World Federation of Advertisers

Media's got talent?

Global Media Talent research findings

Joint study by:

MediaSense®

July 2022

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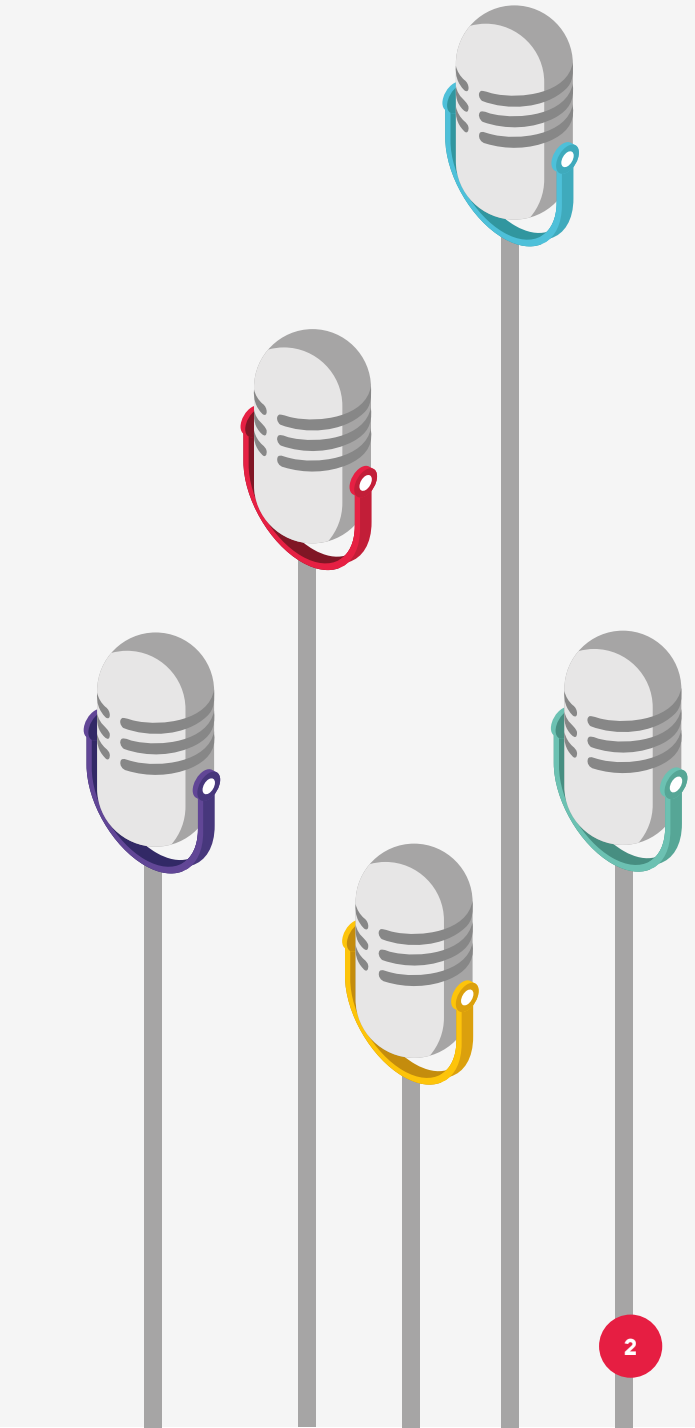


Foreword

Across the media industry, whether you work at an advertiser, agency, ad tech company or publisher, people are the fuel that drives our business. Even as data and automation become more important to the way we work, people remain our No. 1 asset.

Unfortunately, as this new WFA and MediaSense report shows, many parts of the industry are struggling to attract and retain the talent we need at all levels and types of media expertise. This includes client-side marketers who are feeling the pinch across a range of teams from data and analytics to in-house media buying.

But, as this research demonstrates, the impact is particularly pronounced among our agency partners. A healthy, vibrant and competitive agency ecosystem is critical to the success of clients' marketing activities so this is a concern that WFA and its members take incredibly seriously.

Because in answer to the question posed by the title of this report: Media does indeed have talent. We just need to manage it smarter in order to attract and retain it.

We hope that this report can help us all begin to address some of the structural issues impacting on our talent pipeline. There are key areas where the industry needs to collaborate to ensure we can continue to nurture and retain our greatest asset.

Matt Green
Director, Global Media Services
WFA

This study comes at an important time with businesses experiencing levels of staff attrition never seen before, alongside growing fears of recession. And while the industry remains first and foremost a people-centric business, 'riding the wave' is no longer a viable strategy.

The research highlights acute gaps across data, analytics and eCommerce with the level of growth unsupported by much needed recruitment, training and development. Experience is fast being replaced by expertise, leaving the industry lacking in leaders capable of nurturing and developing our best talent.

The impact to future growth is clear, with over two-thirds of our respondents highlighting the impediment talent scarcity is creating. It is vital, therefore, that businesses start to invest in talent in a more meaningful way, ensuring they strike a better balance between specialists and all-rounders, youth and experience, expertise and attitude.

We are delighted to partner with the WFA on this important study and hope the insights from the research act as a valuable barometer for the industry, and provide valuable stimulus to brands, agencies, publishers and technology companies looking to create more rewarding and fulfilling career destinations.

Ryan Kangisser
Managing Partner
MediaSense

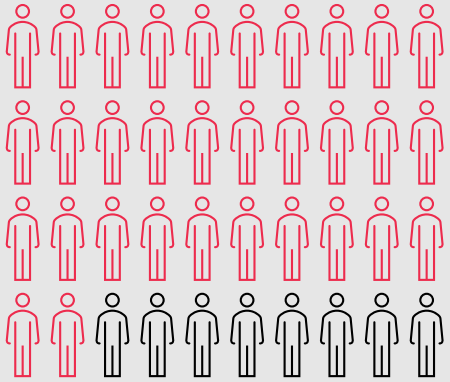
About this research

This joint WFA and MediaSense study examining global media talent was launched in May 2022 on the back of the Media2025 research which revealed how 56% of brands felt that a skills shortage was holding the industry back. Concerns pointed to the rapid (and unanticipated) rise of eCommerce (and failure to suitably resource), excessive 'Covid-shedding' which had not been fully replenished, and an overall lack of investment in entry level talent and talent management.

This research was designed to unpack this theme further, with input from ALL major stakeholders across the global media industry; brands, agencies, publishers & technology companies across all key media markets.

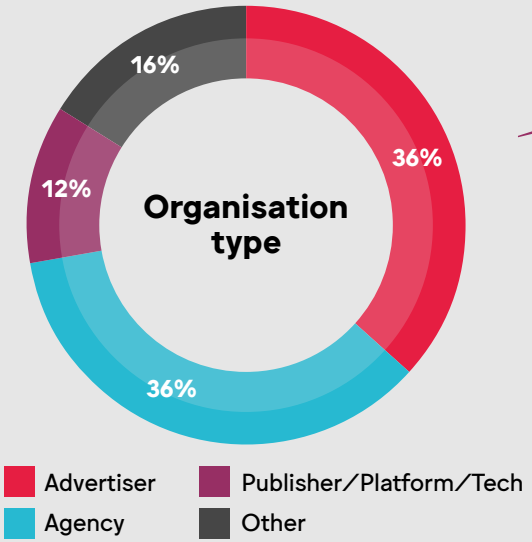
In what has become the largest study of its kind, this study represents views from:

Participants

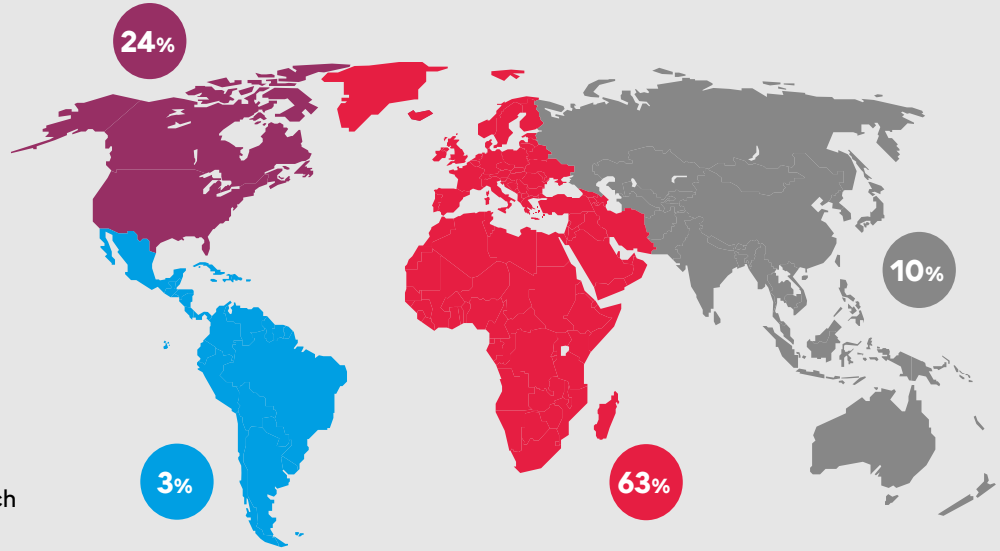


400 stakeholders

81% at Director and above



Global sample



Executive summary

01

An industry in crisis
– "Talent pool is simply not big enough"

77% of respondents recognise that there is high or some scarcity of talent in their organisation. At 85% (38% of which say scarcity is high), agencies are at the sharp end of this.

67% (76% in APAC) highlight how scarcity is proving a major blocker towards growth, as talent remains the key commodity driving our industry.

There is reason for optimism, however, with the vast majority feeling positive about the future of our industry (61%).

02

Where are the gaps?
– "Data and analytics now omnipotent"

It is the more technical and ubiquitous areas of data and analytics, eCommerce & measurement that are seeing the most scarcity, with no discernible difference by region or industry cohort.

Data and analytics were highlighted (by all) as the single most important capability to prioritise for the next two years.

Brands are placing more emphasis on measurement, strategy and omnichannel planning, demanding greater integration over 'silo thinking' and 'over-specialisation' of roles.

03

How did we get here?
– "Pent up attrition now overflowing"

Training and talent management were overwhelmingly highlighted as the top triggers for the talent crisis. It was felt that neither have been adequately prioritised within organisations.

Purpose was also highlighted as a key driver as the industry struggles to compete with others in selling the virtues of the media industry.

An increased migration of talent to technology companies, who are able to offer more attractive and motivating remuneration is adding to the scarcity.

04

Where do we go from here?
– "Find motivated people and invest in training"

Training and talent management must be better prioritised, to accelerate professional development and provide clarity towards career progression.

Greater diversity in the hiring process is needed to challenge existing bias towards background, qualification and experience. Focus needs to shift to motivation and attitude.

Flexibility has become table stakes for many businesses seeking to attract and retain talent, with pre-Covid practices being met with short thrift by employees.

Connecting with universities and colleges earlier or creating more vocational degrees or pathways into marketing will help to better 'market the marketing industry'.

An industry in crisis

An overwhelming **77% of respondents say that there is some or high scarcity of talent in their organisation,** confirming our initial hypothesis of the scale of the challenge facing the industry now and in the future.

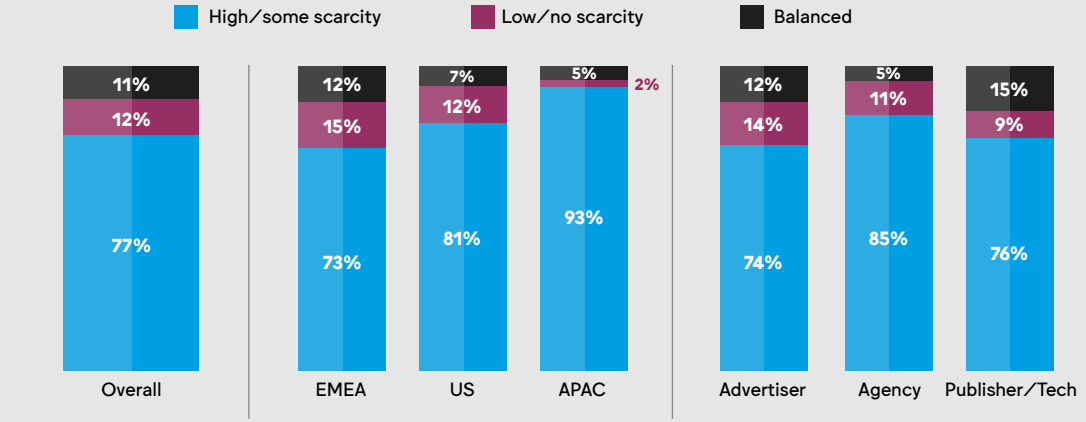
At 85% (38% of which say scarcity is high), agencies are at the sharp end of this. For advertisers, the effect is slightly less severe (74%). Further breaking out publishers and adtech companies, there is a clear divergence of views with AdTech (like agencies) at 85% compared with 58% of publishers agreeing that there is some or high scarcity of talent.

While the trend is consistent by region, it is most pronounced in the US (81%) and APAC (93%).

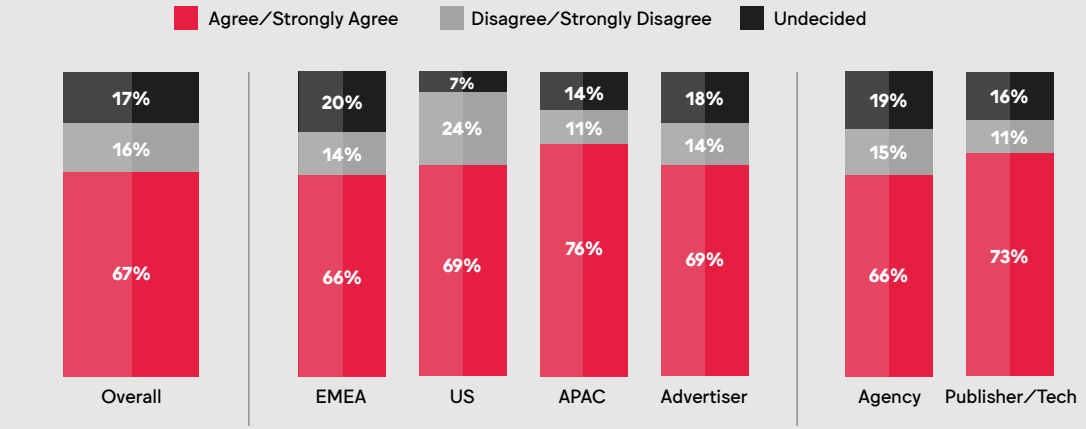
It is the implication to growth which is most concerning. 67% of all respondents (76% in APAC) identify that scarcity is proving a major blocker towards growth as (contrary to the promise of AI!) talent remains the key commodity driving our industry.

"The pool of talent is simply not big enough at the moment with a clear imbalance between supply and demand."

Q. How significant do you feel the talent shortage is for media roles in your organisation?



Q. The shortage of key skills is proving a major blocker towards growth



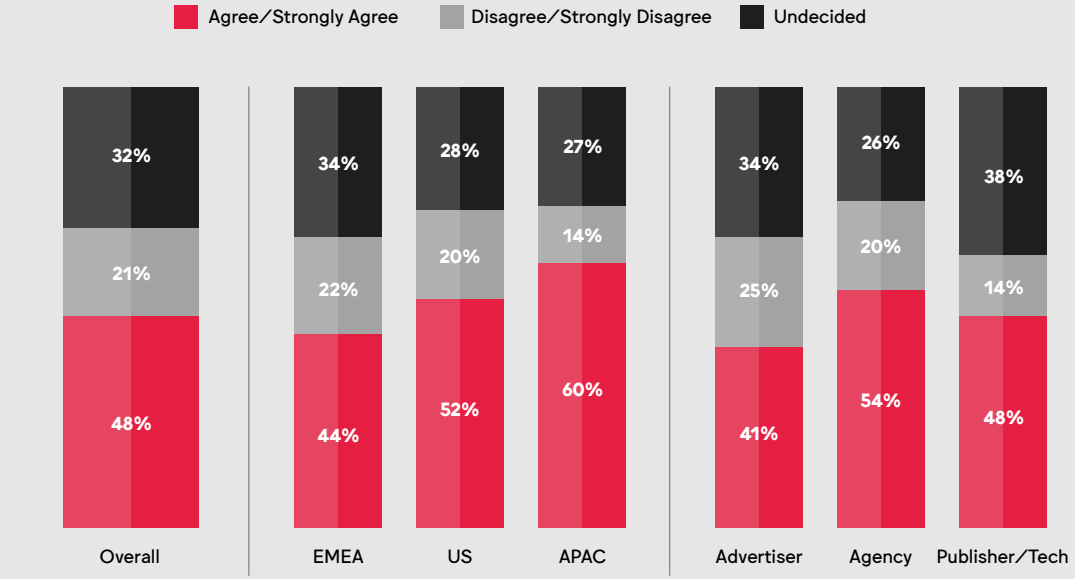
Scarcity is a common factor in most high growth industries (such as media), but this research offers an acute sense that this time is different. 48% of respondents (54% among agencies) believe that the industry is in the midst of its worst ever crisis. Furthermore, 68% (74% in the US) disagree with the statement that talk of a 'crisis' is being overstated.

"There is no doubt in my mind that the industry is facing a serious talent crisis through COVID layoffs, poaching from other sectors and the dilution & disregard of the value of strategy."

This notwithstanding, there is reason for optimism. **The vast majority (61%) of respondents claim to feel positive about the future of our industry,** confident that the current situation will ease. The number of responses received and the richness of feedback provided reveals a strong and shared desire to build a better future for the industry for our youngest as well as the more experienced cohort.

"I am encouraged by the number of agencies/advertisers that now recognise that improving diversity is critical to protecting the long-term health of the industry and preventing future crises."

Q. The industry is in the midst of its worst ever talent crisis



Understanding the gaps

Current day

What emerges strongly from the research is just how nuanced the scarcity is, particularly by discipline.

Across all regions and industry cohorts, the more arts-based disciplines of media buying, social media, influencer marketing and creative are seemingly well covered across the market. For example, only 36% of respondents are seeing scarcity in social and influencer marketing in EMEA, which points to high levels of social media literacy and expertise at entry level.

Similarly, disciplines which can be more easily automated or diversified through offshoring (such as ad operations or search marketing) are also experiencing less scarcity. High concentration of investment into fewer, bigger, self-serve advertising and measurement platforms is only accelerating further the automation of tasks, leading to less appetite towards premium talent.

However, it is the more technical and ubiquitous areas of data and analytics, eCommerce and measurement that are seeing the most scarcity, with no discernible difference by region or industry cohort.

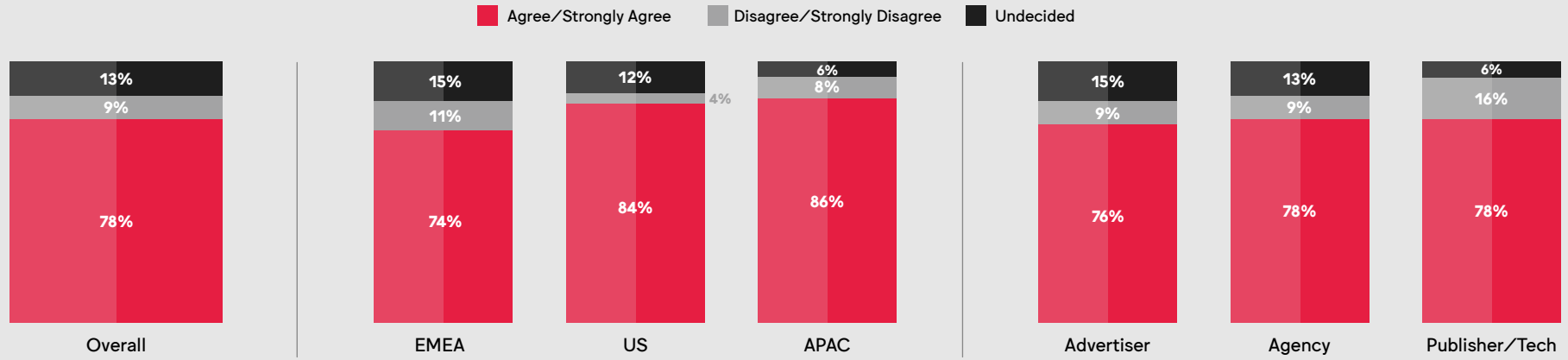
"There was a time when data and analytics people were locked away. Now they are omnipotent."

The paths of those in arts-based marketing disciplines are largely confined to the marketing and communications industry, but the more technical disciplines of data science and analytics are becoming more transversal and transferable.

With industry categories far and wide increasingly demanding data and analytics capabilities, it has created much more optionality and movement.

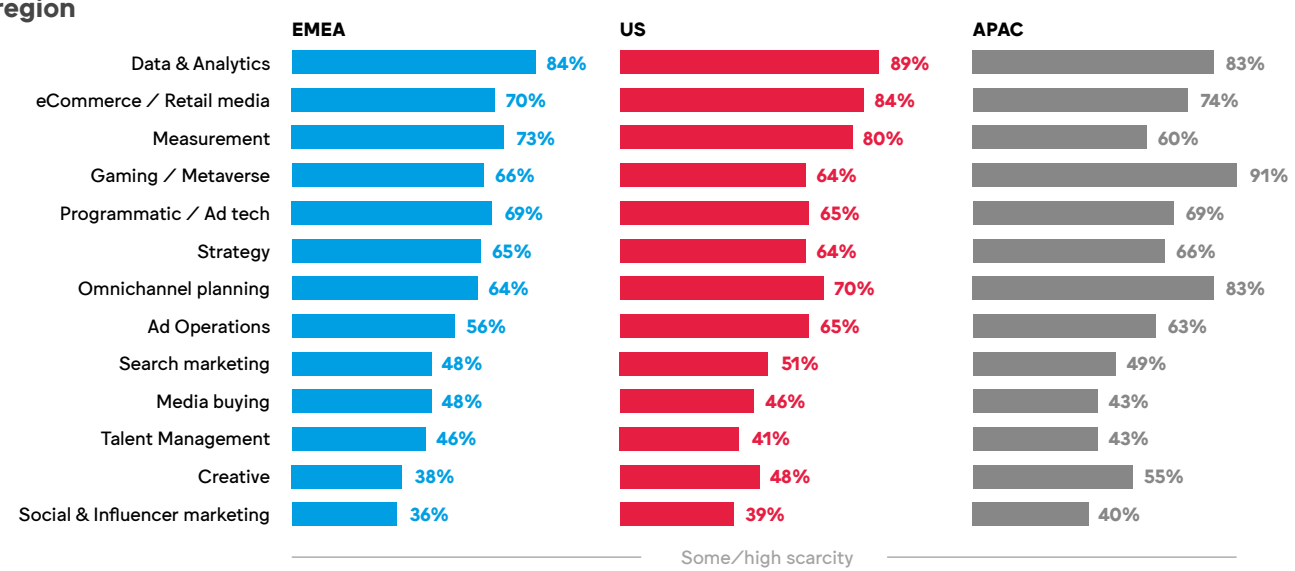
"It's a sellers market"

Q. There is a growing imbalance between salary expectation and capability

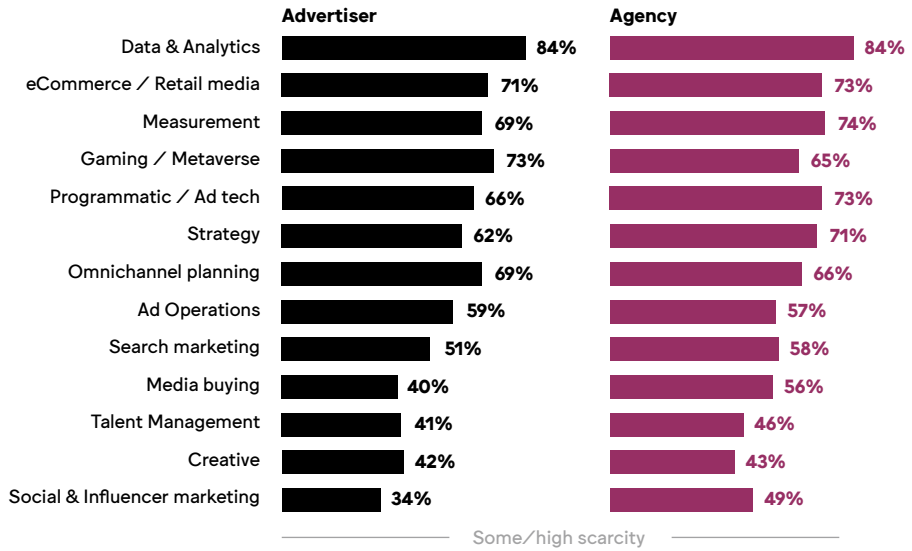


Q. How would you rate the availability of the following skills and capabilities in the marketplace?

By region



By organisation type



Deep dive on LATAM

Feedback sourced from LATAM respondents highlight similar challenges towards scarcity of talent and the imbalance between salary expectations and capability.

This imbalance was most pronounced in LATAM and while this may be true across certain disciplines, a broader challenge was highlighted around the competitiveness of salaries relative to others in the region. This gap will need to be addressed in order to support the growth of eCommerce and gaming, highlighted as key capabilities to prioritise over the next two years. The emphasis on gaming contrasts heavily with other regions with it ranked much lower in US, EMEA & APAC.

Many of the solutions highlighted pointed to culture and ways of working, which have been deeply affected through the pandemic. Readdressing the work/life balance and embracing greater flexibility in the way people work were identified as key priorities.

"Get the agency team spirit that we lost...make work fun and extremely social for young talents."

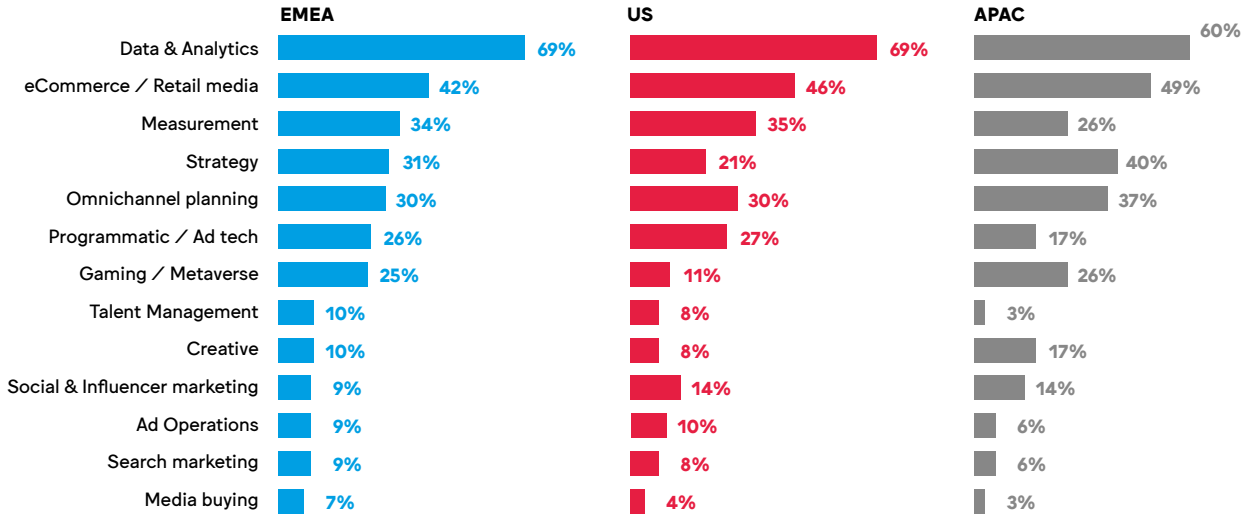
Understanding the gaps

Future state

As the research reveals, these are not just challenges for today but key priorities for the future with **data and analytics highlighted (by all respondents) as the single most important capability for the next two years.** And within this field, the specific skills related to data science, automation, audience management and insight are being heavily pursued as transformational levers.

Q. Which three skills and capabilities do you think will increase most in importance over the next 2 years?

By region



Deep dive on AdTech

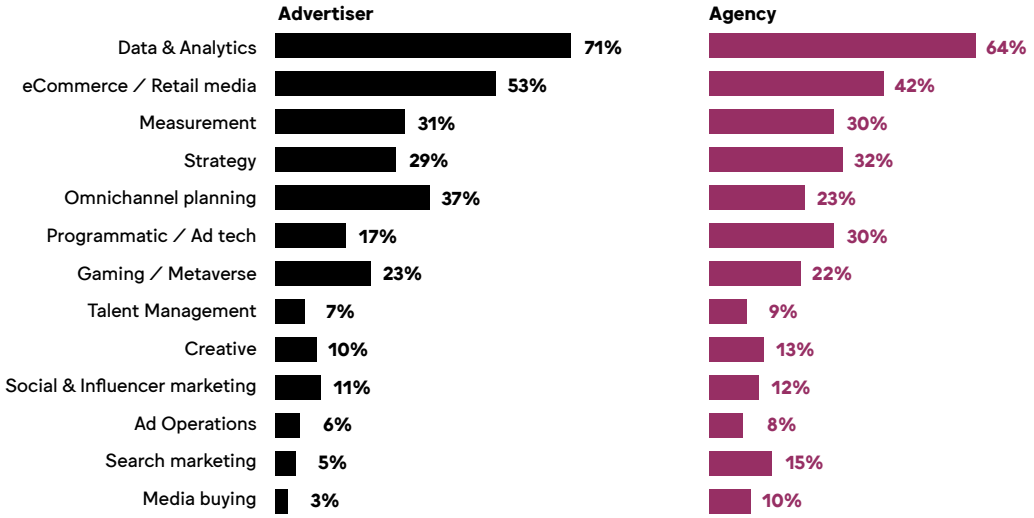
This community recorded the same level of scarcity as agencies, which suggests they are pursuing similar talent profiles, as well as experiencing similar growth levels. Against the backdrop of increased competition and migration from agencies to AdTech companies, the subsequent salary inflation is widening the imbalance between salary expectations and capabilities, which an overwhelming 90% agreed with.

Top of the list of capability needs for this group is data and analytics, followed (understandably) by Programmatic & eCommerce. Like their publisher counterparts, training and talent management were highlighted as key contributors, whereas areas such as purpose, career progression and poor client/agency behaviour were recognised as blockers. Finally, in terms of driving change among this community, more than salary or graduate recruitment, addressing the work/life balance and workplace flexibility were seen as key initiatives which could help stem the shortage.

"We need to press brands to spend ad budgets on socially conscious media sources. That will help younger employees understand that buying media may actually impact their daily lives in a socially responsible or political way."

Q. Which three skills and capabilities do you think will increase most in importance over the next 2 years?

By organisation type



Due to the accelerated growth of eCommerce over the last two years, the demand for skills linked to this and retail media should come as no surprise, where the market continues to play catch up. The need is being felt on all sides of the industry with traditional media backgrounds unable to meet the strategic, commercial and technical requirements that eCommerce demands.

Media continues to converge with increased blurring of lines between media, creative, brand and performance. **To navigate this complexity and put the consumer far more at the centre, brands are searching for more holistic planning and measurement, placing more emphasis on measurement, strategy and omnichannel planning.** The research nevertheless points to concerns around too much 'silo thinking' and 'over-specialisation' of roles, which is limiting the quality and breadth of advice being given, and the scope of learning for employees.

Intriguingly, advertisers point to this over specialisation much more than agencies, with 71% of advertiser respondents (compared to 47% of agencies) agreeing or strongly agreeing that this is limiting career progression. This is understandable as advertisers tend to seek more rounded, commercially minded marketers, over more specialist, siloed thinking.

"Media has become 'divorced' from creative and other marketing disciplines, limiting opportunities to build broader experiences of interest to younger employees who do not yet know which specialisms to focus on."

Deep dive on Publisher/Platforms

While acknowledging there is scarcity, the levels reported from the publisher/platform community were much lower than what was recorded from the other groups. Nevertheless there is less optimism about the future of the industry from the publisher/platform respondents compared to others.

Just 46% of this cohort claimed to be optimistic about their future compared to 73% among AdTech companies, 60% of advertisers and 62% of agencies.

This group highlighted acute shortages across ad operations, data and analytics, media buying and omnichannel, and as they think about the future, omnichannel and data and analytics were cited as key capabilities to prioritise.

Talent management was identified as the key driver behind the talent crisis with a need highlighted to invest more into this capability (alongside training) to improve retention and clarity around career development.

"COVID layoffs, poaching from other sectors (especially tech), poor agency management, and the dilution / disregard of the value of strategy (both materially and symbolically) has had a key impact."

How did we get here?

It would be remiss not to mention the profound impact that Covid has had on people and the talent market, acknowledging the much heralded 'great resignation'. Lockdowns created a new reality for many, with virtual meetings replacing the fun and spirit that thrives within media organisations.

"This is pent up attrition that we're seeing... Minimal movement for the first 18 months due to uncertainty but now that everyone recognises this is the 'new normal', they are less risk averse to making a change."

"Socialising was one of the most motivating parts of the industry but this is now very low."

However, the pandemic and the lack of 'replenishment' of staff did not register in our respondents' top five drivers behind the shortage. **Training and talent management were overwhelmingly highlighted as the main triggers, where it was felt that neither have been adequately prioritised within organisations.** It is highlighted through much of the verbatim that an acute lack of investment in training and mentoring, alongside the pursuit of conventional recruitment strategies ("CV driven") has had a major impact.

"Get motivated people and invest in training. Stop trying to recruit the finished article."

Talent management refers to the hiring and retention practices in place at organisations, where a lack of strategy, leadership and sensitivity were highlighted as problem areas. The level of attrition and demand for talent has not been matched by the investment needed to create clearer career paths and provide support towards professional and personal development.

"Historical overpromotion means that most of the team leaders lack talent management capability, which is creating high talent attrition."

As the media industry struggles to compete with others in selling its virtues, perhaps unsurprisingly, **purpose was highlighted as another key driver behind the talent shortages we're experiencing.** While tempting to treat this as a problem for the younger talent, the 'exodus' of senior talent to other industries has had a major impact, depriving the industry of the elusive 'T-shaped' talent. Despite the progress being made across sustainability, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and 'responsible media', there is clearly a huge task ahead in better connecting purpose and values to our industry and making the work itself more meaningful.

"We need to do a better job of connecting purpose and values to our industry to inspire younger people to feel that they're making a difference."

The client/agency dynamic is invariably a key dependency in retaining and attracting the best talent – particularly where there is an imbalance in trust, transparency, and remuneration. Much of the research verbatim points to the need for better education and alignment of expectations to reset the way that talent is supported and rewarded.

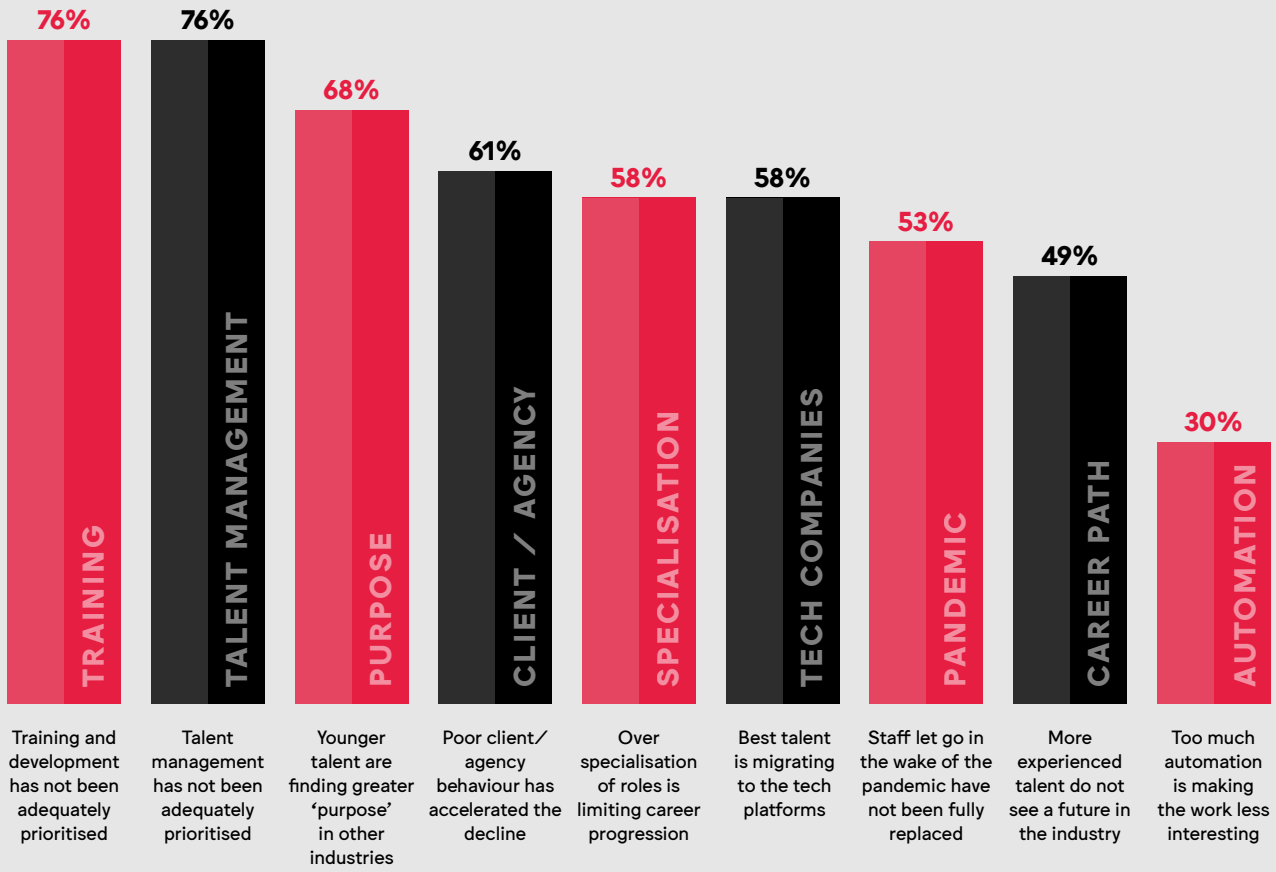
"Education and alignment at client side is essential. The service gap is always a result of expectation misalignment."

The final explanation for the talent gap lies with the **increased migration of talent to technology companies,** who are able to offer a different pace of work, alongside more attractive and motivating remuneration. This is most pronounced in the US (69% vs. 52% in EMEA and 59% in APAC), and is not confined to agencies, with advertisers seeing similar levels of migration. 64% of advertisers compared to 49% of agencies agreed this is a major contributor to the talent shortage.

"We simply can't compete financially with the tech companies when it comes to retaining our best talent."

Q. What is ultimately behind the perceived shortage?

Agree/Strongly Agree



Where do we go from here?

The challenges highlighted in this research are not confined to a particular cohort or region, but are affecting all businesses competing for similar capabilities. And with the opportunity cost presented by staff turnover and salary inflation, there is a responsibility for the entire industry to collaborate around initiatives which contribute towards a more sustainable future.

As the research reveals, burnout – particularly in the last two years – remains a critical issue, and one that needs to be addressed through better resourcing, alignment of expectations, automation (where appropriate) and openness with shifting attitudes surrounding workplace flexibility and mobility.

Hiring strategies will need to be recalibrated. The research identified a need for more diversity in the hiring process, earlier engagement with graduate and pre-graduate levels, stronger clarity around career tracks, and a balancing of emphasis towards young and experienced talent.

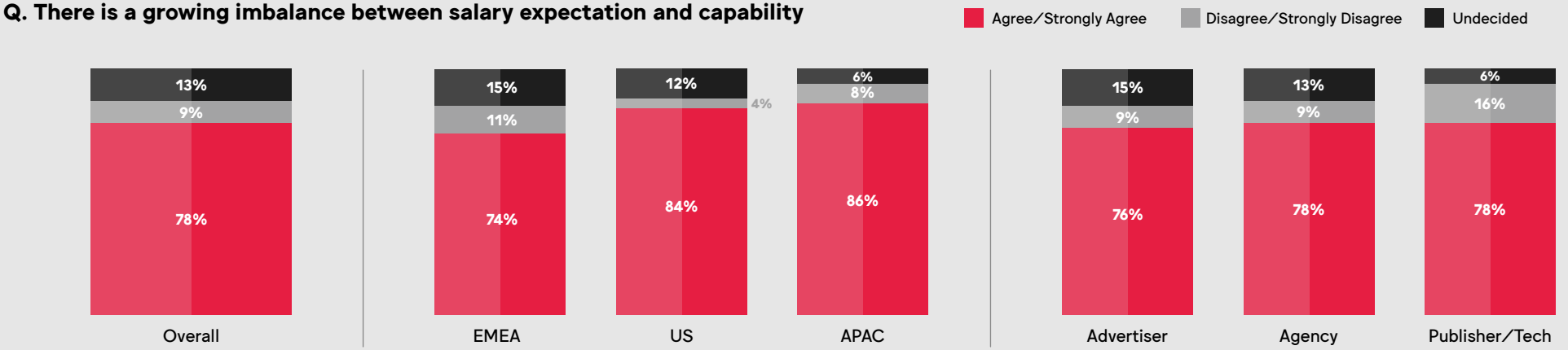
"The industry needs to engage with colleges and universities to create more vocational degrees."

Diversity for many is about challenging bias towards background, qualification and experience, and looking equally at motivation and attitude. Clarity on career paths is particularly acute given the specialisation of roles that exist in the industry. It is incumbent on employers to paint a clearer picture on how an agency, client-side, publisher or platform role can become a destination, not just a pitstop. And critically, invest in building broader, more transferable skills and capabilities which help to unlock future professional and personal growth.

"Percentage of minorities in the advertising and marketing industries has lagged the general population percentages due to a lack of early education, interests/passions and compensation."

"Stop trying to recruit the finished article - get motivated people and invest in training."

Q. There is a growing imbalance between salary expectation and capability



Experienced individuals within the industry may be forgiven for thinking media is a young person's pursuit with much of the Covid rightsizing occurring at senior levels. Too much focus on attracting younger, technical talent and less on nurturing experienced talent who possess much needed management experience and integrated marketing expertise.

"We desperately need to keep these [experienced] people, they are the ones who understand how to build strategies across multi platforms, youngsters do not have this experience."

"Give opportunities to senior staff to retrain, rather than focus on inflating salaries on younger recruits who don't have the solid background to drive clients' campaigns forward."

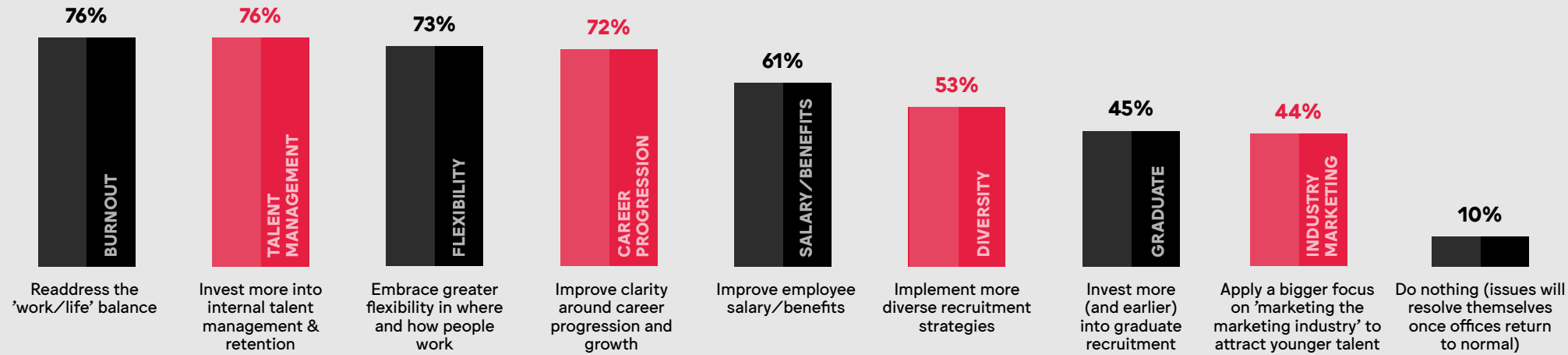
Flexibility has become table stakes for employees. Those demanding a return to pre-Covid working patterns are being met with short thrift by their employees who are so much more aware of how to optimise their productivity. While there is clearly a potential conflict between culture and flexibility, it is an expectation – particularly with the cost-of-living crisis – that employees will determine how they want to work, rather than have this determined by others.

"No one wants to work from the office as much as pre-Covid but industry leaders are not listening."

Finally, there is a role for better marketing of the marketing industry. Connecting with universities and colleges earlier and creating more vocational degrees, industry-wide certification or pathways into marketing can be hugely beneficial in building a future pipeline of talent. Additionally, working with our current leaders to ensure that clarity around progression, and ensuring the work itself remains interesting and fulfilling.

"We need to connect purpose and values to our industry to inspire younger people to feel that they're making a difference."

Q. How would you rate the following initiatives in terms of their impact in addressing the current talent shortages?



Summary of key recommendations for the industry

Media's got talent? We posed the same question to a panel of leaders during the Cannes Lions Festival Of Creativity, kindly hosted by Omnicom. The answer is invariably "yes". And in closing the same way that this report began, it's encouraging to see that there is so much positivity around the industry, in spite of the challenges. But it's a fact that many talented individuals have left the industry.

Thanks to our panellists for building on the WFA and MediaSense recommendations with some practical ideas. Let's seek ways to inspire and attract new talent, while ensuring there are meaningful and rewarding paths ahead for those already in the industry.

01

Resource allocation

Burnout is highlighted as a key reason for talent leaving the industry, which has intensified through the strains of the global pandemic. With employees seeking reassurance and a better work/life balance, employers need to respond with more effective resourcing and engagement strategies, which provide the capacity, flexibility, mobility and meaning so many now demand.

02

Recruitment strategy

Addressing the talent shortage with the same recruitment techniques is no longer fit for purpose with organisations needing to embrace more diverse and inclusive approaches to hiring. Challenging bias towards background, qualification and experience and hiring on motivation and attitude will help to create unlock greater talent and diversity in the workplace.

03

Career progression

Over specialisation of roles and a lack of clarity around career development is creating a glass ceiling for many, limiting career progression and value to their employers. Greater investment in training and talent management will help to build broader [and more] transferable skills and capabilities, ensuring organisations can become destinations, not just a pitstop.

"Organisations need to have really effective career management and development systems in place to give employees real clarity on where the ownership of their career lies and how they can develop."

Gerry D'Angelo
VP, Global Media, P&G
Co-Chair WFA Media Forum & Media Board

Click to play video

04

Leadership & mentoring

While attracting young talent is vital to the future growth of the industry, this should not be done at the detriment of experience who are all too often neglected. The industry needs strong leaders, experienced managers and integrated thinkers to nurture and bring through the next generation.

"We need to start to break down the silos and prevent the over specialisation of talent which is increasingly at odds with a media ecosystem which continues to converge. We also need to be careful not to neglect the importance of experience and leadership in providing much needed direction to those who may be feeling disaffected or disconnected with the industry."

Ryan Kangisser
Managing Partner, MediaSense

Click to play video

05

Flexibility

Flexibility alone has become key for many businesses seeking to attract and retain talent, with those harking back to pre-Covid times being met with very disgruntled employees. It is now simply an expectation – particularly with the cost-of-living crisis – that employees will determine how they want to work, rather than have this determined by organisations.

"It's on us to listen to our employees. We spend a lot of time bringing in really talented people and asking them to conform to the systems, norms, and culture of the organisation where we should actually be asking them to use their skills and experiences to really change us as an organisation. That's how we keep moving forward."

Belinda Smith
Founder and CEO, Second Arrow & WFA Global Diversity Ambassador

Click to play video

06

Industry engagement

Finally, the industry needs to work together on marketing the marketing industry to younger generations and educating them on how a purposeful career can be achieved in this industry. All stakeholders need to be looking to make the work itself more meaningful, accelerate the valuable DEI and sustainability efforts within their own organisations, as well as connecting with universities and colleges to create more vocational degrees or pathways into marketing.

"In order to attract and retain talent we first need to remember why we got into this business in the first place...that is to effect change and drive growth for our clients through greater learning and understanding of the interplay between people and brands. The role of education of our industry in a very purposeful and clear way that ignites and sustains a growth mindset is perhaps the most tangible action that you can take when looking to recruit the best talent."

Chrissie Hanson
CEO,
OMD USA

Click to play video

About the WFA

The World Federation of Advertisers (WFA) is the voice of marketers worldwide, representing 90% of global marketing communications spend – roughly US$900 billion per annum through a unique, global network of the world's biggest markets and biggest marketers. WFA champions responsible and effective marketing communications worldwide.

Find out more at: **wfanet.org**

About MediaSense

MediaSense are a global media advisory firm, empowering the world's leading brands to engineer greater productivity from their media investments, and design more agile and effective media operating models.

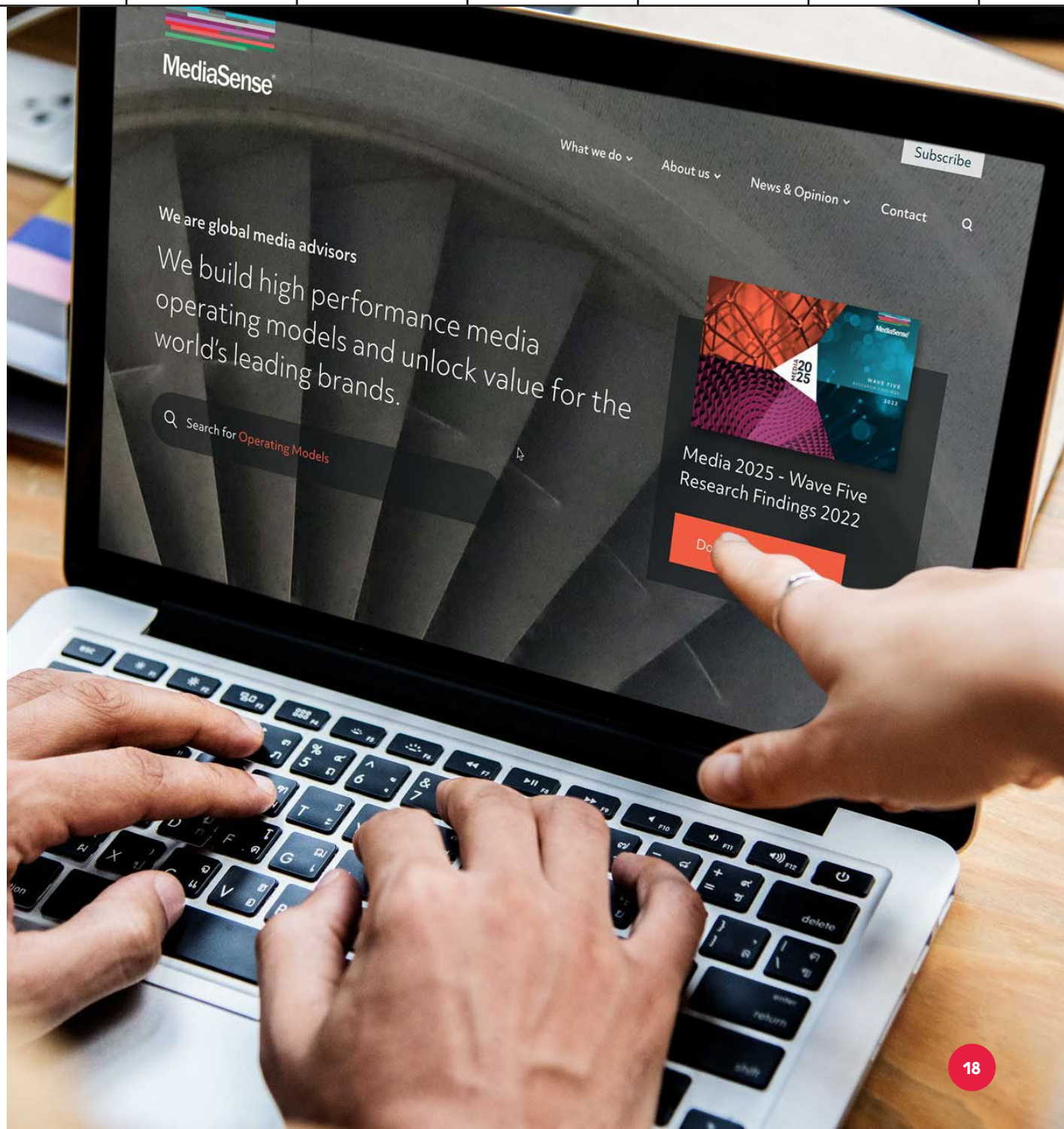
MediaSense specialises in three areas:

Models: Transforming internal and external operating models to break down silos, enhance productivity and drive value creation.

Partners: Managing pitches and optimising partnerships in line with value, performance and capability requirements.

Analytics: Auditing and analysing cross channel data to optimise the performance of media assets and investments.

More information at www.media-sense.com



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Matt is ultimately responsible for the WFA's global media programme of research, events and materials at WFA. The mainstay of Matt's work is concentrated on the needs of clients, but he is also responsible for some of WFA's major collaborative cross-industry initiatives, including our 'Project Halo' Cross-Media Measurement programme. Prior to joining WFA, Matt spent many years working for media consultancies, media auditors and media agencies in London.

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Competition compliance policy

The purpose of the WFA is to represent the interests of advertisers and to act as a forum for legitimate contacts between members of the advertising industry. It is obviously the policy of the WFA that it will not be used by any company to further any anti-competitive or collusive conduct, or to engage in other activities that could violate any antitrust or competition law, regulation, rule or directives of any country or otherwise impair full and fair competition. The WFA carries out regular checks to make sure that this policy is being strictly adhered to.

As a condition of membership, members of the WFA acknowledge that their membership of the WFA is subject to the competition law rules and they agree to comply fully with those laws. Members agree that they will not use the WFA, directly or indirectly, (a) to reach or attempt to reach agreements or understandings with one or more of their competitors, (b) to obtain or attempt to obtain, or exchange or attempt to exchange, confidential or proprietary information regarding any other company other than in the context of a bona fide business or (c) to further any anti-competitive or collusive conduct, or to engage in other activities that could violate any antitrust or competition law, regulation, rule or directives of any country or otherwise.

Please note that the recommendations included in this document are merely meant as suggestions or proposals. They are not binding in any way whatsoever and members are free to depart from them.