

# Perspective 2021

**Our first survey on creativity, disruption and innovation in tech marketing. Shaped by the views and opinions of 200 senior marketing professionals in the UK and US.**

**In 2020, everything changed.  
But how did tech marketers respond?**

**We talked to 200 marketers from leading tech  
companies across the US and UK. They told us how their  
priorities and methods changed, and the results they got.**

**Prepare to have your assumptions challenged.**



Choose a chapter and dive in...

01

Did COVID make tech marketing braver?

02

Changing attitudes to creativity and risk

03

Does martech limit creativity?

04

How the pandemic changed engagement

05

Tech marketers have switched priorities

06

New channels for a new normal

07

Which channels are working now?

08

What marketers want from an agency

09

Key lessons and takeaways

# Q1

Did COVID make tech  
marketing braver?

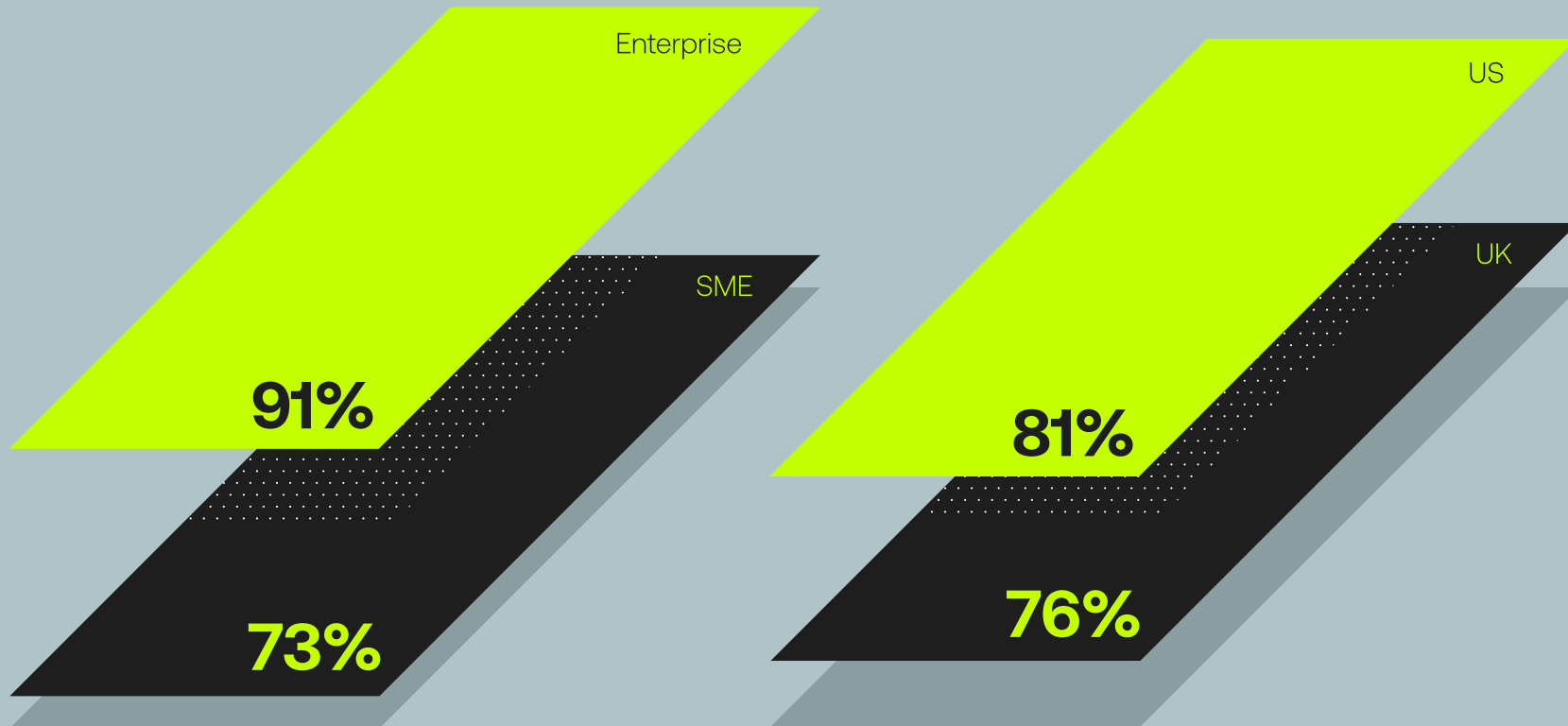
**Put down your expectations. Tech marketers see plenty of bravery in their industry – and COVID has only strengthened their resolve.**

**Show results**

Show analysis

Q1.

My organisation has a culture that embraces / encourages design and creativity  
(answers for net agree)



Q2.

The tech sector is 'brave' with creativity when going to market  
(answers for net agree)

74%

Average

70% SME

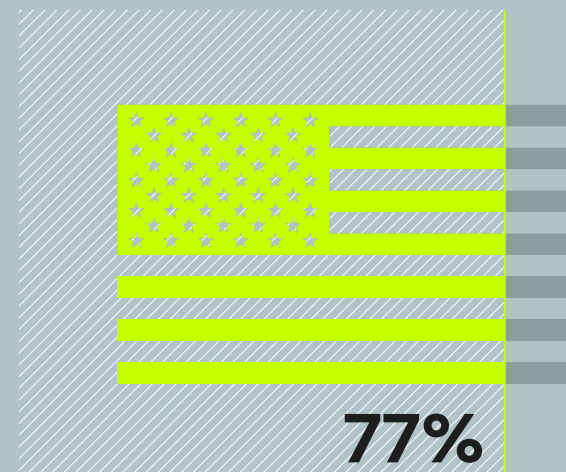
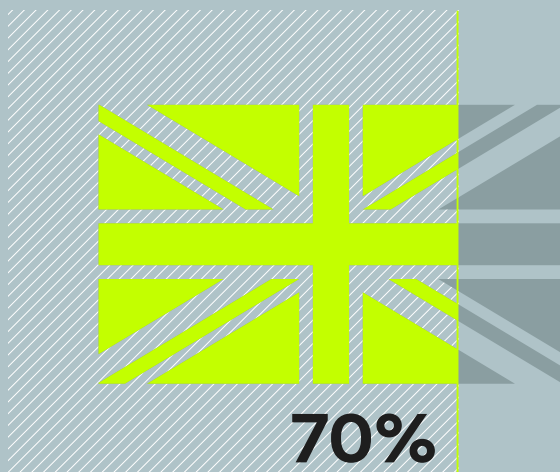
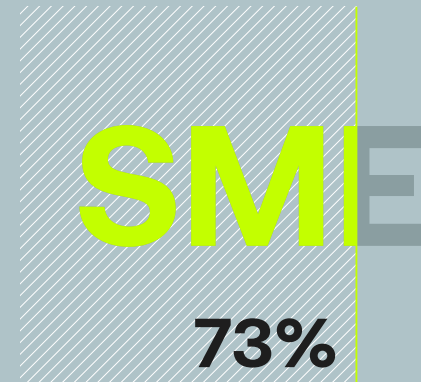
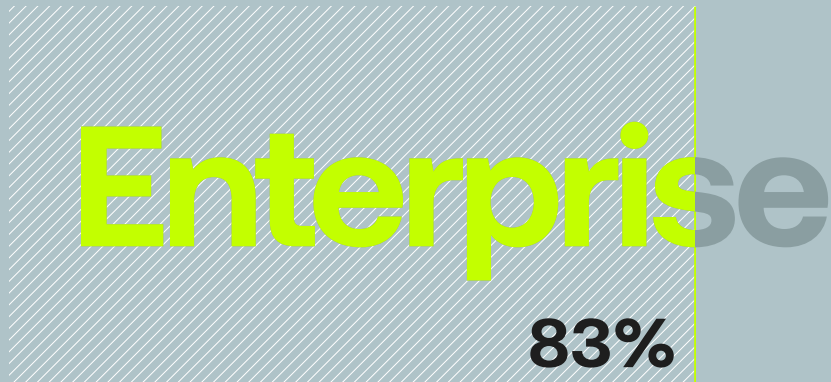
87% Enterprise

70% UK

78% US

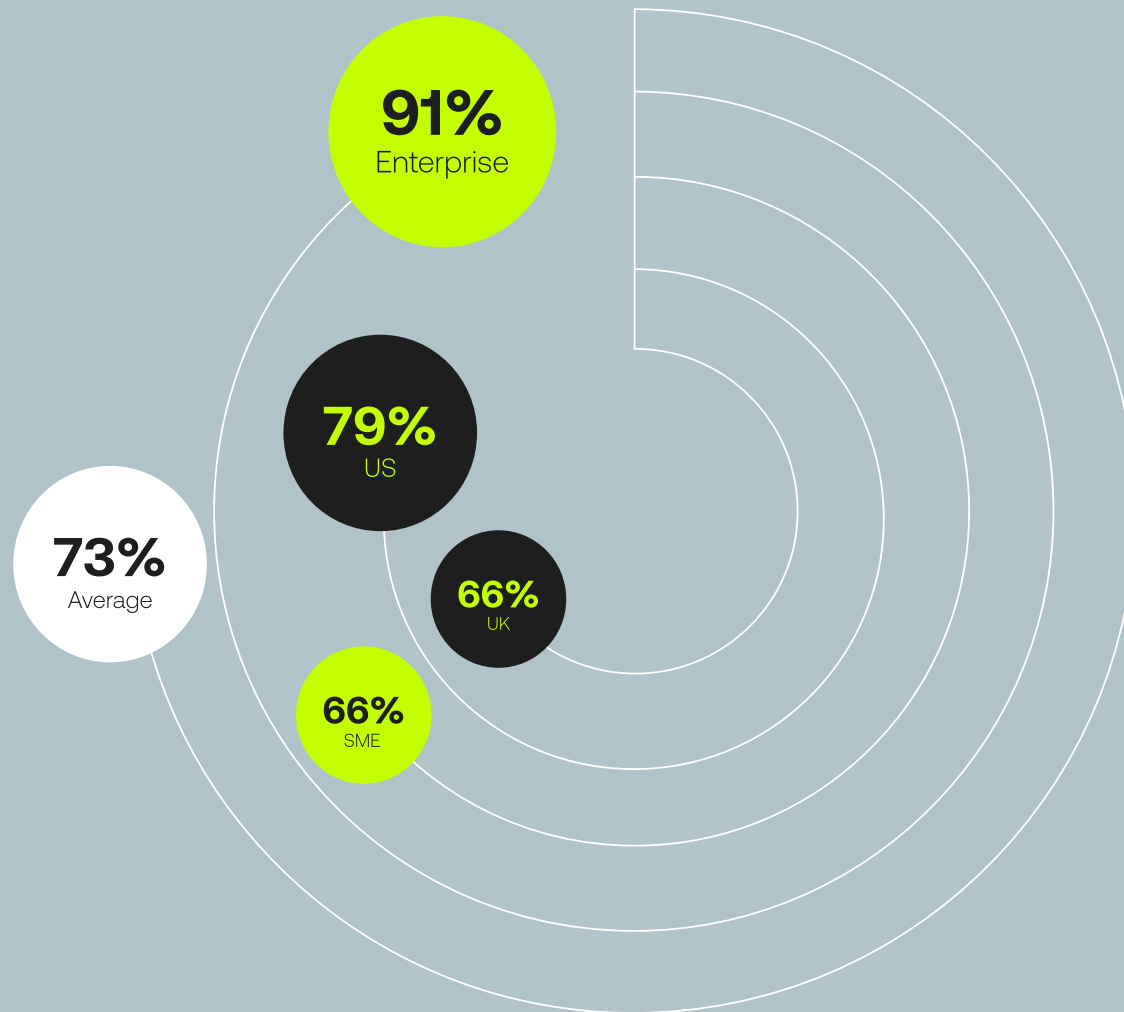
Q3.

I/we were more creative with our go-to-market approach in 2020 compared to previous years (answers for net agree)



Q4.

The pandemic has meant I can be more creative when going to market e.g., use different channels, move away from traditional approaches (answers for net agree)



## Expert view

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**“It’s about seeing what happens; pulling out quickly if it’s not working or passing it over to BAU if it is.”**

**Jenny Green**

Marketing Director, IRIS Software Group



### **Is tech getting braver?**

I think we are being bolder and taking more risks, because we are seeing some of our traditional channels closed down. But at IRIS, we approach risk in an iterative way; seeing what happens, but pulling out quickly if it’s not working or passing it over to BAU if it is. So risk comes into that, but it’s about agility, rather than bravery per se.

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# Analysis

[Show results](#)

## Did COVID make tech marketing braver?

Our respondents are clear: tech marketing is brave. And it's getting braver. OK, let's face it: tech marketing is rarely a matter of life and death. Nobody's running into a burning building to save next quarter's MQLs. But there are different kinds of brave. Like stepping away from the pack and spending your budget on something different, or taking a bold creative approach. That does take a certain kind of courage – after all, nobody got fired for producing more of the same. So we shouldn't be surprised that 74% of respondents say tech marketing is brave when it goes to market. There is a surprise here, though. The bigger the company, the greater the appetite for doing things differently. If you thought enterprises prevented their marketers from taking risks, think again.

COVID has only served to sharpen that focus. Most marketers said they had more freedom to be creative in 2020 than the year before – and 73% attributed this to trying new approaches because of the pandemic.

That bravery, and willingness to try new things means more people get to do the marketing they really want. Three quarters of respondents are proud of their brand's marketing and communications. And in large enterprises, that rises to nine out of ten.

### Key takeaways

# 74%

say tech marketing is “brave” in the way it goes to market.

# 73%

have tried new approaches during the pandemic.

# 91%

of enterprise tech marketers say their company embraces design and creativity.

# Q2

Changing attitudes  
to creativity and risk

**It's not just the marketers who are feeling brave. The pandemic has changed employers' attitudes to creativity too.**

**Show results**

Show analysis

Q1.

Would you say that creativity in marketing is more or less valued in your organisation compared to a year ago (answers for net more)?

54% SME

63% UK

69% US

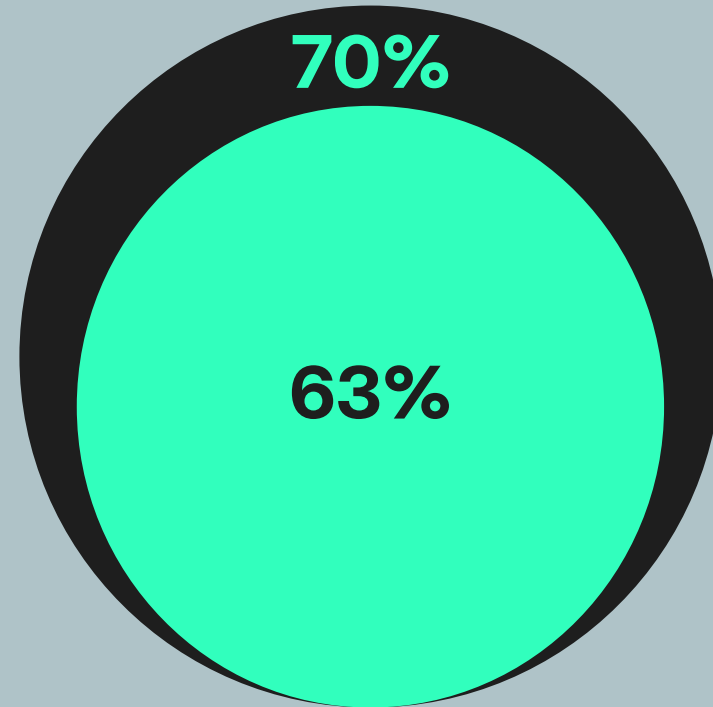
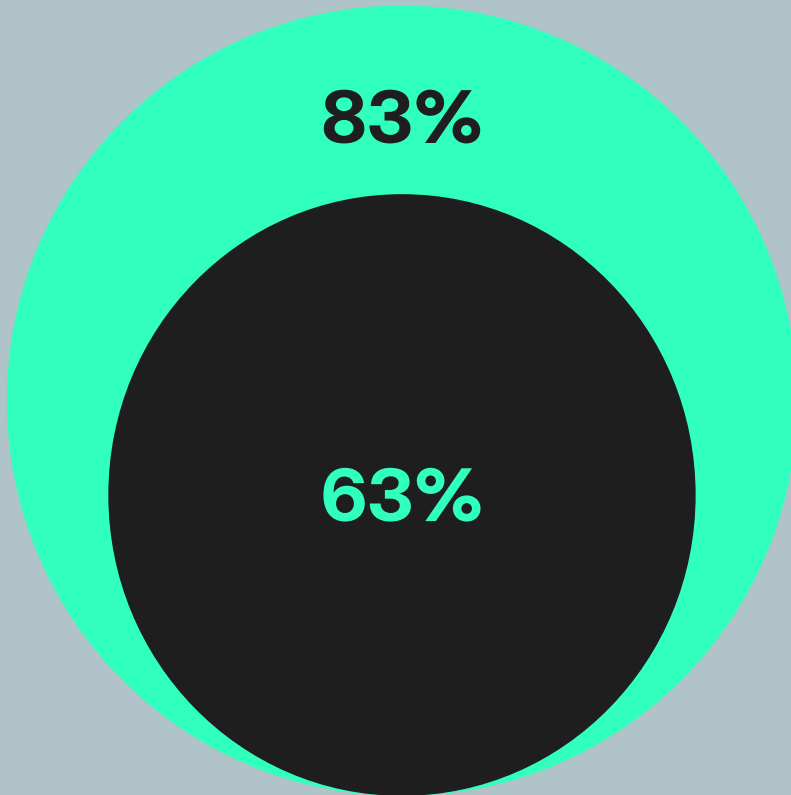
93% Enterprise

Q2.

Does your organisation tend to support or oppose risk taking or being brave and differentiated in its go to market approach (answers for net support)?

● Enterprise ● SME

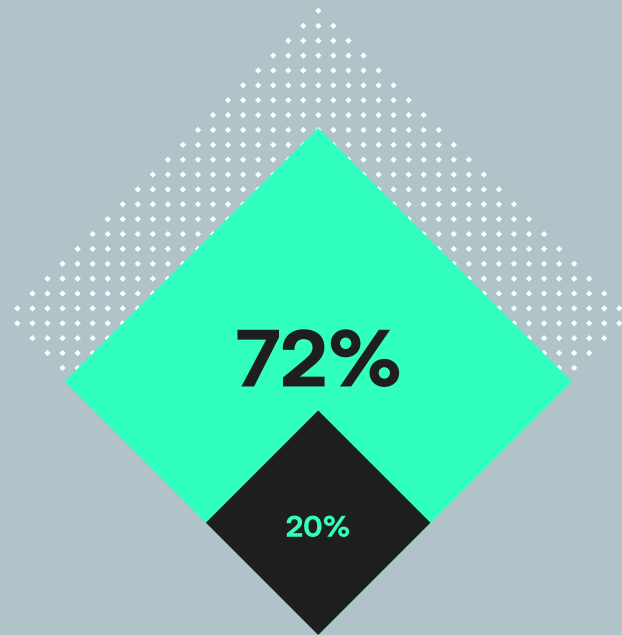
● UK ● US



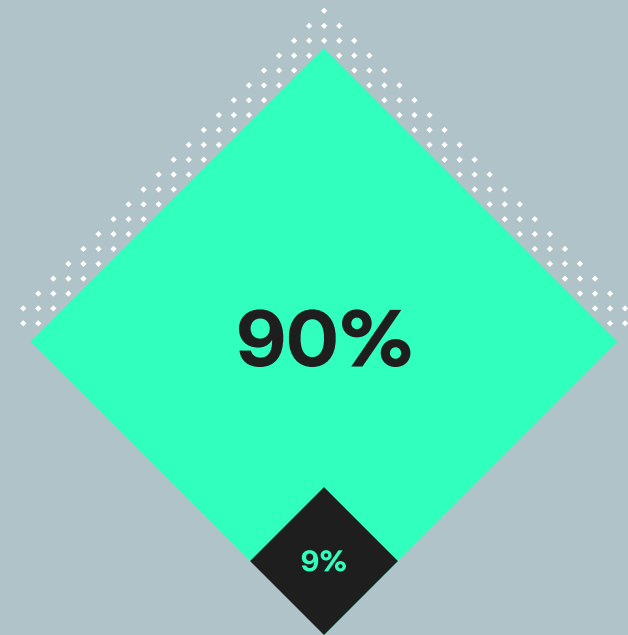
**Q3.**  
**(Company size)**

Has your organisation's tendency to support risk taking or differentiation increased at all during the pandemic?

Enterprise



SME



Yes

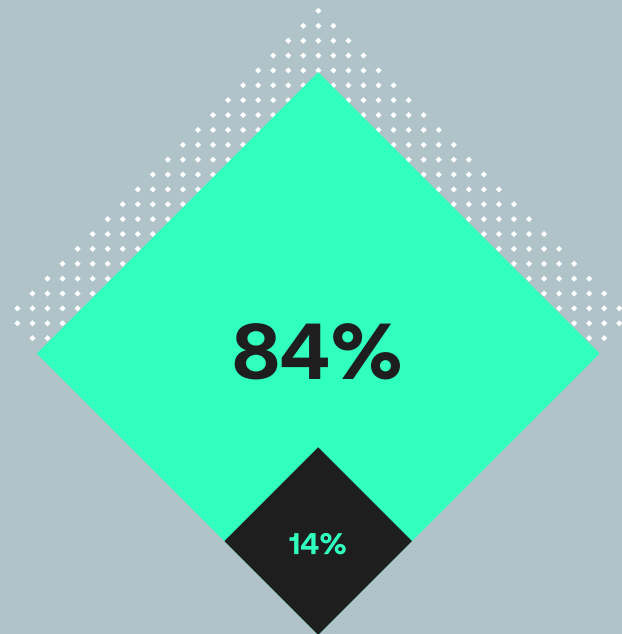


No

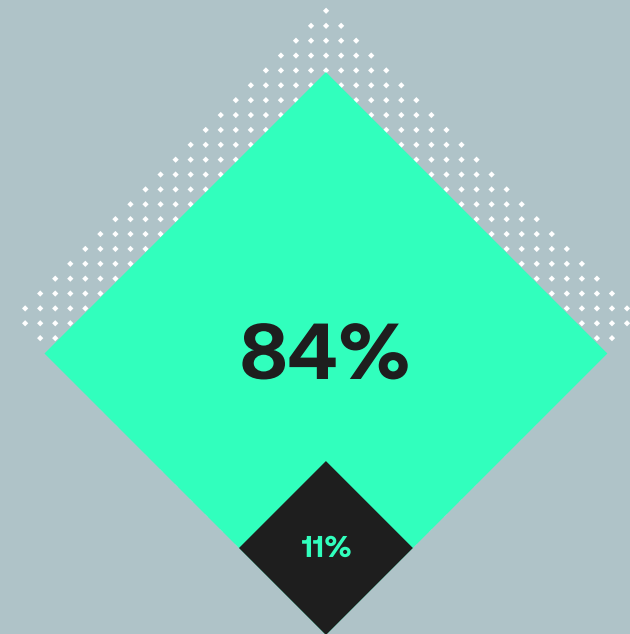
**Q3.**  
**(Location)**

Has your organisation's tendency to support risk taking or differentiation increased at all during the pandemic?

UK



US



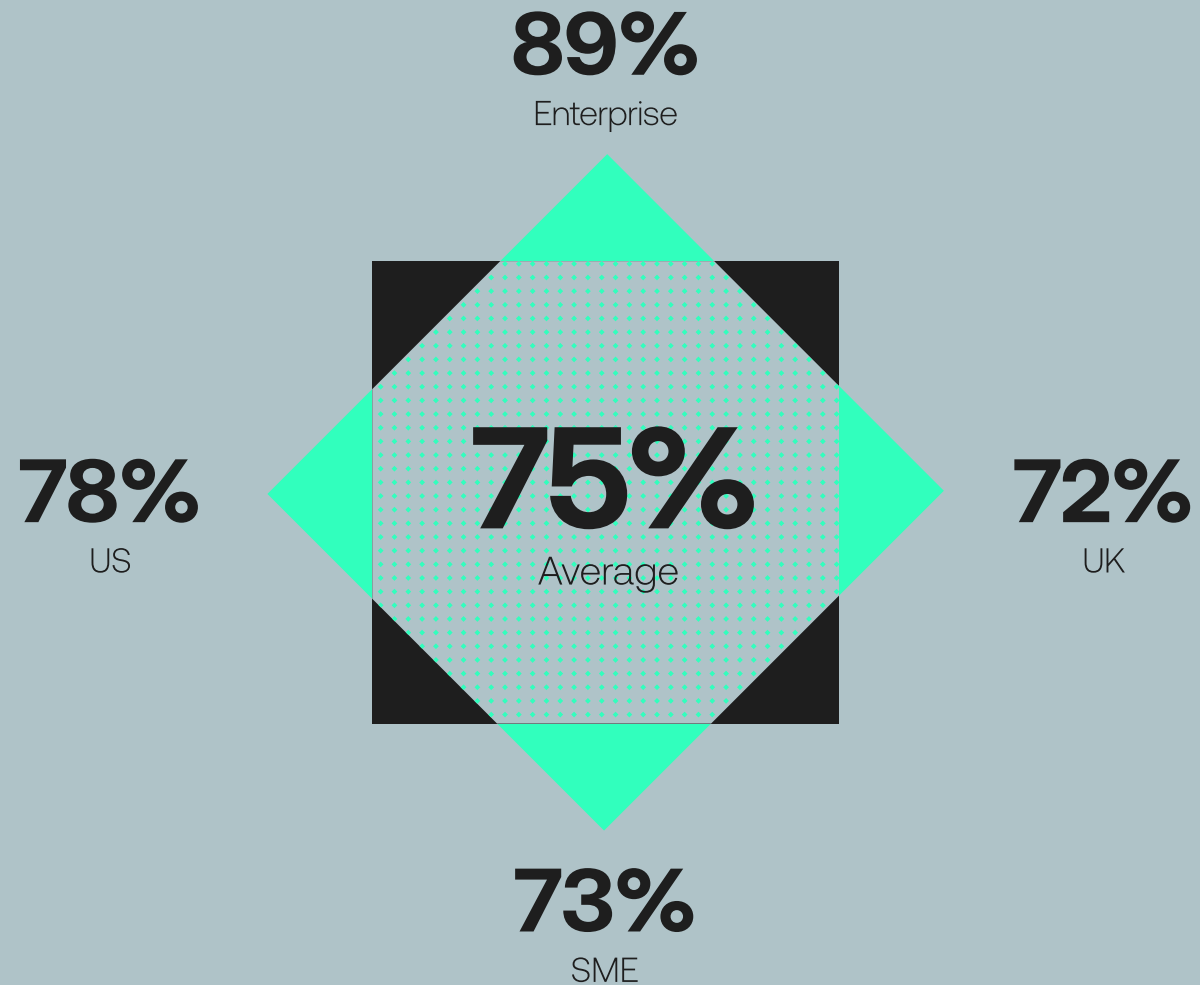
Yes



No

Q4.

How proud would you say you are of your organisation's brand and marketing communications (answers for net proud)?



## Expert view

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**“We seem to be taking chances more – be it a new medium, new paid media strategies or tools for user feedback.”**

**Jess Ellis**

Senior Director of Brand Marketing, Khoros



### **Why be creative now?**

Creativity is always valued, but even more so during a time where we are operating remotely from each other and our customers. We seem to be taking chances more, be it going after a new medium like a podcast, putting dollars into new paid media strategies or adopting tools for testing and user feedback – which hopefully will allow us more data to lean on with the creative and content choices we have made.

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# Analysis

Show results

## Changing attitudes to creativity and risk

Appetite for invention: creative marketers are backed by their employers. It's not just the marketers who are feeling brave. Our respondents told us their bosses are backing creativity too.

You might think that appetite for risk would have been dimmed in the last year. When everything's uncertain, you batten down the hatches and play it safe, right?

Wrong. In fact, two thirds of marketers told us their organisation values creativity in marketing more now than it did a year ago. The same proportion said their employer supports risk-taking and being brave in its go-to-market approach.

And once again, the bigger the company, the greater the appetite for creativity. Among large enterprises, support for risk-taking in marketing rose to 83%. And they were twice as likely to have pivoted their approach due to the pandemic.

### Key takeaways

2/3

Two thirds say their organisation values creativity more now than a year ago.

75%

are proud of their organisation's brand and marketing communications.

x2

Large companies are twice as likely to have changed their approach due to COVID.

# 03

Does martech limit  
creativity?

**Marketers – and their companies – know creativity is important.  
But how freely can they act on it?**

**Show results**

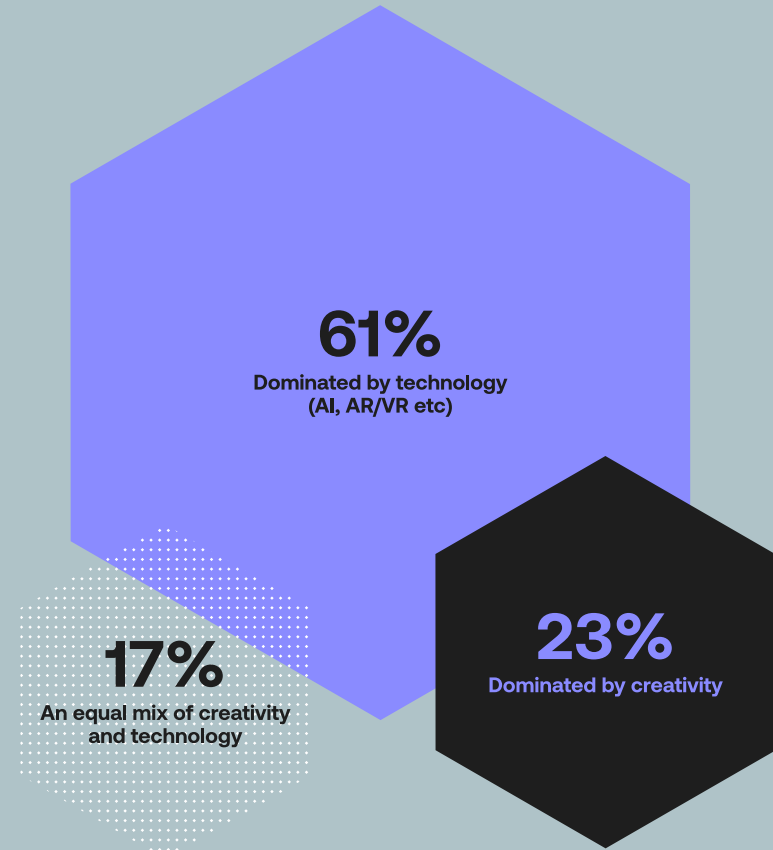
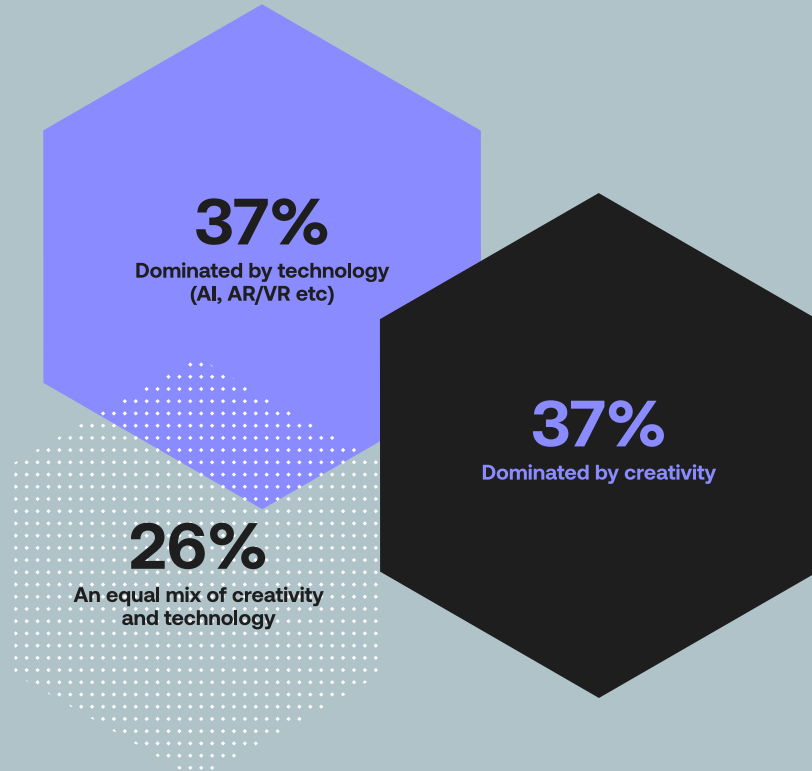
Show analysis

Q1.  
(Company size)

Looking at your organisation's marketing, do you feel it is:

Enterprise

SME

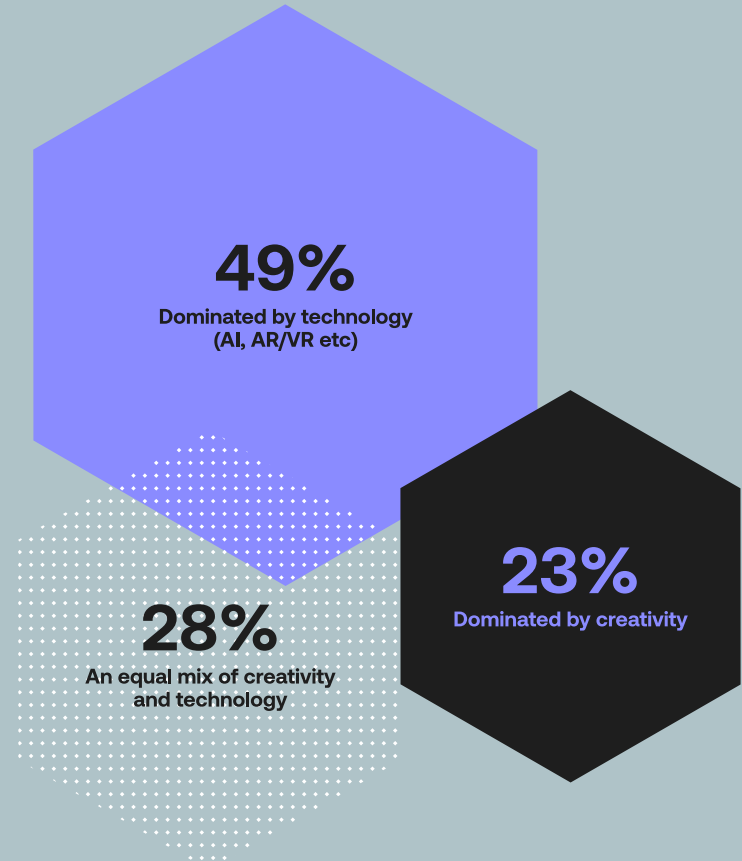
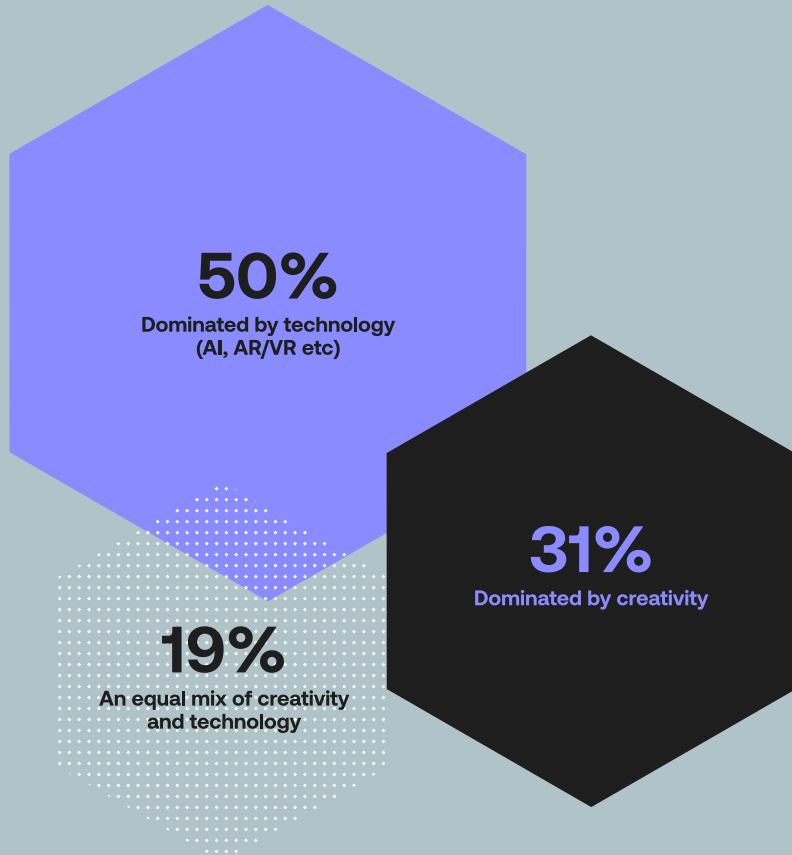


Q1.  
(Location)

Looking at your organisation's marketing, do you feel it is:

UK

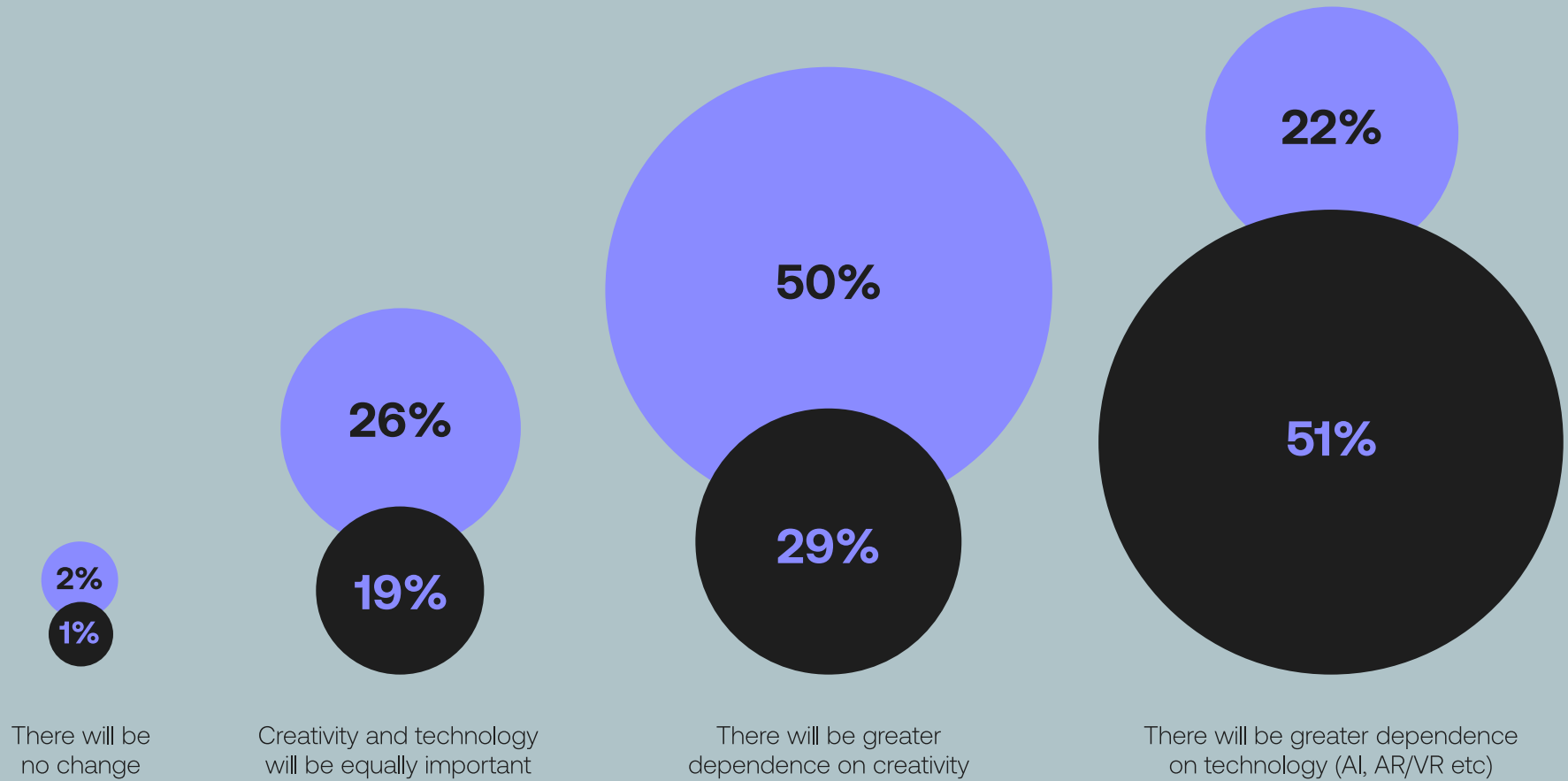
US



Q2.  
(Company size)

Thinking of your answer to the previous question, how do you feel this will change in the next 3 to 5 years?

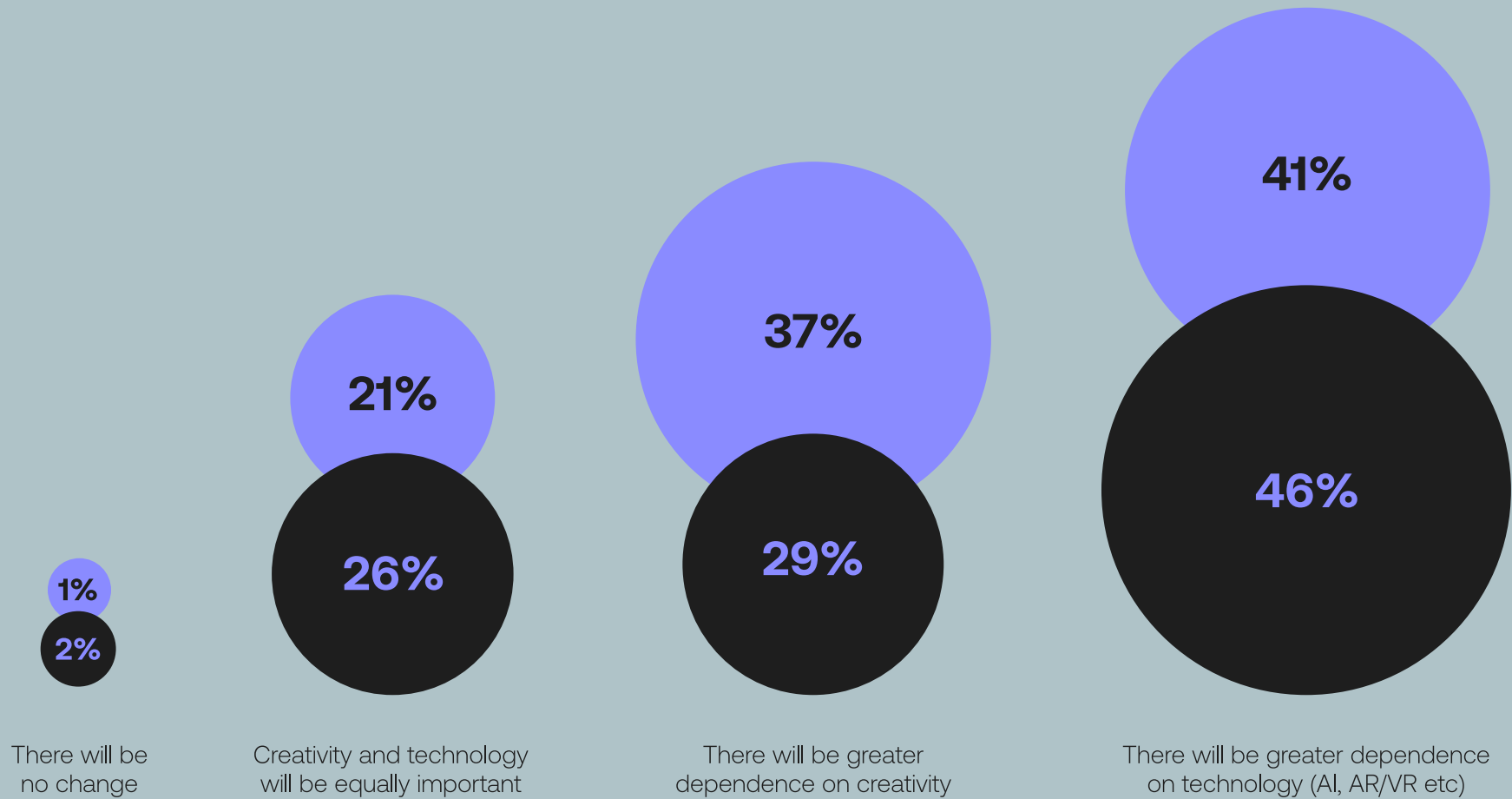
● Enterprise ● SME



Q2.  
(Location)

Thinking of your answer to the previous question, how do you feel this will change in the next 3 to 5 years?

● UK ● US



# Expert view

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**“It’s how you use the technology to make your marketing creative that counts.”**

**Qabil Shah**

Global Enterprise Marketing, Nutanix



## **Can tech and creativity play together?**

I don't think technology takes away from creativity. I think it's how you use the technology to make your marketing creative that counts. Using tech-driven insights, I can present you with an experience that's tailored to you and feels special. It's about having this seamless, unified customer experience that is finely tuned to whoever you're targeting in a topical, relevant format. And that's how creativity and tech coincide.

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# Analysis

[Show results](#)

## Does martech limit creativity?

Marketers might value creativity, but half are dominated by their tech. Our results are pretty unambiguous: tech marketers value creativity. So do their employers, and their organisations. But most are not creativity-led.

So what's the problem? Instead of doing technology marketing, half the marketers we spoke to spend their time feeding marketing technology. And it's pretty clear which half.

61% of small business marketers told us their marketing was dominated by technology, not creativity – compared to just 37% of those in enterprises. And if you think about it, that makes a lot of sense.

Working with limited resources, small-business marketers are under more pressure to get ROI from their martech, so they likely spend more time feeding the machine, and fixing any problems with it.

Meanwhile, martech in large enterprises could well be more mature. Maybe it's embedded really well, or supported by dedicated Marketing Ops staff, meaning they spend less time on the plumbing, and more time thinking about what they actually send.

But either way, the gap is set to grow. Half of small business respondents said their marketing would become more technology dependent in the next 3-5 years. Just 22% from large enterprises said the same.

### Key takeaways

# 1/2

Half of respondents say their marketing is not led by creativity, but tech.

# 61%

of small business marketers are martech-led – compared to 37% in enterprises.

# 50%

The gap is growing. 50% of small businesses will be more tech-dependent in the next 3-5 years.

# 04

How the pandemic  
changed engagement

**Work has changed. So naturally the way B2B tech audiences receive and respond to marketing has changed too.**

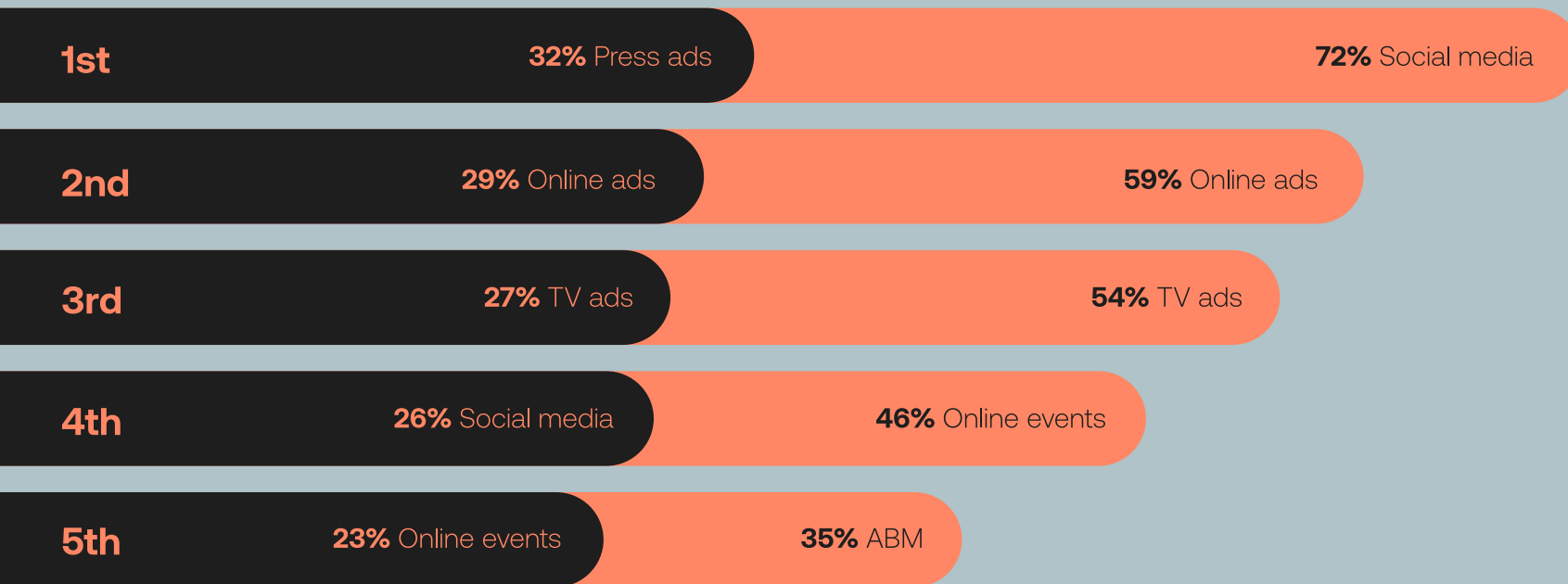
**Show results**

Show analysis

**Q1.**  
**(Company size)**

Which of the following marketing channels were you using before the pandemic? (Top 5)

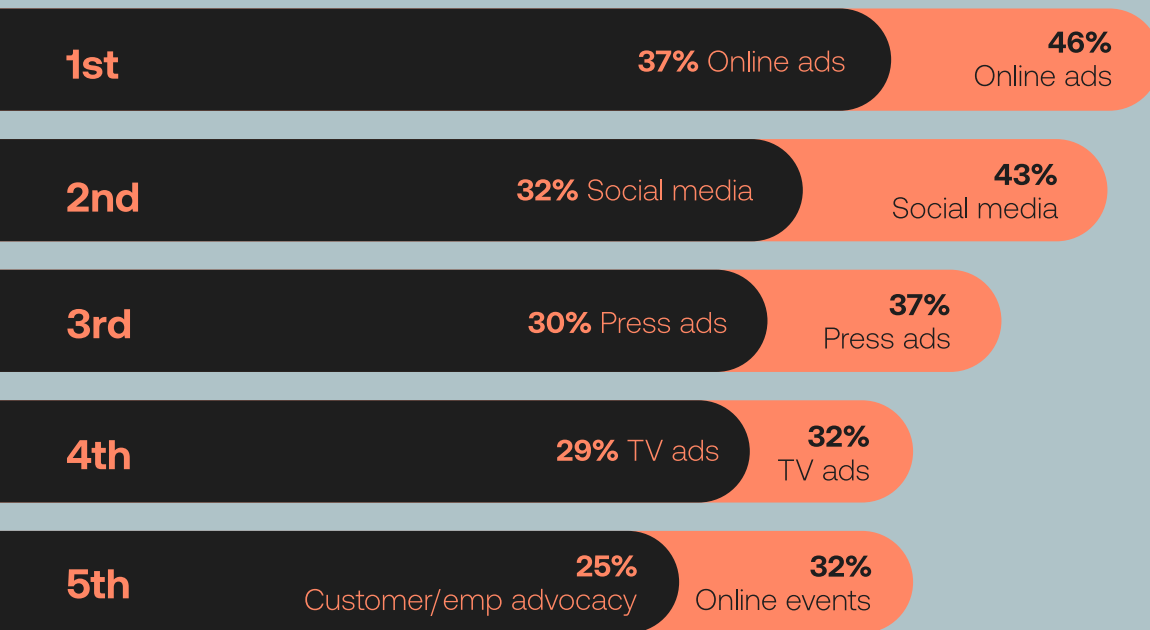
● Enterprise ● SME



Q1.  
(Location)

Which of the following marketing channels were you using before the pandemic? (Top 5)

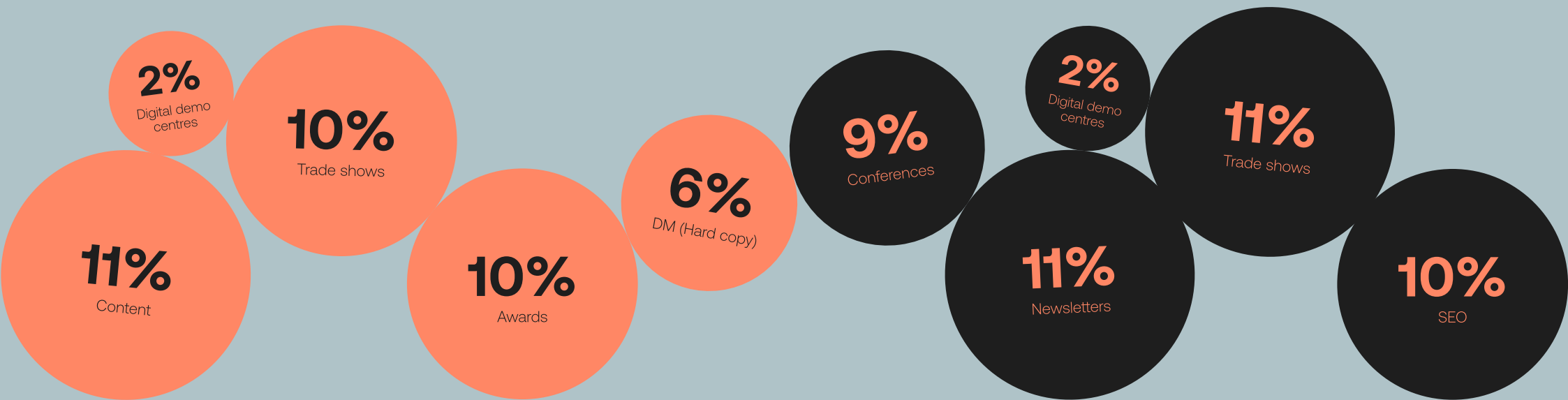
● UK ● US



Q2.  
(Company size)

Which of the following marketing channels were you using during the pandemic? (Bottom 5)

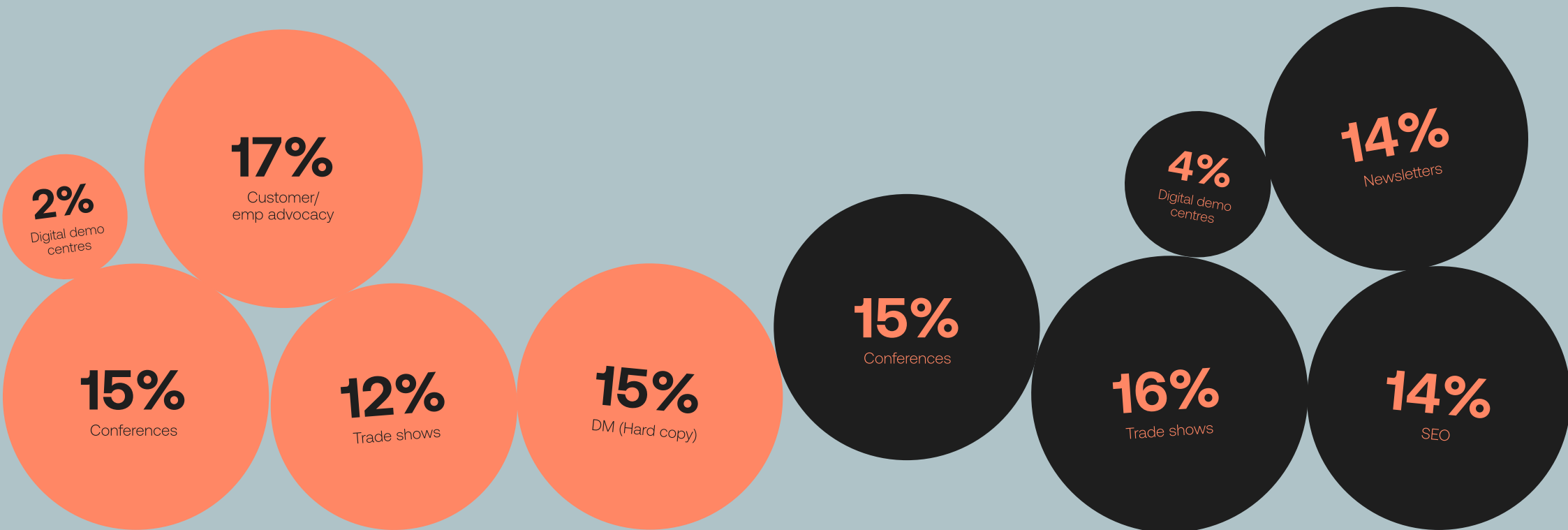
● Enterprise ● SME



Q2.  
(Location)

Which of the following marketing channels were you using during the pandemic? (Bottom 5)

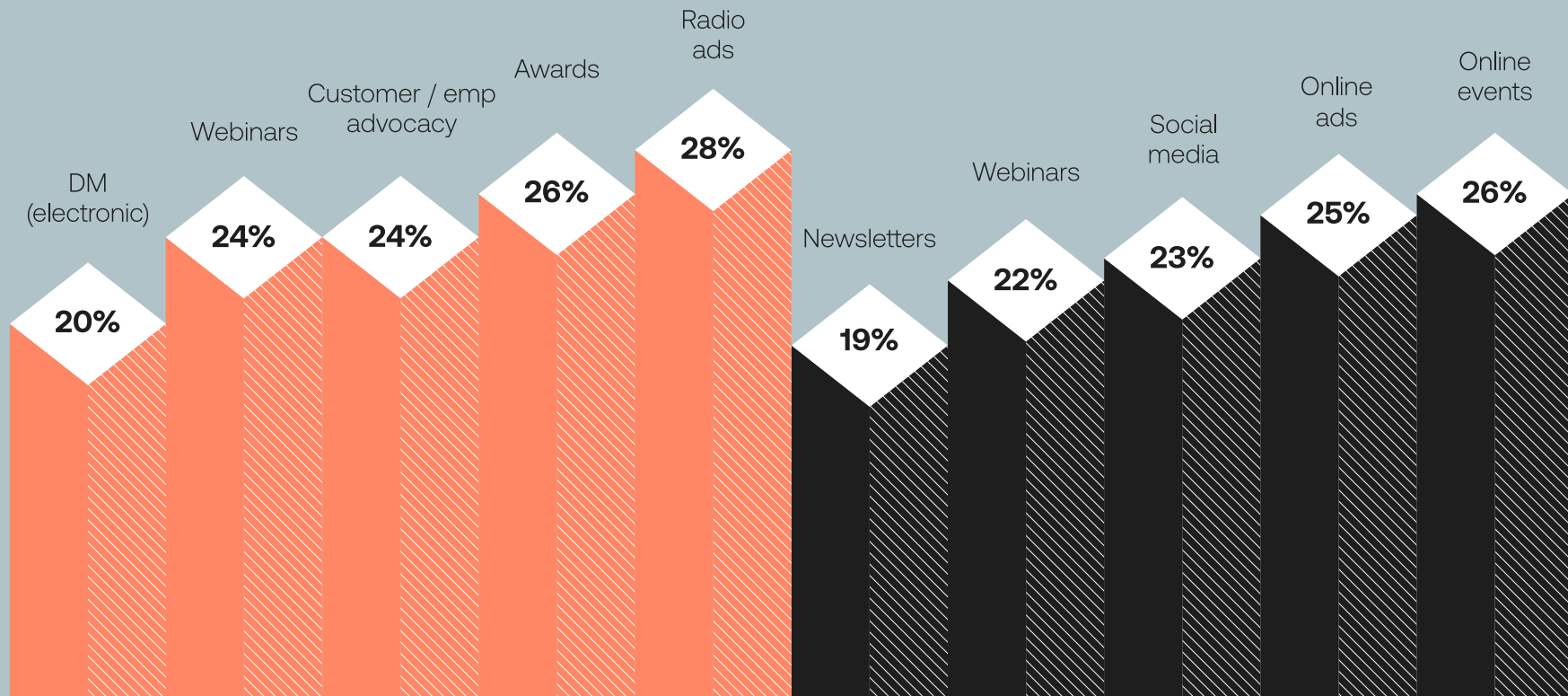
● UK ● US



Q3.  
(Company size)

Since the start of the pandemic, have you experimented with any of the following marketing channels for the first time? (Top 5)

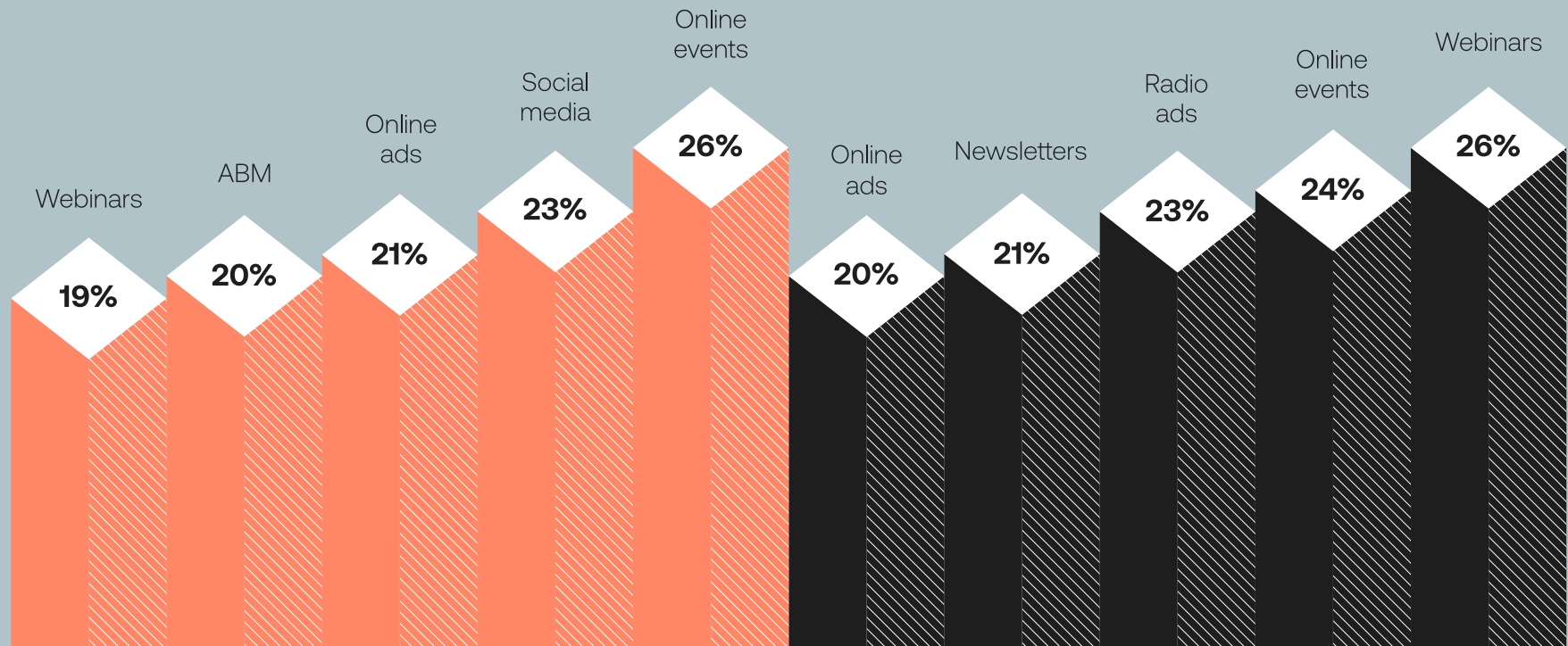
● Enterprise ● SME



Q3.  
(Location)

Since the start of the pandemic, have you experimented with any of the following marketing channels for the first time? (Top 5)

● UK ● US



## Expert view

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**“Everything had to be digital, everything had to be virtual. And I have to say the team really shone.”**

**Mat Harper**

Senior Manager, EMEA Demand Generation, Palo Alto Networks



**How did the pandemic change engagement?**

As a marketing team, we really needed to change the way we were doing things. Everything had to be digital, everything had to be virtual. And I have to say the team really shone. We had some great results, particularly from webinars and events. Our annual cybersecurity predictions, for example, which we ran as a series of nine webinars. They were a huge success, with thousands of sign-ups and a highly engaged audience throughout the series. I was really proud of that one.

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# Analysis

Show results

## How the pandemic changed engagement

Overall, engagement is up. But fortunes have varied wildly.

It makes sense that when work changes, the way people respond to tech marketing changes too. And our respondents paint a complicated picture of the past year.

Broadly, marketers have seen positive changes. People are more than twice as likely to say engagement has increased (28%) as report a decrease (13%). More than half of respondents told us leads and conversions are up (55% and 53%, respectively).

There are wide variations. US marketers are almost three times as likely to report a fall in engagement during the pandemic, compared to counterparts in the UK. But on the flipside, they're more likely to have seen conversion rates grow.

New working patterns have disrupted traditional sales cycles too. 51% of respondents say prospects are dropping off at different times than before.

And again, small business marketers come off worst. Having had less freedom to be creative, they were almost twice as likely to report a fall in lead generation – and also more likely to say subscription renewals are down.

### Key takeaways

2x

Respondents are almost twice as likely to say engagement has increased than decreased this year.

3x

US marketers are three times as likely to report a decline in engagement – but more likely to have seen conversion rates increase.

25%

of marketers have tried online events for the first time.

# 05

Tech marketers have  
switched priorities

With traditional methods cut off, marketers turned to design  
and creativity to reach their customers.

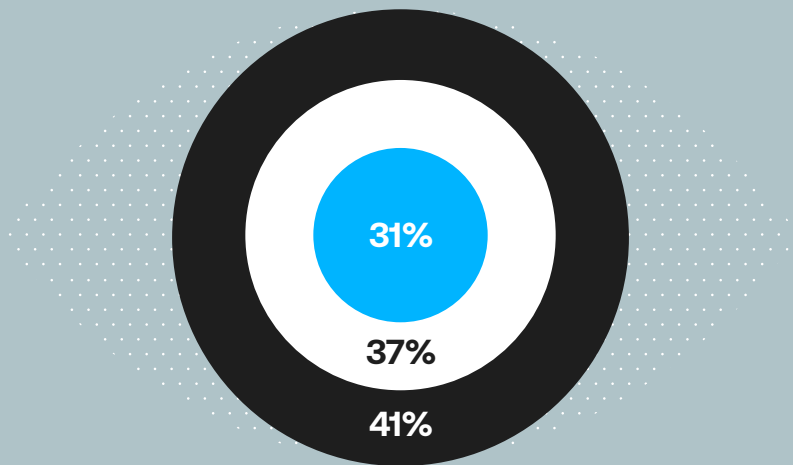
Show results

Show analysis

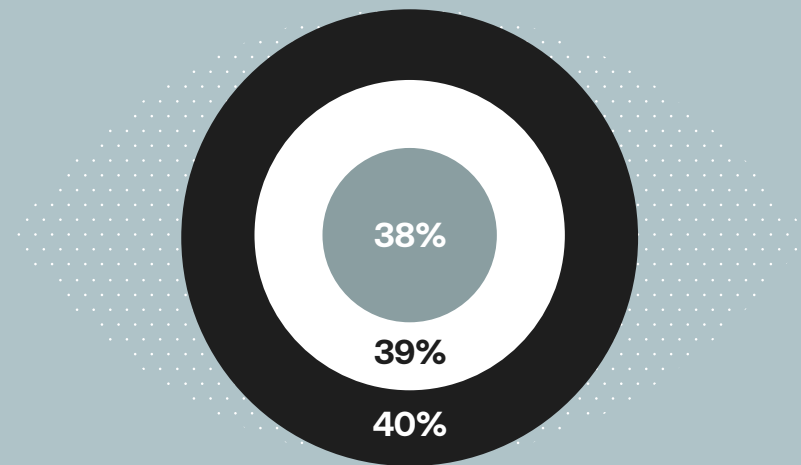
Q1.  
(Company size)

What would you say are the three most important focus areas for marketing teams in the current environment?

Enterprise



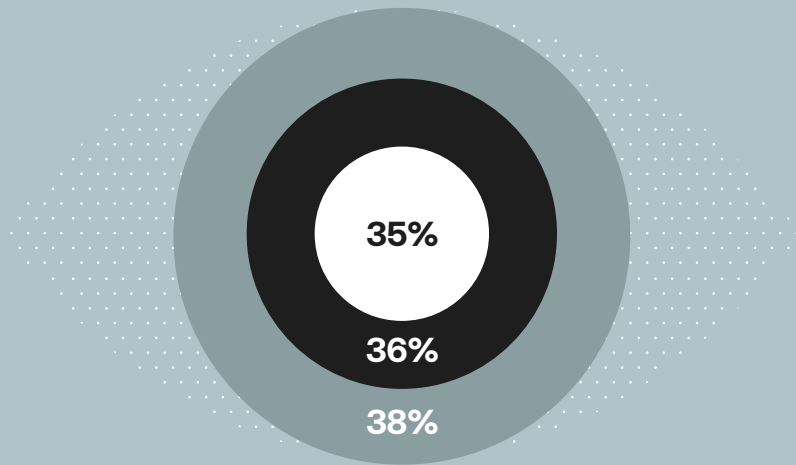
SME



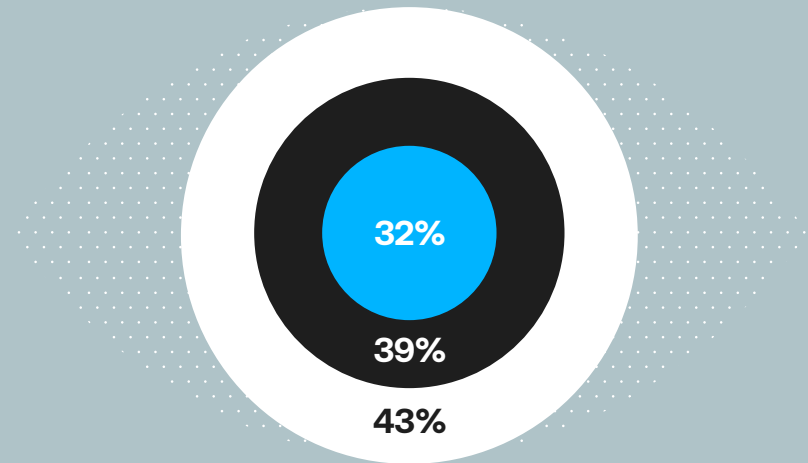
Q1.  
(Location)

What would you say are the three most important focus areas for marketing teams in the current environment?

UK



US



● Strategy    ● Social media    ● Brand    ● Mobile

Q2.  
(Company size)

Since the start of the pandemic are your organisation's marketing priorities any more focused on any of the following?

Enterprise



76%

Design and creativity

74%

Performance marketing

70%

Market research

70%

Internal comms

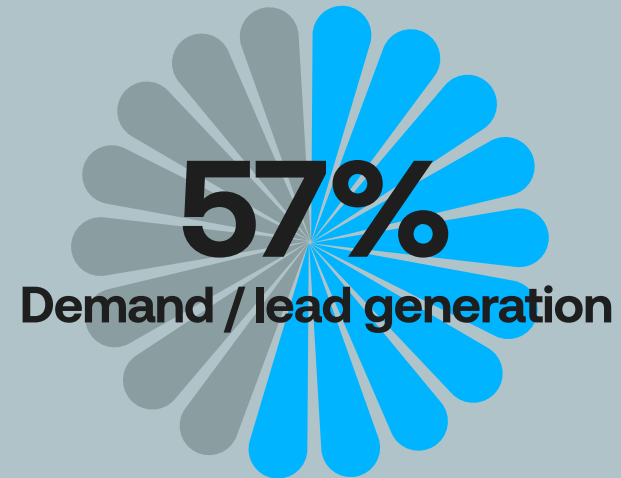
70%

Account based marketing

50%

Demand / lead generation

SME



56%

Performance marketing

54%

Design and creativity

49%

Market research

49%

Account based marketing

48%

Internal comms

44%

Brand

Q2.  
(Location)

Since the start of the pandemic are your organisation's marketing priorities any more focused on any of the following?

UK



56%

Design and creativity

52%

Brand

51%

Account based marketing

50%

Performance marketing

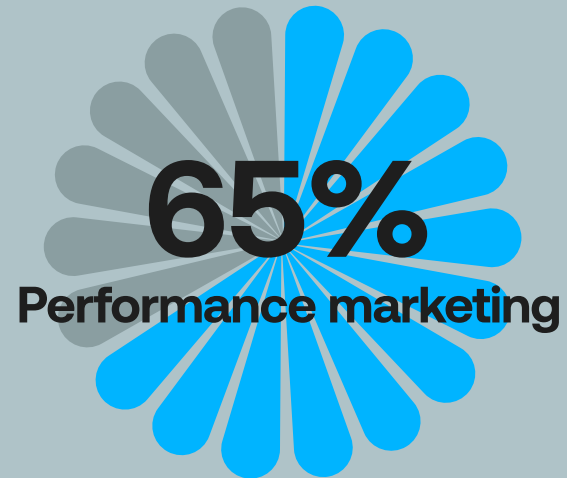
48%

Internal comms

48%

Demand / lead generation

US



64%

Design and creativity

60%

Demand / lead generation

57%

Account based marketing

56%

Internal comms

56%

Brand

53%

Market research

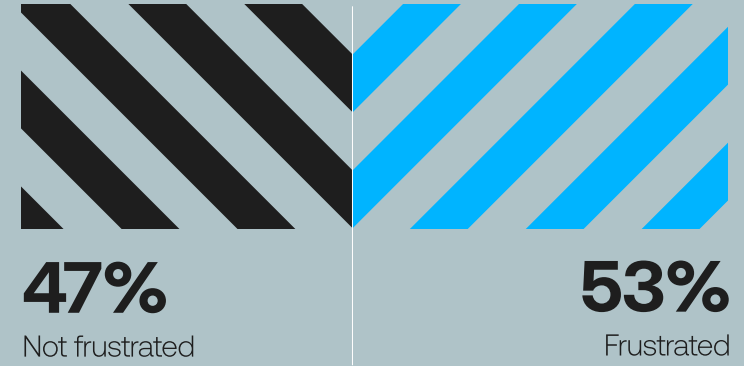
Q3.

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, have you felt frustrated at all by the limits the subsequent restrictions have imposed on your ability to use traditional marketing channels e.g. live events/networking?

Enterprise



UK



SME



US



## Expert view

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**“Everything in our communications now is about brainstorming alongside our customers.”**

**Barbara Moreno**  
Head of Marketing, Amadeus NDC



### **Can creativity drive empathy?**

This pandemic has forced us not just to be creative in our marketing efforts, but also to be more empathetic than before. Everything in our communications now is about brainstorming alongside our customers and saying, “we are all together in this situation. How can we make your life easier?”

We chose to push stories that are focused on our customers: working with them to decide how to move forward, and providing them technology to make it happen.

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# Analysis

[Show results](#)

## Tech marketers have switched priorities

They say necessity is the mother of invention. Here's the proof.

The rules have changed, and tech marketers responded by getting creative.

Roughly half of respondents found themselves frustrated by not being able to use their traditional marketing methods. This was especially true in the largest companies: 59% versus 48% in smaller businesses.

But that change forced marketers to look again at their priorities. The most popular switch was to focus more on design and creativity; 60% made this a priority, followed by 57% emphasising performance marketing, and 55% looking at marketing research.

This shift to creativity was particularly pronounced among enterprise marketers and in the US. Again, there's a clear divergence in the priorities for different sizes of business. Aside from creativity, large enterprise marketers focused on brand and performance marketing.

Meanwhile, the change in trading conditions has forced small business marketers to redouble their focus on lead generation. 57% have made it their top priority during the pandemic – understandably working hard to keep the lights on, at the expense of exploring other approaches.

## Key takeaways

# 60%

of tech marketers say design and creativity are more of a focus than before the pandemic.

# 59%

Most large-company marketers were frustrated at being unable to use traditional marketing methods; most in small companies were not.

# 41%

of enterprise tech marketers say strategy is the most important focus area.

# 06

New channels for  
a new normal

**With face-to-face interaction off the table, marketers turned to new channels – and digital experience was an advantage.**

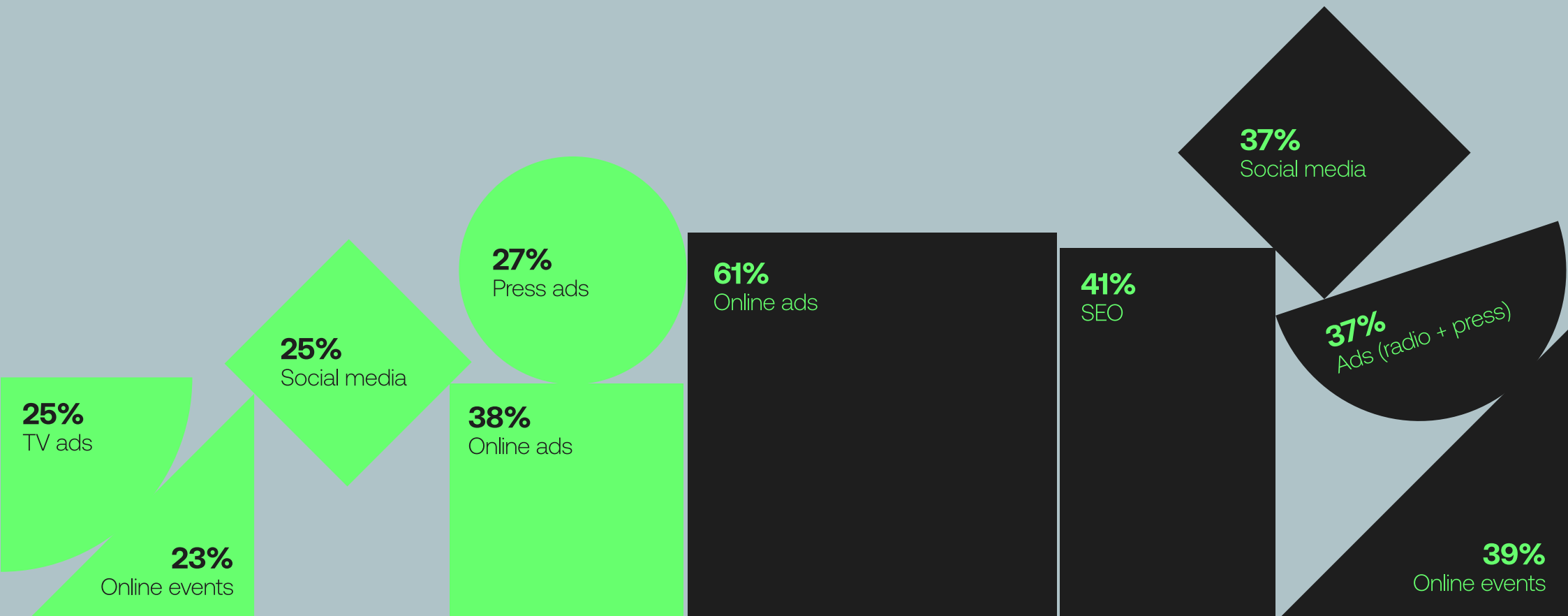
[Show results](#)

[Show analysis](#)

Q1.  
(Company size)

Which channels have you had the MOST 'brand awareness' success with during the last 12 months?

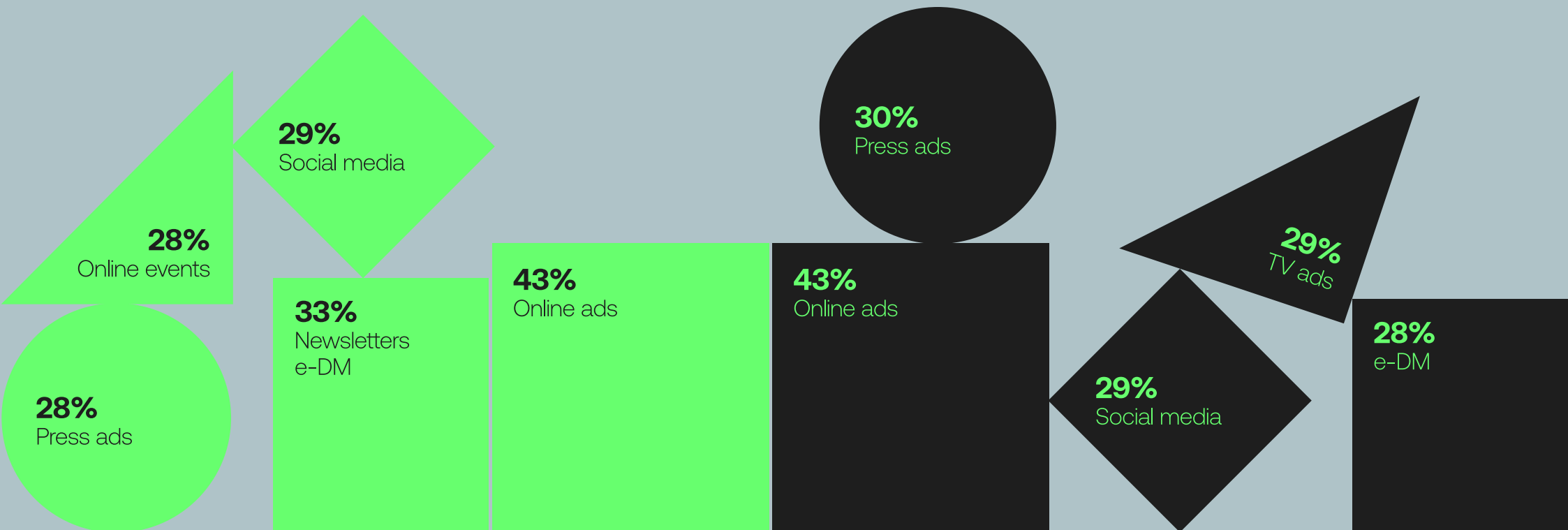
● Enterprise ● SME



Q1.  
(Location)

Which channels have you had the MOST 'brand awareness' success with during the last 12 months?

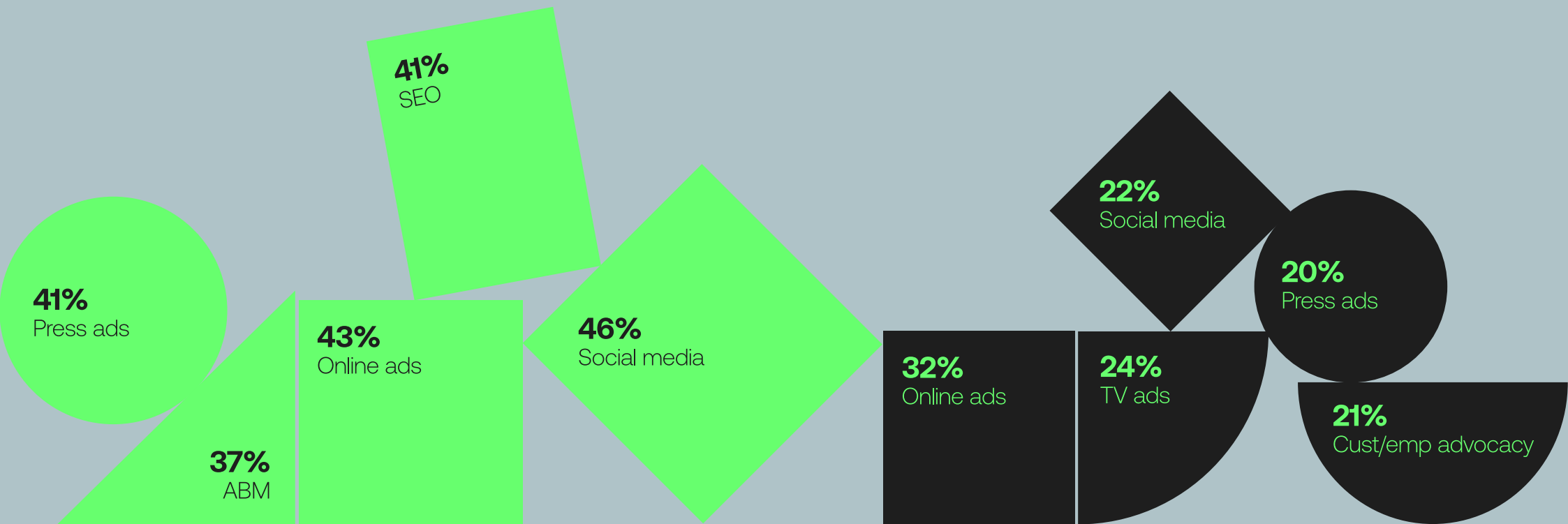
● UK ● US



Q2.  
(Company size)

Which channels have you had the MOST 'demand generation' success with during the last 12 months?

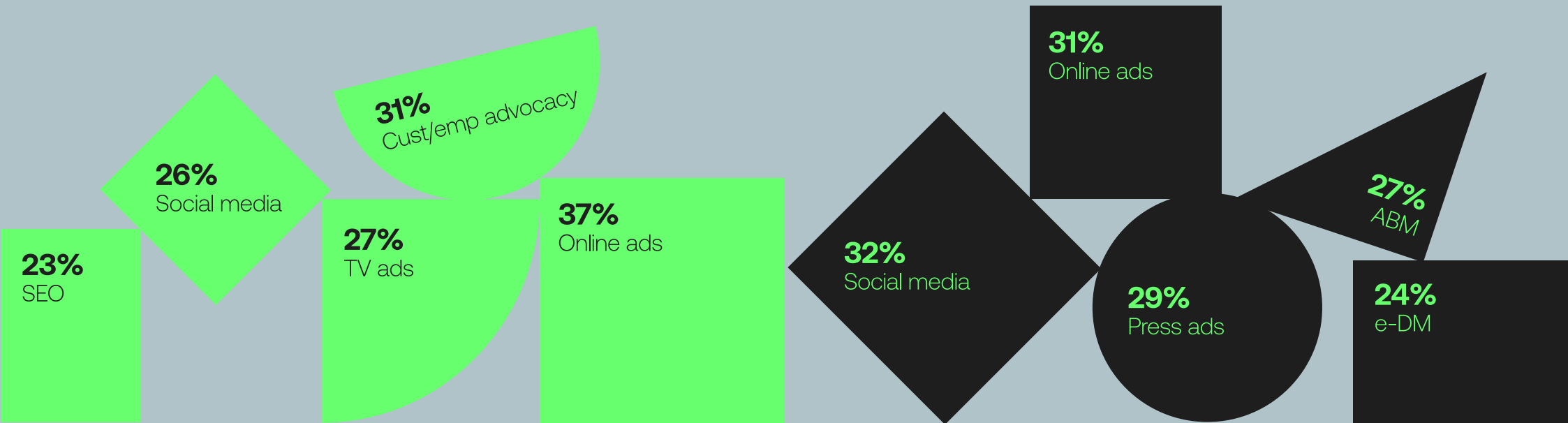
● Enterprise ● SME



Q2.  
(Location)

Which channels have you had the MOST 'demand generation' success with during the last 12 months?

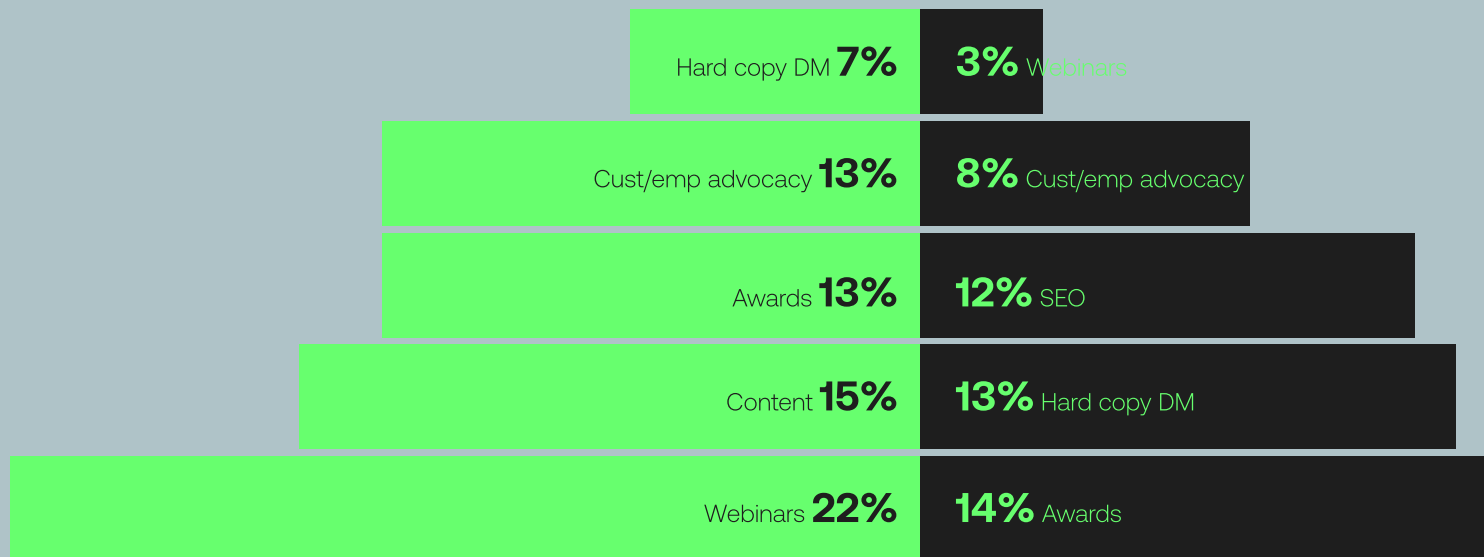
● UK ● US



### Q3. (Company size)

Which channels have you had the LEAST 'brand awareness' success with during the last 12 months?

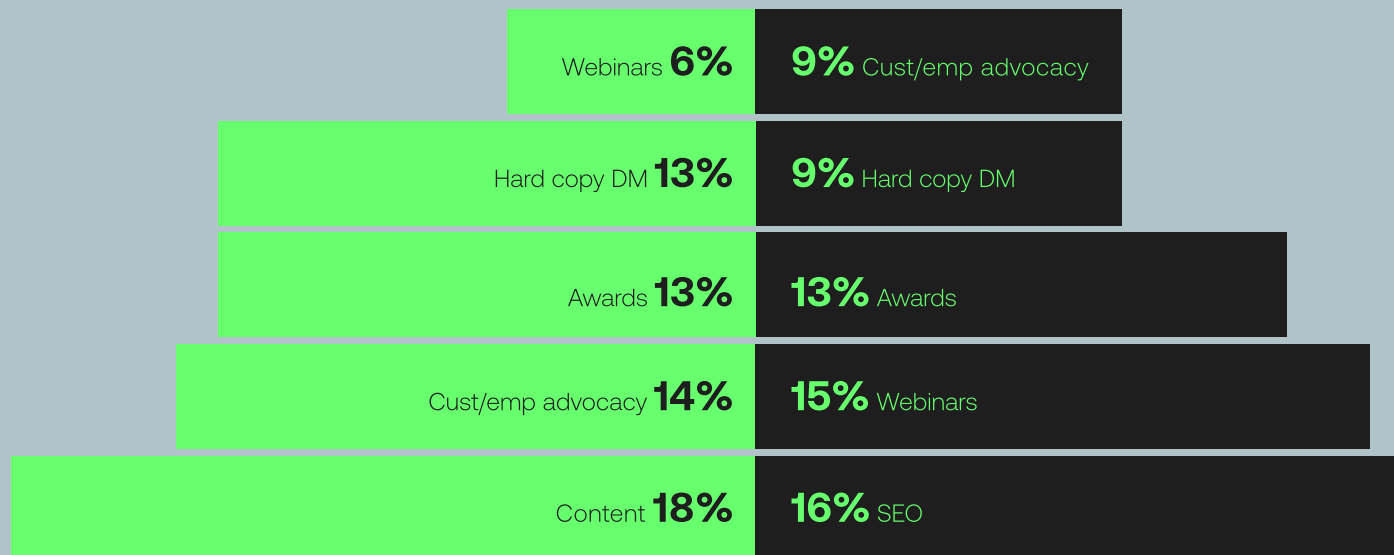
● Enterprise ● SME



Q3.  
(Location)

Which channels have you had the LEAST 'brand awareness' success with during the last 12 months?

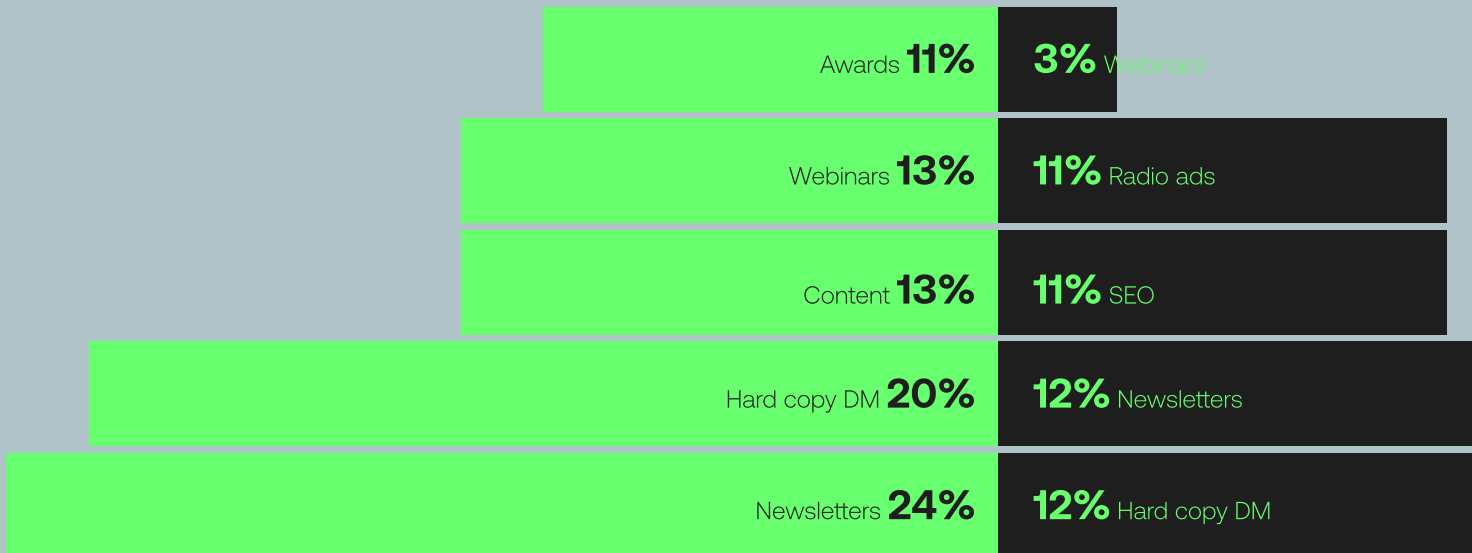
● UK ● US



### Q4. (Company size)

Which channels have you had the LEAST 'demand generation' success with during the last 12 months?

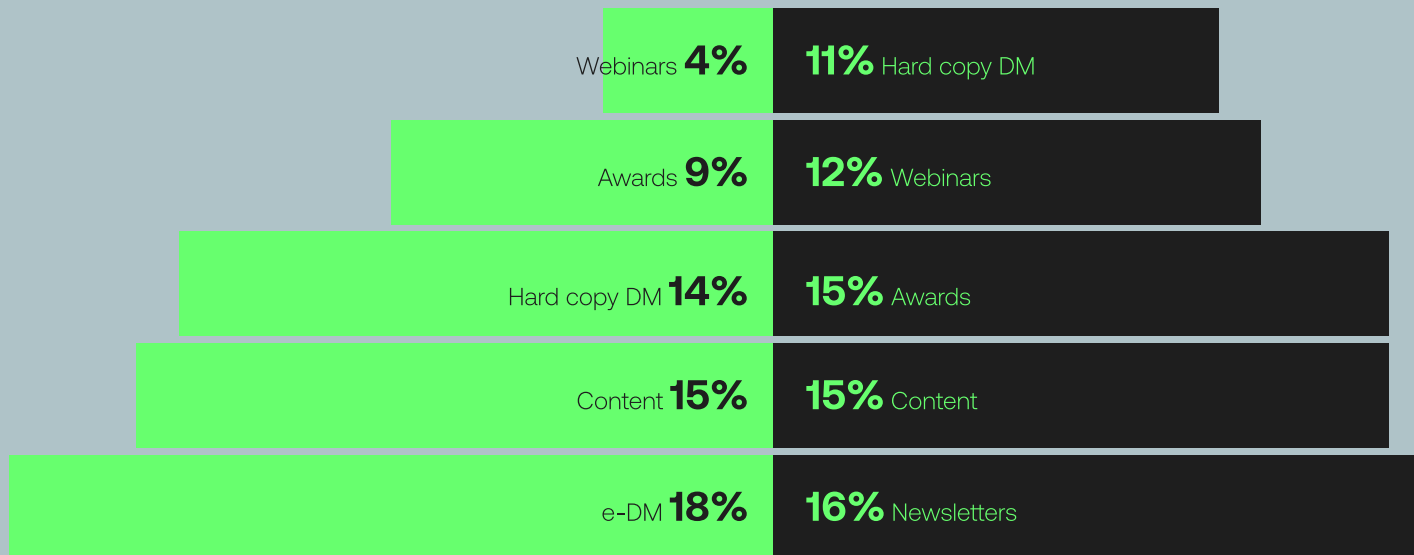
● Enterprise ● SME



Q4.  
(Location)

Which channels have you had the LEAST 'demand generation' success with during the last 12 months?

● UK ● US



## Expert view

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**“As well as trying new formats,  
I’m in favour of going back.”**

**Barbara Moreno**  
Head of Marketing, Amadeus NDC



### **Time to experiment?**

We have experimented with new channels as a result of lockdown, including the use of polling to make virtual events more dynamic. We’ve also started to do some podcasts and they were very well received.

As well as trying new formats, I’m in favour of going back. For instance, direct mailing may be a simpler way for clients to receive information. It’s direct communication with more of a one-to-one, personal feel.

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# Analysis

[Show results](#)

## New channels for a new normal

Adapting to digital: experience has its benefits.

When the pandemic eliminated face-to-face interaction, it's no surprise that tech marketers looked to digital alternatives. But those who already had wide digital experience got a real head start.

Online events and webinars were the go-to replacements for their offline equivalents, with around a quarter of tech marketers using them for the first time this year.

But when we looked more broadly at patterns of channel usage before and after 2020, we noticed another trend. Specifically, marketers who didn't already use a lot of digital channels were playing catch-up.

Overall, the most popular channels pre-COVID were online advertising, social media, and press advertising. However, enterprises were using a much wider channel mix – especially on digital. Compared to smaller counterparts, they were twice as likely to use online advertising and digital events, nearly three times as likely to use social media, and four times as likely to use SEO.

As a result, marketers in smaller businesses were far more likely to use digital channels for the first time this year. 26% started using online events, 25% began online advertising, and 23% commenced social media.

With their digital channels already in place, enterprises were able to experiment with radio advertising (28%) and advocacy (24%), as well as renewing their focus on webinars (24%).

## Key takeaways

# 43%

of marketers said online ads had been the most successful for brand awareness over the last 12 months.

# 34%

of marketers said online ads had been the most successful for demand generation over the last 12 months.

# 25%

of marketers said ABM had been the most successful for both brand awareness and demand generation over the last 12 months.

# Q7

Which channels are  
working now?

**With their creative focus, larger businesses saw success across a wide range of channels – for brand and leads alike.**

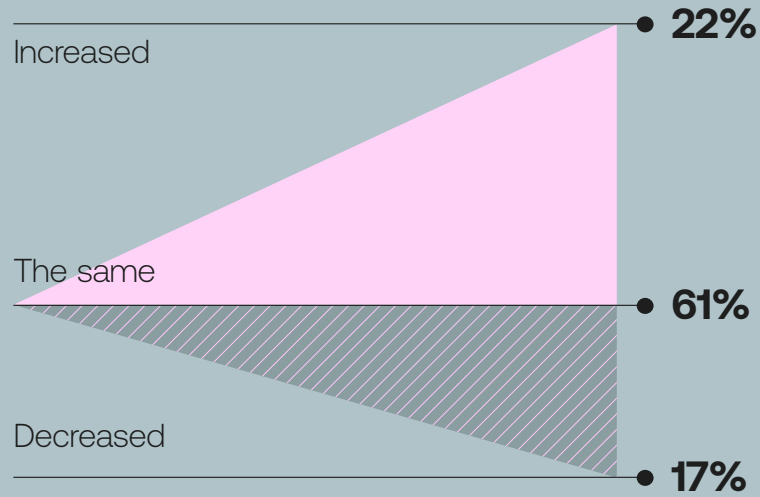
[Show results](#)

[Show analysis](#)

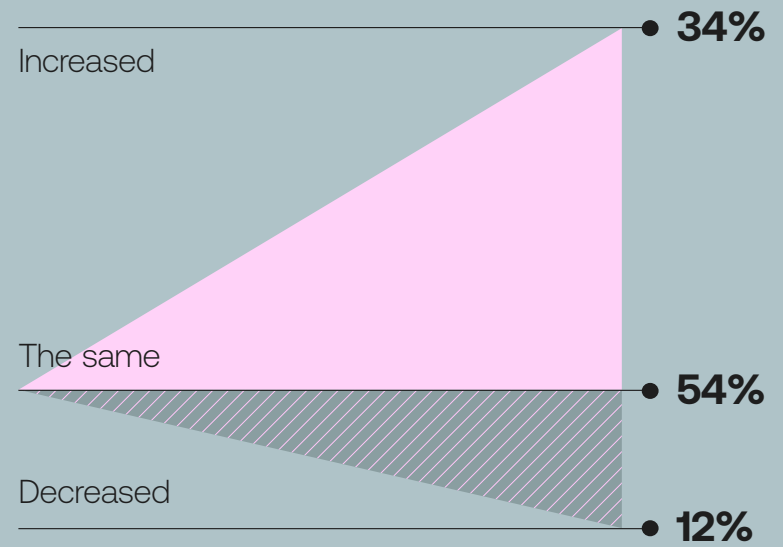
Q1.  
(Company size)

Has audience engagement changed over the period of the pandemic?

Enterprise



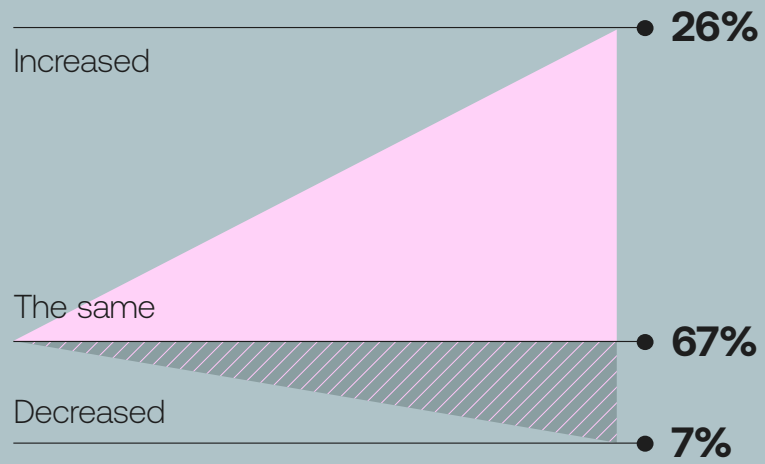
SME



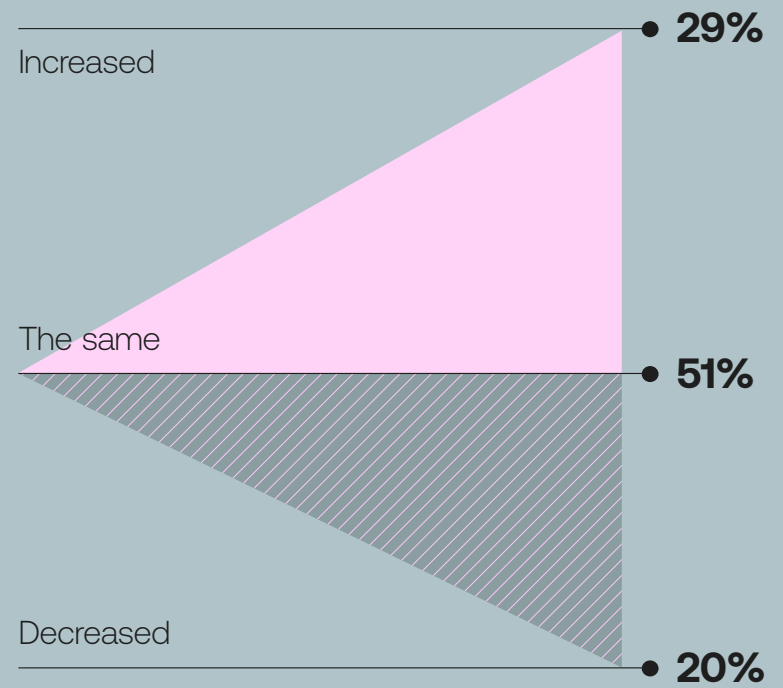
Q1.  
(Location)

Has audience engagement changed over the period of the pandemic?

UK



US



Q2.

Has audience behaviour changed in any of the following ways since the start of the pandemic?

● Happening more frequently ● Happening less frequently ● No change

Enterprise

SME

Responding to different ads and content



Responding to different ads and content



Ability to get leads



Ability to get leads



Ability to convert leads



Ability to convert leads



Prospects dropping off sales cycles at different times



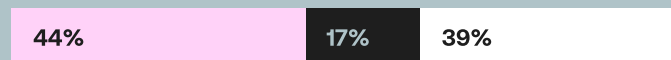
Prospects dropping off sales cycles at different times



Subscription/product renewal



Subscription/product renewal



# Expert view

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**“We are interested in ABM, high touch interactions and a return to direct mail, as well as personalisation efforts on our website”**

**Jess Ellis**

Senior Director of Brand Marketing, Khoros



## **What's next after webinars?**

The influx of virtual webinars began to feel passé almost immediately. Finding unique and different ways to connect with prospects and customers, while everyone is suffering elements of exhaustion from the past year is top of mind. We are interested in ABM, high-touch interactions and a return to direct mail, with a renewed focus on C-level executives and personalisation efforts on our website to continue to foster a bespoke connection with our prospects and customers.

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# Analysis

[Show results](#)

## Which channels are working now?

It's not the channel. It's how creative you are with it.

That's the only conclusion we could draw when we looked at which channels worked best this year. Having reported more of a focus on creativity, larger businesses also saw more success across a wide range of channels.

Overall, online advertising was the most successful channel during the pandemic. 43% say it worked well for brand awareness, while 34% report the same for demand and lead generation. But dive into the data, and the impact of creativity becomes clear.

For brand awareness, 22% of large business marketers found webinars effective, compared with just 3% in small companies. They were also far more likely to have had brand-building success with online advertising, SEO, online events, and newsletters.

It's the same story for demand and lead generation. Larger companies were more than twice as likely to have enjoyed success with ABM, press advertising, and radio advertising. They also outperformed the average on email and newsletters, social media, webinars, and SEO. Demand and lead generation channels also have an interesting transatlantic divide.

While UK and US marketers cited similar channels as effective for brand awareness, Americans were more likely to have seen leads from press advertising, ABM, and electronic direct mail. By contrast, Brits cited employee advocacy and TV advertising.

## Key takeaways

# 59%

have seen audiences responding to different types of content/advertising.

# 55%

have seen an increase in the ability to get leads.

# 51%

have seen prospects dropping off the sales cycle at different times.

# What marketers want from an agency

**It's no surprise that marketers want a creative challenge from their agency.  
But that desire goes deeper than you might expect.**

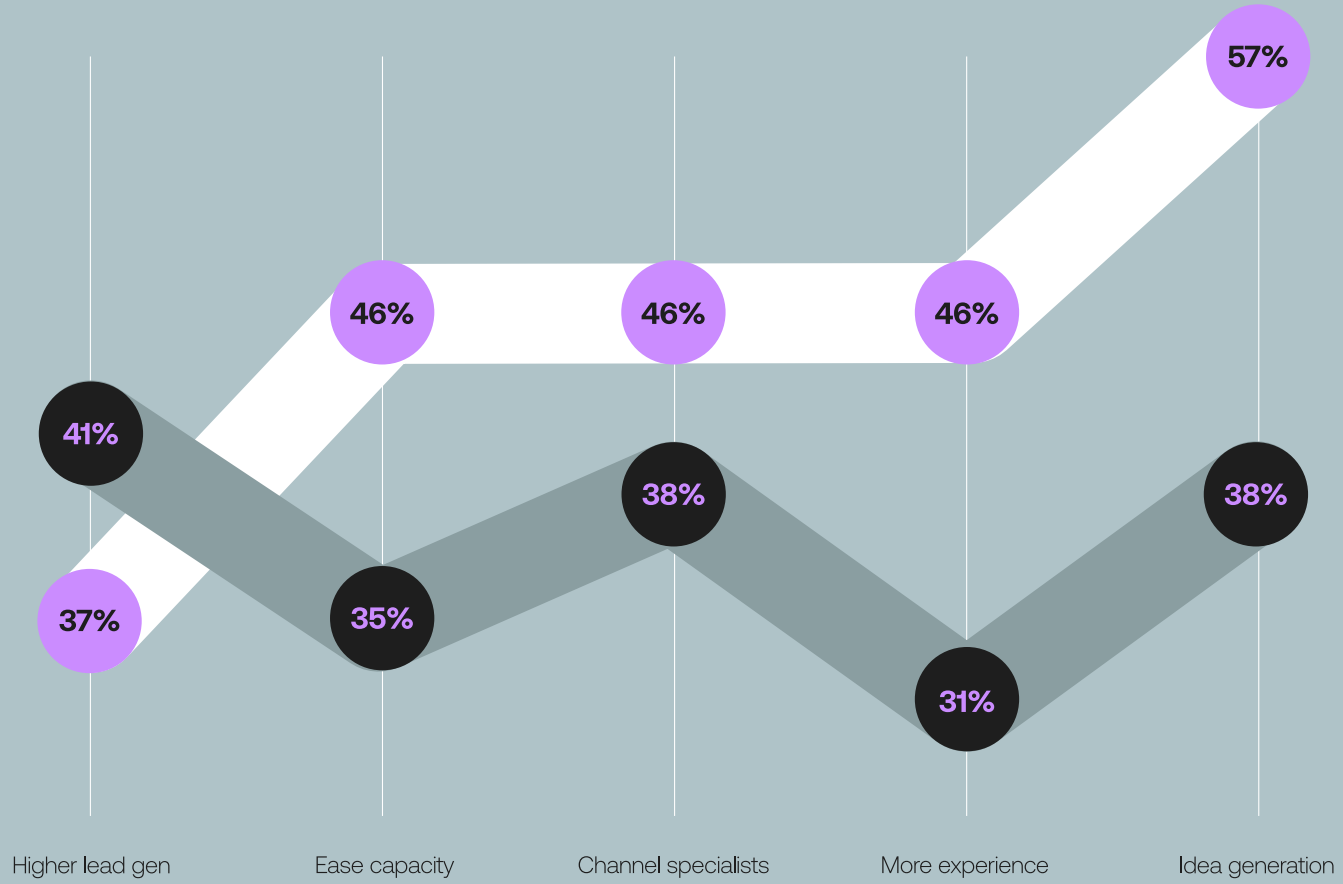
**Show results**

Show analysis

Q1.  
(Company size)

What value, if any, do you see in bringing in external creative agencies?

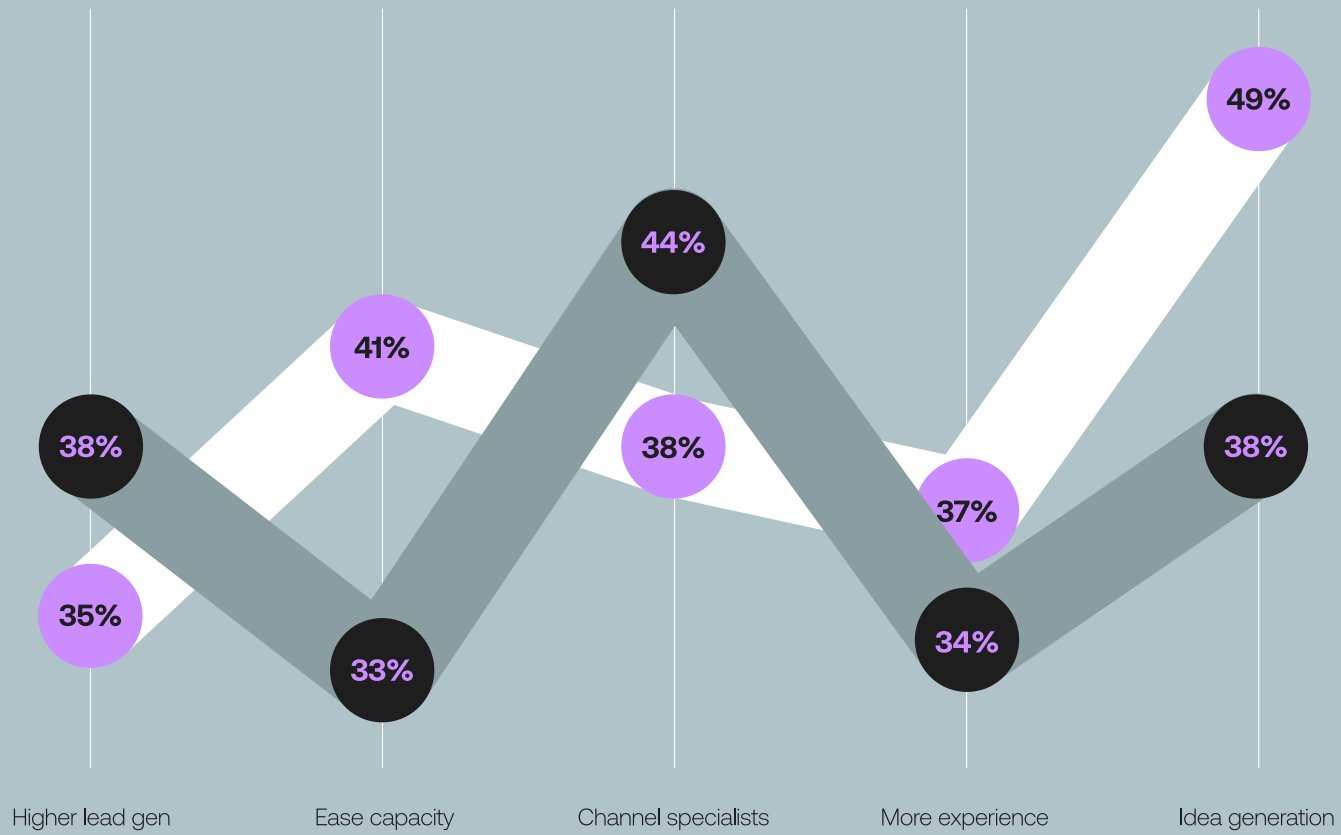
● Enterprise ● SME



## Q1. (Location)

What value, if any, do you see in bringing in external creative agencies?

● UK ● US



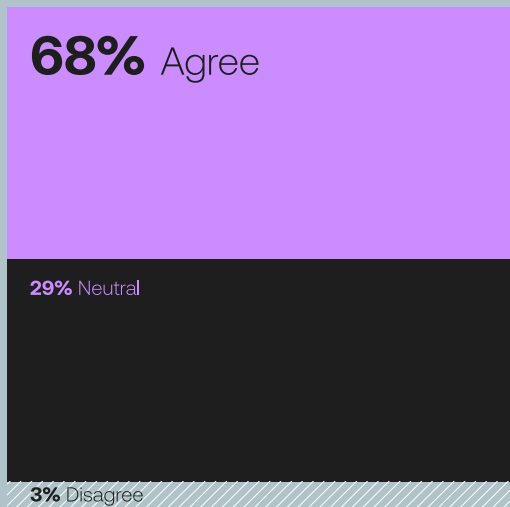
Q2.

How far do you agree or disagree with the following statement:  
“Our creative agencies challenge us creatively”

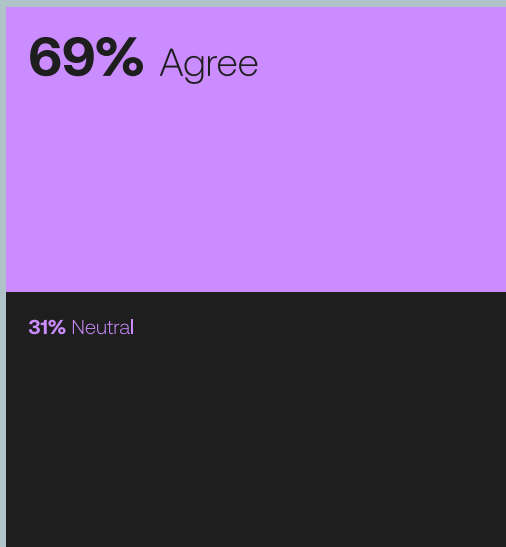
Enterprise



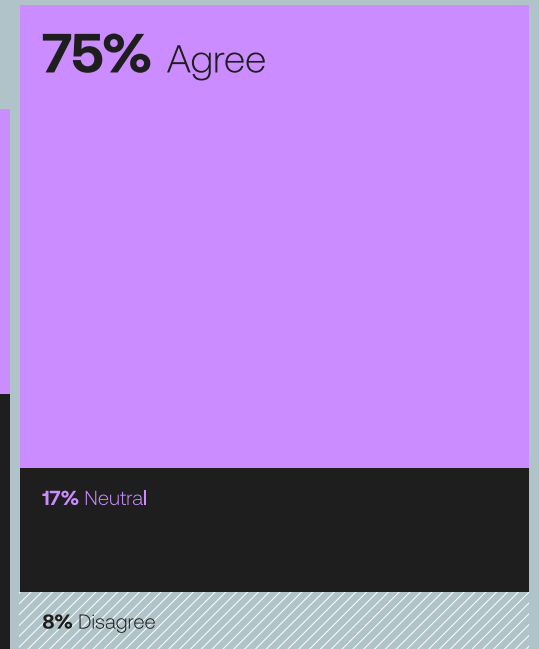
SME



UK



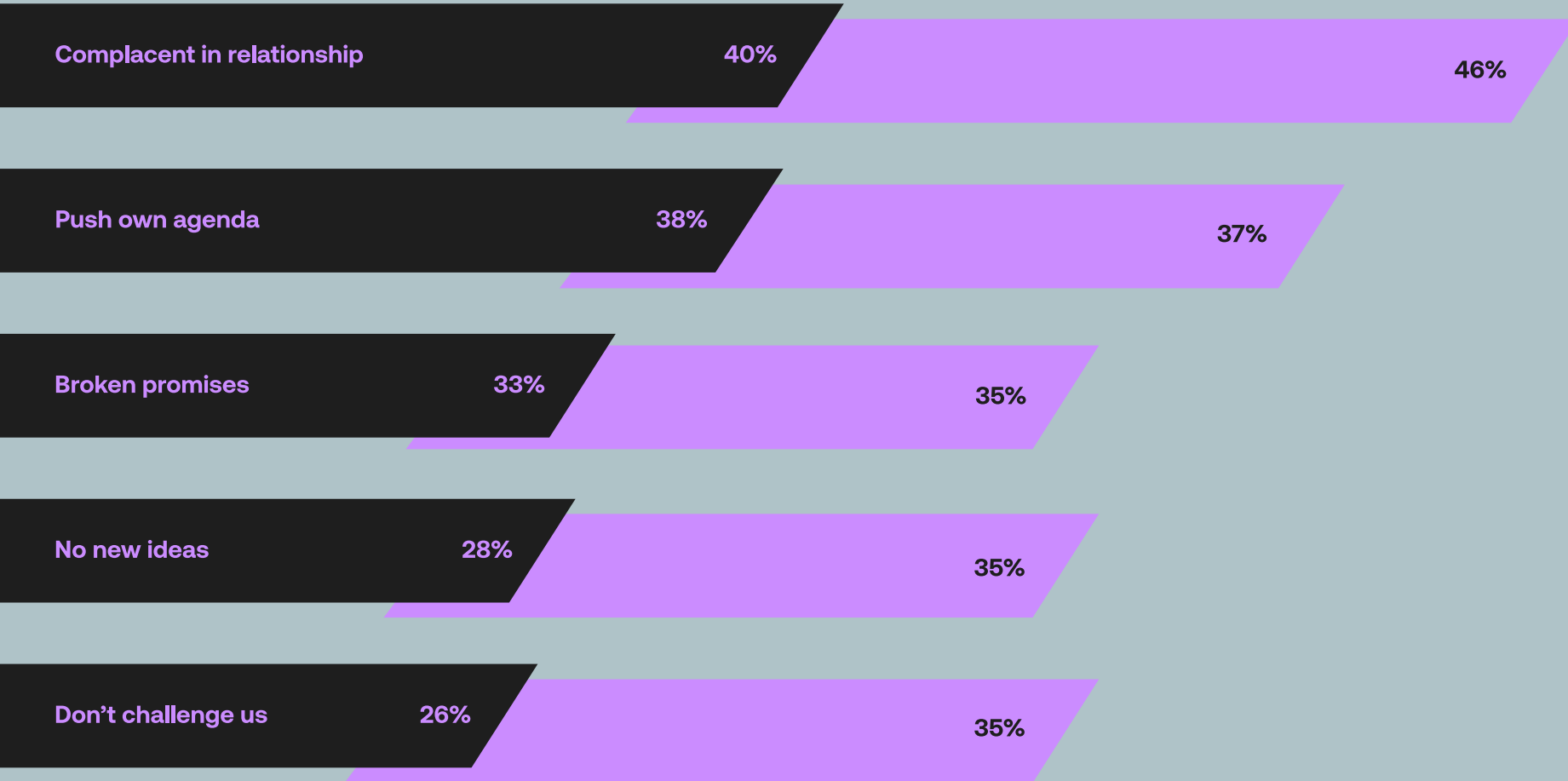
US



Q3.  
(Company size)

What, if anything, annoys you most about your relationship with your creative agencies?

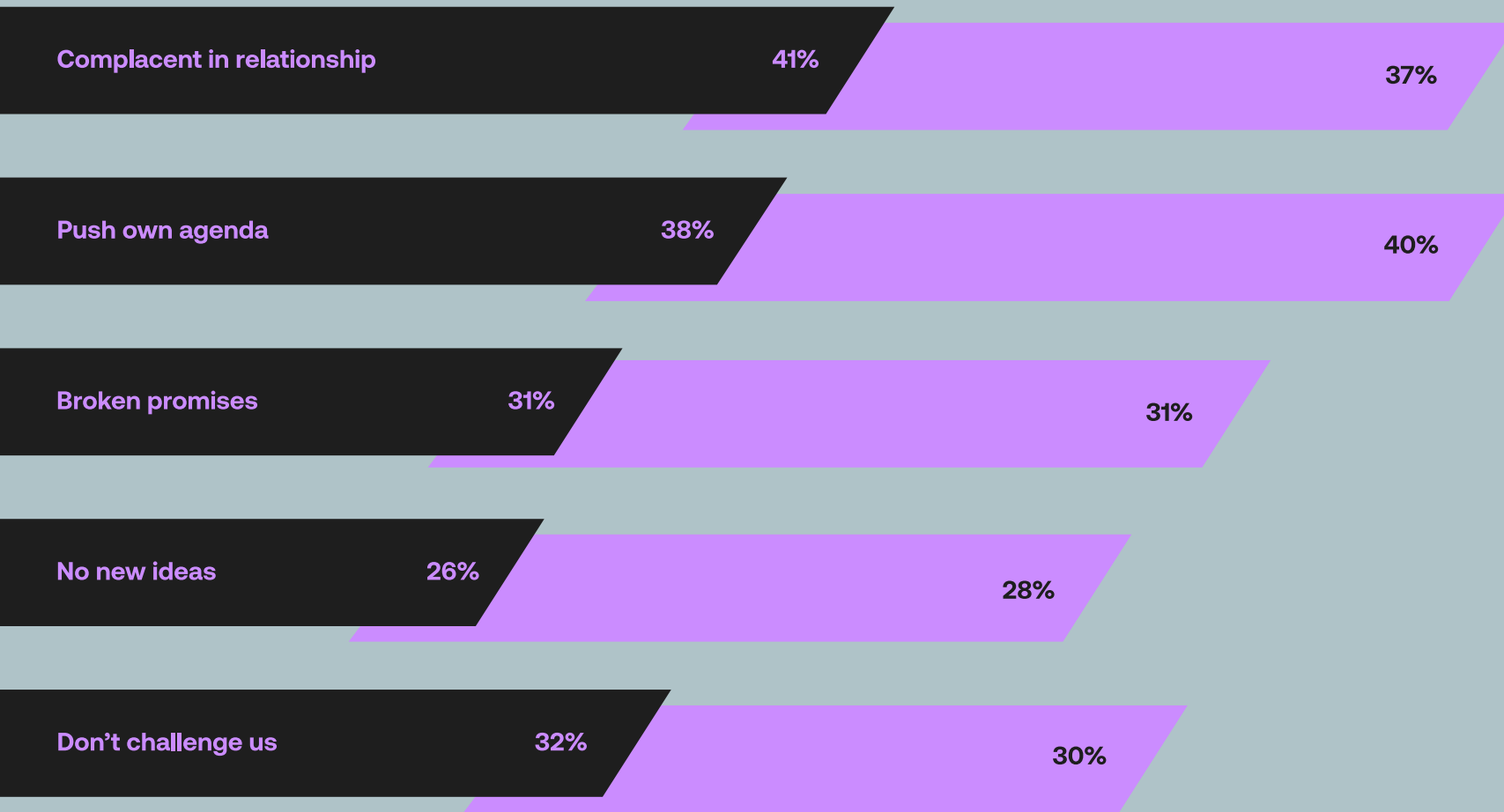
● Enterprise ● SME



Q3.  
(Location)

What, if anything, annoys you most about your relationship with your creative agencies?

● UK ● US



# Expert view

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**“Ultimately, no amount of tech can make up for a piece of creative or a story that falls flat.”**

**Jenny Green**

Marketing Director, IRIS Software Group



## Why is creative so important?

You've got to have both tech and creativity for effective marketing, but I think the creative side is much harder to execute; it's much more subjective. Different things appeal to different people, whereas the digital approach is very data-driven, and data doesn't lie. Ultimately, no amount of tech can make up for a piece of creative or a story that falls flat.

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# Analysis

[Show results](#)

## What marketers want from an agency

Who limits creativity: the marketer, or the agency?

Throughout this survey, respondents have shown how much they value creativity. So it's no surprise that they want to be challenged by their agency. But the extent of that need is a shock – 94% want to be challenged more.

The popular stereotype – of creative agencies pushing the envelope, and conservative tech marketers holding them back – is overturned in every location and business type we surveyed. And the bigger a company is, the more likely it is to choose an agency partner that provides that creative challenge.

But specifically, what do agencies bring? Overall, marketers look most often for ideas (44%) and channel expertise (41%). But the role changes with geography: in the US, the emphasis is on lead generation and channel-specific knowledge; UK marketers view agencies more as a source of external inspiration.

And when agency relationships go wrong, it's usually because that creativity is missing. The most common frustrations include complacency, lack of ideas, and lack of challenge.

One word of warning: the agency still needs to listen. Creativity must serve the brand's goals – it can't be showing off for its own sake. Marketers also complained that too many agencies push their own agenda at the client's expense.

## Key takeaways

# 72%

of marketers say their agency challenges them creatively.

# 94%

say they would like to be challenged more!

# 39%

of marketers say their agency has become complacent in the relationship.



# Key lessons and takeaways

**OK, so now what? Clearly, it's been a strange and unusual year. But many of the lessons of 2020 will remain true through 2021 and beyond. Here's what we see:**



1

**Tech marketers** are very able to adapt, and respond effectively to audience's changing needs. Most have treated this year as an opportunity to experiment – and that creative approach has paid off.



2.

It's striking how the groups that were **most open to creativity and design** in their marketing also saw the best results when the chips were down. Correlation doesn't imply causality, but it makes sense that creative approaches stand out in a time of change.



3

Large enterprises had the edge because of their digital experience, and **freedom to create**. But having caught up with new digital channels, the rest of the industry should now have the technology in place to focus more on creative solutions in future.

Basically, the bar is about to be raised again. Because now the case has been made, using creativity becomes less of a risk.

**In other words, what was once “brave” is now just good business sense.**

The final word from our experts

# What happens now?

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“People expect personalised engagement now, because the B2C world has entirely transformed what we anticipate from a consumer experience. And some people may think, ‘well B2B is different’ – but it’s not. Digitisation has changed the parameters of what customers are looking for.”

**Qabil Shah**  
Global Enterprise Marketing,  
Nutanix



“People are in the mood for change and to try new things. But it’s important to try and be authentic with your risk. Every crisis opens a door of opportunity and it’s really good to be alert to that fact – but you also need to be true to who you are.”

**Barbara Moreno**  
Head of Marketing,  
Amadeus NDC



“We are looking to evolve our positioning to appeal emotionally as well as rationally to our buyers. We do sell product but we also provide the support customers need to grow their businesses, run them effectively and look after their employees”

**Jenny Green**  
Marketing Director,  
IRIS Software Group

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Conducted in February 2021 by Opinium, Perspective 2021 is a survey of over 200 senior marketers in medium to large tech companies in US and UK.