

Gener(AI)ting the future



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CREATIVITY IS THE NEW PRODUCTIVITY



Scott Belsky leads corporate strategy and development at Adobe. He is responsible for design across the Digital Media and Digital Experience businesses and for driving the incubation of some of Adobe's fastest-growing emerging products. Prior to this role, Scott was Adobe's chief product officer, leading the development of all Creative Cloud products. Before joining Adobe in December 2017, Scott was a venture investor at Benchmark in San Francisco. This is Scott's second tenure at Adobe. He originally joined the company after it acquired Behance in 2012. He has also published two best-selling books, *Making Ideas Happen* (2011) and *The Messy Middle* (2018).

Executive Conversations

How has design evolved over recent years?

Two things have happened in the world of design. I think it's fair to say that the floor has been lowered. The skill level required to express yourself creatively has gone down. People can now start from something as opposed to nothing. With generative AI, they can prompt something and start getting something to work with.

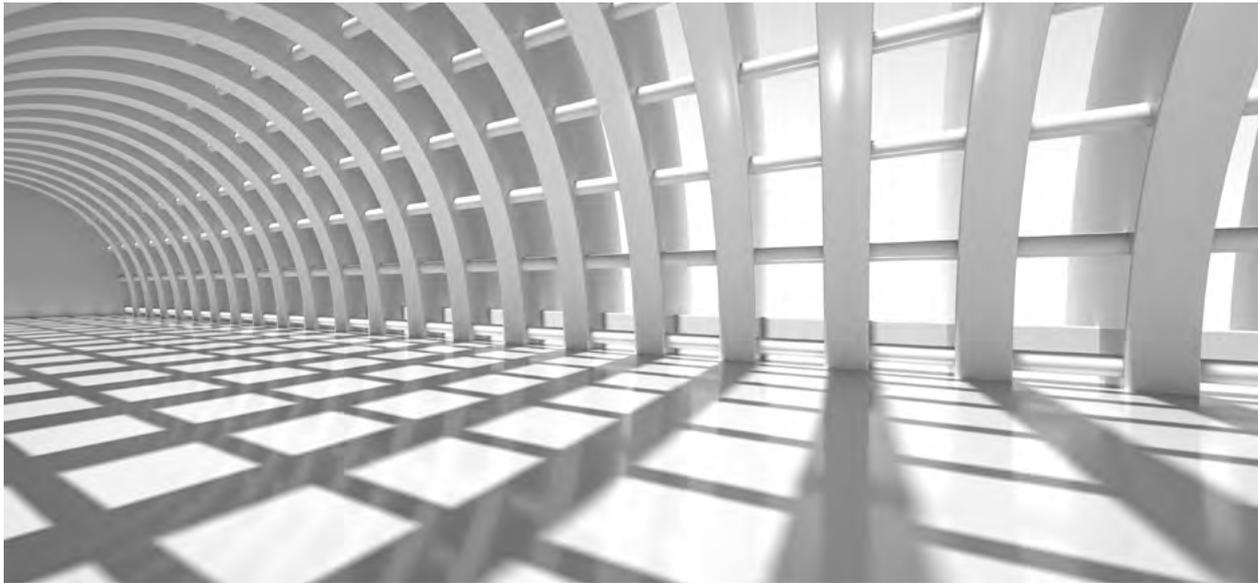
The tools themselves have evolved to enable easier onboarding, making them more accessible to more people. This is really exciting. Creativity is the new productivity. Productivity – getting things done as fast as possible in as great a volume as possible – is shifting to automation. Increasingly, organizations are promoting people based on their creativity, ideas, and the way they tell a story.

However, the ceiling is also rising. It is incredible what creative professionals are capable of now because they are exploring the full surface area of possibilities. Hence, the constraints are disappearing. The cycles that creative professionals can have to explore the surface area of possibility are growing materially, and that is raising the ceiling of what is possible. Those are the two trends that I think are truly transforming the world of design and creativity.



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ADOBE AND AI

**Can you help us understand Adobe's generative AI product offering?**

We have built our family of foundational models based on our customers' needs. So, when you look at Photoshop, many things that were time-consuming and might have seemed very complex in the past can now be done "automagically" using Firefly imaging models.

We built the imaging models not only to unleash these superpowers but also to preserve Photoshop's unique aspect: non-destructive editing. So, customers can come in and explore, ideate, and then try out variations of that idea without losing precision or the ability to retrace their steps. A lot of AI-first tools do not allow customers to pick up the chisel themselves and try to make something they see in their mind's eye. Our customers want to be able to do that.

That was our fundamental approach across imaging, illustration, and 3D, and increasingly across fields such as video. And, of course, we are just getting started. The advent of these Generative AI tools has totally transcended our expectations, but there's so much more to come.

GENERATIVE AI AND THE CREATIVE PROFESSIONAL

"Thanks to Generative AI, what is even more important than skills is taste, intuition and creative direction."

How must creative professionals evolve to keep pace?

We'll see creative professionals no longer feeling constrained by their category. The idea of defining yourself as an animator, a graphic designer, or a photographer seems antiquated in a world where you could harness your creativity to work across any medium.

And suppose your customer or client says, "Can you take that graphic you made and turn it into an animated version for TikTok or Instagram or whatever?" Instead of saying, "Oh, I don't know how," creative professionals are going to gradually be able to take that on themselves and execute to a high standard using these new tools and capabilities. The skills barrier, while still important, is much less constraining. Thanks to Generative AI, what is even more important than skills is taste, intuition and creative direction.

Do you see generative AI as a threat to designers?

Some might say that generative AI is disruptive and impacts creative professionals by automating their work. and that we'll need fewer of them. But the truth, and I think what we are seeing in our own customer base, is different. With generative AI, the cost of exploring has decreased, so we will see organizations coming up with new use cases.

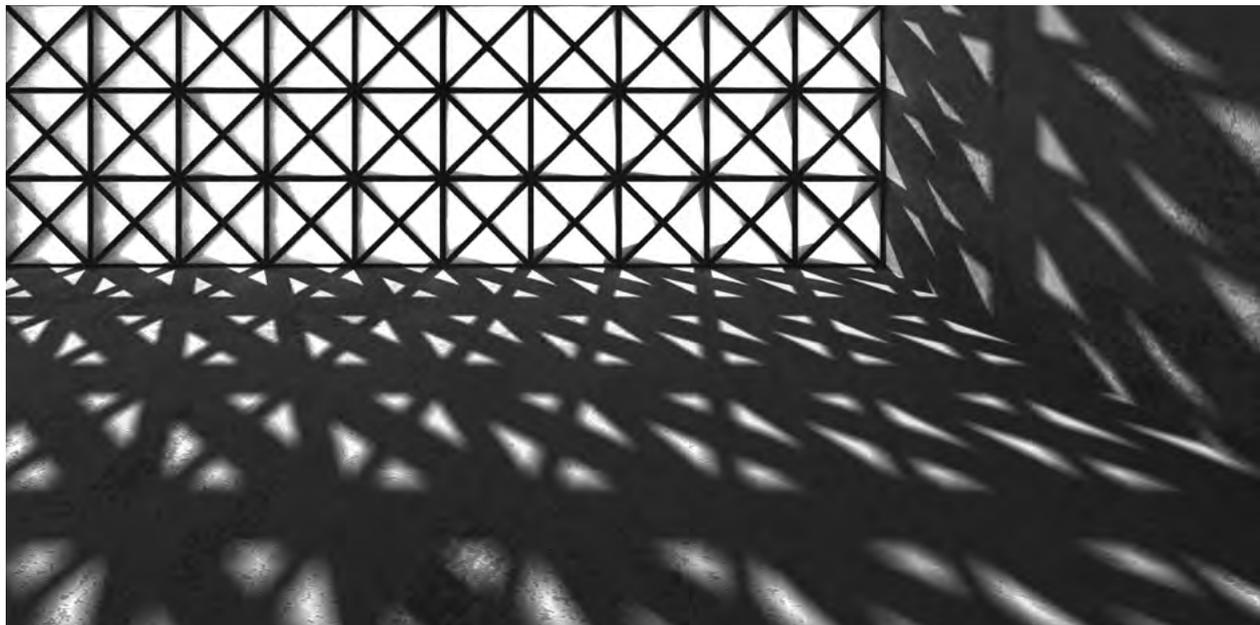
Think about engineers as a proxy. Over the last few decades, engineers have become more productive every year, sometimes by multiples, owing to technological breakthroughs and new programming languages, consoles, and tools. Nevertheless, organizations keep hiring more engineers. Why? Because they want to do more. Organizations always want to build more products, personalize them, optimize them, and invest in building up their business. The more productive they become, the more people they hire.

Similarly, with creativity, brands are realizing, “Wait, instead of just doing one campaign, let’s do five. Let’s do 50 campaigns. Let’s do a campaign for every region. Let’s do personalized visual experiences for every segment.” Generative AI technology has unlocked all of these possibilities.

How is generative AI likely to change the field of design?

Ultimately, creativity is what moves us. Even if digital content can be created at an infinite scale for nothing, and personalized to each of us, we are not going to feel compelled to engage with it unless it moves us in some way.

Generative AI is like a consensus machine. It generates what it thinks you would want, based on what you and others have consumed before. That is not what moves us. If every brand floods the user with SEO content, imagery, or video because it’s cheap to create the user will be overwhelmed, rather than inspired. The user will be left more than ever craving a story with a human touch, written just for them.



How can we measure the value that humans bring to the table?

Human creatives must come up with innovative, unpredictable solutions rather than consensus outcomes. We need people to spend more of their time thinking, emoting, and tapping into their “inner humanity.” I call that liberating our “ingenuity per person.”

If a job typically only allows you to spend 10% of your time on ingenuity because 90% is required for the methodic productivity-oriented minutiae, imagine what a difference generative AI’s computing power can make! It can offload much of that for you, and you are freed up to do more of the deep thinking. That increases the ingenuity per person on your team. And if you have more ingenuity per person, you are going to want more people because then you will have collectively more ingenuity in your organization.



GENERATIVE AI AND THE ENTERPRISE

What is your view on the copyright concerns surrounding generative AI?

If someone can reproduce and manipulate someone else's likeness or style without their permission, that's a problem (one that we're lobbying Congress to fix). But I also recognize that we have to let this technology take us somewhere exciting. The worst thing would be to have overly harsh restrictions choke off progress. So, we have to balance the absolute need to allow progress with the need to proceed in a thoughtful and responsible way.



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How is the role of the marketing professional likely to evolve?

Marketing professionals need to start experimenting and thinking expansively about what generative AI can do for them. The future of the digital world is going to be more personalized than ever before. Marketing has not yet been personalized to the individual consumer, at least not at scale in any profound way.

And that is the future. So, you have to kind of rethink the whole marketing stack and get away from 'macro marketing,' which takes weeks and weeks and meeting after meeting. Increasingly, the world requires agile or 'micro' marketing, which means marketers getting an idea from social media, say, and acting on it in real time. These campaigns need to be launched in 60 seconds, not six months. And to do that at scale, you need to give them tools, backed up by new policies.

How should CMOs look at generative AI?

I think CMOs need to awaken their minds to the role of both macro and micro marketing. The CMO needs to recognize that this agile marketing may be beyond their organization. They need to involve all their stakeholders and empower them to participate. If I were a CMO, I would be forcing my team to rethink how they generate variations of assets using generative AI, how they experiment, how they test, and all these things.

LOOKING FORWARD

What excites you most about the future of tech and its influence on the creative space?

Right now, there are two things about the future of technology that excite me. The first is one thing that makes us uniquely human—ubiquitous access to creative expression. This taps into our humanity. We are most creatively confident when we are five years old, but we lose our creative confidence as we get older because of the skills gap, exposure to criticism, and just the lack of access to creative tools. Generative AI is fundamentally changing this.

The second thing is personalized experiences at scale. We all want to be known wherever we go. We want to know how we are known, and we do not want to feel like marketing technology or ad tech is always secretly guessing what we might like. Generative AI and AI agents that we will encounter across brands are going to make that possible.



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