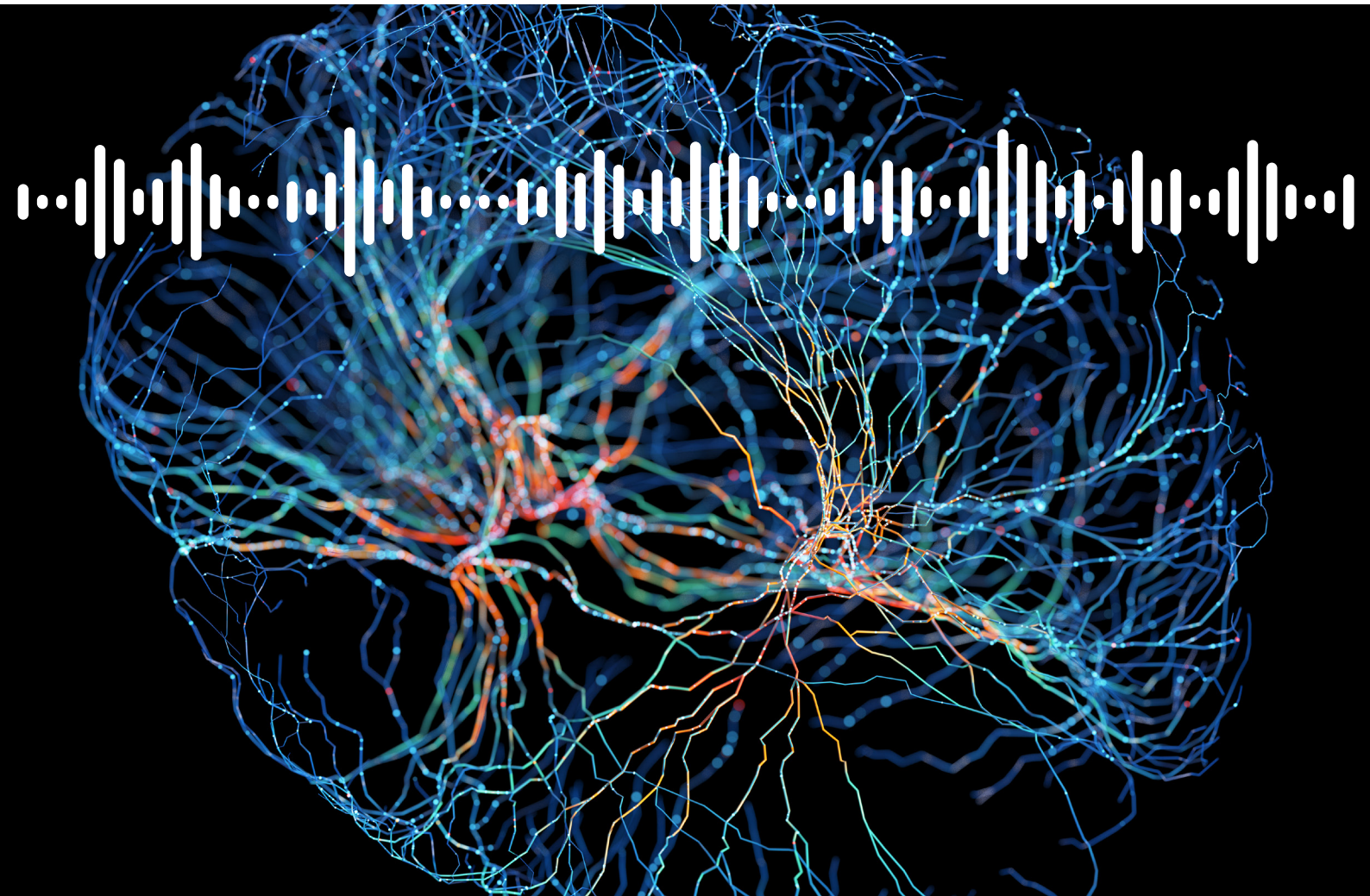


# New language of work

How AI-driven visual communication is transforming the enterprise



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# Executive summary

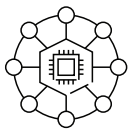
## AI accelerates creation; humans shape strategic vision

Across the enterprise, AI is increasingly embedded in visual content creation workflows, and the organizations getting the most from it are those that have not only adopted AI tools but also built governance and structure around them. In a survey of 600 enterprise professionals across the US and UK, spanning marketing, operations, IT, HR, sales and customer service, 92% report that AI is already impacting their visual content workflows, and most are using it frequently for high-value, business-critical communications.

Teams with more mature AI adoption realize two to three times greater productivity gains than less mature peers, with advantages across content volume, quality, efficiency and brand consistency. These gains come from structured, human-led workflows, not from automation alone.

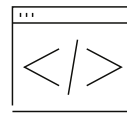
Organizations prefer AI that responds to human direction: 68% favor conversational, iterative creation, with people retaining ownership over strategic priorities and final decisions.

### Figure 1: The rising impact of AI on visual content creation



92%

report AI has driven noticeable impact on visual content creation — most say it's critical



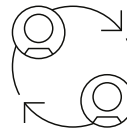
70%

strongly agree there is growing demand for different and personalized content formats



2-3x

greater gains in volume, quality, efficiency and consistency reported by teams with high AI maturity



68%

strongly prefer human-guided, prompt-based chat over blank canvas workflows when creating visual content

Source: 451 Research and Adobe custom content creation survey, 2026.

These findings point to a clear trajectory for the future of visual work. AI is becoming foundational to visual content creation, delivering measurable gains in speed and scale. However, organizations are not handing over creative control. Instead, they are adopting AI in ways that reinforce human leadership in strategic vision, judgment and communication goals. The most successful organizations will combine AI-driven speed with human-guided workflows, accelerating execution while people remain accountable for strategic intent.

# Visual work is now mission-critical, but enterprise systems have not caught up

Visual communication is a core execution layer spanning roles, functions and decision levels. Nearly all respondents (95%) say visual content is very or extremely important to their business unit's communication strategy.

Visual content creation is also no longer a marketing-only discipline. Responsibility has expanded across teams and functions, with assets reused and adapted across roles. While communications and marketing professionals index highest — with over 80% citing growing demand for various types of personalized visual content — even functions such as operations, IT and customer service report strong demand.

The question is no longer whether visual content creation matters, but how to sustain the volume and complexity now required. Survey data shows that individual employees support an average of 6.2 different content types and 3.4 distinct audiences, spanning customers or prospects (74%), internal teams and employees (62%), leadership (55%) and partners (50%).

This complexity extends across both formats and audiences. Presentations remain the most common format, created by 69% of respondents overall, with similarly high usage among IT (75%), operations (73%) and HR (79%). Beyond presentations, visual work spans social media content (62%), training and onboarding materials (58%), videos or motion graphics (57%) and process documentation (51%).

This pattern also holds across seniority. Executives are deeply involved in leadership and strategy communications (56%), while front-line and specialist roles manage multiple visual formats tied to training, documentation and execution.

One respondent stated, “Visuals are how we communicate decisions now.”

Yet systems supporting that work have not kept pace with demand. Commonly cited challenges associated with creating or managing visual content include time-consuming processes (45%), limited budgets for design tools or resources (30%) and poor integration between tools (28%).

These pressures are especially pronounced in sales, customer service, operations and product management, where teams rely heavily on visuals but often lack dedicated design support. And when workflows and standards are weak, visual content can lose contextual clarity or intent as it moves between teams — introducing friction into processes that depend on speed, alignment and trust.

As one respondent said, “We want users to understand insights very quickly, and that increasingly depends on how clearly visuals communicate meaning.”

## AI is accelerating creation, but benefits are uneven

AI is accelerating organizations' content creation, but adoption varies by department, with IT (71%) and marketing (66%) reporting the highest regular AI usage for content creation and workflow support, followed by human resources (62%) and sales (61%). Even in functions with lower adoption, such as product management (50%), customer service (48%) and operations (48%), AI is increasingly present in workflows.

AI lowers generation effort but raises expectations for speed, responsiveness and enterprise-wide reuse. Two-thirds (67%) of respondents report that demand for visual content is increasing, particularly among senior leaders and frequent AI users, who increasingly expect faster turnaround and more frequent updates.

The sections that follow examine how rising demand exposes structural gaps — and why the future of visual work depends on embedding AI throughout the visual content life cycle rather than treating it as a stand-alone tool.

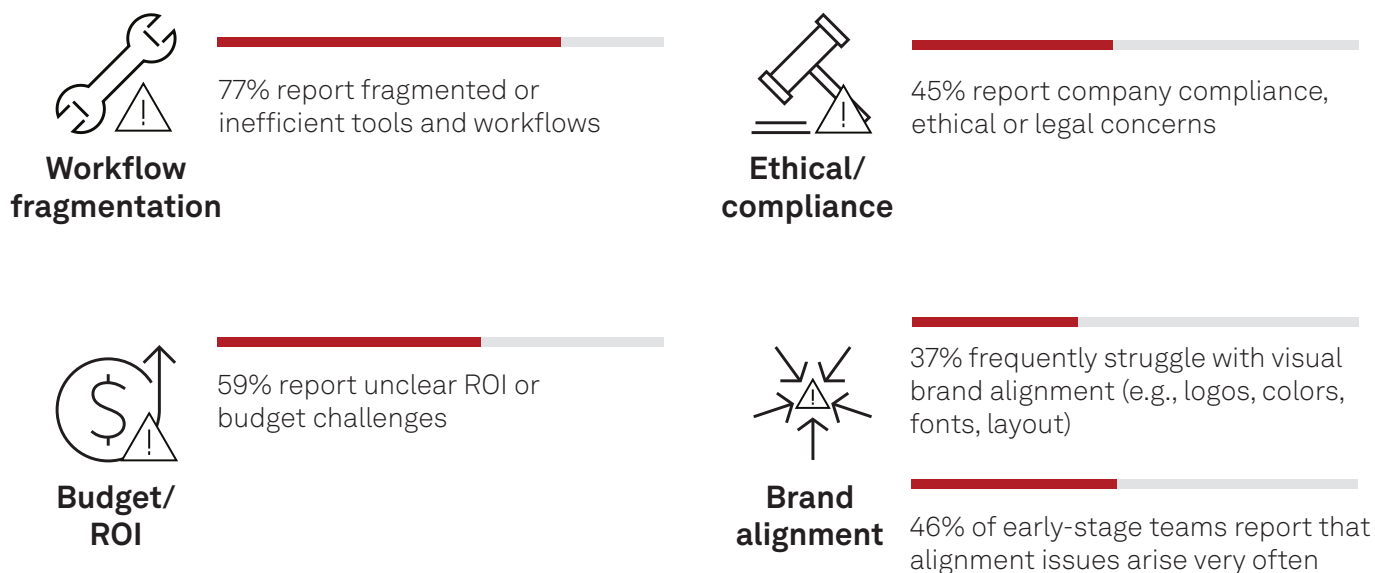
## Faster creation does not fix broken workflows

While AI helps teams start content creation faster, speed alone does not resolve the workflow friction that determines whether content moves from draft to delivery. Fragmented tools, manual handoffs and workflow discontinuity remain persistent barriers.

As organizations scale AI-accelerated visual content creation, structural limitations emerge as the primary constraint. Three in four respondents (77%) cite tool limitations, while 59% point to cost/ROI concerns and 45% identify compliance issues.

Brand consistency remains a persistent issue: More than a third of respondents (37%) say they encounter difficulty ensuring visual content aligns with brand guidelines very often or often, with another 38% experiencing such issues occasionally. These challenges compound as content moves across teams, where context and standards may be inconsistently applied.

### Figure 2: Tools, brand and cost challenges are pervasive



Q. When creating visual content, how often do you encounter difficulties ensuring it aligns with brand guidelines (e.g., logos, colors, fonts, layout)?

Q. You mentioned that you are currently using AI tools for visual content creation. What challenges have you experienced with these tools? Please select all that apply.

Source: 451 Research and Adobe custom content creation survey, 2026.

## Fragmented workflows erode brand trust and limit AI's reach

Brand risk is not inherent to AI-generated content; it is a function of integration into governed, end-to-end workflows. Fragmented systems make it difficult to apply brand rules consistently, increasing perceived risk and slowing confidence in AI-generated outputs, particularly for executive-facing or externally visible content.

Among early-stage AI adopters, 46% report encountering brand alignment issues very often — nearly double the rate seen in more mature environments. Organizations with established or advanced AI workflows report significantly lower frequency of brand-related issues and are far more likely to say such problems occur rarely or never.

AI's limitations also become more visible with more complex formats. Respondents consistently report difficulty using AI to create videos, complex diagrams, high-resolution visuals and multi-layered flows — formats that require structure, precision and coordination across longer workflows. Senior leaders and frequent AI users are more likely to report difficulty with these formats, reflecting their reliance on high-impact visuals for decision-making and alignment.

Addressing tool and workflow limitations is a prerequisite not just for efficiency but also for trust. Until organizations strengthen governance and integration, brand safety and compliance concerns will continue to limit the scale and impact of AI-accelerated visual communication.

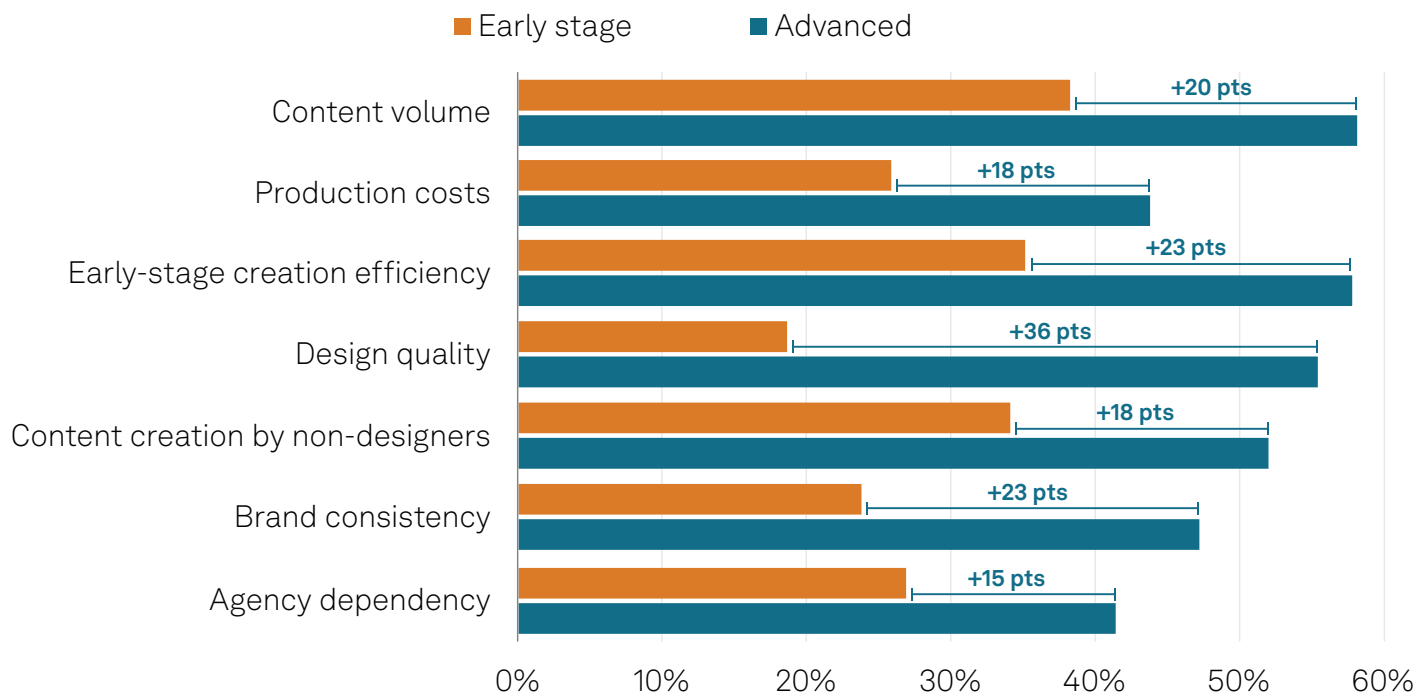
## AI's next phase: Orchestrating visual work at scale

Organizations increasingly recognize that the next phase of visual work is not just about generating more content faster, but orchestrating it within structured, governed workflows. AI-powered generation enables faster asset creation, while orchestration encompasses the shared systems, governance and workflows that ensure content is aligned, reviewed and delivered at scale. The difference comes down to context: AI must have access to the brand guidelines, audience requirements, approval chains and strategic priorities required for usable output. This distinction determines whether AI delivers lasting value or introduces new friction.

### AI value compounds when workflows scale

Organizations with advanced AI practices report stronger gains from AI across every dimension of visual work compared to their less mature peers, often by margins of 20 to 30 percentage points (see Figure 3). These gains span faster drafting and handoffs, with 51% overall reporting a significant AI-driven impact, increased content volume (47%), broader democratization of creative contributions (45%), improved design quality (42%) and stronger brand consistency (37%). These gains also extend to operational efficiency, including reduced production costs and lower reliance on external agencies. Notably, value is driven not by AI usage alone, but by how effectively AI is embedded into workflows that preserve context and intent.

**Figure 3: AI maturity drives outsized performance gains**



Q. In which areas has AI impacted your content creation process?  
Base: All respondents (n=600).  
Source: 451 Research and Adobe custom content creation survey, 2026.

As maturity increases, priorities shift decisively from generation to orchestration. Mature organizations increasingly expect AI to support automation, iterative refinement and workflow orchestration — reducing manual intervention while maintaining alignment with brand, audience and business goals.

Rather than applying context late in the process, mature organizations embed it directly into workflow logic — enabling consistent decisioning, faster iteration and scalable alignment across teams. This marks the shift from incremental productivity gains to resilient, repeatable, context-aware workflows at enterprise scale.

Early-stage adopters tend to focus on speed and efficiency gains — a necessary starting point, but one that delivers only a fraction of the value achieved by mature organizations. Early-stage organizations prioritize guardrails — brand alignment, compliance and error prevention — reflecting concern about risk and control. Established and advanced adopters increasingly expect AI to operate with awareness of purpose, audience and performance signals. Preferences also evolve with maturity. Among mature users, 68% prefer conversational, iterative interaction and greater automation, indicating a shift in trust from manual oversight to system-level governance.

The real advantage comes from using AI to scale consistency, quality and coordination — progressing from incremental productivity gains to resilient, repeatable, context-aware workflows at enterprise scale.

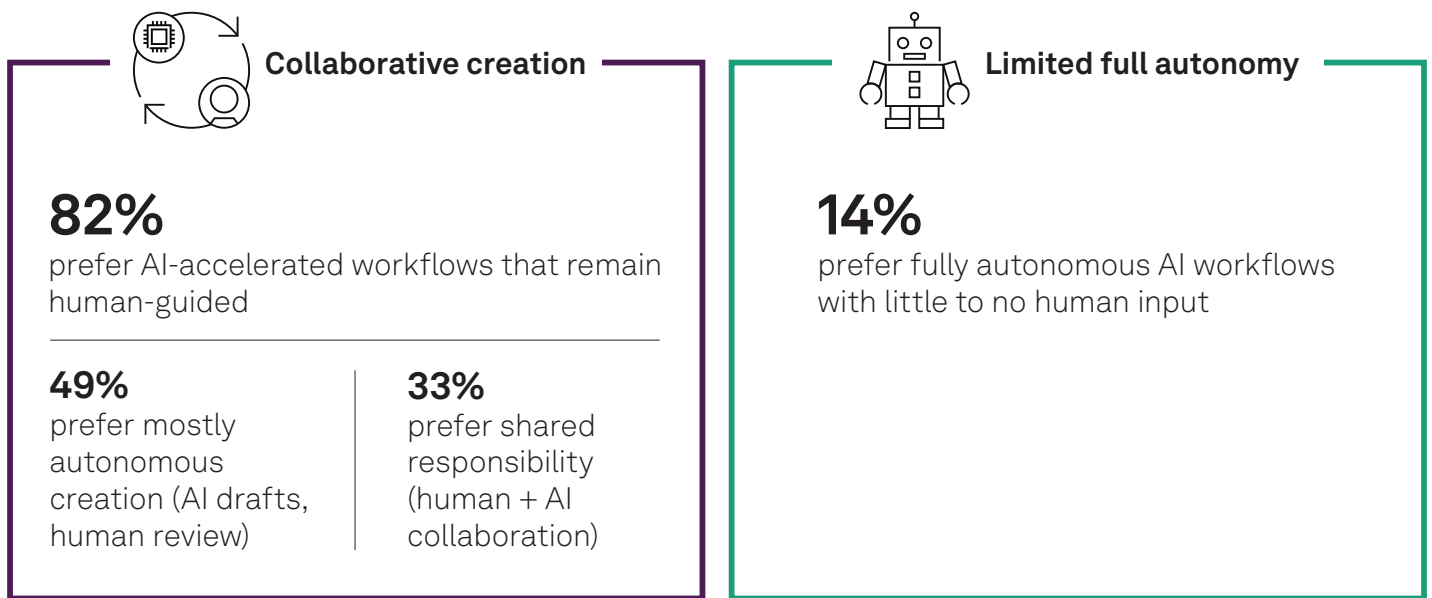
## Automation without context drives risk

While 69% of respondents envision a future in which AI significantly automates visual content creation, it's clear that automation alone will not deliver sustained value. Organizations continue to struggle with insight activation, alignment and governance — gaps that surface when content scales faster than shared context, standards and operating rules. In fact, 70% of marketers and 85% of communications professionals strongly agree that their organization struggles to translate content insights into actionable changes.

## Human oversight turns AI speed into enterprise-ready output

Four in five respondents (82%) prefer workflows where AI accelerates execution while people retain responsibility for judgment and accountability. Rather than seeking full autonomy, organizations want AI that drafts, iterates and scales, with humans directing intent, reviewing output and making final decisions.

Figure 4: The human-guided automation spectrum



Q. In your ideal AI-powered visual content creation experience, how much involvement would you like AI to have?

Base: All respondents (n=600).

Source: 451 Research and Adobe custom content creation survey, 2026.

## Most organizations do not envision a fully autonomous life cycle

Across stages, respondents consistently favor human-guided interaction characterized by conversational creation, iterative refinement and multimodal workflows. However, comfort with automation varies sharply by maturity — and governance, not abstract trust, is the driver. Among organizations with established or advanced AI practices, more than 70% favor mostly or fully autonomous workflows. Among those still experimenting, hands-on collaboration dominates.

This gap reflects the confidence that comes from standardized processes, clear review structures and embedded guardrails.

As AI expands across the life cycle, governance capabilities — such as brand controls, rights management, audit trails and security — shift from optional safeguards to essential enablers of scale. Where governance is weak, organizations default to manual oversight, slowing scale and limiting impact.

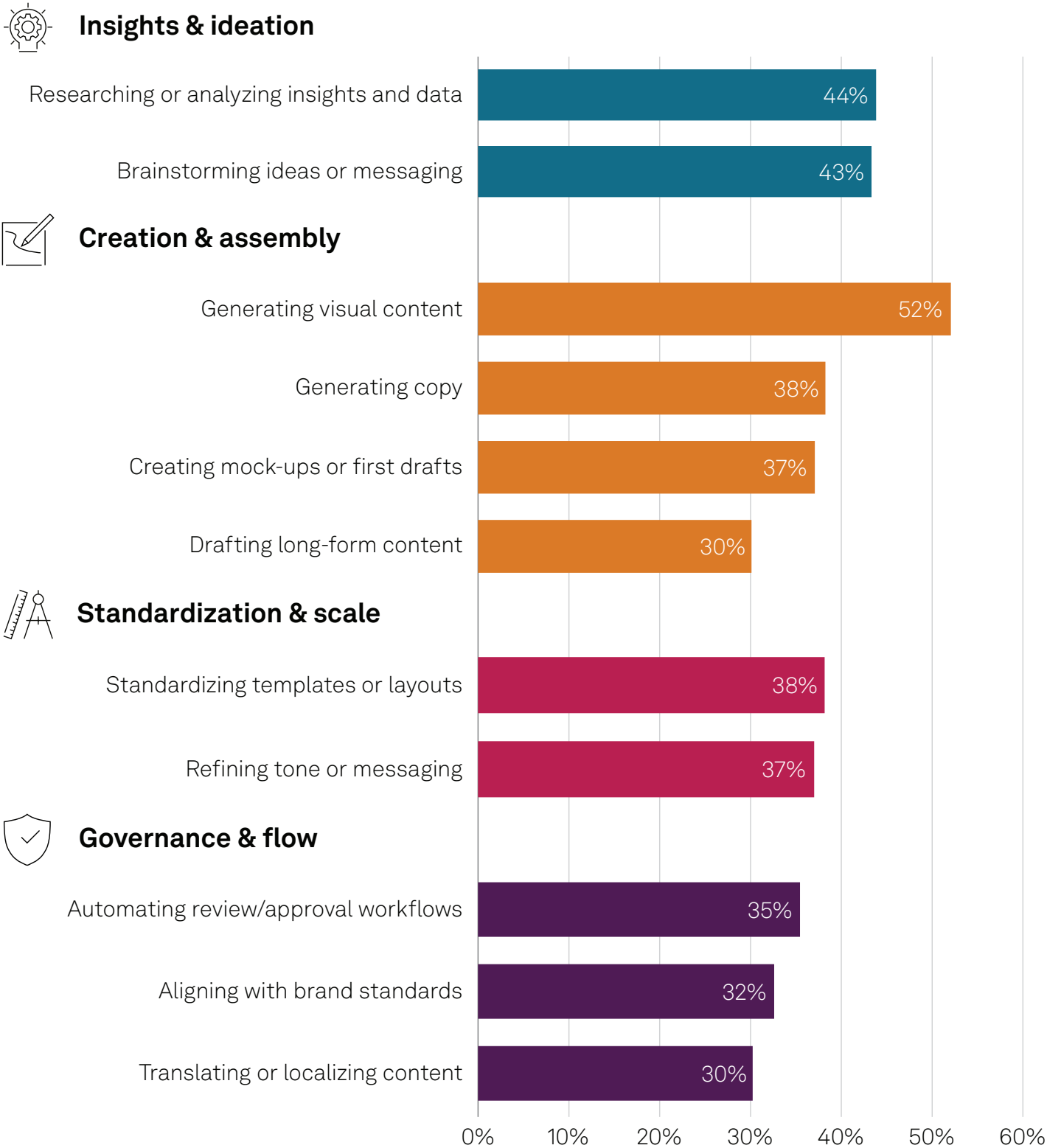
Marketing leaders and executives show the greatest openness to automation; customer service and operations favor collaborative models. Yet appetite for fully autonomous creation remains low (14%), indicating that human accountability is a feature of mature AI workflows, not a limitation.

## Extending automation across the visual content life cycle

Organizations that connect AI across the full visual content life cycle, spanning ideation through delivery, position themselves to outperform those that treat creation as an isolated task. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) use or plan to use AI for image or video generation, and adoption extends across stages, including design customization and personalization (54%), presentation generation (53%), automated editing or enhancement (52%) and layout or formatting assistance (51%). Nearly half also point to workflow automation such as versioning and approvals (45%).

When asked where AI provides the most value across the content creation process, respondents emphasize both upstream and downstream activities that shape effectiveness and speed. The top value area remains generating visual content designs (52%), followed by researching or analyzing insights and data (44%) and brainstorming ideas or messaging (43%), highlighting demand for AI support earlier in the workflow. Respondents also point to value in generating copy (38%), standardizing templates or layouts (38%) and creating mock-ups or first drafts (37%), reinforcing demand for tighter integration between ideation, design and delivery.

Figure 5: AI delivers value across the visual content life cycle



Q. Where do you see AI providing the most value in your overall content creation process? Please select all that apply.

Base: All respondents (n=600).

Source: 451 Research and Adobe custom content creation survey, 2026.

# Strategic implications: Insight, intent and execution

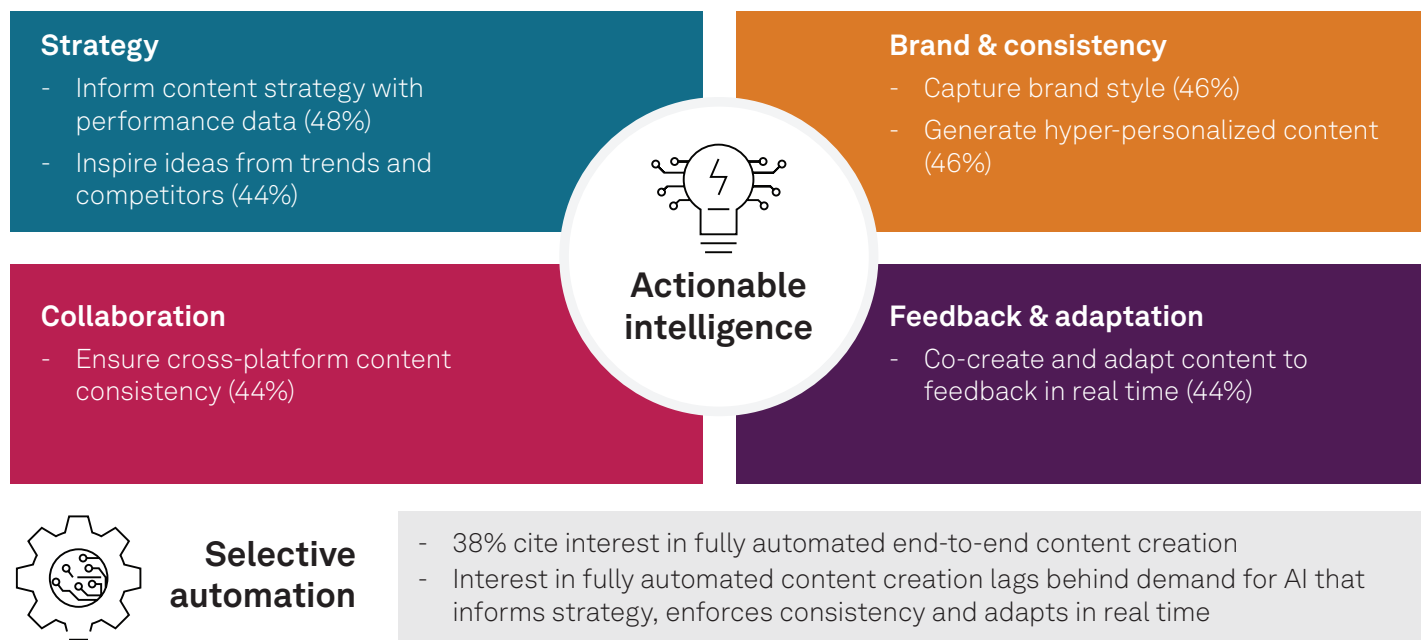
The strategic challenge has shifted from adopting AI tools to orchestrating enterprise-scale visual workflows.

Visual fluency is now a core organizational competence that shapes alignment, decision-making and execution far beyond specialized creative functions. With more than 8 in 10 respondents expecting AI to significantly transform visual content creation over the next two years, leaders must design for scale, consistency and governance rather than localized productivity gains.

Respondents make clear that the future of visual workflows is about connecting insight, intent and execution. Organizations increasingly prioritize AI embedded across the life cycle — linking data, strategy, execution and delivery, rather than operating as a stand-alone content generator. The most transformative capabilities are not about speed; they are about intelligence and coordination across the life cycle.

Nearly half of respondents say the most transformative future capability would be AI suggesting content strategy based on performance data (48%), closely followed by AI that fully captures brand style (46%) and AI-generated hyper-personalized content (46%). Expectations are similarly strong for real-time co-creation that adapts to feedback (44%) and cross-platform AI that ensures consistency across channels (44%).

**Figure 6: The future lies in AI-driven actionable intelligence**



Q. Looking ahead to a future where AI powers visual content creation, which capabilities do you believe would most significantly transform your workflow? Please select all that apply.

Base: All respondents (n=600).

Source: 451 Research and Adobe custom content creation survey, 2026.

Interest in fully automated, end-to-end content creation (38%) remains lower than demand for brand-aware (46%), strategy-led and feedback-driven AI (48%), reinforcing that organizations want AI to orchestrate complexity, not replace human judgment.

The next era of visual work will be defined by AI-orchestrated workflows that connect insight to execution at scale. Success will depend less on how quickly AI can generate content and more on how effectively it can coordinate creation, refinement and governance within a human-defined context.

## **Conclusion: The next era of work is visual and AI-native**

Visual communication is the operating language of modern organizations, and AI is reshaping how it is produced, coordinated and governed. While AI adoption continues to accelerate across visual workflows, the differentiator is no longer access to tools, but the maturity of the systems that surround them — including workflow design, governance and contextual intelligence.

The next phase of visual work will be defined not by how quickly content is generated, but by how effectively insight is translated into coordinated execution at scale. Organizations that treat AI as infrastructure, embed intelligence into workflows and design human-guided orchestration will be best positioned to scale visual communication without sacrificing coherence, trust or control.

In this environment, leadership shifts from driving technology adoption to engineering operating systems for visual work — where human judgment, organizational standards and machine execution are intentionally aligned.



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Sheryl Kingstone is head of the software experiences group, which includes the Workforce Productivity & Collaboration, Customer Experience & Commerce and Macroeconomic research channels at 451 Research from S&P Global Energy Horizons. As a researcher, Sheryl tracks how businesses are spending on technology for the experience economy and how customer experience is a catalyst for digital transformation. Specifically, she oversees the company's coverage of a variety of customer experience data-driven software markets spanning advertising technology, marketing, sales, commerce and service. She is also responsible for both consumer spending and IT tech spending research products.



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