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The state of **brand consistency**

Earning customer trust
in 2020 & beyond

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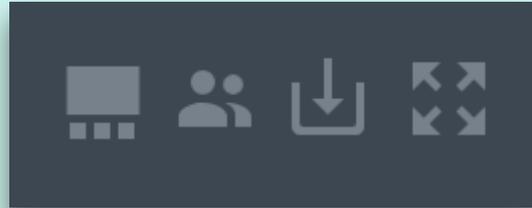
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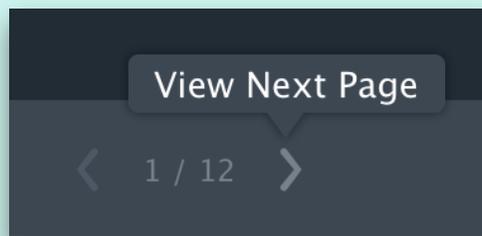
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Now, on to the good stuff ⇨

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Introduction

Trust is a key component to earning new business and cultivating long-lasting customer relationships. However, trust simply doesn't happen overnight — trust is earned.

For most companies, trust is earned through consistent branding. Brand consistency directly translates into brand equity as it provides customers with a dependable platform from which they can effectively gauge a company's commitment and applicability to their specific circumstances. In turn, this directly translates into revenue — or, convexly, a missed opportunity.

The annual Lucidpress State of Brand Consistency report illustrates the measurable influence and impact that brand consistency has over internal infrastructures and external, customer-facing ones.
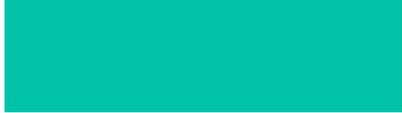
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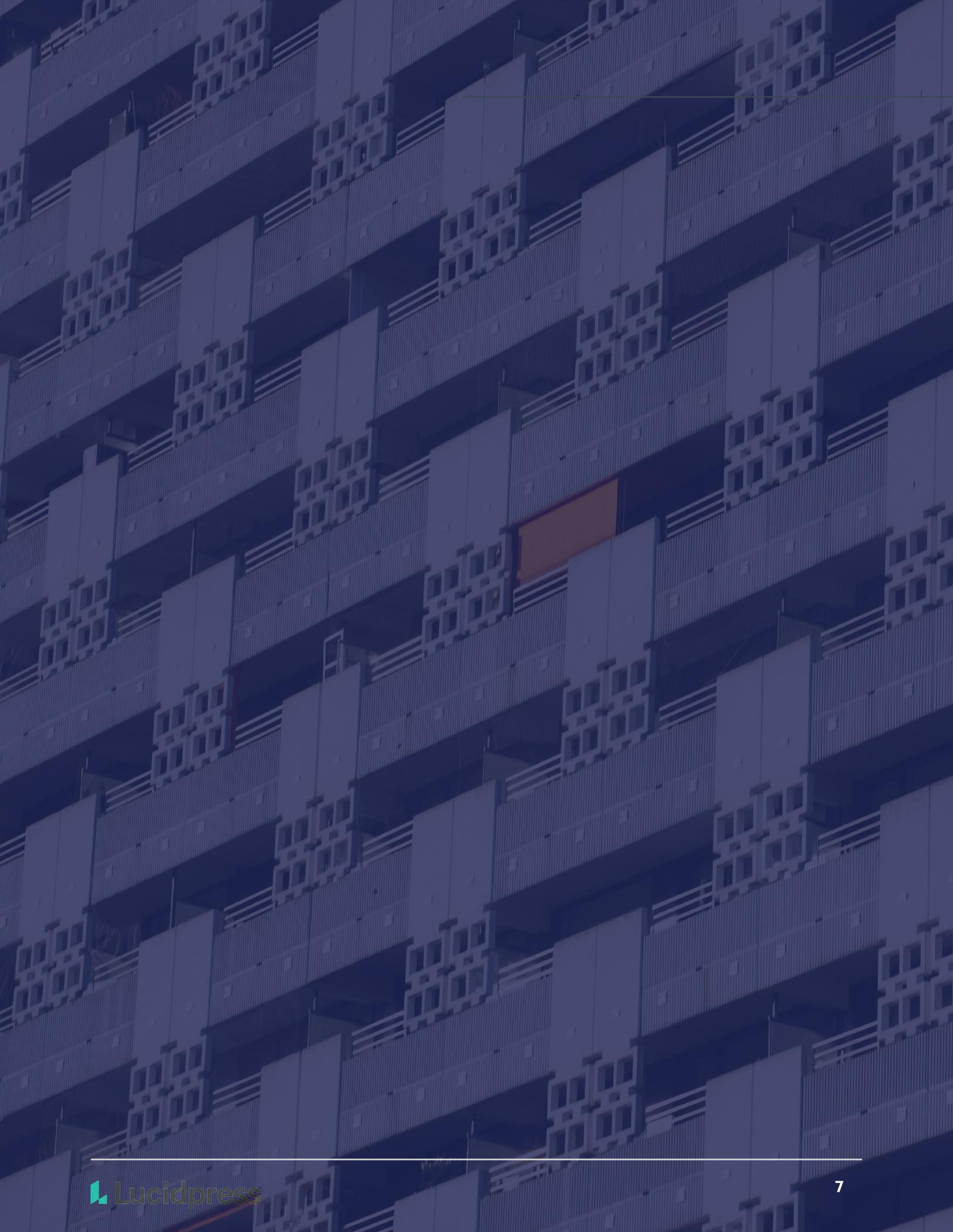
Survey constituents and other demographics

To ensure results were accurately represented, survey constituents held a variety of leadership positions and represented a diverse pool of businesses. The following graphs illustrate the data characterization of brand management representation.

What are your company's approximate annual sales?

	Percent of respondents
Less than $1 million	37%
$1 to $4 million	16%
$5 to $9 million	12.5%
$10 to $24 million	11%
$25 to $99 million	11.5%
$100 to $499 million	6%
$500 million or more	6%

What characterizes the nature of your business?

Non-Profit — 17%

Mostly B2B — 25%

A mix of B2B and B2C — 34%

Mostly B2C — 24%
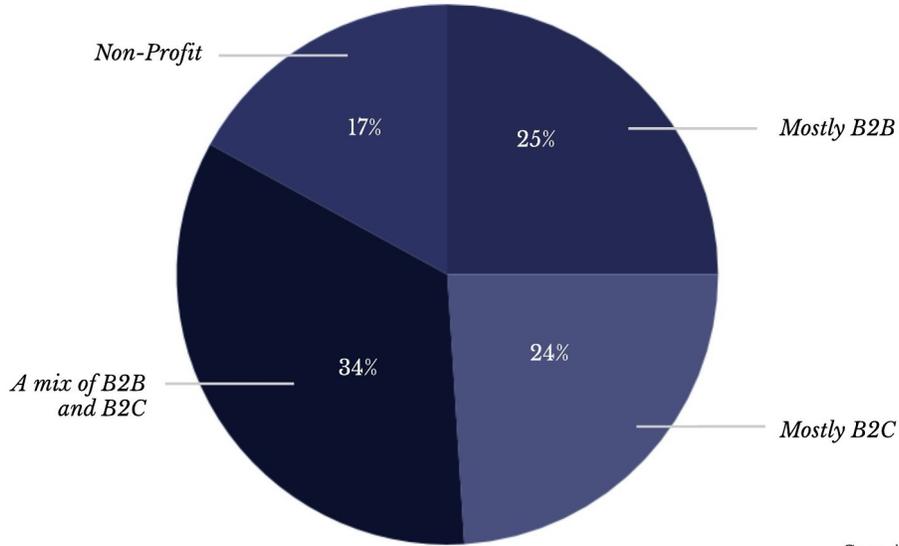
Which statement best describes the revenue growth at your company during the last fiscal year?

Significant increase in revenue growth — 13%

Significant decline in revenue growth — 7%

Modest decline in revenue growth — 9%

Flat or no growth — 21%

Modest increase in revenue growth — 50%
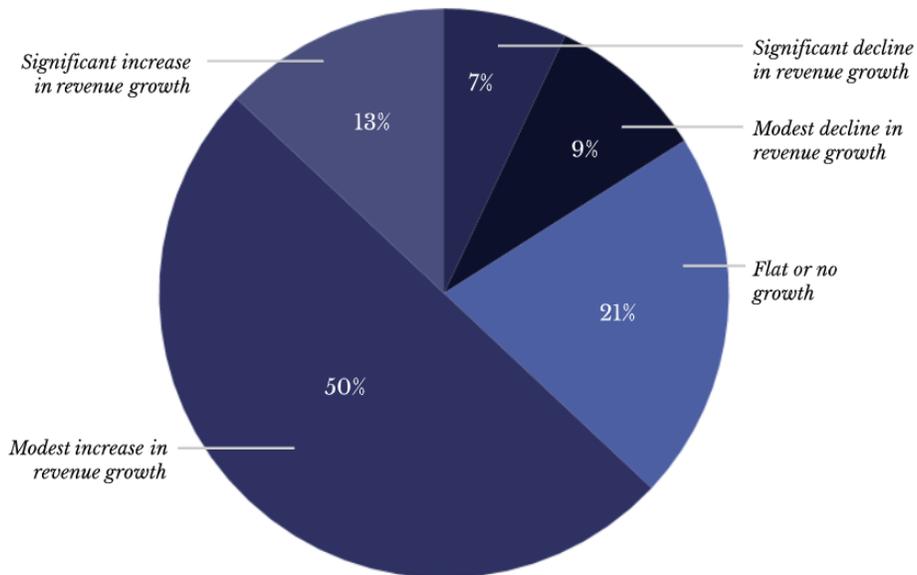
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What best describes your role at your company?

	Percent of respondents
President, CEO or owner	16%
CMO or corporate marketing executive	11%
Sales VP or corporate executive	3%
Marketing (manager or individual contributor)	35%
Sales (manager or individual contributor)	6%
Creative/graphic design	14%
Other	13%

What is your organization's industry classification?

	Percent of respondents		Percent of respondents
Consulting/professional services	9.5%	*Manufacturing*	5.5%
Consumer packaged goods	2.5%	*Media/publishing*	2.5%
Education	13%	*Non-profit*	12%
Energy/utilities	1.5%	*Pharma/biotechnology*	1%
Entertainment	1%	*Real estate/construction*	10%
Financial services	5%	*Retail*	2.5%
Government	2%	*Software/technology*	10%
Healthcare	7.5%	*Telecommunications*	0.5%
Insurance	1%	*Other*	13%
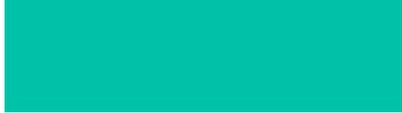
Impact of inconsistent brand usage

Inconsistent brand usage speaks volumes about a company and undermines your brand's trustworthiness. As a result, this can negatively impact customer opinions and their decision to do business with you. Damage, while notable, is not irreparable but it will require diligent effort to recoup lost or confused customers.

How does off-brand content affect your organization? Select all that apply:

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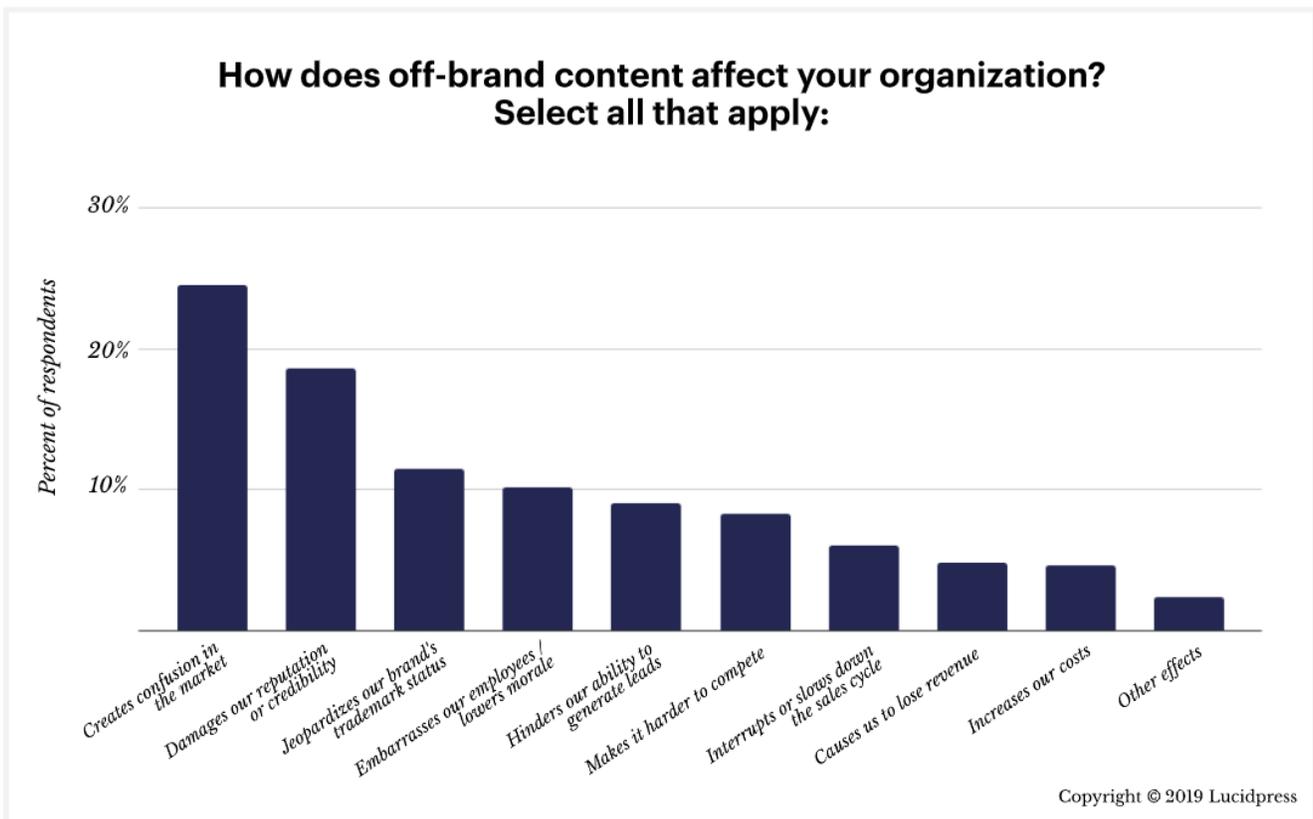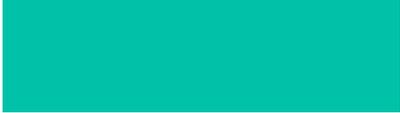
Abbreviated summary of statistics

‣ 24.5% stated that inconsistent branding creates confusion in the market.

‣ 18.6% noted that inconsistent branding damages a company's reputation or credibility.

‣ 10.2% iterated that inconsistent branding embarrasses employees or lowers morale.

Overall findings

‣ In contrast to our 2016 report, the 2019 participants were asked to select all options — instead of a singular response — that they perceived to be applicable.

‣ Overall, constituents stated that inconsistently branded content creates confusion in the market. An inconsistent brand prevents customers from fully recognizing a company and its messaging, which in turn impacts sales conversions and lead generation.

‣ Damage to reputation or credibility was the runner-up response. This can negatively impact customer loyalty and their desire to do repeat business with a company.

‣ The fourth ranked response was "it embarrasses our employees or lowers morale." Your employees are the frontline of brand advocacy — inconsistently branded materials take away the power of brand advocacy.

Brand management

It's easy to have too many cooks in the kitchen — which can result in a myriad of inconsistent branding or messaging errors. To set a baseline reference for this survey, participants were asked to relay information regarding modification permissions and brand management ownership. Note: in the 'Brand Guidelines' chapter, we'll touch on the statistics and repercussions of rogue, off-brand content.

Who can create (or modify) marketing, communication, and sales materials for your company? Please select all that apply:
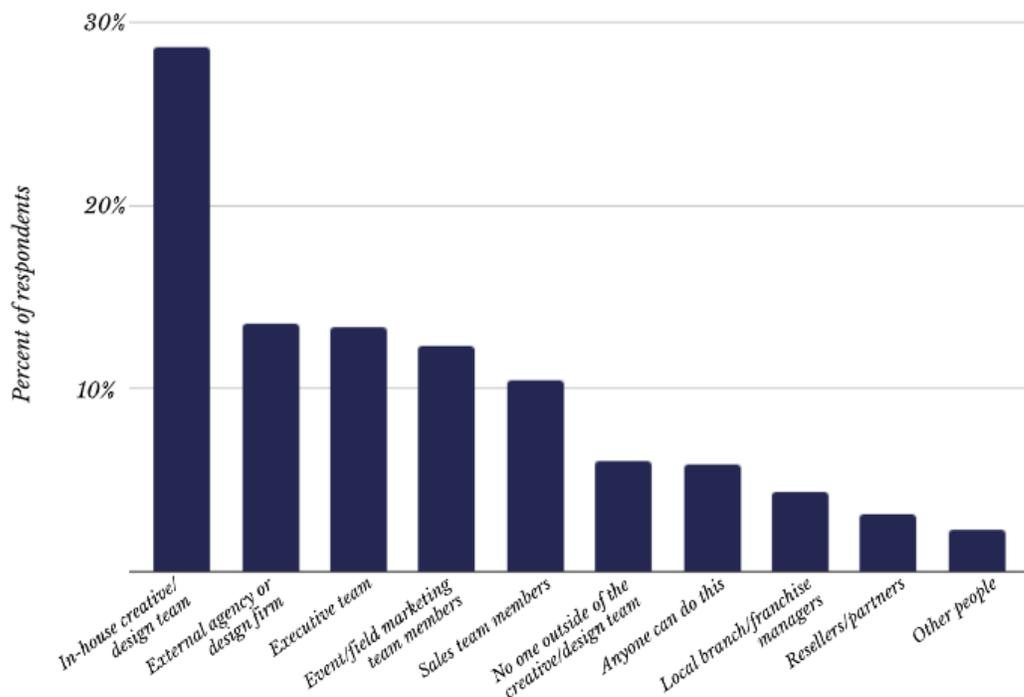
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Who in your organization has primary responsibility to manage and protect your brand?

Percent of respondents

In-house creative/ design team • CMO or corporate marketing executive • CEO • No one • Other • Field marketing • External agency or design firm • Corporate legal
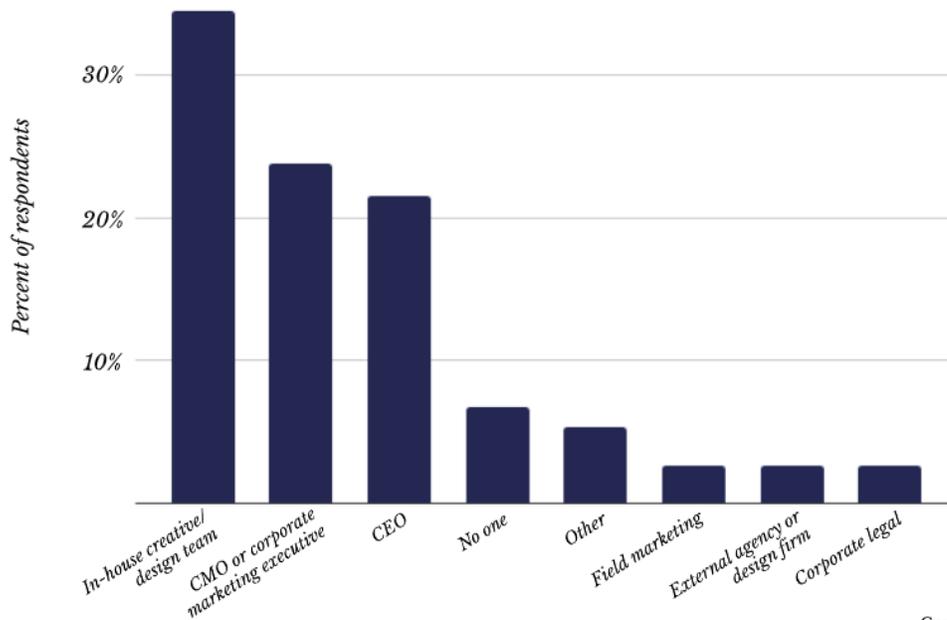
Abbreviated summary of statistics

▸ 28.6% of companies reported that in-house creative or design teams have the ability to create and modify marketing and communication materials.

▸ 13.6% of companies iterated that an external firm has the ability to create or modify marketing and communication collateral.

▸ 34.5% of constituents responded that the in-house creative and design team has primary responsibility to manage and protect the brand.

▸ 23.8% responded that the CMO or corporate marketing executive has primary responsibility to manage and protect the brand.
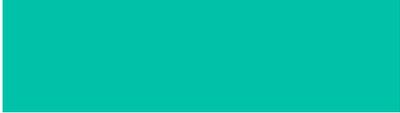
Overall findings

▸ Compared against our 2016 report, we asked that constituents identify and select all options that applied (not a singular response).

▸ In 2016, most constituents responded that only corporate marketing/design and executive level team members could modify branded materials. However, in the 2019 report, this percentage dropped — this could be attributed to the change in selection options (re: all vs singular response).

▸ Please note that company size can greatly impact who or what teams manage branded content and collateral.

▸ Overall, in-house creative and design teams seem to have the most authority over collateral creation. While this ensures more control over brand consistency, it directly translates into larger amounts of responsibility and workload assigned to the internal production teams. Unfortunately, this also negatively impacts the in-house team's ability to dedicate resources to top-tier projects.

▸ External agencies, sales and event (or field) marketing teams, and executive-level individuals all received above 10% in results which is curious and can open up more room for inconsistent branding as the trickle-down can be magnified.

▸ Companies with in-house creative or design teams have increased since our 2016 report — or, in the very least, the amount of ownership these teams possess has increased. In contrast to the 2016 results (which were 25% give or take), in-house team responsibility increased by 10% (now at 34.5%).

▸ That said, CMO or corporate marketing executives still need to be perceived as a brand champion — CMOs were allotted 23.8% of the vote.

Brand status

Your brand status tells a story: it says whether or not you're consistent and trustworthy or flighty and unreliable. That said, good brand status is contingent on consistent visibility and presentation from your brand management team.

In order for customers to see your brand, they have to recognize it — and in order to recognize your brand, customers need to be able to remember your branding from somewhere along the buying cycle. Contributing factors to brand visibility and presentation are as follows:

> ▸ Awareness — Are customers aware of your brand?

> ▸ Searchability — Can customers find you? Are you showing up in their search?

> ▸ Connectivity — Can customers reach out to you when they do find you?

> ▸ Repetitive exposure — Are you consistently following-up with customers?

> ▸ Customer expectations — Are you managing, maintaining, and exceeding customer expectations?

Brand visibility

Today's customer exists in an oversaturated market — meaning, customers can change their mind about doing business with you and not worry about finding another option. Your brand's inbound visibility impacts whether or not a customer chooses you over another company.

When you consider your organization's brand, how well-known is it in all the places and markets that you serve?

Our brand has excellent visibility — 15%

Our brand is virtually unknown — 12%

Our brand has little visibility — 26%

Our brand has moderate visibility — 47%
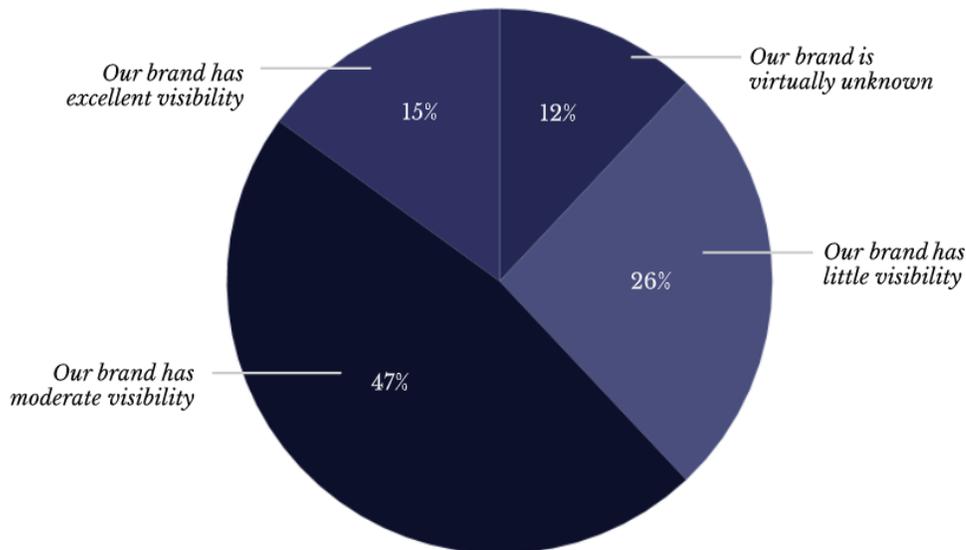
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Abbreviated summary of statistics

▸ 62% of constituents stated that their brand has moderate to excellent visibility.

▸ 38% of survey responders noted that they have little to no visibility.

Overall findings

▸ Overall, nearly half of the survey pool enjoys moderate visibility which means the other half has little to no visibility. This divide can likely be attributed to a lack of internal resources or tools to establish brand visibility as today's customers have come to expect engaging content and branded marketing efforts.

▸ In contrast to our 2016 report, the amount of companies that enjoy moderate visibility has risen by just over 10%, whereas those who reported excellent visibility has dropped by about 5%.

Consistency of brand presentation

Twenty years ago, companies could get away with overwhelming (or underwhelming) design since their customers didn't have much to compare the experience against. Nor did they take branding as a reason to trust (or distrust) a company. However, today's customer has measurably higher expectations thanks in part to the sheer amount of options, as well as the technological advances and general availability of services. As a result, companies are obligated provide consistent experiences across the board.

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statements below.

- Our customers expect *great design* across the marketing and sales materials.
- Our customers expect *consistent branding* across the marketing and sales materials.
- Our vendors/partners expect *great design* across the marketing and sales materials.
- Our vendors/partners expect *consistent branding* across the marketing and sales materials.

Percent of respondents

Strongly disagree · Disagree · Agree · Strongly Agree

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How consistent is your organization's brand is in all the places it appears:

- Very inconsistent 5%
- Inconsistent 15%
- Neutral 22%
- Consistent 40%
- Very consistent 18%
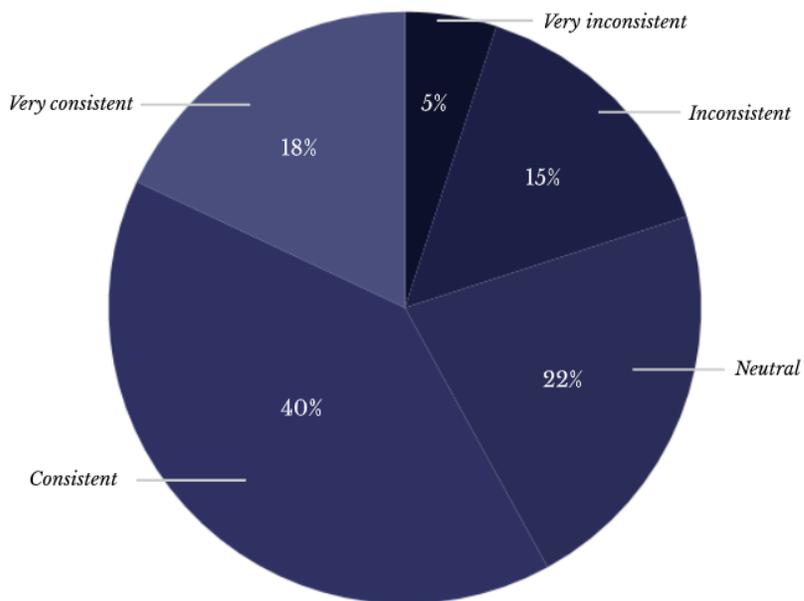
How important is having a strong, consistent brand for the following activities?

Legend:
- Internal communication with employees
- Generating leads
- Nurturing leads
- Closing sales
- Communicating with existing customers

Y-axis: Percent of respondents (20%, 40%, 60%)

X-axis: Not important, Somewhat important, Important, Very important
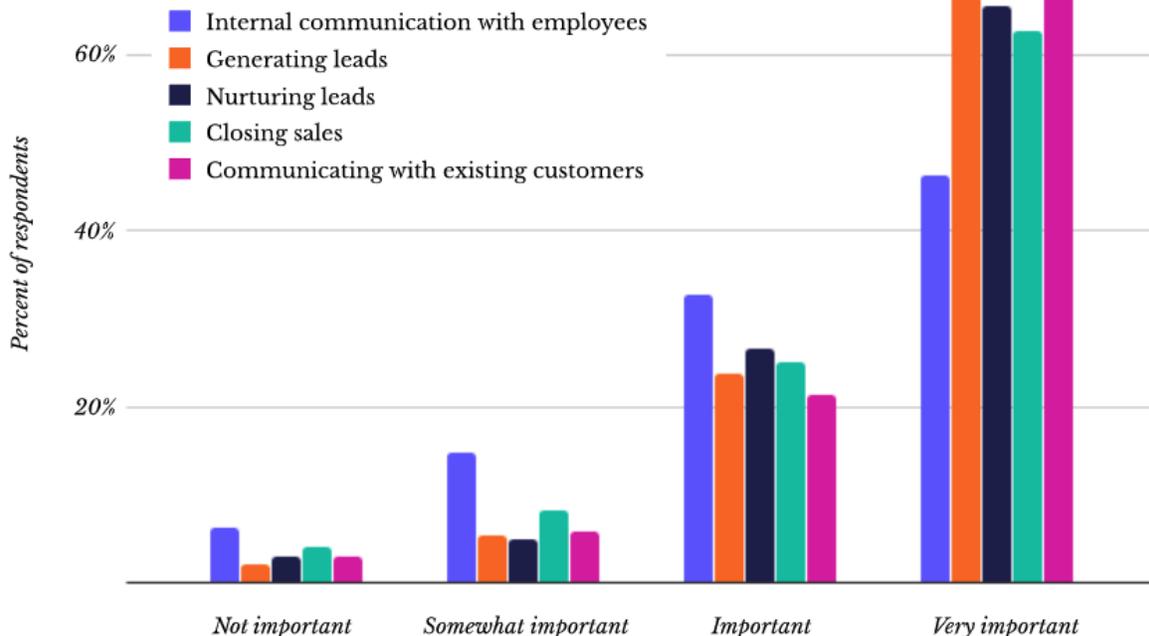
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Abbreviated summary of statistics

- Across the board, most constituents (just shy of 50%) indicated that customers and vendors/partners expect great design and consistent branding.

- 58% stated that their company has consistent or very consistent branding in all the places it appears — with about 43% of the survey pool reporting inconsistent.

- 70% of constituents responded that it was most important to maintain consistent branding when communicating with existing customers.

- 69% iterated that maintaining a strong, consistent brand when generating leads is the second most important — with nurturing leads receiving 65% of the vote and closing sales with 63%.

Overall findings

- In theory, companies treat partners and customers the same because of the overt need for these individuals to be brand advocates and in turn become repeat customers and encourage net new growth. Ultimately, these people are an extension of your brand — brand consistency is an integral aspect in terms of assuring this presence within your niche or industry.

- Approaching brand consistency needs to be perceived as a part of premium customer service. Because as the old phrase goes, "A happy customer tells 2-3 friends about their experience, whereas an unhappy customer will tell 8-10." A customer that thinks highly of your brand will have an easier time locating and elevating your brand if they know specifically what assets and collateral they should associate it with.

- Regarding the impact of brand consistency on select roles or activities, there's not much contrast to report when compared against our 2016 report. Communicating with existing customers largely remains the same in terms of priority, likely due to the fact that customer churn is
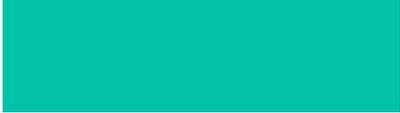
extremely costly — both in terms of the actual customer lost and prospective customers you might lose.

▸ Most brands report the same level of current brand presentation consistency when compared against our 2016 report. It's important to note that internal (yet unknown) bias could skew responses related to questions like these. Admitting the actuality of your brand presentation and its consistency may be difficult for some individual contributors whose personal success is contingent on the measured growth of a brand.

▸ That said, it should be a company's end goal to achieve "very consistent" brand presentation — and just shy of 20% of our survey constituents responded with "very consistent." This leaves ample room for improvement and an elevated brand experience.

CHAPTER FOUR

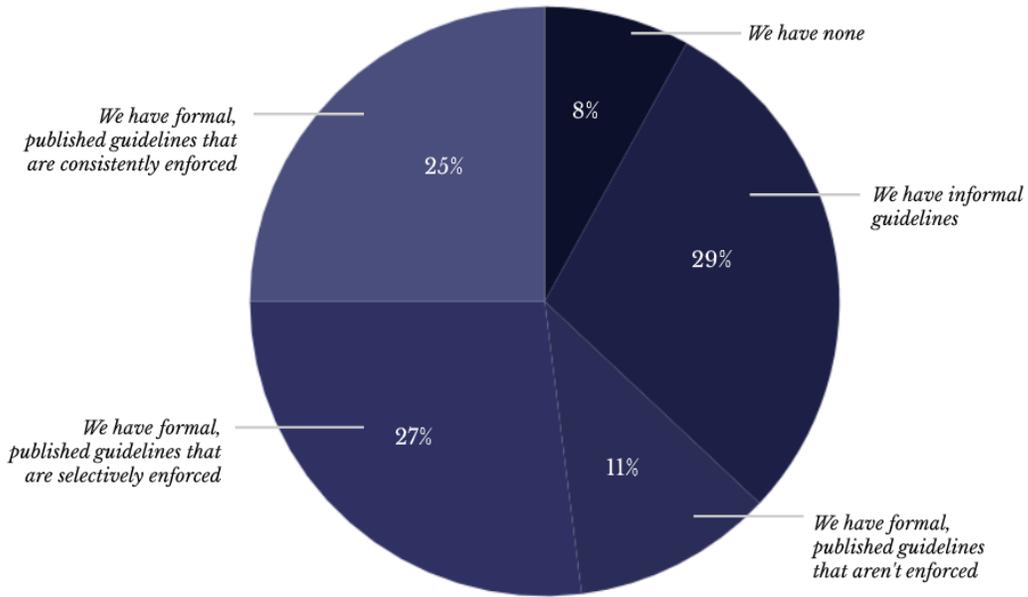# Branding logistics

For every action, there's a reaction.

Meaning, for every piece of branded collateral that's created, there's an impact and reaction. Branding logistics — i.e. guidelines, production, rogue content, or growth attribution — and their corroborating insights help ensure collateral remains on-brand and up to date. Without them, brand consistency flies out the door.

Brand guidelines

The absence of guidelines tends to have a massive trickle-down effect. Without guidelines, branded collateral becomes warped and disjointed, which directly impacts brand consistency. For customers, this is confusing and massively decreases your credibility. And not only that, the trust you worked so hard to build crumbles in the wake of pixelated logos, typos, and warped photos.
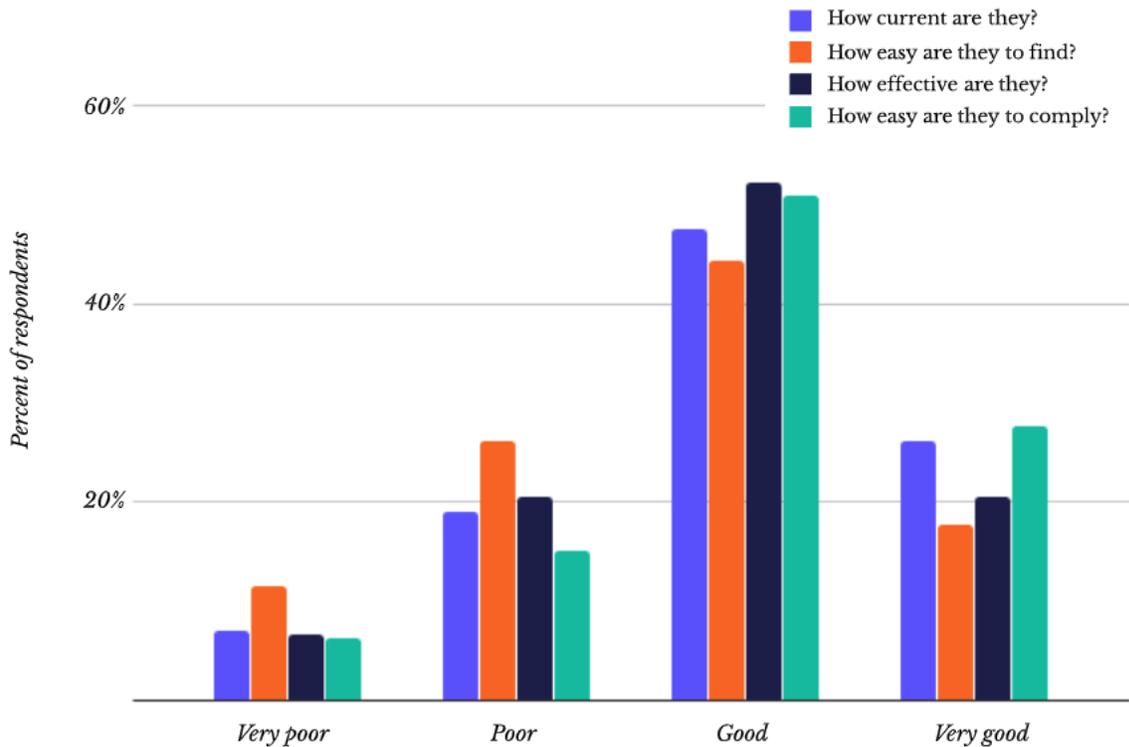
Branding guidelines help you overcome or avoid this incident all together. Guidelines, specifically clear, easy-to-access, up-to-date guidelines, go a long way. They keep individual contributors on-brand and help ensure customer retention through repetitive, consistent exposure.

Which statement best describes the status of brand guidelines at your organization?

We have none — 8%

We have informal guidelines — 29%

We have formal, published guidelines that are consistently enforced — 25%

We have formal, published guidelines that are selectively enforced — 27%

We have formal, published guidelines that aren't enforced — 11%

Please rate your brand guidelines across the following dimensions

Legend:
- How current are they?
- How easy are they to find?
- How effective are they?
- How easy are they to comply?

Percent of respondents (y-axis: 20%, 40%, 60%)

Categories: Very poor, Poor, Good, Very good

In which format(s) do your brand guidelines exist?
Select all that apply:

Other — 2%
SharePoint or other document management platform — 11%
Oral tradition — 21%
Printed — 21%
Webpage — 17%
PDF document — 28%
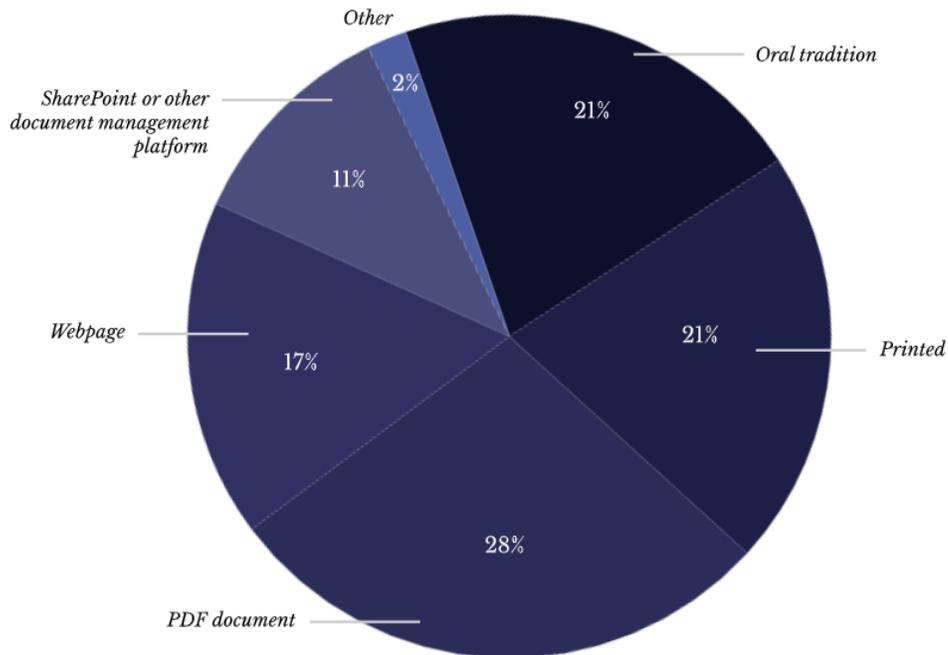
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Abbreviated summary of statistics

- 29% of constituents stated that they had informal branding guidelines.

- 27% iterated that they have formal, published guidelines that are selectively enforced, while 25% noted that they have formal, published guidelines that are consistently enforced.

- Most (about 50%) said that their brand guidelines are generally current, easy to find, effective, and easy to comply with.

- That said, 26% indicated that their brand guidelines were tough to find, making it difficult to enforce them.

- 28% of constituents have their brand guidelines formatted in a PDF document.

- 21% noted that primary access to their brand guidelines are in physical, printed form, whereas 21% say their brand guidelines exist and are communicated verbally.
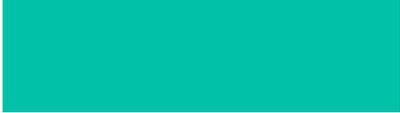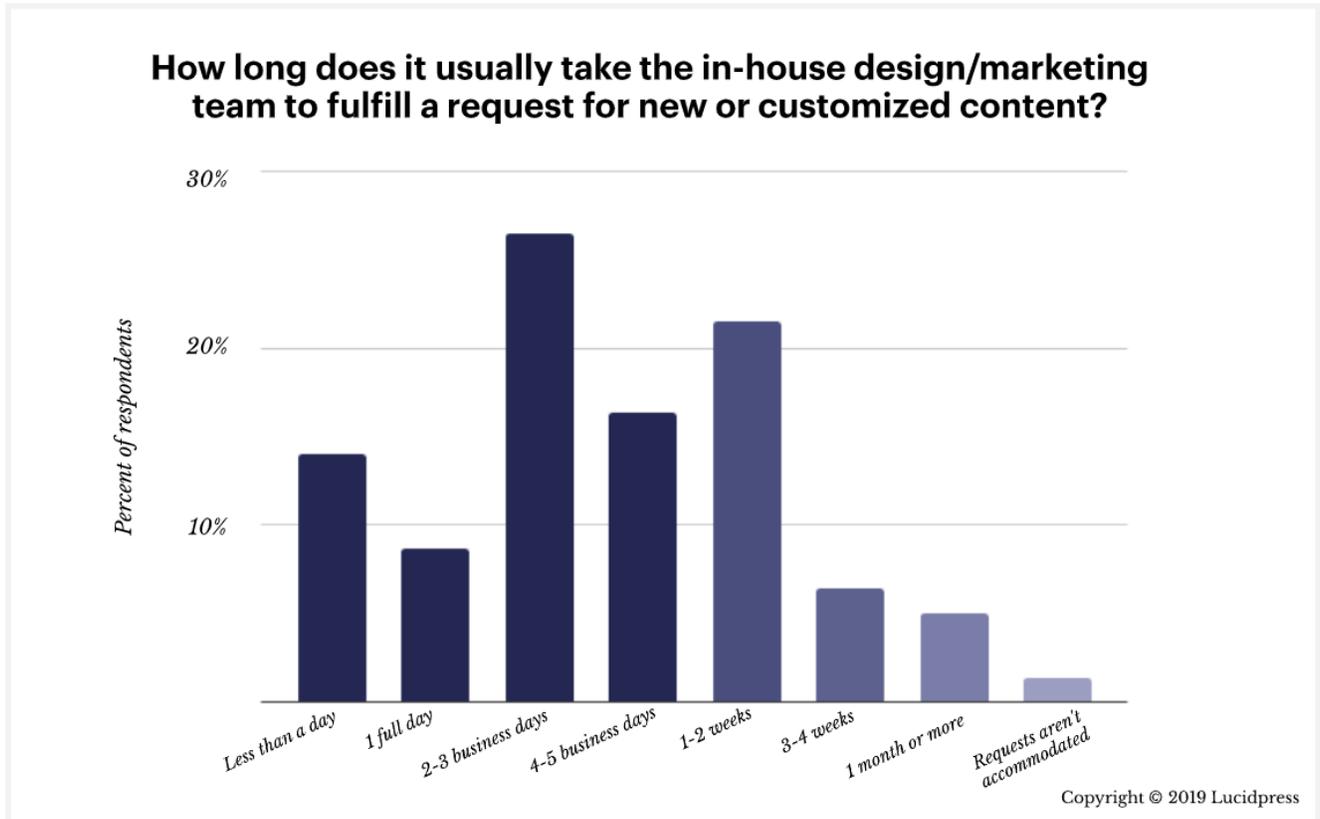
Overall findings

▸ Note: some companies have compliance teams to assure all content stays compliant and on-brand.

▸ Making brand guidelines easy to find and adhere to is a surefire way to ensure brand consistency.

▸ Informal or formal guidelines are rendered obsolete if no one bothers to enforce them.

▸ Additionally, guideline formatting is rendered obsolete if no one can find them and/or enforce them.

▸ That said, formatting branded guidelines in a PDF form can make updates difficult. Plus, there's no way to ensure that everyone has an up-to-date copy of the guidelines, meaning your brand consistency could be negatively impact.
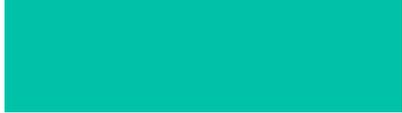
Branded content production

Today's branded content production is typically impacted by a creative team's ability to fulfill the request. And for most brand teams, there's rarely enough time in the day to get everything done — some tasks are completed in a timely, reasonable fashion whereas others get pushed by the wayside or rushed through in an effort to meet production deadlines. The projects that slip through the cracks are often the ones that feature inconsistent branding.

However, proper brand guidelines help offset this inequity. Additionally, they enable maximum efficiency and streamlines time spent on production: it reduces extraneous time spent tracking down information, empowers teams to delegate tasks accordingly, and ensures brand consistency no matter who is put to the task.

In an effort to better understand the relationship between inconsistent branding and content production, we asked survey constituents the following questions:

How long does it usually take the in-house design/marketing team to fulfill a request for new or customized content?

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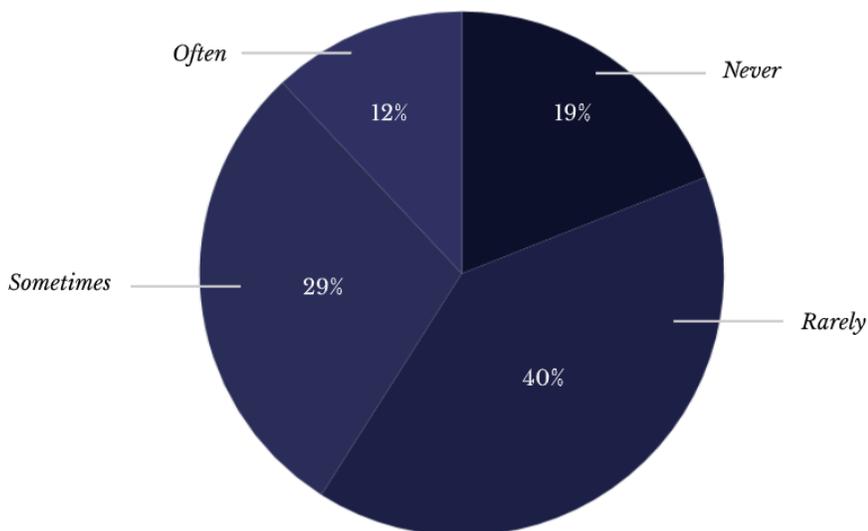
How much content (including sales and marketing materials) is your organization producing compared to last year?

Significantly less — 8%
Less — 12%
About the same — 29%
More — 35%
Significantly more — 16%
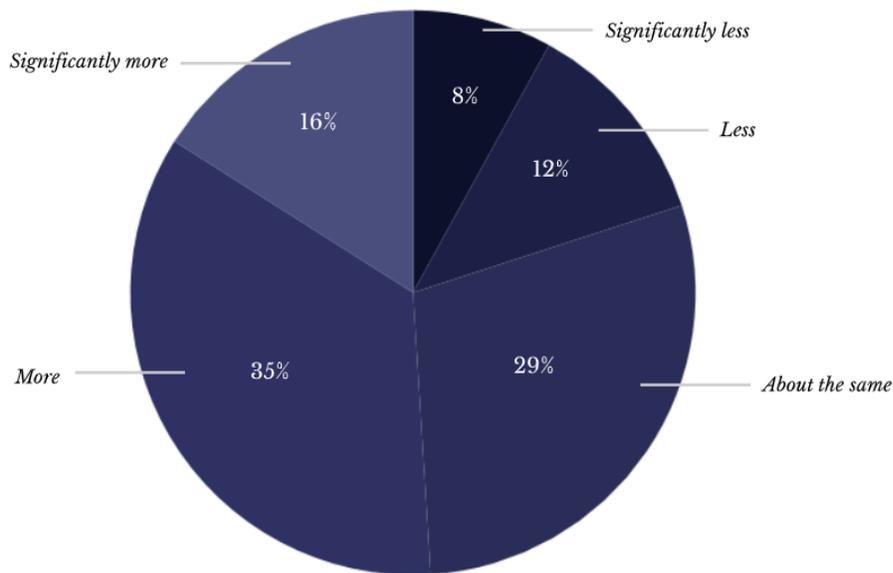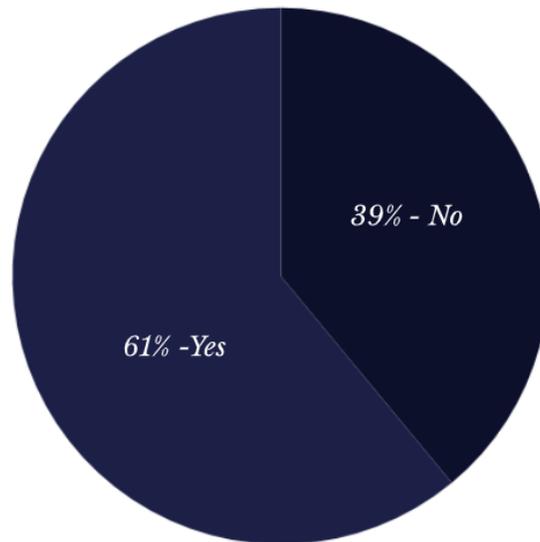
How often are marketing or sales materials created and distributed that *do not* conform to your brand guidelines?

Often — 12%
Never — 19%
Sometimes — 29%
Rarely — 40%

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Has anyone at your organization (either intentionally or unintentionally) created off-brand, rogue content within the past year?

39% - No

61% -Yes

Abbreviated summary of statistics

▸ 26.5% state that it takes 2 - 3 business days for creative teams to fulfill requests.

▸ 21.5% iterate that it takes 1 – 2 weeks to fulfill requests.

▸ 16.5% note that it takes 4 – 5 business days to fulfill requests.

▸ Most organizations, about 50%, are creating more content in comparison to the year prior.

▸ 19% of companies never experienced the production of off-brand content — which means that 81% of companies experience off-brand content on some level.

▸ 61% of constituents stated that they know of individuals creating off-brand content in the past year.
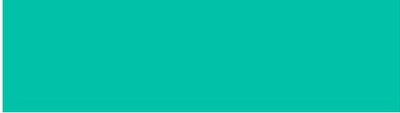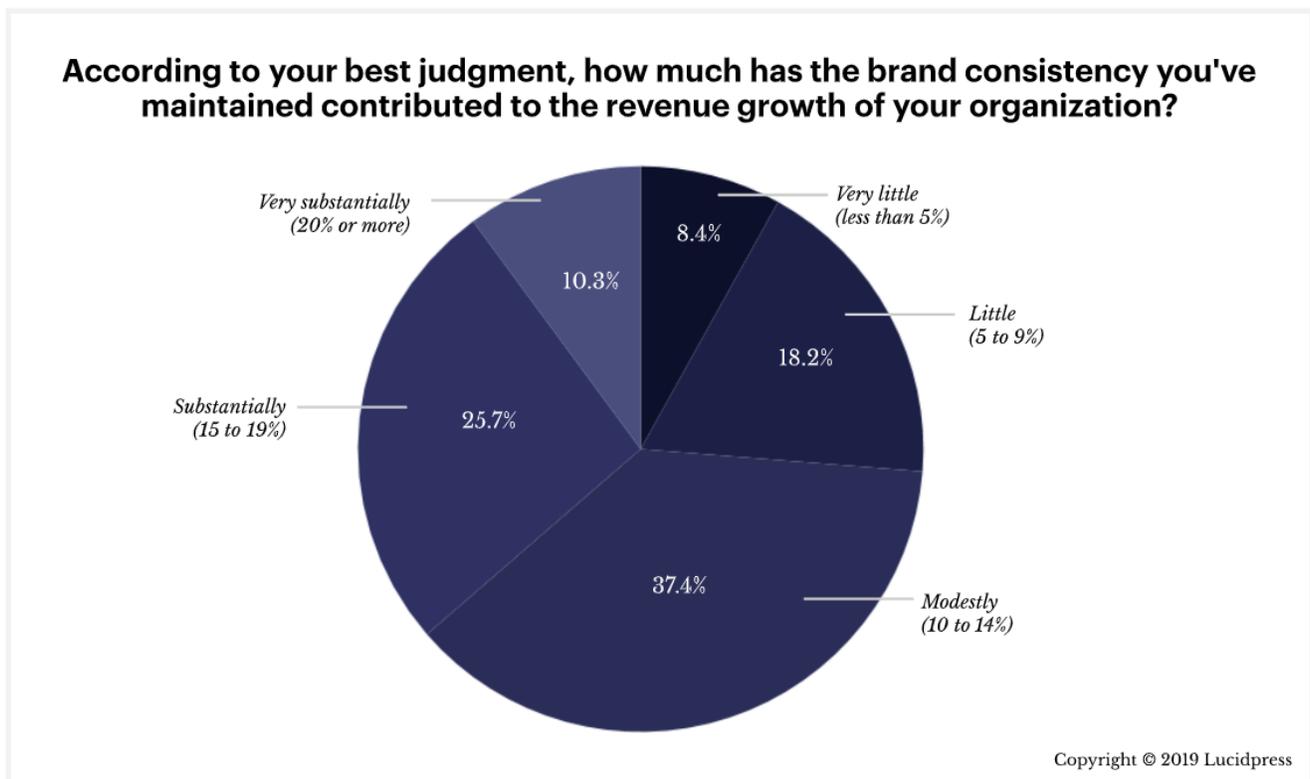
Overall findings

‣ Production pace has increased since 2016 — in contrast to the 2016 report, production turnaround has gone from 1 – 2 weeks to 2 – 3 business days. This could be due to general demand, type of content being requested, or additional team members being added with the intention of boosting production efficiency.

‣ It's possible that companies who experienced an increase in content production also enforced branding guidelines and ensured they were easily accessible to all employees.

‣ While 39% is not a majority, the data does support the need for the enforcement of branded guidelines that are easily accessible to all individuals and employees.

‣ However, the data regarding the frequency and knowledge of off-brand content being produced seems to contradict itself — as well as the data regarding branded guidelines. This could be attributed to a lack of knowledge about the rate of off-brand content being produced or the desire to be honest regarding off-brand content being produced.

‣ A lack of knowledge regarding rogue content creation could be attributed to remote workers, individual contributors, or small teams as well.

‣ Alternatively, companies who enforce brand guidelines might assume that no one is producing off-brand content, which could explain or justify the reported 61% of constituents noting zero off-brand content.

Growth attribution

A key component to elevating your brand beyond the awareness stage is to maintain brand consistency and repetitive exposure to your company.

Ultimately, companies want customers to go from "I know of that brand" to "I know and trust that brand" — and brand consistency serves as that bridge. From there, growth is imminent. Whether it's return customers or earning the trust of potential ones, brand consistency bridges the gap and boosts customer trust.

To better understand how companies view the connectivity between growth attribution, brand consistency, and revenue, we asked constituents the following questions:

According to your best judgment, how much has the brand consistency you've maintained contributed to the revenue growth of your organization?

Very substantially (20% or more) — 10.3%

Very little (less than 5%) — 8.4%

Little (5 to 9%) — 18.2%

Substantially (15 to 19%) — 25.7%

Modestly (10 to 14%) — 37.4%

If your brand was always presented consistently, how much do you estimate that your organization's revenue would increase?

Average of 33%

Abbreviated summary of statistics

▸ Constituents reported an average of 33% in growth if they maintained brand consistency.

▸ 37.4% reported that brand consistency modestly contributed to the overall revenue growth.

▸ 25.7% noted that brand consistency substantially contributed to overall revenue growth.

Overall findings

▸ In contrast to the 2016 report, the reported analytical impact on growth and revenue increased from 23% to 33%.

▸ Growth attribution has stayed relatively the same when compared against the 2016 findings. However, constituent nominations were flip-flopped. In the 2019 findings, more constituents indicated that they would expect moderate (instead of substantial) contributions to overall revenue growth.

Executive summary

Your brand is your most valuable asset. It serves as an integrity filter from which customers evaluate whether or not you're worthy of their business — and inconsistent branding jeopardizes that relationship.

From your customers' perspective, inconsistent branding is a result of carelessness. And if you don't care about the representation and consistency of your brand, how do your customers know they can depend on you to care about them?

Courtesy of the results uncovered by our survey, a majority of constituents agree that inconsistent branding can be both disruptive and confusing to customers, in turn damaging your brand's reputation.

Not only does this wind up impacting how customers perceive your brand, but it impacts your bottom line too — a majority of companies iterated that if their brand was presented consistently, revenue would increase by 33%.

In addition to the statistics presented, our findings identified the following gaps that brands must fill to properly assure and maintain brand consistency:

1. Brand guidelines

Your brand guidelines are your North Star. As the name implies, this document should guide and illustrate the manner in which your
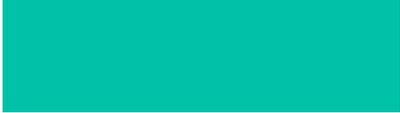
brand is depicted or written about. Your brand guidelines should be easy to update periodically and comply with — and even easier for your employees to find. Be prepared to make your brand guidelines available in a wide variety of formats and channels.

That said, the key to maintaining brand consistency through guidelines is to restrict use, abuse, and modification of branded materials. You can achieve this through a brand asset hub and by providing employees with access to locked assets, pre-formatted templates, and explicit conditions to ensure maximum brand consistency.

2. Brand management

The road to credibility and consistency is often laden with proverbial potholes that are made, in part, by fast-moving marketing strategies and overall company growth.

As a result, whoever possess the primary ownership of brand management must maintain guardianship and perspective related to brand consistency and representation when creating or implementing marketing strategies. Management duties must be viewed as an extension of a linear brand narrative — failing to maintain could dampen credibility or undercut effectiveness of an otherwise excellent marketing strategy.

3. Brand guidelines enforcement and delegation

Brand guidelines won't do you any good if you don't enforce them. Brand management must not only update brand guidelines periodically, but they must be prepared to enforce them as well.

Locked templates or brand assets can assist with this, though further enforcement will be undoubtedly necessary. Should a brand management team be unable to tackle a task quickly or in a timely fashion, individual contributors should be empowered to take the task on themselves with the help of locked assets and up-to-date brand guidelines.

In sum

At the end of the day, you can't have trust without credibility, and you can't have credibility without consistency. Because in order to gain customer trust — and their business — a brand must feel, look, and be credible. And in order to be credible, a brand must be consistent in their messaging and visuals — in turn placing extra emphasis on diligent, yet thoughtful, brand management.

Lucidpress

ABOUT LUCIDPRESS

Lucidpress is a design & brand templating platform that's changing how companies ensure brand compliance. Created in 2013 by Lucid Software, the cloud-based platform empowers teams to create high-quality visual content without sacrificing brand consistency. It brings user-friendly, professional design to creators in real estate, franchises, universities and more.

To see how Lucidpress can help your organization stay on-brand, visit our Business page and schedule a free demo.

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