Detours and
New Directions

Helping Your Creative Team Take Change in Stride

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Change happens in good times and bad, whether or not we're prepared for it. It can be gradual or abrupt, dramatic or subtle. Fortunately, most creative professionals feel their companies do a good job of keeping them informed of new developments: 84 percent of design professionals we surveyed said their manager is effective at communicating changes to the team.

That isn't to say managing change is easy. Dealing with and adapting to change – and encouraging team members to do the same – requires awareness and foresight. To get a better sense of how in-house creative teams are addressing current challenges and opportunities, and preparing for new ones, The Creative Group polled more than 200 winners of *Graphic Design USA*'s 2008 and 2009 American Inhouse Design Awards. Much of the information in this guide is based on the results of this research. You also will find advice from industry experts and best practices that can help you lead your team through times of transition.

We hope this information can serve as your pocket "GPS" – helping you and your team navigate the shifting creative landscape, and, like any good global positioning system, guiding you safely around potential roadblocks to your destination.

We're grateful to the honorees and experts who were willing to share their insights and strategies, and we're pleased to pass along these ideas to you. For more tips, or assistance with any of your staffing needs, please contact The Creative Group office nearest you by calling **1.888.846.1668** or visiting **www.creativegroup.com**.

Going With the Flow:
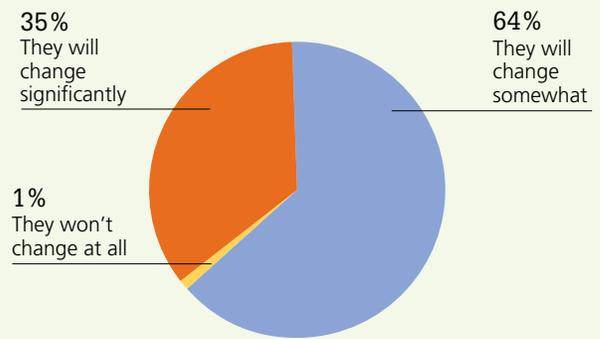# Managing Through Corporate Change

Without question, fundamental change is sweeping through the in-house design world. Nine out of 10 designers we surveyed said their responsibilities have changed in the last year. Furthermore, 35 percent of respondents said they expect their roles to shift significantly in the next three years. The reasons behind this change were varied and included staff reductions, tighter budgets, new technologies and shifting business objectives.

"How would you say the job responsibilities/duties in your current role have changed within the past 12 months?"

24%
They have changed significantly

66%
They have changed somewhat

10%
They haven't changed at all
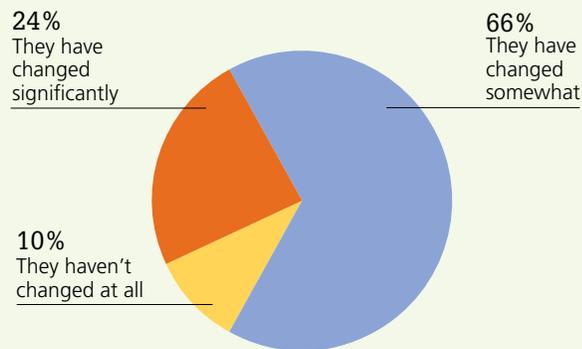
Source: Survey of 200 Graphic Design USA *American Inhouse Design Awards winners*

"How do you anticipate the job responsibilities/duties in your current role will change in the next three years?"

35%
They will change significantly

64%
They will change somewhat

1%
They won't change at all

Source: Survey of 200 Graphic Design USA *American Inhouse Design Awards winners*

Bumps in the Road

Survey respondents shared some of their greatest obstacles when adjusting to change…

- *"Incorporating new job duties with those already in place."*
- *"Getting my manager to lead the implementation of the changes."*
- *"Understanding the rationale for change."*
- *"Getting clarification as to what the new organizational structure is and definition of roles and responsibilities."*
- *"Understanding how best to work with new colleagues, managers and decision makers."*
- *"Miscommunication or non-communication from the powers above as to what they want."*

Going With the Flow: Managing Through Corporate Change

Although change is common, our research indicated that some types of change are easier to absorb than others. In fact, quite often, it's not the change but the uncertainty it creates that can test a design team's resilience.

One key factor in determining whether your team embraces or rejects change is you, the manager. The example you set as you welcome – or resist – business developments sets the tone for your team.
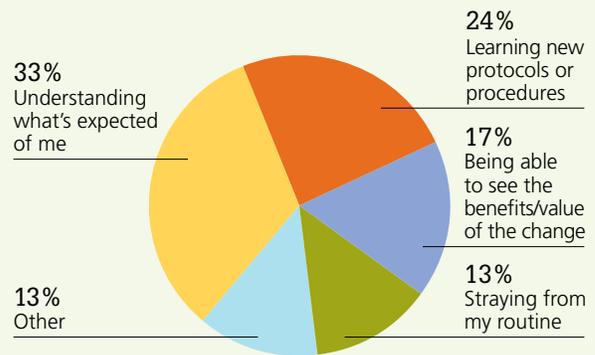
The most successful managers are able to put change in context and actively lead their teams through it. To help your team members adjust more quickly – and with less stress – consider these strategies, based on input from survey respondents and in-house leaders:

- **Explain the change.** By explaining the impact that impending changes will have on each team member and the group as a whole, managers can help their teams integrate new priorities and additional responsibilities with minimal confusion and anxiety. As one survey respondent said: "I want to know why things have changed and the reasoning behind them. This usually helps alleviate the stress related to the change."

- **Involve your team.** While the majority of survey respondents feel their managers are effective at communicating change, more than half (51 percent) of designers feel company leaders fall short in involving team members in the planning and implementation process. Carlos Caicedo, creative director at Wayne, N.J.-based GAF, North America's largest manufacturer of residential and commercial roofing, says it's vital to give your team an opportunity to talk about how they'll handle impending changes. "Share information, strategies, and your knowledge and experience," he advises. "Promote interaction, dialogue and education. We use brainstorming sessions to encourage ideas, and we also meet once a month to present relevant subjects."

  Caicedo, whose nine-person design team includes web and video production, stresses the importance of fostering partnership and collaboration among team members. "Letting everybody know what the others are doing helps with change management. And having an open space where everybody sits increases awareness of what's going on," he says.

- **Get organized.** Encourage your team to make full use of project management software and other organizational tools so that they can more easily juggle competing assignments and tight deadlines. "You can have 100 projects and if they are organized, you can handle them," says Meredith Fordham,

"What is the greatest challenge you face when adapting to change?"

- 33% Understanding what's expected of me
- 24% Learning new protocols or procedures
- 17% Being able to see the benefits/value of the change
- 13% Straying from my routine
- 13% Other

Source: Survey of 200 Graphic Design USA *American Inhouse Design Awards winners*

manager of creative design for JAXPORT, the Port of Jacksonville, Fla. "If there are piles all over your office and you can't find anything, you're sunk."

- **Provide ongoing support.** Your team will have less trouble integrating change if you provide adequate support and guidance throughout transition periods. Here are some tips to ease the way through:

  - Ensure that your team has adequate resources to take on new duties.
  - Provide additional training to prevent "trial-by-fire" pressure.
  - Bring in interim support (i.e., freelancers) to "buy time" for your staff when they must get up to speed on new procedures and duties.

- **Run interference.** There will be times when you'll have to cushion the impact that change has on your staff, says Ivan Boden, creative director at ISO, a Jersey City, N.J.-based company that supplies data analytics to the insurance industry. "If you have to be an intermediary for your staff and an in-house client, do it so your staff can focus on their jobs. Encourage your team to be accessible and customer-service oriented. But as a manager, create an environment where they can get their work done without undue interference with design," says Boden.

Ahead of the Curve:
Mastering New Technologies

Technological change affects the tools designers use on the job and also the media in which their work appears. Keeping up with new design technologies may not pose a great challenge for many designers, as evidenced by our survey results: More than seven in 10 in-house designers feel it's easy to stay current on these tools.

However, acclimating to the realm of social media may be a different matter – and this task is assuming greater importance in the creative world. While training your team on new technology tools is essential, so is encouraging them to become experts in the creative use of social media and other digital platforms so that they can provide knowledgeable, strategic input regarding your company's online marketing efforts or, as one survey respondent noted, "prove that good design transcends media."

Lead, Don't Follow

Ideally, in-house design teams should act as consultants to colleagues outside of their departments, educating them on digital design issues. "Designers have to try to take a bigger role in how things are going to look for websites," says ISO's Boden. "That's a big challenge because websites are controlled by a small number of people in a company. It's really hard when you have bits and pieces done without an overall, top-down approach, as you would have for a print product."

Web production at ISO is part of the Design Services unit, which is within the Corporate Communications department. Grouping web design and production into one area has been a step in the right direction, says Boden. "Our web team is under pressure to produce things so fast, they don't have time to think about design. We're working to have better collaboration between them and the designers."

"How easy or challenging is it for you to stay current on new design technologies?"

11%
Very easy

1%
Very difficult

28%
Somewhat difficult

60%
Somewhat easy
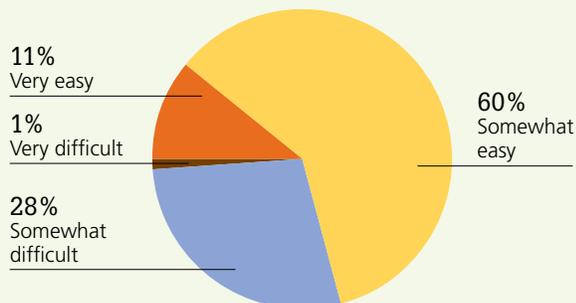
Source: Survey of 200 Graphic Design USA American Inhouse Design Awards winners

Survey respondents ranked the following trends in order of the impact they will have on in-house creative departments in the next five years:

1. Use of social media in marketing (e.g., Twitter, Facebook)
2. Use of mobile media in marketing
3. The "greening" of design*

*The art of designing physical objects, the built environment and services to comply with the principles of economic, social and ecological sustainability

Source: Survey of 200 Graphic Design USA American Inhouse Design Awards winners

Ahead of the Curve:
Mastering New Technologies

Think Multiple Platforms

Tim Heyer, advertising project manager at Carlstadt, N.J.-based Pantone, Inc., says that his company is expanding into areas such as iPhone applications, while also getting involved in social media, to better understand the needs of its customers. This strategy can increase your team's relevance: Wherever your company is focusing its branding and marketing efforts – whether it's webinars, podcasting, streaming video or blogging – your creative department should be involved in helping to ensure the consistency and coherence of the firm's image and message.
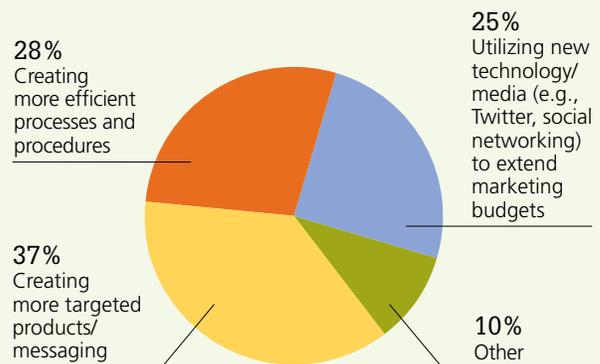
"Most designers I know are creative thinkers beyond just the realm of design. Use this thinking not only to create great design but also to brainstorm ways to help your company," Heyer advises. "You may think of ways to improve the direction or messaging of a piece you're working on, for example, or maybe you have an idea for a program to help bring in sales."

Use Technology to Your Team's Advantage

At the in-house agency of Equifax, a global information solutions company based in Atlanta, HTML and Flash-based projects now account for 30 percent of the design team's work, says senior creative director Brian Tisdale. The team also has recently begun providing photography and video-editing services to all levels of the company.

To keep track of a steady, high volume of projects – more than 1,000 unique jobs in 2008 – the team uses an electronic job input and tracking system. "This is essential to communicate progress, meet due dates and provide client comps," Tisdale says. "Our clients have access to this system so an electronic 'paper trail' is in place to avoid confusion and disputes."

"What do you see as the greatest opportunity for your firm in the current economy?"

28% Creating more efficient processes and procedures

25% Utilizing new technology/media (e.g., Twitter, social networking) to extend marketing budgets

37% Creating more targeted products/messaging

10% Other

Source: Survey of 200 Graphic Design USA *American Inhouse Design Awards winners*

Team Green: Incorporating Sustainability Into Design

The social emphasis on a more environmentally sensitive approach to doing business is bringing significant changes to the design world – far beyond previous eco-conscious initiatives, such as the use of recycled paper or soy-based inks. Terms like "sustainability" pop up frequently in conversations among design professionals who are on the lookout for ways to help their companies better align business goals with progressive ecological principles.

Join the Green Vanguard

In addition to responding to internal clients' requests for "green" collateral, creative directors should take steps to ensure they're on the cutting edge of change. "We advocate that design teams begin to learn about sustainability, develop a plan for implementing and incorporating sustainable practices into their work and communicate what they're doing to clients and suppliers," says Lisa Wellman, CEO of Mercer Island, Wash.-based SustainCommWorld, producers of the Green Media Conferences and ECO*focus* Seminars. "It's always easier and cheaper to be proactive rather than reactive. Right now 'sustainability' is a differentiator. Start now."

## Participate in Corporatewide Green Initiatives

Designers need to make sure they have a place at the table when their firms are developing environmental policies. Fordham, creative design manager at JAXPORT, worked with the organization's full-time environmental manager so that practices like posting documents in the agency's online media room and using an eco-friendly font (like "Ecofont," a typeface developed by Dutch marketing and communications agency Spranq that uses up to 20 percent less ink when printed) on internal documents would be part of the company's Environmental Management System Plan.

"Do you expect your firm to become more or less focused on the environmental impacts of its programs and products in the next 12 months?"

60%
More focused

5%
Less focused

35%
No change
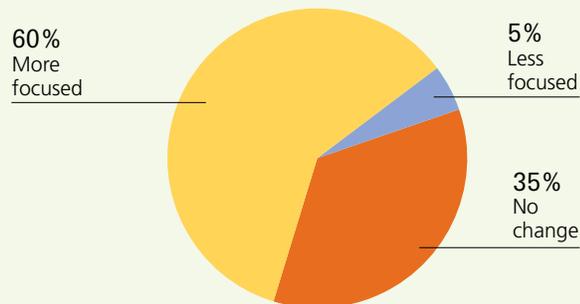
Source: Survey of 200 Graphic Design USA *American Inhouse Design Awards winners*

"How interested are you in learning more about sustainable/eco-friendly design?"
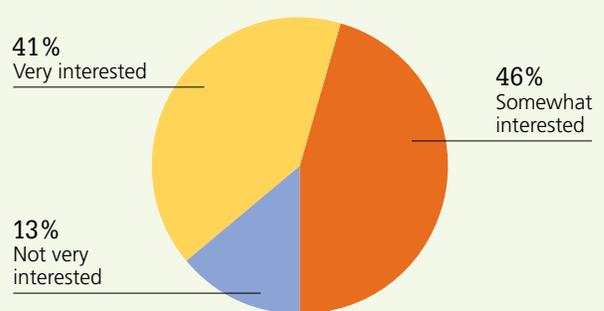
41%
Very interested

46%
Somewhat interested

13%
Not very interested

Source: Survey of 200 Graphic Design USA *American Inhouse Design Awards winners*

Team Green: Incorporating Sustainability Into Design

Put Suppliers to the Test

Sustainability calls for thinking about the work from concept to compost, explains Wellman. This includes examining every link in the supplier chain, from prepress houses and printers to paper manufacturers, and looking for suppliers that are already offering carbon neutral workflows, products and processes. "Typically, design teams get very comfortable with a group of trusted suppliers," she notes. "To keep up, however, they're going to have to examine whether those suppliers are up to speed with sustainable best practices and make some hard calls about who they're going to do business with."

Educate Yourself and Your Team

New products and services that address the greening of the media are coming to market almost daily, notes Wellman. It's a lot to keep up with, but staying on top of such developments is part of continuing professional education. "Designers are going to have exciting new materials to work with and they need to make themselves aware of what's available and on the horizon," she says.

Know When Not to Green

As companies try to save money and earn environmental credibility, designers may sometimes find themselves in a curious position: steering internal clients away from what seems like an eco-friendly option. An example is when businesses distribute corporate newsletters or magazines as PDF files rather than printed copies, a strategy ISO has used. "It saves our paper costs, but it doesn't save paper," observes Boden. "What you have is all the recipients printing copies that are single-sided on low-quality, office-grade copier paper. So really, that doubles or triples the amount of paper used. If anything, it's anti-green."

Quality also can be sacrificed in the process, he adds. "That's been something I've been trying to educate people about. 'Is electronic versus print worth the quality degradation?' In some cases, it probably is. But when it comes to a high-end piece, it's not."

Green Gradually

It's not possible – or practical – to "green" every aspect of your company's collateral in one swift step. Fordham recommends a gradual transition – even if it means taking it one item at a time. "Next time you do a brochure, do it with PCW-content or FSC-certified paper," she suggests. "Then build from there. When you order those promotional stress relievers, get the biodegradable ones, then the recycled newsprint pencils. A big change starts with a small choice."

"Where do you get information on environmentally friendly/sustainable design?"

88% Media (e.g., magazines, websites, blogs)

51% Colleagues/industry contacts

29% Trade organizations

29% Conferences/seminars

11% Classes/educational courses

7% Other

Source: Survey of 200 Graphic Design USA *American Inhouse Design Awards winners. Multiple responses permitted.*

Looking Ahead:
Laying the Groundwork

As the leader of a creative team, you may be so focused on present-day changes that you have little time to consider tomorrow's potential challenges. But it's a smart strategy to always look ahead and try to anticipate what's around the next curve. Here are some first steps design leaders suggest:

Reach Out

Don't get trapped in the in-house world, says Caicedo of GAF. "Go out. See what the rest of the world is doing. Explore. As a creative manager or director, give your people the right to be wrong. Encourage innovation."

Go the Extra Mile

Work hard, says Fordham at JAXPORT. "In the restaurant industry, there's a saying: 'If there's time to lean, there's time to clean.' If you're slow, create a project for yourself."

Strut Your Stuff

Document how your team adds value to the company, advises ISO's Boden. Enter design competitions and display awards publicly. Create a rotating "design wall" in the department that will become a conversation piece. Document your team's successes and positive feedback they've gotten. Explains Boden: "Such efforts sell your services and make the perception solid that you're the source of good design."

Shift Into High Gear

Our survey respondents shared some additional ideas that may inspire you and your team to brainstorm ways to build momentum in your business:

- "We're keeping the PR up about our products, and keeping the standard of design and innovation at a high level."

- "We're increasing the quality of our products when possible, and adding services to increase customer satisfaction."

- "We're becoming more diverse in what our capabilities are."

- "Our creative leaders are concentrating on innovation – using more new media for our products."

- "Our company is currently rebranding globally, so we're revising the website to be more content-rich, incorporating social media and launching a customer showcase."

- "Our department is taking online training during slack times."

- "We're focused on training and education so that we can stay ahead in the industry."

- "Our creative leaders are working hard to think of new ways for our company to use our talents."

Conclusion

In-house designers on the whole seem to be making a good-faith effort to work through the changes in their companies and field. And despite the day-to-day pressures that accompany change, nearly nine out of 10 survey respondents said they believe working as an in-house designer will be a promising career path in the next five years. One respondent spelled out the path to success nicely: "Prove yourself through your work, be dependable and find a company with a very solid foundation."

Here are some additional "words of wisdom" from survey respondents:

- *"Become tremendously knowledgeable about your company's or your industry's products and services. Use that unique knowledge to create innovative messages or innovative ways to deliver the current messages to your audiences."*
- *"Learn as many conceptual and digital skills in the visual communications arena as possible, in as many categories of design, illustration, photography and motion media as possible."*
- *"Find ways to quantify your value to your organization. The only thing that matters is the bottom line. Are you producing value or are you taking up budget space? How do you prove it?"*
- *"Provide solutions with different cost levels. Become a source for information."*
- *"Be invested in what the organization does and offer creative input on how to accomplish goals via print pieces, the Web, social marketing, etc. Don't wait for anyone to tell you what your next project will be."*
- *"Learn every aspect of the business. Knowledge is power. Make yourself irreplaceable."*

Thanks to the Experts

The Creative Group wishes to thank the following people who contributed to *Detours and New Directions*:

- Ivan Boden, Creative Director, ISO
- Carlos A. Caicedo, Creative Director, Creative Design Services, GAF
- Meredith Fordham, Manager, Creative Design, JAXPORT
- Timothy Heyer, Advertising Project Manager, Pantone, Inc.
- Gordon Kaye, Publisher, *Graphic Design USA*
- Brian Tisdale, Senior Creative Director, Equifax
- Lisa Wellman, CEO, SustainCommWorld

About The Creative Group

The Creative Group specializes in placing a range of highly skilled creative, advertising, marketing, web and public relations professionals with a variety of firms. We represent Flash and InDesign experts, brand managers, multimedia strategists, communications specialists and more. Firms that work with us know that they will be matched with professionals who have been evaluated using TalentMatch™, our proprietary evaluation process that includes a personal interview and skills testing. Businesses also appreciate that our staffing team members typically have marketing and creative backgrounds. In fact, many of our account managers have won design competitions and marketing awards. This experience helps our teams recognize creative talent and place these professionals on assignments. For more information or help addressing your staffing needs, please call **1.888.846.1668** for the office nearest you or visit us at **www.creativegroup.com**.

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