

RSW/US

New Business Solutions for Marketing Agencies

2018

THOUGHT
LEADER

SURVEY
REPORT

2018

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LEADER
SURVEY
REPORT

FOREWORD

This is our fifth annual Agency New Business Thought Leader Survey Report, and the only one where we don't provide our own questions, but instead ask leaders within the industry to provide their perspective.

This year we changed our structure by asking individuals who drive new business at individual agencies, to provide questions for the survey. We asked each of them to submit questions they believed would prove helpful to agencies across the country, and ideally this change will translate into useful takeaways for your team.

We'll be conducting interviews with each of them to present feedback on the responses you gave to their questions. These interviews will be released via our Agency New Business newsletter and our agency insights blog.

We would like to thank the following Thought Leaders/New Business Directors for being a part of our survey:

Stephen Larkin R/GA

Jason Parks BARKLEY

Matt Weiss HUGE

Kelly Kennedy R2i

Jordan Wells FCB/WEST

The 2018 Agency New Business Thought Leader Survey was completed by 199 Agencies from across the United States during September 2018 and commissioned by RSW/US.

RSW/US is a full service, outsourced agency lead generation and new business development firm that helps marketing service companies (exclusively) find and win new business. We help Agencies find qualified leads and set meetings with them. We assist Agencies in improving their positioning in the market and move them closer to closing new business.

This report provides an overall summary of findings as well as perspective from RSW/US.

Mark Sneider
President
RSW/US



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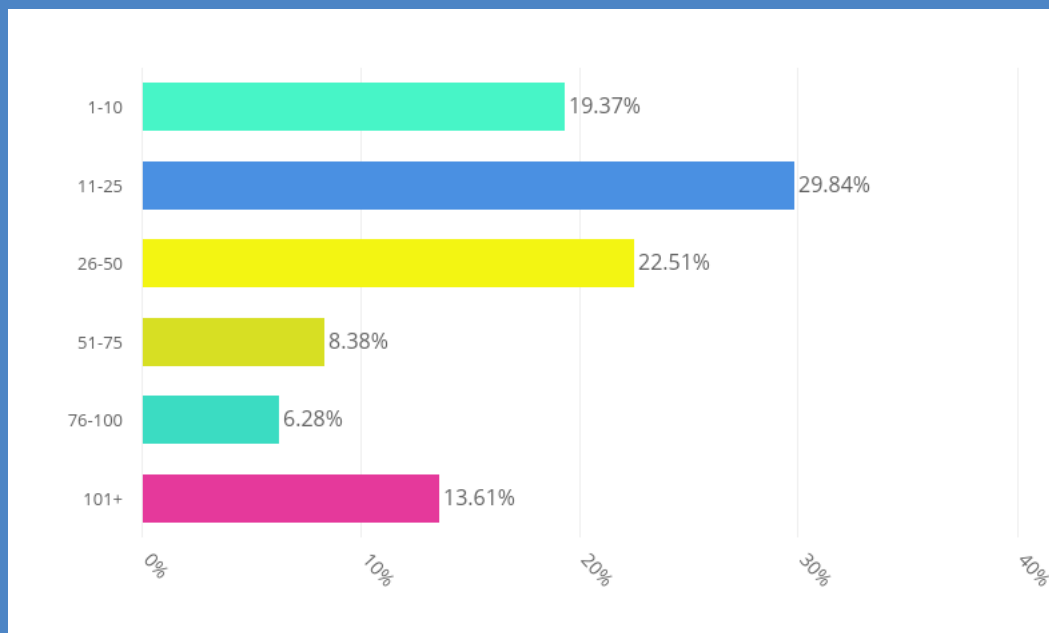
PLEASE NOTE: ALL PERSPECTIVE IS THAT OF RSW/US. SEPARATE INTERVIEWS AND GUEST BLOG POSTS WILL SERVE AS PLATFORMS FOR OUR THOUGHT LEADERS' PERSPECTIVE AND INSIGHTS.

Framing Questions:

We asked two initial baseline questions to frame the report.

The first of those:

How many employees do you have at your marketing services firm?

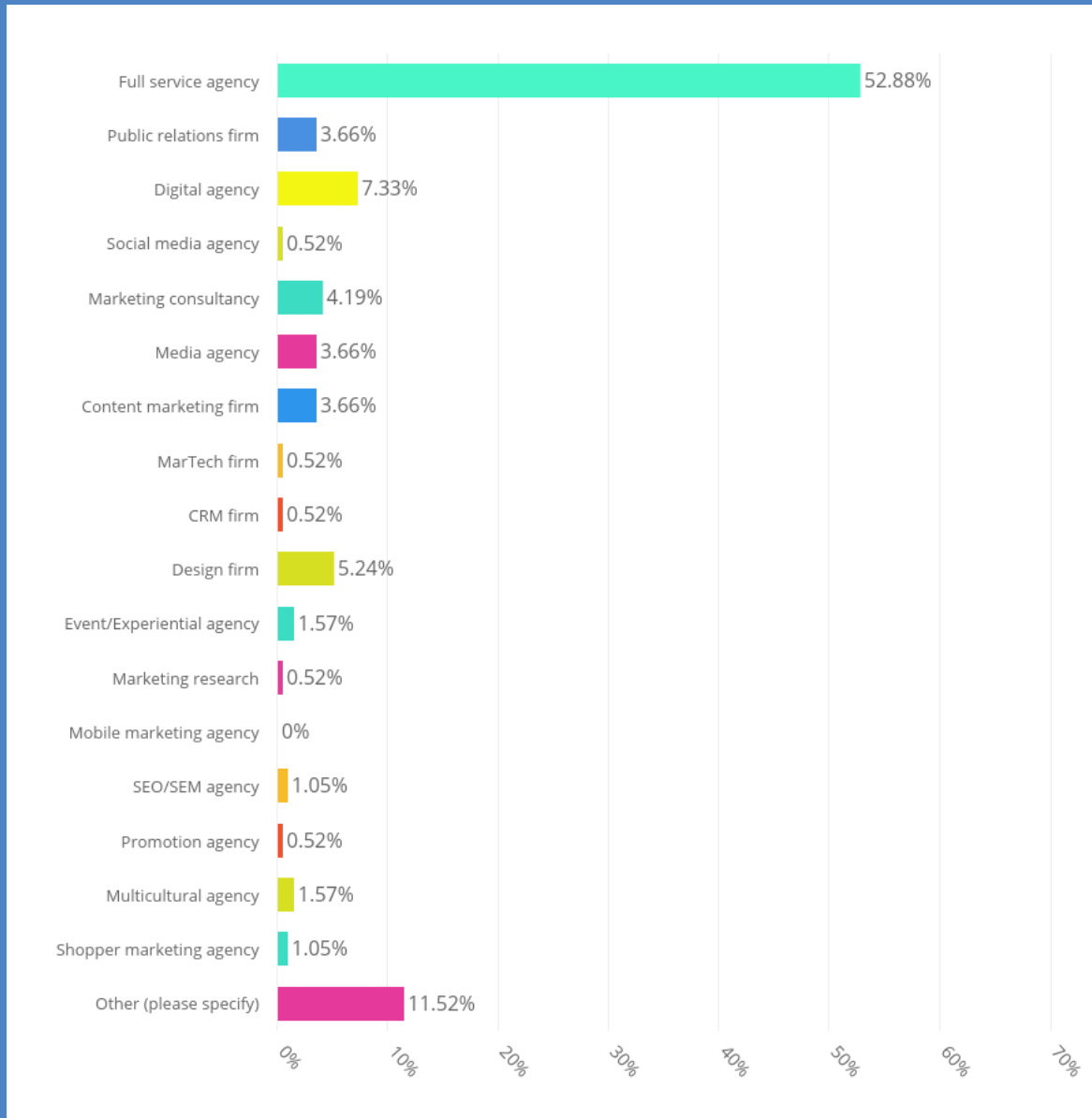


As you can see, the staff spread of those who took our survey is fairly even, with a few exceptions.

The largest group is 11-25, at 30%, 26-50 following at 22.11%, 1-10 at 19.47% and 101+ comprising the 4th largest percentage at 13.68%. Overall, we were quite pleased at the distribution and cross-section of firm sizes.

And the second:

What best describes the type of marketing service firm you are?



A somewhat subjective question, given how firms can often struggle with their own descriptors, but, per the graph, just over 50% of firms taking our survey describe themselves as full service agencies, and then the remaining firm percentages cover a wide swath of descriptions, with digital firms coming in at the next highest percentage. (Taking out the "other" responses.)

Chapter 1:

R/GA's

**STEPHEN
LARKIN**



STEPHEN LARKIN

asks...

Chapter 1:

STEPHEN LARKIN

asks...

The first set of questions comes from R/GA's Stephen Larkin on the subject of pitches and presentations.

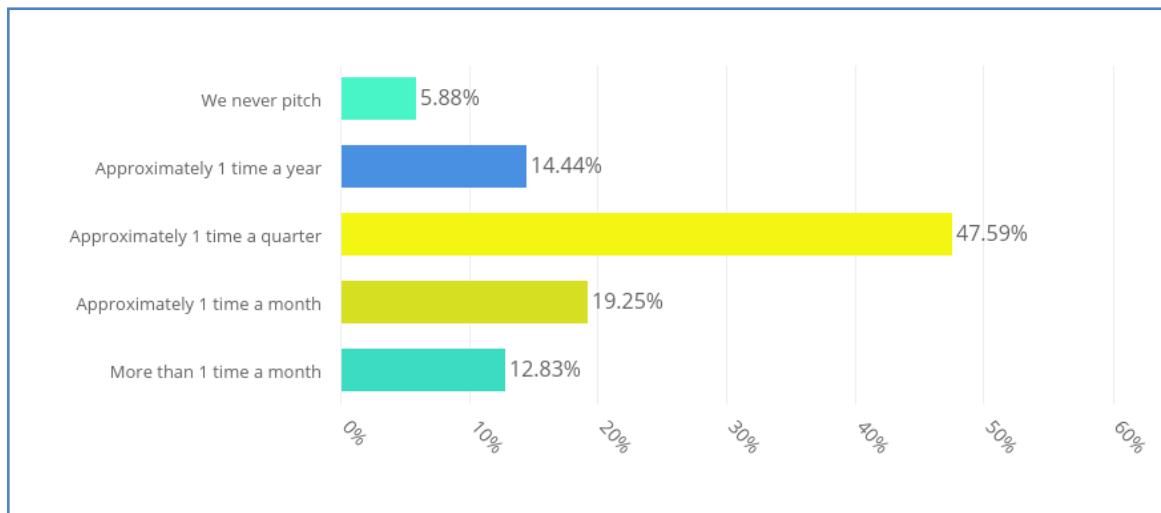
Stephen currently serves as Executive Director of Growth for the west coast operations for R/GA. Prior to R/GA, Stephen was the Chief Marketing Officer for 180LA. During Stephen's tenure at the agency, 180LA experienced tremendous momentum and growth including winning roster spots with Pepsi and HP, projects with Mattel, Dollar Shave Club, Pacific Life, and AOR duties for both University of Phoenix and Miller Lite.

Stephen also led assignments with The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, The Hollywood Foreign Press and 180LA's UnFairy Tales campaign for UNICEF which won five Lions at Cannes including the Grand Prix for Good. Prior to 180LA, Stephen spent a decade at Mullen leading new business and running their Pittsburgh office as Managing Director. Stephen spent significant time at Hill/Holliday as well.

Chapter 1:

STEPHEN LARKIN

Question One: Which best describes how often you find yourself in competitive pitches?



With almost 50% of firms pitching once a quarter, that's obviously an ongoing use of time, effort and resources that takes away from current clients. And while pitching is a necessary "evil" for many firms, in talking to our own marketing services clients, we see them moving toward specialization in one vertical, or multiple verticals, in order to avoid that pitch process.

Per the responses we received, just shy of 6% say they never pitch. Specialization alone won't ensure that for your firm, but it will get you in the door in a more effective way, and show marketers and prospects they may not need to go through the official pitch process.

But if you're an agency that finds itself needing to get involved in pitches or presentations, the key is giving pitches or RFPs critical review. Don't participate if you have to:

1. Pay to pitch
2. There are more than 3 in the final presentation
3. You're rushed to respond
4. The incumbent is involved
5. You don't get a chance to speak directly with the marketer

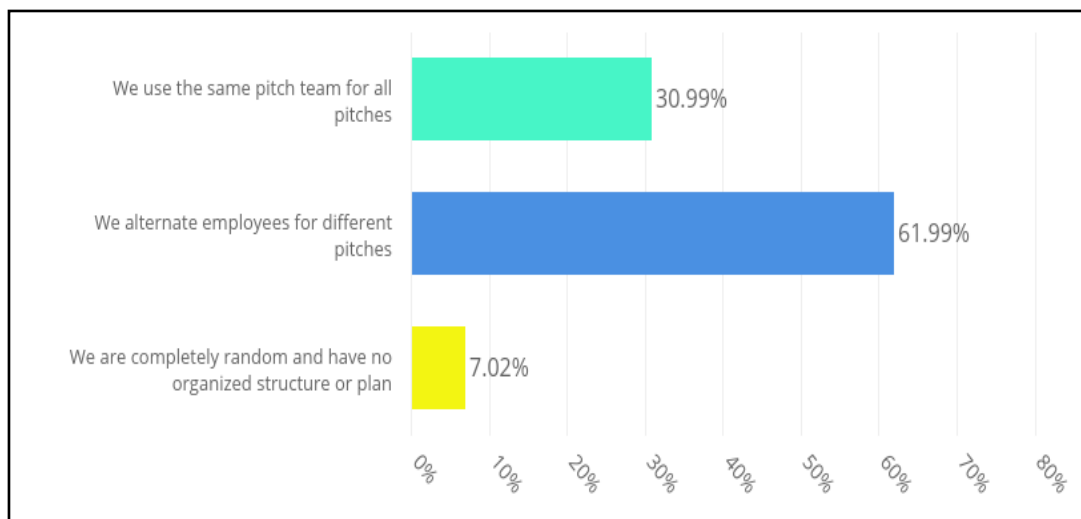
And it appears that AMV BBDO group CEO Cilla Snowball [agrees](#):

"Best to be ruthlessly selective about whether you pitch in the first place and then give it your all. Spreading agency resources too thin on pitches is a recipe for disaster."

*47% of agencies say they pitch
once a quarter*

Chapter 1: STEPHEN LARKIN *asks...*


Question Two: Do you have a pitch team that attends all pitches OR do employees alternate between pitches?



I was surprised to see almost 62% of firms said they alternate employees for different pitches. Surprised, because we've seen success with a proven pitch team that typically is comprised of the same group of people.

To be fair, many firms who alternate are those full-service firms who typically have a core pitch team, and then bring in key members with specific knowledge or talent for that pitch.

For those firms who do alternate, there are some obvious, and not so-obvious things to consider. One of the age-old questions being who will actually work on the account. With many agencies pulling talent from freelancers and freelancing networks, this becomes potentially problematic.



Many marketers have adapted and changed attitudes to accept this trend, but just as many remain “old-school” in their thinking.

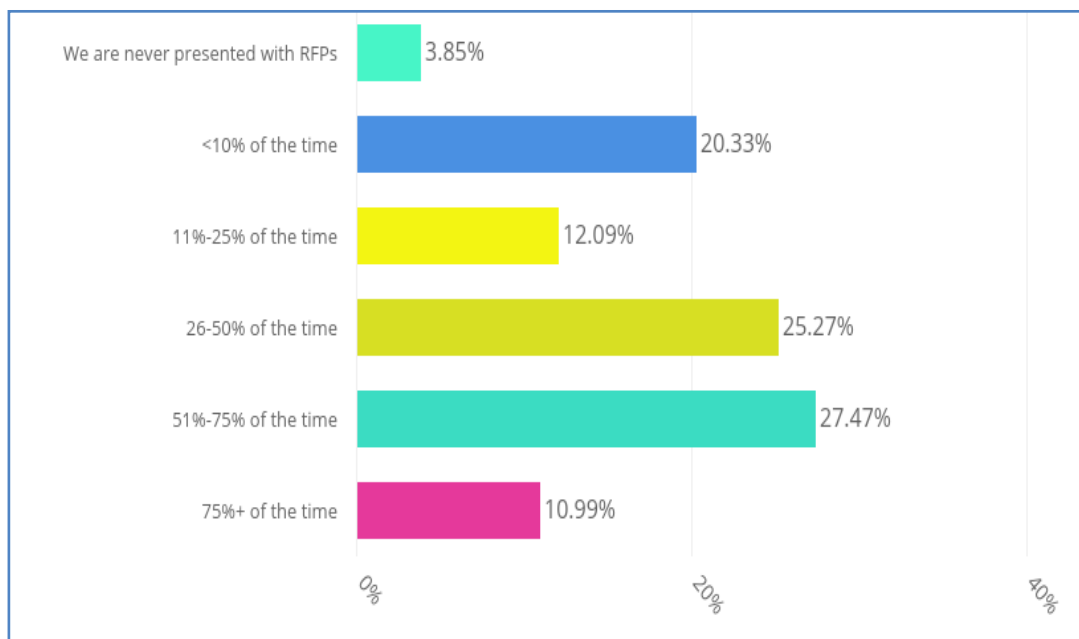
The other potential challenge in alternating employees is one of the classic new business stumbling block: talking too much about the firm’s offerings, rather than the potential client’s needs. When you have that core team typically involved in pitches, it’s less of a concern.

But when you alternate often, you will potentially have less control. And that potential client doesn’t want a pitch team where only two people are doing the majority of the talking.

Only 31% of agencies use the same pitch team for all pitches


Chapter 1: STEPHEN LARKIN *asks...*

Question Three: Approximately how often do you respond to RFPs you're presented with?



27% of responding agencies answered 51-75% of the time, followed by 25% responding 26-50% of the time.

Similar to the previous question on pitching, the more selective you can be with RFPs, the better. It's positive to see 20% of firms saying they respond less than 10% of the time, but sometimes you simply have no choice. As all of you reading know, certain verticals, like government, higher ed and tourism, for example, dictate you must answer in order to get the business.



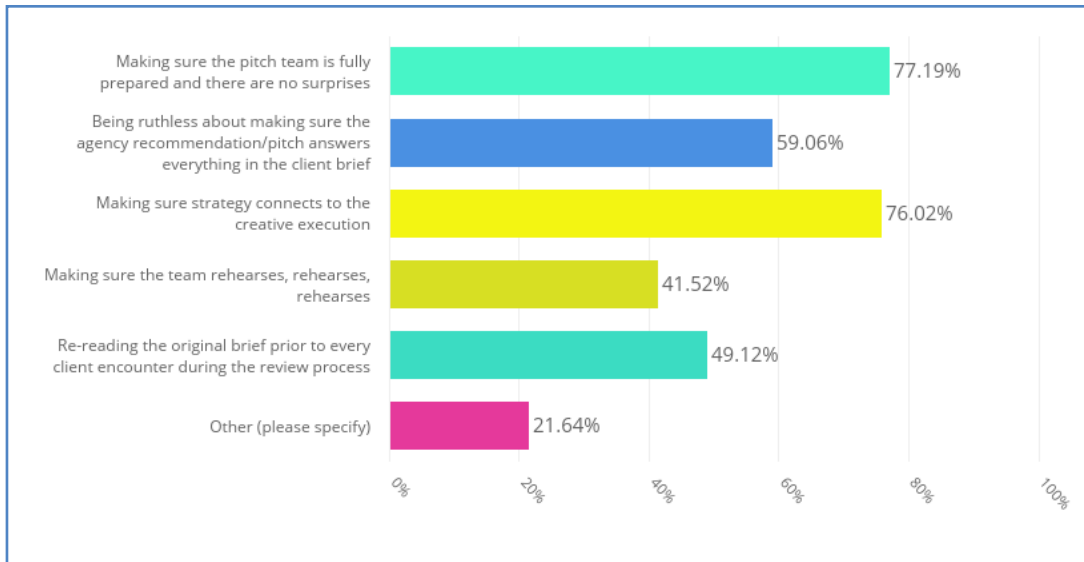
The good news comes from what looks to be the changing perceptions on RFP effectiveness. From an Ad Age piece, [The New Pitch Process: Shorter, Faster, Better](#): Jill Baskin, CMO at Hershey and a former Kraft and Mondelez marketer, says she “tries to avoid paperwork, including RFIs and RFPs, in favor of conversations.”

And from the same piece, Michael McGoohan, CMO at Biofreeze and owner of Performance Health, says: he never used an RFP for the original project, choosing 360i among a handful of agencies. His process included informal conversations and asking 360i to share case studies on how it dealt with similar brands.” It’s what we preach to our clients: those informal conversations and case studies are so important to any new business process.

*Almost 40% of agencies
respond to RFPs 51-100%
of the time they’re presented
the opportunity*

Chapter 1: STEPHEN LARKIN *asks...*

Question Four: Please select all those things you feel are most important to do prior to pitching or presenting for a client's business (regardless of whether your agency pitches or presents to prospective clients)



"Making sure the pitch team is fully prepared and there are no surprises" comes in at the top at 77%. I've been in final pitch presentations where it's clear that the team wasn't well practiced... and it shows. It can really hurt a great agency's chances of winning if they can show a well-organized face to their prospective client.

"Making sure strategy connects to the creative execution" follows right behind at 76%. Again, another final pitch presentation experience I had on the AgencySearch side of our business: We had three agencies in a final pitch presentation and two of them presented very slick campaigns. The third didn't present a campaign, but rather presented "image boards" and tied them nicely to insights they unearthed about the industry, company, brand.

*Most important prior to a pitch:
making sure the pitch team is
fully prepared and there are
no surprises*

The “slick” campaigns couldn’t make the connection and they ended up not winning the business. Key is showing the prospective client that you’re thoughtful, strategic, and organized in how you create and develop new ideas.

One response category that deserves further attention is “being ruthless about making sure the agency recommendation/pitch answers everything in the client brief”, which came in 3rd at 59%. It’s a bit of a Catch-22, as you most certainly need to answer the questions on the brief, but every other firm is doing that, and most will slavishly adhere to the format and method of answering. If there’s a way you can help yourself to stand out, while still answering what’s asked of you, it could be the difference-maker.

This is a bit of a dice roll, as you can go overboard and risk taking it too far past the ask, but if at all possible, try to get a conversation beforehand to gauge the character of the company and culture beyond what you’ve read and researched. You may find a way to do more than the other firms and give you the edge.

*Most important prior to a pitch:
only 41% of agencies said “making
sure the team rehearses, rehearses,
rehearses”*

Chapter 2:

Huge's

MATT

WEISS



MATT WEISS

asks...

Chapter 2:

MATT WEISS

asks...

The second set of questions comes from Hugel's Matt Weiss on the subject of prospecting tools and presentations.

At Hugel, Matt is Managing Director, Strategic Growth. In this role, he partners with agency leadership and new clients to achieve their ambitious growth objectives. Prior to his time at Hugel, Matt spent four years as Global Chief Marketing Officer, and Global Chief Revenue Officer at Havas.

He was also Chief of Staff at MDC Partners agency, KBS, and spent more than 15 years at McCann, putting together an impressive run of wins and awards, making the agency one of the true powerhouses in the industry. He was classically trained in both strategy and account management, running some of the agencies' largest accounts.

Chapter 2:

MATT WEISS

*Question One: What platforms or resources are you using to obtain prospecting intelligence/insights?
(List as many as you want)*



LinkedIn is the most-used platform in our survey at 23%. The remaining responses were spread fairly evenly between 6-10% and included multiple platforms, and internal research as listed below for reference:

Media audit

Google research

We perform our own research as appropriate, we don't use a specific set of platforms

Apollo

Mintel

NetBase

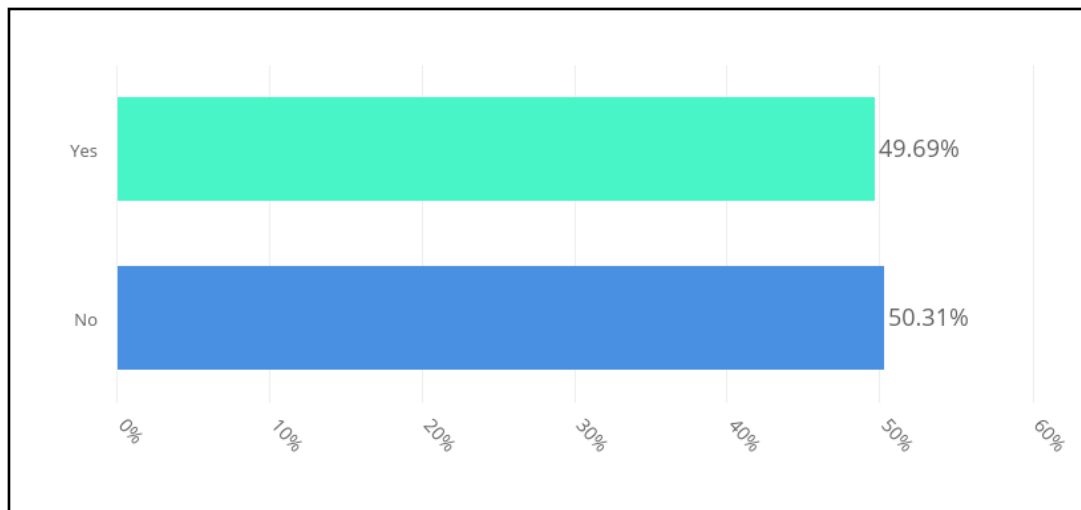
IBM Watson
4As Research
Industry associations
Current clients
Winmo
AHD.com
Nielsen

Ultimately, the key is going in with targeted, smart questions that you can ask your prospective client to show him/her that you understand their space and have knowledge of the central issues challenging brands like theirs. Regardless of where you get your intel and insights, it's important that you have them.

It's worth noting that while platform usage is spread rather widely, it is part of an uptick in the overall category. From our 2018 New Business Tools Report, Target Audience Research Services usage grew 10% in 2018, versus 2017. In fact, it marks the highest usage we've seen for the category in the last 6 years, at an overall 54% of agencies citing usage of these tools.

Chapter 2: MATT WEISS *asks...*


Question Two: Do you currently use a sales engagement platform, such as Salesforce?



An (almost) even split here, with 50% reporting no and 49% reporting yes. We'll touch on it later in the report as well, but these platforms stand as an ongoing struggle for agencies.

They see the efficacy, but are generally faced with the following challenges:

- No centralized individual within the firm to guide usage
- When more than one individual using, lack of proper training on universal usage protocols
- Not simple enough, too function-rich
- Lack of overall consistency in usage



However, anecdotally, we do see firms putting a more diligent effort against using these platforms.

Keys to success in using these platforms:

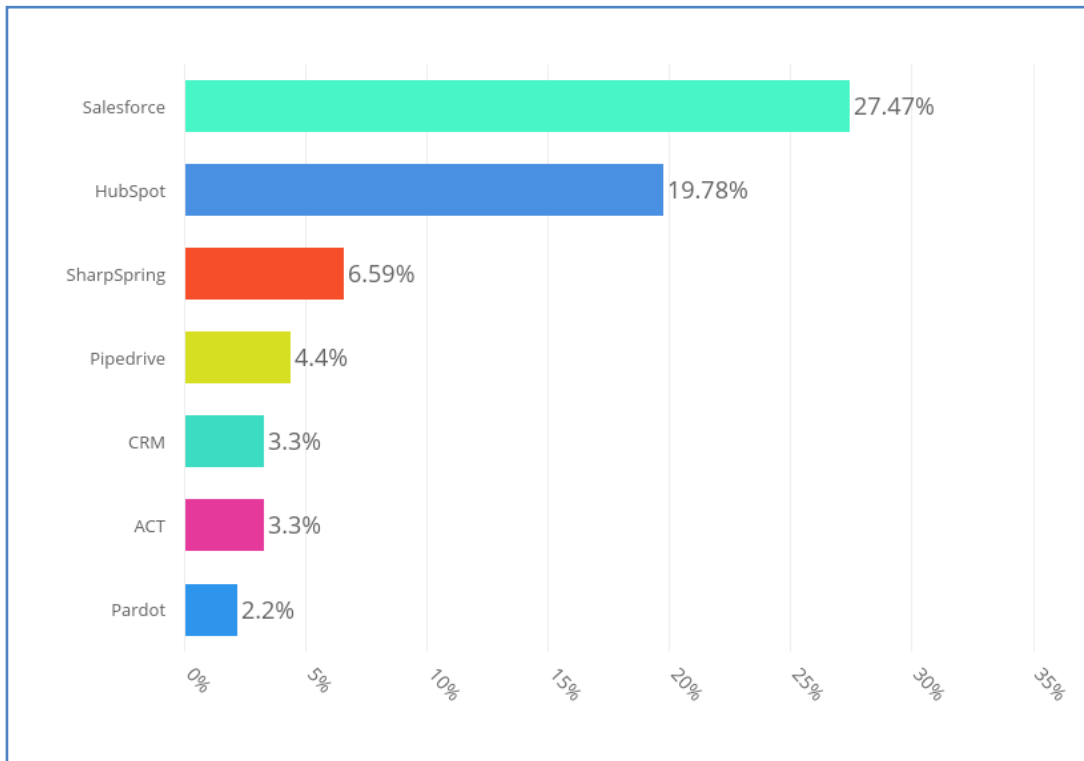
- Consistent use
- Keeping the use of it simple (*don't overcomplicate it...it doesn't need to be*)
- Ongoing updates of information-without them, the platform steadily loses effectiveness

*50% of agencies use
a sales engagement
platform*

Chapter 2: MATT WEISS *asks...*


Question Three: If you do use a sales engagement platform, which one do you use?

As you can see in the list below, Salesforce comes in on top at 27%, followed by HubSpot and SharpSpring at 19% and 6% respectively.



These responses are indicative of two trends we see continuing in 2018:

1) The two dominant leaders in the platform continue to be Salesforce and HubSpot. Certainly part of that can be attributed to their early entry into the marketplace, but they must be given credit for the sheer amount of thought leadership and content they produce on a daily basis. That content practice is one we've dedicated ourselves to at RSW and it has paid dividends, although it takes time and dedication.



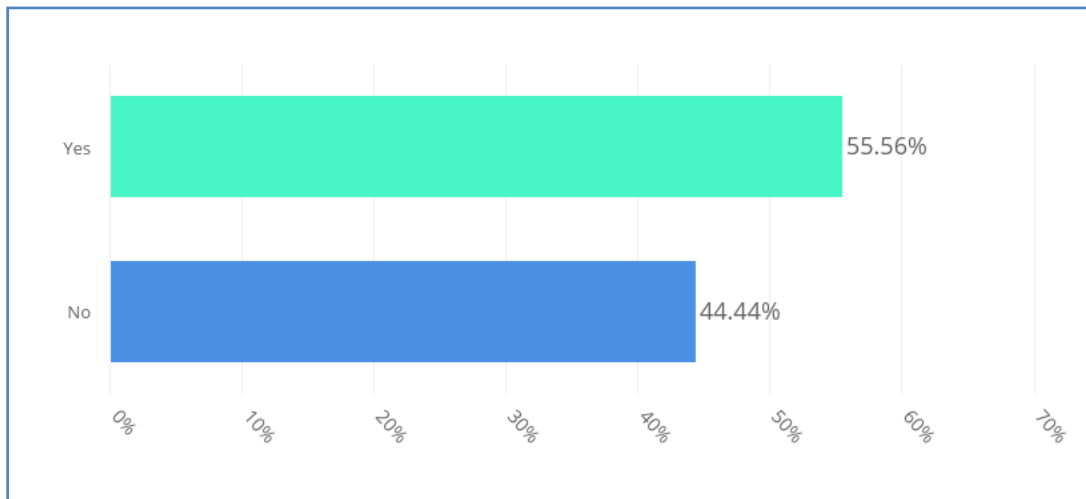
2) The other trend, and we touch on this in a following chapter as well, is one of agencies devoting more time to testing and trying these platforms. While not making up huge percentages, platforms like Pipedrive, ZoHo and Pipeline Deals, to name just a few, are appearing more often in reports like ours.

These platforms are more accessible today, they are easier to use, and they've, generally, become less expensive. A common complaint we hear from agencies is that CRMs are too complicated for their needs. They don't have to be. There are plenty out there that make good sense for the agency world.

Chapter 2: MATT WEISS *asks...*

Question Four: If you do use a sales engagement platform like Salesforce, is it used to manage both outbound sales efforts and existing client organic growth efforts?


The responses here represent an almost seismic change in usage for sales engagement platforms.



In the past, the resounding answer would have been “no” to using these platforms for both outbound and existing client organic growth.

Over the last 3-5 years, firms using these platforms for organic growth would typically not rise above 10%, if that.

We again see this as part of the continuing trend of agencies devoting more time, and becoming more comfortable with these platforms. Speaking to organic growth generally, we see many RSW



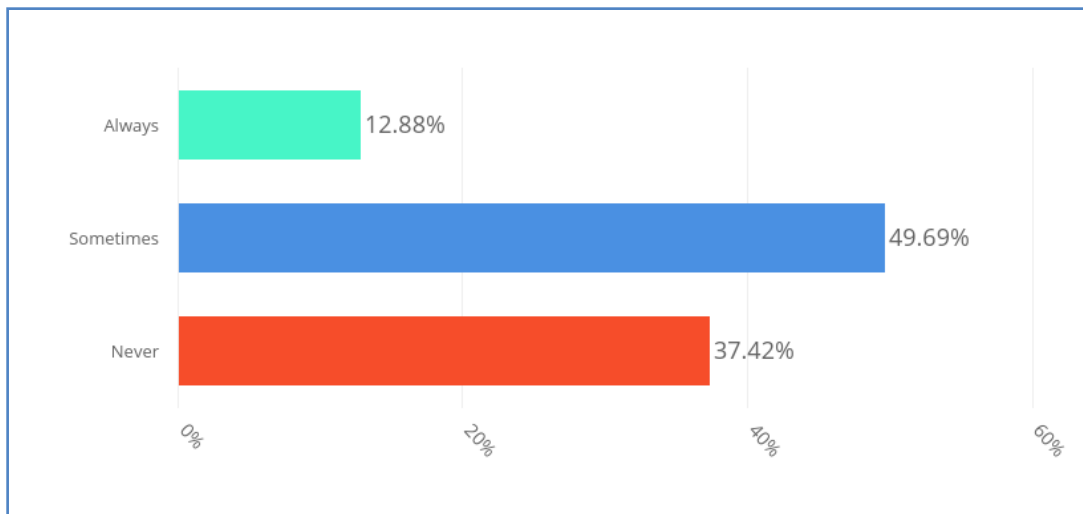
clients enter our programs with little organization around managing organic/internal new business processes. Agencies should apply the same amount of attention to managing organic growth efforts as they apply to managing outbound sales efforts.

56% of agencies use a sales engagement platform to manage both outbound sales efforts and existing client organic growth efforts

Chapter 2: MATT WEISS *asks...*

Question Five: How often are you using purchased tools to assist in your prospecting efforts?

The responses here are perplexing. I was not expecting to see 37% of firms saying they never use purchased tools to prospect, or conversely, to see only 12% of firms responding they always used purchased tools to prospect. There is a healthy 50% saying they sometimes use purchased tools, nevertheless, I think some clarification may be needed, in retrospect.

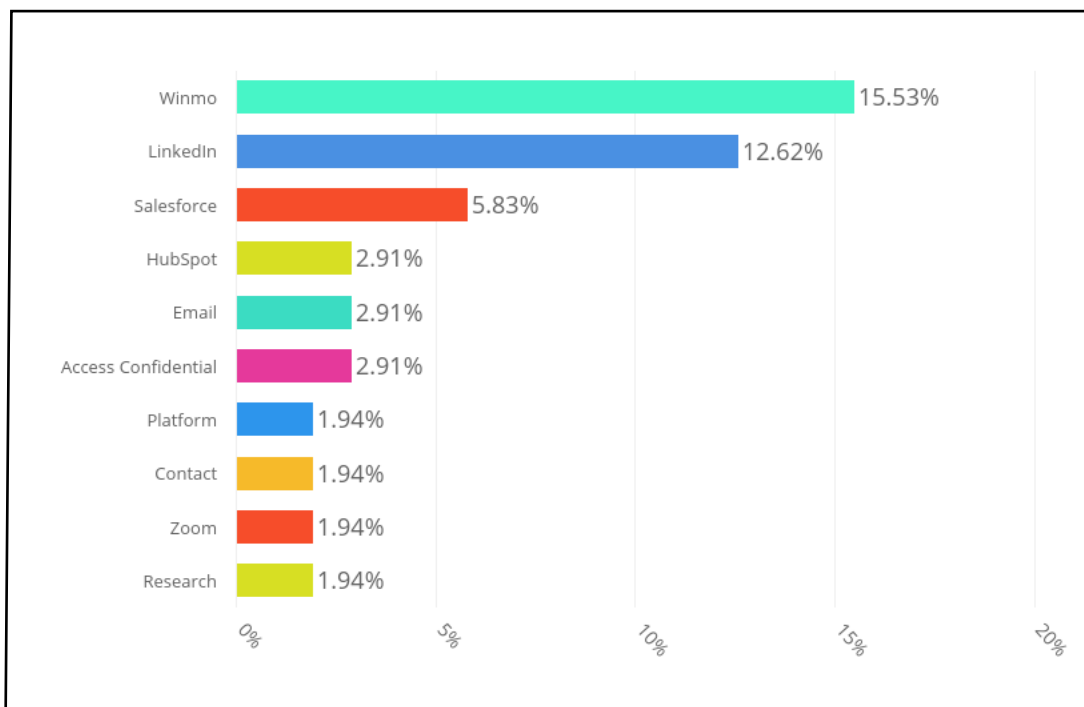


Every firm uses email, paying for it directly or indirectly with software suites like Microsoft Office, for example. Taking those away for a moment, it does jibe with what we saw a few questions ago, with 50% of respondents saying they're using a sales engagement platform. And adding to this, many of the tools firms are using to prospect are free, or at least have free versions. The biggest challenges clients face with these tools are the same challenges they face in new business as a whole: lack of consistency and lack of planning.

Chapter 2: MATT WEISS *asks...*

Question Six: What is your most often paid-for tool that you use to assist with your prospecting efforts?

As a natural extension of Matt's previous question, these responses reflect what we've seen in our past reports, with Winmo, LinkedIn and Salesforce rounding out the top three paid-for tools.



Chapter 3:

BARCKLEY's

**JASON
PARKS**



JASON PARKS

asks...

Chapter 3:

JASON PARKS

asks...

This next set of questions come from Barkley's Jason Parks on the subject of prospecting.

As managing director, Jason oversees all of Barkley's client relationships as well as business development for the 400 person agency.

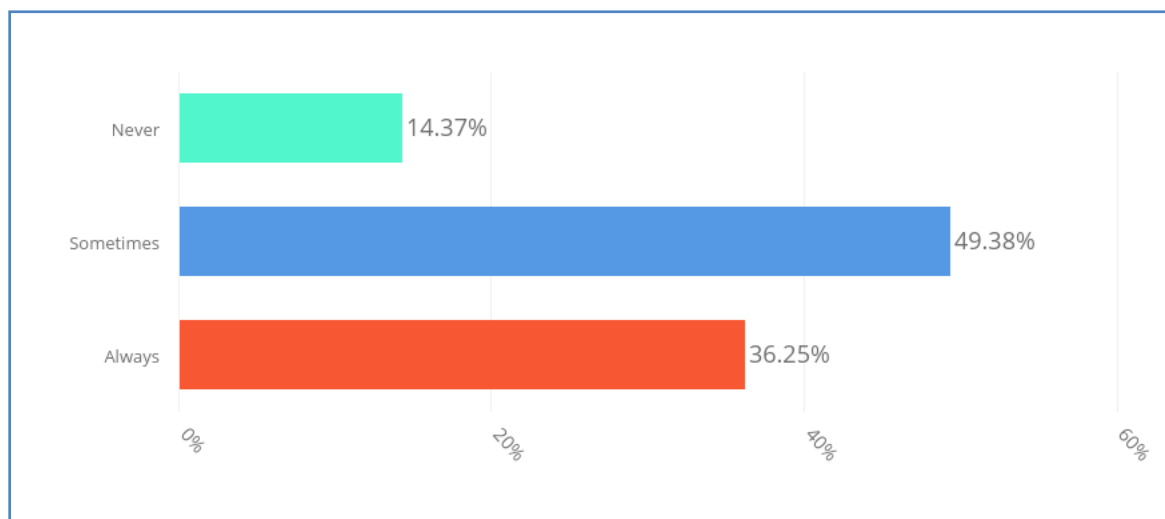
He has helped spearhead the growth of Barkley over the past 5 years, leading Barkley to become one of the largest independent agencies in the country. He has led the business development efforts and ongoing strategy for brands including Target, Dairy Queen, Spirit Airlines, Applebee's and Hershey's.

He was recently honored as one of Kansas City's 40 most influential business leaders under the age of 40.

Chapter 3:

JASON PARKS

Question One: How often, if ever, do you segment your prospects to receive different types of content?



Pleased to see the majority of firms, 85%, reporting they “always or sometimes” segment prospects, although seems a bit high, given the earlier responses to engagement platforms.

You obviously can’t segment without that type of tool, although certainly platforms like Constant Contact or Mailchimp can do that type of segmentation at a lower cost, albeit with less advanced features.

This type of segmentation is critical to your new business efforts, although more work across the board.

While not every single outreach has to be segmented to vertical, we've seen agencies cut corners and push out mass emails without a defining direction too often. And of course, you have to create each type of content as well, not an easy task ongoing.

Agencies tend to get overwhelmed when focusing on multiple verticals, or fail to map out a path as to how they'll grow each sector and in what order. In our own new business programs, where a client is not fully focused in one area, we guide the program by focusing on no more than three verticals at a given time.

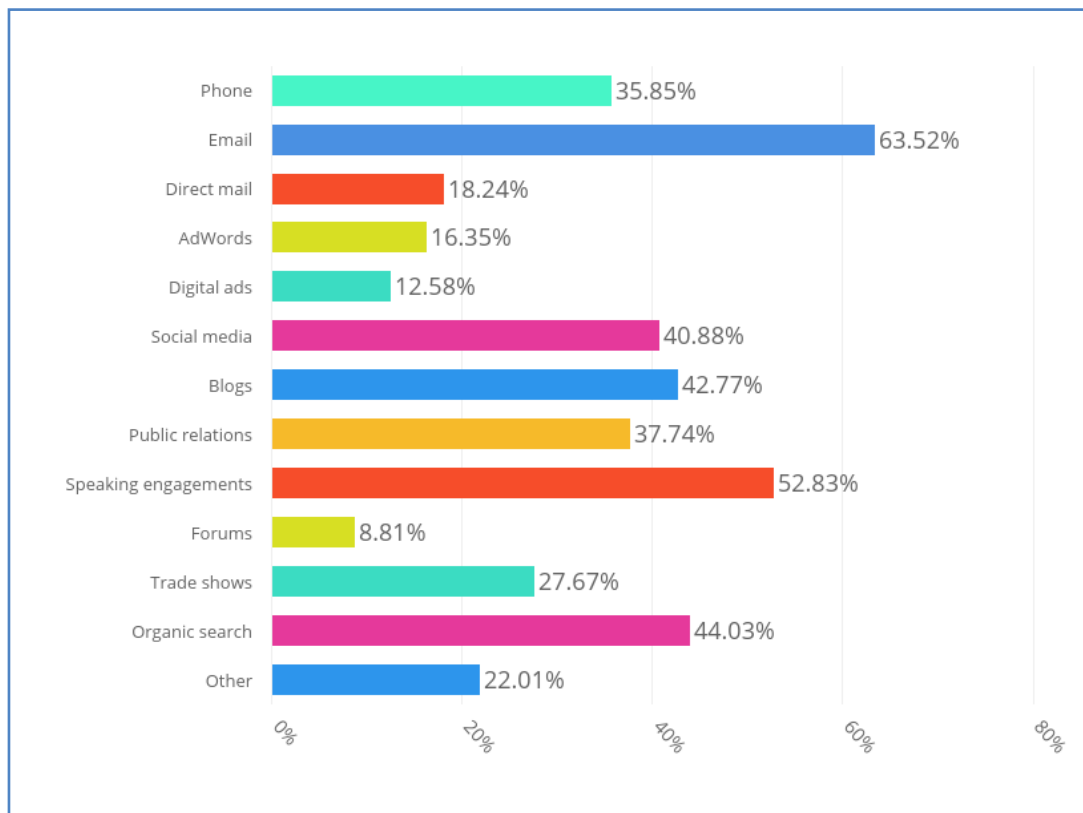
You don't have to focus on just one vertical at a time, but it does take proper list segmentation, content and prospect planning to drive success.

Most important is letting your prospect know you understand them and the nuances of their industry – that you can bring them insightful thinking and new ideas. It's what marketers want, but it's not always what they get!

49% of agencies say they segment prospects to receive different types of content


Chapter 3: JASON PARKS *asks...*

Question Two: What do you find are the most effective channels/platforms to support your new business program? Select all that apply



Always one of our favorite questions and some interesting outliers here. Email coming in first at 63% is in keeping with the industry and our past reports, but with all the factors that can keep emails from your prospect's inbox, and the fact that it continues to be a cluttered space, dictates you have to use as many methods as possible to break through.

(It's worth noting that 63% of agencies in our [2018 New Year Outlook Survey](#) said breaking through was the hardest part of the process.)



The outliers I mentioned were the high percentage of firms saying they were booking speaking engagements and finding success with organic search. Speaking engagements are a fantastic way to support your new business program, and these numbers show firms putting in the effort. But like creating content, it can be a daunting effort. It's an initial time dedication to write and create the presentations, of course, and the good news, you don't always have to reinvent the wheel and can use various pieces (or many pieces) of your presentation over again for different audiences.

The hardest part is booking the gigs, and booking the right gigs. In regards to organic search, it's good to see agencies doing the research and implementing changes and/or additions to bolster their search rankings.

A couple of big-picture tips for further success:

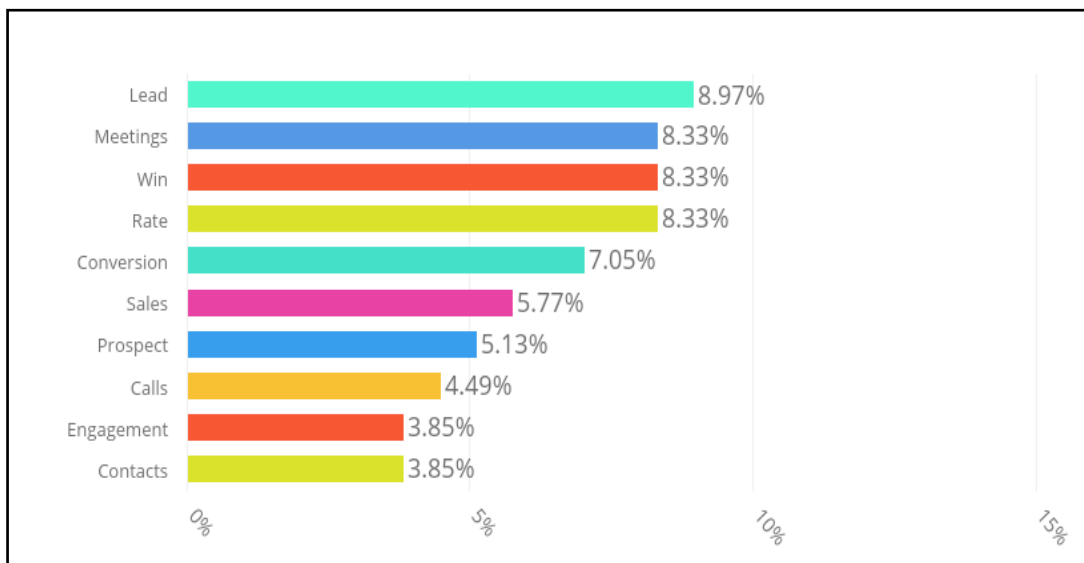
1) As old school as it may be, this is one of the first reports where we've seen agencies include direct mail. The key to success in the prospecting process is using every platform in concert with each other. Prospects don't want to be bombarded via one platform over and over, and they also "live" on different platforms. One prospect will prefer an actual phone conversation, while others will prefer to handle communication through email or LinkedIn. It's always a good idea to engage with platforms or tools that aren't as cluttered, and direct mail is one of them.

2) Two tools/platforms that weren't specifically mentioned are video and blogging. These were probably considered as part of Social, but in the past few conferences we've attended, those agencies putting the time against it were finding success in these two areas.

Agencies list speaking engagements as their second most effective channel/platform to support new business

Chapter 3: JASON PARKS *asks...*


Question Three: What metrics do you use to help you determine if your prospecting efforts are working? If none, please write “none.”



A fairly even spread of responses, with leads, meetings and wins taking the top spots. This may seem like an odd question, as the true gauge of a successful new business effort is the close or win, right? It's working if you're closing business, true, but there are certain levels, or tiers of success you need to be cognizant of and look for.

There are several ways to break it down of course, but staying within our response set, the first of those is certainly calls, or just overall new business activity, as a starting point of potential success.

Done effectively, these will lead to engagements that will, ideally, transform into leads. Following this line of thought, those leads will turn into meetings that will result in conversion. With all this being said, of course you have to look at each of these steps in the ladder



and gauge the success of each. If you aren't moving the needle at any stage, you need to explore why. We've seen it happen with our agency clients. We get them the meetings, they submit the proposals, but the opportunities don't convert the way they should.

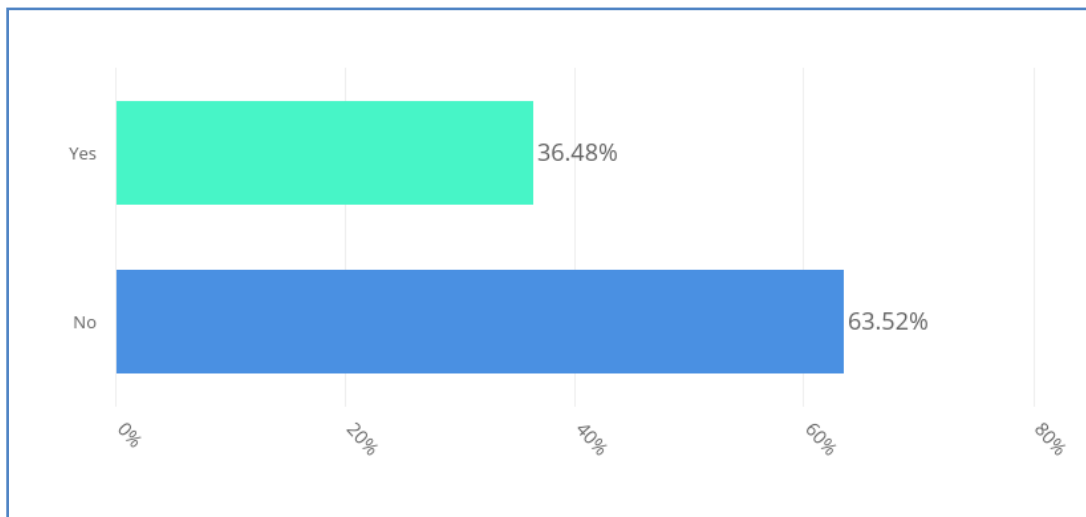
Some of the issue could be the way in which the prospect is being nurtured (not well enough). Or it could boil down to the fact that the proposals aren't resonating, or are stale.

We've been in situations like this with clients, reviewing proposals that are too cookie-cutter in nature, that don't speak to the prospect, and are heavy in text – making them difficult to consume.

One other point: many agencies don't use ANY method for measuring success, and one day come to the realization they haven't won anything of consequence, have spent too much time chasing RFPs and now have a pipeline that has run dry. Agencies need to keep tabs on all aspects of their new business efforts, across the continuum, to be successful.

Chapter 3: JASON PARKS *asks...*

Question Four: Are you satisfied with the success of your new business plan/program?



Unfortunately, a fairly resounding “no” at 64%, and we’ll look directly to Jason’s next question for the reasons why.



Chapter 3: JASON PARKS *asks...*

Question 5: Why do you feel the program has been a success or not been a success?

A lot to glean from the open-ended responses from your peers. Let's look at several of those:

Starting with the challenges:

There's never a point where management says that we have enough

We are well known in several verticals and therefore sought out. However, we have been ineffective at maintaining a sustained and targeted outreach to prospects who should know about us, but don't.

We don't have dedicated resources.

People prioritize client work over prospecting.

Need a dedicated sales person

We are 80% successful in landing new business.

We need more leads


Lack of focus

Not enough time to do every day

Not strategic or resourced; wrong people in the seat; rely more on personal relationships than business landscape

And where firms have found success, what's driving it?

Our program has been successful; what we are working on now is how to expand the quantity of new business beyond the current expectations.



We are laser focused, and understand the categories we best perform in.

Tenacity

We own the process.

Quality not quantity.

We always share original, high-quality content and have used it to enhance our reputation as strategists

To date it has only really been responding to incoming inquiries.

We are currently building a true outbound prospecting system.

For a smaller agency, I think we've done a good job in investing in tools and advertising (paid search and social) to drive more site visits and leads.

We seem to have a pretty steady pipeline of inbound leads from it, which helps round out what we are doing from an outbound and organic growth perspective.

These comments speak for themselves in terms of success or lack thereof. Common themes for a struggling program are lack of time, focus and strategy. The biggest piece of advice we can give from our own 13-year experience as an outsourced new business firm is to establish that focus first.

64% of agencies are not satisfied with the success of their new business program

Once you have that in place, you can install a repeatable process and follow it consistently. The harder part is creating the content ongoing and deciding who heads up this process. And yes, this is an oversimplification as all these pieces take work to put into place, but agencies often don't make it simple enough when putting those pieces into place.

A tool that may help is an eBook we created a few years ago that still holds up today as a new business primer, to help you through the process: [Put On That Damn Sales Hat.](#)

Chapter 4:

R2i's

KELLY

KENNEDY



KELLY KENNEDY

asks...

Chapter 4:

KELLY KENNEDY

asks...

This next set of questions comes from R2i's Kelly Kennedy on the subject of an agency's new business staffing structure.

Kelly is an entrepreneurial executive that possesses the operational mindset, deep digital acumen, and passion for client services to help companies solve their complex marketing needs.

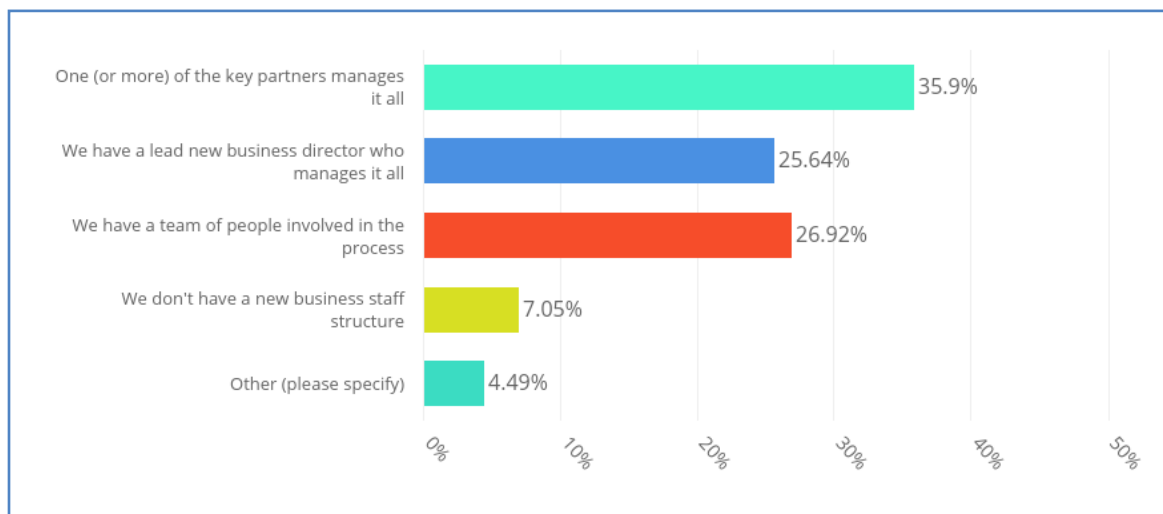
Her collaborative manner both pre-sale and post-sale has allowed industry leaders such as Merkle, eBay Enterprises, and Infogroup to find the right mix of modernized services to achieve business growth.

Kelly's motto is "to serve yourself by serving others" and keeps her passion alive through family, yoga, and riding her Harley!

Chapter 4:

KELLY KENNEDY

Question One: What best describes how you organize your new business development staff?



Several points to unpack with the responses we received. 36% of firms said one or more of the key partners manages it all. That's high. And the key here is "manages it all." For smaller firms, you tend to have little choice which is normal, but no matter the size of the firm, it's really not possible to have a key partner manage it all. Too many hats for one person, especially a partner, to manage it all.

Of course there are real advantages to having a partner be the front face to prospects, but you must hire someone to do the all the work leading up to the chemistry meeting. It's how RSW operates for clients, performing the consuming work of building lists, creating positioning, and prospecting through the various levels of the funnel, so a partner or new business director at the firm doesn't have to.

We asked 5 of those individuals to be a part of this report, so we're obviously believers in that hire, but the unfortunate fact is new business directors at agencies tend to last [18 months](#).

The link in the previous sentence is to an episode of our 3 Takeaways Video series, and I bring it up specifically because we talk 3 different new business persona types and what you should look out for when considering that hire.

36% of agencies say one (or more) of the key partners manages all aspects of new business.

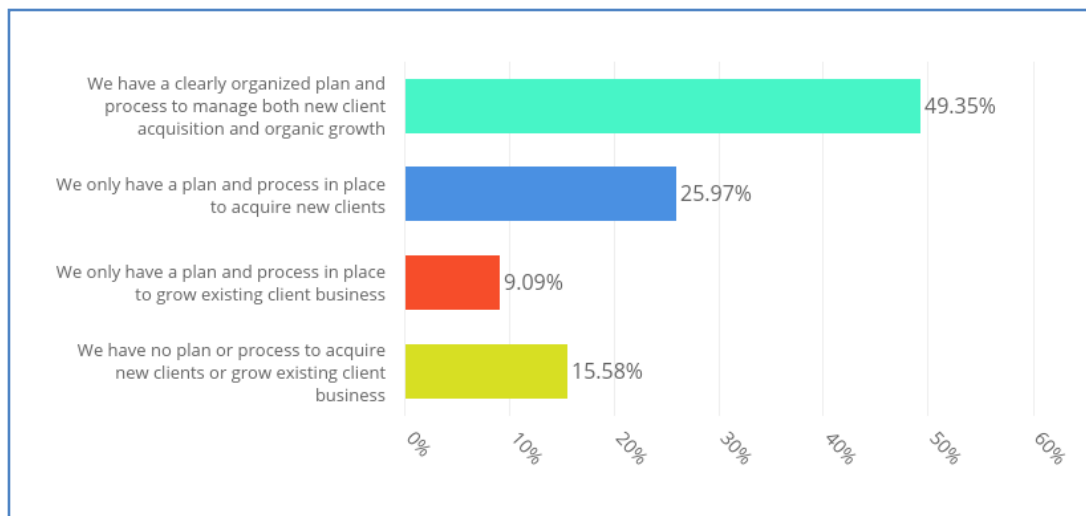
Lastly, 27% of firms said they have a team of people involved in the process. Of the three scenarios represented in this question, this one is the most apt to be fraught with danger. New business should be an agency-wide mandate, but those handling it and making decisions around it on a daily basis should be limited to a small number.

And of those, their roles need to be established early on. Too many cooks in the kitchen sums it up as well as anything you could say. We've seen it time and time again: new business efforts completely stall when members of the team get busy, or are travelling, and everything gets pushed back 2, 3 and 4 weeks. Or the committee slows decisions to a crawl on the smallest of details.

Not that it can't work, but better to have 1-2 people making the decisions and receiving feedback from other key members.

Chapter 4: KELLY KENNEDY *asks...*

Question Two: What best describes your agency's position when it comes to managing new client acquisition relative to growth from existing clients?



When 49% of firms respond they have a clearly organized plan and process to manage both new client acquisition and organic growth, I'm impressed. And dubious.

I sincerely hope that's a realistic stat, but in our 13 years helping agencies drive new business, it's a rarity that agencies have that firm a grasp on a process that manages both.

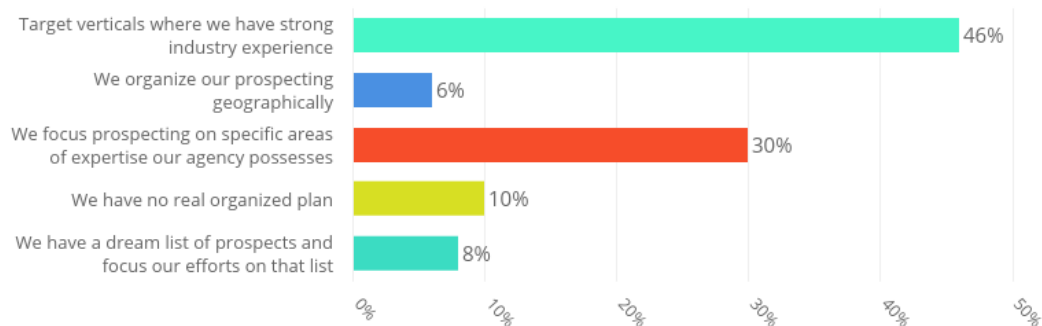
Of concern are the 16% of firms that have no plan or process to acquire new clients or grow existing client business. Assumedly those firms are riding the referral wave, and we've seen plenty of firms do that successfully. We touched on it previously and should be a part of an overall business strategy, but it's not a dependable plan by any means.



49% of agencies say they have a clearly organized plan and process to manage both new client acquisition and organic growth

Chapter 4: KELLY KENNEDY *asks...*

Question Three: What best describes your primary prospecting approach?



Encouraging to see 76% of firms approach prospects through strong industry experience/specific areas of expertise. That may seem blatantly obvious, but we still see agencies who base their approach on what's hot at the moment, "let's go after that!"

If your dream is to add a brand new vertical, of course it can be done, either by showing how your current verticals translate, or by hiring (or both), but without the experience over time, it typically won't happen quickly. (There are always exceptions of course, especially if you have an in.) And you always have to be careful about the flavor of the month and where you invest your resources.

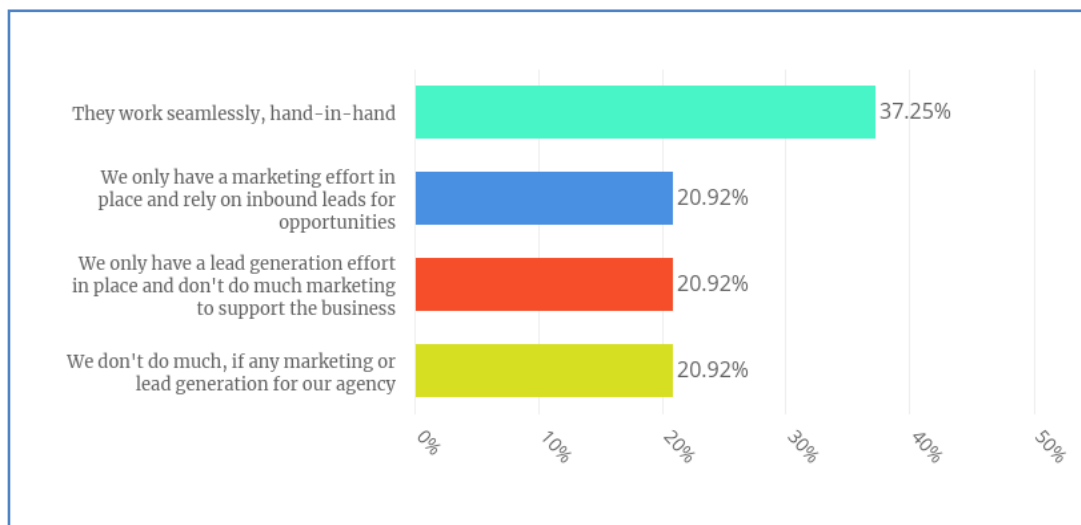
Other responses of note: the 10% with no organized plan is as scary as ever, although appreciate the honesty.

The 8% of firms who said their primary prospecting approach is a focus on their dream list should be addressed. Aspirational clients, or prospecting whales, are a worthy addition to your efforts, but they shouldn't be your only focus. Our VP of sales, Lee McKnight Jr., wrote a post on it that provides further perspective:

[**Hunting the Whale-A Sound Prospecting Strategy?**](#)

Chapter 4: KELLY KENNEDY *asks...*


Question Four: What best describes the alignment between your marketing efforts and your lead generation efforts?



Congratulations to the 37% of firms responding who have their marketing efforts and lead generation efforts working seamlessly together. It is of course the ideal and many of you are doing the same thing for your clients.

Each of the other 3 response categories came in at exactly 20.92%, interestingly.

We can start with the easiest one to unpack, the 20% who don't really do any marketing or lead gen. Without rehashing the previous times we've addressed it, you know you need to have some level of both, even with a strong flow of referrals. Taking small steps toward that goal is the way to initially attack it. Literally start with a few pieces of content: a case study and a post on your blog or LinkedIn, and pull together 20-30 prospects.



Reach out to them 6-8 times over the course of 4 weeks, using different platforms, and showing your expertise with every touch.

You can make time to do that. Follow it through all the way to the end of 30 days and see what it gets you. Then adjust accordingly. And the answer may be, you're not the one to do it. Face up to that, move on, and look for other alternatives.

21% of agencies say they don't do much, if any marketing or lead generation for their agency

For those only relying on inbound, you have the marketing effort in place which is difficult to maintain, so you have a big piece of the puzzle already in place. Inbound leads can be a wonderful thing, but as mentioned in this report, small to mid-sized agencies find it difficult to vet those inbound leads over time, and finding a right-fit becomes a challenge as well.

And finally, for those without much marketing to support your outbound lead gen effort, you can be a great salesperson, but eventually, you'll need the marketing support to break through consistently.

Chapter 5:

FCB/WEST's JORDAN WELLS



JORDAN WELLS

asks...

Chapter 4:

JORDAN WELLS ASKS

This last set of questions comes from FCB's Jordan Wells on the subject of using lists for prospecting.

Jordan is Vice President, Business Development at FCB. In this role he leads new business and growth efforts for FCB in the West.

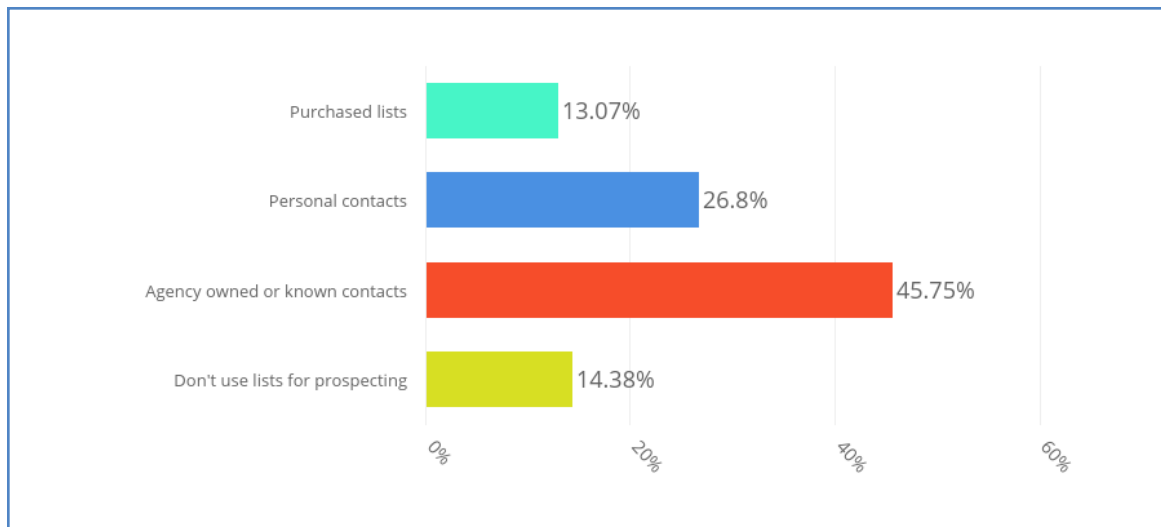
Before joining FCB Jordan led new business for Rosetta, a leading digital agency specializing in customer engagement. Jordan's efforts and new business wins over the years supported Rosetta's expansion into many new geographic markets and provided a strong foundation of anchor clients for the agency. Jordan has also served as a growth consultant for early stage startups advising on marketing and sales strategy.

Chapter 5:

JORDAN WELLS

asks...

Question One: What kind of lists do you most often use for prospecting?



Somewhat torn by the responses here. On one end of the spectrum, and as overused as the phrase, "I'm shocked" is today, I was quite surprised with only 13% of firms saying they purchase lists. Because it's one of the most important elements of a program, but an absolute slog to build.

On the flip side, I think about how many emails I get offering lists to purchase (and I know everyone reading this does as well) that are dubious in terms of quality, and being clean.

And we all know agencies that have wasted money on lists that ended up sub-par. There are, of course, quality list-providers out there, as we've seen in this report, as well as in our [2018 Tools Report](#), which provides a list of them.

Please excuse the brief plug, but we also sell lists as part of our suite of services.

Another surprise was the number of agencies using no lists at all: 14%, although I translate that as the firm not prospecting actively.

The remaining 27% who listed "personal contacts" and 46% who listed "agency owned or known contacts" does not surprise me. Agencies rely heavily on referrals, and I don't blame them: they're less difficult to close and they are an important part of new business strategy.

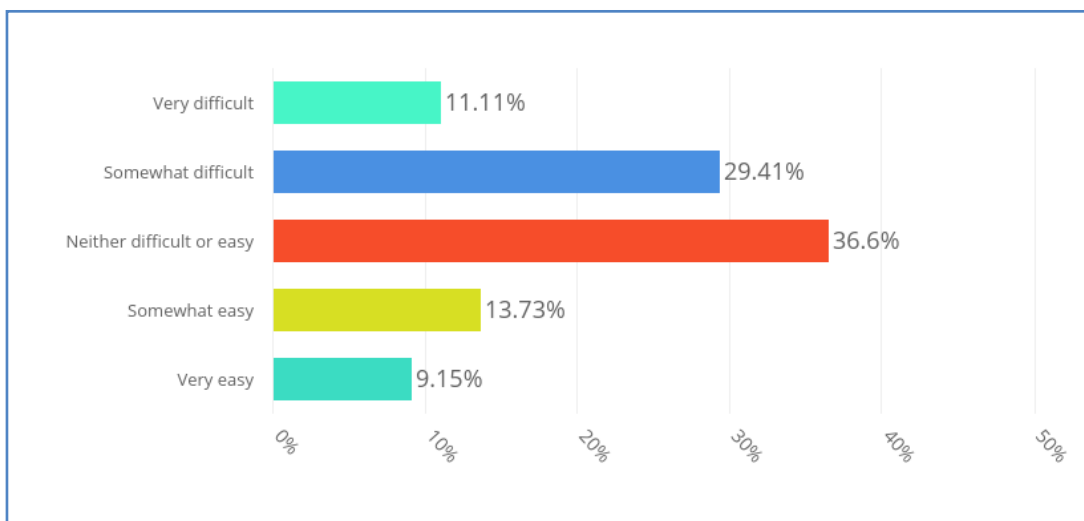
But they also come with their own baggage, and can tend to keep clients in a stalled growth pattern, or often be the wrong fit.

And lastly, building your own lists is certainly one way to maintain quality, and platforms like LinkedIn have made it easier, but it's still a time-intensive process that is usually handled by an intern who may not know your targets the way she or he should.

14% of agencies say they don't use lists for prospecting

Chapter 5: JORDAN WELLS *asks...*


Question Two: How difficult (or not) do you find getting and maintaining contact data for your lists?



This is by far one of the most compelling challenges within list building and the numbers prove it out. 40% of firms responding say it is “very to somewhat” difficult. And then another 36% find themselves right in the middle between easy and difficult, so at the very least, it takes time an effort for those 36% as well.

And while an inbound strategy can deliver those leads, you still have to vet the company and data integrity. As mentioned previously, tools like LinkedIn make your job easier as you’re taking on this Herculean task internally, but it’s a highly manual process.

It’s why we are proponents of a list building team here at RSW that combines the human element with multiple platforms that make the process more efficient.



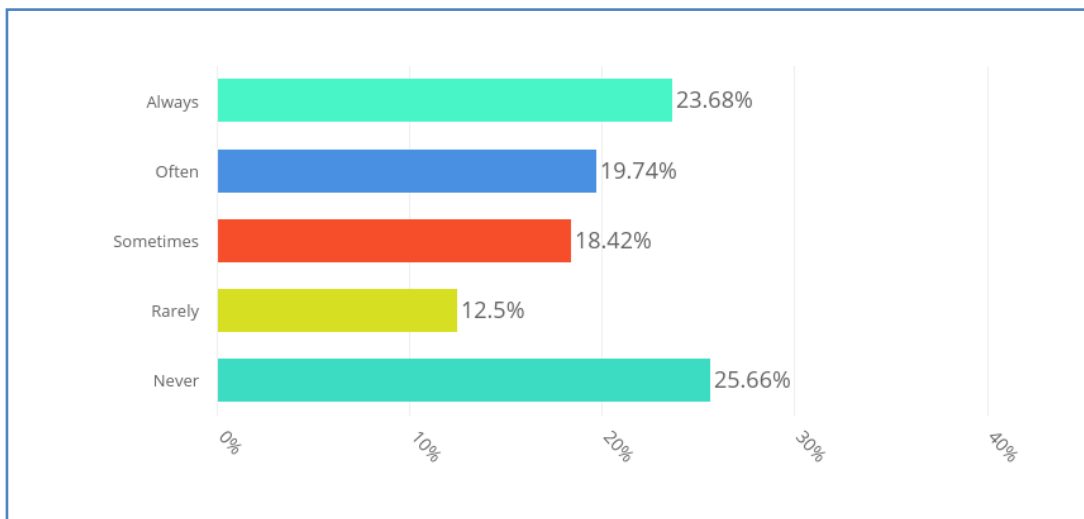
If you're in the position of trying to build lists internally, we've created a webinar hosted by our Director of List Operations, Nicole Bouchard, that provides a framework around making the process more efficient through each step of the process:

[5 Steps To Developing A Solid List Building Strategy.](#)

*40% of agencies
say it's "very to
somewhat"
difficult to
maintain contact
list data*

Chapter 5: JORDAN WELLS *asks...*


Question Three: How often do you use a CRM when you prospect?



The love/hate relationship between agencies and CRM platforms continues unabated. 38% of firms say they “rarely or never” use a CRM when prospecting. Another 43% report using their CRM “always or often.”

And then there’s that 18% who say they “sometimes” use it. I applaud the effort to rise above your Excel spreadsheet and try to make a CRM work for you. Over the years that we’ve created our aforementioned New Business Tools report, we hear consistently from agencies how overpowered CRMs typically are. Or that there really aren’t any that are agency-centric.

While there’s some merit to both those statements, we’ve reported in the past 2-3 years that agencies are finding their CRMs more user-friendly and useful.

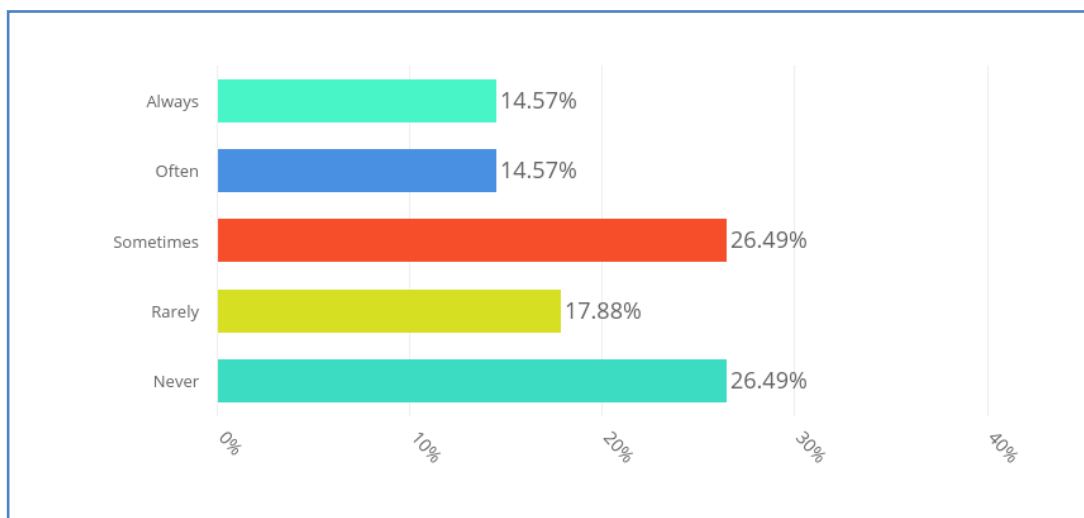


For example, in 2018, it was the second-most used new business tool, with 73% of agencies using a CRM. Compare that to 65% in 2017. We also saw a sizeable shakeup, unlike any in the past 4 years in this category, regarding the makeup of tools in this 2018 list. We saw 4 disappear completely and 6 with brand new appearances. Point being, more than ever before, agencies are doing their homework and taking advantage of the, typically, free trial offers these platforms offer.

*38% of agencies
say they
“rarely or never”
use a CRM when
prospecting*

Chapter 5: JORDAN WELLS *asks...*


Question Four: How often do you use your CRM or other tools for automated, mass outreach to prospects?



A large 70% of firms reporting they “sometimes, rarely or never” use mass outreach to prospects. We all experience ineffective, untargeted and poorly written mass emails on an almost daily basis. Because of that, agencies are reticent to engage in that type of outreach.

And part of that reticence, to be blunt, is agencies either aren’t very adept at the ongoing development of that type of messaging, or don’t make the time to execute it. And let’s not forget that 38% of agencies barely use their CRM.

Marketers actually tell us in our survey reports that agencies don’t reach out enough. Mass outreach absolutely still has its place in new business when not overused. A good rule of thumb for mass outreach: once a week if it’s true thought leadership content,



or twice a month if it's sales-oriented. The sales-oriented emails still need to be highly value-driven however, and should speak your prospect's language, referencing the types of business challenges you help solve.

70% of agencies report they “sometimes, rarely or never” use a CRM or other tools for automated, mass outreach to prospects.



In Closing:

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE THOUGHT LEADER SURVEY?

Our Thought Leader panelists' video interview and podcast series, throughout November and December.

In the weeks ahead, we will share posts with perspective on responses in our blog.

Also expect video exploring these areas in greater depth in our [3 Takeaways Video Series](#).

To those who participated, thank you so much. We invite dialogue/input from all.

RSW/US is a full service, outsourced agency lead generation and new business development firm that helps marketing service companies (exclusively) find and win new business.

We help Agencies find qualified leads, set meetings, better position them in the market, and help move them closer to close.

More information about RSW/US can be accessed at www.rswus.com or email Lee McKnight Jr at: lee@rswus.com.