

Search Engine **Journal**®

STATE  SEO

2024

In-House Report

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Introduction

Welcome to the State Of SEO: In-House Report, one of two supplementary reports SEJ releases alongside the State Of SEO.

In-house SEO professionals fell in line with the main survey results on many of the overarching themes of this year's State of SEO. But they also differed from other respondents in some fascinating ways when answering questions.

In-house respondents agree with the others on difficulties with content strategy and production as well as the disruptive potential of generative AI.

They're also focusing on SEO fundamentals and expanding their teams, just like their agency counterparts.

In both the main report and the agency report, we noted that SEO professionals are turning to measurement metrics that allow them to:

- Better understand audiences and user behavior.
- Map SEO performance to revenue and business goals.

This holds true with in-house respondents as well.

Compared to other respondents, however, they are more concerned about losing third-party cookies and internal communication.

While in-house SEO professionals have a similarly positive outlook on AI to others, they were less likely to say that AI presents significant new business opportunities.



Communication and alignment issues look very different for in-house teams than agency teams. In agencies, tasks like managing expectations, educating clients about SEO, and securing budget through new sales are often handled by specialists in those areas. Salespeople and account managers handle much of the most difficult communication.

But in-house, SEO teams have to be their own advocates. There are no sales specialists inside the SEO team to convince executives that an activity needs more budget. And no client relationship specialists to educate stakeholders and address concerns. If there's a problem with SEO performance, there's no account to save – there's a boss to explain it to.

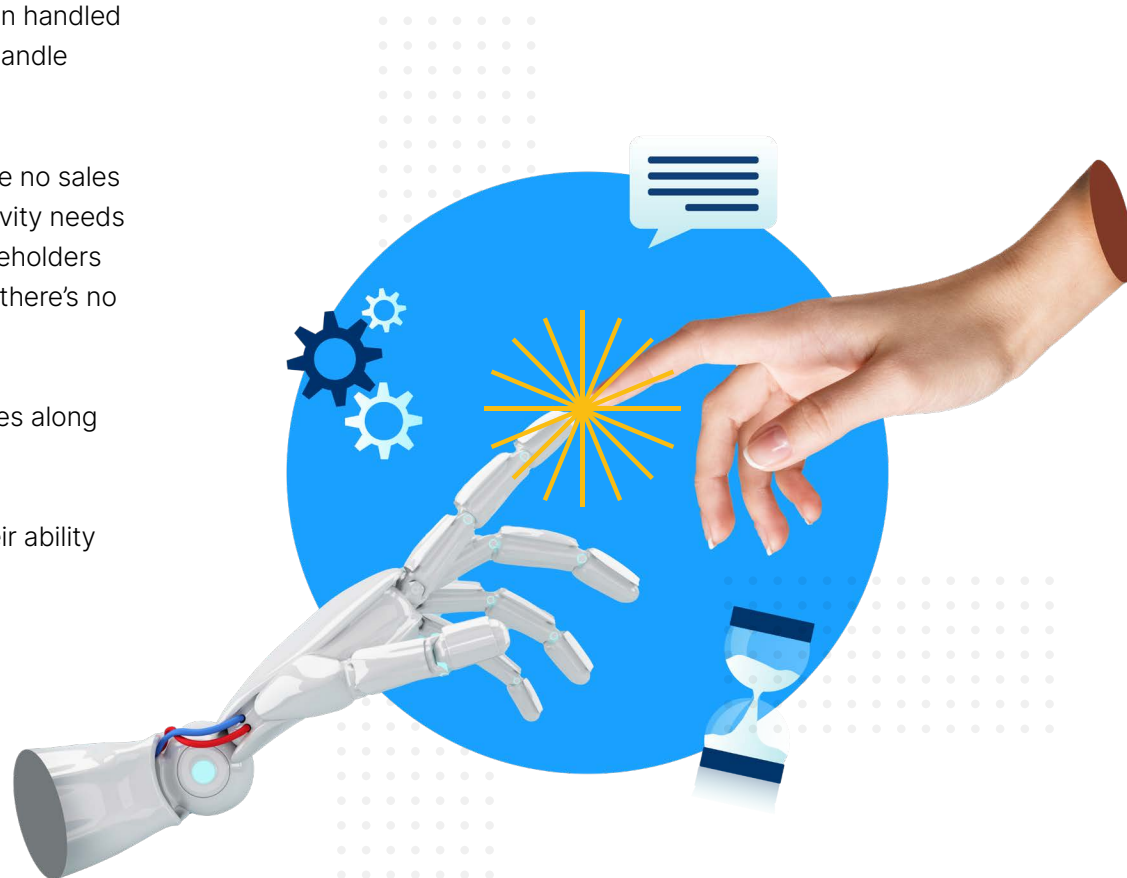
In-house respondents to the survey encounter significant challenges along the lines of internal communication and approval.

They're also concerned about updates to platforms that impact their ability to deliver and communicate results: third-party cookies, AI-driven SERP updates, algorithm changes.

Their concerns come from different places, but in the end, they look relatively similar to their agency counterparts. The solutions they see, too, are similar. Tying performance metrics to business goals and audience insights is a common thread between these two very different roles.

If you're hungry for more data about the state of the SEO industry, download the other two reports in the 2024 series:

- **The State Of SEO: Disruptions • AI • Content Strategies.**
- **The State Of SEO: Agency Report.**



Click or tap this icon ☰ on the lower right of each page to navigate back to the Table of Contents.



In-House Experience & Hiring Trends

Experience Of In-House Teams

The largest group (37.6%) of in-house respondents have five to 10 years of experience.

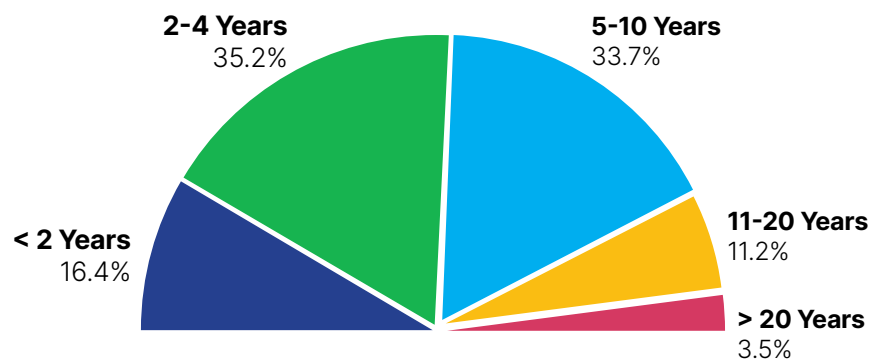
This is different from the overall results, where the largest group of respondents have two to four years of experience.

But there's also a slightly higher number of brand new respondents from the in-house group, which balances the overall experience level.

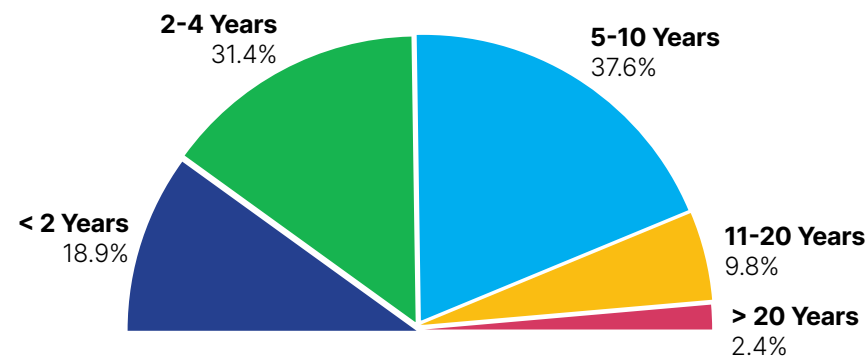
Respondents with more than five years of experience:

Total Survey	In-House Only
48.4%	49.8%

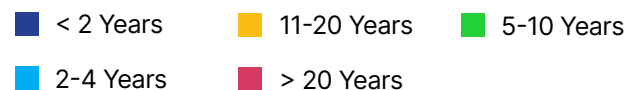
Experience: Total Respondents



Experience: In-House Respondents

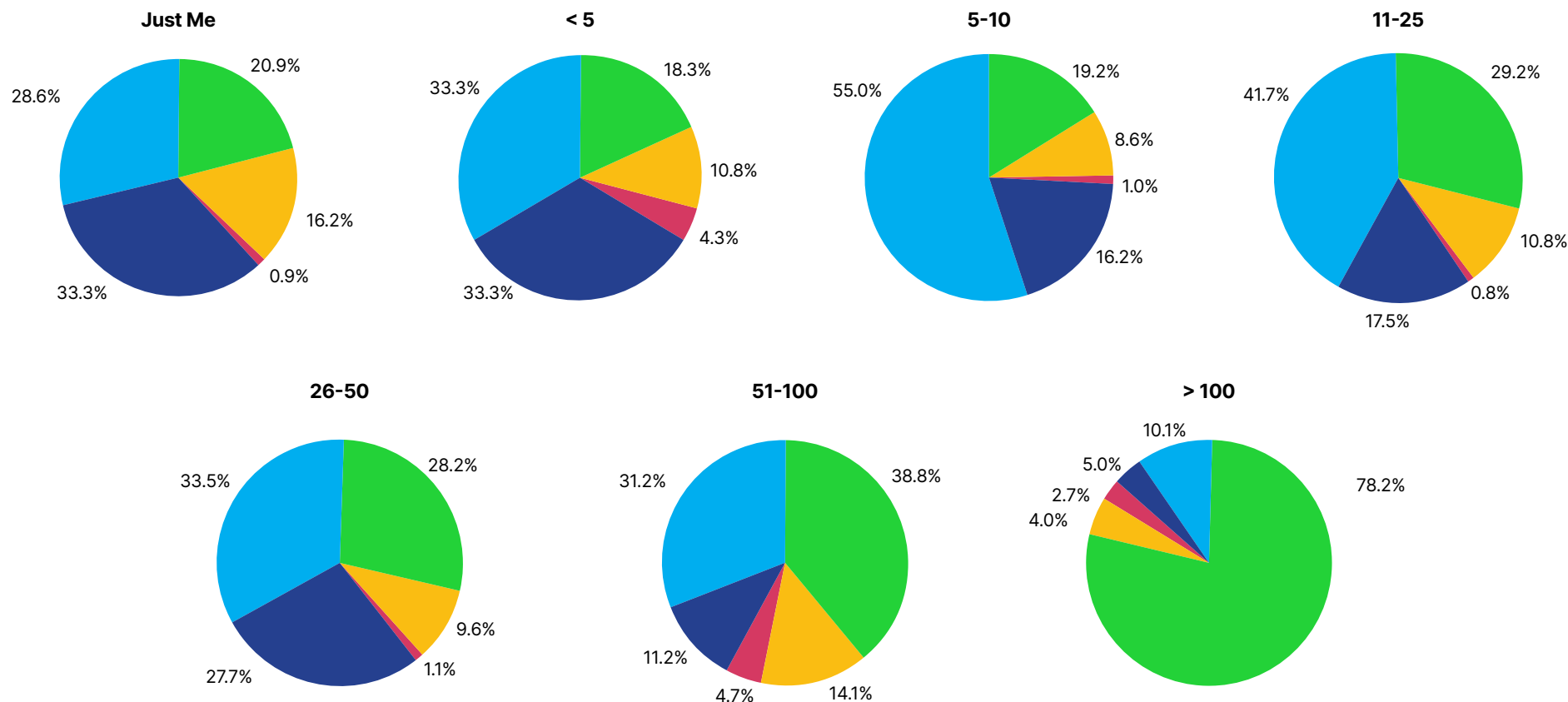


In-House Experience By Company Size



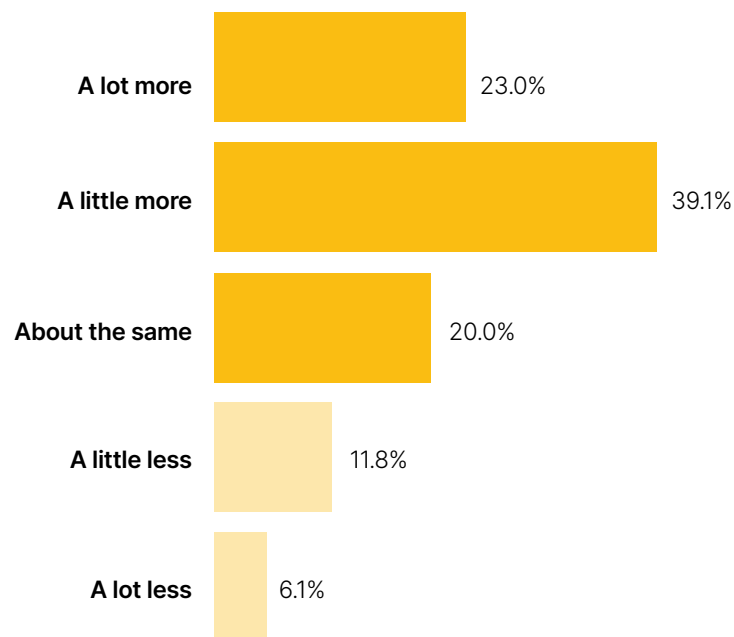
Respondents from larger companies tended to have more experience.

There's a big jump in the number of respondents with five to 10 years of experience in companies of more than 50 people.



Hiring: In-House Teams

Do You Expect To Hire More Or Less In The Next 12 Months?

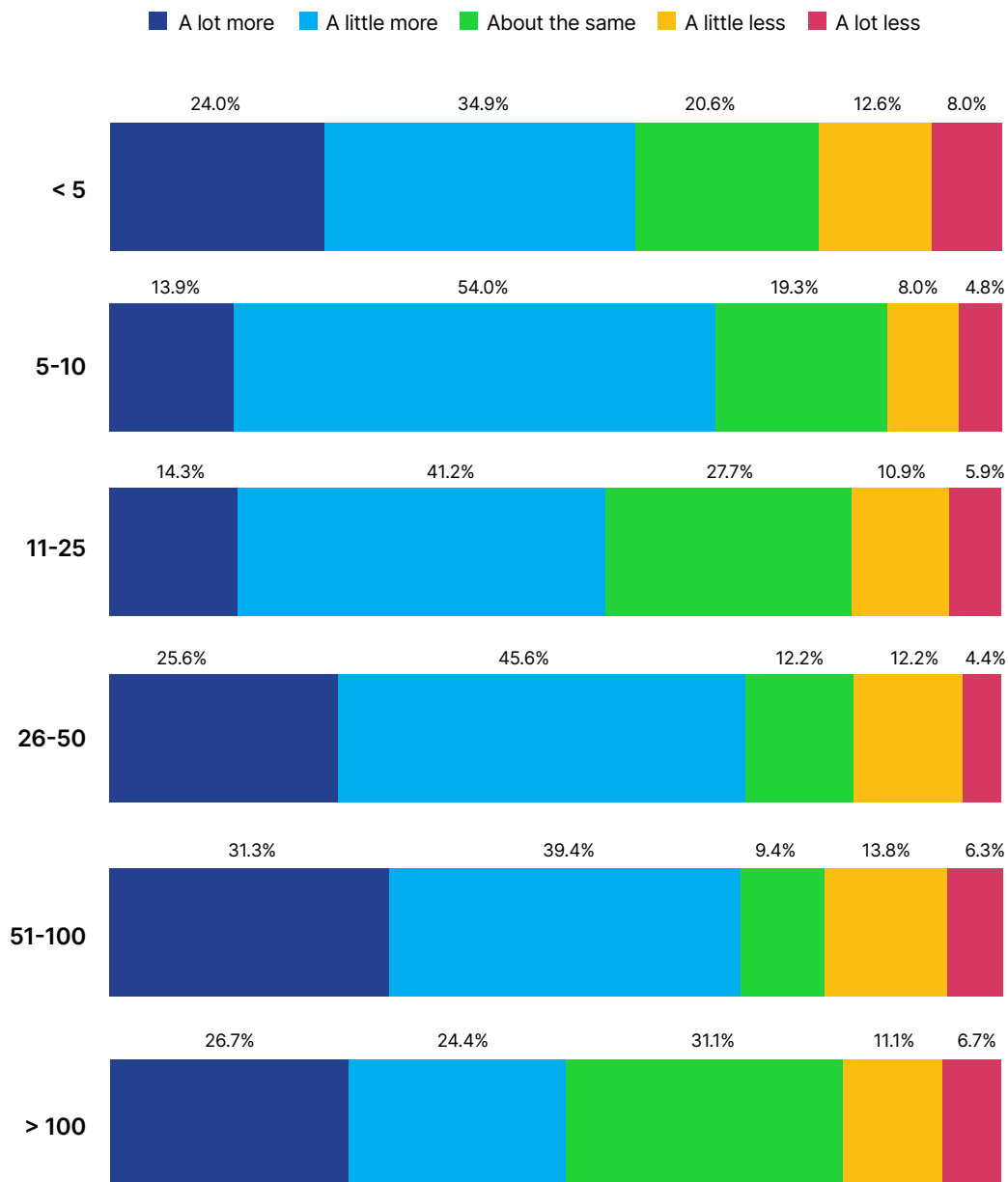


For the most part, these hiring trends hold true regardless of company size. Although, very large companies (100+) seem to be the least likely to increase hiring and the most likely to keep their pace the same as the previous year.

62.1% of respondents expect hiring increases in the next year.

For the most part, if teams aren't actively increasing hiring, their pace looks set to remain the same.

Hiring Outlook By Company Size



Job Websites

Are the top channel that in-house respondents use to find talent.

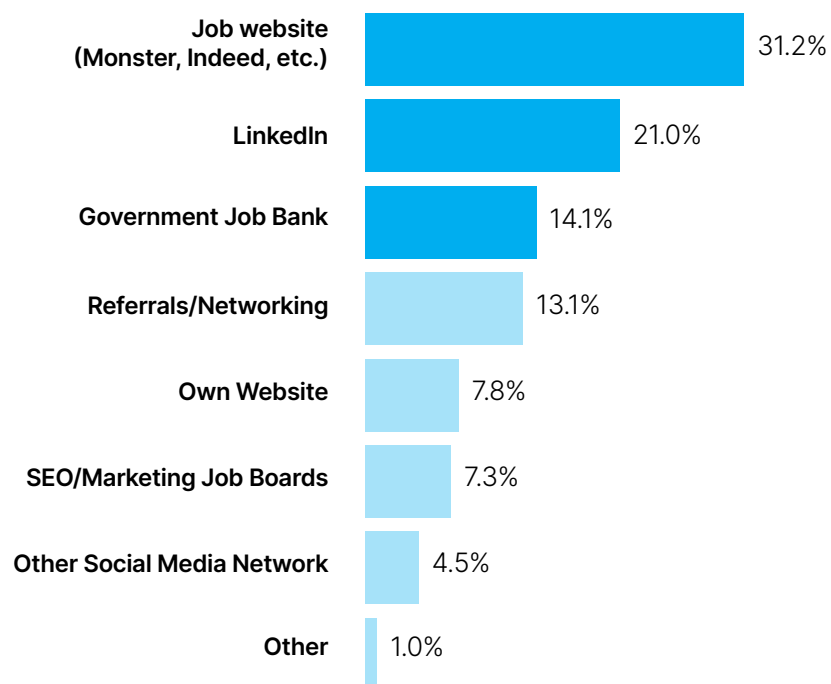


LinkedIn

The second most-preferred channel for hiring overall, and the top channel for large companies (100+).



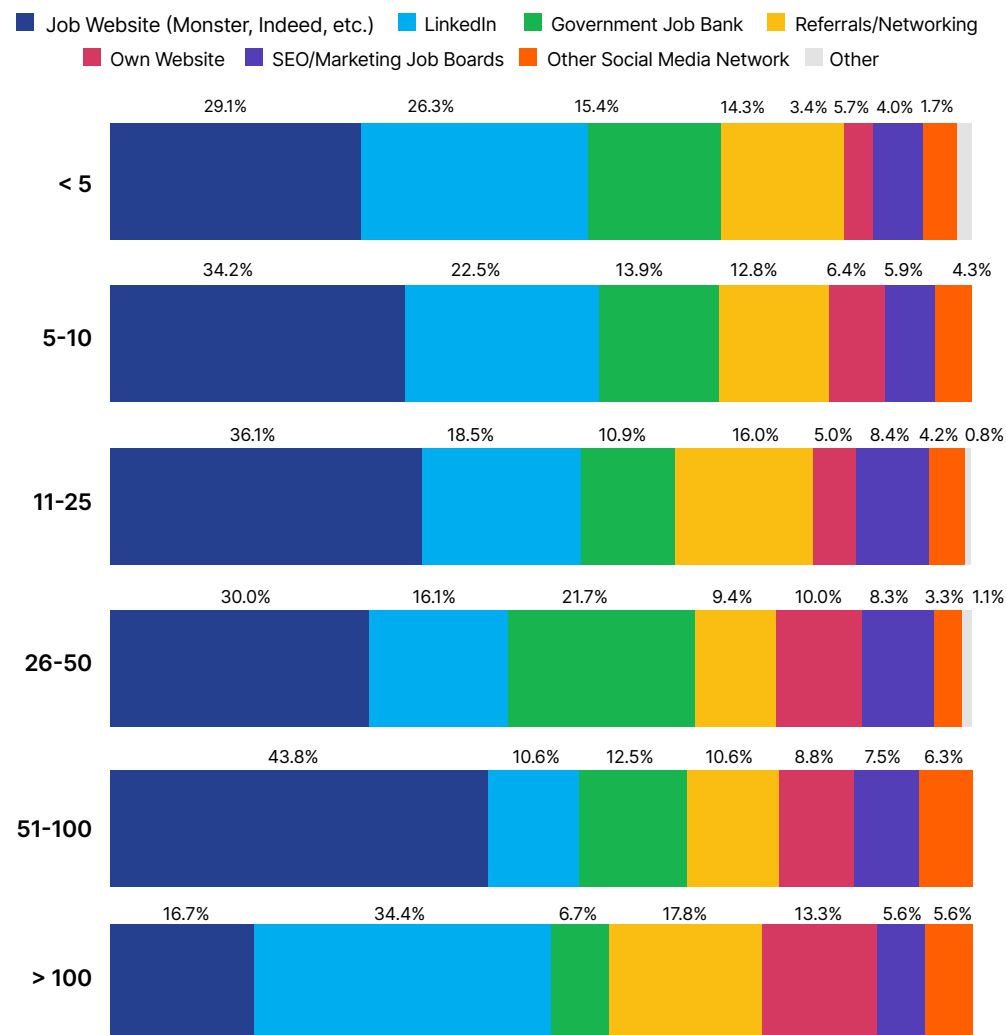
Where Do You Find The Strongest Talent When Hiring?



Very small companies (under five people) and very large companies (over 100 people) are the most likely to use LinkedIn.

A personal LinkedIn strategy can be an excellent way to build a career move.

Talent Channels By Company Size



In-House Focus Areas: Productivity & New Business

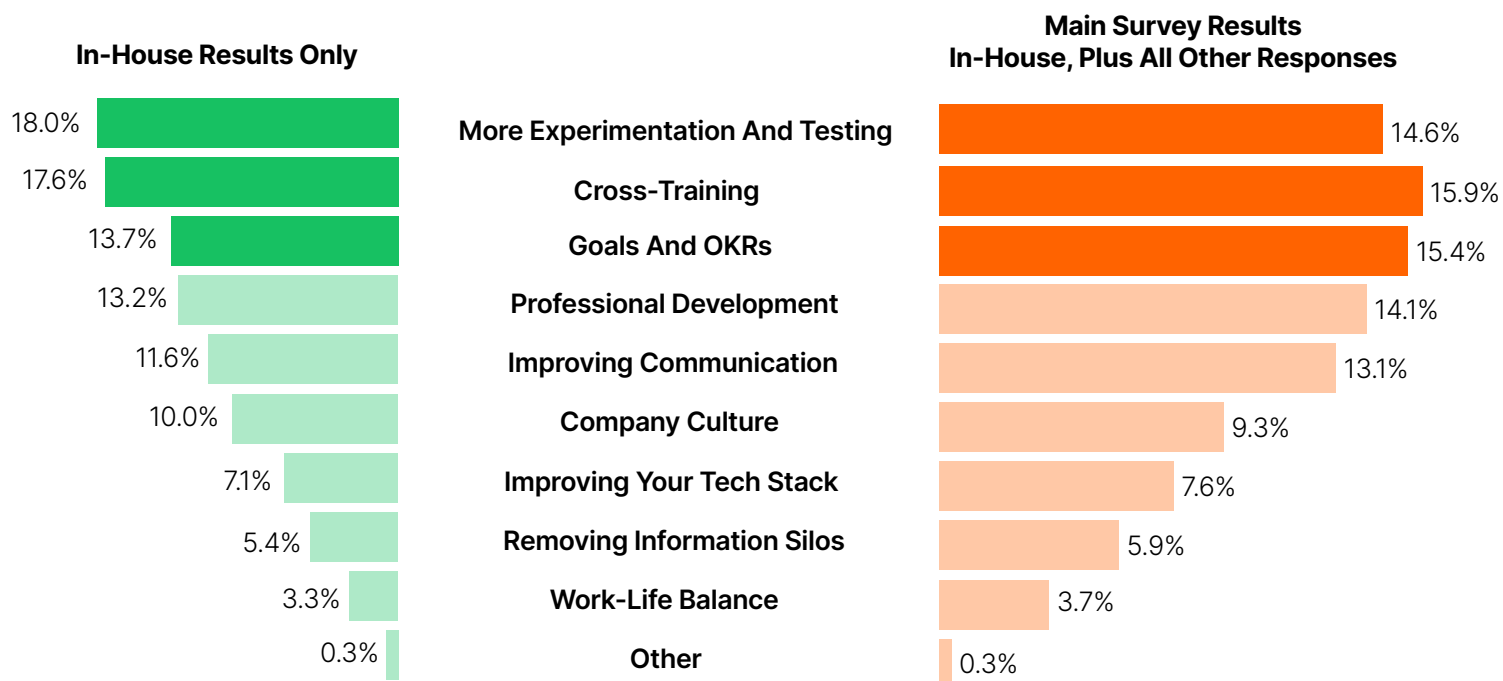
Experimentation And Testing

In-House teams will prioritize experimentation and testing, cross-training, and goals to empower their teams.

Overall, they had the same top five picks as the main survey.

But they're more focused on experimentation, giving it their top spot.

What Will You Focus On Next Year To Make Your Team More Productive?



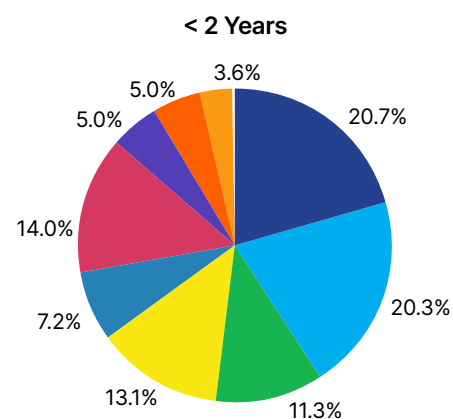
Cross-training is of highest interest to SEO professionals with fewer than five years of experience as well as those with more than 20 years.

It's most critical for those with two to four years of experience. That group is likely developing new skills in anticipation of career advancement.

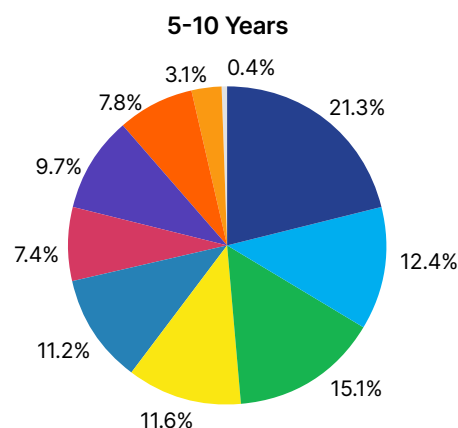
What Will You Focus On Next Year To Make Your Team More Productive? By Years Of Experience

More Experimentation And testing Cross-Training Goals And OKRs Professional Development Improving Communication
Company Culture Improving Your Tech Stack Removing Information Silos Work-Life Balance Other

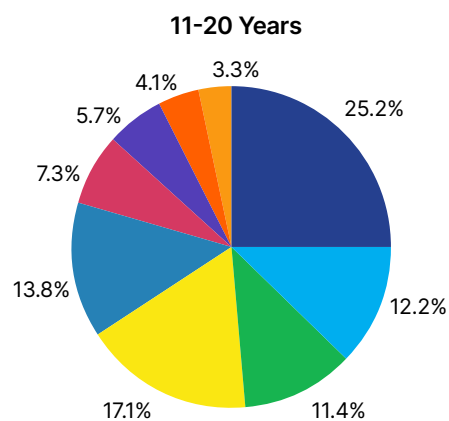
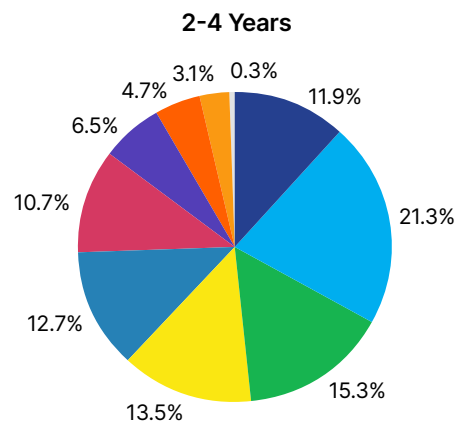
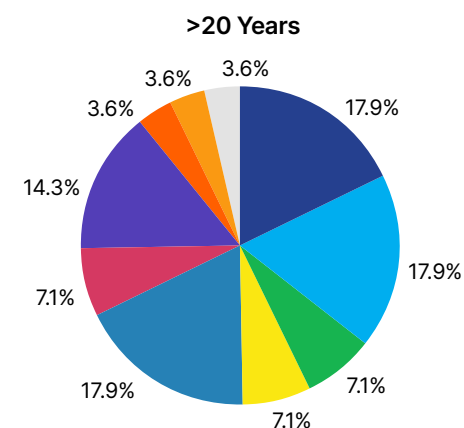
Less Than Five Years Of Experience



Five To 20 Years Of Experience



More Than 20 Years Of Experience



One notable difference is that in-house respondents with more than 20 years of experience are more focused on communication than any other group, giving it equal weight to experimentation and cross-training. The three tie for first place in this group.

Google Search

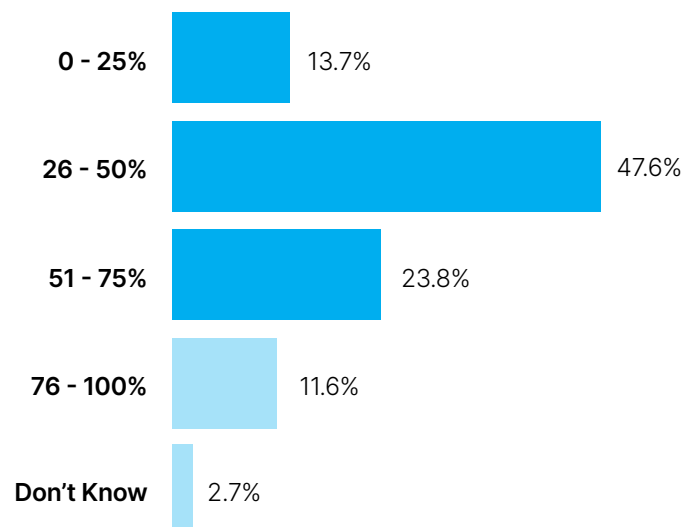
Is the leading channel driving new business for in-house respondents.



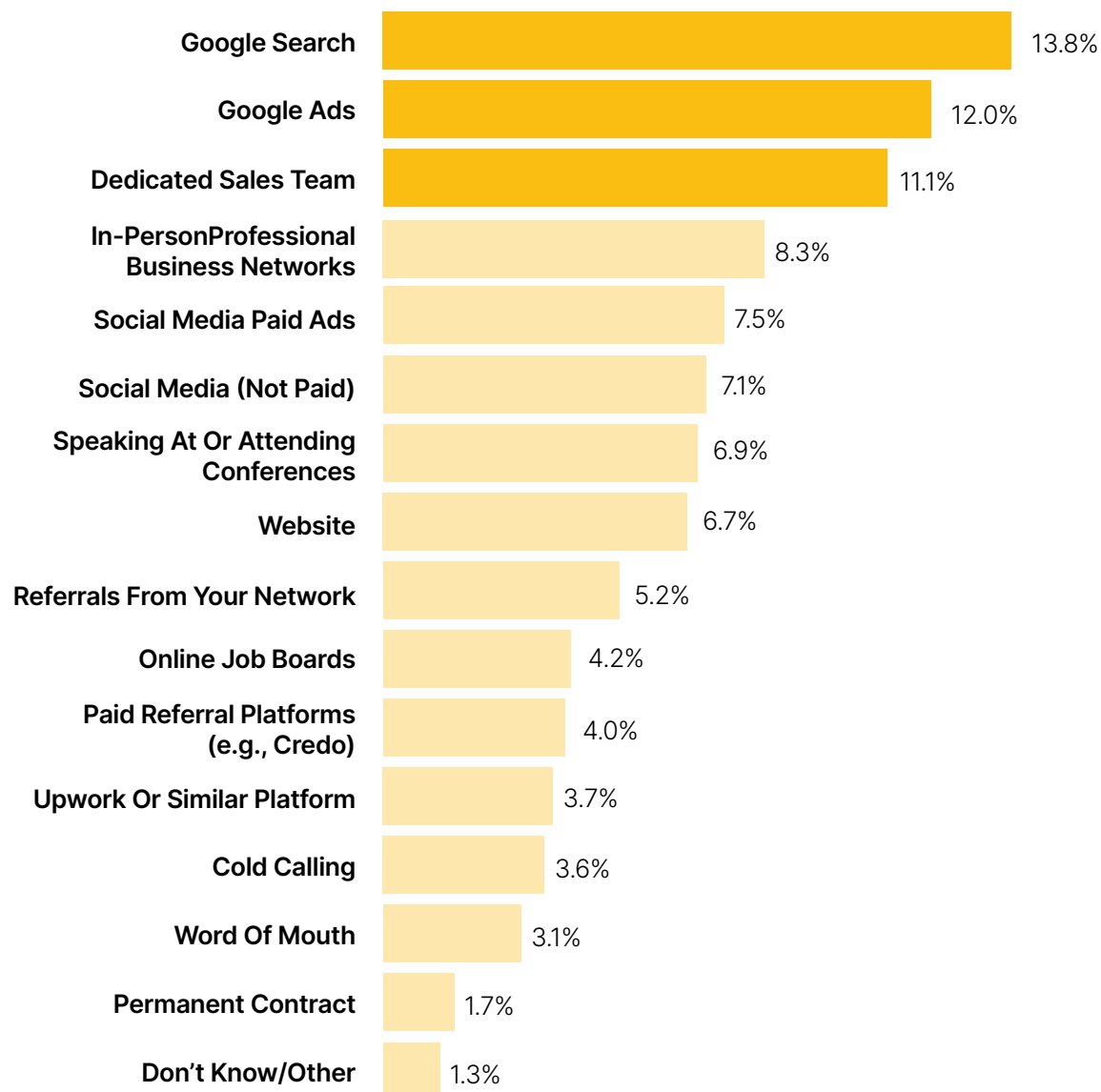
However, organic search accounts for less than 50% of total web traffic, according to 61.3% of respondents.

It seems that many in-house teams see room for improvement in the organic performance of the websites they work on.

What Percentage Of Your Website's Traffic Would You Estimate Comes From Organic Search?



Which Channels Drive The Most New Business For The Company You Work For?

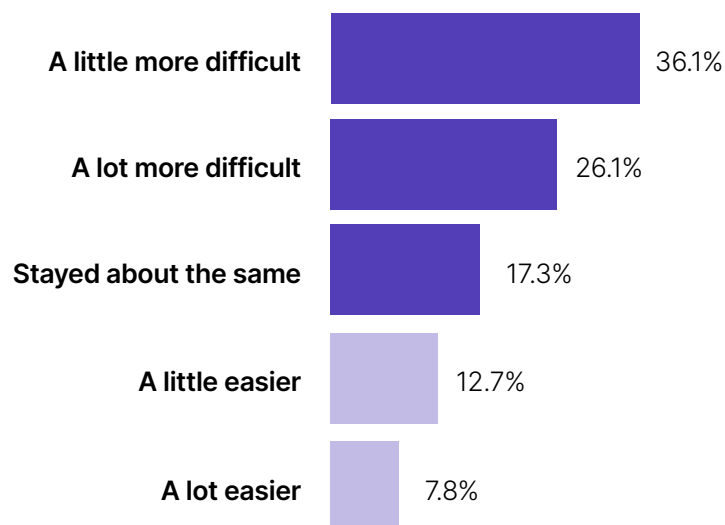




In-House Barriers To Success

SERP Competition & Algorithm Impacts

How Has SERP Competition Changed?



59.4%

of in-house respondents say that Google updates and algorithm changes have helped their SEO efforts.

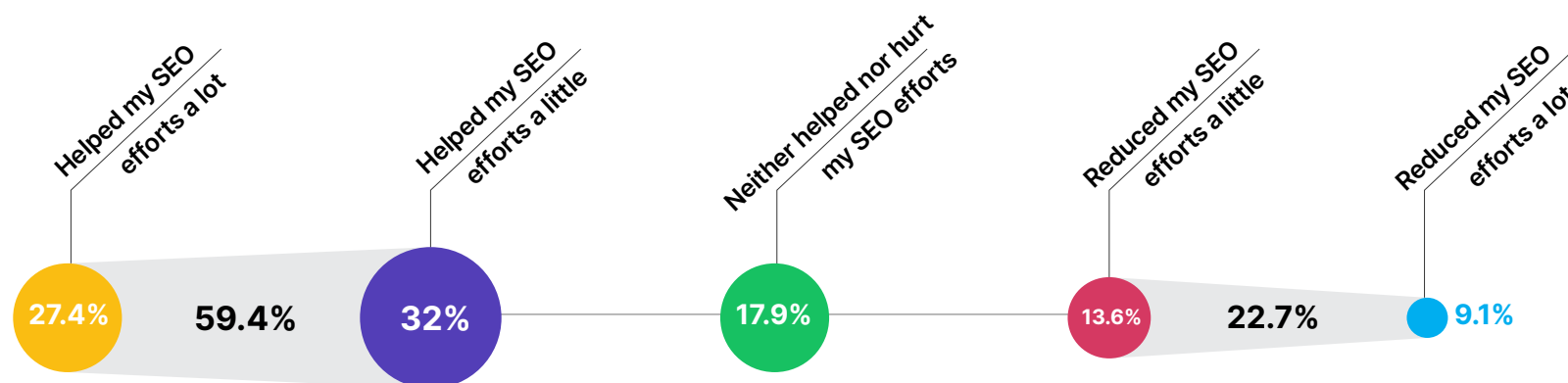


62.2%

of in-house respondents find SERP competitiveness more difficult this year.

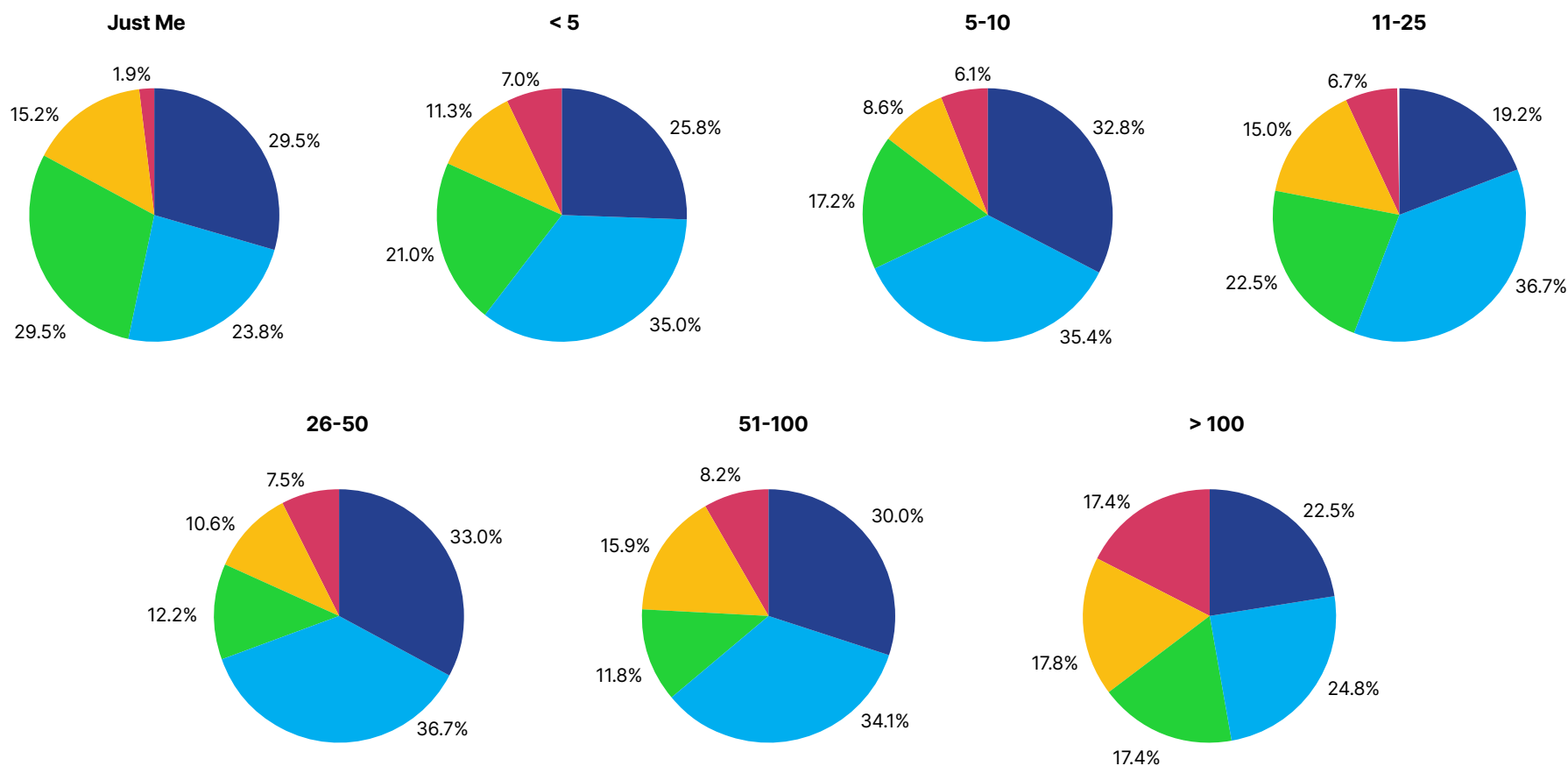


How Have Core, Or Otherwise Significant Changes In Google Algorithms, Impacted Your SEO Efforts Over The Past Year?



Algorithm Update Impact By Company Size

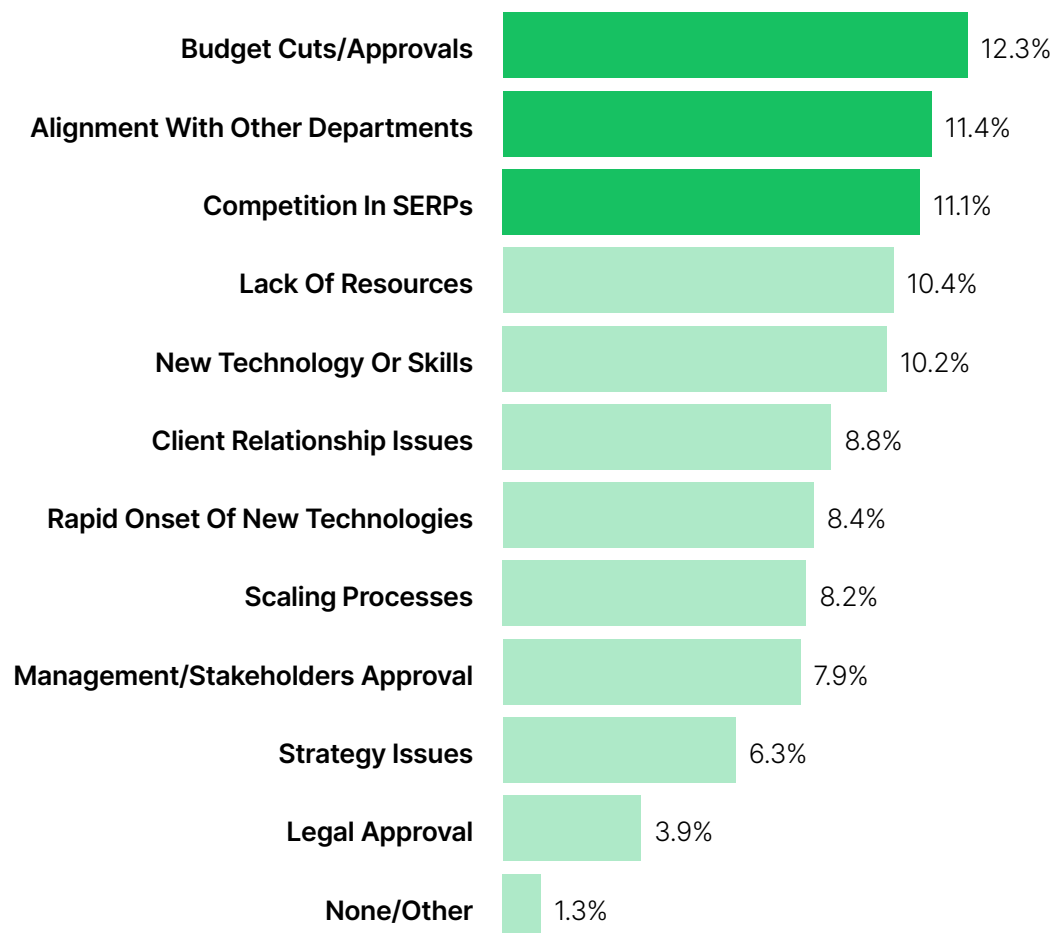
■ Helped my SEO efforts a lot
■ Helped my SEO efforts a little
■ Neither helped nor hurt my SEO efforts
■ Reduced my SEO efforts a little
■ Reduced my SEO efforts a lot



It's interesting to note that respondents from the largest companies are the least confident about the impact of algorithm updates. 35.2% of them said that updates had a negative impact.

In-House Barriers To SEO Success

In The Last 12 Months, What Were Your Biggest Barriers To SEO Success?



Alignment with other departments stands out. It was the seventh overall result in the main survey, but in-house respondents consider it the second biggest barrier to success.

The difference makes sense. Communicating with other departments is a unique challenge for in-house teams.

At an SEO agency, everyone in the company is, on some level, “bought-in” to SEO.

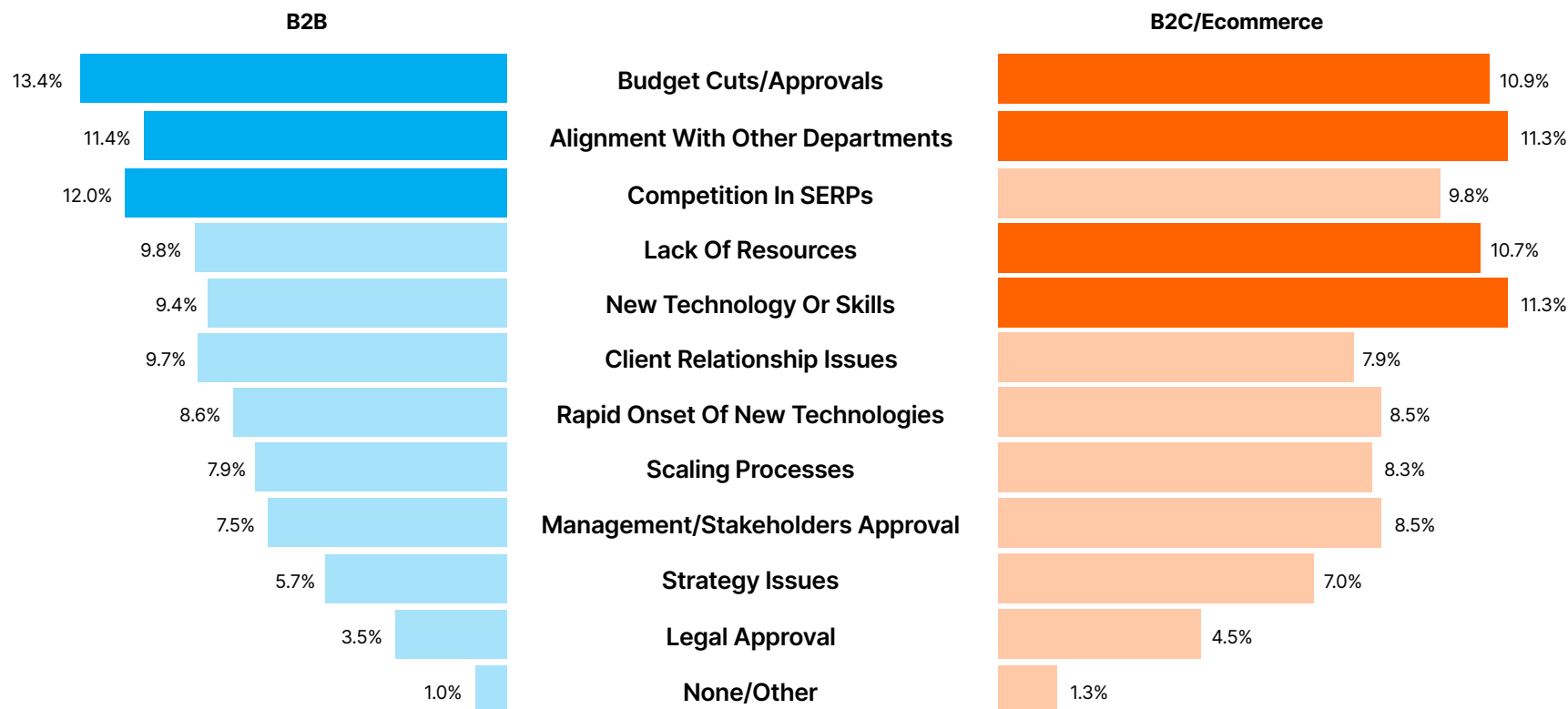
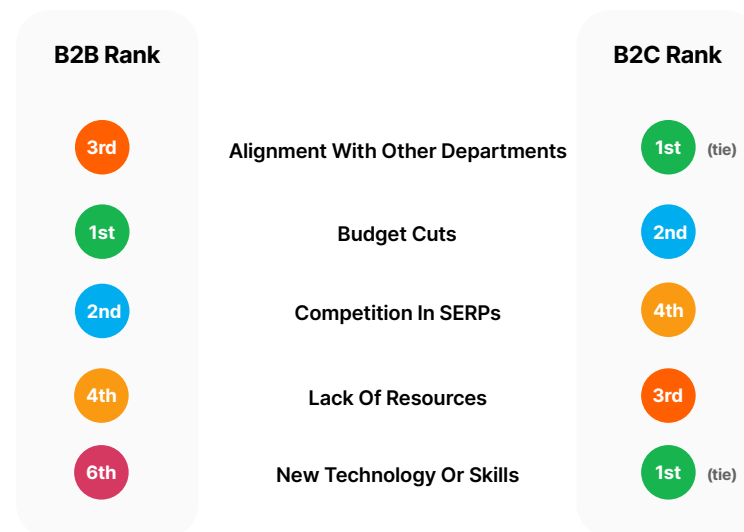
In-house SEO professionals might face communication issues with development teams, other marketing teams, and may need to justify their budgets to higher-ups who aren’t fully bought-in.

The top result, budget cuts, also makes sense in this context.

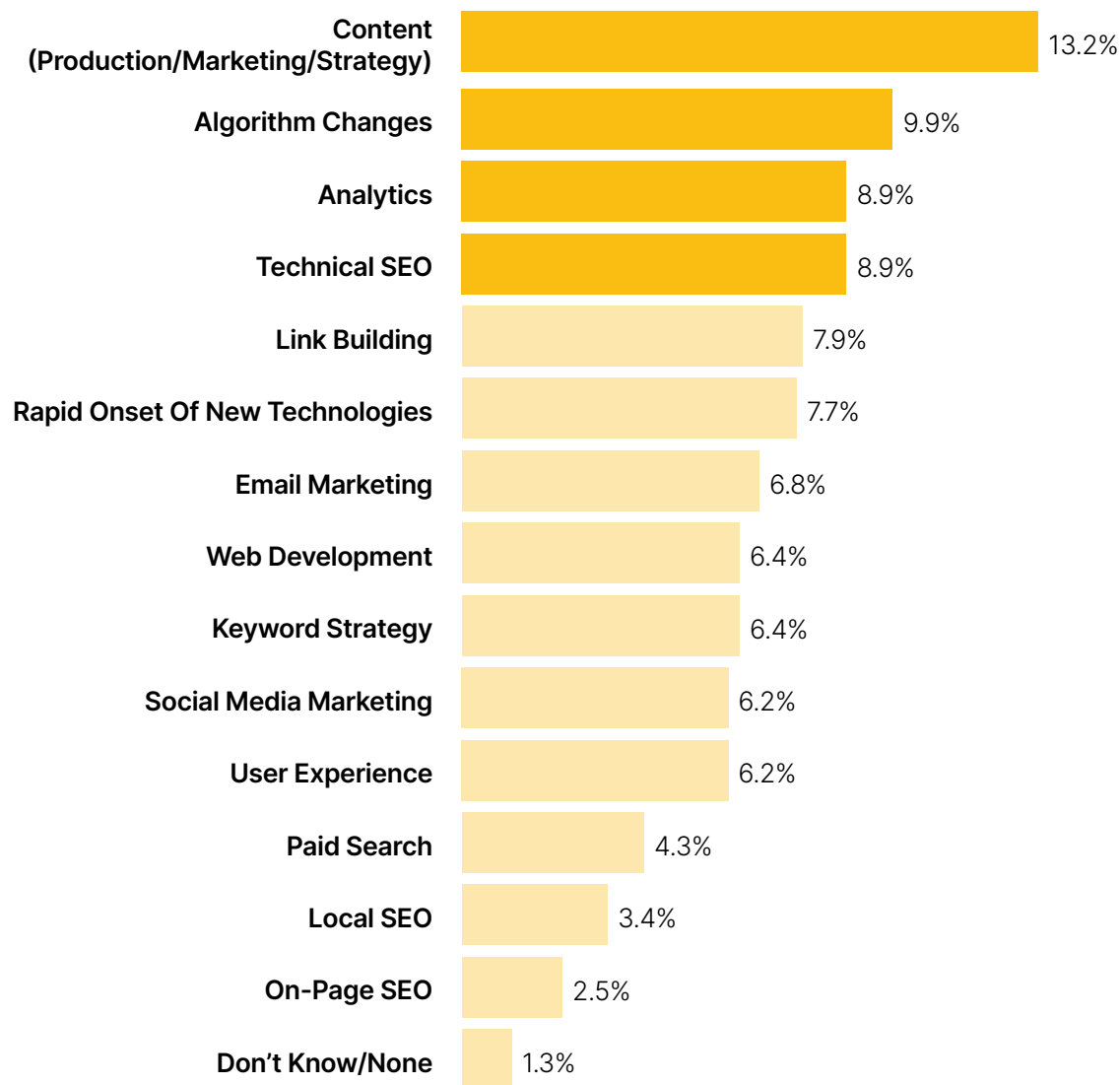
Barriers To SEO Success

Teams with exclusively business customers have somewhat different barriers when compared to teams with exclusively individual consumer customers.

B2B businesses seem to be struggling the most with SERP performance and budget, whereas B2C businesses struggle more with internal processes.



What Are The Three Most Difficult Tasks Of SEO? (Select Up To 3.)



In-house respondents are in line with the rest of the survey when they pick content as the first most difficult task in SEO.

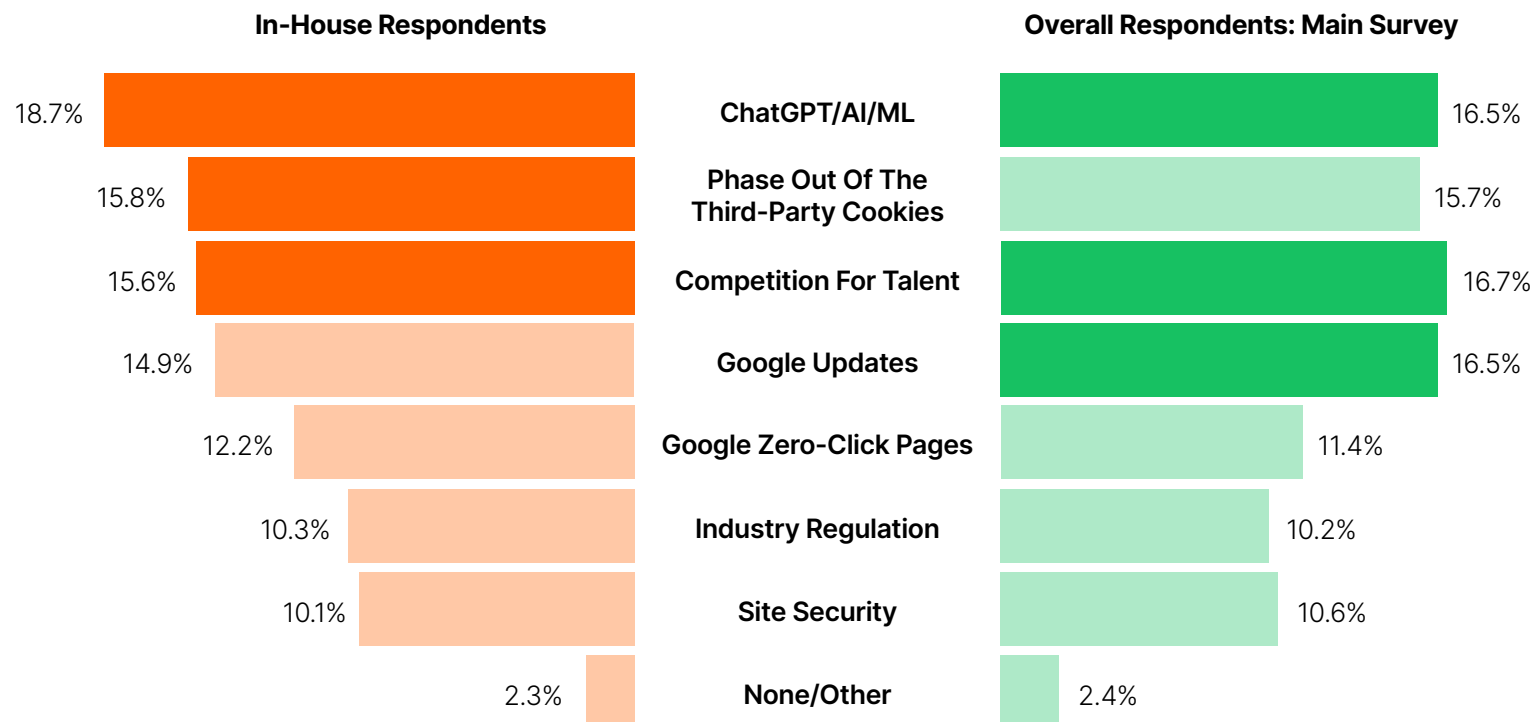
Despite feeling generally positive about algorithm changes, they also noted it as the second-most difficult.

When compared to the overall survey results, in-house SEO professionals seem more concerned about analytics, rating it as third compared to its fifth place result in the main report.

They are also less concerned about new technology, rating it as sixth compared to its fourth place results in the main report.

In-House Predictions About The SEO Industry

What Do You Think Will Cause The Biggest Shifts In The SEO Industry In The Next Two Years?

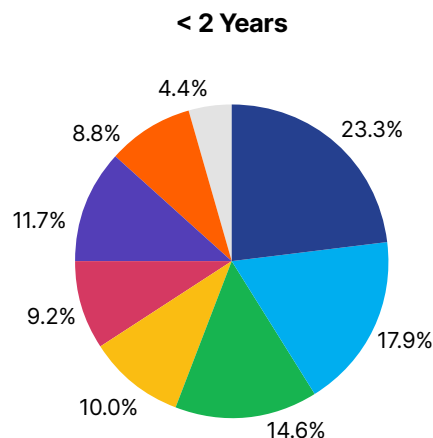


In the main survey, there wasn't a standout first place result for what respondents believe will cause the biggest industry changes. Competition for talent wins by a hair, but is effectively tied with generative AI and Google updates for first place.

In-house respondents, taken as a group on their own, are more concerned about generative AI, and they give second place to the third-party cookie phase-out.

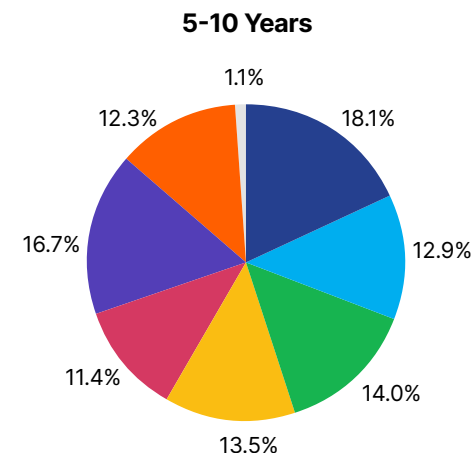
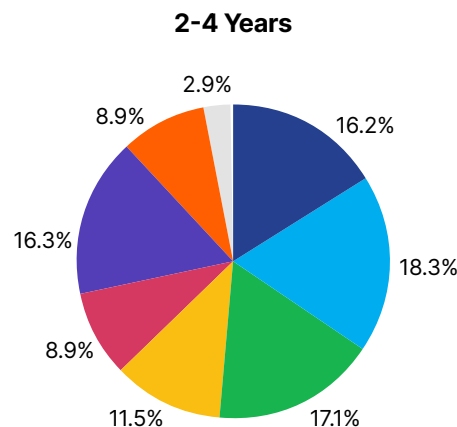
Shifts In SEO Industry By Experience

■ ChatGPT/AI/ML ■ Competition For Talent ■ Google Updates ■ Google Zero-Click Pages
 ■ Industry Regulation ■ Phase Out Of The Third-Party Cookies ■ Site Security ■ None/Other



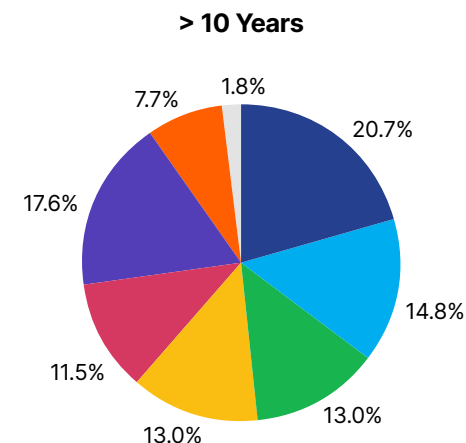
The more experienced the respondent, the more weight they give third-party cookies.

This is likely because they have positions with more responsibility and accountability, and are more concerned about what losing that data means for their strategy and business goals.

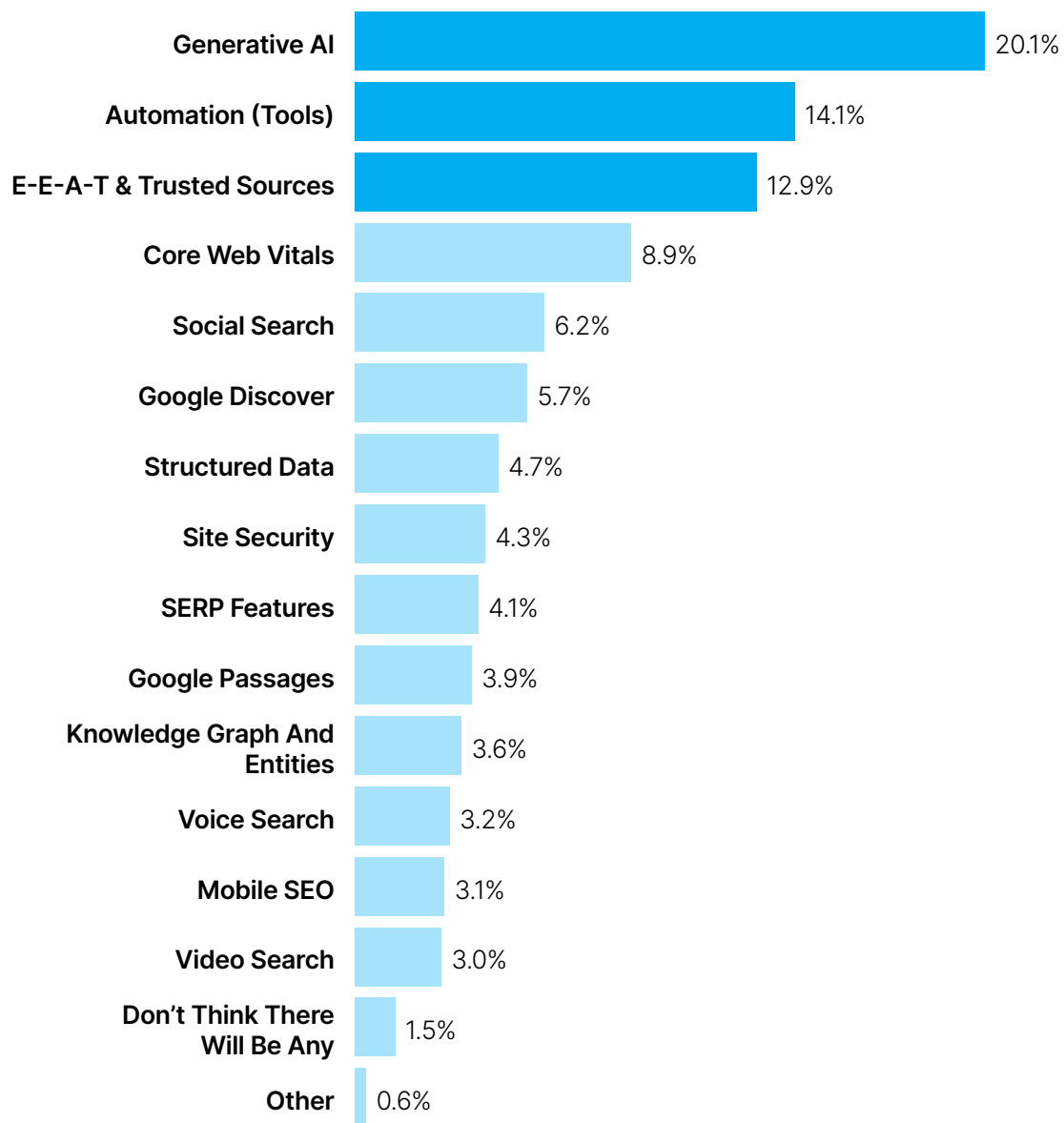


Respondents with less than five years of experience are more concerned about competition for talent.

This tracks with the observation from the main report, that the SEO industry has a high level of competition for jobs, especially in junior roles.



What Do You Think Will Be The Most Significant Disruptor To SEO Performance In The Next Few Years?



There isn't much difference to note between the results of this question from the main survey and the results from just the in-house group.

In-house respondents chose generative AI as the top SEO performance disruptor. They gave it 20.1% of the votes, which is exactly the same percentage as the main survey.

In-house respondents are also more concerned about automation – and less concerned about E-E-A-T – than the main survey results, although not by much.

In-house SEO professionals expect challenges from two main fronts.

The first is internally, where performance disruptions and communication problems can impact the resources available to them.

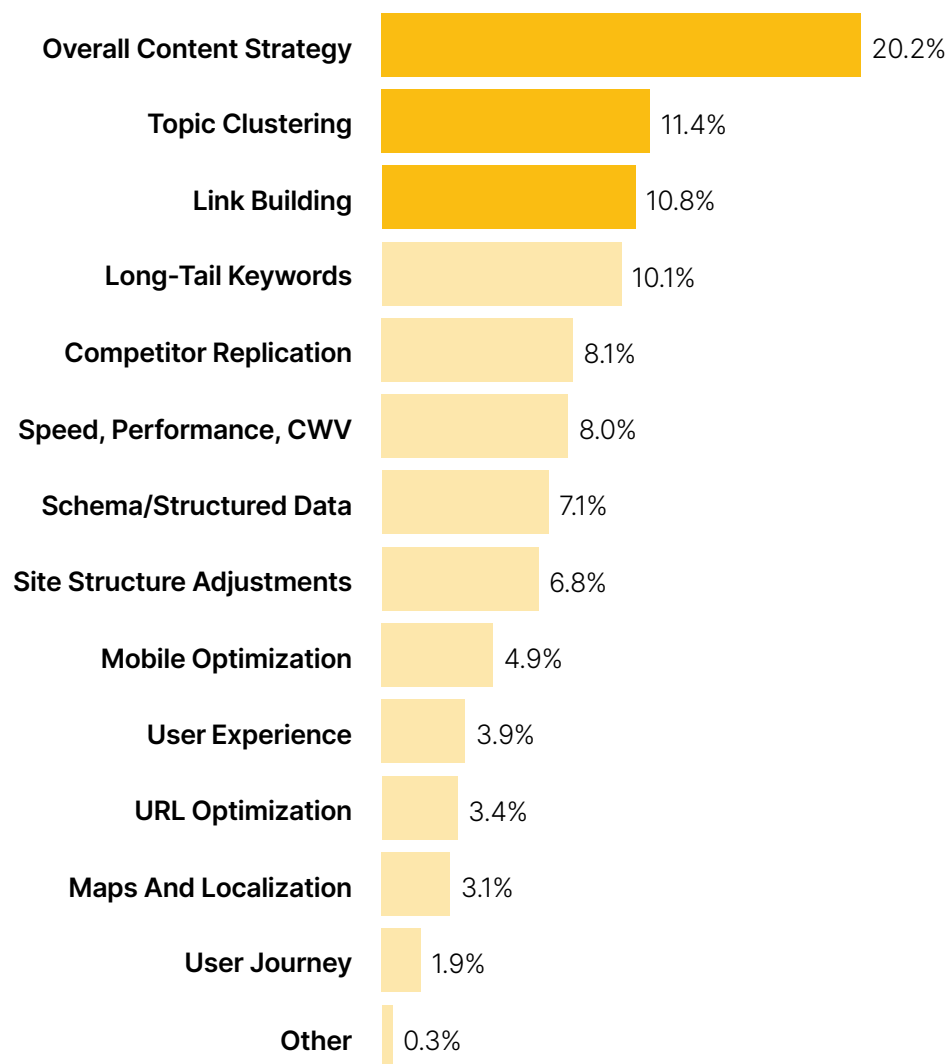
The second seems to be in platform changes that impact how they reach their audiences. These include legislation-driven changes like third-party cookies and technology-driven changes like AI integration.



How In-House SEO Teams Plan The Next 12 Months

The Most Effective In-House Strategies & Metrics

What Are The Most Effective SEO Strategies You've Used Recently?



Content Strategy

The most effective in-house SEO strategy.



In-house respondents rated their most effective SEO strategies in effectively the same way as the main survey. They prioritize content strategy to a slightly higher degree (20.2% vs. 16.7% overall), but their top five answers are the same and in the same order.

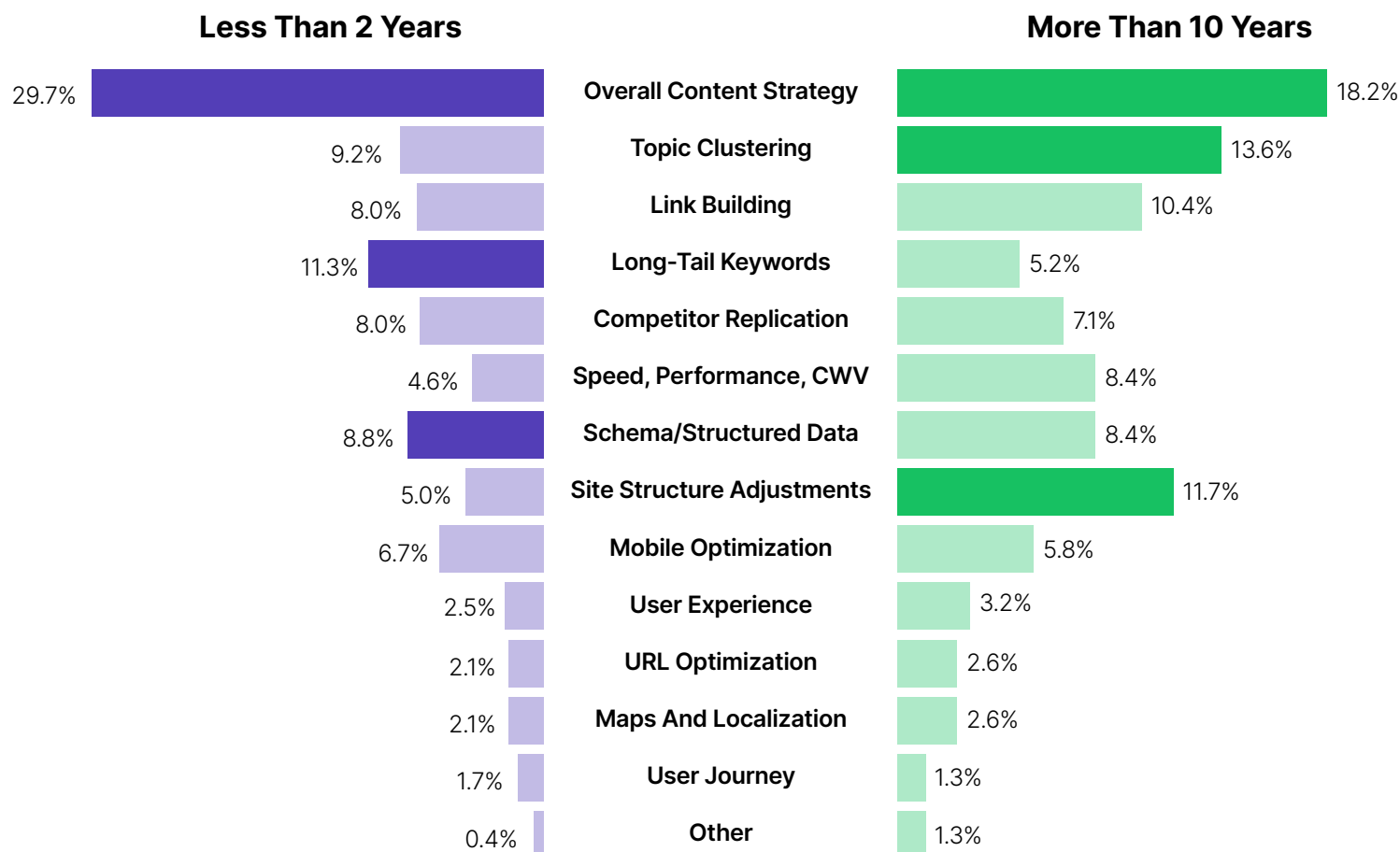
The least and most experienced in-house SEO professionals differ from the overall results.



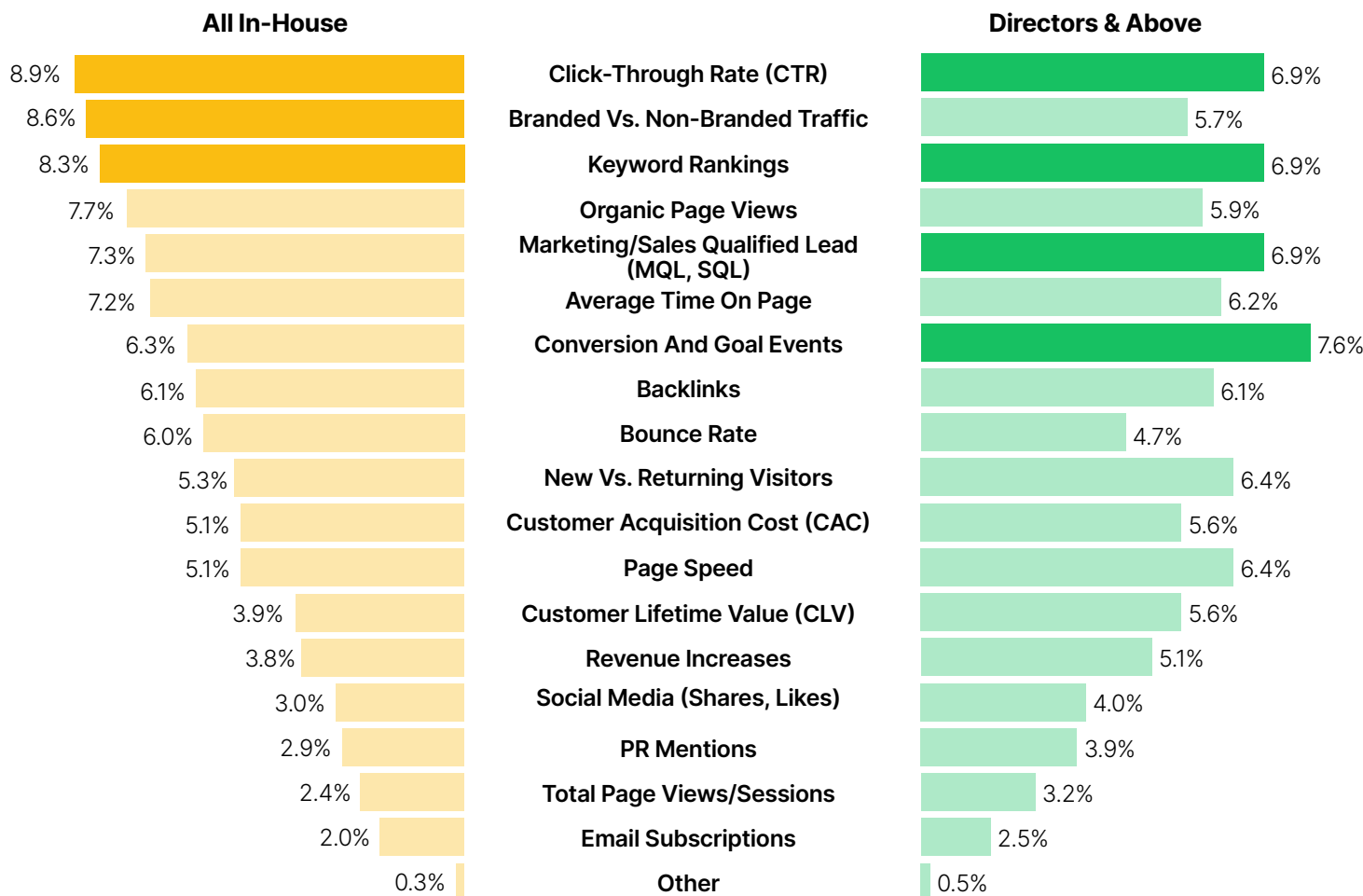
The least and most experienced in-house SEO professionals differ from the overall results.

In-house respondents with less than two years of experience rated long-tail keywords as second, more highly than other groups. Schema/structured data is their fourth choice.

In-house respondents with more than 10 years of experience rated site structure adjustments as their third choice, choosing it more than other groups.



Which Metrics Did You Use Most To Measure SEO Performance In The Last 12 Months?



When it comes to performance measurement, it's interesting to note how directors and other leaders differ from the group.

Their top metric is conversions and goal events, followed by an equal split between CTR, keyword rankings, and qualified leads.

In the main State Of SEO report, we made the point that educating stakeholders about how SEO efforts impact business goals could be key to improving communication and resolving misunderstandings. It looks like in-house SEO leaders are focused on justifying budget spends by targeting metrics directly related to revenue (conversions and leads) as well as SERP performance (CTR and rankings).

In-House Focus Areas & Business Opportunities

In-house SEO professionals chose the same top four focus areas as the main report.

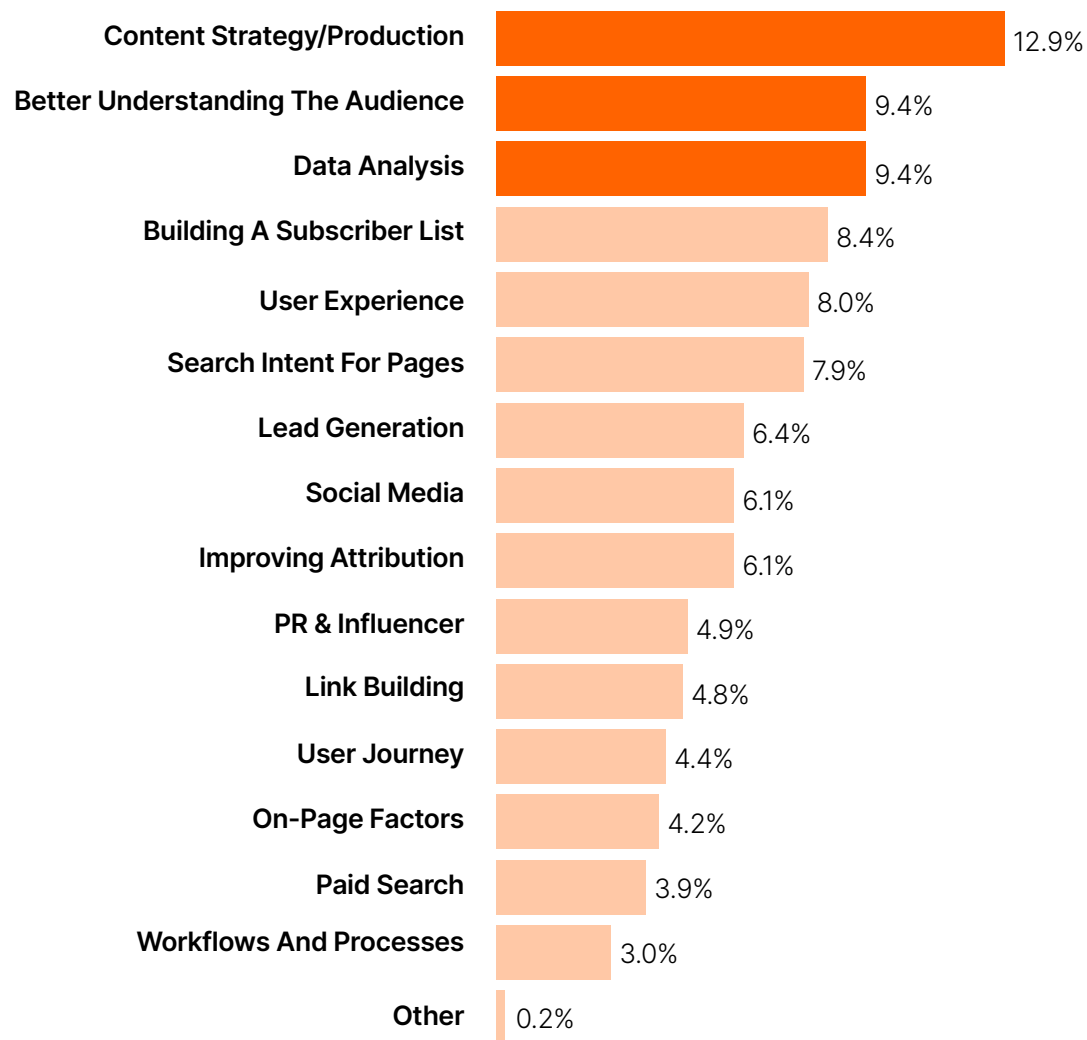
This result isn't surprising. In the main report we noted that SEO professionals will focus on improving content strategy and understanding how audiences respond to content in the coming year.

The only major difference to note is that B2C in-house respondents will focus on user experience more than B2B respondents. They rated it as their second top focus area, a hair above understanding audiences.

B2C respondents are also less focused on subscriber lists than their B2B counterparts.

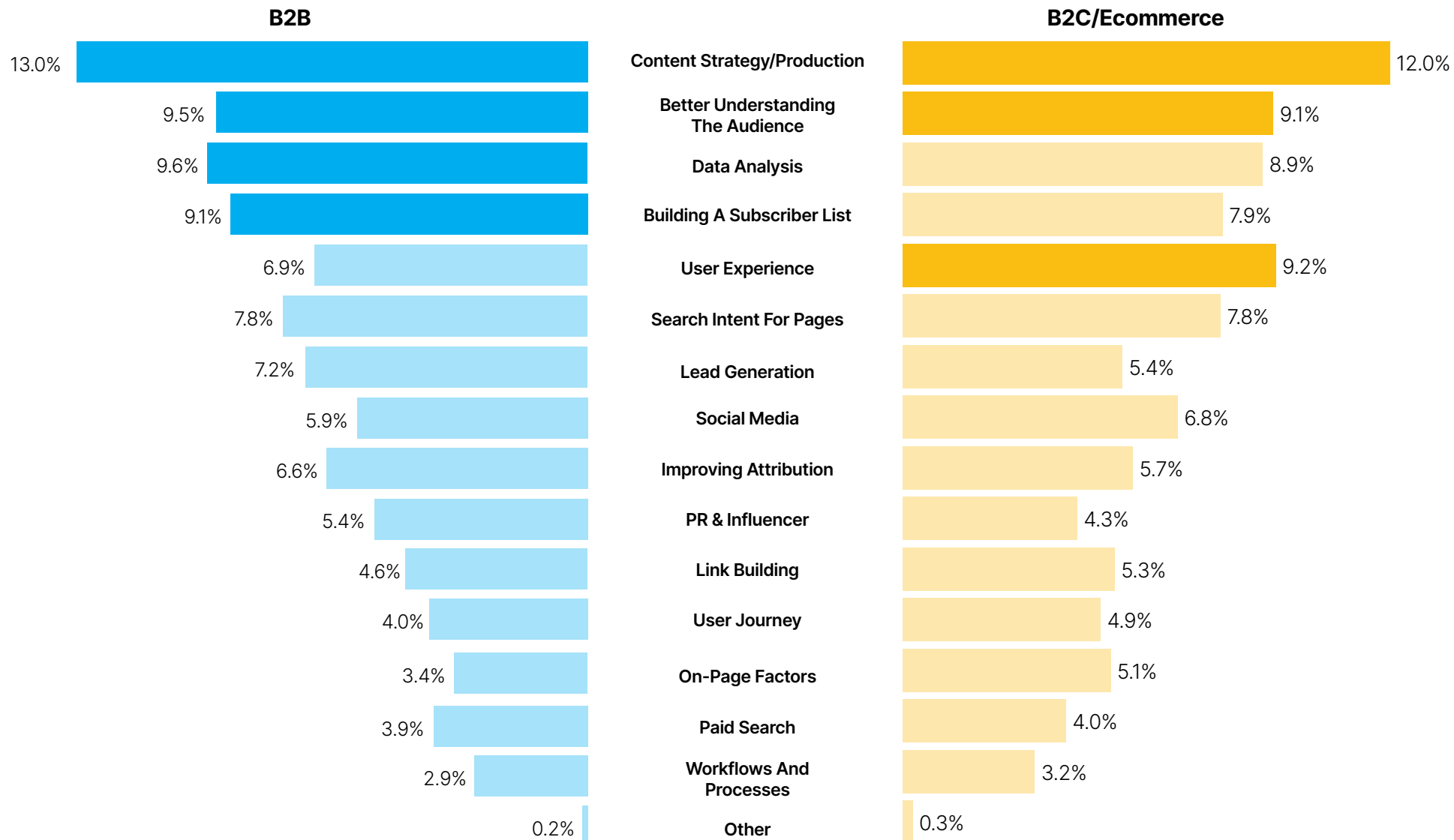
Charts on page 27.

Which Areas Do You Intent To Focus On In The Next 12 Months? (Select Up To 3.)



In-House Focus Areas: B2B Vs. B2C

Businesses serving exclusively business customers compared to those exclusively serving independent consumers.



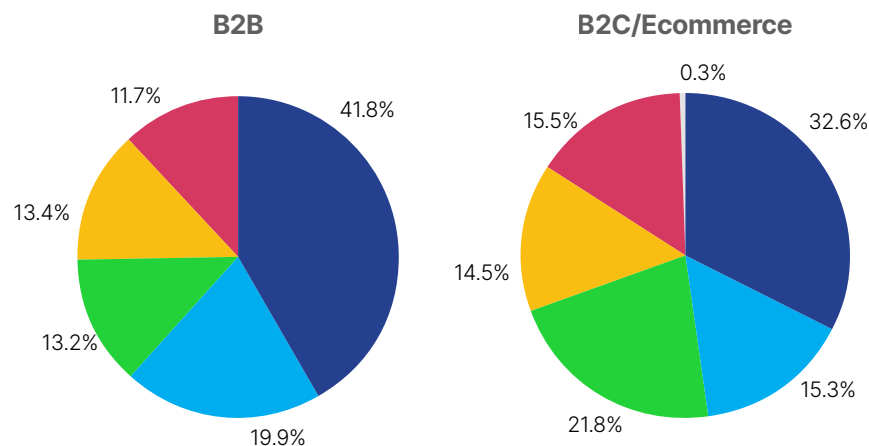
In-house respondents are less focused on AI technology than respondents from SEO agencies and freelancers.

While they agree with other survey respondents on the top area of opportunity, SEO foundations, they picked analytics and UX optimization as their second and third choices, respectively.

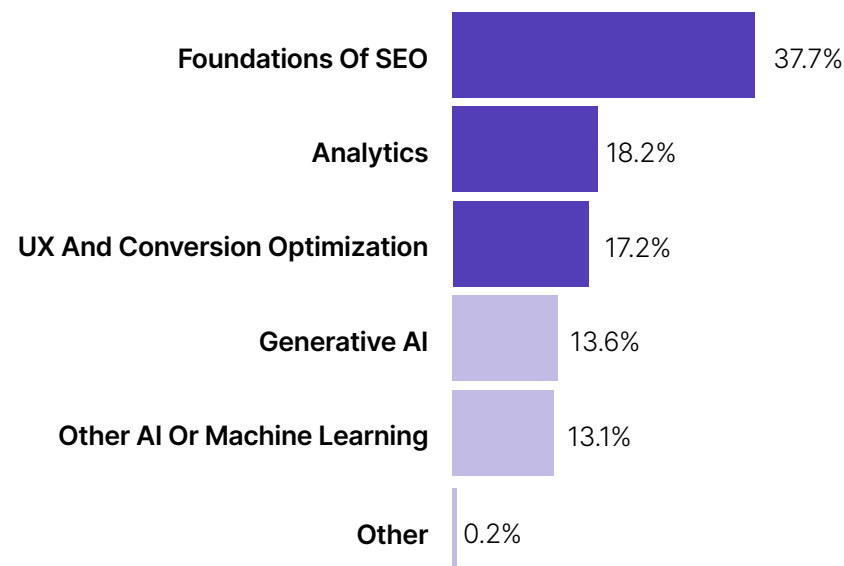
Agency SEO professionals picked generative AI and other AI as their second and third choices, respectively.

Business Opportunity Areas By Audience B2B Compared To B2C

■ Foundations Of SEO ■ Analytics ■ UX And Conversion Optimization
■ Generative AI ■ Other AI Or Machine Learning ■ Other



What Area Holds The Most Opportunity For Your Business This Year?



When we break down the in-house responses by audience type, B2C SEO professionals are more focused on UX and conversions, while B2B SEO professionals are more focused on analytics.

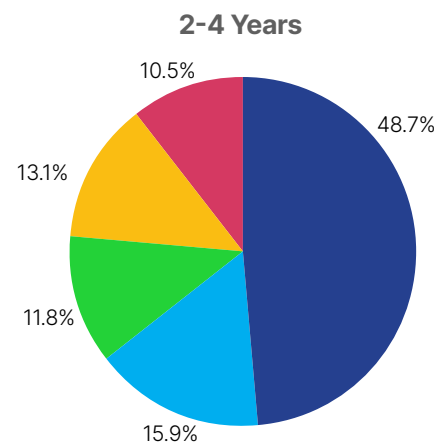
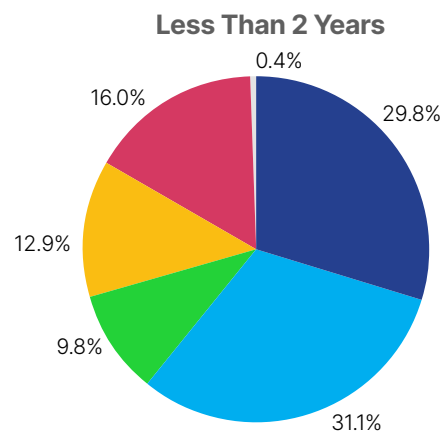
There are two possible explanations for this:

- One involves the different needs of the customer bases.
- One involves the different experience levels of respondents who serve businesses compared to those that serve individuals.

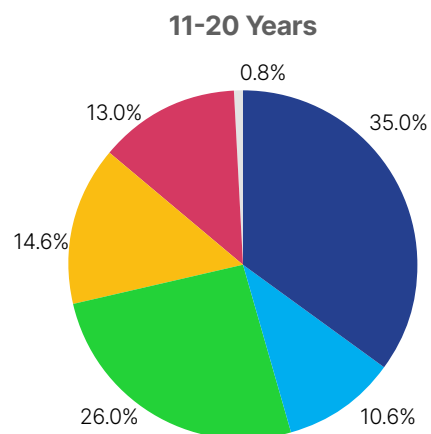
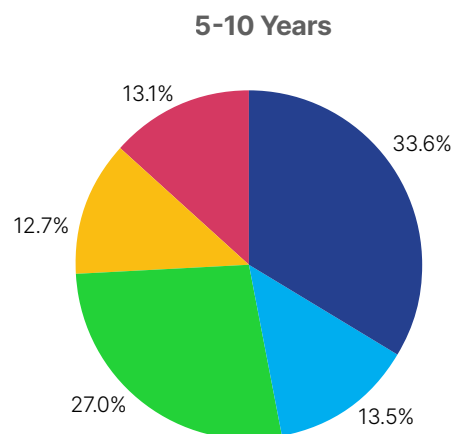
These are expanded upon on pages 29 and 30.

Business Opportunity Areas By Years Of Experience

■ Foundations Of SEO
 ■ Analytics
 ■ UX And Conversion Optimization
■ Generative AI
 ■ Other AI Or Machine Learning
 ■ Other



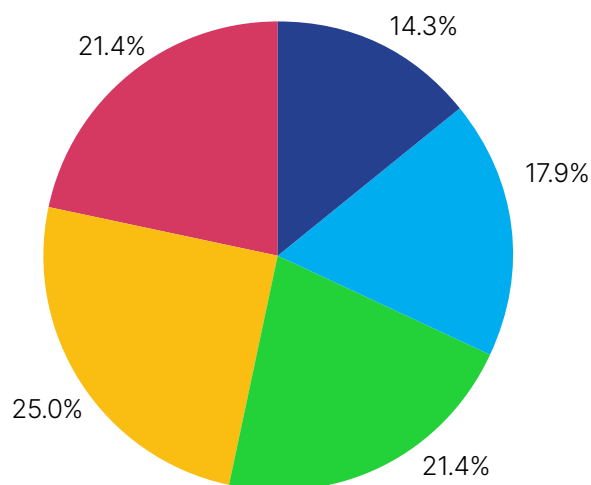
When we break down the business opportunities question by experience, you can see that analytics is most favored by the most inexperienced SEO professionals.



On the other hand, SEO professionals with more than five years of experience prioritize UX and conversion optimization more than their less experienced counterparts.

In-House Business Opportunities: More Than 20 Years Of Experience

■ Foundations Of SEO ■ Analytics ■ UX And Conversion Optimization
■ Generative AI ■ Other AI Or Machine Learning ■ Other

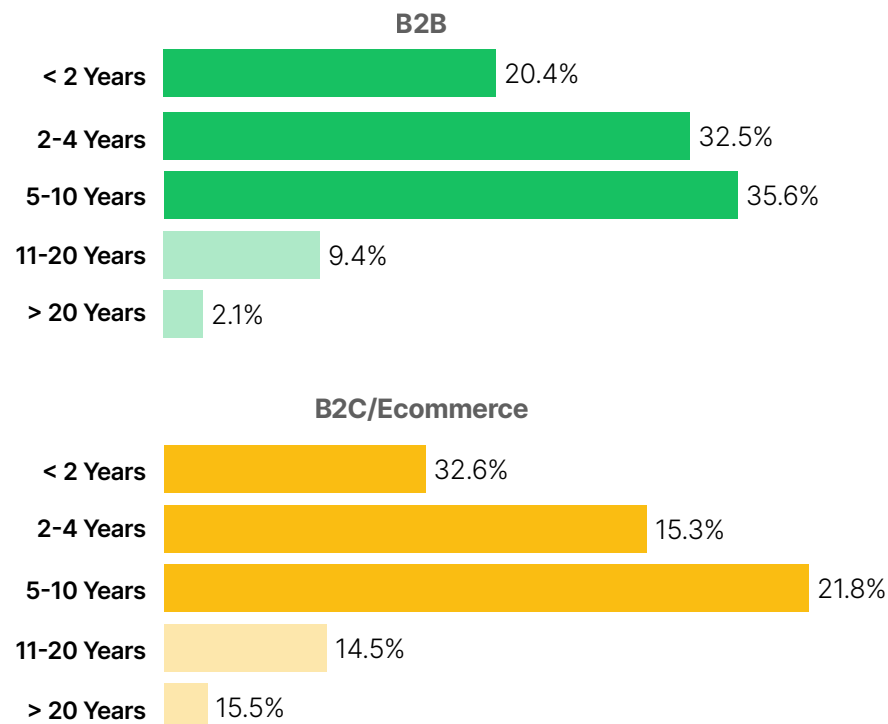


The most experienced in-house SEO professionals are most interested in business opportunities that come from AI. UX and conversions is tied for their second place pick, as well.

In the chart above and to the right, you can see that a higher number of B2C respondents have more than five years of experience, and a higher number of B2B respondents have less than five years of experience.

So there are two potential reasons why B2B respondents prioritize analytics more than B2C, and B2C respondents prioritize UX / conversion more than B2B.

Years Of Experience: B2B Compared To B2C



- 1 Respondents focused on individual consumers (B2C) are more interested in removing friction from on-site experiences and conversion funnels because their audiences make individual purchasing decisions. In the case of ecommerce, this happens directly on the website.
- 2 Alternatively, it could be that UX and conversion optimization is effective in both situations, and the difference is down to experience. A larger number of B2C respondents had more than five years of experience, and a larger number of B2B respondents had less.



In-House: AI

Expert AI Commentary: Patrick Reinhart

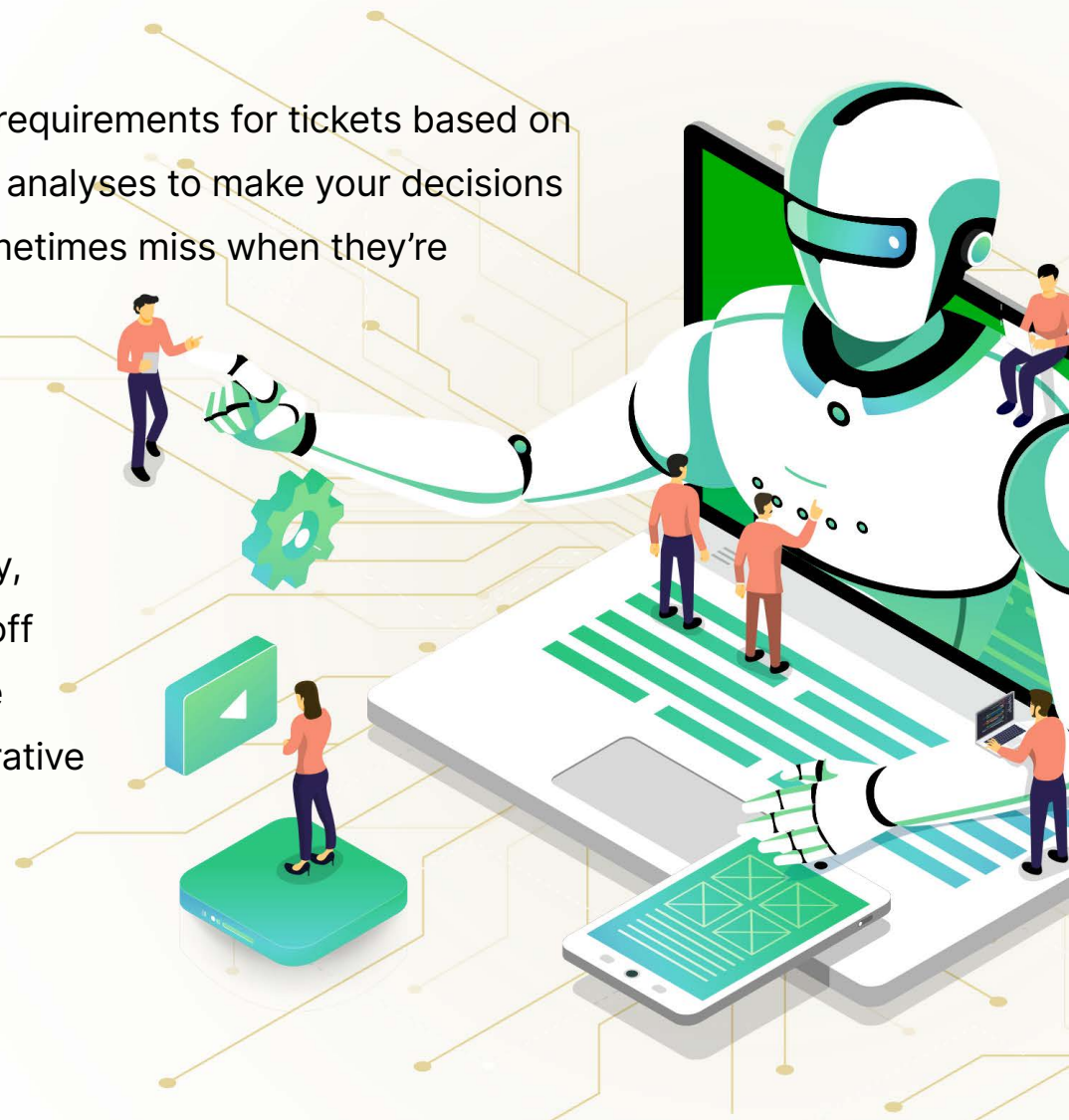
VP of Services & Thought Leadership

"I see generative AI as one of the largest opportunities that has come along in the last 10+ years. SEO is full of tedium and one of the major benefits from the advent of AI is an opportunity to let a machine assist with some that tedium.

AI can help you write a first draft of code, create requirements for tickets based on technical audits, breeze through large-scale data analyses to make your decisions easier, and surface insights that humans may sometimes miss when they're working on larger projects.

AI is the key to helping you increase your productivity, decrease the amount of mundane tasks you have to perform, and, if trained properly, may be a great sounding board to bounce ideas off of. While there is good and bad to everything, the good far outweighs the bad here if you use generative AI responsibly."

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In-House SEO Professionals Have A Positive Outlook On AI

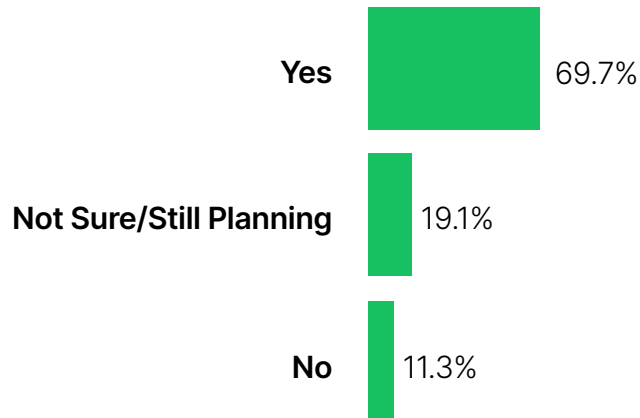
Based on the “business opportunity” results from the previous section, it might be tempting to discount in-house SEO professionals as uninterested in AI software and tools.

It certainly appears so, based on the fact that they showed the least interest in AI out of the options available to them.

However, the most experienced SEO industry veterans (more than 20 years) working in-house see business opportunities in AI, choosing generative AI as their top business opportunity.

These respondents are likely to have influence, either culturally, financially, or both, within their organizations.

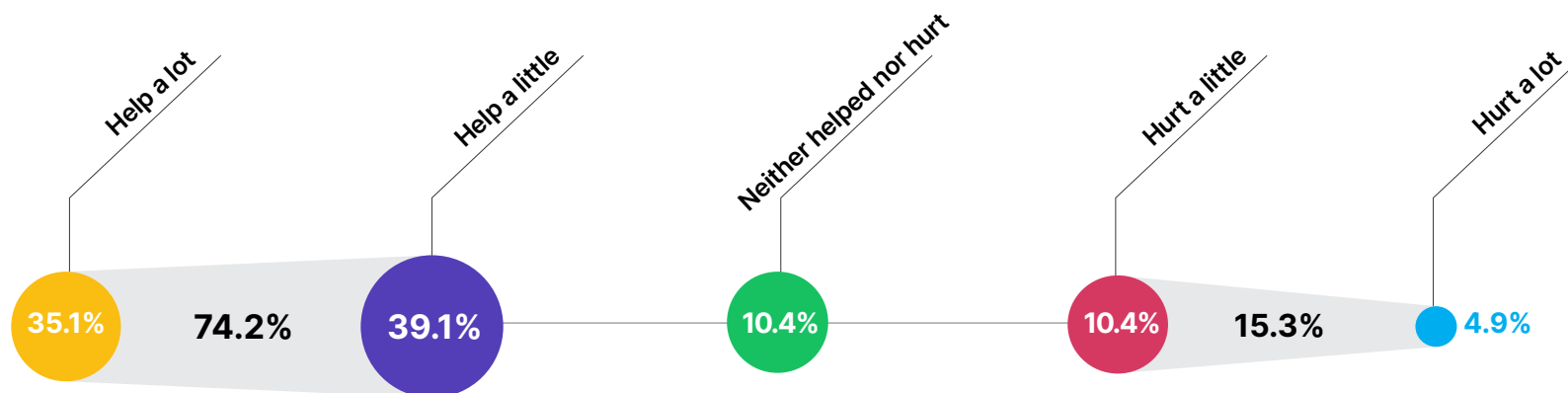
Will You Be Looking To Automate Or Invest In AI-Powered Services This Year?



In-house respondents are actively looking to invest in automation services at effectively the same rate as their agency and freelance counterparts.

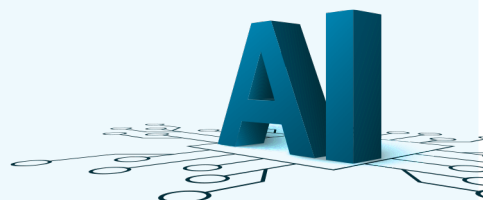
70.1% of agency respondents responded “yes,” they want to invest in automation this year, making a difference of only 0.4%.

Do You Think Generative AI and/or Machine Learning Will Hurt Or Help Your Business This Year?



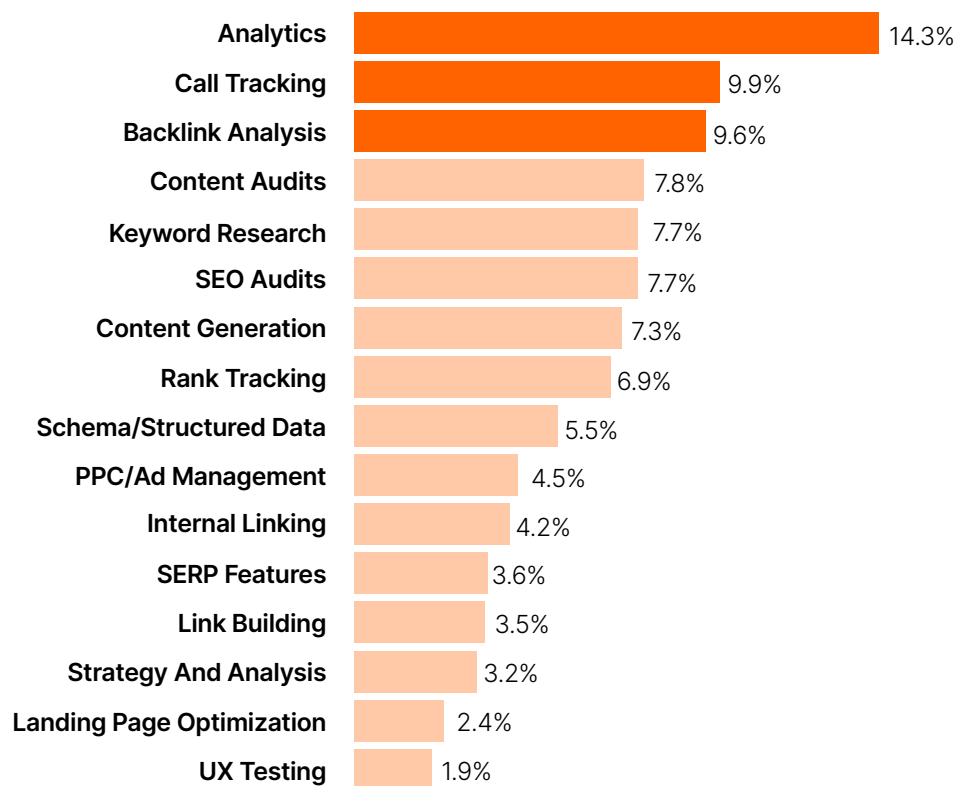
74.2%

of in-house SEO professionals have a positive outlook on AI, saying it will help their business.



Current Software & Software Wishlists

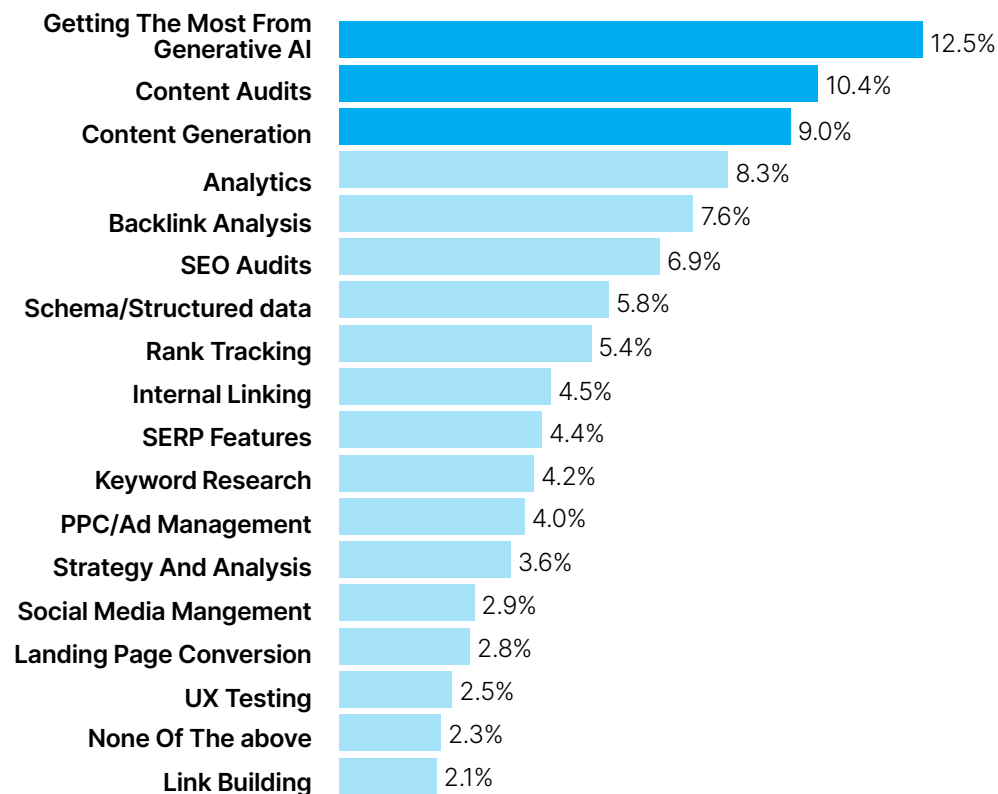
What SEO Tasks Do You Currently Use Software To Manage?



In-house respondents are more interested in analytics software than SEO agency and freelance respondents. It's their first most currently used software, and their fourth priority for future implementation.

On the other hand, in-house respondents prioritized generative AI and content just as much as other respondents.

Which Tasks Or Responsibilities Are You Looking To Automate With Software In The Next Year?



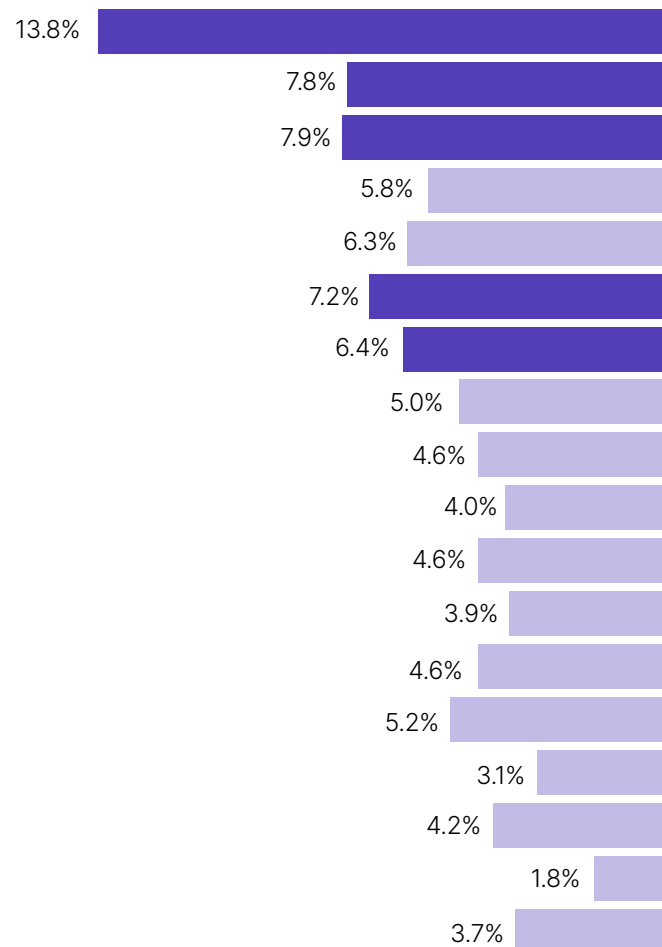
Applying some form of automation to content is a key priority for SEO professionals no matter what type of company they work for.

In-house SEO professionals with more experience have somewhat different priorities.

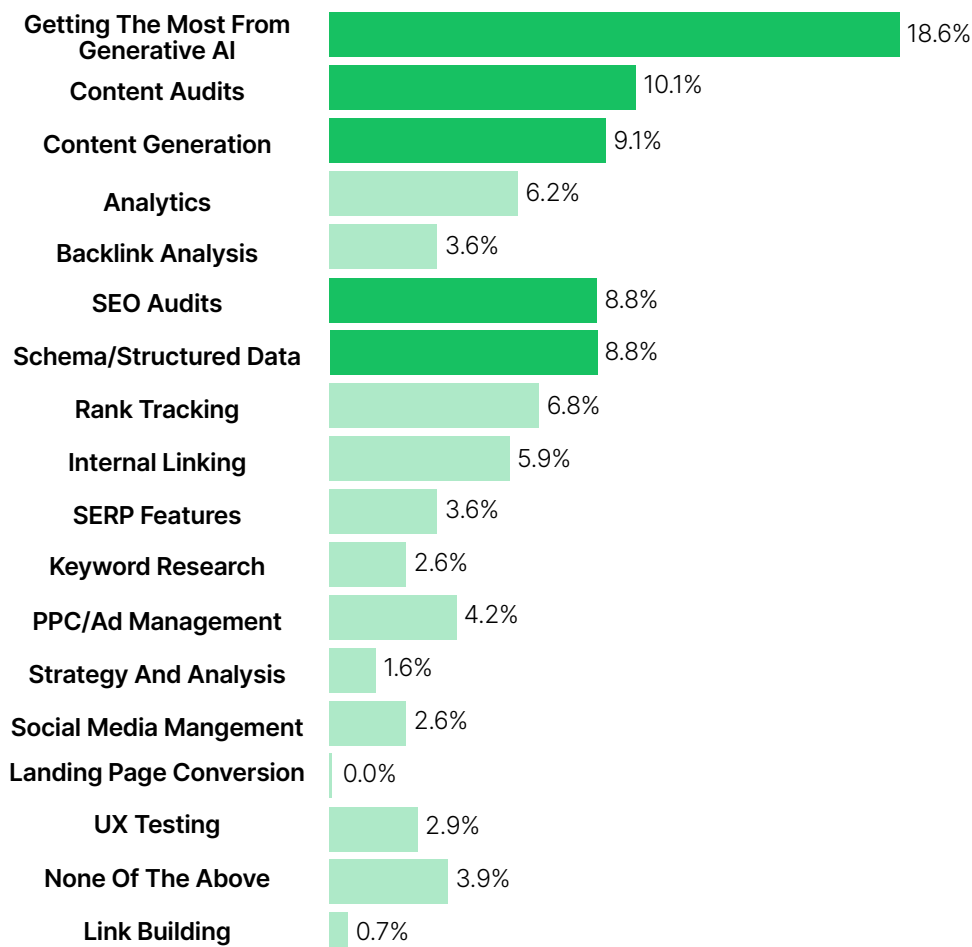
It seems that just like with the business opportunities question, respondents with less experience are driving an interest in analytics.

From five to 20 years, the top three answers remain the same, but these groups are more interested in SEO audits and schema/structured data than in analytics and backlink analysis.

Automation Priorities By Experience: 5-10 Years



Automation Priorities By Experience: 11-20 Years



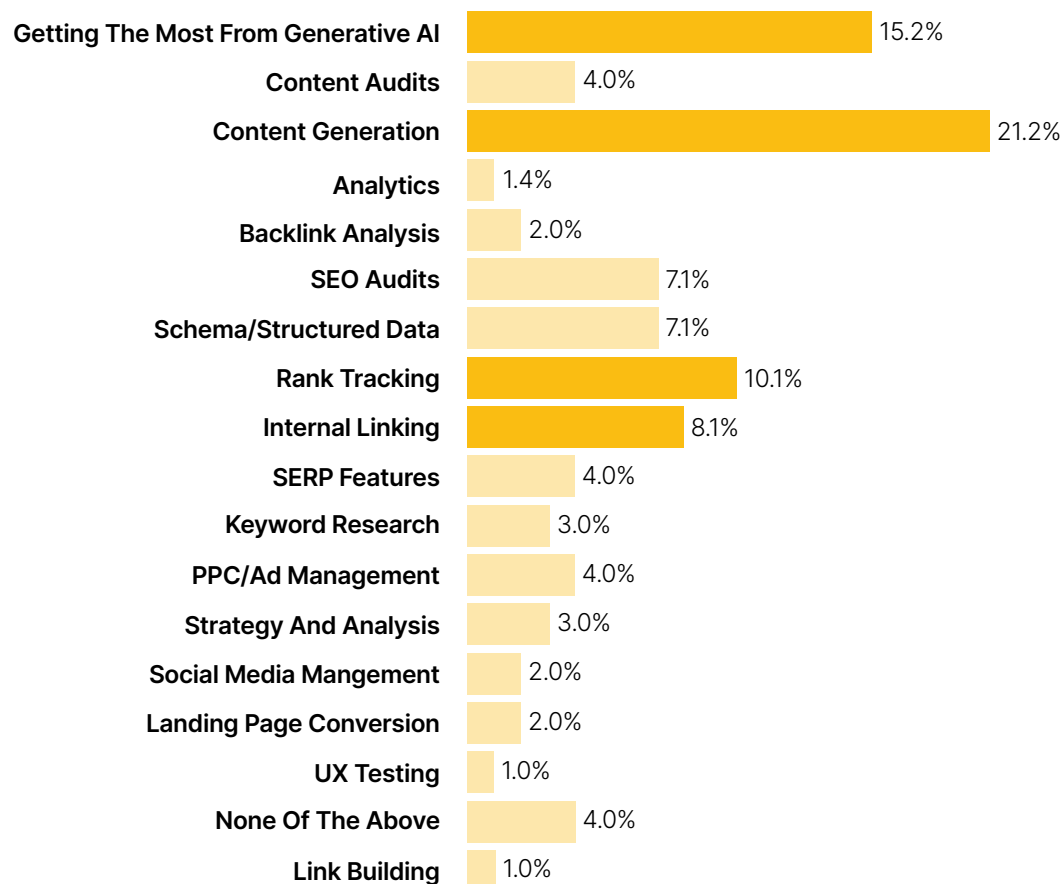
Respondents with more than 20 years of experience had very different priorities to all other experience groups. Their top priority for software is content generation, followed by leveraging generative AI and rank tracking.

Bear in mind, this is a small group of respondents, and so this data has a higher margin of error.

On the other hand, the results make sense for two potential reasons:

- 1 The most experienced professionals likely already have favorite suites and tools that they've been using for years when it comes to analysis and auditing. They're more likely to focus on the new capabilities of AI and how novel solutions can tackle pain points that software hasn't yet addressed.
- 2 The most experienced respondents might not be directly interacting with auditing and analytics software anymore. They might be leaders with a top-level view of their team or business, and so gravitate toward wider-scale implementation.

Automation Priorities By Experience: More Than 20 Years



Thank you for reading the State Of SEO: In-House Report for 2024.

We hope you find the insights helpful as you build your plans for next year, whether you're creating OKRs for your team or focusing on your own professional development.

Have you seen our redesigned newsletter? When you downloaded this ebook, you had the option to [opt-in](#) to the SEJ Today newsletter subscription.

Check it out when it lands in your inbox to stay on top of the latest news and trends in SEO and digital marketing. And let us know if you have issues receiving it.

To dig into more industry data, download the two other reports in the 2024 series:

- The State Of SEO: Disruptions, AI & Content Strategies.
- The State Of SEO: Agency Report.

And if you have any feedback about this report or any other ebooks, email the editor at editor@searchenginejournal.com.





Limitations

1 3,890 people responded to our third annual State Of SEO survey. This report used a segmented portion of the results that only includes respondents who work on in-house SEO teams for businesses that are otherwise not directly related to SEO. The total of respondents included in this report is 1,265.

2 These results reflect a statistically significant portion of Search Engine Journal's audience of SEO professionals. But SEO is a diverse, global industry; we don't claim the final word on industry trends. Nevertheless, we hope they spark conversations with your peers.



3 **51.67%** of respondents are from the U.S., meaning the data likely have a heavy regional bias toward the U.S.



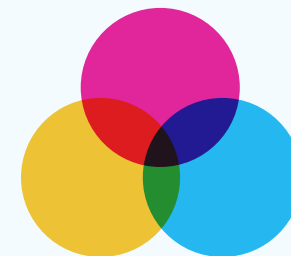
4 We calculated a margin of error of $\pm 1.571\%$ based on an infinite population assumption and a 95% confidence interval.

5 Results are rounded to one decimal place. Due to this rounding, not every set of percentages will equal 100 exactly.



6 We included several multiple-choice questions with up to three answer inputs in the survey. They will be noted when they appear – and are weighted by total number of responses – meaning they could have up to three times more responses than there are participants.

7 When we pivot the data by different groups, the margin of error may increase. That is because there are fewer respondents in each group than there are in total respondents to the survey. For example, the group of respondents with 20 or more years of experience is very small, with only 137 people. We felt it was interesting to highlight their responses in several places since it's more than 100 people, but their responses will have a higher margin of error.



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Patrick Reinhart

VP of Services & Thought Leadership

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Patrick brings over 15 years of organic search and digital marketing experience to his work. Before joining Conductor, Patrick led the U.S. organic search practice at New York-based agency Prime Visibility.

Prior to his agency and technology experience, Patrick was an accomplished entrepreneur, founding an eCommerce appliance retailer and a music management company.