

AgencyAnalytics

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# 23 Clever Ways to Grow & Scale Your Digital Agency

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**Running a digital agency is tough.**

You have to worry about hiring, selling, accounting, payroll, marketing, account management, etc.

Oh yeah, and you need to get results for your clients or they'll move on and may not say the nicest things.

Luckily for you I've put together 23 tactics to grow & scale your digital agency to make your life a little easier.

Sure, you may already be doing a few of these things, but I guarantee that you'll find at least one gold nugget that helps take your agency to the next level.

There's a lot that goes into running a digital agency, from creating systems to getting clients. The guide is broken up into five core categories you need to master in your agency:

1. [Improving your internal marketing & sales](#)
2. [Reducing client churn](#)
3. [Scaling systems & processes](#)
4. [Shrewdly growing your team](#)
5. [Enhancing your service offerings](#)

# Improve Your Internal Marketing & Sales

## #1 – Create a lead magnet for your agency site

The vast majority of visitors to your agency website won't convert to leads.

There are a number of reasons: they may not be ready to commit, they may not be sure what services they need, or they may not trust your company yet.

By offering them an alternative to an intimidating phone call you can collect their business information and move them along the path to becoming a client.

Creating an engaging lead magnet that appeals to your target client is key.

There are a few companies doing this well.

[Wordstream](#) offers free PPC analysis reports for any Adwords account.

**40 Hours of PPC  
Analysis in 60 Seconds  
or Less!**

**Get Your FREE Report Today**

[Powered By Search](#) offers a website grader with an enticing offer to "10x your growth".

# Want to 10x your growth?

Our website grader will tell you where your company can improve.

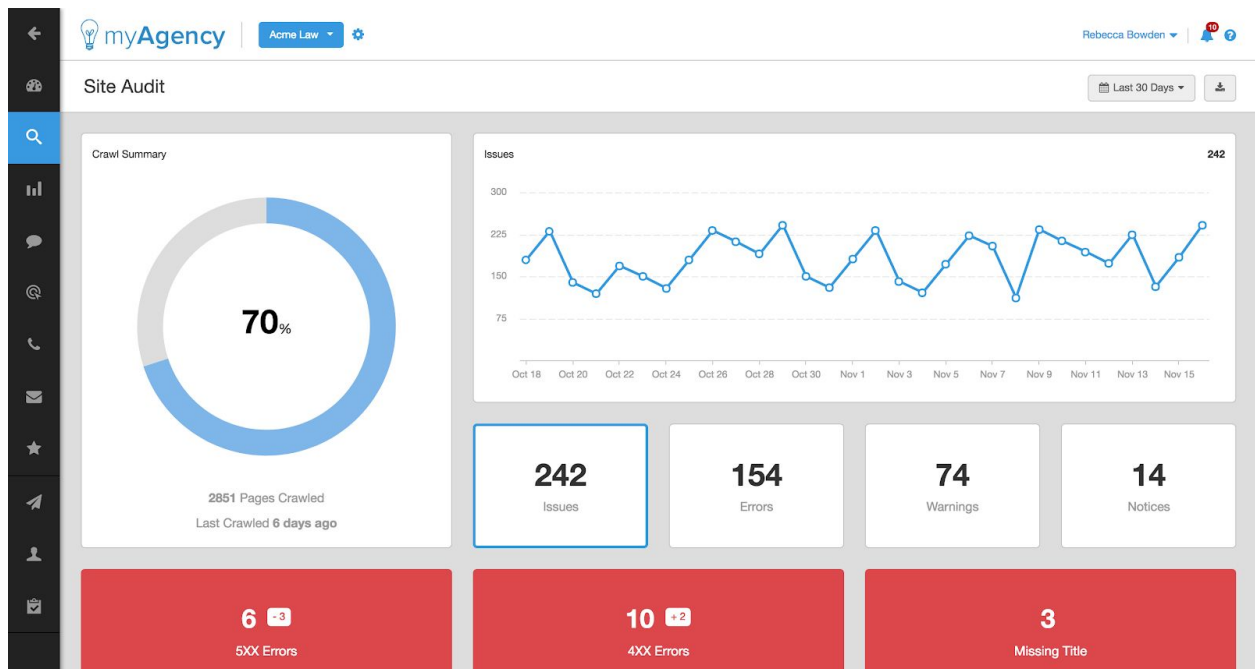
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**ANALYZE MY WEBSITE**

Be creative and offer something of value to your target audience.

A free [SEO audit](#) is a great way to generate new leads. Run a crawl of their website to identify onsite issues, and then send the client the results.

Plus, once they see the issues on their site, they'll understand why they need your agency's help to improve their SEO.



SEO Audit Tool by [AgencyAnalytics](#)

## #2 – Pick a niche for your agency

This recommendation is taken from this [Viperchill post](#) on picking a niche and running with it. Glen (aka Viperchill) had this to say about niche agencies, "*some of the most successful marketing agencies in the world specialised in serving just a specific audience*".

This is absolutely true and there are plenty of examples out there to prove it:

- [Net Profit Explosion](#) offers marketing services to gym owners and personal trainers
- [FirmFinder](#) specializes in SEO for attorneys
- [Wonderist](#) is an agency that focuses on dental practices

Picking a niche allows you to brand yourself **the expert** in that industry and helps separate you from the pack. It opens up other opportunities like getting booths or speaking at industry-specific conferences as well.

Here are some ideas of potential niche industries to get you going:

- Massage Therapists
- Personal Trainers
- Tattoo parlors
- HVAC
- Water Damage
- Rehab Centers
- Auto Shops
- Insurance Agencies
- Optometrists
- Restaurants

Think outside the box as well. It doesn't have to be an industry-specific niche, maybe you're just an expert in a specific marketing vertical like marketing for Shopify stores.

You can even target a *very* specific vertical and niche. What about marketing for roofing businesses? It is bound to be an underserved market. Anything to help you distinguish yourself from the other thousands of full-service agencies.

### #3 – Walk the walk when it comes to web design

Regardless of whether or not you specifically offer web design, I believe that it's imperative to have a clean and presentable website. If your website looks like it was designed in 1998, your revenue will stay at 1998 levels. Your website is how people perceive your company online.

It doesn't have to be expensive either. There are a number of agency-ready WordPress themes available for next to nothing. As a matter of fact, [here are 20](#) to get you going.

Of course, that's the bare minimum and there are some agencies which go above and beyond to display their services. See [Domani](#) for example – now that's an agency that anybody would want to work with – it's true eye candy!



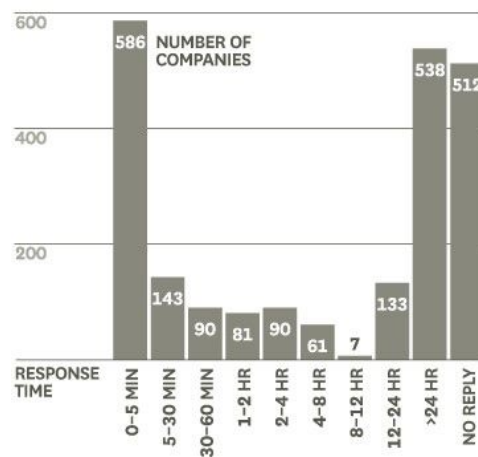
## #4 – Reduce your lead response time

If you're collecting leads from your agency website it's essential that you get back to them as quick as possible.

It's too easy to let them just sit there for a day or two before getting back to them. These potential customers are shopping around and your agency won't be the only one they stumble on.

A [study by the Harvard Business Review](#) found that many companies take far too long to respond to leads and just let them go cold.

**Many Firms Are Slow to Respond**



They found that the average response time among companies that responded within 30 days, was 42 hours.

This is worrying for those companies since a separate study (done by HBR) found that firms that tried to contact potential customers within an hour were **seven times** more likely to close the deal than those that tried even an hour later.

## #5 – Set up outbound sales and fill pipeline with leads

So many start-up digital agencies are dead scared of outbound sales. It seems counter-intuitive when you can just put out a few paid ads to get some leads. The problem is, you're really limiting yourself by not considering outbound.

I recommend checking out [Alan O'Rourke's post](#) over at Audience Stack. It goes into detail on his process of building a sales funnel through outsourcing and vetting leads and then reaching out to them through cold emails. It works even better if your agency targets a specific niche because your prospectors will have clearer targets.



While it's not for every agency, you should consider building an outbound sales funnel.

You no longer have to hire an expensive SDR and they can deliver huge returns for your agency; especially if you're just starting out and don't have many [client referrals](#) yet.

## #6 – Build a strong presence on agency marketplaces

If you're just starting out, getting your first leads and clients is tough work. You may not have a reputation yet or client referrals to fall back to.

Agency marketplaces can be a great resource for your initial projects.

By being on a vetted site, cold leads are more likely to trust that you can deliver. It's also a great strategy to get initial reviews on a third-party site that you can refer to later.

Many of these sites also provide match-making services, so they'll take the tough work out of finding and closing leads.

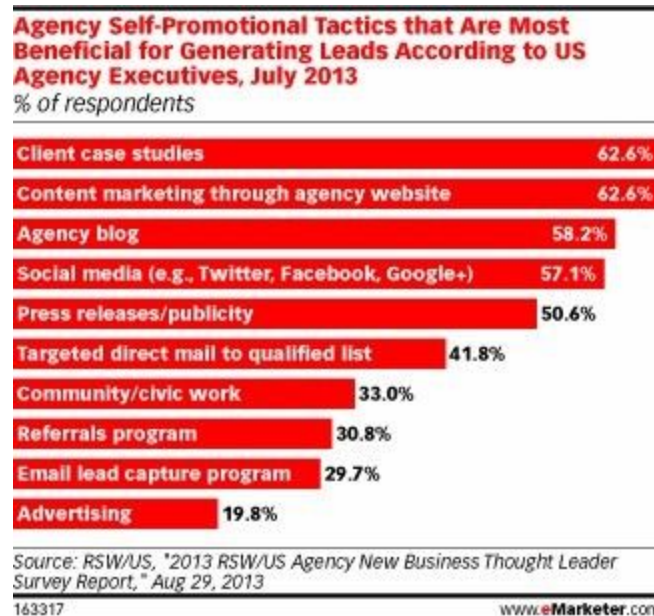
One of the most well-known sites is [Credo](#). They vet all agencies and SEO consultants, and then help connect them to clients.

The screenshot shows the Credo website interface. At the top left is the 'CREDO' logo, followed by navigation links: 'How Credo Works »', 'Blog', and 'More »'. A 'Get Started' button is located in the top right corner. The main content area features a large heading: 'Find and hire the best SEO or digital marketing providers.' Below this is a sub-headline: 'Let us introduce you to the best [vetted and verified](#) marketing providers for your unique needs. *Our high touch approach has been trusted by over 2,000 businesses to date.*' A search form is centered, with a dropdown menu labeled 'What is your main need?' and a green 'Get Started' button. Below the search form is a dark blue banner for a 'Guide to hiring a marketing provider'. This banner includes the text 'Learn how to hire the right marketing provider (the first time) with our 7 step guide.' and a form with two input fields: 'Business email' and 'First name', followed by a green 'Sign Up' button. At the bottom left of the banner, it says 'This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. [What's this?](#)'. A teal 'Got it' button is positioned at the bottom right of the banner.

## #7 – Build case studies from successful clients

According to a study by eMarketer in 2013, client case studies are the most popular self-promotional tactics used by marketing agency executives.

A whopping 62.6% of respondents voted in favor of them being effective. They can be used as: lead magnets on a website, part of email drip campaigns, or assets to your sales team to close more deals.



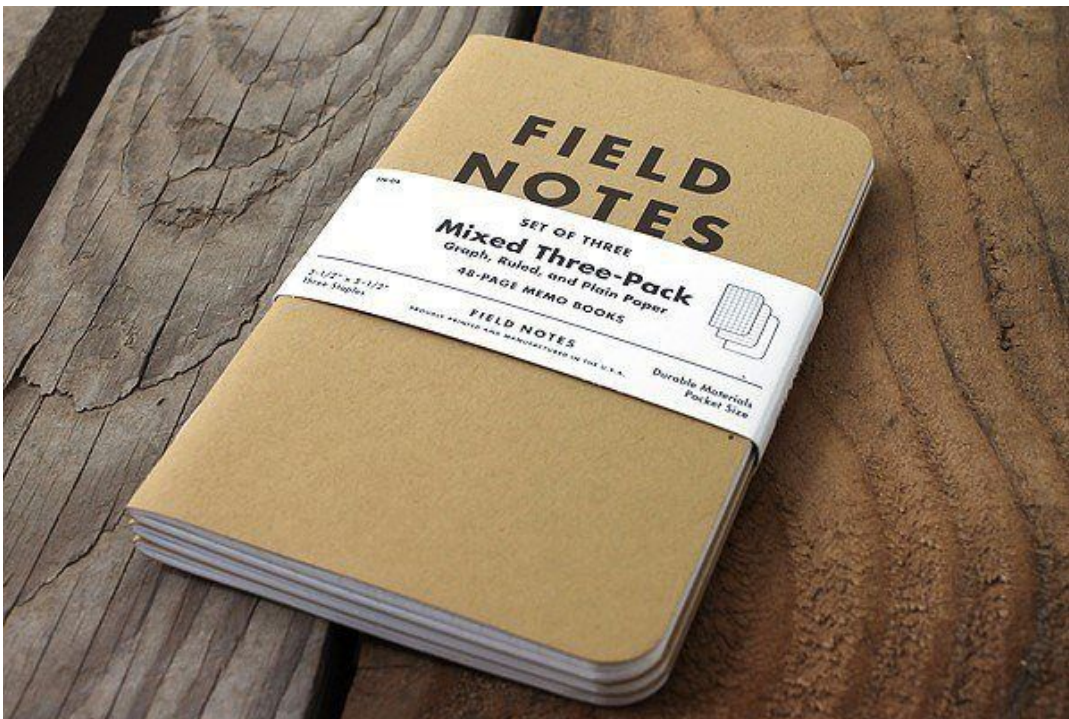
Find a willing participant and tell their story with a case study. Make sure you lay out specific strategies you used and back everything up with data. Create multiple case studies based on buyer personas.

If that sounds like too much work there is also a service available called [Case Study Buddy](#) which will make beautiful case studies for you. It's run by [Joel Kettle](#) who's well known in the content marketing world.

## #8 – Be your own best client

If you have all of this web and marketing talent, why not put it to use on your own product? That's exactly what two agencies did and it worked out pretty well for them:

- 37signals started as a web agency that saw an internal need for project management software. They created [Basecamp](#) to suit their own needs and it's turned in to a massive success.
- Coudal Partners was once a creative agency that started [Field Notes](#) as a side project. The rest is history!



Side projects can be a fantastic learning experience for your agency as a whole. It can be a testing ground for new ideas, you can write about its journey in your blog, and there's a chance it can be the next big thing. Just don't forget about your clients!

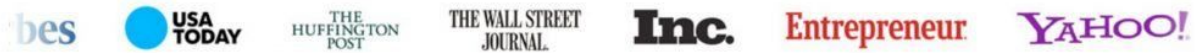
## #9 – Start guest blogging even if you're not an SEO company

Even if you don't offer SEO, your agency can most likely benefit from ranking for certain terms.

What about PPC agency *your city* or creative agency *your city*.

Ranking for those kinds of terms will drive hot leads to your website. Guest blogging is a great way to build quality links to your agency site to improve your organic presence.

That being said, SEO is far from the only reason to guest post. By writing on reputable publications you position yourself as an expert in your field. Jayson DeMers is a fantastic example of this as he writes for [Forbes](#), [The Huffington Post](#), [Inc](#) and a number of other places online. Along with SEO benefits, this drives referrals to his agency site ([AudienceBloom](#)) and he also leverages the logos as trust signals.



"Guest posting is dead" articles pop up once or twice a month, but it's far from it. Guest post will still help you drive traffic and build authority in your space.

# Reducing client churn

## #10 – Use NPS surveys

A little while ago I wrote a post for Kissmetrics on we use [NPS to improve retention for our SaaS product](#). While you aren't marketing a SaaS product, you can leverage the same idea for your agency.

If you're not aware, NPS stands for Net Promoter Survey. Essentially it's a survey you send out to your customers asking them to rate your service on a scale of 1-10. There are a number of products that can help you collect NPS including [Promoter.io](#) and [Wootric](#).



The basic idea is to send out this survey to clients a little while in to their contract to see how they feel about your service. There are three basic groups and here's how you should handle them:

- Anybody who scores 1-6 is considered a detractor and is ready to leave your agency at any moment. Consider them **high priority** and get to the bottom of why they scored so low.
- Anybody who scores 7-8 are considered a passive and are somewhat satisfied with your service but have something holding them back from scoring higher. Find out what you can do to improve their experience and try and deliver it.
- Anybody who scores between 9-10 are considered promoters and **love** your service. Leverage them for case studies and set them up with your referral program if you have one; they'll say great stuff about your company.

NPS is a great way to pinpoint customers who may be on the brink of leaving. If you don't ask, you may never know.

You can also use NPS for a number of other things. What about offering a bonus to the employee with the best score for the year? Be creative!

## #11 – Build out recurring revenues over campaigns

[Robin Leonard](#) of [AllFamous Digital](#) wrote in an article:

*"Brands will realise that consistency is king and they will need a digital agency to run the social media and website functions all year round, with creative agencies that pitch for campaigns to overlay and enhance.*

*The answer is to build recurring revenues in a retainer style relationship where you bill monthly for a fixed set of services (for example, X published blogs per week, Y Facebook posts per day etc)."*

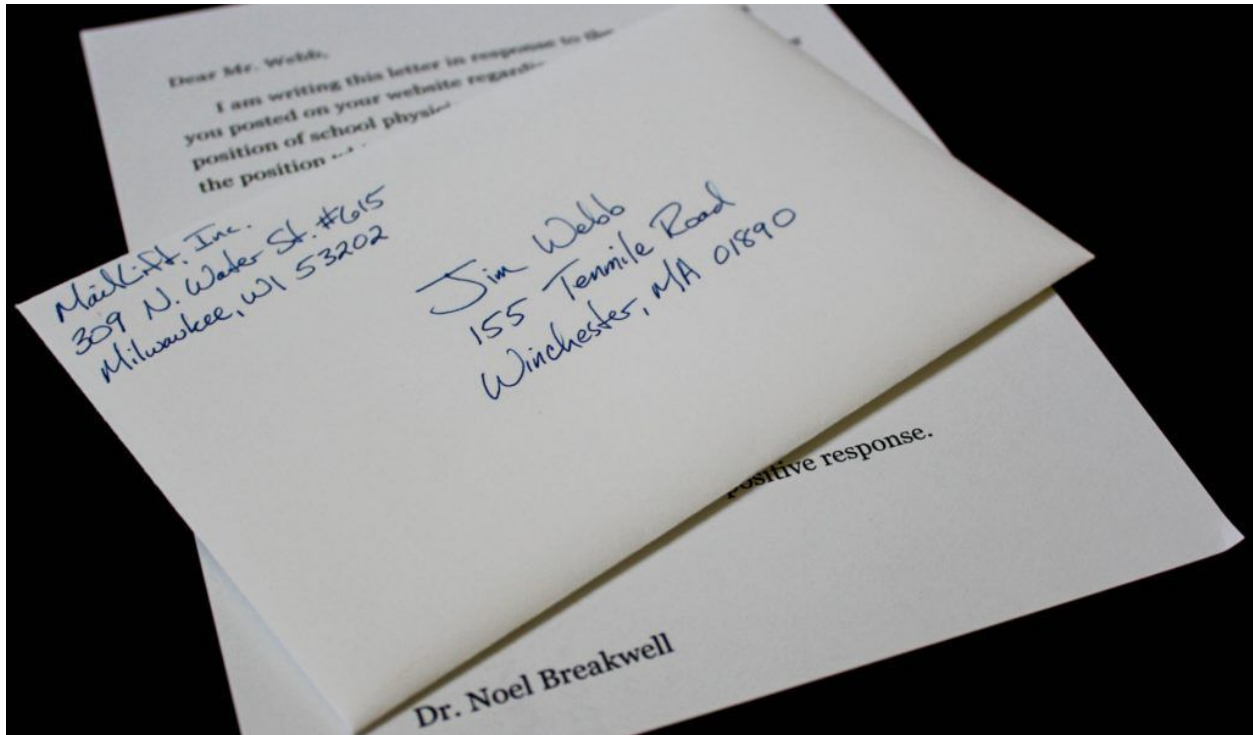
He says to get out of 'campaign' thinking and to move towards charging recurring revenues. Recurring is the key to the success of SaaS businesses and can be critical in building a thriving digital agency as well. It ensures you get paid **every month**. While this may seem obvious to many agencies, some are still left behind pitching new campaigns every quarter.

There are many tools at your disposal to manage recurred billing with clients, see: [Recurly](#), [Chargebee](#) or [ChargeOver](#).

## #12 – Send letters & gifts to clients

Building relationships is important to keep clients around. It helps with communication and they're more likely to listen to your recommendations if they like you. Gifts and letters are a great way to build rapport and get on their good side.

When you sign a new client consider sending a hand written letter as part of your onboarding process. No, you don't need to relearn cursive and go to the post office. There are services like [MailLift](#) that will write and send the letter on your behalf.



If they're a valuable client make them feel valuable by sending over gifts. Forget about fruit cake gift baskets – send something memorable that their office will talk about. See [this is why I'm broke](#) for some fun ideas.

### #13 – Client staff intake training

Be Top Local explained it perfectly in their [SEO case study](#):

"When you're about to spend \$8,500 in marketing dollars to make the phone ring, the last thing you want is to lose leads to a busy phone line."

Be Top Local set up system where leads are followed up within five minutes and the staff receives a commission for every appointment booked to incentivize results. In the end of the day, your goal as an agency is to help your client make more money.

If they're more profitable using your services, they'll stick around. Offer training to client employees to gracefully handle calls and turn them into results for your client. Ensure that phone calls are never left on hold for long and are handled in a professional, friendly manner.

By offering this type of training you not increase efficiency, but go above and beyond where other agencies are willing to go.

## #14 – Be laser focused on results

A good agency will focus on getting financial results for their clients as opposed to vanity metrics. Clicks, likes, impressions, etc. mean NOTHING if they don't turn in to profit in the end of the day.

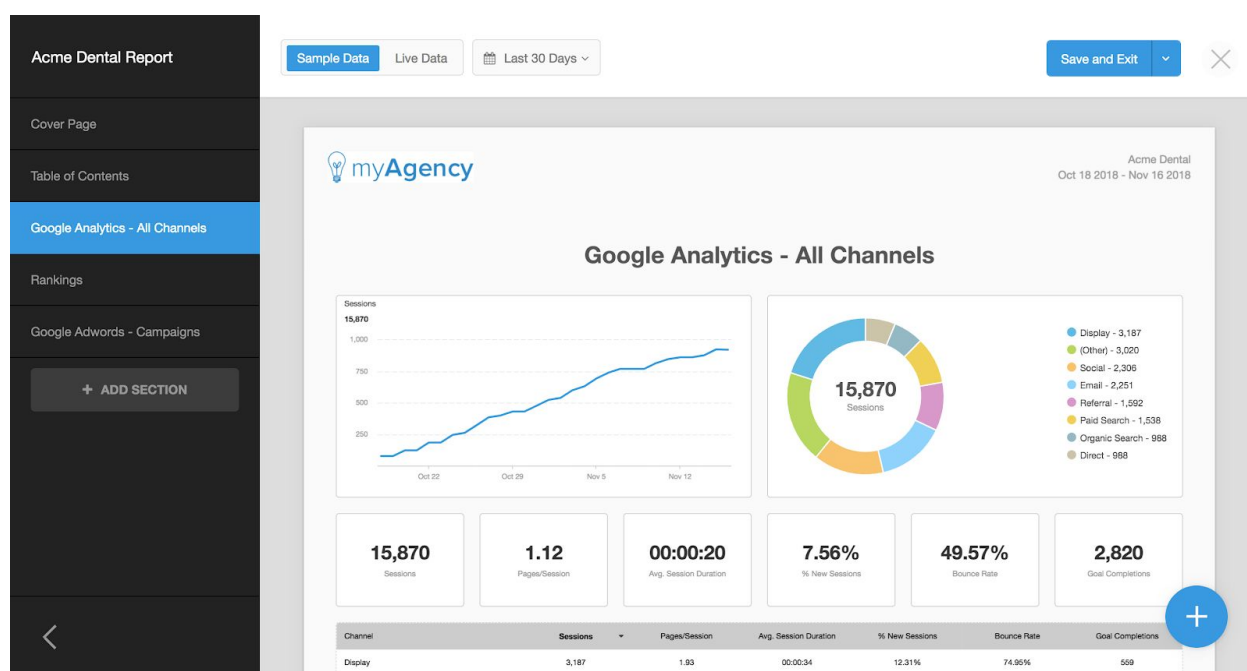
When you first take on a client you should be quite certain that you can turn a profit on your services – if you can't, there's no point of providing the services at all. By ensuring that your client is profitable, there's no good reason for them to leave your agency. Everything is measurable these days: Facebook has even recently [released a way to measure in store visits and sales](#) from their ad platform. Report on the vanity metrics, but be sure that they're somehow translated in to money in your clients pockets.

# Scaling systems & processes

## #15 – Automate your marketing reports

How much time do you spend on reporting each month? Some agencies have said that reporting takes up to a week of their employees time after manually putting the reports together and answering client questions.

Reporting is a necessary evil that won't add to your bottom line. That being said, it is very important to keep clients in the loop with the state of their campaign and results their getting. Reporting also be a great opportunity to upsell new services; especially if you're giving them great news.



Use a system like the [AgencyAnalytics reporting platform](#) to build reports and automate them to go out every day, week, or month. Integrate everything you need like rank tracking, backlinks, PPC, social media and more. You even give clients access to a custom branded dashboard to eliminate reporting altogether if you'd like.

Start focusing on what matters for your business instead of wasting time on reporting. Automation = scalability for digital agencies. Start using the [agency tools](#) out there that will help you scale.

## **#16 – Build a client onboarding process**

Create a repeatable client onboarding process to get the information you need and save yourself headaches down the road.

The best piece of software I've seen to create this type of process is the aptly named Process.st. They have a client onboarding process ready to go and you can make up to five checklists absolutely free. It even plugs in to your CRM and sets follow up reminders.

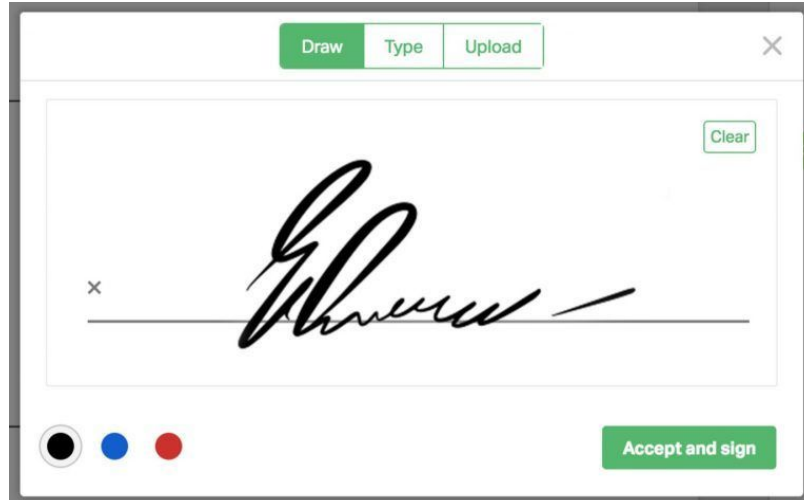
Edit that checklist to suit your agency and ensure that each step is followed when a new client comes on board. Each service you offer will require different information – if you're offering SEO, see Jon Cooper's [questions for new clients](#)– otherwise customize it based on your specific needs.

## **#17 – Systemize proposals & contracts**

Yeah, yeah you probably have a proposal template in place for your agency but customizing each one takes hours. What about if the client asks for edits? How do you handle the signature process?

Using software like [PandaDoc](#) can speed up and systemize that process for you. It helps shorten your sales proposal turnaround times by creating templates that allow collaboration between multiple parties.

They notify you within your CRM when the client opens the proposal so you know to follow up. Once the client is ready to sign they can do so within the PandaDoc software. Integrate your payment gateway to give them the option to pay right after signing!



There are also a number of other features like:

- Managing HR documents when you hire new employees
- Streamlining legal approval for agency partnerships
- Quote management to help you price your services and calculate profit margins

P.S. another tool to checkout for proposals is [Qwilr](#). They allow you to create stunning proposal websites instead of sending docs back and forth. They look great and I imagine they impress the heck out of clients.

## #18 – Streamline appointment scheduling

In this day in age there's no reason to waste time going back and forth with clients to book a meeting time. It's a time hog to find a time that suits both parties and it isn't a value added activity. Time to cut it out!

There are a couple tools you can leverage to streamline appointment booking:

- [Calendly](#) is a tool that allows you to share a link which lets people book meetings according to your availability. It automatically sets reminders before the meetings. (This is what we use at [AgencyAnalytics for demos](#) too!)
- [x.ai](#) is an AI powered assistant who will automatically schedule meetings on your behalf at the best time and location for both parties. All you have to do is Cc: [amy@x.ai](mailto:amy@x.ai) and she'll take over for you.



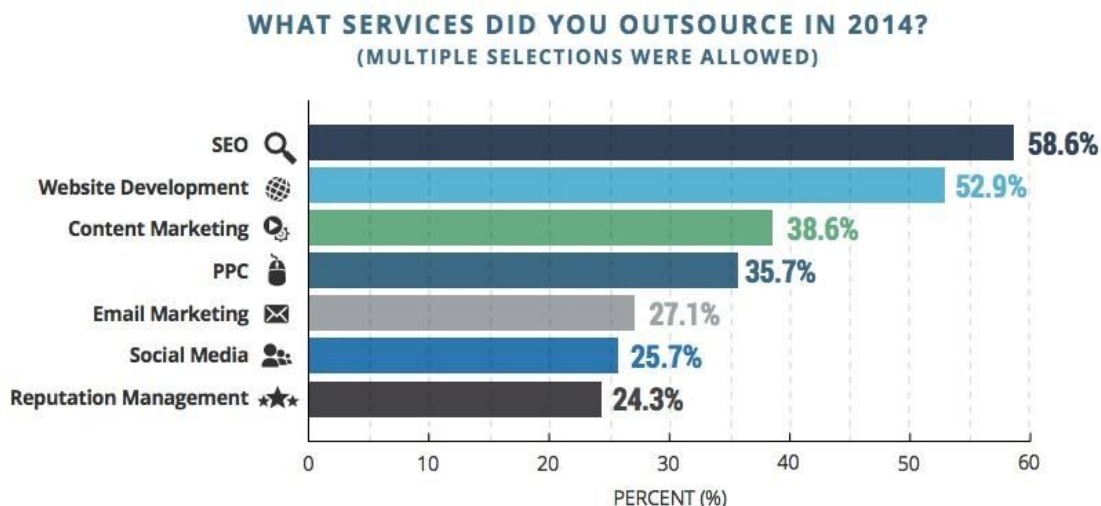
# Shrewdly growing your team

## #19 – Outsource as long as you can

The beauty of running a digital agency these days is that almost everything is outsourceable. You can truly be a "full service" agency as a one-man freelancer if you know how to hire through [Upwork](#) or [Freelancer](#).

I'd say the majority of the outsourcers I've hired haven't worked out, but it's worth it for the few who do. When you find the right people it's a goldmine: high quality work for relatively low cost.

In 2015 [Hubshout conducted a survey](#) and found that 58.6% of digital agencies are currently outsourcing SEO.



Funnily enough, SEO is the one service I would be hesitant of outsourcing – it's too risky to be hands off – but I digress.

If I were growing an agency I would be outsourcing almost everything I can until there's enough work to hire a superstar in house. Leverage those superstars to be your agencies core competencies. If you're lucky, some of the people you outsource can turn in to location independent superstars.

See how Arianna O'Dell is building [Airlink Marketing](#) while [traveling the world on FastCompany](#). While it doesn't go in to depth on outsourcing, it's proof that you can run an agency without being in the same room as your employees.

## **#20 – Leverage internships**

Internships are incredibly common among the marketing community. While I believe unpaid internships are unfair and a recipe for exploitation, you can hire a number of interns for a fraction of what a full time employee will cost and get high quality work. Many interns are hungry to prove themselves outside of school and will surprise you with their determination.

Just like outsourcing, the fantastic thing about hiring interns is that you will find a few superstars along the way. Those high performing interns can become the foundation of your agency and may determine your core competencies.

*"Don't tell people how to do things, tell them what to do and let them surprise you with their results."*

-George S. Patton

# Enhancing Your Service Offerings

## #21 – Partner with other agencies

There are very few agencies that exist who are truly "full-service" in house. In order to offer a complete package to clients it can be very beneficial to partner with other specialized agencies. This allows you to tap in to other company's expertise and portfolio without taking on much added risk.

There are two ways that you can set up partnerships:

- White label other agencies services. This works well if you're looking to have another agency manage smaller projects like PPC or reputation management. I've written a post on [seven services you can white label](#) to increase the revenue of your agency.
- Quarter back the relationships between clients and agencies. This works better for large projects like entire web design makeovers, strategic planning, etc. Your agency can generally work out a finder's fee system when you pass the lead over to them.

## #22 – Think about alternative marketing channels

Don't pigeonhole yourself as a basic digital agency offering web design, SEO and PPC. There are so many other marketing channels available that you can upsell and become experts in. Here are a few ideas:

- Snapchat advertising
- Indoor advertising (know those videos you see in the washroom? See [newad](#) as an example)
- Experiential marketing
- Pinterest advertising
- Native advertising (see [StackAdapt](#))
- Content discovery networks (see [Outbrain](#))
- Influencer marketing (see [#paid](#))

A great thing about many of these is that businesses don't have the time to learn them in house. If you can expertise in one, or multiple, of these channels you can get lower CPAs than traditional advertising and kill it for your clients.

## #23 – Offer Corporate Training

Research in 2015 by the [Society of Digital agencies](#) found that there was a substantial increase in the number of companies who no longer work with outside agencies – from 27 percent up from 13 percent in 2014.

These companies haven't given up on marketing altogether, they've brought it in-house. Many companies now want complete control over their own data and employees instead of handing it off to another company.

This trend is looking to continue, but you can take advantage of this opportunity by offering corporate marketing training. There is a big need for this type of education and colleges are slow to catch up with the digital world.

If you have some superstar employees, think about leveraging them in to teachers. They already have the knowledge and experience that you need.

There are a few companies already doing it like [Brainstation](#) but the demand is high and corporate pockets are deep. Training is also a great alternative for small business owners who can't afford your monthly fee.

## Wrapping Up

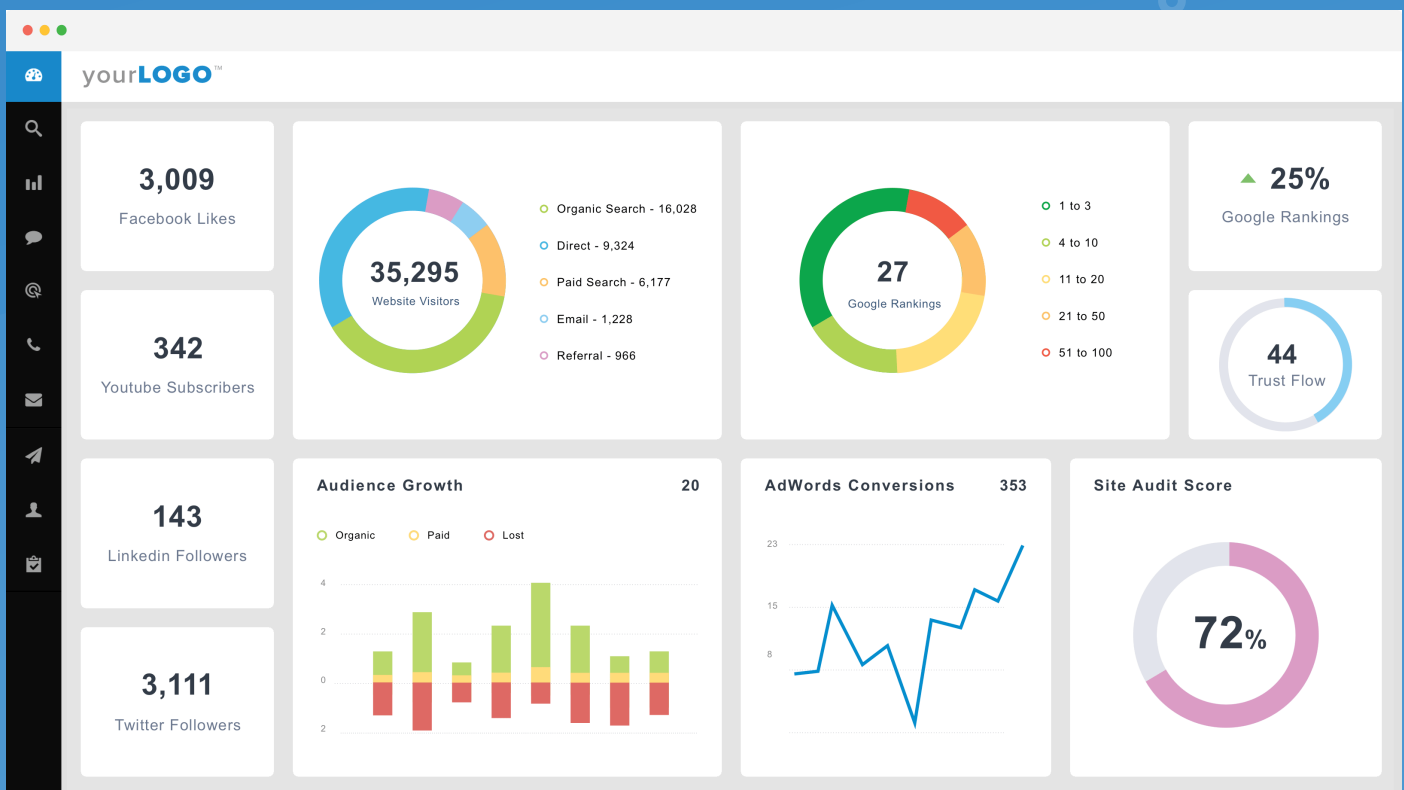
Running an agency is about more than simply getting more clients. Creating processes, growing your team, and reducing churn are all crucial to your agency's success. Yet these are processes that often get neglected.

Prioritize a few of the strategies for 2019, and you'll see how a few new processes will help your agency scale faster than ever before.

***For further reading, check out our Agency Academy for additional resources on growing your agency.***

## All-in-One Reporting Platform for Agencies

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