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://WOMEN IN
TECH SEO/



The State of Technical SEO Report

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Introduction



Paddy

Paddy Moogan



Areej

Areej AbuAli



Welcome to the State of Technical SEO Report from Aira & Women in Tech SEO.

This is our first annual report and it was a no-brainer for us to collaborate together on this. We're pleased to be able to share the collective wisdom of over 870 professionals from the digital marketing industry, along with the insights from 17 experts who took time to review the results and comment on them.

We're proud to have expert contributions solely from the Women in Tech SEO community, members who live and breathe technical SEO. Combined, we have a wealth of information available for you to look through and hopefully use to shape your plans and actions when it comes to technical SEO.

With an almost equal distribution across in-house and agency respondents, we feature two sections that specifically look at technical SEO within each sector.

We then dive into technical SEO tools, going in-depth on visibility, crawling and log file analysis tooling. The impact of technical SEO and ranking signals reveal how the industry measures performance and how much they prioritise Google updates. Finally, the technical SEO skillset section is all about what the industry experts from today's technical SEOs and those who wish to upskill for the future.

Looking ahead, there's no question about the importance of technical SEO and that it will continue being the foundation on which a website is built, many years from now, which means that the future is bright for all technical SEOs.

Want to chat about the results? Our social handles are above.

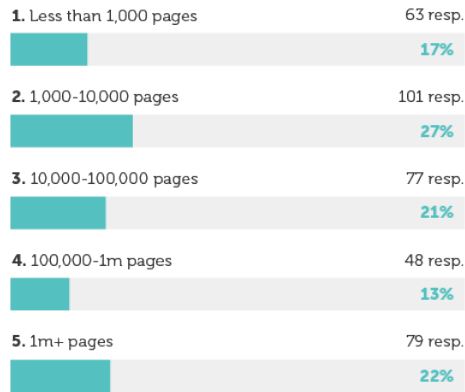
Enjoy!

In-House Specific Questions

If someone defined themselves as an in-house technical SEO, they were taken to a set of questions that specifically asked them about this experience working in-house.

How big is the website that you work on?

The most popular answer here was the range of 1,000-10,000 pages which 27% of in-house technical SEOs said they worked on. The largest size available was 1m+ pages which 22% of respondents worked on.



What the experts think...



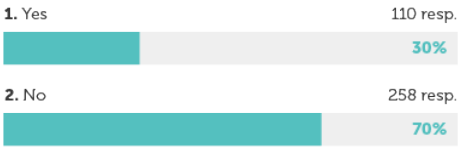
Roxana
Stingu

Even though small websites can benefit from technical SEO, the fact that the vast majority of technical SEOs work on larger websites just shows how much more important the technical aspect of a website becomes the larger the websites are.

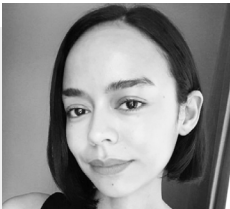


Do you use external agencies, freelancers or contractors for technical SEO?

The majority of technical SEOs (70%) said that they didn't use any external resources such as agencies or freelancers to support their technical SEO efforts.



What the experts think...



Carine
Bourgogne



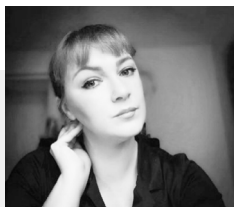
Companies often see the choice between in-house (technical) SEO and agency support as an either/or situation. One aspect of this is budget of course, the other one is the willingness to build SEO as a function in-house and own it end to end, but another element is the challenge that is delivering efficient technical SEO support for agencies/consultants. Technical SEO often requires strong alignment with product & engineering teams & a good grasp of the complexities of a company's tech stack, business model and roadmaps. I see a huge opportunity for agencies and consultants to adjust their offering so as to deliver services that are more embedded into existing engineering workflows and less cookie cutter. Quite often, in-house SEOs do need external support on a project basis, but the difficulties of on-boarding consultants can be a challenge. More "product-led" or "engineering-led" approaches to technical SEO services could really be a win-win for companies in need of support.

It usually takes longer for a business to hire in-house SEOs, and when they do, the expectation is that the in-house SEO will handle 100% of technical SEO-related work, which is reflected here. Unfortunately, in many cases this decision is budget driven and not based on the needs of the in-house team. An agency helping out with technical SEO can work side by side with the in-house team, and serve as an extension of them to identify more technical issues that might be overlooked.



Orit
Mutznik





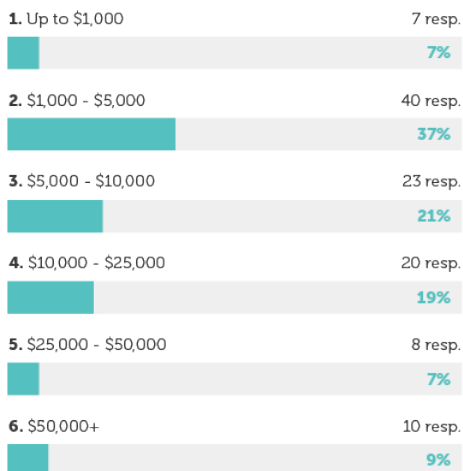
**Natalie
Arney**

As someone who has worked in house before and has had sufficient experience, this does not surprise me at all. We were often approached by external agencies who assumed that the team didn't have the technical knowledge, expertise and experience, yet there are SO MANY skilled technical SEOs working in house.



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

For those who answered yes, we asked how much budget they invested per month on external technical SEO support. The most popular answer with 37% was \$1,000 - \$5,000 per month. Somewhat reassuringly for agencies and freelancers, the least popular answer (7%) was the lowest range which was up to \$1,000 per month.



What the experts think...



Kerstin
Reichert



It is great to see that the lowest end of the scale is the least prominent one. SEO does not mean it is free or doesn't need investment. It seems this view is changing, which implies that SEO is recognised as an important channel and gets the financial support it needs to be successful and deliver good results.

I may be biased but if you're spending £1k or less on an SEO retainer I guarantee you're getting white-label tool exports. You might be better off just buying the tool yourself!

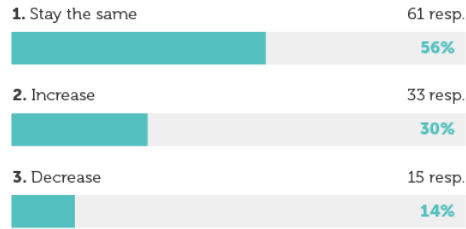


Paige
Hobart



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

Despite the troubles of the last 18 months, it's encouraging to see that the majority (86%) of respondents said that they expected budgets to either stay the same or increase over the next 12 months.



What the experts think...



Tory Gray



56% here to “stay the same” feels quite high relative to the overall growth of the SEO field that happened/is happening since Covid.

I’m willing to bet there are industry-specific splits which help account for this.

From what I have seen Digital Marketing and SEO did actually see more demand over the last 18 months.

I think SEO especially was a good channel to continue to use if budgets needed to be cut, as it is very cost-effective and produces long-lasting results. So unsurprisingly, there should be either the same or even more investment which is what a lot of companies seem to be going for.



Kerstin Reichert





**Carine
Bourgogne**

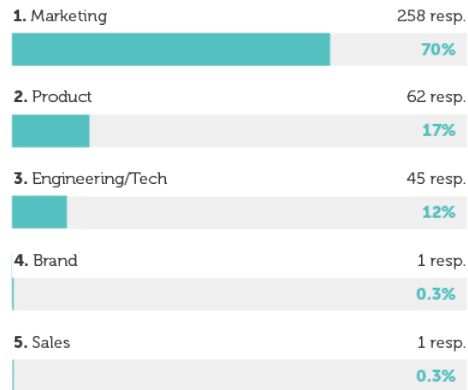


Something I've been thinking about a lot as an SEO for the past 18 months is how certain verticals have been forced to precipitate their digitization (for lack of a better word!) because of covid and how big of an opportunity this could be for SEOs.

Think of small businesses, government agencies, e-learning, the entertainment industry even... if SEO as an industry was not perceived as just the "optimisation for search" part of our jobs, and if businesses saw that the skills SEOs have are truly holistic (think: understanding websites, understanding search, understanding audiences behaviours, understanding digital strategy & so on...) I believe a bigger share of the digitization(?) market could actually be owned by the SEO industry, but maybe this is short-sighted? In the past 8 years I've worked on: local search for small businesses, international expansion involving so many moving parts, migrating large and very mature websites to brand new tech stacks, optimising for accessibility, ASO & so many other varied projects. The list of so long! Maybe we'll see bigger spent in SEO when our skill sets become associated with digitization/digital transformation in the new (post)pandemic world?

In your organization, in which team does accountability for technical SEO sit?

In terms of where SEO sits within an organization, the majority of respondents (70%) said that accountability sits within the marketing function whilst the other sizable answers were Product (17%) and Engineering/Tech (12%).



What the experts think...



Mercy Janaki



I see a clear distinction between Technical SEO review/evaluation and getting the errors fixed. While the marketing team works on reviewing and putting together the recommendations/fixes, the product or the engineering tech does the implementation. Most of the typical agencies and in-house teams work this way, which makes the results pretty obvious! Having said that, the real struggle lies here as two different teams have to work in tandem to get things fixed/implemented.



Serena
Pearson



While it structurally makes sense for SEOs to sit within the marketing department, the most common issue both in-house and agency side is shown to be getting technical SEO implemented. There seems to be a lack of understanding, or at least a lack of support, from senior leadership on the development resource required to push technical SEO changes through. This may be in part due to the difficulty in proving the value of some technical SEO work which can be essential for website maintenance but doesn't necessarily push acquisition.

Interesting that it is Marketing where the accountability for technical SEO sits.

Marketing may be the team that recognises there are errors on the site as they are looking at the bigger picture but the accountability should sit between the marketing, product and engineering/tech teams.

Building a site should not sit under engineering tech. They, along with product and marketing should ensure that a good and well optimised site is built.



Jo Juliana
Turnbull



How do you handle implementing technical SEO tasks that require developers?

Over three quarters of the respondents (76%) said that they used an in-house development team to handle technical SEO tasks. Only 7% of technical SEOs said that they fix issues themselves.



What the experts think...



The 7% that do it themselves are either an SEO/dev hybrid kind of person or they work with incredible CMSes.

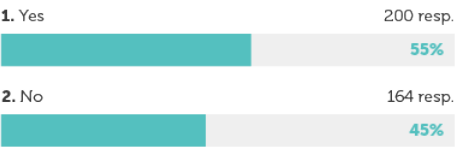


The percentage of in-house SEOs who implement changes themselves is surprisingly high, considering the complex procedures of releasing to production and the limited access that SEOs usually have. I would assume that this is only done for smaller scale implementations to mitigate risks.



When delegating tasks for SEO to your development team, do they have time set aside for SEO tasks on a regular basis?

55% of in-house technical SEOs said that they had time set aside for SEO tasks which is encouraging to see, but overall, the split here was pretty even between the two options.



What the experts think...

Honestly, this split makes me a little sad. Close to half of in-house SEOs still don't have regular development time which likely means they're consistently struggling to get their work prioritised.

Of course we can't know for sure why this is the case. It might be symptomatic of a more general development resource problem (i.e. all departments struggle to get development time); it might be a deliberate structural decision within these organisations (e.g.. all development tasks are prioritised based on a set of pre-agreed KPIs - so no departments get regular development time); or whether it's just that SEO-related development tasks just aren't viewed as high priority (versus requests from other departments) within these organisations.

Regardless of the situation, it seems to me that we still have a bunch of work to do in terms of building the business case to secure regular development resource.





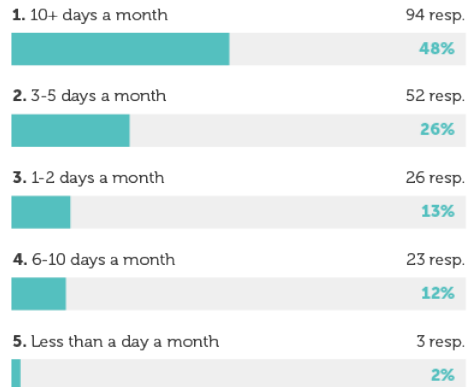
Serena
Pearson



Given how critical development work is to technical SEO implementation, it's surprising that only 55% of in-house development teams have time set aside for this type of work. Technical SEO work generally impacts most users who land on the website. An example can include fixing a broken link, or optimising the header navigation, which benefits all users and channels. To resolve this issue, it may be a case of attaching more monetary values to technical SEO work where possible to improve your chances of getting resource. Alternatively, or in conjunction, SEO activity can be more closely aligned with overall product and website strategy to get additional buy-in from other stakeholders.

Approximately how much time do you have set aside for SEO tasks?

We then asked respondents to estimate how much time they set aside each month for technical SEO tasks. The most popular answer (48%) was over ten days per month.



What the experts think...



Paige
Hobart

In house SEO's?? And less than half of their time set aside for tech SEO. INTERESTING!



I slightly disagree. Maybe in the initial phase of an SEO campaign, the technical SEO would consume a lot of time. Once you get the launch pad cleaned up and ready for the start, it can get into the monitoring phase which can be made easier with crawling tools.

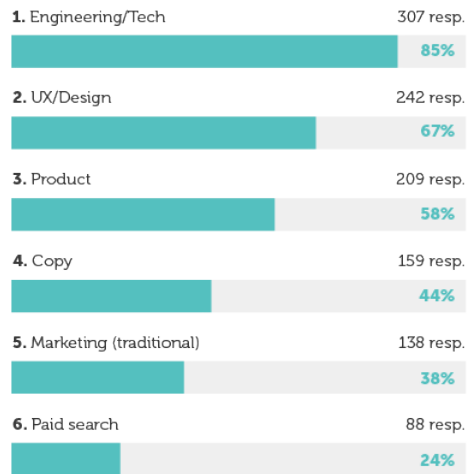


Mercy
Janaki



Which of the following teams do you typically work alongside when it comes to technical SEO? Tick all that apply.

Next, we wanted to understand to what extent technical SEOs crossed over with other areas of their organisation. The most popular answer was the Engineering/Tech team with 85% of respondents saying that they crossed over with them.



What the experts think...



Kerstin Reichert

I'd expect the Engineering team to rank very highly here indeed. One team that I find to be incredibly relevant as well is Data/BI, which seems to be missing here or potentially be reflected in 'Other'. In which case the percentage would be rather low.





Hannah
Smith

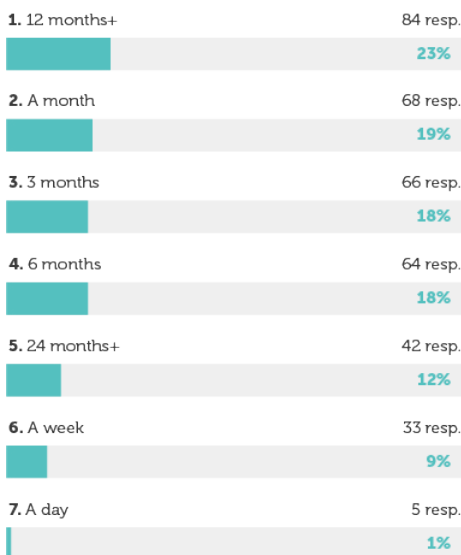


Overall this looks like a pretty healthy balance to me, however I was surprised to note that only 24.3% of technical SEOs are typically working alongside paid search teams.

Whilst I recognise that in many organisations these disciplines are kept structurally separate, in my experience, working closely with paid search teams frequently yields fantastic results. For example, on-page SEO improvements can also positively impact paid search quality scores which, in turn, can improve ROI on paid search campaigns; and creating new pages to target specific keywords can open up new paid search opportunities. As teams, paid and organic really do work better together.

What's the longest timeframe you've had to wait to get a technical SEO change made for a website that you've worked on?

Whilst the top four answers were relatively evenly distributed, the most popular length of time that respondents waited for a technical SEO change to be made was over 12 months.



What the experts think...



Crystal
Carter



I don't find it surprising that 50% of respondents are reporting a delay of more than six months for implementation.

There are some instances when the SEO team is driving tech updates and optimisations that stretch Development teams and the wider business. For larger organisations the time between identifying the need, securing resources, acquiring new skills or tools, and getting sign off along the way can be extensive. For smaller teams, prioritising one task over another can be a challenge for those marketers wearing many hats.

It can be a challenge but getting buy-in from all teams can make a difference.

This is in direct correlation with the priority that SEO gets within the business. It seems that in most cases the priority is low-medium. Constantly advocating for SEO, building relationships and leveraging SEO success across the business can reduce this wait time (and perhaps help with getting some dedicated dev resources).

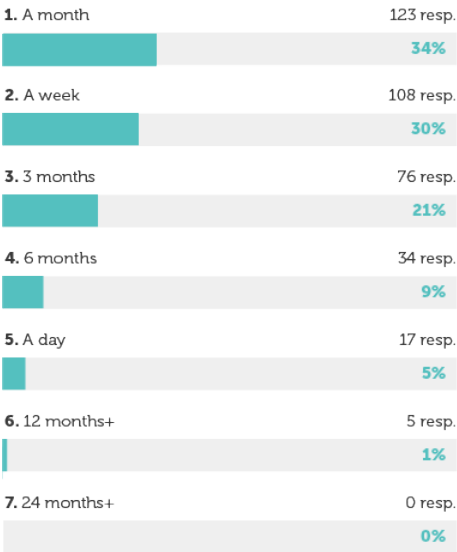


Orit
Mutznik



What's the typical timeframe for a technical SEO change to be made on a website that you've worked on?

In terms of the typical timeframe for technical SEO changes to be made, the most popular answer was a month with 34%, closely followed by a week at 30%. Fortunately for most technical SEOs, waiting over 12 months was only the case for 1% of respondents.



What the experts think...



Paige
Hobart

Great to see most SEO's are waiting between 1 week and 1 month to see their work implemented. I'd be hopeful in assuming that this is for BAU rather than recovery work. I'd say as an agency we will often experience the same timeframes from our clients. But are we settling for 'okay' when it could be 'amazing'?





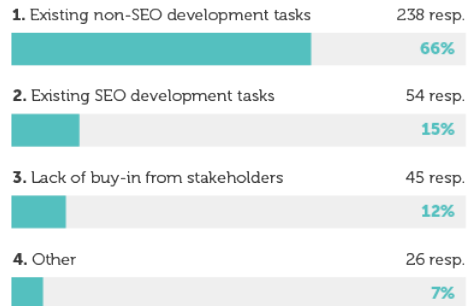
Crystal
Carter

This time frame is reflective of a typical Tech SEO Implementation. And this is largely because we are often making small changes that build on each other to have a significant impact overall.



What is typically the main blocker in getting changes made to the site?

When it comes to reasons why technical SEO changes can't get made, by far the most common answer was existing non-SEO development tasks with 66% of respondents citing this reason.



What the experts think...



Areej
AbuAli



I think this is slightly on us, how can we make SEO requirements not feel like SEO tasks and instead tasks that will directly impact conversion and revenue.

Whilst the majority of respondents cited “existing non-SEO development tasks” as the main blocker; I can’t help but feel that this is a symptom rather than the real problem.

Why are those non-SEO development tasks given higher priority? It’s likely that those tasks/projects have stronger buy-in (and/or commitment) from internal stakeholders. Again, I can’t help but feel like we have more work to do in terms of making stronger business cases to secure the levels of buy-in that other internal teams enjoy.

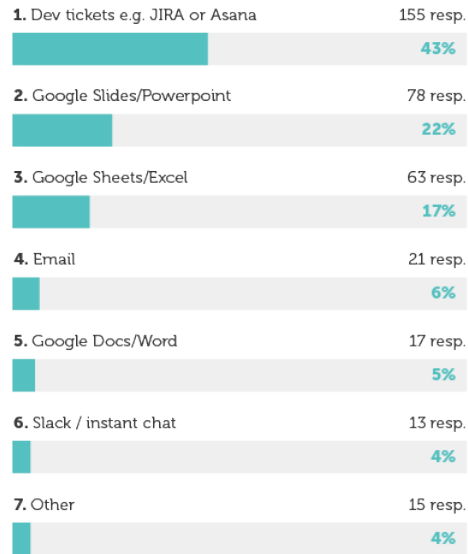


Hannah
Smith



What is your preferred method to present your technical SEO recommendations to your stakeholders?

In-house technical SEOs generally prefer using ticket systems such as JIRA or Asana to present their recommendations to stakeholders, with 43% of them saying this. The next popular answer was Google Slides/Powerpoint with 22%.



What the experts think...



Tory
Gray

Another “persuasion” question - unless all stakeholders are in Engineering (unlikely - I’m sure some are, but not all!) - presenting recommendations in the form of Dev tickets is a big missed opportunity.

I just don’t see this being impactful for business, brand, etc. stakeholders.





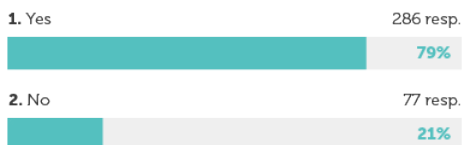
Kerstin
Reichert

I do love a good ticket indeed :) From personal experience, I can agree that having a ticket system in place has improved collaboration, efficiency, clarity, visibility and transparency across stakeholders.



Do you also schedule a call or meeting with stakeholders to discuss your technical SEO recommendations?

Keeping on the theme of presenting recommendations, we then asked in-house SEOs if they followed up written recommendations with a call. The majority of respondents (79%) said yes.



What the experts think...



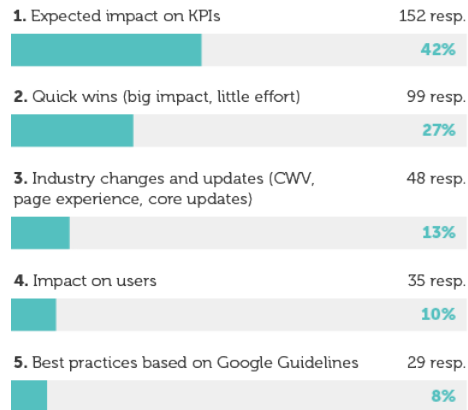
Crystal
Carter

Communication is critical to stakeholder buy-in. Just because decision-makers may not be jargon savvy, doesn't mean that they can't recognise the business value of an optimisation. Further understanding this as SEOs allow us to prioritise our efforts.



How do you prioritise technical SEO tasks in terms of implementation?

When choosing which tasks to work on first, the most popular answer amongst in-house SEOs was using the expected impact on KPIs with 42%.



What the experts think...



Roxana Stingu

With Page Experience and Core Web Vitals growing fear in SEOs’ souls, it is quite refreshing to see that most SEOs still mainly prioritise their tasks based on KPIs and return on investment.



I’m sad that only 9.6% said Users, though... I also get it. It’s really hard to focus on users when the org as a whole only cares about its bottom line. Would love to see us ALL get more user-focused in general - for the long term.

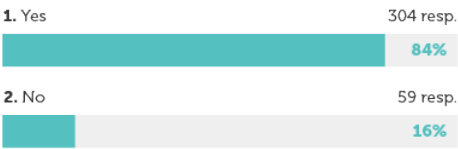


Tory Gray



Typically, are your technical SEO recommendations deployed to a staging environment prior to live?

The vast majority of respondents (84%) said that they deploy technical SEO changes to a staging environment before pushing live.



What the experts think...



Areej
AbuAli

I can imagine this being far more likely in-house than agency-side.



I don't have benchmark data, but this feels like a huge improvement vs. what I've seen in previous years.

I'd love to dig in further and ask about SEO QA in future surveys - is it done, and who's doing it.

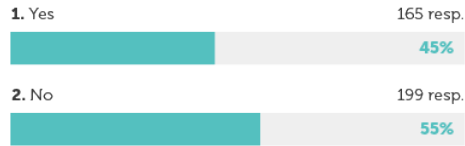


Tory
Gray

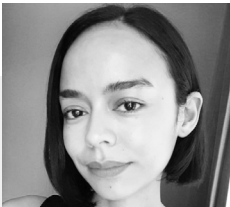


Do you carry out any form of A/B testing to understand the impact of technical SEO changes after they've been deployed?

Whilst a fairly even split, there was a slight majority (55%) in favour of technical SEOs who don't test the impact of technical SEO changes after they've gone live.



What the experts think...



Carine Bourgogne



This to me makes a lot of sense. A/B tests are still a conceptual headache when applied to real-life SEO: in theory testing SEO makes a lot of sense, in practice it can quickly become discouraging. John Mueller recently reminded us that “From a Google search quality point of view, testing a small subset of a site is not enough to have Google say the site is higher quality. G tries to look at site quality overall” - I think this really brings home the importance of technical SEO that is rooted in a coherent and holistic business strategy and that makes “good business sense”. If an SEO initiative requires extensive resources, a lot of time & potentially shifts priorities for a business, it should be strongly rooted in the overall business strategy. This should provide a good safety net for businesses that are not able to test SEO initiatives effectively. I’m not saying this is foolproof, but a holistic strategy where SEO doesn’t exist in a vacuum will provide more checks along the way and make up for the inability to test extensively in my opinion.

SEO testing tools tend to be expensive and difficult to implement within the business. The combination of this and the fact that some technical SEO fixes are obvious (i.e. Unindexable URLs, broken links) many SEOs don't feel these are needed.



**Orit
Mutznik**



Agency And Freelancer Specific Questions

If a respondent said that they worked for an agency or are a freelancer, we showed them a different set of questions about their experience.

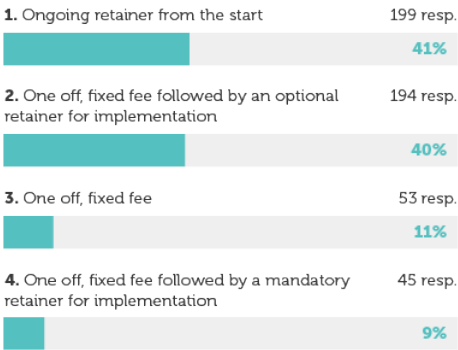
What size of agency do you work for?

First up, we asked respondents to tell us how big their agency was in terms of headcount. 25% of respondents were freelancers whilst the agency size was a pretty even split between most responses.

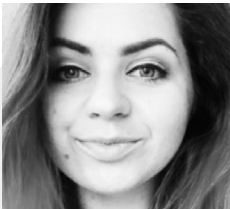


How do you typically structure your budgets for technical SEO work?

Interestingly, the top answers here were pretty much evenly distributed with agency SEOs saying that they structured projects with an ongoing retailer (41%) and a one-off fee followed by an optional retainer which came in at 40%. Bottom of the list came a one-off fee followed by a mandatory retainer at 9%.



What the experts think...



Kristina Azarenko



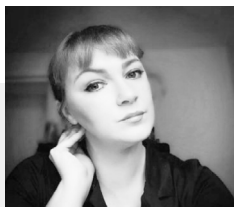
I prefer offering clients optional retainers because it helps me structure these retainers better once I have the results of my initial technical SEO audit. I can then estimate the resources needed for implementation. It helps give more clarity to the client and manage expectations better.

No task in SEO workflow is a one-off. Every single task in SEO comes as recurring and technical SEO is no exception. Though the majority of the technical SEO work is done at the beginning of the engagement, there are high chances that you get to do technical SEO cleanup very often on the website. The plugin might break, it might stop supporting, the client might not inform you about the URL changes (You read it right - you get hired for your expertise but often get ignored!) So no wonder the ongoing retailer model is on the top.



Mercy Janaki





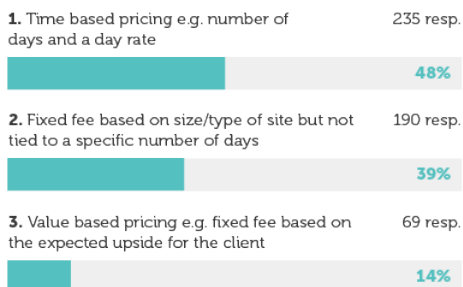
**Natalie
Arney**

As a freelancer I would definitely say that the majority of my budgets are like the first two as well. It gives both sides the flexibility and also allows for the client to actually work with you and get things done, with SEO guidance, rather than do something and then walk away. I find that clients prefer ongoing if they trust you and understand that SEO isn't just a fix and leave process - and that's so important for both sides.

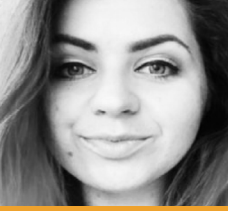


How do you typically price a technical SEO audit of a single website?

Leading on from this, we asked how agency SEOs price a technical audit. Nearly half (48%) said that they use time-based pricing which means estimating the days required and using a day rate charge. This was followed by a fixed fee but not tied to days (39%) and in last place with 14% was value-based pricing.



What the experts think...



**Kristina
Azarenko**



I find that time-based pricing penalizes an expert for working faster. For example, I create processes for myself to make my work more efficient. It means that what used to take me 8 hours might end up taking 4. With time-based pricing, I'd need to charge less for the same value I provide which does not make a lot of sense. So I think a project or value-based pricing is more beneficial as it concentrates on the outcome rather than the number of hours spent.

Time based pricing sounds more ideal as no one is aware of the problems one can unearth after starting with Technical SEO audit. The size and the type of the website would give you an idea, but each website might through you new challenges and issues to identify and resolve. Typically, a large volume of agency clients' technical SEO audit will be part of the monthly retainer package unless or otherwise, there is a separate ask from the client for a one-off technical SEO assessment.

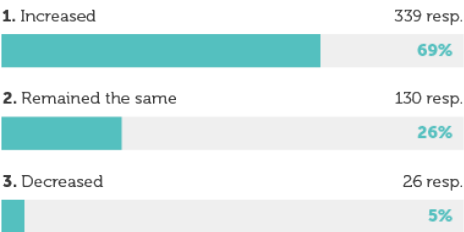


**Mercy
Janaki**



In your experience, how has the demand for your technical SEO services changed over the last 12 months?

A positive response to this question with the majority (69%) of agency SEOs saying that demand for their services has increased over the last 12 months. Only 5% said that demand had decreased.



What the experts think...



Kerstin Reichert

There definitely is a massive boom at the moment. Whether it is freelance and consulting demand or open roles for (technical) SEOs. A very good time to be (not only) in SEO :)



Absolutely! COVID saw people have to turn to online to solve almost all of their problems without leaving the house. Funny enough that meant that Search had never been more important. SEO has seen a big uplift in interest over the last 12 months and we've been privileged enough to win quite a bit of new business. However, this has been coupled with 'the great resignation' and a huge gap in talent in the industry. I suspect this is partly due to there being more in-house SEO roles than ever before.

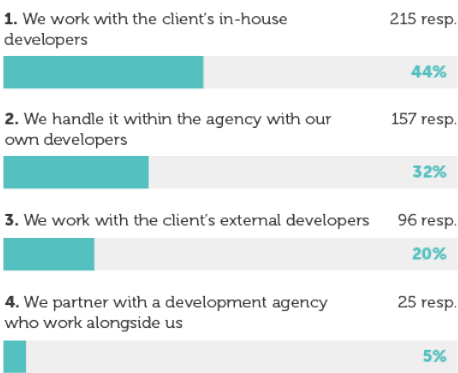


Paige Hobart



How do you typically handle implementing technical SEO tasks that require developers?

Agency SEOs were asked about implementing technical tasks and the most popular answer (44%) was that they worked with in-house developers whilst nearly a third (32%) said that they handled it within the agency.



What the experts think...



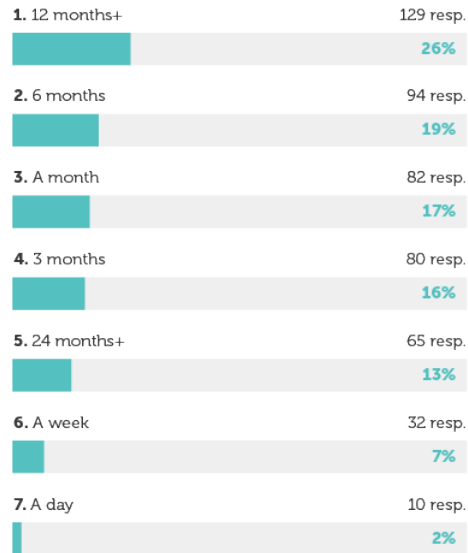
Mercy Janaki

In my experience, I am inclined towards the agency's web developers as both the SEO and the dev team from an agency are tied up to the results and performance. There are always a few advantages like the easy accessibility, doing the implementation audit right after things go live, collaborative environment, etc.



What's the longest time frame you've had to wait to get a technical SEO change made for a client?

This was a question that we asked to in-house SEOs too and the answers are fairly similar with over 12 months being the most popular answer at 26% for agencies and 23% for in-house.



What the experts think...



Natalie
Mott

I would love to see just how far over 12 months some of the individual answers would have been here. I have been in situations where actions weren't taken after 3 years (not from want of trying).



I'm very intrigued by what I'd call the "persuasion gap" between inhouse and agency SEOs.

Yes, 12+ months is the longest for everyone - we've all had BIG, strategic asks that the org takes a long time to implement.

But the second most common longest-time for inhouse SEOs is a month (18.8%) vs. 6 months for agency (19.1%).

Are agencies making bigger asks, as a rule? (I doubt it!)

On the whole, we ALL need to work on improving our ability to shop our roadmap, influence stakeholders, and get impactful work done in a timely manner. But it appears that agency SEOs need more help here, relatively speaking.

Aside: I am SHOOK by these "1 day" answers. The longest you had to wait was... one day? What magical place do you work? Are they all just... extremely easy tasks? My requests often take more than one day to build, much less deploy!

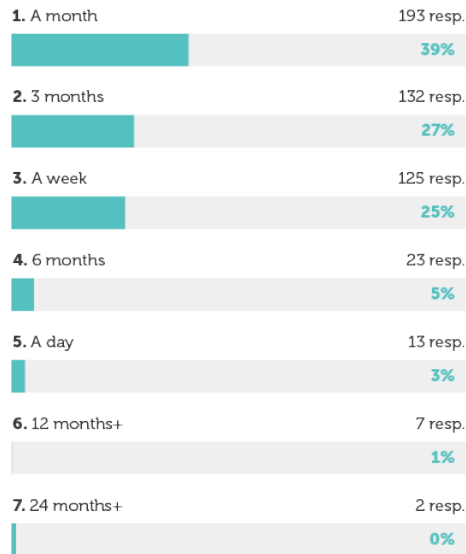


Tory
Gray



What's the typical timeframe across most clients for seeing a technical SEO change made?

Following on from this, we asked agency SEOs what the typical timeframe was for a technical change to be implemented and the most popular answer at 39% was around a month. Only 2% expect to wait more than 12 months.



What the experts think...



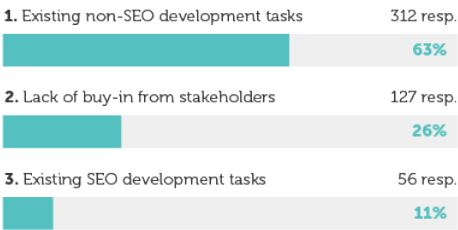
Paige
Hobart

Interesting that this skews to longer than for the in-house SEO. In my experience when you have an in-house working with an agency you will get faster results by having 'boots on the ground'.



What was the main blocker in getting changes made to the site?

In terms of the reason why changes don't get made sooner, the most common reason (63%) was the existence of non-SEO development tasks which we found to also be the case for in-house SEOs.



What the experts think...



Hannah Smith



It's interesting to me that agency responses mirror those from in-house respondents. As I mentioned previously, whilst the majority of respondents cited "existing non-SEO development tasks" as the main blocker; I can't help but feel that this is a symptom rather than the real problem.

Why are those non-SEO development tasks given higher priority? It's likely that those tasks/projects have stronger buy-in (and/or commitment) from internal stakeholders. Again, I can't help but feel like we have more work to do in terms of making stronger business cases to secure the levels of buy-in that other internal teams enjoy.

I'm not surprised about this at all. Unless a client has a dedicated SEO developer resource, and the client knows the impact of the work, they almost always prioritise non-SEO tasks (and more than likely non-UX and non-CRO tasks as well!).

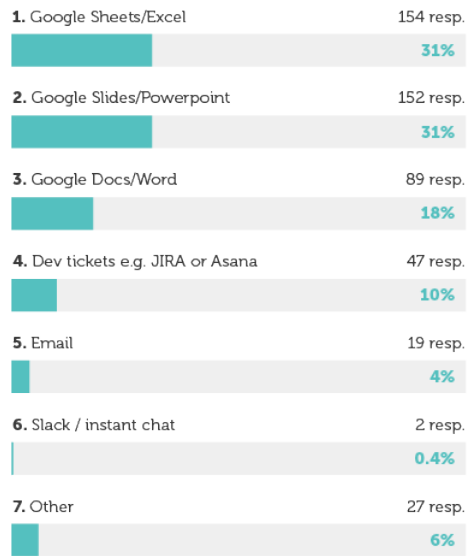


Natalie Arney



What is your preferred method to present your technical SEO recommendations to your stakeholders?

The top answers here were pretty much even at 31% with Google Sheets/Excel and Google Slides/Powerpoint sharing the top spot. Interestingly, the most popular answer to the same question when asked to in-house SEOs was Dev tickets which only 10% of agency SEOs agreed with.



What the experts think...



Tory
Gray

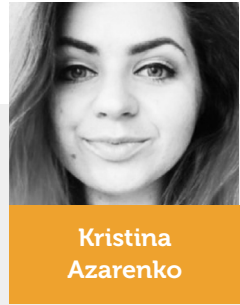


Quite an interesting result, especially in terms of the “longest time to implementation” question for agency SEOs.

Though it’s very possible that agency SEOs over-rely on Excel as a whole, and that they are trying to tell an “SEO story” in Excel vs. using Excel to present data to tell a story about.

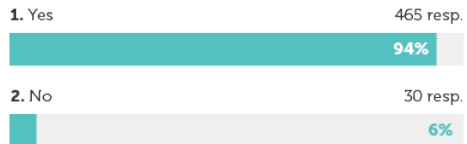
In other words, Excel is sometimes the right place, but only for data, and almost never for the “storytelling”.

While working with a client as a consultant, I need more buy-in from them before tasks are created in JIRA or other task management system. It means, I first need to present the recommendations and explain why they are important, align them with the business goals and only then create anything in the task manager.

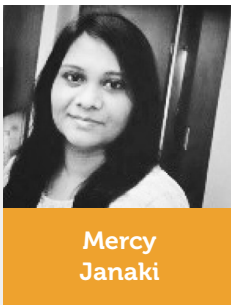


Do you also schedule a call or meeting with clients to discuss your technical SEO recommendations?

The vast majority (94%) of agency SEOs said yes, they do schedule a call to discuss their recommendations. This is noticeably higher than the same answer from in-house SEOs where 79% said that they scheduled a call.



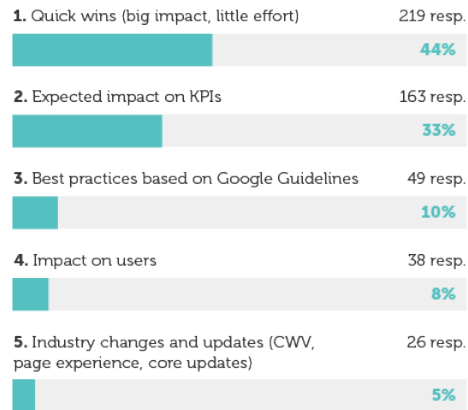
What the experts think...



Clients who take SEO efforts and investments seriously engage very well in the conversation. I see many clients include their dev/eng team in the call rather than just forwarding the findings/call recording with them. Most of the time, these calls end up becoming productive ones. With the right stakeholder on the call helps to find the right low-hanging fruit as most of the time, SEOs will not have visibility into the website backend/CMS.

How do you prioritise technical SEO tasks in terms of implementation?

Nearly half (44%) of respondents said that they prioritise technical SEO tasks by looking for quick wins which we refined as a big impact but with little effort. Again, this differs from the answer from in-house SEOs where the most popular answer with 42% was expected impact on KPIs.



What the experts think...



As an SEO and content strategist in an agency, I'm always thinking about how we can make the client look good by producing the quickest wins to communicate higher up in their business. However, I will also have eyes on the longer-term vision, which are the KPIs that we will be judged against. If there are things that might be in the way of us producing results, such as technical fixes that will hinder the impact of links, then I will always prioritise and maintain the focus around technical SEO fixes that will supercharge link building results.

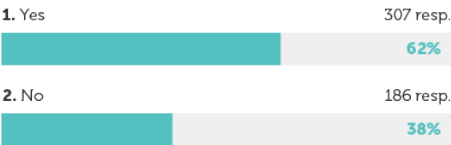
It is interesting to see the difference in response between in-house and agencies. Agencies are often under pressure to show instant value and showing results from quick wins often helps build trust that will come in handy when you are trying to get buy-in for changes that require significant investment.



Miracle Inameti-Archibong

Typically, are your technical SEO recommendations deployed to a client staging environment prior to live?

When it comes to deploying technical SEO changes to a staging environment prior to live, 62% of agency SEOs said that they did this.



Do you carry out any form of A/B testing to understand the impact of technical SEO changes after they've been deployed?

At the moment, the majority of respondents (69%) said that they don't do any form of A/B testing to understand the impact of technical changes that have been made.



What the experts think...

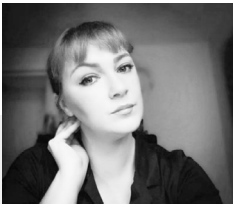


Paige
Hobart

Most clients don't have the budget to waste on testing if something works before rolling it out. Plus I don't think AB testing for SEO is useful for all industries / website types.



I'm not surprised at all by this. Testing can take time and be expensive. Whether in house or working with a client, time can be restricted and stakeholders usually see testing as a 'waste' of time and money, rather than a method of proving whether something will work or not.



Natalie
Arney

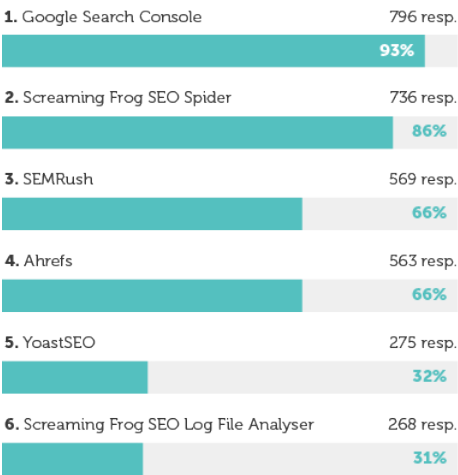


Technical SEO Tools

At this point, all respondents were asked to answer a series of questions related to technical SEO tools.

What tool(s) do you use for technical SEO work? Select all that apply:

We asked all of our respondents to select all SEOs tools that they used. The most popular answer with 93% was Google Search Console, followed by Screaming Frog with 86% and SEMrush at 66%.



What the experts think...



**Jo Juliana
Turnbull**



Google Search Console has a lot of insights about a site but some of the data (eg for errors) is only available for 3 months. Therefore it is important to be on top of GSC and check it regularly.

Was discussing how working on an SEO campaign without Search Console enabled is effectively like trying to do the job with one hand tied behind your back. But it is surprisingly common when onboarding a new client, for them to either be unable to delegate Search Console access, or that Search Console has never been set up.

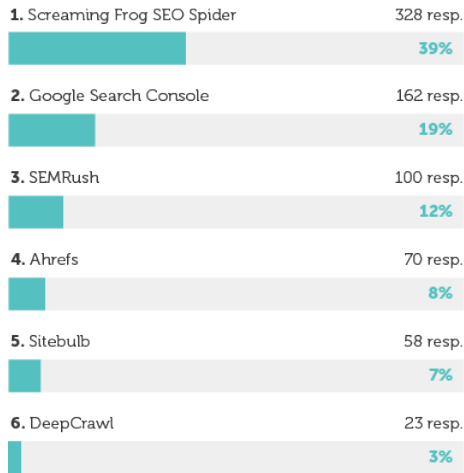


**Natalie
Mott**

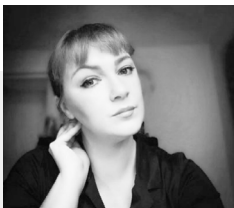


If you could only choose ONE technical SEO tool, which one would you choose?

Next, we wanted to force the issue a little bit and from the same list, asked respondents to tell us the single technical SEO tool that they would use. Here, the top answer with 39% was Screaming Frog.



What the experts think...



Natalie
Arney



Not surprised here at all. Screaming Frog is so helpful and has so many ways to help find what you need. Once you learn how to use it, there's multitudes of opportunities of what you can do/investigate.

+1 from me for Screaming Frog SEO Spider. I will forever be amazed by the wealth of functionality it offers for the given price. It should definitely be part of every (technical) SEOs toolbox.

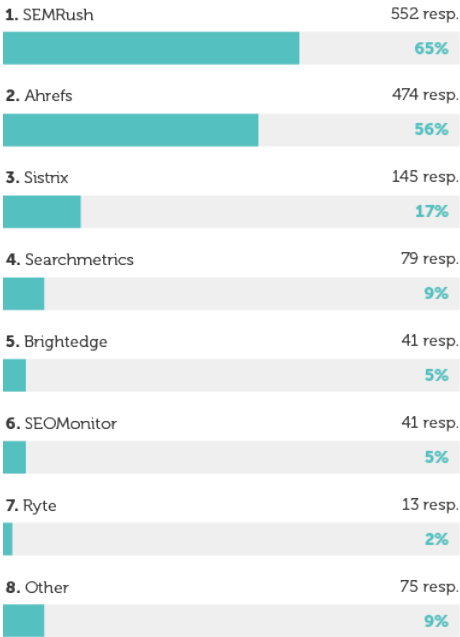


Kerstin
Reichert



When assessing the search visibility of a website, which of the following third-party tools do you use? Select all that apply:

Next, we went a little more granular and asked specifically about tools that help assess search visibility, asking respondents to choose which tools they used for this purpose. The most used tool by our respondents was SEMrush with 65%, followed by Ahrefs with 56% and Sistrix with 17%.



What the experts think...



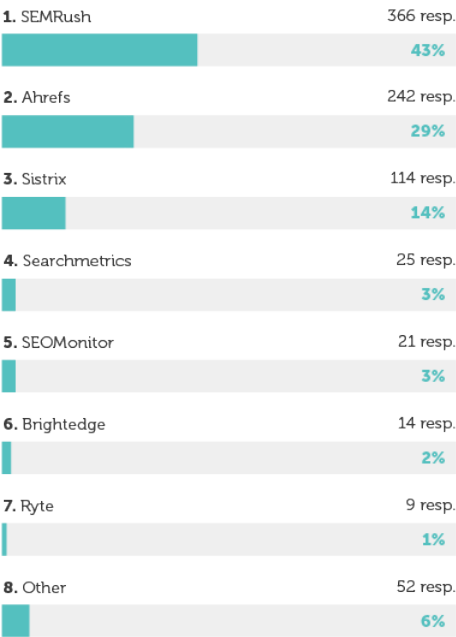
Paige
Hobart



Semrush and Ahrefs are great one-stop-shop tools and perfect for this task. They're also more widely know, have lots of demo help, and at a better cost than something like Searchmetrics.

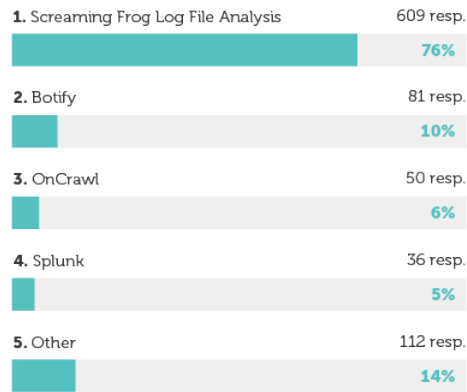
If you could only use ONE tool to assess the search visibility of a website, which one would you use?

Again, we asked respondents to choose just one tool that they'd use for search visibility and again, SEMrush was the winner with 43%.



When carrying out log file analysis, which of the following tools do you use? Select all that apply:

When it comes to log file analysis, 76% of technical SEOs said that they used Screaming Frog for this, followed by Botify with 10%.



What the experts think...



Roxana Stingu



There's a strong correlation here between the 22% of technical SEOs that work on large websites (1M+ pages) and the percentage of tech SEOs who use enterprise-level log file analysis solutions.

This is bound to be cost-related.

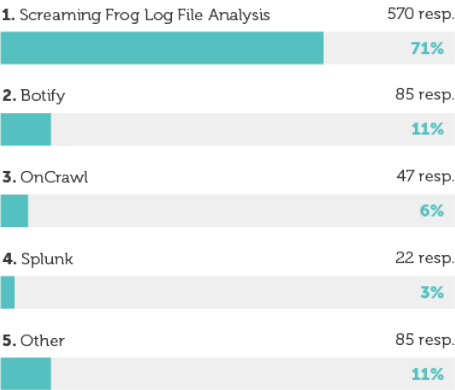


Natalie Mott



If you could only choose ONE tool for carrying out log file analysis, which one would you use?

Answers were very similar when it came to choosing just one log file analysis tool, with Screaming Frog leading the way again with 71% of respondents choosing it as their one tool.



What the experts think...



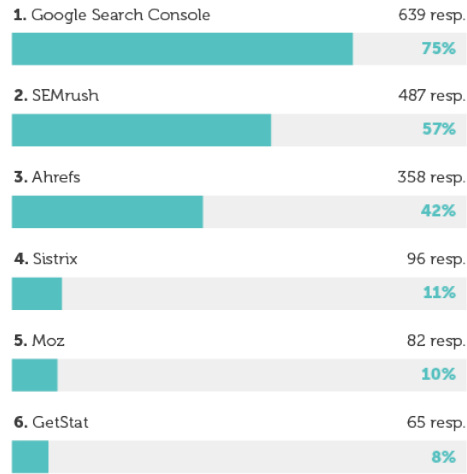
Areej
AbuAli

I expected this, SF Log File Analysis provides such good value at a very low price and is extremely easy to use.



When measuring organic search rankings, which of the following tools do you use? Select all that apply:

Our next question focused on tools to measure organic search rankings and respondents were asked to select all tools that they used for this purpose. The most popular answer with 75% was Google Search Console, followed by SEMrush (57%) and Ahrefs (42%).



What the experts think...



Paige
Hobart



Really interesting to see that 11% are ‘other’ - more than Moz in total. Good to know our tech is staying diverse - we’re always looking for the next advancements in rank tracking; from pixel ranking to SERP feature analysis.

This makes me so happy! GSC provides us with so much accurate ranking data and it surprises me the number of people who rely on third party tools over it.

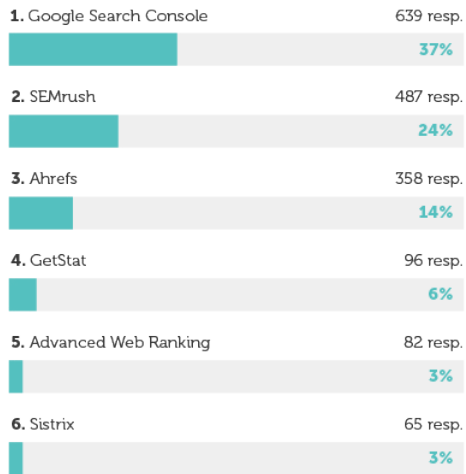


Areej
AbuAli



If you could only choose ONE tool to measure organic search rankings, which one would you choose?

When it comes to choosing just one ranking tool, Google Search Console was the winner again with 37% of respondents choosing this as their tool of choice.



What the experts think...



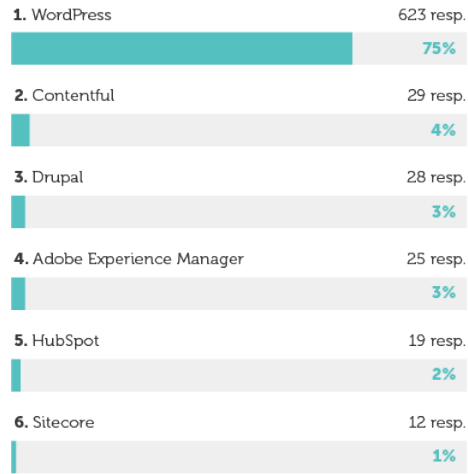
Jo Juliana
Turnbull



Google Search Console has a wealth of information. It is important that if you are using ONE tool that everyone in your team is across it and your clients too. There can be variations in rankings with different tools and clients may like to use their own.

If you could choose just ONE non-eCommerce platform to work on, which one would you choose?

Next up, we wanted to ask technical SEOs which platforms they preferred to work on, starting with non-eCommerce ones. WordPress was by far the most popular answer with 75% of respondents choosing it as their platform of choice.



What the experts think...



Roxana
Stingu

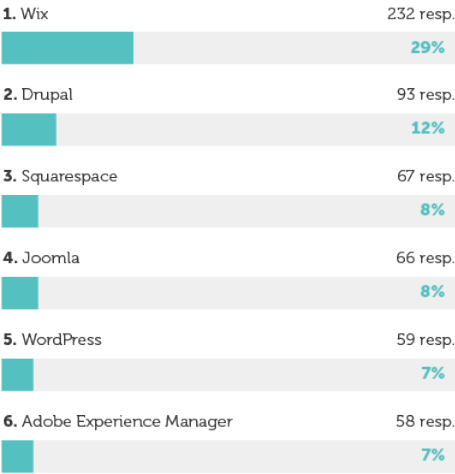


I was expecting WordPress to be the first choice for the majority of respondents but the real surprise comes from Contentful.

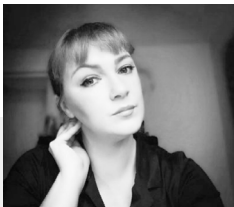
Considering the rise in popularity for modern Javascript frameworks such as React, Vue.js, and Angular, I should have seen this coming. No wonder even WordPress has a headless option that still allows marketing teams to work with the interface they love while giving development a wider choice of tools.

In your opinion, which non-ecommerce platform is the most problematic to work on?

We then asked the inverse of this question and asked respondents to tell us which non-ecommerce platform they didn't like working on. Wix was the least popular platform to work on with 29% of respondents saying it was the most problematic for them. This was followed by Drupal at 12%.



What the experts think...



Natalie
Arney

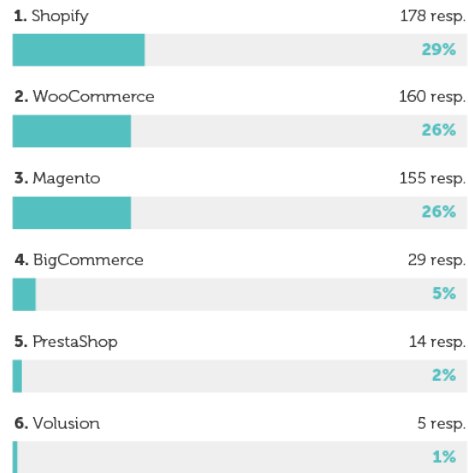


Fully agree that both of these platforms can be so difficult to work with. Wix is slow, and so very limited, and Drupal can be very limited.

Also not surprised to see Squarespace and Joomla! here either - again, Squarespace is slow and limited, and Joomla! can offer so many limitations!

If you could choose your favourite eCommerce platform to work on as a technical SEO, which ONE would you choose?

We then asked respondents if they had experience working on eCommerce platforms. 72% said that they did and they were then asked which platform they preferred working on. The top three answers were relatively close here, with Shopify just about winning with 29% of the votes. Closely following were WooCommerce (26%) and Magento (26%).



What the experts think...



Tory Gray



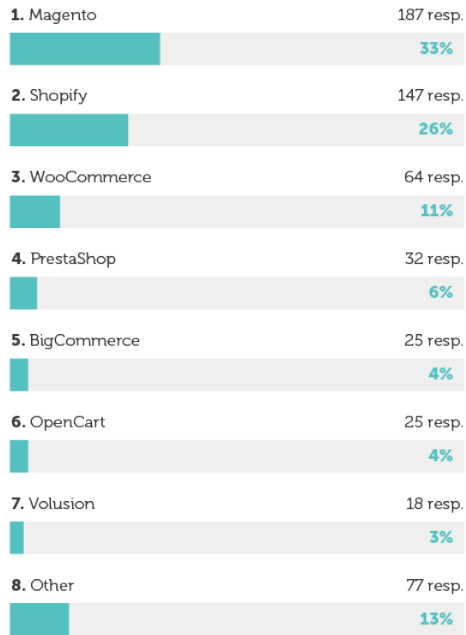
Given the hate piled onto Shopify from SEOs (historically), this answer feels pretty astounding.

I'd be curious how Shopify was able to turn this around - the team Shopify is building out (Kevin Indig and the like), the new features? The lack of... better tools? "New blood" - eg many more new, younger people coming into the field without historical baggage?

Is it possible to break this down by in-house vs agency answers? (I'd bet that Shopify is more loved by in-house people!)

In your opinion, which eCommerce platform is the most problematic to work on?

Again, we asked the inverse of this and 33% of respondents said that Magento was the most problematic platform to work on from a technical SEO point of view.



What the experts think...



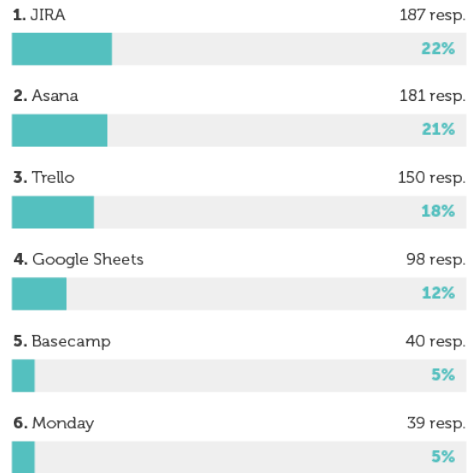
Paige
Hobart

This is really interesting, I've worked on Magento and found that (with the right developer) you have a lot more flexibility to do things like facet expansion.



If you could choose just ONE project management tool to use, which one would it be?

Finally in this section, we asked about project management tools that technical SEOs prefer to work with. This was a close one again with JIRA just winning the race with 22% and closely followed by Asana at 21%.



What the experts think...



Natalie
Mott



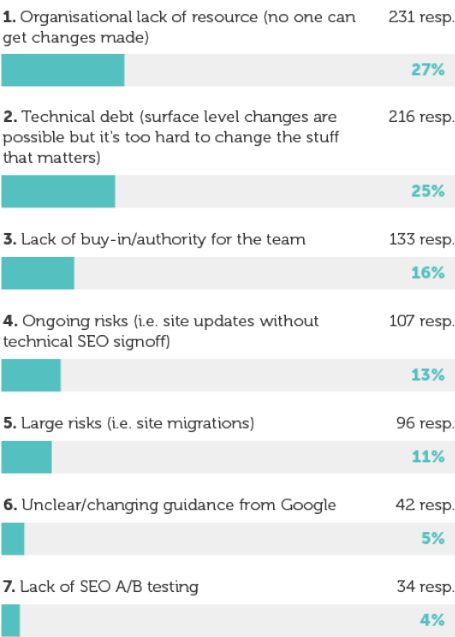
I'd love to know why. Is this just a reflection of market share and people's exposure to different platforms? Can you see the difference in answers from people in terms of seniority and decision making status?

The Impact Of Technical SEO

In this section, we asked all respondents to answer a series of questions about the impact of the work that they do.

What do you think is the biggest risk to technical SEO success?

The answers here were pretty close but a lack of resources was the most popular answer with 27% of respondents citing this as the biggest risk to technical SEO success. Second in the list with 25% was technical debt, followed by a lack of buy-in/authority at 16%.



What the experts think...



**Mercy
Janaki**



Companies repeatedly lack the standard operating procedures describing how SEO changes or new ideas should be executed on the website. Similarly, the rigid workflows hinder their abilities to approach technical issues differently. Technical Debt is not spoken much among the SEOs. Technical debt not just restricts a company's capability to innovate, adapt and grow but also prevents SEO teams from intensifying numerous opportunities.

I have been working in SEO for many years, both client and agency side. Unfortunately I still see a lot of technical changes have not been implemented due to a lack of resources.

I have found one way to get past this is to have more buy-in from the top managers. Once they realise the impact of the technical changes (and how it impacts the bottom line), resources are allocated to working on those issues which is great!

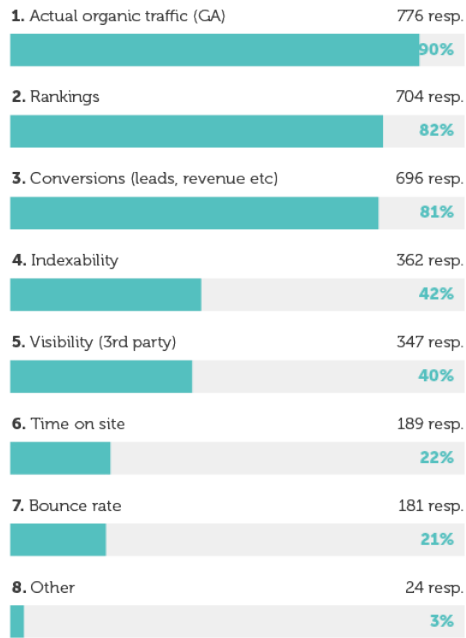


**Jo Juliana
Turnbull**



What metrics do you measure SEO performance on? Select all that apply.

Here, we asked respondents which metrics they used to measure their performance and the most popular answer with 90% of the votes was organic traffic, followed by rankings (82%) and conversions very close behind at 81%.



What the experts think...



Miracle Inameti-Archibong



It's great to see that 81% of respondents voted for conversions (leads revenue etc) as a metric to measure performance. However, I would have loved to see that number at 100% above the organic traffic vote because traffic is just a vanity metric if it doesn't convert.

One of the greatest barriers to getting buy-in for SEO is showing ROI in other to combat this, we need to be more commercial-minded and focus on metrics that Stakeholders understand and are most concerned about.



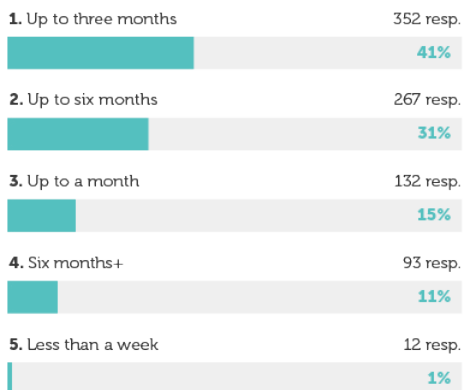
Zoe-Lee
Skelton



We know that increases in organic traffic are an essential KPI when measuring how well a website is performing, but being able to tie this back to increases in keyword rankings that your work has directly influenced is something that not all agencies do effectively. One of the best ways to do this is to ensure that both you and the client have an agreed set of keywords that your activity will focus on. I like to ensure these keywords are incorporated into digital PR campaign landing pages through a strategic internal linking plan.

When setting expectations with stakeholders, how long do you say that it can take for technical SEO changes to have an impact on traffic?

41% of technical SEOs set the expectation that it can take up to three months to see an impact on traffic from technical SEO work. Next up was up to six months with 31%.



What the experts think...

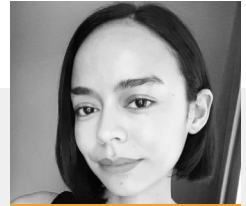


Orit
Mutznik



This really depends on whether the question is asked before or after the SEO has a good grasp of the allocated resources. Up to 3 months is incredibly ambitious considering the time it takes to get buy in from stakeholders, priority, work completion and the time it takes Google to index the change.

I find these answers interesting. Personally (and I could be wrong here) I find it harder and harder to set timeline expectations. Generally speaking I'd say it's reasonable to expect that changes take at least 3 months to show results, positive or not. But I've seen much shorter time frames around algo updates (assuming here that the changes went live when a section was being re-evaluated by G and was picked up faster than usual?) and much longer time frames too (for example initiatives rewarded months later, post algo-update after a website re-evaluation). It definitely makes things a little harder and I think ensuring short term KPIs live under a long-term (12 months +) objective really makes sense here. Quarterly or monthly key results should really be seen as signals for a long term objective, not used as isolated short-term targets.



Carine
Bourgogne



Technical SEO Ranking Signals

For the next series of questions, we asked technical SEOs about ranking signals and which ones they felt were most influential.

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

In terms of on-page SEO signals, page titles scored pretty high in terms of their influence on organic search traffic. Page headings and ALT text also scored relatively high, followed by META descriptions.

	Zero	Minimal	Neutral	Some	High
Page titles	1%	5%	2%	31%	61%
META descr.	14%	26%	15%	35%	10%
Page headings (Hx tags)	1%	9%	5%	53%	32%
ALT text on images	3%	25%	18%	47%	7%

What the experts think...



Natalie
Mott

86% of technical SEOs are unaware that meta descriptions are not a direct ranking factor it seems?



Interesting that image ALT text is still regarded as such an influencer.



Paige
Hobart

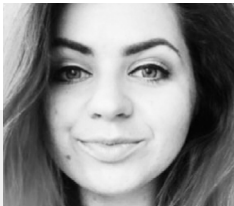


In your experience, how influential are the following navigation and Schema signals in improving organic search traffic?

Our respondents rated site-wide navigation and internal links very highly when it came to improving organic search traffic. In fact, out of all respondents, no one said that site-wide navigation had zero influence and only 1% said that internal links have zero influence.

	Zero	Minimal	Neutral	Some	High
Site wide nav and architecture	0%	3%	3%	24%	70%
Schema markup	1%	7%	11%	57%	24%
Internal links	1%	2%	2%	29%	67%

What the experts think...



Kristina
Azarenko



I'm so happy to see that SEOs realize the importance of internal links. From my experience, optimizing internal linking and anchor text goes a long way (and luckily, it's not always relying on the dev resources).

In your experience, how influential are the following content and URL signals in improving organic search traffic?

When it comes to content and URL-related signals, respondents typically agreed that quality and uniqueness of content were important, although slightly fewer people felt that uniqueness was important compared to quality. URLs being readable and including target keywords scored slightly lower overall.

	Zero	Minimal	Neutral	Some	High
Quality of content	0%	1%	2%	15%	82%
Uniqueness of content	1%	2%	5%	35%	57%
URLs being readable to users	6%	16%	22%	40%	16%
URLs inc. target keywords	6%	17%	15%	45%	17%

What the experts think...



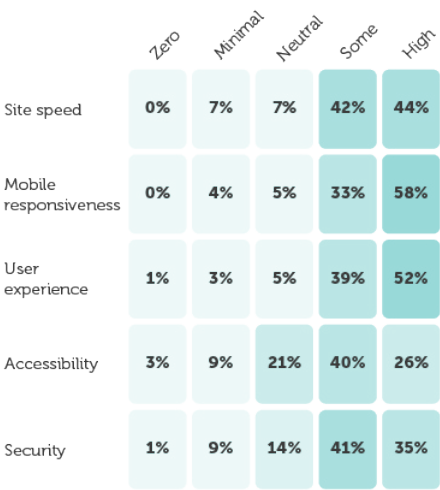
Paige
Hobart

I would have thought URLs would have scored lower overall, I would consider this more a 'best practice' than something I would do to increase traffic.



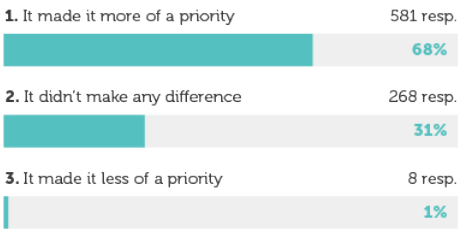
In your experience, how influential are the following user-related signals in improving organic search traffic?

For user-related signals, the ones deemed most influential by our respondents were mobile responsiveness, site speed, and user experience. Accessibility and security scored slightly lower with most respondents saying that they had some influence, but not a high level.



Did Google’s formal announcements surrounding Core Web Vitals influence your priority level at all?

Next, we wanted to understand whether the formal announcements and notices given by Google regarding Core Web Vitals made a difference to how much it was prioritised by SEOs. 68% of respondents said that yes, these announcements made CWV more of a priority to them.



What the experts think...

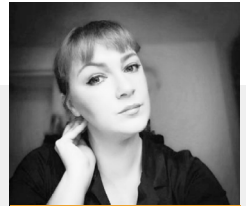


**Mercy
Janaki**

More than the formal announcement from Google, the chatter that gets created in SEO community is the biggest driving force for this result. The early analysis after the CWV rollout indicates that it has very little impact on the ranking. Google also confirmed that it is not going to create a disruptive change.



Personally I found that it became more of a priority for myself and client contacts, but less so for dev and product teams who just wanted to push things out. There's a definite need for further education around this for clients - have been doing it for mine, and know others who have as well, but even then it's difficult to prove how much of an impact these things have if they don't implement fixes.

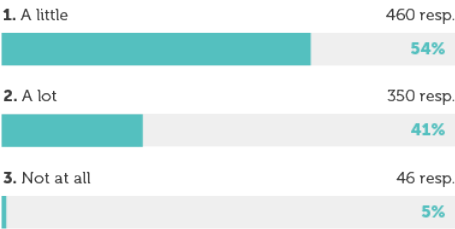


**Natalie
Arney**



To what extent does Google influence prioritising your technical SEO roadmap with formal announcements of upcoming changes e.g. Core Web Vitals/Site Speed/Mobile indexing?

Following on from this, we asked respondents about how announcements from Google influence their technical SEO roadmap. Just over half (54%) said that it affected things a little whilst 41% said it affected things a lot. Only 5% said that it didn't affect things at all.



What the experts think...



Orit Mutznik

Google announcements are very helpful to get reinforcements on current priorities, but they don't drive them.

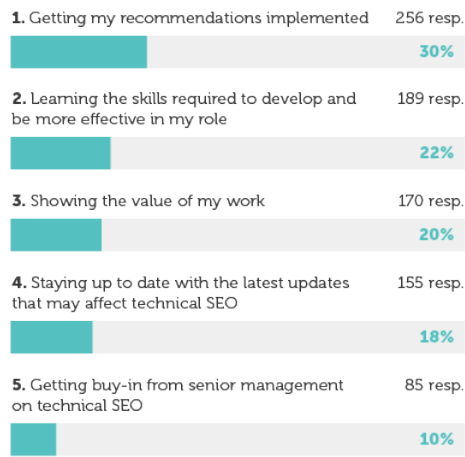


The Technical SEO Skillset

In this section, we asked all respondents across in-house, agency and freelance roles for their thoughts on the required skillset of a technical SEO.

What’s the hardest part of your job?

When it comes to the hardest part of a technical SEOs job, the most popular answer was getting recommendations implemented which 30% of respondents said was hard for them.



What the experts think...



Areej
AbuAli

I didn’t expect “learning the skills required” to come in second place. This highlights a learning gap and that more support is required for tech SEOs in the industry.





**Hannah
Smith**



Interesting that it's a fairly close call between "getting recommendations implemented", and "learning the skills".

I do worry that many SEOs are feeling a considerable amount of pressure to: LEARN ALL THE THINGS; and how necessary that really is in reality.

I feel like there's a lot of talk in the industry about which skills an SEO has to have, which from my perspective are largely nonsense, and only serve to make people feel bad about themselves.

As an SEO the skills you might or might not need are necessarily specific to your situation and specialisation. Pay no attention to the babbling masses; focus on learning the things you are most interested in, and you feel will be most likely to help you do the job you do right now; and/or whatever job you think you might want to do in the future.

SEO is one of the jobs where continuous learning and development is a must - yet, there are still SEOs out there that can't get the resources they need to level-up.

I believe this is not due to a lack of training budgets or access to information but due to a lack of understanding that training and learning has to be part of the job role itself.

There is more free information about SEO out there than all of us combined can read but not everyone has the luxury of spending a few hours every week working on learning new things as part of their working day.



**Roxana
Stingu**



Please rate the following in terms of how important you think they are for a technical SEO to fully understand:

Here, we asked respondents to rate how important certain skills were for a technical SEO to fully understand. Overall, the highest rated skills were data analysis, content strategy and reading/understanding HTML and CSS.

	Not important at all	Fairly important	Very Important	Essential
Reading and understanding HTML/CSS	2%	23%	33%	41%
Reading and understanding JavaScript	12%	46%	29%	13%
Writing HTML/CSS	31%	43%	19%	8%
Writing JavaScript	55%	34%	9%	2%
Log file analysis	11%	41%	34%	15%
Python	51%	39%	8%	2%
Regex	18%	45%	27%	11%
Machine learning	49%	38%	11%	2%
Data analysis	2%	15%	27%	57%
Databases such as SQL/BigQuery	33%	46%	17%	4%
Link building	19%	28%	29%	25%
Content strategy	5%	17%	29%	49%
Commercial awareness such as profit/loss and revenue	3%	20%	33%	41%

What the experts think...



**Kerstin
Reichert**



Good to see data analysis and even content strategy be valued highly as a core skill to have for tech SEOs.

What I would have expected to be much higher is commercial awareness, especially as 'getting recommendations implemented' seems to be the main blocker for most respondents.

In my experience having strong commercial awareness and including business-relevant KPIs (conversions, revenue) in performance reports will support getting senior-level buy-in and essentially help get requirements and recommendations implemented.

Data analysis is by far the most important here and rightly so, being able to look into performance data gives us the feedback that our changes have had an impact (or not).



**Paige
Hobart**



**Orit
Mutznik**

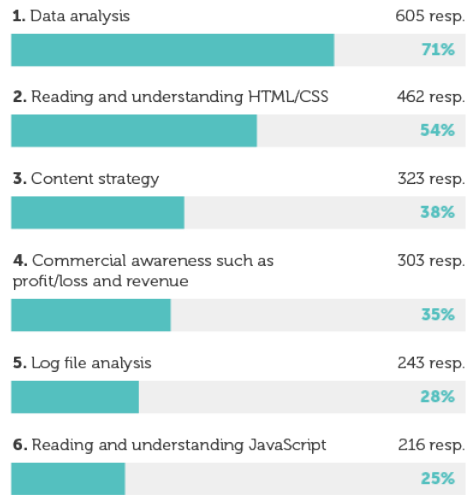


I'm surprised by how high log file analysis, machine learning, SQL/BigQuery and regex scored in this poll. I've worked at medium to large companies that didn't have centralised logs or access to SQL/BigQuery or even analysts to help with machine learning and, as much as this would have been preferable to have, we've achieved results regardless.

Regex in particular is a frustration that many SEOs share, and it's also good to have skill in my opinion, you can always get help from developers and there are plenty of resources out there.

What do you think are the top three skills that a technical SEO should have right now?

Finally, we wanted to get more specific and ask what the top three skills for a technical SEO to know should be. Scoring highest was data analysis with 71% of respondents saying that this was in their top three skills.



What the experts think...



Natalie
Mott



Surprising that there's more of an expectation for technical SEOs to have content strategy skills over reading JavaScript.



Hannah
Smith



As I mentioned before, I don't think it's possible to create a sensible list of skills that all technical SEOs ought to have, because there's no such thing as a typical technical SEO, or indeed, a typical technical SEO project.

As such, I'm a little worried that some technical SEOs may read this list and think that the top ranked skills are the things that they either need to have, or ought to focus on. From my perspective, that's almost certainly not the case.

That said, I do think that these results are directionally interesting.

The top two on the list aren't a surprise; but "Content Strategy" being ranked so highly is. I think perhaps it speaks in part to the ways in which search algorithms have evolved over time, and perhaps, in turn, also to the ways in which the industry is evolving. Is content strategy a more important skill because we're less siloed than we once were, and instead, are working more closely with other functions across organisations? Possibly :)

I was also a little surprised that commercial awareness wasn't ranked more highly, because, as I mentioned before, I believe that technical SEOs need to have an understanding of the commercial goals of an organisation in order to make appropriate recommendations.

If you forced my hand and made me rank these things, that's the first box I'd tick :)

Methodology and Respondent Demographics

Methodology

The survey opened on 27th July 2021 and closed on 2nd September 2021. During this time, 873 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.

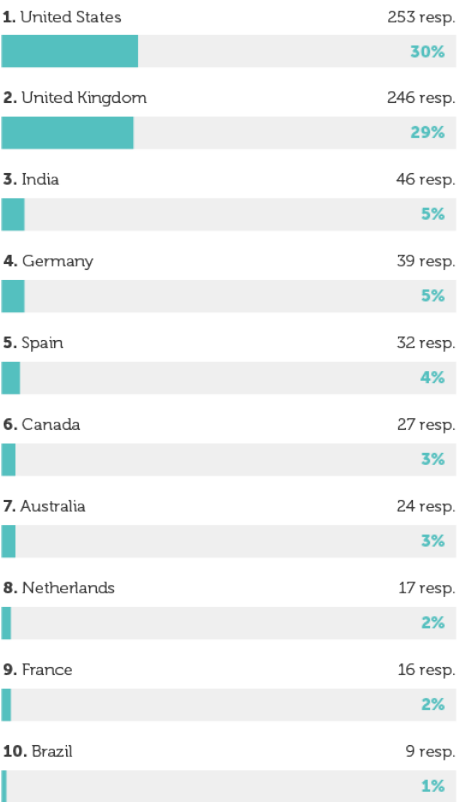
For example, those who described themselves as in-house marketers answered several questions which were customised to them. This is why not all questions will add up to 100% of respondents, along with the fact that the majority of questions were optional.

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.

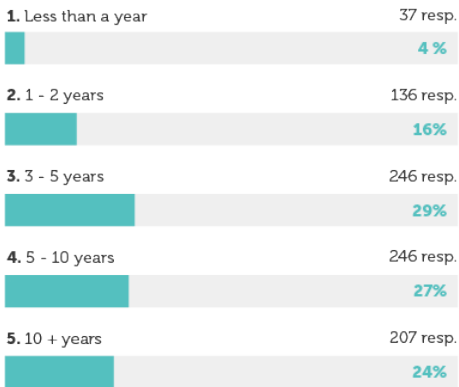
Demographics

Below is a breakdown of the key demographics of respondents.

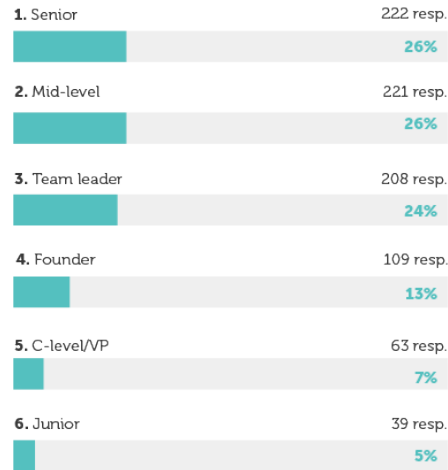
In what country are you based?



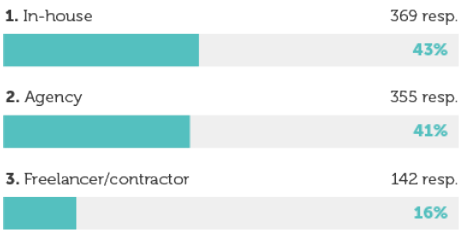
How many years have you been working in technical SEO?



How would you describe your role?



How would you describe who you work for?



Contributors

Thank you to the 873 people who took the time to take the state of technical SEO survey and share their thoughts with us. We never expected such a great response and we really do appreciate it.

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

[Areej AbuAli](#) - Head of SEO, Papier

[Carine Bourgogne](#) - SEO Manager, Simply Wall St

[Crystal Carter](#) - Senior Digital Strategist, Optix Solutions

[Hannah Smith](#) - Founder, Worderist

[Jo Juliana Turnbull](#) - Marketing Consultant, SEO Jo Blogs

[Kerstin Reichert](#) - SEO and Content Lead, SeedLegals

[Kristina Azarenko](#) - SEO Consultant, MarketingSyrup

[Mercy Janaki](#) - Global Head of SEO, Webenza

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[Natalie Arney](#) - SEO Consultant

[Natalie Mott](#) - SEO Consultant

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[Paige Hobart](#) - Head of SEO, ROAST

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[Serena Pearson](#) - SEO Manager, ThinkMoney

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Thank You

An extra thank you to Hannah Smith and Roxana Stingu for their help and feedback when putting the survey together.



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