



2020 Survey

State of Writing

A deep dive into where business communicators are winning and where they're falling down when it comes to writing.

Introduction

In an era of too much information and a glut of choice for consumers to read, business communicators want to know the best way to attract and retain an audience. Regardless of the medium, we depend on the written word to convey our ideas, even when communicating by video, in person or in a podcast. But how do we know if we're being effective in our marketing efforts? How do we know if our blog posts, video scripts and speeches are hitting the mark? And, if they aren't, how can we improve?

In other words, how can our business writing become more effective?

We wanted to find out how marketing and communications professionals approach their writing tasks. We had a notion of what worked, a few preconceived ideas about effectiveness and a lot of conflicting “best practice” advice for writing. Our goal for this project was to identify what differentiated the best marketers and communicators from those experiencing moderate success.

We want to know the secret to effective writing, and we bet you do, too.

What we discovered is that a focus on the writing process makes a big difference. While three-quarters of the respondents said they know what successful writing

looks like, there was little evidence to suggest they have the quality processes in place or are evaluating writing effectiveness in a meaningful way. Less than half told us they would rate their writing as very or extremely effective, yet less than a third communicated a desire to improve quality and accuracy in their writing.

Read on for valuable insights about how to improve the effectiveness of your business writing.

Sarah Mitchell

Co-founder, Typeset

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“What we discovered is that a focus on the writing process makes a big difference.”

How To Use This Report

For State of Writing 2020, we wanted to compare two groups, those who say their writing is extremely/very effective and those who are only experiencing moderate success. There were several factors playing into our decision to approach the 2020 research this way.

Look for the green

To help you easily find information about business communicators with the highest levels of writing effectiveness, look for the green sections of the charts/graphs in this report. We're reporting moderately effective information in black.

-  Extremely/Very Effective
-  Moderately Effective

1

Business communicators who say their writing is producing top results are of interest to those making an investment of time and budget into writing projects. There's an expectation our business writing is going to provide some sort of benefit and we wanted to know as much as we could find out about what those writers are doing.

2

Moderate effectiveness tells us there's room for improvement. What makes this group different and what changes can they make to move toward optimal writing effectiveness?

3

We can't determine why some business communicators are failing in the effectiveness stakes because there are far too many variables. It could be as simple as poor writing skills or as complex as internal bureaucracies creating barriers to success.

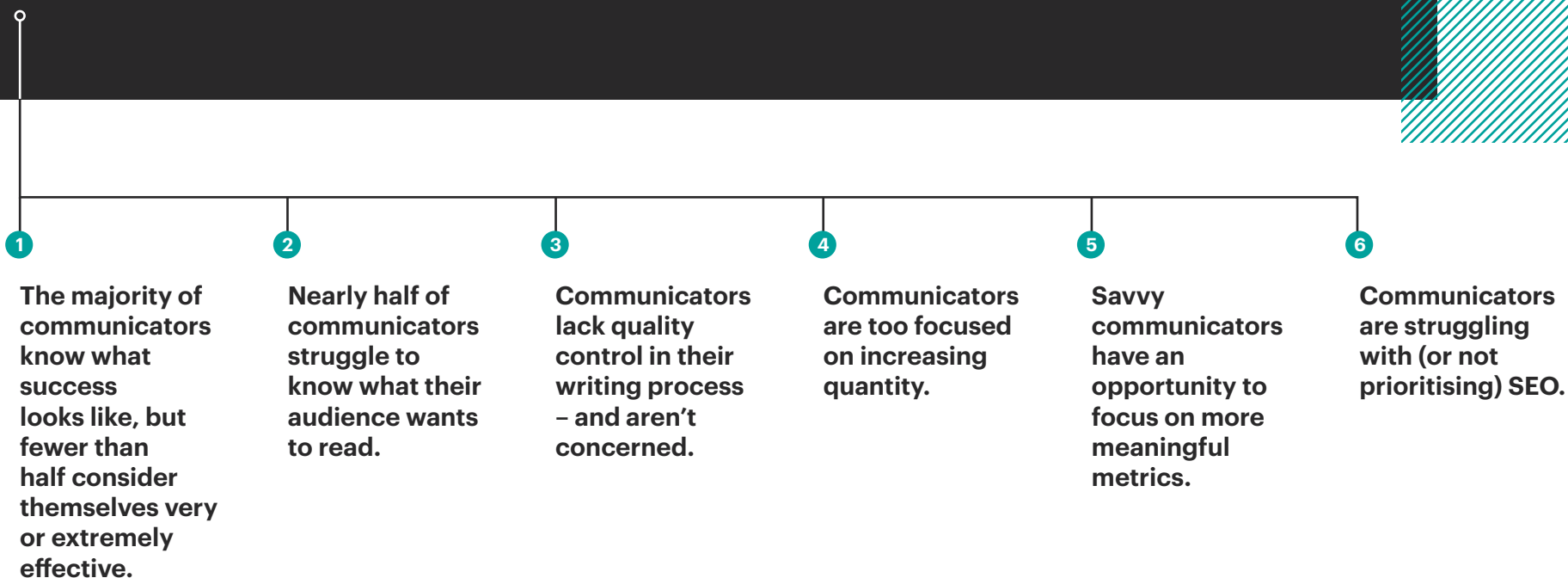
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We had few respondents admit to low effectiveness with their business writing. The reasons for the poor response rate in this groups could be:

- They don't want to admit to poor performance.
- Communicators experiencing low or no effectiveness may not be interested in taking a survey.
- Writing effectiveness is simply not a priority in how they produce their written content.

Stand-out Findings

We asked business communicators – marketers, small-business owners and communications professionals – how they approach and evaluate writing. Here are six insights we can't quit thinking about from our research.





What We Learned

Business communicators are planning to do more, despite uneven success.

We wanted to find a baseline for how business communicators are approaching writing projects and what they're planning to change in the coming year.



Seventy-six per cent of business communicators know what successful writing looks like, but only 45% think the content they publish is extremely/very effective.



76%

of communicators know what success looks like

45%

say they're effective

Source: State of Writing 2020: Typeset/Mantis Research

Almost 6 in 10 business communicators plan to write more, but only 3 in 10 plan to increase budget.



57%

of business communicators plan to write more



30%

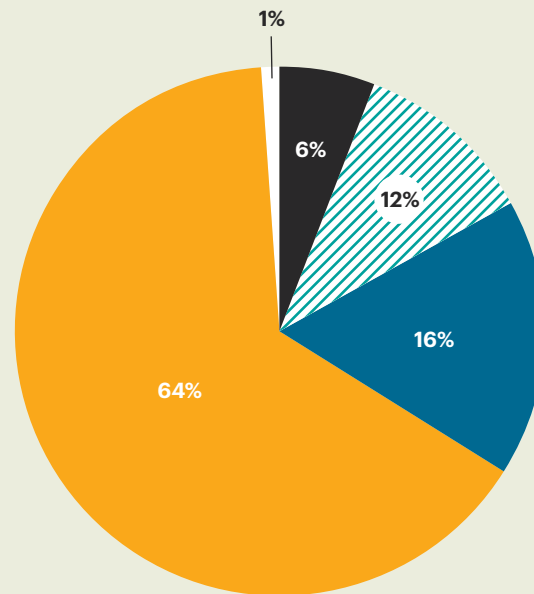
but only 3 in 10 plan to increase budget

Source: State of Writing 2020: Typeset/Mantis Research

The vast majority of business communicators are writing content that will be published online.

Per cent of writing published online

- Less than 25%
- 26% to 50%
- 51% to 75%
- More than 75%
- Unsure



Source: State of Writing 2020: Typeset/Mantis Research



What We Learned

Blogging habits show going deep produces better results.

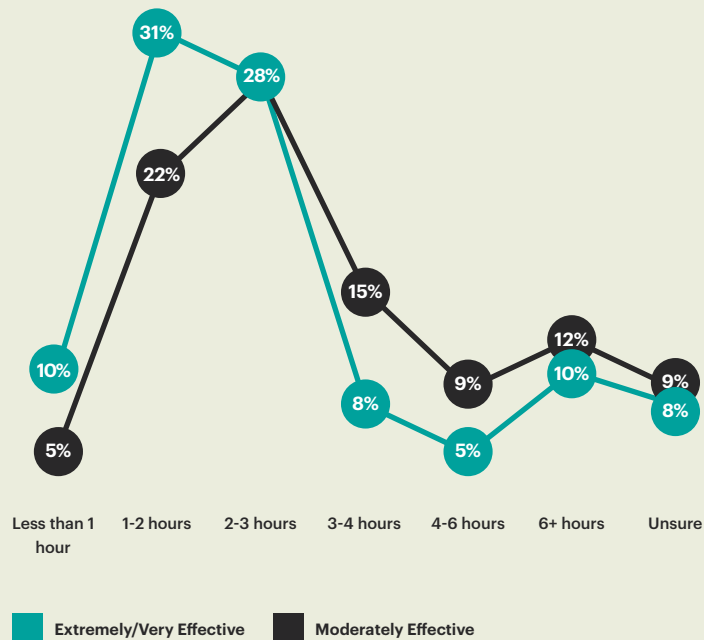
Because each writing project is different, we asked questions about how communicators approach writing a blog post, the most popular type of repeatable writing businesses perform. These answers give us insight into technique.



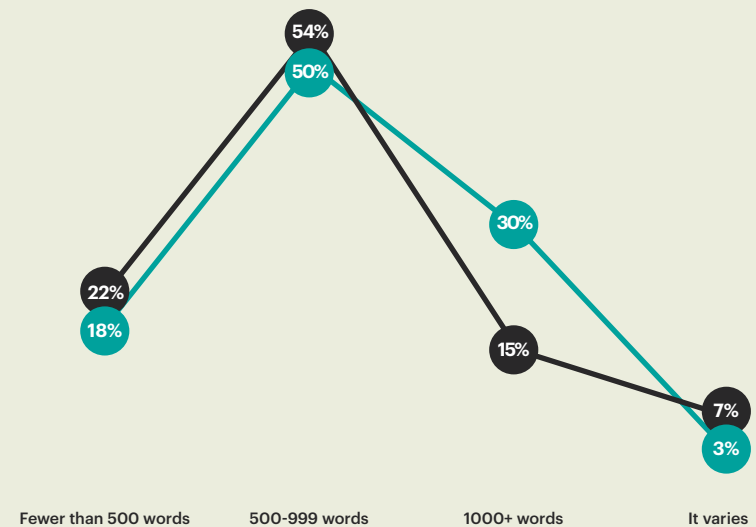
Those who are extremely/very effective are twice as likely to write long blog posts but spend less time writing than those who are moderately effective.

Attention to editorial efficiencies could explain why extremely/very effective communicators produce longer blog posts but tend to spend less time writing.

How long does it take you to write a typical blog post?

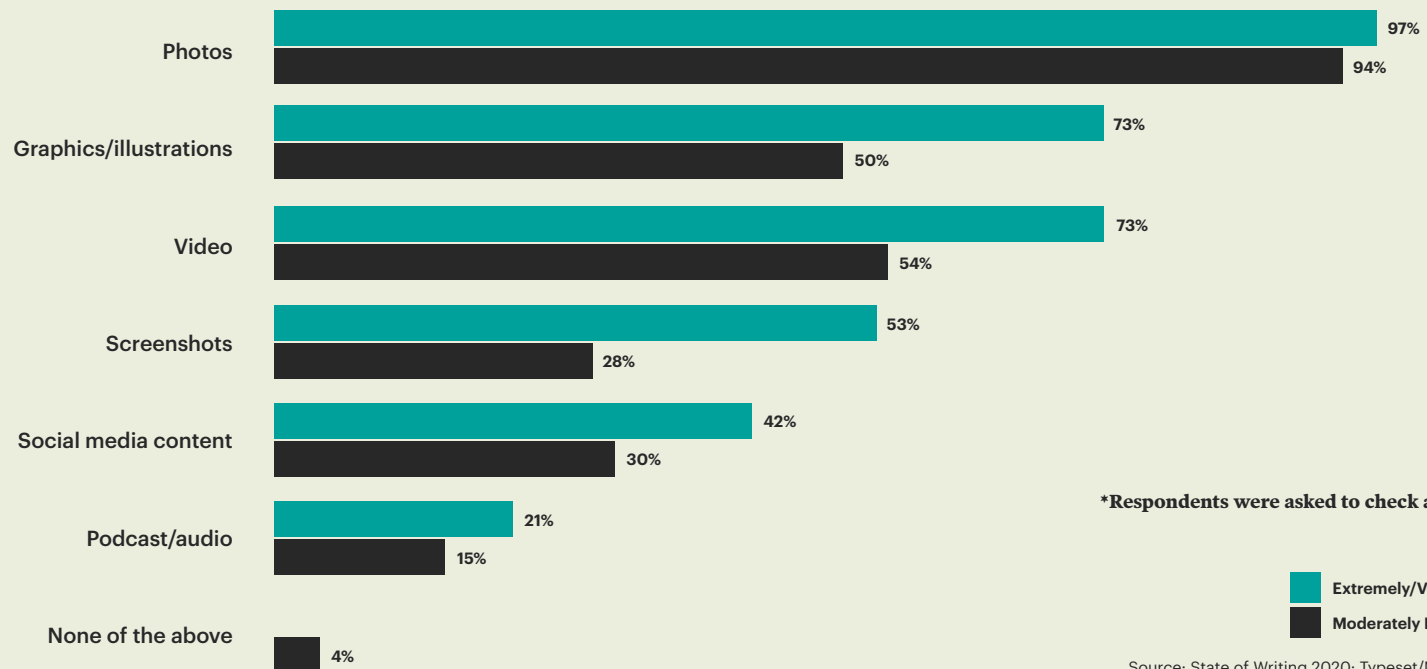


What is the length of a typical blog post?



Source: State of Writing 2020: Typeset/Mantis Research

Those who are extremely/very effective are embedding more variety of content in their blog posts than those who are only moderately effective.



*Respondents were asked to check all that apply.

■ Extremely/Very Effective
■ Moderately Effective

Source: State of Writing 2020: Typeset/Mantis Research



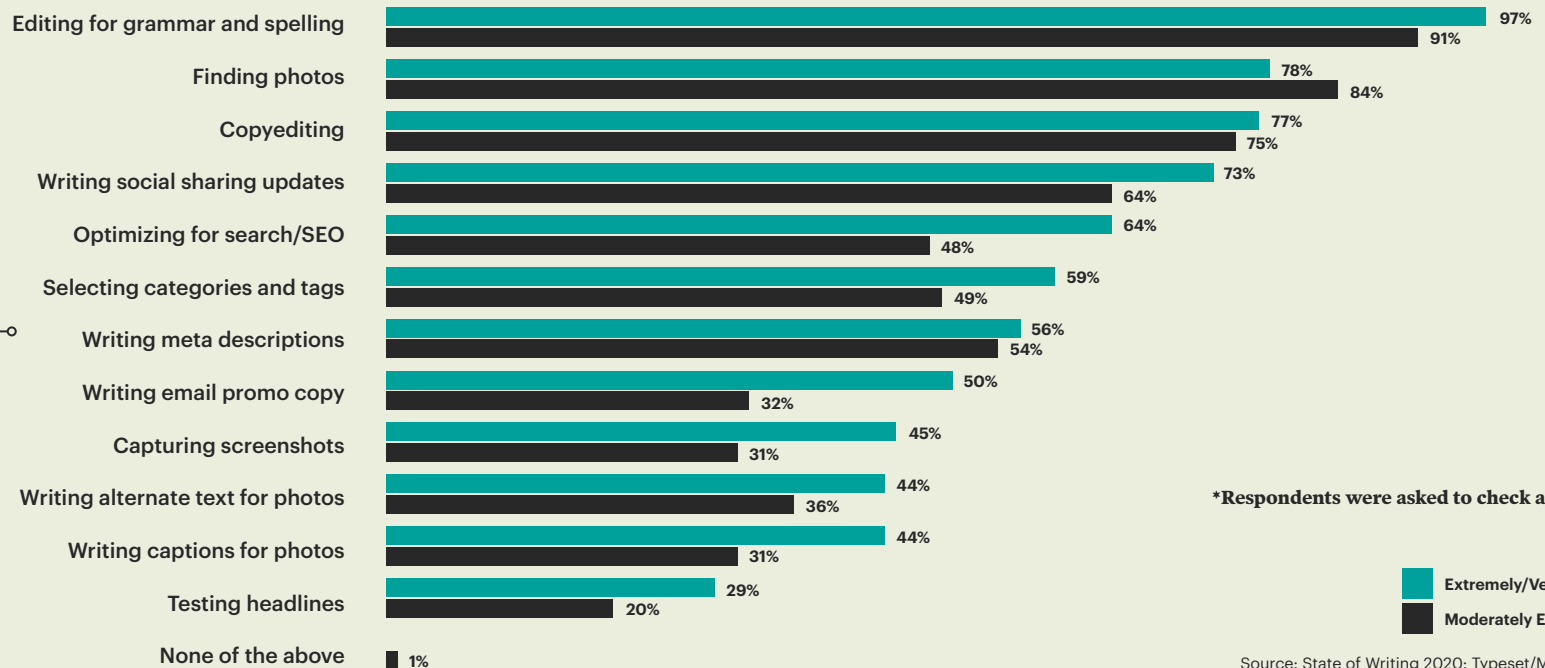
What We Learned

Editorial rigour is a key indicator of writing effectiveness.

We wanted to know what measures communicators take to ensure their writing is effective. We also wanted to find out what contributes to effectiveness and what detracts from it.



Communicators who are extremely/very effective in their blogging are more likely to consider a wider range of activities in their process.

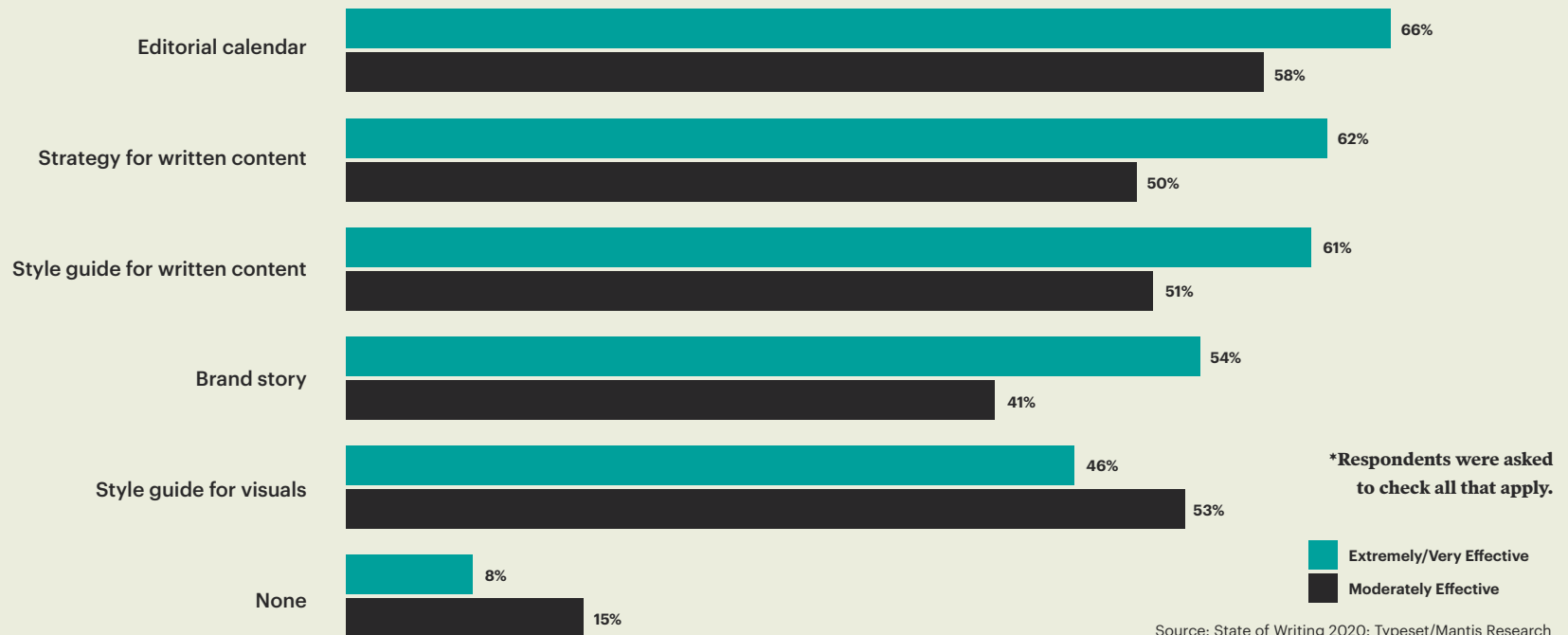


*Respondents were asked to check all that apply.

■ Extremely/Very Effective
■ Moderately Effective

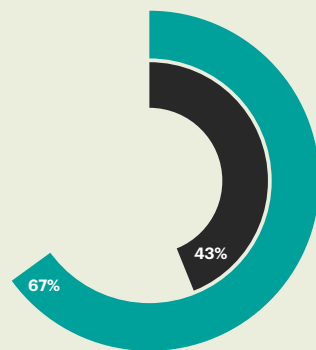
Source: State of Writing 2020: Typeset/Mantis Research

The most effective communicators are more likely to use editorial tools than those who admit to being moderately effective.

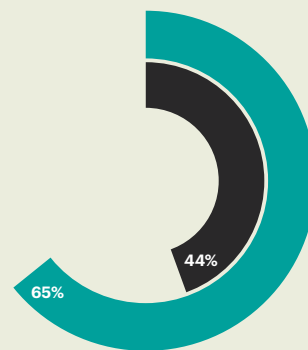


Source: State of Writing 2020: Typeset/Mantis Research

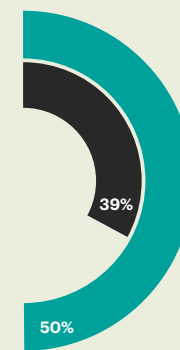
The most effective organisations are more likely to focus on editorial efficiencies compared to moderately effective organisations.



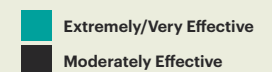
Has editorial meetings



Has one person who oversees all written content

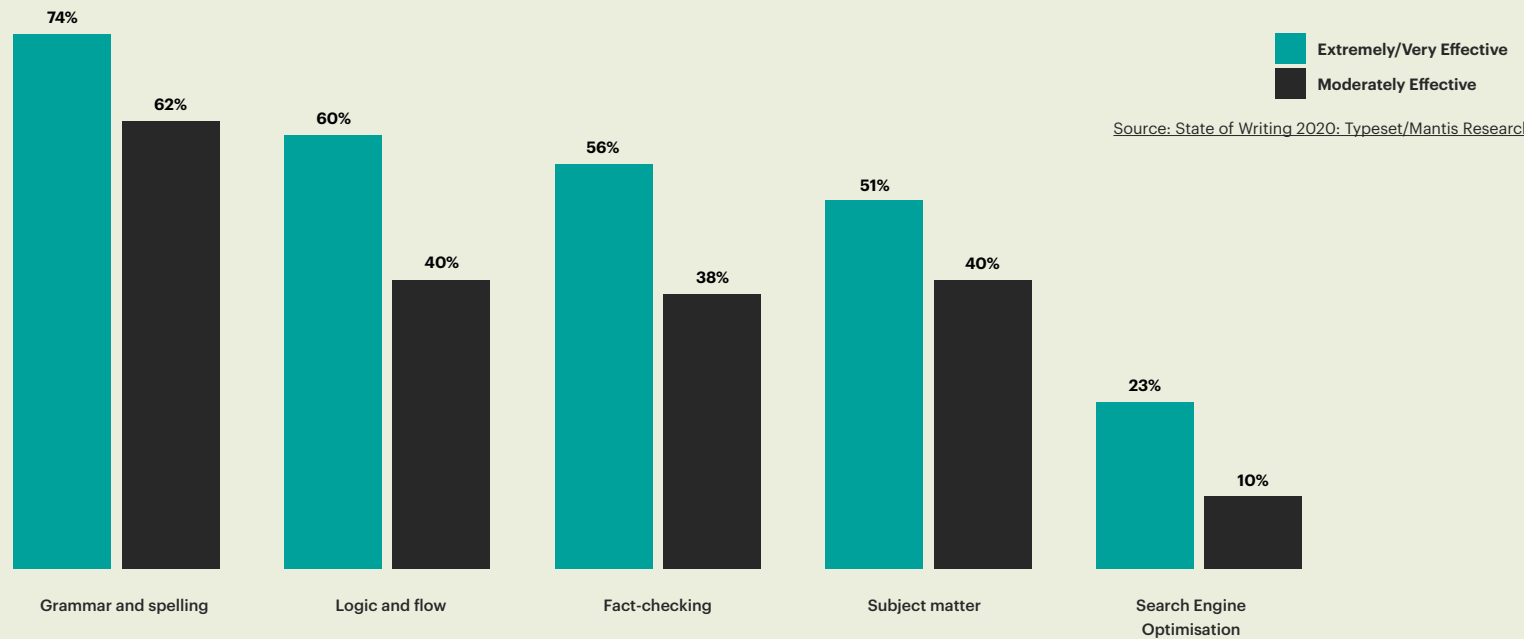


Outsources writing



Source: State of Writing 2020: Typeset/Mantis Research

Those who are extremely/very effective are more likely than those who are moderately effective to consistently edit their content in all ways. The biggest differences are in logic and flow, and fact-checking.



Source: State of Writing 2020: Typeset/Mantis Research



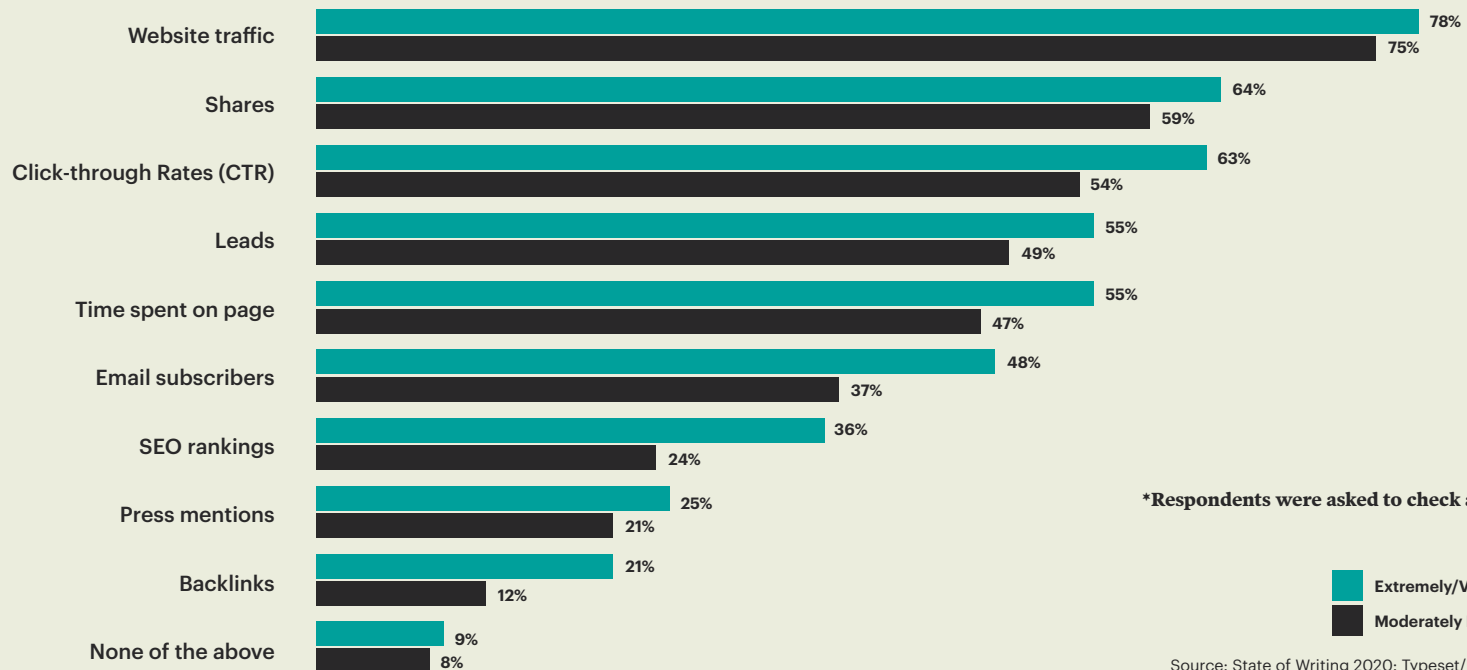
What We Learned

Writing effectiveness is impacted by lack of content strategy.

We asked questions about the results marketers are getting from their writing. We wanted to know how they assessed those results and where they're struggling.



Communicators are focused on activity metrics to determine the effectiveness of their written content.

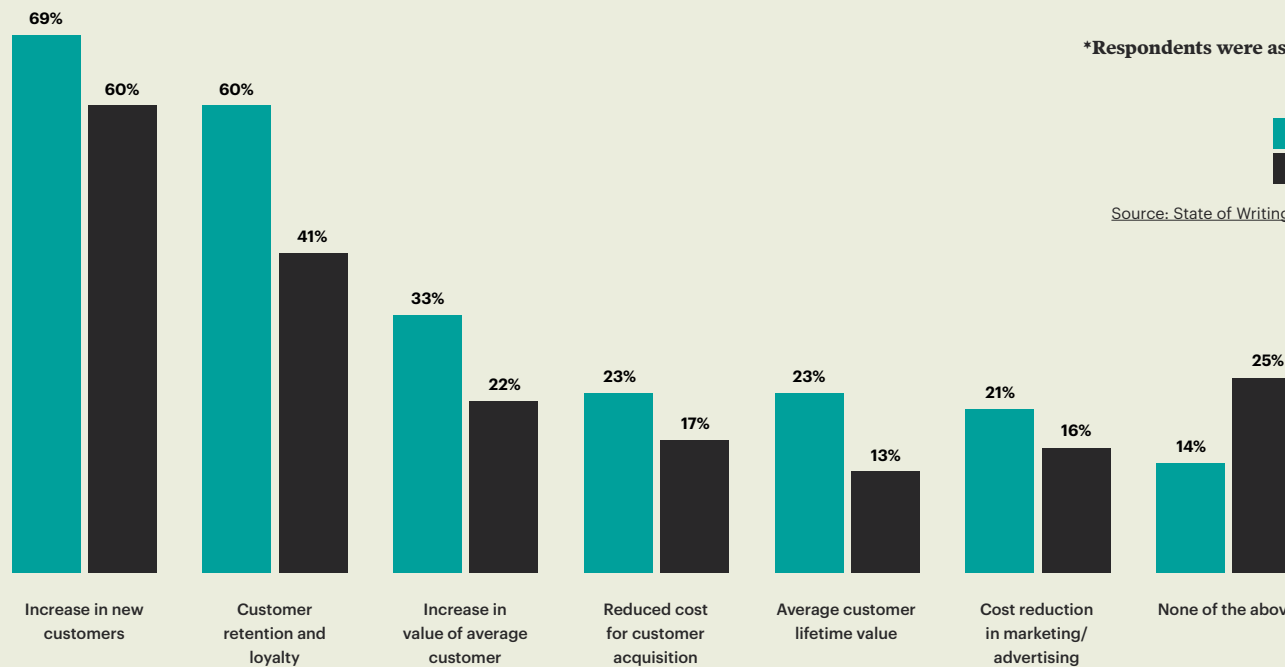


*Respondents were asked to check all that apply.

Extremely/Very Effective
Moderately Effective

Source: State of Writing 2020: Typeset/Mantis Research

The business benefits most often used to evaluate writing effectiveness are an increase in new customers and customer retention/loyalty.



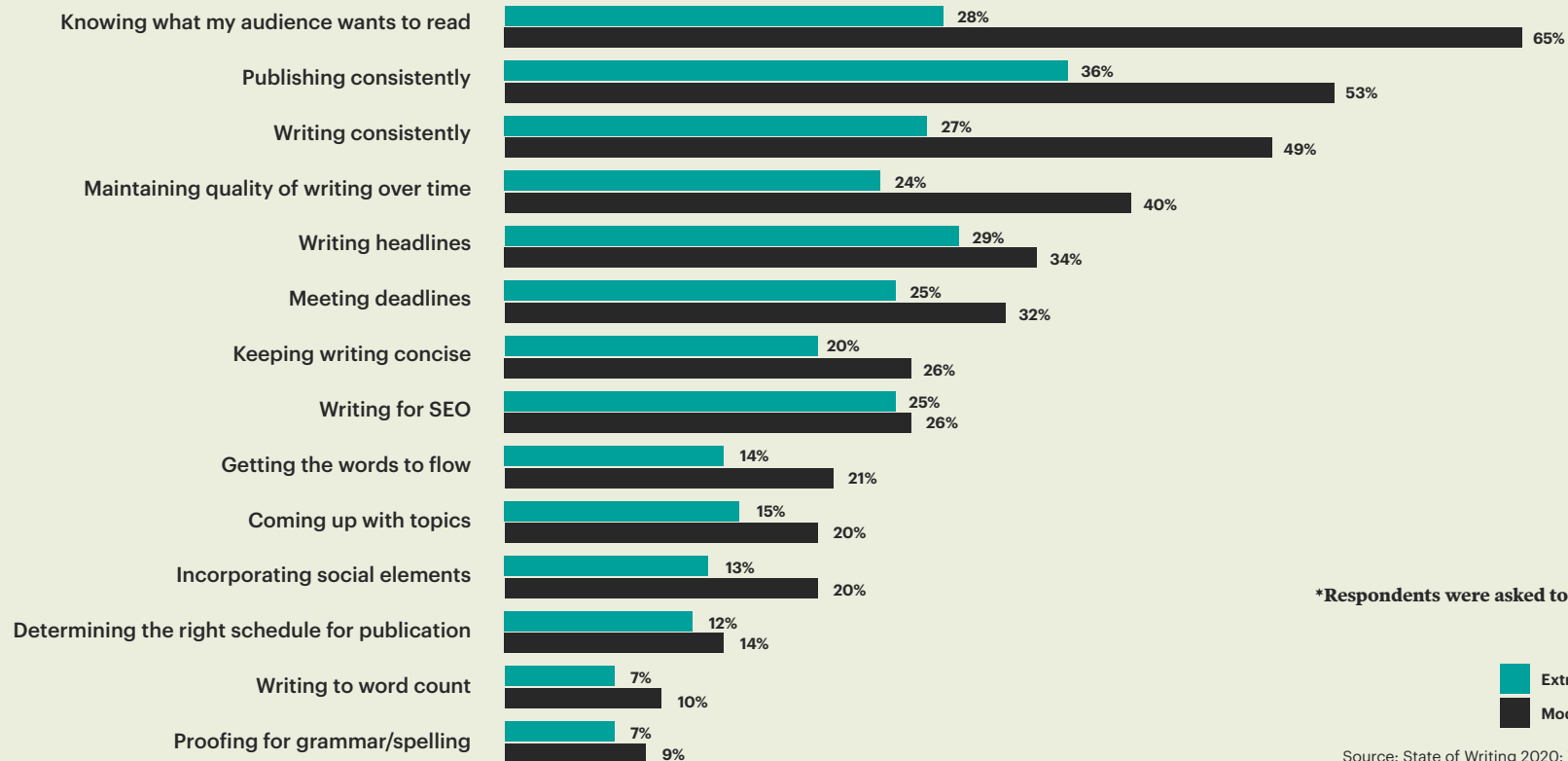
*Respondents were asked to check all that apply.

Extremely/Very Effective
Moderately Effective

Source: State of Writing 2020: Typeset/Mantis Research

Business communicators struggle to know what their audience wants to read, and have difficulty maintaining consistency.

Moderately effective communicators are more likely to experience difficulty implementing different steps of the writing process.



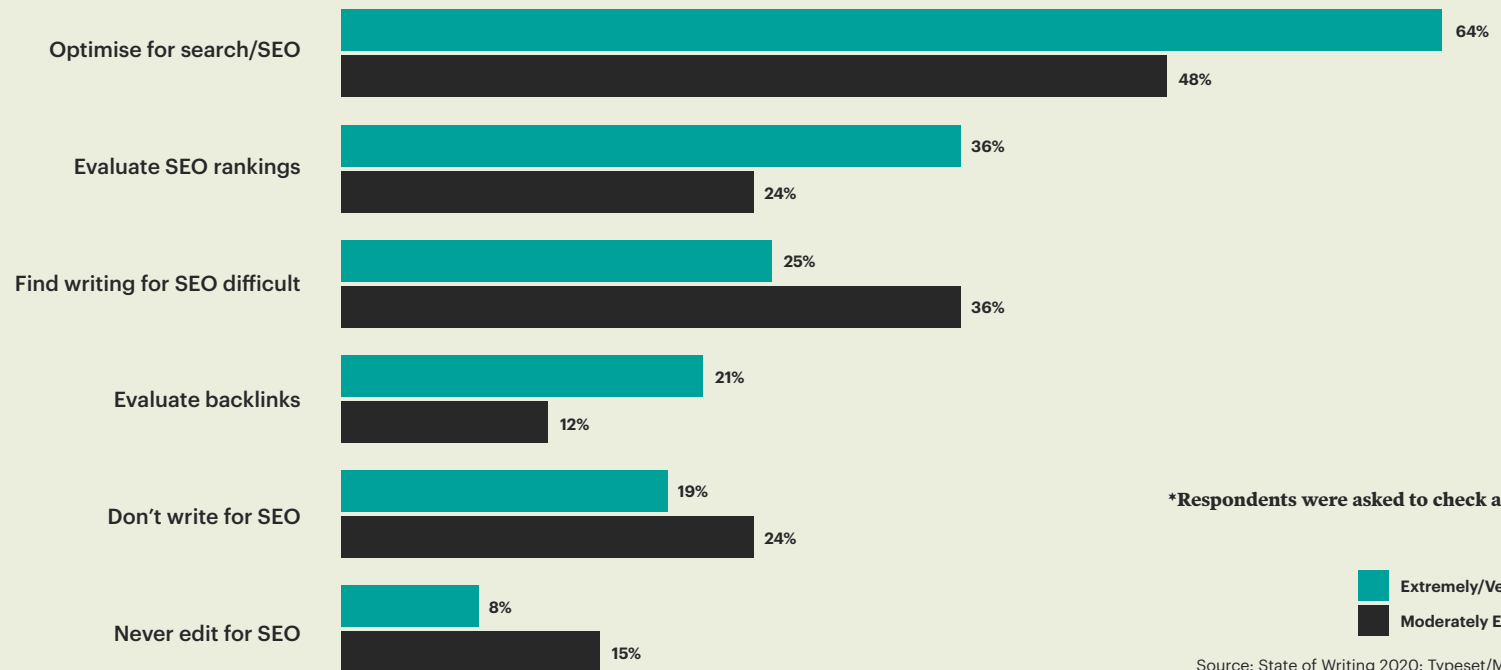
*Respondents were asked to check all that apply.

Extremely/Very Effective
Moderately Effective

Source: State of Writing 2020: Typeset/Mantis Research

Search is not a priority for business communicators.

Attention to SEO is surprisingly low, even though the majority of content is being published online.



*Respondents were asked to check all that apply.

■ Extremely/Very Effective
■ Moderately Effective

Source: State of Writing 2020: Typeset/Mantis Research

Where to go from here?

There are clear areas where marketers, communications professionals and small-business owners can increase their writing effectiveness. Some of them are quick wins but others will take a more considered approach to how written content is produced in your organisation.

1

Implement company-wide workflows and processes to guide each writer.

Writing is often viewed as a creative activity, but those who put processes into their written production are far more effective. Ensure one person in your organisation has oversight for all that gets published – a managing editor or content strategist are typical roles. Arm them with an editorial calendar, a brand story, a content briefing template and a blogging template to ensure every writer is fully supported for effective writing. Hold regular editorial meetings.

2

Review your strategy and messaging.

Marketers are having difficulty determining what their audience wants to read. A documented content marketing strategy, coupled with an audience needs analysis, provides a good first step to ensuring every writer has clear direction about topics, themes and key messages. A strategy also provides your editors with specific guidance on what content is the most effective in achieving business goals and the ideal frequency for publishing.

3

Enlist the help of a proofreader, and make better use of tools.

The most effective writers use a variety of tools and methods to ensure writing effectiveness. While online tools provide value, only a proofreader can uncover errors in logic and flow, check facts, test hyperlinks, and determine if your writing is hitting the right emotional notes. You need to edit for all four of these things if you want to have written content that is trusted by readers. In addition, a proofreader ensures your brand's style guide and tone of voice are maintained.

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**Extremely/
very effective
communicators
are less likely to
increase the amount
of writing they're
producing in the
next 12 months.**

4

Ditch more; go deep instead.

The most effective writers develop longer blog posts than those who are moderately effective. Extremely/very effective communicators are less likely to increase the amount of writing they're producing in the next 12 months, but are more likely to spend more on written content. Show your expertise through considered, meaty blog posts, articles and other long-form content. Enrich your content with photos and graphics and embed multimedia content like video and audio clips.

5

Link content initiatives to business goals and strategy.

Refocus the way you assess writing effectiveness, to align with business goals. Define these goals and how you'll measure them in your overall strategy. Ask for information and track trends in two areas: sales and increased authority. For sales, look at customer retention, new customers, and average cost of sale. Track backlinks and subscriber lists to show how your online authority is tracking against your marketing strategy.

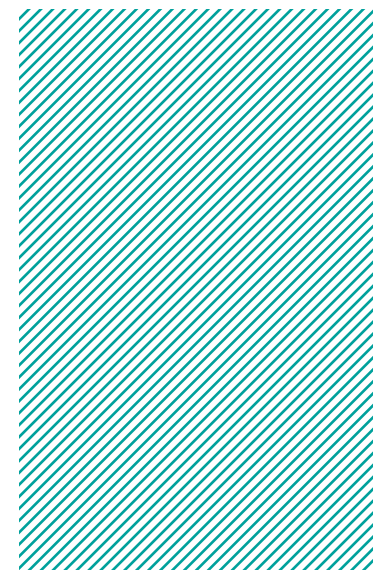
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Make sure everything published online has been through an SEO filter.

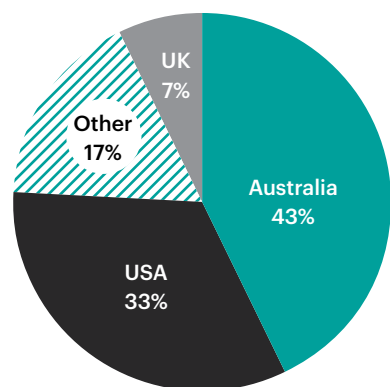
Ensure each brief addresses keywords and phrases to guide your writers, and include them in your headings and subheadings. Ensure your blogging template is SEO-friendly so writers know to include alternate text (ALT TXT) for images, have written meta descriptions, and have tested headlines. Ensure your brand style guide has a detailed section on what search engine optimisation (SEO) means for your organisation so your managing editor and proofreader can catch errors and omissions.

Our Methodology

Typeset commissioned Mantis Research to survey marketers, business owners, and communications professionals to understand how businesses use writing to achieve their goals and how well their writing is working. The results in this report are from an online survey that was open from 21 August to 20 October 2019. The **238 respondents** represented a broad mix of people responsible for marketing and communications, all of whom rely on writing effectiveness in their organisations. This is how they are represented in our research.



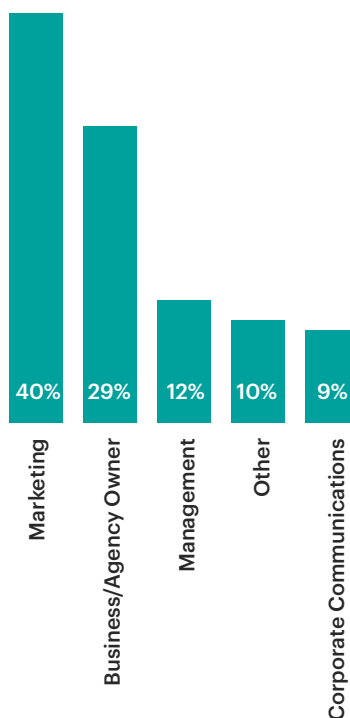
Location



Type of Business



Primary Role



Number of Employees



Typeset + Mantis Research

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Typeset is a specialist editorial and content marketing services company headquartered in Australia, with offices in the UK and the USA. Typeset produces any kind of written content required by companies or agencies — from blog posts to full content marketing strategies — and offers professional development for people who want to improve their writing effectiveness and expand their content marketing capabilities. The Typeset mission is to make the world a better place for readers everywhere.

About Mantis Research

www.mantisresearch.com

Mantis Research helps marketers tell data-driven stories. Mantis offers a range of research services – from research strategy and data science to data journalism and amplification.