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5 Common Frustrations of In-house Creative Teams
and How to Solve Them

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Out of the Mouths of Creatives

The life of an in-house creative team is fraught with frustrations—some even painful enough to tweet about. This eBook is a collection of real Twitter® tweets we found using the hashtags: #GraphicDesignProblems, #GraphicDesignProbs, or #CreativeProbs.*

These tweeps aren't alone; in-house creative teams the world over share their pain. And even though these #CreativeProbs can be summed up in 140 characters or less, they shouldn't be dismissed with a simple, "Well, that's just the life of a creative." These are real problems, and believe it or not, they have real solutions. In the following pages, you'll read about five common lamentations of in-house creative teams and what your team can start doing now to overcome them.

*Twitter handles and names have been changed to protect tweeter identities. Any connection between our made-up names and handles to real people is purely accidental.



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**Having more work than time,
then getting urgent requests.
#CreativeProbs**

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12:30 PM - 15 Jul 2014

Why is everything an emergency?

A day in the life of an in-house creative team almost always consists of several last-minute work requests (also lovingly referred to as, “fire drills”) that somebody needs by the end of the day. These requests:

- Derail and interrupt whatever work was already being done
- Push back all other deadlines
- Require everyone to drop what they’re doing to save the day
- Shift the entire team’s priorities, regardless of importance

In reality, creative teams already have more work to do than time in the day—and most team members consistently work more than 50 hours a week, plus nights and weekends—which makes for some seriously burned out and overloaded employees.

U.S. companies lose between \$200-\$300 billion per year due to absenteeism, tardiness, burnout, decreased productivity, worker’s compensation claims, increased employee turnover, and medical insurance costs resulting from work-related stress.¹

Get a better grip on your workload

The life of a creative doesn't have to be cluttered by chaos. Here are three steps to eliminating fire drills and last-minute requests:

STEP 1: MANAGE AND FILTER REQUESTS

Your team will always be slaves to fire drills—expected to drop everything to fulfill a last-minute request, regardless of importance—unless you get organized. To solve this, develop a standardized method for receiving requests, whether that means a request management tool or a designated email alias like requests@yourcompany.com. Make sure you only have one gatekeeper—a traffic manager or similar—to keep things simple.

52% of creatives named managing heavier workloads as the greatest challenge for in-house teams over the next 3-5 years.²

STEP 2: DEVELOP A BALANCED SCORECARD FOR NEW REQUESTS

Start with your company goals in mind. Then, make a list of the types of work requests you generally receive. Assign

points to the different request types based on their alignment with strategic goals and/or possible ROI. Include any other variables necessary. Then, whenever your team receives new work requests (emergency or not) assign them points based on your scorecard and value and prioritize accordingly. You may also want to set weekly point goals for your team based on the size of your requests and effort needed.

STEP 3: SAY “NO” WHEN YOU NEED TO

Nobody likes to say no, especially creatives, because they don't want to be seen as difficult to work with or unhelpful. But saying yes to every new request that comes your way will lead to more work than can ever realistically be completed. So, be strategic. Check your scorecard. If a new request scores low, tell the requestor “no” or at least, “not now.” Make sure you can explain to them why their request is low priority. You may receive some pushback at first, but like any process, the more you stick to your guns, the more others will start to comply.



Revisionista
@revisionista



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By naming a file “final” you automatically doom it to six more revisions.

#CreativeProbs

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2:48 AM - 18 Jul 2014

Revisions may be the death of you

Every in-house creative team knows that revisions need to happen. Most teams typically factor in time for two or three rounds, because revisions and feedback help turn a first pass into a world-class finished product. But when two or three rounds turns into hours of rework, last minute changed minds, or glacial-pace approval processes, there's a problem.

Too often, the simple concept of feedback grows into an all-consuming enemy that no one can conquer. When this happens, deadlines get missed, other projects get delayed, and the creative and stakeholder get thrown into a battle of the egos that threatens to start the next World War.

More than 70% of marketers report using the phrase “final-final” at work more than half of the time.³

Turn war into peace with automation

The solution to revision and approval wars isn't hatred and finger pointing. It's automation.

MANAGE REQUESTOR EXPECTATIONS

One of the single most important things an in-house creative team can do is manage the expectations of their requestors. When you don't manage expectations properly, you end up with too many revisions and even more resentment. Do this by first using a creative brief for all new projects—not just the big ones. It's important to gather all the client's wants and needs up front and have communications about the project before the project begins. This way, if expectations or requests are unreasonable or not best practice, you can find solutions to those issues early on and spare yourselves the rework.

Only 16% of in-house creative teams use creative briefs on all of their projects.⁴

AUTOMATE APPROVAL PROCESSES

For creative teams, approvals can easily be the worst part of the workflow. It's in approvals where egos clash, feedback contradicts, and bottlenecks delay. The best way to mitigate these issues is by setting clear approval paths before you begin your project. Determine at each step of the revision process who needs to see your piece, when, and in what order. Additionally, if you find an online digital proofing tool to help, you'll be able to make sure everyone is approving the correct version, see whose feedback may be contradicting, and even gather all feedback at one time to streamline the process.



CommuniCreate
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**Mondays mean emails.
Emails mean revisions.
It's a never-ending cycle.
#CreativeProbs**

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10:30 AM - 21 Jul 2014

Emails make us dread Mondays

You gotta love email, right? It's the best thing since sliced bread! Well, maybe 20 years ago it was. These days, email has become more of a burden than anything else. Most creative teams are drowning in emails and spending hours a day just sifting through their inboxes trying to find relevant updates on their projects. The problem is, so much email back and forth creates too much room

for error—communications get lost, accidentally overlooked, or deleted and it takes ages to find the information you need about specific jobs you're working on, which often negatively affects deadlines and client relationships.

63% of marketers rank overflowing email inboxes as their #1 work inefficiency.⁵

Get crisp about communication

If trying to communicate about work takes more time and effort than actually executing on work, there's a problem.

COLLABORATE WITH CONTEXT

One of the biggest problems with using email to communicate is it's messy. Email threads constantly include unnecessary people or forget to include necessary people. Individual emails or threads often get lost or buried and take too much time to find, and because multiple people can't contribute to one email, email chains grow longer and longer each day, forcing people to spend too much time scrolling through just to find the data or information they need. To combat this, learn to collaborate within the context of the work you're doing, so all communication connected to a single task or project is collected and visible in one place. Use work management tools with built-in collaboration to save your team a lot of time and headaches.

INVEST IN DIGITAL PROOFING

If you're still managing feedback or approvals with printed assets in file folders and red pens, you're making everyone's lives much more difficult than they need to be. Save time and frustration by investing in digital proofing. With digital proofing, you can streamline feedback processes by allowing multiple approvers to provide feedback at one time. You can also ensure that everyone is proofing the correct and most recent version of an asset, as well as compare versions side by side. Proofing tools collect everyone's feedback in one place, let others see what else has been said to minimize duplicate or contradictory comments, and make a creative's job much, much easier.

44% of in-house creative teams are not taking advantage of digital proofing. (CELLA)⁶

A single proofing solution can give you 56% faster speed-to-market of your projects, 59% less time spent managing proofs, and 29% reduction in number of revisions.⁷



WannaBeExpert
@wannabeexpert



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How do you help clients see you as an expert?
#CreativeProbs

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5:36 AM - 23 Jul 2014

If I have to hear “Make it pop more” one more time...

It’s a struggle, getting clients to view you as a strategic partner and expert in your craft instead of some infinite resource akin to a machine. One of the biggest contributors to this problem is a lack of trust or credibility from your clients. If your team isn’t consistent about hitting deadlines and budgets, keeping the client informed, and managing expectations, your clients throughout the organization will only view you as difficult to work with. They won’t ask for your opinion, consult your

knowledge about design or content best practices, and many will begin to outsource—a direct threat to the existence of your team. So, how do you get them to view you and your team as experts?

70% of in-house creative teams cite client behaviors as their top challenge in 2014. (CELLA).⁸

39% of in-house creative teams say gaining respect from their internal clients is their biggest challenge. (CELLA).⁹

Build relationships on a foundation of trust

Every kind of lasting relationship needs to be built on trust. Here are a few best practices for getting the cred you deserve:

DELIVER WHAT AND WHEN YOU PROMISE

It sounds obvious, but you'd be surprised (or maybe you wouldn't) to know how often this doesn't happen. The first step in building trust and credibility with your client is by delivering what you say you will, when you say you will. This means your time estimations need to be near perfect. And there's no better way to do that than by accurately tracking your time. There are several tools available to help your team do this, but what really matters is that you be able to accurately compare your planned vs. actual hours on like projects. After two or three of these projects are completed, you should have a pretty decent idea of how long they will take you. You may even have a good idea of which team member is faster at what and can plan your resources accordingly in the future.

41% of in-house creative teams do not track their time. 16% track time manually. (CELLA).¹⁰

CONSIDER BECOMING AN IN-HOUSE AGENCY

This move won't necessarily make sense for every team, but if your in-house creative services team is large (20+ team members) and needs a better way to prove its existence, consider doing what creative teams of companies like Disney, Best Buy, Hyundai, and American Express are doing: becoming full-service in-house agencies. This accomplishes a number of things. First, your team functions like an agency and therefore can be competitive and win the best projects. Second, in-house agencies can win awards, just like regular agencies, to help them build credibility and are often more likely to be seen as business partners and experts than just shared resources. Becoming an in-house agency is a very strategic move and, if executed correctly, can protect your team from being replaced by an outside agency or from losing projects to outsourcing.

In 2013, 58% of creative teams reported being full-service, in-house agencies. Up 16 percentage points from 2008.¹¹



MisunderstoodCreative 
@misunderstoodcreative

 Follow

The question, “What does a creative team do?” infuriates me more than it probably should. [#CreativeProbs](#)

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9:15 AM - 27 Jul 2014

They think all we do is pick out colors...

Maybe it's cliché, but it still holds true that few people within companies have any idea what their creative services team even does, besides design swag and pick out colors. It's this common misunderstanding that leads to the rest of the company, and even executives, questioning the value of the in-house creative team. In fact, many creative teams live day-to-day hoping and praying that they will still have their jobs tomorrow and scrambling to find ways to prove their value.

This misunderstanding occurs because of one unfortunate problem: a lack of visibility. When the rest of the company has no transparency into what your team accomplishes or the value you bring to the table, you will always be under high scrutiny.

33% of in-house creative teams say value recognitions from the rest of the company is their biggest challenge.¹²

Prove your team's value

Your team has value, but how do you prove it? Here are a few tips for giving the rest of the company visibility into what you really do:

BE COMPLETELY METRICS DRIVEN

Creative types hate to hear this, but it's true. The more often and accurately you can track your value with metrics (i.e. how many projects your team completes per quarter or per year, how many of those are on-time and within budget, and how much those projects contribute to pipeline), the more insights you'll have into how you can improve moving forward and the more the rest of the company will understand your worth. In addition, consider instituting a quarterly MegaDemo, or some sort of a presentation where each subset of your team presents to the company what they accomplished during the quarter and how and why those accomplishments matter.

STOP MANAGING YOUR WORK IN SPREADSHEETS

Most creative teams have a love-hate relationship with spreadsheets that leans more on the side of hate. Why? Because spreadsheets are seen as a necessary evil. They're awful and clunky (not to mention, ugly), and you can never be sure that they're 100% accurate or up-to-date. Even using a Google Doc, where multiple people have access without having to email back-and-forth, gives no real way to track who makes changes and when. In the end, spreadsheets are nothing but hours of manual labor. Instead, find a work management tool that can eliminate your spreadsheets, update automatically and in real time, and provide visibility to all relevant parties.

| *82% of companies use spreadsheets to manage their work.¹³*

#CreativeProbs are what you make them

In the end, your in-house creative team has the power to solve all your creative problems and frustrations—you just have to start now to make the change. By managing your work with more visibility and the right structure, you'll dramatically improve the state of your team, kill your work chaos, and show everyone why your team is valuable and awesome.

WORKFRONT MARKETING WORK MANAGEMENT


Solving the frustrations and #creativeprobs of in-house creative services teams worldwide.













Workfront is a cloud-based Marketing Work Management solution that helps in-house creative teams and agencies, marketing departments, and external agencies conquer the chaos of excessive email, redundant status meetings, constant rework, and tedious approval processes. Unlike other tools, Workfront Marketing Work Cloud is a centralized, easy-to-adopt solution for managing and collaborating on all creative work through the entire work lifecycle, which improves team productivity, credibility, and executive visibility. Thousands of enterprise marketing teams and agencies trust their work to Workfront, such as Adobe, Cisco, HBO, Covario, Ralph Lauren, SapientNitro, REI, Trek, Schneider Electric, Tommy Hilfiger, and ATB Financial. To learn more, visit marketing.workfront.com or follow us on Twitter @Workfront_Inc.

See how Workfront can solve your #creativeprobs. Contact us at:

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