



# The State of Link Building Report 2022

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# Introduction



Paddy

Paddy Moogan



Welcome to the State of Link Building 2022 Report from Aira.

Now into our third annual report, the State of Link Building Report continues to be the most comprehensive report on link building in the SEO industry. This year, we're able to share the collective thoughts and insights from 270 SEOs across agencies, in-house roles and freelancers.

The goal of the report is to give all SEOs insights into how their peers conduct link building, learn about approaches and compare their own activities. Whilst the SEO community is generally an open one, we feel that comparing your own work and approach against others is always useful as a benchmark.

This year, we narrowed down the questions a little, whilst adding a couple more that sought to learn about how journalist behaviours have changed

over the last year, as well as trying to understand how long it actually takes to build links.

One interesting insight is that despite fewer in-house SEOs saying that they outsourced their link building compared to 2021, demand for link building is still remaining strong, as are budgets.

We are continuing to see content-led link building remain the most popular tactic across the board and this section attracted a lot of interesting comments from our expert contributors.

Want to chat about the results?  
My social handles and email are above.

Enjoy!

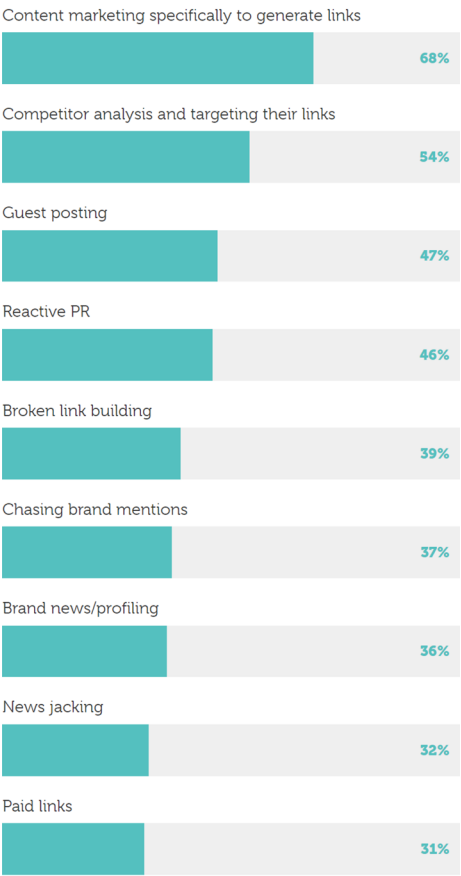
# Link Building Techniques & Tools

Let's begin with the tactics, tools and techniques that are most popular right now. The questions in this section focus on the day-to-day side of link building and seek to learn more about how link building is done in 2022.

## What techniques do you use for link building?

Asked to all respondents, this question seeks to get an understanding of the most popular ways that agencies, freelancers and in-house teams build links.

Similar to 2021, content marketing was by far the most popular answer, with 68% of respondents saying that they used content as a way to build links. The next two most popular techniques were competitor analysis (54%) and guest posting (47%).





## What the experts think...



Eva  
Cheng



I'm so surprised that guest posting is ranked higher than reactive PR! In my opinion, Reactive PR is one of the most beneficial tactics for link building. Chasing brand mentions also feels like an underutilised technique, especially when partnered with outreaching a creative campaign. I personally have had a lot of success converting mentions to links from campaigns and is a technique I use daily.

Looking at the results this year vs last year, there are some interesting changes.

I'm not surprised to see content marketing decrease slightly (from 76% to 68%), as with the media landscape constantly changing, this type of activity is becoming riskier. However, I am surprised to see that Reactive PR hasn't increased (49% in 2021 vs 45% in 2020) on the back of this.

It's also interesting to see that influencer outreach is still being used for SEO, even though, if abiding by Google's guidelines, the techniques within this (i.e. gifting or payment) wouldn't result in the right type of links - especially since the Google update in 2019.

Equally, it's interesting that Guest Posting has increased since last year (42% to 47%) - especially as it results in unnatural links, which are problematic for Google. Whilst Google is not penalising for using guest posting, John Mueller has been noted as saying they "catch most of these in the algorithm anyway", therefore they wouldn't be bringing value for the brand - so brands could be wasting their money!



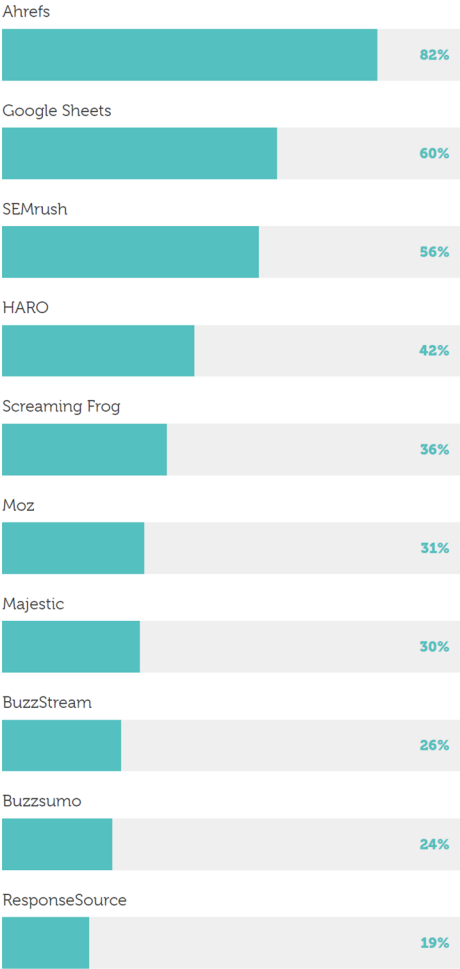
Chloe  
Hutchinson



# Do you use any of the following tools for link building purposes?

Next, we wanted to understand how SEOs used tools as part of their link building process. Respondents were allowed to select as many answers as they wished and once again, Ahrefs was the most popular tool, with 82% saying that they used it.

In second place was Google Sheets (60%), followed by SEMrush with 56%.



## What the experts think...



Bibi  
Raven

I'm so happy to see this stat. Ahrefs has been my ride-or-die for link building. I do think a lot of their features are under-used. For instance, the content explorer is an absolute goldmine. I use it to dig up diamonds from Pinterest, and I use non-topical words (like "how many") to reverse engineer linkable assets.



Who would have thought that Google Sheet is actually an SEO tool? Obviously that's not its primary purpose and it's not an SEO tool...but it's clearly part of an SEO's toolkit. It speaks volumes on how powerful it can be since it is way ahead of other specialist SEO tools. And it is free.

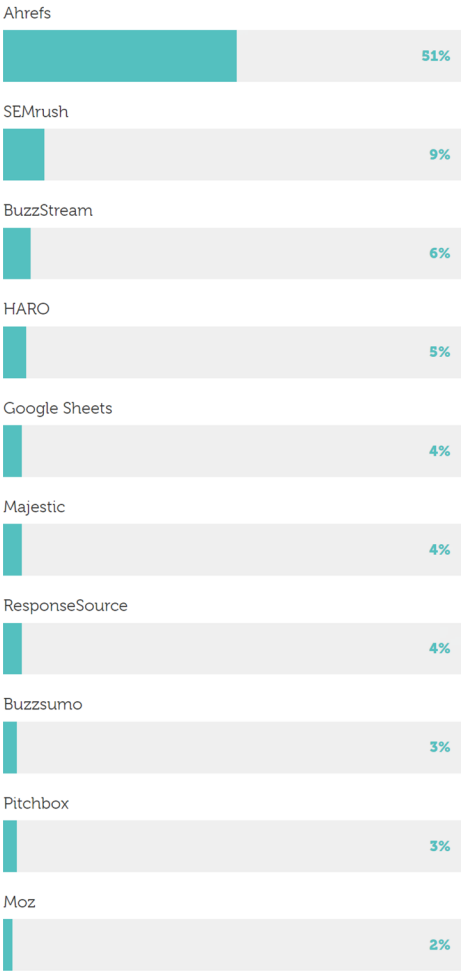


Ahmed Khalifa



## If you could only use one tool, which one would you choose?

Now, we wanted to force the issue a little bit more and force respondents to only choose one tool they'd use for link building. Again, the winner was Ahrefs with 51% of respondents choosing it. SEMrush jumped into second place here with 9% of respondents choosing it, whilst BuzzStream was third with 6%.



## What the experts think...



Laura  
Slingo

Ahrefs will forever be my favourite tool for link building. It's particularly savvy for the more tactical forms of link building, such as link reclamation, unlinked mentions, broken link building, stealing competitor backlinks, pursuing link gaps – the list is (pretty much) endless.



Cheers to Ahrefs for being the most comprehensive, useful tool!



Victoria  
Wildhorn



Eva  
Cheng

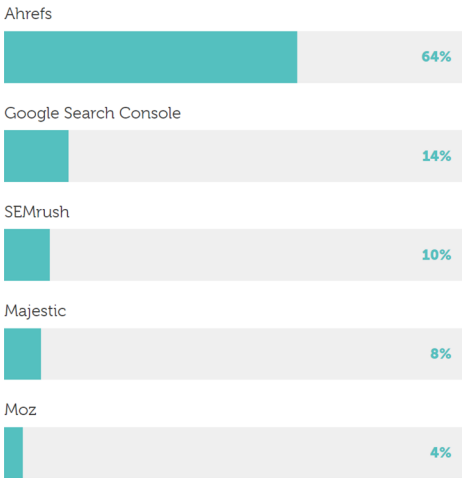
I honestly can't think of a day where I haven't used Ahrefs. It's a fantastic tool to help keep track of broken links and links gained, as well as a way to create campaigns around search metrics. It's interesting to see that majestic is so far down on the list too, as it can offer similar results to Ahrefs but also you can complete a competitor backlink gap analysis with this tool meaning we can find out which sites can add the most value when building links.



# In terms of your usage of link indexes, which of the following tools do you trust the most when it comes to link data?

Continuing on the theme of tools, we now asked respondents which link data source they trusted the most. Again, Ahrefs was the clear winner here with 64% of respondents saying that they trusted their link data the most, even more than Google Search Console which was second with 14%.

In third place was SEMrush with 10% of respondents selecting it as their most trusted link source.



## What the experts think...



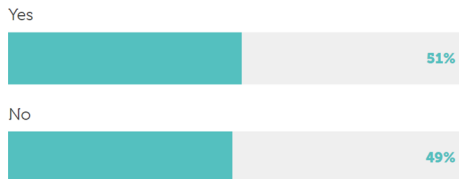
Mercy Janaki

While I would pick Ahref for sure, Moz taking the last spot is definitely an upset. I have been following the Aira link building survey in the past years and Moz is definitely losing the spot and SEMrush is gaining its popularity. This will be an interesting game to watch out for.



## Do you maintain a Google Search Console Disavow file for the domains that you're responsible for?

We also asked respondents whether they maintain a disavow file and answers were split almost down the middle, with the tiniest of tilts toward yes which received 51% of votes.



### What the experts think...



Laura  
Slingo

I suspect the 51% that is responsible for the disavow files of domains are SEOs, and the remainder is likely to be content marketers or digital PRs.

When you're in the link building game, no matter what your role or specialism, you'd do well to learn more about how links affect a website, and in turn, what happens when you gain good ones, bad ones, and even take them away.



In my opinion, the disavow file is not used correctly most of the time. When we depend on the SEO tools to pull the so-called "bad links" and disavow them all together, it might harm the domain than help.

Also, Google keeps saying that disavowing is not important and they know what is a good link and what is a bad link. Now, it is no surprise that the responders have split opinion.



Mercy  
Janaki



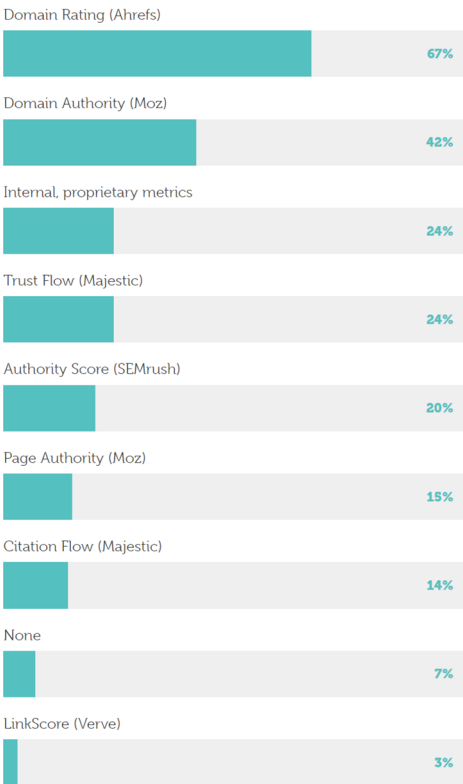
# Link Building Measurement and Reporting

How do people measure and report on link building activity in 2022?  
This section of questions focuses on the metrics that we use, as well as the KPIs on which we measure our work.

## Do you use any metrics to measure the authority and/or quality of a link?

We asked our respondents to select which metrics they use to measure the authority and/or quality of a link and the most popular answer with 67% of the votes was Domain Rating by Ahrefs.

This was followed by Domain Authority from Moz which 42% of SEOs use to measure the authority or quality of a link.



## What the experts think...



**Martin  
Vasko**



I am always surprised by the importance people assign to these domain-level metrics. I've been interviewing people and agencies throughout my career, and DA is always their preferred metric.

Domain-level metrics tell you very little about the value of the website section or the specific URL you are trying to get a link from. I would focus more on page-level metrics and try some more specific metrics in the link quality evaluation (e.g. traffic and keywords).

It still bugs me, as an SEO, to see that there are large numbers of people who use third-party metrics like DR and DA to measure the quality of the links they build.

Sure, they're helpful metrics to give you a vague idea as to how authoritative a link is, but it is in no way the be-all and end all!

I, personally, don't use metrics like these at all in my link building. If I get a link from a website that gets traffic, is relevant to the content I'm producing and has a good chance of driving some traffic to my site, I'm a happy SEO!



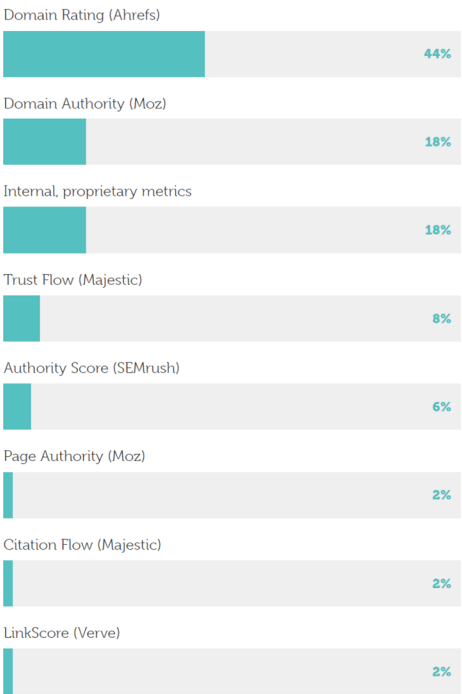
**Ryan  
Jones**





# If you could only choose one metric to use, which one would it be?

Forcing the issue a little, we asked respondents to choose just one metric that they would use. The winner was Domain Rating from Ahrefs with 44% of the votes, followed by Domain Authority from Moz with 18% of the votes.



## What the experts think...



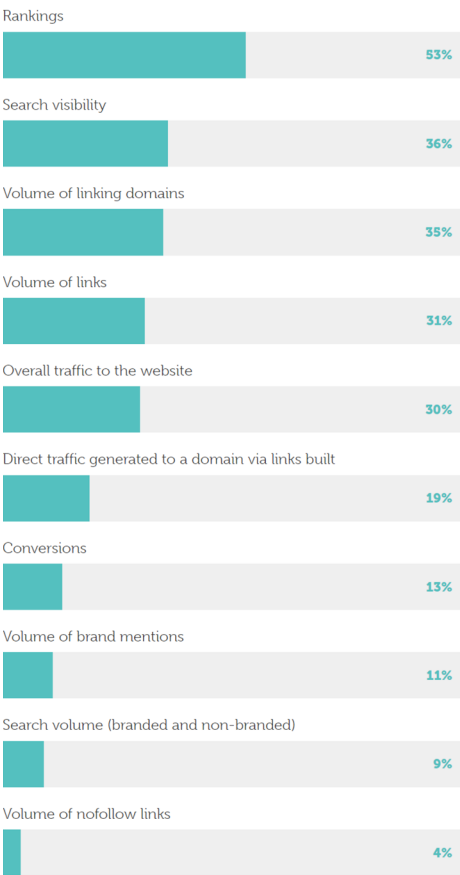
Victoria Wildhorn

Knowing that nearly half of respondents would rely on Ahrefs Domain Rating as a sole determinant, consideration should be given as to whether to make this the industry standard for measuring page authority.



# What primary KPI do you use to measure the effects of your link building efforts?

In this question, respondents could select up to three answers to indicate how they measure the effectiveness of their link building. The clear winner with 53% was rankings, followed by search visibility at 36%.



## What the experts think...



**Jo Juliana  
Turnbull**



Those who are not familiar with link building may think they would get more traffic to the site and traffic from that domain where the links were built.

Therefore it is good to see this study shows that link building is executed to improve search visibility, including rankings.

It is important stakeholders are aware of the KPIs of link building. Improving rankings does not always lead to more conversions as this study demonstrates.

Link building shouldn't be performed individually. The best results are achieved in a multichannel campaign. Therefore, I would like to see 'Direct traffic generated to a domain via links built' with more responses in future. If traffic generated via a link is evergreen, it's a strong signal of a valuable backlink.



**Martin  
Vasko**



It is highly unlikely that every piece of content you create will rank in the SERPs, so it seems unrealistic to make rankings the largest indicator of performance. Volume of LRDs, traffic to the site generated from the page, and conversions are no less important indicators of success.

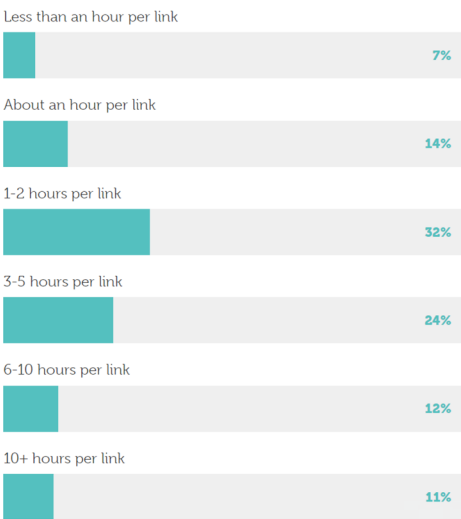


**Victoria  
Wildhorn**



# If you needed to put a time estimate on how long it takes you to secure a single link, how long would you say it takes?

We asked SEOs how long it typically takes to build a single link and the most popular answer was 1-2 hours (32%). Next up was the 24% of people who said that it typically takes 3-5 hours to build a link.



## What the experts think...



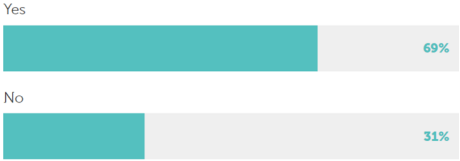
Heba  
Said

It can be related to niche, language, and culture. With Arabic websites it is very hard to land a link, so it might take longer to convince a site admin to link to you, especially if people are seeking something in return. Green links are very hard to get.



# Do you report on nofollow links, including sponsored and UGC attributes?

In terms of reporting on links that contain the nofollow, sponsored and UGC attributes, 69% of SEOs said that they do report these to stakeholders.



## What the experts think...



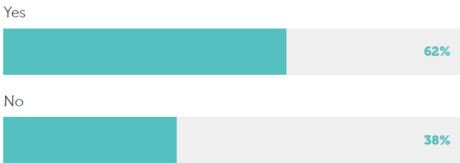
Abi  
Bennetts



I'm surprised that such a high number of people are not reporting on nofollow links! We all know that nofollow links are considered a "hint" and while it's not clear exactly how much of an SEO impact these nofollow links will have, they will still likely be driving traffic and boosting brand awareness. It seems a shame that digital PRs are not reporting on what could be wonderful pieces of coverage - particularly when so many national titles these days are only giving out nofollow links anyway!

# Do you count nofollow links, including sponsored and UGC attributes toward your overall link target?

Leading on from this, a slightly lower number of respondents (62%) said that they actually counted them toward link targets.



# What the experts think...



Chloe  
Hutchinson



I loved seeing this result!

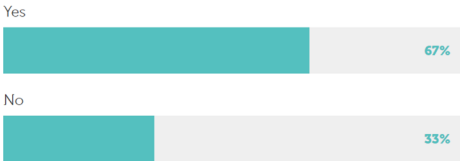
Yes, Follow links are the *crème de la crème* when it comes to link building, but studies have shown that NoFollow links have been found to have some impact. Most say NoFollow links could work as a hint for Google that you're trustworthy/authoritative on that topic. Therefore, NoFollows on hyper-relevant sites will be more beneficial.

In addition, NoFollows can drive other value such as traffic, and the coverage could help increase branded search too.

So with this in mind, we should definitely be reporting on them too and including them in our targets.

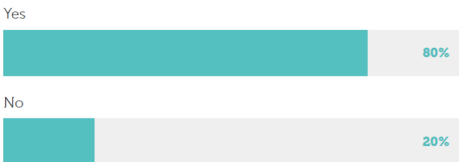
## Do you report on brand mentions (i.e. no link) which occur as a result of link building activity?

67% of respondents said that they also report on brand mentions that happen as a result of their link building activity.



## Do you think that brand mentions influence organic search rankings?

A higher number of respondents (80%) said that they believe brand mentions influence organic search rankings.



## What the experts think...



**Laura  
Slingo**



I'm quite shocked by how many respondents believe brand mentions affect organic search rankings. I'm undecided on the matter. I have no doubt that inferred links (i.e. unlinked brand mentions) may one day concretely influence rankings, but I'm yet to see any real evidence of this today.

Absolutely, yes!



**Victoria  
Wildhorn**

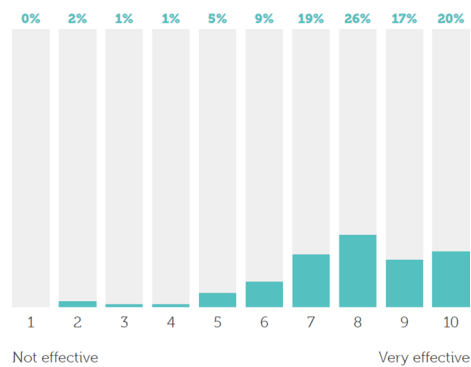


# The Impact of Link Building

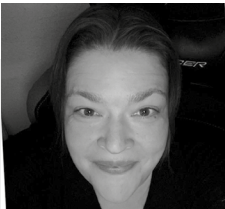
Open to all respondents, this section focused on the impact of link building on organic search, both now and in the future.

## On a scale of 1-10, how effective do you think link building is in influencing organic search rankings?

In this section, we're interested in knowing the extent to which SEOs believe that links actually influence organic search rankings. Answers tilted toward effective, with the average score being 7.8 out of 10.



## What the experts think...



Veronika Höller

I'm one of the SEO's who doesn't really believe that backlinks still have an influence on the ranking - I think a clear internal structure is more important for a good ranking.







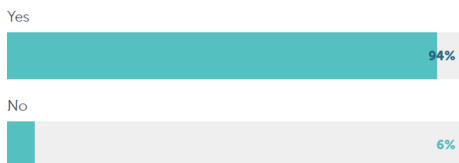
Mercy  
Janaki



There is a common misunderstanding that Google does not want businesses to build links. Links improve visibility because Google values them as an indication of how important and authoritative a business is for what they do and where they are located. I am glad to note that the vast majority of respondents agreed that it is effective!

## Do you think links will be a signal that Google uses in their ranking algorithms in five years' time?

The vast majority of SEOs (94%) said they believe Google will continue to use links as a ranking signal for the next five years.



## What the experts think...



Sam  
Pennington



I agree, although they might not be as highly weighted as they are today, Google sees links as a type of "word of mouth recommendation" from one site to another and this will always be valuable.



Martin  
Vasko

I am very confident like many people in the survey that Google will continue using links in their algorithms for quite some time. Links, in general, are the basis of crawling and indexing, and as such will not go away anytime soon. However, there are signals that backlinks are becoming more and more sophisticated over time.



I can't imagine links fading away, because they're literally the threads on the web. But the Internet itself could be replaced by something else. An algorithm that serves content based on neurological input or something? Or is that sci-fi?

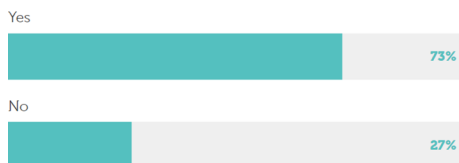


Bibi  
Raven



## Do you think links will be a signal that Google uses in their ranking algorithms in ten years' time?

Whilst the majority said the same when asked about ten years' time, there was slightly less confidence with the majority dropping to 73%.



# What the experts think...



Ahmed  
Khalifa

“ ”

Long live the links!!

While I totally agree with this sentiment, I feel that Google will adjust how they view and interpret links in the next decade, much like how they have done over the past decade. What will they do is anybody's guess.



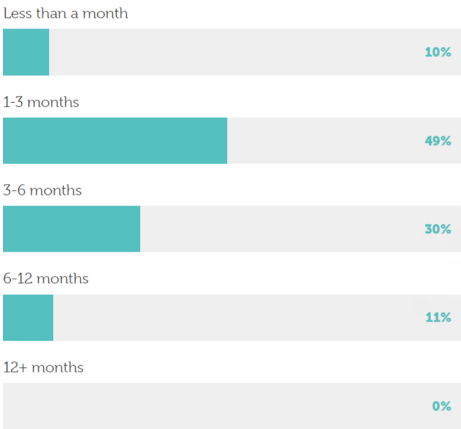
Abi  
Bennetts

“ ”

# Assuming no other major technical, content or penalty issues, how long does it typically take for you to see the impact of link building on rankings and traffic?

A classic question is how long will it take for links to start positively affecting organic rankings and traffic. According to our respondents, 1-3 months is the most likely time frame with 49% of the votes.

This was followed by 3-6 months, which 30% said was a fair timeframe for links to have an effect on rankings.



## What the experts think...



Laura  
Slingo

I would agree with the majority here – typically 1-3 months is the most likely timeframe to see the impact of links. However, the stronger the domain you land a link on, the quicker the impact.



Agreed. Generally, if your content belongs at the top of the SERPs, it should make its way there within a year at most (assuming you aren't being outranked by .govs, .orgs, .edus, or any other big players).

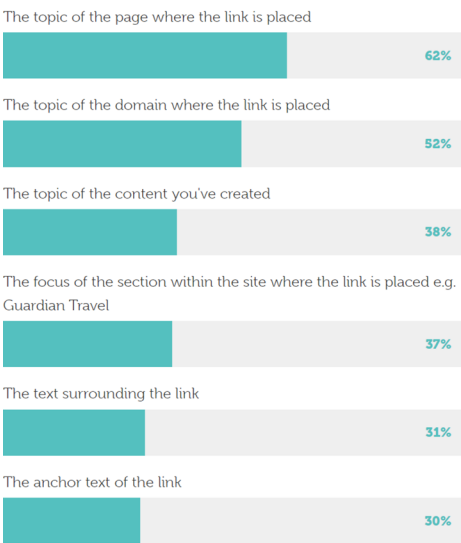


Victoria  
Wildhorn



# What factors do you think are most important when determining whether a link is topically relevant or not?

Revisiting the theme of topical relevance, we asked SEOs which factors are most important when determining if an individual link is relevant or not. We asked them to select up to three factors and the most popular with 62% was the topic of the page where the link is placed. This was followed by the topic of the domain where the link is placed, which received 52% of the votes.



## What the experts think...



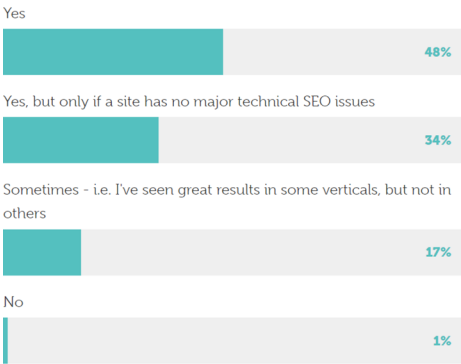
Heba  
Said

Here I would consider both equally, the domain and topic of content. As some spammy websites/domains add content that may fit with my content, but it would hurt my overall quality.



# Do you believe that link building positively influences rankings?

We pushed again on the extent to which SEOs believe that links positively influence rankings. 48% gave a categorical yes, they do positively influence rankings. 34% then said yes, but with a caveat that the website has no major technical SEO issues.



## What the experts think...



Jo Juliana  
Turnbull

This shows it is important to resolve those technical issues of the site. I am surprised the percentage for "Yes, but only if a site has no major technical SEO issues" is not higher, but maybe those who responded "Yes" did not have sites that had major technical issues.



Yes. We go for links after we have done all the technical and on-page needed. But they improve ranking, especially for high competition queries.

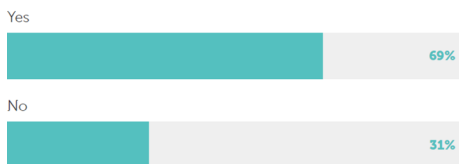


Heba  
Said



## Do you think that buying links can positively influence rankings?

Despite only 30% of respondents saying that they used paid links as a tactic, the majority (69%) said that they believe they do positively influence rankings.



### What the experts think...



Amanda  
Milligan



This discrepancy probably comes from marketers seeing their competitors ranking in the SERPs even though they're buying low-quality links. It can be really frustrating to go about things the white-hat way and spend the time/resources creating high-quality content to earn better links and still see others doing well by taking the easy route. However, earning links organically is always the better long-term play. While some link buyers will see a boost for very particular page rankings, those who earn links build site/page authority over time and sustainably and are more likely to experience long-term growth.

Paid links work all the time. What is interesting here is while 69% say that it is making a positive SEO impact, only 30% said they used paid links as a tactic. Budget and a fear of getting penalized by Google could be the possible reasons for the lower rate.



Mercy  
Janaki



# Do you report competitors if you see them breaking Google guidelines?

Following on from paid links, we asked respondents if they reported competitors for breaking Google guidelines, and the majority (84%) said no.



## What the experts think...



Victoria Wildhorn

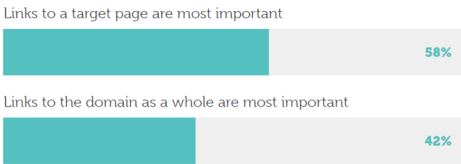
What is stopping more individuals from reporting competitors breaking Google guidelines? Is the overall consensus that it's a waste of time or are people concerned over possible ramifications from their actions? If your actions are ethical AND benefit your client, there shouldn't be as much hesitancy to report competitors' bad practices.



# Do you believe that links directly to a target page (such as a product or category page) are necessary in order for that page to rank? Or is the onus on the strength of the domain as a whole?

When it comes to where links are most effective, we wanted to know whether SEOs felt that links to a target internal landing page were necessary, or if links to the domain as a whole would suffice.

58% of SEOs felt that links to a target page were most effective in getting those pages to rank, as opposed to the domain as a whole.





## What the experts think...



**Martin  
Vasko**



I'm a bit surprised to see an almost equal split here. Of course, good internal linking can drive link juice over your website quite sufficiently. But the logic seems simple: if links are an important ranking factor, then pointing them directly to the page you want to boost in rankings should help the most.

In my opinion, links to a target page are the most important, but domain-level authority is important too. I do wonder how many digital PR campaigns out there that receive links to the campaign page are designed to rank in their own right though. I think there's an opportunity for digital PRs and SEOs to work closer together and share each other's skillsets, as both specialists share ROI touchpoints.



**Laura  
Slingo**



**Amanda  
Milligan**

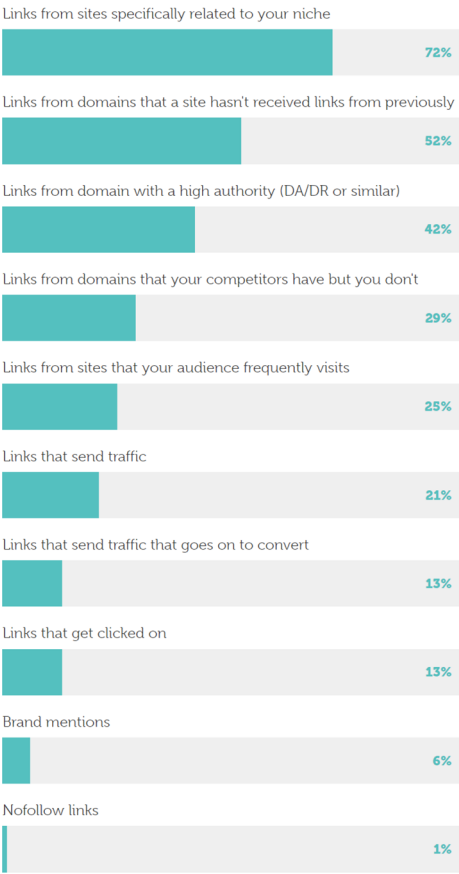


I don't think internal linking strategies should be overlooked here. We know how incredibly difficult it is to earn links to a product/category page, but if you're earning links to other pages and internally linking to those product/category pages, you can be getting the best of both worlds.

# What attributes of a link do you focus on when it comes to positively influencing organic search rankings?

We asked respondents to select up to three attributes that they felt were important when it comes to a link being able to positively influence organic search rankings.

The most popular answer with 72% of the votes was links from sites specifically related to your niche. This was followed by 51% saying that links from new domains (i.e. they haven't linked to you previously) are a key attribute.



## What the experts think...



**Jo Juliana  
Turnbull**



These are very interesting stats and answer many link building questions we may have.

Topical relevance is important but so is having links from domains that have high authority.

We should still carry out competitive analysis as we can find sites we have not linked from previously and it may also be domains our audience visits regularly.

I don't think that receiving links from domains you haven't been linked from previously is as critical as most think. In my experience, what matters most is the authority and relevancy of the links. We've seen growth from repeatedly earned links from top news sites because repeated high-quality pickups signal that you're consistently creating great content worthy of top-tier news coverage. Authority trumps all, in my opinion, as long as the content is related to your industry.



**Amanda  
Milligan**

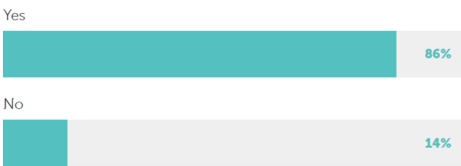


# Content-led link building

Here, we take a deeper dive into the most popular method for building links - content. All questions below were shown to respondents who stated that they use content as part of their link building process.

## In your experience, how influential are the following on-page SEO signals in improving organic search traffic?

For the 86% of respondents who said that they produced content with a goal of getting links, we gave them a specific set of questions with the goal of getting specific insights about what is the most popular way to build links.



## What the experts think...



Crystal  
Carter

The goal of any content should be for it to provide genuine value to users. If this is the case, then users will wish to reference, return, and link to it. When it's done well, "building links" should be a metric for "building value", and all content should do that.



We sure do! While the majority of our content is written to inform, we publish several Data Journalism articles each quarter that has the main goal of driving high-quality backlinks to our sites. Part of our strategy is to look for valuable insights in our data that is unique to us. We will then work to display that data in ways that make it super consumable and shareable. Before it's even written, we have an idea of the sites we would like to cover the article and link back to us, optimizing the content to appeal to those outlets, increasing our chances of getting backlinks.



**Shelly  
Fagin**



**Eva  
Cheng**

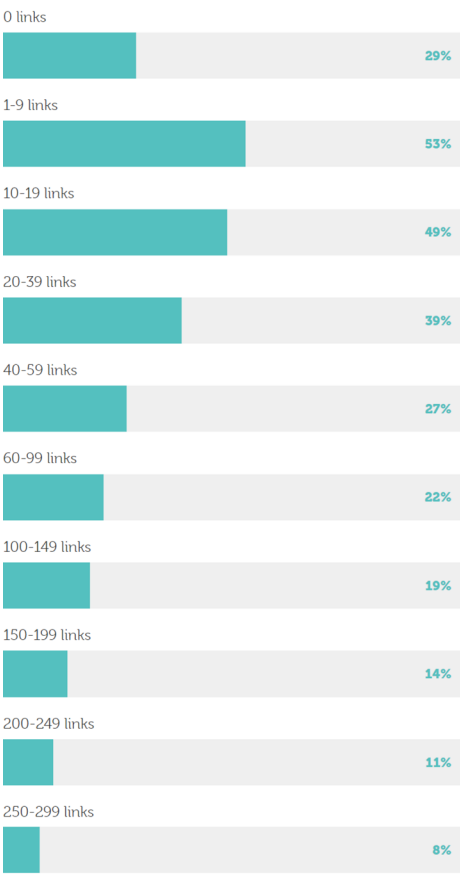
As a creative person, I love that as an industry we are moving away from traditional link building tactics and leaning more towards content-led link building. Whilst there's still room for some traditional link building, the creative campaigns allow us to not only build links but also create brand awareness and trust from consumers.



# If you do create content specifically to generate links, in the past 12 months have you created a campaign that generated:

We were keen to understand the kinds of results that content marketing can drive when it comes to link volumes. Respondents were asked to select multiple answers to indicate whether they'd experienced campaigns achieving ranges of link volumes.

The most selected range for a campaign to achieve was 1-9 links, with 53% of respondents launching a campaign that achieved this number of links.



## What the experts think...



Victoria Wildhorn

In most cases, a regular cadence of content pieces each earning a lower quantity of link placements is more valuable than 1-2 pieces of content with a large number of links. It is, however, understandable for certain sites to have a goal of hundreds of links for one very helpful resource of which they are an expert in the subject matter (i.e. GitHub explaining what 'git' is).



I'm relieved to see so many of the campaigns sitting around the 1-9 links mark. We all know that not every campaign flies and we all have our flops, but sometimes it can feel like you're failing your job when you have a campaign that "underperforms".

It's also important to remember that if you're building topically relevant links to priority pages from high-quality sites, then you do not even need hundreds of links to see an impact!



**Abi  
Bennetts**



**Ahmed  
Khalifa**

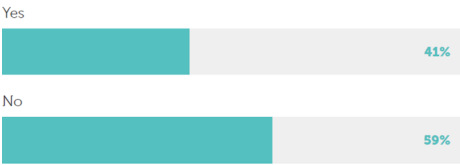


There has always been somewhat of a correlation between the number of links and the number of people who manage to achieve this high number. We would all love to achieve hundreds of links for our link building campaigns.

But the fact of the matter is that very few people achieve that, as the survey shows. Hopefully, this will give assurance that just because you didn't achieve a high number of links, it doesn't mean that you have failed, nor does it mean that you are the only one who does that. It happens to most of us.

# Do you set link targets for each campaign that you launch?

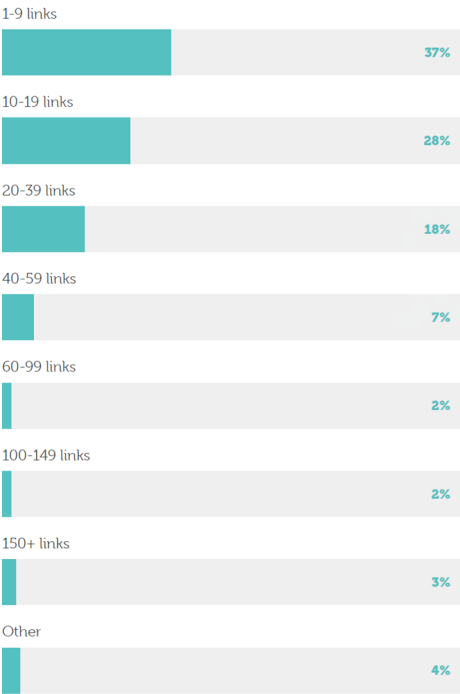
Continuing on the theme of link volumes, we asked all respondents to say whether they set link targets for each campaign. The majority (59%) said no, they didn't set targets for each campaign.



# Typically, how many links does a campaign need to have in order to be deemed a success?

In terms of setting expectations around success, we asked SEOs how many links a campaign needed to generate in order to be deemed successful. The most popular answer with 37% was 1-9 links, closely followed by 10-19 links with 28%.

Combined, this means that the majority (65%) of SEOs believe that a range of 1-19 links per campaign is successful.





## What the experts think...



George  
Driscoll



I agree with the majority here and studies keep consistently showing that a successful campaign does not equate to virality.

Importantly too, success needs to be in line with the size of the team on the project, the campaign budget, as well as your own goals. For some, success could look like 5 links in niche industry press that are hyper-relevant to the brand. The industry could do with celebrating that a bit more too.

Since last year, the percentage of SEOs that think achieving 1-9 links deems a campaign successful has increased from 27% to 37%! I think this is really interesting and reflective of the way the industry is going.

All links are not valued equally. With Google focusing more on relevancy than volume, a smaller number of hyper-relevant links would have a greater impact for the brand than a higher volume of less relevant links. This means that this result could demonstrate the move toward a hyper-relevant focus - aligning to the way Google is heading.

With the media landscape constantly changing and larger campaigns (e.g interactives and tools) riskier, I've also seen a shift in moving more towards a steady flow of smaller, less 'time intensive' campaigns/content marketing, to drive consistent links. As this success rate focuses on per campaign, this could also reflect this change - less links per piece, but more pieces over time and therefore more links over the year, driving consistency over volume.

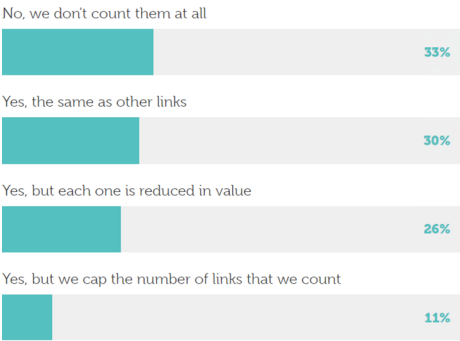


Chloe  
Hutchinson

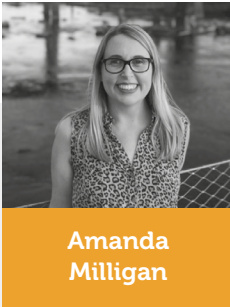


# Do you count syndicated links toward your overall link target?

We asked SEOs whether they counted syndicated links toward their overall target and answers were generally evenly distributed. The most popular answer with 33% was no, they didn't count them at all and this was closely followed by pretty much the exact opposite answer - counting the same as other links at 30%.



## What the experts think...



Working at Stacker Studio has altered my opinion on this. Originally, I honestly didn't know the value of syndication links. But what I've learned is it's not clear-cut, similar to link earning. It turns out earned syndication links can be extremely valuable, but only if the site that's syndicating your content is authoritative (again, just like earning links). If you have the canonical established and a link back to your site, that's a huge win. This is what we earn for our clients, and they've seen sustained organic growth from this strategy. I'd encourage any link earners to start tracking syndicated pickups if they're from authoritative sites.

It is interesting to see that 33% of respondents don't count syndicated links toward their overall link target. It's a big topic of conversation whether or not syndicated links add value to SEO and personally whilst I do feel organic links provide more value, syndicated links shouldn't be ignored altogether.



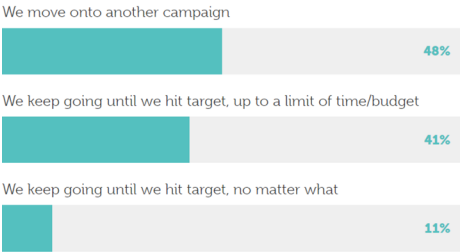
Eva  
Cheng



## If a campaign misses the link target, what is the usual course of action?

When asked what course of action is taken if link targets are missed, the most popular answer from SEOs (48%) was that they move on to another campaign. Just behind this at 41% was the action of keeping going up to a limit of time or budget.

Only the minority (11%) said that they kept going until the link target was met.



## What the experts think...



Mercy  
Janaki

The top result made me laugh my head off. That's the most realistic answer for this question! :)





Ryan  
Jones

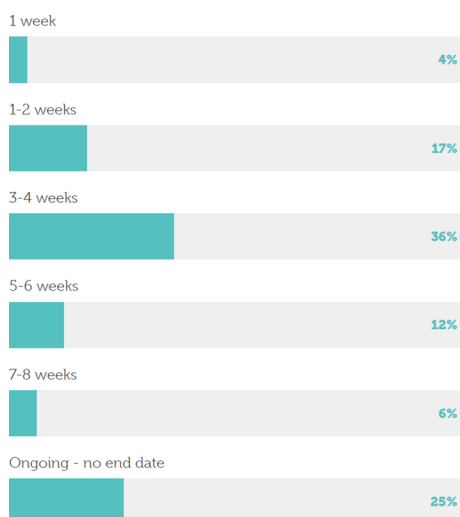


Not massively surprising for me to read these statistics, mainly because I've done both. If a campaign doesn't hit, we will generally move on to another campaign and focus on that.

However, if myself and the rest of the team still believe there is link potential there, we will come back to it and promote it more, as well as make any changes needed until it's hit the target we've set or we hit the budget for that campaign.

## After you've launched a piece of content, how long do you typically continue to outreach that campaign?

We were interested in the length of time SEOs spend outreaching a single campaign. The most popular answer was 3-4 weeks which 36% said was the usual length of time for outreaching a single campaign. Next up was 25% of SEOs who said that there was no fixed end date for outreach on a single campaign.



# What the experts think...



Victoria  
Wildhorn



Those campaigns only being pitched for a matter of 1-2 weeks or less likely have a lower placement rate. I would not suggest anticipating spending such little time on outreach for a campaign unless absolutely necessary. Consider your target audience who might be on holiday break, on a vacation, or having a business restructure. If your pitch reaches them at a bad time with no intent to follow up later on, you'll have many missed opportunities.

This is interesting - I wonder if the "budget" spent on each campaign plays a part here?



Sam  
Pennington



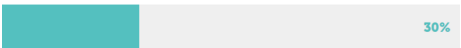
## After you've launched a campaign, where do you find that websites link to the most?

In terms of where links point to, 70% of SEOs said that, typically, links are pointed toward the page where a campaign is hosted, as opposed to the homepage.

The page where the campaign is hosted



The homepage



## What the experts think...



**Jo Juliana  
Turnbull**



Glad this has been highlighted. It is important that we are not always driving links to the home page. Those who may not be doing link building may not be aware.

A huge challenge for ecommerce sites is generating quality links to category pages, on these types of sites links to products and the homepage are by far the most common and therefore having a solid OOS (out of stock) products process can help bridge / fill the gap of links to categories.

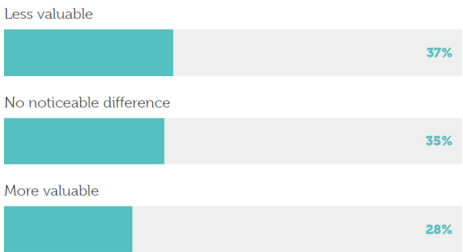


**Sam  
Pennington**

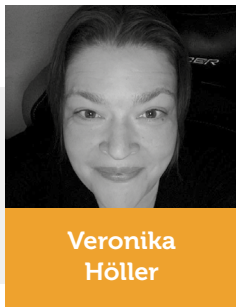


# Do you think that links to the homepage of a domain are more or less valuable than links to a campaign URL when it comes to driving increased rankings and traffic?

We wanted to learn more about the value of links and how this value may change based on where a link points toward. Answers were pretty evenly distributed for this one, with a very marginal tilt (37%) toward links to a homepage being less valuable than links to a campaign page. However, very close behind was no noticeable difference (35%) and more valuable (28%) which shows that opinion is very much divided here.



## What the experts think...



This is fascinating because from my point of view it is more valuable to link to the domain. Because the domain gets the power from the campaign and the campaign the power from the domain. We make better results with domain pages than landing pages.



I think the strong division stems from the variation in goals for link building campaigns. They can be used for branding, boosting a new domain, ranking a money page etc.



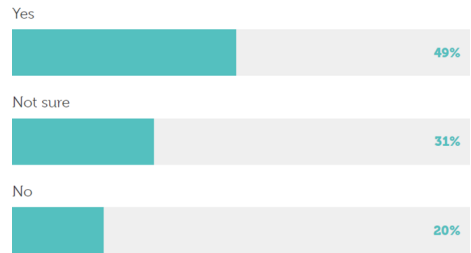
Bibi  
Raven



## Do you think that links generated by campaigns that aren't related to the core topic of a website positively affect rankings?

Topical relevance of campaigns is always a hotly debated topic and we asked SEOs if they felt that links that aren't related to the core topic of a website can positively influence rankings.

The winner with 49% of the votes was yes, links that aren't related to the topic of the website can influence rankings.



## What the experts think...



Bibi  
Raven

Relevancy is a tricky thing. In our teams we often have discussions on what is relevant and what is not. It's good to have these discussions because it can open up your link building options, and you can tap into markets and topics your competition hasn't looked into.



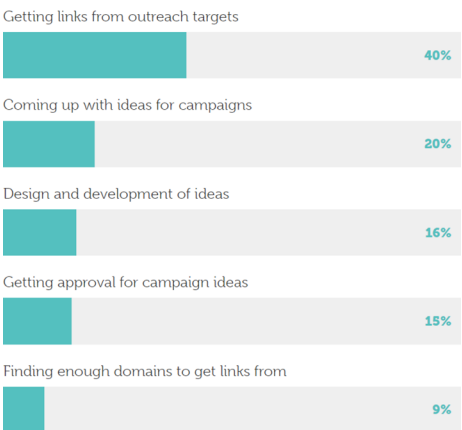


Wow, I don't think so because if your links don't match the topic the bot ignores the link.



## What is the most challenging part of the content-led link building process for you?

We know that link building can be very hard. But what specific part of the process is the hardest? According to our respondents, getting links from outreach targets is the hardest part of the process with 40% of the votes. In second place was coming up with ideas for campaigns which 20% of respondents said they struggled with the most.



## What the experts think...



Shelly  
Fagin



It's extremely challenging to perform outreach for link building and not come across as spammy. I definitely don't feel comfortable asking for a link and prefer instead to focus on building creatives and data stories that a journalist would feel quite uncomfortable not linking to the resource it came from.



Chloe  
Hutchinson



It's interesting that getting links from outreach targets is top - same as last year. In fact, the percentage of SEOs that picked this option increased from 35% to 40%. Getting links is definitely not getting any easier, with publications also changing linking policies, and it sometimes depends on who you approach and on which day.

I've found that a good way to check if our outreach targets actually do link out is using the "outgoing links" section on Ahrefs. This enables us to make sure we have the right link targets in the first place when looking at opportunities outside of just link gaps, i.e. we know the publications we're targeting from the start could link to the brand.

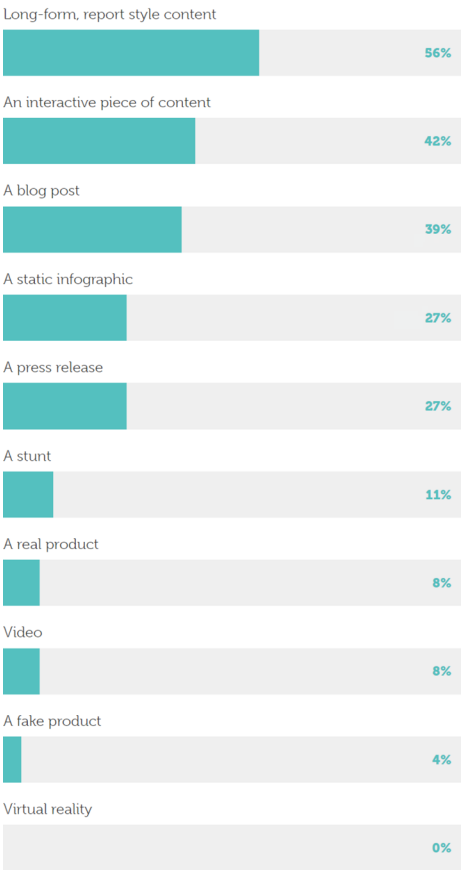
Getting links being the hardest part could also be related to the point in second place, "coming up with ideas for campaigns". If you're struggling to come up with ideas, and don't have strong stories with great hooks and angles, you're going to make life harder when it comes to getting coverage and links.

I think we've all suffered from idea fatigue, especially during lockdown when creativity was low due to being in the same environment all week long. It's really important we now try to shake this up and encourage creativity in our teams, through various methods, to help make the whole process a little easier, and a lot more fun (like it should be!)

# When it comes to the execution of your idea, which of the following do you find to be the most effective in generating links?

We asked SEOs which formats they found to be the most effective when generating links and were allowed to select up to three options. Similar to 2021, the most popular format for generating links is long-form, report style content which 56% of respondents selected.

This was followed by interactive content which 42% of respondents said they felt was effective when generating links.



## What the experts think...



Katheryn  
Watson



It's surprising to see that interactive content sits higher up in effectiveness than press releases.

I'm a fan of interactive content and bringing data to life as I think these assets show value to journalists to provide a credit link. Any evidence of demonstrating the spend versus link performance working in 2022 would be great to see.

It can be hard to justify to clients the larger resource spend it takes to deliver an interactive page compared to a quick turnaround listicle with expert commentary. But, if it's still continuing to work across the industry then that's super useful to know.

The top three results are quite similar, in that it is easier to create those types of content than to create a stunt or create a one-off product. Not everyone will have the budget and resources to create the latter two, but most will be able to create the first three content-type because it's more in your control. You'll have better quality control, you can continuously update it over time, it has the potential to be evergreen, and it is perhaps more cost-effective too.



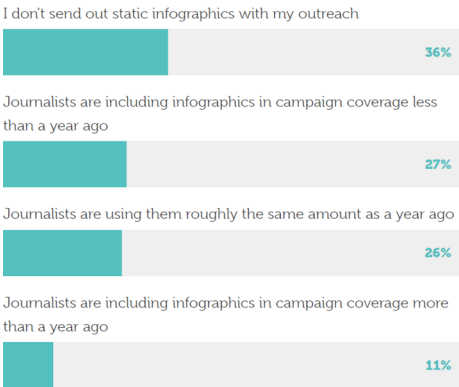
Ahmed  
Khalifa



# When you send static infographics with your outreach pitch, do you find that journalists are now including these in campaign coverage more or less than a year ago?

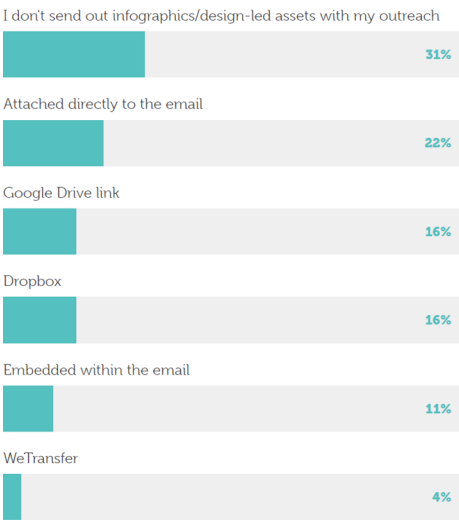
We were interested in the changing behaviours of journalists and asked SEOs if they included content such as static infographics more or less in coverage than a year ago. The most popular overall answer was actually that 36% of respondents don't send one at all.

When it comes to using them more or less, the winner with 27% was that journalists were using them less than a year ago, compared to 11% who said they were using them more.



# How are you providing journalists with your infographics/design-led assets ahead of them using them in coverage?

Leading on from this, we asked what methods SEOs used to share content with journalists. Again, 31% said that they don't share design assets at all, whilst among those who did, 22% attached the assets directly to their email.



## What the experts think...



George  
Driscoll



Most of the time journalists say they prefer Dropbox so I'm surprised it's not at the top. I personally fear the wrath of spam filters too much to be attaching images. Links to file folders let you send multiple sizes/a range of images at once too so you can hand over everything at once making the journalist's life easier.



Abi  
Bennetts



It's interesting to see the majority of respondents sharing that they don't tend to send out infographics with their outreach, because when I started out in the digital PR industry around four years ago I feel like this was much more commonplace.

I personally would not tend to create infographics or design-led assets unless they're the best way to tell the story, and try to work story-first when devising what assets are needed for a campaign.

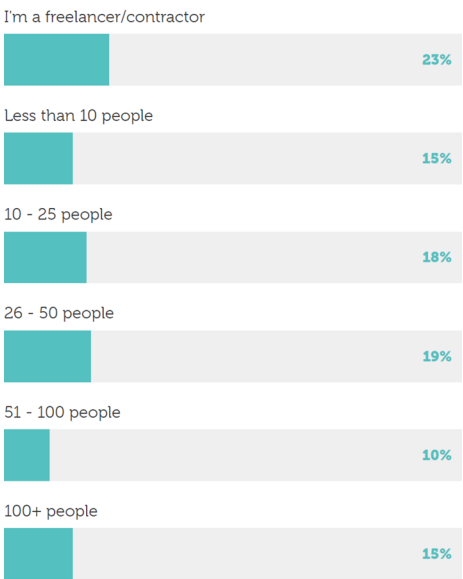
For your run-of-the-mill data or survey stories, a lot of national publications will prefer to create their own supporting graphics, or will instead use stock or user-submitted images in their features. For this reason, I think it is only worth splashing the cash on getting something designed if it's really going to enhance your campaign and tell the story in a super clear and engaging way.

# Agency and Freelancer Specific Questions

Those who described themselves as working for agencies or freelancers/contractors were shown the next series of questions. 51% of respondents fell into this section.

## How big is the agency that you work for?

If we remove freelancers and contractors, the most popular size of the agency was 26-50 people at 19%.



## What the experts think...



Abi  
Bennetts

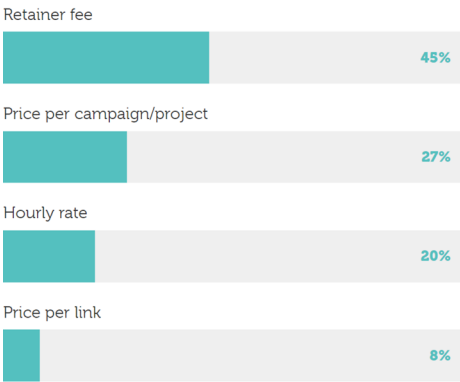
It's been so great seeing so many talented SEO and digital PRs go freelance over the past year. It seems like a really supportive community, with more work out there than ever before thanks to increased demand for support amongst both in-house teams and agencies.



# What pricing model do you use for most clients?

We wanted to find out what pricing models agencies and freelancers used when it came to charging for link building services. Multiple answers were allowed here to account for different pricing models for different projects.

As was the case in 2021, the most popular answer was a retainer fee, with 45% of respondents saying that they used this pricing model. The least popular pricing model was price per link, with 8% of agencies and freelancers saying that they used it.



## What the experts think...



Katheryn  
Watson



Using a ‘price per link’ model portrays the message that the goal of the project is purely link volume - regardless of the surrounding organic or brand metrics that can be positively measured and reported on through activity like this. It also builds a culture within teams that links are the only way to deem a campaign a success.

So, it’s refreshing to see that ‘price per link’ is the lowest used pricing model as this means that, hopefully, as an industry we are slowly shifting towards other valuable ways to measure digital PR activity. Whether this is relevancy, link gaps, audience building, purchases or organic uplift.

The more widespread this attitude towards strict link targets becomes, together we can build a stronger rapport in the industry to prove ROI and true value to our clients.

Links will always be important. But there is so much more to measure outside of just link numbers.



No surprise here. Agencies go with retainer fees because that gives a lot of flexibility. This is more suitable and profitable because link building is a combination of research, content, pitching, and followups.



Mercy  
Janaki



Crystal  
Carter



Link building can require a number of dependencies around timing, quality of content, contacts and more. That agencies and freelancers are using 'Retainer' or "Project" base billing is the best way to account for the resources required.

## Do you provide any services on a performance-based model?

Following on from the theme of pricing models, we asked agencies and freelancers whether they used performance or bonus models for link building. As with previous years, the vast majority (84%) of respondents said no.



## What the experts think...



Ahmed  
Khalifa



In an industry where you can't control everything, it would be unfair if the pricing model is dependent on a performance-based model. It is positive that the majority does not use this model. The success of linkbuilding campaign can be subjective on some occasions in my opinion. For example, one company might prefer high-quality links from media publications, whereas another would prefer to have something more niche than general publications, and another wants to have both.

But in some way, they are positive results in their own unique ways.

I would be interested to know what falls under "performance" in link building. Does everyone have the same definition? Or do some people think it's deliverables like the amount of links, while others think it's rankings & traffic, and some only look at actual conversions?



Bibi  
Raven



I think 16% is still high considering that no one can guarantee a live link. This can create a trust issue between the agency/freelancer and the client.

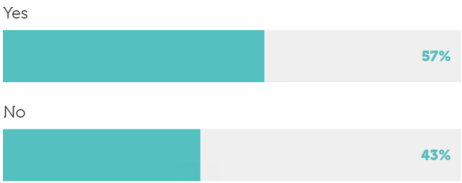


Mercy  
Janaki



# Do you set a target in terms of the number of links for each client or campaign?

Here, we wanted to learn about setting targets for link building either at the campaign level or client level. Answers were fairly evenly distributed but tilted toward yes, with 57% of agencies and freelancers saying that they did set link targets.



## What the experts think...



Sam Pennington



It is common for any outsourced campaign or service to have KPIs and targets, typically these are per contract or year as it is difficult to judge or gauge the potential of each campaign individually. I would question why over 40% said this was not something they did? How do they measure performance? Are they using other metrics like traffic and revenue instead and, if so, it would be interesting to hear how they attribute this back to the link building.

Digital PRs tend to specialize because setting targets is much easier when you have direct experience and contacts within a specific vertical. For new or emerging markets this can be more challenging.

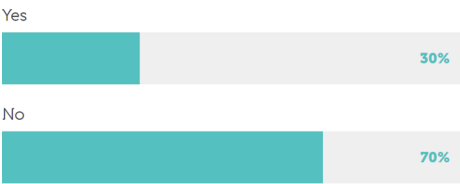


Crystal Carter



# Do you offer your clients any kind of guarantee for link volumes or metrics?

The majority of agencies and freelancers (70%) said that they do not offer any kind of guarantee when it comes to the volume of links they build, or metrics associated with links.



## What the experts think...



Eva Cheng



I'm surprised by this result, I feel like a lot of agencies I know of set link targets. It's amazing to see that we are moving away from creating a 'link guarantee' for clients as it can create a lot of stress for those working on the account and it means the industry is moving more into a strategic approach for link building rather than building links for the sake of it. From my experience, it's not about the number of links you build, but the quality and relevance of the links so it's encouraging to hear that the industry is moving to this way of thinking.

I was very surprised by this number, as most of my link builder friends all have contracts with clients based on a specific number of links.



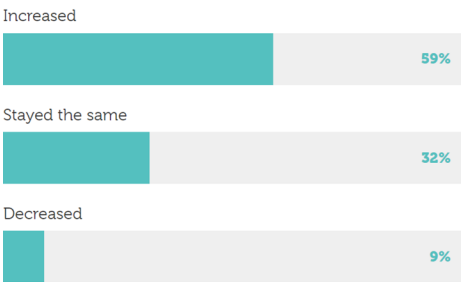
Bibi Raven



# In your experience, how has the demand for link building services changed over the last 12 months?

Whilst it's been a difficult couple of years for many businesses, it's good to see that demand for link building services has mostly increased (59%) or stayed the same (32%) over the last year.

Only 9% of agencies and freelancers said that demand for link building services has decreased over the last 12 months.



## What the experts think...



Eva Cheng



Over the years, I have seen a huge increase in the demand for link building, not just your classic core link building tactics but mainly through creative campaigns. 'Creative' link building is definitely increasing and becoming ever more valued in the industry. Journalists are far savvier now to people building links so it's important to create campaigns that add value to a journalist and tell stories that make sense for your client's niche.

Link building is a great business to be in for sure! I started my agency 5 years ago and the demand has never stopped. I can recommend it to any SEO to specialize in link building, especially as it's something in-house SEO teams don't want to do.

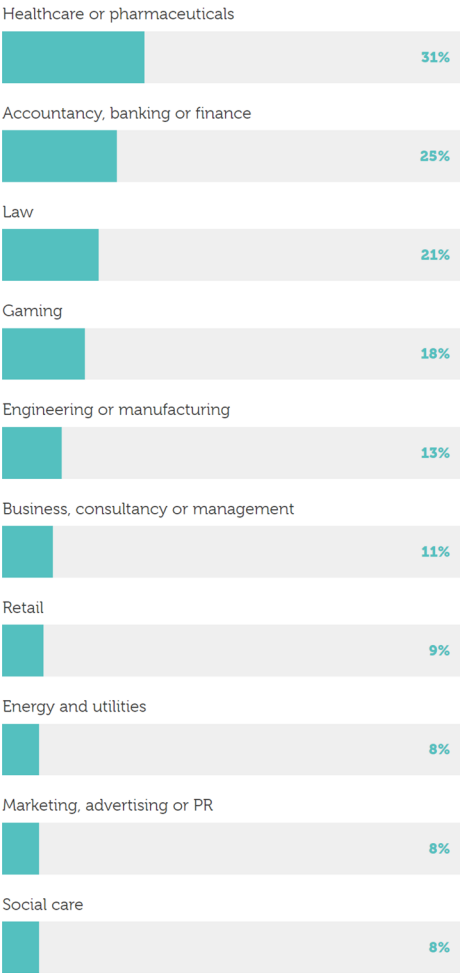


Bibi Raven



# Which of the following industries do you think are the hardest to build links in?

Here, we were aiming to get some insights into which industries are the hardest for agencies to build links for. The top answer is the same as it was in 2021, with healthcare or pharmaceuticals taking 31% of the votes from agencies and freelancers. Respondents could select up to three industries.



## What the experts think...



Mercy Janaki

Every single industry is harder as link building is nothing but relationship building. I am surprised to see healthcare tops the list. Often the high visibility publications look out for an expert opinion as the journalists will not have a healthcare background in most cases.



This is really surprising! Our team delivers digital PR services for a pharmaceutical company, and link building results for that brand have been fantastic this year - above those in other industries.

There are always going to be industries that are harder than others to build links in (e.g. due to linking policies of particular industry publications, the limited number of topics which can be utilised for stories to remain relevant, and more). It should encourage thinking outside of the box, beyond content marketing (which has still been picked as a key link building technique this year), to other tactics that could help to get cut-through and drive valuable links in the right spaces.

Although unfortunately we won't be able to change publications' minds on external linking policies.



Chloe  
Hutchinson



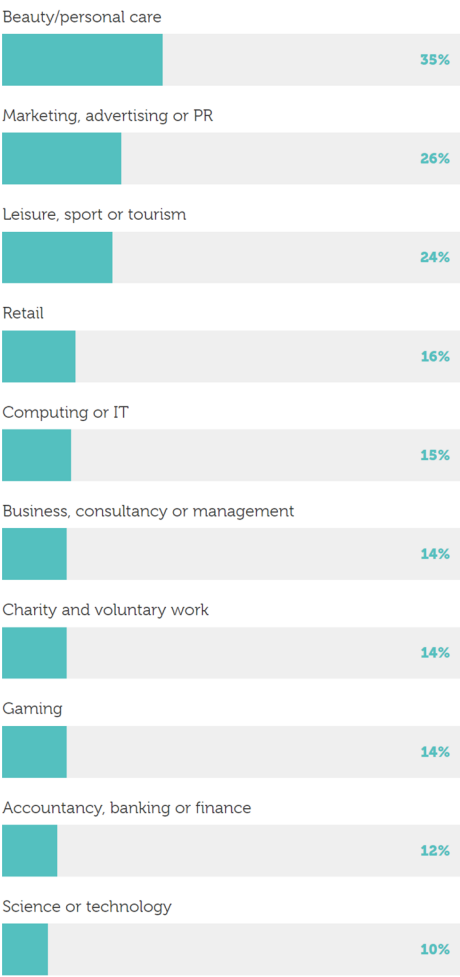
Sam  
Pennington



Interesting how the topics people find the hardest are the ones that are requiring more 'EAT' consideration and factual information. These also tend to be some of the more challenging to get "creative" with. I wonder what part of this is due to struggles for sign off of ideas rather than difficulty to actually build the links, though?

# Which of the following industries do you think are the easiest to build links in?

On the flip side, we also wanted to know which industries are the easiest to build links in. The clear winner with 35% was beauty and personal care. A somewhat meta answer in second place was marketing, advertising and PR with 26%. Respondents could select up to three industries.





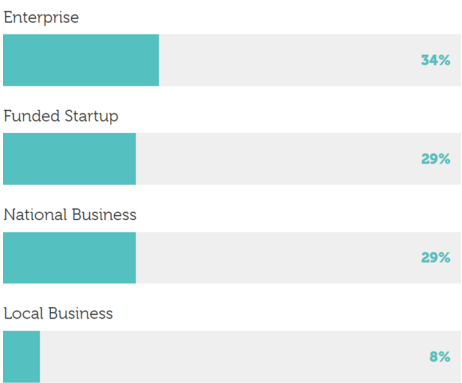
# In-house Specific Questions

This section consists of questions answered only by the 33% of respondents who classified themselves as in-house marketers.

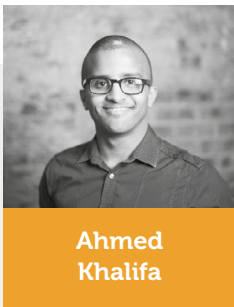
## Which of the following best describes the company that you work for?

We wanted to learn more about the type of businesses that in-house marketers worked for. We began by asking what type of business best described them. The most popular response (34%) was Enterprise, followed by National Business and Funded startup, both at 29%.

Very few respondents (8%) described themselves as local businesses.



## What the experts think...



Ahmed Khalifa

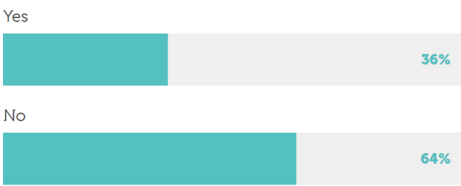
There is a good possibility that local businesses, especially if they are young and/or are of small size, cannot justify having a dedicated SEO team in their business due to budget constraints.

So it's not surprising that the majority of the survey respondents are working for slightly larger companies that tend to have the budget to create a dedicated team or department to carry out their linkbuilding campaigns.



# Do you use external agencies, freelancers, or contractors for link building?

64% of in-house respondents said that they don't use external resources for link building which is an increase from 2021 when 56% said that they didn't use external resources for link building.



## What the experts think...



Martin  
Vasko

It would be interesting to know if people are just doing more link building in-house now, or if some companies stopped cooperating with external agencies (e.g. because of Covid savings, inflation, etc.)



In an Enterprise environment, it's much more likely that the company has an internal PR team which manages all outreach to media outlets. With the possible exception of engineering, forming a strong working partnership with the PR team will be the most beneficial thing an SEO team can do for the company. PR works extremely hard to build trust with their media relationships, so it's important to keep that in mind when hiring external agencies or contractors to do link building, and make sure they are not doing anything to jeopardize that working relationship.

With this in mind, it's important to remember the PR team's primary objective is to simply get media coverage and/or mentions. As SEOs we need to work with the PR team to make sure they are taking link acquisition into consideration when appropriate too.

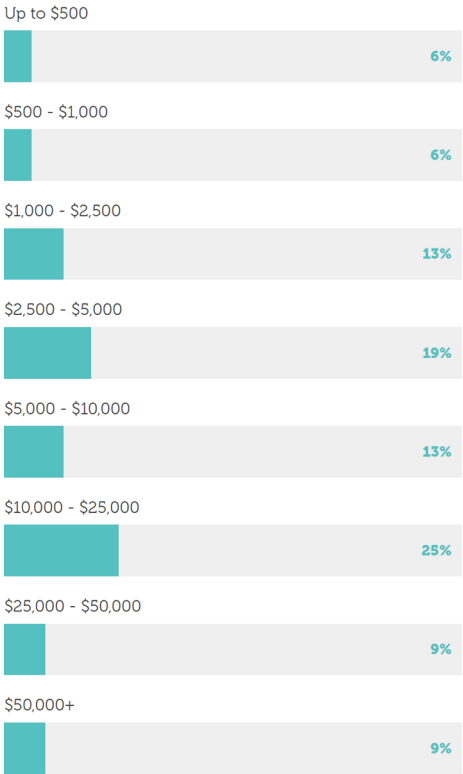


Shelly  
Fagin



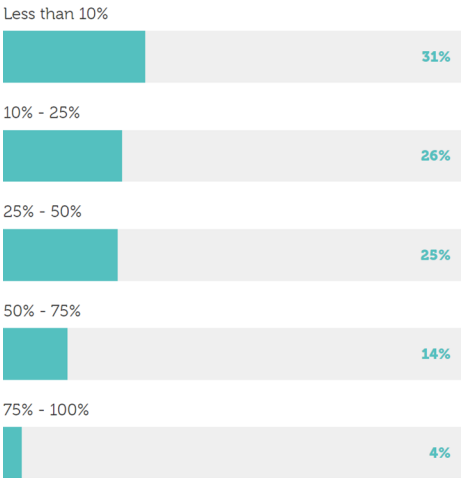
# When you use external agencies, freelancers or contractors, how much budget, on average, do you invest per month?

The most common budget range for in-house SEOs was \$10,000-\$25,000, with 25% of respondents saying that this was their average monthly budget for link building. Close behind with 19% was the \$2,500-\$5,000 range.



# What percentage of your SEO budget is currently dedicated to link building?

Answers were fairly evenly distributed here, with the most selected answer by a small margin being 'less than 10%'. However, we can see that the three closest answers show that over 80% of in-house SEOs dedicate up to 50% of their SEO budget to link building.



## What the experts think...



Ryan Jones



As an in-house SEO this really does not surprise me. It's common for a lot of in-house SEO teams to outsource their link building needs to agencies and/or freelancers. It's something we've done and continue to do, although I also help link building efforts too.

For a lot of businesses, this means they can focus on content creation, SEO testing and other things that will help move the needle, rather than just link building.

It's so great to see that since last year's [State of Link Building] report budget distribution has increased, with more in-house teams dedicating between 10 - 50% of their SEO budgets for link-building. I think this is definitely a trend that we've seen reflected in the increased demand from in-house teams for digital PR services over the past year and is brilliant to see more and more teams seeing the value of investing in (quality) link building.

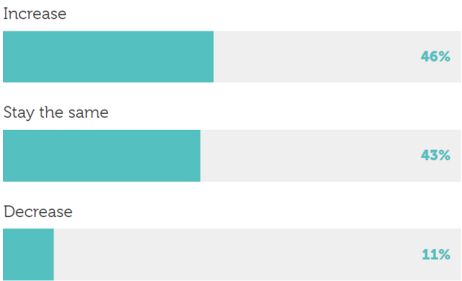


Abi  
Bennetts



## Following on from this, are you expecting this to increase, decrease or stay the same next year?

The good news for agencies and freelancers is that in-house SEOs said that they generally expect budgets for link building to either increase (46%) or stay the same (43%) over the next year.



## What the experts think...



Victoria  
Wildhorn

It is interesting that nearly half of the respondents are expecting to increase their budget for link building. Curious about what this means: Will they be adding teammates, subscribing to a paid platform for the first time, and/or paying an external service to bolster the amount of links?





Laura  
Slingo



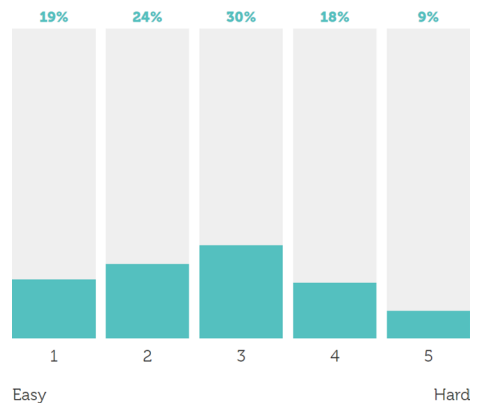
I find it really interesting that over 80% of in-house SEOs dedicate up to 50% of their budget to link building, and that the majority of in-house SEOs intend to continue the investment or increase it.

As someone who worked agency-side in link building and now in-house, the conversations I'm having amongst the SEOs on both sides suggest that brands are witnessing the benefits of link building, running test campaigns, and developing business cases and forecasts for growth, with a view to bringing it in-house once they have their sums sorted.

Give it three years and I think we'll see a significant increase in in-house job adverts for outreach teams compared to today.

## Working in-house, to what extent do you struggle to get buy-in and budget for link building activities?

Whilst the most popular answer here was midway between easy and hard, answers overall tilted toward easy when it comes to getting buy-in and budget for link building activities. Around 43% of in-house SEOs leaned this way, whilst only 9% said that getting buy-in was very hard.



## What the experts think...



Ahmed  
Khalifa



This is moving in the right direction, but it's clear that it's not a straightforward process to get everyone onboard. It can be challenging for in-house teams to get a buy in from other stakeholders and departments, particularly if they have not been educated enough by the in-house team or lack the expertise of what the benefits are of a link building campaign.

This is why it is hugely important to educate and communicate clearly on the value of link building campaigns and the knock-on effect it can have in other areas of the business, e.g. positive PR, traffic, conversions, brand awareness, authority, etc.

When we think back to SEO over the past few years, so much has changed. One thing that hasn't changed? The importance of building high-quality and relevant links back to your website. So it's hardly surprising to hear that most SEOs don't have too many issues getting buy-in for link building activities.



Ryan  
Jones



# Methodology and Respondent Demographics

## Methodology

The survey opened on 16th March 2022 and closed on 2nd May 2022. During this time, 270 individuals responded to the survey which was run via TypeForm. Whilst most respondents answered the same set of questions, there was some custom logic included which meant that some respondents didn't see all questions.

For example, those who described themselves as in-house marketers answered several questions which were tailored to them.

The results were visualised automatically via TypeForm and these initial results were shared with expert contributors in the weeks following the closure of the survey. Expert contributors were asked to comment on questions and answers which they found particularly interesting. Aside from correcting errors such as typos, expert contributor comments are published unedited.

Numbers were rounded off for the purpose of publishing the report.

## Demographics

A breakdown of key demographics to which we asked respondents is shown on the following pages.

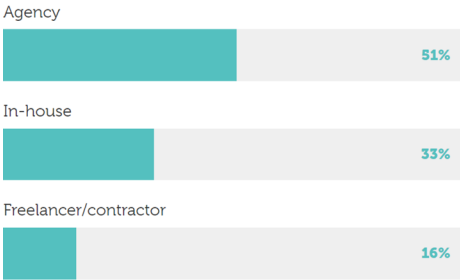


# How would you describe who you work for?

Respondents were asked to choose the best fit for who they worked for. We deliberated a little bit about where freelancers/contractors should fit because they could cross between agency and in-house, but we decided to keep them separate to get a clearer view of the results.

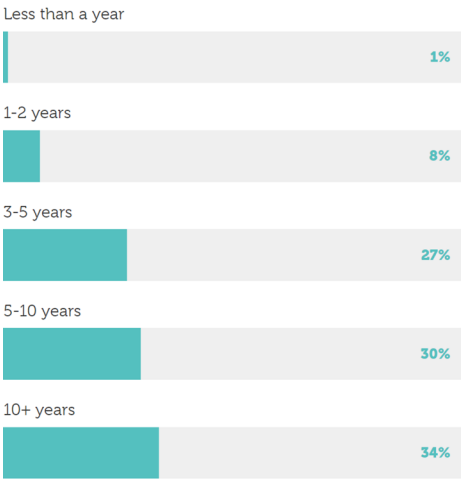
This year, people who work at agencies made up just over half of respondents (51%) whilst in-house respondents followed behind at 33%. Freelancers and contractors made up the remaining 16%.

After choosing their type of role, respondents were taken in two different directions based on their answers to the question above. Agencies and freelancers were given a different series of questions to in-house marketers. Later on, they come back together.



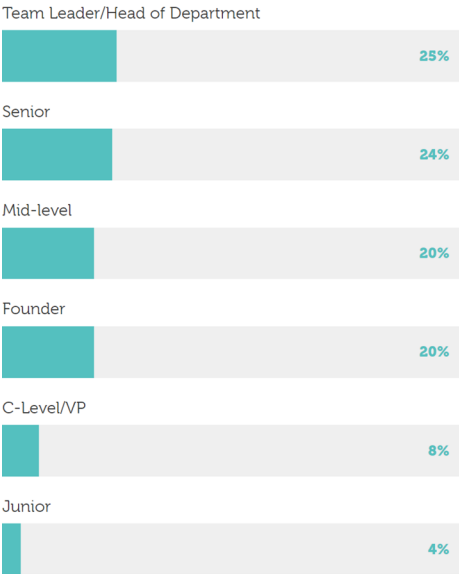
# How many years have you been working in digital marketing?

34% of respondents have been working in digital marketing for over ten years, followed by 30% who have been working in digital marketing for five to ten years, closely followed by three to five years at 27%.



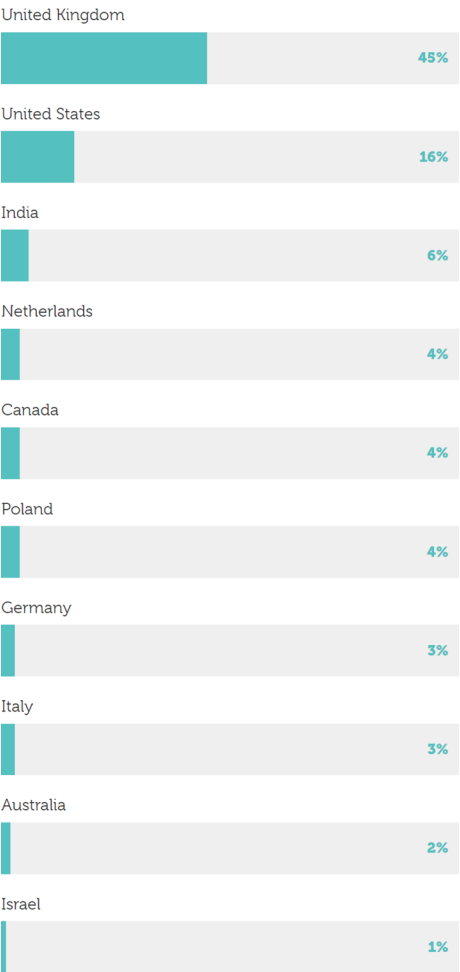
# How would you describe your role?

Next, we wanted to learn the kinds of roles that respondents had and we saw results tilted toward senior roles, with Team Leaders/Heads of Departments and Seniors making up 49% of respondents. Only 4% described themselves as Junior level.



# Location

The survey received responses from 31 different countries. The majority of respondents were based in the United Kingdom (45%) and the United States (16%), followed by India (6%) and Netherlands (4%). The other respondents were spread relatively evenly across the remaining 27 countries. Only answers above 1% are shown in the graph below.



# Contributors and Thank Yous

Thank you to all of our expert contributors who took the time to review the results and give their thoughts and feedback:

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