

Research Report

2023 Independent Workforce Outlook

Latest Trends in Corporate Spending on Independent Professionals



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Introduction



Uncertain economic environment. Battle for the best knowledge workers. The need for agility and cost savings.



“2023 – New year, NEW UNCERTAINTY!” seems appropriate to describe the current situation business leaders find themselves in. The reasons behind the current uncertain environment, though, are entirely different from the ones encountered while entering 2020, 2021, and 2022.

As we created this report, we experienced a sense of déjà vu. It’s safe to assume we’re not alone.

To list a few key challenges that business leaders have been entrusted with to overcome:

- **A slowing economy** as companies rein in spending and [consumer confidence declines](#) caused by increasing interest rates
- As companies face slower growth rates and decreasing profitability, investor sentiment swiftly turned negative. Business leaders have been forced to [preserve cash and make tough decisions to reduce their workforce](#)
- However, the talent market for highly specialized skills continues to be tight. Unemployment rates [continue to be at record lows](#), and Gartner reported that 1 in 3 Human Resources (HR) leaders believe that their current sourcing strategies are insufficient for finding the skills they need

**1 in 3 HR leaders believe
that their current
sourcing strategies are
insufficient for finding
the skills they need.**

– Gartner

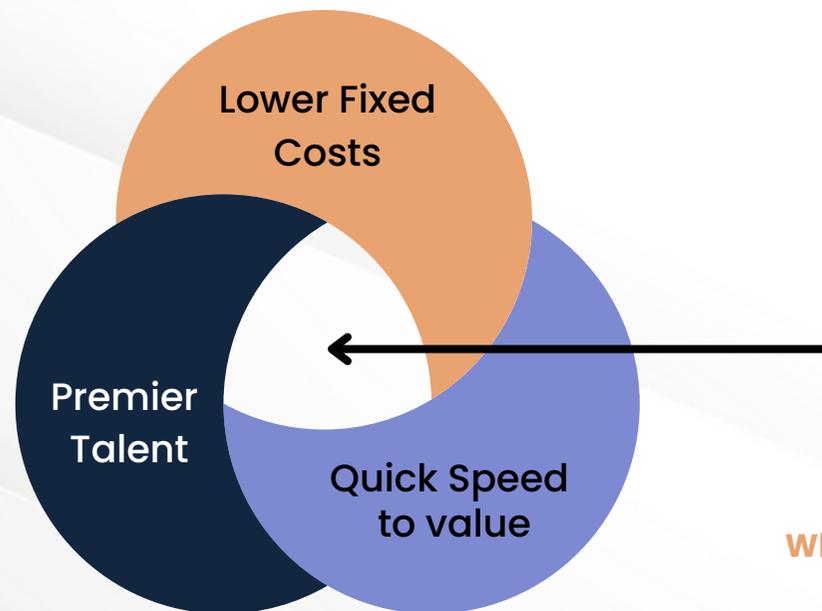
Building your talent acquisition plans for this new era of uncertainty



Cash conservation efforts to prepare for a rough economic environment are likely to drive leaders at enterprises to make some additional tough decisions on slowing down the pace of hiring and relooking the size of their workforce.

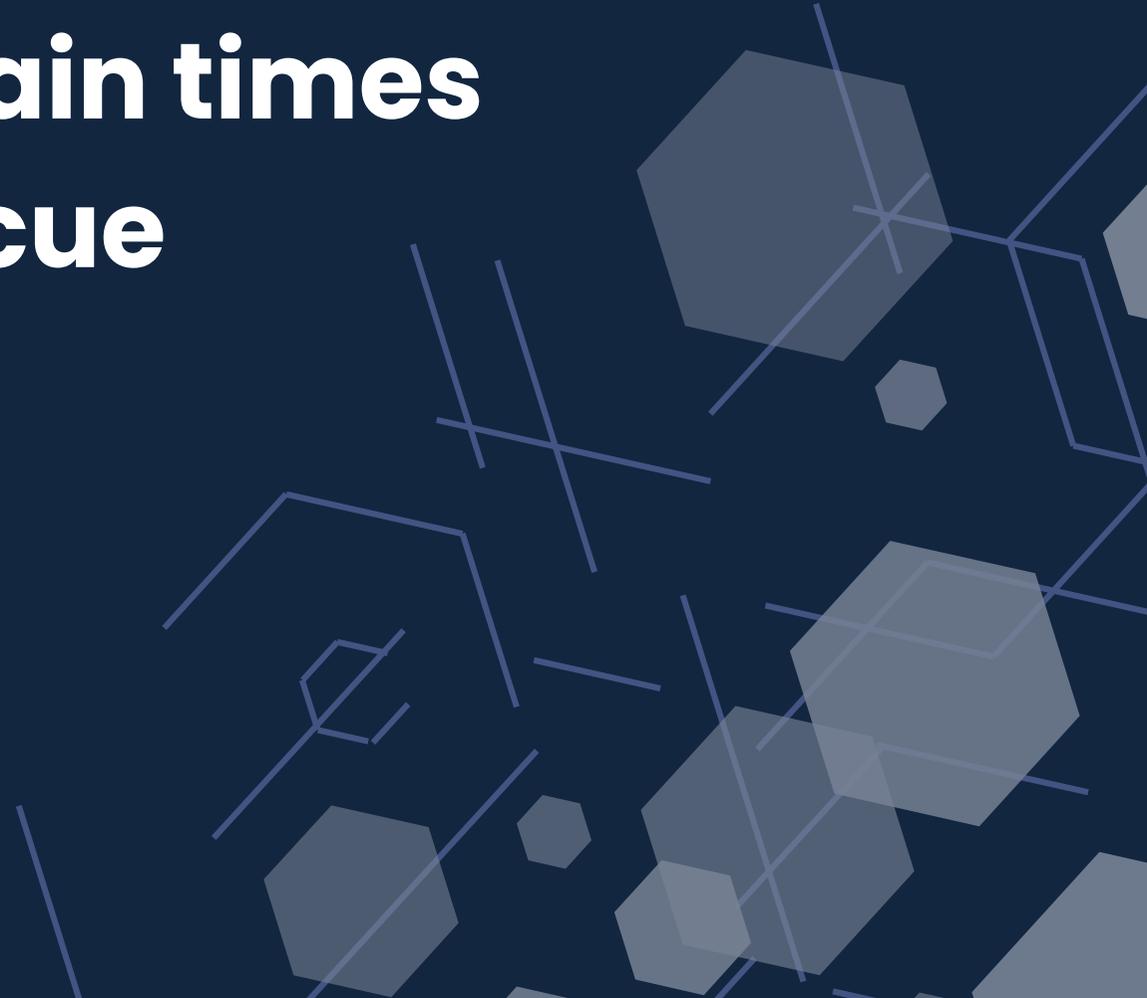
They are, however, investing in proven talent acquisition models that provide them:

- **Flexibility to reduce fixed costs** to onboard expertise to their teams to respond to a [rapidly evolving economic environment](#) quickly
- **Highly skilled experts** in [a new workplace ecosystem](#) with a focus on addressing key skills gaps in their teams
- **Faster speed-to-value** to onboard expertise and execute projects



What enterprise leaders need today

**A proven talent acquisition
model for uncertain times
comes to the rescue**



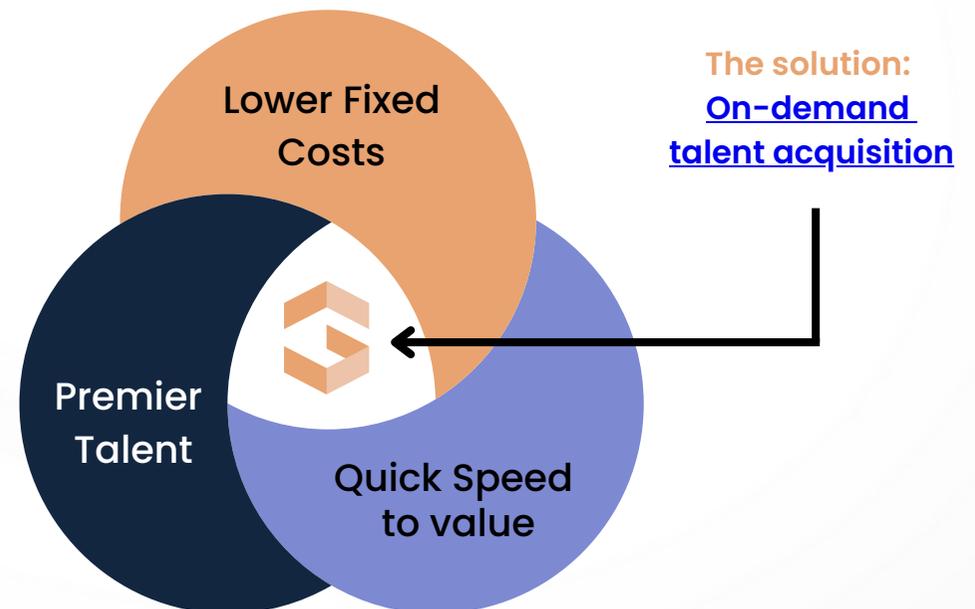
Faster. Agile. More cost-effective.

Flexibility, lower costs, and high speed to value are the very attributes that have attracted enterprises to on-demand talent acquisition platforms to achieve their business objectives.

A [Deloitte and MIT Sloan](#) report found that 74% of leaders and managers stated that effective management of their independent workforce is critical to their organization's success. We saw this dynamic play out on Graphite; **corporate spending on hiring independent experts for the most in-demand skills went up between 51% - 158% YoY in 2022.** Demand for specific functional skills such as [corporate strategy](#), [marketing](#), [data science/analytics](#), and [HR](#) rose the most. In contrast, demand for independent [finance & accounting](#) expertise remained steady, increasing only by 2%.

Enterprises looked inwards and invested in digital transformation, tools, automation, and more to enable the business to operate more efficiently and grow.

Tapping into skilled professionals without increasing fixed costs while achieving 30-50% cost savings compared to traditional consulting spend gives enterprises the flexibility to achieve their strategic goals in an environment where enterprise leaders must rethink budgets and headcounts.



A preferred work model for knowledge workers

The desire for a flexible model to onboard talent also coincides with a shift in knowledge worker preference to have higher control over how, where, and for whom they work. Here at Graphite, we saw our network of highly vetted independent experts grow by 12% in 2022 to where it is today at 9,000+ skilled professionals.

In this annual review of Graphite's proprietary data, we wanted to look closely at the functional areas companies focused on this year and the implications for 2023.

While independent talent usage was up across nearly all project types, we'll focus on the noteworthy ones as they indicate where corporate investment in hiring independent experts is today and where we will be going, given the economic climate.



What's in this Report?

Business leaders leverage a guided experience on the Graphite platform to share **the skills** they seek to onboard to their teams **for project-based work**. In this report, we have uncovered insights from the aggregated data on our platform.

You can use these insights to:

- Identify critical skills for which your peers are hiring independent experts on-demand
- Build your plans to address subject matter expertise gaps in your teams by onboarding independent experts
- Learn what lies ahead and the investments we've made to enable corporate leaders to onboard the right talent at the right time to achieve their business goals

Trends in demand for independent talent in specific functional skills



Corporate strategy

Redefining core business operations with resilience at its heart

Amidst peak uncertainty, as companies sought solutions to their toughest business challenges, they looked to their corporate strategy teams – the very teams that were already understaffed and reeling from the impacts of the great resignation.

To set their teams up for success, corporate strategy leaders recognized the need to alleviate bandwidth constraints. They increased their investments in hiring high-caliber [independent corporate strategy professionals](#) on Graphite by 51% YoY over 2022.

As they looked to enhance business performance by restructuring business units to better operate in today's environment and transformation initiatives, the spend on hiring independent expertise was up in the following skills:



Change Management

838%

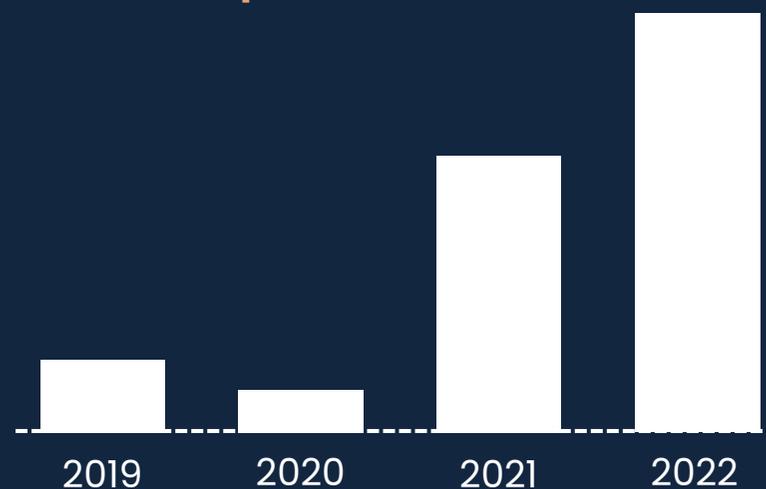
Business Unit Strategy

62%

Transformation Management

48%

Spending on hiring independent corporate strategy expertise was **up 51% YoY** in 2022



Corporate strategy

What lies ahead in 2023

Looking toward 2023, companies will likely continue to grapple with the aftereffects mentioned above. Continued investments in [digital transformation initiatives](#) will likely continue to fuel demand for business unit strategy and change management/organization design expertise.

These focus areas will also help drive other initiatives, such as improving customer-centricity, focusing on ESG (environmental, social, and governance) issues, and optimizing supply chains to combat inflation better and enhance resilience.

Corporate strategy teams and professionals will be called upon to define new approaches to building resilience into their organization's DNA.

How corporate strategy teams leverage on-demand expertise

A global Investment Bank redefined its enterprise risk management framework by onboarding a former management consultant with 9+ years of experience working for firms like S&P Global and Barclays.

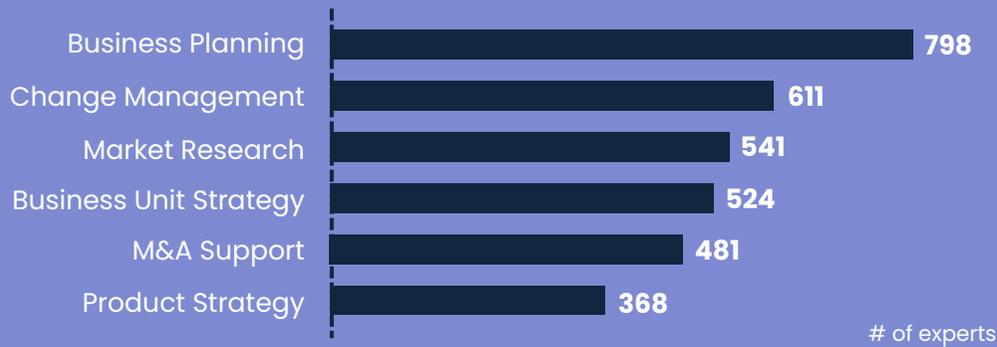
[Learn more >>](#)

A clinical-stage gene therapy company onboarded a former Big Four consultant with over 18 years of experience to set up medical affairs unit to better connect with an external audience.

[Learn more >>](#)

Our network of **2,890 independent corporate strategy** experts at a glance

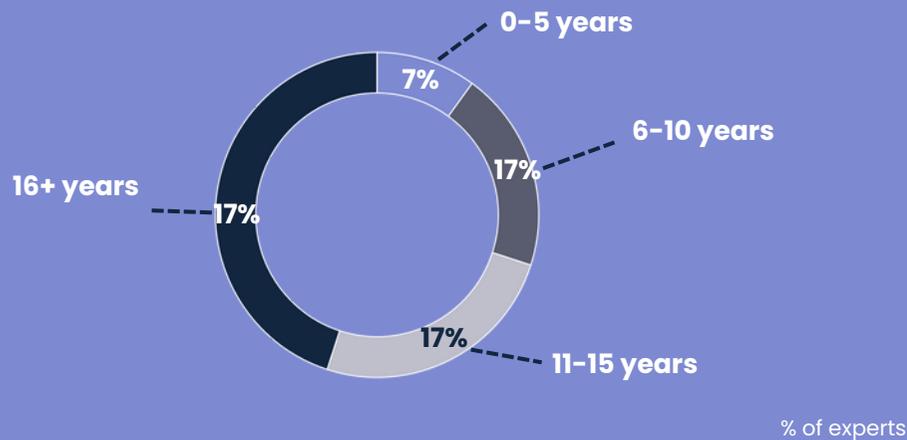
Top functional skills



Top sector subject matter expertise



Years of experience



Experience at leading firms



Corporate strategy

How we've invested in setting you up for success in 2023

We've aligned our efforts to the key needs corporate strategy leaders have shared with us. To help you access the most highly skilled experts, we:

- Optimized our vetting processes with tweaks to our already robust hard skills and soft skills assessments while growing the pool of independent corporate strategy professionals by 11% in 2022 to 2,890 experts
- Built robust AI models to recommend and match the most relevant experts to your projects by looking at parameters such as their relevant hard skills, sector experience, reviews on past projects, and more

A few of our top-rated corporate strategy experts



Kate W

Results-driven professional with over 20 years of management consulting experience

Change Management / Org Design

Market Research / Analysis

Business Analytics

Cost Reduction



Peter C

Business transformation leader with expertise leading complex transformations and integrations

Restructuring / Turnarounds

Post-Merger Integration

Human Capital Consulting



Christoph K

Strategy consultant with 10+ year experience with Bain and EY; M&A and PE experience

Strategy Development

PMO Transformation

Geographic Expansion



Finance & accounting

Proactive actions to prepare for uncertain times

Finance teams found themselves at the intersection of [several challenges](#) we explored at the beginning of this report. Each one caused an acute impact on corporate financial performance in 2022.

Corporate spending on onboarding [independent finance expertise](#) on our platform remained largely steady over 2022, growing by only 2% YoY. However, while facing an acute shortage of skilled finance talent, CFOs recognized the importance of [enhancing decision-making capabilities](#) and supporting M&A transactions in the midst of a murky economic climate.

To successfully execute these projects, they increased their investments in onboarding independent experts with highly specialized skills, such as:



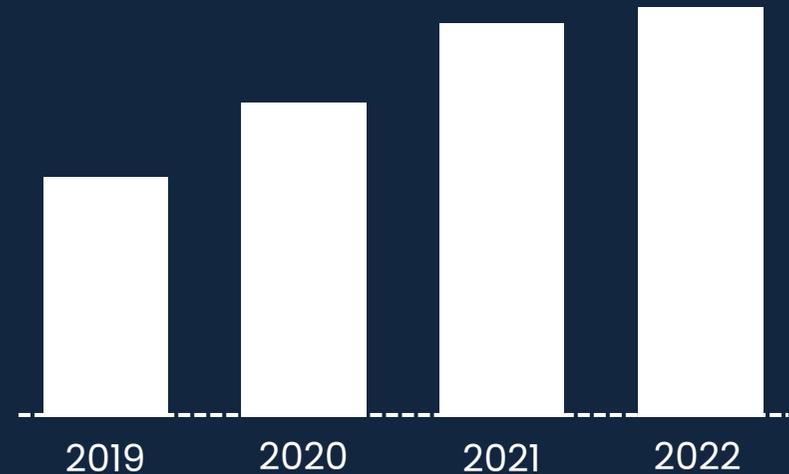
Financial Planning & Analysis (FP&A)

51% 

M&A Support

22% 

Spending on hiring independent finance & accounting expertise remained steady over 2022



Finance & accounting

What lies ahead in 2023

Heading into an uncertain environment in 2023, CFOs are bound to be called upon to overcome some of the toughest challenges in a high-interest-rate environment. However, falling valuations and an environment where capital is hard to come by could present financially stable companies with attractive M&A opportunities. The biotechnology sector appears to be one of the first sectors to be [experiencing this phenomenon](#).

This, combined with a [renewed focus on monitoring financial performance](#) and identifying areas for improvement, is likely to strain understaffed finance teams in the perceivable future. We anticipate these trends to drive, if not an increase in demand, a steady need for independent financial expertise in 2023.

How finance teams leverage on-demand expertise

After their CFO resigned, **a healthcare company** hired an interim CFO on-demand in less than 2 weeks to ensure business continuity. They achieved quick speed to value with an expert with 17+ years of finance expertise.

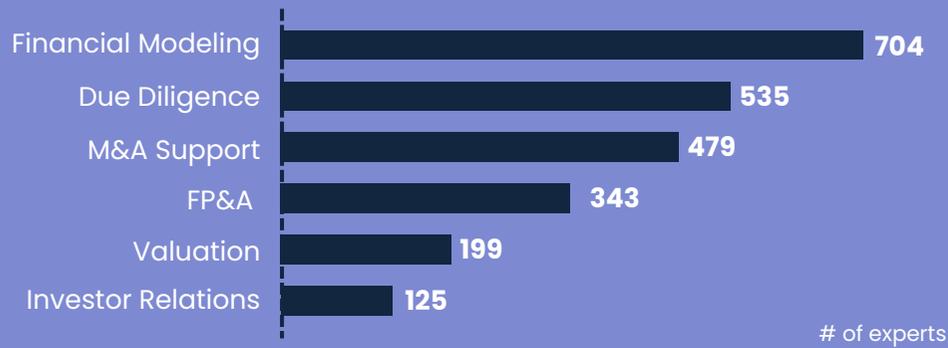
[Learn more >>](#)

Krispy Kreme hired an independent FP&A expert with past experience in the quick service restaurant space to define a predictable financial modeling and reporting process to power continued growth momentum.

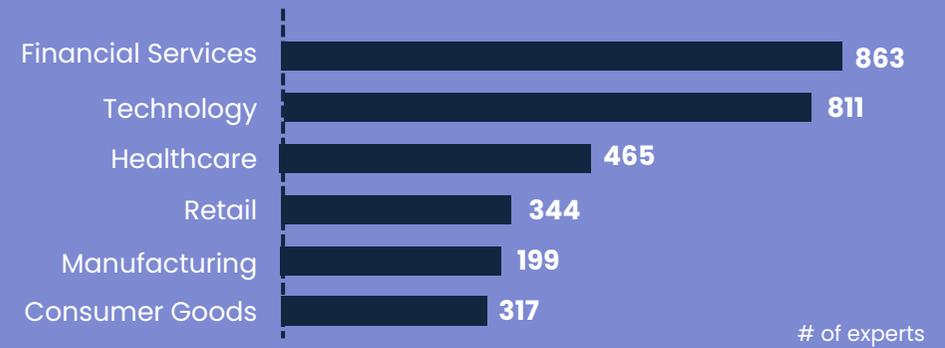
[Learn more >>](#)

Our network of **3,490 independent finance & accounting** experts at a glance

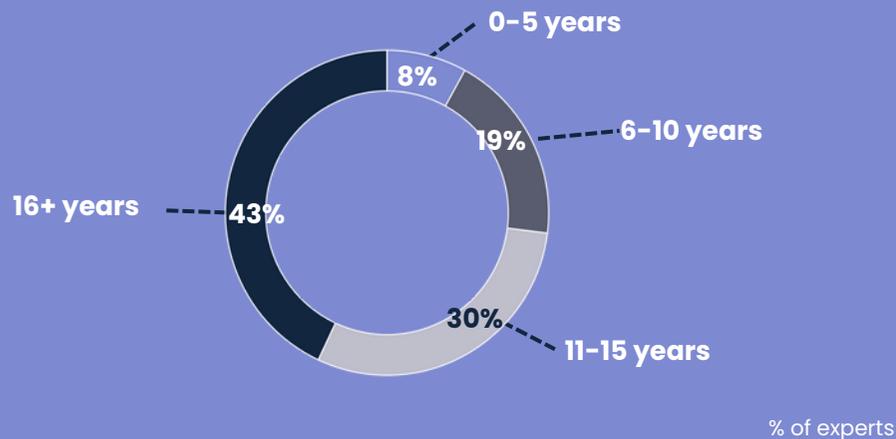
Top functional skills



Top sector subject matter expertise



Years of experience



Experience at leading firms



Marketing

Shining a light on customer centricity

Marketing leaders started 2022 on a high note – beating expectations in a red-hot economic environment. However, as the bottled-up effects of inflation and supply chain challenges unraveled, they faced unprecedented challenges in achieving targets, and budgets came under pressure.

They returned to the drawing board to reimagine their go-to-market strategies. To achieve their goals with fewer resources, they looked to onboarding highly-skilled independent experts on demand. We saw this shift on Graphite, where enterprises increased spend on hiring [independent marketing expertise](#) by 74% YoY.

To execute their newly defined customer-centric strategies, marketing leaders increased their spending on onboarding independent expertise for:



Customer Experience

450%



Content Marketing

310%

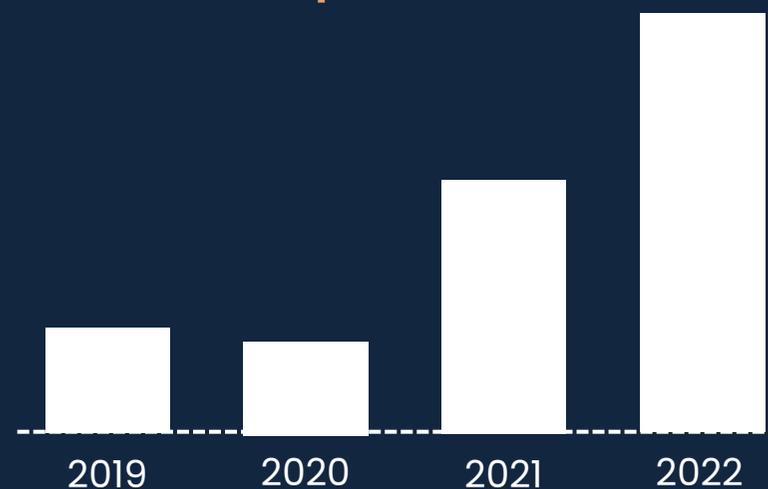


Digital Marketing /
Advertising

139%



Spending on hiring independent marketing experts is **up 74% YoY**



Marketing

What lies ahead in 2023

Marketing leaders will enter 2023 with a renewed focus on defining and executing strategies that drive quantifiable results to secure budgets and demonstrate the value of marketing across the organization. [Forrester predicts that CMOs will double down](#) on improving the customer experience, ultimately fueling brand equity.

The above priorities, combined with the desire for a flexible model to onboard highly skilled experts as needs evolve, are likely to drive increased demand for independent customer experience and digital marketing professionals.

How marketing teams leverage on-demand expertise

A leading SaaS technology company launches a new product in record time by onboarding a seasoned brand strategist with over 20 years of experience.

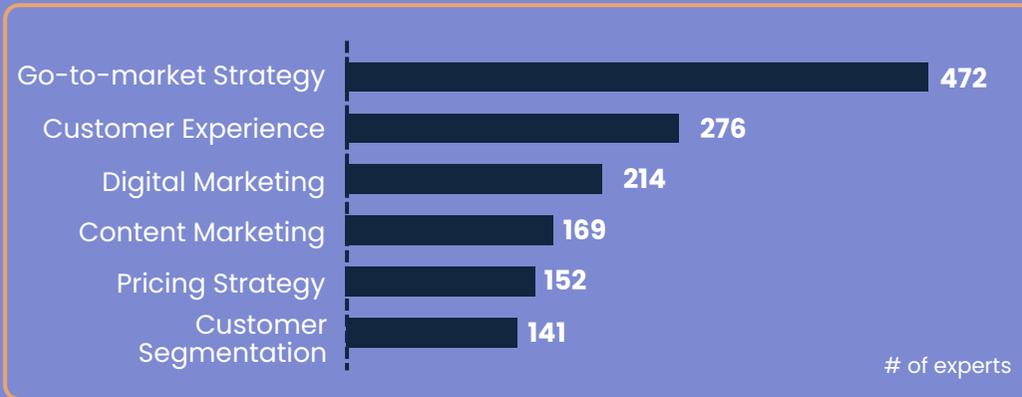
[Learn more >>](#)

A southern California-based **medical practice management company** onboards brand building expert on Graphite to devise a strategic marketing plan to fuel future growth.

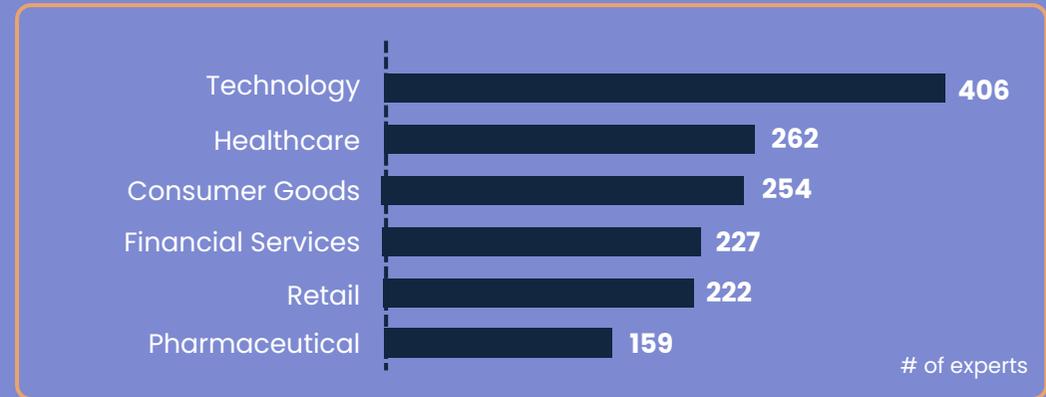
[Learn more >>](#)

Our network of **1,375 independent marketing experts** at a glance

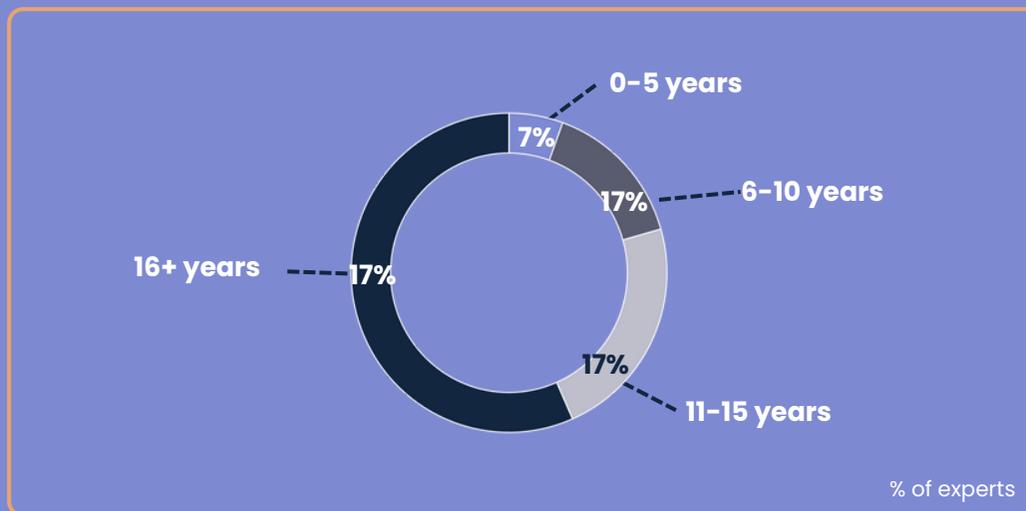
Top functional skills



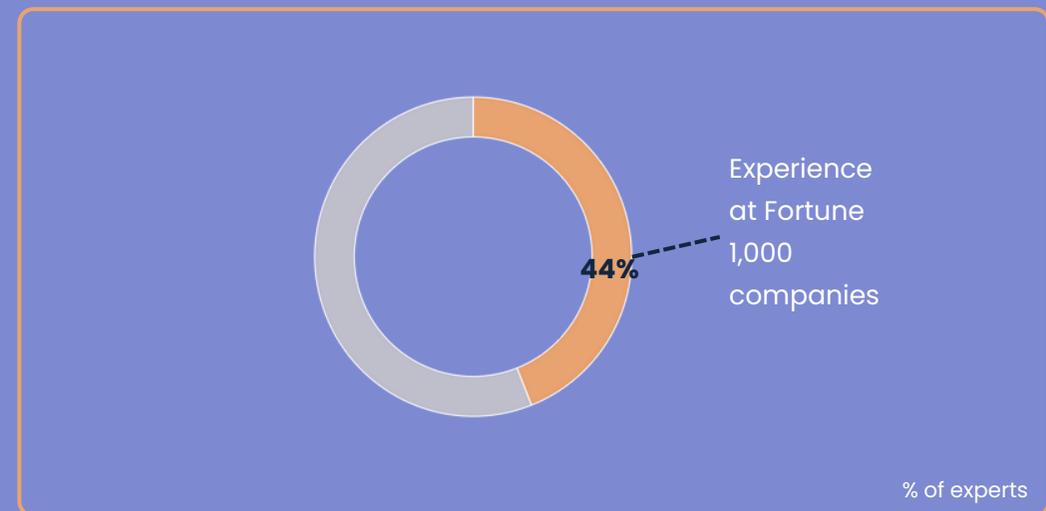
Top sector subject matter expertise



Years of experience



Experience at leading firms



Marketing

How we've invested in setting you up for success in 2023

As CMOs prepare for a challenging year ahead, we've invested in ensuring that onboarding the best independent marketing professionals on demand is one less thing they have to worry about. We have invested in:

- Optimizing our vetting processes to assess specific marketing skills and soft skills assessments while growing the pool of independent marketing professionals by 5% in 2022 to 1,375 experts
- Building robust AI models to recommend and match the most relevant experts to your projects by looking at parameters such as their relevant hard skills, sector experience, reviews on past projects, and more

A few of our top-rated marketing experts



Anthony R

Full-stack marketer with 50K hours of marketing, branding, and advertising experience

Digital Marketing / Advertising

Voice of Customer Growth Strategy

Customer Segmentation



Keren U

Fraction CMO, brand strategy, and product marketing for B2B service and SaaS brands

Go-to-Market Strategy

Competitive Landscaping

Content Marketing



Michael F

CMO with experience in growth strategy across several sectors

Primary Research

Brand Strategy

Pricing Strategy

Product Strategy

Go-to-Market Strategy

Data & analytics

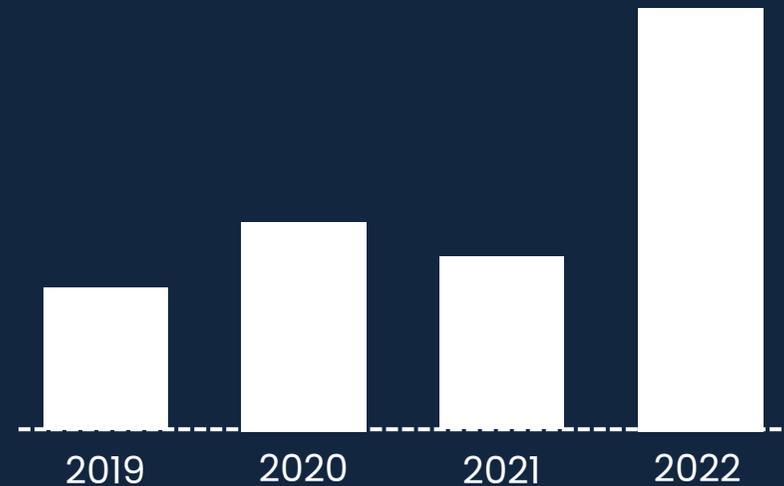
Striving for a more data-centric organization

We find ourselves in a world where every organization is in a quest to quickly discover and act on insights to find its way through these uncertain times. Today Chief Data Officers (CDO) and, more broadly, data & analytics leaders are being called upon to lead [data offense initiatives](#). Data offense projects tend to focus on the following:

- Enabling new products and services
- Increasing revenues and profits through enhanced operations
- Powering insights to improve customer relationships, and more

Democratizing access to data that can be trusted and in a format that's usable for business decision-making is key to achieving those lofty goals.

Spending on hiring independent marketing experts is **up 158% YoY**



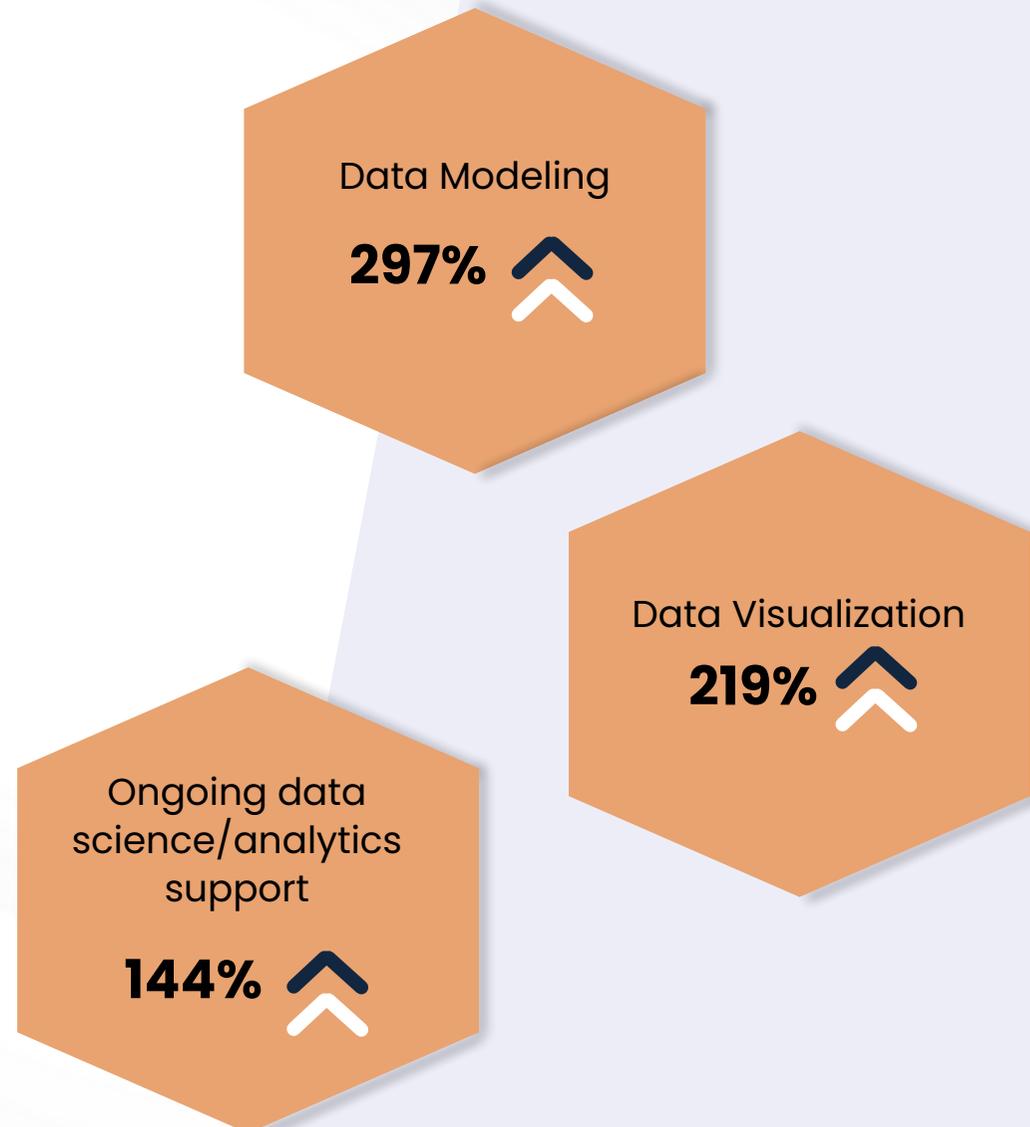
Data & analytics

Striving for a more data-centric organization

However, finding [qualified data and analytics talent has always been a challenge](#) and one that was exacerbated as part of the Great Resignation. As companies struggled to find talent with the appropriate skill set, they started looking at creative ways to onboard the right subject matter experts.

We saw this pent-up demand for experienced data and analytics professionals on Graphite, with spending in the category growing by 158% YoY.

Looking closer at the most in-demand skills, the data supports the undercurrent trend, with spend on the following categories ramping up the most:



Data & analytics

What lies ahead in 2023

Looking ahead, [data is not expected to remain static](#). AI systems, combined with ML, are transforming data so that it will learn, cleanse itself, and pull in additional data as customers and market conditions change.

The results of all future investments in modernizing their data infrastructure would lie in building a data-driven culture across the entire organization, and 69% of CDOs reported that [most of their time is spent on data-driven culture initiatives](#) and changing behavior around data.

However, technology leaders continue to ask themselves the same question as always – “[Who’s got the talent](#)” to execute such strategically critical initiatives? Gartner’s recent report suggests that the solution lies in a creative approach to sourcing talent from the independent workforce – IT leaders can create new role profiles and work with their HR partners to identify outdated policies that may keep the enterprise from [quickly and easily engaging gig](#) and other workers to create a neurodiverse work environment.

How data teams leverage on-demand expertise

A **US-based healthcare provider** leveraged an independent expert to deploy a deep learning-based image processing model to prevent sources of surgeon errors with real-time notifications.

[Learn more >>](#)

A **SaaS technology provider for life sciences companies** hired an independent expert to optimize an SKU-based pricing model by running a price elasticity multivariable regression analysis.

[Learn more >>](#)

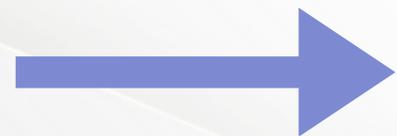
Data & analytics

How we've invested in setting you up for success in 2023

04

Technology leaders across sectors are likely to continue facing pressures in finding highly specialized expertise to execute their efforts toward building data-driven culture at their companies. Through a combination of investments in sourcing efforts and further optimizing our vetting processes, our network of approved data and analytics independent experts on Graphite grew 35% YoY in 2022 to help companies onboard leading experts on demand.

A few of our top-rated data & analytics experts



Holly R

A technology leader providing end-to-end data analytics and IT consulting

Data Visualization / Reports

Data Optimization Data Modeling

Cloud Architecture



Gideon F

Data Engineer with strong proficiency in Python, SQL, APIs and BI analytical tools

Data Visualization / Reports

Python Systems Integration

Business Analytics



Evan O

Globally experienced Customer Analytics & Consumer Insights consultant

Data Science

Python

Power BI

Tableau

Qualtrics

R

SQL

Human resources

Reimagining the role of human resources

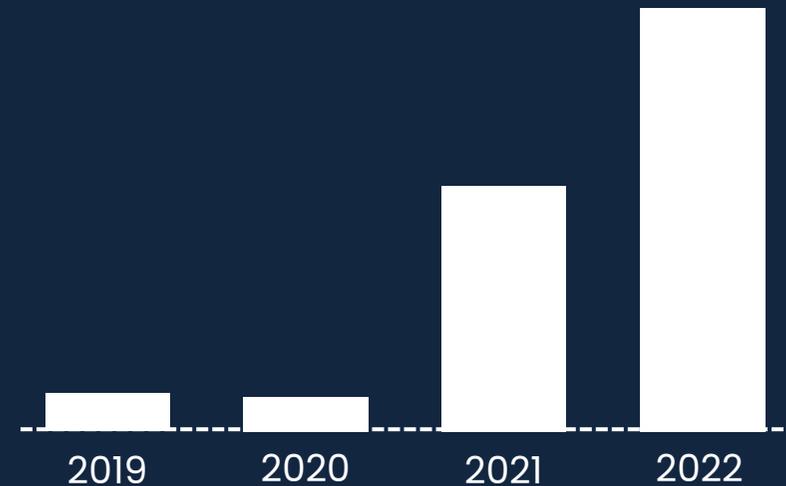
Disruptions brought on by the pandemic brought human resources teams to the forefront. While ongoing trends such as finding and retaining talent, developing a stronger company culture, and connecting business goals to purpose were always top of mind before 2020, recent challenges have shifted the role of HR – making it more integral to driving the success of the organization.

Whereas the focus of HR early on in the pandemic was centered around how to best respond to the crisis and ensure business continuity, in 2022, the shift has centered predominantly on responding to immediate and long-term issues pertaining to talent acquisition.

Some of the challenges HR leaders looked to address in 2022 included creating a better work environment, how work happens in a hybrid work model, and how to best find and retain top talent.

As expectations rose, HR leaders increased their investment in hiring independent HR experts on Graphite by 75% YoY in 2022, with HR transformation spending growing by 183% YoY.

Spending on hiring independent marketing experts is
up 75% YoY



Human resources

What lies ahead in 2023

As we enter 2023, many HR business leaders will continue to grapple with the aftereffects of 2022. They will need to make hard decisions, weighing multiple tradeoffs, such as whether to focus on cost savings or continued talent investment and whether to focus on business needs or employee needs.

Another area of focus for HR leaders in the upcoming year will be centered around creating a cohesive organization-wide culture, particularly as organizations continue to move upstream toward becoming more data-centric. This shift requires remaining how work gets done and understanding how to best upskill the workforce with the necessary skills needed to thrive in a digital environment.

Among other focus areas, [Gartner's recent survey](#) highlights additional factors that will be top of mind for HR, such as how to improve leader and manager effectiveness, organization design and change management, employee experience, recruiting, and future of work.

How HR teams leverage on-demand expertise

A private equity firm hired an independent human capital consultant to build an organizational structure to set a merger transaction of 2 water treatment companies up for success.

[Learn more >>](#)

A SaaS company onboarded an independent organization design consultant to build an operating model and governance structure for a newly build technology migration team.

[Learn more >>](#)

Conclusion



2023 outlook – a new skills-based workforce ecosystem powered by the independent workforce



Spending trends on our platform have provided insights into how corporate leaders are increasingly rely on the independent workforce to achieve their business goals in an uncertain environment.

By no means are we out of the woods yet! As conversations around a [potential recession](#), [layoffs](#), the [federal reserve's efforts](#) to curtail inflation, and [geopolitical tensions](#) take center stage; businesses will likely proceed with caution in the upcoming months.

This environment of several unknowns and unknown-unknowns is likely to impact how companies approach onboarding talent. Organizations need to [rethink their workforce ecosystem](#) and [seek flexibility and speed to onboard talent](#) to react swiftly to the ever-evolving economic environment.

As we move through 2023, we will have our eyes peeled on trends on how corporate leaders are relying on the independent workforce to overcome the toughest challenges to achieve their stated business goals. Stay tuned for our mid-year report!

About Graphite

Graphite is shaping the future of work by enabling seamless access to the world's best independent talent.

Over 2022, **250+ companies** leveraged our network of **9,000+ independent experts** to:

- Alleviate bandwidth constraints by onboarding the right talent on demand
- Reduce fixed costs by quickly scaling teams up or down as their business needs evolved

[**Learn More >>**](#)