

A woman in a dark jacket and red pants stands in a field, holding a glowing star-shaped object. She is surrounded by concentric circles of light that create a tunnel effect. A large, glowing ring of light encircles her. The background is a dark, starry sky.

The Future of Creative Collaboration



The Drum.



Adobe

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Introduction

Creative Collaboration: The new world order

The new world order is where creativity and innovation are not forced to fit into the confines of the office but are part and parcel of everyday life. They should be present wherever you are, whenever you'd like to work and with whoever you want to collaborate. With this creative collaboration fuelling the daily work routine of most creatives, you'd assume technology would be providing the common platform to do this. Although technology certainly has the potential to do this, there's proof this still hasn't been adopted widely enough. Only 36% of those in the creative industry are using creative collaboration tools and technology within their business, while 23% admit they don't feel there's enough information out there to decide which tools might be the best for them. This means there's still a lot of work to do to ensure marketers can find the space, tools and culture to create a truly collaborative technological environment in the workplace.

This piece of research, conducted in collaboration with The Drum, is a great leap forward in achieving that. It helps us gain insight into the creative collaborative tools widely adopted today as well as letting us understand the obstacles around their implementation and how we can ensure they're used more effectively.

At Adobe, we feel the time is right to explore the challenges and opportunities around creative collaboration because of the following factors:

- 1** The acceleration of technology is driving more connectivity. This in turn is boosting the consumption of content as users take in the things they love on more devices than ever before.
- 2** The importance of collaboration has risen in most workplaces, with more cross-pollination occurring between different departments. This means marketers are becoming less individualistic and have to become better team players.
- 3** Businesses need to create more content than ever before and must find a way to maintain a consistent supply. This means having creativity at their core is fundamental in order to keep up with the pace of change.



Methodology

Adobe partnered with The Drum to delve into the future of creative collaboration and look at the tools and technologies used to aid the creative process.

The report surveyed over 166 senior creatives. Over the coming pages, we will discuss the importance of these creative collaborative tools, attitudes around using them and what impact AI could have on the creative journey.

Key Findings:

Although most of the creatives surveyed recognized how creative collaboration tools and new technology could improve their content, only

36% said they currently use these actively within their business.

Rather worryingly, a whopping **52%** admitted they don't use any of these tools whatsoever.

And despite most of the surveyed creatives clearly recognizing that creative collaboration tools would improve their creative content, there were others who said they were using free or subsidized software.

16% of respondents cited a rise in efficiency and productivity as the biggest benefits to using creative collaboration tools.

Our research shows that among the creatives who have applied creative collaborative tools within their business, there have been various positive outcomes.

34% said that using their future designers more time to focus on producing better content, **31%** said it increased overall productivity, **29%** said it made workplace data more meaningful while simplifying workflows, **27%** said it gave them greater vision around design, and **25%** said it gave them deeper insights that informed better decision making.

A small percentage of those surveyed admitted they were hesitant to use creative collaboration tools.

14% said it could make designs lack emotion and **8%** feared it could replace creative job responsibilities and put workers out of a job.

Why creative collaboration is the future

Perhaps there was an era where marketing was built more around individual excellence than team effort but with the acceleration of technology, collaboration in the workplace has never been higher on the agenda. Our survey shows 42% of marketers believe creative content will become more critical for the industry over the next five years; a telling statistic that shows creativity will become a key skill for pretty much everyone in your organisation.

Central to promoting this kind of workplace creativity is the exhilaration of technology that fuels collaboration. Programmes such as Adobe Creative Cloud, Slack and Figma, in particular, allow teams to work seamlessly no matter where they are geographically located. This means they can sync with projects and campaigns as necessary. By being able to work simultaneously in one place, creatives can comment and work in real time, allowing projects to be responded to quickly. These tools also store all content and communication in one place, making for easy referrals to previous conversations as well as the sharing of reports and feedback. The biggest benefit is that

these tools work in the background, allowing teams to continue developing the creative by improving the communication process.

The report surveyed 166 senior creatives to review how creative collaboration tools can benefit them, yet also understand why some businesses are not adopting these new technologies into their workplace. They were also asked to consider what the future of creative collaboration - and the creative process - looks like. Of the executives we polled, six out of ten said that they knew these tools allowed teams to work more efficiently. It's clear that by having this open path of communication, creatives can just get on and do the work faster, as they're less focused on how to deliver the project and more concentrated on developing it instead.

Creatives recognised the results that using creative collaboration tools could reap too, with 11.7% believing that their use contributed to businesses producing better content. A slightly less 9.2% thought that they strengthened communication between teams. Others also realised that these tools could offer a much more synergistic approach. Some 8.6% of respondents felt that they worked more creatively when they used collaborative tools, with 7.4% of creatives even likening the sensation of using the tools to "feeling like family" thanks to functions that allow team members to converse freely.

Delivering results

Some of the most popular tools at VCCP, for instance, include shared libraries on Photoshop, After Effects and Illustrator. “The tools allow us to share our core elements globally across different studios [and helps us to] maintain a consistent brand identity; effectively eliminating the need to question if we’re using the right logo / font / colour palette for all our designers,” says Mike Shaw, design director at VCCP. “A key benefit is that if a logo does change we can instantly update it across every workstation just by changing the asset in the library.”

But obviously, culture aside, the respondents also realised the sales potential in these creative collaboration tools: 12.9% of respondents said they thought that using these tools would contribute to their business’ growth, with 4.3% believing clients were more satisfied after they had been used and another 4.3% felt there was better overall consistency in the work produced.

Not only do many of the programmes allow offices to connect internationally so that they can share ideas and assets seamlessly, but by having all the tools in one place, it makes for better project organization as it makes the process more streamlined. “Creative collaboration tools shorten the distance between people because they remove it entirely,” agrees Unit9’s art director, Karol Goreczny. “It’s like gathering all the team members in the same room even though they are far away from each other. Creative collaboration tools combine the speed of creating on your own with the advantages of working together.”

Jon Bancroft, associate creative director at VCCP adds: “Creative collaboration is the glue that holds us together. It’s the essential element of working that takes a thought from an idea and turns it into an actual thing that works. Without collaboration, we don’t work as a company, a collective thought process on creativity and production helps us execute the jobs to the highest standards as each gear in the system knows what to expect from its peers and can focus on their piece of that process and help inspire the rest to enhance the idea. It allows us to work more agile.”

Creative collaboration tools also speed up the approval process. It means creatives can share various functions with clients, such as email designs via Adobe XD as in the case of VCCP, and await their feedback or approvals, before sending them on to development teams overseas who can use them as a reference point or template for the build. The tools allow for greater synchronicity and for teams to continue working on projects without any need for setbacks.

“Creative collaboration is the glue that holds us together.”

Doing more with less

As creativity and collaboration become more common, and the demands for content subsequently rise. Many marketing teams will be under pressure to up their productivity and work, many with similar budgets and timeframes as they had before. They will essentially have to do more with less and the same amount of resources. This makes working more closely with collaborators and stakeholders absolutely imperative and using technology to aide this journey something that is unavoidable if you want your productivity sour. The need to implement this kind of mentality is clearly reflected in our data.

One in three respondents believed that these collaboration tools will boost the productivity of creative teams and 28% thought it would simplify work flows. Furthermore, 29% of creatives believe that the evolution of tools will increase the use of data and contribute to creatives needing to use data more meaningfully. Meanwhile, one in four thought that creatives will be able to extract deeper insights through these tools and be able to work out what's working or - just as equally as important - to analyse what isn't working.

There has been much chatter around the future of creative collaboration, what it might look like and how it might help ease the pressure of creatives needing to produce more and more work. In truth, nobody fully knows yet. Admittedly, there's been

“ One in three respondents believed that these collaboration tools will boost the productivity of creative teams

some fear and hostility around the full use of artificial intelligence and tools that aid the creative journey. It is also clear that there's still a way to go for these technologies to be fully accepted and adopted by the industry. Yet if creatives acknowledge the impact of adopting technology, there are still barriers preventing them from actually doing it.

Why some marketers are hesitant around collaborative tools

This is something highlighted by the creatives that took part in this report. As many as 52% of respondents admitted that they don't currently use creative collaboration tools and technology in their business, despite many of them clearly recognising the potential benefits. So, why aren't they investing? There are so many creative collaboration tools currently available - from Adobe Creative Cloud and Microsoft Teams, Slack, Figma, inVision, Google Drive, Spark AR Studio and more - that understandably it can be hard for businesses and creatives to know which tools to use.

When asked about whether there were too many tools in the market, 16% of respondents said yes. Whereas another 23% revealed that they felt that they couldn't make an informed decision on which technology or tools would be best suited to them based on the information available. Some 7% of creatives actually said the opposite, revealing that they were given new tools too often in the workplace, resulting in the same effect; that creatives couldn't make their mind up on what tools to use for their business. Perhaps most worryingly was the fact 20% still believe collaborative tools are too hard to use, something that proves education around their benefits still needs to be improved.

However, the marketers we spoke to also agree that awareness around technology like artificial intelligence will improve over the coming years, as adoption naturally rises. "The way we collaborate is changing due to the new technology and products that help us run the project faster and more productively," adds Unit9's Goreczny. "In future, some of the processes will become automated by AI giving us more time and space for the project itself."

The relationship between technology and creative is evolving and that's no bad thing, assures Goreczny. He explained further: "Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality will play a big role in role in the creative collaboration process. They're great technologies that can bring people together in one virtual room in order to review, provide feedback while in context and iterate on the actual project."

And Bancroft agrees. "AI will help to streamline the process and smooth out any lumps. The process will get better, more streamlined and trusted as a natural way to work together," he explains. "Technology will help to build relationships between teams and disciplines, providing us with greater options and opportunities to get the best out of an idea. We imagine eventually you'll be able to mix collaborative tools, with AI and generative design principles and stress test ideas further together and act faster. And in turn, make them better."

Creative director at Antoni, Damon Ava, adds: "Software can be totally underrated. But it is the thing that brings our ideas to life.... after all, what is an artist without a pen?"

Moving past these concerns and looking to the future

Perhaps understandably, concerns were raised around the role that these technologies played in the creative process. Some 14% of respondents thought that designs could be affected; that they could lack empathy and emotion if they were created by a machine. Meanwhile 8% feared that these tools could lead to technology taking over most creative job responsibilities. "I'm sceptical about the whole Idea of art generated by AI, I think what makes art special are feelings that only we humans have, and there is no way around it," says Goreczny. "Maybe in the future, AI will be capable to make the decisions the same way we humans do (with feelings) but that will change the entire world and might get out of our control."

"Creativity comes in many forms, like solving a design problem or creative designing but this is based on ideas or thinking that has already happened, predefined, based on experiences," says Bancroft. "Can you ask AI to independently create a strap-line or Blue Rabbit to celebrate live experiences? I'm not sure it's that free thinking yet, and also if it was then I'd be concerned for us as a human race. I've seen Terminator..."

“Creativity comes in many forms like solving a design problem or creative designing but this is based on ideas or thinking that has already happened, predefined, based on experiences

Conclusion

Technology may be changing the way creatives have traditionally done things but that doesn't necessarily have to be a bad thing. In fact, only 3.1% of those surveyed couldn't think of a single benefit for implementing creative collaboration tools into their workplace. The rest of the respondents cited all sorts of reasons for the adoption of these assets into the creative process; from improved productivity (16%), business growth (12.9%), better results (11.7%), better communication (9.2%), more ideas (8.6%), happiness (7.4%), consistency (4.3%), client satisfaction (4.3%) and diversification (3.7%).

A lack of clarity around how creative collaboration tools can help businesses does remain but these worries are increasingly being met by the creative shop providers in the way of education and improving capabilities. With many creatives shrugging off deep-rooted concerns about the threat of technology on their creative prowess, believing that it is unlikely to develop enough power to mimic the human imagination, these doubts should not take priority.

Fears aside, it looks like those ready to experiment and use new tools will only reap the benefits. There's still some ambiguity

“Tools are what bring ideas to life and enrich our horizons with new possibilities for execution

over how important creative design will become in the next few years as 42% of respondents thought that it would become more critical for businesses to adopt these tools, while 43% predicted that it was unlikely to change much in uptake.

Looking at the rate at which technology and machine learning is evolving and considering how much other businesses and industries are starting to rely on it, it would seem naïve to not think about the impact that these tools could have on streamlining processes and keeping up with demand, without interfering with the creative. While traditional practices don't have to be completely forgotten, creative teams and businesses should be prepared to adapt and evolve with the changing tide, and The Drum and Adobe are committed to raising awareness of the rise of technology and collaboration tools so marketers can be the best they can be.

“Tools are what bring ideas to life and enrich our horizons with new possibilities for execution,” concludes Antoni's Ava. “This is the future and we have to embrace it.”

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