; "I don't know" excluded)

9.1 HOURS

On average, more than nine hours are saved per week by using AI at work.

# Standardized processes and project management tools can help

How can project and campaign efficiency be improved? Marketing and creative stakeholders (84%) largely agree that having standardized processes in place can have a positive impact. There is always an opportunity for improvement, and 99.5% of marketing and creative professionals say their organization would benefit from additional technical capabilities. What do marketing and creative professionals want? Project management tools (64%) are at the top of the list. Consistent with other findings, AI tools (60%) are also reported as a capability that would benefit organizations. Automated workflows (58%) and standardized processes (54%) were also selected by more than half of the participants.
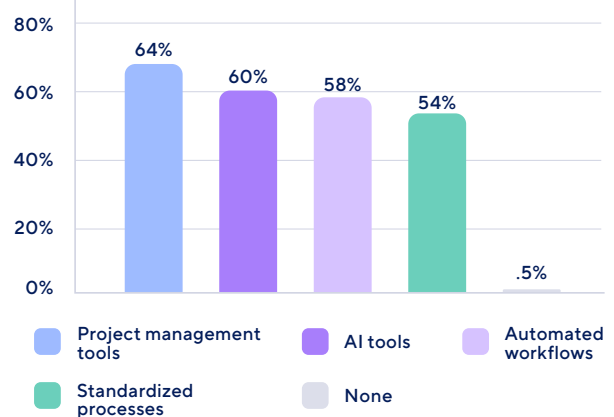
2/3 of marketing and creative professionals believe their organizations would benefit from project management tools.

"Standardized processes have a positive impact on project and campaign efficiency."

16%

84%

- Agree
- Disagree
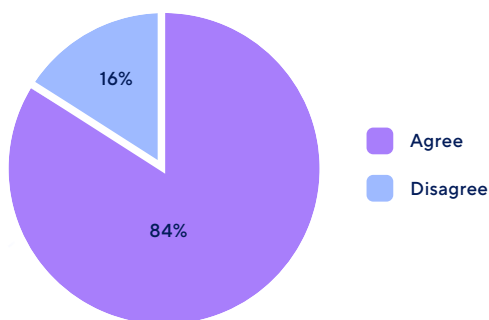
n = 1229 ("No opinion" excluded)

In your opinion, which of the following capabilities would benefit your organization?

64% 60% 58% 54% .5%

- Project management tools
- AI tools
- Automated workflows
- Standardized processes
- None

n = 1239 ("No opinion" excluded)

From chaos to clarity: Overcoming the barriers of connecting work to impact

This research underscores the growing pressure marketing and creative professionals face to demonstrate the business impact of their work. As organizations increasingly expect marketing teams to prove their value to broader business outcomes, the struggle to be viewed by the rest of the organization as a strategic partner only increases.

Many professionals are facing obstacles like shifting priorities, limited resources, and disjointed workflows that prevent them from effectively demonstrating their impact. Nearly all respondents agreed that greater visibility into project and campaign data would enhance their decision-making and help bridge the gap between work and impact. Unfortunately, the lack of visibility into critical information and the need to use multiple tools are common barriers that complicate their ability to report on their business contributions.

Technology is clearly a crucial enabler in overcoming these challenges. AI tools, in particular, have proven to be a game-changer, saving marketing and creative professionals significant time each week, allowing them to focus on strategic tasks and proving the impact of their hard work.

As organizations continue to demand more from their marketing and creative teams, investing in the right technology and streamlining workflows will be key to empowering these professionals to demonstrate their value and succeed in a fast-paced, high-pressure environment.
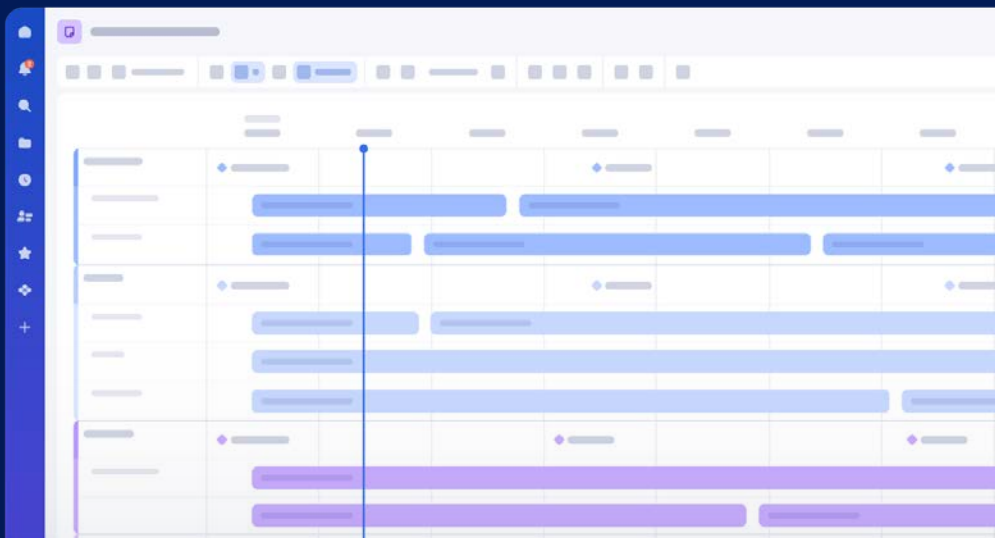
Ready to take the first step toward overcoming these challenges? Let's get started.

Show me how

Learn more about how you can manage your marketing and creative work within a single platform.
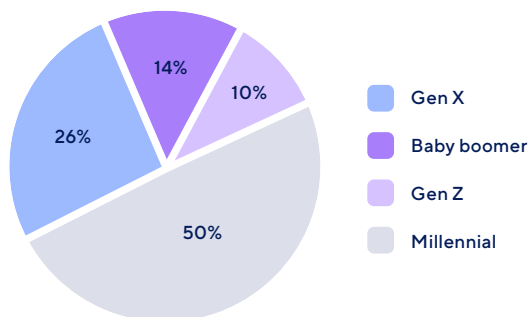
Watch a demo

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Survey methodology and participant demographics

Marketing and creative professionals were invited to participate in an online survey. A total of 1,242 qualified individuals with job responsibilities for marketing, creative, or creative operations at companies with more than 200 employees in the United States completed the survey. Participants included a mix of ages, job levels, job functions, company sizes, and industries. The survey was fielded in September 2024. Due to rounding, certain graph options may not add up to exactly 100%.
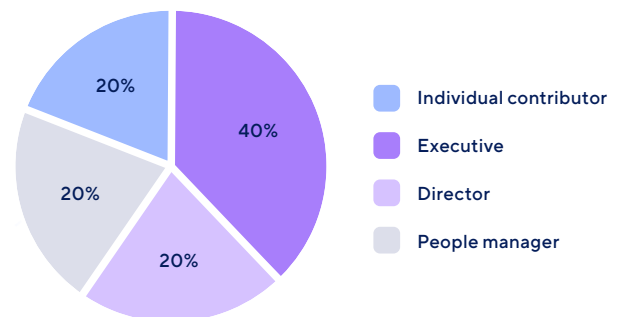
"Business impact"

For this survey, "business impact" is defined as the direct support of business objectives. Think of this as value or return on work initiatives (what can be measured in financial terms, amount of effort required, number of projects or tasks successfully executed, etc.)
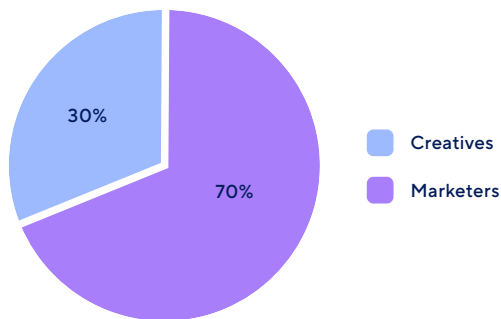
Generation

- 14% Baby boomer
- 26% Gen X
- 10% Gen Z
- 50% Millennial

Legend:
- Gen X
- Baby boomer
- Gen Z
- Millennial

n = 1242 (All)

Job level

- 20% Individual contributor
- 40% Executive
- 20% Director
- 20% People manager

Legend:
- Individual contributor
- Executive
- Director
- People manager

n = 1242 (All)

Survey methodology and participant demographics

Job function

30% Creatives
70% Marketers

- Creatives
- Marketers

n = 1242 (All)

Company size

22%
34%
43%

- \> 10,000 employees
- 200-2,000 employees
- 2,000-10,000 employees
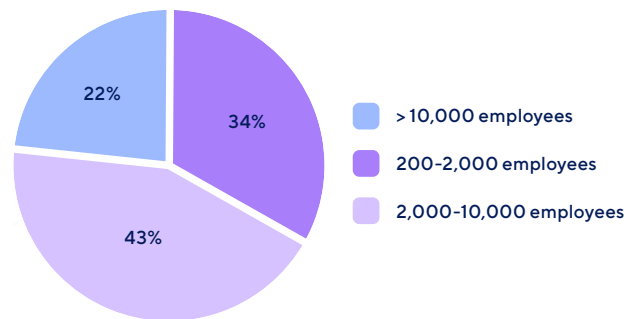
n = 1242 (All)

"Marketing and creative professionals"

For this survey, "marketers" are defined as professionals who develop or execute strategies or messaging to promote products, services, and/or their organization's brand through marketing initiatives.

"Creatives" are defined as professionals who develop creative concepts or content through visual and written communications to support marketing initiatives or those who manage and optimize creative operations, including the processes, systems, and resources necessary for creative work.

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