SHOE STORE

Logo Size

Featured Product

Background Color

4.1 AESTHETICS ↑54%

3.8 MEMORABILITY ↓17%

Headline Length

$100 OFF
SPRING SALE STARTS TODAY

Subtext Copy

Call To Action

SHOP NOW

Releasing the Power of
Digital Creative

If Advertisers Want Better Creative, What's Getting in the Way?

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Executive Summary

In association with Ad-Lib.io, a Smartly.io company, WBR Insights conducted a survey of 100 major U.S. brands and multi-brand retailers with advertising budgets greater than $50M million to better understand the challenges faced by marketers who aspire to improve the efficacy of their digital marketing.

Marketers have long known the value of Creative in driving business outcomes. However, concerns are rising over the long term viability of investing in media optimization alone. **Are advertisers seeking solutions that will help them better connect their big ideas to compelling, audience-driving advertising campaigns?**

The overwhelming conclusion is "yes"—Creative is perceived as the next frontier to improve campaign performance.

89% of respondents see creative capabilities as in their top four priorities for improving ROAS through strategies such as:
- Scaling creative production
- Boosting creative acumen
- Increasing ad relevance

But what's standing in the way of capitalizing on these creative levers?

> An overwhelming 90% of enterprise marketers believe their creative and media teams are not well aligned, which limits the potential of creative to drive marketing outcomes.

Additional areas of need highlighted by the survey respondents focused on two issues:
- **The creative agility needed to activate, scale and resuse creative assets**
- **The need for creative data and intelligence to optimize performance**

To address these issues, 97% of the respondents who do not already have technology in-house are seeking solutions that will automate their creative capabilities.

The takeaway? Technology is increasingly seen as an opportunity, and not the enemy, for Creative effectiveness in campaign performance. Technology solutions that align creative and media teams and combine capabilities to both enhance campaign agility and augment campaign intelligence will be heavily sought after.

89%

Prioritizing Investment in Creative

64%

See Data and Intelligence as Important

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Sale starts May 1

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The Perceived State of
Creative & Media Alignment

As cookie-based targeting continues to lose its effectiveness, it's more important than ever to align media and creative teams to execute personalization and relevance strategies that tap into digital creative's power to boost campaign performance. But how can teams make sure they capture the full value of their creative assets and ideas if media and creative efforts are siloed?

If advertisers and marketers are going to go all-in on creative, they must ensure their media and creative teams are aligned on the goals. Of all the insights from the survey, this one stood out – the overwhelming majority of respondents felt that creative and media teams are not aligned and collaborating together.

To what degree are your creative and media teams currently aligned and collaborating in a single digital workspace?

We are fully aligned.

10%

We could improve our alignment.

51%

We are not aligned.

32%

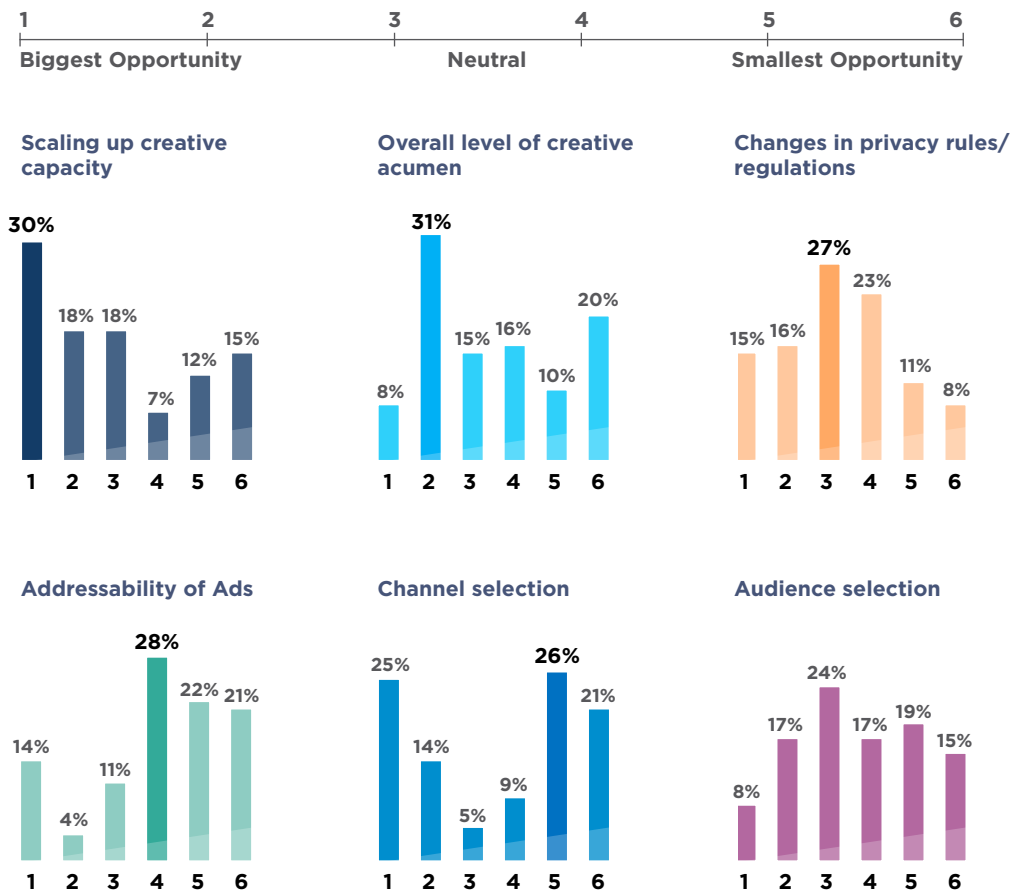We are not aligned and consider this is a major area for improvement.

7%

Researchers found that the vast majority of creative and media teams are not aligned or could be collaborating much more effectively. Overall, **90% of the respondents** to the survey say that their teams could improve their alignment. This includes 32% who say their teams are not aligned at all and 7% who say this is a major area for improvement.

Since the focus of the past decade has been on investment in media and audience reach, it's clear a lack of attention to the creative side of the equation has led to siloed teams and lack of collaboration.

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Digital Creative
PRIORITIES AND ROADBLOCKS

Digging into this perception of creative/media alignment to see how it might be reflected in performance improvement priorities for major advertisers, we heard that **creative scale and creative acumen were the first and second choices** in the list of opportunities that advertisers felt offered the greatest opportunity for improving ROAS.

Please rank the following options based on which you believe represent the biggest opportunities for improving your return on advertising.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Biggest Opportunity		**Neutral**		**Smallest Opportunity**	

Scaling up creative capacity

30% 18% 18% 7% 12% 15%
1 2 3 4 5 6

Overall level of creative acumen

8% 31% 15% 16% 10% 20%
1 2 3 4 5 6

Changes in privacy rules/regulations

15% 16% 27% 23% 11% 8%
1 2 3 4 5 6

Addressability of Ads

14% 4% 11% 28% 22% 21%
1 2 3 4 5 6

Channel selection

25% 14% 5% 9% 26% 21%
1 2 3 4 5 6

Audience selection

8% 17% 24% 17% 19% 15%
1 2 3 4 5 6

The Top Two: Scale and Acumen

Scale up creative capacity. The study found that 30% of the respondents believe scaling up their creative capacity is a top opportunity for improving return on ad spend. Why? A significant portion of brand manufacturers and multi-brand retailers are now recognizing the challenges associated with producing creative at scale and the importance of the productivity of their creative teams and assets as they seek to scale their advertising efforts.

Boost people's overall creative acumen. 31% of those surveyed said that increasing their team's overall creative acumen was the second biggest opportunity to boost ROAS. Historically, the ability to create and edit ads has resided in the hands of a few skilled people lucky enough to have the know-how required to operate design tools and the skills to conduct trafficking and project management. As teams look to have the informed conversations required to align creative and media efforts, the ability of all players in the campaign activation workflow to understand design best practices and the role creative plays in driving performance is increasingly important.

In addition, recognize that addressability and scale go hand-in-hand. One-quarter of the respondents ranking creative scale as their first choice would rank improving the addressability of their ads as a close second. Addressability refers to advertisers' ability to deliver more relevant ads to a specific audience. As teams look to make their ads more relevant for viewers, that means they need more of them.

Where Do Data and Intelligence Fit In?

Leverage intelligence to capture even more value. Indeed, most of the respondents (64%) say creative intelligence and data play a significant role as an optimization lever in advertising. The collection of media-supplied audience data assists in this activity to some degree, but it has been challenged by the loss of browser cookies, so capturing intelligence from the creative itself to guide performance improvement has risen in importance. These respondents recognize the value creative intelligence can have on their campaigns, and they've likely experienced improvements in their ad spending thanks to their use of intelligence.

How important is the role of creative intelligence and data as an optimization lever?
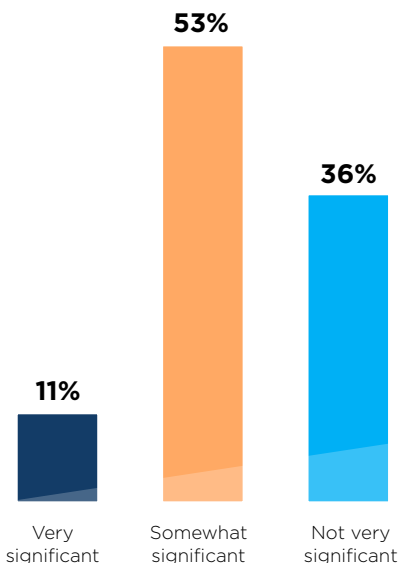
11%	Very significant
53%	Somewhat significant
36%	Not very significant

How do you expect your process for generating digital ad campaigns to change in the next three years?

"I believe we should have more support from AI in the whole process of digital ad generation over the next three years. Investments have already been made."

—Director, Brand Strategy, Brand Manufacturer

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Roadblocks for Creative:
Governance and Agility

Getting it Right the First Time

When creative and media teams aren't aligned, consumer experiences can fall flat. If the assets delivered by the creative teams and the targeting the media teams are using to deliver their ads don't line up (or even worse, no one even considered lining them up), from a consumer perspective, the intended message may miss the mark entirely.

Although there are many schools of thought on how advertising campaigns succeed, one of the prevailing theories centers on ad creative. Most advertisers agree that ad creative is the driving force behind successful advertising campaigns, and its quality must be protected for companies to see a viable return on their spending.

Teams lack a creative governance infrastructure. Unfortunately, some teams struggle to maintain their creative quality and addressability during the campaign activation process. This often occurs when teams are out of sync on channel requirements and priorities, or the urgency to scale creates misalignment. This can result in not only a loss of resonance with audiences, but also diminish the value of the brand in the eyes of the customer.

How often do your creative branding assets get rejected, diminished, or lost during the activation of a campaign?

Always or almost always
7%

Very often
29%

Somewhat often
36%

Not very often
16%

Not often at all
9%

Never
3%

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Most of the respondents say they have experienced this effect first-hand. Overall, 72% say their creative branding assets get rejected, diminished, or lost during the activation of a campaign at least somewhat often. This is a common occurrence when placing ads through third-party networks and channels.

The challenge for advertisers is determining how they can maintain the strength of their ad creative throughout the campaign production and activation processes. They need a means for teams to collaborate on creative development and automated tools for improving the speed at which they can adapt ads to different channels.
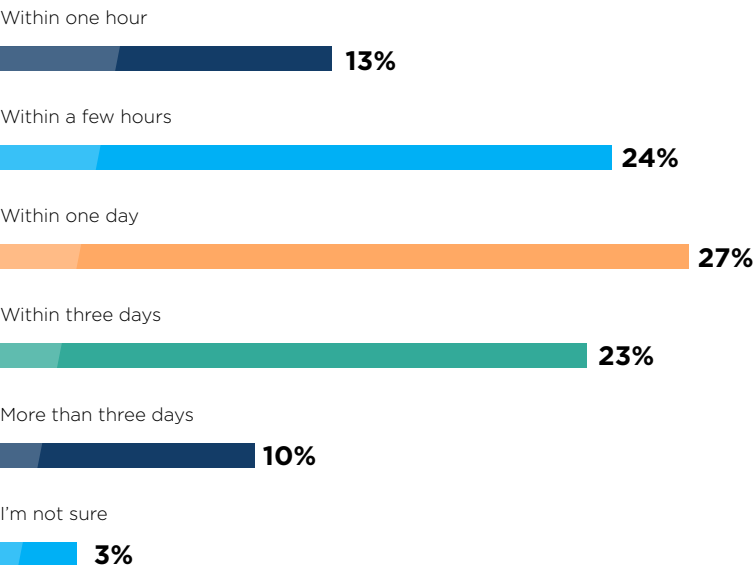
Ideally, assets will be aligned with strategic campaign objectives before they are reviewed by media teams for distribution. Not only will this improve the effectiveness of companies' digital ads overall, but it will also enable companies to scale their advertising capabilities quickly to meet demand.

Improving Scale and Productivity

Scaling creative production is time consuming. Producing contextualized creative at scale is particularly important when creating different versions of advertisements. Companies must be able to deliver ads based on customers' needs and interests, but they must also design ads based on different markets, regions, languages, channels, and more.

Currently 33% of the respondents say it takes three or more days to develop every version of an advertisement. This can lead to diminished ad effectiveness when the timeliness of advertising messages counts.

How quickly can you create all the versions of an ad that you need for a campaign that needs to reach multiple markets, regions, and channels?

Within one hour
13%

Within a few hours
24%

Within one day
27%

Within three days
23%

More than three days
10%

I'm not sure
3%

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Reusing assets is difficult. Furthermore, 77% of the respondents claim they must build creative assets from scratch, at least somewhat often, when personalizing campaigns. This implies that they are unable to reuse creative assets to develop concepts quickly and achieve faster speed to market.

How often do you have to build creative assets from scratch when personalizing campaigns to different audiences or regions?

Always or almost always
10%

Very often
33%

Somewhat often
34%

Not very often
10%

Not often at all
13%
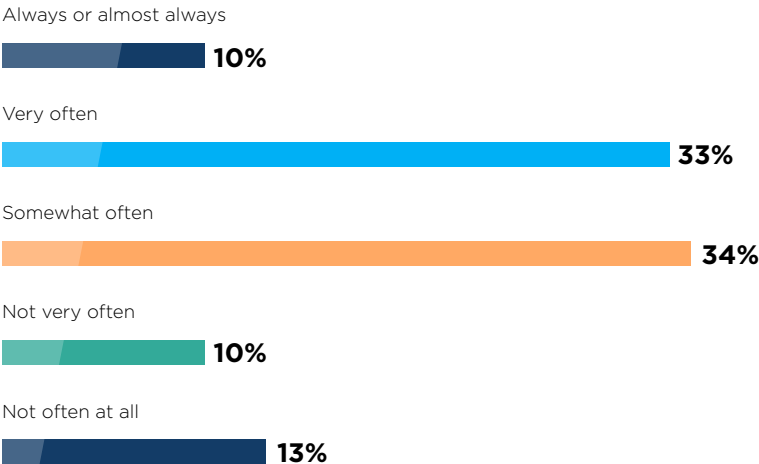
Introducing automation into this process could significantly maintain governance of creative quality and intent, improve the ability of creative teams to support scale without impacting relevance, and reduce costs of subsequent campaigns. Organizations that are struggling to adapt their ad creative quickly should adopt solutions that will allow them to align their teams and streamline these processes.

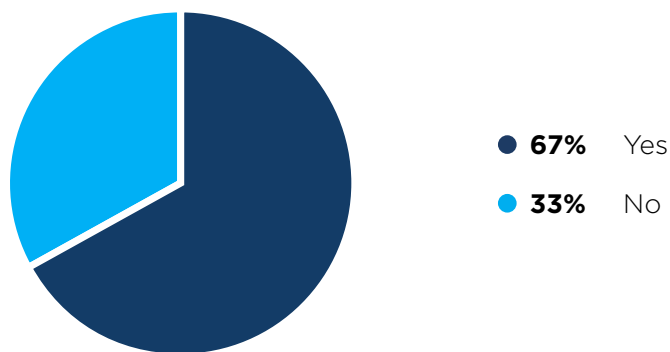**How do you expect your process for generating digital ad campaigns to change in the next three years?**

"We won't have to spend a lot of time in designing new campaigns as digitization will do most of the heavy work for us."

—Creative Director, Multi-Brand Retailer

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Expectations for
Technology

There are a variety of tools available that help advertisers with one or another aspect of connecting big ideas to data-driven advertising campaigns. Some focus on collaboration between teams to reduce the chance that creative assets will be diminished or rejected during the campaign activation process. Others manage the creative assets that are used for campaign activation cross-channel. Still others help creative teams incorporate data-driven insights into their design strategies. Currently, 67% of the respondents are using some flavor of creative management platform (CMP) for these reasons.

Do you currently use a creative management platform?

- **67%** Yes
- **33%** No

The right collaboration tool can even make a big difference in the effectiveness of an advertising campaign overall. **However, 33% of respondents do not currently use a creative management platform (CMP), digital asset management (DAM) solution, or a similar type of platform.**

How do you expect your process for generating digital ad campaigns to change in the next three years?

"The next three years will witness more automation and steady integration of digitization along the way."

—**Vice President, Brand Strategy, Brand Manufacturer**

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Do you currently have plans to explore or issue an RFP for creative automation technologies?

Yes, we are currently investigating this.

24%

Yes, within this year.

46%

Yes, but not this year.

27%

No, we have no plans of this kind.

3%

Among the 33% of respondents who don't currently use a CMP or other technology, most (70%) plan to investigate or issue an RFP for a platform at least within the next year. Almost one-quarter of these respondents (24%) are currently investigating in a CMP platform.

Looking into
the Future

In addition to helping their teams align around creative and strategic advertising objectives, the onboarding of these solutions could significantly improve advertisers' ability to adapt to the upcoming loss of the third-party cookie.

What are your plans for adapting to the removal of third-party cookies?

We only rely on advertising channels with first-party data.

55%

Leverage data and intelligence to improve campaign performance

52%

Develop alternative advertising channels

33%

Generate assets with more relevant creative

32%

Invest more with first-party data platforms like Google, Meta, and Amazon

25%

No plans - we never relied on third-party cookies.

6%

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While most of the respondents (55%) say they only rely on advertising channels that provide first-party data, 52% are still counting on creative intelligence to guide creative performance and 32% will look to increase the relevance of their creative.

In addition, the demise of the cookie is not seen as a disincentive to pursue digital advertising over other forms.

In light of the trend toward increased media spend on digital over TV, how are you planning to allocate your creative investment between digital channels and TV channels?

We advertise on digital channels, but not TV channels.
14%

We are shifting investment in creative toward digital.
32%

We are maintaining the same allocation between the two.
24%

We are shifting investment to TV channels.
17%

We advertise on TV channels, but not digital channels.
12%

We advertise on neither digital nor TV channels.
1%

While some advertisers are adapting to this change by diverting more of their investments into traditional advertising mediums, such as television, 32% say they are shifting their investment in creative to digital and only 17% are going the other way. Most of the respondents recognize that digital advertising is the future, regardless of the existence of cookies.

Aligning their teams to address the opportunities of this new digital advertising landscape may be a challenge. Thankfully, some solutions can help to bridge gaps between creative, media, and data teams in this new environment.

Using automation, collaboration, and workflow tools, teams can produce quality advertisements at scale. They can also better align their media and creative strategies to improve return on ad spend and engage customers with the type of content that drives sales.

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Conclusion:
Crossing the Creative & Media Divide

A greater focus on digital creative has the power to transform digital advertising. But as the industry moves away from reliance on cookies and other third-party data, marketers will need to find new ways to connect their big ideas with data-driven campaigns.

An intelligent creative management platform helps to streamline the creative process by bringing all team members together in one place. It provides a way for marketers to ensure that brand identity is consistently maintained and to share creative intelligence from successful campaigns with the entire team. For creative teams, it's an automation resource that reduces the effort to scale their creative, and for media teams, the platform is a tool to start using Creative as an additional lever for performance.

By understanding the obstacles and opportunities associated with campaign activation, advertisers can make sure they're prepared for the future of digital advertising. With a workflow, intelligence-sharing, and collaboration solution in place, they can release the full power of digital creative.
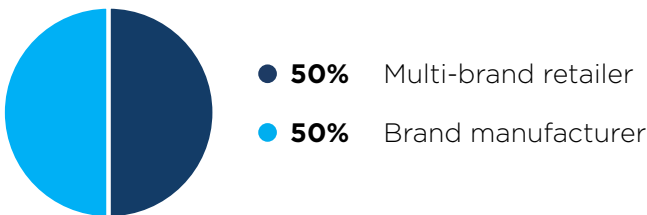
Key
Suggestions

- **Focus on creative as the driving force for transforming your digital advertising. Strong creative assets will become more important as the reliance on cookies diminishes.**

- **Find new ways to align your creative, marketing, and media teams. This will allow you to connect your big ideas with more audiences at scale.**

- **Adopt a comprehensive platform for creative automation and intelligence, and evaluate your current solution if it is not delivering on all fronts. This type of platform helps to streamline the creative process by bringing all team members together in one place, enabling the team to quickly generate variations of your ads and scale your strategy quickly.**
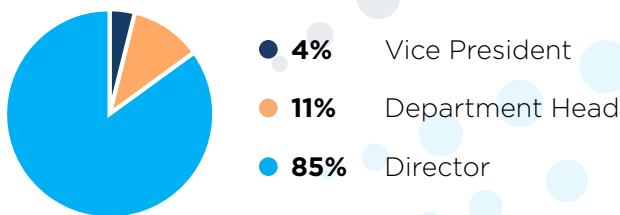
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About the
Respondents

The WBR Insights research team conducted live interviews with 100 marketing, brand strategy, media, and creative leaders from B2C brands to generate the results featured in this report. The respondents represent an even distribution of brand manufacturers and multi-brand retailers. All the companies surveyed advertise products to consumers online.
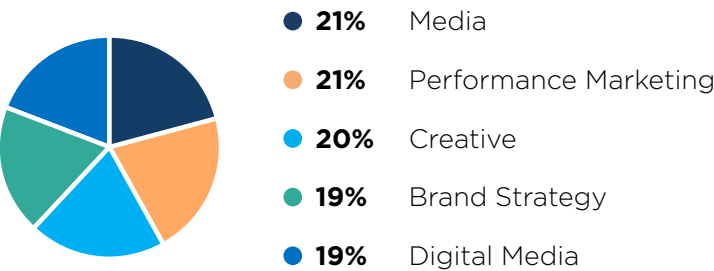
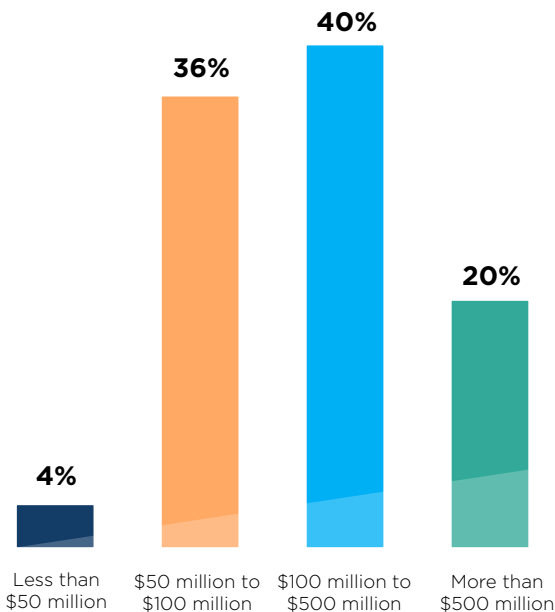## What type of company do you represent?

- **50%** Multi-brand retailer
- **50%** Brand manufacturer

What is your seniority?

- **4%** Vice President
- **11%** Department Head
- **85%** Director

What is your role?

- **21%** Media
- **21%** Performance Marketing
- **20%** Creative
- **19%** Brand Strategy
- **19%** Digital Media

What is your annual digital advertising budget?

4%	36%	40%	20%
Less than $50 million	$50 million to $100 million	$100 million to $500 million	More than $500 million

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About the
Authors

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Ad-Lib.io, a Smartly.io company, provides the leading next-generation Creative Management Platform to enable marketers at the world's largest brands to scale their digital creative. Ad-Lib.io connects creative and media workflows using intelligent automation, making it easy and fast to produce and optimize relevant ad creative across all digital channels. These ads are 60% more cost-efficient to produce, according to Ad-Lib.io's customers which include Estée Lauder, Samsung, Deliveroo and Johnson & Johnson. The venture-backed company -- recognized as a 2021 Start Up of the Year by Campaign Magazine -- was founded by former Google executives who understood the need to close the wide gap between creative concepts and digital media execution. Ad-Lib.io is headquartered in London, UK with offices in North America, Asia, Australia, Europe and the Middle East.

For more information, please visit **www.ad-lib.io.**

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eTail

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