

EBOOK

20 Quick Tips to Guarantee On-Time Delivery



Introduction

When every project is urgent, the pressure mounts for marketing and creative teams to deliver quality work on time, on message, and under budget.

Marketing teams are under an enormous burden to produce work quicker and better than ever to prove their value to the rest of the company. However, plenty of obstacles stand in their way.

Too many disparate tools, random work requests, and a lack of standardized processes and project management slow teams down and leave managers trying to figure out who's working on what, how to assess and control workloads, and when projects will actually be done. A recent survey showed that work chaos is why nearly 60 percent of workers are either completely overwhelmed or barely meeting their deadlines.¹

Thankfully, getting campaigns and content to market on time doesn't require that managers resort to hovering over desks trying to coax more work out of already overburdened teams. Creative teams that can work smarter—not harder—have proven they can work more efficiently, avoid unnecessary confusion, and firmly establish their value to the company by delivering work when it's expected.

This ebook offers 20 tips for completing quality work quickly and on time, leaving your team with time for creativity...and actual work.



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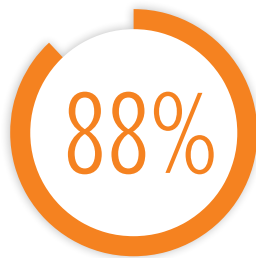
17% of marketers say missing deadlines is one of the biggest sources of conflict with other teams or departments.²

1. Take a tool inventory

One easy way to trip up a creative team is with “tool overload.” Creative teams often use six or more (sometimes more than 10!) tools at a time to manage their work.³ Too many tools create information silos, broken or complicated workflows, and muddled communication that stifles creativity and productivity.

To produce work faster and with better quality, start by re-evaluating any tools you’re using to manage work. Determine which patchwork solutions only address one aspect of your workflow, which tools are outdated, and identify any tools that your team isn’t using or hasn’t completely adopted. And be honest with how much your team is using spreadsheets*, shared docs, and email** as a means for managing work.

Getting a firm grasp on which marketing tools bring real value to your team will help you identify which ones are redundant, create extra steps in your processes (which slows things down), or could be replaced by something else.



*88% of spreadsheets have errors.⁴



** It takes people 16 minutes to refocus after handling incoming email.⁵

2. Eliminate excessive tools

Using too many tools kills productivity, increases time spent clicking around, and blinds your team members to the work that is in progress.

Once you've taken a tool inventory, stop using the ones everyone can do without. If your team is paying for a tool that some or none of the team is using, ditch it. If you have another that seems to cause more problems than it solves, chuck it. If the cost—in money, time, or sanity—of using a certain tool is greater than the benefits, toss it.

By eliminating excess tools, you can speed up the process, ensure that everyone is producing their best work, and establish a single source of “truth” for your marketing operations.



Teams consistently use six or more (sometimes more than 10!) tools at a time to manage their work.⁶

3. Implement the right solutions for your team

It's easy to find four or five different tools that improve specific areas of your workflow, but now you've just committed to adding extra tools to your team's plate. Instead, look for a single tool (or as few tools as possible) that meets your team's workflow needs and supports the evolution of the enterprise. Ideally the right tool(s) will allow your creative team to:

- Manage requests and priorities
- Template, plan, and track projects
- Manage resources
- Collaborate in context
- Organize, store, and share documents
- Streamline approvals
- Track data
- Generate visual dashboards and reports

And it will allow you to do all of this in a user-friendly way that integrates or links with the other systems you use.

Manage the end-to-end workflows from idea to delivery more easily by consolidating tools to the ones that meet multiple team needs. More importantly, using the right tools at the right times ensures on-time delivery to clients, while also giving them confidence in your team's capabilities.



A recent study revealed that managers spend more than 15 hours a week on routine administrative tasks like providing status updates, filling out forms, requesting support, and updating spreadsheets.⁷

4. Stop wasting time on the wrong work

Sixty-one percent of marketers say excessive emails prohibit them from getting work done.⁷ Emails and other administrative tasks eat up so much time that it's nearly impossible to find time to do actual work.

Rather than checking email every five minutes, responding to every text immediately, and leaving instant messaging on all day, encourage your team to check email and messages only during a few designated times a day.

Also, have them block time on their calendars when they can turn off all incoming distractions and hunker down to work on key priorities. Staying in touch with colleagues is important, but not at the expense of productivity and speed. With the right corrections, you can help guard against communication overload and the need to respond to everything ASAP.



61% of marketers say excessive emails prohibit them from getting work done.⁸

5. Create templates for anything repeatable

Without templates, it's hard to keep standardized processes, and without standardized processes, teams end up wasting time setting up each new project. With each variation, you run the risk of missing steps, leaving important people out of the loop, slowing down the process to a deadly crawl, or overlooking crucial information.

Templates don't have to be fancy. Creating templates can be as simple as converting an existing workflow or project plan for your repeatable types of work into a reusable standard document or spreadsheet.

Share it over Google Drive, Sharepoint, or within a work management solution, and then customize it to your team's workflow. Be sure to plan out the entire workflow, including individual tasks and subtasks, task dependencies/predecessors (what needs to be accomplished before a certain task can be addressed), and hours and job roles needed per task.

Standardizing work with templates saves time during planning phases and can help guarantee that final projects get out the door on time.



42% of marketers rarely or only sometimes deliver content consistently.⁹

6. End wasteful meetings

Many companies default to meetings as the way to get visibility into what's going on with work. But the truth is that status meetings often waste more time than they save and do little to provide greater insight into work. In fact, marketers can spend as much as 42 percent of their workday sitting in meetings instead of actually doing work.¹⁰

Where possible, minimize meetings by investing in a real-time online collaboration tool that gives your team a way to get status updates, review work, approve projects, and discuss issues. Although it sounds counterintuitive, minimizing meetings reduces chaos while increasing work speed, especially when meetings are replaced with a single online solution. An effective collaboration solution makes it easy for your team to communicate in the context of the project, and enables managers to see the status of the team's work as the work is happening so you know projects will be delivered on time.



31 hours per month, per company, are spent in unproductive meetings.¹¹



45% of workers feel overwhelmed by the number of meetings they attend.¹²



56% of creative professionals consider unproductive meetings as one of their top work inefficiencies.¹³

7. Invest in a Digital Asset Management system

For many teams, assets live everywhere, which means teams struggle with version control and with tracking who has what. Consider this: If five people on your team spend one hour a week for a year searching for digital files, your team will have lost 1.63 months in wasted time. That's why a digital asset management (DAM) system can be so valuable. It will allow you to store, control access to, and distribute your team's files and assets. It will save even more time if you make sure it integrates easily with the other tools your team uses.

An integrated DAM system can provide teams more visibility and quicker access to their assets by offering a protected, organized repository for all digital files, where the whole team can upload, tag, store, search, and share.

1.63 

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8. Invest in digital proofing

One of the most frustrating steps in a creative workflow is the review and approval process. Creatives often wait several days to hear back from stakeholders once they've delivered a draft—whether it's because someone simply forgot to provide it or because there are a number of approvers involved in the process. And when they finally do review the piece, the designers have a mountain of feedback and edits to incorporate at once, sorting through which comments are repetitive or unproductive.

Eliminate the wasted time and miscommunications by using a digital proofing tool. Digital online proofing makes reviews and approvals simple and efficient. All collaboration, comments, and corrections occur immediately, are visible to everyone, and are available in real time from anywhere in the world in an easily-accessible, sharable view.

It's been shown that teams that use a digital proofing tool spend 59 percent less time managing proofs.¹⁴ Digital proofing eliminates the need for email or red pens and printed drafts to communicate feedback. Instead, it captures everyone's review in one place (and multiple people can review at the same time!), making it easy for your team to compare notes, track changes, and stay on schedule.

“Companies that use social technologies can realize faster, more efficient, more effective collaboration.”

– McKinsey Global Institute.¹⁵

9. Use creative briefs

How many times have you seen it happen? A designer on your team submits a first draft to an internal client after hours of hard work, and the client returns the draft with so many changes that it hardly resembles the project your team was asked to deliver. The result is frustration, dissatisfaction, and a lot of rework—a surefire way to miss a deadline and blow a budget.

Creative briefs offer full project understanding from the first submission, so your team understands the who, what, why, when, and where of the project. It creates a central reference point where both your team and the client can refer to the details of the request and reduce the delays that result from too much rework. Or, make the process even easier with a work management solution that includes customizable creative briefs built into the request process, helping your team gather all the information they need from the start.



Creative briefs guarantee better quality work and reduce schedule delays that happen as a result of too much rework.

10. Centralize requests in one place

The request process is where the corporate creative workflow starts and, sadly, it's also where order ends. Too often requests come in for many projects simultaneously. When requests come from all over the place—like personal emails, IM, or sticky notes—you can count on the process being one ambiguous, chaotic mess. Disorganized requests can lead to confusion among your team about how to prioritize work, resulting in working on the wrong project in the wrong order, and causing fire drills that inevitably lead to lower quality work, higher likelihood of missing deadlines, and exponentially more stress among team members.

When it comes to request management, the only way to get a handle on it is to standardize and centralize your team's intake process. Designate one way to receive requests—whether with an online form, an email alias, or a work management solution—and then communicate that method to your team and clients. Buy-in is essential to success, which requires respectful and firm enforcement to establish the process.

When all requests are received, assigned, and tracked from one location, it's easy to see what the work is, who is doing it, and when it's due. Now, you can bring clarity to a chaos-prone process and give your team a better chance to produce and deliver work on time.



46%

46% of marketers say a lack of standard processes is one of the biggest inefficiencies to getting work done.¹⁶

11. Appoint a traffic manager

Channeling all requests into one place is a first step to managing them, but you still need someone to be the “eye in the sky” with complete visibility into the team’s priorities and workload from start to finish. Appoint a traffic manager to be the gatekeeper of every request that comes in. It might also be helpful if that person can act as the project manager for ongoing work to manage the workflow of every project for the team.

The project manager can keep track of workloads, appropriately assign tasks, and ensure that projects are completed according to client expectations in a timely manner. Of course, that doesn’t mean you have to run out and spend huge bucks on a certified project manager (PMP) or other credentialed professional. The project manager in this case could be a campaign manager, resource manager, or traffic manager who understands how to organize and manage workflows, projects, and resources to keep the team on task and on time.



The project manager is a team’s gatekeeper with complete visibility into every request that comes to the team.

12. Standardize how you prioritize work

Work is often distributed without considering its strategic value—usually because teams neither have the time nor tools in place to assess value.

Prioritize incoming work using either a scorecard or tiering method. With a scorecard, assign points to requests based on elements such as the requester's role, business strategy impact, and deadlines. Then, distribute the work to your team according to the total number of points assigned to the request. Alternatively, with a tier method, assign Tier 3 as templated, recurring projects; Tier 2 as an existing concept or template applied to new work; and Tier 1 as non-standard, non-iterative work.¹⁷ Either way, top-priority work will always get the right attention.

Without standardized methods, it's easy to fall prey to working on ad hoc requests rather than the most important, strategic work. But having a plan in place to strategically prioritize requests will help identify important work, accurately assess project value, and order tasks by estimated effort, ensuring your team will complete projects on time with time left over for innovation and creativity.



68% of organizations say they have no systematic approach in place to prioritize projects or link them to corporate and strategic goals.¹⁸

13. Adopt Agile Marketing principles

Agile methodology is more than just improving efficiency and visibility. It has also given an increasing number of marketing teams the ability to move more quickly. Your team might not be in a place where they can convert their entire workflow into an Agile approach, but even adopting a few Agile principles can improve speed to market and on-time delivery rates.

- Assign a “scrum master” and adopt a sprint cadence. Sprints ensure that everyone on the team has visibility into which activities have been assigned to whom and that they understand what is expected of the team in a given period of time.
- Hold stand-up meetings. The scrum master can then control the backlog of requests and track progress on the burn-down chart. Much like a project manager, the scrum master has complete visibility into all the requests in the sprint, and understands the workload of everyone on the team.

Together, the sprint and the scrum master role boost productivity, cultivate team unity, and help teams meet deadlines.

80% 80% of marketing leaders said adopting Agile led to an enhanced prioritization of the things that matter.¹⁹

93% 93% of marketing leaders said adopting Agile helped them improve speed to market (ideas, products, or campaigns).²⁰

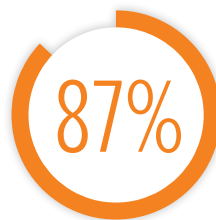
14. Calculate “lights-on” time

Creative teams often struggle to predict accurate time estimates for projects because they lack insight into how much time they actually have to spend on creative work.

“Lights-on” time is an Agile term that means the time a team or individual spends on administrative tasks such as checking email or attending status meetings. It’s the time creatives are not using to do creative work.

Calculating your team’s lights-on time will show many hours each individual can dedicate to strategic projects per week (or per sprint). Assign hour estimates to incoming work based off of the number of resource hours each task will take, and then distribute tasks to your team based on how many hours they have available. [Use this free hour calculator to do the math for you.](#)

By organizing your team’s work and resources according to estimated hours, managers get a better sense of resource availability and project hour requirements. Plus, teams can give clients a more accurate estimate of how much time they need to finish a project.



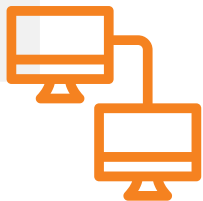
87% of marketing leaders said adopting Agile made their teams more productive.²¹

15. Hold daily 10-minute stand-ups

Much of the confusion that muddles a creative team's workflow comes from a lack of team coordination and communication.

To make Agile sprints more effective—or as a simple best practice for any creative team—hold a daily 10-minute stand-up before diving into the day's work. For the uninitiated, a stand-up is a quick, in-person meeting typically organized by the scrum master or project manager to check the pulse of all the projects in the team's sprint and discuss how to help all team members complete what they've committed to.

Stand-ups give creative team members an opportunity to share and hear the progress of their individual work and the work of others, and offer help to others in order to finish work on time each week.



Even the most sophisticated project management software can't offer the clear communication and resulting mutual understanding that a quick face-to-face interaction can offer.

16. Track your productivity time

When creative teams do not track time, they risk having little concept of their own productivity and efficiency. Interestingly, nearly 50 percent of creative teams don't track time; this means nearly 50 percent likely struggle to understand how they are performing and how they could improve.²²

Require the entire team to track time. Whether in an automated work management solution, or by other means, make sure it's a user-friendly, unobtrusive method so your team can maximize work time and reclaim creative time.

Tracking time provides a basis for assessing most key performance indicators (KPIs), which in turn gives creative team leaders a true understanding of the efficiency of their teams and provides data that can be used in chargeback billing.

“Time tracking has illustrated just how much my team does on a weekly basis. Plus, it provides insight into whose projects require the most time.”

– Denis Schiller, Copywriter, Advance Auto Parts

17. Know your current on-time delivery rate

Once your team has instituted time tracking, measuring other key performance indicators (KPIs) becomes a simple managerial task. One useful KPI you can start tracking right now is your team's on-time delivery rate.

Track how often projects are delivered on time, late, or ahead of schedule. If the results are impressive, make sure your team is praised and that other executives hear about it (and keep doing what you're doing). If your team's deliverables are consistently late, identify what's wrong and make a plan to improve.

Like many business matters, understanding historical trends helps predict future performance. Taking account of how long certain types of projects take will help you better prioritize work in the future, enabling your team to more accurately project delivery timelines to meet deadlines more consistently.



73% of CEOs think marketers lack business credibility because they can't prove that they generate business growth.²³

18. Track lead time

Lead time is another indicator of a team's efficiency and refers to how much time should be allotted to kick off a project and then see it through to final delivery. This metric essentially measures how efficiently a creative team executes and delivers projects.

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Stand-ups give creative team members an opportunity to share and hear the progress of their individual work and the work of others, and offer help to others in order to finish work on time each week.



Tracking lead time gives you visibility into the efficiency of your team's workflows and even into the efficiency of individual employees, helping you to more intelligently allocate time and resources for greater productivity and on-time project completion.

19. Understand client satisfaction ratings

Two of the top five challenges of creative services teams stem from internal client relationships, and more than a fourth of creative leaders worry about losing work to external agencies.²⁴ There's no question that the client-creative relationship directly affects corporate creative work.

Measure client satisfaction ratings with regular, short post-project surveys. Ask about overall satisfaction with your team, how your team could improve its service, and if the assets or deliverables met expected outcomes and timelines. Use these results to direct future dialogues with the client and to decide where to dedicate time and resources so your team can focus on delivering good work faster.

2 of the **5** 2 of the top 5 challenges of creative services teams stem from client relationships, and more than 1/4 of creative leaders worry about losing work to external agencies.²⁵

20. Help your team enjoy their work again

Marketers and creative services pros tend to be extremely passionate about their work. But a constant barrage of rush projects, wasted time, and inefficient processes can extinguish that flame, especially when 44 percent of all marketers already feel like they're burning out.²⁶

It's important that your team enjoys what they do while also doing great work. But driving your team to do great work, give 100 percent effort to their job, and execute with speed doesn't have to mean they spend hours of overtime at the office or spin their wheels in inefficient work processes.

Clearly defining workloads, workflows, and project expectations is critical for helping your team strike the work/life balance that results in happier, healthier, and more productive employees. When team members can actually leave work at a reasonable hour to spend more time with family or on leisure activities, they come back to the office refreshed, recharged, and reenergized, ready to produce.



44% of all marketers are facing burnout.²⁷



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