Building a Creative Dream Team That's Positioned for Growth

A workbook for creative leaders.

Grow your business,
grow your team.

Your business is growing, and so are your customers' expectations. As a creative leader, you need to scale your team, and you want to do it right — in a way that both accelerates the business and fosters career growth for your team.

This hands-on guide is designed to help you think through the important questions you need to ask for smart growth. It's full of prompts and exercises to help you set goals, prioritize your work, and hire the right people. Use this workbook to walk through the process of building your creative dream team.

Let's get started.

> A lot of young teams get used to taking in every request and doing it all, and then you just become a service organization. In creative leadership, you want to own creative strategy, meaning, "How is creativity going to impact the business in a positive way, and what is the plan to get there?"

Adam Morgan
Executive Creative Director, Adobe

1. Know your business.

Understanding the goals and strategies of your business — not just your creative team — is essential to building a team that contributes to the bottom line. While creative leaders don't typically determine business strategy, you need to understand the strategy at more than a surface level to build a team that's aligned with it.

Use the following questions to check your knowledge of the bigger picture.

What type of business is it?

How does it make money?

What kind of creative work does it need?

In their book *The Discipline of Market Leaders*, Michael Treacy and Fred Wiersema make the case that no business can be all things to all people. Instead, companies succeed when they find a unique value they can deliver to a specific market. They do this by choosing one of three strategic areas (listed below) in which to excel, while performing adequately in the other two. **Select the strategic approach that best describes your company's strategy.**

Operational excellence. Companies that focus on operational excellence emphasize reducing costs through automation and streamlining. This strategy is volume-oriented, and it is ideal for markets where customers value cost over choice. Businesses that lead in operational excellence tend to be centralized and standardized.

Product leadership. Companies that go all in on product leadership emphasize high-quality products and experiences at premium prices. They build a culture of creativity, problem solving, and teamwork, and they rely on expensive talent to ensure quality. Businesses that succeed in product leadership leverage their expertise as a differentiating factor.

Customer intimacy. Companies that prioritize customer intimacy emphasize customer service, offering customized services and products that meet individual needs. They often feature bundled solutions based on deep knowledge of customers and their business processes. Businesses that lead in customer intimacy are often decentralized so they can be nimble and responsive.
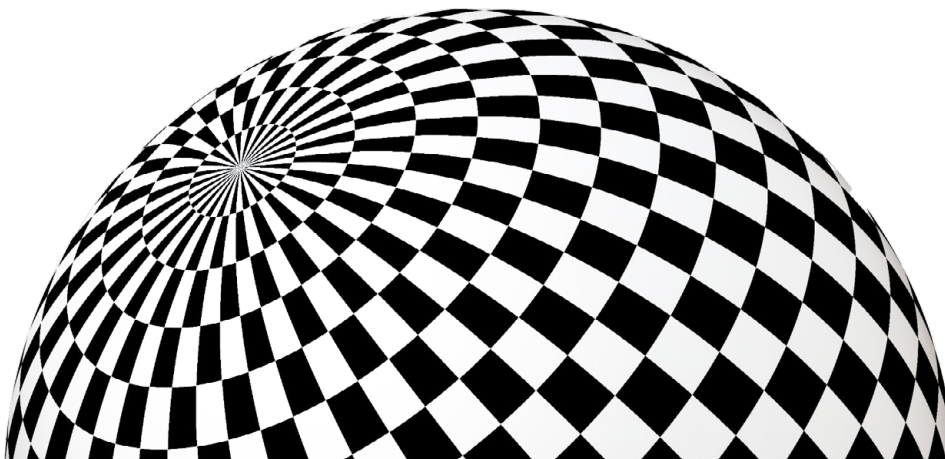
Another way to understand your company's strategy is to explore the competitive landscape. True competitive advantages are hard to come by and even harder to defend. Your company may have many strengths, but not every strength is a sustainable competitive advantage. The main types of advantages, according to strategy professor Bruce C. Greenwald, include:

- **Supply advantage**, such as proprietary technology, experience, exclusive supplier agreements, or government regulations

- **Demand advantage**, or captive customers due to habit, cost of switching, etc.

- **Economies of scale**, or the ability to reduce costs per unit as volume increases

For a deeper dive into this topic, see Greenwald's book with Judd Kahn, *Competition Demystified: A Radically Simplified Approach to Business Strategy*.

List your company's main competitors and note any competitive advantages you have.

Who are your top five competitors?

Does your company have any
competitive advantages?

Type of advantage
(supply, demand, or economies of scale)
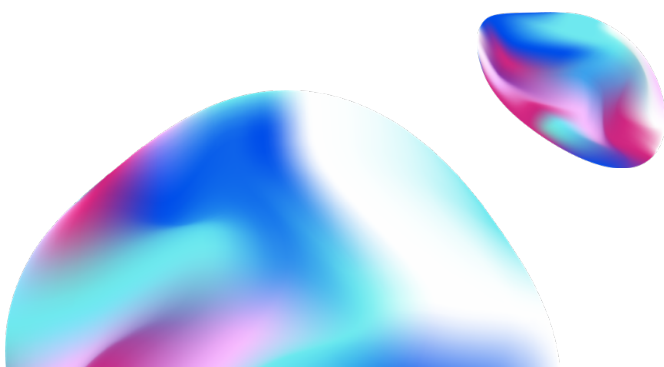
Finally — and this is key to both overall business strategy and creative work — you must be crystal clear about who your target customers are and what problem you help them solve. What are their pain points, and why should they buy from you rather than your competitors?

Use the following table to identify your main customer segments, their needs, and how you meet those needs. Be as specific as possible.

Target audience	The problem you help them solve	What you offer to help them solve it

Now, putting it all together: How do your company's strategy, competitors, and target audiences impact the demands on your creative team? What is your role in supporting the business strategy?
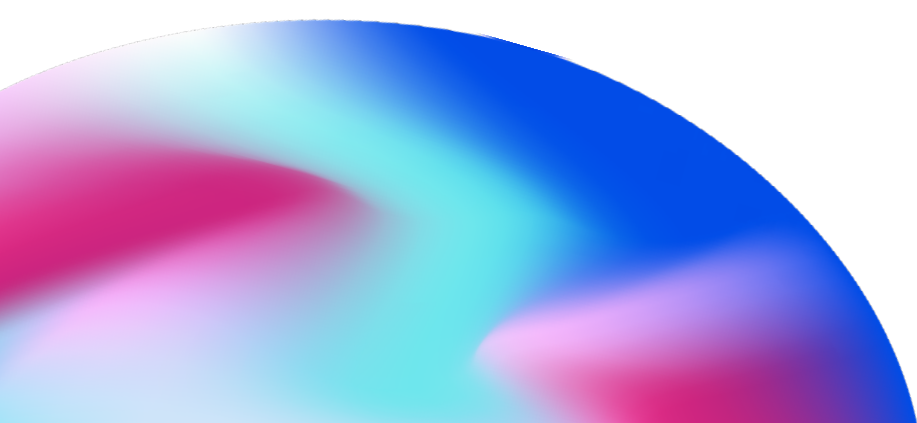
2. Set goals.

Before you decide how to organize your team, you need to be crystal clear on what the team is meant to accomplish. Clear goals function as a north star that guides all of your decisions on staffing and resource allocation. As you set goals specific to your team, consider things like productivity, quality, growth, and how you support the goals of the business, and any gaps between the creative content needed for the business strategy and current creative content. Where do you see yourself a year from now, or six months from now, and how will you know if you've achieved it?

One way to make sure your goals are useful and actionable is to use the **S.M.A.R.T.E.R.** framework.

Specific	Be clear and detailed about what will be achieved, why, where, and who is responsible.
Measurable	Define the metrics you will use to measure progress and success, including specific benchmarks.
Achievable	Choose a goal that is challenging but realistic given your constraints, and ensure you have the resources to accomplish it.
Relevant	Make sure your goal is something you want, not something you're doing for someone else, and that it's aligned with the company mission, values, and strategy.
Time-bound	Set a realistic and specific deadline for achieving your goal.
Evaluate	Regularly check in about progress and roadblocks, and ensure the goal remains attainable and realistic as time goes on.
Readjust	Make adjustments to the goal as you go along.

Based on your organization's business strategy, write two S.M.A.R.T.E.R. goals for your creative team. Then, on the right, check the boxes to ensure your goals are S.M.A.R.T.E.R.

Goal 1:

S
M
A
R
T
E
R

Goal 2:

S
M
A
R
T
E
R

Once you've got your north star, you're ready to chart a course. A SWOT analysis (short for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) can help you assess your position and choose the best path forward. In this exercise, strengths and weaknesses are internal attributes of your creative team, while opportunities and threats exist in the outer environment. Opportunities and threats could relate to your team, your company, or both.

Strengths — List your team's advantages, including things you're good at, resources, skills, assets, culture, etc.

Weaknesses — List your team's disadvantages, including things your competitors do better, resource limitations, shortfalls, etc.

Opportunities — List potential openings or gaps in the market, as well as opportunities created by your strengths.

Threats — List anything that could block your progress, including strong competitors, restrictions, or vulnerabilities created by your weaknesses.

How can you turn your strengths into opportunities that are aligned with your goals?
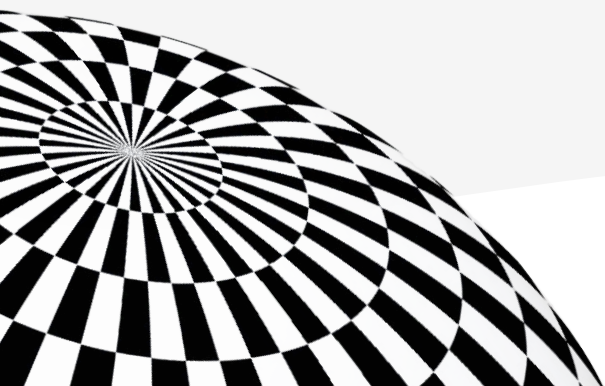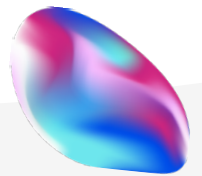
How can you mitigate your weaknesses and guard against threats?

"If you travel fast but are headed in the wrong direction, it can feel like you're making progress — but you could actually be moving farther away from your goals. So be really intentional. Direction matters more than speed."

Chris Do
CEO & Founder, The Futur

3. Prioritize your projects.

Even with clear goals and action plans, it can be difficult to know how to handle the many requests for creative content that come across your desk. But, if you have an established method for evaluating requests, you can weigh them against each other and make smart decisions about how to allocate your resources.

A decision matrix gives you such a method by assigning a priority score to each request, based on how aligned it is with business strategy and goals.

Start by using the first column to list the criteria you'll use to decide which requests to prioritize. For example, possible criteria could include:

- Budget is readily available, executive visibility is high, or the project supports the business plan.

- The project directly drives revenue, is cost efficient, or is time and effort efficient.

- Media budget, demand program, or promotional program is attached.

- The project is part of an integrated campaign with cross channel requirements (rather than a one-off project).

Use the sample criteria, along with your goals, to determine your own criteria. Then, use the second column to identify the relative importance of each criteria on a scale of 1-3.

	Scale of 1-3	Scale of 1-5	Important x Alignment
Criteria for project requests (Create your own based on your business strategy and goals)	**How important is this criterion?**	**How aligned is this project with the criterion?**	**Score**

Final score (sum of scores for all criteria)

Now your matrix is ready to use. Each time you receive a request, run it through the matrix by following these three steps:

- Evaluate on a scale of 1-5 how aligned the project request is to your criteria (column 3).

- Multiply the importance by the alignment to give the project request a score on each criteria (column 4).

- Add the scores for all criteria to get a final score for the project.

Once you've done this exercise for a few project requests, you'll start to see patterns and you'll be able to determine cutoffs for Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 projects. Then, you can prioritize according to the tiers.

For now, take a moment to reflect more generally on what the criteria you listed above mean for how you prioritize your team's work.

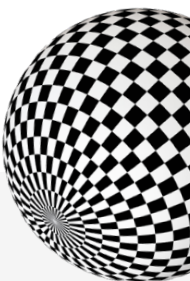Based on the criteria in your decision matrix, what types of projects will your team say yes to?

What types of projects will your team say no to?

> "Figure out what your team will create. Find and make a line in the sand, and only do that work that really impacts the business in the right way."
>
> **Adam Morgan**
> Executive Creative Director, Adobe

4. Hire the right people.

Hiring people is one thing. Hiring the right people — those with the skills that match your highest priority projects — is another. For example, hiring an amazing graphic artist is great — unless you already have several graphic artists and your Tier 1 projects call for other skills not represented on your team.

A simple skills gap analysis can help you identify which skills to hire for next. First, make a list of current members of your team and their skills. Then, keeping in mind your goals and the highest-priority projects you identified in the last section, make a list of the ideal number of team members with each type of skill they will need.

Current staffing — How many people are on your team now? List the job functions and skills represented. For example, 3 UX designers, etc.

Future staffing — How many people will be needed on your team in the future? List the job functions and skills they need to represent based on priority.

What gaps do you see between your current and future lists? Include gaps between the types of skills as well as the number of people with those skills.

Who do you need to hire to fill those gaps?

5. Empower your team.

Once you have your creative dream team in place, they'll need the right tools to turn your vision and goals into reality. Start by looking at the future staffing list you created on the previous page, and think about what those people will need in order to perform at their best.

What types of creative tools will your future team need to create top-tier work?

Now, think about your existing set of creative tools. Use the following checklist to help you determine whether you've outgrown your current setup and are ready for an upgrade.

Do your creative tools...

Enable a unified, obstacle-free workflow?
Encourage creative, out-of-the box thinking?
Facilitate collaboration within the creative team?
Promote collaboration with stakeholders in other departments?
Make it easy for team members to find files and assets?
Allow for team members to work remotely?
Integrate easily with communication and project management tools?
Permit your team to create the highest-quality work possible?
Help you evolve with your business as it grows?

If you answered no to any of these questions, consider exploring new options for tools that can better support your growing team.

What action do you need to take to further assess or upgrade your current toolkit?

6. Organize your work.

To keep your new creative team humming, build a seamless workflow that anticipates their needs and makes it easy to collaborate. Start by asking a few simple organizational questions that will help you identify areas where you need to insert a bit more structure or guidance.

Have we scheduled weekly team meetings?
Have we decided how our team will deal with file naming?
Do we know what libraries we will use, and are they all connected in our systems?
Have we chosen a project management system?
Have we created a system for handling approvals and delivery?
Do we know how we will archive creative materials?
Do we have a system for templates to maintain brand consistency?
Do we have creative briefs that encourage thorough understanding of projects?

Note any questions you still need to address and make a plan to address them.

Congratulations.

You're on your way to building a creative dream team that's positioned for growth. You can return to these strategies anytime you need a realignment or your business is ready to grow in a new direction.

For a deeper dive into these topics, watch — or take a second look at — the on-demand webinar on which this workbook is based, *Building a Creative Dream Team That's Positioned for Growth*, at RealCreativeLeadership.com.

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Adam Morgan
Executive Creative Director, Adobe

Chris Do
Founder & CEO, The Futur

Adobe can help.

Adobe Creative Cloud for teams gives you the world's best apps and services for empowering creative teams. This complete creative solution comes with 20+ industry-leading apps for design, photography, video, and web, including favorites like Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop. Creative Cloud for teams also helps you stay in sync with Creative Cloud Libraries, 1TB of storage per user, integration with other business tools, and premium-level support.

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