

# Shaping up the future of **creative production**

Building an efficient production  
process through creative  
automation

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# The future of ad production is creative automation

— Dear reader,

Today, advertising is undergoing an irreversible transformation.

Customers' expectations are on the rise. At the same time, marketing and creative teams are grappling with an increased demand for content, which is fueling customer frustration and team burnout.

Something's got to give. Both marketing and creative teams need to find a way to meet and exceed customer expectations, while reducing the burden and workload on their team.

We firmly believe that creative automation – the process of gaining flexibility to automatically adapt and scale your asset production process – is the next-generation way to give your customers the personalized, targeted, convenient experience they expect and want.

Using a modern creative automation platform, you can create personalized and contextual content for your audience in a way that feels far more lightweight and convenient than the manual ways of the past.



We've worked with hundreds of brands and agencies who have embraced and successfully scaled their ad production, which has led to increased efficiency, an improved audience experience, and better team productivity.

Now, we've consulted these brands that are at the forefront of creating and scaling content in a smart way to develop a blueprint and show you how to unlock the exact same benefits for your team.

As Benjamin David, Digital Marketing Specialist at Heineken told us recently in a blog article, the key to better ads lies in a flexible production process:

**"We are now able to automate the whole process and create personalized content at scale. We can adapt, manage, and analyze our ads more easily. Digital and marketing teams are faster and more flexible. Campaigns are data-driven."**

This guide will help you unlock all the best practices and examples from key marketers and creatives who have already adopted this strategy. Through creative automation, they now rely on it to granularly adapt their assets and create stellar campaigns that resonate with their audience.





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# 01

## Creative automation, explained







# Creative automation, explained

- If you're regularly working with creatives but are stalled by slow workflows and quality and personalization challenges, you're not going through it alone. Around the world, brands just like yours are experiencing many of the same thoughts, concerns, and setbacks.

That's why we asked leading brand managers, creatives, and marketers at **Google, Jägermeister, VIA Productions, InnoGames, Wieden + Kennedy**, and more to share their experience and insights on producing premium creatives at scale.

## Cre·a·tive Au·to·ma·tion

Creative automation helps remove bottlenecks in the creative production process by shortening, personalizing, and making it easier for your organization.

Without the option of creating and adapting visual assets like banners or videos with ease, designers and marketers would need to manually create each asset to ensure high quality and brand consistency.

With creative automation, you can automatically create content variations to save time and resources by relying on the use of dynamic creatives.





Oftentimes, the concept of creative automation can sound confusing. The use of the term *creative* in creative automation is often misunderstood, with confusions such as the idea that it automates the creative process and, therefore, replaces creative teams.

Creativity, is not one of the automatable aspects of this process and therefore, is not under any threat. In fact, it's quite the opposite. It's all about freeing the designer and empowering the marketer – and giving creativity the mindspace it deserves.

## Dy·na·mic Cre·a·tives

Dynamic creatives consist of a base creative (video, banner, or image) in which elements are set to be swappable. These are called “dynamic creatives” and are typically text, images, sound, video, or even entire scenes. This gives you the ability to instantly create customized videos or banners at scale without sacrificing creative quality.

A dynamic element is something in a piece of creative that can be changed from a data trigger. This can be the aspect ratio of the video, a text element, an image element, a video element, etc.

**To avoid misclassifying creative automation as part of the creative process, we suggest that the term should be tweaked to showcase exactly what it can automate: the production process.**

According to John van Pijkeren, Entrepreneur, ex-Marketing Technology Lead at Heineken, “automation helps you deliver the right content at the right time to the right consumer in an effective way – it's an enabler to be more efficient especially when publishing content at a large scale for multiple brands in multiple countries.”





Fill your campaigns with enough ads, and you're bound to squeeze out a few clicks. A decade ago, that's how most digital marketing teams approached advertising.

And their efforts looked something like this: blast out the same generic ads to everyone and secure a few leads or an eyeball.

It was a numbers game. And, for a while, it worked. At least to some degree. But times are different now. Consumers are smarter. Their eyes are trained. They do their research up-front and are unlikely to engage with impersonal, generic ads.

Instead, the modern consumer expects and deserves a personalized approach. And it's time for companies to deliver. So how do you achieve this – scaling great ads – without blowing your budget or damaging the quality of the consumer experience?

**“Automation is key because dynamic creatives bring a level of complexity. When you operate across 4 countries, with different products, and various promotion strategies, creative automation gives marketers the opportunity to focus on quality rather than lower the standards to meet scale.”**



**Giovanni Simonetti**  
Creative Lead at Google

It's an age-old question for anyone leading a marketing or creative department, the sort of challenge that requires continuous innovation as a company grows.

Ad production, in its breadth and depth, can feel overwhelming. But you can make it easier by removing its manual aspects with the help of creative automation.







# Creative automation helps you to:



## Target your audience

Tailor your ads to match your audience's intent and reach people at the right time, channel, and with the right message



## Scale asset production

Roll out dynamic creatives (videos and banners) at scale to serve your global markets



## Personalize ads

Drive your audience through the funnel with personalized video experiences



## Cut production cost

Cut cost on the production process without adding headcount



## Collaborate

Create workflows on a global scale by knowing who is using a creative and in which part of the world



## Prevent ad fatigue

Combat ad fatigue by recycling your existing creatives



## Achieve team focus

Help your team stay focused on creative ideation by automating repetitive tasks



## Adapt at scale

Adapt your ads based on the format you need for omni-channel campaigns





55,000

Produced ad variations

80%

Cost reduction

*How companies like CarNext benefit from creative automation*

With creative automation, you can liberate designers from having to hand-generate the countless, nearly identical variations of each asset necessary to fuel personalization. Take the example of Nathan Babian, Vice President at [VIA Productions](#):

**“We still do all the traditional commercial production, primarily producing TV ads, explainer videos, B2B communications, and recently some live streaming work, but the need for content just keeps growing.”**

Nathan shared with us that **clients continuously need more content which requires his team to rethink the way they produce it.**

In his role, Nathan has found that automating the process of producing all this additional content makes their business more efficient.

1

### Create

Adopt the “template-thinking” mindset and build your own visual assets

By automating both production and adaptation to meet demand and also to ease creative operations, you’ll have better oversight, improved results, brand conformity, and more.

2

### Collaborate

Manage your asset production in one platform

To learn how creative automation can help your team efficiently produce visual assets, we broke down this process into three parts.

3

### Automate

Speed up the production process for your entire team



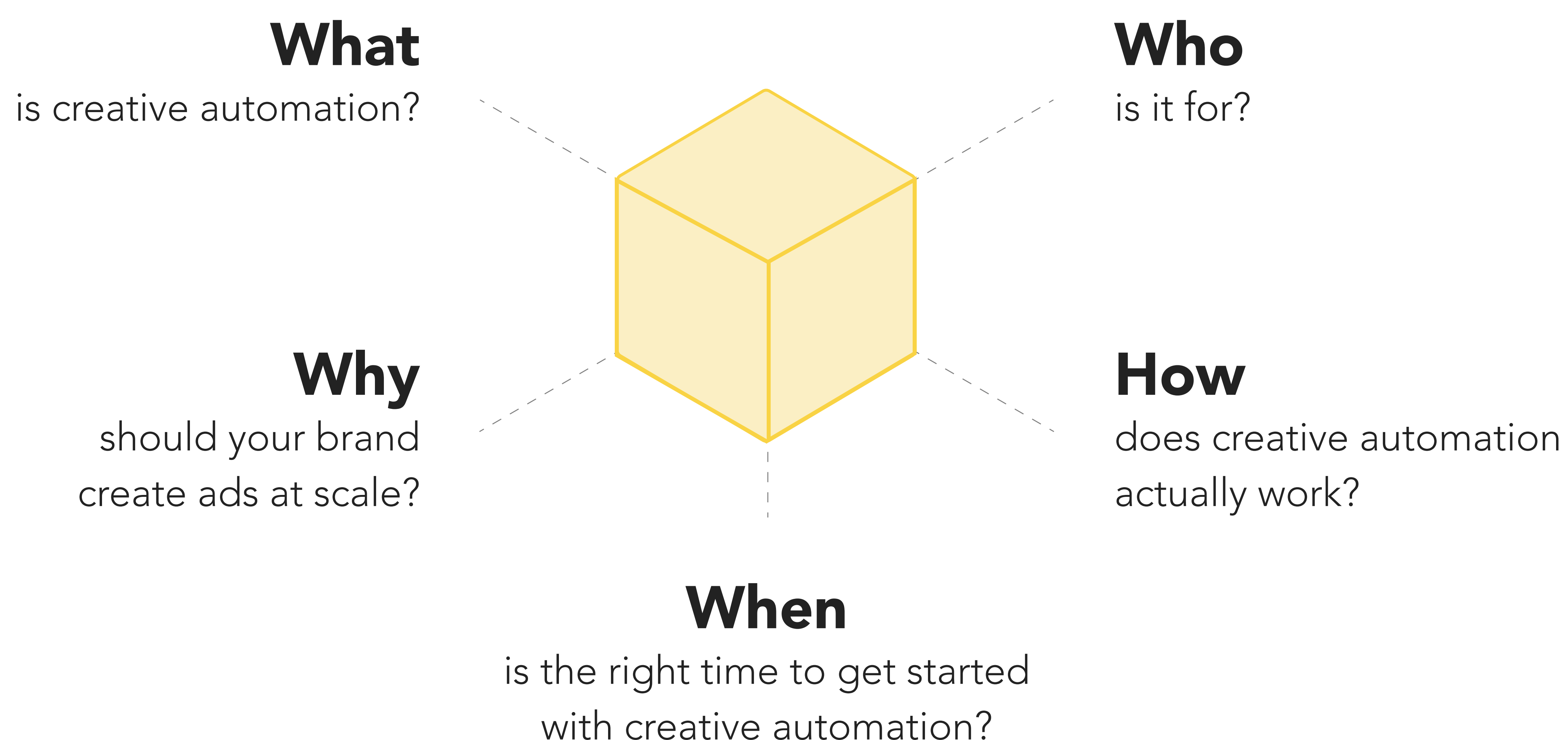


# The 5Ws and 1H for creative automation

— To do your job effectively, as an advertiser you need to know how consumers are using your products, what your business objectives are, and how you can help them reach their goals.

The big challenge in this field is that you craft all your experience at scale without having one-to-one interactions with every customer as much as everyone would want that. That's definitely no small feat. But there are ways to gain fresh perspectives and get closer to your audience by crafting the right assets for each campaign.

To get started, you could tap into the 5Ws (and an H) formula used by journalists to formulate questions and uncover information by asking yourself these questions:



*Note: We deliberately omitted the "Where?" as you can use creative automation anywhere you are located.*

**This investigative method will help you rethink your production process and understand what your customers are looking for.**





# What

## is creative automation?

Creative automation is the process of leveraging technology to scale your asset production by automatically changing certain aspects of your banner or video content such as size, format, CTAs, and graphic elements to enable high-volume content creation for high-volume demand.

**In a nutshell, creative automation helps marketers and creatives scale content automatically.** By removing time-consuming tasks from creatives' work, creative automation helps you scale your asset production and reduce the overall costs associated with campaigns that need constant optimization. This replaces the processes of opening up your master assets to make adjustments, render them, and repeat the workflow.

# Why

## should your brand create ads at scale?

Producing personalized content for your audience is no longer a nice option – it's now a necessity. If your team wants to **increase conversion and exposure**, this kind of strategy is the only way to go. From targeted search keywords to crafting relevant ads, marketers can now create tailored journeys based on what's most important to their audiences to help connect the dots for future customers.

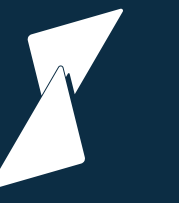
For example, your brand needs to create an ad campaign that targets consumers from a specific age group, in a certain country, on specific channels.

With creative automation, you can easily achieve this by taking the components of this specific ad – messaging, images, CTAs – and creating all the variations you need instantly, solving your challenge and improving your workflows.

### How it works

With creative automation, you can enjoy full-flexibility to create your own dynamic ads in minutes. Start with your base creative, fill out a data sheet with key information about your campaign, and automatically add elements like overlays, CTAs, messages in different languages, or product images to each asset.





## Creative automation use cases:



### Global markets

Language adaptations



### Products

Product inventory and adaptation



### Audience groups

Stance, copy variations

If you peel off all these layers of design, it can be easy to forget that the most important thing for a creative is simply **having more time to conceptualize and design visuals that stand out.**

Nathan Babian, Vice President at VIA Productions understands this perfectly when he needs to create content at scale and knows that “if the content isn’t interesting or doesn’t stand out, it doesn’t matter how fast, or how much you make of it – it still won’t be effective.”

**“Automation is only useful if it has something that draws your audience in and gives them reasons to keep watching,”** added Nathan.

And if this type of issue is left unchallenged, it can only increase your need for resources and a higher budget, burn out your employees, and derail goals. A weak link in the process can create a ripple effect that impacts the performance of the whole company.

The VIA Productions team concurs. As the company works with over 80 fast-paced retail groups which are consistently promoting thousands of products with ever-changing prices, the quest for creating quality content fast is real.

**“Social media has been really huge for our clients, especially video content, but we don’t have the budget to make and update large volumes of content every time there’s a pricing update or a new product,”** Nathan explains.

Ultimately, if you tap into creative automation and understand that it can be a great time asset to nurture your creative processes, you’re thinking from a business perspective and that is a perspective of measurable and quantifiable results.





**“Being able to  
dynamically create  
content has enabled  
our retail clients to have  
access to on-demand  
content whenever they  
need it.”**



**NATHAN BABIAN**

Vice President, VIA Productions



# When

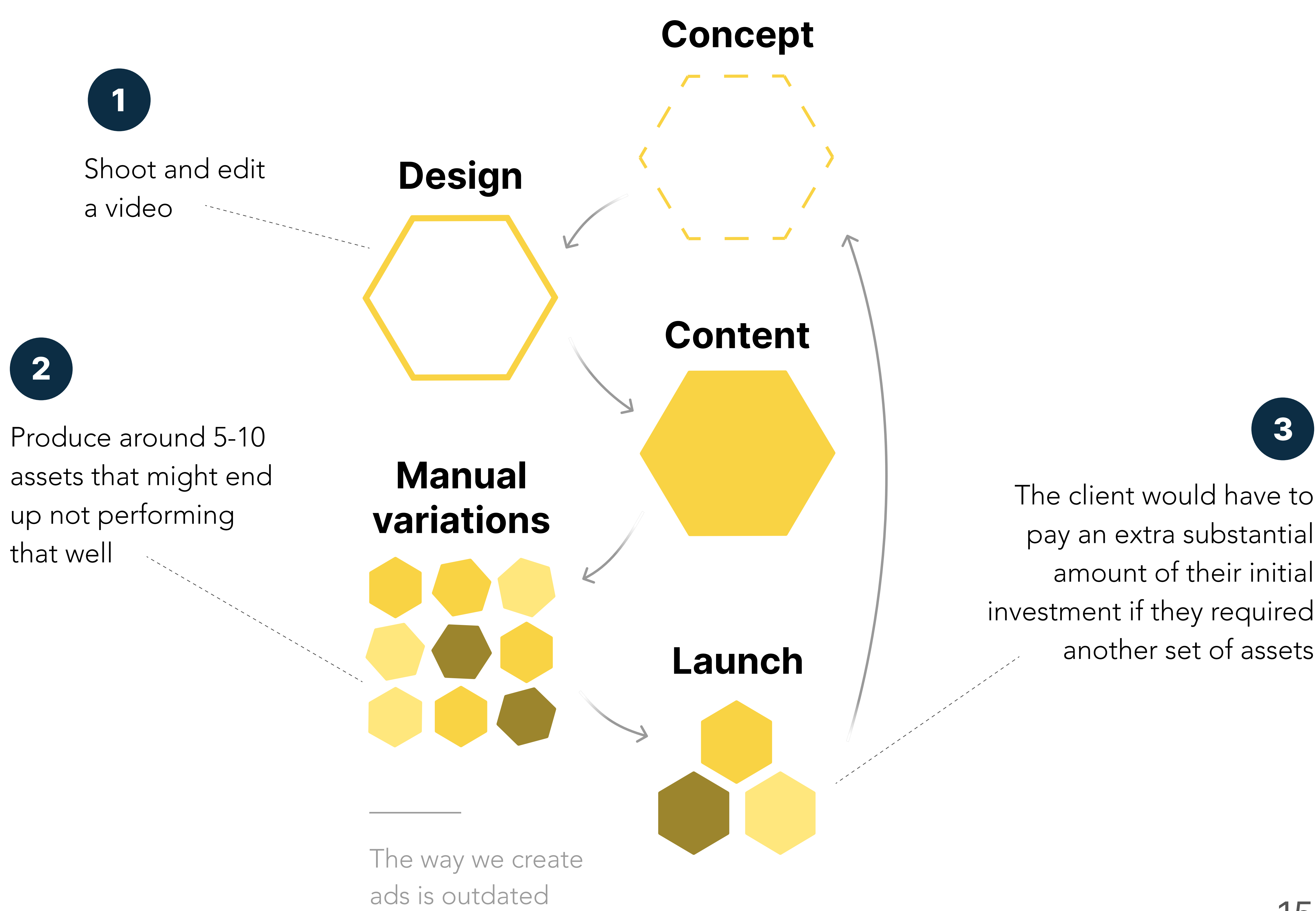
is the right time to get started with creative automation?

There’s no right or wrong timing to get started with creative automation. But one thing’s key – there is a growing acknowledgment for removing or automating non-essential steps from your daily workflows.

The digital marketing landscape has evolved enormously in the past 20 years, but **the way we create ads is outdated** – we’re simply still not getting better at avoiding unnecessary manual work.

The cost of manual work is also just too much. And **in the existing ad creation process, every adaptation opportunity comes at the cost of a full production cycle.**

In the traditional way of working, Tom Specht, Digital Producer at Boomerang shared with us in a recent conversation that if you had a €10,000 budget to shoot a video for a brand, you’d do the following:







“When manually producing content at scale, the cost per asset is just too high, which results in inflated budgets for production work,” Tom Specht, Digital Producer at Boomerang told us.

Sebastian Seeber, Product Owner & Senior Project Manager at InnoGames, a leading developer and publisher of online games, shared:

“The global gaming market is evolving and changing very fast, so the goal is to automate some of the less-creative and recurring tasks and free up time for more innovative projects.”

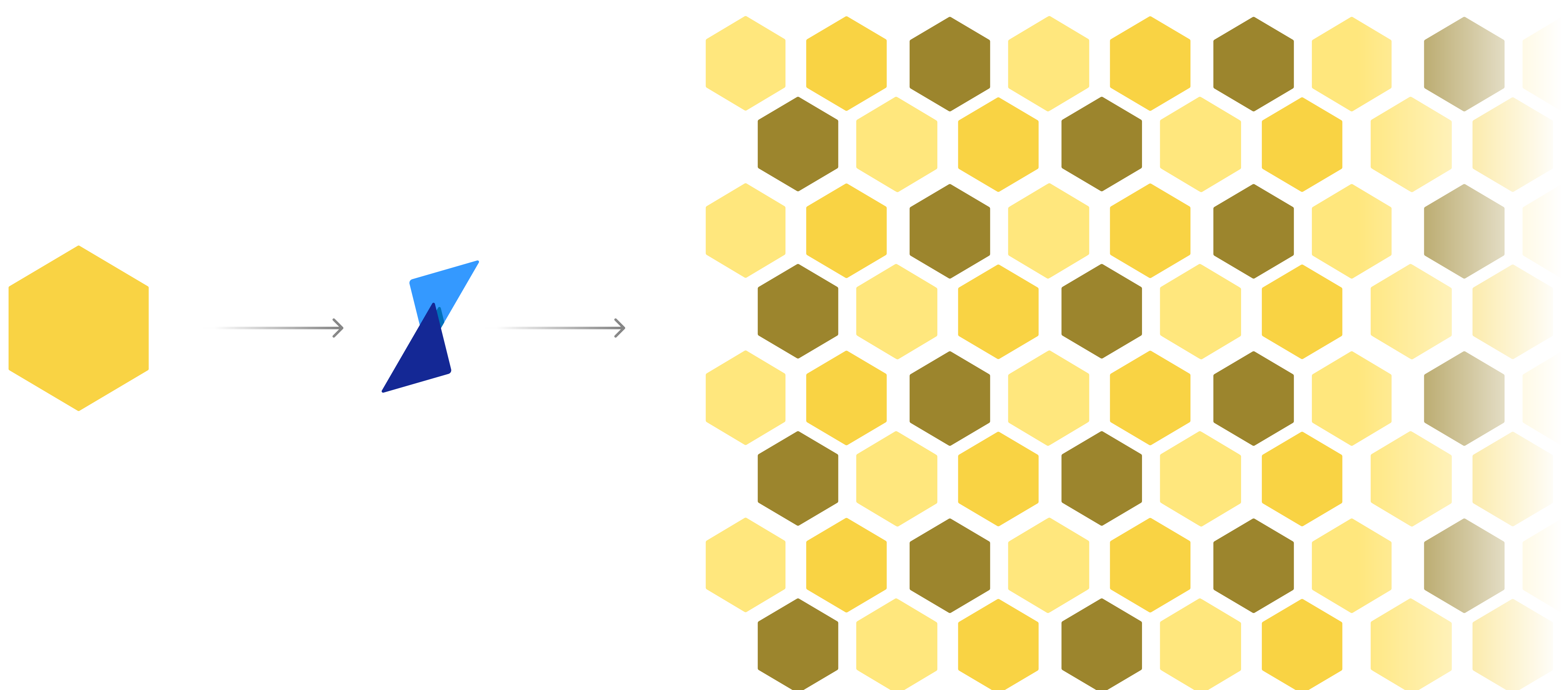
There is a constant influx of content needed to support the company’s efforts to reach their audience, so the idea of improving and speeding up the workflows associated with this is crucial.

**“We face a constant change and increase of platforms, channels, partners, and formats, which leads to an increasing number of assets we need every month.”**



**Sebastian Seeber**

Product Owner & Senior Project Manager at InnoGames





# Who

is it for?

Any team with a need to produce assets at scale or to keep their branding on point can use creative automation.

When your brand needs to create an ad campaign that targets consumers from a specific age group, in a certain country, on specific channels, the production process becomes complex.

This means that you need to think through the ad's format, language, and messaging from the ideation stage.

But, most likely, your creative team will end up grappling with producing multiple ad variants. While this sounds achievable, it becomes an issue when you have to implement the same workflow for different countries or audience groups.

## Digital marketing teams

You have more opportunities to create advanced ad strategies and increase the performance of your current ads – and build a more data-driven approach for your target market.

## Creative teams

You regain time spent on doing nitty-gritty work like versioning, re-sizing assets, and creating hundreds of variations of the same template. Just think about all the time you could be spending on the creative process instead.

## Tech enthusiasts and early adopters

Empower yourself to be both highly efficient in your workflows but also hyper-personal to meet and exceed the demands of modern customers.

## Facilitators

As a global marketing or brand leader, you'll no longer be burdened by the effort required to create and maintain complex workflows that power your organization. Think of automating the biggest sources of frustration caused by both lack of efficiency and the right platforms.





# How

## does creative automation work?

For many teams, making a move into creative automation often feels like meeting a fork in the road, a choice that cannot be taken easily – some are afraid it's too painful to implement it, some think it's going to steal their jobs, while others think it's too expensive. However, that doesn't need to be the case.

In reality, you wouldn't climb a real mountain without a plan to reach the top—and your journey into creative automation should be no different. So before you begin, think about how it can support your objectives.

With creative automation, you can create thousands of assets in a short period of time. You can use an existing asset to make a brand new one in minutes, which you can then personalize based on your requirements. While scale may be your goal, fine-tuning your content is absolutely crucial.

Many marketers think they can use a one-size-fits-it-all strategy to target their different audiences with the same video. But there's nothing creative that changes across the audience.

Giovanni Simonetti, Creative Lead at Google echoes the sentiment and told us that one of the greatest challenges in the field is breaking the myth of "know-it-all."

**"70% of your campaign's ROI is influenced by creatives while only 30% is driven by targeting."**

*Source: Nielsen Catalina Research via the Advertising Research Foundation May 2017*

The reality is that you need to create relevant messages for different audiences. So when you scale a dynamic display campaign, Giovanni recommends asking yourself: **"How can you keep creativity while allowing for scale?"**



# Creative automation step-by-step

To get started with the actual process, you need to create a template, which consists of a base creative (video or image), and define which elements are swappable.

These “dynamic elements” such as text, images, sound, video, or even entire scenes give you the ability to instantly create customized videos and banners at scale without sacrificing creative quality.

For Nathan from VIA Productions, being able to tap into this process to dynamically create content has helped his team become more efficient.

“This lets the client get content that’s affordable and moves at the speed of retail,” pointed out Nathan.

By learning these processes, Nathan and his team can enjoy the possibilities of one-to-one personalization to specific consumers as, according to him, “the research out there proves that this is highly successful.”

## **The *VIA Productions* creative production process**

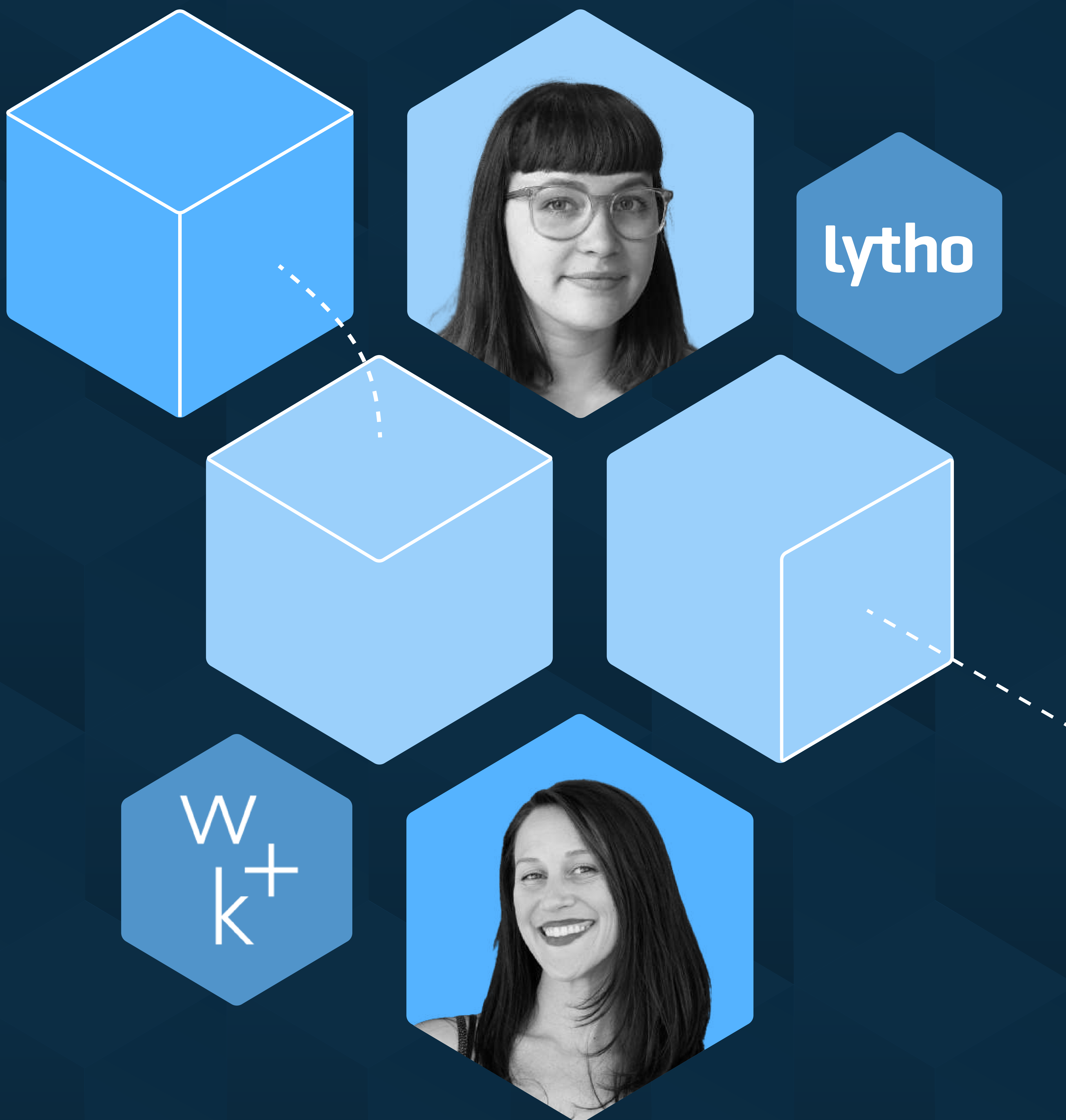
- Create a base asset in the Template Builder
- Plug in which products and prices your clients want to promote
- Render the video automatically
- Get the files back in just a few minutes



# 02

## Creative automation in action

Resolving any marketer's fear





# Creative automation in action

Workplaces and productivity platforms are rapidly changing. The proliferation of SaaS platforms and a shift towards decentralized and flexible ways of working have both enabled and necessitated more collaborative platforms.

If we can now easily collaborate on documents, spreadsheets, or slides, shouldn't it be the same for creatives as well? For this to happen, your team can work towards integrating creative automation into their workflows.

At Merkle, the global performance marketing agency, **the process of creating dynamic ads has the purpose to automatically produce assets at scale for their creative department.**

Here's how Merkle, The Netherlands, approaches it according to Online Marketing Consultant Danielle Antonis:

- 1 Use a master template to create a video that is tailored to your campaign by changing the dynamic fields that you need
- 2 Before pushing the video ad to the channels, download one example to check if everything is on point
- 3 Create different ad variations and push them to the ad channels

This workflow was designed to solve a problem within the company's media production process. Now, instead of using different ads for different channels, the Merkle team only gets to review them once to check if everything looks consistent across all the channels.



# Get access to the full guide

Setting up creative automation  
in your workflow