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BENCHMARK REPORT

2012 Search Marketing - SEO Edition

Research and Insights on Creating and Capitalizing on a Rich End-User Search Experience

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2012 Search Marketing – SEO Edition

Benchmark Report

Research and Insights for Creating and Capitalizing on a Rich End-User Search Experience

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2012 Search Marketing Benchmark Report – SEO Edition

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NEW RESEARCH AND INSIGHTS FOR CREATING AND CAPITALIZING ON A RICH END-USER SEARCH EXPERIENCE

A rich end-user experience has become the hallmark of search marketing. Searchers now receive instant, real-time, personalized and local information. Blended search supports these developments by generating results pages that include not only blue links, but also video, images, news, press releases, customer reviews and real-time social media content.

This colorful backdrop of search activity is the setting for MarketingSherpa's eighth annual benchmark report of search engine marketing. Last year's study looked at managing the evolving search and social climate to achieve optimal results; this year's report builds on that by examining the fast-paced and growing shift to inbound marketing efforts. The role of content, including optimized local content, also comes under study. Marketers rated content creation as the most difficult (yet most effective) SEO tactic. This comes as no surprise, since content marketing sits at the intersection of search and social. To achieve good organic rankings and ensure that their products and services are found across all formats and venues, organizations must be strategic with their planning and processes, and ever-savvy with the creation and optimization of all digital assets. Simply put, good content makes for a better end-user experience.

Benchmark Report

MarketingSherpa Benchmark Reports provide marketing executives and practitioners the comprehensive research data and insights needed to compare an organization's practices and performance against industry benchmarks in order to guide strategic decisions and tactical planning.

Organized for fast and easy reference

The *2012 Search Marketing Benchmark Report – SEO Edition* is a comprehensive reference guide containing more than 150 charts with analytical commentary, hundreds of informative insights from your peers, several abridged case studies of real-life search and inbound marketing campaigns and more. To help you quickly locate the information most relevant to your marketing situation, we have segmented data throughout this report by:

- Average of all respondents
- Phases of SEO marketing maturity
- Primary marketing channels
- Organization size
- Key industry sectors

Highlights of this year's study

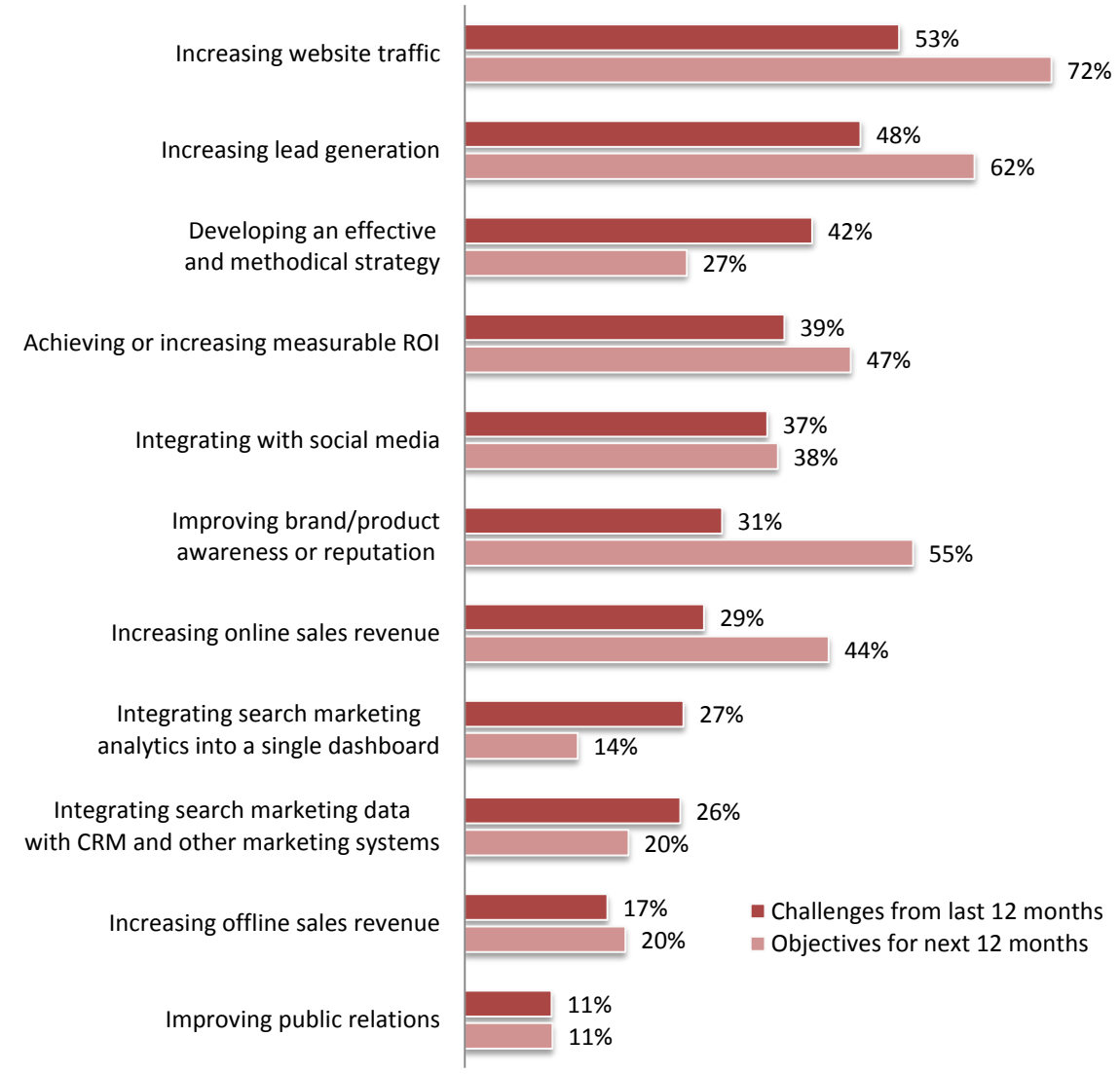
- The alignment of search marketing objectives against the most difficult SEO challenges
- The usage, effectiveness and level of effort required for SEO tactics and content products
- How organizations are allocating marketing dollars and where they are shifting their efforts
- What marketers are doing to fare well in local and mobile search results
- How agencies view their clients' SEO and inbound marketing efforts

KEY FINDING: DEVELOPING A STRATEGY IS A TOP CHALLENGE ... BUT A BOTTOM OBJECTIVE

In planning for the upcoming year, marketers' SEO program objectives frequently addressed the previous year's challenges head-on. Bringing in more website traffic and increasing the volume and quantity of leads generated were cited as last year's top challenges. These now are top objectives for the coming year.

Developing a strategy should be a top objective, especially in light of the fact that developing an effective strategy had been a top challenge for the previous 12 months. A strategy would also serve to guide prioritization decisions for other objectives. Nevertheless, many organizations sidestepped this and zeroed in on clear revenue drivers such as Web traffic, leads, online sales and brand awareness. Interestingly, increasing measurable ROI ranked higher as an objective than developing an actual strategy to do so!

Chart: Comparing most frustrating SEO challenges with most important SEO objectives



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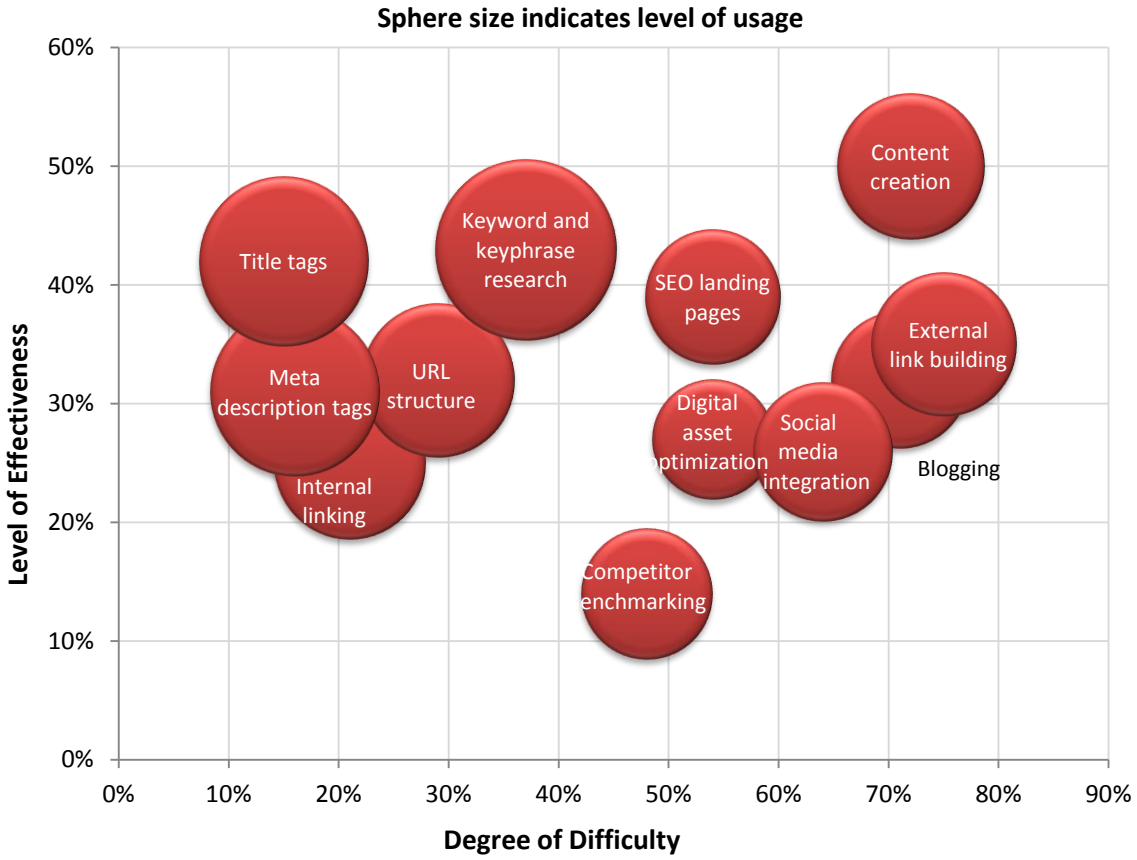
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

KEY FINDING: CONTENT CREATION WORKS THE BEST, BUT TAKES THE MOST WORK

Keyword and keyphrase research is an old standby. When done well, this research delivers results and creates a competitive advantage, explaining its popular levels of usage. Creating title tags is another keyword-related and commonly used tactic – one which marketers considered to be equally effective.

Content creation stands apart in the cluster of tactics, both for its difficulty and its effectiveness. Good content creates buzz and attracts links. For this reason, marketers who commit to the effort required in creating quality content can improve their SEO positions.

Chart: Three-dimensional view of SEO tactics



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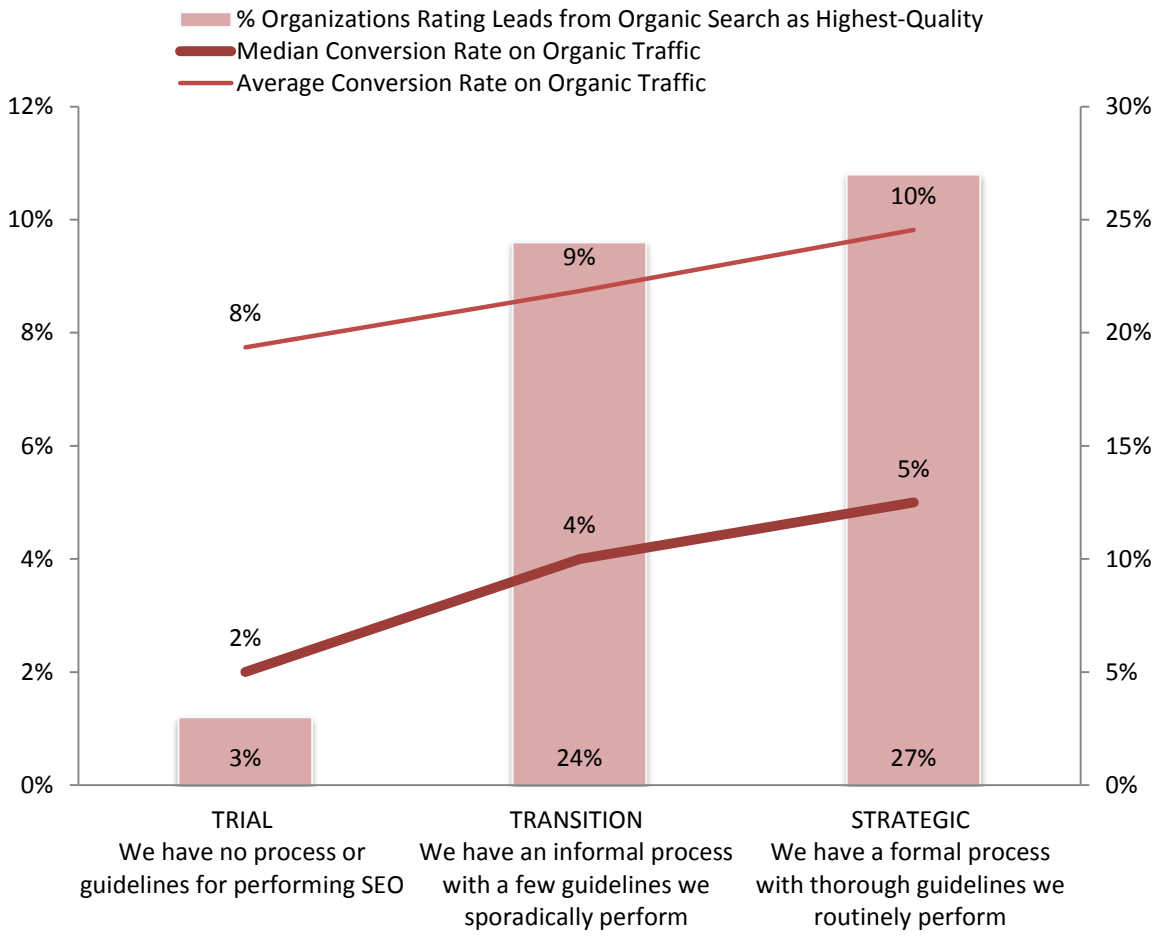
But, what is good and effective content? From the perspective of marketers surveyed, Web pages ranked highly, with half of marketers stating that they are very effective in helping them achieve their marketing objectives. Many Web pages also act as SEO landing pages if they serve as an entry point from search results. When pages have strong customer-oriented language, good layouts and clear call-to-actions, there is a greater likelihood of "clickthrough" than "click back."

Webinars and whitepapers were other leading examples of good content, with 46 percent and 40 percent of marketers, respectively, rating these as very effective content products.

KEY FINDING: INCREMENTAL SEO IMPROVEMENTS ADD UP TO LARGE GAINS

Organizations that routinely follow a formal process and thorough guidelines for their SEO practices and programs reap the biggest bottom-line benefits. One example is lead quality. Organizations in the Trial or Transition phases for SEO performance management each had a percentage of natural search leads deemed "low-quality." In contrast, only organizations in the Strategic phase could declare that all leads from natural search traffic were either of the highest quality or of mixed quality.

Chart: Organic traffic lead quality and conversion rates, by SEO maturity phase



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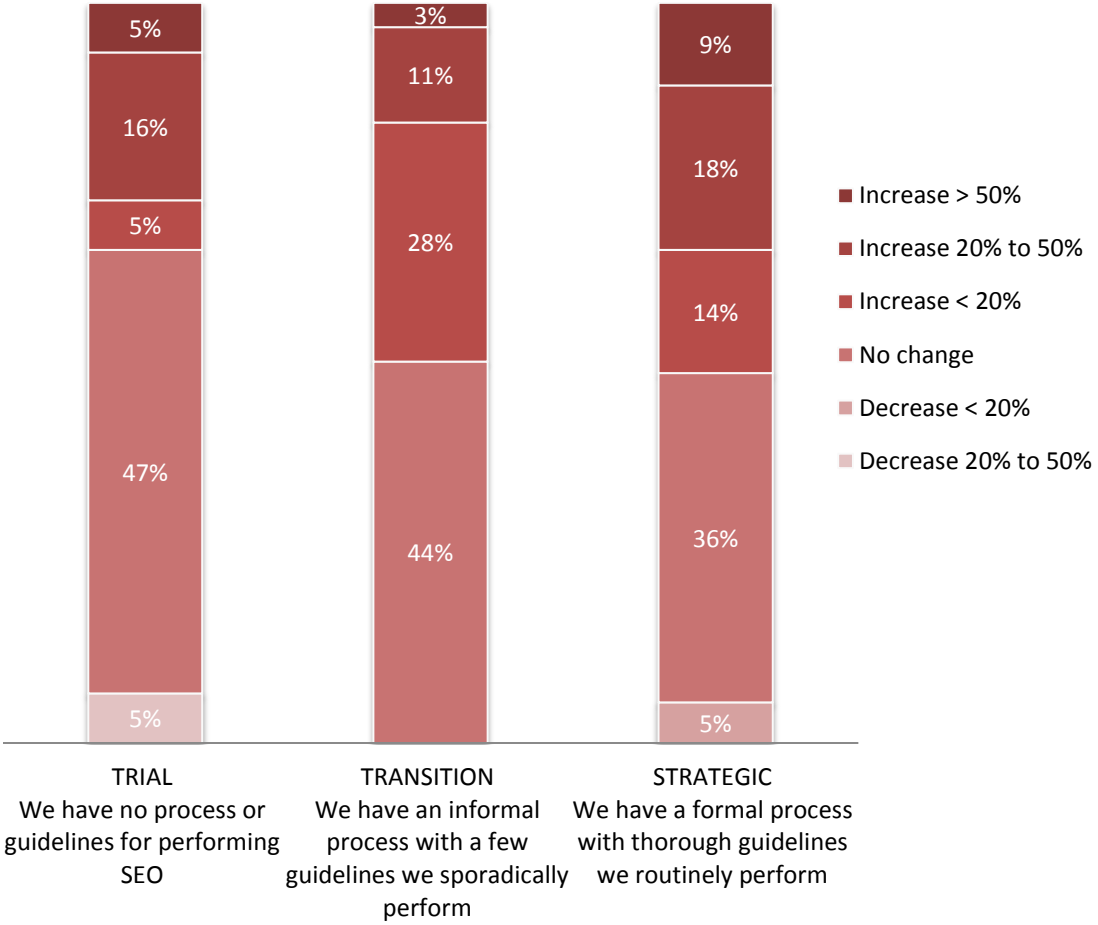
Not only do the efforts of strategically minded organizations pay off through a larger percentage of high-quality leads from organic search traffic, but they also convert more of these leads. When looking at median conversion rates, Strategic organizations tend to convert 150 percent more leads than Trial organizations and 25 percent more than Transition organizations, or those with informal processes and guidelines.

KEY FINDING: FUTURE INVESTMENTS IN SEO BACKED BY HAVING SEO PROCESS IN PLACE

Who doesn't like to get the biggest bang for the buck? Organizations in the Transition and Strategic phases of SEO maturity convert more high-quality leads from natural search visits. As such, it makes sense for organizations to put more money into these programs.

Chart: Expected 12-month SEO budget change, by SEO maturity phase



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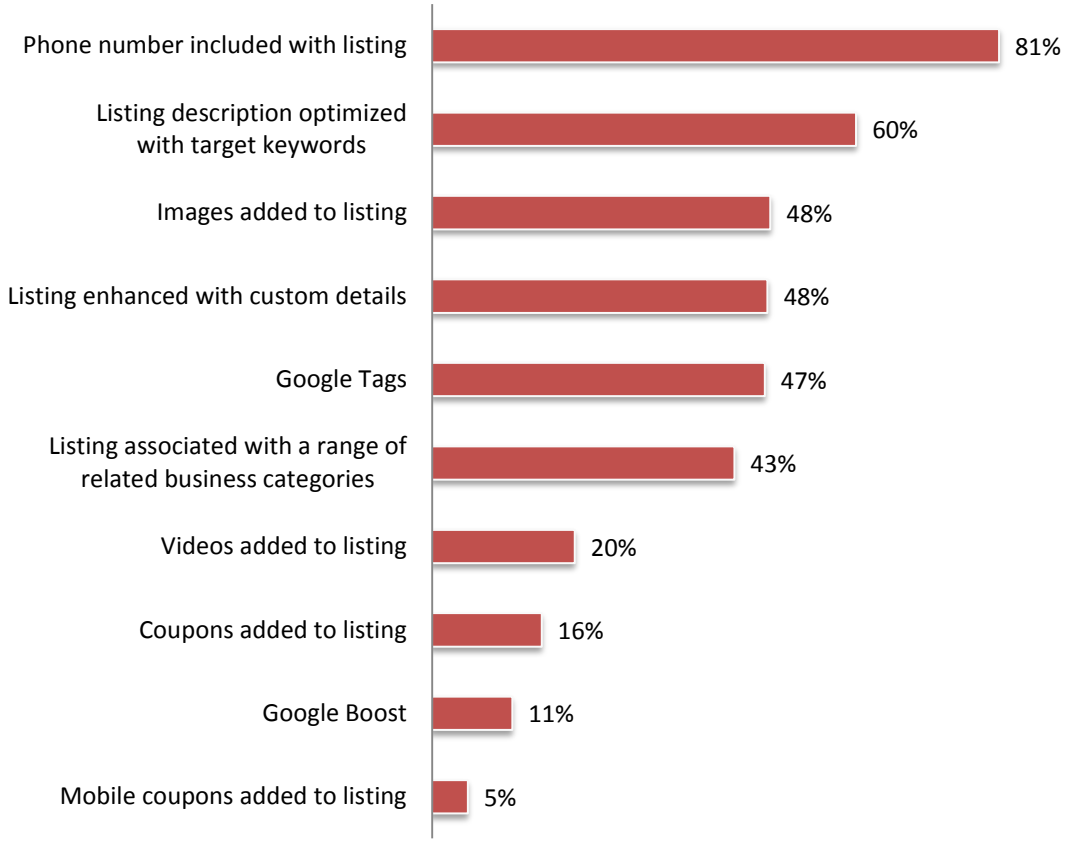
Organizations that are relatively immature with their SEO processes are still investing money into SEO. The overwhelming majority of these organizations spend their SEO budgets on staff salaries, whereas Transition and Strategic organizations tend to divide their budgets across staff salaries, outsourced agency services, and for-fee SEO marketing and analytics tools.

KEY FINDING: LOCAL BUSINESS LISTING TACTICS ARE UNDERUTILIZED

Local business listings and reviews now sit atop natural search results; therefore, it is critical to be found through local search. Despite this reality, only 37 percent of organizations surveyed claimed a local business listing on one or more search engines. Of those, most did not fully employ available listing tactics.

Chart: Local business listing tactics used for local search purposes



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Even fewer organizations – 27 percent – had optimized for local search as part of their organic search (SEO) strategy. Adding local content to Web pages, blog posts and titles was the most popular local optimization tactic for this group, with 81 percent committed to this effort. By contrast, posting customer reviews or making customers aware of a customer review site (e.g. Yelp, Places) were efforts that ranked low in their execution. With local search algorithms placing weight on the quantity of reviews and citations, the importance of encouraging more (unbiased, non-incentivized) reviews cannot be overrated. Interestingly, marketers indirectly agreed with this in another question, where 88 percent said that customer reviews were the most effective content product for helping them achieve their marketing objectives.

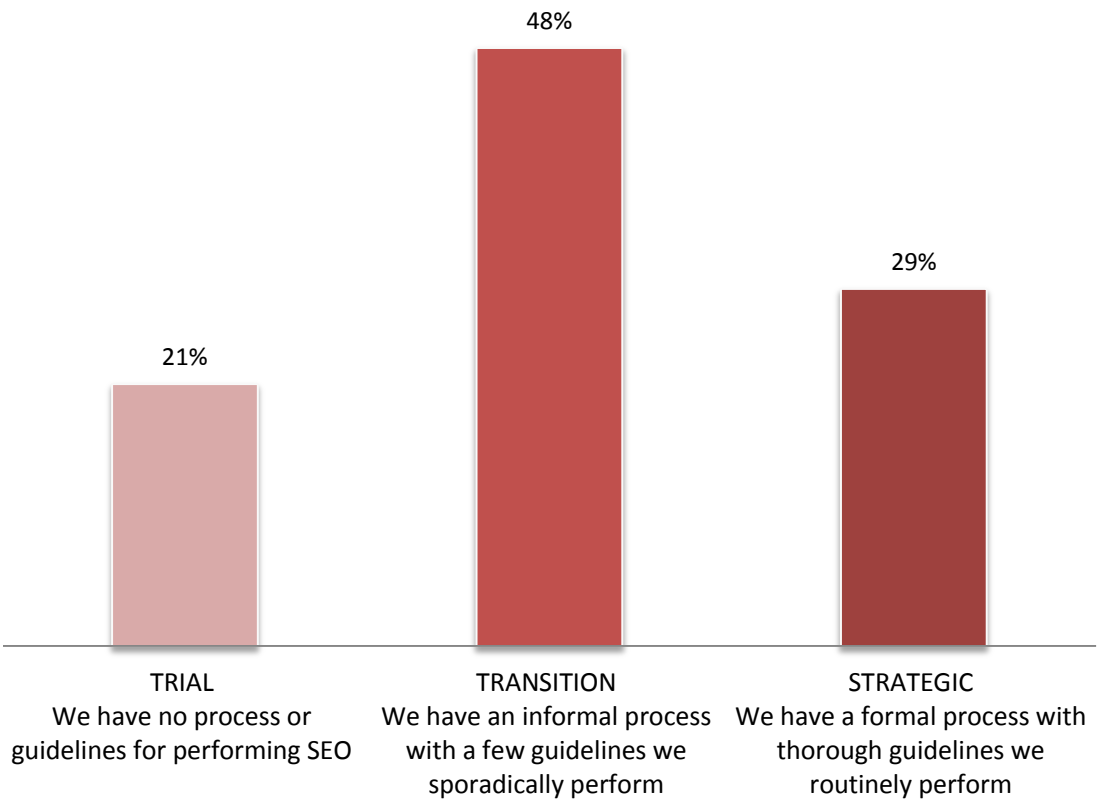
CHAPTER 1: SEO OBJECTIVES AND CHALLENGES

Increasing traffic and generating more qualified leads are the top two challenges and objectives for organizations with respect to SEO campaigns. Organizations that have been most successful at facing down these challenges over the last year are those with a process in place for planning, executing and measuring the performance of their SEO programs.

INFORMAL PROCESSES STILL DEFINE SEO MARKETING MATURITY

Chart: Organizations with a process for planning, executing and measuring SEO programs

Q. Which statement best describes the process your organization uses to plan, execute and measure the performance of your SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO) programs and practices?



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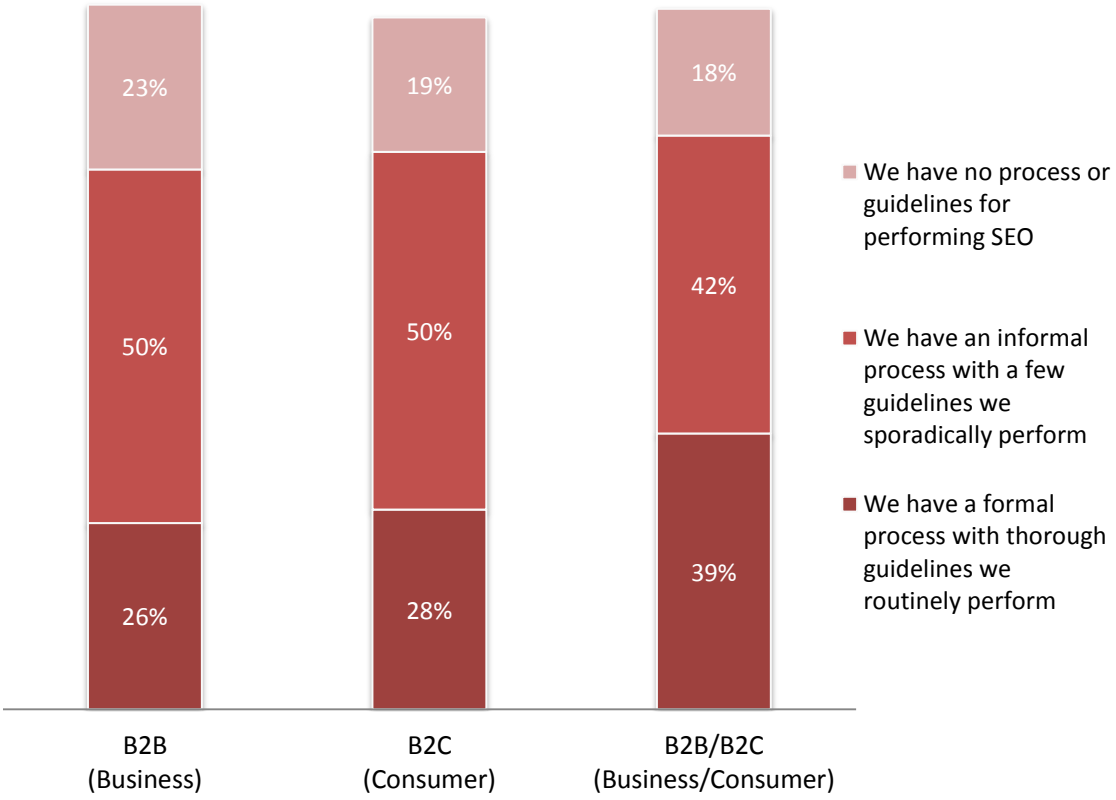
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

The disciplined application of a methodical process for planning, executing and measuring SEO programs still eludes many organizations. Twenty-one percent of organizations have no defined process for their SEO programs, essentially adopting a "hit-or-miss" approach. Strategic organizations, by comparison, view SEO as part of a larger marketing strategy. Planning to this degree requires more of a coordinated and integrated effort. As such, only 29 percent of organizations claim to be in this phase.

Chart: Organizations in each phase of SEO marketing maturity, by primary channel



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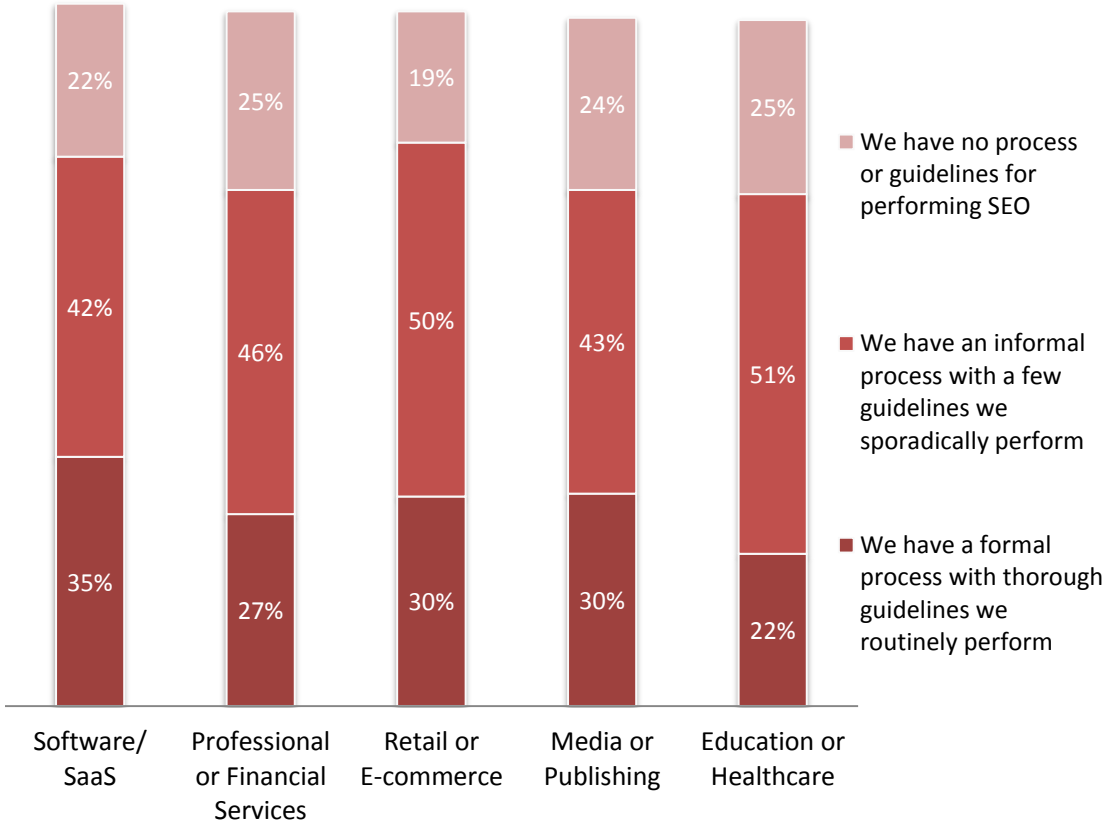
Search engine optimization plays out differently for B2B and B2C companies. The SEO goal for a B2C organization is typically more immediate, often just to generate an online sale in a single visit. The SEO goal for a B2B organization, by contrast, is inclusion in the consideration set of providers for every step of the purchase path. Business purchasers do much more research as part of the buying process, and they often use different search terms for different phases of the cycle. To be successful with SEO, B2B organizations need to optimize for this broad set of search behaviors. This takes focused planning and execution. For this reason, only 26 percent of B2B organizations have made the leap to the Strategic phase.

> *"We develop content by business customer pain points and integrate key words. We outsource this to SEO firm. They submit keyword-rich articles 'off page' to link to our site. We also utilize on-page optimization with a blog, articles, product descriptions, meta tags, and URLs."* – Marketer insight

Chart: Organizations in each phase of SEO marketing maturity, by industry



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Software companies are the most strategic with their SEO programs and practices. This is a competitive industry, marked by many small- and mid-sized players racing to be first to market with their product releases. For many of them, the Internet is their main (or even only) source of orders. Thus, software companies turn to SEO to help them reach potential customers.

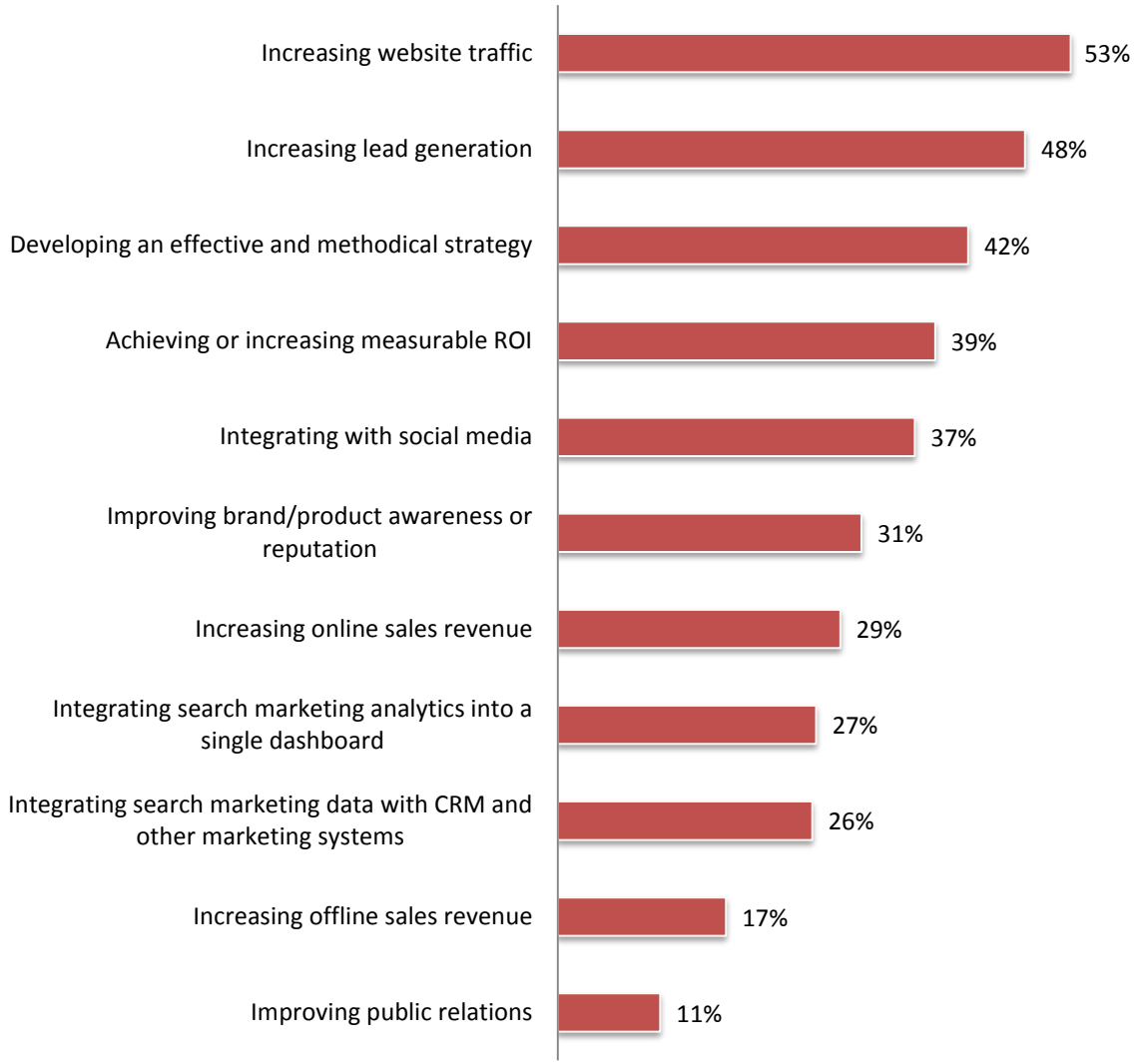
By contrast, educational institutions and healthcare organizations trail in their ability to formalize SEO practices. Many educational institutions rely on directory sites which generate traffic for competitive educational search terms and then resell the leads. Unfortunately, instead of optimizing their own websites to bring students to an environment where they can control the message and experience, many educational institutions rely on these lead gen sites for the majority of their Web traffic. In doing this, they forfeit a valuable opportunity to reach prospective students and create and maintain a strong online name and reputation.

> *"We don't have a process in place. We are just now updating/optimizing our site to work within an SEO world and hope to educate ourselves about strategies to employ."* – Marketer insight

CHALLENGES HAMPERING SEO EFFECTIVENESS OVER LAST 12 MONTHS

Chart: Web traffic and lead generation are top challenges for SEO

Q. Which were the MOST FRUSTRATING CHALLENGES with respect to Search Engine Optimization (SEO) effectiveness for your organization in the last 12 months?



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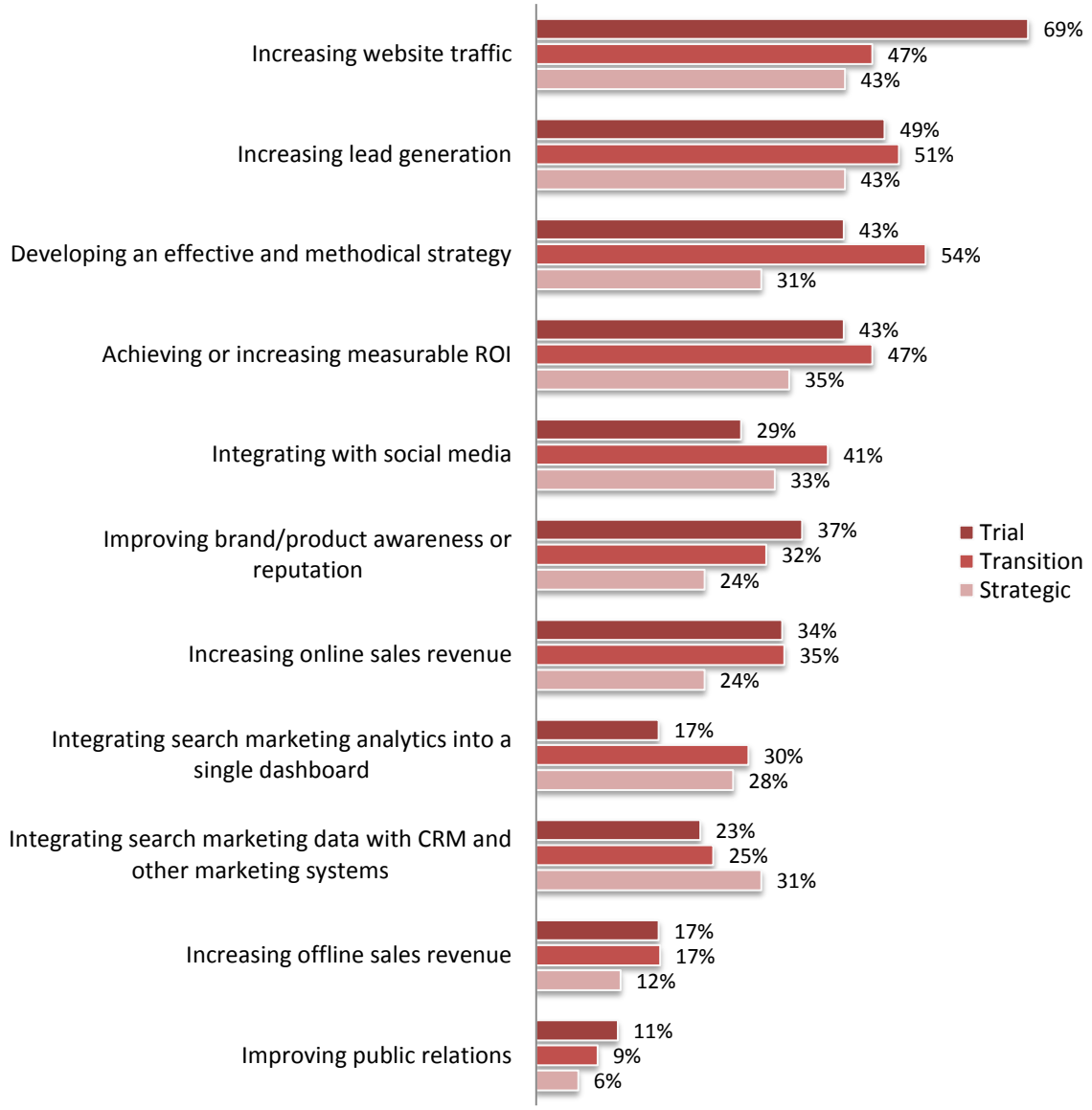
Increasing website traffic and lead generation top the list for the most frustrating challenges with respect to SEO effectiveness. Traffic follows good rankings in search engine results pages (SERPs), and leads follow traffic. Organizations struggling in these areas need strategic solutions, evidenced by 42 percent of organizations stating that the development of an effective and methodical SEO strategy was their third-most frustrating challenge.

Increasing lead generation posed a greater challenge than increasing online sales revenue. This suggests that organizations are better at converting leads than they are at generating them.

Chart: Most frustrating SEO challenges, by SEO maturity phase



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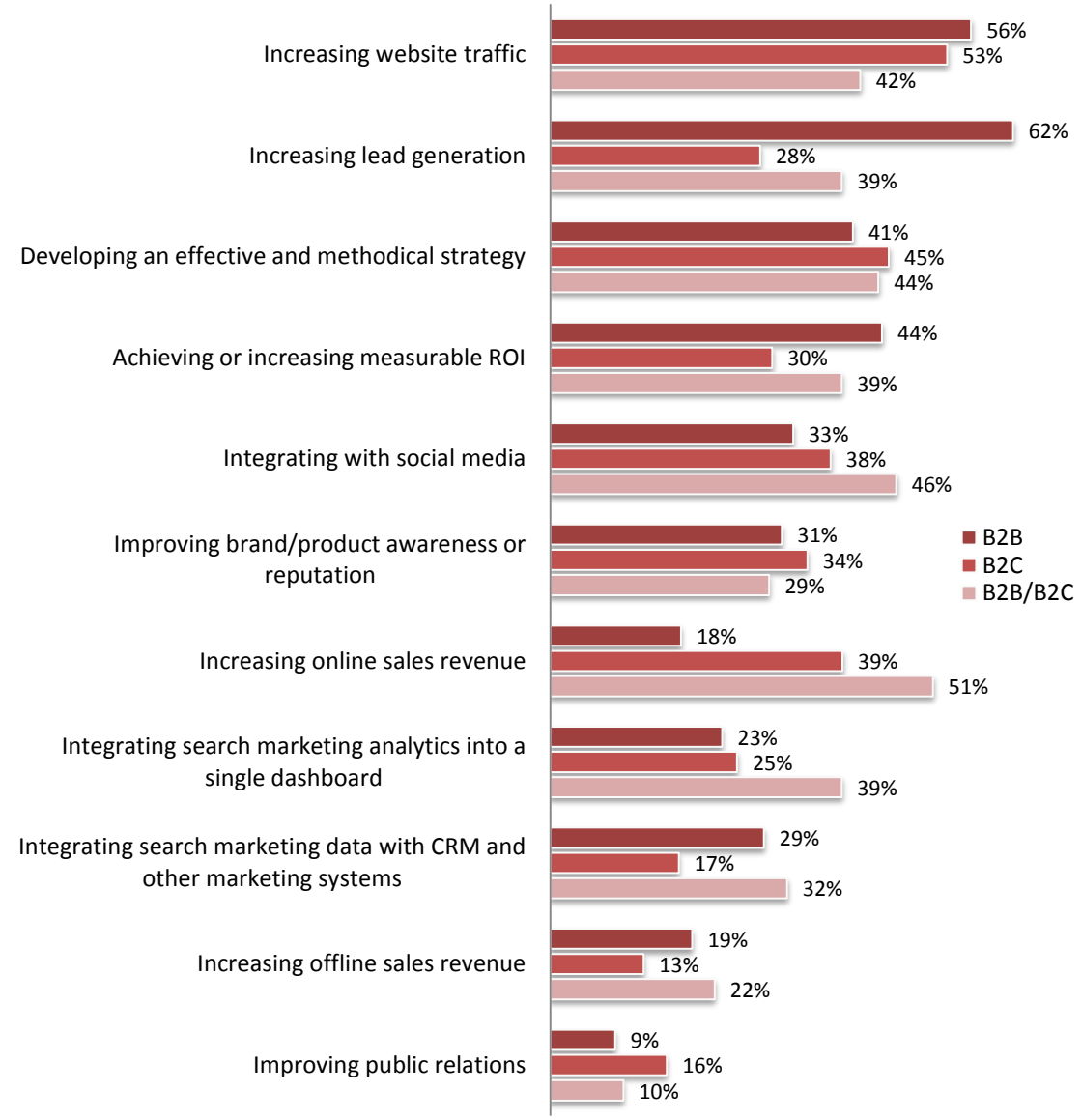
A telling difference exists between Trial and Strategic organizations with respect to their most frustrating SEO challenges. Although website traffic is considered a top concern for all organizations, Trial organizations struggled with this the most. The absence of formalized SEO procedures and guidelines is a likely explanation.

Strategic organizations contend with many of the same challenges as the organizations in other phases, but to a lesser degree. The integration of search marketing data was the one challenge that Strategic organizations faced to a greater degree. Search user behavior can be a powerful indicator of interest and intent (or lack thereof.) The better handle these organizations get on a prospect's or customer's online behavior, the better they can generate and cultivate leads.

Chart: Most frustrating SEO challenges, by primary channel



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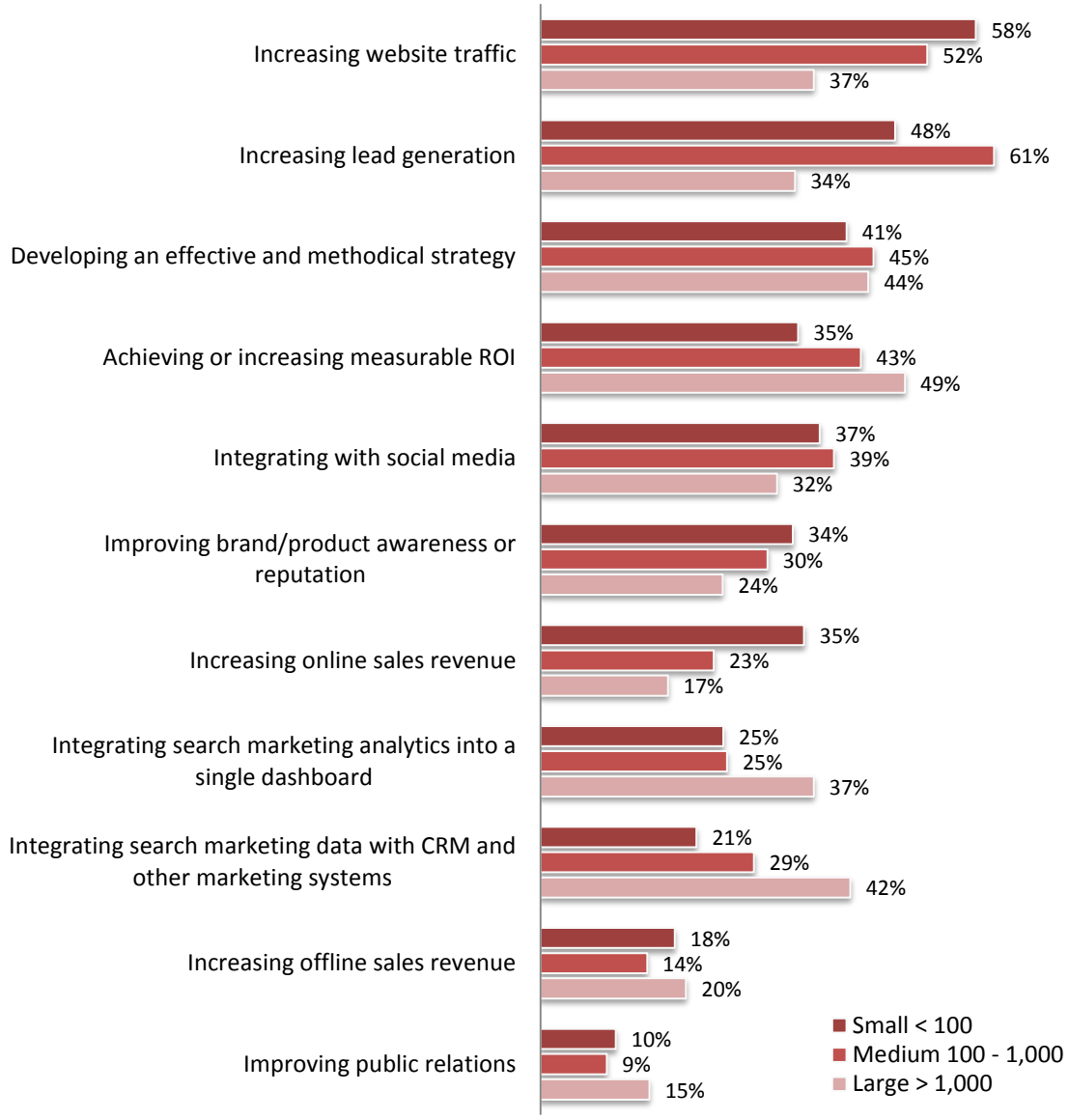
Generating more leads stands out as a top challenge for B2B marketers. Given their longer sales cycles – and the multiple steps through research, consideration and purchase – it is understandable that marketers are looking to bring more leads into the funnel.

Increasing online sales revenue and integrating social media were key challenges hampering the SEO effectiveness for B2B/B2C organizations. Similarly, nearly 40 percent of B2C organization also faced challenges with these areas. Their top challenges, however, dealt with driving more traffic to their websites, and devising a strategy to do so.

Chart: Most frustrating SEO challenges, by organization size



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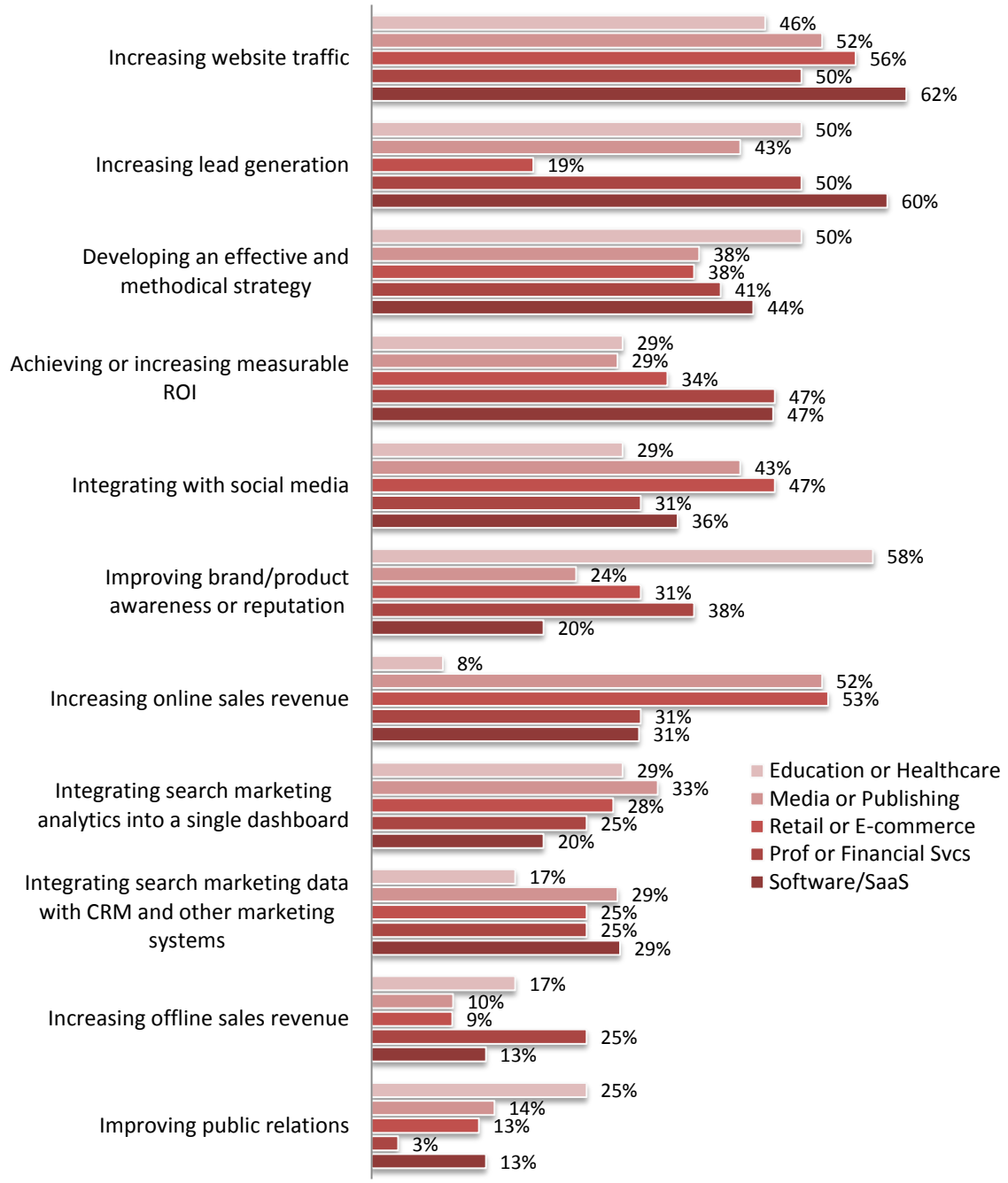
Search engine optimization boosts the abilities of small- and medium-sized organizations to contend with larger players in the marketplace. Good indicators of effectiveness are traffic and leads. As such, these areas posed the most significant challenges.

Achieving measurable ROI was the biggest challenge for large organizations. Data integration – more specifically the ability to track, measure and use data – is fundamental for accurately establishing ROI. Large organizations, with their disparate and complex systems, also found search data integration to be a challenge. Whether they were trying to integrate search marketing analytics into a single dashboard for reporting purposes, or were working on integrating search marketing data into a marketing CRM solution, these types of initiatives proved daunting.

Chart: Most frustrating SEO challenges, by industry



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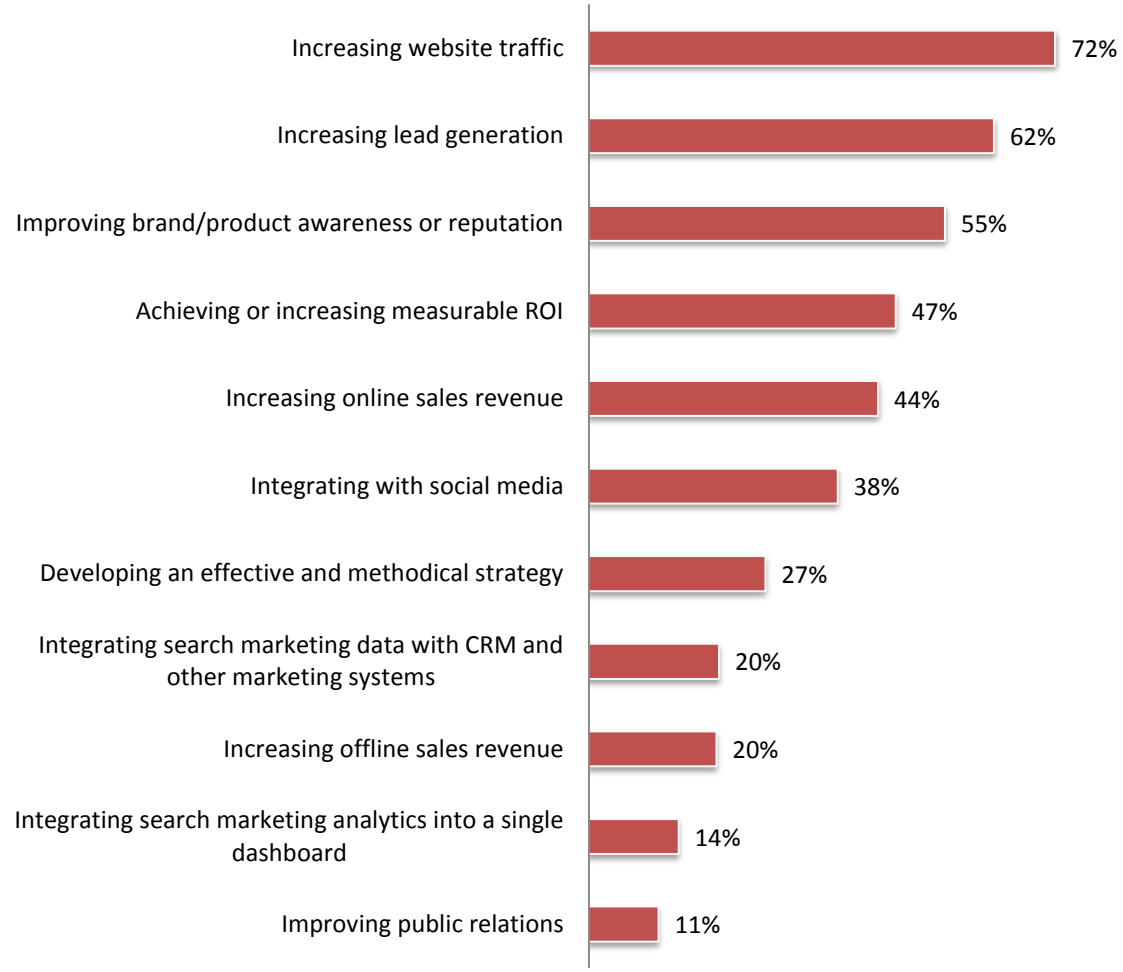
Reputation is critical for all types of organizations, but it is especially important to organizations that offer a knowledge product. Educational and healthcare institutions acquire patients and recruit students based in large part on their reputation. As such, using SEO to improve their awareness and reputation is the most pressing challenge faced by 58 percent of organizations in these industries.

OBJECTIVES FOR SEO PROGRAMS IN NEXT 12 MONTHS

Chart: Increasing Web traffic and lead generation top the list for SEO objectives

Q. Which are the MOST IMPORTANT OBJECTIVES with respect to your organization's search engine optimization (SEO) programs in the next 12 months?



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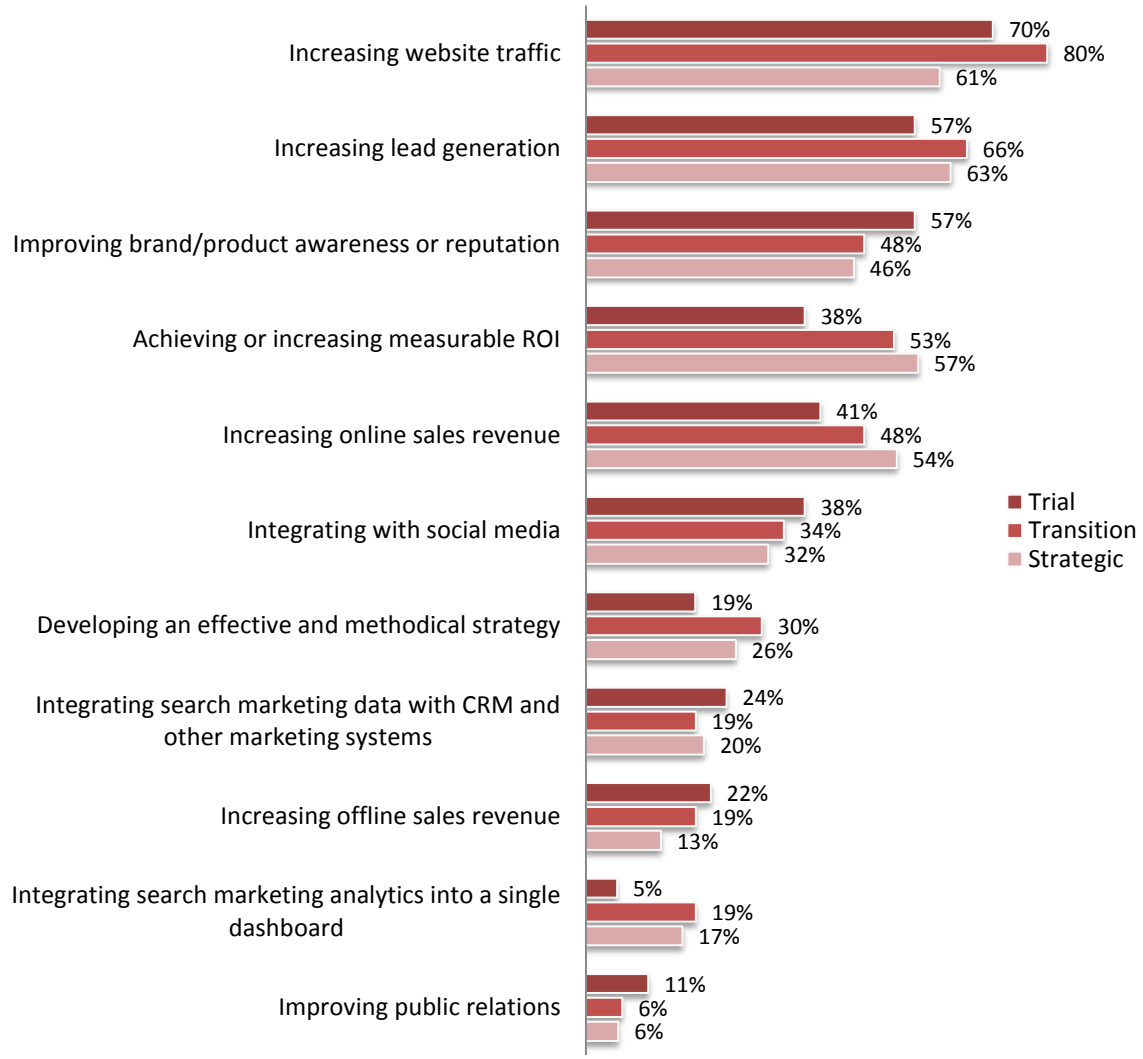
Increasing Web traffic and leads from SEO campaigns are the top objectives for all organizations surveyed. These objectives mirror the top two challenges faced by organizations over the past 12 months.

The lack of an effective strategy was the third-most frustrating challenge faced by organizations. Despite the clear need for a strategy, organizations relegated the development of one down to the seventh spot, choosing instead to focus on more "measurable" objectives – even if having a strategy would help organizations deliver measurably better results.

The impact of operating without a methodical SEO process and strategy is discussed throughout this benchmark report.

Chart: Most important SEO objectives, by SEO maturity phase



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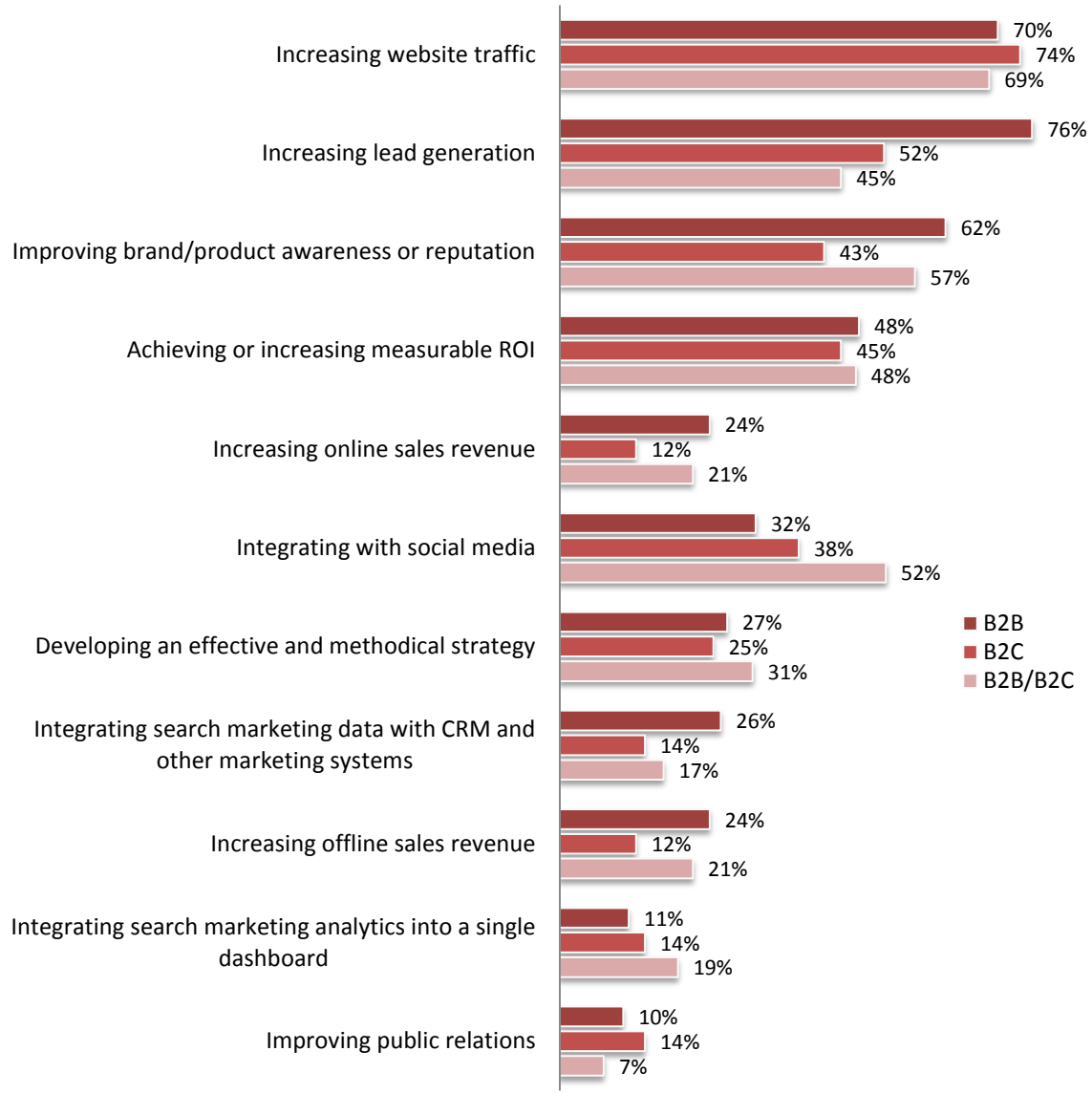
Strategic phase organizations, like organizations in other SEO maturity phases, want to increase traffic and leads. But they are not stopping there. More than half of Strategic organizations also want their SEO programs to produce online sales revenue and a measurable, growing ROI. In other words, traffic and leads provide a good start, but are ultimately worthless if they do not result in revenue.

Nearly one-third of Transition organizations expressed intent to develop an effective and methodical SEO strategy. Unfortunately, this objective is still rated quite low when compared to the others, suggesting that this objective will be downgraded in terms of importance over the coming year.

Trial organizations are directing their attention to social media integration. Social media supports SEO through content generation and link building. As such, integrating with social media augments an organization's ability to increase Web traffic, leads and online revenue, all top objectives for Trial organizations.

Chart: Most important SEO objectives, by primary channel



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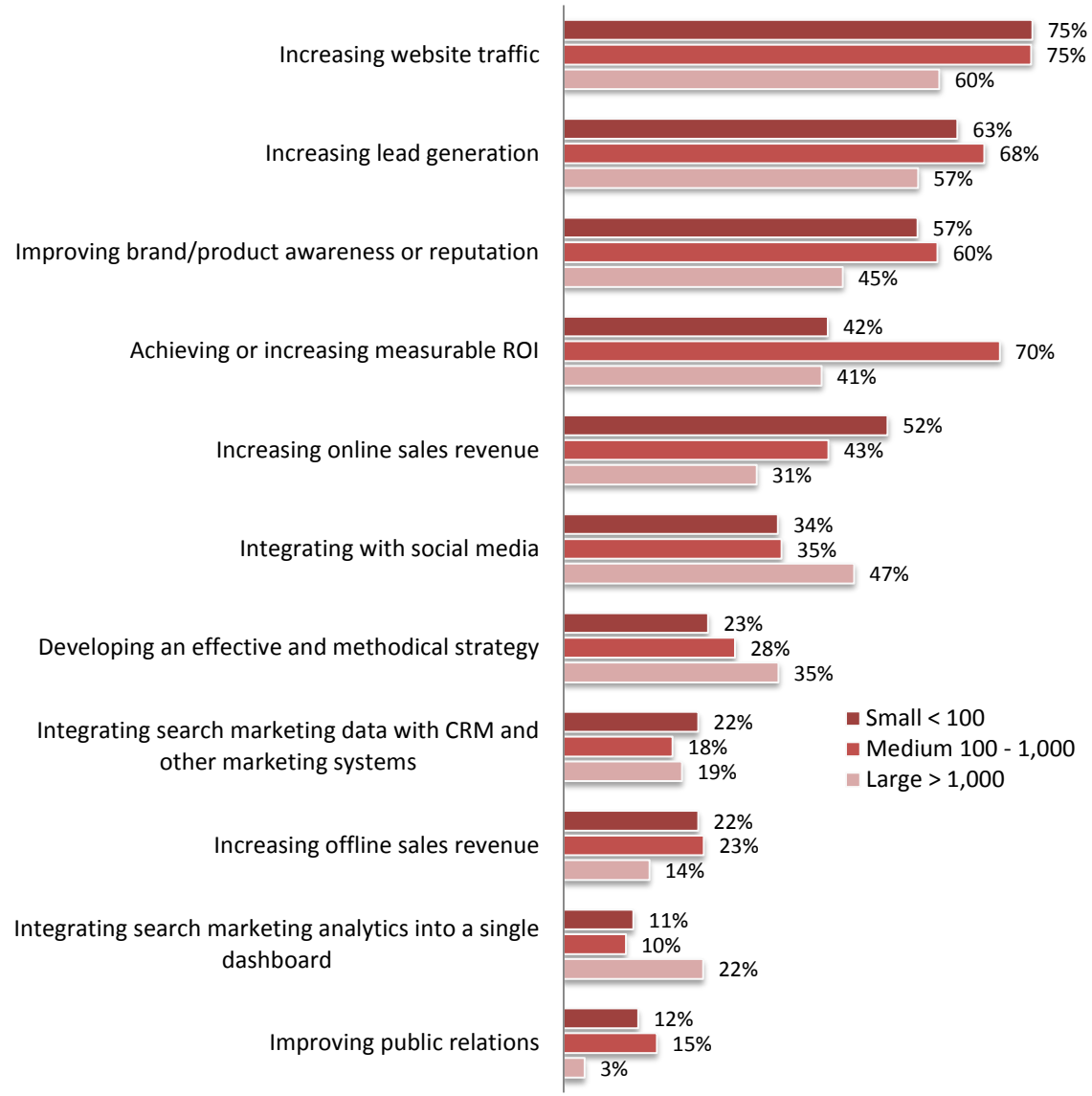
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Increasing lead generation is the most important SEO objective for B2B organizations. Given the longer sales cycles – including funnel steps to generate, qualify, score, nurture and hand-off leads – marketers know that they have to maintain an adequate inflow of leads to keep the funnel full.

Interestingly, this objective is more important for them than simply increasing website traffic. Web traffic does not necessarily produce good quality leads, and B2B marketers may be making this distinction when they choose to focus on lead generation rather than just more traffic.

Chart: Most important SEO objectives, by organization size



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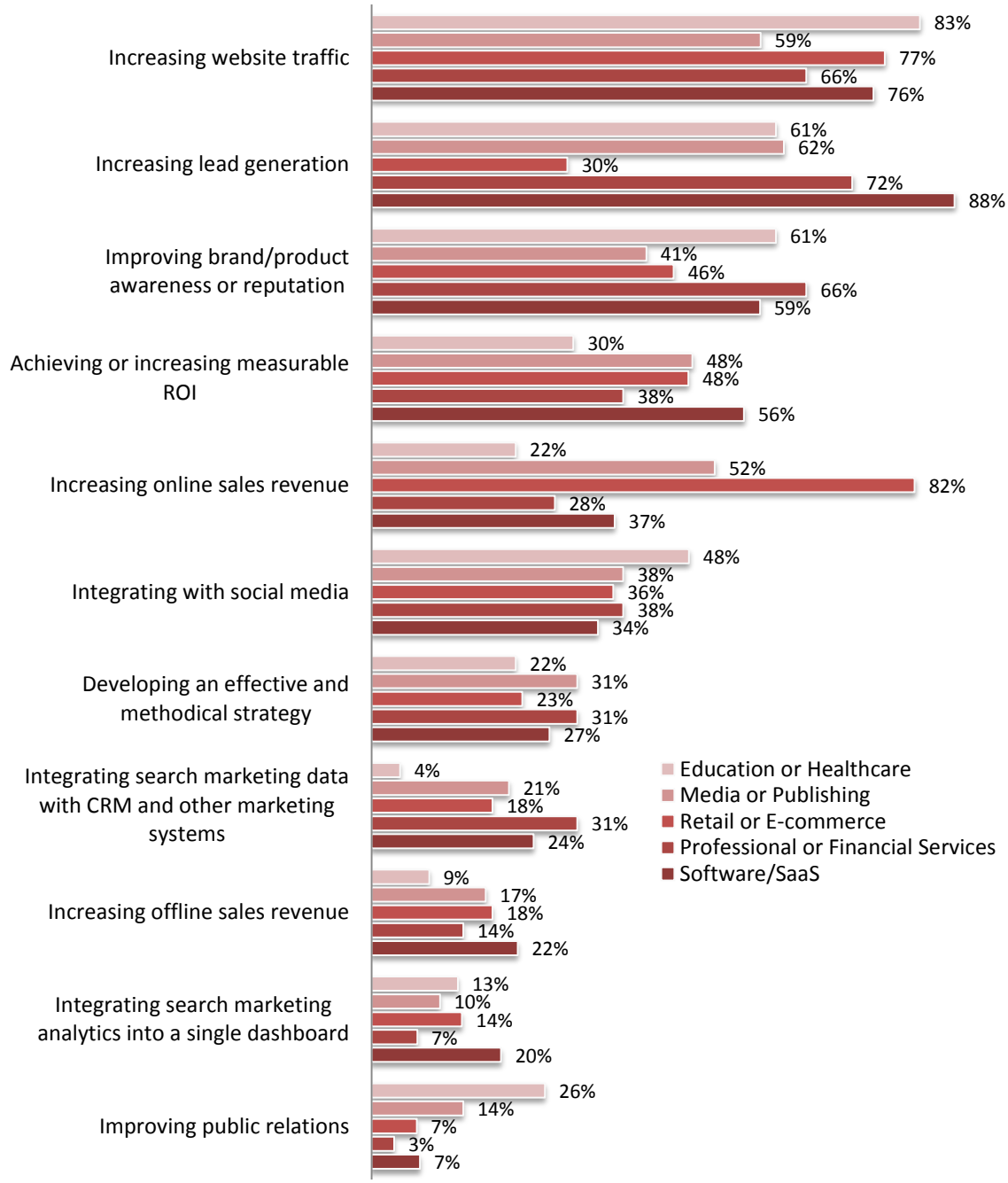
Nearly half of large organizations will put attention on social media integration in the next 12 months. Larger organizations typically lag in this initiative, given the difficulty of devising corporate guidelines and standards of procedure for social media activities.

Achieving and increasing measurable ROI is a critical objective for 70 percent of mid-sized organizations. Many marketers shared how they want to improve the ROI on search, but struggle with quantifying the opportunities.

"We view SEO as necessary, but it is frustrating in that we are unable to measure ROI as precisely as we would like." – Marketer insight

Chart: Most important SEO objectives, by industry



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It comes as no surprise that 82 percent of retail and e-commerce companies want SEO to help them increase their online sales revenue. Appearing in SERPs for appropriate product keywords can spell the difference between oblivion and success, with ultimate success measured by the conversion ability of the website and landing pages.

MARKETER INSIGHTS ON DEVELOPING SEO MARKETING STRATEGIES

Q. Please describe the process your organization uses to plan your Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategy.

TRIAL PHASE MARKETERS

- It is dictated by myself. Once I have time, I will piece together a strategy document.
- It is not yet defined. Still trying to find our feet.
- No formal process
- There is no process.
- We do not have a program in place.
- We have no formal SEO strategy.
- Working with local SEO strategy company to establish.
- Working with Web designer(s).
- Right now, it is hit and miss, nothing formal. Management above me sees no real usefulness and believes the Web is not the way to sell our product.
- We do not have a strategy. It is something we knew we had to do, but we didn't formalize the process.
- We are novices, at best, with SEO, so my students and I are self-taught.

TRANSITION PHASE MARKETERS

- Extensive plan is being rewritten.
- I'm a one-man show, so whatever research shows is necessary, I make the changes.
- Internal team discussions and planning, along with outside source for additional implementation
- It's very informal. We just look for gaps and try to fill them.
- No formal process. Have assigned a staffer to work on this.
- Recording search terms and optimizing them to generate better traffic to our site.
- Research blogs, publications, articles, etc. for new ideas to test.
- SEO strategy is performed by an outside company hired to do so.
- Unfortunately, right now there is no plan. Extremely sporadic and driven by HIPPOs
- We A/B test and look at results in Google analytics on CTR and sales.
- We are a small company. We meet, discuss, review analytics, and decide.
- We currently don't have a process. It is something that is under development.
- We have an SEO firm who does SEO for us.
- We outsource this task to a specialized company.
- Review of the key program offerings. Prioritize searchable terms related to those offerings.
- Try to keep abreast of what's changing.
- Watching trends and tweaking as seems necessary. Doing some testing.
- We don't have a plan. It is pretty informal, but there is a constant monitoring of performance.
- We regularly optimize pages based on insights from analytics and advice from external SEO professionals.

- Use a combination of free search engine tools to extrapolate possible search terms and ongoing analysis of actual search terms used.
- There is no process. It is done sporadically when there are no other 'more urgent' things to do.
- We add as many keywords to text as possible on pages and also link to as many partners and organizations. That's our process in a nutshell.
- Benchmark by observing and measuring rankings of key competitors for key search phrases of interest, analyze site differences for salient issues to address, make changes while maintaining the integrity of the site persona.
- We are using an outside agency now and are optimizing the top 10 Web pages for our business with 2 keywords each.
- First we start with a keyword-analysis, then dive into the code of the website, and finally execute with link building, meta tags, and content-optimization.
- Precisely define market segments and sales goals. Give input to SEO marketing agencies.
- Monitor position on keywords, research keywords and other SEO refinements, and implement into website pages.
- We look at keywords in terms of search volume, conversion ratio, and potential gain from moving up in the rankings. Very ROI driven.
- Target segment -> keyword selection-> testing of keyword in various websites/tools -> choose keyword meta tags -> keyword in title -> content including keyword -> testing of results in various search engines -> and tweaking.
- Determine in what area we have interest. Determine if there is money in that area of interest. Find out the keywords. Determine the competition and the market segment they are targeting. Determine what can solve some of what appears to be the problems of most concern. Develop a site which would best be able to address the problems in a simpler fashion than the competition. Determine where the competition has developed the backlinks. Examine what method, type of content, service or relationship they used to help develop the link. Duplicate it and ask for links. Scrape to find similar authority sites, forums and blogs from which to develop links. Establish social sites to try to gather more juice back. Then, move into related fields and repeat process to build back more traffic.
- We utilize sales results and PPC campaign results to determine the most effective keywords to target. We then focus on those keywords throughout our website, linking programs and press releases.
- Very ad hoc and informal. Often forgotten about until an article or comment prompts some activity.
- I look at what problems my customers have that my company also solves. Then I find out what words my customers use to describe those problems. Then I write content using long-tail keywords based on my customers' descriptions of their problems. It has been very, very effective for marketing to our niche.
- Each brand team works independently to define and execute their digital marketing strategies. The Integrated Marketing Team links the digital strategies together into cohesive messaging.
- Mainly white hat processes including organic link building, content development, etc. We are doing some link renting for now until we get more organic backlinks built out.
- Bi-weekly consultations with outside resource, updates to website content on an as-appropriate basis, identification of target phrases to incorporate into Web materials.

- I read up on best practices and try to implement those as best I can. I'm documenting the process as we go – which is a move toward a formal process.
- SEO is going to be critical to our marketing efforts. Identifying key words, incorporating them in our online collateral, tracking collateral downloads are important.
- We use an SEO cookbook, but it is not a regular or measurable responsibility assigned to an individual.
- We use analytics and in-house SEO tracking to identify poorly performing pages and keywords. We use Insights and analytics to identify better keywords. We modify the problem page text. If no improvement occurs, we test layout changes.
- Systematic review and modification of product pages.
- Using keyword strategies and Hubspot.

Strategic Phase Marketers

- Keeping a fresh approach to trends and adapting a new look and feel. Keeping the site up to date by removing old historical information. Ongoing monitoring of search phrases. Making use of meta tags for page descriptions. Using keywords across the combination of page titles, headings, first paragraphs.
- We have a spreadsheet for each of our websites with all of the specific pages listed. We then have fields for meta tags, keywords, and an overall page description. We also can list how we want the images tagged and alternative text for them within our spreadsheets. We have a specific IT worker to implement any updates we have to this sheet as well. We also have a third-party who can rate and compare our keywords (when people are searching us). We sat down and prioritized our keywords, and we now work increasing our traffic for about four keywords at a time.
- SEO/SEM corporate lead defines process, budget, budget allocation and guidelines. Regionally, SEM is optimized with distribution partners. Keyword listings/updates are shared and optimized along the buying process.
- It was initially based largely on observing what our competitors have done as far as what words to bid. We have drastically increased our efforts in SEO by optimizing all collateral that is put on the Web, and increasing our blog writing, social media efforts and internal linking. We study our results and make necessary changes frequently.
- Let’s just say that our decisions are data driven. We’re quite large, so doing SEO on our site is rather difficult and requires loads of coordination with regions/countries.
- We develop a six-month marketing and merchandising plan and then determine the products, categories and social conversations that will center around those campaigns. Keywords and social monitoring / conversations all follow this same theme.
- This is a prime directive. Our CEO is directly responsible for our developers and the SEO activity.
- SEO methodology with actions points, deliverables and KPIs for each of the core sectors: content production, technology, product management and marketing.
- Because we drive prospects to our site so they can complete a RFI/RFQ, SEO is extremely important. Through trial and error, I've discovered key search terms that drive the most qualified leads to our website. We use these keywords and test other new, potential keywords and monitor their success. As needed, we also update our landing pages for these keywords to better reflect the term, resulting in better Google optimization.

- Our SEO process is strongly intact. Each quarter following a customer council, we revisit our plans based on the conversations that happened there. We also include our search marketing results as part of the integrated view.
- We use an SEO company to optimize our main company website. Our two other websites (one for a welding school, the other is for gun dealers and manufacturers) are WordPress sites that I placed SEO packages on and filled in the blanks. I also used alt text behind almost all the photos on the sites.
- SEO team is involved in QA'ing new projects, identifying on-page issues, recommending solutions, and reporting on keyword rankings.
- We have a team focused on defining the strategic objectives. They act as a consultant and partner with the Marketing Product teams to implement the best tactics to increase our content positioning on SERPs.
- Analyze converting SEO keyword performance for brand and non-brand keywords. Develop enhanced SEO content onsite and offsite.
- We take courses, identify goals for improvement, implement them, test them, and repeat. We try to design our improvement strategies so we can measure the results.
- Entwining SEO with public relations and focusing on keywords, phrases and applications which our prospects will find appealing. Adding the "detail" to the articles to educate and get them to entertain the idea of our technology.
- A mixture of keyword research and measuring the keywords we already receive for long tail insights. Then we look at keyword mapping, internal link structure and architecture. From that we decide on new content and editorial, and with that we construct new online PR and link building campaigns by assessing who should link to us and the optimum path to getting those links organically (bolstered by social media.)
- Routinely track the top 20 keywords on all major search engines and do the competitive analysis too. Work closely with an agency and consultant to increase backlinks and submissions. Engineering works closely with marketing on all on-page optimizations for all existing and new Web pages and content.
- Gather analytical data from several sources. 2) Monitor search engine changes. 3) Be proactive on new techniques. 4) Conduct keyword search volume research. 5) Develop formulas to detect ease of improving ranking on target keywords. 6) Consult with experts on retainer.
- We did a complete site audit this past year and determined what we needed to do in order to achieve significant growth in this channel. We are moving through the list of changes weekly.
- SEO efforts are based upon product benefits and include: 1) Website - creating specific product pages and landing pages. 2) Website - incorporating these into homepage. 3) Website - optimize URL, titles, descriptions, images and content with appropriate keywords and calls to action. 4) Marketing Message - SEO our marketing message in all publicity. 5) Article Content Writing - SEO in all our marketing material posted on YouTube, Forums and Blogs. 6) Select relevant keywords with volume and commercial intent. Drive to page #1 and position #1 with external links. Support with quality content that is regularly refreshed.
- Key word market research, competition research, optimizing Web pages, link building.
- Thorough analysis of key words and the incorporation of them in text. Link building.
- We employ an SEO Manager to develop sites and content in conjunction with the IT and editorial teams.

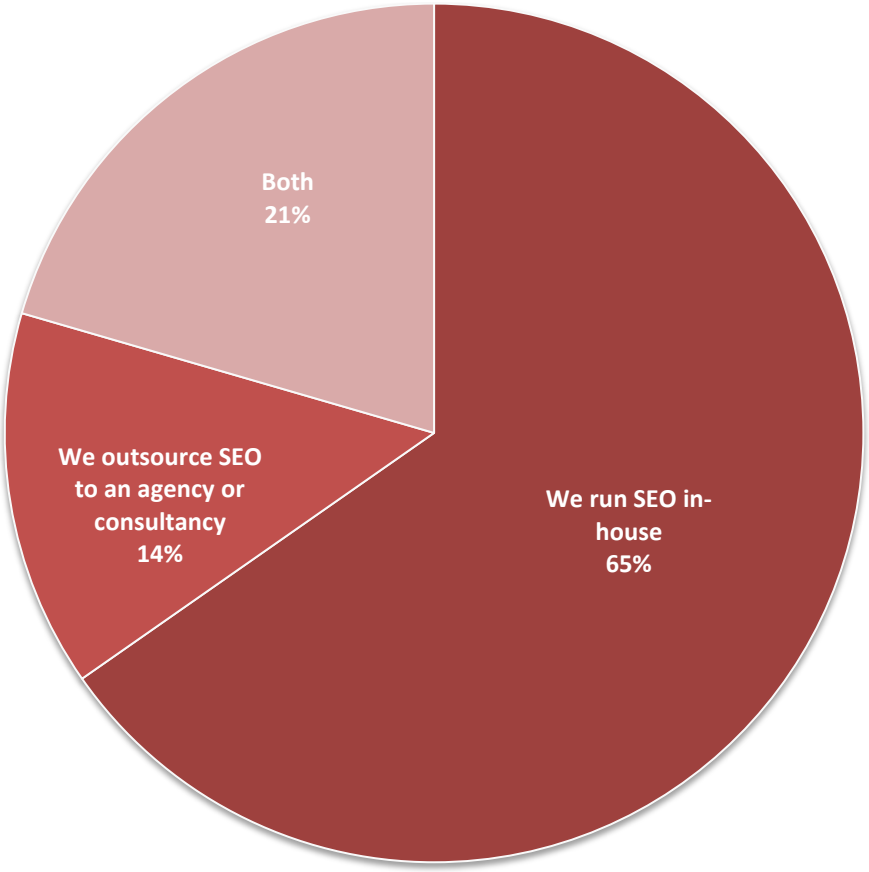
CHAPTER 2: SEO TACTICS

What are the most popular SEO tactics? Which ones get the best results? What is the level of effort required to execute these? Marketers readily shared their answers to these questions and more.

MAJORITY OF ORGANIZATIONS RUN SEO CAMPAIGNS IN-HOUSE

Chart: Popularity of in-house versus outsourced SEO campaign management

Q. How does your organization manage and execute its SEO campaigns?

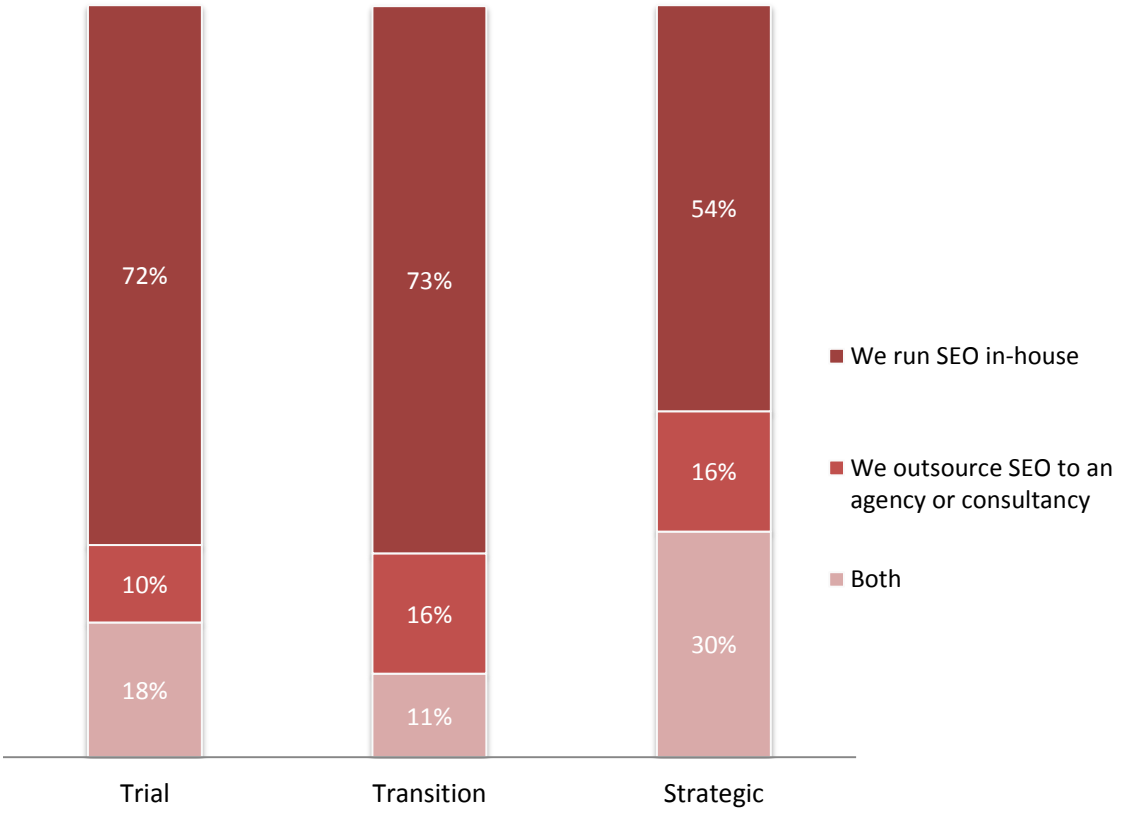


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Many organizations choose to handle SEO themselves, despite the expertise that agencies can provide. Two-thirds of organizations operate their SEO campaigns completely in-house, with an additional 21 percent electing to outsource part of the management and execution of these.

With so many organizations choosing to run their own SEO programs, following a routine set of guidelines should be a given. However, as we saw earlier, only 29 percent of organizations currently operate with a strategy and only 27 percent of organizations are planning to develop an effective and methodical strategy for SEO for this coming year.

Chart: SEO campaign management, by SEO maturity phase

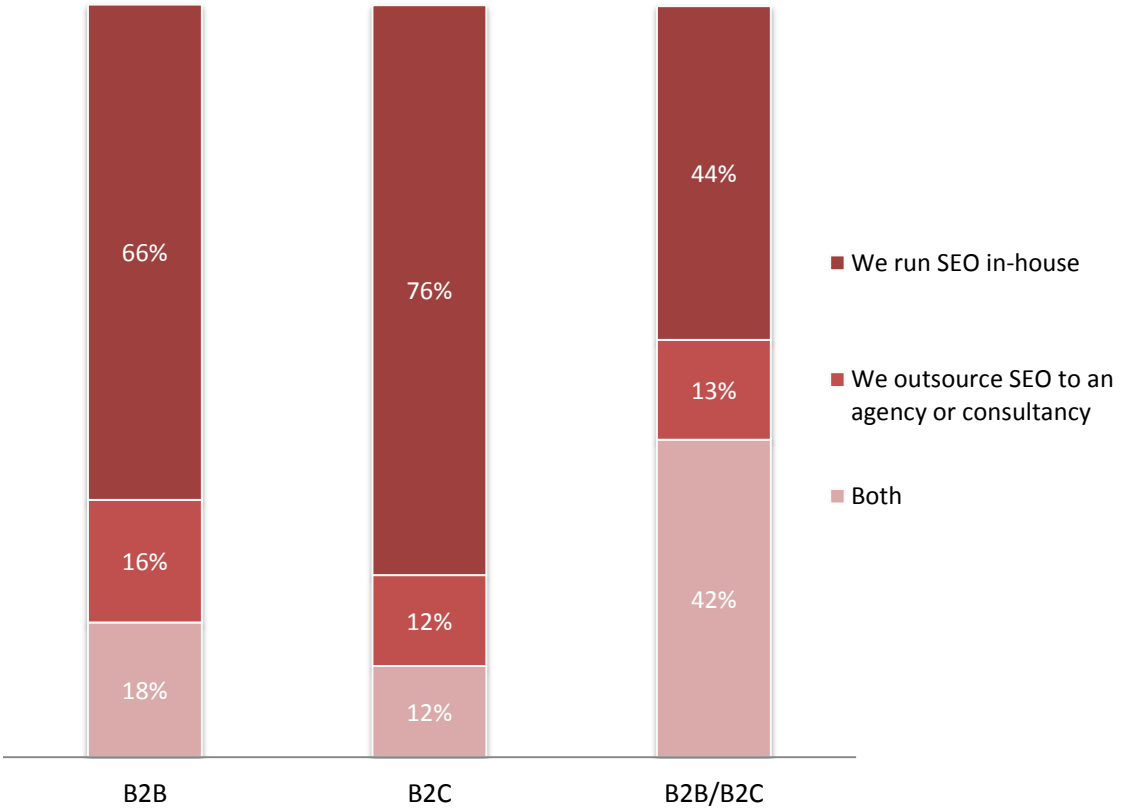


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Many businesses fail when it comes to search engine optimization, because they often lack the proper knowledge and how-to of specialized companies. As this chart indicates, Strategic organizations more readily understand they need to use the services of an agency when they have exhausted their internal SEO resources. Instead of settling for a plateau, these organizations enlist the help of external experts to take their campaigns to the next level.

"We've contracted an external source to help us with focus and driving as a business priority. We are starting with targeting sections of our media site, keyword search volume analysis and recommendations. We are making strategic recommendations and establishing best practice guidelines for the content team. We are establishing KPIs and scorecard reporting to measure effectiveness/ROI." – Marketer insight

Chart: SEO campaign management, by primary channel



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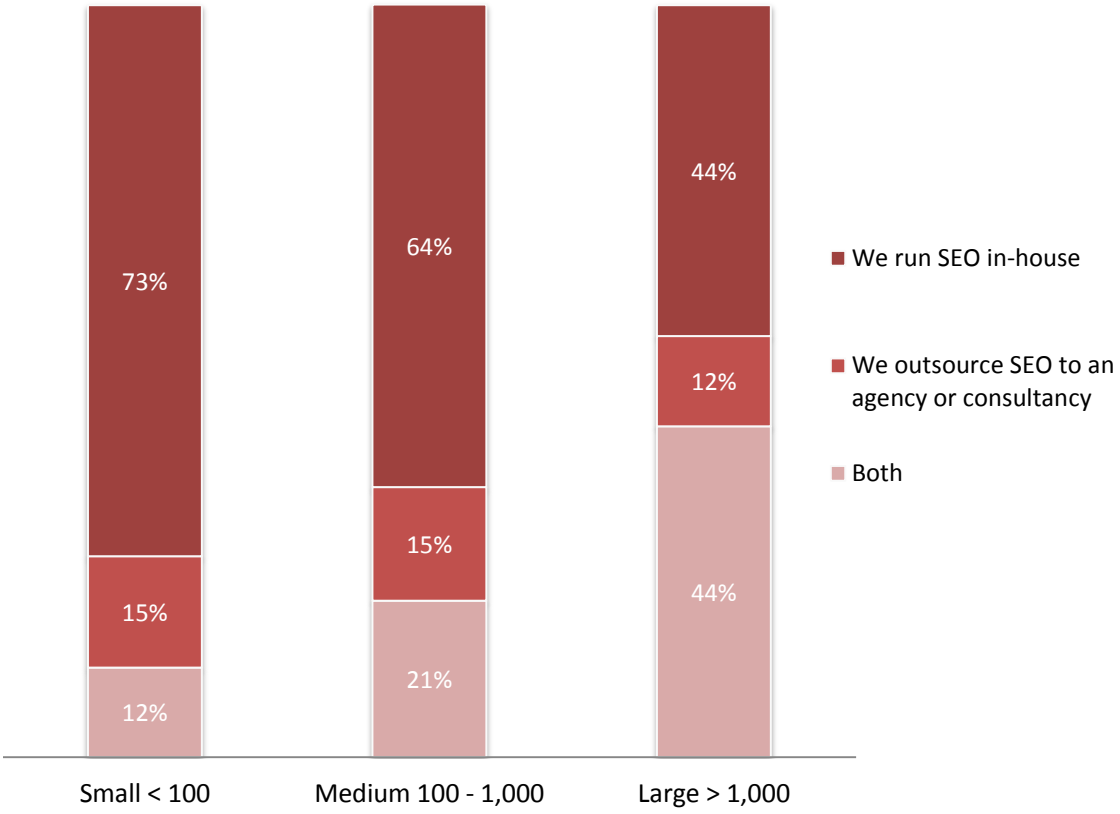
B2C marketers predominantly run SEO in-house, with 76 percent choosing this option. To a lesser extent, B2B marketers also keep SEO in-house.

Organizations serving both business and consumer channels are 42 percent less likely to run their SEO programs in-house as compared to B2C organizations. Instead, these organizations take a blended approach to SEO program management. The increase in complexity that comes with campaigns that span both business and consumer channels calls for an increase in the sophistication of the approach. For this reason, these organizations turn to outside assistance and expertise.

> *"We use a third-party SEO vendor to help us devise a strategy, but the execution of that strategy is done in-house. The third-party provides Web copy guidelines for writers and also provides monthly metrics."* – Marketer insight

Chart: SEO campaign management, by organization size



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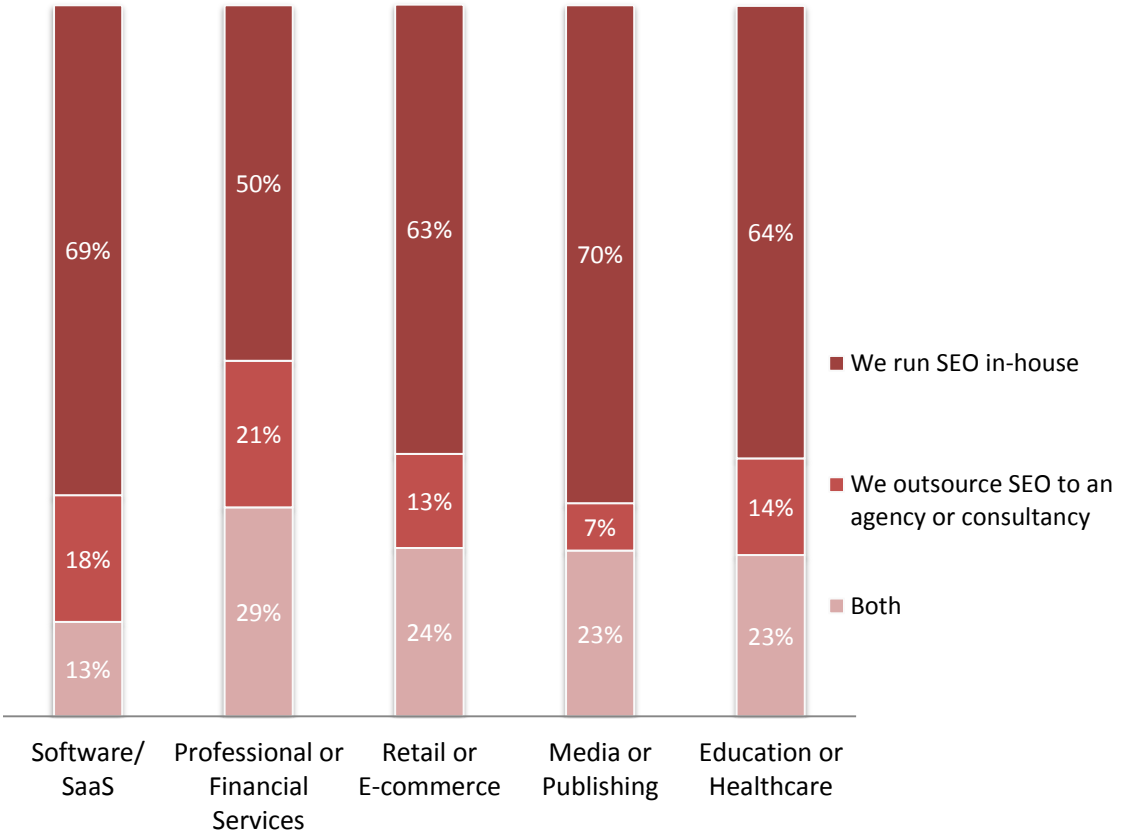
Small organizations are more apt to manage their SEO programs themselves. Budget considerations may necessitate the "wearing of multiple hats" in these organizations. Beyond this, SEO offers a way to take market share. Even small increases in traffic and leads can help a small company stay financially viable. For this reason, many small organizations choose to invest their own time into this area.

"We use an outside SEO company to implement based on our research and knowledge of our industry and region." – Marketer insight

As organizations grow in size, they tend to shift more of their resources to outside help. For example, larger organizations have the budgetary resources to outsource the management of SEO. This is seen by 56 percent choosing to use an agency to a partial or full extent. Interestingly, only a small portion of large organizations outsource their SEO campaign management exclusively. Instead, 44 percent choose to split control, understanding the importance of staying involved with SEO and managing aspects of it.

Chart: SEO campaign management, by industry



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Half of all Professional and Financial Services firms surveyed said that they outsource all or a portion of their SEO campaign management to an agency or consultancy. Many large players dominate this competitive industry, indicated by their top rankings in search engine results.

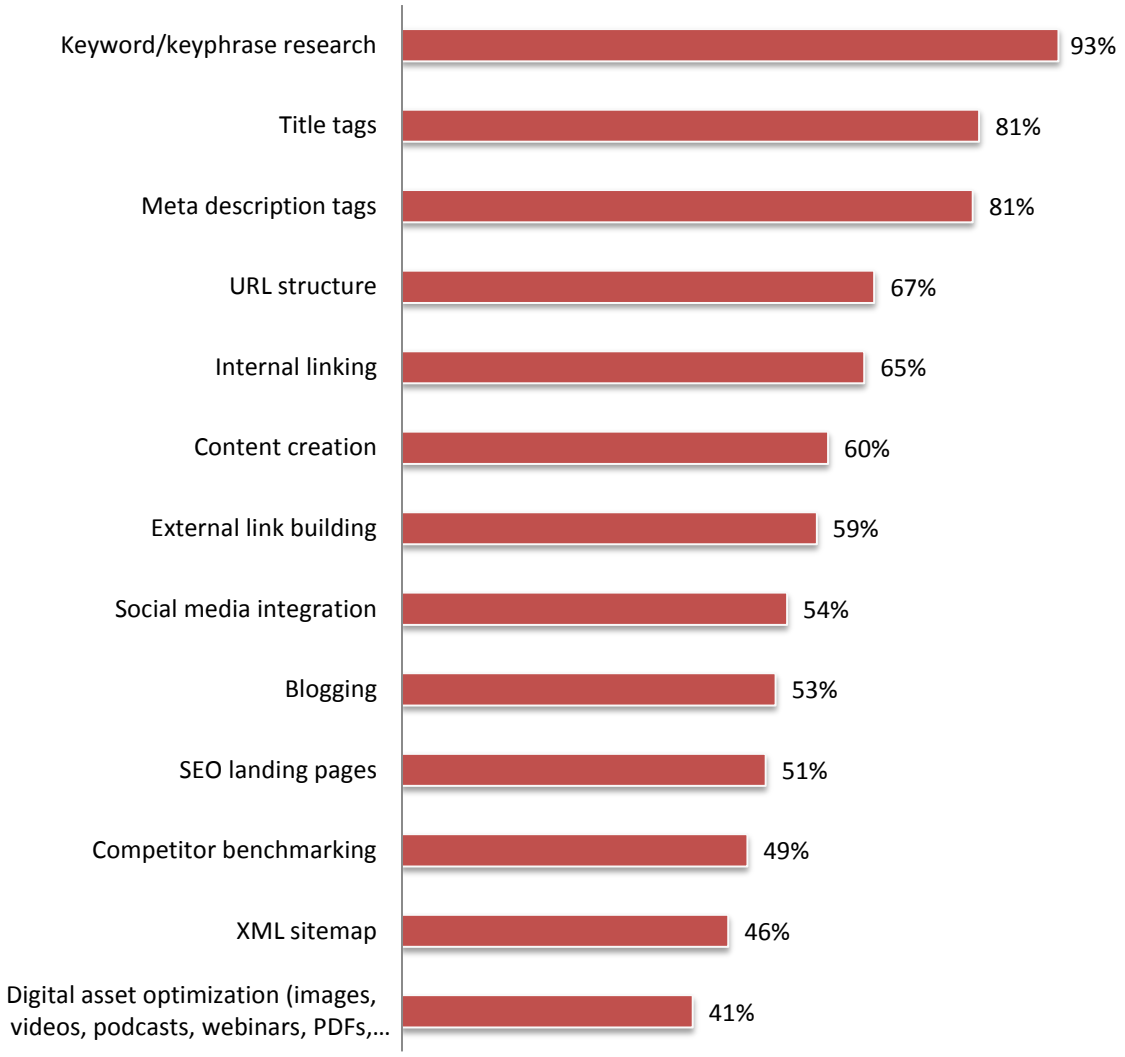
Although high barriers to "search entry" do exist, there is also the promise of returns for targeted SEO strategies. One such strategy is to pursue niche categories in this service sector, such as investment banking, wealth management, stock trading, insurance, mutual fund management, mortgages, accounting and more. With so many categories, companies can pursue targeted niches and divert some of the search engine traffic controlled by the search engine leaders.

> *"We have retained an outside agency that specializes in SEO and has demonstrated experience. They are developing and implementing a disciplined and formal process for handling SEO going forward."* – Marketer insight

KEYWORD-FOCUSED TACTICS ARE THE MOST POPULAR

Chart: SEO tactics used by organizations cover many angles

Q. Which of the following SEO tactics has your organization used?



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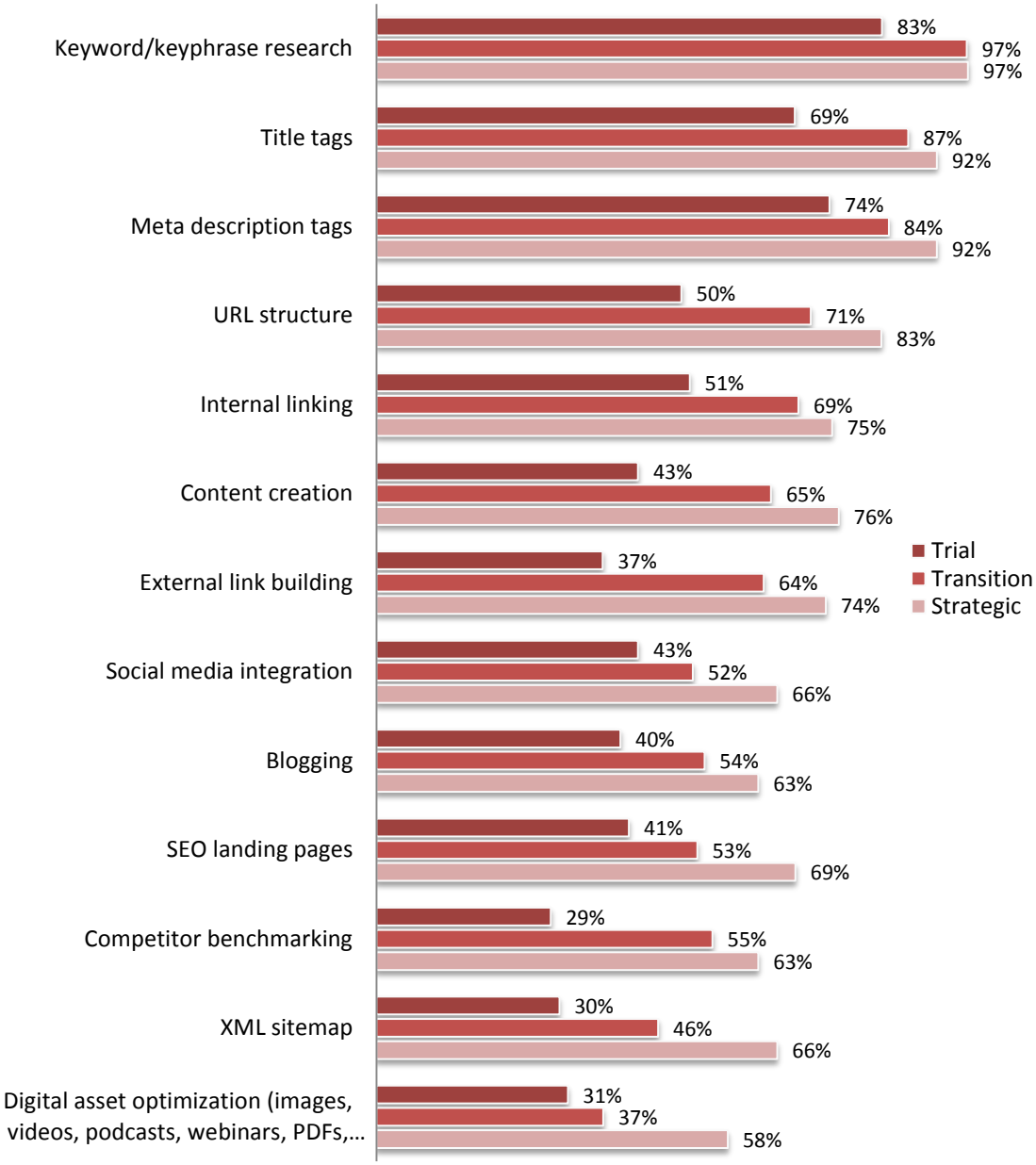
The process of search engine optimization influences the relevancy and importance of a company's website, pages and digital assets. Keywords are foundational to establishing relevancy in the eyes of the search engines, and almost all organizations are conducting keyphrase research. Title tags and meta description tags – more options for highlighting keywords – tie as the second-most widely used tactic.

Content creation is a tactic used by sixty percent of organizations. However, only 53 percent of marketers are blogging and only 41 percent are optimizing their digital assets for search purposes. Expanding content creation beyond just Web copy offers an opportunity to create and capitalize on a rich end-user search experience by offering more content variety in search results.

Chart: SEO tactics, by SEO maturity phase



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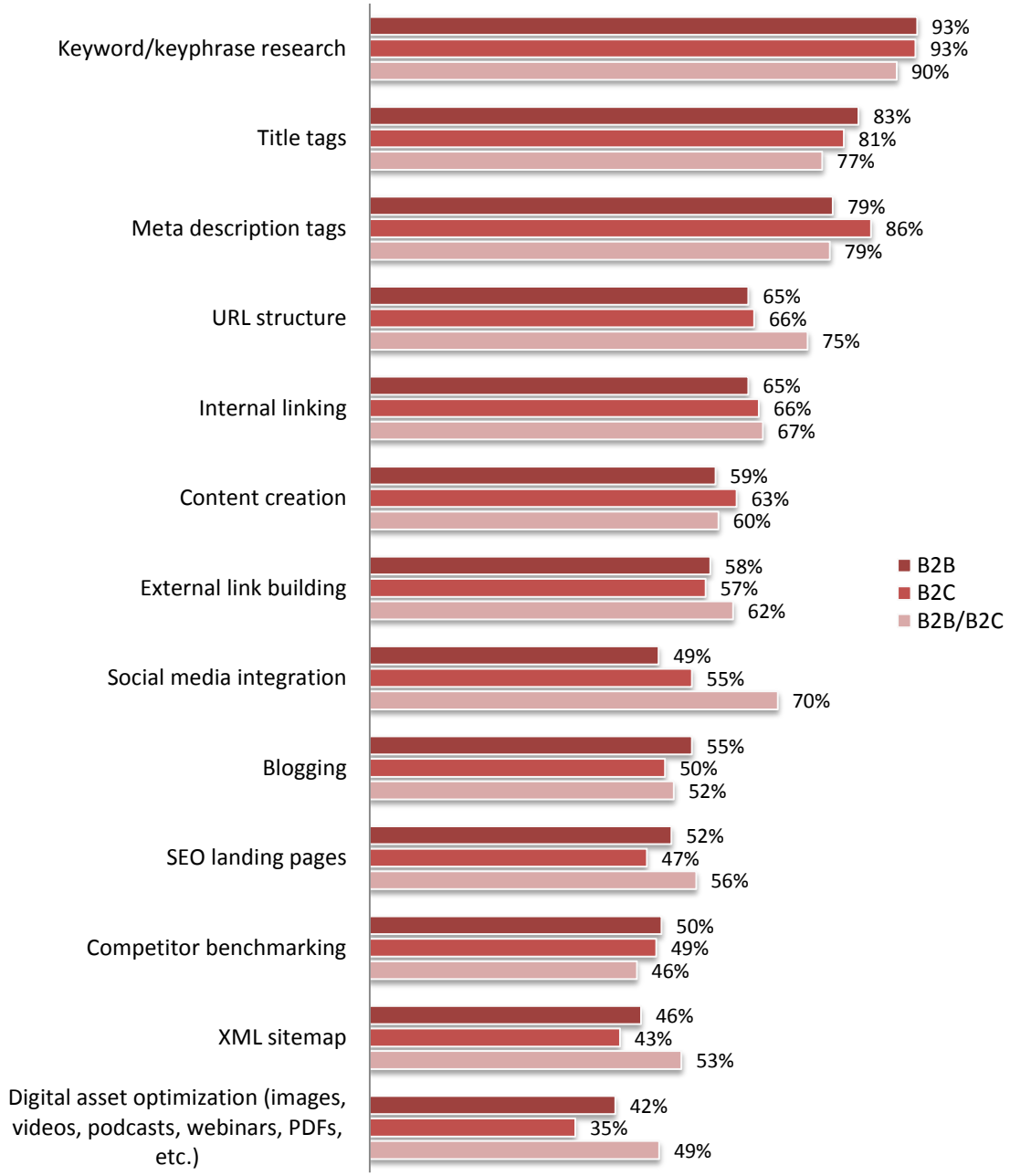
In this chart, we see how Strategic organizations are making better use of all SEO tactics. Strategic organizations differentiate themselves in their higher levels of usage with a systematic and strategic approach to planning, executing and measuring these tactics.

By comparison, the extent to which they use these tactics is also telling. For example, for every ten percent of organizations in the Trial phase building external links, twenty percent of Strategic organizations are doing the same. Since backlinks send a message of popularity to the search engines, link building is a critical strategy for SEO success.

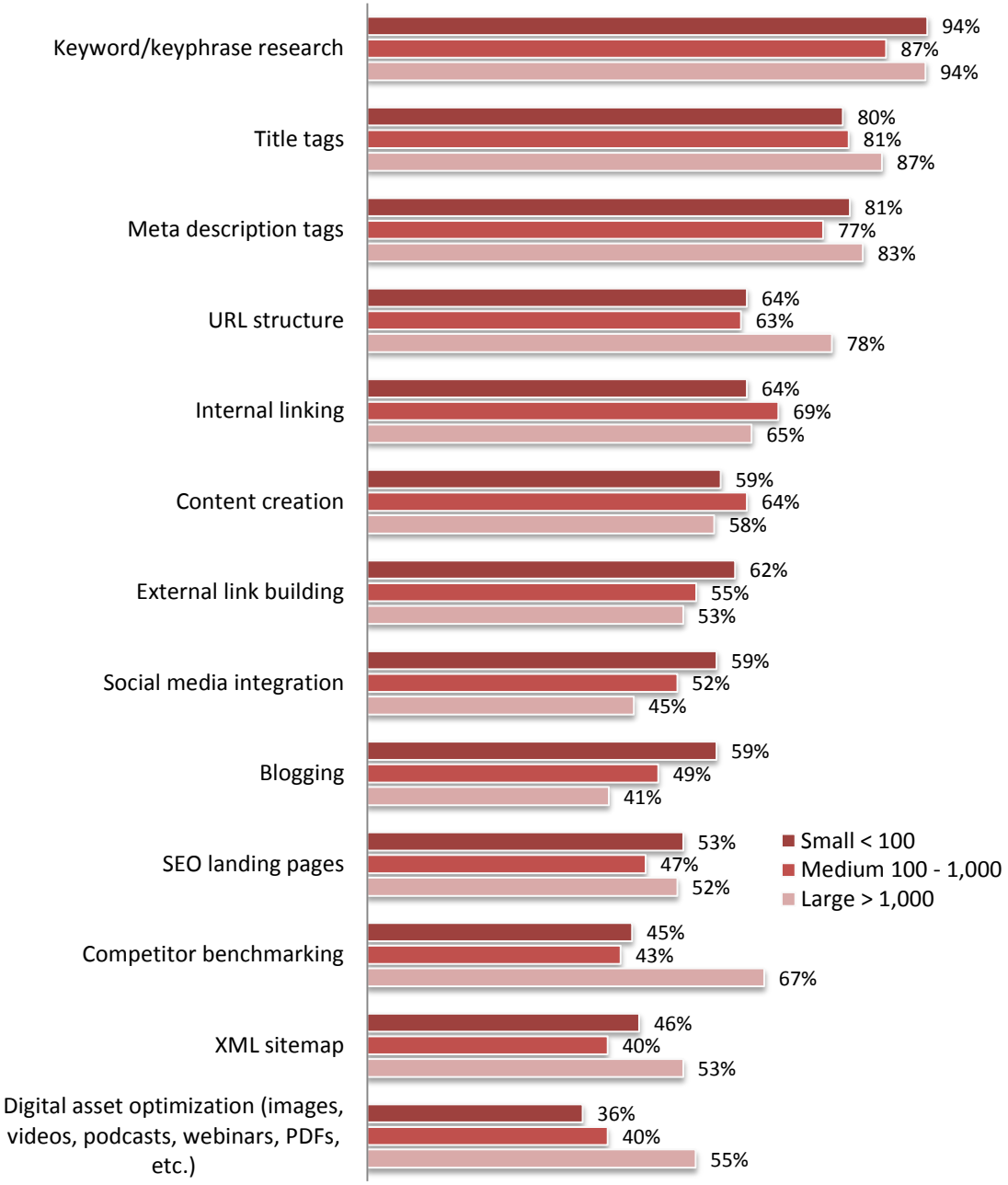
Chart: SEO tactics, by primary channel



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Paying attention to a URL's structure is a widely used tactic by 75 percent of organizations marketing to both consumer and business channels. Judiciously adding keywords to the URL is important, because descriptive URLs help users easily and accurately predict the content of a Web page. Static pages, unlike dynamic pages, support short, keyword-rich and descriptive URLs.

Chart: SEO tactics, by organization size



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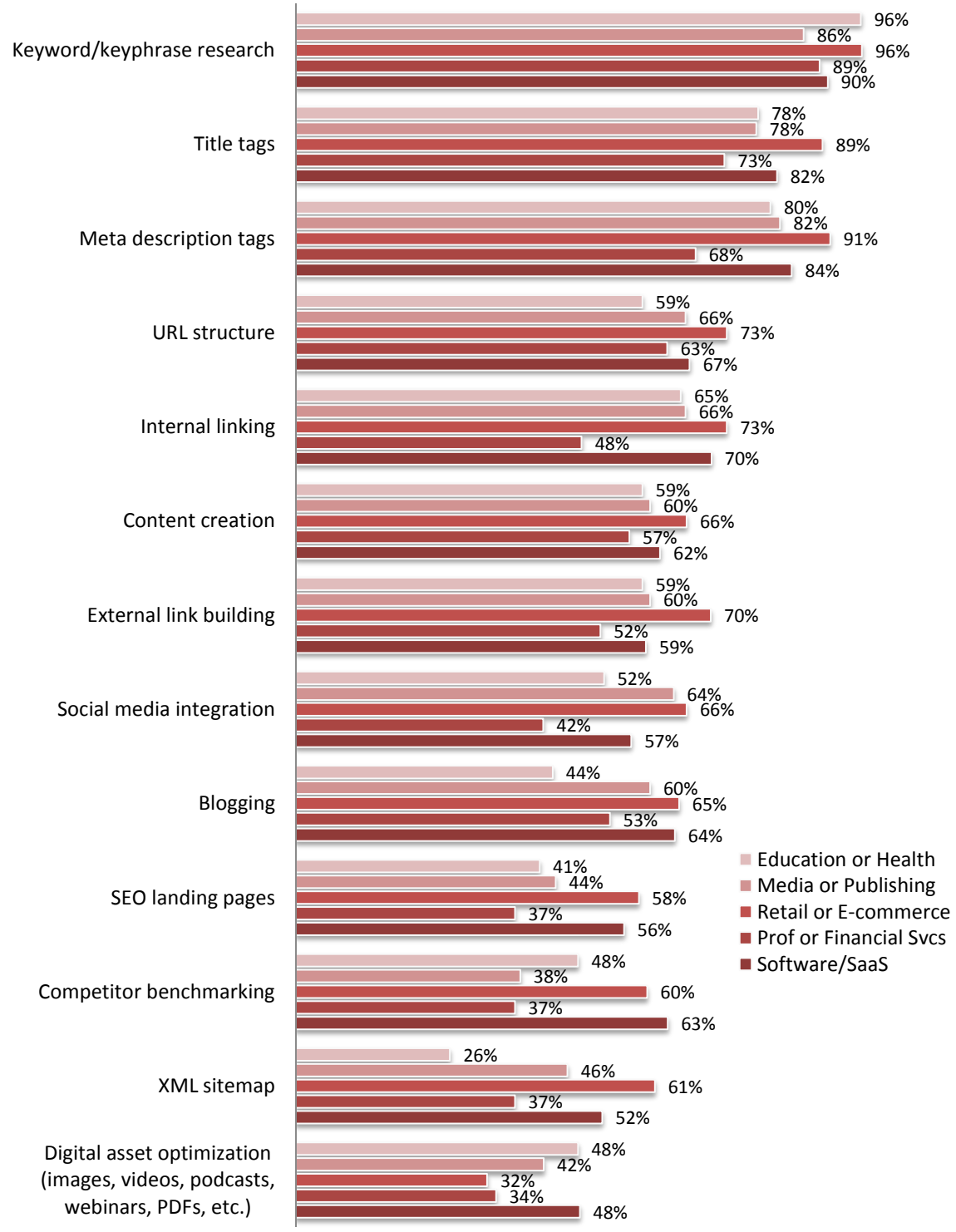
Competitor benchmarking is a tactic used by larger organizations to a much greater degree than by organizations of other sizes. Good competitive research is about determining what makes the competition different and notable. It goes beyond comparing title tags and the number of backlinks by also looking at product offerings, features and even social visibility. In short, valuable competitive research helps organizations figure out what makes a competitor rank and why people like them, link to them and share their content.

Chart: SEO tactics, by industry



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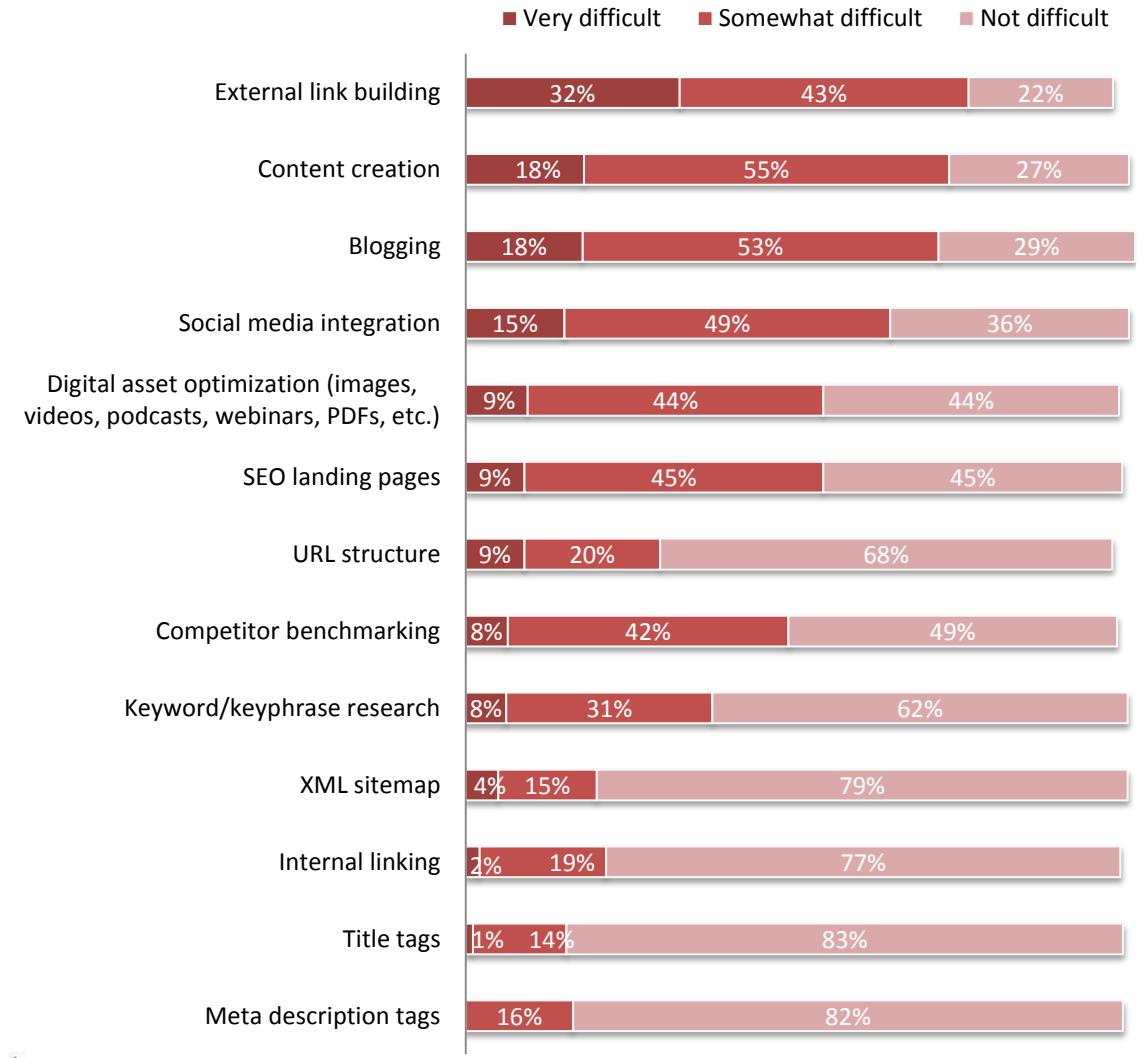
GOOD CONTENT IS GREAT LINK BAIT...BUT DIFFICULT TO CREATE

Chart: SEO tactics vary widely in their degree of difficulty to execute

Q. Please indicate the DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY (time, effort and expense required) for each of the SEO tactics used by your organization.

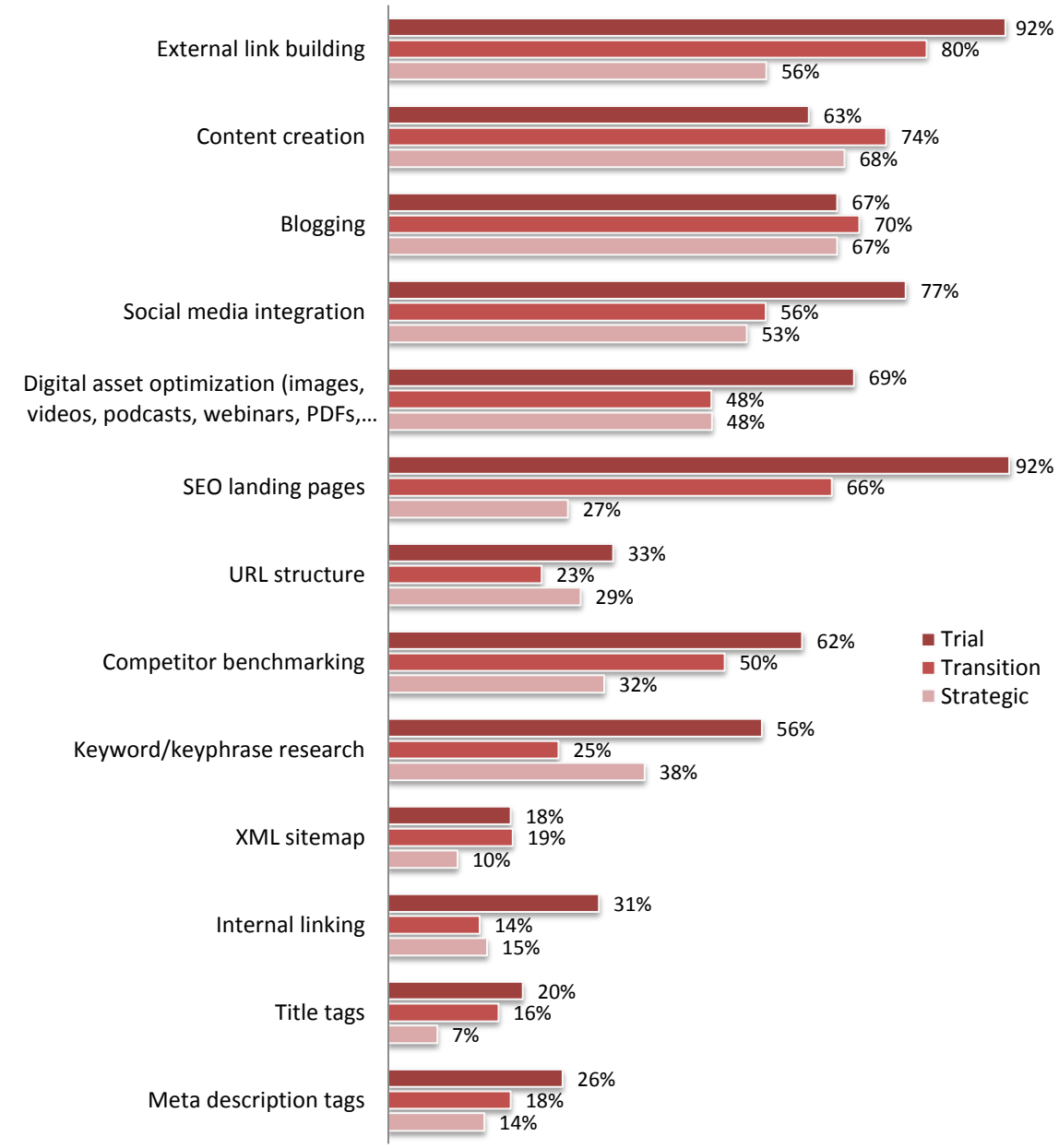


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

An organization's selection of SEO tactics is determined, in part, by the level of difficulty involved in executing these. For example, more than 80 percent of organizations do not find it difficult to add meta description and title tags. As such, these two tactics are also the second- and third-most widely used.

External link building requires the most time and effort. On a related level, content creation and blogging are two more SEO tactics considered very or somewhat difficult to conduct by a large percentage of organizations. All three of these tactics are interrelated.

Chart: SEO tactics deemed very or somewhat difficult, by SEO maturity phase



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
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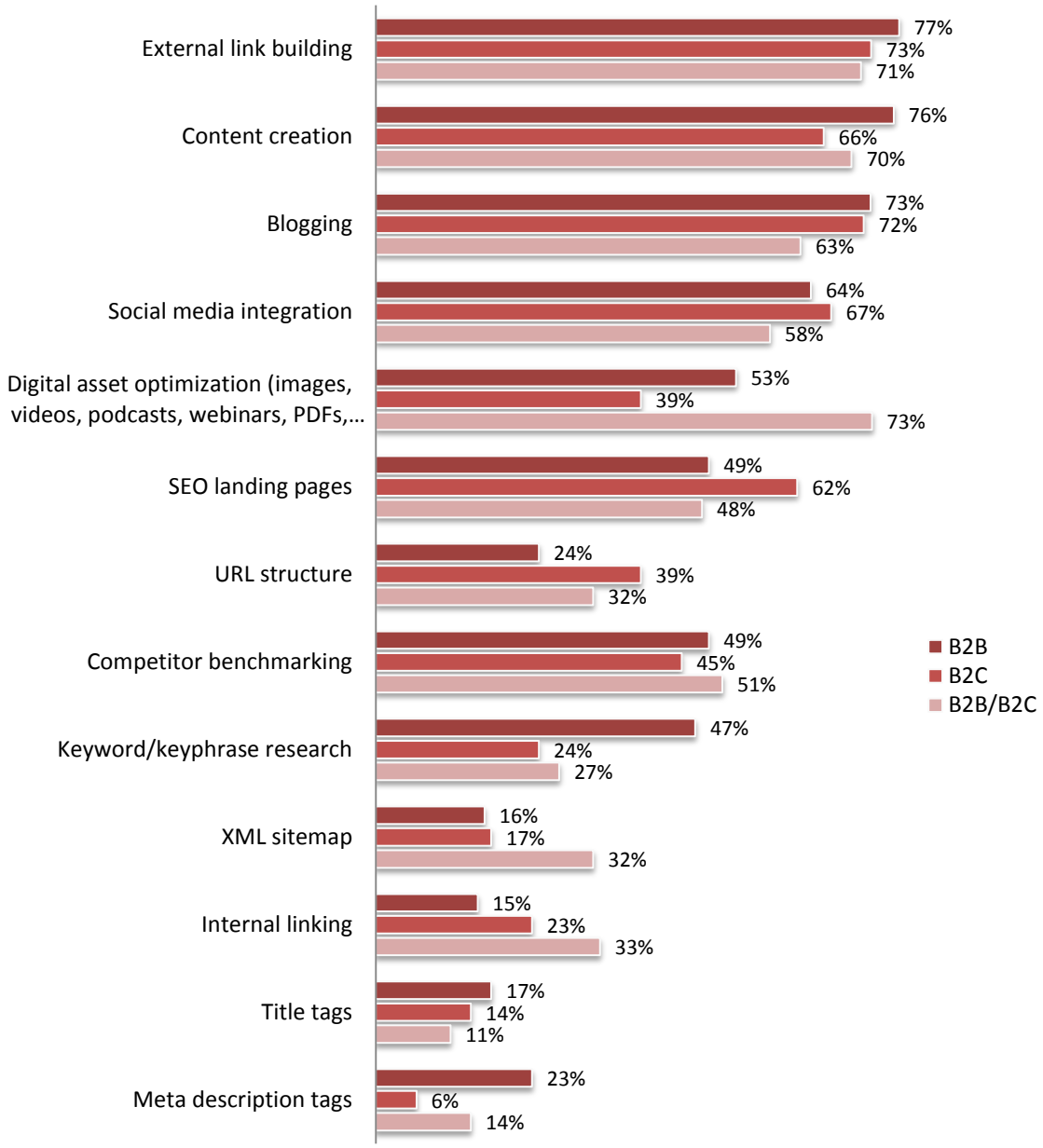
Organizations with no process in place for their SEO programs and practices struggle the most with implementing most of these SEO tactics. The longer it takes to execute some of these tactics – not to mention executing them well – the further these organizations may lag in their competitive search rankings.

Chart: SEO tactics deemed very or somewhat difficult, by primary channel



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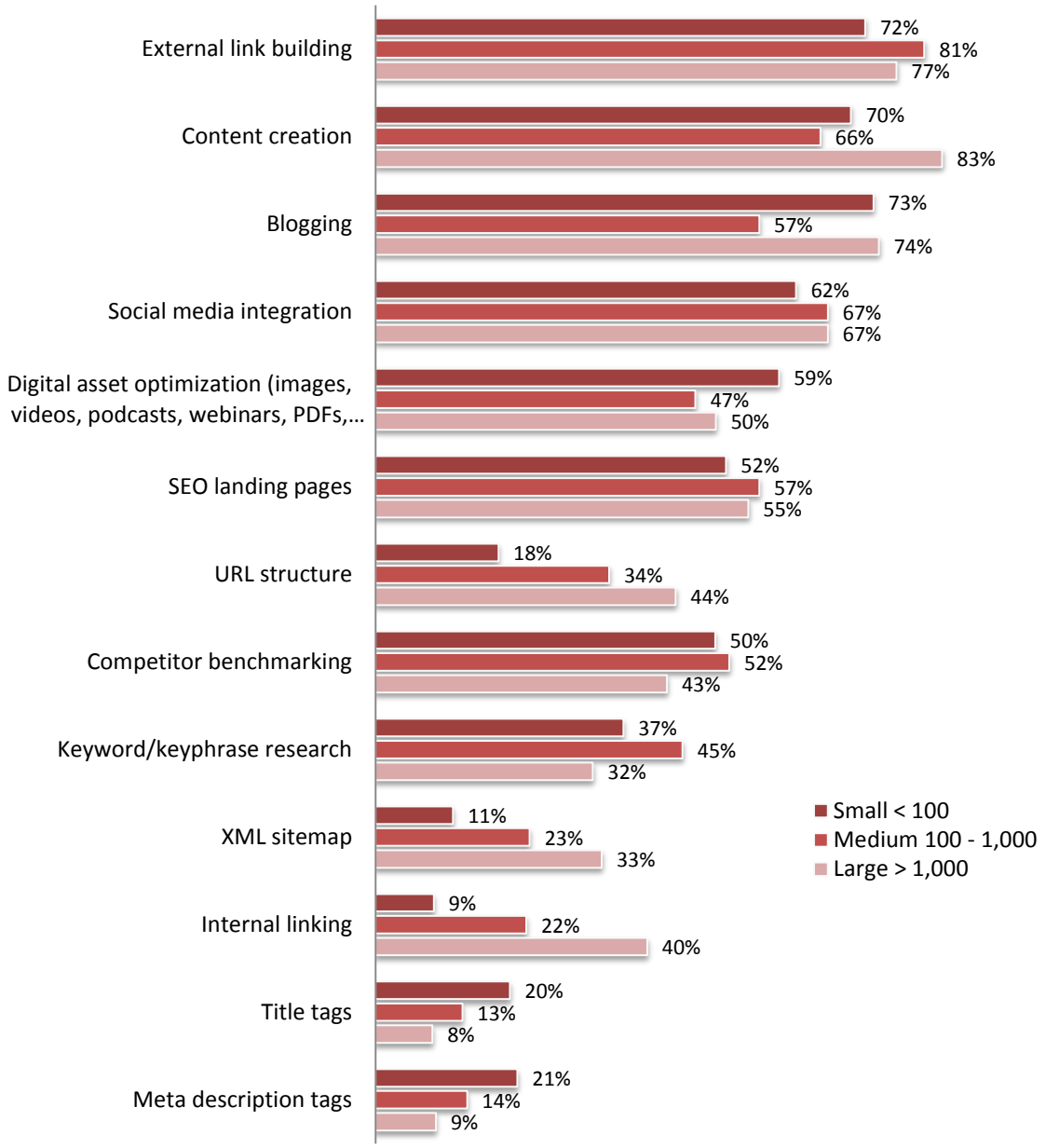
Digital asset optimization is rated as the most difficult tactic by organizations targeting both business and consumer channels. Attempting to develop – and then optimize – a broad array of digital assets to appeal to these distinctive customer sets is challenging. Each customer set has specific needs and shopping behaviors, so the supporting keywords do not neatly fall into any one category.

Chart: SEO tactics deemed very or somewhat difficult, by organization size



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
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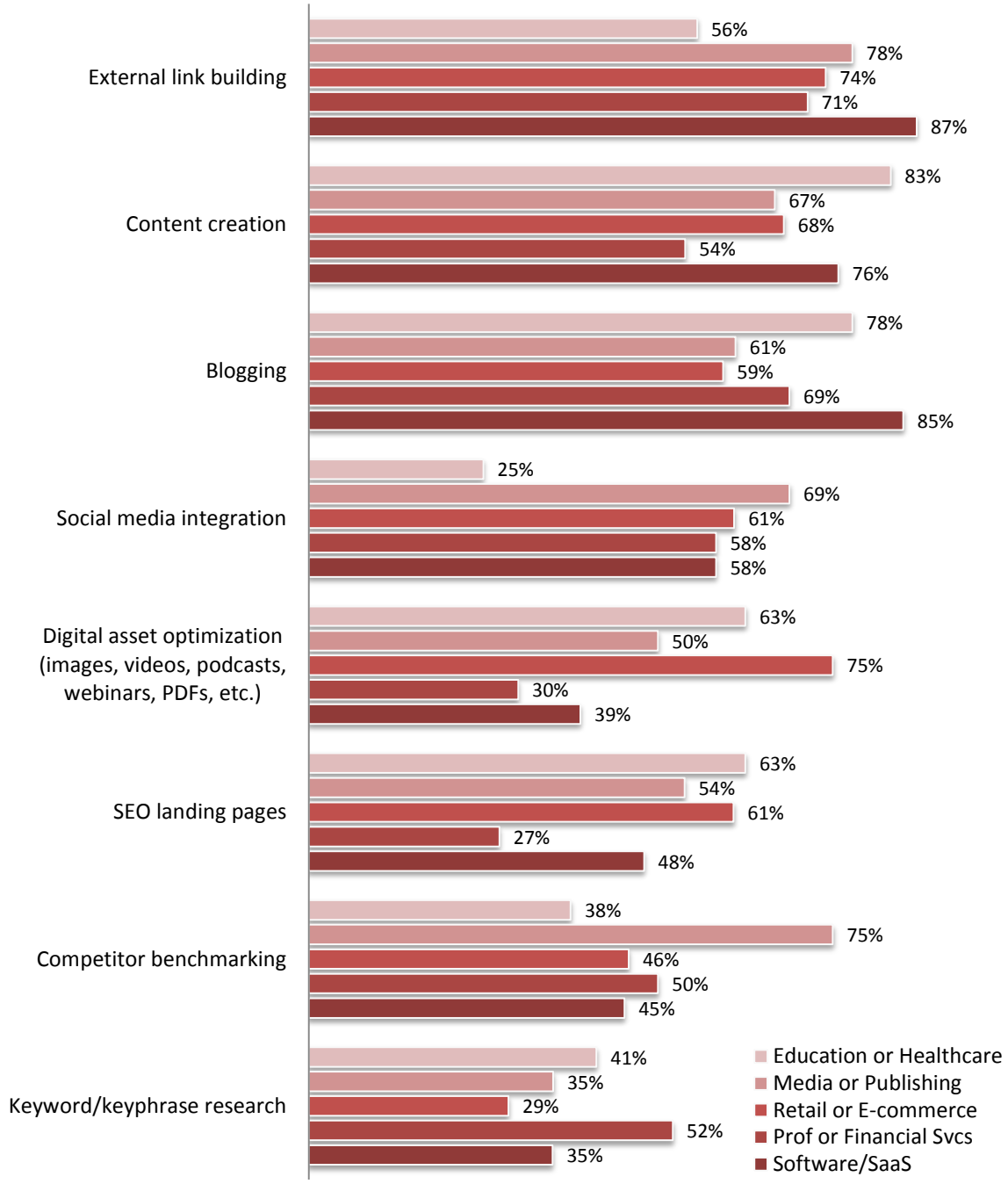
Large organizations, despite the resources at their disposal, find a number of SEO tactics more difficult to carry out than their counterparts in smaller organizations. Take content creation and blogging, for example. Larger organizations often have more legal guidelines in place for external communications. These can delay the time it takes to publish an article, video or any of the other multiple forms of useful content.

Chart: Top 8 SEO tactics deemed very or somewhat difficult, by industry



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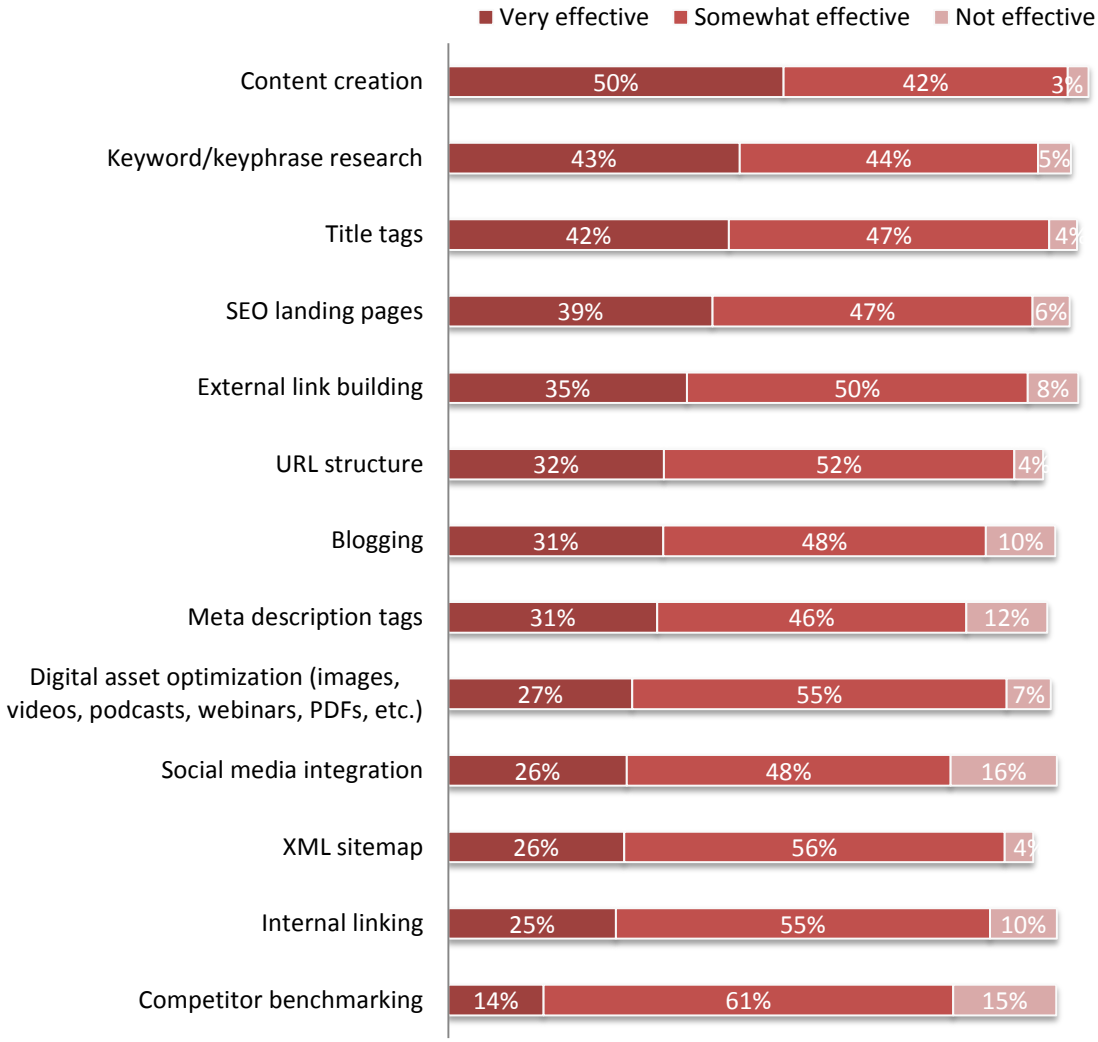
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

External link building poses a big challenge for nearly all organizations. Education and Healthcare organizations, by comparison, may find this tactic somewhat less difficult to implement, due to the number of directories, ranking sites and article mentions focused on these institutions.

CONTENT CREATION MAY BE DIFFICULT, BUT IT IS EFFECTIVE

Chart: Content creation and keyword research considered most effective SEO tactics

Q. Please indicate the LEVEL OF EFFECTIVENESS (in terms of achieving objectives) for each of the SEO tactics used by your organization.



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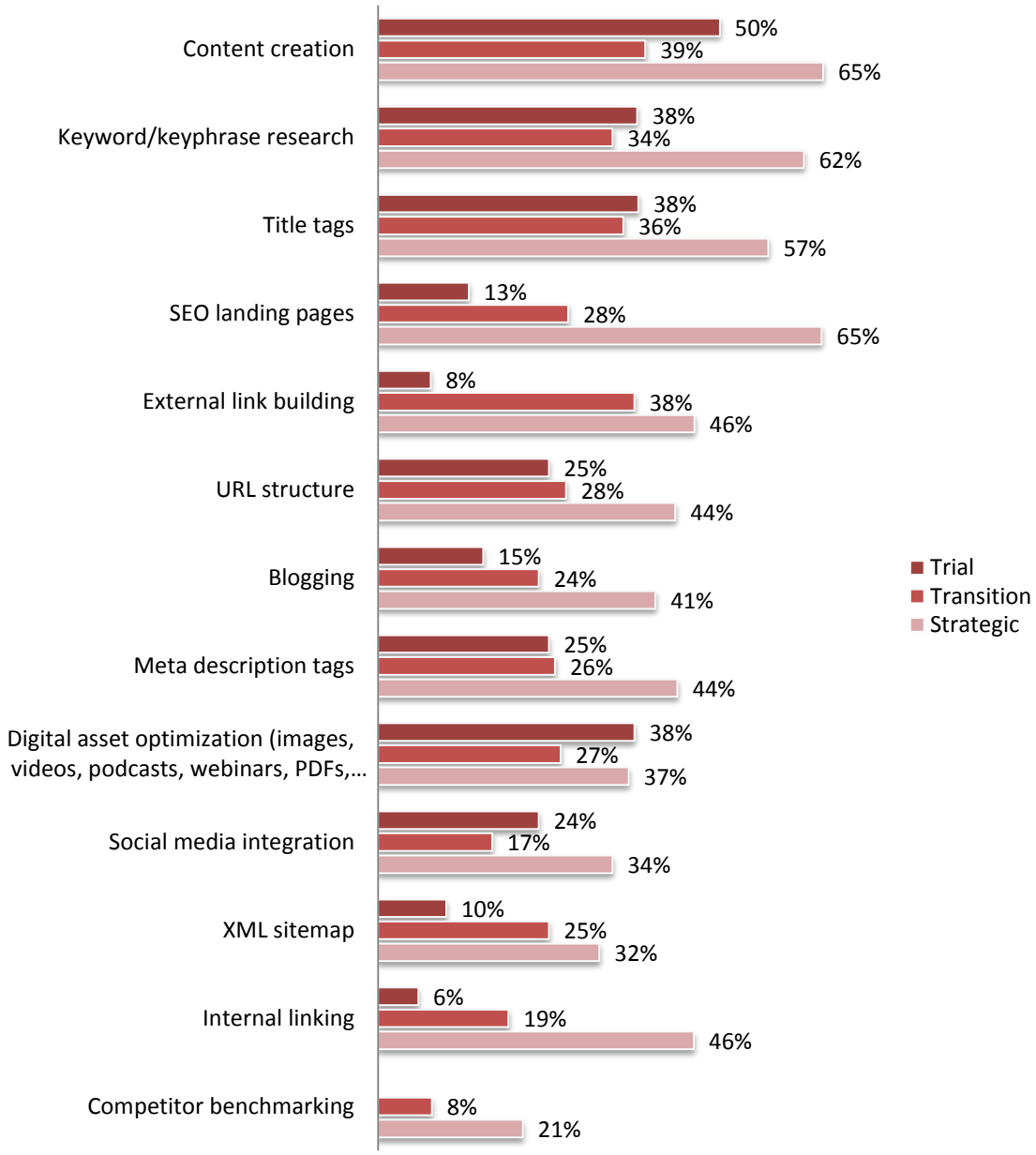
Content creation, in spite of the level of difficulty it entails, is deemed a very effective tactic by half of organizations surveyed. Unique and well-written content gives search engine spiders something to index, and supports the search engine's goal of providing the most relevant results in response to a query. Relevance, in the eyes of the searcher, is content that deals with the questions they ask – and even other questions before they ask them. For these reasons and more, good content is the backbone of any website.

Chart: SEO tactics deemed very effective, by SEO maturity phase



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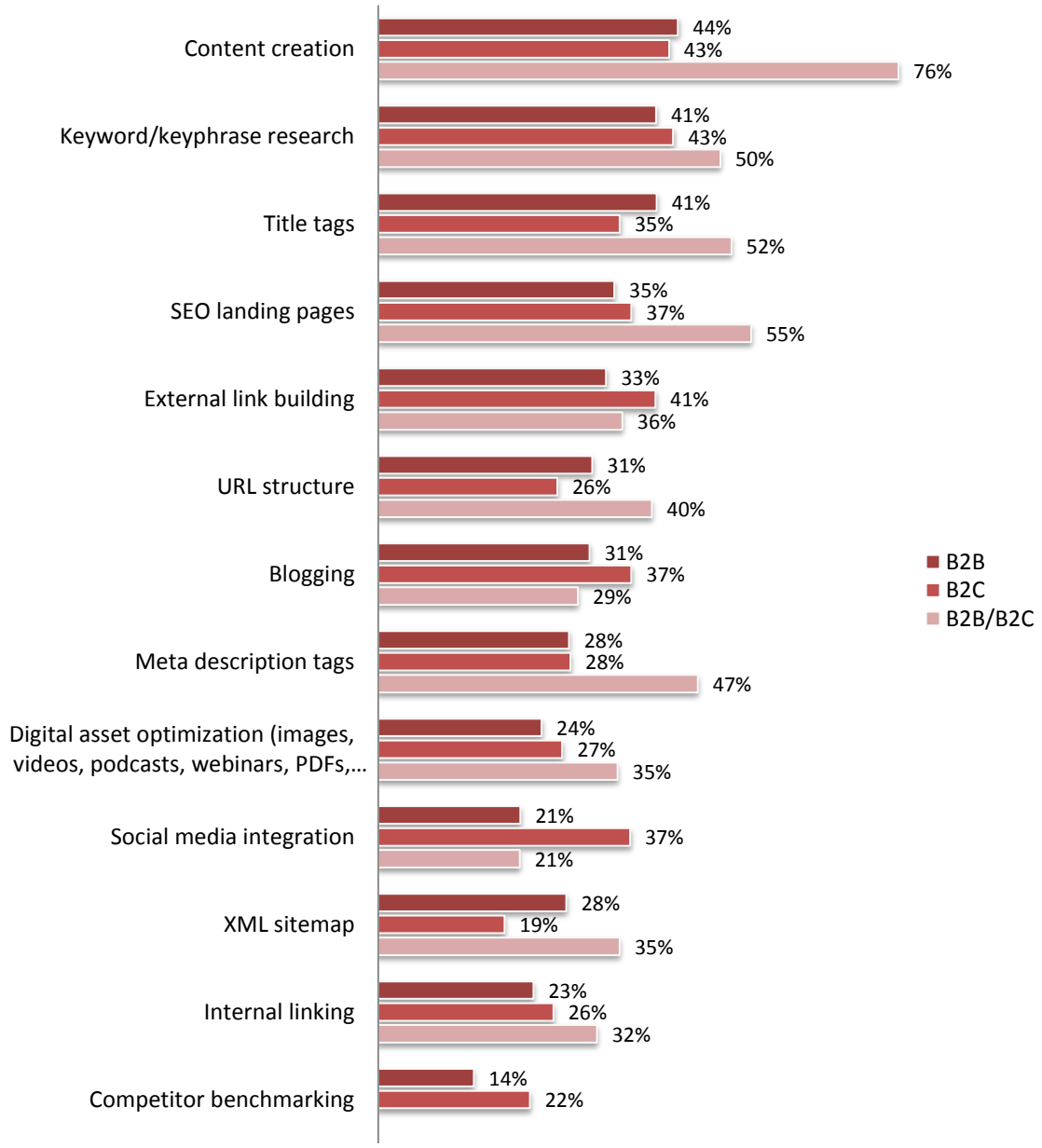
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Organizations in the Strategic phase understand the interplay between these SEO tactics and know how to exploit the synergies. For this reason, Strategic organizations clearly find more success with these tactics than organizations that do not have formalized guidelines and processes in place for their SEO programs.

The relative differences between these groups are quite startling. One example is with keyword research. Transition organizations are just 55 percent as likely as Strategic organizations to consider this tactic to be very effective. The cumulative impact of finding greater success with these tactics creates a widening performance gap, which is demonstrated in later charts throughout this report.

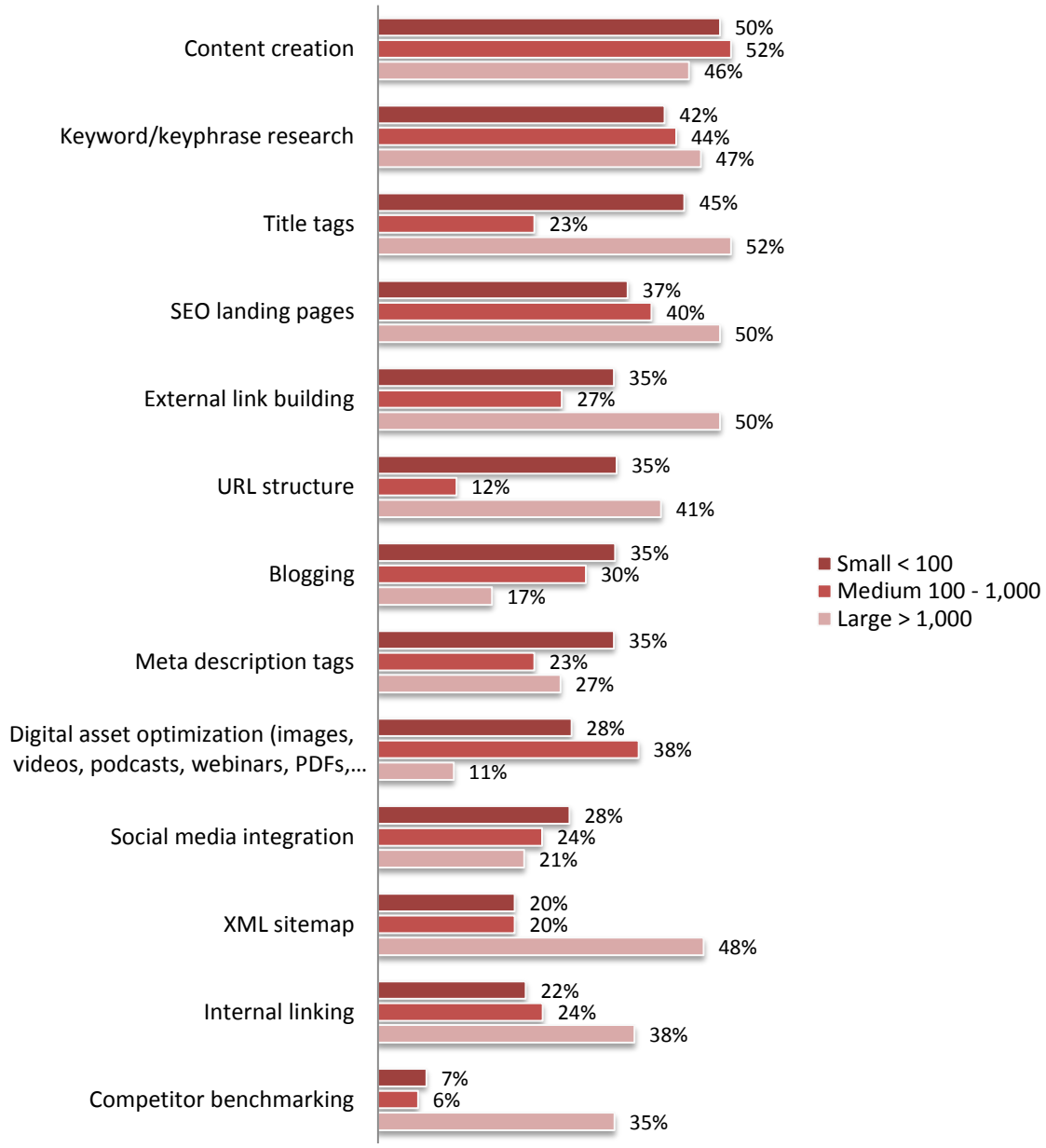
Chart: SEO tactics deemed very effective, by primary channel



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Nearly eight out of every ten B2B/B2C organizations regard content creation as a very effective SEO tactic. This is twice the rate of organizations specifically focused on B2B or B2C. Solid and compelling content is a way to grab attention and meet the information needs and requests of searchers.

Chart: SEO tactics deemed very effective, by organization size



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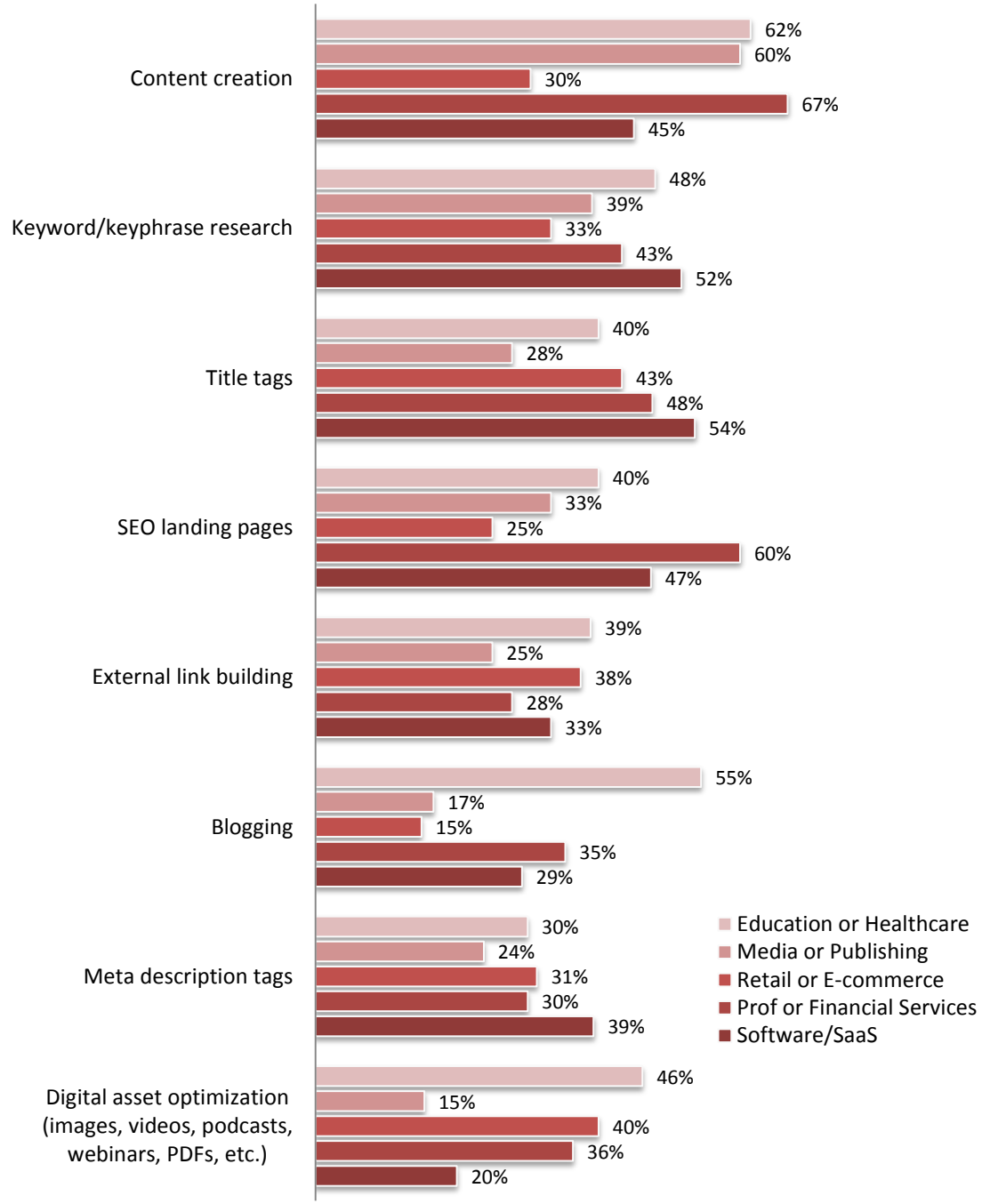
Organizations with more than 1,000 employees find great benefit in crafting SEO landing pages. These are not mass-generated and nearly identical pages. Rather, SEO landing pages are simply top search entry pages which have been carefully crafted to lead visitors to a desired action. These pages help customers click through, instead of clicking back. In using these, organizations can more successfully convert Web visitors.

More than half of large organizations use XML sitemaps. These organizations find them to be very effective in helping search bots crawl a site more quickly, thereby discovering and indexing more pages.

Chart: Top 8 SEO tactics deemed very effective, by industry



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Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Each industry seems to have its winning tactic. Education and Healthcare companies find success with blogging. SEO landing pages – essentially "homepages" for search – are deemed very effective by more Professional and Financial Services firms than by other industries. Content creation, despite being a very effective tactic for others, does not fare as well as external link building and digital asset optimization for retail and e-commerce companies.

MARKETER INSIGHTS ON SUCCESS WITH SEO TACTICS

Q. If your organization has achieved an extraordinary result from one of the SEO tactics, please give a brief description.

- Content is still king.
- Great question. We have tried these, but we don't know what has really 'worked.'
- Integrating paid and natural search.
- No! So, we assume we haven't done a good job of it.
- On-page optimized completely for main keywords. Driving backlinks based on relevance.
- Optimizing the internal linking has had remarkably positive, measurable results.
- Placing keywords we are trying to rank for in every page's meta description.
- Sitemaps are crucial. We notice an immediate hit if there's a problem.
- Social media integration has been greatly enhanced by the use of social syndication tools.
- Taking the company name out of all title tags.
- The keywords/key phrases we target - we get top 10 results.
- Title tags are by far the most influential factor for our website.
- Videos slightly changed and spread across different networks is king.
- We are still waiting for extraordinary results!
- Blogging and internal bread crumb links.
- Link building.
- Internal linking throughout the site network. Improving relevance at each stage.
- Content creation, internal linking, title tags and URL structure changes have all helped increase organic traffic.
- Our partnership with a government agency creates very powerful search results for one of our key product areas.
- Two methods that have proven to be most effective are external linking and content creation. We use these tactics on both the websites and externally in a variety of places, like blogs, directories, article writing, etc.
- Blogging/content creation on an external 'non-branded' Wordpress blog website that links back to our e-commerce site. The purpose is to create useful informative keyword-rich content about our products and industry and then refer readers to visit our site.
- Embedding relevant links in the website footer (on all Web pages) to our YouTube and Facebook channels generated increased SEO traffic.
- Microformatting for e-commerce product pricing and reviews had a noticeable impact for search rankings across the board for our product pages. It's definitely a tactic we prioritize. We had a blog article that became the fifth highest viewed page on one of our sites because one of the optimized images was ranking well in search results. The image was driving traffic from a keyword that we never considered. (We did after that!) It was a key point that simply writing for the audience and applying tactics for search engines to easily find the content was the best approach. Don't get hung up on the exact keywords to use!
- We have seen significant results in SEO with the integration of our community blogs and forum discussions.
- Blogging offered a great opportunity to provide our customers with a lot more insightful information about our products and their uses.

- Editing website content to reflect on-target keywords and phrases commonly used to search our industry and offerings increased our placement noticeably.
- I am just starting out, but I am finding social media (using my Facebook Page) to be the best. But even this can still be improved upon.
- Blogging is one of the most productive tactics, but is incredibly time intensive. As I tell my executives, blogging is like getting a pet – it requires constant care and feeding.
- Creating content and getting that published on external websites that link back to our site seems to be the most effective tactic for us.
- Keyword and keyphrase research and social media integration are two of the best efforts for delivering better ROI in general for our consultancy department.
- The introduction of an XML sitemap increased navigation of our website beyond just the homepage. Most notable: deeper navigation of the "Products" and "Solutions" sub-pages.
- Splitting my online presence into several different sites and blogs to create more narrowly optimized presences online.

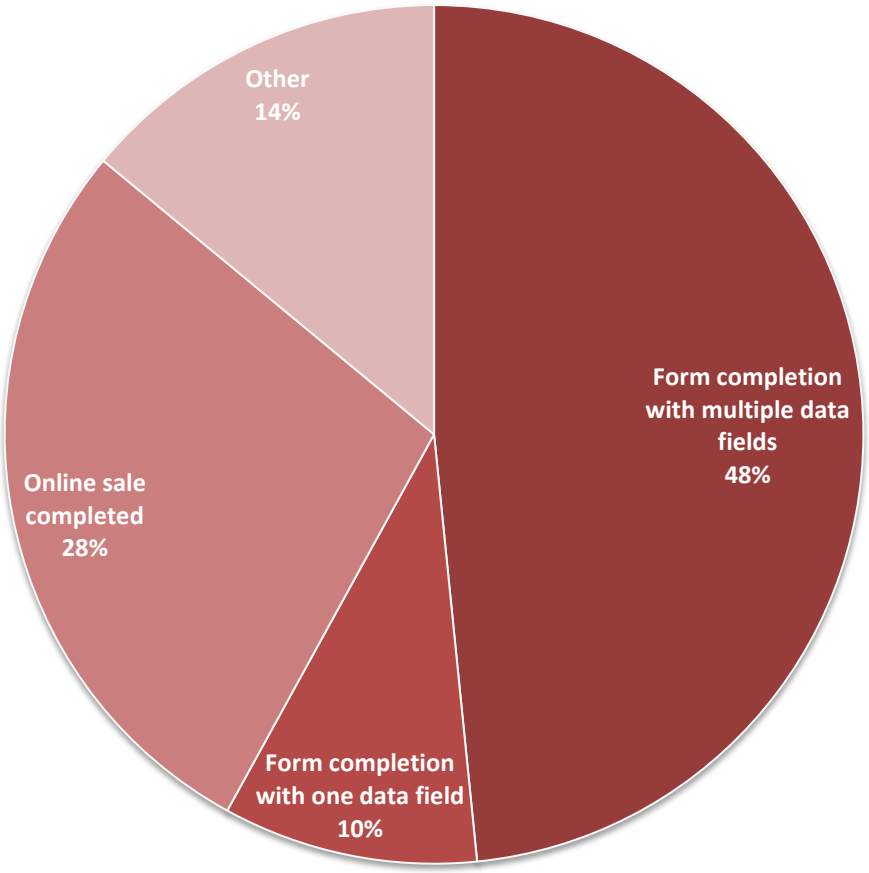
CHAPTER 3: MONITORING AND TRACKING METRICS

Website conversion is the single most important factor for the success of an online business. Driving traffic to a website is pointless if the visitors do not take the intended action – whether that is purchasing a product or signing up for a newsletter. In other words, outcomes are the true measures of success.

WEB CONVERSION OFTEN DEFINED AS MULTIPLE-FIELD FORM COMPLETION

Chart: How organizations define a website conversion

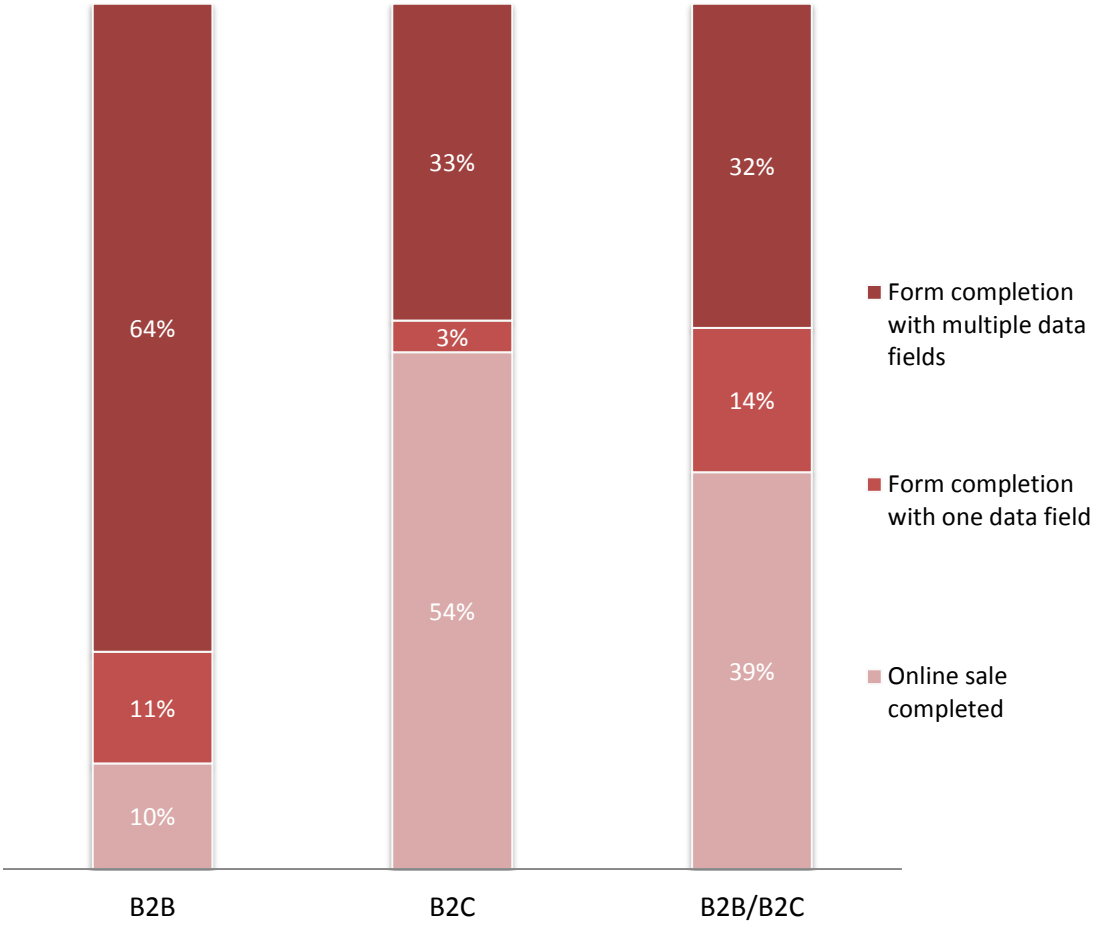
Q. How does your organization define a conversion on your website?



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

The successful completion of a sale is considered to be a website conversion by just 28 percent of organizations. By contrast, more than twice as many organizations define a conversion as simply securing some degree of information from a Web visitor. Completing a form with one or more data fields is a common practice. Often, these forms mediate an exchange of value – content for contact information.

Chart: Definition of website conversion, by primary channel



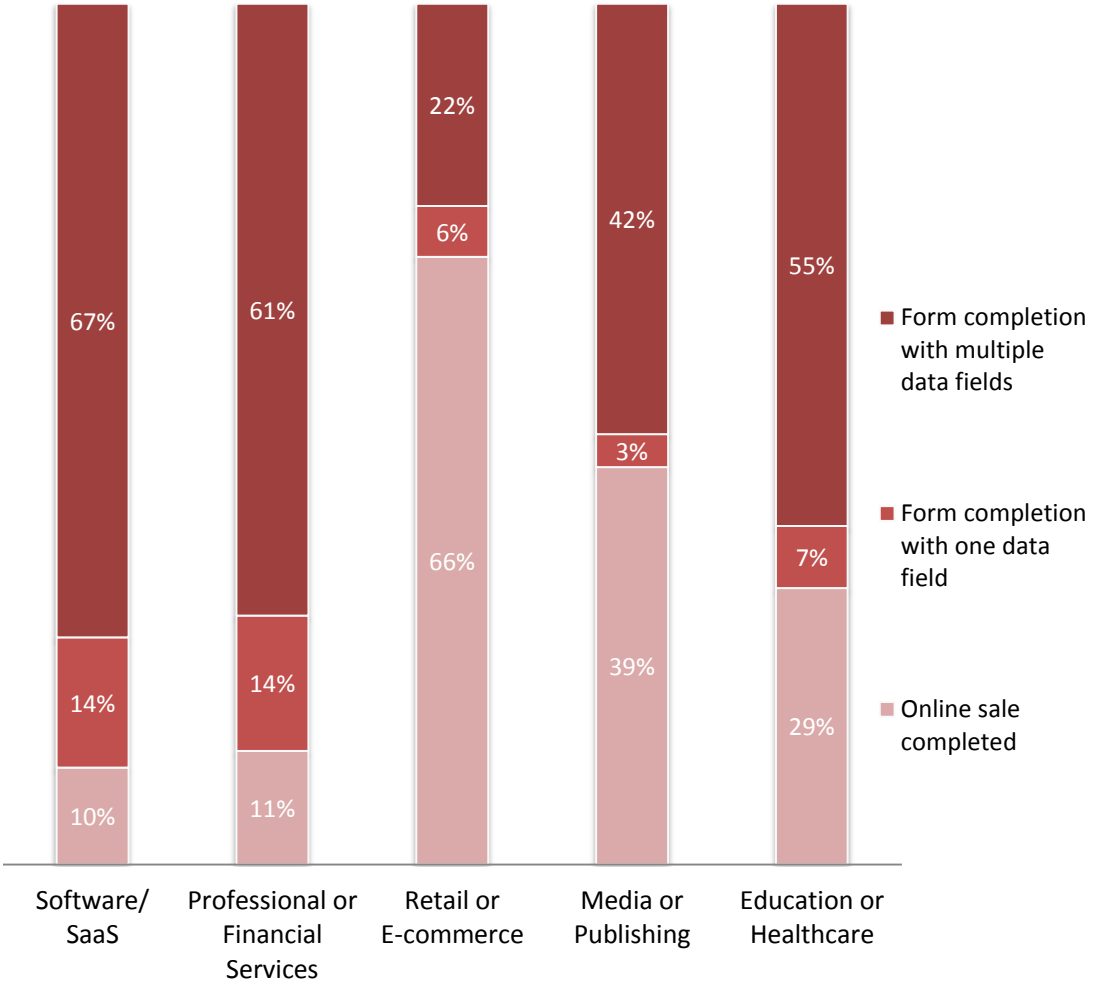
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Over fifty percent of B2C organizations use online sales transactions to measure a successful Web conversion. These sites often use conversion triggers to guide a visitor toward making an actual purchase.

Web conversions on a B2B site are more in the vein of building a relationship with the users. Whereas the content featured on B2C sites is often focused on a product or a series of products, content on B2B sites has an entirely different purpose. B2B marketers understand that prospects are gathering information, so providing the right type of content – like whitepapers, case studies and demos – and making it available at the right time is critical.

Prospective B2B customers also use search at different points of the buying cycle. Users search to find potential vendors. They then search for testimonials, solution comparisons, demos and even pricing.

Chart: Definition of website conversion, by industry



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

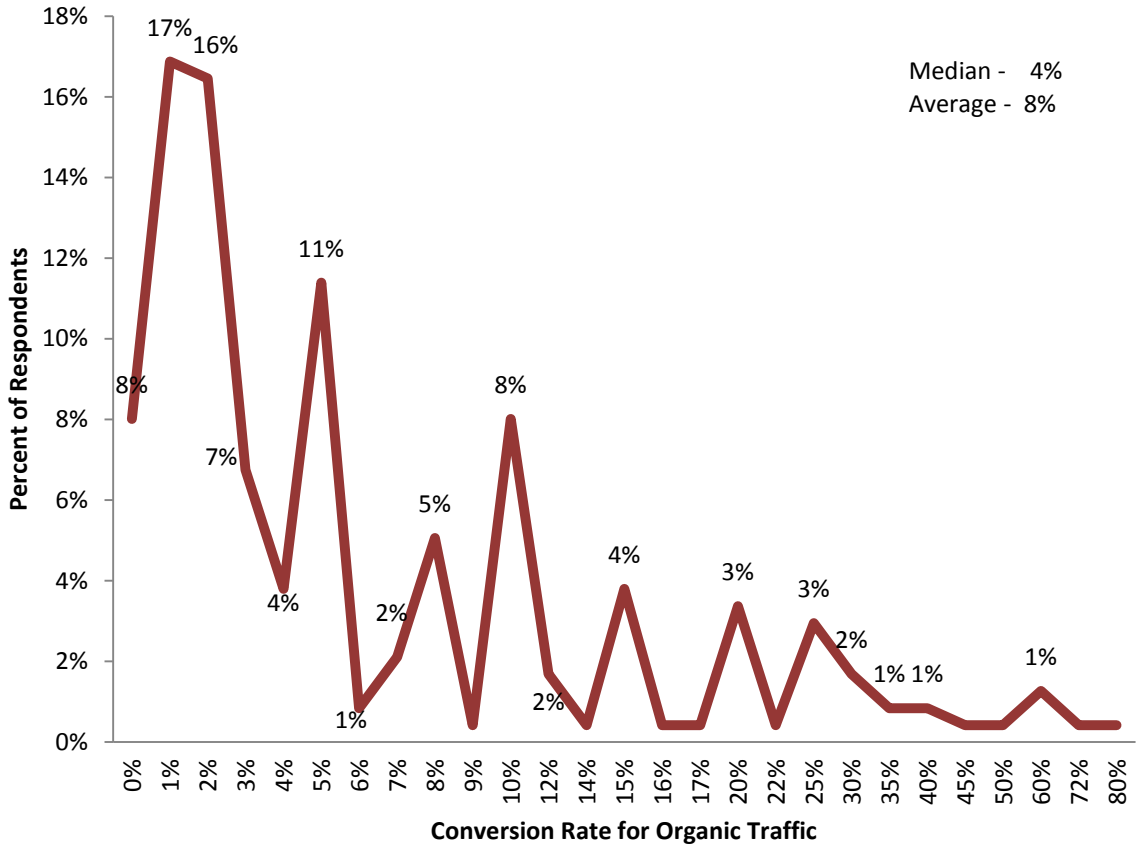
Sixty-six percent of retail and e-commerce businesses define a website conversion as an online sale. An ideal scenario for these businesses is to rank high in the search engine results and then see a visitor navigate quickly through the landing page, shopping cart and checkout process.

Often, this is not the scenario. People typically do not purchase on the first visit. Understanding why is where analytics comes into play. Organizations should work to understand the pan-session behavior of their customers by measuring “visits to purchase” and “days to purchase.” Learning what it takes to convince people to purchase can help organizations improve their conversion rates.

MEDIAN CONVERSION RATE ON ORGANIC TRAFFIC IS 4%

Chart: Organizations experience wide variability in conversion rates on organic traffic

Q. What is your organization's conversion rate for organic traffic?



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

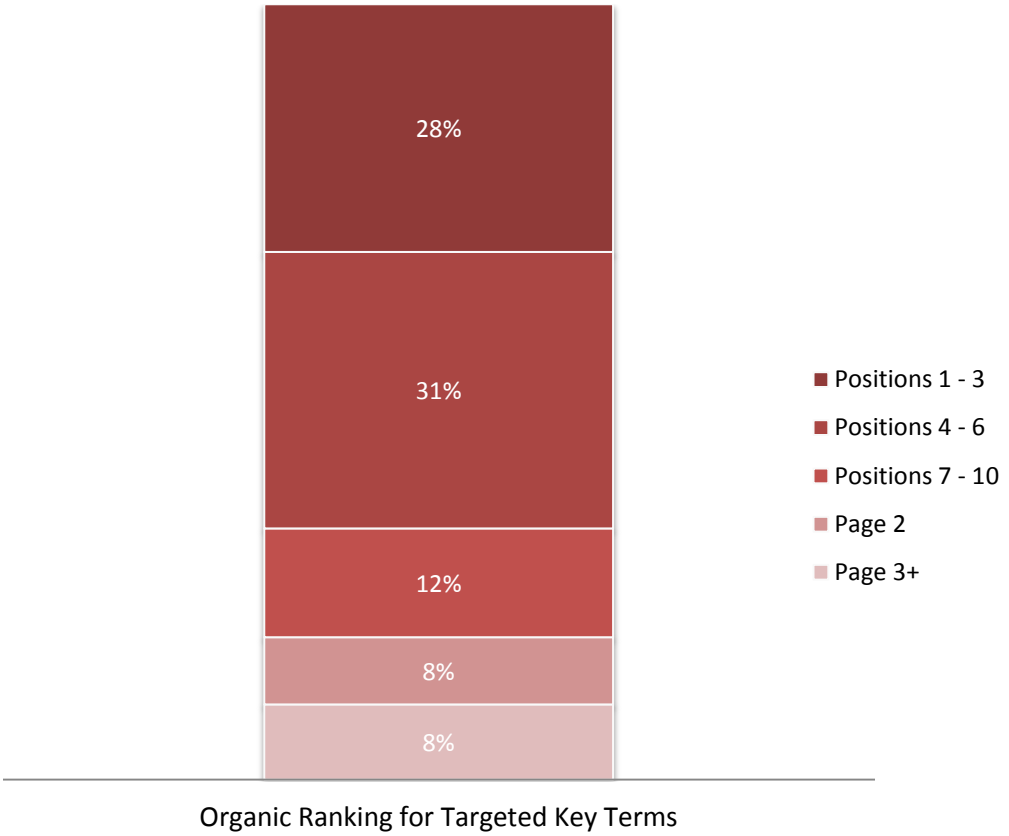
Conversion rates measure user behavior, so to speak. The median conversion rate for all organizations surveyed is four percent. Put another way, 96 percent of visitors to an organization's site leave without buying or doing anything. Understanding why is crucial for improving SEO and the marketing campaign performance. Here is where metrics play a part, because these reveal user behavior, from analyzing how visitors arrived on a site to figuring out why they did or did not convert.

Fine-tuning a website to lower bounce rates and guide visitors to the desired actions is the process of conversion rate optimization. This process includes not just metrics analysis but also usability analysis, A/B testing, and even landing page and sales funnel optimization.

PAGE 1 OF SERPS NOT OUT OF REACH FOR MOST MARKETERS

Chart: Targeted key terms yield good rankings for many

Q. What is your organization's typical organic ranking for the majority of your targeted key terms?



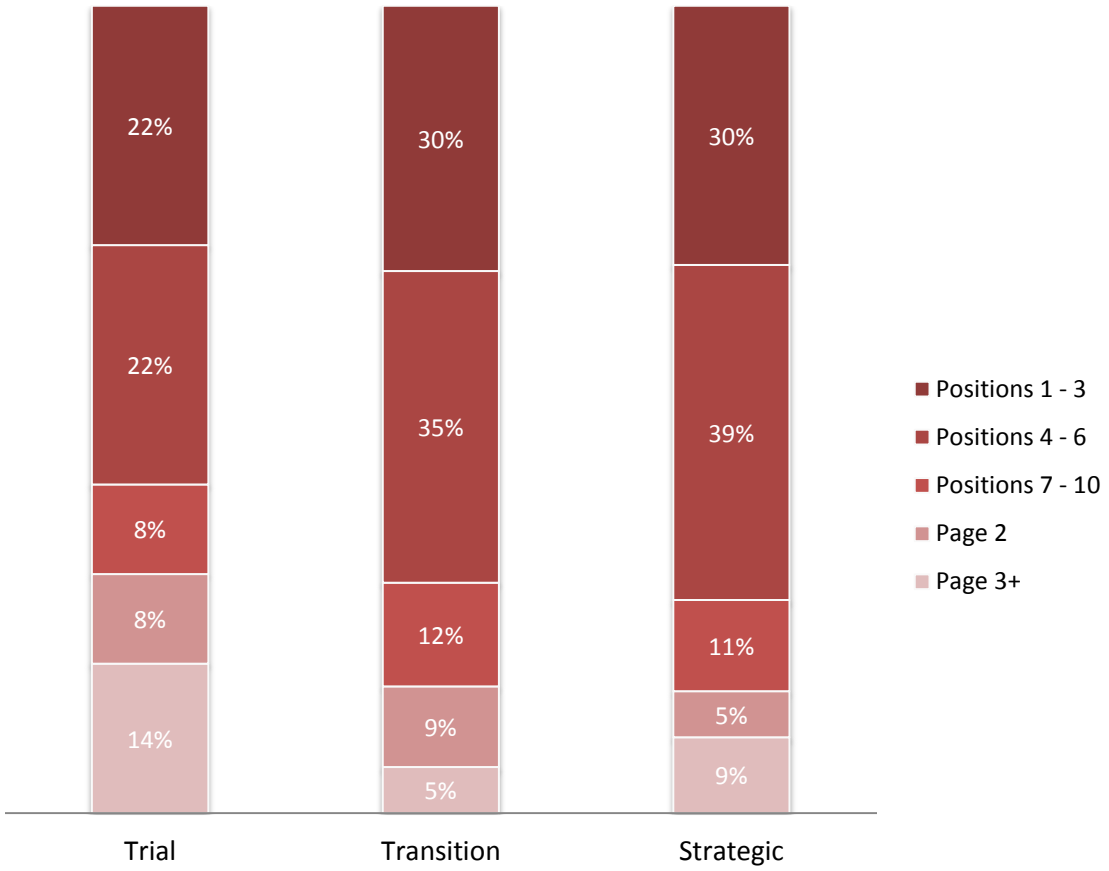
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

More than 70% of organizations surveyed appear on the first page of targeted search results. At first glance, this appears successful, because appearing on page 1 is obviously better than a later page. However, the difference in clickthrough rates between positions 1 and 2 on Page 1 is dramatic, not to mention the difference between the first and tenth positions.

A number of studies exist that look at the organic clickthrough rates by position. Despite the slight variations in the results of these studies, two things are always clear. First, position 1 always gets the most clicks. Second, the clickthrough rate from the first to second position drops sharply, sometimes by a factor of three or more. In other words, organizations that invest the resources to move from the second position to the first position could triple their traffic for a particular keyword or key phrase.

One caveat to keep in mind: It does not matter how great your ranking is, if the traffic does not convert. Common reasons for lack of conversion include optimizing for the wrong set of keywords or incurring high bounce rates due to poor landing pages and site experiences.

Chart: Organic ranking for targeted key terms, by SEO maturity phase



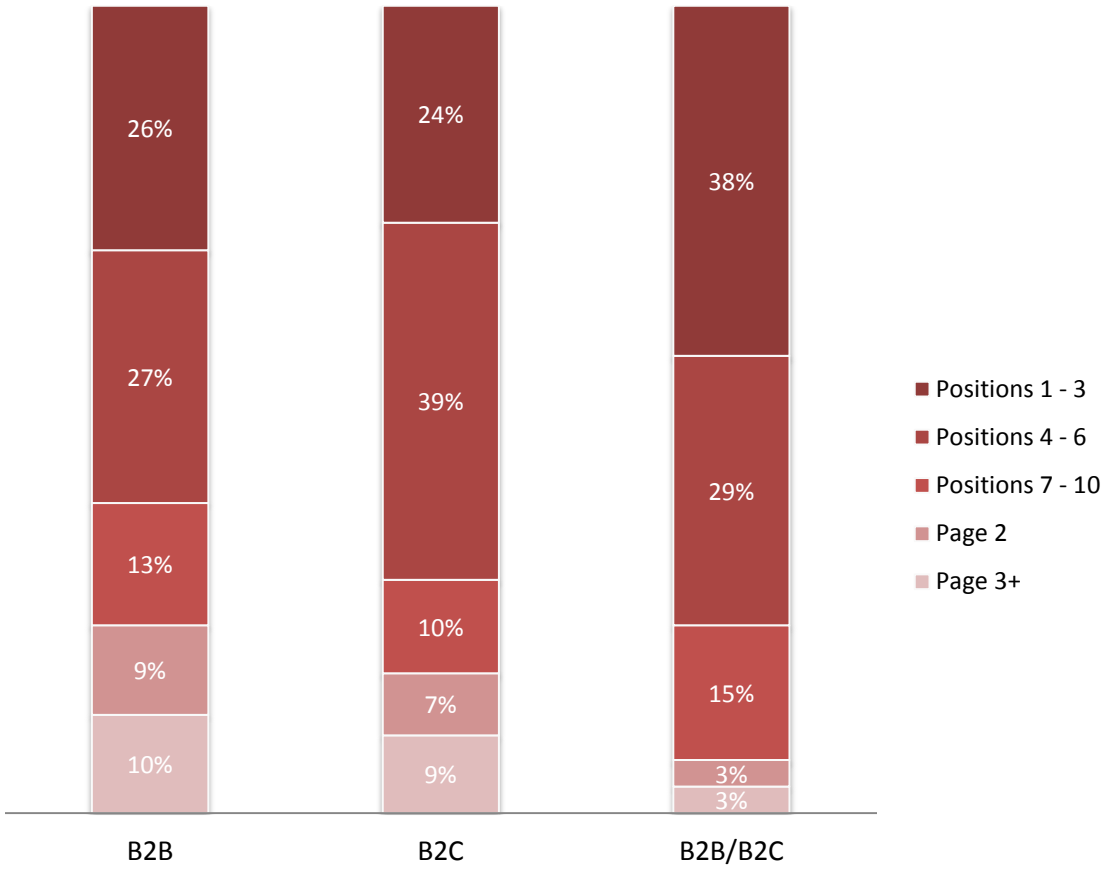
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Nearly one-third of organizations in the Transition and Strategic phases of SEO management achieve rankings in the top three spots for their targeted key terms. By contrast, only 22 percent of Trial organizations can claim these same spots. Getting these highly coveted positions is no easy task and requires a strategic plan of action. Trial and error can only take an organization so far.

Strategic organizations start to pull away from the pack for positions 4-6 in organic rankings. Transition organizations are only 89 percent as effective at achieving these spots as Strategic organizations. Trial organizations lag even further behind, experiencing success just 56 percent as often as Strategic organizations.

"Deep content creation boosted our Google rank to #1 in natural search results for our keyword niche ("antique clocks") where we have remained for the past seven years." – Marketer insight

Chart: Organic ranking for targeted key terms, by primary channel



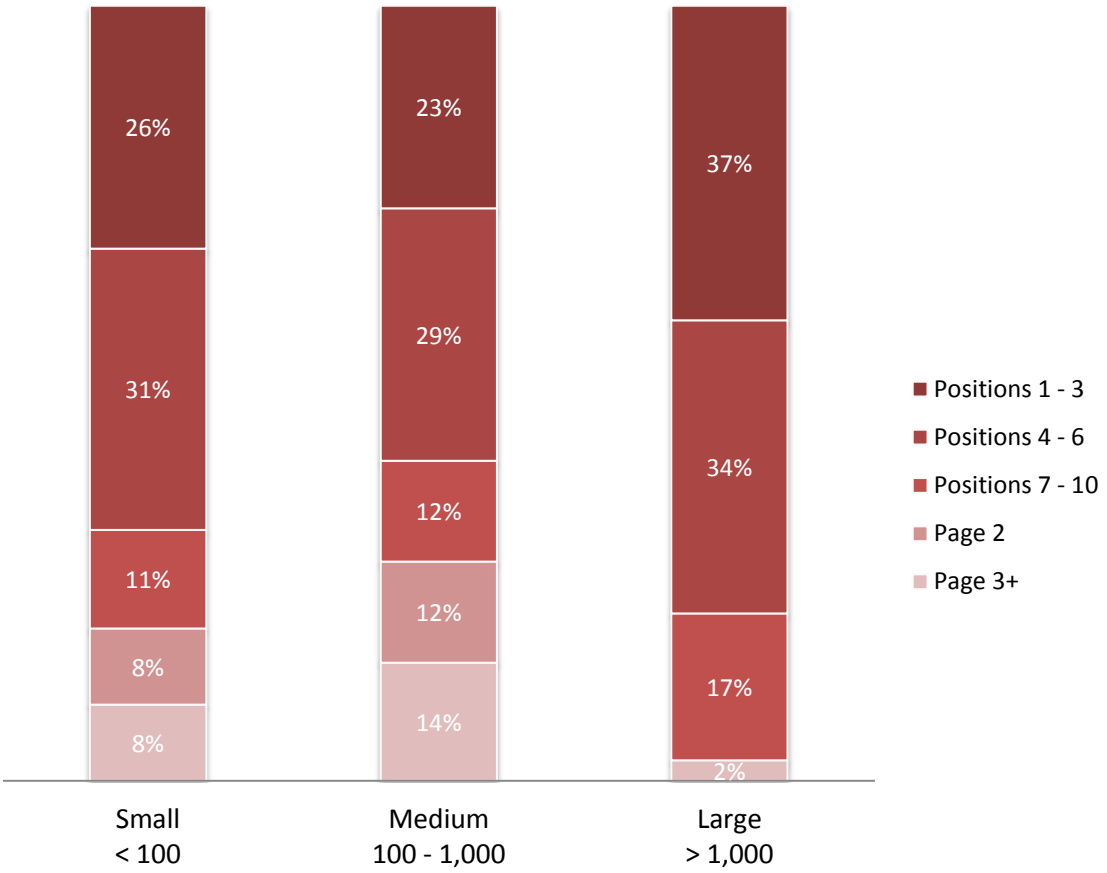
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Organizations engaged in both business and consumer channels do the best at attaining one of the top three positions for organic rankings. Although these channels are distinct, the impact on organic rankings from optimization efforts and other SEO tactics can spill over into both sides. This is particularly the case when there is a coordinated effort among divisions to look for – and exploit – synergies.

These B2B/B2C organizations operate in a complex marketing environment, one requiring a special set of SEO skills. For example, some organizations in this sphere work through intermediaries. Not only do these companies need to create consumer demand for their products or services, they also need to meet the search needs of intermediaries in their distribution supply chains. Other organizations bypass intermediaries and sell directly to both businesses and consumers. These organizations must juggle the variety of psychological considerations and pressures people attach to their business versus personal purchases – and then address both sets of motivations in their SEO efforts.

> *"We identify top query terms we want to rank for, identify pages relevant to query terms, optimize on-page elements for query terms or develop new pages with relevant content, update links to utilize query terminology, work with external bloggers and PR agencies to utilize specific terms and phrases in inbound links to our site. We regularly monitor performance and make adjustments."* – Marketer insight

Chart: Organic ranking for targeted key terms, by organization size



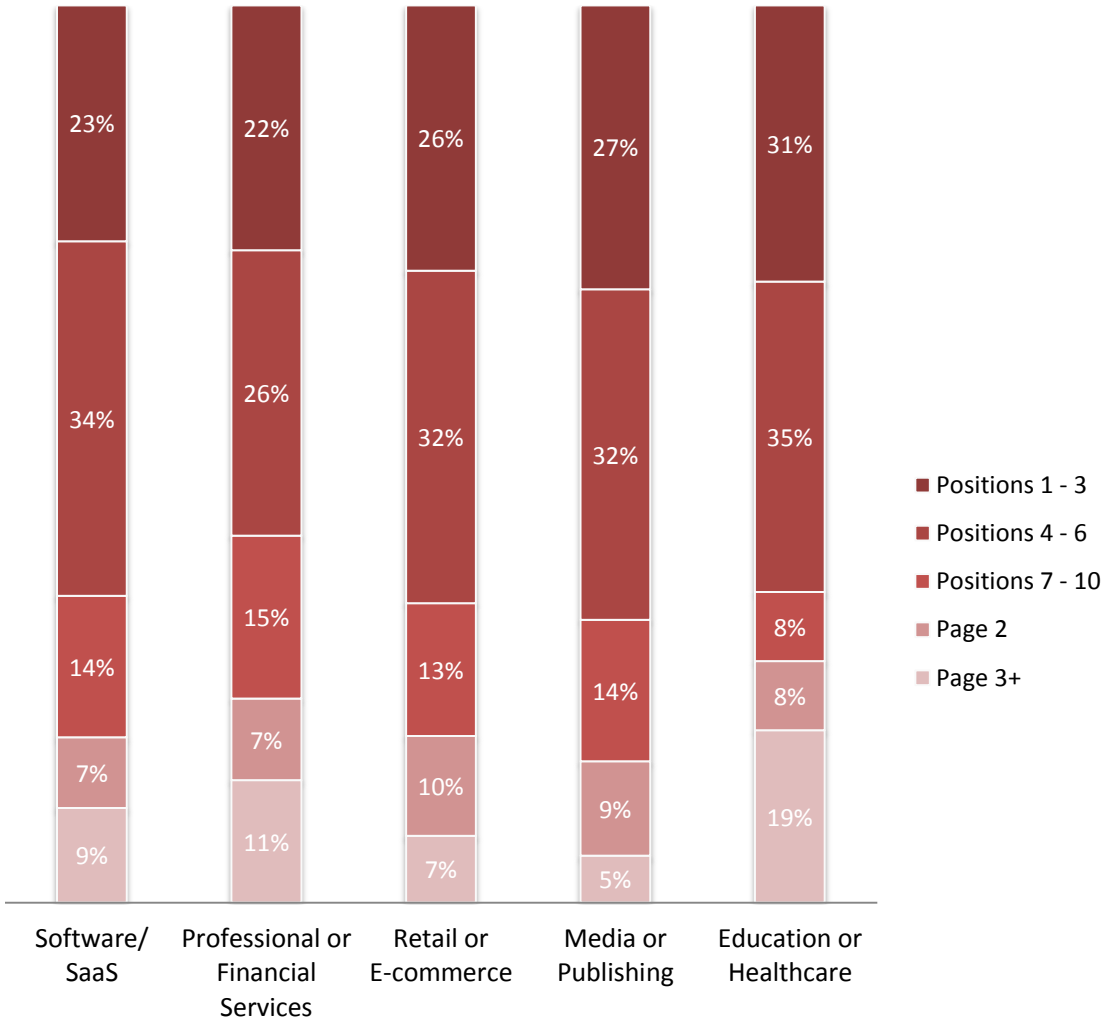
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Large organizations are the most effective at ranking for top positions in search engine results pages. Thirty-seven percent rank for positions 1-3 for their targeted key terms, with an additional 34 percent ranking for the fourth to sixth positions. Large organizations typically have large sites, and large sites are often flush with content. More content means more information to be indexed and returned for relevant search queries.

Large-scale optimization can be daunting. Although research, planning and prioritization are important SEO activities for any organization, these steps are critical for large organizations – simply because there is just so much to do. Without an operational framework, getting overwhelmed or sidetracked can become an unfortunate modus operandi.

Understanding a site's hierarchy is also an important factor in successfully optimizing a larger website for SEO. Organizations should work to know linkages between pages, ascertaining those that are most important. They should also plumb the depth of pages and measure the degree of separation a page has from the homepage. (In SEO, pages that are closer to the homepage are often deemed more valuable by search engines.)

Chart: Organic ranking for targeted key terms, by industry



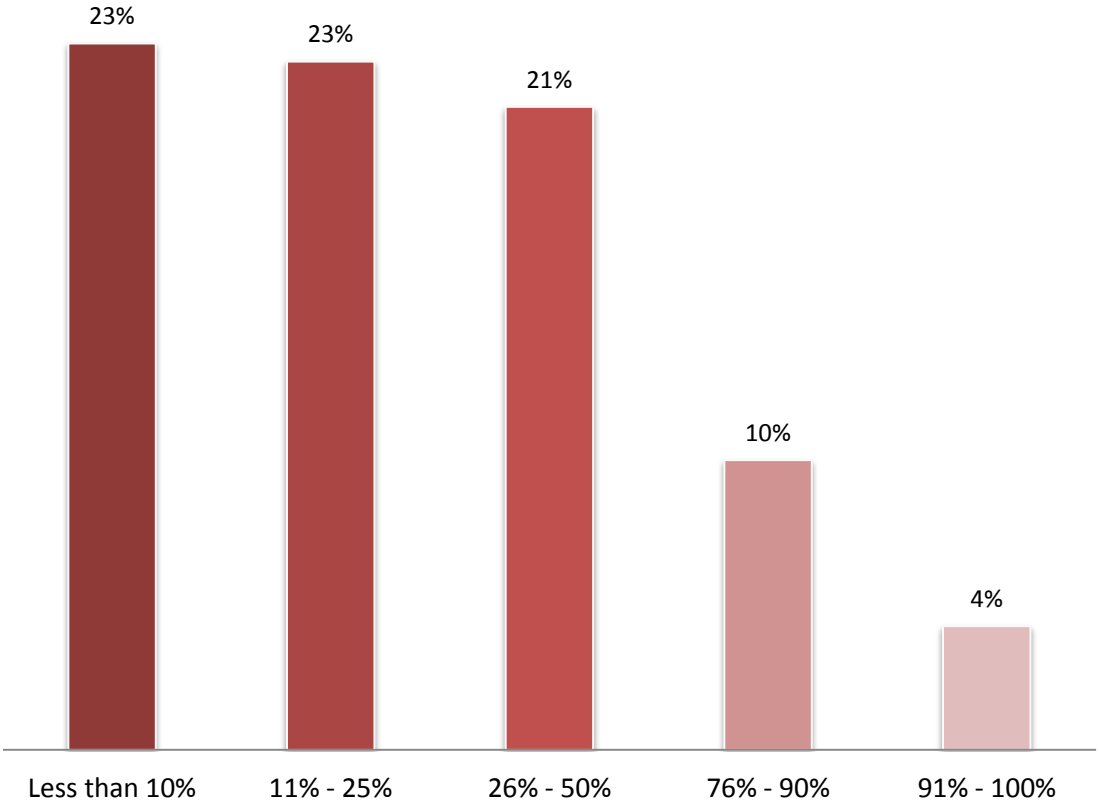
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

"We identify key terms where we should be on the first page of results. We then research those terms and similar terms to determine the keyword effectiveness (particularly to determine if the keyword has a high enough search volume to warrant investment). Once we have decided on the appropriate terms, we use a combination of SEO and SEM tactics to increase rankings. We add meta data (descriptions and keywords, alt tags, etc.) to key pages on the website. We use those terms in press releases, technical documentation, etc." – Marketer insight

ORGANIC SEARCH PLAYS MINOR ROLE IN TOTAL LEAD VOLUME

Chart: Percentage of total lead volume from organic search

Q. What percentage of your organization's total lead volume is generated from organic search?

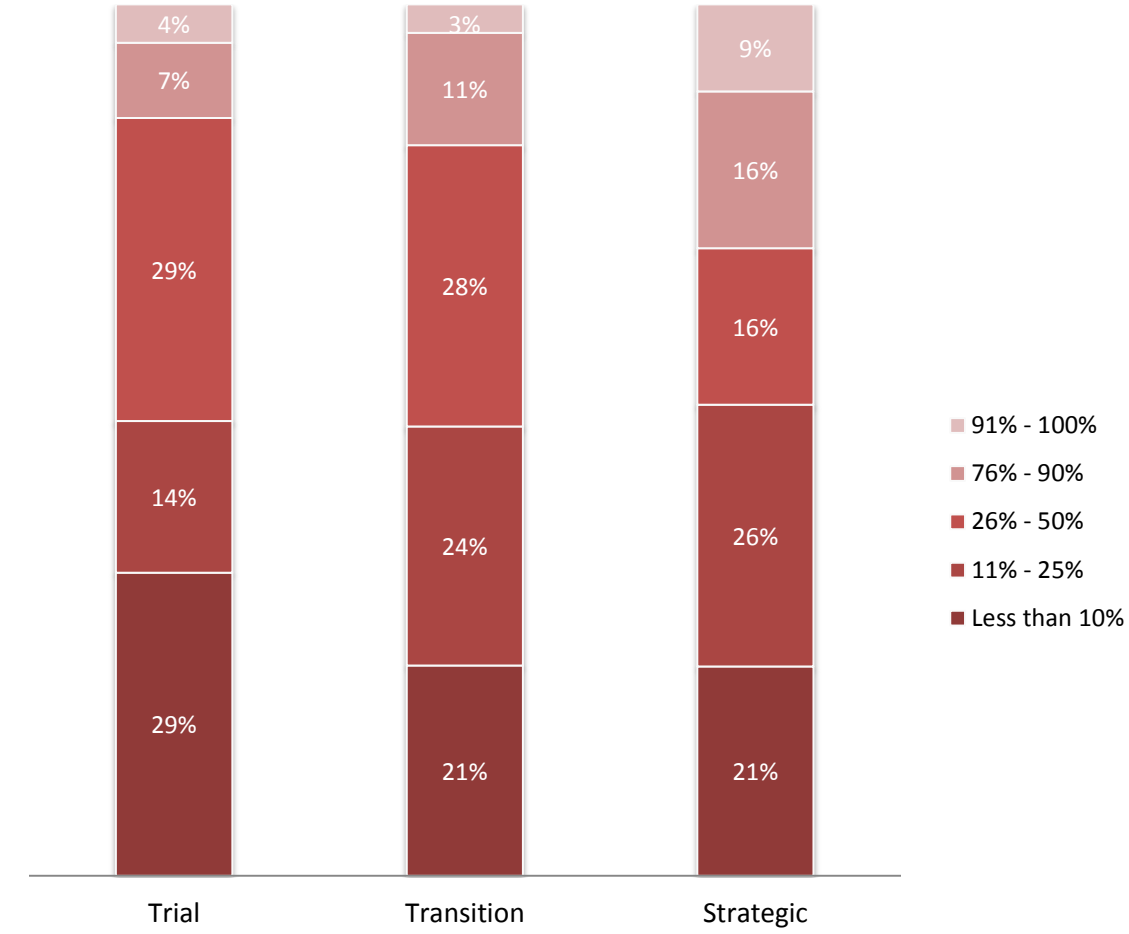


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Nearly half of all organizations obtain fewer than 25 percent of their totals leads from organic search.

The investment of time, money and effort (albeit the right effort) into generating more leads from natural search traffic can produce a steady return on this investment. Every time an organization takes over a new spot in the SERPs, it stakes claim to a certain volume of traffic. Of course, if there is more traffic, there is a greater probability of leads. Granted, it can take time to reach the top positions, but getting and staying there can bring about extended flows of traffic and revenue for the long term.

Chart: Percentage of total lead volume from organic search, by SEO maturity phase



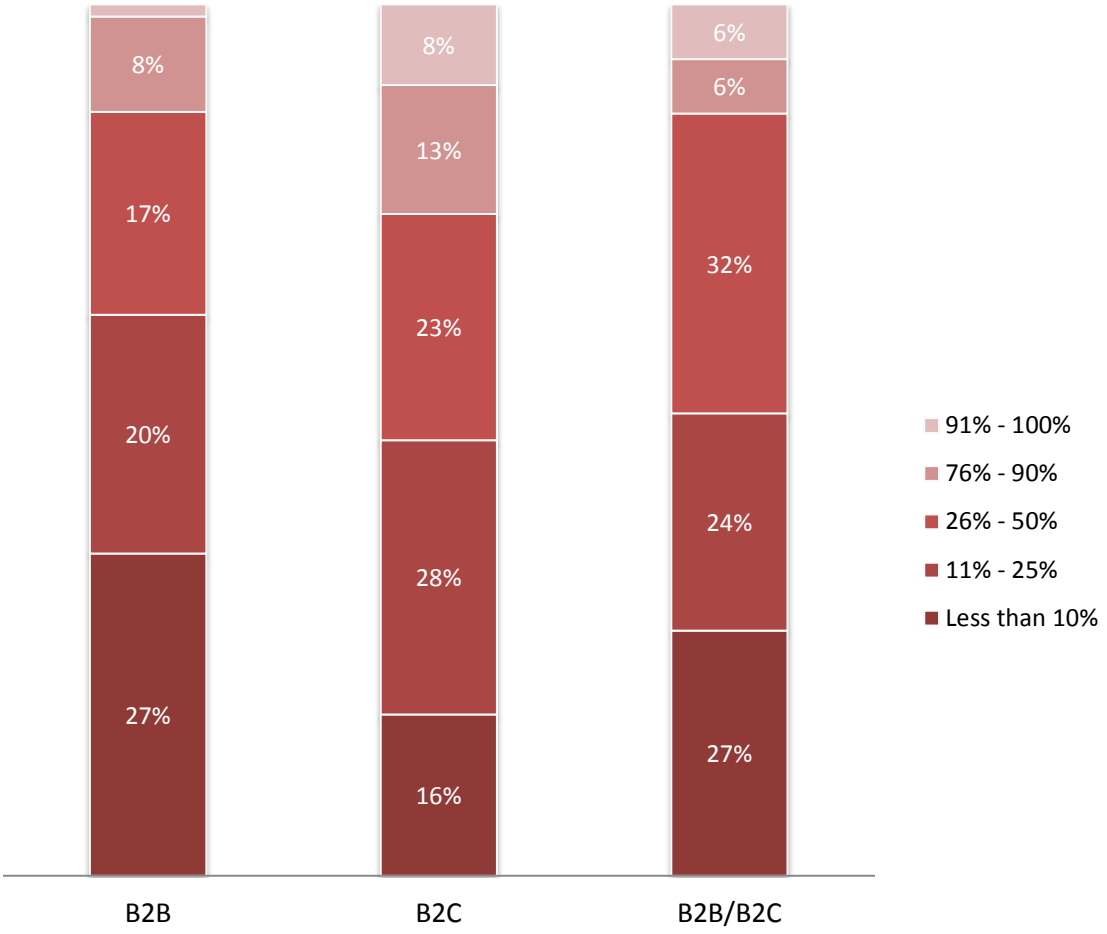
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Strategic organizations have more success with generating a greater volume of leads from SEO than organizations in the Trial and Transition phases of SEO. Only 11 percent of Trial organizations receive more than three-quarters of their total leads from organic search, compared to 25 percent of Strategic organizations.

Cost savings is just one benefit of obtaining leads from natural search traffic. As we will see later, Strategic organizations also yield more high-quality leads from organic search and convert these at a higher rate.

> *"SEO is a very important part of any Web strategy. Without proper optimization of a website, blog, etc., you cannot expect decent returns, as your site will not rank within the areas of search results where it has been proven most people click. The top portion of the first page of results not only increases the probability your link will be clicked, but it also helps to build trust and a strong reputation because search engines are like a popularity contest in high school."* – Marketer insight

Chart: Percentage of total lead volume from organic search, by primary channel



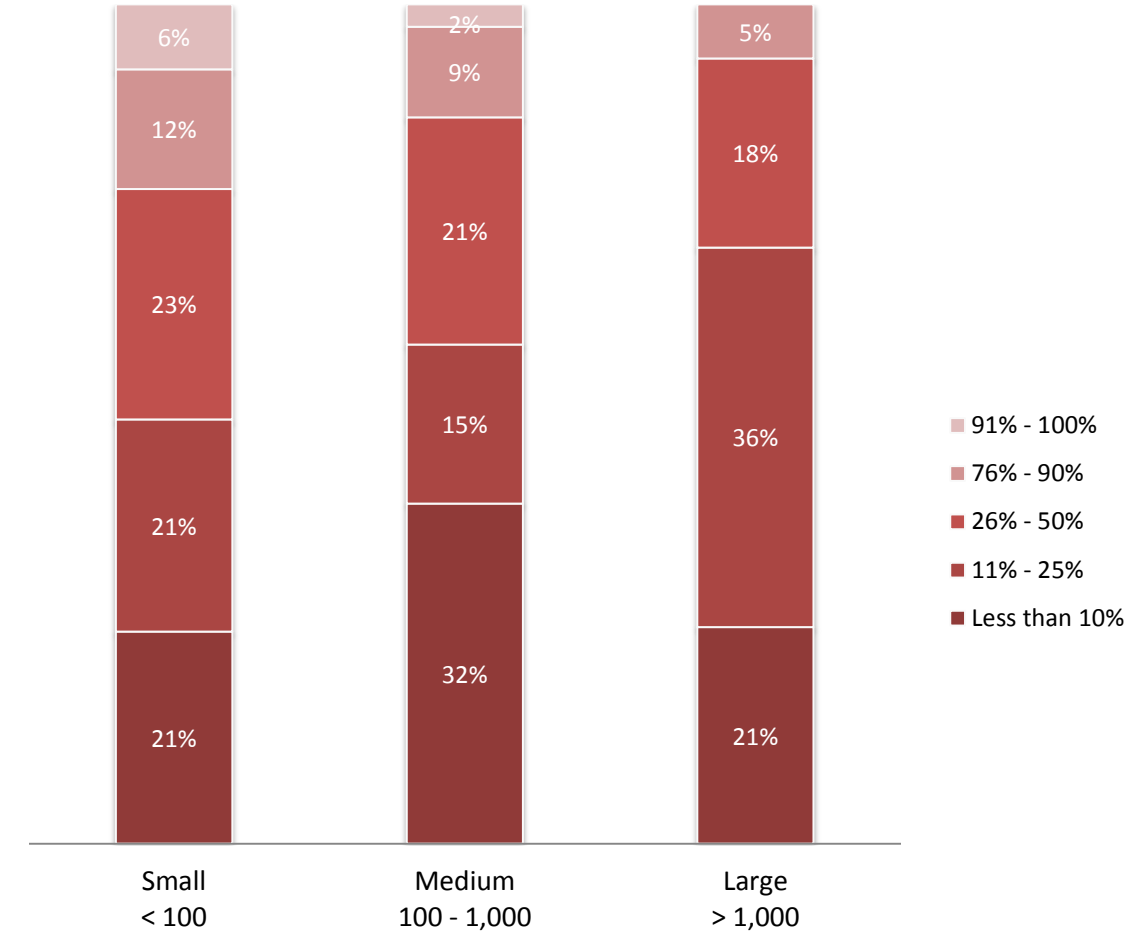
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

More than one-quarter of B2B organizations receive less than 10 percent of leads from natural search traffic.

It is important to remember that there is no singular best marketing mix for businesses. Each organization needs to determine its own unique, optimal blend of inbound and outbound lead generation tactics. Even so, SEO is a marketing tactic to keep top of mind. When done well, it offers a distinct set of advantages. Search plays a pivotal role in the buying cycle of many business customers, especially in the research and consideration phases. Therefore, providing a rich array of informative content to prospects in these early stages can facilitate a B2B company's ability to attract more leads through natural search traffic.

"SEO for existing brands and organizations is vital. In niche B2B "solution selling" companies, SEO is very important (but difficult) since customers have no idea what your products ARE and WHAT they might do for them. But with a proven brand and a ton of work, SEO is achievable. ROI on such efforts have been the highest across a full marketing campaign. The largest problem is that you cannot get enough of it to replace the other forms of advertising/marketing." – Marketer insight

Chart: Percentage of total lead volume from organic search, by organization size



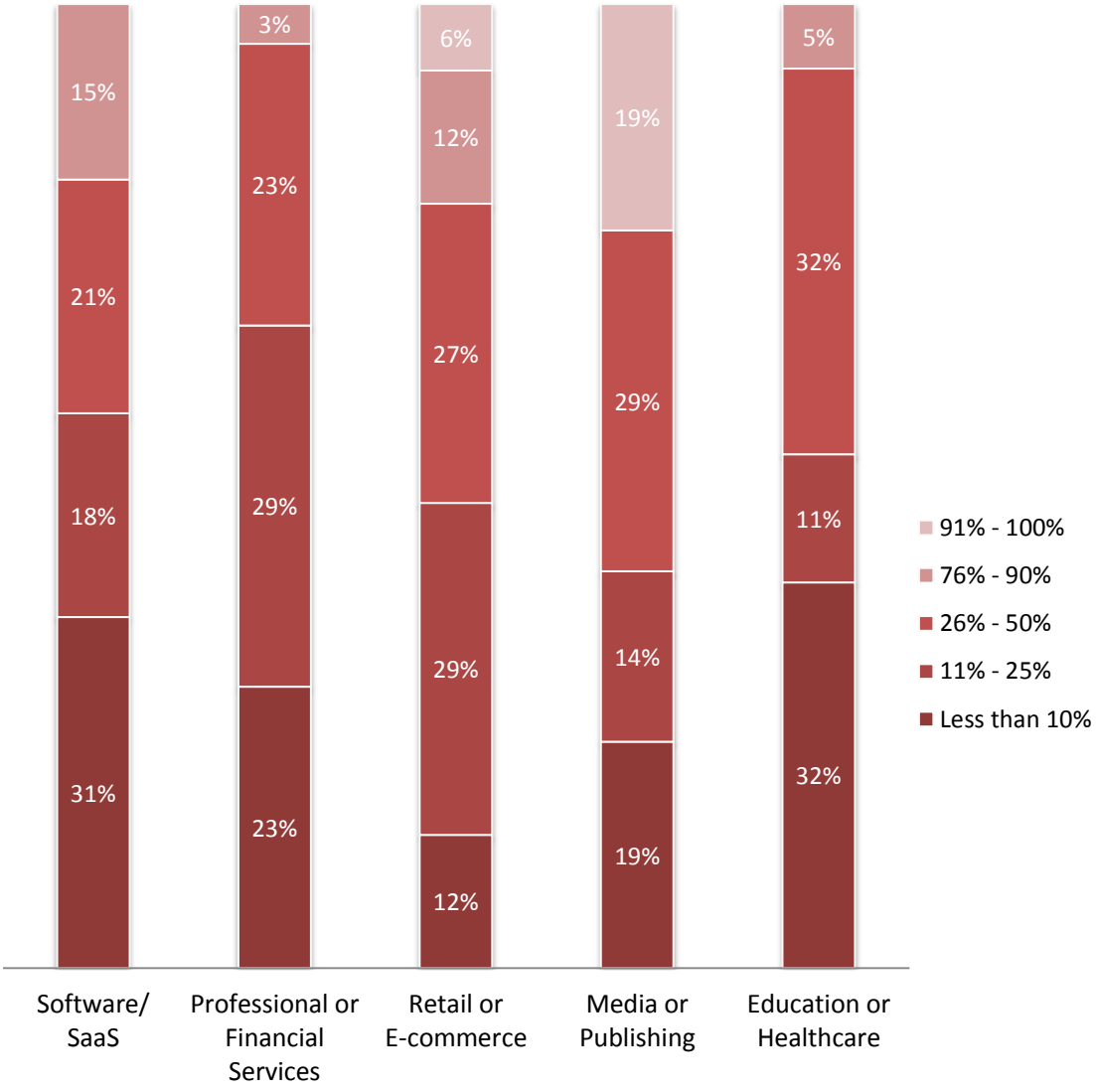
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Small organizations are most adept at using SEO for generating a large share of leads. Nearly one out of five small companies depends on natural search traffic for more than 75 percent of its total lead volume.

Search engine optimization is a great way for small businesses to compete with larger and more established companies. Small businesses that have incorporated SEO into their marketing, as well as website development processes, are able to increase brand image and awareness. A company listed in the top spots is more readily perceived as trustworthy, not to mention as an industry leader. The combination of perception and position drives more traffic. Over time, traffic and leads become more qualified as organizations center energies on high-conversion keywords.

> *"SEO is vital to our organization, as we're small and rely heavily on search engine traffic and content marketing over paid advertising."* – Marketer insight

Chart: Percentage of total lead volume from organic search, by industry

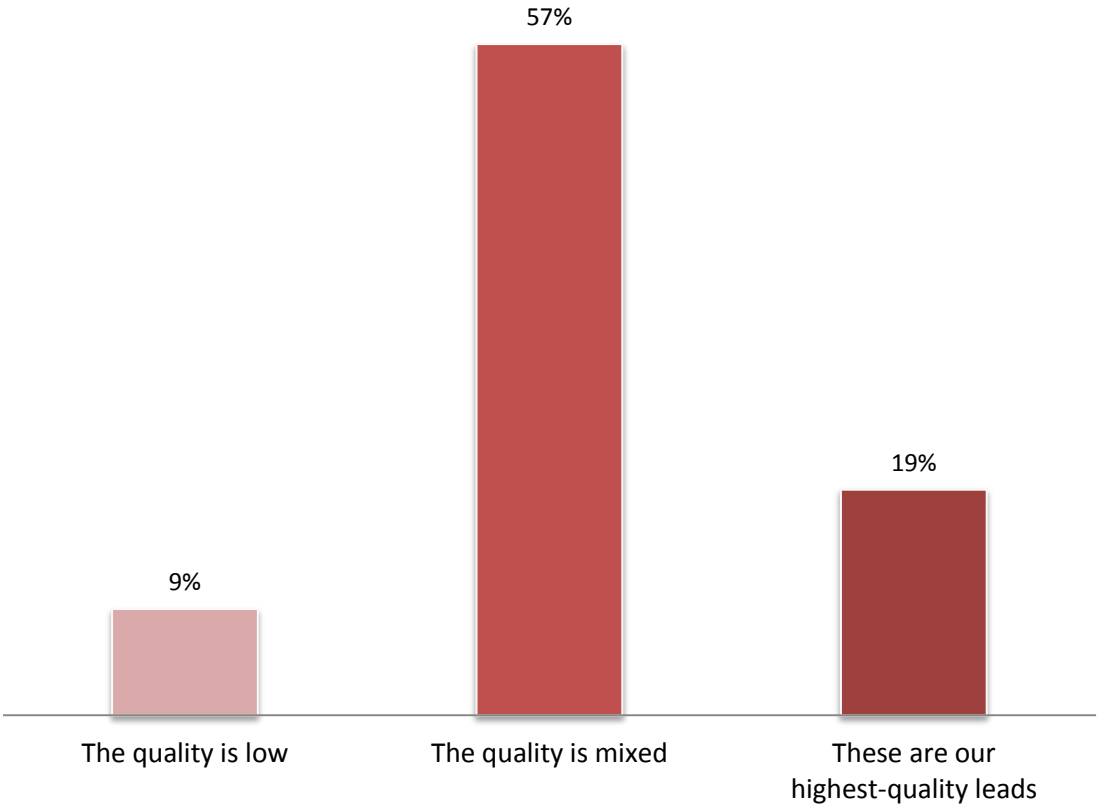


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

ORGANIC SEARCH YIELDS MIXED RESULTS FOR LEAD QUALITY, WITH SOME STANDOUTS

Chart: Quality of leads from organic search

Q. How would you rate the quality of leads generated from organic search?

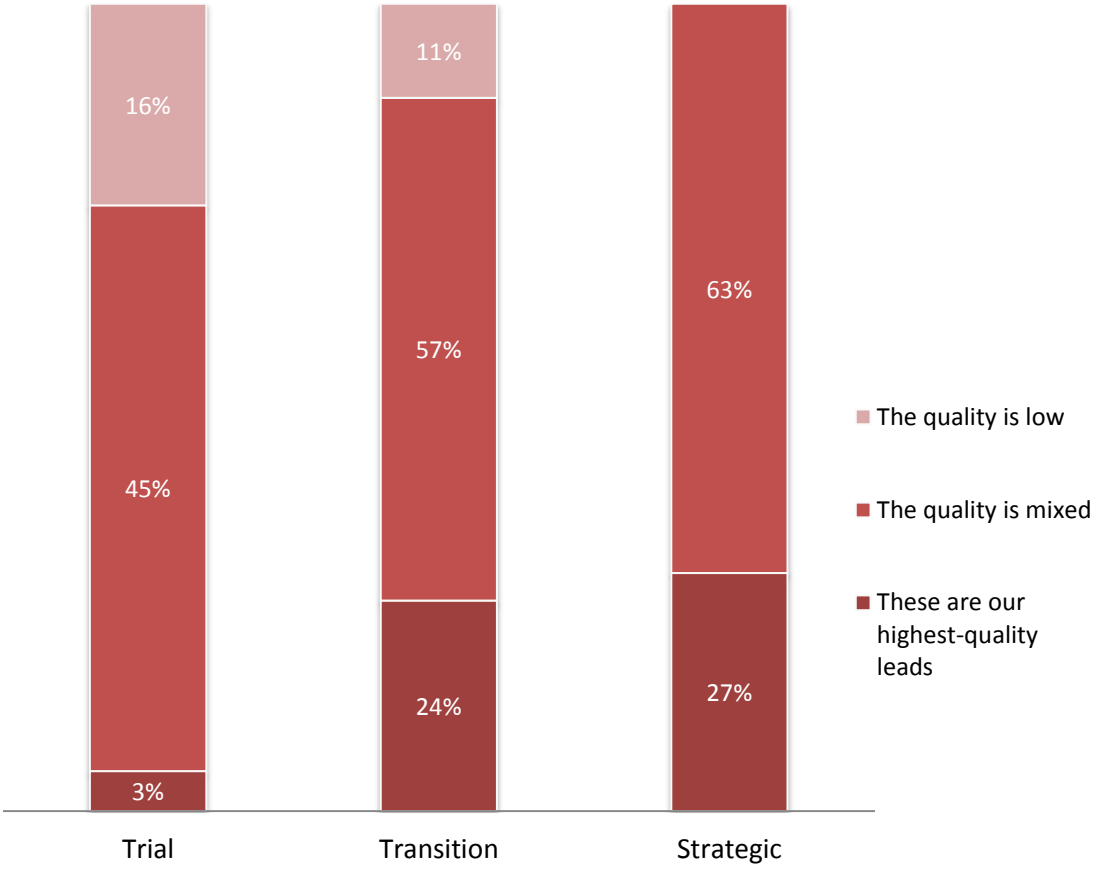


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

The majority of organizations find the quality of leads from organic search to be a mixed bag. What is encouraging, however, is that nearly 20 percent find these leads to be of the highest quality. In fact, more than twice as many organizations rate their leads from natural search traffic as high-quality rather than low-quality. With enough fine-tuning, search is an efficient, effective form of marketing.

For organizations experiencing mixed results with their leads, one explanation is that some of these leads simply may not be sales-ready. For those that are not, a nurturing campaign may be the answer. Through the use of complementary tactics to reach out and stay front-of-mind, these organizations can build a relationship and communicate value over a longer term.

Chart: Quality of leads from organic search, by SEO maturity phase



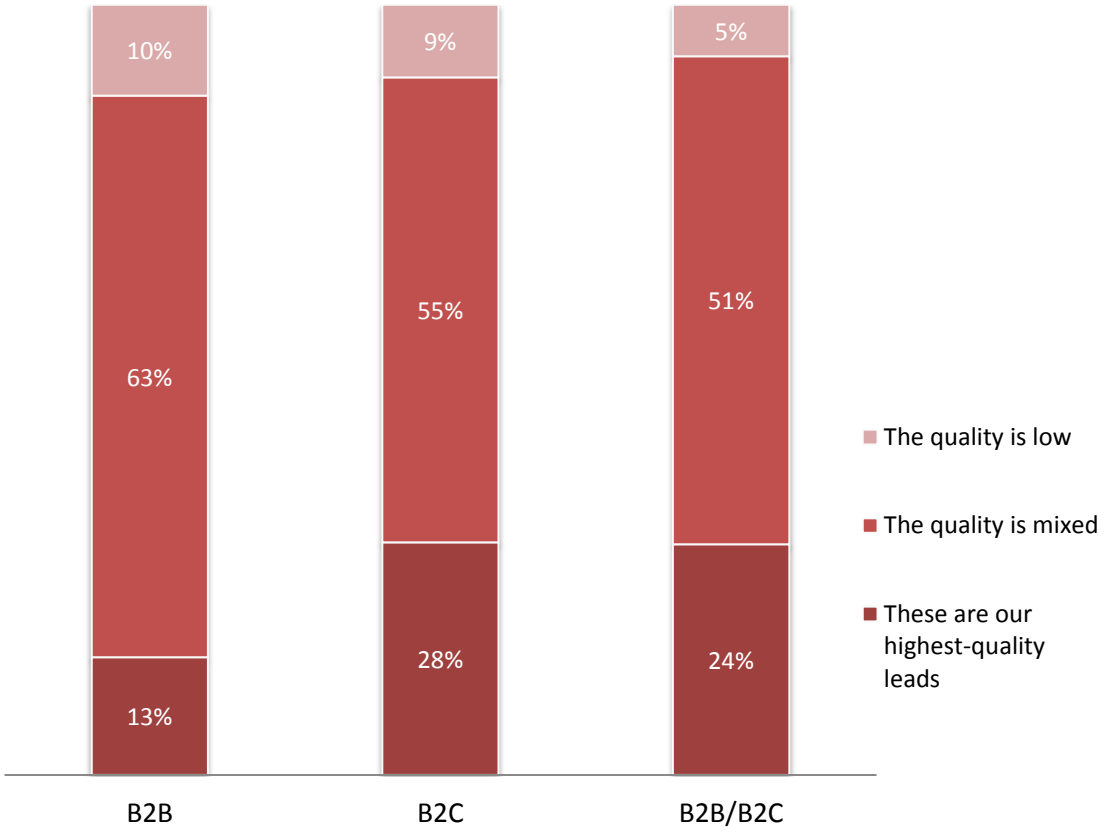
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

As indicated earlier, Strategic organizations receive a greater percentage of their total leads from organic search. Additionally, they also find more of these to be of the highest quality than their counterparts in the other SEO maturity phases. For example, one in four Strategic organizations states that leads from natural search are of the highest quality compared to just one in 33 Trial organizations.

Interestingly, Strategic organizations have also reached a point in their SEO processes where they have filtered out low-quality leads altogether. By comparison, 16 percent of Trial organizations and 11 percent of Transition organizations still contend with low-quality leads.

> *"We measure our digital leads based on the originating source of a visit through either paid or organic traffic. Once we finalized that metric, we could quickly see the business units that paid attention to SEO got 10x the results from organic search as paid search. This revelation immediately changed priorities for us. We are now aligning user intent and content linguistics to improve engagement and lead conversion."* – Marketer insight

Chart: Quality of leads from organic search, by primary channel



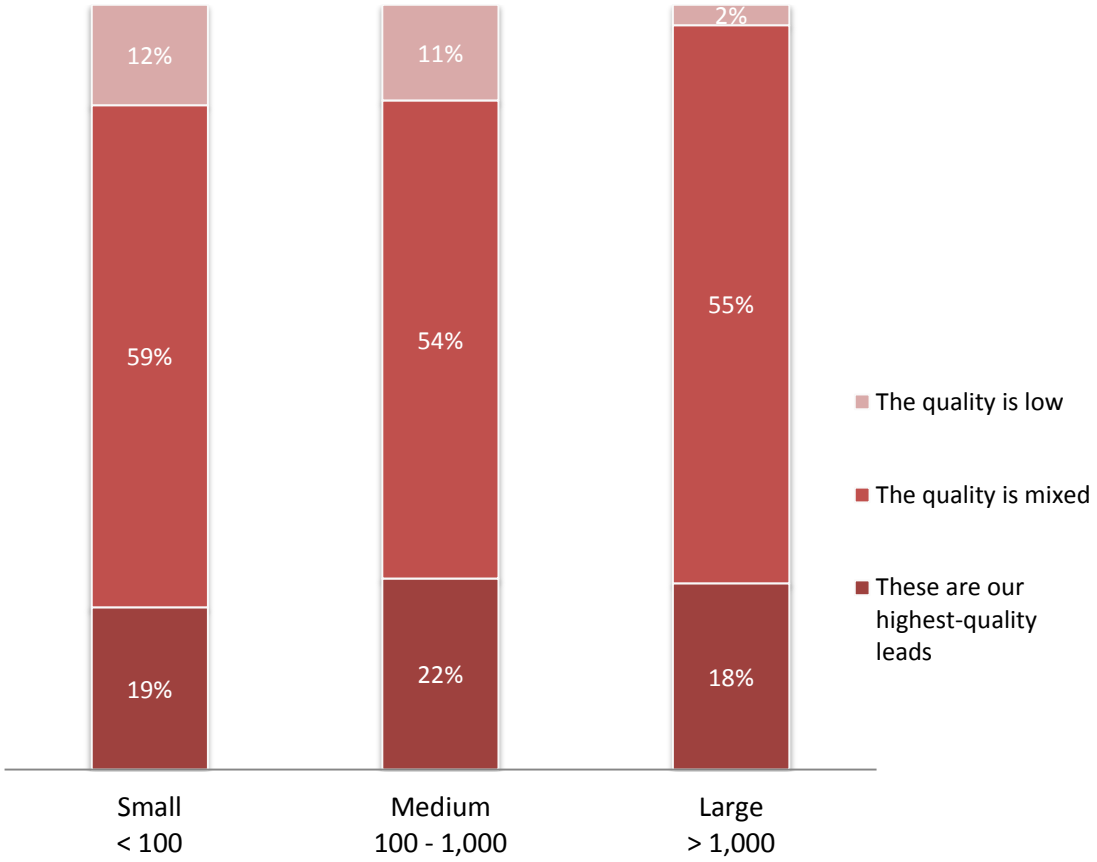
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

B2C organizations have the most success with getting high-quality leads from organic search, with 28 percent of B2C organizations assigning this rating. Consumer searchers often have a good idea of what they want to buy; they often just want to find the best source for the product or service. Consumers tend to use keywords in phrases with "price" or "review" and also often use well-known brand names in their searches. When consumer searchers *do* use generic terms, there is typically less variation in the terms they use. B2C companies that optimize their pages and content around these exact keyword variations are better able to establish relevance in the eyes of the search engine and the search user.

"SEO analytics have helped us in identifying how our customers search for our products, the terminology they use to search, and the information they are seeking." – Marketer insight

By comparison, only 13 percent of B2B organizations give top marks to their SEO leads. Uncovering qualified leads is a challenge for B2B organizations, as not all leads are created equal. Moreover, sales cycles are longer in B2B organizations, meaning many leads are low-quality simply because they are not sales-ready at the present time. However, with the proper lead scoring and lead nurturing programs in place, some initially low-quality leads can be cultivated and harvested over time.

Chart: Quality of leads from organic search, by organization size

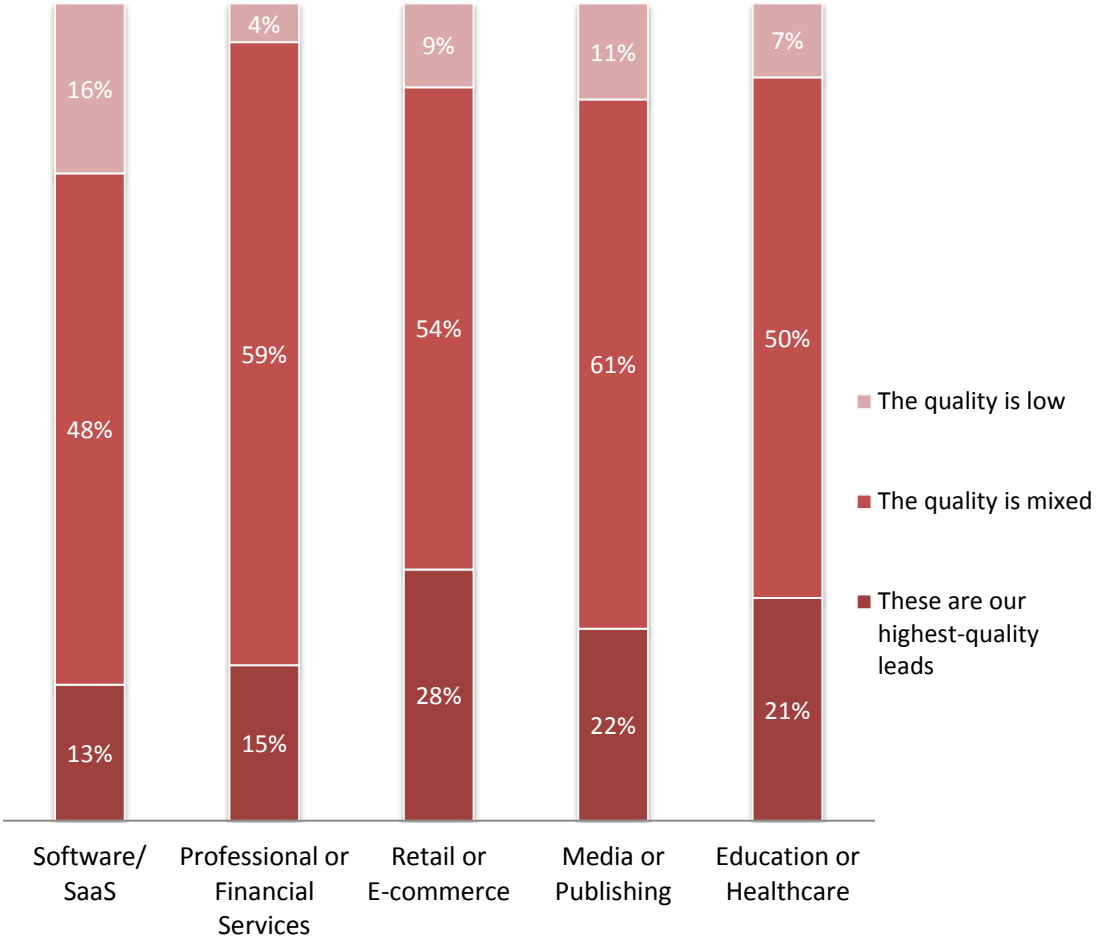


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Large organizations have the most success at weeding out low-quality leads. Only two percent of these organizations said that leads from organic search were of low quality. By comparison, 12 percent of Small organizations and 11 percent of Medium-sized organizations rated their leads from organic search as low-quality.

Many organizations have programs and processes in place to effectively manage the flow of leads entering their systems. These Marketing-Sales funnels assist the buying process by clearly identifying the various stages a lead experiences on its journey to becoming a customer. With these types of programs in place, and a focus on funnel progression from one stage to the next, low- and mixed-quality leads may just be high-quality leads-in-waiting.

Chart: Quality of leads from organic search, by industry



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

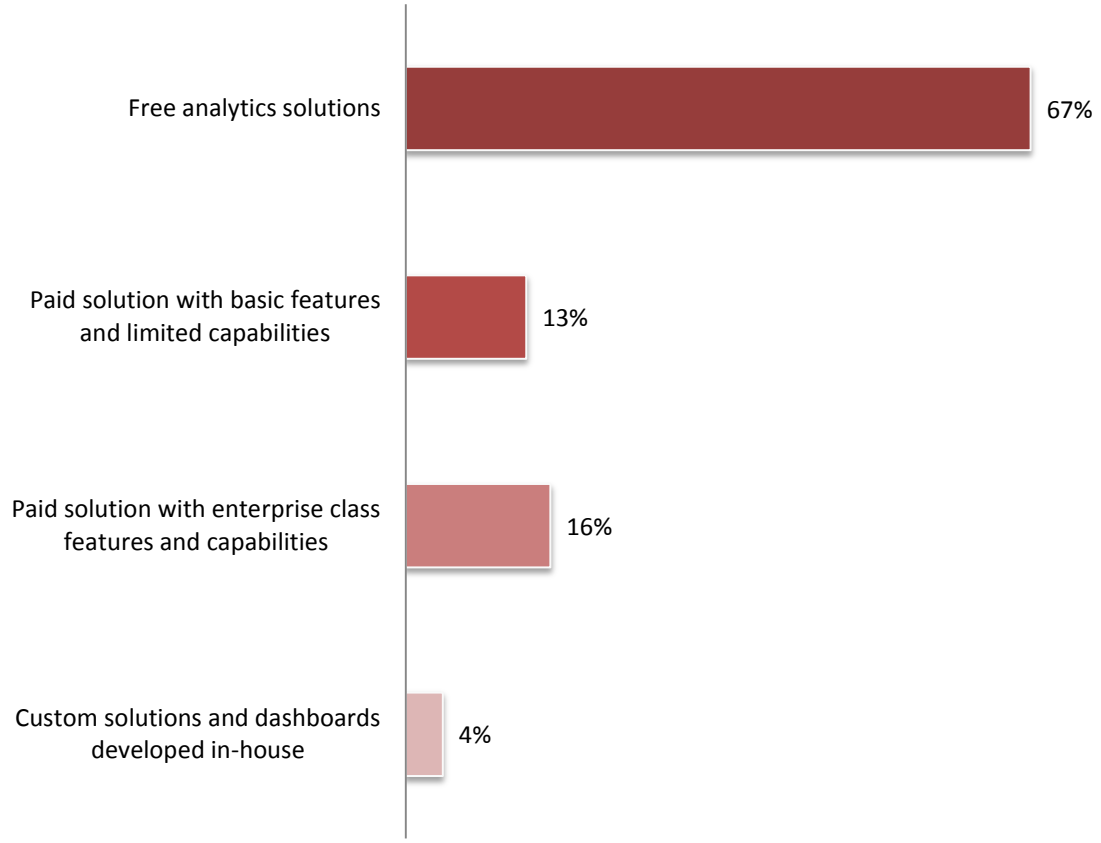
Twenty-eight percent of Retail and E-commerce organizations find leads from organic search to be of the highest quality. Yet, only 13 percent of Software companies could say the same.

> *"SEO is seen as a positive investment. Its benefits are obvious based on inbound lead generation. More budget should be allocated to it, but it isn't available currently."* – Marketer insight

FREE ANALYTICS SOLUTIONS ARE THE MOST WIDELY USED

Chart: Analytics and monitoring solutions for tracking SEO metrics

Q. Which type of analytics or monitoring solution does your organization primarily use to track SEO metrics?



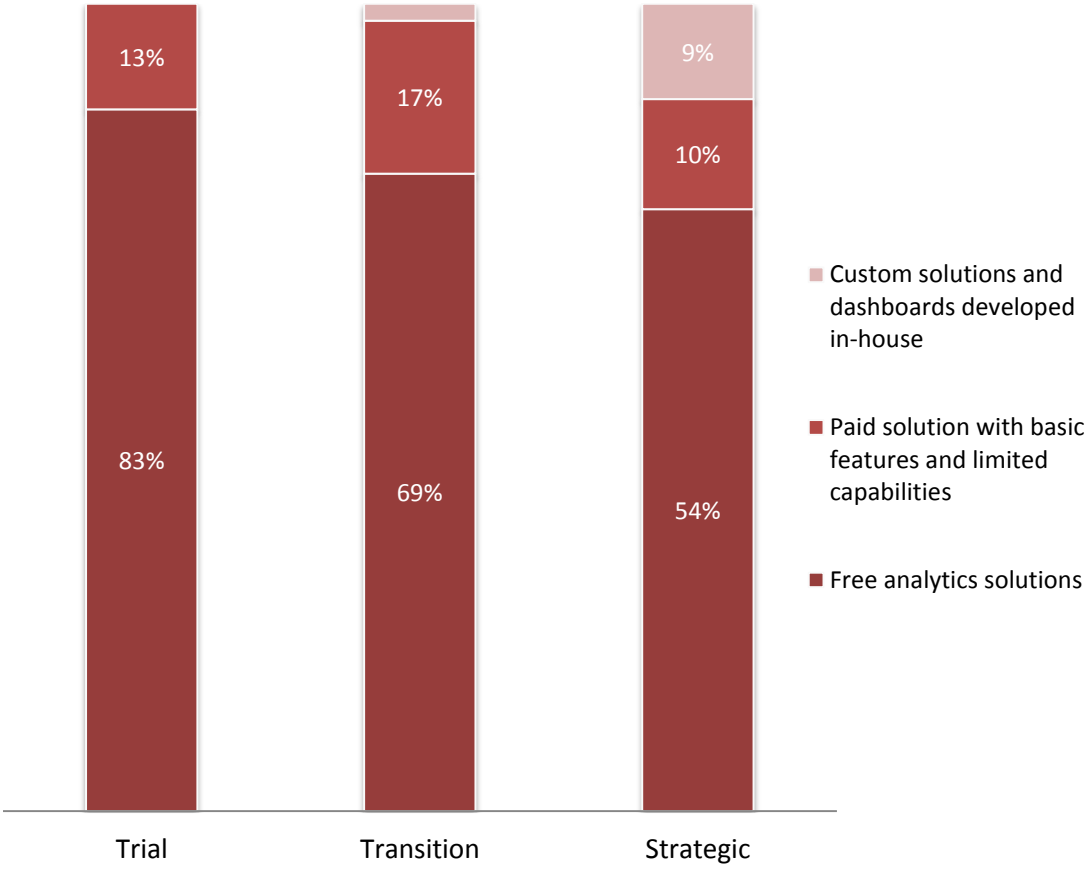
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Free analytics solutions, used by 67 percent of organizations, are the most popular choice for tracking and monitoring SEO metrics. Both free and paid tools allow organizations to monitor Web visitors and conversions, looking at everything from how visitors arrived, to what they viewed and what actions they took.

"Each lead (particularly those who convert to a sale) is tracked by referral source, search keyword, landing page and conversion path. We analyze this data to create more persuasive and effective conversion funnels by minimizing distraction and unsupervised thinking." – Marketer insight

Many analytics tools are good at answering the "what" (i.e. clickstream data) but organizations also need to answer questions relating to "why," "how much" and "what else." An appropriate suite of solutions should support both quantitative and qualitative analyses of an organization's website, its customers, its potential customers, and its competition.

Chart: SEO analytics and monitoring solutions, by SEO maturity phase



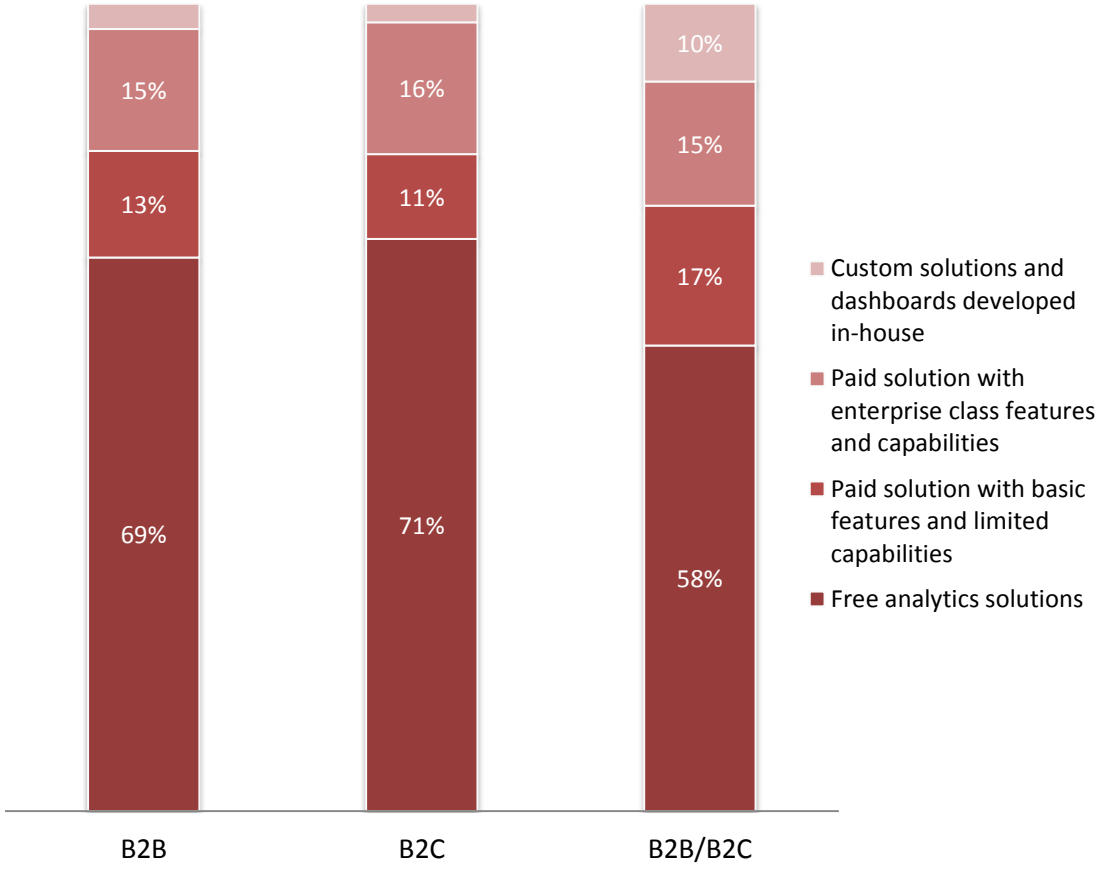
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Strategic organizations are more inclined to invest in paid solutions with more advanced and customized capabilities. From competitive research to experimenting and testing, these tools help companies with on-page and off-page optimization efforts. The return on the monetary investment in these analytics packages comes in the form of desired outcomes – the best indicators of SEO success. Top rankings, highly optimized keywords, and even great flows of traffic mean nothing if they do not result in stronger conversion rates.

> *"[Analytics are] deeply rooted in all of our online marketing. We identify poor performing keywords and pages and make adjustments. We also use it to track paid marketing to evaluate performance, only reinvesting if analytics show good performance."* – Marketer insight

Most Trial organizations rely on free tools, yet some are not even using these. Many marketers in this phase shared that they are not using any analytics tools, or are just beginning to see the benefits of using them. A percentage also expressed that they do not know how to adequately use these tools to improve their SEO performance.

Chart: SEO analytics and monitoring solutions, by primary channel



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

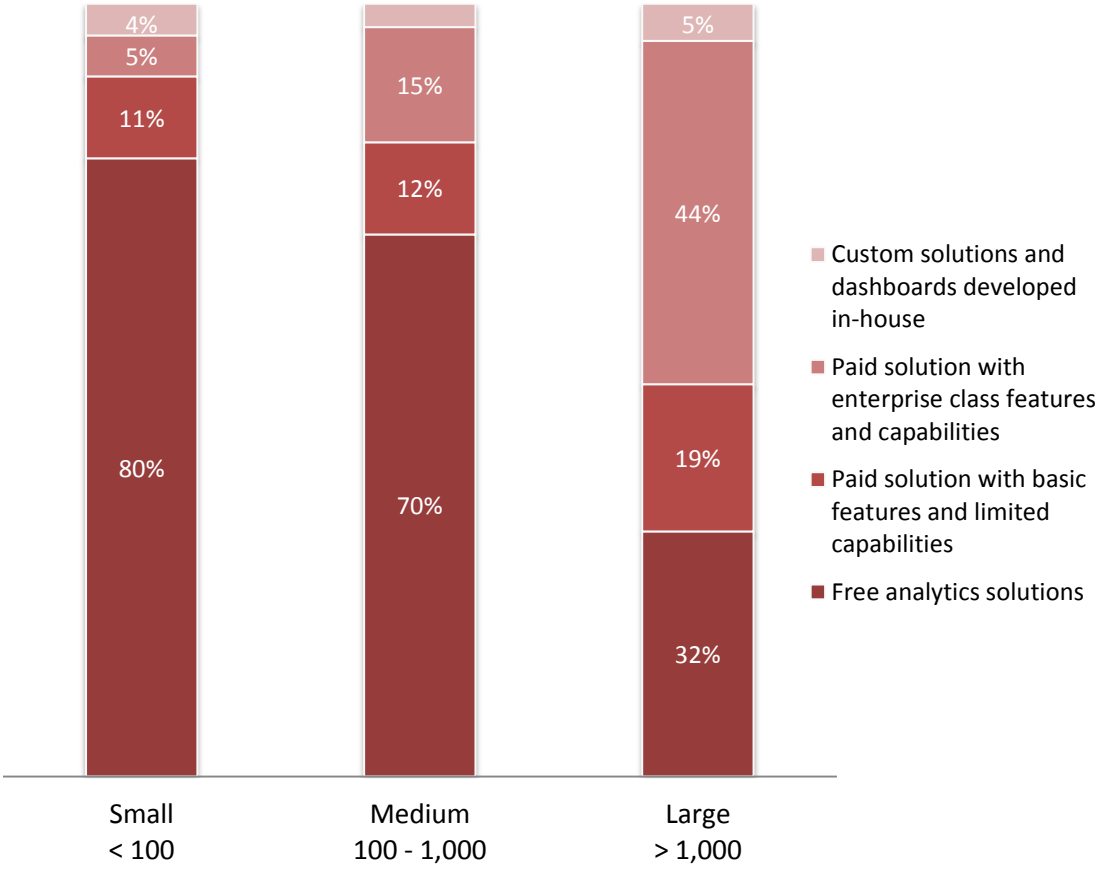
Organizations targeting both business and consumer channels invest more readily in paid analytics solutions. More than 40 percent of these companies have moved away from free analytics solutions, compared to just 31 percent of B2B organizations and 29 percent of B2C organizations, respectively.

Implementing and learning the intricacies of an analytics tool takes time. If an organization discovers that what they have is not what they need, they lose more than just time and money: they can also lose competitive share of search.

"[We use analytics to find pages with high bounce rates and/or low conversions and then better optimize those pages for sales." – Marketer insight

To maximize its success, an organization needs to carefully consider and select the right set of analytics tools for its unique needs along a two- to three-year horizon. Some organizations do not want, or need, to integrate with a survey system. Other organizations, like B2B companies, may require the ability to accept data from company ERP and CRM systems. Other companies, for which testing is part of the marketing culture, must be able to integrate their clickstream data with their multivariate vendors.

Chart: SEO analytics and monitoring solutions, by organization size



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Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Small organizations are more than twice as likely to use free analytics solutions as their larger counterparts. Many free analytics solutions available today have an impressive array of features, such as custom reports and advanced segmentation. In fact, many organizations do not even come close to availing themselves of these free features.

To a lesser degree, small organizations use paid solutions outfitted with basic features and limited capabilities. By comparison, large organizations overwhelmingly favor paid solutions, with 44 percent selecting tools with enterprise-class features. Larger organizations often need to integrate data with other systems, and paid solutions offer these capabilities.

> *"We have used analytics to make cultural shifts in our own language to better align content to the customer's vernacular. Over the past four years, we have re-titled "financial assistance" as "financial aid" in marketing content to lift search results. Likewise, we have slowly influenced internal jargon to shift in favor of the customer's language, retrofitting our online content to be more search-sticky. This approach is now a standard of procedure we use with all internal clients to ensure that their content attains the best possible rankings."* – Marketer insight

MARKETER INSIGHTS ON USING ANALYTICS TO OPTIMIZE SEO PERFORMANCE

Q. How has your organization used SEO analytics to optimize your SEO marketing performance?

- Targeting the right words by balancing volume, relevance, competition, and "commerciability."
- Continuous monitoring and making changes daily.
- Continual testing of landing page layouts and forms.
- Deciding whether an agency is truly increasing organic search results.
- Entry Keyword analysis and Entry/Exit analysis.
- A/B testing. Keyword analysis. Using Google Analytics and the tools they provide.
- Identifying keywords that would be best to link build for.
- Identifying product lines to enhance.
- Identifying key metrics on which to concentrate our efforts (e.g. bounce rate v. CTR).
- Improving blogging tactics, keyword usage, site layout, social media integration.
- It hasn't – it is one of our goals.
- Keywords, traffic sources, page visits.
- Looking at common exit pages and mobile traffic percentages.
- Modifying keywords and adding content.
- Sharing results with the SEM team has proved effective.
- Still working to optimize. Using Google Analytics tools more than anything.
- Traffic flows, pages viewed, time on site, views of online videos.
- Used the keyword analysis to add and delete keywords from Web pages.
- Ensuring that anything posted in any format anywhere on the Web is SEO optimized.
- Use analytics to decide where to make changes to our website and sales processes.
- Use weekly reports generated by an agency to determine actions.
- Google Analytics enables us to see what keywords are working.
- By seeing and filling holes in performance.
- Keyphrase/keyword meta tagging
- Keyword research
- Monitoring both paid and organic search terms, conversions, and internal site searches.
- Website grader tool
- We just began using an outsourced firm to manage our SEO program about 45 days ago. We've seen a significant increase in traffic during 2011, but it isn't clear whether this is primarily due to SEO or the result of other marketing initiatives. We're closely watching to see if our organic search traffic increases.
- Google Analytics. Since Google is generally the *de facto* search engine, it is necessary to use their tools to get up in the ratings.
- Visits and conversions at the keyword level and at various vertical market levels help us decide where to focus our organic efforts.
- Focusing on keywords that lead to a final sales conversion.
- We utilize Google Analytics to monitor the traffic and content on our existing site, and then make modifications as needed based on the data provided through Google Analytics.
- Keyword analysis for altering title tags and adding meta data. Google Crawl data for optimizing page format.

- Google Analytics is one of the main tools we use and we are very satisfied with its performance and insights.
- We invested in BrightEdge to assist with tracking search rank historical trends for keywords on our sites and our competitors. We love it. The time savings for reporting on several sites is invaluable and leaves more time for my SEO Manager to work on strategy. We also use Internet Business Promoter (IBP) and occasionally SEOmoz tools.
- We're currently analyzing the stickiness (# page views) of visits for optimized search terms to see what we need to do in terms of content improvement, etc.
- We continually focus on the "low-hanging" fruit from SEO traffic that lands on the wrong page and then jumps to other pages to complete their task.
- Looking at the keywords that drive users to the site. Comparing bounce and exit rates on pages that should generate clickthroughs rather than one-stop pages. Measuring the success of an internal linking strategy.
- Tracking which pages score best on visitors coming in and testing if changes with buttons and repetition have effect.
- To develop effective KPIs, I work with both an online marketing firm who specializes in SEO / SEM, as well as a Web analytics consultant. Based on the relationships, ongoing tweaks are made to the marketing tactics as well as to the Web content.
- Most improvements are around key words and their impact on the usage for other collateral.
- Determining sources of visitors, readership of pages, and readership of sections of pages, number of pages scanned or read before visitor leaves site or makes a purchase. We discern the variables of each kind of visitor for further enhancement of our site mapping and internal links.
- We've just begun, but are beginning to use the data as a guide of where our dollars and time can be most effectively spent.
- Google Analytics has everything you need to see keyword performance, referring sites, and paid and non-paid traffic.
- We use HubSpot and it has been very helpful. I'm a one-person marketing shop for a high-tech startup with limited budget.
- The metrics have been a way to show the marketing team that there's room for improvement and how they can take advantage of this free way to market their products.
- First, we use analytics to determine what keywords are generating the traffic and then we determine how best to monetize that traffic.
- Daily monitoring of Web visitors and conversions - looking at how visitors found us, what they looked at, what forms they completed, etc. Weekly evaluation of keyword relevance and performance.

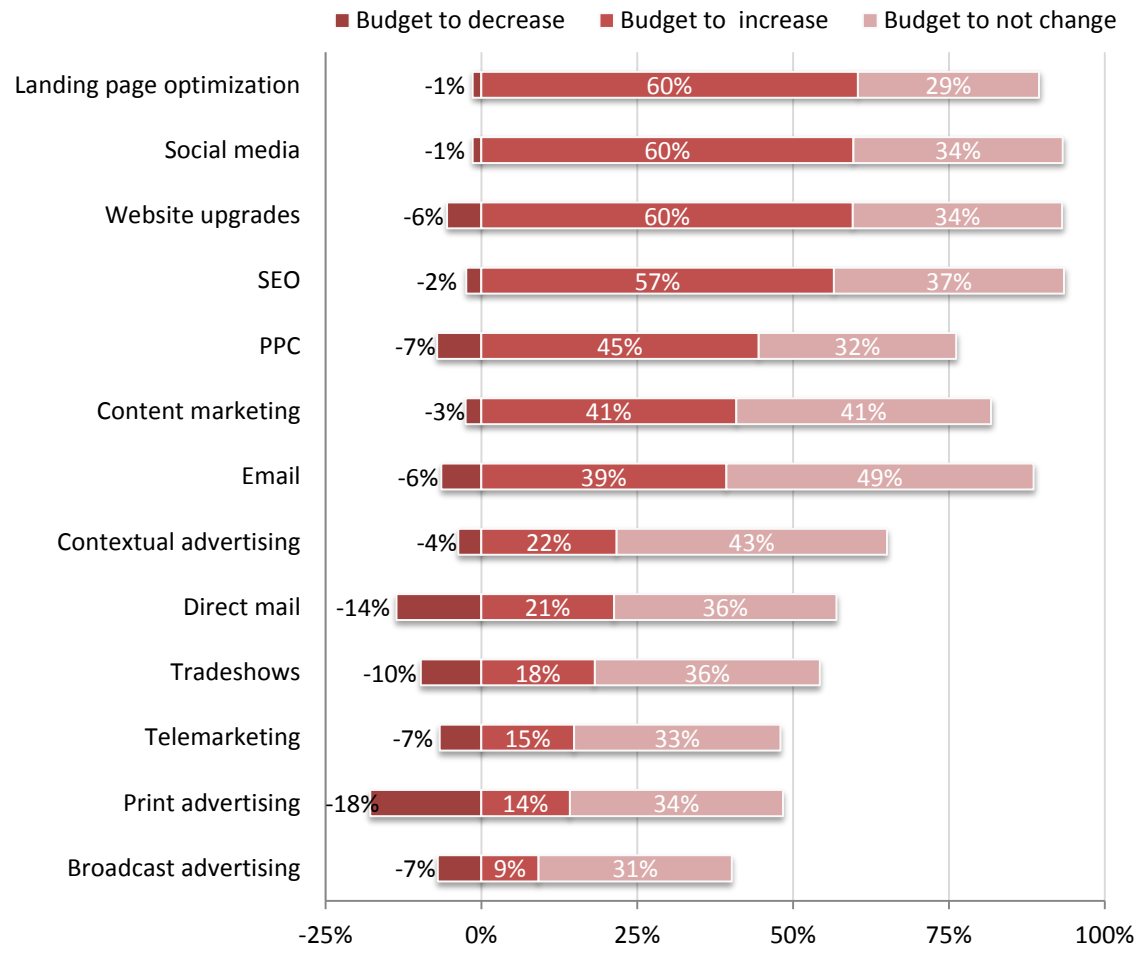
CHAPTER 4: PLANNING AND TRACKING BUDGETS

Marketing programs aim to deliver against three types of outcomes: Increase revenue, reduce cost, and/or improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. Search engine optimization and other complementary inbound marketing tactics drive results in these areas. As such, organizations are expected to move more of their budgets into these programs over the next 12 months.

BIGGEST BUDGET INCREASES EXPECTED IN INBOUND MARKETING

Chart: Expected marketing budget changes over 12 months

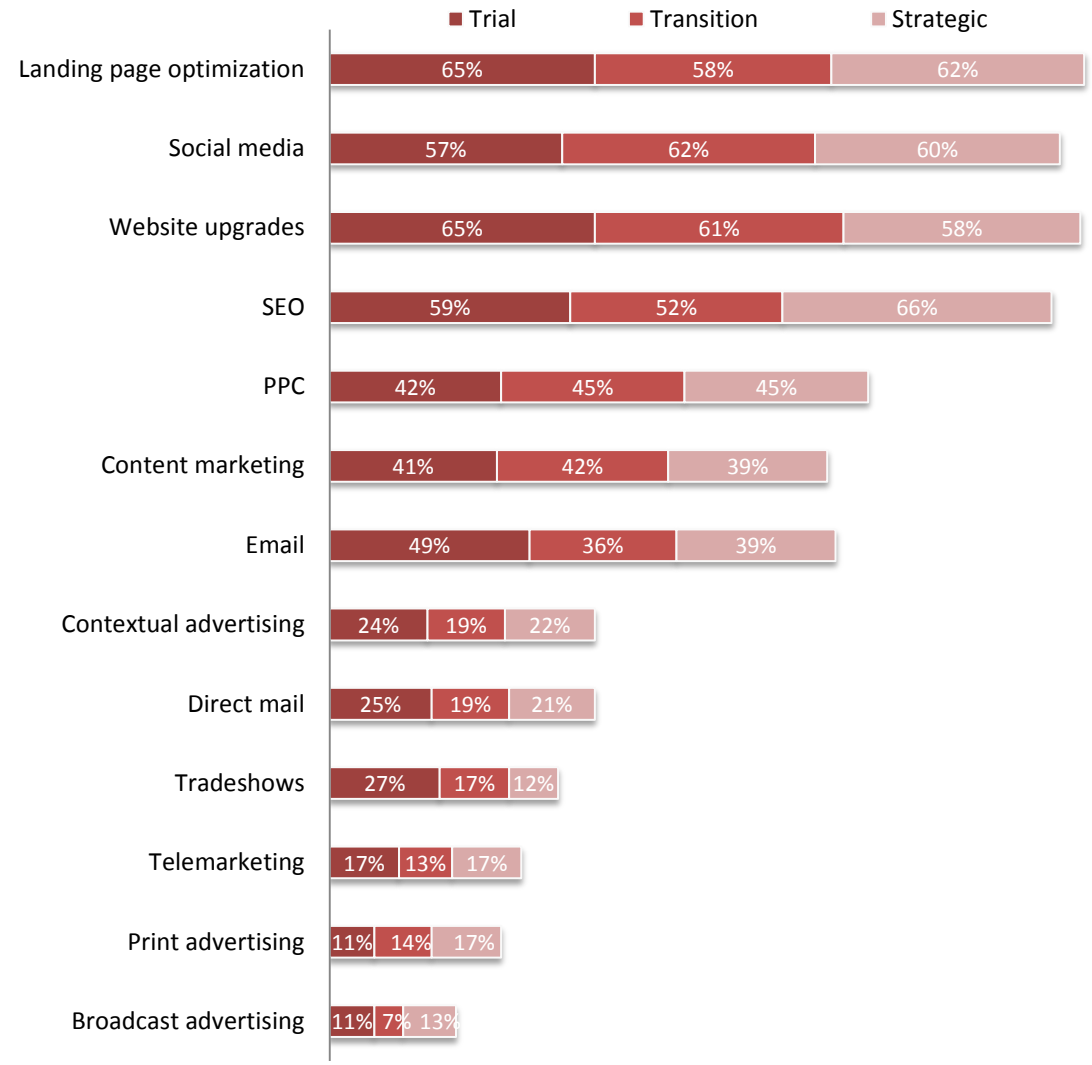
Q. How will budgets for the following marketing line items change in the next 12 months?



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Inbound marketing complements the way customers shop – namely, by starting online. Most organizations expect to increase marketing budgets for inbound marketing tactics. Marketers are increasingly considering these tactics to be cost-effective for connecting with prospects and customers.

Chart: Percentage of organizations increasing budgets over 12 months, by SEO maturity phase

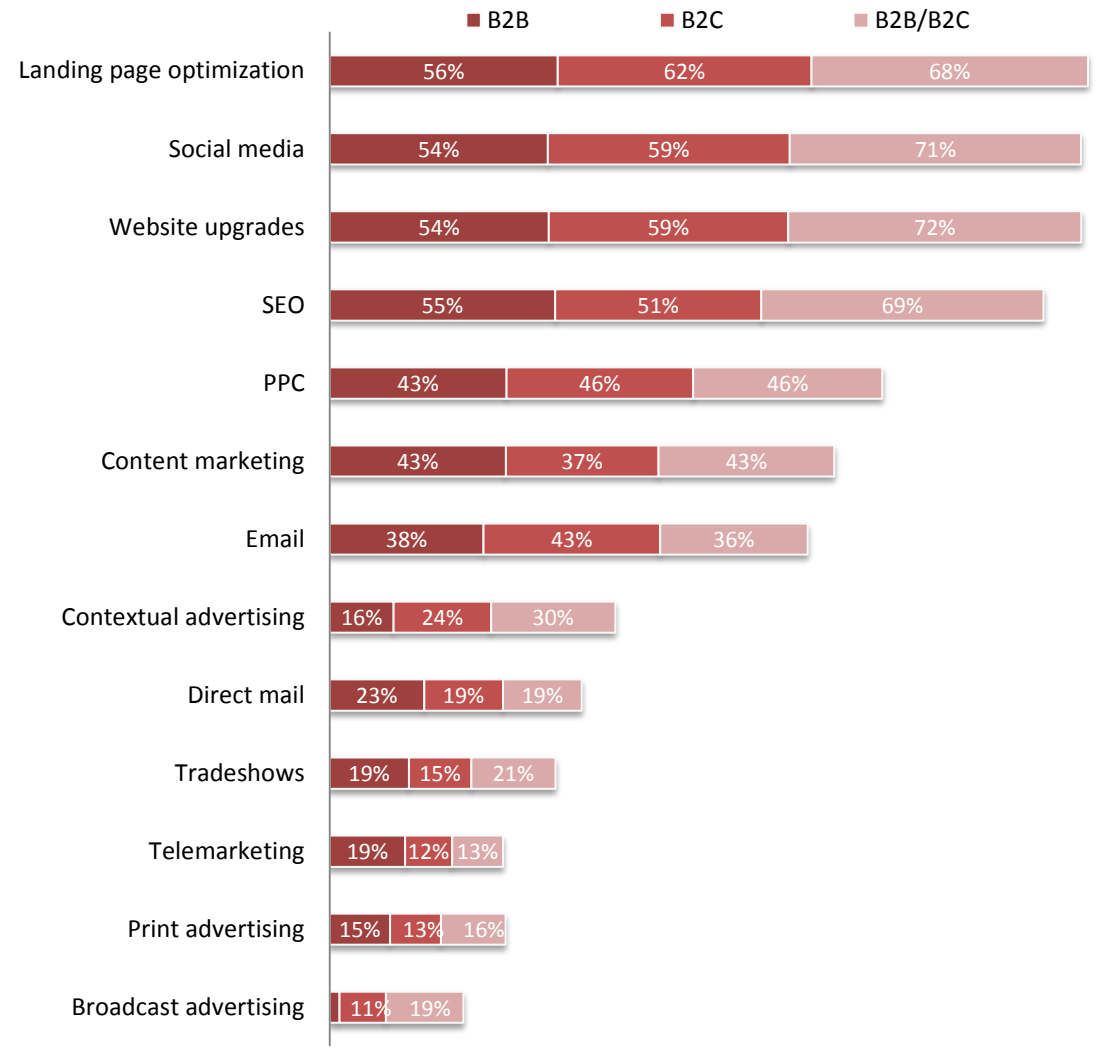


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Organizations across the spectrum of SEO maturity expect to increase their inbound marketing budgets the most. This is quite telling. Marketers, as a whole, are tipping the scale in favor of inbound marketing tactics and are placing less focus on traditional forms of marketing.

"We have discovered that our best prospects come from our website. Our best quality opportunities are coming from being found." – Marketer insight

Chart: Percentage of organizations increasing budgets over 12 months, by primary channel



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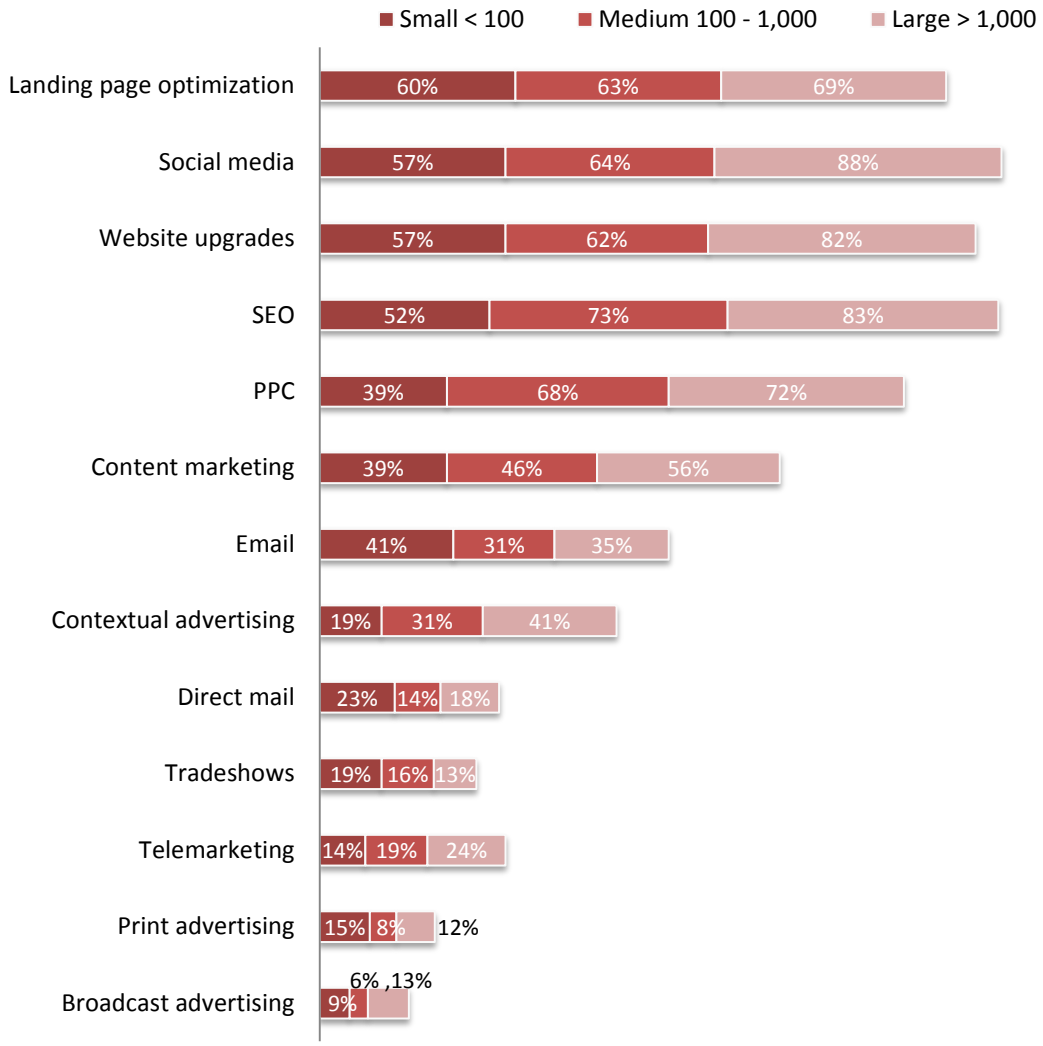
The company website is the center of a company's marketing plans. All lead generation activities, whether inbound or outbound in nature, drive traffic back to the site. This is why a website is commonly referred to as "the hub."

A website is arguably the greatest asset in any marketing mix. It is also one of the most expensive. Nevertheless, because of its central role, companies are prepared to invest in its design, management, performance and optimization. To illustrate, here we see that 54 to 72 percent of all organizations plan to increase budgets for website upgrades. Additionally, most organizations plan to increase budgets for landing page optimization. These LPO efforts help organizations increase the quantity and quality of the visitor response to the website experience.

One last big area of investment is in the interrelated areas of social media and SEO, both major sources of a company's inbound Web traffic.

Chart: Percentage of organizations increasing budgets over 12 months, by organization size



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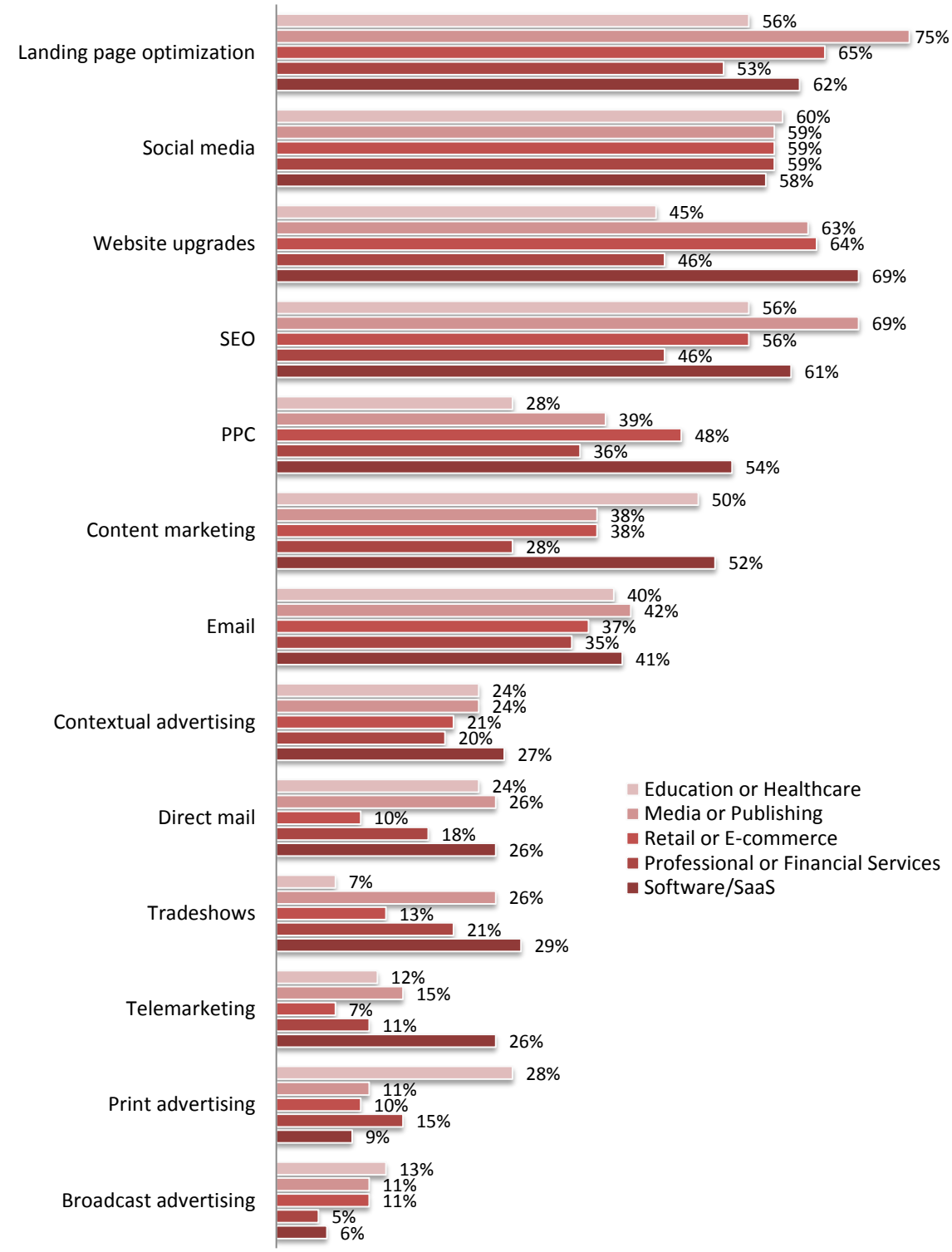
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Large organizations are stepping up their spending in social media, website upgrades and SEO, with social media being a particular standout. Nearly 90 percent of these organizations expect to increase their social media budgets, strongly indicating they see real value potential in these platforms.

A much smaller fraction of organizations plan to increase their budgets for outbound tactics like print advertising, telemarketing and even direct mail. For many organizations, the returns on time and money invested no longer exist. Nevertheless, organizations are not doing away with these altogether. Instead, they are modernizing their approaches. The traditional approach of sending mass messages to a large and varied audience is becoming increasingly less effective; therefore, many organizations are employing advanced list segmentation techniques to inject more relevancy and personalization into these traditional marketing tactics.

Chart: Percentage of organizations increasing budgets over 12 months, by industry



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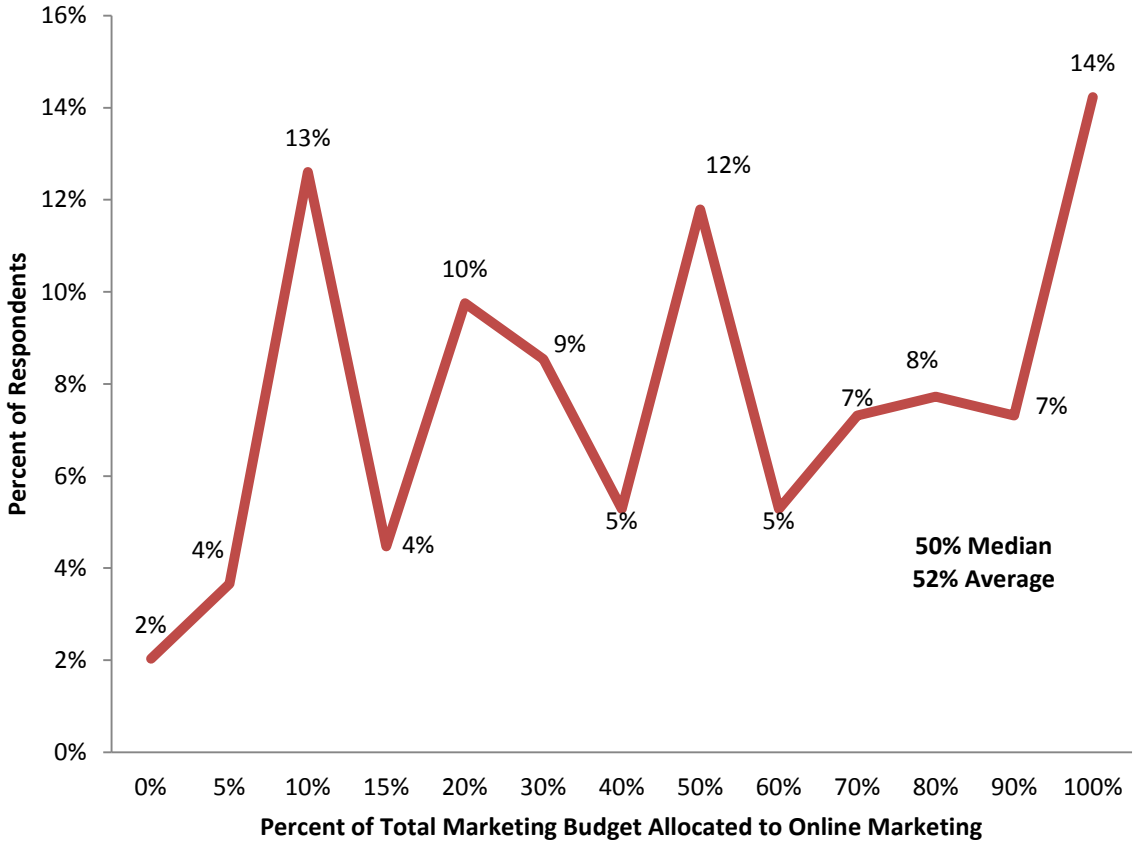
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

HALF OF MARKETING BUDGETS GO TO ONLINE MARKETING, ON AVERAGE

Chart: Percentage of total marketing budget allocated to online marketing varies widely

Q. What percentage of your organization's TOTAL MARKETING BUDGET is allocated to online marketing (including personnel, media, and other direct costs of online marketing)?



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

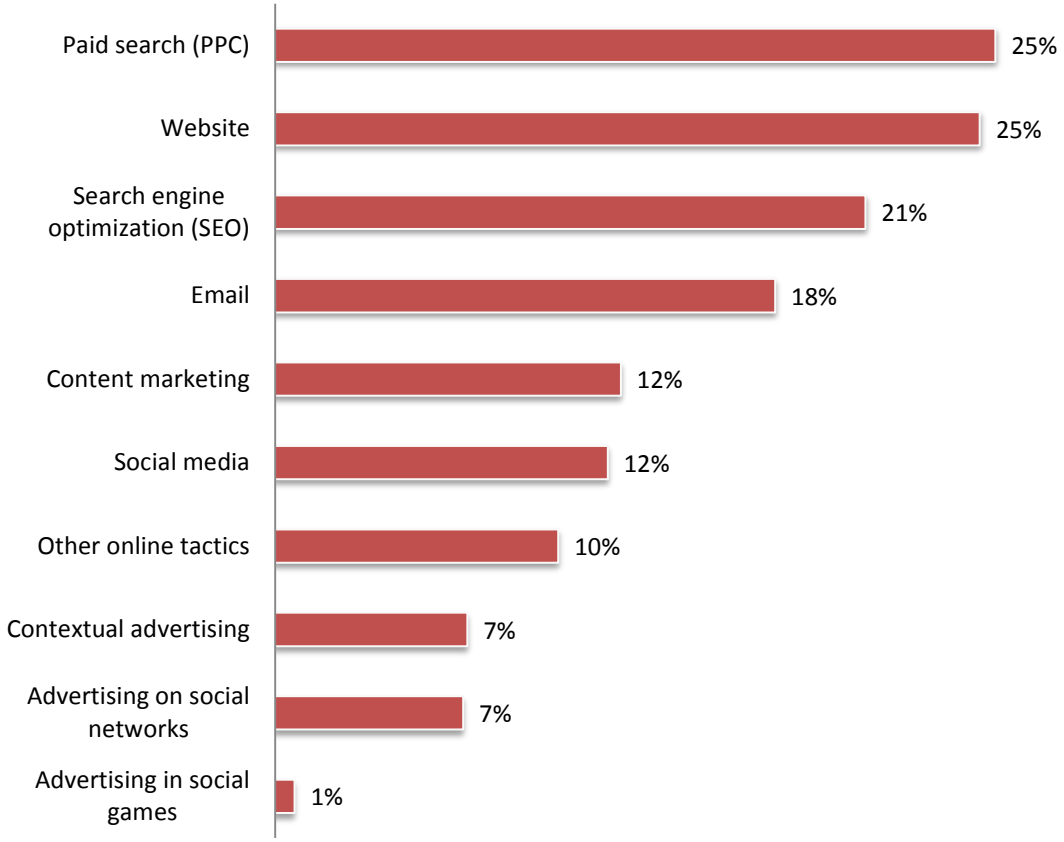
As earlier charts indicated, budget dollars are increasingly used to fund inbound marketing programs. On average, organizations now allocate half of their total marketing budgets specifically for online marketing activities.

> *"SEO is a very powerful tool where we invest considerable attention. Our content marketing efforts are always executed with an eye to SEO."* – Marketer insight

PPC, SEO AND WEBSITE TAKE BIG SHARE OF ONLINE MARKETING BUDGET

Chart: Allocation of online marketing dollars

Q. What percentage of your ONLINE MARKETING budget is allocated to each of the following online tactics (including personnel, media and other direct costs)?



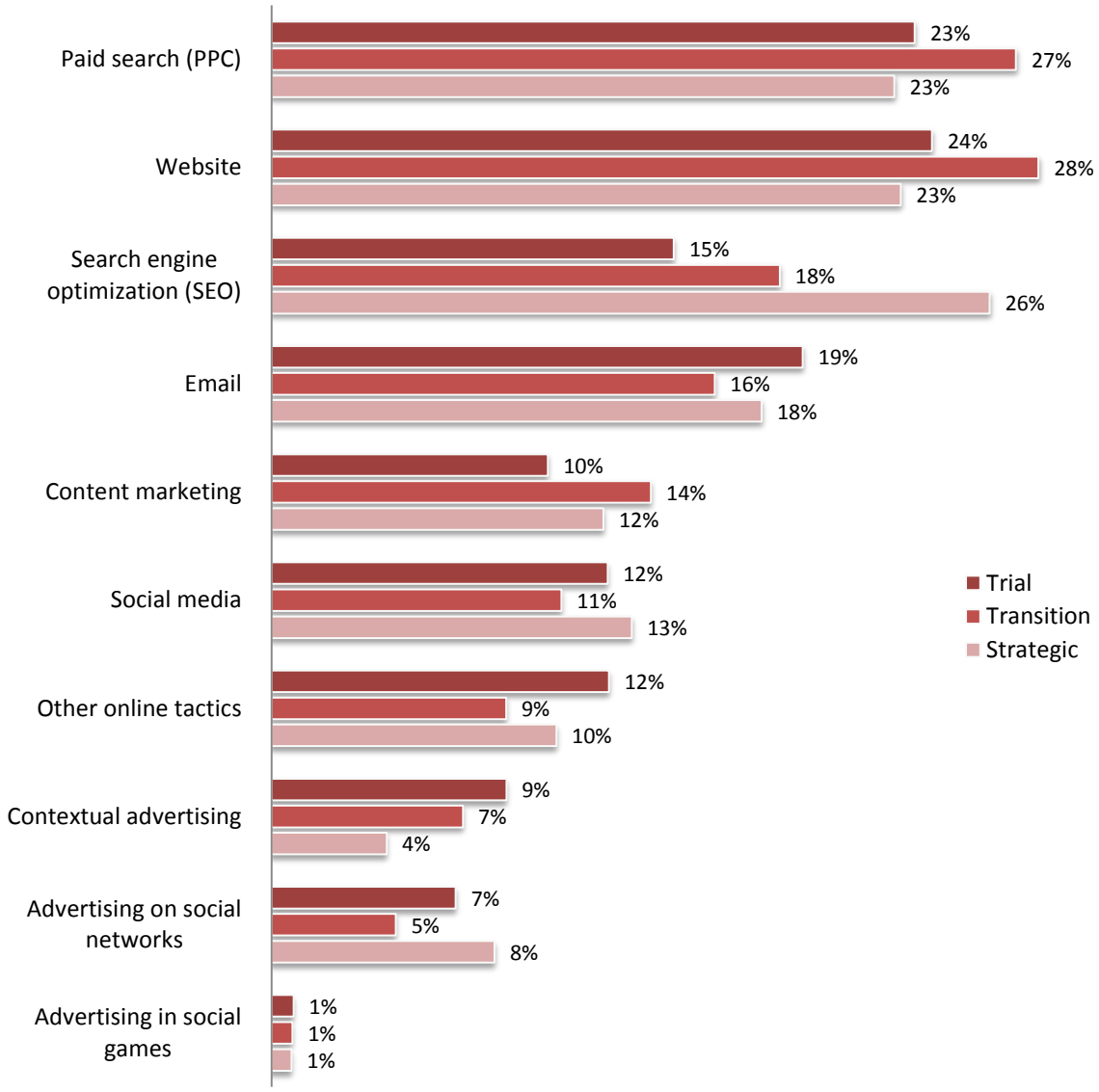
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Paid search, website management and design, and search engine optimization are the top three tactics to which organizations designate online marketing dollars.

Organizations devote one-quarter of their online marketing budgets to their websites. Even the best marketing efforts are for naught if the website is not optimized (in terms of performance and design) to communicate the "offer" and trigger a "response." Paid search also comprises 25 percent of the budget. SEO tactics often take time to make an impact on search rankings. For this reason, many organizations use paid search to supplement SEO efforts.

> *"We employ a combination of organic and paid search. Our strategy combines a constant underlying organic effort using selected keywords for certain audience segments with paid search at the product level to mine leads among purchase-ready prospects."* – Marketer insight

Chart: Percentage allocation of online marketing dollars, by SEO maturity phase

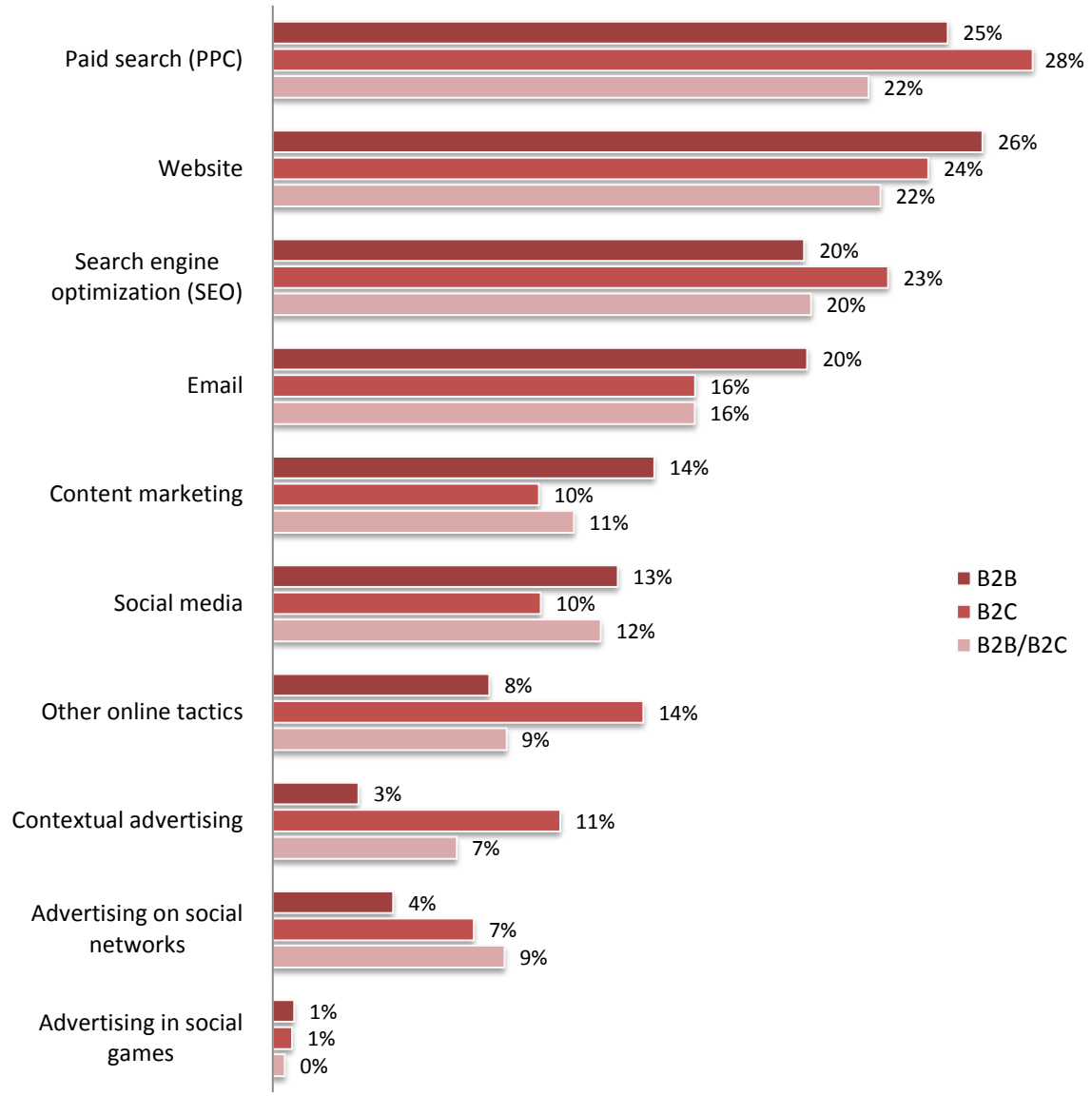


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Strategic organizations apportion the greatest percentage of online budgets to SEO. As earlier charts indicated, Strategic organizations generate and convert a greater percentage of leads – and high-quality leads at that – than either Trial or Transition organizations.

> *"SEO is one of the most critical components of our online marketing efforts. We keep it at the highest level of importance and it delivers high ROI."* – Marketer insight

Chart: Percentage allocation of online marketing dollars, by primary channel

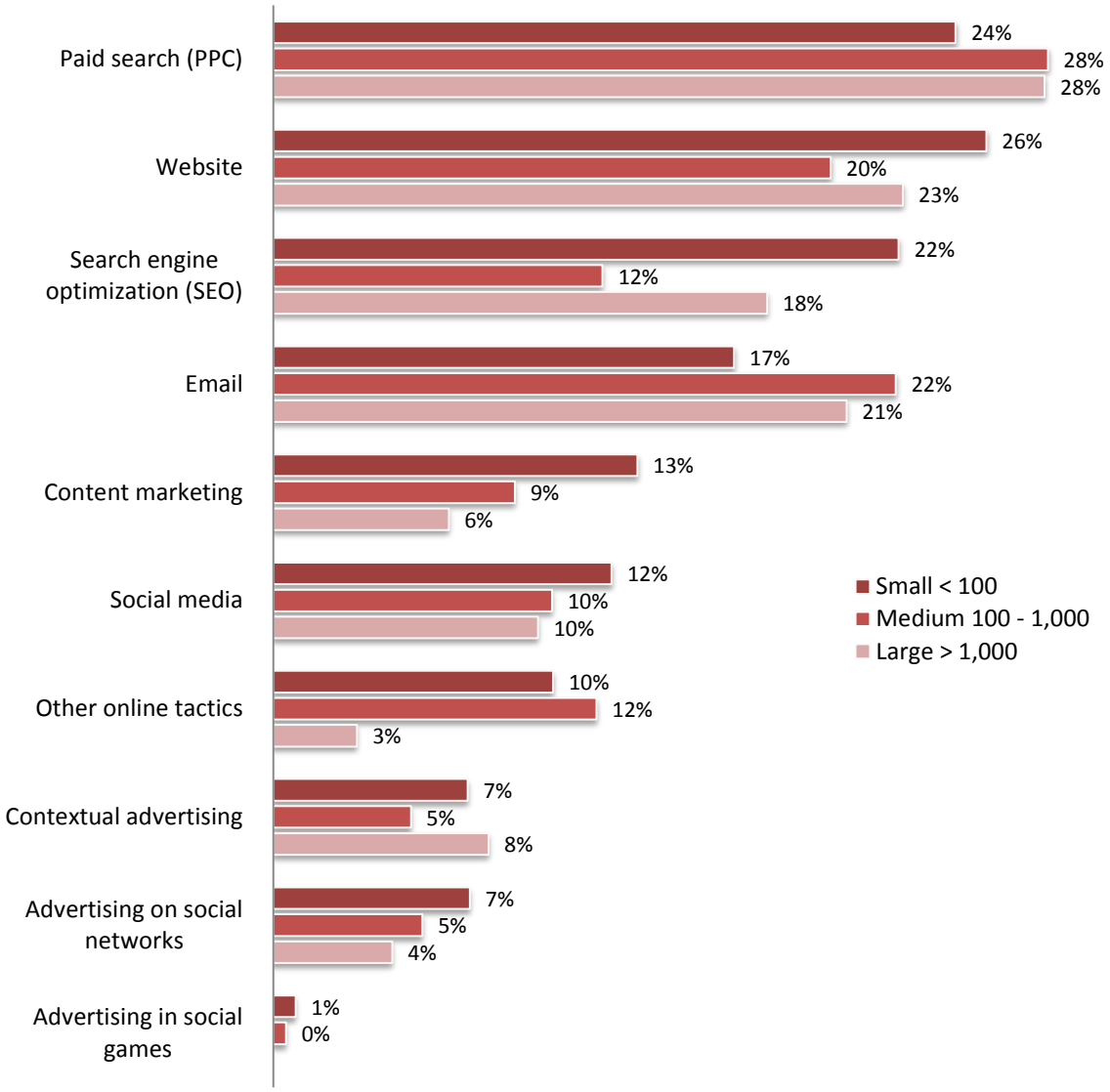


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

B2C organizations allocate a greater percentage of online marketing dollars to PPC, SEO and contextual advertising than B2B companies. These three "search" tactics complement one another.

Advertising on social networks is gaining traction. Companies focused on both business and consumer channels are allocating nearly 10 percent of their online marketing budgets to this area. Organizations advertising in this arena need to bear in mind that social media users are focused on social interactions, unlike searchers who are seeking relevant information to a query. Thus, social media ads often work better when they do not attempt to drive traffic off the social media platform. Instead, organizations should use the ads to engage, attract and acquire fans.

Chart: Percentage allocation of online marketing dollars, by organization size



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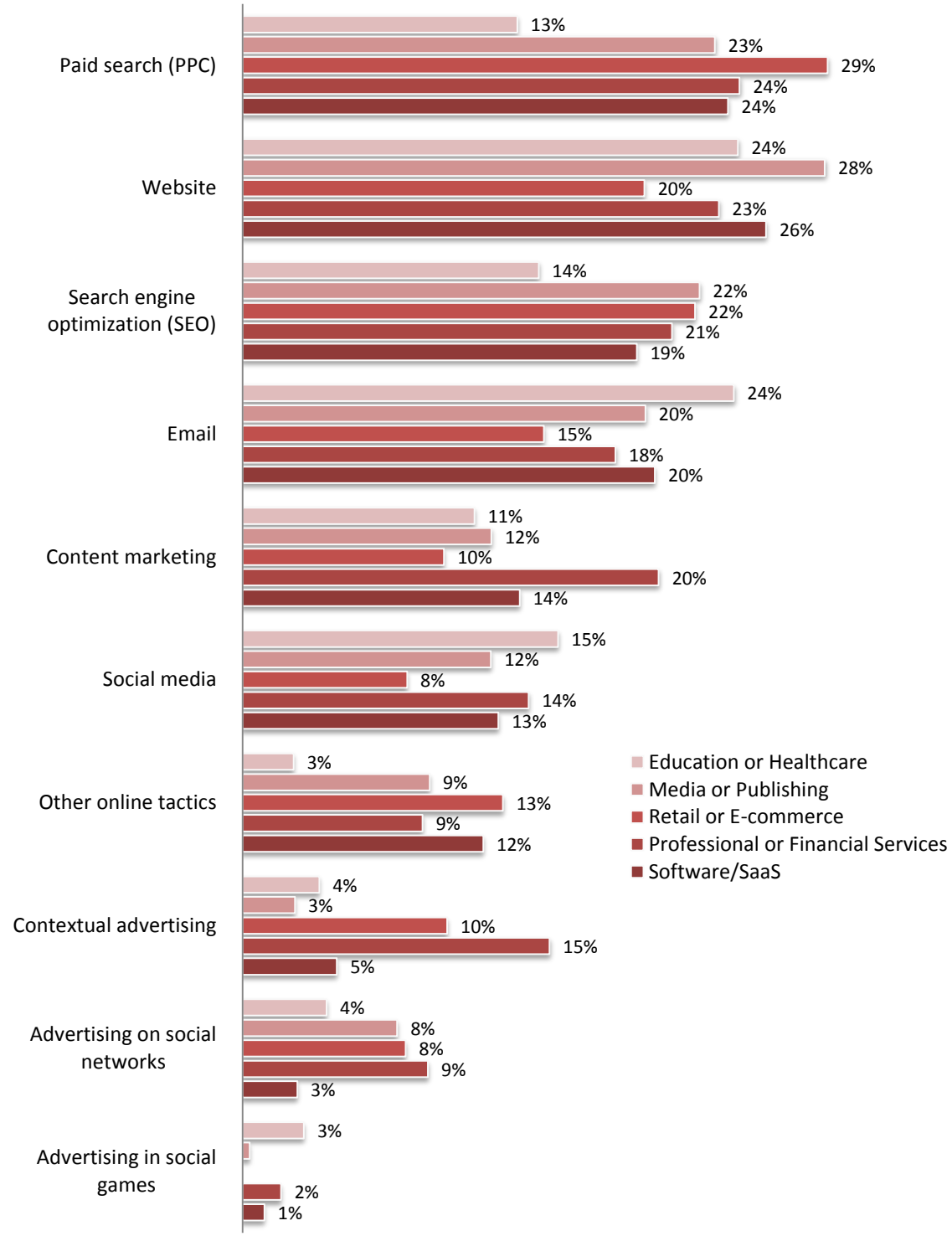
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Search engine optimization is a big area of investment for small organizations. On average, these organizations earmark 22 percent of their online marketing dollars for SEO. They also designate a greater percentage of online marketing budgets for content marketing, a strong complementary tactic to SEO. Search engines index content, while people share content. In short, content is good for an organization's SEO efforts.

> *"As a business with a small marketing budget, we feel SEO is the highest value marketing activity we can spend our and our outsourced worker's time on."* – Marketer insight

Chart: Percentage allocation of online marketing dollars, by industry



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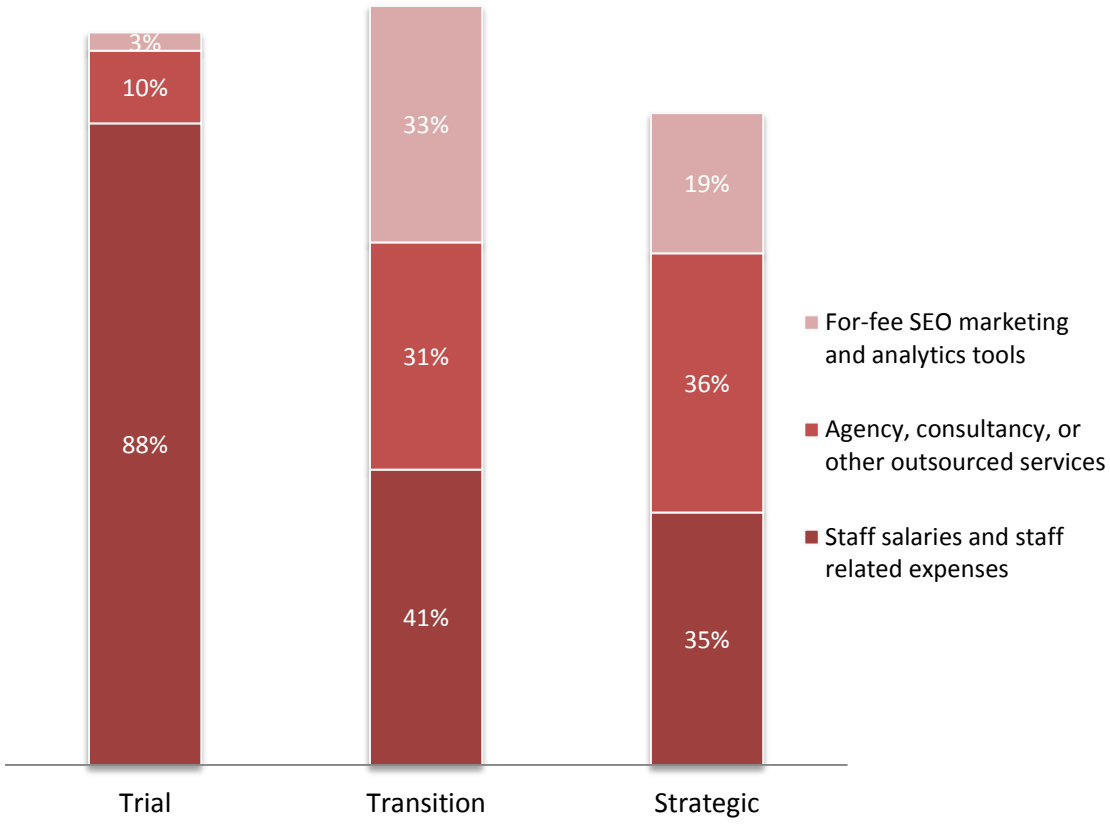
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

STAFF SALARIES COMPRISE THE LARGEST PORTION OF TOTAL SEO BUDGETS

Chart: Total SEO budget allocation, by SEO maturity phase

Q. What percentage of your SEO budget is allocated to each of the following line items?



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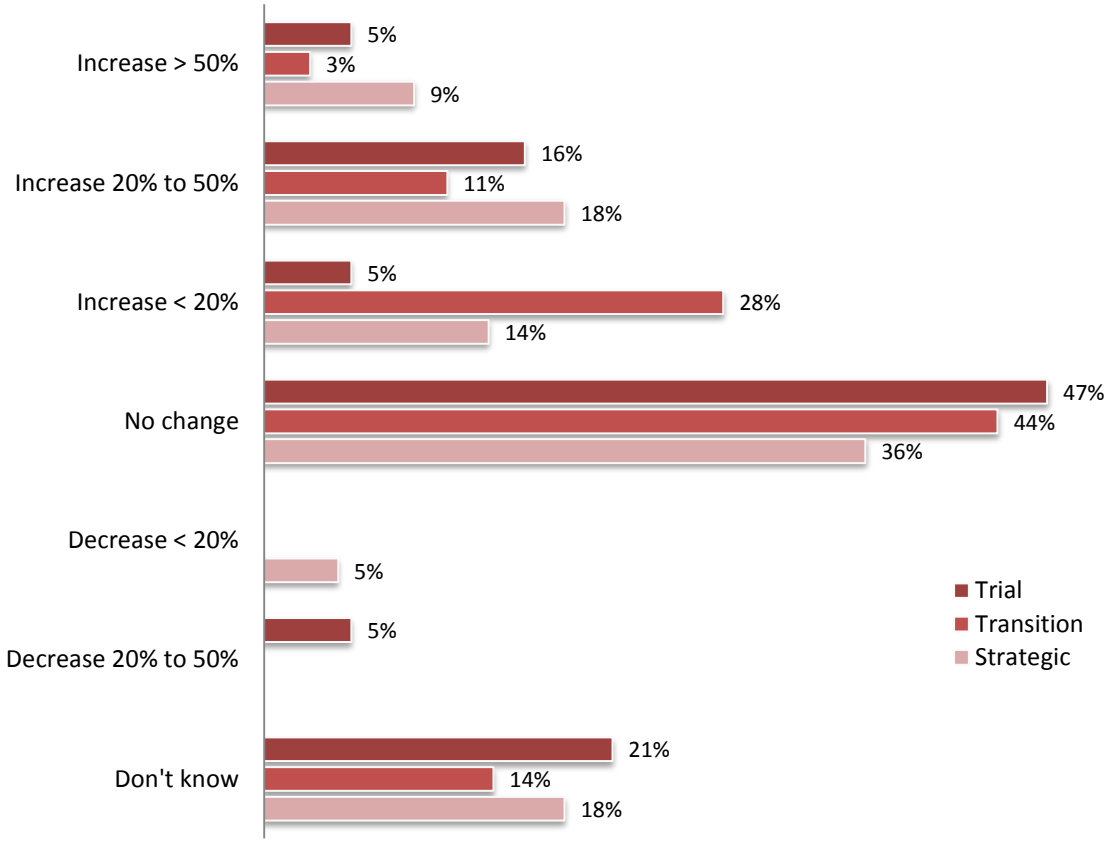
Trial organizations spend most of their SEO budgets on staff salaries. By contrast, organizations in the Transition and Strategic phases of SEO programs spend less on in-house staff salaries and more on outsourced services. Organizations in these phases also designate a good portion of SEO budgets for advanced analytics tools. These tools can effectively extend their budgets by monitoring, measuring and analyzing the outcomes from their SEO efforts.

> *"The perception is that it is not worth the investment to hire an outside firm. The in-house marketing team feels that they have the baseline level of skills needed to manage SEO best practices."* – Marketer insight

SEO BUDGETS EXPECTED TO STAY THE SAME OR GROW

Chart: Expected 12-month SEO budget change, by SEO maturity phase

Q. How much do you expect your organization's SEO budget to change in the next 12 months?



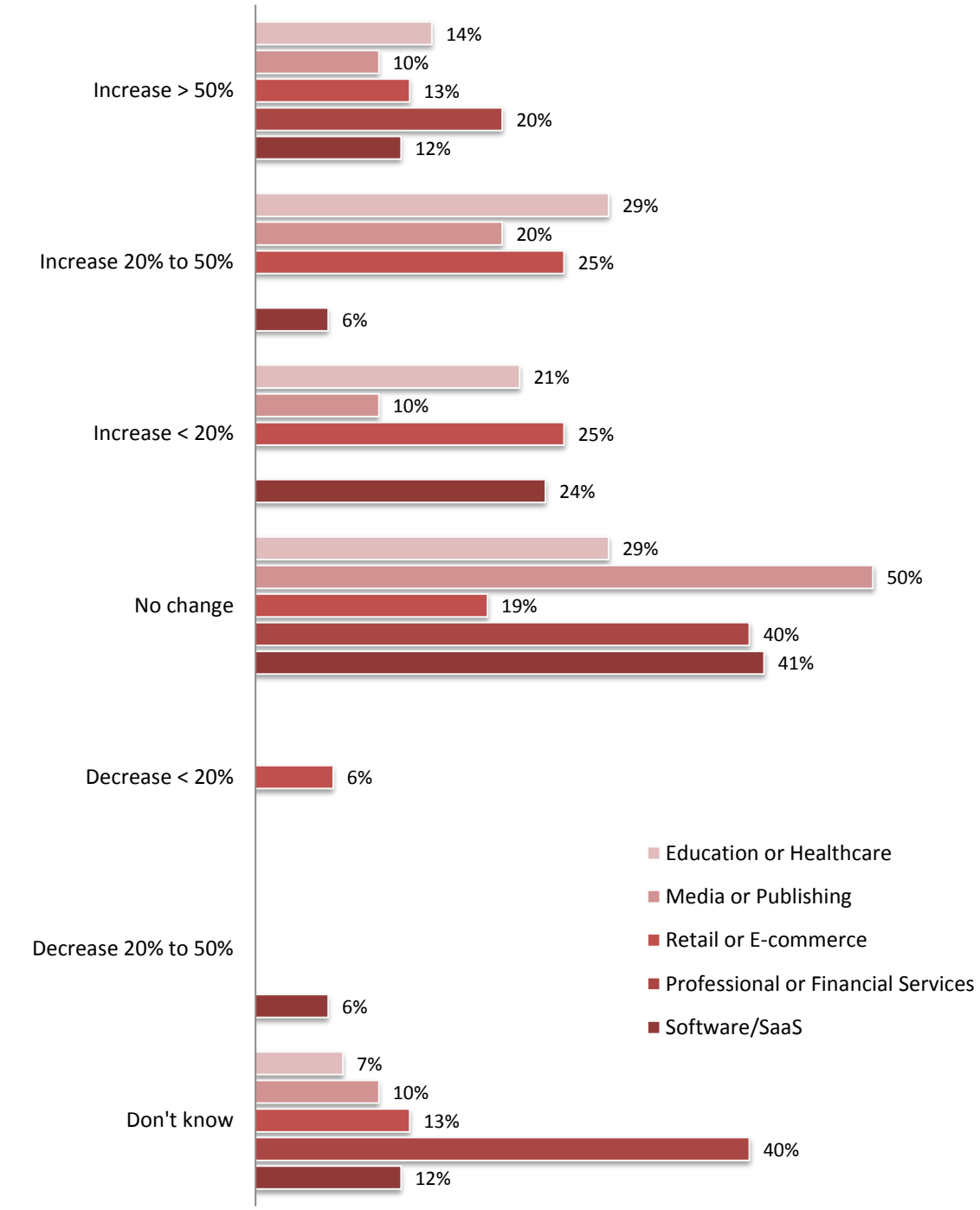
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Strategically oriented organizations expect to increase SEO budgets to a greater degree than organizations in other SEO phases. Although budget increases are in sight for many, a greater percentage of organizations in the Trial and Transition phases expect to keep SEO budgets the same.

One interesting item to note is how five percent of Strategic organizations expect to decrease SEO budgets by up to 20 percent. Across-the-board budget cuts may be an explanation for this, but these organizations also may have developed their SEO programs to a point where they can maintain and sustain quality results at a reduced cost.

"SEO is a top priority and will have an increased budget over the coming year, supported by close tracking of results." – Marketer insight

Chart: Expected 12-month SEO budget change, by industry



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
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MARKETER INSIGHTS ON THE VALUE RETURNED FROM SEO BUDGET INVESTED

Q. How would you describe the perception of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) at your organization in terms of the value it returns on the budget invested?

TRIAL PHASE MARKETERS

- Does not seem worthwhile.
- I don't see my customer seeking me on SERPs.
- It is not worked thoroughly. It is not a priority.
- It is perceived as important, but is still a bit of a mystery.
- It's an important traffic channel.
- Just getting started. Need to add more SEO.
- People do not understand the benefit of it.
- The organization does not have the knowledge. SEO is still too new.
- Too much investment for too little return.
- Perceived very highly, but hard to quantify.
- We don't feel that SEO brings a great deal of return due to our business niche.
- We use blogs which are SEO friendly, if written correctly. Other than that, we do not bother ourselves about it.
- SEO takes time. While there are some easy aspects that can be achieved by modifications to one's website, the more fruitful aspect takes time.
- Until now our CEO wasn't convinced about the use of SEO. After four years of preaching, he is moving towards being positive about SEO. Let's hope he will not change his mind again.
- SEO is thought of very highly. We will spend even more time on learning and engaging best practices.
- As an institution responsible for academic and research, SEO will receive more attention as our competition gets tougher. Hence, we need a more strategic approach to circumvent the possibility of being crowded out.
- The problem is that SEO vendors have said it will take a year to pay back and we need immediate results.
- We do not currently use SEO because of the limited research on its value. We have not focused on this as a marketing tactic.

TRANSITION PHASE MARKETERS

- A super ROI. Just takes time.
- Best course of action.
- Brings 65% of revenue.
- Could be more profitable!
- Good return on investment
- It may be the most valuable thing we do at the moment, as PPC is becoming less effective for us.
- It’s a key strategy.
- One of the most powerful tools in our arsenal.

- ROI could be higher.
- SEO experts turned out not to be experts. Got screwed. Content marketing works better for us.
- Senior management is somewhat unconvinced of its value.
- Since returns are not as noticeable as proactive activities, little is invested.
- The best method.
- They are modest at best. It has proven to be incredibly harder than initially expected.
- Very valuable, but not consistently monitored and updated.
- Misunderstood
- Okay, not great.
- It produces increased clicks to our site as we move up in listings with keywords that important to us.
- Is not seen as a priority within the organization other than in marketing. There is an education component that has to first be done within the organization to get buy-in.
- Here no one pays it any attention. To them it "just happens."
- We did a site redesign and are actually making a big investment into SEO for the next 6 to 9 months. We will see the business benefits from this initiative and evaluate how to proceed after that point.
- Very strong but requires cooperation and commitment of resources between business and technology teams to achieve.
- Upper management worries that it is all "smoke and mirrors" and opens up too many avenues for budget creep. They find it difficult to put a value on and judge what the actual ROI is.
- We are keenly aware of its importance in developing all marketing efforts, including email, website enhancements, content marketing, etc.
- Search engine optimization tests as a key differentiator in a market where products and offerings are very similar.
- We have learned a lot ourselves and find it imperative to our business. It has helped us tremendously since we do almost all our marketing online.
- It's far too costly a practice, done by black-art practitioners preying upon ignorant executives.
- The organization only sees the output (conversions) of our SEO activities. They don't see and really understand the work we do behind the scenes. So it is difficult to explain the value of SEO.
- Since SEO is the only tactic used by us, there is no way to compare it with others. But it is what made the company's website and name so recognizable and important in the market.
- It's not well understood, but then again neither is anything else that we do in the online marketing arena.
- We do not have a budget for SEO. This is an activity that we pursue internally and daily within the context of our normal Web operations. There is not a separate line item on our budget for SEO or Optimization.
- SEO seems like a necessary evil. It helps drive traffic, but seems like only the "big" guys can win.
- It is still considered a 'black box' and is not given a lot of credence because the results are not usually immediate. It is hard to relate a specific increase in traffic with an increased SEO expenditure.
- Since we started investing in SEO we have seen an increase of small project-based work, which is helpful, but not large contractually-based work, which is where the money is for us.

- I find that intellectually people understand what SEO does and how critical it is to our overall inbound marketing strategy, so I feel I have a strong buy-in. There is a disconnect in the understanding of how much time it takes to keep SEO up.
- We are the #1, 2 and 3 results in search engine results in our market for a few reasons. 1) The name of the business contains both the name or our market and the business segment, and that generates the most traffic for us. 2) Name recognition. One-third of all Web traffic is direct. 3) Page content supports the most searched on terms.
- It is a forever changing market, but the SEO vendors seem to have a limited bag of tricks that they apply and then have little else to offer. Their service contract protects them from early discharge.
- SEO is perceived as important by upper management but not a lot of resources are focused on it in terms of performance monitoring or budgeting to improve performance. This is not due to a lack of interest but to limited resources.

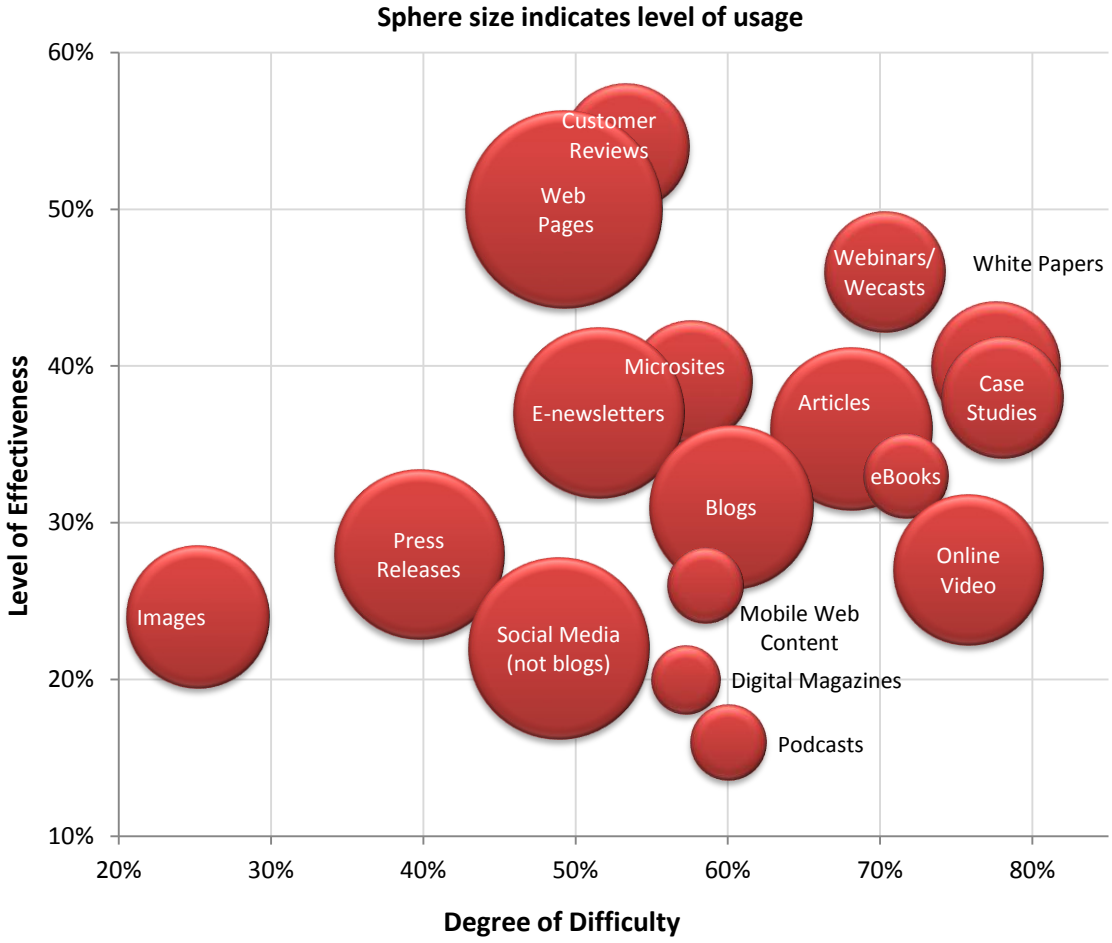
Strategic Phase Marketers

- 100% relevant
- Extremely effective and efficient.
- Extremely important and an area we are focusing on heavily this year.
- SEO is done in-house is very effective.
- SEO is viewed as very favorable.
- This is an important activity for us and the ROI we receive is well worth the money we spend.
- We believe in SEO very much.
- We see it as a pivotal, high value aspect of our marketing activity.
- Significantly helps extend our search presence without having to pay for rankings with SEM/PPC.
- Essential. We aim to be in the first three pages. This requires monitoring words used on our site with search phrases.
- We believe that our continued efforts in the area of SEO will represent the biggest return for the time and money spent. However, that being said, there are so many other areas that continue to require our attention. It is very hard to make the correct decisions when there are only so many hours available and few dollars to work with.
- We put a lot of emphasis on SEO, since that is where a majority of the website visitors come from and it gives us the maximum traffic. Decent and lawful SEO is absolutely necessary for a website to become famous in its genre.
- SEO brought us the most profits, so everybody in our company understood the importance and accepts the investment effort.
- We take SEO very seriously, because we can see the results of more leads and conversions coming from driving more traffic to our site.
- SEO has been very valuable to our organization because we target one of the largest targets in the country that is the hardest to reach. Making sure clients find us is critical.
- SEO is very important to us. Our budget allocation does not reflect that because SEO is integrated into other things we do, like content marketing.
- SEO has the highest ROI, but it is a long term strategy that provides slow traffic growth. We must put greater amounts into PPC to keep traffic high in the short term. We believe that in the future we may be able to reduce our PPC spend by 50% if we invest in SEO now.

CHAPTER 5: THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTENT IN A SEARCH MARKETING STRATEGY

As covered earlier, marketers rated content creation as the most effective SEO tactic. This comes as no surprise, since good content makes for a rich end-user experience.

WEB PAGES AND SOCIAL MEDIA ARE THE MOST USED CONTENT PRODUCTS



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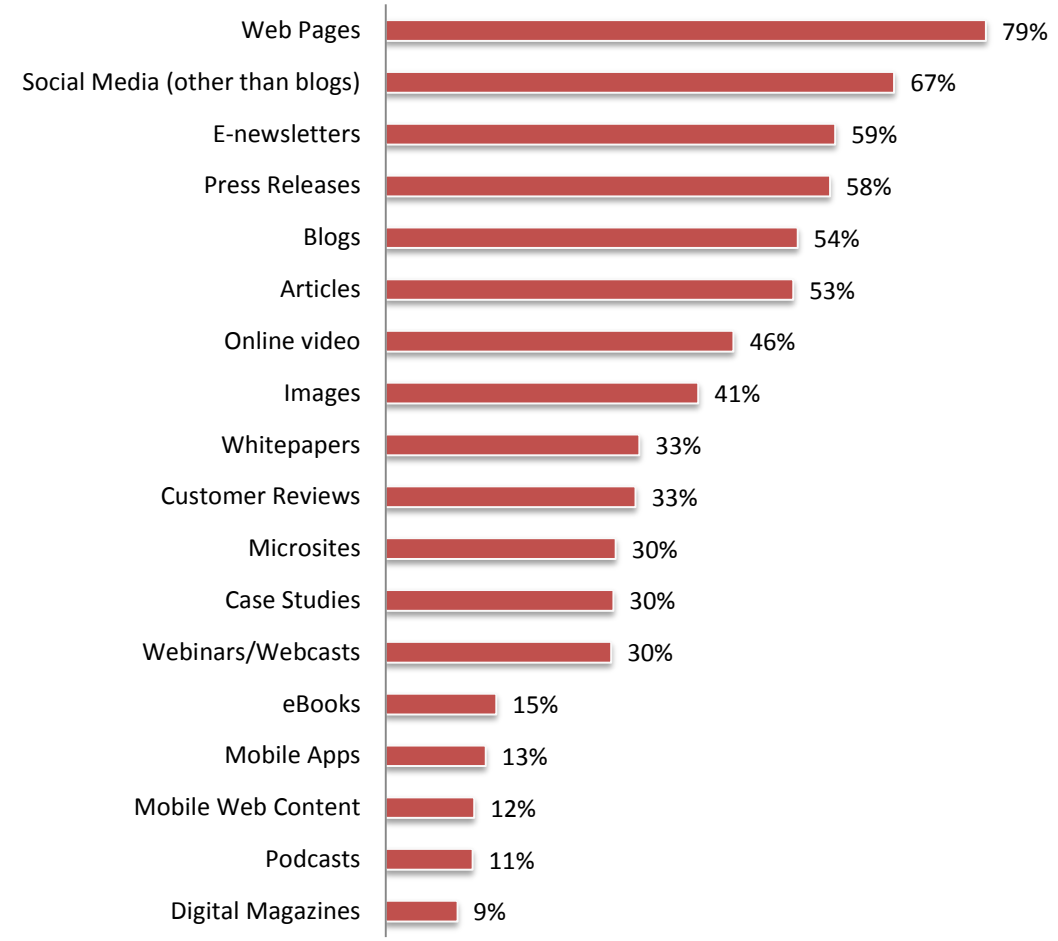
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

To achieve good organic rankings and ensure that their products and services are found across all formats and venues, organizations need to be ever-mindful when it comes to the creation and optimization of their content products. Content can be a digital asset, in the truest sense of the word, or it can be a digital liability. It all comes down to how organizations put content to use.

Chart: Mix of content products used as part of total search marketing strategy

Q. What mix of content products do you currently use as part of your total search marketing strategy?



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Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

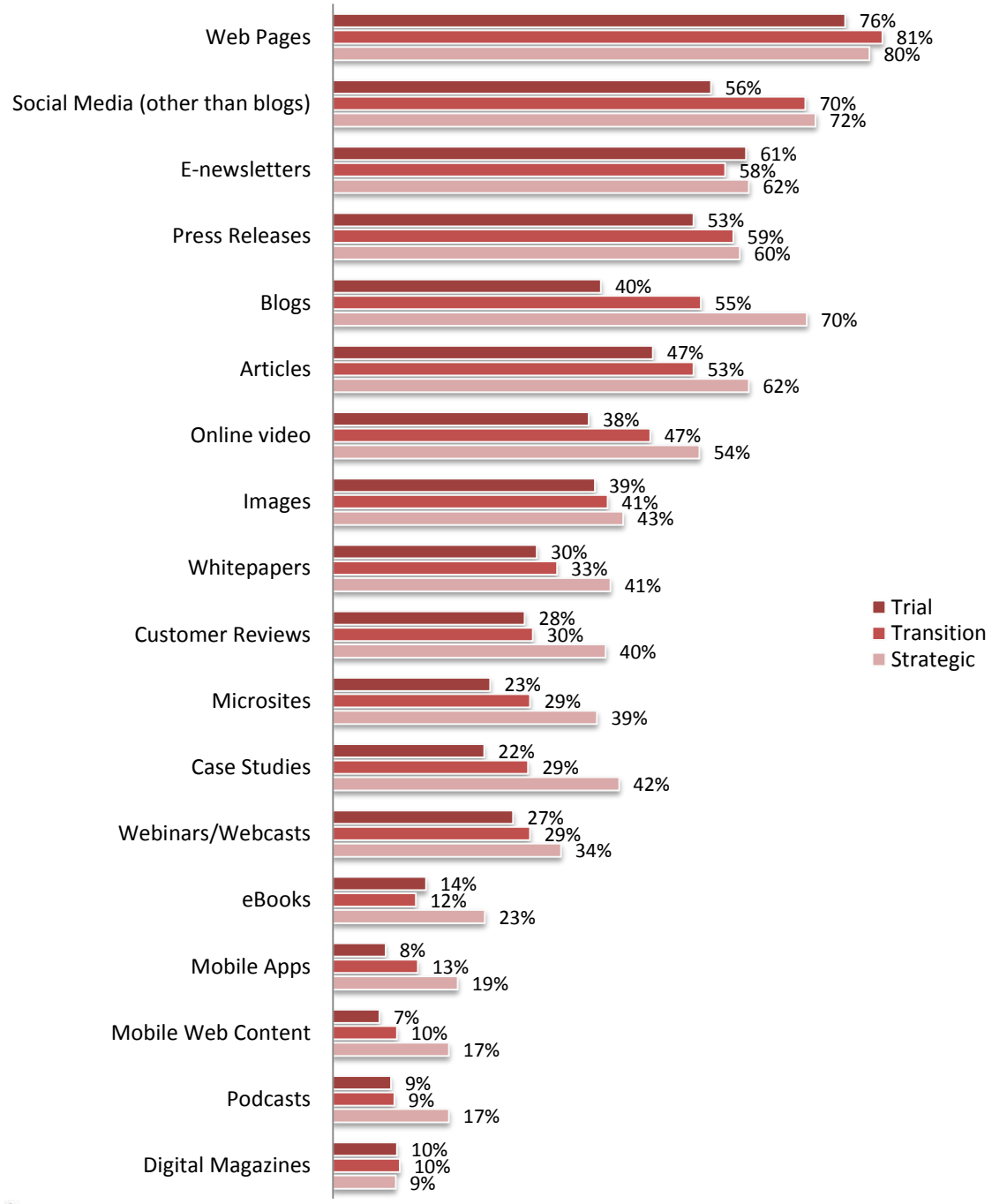
Web pages are the most popular form of content used by organizations. This makes sense, as website content is always "on" and always "there."

Content from social media is the second-most widely used form of content. As organizations participate across social media platforms, they leave content footprints behind.

Nearly half of organizations use online video, yet far fewer use webinars and podcasts, other viable alternatives to text.

> *"Content creation combined with SEO landing pages has been key. We give the reader lots of technical info on our Web pages, but we withhold the next level of detail and put it in a technical paper that the reader can only download if he gives us his name, email and company name."* – Marketer insight

Chart: Content marketing products, by SEO maturity phase



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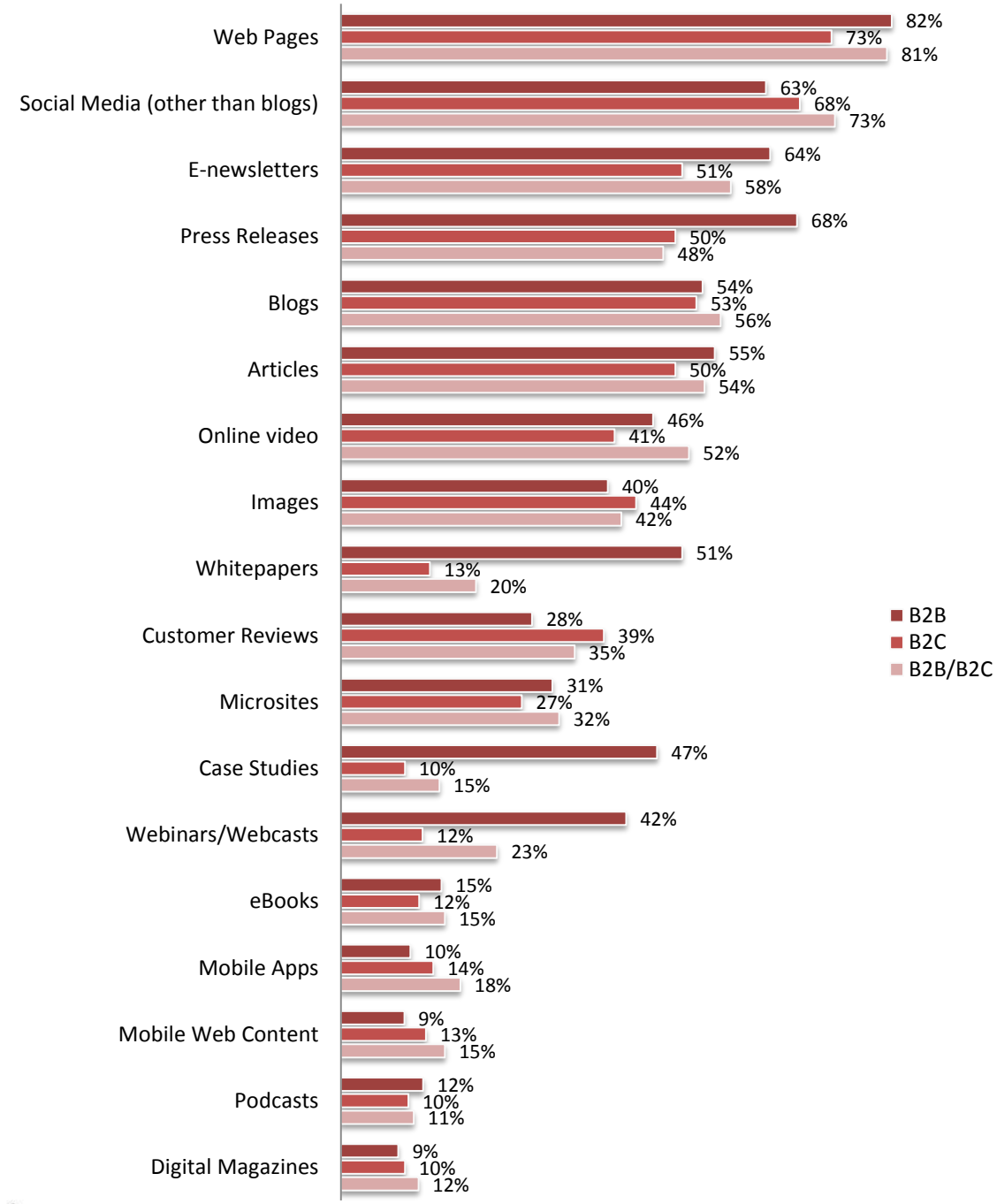
Having a variety of content creates more potential touch points with prospects and customers. Strategic organizations understand this. They employ a broader array of content products and use them to a greater extent than organizations in the other SEO phases of maturity. Strategic organizations also likely understand the value of – and need for – repurposing content across multiple formats as a way to "do more with less."

Chart: Content marketing products, by primary channel



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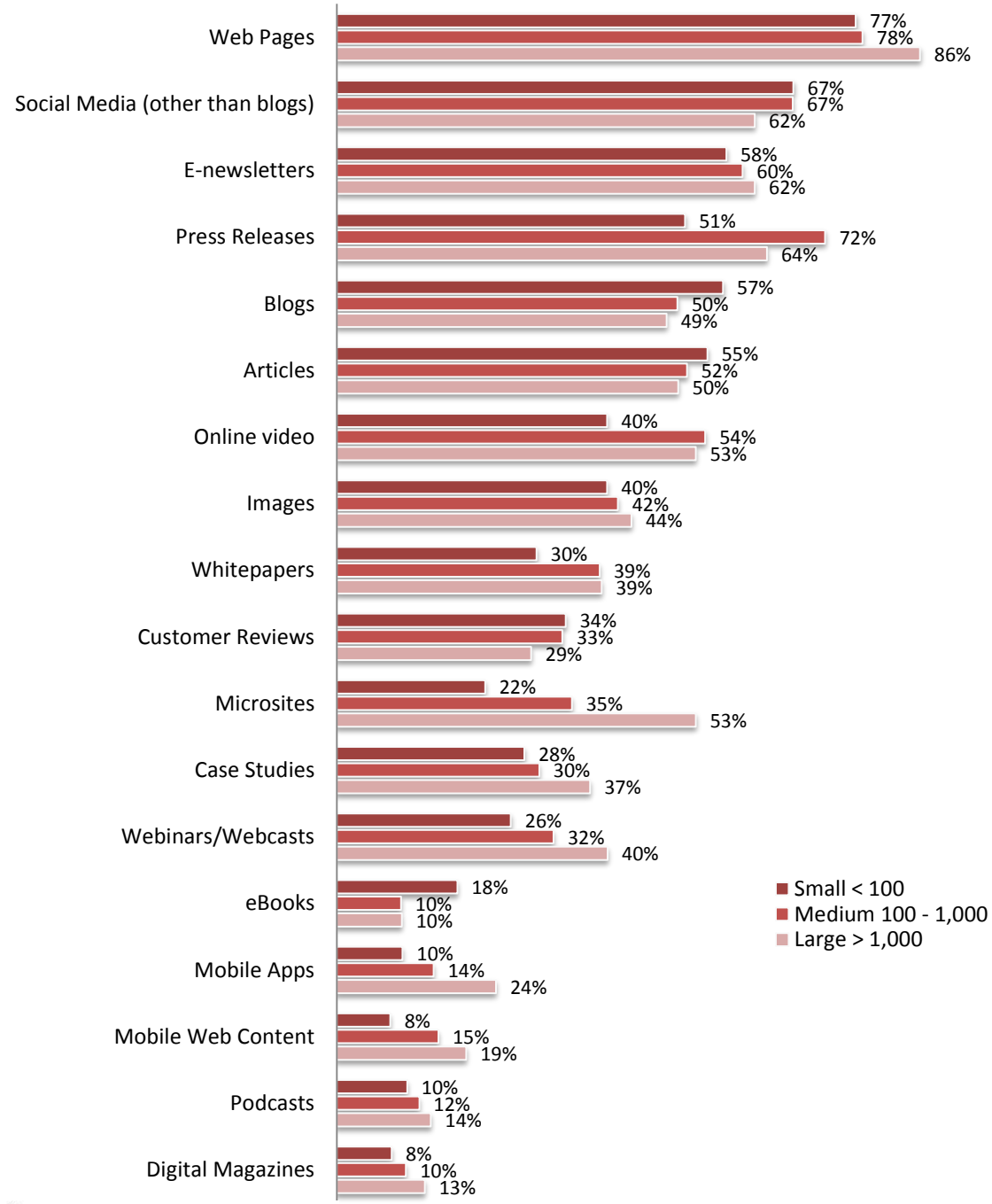
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

B2B marketers offer content that can help potential buyers make the right decisions. As such, we see that Web pages are the content product of choice for communicating information, followed by press releases, whitepapers and case studies. Organizations targeting both business and consumer segments also heavily rely on Web pages, but 73 percent of them turn to social media as their second-most utilized content product, compared to just 63 percent of B2B marketers and 68 percent of B2C marketers.

Chart: Content marketing products, by organization size



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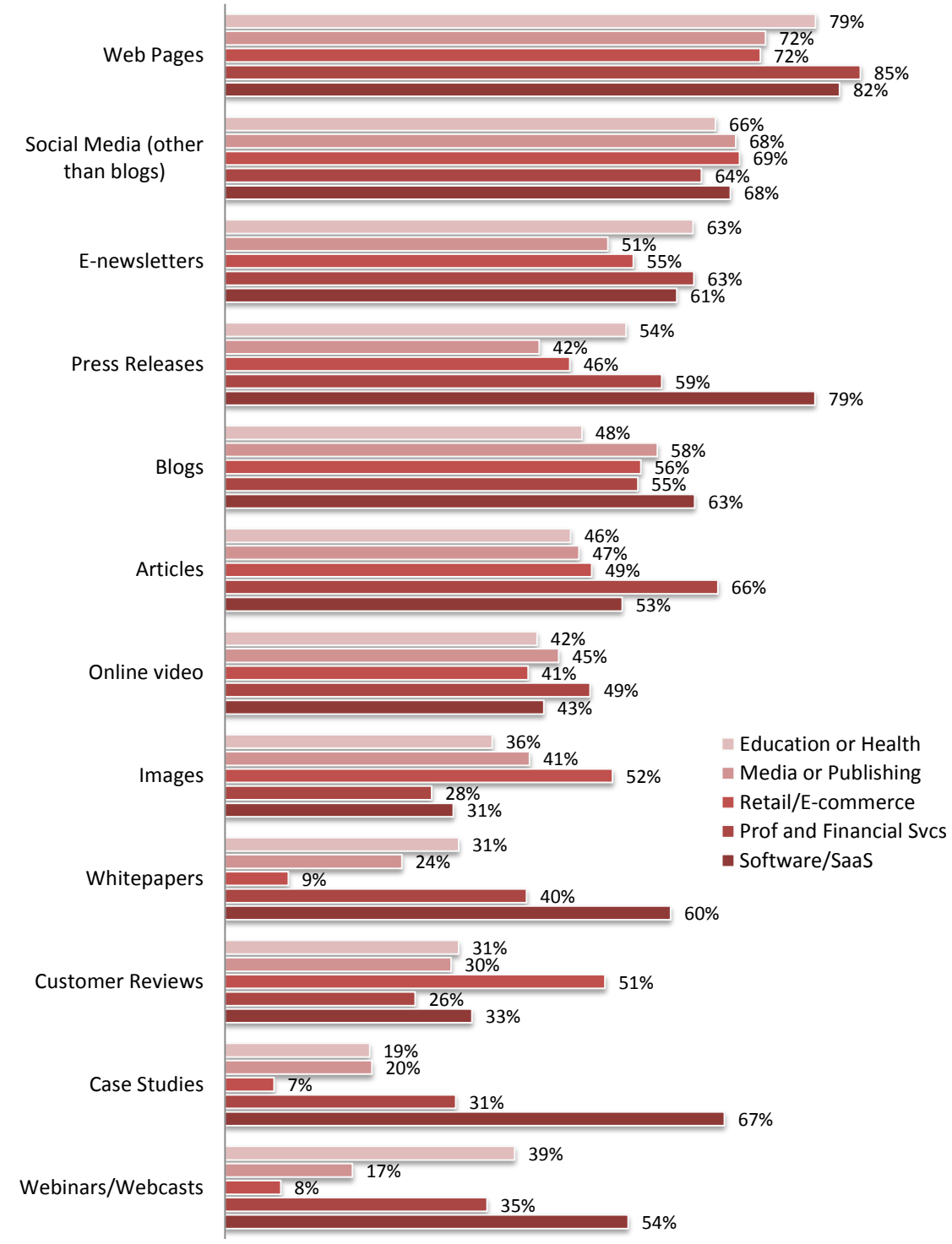
Press releases, especially those optimized with keywords and enhanced with links pointing back to an organization's website, can support SEO and social media integration efforts via Twitter feeds and LinkedIn groups. Nearly three-quarters of medium-sized organizations use press releases to enhance online coverage.

Chart: Top 12 content marketing products, by industry



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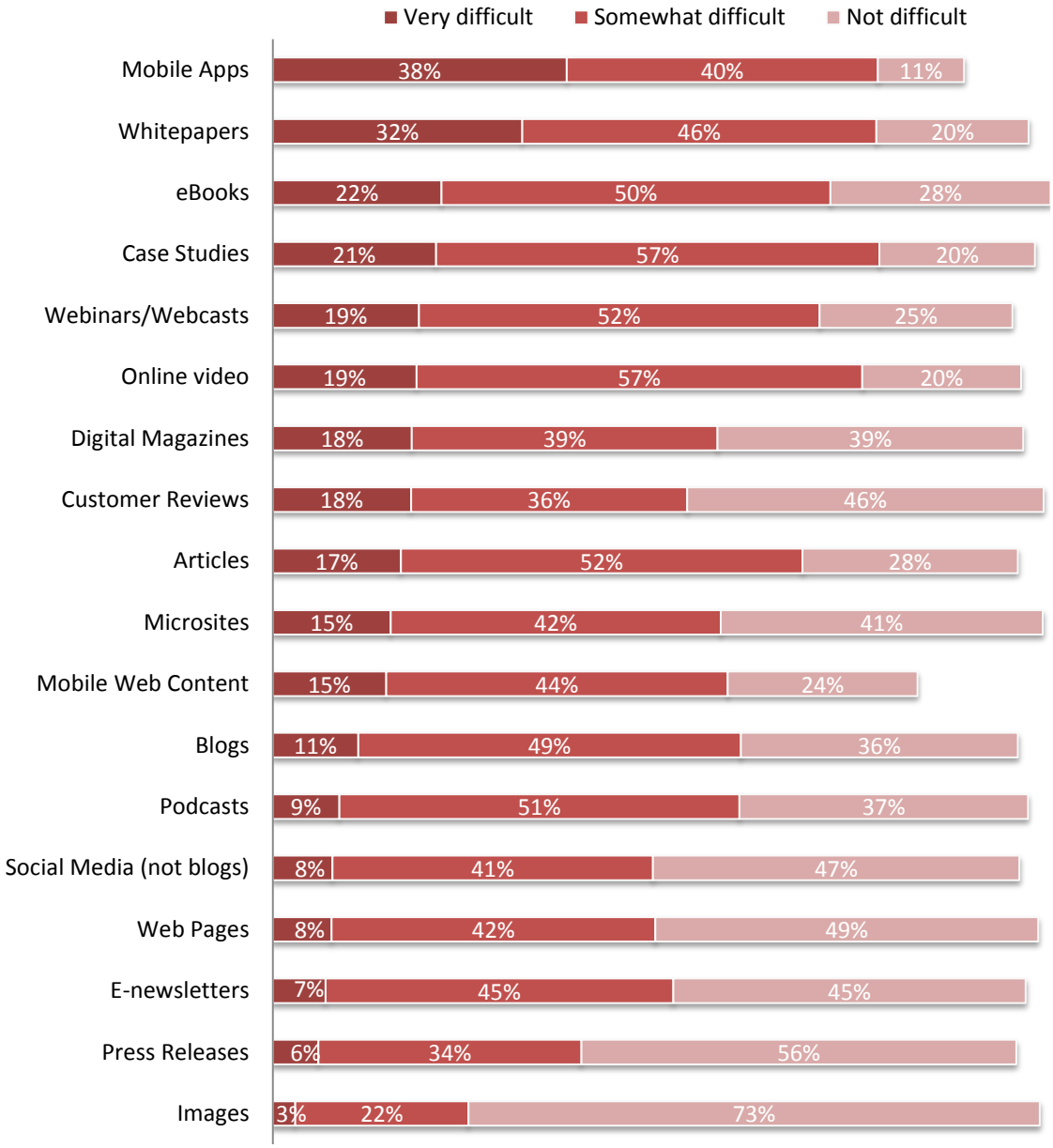
MANY CONTENT PRODUCTS REQUIRE HIGH LEVEL OF TIME, EFFORT, EXPENSE

Chart: Degree of difficulty required in creating content products

Q. Please indicate the DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY (time, effort and expense required) in creating each of the content products used by your organization.



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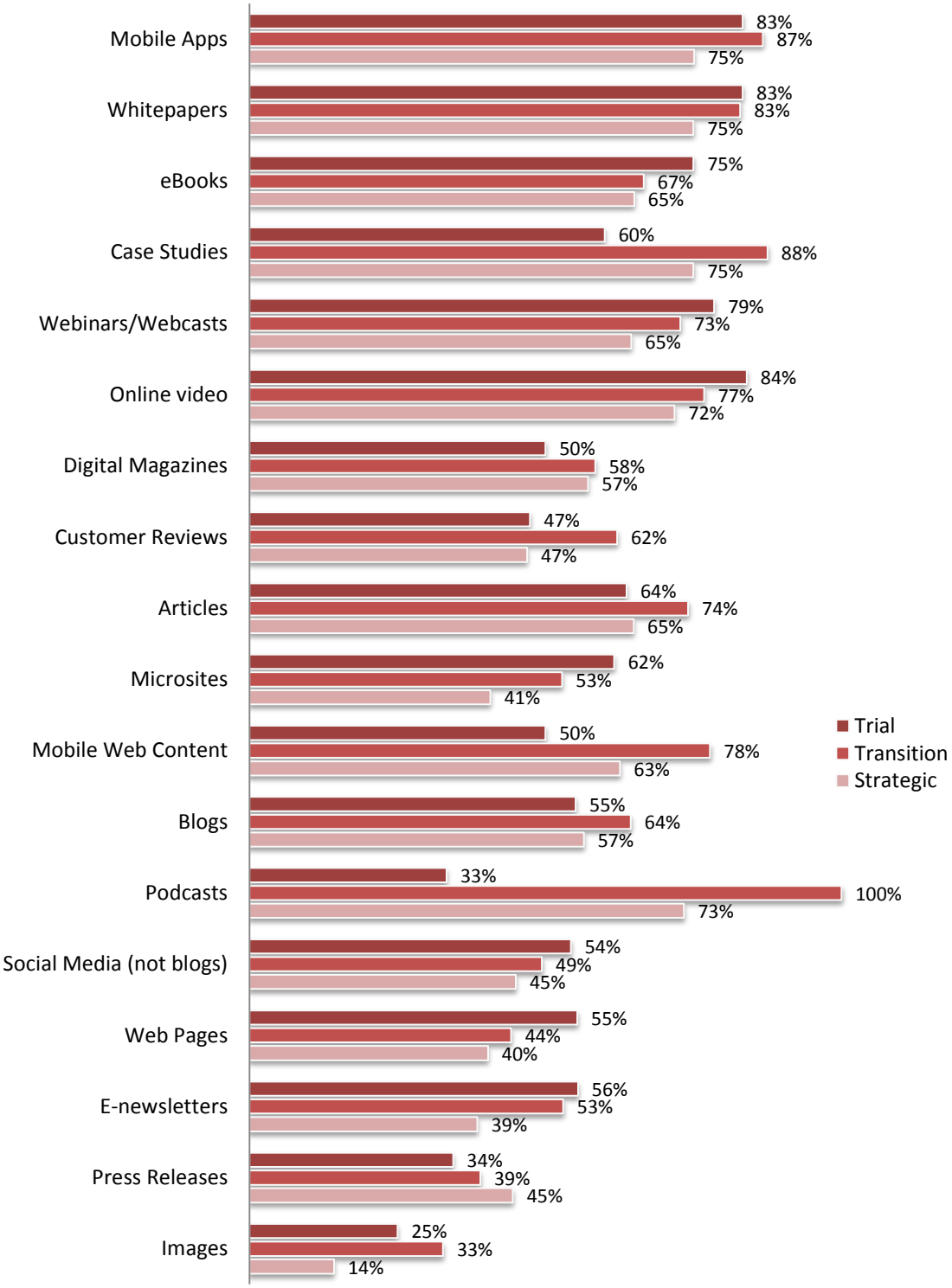
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

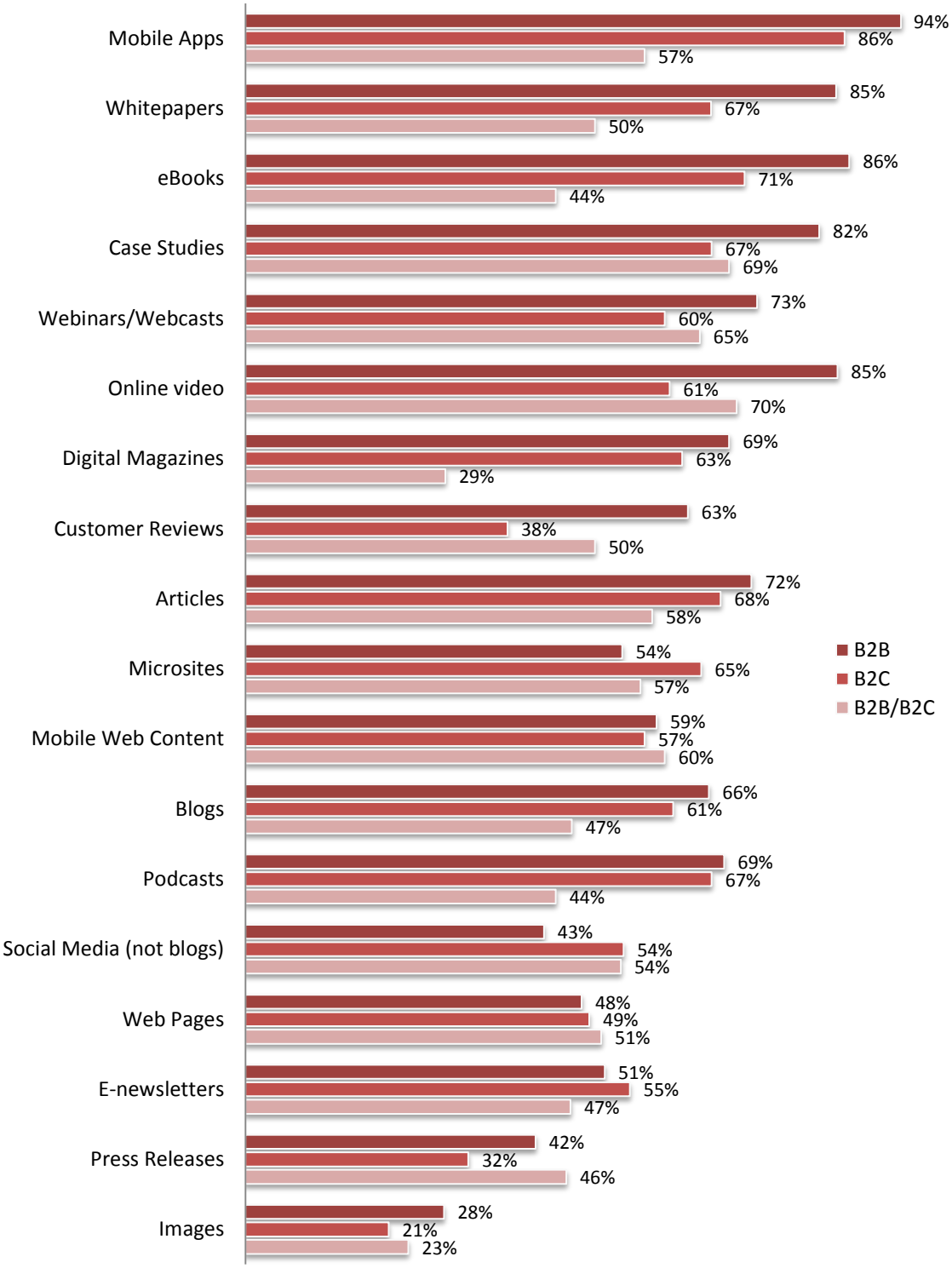
Whitepapers, case studies and online video take the most time, effort and expense to create. On the opposite end of the spectrum, organizations find that images are the easiest to create.

Content products deemed very or somewhat difficult to create, by SEO maturity phase



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Chart: Content products deemed very or somewhat difficult to create, by primary channel



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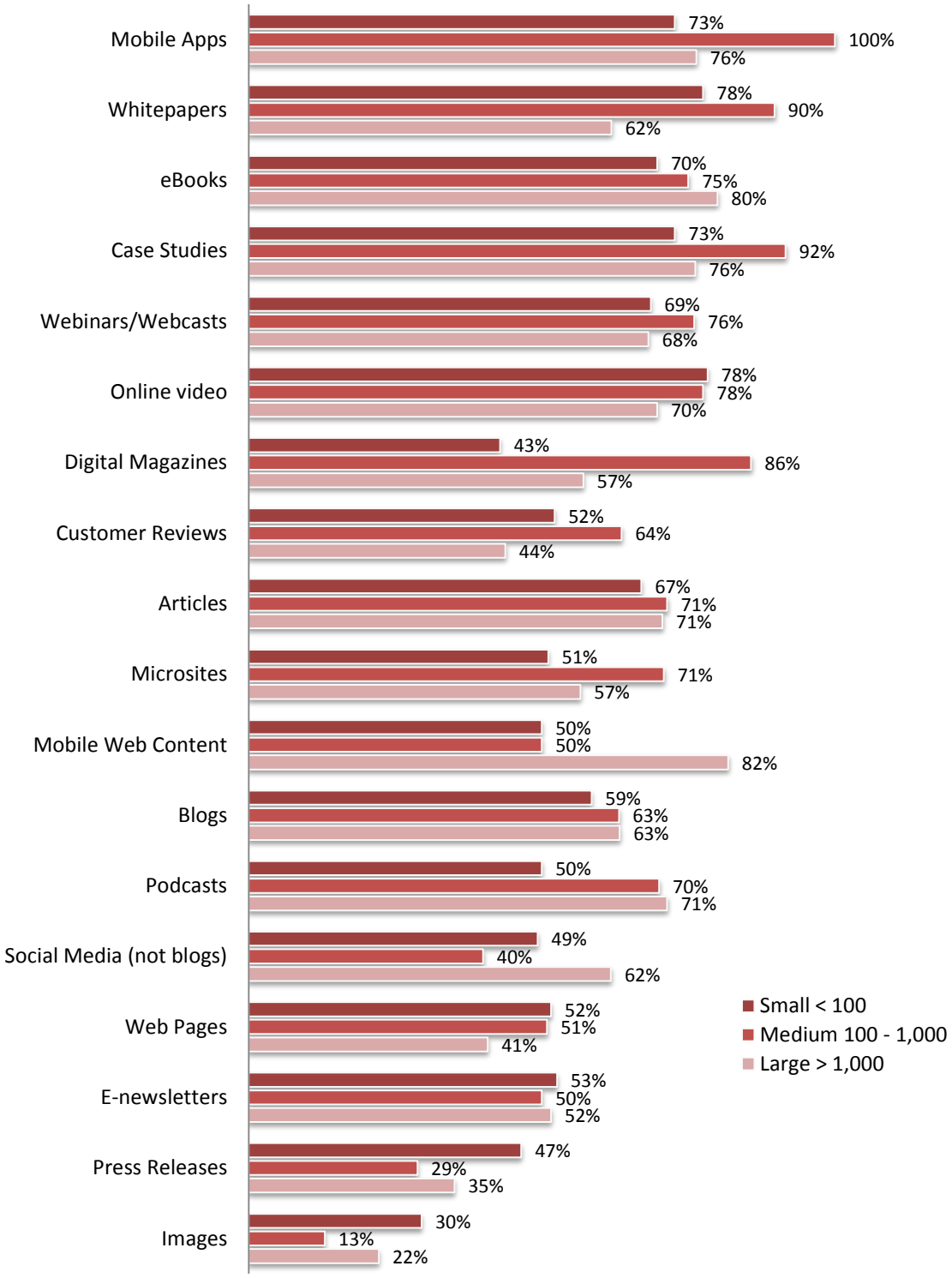
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Content products deemed very or somewhat difficult to create, by organization size



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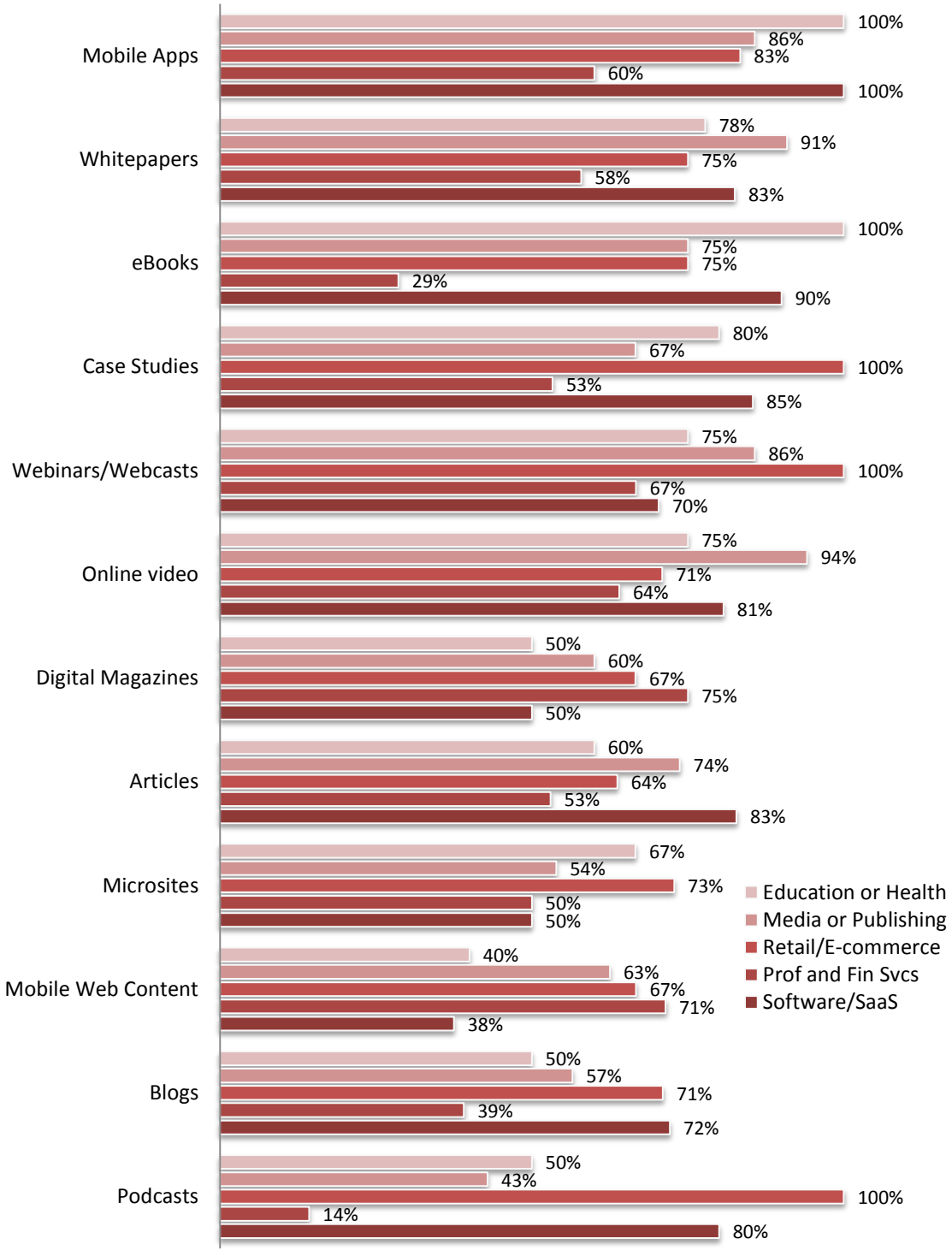
Top 12 content products deemed very or somewhat difficult to create, by industry

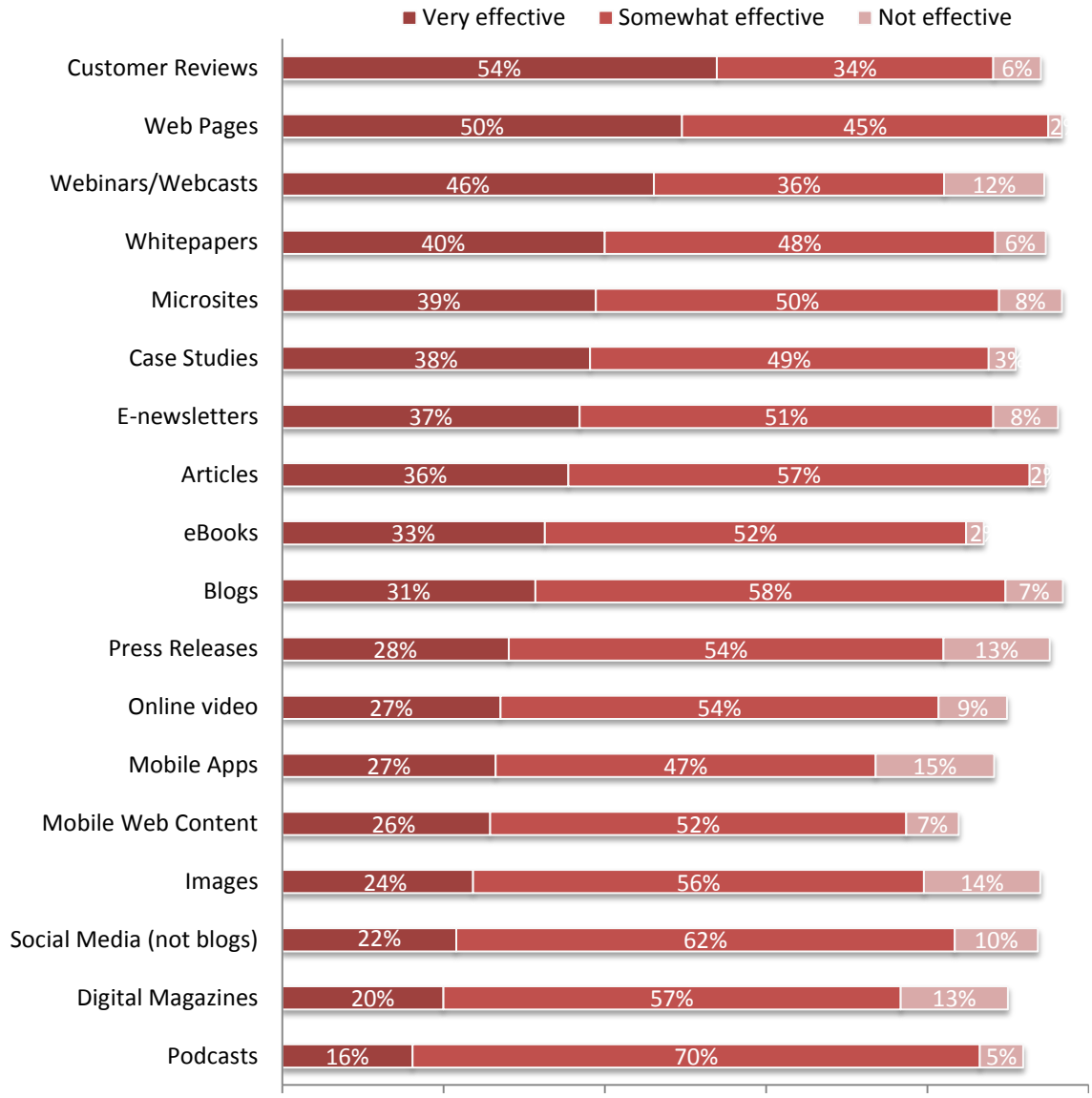


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

CUSTOMER REVIEWS CONSIDERED THE MOST EFFECTIVE CONTENT PRODUCT

Chart: Level of effectiveness in achieving marketing objectives, by content product

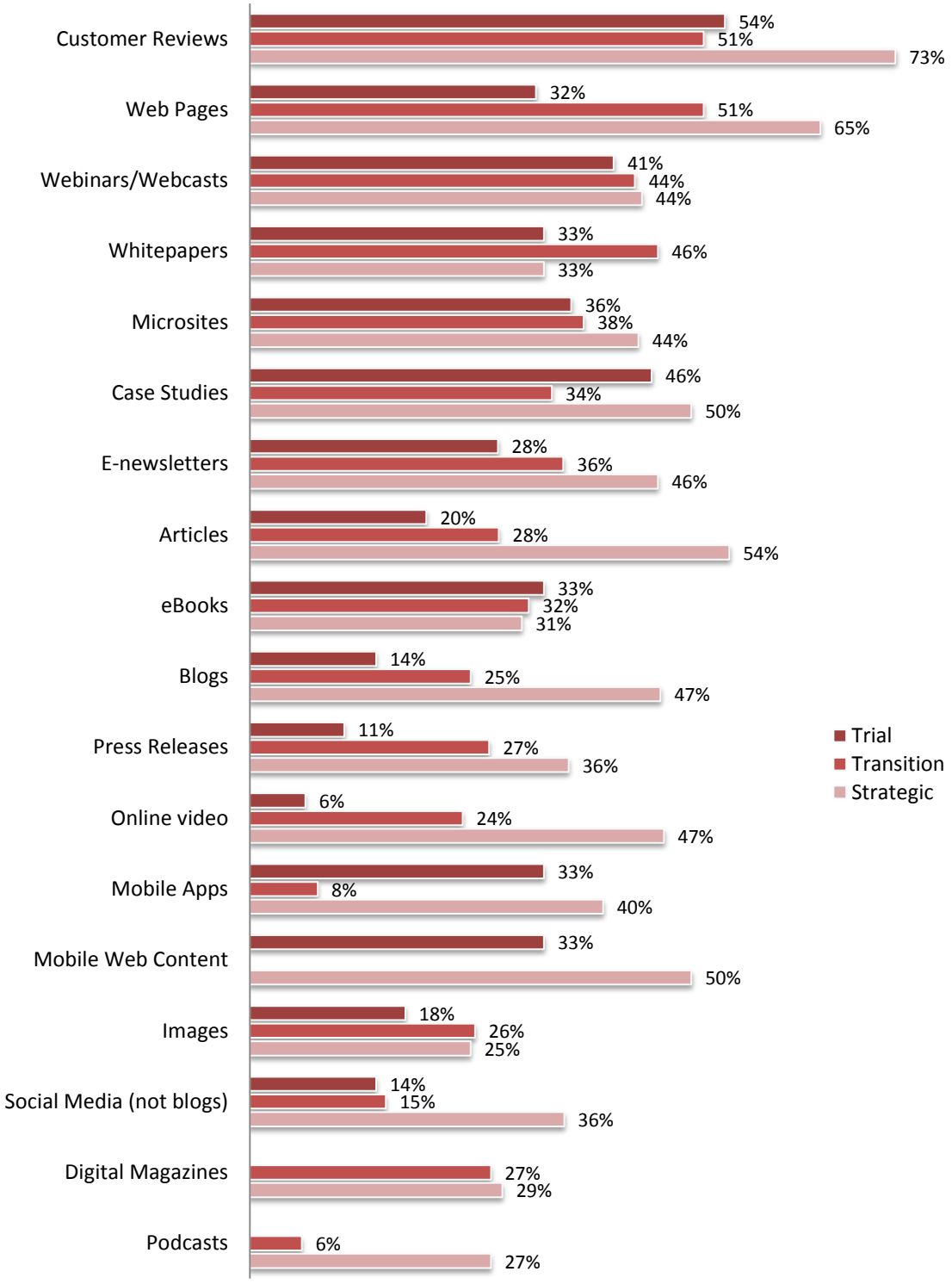
Q. Please indicate the LEVEL OF EFFECTIVENESS (in terms of achieving marketing objectives) for each of the content products used by your organization.



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Nothing beats word-of-mouth marketing. The most artfully crafted and compelling advertisement still pales in comparison when paired against the simple effectiveness of a customer review. Organizations understand this, with more than half stating that customer reviews are very effective in helping them achieve marketing objectives.

Chart: Content products deemed very effective in achieving marketing objectives, by SEO maturity phase



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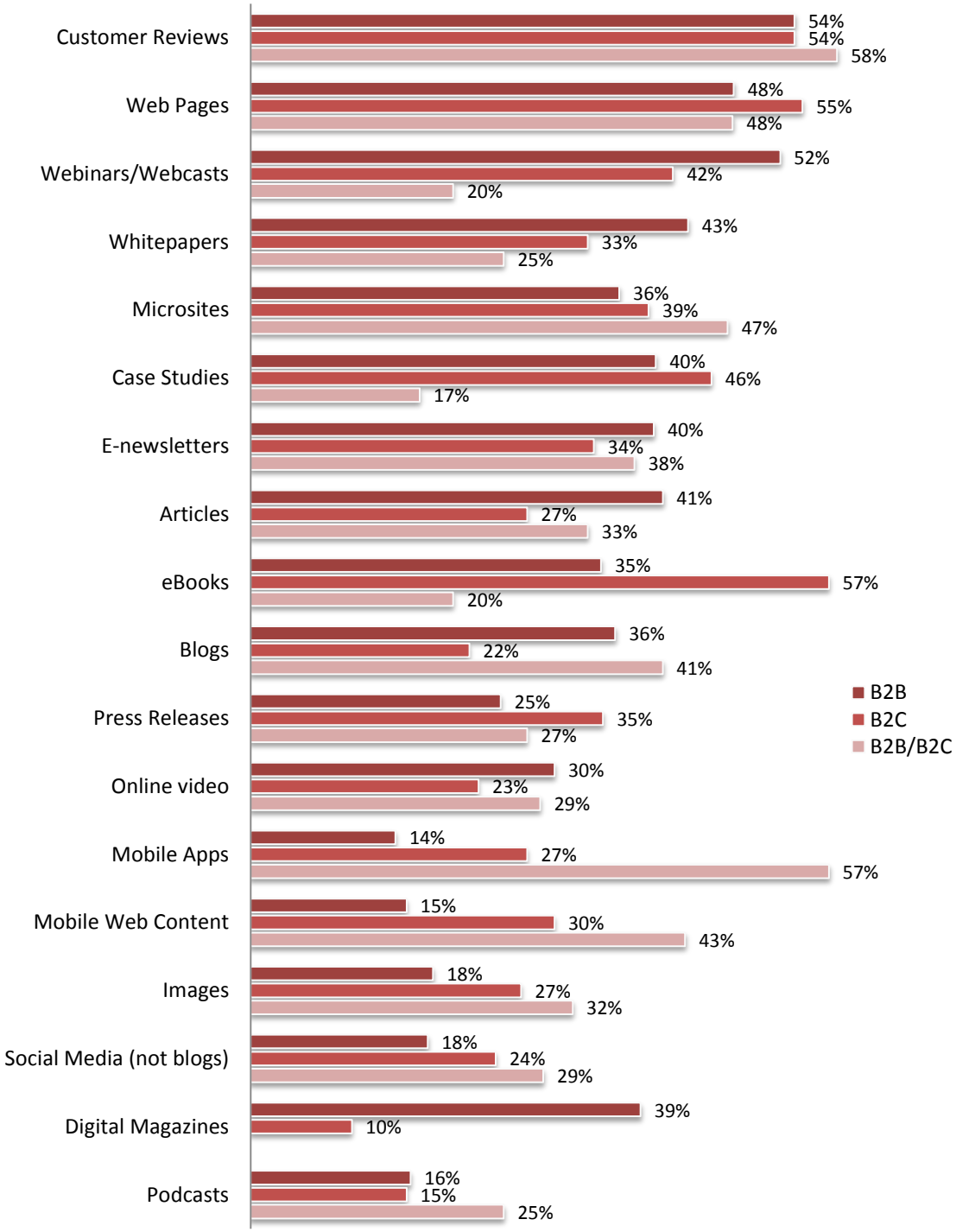
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Chart: Content products deemed very effective in achieving marketing objectives, by primary channel



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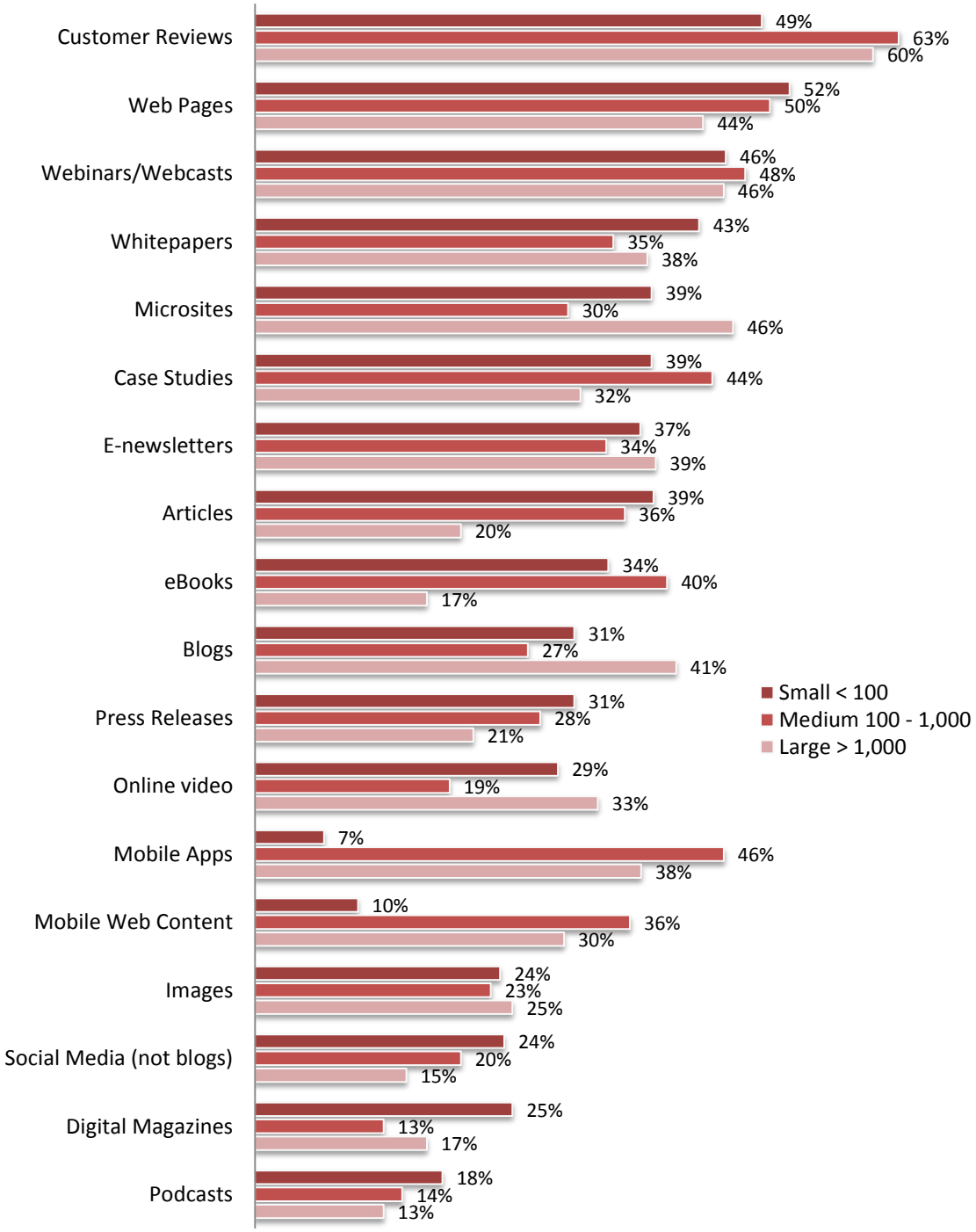
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Mobile apps and mobile Web content are two of the most effective content products for companies selling to both business and consumer markets. With the rise of mobile search and other mobile behaviors, organizations are experiencing success with the medium.

Chart: Content products deemed very effective in achieving marketing objectives, by organization size



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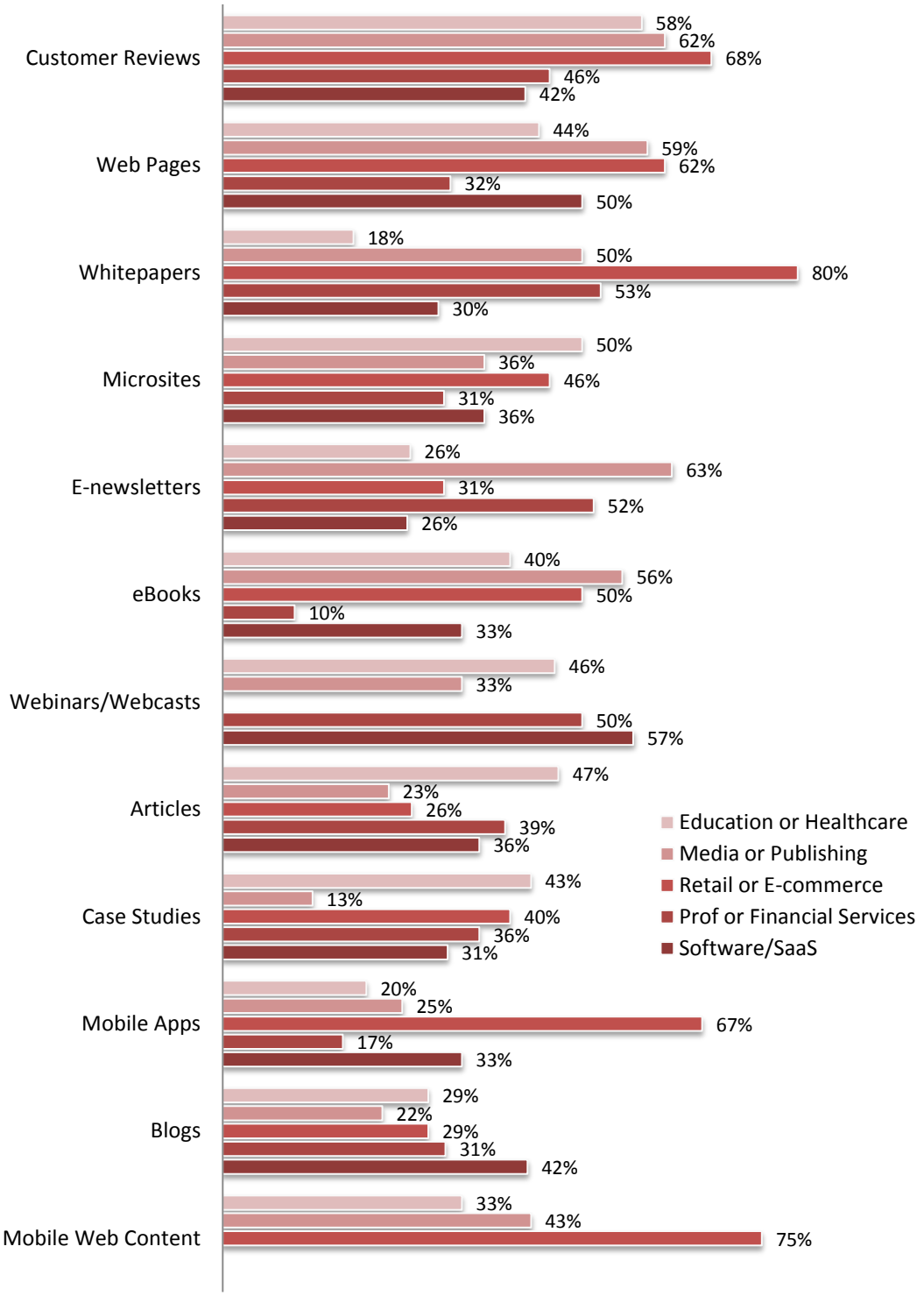
Microsites, often considered "niche" marketing, typically have defined editorial or commercial purposes. Microsites support an organization's search marketing efforts because they feature topic-specific and keyword-rich content. Nearly 50 percent of large organizations consider microsites to be very effective in helping them achieve marketing objectives.

Chart: Top 12 content products deemed very effective in achieving marketing objectives, by industry



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
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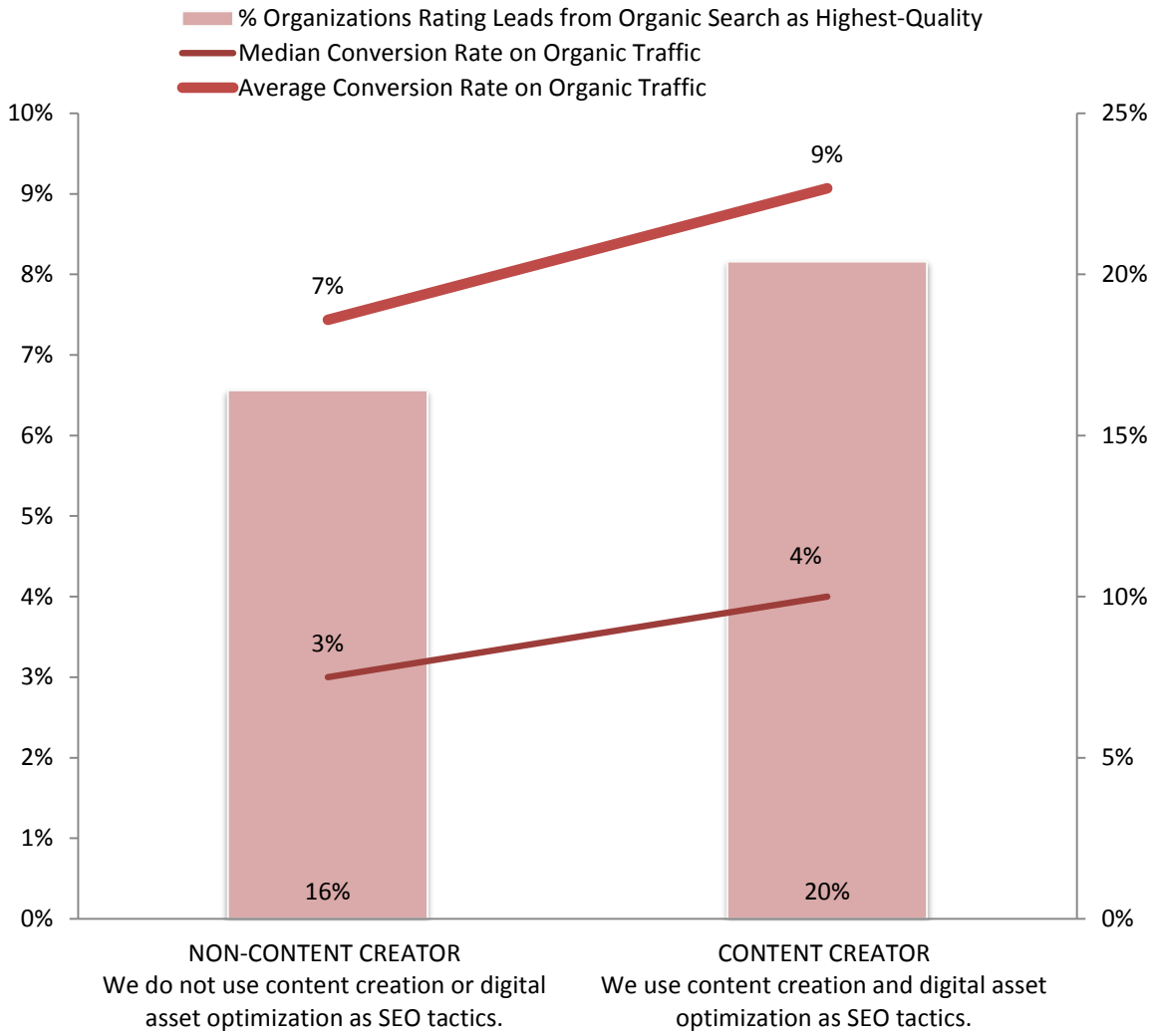
Chart: The effect of content creation as an SEO tactic on lead quality and conversion rates



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Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Content creation and digital asset optimization are two underutilized SEO tactics. As seen earlier, just 60 percent of organizations have used content creation, and 42 percent have used digital asset optimization. Nearly three-quarters of organizations rated content creation as either very difficult or somewhat difficult, in terms of time, effort and expense. Optimizing digital assets (e.g. images, videos, podcasts, PDFs, etc.) with keywords did not fare much better in terms of difficulty. Fifty-three percent of organizations also found this difficult to do.

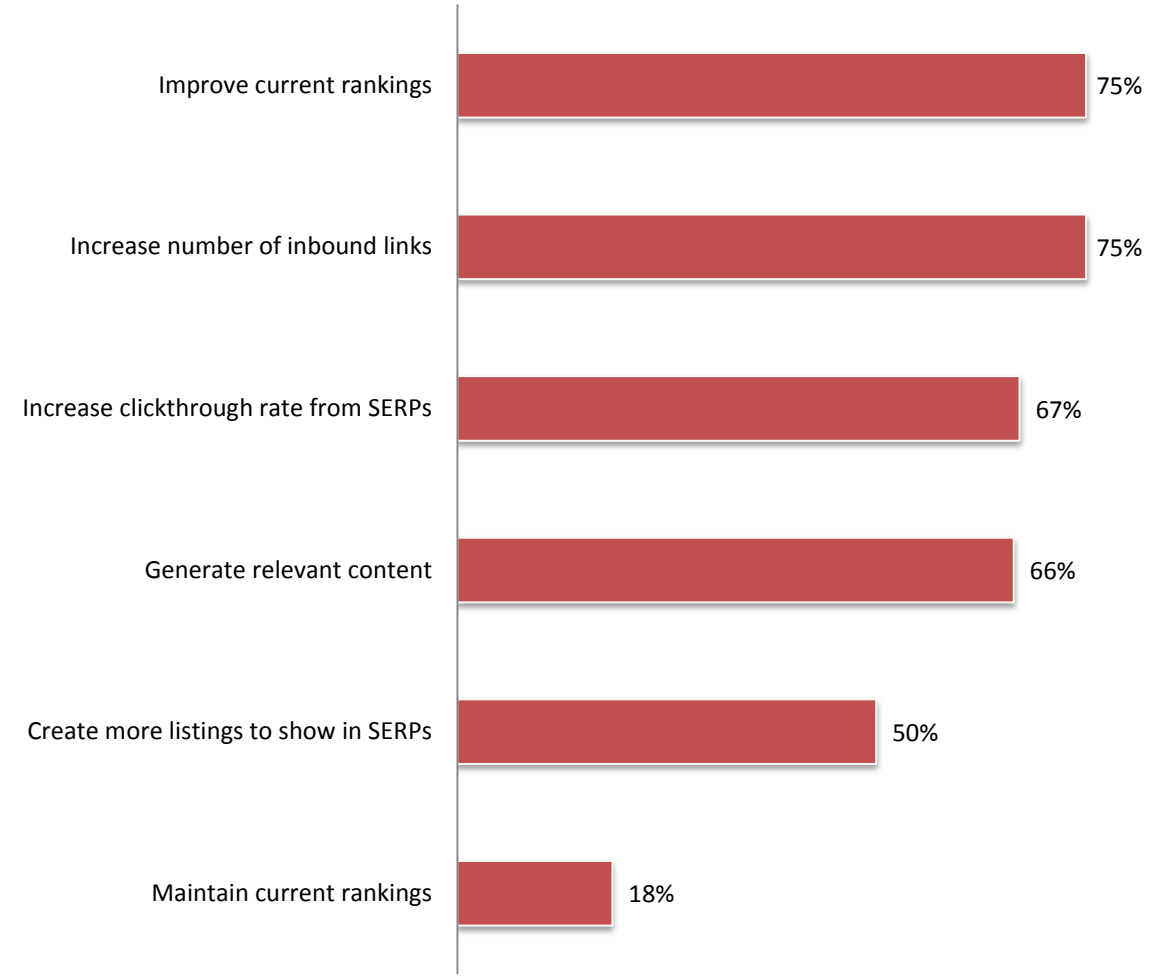
In spite of (or perhaps because of) its difficulty, content creation is rated the most effective SEO tactic. Twenty percent of organizations using content creation state that their leads from organic search are of the highest quality. They also have better average web conversion rates, experiencing a 28 percent lift in conversion after adding content creation and digital asset optimization to their mix of SEO tactics.

CHAPTER 6: INTEGRATING SOCIAL MEDIA AND SEO

Major search engines now regularly index social media content, from Twitter feeds to Facebook updates and blog posts. Organizations now realize that they can harness the power of social and real-time interaction to positively impact SEO results.

Chart: Top goals for integrating social media with SEO

Q. What are your organization's goals for integrating social media into your SEO plans?



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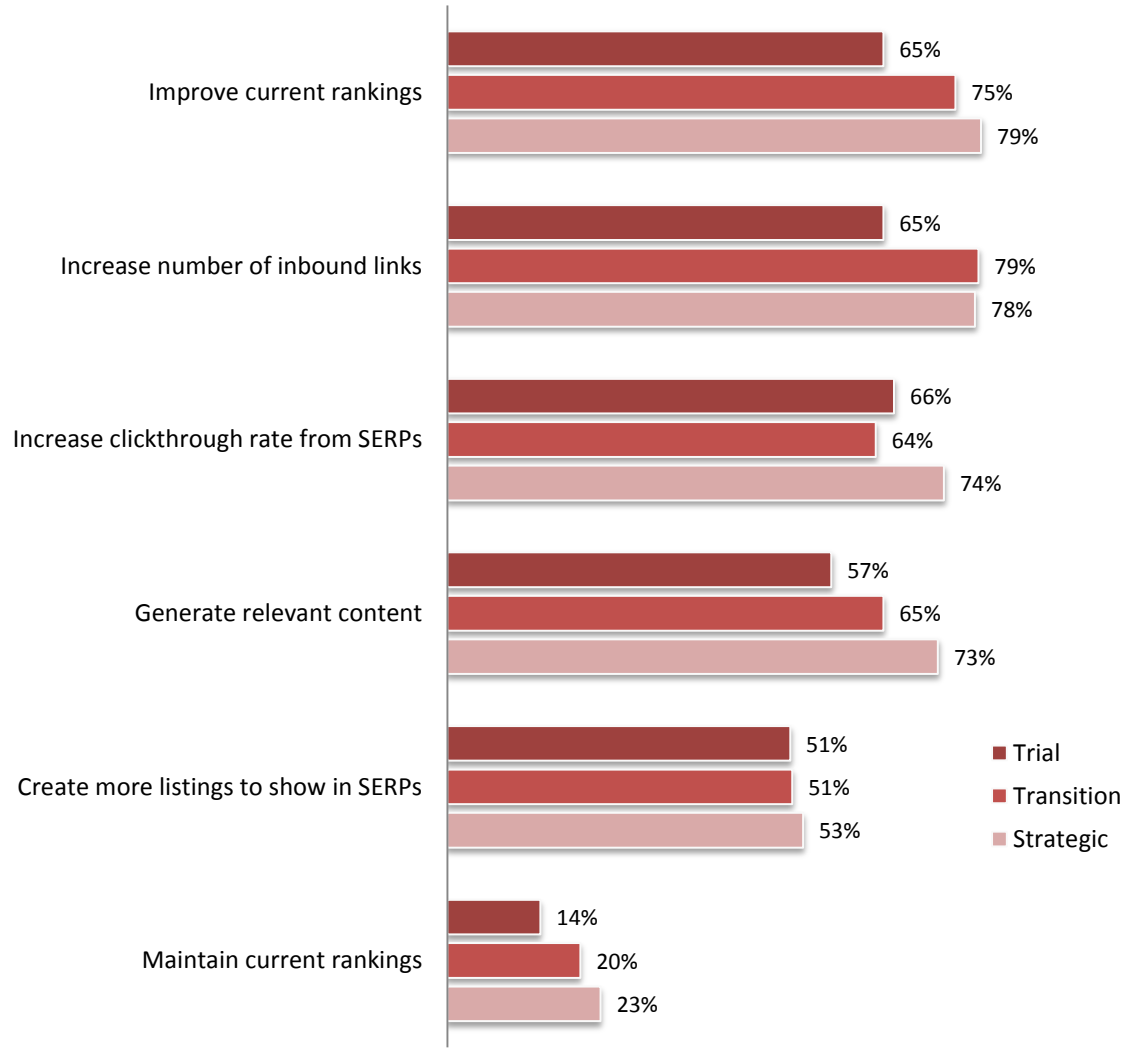
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Obtaining better rankings and more links are top goals for social integration. Case in point – 75 percent of organizations are integrating social media into their SEO plans to improve current rankings and increase the number of inbound links. By comparison, only 18 percent state that they use social media to maintain current search rankings. In other words, organizations believe that social media has the power to amplify SEO efforts.

Chart: Goals for integrating social media with SEO, by SEO maturity phase



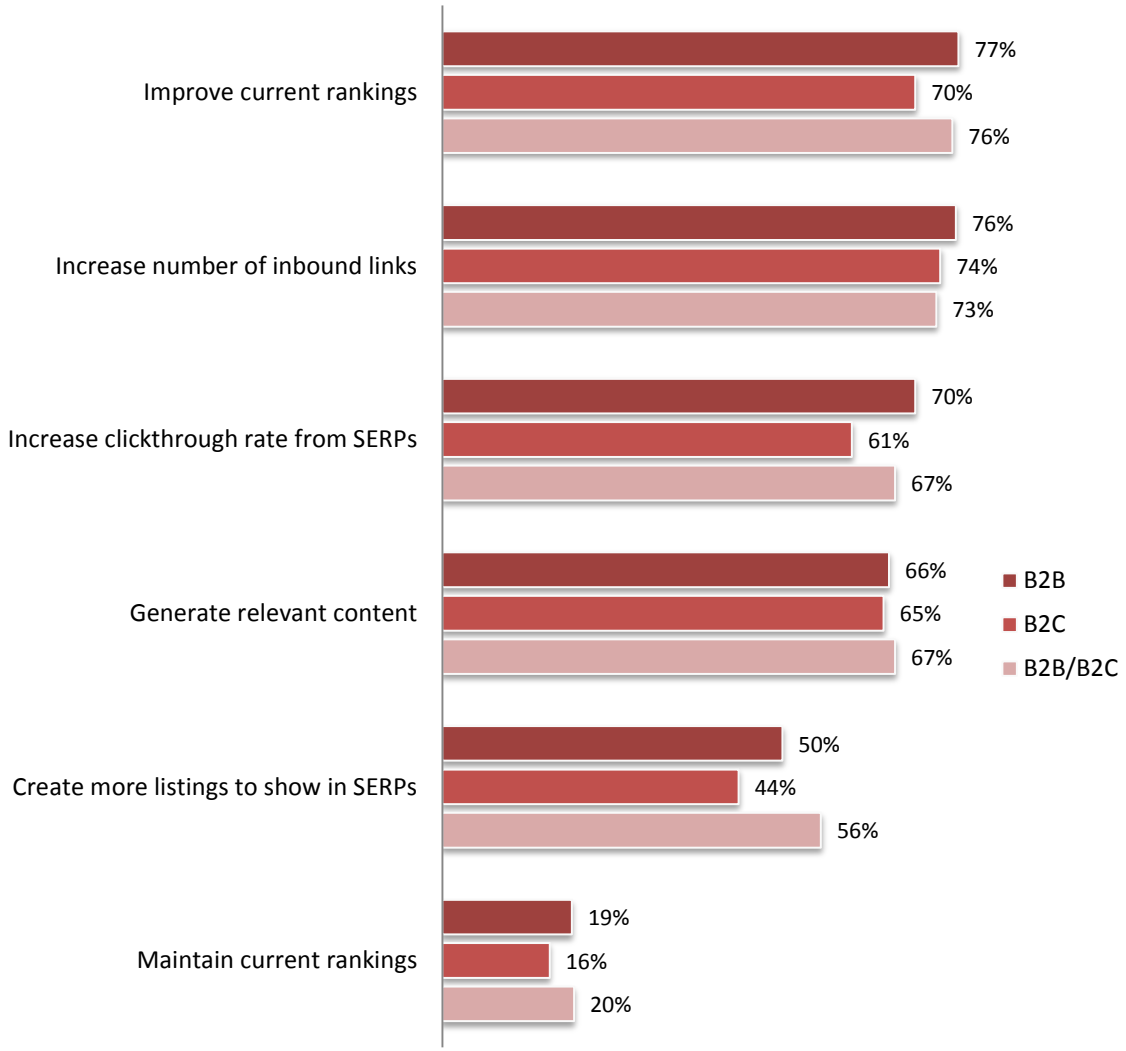
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

The key to achieving success with social marketing is to take a strategic approach – one that will outlive current technology. Without a comprehensive strategy, it becomes very difficult for any organization to produce great results.

In this chart, we see that Strategic organizations understand the interdependent relationship between the first four goals and therefore expect results on all four accounts.

"Integrating social media and SEO tactics is great link bait." – Marketer insight

Chart: Goals for integrating social media with SEO, by primary channel



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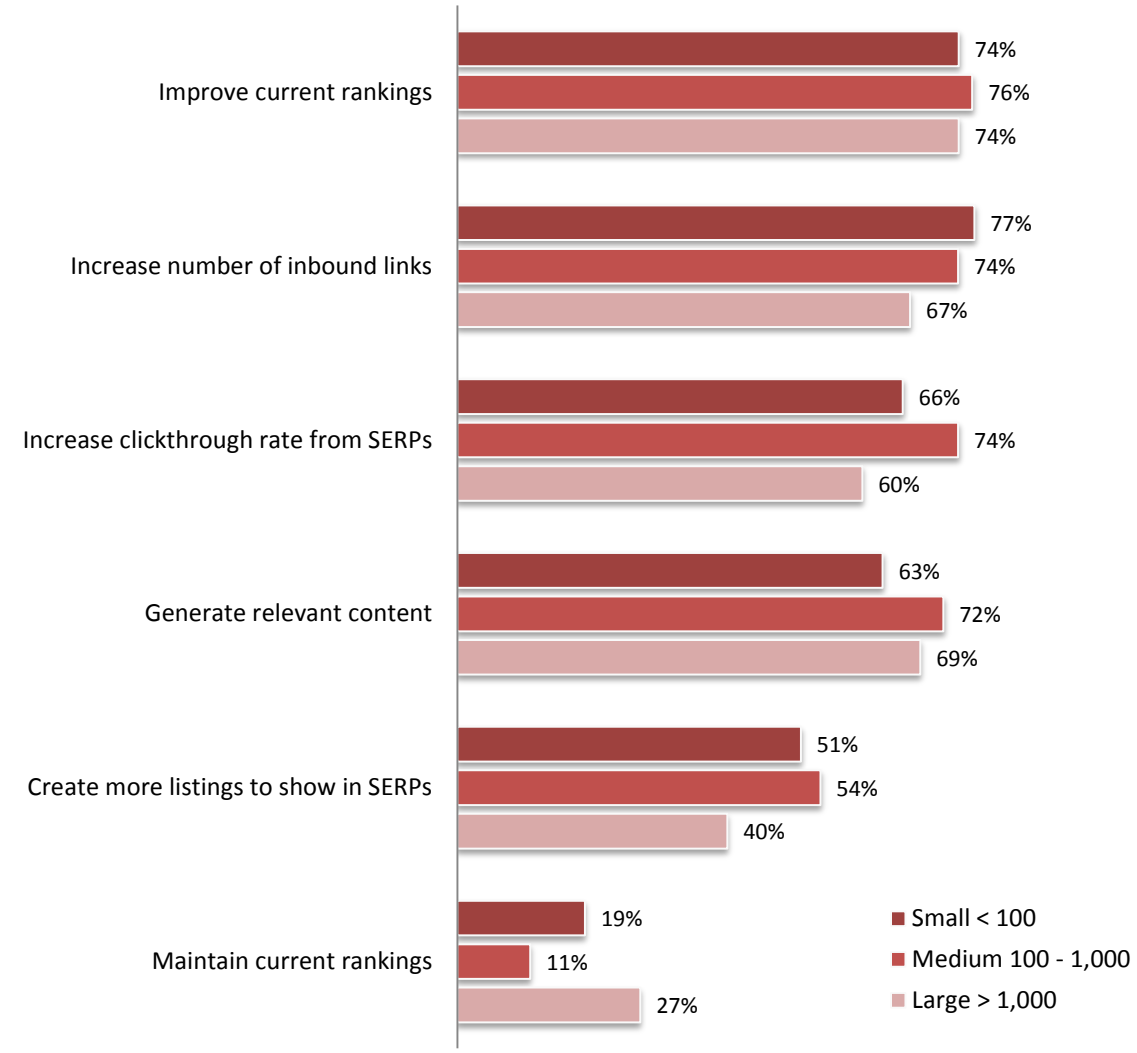
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

B2B marketers are using social media to find (or be found by) customers and prospects and directly engage with them. Interactions through social media platforms serve to humanize their brands by helping them manage their reputations and establish thought leadership, both of which ultimately build trust. When done well, organizations can attract more links to their content and thereby improve their rankings. Understanding this, more than three-quarters of B2B organizations set these as their top social media integration goals.

Chart: Goals for integrating social media with SEO, by organization size

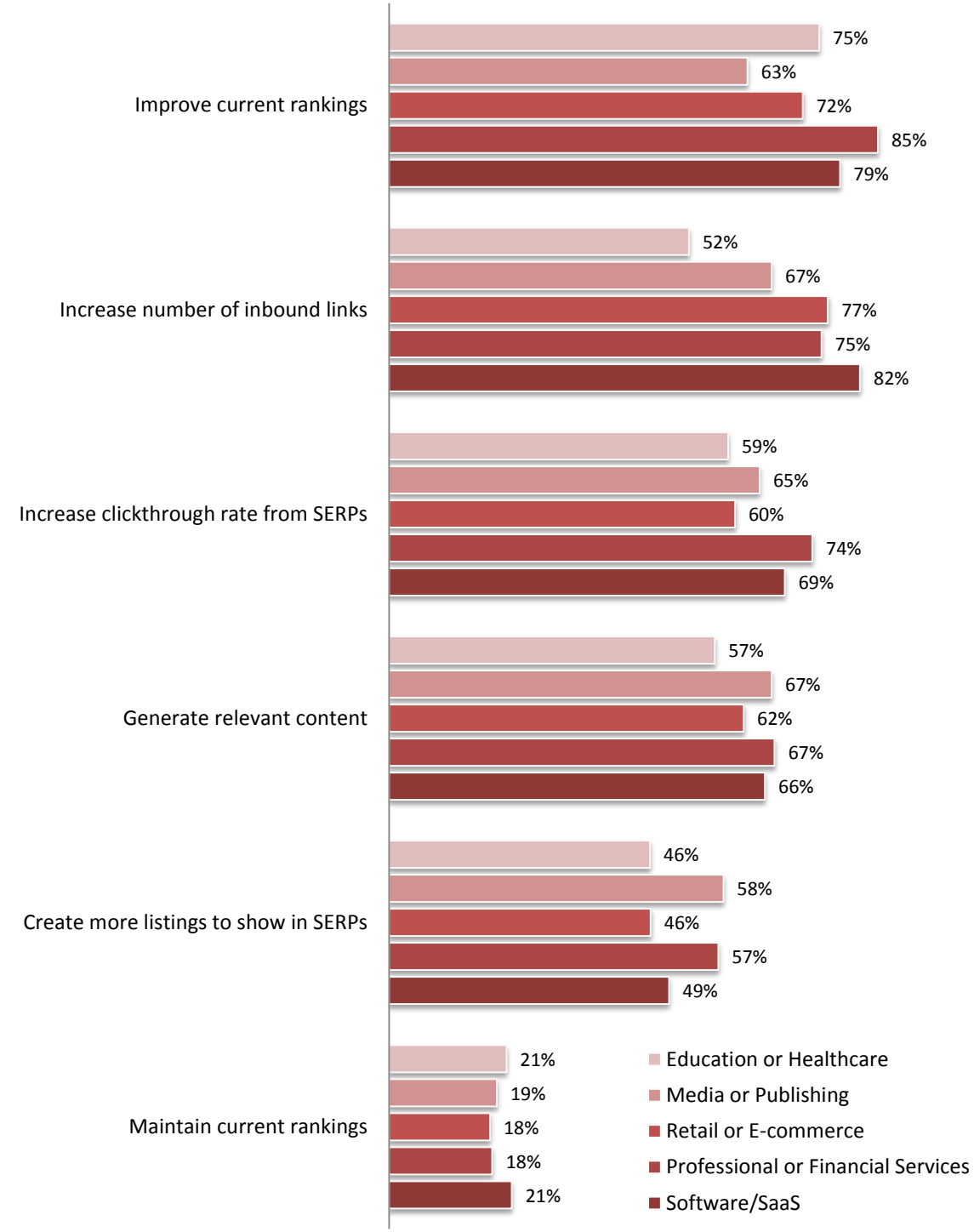


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Small organizations have the ability to react quickly to developments in their industries. This agility enables them to revise marketing plans and adjust tactics more easily than larger organizations, which serves as a decided advantage in the real-time social media climate.

One area of opportunity is to create more listings to show in SERPs. This goal did not rank as highly as others, but nonetheless offers viable benefits. Social media can be a great content generator, helping companies create multiple listings in search engine results. Through "owning the page" and, in turn, pushing the competition down the page, an organization conveys brand authority. This then creates a sense of confidence and trust in the organization, prompting more clicks from searchers.

Chart: Goals for integrating social media with SEO, by industry



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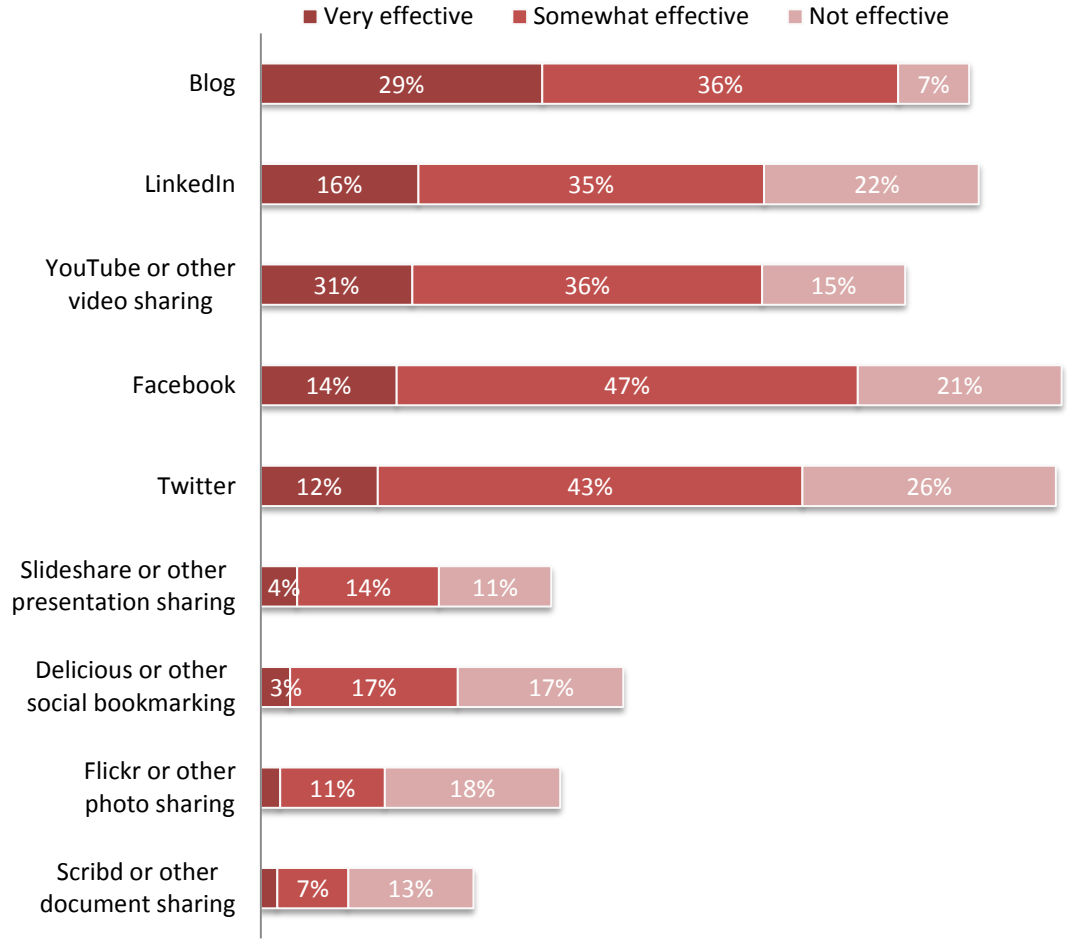
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

BLOGS CONSIDERED MOST EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

Chart: Level of effectiveness by social media platform

Q. Please indicate the LEVEL OF EFFECTIVENESS (in terms of achieving objectives) of using these social media platforms in your inbound marketing efforts.



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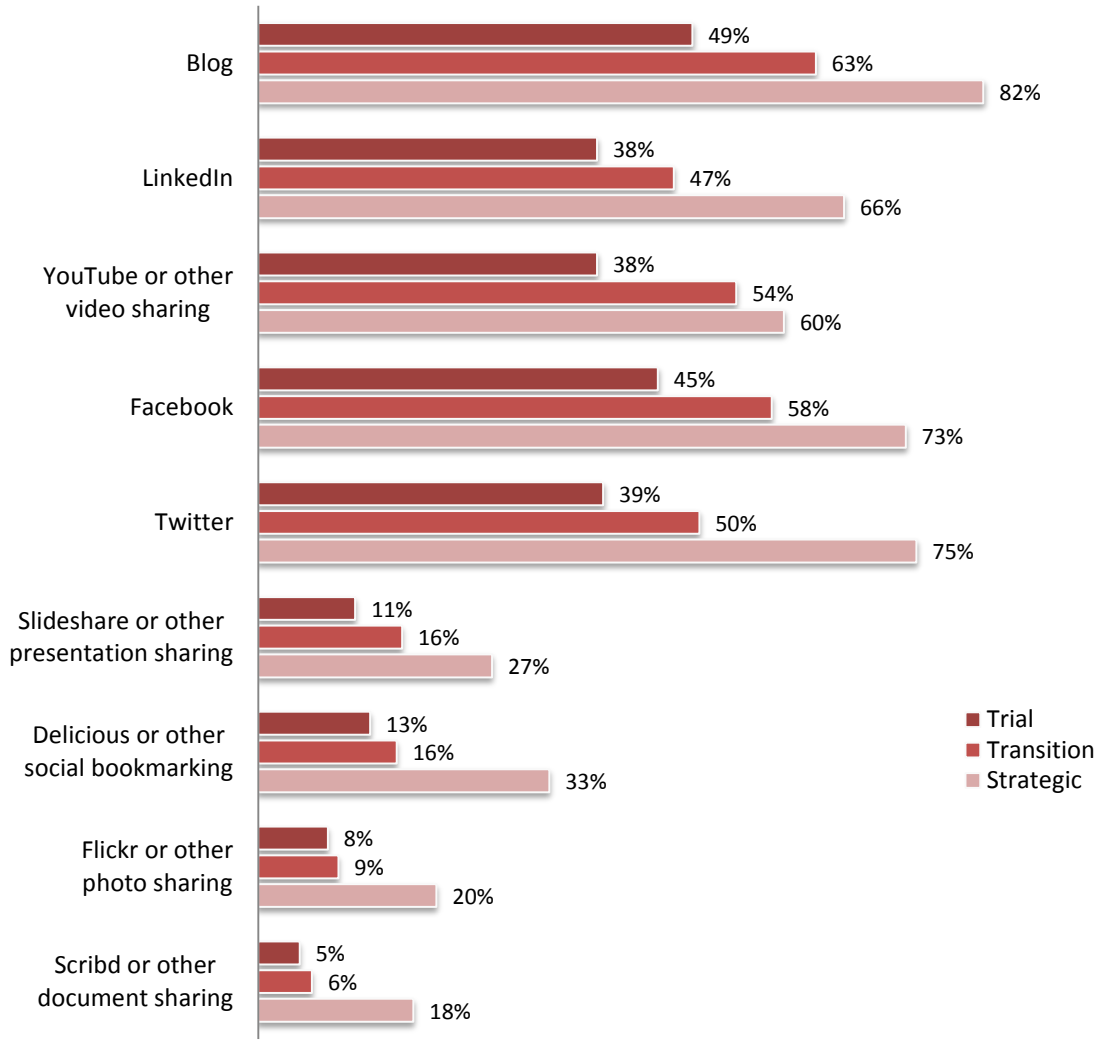
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Blogs offer myriad benefits. They give organizations a chance to develop link-worthy content through demonstrating expertise and credibility. Blogs also help with long-tail search, widening an organization's reach. For these reasons, among others, 29 percent of organizations find blogs to be a very effective social media platform.

Facebook and Twitter are considered somewhat effective by 47 and 43 percent of organizations, respectively. Twitter data is a good example of how real-time social media content affects search results. Re-Tweets effectively serve as a new form of link building. Having a page mentioned by users with social authority (determined by a user's total followers and how many accounts that user follows) is a social signal to search engines that can have some bearing on regular search rankings.

Chart: Social media platforms deemed very or somewhat effective, by SEO maturity phase



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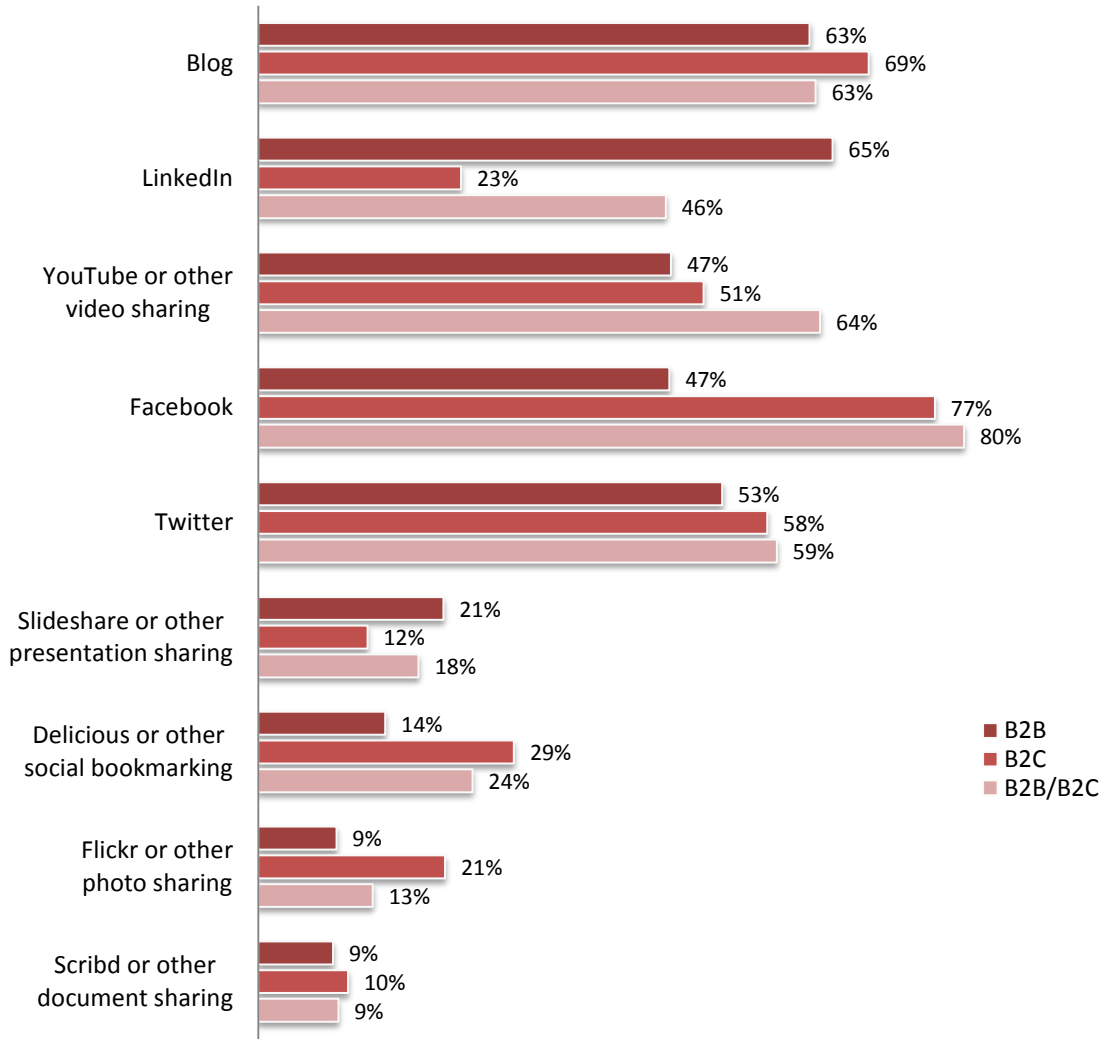
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Organizations with a strategic approach to SEO programs and practices have a clear advantage over Trial and Transition organizations when it comes to how effectively they use social media platforms for inbound marketing purposes. These organizations are finding success in the crowded spaces of more popular social media platforms like blogs, Facebook and Twitter. They also have learned how to create marketing opportunities from less-frequently used social media platforms to a greater degree than organizations in other SEO phases of maturity.

"We have dramatically increased our presence on Facebook. We now get orders from Facebook directly and have a huge online following. We have created much better relationships with these customers, have increased our credibility dramatically and created a positive image of ourselves with all of our customers and potential customers. We have created an atmosphere where like-minded people communicate on our Facebook Page and really seem to enjoy it." – Marketer insight

Chart: Social media platforms deemed very or somewhat effective, by primary channel



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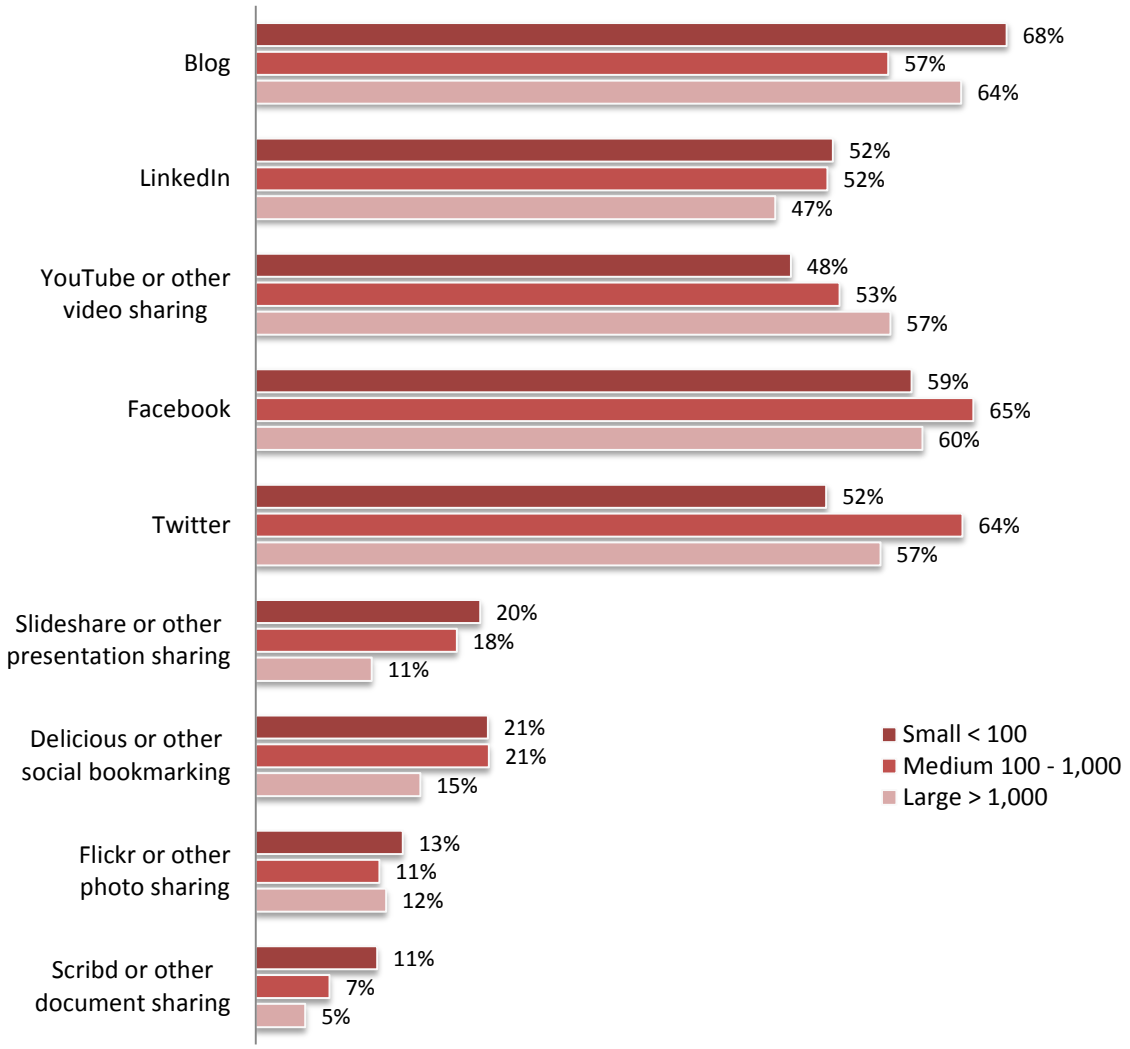
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Facebook is an effective social media platform for 77 percent of B2C organizations and 80 percent of B2B/B2C companies. B2B organizations, by comparison, turn to LinkedIn as their social platform of choice.

More than two-thirds of B2B/B2C organizations regard YouTube and other video sharing platforms as effective channels for inbound marketing efforts. YouTube channels are powerful marketing tools used by countless businesses and freelance professionals to advance their products and services. People are often more willing to watch a short video than read a long blog post, especially if the video is engaging or entertaining. Unlike television commercials, those viewing YouTube videos often are searching for specific information. By posting engaging videos optimized with target keywords and key phrases, B2B organizations can connect with audience members likely to buy their products or services. (See “Case Briefing: Turning a YouTube Channel into a Powerful Inbound Marketing Hub.”)

Chart: Social media platforms deemed very or somewhat effective, by organization size



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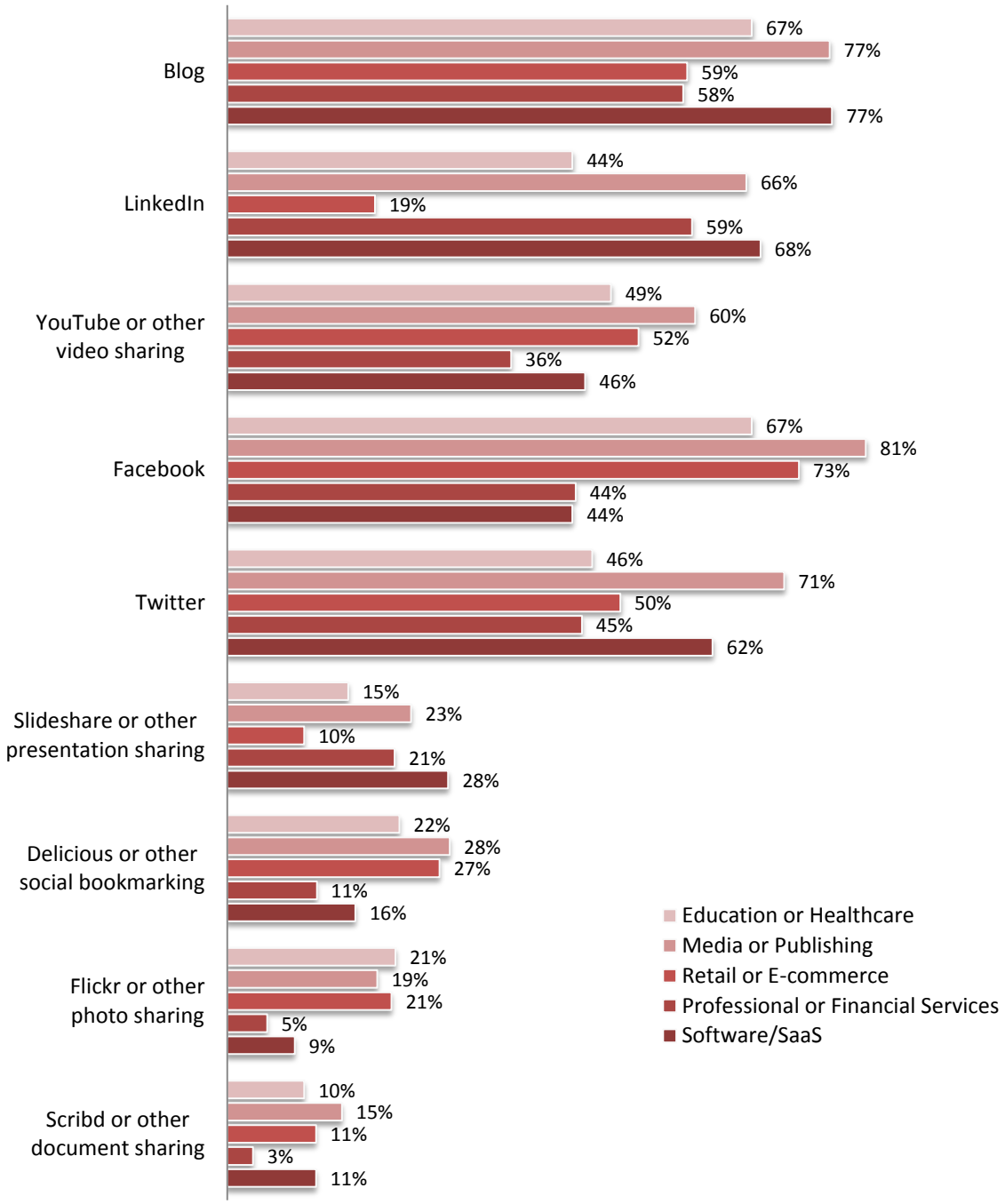
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Blogging has become a well-established tactic in many marketers' playbooks. But, creating a company blog that integrates with an organization's social media and SEO programs requires more than just setting up a page and letting writers "have at it." Good keyword strategy and strong keyword coverage are essential to getting the biggest SEO impact from a blog.

"Adding a company-owned blog significantly improved the traffic to both our site and to the relevant content on the blog." – Marketer insight

Many organizations find success running a team blog. Not only does the multiple blog author approach lessen the burden on any one person to provide posts each week, but it also creates a natural diversity in phrasing and word use – the result of which is better, search-optimized content.

Chart: Social media platforms deemed very or somewhat effective, by industry



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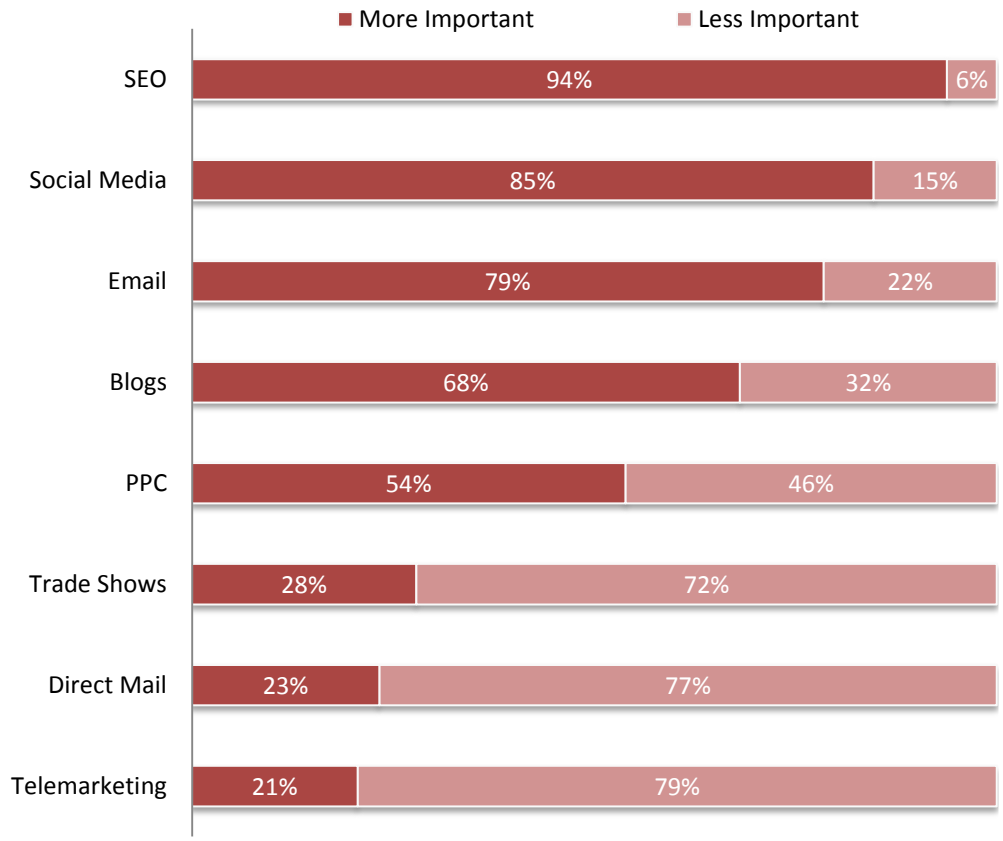
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Media and publishing companies are finding considerable success across many common social media platforms. These companies are in the business of producing entertaining, educational and persuasive content, and transferring these capabilities to the social media realm is proving to be quite effective for them.

INBOUND MARKETING LEAD SOURCES ARE GROWING IN IMPORTANCE

Chart: Lead sources increasing and decreasing in importance over last 12 months

Q. Which sources of leads have become more important and less important to you over the last 12 months?



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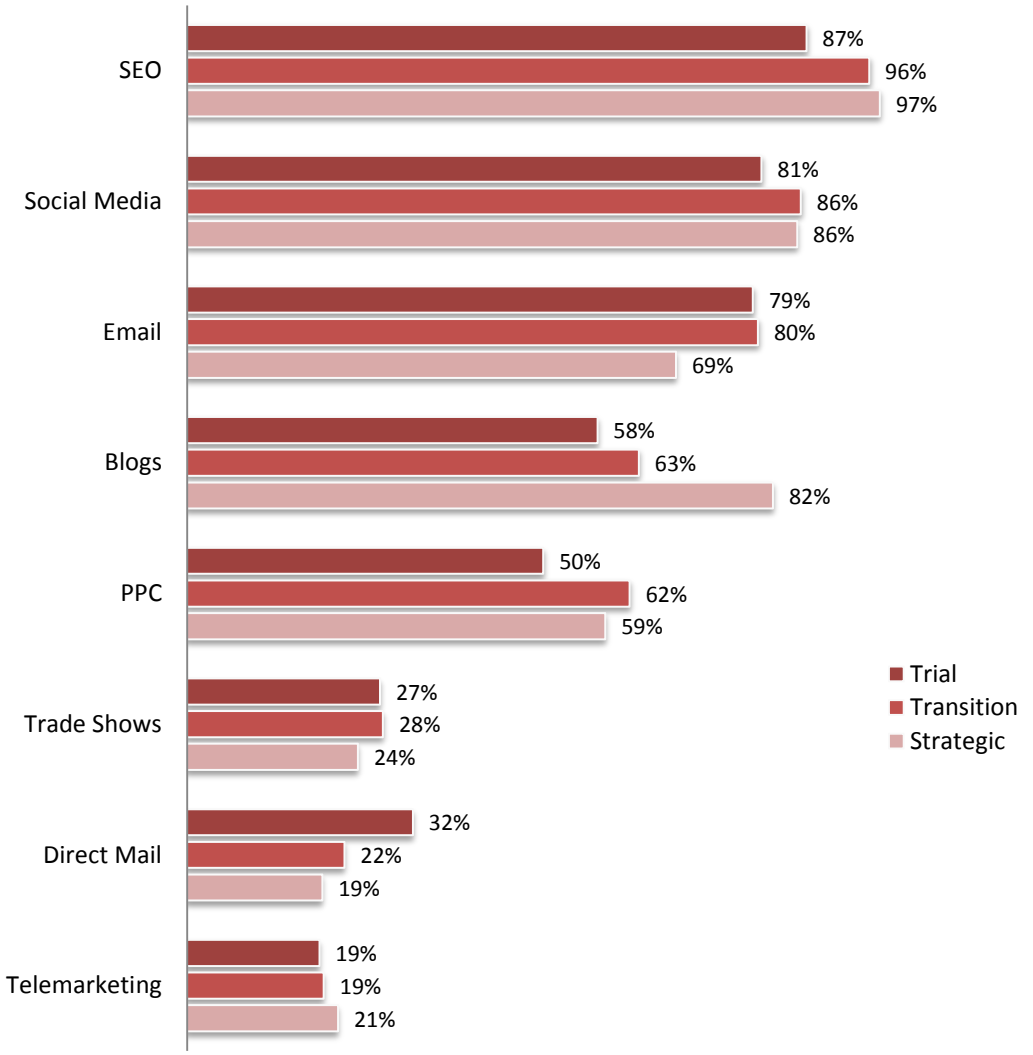
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Over the last 12 months, leads from inbound marketing tactics have increased in significance. As the name suggests, these marketing strategies and tactics draw relevant prospects and customers to a business. For the purposes of search, inbound marketing increases the visibility of a company's website to prospects looking and shopping for a solution.

Inbound marketing tactics tend to be cost-effective and offer an efficient option for generating highly qualified leads. Nevertheless, as with all marketing programs, the lack of a plan or strategy can nullify the best of intentions and efforts.

> *"Our inbound leads resulting from our SEO strategies have been incredible. Blogging is the biggest asset that brings us inquiries. Speaking informatively about your product is key. We keep our success and ego out of the content entirely. Searchers want to learn about your product and how it will help them in their positions."* – Marketer insight

Chart: Lead sources growing in importance over last 12 months, by SEO maturity phase

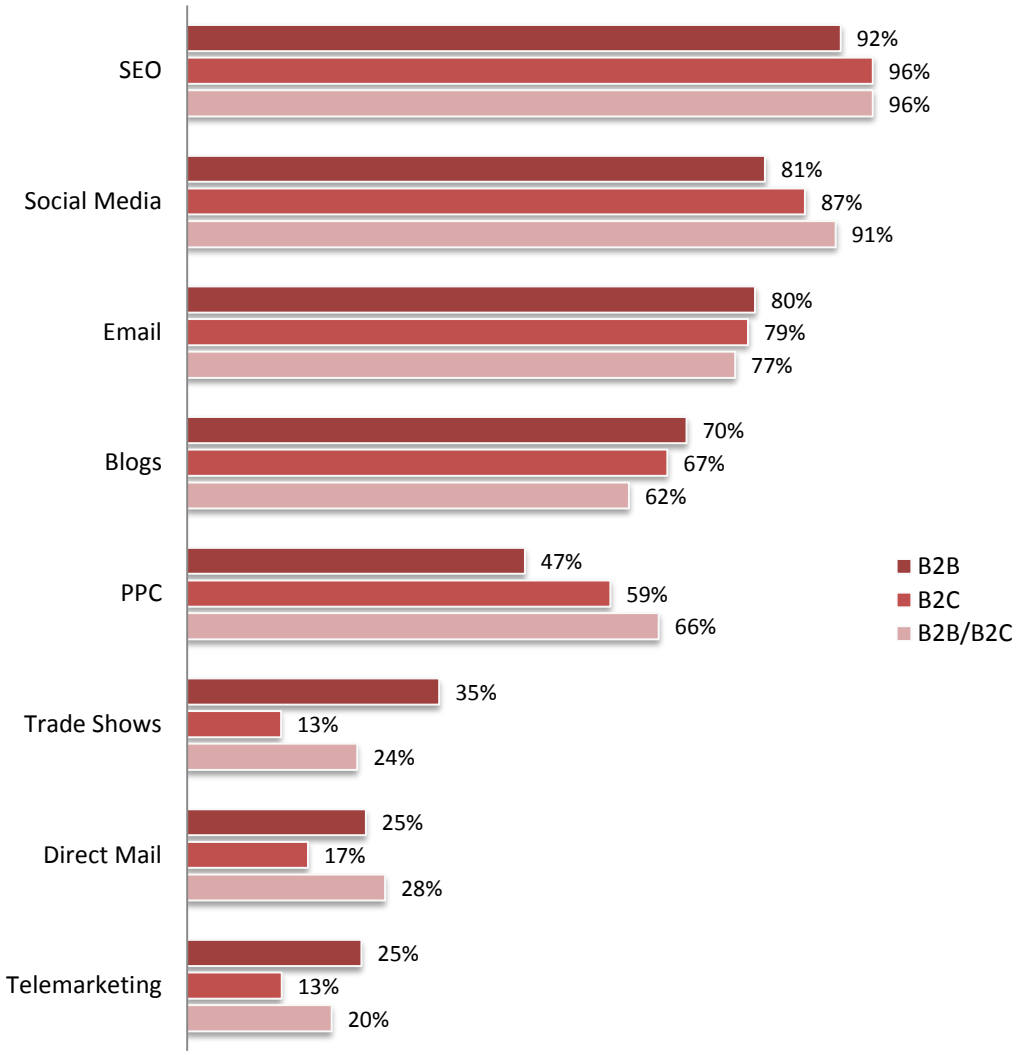


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Blogs are to social media what websites are to marketing campaigns – both serve as hubs. Blogs are great for content generation, because great content attracts links and improves rankings. As highlighted in an earlier chart, 82 percent of Strategic organizations found blogs either very effective or somewhat effective in helping them achieve marketing objectives. Here, we see a similar story, with 82 percent of Strategic organizations indicating that leads from blogs have become more important over the last 12 months. The logical conclusion is that blogging is effective because it produces good leads.

Trial organizations find leads from SEO and social media to have rising importance, although to a lesser extent than organizations in the other phases. As seen earlier, many social media platforms have failed to be very effective for them. Until these organizations develop a strategy for SEO and social media programs, they will be unable to realize the full benefits from an integrated approach.

Chart: Lead sources growing in importance over last 12 months, by primary channel



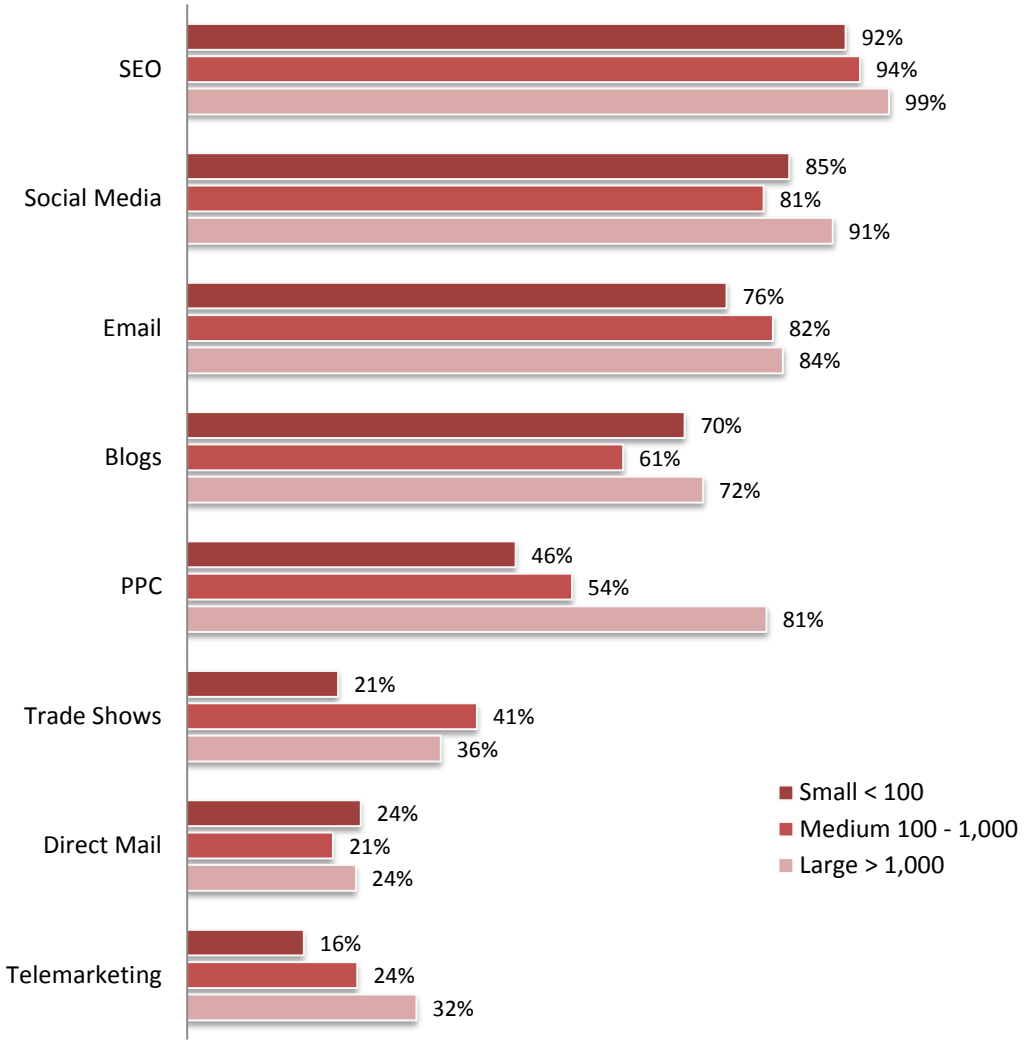
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Search engine optimization is a growing source of important leads for marketers targeting all types of customer segments. Nearly all marketers welcome leads from SEO efforts. Following closely are leads from social media, stemming from organizations maturing in their skills and understanding of how to effectively run social marketing programs.

Despite the effort and expense, more than one-third of B2B organizations still view tradeshows as an important source of leads. For many, the value of in-person contact is worth the price.

Email leads have eclipsed direct mail as a more important source of leads. More than twice as many organizations across all channels value leads from email over direct mail.

Chart: Lead sources growing in importance over last 12 months, by organization size

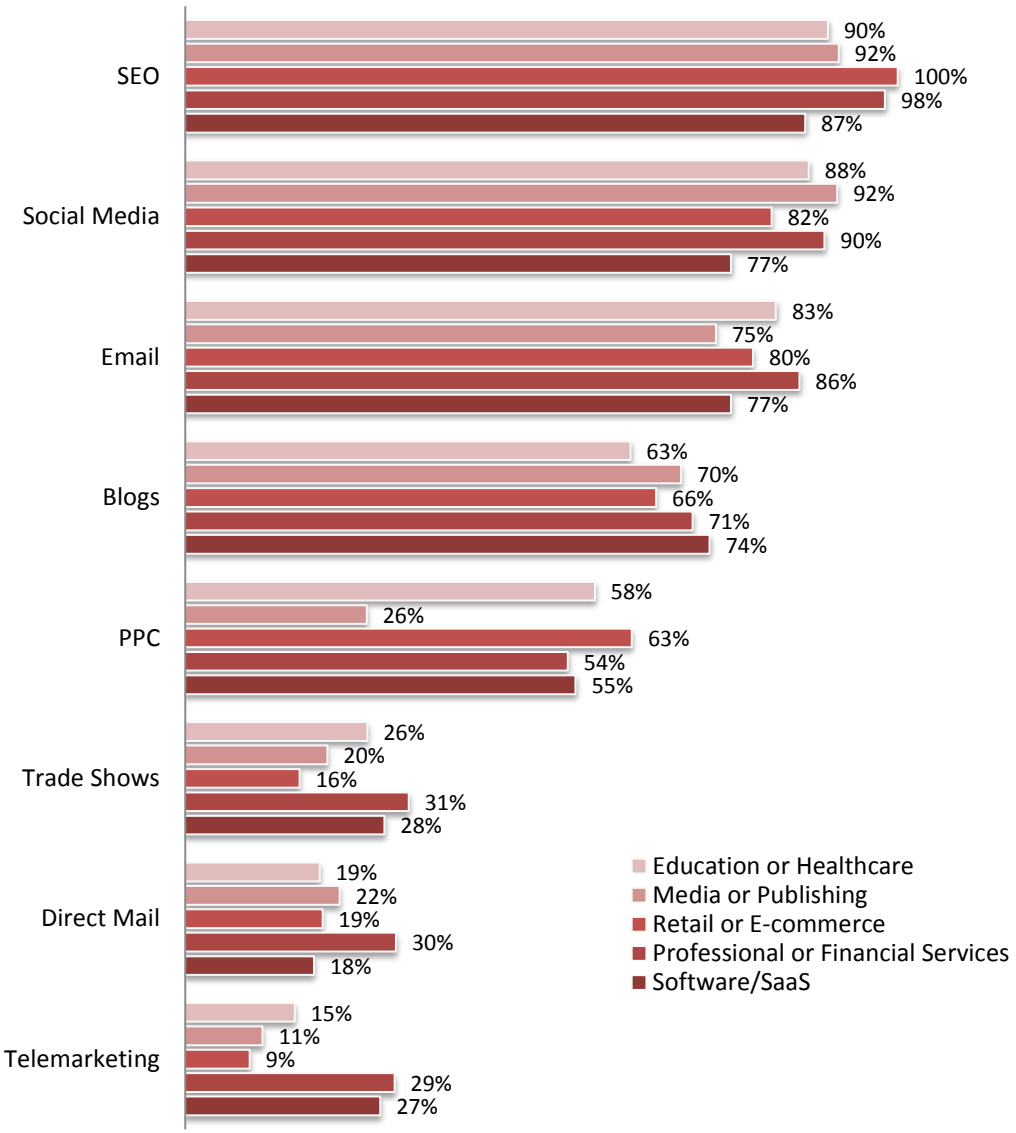


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

As reported earlier, organizations of all sizes find many social media platforms to be very effective in helping them achieve marketing objectives. By extension, more than 80 percent of organizations also find leads from social media are rising in importance.

"40% of my website traffic comes from social media." – Marketer insight

Chart: Lead sources growing in importance over last 12 months, by industry



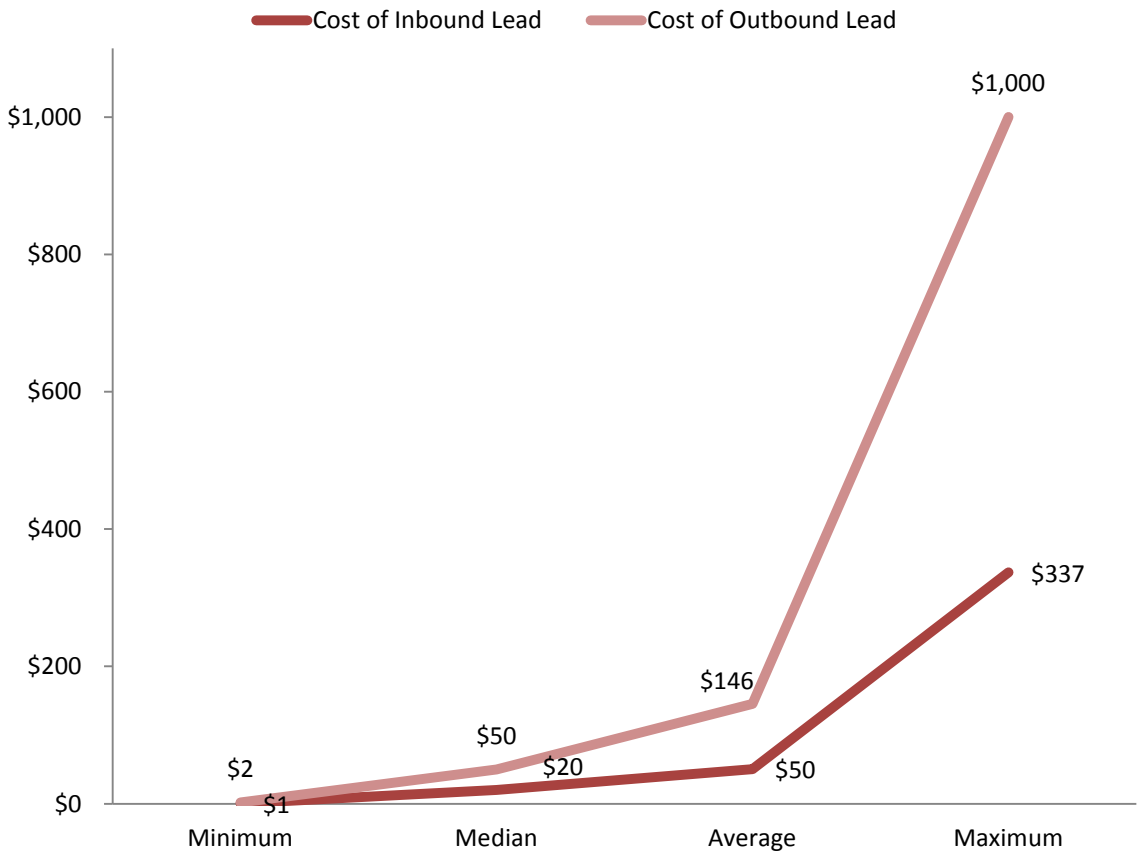
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

"We have implemented a blog network (of both in-house and external bloggers) and a YouTube channel that have both generated tremendous results. Our blog network has attracted over 20 bloggers and has been a great source of generating links because it caters more to the consumer. (Most of the businesses in our industry are not particularly involved in online interactions, so they have been difficult to get links from.) We were also able to submit our industry news blog into Google and Yahoo! News, which has been great for branding and link building. We have put up a mix of individual product videos and more general category and customer segment videos. These activities have increased our sales in these categories, sent us traffic, and given us more visibility in the search engines because we now show up in basic search, image search, video search, and blog search." – Marketer insight

INBOUND LEADS COST 66% LESS THAN OUTBOUND LEADS, ON AVERAGE

Chart: Cost of inbound versus outbound lead

Q. What is your average cost per lead of inbound versus outbound leads?



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

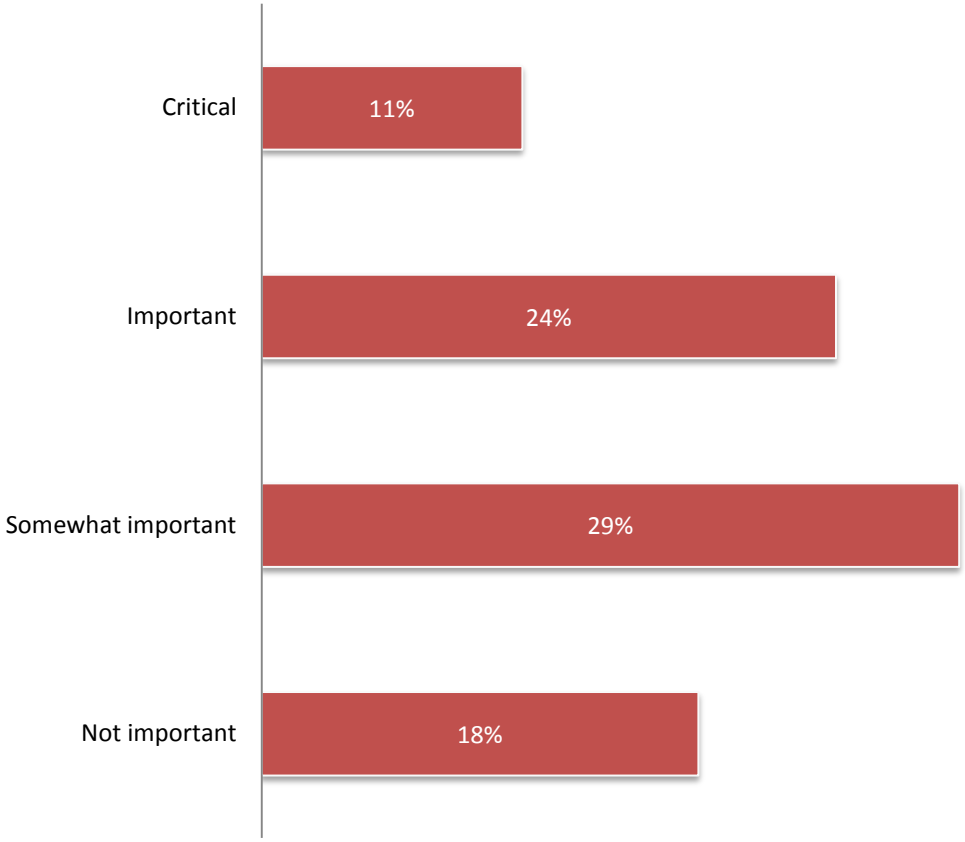
Inbound leads are less expensive than outbound leads by nearly a factor of 3, on average. Sometimes organizations get what they pay for with low-cost leads. However, as earlier charts indicated, organizations value leads from inbound marketing tactics and assign them growing importance.

> *"A promotion that we ran in conjunction with our airline partner for a credit card offer featured a strategy to drive people to Facebook. This page has generated over 15k fans for a fraction of the cost that it would take to generate a qualified lead list of this size."* – Marketer insight

SOCIAL SEARCH VIEWED AS HAVING SOME IMPACT ON OBJECTIVES

Chart: Degree of importance social search plays in achieving search marketing objectives

Q. How important is social search (real-time search) in helping you achieve your search marketing objectives?



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Social search, a variation on real-time search, is viewed as important or somewhat important by more than half of organizations. Since search engines are more frequently indexing real-time content, organizations that conduct heavy and regular social media and social networking use can benefit in this area. Google, for example, takes published content from a user's social network and ranks it as relevant in search results to other users in that same network.

Marketers wanting to capitalize on these search variations should, as always, pay attention to the mechanics of good SEO. For example, they should make good content that people want to read and follow. Popular events and topics with significant social media "noise" may trigger search engines to show this content in real-time and social search results.

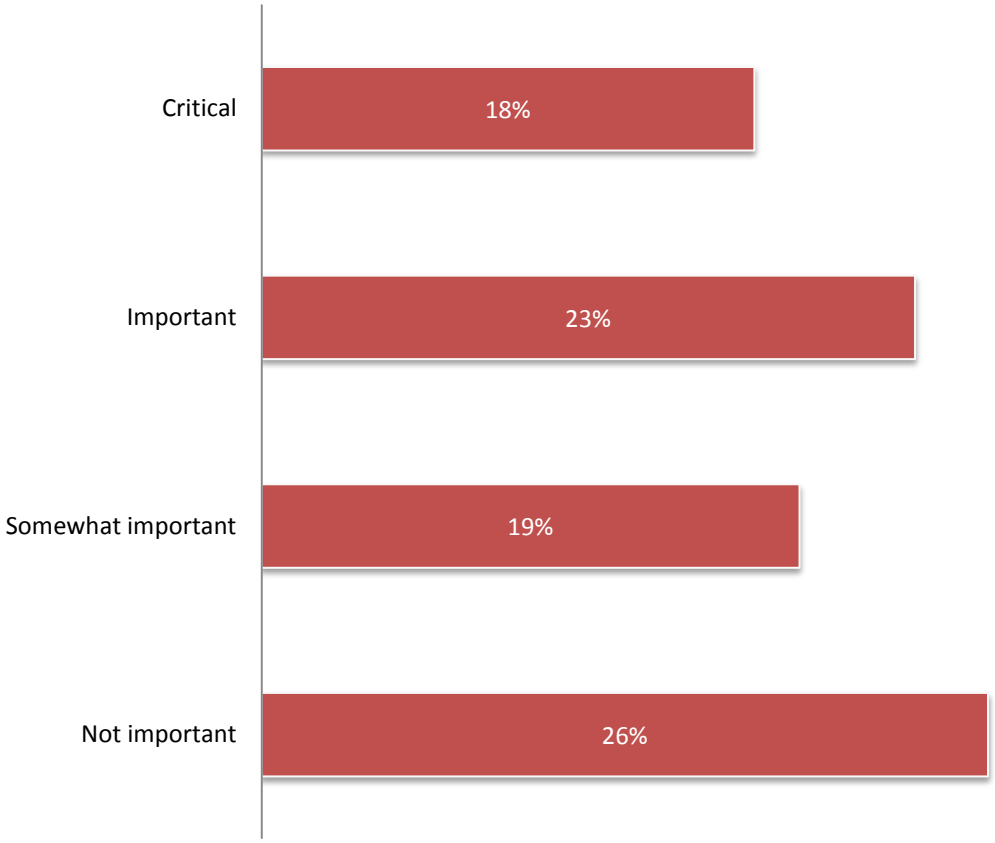
CHAPTER 7: CAPITALIZING ON LOCAL SEARCH

For years, marketers have optimized for global search. But now Google states that 20 percent of all searches have a local intent. Are organizations prepared for this shift?

LOCAL SEARCH VIEWED AS HAVING POSITIVE IMPACT ON OBJECTIVES

Chart: Degree of importance local search plays in achieving search marketing objectives

Q. How important is local search in helping you achieve your search marketing objectives?



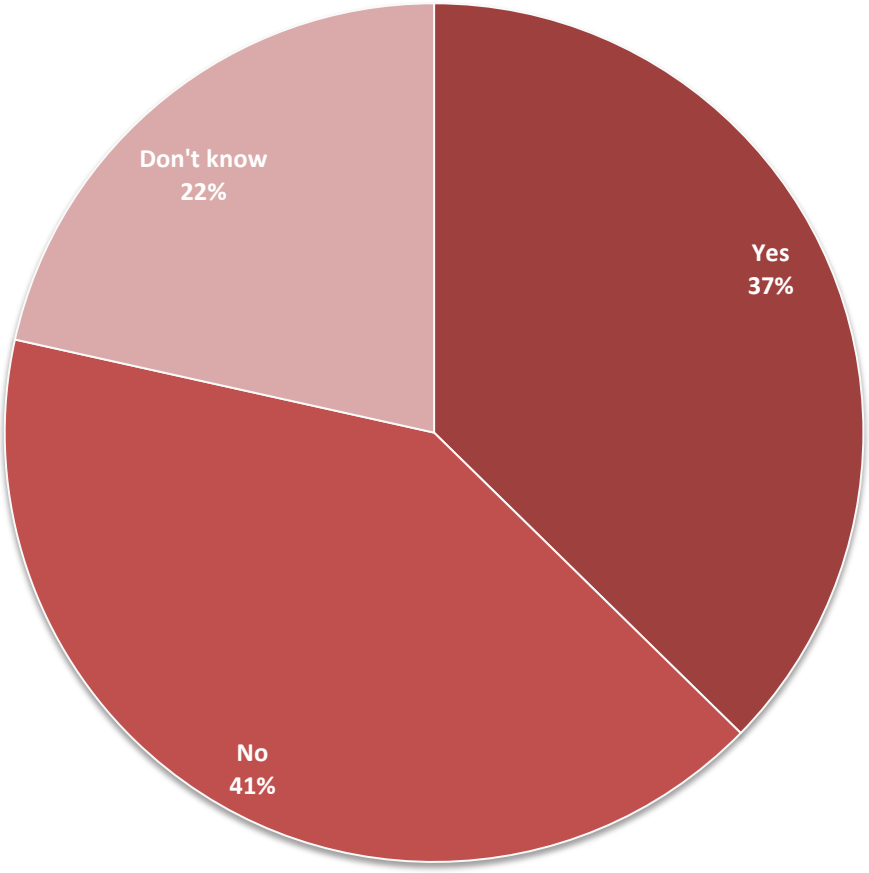
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Forty-three percent of organizations consider local search a critical or important factor for achieving search marketing objectives. Individuals and businesses are increasingly looking to local listings for shopping, restaurants, services, vendors and more. For these reasons (among others), appearing in local search results, which are listed at the top of the SERPs, can help a business stand apart from its competition.

MANY STILL HAVE NO LOCAL BUSINESS LISTING ON SEARCH ENGINES

Chart: Organizations claiming local business listing on search engines

Q. Has your organization claimed a local business listing on one or more search engines?



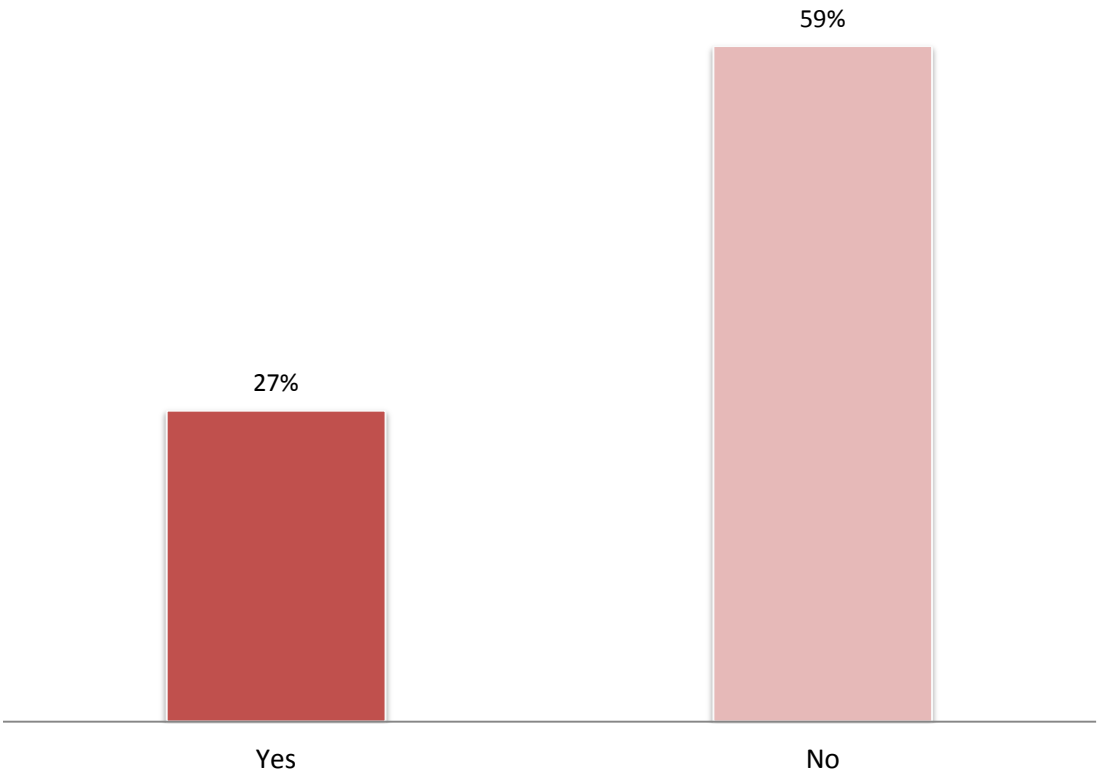
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Local business listings (e.g. Google Place Page) are featured at the top of search engine results pages. Despite these enviable ranking positions, for every organization that has a listing, another does not. Forty-one percent of organizations still have not claimed a local business listing, and an additional 22 percent are simply unsure.

OPTIMIZING FOR LOCAL TERMS IS NOT COMMONLY PRACTICED BY MOST

Chart: Organizations optimizing for local terms as part of organic search strategy

Q. Does your organization currently optimize for local terms as part of your organic search (SEO) strategy?



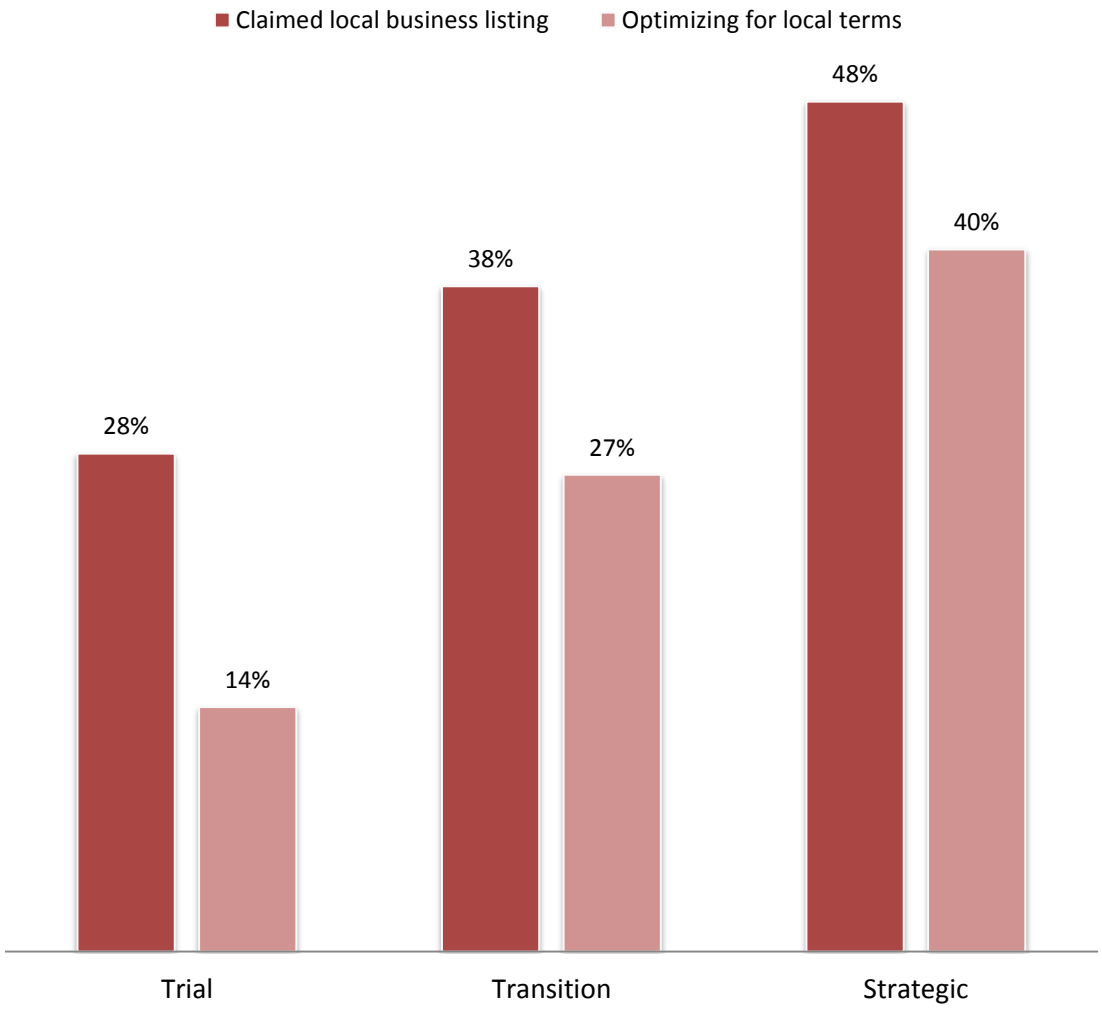
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Local search optimization is the process of optimizing one's website in order to be found when someone searches locally. Local search optimization is valuable when a keyword or key phrase directly describes and relates to the business, and comprises enough search volume to make optimization worthwhile.

Only 27 percent of organizations currently optimize for local terms as part of their organic search strategies, compared to 59 percent of organizations that do not. Many organizations stated that local search is not relevant to their business model or market. For those that are optimizing for local search, most organizations had more challenges to report than successes to share.

"[Our most significant challenge with local search optimization is] dealing with all the categories of states and cities when working on a national scale. It is a little overwhelming to try to optimize for all of these. So basically we just optimize for any rankings that show up in Google "on their own." Then we try to strengthen these pages." – Marketer insight

Chart: Organizations claiming local business listing vs. optimizing for local terms as part of organic search strategy, by SEO maturity phase



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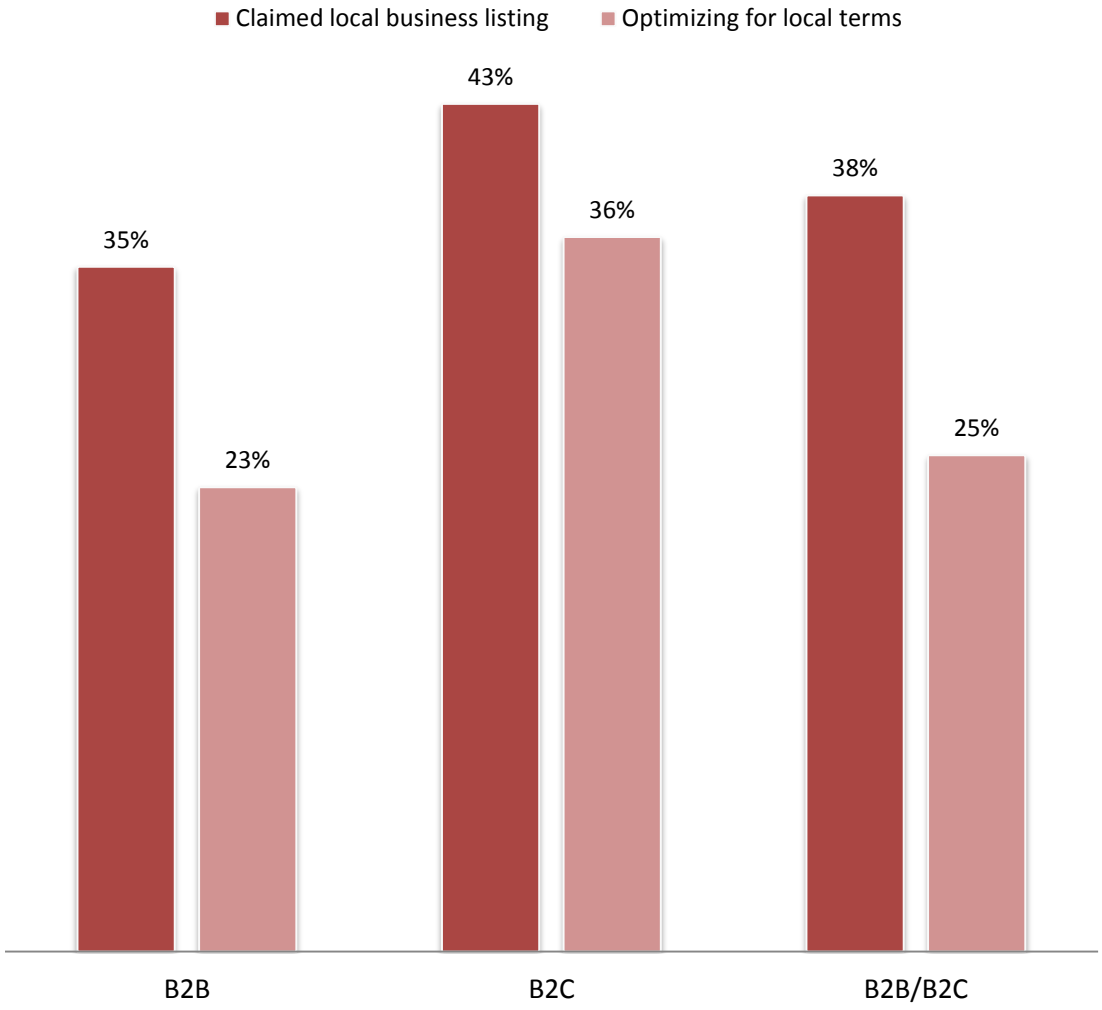
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Strategic organizations lead the pack when it comes to claiming a local business listing. Since this group follows specific guidelines and procedures for planning and executing their SEO campaigns, it makes sense that they see value in adding local business listings to their SEO marketing mix. Strategic organizations are also 1.7 times more likely than Trial organizations and 1.3 times more likely than Transition organizations to have claimed a local business listing.

Despite the fact that almost half of Strategic organizations have claimed their local business listings on search engines, 36 percent still have not. Whether this means they have ruled out local business listings as relevant for their search goals, or have simply not prioritized this yet, is unclear.

Chart: Organizations claiming local business listing vs. optimizing for local terms as part of organic search strategy, by primary channel

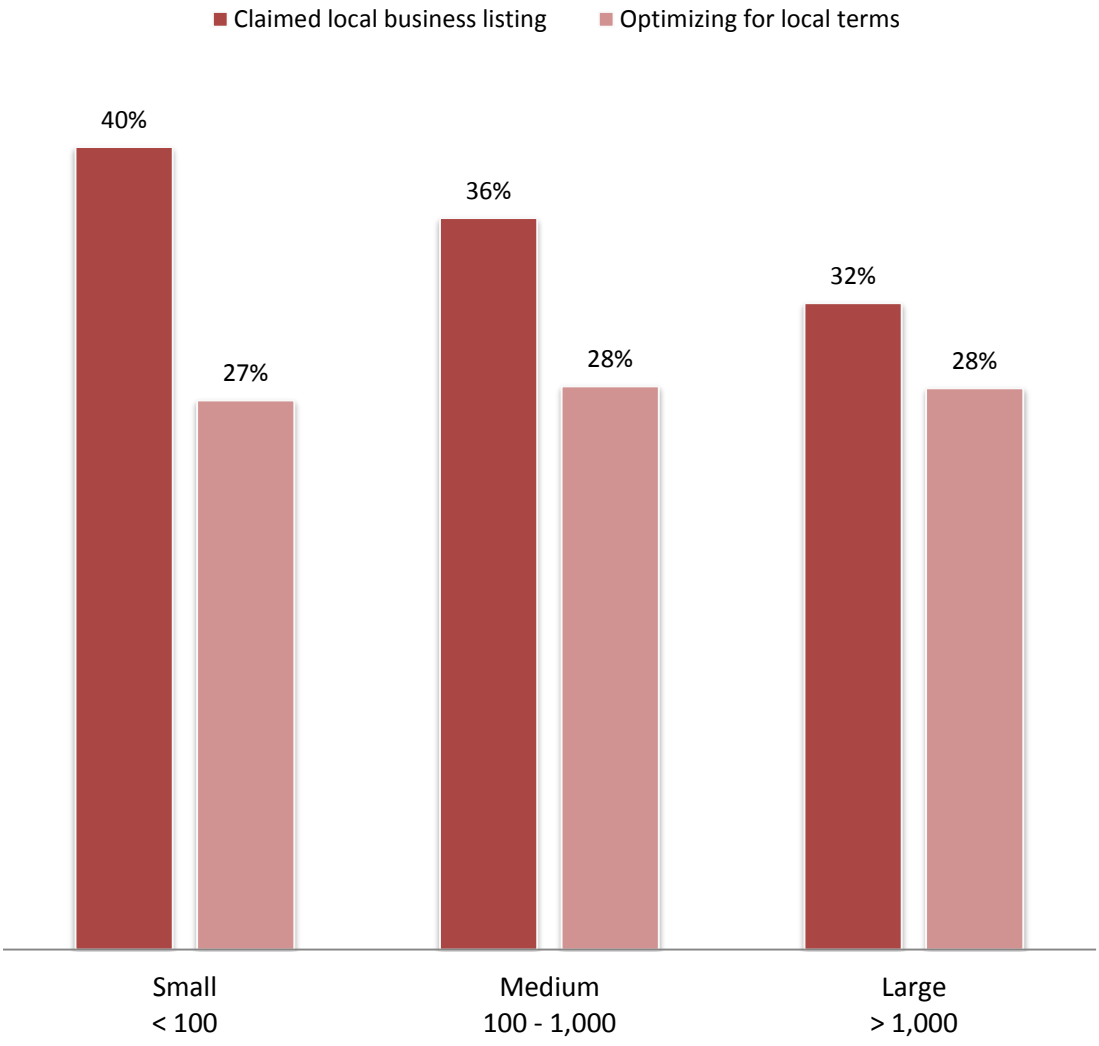


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

An easy first step toward establishing a local online presence is to claim, enhance and customize the local business listing. Successive and more advanced steps involve optimizing the website for local search purposes.

In this chart, we see that 35 percent of B2B organizations have claimed a local business listing on a search engine(s), yet only 23 percent are optimizing for local terms as part of an organic search strategy. The difference for B2B/B2C organizations is even larger at 13 percentage points. These gaps indicate potential areas of improvement.

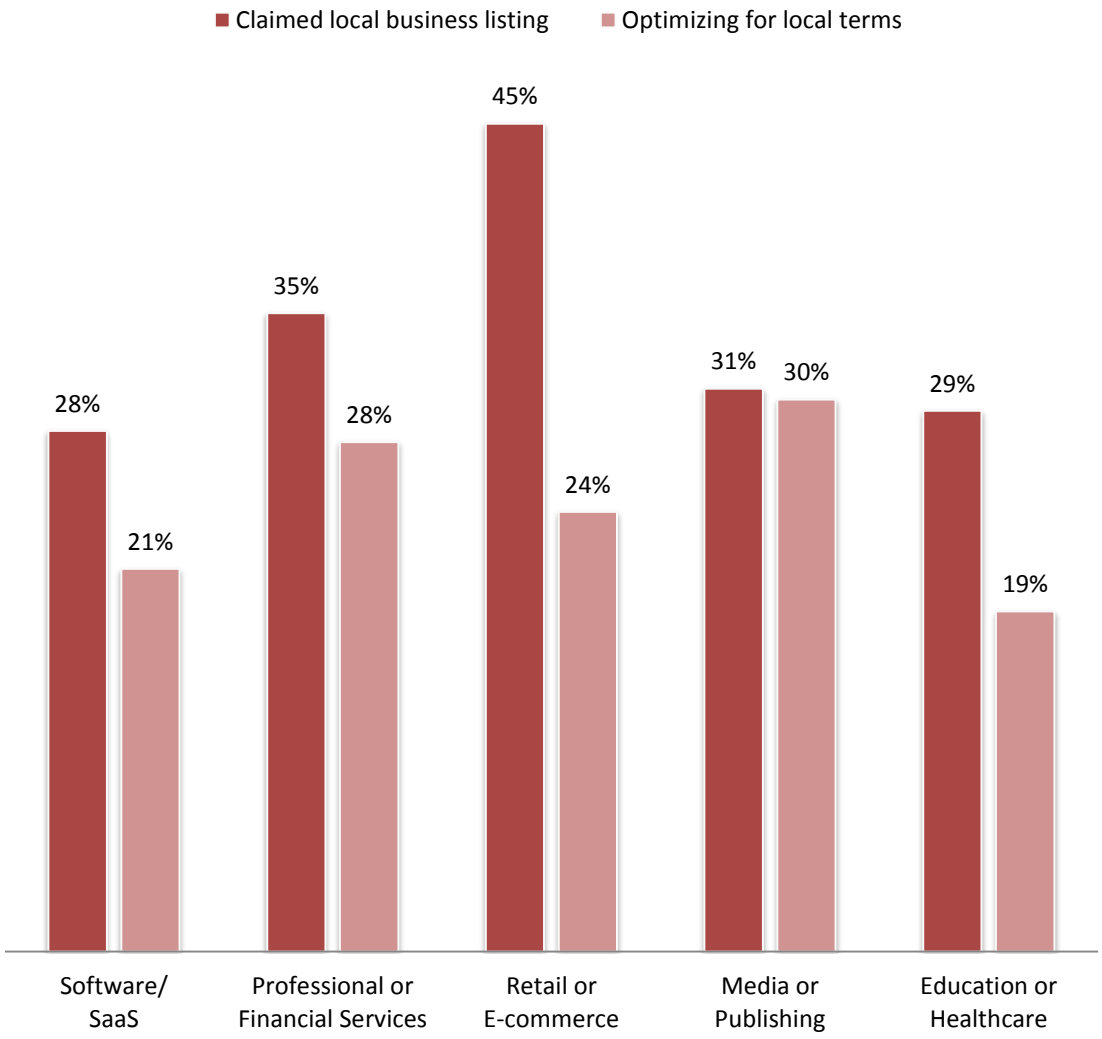
Chart: Organizations claiming local business listing vs. optimizing for local terms as part of organic search strategy, by organization size



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

More small organizations have claimed local business listings than medium and large organizations. Despite their forays into local search, many small organizations stop short when it comes to optimizing their websites for local terms. By comparison, large organizations are coming at local search from both angles. Thirty-two percent have claimed a local business listing and 28 percent are optimizing for local terms as part of their organic search strategies.

Chart: Organizations claiming local business listing vs. optimizing for local terms as part of organic search strategy, by industry



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

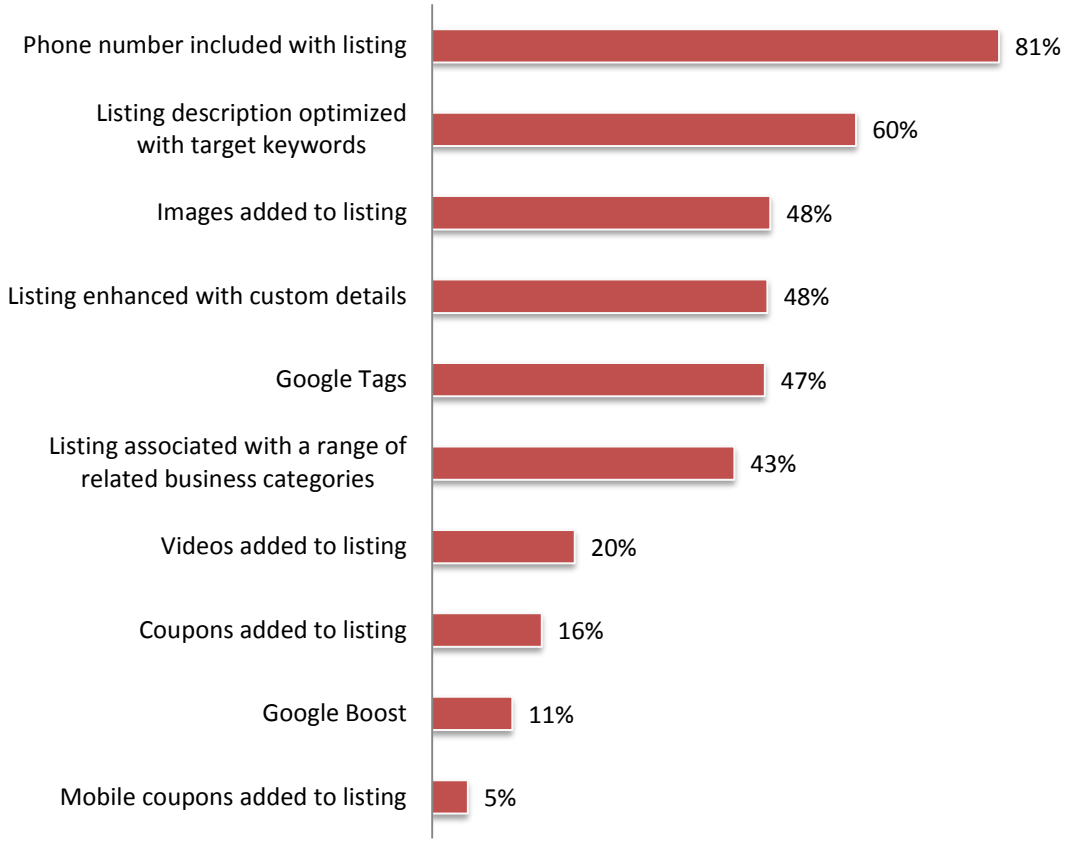
Local search is a great way to attract attention both online and offline. Retail organizations have claimed local business listings to a greater degree than organizations in other industries. Although buyers enjoy looking for information online, particularly to research and compare, many prefer to purchase locally. This is especially the case when buyers want or need a product immediately. For this reason, retail organizations would be advised to step up their efforts in optimizing for local search terms, in addition to their local business listings.

Across industries, at least 28 percent of all organizations have claimed a local business listing. For marketers questioning the value of pursuing local search, it may prove helpful to study what industry peers and competitors are doing with local business listings and local search optimization. They may be overlooking the benefits.

MANY LOCAL BUSINESS LISTING TACTICS ARE NOT BEING PUT INTO PLAY

Chart: Local business listing tactics used by those with local business listing

Q. Which of the following local business listing tactics has your organization used for local search?

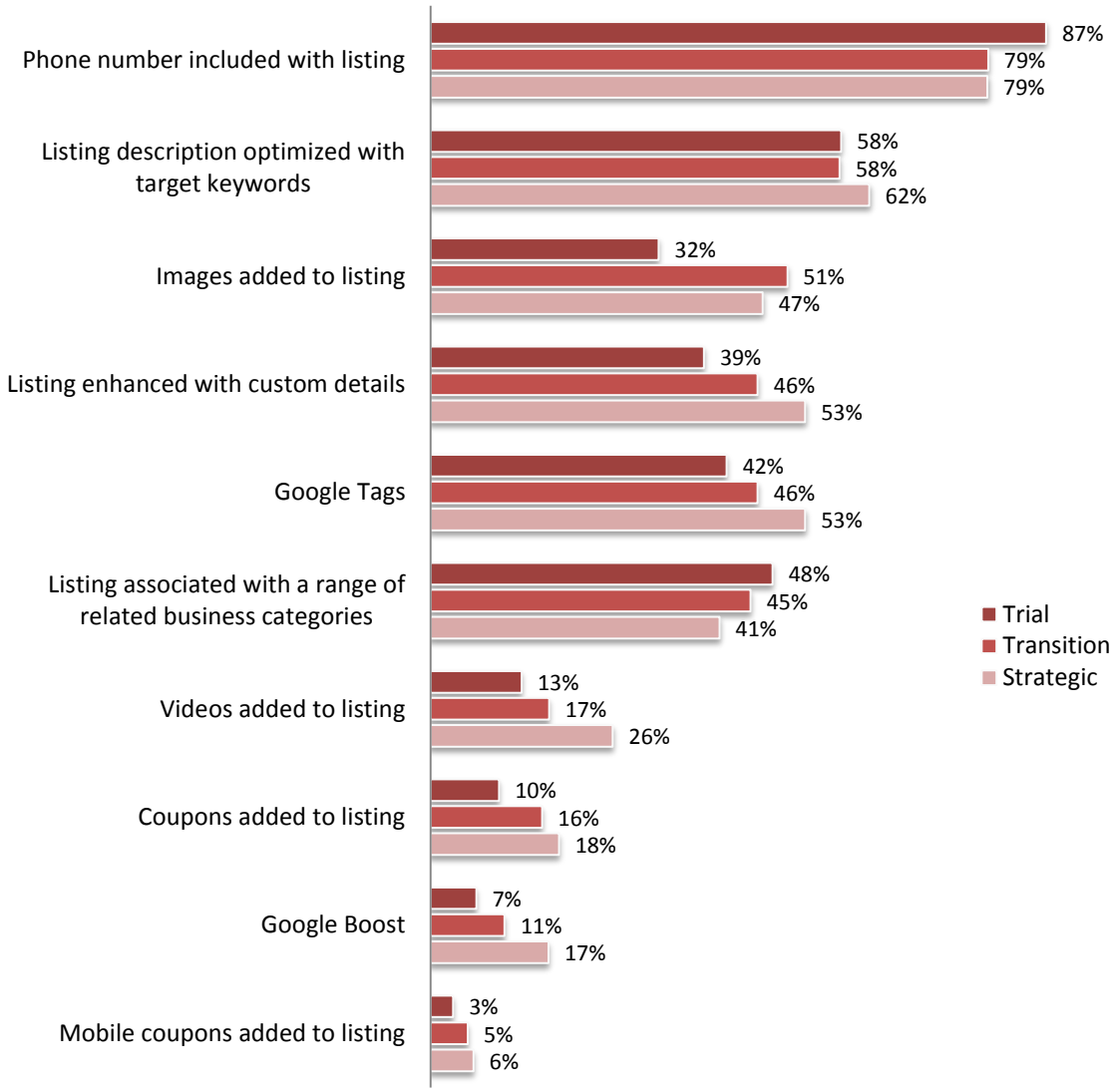


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

As seen earlier, only 37 percent of organizations have claimed a local business listing. Of these, most are not taking full advantage of the available options for local business listings. The vast majority, namely 81 percent, do include a phone number. Stopping there, however, is about as effective as a phone book listing.

Despite the fact that these listings can be indexed, only 60 percent are optimizing listing descriptions with target keywords. Less than half of organizations use images – another great way to not just optimize but also personalize a listing. In a similar vein, only 20 percent of organizations have added videos to their listings.

Chart: Local business listing tactics used for local search, by SEO maturity phase

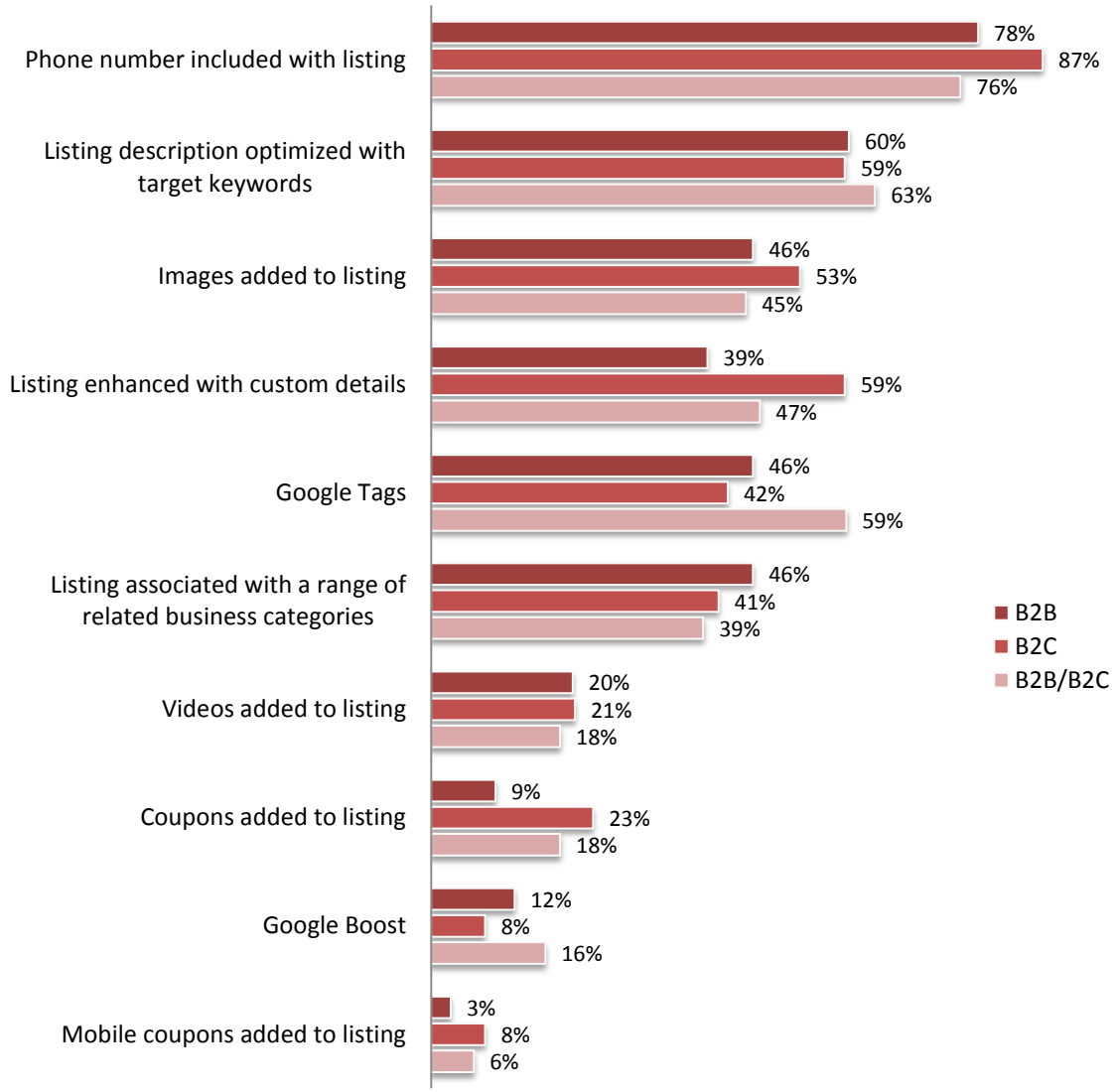


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Strategic organizations are the most active with their local business listings. Although many tactics are still underutilized, a greater percentage of these organizations try to use more to improve the relevancy and appeal of their local business listings.

"We have been successful in exploiting Google map listings on SERPs." – Marketer insight

Chart: Local business listing tactics used for local search, by primary channel



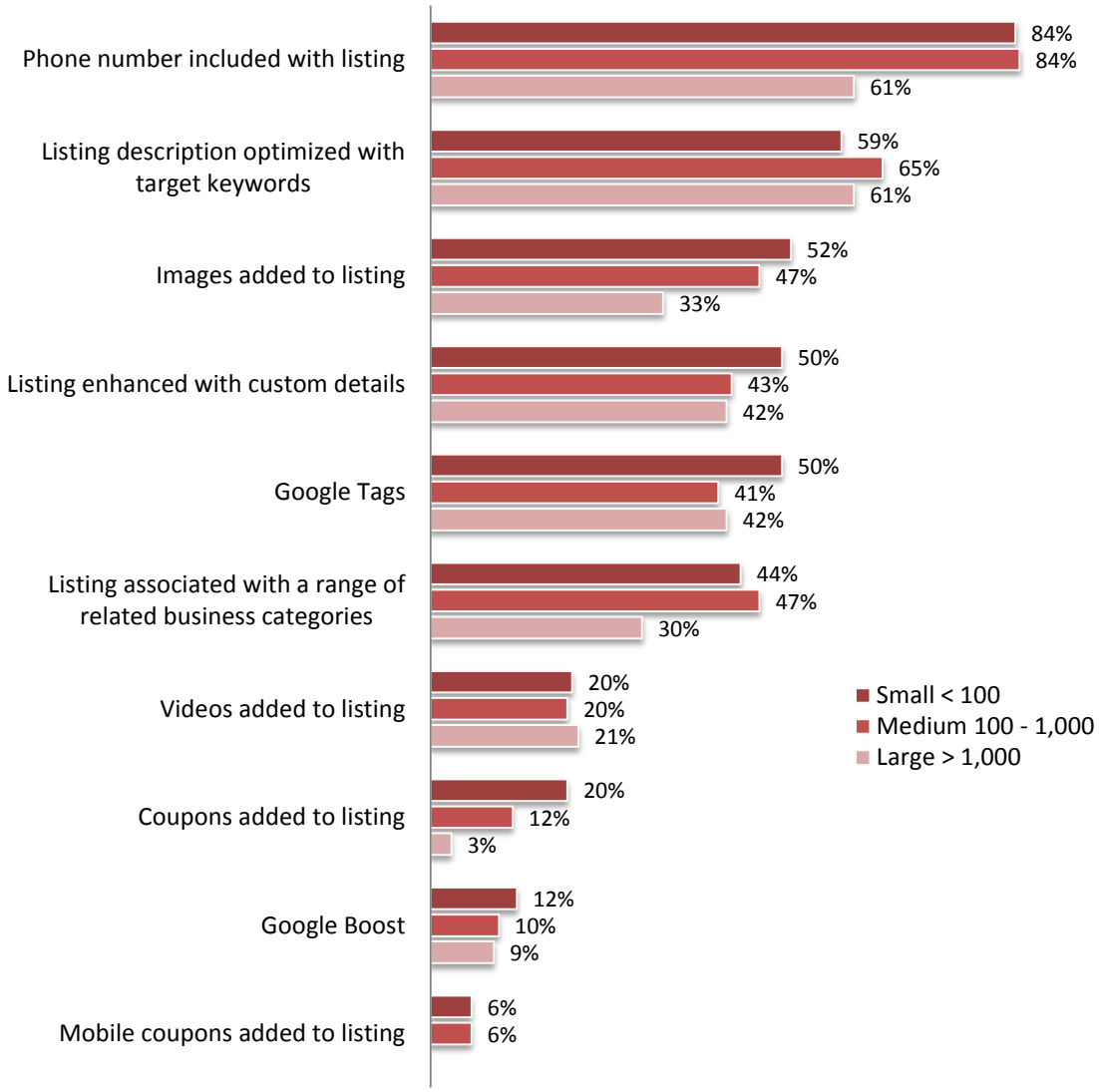
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

B2C organizations are more likely to add images to their local business listings and enhance them with custom details. These organizations are also more likely to feature coupons in their listings, including coupons for mobile phones.

.

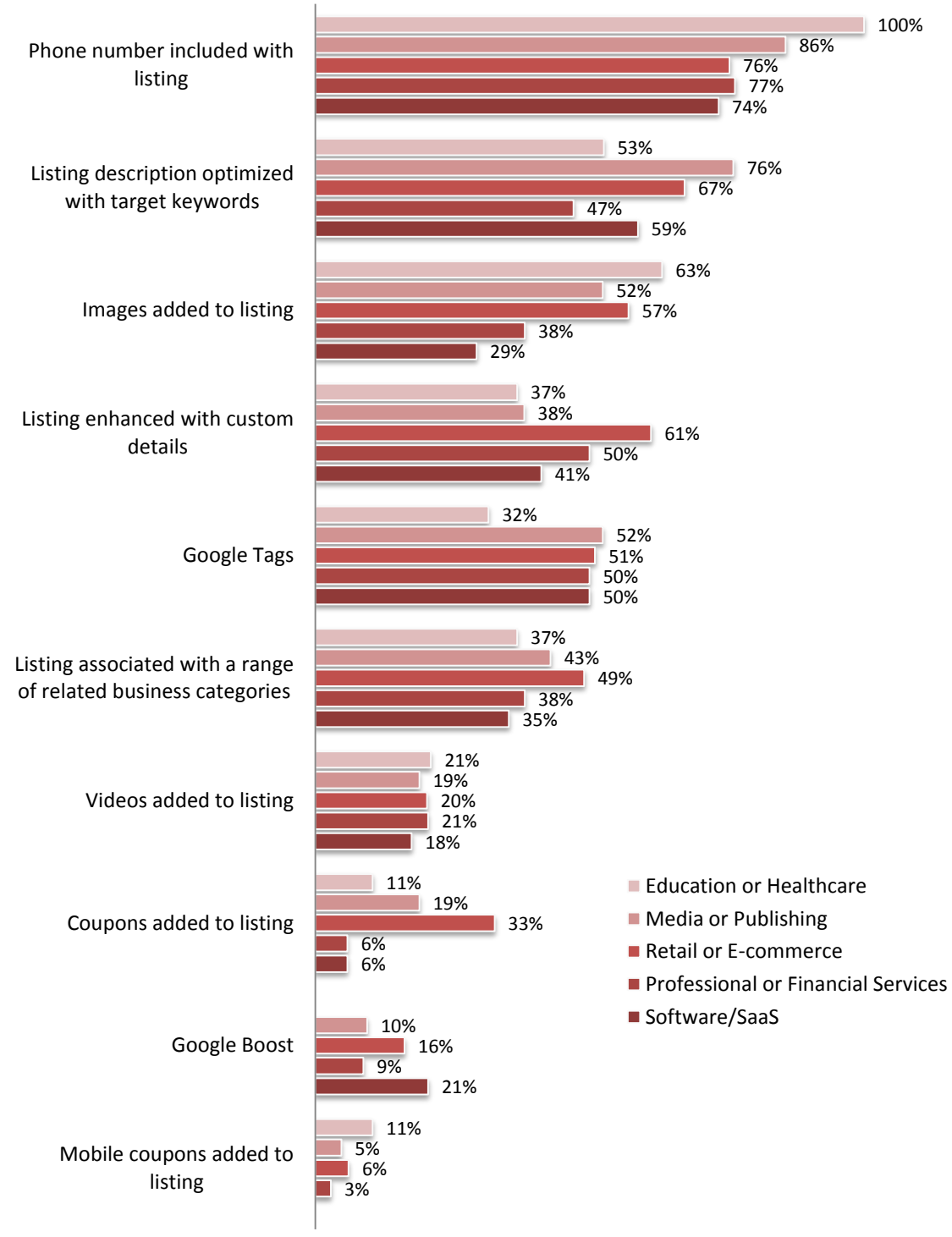
> *"I found that signing up for Google's local search to be difficult and cumbersome. But to be honest, as a B2B player, we did it when it first came out and forgot all about it."* – Marketer insight

Chart: Local business listing tactics used for local search, by organization size



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Chart: Local business listing tactics used for local search, by industry

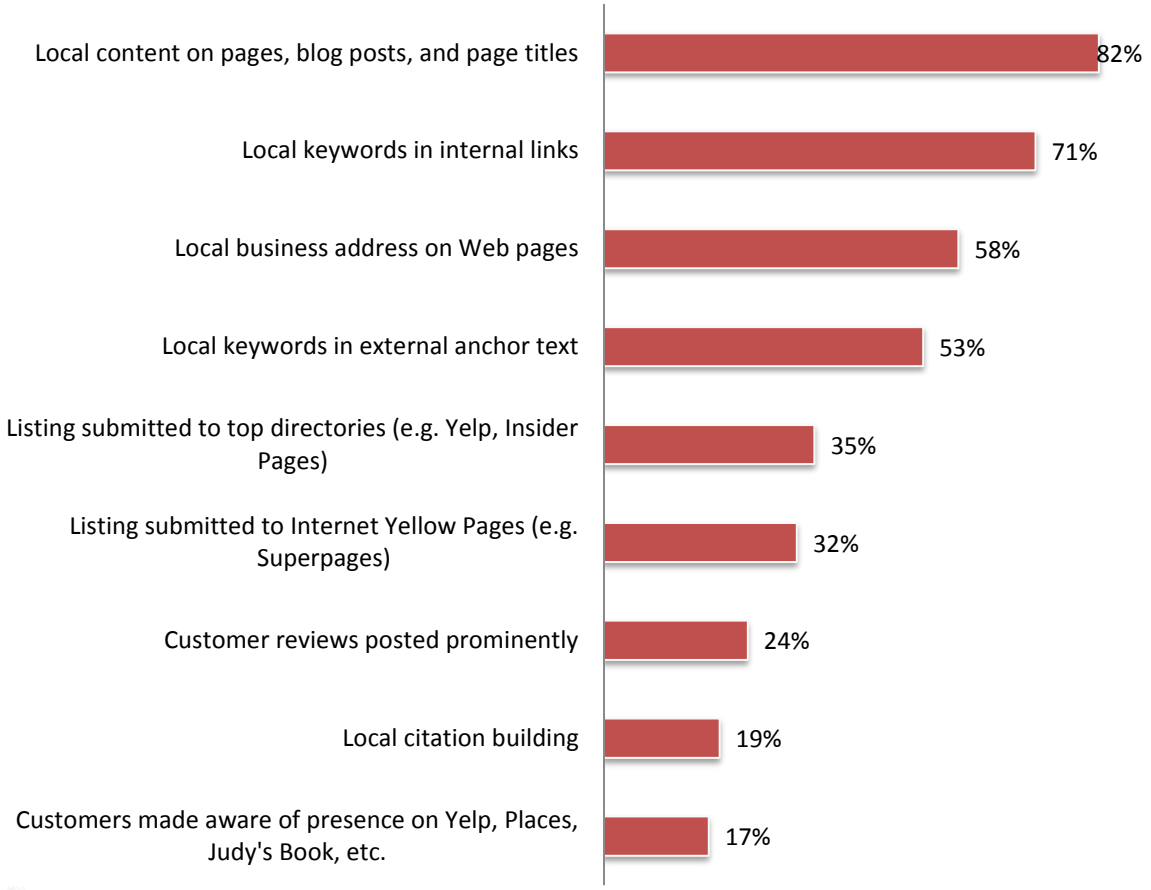


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

DEVELOPING LOCAL CONTENT IS TOP LOCAL OPTIMIZATION TACTIC

Chart: Top local search optimization tactics

Q. Which of the following Local Search optimization tactics has your organization used?



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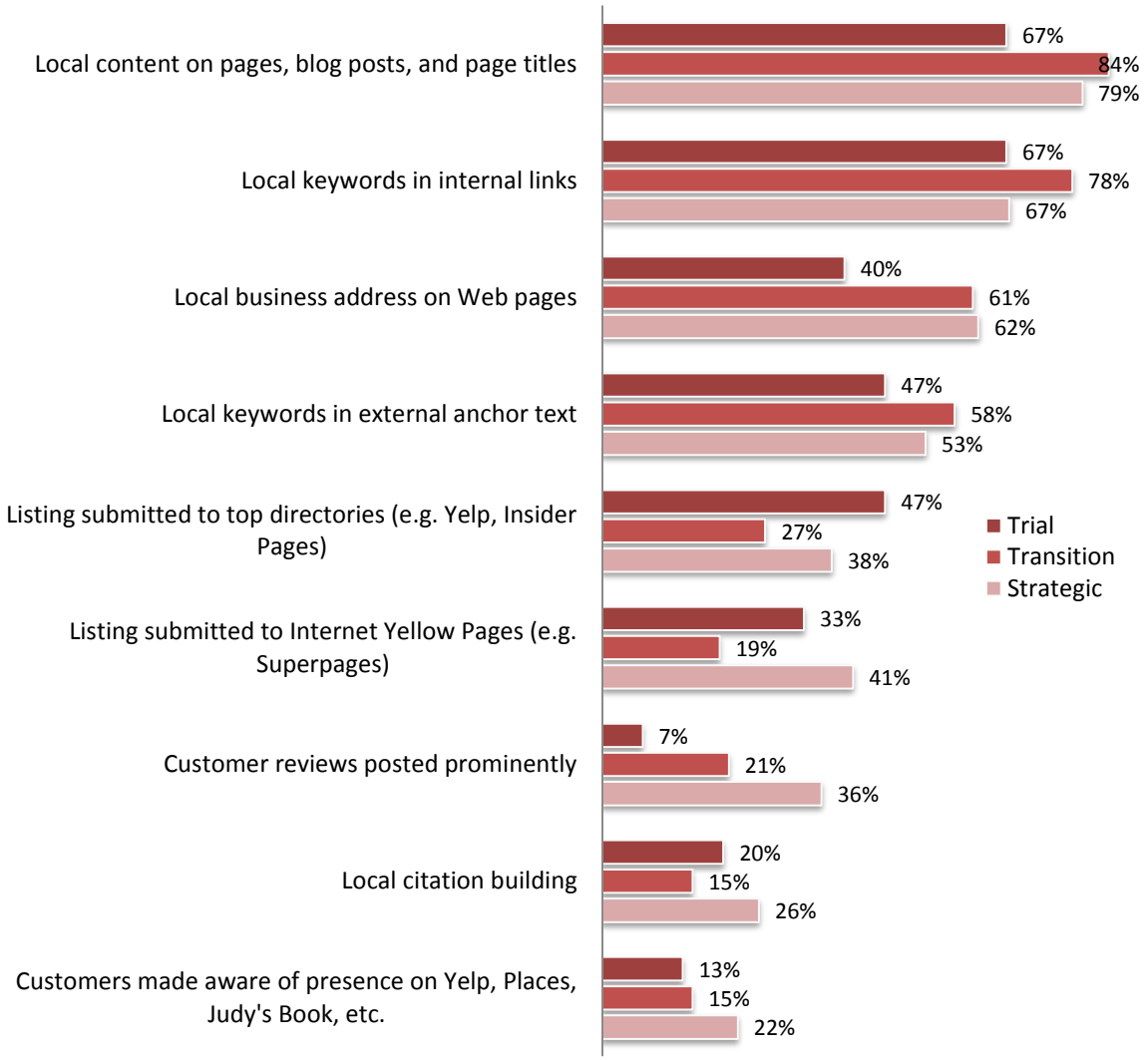
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

The opportunity to be found through local search does not depend only on Google Places, Yahoo! Local or Bing Local listings. Rather, an organization's website can also rank well in regular search results, if optimized correctly. Simply put, local search optimization is the process of optimizing one's website in order to be found when someone conducts a local search.

As covered in an earlier chart, only 27 percent of organizations are actively optimizing for local terms as part of their SEO strategies. Of these, a high majority of organizations that have a local presence – and even organizations that are national, yet have strong geographic pockets – optimize for local search by developing local content for their Web pages, blog posts and page titles. Linking is the second-most commonly used local search optimization tactic, with 71 percent using local keywords in internal links. More than half of organizations work to get local keywords in the anchor text of external links.

An address is one of the strongest signals of having a local presence, yet only 58 percent of organizations optimizing for local search include a local business address on their Web pages.

Chart: Local search optimization tactics, by SEO maturity phase



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

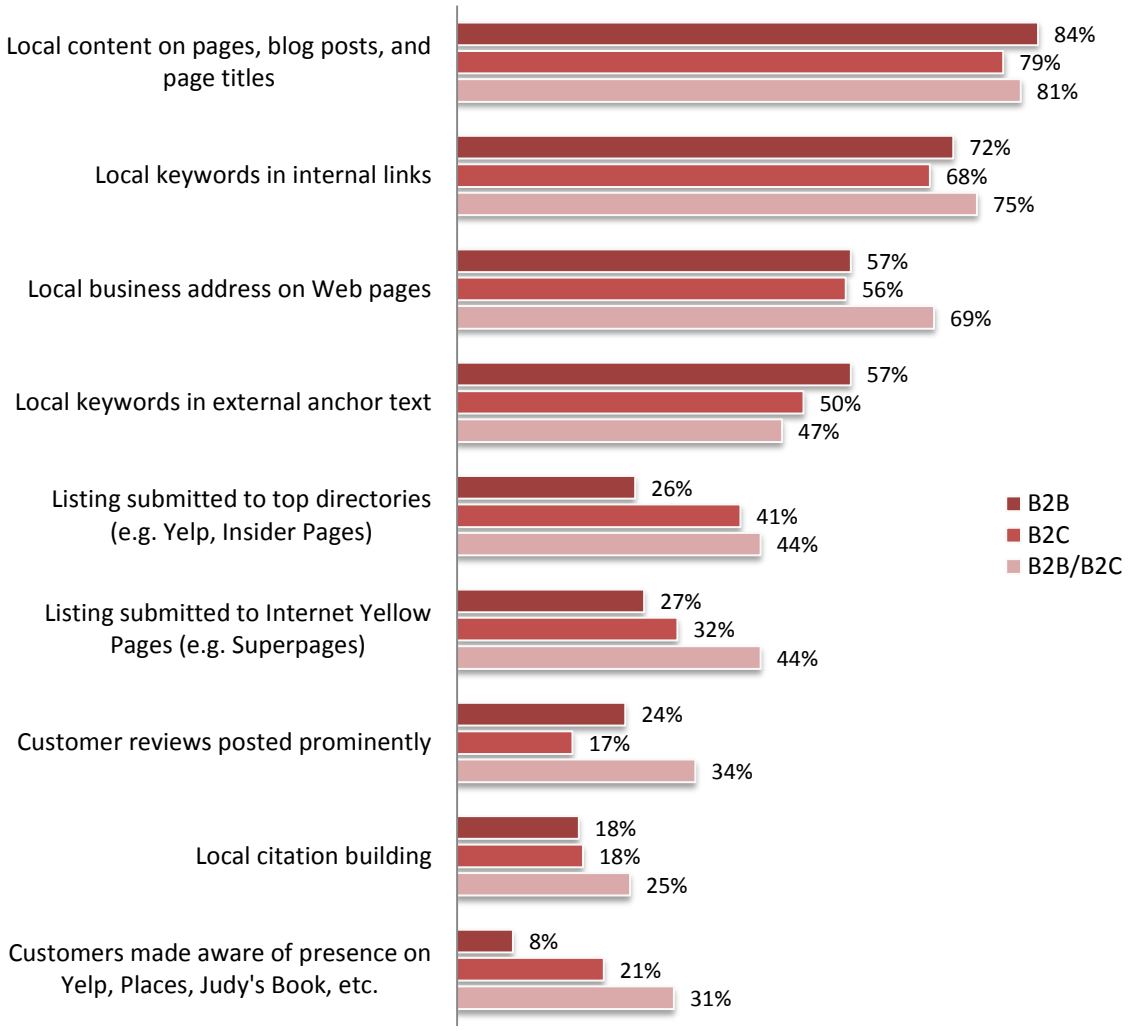
Some local search optimization tactics are just regular SEO tactics with a local spin to them. Transition organizations turn to these the most. Strategic organizations go a step further and also execute tactics that are more unique to local search (e.g. posting customer reviews, pointing customer to review sites).

"Just systematizing and staying organized, setting the metrics to measure and integrating results in one location is our biggest challenge." – Marketer insight

***

"Our best results are so simple. We align a location search phrase for all four of our offices areas with key phrases for our service or product term and then focus content, advertising, search optimization efforts, landing pages and social media communication around it." –Marketer insight

Chart: Local search optimization tactics, by primary channel



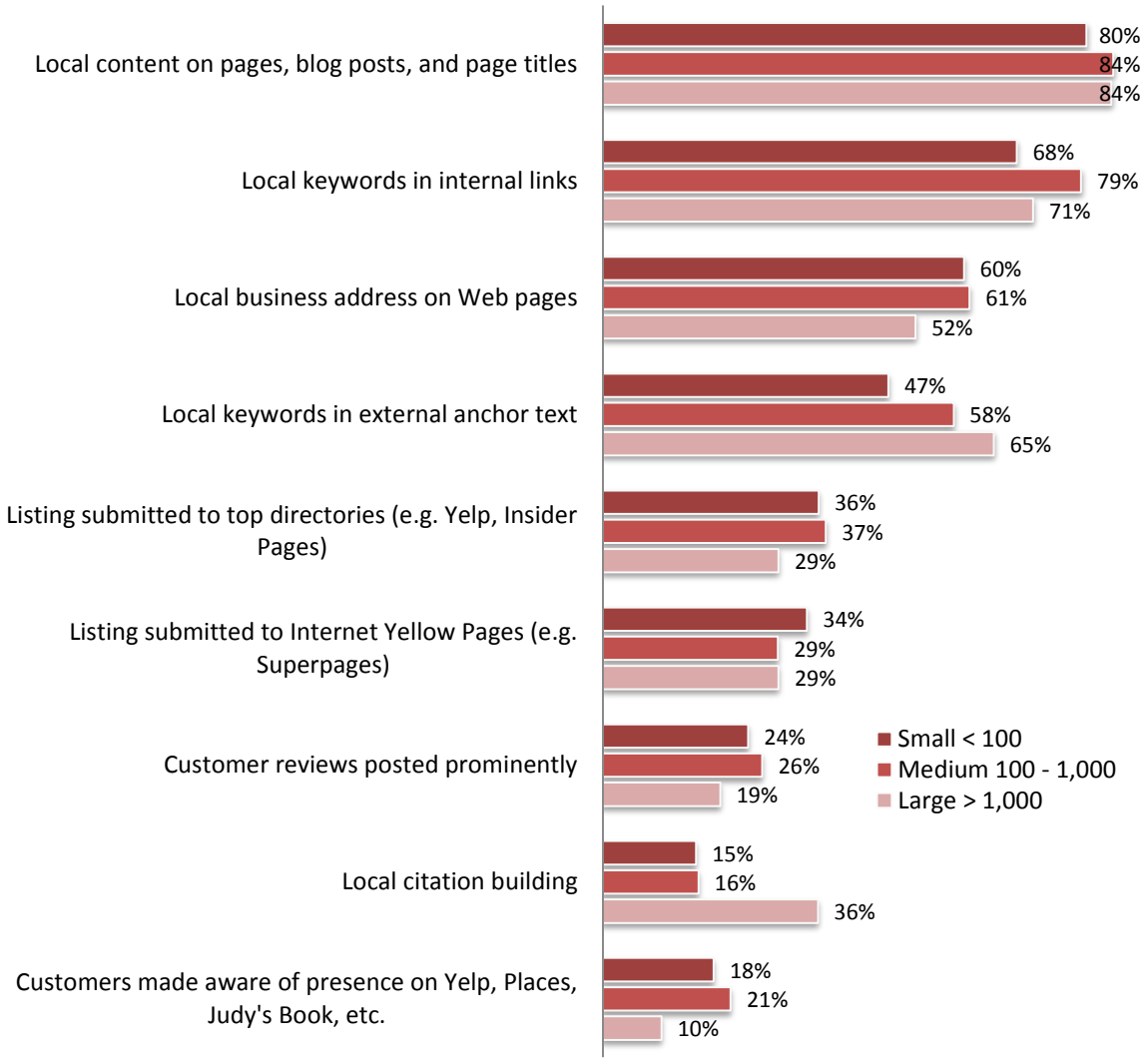
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Organizations marketing to both business and consumer channels used local search optimization tactics to a greater degree than organizations marketing specifically to one or the other. These organizations, with a broader base of customers, may be targeting local terms with enough search volume to make optimization worthwhile.

Word-of-mouth, which is such an influential factor in gaining customers, is brought to life in local search by online reviews. Interestingly, posting reviews or making customers aware of where they could post reviews were two of the least used tactics.

"Local search optimization is critical for our organization as the services we provide are very targeted. Admittedly, we just launched this effort, but in less than a month, we already have received leads which hopefully will become sales conversions." – Marketer insight

Chart: Local search optimization tactics, by organization size

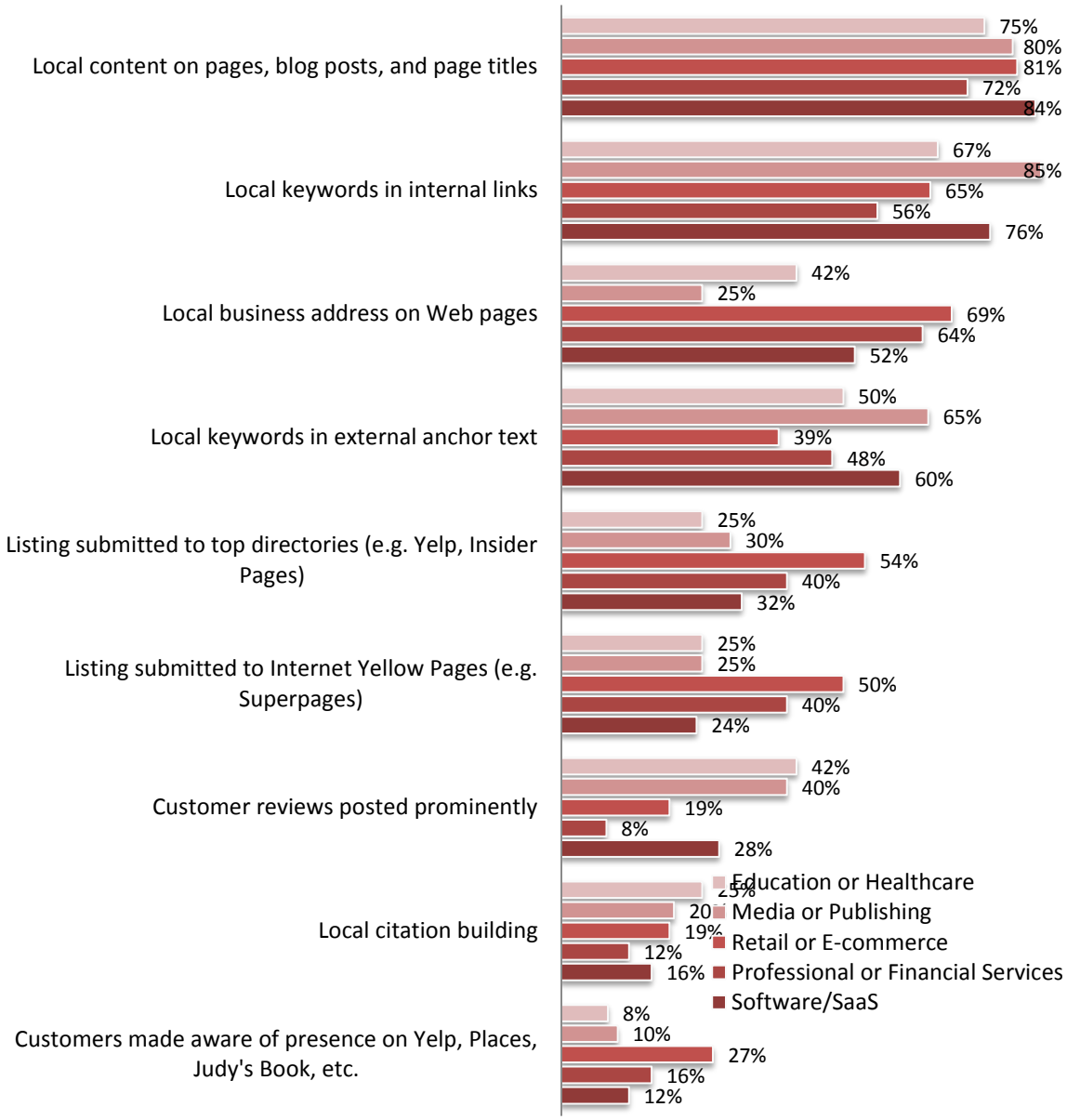


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Local search is often mistakenly associated with just smaller organizations. It *is* true that a smaller comparative percentage of large organizations have claimed local business listings and are electing to optimize local search terms for organic search purposes. Nevertheless, local search can help these organizations find success in key geographic markets. Larger organizations are often going up against smaller organizations, just as smaller organizations are fighting to maintain the little market share they might have. Larger organizations can optimize for individual outlets or highlight the specialty of a department by optimizing at the department level (e.g. automotive).

> *"The field [of local search] is moving and changing faster than a small one-person marketing department can reasonably keep up with if that person is handling all aspects of marketing."* – Marketer insight

Chart: Local search optimization tactics, by industry



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Marketers across industries showed considerable fluctuation in the usage of local search optimization tactics. Many marketers shared comments expressing how local search is not relevant or helpful in their marketing efforts because they operate nationally, globally or exclusively online. Others knew they should be doing this but had not developed a strategy or lacked the knowledge to execute.

> *"We sell nationally. As Google has been putting more emphasis on customized local results, our biggest challenge is to remain on the first page above the local results in areas where we do not have a physical address."* – Marketer insight

MARKETER INSIGHTS ON THE CHALLENGES OF OPTIMIZING FOR LOCAL SEARCH

Q. Please briefly describe your organization's most significant challenge with optimizing for Local Search.

- 200 offices nationally, 11,000 agents.
- Attracting the target customer.
- Budget, personnel, and high-level support.
- Buy-in to build microsites and refine pages for our local targets.
- CEO isn't convinced.
- Competing with non-local vendors pretending to be local.
- Competitive industry
- Conversion rate
- Creating locally focused content and Web pages that will show up high on the Local Search results.
- Getting leads from local search.
- Having enough time and manpower to monitor the activity and to tweak the local search listings.
- Having more than one address.
- Having skilled staff to manage the process.
- I have not done this yet as there are still many higher-priority marketing tasks to get to.
- Irrelevant searches. Displaying the wrong location on search results.
- Lack of understanding and funds to hire someone else to do it.
- Limited searching locally for our types of solutions.
- Lots of competition from other local companies.
- Most of our business is in Asia, so we have not optimized for local search.
- National marketing program not focused on locations.
- Our business is 100% online. Local search is not relevant.
- Our business is National
- Our organization has websites, so there's no real concept of localization.
- Our potential clients don't search by location.
- Searching for high traffic keywords
- Separating each local market from the (country wide) website.
- The fact that our geographical location is unrelated to much of the source of our target market.
- This does not apply, as we are a national B2B only seller.
- This is a future task. Implementation parameters are not yet evaluated.
- Time, knowledge.
- Time. There never seems to be enough to cover all the bases.
- Too many locations in the same geographic area, many of which at the same physical address.
- Understanding where local search fits in an SEO strategy.
- Understanding/testing the needs of the local searcher.
- Volume of our listings and external emerging competitors.
- We are at the early stages in terms of SEO, so some of these phrases are new to us.
- We are a business operating globally. Outreach is our objective, not localization.
- We are a global company. Local search is not really relevant.
- We are a national/global business, so local isn't a priority.
- We are an international service company, with customers worldwide. We are not optimizing for local search.

- We are an online business and local search does not apply.
- We are only interested in international search.
- We do not have the bandwidth internally to manage local.
- We don't do it.
- We don't optimize for local search, we are a global software company.
- We have offices all over the world and it's a challenge to try to localize global content.
- We haven't really done localized search.
- We live in a large metro area. Too many cities to do SEO for.
- We optimize for global search. Out of region is the most costly.
- We're a SaaS business, so local search isn't very relevant to us.
- What is met by Local Search?
- Yahoo! and Bing are hard to list on and there is a time lag associated with listing.
- Driving search traffic without a physical location.
- Getting the keywords right.
- How to do it
- It’s not relevant to our business.
- Little knowledge so no strategy.
- Manpower
- Marketing talent to pursue.
- Our main keywords for our business are very competitive.
- Sheer volume of keywords defined by each [geographic area]
- We don't use local search because our business is cross-country.
- Since we do business worldwide, wherever that customer is is local to them. Our offices are located in one of those "wow" places, so some local references are sometimes used but, for the most part, we are international more than local.
- Having good translations that correctly reflect our offer and positioning. In some languages (like Dutch) we have no way to validate if the translation is as effective as the original copy in English, and sometimes we need to just "have faith"!
- Being a new business, we cannot afford to pay for local listings. Therefore, we have found as many websites as possible to list our store for free and added as much information at the site allows.
- Retail banking, though a predominantly online business, has its shortfalls as we don't have a 'localization' that we can leverage. We can try to localize content based on the demographics, use and psychographic profiles, but this is limited. As you move away from the core offering (retail banking services in our case), it is difficult to build relevance into these peripheral points.
- We have training centers in different areas, but as a whole we are not a local company and can't cater to specific areas easily.
- We operate on a multi-national level with a very strong distribution channel, so our local presence is minimal.
- There is a small percentage of people using the internet in South Africa compared to other countries, so actually getting people interacting and searching online is the biggest hurdle.
- Quite the reverse. We are an online only retail outfit and we have random folks showing up at our door. While we have a nice chat with them, it wastes our time and theirs.
- We are a service business covering a large geographic territory. It is difficult to optimize for local search since our office in one city functions as a regional hub. We don't have brick and mortar stores in every city we service.

- Balancing the local search customizations so that it doesn't affect the relevant general search results for global markets.
- We do business in a small state, so it becomes a challenge to optimize for our local town, region or for the entire state. We also do business across the US, so we local optimization is not always a priority for our strategy.
- Our product is nationwide, so local searches aren't really our best option. We added it just to have another source of links, but don't rely on or monitor the results.
- Getting upper management to agree to devote effort to optimizing with local search and getting them to commit some budget to it.
- Optimizing for local search is more of a mystery than regular organic keyword searches. Rather, it seems the algorithms are well-balanced and don't have any factors that are drastically more important than others. This makes planning an effective testing strategy much more difficult.
- It’s not important to us. Our product is national/international – content that is downloaded or shipped.
- Current efforts are on expanding exposure on local as well as broader markets. It's a challenge to get enough content on the net to make huge impact.
- We are in the family Christian marketplace and have found local advertising does not match with the local demographic.
- We are a global company. Local search is not that important to us. Mostly it attracts people trying to sell to us.
- Our organization is global and we take a global approach to optimization rather than focusing on local.
- We are a national business, so we don't do much localization for search. We have a bit in New England but not much.
- Not too sure local has the foundation or consumer interest or widespread acceptance it needs to have to be successful. Content is a problem.

MARKETER INSIGHTS ON SUCCESSFULLY OPTIMIZING FOR LOCAL SEARCH

Q. Please briefly describe your organization's greatest success with optimizing for Local Search.

- Depth of translation is key to success.
- Driving local business.
- High Google rank
- Increase in mobile traffic and conversions.
- Joining places like Merchant Circle and LinkedIn has been the most useful.
- Keywords and content targeting
- Local content pages
- Stressing our 25+ years serving New England businesses.
- The use of video.
- Using an extension of a more familiar web site for optimization.
- Using geographical locations in link text and PPC keywords.
- Using local terms on website and blog.
- We sell mostly on a national level, so we use local listings just to reinforce targeted keywords.
- Just optimizing pages for local search keywords and terms has been the most successful.
- Listing enhancement
- Local relevant keywords are key.
- We sell nationally, but we have used local key words to draw traffic.
- Our organization is an international church in Europe. Our target demographic is expats, international students, and other people new to our city. We have a page on our site called "New to [City]?" It gives all sorts of useful links and resources, such as local emergency numbers, local gyms and cultural centers, and helpful information for expats and students. Providing this service to people is a great way for us to be a welcoming helpful place they know they can turn to for help getting acclimated. The local keywords on the page help drive traffic.
- We haven't heavily optimized for Local Search, but our overall strategy has allowed us to rank high on Local Search.
- Because of our welding school local listing, Google also brings up our main company for welding services. We are aluminum fabricators.
- Our domain name has been our most successful asset. Our domain name is atlantagraphicdesign.net. We rank #1 on Google for that local search term.
- List the name of the area you are targeting in the ad as people seem to feel more connected to a local company.
- Look at competitor ratings and seeing where they advertise. Get listed on effective local directories.
- We will target our 'category' plus the local city and state keywords. So 'category near city, state'.
- We were successful in driving organic leads but did not always staff every location to nurture those leads. We have moved that nurture to Unica automation with periodic telephone touch points for conversions to leads. This has been highly successful.
- No really great successes. But when doing SEO for boutique hotels, you must optimize at the local level as that is where than more than 50% of your customer base is. Our clients' optimization efforts far exceed the flagship hotels and other local hotels in the area.
- Many sites have a business address on their Web pages. That usually shows the suburb. Consumers most often search by town. We've gotten good SERPs by including the city name in brackets.

- We are a North American service company, so local isn't our big goal. But we do have people who come by our office to purchase directly because they see we are so local.
- We achieved high rankings for searches where city is mentioned and we try to position ourselves as a "local" provide. This traffic is usually very targeted.
- Google Maps presence is essential to us.

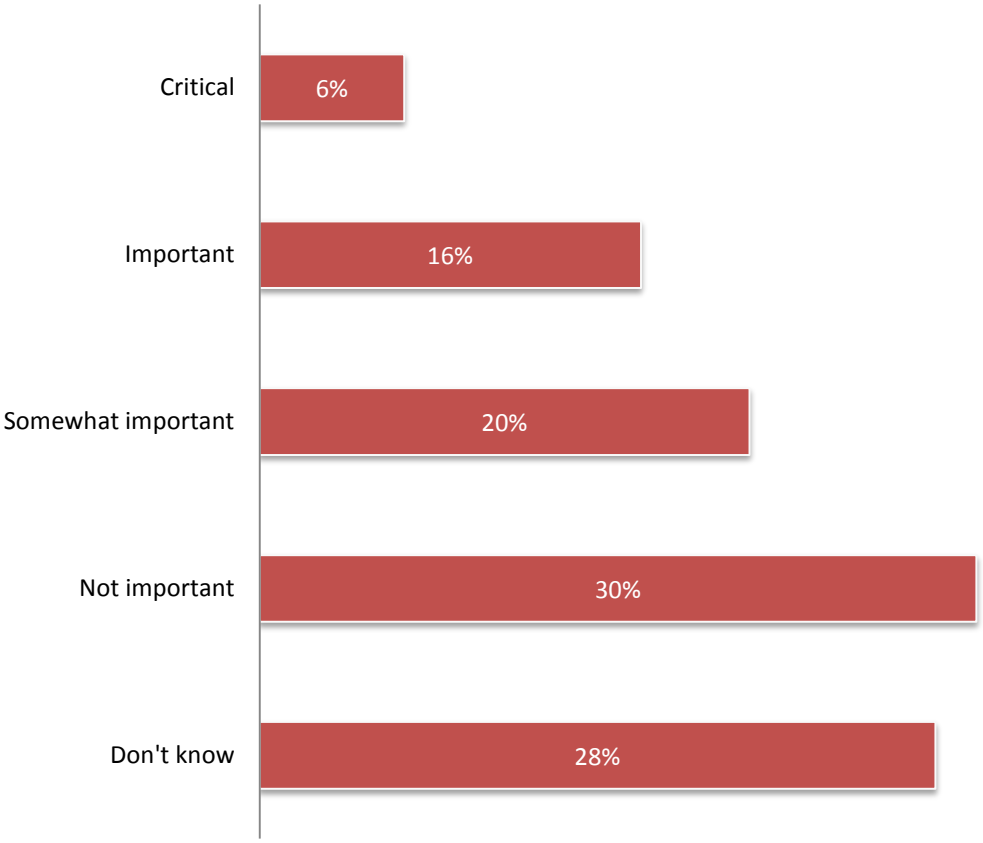
CHAPTER 8: MAKING SENSE OF MOBILE SEARCH

Marketers still have reservations about mobile search. Despite the growing market penetration of smartphones and mobile devices, not to mention the percentage of search queries with a local intent, many organizations still struggle with seeing how mobile search benefits them. For those that do see the promise, developing and implementing systems and programs for it is slow-moving.

MOBILE SEARCH VIEWED AS HAVING POSITIVE IMPACT ON OBJECTIVES

Chart: Degree of importance mobile search plays in achieving search marketing objectives

Q. How important is mobile search in helping you achieve your search marketing objectives?



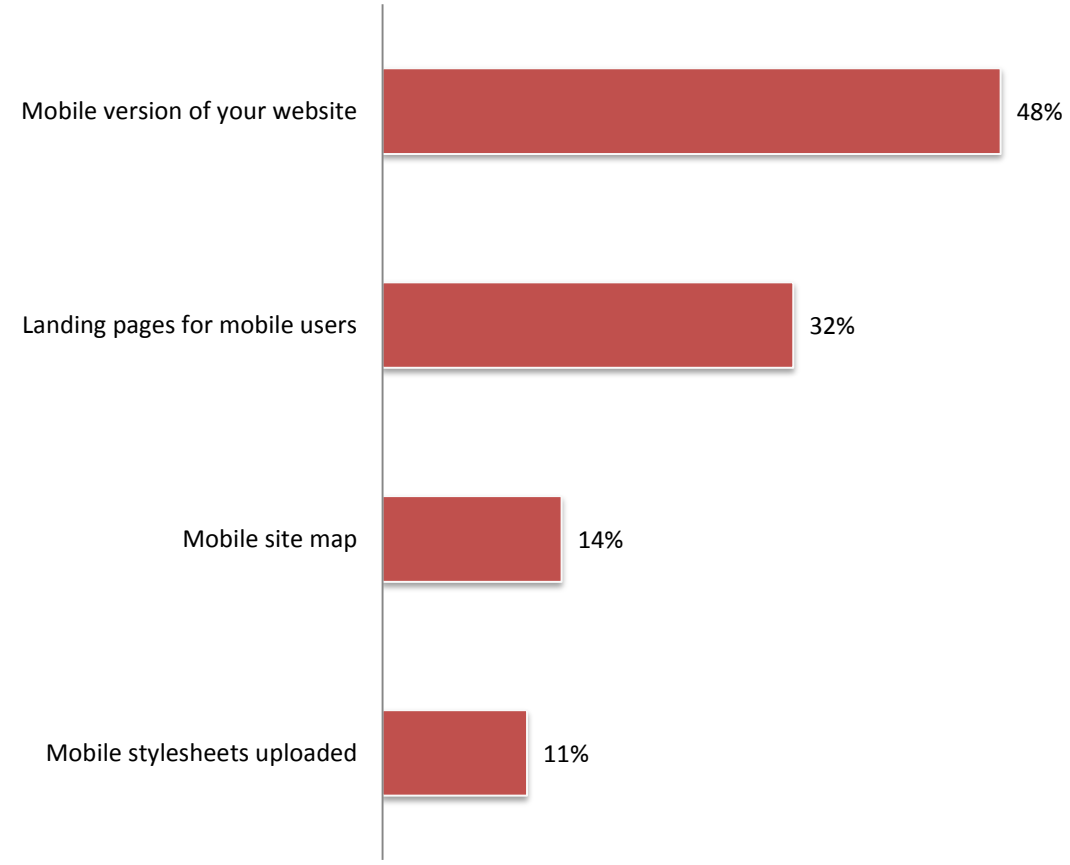
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Mobile search plays a minor role in most search marketing programs. Only 22 percent of organizations rated mobile search as either a critical or important factor in helping them achieve their objectives. The majority of organizations view mobile search as either somewhat or not important. Nearly 30 percent were unclear when it came to knowing whether mobile search could help them deliver on their marketing objectives.

LESS THAN HALF OF ORGANIZATIONS HAVE A MOBILE VERSION OF THEIR WEBSITE

Chart: Mobile search tactics are not widely exercised

Q. Which of the following mobile search tactics is your organization currently employing?



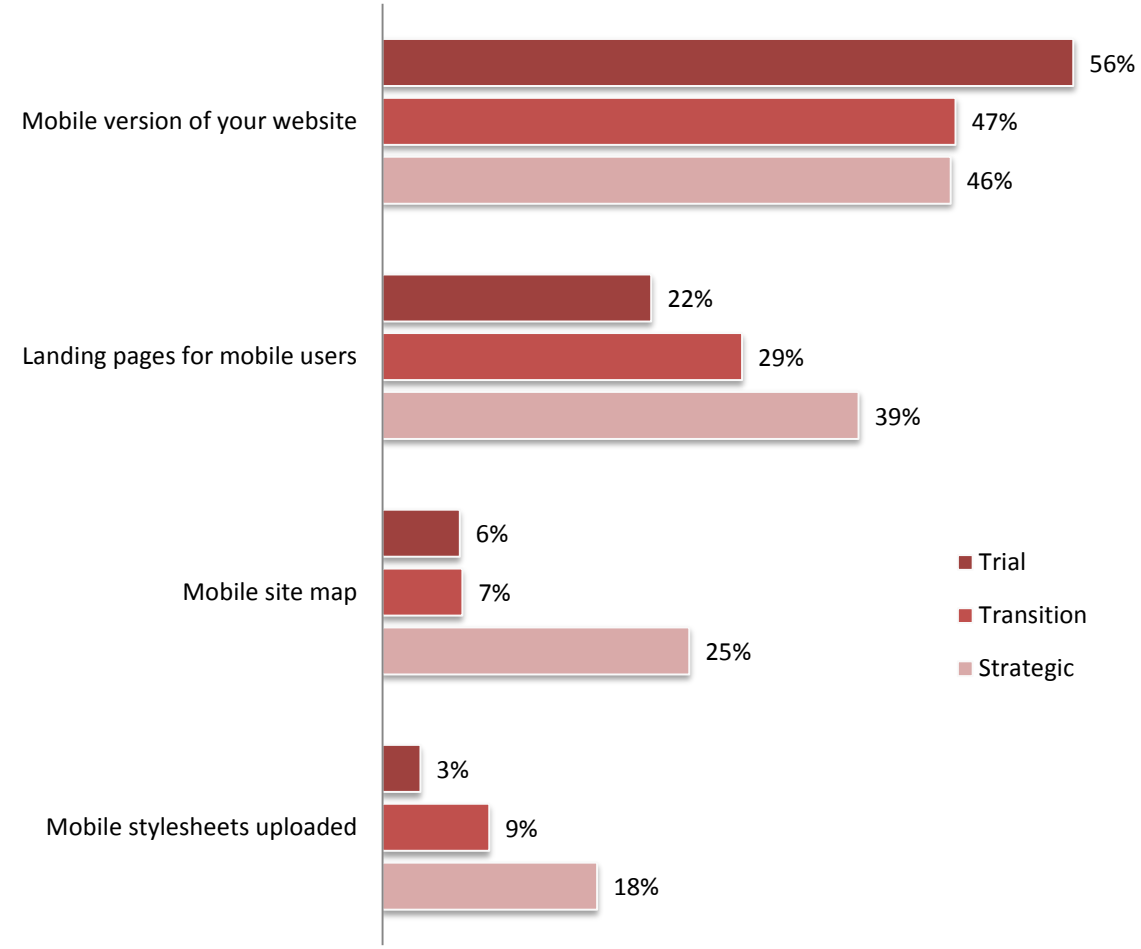
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Mobile search operates, in large part, on the premise that on-the-go users have more immediacy than PC users. Making it easy for searchers to discover businesses via their mobile devices opens local companies up to a whole new customer demographic. Savvy organizations should make sure they maximize this opportunity.

To this end, nearly half of organizations have created a mobile version of their websites. Although this is a start, it may not be enough for success. Mobile site maps, for example, provide an efficient way for search engines to crawl and index mobile sites, and speed up the discovery process of crawlers. Nevertheless, only 14 percent of organizations have added such tools.

> *"Mobile search is not working for me, even though I am generating traffic. I have a high bounce rate, because I don't have a mobile friendly version of the website developed."* – Marketer insight

Chart: Mobile search tactic usage, by SEO maturity phase



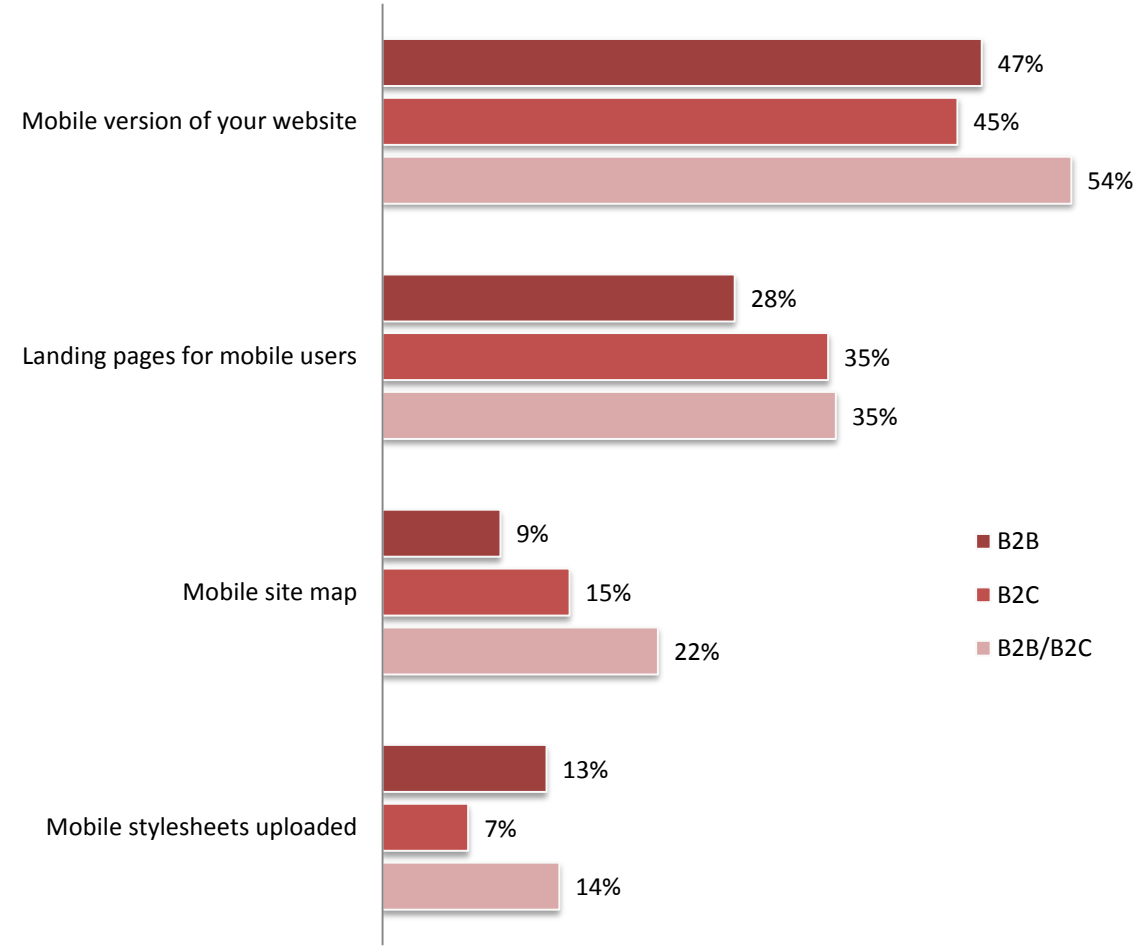
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Organizations in the Transition and Strategic phases of SEO management make use of mobile search tactics to a greater degree than Trial organizations. Strategic organizations, in particular, seem to focus on the mobile user experience by developing mobile versions of their websites and uploading mobile stylesheets. They also are taking steps to ensure that search engines categorize their mobile websites by creating mobile sitemaps.

"Optimizing our landing page for mobile search has increased calls and sales." – Marketer insight

"We are still trying to produce a mobile-friendly site that is simple to use. A work in progress!" – Marketer insight

Chart: Mobile search tactic usage, by primary channel

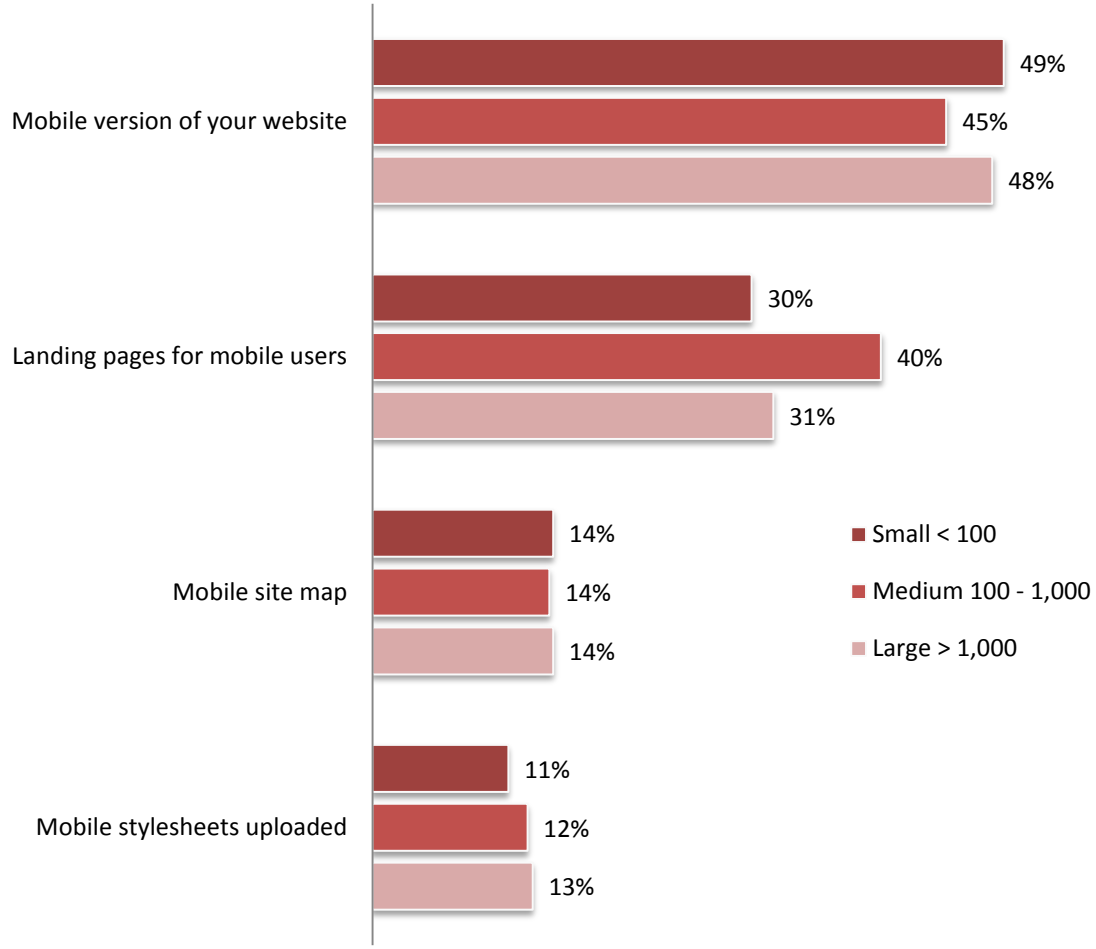


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

B2B organizations are not actively using mobile search tactics as heavily as B2B/B2C organizations. Some B2B organizations perceive that B2B buyers are office-based and therefore not searching on mobile devices. However, in today's "always-on" culture, and with the advent of the iPad and other search-friendly mobile devices, research and consideration activities can happen at all hours of the day.

> *"[We have a] significant presence in the space, which is arguably not a success. However, as a business that has moved from a launch and awareness phase, we believe it has assisted us. Mobile search is cheaper, less cluttered. The paid ad placements seem to be more prominent, which is a good thing for your brand searches."* – Marketer insight

Chart: Mobile search tactic usage, by organization size



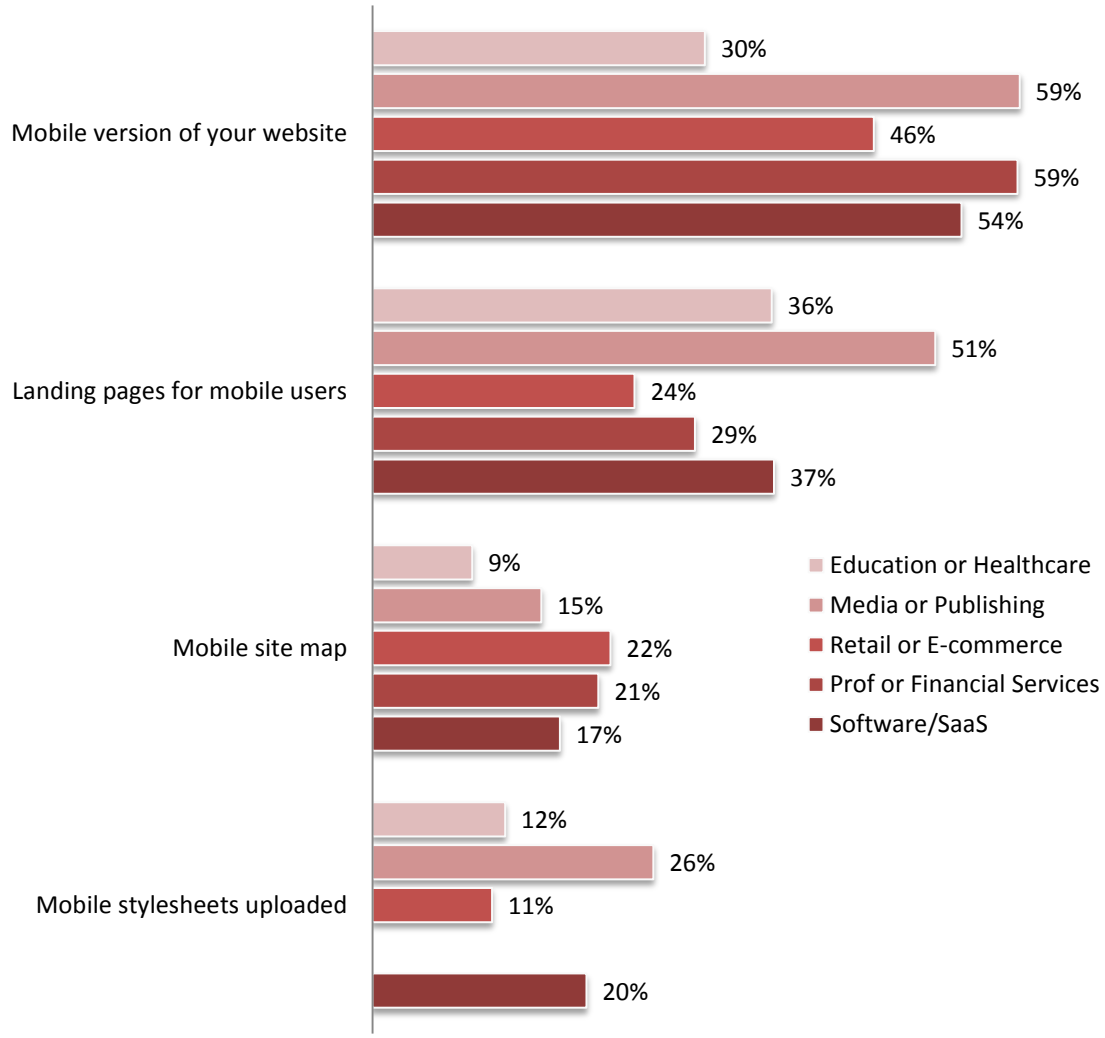
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Medium-sized organizations stand out in their understanding of how mobile search behavior differs from online search behavior and must, as a result, be addressed on its own terms. Forty percent of these organizations have developed landing pages for mobile users. (Landing pages, for the purpose of SEO, are the top entry pages from search.) Ensuring that pages are light and quick to load, simple to read, fit neatly into small widths, and require little to no zooming or scrolling are all best practices for mobile landing pages. Pages should also be formatted to work with "click to call" features available on smartphones.

Local businesses, in particular, can benefit from preparing their sites for mobile, as mobile searchers often act on information while on-the-go.

> *"Finding ways to differentiate on mobile [is our biggest challenge} since we are not a locally-based business. So far we've just stuck to optimized layouts."* – Marketer insight

Chart: Mobile search tactic usage, by industry



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Nearly 60 percent of both Media and Professional Services organizations have designed a mobile version of their websites. Good mobile websites do not use Flash banners or frames; they also limit the use of forms. Skip anchors, like "skip to content" or "back to top" are also vital navigational aids.

Over half of Media and Publishing companies have also created unique landing pages for mobile users. By comparison, Retail and E-commerce sites lag in this respect.

> *"We were an early adopter of mobile in our industry, which we backed with extensive on- and offline campaigns. This has given us a very significant lead in natural search for mobile."* – Marketer insight

MARKETER INSIGHTS ON THEIR CHALLENGES WITH MOBILE SEARCH

Q. Please briefly describe your organization's most significant challenge with Mobile Search.

- Aligning the needs of mobile users on the landing pages.
- B2B tech Buyer adoption is < 2%. This just is not a big deal yet for our business.
- Convincing higher-ups of the necessity of mobile search.
- Convincing leadership to buy-in.
- Defining a strategy and identifying an ROI.
- Finding the resources to learn and implement it.
- Getting started.
- Getting the websites/landing pages compatible with mobile browsers.
- Getting the site to work on mobile platforms!
- Getting time to work this area. Our client base is national.
- It is an area we need to eventually focus, but for the moment has been put on hold.
- Learning and getting started with mobile search!
- Low conversion rate.
- Making the website mobile optimized.
- Not started yet... so everything will be a challenge!
- Target market hasn't heavily adopted in terms of our market.
- This is our next major project - ask us next year!
- To create mobile-friendly browsing and enquiry forms.
- Tracking of mobile payment conversions and integration into Analytics.
- Volume
- Your list has shown me how much we need to do in the mobile search area.
- Currently doing nothing in mobile search.
- Deciding what content should be sent to the users.
- Expense – it's expensive!
- Finding time to do the extra work.
- Getting started - too much confusion, too many apps, don’t know which direction is best for my industry.
- Getting impact.
- Lack of understanding.
- Making sure the mobile site is easy to use for our customer.
- Multiple phone formats.
- Strategy
- Time and resources.
- Traffic quality is poor.
- Learning and adding it into the funnel while still catching up on the last little funnel. Upgrading the site and systems all at the same time.
- Mobile is hot, hot, hot, but taking the time and money to do it successfully in a small non-profit environment is very challenging.
- We are just getting to the stage of creating a mobile platform; we just moved to a transactional site last year and it takes time to continue to evolve.

- None - as of now. We are still not fully convinced about mobile search, so we are in a wait and watch stage.
- Currently we are working on getting our sites working on mobile phones. Once that happens, we can actually get our mobile search campaigns running.
- Mobile searches are becoming more popular as more people get more exotic phone systems and iPads. QR Codes are in our future plans, along with designs for mobile pages for our more popular pages.
- We are not actively doing it yet. We send SMS text messaging, but we are still working out plans for how we will integrate mobile applications.
- The CPA is much higher than regular search. Tracking it is much more difficult, because if they call in instead of navigate to site, then PPC doesn't get credit for that sale.
- Our website isn't optimized for mobile browsing, so even if we get people to our site, it doesn't display properly.
- Too soon to tell. So far seeing challenges in terms of different operating systems.
- Better targeting.
- We see mobile traffic increasing but haven’t yet made changes to fit this traffic.
- We cannot detect a lot of interest in our customer base yet.
- My clients are not usually using a mobile to find my services, as they tend to be office based.
- We do not see it as a relevant marketing tactic for our clientele.
- We don't do anything with mobile search and have no plans to.
- We have been very slow to jump on this.
- Will be addressing this in 2011.
- We have not directed any activities to mobile search.
- We have not used mobile search yet but will in the future.
- We are currently testing and preparing for mobile search.
- We are currently not utilizing mobile search. It is an endeavor we look towards this year.
- We are not mobile-enabled yet. Will have a mobile version of our site in a few months.
- Our org is slow moving in this area and unwilling to invest in mobile for our target audience. It is less of a fit due to the large ticket price of our products, i.e. high consideration, no purchases on phone.

MARKETER INSIGHTS ON THEIR SUCCESSES WITH MOBILE SEARCH

Q. Please briefly describe your organization's greatest success with Mobile Search.

- This is something that we'll be integrating shortly, so I don't have feedback as yet regarding the success.
- Five percent of traffic and sales now come from mobile devices (including the iPad)
- We are in the process of developing a mobile program with affiliates…apps, etc.
- Experienced huge increase in visits via handheld devices in recent months
- We don't do this. The only thing we do for mobile is to make sure our regular site is viewable on smart phones.
- None that's measurable other than an increase in traffic from various sources including email and social media.
- We do not do much with mobile search at this point. Only about 1% of our visitors use a mobile device, so we have not see any need to optimize for it (with the exception of making sure our website shows up appropriately on mobile devices.)
- Optimizing mobile website so that all three major platforms have unified messaging and functionality (Blackberry, Android, Apple)
- Too new for us to show results that demonstrate marketing impact.
- Too soon to declare a 'greatest success'. Ask again next year.
- We are just navigating into our strategies on this and learning what works.
- We just recently launched our services in this aspect. We have not yet experienced actual ROI, but it's been great for lead generation.

CHAPTER 9: SEARCH MARKETING SUCCESS STORIES

CASE BRIEFING: OPTIMIZING EARLY TO CAPTURE FUTURE SEASONAL TRAFFIC LIFTS

Abridged Case Study ID: 31890
Location: MarketingSherpa Member Library
Summary: How Become.com, a shopping comparison site, increased traffic and revenue on Cyber Monday by using four factors to prepare its SEO six months in advance

CHALLENGE

Become.com aims to provide visitors with search tools and content to find the right products. The site generates revenue by sending cost-per-click leads to online merchants. They depend on a holiday or season for sales lifts. For this reason, Become.com needed to prepare its marketing well in advance in order to avoid the risk of having a major channel, such as natural search, suddenly plummet before Cyber Monday.

CAMPAIGN

Understanding that SEO is such a gradual process, Become.com started preparing the site for Cyber Monday six months in advance.

The first series of actions the team took was giving the site an accessibility audit to see whether search engines could index all content. They fixed pages with listing problems and took down older versions of product pages to ensure that newer pages were well indexed.

Ensuring that the right content was available for important topics was the second step in preparing the site for SEO. The marketers analyzed search behavior both on and off the site to identify topics on which Become.com could provide more information (or new content, if none existed) in order to attract and satisfy more visitors. The team also worked to stay abreast of the latest trends and products in the news to anticipate hot topics and build content around them.

The third step focused on analyzing their inbound links to determine whether they were helping or hurting the site's search rankings. Become.com did not want to receive links from websites that were irrelevant or looked "spammy" (such as a site with more advertising than content). After identifying a questionable link, the team reached out to the site's owner and cordially asked for it to be removed.

The final step was to use historical data to set expectations. They understood that SEO takes time to show results, and any last-minute changes in response to early metrics could do more harm than good.

RESULTS

The six months of preparation paid off. On Cyber Monday 2010, Become.com earned:

- 7 percent year-over-year increase in leads sent to partners from natural search
- 4 percent year-over-year increase in natural search traffic
- Close to $250,000 in gross merchandise value for their merchants

CASE BRIEFING: FINDING AND TESTING NICHE CONTENT INCREASES ORGANIC TRAFFIC 40%

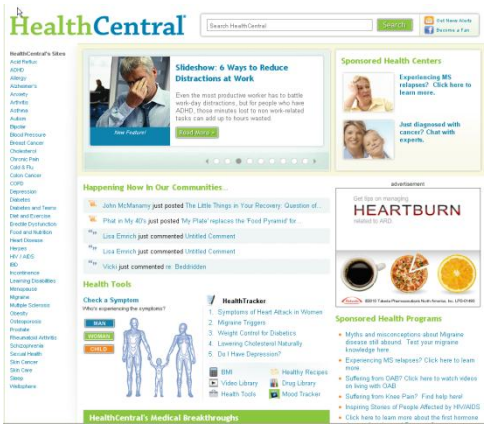
Abridged Case Study ID: 31613
Location: MarketingSherpa Member Library
Summary: How HealthCentral captured more natural long-tail search traffic by analyzing referring phrases, estimating potential traffic and measuring visitor satisfaction

CHALLENGE

The majority of HealthCentral's site traffic comes from natural search, so the team needed to develop an ongoing strategy for identifying long-tail search opportunities, turning them into greater site traffic, and delivering the right information.

CAMPAIGN

Satisfying their site's visitors is HealthCentral's primary concern, not capturing the traffic from search engines. With this in mind, the team developed a series of tactics that would enable them to better "help people who are living and managing with disease."



1. *Create strong content in the visitors' language*. The team hosted information from individuals who discuss how conditions impact their lives. This conversation and natural language helped HealthCentral get indexed and found in long-tail searches.
2. *Analyze search phrases by the number of words*. By looking at the center of a distribution graph plotting the head and the long-tail search phrases, the team got a better sense of what information visitors were seeking.
3. *Evaluate the traffic potential of topics*. Once the team identified an area for long-tail traffic, they researched words with similar meanings and then estimated the potential search volume and traffic.
4. *Create content that targets the topic, not the keywords*. HealthCentral fully covered a new topic by tapping their network of bloggers and asking them to simply write about the topic for which they had shown interest. This approach helped HealthCentral capitalize on the areas they identified in their research, as well as other sub-topics they might not have identified. These additional areas were especially valuable for capturing long-tail search traffic.
5. *Gauge visitor satisfaction*. The team gauged their audience's response to new content in two ways: bounce rates and satisfaction surveys.

RESULTS

By focusing on developing long-tail opportunities, HealthCentral saw a spike in the number of different pages receiving traffic and the number of different search strings that landed someone on their site. One successful example was in the subject area of chronic pain. While maintaining their placements for primary terms such as "pain medication," they also targeted long-tail, multi-word searches such as "neck, head and shoulder pain from fibromyalgia." Just over three months later, the natural search traffic to their chronic pain pages had surged 40 percent.

CASE BRIEFING: CONTENT MARKETING CAMPAIGN GENERATES SURGE IN TRAFFIC

Abridged Case Study ID: 31662
Location: MarketingSherpa Member Library
Summary: How Suitcase.com combined the targeted audience of its existing email database, insights from search marketing, and the reach of public relations and social media to increase their blog traffic five-fold

CHALLENGE

Suitcase.com wanted to attract more visitors to the company's blog, believing that educating shoppers on the types of luggage they needed would further establish their authority in the luggage retailing business. The team did not want to spend money on advertising; rather, they wanted to use existing marketing channels and assets to attract a relevant audience.

CAMPAIGN

Suitcase.com developed a multichannel campaign to create a premium report on consumer luggage trends, using the following tactics to align their key marketing channels:

1. *Use search metrics to research potential report topics*. The team looked at search volumes for "luggage," "suitcase" and other related keywords. High search volumes for phrases such as "baggage restrictions" and "travel bags" helped them uncover a demand for relevant information.
2. *Send survey request to email database*. Suitcase.com's current email subscribers were a readily-available, highly-relevant audience to query. The end report was based entirely on responses captured from the emailed survey request.
3. *Host report download on a dedicated landing page*. The team compiled the survey's results into a nine-page PDF download that was rich with data points, quotes and analysis and light on self-promotion. The landing page featured key stats and two colorful charts. Visitors could download the report, browse Suitcase.com or follow the team through its blog, Twitter account or Facebook page.
4. *Pitch report to media outlets*. Using well-optimized press releases and blogger/media outreach efforts, the team improved the report's availability in natural search by attracting links and press mentions.
5. *Use social channels, even if you don't have them*. The team used the social media channels of its PR and agency partners, all of which had strong followings, to syndicate the report content and attract links and traffic. The team asked the agencies to focus on its PR and content strategy, which applied to their distinct audiences, rather than the content of the report itself.

RESULTS

Blog traffic from January through April increased 518 percent, compared to the same period in the previous year. Traffic from search engines increased at an even higher rate. Additionally, the report's landing page had a 16 percent lower bounce rate than the site's average. Twenty-nine percent of report downloads came from referring websites, and 22 percent of downloads were referred by search engines.

CASE BRIEFING: TURNING A YOUTUBE CHANNEL INTO A POWERFUL INBOUND MARKETING HUB

Abridged Case Study ID: 31864
Location: MarketingSherpa Member Library
Summary: How Orabrush, a breath-freshening tongue cleaner , developed a video strategy that powers over 80% of the company's marketing, pulls in millions of YouTube viewers, and turns viewers into customers right from their profile

CHALLENGE

Dr. Robert Wagstaff spent years trying to market his invention through traditional channels without success. Looking for ideas, he approached a marketing class that also told him that 92 percent of potential customers were unlikely to buy the product online. One student, however, noted that the remaining 8 percent represented millions who just might.

CAMPAIGN

After a successful test with a video titled "How to tell if you have bad breath," Orabrush spent two years building the company's YouTube page into a full-blown inbound marketing hub using these key tactics:.

1. *Create an effective YouTube page*. Orabrush painstakingly researched successful YouTube channels and created a page combining the best tactics. The page also doubled as landing-page, encouraging visitors to follow the brand in social networks and visit Orabrush's site for a free trial.
2. *Create more than one type of video*. Orabrush's YouTube channel features three different types of videos, each with a specific purpose: conversion videos, engagement videos, and customer reviews.
3. *Commit to consistency*. The team found that consistent engagement was the biggest factor for success. To achieve this, the writers and video experts worked off a publishing calendar planned months in advance. They also stuck to a strict budget.
4. *Interest the audience with interesting content*. Each Orabrush video is entertaining and explains a product about which most consumers are unaware. These factors, combined with the team's persuasive calls-to-action, encouraged viewers to subscribe and share with friends.
5. *Engage fans and peers*. Despite the volume, Orabrush tries to respond to as many comments as possible. They also mine viewer comments for content ideas, making sure to credit viewers in the videos they inspire.

RESULTS

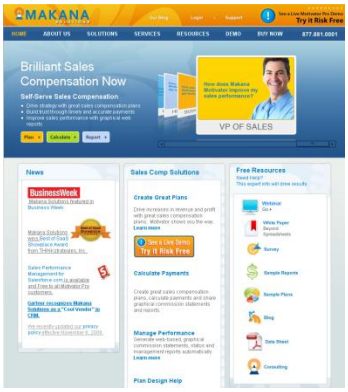
Since the launch of the first video, businesses from more than 40 countries have inquired about becoming Orabrush distributors. Other results include:

- More than 35 million YouTube channel views
- More than 116,000 YouTube subscribers (second only to OldSpice among YouTube sponsor channels)
- Up to 10x increase in landing page conversion rates after adding Orabrush videos to landing pages
- More than 271,000 Facebook fans (driven mostly from YouTube)

CASE BRIEFING: REVAMPED AND OPTIMIZED WEB CONTENT DOUBLES LEAD CONVERSIONS

Abridged Case Study ID: 31765
Location: MarketingSherpa Member Library
Summary: How Makana Solutions, a subscription-based software company, tripled its traffic and leads by using SEO tactics and online registration forms to revamp itself as a premier Web destination.

CHALLENGE



Makana Solutions provides subscription-based software that helps organizations perform sales compensation planning. Few prospects, however, knew the software-as-a-service solution was available, and so they weren't actively looking for it online.

CAMPAIGN

Gehring's team revamped their website as an online destination for sales compensation planning by following these seven steps:

1. *Create content for planning best practices*. Sample sales compensation plans and educational webinars were just two types of valuable resources Makana created and offered to help prospects answer questions about their sales compensation planning challenges.
2. *Optimize website around high-value search terms*. Using research, the team identified broad, general terms and also longer-tail key terms that reflected more targeted searches or specific industry verticals. With a list of 600 keywords identified, they optimized specific pages of their site around two or three relevant terms per page.
3. *Boost inbound links to improve search rankings*. The team identified sites with a high Google PageRank from which they could get a link.
4. *Use paid search advertising to supplement SEO efforts*. SEO tactics often take time to make an impact on search rankings. In the meantime, the team employed pay-per-click advertising to drive traffic around specific events or campaigns.
5. *Follow up on web leads*. Visitors had to fill out a registration form to receive a piece of educational material, such as a sample sales compensation plan. The team then targeted them with additional marketing to move them into a free software trial.
6. *Add lead information to CRM system for sales calls*. The sales team called free-trial members to encourage them to make use of the system. At the end of the trial period, they attempted to convert trial members to subscribers. In both cases, they kept the trial account live until a sales representative had made contact with the prospect.
7. *Continually monitor keyword, inbound links, and outbound campaign results*. A key goal for the team was to highlight the best performing tactics so they could repeat them.

RESULTS

Makana Solutions succeeded in becoming a top destination for advice about sales compensation planning. Three months after adopting the strategy, website traffic increased 200 percent, the lead generation rate tripled, and the lead conversion rate doubled. SEO efforts also reduced paid search traffic from 75 percent to just 30 percent of traffic. The company's website also ranked on the first page of Google search results for key industry search terms,

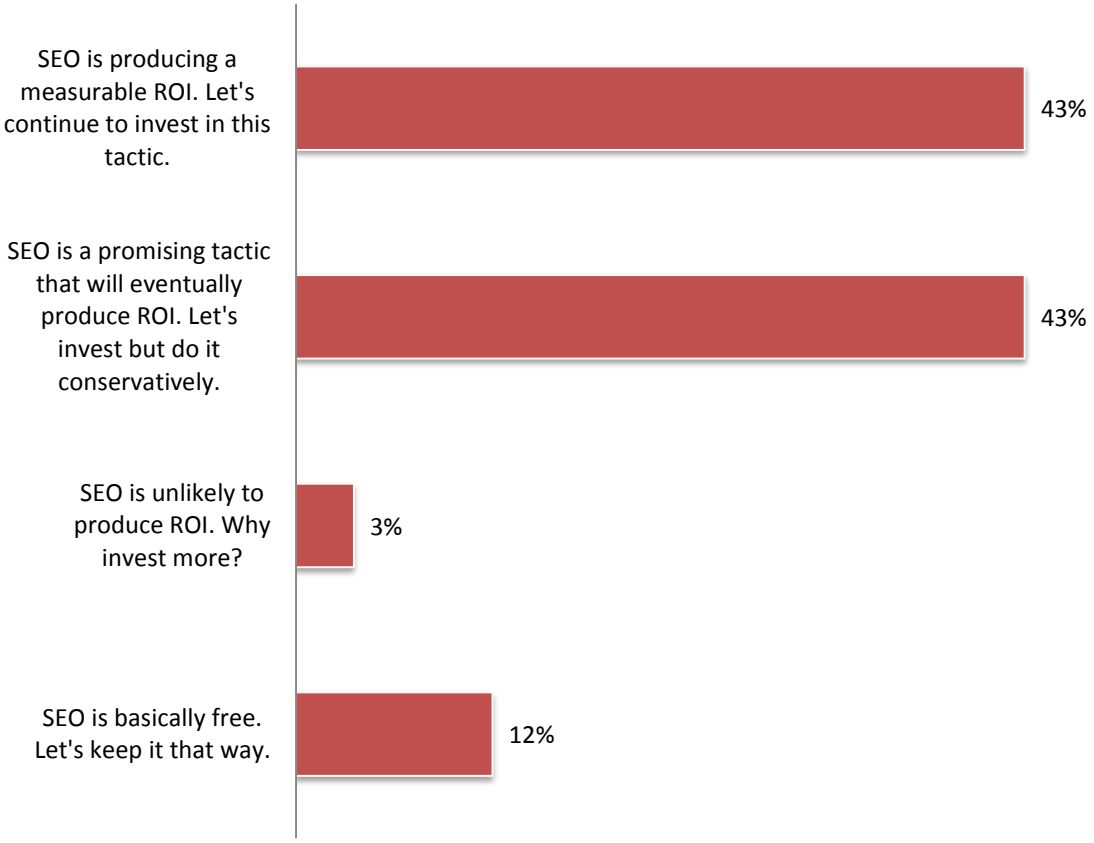
CHAPTER 10: AGENCY PERSPECTIVES

When it comes to convincing clients who control agency budgets, perception is everything. And, fortunately for agencies, their clients' confidence in the value of SEO is high.

CLIENT INVESTMENT IN SEO IS DRIVEN BY MEASURABLE ROI

Chart: Client perception of SEO's ability to produce ROI

Q. Which statement best describes how your typical client organization perceives the ability of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to produce a return on investment (ROI) at budget time?



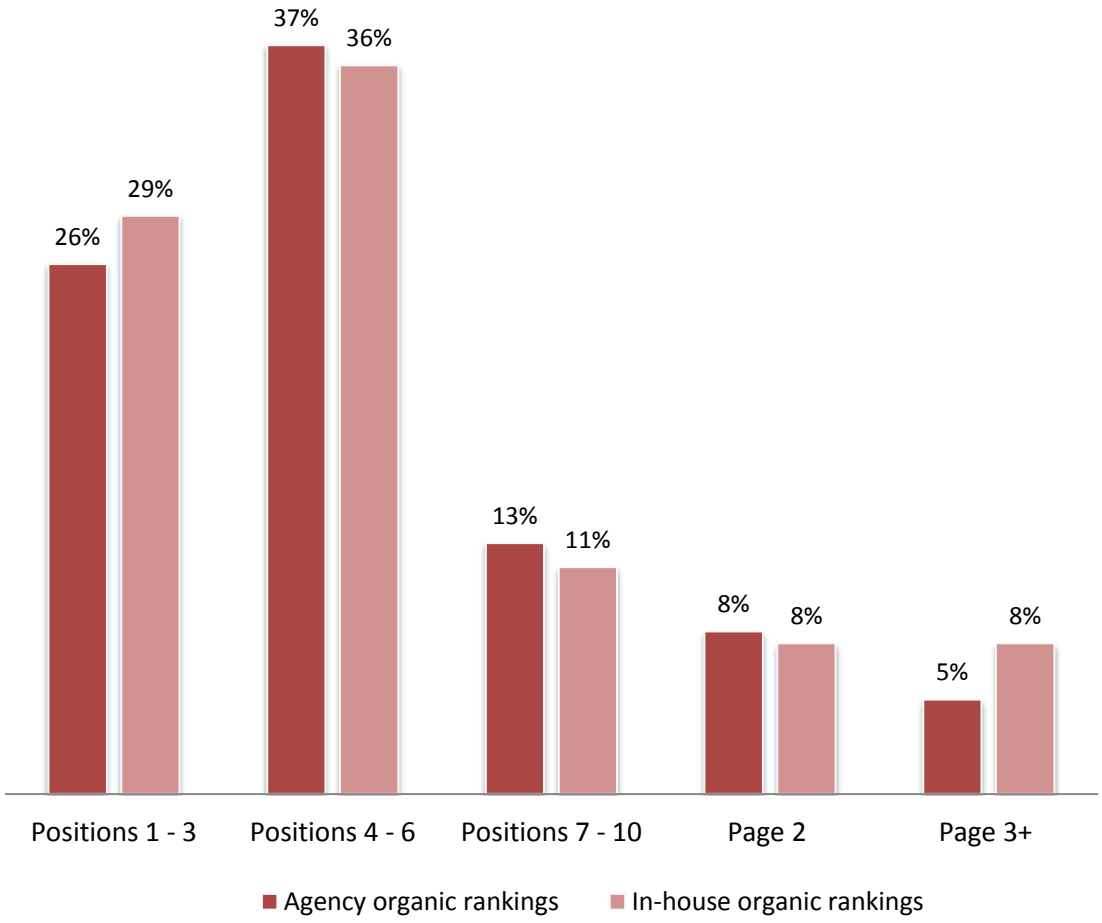
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Achieving a return on investment is the gold standard. Marketing programs that deliver results attract more attention and budget dollars, while those that do not are cut loose.

Nearly half of agencies report that their clients experience measurable and repeatable results with SEO, prompting them to invest and reinvest. Other clients see the promise of SEO and are moving dollars in this direction at a more conservative pace. These organizations likely are still in the Trial and Transition phases of SEO maturity, figuring out how to plan, execute and measure their SEO programs for optimal results.

MAJORITY OF CLIENT ORGANIZATIONS GET PAGE 1 ORGANIC RANKINGS

Chart: Typical organic ranking on targeted key terms



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Twenty-six percent of agencies deliver the coveted top three spots for their clients' targeted key terms. Nearly another 40 percent help their clients claim the 4 to 6 positions. Organizations that manage their SEO programs in-house achieved similar organic rankings on their targeted key terms.

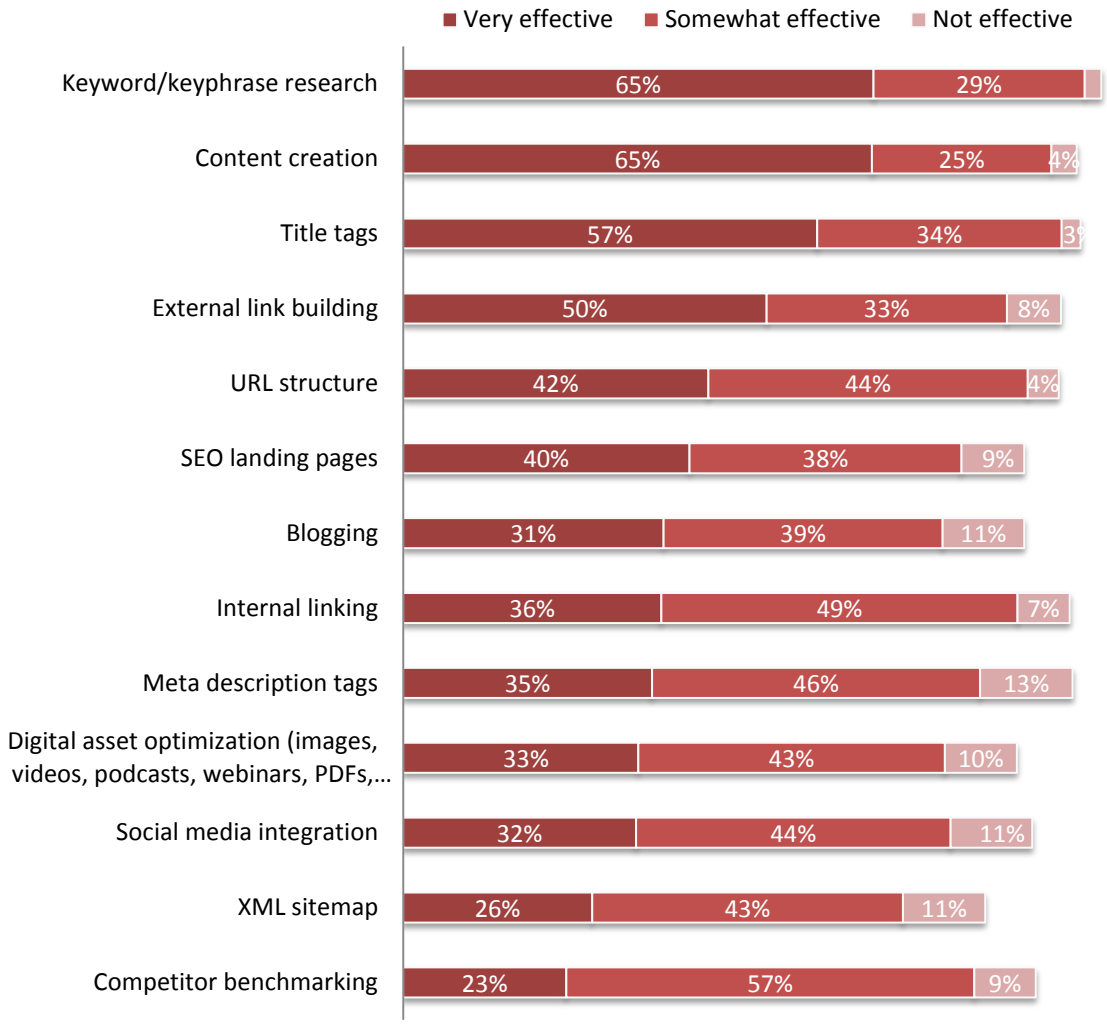
As we saw earlier, only 13 percent of organizations fully outsource their SEO programs, with an additional 21 percent relying on both external and internal resources. The vast majority run their SEO campaigns in-house. If this comparison of organic rankings holds up, agencies may need to find other "pain points" besides organic rankings to address if they hope to attract new business.

> *"Most clients who come to us for SEO need assistance just getting the on-page SEO elements completed with the right keywords and phrases. Once the foundation is set, it's about building relevant and quality inbound links."* – Agency insight

AGENCIES AND CLIENTS AGREE ON TOP 3 MOST EFFECTIVE SEO TACTICS

Chart: Level of effectiveness of SEO tactics, rated by agencies

Q. Please indicate the LEVEL OF EFFECTIVENESS (in terms of achieving marketing objectives) for each of the SEO tactics a typical client organization is using.



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Agencies and marketers agree on the top three most effective SEO tactics: Keyword research, content creation and title tags. Agencies, however, put more stock into these than marketers. For example, 65 percent of agencies view content creation as a very effective SEO tactic, compared to just 50 percent of marketers.

> *"Content is still key of organic rankings...and spreading unique content across the Web provides multiple positions for organic search rankings."* – Agency insight

AGENCY INSIGHTS ON THEIR SUCCESSES WITH SEO CAMPAIGNS

Q. If your agency has achieved an extraordinary result for a client organization using SEO, please briefly describe the campaign strategy and tactics.

- Blog commenting, offsetting competitor backlinks, and in-content links on private blog networks.
- Blogging has contributed excellent results in selected long-tail searches.
- Key words and social marketing have been the major assisting factors in marketing and ROI.
- We view SEO as one of many integrated tactics and not responsible, on its own, for successes.
- Website architecture around main focused keywords. Content creation using keyword and latent semantic indexing (LSI).
- Gain maximum exposure for new content, both via search engines and existing audience, by integrating their social media presence with their existing website through connecting articles and newsletters to social media profiles.
- Writing unique product descriptions for e-commerce sites is critical. It not only helps engines distinguish your site against others using the same boilerplate copy (read: duplicate content!), but also helps your customers distinguish this as well so price is not the only differentiator. Good copy can be the difference between not just ranking, but making the sale.
- Used the great free service, MyBrainShark, which allowed the consultants to add voice to their PowerPoints. This created something unique and viral. Submission of the blog to blog directories and getting legitimate one-way links from highly ranked, industry-specific blogs (without nofollow) jumped our PageRank from 0 to 3 in a week.
- For small local businesses with small marketing budgets, amazing results are highly achievable with local link building campaigns, which include the map/Yellow Page type sites. A good 90% of the time they will be found locally under the main keyword phrase used by searchers for their services. While other areas of SEO are very effective, we've seen the most amazing results across the board for more clients. It seems there is less competition on the optimization level for this area. Examples: In Google, search on "Dallas Foundation Repair" – Advanced Foundation Repair is in the top results. Search on "Houston Skylights" or "Houston Solar Roof Vents," and Innovativeskylights.com is in the top results. Search for "Ardmore mortgages," and countryhomefinancial.com is in the stop results. Search for "soft window treatments ny ny." And DFB Sales is at the top. All of these clients have done both SEO and Local, so it might be the combination of the two, but the results have been excellent.
- Keyword research, content creation, quality backlinks. These, along with videos, press releases, and social media, produce the results clients are searching for.
- We moved into position 1 after focusing on Page Speed and SEO and by adjusting URLs. Social media helped as well.
- Quality link building using prioritized keywords as anchor text has allowed our clients to achieve David vs. Goliath results, outranking powerful competitors.
- We have done SEO on e-commerce websites on all top searched keywords for the client's products. We used dynamic meta tags and content with structured URLs that boosted rankings and traffic more than 300% on highly competitive keywords like "mobile." We have done changes in CMS to make sure all the pages are indexed by search engines.
- Local knowledge and advantages, regular content creation, following and implementing new search trends, ensuring consistency among all channels, and social integration.

- A client that had used 3 different SEO companies with little to no results came to us and within 6 months we had achieved page 1 rank for most of their primary keywords. This resulted in a 75% increase in sales in the first year after optimization. We did this through extensive competitor research and by developing targeted landing pages and creating supporting content.
- The most effective results I've seen came from rewriting the URLs to better describe site pages and title tags.
- We have started using Linkdex as a platform to share with our clients and work with them to get results. The link-building data is a class above anything else out there and the competitor analysis saves hours of work.
- In our geographical region, the most effective tactic is blog optimization for the long-tail traffic.
- Internal Optimization (Title, H1 tags, content building, internal links) 2) External Links 3) Social media integration in SEO strategy.
- We have gotten the best results from revising the meta description tag, which is part of an overall effort to produce a compelling blurb in SERPs.
- The key for clients is to get them to invest at the appropriate level. For low competition engagements, we can often get to our goals with the right title tags and a few other basics. However, in competitive situations, ongoing content creation and other tactics are essential.
- This will depend on the level of competition. In general, thorough research, implementing SEO best practices on the site including site structure, quality content, and strategic marketing produce great results.
- We were able to clean a lot of legacy code and spam flags from a client's website. When we did this, the content for which they had already done SEO work on began to shine and we saw a sharp increase in qualified search traffic.
- By utilizing articles with good content and developing a link wheel and social bookmark building campaign, we were able to rank within weeks for some of our core keywords. But the real magic was in the keywords used, as ranking for just anything is just valuable for vanity.
- One of our client has 10,000 visitors in traffic per day. After improving search engine crawlability, the traffic increased to over 15,000.
- Our organization produces a mindmap cataloging every known site, hashtag, discussion thread, forum, trade industry, and vertical directory where qualified prospects frequent in a known target industry. Once this is built we then target publishers via their editorial focus, pushing our own high value content where we find fits in discussion threads, trade shows, magazines, blogs etc. The key is that we target the exact buyer types and their industries which matter to our clients. Because we focus on quality communications, content and audience types, this mitigates our need to focus on algorithm changes. All onsite and promotional content must have high value to our targeted stakeholders.
- I have ranked for keywords that produce hundreds of thousands of dollars monthly by building external links from various websites with high PageRanks and brand equity.
- We moved our client to Mura, an open-source CMS (content management system) that is set up for SEO optimization. That alone generated a quote request within three days - a company milestone for them!
- We took a newly launched web platform and performed a phased-in SEO overhaul, beginning with adding title tags, meta tags, ALT tags and moved into additional content creation, blog articles and external link building. This resulted in a 24% increase in traffic over 75 days.

- Many of our clients are regional, and they target specific geographic areas (towns) due to our advice and research. We emphasize highly local SEO with keywords and site content specific to the community served (and prospects sought). This has resulted in top search positions and frequent appearances and top rankings at other sites (such as Google Places.) Due to the accurate demographic targeting, the results have been excellent, with traffic tripling and prospects far more qualified.
- The client needed a site redesign where we performed the following on-page optimization: 1) Proper title, meta, alt and header tags. 2) Proper URL structure, including canonicalization. 3) Proper interlinking strategy that did not go further than 3 depths. 4) Each page targeted no more than 2 keywords/phrases. 5) Created a blog where the client could showcase his expertise. These steps resulted in a jump from page 3 to page 1 position #2 after 2 weeks.
- We have found effective SEO to include most of the items in your questionnaire. Keyword, site optimization, including URL, articles, links, and blogging, all contributed to the increase in awareness for an online company offering professional services. Starting with only a existing website with no SEO, in 9 months we combined SEO with direct email and phone contact to create a significant presence in this client's target market. Because the market was $500B companies and up, it was a significant achievement.
- Using GoodRelations markup we were able to take a clients sales page from SERP page 8 to page 1 position 5 within 1 week and to page 1 position 1 within 9 days for the keyphrase 'anti aging skincare'.
- Find converting keywords through AdWords or initial SEO efforts in Google Analytics. Create a landing page for that keyword. Build skeletal links to it through paid directories (can do instantly). Find a more long-term linkbuilding strategy once the skeletal links are in place (takes time, massaging, and relationship building). Go after several long-tail words first until you rank and then more and more medium tail (building links the whole time) until you are powerful enough for short-tail.
- Clients innately think internally. So we've had clients ask us why they weren't showing up for phrases like "Heating Oil Dealers" and we had to educate them that none of their consumers would be searching for "dealers;" rather, they are looking for "companies". So we start every client project out with an SEO grid. This grid first lists all website audiences and then lists all keyword(s)/keyword phrases this potential audience might search to find a company's products by name, SKU and description, by product benefit , and by consumer need. We saw how important this was when creating a site for a corrugated cardboard box manufacturer. Each audience called the same "box" something different. A home owner might call it a "storage box", a moving company might call it a "moving box", a direct mail company might call it a "dimensional mailer", an e-commerce company may call it a "shipping box", etc. We built the site with content/URLs/browser titles etc. to support what we learned during the SEO grid process. It is always best to plan SEO strategies before site development, but clients typically think it's something you can do after and often it's much more expensive and not as effective then.
- SEO ranking is purely "relative;" meaning, your rank depends on how your page performs with relation to your competitors. Our recommendations to target highly competitive keyphrases come from reviewing the pages of competitors. This is across all parameters: meta tags, links, technical (URL etc). For a "software services client," we reviewed the top 10 ranking pages for a list of 30 keyphrases and made custom recommendations for each, based on the competition's pages. This approach helped us improve exceptional rankings for the above: 30% of keywords ranked #1, 50% of keywords came up in page 1, and 20% of keywords showed an improvement of at least 1 page

- Our agency is only 16 months old and we have tried numerous tactics to improve market exposure. The sad fact is that Google changes its ranking in a capricious manner– or so it seems. Media integration has had little impact, even when we have attended marketing sessions with other agencies that have similar interests. Frankly, we are at a loss for what really has an impact on consumers of our services. We need a more strategic system that "speaks" to the needs of the consumer, turns prospects into hot leads and turns the leads into customers. I guess we are seeking the enigmatic "magic wand" that does not exist and everyone is trying to find.
- Coupling on-page and off-page best practices. On-page tactics include title tags, header tags, meta tags, keyword density, sitemap, fresh content via on-site blog. Off-page tactics include backlinking via articles, forums, profiles and video.
- Search engine reputation management: We helped push out negative mentions about the client on the 1st page of Google - by optimizing the links that spoke positively about the client. 2 negative links were pushed to beyond 5th page.
- Most of our small biz clients don't understand SEO as an ongoing maintenance function and therefore do not allow for enough budget to be effective.

AGENCY INSIGHTS ON MOST EFFECTIVE TACTICS FOR IMPROVING RANKINGS

Q. In your experience, what have you found to be the single most effective tactic for improving organic search rankings?

- All four on-page elements optimized and structured back links from high page rank domains.
- Backlinks
- Blog posts
- Blogging and link building has work extremely well.
- Building links to social media with calls to action back to the website/blog
- Clear and sensible meta data, external linking and peer to peer sharing (social media)
- Competitor benchmarking
- Constant monitoring and tracking
- Content creation
- Writing content about intensely researched keywords. Putting the keywords in meta tags too.
- Content, content, content
- Current, relevant and compelling content.
- Creating good content matched with keyword phrases
- Domain level trust and link metrics.
- Education and demonstration to the client of the results for others.
- External backlinking to the client's site. The more variety and clout, the better.
- External backlinks to the site. Much more effective than keyword/content development.
- External linking strategies
- Focused relationship building is the best tactic for our organization.
- Frequency in use of a single premise in content creation.
- Frequent review and revision as needed for clients in highly-competitive markets.
- Fresh, original content consistently delivered on a regular and timely basis.
- Getting clarity on the terms target customers will use to search for the offering.
- Good content
- Having the guest, product, or service featured in a top-tier publication.
- High-quality editorial links.
- Inbound links and XML sitemaps.
- Increasing incoming links
- Keywords and social media integration
- Keyword density.

- Keyword integration
- Keyword strategy.
- Keywords analysis for title tags and meta description.
- Link building through articles, press releases and authority site links
- Links from quality sites.
- Meta tag descriptors
- Moving content closer to the homepage.
- New and fresh content along with effective meta tags.
- Off-site link building through syndication of great content.
- On-site: Title Tags. Off-site: Link building.
- Optimization of individual pages for individual phrases. One Page=One Idea.
- PPC
- Paying for PPC
- Popular content.
- Providing useful, accurate, regularly updated content.
- Quality content creation.
- Reviews in Google Places.
- Revisions to content.
- Rich content.
- Site architecture and an effective content strategy.
- Site structure (tags etc), article marketing for certain niches, link building.
- Social Bookmarking, directory submissions, etc.
- Social media optimization
- Page titles and page content
- Titles tags and inbound link building.
- Title tags and URL structure.
- Twitter
- URL structure coupled with competitive analysis and keyword research
- Valued content
- Video
- Website redesign to include smarter URLs, site structure, and relevant content.
- Articles and content distribution
- Blog
- Blogging
- Bringing in links from authoritative and relevant websites and blogs.
- Cleaning up online listings (Google Places, Yahoo! Local, etc.)
- Control of message
- Creating backlinks
- Credible inbound links
- External link building. Having a niche in your market and building on that.
- Developing engaging content
- Eliminating flash animation wherever possible.
- External links
- External links (bilateral} and keywords.

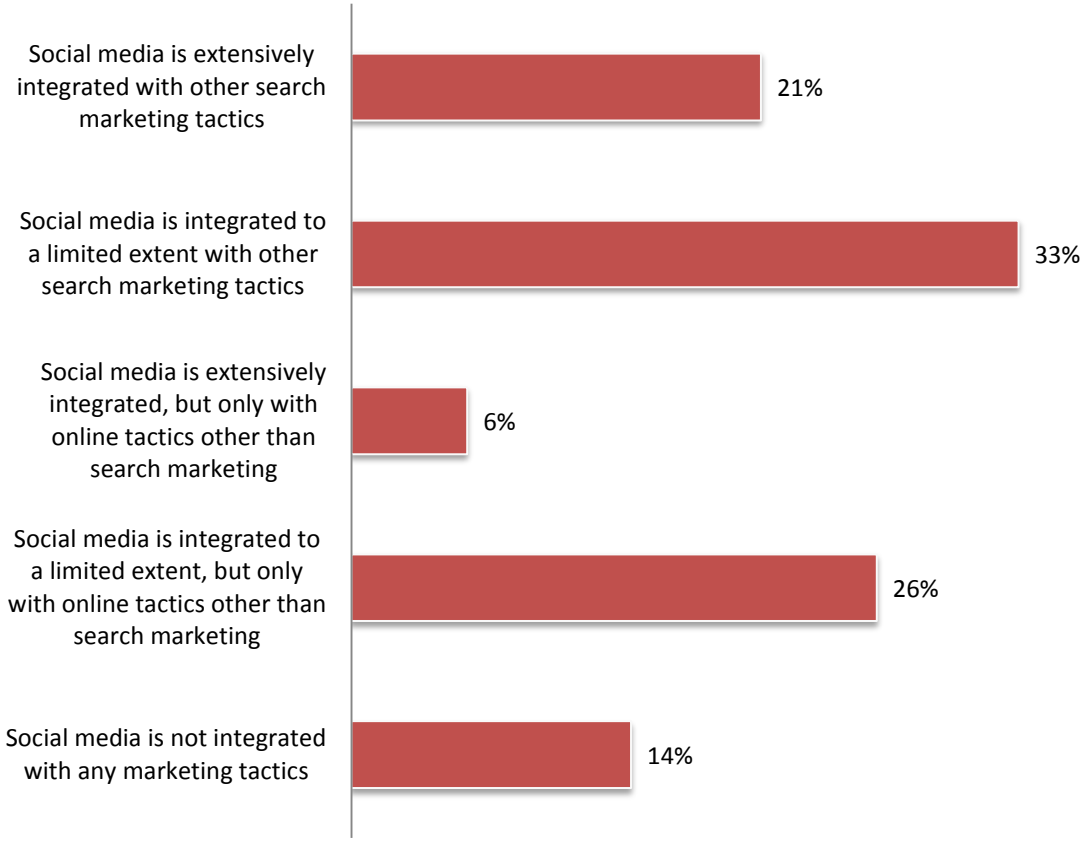
- Frequent blogging and pushes from Twitter and LinkedIn
- Fresh content combined with strong link building
- Getting the basics right. Creating a solid foundation to build off of.
- Good content
- Helping clients rewrite content with high-ranking keywords
- High-ranked and authoritative backlinks.
- Inbound keyword-focused links from relevant authoritative sites.
- Inbound linking
- Keyword-focused content that is useful and informative for the user.
- Keyword-targeted videos, citations and reviews.
- Keyword-rich content that changes regularly.
- Optimized blog content.
- Optimizing key words.
- Properly formatted meta tags and keyword placement.
- Really good content
- Relevant content
- Relevant page titles
- SEO landing page with internal linking
- Targeted URL
- Title tags and URLs
- Website depth
- PPC advertising actually seems to be enhancing organic SEO. Because it is generating more views of the website, the website's relevance increases in the search algorithm and thereby enhances organic search results.
- Optimize the client's point of difference by creating relevant digital (and real-time) content for competitive search phrases.
- Excellent content targeted to known search phrases based on research. Structurally correct website. Link building.
- Future keyword phrases for future traffic and profits! Look for upcoming products or technologies that are related to my specific niche. These keyword phrases have no competition right now and not much traffic, but they will. You can SEO for these phrases very, very easily.
- A keyword rich domain name or URL along with a strong focus on the title tag (homepage) for the main keyword. This has to be well supported by strong backlinks from varied IPs and websites, most of which need to be anchored with primary keyword. Boosting existing links to ensure that they stay indexed is getting more and more important.
- Using a number of marketing channels, e.g. online videos, podcasts, articles, bookmarking, publicity, with backlinks to the site.
- Creating a steady stream of original, well-optimized content. The blog is one of the most effective ways to do this.
- High-quality organic one-way links received from industry-specific blog commenting (with no-follow disabled). Blog and article writing and submission to directories and social media avenues.
- Correcting the titles and the headings (h1)

- Meta tags (title and description) and URL rewriting. Assigning adequate names to products and categories
- Ensuring content uses targeted keyword phrases that are varied but of the same theme across the page
- Create keyword-rich content and utilize those same keywords in the page title
- Synchronizing the different elements like keyword structuring, meta tags, content, etc. Most clients/agencies tend to prioritize one over the other to optimize on short-term goals.
- Creating valuable content that people actually want to read (and link to). Keyword research helps, but the quality of the writing is crucial.
- Optimize content. Inbound linking, including press release/article programs. Ensure that the technical pieces are working with URL structure, page load times, etc.
- Create content about the page with keyword embedded in the content. Keywords in the title tag, meta description and so on help as well.
- Relevant and qualified keyword phrases integrated throughout properly themed pages with exceptional copy and good calls-to-action.
- Creating relevant keyword-rich title tags and creating inbound links. Don't feel you can have one without the other.
- Continually monitor the algorithmic changes by Google and Bing, and simply adjust the mix if needed. There is no single tactic that covers everything. It's about understanding the complete mix of tactics.
- Most clients who come to us for SEO need assistance with just getting the on-page SEO elements completed with the right keywords and phrases. Once the foundation is set, it's building relevant and quality inbound links.
- Structuring a website around a single theme with all categories related to that theme. Combine this with a good internal link structure and lots of relevant original content.
- Depends on the search engine. Google loves content. That's why Wikipedia and blogs do well in Google results.
- Develop new dynamic content per page that is consistent with meta tags and SEO objectives.
- Frequent press releases. These are picked up immediately by search engines and are quite effective when used properly.
- Link building is still the only thing that that really matters. You can have everything else perfect but no link building and you will fail. Or you can have everything else wrong and good link building and you will succeed. This is unfortunate, but still true.
- Link building strategy and paying attention to creating the proper anchor texts. Optimization of the landing pages.

SOCIAL MEDIA PART OF SEARCH MARKETING MIX FOR OVER 50% OF CLIENTS

Chart: Extent of social media integration by clients

Q. To what extent does your typical client organization integrate social media tactics into the search marketing mix?



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

A majority of agencies report that their client organizations are integrating search marketing and social media to some extent. However, one of every three agencies also reports that their clients use social media but do not align it with their search marketing campaigns, electing instead to run these online efforts on parallel paths.

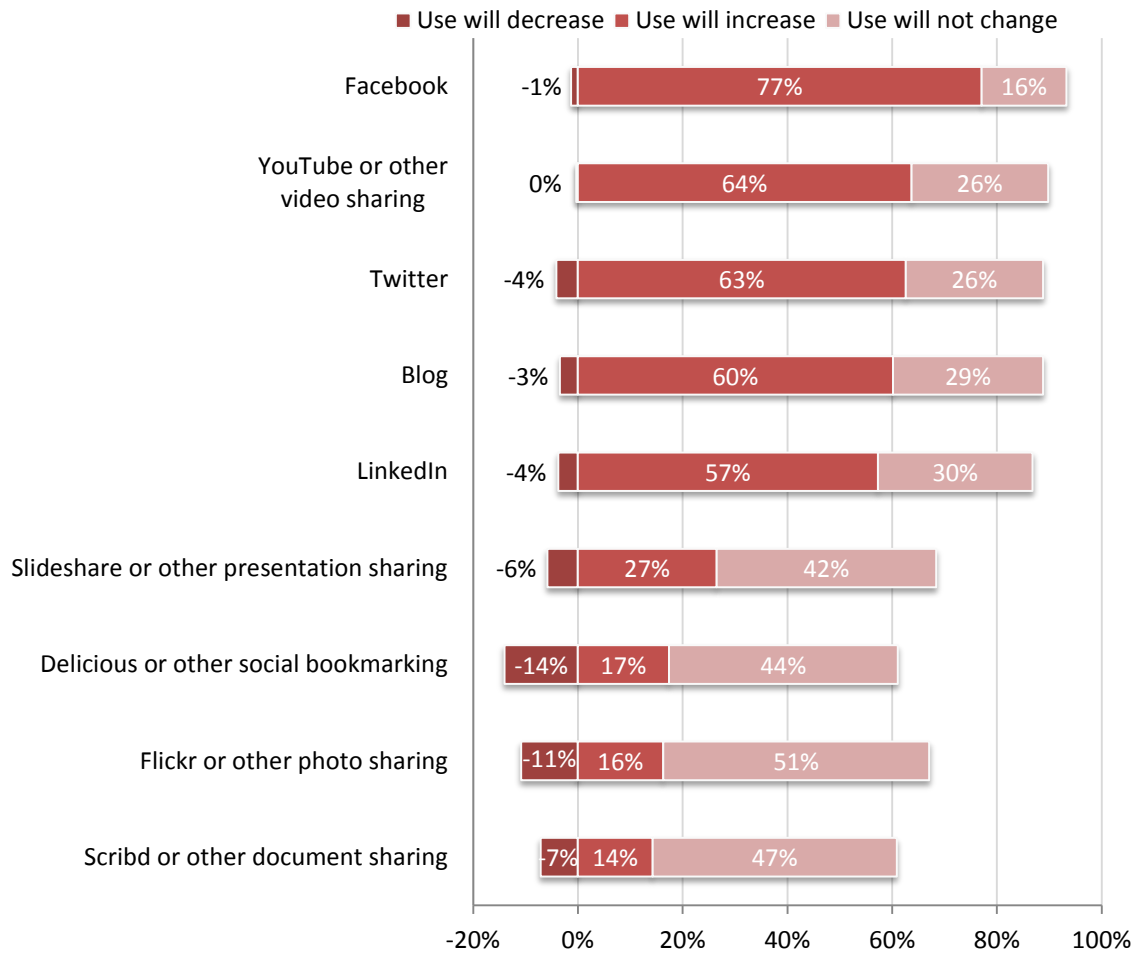
When asked how inbound marketing tactics are used to achieve extraordinary results, a number of agencies shared that results have been more ordinary than extraordinary. Others admitted that success has been slow in coming, thwarted in some cases by lack of client understanding, participation and support. Some were even so bold in stating that social media is not worth the effort.

> *"We find most clients romanticize about the concept of social media given the incredible growth of sites like Facebook, however they have poor strategies for using it. They general are stuck seeing it as a broadcast medium and can't see ROI in softer methods."* – Agency insight

CLIENTS EXPECTED TO INCREASE USAGE OF FACEBOOK, YOUTUBE, TWITTER

Chart: Expected usage levels of social media platforms by clients

Q. Based on the impact the following social media platforms have had on a typical client's search marketing campaigns in the last 12 months, how will the use of these platforms change in the next 12 months?



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Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Social media integration may be slow-going for many clients. Nevertheless, their results with the tactic over the last year are expected to drive an increase in their participation across all social media platforms. Most agencies anticipate that their clients will be more active on highly popular social platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Only a small percentage of agencies think it is likely that their clients will decrease their involvement on social platforms where they currently take part.

> *"Multi-party blogging for technically-oriented clients helped foster the client's brand benefit of thought leadership and provided strong lift to the website's traffic, especially from new, highly engaged visitors."* – Agency insight

AGENCY INSIGHTS ON USING INBOUND MARKETING TACTICS FOR EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS

Q. If your agency has achieved an extraordinary result for a client organization using inbound marketing tactics, please briefly describe the campaign strategy and tactics.

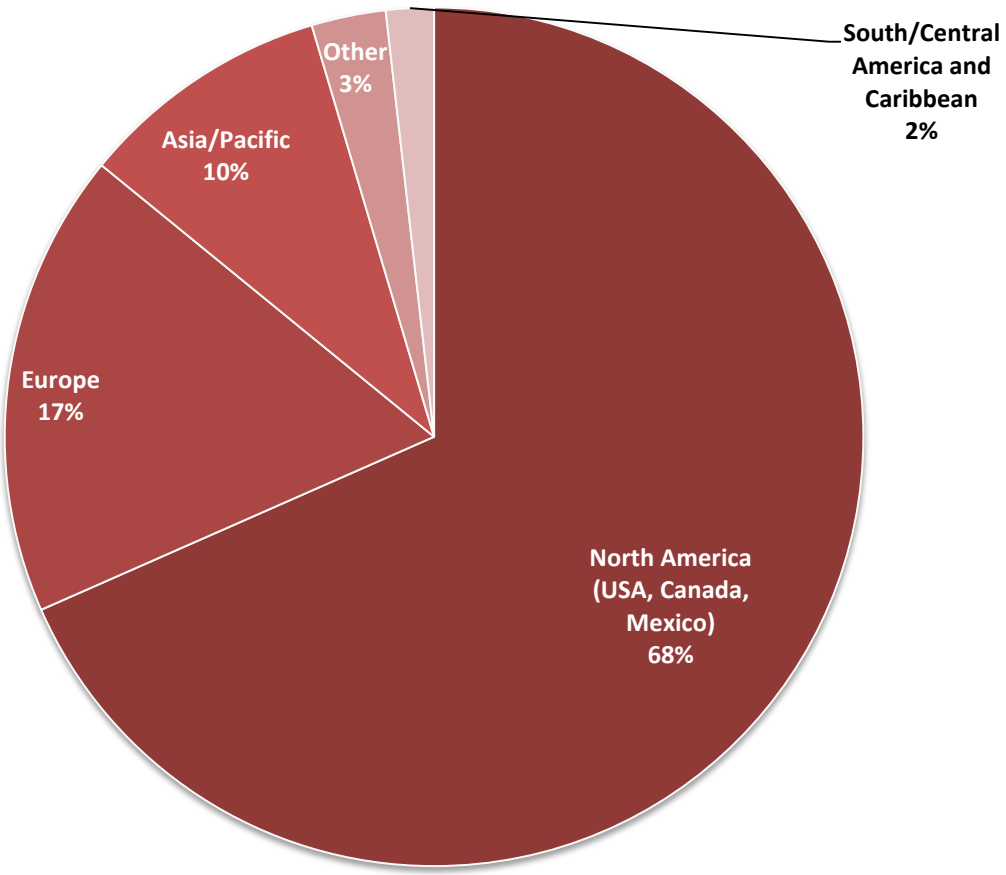
- Integration of gamification techniques.
- Online press releases result in exponential growth in inbound blog links.
- Press Releases worked well.
- Sharing documents and whitepapers on document sharing sites like Slideshare and Scribd.
- Social engagement
- Viral marketing through social media.
- Advanced article marketing
- In view of the intensive labor to keep social media relevant and updated, we are not convinced social media is productive for our clients who love the "buzz" but fail to appreciate and do the work required. This is a major "fad" that has not yet proved its worth.
- The strategies and tactics are always dependent on context and the product or service. There is no unique pattern
- We were already big users of Flickr and YouTube and had limited unsupported presence on the other social channels. Now, it seems everyone has drunk the social media Kool-Aid and we are throwing everything at it. Don't think this is sustainable or even smart in the long run. Blog, Scribd, LinkedIn? Yes. Facebook? Not so much.
- A Property Management client focusing on the highly competitive Southern California Vacation Rental market was having difficulty expanding their reach beyond their immediate location. We developed a series of videos and optimized them for their targeted keywords. Within three months their response rate increased by 50% and their search engine rankings for the expanded locales increased by more than 10 positions.
- Unfortunately, we have not been successful in convincing our clients to aggressively use social media opportunities
- Haven't had any extraordinary results to date. Most campaigns are in their early stages or have produced reasonable results.
- Mind mapping is at the core of what we do. We spend a week doing an inventory of every place our target audience and key influencers/publishers live online. This affords us a very accurate targeting mechanism to engage with them via high value content, relevant discussion/social threads and targeted media placements with pre-determined conversion paths according to our personas' information needs. We have increased one client's position using this strategy by making them the most dominant company in their industry. We "know" and continue to inventory every blogger, trade publisher, relevant discussion / social media influencer in this space. In the 3 years of our service, the client has grown by over $20,000,000.
- Most notable tactic was 9 million video views and impressions through the use of social bookmarking sites and blogger outreach.
- None have been outstanding. We struggle to get clients to create content, nevermind interesting, relevant content, on even a monthly basis.
- Tweets and re-Tweets work very well for new blog posts. Content sharing also can produce dofollow links from relevant websites.
- Inbound marketing has worked incredibly well for pushing online donations to a charity organization through the combined use of Facebook posts and email broadcasts.

- Have incorporated HubSpot into the social media mix and the combination of their methodology has been extremely effective.
- Growth in fans of a cause marketing Fan Page helped convince the client to develop a more advocate- focused content strategy by adding Facebook landing pages and additional tabs with registration form functionality.
- We make heavy use of branded and fact-based content (whitepapers, video, podcasts, polls/surveys) to engage the target audience.
- We have leveraged social media platforms mainly to help sites improve their natural search ranking.
- Have promising results appearing for Health & Beauty Clinic offering complimentary health workshops. Take up rate of registrations has increased by over 300% by listing as Facebook event and talking about the subject on forums and discussion groups with links back to the website. Early stages, but clients very happy with results so far.
- Our Facebook use will increase because it's cheap to do and easy to change. Period. We realize we are reaching a small percentage of our target market with Facebook. Commercial exploitation of Facebook will be weakening because it will be shown to be less effective than originally thought, and because the novelty is wearing off for Facebook users.
- Link all of the networks together and offer a special offer or something for free to gain users. Works like a charm.

APPENDIX

BENCHMARK SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

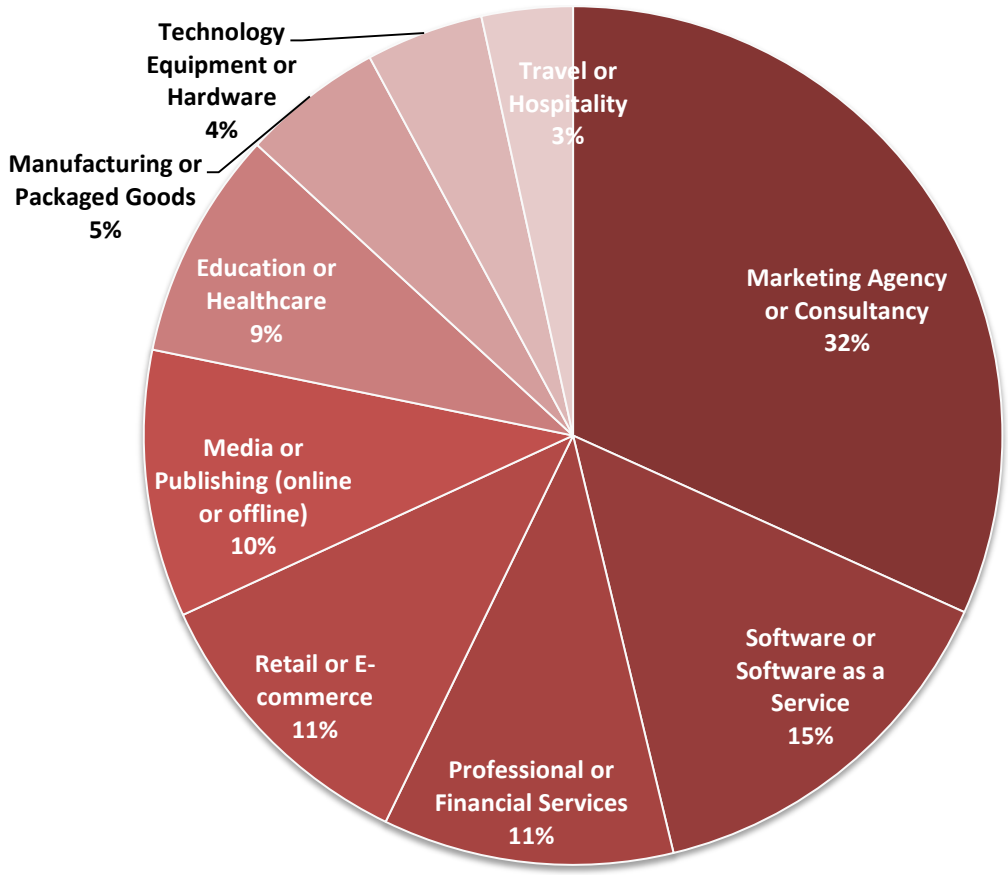
Chart: In which geographic region is your organization based?



marketingsherpa

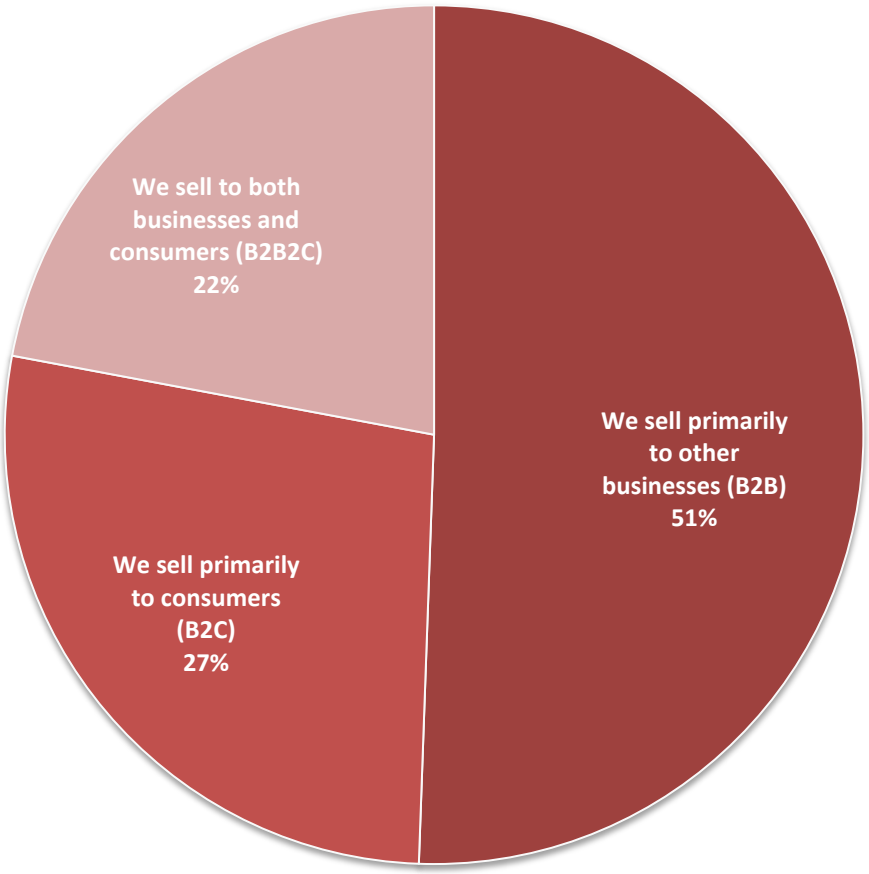
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Social Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Chart: Which best describes the type of organization you work for?



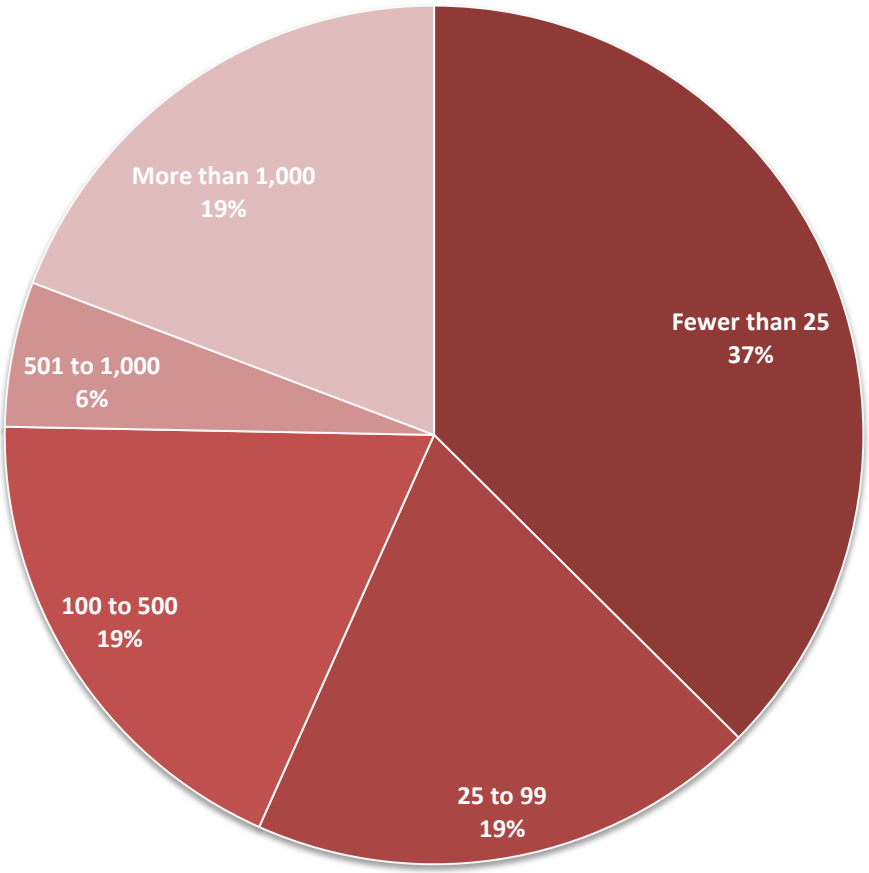
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Chart: Which best describes your organization's primary sales channel?



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Chart: Please select the approximate number of employees in your organization.



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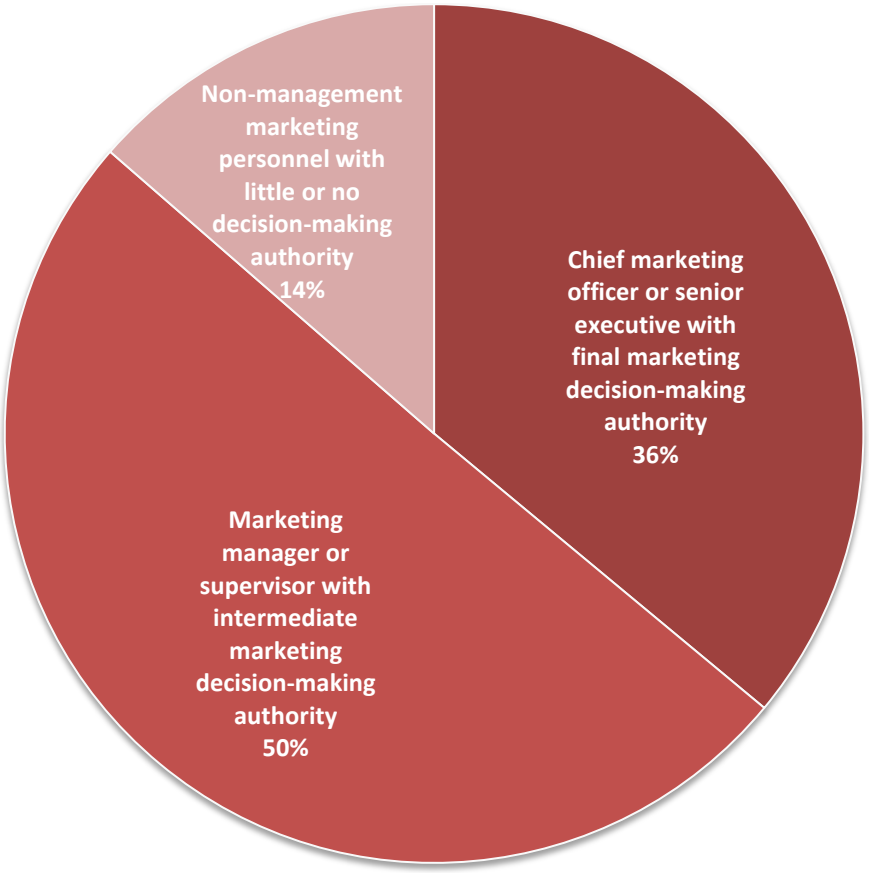
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Chart: Which best describes your role and decision-making authority in the organization?



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING GLOSSARY

AN A-TO-Z GLOSSARY OF COMMON SEARCH MARKETING TERMS

1st-Party Cookie: A piece of code placed on the user's browser by the website they are currently visiting that is used to track visitor behavior.
2nd-Tier Search Engine: Vague grouping of search engines/properties that can be simply any search property but Google, Yahoo!, MSN and AOL.
3rd-Party Cookie: A piece of code used to track user behavior, placed on the user's browser by someone other than the website they're currently visiting. Third-party cookies are used in web analytics and ad serving, among other areas.

A

Abandonment: As in call or site abandonment, measured when people leave a site, telephone call, etc. The abandonment rate measures the efficiency of the marketing tool.
Above the Fold: The part of a Web page that is visible without scrolling. Material in this area is considered more valuable because the reader sees it first. It refers to a newspaper term for the top half that's above the fold but, unlike a newspaper, email and Web page fold locations aren't predictable. Your fold may be affected by the users' preview pane, monitor size, monitor resolution and any headers placed by email programs.
Algorithm: A set of mathematical rules that describe or determine a circumstance or action. In the case of search engines, unique algorithms determine the ranking of websites returned within search queries. Although some of the qualities used to determine ranking (number of referring sites, meta tags, etc.) are known, the precise functioning of search engine algorithms is a closely kept secret to prevent the manipulation of the system.
Applet: Small programs, usually written in Java, or another web-friendly language that run within a web browser. Some applets may be negatively viewed by search engine spiders, affecting indexing and page rank
Application Program Interface (API): How a program (application) accesses another to transmit data. A client may have an API connection to load database information to an email vendor automatically and receive data back from the email.
Application Service Provider (ASP): A company that provides a web-based service. Clients don't have to install software on their own computers; all tasks are performed, or hosted, on the ASP's servers.
Average Adopter: Those who want to take advantage of new technologies but have lengthy processes in place to protect them from adverse reactions. They'll often wait for a big-name company to offer a solution in an area spearheaded by smaller, faster-moving companies.
Awareness: The first phase of the product marketing cycle, during which prospects gain awareness of the product/service.

B

Backlink: (or inbound links) A link pointing to a particular Web page.
Bait-and-Switch: (or agent name delivery or IP delivery) The attempt to feed search engine spiders different content from what is delivered to human website visitors in an attempt to optimize page ranking.

BANT: An acronym for the basic pieces of lead development information: budget, authority, need, time frame.
B2B: Business-to-Business (also B-to-B and BtoB).
B2C: Business-to-Consumer (also B-to-C and BtoC).
Black Hat: In SEO, also known as search engine spamming. Involves techniques that aim to deceptively or unethically show relevance or importance of a website per a specific key term. Black hat techniques are frowned upon by the search engines. If found out, websites utilizing black hat techniques are generally blacklisted by the search engines.
Blog (Weblog): A style of Internet publishing using content management software that allows for quick posting of journals, news and articles.
Buzz: The cumulative coverage of an issue, event, company, etc. in all media outlets and the population at large. Companies that measure buzz examine the volume and tone of coverage in both individual-generated media — blogs, message board postings, discussion lists — and mass media outlets.

C

Call-to-Action: In a marketing message, web ad, email, etc., the link or body copy that tells the recipient what action to take.
Cell: A segment of a list that receives different treatment specifically to see how it responds vs. the control (normal treatment).
CGI: Abbreviation for common gateway interface. It is a specification for transferring information between the web and a web server, such as processing email subscription or contact forms.
C-Level Executive: Any chief officer of a company. It can be a CIO, CEO, CFO, COO, CMO or others. CXO can refer to any C-level executive.
Clickthrough Rate: Total number of clicks on search ads, email link(s), etc. divided by the number of impressions, emails sent, etc. Also known as CTR.
Clickthrough: The process of clicking on a link in a search engine output page to visit an indexed site.
Client: Commonly, the user's computer, browser or application that requests information from another online application. Most client applications request information from a server-side application.
Collaborative Filtering: (or social filtering) Using the experience of previous searchers to return more relevant results.
Comparison Shopping Site: Similar to search engines, Comparison shopping sites or engines allow users to compare products from a variety of sources (websites). Merchants feed product data to the comparison sites and pay for leads or sales generated.
Conditional Content: Use of a database to allow or block content based on user behavior. This is done with "if" and "then" statements.
Consideration: The second phase of the buying cycle, when buyers are already familiar with a product, its features, benefits, prices, etc. Consideration is the phase during which relationship marketing using email, telemarketing, etc., is commonly used to warm the lead, or move the lead from consideration to the sales funnel.
Consumer Generated Media: Any of the many kinds of online content that are generated at the user level. Personal Web pages, such as those found on MySpace, are rudimentary examples. Blogs and podcasts are more evolved ones.
Content: All of the material on a Web page. Includes all words, images and links.

Content Rich: Refers to a Web page that contains relevant content to the topic at hand. Usually used to refer to the need to repeat keyword phrases within the body copy of a website. Search engine algorithms give higher ranking to a site that contains the keyword phrases that a user is searching for.
Conversion Rate: The percentage of visitors/users who "convert" on the action of a Web page or campaign. For example, actions may be purchasing, submitting a form, downloading content, calling a telephone number or making an extended site visit.
Conversion: The point at which a recipient of a marketing message performs a desired action. A conversion could be a monetary transaction, such as a purchase made after clicking a link. It could also include a voluntary act such as registering at a website, downloading a whitepaper, signing up for a web seminar or opting into an email newsletter.
Crawler: See "spider."
CRM: Customer relationship management. The software and processes of tracking the information that defines a prospect or customer relationship. CRM systems typically store contact and interaction data, such as number and dates of touches, products considered.
Customer Lifetime Value: A measure of the total amount the customer will spend with a merchant during their relationship. Usually calculated by their spending per year multiplied by the average number of years they are likely to be a customer.

D

Deep Linking: Links that direct the person clicking on the link to a page beneath the homepage of a website. Sometimes it is used to mean linking to a deep page on someone else's website, which has different legal issues than simply directing someone to a homepage.
Deferred conversion: Sales that take place after visiting a website. With many online marketing tactics, it's not always possible to discern whether a sale took place as the result of some past interaction.
DHTML: The technology on which floating online ads are built. DHTML can be made to sit on top of the page, incorporating movement and sound. DHTML is not typically blocked by pop-up/pop-under blocking software.
Domain Name System (DNS): How computer networks locate Internet domain names and translate them into IP addresses. The domain name is the actual name for an IP address or range of IP addresses, e.g., MarketingSherpa.com. See **Reverse DNS**.
Dynamic Content: Web page information that changes according to rules set by the client or server and can adapt to instructions. For example, a dynamic content system makes it possible for unique homepages to be delivered to millions of Yahoo! users whose personal preferences have been set.

E - F

Early Adopter: The first to experiment and benefit from new technologies. They are often beta testers and tech companies themselves.
Eye Tracking: A type of Web page testing that follows the eye movements of participants to gauge how they interact with the page.

F

Fast Follower: Someone who stays informed about new technologies as they appear and move to integrate them as soon as they are proven effective. The sale process can be a long one with fast followers because they want information long before they are ready to buy.
Firewall: A program or set of programs designed to keep unauthorized users or messages from accessing a private network. The firewall usually has rules or protocols that authorize or prohibit outside users or messages.

G - H

Gateway Page: A page submitted to a search engine that's designed to give the spider what it's looking for (fitting the algorithm for that particular search engine) and increasing the relevance of the site. The search engines have actively banned this practice. Most, if not all, search engines seek to discover and eliminate the use of these pages because it is another form of "gaming," or trying to fool, the algorithms.
Heat Map: A map of a Web page that displays where the consumers most likely direct their eyesight on the page.
Hidden Text: A black hat technique in which text is invisible to readers (same color as background, an HTML comment, etc.) but is visible to spiders. Most search engines can detect this practice, and pages suffer the consequences in rank.

K

Keyword: A word that forms all or part of a search engine query.
Keyword Density: The percentage of a page's text that is made up of a single keyword. For example, if a 500-word press release has the keyword "security" in it ten times, it has a 2% keyword density.
Keyword Phrase: A phrase that forms all or part of a search engine query.

L

Laggards: A group defined by their attitudes toward change and innovation. Laggards depend on tried-and-true technology and are more concerned with stability and security than cutting-edge ideas.
Landing Page: The destination Web page for people responding to an advertisement, designed specifically for that campaign and audience. The campaign might be in any medium, but is typically search or online-ad driven and email. The key difference between a homepage and landing page is that the former must be all things to all visitors, while the latter should be very narrowly designed for the campaign and, perhaps, for a segment of the audience responding to it.
Latency: In regards to search marketing and conversion, the likelihood of a conversion to take place after an initial visit. It is estimated that, in some categories, 85% of conversions are latent.
Lead Development: The process of moving a qualified lead toward becoming a prospect (someone in the sales funnel).
Lifestage: In marketing, the division of life into stages based on age and family status, from "young singles" to "empty nesters."
Link Bait: Useful, interesting or entertaining website content that encourages other websites to link to it.
Linkrot: Term describing the process of links going bad over time, either because a website has shut down or a site has stopped supporting a unique landing page provided in an email promotion.
Log File Analysis: Combing through website log files to study Web visitor behavior.

Long Tail: Refers to keywords usually with three or more words and lower search volumes. These terms target a niche audience and tend to convert at a high rate.

M

Meta tags: HTML components that can include page titles, descriptions, and keywords. These components are visible to search engine spiders but do not affect the appearance of the Web page.
Meta Search: A search that aggregates the results from a variety of search engines by submitting the query to them and consolidating the results.
Microsite: A cross between a landing page and a regular website. These sites often have their own domain names and even separate brands from the organization's core brand. They are used when a marketer wants to offer a user an extended experience for branding or educational purposes. In fact, a site the visitor might even return to a microsite as a destination.
Mobile Search: Conducting a search query from a handheld device with wireless internet connection, such as a smart phone or blackberry.
Modality: Generally used as a synonym for "category;" for example, "Direct mail is among the oldest modalities of offline marketing."

N - O

Natural Results: See **Organic Listing**, **Algorithm**.
Offline Conversion: Sales or other conversion events that take place in the real world, typically in a brick-and-mortar store.
Organic Listing: (AKA natural listings) Search page result that is provided free and based on the search algorithms of the search engine. A site might have a high "organic" ranking without paying the search engine anything at all. Conversely, a high spending advertiser in a keyword category might not appear anywhere near the top organic results.

P

Paid Placement: (or Search PPC) Ad model in which search engines return paid advertising when appropriate queries are used. For example, if someone searches for "new cars," a paid ad from a major auto manufacturer may appear. Advertisers bid on specific keywords that are contained in search queries and attach specific text ads to them. Google, Yahoo! and Bing are the largest paid placement search engines.
Pay-per-call: A tactic in which merchants (often local retailers) pay search properties for offline telephone calls that are generated from their pages.
Pay-per-click (PPC): Paid search advertising is usually based on this model, where advertisers pay a bounty for each click originating from a source of traffic.
Penetration: In search, the percentage of the total potential search engine users who conduct a search on a given engine or site.
Persona-Based Design: Personas are virtual customers; useful templates based on common customer types that can guide site design, offer testing, etc.
Personalized Search: Search engine feature that determines a search engine user's results based on that user's search history.

Personalization: A targeting method in which a Web page or email message appears to have been created only for a single recipient. Personalization techniques include adding the recipient's name in the subject line or message body, or an offer reflecting purchasing, link clicking, or transaction history.
Phase I: Trial: For the purpose of this report, Search Marketing Benchmark survey respondents who indicated that they had no repeatable process for performing SEO.
Phase II: Transition: For the purpose of this report, Search Marketing Benchmark survey respondents who indicated that they had an informal process that was randomly performed for SEO.
Phase III: Strategic: For the purpose of this report, Search Marketing Benchmark survey respondents who indicated that they had a formal process for SEO that was routinely performed.
Podcast: A way to publish audio content to the Internet for download to multimedia players.
Privacy Policy: A clear description of how your company uses the information it gathers about visitors, users and/or customers. Links to privacy policies are generally included on landing pages, email registrations, lead forms, etc. as a best practice.
Prospect: A lead that has progressed from the stage of qualified lead into the sales funnel. However, the term is often heard used as a synonym for qualified lead.
Purchase Phase: The final stage of the buying process, when consumers commit to purchasing a product.

Q-R

Qualified Lead: While the definition varies from marketer to marketer, a qualified lead is generally the next step up from inquiry — the lead fits some criteria to warrant lead development. It may be as simple as "anyone who searched for this term is qualified" to "they only corresponded to three of five criteria from our registration form, so they're not qualified."
Query: A word, phrase or string of words used to define the response from a search engine or database.
Ranking: A Web page's position in search engine results for a particular keyword/search phrase. Higher rankings typically indicate better SEO, high volume and quality traffic.
Real time search: A search engine's ability to index Web content and index it in real time without delay. Content commonly displayed in real time includes social media content.
Recreational Shopper: Someone who is part of the approximately 40% of the population who say they like to shop and consider shopping a hobby or fun activity.
Referrer: (or referring URL) The address of the Web page from which a visitor arrived.
Research phase: Initial stage of the buying process, when consumers are beginning to understand a product and its role in the market.
Robots.txt: A website command in HTML that tells search engine spiders to stop indexing a site or page.
ROI (Return on Investment): Either mathematical or anecdotal analysis of payback for a project. Mathematical calculation for ROI equals ((Return –investment) / (investment) x 100).
RSS (Really Simple Syndication): XML based content distribution method that powers many blogs and other types of content websites. RSS gathers "feeds" of information from user-designated sources. The "feeds" include clickable headlines and blurbs about full pieces of content. RSS is seen as an alternative to some types of email communication, but has yet to become an established marketing medium.

S

Sales Cycle: The time between first direct contact (may simply be a registration on a website) and ultimate sale. Sales cycle is a measure of efficiency of the sales organization.
Scraping: The process of grabbing keywords from competitors' websites.

Search Engine Marketing (SEM): All of the tactics and versions of search engine advertising, including search engine optimization (SEO) and pay-per-click marketing (PPC).
Search Engine Optimization (SEO): The practice of designing and writing Web pages to be attractive to the search engines. SEO attempts to place pages highly within the "natural" listings on search engines, as opposed to paid ads and includes on-site optimization as well as off-site optimization.
Searchjacking: Optimizing a page for highly sought after search terms, even though the page doesn't have anything to do with the subject matter. Used to generate large volumes of (highly irrelevant) traffic.
Segmenting Log File: A process that goes beyond simply correlating keywords by frequency with later conversion. Often keywords that occur infrequently can be top converters. The inverse is also true.
SERP(s): Search engine results page(s).
Server: A host computer that fulfills requests from other computers such as information, data, Web pages, emails, images, etc.
Share of Wallet: A measure of how much business in a given category is owned by a merchant. Of everything that someone might be expected to spend on product X this year, how much are they spending with merchant Y?
Shopping Search Engine: See "Comparison shopping site."
SKU (Stock Keeping Unit): Any product, part or accessory that is numbered. Often used to refer to the number of products sold by a merchant.
SMS (Short Message Service): A feature of mobile phones that allows the transmission of short text messages from one device to another.
Social Marketing: The planning, execution and measurement of marketing tactics deployed through social media sites and involving the voluntary actions of prospects and consumers.
Social Media: Includes websites that contain user-generated content such as customer review sites, social networking sites, blogs, social bookmarking sites, forums, etc.
Spider: (AKA bot or crawler) A small program that surfs the web to index information for a search engine.
Spidering: The process of surfing the Web, storing URLs and indexing keywords, links and text. Because there is far too much information available to index it all, every search engine has unique (and highly proprietary) ways in which it saves time and space.
Stemming: An advanced search quality of some search engines that allows the engine to return results containing the same word stem as the keyword. Example: A "stemming" return for "marketing" might return results for "marketer."
Stop word: Words that are so common they don't affect search results, such as "a," "an" "the," etc.

T-U

Thank-you Page: Web page that appears after user has submitted an order or a form online – often a receipt.
Unique Visitor: A single visitor to a website determined by the number of unique IP addresses that hit the site.
URL (Uniform Resource Locator): The web address for a page, always beginning with http:// (or https:// for a secure page) and followed by "www." (or variations, although some URLs are set up to not include this information) and the domain name, e.g. http://www.marketingsherpa.com.
Universal Search: A search engine's ability to deliver multimedia content in search results pages, including images, videos, news, local information, social media sites, and books.
Usability: The study of how people interact with their environment. In online marketing, a specialized form that focuses on Web page design.

V-W

Vendor: Any company that provides a service.
Video Search: A search engine's ability to "crawl" the Web for video content and index it on a search results page.
White Hat: In SEO, this refers to ethical and acceptable methods of optimizing a website to achieve higher search engine rankings and increased traffic.
Word-of-mouth (WOM): An area of marketing that attempts to measure and/or harness the power of personal recommendations. With the explosion of blog readership, WOM has become a hot topic in virtually every industry.

X

XML feed: A method of feeding page information to search engines using XML. Some feeds are paid on a cost-per-click or subscription basis.
XML: Extensible Markup Language, a new language that promises more efficient data delivery over the web. XML does nothing itself. It must be implemented using "parser" software or XSL.

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