CONTENT MARKETING

Benchmarks from the Agency Perspective

What content marketing success will look like in the year ahead and how agencies plan to achieve it, based on a broad-range of client experience.

SharpSpring

Content Marketing: Benchmarks from the Agency Perspective

Ascend2 Research Conducted in Partnership with SharpSpring.

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CONTENT MARKETING

Benchmarks from the Agency Perspective

Content is essential to attracting, engaging and acquiring customers today.

What will be the most challenging obstacles to content marketing success in the year ahead and how will agencies use their broad range of client experience to overcome them?

To find out, Ascend2 and SharpSpring fielded the Content Marketing Survey and completed interviews with 521 marketing, sales and business professionals; 111 of whom are marketing agencies.

This report, titled the *Content Marketing: Benchmarks from the Agency Perspective*, presents the unique broad-based experience of these marketing agencies. We thank these busy professionals for sharing their valuable insights with you.

This research has been produced for your use. Put it to work in your own marketing strategy planning and presentation materials. Clip the charts and write about them in your blog or post them on social media. Please share this research credited as published.
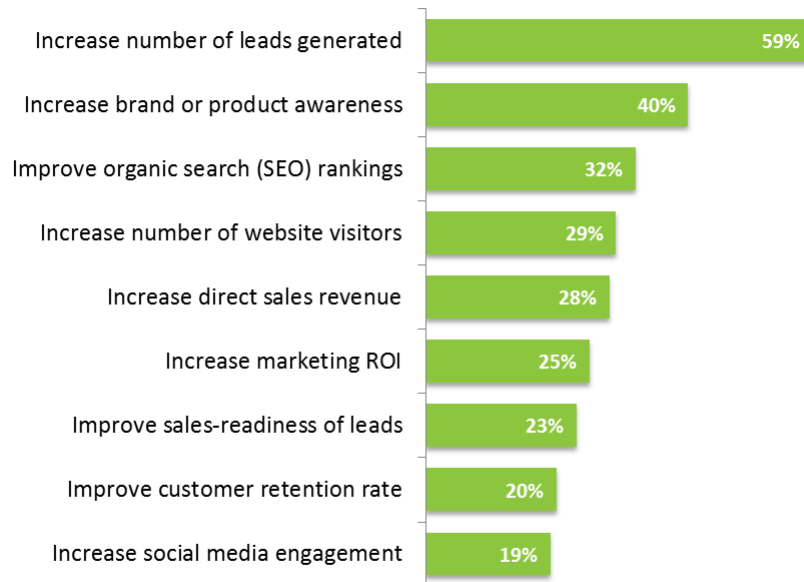
All the best,
Rick Carlson, CEO / Founder

SharpSpring

The Most Important Objective Agencies Aim To Achieve With Content Marketing Is Lead Generation.

What are the MOST IMPORTANT OBJECTIVES for your content marketing strategy in the year ahead?

Objective	%
Increase number of leads generated	59%
Increase brand or product awareness	40%
Improve organic search (SEO) rankings	32%
Increase number of website visitors	29%
Increase direct sales revenue	28%
Increase marketing ROI	25%
Improve sales-readiness of leads	23%
Improve customer retention rate	20%
Increase social media engagement	19%

SPRING FORWARD

Lead generation is what fuels the entire sales process. Without leads, you don't have anyone to sell to. **Marketing autmation can identify the 98% of web traffic that is usually completely anonymous** - enabling you to significantly increase leads from your web traffic.

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Only 14% Of Marketing Agencies Have Generated *"Very Successful"* Results For Their Clients.

How do you RATE THE SUCCESS of your current content marketing program to achieve important objectives?

Not successful 5%

Very successful 14%

Somewhat successful 81%
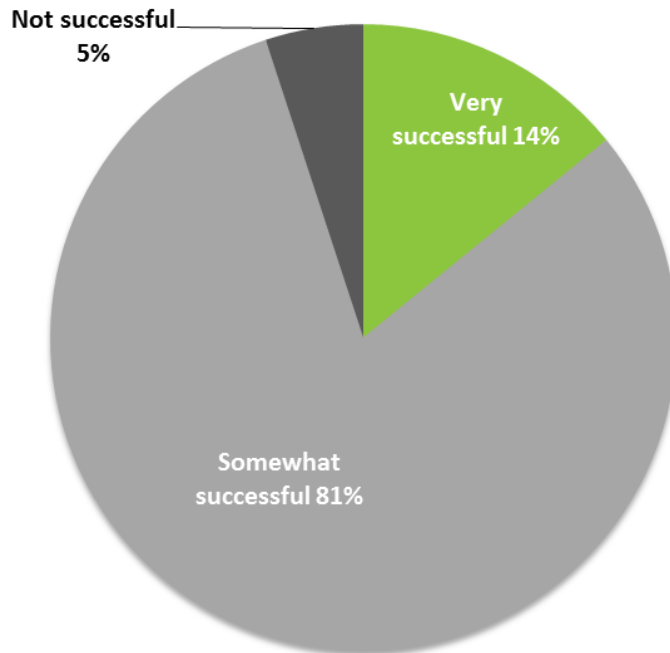
SPRING FORWARD

It can be tough to accurately quantify how effective your marketing strategy is. Marketing automation platforms offer tools that allow you to **identify which campaign generated a lead**, and then calculate the ROI for that campaign - enabling you to see what is working and what isn't.

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Even For Agencies, Content Creation Is One Of The Biggest Roadblocks When Implementing A Successful Content Marketing Strategy

What are the MOST CHALLENGING OBSTACLES to achieving your content marketing objectives?

| Obstacle	Percentage
Lack of internal content creation resources	50%
Writing original articles and blog posts	41%
Lack of effective content marketing strategy	31%
Lack of content outsourcing budget	31%
Inability to measure content marketing ROI	29%
Curating or repurposing existing content	23%
Lack of social followers to consume content	22%
Lack of marketing and sales alignment	14%
Lack of premium content	12%

SPRING FORWARD

Content creation is very challenging, so it's important to make that content count. Marketing automation enables you to **leverage content more efficiently.** It provides a wider reach, and ensures that the content goes to people who want it. Content marketing and marketing automation go hand-in-hand: when you use your content better, you don't need to create as much.

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Agencies Are Adopting Marketing Automation At A Faster And Faster Pace.

To what extent does your agency USE MARKETING SOFTWARE to automate and manage the content marketing process?

Extensive use of marketing software 20%

Don't use marketing software 39%

Limited use of marketing software 41%
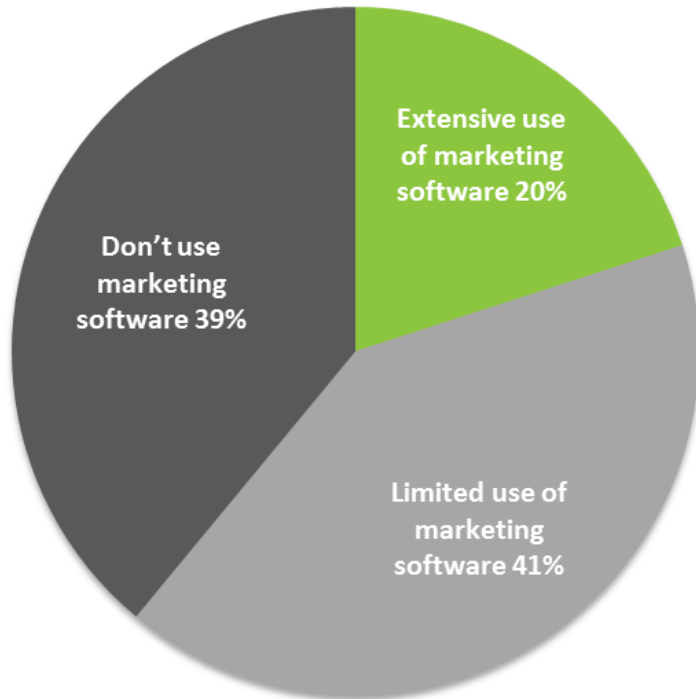
SPRING FORWARD

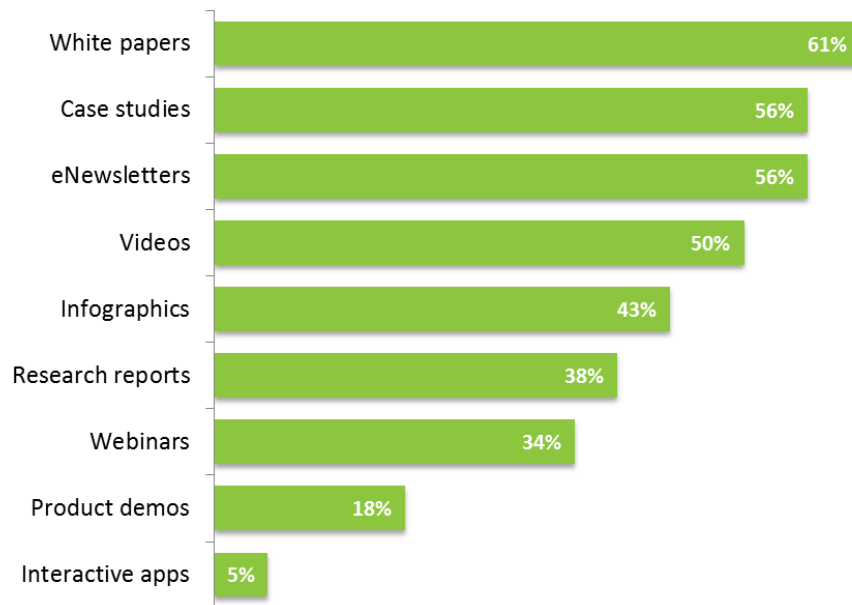Over half of marketing agencies are already using marketing automation. Marketing automation generates **billable hours** and retainer-based relationships so effectively that it's becoming harder and harder to compete without it.

CATCH UP WITH A
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The Top 3 Forms Of Premium Content Used By Agencies Are White Papers, Case Studies, and eNewsletters.

Which of the following types of PREMIUM CONTENT has your agency used for marketing purposes?

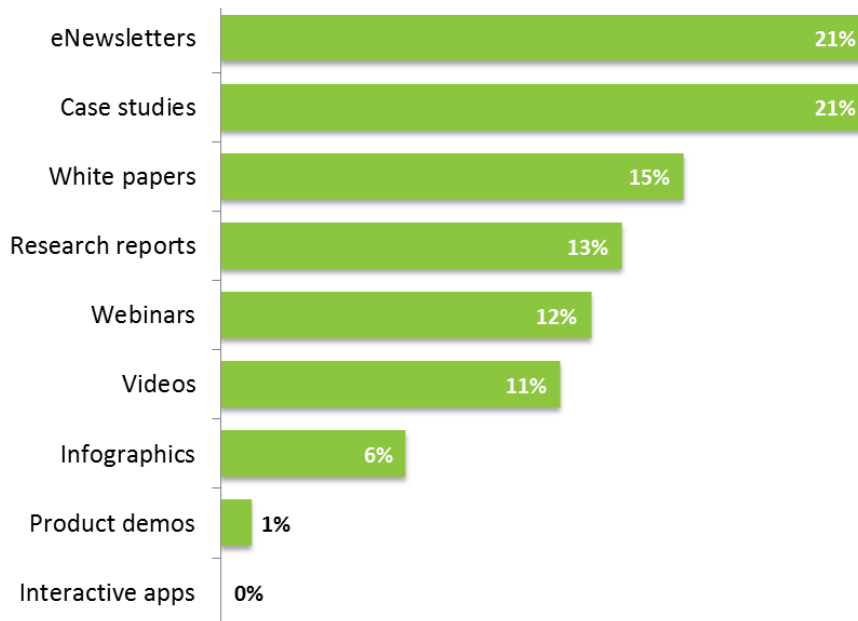| Type	Percentage
White papers	61%
Case studies	56%
eNewsletters	56%
Videos	50%
Infographics	43%
Research reports	38%
Webinars	34%
Product demos	18%
Interactive apps	5%

SPRING FORWARD

Content is the key to a successful marketing strategy, but it's not the whole picture. The **role of marketing automation in the content marketing process** is to maximize the benefit that the content produces. Developing content without using marketing automation is like filling up a grill with charcoal without having any way to light it.

LIGHT UP YOUR GRILL
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Email-distributed Newsletters Are The Most Effective Form Of Premium Content Used By Agencies, But Better Segmentation Is Changing This.

Of the types of premium content used, which is the MOST EFFECTIVE for achieving important objectives?

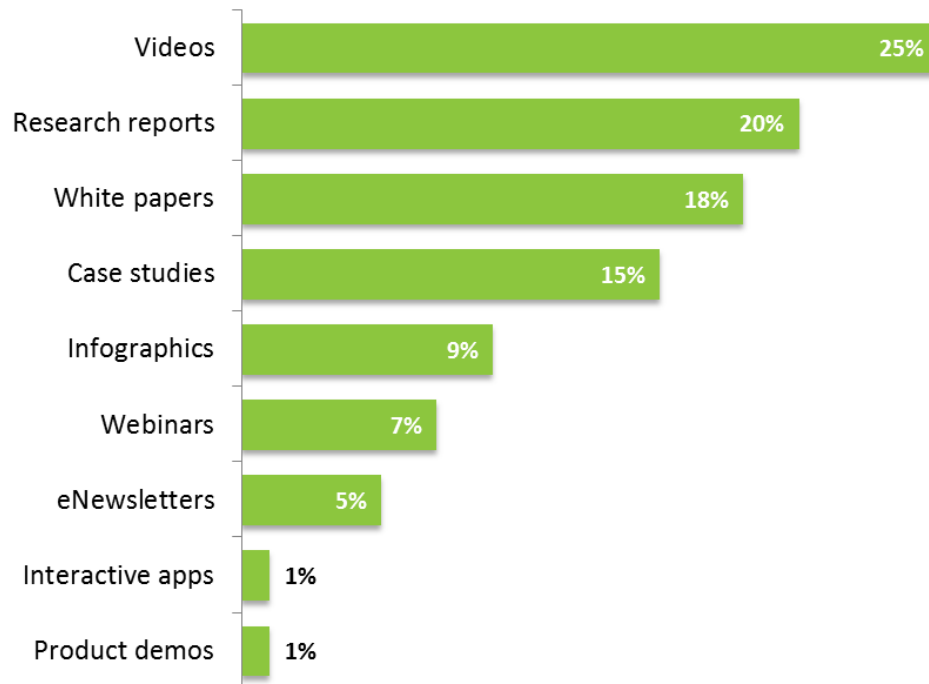| Content Type	Percentage
eNewsletters	21%
Case studies	21%
White papers	15%
Research reports	13%
Webinars	12%
Videos	11%
Infographics	6%
Product demos	1%
Interactive apps	0%

SPRING FORWARD

Although marketers have relied heavily on eNewsletters, they're becoming a thing of the past. Thanks to marketing automation, the ability to send personal emails to very narrow lead segments can generate much **higher conversions** then traditional bulk generic eNewsletters.

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Content Creation That Requires A Lot Of Resources Can Be Very Difficult For Clients To Generate On Their Own.

Of the types of premium content used, which is the MOST DIFFICULT to execute?

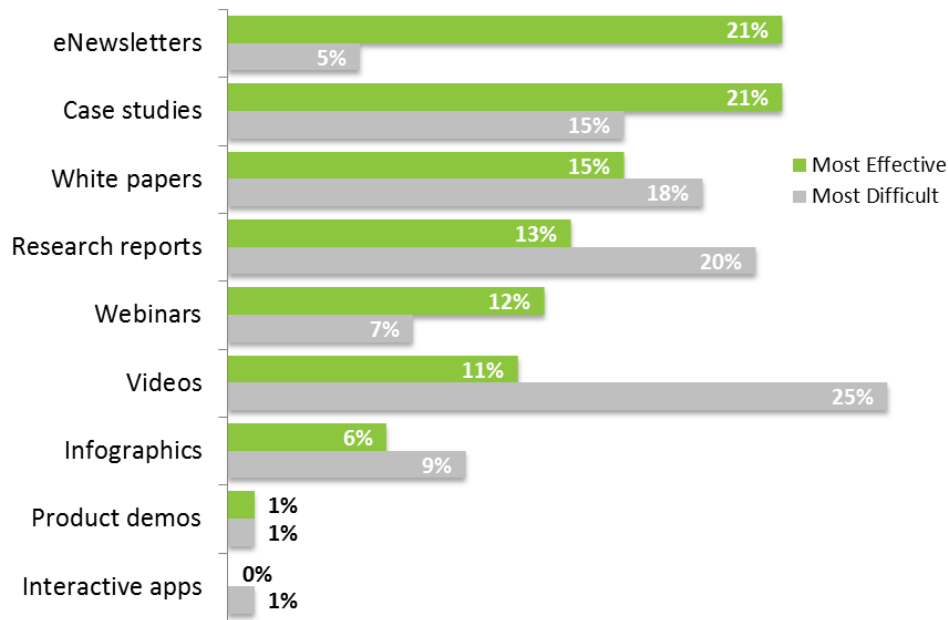| Content Type	Percentage
Videos	25%
Research reports	20%
White papers	18%
Case studies	15%
Infographics	9%
Webinars	7%
eNewsletters	5%
Interactive apps	1%
Product demos	1%

SPRING FORWARD

It takes a lot of resources to generate quality content on a regular basis. The best way to make sure that effort isn't going to waste is to ensure that the **content gets delivered where it will have the greatest effect.**

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Clients Generally Prefer That Their Marketing Agency Use Fast And Easy Methods Over What May Be More Effective Methods.

Premium Content: Most Effective versus Most Difficult to execute.

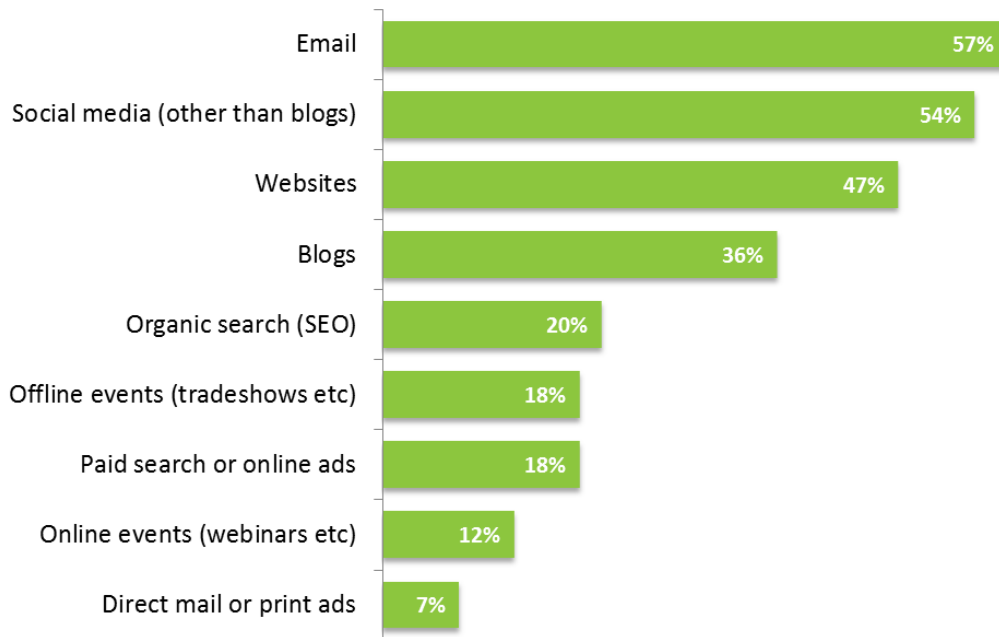| Category	Most Effective	Most Difficult
eNewsletters	21%	5%
Case studies	21%	15%
White papers	15%	18%
Research reports	13%	20%
Webinars	12%	7%
Videos	11%	25%
Infographics	6%	9%
Product demos	1%	1%
Interactive apps	0%	1%

Legend:
- ■ Most Effective
- ■ Most Difficult

SPRING FORWARD

Clients often have a difficult time justifying paying more for more effective methods, because it can be tough to quantify how much a marketing program is actually doing. Being able to **track ROI for individual campaigns** from lead generation all the way through the end of the sales funnel overcomes this.

DISCOVER HOW WITH A
LIVE DEMO

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Email Is The Most Effective Channel Used To Reach Client Prospects And Customers With Content.

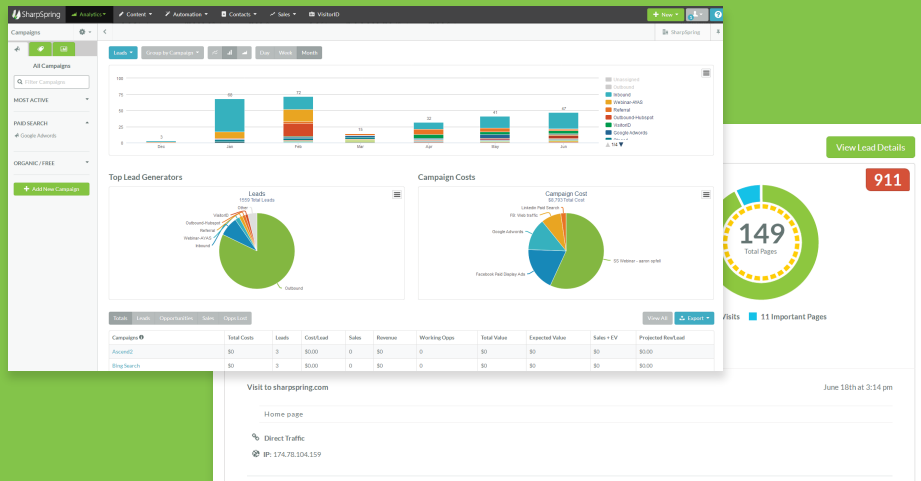*What are the MOST EFFECTIVE CHANNELS used to reach prospects and customers with your content?*

Channel	Percentage
Email	57%
Social media (other than blogs)	54%
Websites	47%
Blogs	36%
Organic search (SEO)	20%
Offline events (tradeshows etc)	18%
Paid search or online ads	18%
Online events (webinars etc)	12%
Direct mail or print ads	7%

SPRING FORWARD

Sending content to clients doesn't matter if the clients don't bother to read or act on that content. By **segmenting leads well,** you can make sure you're sending your leads content that is interesting and engaging to them.

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Discover Why Hundreds of Agencies Around The World Choose SharpSpring

- Drive More Sales
- Generate More Leads
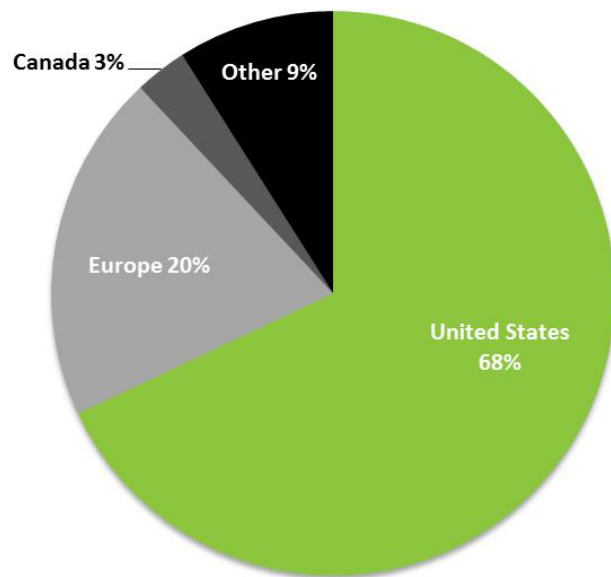- Prove ROI

GET YOUR LIVE DEMO
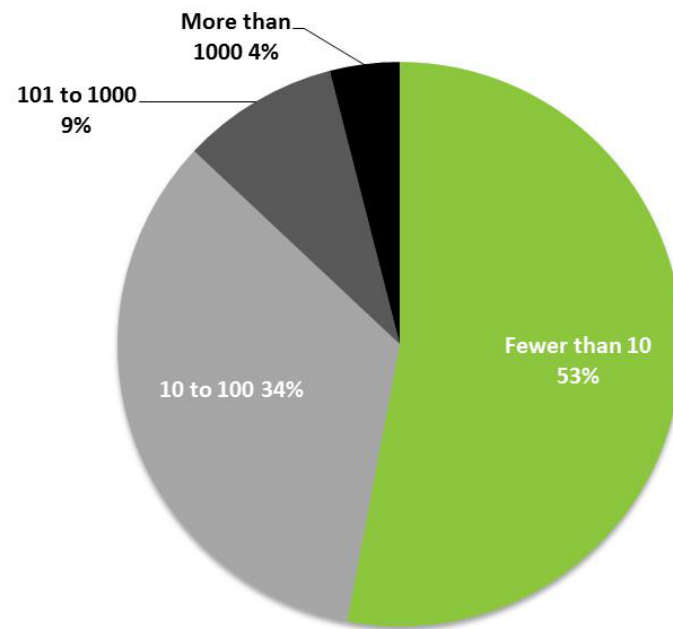
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Ascend2 Research Surveys are conducted online from a panel of more than 50,000 US and international marketing and sales decision-makers and practitioners representing a range of contact roles, company types, sizes and geographic regions. The questionnaire used is standardized to incorporate these methodologies across all studies while maintaining our proven 3-Minute Survey format. Survey findings are examined in a quantitative context by experienced analysts and reported objectively.

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SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Agency Location

Canada 3%
Other 9%
Europe 20%
United States 68%

Agency Size (Employees)

More than 1000 4%
101 to 1000 9%
10 to 100 34%
Fewer than 10 53%

ABOUT THE RESEARCH PARTNERS

SharpSpring

Simple Marketing Automation for Agencies and SMBs

Powerful, affordable marketing tools that help you automate workflows, drive more leads and convert them to sales with SMB friendly pricing to fit your budget. SharpSpring is built to help your marketing agency attract new business, create a recurring revenue stream and tie your clients to you.

Learn more at www.SharpSpring.com

Ascend2

Research - Based Demand Generation for Marketing Solution Providers

Marketing software firms and marketing agencies partner with Ascend2 to reliably generate new business opportunities. Our integrated research , content creation and demand generation programs are transparent – putting the spotlight on your brand and the interests of your audience.

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