Risks & Rewards

The opportunities before media and entertainment are unprecedented. So too are the threats.

OUR CHANGING INDUSTRY
The roadmap to media and entertainment's future is paved with innovation

LOCALIZATION
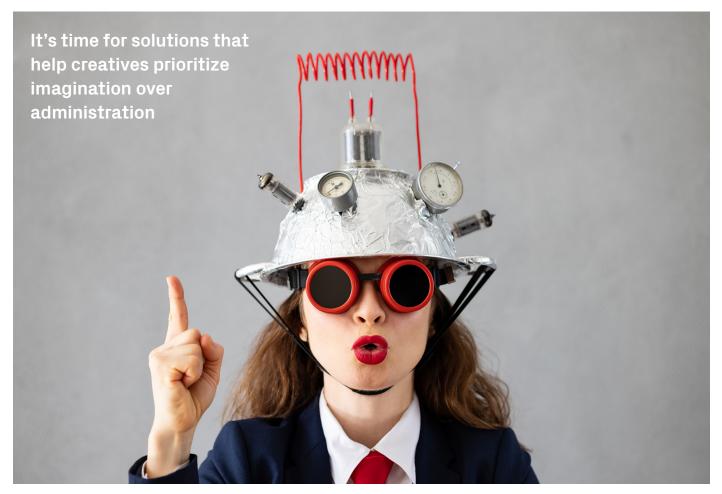Content localization is a worldwide, need-it-now business. Here's how to keep pace

WORKFLOWS AND THE CLOUD
Cloud workflows are proving crucial for media productions today

SMART CONTENT
It's a data-driven content reality, and all the tools are there to realize success

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COULD AUTOMATION BE THE KEY TO KEEPING CREATIVES CREATIVE?

It's time for solutions that help creatives prioritize imagination over administration

ABSTRACT: As digital transformation accelerates, demands on creative teams to create more content, more quickly, continue to grow. To succeed, organizations must rethink how they scale content creation by optimizing workflows. Adobe's automation tools, via scalable cloud services, automate tedious production tasks while allowing designers to retain full creative control.

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There comes a time in most jobs where the work you do starts to feel less and less like the work you signed up for.

This is particularly true in the creative world. You finally secure a job in your dream industry, and you're ready to spend your days making stunning visuals, producing music, or conjuring worlds on film. But suddenly it dawns on you that you're spending your actual hours doing mundane tasks. Applying the same process to file after file; image after image; frame after frame.

Today's creative teams are spending less time being creative, and more of their time cycling through processes. And in our multi-platform, multi-format world, the demands for "more" are only getting louder.

Automation has frequently been presented as a counteragent to creativity. But, when applied in the right way (such as in automating mundane, repetitive tasks), it offers a vital opportunity for creative professionals to reclaim their time and withstand the demands that are now commonplace in their industries.

WHERE WE ARE NOW

At Adobe, we have frequent conversations with creative teams about their ideas, plans, and challenges. As these teams plan for the next few years, they acknowledge that the volume of output they'll be required to produce will need to scale (possibly beyond their capacity).

This can be exciting, but it has a cumulative effect on the people they employ. And many of these issues have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as teams disperse to work remotely, and the line between work and home life blurs.

Earlier this year, we decided to delve deeper. Adobe's "Future of Time" study surveyed more than 5,000 workers and leaders from small and medium businesses (SMB) all over the world. It investigated how we now think about time, and how we spend it.

It revealed that 48 percent of enterprise workers — and 61 percent of SMB leaders — feel pressured to be on-call "around the clock," while 53 percent of workers and 57 percent of SMB leaders feel constantly stretched for time at work.

Furthermore, these creative people believe they are spending too much time on tasks that get in the way of doing their jobs effectively. For example, workers say a third of their week is spent on unimportant tasks. Ninety-one percent are hungry for tools that can make these processes more efficient, or free up their time. And more than half would be willing to switch jobs in order to access these tools.

On top of that, 24 percent of employees have experienced burnout over the last year. This means that businesses that value their talent need to take steps to protect both their time, and their mental and physical health.

In truth, while the pandemic has accentuated many of these issues, they weren't exactly unfamiliar to creative workers before COVID-19. A single piece of content now often needs to be repurposed for a variety of uses — across multiple social channels, different screen sizes, media formats, and in many languages. That means resizing, adding metadata, and much more. And with that comes a higher risk of human error, and the possibility that you'll need to return to the task to correct mistakes that may impact multiple files.

Ambitious teams are left with a choice: Ask more of creative professionals, and risk them burning out and leaving; recruit more staff to tackle the more mundane tasks; and free up top-level talent for the creative flourishes. Or embrace tools that automate those repetitive tasks, and help creatives achieve more with less.

THE NEED FOR AN END-TO-END SOLUTION

Automation is the clear solution to solving these workflow challenges in a scalable and future-proof way. However, the big questions at hand are how to seamlessly introduce automation into workflows and which tools will best serve that need.

In recent years, companies have invested heavily in digital transformation. The days when a post-production editor

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would fly cross-country with a hard drive are dwindling, and not just because of COVID-19. Companies now offer tools and services which operate in the cloud, providing solutions for both common and niche tasks.

While there are many great tools out there, we believe Adobe is best placed to address this problem. Switching to a standalone tool that automates part of the production process might solve some issues but could also force creatives to adapt to a new, unfamiliar workflow. Adobe offers a suite of tools that are already embedded in the workflow of many creatives and have been for many years. This allows them to automate their workflows without losing the comfort, control and consistency that comes with working with the tools they know well.

In addition, our cloud-first approach means that our tools are regularly updated, adding new features and capabilities. This means that all customers get access to the same opportunities for collaboration and automation. We also offer

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companies the chance to pay to integrate these tools into their own systems and workflows via APIs, meaning that they can do everything they need to do within a single system.

The changes that Adobe has made — and continues to make — to its tools are informed by the stories our clients are telling us, across the creative industries. For example, "ethical e-commerce" company Dreamship handles logistics for the growing print-on-demand market. It required a high-quality imaging solution to provide e-commerce clients with high-fidelity images that could be printed on shirts, mugs, pillows, and other items.

However, as Dreamship scaled, it found that the time and effort required for engineers to take Photoshop files from designers and adjust them in a third-party tool was unsustainable. Using Adobe's developer platform, it was able to use Photoshop solutions such as Smart Object Replacement. This automated the process of placing designs on product mockups — even those that required the warping of the image, such as to fit it around a mug.

This change allowed Dreamship's design team to be more focused on creative work, and reduced the time it took to create mockups from 10-20 hours to less than 30 minutes. As a result, it was able to expand its virtual inventory of images for e-commerce clients and increase its revenue more than twelvefold.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Creative Cloud is continuously being updated with new automation features, so expect to see new ideas and improvements for all sorts of creative workflows and media types.

FRAMING THE CONVERSATION AROUND AUTOMATION

When we talk about developments in fields such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and automation, the conversation can veer from fantastical to funereal. Every day, new technological advances show us wondrous advances, such as AI bots that can write scripts and algorithms that deliver smooth visual effects.

We should be diligent in ensuring that automation is used to empower creatives rather than undermine and compromise them. But we should not let valid concerns about potential over-reach drown out the excitement over the possibilities automation offers.

Creative teams are now able to harness modern tools and technologies to create awe-inspiring designs and immersive experiences. But they also face increasing demands on their time, which are multi-faceted and ever-increasing.

It is exciting to think of what these creatives could achieve in the future. However, these possibilities will only become real if we give them the space to make this art happen, rather than bury them in mundane tasks.

We need to champion solutions that help creatives prioritize imagination over administration, without turning their workflow upside down.

We're committed to exploring how automation and workflow simplification can be implemented throughout our Creative Cloud suite, as we expand and learn from our customers. Because, as they've told us throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and even before, these are the sorts of features they need to empower them to do their jobs and tell amazing stories. ⊞