

The State of Creative Operations in 2021

SURVEY RESULTS REPORT



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Introduction

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2020 tested creative teams like never before. Priorities were shifted, deadlines were tighter and creatives had to adapt to a whole new way of working. While it may not have been the shake-up we all needed, it did do creative operations a favour in catapulting it into the limelight.

A lot more organizations now realise the benefits associated with measuring and managing the creative workflow for optimum performance thanks to 2020. It's a positive step for the function of creative operations but of course, the challenge doesn't end there. 2021 has brought new problems, creative leaders are trying to cope with managing a borderless workforce, an increased workload and reduced resources. It's not an ideal scenario for any creative leader but it has forced them to re-evaluate and rebuild their creative processes, tools and talent pool – creative operations has been kicked into action.

In the fourth installment of The State of Creative Operations Report we share insights from over 100 creative leaders about their experiences of managing creative teams in 2021. We investigate what the creative team of 2021 looks like, the new processes and technologies adopted, thoughts on measuring creative operations, and look at what the future holds for creative operations in 2022. We also ask creative leaders "Who is Getting Creative Operations Right?" and provide a snapshot of the companies that are leading the way in creative operations.

Thank you to all the creative leaders who participated in this year's survey, many of you went above and beyond to offer great insights into your own creative operations. As a result, this year's report is packed full of learnings and new findings for the creative operations community.

We hope you enjoy it!

Síle Cleary

Head of Marketing, Screendragon

Executive Summary

The demand for creative work is at an all-time high, team members are spread across multiple locations, and we are seeing a greater demand for freelancers. The role of creative operations in providing much-needed transparency, improving productivity, and reducing costs is critical as we head into 2022.

Key Findings From the Research Survey:

58%

58% of creative teams are currently **working 100% remotely**.

5+

Nearly 30% of creative teams have **team members based in 5+ locations**.

1/2

Over half of creative leaders reported **an increase in the number of freelancers/part-time staff/contract workers** hired in 2021 when compared to pre-pandemic times.

2/3

66% of creative teams saw an increase in their **workload in 2021** when compared to pre-pandemic times.

20% ↑

52% of creative leaders now measure the value of creative operations. (**Nearly a 20% increase** compared to 2019.)

72%

72% of creative leaders expect their company to adopt **a hybrid approach to working in 2022**.

Turning to Tech:

50%+

Over half of creative teams **implemented new software tools in 2021** to help manage creative operations.



Project management and resource management software tools were the most popular types of software tools implemented in 2021.

60%

Nearly 60% of creative leaders said that **the switch to remote working** had an impact in them implementing new software tools sooner than expected.

The Future of Creative Ops:

1

A greater focus on the business value of creative operations.

2

Increased reliance & investment in smart technology to support remote teams.

3

Hybrid working structures will demand more defined operational goals and processes.

4

Increased demand for freelancers to bridge the skills gap.

Who is Getting Creative Operations Right?



TBWA\

Deloitte.

Ogilvy

FARFETCH

& more...

Creatives in Demand

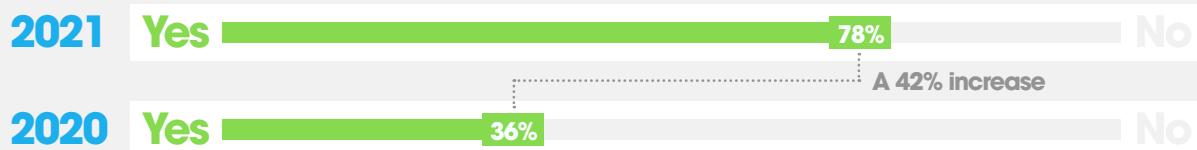
A Growth in Numbers

When we ran this survey last year, we were right in the thick of a global pandemic and the future of many sectors including the creative sector, wasn't looking promising. At the time, the majority of creative leaders we surveyed told us that they didn't expect to be hiring any new staff in the next year. Thankfully that outlook has changed and this year, nearly **80% of the creative leaders we surveyed said they expect their creative team to grow in 2022.**

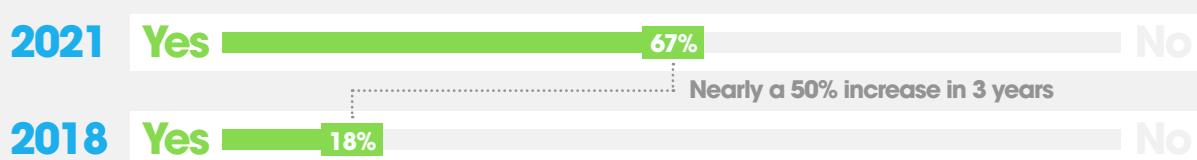
The focus on creative operations isn't waning anytime soon either as more companies realise the benefits associated with streamlining their creative workflow for productivity and cost gains. **In 2018, just 18% of our respondents said they had a dedicated creative operations role** in their organization, fast forward to 2021 and this number has shot up to 67%.

The numbers don't stop growing there. Over 50% of creative leaders reported an increase in the number of freelancers/ part-time staff/ contract workers hired in 2021 when compared to pre-pandemic times. **More organizations and agencies are clearly looking for outside help to fill the skills gap** – a trend we may see more of in 2022 with the increasing pressures on creative teams.

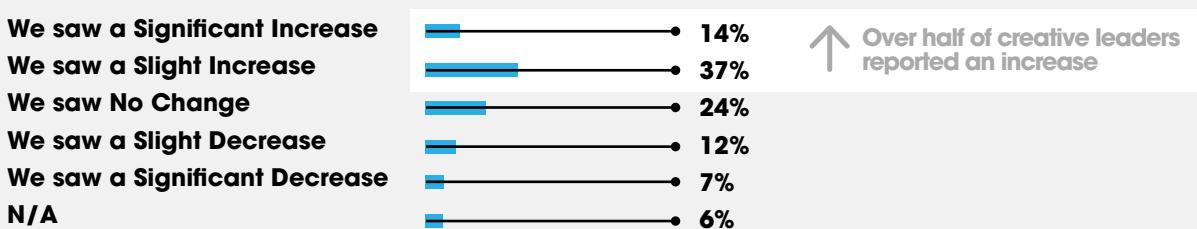
Do you expect your creative team to grow in the next year?



Is there a dedicated Creative Ops role in your company?



Has there been an increase or decrease of freelancers/part-time staff/contract workers hired for your creative team in 2021 compared to pre-pandemic times?



What Does the Creative Team of 2021 Look Like?

We are seeing a clear trend towards a borderless workforce, where team members are distributed across many locations instead of being in a single office.

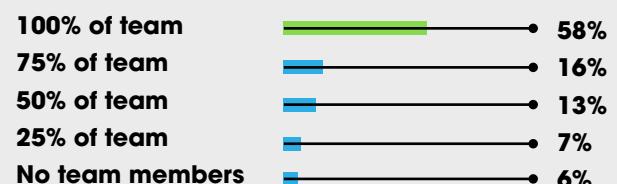
As noted in the previous section, there is a greater reliance on freelancers and part-time staff too. The task to unite the creative team of today is clearly challenging, but ultimately, smart technology combined with strong leadership will help ensure everyone is on the same page and working efficiently together.

- Almost ¾ of teams have members based in 2 or more locations.**
- 70% have under 20 team members.**
- Nearly 60% of teams are working 100% remotely.**
- Over 70% expect their company to adopt a hybrid approach to working in 2022.**
(a mixture of in-office and remote working).

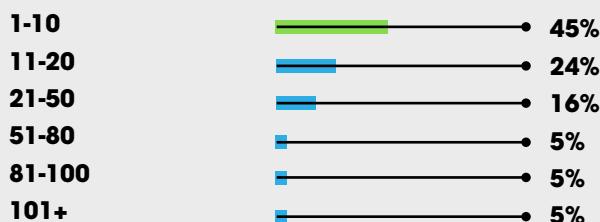
In how many locations are your creative team members based?



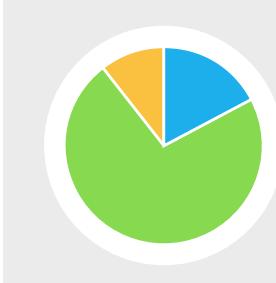
Approximately, what percentage of your creative team is working remotely at present?



What is the size of your creative team?



What model of work do you foresee your creative team adopting in 2022?



- 17% Full time remote working
- 73% Hybrid - a combination
- 10% Full-time office working

Managing Day-to-Day Creative Work in 2021

As much as we'd like to report that creatives have had it easier in 2021 when compared to a very challenging 2020, unfortunately that doesn't seem to be the case. In fact, 66% of creative teams have experienced an increase in their workload in 2021 so far when compared to pre-pandemic times. On top of that, they are still not getting a break from admin work, with most creatives spending on average two days per week on non-creative work – **a statistic that continues to remain stagnant year on year with this survey.**

In some good news, we are seeing **a move away from a reliance on emails for creative management in 2021** with a 12% drop in the number of creatives using email, skype or other communication platforms to manage their creative brief process. More and more creative teams are turning to project management software to speed-up and streamline their creative workflow and thus avoiding the nasty time-zapping trap that is email.

As we move into 2022, hopefully we will continue to see more creative teams leveraging creative operations software to better manage their increasing workloads, giving them more time to focus on what they do best – creative work!

- ↑ **66% of creative teams saw an increase in their workload in 2021 when compared to pre-pandemic times.**
- **In no change to 2020, creatives are still spending on average 2 days per week on non-creative work.** (Remained stagnant)
- New stat: **70% of creative teams have meetings with outside departments at least once a week.**
- ↑ **65% of creative leaders said they either fully practice agile or use some agile practices to manage creative work.** (Up just 3% from last year)
- ↑ **55% of creative leaders are using project management software to manage their creative brief process.** (Nearly a 20% increase on last year).

How has your workload changed in 2021 compared to pre-pandemic times?



- **66% Higher volume of work**
- **26% No change**
- **8% Lower volume of work**

Do you use a project management software tool to manage your creative brief process?

- Yes** ● **55%**
- No, we use email** ● **29%**
- No, we use Excel** ● **8%**
- We use paper/whiteboard** ● **2%**
- We just talk** ● **6%**

Turning to Tech

Creative leaders are turning to tech more than ever before. As resources are now distributed across multiple locations, the need to unite the team in one place to get work done is critical. This is simply something that can't be achieved without the aid of technology and what's more – the right technology.

In 2021, **53% of creative teams implemented new software tools to help manage creative operations.** When they were asked in our survey what was the single biggest challenge they faced when searching for a software tool, over half said it was difficult to find a tool that met all their requirements. This begs the question, are creative leaders finding the right tools to manage their creative operations?

Creative leaders need to find THE RIGHT TECH for creative operations

We know that the creative operations tech landscape is growing – great, but having access to tools that only tick half of the boxes isn't going to cut it for the creative operations leader of today. In fact, it can do the exact opposite and act as a bottleneck whereby team members are spending precious time jumping from tool to tool instead of getting their work done.

Instead, creative leaders may need to **take a more holistic approach when assessing their tech needs.** Either evaluate how multiple tools can fit together into an effective delivery workstream or focus on a single all-in-one platform that will support all stakeholder needs natively. While integrations can make it possible to link multiple point solutions, it's important to remember that the challenge to achieve a consistent and simple UX across multiple platforms will still remain.



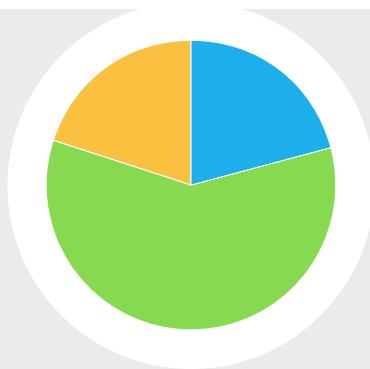
Over 50% of creative leaders said they found it difficult to source a creative operations software tool that **met all their requirements.**



Project management and resource management software tools were the most popular types of software tools implemented in 2021 to help manage creative operations.



Nearly 60% of creative leaders said that **the switch to remote working had an impact in them implementing new software tools sooner than expected.**



What is the single biggest challenge your team encounters when searching for a software tool for creative operations?

- **21%** Most tools are outside of our budget range
- **59%** Difficult to find a tool that meets our requirements
- **20%** Too much choice

Measuring the Value of Creative Operations

52% of creative leaders measure the value of creative operations.

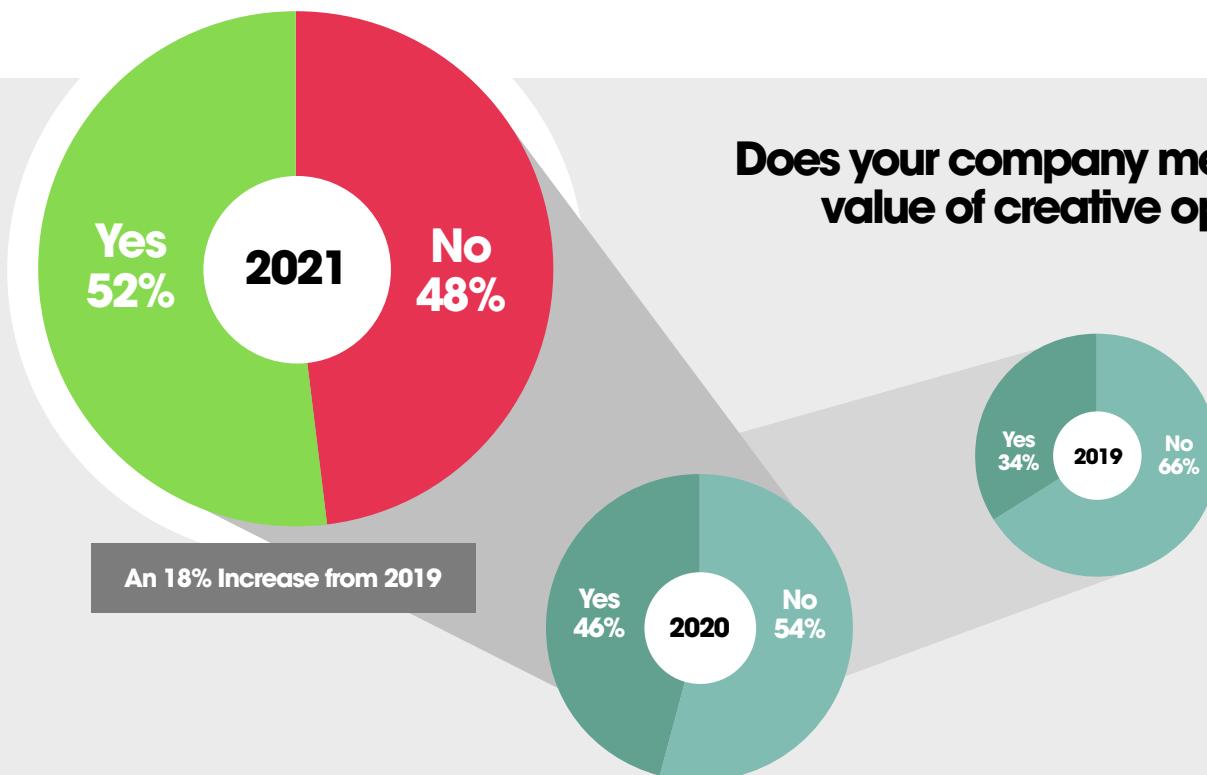
(18% increase compared to 2019)

'Resource Utilization' was rated as the No.1 creative operations metric to measure, closely followed by 'No. of projects completed in a given timeframe'.

It's clear that the trend towards metrics is growing year on year. In our survey in 2019, only 34% of creative leaders said they measure the value of creative operations.

In this year's survey, that figure jumped by 18% to 52%. No doubt, this upward trajectory will continue as the function of creative operations continues to evolve and more companies realise its business value.

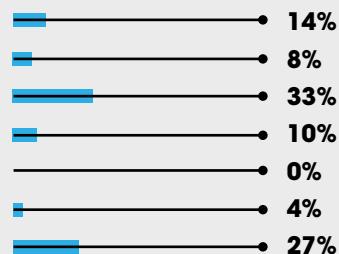
The rise in remote working has also shifted focus towards **a more metric driven approach**. Leaders need more transparency into the creative workflow and they need the data at hand to answer the key questions fast like: what are resources working on now and in the future? How many resources are required to produce X amount of content? Or, how much can we expect to spend or make on a certain type of project? The answers to these types of questions are a must for the creative leader of today.



A third of creative teams produce reports on operational metrics at least once a month, while close to the same amount, almost 30%, don't produce any reports on operational metrics.

How often does your creative team produce reports on operational metrics?

- At least once a week
- Bi-weekly
- Once a month
- Once a quarter
- Every 6 months
- Annually
- We dont create these reports



When we asked creative leaders what was the biggest challenge they faced in reporting on operational metrics, the same answers tended to come back again and again. Most responses centred on two key areas – **not having the ability to accurately forecast and/or not having a single integrated tool to capture data and report on all creative metrics easily**.

What is the biggest challenge you face in reporting on creative operations metrics?

“ Accuracy – duplicate tickets, Marketing uses their own PM tools which don't include reporting on design projects.”

“ “Total resource forecasting for future weeks due to influx of projects and client missed deadlines.”

“ “Allocation of hours is extremely nuanced based on client, project, team, etc. and very difficult to objectively forecast.”

“ “No single tool to track work assignments, time estimates & time actuals.”

“ “Tracking operational metrics is a very manual process if we want to break it down beyond just how many jobs we have completed.”

“ “Lack of real time information. Always spreadsheets or manual notes to track.”

“ “Accurate pipeline and projections.”

TIP:

To accurately forecast resourcing or other key metrics you need to lean on smart technology that has the capabilities to capture and track estimates (resourcing, expenses or other) and automatically apply those to your live project for up-to-the-minute projections.

If your timelines or resource requirements change, your projections will adjust accordingly.

Who is Getting Creative Operations Right?

What in-house or agency teams are leading the way in creative operations? We asked creative leaders to nominate a company or agency (excluding their own of course!) that they think is getting creative operations right.

Here are some of the brands and agencies that were nominated.



What are they doing right according to creative leaders?

- 1** “ They have a forecasted pipeline of project needs and creative resources (contract and full-time) to quickly deploy when necessary.”
- 2** “ They have the right experts doing the right job, creatives working on anything else other than their expert skills is a big problem.”
- 3** “ They use marketing procurement tools, have an automated workflow and approval system and adopt agile ways of working.”
- 4** “ They deliver projects on time and most of the time, on a short notice.”

The Future of Creative Operations

Creative leaders have a lot on their plate in 2021; Managing the ever increasing demand for creative work, reduced budgets and resources and trying to source and implement new software to support their team and organization. Despite all the challenges being thrown their way, most remain optimistic about the future of creative operations in 2022.

The role of creative operations is set to grow in significance as the need to unite global creative teams, measure the value of creative work, and drive more efficient processes becomes even more important. **Expect a greater reliance on smart technology, an increased focus on measuring and reporting on metrics and an increase in demand for freelancers.** The age of creative operations is officially here and exciting times are afoot for creative leaders in 2022 and beyond.

Challenges for creative leaders:

Top 6 challenges for creative leaders in 2021

- 1** The increasing demand for creative work.
- 2** Too much time spent on admin tasks and not enough time spent on creativity.
- 3** Getting projects out on-time.
- 4** Resource scheduling and planning.
- 5** Staying on track with their budget.
- 6** Sourcing the right tools to support their team.

What do creative leaders believe the future looks like for creative ops in 2022?

- + The role of creative operations will grow in significance.**
- + A greater focus on the business value of creative operations.**
- + Increased reliance & investment in smart technology to support remote teams.**
- + Hybrid working structures will demand more defined operational goals and processes.**
- + Increased demand for freelancers to bridge the skills gap.**
- + More agile, efficient and automated.**
- + More focus on metrics.**
- + Creative operations will become a more common role in agencies.**

What do you think the future looks like for creative operations in 2021?

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"I believe Creative Operations will grow in significance and there will be a greater need for technical support to track progress and employee bandwidth and output."



"Great. I am a creative operations manager and due to the pandemic, my role became highlighted and seen as critical instead of optional. Managers across creative roles see me as an essential partner in how they meet goals and help grow and build talent."



"Hybrid work environments are here to stay, but roles requiring collaboration will have to return to work to ensure we continue to challenge the status quo of content ingenuity."



"The need for Creative Ops will increase as companies try to do more with less. Metrics will start to be applied to output to justify (or not) the need for in-house design."



"The demand for creative and digital assets are increasing and we are seeing an increasing need to produce these and support the requirements on a much more real-time basis. The need to have a good eco-system with the right talent, tools and processes is the way forward to achieving this changed pace of business."



"Creative Operations must be the #1 goal for agencies in 2022."



"Hopefully recognition that teams need tools designed to support our type of workload and a willingness to invest in them, especially as we're working more remotely and need to address management concerns over remote productivity."

The Demographics

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The survey garnered **over 100 respondents** that work in creative and marketing roles. 50% of respondents hold creative or marketing managerial positions. Respondents work on teams of a wide variety of sizes and in a range of company types – large enterprises accounted for 36% of respondents, agencies made up 32% and SMEs and professional services firms made up the rest.

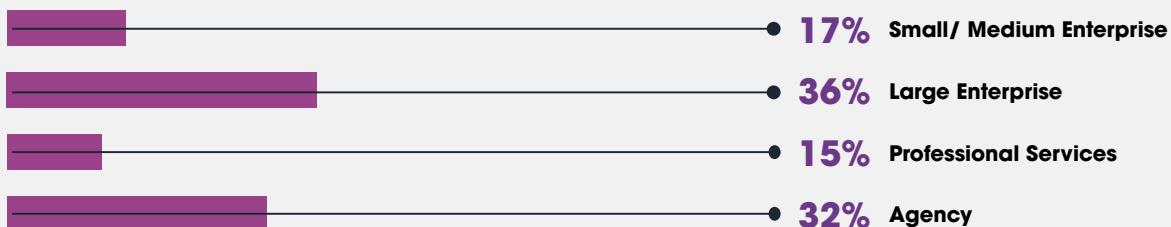
What best describes your role?



What is the size of your creative team?



What is your company type?



What is your company's approximate annual revenue?



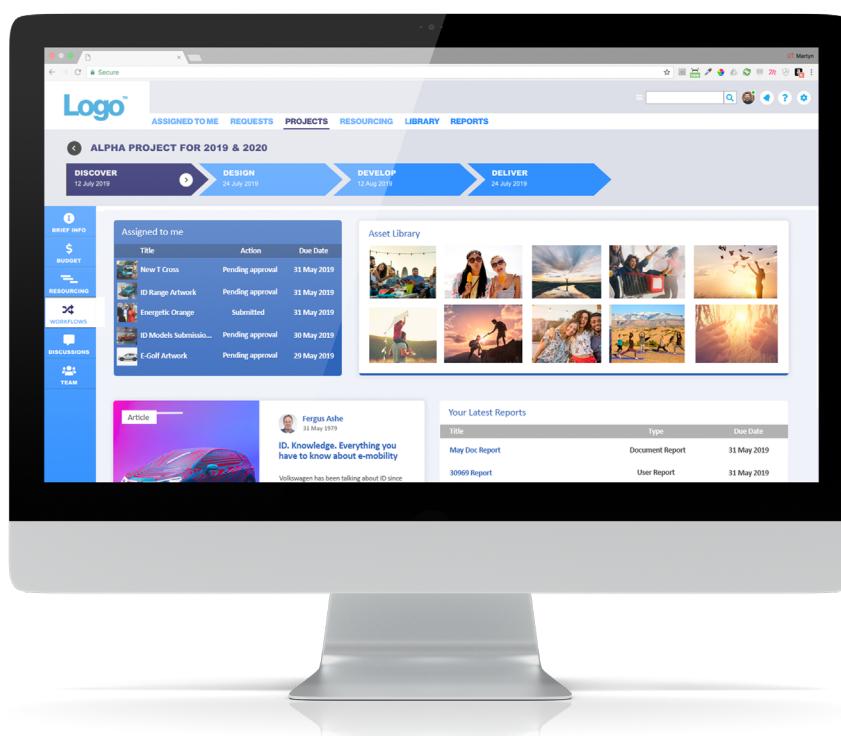
About Screendragon

Screendragon is a leading work management solution designed for the needs of marketing, agency and professional services teams. We have been working in the creative operations space for over 15 years, driving efficiency and cost-saving gains for global brands and agencies like Kellogg's, Keurig Dr Pepper, BP, TBWA and McCann World Group.

Screendragon provides high-performing teams with a single software solution to manage their entire creative process – from project initiation to execution and delivery – combining project, resource, workflow and budget management. It is proven to scale for the needs of global Fortune 100 companies, helping them to solve big complex operational challenges. Design thinking is at our core and our unique UX enables fast adoption by all.

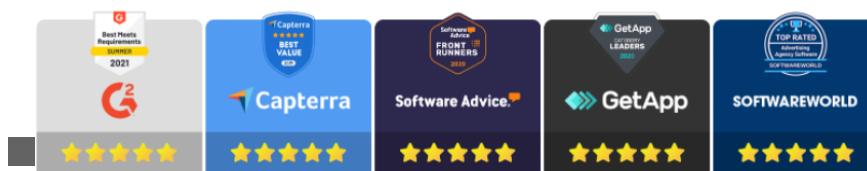
Book a demo today or get in contact with our experts to discuss your unique use case.

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