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21 Survey Questions
Dear Alums,
Following, please find our third ever Brandcenter Alumni Salary Survey report. The first survey was done in 2013, and we plan to do this survey every two years.

I want to start by saying a HUGE thanks to:
- Stacy Thomas Elsbury (ST, 2001), Jessica Collins (ST, 2010), and Noel Van Aartrijk (ST, 2016) of Good Run Research for helping me improve the survey questions and logic as well as analyze the results. If your agency or company is looking for a kick-ass research partner, you should check them out! They also have an amazing event space here in RVA. Contact: noel@goodrunresearch.com.
- Diana Tung Ojibway (AD, 2002) for turning my boring Word document and tables into beautifully-designed infographics.
- Katherine Keogh and Hawley Smyth for proofing this document.
- All of our alums who contributed to this report. I am so grateful to you for everything you do to give back to our program, including taking this survey.

Purpose:
To help our alumni understand average salaries for their disciplines and prepare them for annual reviews, job changes, salary negotiations, etc. We also took a look at things like how happy you are at your job and how many hours you work each week.

Methodology:
Online survey, fielded September 2017. 637 respondents.

Response Rate:
Respondents came from the following tracks:
- 23% Art Direction
- 27% Copywriting
- 25% Strategy
- 15% Creative Brand Management
- 10% Experience Design/Creative Technology

n.b. The CBM track wasn’t offered until 2005 and Experience Design until 2008, so there are fewer alumni in those tracks.

Respondents came from the following graduation classes:
- 7% Class of 1998 – 2002
- 13% Class of 2003 – 2007
- 33% Class of 2008 – 2012
- 47% Class of 2013 – 2017

n.b. The earlier classes were much smaller in terms of number of graduates than the more recent classes. For example, the Class of 1998 had 48 graduates. The Class of 2017 had 102 graduates.

Questions/Comments:
Please let me know if you have questions, comments or suggestions about this survey or future ones.

Best,
Ashley Sommardahl
Director of Student Affairs and Industry Outreach
asommardahl@vcu.edu
OVERALL FINDINGS

FIVE TRACKS OF STUDY

AD
Art Direction
1st class graduated in 1998

CW
Copywriting
1st class graduated in 1998

XD
Experience Design
(formerly known as Creative Technology)
1st class graduated in 2010

CBM/ST
Client-side
1st CBM class graduated in 2007

CBM/ST
Agency-side
1st ST class graduated in 1998

SPECIAL NOTE REGARDING CBM/ST TRACKS

The information in this report is generally broken out by track/discipline. As you may know, there is a great deal of “crossover” among the CBM and ST tracks in terms of the jobs they hold. For this reason, I segmented them in the following way:

• CBM/ST working on the CLIENT-side in brand management, product management, and/or marketing for companies – e.g. Facebook, Nike, Apple
• CBM/ST working on the AGENCY-side in strategic planning, account management, hybrid planning/management roles, and/or brand consultancy.

AVERAGE ANNUAL SALARIES

Q: What is your current annual salary? (open-ended)

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>$56,522</td>
<td>$71,904</td>
<td>$114,985</td>
<td>$154,079</td>
<td>$186,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CW</td>
<td>$55,662</td>
<td>$78,529</td>
<td>$123,806</td>
<td>$146,030</td>
<td>$205,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XD</td>
<td>$88,125</td>
<td>$86,972</td>
<td>$132,000</td>
<td>$132,250</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBM/ST (client-side)</td>
<td>$63,750</td>
<td>$90,875</td>
<td>$132,000</td>
<td>$132,250</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBM/ST (agency-side)</td>
<td>$59,926</td>
<td>$71,570</td>
<td>$101,437</td>
<td>$151,725</td>
<td>$231,666</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n.b. This analysis does not include freelance salaries. In the 2015 report, we noticed an increase in full-time freelancers so we developed questions specific for freelancers. You can check out the Freelance section on page 19.

Prepared by VCU Brandcenter and Good Run Research
**JOB HAPPINESS**

Q: How would you describe the way you feel about your current job? (multiple choice)

- **83%** answered they “like” or “love” their job.
- **67%**
- **74%**
- **85%**
- **75%**

**WORK/LIFE BALANCE**

Q: In this industry, we understand that workload varies depending on things like current projects, production, new business, etc. ON AVERAGE, how many hours per week do you work? (multiple choice)

- **46%** work more than 50 hours per week.
- **44%** work more than 50 hours per week.
- **23%** work more than 50 hours per week.
- **22%** work more than 50 hours per week.
- **31%** work more than 50 hours per week.

**JOB TENURE**

(all respondents combined)

Q: How long have you been at your current job? (multiple choice)

- **37%** have been at current job less than 1 year.
- **33%** have been at current job 1-2 years.
- **22%** have been at current job 3-5 years.
- **6%** have been at current job 6-8 years.
- **2%** have been at current job 9+ years.
JOB HUNT
(plan to look for new job next year)

Q: Do you plan to actively look for a new job this year? (yes or no)

- AD: 37%
- CW: 38%
- XD: 37%
- CBM/ST (Client-side): 37%
- CBM/ST (Agency-side): 40%

REASONS FOR JOB HUNT
(across all respondents)

What are the reasons you are looking for a new job? (check all that apply)

- Top 4 Reasons for Planning to Look for a New Job
  - I WANT A HIGHER SALARY.
  - I WANT TO TRY A NEW AGENCY/COMPANY.
  - I WANT A HIGHER TITLE.
  - I WANT TO FEEL MORE CHALLENGED.

NUMBER OF OFFICIAL JOB OFFERS BY GRADUATION

The class of 2016 had 101 students total. 72 of them answered this survey.

The class of 2017 had 102 students total. 61 of them answered this survey.

ART DIRECTION $54,615
COPYWRITING $57,615
EXPERIENCE DESIGN $73,750
CBM/ST (client-side) NOT ENOUGH DATA
CBM/ST (agency-side) $61,076

The class of 2016 had 101 students total. 72 of them answered this survey.

Of those 72, 47% said they had earned a promotion and/or raise within their first year of work.
### Findings by Track

#### Employer Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freelance/Self-Employed</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start-Up</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Agency</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client-Side</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-Service Ad Agency</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Average Annual Salary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JR.</td>
<td>$56,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MID.</td>
<td>$71,904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR.</td>
<td>$114,985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIR.</td>
<td>$154,079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXEC.</td>
<td>$186,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Job Happiness

- 27% Love It.
- 56% Like It.
- 7% Meh. I’m Indifferent.
- 7% Don’t Like It.
- 3% Hate It.

#### Weekly Hours Worked

- 16% work 40 (or below 40) hours per week.
- 38% work 41-50 hours per week.
- 31% work 51-60 hours per week.
- 13% work 61-70 hours per week.
- 2% work 71+ hours per week.
YEARS AT CURRENT JOB

37% have been at current job less than 1 year.
28% have been at current job 1-2 years.
24% have been at current job 3-5 years.
7% have been at current job 6-8 years.
4% have been at current job 9+ years.

JOB SEARCHING

37% plan to actively look for a new job in the next year.

GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

57% female
43% male

WHERE THEY WORK

Seattle 2%
Portland 4%
SF 15%
LA 12%
NYC 28%
Washington DC 4%
Richmond 8%
Chicago 6%
Other 21%
EMPLOYER TYPE
- 16% FREELANCE/SELF-EMPLOYED
- 3% START-UP
- 4% OTHER
- 4% DIGITAL AGENCY
- 9% CLIENT-SIDE
- 64% FULL-SERVICE AD AGENCY

AVERAGE ANNUAL SALARY
- JR. $55,682
- MID. $78,529
- SR. $123,806
- DIR. $146,030
- EXEC. $205,875

JOB HAPPINESS
- 27% LOVE IT
- 40% LIKE IT
- 17% MEH. I'M INDIFFERENT
- 13% DON'T LIKE IT
- 3% HATE IT

WEEKLY HOURS WORKED
- 11% work 40 (or below 40) hours per week.
- 45% work 41-50 hours per week.
- 29% work 51-60 hours per week.
- 10% work 61-70 hours per week.
- 5% work 71+ hours per week.

Prepared by VCU Brandcenter and Good Run Research.
YEARS AT CURRENT JOB

33% have been at current job less than 1 year.
31% have been at current job 1-2 years.
30% have been at current job 3-5 years.
5% have been at current job 6-8 years.
1% have been at current job 9+ years.

JOB SEARCHING

38% plan to actively look for a new job in the next year.

GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

37% female
63% male

WHERE THEY WORK

Chicago 6%
LA 15%
Portland 3%
SF 11%
Austin 2%
Richmond 6%
NYC 32%
New York City
Richmond
Atlanta 2%
Boston 2%
Washington DC 2%
Chicago 6%
Other 19%
EXPERIENCE DESIGN

EMPLOYER TYPE
- 3% FREELANCE/SELF-EMPLOYED
- 8% START-UP
- 8% OTHER
- 24% DIGITAL AGENCY
- 15% CLIENT-SIDE
- 32% FULL-SERVICE AD AGENCY
- 10% BRAND/STRATEGY CONSULTANCY

AVERAGE ANNUAL SALARY
- JR. $68,125
- MID. $86,972
- SR. $119,642
- DIR. $145,429
- EXEC. NOT ENOUGH DATA

JOB HAPPINESS
- 35% LOVE IT.
- 39% LIKE IT.
- 22% MEH. I’M INDIFFERENT.
- 2% DON’T LIKE IT.
- 2% HATE IT.

WEEKLY HOURS WORKED
- 25% work 40 (or below 40) hours per week.
- 52% work 41-50 hours per week.
- 17% work 51-60 hours per week.
- 4% work 61-70 hours per week.
- 2% work 71+ hours per week.
YEARS AT CURRENT JOB

49% have been at current job less than 1 year.
30% have been at current job 1-2 years.
18% have been at current job 3-5 years.
3% have been at current job 6-8 years.

JOB SEARCHING

37% plan to actively look for a new job in the next year.

GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

42% female
58% male

WHERE THEY WORK

Seattle 6%
SF 11%
LA 8%
Boulder/Denver 8%
NYC 24%
Richmond 16%
Washington DC 5%
Atlanta 5%
Other 14%
The information in this report is generally broken out by track/discipline. As you may know, there is a great deal of “crossover” among the CBM and ST tracks in terms of the jobs they hold. For this reason, I segmented them in the following way:

- CBM/ST working on the **CLIENT**-side in brand management, product management, and/or marketing for companies – e.g. Facebook, Nike, Apple
- CBM/ST working on the **AGENCY**-side in strategic planning, account management, hybrid planning/management roles, and/or brand consultancy.

### Average Annual Salary

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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIR.</td>
<td>$132,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXEC.</td>
<td>NOT ENOUGH DATA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Job Happiness

- 22% LOVE IT.
- 63% LIKE IT.
- 8% MEH. I’M INDIFFERENT.
- 7% DON’T LIKE IT.
- 0% HATE IT.

### Weekly Hours Worked

- 34% work **40 (or below 40) hours** per week.
- 44% work **41-50 hours** per week.
- 20% work **51-60 hours** per week.
- 2% work **61-70 hours** per week.
- 0% work **71+ hours** per week.
YEARS AT CURRENT JOB

- 34% have been at current job less than 1 year.
- 32% have been at current job 1-2 years.
- 15% have been at current job 3-5 years.
- 7% have been at current job 6-8 years.
- 12% have been at current job 9+ years.

37% PLAN TO ACTIVELY LOOK FOR A NEW JOB IN THE NEXT YEAR.

GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

- 55% female
- 45% male

WHERE THEY WORK

- Seattle 7%
- SF 18%
- LA 7%
- Chicago 2%
- Boston 2%
- 2% NYC
- 9% Washington DC
- 27% Richmond
- 26% Other
EMPLOYER TYPE

- 8% Freelance/self-employed
- 4% Start-up
- 15% Other
- 12% Digital agency
- 9% Brand/strategy consultancy
- 50% Full-service ad agency
- 2% Research or trend reporting company

AVERAGE ANNUAL SALARY

- JR.: $59,926
- MID.: $71,570
- SR.: $101,437
- DIR.: $151,728
- EXEC.: $231,666

JOB HAPPINESS

- 23% Love it.
- 52% Like it.
- 13% Meh, I'm indifferent.
- 10% Don't like it.
- 2% Hate it.

WEEKLY HOURS WORKED

- 20% work 40 (or below 40) hours per week.
- 49% work 41-50 hours per week.
- 25% work 51-60 hours per week.
- 4% work 61-70 hours per week.
- 2% work 71+ hours per week.

Prepared by VCU Brandcenter and Good Run Research.
YEARS AT CURRENT JOB

- 39% have been at current job less than 1 year.
- 37% have been at current job 1-2 years.
- 17% have been at current job 3-5 years.
- 5% have been at current job 6-8 years.
- 2% have been at current job 9+ years.

JOB SEARCHING

37% PLAN TO ACTIVELY LOOK FOR A NEW JOB IN THE NEXT YEAR.

GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

- 57% female
- 43% male

WHERE THEY WORK

- Seattle 4%
- Portland 3%
- Boulder/Denver 3%
- SF 9%
- LA 10%
- Austin 3%
- Chicago 5%
- NYC 26%
- Washington DC 7%
- Richmond 10%
- Other 17%

Prepared by VCU Brandcenter and Good Run Research
Anecdotally, we noticed a trend that many of our alums are starting their own businesses and/or have goals to start their own businesses one day. In response to that trend, we added some questions to the survey re entrepreneurship.

**Q:** HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED STARTING UP YOUR OWN THING AND BECOMING AN ENTREPRENEUR? (YES OR NO)

OVERALL

- **YES** 77%
- **NO** 23%

**ANSWERED “YES”** BY GENDER

- **44%** female
- **56%** male

**ANSWERED “YES”** BY TRACKS

- **AD** Art Direction: 68%
- **CW** Copywriting: 62%
- **XD** Experience Design: 76%
- **CBM** Creative Brand Management: 83%
- **ST** Strategy: 67%

**ANSWERED “YES”** BY CURRENT JOB LEVEL

**NOTE:** I assumed most alums who were considering starting their own business would likely be at the Senior or Director level. It’s interesting that alums at the Mid and Junior levels are seriously considering this. Maybe by the time alums get to the Mid or Senior level, they’ve garnered enough experience and developed a strong enough network to go out on their own.
Q: WHAT IS THE ONE THING HOLDING YOU BACK FROM PULLING THE ENTREPRENEUR TRIGGER? (OPEN-ENDED)

TOP ANSWERS:

- **FINANCES** - “I need to pay off loans and save more or find external funding.”
- **CAREER/EXPERIENCE** - “I’m still learning from smart people around me. I’d like to get a few more years in before I feel confident enough to lead myself.”
- **TIME** - “I don’t have the time to build it on the side.”
- **RISK** - “The unknown. Not being on stable enough ground to take the risk.”
- **NETWORK** - team and clients “Every successful agency starts with a client and trusted partners. I want to find the right people to work with.”

FOR THOSE CONSIDERING DOING THEIR OWN THING, WHAT IS YOUR SELF-DESCRIBED JOB HAPPINESS?

- **23%** LOVE IT.
- **52%** LIKE IT.
- **14%** MEH. I’M INDIFFERENT.
- **9%** DON’T LIKE IT.
- **2%** HATE IT.

**NOTE:** I assumed that alums who were considering starting their own businesses were unhappy in their current jobs. That’s not the case at all. In fact, most like or love their current jobs. Maybe they just feel that they can like what they’re doing even more by working for themselves/building their own company/agency.
17% of all respondents identified as freelance/self-employed.

MEN AND WOMEN ARE EQUALLY AS LIKELY TO FREELANCE FULL-TIME.

50% female  
50% male

CWs and ADs are most likely to freelance full time, making up for 73% of respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art Direction (AD)</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copywriting (CW)</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience Design (XD)</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Brand Management (CBM)</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy (ST)</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of our alums that are freelancing full-time are experienced and working at senior or director levels.

78% of freelance respondents had 7-18 years of work experience, working at senior or director levels.  
This is likely due to the fact that it takes time to establish credibility and garner contacts/professional network.

A little more than half of our alums are relatively new to freelancing full-time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-2 years</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+ years</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They’re happy!

67% reported that they “like” or “love” their job/freelancing.
TOP 3 FREELANCING MARKETS FOR OUR ALUMS

NYC 29%
SF 12%
LA 12%

TOP 3 MOTIVATIONS TO FREELANCE

40% “I have more flexibility.”
24% “I want to be in charge of the projects I work on.”
21% “I make more money.”

THEY HAVE AN ENVIVABLE WORK/LIFE BALANCE.

43% work 40 (or below 40) hours per week.
39% work 41-50 hours per week.
11% work 51-60 hours per week.
7% work 61-70 hours per week.

AVERAGE DAY RATES

* For other tracks/levels, there was not enough data to report findings.

ART DIRECTION
Junior level $325
Mid-level $620
Senior/Director level $1,123
COPYWRITING
Junior level not enough data
Mid-level not enough data
Senior/Director level $1,231

Prepared by VCU Brandcenter and Good Run Research.
SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What year did you graduate? (multiple choice)

1998
1999
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016 (if selected go to 1b, then 1c)
2017 (if selected go to 1b)

1b. How many official job offers did you receive upon graduation? (Official means the agency/company made a formal offer verbally or in writing including title, salary, etc.).
(multiple choice) (2017 respondents go to Q2; 2016 respondents go to 1c.)

0
1
2
3
4
5+

1c. Have you received a promotion and/or raise since you graduated? (multiple choice)

Yes
No
SURVEY QUESTIONS

2. What track were you in? (multiple choice)

   Art Direction
   Copywriting
   Strategy/Communications Strategy
   Creative Brand Management
   Experience Design/Creative Technology

3. What city do you currently work in? (multiple choice)

   Atlanta
   Austin
   Boston
   Boulder/Denver
   Chicago
   Los Angeles
   New York City
   Portland
   Raleigh/Durham
   Richmond
   San Francisco
   Seattle
   Washington DC/NOVA
   Other (please specify)

4. What type of agency/company do you currently work for? (multiple choice)

   Self-employed/freelance (If selected, skip Q.5, go to 4b.) (If NOT selected, go to 4f.)
   Full-service advertising agency
   Digital advertising agency
   Brand/strategy/innovation consultancy
   Client-side/company (Nike, Target, Coke, etc.)
   Non-profit
   Start-up
   Research or trend reporting company
   Other (please specify)

4b. As a freelancer or being self-employed, what is your average day/hourly rate? Please enter in $XX format. (open-ended) (Go to 4c)
4c. What were the motivations that led you to being a freelancer and/or self-employed? (check all that apply)

I have more flexibility.
I make more money.
I want to be in charge of the projects I work on.
I was unable to find a full-time job in the industry.
Other (please specify)

4d. Tell us the best thing about being a freelancer and/or self-employed. (open-ended)

_________________________________________________________________

4e. What size agency/company do you currently work for? (multiple choice)

_________________________________________________________________

4f. Have you ever considered starting your own thing and becoming an entrepreneur? (multiple choice) (If yes, go to 4g. If no, go to Q5.)

Yes
No

4g. What is the one thing holding you back from pulling the entrepreneur trigger? (open-ended)

_________________________________________________________________

5. All agencies/companies define titles in different ways and have their own hierarchies. How would you define your current level? (multiple choice)

Junior level
Mid-level
Senior level
Director level
Executive level
6. **What is your current annual salary range? If you are working abroad, please estimate the amount in US dollars.** (multiple choice)

- $30,000-$49,999
- $50,000-$74,999
- $75,000-$99,999
- $100,000-$124,999
- $125,000-$149,999
- $150,000-$174,999
- $175,000-$199,999
- $200,000+

7. **Now please enter your salary in $XXX,XXX format.** (open-ended)

   ___________________________________________________________________

8. **How would you describe the way you feel about your current job?** (multiple choice)

   - I hate it.
   - I don’t like it.
   - I am indifferent.
   - I like it.
   - I love it.

9. **Thinking of where you are in your career right now, rank the following job attributes in order of importance.** (ranking question)

   - Salary
   - Mentorship
   - Cultural Fit
   - Work/life balance
   - Company/Agency’s notoriety

10. **In this industry, we understand that workload varies depending on things like current projects, production, new business, etc. ON AVERAGE, how many hours per week do you work?** (multiple choice)

    - 40 (or below 40)
    - 41-50
    - 51-60
    - 61-70
    - 71+
11. How long have you been at your current job? (multiple choice)

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-8 years
- 9+ years

12. Do you plan to actively look for a new job this year? (multiple choice)

- Yes
- No

If yes, What are the reasons you are looking for a new job? (Check all that apply):
- I want a higher salary.
- I want a higher title.
- I want to move to a new city.
- I want to try a new agency/company.
- I want to leave this industry and start something different.
- I want to feel more challenged.
- I want more job security.
- Other (please specify)

13. What is your gender? (multiple choice)

- Male
- Female

14. In your opinion, what agency/company is doing the best advertising/branding work right now? (open-ended)

_________________________________________________________________