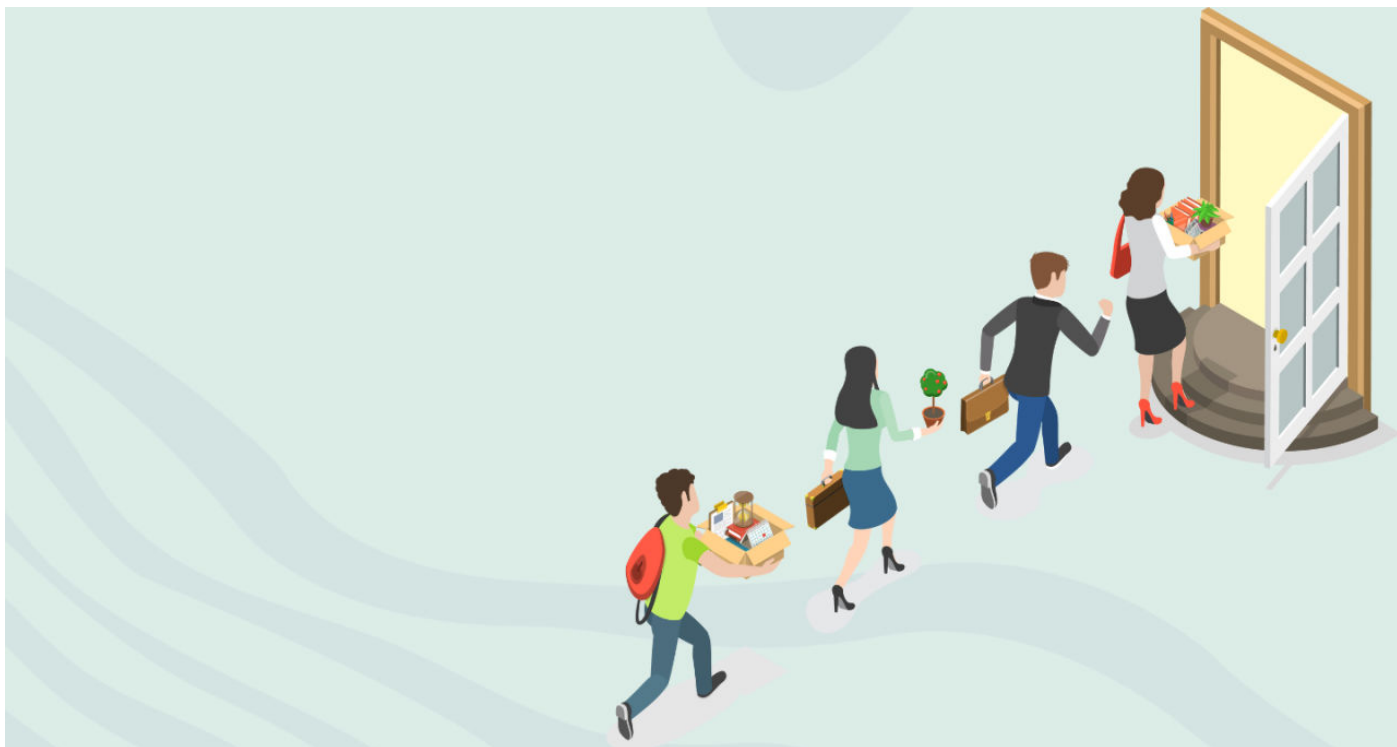


# The Silent Exit – Shedding Light on Where the Ad Industry’s Over 40s Have Gone



## Background

The advertising industry is quietly losing seasoned professionals aged over 40 at an alarming rate. In a world where DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) has become part of the workplace vernacular, it is a troubling trend affecting both individuals and the industry at large.

One respondent aged 55-59 shared: *“Ageism brings with it the fears of redundancy, irrelevance, and insecurity. Why aren't more wise people speaking up?”*

This survey by the Experience Advocacy Taskforce (EAT) and Advertising Industry Careers (AIC) aims to give this group a voice. The survey garnered insights from 130 respondents who are no longer working in the industry, shedding light on why seasoned professionals have left or are finding it challenging to get back in.

## Respondent Snapshot

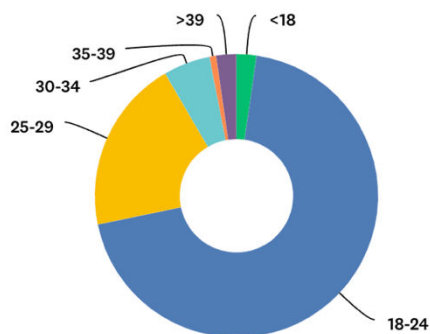
- **Age:** Over 55% are aged 40-54, showing ageism likely begins mid-career, with a steep impact on those over 50. No wonder the MFA Census 2023 revealed only 5.1% of the industry is aged over 50.
- **Sector:** Respondents came from full-service agencies, media agencies, creative agencies, and media owners/publishers. Media agency respondents represented the highest exits (26.72%) whilst media owners/publishers were the lowest (12.99%).

- **Gender:** Slightly more female respondents (53.85%) than the industry average, indicating ageism affects both genders.
- **Agency Type:** The highest exits came from global agencies (67.69%) with fewer leavers from independents (31.54%). Interestingly, of those who exited from global agencies, a disproportionate number was from media agencies (34.09%).

## Key Findings

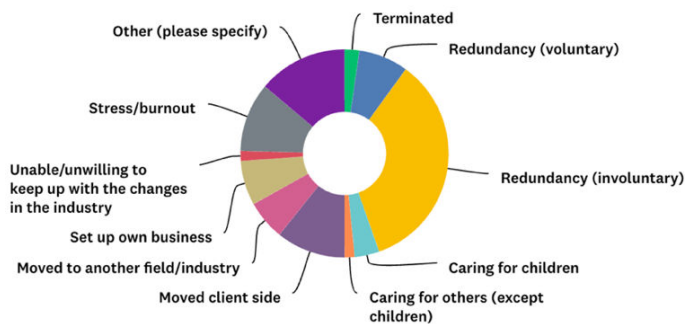
### 1. The Original "Young Guns" Have Exited Early

Once considered the industry’s “Young Guns”, 69.23% of respondents who started their careers between 18-24, have left prematurely, with only one respondent retiring.



## 2. Involuntary Exits Dominate

35.38% of respondents left due to involuntary redundancies, far surpassing stress/burnout or moves to client-side roles (both 10.77%). The myth that older professionals can't keep up with industry changes, especially in the digital age, is largely unfounded—fewer than 2% left for this reason.

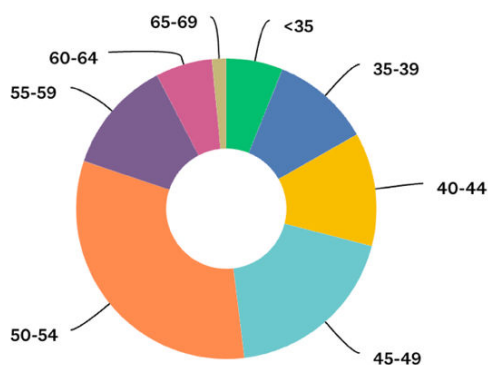


One respondent aged 50-54 shared: *“If we could do one thing to make a change, it would be to warn those in the industry between the ages of 25-40 to have a Plan B. Know what they want to be doing past the age of 40-45. I wish I had been warned.”*

As an industry, do we really want the solution to be an exit plan post-40?

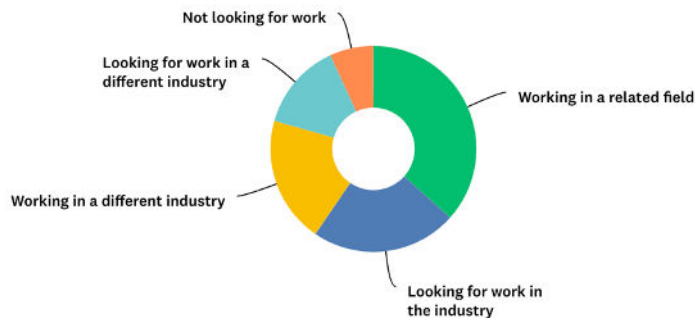
## 3. Mid-Career Exodus

Over half (51.54%) of exits occur between the ages of 45-54. This is well before their time, signalling a significant talent drain. Alarmingly, the creep starts as early as 35.



## 4. Willing to Return, Open to Compromise

Despite leaving in senior roles (76.93%), 1 in 4 respondents are still seeking work in the industry. Half are open to various types of employment—full-time, part-time, freelance.



Interestingly, 7 out of 10 said they would consider taking positions below their previous level, reflecting their continued passion for the industry, the desire to contribute, but also the real need to earn an income.

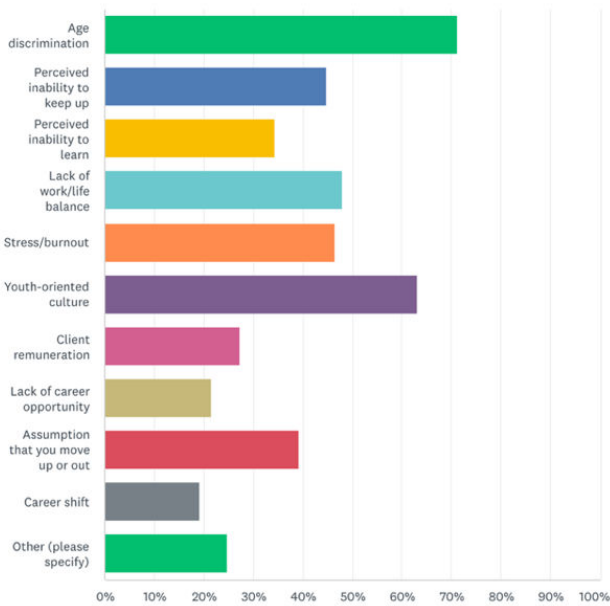
Adam Elliott, CEO, AIC said: *“Clearly, it is imperative we offer greater support and career pathways for our more experienced workforce. As a result, AIC has launched the ‘Expert Directory,’ where senior experienced people seeking full-time, part-time, or contract work can register a free profile and be found by companies wanting to tap into this experienced cohort.”*

Unfortunately, many face poor recruitment experiences, with "ghosting" a common frustration.

A respondent aged 50-54 shared: *“I applied for 200+ jobs. How many interviews do you think I got? Zero.”*

## 5. Overwhelming Perception That Ageism Is the Main Reason for a Younger Industry

Respondents believe that age discrimination (68.46%) and a youth-oriented culture (60.77%) are key factors pushing seasoned professionals out. Many feel they're perceived as either unable to keep up with industry changes or unable to learn new skills, fostering a "move up or move out" mentality. Stress and work/life balance challenges also contributed to the exodus.



### Conclusion: Urgent Call to Action

The Silent Exit is a wake-up call for the industry. Ageism, involuntary exits, and negative perceptions of over 40 year old workers are creating a void of talent, experience, and knowledge transfer. To foster a diverse, inclusive and sustainable workforce, it's crucial to address these issues head-on and ensure that experienced professionals are valued, not silenced. It's vital to:

1. Eliminate age bias (conscious or unconscious) in the hiring process.
2. Recruit and retain experienced talent with more creative strategies.
3. Offer greater support and career pathways for seasoned employees not looking to climb the corporate ladder.
4. Prioritise the retention of experienced professionals as a measure of success.
5. Create an ageism action plan as part of DEI efforts. As Ashton Applewhite said: *"Ageism is a prejudice against our own future selves."*

To become an advocate to change, contact Greg "Sparrow" Graham (EAT Founder and The Nest Consultancy Director), at [experienceadvocacytaskforce@gmail.com](mailto:experienceadvocacytaskforce@gmail.com)

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