

UK Marketing Consultants:

# DIGITAL MARKETING SURVEY

# Introduction

Marketing consultants spend vast amounts of time advising their clients on how to find and win customers. But how good are they at their own marketing? And are they making best use of all the digital opportunities available today?

To put this to the test Our Social Times has teamed up with digital marketing experts, Constant Contact, to ask more than 130 UK-based marketing consultants and agencies how they promote their own services. This report sets out their responses to a series of questions exploring their digital marketing practices, perspectives, budgets and results, as well as where they look for advice and information.

## Methodology

We followed Constant Contact's best practice advice on the wording of questions and answers for the survey and used their online survey tool to capture responses. This enabled us to randomise the multiple-choice answers and structure the questionnaire to minimise survey bias.

The survey was promoted through Our Social Times and Constant Contact's social media and email channels, as well as those of our media partners, Smart Insights and Enterprise Nation. We incentivised respondents by offering each one a £10 voucher to complete the survey.



**OURSOCIALTIMES**

Our Social Times is a specialist social media agency. We help our clients to maximise the benefits of social media for marketing and communications. We also run high value conferences and courses.

Visit us at <http://oursocialtimes.com>

**Constant Contact** 

Constant Contact introduced the first email marketing tool for small businesses in 1998.

Today they offer the only all-in-one online marketing platform that helps small businesses drive repeat business and find new customers.

Find out more at <http://constantcontact.com/uk>



Media Partners:



# Executive Summary

Independent marketing consultants and small agencies in the UK are already heavily reliant on digital marketing. For the majority digital marketing currently accounts for over 60% of their marketing with a small minority eschewing digital channels in favour of more traditional options.

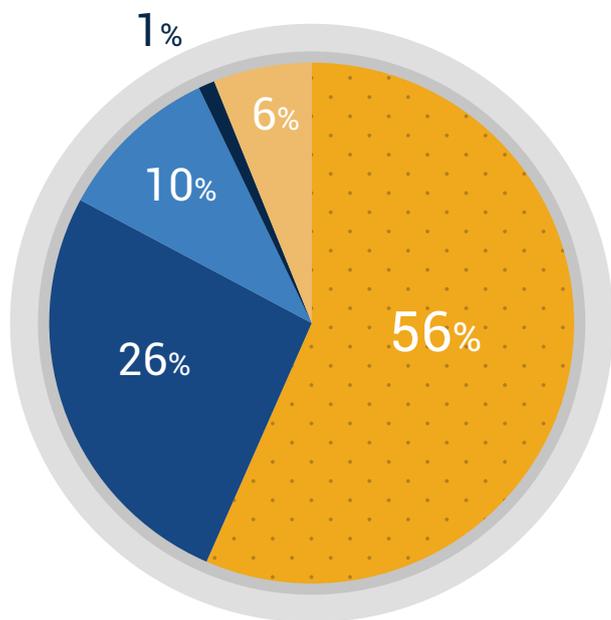
The most popular and, according to our findings, effective forms of marketing among UK marketing consultants are content marketing, social media, email marketing and SEO. The combination of high-value content promoted through social networks and email seems particularly potent, with on-going SEO a simple must.

There is a clear preference for marketing activities that don't require much expenditure. Content marketing, social media, email marketing and SEO all meet this requirement, while Pay-Per-Click (PPC) and online advertising are seen as both less effective and more expensive. It's fair to say, this report does not make encouraging reading for advertisers.

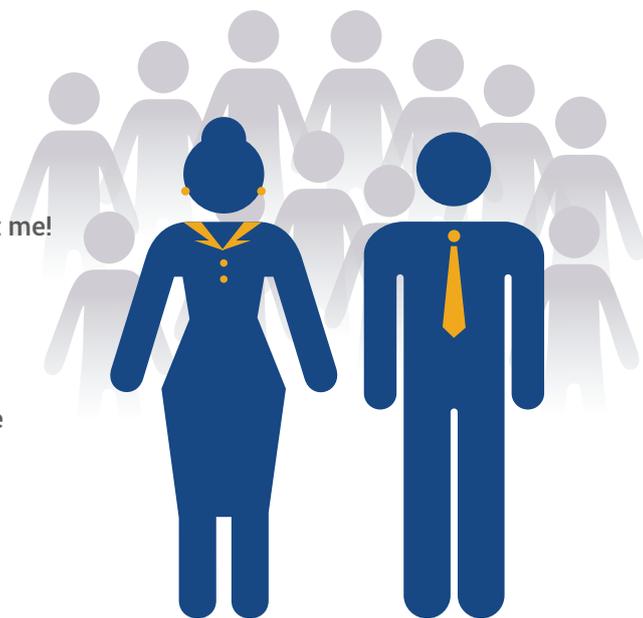
UK marketing consultants rely on each other as sources of new marketing information and insights, often communicating via LinkedIn and Twitter. They are keen readers of the leading marketing blogs, both in the US and UK, and subscribe to weekly email newsletters.



## How many people work in your agency / consultancy?



- 1 - it's just me!
- 2 to 5
- 6 to 10
- 11 to 20
- 21 or more



### Key point



**THE VAST MAJORITY 83%**

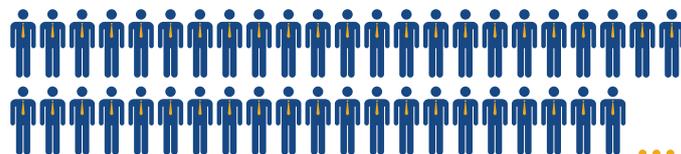
of respondents to the survey

are micro-businesses with fewer than 5 staff members

**11%** have between 6 and 20 staff



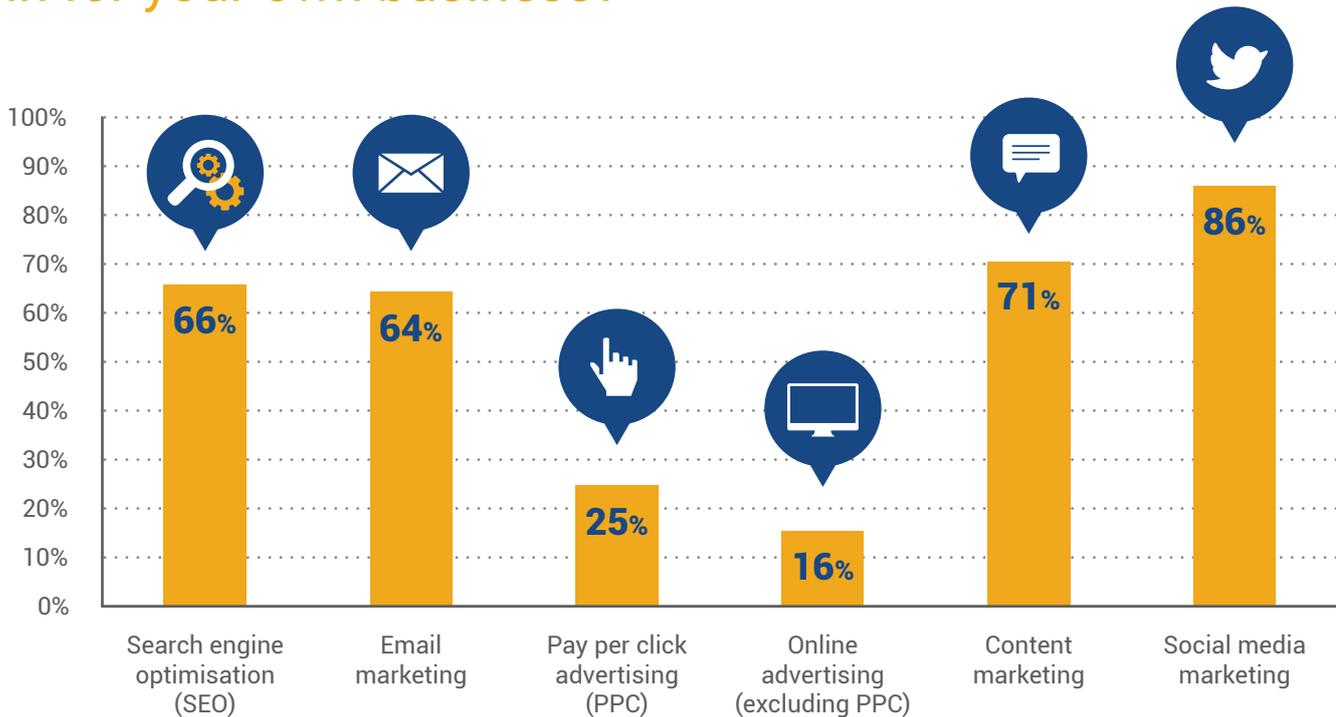
**6%** have 21 or more staff



“ Having so many micro-businesses completing the survey has had a big impact on the results. Companies with tighter budgets have to take tougher decisions about their time and resources. They simply can't do everything. ”

Luke Brynley-Jones | CEO, Our Social Times

## What kinds of digital marketing do you engage in for your own business?



### Key point

The top four digital marketing activities that marketing consultants engage in are **content marketing, social media, SEO and email.**



### Analysis



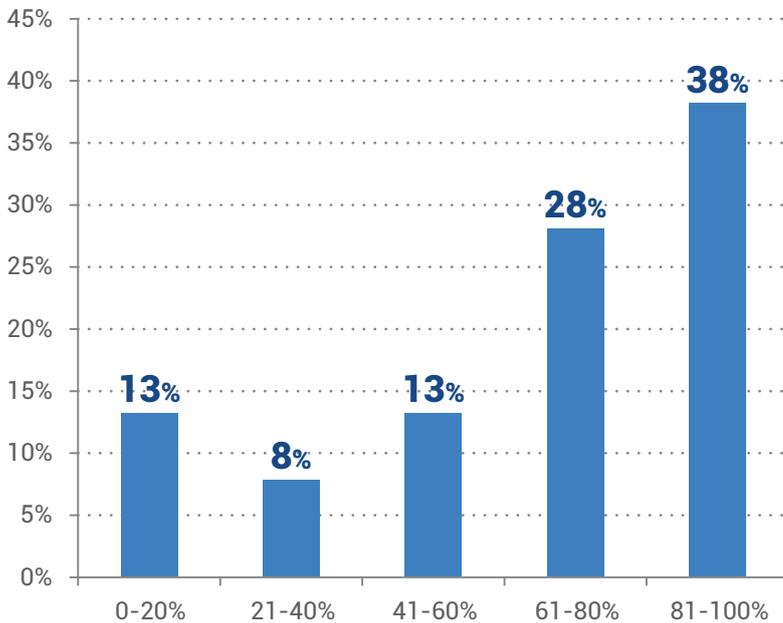
There is a clear preference for **marketing activities that don't require much expenditure** and that focus on attracting interest through high-value content, instead of advertising.



“ I'm surprised how few consultants invest in PPC. There are only so many all-important local slots in search results - and AdWords enables such specific targeting. But then, with the cost of AdWords, it doesn't surprise me at all! ”

Dr Dave Chaffey | [SmartInsights.com](http://SmartInsights.com)

## What percentage of the overall marketing activity for your business is digital?



**38%** of respondents SPEND

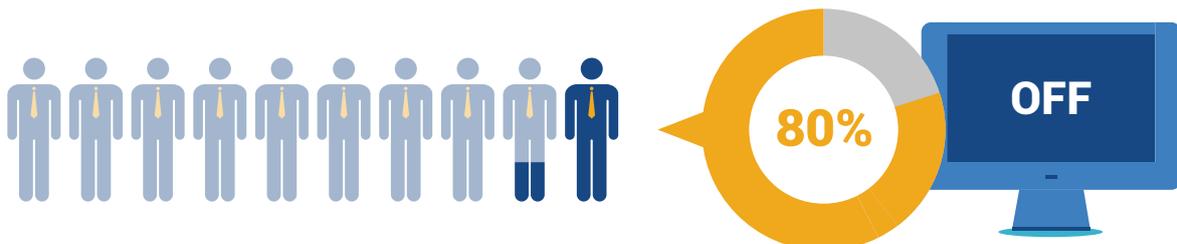
**81-100%**  
of their marketing effort on **DIGITAL**

### Key point

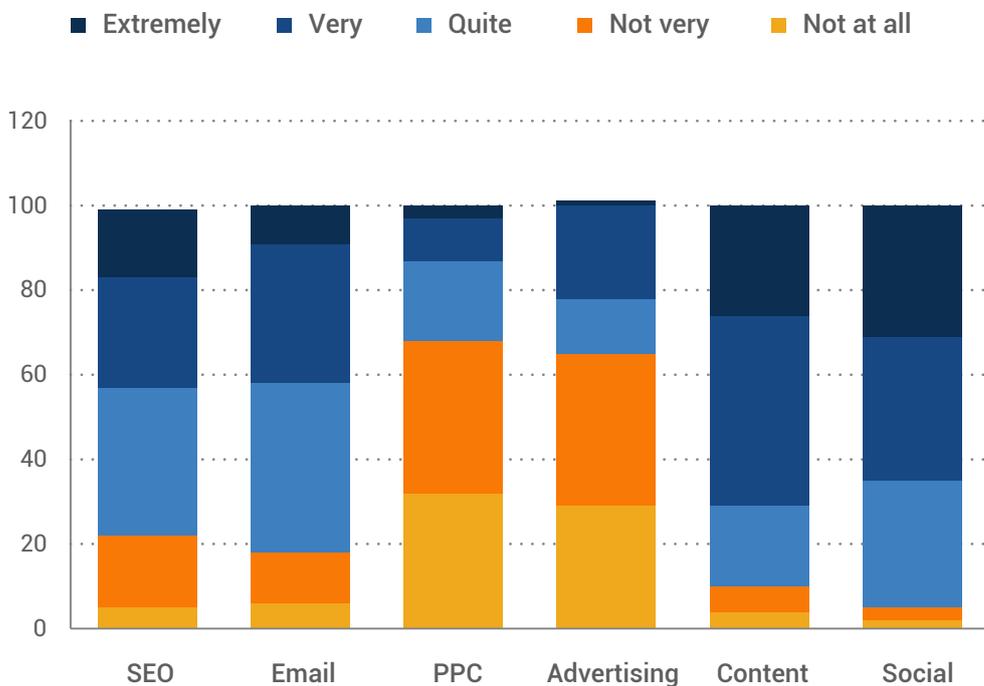
It seems that UK marketing consultants rely heavily on digital marketing to promote their business.

### Analysis

While the dominance of digital marketing is no surprise, we were still shocked by one finding: 13% of marketing consultants say that 80% of their marketing still happens offline. Of course, a lot of marketing still happens offline, but we would have expected marketing consultants to be exploiting every available opportunity.



## Overall how effective do you consider these marketing activities for your business?



### Key point

For the majority of consultants

- content marketing
- social media
- email marketing

are their **MOST EFFECTIVE MARKETING ACTIVITIES**

**68%** of respondents say PPC is ineffective

**65%** of respondents say online advertising in general is ineffective

## Analysis

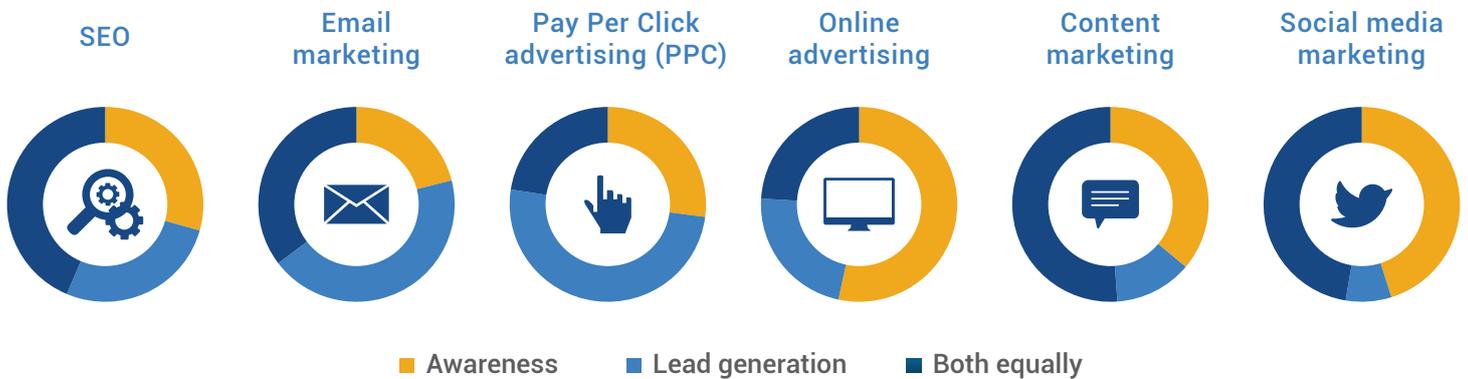
High quality content promoted via email and social media offers a powerful marketing opportunity for any business, so it's not surprising Marketing Consultants are making good use of it. Industry surveys consistently highlight email as the most effective form of online marketing and in our findings SEO came a close fourth.



“The beauty of content and social media is that you can showcase your personality as well as the results you have delivered for your clients”.

Dr Dave Chaffey | [SmartInsights.com](http://SmartInsights.com)

## Overall, do you consider each of these activities better for driving awareness, for lead generation or for both equally?



### Key point



Email and PPC are used for **LEAD GENERATION**



Online advertising is used for **RAISING AWARENESS**



Social media and content marketing are used for **BOTH**



SEO is the only activity that seems genuinely **MULTI-PURPOSE**

### Analysis

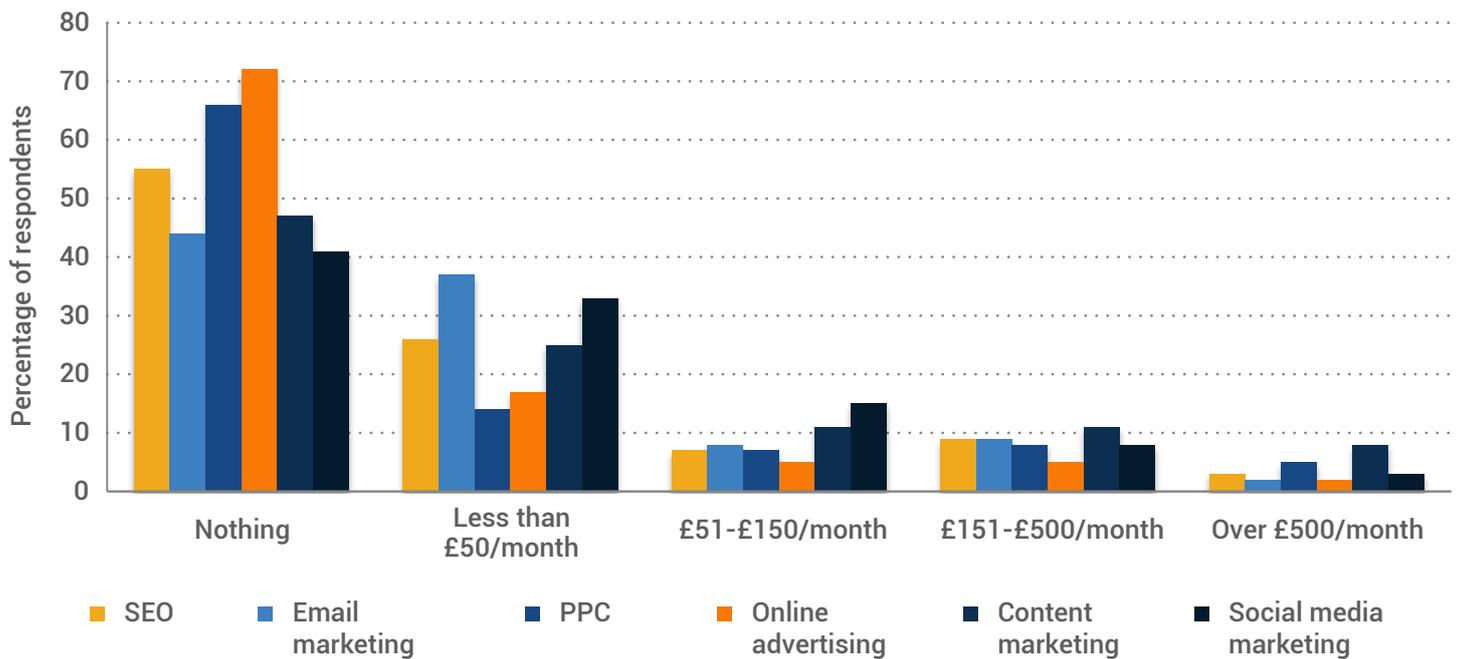
We were a little surprised that content marketing and social media aren't considered effective for lead generation. Clearly, neither is as direct as email or PPC, but for B2B organisations at least, content is often at the heart of their lead generation campaigns."



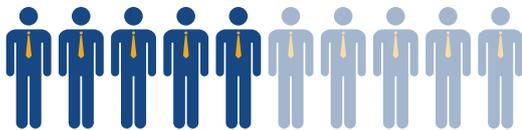
“ There may be confusion about the meaning of the question here. Most companies don't actually use email for lead generation, but rather for nurturing existing contacts to generate more revenue. There's a subtle but critical difference. ”

Luke Brynley-Jones | **Our Social Times**

## How much do you currently spend (£) on each of these digital marketing activities for your business?



### Key point



50% of marketing consultants are willing to spend on email marketing, content marketing and social media.



**£50 per month** is the maximum most will spend.



A tiny minority will spend up to **£500 per month** on content marketing



2/3 will spend nothing on **PPC or online advertising**



### Analysis

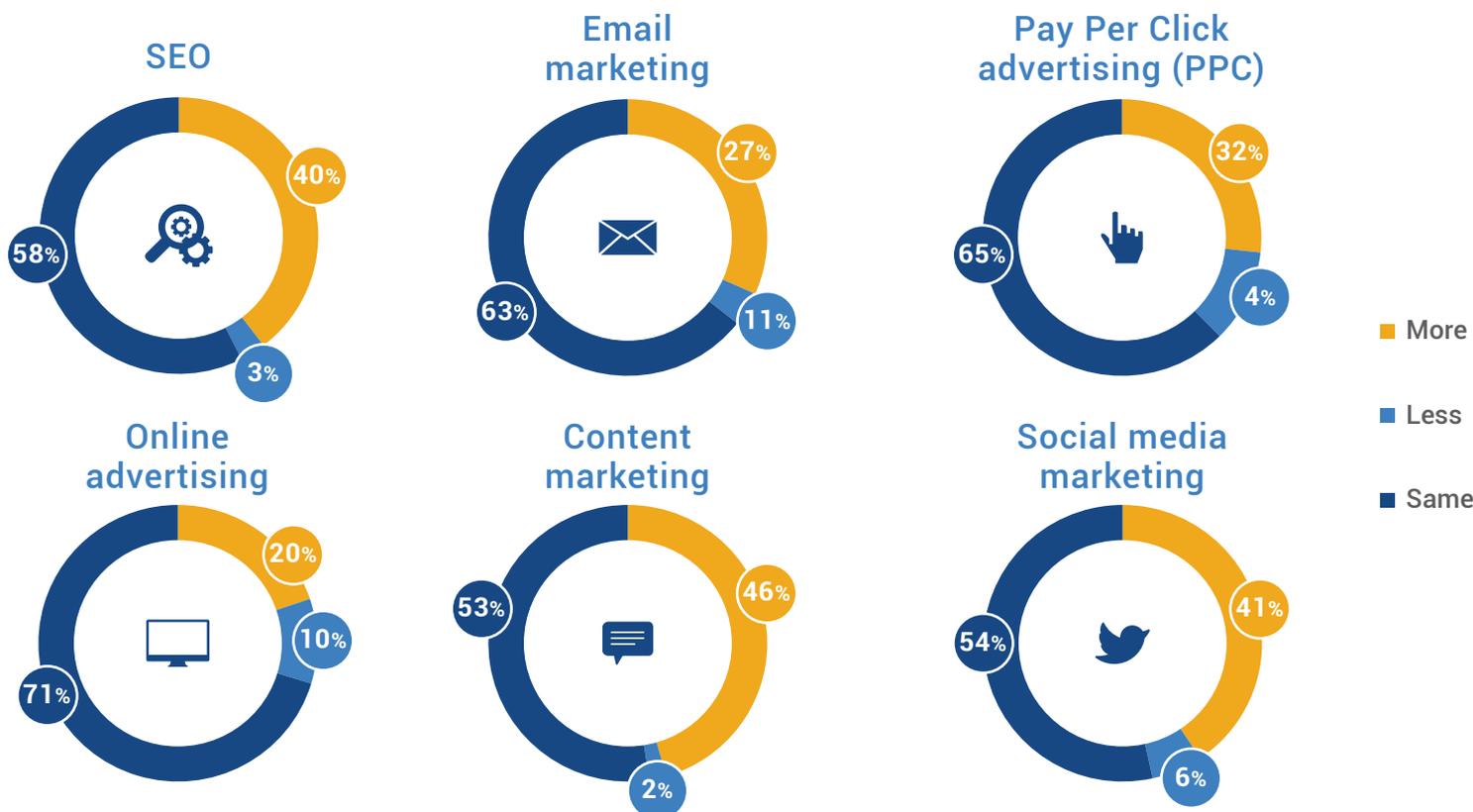
Echoing our earlier finding that consultants prefer activities that don't cost money, this chart suggests that marketing budgets are extremely tight.



“ Even as the economy is warming up it's clear that digital marketers are being canny with their own budgets. They are engaging in activities that cost little to no money, such as email, content and social. ”

Tamsin Fox-Davies | **Constant Contact**

## Compared to 2014, are you planning to spend more money, less money or the same on your marketing activities in 2015?



### Key point

The budgets for most marketing activities won't change next year.

**>40%** of consultants are planning to increase their spend on **content marketing, social media and SEO**

**32%** expect to increase spend on **email marketing**

### Analysis

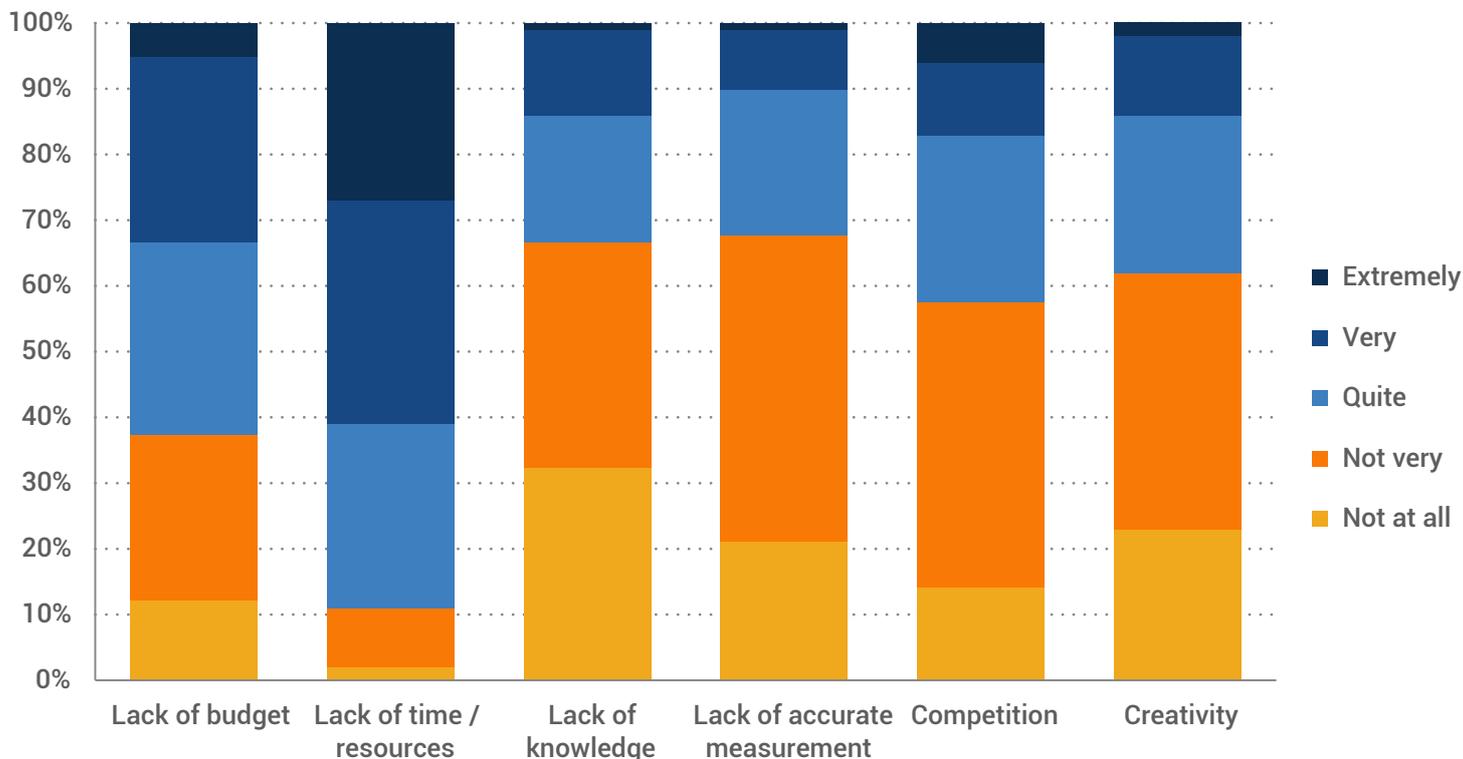
Content marketing and social media are serious growth areas in digital marketing, so it's not surprising they are getting more investment. We were surprised to see SEO spend increasing, though the relationship between SEO and content marketing is so close, there may be crossover between the two.



“ 46% of marketing consultants and agencies are planning to spend more on content marketing next year. That's actually less than most other industry sectors, but then, you'd expect marketers to be able to produce their own content. ”

Luke Brynley-Jones | Our Social Times

## How limiting do you feel these factors are on the success of your digital marketing?



### Key point


**'Lack of time / resources'**


**'Lack of budget'**
are seen as the two primary factors limiting success in marketing

Most respondents are confident about their knowledge, creativity and ability to measure results, but competition is also a limiting factor.

### Analysis

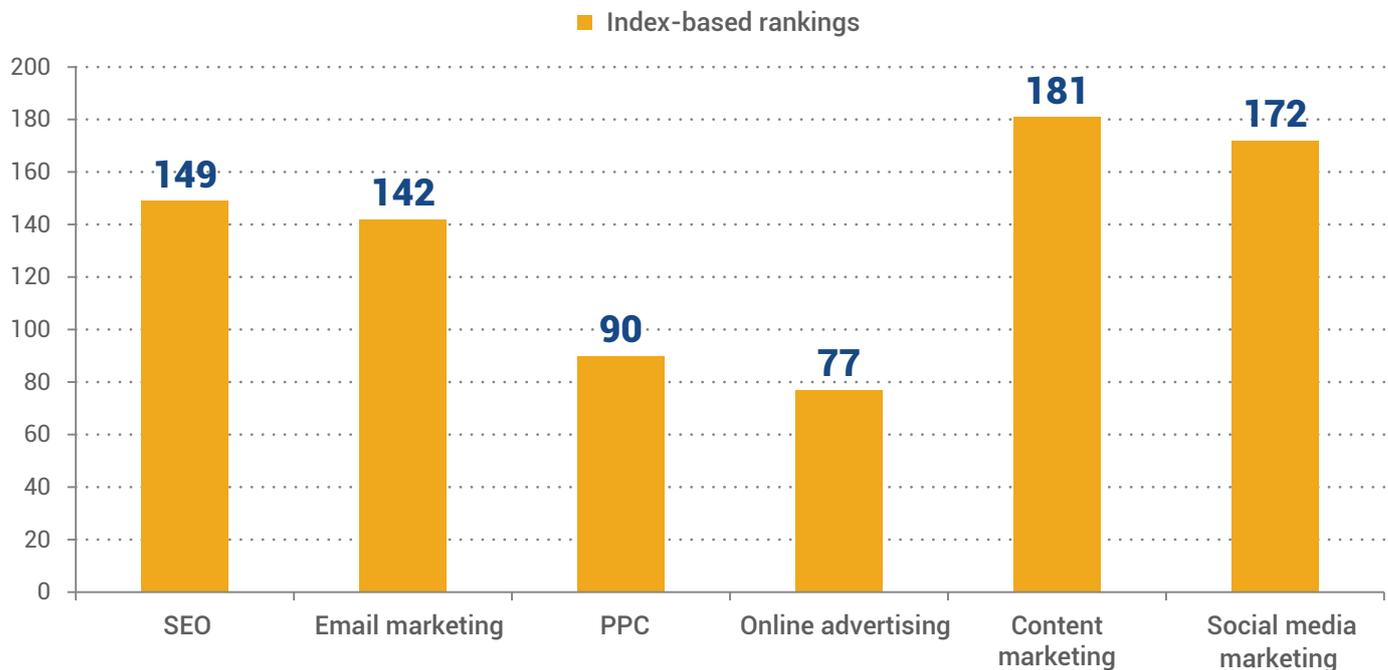
Everyone in business complains about a lack of time, money and resources, but given that a high percentage of our respondents run their own businesses, this is probably a justifiable limitation. We were a little surprised that 17% see 'competition' as a 'very' or 'extremely' limiting factor - but some activities (SEO, in particular) are very competitive.



“
 I'm not surprised that it's lack of time and resources that are limiting success. The small agencies and independent marketing consultants who are succeeding are the ones using marketing automation tools to maximise their output.
 ”

Tamsin Fox-Davies | **Constant Contact**

## Please rank these activities in terms of their importance to your own marketing in 2015



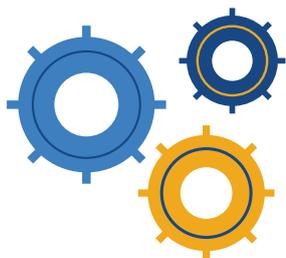
\*Average rank indexed against the midpoint of the ranking scale (3.5)

### Key point

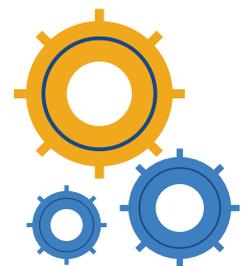
Consultants see their most valued marketing channels as content, social media, email and SEO. PPC and online advertising are their lowest priorities by some distance.

### Analysis

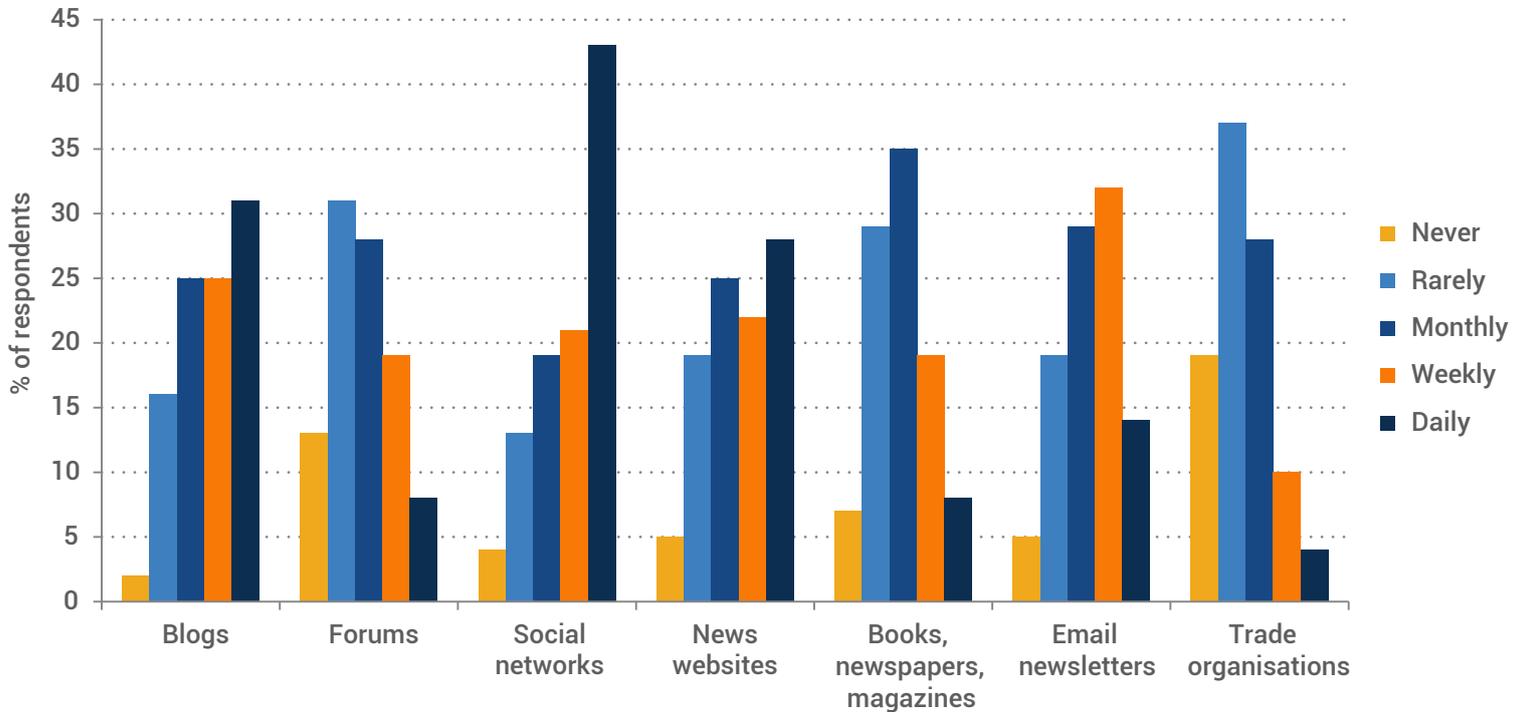
The marketers we spoke to are currently prioritising content marketing and social media along with email and SEO.



Email marketing and SEO  
are still very much the 'engine room'  
of modern digital marketing.



## How often do you seek advice / information about digital marketing from the following media sources?



### Key point

Social networks, news websites and blogs are the top daily media for marketing consultants with email newsletters the top weekly media. Trade organisations, forums and hard-copy media are the least used sources of information.

### Analysis

The prevalence of online media sources is unsurprising, given our respondents' passion for social media. We were quite surprised the forums weren't more popular, but not at all that trade organisations appear to be waning in importance.



“ Our internal data mirrors these findings. Most marketers actually send their emails weekly or monthly. 'How often should I email?' is a question we hear all the time. The answer is simple: test it out and see when gets the best results. ”

Tamsin Fox-Davies | **Constant Contact**

What are the most popular daily or weekly sources of information on digital marketing?



## Key point

The main business-oriented social networks, Twitter and LinkedIn, are the most popular regular sources of information, while blogs, including Smart Insights, Social Media Examiner and Mashable, also feature prominently.

## Analysis

It's interesting that respondents cited blogs and social networks by name, but still listed 'email newsletters' as a generic source of regular information. Perhaps this reflects the continued dominance of newsletters among the weekly communications that marketers consume.



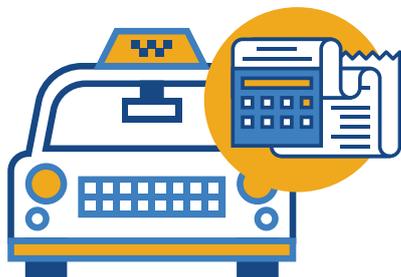
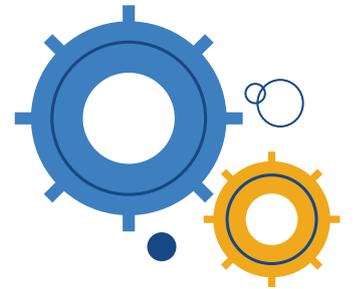
# Conclusion

We believe this report reveals some surprising insights into the mind-set of the modern British marketing consultant and growing agency.



They have a strong belief in the effectiveness and value of both social media and content marketing. This may be partly due to the increasing popularity of both activities across almost all industry sectors, but it also chimes with other findings in the report: namely UK marketing consultants' preference for digital marketing and a distinct reluctance to spend money. We have consequently dubbed these the **ROCKET FUEL of digital marketing for consultants.**

Email marketing and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) are consistently portrayed by the marketing consultants we questioned as being both necessary and effective. We would describe these as being the **ENGINE ROOM of modern digital marketing**; highly respected for what they deliver.



Once the darling of SMEs (and still popular, no doubt) Pay-Per-Click seems to have lost its allure for marketing consultants. Similarly, online advertising seems of little interest to savvy marketers who are supremely confident about their knowledge and creative flare. Unsurprisingly, these are the **TAXIS of the marketing world**; expensive, but you take them when you really need a lift.

While consultants complain that their marketing efforts are limited by time and money, it appears they are rather less stingy with their time than their money. Given that the majority spend under £50 per month on each marketing activity, it's quite possible they are **UNDERVALUING THEIR TIME.**



Lastly and perhaps most tellingly, with Twitter and LinkedIn listed as the most popular sources of marketing information, it seems that UK marketing consultants are relying largely on each other for new ideas and advice. As traditional media sources take a back seat, the modern marketing consultant is as much a **CREATOR OF CONTENT** as he is a consumer.