

AGENCY INSIGHTS REPORT: Sheffield

A benchmarking report to
show how digital agencies
are utilising their websites
for lead generation and
business growth

The logo consists of a cluster of white-outlined hexagons on a light gray background. One hexagon in the lower-left cluster contains the text "data hive" in a lowercase, sans-serif font.

data hive

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Introduction:

The digital sector is the newest and most competitive industry in the UK. There are currently over +9000 registered agencies on the RAR website (Recommended Agencies Register) and these are by no means the only agencies active in the UK.

We set out to understand the current landscape of digital agencies in Sheffield and how they approach using their own website to generate new business.

As business growth specialists, we develop strategies and processes and build predictable stream of new clients.

By identifying the gaps within the digital assets of a business we can optimise and improve to increase inbound enquiries.

Creative agencies are heavily reliant on customer referrals for new client work. Even though they form a strong source of work, referrals can be hard to predict, let alone plan for. This makes referrals an unreliable strategy for long term growth.

The irony is, many digital agencies deliver great web and digital solutions for their customers – however, we suspect they might be leaving ‘money on the table’ when it comes to utilising the same digital skills for their own acquisition strategy.

This report focuses on growth potential. The marketing aspects and the digital approach that is in place ready to develop new business.

The report highlights which agencies are leading the way currently, and investigate areas for improvement that other agencies can easily implement to make the most of their digital assets for future business.

About the data:

We focused on investigating all the digital agencies that stated their Head Offices as based in Sheffield - directly from the Recommended Agency Register (RAR).

The RAR website is a common search tool for marketing teams to find and approach digital agencies in the UK in order to hire them for project work.

Our search for Sheffield based agencies resulted in a list of **149** agencies. After verifying the data for active agencies, removing duplicates and manually qualifying Sheffield postal codes only – a total of **89** agencies were left for our analysis and reporting.

This analysis focused on a range of key digital growth aspects that are publicly available for referencing on website pages and within viewable source code.

We also reviewed direct roles listed within each team 'about us' pages and cross-referenced these using LinkedIn.

From this data we were able to gain a unique perspective into the overall Sheffield digital agency landscape.

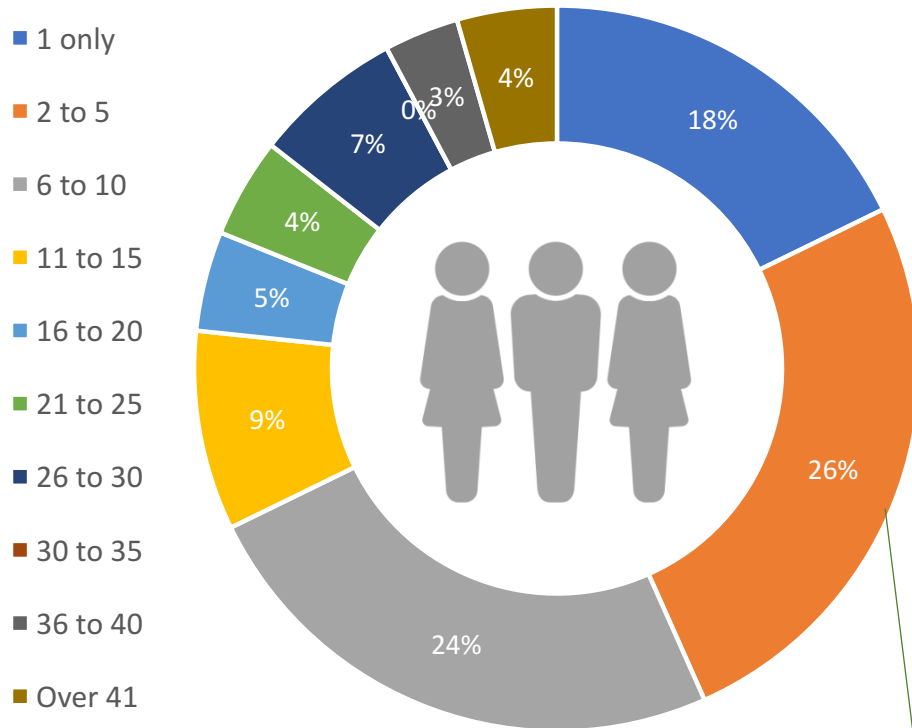
This landscape is outlined in this report, along with our benchmarking and key insights that the data revealed - about which activities agencies are using (or missing out with) to engage their website visitors in an a manner that could help generate new business.

We ranked these factors to give us a model on 'potential for growth' across all 89 agencies, regardless of size and without needing to request turnover data or other private details. Data has been anonymised to preserve the reputation of the agencies we researched.

Data Outliers:

3 larger Agencies (stated as being based in Sheffield) were confirmed have a majority of team and offices in other locations. These are Jaywing, Orangebus and Bunnyfoot. We've indicated on the following pages and data charts where these could be affecting baseline results, and acknowledged these as factors in the insights drawn from the analysis.

Agency Staff Size:



33%

Of the 89 agencies reviewed have 3 or less staff.

Staff size plays a major factor in how agencies approach their growth strategy.

Whilst larger agencies can offer more aspects of the full service agency to their clients, there's also an increase in their overheads, direct and fixed costs – thus increasing their minimum turnover requirements.

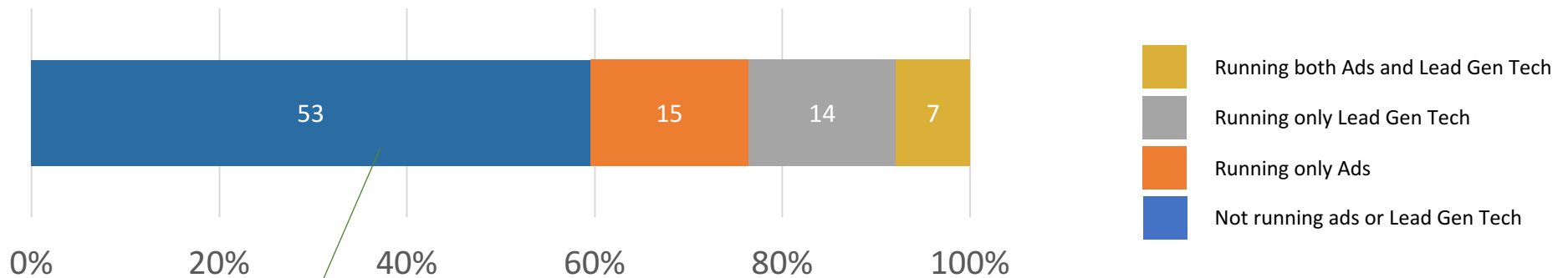
Smaller agencies do not have the burden of the vast overheads that large agencies have, making them more agile and able to pivot depending on the work required.

Threats to the smaller agency come from budget services like People per hour, Task Rabbit and Fiverr. These websites have a world-wide market place and can be very competitive.

Average agency size is 16 staff (without the 3 outliers*).

*3 Outliers for staff are – Jaywing (600), Orangebus (120) and Bunnyfoot (41)

Pay Per Click (PPC) Advertising:



6 out of 10

Agencies in Sheffield don't use PPC to advertise, or capture any customer leads on their website.

Due to the consultative nature of many of the agency services – PPC is not a priority marketing channel for some agencies. 60% of the agencies we reviewed have no PPC activity (denoted by a cookie tracking code on their website).

From agencies we spoke with, they cited the high costs of paying for ads on industry keywords as reason for not using PPC. Many found the leads that converted into paying customers to be poor Return On Investment (ROI).

We noted 3 agencies (10 staff and above) who regularly advertised on the paid brand name keyword of other Sheffield agencies.

When we looked for PPC activity paired with a technology to capture information to use for sales contact. Only 7 agencies had this connection in place to generate new leads.

Lead generation technology:

Analysing the source code and tracking cookies for all 89 websites, we identified 22 agencies using lead generation technology. This technology is implemented across three distinct areas:

1 - Visitor Traffic:

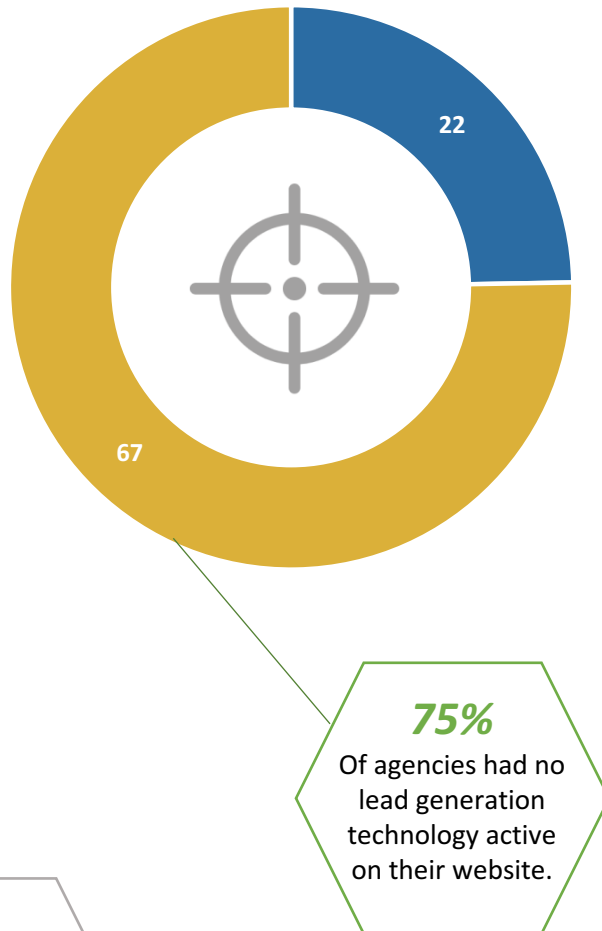
Of agencies using visitor traffic technology the two most popular technologies used were **Hubspot** (CRM and content marketing software), followed by **Lead Forensics** (Identifies which business IP addresses visited a website).

2 - Call Tracking:

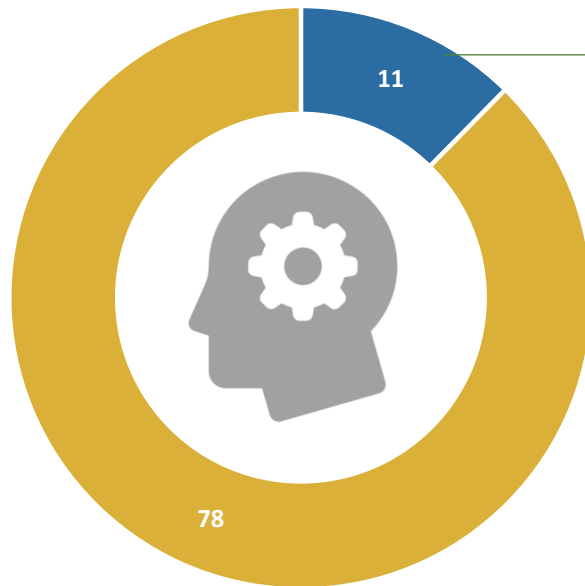
Placing a unique business phone number on each webpage passes visitor data to a report when the number is called. We found only 2 agencies using **Google Call Tracking**. Each of these two agencies was sized between 20-25 staff.

3 - LiveChat:

This technology allows business representatives to ask or answer questions directly with visitors using an on-page chat feature. This is often used as a support option to engage with visitors who might not be motivated enough to call directly with questions about a business service. We found 4 agencies with this technology in use.



Business Development Roles:



5 out of 11

Agencies with a business development role had 10 or less staff.

We identified 11 agencies that currently have a clearly defined business development manager (BDM) role as part of their team. We defined BDM as a role separate to either a marketing manager or sales executive.

Three of these roles were hired by agencies with seven to ten staff since Jan 2017.

Most of the BDM roles were done by the highest or most senior member of staff in agencies with 7 or less staff.

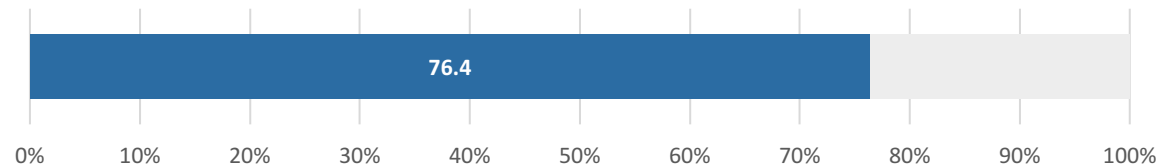
Three agencies we spoke with that had three staff or less confirmed they were actively considering outsourcing business development this year.

Blog Content:

Just under a quarter of agencies had no blog content* on their website.

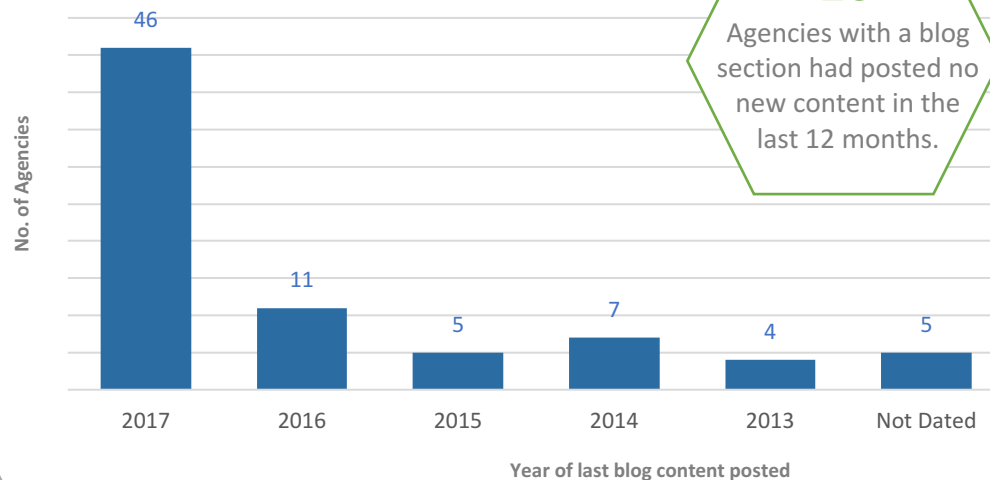
Of the 68 websites with blogs – 53 didn't have up-to-date content.

Agencies with Blog Content* Featured on Website:



* We term 'blog content' to mean any defined sections on the websites (such as blog, news, latest, views) that contain more than one article or post.

Last date of Blog Content:

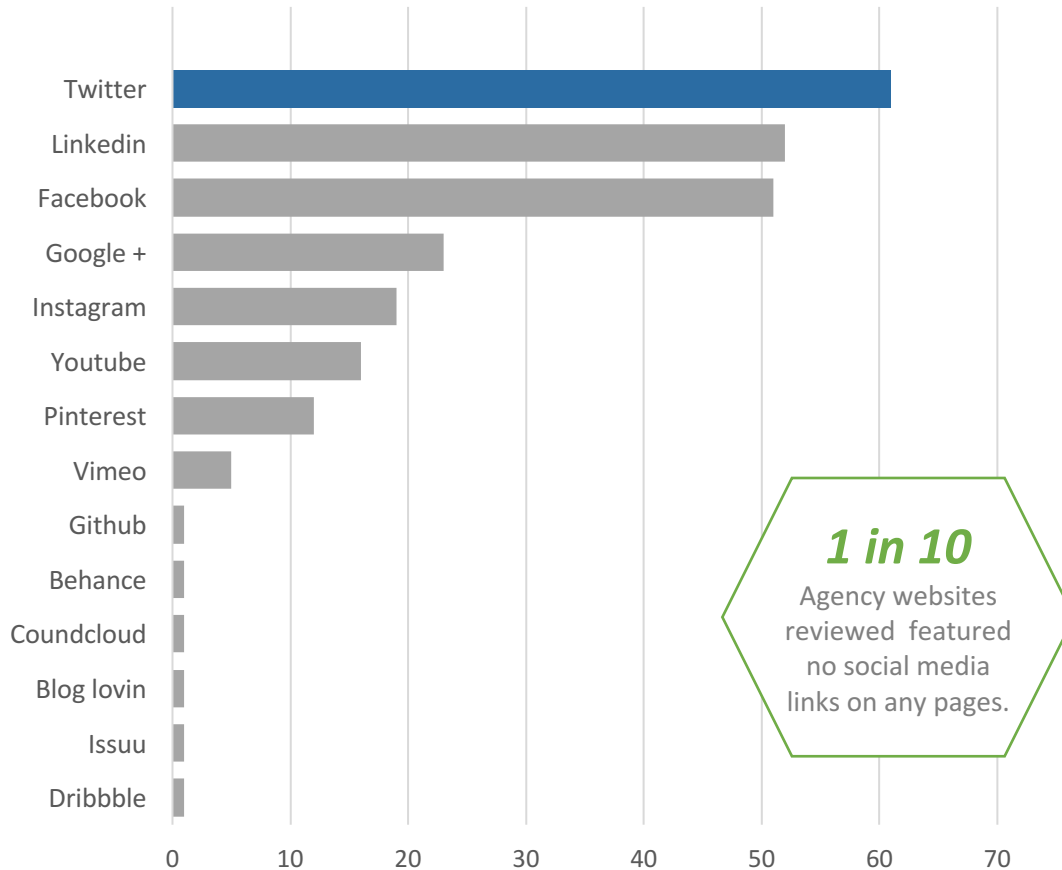


There are clear SEO benefits to regularly updated content on a website. Plus the added benefit of a better user engagement for first time and returning visitors.

The findings highlight that a consistent content marketing strategy is not a focus for the majority of agencies.

Social Media:

Preferred Social Platform



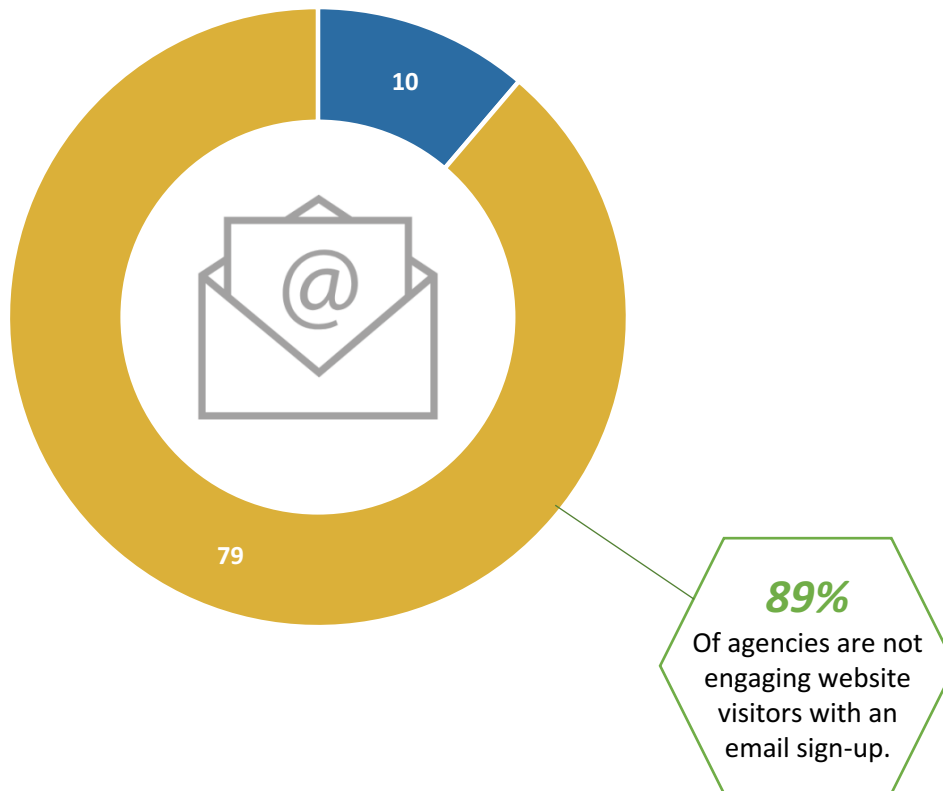
Twitter is the most popular platform with 61 out of 80 agencies featuring this on their website.

LinkedIn would be expected to rank highly as it is the only business-to-business (B2B) focused platform.

Smaller agencies of 1-3 were not taking advantage of LinkedIn as much as larger agencies. Many pages lacked a business logo or detail – which could lead to missed opportunities for new visitors from LinkedIn.

Surprisingly, Instagram results were lower than expected. Given that Instagram is one of the fastest growing social platforms, the visual nature would suit the promotion of agency work examples, and support an agency documenting 'behind the scenes' progress and development.

Email Marketing:



It was revealing that only ten agencies had an email sign-up form on their website.

Analysis of the technology being used revealed:

- 4 had coded their own email forms
- 5 used the Mailchimp platform
- 1 used CreateSend software

Email is still considered to be a strong marketing channel for customer engagement across many industries. Which would lead us to ask the question of how else are agencies engaging with their customers off-site?

Trust Icons:

Increasing trust through digital channels is an effective way to generate more leads.

Case studies and testimonials were common across all the sites reviewed.

We looked at two other methods that agencies use to build more trust and deliver a better user experience.



66%

Of agencies are not using any photos on their about us page.

1) Team photographs:

Used primarily to show personality and allow prospective clients to make an informed impression of the staff or key team members. 30 agencies displayed team photos on their about us page.



82%

Of agencies displayed no icons, badges or awards on their pages.

2) Trust badges and Awards:

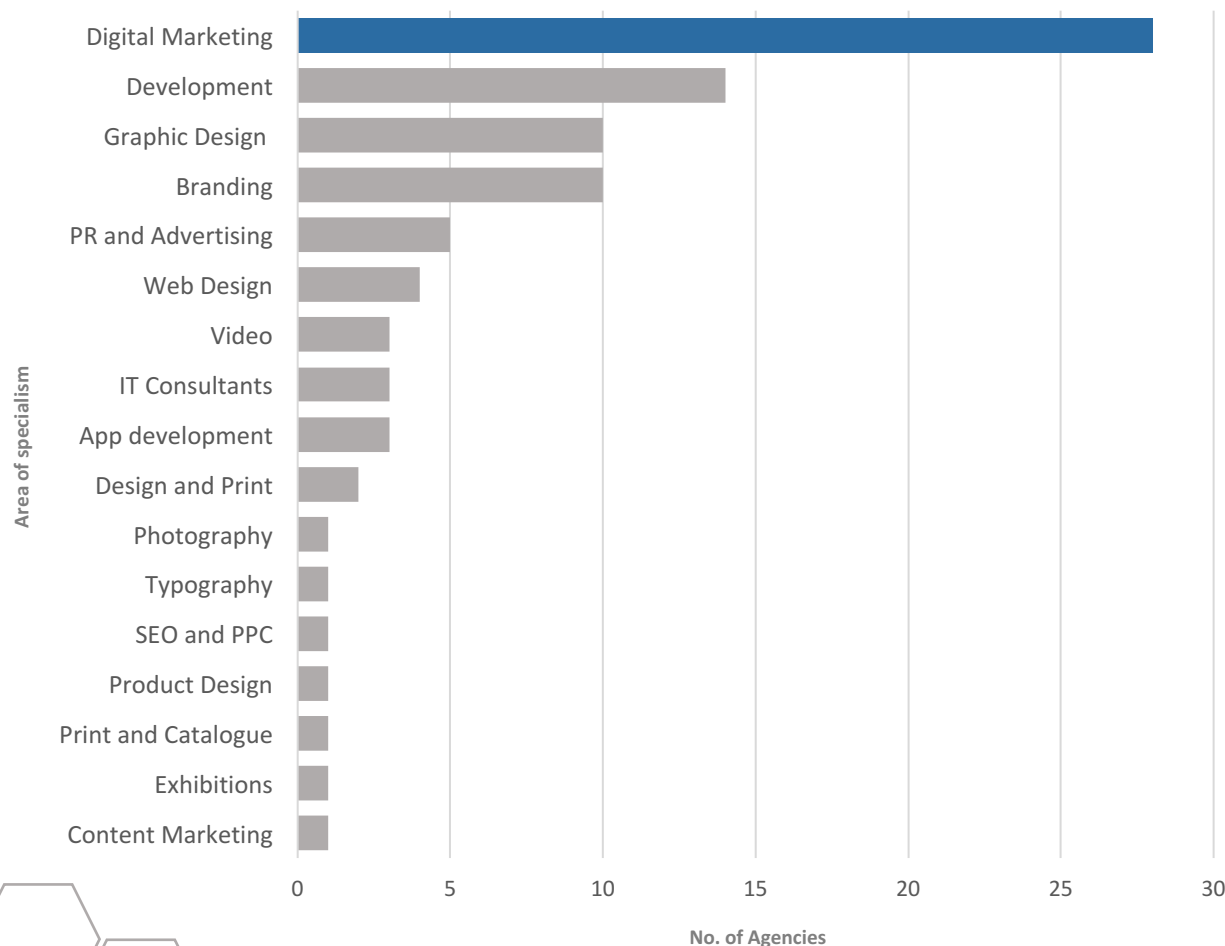
Linking to membership and industry regulators reassures potential customers and builds trust. Displaying recent awards and accolades is used to boost confidence that the quality of work is good.

Only 6

Agencies displayed both team photos and icons, badges or awards on their website.



Service Specialisms:



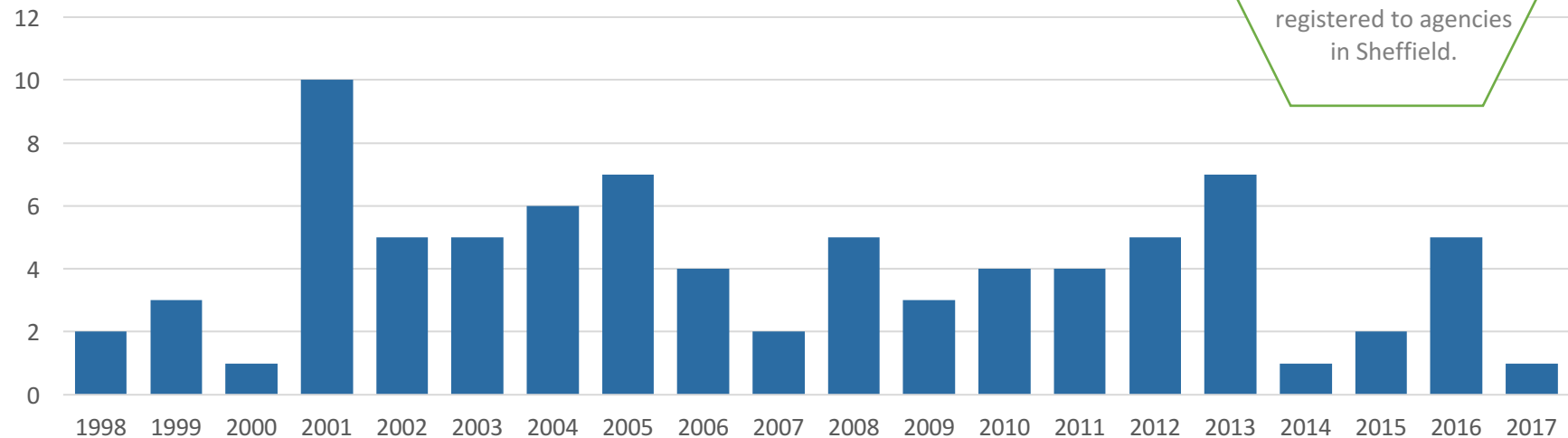
The largest group of agencies describe themselves as offering Digital Marketing services (mainly front-end and client side website design with additional social media and marketing support).

This was twice as many as the second highest area - which is agencies offering Developmental services (coding, software and systems, IT and website hosting).

Areas where agencies seem most competitive are across Digital Marketing, Development, Graphic Design and Branding.

The smaller niche specialisms make Sheffield a diverse map for agencies.

Domain age:



10 Years

Is the average age of the domains registered to agencies in Sheffield.

We analysed the registered domain age of the current agencies in our Sheffield data set.

Of the 89 featured, we found listed 82 as publicly accessible. We also knew of four agencies which had completed re-branding projects within the past 12 months – who would appear younger than they are.

Overall – even with these re-brands taken into account, the average age of the domains for our Sheffield agencies is ten years.

This age being an indicator that although Sheffield remains a competitive location there is opportunity for long term success as an agency based in the city.

Growth Score Model:

In order to rank and benchmark how agencies are effectively using their websites for growth and lead generation we created the scoring model shown opposite.

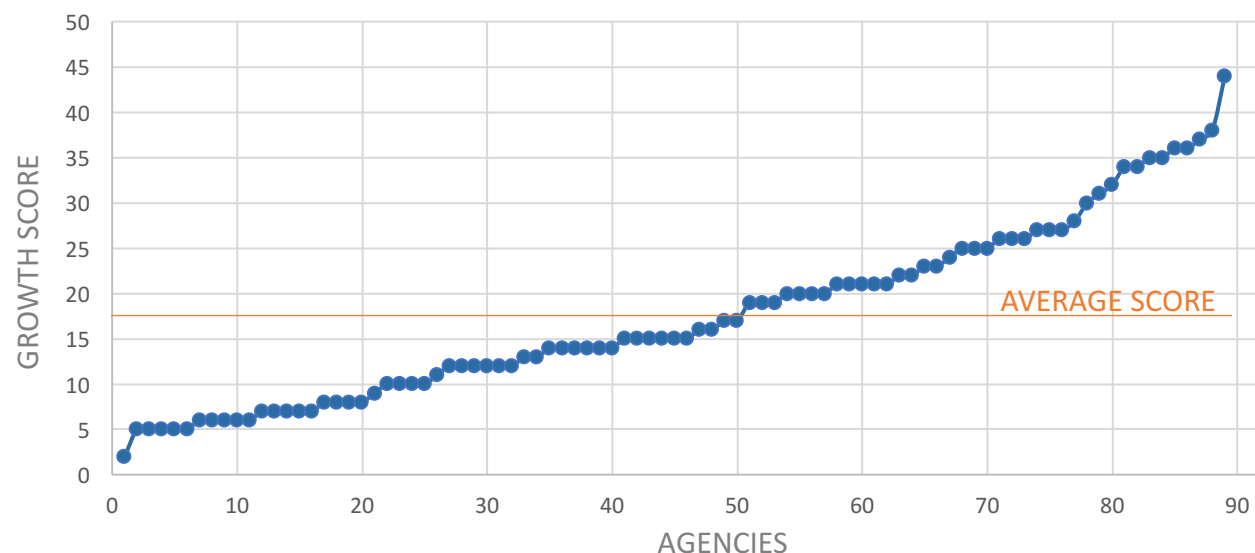
We assigned bonus points, and higher scoring for specific areas that support business growth (highlighted).

All 89 sites were then ranked against this model up to the maximum of 57 points.

The results of all 89 agency scores are shown on the next page of this report.

DETAILS	SCORE
Running Paid Advertising to the website (Pay-per-click)	1
Use of Lead Generation Technology on the website	1
Bonus = has both Paid Advertising and Lead Gen technology together	5
Displays an email sign up form	1
Website has obvious Blog/News/Views section	1
Bonus = up-to-date content on Blog (within last two months)	5
Clear Social Media links on the website (one point each - up to 7)	7
Bonus = has active LinkedIn business page	5
Use of team photos on about us page	5
Trust Icons on page (Badges, Awards or Memberships – up to 5)	5
Bonus = using both photo's and trust icons together	5
Features client testimonials and/or quality case studies	5
Bonus = has clearly hired a Business Development Role in the team	10
Total Available Score	57

Growth Score results:



The results of the scores for all the agencies are represented on this graph. The average score was 18 out of a possible 57.

The table to the right shows the scores, staff sizes and domain ages* of the top 10 agencies.

39 agencies scored above this average with the other 50 scoring between 2 and 17.

Top 10 Results		Score	Staff	Dom. Age*
1	WeAreArise	44	7	2015
2	FORTAY Media	38	15	2008
3	BunnyFoot	37	41	2001
4	AirShip	36	27	2005
5	Converted	36	21	2013
6	SEO Works	35	30	2006
7	Evoluted	35	23	2002
8	Omni	34	8	2016
9	Diva Creative Ltd	34	25	2002
10	DS Creative	32	8	2003

Key Takeaways:

Here are the key takeaways we identified that will help increase the lead generation potential of the agency websites featured in this report:

1	The challenge with PPC	Though consultative in nature, many agencies do offer some fixed price levels of service (or even bespoke products) that could benefit from paid advertising campaigns. Brand bidding is being taken advantage of by competitors (p-6), an agency could explore the best paid channel for packaged services – and combine with B2B reporting or Lead gen tech to maximise ROI.
2	Link technology for growth	The lack of technology being used to understand and engage with B2B visitors (p-6 & p-7) could be improved through a mix of either cost effective or free tools. Linking PPC and other tools to website reporting will improve customer insights over the more standard use of Google Analytics reporting tool.
3	Better content strategy	The blog content analysis (p-9) shows that there is a clear opportunity for establishing a content strategy. SEO benefits and social media can widen the audience and help drive more on-page traffic. Content can and should be delivered in multi-media formats to broaden the chance of engagement with their prospective customers.
4	Leverage LinkedIn	A free to use business focused platform, LinkedIn is great for building direct business relationships. Many agencies are under utilising this through a lack of connection to their website (p-10), as well as not adding in descriptions about their agency, or actively engaging with their target market. A logo, company description, and clear link from the website should be standard.
5	Be more sociable	Social media analysis (p-10) showed potential for more to be done through social media. Instagram is a rising focus of the agencies we spoke with – and supports a strong visual means of communication that most agencies in digital marketing could leverage for wider appeal and to drive more potential clients to their website.

Key Takeaways (Continued):

6	Do more with emails	Email marketing (p-11) is still one of the strongest marketing channels – reaching out to potential customers in a cheap and targeted way. Agencies could take great advantage of nurturing potential clients and building trust with a strategic campaign based around education rather than sales. Implementing email sign-ups will allow you to better connect with potential clients.
7	Make content 'take-away' friendly	If your work looks good – let it be shared. Building your agency brand through downloadable content is simple and effective to do. Linking this to your email forms and campaigns (see above) and get the benefit of allowing your work to be taken offline for consideration. Measuring the engagement with different content types will give insight into what services your potential customers are looking for when they engage with your website.
8	Finding local customers	Many Agencies of 10 plus staff we spoke with mentioned the majority of their work (around 74%) came from businesses outside of the Sheffield region. Making any local networking a weaker activity for generating target market clients. Attending Networking groups in these wider geographies could prove a challenge as a means of growing the agency through this activity.
9	Rise of the BDM	A role around the business development (p-9) is going to be more focused for agencies who are looking at growth and long term stability. Expectations about how to grow and how quickly this will happen are still a challenge for these roles, as is accessing marketing budgets to create the systems to enable this growth.
10	Create Partnerships	The landscape in Sheffield specialisms was broad enough to support work across collaborative skills (p-10). We spoke with around ten agencies who are already partnering with freelancers to deliver wider service projects. When asked about their challenge with taking on larger projects, agencies of three or less reported as having already established networks to aid this level of work.



DATA SOURCES:
recommendedagencies.com
companieshouse.gov.uk website
LinkedIn.com
google.co.uk/business

ADDITIONAL DATA:
Business Data relating to the individual agencies was sourced from publicly listed information. All data used in the scoring model taken from source code analysis of agency websites – as viewed in google chrome browser & tools.

The data and information contained in this report was researched (April 2017), analysed and formatted by:

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DataHive are Digital Growth Strategists and Marketing Consultants.
Leveraging powerful insight to grow business.

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