



### TREND 3

## Creativity as a force for growth

Data and analytics may have gained prominence over creativity in addressing modern marketing challenges, but the latter can still be valuable—if done the right way.

Mark Singer, Rory McCallum

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**S**OME MAY SAY that being creative is a fundamental part of the human experience. It can be a means of discovering ourselves, overcoming adversity, and finding a way to inspire hope in challenging times. Creativity is a process our brains could go through to see a problem in a new light and find a solution that works outside the bounds of the “standard approach.” But in the business world, which prioritizes optimization and guaranteed results, thinking outside the box can risk our careers, success, and relationships. Often, we stick to the road well travelled with playbooks,

mimic our competitors, or make incremental improvements to tired methods.

Chief marketing officers (CMOs) may be the executives best positioned in the organization to emphasize the importance of creativity in a business. Whether during a time of transition, as a business seeks to develop new markets by finding unmet needs, or in an economic downturn when customers, employees, and partners need the inspiration to find resilience, CMOs can be the force behind never letting the business settle for the status quo.

## Creativity in the spotlight

Growth has been a primary responsibility for CMOs. However, as generating growth becomes more complex due to rapid societal, technological, and **economic changes**, many brands have responded by doubling down on data and analytics. While these analytical tools are now often viewed as essential for any contemporary marketer, there are indications of an imbalance: Organizations may now lack the creativity needed to meet the challenges of the modern business world, as manifested in fewer creative leaders in the C-suite and lower emphasis on creative skills among CMOs and marketing talent.<sup>1</sup>

Creativity can go well beyond brand communications and advertisements, using innovative thinking to shape how systems are designed, challenges are converted into opportunities, employees collaborate, and

organizations engage with customers and other stakeholders.

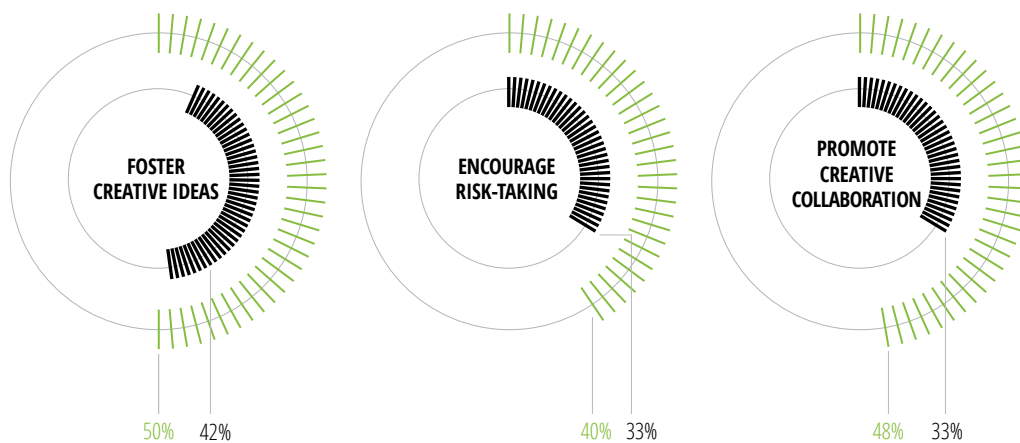
Our **Deloitte survey of 1,015 executives** indicates that creativity in this form does, in fact, contribute to growth. High-growth brand respondents (defined as those with annual revenue growth of 10% or more) are more likely than their negative-growth peers to have the mindset and processes to allow creativity to flourish. Not only are higher-growth brands more likely to view creative ideas as essential to long-term success, they are also more likely to create an environment that supports creative thinking by encouraging risk-taking and cross-functional collaboration (figure 1). The percentages shown may seem low for high-growth brands, but it should be noted that only the “strongly agree” responses are displayed (that is, the brands that are fully committed to these ideals); when including “agree” responses, the proportion of high-growth companies who responded approaches 90% for each attribute.

FIGURE 1

### High-growth brands are more likely to have the mindset and processes to allow creativity to flourish

*Organizations that responded “strongly agree” on aspects of creativity by growth rate*

III Negative growth    III High growth (10%+)



Source: 2023 Deloitte Global Marketing Trends executive survey, conducted in June 2022.

And at a time when we are seeing a shift from creative skills to analytical skills across the marketing function, high-growth brands surveyed are more frequently doing the opposite by considering creative thinking as one of the most important attributes for talent.

## Taking the creative lead

One of the features of this new approach is that creativity is no longer limited to select individuals or teams. In fact, joint research from Deloitte Digital and LIONS reveals that one of the key elements of successful creative business transformation is

finding “hidden” creatives from surprising sources—not just every employee, but also external partners, suppliers, and customers, all of whom can act as wellsprings of creative ideas.<sup>2</sup>

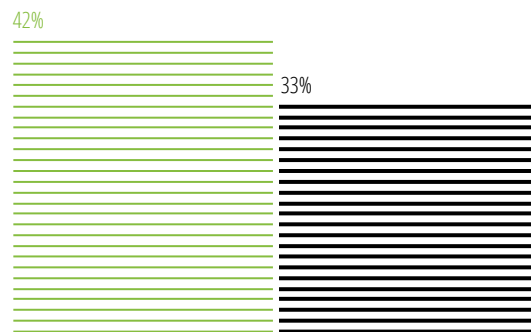
While creative ideas can come from any of these sources, the CMO is sometimes best positioned to be the champion of identifying and activating these ideas across the enterprise. As the executive closest to the consumer, translating these ideas into practical business applications may be key to driving transformative success. Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that we see high-growth companies more than their negative-growth peers leaning on marketing for creativity (figure 2).

FIGURE 2

### High-growth companies rely more on marketing for creative ideas

*Organizations that responded “strongly agree” to relying on the marketing function for their most creative ideas*

III Negative growth    III High growth (10%+)



Source: 2023 Deloitte Global Marketing Trends executive survey, conducted in June 2022.

CMOs might consider the following strategies to encourage creativity in their organizations:

- **Redefine what creativity can offer.** Creativity is no longer confined to single advertisements or campaigns. This shifts the priority for CMOs from delivering one-off projects to consistently delivering products, services, and experiences that allow a brand to stand out. Cristian Cabello, CMO of Chilean vehicle manufacturer Derco, says, “I believe the greatest challenge for a brand is to be able to deliver differential services or experiences that go beyond what is innovative or traditional in the industry. They (those experiences) must be relevant and agree with cultural, economic, or political fluctuations of the countries where we are present. Being consistent over time will allow us to stand out in the market.”<sup>3</sup>
- **Bring the rest of the organization along for the ride.** While CMOs and the marketing function can play a lead role in a brand transformation, all functions should be aligned on business aspirations. For Cargill Protein & Salt CMO Chuck Gitkin, this means ensuring marketing and innovation teams are working closely with functions like sales, operations, and supply chain, especially on innovation. According to Gitkin, this collaboration allows Cargill to “reliably commercialize and supply innovative products and solutions to its customers,” ultimately scaling the impact of the organization’s offerings.<sup>4</sup>
- **Inspire the organization to think differently.** Encouraging risk-taking and providing room for failure can encourage creative thought. But encouraging your organization toward more creative risk-taking

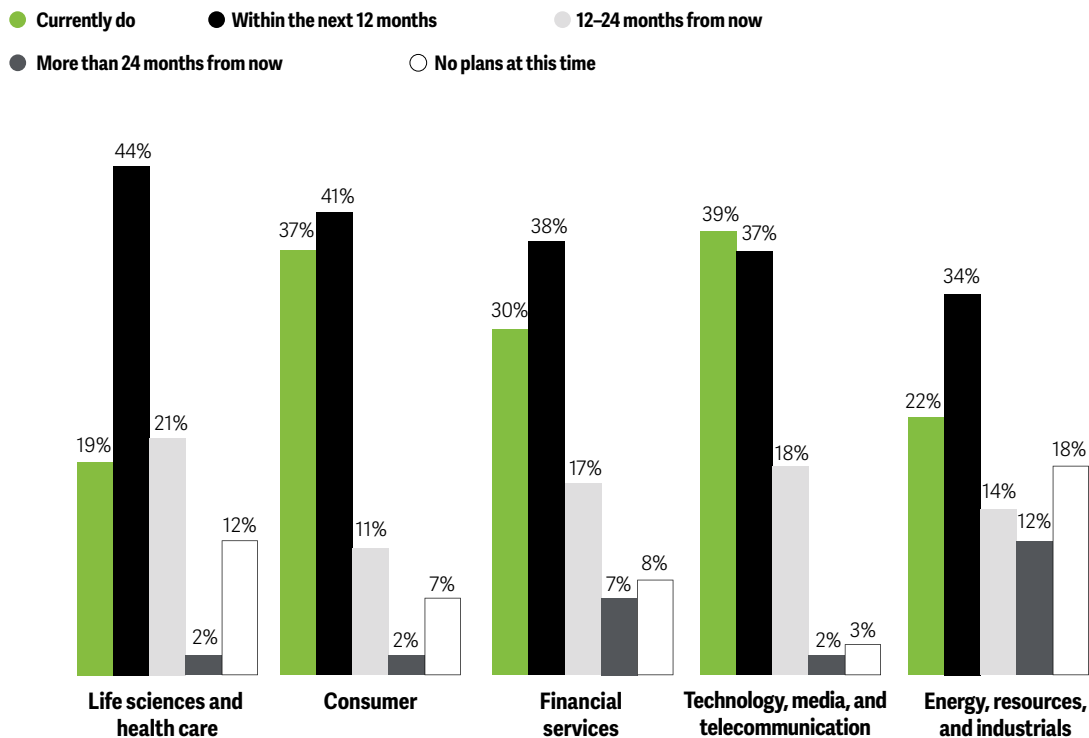
may require effective leadership. Take the example of Tasha Boone, assistant director of communications at the US Census Bureau, who considers creativity essential to delivering on the bureau’s vision. For Boone, this means connecting functions and ideas into a single, unified strategy while giving individual employees the freedom to express themselves within this strategy.<sup>5</sup>

It is this type of combination of individual creative thought with cross-functional collaboration that can lead to the type of transformative change that drives growth.

## Beyond the organization

We are living in an era of cocreation. Creative collaboration does not need to reside only within the four walls of the organization. External creative partners can care just as deeply about a brand and may come across as more authentic to consumers than the brand itself. Some of these potential partners, namely creators and influencers, have large social followings and are actively looking for brands to work with. The brands that are willing to share their voice with select others are the ones that could potentially generate a stronger brand community.

Thus, it may not be a surprise that CMOs across all sectors are increasingly exploring partnerships with creators if they haven’t already done so. In our survey, we found use of creator partnerships is expected to approximately double in the next year, with particularly notable increases in sectors that don’t normally consider such partnerships: life sciences and health care, and energy, resources, and industrials (figure 3).

**FIGURE 3:** Sectors that plan to partner more with creators

Note: Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding and omission of "unsure" answers.

Source: 2023 Deloitte Global Marketing Trends executive survey, conducted in June 2022.

While paying a creator to feature a brand in a post is an obvious way to engage, it is not a comprehensive creative strategy. Many brands are finding that creators can be a natural extension of the strategic development team. When asked to rate the ease of conducting several aspects of the brand/creator partnership, nearly four out of five (78%) respondents indicate it is easy or very easy to collaborate with creators on creative strategy—the highest percentage of any aspect.

Research from Deloitte's CMO Program shows that creators are also looking for mutually beneficial collaborations that help them grow alongside the brands they work with.<sup>6</sup> However, more than half of surveyed creators (58%) report difficulties securing partnerships with brands. Considering the

difficulties from the creator perspective, and the fact that our executive survey showed that fewer than one-third of brands (32%) are currently partnering with creators, there seems to be a disconnect between the two sides of the partnership.

Here are a few ways brands might better include creators as strategic partners in creativity and growth plans:

- **Allow for creative freedom.** Almost by definition, creators are considered accomplished at generating information in a way that engages a core audience. Giving creators the freedom to express their abilities with minimal interference can not only lead to

more appealing content but also helps maintain the authentic voice that is vitally important to creators and consumers. In the words of Bree Sandlin, vice president of lubricants marketing at Shell: “It’s a little scary as a brand manager to know that you’re releasing that control. But it’s telling our brand story in a way that we could never do with a level of authenticity and credibility that consumers need.”<sup>7</sup>

- **Build a partnership based on relevance.** Just as businesses are likely seeking creators who are on the same social platforms as the company’s target audience and who portray an image that’s compatible with the brand, creators, as the sole representatives of their own brands, are likely looking for company partners that are relevant to the creator’s audience. In our survey of 400 creators, nearly seven in 10 (69%) indicated that the top priority when deciding whether to partner with a business was “relevance of brand to my audience”—a higher priority than even monetary value of a partnership.<sup>8</sup> A strong partnership may include plans for how content can be reinforced in a way that leads to growth for both brand and creator.

- **Align on expectations.** Creators surveyed indicated clear expectations are important to forming an ideal partnership with companies. When contract terms plainly define how creators are evaluated, amplified, and paid, brands do not need to overthink how they define a successful partnership. Among brands that partner with creators, the top two ways of measuring the success of those partnerships among those surveyed are “increased engagement on brand channels” (58% of executives) and “revenue growth” (57% of executives).

Like every aspect of modern creativity, creator partnerships are likely to be effective when integrated into the larger creative strategy rather than as a solitary campaign. Connecting formerly disparate stakeholders, functions, and ideas into a concerted effort to infuse creative thought across the organization (and beyond) may seem like a daunting task. Yet, with a combination of customer knowledge and business acumen, CMOs are well positioned to lead this transformation and potentially uncover new sources of growth.

## Endnotes

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