

# State of Audience Report

## 2024

An exclusive survey and analysis for media,  
publishing and content creators who generate  
direct and indirect revenue by serving audiences.



Because Audience Matters

At Omeda, we work with hundreds of audience and media professionals to grow, activate, and monetize their audiences. Every day, we get asked, "What are other publishers doing to grow their audience, revenue, and first-party data? What audience strategies and tech stacks are media teams like mine using? What's working right now for other audience teams, and what should we be moving away from?"

So, we surveyed consumer and business media and audience leaders to find out. By studying the latest audience development thinking, plans, and efforts, we can achieve a few things:

- Learn and share media teams' strategies to stay connected with their audience.
- Discover the opportunities and roadblocks teams are navigating to maximize their audience investment.
- Understand the makeup of today's audience function within media and publishing organizations and the strategies and tools they are using.

In addition to the survey, we've incorporated insights from media and audience professionals to help you reach your growth goals.

Let's examine what we found, what the data plus expert analysis tells us, and what we can do to keep moving forward.

# The state of audience in 2024:

## The Big Takeaways

This report delves deep into all things audience, as reported by media, audience, and publishing leaders. Based on a survey of 112 media and audience professionals, it provides insights on audience development and marketing needs, challenges, priorities, budgets, technology, and resources.

Here is a summary of the takeaways, what we learned from the survey, and follow-on discussions with media, publishing and audience professionals.

- Media companies report increasing (27%) or maintaining (54%) audience investment (81%). However, most lack a documented audience development strategy – nearly 2/3 do not have a formal audience plan.
- Most media companies prioritize audience and database size and growth (70%), with less emphasis on developing deeper engagement with their audience.
- Audience engagement is hard. Some culprits cited include disconnected workflows, disjointed systems, and/or an organizational bias toward quick wins over gradual audience growth tactics.
- Converting unknown visitors (60%) and disconnected workflows (52%) are keeping teams from connecting with their audience, and respondents named these as their top challenges.
- Engagement is directly tied to monetization and revenue, but the research shows that the definition of engagement varies by organization. 25% of respondents said they do not track engagement. Just 20% of the survey respondents reported having an audience with more than 75% of their audience as engaged.
- Digital channels are the most important source of first-party data. 64% and 52% of respondents said newsletter sign-ups and gated content were top data sources, respectively. More than half of respondents rely on their websites for valuable first-party data.
- Many media organizations focus their audience strategies on imprecise, surface-level measurements rather than accounting for engagement across every channel. Respondents were twice as likely to prioritize breadth metrics (email opens, email clicks, and website visits) over depth metrics (like time on site and subscriber renewal rates) when defining audience engagement metrics.
- Despite using 4+ audience management systems on average, most media companies (85%) don't feel they have the technology they need to reach their goals.

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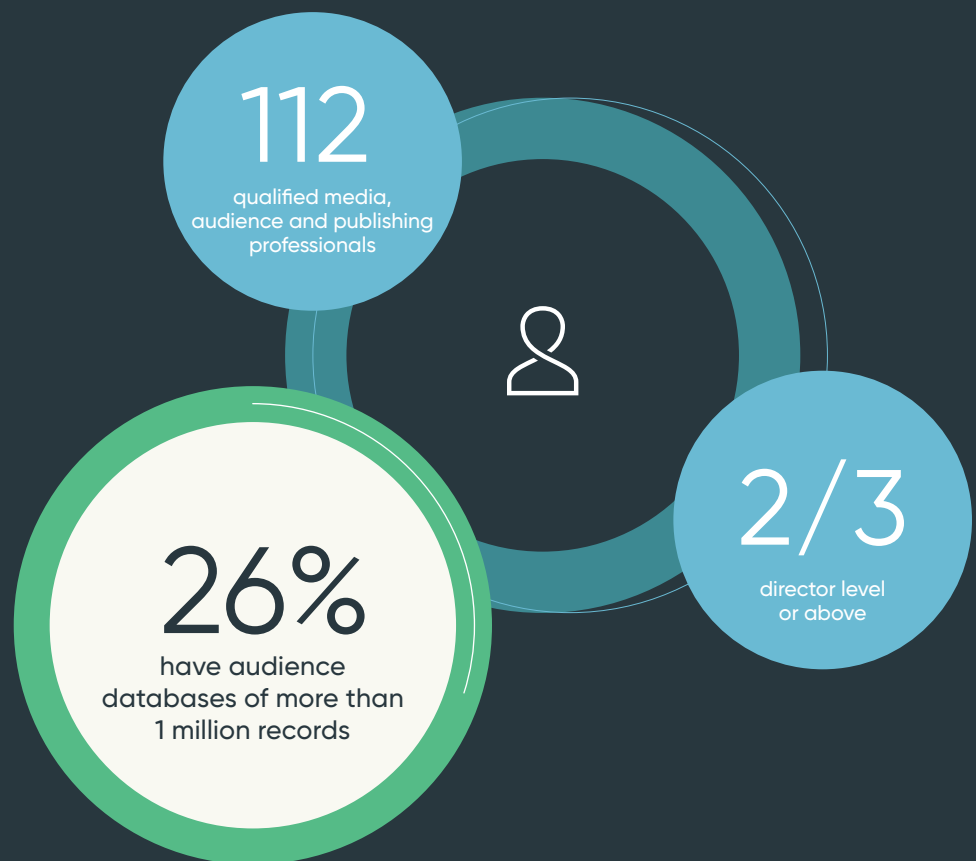
Media companies plan to invest in workflow and data management and visualization tools this year

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## Survey methodology

- 112 qualified media, audience and publishing professionals completed the survey in March 2024.
- Two-thirds were director-level or above and one-third were managers and individual contributors.
- Respondents work within business media, consumer, niche, enthusiast, and regional publishers and media organizations, serving a wide range of audience sizes: 43% of our respondents have audience databases comprising 250,000 records or fewer, 21% have between 250,000 to 1 million records, and 26% have more than 1 million records.



# The anatomy of a modern media company

First, we wanted to understand what media companies look like today. We analyzed our business and consumer media respondents to understand the makeup of their organizations, including the number of brands, overall company size, and audience marketing team size. There was no meaningful difference between business media and consumer media along these lines.

**(Note: There was an outlier effect for both business and consumer media respondents, with a few large companies lifting the overall averages. We've added context to the overall averages to provide a more accurate picture of the responses.)**

## Business media organization breakdown:

Business media organizations have an average of 233 employees. However, the majority of surveyed organizations skewed smaller: 39% of respondents had between 0-50 employees and another 23% had between 51-100 employees. They manage 14 brands on average, but two-thirds had between one and 10 brands.

Our business media respondents had an average of 5 audience marketing professionals in their organizations, but there was significant variation between individual teams. 55% had three or fewer, while 26% had seven or more.

### Business media respondents:

- 233 employees on average
- 39% had between 0-50 employees
- 14 brands managed on average
- 4 audience marketing professionals

## Consumer media organization breakdown:

Consumer media organizations had an average of 250 employees. Like their business media counterparts, most are smaller: 33% of consumer media respondents had 0 to 50 employees, and another 25% had 51 to 100 employees. On average, they manage nine brands, with 77% having between one and 10 brands.

Our consumer media respondents had an average of 4 audience marketing professionals, but again, there were individual differences between respondents. 59% of surveyed consumer media organizations had three or fewer audience marketing professionals, while 22% had seven or more.

### Consumer media respondents:

- 250 employees on average
- 33% had between 0-50 employees
- 9 brands managed on average
- 4 audience marketing professionals

## Our takeaway:

There is no such thing as an average media organization. Media and publishing companies come in all sizes, representing a multitude of media brands.

# Media companies are investing in their audience, but 65% lack a formal audience strategy

The media game has never been easy. But in recent years, declining social traffic, advertising shortfalls, and regulatory pressure have created significant hurdles and new opportunities for the media industry. We see a mix of traditional publishers, media conglomerates, and upstart newsletter and content creators vying for their audience's attention.

These disruptions have made it more important to connect with and invest in your audience. Media companies realize this: The survey shows that **80% of respondents said they were increasing or maintaining their audience budget in 2024.**

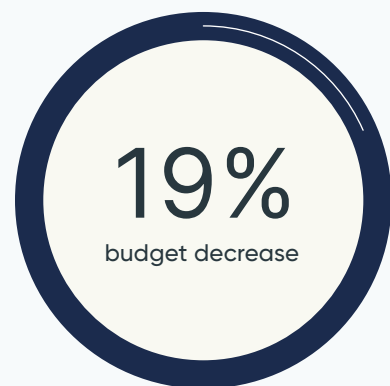
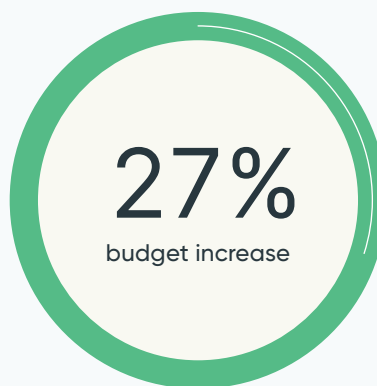
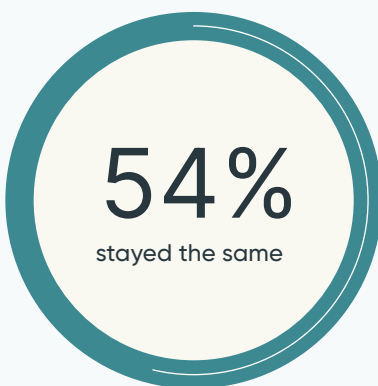
But despite its importance, **65% of our respondents said they didn't have a formal, documented audience development plan** (which we define as a top-down, organization-wide documented strategy for growing, engaging and monetizing your audience).

**The lack of documented strategy is a lost opportunity. We wanted to figure out why so many media and audience leaders missed this step:**

- Do they lack the time or budget to invest in their audience?
- Are they siloing their audience development initiatives across different departments (editorial, email, advertising, etc.)?
- Are they redefining their audience development strategy in light of changing social algorithms and search dynamics?
- Do they lack the talent, technology, or workflows to run campaigns and reach audiences?

We tackle all that and more in this report. **Read on for more.**

**Over the last 12 months, has your audience development budget increased, decreased, or stayed the same?**



# Media company business drivers

Audience size is the top priority, but engagement is the real prize for media organizations.

If media teams had their way, they'd be able to grow their audience while deepening engagement, increasing profit margins, and launching new products and services — all at once. (Perhaps more importantly, that's what their bosses expect.)

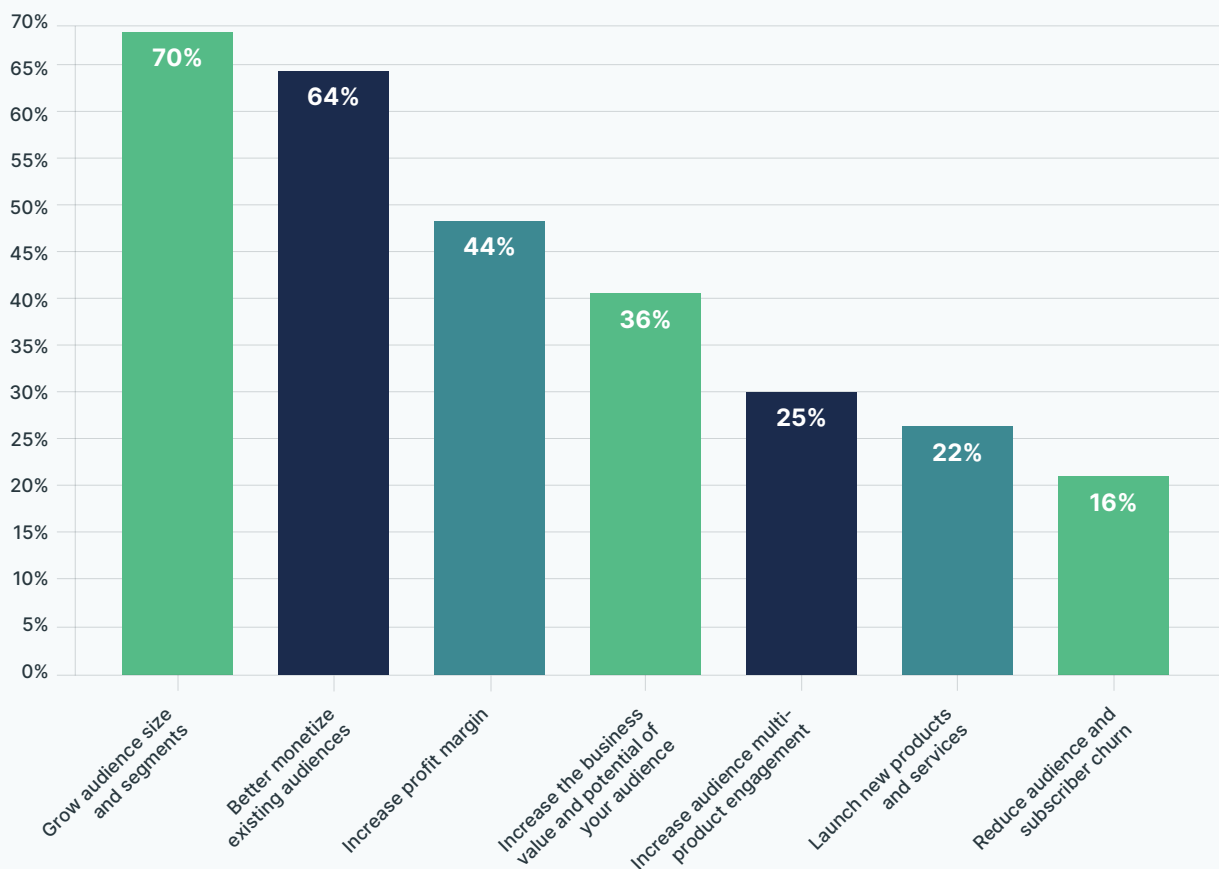
But as anyone in the business knows, it's more complicated than that. Sometimes, advancing one priority shortchanges another. So success in media isn't just about making the right decisions — it's about making the right tradeoffs at the right time.

We wanted to identify the top priorities among media and audience professionals and see how they prioritize these goals in relation to one another. What do they care about most? What's getting less focus?

We asked respondents to name their top three priorities for the year — and here's what we captured:

## What are the top priorities for your company in the coming year to achieve your objectives?

Respondents could choose up to 3 answers.



Audience growth is a top priority for media professionals, with **nearly 70% of respondents naming it as one of their top three priorities.**

However, few cited audience engagement as a top priority — **less than a quarter of respondents said that increasing multi-product engagement, launching new products and services, or reducing churn were the top three priorities.**

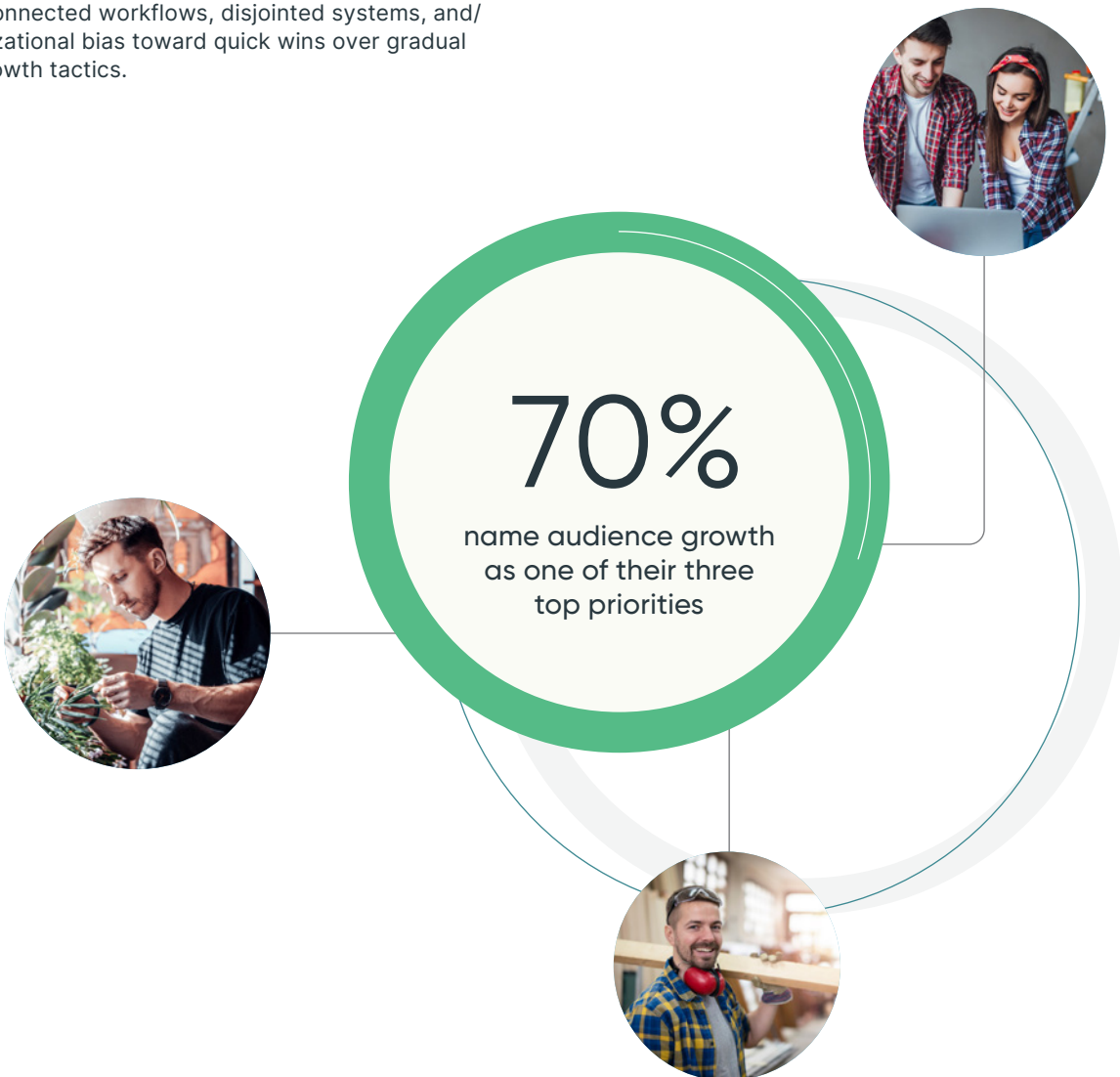
Media companies want to grow their audience. And they want to monetize their existing audiences. However, they don't necessarily prioritize the strategies that will help them achieve these goals.

Why? Audience engagement is hard. Some culprits include disconnected workflows, disjointed systems, and/or an organizational bias toward quick wins over gradual audience growth tactics.



**"The value center of a publisher has moved to what you know about your audience vs. how you publish."**

**Brian Morrissey**  
Founder of The Rebooting

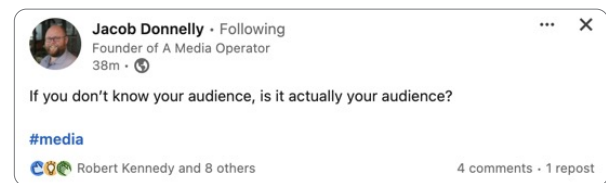


# Media companies are struggling to identify and activate their top audience members

We know what media companies want to achieve. But what's stopping them from reaching those goals? We asked respondents to name their five biggest audience development challenges, and here's what we discovered:

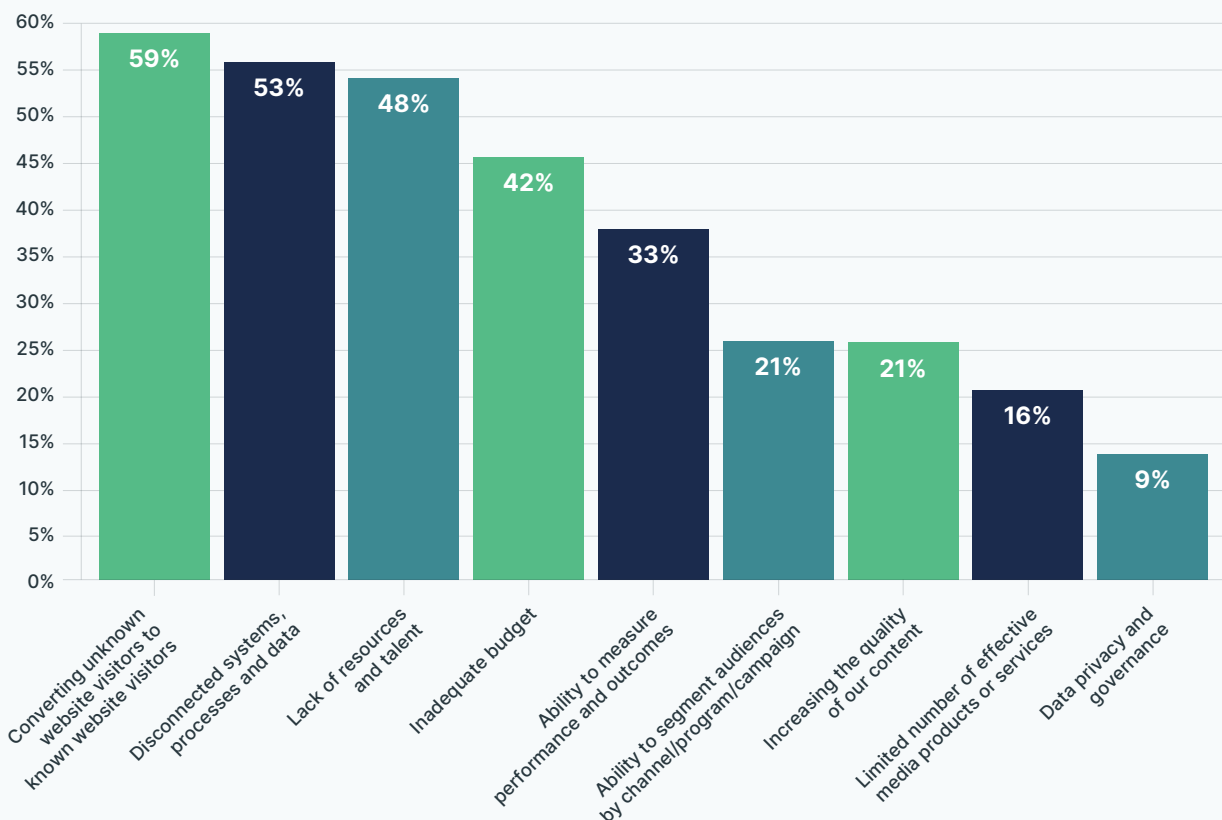
Nearly 60% of respondents said that unknown-to-known conversion was one of their biggest challenges. The other most common issues all stem from resource constraints. The next biggest audience development challenges included disconnected systems and workflows (53%), lack of talent/resources (49%), and lack of budget (42%).

**The takeaway:** Most media organizations don't know who their audience is. They might be getting traffic, but they can't convert those anonymous site visitors to known audience members. So, while most media companies say they're investing in their audience, they don't have the insights they need to actually engage or convert them through segmentation and personalization.



## What are the top hurdles or challenges to achieving your goals?

Respondents could choose up to 5 answers.



From our work with audience leaders, here's how leading media teams are converting anonymous visitors into known audience members:

- **Get more out of gated content.** Gated content is a great source of first-party data. But if your content just repeats information your audience can find on Google, your readers aren't going to download it or come back again. Incorporate more proprietary research, expertise, survey reports, and interviews into your gated content to establish credibility, get more responses and earn repeat site visits.
- **Optimize your paywalls/meters to drive more responses and boost anonymous conversion.** Not getting enough submissions? Consider targeting meters at different custom audiences (i.e., displaying paywalls only at non-subscribers who have visited 4+ times per week, or changing the number of "free" articles someone can read before being blocked by the meter), A/B testing your copy and CTA message.

Also experiment with your meter's format and firing frequency. Our research shows that these variables greatly impact click and conversion rates: Paywalls/meters that fill the whole screen (aka, standard modals) get 3x more clicks than other paywall types.

But use them too frequently and you'll turn away first-time visitors before they can read anything on your site. So test multiple formats and display frequencies to see what yields the most responses.

- **Aid anonymous conversion with a Customer Data Platform (CDP).** Consider using a CDP or similar technology to convert unknown website visitors into known audience members more quickly.

This approach also unifies audience data from every channel in one place. So once you've converted someone from unknown to known, you can see how they're interacting with you across every channel in one place. This gives you the 360-degree view you need to reach every individual in your audience with the right message at the right time — and turn them into loyal audience members.

Media and audience leaders grow audience and engagement by 15 - 20% on average when ID resolution and conversion are in place.

The survey also revealed that respondents **were twice as likely to name workflow as an issue as content quality**. So for many companies, content isn't the issue. The issue is getting sufficient results and ROI from that content.

## Streamline your operations with these tips:



Invest in process automation tools, including marketing automation solutions, data management and visualization tools, or headless API systems.



Use content recommendations, dynamic email content and targeted personalizations to deliver more relevant content and offers to everyone in your audience without overstressing your team.



Add interactive content such as polling and surveys that can be quickly turned into reports where you can share the data and findings with your audience.



Consider replacing your disparate audience marketing tools with a single integrated solution.

# Exploring today's audience marketing and development organizations

Not too long ago, audience development managers were in the back office, sorting through subscription forms, manually entering data, and building audience lists.

Today, audience teams are working cross-functionally to address their media businesses' existential concerns, like how to scale their audience, foster engagement, earn their audience's loyalty, and make some money doing it.

There's a lot at stake as audience equals revenue, whether directly through paid subscriptions and events or indirectly through monetization strategies. Let's explore how media companies approach audience development, what challenges are still standing in their way, and how they can help their media organizations move forward in the post-platform era.

## Audience teams remain lean

Over two-thirds of respondents have three or fewer audience professionals in their organizations.

Like every function today, audience teams need to do more with less. Not exactly earth-shattering, but it does have big implications for anyone prioritizing their audience in 2024 and beyond, including:

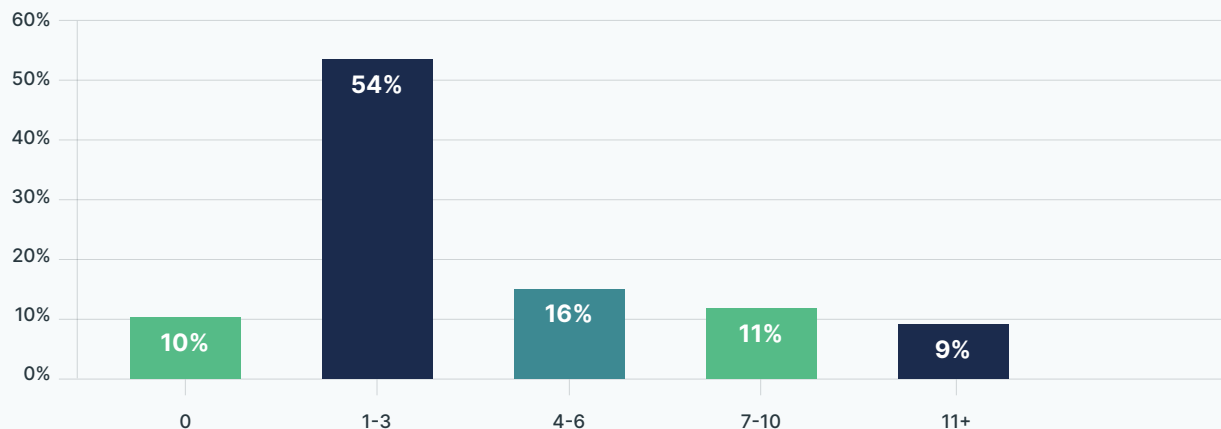
- **Media teams say they're investing in their audience, but their organizational structures aren't keeping pace.** We could conclude that there's a limited budget for audience development. While that's possible for some companies, we think it's more nuanced than that.

Media organizations often advance their audience marketing initiatives on a team-by-team basis. For example, email marketers focus on newsletter growth, while editorial tries to grow website traffic, but they take two vastly different approaches to get there.

By taking a brand- or department-specific approach, leaders risk creating silos that create less cohesive experiences for their audience. Worse, that disjointed approach makes it more difficult to sell and cross-promote your full portfolio of content, products, or subscriptions.

- **Audience teams that work across departments see better results.** Streamlining workflows — whether through automation, outsourcing content creation and/or process improvements — will make it easier for audience teams to grow and engage their audiences long-term.

## How many audience marketing and development professionals are in your company today?



**So, how can audience teams scale and increase their impact?**

- **Take stock of your audience marketing capabilities.** Break down the audience team's workload and day-to-day responsibilities. Understand where they spend the most time, then align with business growth initiatives to minimize busywork and increase collaboration.
- **Simplify the tech stack and arm them with the right tools.** Consider investing in workflow and process automation tools. Look to outsource manual or low-value tasks — or create a 'stop-doing' list like the team at [Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel](#) did.
- **Redefine audience marketing's role within your organization.** Consider how audience marketing can work alongside your editorial, email, ad sales, subscription, etc., teams and how to divide roles and responsibilities.



# Audience marketing strategies and tactics

## Engagement is all over the place

Audience growth is a top priority for most media companies. But audience size only tells part of the story.

### We also wanted to know:

- Do publishers feel that they're meaningfully connecting with their audiences?
- Are they successfully creating a community among their readers?
- What percentage of their audience is "engaged?" And how are they defining engagement?

But before we dive in, let's settle on a common definition of engagement. Engagement measures the strength of your relationship with your audience. Are you pushing content and offers at them? Or are you listening to them — and producing content that answers their questions and helps them improve their lives? As our research shows, media companies use a wide variety of metrics to quantify this.

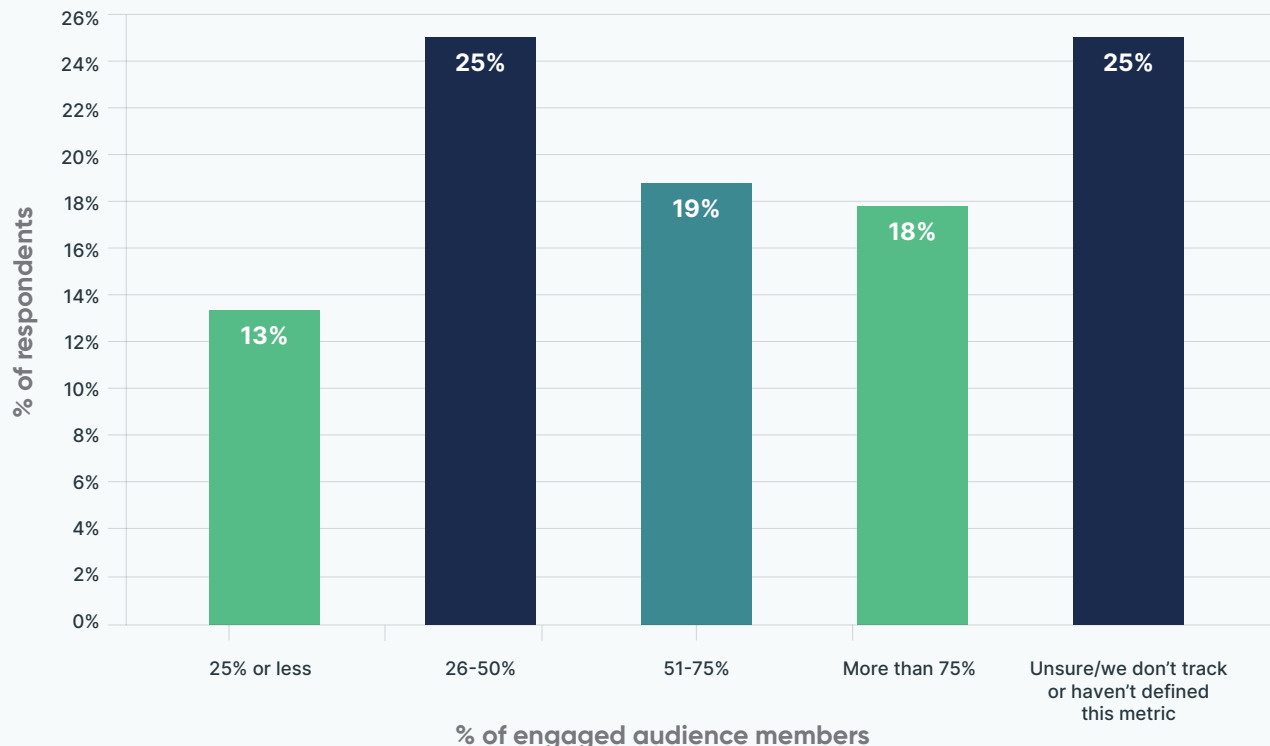
**Now, on to the findings:** Even though engagement is directly tied to monetization and the ability to generate revenue, our research shows that the definition of engagement and how it is measured is all over the place.

- Nearly one-quarter of respondents said that they don't track audience engagement.
- Another 13% said less than 25% of their audience was actively engaged.
- From there, we see a lot of variation among respondents, with about 18% saying that at least 75% of their audience is engaged.



Engagement measures the strength of your relationship with your audience.

### What percentage of your database are records of audience members that have engaged with your brand in the last year?



## Ideas for audience and media leaders to improve audience engagement:

- ▶ **Use engagement metrics to inform audience and content priorities:** There's only one surefire way to protect your business against platform and algorithm changes: build an audience that'll follow your brand wherever it appears. So if you've been waiting to prioritize audience engagement, now's the time to start.

Start by measuring “attention metrics” such as time on site for specific website pages, as well as email clicks and opens that lead to engaging with multiple pieces of content. From there, you can discover what your audience is responding to and what they want to learn from you. Take it one step further and analyze the findings by audience segment. With this information, you can start to plan your content around your community's needs.

- ▶ **Prioritize metrics that predict conversions and revenue:** Website visits and email opens don't automatically lead to a subscription. Overemphasize those metrics, and you'll lose sight of the real prize — revenue.

Query your paid subscribers to see what engagement metrics predict eventual paid subscriptions. Maybe your newsletter readers are three times more likely to become paid subscribers than non-readers, or maybe your audience is more likely to pay for a subscription when they visit your site more than twice per week. Whatever the case, prioritize those metrics when defining audience engagement targets to improve performance.

- ▶ **Plan content and engagement initiatives around user needs with a single view:** Tie your engagement strategy to user needs based on a complete view of their activity and behaviors. This ensures you prioritize the audience members and focus only on the initiatives that create community and value.

Sarah Marshall, Conde Nast's VP of Distribution and Channel Strategy, [describes this framework in a recent Nieman Lab article](#).

“With a seemingly limitless number of platforms on which to meet and engage audiences — but still a finite number of hours in the day — teams will need to develop frameworks to understand where to start, stop, and pivot,” she says.



In 2023, we updated our “user needs” at Condé Nast, determining that our audiences have six needs:

- Update me
- Inspire me
- Divert me
- Educate me
- Guide me
- Connect me

Consider which stories meet each need and the role each channel plays in meeting those needs (for instance, Instagram is the best place to inspire your audience, whereas your newsletter is more conducive to education). Then, work backward to develop and distribute content your audience will love.

- ▶ **Diversify your content mix:** Consider experimenting with new formats, like short-form videos, graphics and interview-style podcasts. Digiday research shows that [short-form video \(78%\)](#) and [a combination of text and video \(62%\)](#) were the most effective channels for engaging Gen Z and younger Millennial (28- to 32-year-old) audiences.

They also recommend looking into specific sub-segments within preferred channels to see what format works best for your audience. If you're launching a podcast, consider if daily news briefings or longer serials make sense for the topic/audience.

- ▶ **Make audience engagement a team-wide KPI:** If you're serious about growing your audience, audience engagement shouldn't be just audience marketing's responsibility. By elevating audience marketing to a management-led, organization-wide priority, company standards for audience engagement can be set. Then, each department can focus on reaching audience engagement metrics that drive direct and indirect revenue.

## Content is the most important source of audience data

First-party data gives you the insights you need to connect with and monetize your audience. That in mind, we wanted to know where our respondents get the most actionable information about their audience.

Our research showed that digital channels are the most important source of first-party data. 64% and 52% of respondents said newsletter sign-ups and gated content were top data sources, respectively. All told, more than half of respondents are getting valuable first-party data from their website content.

**Content matters more than ever.** In the age of **fake SI writers**, Chat-GPT and a historic wave of editorial staff reductions, content may feel less valuable.

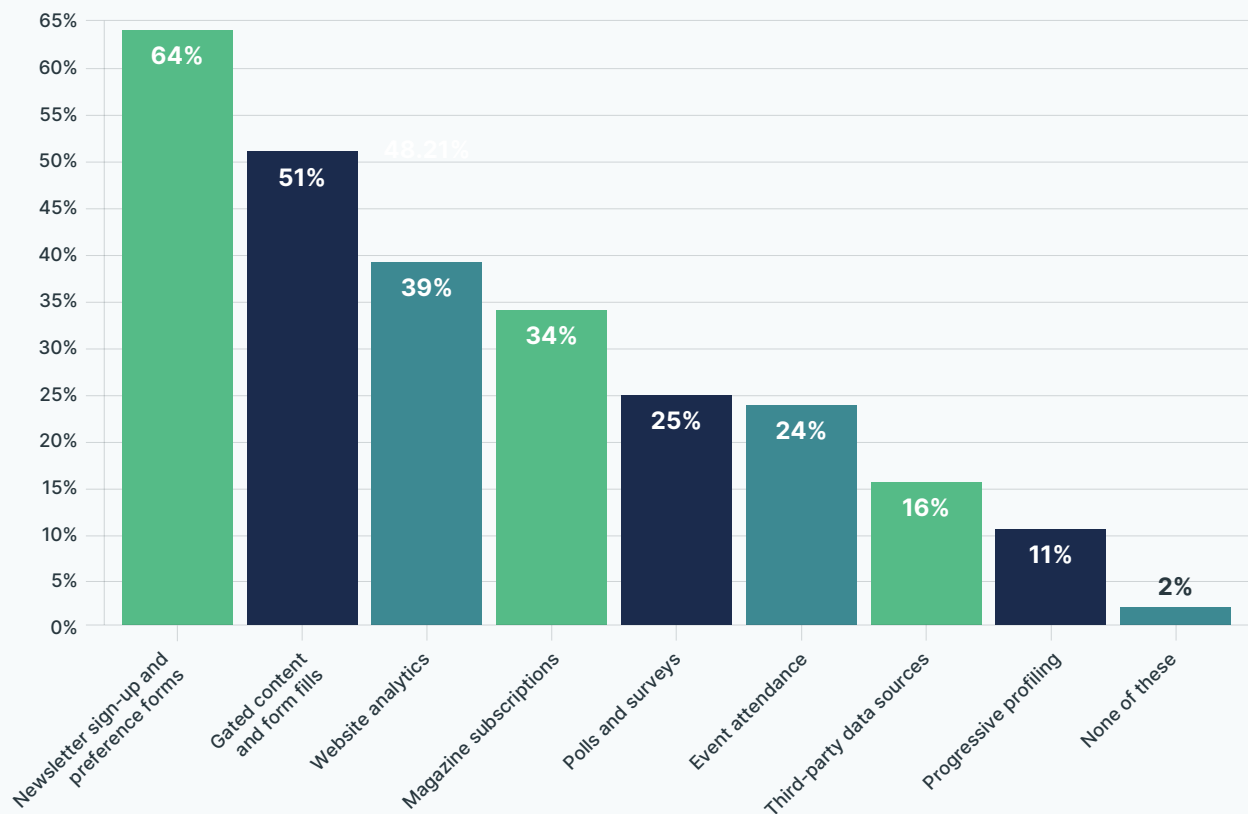
Our findings suggest otherwise. Original, differentiated, and valuable content is still important.

Teach your audience something, inspire or outrage them, and you won't just get one-time impressions. You get audiences to engage and with that, you get first-party data. That data helps you create even more targeted, specific and relevant content. From there, you can better speak to your audience's concerns and keep them coming back. Not a bold statement. But observations show relevant and useful content is the fast path to audience engagement and revenue.

When the audience keeps engaging, you get even more data to further hone your strategy, engage your audience, and grow your business. It's a virtuous cycle of good data driving better content driving more data, and so on.

### What are your best sources or channels for collecting demographic and behavioral data (and other information) about your audience?

Respondents could choose their top three answers.

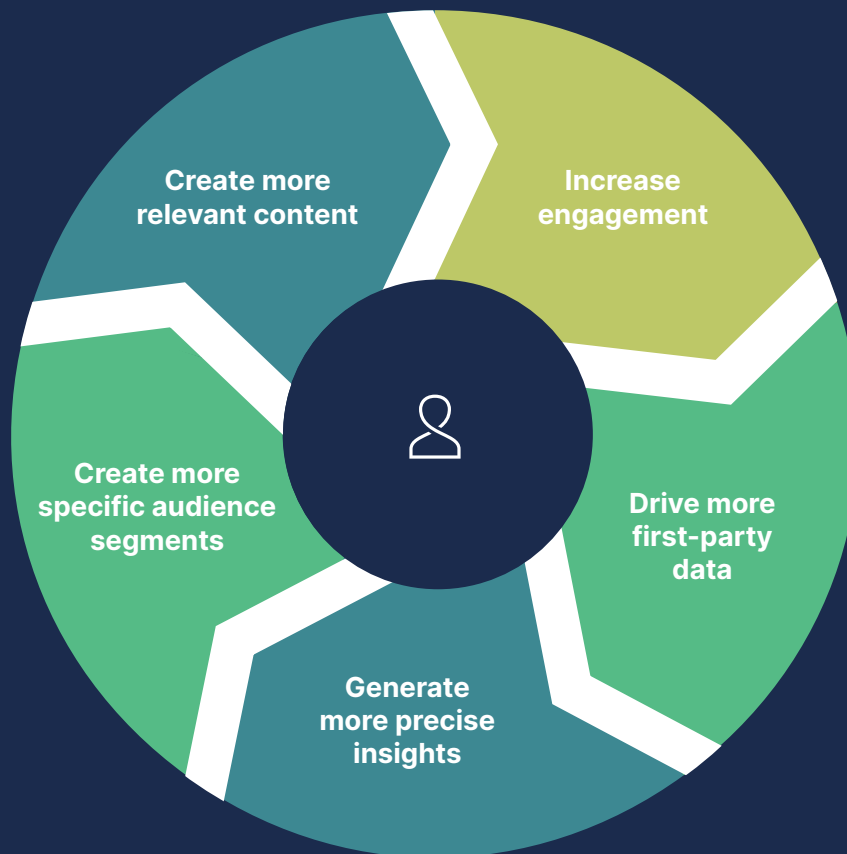


Engaging content generates the first-party data to make your audience more valuable. Start with these best practices:

- **Collect more first-party data:** Drive more audience data by hosting webinars, events and podcasts highlighting your most important content and personalities. The registrations will yield important insights that you can use to identify your audience's interests and knowledge gaps, which you can address through future content.

- **Make content creation an organization-wide initiative.** Media organizations are under pressure to create more content fast. But they're pressed for time, and often, they don't have data on how their audience interacts with them across every channel. So they've got one team managing the website, another writing newsletters, and a third posting on social media — and none of them are talking to each other.

That approach might help everyone ship content more quickly. But it gives your audience a disjointed, disconnected experience — and it minimizes the opportunity for cross-sell and additional offers that meet their needs.



**One tactic that many audience teams use:** Gather each of your audience-facing teams to see what's worked in the last month, what your audience wants and needs, and what kind of content and formats will help you achieve that. Come armed with all your audience data, so your team can create narrower segments and cover every channel (Bonus: if you're using a CDP for media, you'll already have data from each channel stored in one place!). From there, each team can create content that ladders up to those top priorities.

Struggling to get your team involved in content creation? Try out some of these tips from Beam Content's [Closing the Content Gap Report](#):



**Beam Content**  
 4,602 followers  
 58m · 🌐

Want to get your team involved in content creation?

Make it easy for them to participate.

Here's how.

» Create a connection with each function «

**Chelsea Castle** says to ask yourself: "How can I make it easy for them to tell me ideas, asks, questions, or needs?"

For example, she created a CMS spreadsheet to build rapport with sales, as that was their preferred way to communicate.

» Build a brief system «

A solid structure helped **Nick Bennett** contribute to a piece easily early on, knowing that he just had to fill out a template. He said:

"The content team would come back and say, 'Let's go through this together, I'll ask you any questions, and we're going to make sure we approve this brief.' Then it goes into production from there."

» Involve team members in social «

**Tara Robertson** says **Chili Piper** has a "takeover" every Thursday where they pull a content piece and write up different ways for the team to share it.

That way, everyone gets involved, even if they aren't sure what to post.

» Create a routine «

**James Carbary** suggests finding a 2-4 GTM folks who have the insights your content needs and sending them a recurring cal invite for a quick recording.

How do you get your team members involved in content creation?

(Tips pulled from our new report, [Closing the Content Gap](#). Drop a comment if you want to read it!)

👤 Sabina Hahn and 5 others

- **Niche down through audience segmentation:** Once you've got enough data, segment your audience by demographic, interests and/or behaviors. Jacob L. Nelson, Assistant Professor of Journalism at the University of Utah, found that **city news publishers were more successful when they targeted their audience by demographic, neighborhood or interest**, rather than a mass audience.

A narrower focus helps you serve your audience on a deeper level and gives you a competitive advantage, especially as mass traffic models become less reliable.

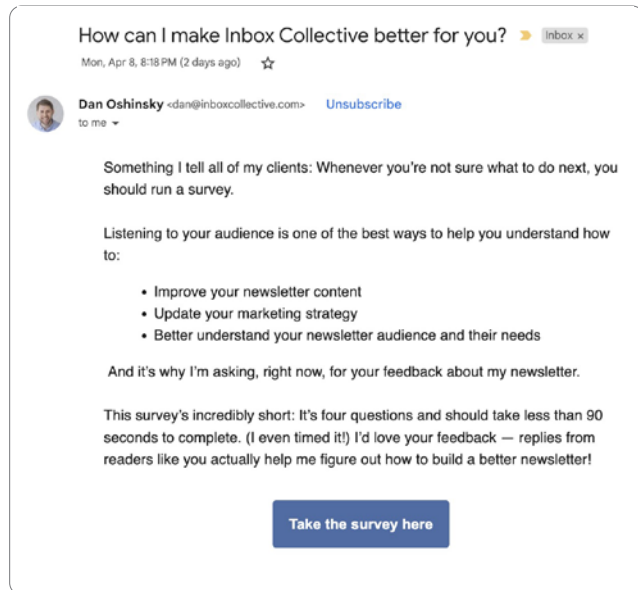


"Go super niche and give yourself license to expand from there," **Sarah Fischer, Axios senior media reporter** and the writer of *Axios Media Trends*, said on a recent episode of [Brian Morrissey's People v. Algorithms](#) podcast. "Be a little bit profitable. Don't borrow too much money. That's what we're going to see in the future."

- **Combine audience data with direct audience feedback:** Data tells you how your audience thinks, feels, and interacts in real time. But you still need to draw the right conclusions from that data. That's not a given. So stay connected with your followers in person, too, whether through industry events, networking circles, or informal outreach.

Don't have the budget for events? Use surveys and polls to identify and address audience needs. This doesn't have to be a big lift, either. Make it clear that you care about your audience's feedback — that you're planning your content strategy around them — and you'll get the responses you need.

## Not sure where to start? Here's a great example from Dan Oshinsky of [Inbox Collective](#):



- **Prioritize research and expert-led content:** Everyone from the New York Times to your next-door neighbor has a mic. And your audience doesn't know who to trust. Research and expert-led content help you earn that credibility. Beyond that, expert-led content gives you the relevance and word-of-mouth recommendations your audience team dreams of.
- Don't outsource content creation to Chat-GPT: AI is one solution to the workflow issues we've mentioned in this report. [Investigative journalists have used LLMs to analyze large datasets more quickly](#), and others have used it to generate images and model data. But the bots can't replace expertise (yet). So if you're connecting with your audience through content, use AI as a resource, not another writer.

### Offline channels still produce valuable audience data:

Offline channels — events and magazines — were the second-best source of audience data, with 34% and 27% of respondents naming them as a top-three data source, respectively.

Polls, surveys and respondents were least likely to say that engagement-based channels — like progressive profiling and polls and surveys — gave them valuable first-party data.

If you're short on data, start creating more polls and surveys.

But if you're just mass-sending the same 7-question survey to your whole audience, you'll only get so far. For best results, you want to target your polls and surveys toward specific audience segments (for example, unknown visitors) with the goal of gaining specific information (email address or job title) that you can use to improve their experience.

Here's how some of our media industry clients have used interactive polls and surveys to collect more audience data and, ultimately, better serve everyone in their audience.

**Use quizzes to provide more value to your audience and drive deeper website traffic:** WATT Global Media was getting good website traffic — but their email sign-ups weren't keeping pace. So they used Omeda's customer data platform to unify audience data from every channel into one solution.

From there, the WATT team could identify unknown website visitors and target them with interactive quizzes testing their knowledge of the industry (the WATT team created these quizzes via Omeda's integration with CredSpark, an audience engagement platform that helps media companies create interactive content experiences).

Upon completion, users were prompted to sign up for a newsletter on the quiz topic. The WATT team also embedded forms directly into emails to increase engagement and retention. Their three active forms have conversion rates between 5 and 43%, which has helped them engage their audience and net 50+ email sign-ups.

### Convert unknown to known and drive newsletter signups:

BNP Media targeted its unknown website visitors with interactive multi-select newsletter sign-up forms created on CredSpark, so each user could register for their preferred newsletter and become known.

BNP also targeted each known website visitor with embedded subscription sign-up forms that were targeted to their individual interests and needs, based on engagement data from Omeda. All told, this has helped BNP earn 1500 newsletter subscriptions and counting.

Please answer this quick question to access this content.

Thanks! You can close this window to continue.

**Fill data gaps:** Questex used Omeda's customer data platform to create a custom segment of known website visitors with missing "job function" or "company type" fields in their profiles. From there, Questex targeted those visitors with on-site forms the next time they visited the site, using surveys created on CredSpark. The form prompted users to submit their job function or company type before accessing the page's content.

## The definition of “audience engagement” varies greatly – don’t be “loosey-goosey”

By asking respondents how they define audience engagement, we hope to discover how media professionals are building communities and what success looks like to them.

We found that media professionals are still prioritizing breadth over depth when it comes to defining audience engagement.

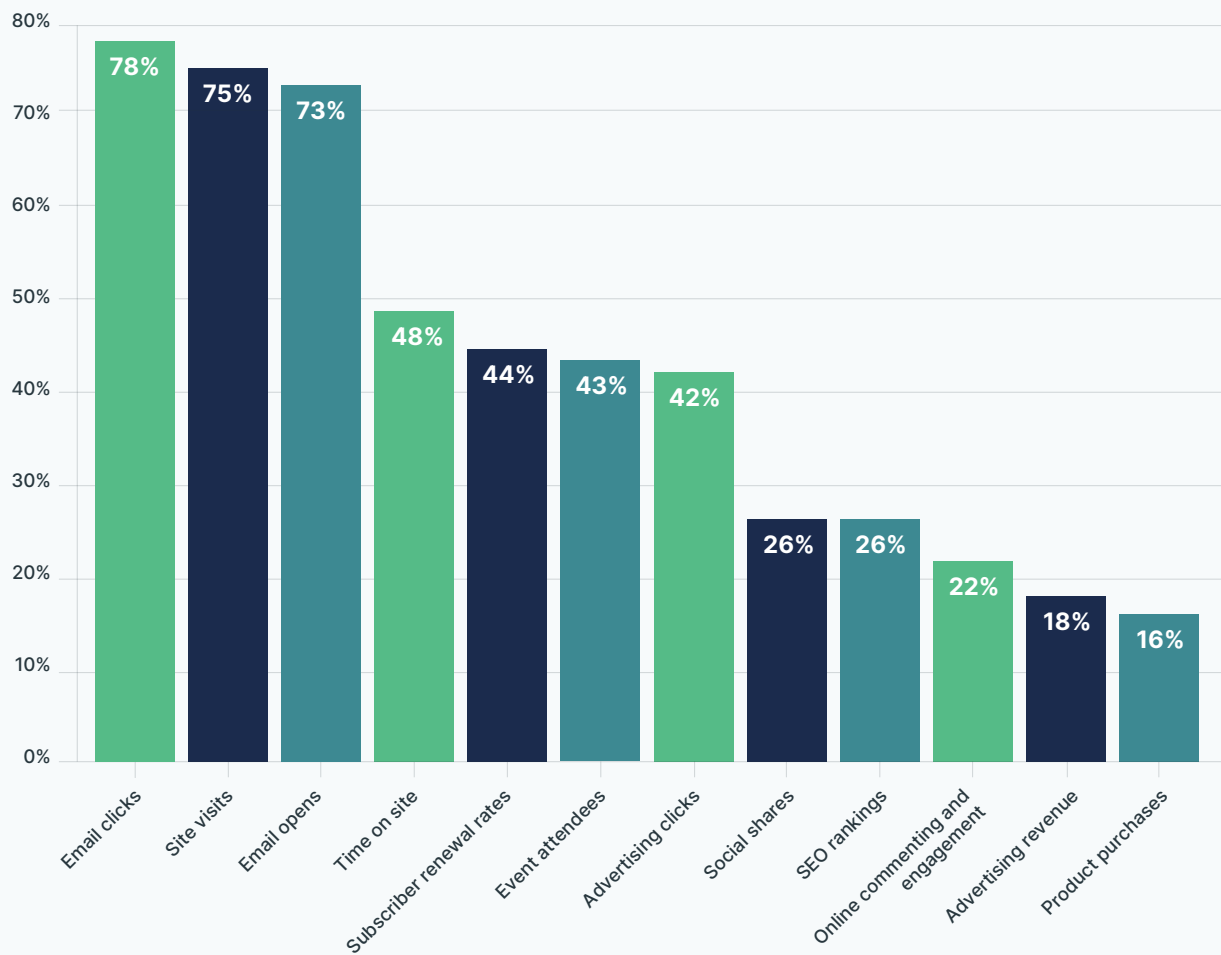
Respondents were twice as likely to track “breadth” metrics like email opens, website visits, and email clicks than depth metrics such as time on site and renewal rates.

TLDR: Many media organizations are basing their audience strategies on imprecise, surface-level measurements, rather than accounting for engagement across every channel.

What does that mean for you? And what should you track? There’s no one-size-fits-all solution. So we’re presenting frameworks that companies like yours have used to define, operationalize and improve audience engagement.

### What metrics do you use to define audience engagement?

Respondents could select all that applied.



**Prioritize engagement goals with a matrix:** Media organizations need to balance traffic with engagement. But sometimes, those goals are mutually exclusive. How can you balance those competing goals without shortchanging one?

**The Financial Times did this by creating a matrix combining two metrics — page views and “quality reads,”** essentially, time on site. They kept pieces that excelled on one or both of these dimensions — and axed the rest. This model helped FT produce 15% fewer articles without a meaningful drop in traffic or engagement.

**Create a 360-degree view of audience engagement with lead scoring:** Many media companies want to measure engagement more holistically, but they lack the tools to do so.

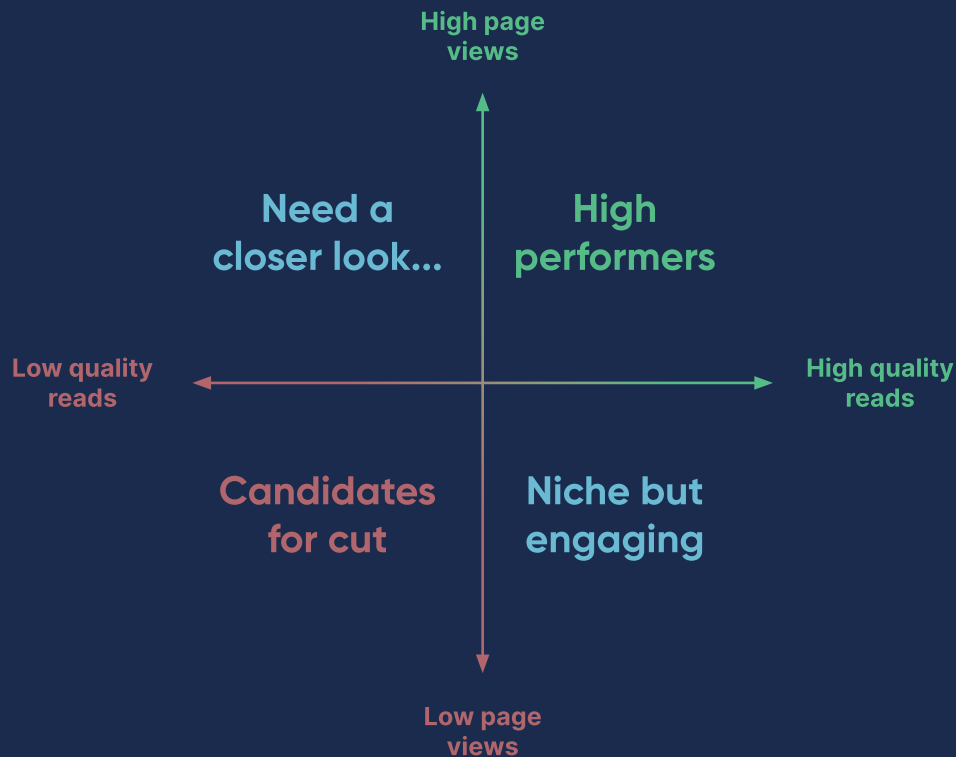
One possible solution: lead scoring. The right model will account for someone’s interactions across every channel (not just email and website), the depth and momentum of their engagement, the number of engagements, and more.

This way, you can see how each person is engaging across every channel and, even better, find the audience members who’ll drive real results for you.

**Prioritize regularity over volume:** Conventional wisdom says that to maximize subscriptions, you want to optimize for pageviews and time on site. But Northwestern University research contradicts this: They found that **reader regularity — not the number of visits or time on site — was the best predictor of a paid subscription.** Increases in page views and time spent were negatively correlated with subscribers and revenue.

The report recommends improving regularity by creating differentiated content and community-led experiences, as well as designing content for your audience’s content consumption patterns. So if you want more subscriptions, promote habit-building rather than optimizing for any one engagement metric.

### Prioritizing Engagement Goals: Page Views v. Quality Reads



Source: The Financial Times

# Audience marketing technology and investments

Technology can make or break an audience strategy. **As much as 71 percent of the impact of business transformations depends on technology**, according to McKinsey research.

Choose the wrong tools, and you'll spend more time managing your data and resolving your tech issues than growing your audience. This doesn't just create busy work; it also makes your business less competitive and successful over time. Another McKinsey report found that **technical debt can account for 20 to 40 percent of technology budgets and significantly slow the pace of development**.

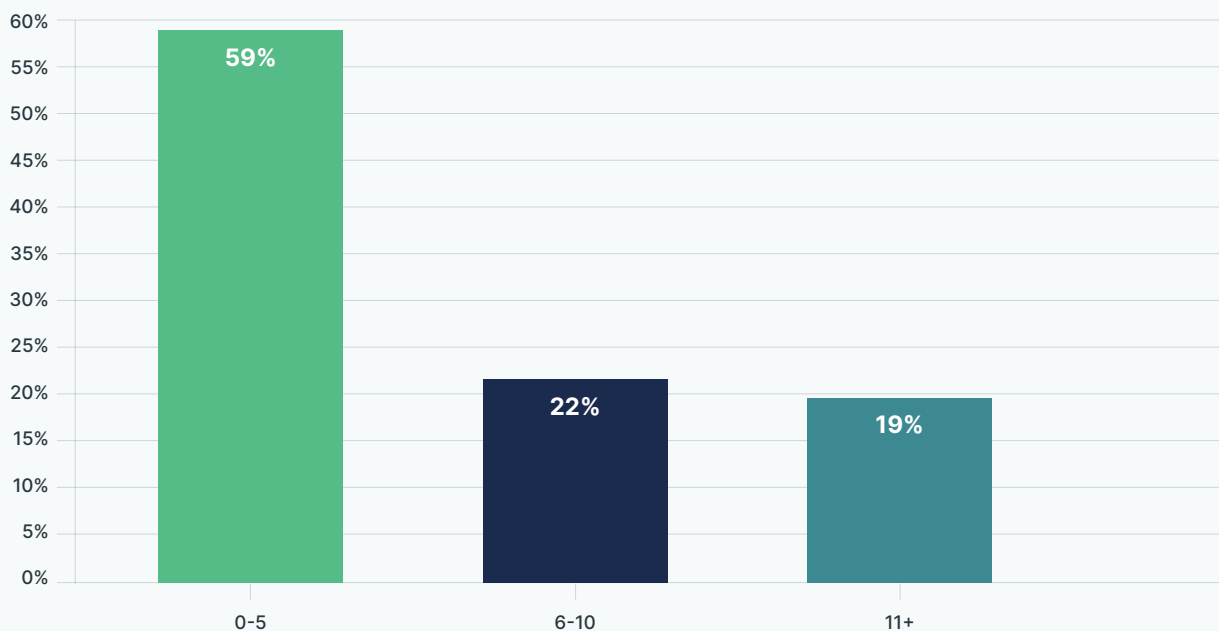
With these next few survey questions, we'll see how media and audience teams are using technology — and whether their tech stack is an asset or an albatross.

## Siloed data is keeping teams from actually reaching their audiences

The more time you spend managing your audience data, the less you have to determine what it means. So you definitely can't use it to personalize your content, segment your audience, and drive engagement.

To see how widespread this problem is, we asked our audience how much time their teams spent on what we called "data janitorial tasks," like cleaning and scrubbing lists, pulling segments, compiling spreadsheets, creating graphics for internal presentations, etc. (in other words: managing their data rather than using it.).

**How many cumulative hours per week does your team spend on "data janitorial" tasks, like cleaning audience lists or uploading/transferring data between tools?**



About 60% of respondents say their audience team spends five hours or less on data janitorial tasks. But almost half of our respondents spend 5+ hours — more than half a workday — on these tasks. **So, if you've got five people on your audience team, they could spend 25 hours a week just on this kind of busy work. Not good.**

That carries a massive opportunity cost. Imagine what you could do if you reduced this effort by half, then redirected that time to creating content, launching a new product line, or turning insights into offers.

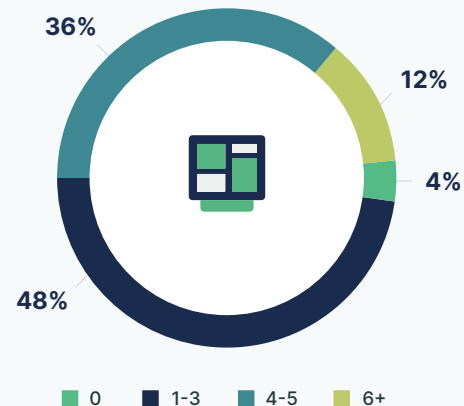
But to solve the problem, we need to address a root cause uncovered in follow-up conversations — tech bloat. In the survey, we wanted to see how many tools our respondents are using to manage their audience data. We found that 47% of respondents have between 0 and 3 tools to manage, develop, and optimize their audience, whereas 53% use 4 or more.

So start by reviewing your top business priorities (attracting more leads, maximizing revenue, etc.), then identify the tools that will best help you reach each goal. This bottom-up approach will help you buy your technology more intentionally.

Most likely, you'll realize you need to streamline your stack in some way. Take control of your technology with these tips:

- **Simplify your tech stack:** Once you have a better picture of your technical needs, start streamlining your tech. Here's where to start:
  - Conduct a tech audit: Data silos are typically caused by organizational silos. Each department sees a problem and buys some tech to solve it, often without checking with other teams to see if they already have a tool that can meet those needs. Understand what you've got and what's contributing value with a tech audit. As you go, watch out for these signs that your tech stack is setting you back:
  - Data is siloed and functions overlap.
  - You're constantly fixing bugs and managing problems related to integrations.
  - You're losing employees over it. 85% of professionals state they would leave their jobs due to dissatisfaction with the software and tools they have to use.
  - Your budget has a line item dedicated to tech and another for fixing the tech you just bought. A McKinsey report found that 30% of CIOs believed they were using more than 20% of their budget to resolve issues created by tech debt.

### How many audience marketing and database tools does your team use today to manage, develop, and optimize the value of your audience?



- **Prioritize integrated solutions:** The less tech you need to run a campaign, the less likely it'll be derailed by an untimely software bug, data silos, or simply not knowing how one of the tools works. And there's fewer vendors and contracts you have to manage.
- **Scale for your present and future state:** Obviously, a two-person company doesn't need Jira for project management, and a 20-person team can't manage audience data out of a Google sheet. You know your tech needs to fit your current company needs.
 

But also anticipate your future needs as you look for new tools. Look for tools that'll remain on-budget as your team scales. This way, you won't get locked into a major price increase once your audience grows to a certain point, double your spend once you start needing extra host licenses, or need to switch tools upon realizing you've outgrown your technology.
- **Choose vendors that prioritize onboarding:** A hands-on provider will typically cost more upfront, but the extra training will help you master your use cases more quickly and maximize ROI in the long run. That's especially important if your dev team doesn't have time to assist with audience development tasks.
- **Monitor your tech portfolio quarterly:** Some tools will add features that could make others redundant. Conduct a regular audit to catch these changes and adjust your tech spend accordingly.

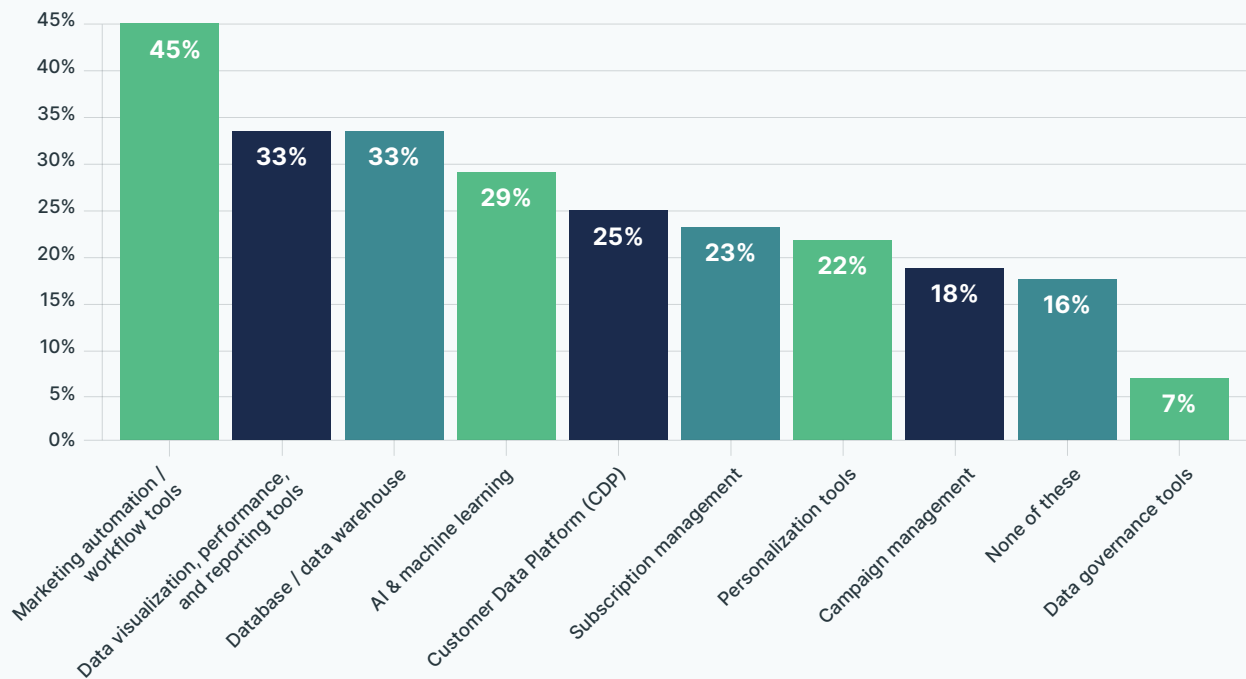
## Media companies plan to invest in workflow and data management and visualization tools this year

So how are companies planning to solve their tech concerns? Perhaps unsurprisingly, workflow tools and data visualization are the two biggest technology investment priorities for media companies.

40% of respondents said they planned to buy marketing automation or workflow tools in the next year, and 30% reported they wanted to invest in data visualization, reporting and database tools.

### What are your planned technology investment priorities for the next 12 months?

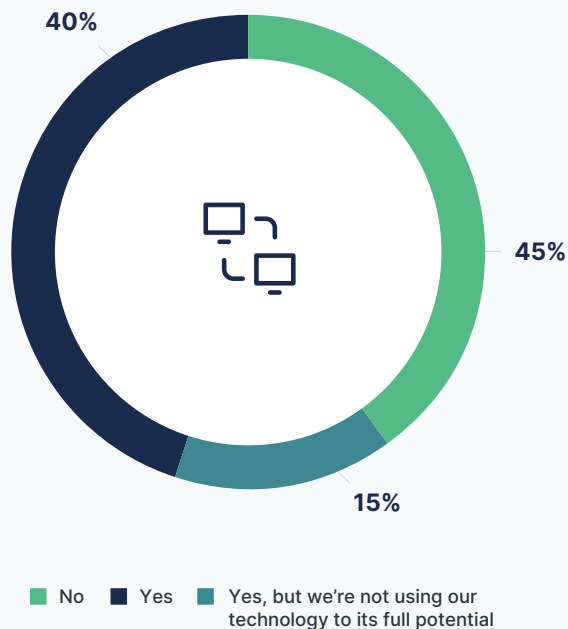
Respondents could select all that applied.



## The answer isn't more tech, but rather the right tech for your media business

Most of our respondents said they don't have the right technology to reach their audience goals. Almost half said they don't have the right technology. Another 40% said they have the technology, but they're not using it to its fullest potential.

### Do you feel your organization has the right technology in place to manage your audience across your entire organization?



**The takeaway:** Media and audience teams are using more tools than ever, but they have less to show for it.



### Tech can't save you from **bad strategy**.

Worse, bad tech can set you back even further. If you invest in a shiny object without considering how it'll fit into your broader audience development work, all you've done is create another data silo.

So you're not just failing to improve your business. You're introducing new privacy issues, complicating your workflows even more, and ultimately getting even further away from the work of connecting with your audience.

**The solution:** Consider using an integrated audience data platform to grow, engage and activate your audience from one place. That way, you can spend less time managing your data and workflows and refocus on what really matters — your audience.

# Audience is your best investment

Your audience is your insurance policy against the unpredictable media landscape. Create a passionate and loyal community that'll follow you across channels, and you'll be better prepared to navigate platform changes, declining social traffic, market downturns, and whatever else the media world throws at you.

Media companies are working hard to balance opportunities and challenges. But as our research has shown, most media and audience teams lack the plan, resources, first-party data generation, and connected workflows to execute.

That's a problem. Without a plan, you risk making short-term moves that get fleeting results at the expense of long-term audience development (i.e., sending a daily newsletter to your entire list for "traction," failing to segment, spamming audiences with irrelevant content and ultimately getting unsubscribes and deliverability issues).

So ditch the quick fixes and double down on fundamentals. **That includes:**

- **Keep your audience at the forefront – and develop the content and data collection mechanisms you need to stay connected with their needs.** Learn more about your audience by collecting first-party data from a variety of online and offline sources. Combine this with direct audience feedback, whether through polls and surveys, networking dinners, events and other in-person interactions. Use those insights to build more precise segments and create more personalized content and offers.
- **Focus on connecting data and workflows to understand and dazzle your audience.** Today's winners aren't the companies that can do the most, but the ones that can make the right content at the right time. Simplify your workflows by prioritizing integrated audience technology solutions and democratizing access to insights wherever possible.



"The last era of consumer media was marked by a series of growth hacks in order to secure distribution, whether that was SEO or distributed media tactics on Facebook. Intentional audiences and habits are far more durable. The tradeoff – and there is always a tradeoff, and anybody who says there isn't is a passive-income grifter who will likely try to sell you some kind of online course – is that it will take a lot longer than you expect or would like."

**Brian Morrissey**  
Founder of The Rebooting

- **Shiny objects and shortcuts won't save the day — but a formal audience development strategy can.** If you're doing it right, building strategy is hard, gradual and incremental work. It won't yield instant results and or look good on a PowerPoint deck.

But like any other investment, you need to be patient. Keep making deposits in your audience and it'll pay off in the form of a more passionate audience and more profitable business.



## About Omeda

Omeda is a SaaS provider delivering the platform and expertise required to maximize the value of media and publishing businesses' most critical asset — their audience. The platform of choice for B2B and B2C professionals, Omeda's integrated solution, which includes a customer data platform, workflow automation, email automation, and subscription management, provides the professional tools and controls required to maximize a media business' diverse revenue streams, power 24/7 audience development, and orchestrate precise targeting for measurable results. Our platform is built by passionate audience pros, workflow masters, and data nerds who partner with our customers to grow and thrive in a disruptive media world.

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