

**The advertising
industry:**

SHOULD I

STAY

OR SHOULD I

GO 

edcom

eaqa
EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNICATIONS AGENCIES

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_intro

Courtesy of the 4th Industrial Revolution, there are many more career choices for commercial communication graduates. Why should graduates enter the advertising professions when marketing careers face turbulent times? What factors do graduates weigh up when choosing communication careers, and – according to agencies, to what extent are they ready for the professional rigours of the workplace? This White Paper addresses graduates’ and recruiters’ perspectives as new talent crosses the threshold from education to industry.

The timing of this White Paper makes the findings even more intriguing: post-pandemic and during a global economic crisis, the survey of 200 students and 200 recruiters from across Europe surfaces the overlapping circumstances and current issues that impact both employers and educators. These include the changing nature of advertising work, the rise of #WFH and health & wellbeing.



Paul Springer
Dean of Academic Strategy,
University of Arts London &
edcom President
2019-2022

**“Before, I wanted to
have a big career,
now I want to have
a **big impact!**”**

- student respondent



_graduate talent profile

The values of Generation Z (those born between the mid-1990s and mid-2010s) are significant to the findings, as is the role of digital communication — not just in emerging graduate jobs but also in the expectations of professional work environments. It is clear from the responses that Generation Z has a distinctly different outlook on work than their predecessors.

The differences are born out in this White Paper.

As you will see, issues of autonomous and hybrid working, work-life balance and value aspirations feature prominently as career ambitions. However, the survey does reveal gaps between graduates' expectations and employers' "wants". The role of new talent and what they bring to a job or a team differs from what recruiters envisage, reflecting divergent post-pandemic work ideas. There are clear lessons to be drawn from these differences, and the 'skills drain' of graduates migrating to careers beyond the communications industries is reflected in the evidence.

As Europe has absorbed the shock of Covid, this study starts to shape a view of the current and future talent supply for Europe's communications industries.

The clues to incentives, working styles and values will flavour the practical factors shaping the industry for paradigm-shifting years to come.

Hybrid working, future talent supply and rewards were listed as highly sought-after job characteristics, alongside a good working environment and fair financial rewards. However, the definition of hybrid differs as brands need help determining what their working culture will look like post-pandemic.

Students in Europe face similar challenges to varying degrees. The cost of travelling to campus and opportunities for blended or online learning have become popular amongst current graduates. Many would like to continue a version of hybrid working, which makes them wary of employers who may be keener on in-person working.

Lastly, the energy crisis is driving more new workers to attend so that they are not bearing the additional overheads of homeworking.

_sample, structure, methodology

200 recruiters
from all over Europe
coming from agencies
of all sizes

200 students
studying advertising,
marketing, digital
design and PR
(40.6% enrolled in a
4-year course)

The survey was structured to balance yes/no questions with more discursive responses. For the 50 EU-based Higher Education institutes approached through the European Institute for Commercial Communications Education (edcom) to complete the survey, questions centred on the exposé that students had to "taste" the industry during their study (via placements, guest lectures and industry visits) to form a perspective of the professional workplace. Students were also asked about their career ambitions, if and how their motivations for studying communications had altered during their study — and why. The aim was to establish the basis for their career motivations and how much this had been adjusted during their study period.

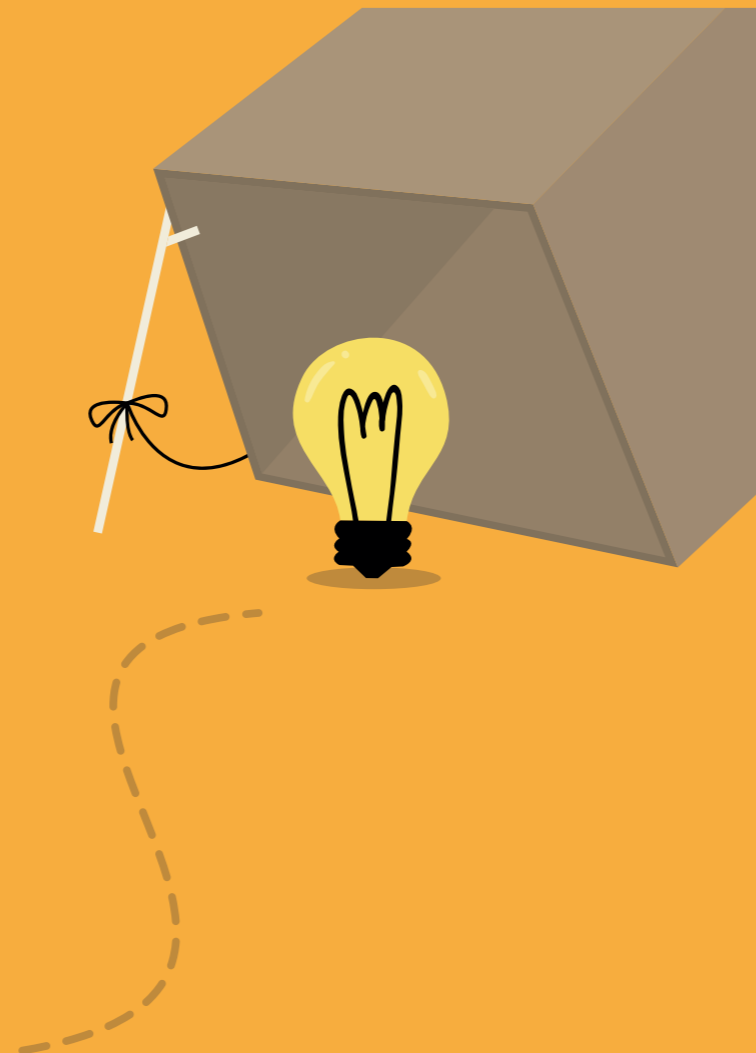
For the 200 agency organisations approached through the European Association of Communications Agencies (EACA), the questions were also designed to balance yes/no questions with open-ended responses. The questions sought to unearth the fits and purpose of new talent within existing work teams, the roles that graduates were expected to fulfil and the experiences employers had of recent graduates in meeting the needs of the current workscape. The questions for both the students and the industry were matched in format, direction and scale so that they could be overlapped. They were also submitted through the Falmouth University Research & Ethics Committee to ensure that the questions posed to both sets of recipients demonstrated composure, rigour and neutrality.

The questions were administered via Typeform, a contemporary survey platform based in Barcelona, Spain. In terms of dissemination, the edcom network and EACA's members helped spread the message to Universities.

“In my opinion, [the communications industry] is a very popular sphere.

Everything revolves around marketing and advertising in the 21st century, and all business and companies are in need of **advertising**.

- student respondent



_careers and paths

Students thought about joining the industry because:

They can **exercise creativity** and problem-solving.
They find it **relevant to their skills** and interests.
They are **interested** in it!

However...

69.1%

have considered
alternative career paths

46.7%

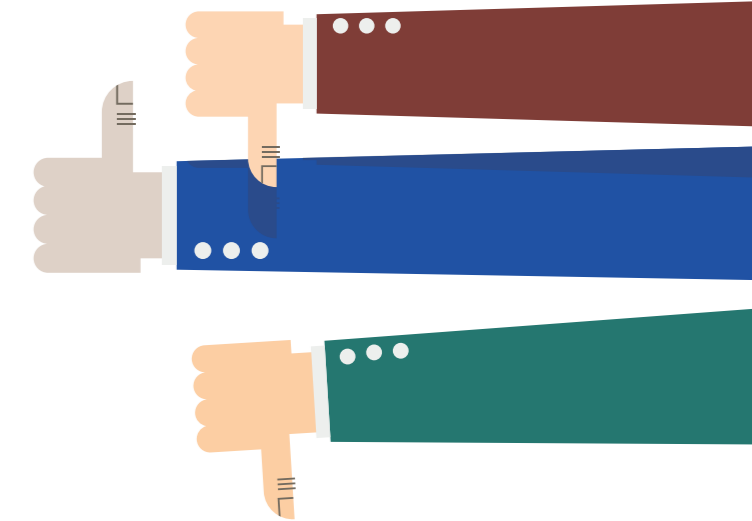
of students said that their career plans
changed since they started their degree

22.4%

of students said that they are NOT seeking a
career in a creative, media or digital agency

More than 75% of the students admitted that their view of the advertising industry professions has improved since they started their studies. They now see that it is an intricate and broad field with many opportunities which only sometimes rely on creativity. Many claimed they started paying more attention to ads around them and other details of their daily lives.

47.4% of the students confessed that their initial career plan has slightly changed since they started their studies: while some are interested in other industries, such as finance and IT, the majority are interested in switching lanes within the industry - from advertising to PR, from art director to manager or from employee to entrepreneur.



_experiences

40% of students have completed an internship in creative, media or digital agencies

They reported that their internships allowed them to gain insight into the industry, and after completing them, they could see if they possessed the right skill set to thrive in the industry.

Many students enjoyed meeting people from the industry and understanding their own potential career paths.

76.4% of students had a creative, media or digital professional talk/present to their class

Seeing a professional in the industry helped students get career direction and gain more insight.

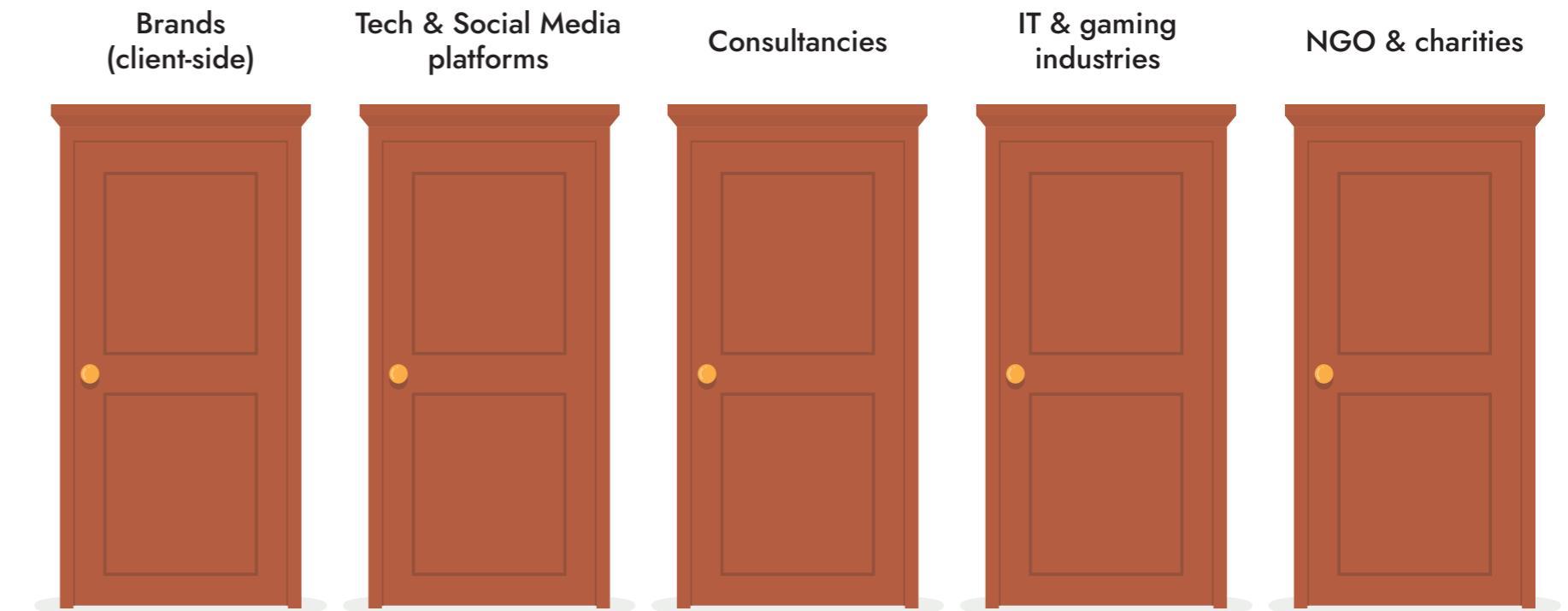
They reported feeling inspired and passionate.

Some felt like seeing a professional allowed them to understand better what they **did not want to do**.



_competitors

Recruiters believe that the ad industry is losing talent to and competing with:



Moreover, the students feel the same, with a slight preference for Tech & Social Media platforms.

The top 3 types of employers students are interested in are: creative advertising, Social Media platforms and search providers.

_job hunting

Besides online platforms, companies find new talent via **word-of-mouth**. Students may not have enough contacts, however, networking through the Universities' associations or even with guest lecturers has proved to be a career launch pad.

Students are also reportedly looking for opportunities:

- _On **LinkedIn** (80%)
- _On **companies' websites**/spontaneous applications (62.6%)
- _At the **university**/university network (50.5%)
- _Via **local government** job search platforms (27.4%)
- _By working with **head-hunters** (15.8%)



“[the other industries] are saving/making the world a better place to live in. Advertising and marketing communication, in general, are often perceived as something paid for by global corporations and brands whose only goal is to **make a profit**.

- student respondent

_skills

The students believe that recruiters are looking for the following skills when scouting for talent:

- Creativity**
- Teamwork**
- Strategy**
- Working under pressure**
- Problem-solving**
- Presentation**
- Analytical**
- Copywriting**
- Campaign management**
- Design**
- Multiple languages**
- Account management**

Not far from the reality, however, recruiters might be paying attention to skills which students do not consider crucial:

- Creativity**
- Teamwork**
- Presentation**
- Multiple languages**
- Copywriting**
- Strategy**
- Account management**
- Working under pressure**
- Design**
- Problem-solving**
- Analytical**
- Campaign management**

_skills

In terms of *undervalued skills*, students believe recruiters need to pay more attention to the **ability to work in a team setting**, listening, creativity, organisational skills, patience, time management, resilience and a good sense of humour. They also noted emotional intelligence as a critical characteristic that could bring more value to a candidate's profile. Students are often disappointed that multilingualism is not taken into account by employers. Some skills they would like to see more of in job ads are **resilience**, proactivity, punctuality, communication, and working under pressure.

Recruiters feel that knowledge about the industry is an undervalued skill, as well as problem-solving and **resilience**. Being a people person with good interaction abilities is what they are often looking for in a candidate. Both groups argued that the **ability to work under pressure** is not viewed with the importance it deserves.

Students are encouraged to work on a new skill set as recruiters seek enthusiastic people open to learning and developing. In order to be successful, the recruits should bring a passion for the industry, team spirit, adaptability and flexibility. “**Fresh**” is a term more than 25% of recruiters use to describe the desired employees' skills.

When referring to *overvalued skills*, many students noted **team-working**, **creativity**, graphic design and account management as competencies that should not be at the top of a job listing. At the same time, recruiters find IT & digital skills (including Social Media) repeatedly specified by the candidates.

The academic background is a feature that students and recruiters do not find relevant to the industry nowadays.

73.9% of the recruiters believe that their agencies are missing people skilled in strategy, project management, copywriting, planning, social media, digital, creativity

22.7% of them believe that skills such as MS Office knowledge and data analysis are becoming redundant



// There should be proper skills required, rather than just jargon, like *a go-getter with a positive attitude to work in a fast-paced environment with the ability to get things done quickly.*

- student respondent

_expectations

When making a career choice, students are looking for the following values:



#1 Work/life balance



#2 Money



#3 Ethical/moral considerations



#4 Career advancement opportunities



#5 Career experiences/travel

Regarding work/life balance, they believe that creative advertising agencies, Social Media platforms and Search providers (such as Google) offer their employees the best working conditions, with sufficient (or unlimited) time to disconnect.

Unsurprisingly, **55% of the recruiters** believe that better remuneration packages are why graduates find other industries more attractive.

Flexibility and a good work/life balance, and a clear career advancement path are also believed to be the other two biggest arguments behind the alumnae's hesitation to join the communications world.

_expectations

What does a great employer look like and how can communications agencies become more attractive?

What students envision:



What recruiters believe students envision:



_mismatch

When asked where the mismatch between the freshly graduates and the ad industry lies, both groups highlighted a difference in motivations. The other reasons differ: while students believe that recruits' expectations are sometimes out of touch, recruiters are optimistic that the newer generations have a different outlook & values. Furthermore, students also noted communication as a pain point, whether it is related to the recruitment process or the job experience as a whole.

Students:

- #1 Motivations
- #2 Recruits' expectations
- #3 Work ethic
- #4 Communication
- #5 Behaviours

Recruiters:

- #1 Motivations
- #2 Outlook & values
- #3 Recruits' expectations
- #4 Work ethic
- #5 Behaviours

_hope

78,9% of the students are choosing to stay in the industry

_conclusions

different expectations

Many communications students now view careers, lifestyle and personal ethics as mutual in value. For graduates, the communications industry brings career flexibility, the potential to travel while earning a decent salary, and various work opportunities and scope to change roles while working.

At the same time, graduates are looking to learn on the job. They seek a sense of challenge and change. They expect development opportunities from the off, which employers are only sometimes in a position to offer.

Where previous graduates were keen to specialise, primarily as creatives, strategists or account managers, this survey showed a shift in thinking. Communications careers were now viewed as a bridge to blend creative and strategic skills to take on opportunities afforded by future digital technology. The future opportunities, often outside of the advertising industry, were most apparent in their comments.

Creative work that is financially stable.

(Advertising is a) combination of a lot of fields in which I am interested.

I want to combine the logical and the creative parts.

It is a sector that involves all subjects and requires good general knowledge, but above all, it is an industry that is changing. It develops my creativity and allows me to learn new things every day.

Because I feel like there is always gonna be a job out there.

At first, I had no idea what to study, but I had a talk with a career consultant and this is what we chose because PR is about feeling under stress and I work better under pressure.

Because I was interested and curious regarding this industry, because I found it really interesting and because it is an industry where you can always find something new which breaks the normality.

_conclusions

post-pandemic difference

The pandemic reshaped modes of working for education and prompted different learning and social behaviours in students. Online learning led to lurkers (viewers joining online classes with camera and mics switched off), much shorter forms of communication in online meetings and, for asynchronous pre-recorded material, led to 1.5x speed streaming. Content became faster, shorter and 1:2:1 dialogues were much briefer. Consequently, collaborative working and socialising were less practised, which some have attributed to quieter, more introspective and socially anxious graduates.

Angela McMillan, certified anxiety therapist based in Wales, said: “[...] the lockdowns created a situation where people were at home, they weren’t around lots of people... There was a lot of fear and anxiety around being in contact with other human beings when accessing things like loud noises or music.”

All advertising programmes engaged current industry practitioners as speakers and tutors, who gave perspectives on and insights into the contemporary advertising workplace.

These did not, however, make students more inclined to graduate into the advertising industry. Around 35% of our respondents were not particularly touched by the guest speakers’ input. Some claimed it made them change their minds about working in communications altogether. The working cultures – particularly the idea of *work hard/play hard*, as speakers often characterised it, held less lustre for current graduate cohorts.

Working under pressure is no longer glorified – many students value their mental health and would not wish to perform in a stressful environment.

Consequently, the skills that pandemic-period students missed out on are those they perceive as overrated by employers – teamwork, previous industry work experience and resilience, while softer skills – emotional intelligence, linguistics, eagerness to learn, went unrecognised by prospective employers from advertising industries.

_conclusions

gen Z

According to Pola Orzechowska (Aprais, 2023), Gen Z (1996-2012) is the most diverse ethnic and racial generation in history, while cultural capital (particularly family priming for the workplace) is at its lowest. This generation may remember parents and older siblings losing their jobs and struggling financially during the recession of 2000 when the sense of employment security changed.

Throughout their lives, the wealth gap has widened while the cost of living has risen. University fees have also placed significant importance on the value of education. With mortgage-length repayment windows, financial stability is important in career choice, which is borne out in graduates’ responses.

What are the factors that inform their career choice? A healthy work environment, benefits, colleagues, salary package, creativity, ability to express oneself freely, happiness (!), flexibility, and opportunities for advancement.

Given that Gen Z will be 30% of the global workforce by 2030 (source: Interact 2022), their outlook will inevitably shape the next form of commercial advertising. Nevertheless, there is an

apparent generational gap between Zers and Millennials (1981-1995). Most Graduate Gen Zers surveyed held similar work and media usage values, regardless of where they were in Europe. For instance, most viewed careers as a means of stable support for other interests in life rather than an end goal.

Deloitte have gone further in reckoning that “Gen Z can demand greater personalisation in how they move along their career journey. For organisations to attract and retain the best and brightest of the generation, it will require a different mindset.” This includes establishing internal apprenticeship programmes, facilitating multiple work formats, and even leaning further into education by partnering at the university level – especially if advertising wants to attract female candidates for tech roles in what is now a competitive space for emerging creative tech talent.

Most graduates sought challenges of bridging what for them is their primary supply of entertainment – social media and short-form vids – with what they saw as an older but stable professional industry environment.

_conclusions

gen Z

The vast majority of Gen Z have their own mobile technology and frequently use Snapchat, TikTok, Whatsapp and Instagram rather than Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn, which they see as for older generations. They also tend to interact on social media through emojis, acronyms and short-form proxies, gifs, quick vids and voice notes. This vibrancy of their communications methods and what they saw as more traditional media usage sat awkwardly in their reading of future advertising employment opportunities.

What also jarred were the potential clients they would have to work with in the industry. Many graduates saw their own values as a significant factor in future career choices. They appeared to be issue-driven and wanted employers to demonstrate their commitment to issues such as belonging, sustainability and equality.

Many saw communications as a way to make a difference for their cause of choice or brands that they most readily identified with.

Richard Robinson, Managing Director at Xeim Engage and Oystercatchers, believes controversial industries should not be off-limit for young people, as they can positively impact their campaigns:

“Purpose and product matter if you’re a brand hiring Gen-Z talent for the modern world. Where once tobacco, fossil fuel, alcohol and automotive were the destination of choice for many creative careers, new morals apply with some grads and non-grads looking to involve more values-driven decisions in their careers. However, with every vice comes virtue. Tobacco, fossil fuel, alcohol and automotive all offer Gen Z the opportunity to be the change they seek. The time is now to create the campaigns and strategies to build the fame & fortune of smoke-free futures, renewable energies, non-alcoholic drinks & destinations, and vehicles powered by electricity, wind, air and water.

My top tip is to invest the time to separate fact from fiction. Ask yourself where you will make your mark and build your fame in determining the brands of the future.”

_conclusions

communications & the nature of work

The graduates surveyed presented a different post-pandemic view of work and workplace than employers, who expected in-person presence as a starting point. Employers sense that graduates have not come around to pre-pandemic office attendance. As one surveyed employer put it, “fresh-graduates are missing industry understanding in general”.

However, graduates anticipate a much more blended work pattern, an element other industries offer. It is advertising that needs to adapt more to attract and accommodate new talent in a competitive market for new talent.

Marketing Week are not alone in reporting that employment in marketing and advertising has fallen 14% in three years. Adweek described a talent crisis, while the Financial Times observed that in “one of the tightest labour markets in modern history, advertising is yet another industry struggling with recruitment”.

As Christian de la Villehuchet, President of the European Association of Communications Agencies, observed, “we need to ask ourselves what has led to this talent crisis. Why are we failing to attract enough young professionals and keep them in

the industry? And, most critically, how can we resolve this issue?” (WFA, “Bringing back the talent”).

Fewer graduates are now prepared to root their entire careers within one company. More have ‘side-hustle’ businesses and consider the time they spend working for employers in the same frame as social and leisure activities. The notion of extended office hours for work-hard-play-hard lifestyles no longer holds.

What do employers expect from graduate talent when joining the agency? Energy, enthusiasm, teamwork, resilience, willingness/eagerness to learn, freshness, flexibility, hard work, cultural awareness, curiosity, dedication, proactivity, attention to detail, patience, and motivation. *“Analytical mind, proactivity and less I-am-superb-and-you-don’t-understand attitude”*

As an example of best practice, Deloitte have suggested that larger agencies can create value by establishing internal marketplaces to match projects with needed skill sets. That way, graduates could develop their skills and experience in a way that would keep them fresh and anchored to advertising agency work.

_conclusions

This survey was initially sparked by edcom members who reported a noticeable change in outlook from their graduates. While employers actively sought ways to engage with students during their studies, even during the pandemic, lecturers noticed that final-year students' working behaviours and ambitions differed from their previous cohorts. At the same time, employers and their graduate mentors reported that their supply of postgraduate talent was getting slimmer and less work-ready than previous generations.

Our starting point was, therefore, to identify the apparent gap between graduates' and employers' expectations. What we learnt from the graduate responses, in particular, was that life goals, the pandemic, the perceived impact of digitation on work, and changing ideas of work and wellbeing profoundly impacted the profile of future advertising talent. Views were consistent among graduates across East, Central and West in what seemed like a shifting zeitgeist of values. We could see how Gen Z was deep and pan-European, at the very least. This impacted ideas about the importance of a communications degree and how graduates viewed future employers. It also centred on advertising as a 'safe career', 'a transferable skillset' and 'an opportunity to get different life experiences through work'.

The growth of home-based leisure is matched by graduates' wish to work remotely more often. During the pandemic, graduates would have witnessed parents and others working in digital industries adjusting working patterns to incorporate working from home. In many cases, WFH has continued, and this is now an expectation of students graduating into the industry. Recent post-pandemic surveys on the generational gulf in leisure and media usage support this viewpoint. In our survey, it was evident that home-based leisure was mainly driven by 18-24 years olds and this, coupled with students' experiences or remote study during the pandemic, has shaped their expectations of work. A 2022 survey for YouGov (Global Media White Paper November 2022) in the UK showed that, for this Gen Z graduating cohort, there had been a significant rise in the use of websites and registered apps since 2021 (+30%), compared to those over 35. According to YouGov, a third more graduates under 24 are likely to stream video and music, listen to podcasts or play video games than those aged 55+. The research also identified a similarly large gap in video streaming habits (+21%) between the same age groups. Conversely, the difference in drop-off for live cinema attendance (-22%) and attending live events (-16%) between young adults and over-35-year-olds echoes a new generational outlook for in-person attendance – albeit for leisure or work.

_conclusions

Where we were expecting to spot differences in opinion between employers and graduate talent, we unearthed a more significant shift in behaviours that had been spurred on by The Fourth Industrial Revolution, technologically driven, with the pandemic as a catalyst for behavioural changes. These shifts in view were culturally rooted and generational. The 2022/23 edcom survey identified a set of values that will seem more pronounced in the following round.

_next steps

_While the survey covered the European area only, differences in thinking between East and West, South and North were spotted. Benchmarking the results against similar research pieces carried elsewhere would be interesting. Is the European Higher Education Institutes grads' perspective unique? Or is it a global trend?

_This piece of work is meant to serve as a foundation for companies whose employer branding strategies need an upgrade. It is becoming evident that the two fronts must reach a satisfactory compromise. The bridging power lies in the recruiters' hands - how diverse skills do employers want from future hires? What are the communications agencies willing to give up or change?

_Joining the industry only to leave it after a few years is a well-known phenomenon, however, it would be interesting to research what is the current "lifespan" of an advertising professional and what are the reasons why they are leaving.

_Retention is equally essential - while a healthy job hopping pattern helps professionals climb the career ladder, agencies can only benefit from low turnover and skilled & loyal employees. Engaging new hires on the topic could yield thought-provoking results.

_The next edition of the survey aims to gather even more responses and join forces with trade organisations with the talent supply as a central concern.

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_survey questions (students)

- _First of all, what is your first name?
- _What are you studying right now?
- _How long is the course?
- _Where is it taking place?
- _Why did you choose to study/work in the ad industry?
- _Have you considered alternative career ambitions to advertising?
- _What would you now consider and why?
- _Have you completed a traineeship/internship/anything else short-term in a creative, media or digital agency? How did this influence your career choice?
- _During your studies, did creative, media or digital agency professionals come to talk/present to your class? How did it help your career decisions?
- _What common skills are you seeing as requirements for recent graduate recruits?
- _What are some skills that you find over- or under-valued?
- _Are there skills and attributes missing in the job description when you apply for roles in a creative, media or digital agency? What other skills would you like to see in there?
- _Have your views of the advertising professions changed since you’ve been studying? In what ways?
- _What are the most important factors that inform your career choice?
- _Has your thinking around your intended career plan changed since you started your degree? How?
- _What motivates and drives you in a job?
- _Are you seeking to work for a creative, media or digital agency when you complete your advertising course?
- _Put into order your ideal employers. If you selected “other”, can you please explain what it is?
- _Which of the values below are the most important in your career choice?
- _In terms of work/life balance, please put in order the following career destinations:
- _Where do you think the talent is going, if not into creative, media or digital agencies?
- _Which industries do you think ours is competing with for graduate talent?
- _Where do you tend to look for jobs?
- _From your perspective, where is the mismatch between talent and the advertising industries at the moment?
- _To wrap up in a few words: what does a great employer look like?
- _How can communications agencies (creative, media, digital) become more attractive?

_survey questions (recruiters)

- _First of all, what is your first name?
- _Which agency do you work for? (not required)
- _Where is it based?
- _How big is the agency in terms of employees?
- _What is it specialised in?
- _How have you been sourcing your talent supply so far?
- _Where do you think the talent is going, if not into your creative, media or digital agency?
- _Which industries do you think we are competing with for graduate talent?
- _From your perspective, where is the mismatch between young talent and the advertising industries at the moment?
- _What common skills are you seeing in recent graduate recruits?
- _Are there skills that you think are over- or under-valued?
- _What do you expect from graduate talent when joining your agency? How are the new skills of fresh recruits factored into existing teams?
- _Are there skills and attributes that are missing from your agency right now? What is your agency short of?
- _Are there skills that you think are redundant these days? Which ones?
- _From your perspective, what makes other industries seem attractive to graduates?
- _To wrap up in 3 words: what does a great employer look like for graduates?
- _And how can communications agencies (creative, media, digital) become more attractive?



_about EACA

The European Association of Communications Agencies (EACA) represents more than 2.500 communications agencies and agency associations from nearly 30 European countries directly employing more than 120.000 people.

EACA promotes honest, effective advertising, high professional standards, and awareness of the contribution of advertising in a free-market economy and encourages close cooperation between agencies, advertisers and media in European advertising bodies.

The organisation works closely with the EU institutions to ensure freedom to advertise responsibly and creatively.

www.eaca.eu

_about edcom

edcom is the European Institute for Commercial Communications Education. It strives to promote excellence in commercial communications education and research and to further exchanges between the European commercial communications sector and academic partners.

edcom was founded by EACA together with the founding academic partners in 2007.

www.edcom.eu

_about WARC

For over 35 years, WARC has been powering the marketing segment by providing rigorous and unbiased evidence, expertise and guidance to make marketers more effective. Across four pillars - WARC Strategy, WARC Creative, WARC Media, WARC Digital Commerce - its services include 100,000+ case studies, best practice guides, research papers, special reports, advertising trend data, news & opinion articles, as well as awards, events and advisory services.

WARC operates out of London, New York, Singapore and Shanghai, servicing a community of over 75,000 marketers in more than 1,300 companies across 100+ markets and collaborates with 50+ industry partners.

www.warc.com