Advanced
WEB RANKING

SEO Stats Report **2017**

SEO Stats Report 2017

Foreword

Welcome to the 2017 SEO industry report from Advanced Web Ranking. We're very excited to bring you fresh industry insights that will help make 2017 a successful year for you and your company.

This report was born out of the idea that marketing is a dish best served with a side of hot data. There seem to be few data reports focusing on SEO, so the survey we sent out to thousands of marketers from around the world mainly targeted this niche of marketing. Out of the 1200+ that replied and took the survey, we've gathered what we think is a quite comprehensive view of the state of SEO today, both as part of the marketing industry and as a practice.

The audience we reached out to was diverse on various accounts, so where possible, the data has been sliced by the type of organization that the marketers operate in (agency, in-house department, freelance/consultant). This should make it easier for you to pinpoint trends in your own category, get a sense of what your direct peers are doing and, more importantly, how it's been working out for them so far. Comparisons with other categories might also yield interesting and useful tips.

While there are similarities between organizations, some of the differences paint a telling story on the variety of approaches marketers have to SEO depending on the size of their team, their budgets and resources.

We hope this eBook will be inspiring for you, and for those you choose to share it with.

Happy reading!

The Advanced Web Ranking Team

TACTICS

Which is the most effective SEO tactic you use?

In 2017, on-page SEO is still considered to be the most effective SEO tactic

TACTICS

Other (1.73%)

Content creation 33.20%

On-page SEO 48.45%

Link building 14.96%
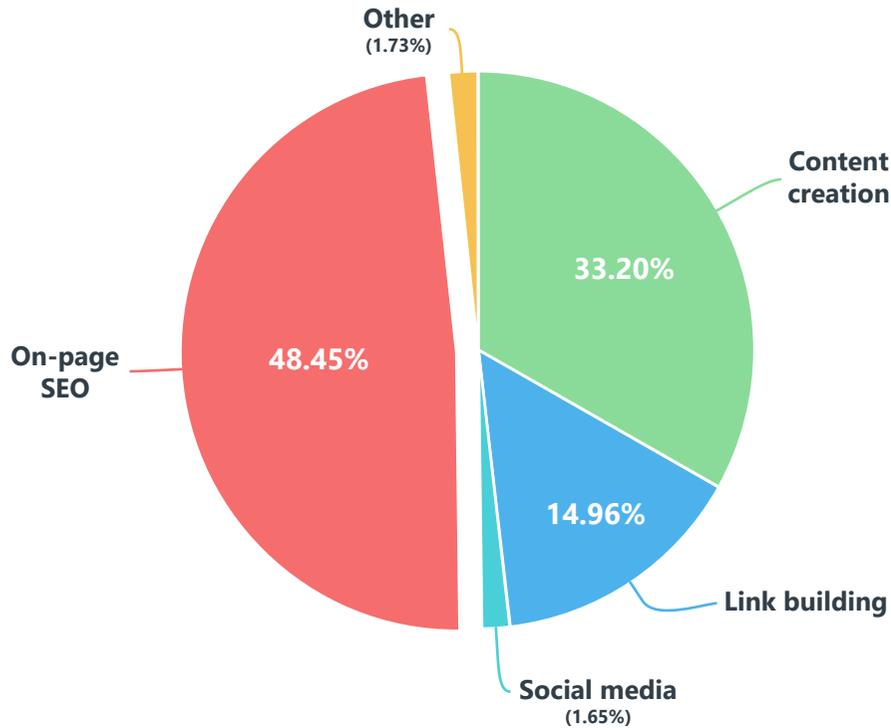
Social media (1.65%)

Almost half the marketers surveyed (48.45%) say on-page SEO has been the most effective tactic they used in the past year.

Content creation follows closely with 33.20% of votes, while social media sits at the bottom of the list, being considered effective by a mere 1.65% of those surveyed.

When slicing the results by respondent type, in-house (18.6%) and freelance (17.24%) SEOs seem to extract more value out of link building tactics than their agency counterparts (11.95%).

However, the top three most effective SEO tactics remain constant globally and by type.

Marketing agency

Other (1.57%)

Content creation 33.65%

On-page SEO 50.63%

Link building 11.95%

Social media (2.20%)

In-house

Other (2.33%)

Content creation 34.88%

On-page SEO 43.02%

Link building 18.60%

Social media (1.16%)

Freelance / Consultant

Other (1.37%)

Content creation 30.25%

On-page SEO 50.12%

Link building 17.24%

Social media (1.03%)

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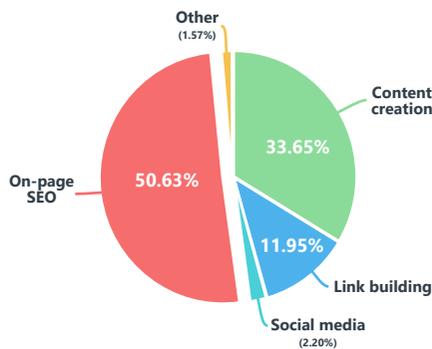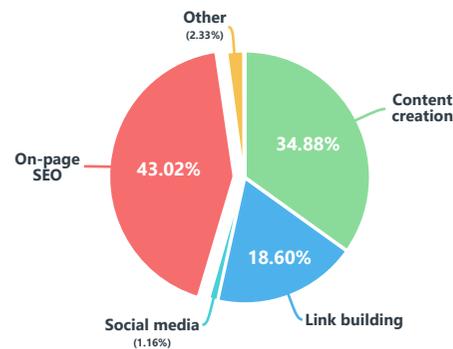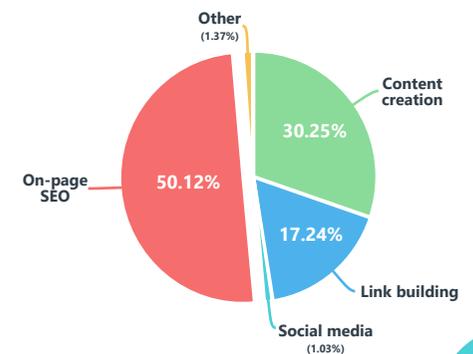
Which SEO tactic is the most difficult to perform?

Building links is by far the most demanding tactic for SEOs

TACTICS

Other 3.13%
On-page SEO 4.14%
Social media 3.20%
Content creation 17.62%
**Keyword research** 4.45%
Link building 67.46%
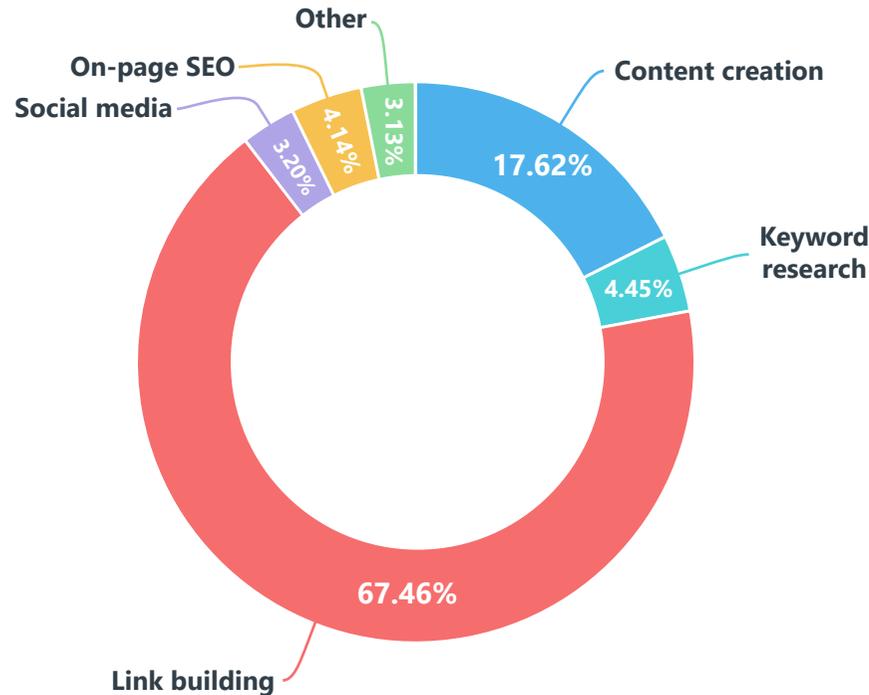
Whether they freelance, work in a marketing agency, or do SEO in-house, the majority of respondents (about 67%) agree that link building still is the most difficult tactic to perform.

The second most difficult tactic, though in a much smaller percentage, is content creation (17.62% globally). Only 1 in 6 respondents rated content creation as being troublesome.

Keyword research, on-page SEO and social media were rated as difficult by a very small percentage of respondents. Further data reveals (*see next page*) these are also tactics that most marketers don't outsource; they're easier to handle internally, and results are probably often satisfactory.

Marketing agency

Other (3.13%)
On-page SEO (3.75%)
Social media (2.50%)
Content creation 18.13%
Keyword research (3.13%)
Link building 69.38%

In-house

Other (1.16%)
On-page SEO
Social media (2.33%)
Content creation 15.12%
Keyword research (2.33%)
6.98%
Link building 72.09%

Freelance / Consultant

Other (5.48%)
On-page SEO (1.64%)
Social media (5.75%)
Content creation 19.45%
Keyword research 9.86%
Link building 57.81%
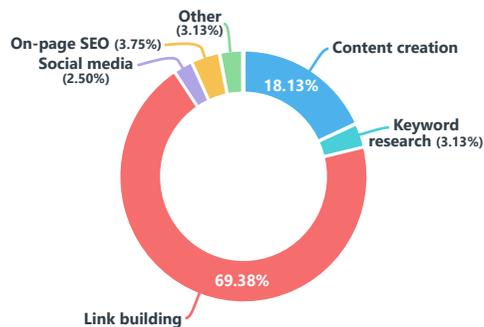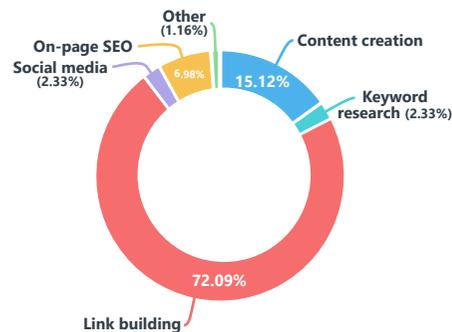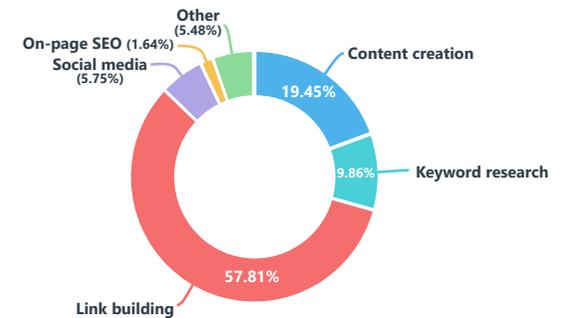
How do you execute on-page SEO?

## Most marketers have expertise in on-page SEO
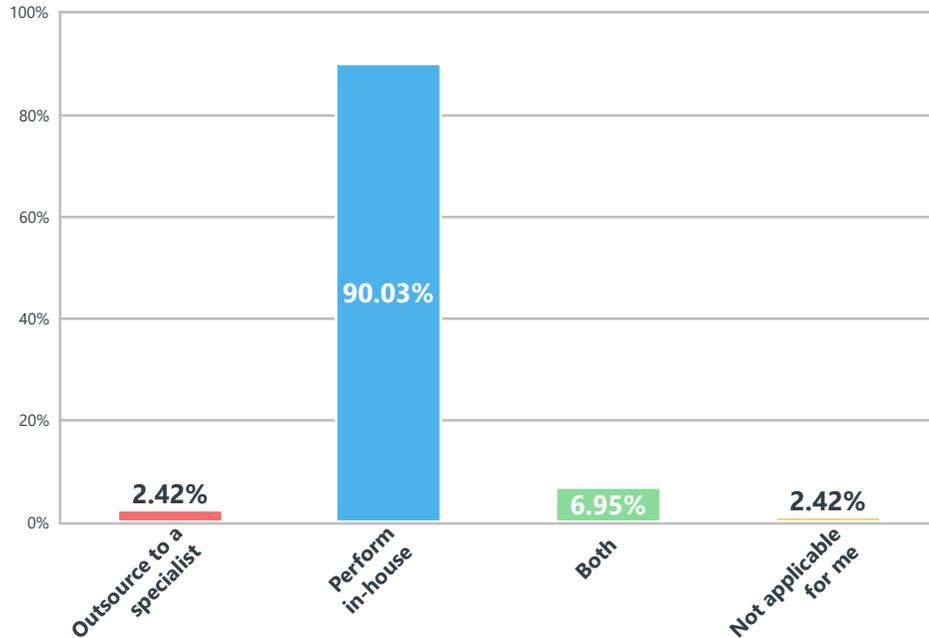
TACTICS

On-page SEO is one of the tactics with the highest likelihood to be performed exclusively in-house, as 90.03% of respondent votes point out.

The category of survey respondents who outsource on-page SEO (totally or to a certain extent) the most are freelancers (14.87%), while in-house SEOs outsource the least on-page work (6.9%).

It's also worth noting that very few of those participating in the survey found this question to be irrelevant for them (0.6%), indicating that on-page SEO is also one of the most popular tasks among marketers, as compared to the other tactics we asked about (link building, content creation and social media).

Marketing agency

In-house


Freelance / Consultant

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How do you execute keyword research?

## 1 in 10 marketers outsources keyword research to some extent
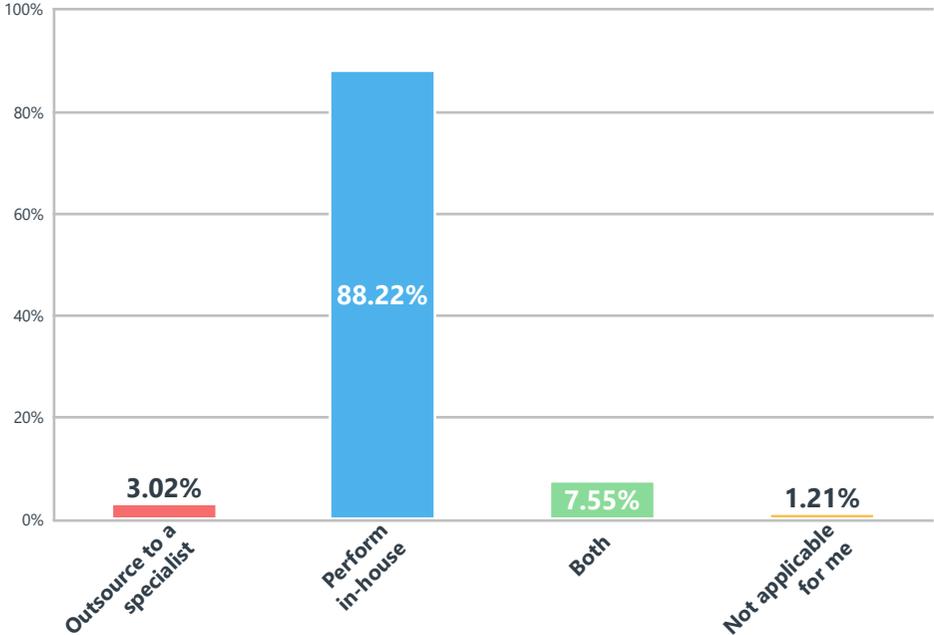
Our survey shows that following on-page SEO, keyword research is the second least outsourced tactic - on average, only 10.57% of professionals contract external help for researching new terms.

Just as with on-page SEO, freelancers are the respondent category outsourcing keyword research the most (13.7%).

As further data will show, the trend remains the same for freelancers in regard to the rest of the tactics we covered - they are outsourcing the most work to other professionals (they usually specialize in 1-2 tactics, and also lack the time to handle all aspects of SEO).

TACTICS

Marketing agency

- Outsource to a specialist: 2.34%
- Perform in-house: 90.64%
- Both: 6.43%
- Not applicable for me: 0.58%

In-house

- Outsource to a specialist: 2.30%
- Perform in-house: 85.06%
- Both: 9.20%
- Not applicable for me: 3.45%

Freelance / Consultant

- Outsource to a specialist: 5.48%
- Perform in-house: 86.30%
- Both: 8.22%
- Not applicable for me: 0%
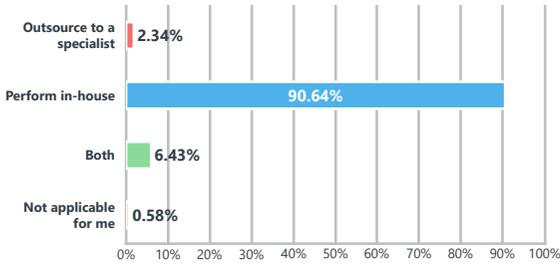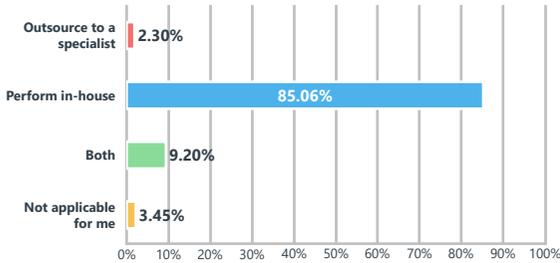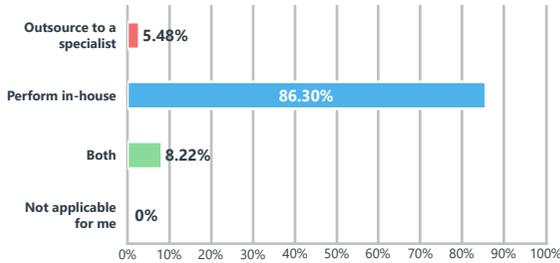
How do you execute content creation?

More than 40% of marketers seek outsourcing for content creation

TACTICS
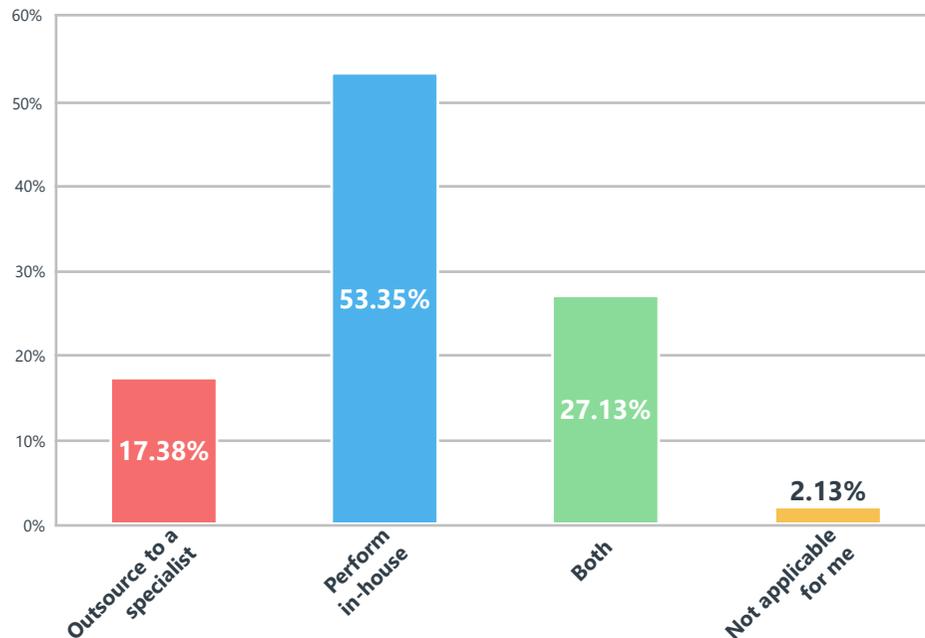
While slightly more than half our survey respondents generate their content through internal resources only (53.35%), a considerable amount of people seek external help for their content creation needs (44.51%).

Content creation came out as the most outsourced tactic in our survey, a very likely result for one of the most challenging tasks (*see page 6*).

The result is similar for all respondent types - 42.6% of agencies, 40.23% of in-house SEOs and 54.17% of freelancers appear to seek some amount of external help for producing content.

The number of professionals who completely outsource their content creation needs is, thus, lower - only 14.2% of agencies, 13.79% of in-house SEOs and 29.17% of freelancers.

Marketing agency

In-house

Freelance / Consultant

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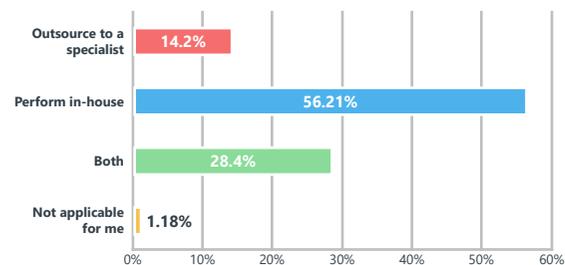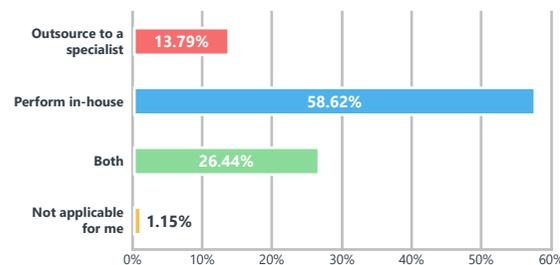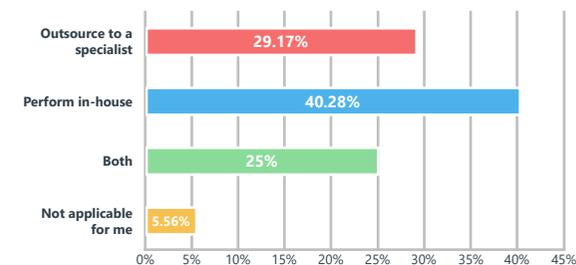
How do you execute link building?

Most marketers have some expertise in link building

TACTICS
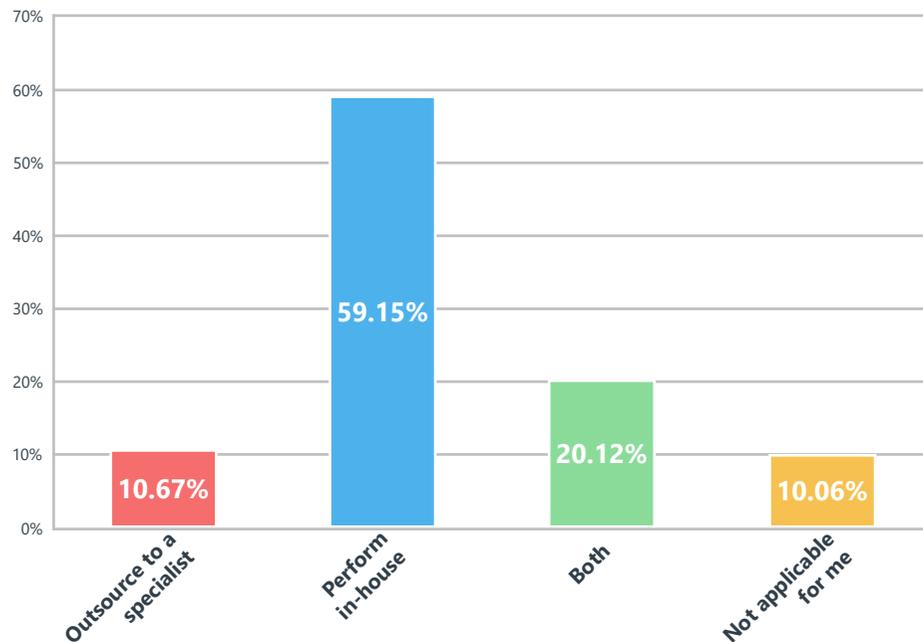
Although rated as the most difficult to perform, link building is not as outsourced as content creation - only 7.1% of agencies, 13.79% of in-house SEOs and 15.28% of freelancers are building links exclusively through external resources.

While another sizable number of marketers participating in the survey also reported to partially outsource their link building tasks (20.12%), when adding up the numbers, it seems that the great majority have, at least partially, expertise in building links - 83.43% of agencies, 74.71% of in-house SEOs and 75% of freelancers.

On average, approximately 10% of survey respondents say they are not performing link building at all.

Marketing agency

In-house

Freelance / Consultant

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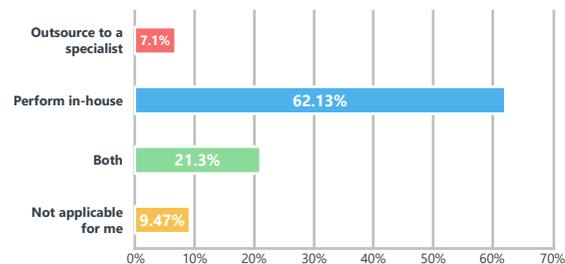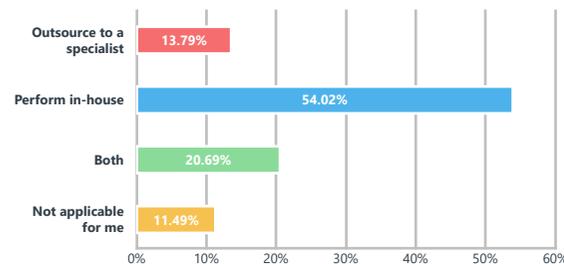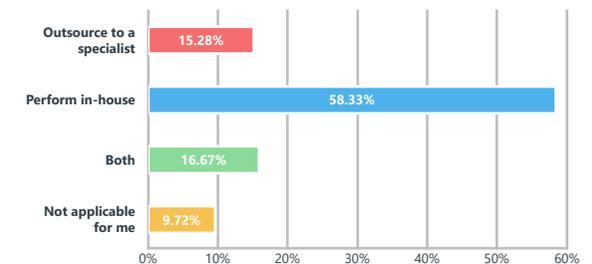
How do you execute social media?

10% of agencies are not responsible for social media management

TACTICS

Chart (main):
- Outsource to a specialist: 11.21%
- Perform in-house: 66.06%
- Both: 12.12%
- Not applicable for me: 10.61%
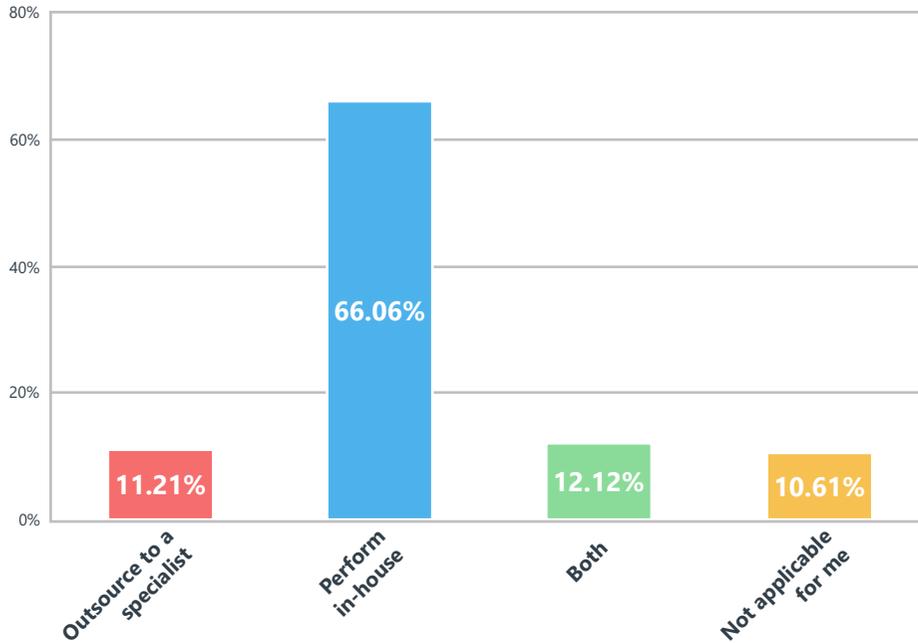
After on-page SEO and keyword research, social media also seems to be handled internally by a fair number of marketers.

It is, however, represented by a very distinctive behaviour among the three types of survey respondents. While the majority of in-house SEOs (80.46%) prefer to handle this task exclusively internally, nearly half of freelancers (42.47%) outsource social media to some extent.

Most agency marketers (69.41%) also say they entirely manage social media in-house.

On the whole, survey respondents seem to prefer performing main SEO tasks using internal resources rather than outsource them, regardless of their profile type (part of a marketing agency, freelance, in-house SEO).

Marketing agency
- Outsource to a specialist: 9.41%
- Perform in-house: 69.41%
- Both: 11.18%
- Not applicable for me: 10%

In-house
- Outsource to a specialist: 5.75%
- Perform in-house: 80.46%
- Both: 6.90%
- Not applicable for me: 6.90%

Freelance / Consultant
- Outsource to a specialist: 21.92%
- Perform in-house: 41.10%
- Both: 20.55%
- Not applicable for me: 16.44%

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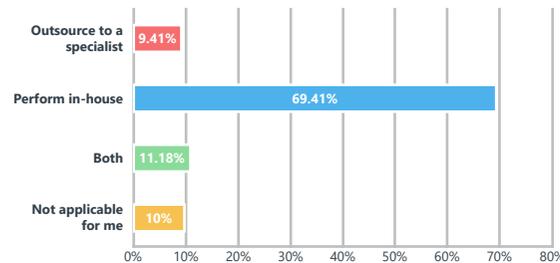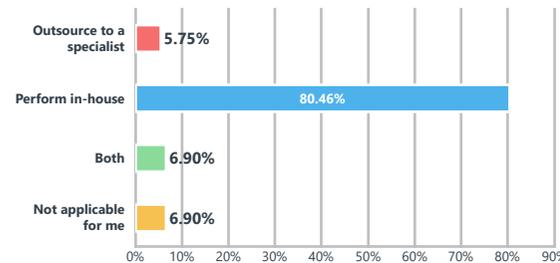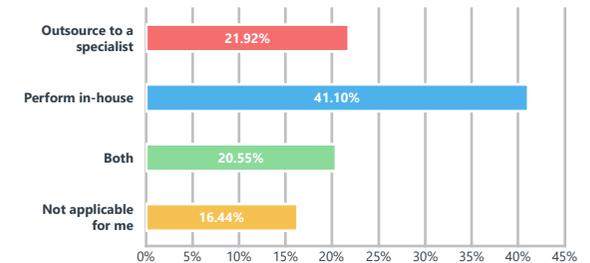
How often do you perform visitor tracking?

1 in 3 professionals performs visitor tracking sporadically

Once per project **4.50%**
When required **29.73%**
Monthly **63.96%**
Quarterly **1.20%**
Yearly **0.60%**
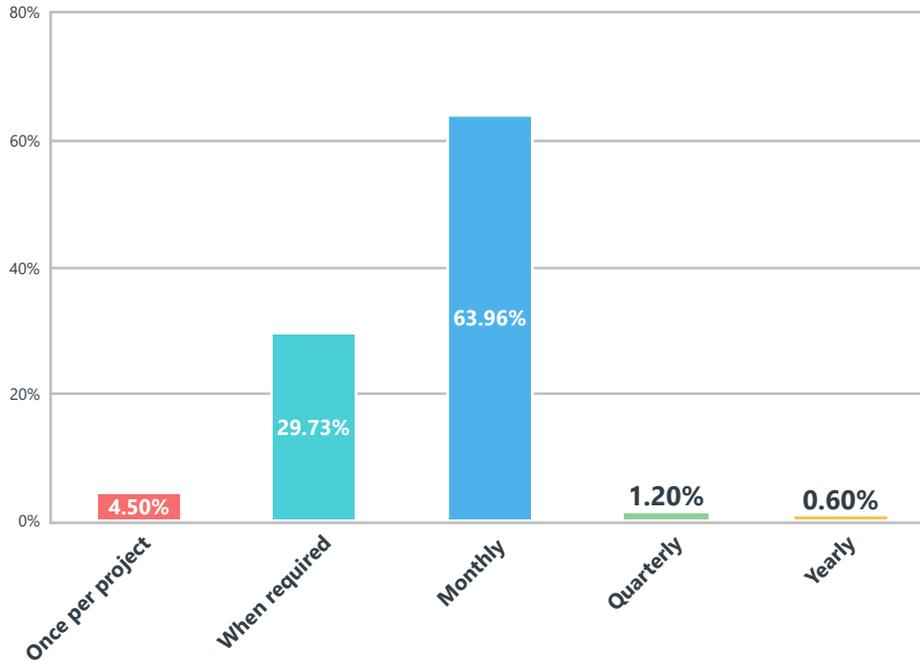
Our results point out that while the majority of marketers (63.96%) have added visitor tracking to their monthly schedule, the other third of survey participants perform the task sporadically - either only one time for each project (4.5%), or when necessary (29.73%).

Agency marketers seem to be the most devoted to a monthly tracking of visitor onsite behavior (72.83%).

Although most freelancers and in-house SEOs track their visitors monthly as well, there is still a considerable part who opt for occasional tracking - 41.86% of in-house marketers and 47.3% of freelancers monitor website visits once per project, or when required.

Marketing agency

Once per project	2.31%
When required	22.54%
Monthly	72.83%
Quarterly	1.73%
Yearly	0.58%

In-house

Once per project	5.81%
When required	36.05%
Monthly	55.81%
Quarterly	1.16%
Yearly	1.16%

Freelance / Consultant

Once per project	8.11%
When required	39.19%
Monthly	52.70%
Quarterly	0%
Yearly	0%

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How often do you perform rank tracking?

Rank tracking is a monthly routine in more than 75% of marketing agencies

TACTICS
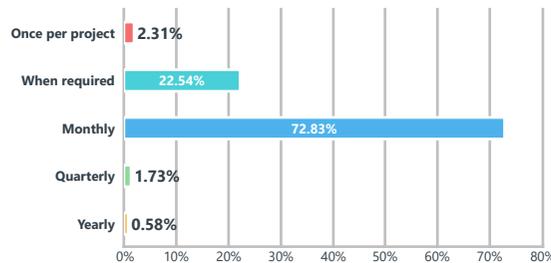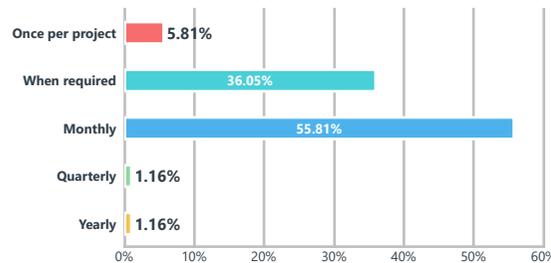
Chart: How often do you perform rank tracking?
- Once per project: 5.69%
- When required: 23.95%
- Monthly: 67.66%
- Quarterly: 2.69%
- Yearly: 0%
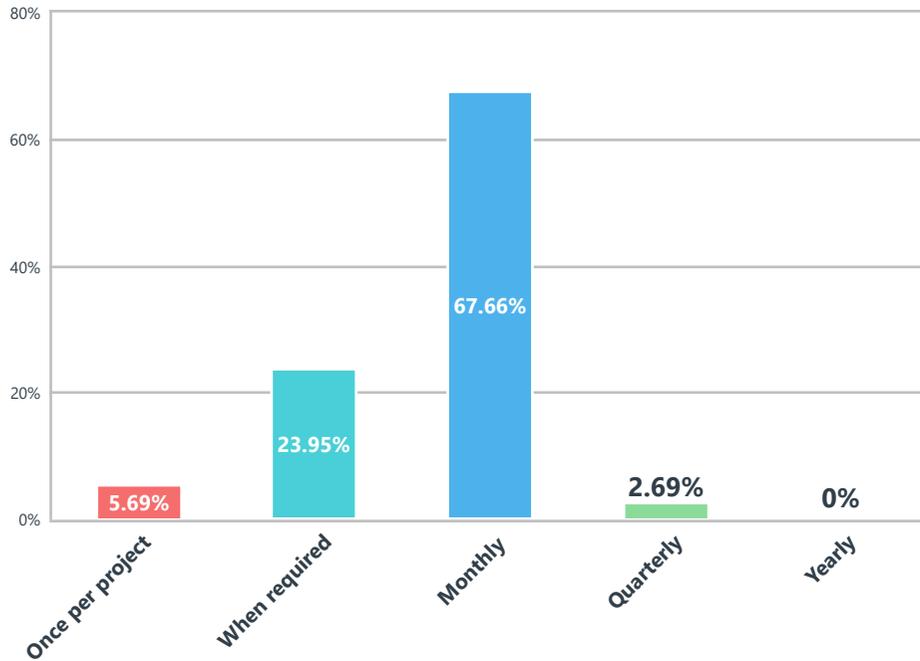
Just like visitor tracking, monitoring rankings is part of most marketers' monthly schedule (67.66%), regardless of the type of work they do - agency, in-house or freelance.

However, it's worth mentioning that marketers working in-house, who may also have the least strict reporting needs, opt for monthly rank tracking less (only 55.17%) than the other two categories (76.3% of agencies and 62.16% of freelancers).

While the majority of SEOs monitor rankings monthly, a considerable number of professionals treat this task lightly, checking their SE position only when needed - 17.92% of agencies, 34.48% of in-house SEOs and 25.68% of freelancers.

Marketing agency
- Once per project: 3.47%
- When required: 17.92%
- Monthly: 76.30%
- Quarterly: 2.31%
- Yearly: 0%

In-house
- Once per project: 6.90%
- When required: 34.48%
- Monthly: 55.17%
- Quarterly: 3.45%
- Yearly: 0%

Freelance / Consultant
- Once per project: 9.46%
- When required: 25.68%
- Monthly: 62.16%
- Quarterly: 3.45%
- Yearly: 0%

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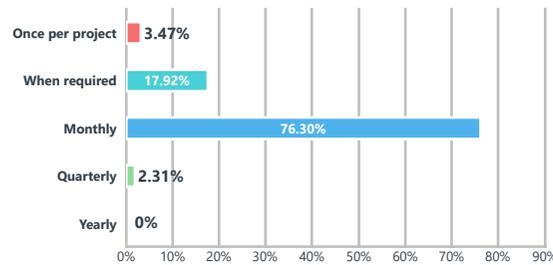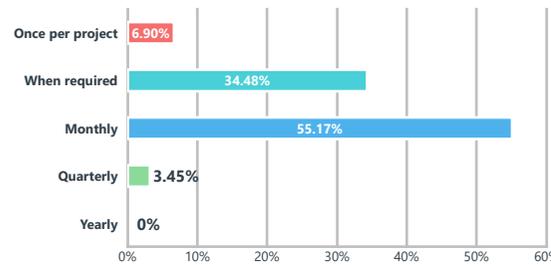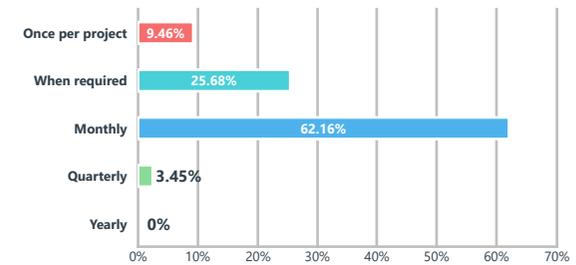
How often do you perform link analysis?

Half of those surveyed don't have a link analysis routine in place
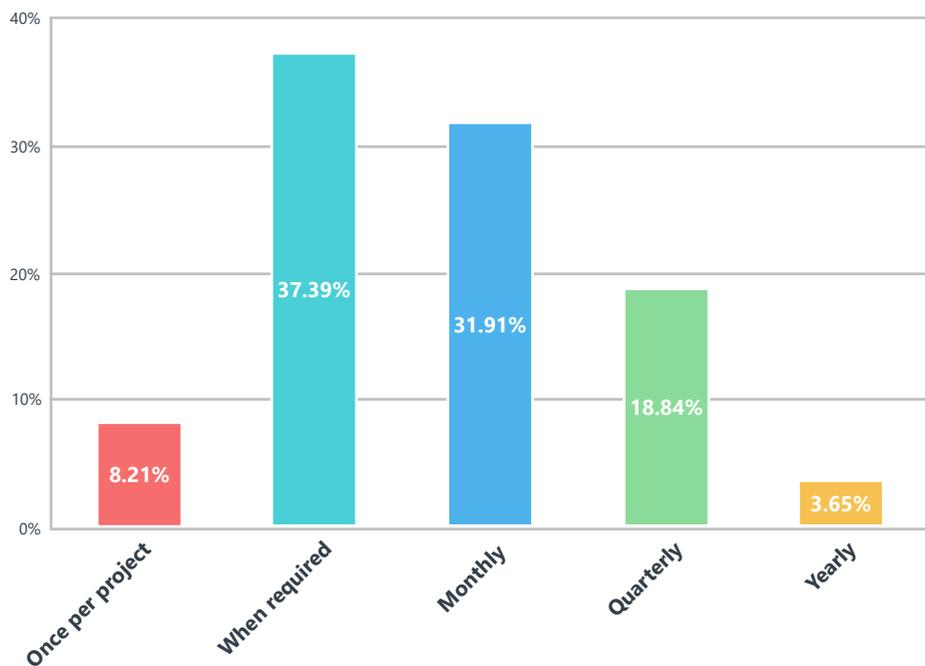
According to our survey, link analysis is yet to be part of the monthly routine for many SEO professionals.

On average, 45.6% of marketers analyze their links when needed (response options "Once per project" or "When required"), while 54.4% perform this process periodically ("Monthly", "Quarterly" or "Yearly").

The trend stays fairly consistent when you carve the data by respondent type, with all three categories being equally inclined toward recurring and occasional link analysis.

Marketing agency

|	
Once per project	7.02%
When required	38.60%
Monthly	30.41%
Quarterly	22.22%
Yearly	1.75%

In-house

Once per project	7.14%
When required	38.10%
Monthly	32.14%
Quarterly	14.29%
Yearly	8.33%

Freelance / Consultant

Once per project	12.16%
When required	33.78%
Monthly	35.14%
Quarterly	16.22%
Yearly	2.70%

TACTICS

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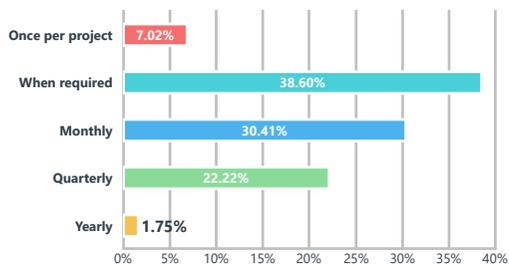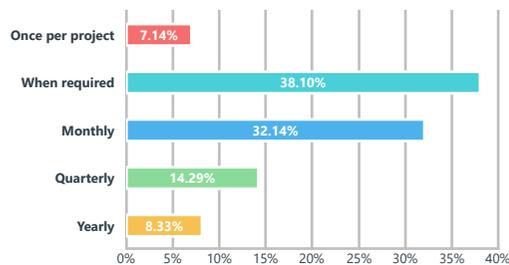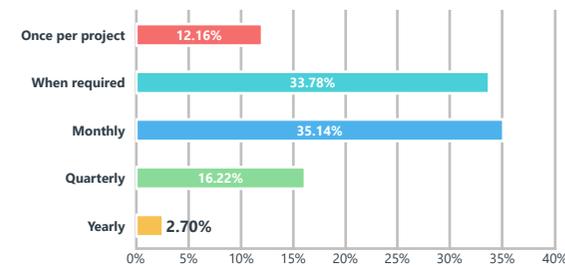
How often do you perform technical auditing?

On average, 14% of marketers run technical audits only once per project

TACTICS

50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%

Once per project	When required	Monthly	Quarterly	Yearly
14.37%	43.71%	20.36%	16.17%	15.39%
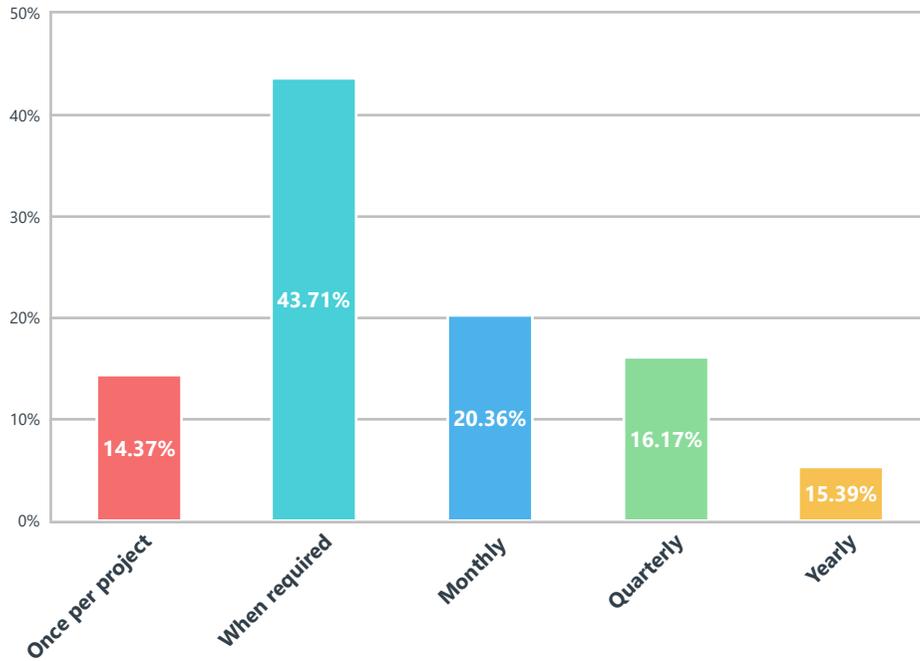
Technical audits seem to be performed by most SEOs (43.71%) whenever required, without a predefined time frequency. Moreover, a surprising 12.79% of agency marketers, 13.79% of in-house SEOs and 18.67% of freelancers run audits once per project.

Only 26.67% of freelancers claimed to perform technical audits periodically for their projects (monthly, quarterly or yearly), possibly due to shorter contract periods with their clients.

In contrast, in-house specialists (50.58%) and agency marketers (44.19%) perform website audits regularly, twice more than their freelance counterparts.

Marketing agency

Once per project	12.79%
When required	43.02%
Monthly	20.35%
Quarterly	16.28%
Yearly	7.56%

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35% 40% 45%

In-house

Once per project	13.79%
When required	35.63%
Monthly	24.14%
Quarterly	20.69%
Yearly	5.75%

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35% 40%

Freelance / Consultant

Once per project	18.67%
When required	54.67%
Monthly	16%
Quarterly	10.67%
Yearly	0%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%

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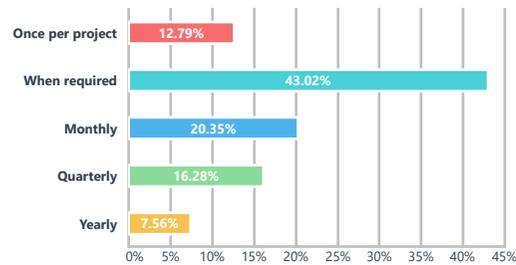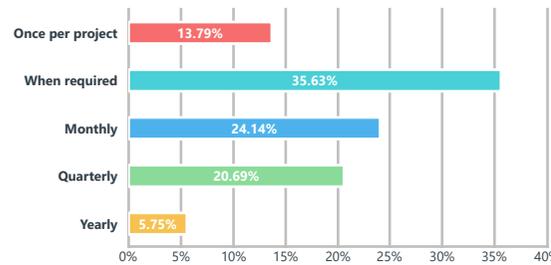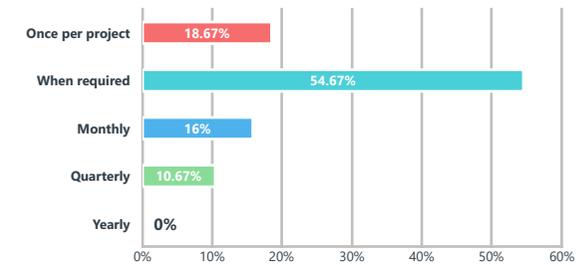
How often do you perform keyword research?

1 in 4 freelancers research keywords only once per project

TACTICS
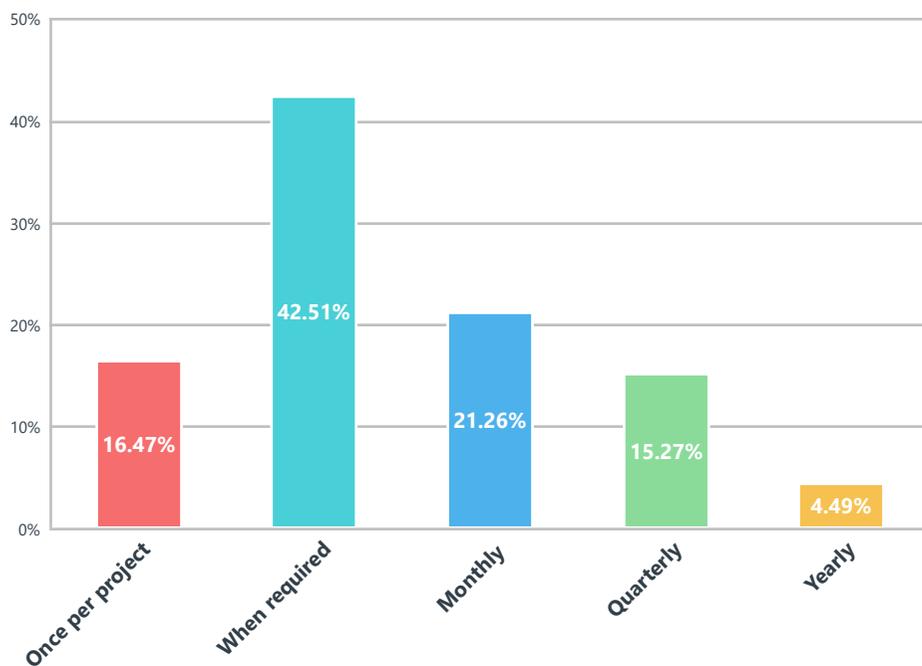
Keyword research is also one of the processes most marketers perform occasionally or at greater intervals of time - on average, only 36.53% regularly research their keywords monthly or quarterly.

The respondent category with the lowest tendency toward regular keyword research are freelancers - only 33.78% of them perform the task monthly, quarterly or yearly.

At the same time, a slightly larger number of agency marketers (42.77%) and in-house SEOs (43.68%) report to be committed to recurring, systematic keyword research.

Keyword research seems to be performed just once per project by a much larger number of respondents than technical auditing, link analysis, and the other processes listed in the survey.

Marketing agency

In-house

Freelance / Consultant

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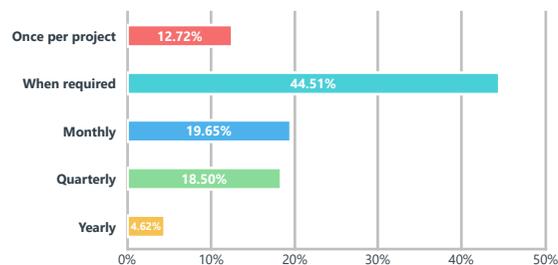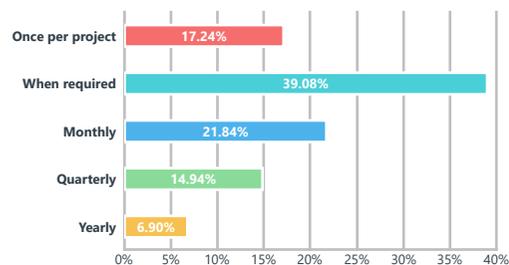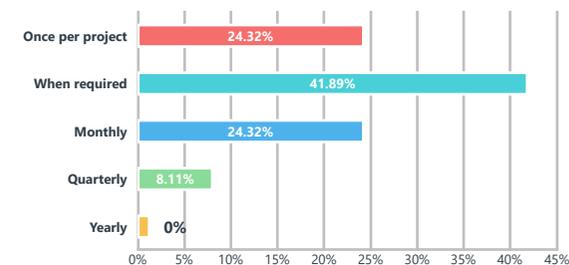
REPORTING

Which are the most valuable KPIs you use for reporting SEO performance?

## Different audience, slightly different KPIs

Sales revenue 10.66%
Visitor conversion rate 10.21%
Leads generated 16.50%
Other: Return on SEO investment **7.52%** Visit duration / engagement **3.48%** Brand awareness **1.57%** Other **0.45%** 13.02%
**Search rankings** 23.68%
Website traffic 25.93%

Overall, website traffic was quoted as the most valuable KPI in measuring SEO performance (25.93%), followed closely by search rankings (23.68%) and leads generated (16.50%).

However, things are somewhat different when results are sliced by respondent category. Agencies reflect the global top three, whereas in-house departments see website traffic (28.51%), search rankings (14.1%) and sales revenue (14.86%) as the most important KPIs. Freelancers are most interested in tracking search rankings (26.56%), website traffic (25.52%) and leads generated (13.54%).

Visitor conversion rate also seems to be an important KPI, say 10% of respondents across the board.

Marketing agency

Visitor conversion rate 10.44%
Sales revenue 9.56%
Leads generated 19.78%
Other: Return on SEO investment **8.44%** Visit duration/engagement **3.11%** Brand awareness **1.11%** Other **0.67%** 13.33%
Search rankings 22.22%
Website traffic 24.67%

In-house

Sales revenue 14.86%
Leads generated 12.85%
Visitor conversion rate 9.24%
Other: Return on SEO investment **4.42%** Visit duration/engagement **4.42%** Brand awareness **1.61%** 10.44%
Search rankings 24.10%
Website traffic 28.51%

Freelance / Consultant

Leads generated 13.54%
Visitor conversion rate 10.94%
Return on SEO investment 9.38%
Website traffic 25.52%
Other: Sales revenu **7.81%** Visit duration/engagement **3.13%** Brand awareness **2.60%** Other **0.52%** 14.06%
Search rankings 26.56%

Advanced WEB RANKING

How often do you report progress, on average?

Monthly reporting keeps customers happy

Weekly
- 25.34%
- 13.33%
- 45.78%
- 26.98%

Monthly
- 65.54%
- 76.67%
- 45.78%
- 65.08%

Quarterly
- 6.76%
- 8.67%
- 4.82%
- 4.82%

Other
- 2.36%
- 1.33%
- 3.61%
- 3.17%

Legend: Global | Marketing agency | In-house | Freelance / Consultant
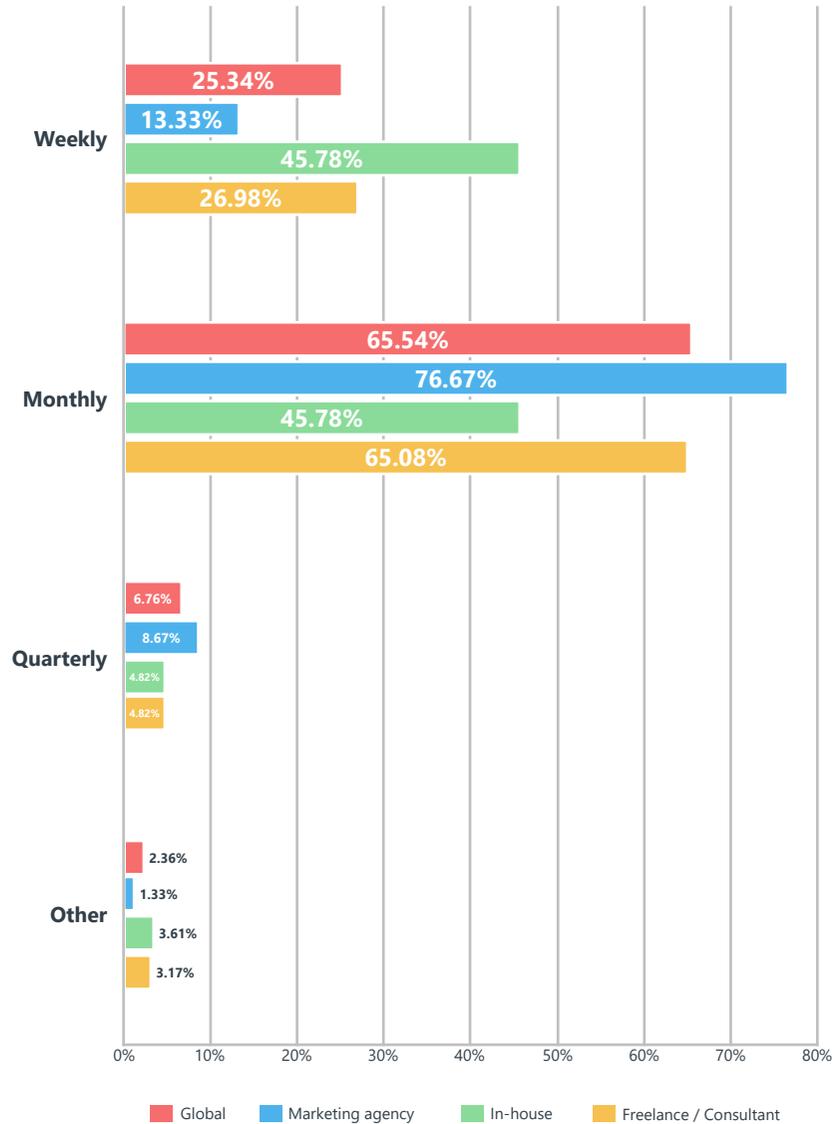
Most clients of SEO services seem to be happy with monthly progress reporting, whether they hire an agency or freelancers - 76.67% of marketers working in an agency report their performance on a monthly basis, and so do 65.08% of freelance professionals.

A more granular, weekly SEO monitoring is requested occasionally to agencies - only 13.33% of professionals working in an agency say they report on a weekly basis -, while almost 1 in 3 freelancers is asked for weekly reporting (26.98%).

Many more in-house marketers report on a weekly basis - 45.78% of respondents in this category chose weekly as their usual frequency for reporting.

However, an equal percentage opted for monthly reporting, which most likely means they do both, in perhaps more or less formal ways (status updates, meetings with supervisors and executives).

Advanced WEB RANKING

How do you showcase progress?

Individual service reporting is the most common approach
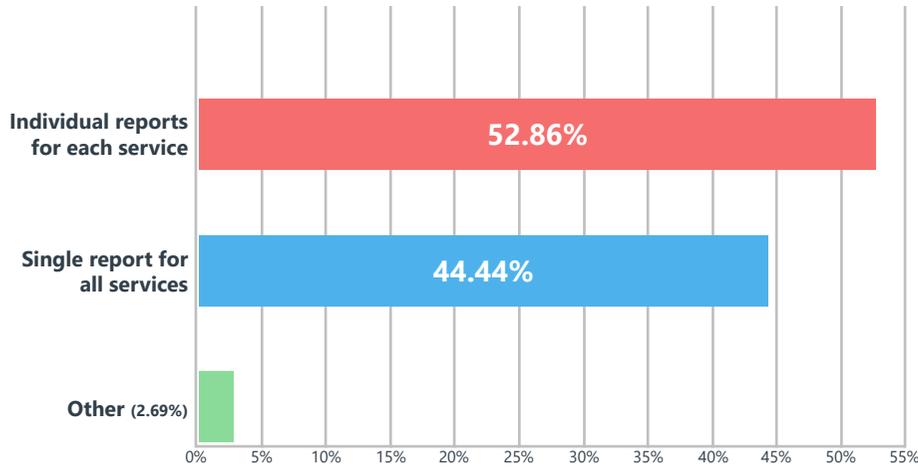
Over half of those surveyed reported they prefer to put together individual reports for their services when showcasing progress to clients. 52.86% of all respondents practice individual reporting, while 44.44% use a single report for all services they provide per project.

The difference is not all that significant, and slicing the data by respondent type reveals why. Agency marketers use individual reporting in a proportion of 52.67%, in-house teams in proportion of 59.04%, whereas only 45.31% of freelancers do.

These rather small, but still quite notable differences may be explained by the fact that agencies can have several teams, each specialized on a certain kind of service, whereas freelancers, who work alone or in small, versatile groups, have fewer resources and time, thus preferring to report on everything in one go.

Overall, it seems that clients prefer individual reports.

Marketing agency
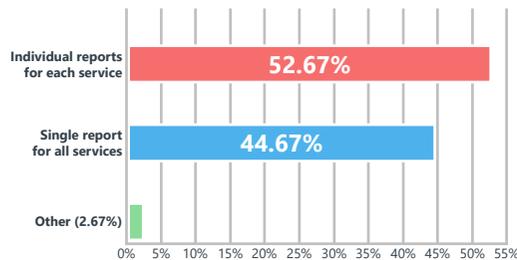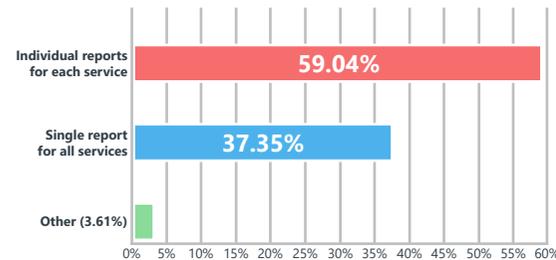
In-house

Freelance / Consultant

20
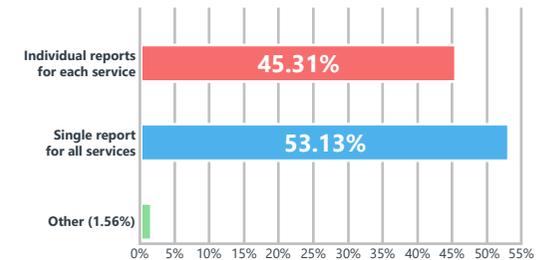
Do you use any tools for report automation?

Agency marketers and freelancers report differently

Yes
45.04%

54.96%
No, I compile my reports manually
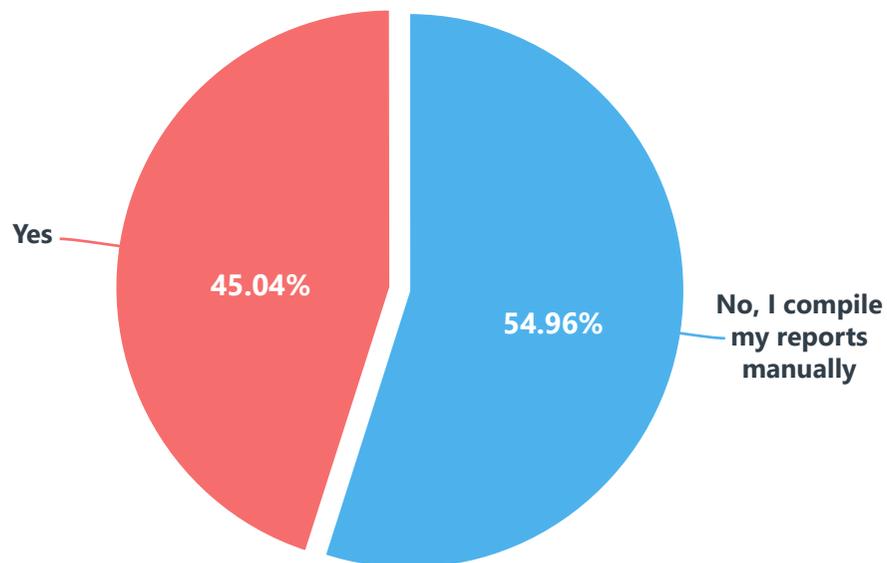
There is still quite a large number of marketers who compile their reports manually. Overall, our survey respondents seem to prefer manual reporting (54.96%).

However, the numbers are slightly weighted by freelancers, most of whom do manual reporting (62.50%). This high percentage is to be expected with freelancers, who often dispose of smaller tool budgets, or who prefer to report manually simply because they needn't compile data on too many services at once.

As for agency marketers, over half (52.24%) actually use report automation. But this is still a surprisingly low number, which has either to do with the fact that most marketers report progress individually, or with budget, and difficulty squeezing in reporting tools on that budget.

Marketing agency
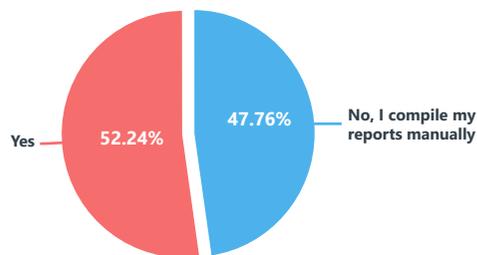
Yes
52.24%

47.76%
No, I compile my reports manually

Freelance / Consultant

Yes
37.50%

62.50%
No, I compile my reports manually

Advanced
WEB RANKING
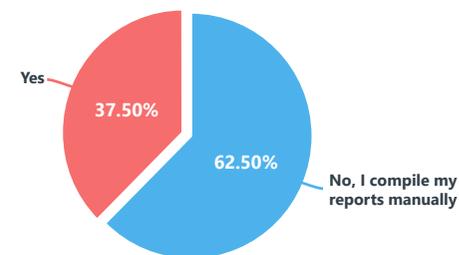
Do you use any tools for report automation?

Agency marketers and freelancers use different tools for reporting

REPORTING
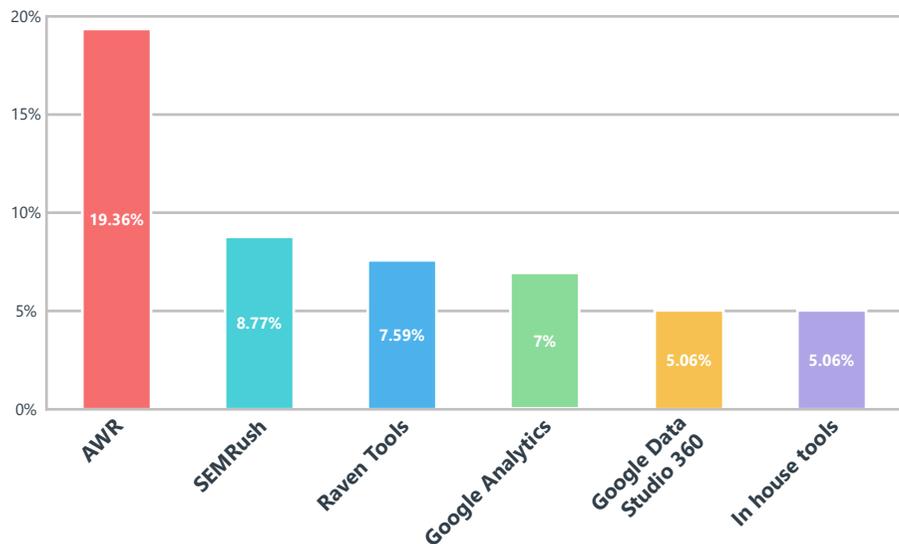
When asked about the tools they use (either paid or free), agency marketers and freelancers chose different tools for report automation.

Since many of our users filled-out the survey, AWR was the top choice for both categories of respondents - agency marketers (19.29%) and freelancers (19.88%) - for report automation.

Other popular choices for agencies were Raven Tools (8.57%), Google Analytics (7.86%), DashThis (5.71%) and Swydo (5.71%).

Freelancers chose SEMRush (17.65%), SEO Powersuite (8.41%), Raven Tools (6.31%) and Google Data Studio (6.31%).

Marketing agency

Tool	%
AWR	19.29%
Raven Tools	8.57%
Google Analytics	7.86%
DashThis	5.71%
Swydo	5.71%

Freelance / Consultant

Tool	%
AWR	19.88%
SEMrush	17.65%
SEO Powersuite	8.41%
Raven Tools	6.31%
Google Data Studio 360	6.31%

Advanced
WEB RANKING
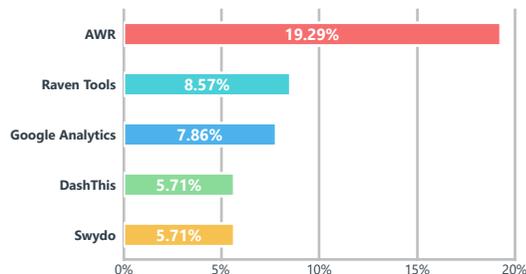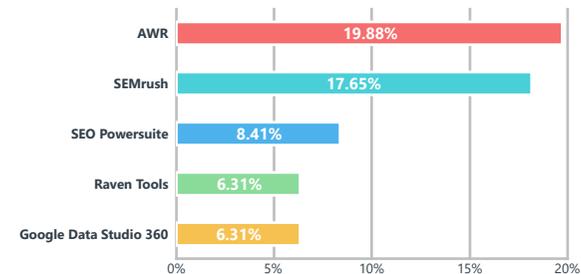
TOOLS

What is your minimum annual tool budget?

1 in 4 marketers spends more than $500/month on tools

| Budget	Percentage
$1 - $1,200	24.52%
$1,201 - $6,000	41.38%
$6,001 - $24,000	15.33%
$24,001 - $48,000	2.68%
$48,001 - $120,000	2.30%
More than $120,000	2.68%
I don't know	11.11%
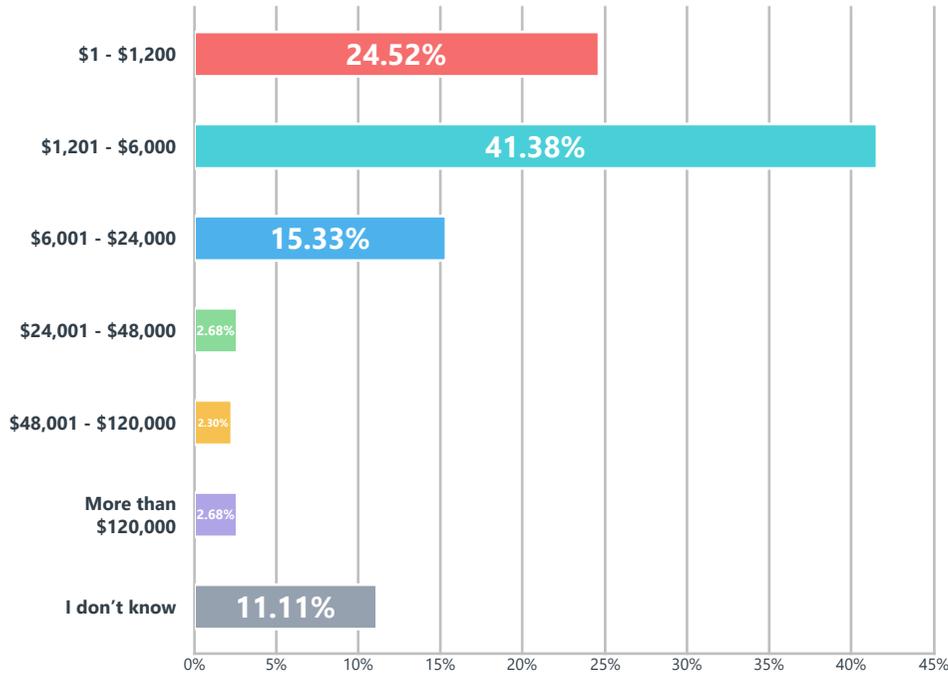
Most commonly, respondents said their minimum annual tool budget is between $1,201 - $6,000 ($101 - $500 / mo) - 41.38% of marketers selected this option.

Slicing the data by responder type, the trend is maintained. The biggest percentages of replies show these sums as representative for the budgets that agencies (43.18%), in-house teams (33.33%), and freelancers (47.37%) have access to.

On average, it seems that tool budgets for in-house teams are larger than those of agencies. 33.33% of in-house SEOs have monthly tool budgets over $500, while only 22.73% of agencies and 10.53% of freelancers do.

Marketing agency
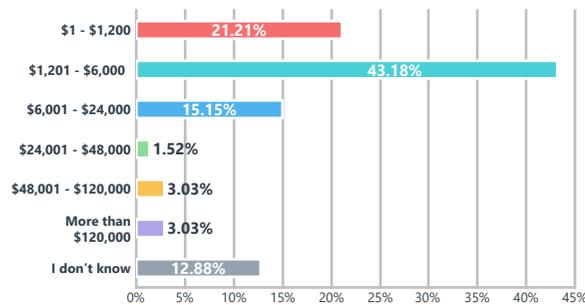
Budget	Percentage
$1 - $1,200	21.21%
$1,201 - $6,000	43.18%
$6,001 - $24,000	15.15%
$24,001 - $48,000	1.52%
$48,001 - $120,000	3.03%
More than $120,000	3.03%
I don't know	12.88%

In-house

Budget	Percentage
$1 - $1,200	20.83%
$1,201 - $6,000	33.33%
$6,001 - $24,000	22.22%
$24,001 - $48,000	4.17%
$48,001 - $120,000	2.78%
More than $120,000	4.17%
I don't know	12.50%

Freelance / Consultant

| Budget	Percentage
$1 - $1,200	36.84%
$1,201 - $6,000	47.37%
$6,001 - $24,000	7.02%
$24,001 - $48,000	3.51%
I don't know	5.26%

Advanced WEB RANKING
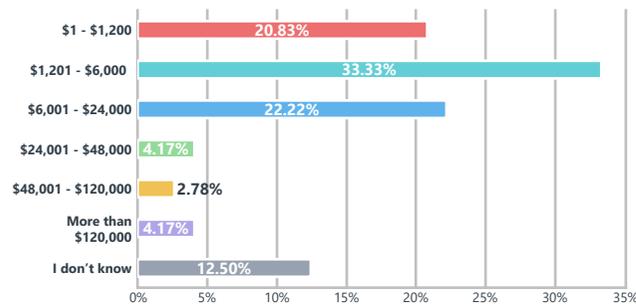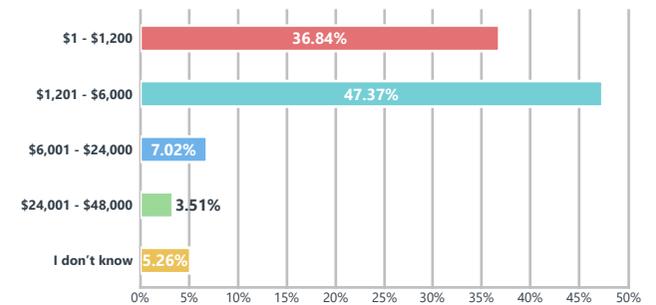
How many automation tools do you regularly use for executing content creation?

Content creation is the least automated tactic
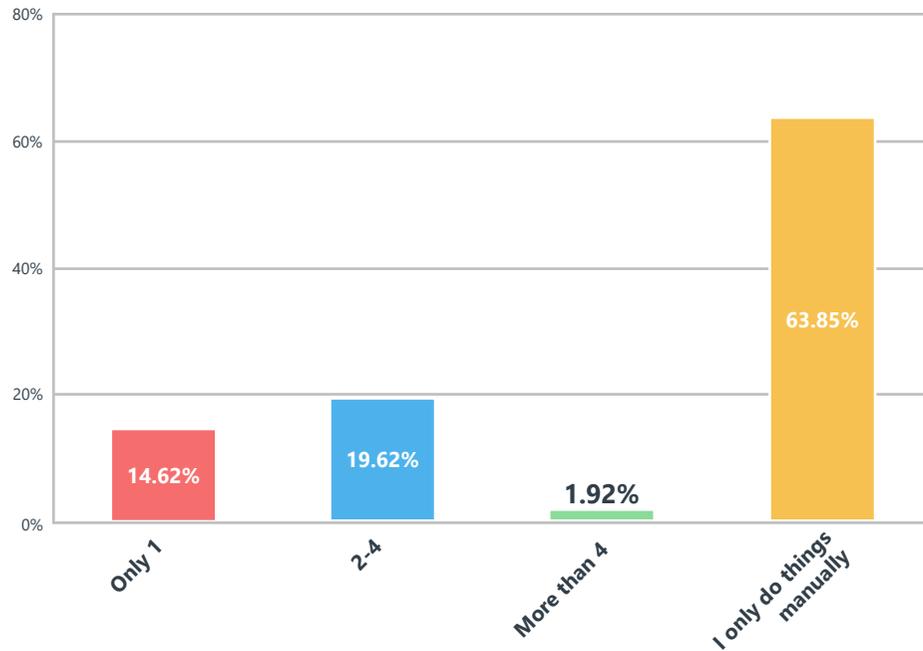
On average, the majority (63.85%) of survey participants do not use any automation tools for generating content.

Out of those who do (36.16%), almost half use 2 to 4 automation tools (19.62% of total and 54.26% of those using tools), while the other half use only 1 tool (14.62% of total and 40.43% of those using tools).

The results are consistent across all types of marketers - agency, in-house and freelance.
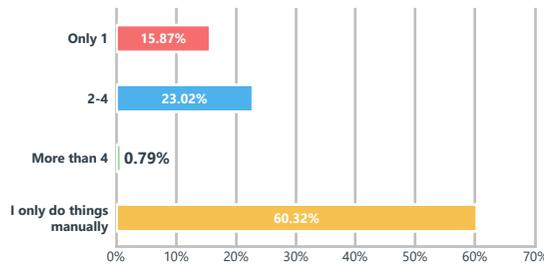
TOOLS

Marketing agency

Only 1	15.87%
2-4	23.02%
More than 4	0.79%
I only do things manually	60.32%

In-house

Only 1	11.84%
2-4	14.47%
More than 4	5.26%
I only do things manually	68.42%

Freelance / Consultant

Only 1	15.52%
2-4	18.97%
More than 4	0%
I only do things manually	65.52%

Advanced WEB RANKING
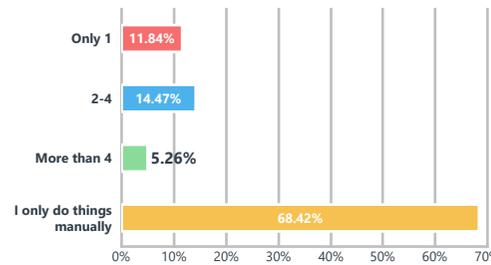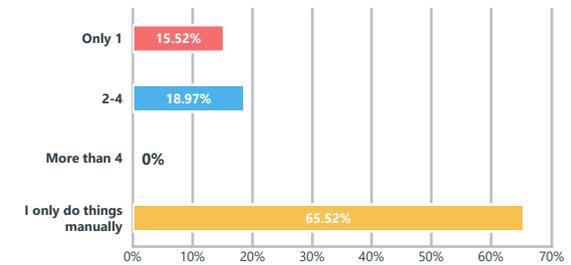
How many automation tools do you regularly use for executing keyword research?

## Most marketers use 2-4 automation tools for keyword research
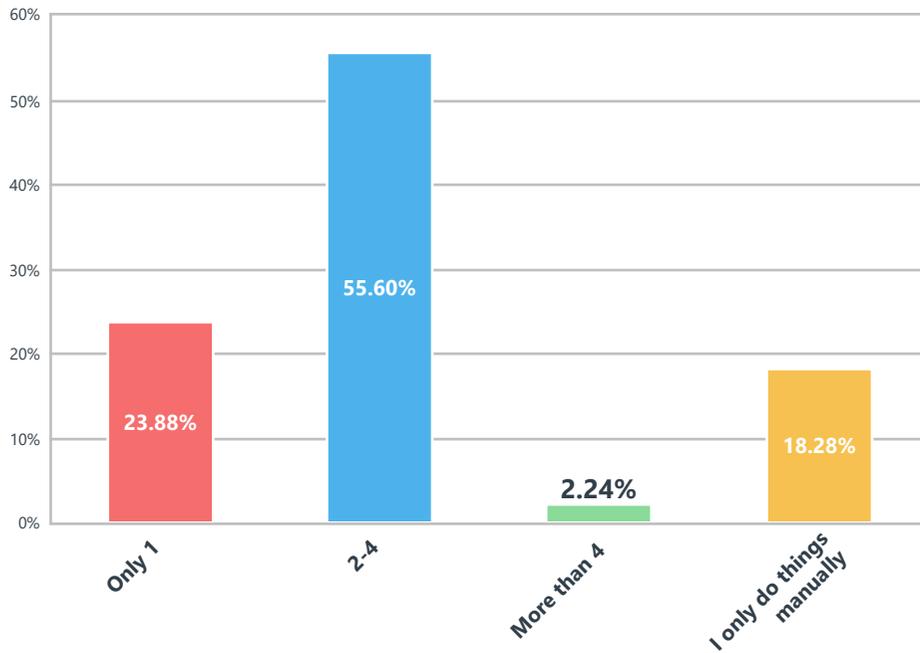
TOOLS

Keyword research is mostly automated - 81.72% of marketers use at least one tool, while a mere 18.28% say they research keywords only manually.

It seems that the majority of marketers (55.6%) use 2 to 4 tools for researching keywords, another important slice use a single tool in their kit (about one quarter - 23.88%), while very few regularly use more than 4 keyword research tools (2.24%).

Although the differences between the three categories of respondents are small, it is worth highlighting that marketers working in agencies are researching keywords manually (19.08%) more than in-house SEOs (16.88%) and freelancers (18.33%).

Marketing agency
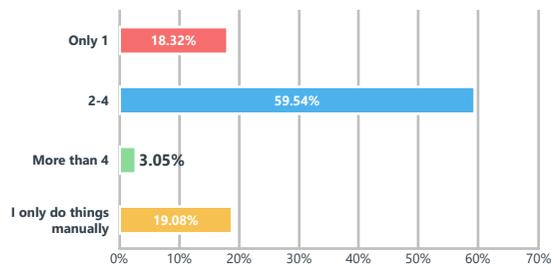
In-house

Freelance / Consultant

Advanced WEB RANKING
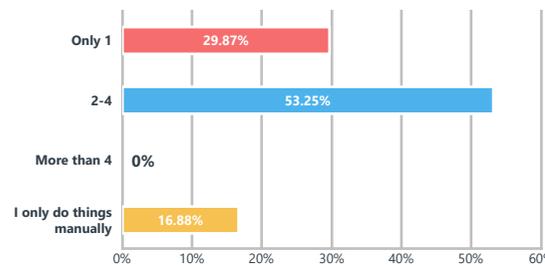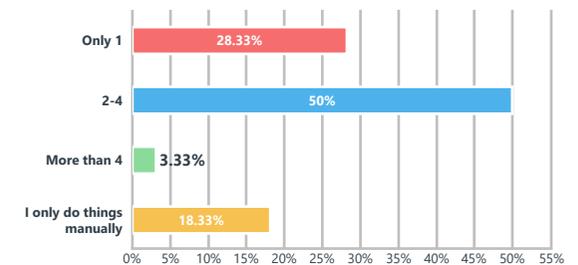
How many automation tools do you regularly use for executing link analysis?

More than 80% of marketers use at least one automation tool for link analysis
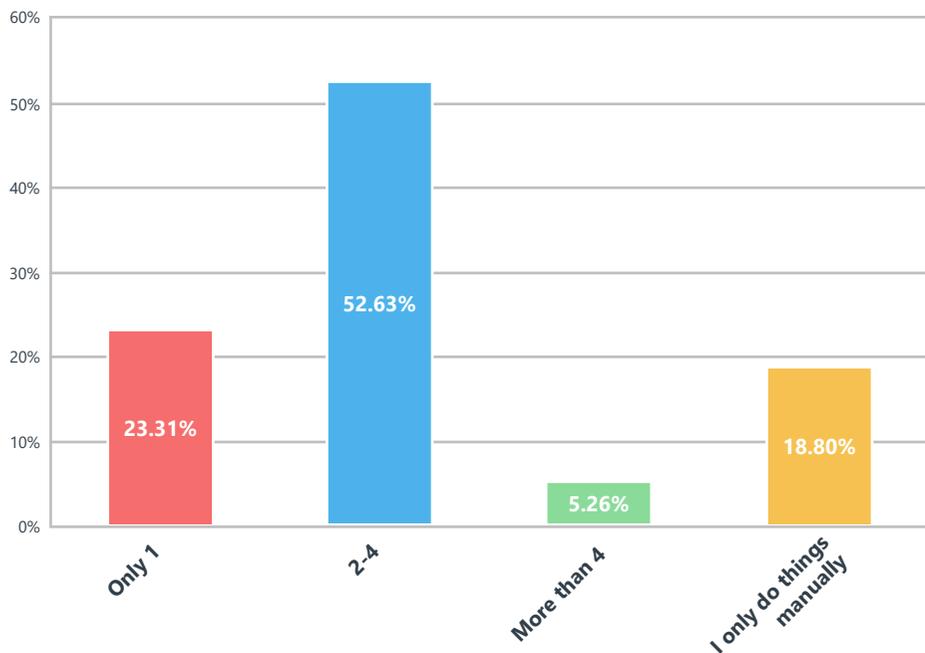

TOOLS

When it comes to link analysis, the stats are not that different from those on keyword research. An average of 18.8% marketers analyze their links manually, while the other 81.2% state they regularly use automation tools for this task.

The results on the number of tools marketers use for link analysis are similar:

- A majority of 52.63% use 2 to 4 tools
- 23.31% use only 1 automation tool for link analysis
- Only 5.26% use more than 4 tools for this task

This time, however, in-house SEOs analyze links manually the most (20.78%), as opposed to agency marketers (18.46%) and freelancers (16.95%).
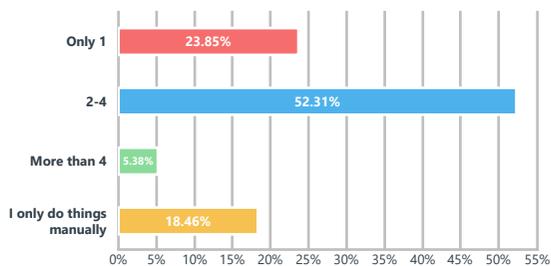
Chart (main)

Category	Value
Only 1	23.31%
2-4	52.63%
More than 4	5.26%
I only do things manually	18.80%

Marketing agency

Category	Value
Only 1	23.85%
2-4	52.31%
More than 4	5.38%
I only do things manually	18.46%

In-house

Category	Value
Only 1	22.08%
2-4	54.55%
More than 4	2.60%
I only do things manually	20.78%

Freelance / Consultant

Category	Value
Only 1	23.73%
2-4	50.85%
More than 4	8.47%
I only do things manually	16.95%

27

Advanced WEB RANKING
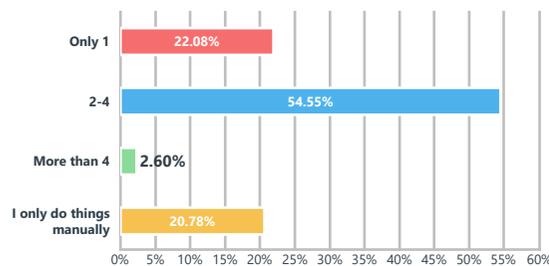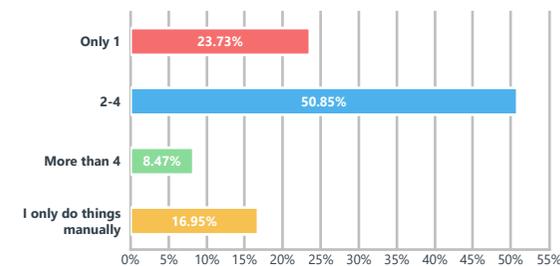
How many automation tools do you regularly use for executing social media?

1 in 3 marketers doesn't automate social media

TOOLS

Chart — main:
- Only 1: 29.25%
- 2-4: 37.55%
- More than 4: 2.37%
- I only do things manually: 30.83%
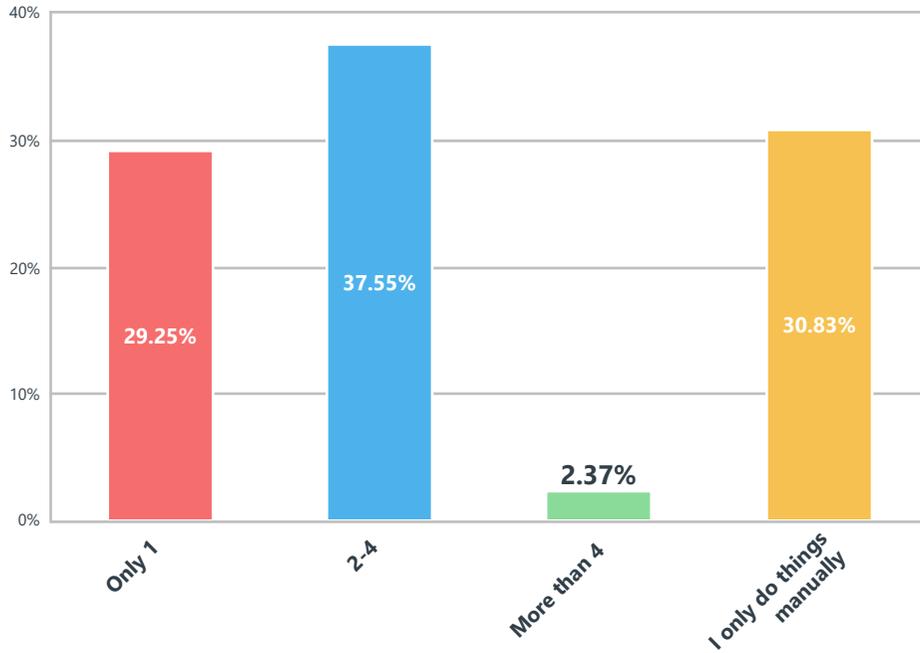
On average, about one third of all survey participants (30.83%) manage their social media presence without the help of any automation tools, 37.55% use 2 to 4 tools, 29.25% use only 1 tool and 2.37% use more than 4 tools for automating social media tactics.

When slicing the data by respondent type however, new interesting facts surface. It seems that:

• In-house marketers are investing the least in social media automation tools, 42.25% of them dealing with this task manually
• Most freelancers use one automation tool for social media (40.68%)
• The majority of agencies rely on 2 to 4 social media automation tools (43.90%)

Marketing agency
- Only 1: 29.27%
- 2-4: 43.90%
- More than 4: 1.63%
- I only do things manually: 25.20%
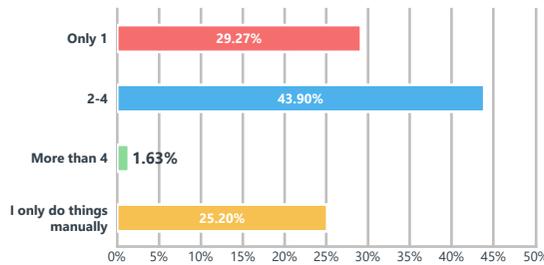
In-house
- Only 1: 19.72%
- 2-4: 33.80%
- More than 4: 4.23%
- I only do things manually: 42.25%

Freelance / Consultant
- Only 1: 40.68%
- 2-4: 28.81%
- More than 4: 1.69%
- I only do things manually: 28.81%

Advanced WEB RANKING
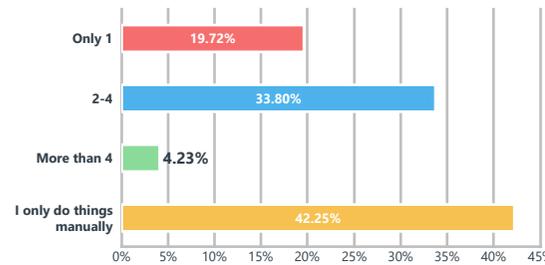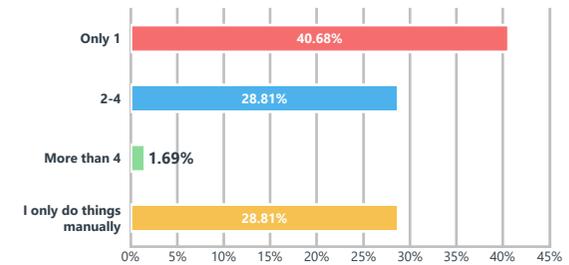
How many automation tools do you regularly use for executing on-page SEO?

Almost half of marketers use 2 to 4 automation tools for on-page SEO

- Only 1: 17.11%
- 2-4: 47.53%
- More than 4: 10.27%
- I only do things manually: 25.10%
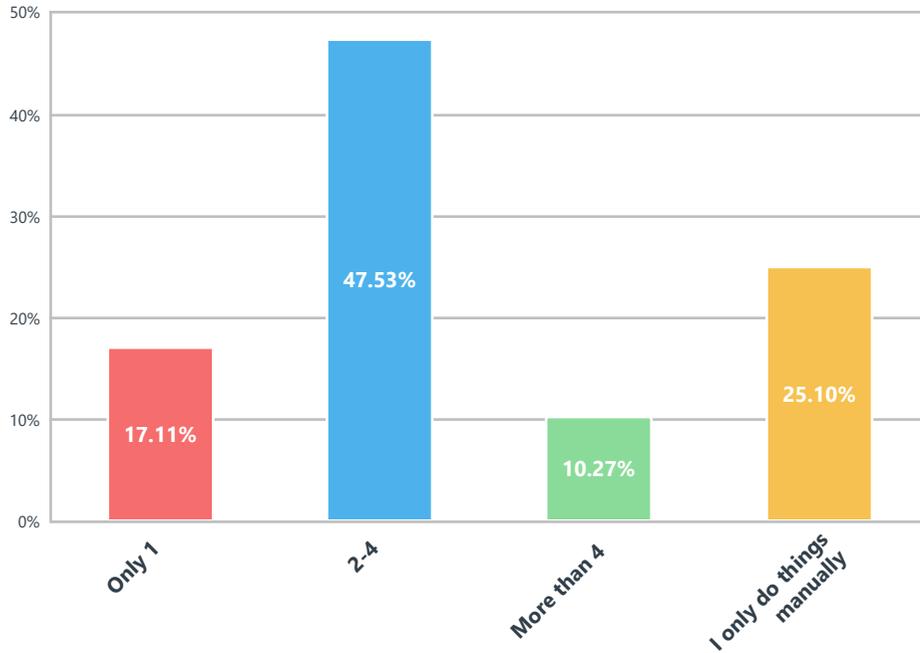
For on-page tactics, the number of marketers that handle the task strictly manually is a bit lower than in the case of social media, with only 1 in 4 marketers saying they use no automation tools for on-page SEO.

The majority of survey respondents (47.53%) said they use 2 to 4 tools for their on-page routine, while 17.11% use only 1 automation tool and 10.27% have more than 4 items in their on-page automation toolkit.

The results are consistent across all types of marketers participating in the survey (marketing agencies, in-house SEOs and freelancers).

Marketing agency

- Only 1: 16.28%
- 2-4: 48.84%
- More than 4: 10.85%
- I only do things manually: 24.03%

In-house

- Only 1: 20.27%
- 2-4: 41.89%
- More than 4: 10.81%
- I only do things manually: 27.03%

Freelance / Consultant

- Only 1: 15%
- 2-4: 51.67%
- More than 4: 8.33%
- I only do things manually: 25%

TOOLS

Advanced WEB RANKING
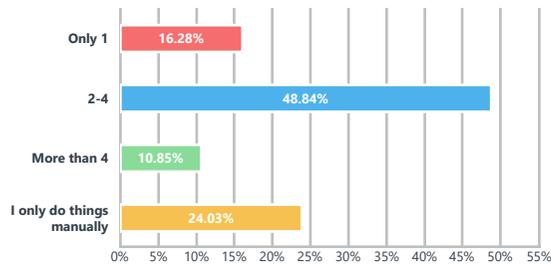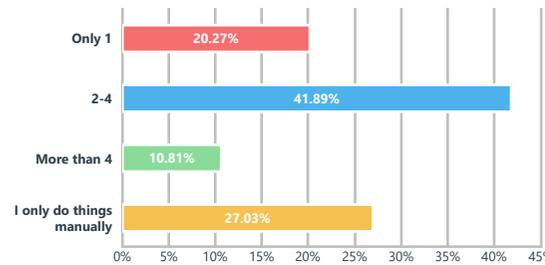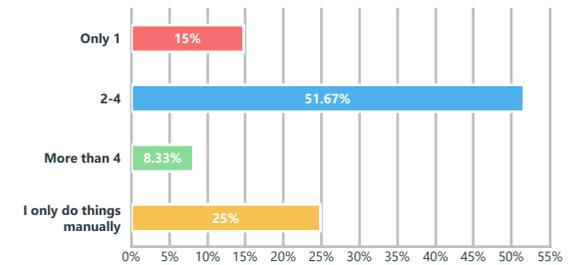
Which paid tools have you used for keyword research in the last 12 months?

On average, marketers use 1-2 paid tools for keyword research
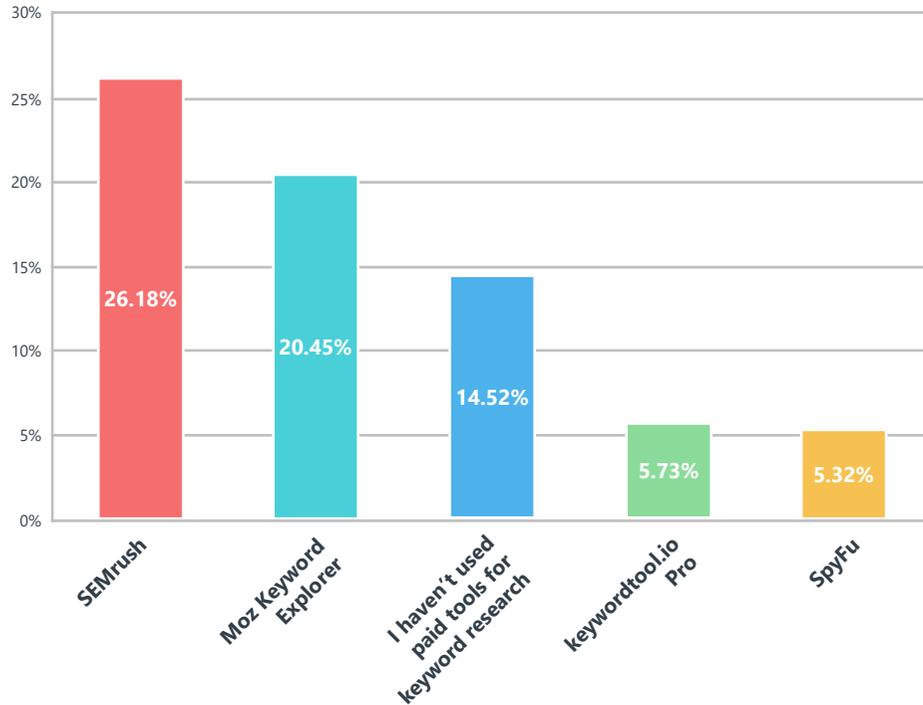
Only 14.55% of respondents haven't used a paid keyword research tool in the past 12 months. The overall top 3 keyword tools are as follows:

- SEMrush (26.23%)
- Moz Keyword Explorer (20.49%)
- keywordtool.io Pro (5.74%)

The only respondent category that didn't reflect this top is represented by marketers working in agencies, as their third choice is SpyFu (5.84%) instead of keywordtool.io Pro (4.67%).

The average number of paid research tools used is between 1-2 (1.61).

Marketing agency

SEMrush	26.85%
moz Keyword Explorer	22.18%
I haven't used paid tools for keyword research	11.28%
SpyFu	5.84%
keywordtool.io Pro	4.67%

In-house

SEMrush	33.06%
moz Keyword Explorer	23.14%
I haven't used paid tools for keyword research	16.53%
keywordtool.io Pro	6.61%
SpyFu	4.13%

Freelance / Consultant

I haven't used paid tools for keyword research	19.82%
SEMrush	17.12%
moz Keyword Explorer	13.51%
keywordtool.io Pro	7.21%
Wordtracker	6.31%

Advanced WEB RANKING
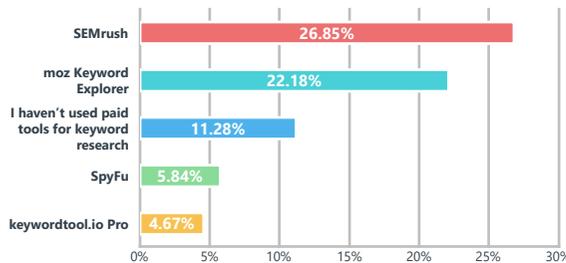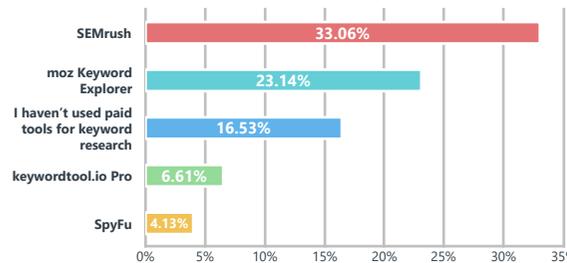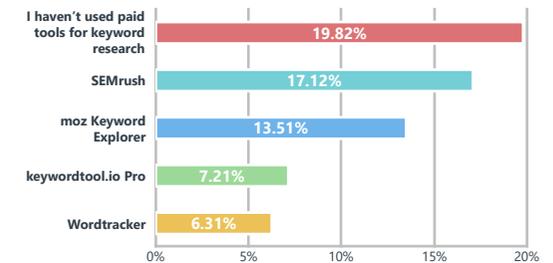
Which paid tools have you used for rank tracking in the last 12 months?

Only 3% of SEOs say they haven't used any paid rank tracking tools in the past year
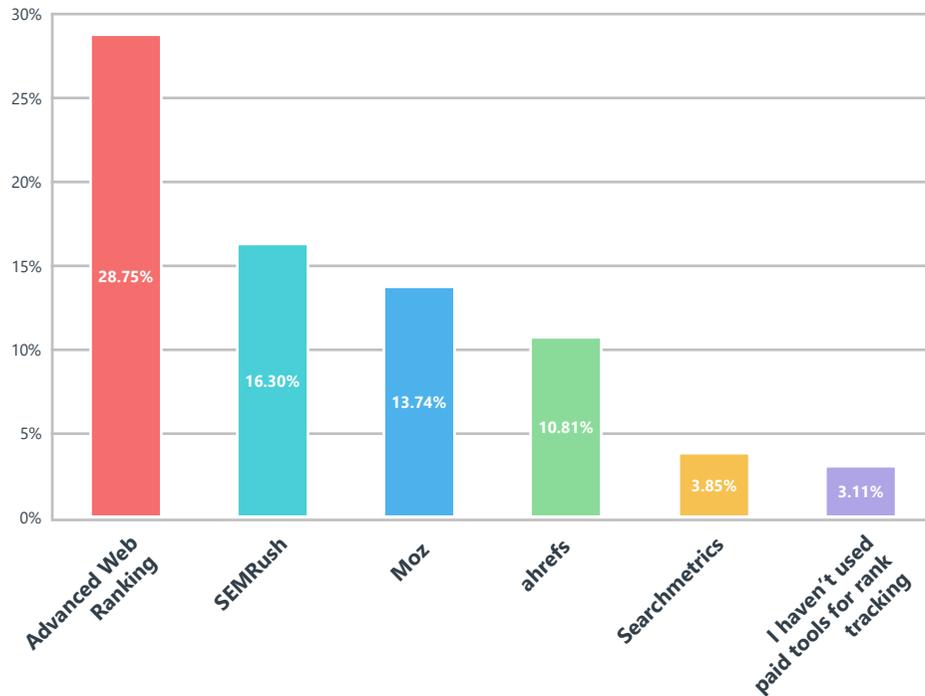
TOOLS

Almost 98% SEOs are using a paid rank tracking service and the top 3 tools are as follows (*stats might be a little biased since a lot of respondents are AWR customers*):

- Advanced Web Ranking (28.75%)
- SEMrush (16.30%)
- Moz (13.74%)

Interestingly, freelancers are the only category where the top 3 rank tracking tools is a bit different: ahrefs is used slightly more than Moz, and thus occupies the third spot (13.33% versus 12.22%).

Generally, SEO professionals have used 2 ranking tools over a 12 month period.

Only 3.11% of respondents haven't used any kind of paid tool for rank tracking in the past year.

Marketing agency

In-house

Freelance / Consultant

Advanced WEB RANKING
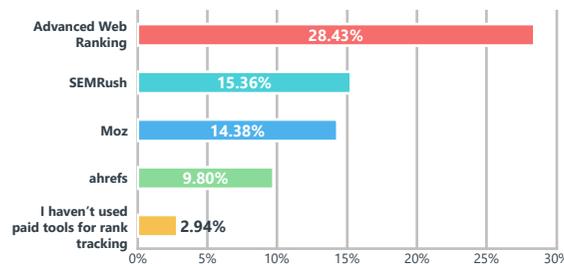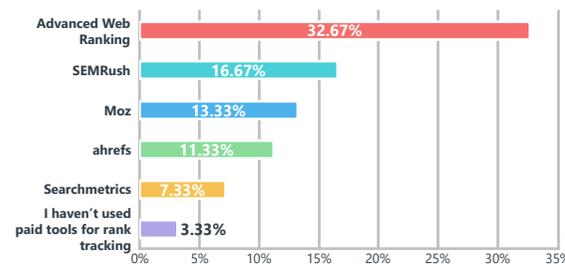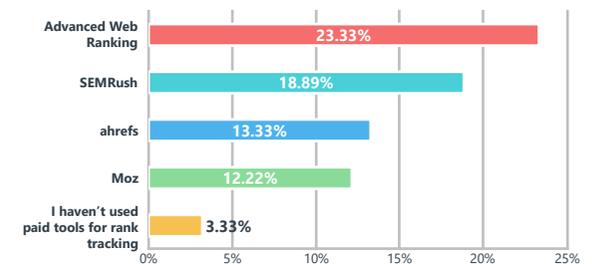
Which paid tools have you used for link building / analysis in the last 12 months?

1 in 10 marketers doesn't invest in link building / analysis tools
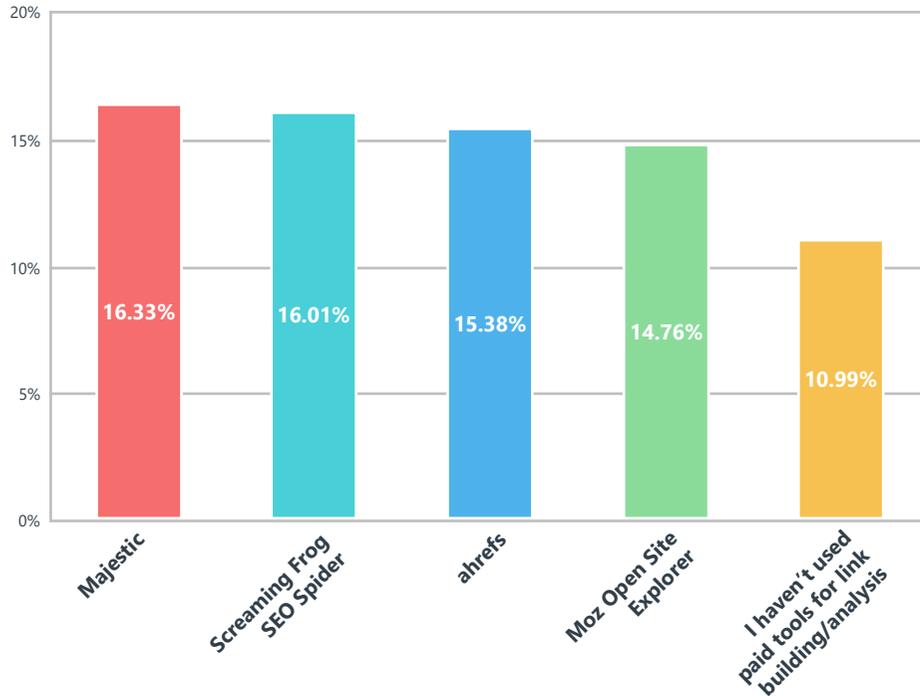
TOOLS

Surprisingly, Moz's Open Site Explorer doesn't make it into the link building / analysis top 3 paid tools of the global results. However, it remains agencies' most used link analysis service, counting 16.72% of respondents' choices. Here is the global top three:

- Majestic (16.33%)
- Screaming Frog SEO Spider (16.01%)
- Ahrefs (15.38%)

In most cases, respondents admitted they use on average about 2 paid link building analysis tools for a more complex and objective analysis. Globally, Moz's Open Site Explorer followed closely at 14.76% usage.

About 11% of those surveyed haven't used any paid tools in the last 12 months, the ratio being roughly the same across the three types of survey participants.

Marketing agency

Tool	%
Moz Open Site Explorer	16.72%
Screaming Frog SEO Spider	16.40%
ahrefs	14.83%
Majestic	13.56%
I haven't used paid tools for link building/analysis	11.99%

In-house

Tool	%
Majestic	20.56%
Screaming Frog SEO Spider	17.78%
ahrefs	16.67%
Moz Open Site Explorer	13.33%
I haven't used paid tools for link building/analysis	9.44%

Freelance / Consultant

Tool	%
Majestic	17.14%
ahrefs	15%
Screaming Frog SEO Spider	12.86%
Moz Open Site Explorer	12.14%
I haven't used paid tools for link building/analysis	10.71%

Advanced WEB RANKING

Which paid tools have you used for social media in the last 12 months?

Marketers' preferences for social media tools are diverse
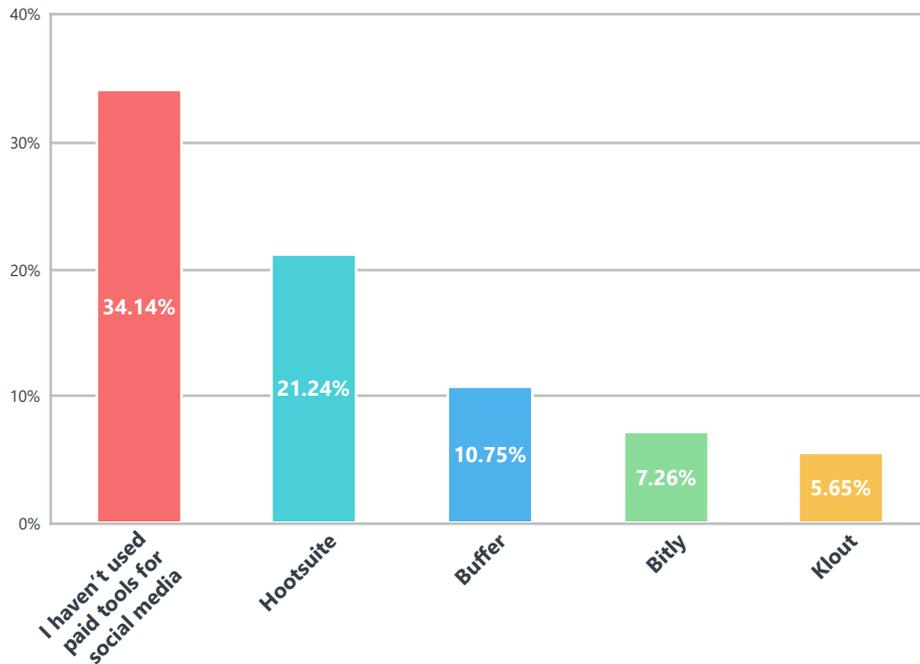
TOOLS

Of all industry-related services, paid social media tools are the least used by SEO professionals, as 34.14% of respondents claimed they don't invest at all in this area.

The overall top 3 tools used looks like this:

- Hootsuite (21.24%)
- Buffer (10.75%)
- Bitly (7.26%)

Slicing the data by user type, only the last option of the top three differs for agency SEOs. They rate Sprout Social (8.00%) instead of Bitly (6.00%) as their third favorite choice.

Marketing agency

In-house

Freelance / Consultant

Advanced WEB RANKING
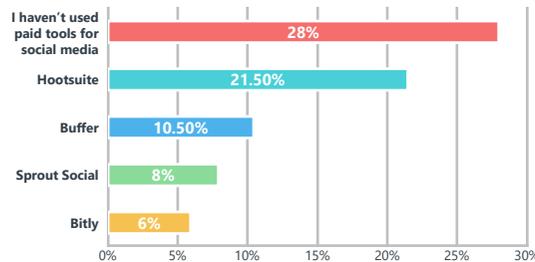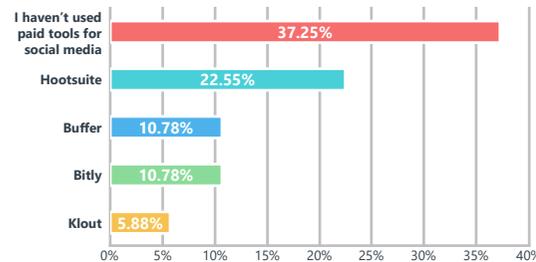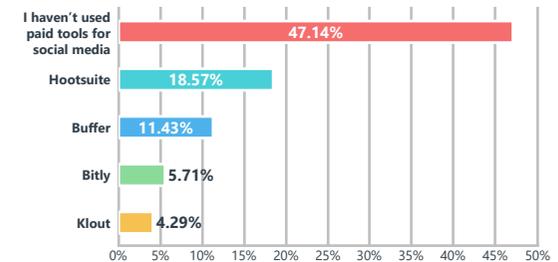
Which paid tools have you used for on-page SEO in the last 12 months?

On-page is important, and Screaming Frog SEO Spider seems to be the preferred tool

TOOLS
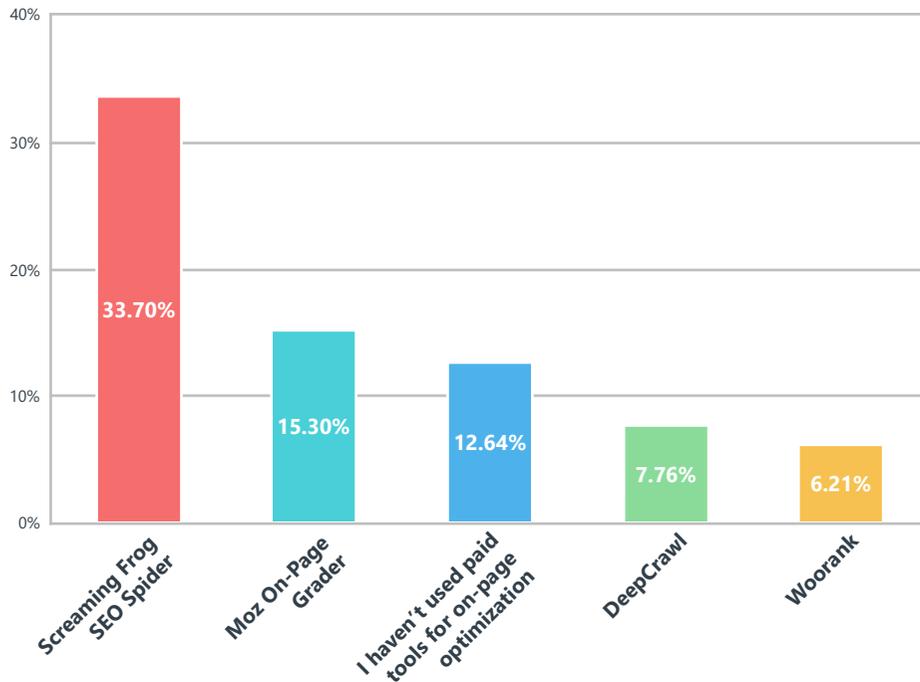
Here's how the top 3 for on-page paid tool usage is laid out according to the survey's results:

- Screaming Frog SEO Spider (33.70%)
- Moz On-Page Grader (15.30%)
- DeepCrawl (7.76%)

Approximately 13% of those surveyed haven't used any paid tool in the past year.

Results remain more or less consistent if the data is carved by responder type. However, in the freelance category, Moz On-Page Grader shares second place with Woorank (8.89%), and Alexa comes up on third place with 7.78% of votes.

There is also a larger percentage of freelancers who don't use any paid tools for on-page (17.78%).

Marketing agency

Screaming Frog SEO Spider	32.35%
Moz On-Page Grader	18.07%
I haven't used paid tools for on-page optimization	11.34%
DeepCrawl	7.14%
Woorank	6.72%

In-house

Screaming Frog SEO Spider	37.40%
Moz On-Page Grader	14.63%
I haven't used paid tools for on-page optimization	11.38%
DeepCrawl	10.57%
Site Analyzer	6.50%

Freelance / Consultant

Screaming Frog SEO Spider	32.22%
I haven't used paid tools for on-page optimization	17.78%
Moz On-Page Grader	8.89%
Woorank	8.89%
Alexa	7.78%

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Advanced WEB RANKING

CLIENT ACQUISITION

Which services are most requested by your customers?

SEO and PPC are the most solicited marketing services

Analytics 9.97%
Social Media 7.79%
Link Building 5.30%
Content Creation 10.28%
Web Design and Development 11.21%
PPC 13.86%
SEO 27.88%

Other: 13.71%
Local Search Services **4.52%**
CRO **2.65%**
Web Hosting **2.02%**
Email Marketing **1.87%**
PR **1.09%**
Reputation Management **0.93%**
Video Content Creation **0.62%**
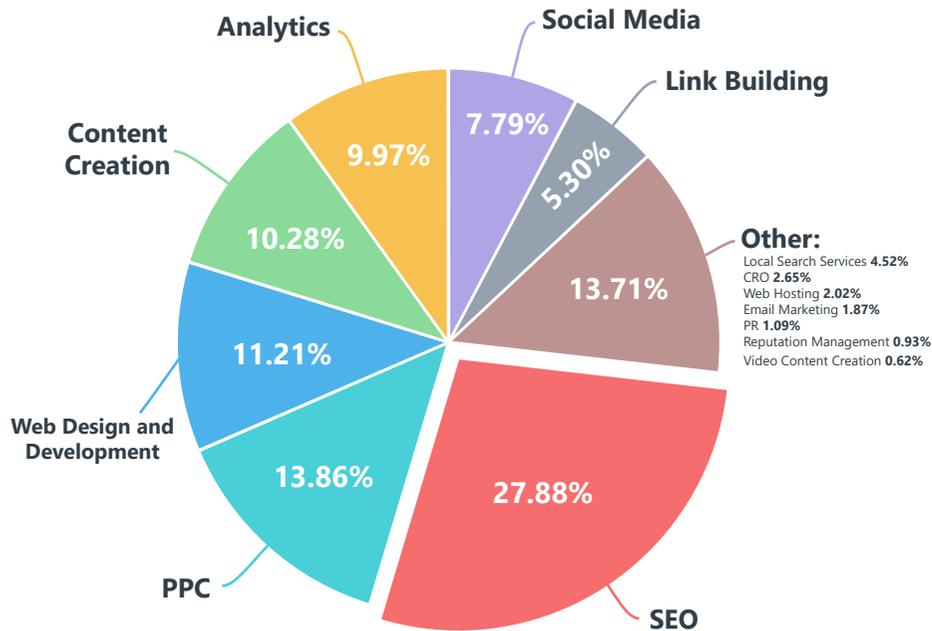
Overall, the top 3 services most requested by customers are as follows:

• SEO (27.88%)
• PPC (13.86%)
• Web Design and Development (11.21%)

While agency results reflect the global stats, freelancers deal with more Analytics (12.50%) service requirements than PPC, thus ranking it as their second most common service provided.

Content creation is the fourth most requested service at 10.28%, globally.

*Note: the audience we surveyed might have influenced the overall results, as 49.88% of the respondents are part of a marketing agency, while freelancers represent 19.41% of the survey's audience.*

Marketing agency

Analytics 8.89%
Social Media 8.00%
Link Building 4.22%
Web Design and Development 10.89%
Content Creation 10.89%
PPC 16.67%
SEO 27.33%

Other: 13.11%
CRO **3.33%**
Visit duration/engagement **3.11%**
Local Search Services **2.89%**
Email Marketing **2.44%**
Web Hosting **1.78%**
PR **1.11%**
Reputation Management **0.89%**
Video Content Creation **0.67%**

Freelance / Consultant

Local Search Services 8.33%
Content Creation 8.85%
Link Building 7.81%
PPC 7.29%
Web Design and Development 11.98%
Analytics 12.50%
SEO 29.17%

Other: 14.06%
Social Media **7.29%**
Web Hosting **2.60%**
CRO **1.04%**
PR **1.04%**
Reputation Management **1.04%**
Email Marketing **0.52%**
Video Content Creation **0.52%**

Advanced WEB RANKING

What niches do you work with most often?

SEO is relevant for all industries

Industry	Percentage
Business & Industrial	12.70%
Travel & Tourism	7.20%%
Retailers & General Merchandise	7.08%
Finance	6.47%
Health	5.86%
Real Estate	5.49%
Home & Garden	5.37%
Beauty & Personal Care	4.76%
Internet & Telecom	4.52%
Sports & Fitness	4.40%
Vehicles	4.40%
Computers & Consumer Electronics	4.03%
Arts & Entertainment	3.79%
Law & Government	3.66%
Food & Groceries	3.42%
Hobbies & Leisure	3.17%
Apparel	3.05%
Jobs & Education	3.05%
Dining & Nightlife	2.32%
Family & Community	1.95%
News, Media & Publications	1.83%
Occasions & Gifts	1.47%

The great majority (83.77%) of respondents offering SEO services to their clients aren't specialized in a single niche. SEOs working in an agency or freelancing handle, on average, clients from 5 different industries.

The top 5 industries our respondents stated they work with most often are the following:

- Business & Industrial (12.70%)
- Travel & Tourism (7.20%)
- Retailers & General Merchandise (7.08%)
- Finance (6.47%)
- Health (5.86%)

Top 5 industries/niches for agencies:

- Business & Industrial (13.66%)
- Finance (7.92%)
- Retailers & General Merchandise (7.52%)
- Travel & Tourism (7.52%)
- Home & Garden (5.35%)

Top 5 industries/ niches for freelancers:

- Business & Industrial (11.15%)
- Health (7.01%)
- Travel & Tourism (6.69%)
- Retailers & General Merchandise (6.37%)
- Real Estate (6.05%)

Advanced WEB RANKING

What niches are you specialized in and what type of clients do you work with?

Proximity is key for clients

Niche	Percentage
Real Estate	20%
Travel & Tourism	15%
Health	10%
Home & Garden	10%
Retailers & General Merchandise	10%
Vehicles	10%
Apparel	5%
Business & Industrial	5%
Internet & Telecom	5%
Jobs & Education	5%
Law & Government	5%
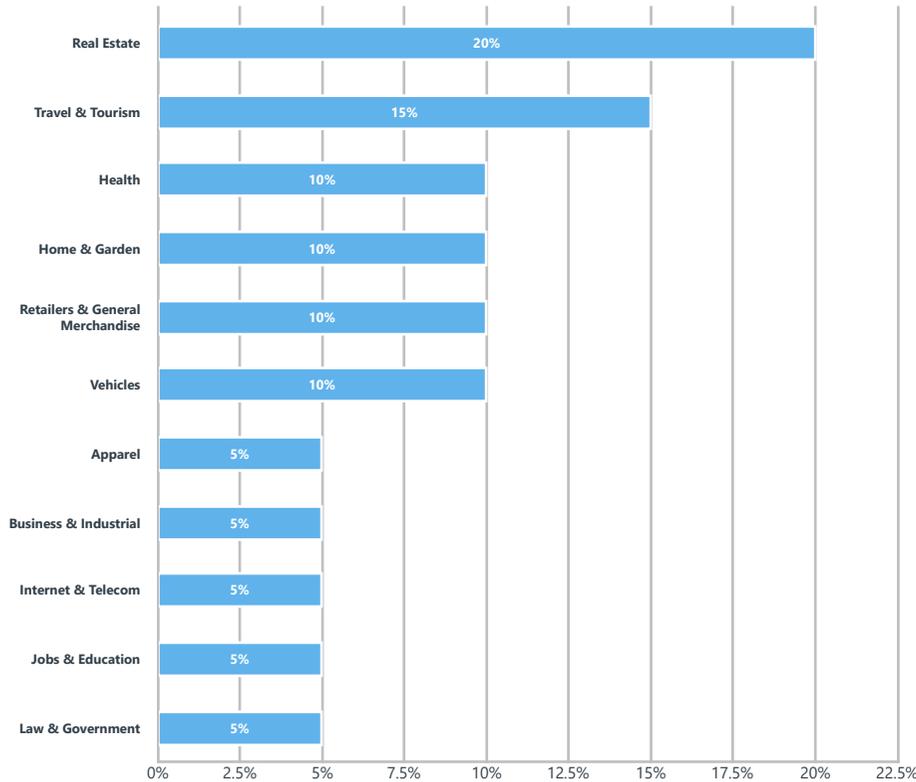
Across our survey sample, it's interesting to notice how a few industries seem to dominate.

Here's the top 3:

• Real estate (20%)
• Travel & Tourism (15%)
• Health/ Home & Garden/ Retailers & General Merchandise/ Vehicles (10% each)

Many other industries such as Arts & Entertainment, Beauty & Personal Care, Computers & Consumer Electronics, Dining & Nightlife, Finance, Food, Hobbies & Leisure, News & Media, Gifts, or Sports & Fitness, got no vote.
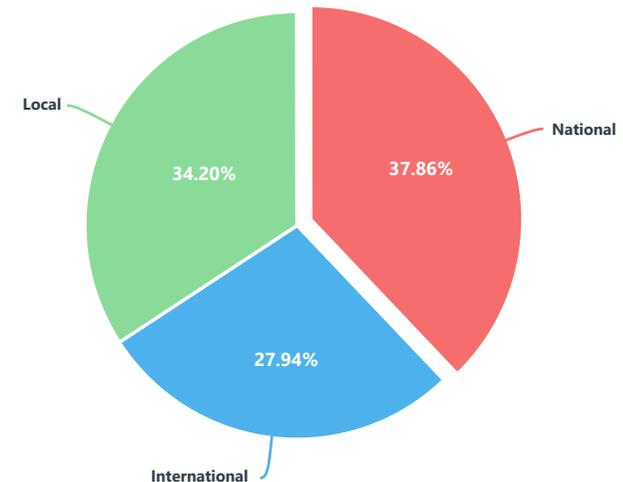
When asked about the types of clients they work with, proximity played a crucial role, as most of our respondents (72.06%) said they do SEO for local or national customers. The rest 27.94% said they handle international clients as well.

On average, each respondent said they handle 2.08 types of clients, indicating that most often, marketers have expertise in promoting more than one type of business.

Local 34.20%
National 37.86%
International 27.94%

Advanced
WEB RANKING

BUSINESS MODEL

What percentage of your business is SEO?

Main pie chart:
- More than 90%: 14.51%
- Less than 10%: 16.09%
- 10% - 30%: 23.48%
- 31% - 60%: 25.86%
- 61% - 90%: 20.05%
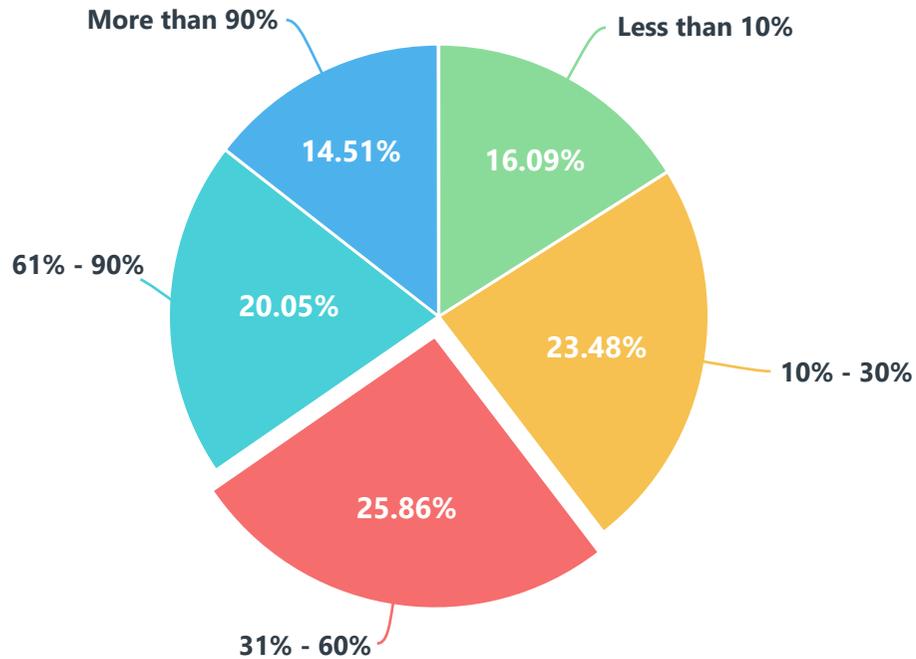
The numbers vary substantially among the three respondent categories:

• Freelancers - for 3 in 5 professionals their business is SEO, in which they invest more than 60% of their resources.
• In-house - almost 85% spend less than 60% of their time on SEO.
• Agencies - percentages are rather evenly distributed when it comes to SEO resources allocation.

Marketing agency
- More than 90%: 11.50%
- Less than 10%: 16%
- 10% - 30%: 22%
- 31% - 60%: 28%
- 61% - 90%: 22.50%

In-house
- More than 90%: 6.19%
- 61% - 90%: 9.28%
- 31% - 60%: 27.84%
- Less than 10%: 25.77%
- 10% - 30%: 30.93%

Freelance / Consultant
- Less than 10%: 4.88%
- 10% - 30%: 18.29%
- 31% - 60%: 18.29%
- 61% - 90%: 26.83%
- More than 90%: 31.71%

Advanced WEB RANKING
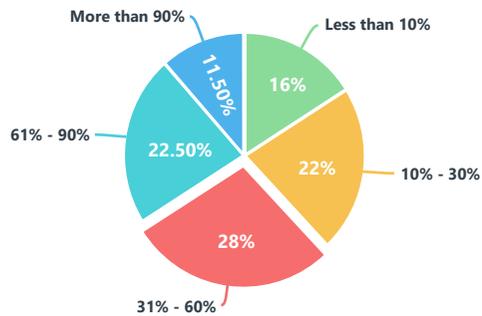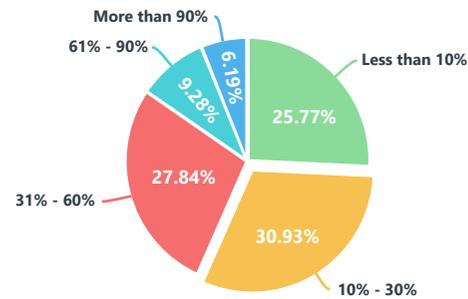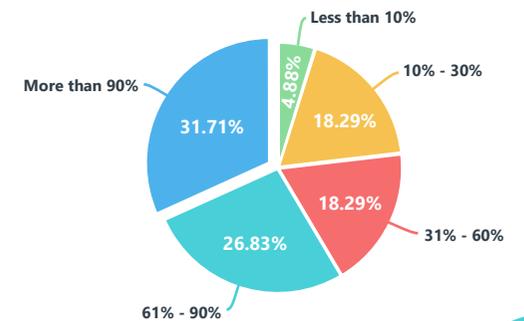
How many people work in your team / department?

- more than 50: 2.67%
- 1-2: 26%
- 3-10: 50.67%
- 11-25: 13.67%
- 26-50: 7%
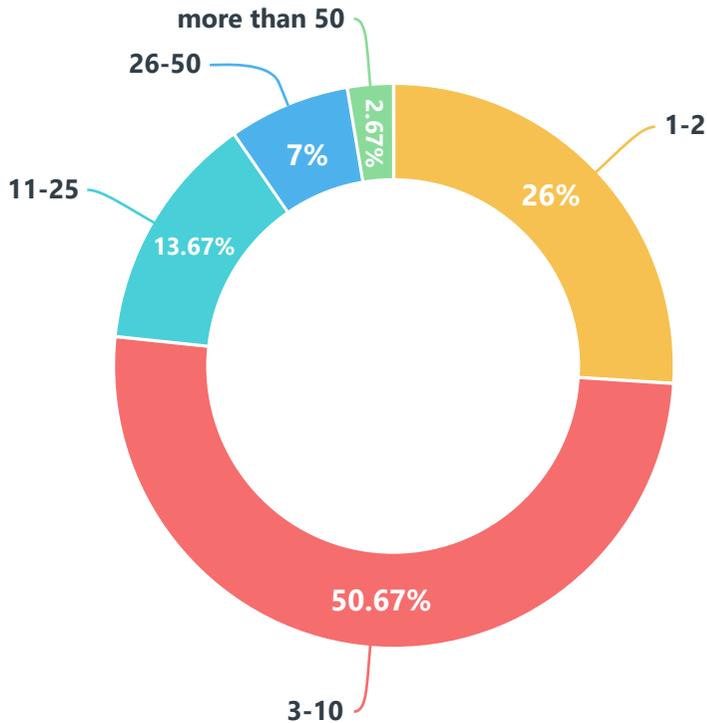
On average, marketing teams seem to be mostly composed of 3-10 professionals. However, at a closer look, the patterns change:

• Agencies - in most cases, the "typical" team consists of 3-10 members (55.45% of respondents).
• In-house - 2 types of teams: 1-2 members (39.80%) and 3-10 members (40.82%).

Marketing agency

- more than 50 (2.97%)
- 26-50: 7.92%
- 11-25: 14.36%
- 1-2: 19.31%
- 3-10: 55.45%

In-house

- more than 50 (2.04%)
- 26-50 (2.04%)
- 11-25: 12.24%
- 1-2: 39.80%
- 3-10: 40.82%

41
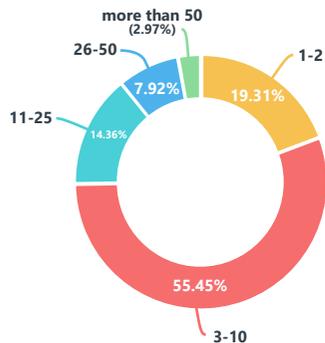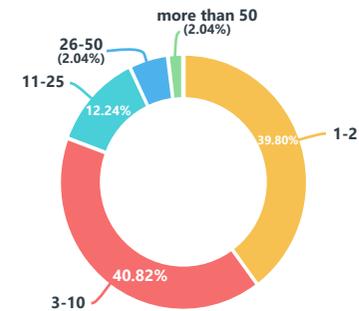
How many team members are involved in SEO?

BUSINESS MODEL

More than 75% — 22.12%
Less than 25% — 44.87%
51-75% — 14.10%
25-50% — 18.91%
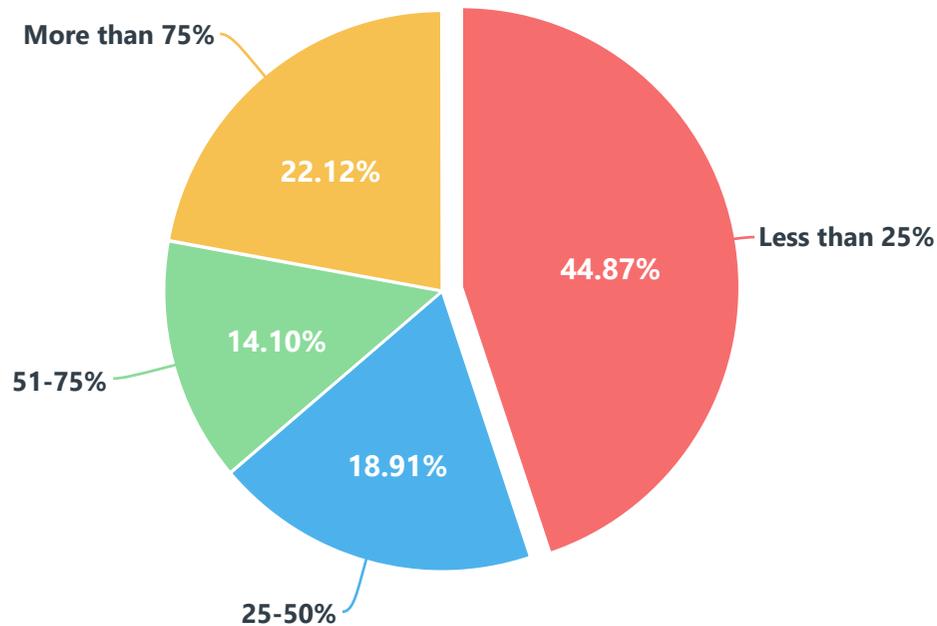
When it comes to SEO tasks, human resource allocation inside marketing teams is different for agencies than for in-house teams:

• For most in-house teams (63.7%), SEO tasks involve less than 25% of their team members, while only 15.69% say 75% of their team does SEO.
• For agencies, in 58.1% of cases, SEO tasks draw in less than 50% of team members, while for the rest of 41.9% it's the majority of team members that's involved in SEO tasks (more than 75%).

Marketing agency

More than 75% — 25.24%
Less than 25% — 35.71%
51-75% — 16.67%
25-50% — 22.38%

In-house

More than 75% — 15.69%
51-75% — 8.82%
25-50% — 11.76%
Less than 25% — 63.73%

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Advanced WEB RANKING
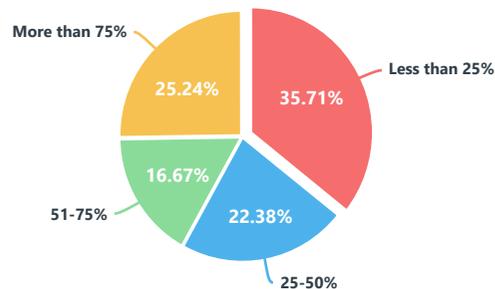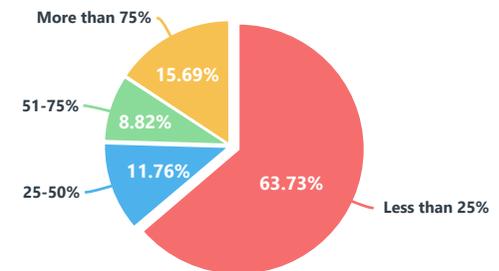
How many clients do you personally handle each month?

more than 30
21-30
11-20

None (new to SEO)
1

4.08%
5.44%
8.16%
3.74%
19.73%
30.61% — 2-5
28.23%
6-10
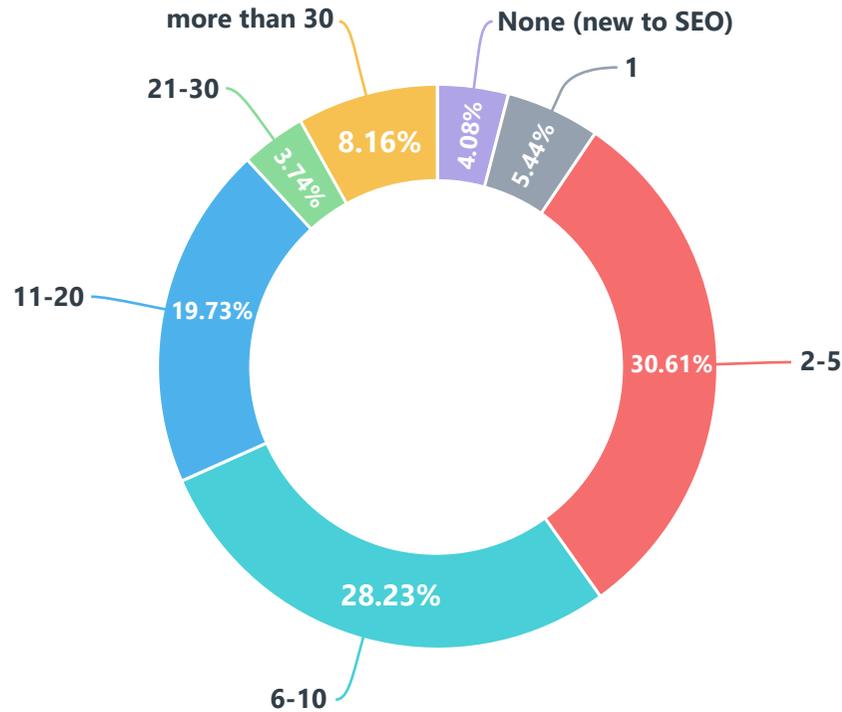
The feedback provided on this question indicates that most marketers (both agency and freelance) rarely deal with more than 20 clients per month. However, a much lower percentage of freelancers (11.76%) handles up to 20 clients, whereas agencies (23%) can take on the workload.

• Agencies - 55% of respondents stated that they personally handle 2-10 clients each month.
• Freelancers - 68.24% of respondents handle about 2-10 of clients each month.

Marketing agency

None (new to SEO)
(3.83%)
1
(3.35%)
more than 30
21-30
(4.31%)
11-20
10.53%
22.97%
29.19% — 2-5
25.84%
6-10

Freelance / Consultant

more than 30
(2.35%)
21-30
(2.35%)
11-20
None (new to SEO)
(4.71%)
1
11.76%
10.59%
34.12%
34.12% — 2-5
6-10

43
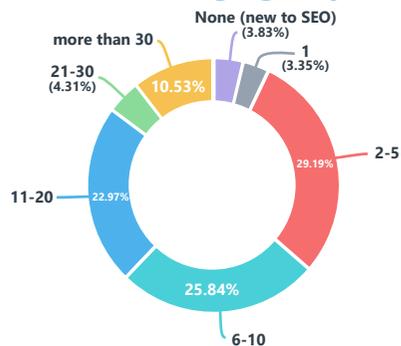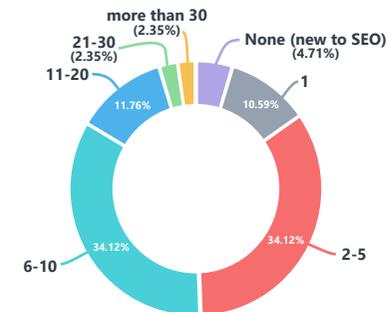
DEMOGRAPHICS

Where our data sample comes from

Age (years old)

- **70 or over** (0.95%)
- **46-69** — 15.17%
- **18-25** — 8.77%
- **35-45** — 28.44%
- **26-34** — 46.68%

Job title

- **Other** — 3.07%
- **In-house SEO** — 26.89%
- **Part of a marketing agency** — 48.58%
- **SEO Freelancer** — 21.46%

Top 10 countries

Australia | France | Germany | India | Israel | Italy | Netherlands | Spain | United Kingdom | United States
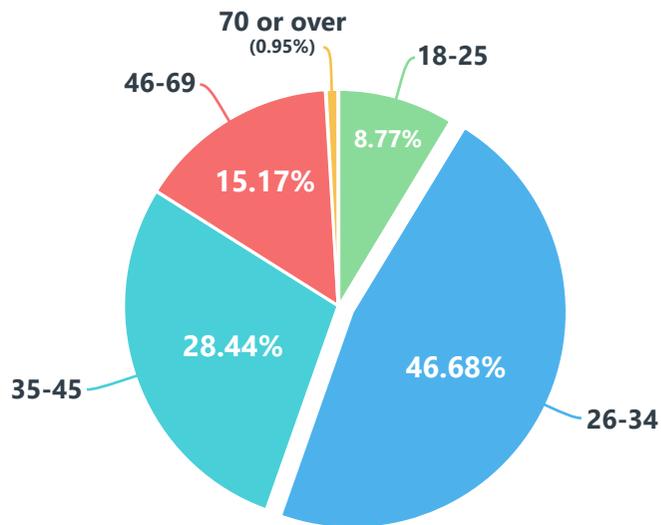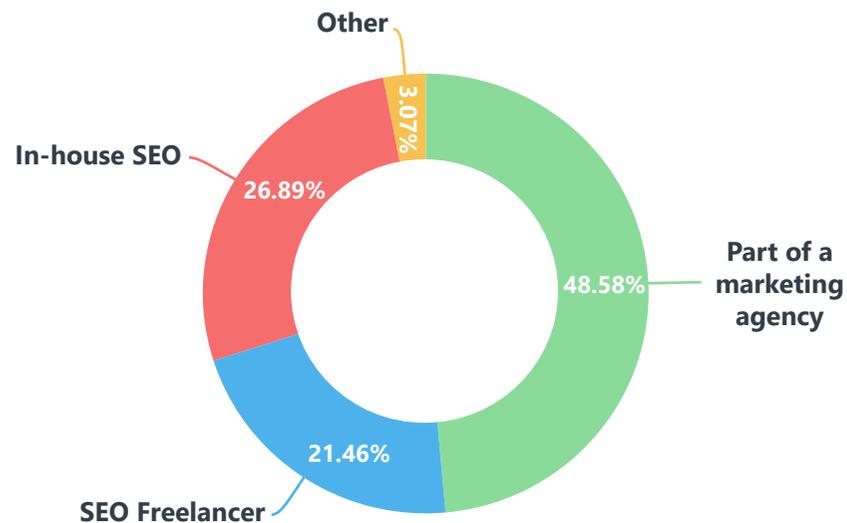
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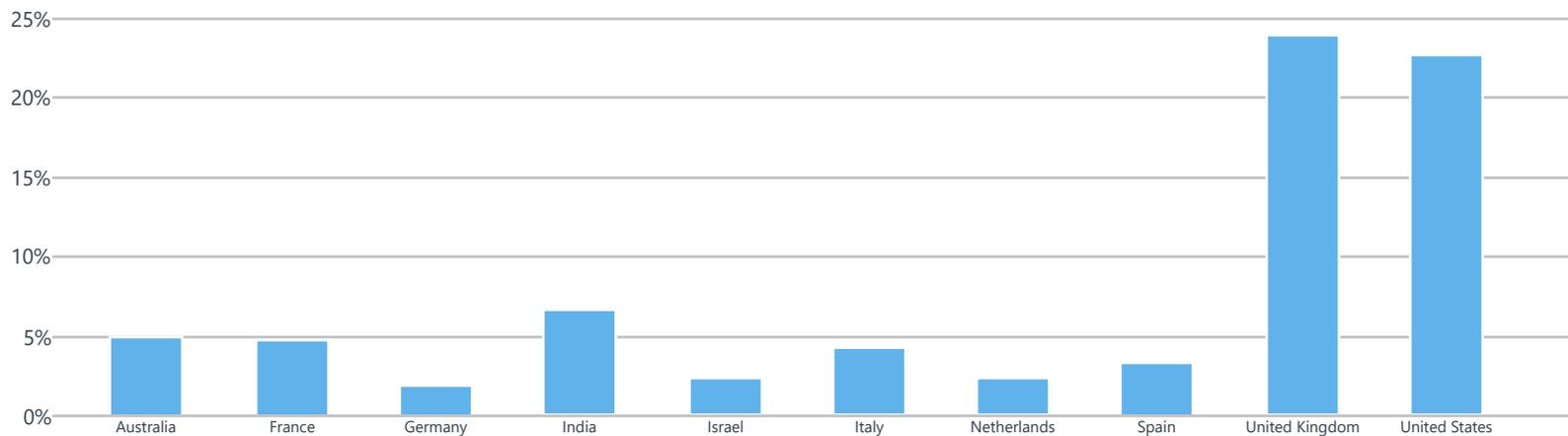
About Advanced Web Ranking

Advanced Web Ranking was born back in 2002 and it soon became a powerful online rank tracker suitable for both Digital Agencies and In-house SEOs. Nowadays it is being used by more than 20.000 companies worldwide.

Authors:
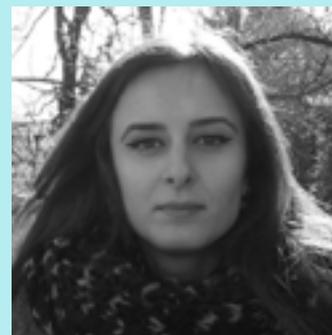
Dana Loiz	Dan Popa	Lia Boangiu	Alina Stancioiu
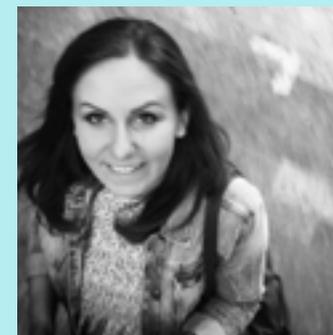
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