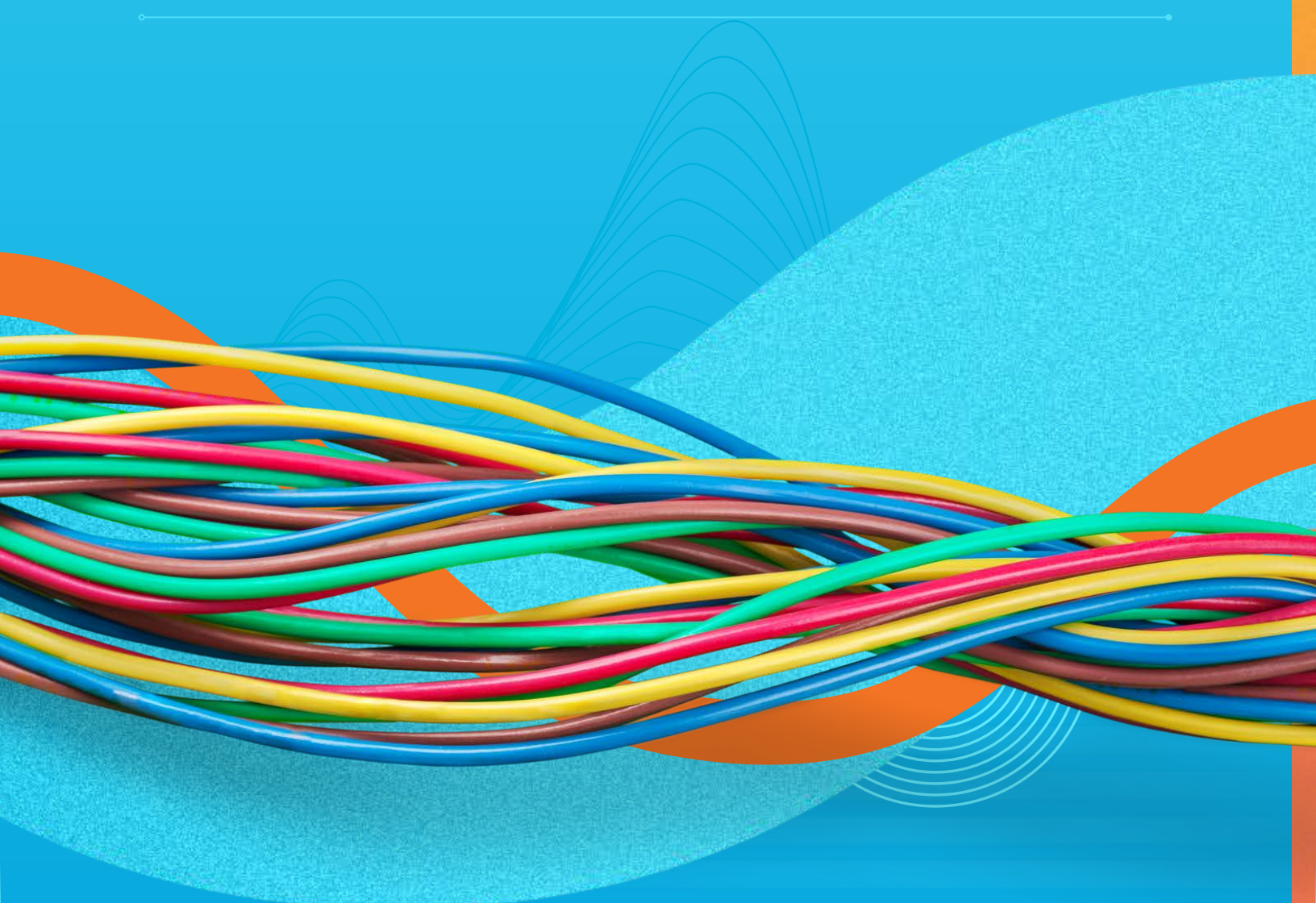24 | seven™

TALENT REPORT

AI, Upskilling and Staff Augmentation

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations of all sizes are grappling with an increasingly fast-changing business environment driven by generative AI advancements and other powerful machine learning tools. But what are the greatest specific challenges and opportunities companies and their employees are encountering in this era of AI? What staffing issues are firms facing? How committed are leaders to training and retraining their teams for this tech-forward world? And when (and whom) are they hiring to access specialized expertise? To find out, **24 Seven** surveyed more than **2,100** professionals across the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom who work in the marketing, creative, technology, beauty, fashion or retail sectors.

Put simply, to stay competitive in this time of incredibly rapid tech evolvement, our findings indicate it's critical for employers to recognize the dual necessity of upskilling existing team members and leveraging highly skilled outside talent. With the marketing, creative, and tech industries largely leading the way in terms of AI-related demand and expertise, it's particularly crucial for leaders in those spaces to zero in on the skills — and people — their organizations will need to thrive.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM OUR REPORT:

61% OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS SAY THEIR ORGANIZATION HAS HIRED EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS OR FREELANCERS WITH SPECIALIZED AI SKILLS.

70% OF EMPLOYEES SAY THEIR COMPANIES ARE EITHER MODERATELY OR EXTENSIVELY INCORPORATING AI AND MACHINE LEARNING INTO UPSKILLING INITIATIVES.

A WHOPPING **86%** OF THOSE WHO MAKE OR INFLUENCE HIRING DECISIONS SAY IT IS CHALLENGING TO FILL OPEN ROLES.

90% OF EMPLOYEES SAY MORE PERKS RELATED TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND UPSKILLING WOULD ENCOURAGE THEM TO STAY WITH THEIR CURRENT COMPANY LONGER.
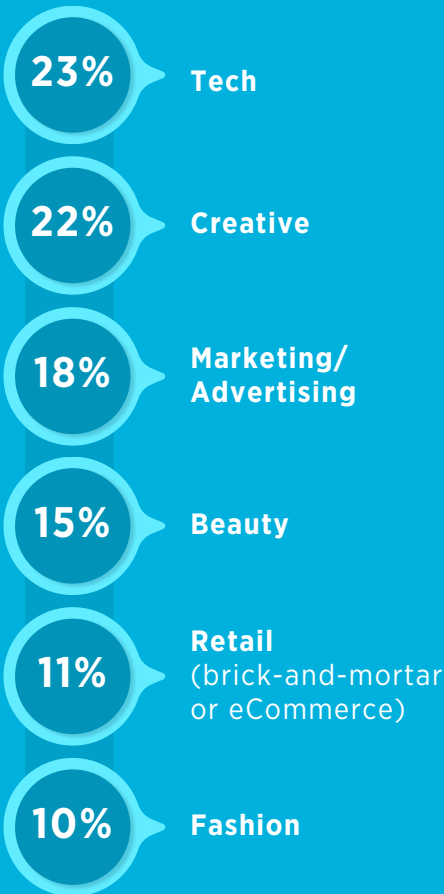
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SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

SECTOR

23% Tech

22% Creative

18% Marketing/Advertising

15% Beauty

11% Retail (brick-and-mortar or eCommerce)

10% Fashion

COMPANY SIZE
(number of employees)

- ◆ 50 or less
- ◆ 51-100
- ◆ 101-300
- ◆ 301-500
- ◆ 500+

25%
32%
5%
14%
24%
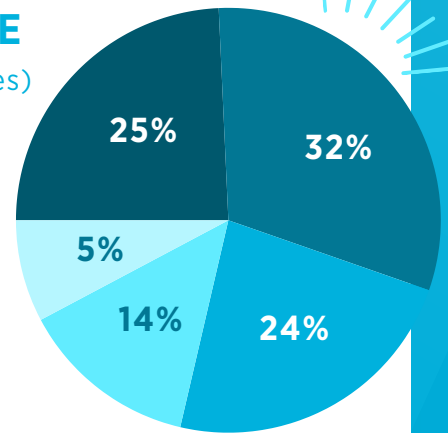
Number of Survey Participants

2,128

GENERATION

22% Gen Z

58% Millennial

17% Gen X

3% Boomer
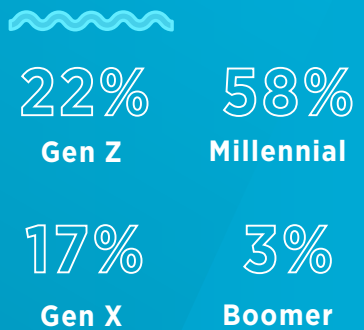
SENIORITY LEVEL
* 85% of those surveyed make or influence hiring decisions

16% C-Suite

13% VP/Managing Director

20% Director

31% Manager

18% Below-Management

1% Other
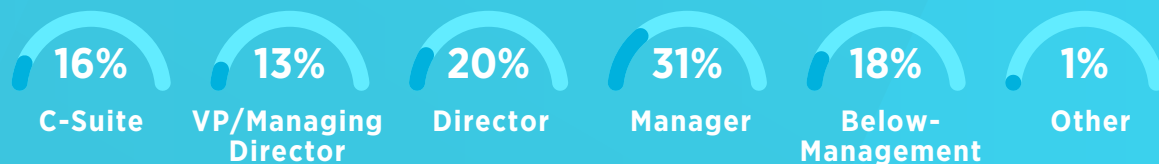
* Survey conducted September 2023
* Some survey responses do not total 100% due to rounding

THE STATE OF AI

Technology has evolved with breathtaking velocity in the last year. And in that time, one thing has become abundantly clear: The integration of generative AI into business operations is no longer a cutting-edge strategy — it's an absolute necessity. Many companies that were early AI adopters are achieving greater efficiency and productivity, and they're generating more innovative solutions as a result. This has translated into increased profits, reduced operating costs, better data-driven decision-making, and stronger positioning within their respective industries and markets.

In contrast, the reluctance to embrace new technologies and bring aboard professionals skilled in the latest and greatest tools can place companies at a significant disadvantage, potentially causing them to fall behind in relevance — and market share. As we focus on the growth within the marketing, creative, and tech spaces, the need to embrace AI remains at the forefront of today's dynamic business landscape.

BRINGING IN THE (AI) REINFORCEMENTS

61%

OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS SAY THEIR ORGANIZATION HAS BROUGHT IN EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS OR FREELANCERS WITH SPECIALIZED AI SKILLS.

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AI AVAILABILITY VS. AI UNDERSTANDING

84%

of respondents say their organization is using AI-powered tools.

THE ISSUE?

55%

of respondents say employees at their companies have only basic, very limited or no knowledge or understanding of AI.

BOTTOM LINE FOR COMPANY LEADERS:

If you invest in the tech, invest in the employee training and adoption.

THE NEED FOR SPEED

41%

of respondents say their organization is average or slow in how quickly it adapts to technological change.

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AI HIRING EXPECTED TO GO HIGHER

A sizeable majority (70%) of employees expect an increase in hiring for AI-specific roles in their organizations in the next two years.

AI'S ROLE IN ROLE REPLACEMENT

To what extent do you believe that AI will replace traditional jobs in your organization within the next decade?

- Partially replace or augment many roles
- Only a few roles will be affected
- Completely replace many roles
- No roles will be replaced
- Unsure

17%

9%

4%

43%

26%
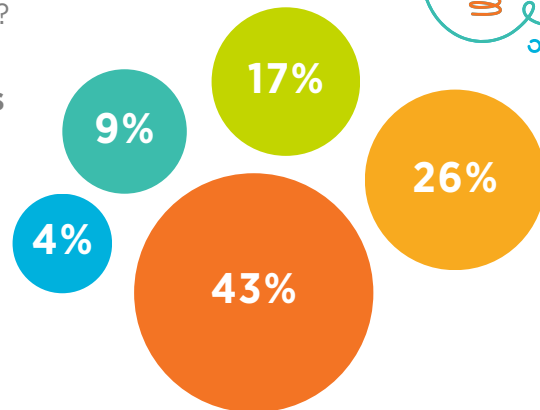
AI'S EFFECT ON JOB SECURITY

When it comes to the integration of AI into the workplace and its impact on job security, **38% of respondents believe AI will change how jobs are done,** but not necessarily reduce the number of jobs available. One-quarter of respondents are confident AI will create more opportunities than it displaces. **Only 4% of respondents say they are very concerned that AI poses a threat to many traditional jobs.**

UPSKILLING INSIGHTS

While hiring external talent can immediately bridge skills gaps (more on that topic in the next section), it's also critical to cultivate internal AI fluency. Upskilling initiatives serve multiple important purposes, including fostering a culture of adaptability and innovation.
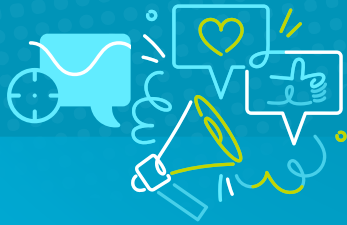
Upskilling enhances a company's in-house capabilities, but can also bolster employee morale, engagement, and retention.

When employees feel that their professional development is being prioritized, they're more apt to be invested in the organization's long-term success. Furthermore, equipping current employees with robust and relevant training can lead to a more seamless integration and adoption of new tools, technologies and programs. In a hypercompetitive landscape, the ability to swiftly adapt is crucial, and upskilling ensures that companies and their employees remain agile and ahead of the curve.

UPSKILLING EMPHASIZED
(BUT NOT ALWAYS EFFECTIVE)

89% of respondents say upskilling is deemed at least moderately important within their companies.

The issue is that "important" doesn't always mean "useful." Nearly one-fifth (**19%**) of employees say their organization's upskilling programs are only slightly effective or not effective at all.

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UPSKILLING OBSTACLES

The most frequently cited barriers to effective upskilling:

#1

Lack of time and resources

#2

Lack of knowledge about available programs

#3

Employee resistance

#4

Inadequate technology infrastructure

UPSKILLING UPSIDE: IT REVS UP RETENTION

90% of employees say more perks related to professional development and upskilling would encourage them to stay with their current company longer.

LEARNING ABOUT MACHINE LEARNING

To what extent does your organization incorporate AI and machine learning into its upskilling programs?

EXTENSIVELY
20%

MODERATELY
50%

RARELY
22%

NOT AT ALL
8%

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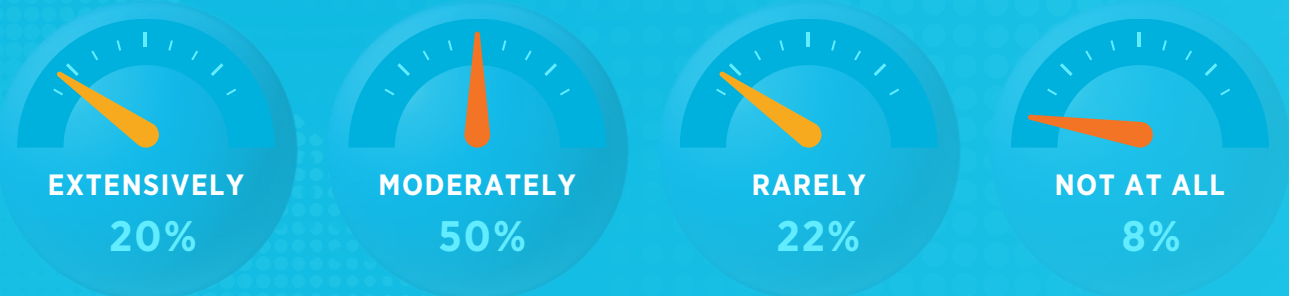
THE MOST POPULAR UPSKILLING APPROACHES

What is the primary mode of upskilling used in your organization?
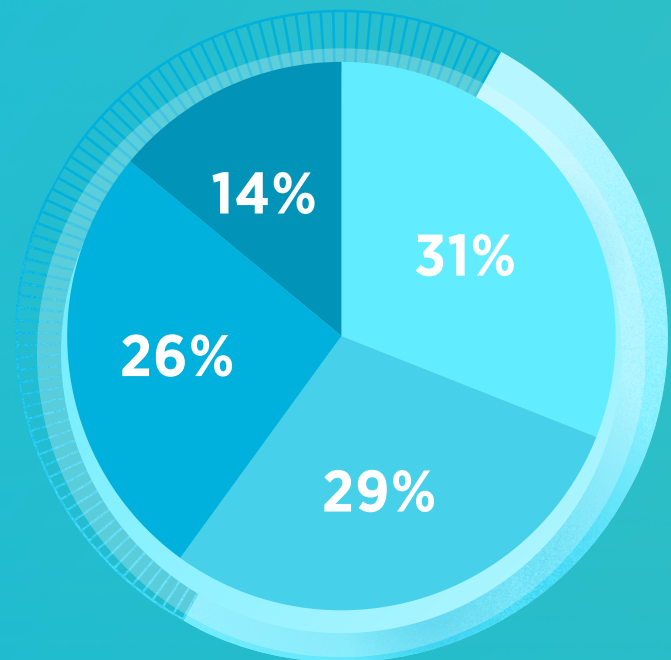
- **Internal training programs**
- **Online courses**
- **External workshops, seminars and conferences**
- **Formal mentoring program**

31%
29%
26%
14%

TRAINING TIME

Which best describes the frequency of upskilling initiatives in your organization?

Regularly (monthly or more frequently)	**30%**
Quarterly	**30%**
Bi-annually	**22%**
Annually	**15%**
Rarely or never	**4%**

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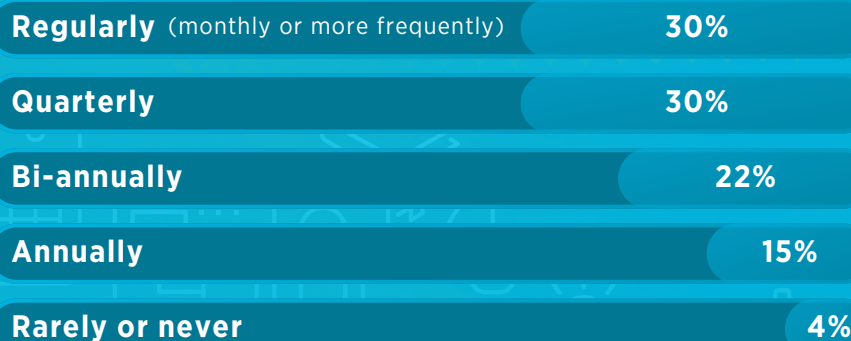
STAFF AUGMENTATION APPROACHES

Hiring in-demand talent with advanced AI skills has become a strategic imperative for many companies. While upskilling current employees is vital, it's a longer-term process. Pressing business needs require immediate expertise. Bringing in marketing, creative, and IT consultants and freelancers with elevated AI capabilities enables companies to quickly capitalize on opportunities, while serving as a catalyst for further technological transformation. These experts bring the technical acumen needed to implement and optimize AI-driven solutions, but they also can offer fresh perspectives and guidance to in-house employees.

In situations in which niche projects or challenges arise, skilled consultants and freelancers can be quickly onboarded to provide targeted expertise without the costs or commitment of extending full-time offers. In essence, by tapping into a reservoir of external AI talent, companies gain flexibility and ensure they're always equipped with the best resources to navigate the complexities of the modern digital age.

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SEEKING SPECIALIZED EXPERTISE

The most common reasons employees say their organization hires freelancers or consultants:

#1 To provide specialized expertise

#2 For immediate help with quick-turn projects

#3 To evaluate and improve current processes and upskill employees

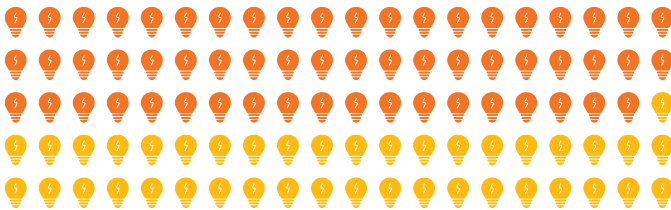**#4** To offset costs accrued by full-time hires

#5 To fill short-term skill gaps

#6 To support teams that are spread thin by increased demands/workloads

TECH-SAVVY REINFORCEMENTS TO THE RESCUE

59% say bringing in freelancers or consultants with specialized tech skills helps bridge the AI knowledge gap within companies.

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STAFFING STRUGGLES

86%

OF THOSE WHO MAKE OR INFLUENCE HIRING DECISIONS SAY IT IS CHALLENGING TO FILL OPEN ROLES.

27%

MEANWHILE, MORE THAN A QUARTER OF WORKERS SAY THE TEAM THEY ARE ON IS NOT ADEQUATELY STAFFED.

REACTIVE RESOURCING

49%

say their organization's **approach to staff augmentation is reactive based on project needs**

28%

say their company **rarely or never brings in additional resources**

22%

say their company **is proactive in seeking external experts**

The inability to effectively anticipate staffing needs and the reluctance to invest in support from freelancers or consultants could be why **51%** of employees surveyed admit they **are currently experiencing burnout.**

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CREATIVE, MARKETING, AND IT HIRING IS HOT

If your organization is actively hiring, which disciplines are the most in-demand?

#1
CREATIVE

#2
MARKETING

#3
IT

#4
HUMAN RESOURCES

#5
OPERATIONS

HOW 24 SEVEN CAN HELP

Whether you're looking to add a dedicated team or individual contributors to scale your **marketing, creative, tech, fashion, beauty** or **retail** efforts, 24 Seven and our family of brands can help you find the right talent — and quickly.

If you need help with AI initiatives, we've got you covered. From content creation and deep market research to trend forecasting and ad campaign management, we have a vast (and vetted) pool of professionals skilled in the latest AI and machine learning tools to help keep your organization one step ahead.

To learn more about how we can help with your hiring or job-searching needs, please visit **24seventalent.com.**

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ABOUT THE 24 SEVEN FAMILY OF BRANDS

24 Seven partners with companies to get **marketing, creative,** and **digital** work done by providing the right talent, innovation, and insights. We drive meaningful impact by helping navigate change in today's evolving environment. Our robust suite of service offerings enables us to identify customized talent solutions for any situation. The 24 Seven family of brands includes these subsidiaries:

• **The Sage Group** provides exceptional marketing and business operations consultants, contractors, and permanent talent that drive results for leading companies across industries.

• **Marketers That Matter**® is a thriving community of influential marketing executives coming together to share innovation and insights.

• **Simplicity Consulting** helps brands run their marketing and operations programs with highly specialized consultants in digital marketing, strategic communications and project management.

• **SketchDeck** is a next-generation creative agency that empowers organizations to seamlessly scale their marketing efforts by accessing all the design services they need in one place.

• **The Cydio Group** is a specialized IT staffing firm that provides innovative, first-hand knowledge of the information technology space. The team is uniquely positioned to connect top-tier IT professionals with notable organizations.

MARKETERS THAT MATTER.   THE SAGE GROUP   simplicity   sketchdeck   THE CYDIO GROUP