



# Creativity, collaboration and culture: the impact of working from home on marketers and marketing

# Executive summary

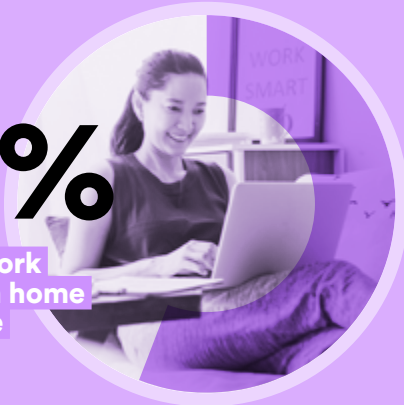
**Companies may be starting to reopen their offices after 15 months of staff working from home, but most marketers have little interest in going back to their former workplaces full-time.**

This is the key finding of this research, which is based on a focus group with marketing professionals and creatives, and a quantitative survey carried out for The Drum and Adobe by James Law Research Associates. Just over half of the survey respondents (56%) said they expect to work mostly from home in the future, a figure that rises to two-thirds of creatives. Almost a further quarter (22%) of both groups expect to divide their time equally between home and office.

The survey found that working from home has been a positive experience for most marketers. They enjoyed the greater flexibility and being able to spend more time with their families, and fewer than one in five (16%) struggled to work effectively. The thing almost all of them (92%) missed the most was the informal conversations with colleagues.

**56%**

expect to work mostly from home in the future



**22%**

of both groups expect to divide their time equally between home and office



**16%**

struggled to work effectively



**92%**

missed the most was the informal conversations with colleagues



### Other key findings include:

**Opinion is divided on the quality of creative work produced during lockdown.** Respondents were evenly split about the impact on their own creativity. Almost half (47%) agreed it had improved due to working from home, with the same proportion disagreeing. Three-quarters (74%) said their own company's creative output hadn't suffered as a result of the changes, but only just over a third (37%) felt the same about the quality of the entire industry's work.

**Technology is most effective in the latter stages of the creative process.** The majority of companies (86%) and individuals (67%) turned to specialist software tools for help during lockdown. The two areas that marketers felt most benefited were client/agency relationships and brand consistency when multiple people are working on different assets. Ideation and creative development, on the other hand, benefited least.

**Organizations have more to do to help make teams work more collaboratively and efficiently.** Although respondents were enthusiastic about working from home, more than half (53%) acknowledged it had made collaboration harder, a figure that rises to 70% among creatives. As companies look to realize the benefits of a distributed workforce, they will need to improve their processes, tools and physical locations in order to attract and retain talented staff, and to address the issue of creative quality.



**The future is a hybrid system. An office that's good enough, comfortable enough, fun enough to work in and to do your best work. And then if you do decide to work from home, making sure you've got the best tools available for proper online collaboration, asset sharing etc, so you don't lower the quality of the work simply because you're not physically in the office. No one should be able to notice that."**

**Bart Van de Wiele, principal solutions consultant, Adobe**

## 1.

# Working from home – extent and impact

On March 23, 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson appeared on UK television telling people that they “must stay at home” in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Legal restrictions came into effect three days later.

The announcement sparked frenzied activity as businesses across the country reorganized themselves so their staff could work from home. A McKinsey global survey carried out in July 2020 found that companies took an average of 11 days to put functioning remote working solutions in place, something that the people surveyed said they would normally have expected to take a year.

Working from home quickly became the ‘new normal’ for the UK marketing sector. According to research carried out for The Drum/Adobe by James Law Research Associates, 93% of marketers had been exclusively or mostly working from home for the 12 months before May 2021. Creatives were slightly less likely than other marketers to spend any time in the office; three-quarters (77%) said they worked exclusively from home, compared to two-thirds of all marketers.

# 93%

of marketers had been exclusively or mostly working from home for the 12 months



# 77%

of creatives worked exclusively from home



Q1: To what extent have you experienced working from home in the last year or so?

“There was a lot of adrenaline at the beginning. We all moved super-fast overnight back into our homes. And in the main it was really successful. I didn’t work from home at all, ever, so for me it was a massive change. And that was really exciting.”

Emily Fox, creative director, Lewis Moberly

### A positive response to working from home

The Drum/Adobe research shows this initial positive feeling carried on throughout the year. Marketers generally liked working from home, with more than three-quarters (79%) being able to spend more time with their families and four out of five (83%) enjoying the greater flexibility in their working hours. They also adapted well to the new situation. Only 16% said they’d found it difficult to work effectively from home.

79%

of marketers enjoyed being able to spend more time with their families



83%

enjoyed greater flexibility in their working hours



**Q2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

**“ There was a lot about the workplace that was quite infantilized. You wanted the staff in the office, you wanted a level of control. And actually, with the pandemic, we lost all sense of control in terms of managing people’s time. And what we realized is, people are here because they want to work and they want to do a good job. And so however they manage their work time, as long as they deliver the result, giving people autonomy and freedom has allowed them to be more invested in the culture and the business. And they want to work harder, because you’re respecting their boundaries and their time.”**

**Jordan Mitchell, co-founder and chief culture officer, Good Culture**

Opinion was more divided on the effect of home working on the quality of work being produced. Three-quarters of respondents (74%) said their company’s creative output hadn’t suffered as a result of the changes, but only just over a third (37%) felt the same about the quality of the entire industry’s creative work.

Respondents were evenly split about the impact on their own creativity. Almost half (47%) agreed it had improved due to working from home, with the same proportion disagreeing.

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**Things have improved due to fewer distractions than in the office and having freedom for more abstract creativity without fear of onlookers.**

**Sometimes an idea needs developing before sharing with the team. It's been really easy to transition to home working and I have much more working time available in the day.”**

Creative, Midlands

Looking at possible reasons for this, two-thirds of people reported fewer interruptions to their work when at home (67%). But a slight majority (55%) admitted to missing their previous working environment, and almost everyone (92%) agreed they missed informal conversations with their colleagues in the office. Most tellingly, more than half (54%) agreed that working from home had made collaboration more difficult, compared to 44% who disagreed.

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**Not truly brainstorming and being able to bounce off one another's energy has meant a hit on creative output. While there is the bonus of being able to create in your own headspace, it is hard when collaboration helps spark ideation.”**

Marketer, Southern UK

Breaking this down further, marketers and creatives felt roughly the same about missing informal office conversations. But creatives were significantly less likely than marketers to miss their offices (53% compared to 41%), while at the same time being much more likely to agree that remote working had made collaboration harder (70% v 52%).

**Q3: split by marketers/creatives: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

For an industry that's built on working together – creative teams, brainstorming sessions, etc – and that has long stressed the importance of its collaborative culture and environments to the quality of its work, these findings pose some challenging questions about the future.

**“It’s hard to be creative in isolation. In the office you can bounce ideas off each other to get the idea from a nugget to a really good one – one that works. That’s done over time and in casual and focused conversation – it happens by having other creative people around you. It can be done to some degree on Zoom etc, but people are distracted and not focused.”**

Creative, Greater London





## 2.

## The role of technology

Technology was vital in the transition to working from home, but its impact has been uneven. The Drum/Adobe research shows where users think it has delivered the most benefits, and where progress still needs to be made.

Clearly, technology's most important role has simply been allowing teams to communicate with each other. Almost three-quarters of respondents (70%) agree that online meetings have worked well as a replacement for face-to-face, and nine out of 10 report such meetings have worked well "for me".

At the same time, enthusiasm for virtual meetings is somewhat muted. Only 17% "agree strongly" that online works well as a replacement for face-to-face, compared to 53% who simply agree. And only 16% are strongly in favor of online meetings "for me", compared to 73% who just agree. This supports anecdotal evidence that although virtual meetings have kept businesses operating, they are often seen as challenging by participants.

In addition, even though almost two-thirds (60%) of creatives agreed or strongly agreed that online meetings had worked well as a replacement for meeting face-to-face, this is noticeably lower than the proportion of marketers who felt the same (72%).

# 70%

agree that online team meetings have worked well as a replacement for face-to-face



## Where technology delivers

The research also looked at the areas where marketers and creatives think technology has had the most benefits. Although two-thirds (67%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had “started to use more technology-based tools to assist creative activity”, overall marketers believe more than creatives that technology has helped.

### Q4: To what extent has technology or technology-based tools/software helped improve any of the following in the last 12 months or so?

Marketers see technology as being most effective in improving client/agency relationships (62%) and brand consistency when multiple people are working on different assets (61%). Creatives agree, but are slightly less likely to see the benefits than their colleagues (58% and 47% respectively).

The value of technology in these areas is reinforced by the fact that almost nine out of 10 respondents (86%) said their company had “successfully used technology to assist workshops, discussions and collaboration activity”.

Anecdotally, agencies report significant improvements in their efficiency, partly because less of their time is spent traveling to client meetings. There is also the suggestion that, because people are always at their desks, issues can be resolved quickly in a video call, rather than having to schedule a meeting.

**“Our efficiency has gone through the roof. I now cannot believe that I would waste a whole day flying somewhere just for an hour’s meeting, not to mention the damage to the environment. It now seems so horrendous that it was considered the right thing to do. So there are some real positives coming out of this.”**

Emily Fox, creative director, Lewis Moberly

Within organizations, the picture that emerges is that technology's main value currently kicks in after the start of the creative process, when initial creative ideas are being shared and refined, and when the completed assets are being incorporated into all the different elements of a campaign.

**“The ecosystem of graphic design is more than just the creative who’s using Photoshop or InDesign. It’s everyone that needs to use creative assets: certain logos and colors; your latest pack shot or product shoot that you did; or the latest marketing assets localized in X number of languages. Making all of that available to anyone in the company so they’re able to comment and collaborate and do proper briefings and better project approvals is something we’ve really seen expanding this last year and a half, and it’s going to be key in the future.”**

Bart Van de Wiele, principal solutions consultant, Adobe



## 3.

# The tools that helped the industry work from home

The research then looked in more detail at the types of software tools marketers and creatives have been using to facilitate working from home, using Adobe's creative suite as a reference.

Almost half the survey respondents (47%) said they had used Adobe Creative Cloud features or software when working from home in the last 12 months. This went up to almost two-thirds (63%) of creatives.

Over half of the people who responded (58%) used Adobe Stock (which offers creatives and marketers a database of approximately 200m images, illustrations, videos and design templates), more than a third (38%) used Creative Cloud Libraries and a quarter used cloud storage.

Creative Cloud Libraries are online libraries of curated branded content that are directly available in all of Adobe's creative solutions. Shared cloud-based libraries allow dynamic collaboration between members of the creative team, and out into the broader creative ecosystem. For example, changing a design asset like a vector shape or image in a library automatically updates the actual design files across multiple projects, applications and/or teams. The same shared library can not only be used to collate the constituent image, video or audio assets for a design project but can also help keep track of what's already been licensed and is ready to go to publication, and what isn't.

# 47%

had used Adobe Creative Cloud features or software when working from home in the last 12 months



### Q5: What Adobe Creative Cloud features/products have you used?

Creative Cloud Libraries were the most popular feature among creatives, used by 56%, followed by Adobe Stock and cloud storage, both used by almost half (44%). One in five (19%) used Adobe's Behance social media platform (designed for showcasing and discovering creative work). The same proportion used the Admin Console for Adobe's Creative Cloud for teams, which suggests that at least 20% of creative respondents were using Creative Cloud for teams, compared to 12% of the total sample.



**56%**

used Creative Cloud Libraries were the most popular feature among creatives



**44%**

use both Adobe Stock and cloud storage

### Collaborative tools matter more to creatives

Creatives were significantly more likely than respondents in general to feel that Adobe tools had assisted them in working from home. Half the total respondents (49%) said the tools had made no difference to them, compared to only a third of creatives (32%).

Conversely, a fifth of creatives (21%) felt Adobe tools had been a significant help, almost twice the proportion of the total who felt the same (12%). Creatives were also six percentage points more likely than the total sample to feel Adobe tools had been "some assistance to working from home".

**Q6: To what extent did using Adobe tools or software assist you in your working from home?**

Creatives' enthusiasm for collaborative tools chimes with the findings in the previous section, that the two biggest areas of impact for technology during the pandemic have been in building client/agency relationships and maintaining brand consistency when multiple people are working on different assets. From a creative perspective, both of these activities depend - wholly or partly - on sharing work-in-progress.

**“Creative Cloud Libraries play a key role in maintaining brand consistency across multiple projects, apps and teams. The assets in the library are linked to your projects, which means that updating the asset will trigger global updates across your projects. And you can even set these libraries to have read-only access in order to better manage ownership of assets, for example when working with freelancers. And thanks to the Creative Cloud Library integration with Microsoft 365 apps, Google Suite and other solutions it's even possible to curate your branded assets when sharing with other parts of the organization.”**

Bart Van de Wiele, principal solutions consultant, Adobe

## 4.

## The future of creative work

The success of the UK's vaccination program means that companies are now starting to welcome their staff back into the office. But does this mean the great working-from-home experience is over?

The Drum/Adobe research suggests not. Two-thirds of creatives expect to be working from home in the future, with only occasional days in the office. Almost a further quarter (23%) expect to spend an equal amount of time at home and in the office. Across the total sample, just over half (56%) expect to work mostly from home and almost a further quarter (22%) expect to divide their time equally.

**23%**

expect to spend an equal amount of time at home and in the office

**56%**

expect to work mostly from home

### Q 7: Now that lockdown restrictions seem to be easing, what are your expectations in relation to future working arrangements?

This might seem surprising. Creatives in particular, who according to industry wisdom require the stimulation of a specific collaborative culture and environment, don't miss that environment as much as marketers in general miss theirs, and are less inclined to go back. This is despite agreeing more widely than their peers that working from home makes collaboration more difficult, and being less convinced of the effectiveness of online meetings.

## Flexibility is key

Conversations with agency creative heads suggest the explanation for this seeming contradiction is people's need for flexibility.

**“The research shows 83% of people really value a flexible way of working. We need to trust individuals to know the best way for them to deliver, the best way for them to work and the best culture for them to work in. We should really be listening to those 83% of individuals saying, ‘Let us do what we want’.”**

Jordan Mitchell, co-founder and chief culture officer, Good Culture.

Organizations will also need to address this desire for flexibility at the level of their entire creative workforce. The headline figure may be that three-quarters of marketers don't want to go back to the nine-to-five, but that leaves a quarter who expect to do exactly that.

**“Particularly for the more junior members of staff, it's so important for them to be absorbing so much from those around them. It's been particularly challenging for them to grow, but from home.”**

Ellen Munro, creative director & associate partner, BrandOpus



The research also suggests this flexibility means organizations will need to recognize the creative ecosystem is bigger than just the creative department. Rather, it includes everyone who uses the organization's creative assets. If the workforce continues to be widely distributed, tools will be needed to enable collaboration across this entire ecosystem.

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**Working from home and online collaboration are here to stay. There has been massive innovation in Adobe Creative Cloud, especially around creatives working with non-creatives, which could be someone in marketing, could be an account executive, could be a customer, could be a freelancer. Now you can have Creative Cloud assets available in Microsoft Office solutions, or in the Google Suite solutions, or in Slack, for example. Providing more of those integrations is key to where we're heading.”**

Bart Van de Wiele, principal solutions consultant, Adobe



## 5.

## Key takeaways

**Working from home will continue past the pandemic.**

The survey showed the vast majority of marketers have enjoyed working from home, with the extra time and flexibility involved, and don't expect to go back to the office once the pandemic is over. This is despite them missing informal conversations with colleagues, and feeling that collaboration is harder when working remotely.

**The future is flexible.** Working from home has shown many people that they are happier when they can manage themselves. It has also shown organizations that, as long as tasks are completed to the required standard and on deadline, it doesn't matter how people choose to work. Companies will have to accommodate this desire for autonomy and flexibility in order to attract talented staff. At the same time, they will have to recognize that working from home is not something everyone wants all the time, and design attractive, welcoming workplaces to reflect that.

**Creative tools aren't just for creatives.**

With the white-collar workforce of the future continuing to be distributed geographically, it will be essential for businesses to push the use of collaboration tools out beyond the creative department into marketing as a whole, further streamlining the process of getting from the initial idea to the finished campaign, product or service. Businesses should also explore ways of facilitating the initial creative stage when creative teams no longer all work in the same office.



# 6.

## Methodology

This report is based on the results of an independent online survey carried out for The Drum and Adobe by James Law Research Associates of 144 marketing professionals and creatives, in May 2021. The white paper conclusions were drawn from the quantitative survey combined with a focus group to discuss the survey results, which took place in June 2021.

### The Drum would like to thank the following for their contributions:

Emily Fox, creative director, Lewis Moberly

Jordan Mitchell, co-founder and chief culture officer, Good Culture

Ellen Munro, creative director & associate partner, BrandOpus

Bart Van de Wiele, principal solutions consultant, Adobe



