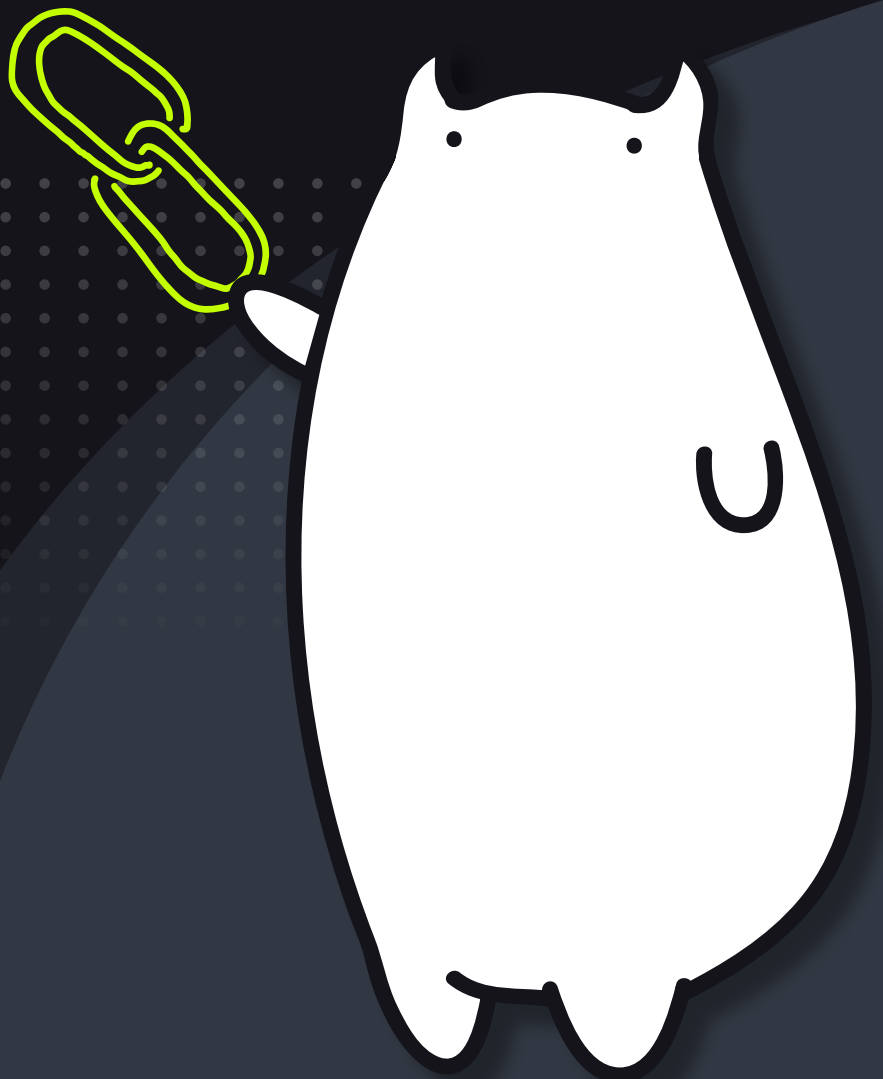


fatjoe.

The Future Of Link Building: 2025 And Beyond



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The Future Of Link Building

You're welcome to syndicate and use our research in your own content, provided that you credit it with a link back to fatjoe.com.



Introduction

In late 2024 FATJOE conducted a survey of over 500 professional SEOs with one thing in mind – what is the future of link building?

As we head into 2025, we're proud to unveil the results of our industry survey to comprehensively answer – what is the future of link building in 2025 and beyond?

The methodology: We partnered with CensusWide research consultants to survey SEO professionals and marketing managers who actively engage in link building, with 536 respondents in total.



Everyone loves links, yet most hate 'Link Building'.

After almost 20 years in the industry, it's still the part of SEO that has me most fascinated, frustrated and kind of obsessed. In 2025, I'll be honest, not much has changed. As an industry, we are more mature in how we get links. Link building has moved from forums and author profiles to industrial-scale Blogger Outreach and now even Digital PR – working on some of the biggest publications in the world.

In a world of AI advances, where anyone can create perfectly written content with a few clicks, links have become even more of a backbone in SEO. Whether it's Google, other search engines, or even AI search, they all have to manage the same goal – deliver users reputable information. Backlinks are a great way to prove yourself – or your brand – as a top resource.

We know it, you know it, and our State Of Link Building 2025 respondents knew it too.

Links aren't going anywhere. They're as important as they've ever been, even as the sites we target get bigger and better than ever before.

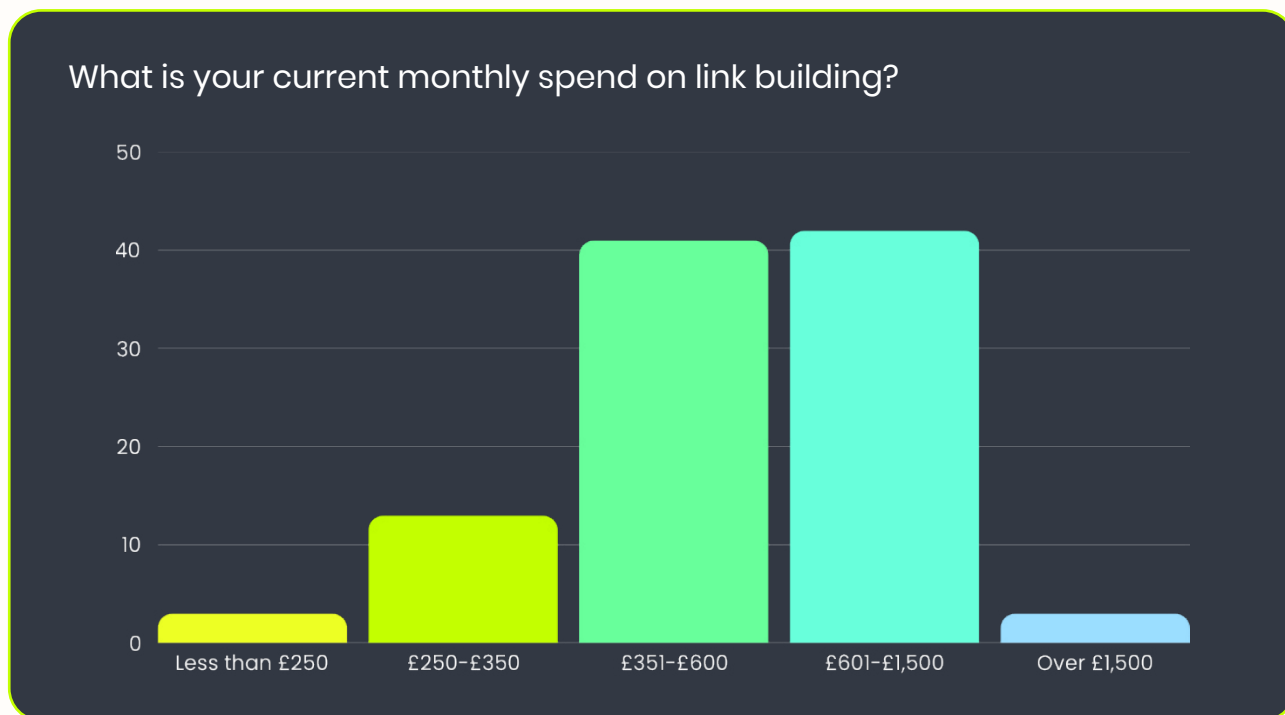
Everything's changing. But nothing is changing.

Keep link building, keep ranking, and keep going.

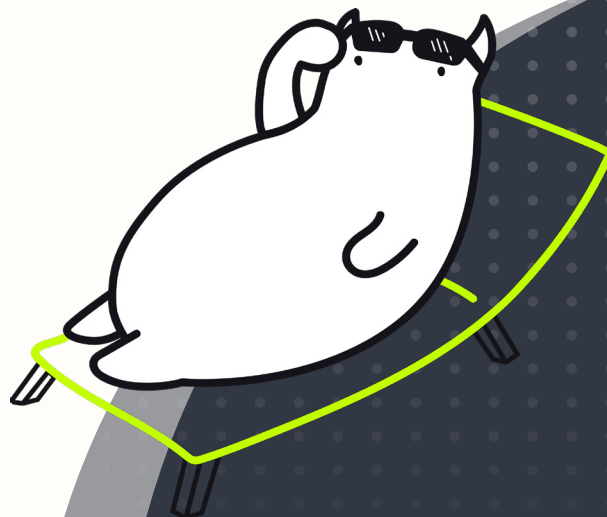
– Joe Davies, FATJOE CEO

We've pulled out a few of the most notable takeaways from the data in our initial overview here. If you'd like access to the full responses, pop an email over to support@fatjoe.com

What is your current monthly spend on link building?



The key takeaway here is 47% of respondents spend more than £600 on link building every month, with 14% spending more than £1,500 every single month. If you're not spending, you're not keeping up.

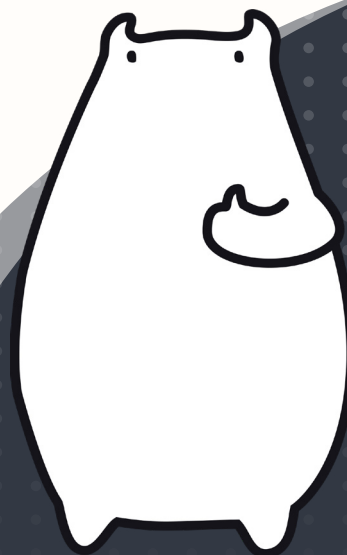


Diving deeper, we see that the more experienced an SEO is, *the more they spend on links.*

This likely comes from larger budgets and the knowledge that links are what really move the needle in SEO.

What Is Your Current Monthly Spend On Link Building - By Years Of Experience

What is your current monthly spend on link building?



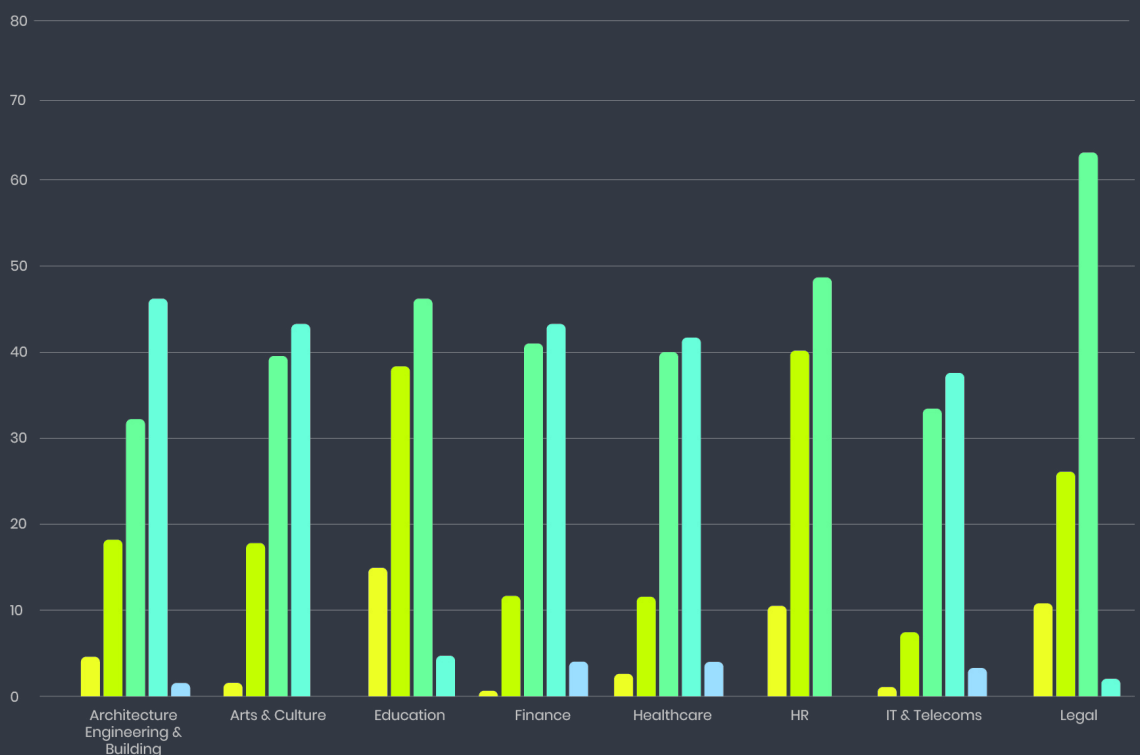
While spending on link building is high across all niches, we can see that super-competitive niches like legal spend the most.

This tracks with legal SEOs spending hundreds of dollars per link to get their clients those all-important rankings.

Current Monthly Spend On Link Building – By Industry

What is your current monthly spend on link building?

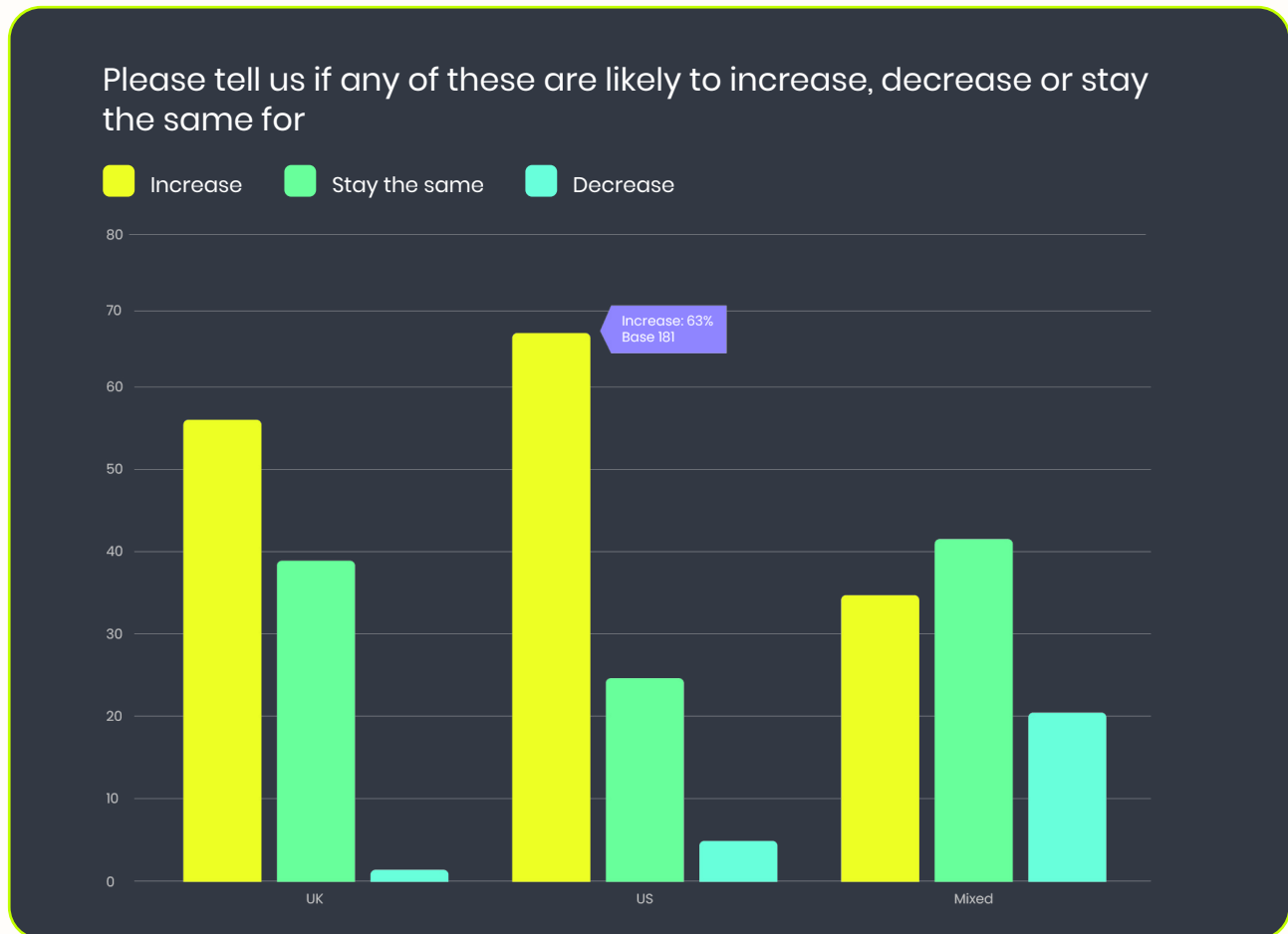
Less than £250 (please specify in £) £250-£350 £351-£600 £601-£1,500 Over £1,500



SEO isn't dead and links sure aren't either. With reduced SERP real estate it's more important than ever to be the top result and links are a great way to achieve that.

61% of respondents expect their spending on link building will increase in 2025.

Will Link Building Spend Increase, Decrease, Or Stay The Same?



Only 4% think it will decrease – it's clearly not something SEOs can afford to cut back on if they want to keep ahead.

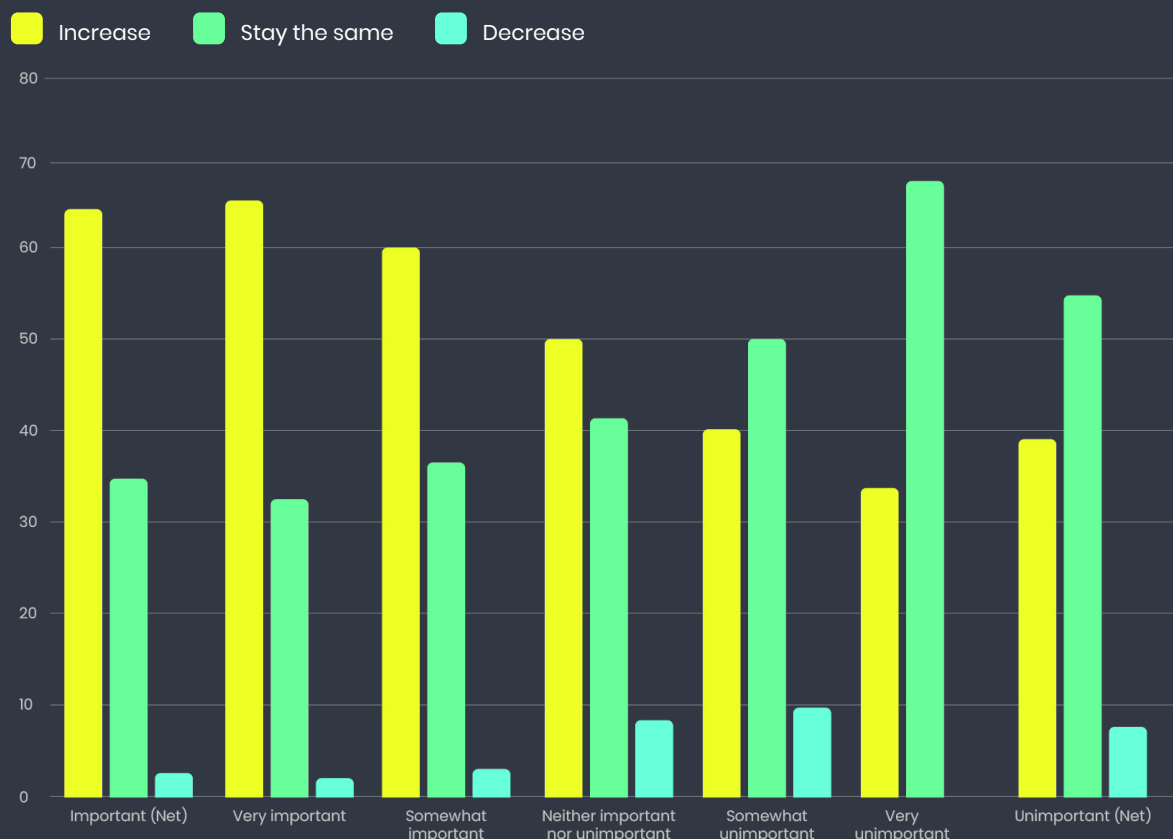


It's not just link building, though, 64% of respondents thought their SEO budget was likely to increase in 2025.

Interestingly, the more important a respondent thought AI was, the more they were likely to spend on links.

Link Building Spend X How Important AI Is

Please tell us if any of these are likely to increase, decrease or stay the same by importance of AI response

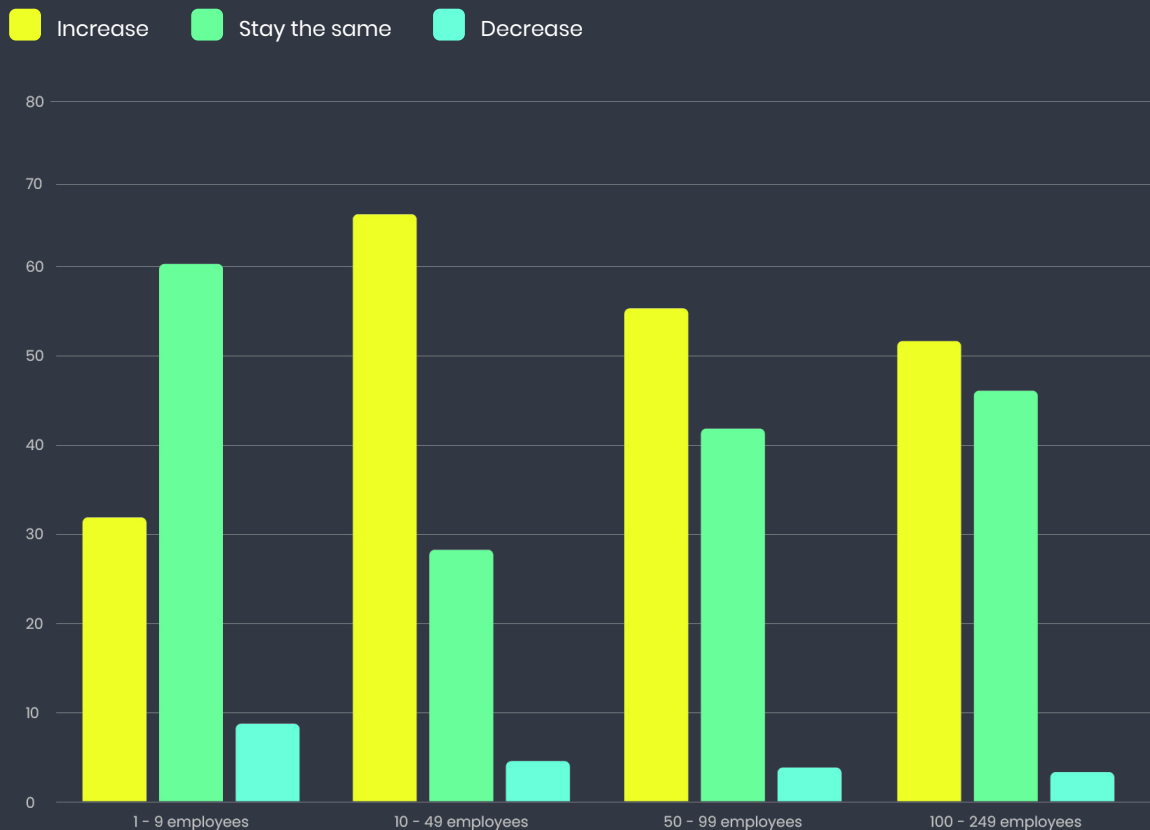


This is likely because they know how valuable brand mentions (often in the form of links) are when it comes to being mentioned in AIOs and chatbot responses.

54% of respondents believe they will need to increase their staffing to keep up with link building in 2025.

Is Staffing Set To Increase, Decrease, Or Stay The Same?

Please tell us if any of these are likely to increase, decrease or stay the same for:



Staffing costs alone are set to increase massively with this trend.

This is where we see outsourcing become so appealing – to keep those costs down.

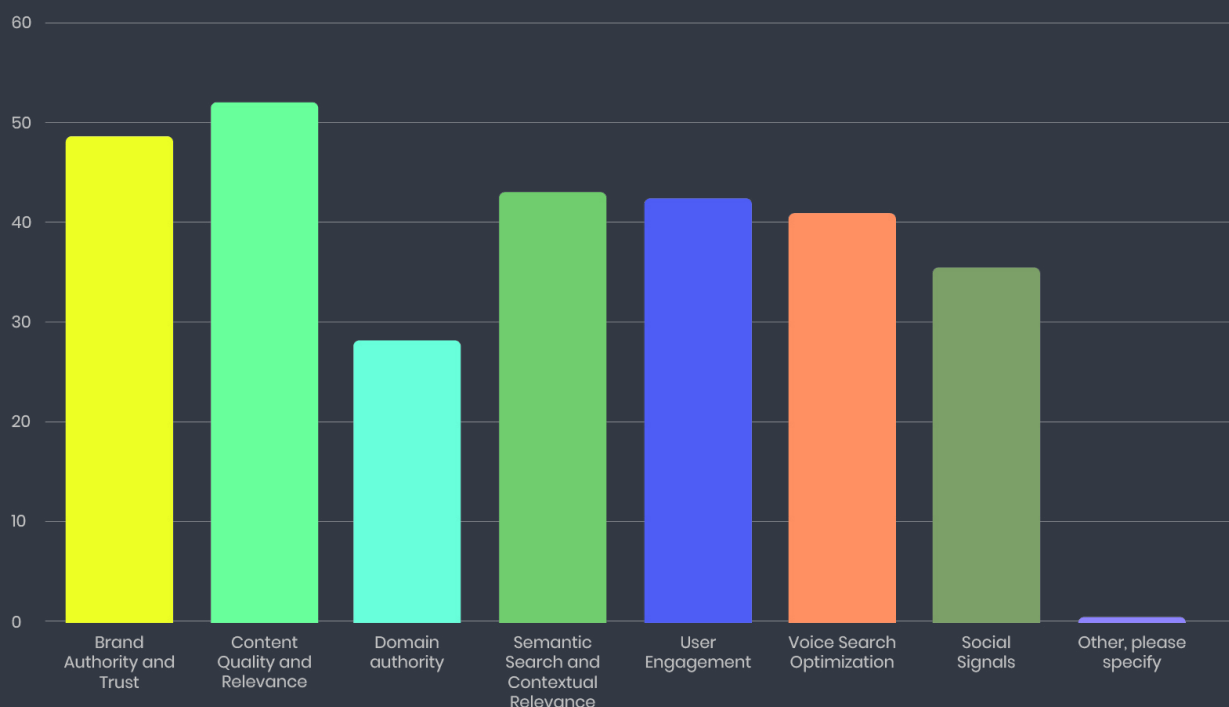
With the ever-rising costs of staff, that is likely to make outsourced SEO and link building solutions more popular than ever before as a way to keep up without spiralling costs.

Opinions are split on what measure of SEO and link building quality will stand out as the most important in 2025 and beyond.

Across the whole cohort, content quality and relevance stands out, with 51% of respondents putting it in their top 3 most important factors.

What Will Be The Most Important Factors In Link Building?

Which of the following, do you think, will take precedence in the future, if anything? (Select up to 3)

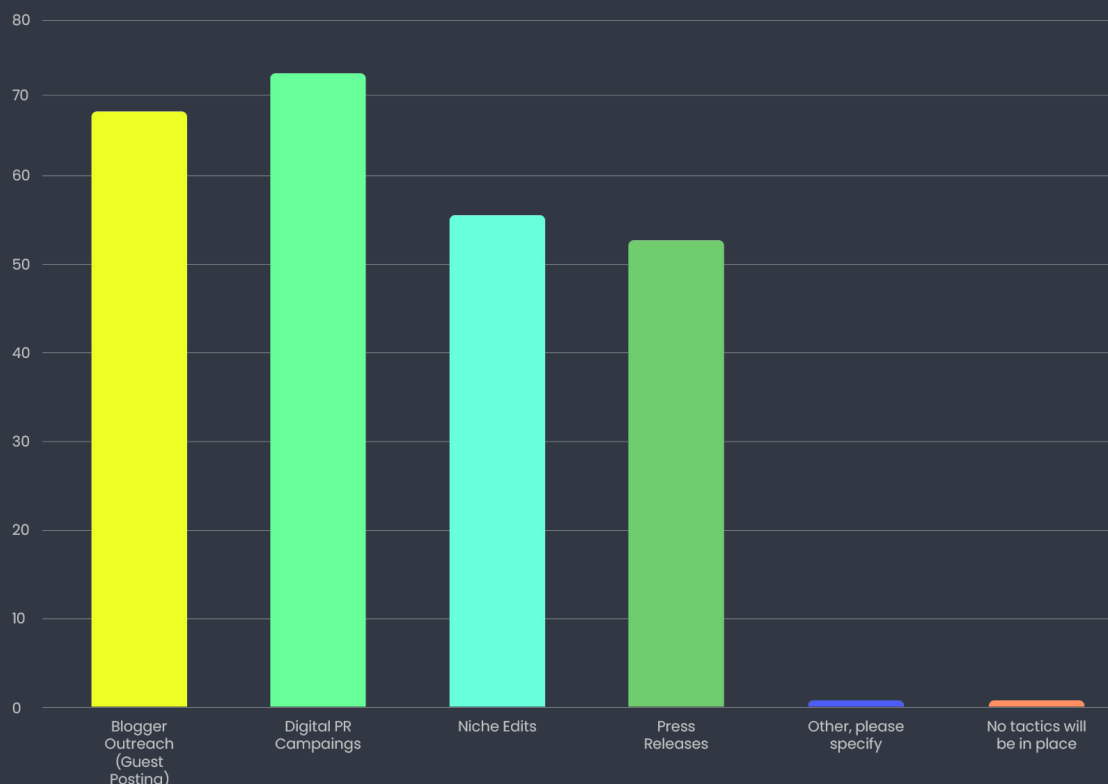


However, interestingly, senior SEOs are most likely to place heavy emphasis on brand authority.

This tracks with both the rise of digital PR link building as a means of building brand authority, and with the general consensus that brand authority will be vital in the age of AI.

Speaking of digital PR, it stands out with 73% of respondents saying they will be using it as a key link building tactic in 2025.

What tactics, if any, will you be using in 2025? (Select all that apply)



This only just beats Blogger Outreach's 68%, but it's notable just how fast digital PR has grown in the past few years to now become the top link building method. It's showing no signs of slowing in 2025!



Digital PR is increasingly looking like the future

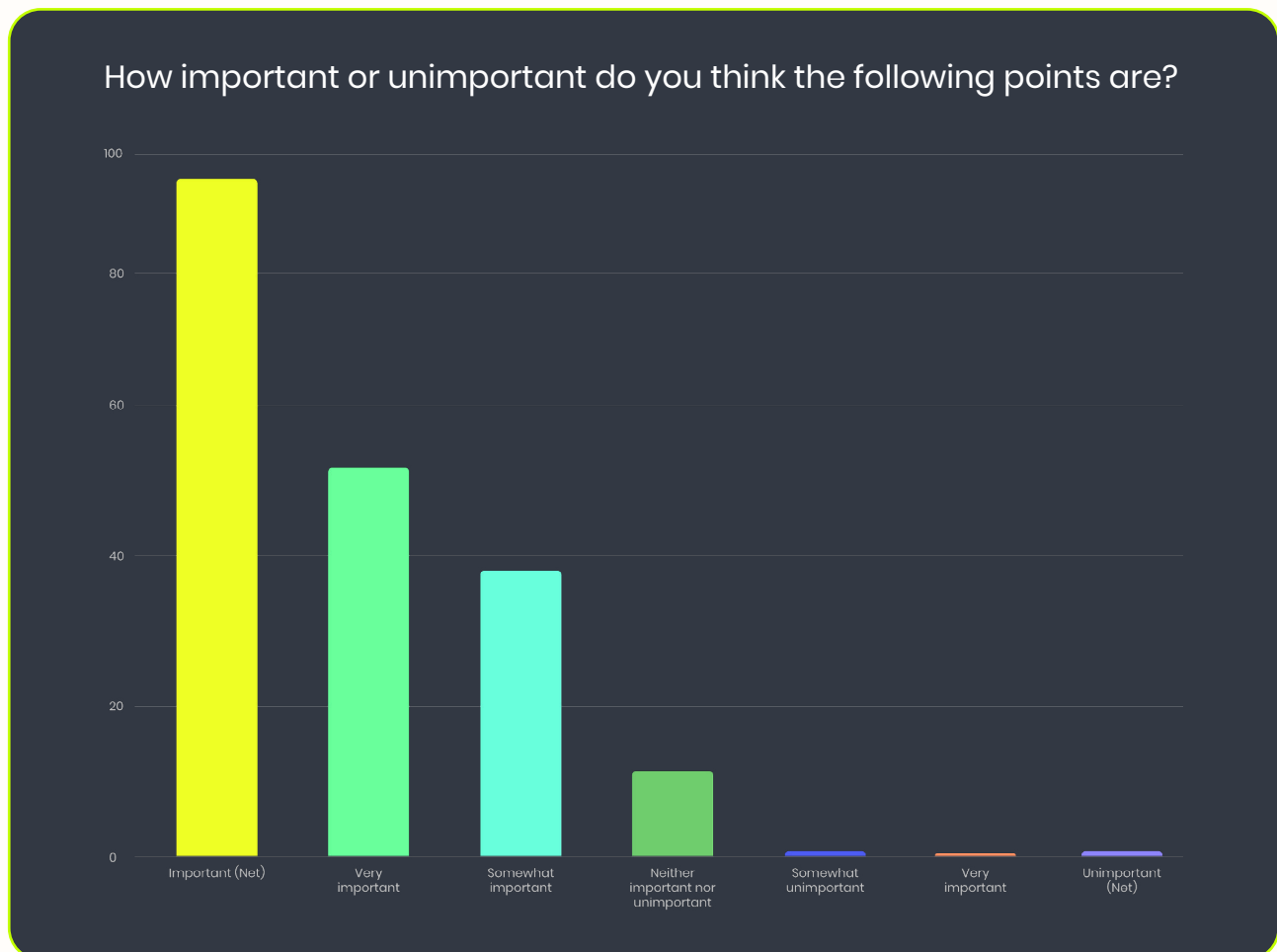
Not only of link building but brand marketing and SEO generally. It's an exciting time, but you've got to keep up.

Those who are set to increase their budgets are also most likely to be spending on digital PR.

It's expensive work, but it sure is worth it when you land top-tier media coverage and links! Everyone agrees that AI is going to help link building – 87% in total said it will be at least somewhat important in link building in 2025 and beyond.

A full 89% believe link relevance is important with links. This is no surprise – if anything, it's only surprising that 11% *didn't say that* but it does show no matter how flashy a link is, it needs to be relevant first and foremost for it to really matter.

How Important Is Link Relevance?



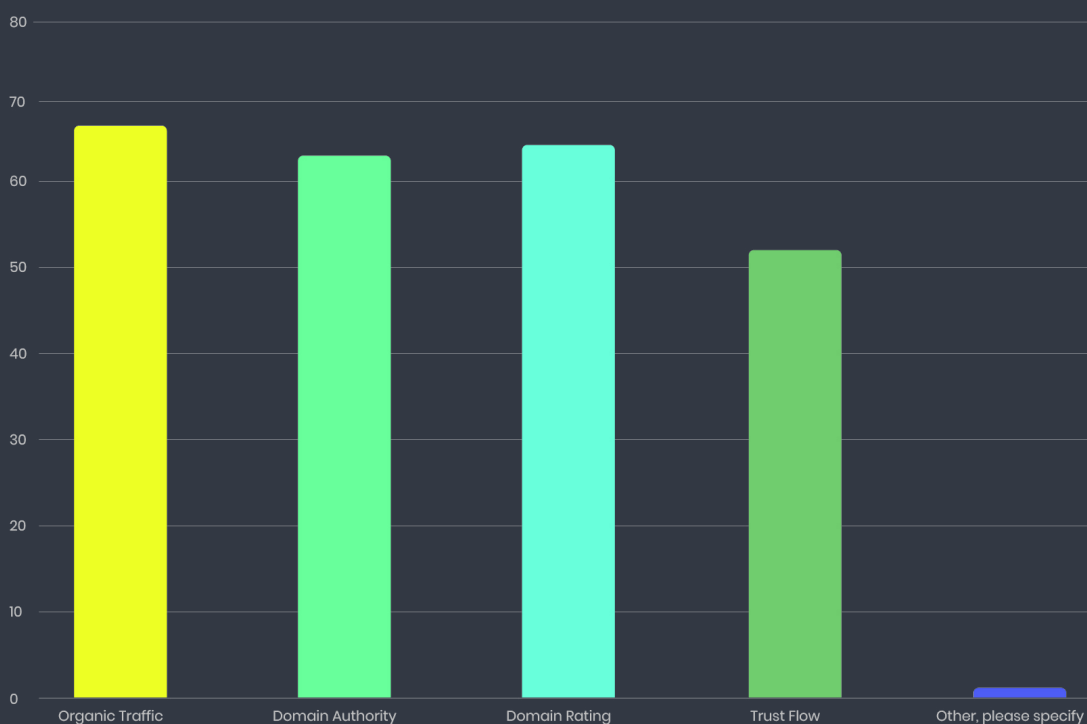
It's a similar story with link authority – 90% feel it is important, but the difference here is the split between 'Very Important' and 'Somewhat Important'.

This likely reflects that same hesitation to value a link simply because it's from a great site if there isn't the necessary relevance behind it.

Funnily enough, despite certain marketing claims, there isn't one true SEO metric with SEOs ranking organic traffic, Domain Authority, and Domain Rating very similarly in how often they use them.

What Metrics Do You Use To Measure Backlink Quality?

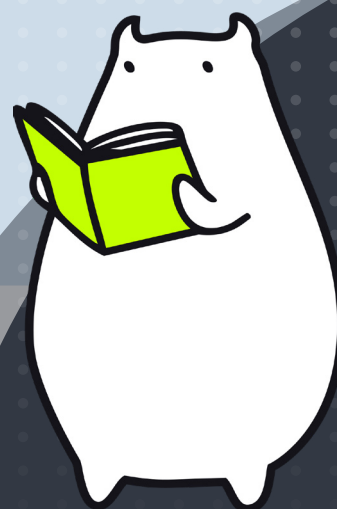
What metrics are you using to evaluate the quality of a backlink? (Select all that apply)



Only Trust Flow lags behind, but even that was used by 52% of respondents.

Digging deeper, junior SEOs value organic traffic a lot more than their counterparts.

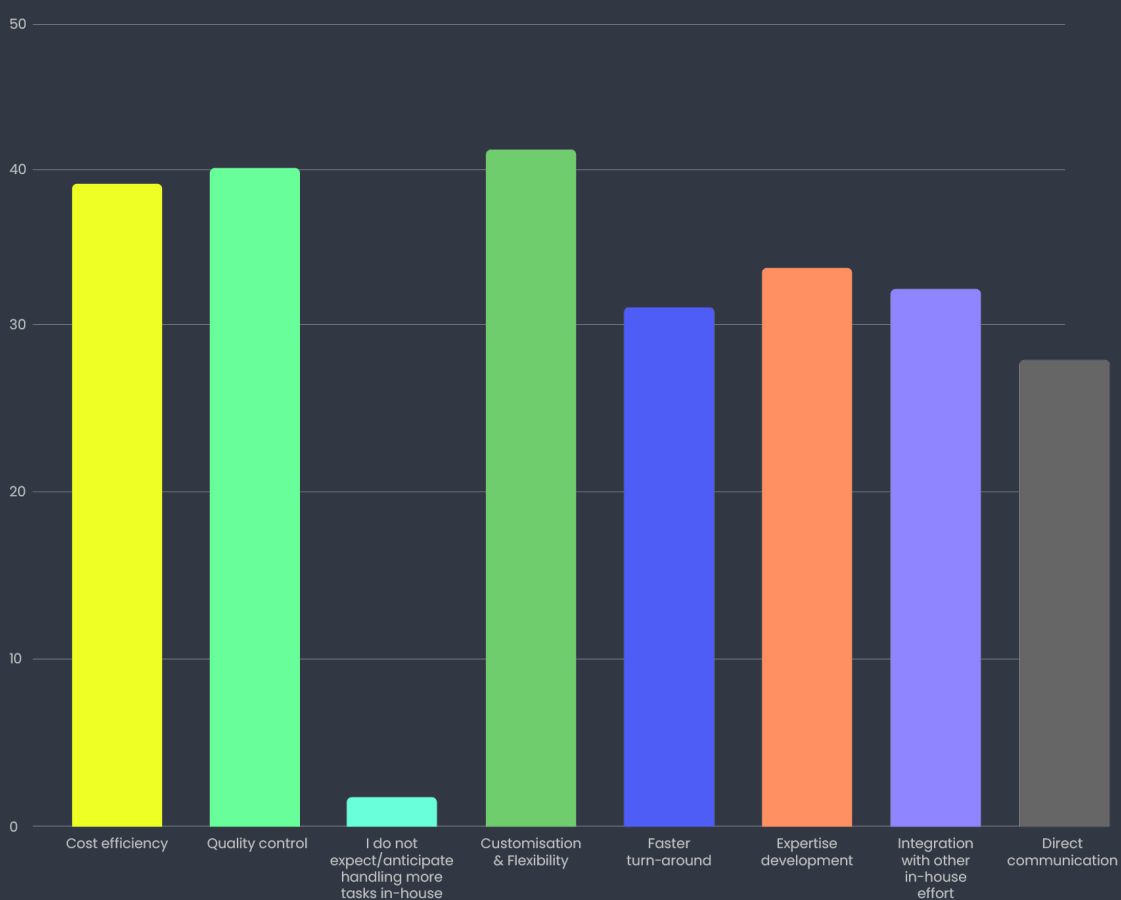
This may drop off at higher levels of seniority as it is an easier metric to fake or simply as it doesn't necessarily denote quality in the way other metrics do.



For those who are going to be bringing more link building tasks in-house, the reasons are varied, with no one stand-out reason for doing so.

Why Are People Bringing Link Building In-House?

If you expect/anticipate handling more link-building tasks in-house, in the future, what are the biggest reasons for this? (Select up to 3)

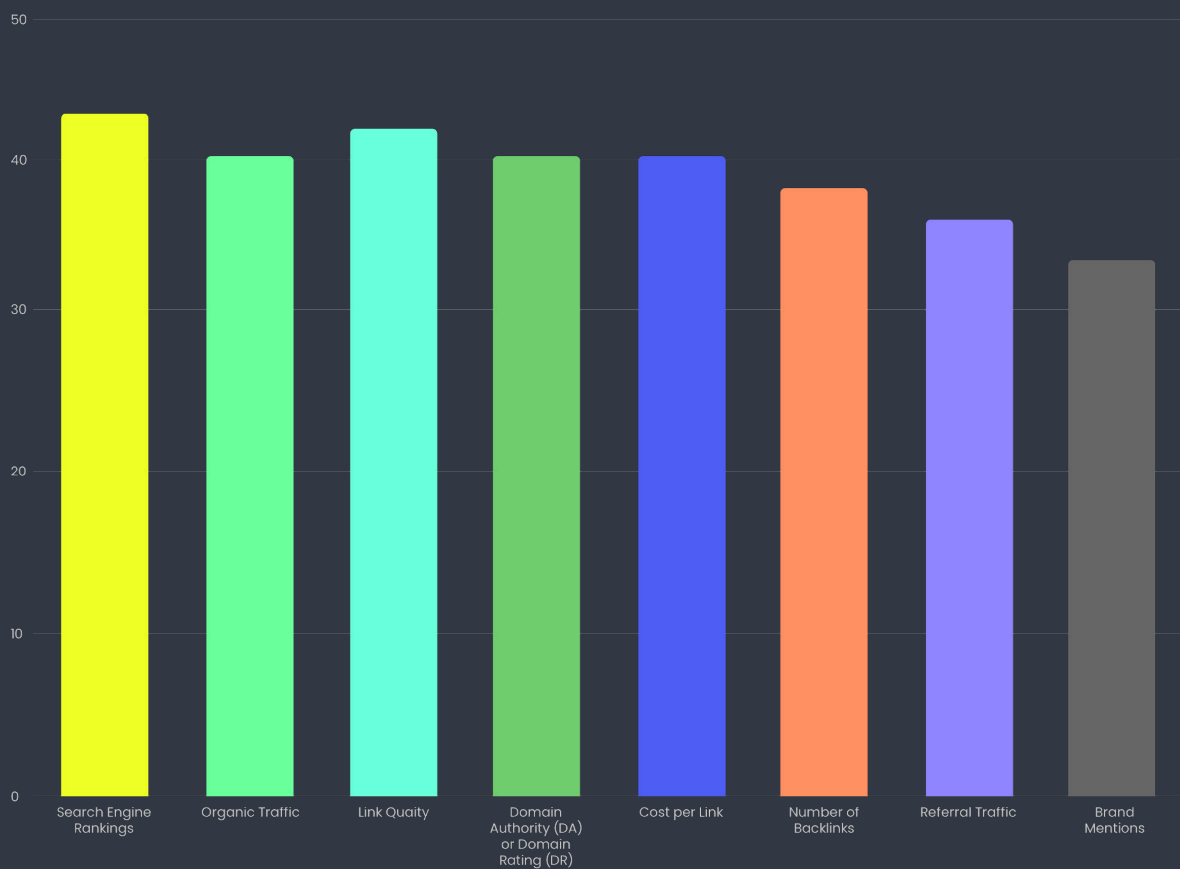


SEO is a notoriously difficult channel to prove ROI for and that's no different with this set of results.

Only 43% of SEOs said rankings were a main KPI for their link building.

What Are Your Link Building KPIs?

What are your main KPIs for determining your ROI for your link-building efforts? (Select up to 5)



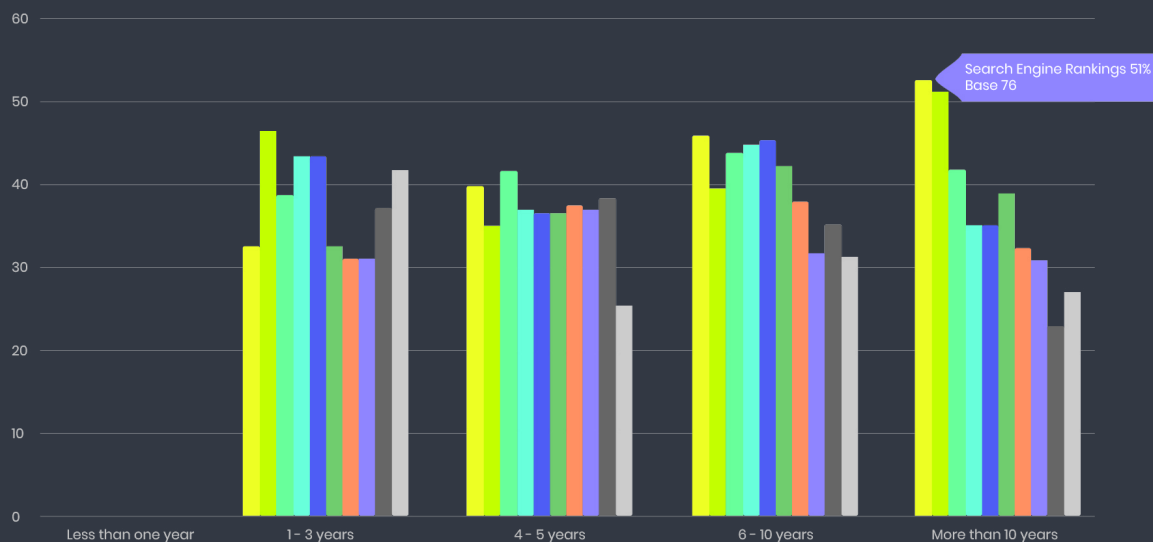
The might represent a shift in mindset to getting traffic for the right reasons. However, it's still surprising to not see "rankings" rated higher, given that higher rankings increase the likelihood of more traffic. Assuming you're optimizing for the right terms and intent of course!

The most important KPI for more experienced SEO professionals is still rankings (51%), which either shows that experience wins out – or that believing rankings are everything is outdated. You can decide on that one!

Link Building KPIs By Seniority

What are your main KPIs for determining the ROI of your link-building efforts? (Select up to 5)

Search Engine Rankings Organic Traffic Link Quality Domain Authority (DA) or Domain Rating (DR)
Cost per Link Number of Backlinks Referral Traffic Brand Mentions Conversion rate

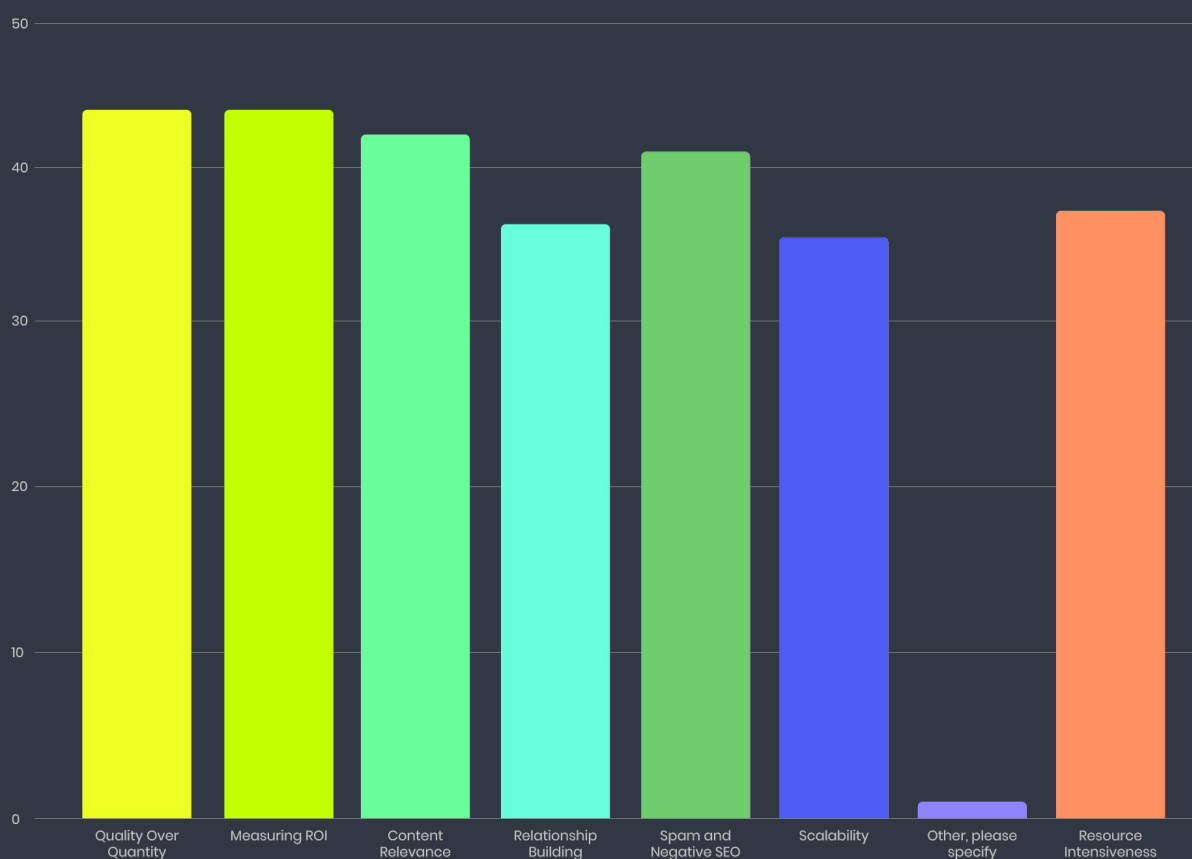


Link building is difficult. Really difficult. We know it, you know it, and our respondents know it, too.

Now, we did let them select up to 5 options, but it's notable there are no stand outs here - every aspect of link building is considered hard.

What Link Building Challenges Do You Face?

What, if anything, are the biggest challenges you face in link building today? (Select up to 5)



No wonder so many simply choose to outsource it instead!

Finally, when asking about upcoming challenges and changes it's easy to see the standout theme - AI.

Time and again, it was mentioned in additional responses, with the general sentiment pretty much summarized in one response:

"AI will go crazy".

The Big Picture

The real interest here isn't just the individual answers, but what they tell us about the future of link building – and the wider state of SEO – in 2025 and beyond.

We've analyzed the responses on a macro scale to pull out 6 key takeaways from our state of link building survey for 2025.

1. AI Has Changed Everything – And Nothing

“Dread it, run from it, destiny arrives all the same” – Thanos.

Whether you're pro AI or against it, it's inevitable it's going to have major impacts on link building and SEO.

Increased Automation & Lower Costs

The majority of respondents believe that AI-driven tools will help automate link-building processes – from prospecting to outreach – leading to:

Reduced manual effort

Lower overall cost

Faster identification
of link opportunities



While this is exciting for outreach at scale it does also mean that site owners are going to be flooded with requests – even more than they currently are. To truly stand out manual outreach or a lot of work on personalisation will be needed. So, the same as before then.

Higher Quality Standards & Potential Challenges

Conversely, others warn that with more AI-based automation, search engines will also become:

More discerning about link quality (i.e., penalizing spammy or automated link schemes)

Focused on brand signals, E-E-A-T (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness), and user engagement



With the flood of AI content affecting every step of link outreach, it will be more important than ever to have content that truly stands out in terms of quality and relevance.

2. Can The Little Guys Break The Big Boy Algorithm?

Algorithm Updates & Devaluation of Low-Quality Links

Several responses suggest search engines will continue to refine algorithms to:

Devalue low-quality or irrelevant links

Prioritize authoritative, trusted brands

Reward sites with genuine organic presence and real user engagement

Heightened Focus on Brand & Relevance

We've mentioned several times that brand signals (brand mentions, brand authority) and topic relevance are expected to become more crucial – especially amongst more senior SEOs and link builders.

There's an increasing feeling that the open web is shrinking for smaller sites, as large brands dominate SERPs and have the resources to sustain robust content and backlink profiles.

It's getting harder than ever to stand out, but it's a great chance for SEOs to stand out if they can still get their clients results in this hostile environment.

3. Links Don't Sell Themselves (To CEOs At Least)

Persistent Cost & Budget Constraints

Respondents highlighted that link building is often the last thing added to marketing budgets because:

Results are not immediately visible

It's difficult to attribute direct revenue uplift

Clients may not fully understand the ROI

Even if AI drives some costs down, many foresee budget considerations remaining a challenge for certain clients, especially those with tight margins or limited budgets.



Even with a general shift to understanding SEO, it's still sometimes a challenge for SEOs to get buy-in, especially with something with a potentially shady reputation like link building.

If you can master pitching SEO and getting skeptical clients on board you'll be able to set yourself apart from the competition.

4. More Scrap For Less SERP

Fewer Viable Opportunities

Multiple respondents believe the link landscape is becoming more competitive and that relevant link opportunities will be harder to find due to:

Overlap in outreach targets

Big brands dominating reputable sites

In some niches, “the open web is struggling,” making it tough to secure high-quality links

Tools & Technology to Scale

At the same time, increased availability of outreach and automation tools may help smaller or mid-sized businesses scale their efforts more effectively:

Streamlined prospecting

Template-based outreach

More time to focus on relationship-building instead of administrative tasks



AI has the chance to be a real leveller for smaller agencies fighting with industry giants by democratizing access to easy outreach, but everyone is fighting for the same scraps.

5. Humans Are The Best Link Builders

Continued Need for Authentic Outreach

Despite any automation, building genuine relationships with industry partners, publishers, and influencers remains a critical success factor – arguably more so in the future as AI continues to scale faceless outreach.

Authenticity goes both ways – for your outreach and your client relationships.

Some respondents explicitly mention the importance of being transparent when outreach isn't working – i.e., open dialogue between agencies and clients rather than continuing a poor-value strategy.



We already highlighted this in point 1, but if everyone is using AI then authenticity is the way to stand out.

6. Is The Red Tape Coming?

Tighter Regulations & Brand Reputation

Particularly in the UK responses, there's a mention of societal and environmental concerns that could lead to tighter industry regulations (finance, healthcare, tech, etc.).

As regulations become more stringent, compliance and reputation-building may shape the way link building is approached, requiring more scrutiny of link partners.



It's not just Google algorithms we need to consider here – AI regulation and laws could also play a major role in the future of link building.

The Future Of Link Building

Overall, respondents and our analysis generally agree that AI, analytics, and evolving algorithms are the biggest forces shaping how link-building challenges will change.

While automation may ease some of the manual burdens, it also demands higher-quality strategies to stay competitive and avoid penalties.

As large brands and stricter algorithms dominate SERPs, smaller or mid-tier players must prioritize authenticity, relationship-building, and brand authority.

Finally, while some believe these challenges will become simpler with improved tools, others are more cautious, expecting the link-building environment to remain fluid and highly competitive

Regardless of whether you think AI is an opportunity or a threat, it's clear link building is still going to be foundational to SEO success.

The more SEO changes, the more it stays the same.

