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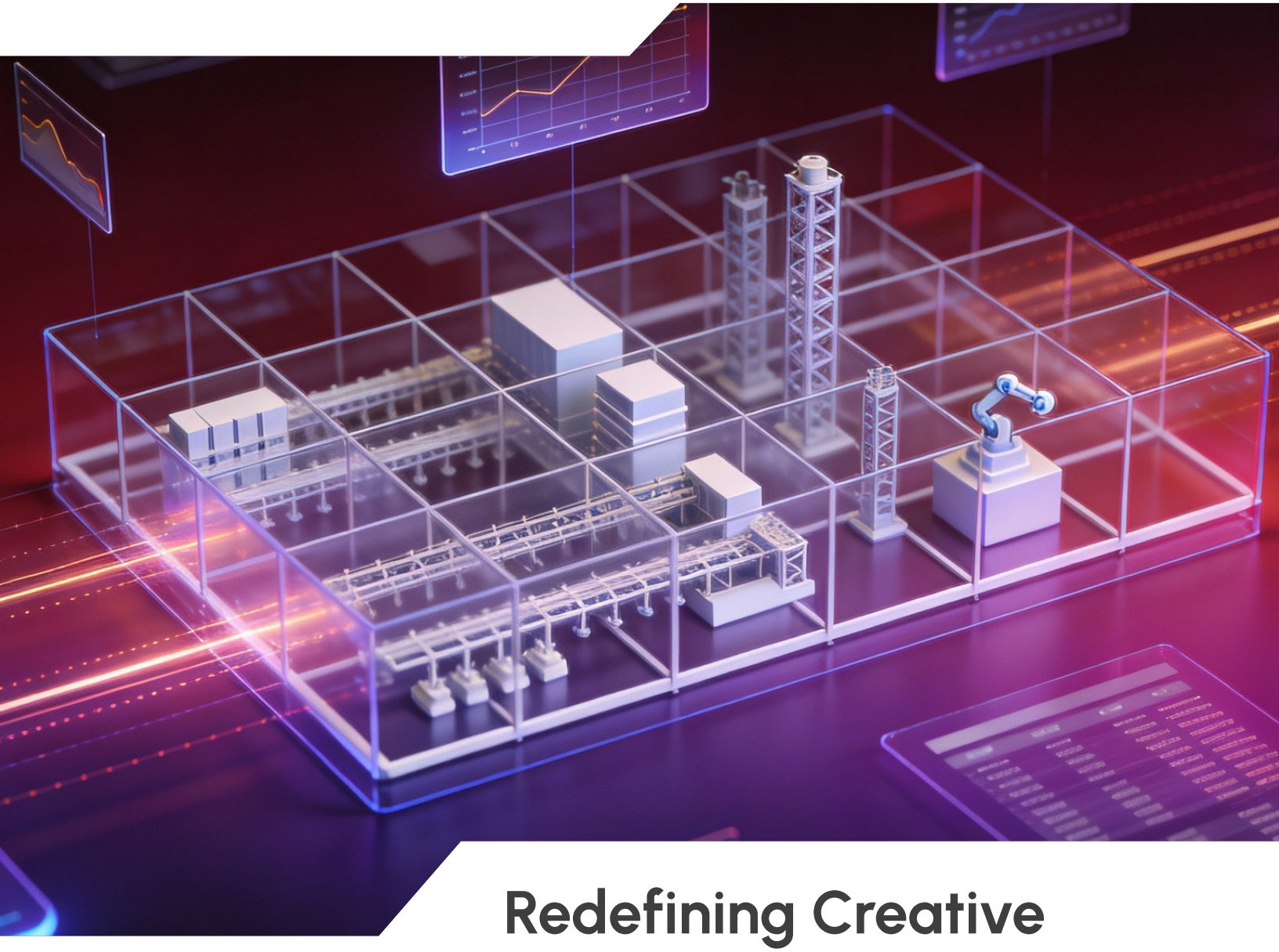

Redefining Creative Workflows in the AI Era

How Organizations Are Transforming Content Creation to Deliver Business Value

JUNE 2026

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Executive Summary

Scaled content production is an indisputable performance driver for enterprise businesses. As digital channels continue to proliferate alongside mounting customer expectations around quality and personalization, creative teams are feeling the pressure to produce more content, in more formats, than ever before.

Generative AI has emerged as a powerful force multiplier in this environment, enabling teams to scale their content production efforts in ways that were not previously possible. Enterprises agree. According to Futurum Group's 1H 2026 Enterprise Applications Decision Maker survey, generative AI ranks as the #1 underlying technology priority among enterprise buyers, with 33% placing it above all other technologies including predictive AI, data integration, and agentic automation.

While AI has expanded individual creative capacity, many organizations have found that operational bottlenecks caused by fragmented processes and toolsets remain, diluting overall financial impact for the business. Necessarily, this change in locus leads to a definitional shift regarding return on investment (ROI) as it relates to creative workflows. Organizations are moving beyond measuring ROI purely through isolated productivity gains or incremental efficiency improvements. Instead, ROI is being defined by the ability to increase production throughput, compress cycle times, reduce external production costs, minimize rework, and scale governance across a growing volume of content. What this changing definition points to is that enterprises committed to extracting the most value from generative AI are also investing in modernizing the very foundation upon which their content is produced.

This shift demands a new operating model. The organizations generating the strongest returns are not simply adopting more AI tools. Instead, they are embedding AI into a unified platform that both connects the full content lifecycle and establishes greater transparency, consistency, and security through unified governance controls. By integrating previously discrete workflows, centralizing financial control, and enforcing governance at scale, organizations are able to standardize their creative workflows across more teams. Transforming the once previously convoluted content lifecycle into a repeatable, measurable enterprise system that delivers financial impact.

This paper provides a practical framework for how organizations can make that transformation.

The Changing Definition of ROI in Creative Workflows

Historically, ROI in creative tools was measured through relatively narrow lenses: how fast a designer could produce an asset, how much time was saved on a specific task, or how efficiently a team could complete a project. These metrics remain relevant, but no longer capture the full scope of value in a world where content demand has increased exponentially.

As organizations expand their use of generative AI to meet that demand, we find that isolated gains won at the task level end up being lost due to widespread, varied process inefficiencies. To be clear, speed without strong operational support simply acts to scale internal chaos. How does an enterprise avoid this pitfall? By improving the holistic performance of their content production system.

Enterprise leaders are now redefining creative ROI around a new set of metrics:

Production Throughput—The total volume of quality content an organization can deliver at scale is emerging as one of the key indicators of the health of an organization's creative lifecycle.

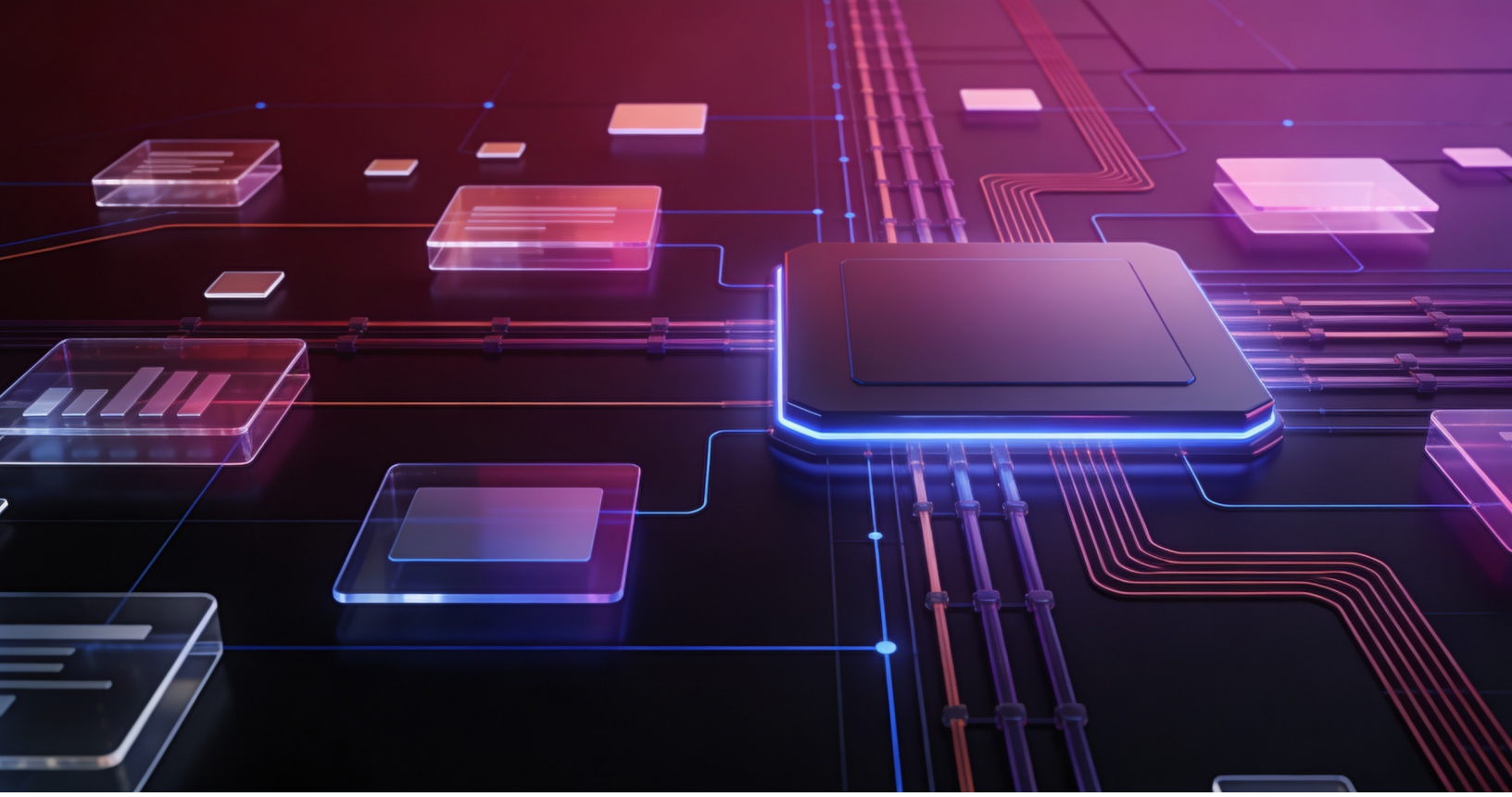
Cycle Time Reduction—This is the total time from initial brief to final approved output. It is an increasingly critical measurement to optimize if seeking to capture the market through faster execution and competitive positioning.

External Cost Savings—This is the reduction of third-party content production costs by bringing more work in-house.

Rework Elimination—This is achieved through the "baking in" of governance and brand standards across the entirety of the workflow.

Scalable Governance—This is the ability to ship more content, faster, without introducing additional risk, i.e., brand, legal, or quality. This is an especially important consideration in the age of generative AI given the inherent behaviors of the technology.

This evolution in value definition points to an important truth about the rapidly changing landscape of content production. As demand for content continues to grow, content can no longer be treated as a series of discrete deliverables. Instead, organizations must operate content creation and production as a unified system of continuous output—one that can be measured, optimized, and scaled across the enterprise.



The Fragmentation Challenge

Creative professionals, marketers, production specialists, and business stakeholders often rely on separate, specialized tools and systems for ideation, design, editing, collaboration, review, and approval.

This fragmentation results in disconnected workflows, duplicated effort, inconsistent governance, and limited performance visibility that impacts an organization's ability to realize the full value of the content they ship. When generative AI is introduced into this environment, it is typically layered on top of existing silos rather than used to unify them. While this may improve speed of completion for individual tasks, that improvement is lost due to persistent systemic inefficiencies.

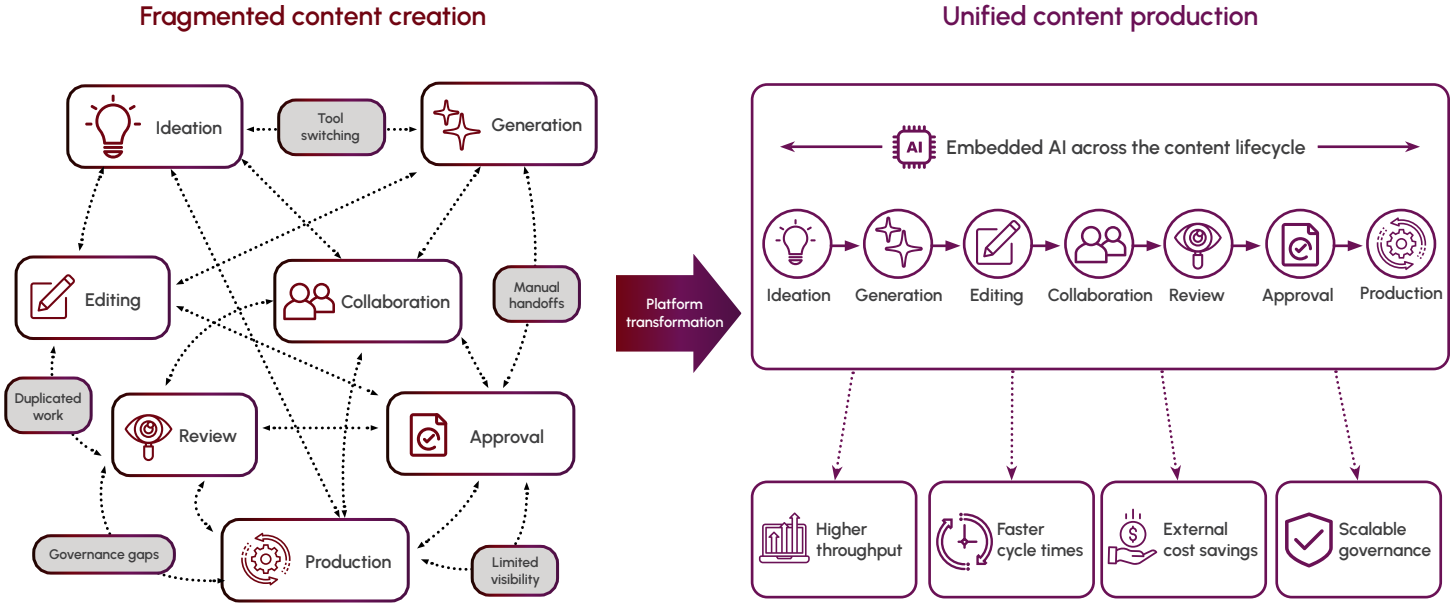
The consequences are significant. Organizations struggle to maintain brand consistency, enforce governance standards, and track how content is created and used. Redundant spending on overlapping tools and AI models becomes common, while the lack of integration slows production cycles and increases the likelihood of rework. In this context, AI expands capability without necessarily improving outcomes.

This is why the next phase of enterprise value creation is not about adding more tools but about rethinking how content creation and production are structured.

A Platform Approach

Organizations that are realizing meaningful ROI from AI are taking a fundamentally different approach. Rather than treating content creation as a collection of discrete activities supported by a similarly discrete ecosystem of tools and processes, they are embracing a unified approach. In this model, ideation, generation, editing, collaboration, review, approval, and production are connected within a unified environment. AI capabilities are embedded directly into these workflows, enabling teams to move seamlessly from concept to finished output without the friction of switching between systems or reconciling disconnected processes. By consolidating and standardizing content production lifecycles onto a single, integrated platform, enterprises are better able to capture more of the value that generative AI tools can deliver.

From fragmented content creation to unified content production



Organizations capture greater value from generative AI when content creation, governance, collaboration, and production are connected within a unified platform rather than managed through disconnected tools and workflows.

The Role of IT in Enabling Creative ROI

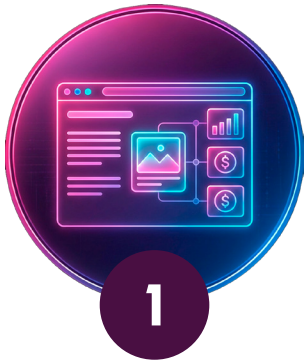
As organizations transition to platform-based systems of content creation, IT plays a critical enabling role. In traditional environments, IT is often tasked with integrating disparate tools, managing access across multiple systems, and addressing governance gaps after the fact.

A platform approach simplifies this landscape by providing a centralized integration layer for creative workflows and AI capabilities. This reduces the need for constant re-architecture as new models and tools emerge, while enabling consistent access controls and policy enforcement at scale.

By establishing a consistent, holistic operational foundation for content creation and production, IT enables creative teams to scale their work more effectively, without introducing additional complexity or risk.

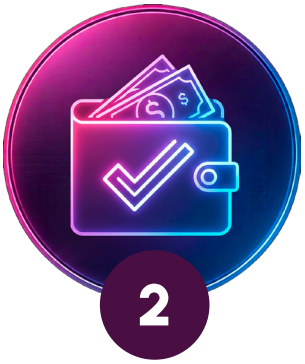
This approach shifts the focus from isolated productivity gains to system-level performance. It enables organizations to treat content creation as a coordinated, scalable operation, one that can be measured, governed, and optimized in alignment with broader business objectives.

The Four Drivers of Creative ROI



Workflow Integration

Connect creative workflows across teams, tools, and AI to streamline content production from idea to delivery.



Financial Efficiency

Reduce costs and maximize resources by eliminating duplicative work, tools, and infrastructure.

Operational Control

Establish governance, visibility, and policy enforcement at scale across all content and AI activities.

Speed to Impact

Accelerate content creation and time to market with AI-powered tools and streamlined processes.

1 Integrated Workflows and Production Throughput

The first and most immediate impact of a platform approach is the integration of creative workflows. Content creation today involves a wide range of contributors, from designers and marketers to legal reviewers and business stakeholders. Each of these participants plays a role in moving content from concept to completion.

When these workflows are fragmented, time is lost in handoffs, context switching, and misaligned collaboration. A platform approach eliminates much of this friction by embedding AI and creative tools directly into a shared workflow environment.

From Fragmented Testing to Integrated Utility: Rather than treating generative AI as a standalone experimental layer, a platform approach embeds it directly into existing creative and collaborative tools. This integration removes the friction of context-switching and unifies the content lifecycle.

Workflow-Native Intelligence: Platforms embed AI functions such as generation, brand consistency, and optimization directly into user workflows. This focus on integration with existing tooling (rather than replacement) transforms AI into an essential production tool, significantly boosting adoption and practical utility.

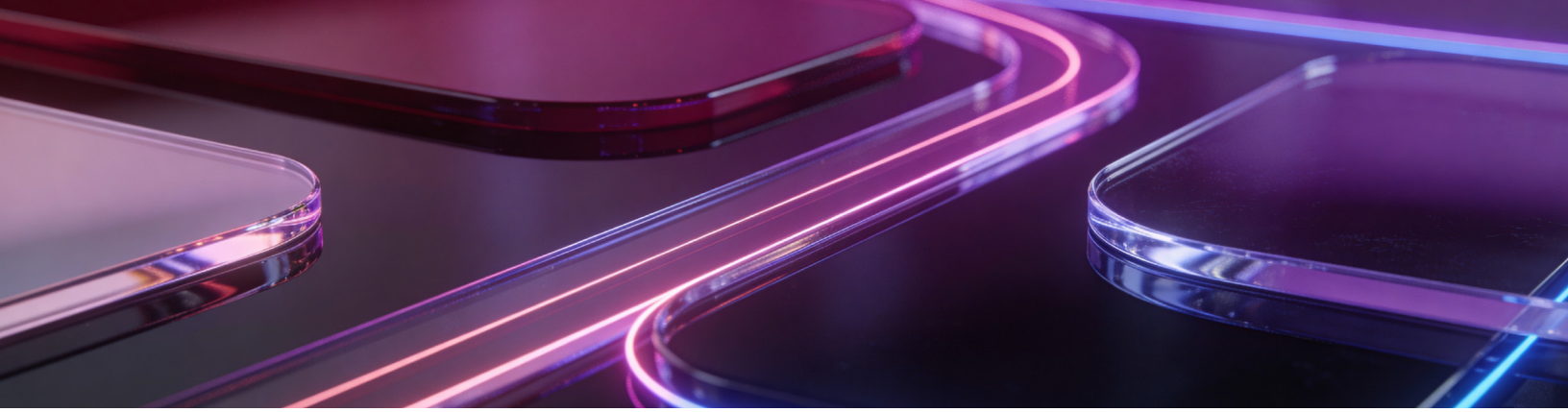
Streamlined Review and Approval: Effective content production requires more than just generation. By merging AI output with human oversight, drafts flow into existing review cycles. Automated compliance and brand checks ensure AI speed never compromises essential standards.

A unified platform has a compounding effect on productivity. Rather than improving efficiency at the individual or team level, organizations are able to drive continued optimization across the entire production chain. As content moves through ideation, creation, review, approval, and production, small efficiency gains accumulate across teams, resulting in meaningful improvements in throughput.

"As creative thinking evolves, I try to tell [teams] to break the rules as you're coming up with an idea … As you compound the efficiency from each team who touches it, then I think we're starting to realize the cumulative effect of that."

— Doug Guttenberg, EVP of AI Innovation and Delivery, DonerColle Partners

This cumulative impact is where workflow ROI is realized. A platform does not simply help one person create content faster; it enables multiple teams to collaborate more effectively across the content lifecycle. In enterprise environments, that is often where the greatest gains are found.



2 Financial Efficiency and Resource Optimization

In fragmented environments, teams often procure their own tools and AI models independent from one another. This leads to behaviors such as redundant spend and underutilized licenses, and limits visibility into how resources are consumed.

Instituting a platform approach that is led and directed by IT centralizes the commercial layer of content creation, providing a unified framework for access, billing, and usage. This allows organizations to better align spending with actual business value, as well as reduce waste associated with overlapping capabilities.

One of the clearest examples of this is the use of a shared credit or consumption system. For example, within Adobe's platform, usage credits can be allocated across users and teams without requiring each group to maintain its own isolated licensing relationship with disparate applications or AI model providers. This allows organizations to pool usage more effectively, expand access more broadly, and reduce the waste that often comes with fragmented tool adoption.

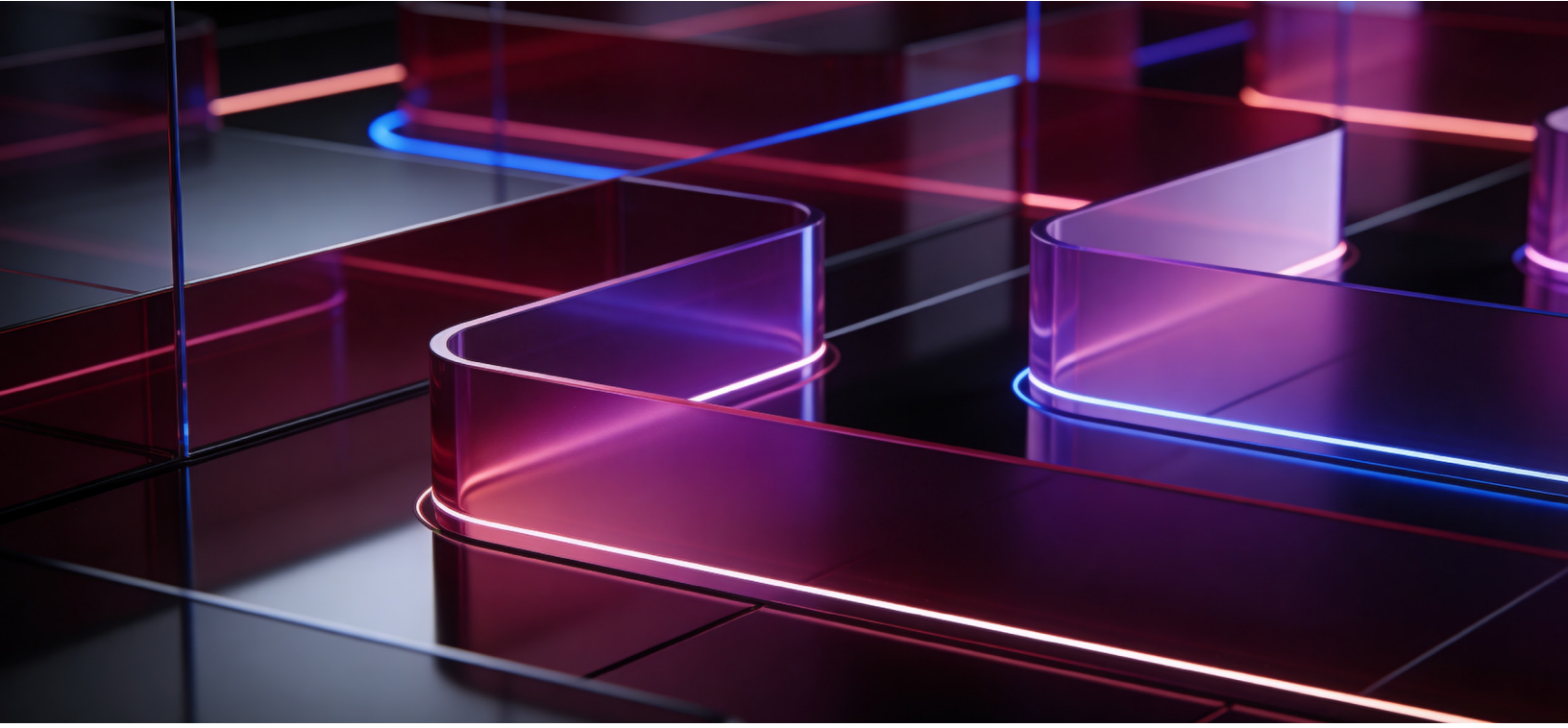
DonerColle Partners achieved significant operational efficiency and cost savings by adopting this type of enterprise-wide AI access structure via Adobe's platform, which allows creatives to switch between different AI models without the need for individual licenses. This approach simplifies procurement and expands access across the agency, avoiding the cost and complexity of fragmented licensing.

DonerColle's Guttenberg highlights the practical benefit of this model:

"I have a whole bunch of credits for everybody in the agency, and so creatives can switch off between models for exploration use...So it's very cool, and it's very helpful, because now I'm not buying individual [model] licenses for everybody in the agency. I have this blanket enterprise AI license, so you have much more opportunity for more people in my organization to access more models."

By pooling access to AI capabilities and creative tools, organizations can expand usage across more users while maintaining control over costs. This not only improves financial efficiency but also enables broader participation in content creation without introducing additional complexity.

In this sense, the value of a platform is not simply that it lowers costs, but that it makes those costs more predictable, governable, and directly tied to outcomes.



3 Governance as the Foundation for Trusted AI Content

As organizations scale their use of AI for content production, establishing a strong governance framework becomes a critical enabler of ROI. Without consistent standards for brand, compliance, and data hygiene, teams risk introducing errors, inconsistencies, and legal exposure into their content workflows.

By taking a platform approach toward governance (i.e. embedding standardized processes, policies, and roles directly into the content lifecycle), companies are better able to ensure that content being produced meets brand and legal standards, as well as ensuring alignment with strategic business goals. This reduces the need for downstream corrections and enables organizations to scale output with confidence.

Peter Steiner, Head of Creative Labs at Code and Theory, underscores the importance of this distinction, and leverages Adobe's Firefly models to ensure generated outputs remain commercially safe:

> ***"When it comes to final outputs, everyone knows they can't use anything but Firefly models, and don't use anything but Firefly for final outputs."***

This clarity reflects a broader principle. While experimentation may occur across a range of tools, production-grade content must be created within governed environments that meet enterprise standards. Models that are trained only on licensed or public-domain content are the only ones that should be used to ensure that intellectual property and copyrights are respected in all outputs. By properly governing model usage, organizations can balance innovation with control and allow creative work to scale without introducing risk or inefficiency.

4 Cycle Time Reduction and Internal Production Gains

The final major driver of ROI is the acceleration of the content production cycle. While generative AI solves the bottleneck of asset creation, if organizations don't take the time to invest in the underlying platform upon which to create, ship, and measure, then those benefits realized early in the lifecycle evaporate.

By integrating workflows and reducing friction between stages, organizations can significantly compress the time required to bring content to market.

Paul Lammert, SVP of Collaboration and Innovation at Stagwell, described a new business pitch scenario in which his team needed to create AI-generated content with full narration on an aggressive timeline. Instead of outsourcing the work to a post-production or computer graphics shop, the team was able to produce the necessary assets internally and stay under budget using Adobe's platform and generative AI tools.

> ***"We were able to do this in house, and in this case, save $50,000 in out-of-pocket expenses just to get the pitch elements going. We were able to do it in three days, versus several weeks."***
>
> — Paul Lammert, SVP of Collaboration and Innovation at Stagwell

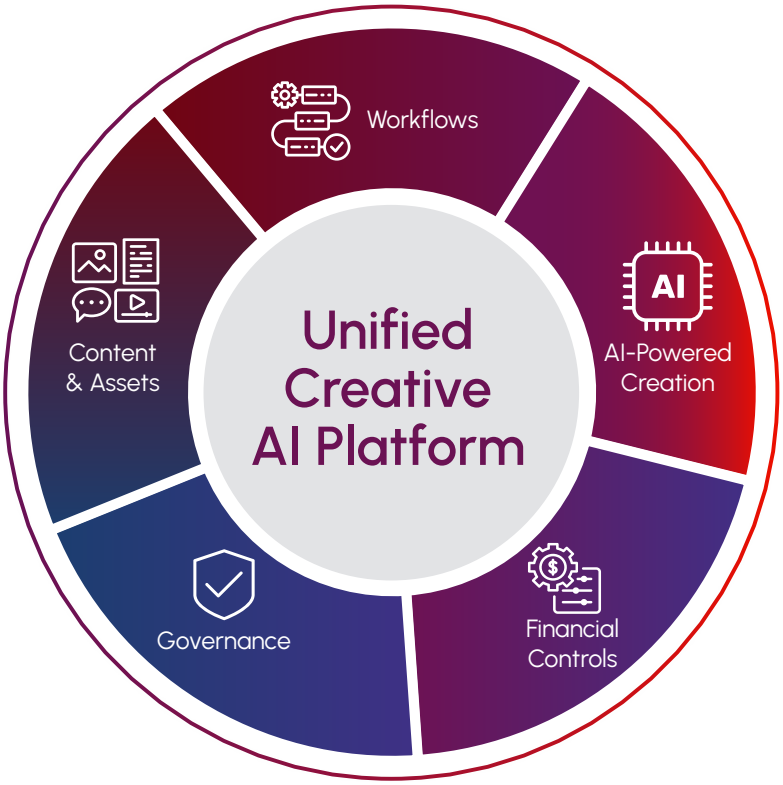
Lammert's words point to the broader financial implications of cycle time reduction. Faster production not only improves speed to market but also enables organizations to shift more work in-house, reducing reliance on external vendors and lowering overall costs.

In this way, speed becomes a direct contributor to ROI, not just a measure of operational efficiency.

Why the Platform Layer Is Becoming the Primary Source of Value

As generative AI capabilities become more widely available, the source of differentiation in enterprise software is shifting. The ability to access advanced models is no longer sufficient to drive meaningful value on its own. Instead, value is increasingly determined by how effectively organizations can operationalize those capabilities within their workflows. More and more, organizations are choosing a platform layer such as Adobe as the primary driver to capture that ROI because platforms simplify tool and process integration, and centralize governance and financial control.

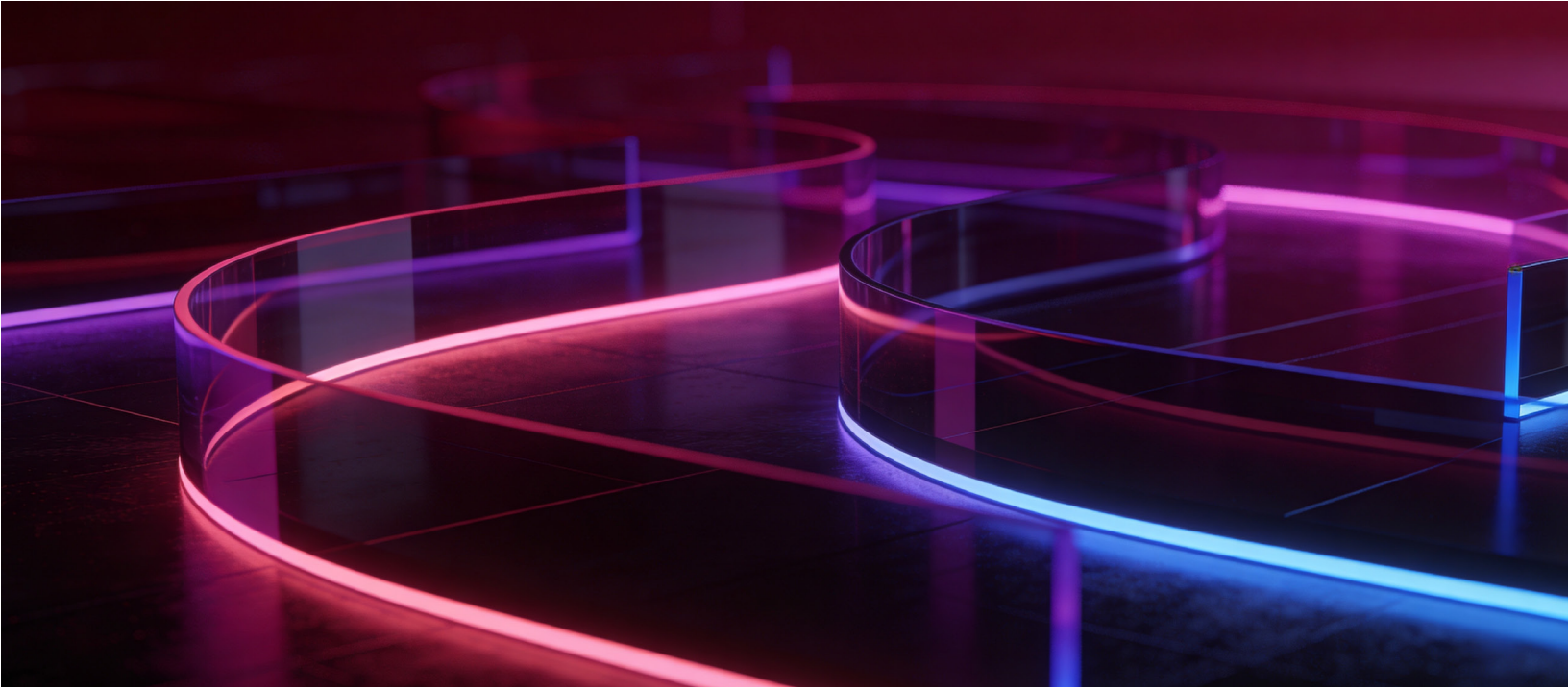
In today's world, ROI measurement is shifting toward software's ability to drive direct financial impact to the overall business, namely around revenue growth and profitability, which, taken together, were named as the primary success metric by 21.7% of respondents, while an emphasis on productivity gains have fallen, according to Futurum's 1H 2026 Enterprise Software Survey.



AI delivers more consistent, organization-wide returns when tools, workflows, governance, and financial controls are centralized within a single content production platform.

Scattered spending across vendors makes this ROI attribution nearly impossible, whereas a single platform provides unified consumption dashboards, cross-model budget allocation, and the spend visibility CFOs require to link software investments directly to business outcomes.

Organizations that adopt a platform approach to content generation and production gain greater visibility into how content is created, how resources are consumed, and how outcomes are achieved. This enables more accurate ROI measurement and stronger alignment between software investment and business performance.



Conclusion

The rise of generative AI has fundamentally changed the dynamics of content creation and production. As demand for content continues to grow, organizations must move beyond fragmented approaches and adopt operating models that support scale, efficiency, and control.

Integrating workflows, centralizing financial management, embedding governance, and accelerating production cycles enable organizations to turn content creation into a repeatable, measurable source of enterprise value.

Adobe's Creative Cloud ecosystem, with generative AI capabilities embedded across tools such as Photoshop, Premiere Pro, and Firefly, offers a clear example of how this model can be realized in practice. Unifying creative workflows and aligning them with business outcomes demonstrate how organizations can move from experimentation to scalable production.

Ultimately, the organizations that achieve the greatest return on their investment in generative AI will not be those that adopt the most tools, but those that redefine their creative workflows to deliver lasting business value.

Important Information About This Report

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