UPPER INDUSTRY REPORT · MEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT

The Media & Entertainment Talent Market in 2026.

How AI-accelerated sourcing fills creative, production, and technical roles across fast-moving content pipelines — a field guide for media talent teams.

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KEY FINDINGS

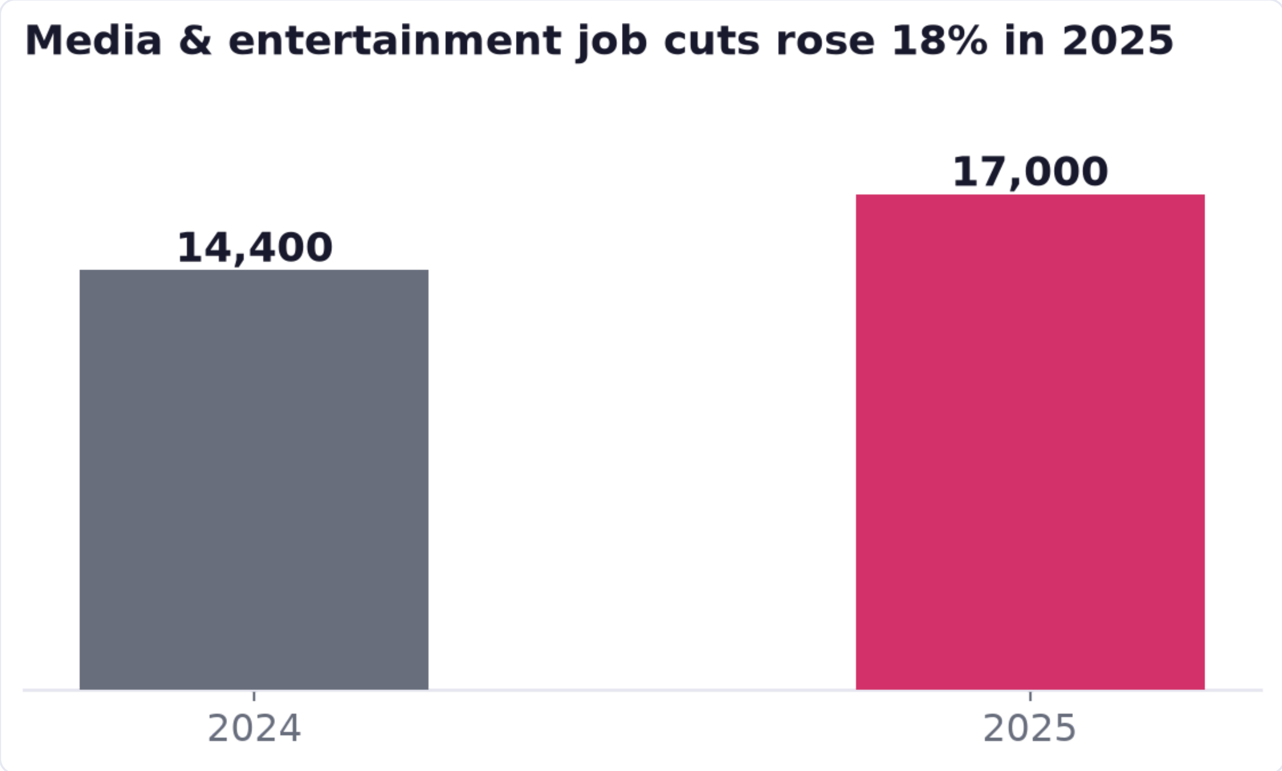
17,000+	media and entertainment job cuts announced in 2025 — an 18% increase over 2024.[1]
-30%	US film/TV production employment since late 2022, even as the industry restructures around project-based work.[2]
45–70+ days	typical time-to-fill for specialized creative and VFX roles, versus ~39 days for general tech & media roles.[6]
57%	of tech, media, and entertainment HR leaders rank reducing time-to-hire as their top 2025 priority.[5]
80–90%	efficiency gains studios expect in VFX and 3D asset creation from generative AI, augmenting rather than replacing creative judgment.[4]

01 — The Contraction

Is media and entertainment shrinking or restructuring?

> **Both — headcount is falling even as specific skill categories, like advertising, are projected to grow.**

Media and entertainment companies announced more than **17,000 job cuts** in 2025, an **18% increase** over 2024.[1] U.S. film and TV production employment has fallen roughly **30% since late 2022**, and on-location production in Los Angeles — historically the industry's home base — declined **22% year-over-year** in Q1 2025 and a further **13.2%** in Q3 2025.[3] Advertising and PR employment fell **9.9% year-over-year** as of May 2025, a loss of roughly **54,000 positions**.[1]



Source: Mediabistro / Challenger, Gray & Christmas, 2025.

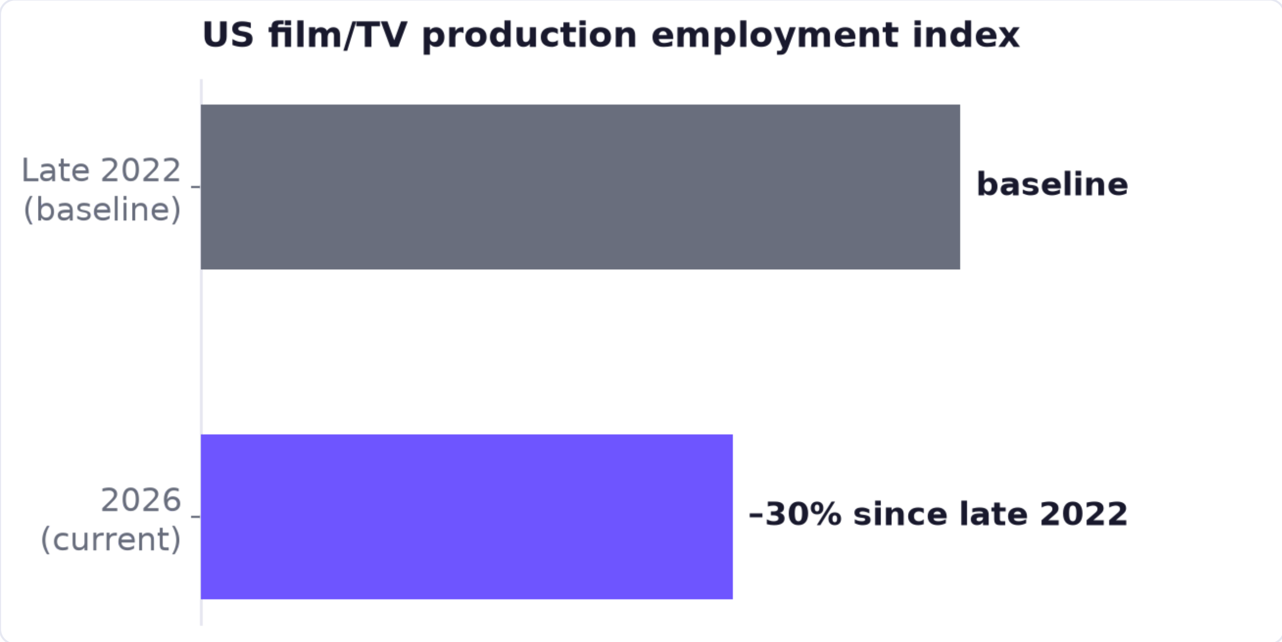
Yet it isn't uniform decline: BLS projects advertising and related services employment to grow **8%** from 2023–2033.[1] The picture is restructuring, not simple contraction — headcount is being redistributed toward project-based and specialized roles.

02 — The Production Shift

Why has production employment fallen so far?

> **Studios are moving to project-by-project staffing with skeleton full-time teams.**

Disney/Marvel's 2026 restructuring illustrates the new operating model: a project-by-project staffing approach where most departments are let go between productions except a small full-time core.[2] FilmLA called 2024 the "second least productive year" on record for Los Angeles production, and the decline has continued into 2025.[7]



Source: Forbes, July 2026, citing industry production employment data.

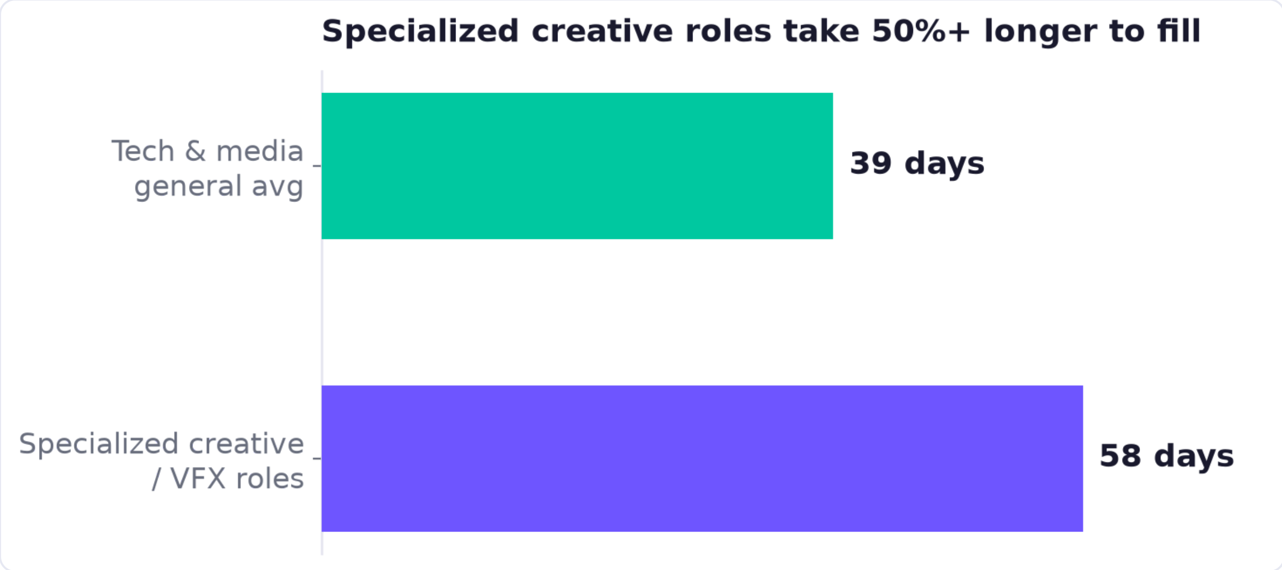
This shift changes what "hiring" means in the industry: instead of one big staffing wave per show, employers now run many smaller, faster staffing sprints — and need a reusable bench of vetted freelance talent rather than a one-time recruiting push.

03 — The Clock

How long does it take to staff a production?

> **Specialized creative and VFX roles take 50%+ longer to fill than general tech and media roles.**

General "Tech & Media" time-to-fill benchmarks run around **39 days**, but specialized, technical, or senior creative and VFX roles run **45–70+ days** given credentialing, portfolio review, and multi-stakeholder creative approval.[6] Industry-wide, all-industry average time-to-hire stretched from **36–44 days in 2023** to **63–68 days** by January 2026 — and **57%** of tech, media, and entertainment HR leaders now rank reducing time-to-hire as their #1 2025 priority, ahead of automation, safety, and retention.[6,5]



Sources: Corporate Navigators, The Resource Company, Pivotal Customer, 2025.

> **"A greenlit production doesn't wait for a 60-day search. If your bench isn't already vetted, you've already lost the schedule."**

04 — The Skills Shift

What talent actually gets scarcer as AI adoption rises?

> **As execution work automates, the scarce skill shifts to creative judgment and AI-output evaluation.**

McKinsey finds studios expect **80–90% efficiency gains** in VFX and 3D asset creation from generative AI — but the technology augments, rather than replaces, creative judgment in the near term.[4] Deloitte projects gen-AI content-creation spend will stay under **3%** of production budgets near-term, even as roughly **7%** of operational spend shifts toward gen-AI-enabled contract and talent-management tools.[8] PwC separately finds wages rising faster in AI-exposed sectors, with revenue growth nearly quadrupling since 2022 in those segments.[1]

Source: Pivotal Customer, Future-Ready Hiring Trends, November 2025.

The net effect: the people who can direct AI tools, catch brand and factual errors, and make final creative calls become more valuable even as routine execution work compresses — a bifurcation similar to what's playing out in technical hiring more broadly.

05 — The Playbook

What should a media or entertainment talent team do about it?

Five moves separate the studios and production companies that will staff productions on deadline:

1. Build a reusable, verified freelance bench. Continuously refreshed pools of pre-qualified editors and VFX artists let a crew assemble in days, not weeks.
2. Compress time-to-fill for specialized roles. Automated sourcing and screening cut days out of a hiring window that averages 45-70+ for creative specialists.
3. Screen for hybrid creative-technical judgment. Target candidates who can direct and evaluate AI-generated output, not just operate software.
4. Track production geography in real time. Re-target regional talent pools as incentive-driven production shifts occur.
5. Treat every production as a staffing sprint. Design sourcing workflows for repeatable, fast crew assembly rather than one-time recruiting campaigns.

This is precisely the model UPPER was built to run: autonomous, compliant sourcing that keeps a verified freelance bench warm and ready, so productions greenlit with only weeks of lead time can staff a full crew before the shoot window closes.

Sources

1. Mediabistro (citing Challenger, Gray & Christmas / BLS) — Media Industry Jobs Are Being Rewritten
2. Forbes — Studios Are Cutting Staff, Freelancers Will Pay the AI Bill, July 2026
3. FilmLA — Research & Updates on Los Angeles Production
4. McKinsey — How AI Could Reinvent Film and TV Production, November 2025
5. Pivotal Customer — Future-Ready Hiring Trends, November 2025
6. The Resource Company — Time to Fill by Industry, October 2025
7. WSWS (citing FilmLA) — Los Angeles Production Decline Data
8. Deloitte — TMT Predictions: Hollywood Cautious of GenAI Adoption, 2025
9. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics — Motion Picture and Sound Recording Industries (NAICS 512)
10. Corporate Navigators — Average Time to Fill by Industry, 2024

This report synthesizes third-party research current as of July 2026; figures are attributed to their original sources above. Some forward projections are inherently uncertain. UPPER edition H2 2026 — refreshed semiannually.