



In-house creative services are growing. Around the country, more companies are starting or growing their own in-house creative teams. Sharing ideas and personal experiences as leaders and members of in-house creative teams was the focus of the InSource Regional Roundtable held in Phoenix, Arizona, on September 25, 2014. Facilitated by Andy Brenits who serves as president of InSource and leader of creative services at Arizona Public Services, a group of 30 in-house creative professionals came together to discuss “Managing the Constant of Change: Preparing for the Growth of Your In-House Teams.”

Our roundtable participants shared their responses to the question, “What are your 15 minutes of fame?”

“I answered the phone when a famous author called my house; it was a wrong number.” • “I was on the TV show *Romper Room* when I was 5 years old.” • “I went to school with people who went on to play football in the NFL.” • “At one time in my life I saved a lot of money and made a lot of art.” • “In college I went on tour with a band.” • “I designed a record label and was given a credit line.” • “I designed a tee-shirt that people wore.” • “I designed two murals: one on a side of a movie theater and one for a public school.” • “I was an intern for *ABC News* and did behind-the-scenes work on the London bombing.” • “My face appears in signage for my employer.” • “I met many stars when we won an Emmy for a video we produced.” • “I was an extra in a movie.” • “I was in an Instagram that was put on TV.” • “I met Peter Frampton while working for a radio station; he signed the \$8 ticket stub I had saved since high school.” • “When I was 5 years old, I was runner-up in the Little Miss Arizona competition.” • “I trained with a martial arts expert who works with celebrities.” • “I shook hands with President Obama.”

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

78%	Change From Order Taker to Strategic Partner
17%	Grow Client Base
34%	Executive Support
13%	Other (keeping work fresh, be assertive with ideas, always solve problems, role clarity, ownership & accountability)
52%	Add Responsibilities/Accountabilities

Obstacles

44%	Resources
40%	Convincing Execs
17%	Other (resources, hierarchy, creative team alignment, executive team alignment, ownership of creative, educating business partners)
26%	Recognition
26%	Technology

Challenges

70%	Poor Communication
44%	Executive Support
48%	Prioritizing Projects
40%	Production Process
17%	Prioritizing Training
21%	Other (anyone with Photoshop can do my job, being creative within brand, free vs cost resources, strategy shift)

InSource provides the following takeaway messages from this roundtable discussion:

How in-house creatives keep clients in check

- We are often asked to do more work with less resources. Business partners are asking for more. For example, "It's time to refresh our design." Yet, very little time is given to do the work. Concepts are pitched; then a long wait for decisions. Then there's a rush to get the work done. One approach: Show what can be done with little time and no money versus what can be done with more time and more money. Make it clear: "This is what it takes to get what you want."
- We struggle to help others understand that in-house creative teams need more useful feedback than "this doesn't work for me" and "make it better." We need to help people better communicate their vision for a project up front.
- We need to choose our battles carefully. Cultivate champions higher up in the company who can back you up when needed.
- Sometimes it's best to go to an outside agency when the skill set needed is not an in-house capacity at the current time.
- Be realistic to set expectations ahead of time; be careful not to cry wolf. Develop the strength to say "it can't happen" when expectations are too unrealistic. Meet halfway when possible.
- We need to train ourselves to write schedules down and report metrics to our in-house creative teams.
- **Suggestion:** Show metrics to others. Track how often your team does deliver results on time. Make it clear when circumstances are beyond one's control; for example, it's labor intensive to make 25 rounds of revisions versus 4 rounds of revisions.
- If possible, track design results with sales metrics. Ask for customer feedback and report it to others, even if only anecdotal.

Suggestion: Test two versions of a design. Go with the design that receives the largest number of people who respond favorably to it.

- It takes time to make the case for best practices, raising a healthy respect/demand for a higher level of design work. One can earn more credibility with metrics.
- **Suggestion:** To gather metrics on an event, ask the event organizer to ask spot survey

questions to determine what was the draw for people to attend the event. Internal relationship building is required to make this happen.

- **Suggestion:** Include any research already done—eg, age testing on color(s)—in the creative brief. Use language your business partner will understand rather than only "creativespeak."

On building trust and respect to gain a seat at the table

- Transparency and authenticity are important to build trust and respect. Share what other in-house creative teams are doing to make a difference in business terms.
- Respect the confidentiality of the workplace by not giving away any secrets.
- Sometimes respect is gained when the team stays late and gets the job done.
- Be aware that with growth comes change. Make a case for fresh ideas versus doing again what's already comfortable for others.
- Cultivate a growing awareness to be engaged in the "why" of a project so others will move beyond your team being perceived as an order taker. Present your team as a business partner that helps others achieve their business goals.

How in-house creative leaders create opportunities for growth

- It starts with an understanding that if your in-house talent doesn't move up, they will move out. That's why we need to provide ongoing training and staff development.
- In-house team members can ask for more variety in their assignments as a designer, growing to serve in a consultant role for others. They can take the initiative to figure out how to gain knowledge and skills they want to develop over time.
- **Suggestion:** Plan 2-hour meetings as creatives on branding or other relevant topics on a monthly basis.
- Plan for staff training and learning throughout the year, especially at offsite locations when possible.
- Be bold and say, "We're not doing it that way anymore." Present a different perspective that leads to a higher level of deliverables from the in-house creative team. Take the initiative to communicate the process to

others by saying "here's how we operate."

Suggestion: Become involved in design-related organizations as another way to grow.

- Gather information on what people are saying about your company's advertising commercial or campaign. Use social media to create more buzz about in-house creative team success stories.

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