

ALUMNI SALARY SURVEY RESULTS

January 2024



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Dear Brandcenter Alums,

Following, please find the most recent VCU Brandcenter Alumni Salary Survey Report. We conduct this survey every other year. The last report was shared in December of 2021.

I want to start by saying a HUGE thanks to:

- **Stacy Thomas** (ST, 2001), **Allison Schneider** (ST, 2021), and **Natalie Baxter** of Good Run Research & Recreation for helping me improve the survey questions and logic as well as analyze the results. If your agency or company is looking for a super talented research partner, you should check them out! They also have an amazing event space here in RVA. Contact: allison@goodrunresearch.com
- **Diana Tung Ojibway** (AD, 2002) for turning my boring Word document and tables into beautiful infographics.
- All of our alums who contributed to this report. I am so grateful to you all for everything you do to give back to our program, including taking our survey.

Purpose:

- To help our alumni understand average salaries for their discipline and level, and prepare them for annual reviews, salary negotiations, career shifts, etc.
- We also took a look at factors beyond salary - such as how happy our alumni are at their current job, how many hours they work each week, and what companies/ agencies they want to work for next.

What's new this time?

- We reported salary data by concentration (like we normally do) and by role (new!) for the positions where we had enough responses to report them.
- We reported both average and median salaries.
- We reported current work modality and preferred work modality.
- We reported what employer benefits/perks our alums care about most.

Methodology: Online survey, 33 questions, fielded between September - October 2023

Response rate: 630 alumni responses

Response rate by concentration:

- 24%: Art Direction
- 24%: Copywriting
- 23%: Strategy/ Communications Strategy
- 16%: Creative Brand Management
- 13%: Experience Design/Creative Technology

Note: CBM and XD are newer concentrations. The CBM concentration started in 2005 and Experience Design started in 2008.

Response rate by graduating class:

- 7%: 1998-2003
- 12%: 2004-2008
- 21%: 2009-2013
- 21%: 2014-2018
- 39%: 2019-2023

Note: Earlier graduating classes were much smaller in class size than more recent graduating classes. For example, the Class of 1998 had 48 graduates. The Class of 2023 had 95 graduates.

Questions/Comments:

Please let me know if you have questions, comments, suggestions for future surveys/reports.

Best,

Ashley Sommardahl

Associate Director

New this year:

- We've reported salaries by both concentration and specific role (wherever possible.)
- We did not report data by major vs. non-major markets because we discovered that 30% of our alumni work virtually and don't live in the city where their company is located. Many live in major markets while working for companies located in non-major markets or vice versa. With norms changing on where people work and live, reporting by market isn't as demonstrative as it's been in the past.
- In addition to reporting salary **averages** (the sum of reported salaries divided by the number of responses), we're also reporting salary **medians** (the midpoint salary of all reported salaries).
 - **Median is often a truer reflection of the middle of the salary range than is average**, as outlier salaries (both high and low) can have a disproportionate impact on averages. We encourage consideration of both, for perspective.

Annual Salary by Concentration and Level

Q: What is your current annual salary? (open-ended; Average and Median)

Note: Because titles and hierarchy vary greatly by individual agency/company, we asked alums to define their current level.

Note: See above for average and median definitions and our rationale for providing both.

Note: Segments marked n/a had less than 10 data points, and were thus omitted from the analysis.

	AD	CW	XD	ST	CBM
Junior	\$67,222 Average \$68,500 Median	\$57,693 Average \$65,000 Median	n/a Average n/a Median	\$65,886 Average \$75,000 Median	\$67,167 Average \$70,000 Median
Mid	\$83,797 Average \$80,000 Median	\$90,411 Average \$84,000 Median	\$104,331 Average \$92,500 Median	\$87,818 Average \$81,250 Median	\$93,451 Average \$81,500 Median
Senior	\$141,551 Average \$125,000 Median	\$153,008 Average \$135,000 Median	\$172,471 Average \$145,000 Median	\$148,609 Average \$120,000 Median	\$139,361 Average \$126,000 Median
Director	\$210,487 Average \$200,000 Median	\$204,419 Average \$175,000 Median	\$165,765 Average \$141,000 Median	\$177,064 Average \$175,000 Median	\$177,280 Average \$168,000 Median
Executive	n/a Average n/a Median	n/a Average n/a Median	n/a Average n/a Median	\$263,370 Average \$265,000 Median	n/a Average n/a Median

Annual Salary by Role and Level

Note: New this year - Because many alumni pursue roles “outside” of their Brandcenter concentration, we asked alums to identify their **role** in addition to their concentration

Note: We reported salary data for the roles for which we had enough responses. Segments marked n/a had less than 10 data points, and were thus omitted from the analysis.

	Art Director	Copywriter	UX/UI/Product Designer	Strategist	Marketing/ Brand Manager
Junior	\$68,295 Average \$70,000 Median	\$65,385 Average \$65,000 Median	n/a Average n/a Median	\$65,000 Average \$70,000 Median	n/a Average n/a Median
Mid	\$88,011 Average \$80,000 Median	\$93,759 Average \$85,000 Median	\$110,423 Average \$105,000 Median	\$89,593 Average \$82,500 Median	n/a Average n/a Median
Senior	\$138,044 Average \$140,000 Median	\$146,837 Average \$135,000 Median	\$173,179 Average \$146,400 Median	\$142,185 Average \$120,000 Median	\$249,789 Average \$135,500 Median
Director	\$195,200 Average \$190,000 Median	\$207,392 Average \$176,000 Median	\$185,000 Average \$200,000 Median	\$175,568 Average \$171,000 Median	\$209,458 Average \$185,500 Median
Executive	n/a Average n/a Median	n/a Average n/a Median	n/a Average n/a Median	\$256,967 Average \$245,000 Median	\$279,166 Average \$270,000 Median

Annual Salary by Gender and Level



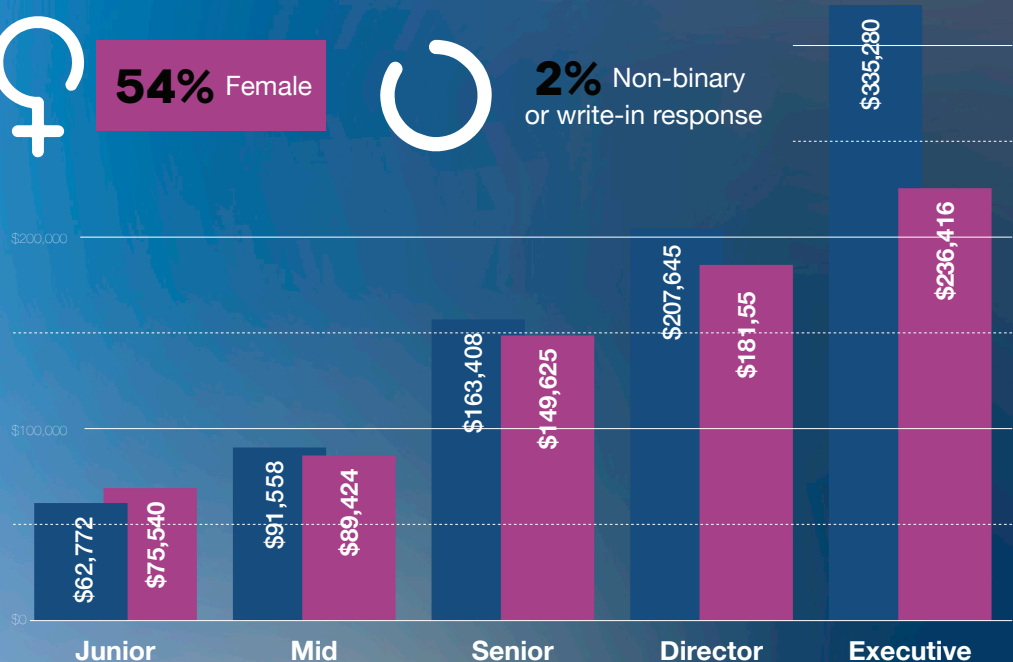
44% Male



54% Female



2% Non-binary or write-in response



Note: This is the same trend we've seen in past reports where females start out strong (actually a little ahead of their male counterparts) but lose momentum as they advance.

Average Junior Salaries: Industry Average vs. Brandcenter Average

Source: Glassdoor (US average; junior level; media and communications industry)

Role	US Average Salary	Brandcenter Salary	Percentage more for Brandcenter grad
Junior Strategist	\$58,745	\$65,000 Average \$70,000 Median	19%
Junior Copywriter	\$53,943	\$65,385 Average \$65,000 Median	20%
Junior Art Director	\$61,206	\$68,295 Average \$70,000 Median	14%

Job Happiness

Q: How would you describe the way you feel about your current job? (multiple choice)

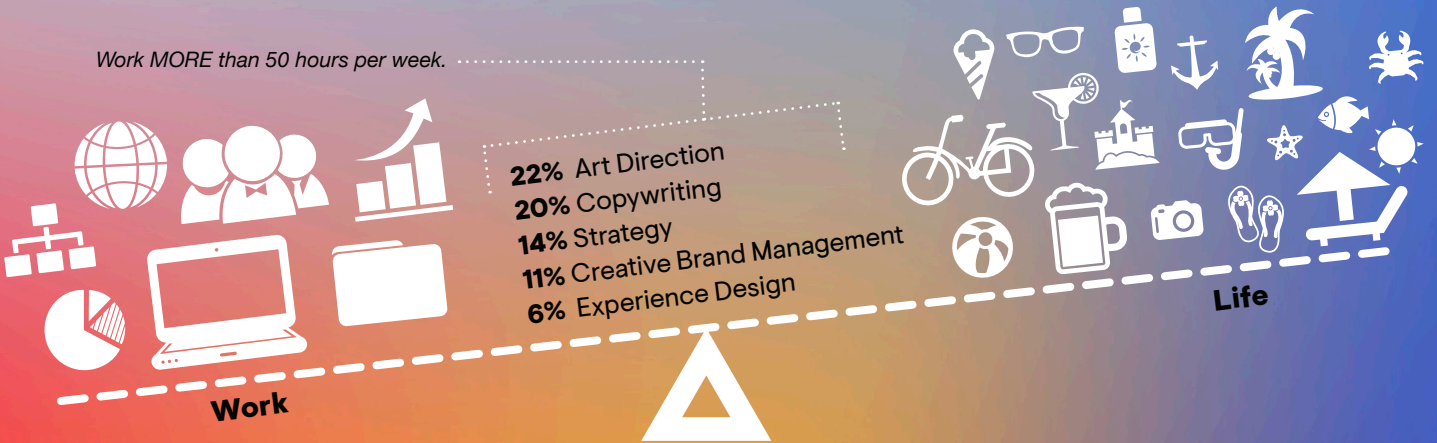
Answered they "Like" or "Love" their job.



Work-Life Balance

Q: In this industry, we understand that workload varies depending on things like current projects, production, new business, etc. ON AVERAGE, how many hours per week do you work? (multiple choice)

Work MORE than 50 hours per week.

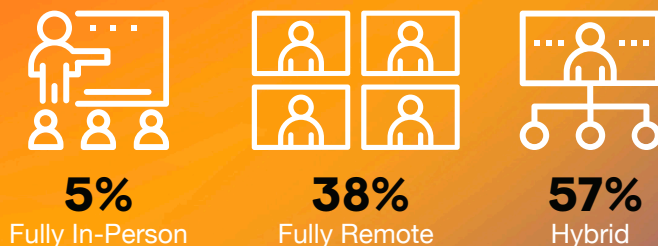


Job Modality (In-Person, Virtual, or Hybrid)

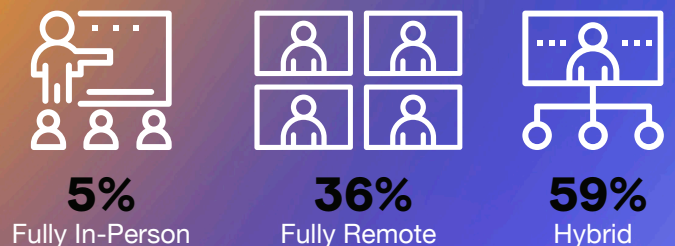
Q: Is your current role fully in-person, fully remote, or hybrid?

Q: Regardless of how your current role is structured, what is your preferred modality for working?

Current Job Modality



Preferred Job Modality



Job Attributes

Q: Thinking of where you are in your career right now, rank your top FIVE most important job attributes.

All Respondents
(top 5 most important attributes)

- Salary
- Work/Life Balance
- Cultural Fit
- Clients I want to work with/Category work
- Growth potential

Respondents at the Junior Level
(top 5 most important attributes)

- Salary
- Work/Life Balance
- Mentorship
- Cultural Fit
- Growth potential

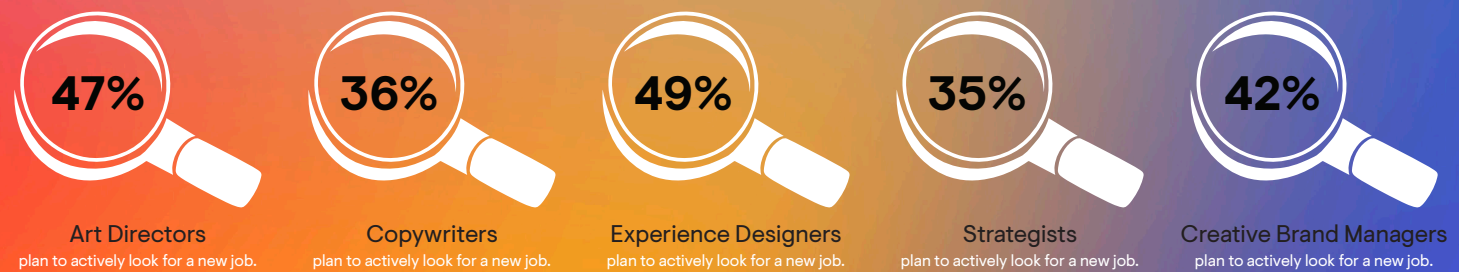
Job Tenure

Q: How long have you been at your current job? (multiple choice)



Job Hunt

Q: Do you plan to actively look for a new job this year? (yes or no)



Q: What are the reasons you plan to look for a new job? (Check all that apply) (across all respondents)

Planning to Look for a New Job (top 3 reasons)



Top Employer Benefits

Q: In addition to salary and health benefits, when considering a new role, what benefits/perks do you value most?
(Select top 3)

All Respondents
(top 3 most valued benefits)

401K/Retirement Savings Plan
Unlimited (or generous) vacation allowance
Parental leave

Respondents at the Junior + Mid Level
(top 3 most valued benefits)

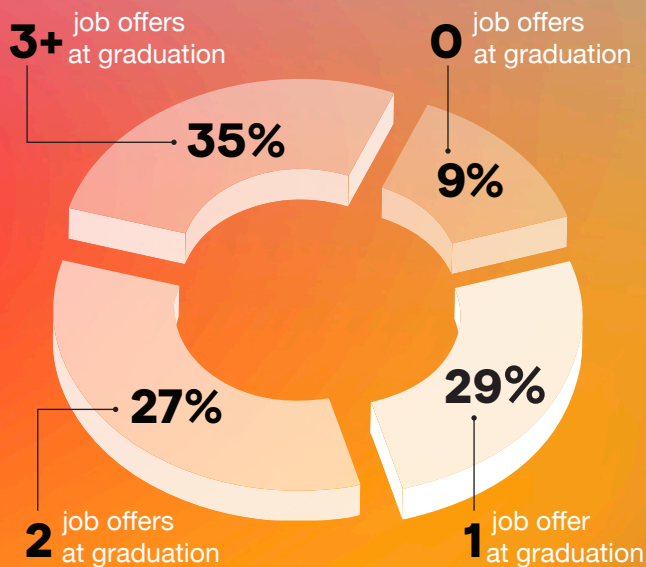
Unlimited (or generous) vacation allowance
401K/Retirement Savings Plan
Relocation stipend

Early Career Advancement (Class of 2022 and 2023)

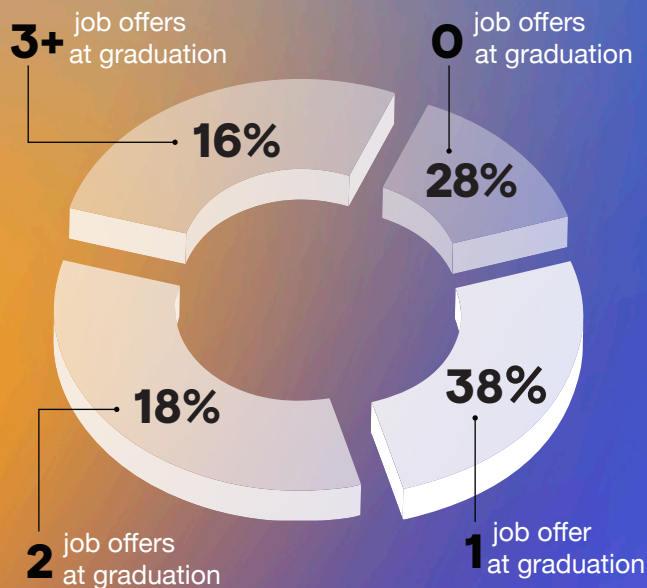
Job Offers by Graduation

Q: How many official job offers did you receive upon graduation? (Official means the agency/company made a formal offer verbally or in writing including title, salary, benefits).

Class of 2022



Class of 2023



Note: Class of 2023 faced a more challenging state of economy and job hiring climate.

Job Level Accepted After Graduation

Q: What level of job did you accept after graduation?

Class of 2022

11% Intern



49% Junior



36% Mid



4% Senior



Class of 2023

16% Intern



46% Junior



12% Mid



5% Senior



Promotion/Raise in Year Since Graduation (Class of 2022)

Q: Have you received a promotion and/or raise since you graduated?

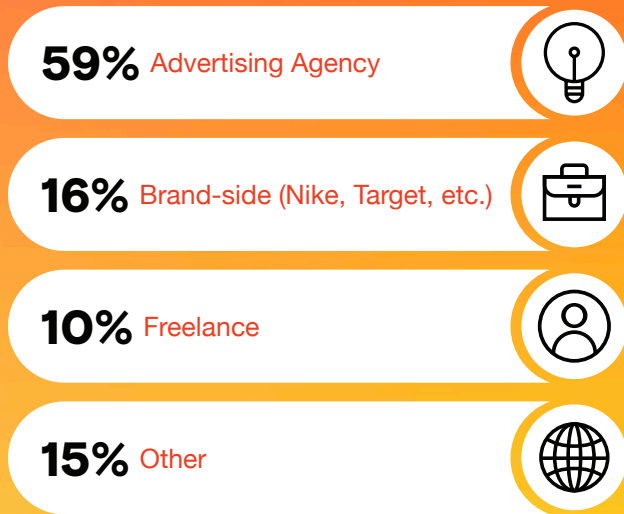
Of the 45 Class of 2022 alums who took this survey, **67%** have received a promotion or raise since graduation.

Job Preparedness (Class of 2022 and 2023 combined)

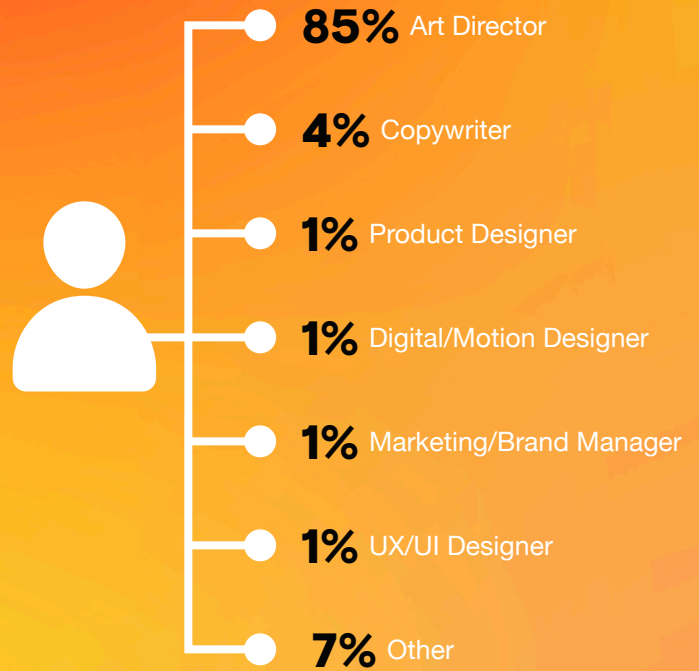
Q: How prepared did you feel in your first job post-Brandcenter?

84% reported feeling very well prepared or prepared for their jobs.

Employer Type



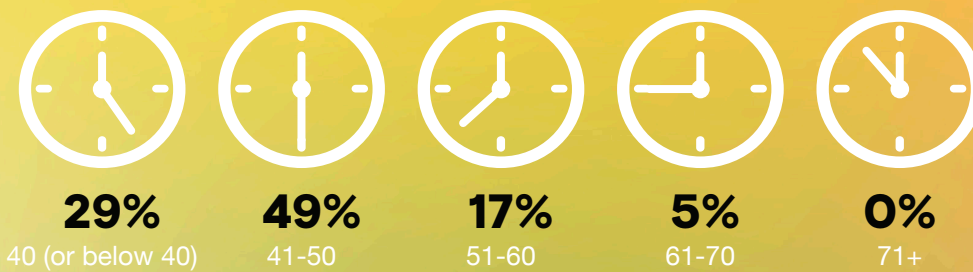
Roles



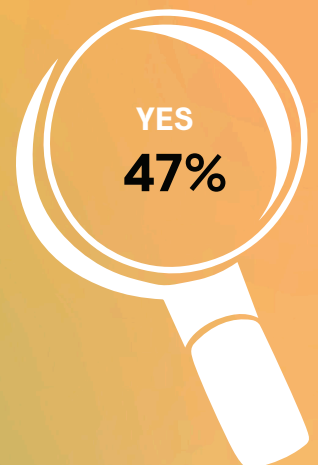
Job Satisfaction



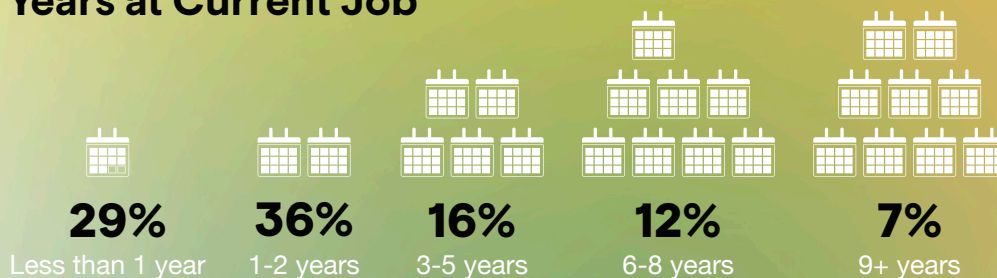
Weekly Hours Worked



Job Searching (in the next year)



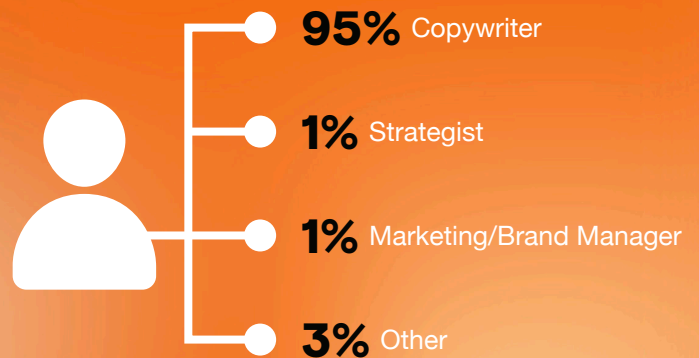
Years at Current Job



Employer Type



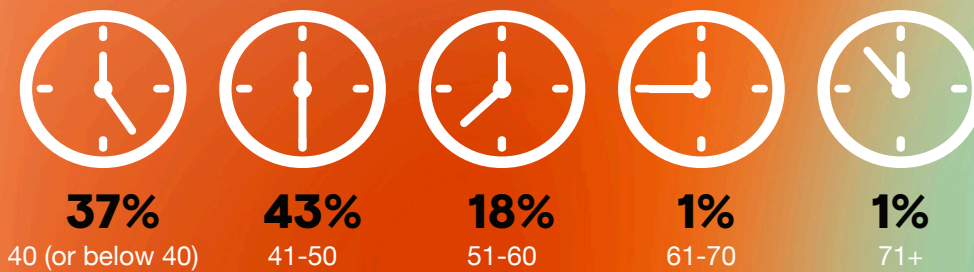
Roles



Job Satisfaction



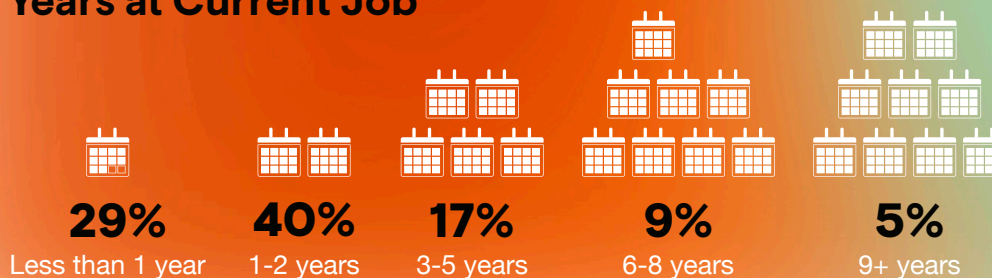
Weekly Hours Worked



Job Searching (in the next year)



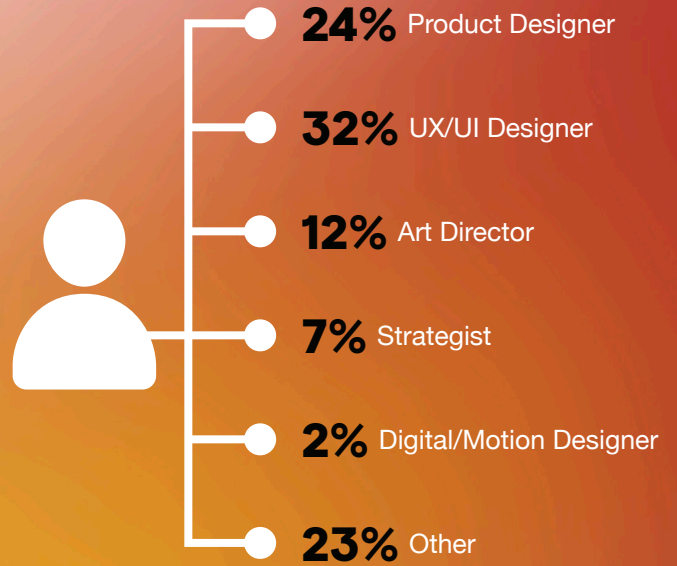
Years at Current Job



Employer Type



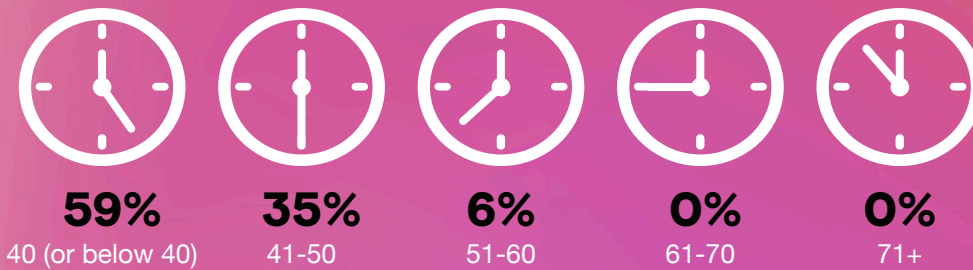
Roles



Job Satisfaction



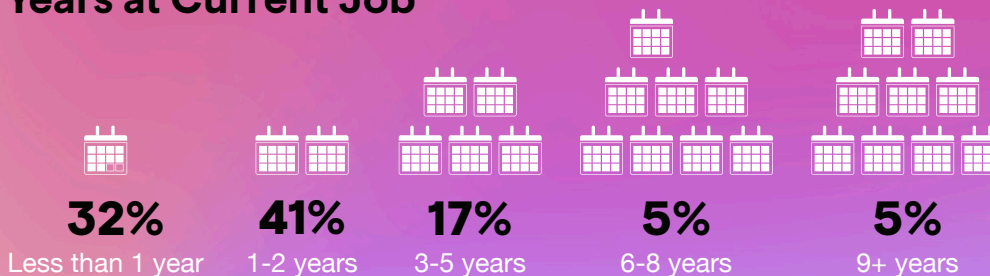
Weekly Hours Worked



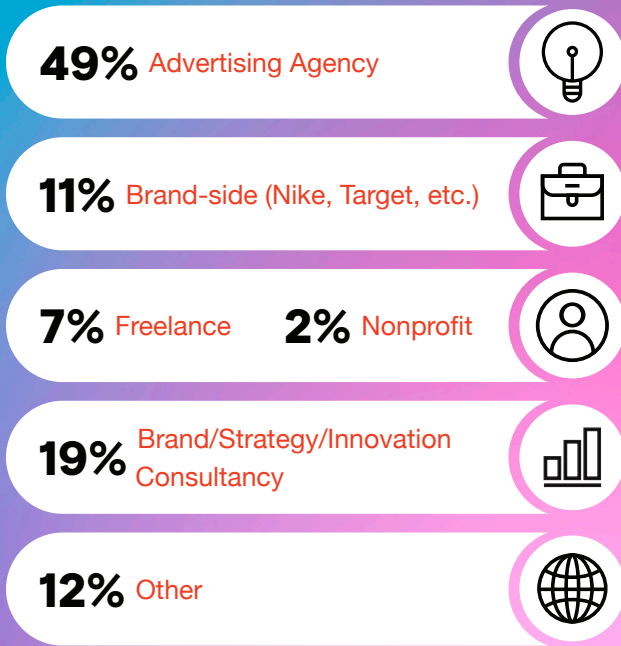
Job Searching (in the next year)



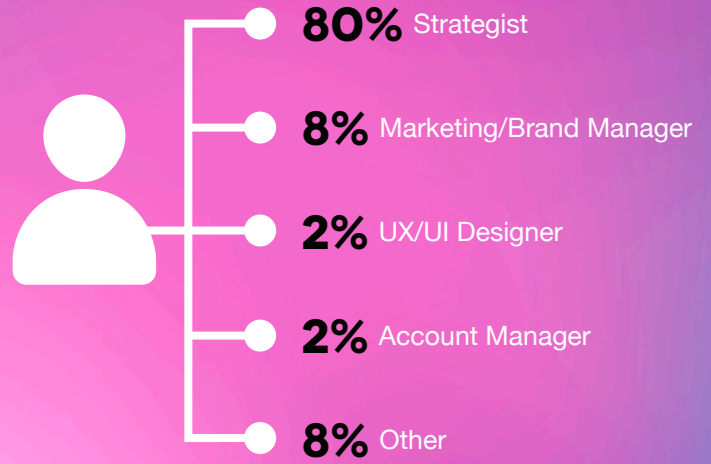
Years at Current Job



Employer Type



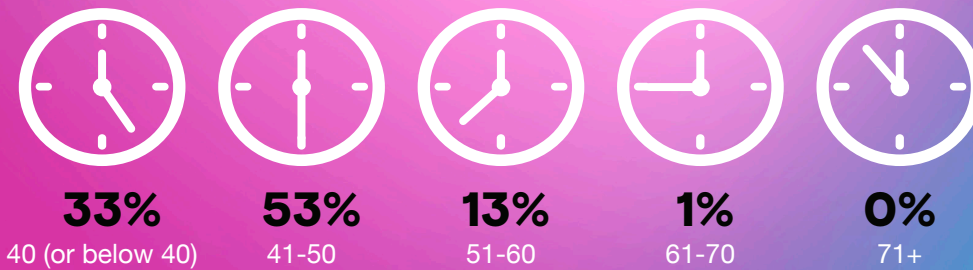
Roles



Job Satisfaction



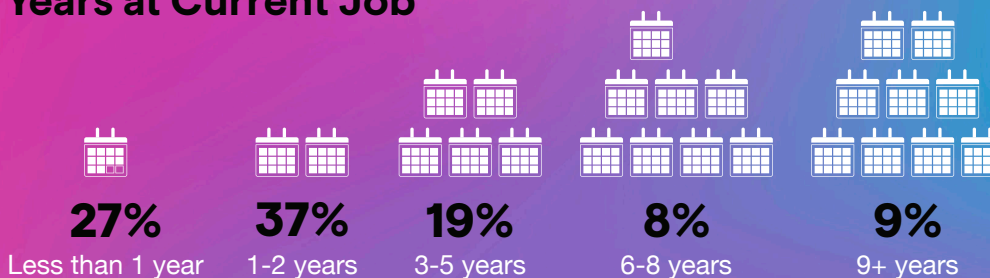
Weekly Hours Worked



Job Searching (in the next year)



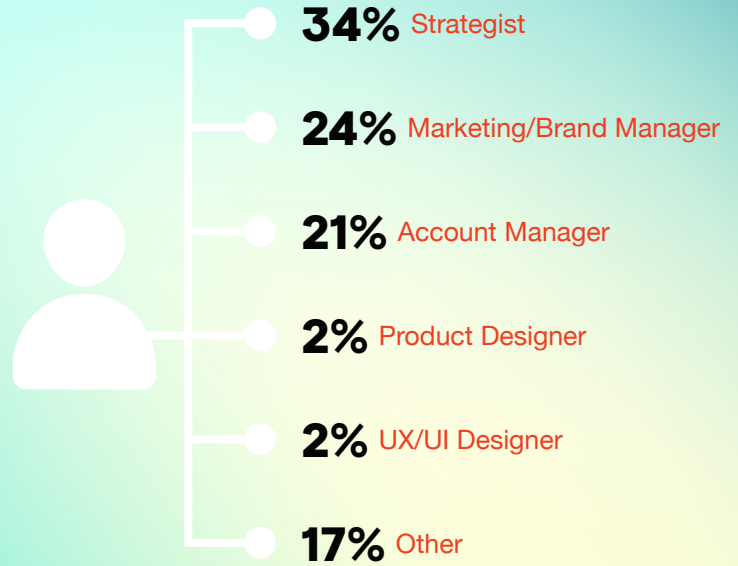
Years at Current Job



Employer Type



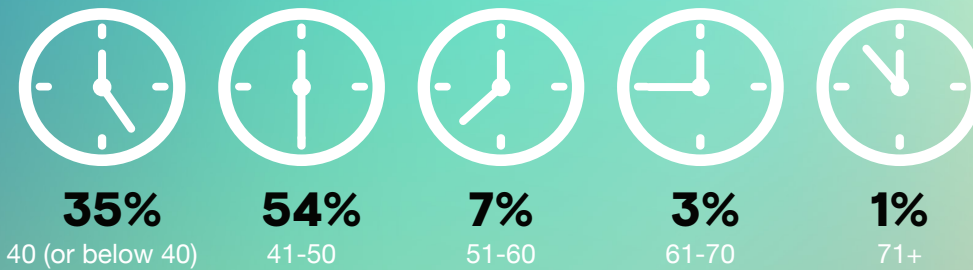
Roles



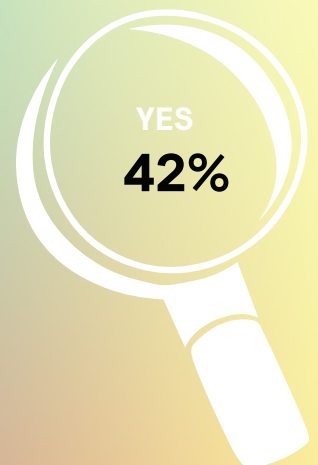
Job Satisfaction



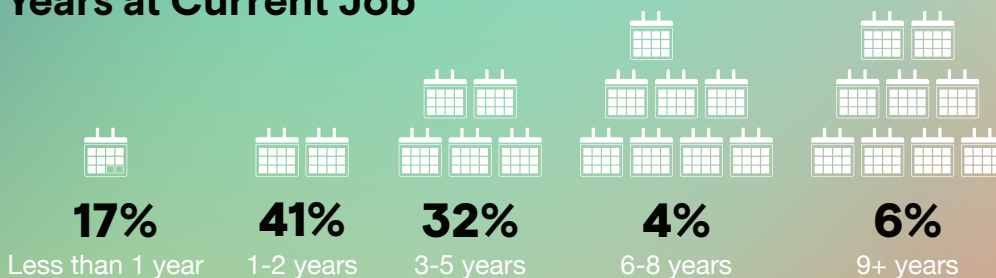
Weekly Hours Worked



Job Searching (in the next year)



Years at Current Job



Q: Have you ever considered starting your own business? (all responses)



51% YES

14% I have already started my own business



35% NO

Answered "YES" by
GENDER

- 47%** Female
- 55%** Male
- 41%** Non-binary or write-in

Answered "YES" by
CONCENTRATION

- 56%** AD
- 44%** CW
- 49%** ST
- 57%** CBM
- 48%** XD

Answered "YES" by
CURRENT JOB LEVEL

- 49%** Junior
- 53%** Mid
- 53%** Senior
- 50%** Director
- 43%** Executive

Career Attributes Preventing Entrepreneurship

Q: What is holding you back from entrepreneurship? (Select all that apply)



34% **Financial Security:** I need to save more, find external funding, etc.



24% **Career/Experience:** I want to get more experience, I still have more to learn, etc.



20% **Risk:** There are too many unknowns, I have a fear of failure, etc.



16% **Network:** I want to build my network more, develop more relationships



6% **Something Else**

Job Happiness

For those considering entrepreneurship, their self-described happiness at their current job:



21%

I love it



47%

I like it



20%

I am indifferent



8%

I don't like it



3%

I hate it

Career Attributes Ranking

Q: For those considering entrepreneurship, what is MOST and LEAST IMPORTANT in terms of career attributes?

(Respondents could select multiple answers)

Most Important



1

Salary



2

Work/Life Balance



3

Cultural Fit

Least Important



1

Networking Potential/
Connections



2

Title

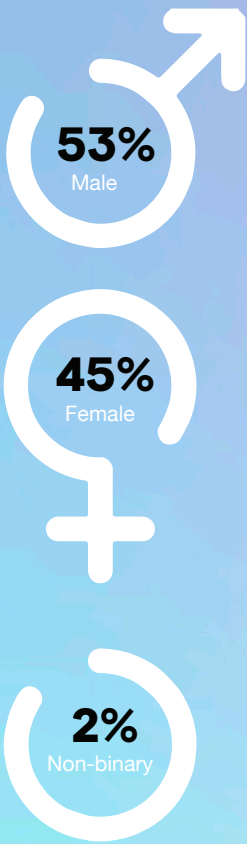


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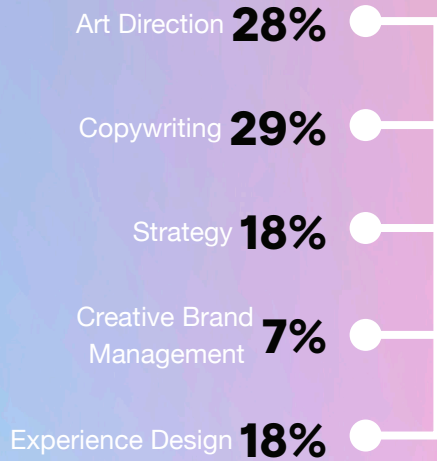
Cause-Related
Work

9% of respondents reported they are freelancers.

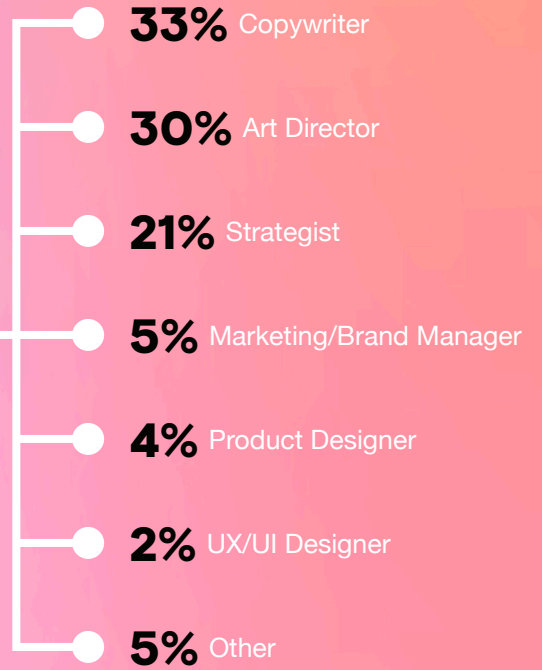
by Gender



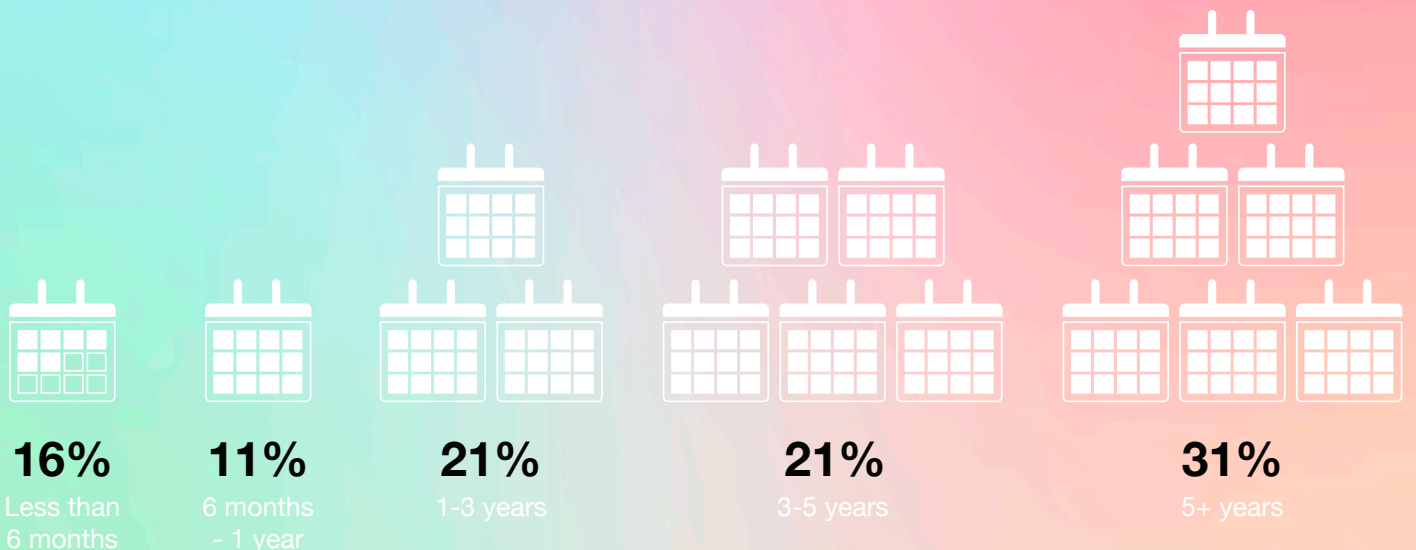
by Concentration



by Role



Q: How long have you been freelancing?



Day Rates

Because 93% of the respondents were at the senior, director, or level, we only included day rates for that level. Senior/Director Level - Average day rate by role:



\$1331

Art Directors



\$1300

Copywriters



\$1413

Strategy

Job Satisfaction

Q: How would you describe the way you feel about your current job?



21%

I love it



51%

I like it



19%

I am indifferent



7%

I don't like it



2%

I hate it

Average Workload

Q: Workload varies depending on current projects, production, new business, etc. On AVERAGE, how many hours per week do you work?



44%

40 (or below 40)



40%

41-50



12%

51-60



4%

61-70



0%

71+

Where Our Alums Want To Work Now

Q: What agency/company would you LOVE to work for? (open-ended)

Some of the most popular answers were:



Q: Your Adcenter/Brandcenter experience was an investment. In looking back on your decision to attend, do you consider it worth the investment?

80%

Yes, it was absolutely worth the investment.

16%

I don't know yet.

4%

No, it was not worth the investment.

Q: What makes Brandcenter worth the investment?

Most popular answers included:

- Networking/connections - Alumni, peers, and faculty**
- Foot in the door/ entrance to industry**
- Real-world/industry preparation**
- Job placement assistance**
- Higher starting salary/earning potential**
- Obtaining graduate degree**
- Skills learned**
- Rigor/intensity**
- Widened perspective/creativity**
- Learning team dynamics and leadership**
- School's reputation**

Q: How would you rate the strength of Brandcenter's industry/alumni network (for landing jobs, finding new clients, staying current in the industry, etc.)?

79% of respondents say the Brandcenter network is strong.

Welcome! Thank you for supporting the school and its past/present/future students by completing this survey. Should take ~5 minutes to complete. This information will be used to publish the biennial Brandcenter Alumni Report.

What year did you graduate? (drop-down menu)

- 1998
- 1999
- 2000
- 2001
- 2002
- 2003
- 2004
- 2005
- 2006
- 2007
- 2008
- 2009
- 2010
- 2011
- 2012
- 2013
- 2014
- 2015
- 2016
- 2017
- 2018
- 2019
- 2020
- 2021
- 2022
- 2023

If they answer 2021, 2022, 2023, they get the next 4 questions

How many official job offers did you receive upon graduation? (Official means the agency/company made a formal offer verbally or in writing including title, salary, benefits.)

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3+

What level of job did you accept after graduation?

- Intern
- Junior Level
- Mid Level
- Senior Level
- I haven't started my job yet

How prepared did you feel in your first job post-Brandcenter?

Very well prepared
 Prepared
 Unprepared
 Very unprepared

IF “unprepared” or “very unprepared” above:

Please explain why you did not feel prepared for your first job.

Have you received a promotion and/or raise since you graduated?

Yes
 No

What track/concentration were you at the Adcenter/Brandcenter?

Art Direction
 Copywriting
 Strategy/Communications Strategy
 Creative Brand Management
 Experience Design/Creative Technology

Which of the following best describes the type of role you’re currently in/ your discipline? We know roles often overlap/blur so please choose the one that aligns most with your current position at your current employer. (drop-down menu)

Art Director (jr, mid, sr, ACD, CD, GCD, CCO, etc.)
 Copywriter (jr, mid, sr, ACD, CD, GCD, CCO, etc.)
 Strategist (jr, mid, sr, director, GPD, CSO, etc.)
 Research (Design, Consumer, Market, etc.)
 Account Manager (jr, mid, sr, supervisor, director,etc.)
 Product Designer (jr, mid, sr, supervisor, director,etc.)
 UX/UI Designer (jr, mid, sr, supervisor, director,etc.)
 Digital/Motion designer (jr, mid, sr, supervisor, director,etc.)
 Marketing/Brand Manager (jr, mid, sr, supervisor, director, CMO,etc.)
 Other

All agencies/companies define titles in different ways and have their own ways of explaining hierarchies. How would you define your current level?

Junior level
 Mid level
 Senior level
 Director level
 Executive level

In which city/metro area is your company located?

Atlanta
 Austin
 Boston
 Boulder/Denver
 Chicago
 Los Angeles
 Minneapolis
 New York City
 Portland
 Raleigh/Durham
 Richmond
 San Francisco
 Seattle
 Washington DC/Northern Virginia
 Other

Do you live in the same city/metro area where your company is located?

Yes
 No [IF NO:
 In what city/metro area do you live?

Is your current role fully in-person, fully remote, or a hybrid?

Fully in-person
 Fully remote
 Hybrid

“Regardless of how your current role is structured, what is your preferred modality for working?”

Fully in-person
 Fully remote
 Hybrid

There are lots of different ways to describe a company/organization, and all have their own ways of defining themselves. Which best describes the company that you currently work for?

Freelance/Self
 Full-service advertising agency
 Digital advertising agency
 Brand/strategy/innovation consultancy
 Brand-side (Nike, Target, Apple, etc.)
 Nonprofit
 Start-up
 Research or trend reporting company
 College or University
 Other [If YES to freelance/self, ask these 2 questions

How long have you been freelancing?

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months – 1 year
- 1 – 3 years
- 3 – 5 years
- Over 5 years

What is your average day rate? Please enter a number (no \$ symbol).

Have you ever considered starting your own business?

- Yes
- No
- I am already an entrepreneur

If YES, ask the next question.

What is holding you back from entrepreneurship? (check all that apply)

- Career/Experience: I want to get more experience, I still have more to learn, etc.
- Financial Security: I need to save more, find external funding, etc.
- Risk: There are too many unknowns, I have a fear of failure, etc.
- Network: I want to build my network more, develop more relationships, etc.
- Something else (Please specify)

What is your annual salary? Please enter a number with no \$ symbol (ex. 80,000). If you are working abroad, please convert to USD.

In addition to salary and health benefits, when considering a new role, what benefits/perks do you value most? (Choose top 3)

- 401K/retirement savings plan
- Unlimited (or generous) vacation allowance
- Parking allowance
- Gym allowance
- Cell phone allowance
- Pet insurance
- Parental leave
- Relocation stipend

How would you describe the way you feel about your current job?

- I hate it.
- I don't like it.
- I am indifferent.
- I like it.
- I love it.

Thinking of where you are in your career right now, rank your top **THREE** most important job attributes (#1 spot = your most important attribute). Label **ONLY** your top three with a 1, 2 or 3 in the corresponding boxes.

Global/cultural impact
 Mentorship
 Clients I want to work with/category work
 Fast-paced
 Cultural fit
 Salary
 Cause-related work
 Work/life balance
 Title
 Networking potential/connections
 Growth potential
 Company/agency's notoriety
 Autonomy

Workload varies depending on current projects, production, new business, etc. ON AVERAGE, how many hours per week do you work?

40 (or below 40)
 41-50
 51-60
 61-70
 71+

How long have you been at your current job?

Less than 1 year
 1-2 years
 3-5 years
 6-8 years
 9+ years

Do you plan to actively look for a new job this year?

Yes
 No

What are the reasons you are looking for a new job? (Check all that apply)

I want a higher salary.
 I want a higher title.
 I want to move to a new city.
 I want to try a new agency/company.
 I want to do something else in marketing/advertising/branding industry.
 I want to leave marketing/advertising/branding and do something else.
 I want to feel more challenged.
 I want more job stability.
 Other (Please specify)

Your Adcenter/Brandcenter experience was an investment – in time, money, energy (and likely more...).
We want to know: in looking back on your decision to attend, do you consider it worth that investment?

- Yes, it was absolutely worth the investment.
- No, it was not worth the investment.
- I don't know.

If yes to above: What makes Brandcenter worth the investment?

How would you rate the strength of Brandcenter's industry/alumni network (for landing jobs, finding new clients, staying current in the industry, etc.?)

- Very strong
- Somewhat strong
- Neutral
- Somewhat weak
- Very weak

Just a few more questions! Thanks for hanging. What agency/company would you LOVE to work for?

This question is optional, but if you've got an idea we'd love to hear it! What's one skill that you wish you knew (or could learn) to take your career to the next level?

How would you describe your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Gender not listed. My gender is _____