



In-house creative leaders can discover new ideas, successful strategies, and mutual support by interacting with other in-house creative leaders. We can build a strong sense of community by sharing ideas, information, and personal experiences, which was the focus of the InSource Regional Roundtable held at SAS corporate headquarters in Cary, North Carolina, on November 11, 2014. Facilitated by Kim Conder who serves as an InSource board member and vice president, marketing, at Durham Convention & Visitors Bureau, a group of 15 in-house creative professionals came together to discuss “Managing the Constant of Change: Preparing for the Growth of Your In-House Teams.”

**Participants shared their responses to the question, “What is one challenge in your work as a creative leader that you are terrified or excited about these days?” (in other words, “What’s rocking your world?”)**

“Our team is one person short now, which has an impact on the lava flows of our work.” • “Finding that balance in handling daily work volume and being tactical versus developing long-term plans and a big-picture perspective, as well as the use of resources versus time.” • “Working with a reduction in staff to handle an increased workload; this requires communication of constraints to others.” • “Managing the transition from print to online work, which means quicker turnaround of deliverables; we’re looking for the right project management software to help us.” • “Given

the constant influx of new technologies, we need to figure out which ones work for us.” • “Our team is trying to meet the various expectations for receiving communications of our different target audiences.” • “Managing upward communications in a setting where sales and research & development matters trump the value of design as drivers of our business.” • “Our day-to-day workload is a challenge.” • “Evolving technology has changed our workflow, along with role confusion and workplace tension.” • “Mastering new tools and platforms to roll out after 18 months of work.” • “Cranking through the trees (of day-to-day work) but we need a bigger picture view.” • “Keeping up with technology.” • “Educating in-house colleagues about the value our creative team adds; we’re trying to lead, not always follow.” • “Keeping everyone together as a team even when the work is too disparate.” • “Managing an increased workload that requires more resources than we’ve got at this time.”

**Change Management Survey:** We asked participants to identify three challenges they face as in-house creative leaders in the following three areas (percentages reflect number of responses to each issue, and therefore equal more than 100%):

### Growth Goals

48%	Change From Order Taker to Strategic Partner
17%	Executive Support
17%	Add Responsibilities/Accountabilities
9%	Grow Client Base
4%	Other (buy-in from in-house clients)

### Obstacles

48%	Resources (budget)
22%	Technology
13%	Change is too slow
2%	Convincing Executives is difficult
9%	Recognition

### Challenges

44%	Prioritizing Projects
22%	Executive Support
13%	Poor Communication
22%	Prioritizing Training
9%	Production Process
9%	Other (Internal client silos, trust, project volume vs. staff level)

#### InSource provides the following takeaway messages from this roundtable discussion:

##### How in-house creative leaders can plan for growth

- Using freelance talent and temp workers can help fill the gaps when headcount constraints prohibit new hires; creative leaders can often make a strong case to gain resources for freelancers. However, when pressed to find high-quality freelance talent at cheaper rates, a case needs to be made to justify the value of using tried and tested freelancers. In some cases, the focus needs to be on the lack of efficient workflow realities (eg, too many revisions/change of scope that occurs for a project) that increases hours for freelance work, rather than claiming freelance services cost too much. At times project rates versus hourly rates may be a better approach to manage these cost concerns.

**Suggestion:** Ask for an estimate from an outside agency for a project/campaign and then compare this to the freelancer’s estimate; a \$30,000

agency bid versus a \$3,000 from freelancer offers a compelling perspective.

- Word of mouth seems to be the best way to find freelance talent. Ask others, “We’re looking for x, y, and z. Do you know anyone?” Given that some workplace settings have self-imposed constraints for ongoing use of freelance/contracted services, it’s a win-win to be able to share such information about specific freelance talent.
- Finding freelance talent and assessing their skill sets/fit within one’s organization takes time; this seems to become more difficult over time as the demand for high-quality freelance services increases.

**Suggestion:** Develop a collective list of freelance talent for creative services teams with contact information and share with other creative leaders; this approach is more efficient than everyone developing their own list on their own.

- In-house creative leaders need to be agile to get the work done. One way to educate others about real costs

is to champion project management systems; meticulous recordkeeping can be a tool to educate others. Assign fair market value of your creative team’s work if the work were outsourced to make comparisons.

- Take into account what freelancers may be lacking. Some may lack an understanding of strategy. As part of the interview process, ask freelancers, “Talk about this piece in your portfolio and how this was the solution to achieve the desired goal.” Responses should go beyond PMS colors and fonts selected to demonstrate an understanding of the importance of strategy. In the in-house creative services setting, “it’s about business, not art.”
- Soft skills trump technology deficits. It’s hard to find people who care. Look for traits that suggest a person is well-rounded and knows how to work with people and manage relationships. (eg, Email etiquette is important. When a client sends an email asking “Will the project be done today?” the desired response from the creative team member is not a one-word email: “No.” Regardless of

the high quality of the deliverable, the internal client may develop a negative impression of the creative team based on this single interaction.)

- Creatives may be introverts by nature; it takes time to build confidence and skills to effectively engage with clients as in-house creative team members.
- Hire people for your team who are hyper-positive and motivated; such individuals can be a catalyst for change.

#### **On building trust and respect as in-house creative leaders**

- Creative leaders need to tactfully help clients clearly communicate their expectations. It's not enough when the only feedback an internal client provides is "it needs to pop."
- An internal client may say, "We need a brochure." But first ask, "What's your goal?" Discuss the target audience(s) and the desired outcome. The specific format/communications tool may be the last item for discussion and then focus on assessing its fit to achieve the goal. Sometimes what the client really needs may not match what the client is initially asking for.
- One approach to change a workplace habit that doesn't serve in the interest of best practices is to find allies and work together. Find a champion in the organization and then work with that person to transform and make that person succeed.
- Share success stories with others to build trust.

**Suggestion:** Seek feedback on a project/campaign after it's completed. Ask for analytics/data, which can serve as metrics that tie back to the business and measurables for your team's credibility. Focus on what did work, not only what didn't work.

- Take the initiative to ask, "What are the metrics for this project?" Show your interest in achieving the marketing goals, not only delivering a project with great design. Then talk about your creative team's work in terms of return on investment (ROI).

- Look for ways to determine time spent on a project versus effectiveness of a project; analytics can help reveal where most of the time should be spent for the greatest impact. Make decisions based on results/effectiveness as a top priority when possible.
- Build relationships and communicate beyond telephone calls and emails. Using Google hangouts and/or scheduling check-in meetings on a weekly or once-a-month basis can serve as virtual "watercooler" talk to build relationships with others.

**Suggestion:** BombBomb (a video email service; bombbomb.com) allows you to record your message ahead of time as a video (eg, 30-second message) and allows you to track its receipt/use. This works particularly well when working remotely with clients.

#### **On tackling other challenges as in-house creative leaders**

- When dealing with difficult personalities and/or potential bullying/backstabbing, take the initiative for one-on-one communication.

**Suggestion:** A good way to disarm a possible uncomfortable confrontation is to ask, "Can you help me understand....?" This is based on the premise that "if I can understand what's happening, I can improve the situation."

- If you hit a roadblock and exhaust available resources, lay out the situation and pose the question, "What are we not going to do?" as a way to set priorities.
- Devaluing the brand is unacceptable. When an internal client decides to go rogue and disregard one's corporate style and brand, make it clear: "This is our best advice for the brand: We think it's wrong (to deviate) and here's why." Also add: "So we're deciding not to do good design work, correct?" Yes, refuse the work if it's counterproductive to everything we know about good design/best practices; this may mean we're called upon to pick up the pieces later on. But we need to

stay true to what we know.

**Suggestion:** Consider appointing brand stewards (ie, admins) throughout the organization who you train in using the corporate style guide. Bring these brand stewards together on a periodic basis (every 6 months?) for a refresh in guidelines and to express your appreciation for their work as brand stewards.

- Listen and be aware of what challenges people have around you. Hang out with people who are motivated to make transformations happen. With respect to metrics and keeping meticulous records about your creative team's work and use of time/resources, make it clear that such tools are important; develop the mindset that "it's worth it because it's going to help all of us."

**InSource greatly appreciates the gracious hospitality of SAS for providing meeting space for this InSource Roundtable in Cary, NC.**

We thank **Adobe** (adobe.com), **Aldine** (aldine.com), **AtTask** (attask.com), **Boom Ideanet** (boomideanet.com), **Bridgeman Images** (bridgemanimages.com), **Brilliant Graphics** (brilliant-graphics.com), **GDUSA** (gdusa.com), **InMotionNow** (inmotionnow.com) and **HOW** (howdesign.com) for their generous donation of sponsorships, materials, and services to support the work of InSource!



---

#### **InSource Board of Directors**

Andrew R. Brenits, President  
Robin Colangelo, Vice President  
Cindy Salant, Director, Events  
Kim Kiser, Director, Editorial  
Clarissa Zorr, Director of Brand & Design  
Ed Roberts, Director, Marketing  
Shani Sandy, Director, Digital