

# Diversity and Inclusion in the U.S. Graphic Communication Industry

## Research Summary

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*This report is an excerpt from the published research study. The full research study will be published in the Society for the Advancement of Management 2016 Conference Proceedings and will be available fall 2016 at [www.samnational.org](http://www.samnational.org).*

## ABSTRACT

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The primary purpose of this exploratory research study was to investigate the current status/issues on diversity and inclusion in the U.S. graphic communication industry. The objectives of the study were to: 1) understand the make-up of the industry's gender, ethnic and age demographic, 2) gain insights on the level and areas of diversity and inclusion in the companies where study participants were employed, 3) examine participants' perspective on the state of diversity and inclusion in today's graphic communication industry and, 4) add to the body of knowledge on this very important issue.

The research sample consisted of members of the Print Production Professionals LinkedIn Group and Alumni from the Rochester Institute of Technology's School of Media Sciences. Data were collected through an Internet survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was focused in three areas: 1) demographics, 2) the status of diversity and inclusion in graphic communication and, 3) any recommendations or comments the participants chose to share relative to the industry's state of diversity and inclusion.

The significant findings that emerged were:

- The graphic communication workforce was described by respondents as an aging population with the majority of employees being near or at retirement age. The majority of the respondents indicated that their age range was 40 years (63.5%) or older and almost half have worked in the industry more than 20 years.
- Challenges with attracting and retaining younger employees were noted. Less than 17% of the respondents were under the age of 30.
- The ethnicity of the industry seems to be keeping pace with the U.S. population where it is predicted by the year 2020 that the U.S. will be 36% non-white ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)). Approximately 29% of research study respondents were non-white.
- The level of diversity in the workplace was reported to be higher at smaller (<50 employees) and larger (>500 employees) companies. However, comments from the respondents suggest that women and people of color are often excluded from management and higher level positions. Gender, age and ethnicity were the major areas of diversity and inclusion that were indicated.

The outcome of this research suggests that as the industry continues its structural and technical transformation and the search for key personnel becomes more competitive, it is imperative that graphic communication businesses understand, embrace and celebrate diversity and inclusion. It is hoped that the findings from this study will be a call to action that will help industry leaders, educators and individuals realize that diversity and inclusion is essential for future industry stability and success.

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

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What is diversity and inclusion and how diverse and inclusive is the U.S. graphic communication industry? Does the ethnic diversity of this industry align with that of the U.S. population? The U.S. population is becoming more ethnically diverse and it is predicted that by the year 2020 at least 36% of the population will be non-white and by 2060 that percentage will increase to 48% (www.census.gov).

It is important for employers in the industry to have answers to these questions for several reasons, but a key one is that companies with diverse workforces are known to be more innovative, strategic and profitable (Kerby and Burns, 2012).

Diversity can be defined as the individual differences (e.g., personality, learning styles, and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, gender, country of origin, religion) that can be engaged in the service of learning and working together. Subsequently inclusion is the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in people, curriculum, and communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) in which individuals might connect (www.aacu.org).

The term diversity is often associated with only race and/or gender. It is clear from the above definition that diversity goes far beyond these two characteristics.

Additionally, it is important to note that diversity and inclusion should complement one another. The full benefit of a diverse workforce cannot be realized without inclusiveness. Thus, diversity and inclusion should be a strategic goal for all businesses and industries.

## OVERVIEW OF THE GRAPHIC COMMUNICATION INDUSTRY

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The graphic communication industry is multi-faceted in that it consists of many types of businesses that employ a large number of individuals. It is difficult to determine an exact number of employees that make up the entire industry. A significant portion of the businesses in the industry are market service providers or printing companies. The National Association for Printing Leadership (now Epicomm) estimated in its 2013 State of the Industry Report that there were approximately 40,000 of these companies that employ more than 1 million people (Hall, 2013).

The graphic communication industry can be defined as:

*The people and processes that create, develop, produce, and disseminate media using words, illustrations, or images to communicate information, ideas, and feelings. Included are content creators and service providers that apply printing, publishing, packaging, and electronic imaging technologies for production, marketing, and information distribution (Romano, 2015).*

This definition is indicative that the graphic communication industry is quite diverse relative to the processes used and the products and services offered. However, the question that remains is: How diverse is the graphic communication industry workforce?

According to the 2014 Bureau of Labor Statistics *Printing and Related Support Activities* report gender diversity for this sector of the graphic communication industry is 63% male and 37% female. Further it is noted in this report, that ethnic diversity is 70% Caucasian with Hispanic/Latino being the next largest ethnic group at 16.8%. These percentages, based on approximately 528,000 employees, seem to be in line with U.S. projections on ethnicity (www.census.gov) which indicates that in 2012 the U.S. population was 78% Caucasian and 17% Hispanic/Latino.

As the U.S. graphic communication industry continues its structural and technical transformation and the search for key personnel becomes more competitive, it is imperative that graphic communication businesses embrace and celebrate diversity and inclusion (Cummings, 2014).

## METHODOLOGY

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Data for this qualitative exploratory research project was obtained through the use of an internet survey questionnaire and was analyzed using descriptive statistics, proportion and independence testing.

The questionnaire was focused in three areas: 1) demographics, 2) the status of diversity and inclusion in graphic communication and 3) recommendations or comments the participants chose to share relative to the industry's state of diversity and inclusion.

The research sample consisted of members of the Print Production Professionals LinkedIn Group and a sample group of alumni from the Rochester Institute of Technology's School of Media Sciences. The Print Production Professionals LinkedIn Group consists of print producers, buyers, art directors, designers and individuals in various areas of management.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As with any research this study was subjected to a number of limitations. Key limitations include:

- Sample population and size – a random sampling selection method was used and there were 160 respondents which is a very small sample when compared to the approximately 87,000 members in the Print Production Professionals LinkedIn group and the 500 alumni from the School of Media Sciences.
- The total number of research study respondents was less than 160 as some respondents started the survey, but only answered the first two questions. As a result they were not included in the total number (n) of respondents.

- Although definitions for the terms “diversity” and “inclusion” were provided on the questionnaire, combining these terms in the related questions may have prevented respondents from accurately giving a clear perspective on both the status of diversity and the status of inclusion.

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

This section outlines an abbreviated summary of the results from the research study. The total data set can be accessed in the published report which will be available in fall 2016 at [www.samnational.org](http://www.samnational.org).

### Respondents' Demographics:

#### Gender

Female 44.0%  
Male 56.0%

#### Ethnicity

Caucasian 72%  
Hispanic/Latino American 10.0%  
African American 10.0%  
Asian 4.2%  
Native American 1.7%

#### Age

41-50 years 22.8%  
51-60 years 35.8%

#### Job Title/Area of Responsibility

Management/business owners 44.1%  
Sales/marketing 18.9%  
Production 14.7%

#### Company Size by Employee

50 or less employees 36.9 %  
50 to 100 employees 16%  
Over 500 employees 29.1%

### Status of Diversity and Inclusion:

Level of Diversity and Inclusion in Respondents' Company: 41.1% of respondents indicated that the level of diversity and inclusion in their company was somewhat diverse/inclusive and 41.8% indicated that the level was very diverse/inclusive. Gender, age and ethnicity were the major areas of diversity and inclusion that were indicated.

**Note: To ensure response clarity, a definition for diversity and inclusion was provided on the questionnaire.**

### Voluntary Comments:

Of the 130 comments provided the majority could be grouped into specific categories such as recognition of advances in diversity, minimal diversity and inclusion and the need to attract younger workers, women and people of color.

## DISCUSSION

The research question at the core of this study is: What is the perception of employees in the U.S. graphic communication industry about the types and levels of diversity and inclusion?

As mentioned previously it is difficult to determine the exact number of employees that work in the U.S. graphic communication industry. Sources suggest that the number exceeds 500,000 (Bureau of Labor Statistics) and based on the types of businesses included, it may be over 1 million (Hall, 2013). Although the sample size of those who responded to this survey was very small (160)

when compared to the potential number of people employed in the industry, those who participated in this research study are employees in this industry who shared their own unique perspectives on the status of diversity and inclusion. Therefore, the conclusions drawn are largely based on these perspectives.

The significant findings that emerged from the respondents of this research study were:

- The industry appears to be largely comprised of an aging workforce. The majority of the respondents indicated that their age range was 40 years (63.5%) or older and almost half have worked in the industry more than 20 years.
- The industry seems to attract few young professionals/workers. Less than 17% of the respondents were under the age of 30. One respondent commented: “I believe the biggest need in the industry is to get more age diversity. We need younger people to come into the industry and shake things up a bit with their perspectives and thoughts.”
- Even though women have a presence in the industry there is still limited ethnic and gender diversity in management and leadership positions. The following comment from one of the respondents clearly articulates this: “There is a lack of African American and female representation in creative leadership positions.”
- None of the African American respondents cited their place of employment as being very diverse or inclusive. The majority of African American respondents described their company as not diverse or inclusive.
- The majority of males who participated in this research have worked in the industry 20+ years which seems to support the perception that this is still a male dominated industry. The following comment supports this perception: “It’s gotten better for women, but there is still a lot of the ole boy’s club prevalent.”
- Twenty four percent of the women who responded to this survey have been in the industry 1 to 5 years. Approximately 47% have been in the industry 20+ years. This seems to suggest that younger women are entering the graphic communication workforce and that there are women who were trailblazers that still remain in the industry.
- Respondents who indicated that their companies were either somewhat or very diverse and inclusive cited gender, age, ethnicity or professional background as the major areas.
- Of the 130 voluntary comments that were provided 21.5% noted advances in diversity during their time in the industry. However, 31.5% of the respondents who commented noted that the graphic communication industry is not very diverse or inclusive. To quote one respondent: “I think it is still a very tough field for women and people of color.”

Although the majority of the respondents indicated that their companies were very or somewhat diverse and inclusive, the overall response from the research study participants suggests that there is significant work to do to ensure that the industry continues to work toward a balance of diversity of all types and to provide an inclusive work environment.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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It is the opinion of this researcher that the inputs and perspectives of the respondents from this study are representative of the situations and occurrences associated with and the status of diversity and inclusion in the graphic communication industry. Based on the resultant data and voluntary comments, the status of diversity and inclusion in the U.S. graphic communication industry can be summarized as follows:

- The ethnicity of the industry seems to be keeping pace with the U.S. population where it is predicted by the year 2020 that the U.S. will be 36% non-white. Approximately 29% of research study respondents were non-white. Additionally, the data from the 2014 BLS report showed that 30% of employees involved in printing and related support activities were non-white ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)).
- The majority of employees in the industry are Caucasian and male.
- The majority of employees in the industry are over the age of 40.

- The level of diversity in the workplace is higher at smaller (<50) and larger (>500) companies.
- The level of inclusion experienced by respondents could not be adequately determined due to the structure of the associated question. However, comments shared by the respondents suggest that women and people of color were often excluded from management and higher level positions.

The preceding summary is indicative that more focus from graphic communication business leadership is needed to address the shortcomings and promote the accomplishments relative to the diversity in their organizations. Along with businesses, institutions of higher learning and individuals can play a key role in ensuring that the U.S. graphic communication workforce is diverse and that companies ensure inclusiveness.

### *Roles of Graphic Communication Businesses*

Diversity and inclusion must be managed, thus leaders must create a culture of inclusion, not exclusion if they are to be successful in establishing a culture that values differences. Some key approaches include:

- Developing strategies for implementation, training, mentoring, retention and assessment.
- Diversification of the leadership team. To quote one respondent: “As a long term member in this industry I have seen little diversity in management. Most managers are white, male and English speaking.”

- In order to address the issue of difficulty of attracting younger workers businesses should expand college recruitment efforts with a focus not only on recruiting, but retention.

### *Role of Institutions of Higher Learning*

Institutions of higher learning must prepare the next generation to thrive in the industry both educationally and experientially. In addition to teaching the needed technical skills educators need to inform students about the value proposition of this cross-media industry by showing them the innovative, creative and progressive aspects. One respondent stated it best: “A broadly implemented education on the possibilities within the graphic communication field could greatly increase [age] diversity within the industry.”

### *Role of Individuals*

Individual contributors have a role in promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace and beyond. There are many things individuals can do to assist the graphic communication industry with advancing diversity and inclusion. Seasoned employees can act as mentors to younger or new employees. Another important contribution is to reach out to one’s professional and personal contacts as a way to diversify candidate pools. It is hoped that the findings from this study will be a call to action that will help industry leaders, educators and individuals realize that diversity and inclusion is essential for future industry stability and success.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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