

Scaling creative operations:

How to deliver quality creative work at scale while increasing efficiency and productivity.

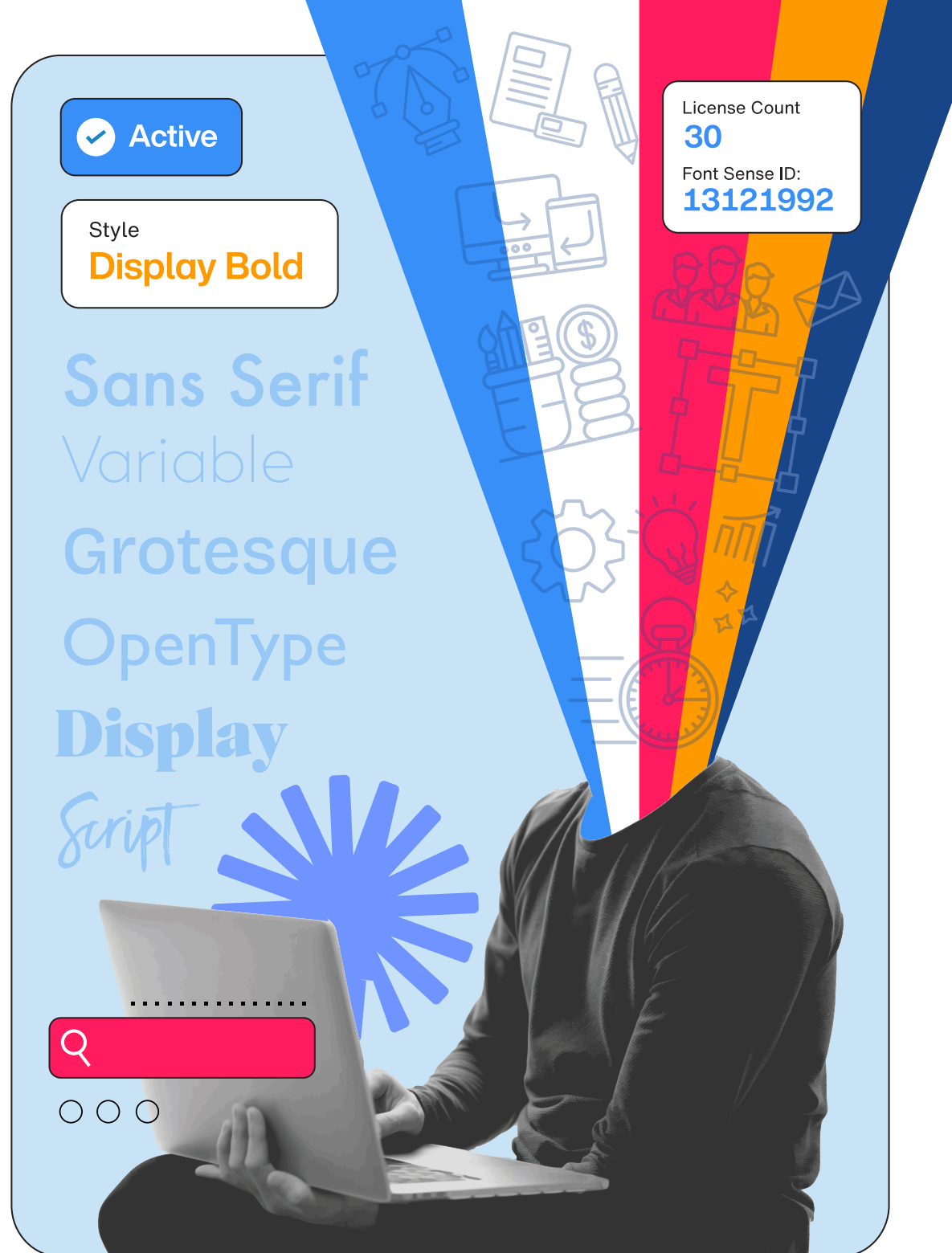


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Executive summary: How to optimize creative operations for scalable growth.



Managing Director, Extensis.
Bernie Gracy.

Digital transformation has fundamentally changed the way organizations manage and deliver creative work. We see this every day in our work at Monotype with the rapid onset of AI, a growing abundance of design tools, and increasing demands for content. Today's creative teams face mounting challenges as they strive to balance increasing demands with operational efficiency. Our latest research with over 1,000 creatives across the globe examines these challenges in detail.

Creative teams, often at the heart of organizational innovation, face an alarming inefficiency:

Nearly 41% of creative professionals report spending 26-40% of their time on non-creative tasks.

This represents a costly misallocation of human capital, constraining creative excellence and limiting your team's potential. To address this operational gap, you must reimagine workflows, technology solutions, resource allocation, and compliance management.

Key challenges facing creative teams.

- **Operational inefficiency.**

As content demands skyrocket, 38% of organizations report difficulties in keeping up with that increasing volume. For many teams, controlling costs remains a concern, affecting 35% and limiting profitability.

- **Compliance and risk management.**

Legal and financial risks tied to font licensing complexity affect 68% of organizations, while 42% struggle with version control, creating vulnerabilities in brand consistency. These challenges underscore the importance of systematic risk management as a core aspect of creative operations.

- **Untapped technology ROI.**

While 62% of organizations that have implemented AI and automation tools report significant boosts in both efficiency and creativity, adoption remains uneven. Challenges such as technical complexity and cost concerns are slowing progress, preventing many teams from fully unlocking the potential of innovative tools.

Font management as digital infrastructure.

Font management illustrates the transformative power of operational improvements. Once seen as a niche IT function, it has evolved into critical digital infrastructure, with 82% of organizations reporting it as critical or mission critical.

Strategic font management can deliver tangible benefits, including:

- Reclaiming up to 35% of creative time for higher-value work.
- Mitigating compliance risks tied to licensing and version control.
- Strengthening brand consistency across touchpoints.

By systematically addressing your organization's font management, you can not only solve day-to-day challenges but also unlock scalable benefits—reduced operational costs, increased billable capacity, improved creative quality, and increased creative output.

The transformation framework.

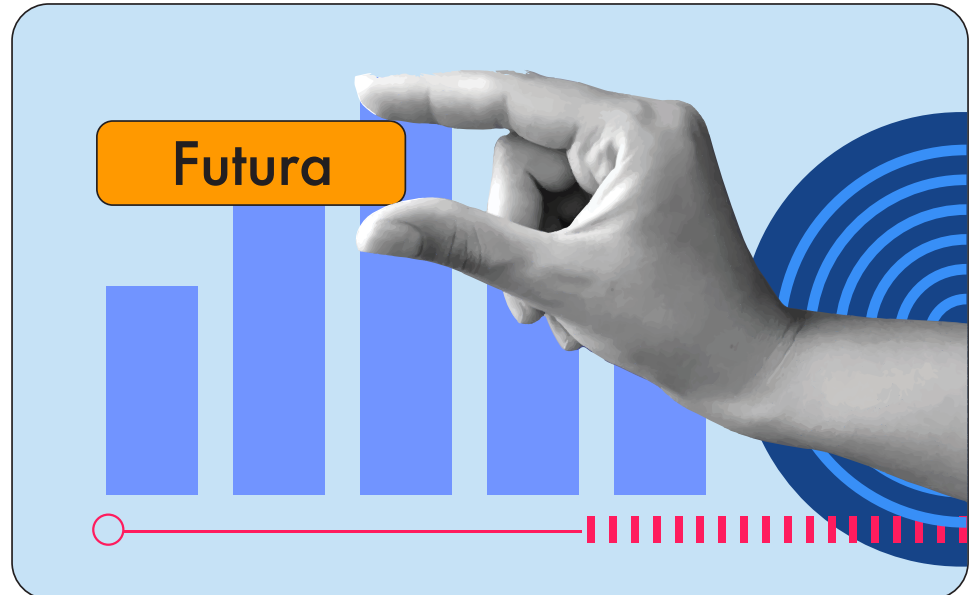
Organizations that embrace comprehensive creative operations strategies reap measurable rewards. Key outcomes include:

- **Business impact:** 43% of organizations now track ROI per creative project, reflecting a shift from seeing creative teams as cost centers to strategic assets.
- **Competitive advantage:** Systematic approaches to workflows, compliance, and measurement can turn chaos into clarity, empowering teams to achieve operational and creative excellence.
- **Operational excellence:** 88% of teams with dedicated creative operations report high effectiveness in balancing creativity with business needs.

This transformation framework can position creative operations as more than a support function – as foundational infrastructure essential for scalable growth, risk mitigation, and competitive differentiation.

The bottom line.

Organizations that fail to address these challenges risk falling behind, with escalating compliance risks, shrinking creative productivity, and limiting scalability. Those who invest in strategic creative operations can unlock a path to sustainable growth – elevating creative teams to revenue-generating drivers while achieving operational excellence and delivering higher-quality outputs. For creative operations managers, this journey begins with recognizing the critical role of thoughtful workflows, effective resource allocation, and advanced technology in building a competitive advantage. This isn't just about solving problems – it's about enabling creativity to thrive and delivering measurable outcomes that matter to your organization.



Key findings & takeaways.

“Creative operations for all.”

Creative operations isn't just a specialized role – it's a strategic approach that benefits everyone on the creative team, from individual designers to creative directors.

95%

of organizations have dedicated creative operations roles.

1

Reclaim your creative capacity.

57% of creative teams report spending over 25% of their time on non-creative tasks.

This represents massive untapped creative potential that could be redirected toward strategic work that drives business value.

3

Achieve efficiency & creativity.

62% of teams using automation report enhanced efficiency AND creativity.

The most successful teams aren't choosing between operational efficiency and creative quality – they're achieving both simultaneously.

2

Transform font management.

68% struggle with licensing complexity.

This gap between importance and execution creates both risk exposure and competitive disadvantage for teams that don't address it strategically.

4

Prove creative ROI to stakeholders.

43% of organizations now track ROI per creative project.

Organizations that can demonstrate measurable business impact from their creative investments will secure more resources and strategic influence.

Introduction:

The evolving creative landscape.

The creative industry has undergone a dramatic transformation in recent years. Digital acceleration, channel proliferation, and content personalization have created new pressures requiring operational excellence alongside creative brilliance.

The operational challenge.

Survey insight: 38% of respondents report that managing increasing content volume is their top challenge in maintaining or scaling effective operations. Participants could select up to three.

But it's a close race for second place. Creative teams across all industries face common challenges:

35%

Controlling costs.

34%

Collaboration.

30%

Inefficient workflows.

29%

Maintaining compliance.

The strategic imperative.

Creative operations is evolving from a support function to an essential operational imperative – transforming how creative work gets done, measured, and valued.

Regional variations in challenges.

Survey insight: While managing increasing content volume (38%) is the primary challenge overall, our research reveals significant regional differences. In the United States, managing increasing volumes of creative projects remains the dominant concern, but in Germany and the U.K., maintaining brand consistency emerges as the top priority for creative teams.

The creative operations advantage.

Survey insight: Organizations with dedicated creative operations roles are better positioned to address these challenges, with 88% rating themselves as “somewhat effective” or “highly effective” at balancing creativity with staying in scope, on time, and on budget.

Understanding creative operations.

What is creative operations?

Creative operations encompasses the systems, workflows, and processes that enable creative teams to work efficiently, consistently, and compliantly.

It's both a specialized function and a broader operational mindset that benefits everyone involved in creative production.

Role distribution and responsibility.

Survey insight:

95%

of organizations have dedicated creative operations roles.

77%

of teams without dedicated roles rely on individual responsibility to manage font licenses.

The evolution of a critical operational function.

Survey insight: Among organizations with dedicated creative operations roles, the vast majority (92%) rank increasing operational efficiency as the most important outcome of creative workflow and asset management functions.

Creative workflow and asset management.

Strategic alignment.

Creative operations creates alignment between creative output and business objectives, transforming creative departments from cost centers to strategic assets.

Top project management challenges.

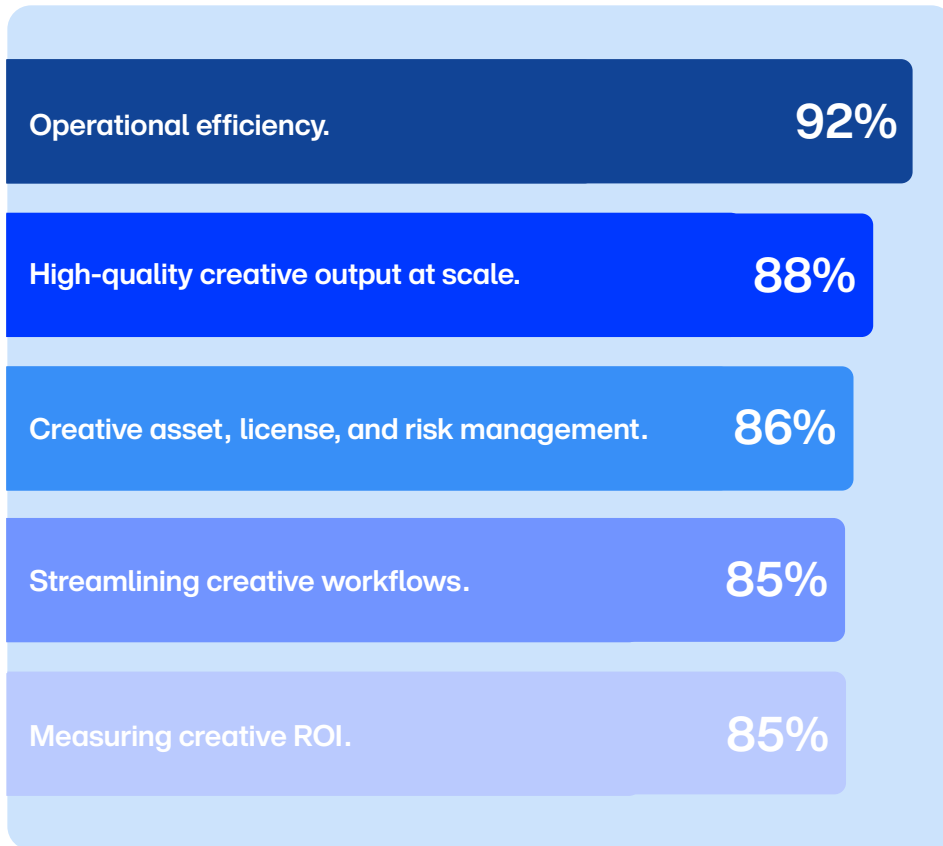
Survey insight: These were the most frequently cited creative project management challenges.

Participants could select up to three:

35%	Meeting tight deadlines.	28%	Cross-team collaboration.
32%	Workflow bottlenecks.	18%	License & compliance management.
30%	Maintaining brand consistency.	18%	Identifying and assigning non-scoped project costs.

Critical operational functions.

Survey insight: The following creative workflow and asset management functions were rated as “important” or higher:



Actionable improvements.

To immediately enhance your creative workflow efficiency:

1.

- ☐ Implement a centralized font management system to eliminate wasted time searching for fonts and ensure licensing compliance.

2.

- ☐ Establish clear handoff protocols between creative and production teams to prevent last-minute fire drills.

3.

- ☐ Conduct quarterly font audits to identify and eliminate outdated or improperly licensed elements.

4.

- ☐ Tag fonts with licensing information to prevent costly compliance issues and enable faster project reviews.

Maintaining & scaling effective operations.

Balancing creativity with business realities.

Survey insight: Among organizations with dedicated creative operations roles, 88% of organizations rate themselves as “somewhat effective” or “highly effective” at balancing creativity with staying in scope, on time, and within budget, with 32% rating themselves as “highly effective.”

Impact of organizational size.

Survey insight: Organization size significantly influences creative operations challenges. Budget constraints represent the most significant barrier to effective creative operations for smaller organizations (under \$5 million in revenue).

In contrast, larger organizations (over \$5 million in revenue) identify consistency and compliance as their primary challenges, reflecting the complexities of maintaining brand integrity and legal compliance at scale.

Emerging productivity trends.

Survey insight: The most relevant trends for team productivity.

Note: survey participants could select all that applied to them:

- 64%** Efficient creative processes.
- 56%** Managing scope, timelines, & budget.
- 49%** Automating creative workflows.
- 42%** Personalization at scale.
- 41%** Global content localization.
- 36%** Managing communications & handoffs.

Top challenges in maintaining or scaling operations.

38%
Managing increasing content volume.

35%
Controlling costs.

38%
Collaboration.

32%
Integrating new technologies.

30%
Preventing team burnout.

30%
Inefficient workflows.

Font management: A critical operations challenge.

Font management emerged as a particularly significant operational challenge, impacting both efficiency and compliance.

Font management challenges.

Survey insight: When rating font management challenges on a scale from 1–5, **65-69%** of survey participants rate...

- font licensing complexity.
- managing fonts across multiple platforms.
- ensuring correct font versioning.
- ensuring brand consistency across fonts.

...as challenging or higher.

Critical importance of font management.

Survey insight: **82%** of respondents rated font management as “critical” or “mission critical” to their creative operations, with **36%** rating it as “mission critical.”

Productivity impact.

Manual font activation processes or font management software with ineffective auto-activation features can consume over 34 otherwise billable hours per creative per year, representing a substantial portion of the non-creative tasks that already burden most teams. For mid-to-large-sized creative teams, that’s equivalent to nearly a full-time position.

Common font management challenges.

Survey insight: The most frequently encountered font management challenge (participants could choose all that apply):

Font licensing complexity. **42%**

Font version control. **42%**

Inconsistent font usage across teams. **40%**

License compliance. **38%**

Difficulty in font discovery. **36%**

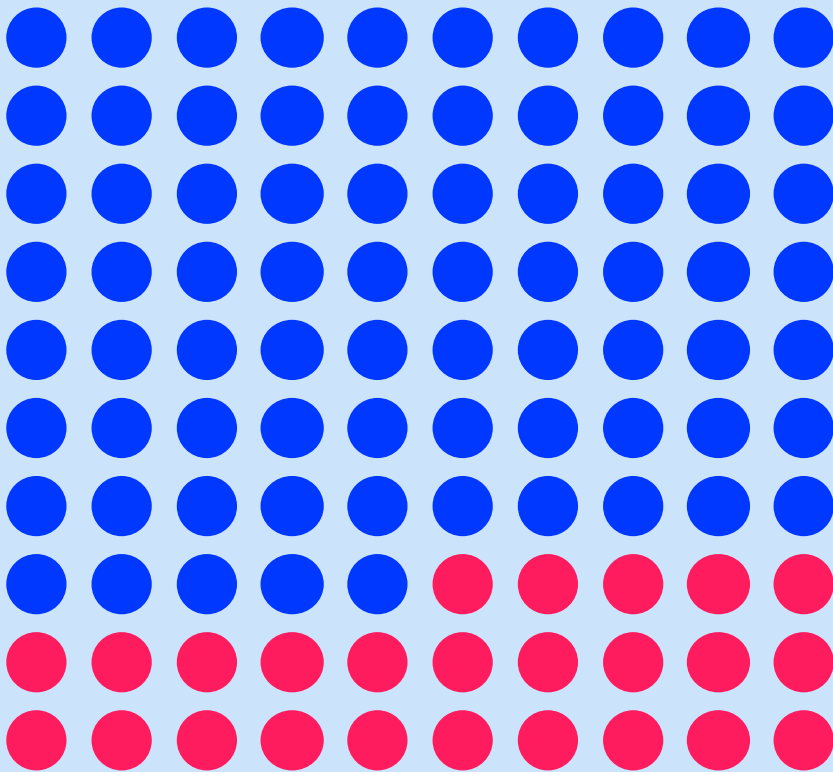
Lack of centralized font library. **35%**

Beyond administration.

Strategic font management isn't just about operational efficiency – it's about transforming compliance risk into a creative advantage by eliminating workflow disruptions, ensuring consistent brand expression, and freeing teams to focus on innovation.

Time allocation.

Creative work vs non-creative tasks.



● 75% Creative work

● 25% Non-creative tasks

Actionable improvements.

To immediately take control of your font workflow:

1.

- ☐ Replace spreadsheets with automated font management tools to reduce tracking errors.

2.

- ☐ Prevent personal fonts from entering your workflow without proper licensing checks.

3.

- ☐ Implement auto-activation to eliminate font-related workflow disruptions, ensure version consistency, and save up to 34 billable hours per year per team member.*

4.

- ☐ Scan projects for font usage against licensing terms before handoff to production to prevent compliance risks.

* Note: Font version control presents a critical challenge for 42% of survey participants, often leading to unintentional licensing violations.

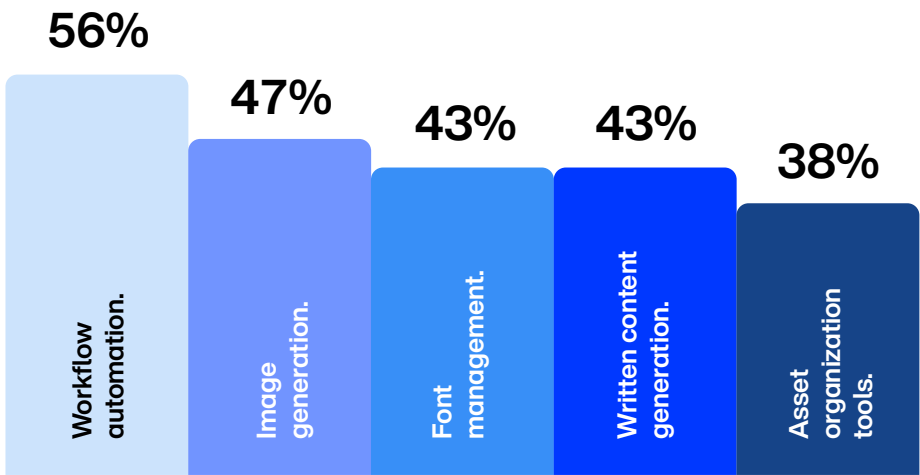
Extensis Connect's Font Sense ID™ minimizes licensing risk by stopping "silent font substitutions." When design applications can't find a specified font, they often replace it with an unlicensed version from the same family. Font Sense ID instead automatically activates the exact licensed font from your library.

Technology and creative workflow tools.

Creative operations increasingly relies on technology to streamline workflows and enhance collaboration.

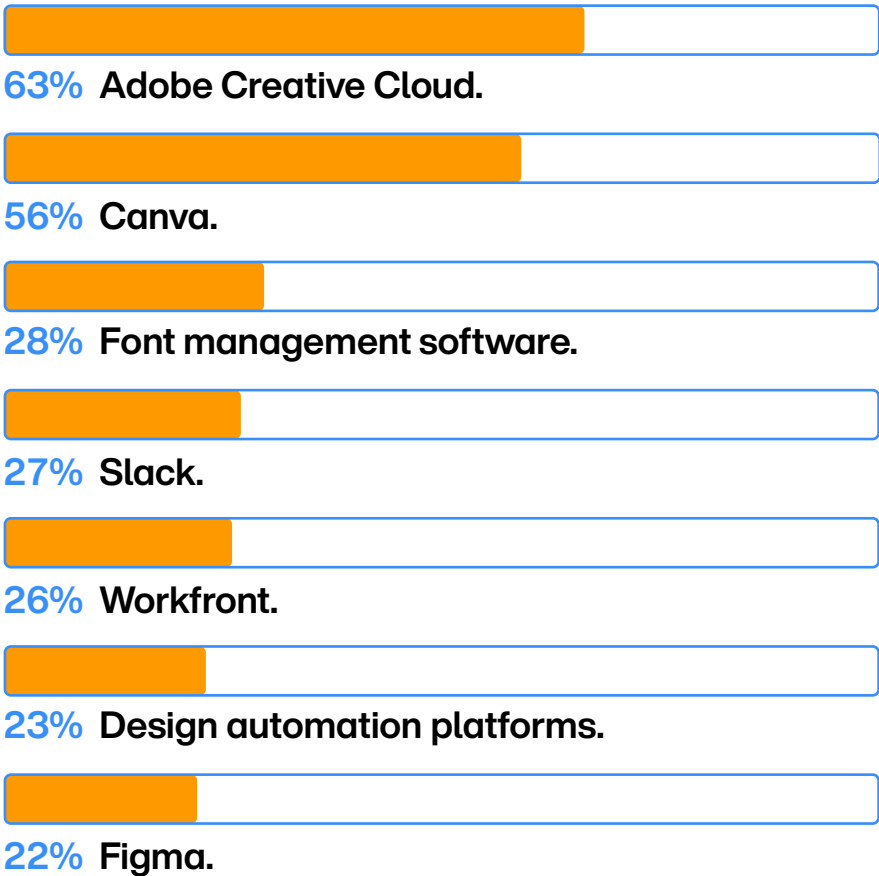
AI and automation adoption.

Survey insight: AI and automation tools currently integrated into existing workflows (participants could select all that apply):



Current creative workflow tools.

Survey insight: The most commonly used tools include (participants could select all that apply):



Barriers to technology adoption.

Survey insight: The primary barriers to AI or automation adoption (participants could select their top 4):

50% Technical complexity.

43% Privacy.

43% Cost.

37% Lack of understanding.

62% Quality of creative output.

53% Completion within budget.

47% Project completion time.

Regional privacy concerns.

Survey insight: Privacy concerns around AI adoption show significant regional variation. In Germany and the U.K., data privacy ranks substantially higher as a barrier to AI adoption compared to the United States, reflecting different regulatory environments and cultural attitudes toward data protection.

The integration imperative.

The most successful creative operations strategies don't just add new tools – they integrate technologies into cohesive ecosystems that support both creativity and efficiency.

Actionable improvements.

To immediately take control of your creative workflow tools:

1.

- ☐ Start with centralized font management to address immediate licensing and efficiency concerns.

2.

- ☐ Identify the highest-impact bottlenecks, then gradually integrate workflow automation tools based on bottleneck severity.

3.

- ☐ Create clear implementation timelines with defined success metrics to monitor ROI.

4.

- ☐ Focus on tools that enhance both operational efficiency and creative quality simultaneously.

Efficiency & performance measurement.

Effective creative operations requires meaningful measurement and performance tracking.

Survey insight: How teams measure success (participants could select all that apply):

- 62% Quality of creative output.
- 53% Completion within budget.
- 47% Project completion time.
- 45% Volume of work produced.
- 34% Stakeholder satisfaction.
- 1% Don't measure systematically.

43%

of teams now track ROI per creative project – proving that creative operations delivers measurable business value.

Organizations that can demonstrate this impact secure more resources and strategic influence.

The measurement evolution.

Forward-thinking organizations are moving beyond time and budget metrics to measure the business impact of creative operations.

Future outlook & improvement.

As creative production demands continue to evolve, creative operations will play an increasingly vital role in organizational success.

Scaling concerns.

Survey insight: The biggest concerns about growing and scaling creative operations:

- | | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|-----|------------------------------|
| 25% | Maintaining creative quality. | 17% | Managing increased workload. |
| 22% | Technology integration. | 16% | Budget constraints. |
| 22% | Team skill development. | 7% | Controlling costs. |

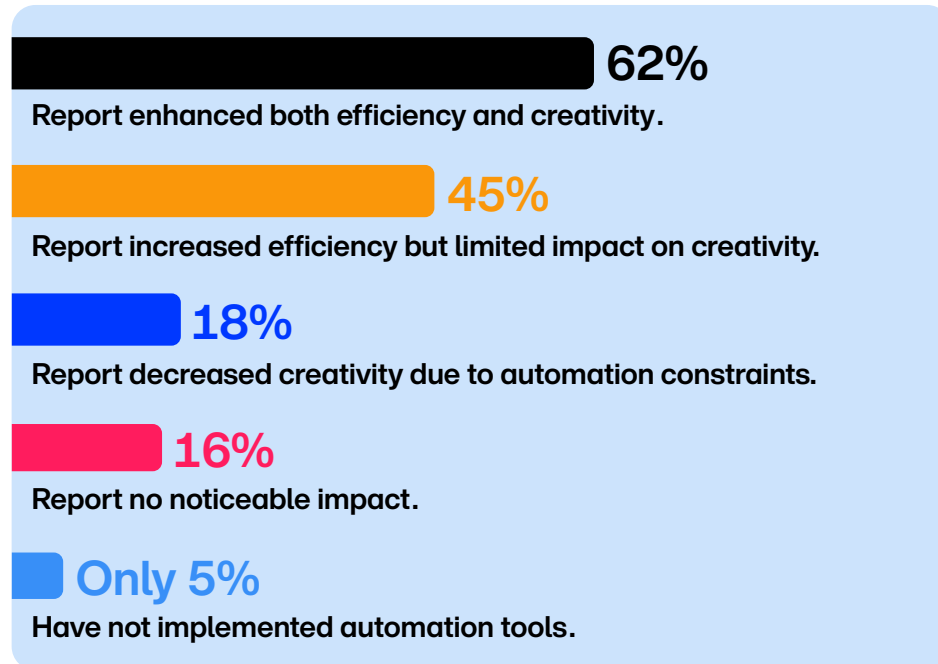
Impactful emerging technologies.

Survey insight: Technologies expected to have the biggest impact (participants could select all that apply):

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| AI-driven content creation. | 61% |
| Workflow automation. | 58% |
| Augmented/virtual reality. | 41% |
| Real-time collaboration tools. | 34% |

Impact of AI and automation.

Survey insight: Among organizations that have implemented AI or automation (participants could select all that apply):



The future-ready team.

As creative production demands continue to grow, creative operations will become an even more critical component of organizational success.

Actionable improvements.

To immediately take control of your creative operations to prepare for future creative demands:

1.

- ☐ Evaluate your current creative risk exposure through a comprehensive audit of font creative asset management practices.

2.

- ☐ Develop clear font and creative asset policies that balance collaboration with compliance.

3.

- ☐ Build scalable resource allocation models that can flex with variable workloads.

4.

- ☐ Implement ongoing educational initiatives to keep teams current on best practices and technology adoption.

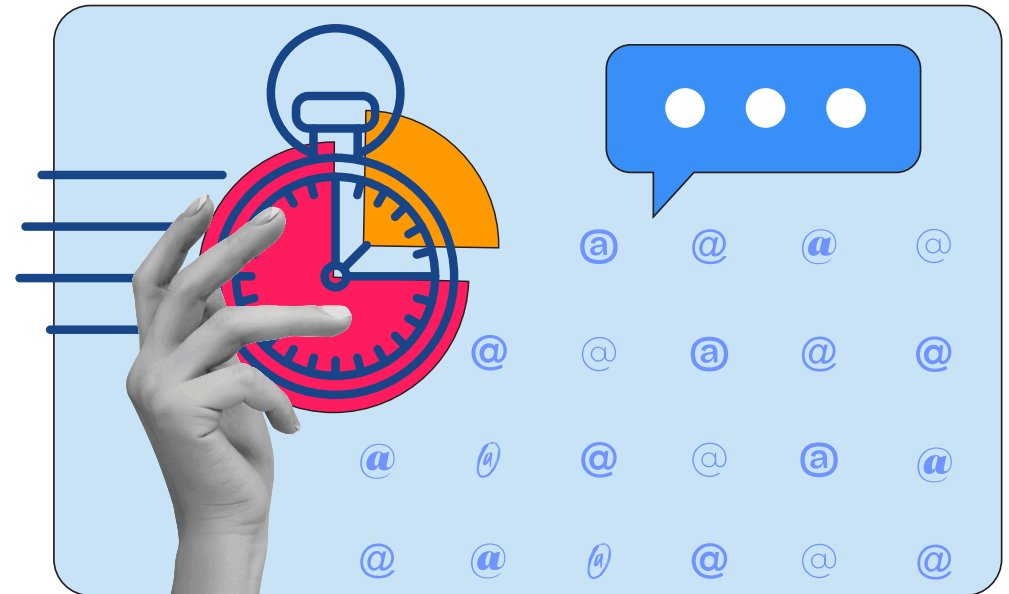
The transformative impact of effective font management.

Effective font management delivers measurable benefits across multiple dimensions of creative operations, creating a virtuous cycle of improved efficiency, creativity, and business outcomes.

Survey insight: Organizations with optimized font management systems report:

- Reduced time spent on non-creative tasks, reclaiming up to **35%** of capacity for creative work.
- Improved ease of use for creative professionals, eliminating technical barriers.
- Access to higher-quality font resources that enhance creative output.
- Strengthened brand consistency across all touchpoints.
- Significantly improved ROI through combined efficiency and quality gains.

The impact extends beyond mere efficiency – effective font management fundamentally transforms how creative teams operate, directly contributing to business success through both risk reduction and creative enhancement.



The font management advantage.

When font management shifts from operational burden to strategic advantage, organizations experience a ripple effect of benefits that enhance both operational efficiency and creative quality.

Ten best practices for scaling creative excellence.

Based on our research and survey findings, we've identified ten best practices for scaling creative excellence through operational innovation:

1. Implement strategic font management.

What: Adopt specialized font management tools with automated compliance monitoring.

Why: Reduces licensing risks while ensuring brand consistency across all creative outputs.

Evidence: Organizations with effective font management report 42% fewer issues with font licensing complexity and 40% reduction in inconsistent font usage across teams.

2. Establish centralized font license and compliance management.

What: Implement centralized font license tracking with comprehensive compliance protocols.

Why: Creates systematic oversight of font licensing obligations while enabling quick discovery and reducing exposure to legal and financial risk.

Evidence: 68% of respondents struggle with licensing complexity, and 82% rate font management as critical to their operations.

3. Develop clear workflow frameworks.

What: Document and optimize creative processes with flexible standardization.

Why: Balances structure with creative freedom while eliminating bottlenecks.

Evidence: 32% of teams identify workflow bottlenecks as a top challenge; structured frameworks address this while still allowing for creative exploration.

4. Establish cross-functional collaboration protocols.

What: Create shared terminology, clear handoff procedures, and integrated feedback systems.

Why: Builds mutual understanding between creative and business teams.

Evidence: 34% of respondents cite collaboration as a key challenge; improved protocols lead to fewer revisions and faster approvals.

5. Leverage automation strategically.

What: Implement AI and automation for repetitive tasks, with 46% prioritizing font license management automation.

Why: Frees creative talent for high-value work while maintaining quality control.

Evidence: 62% of organizations report that automation enhances both efficiency and creativity when implemented thoughtfully.

6. Implement proactive compliance measures.

What: Create comprehensive guidelines, regular audits, and team education on licensing.

Why: Transforms compliance from a limitation to a strategic advantage.

Evidence: 52% of respondents rate licensing usage and compliance as a top priority in font management, with structured approaches reducing risk exposure.

8. Establish continuous learning programs.

What: Provide regular skill development in both creative and operational areas.

Why: Teams that struggle with technology integration and adopting new methodologies benefit from structured skill development

Evidence: 132% of respondents rate integrating new technologies as a top challenge for scaling creative operations.

7. Create performance measurement frameworks.

What: Define meaningful metrics that balance efficiency with creative quality.

Why: Connects creative metrics to business outcomes and enables data-driven improvement.

Evidence: 62% of teams measure quality of creative output, while 53% track completion within budget – integrated metrics provide a holistic view of creative value.

9. Prioritize team well-being.

What: Monitor workload, create supportive environments, and recognize all forms of excellence.

Why: Prevents burnout while maintaining creative energy and operational momentum.

Evidence: 30% of teams identify preventing burnout as a key challenge; well-being initiatives reduce turnover and maintain quality under pressure.

10. Build scalable resource allocation models.

What: Develop flexible staffing strategies and clear prioritization frameworks.

Why: Enables growth without proportional increases in overhead or complexity.

Evidence: 35% struggle with controlling costs; scalable models allow for efficient expansion while maintaining profitability.

The operations mindset.

Implementing these best practices requires more than tools—it demands a cultural shift that values operational excellence as a creative enabler, not a constraint.

Conclusion:

The strategic imperative.

Creative operations isn't just about efficiency – it's about transforming how creative teams deliver value in an increasingly complex environment.

By embracing operational excellence, creative teams of all sizes can:

- 1 Reclaim valuable creative time.
- 2 Minimize compliance risks.
- 3 Improve creative quality.
- 4 Enhance team satisfaction.
- 5 Deliver measurable business impact.

The organizations that thrive will be those that successfully balance creative brilliance with operational excellence – making creative operations everyone's responsibility.

The bottom line.

Creative teams that embrace operational excellence can reclaim up to 35% of their time for creative work while dramatically reducing compliance risks.

Take the next step.

Ready to transform your creative operations?

Whether you want to see our solutions in action or assess your current state, we're here to help you reclaim valuable creative time and prove measurable business impact.

Request a demo.



See how our solutions can
reclaim 35% of your creative time.

Learn more.

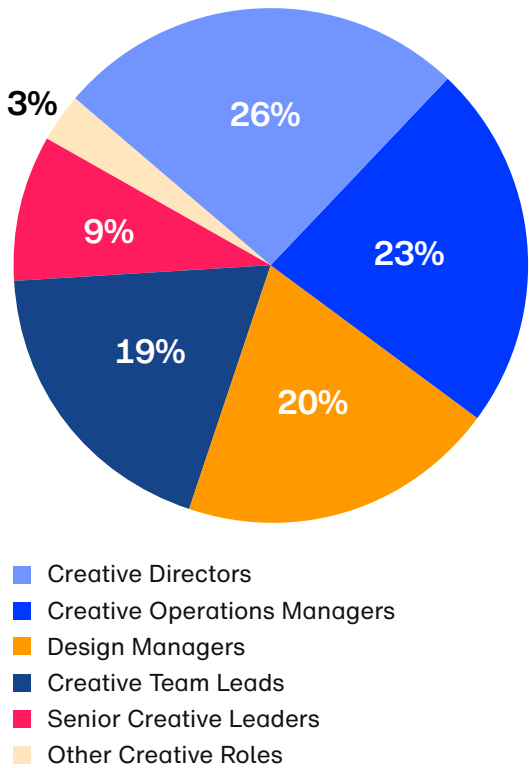


Discover our full range of solutions
for creative teams of all sizes.

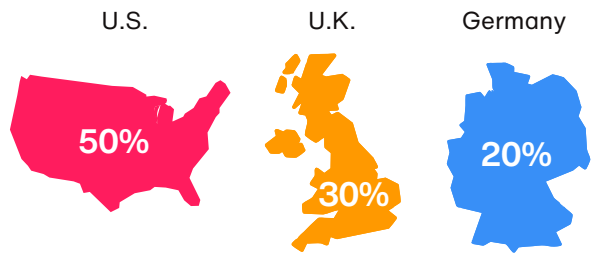
Survey demographics and methodology.

This research is based on a comprehensive survey of 1,008 creative professionals across multiple industries and organization sizes, conducted April 2025.

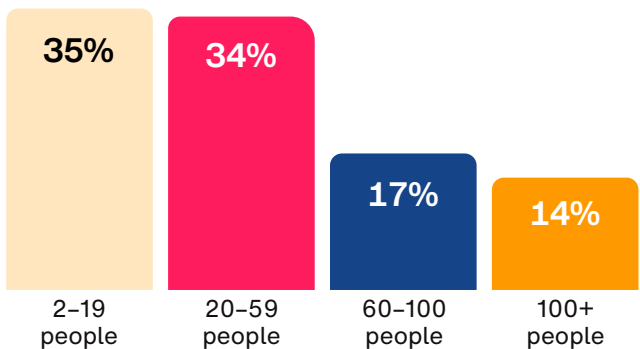
Respondent breakdown:



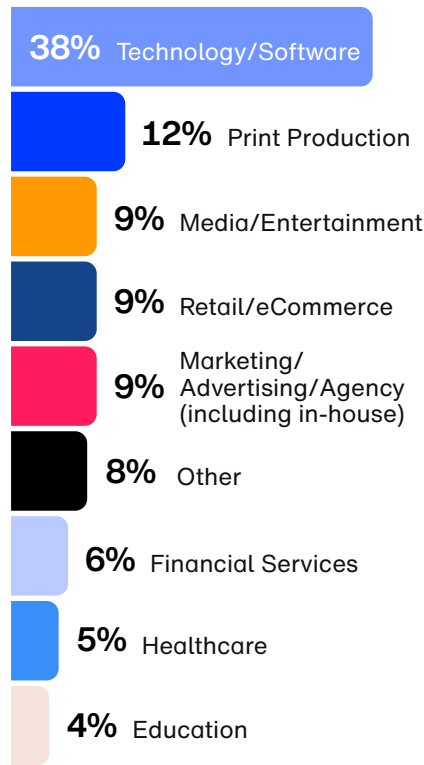
Audience:



Team sizes:



By industry:



Thank you.

The Scaling Creative Operations Survey was conducted by Monotype and Extensis, a Monotype company.

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