

2018 Report:



Engaging Your Audience with Visual Content



Libris by  PHOTOSHELTER

Contently

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PART I

Introduction



Photo by Scott Serfas

Content creation often focuses on the written word: blog posts, tweets, website copy, etc. But text by itself is rarely going to make an impact. Communicating visually is one of the best ways for a brand to engage and connect with its audience. As a result, the demand for good visual content is increasingly on the rise.

So how do creatives and marketing professionals keep up and manage the constant need for visual assets? What are their main use cases for photos and videos? And what are the biggest challenges when it comes to activating that content quickly and efficiently?

To get to the bottom of these questions (and many more), [Libris](#), a digital asset management platform empowering the effortless creation of visual stories, partnered with [Contently](#), the content marketing solution of choice for the world's most valuable brands, on a report about the state of visual content.

With visual content at the center of storytelling, this report may open your eyes to the fact that the production, organization, and sharing of visuals is more central to your job than you realize. Creators have to establish a clear workflow, communicate their approach to the entire team, and set up a system for testing and measuring performance. In other words, when it comes to engaging your audience with visual content, you need a strategic plan in place to help you get there.

Methodology

In March 2018, 564 marketers and creative professionals participated in an online survey of 35 questions. Respondents came from a variety of industries including

media, travel, finance, technology, sports, education, retail, non-profit, healthcare, and more.

Key Findings

This 2018 report is packed with insights on how marketers are navigating visual content today. Here are a few major takeaways.

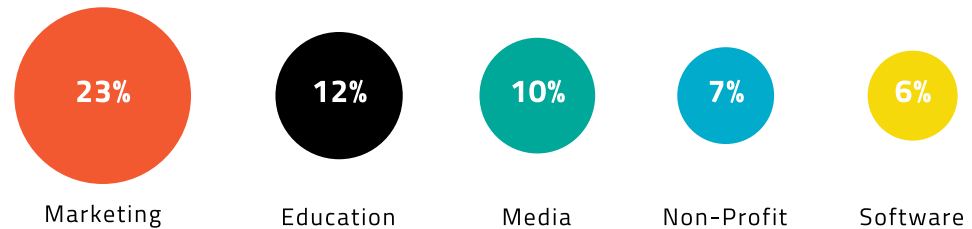
- 75% of creative professionals say they always use a visual when posting to the digital marketing channel that best engages their audience.
- Organizations are sharing *a lot* of visual content. In fact, 65% are sharing visual content to engage their audiences at least once a day.
- Speed is a critical factor when publishing, and 63% of respondents believe the ability to locate and share visual assets quickly is more important than ever before.
- While the need for video is increasing (even more so than photography), 81% say video is still the hardest type of content to produce.
- Measurement remains a challenge for 21% of participants who don't know which type of visual content drives the most engagement for their company.
- And — no surprise here — 70% say the results of their digital marketing are typically better when they use visual content than when they don't.

Now let's dig into all the data we uncovered. Use this report to see how you stack up compared to your peers.

PART II

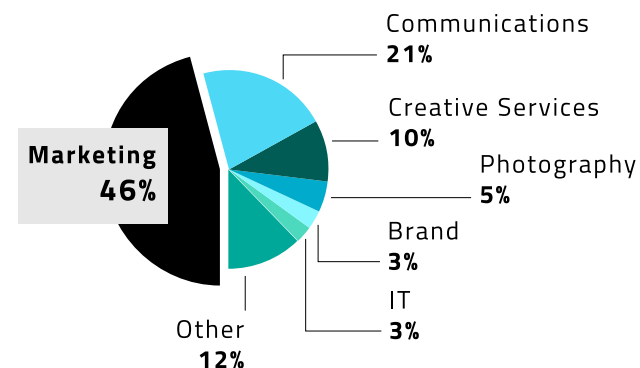
The Survey Audience

To get a sense of where respondents came from, we asked them to select their industry. The top five industries represented in the survey were:



Other industries represented were health and wellness (4%), manufacturing (4%), travel (4%), retail (4%), finance (3%), consumer goods (3%), entertainment (3%), food and beverage (2%), government (2%), sports (2%) and other (11%).

When we asked participants to identify the departments they work in, we learned almost 50% of them work in marketing. Here's the breakdown:



PART III

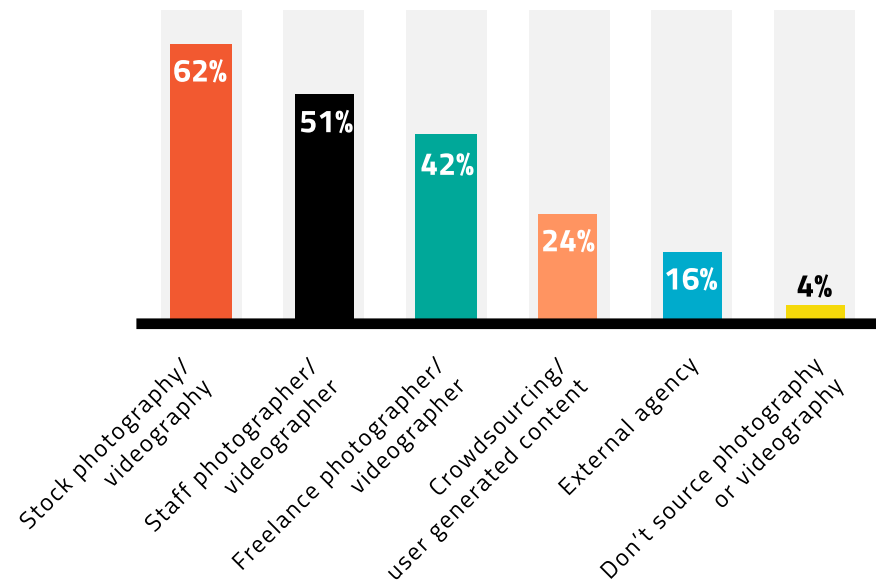
Sourcing Visual Content

As of 2018, almost all creative professionals incorporate visual content in some way. But how they do so varies quite a bit. With all of the photo and video platforms out there, companies have plenty of options to source their visuals. Some opt to hire internal staff; others go for freelancers. A few have a combination of the two.

Given the number of paths, we wanted to get a sense of how creative professionals think about visual content and how their needs have changed over time.

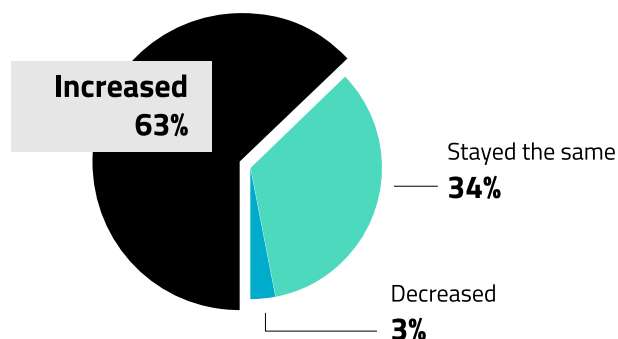
First we asked: **What is your organization's method for sourcing photography or videography?**

Participants could choose all methods that applied.



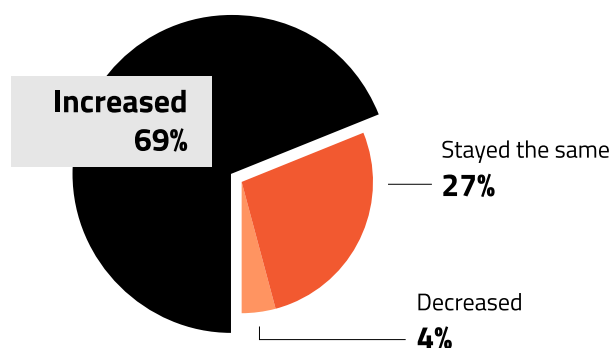
It was a bit of a surprise that a majority of participants (51%) source content directly from staff, instead of freelancers. Of those who use staff photographers and videographers, 18% also came from the marketing industry and 18% came from education.

Whether you're in a large organization or a small startup, creative needs evolve rapidly as budgets, strategies, and stakeholders change. To find out more about recent changes, we asked: **Compared to last year, has your need for photography increased, decreased or stayed the same?**



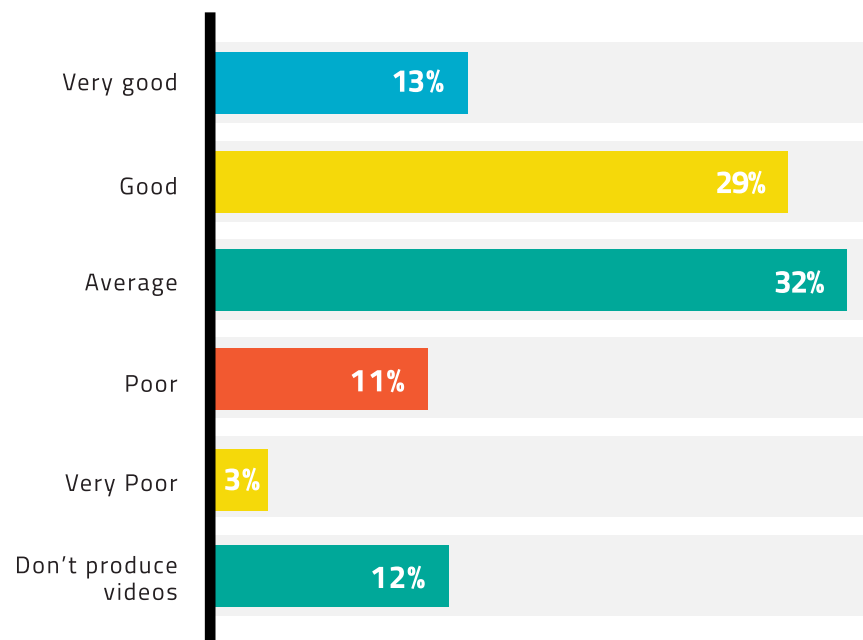
70% of those who say their need for photography has increased also use visual content to engage with their audience daily or multiple times a day. The takeaway? The more frequently you use visual storytelling to connect with your audience, the more fresh visual assets you need to keep up with demand.

We then asked: **Compared to last year, has your need for videography increased, decreased or stayed the same?**



The demand for video has increased, even more so than the demand for photography. A closer look at the 69% who say their need for video has gone up reveals that their primary use cases for visual content today are advertising, social media, website, editorial, and PR.

Since video is arguably the most expensive type of content to produce, creating high-quality multimedia content comes with huge stakes. On this front, we asked: **How would you rate your company's video content?**



Interestingly, while the need for videography has increased, the quality of video content is not necessarily up to par. 32% call their company's video content "average."

Also, it's worth noting that 60% of those who "don't produce video" come from small companies with fewer than 20 employees. And 53% of those who rated their video content as "good" or "very good" also cited video (custom video or live video) as the visual content that drives the most engagement for their company. Video may present high barriers to entry for small teams, but those who invest in it are starting to see substantial ROI.

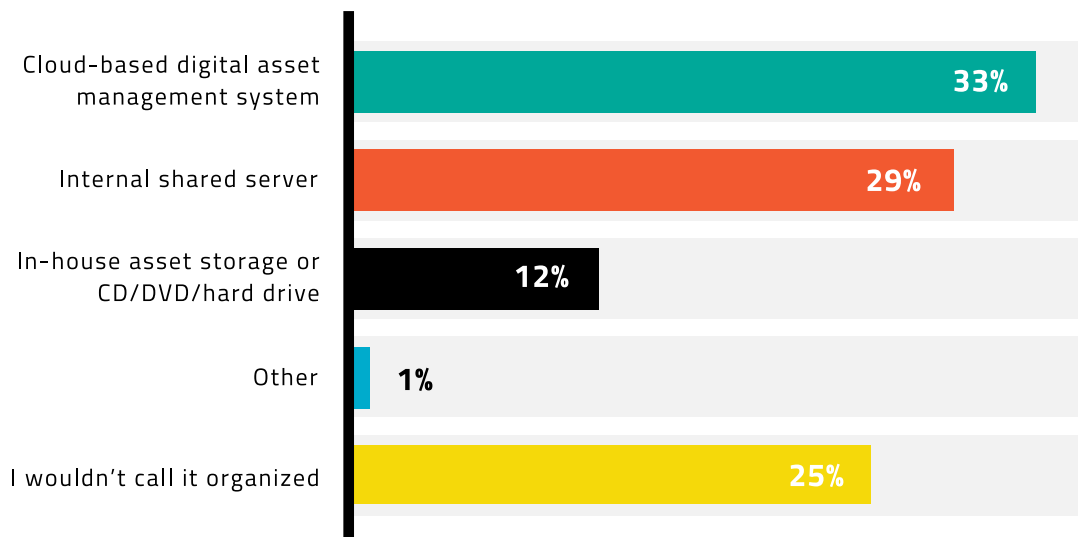
PART IV

Organizing and Creating Visual Assets

Photo by Michael Runkel

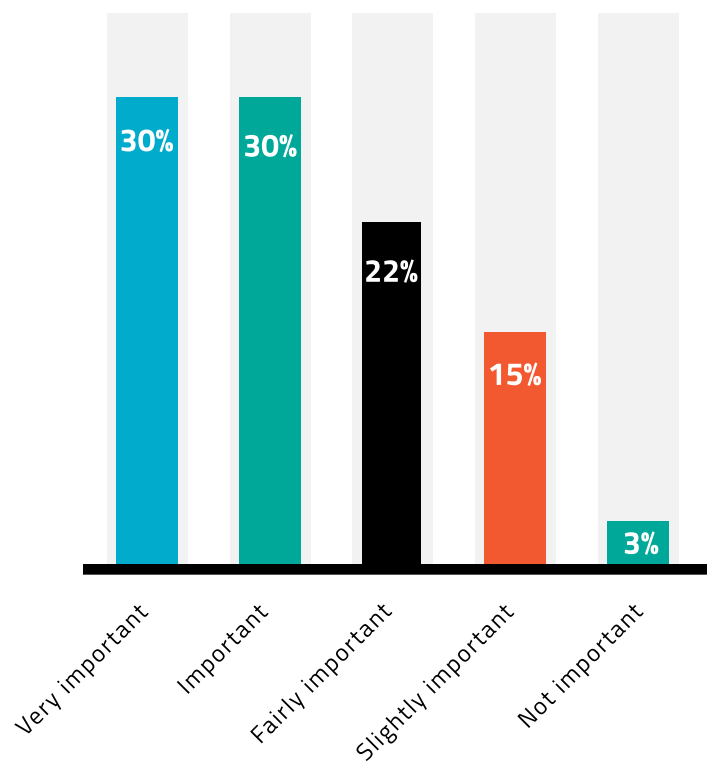
If sharing visual content is fundamental to helping businesses engage with their audiences, then how are they creating assets internally and keeping the content organized and accessible?

We first asked: **How would you best describe the system used to organize your imagery and video assets?**



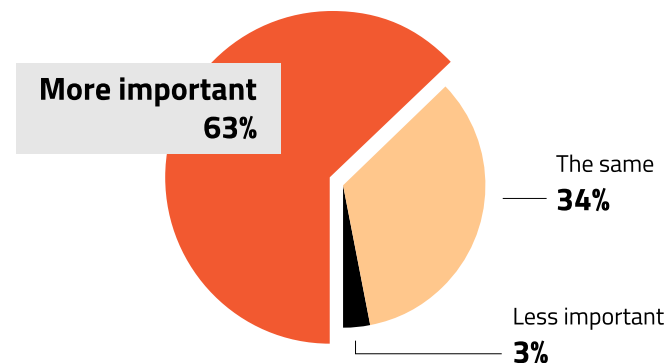
Interestingly enough, many of the participants who “wouldn’t call their system organized” also cite social media as the number one use case for their photos and videos. This trend suggests organizations produce content for visually focused social media platforms but don’t necessarily have a good system in place to easily find and share that content.

We then asked: **How important is speed when you're looking for a visual asset to use for marketing purposes?** Sixty percent said "important" or "very important."



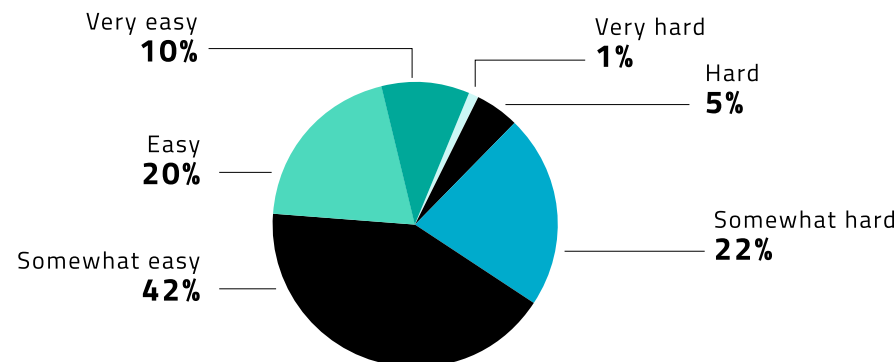
Those who said speed was "important" or "very important" identified their top use-cases for visual content as advertising (22%), social media (20%) and website (14%).

We asked: **Compared to previous years, is the ability to locate and share visual assets quickly more or less important to your job?**



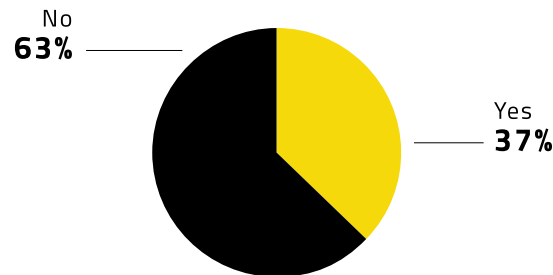
When we looked closely at the 63% who said that finding a visual asset quickly is "more important" today compared to previous years, we found that the top industries represented were marketing (23%), education (15%), media, (9%), and non-profit (8%).

If companies are going to spend their hard-earned time and budgets creating content, they should be doing whatever possible to find valuable ways to use it. That could come in the form of a media library, intranet, or any other established system that simplifies the process across the organization. We asked: **Currently, how easy is it to locate a visual asset you need to share online or with a coworker?**



Of those who said locating visual assets to share online or with a coworker is “some-what hard,” “hard” or “very hard,” 38% answered claimed they didn’t have an organized approach for sharing photos, or videos.

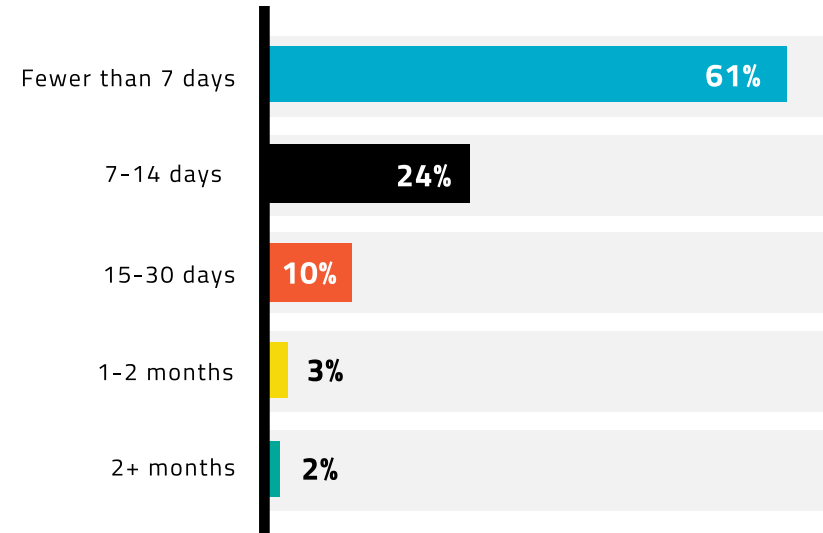
We then asked: **Does your team have a clear method for tagging and organizing all your visual assets (with metadata, keywords, etc)?**



Of those who answered “No,” 58% also said speed is “important” or “very important” when looking for an asset for marketing purposes. The takeaway? Although speed in locating assets is a priority, many creative professionals still don’t have a metadata or tagging system in place to make it easier to find assets quickly.

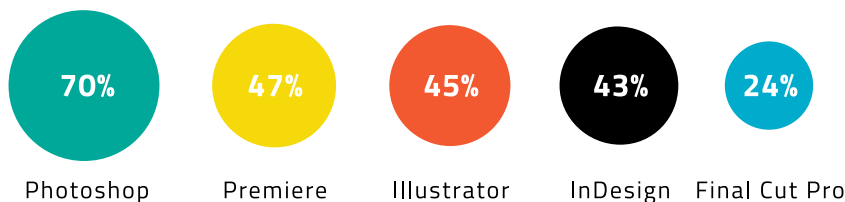
And although a large segment do not have a method for tagging their visual assets, most participants do understand that captions, title text, etc. can help improve the SEO of their visual assets. We asked: **Do you add captions, alt text, and title text to improve the SEO of your visual assets? Sixty-nine percent said “Yes.”**

Next, we wanted to find a benchmark for the timeline of the average creative process. We asked: **On average, how long does it take to create, approve, and publish a single visual asset?**



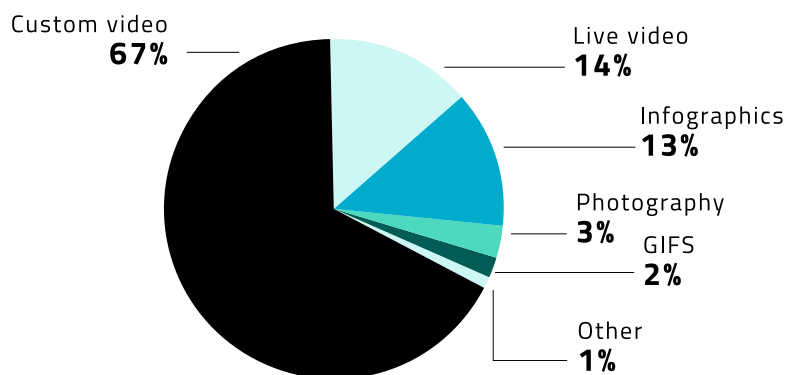
While most participants say they can produce, approve, and share an asset in fewer than seven days, 39% still take over a week to get something out the door. 30% of those who take longer than a week cite “movement between visual content creators, marketers and other stakeholders” as the biggest obstacle in sharing content with their audiences. Clearly, bottlenecking is a problem.

We then asked: **What tools does your organization use to create/edit photos and/or videos?** Participants were asked to choose all that apply. The top 5 responses were:



The top responses are all paid software services, indicating that companies are investing in fairly advanced tools to create and edit visual content.

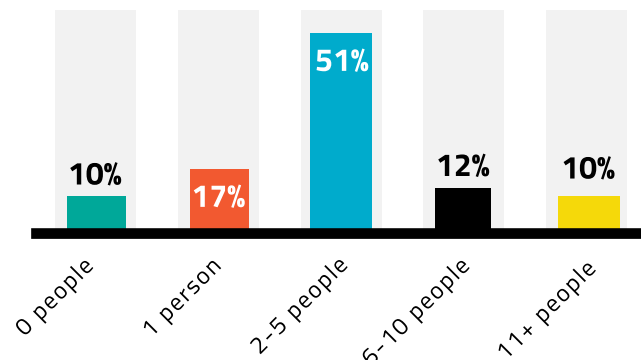
We also wanted to know: **What type of visual content is hardest to produce?**



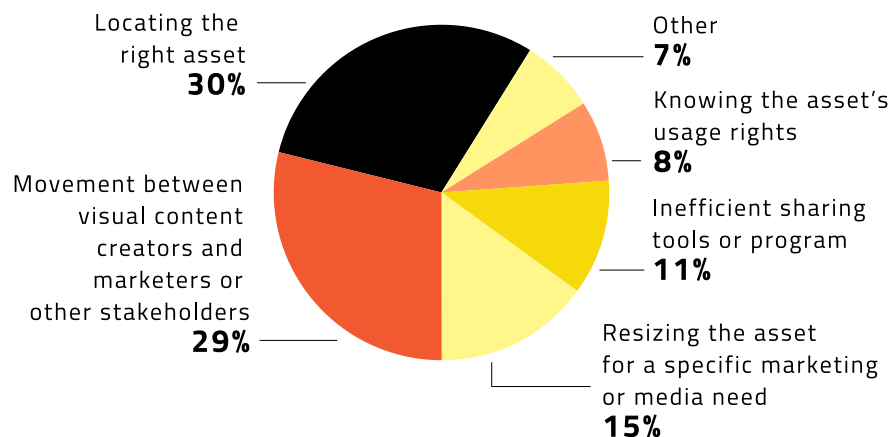
We learned earlier that 69% of participants said their need for video is increasing. Here, we discover that 81% say video (either custom or live) is the hardest content to create. The takeaway? The need for video is growing, but producing this content presents the biggest challenge.

To figure out the root of these challenges, we asked a few follow up questions about the participants' teams.

We asked: **How many full-time employees in your company are tasked with creating visual content?**



Not all challenges are created equally. Given the different strategies and processes, it's no surprise that individuals are trying to solve a number of visual content issues. We asked: **What's your team's biggest obstacle in quickly sharing visual content with your audience online?**



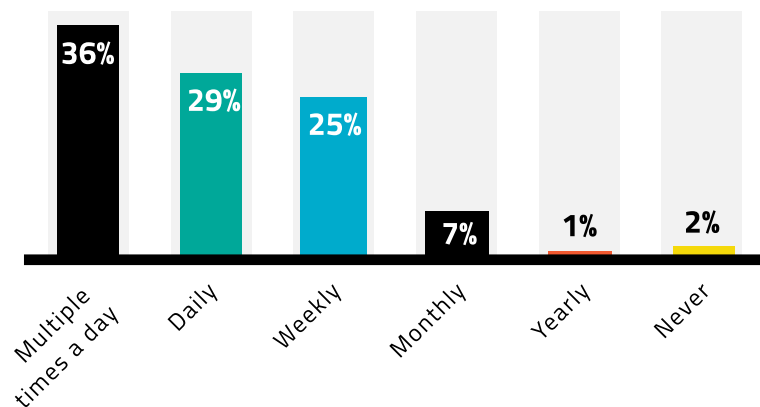
Those who share visual content the most—either daily or multiple times a day—say the biggest obstacles to getting content out are “locating the right asset” (34%) and “movement between visual content creators and marketers or stakeholders” (34%).

PART V

Engaging Your Audience

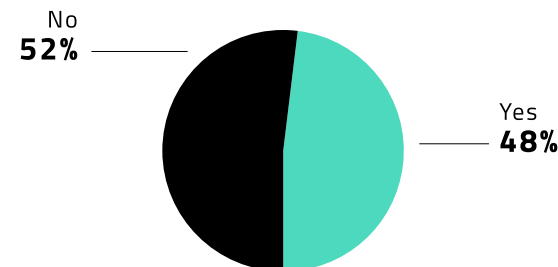
We wanted to know which channels participants use to engage audiences and market their products and services, how often they include visual assets in those efforts, and which kind of content drives the most engagement.

We first asked: **How often does your organization use visual content to engage with your audience online (whether through social media, email, blog posts, etc)?**



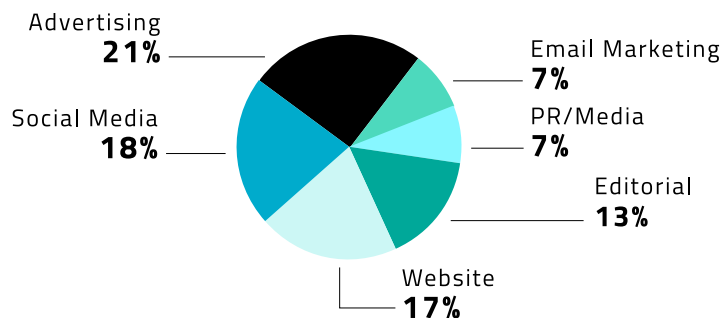
Of those who share visual content daily or multiple times a day, 34% believe speed is “important” or “very important.”

But how much is enough? We asked: **In your opinion, does your organization use visual content enough to engage with your audience online?** The results here are almost split down the middle.



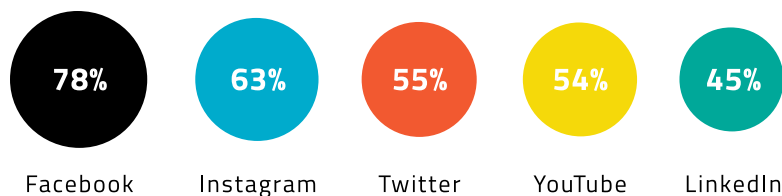
52% of those who said “No” also use visual content to engage with their audience at least once a day — a rate they want to increase in the future.

When it comes to both photos and videos, how exactly is the content being used? We asked: **What is the main use case for photos and/or videos in your organization?** Participants could choose only one. “Advertising” was the top response, followed closely by “social media” and “website.”



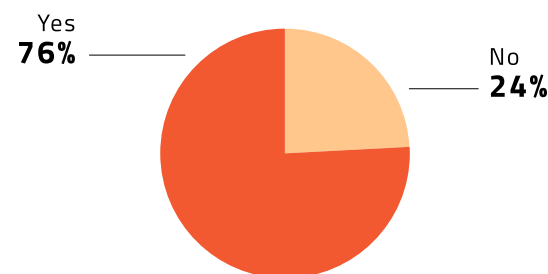
Less common primary use cases were sales (3%), customer support (3%), experiential communication (2%), recruiting (2%), internal communication (2%), print marketing (2%), training (1%), and other (2%).

Distribution can sometimes be overlooked when discussing the different parts of the creative process. In terms of sharing, we asked: **What tools/platforms does your organization use to share/publish photos and/or videos?** Participants could choose all that apply. The top five responses were:



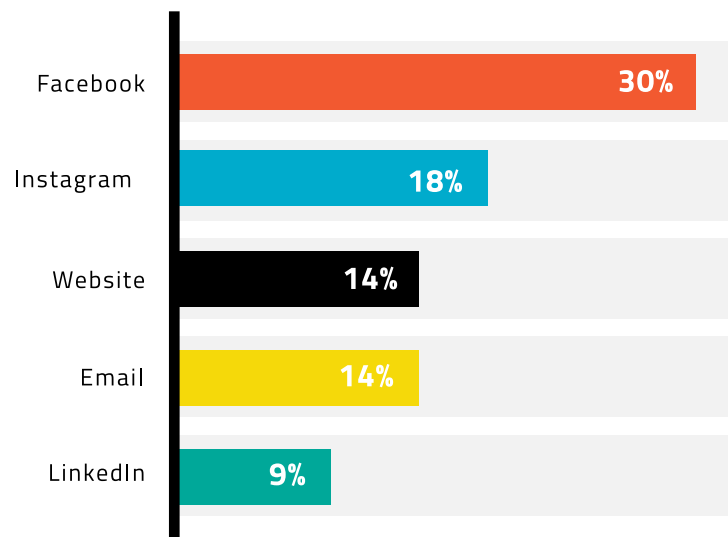
Facebook came out on top, which will be interesting to watch considering it's algorithm changed at the start of 2018 and no longer favors content from businesses, brands, and media.

We also asked: **Are your visual assets optimized for mobile devices?**



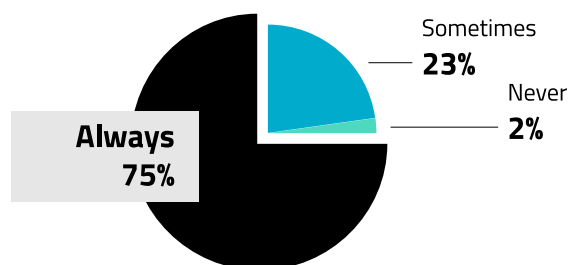
Of those who said “Yes,” 69% use visual content to reach their audience daily or multiple times a day. Of those who said “No,” 30% came from small companies that have fewer than 20 employees.

To measure the effectiveness of different channels, we asked: **Which digital marketing channel does the best job engaging your audience? Participants could only choose one answer.** The top responses were:



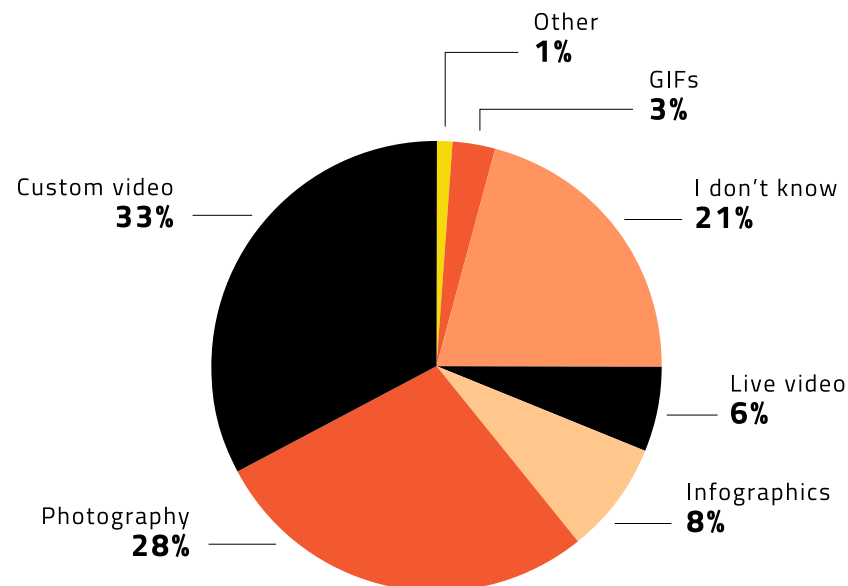
The channels that came in at the bottom? Twitter (7%), blog (5%), YouTube (2%), Snapchat (0%), and Other (1%). It's worth noting that 100% of respondents who say Facebook does the best job engaging their audience always include a visual asset with their posts.

We then asked: **When using this digital marketing channel (the one referenced above), how often do you include a photo, video, or other visual asset?**



Clearly, visual content is a crucial part of audience engagement. Of the 75% who always use visuals with their content marketing, 72% also say their need for videography is increasing and 66% say their need for photography is increasing.

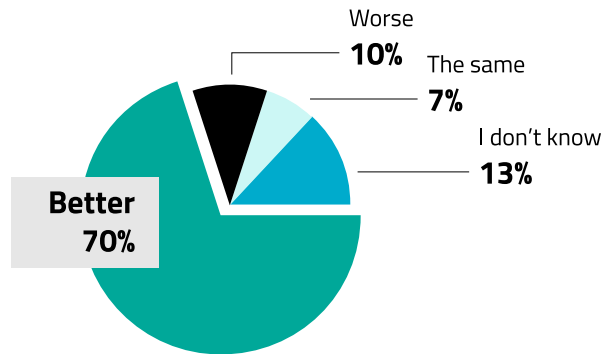
To get a snapshot of the mix of content companies are using, we asked: **What type of visual content drives the most engagement for your company?** Participants could only choose one answer.



More than 70% of participants who cite custom video as the hardest content to produce also say it drives the most engagement. While some may find the production and execution of custom video challenging, the return is well worth the investment.

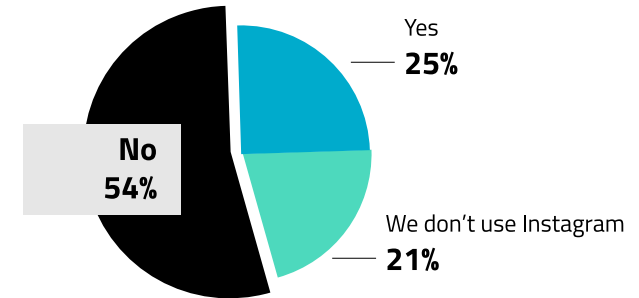
Additionally, with 21% of participants sharing they don't know which type of visual content drives the most engagement, a large portion of creative professionals can't definitively link content types to performance, even if they know it's having an impact.

And if there was any doubt, it's clear visual content is working. We asked specifically: **When using visual assets in digital marketing, are the results typically better, the same, or worse than without the use of visuals?**



To round out this section, we wanted to dive into [Instagram](#) specifically because it's fundamentally a visual storytelling platform designed for photos, videos, memes, and more.

We asked: **Do you feel like your organization maximizes its use of Instagram to meet its goals?**



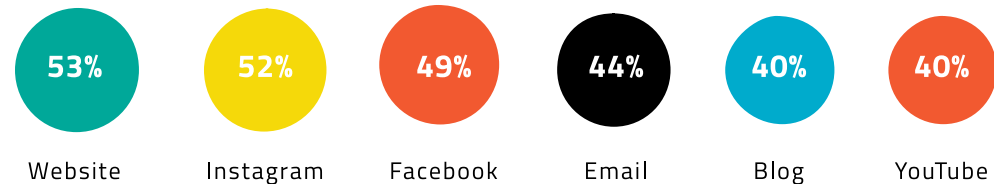
So while 63% use Instagram to share and publish visual content, a majority of respondents feel like they're not using the platform effectively.

PART VI

Looking Forward

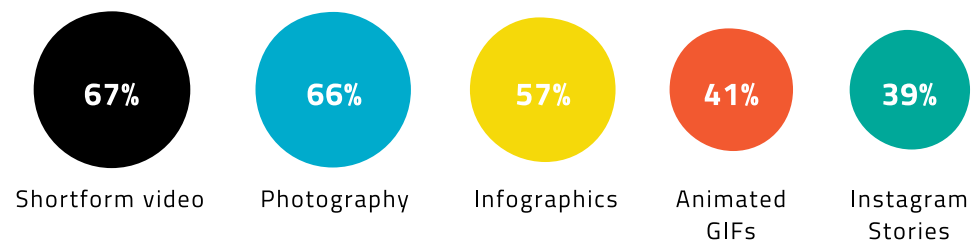
The fact that the need for visuals is on the rise means the next year is going to be interesting as brands adapt their strategies and pursue growth. In the final section of the report, we explored what creatives and marketers are planning to do more this year and which channels they will use most often.

We asked: **Which digital marketing channels do you plan to use more this year to engage your audience?** Participants could choose all that applied. The top responses were:



The channels organizations plan to focus on least are LinkedIn (38%), Twitter (35%), and Snapchat (11%).

We then asked: **What visual content formats will you take advantage of this year?** Participants could choose all that applied. The top responses were:



We also wanted to know which brands and thought leaders inspire people most today. We asked: **In your opinion, what brand or organization produces the best visual content?**

Many of these brands — Apple, Coca-Cola, and Disney, to name a few — have been leaders in visual content for decades, and will likely continue to inspire for years. Of the responses we received, there's a trend toward B2C companies focused in tech and retail. Companies like REI, Patagonia, Nike, and Target are examples of brands that use photography and videography to uplift their audiences and communicate an experience far beyond the merchandise itself.

Here's a snapshot of what people said.

APPLE: “They make really compelling content because of the way they’re able to emotionally connect with consumers.”

BUZZFEED: “Their content runs the gamut in terms of video, GIFs, memes, and more. They’ve found a way to connect with almost any audience through visual content.”

COCA-COLA: “They continuously manage to be innovative and their visual presentation captures and engages groups of all ages.”

DISNEY: “Their visuals are recognizable, high quality, and impactful.”

DOVE: “They’re simple, clean, straightforward, and down to earth.”

GE: “They do a great job at wowing, educating, and engaging through visual content.”

GRAMMARLY: “They really nail it with oversized, text-saturated visual content. The content is humorous, helpful, and relatable. Best of all, it’s easy to consume.”

GREAT BIG STORY: “They have excellent, narrative-driven videos that are perfect for social media and other platforms.”

GOOGLE: “They provide great weekly emails which often include infographics, videos and storytelling visuals.”

HEINEKEN: “They’re a company able to combine storytelling, stunning visuals and cross-platform delivery.”

HUMANS OF NEW YORK: “This is an example of very successful storytelling that seems to resonate with people and encourage interaction.”

NIKE: “They use compelling multimedia through the use of images, GIFs, and videos.”

PATAGONIA: “They really show what they’re about. Not so much their product, but the experience you can have with them. They also produce high quality videos that inspire.”

REI: “They have stunning outdoor images that reach the emotions and passions of their audience.”

STARBUCKS: “I’m frequently impressed with their visual content strategy and specific omni-channel examples of visual content. Their consistency and quality across channels inspire me.”

TARGET: “They’re vivid and bold, and for that they stay ahead of the game. Their content is colorful, but they still have a real human component to it all.”

ZENDESK: “I really like their marketing. They’ve done a great job with fun, entertaining videos that also demonstrate their primary value proposition.”

We also asked: **Which thought leaders or experts in the creative/marketing industry do you follow?** Many listed have strong expertise in marketing ROI and offer insights on how to best target and convert customers. Powerful visual storytelling is vital for brands, but only if you can prove impact. It makes sense that marketers look to those who can speak to ROI.

JOSIE AHLQUIST | Speaker and Leadership Consultant

TIM ASH | Digital Marketing Keynote Speaker

JAY BAER | Marketing and Customer Service Keynote Speaker

MATTHEW BARBY | Director of Acquisition at HubSpot

CHRIS BROGAN | CEO OF Owner Media Group

BRIAN CLARK | Founder and CEO of Rainmaker Digital

BRENT CSUTORAS | Social Media Strategist, Speaker and Entrepreneur

BRIAN DEAN | SEO Expert

MELANIE DEZIEL | Branded Content Consultant & Speaker

TINA ROTH EISENBERG | Designer and Entrepreneur

RAND FISHKIN | Author and Co-Founder of Moz

PEG FITZPATRICK | Social Media Expert, Author and Speaker

TOM GOODWIN | Head of Innovation at Zenith

LIZ GROSS | Founding Director of Campus Sonar, Social Data Consultant

KRISTINA HALVORSON | Content Strategist and CEO and Founder of Brain Traffic

ANN HANDLEY | Digital Marketing & Content Expert, Author and Keynote Speaker

DREW HENDRICKS | Social Media Strategist and Contributing Writer at Inc., Forbes and Entrepreneur

TARA HUNT | CEO + Partner at Truly Social, Inc.

MONIKA JANSEN | Head Copywriter and Strategist

CYNTHIA JOHNSON | Co-Founder and CEO at Bell + Ivy, Speaker and Author

JOE LAZAUSKAS | Head of Content Strategy at Contently, Author and Keynote Speaker

REBECCA LIEB | Digital Marketing Advisor and Research Analyst

JON LOOMER | Facebook Marketing Strategist and Consultant

ANITA NEWTON | Startup Advisor & Investor

NEIL PATEL | Digital Marketing Influencer and Entrepreneur

AMY PORTERFIELD | Digital Marketing Coach

JOE PULIZZI | Founder of Content Marketing Institute

MARK RITSON | Marketing Professor and Columnist

DARREN ROWSE | Founder of ProBlogger

MARK SCHAEFER | Executive Branding Coach and Marketing Strategist

MARI SMITH | Small Business and Facebook Marketing Expert

SHANE SNOW | Author and Co-Founder of Contently

CHARISE STRANDBERG | Marketing & Digital Media Director

SCOTT AND ALISON STRATTEN | Authors, Podcasters and Owners of UnMarketing

SUE ZIMMERMAN | Social Media Strategist and Instagram Consultant



PART VII

Conclusion

In case there was any doubt, the results of our survey, *Engaging Your Audience with Visual Content*, confirm that visual content is one of the most essential tools for engaging audiences.

For example, compared to previous years, the demand for both photography and videography is increasing, as many organizations are sharing visual content with their audiences multiple times a day. As a result, speed in locating and sharing visual assets is becoming more important than ever before.

And while 70% of creative professionals say their digital marketing results are typically better when they use visual content, many still don't know which type of visual content drives the most engagement for their company.

As the demand for visual content grows, we hope you use this report as a resource to compare how others in the industry are managing the ever-present need to use visual content to connect with and engage their audiences.

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