

INDUSTRY INSIGHTS:

WHAT OUR ALUMNI DATA REALLY TELLS US

JANUARY 2026

WHAT IS THIS REPORT?

Every two years, The Brandcenter surveys our alumni to capture a real-world snapshot of where graduates land, how fast they move up, and what they earn across every concentration and career stage. This is not the full salary survey results (you can find that [here](#)), but our honest read of the data that we think matters most to anyone trying to understand what a career in this industry actually looks like right now.

We'll show you the numbers, tell you what we think they mean and what we'd tell a student sitting across from us.

We've been sending people into this industry for over twenty-five years, and we want to share our thoughts.

HOW CAN THIS BE HELPFUL TO YOU?

FOR PROSPECTIVE AND UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

You've probably heard a hundred versions of "follow your passion." This analysis gives you something more useful: context.

- **Read between the lines.** Don't just look at the numbers. Look at our commentary on why certain data points are important.
- **Think career, not just a job.** Use our takeaways to understand the difference between your first job and your career trajectory.
- **Know the market, know your worth:** When you know what Brandcenter-level professionals earn, you have a better benchmark for negotiation.

Use this to ask better questions, set realistic expectations, and make a more informed decision about the best path forward after undergrad. If you're applying to multiple graduate programs, ask for this information from each. It'll help you understand the ROI on your educational investment.

FOR UNDERGRADUATE FACULTY

Your students are going to ask you whether graduate school is worth it or what they can expect jumping right into the workforce. This report gives you real, current data to draw on when you answer.

- **Back up your instincts:** Our commentary gives you an expert opinion layer you can bring back into the classroom.
- **Stay current:** Use our analysis to keep your teaching connected to where the money and influence are actually moving.
- **Make the case:** Use our commentary to advocate for your own programs. We provide the evidence that a creative degree can lead to high-level, executive careers.

Our goal is to help you speak to the full picture of what a creative industry career looks like and spark useful conversations about how undergraduate programs can better prepare students for what's waiting on the other side.



MEET THE EXPERT

As a Brandcenter Strategy alum and our Associate Director, **Ashley Sommardahl** lives and breathes the creative industry. With a wealth of knowledge spanning decades of alumni success and recruiter relationships, Ashley provides the expert analysis you'll find throughout this report.

SALARIES

ANNUAL SALARIES BY ROLE AND LEVEL

Q: What is your current annual salary?

(open-ended; national average and median)

Notes:

- Segments marked N/A had fewer than 5 responses and are thus excluded due to insufficient data.
- Segments with 5–10 responses are reported with an asterisk (*) to indicate that results should be interpreted with caution given the small sample size.
- At the executive level in particular, we recommend caution due to large variation in individual salaries.



We share this with our:

Students - so they understand what a fair offer is during their job search process

Alums - so they can use the data to help negotiate during annual reviews

Prospective students - so they understand the ROI on their Brandcenter investment

Recruiters - so they can share the data with their colleagues who may only have access to salary data for their own agency/holding company

Role	Junior	Mid	Senior	Director	Executive
Art Director	\$66,850 Average \$65,000 Median	\$89,073 Average \$87,500 Median	\$133,632 Average \$122,500 Median	\$197,588 Average \$185,000 Median	n/a Average n/a Median
Copywriter	\$67,053 Average \$67,000 Median	\$85,000 Average \$82,000 Median	\$139,154 Average \$125,000 Median	\$212,936 Average \$190,000 Median	\$364,625* Average \$355,000* Median
UX/UI/ Product Designer	n/a Average n/a Median	\$115,029 Average \$105,500 Median	\$181,033 Average \$160,000 Median	\$225,750 Average \$210,000 Median	n/a Average n/a Median
Strategist	\$65,080* Average \$65,000* Median	\$93,659 Average \$85,000 Median	\$132,566 Average \$110,000 Median	\$202,054 Average \$182,500 Median	\$237,105 Average \$220,000 Median
Marketing/ Brand Manager	n/a Average n/a Median	\$96,318 Average \$90,000 Median	\$150,219 Average \$138,500 Median	\$246,966 Average \$220,000 Median	\$259,167* Average \$260,000* Median
Account Manager	\$61,727 Average \$65,000 Median	\$86,667* Average \$83,500* Median	\$96,429 Average \$95,000* Median	n/a Average n/a Median	n/a Average n/a Median

AVERAGE JUNIOR SALARIES: INDUSTRY AVERAGE VS. BRANDCENTER AVERAGE

Note: US averages pulled from industry-specific salary reports.

Role	US Average Salary	Brandcenter Salary	Percentage more for Brandcenter grad
Junior Art Director	\$58,392	\$66,850 Average \$65,000 Median	11%
Junior Copywriter	\$59,512	\$67,053 Average \$67,000 Median	13%
Junior Strategist	\$60,234	\$65,080 Average \$65,000 Median	8%
Junior Account Manager	\$52,476	\$61,727 Average \$65,000 Median	24%



"The Average Junior Salaries by role and level is helpful to understand the financial landscape you're entering. There is so much growth potential in this industry, but understanding this salary survey as a benchmark is going to be very helpful as you navigate your first few job offers.

This chart also highlights how Brandcenter alums are stacking up next to their counterparts in the industry without Brandcenter degrees.

I encourage you to look at salary data. Some of the places you can find good information are the 4As and Glassdoor."

JOB MODALITY (IN-PERSON, VIRTUAL, OR HYBRID)

Q: Is your current role fully in-person, fully remote, or hybrid?

Current Job Modality



8%

Fully In-Person



33%

Fully Remote



59%

Hybrid

Q: In the past year, has your employer requested or mandated that you increase your in-person work time?

In-Person Work Mandate



32%

Yes



68%

No



"We often get students who say they want to work remotely. This is a highly collaborative field and starting out I would recommend in-person or hybrid roles that allow you greater access to mentors and higher visibility. Modality is also in flux - this is something we have only recently been tracking after COVID, but we have noticed an increased number of employers asking for more in-person time from their employees."

JOB TENURE

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



31%

Less than 1 year



24%

1-2 years



29%

3-5 years



11%

6-8 years

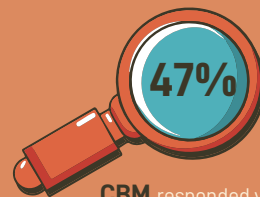
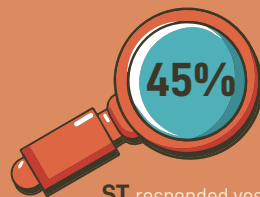
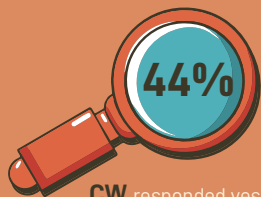


5%

9+ years

JOB HUNT

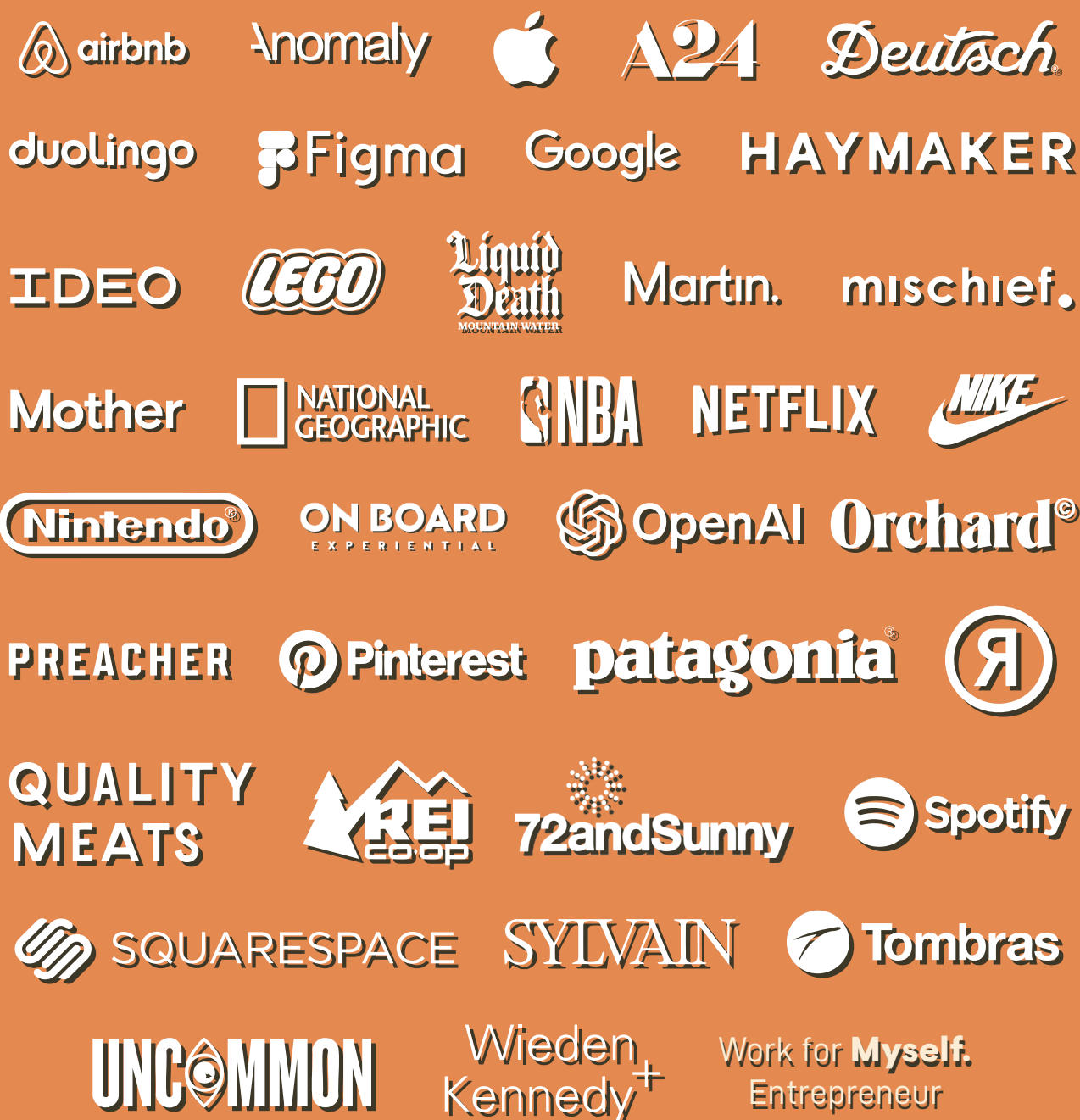
Q: Do you plan to actively look for a new job this year? (yes or no)



"Building a career in this industry means building a career that can move. Strong relationships, a clear point of view, and a portfolio that evolves over time are the tools that keep you competitive. Unlike other industries where you might land a job somewhere and plan to be there for 10 - 15 years, in this industry, people tend to move more frequently. What I'd be looking for is a place where I can work with people who are doing interesting work, somewhere I can find a good mentor, and somewhere that gives me the opportunity to grow my portfolio."

Q: What agency/company would you LOVE to work for? (open-ended)

SOME OF THE MOST POPULAR ANSWERS WERE



"I love this page because it highlights the places where good work is happening from the point of view of people actually in the industry.

When I see this list, I'm also reminded of how important your network is. So many of our own alums work at these industry leading brands/agencies."

Q: Your Adcenter/Brandcenter experience was an investment. In looking back on your decision to attend, do you consider it worth the investment?
(all responses)

81% Yes, it was absolutely worth the investment.
14% I don't know yet.
5% No, it was not worth the investment.

BRANDCENTER CONNECTIONS

Q: Has a Brandcenter alum or connection ever helped you land a job?



70% of respondents say a Brandcenter alum or connection has helped them land a job.

BRANDCENTER NETWORK

Q: How would you rate the strength of Brandcenter's industry/alumni network (for landing jobs, finding new clients, staying current in the industry, etc.)?

81% of respondents say the Brandcenter network is somewhat or very strong.



43%
very strong



38%
somewhat strong



14%
neutral



4%
somewhat weak



1%
weak

BRANDCENTER RESOURCES

Q: Which, if any, of the following Brandcenter resources have you used since graduating? (multi-select)

84% of respondents have used at least one Brandcenter resource since graduating.

51%

Job postings via
Brandcenter social
media or email

57%

Alumni Salary
Survey Report

32%

Attended an
alumni event

56%

Reached out to Ashley
Sommardahl or Brandcenter
faculty for alum/ recruiter/
Industry contacts or advice

16%

None of the above

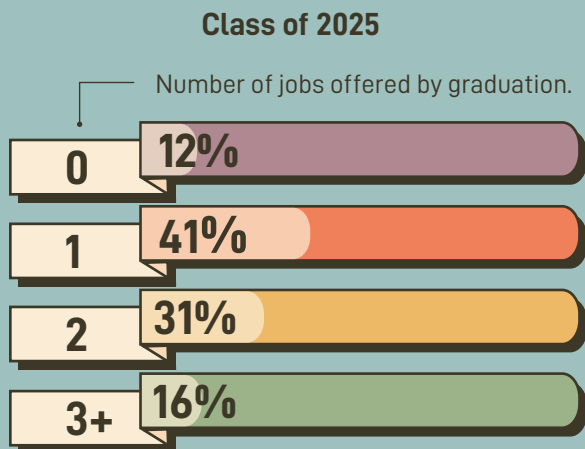


"What you know is important, but who you know is just as important. So much of the job search process is about building relationships and networking. Recruiters are always building their talent pipeline. Building your network is as important as building your portfolio."

CAREER PREPARATION AND ADVANCEMENT (CLASS OF 2025)

JOB OFFERS BY GRADUATION

Q: How many official job offers did you receive within three months of graduation? (Official means the agency/company made a formal offer verbally or in writing including title, salary, benefits).



PROMOTION/RAISE IN FIRST YEAR

Q: Have you received a promotion and/or raise since you graduated?

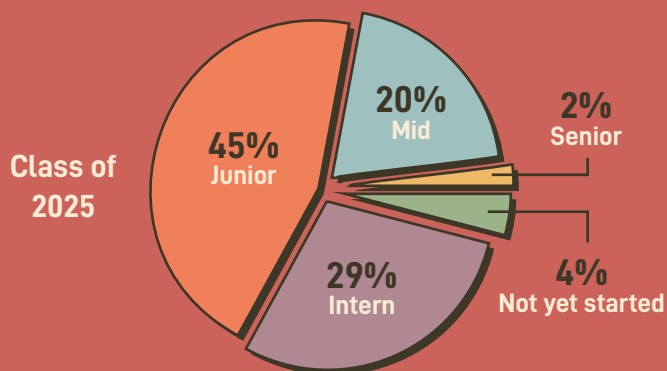
Of the 44 Class of 2024 alums who took this survey, 39% received a promotion or raise since graduation.



"The Brandcenter is a great place to start building your portfolio, your network, and accelerate your career."

JOB LEVEL ACCEPTED AFTER GRADUATION

Q: What level of job did you accept after graduation?



JOB PREPAREDNESS

(Class of 2024 and 2025 Combined)

Q: How prepared did you feel in your first job post-Brandcenter?

91% reported feeling very well prepared or prepared for their jobs.



WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

To read the full salary survey -
<https://bit.ly/bcsalarysurvey2026>

To learn more about the Brandcenter -
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 Instagram @vcu_brandcenter