

3 Things Every CMO Should Know

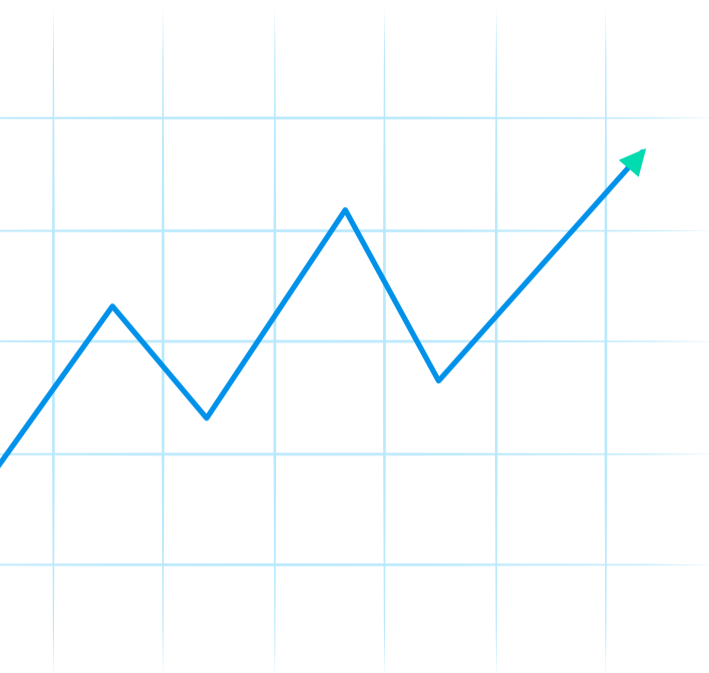
About the Creative Production Process

Marketing is changing beyond recognition.

The proliferation of digital marketing channels has resulted in an explosion of demand for content - designs, websites, ads, multimedia, etc. - from marketing teams. Marketing cycles have shortened dramatically, so marketers need to produce more content in less time. Marketing compliance is also growing exponentially, which requires marketing content to meet strict brand, corporate and regulatory compliance requirements.

Regardless of what type of CMO you are, it's never been more important to understand how all of this creative work comes together as a finished product. The time, effort and resources required adds up to a significant portion of both your headcount and budget.

There is an opportunity in your organization to accelerate creative project delivery, and it's hiding in plain sight - your creative content production, review, and approval processes.



Speed, Quality or Cost? Why Not Everything?

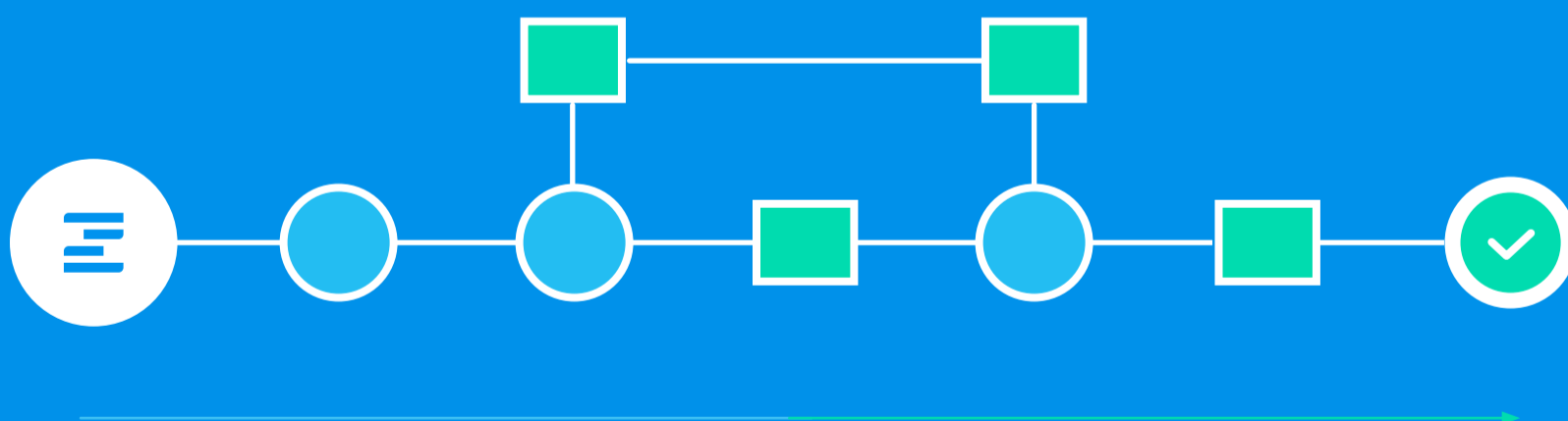
Most teams that produce creative content are spending far too much time on the tasks that surround the creative process. Between sending emails to request (and re-request) feedback, checking on the status of projects, follow up meetings and calls, and coordinating production tasks, it can be difficult for managers to keep a consistent eye on every project that goes through the pipeline. A proper review and approval process including tools can help you eliminate the inefficiencies associated with these tasks, improving project delivery speeds, while improving quality. Fortunately, this can all be accomplished via robust cloud-based applications, which are easy to acquire and adopt.

With your strategic investments in technologies like marketing automation, analytics and project management, you've focused on measurable results. However, there's a good chance that you haven't invested time or resources looking at the creative asset creation and approval process with the same lens.

HERE ARE

THREE THINGS EVERY CMO SHOULD KNOW

ABOUT THE CREATIVE PRODUCTION PROCESS



Revelation #1: Your Creative Review and Approval Processes Are Most Likely Inefficient

If you haven't already taken the time to audit your creative review processes and identify areas for improvement, you might be shocked to find out just how much time is spent waiting for emails to be responded to, feedback to be implemented and for creative work to be approved for production..

Let's take a look at a common example; your creative team is putting together a set of banner ads for a new campaign, each requiring feedback after the first draft. Once the team of 5-6 people have been emailed the assets to review, there is often no process or oversight of when or how team members will provide that feedback. As a result, feedback trickles in over the course of several days across several different channels. Some might send their feedback through email. Another may make a comment in the company Slack channel. One might mention a few things when they run into the designer at the water cooler. There are even "traditionalists" who still print out each asset and mark them up by hand. Some of that feedback might even be for older versions of the same asset.

How can you manage that process for efficiency or compliance?

Companies that produce any volume of creative content are better served by utilizing a centralized location to collect feedback, apply markups and make comments tied to specific versions. The alternative, trying to manage this process through email, is nearly impossible.

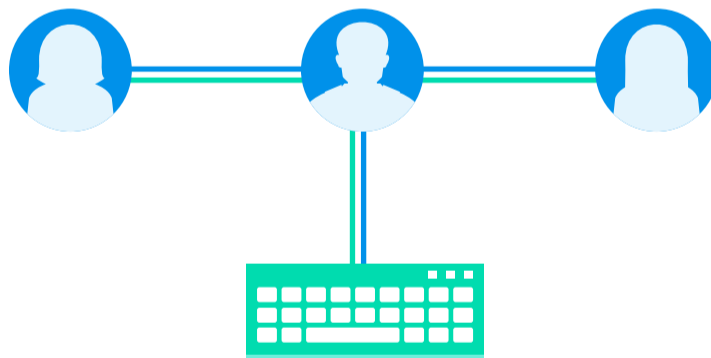
There are many opportunities in the content review and approval process to increase efficiency. **These include but are not limited to:**

- [Accelerating the Feedback Cycle Through Collaboration](#)
- [Improving the Quality of Feedback With Context](#)

Accelerating the Feedback Cycle Through Collaboration

Creative production teams, to no fault of their own, spend a lot of time waiting for feedback, particularly in marketing departments where high volumes of creative assets are being produced. This time isn't lost, as there are many other projects to move along, but key projects can lose momentum and are often subject to delay.

There is also a risk to moving forward without proper feedback. If stakeholder feedback arrives after a new version has been implemented, pieces may be published prematurely and without proper oversight. Now you have a situation that causes costly rework to come into play.



Creative asset approval and review should be a collaborative process, with multiple stakeholders working together to produce an end product that hits the mark. But when marketing teams handle their feedback serially through email or chat programs like Slack you lose all the benefits that a collaborative environment offers.

Providing a system that centralizes feedback in a common interface, allowing everyone involved to benefit from the feedback and insights of team members will accelerate the feedback cycle.

Improving the Quality of Feedback With Context

When feedback and revisions are handled through channels like email, there is a good chance that creative teams are not receiving effective feedback. Non-specific, vague comments, references to other work not readily accessible or even a comment as simple as “make the logo bigger”, does not give your creative teams the information required to improve upon their initial work.

Ineffective feedback not only hinders the finished quality of each piece, it slows down the entire creative production process as it may take several rounds of revisions before the final product reaches an appropriate quality level.

Building upon a centralized feedback model, providing highly precise in-context feedback on the creative asset itself in the form of markups and comments provides clear, unambiguous direction to all team members. This typically means that everyone is seeing the creative asset in the same manner, which cuts down on the variables that can cause ineffective feedback.

79%

encounter regular issues with getting feedback on their creative projects.

55%

point to vague, or non-actionable feedback as the challenge

24%

identify the key stakeholders in a project as the role most frequently holding up the feedback cycle

Revelation #2: Review and approval is not a PM activity

It's easy to see why a CMO might look at their creative review and approval challenge as just another project management problem to solve. They are indeed projects and require the oversight and management that any other project would require to receive a favorable outcome. However, one fact that many overlook is that creative content production is unique in both process and delivery.

The creation of creative assets are typically highly-specific activities, requiring more focused collaboration and feedback to deliver a suitable final result. Creative asset approval requires input from multiple departments brand, account, legal, compliance, etc. with very specific changes and revisions required of your creators.

Without a proper system in place, it's too easy for these requirements to get lost in the shuffle. Creative content approval goes well beyond simply checking a box to mark that something has been reviewed. Often, multiple versions must be created, compared and decided upon. The review process must incorporate as much specific feedback as possible throughout the process.

20%

of surveyed say they use project management software for the review and approval process.

From the aforementioned survey; interestingly, 20% of those surveyed say they use project management software for the review and approval process. Yet the overwhelming majority of those marketers (80%) still rely on email as well!

So, even by attempting to accomplish the creative review and approval process via traditional project management, email remains a consistent roadblock to efficiency and clarity.

80%

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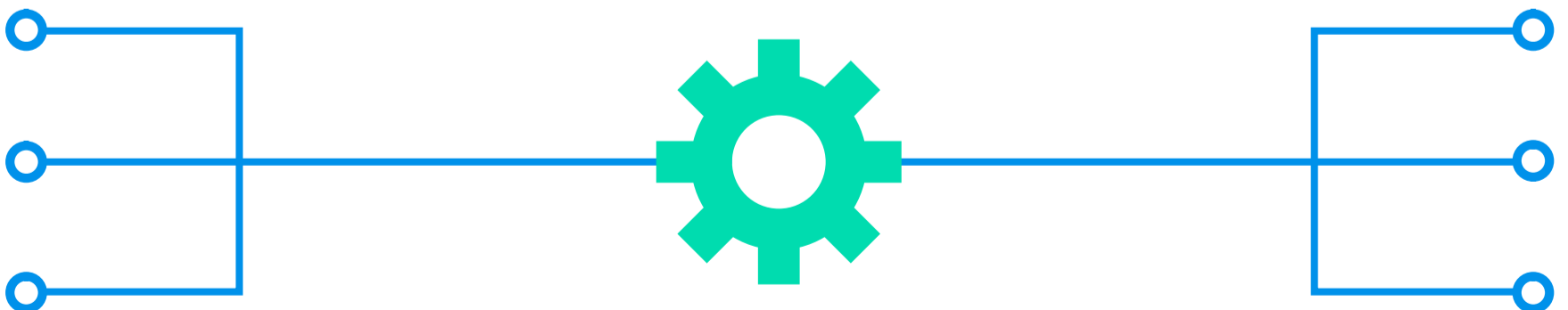
Treating creative content approval like any other project and managing it the same way is going to result in a lower quality work product and slower production times.

Revelation #3: Current Processes Lack Control & Compliance

The biggest issue with the current approach ccp teams take to deliver assets is the lack of control they have during the delivery. Depending on your industry and type of content you produce, there are a myriad of issues that must be accounted for during the production process including disclosures, copyright and trademark considerations, regulatory compliance, and stakeholder involvement.

The 2018 In House Creative Agency Report found that 55% of respondents don't feel all of their review processes are documented sufficiently.

Many of these issues will require training for your teams and ongoing input from legal teams to keep your company "safe". Without the ability to view all of your projects from an easy-to-use interface, brand and regulatory compliance enforcement can be difficult. You'll have to rely on whatever manager is overseeing each project through email to spot and curtail compliance issues or seek out consultation from the right people within your organization. This can lead to mistakes that put your company at risk.



In the legal and medical industries, regulatory compliance is critical. There are specific considerations for how you share information, the promises that you make to your clients and how data can be stored and shared. With steep fines for violating these regulations, even inadvertently, it is absolutely critical that you give yourself the best possible opportunity to avoid mistakes and comply.

HIPAA violation fines, for instance, can range from \$100 to \$50,000 per data record, with a maximum penalty of \$1.5 million per year. Enduring large fines like these are definitely not worth the costs savings associated with foregoing a proofing and content production management solution that helps your legal teams spot these issues before they are approved.

It is absolutely critical that you have the proper workflow tools incorporated within the creative review and approval tools to get all stakeholders involved in the sign off of each project, including stakeholders with a focus on brand management, compliance and legal. According to Ziflow's survey results, captured in our "From Chaos to Compliance" ebook, 78 percent of all work performed today by creative marketers is subject to at least one type of rule.

Effective control and compliance might be, simultaneously, the biggest opportunity and liability in your creative review and approval process.

"2018 In-House Creative Industry Report." <http://www.creativeindustryreport.com/>

"From Chaos to Compliance - Ziflow." <https://www.ziflow.com/survey-ebook>

SOLVING



THE CHALLENGE

Solving the Challenge

In creative content production, your managers and stakeholders must be closely aligned and involved in the process, requiring feedback from several parties outside of typical creative considerations.

Online proofing solutions streamline the process of reviewing, revising, and approving creative content. Regardless of the channels in which the content will be distributed, an online proofing system helps limit errors, increase quality, ensure compliance and improve production throughput across the board.

In addition, online proofing systems allow team members to focus on their core goals and strengths. Your production managers won't have to frustratingly sift through emails to find information about their projects, and your creatives and designers can focus on the process of producing high-value, creative content and spend less time interpreting ineffective or vague feedback.



Simply put — online proofing systems replace many of the analog activities that your team would be forced to engage in without one. Your production teams receive more high-value feedback without the back-and-forth email exchanges. Your managers have a simple, straight-forward way to manage the dozens of different open creative content projects at any time, and your stakeholders have a streamlined way to provide feedback and ensure compliance.

Online proofing makes your marketing teams more efficient. Projects are approved more quickly and with improved quality. Without the right tools, you leave your teams trying to cobble together inefficient review and approval processes that will result in overlooked details, lower quality work product and a more frustrating experience for all your teams.

YOUR NEXT STEPS



For CMOs that want to improve their creative content production processes, there are active steps that you can take today to start evaluating whether or not the investment is right for your company and audit your current processes.



Step #1:

Talk with Your Team About Your Creative Content Review Process

If you don't have an in-depth understanding of how your creative content review process works, learning about that is the best place to start. Speak earnestly with your team about your current processes. Ask them about what frustrates them and where they think improvements could be made.

Don't just solicit feedback from your content production teams either. Speak with all stakeholders, including legal and brand. You will quickly find that the issues and concerns will differ among the different job titles within your team and each will have their own unique complaints and recommendations for improving the process, many of which can be improved using online proofing software.

One common issue that we often find when onboarding companies to Ziflow is that without a software solution and defined workflow, teams often end up playing fast-and-loose with content production processes out of necessity. There are just too many email threads, stakeholders to contact, and feedback coming from all angles to reliably conduct a defined process through email.



Step #2: If Email Is Your Feedback Mechanism, Find Out Why

Most of the time, if you are handling complex creative projects through email it's because it is either the most convenient option, or a lack of other tools necessitate it. What is the reason your company runs its creative content production through email? Have other options been tried? What were the outcomes of those attempts?

Email is a critical component of any creative production operation. You'll need to use it to coordinate with individuals outside of your review system, but it's not a suitable platform for managing dozens of different creative asset projects with a whole host of creators, stakeholders and managers that must be involved in the process. In understanding why your team is currently using email, you'll be able to better identify the issues that need solving.

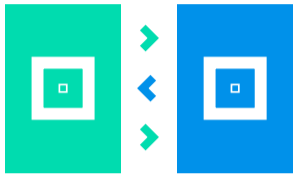


Step #3: Understand Your Approval Processes. How is “Done” Defined?

What is the process your internal teams use to approve or "finish" a specific asset. Does that approval process differ from project to project due to a lack of consistency, processes, or tools?

Understanding the process of creative project completion is critical to identifying the gaps in your review and approval process. It also can be insightful when considering a switch to online proofing software because you can begin to flesh out the workflows that will need to be duplicated in the proofing solution.

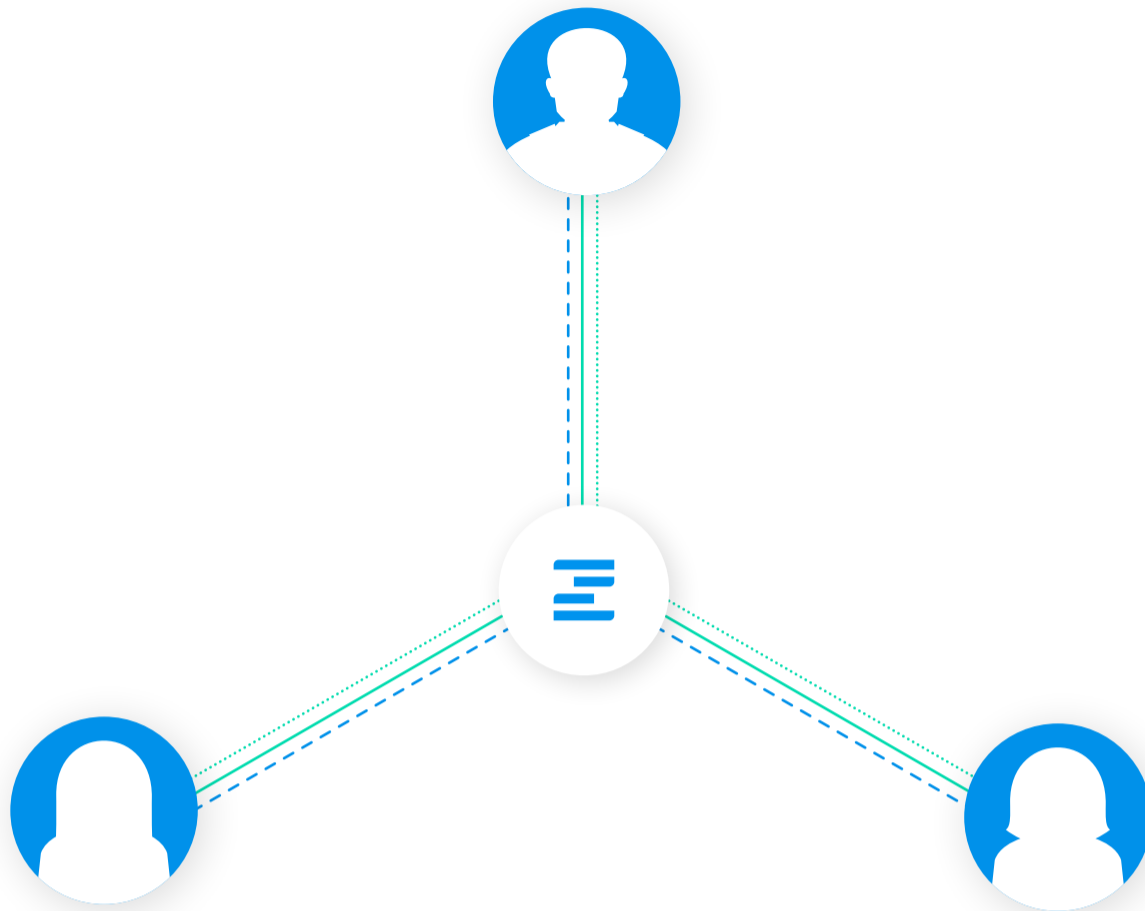
Being able to put together a refined workflow for each project is one of the biggest benefits of using an online proofing solution. When the requirements are pre-defined, every box must be ticked before a project can be signed off by your production management team. This will help establish consistency improve overall quality among your creative content projects.



Step #4: Run a Comparison Test Between Two Similar Projects

If you aren't 100 percent convinced that an online proofing solution will improve efficiency and improve quality — test it out for yourself. Run tests for two different but similar projects. Have one handled through email, and the other through Ziflow.

In conducting this practice run, you'll be able to see how an online proofing solution can fill the gaps in your production process, give more stakeholders the ability to participate, and result in a better finished product. Running these tests side-by-side will let you see for yourself where inefficiencies lie in your production processes and how online proofing software can help you solve those inefficiencies. A full project run should be more than enough to see the benefits in online proofing and give your teams the ability to provide feedback on online proofing.



Conclusion

An online proofing solution should be an integral component of any creative asset production operation. It allows your production managers and stakeholders to deliver more refined feedback without the back-and-forth in disjointed email threads and allows your creators to focus on what they do best.

Ziflow is designed to help creative content production teams streamline and improve their approval processes. An online proofing solution will help your company save time, improve quality and involve more stakeholders in the creative asset production process.

Ziflow online proofing was used for the review and approval of this ebook.

Our proofing scorecard:



3 versions shared with 6 total team members



36 comments, 3 attachments to comments, 26 replies and 12 upvotes  to comments



1 changes required decision, 3 approval decisions

About Ziflow

Ziflow is an online proofing application for marketers, which streamlines the review and approval of creative content to deliver marketing projects faster. We do this by improving collaboration, centralizing feedback and eliminating manual steps through automated workflow. Ziflow replaces email, printouts and other ad-hoc methods for reviewing creative content with an enterprise-ready, pure-play online proofing solution.



For more information, please visit www.ziflow.com