Extensis™

THE HIDDEN RISKS OF
FONT MISUSE SURVEY REPORT

The Obsession is Where it All Begins

Creative professionals love fonts, there's no doubt about it. Fonts to the Graphic Designer are the same as paints are to the Painter: essential tools for their creative work.

And as with anything that one loves, it can easily turn into an obsession. This is where problems can arise: legal, organizational, and even damage to the reputation of your client and professional brand.

With more than 60 million fonts activated across the globe daily and the average collection at more than 4500 fonts, Extensis conducted the survey to help businesses understand how fonts are used, and expose where hidden risks may reside.

We surveyed a broad selection of graphic designers and creative professionals to learn more about their font usage. With over 2,250 responses, we're able to draw some conclusions about how creative pros approach and utilize fonts.
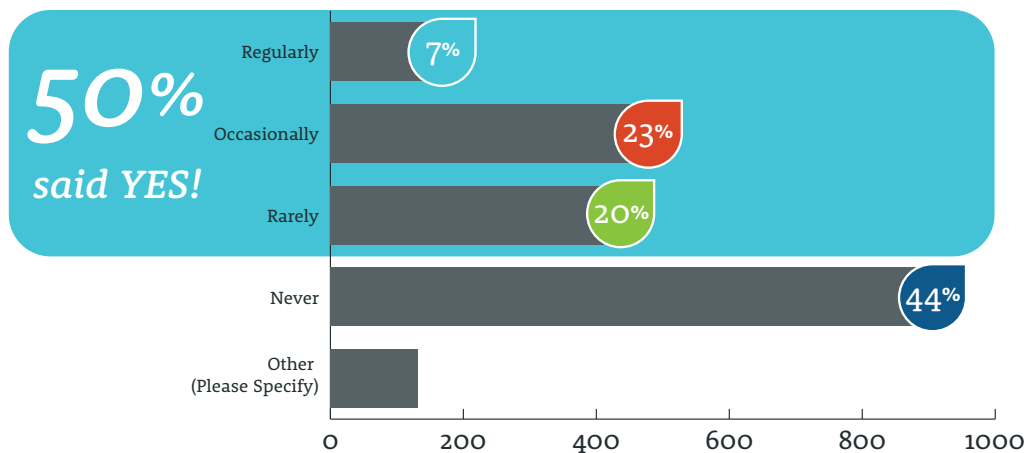
Font Piracy?

Fonts are licensed just like any other piece of software. That being said, over the years fonts haven't always garnered the same respect as other software on a user's system.

Font Trading & Migration

Every designer has his or her favorite fonts to use in projects. When moving from job to job, at one time it was common for a designer to fill up an external hard drive, ZIP disk or floppy with all of their fonts and bring it to the new job.

While many are starting to fully understand the value of fonts and risk of moving fonts in this way, font migration is still an issue.

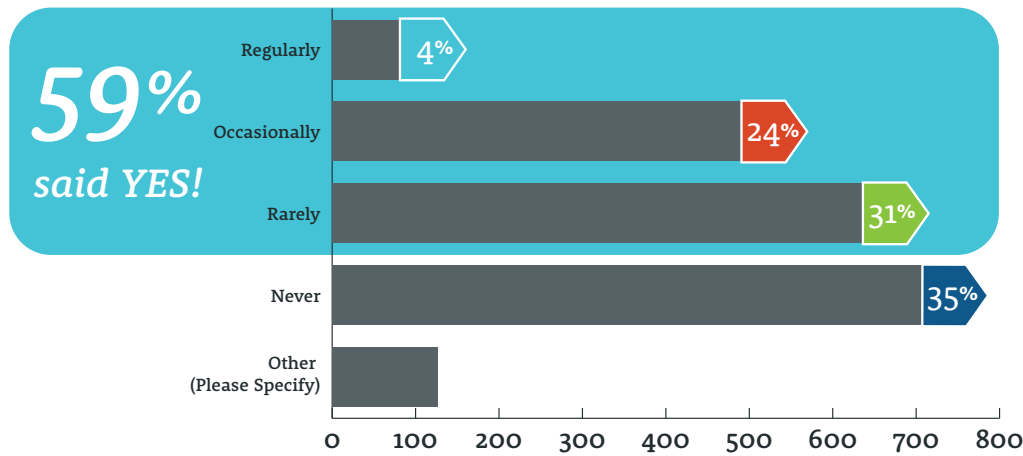*Do designers bring personal fonts into the office?*

50% *said YES!*

Category	Value
Regularly	7%
Occasionally	23%
Rarely	20%
Never	44%
Other (Please Specify)	

Axis: 0, 200, 400, 600, 800, 1000

With that migration, an even larger number of designers said that they had traded fonts with others.

Who took the survey

- *Graphic Designers*
- *University educated or higher*
- *In career 15+ years*
- *No formal font licensing instruction*

Methodology: Survey was taken by a self-selecting group of Extensis customers, and respondents to a public call for feedback on Twitter, design forums, and other social media.

Do designers trade fonts?

59%
said YES!

Regularly	4%
Occasionally	24%
Rarely	31%
Never	35%
Other (Please Specify)	

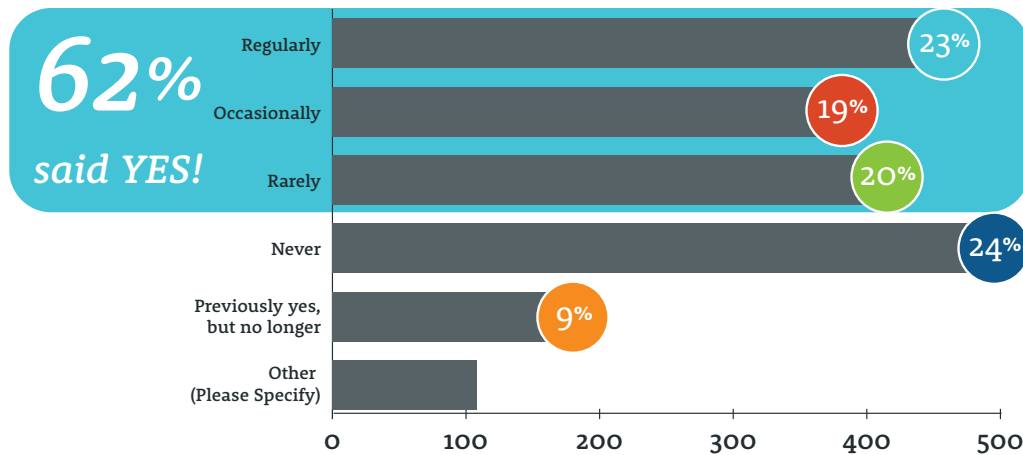0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800

While many employers understand the risk of using fonts that were not appropriately licensed in professional work, these figures may be shocking to some managing creative teams.

Legitimate Use?

Of course, not all transferring of fonts is considered inappropriate or prohibited by a font's End User License Agreement (EULA). For example, many licenses include the ability to transfer an actual font file to a printer or other output provider, as long as the person receiving the font has also purchased a license.

Do designers transfer fonts out of the office?

62%
said YES!

Regularly	23%
Occasionally	19%
Rarely	20%
Never	24%
Previously yes, but no longer	9%
Other (Please Specify)	

0 100 200 300 400 500

Even though many service providers are no longer part of the output process, font transfer to output providers is still a common practice.

There are also an increasing number of open source fonts that allow free transferal. It all depends on the terms of the license, so read them carefully.

Building new creative work

So, with the inherent restrictions on the acquisition of new fonts, how do designers locate fonts for a new project?

- 93% Use fonts they already have
- 56% Download new free fonts
- 26% Purchase fonts before client approval
- 32% "Locate" a copy of the font online

It is that 32% of designers who are willing to locate fonts without the appropriate licensing that should be of concern to businesses, creative agencies and type foundries. Fonts brought into the creative workflow this way may not be integrated into font servers, treated the same way as other assets, and are easy to overlook when it comes time to buy creative assets for a project.
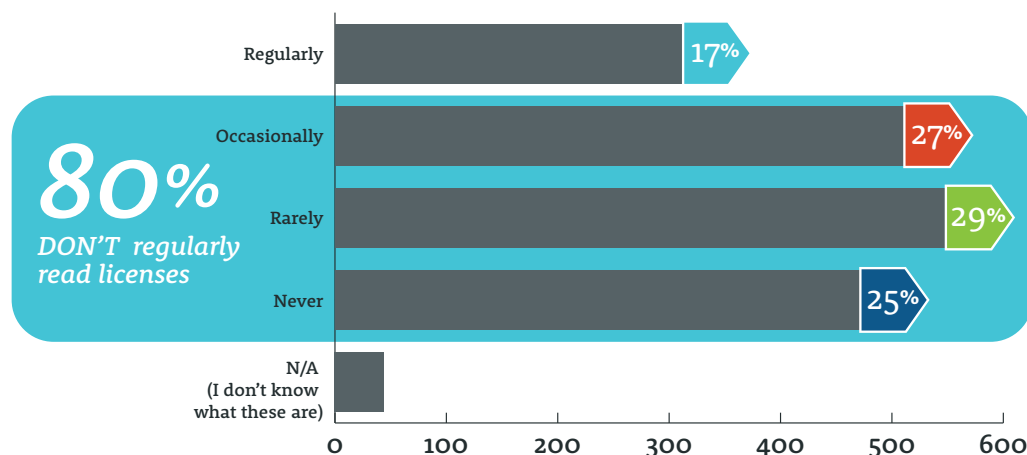
In this example, it is possible that the art director did not budget for a new font purchase, creating an awkward budgeting discussion with the client, or more troubling, a potential surprise call to the client from the type foundry when the unlicensed font is discovered in use.

Font licensing related lawsuits that stretch into the millions of dollars have been brought against corporate brands, creative agencies and publishers in recent years. For example, NBCUniversal has been engaged three times in recent years for lawsuits totaling over $5 million US for font related issues. Obtaining and understanding font licenses is clearly a matter worth serious consideration and attention.
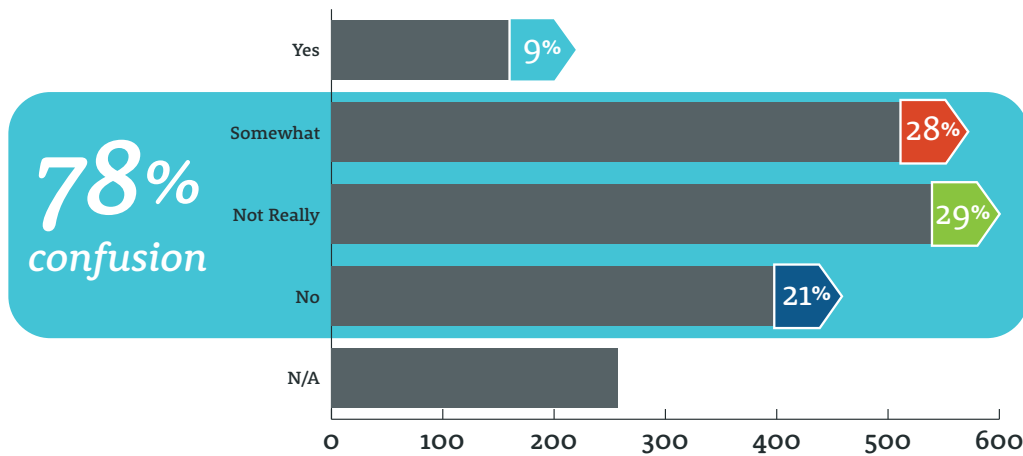
Understanding & Following Font Licenses

It's important to understand how designers view and follow licenses. Much like the licenses that you probably click right though as you are installing new software, font licenses are rarely read, and even more infrequently understood by creative pros. Did you know that some licenses prohibit using fonts in print over a certain size? Or charge more for logo use? If you didn't, you're not alone.
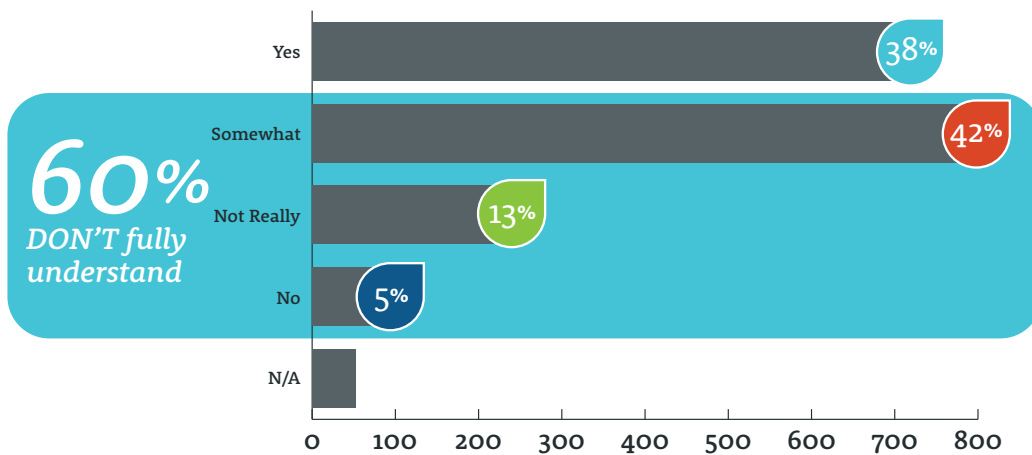
Do designers read font licenses?

Regularly 17%
Occasionally 27%
Rarely 29%
Never 25%
N/A (I don't know what these are)

80% *DON'T regularly read licenses*

0   100   200   300   400   500   600

Are font licenses easy to understand?

78% confusion

|	
Yes	9%
Somewhat	28%
Not Really	29%
No	21%
N/A	

(x-axis: 0, 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600)

Even with this ambiguity in EULA comprehension, designers have no choice but to move forward with their creative work.

Do designers understand what they are licensed to do with fonts?

60% DON'T fully understand

Yes	38%
Somewhat	42%
Not Really	13%
No	5%
N/A	

(x-axis: 0, 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, 800)

Font license comprehension can cause problems at many points in the creative workflow. In addition, because there is no standardization of font licensing, there are potentially many license options available from each foundry – rights to embed fonts into PDFs, use in eBooks, use as web fonts, in packaging, etc. This dizzying array of options from foundries and typography vendors leads to problems tracking what designers can do with each font.

Problems tracking font use options

55% HAVE problems

Yes	28%
Somewhat	27%
Not Really	20%
No	14%
N/A	

(x-axis: 0, 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600)
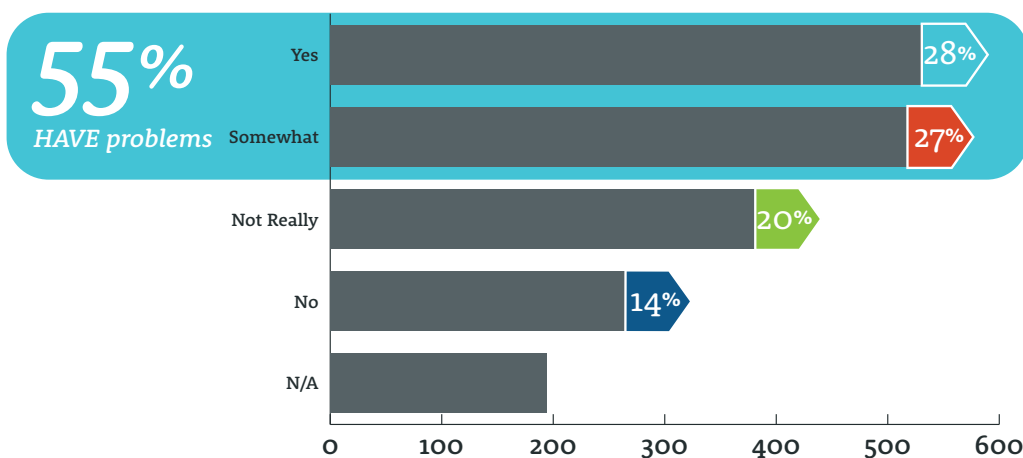
And those who employ creative pros aren't doing much to make usage rights and restrictions clear to designers.

Employers not making usage requirements clear

57%
NOT clear

Yes — 26%
Somewhat — 12%
Not Really — 17%
No — 28%
N/A

0   100   200   300   400   500   600
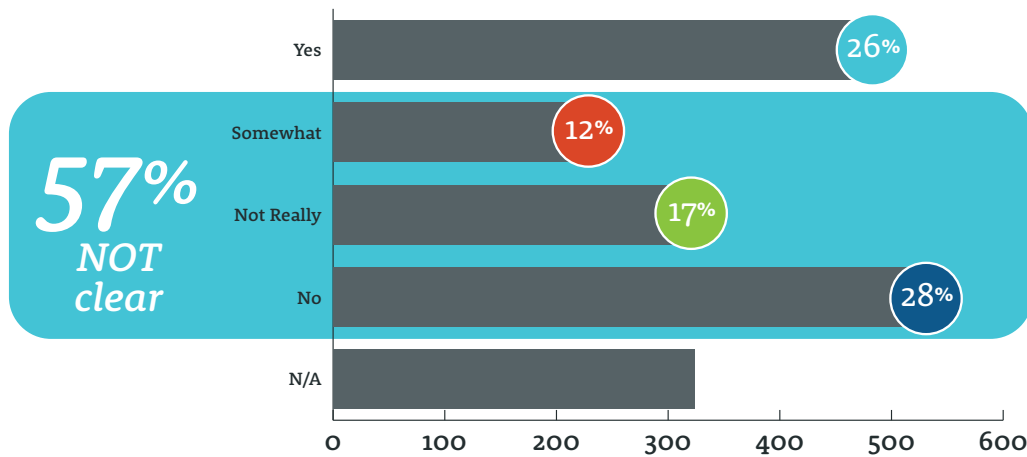
Solving Font EULA Problems in the Creative Workflow

So, what's the best way for employers to solve font EULA problems in the creative workflow?

The first step is to get a handle on the fonts currently in use. How this can work for many organizations is to divide their collection into two groups – known licensed fonts, and fonts of unknown origin. Creative users can then pull from the "known" pile and every time a font from the unknown pile is required, a possible previous purchase can be researched, and if not found, an appropriate license purchased. To do so, most creative groups can benefit from implementing a font server such as Universal Type Server to manage their fonts centrally, and track their licenses.

After implementing a font server, it's a fairly straightforward process to add and track font license information to the font server. Centrally managing these files and the associated EULA details gives the creative user a window into how they can utilize their favorite fonts.

Granted, the implementation of a software solution is never a panacea. It's also important to formally educate every font user in your workflow about the importance of appropriate font licensing. When people fully understand what's at stake, they are less likely to tread in areas that could get your creative team in trouble.

North America: 1.800.796.9798
Europe: +44 (0) 1604 654 270

extensis.com

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