

THE 2019 SEO SERVICES REPORT:

Methods

BACKLINKO

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The primary goal of this survey was to better understand the current state of the SEO services industry. While there is anecdotal information on satisfaction levels ([and pricing](#)), to our knowledge there hasn't been a comprehensive look into the SEO services industry as a whole.

Specifically, we wanted to learn more about how small business owners (and decision makers inside of small businesses) find, hire, recruit, work with and pay the SEO providers that they work with.

We hope this study helps provide a deeper understanding of the current state of the SEO services industry. Also, our data will hopefully help inform best practices for both SEO service providers and clients.

WHAT WE DID— STUDY METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted by [Northstar Research Partners](#), a market research firm based in Toronto, Canada.

In conjunction with Backlinko founder Brian Dean, Northstar developed the survey questions and methodology. They also recruited the 1,200 panelists that ultimately contributed answers to the survey (n=1200). All of our participants were small business owners and decision-makers in the United States.

Our 1200 respondents were broken down as such:

- 524 Owners/CEOs/Presidents
- 676 other decision makers

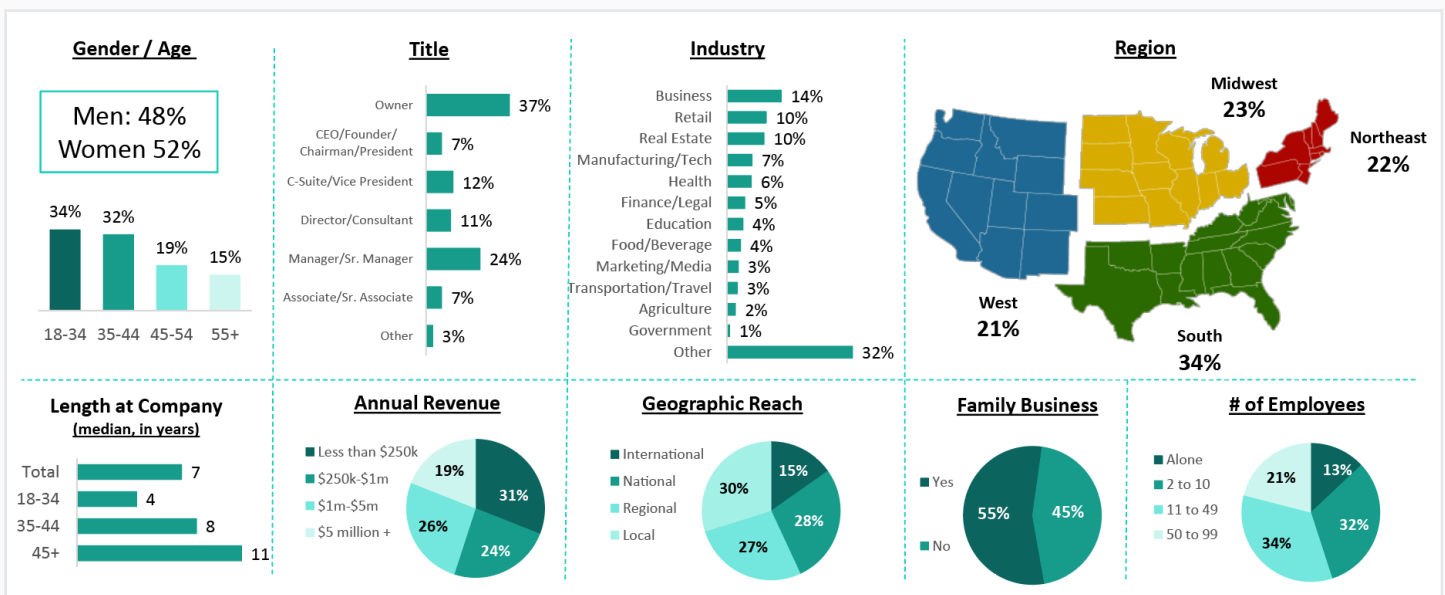
Our qualifying criteria was:

- Make decisions about technology issues and strategy
- Have used or currently using an SEO service
- Own/work at a company with fewer than 100 employees

The online survey was conducted between March 28th – April 1st, 2019.

We put quite a bit of effort into ensuring that our panel was representative and didn't have a bias that may stem from a specific geographic location or age.

Here is the audience profile:



SURVEY RESULTS BREAKDOWN

PANELIST MARKETING AND GROWTH APPROACH

TECH/DIGITAL APPROACH	
Digital First	29%
Mixed	57%
Traditional	14%

GROWTH APPROACH	
Top Priority	28%
Balanced	64%
Maintaining	8%

USE OF SEO SERVICES

TOTAL	EXISTING SEO USERS 71%	LAPSED SEO USERS 29%
NUMBER OF SEOS USED EVER		
1: 35%	1: 30%	1: 46%
2: 40%	2: 40%	2: 40%
3: 18%	3: 21%	3: 11%
4 or more: 7%	4 or more: 9%	4 or more: 3%
NUMBER OF SEOS USED LAST YEAR		
None: 6%	1: 46%	None: 25%
1: 47%	2: 41%	1: 53%
2: 36%	3: 9%	2: 18%
3: 7%	4 or more: 4%	3: 3%
4 or more: 3%		4 or more: 1%

HOW USERS FIND SEO SERVICES

Word of mouth / referral from a friend of business associate: **28%**

Google search engine: **26%**

Through online research / reviews: **18%**

through another technology vendor I was already using: **14%**

Online advertising: **8%**

Traditional advertising (TV, radio, magazines, etc.): **3%**

INFLUENTIAL CHOICE ON SEO SERVICES

CHOICE	EXTREMELY	VERY	TOTAL
Reputation overall	32%	42%	74%
Cost	33%	37%	70%
Reputation in my specific industry	25%	34%	59%
Google rankings	23%	36%	59%
Referrals	23%	32%	55%
Case studies / examples of work	15%	34%	49%
Social media promotion	14%	24%	38%

IMPORTANCE OF SPECIFIC BENEFITS FROM SEO

BENEFITS	EXTREMELY	VERY	TOTAL
Accessing new customers	49%	34%	83%
Increasing traffic to your site	47%	35%	82%
Increasing brand awareness	41%	37%	78%
Helping to build trust and credibility	37%	39%	76%
Easily measurable return on investment	34%	39%	73%
Better value than paid advertising	33%	40%	73%
Better site usability	31%	40%	71%
Improving the safety and security of your website	30%	34%	64%
Improving the speed of your website	27%	33%	60%
Gaining followers on social media sites	26%	29%	55%
Increasing number of email subscribers	23%	30%	53%
Helping to attract new talent and employees	21%	28%	49%

WHO MANAGES SEO

A service provided by a web hosting company: **43%**

A freelancer: **24%**

An agency: **16%**

Both an agency and freelancer: **6%**

Other: **11%**

(Note: There was some panelist confusion into what constitutes an “SEO service”. Many believed that software provided by hosting companies were providing a service. Therefore we tended not to include web hosting “services” in most of the final results in the report).

SPENDING ON SEO SERVICES

Those not using a web hosting company spent an average of \$5,966 per year.

NOT USING WEB HOSTING COMPANY	
\$5K/year or more	14%
\$1K-5K/year	21%
\$500-\$1K/year	18%
Less than \$500/year	32%
Don't know/not sure	15%

OVERALL SATISFACTION LEVEL

WHO MANAGES SEO	EXTREMELY	VERY	SOMEWHAT	NOT VERY/ NOT AT ALL
Total	20%	44%	28%	8%
A service provided by a web hosting company	18%	42%	33%	7%
A freelancer	18%	35%	34%	13%
An agency	14%	46%	25%	15%
Both an agency and freelancer	25%	35%	30%	10%
Spending <\$500	15%	36%	36%	14%
Spending \$500+	23%	42%	27%	8%

IMPORTANCE OF SEO PROVIDER LOCATION

Know location of SEO provider: **51%**

LOCATION OF SEO PROVIDER	
United States	96%
Canada	2%
India	1%
China	1%

78% with a US location say it is extremely/very important (**46%** extremely)

SATISFACTION WITH ELEMENTS OF SEO SERVICE

ELEMENTS OF SEO SERVICE	EXTREMELY	VERY	TOTAL
Increasing traffic to your site	26%	39%	65%
Accessing new customers	25%	37%	62%
Increasing brand awareness	25%	36%	61%
Better site usability	23%	36%	59%
Helping to build trust and credibility	23%	36%	59%
Better value than paid advertising	26%	33%	59%
Easily measurable return on investment	23%	32%	55%
Improving the safety/security of website	22%	32%	54%
Improving the speed of your website	21%	30%	51%
Gaining followers on social media sites	18%	32%	50%
Increasing number of email subscribers	19%	29%	48%
Helping to attract new talent/employees	20%	25%	45%

NPS SCORES AND REASONS FOR SWITCHING

Likelihood to recommend among total: **NPS 0**

Both agency & freelancer: **NPS 9**

Agency only: **NPS 8**

Freelancer only: **NPS -6**

REASON FOR SWITCHING	MAJOR FACTOR	MINOR FACTOR	NOT A FACTOR
Dissatisfaction with business results	44%	38%	18%
Dissatisfaction with cost /expense of service	41%	41%	18%
Heard about a better option on my own	40%	40%	20%
Dissatisfaction with customer service	34%	38%	28%
Was approached / pitched by a competitor	21%	35%	44%

AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS ABOUT SEO PROVIDER

AGREEMENTS	AGREE COMPLETELY	AGREE SOMEWHAT	TOTAL
I have seen dramatic positive results for my business because of SEO	21%	38%	59%
I feel like I need more training to fully benefit from what SEO offers	13%	37%	50%
I do not have the staff resources to properly benefit from SEO	8%	20%	28%
I find SEO to be confusing and unclear about what services they offer	6%	21%	27%
I am not sure what I am really paying for with SEO	7%	18%	25%
I feel like SEO companies are very unreliable	6%	17%	23%
I don't think SEO is worth the money for my business	10%	14%	24%

DEMOGRAPHICS

City/urban area: **34%**

Suburban area (surrounding a major city): **51%**

Rural/farming area (far from a major city): **15%**

Non-Hispanic Whites: **71%**

Hispanics: **14%**

African-Americans: **7%**

Asian-Americans: **7%**

Other: **1%**

WEB SAVVINESS	EXTREMELY	VERY	SOMEWHAT	NOT VERY/ NOT AT ALL
Total	21%	43%	33%	4%
Existing Users	24%	43%	30%	3%
Lapsed Users	12%	44%	39%	5%
18-34	28%	45%	24%	3%
35-44	22%	47%	28%	3%
45+	13%	37%	45%	5%