

In-House SEO vs. Agency Outsourcing

The Benefits of Both Compared

In 2020, businesses spent nearly [\\$47.5 billion on SEO](#) or SEO-related products and services. If one thing became clear to us in 2020, it's that the demand for search marketing became higher than ever. As the Coronavirus pandemic swept the globe, shelter-in-place restrictions and travel bans drove a great deal of uncertainty. When consumers had a question or needed to find a solution to a problem, they turned to search.



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— The Business Research Company

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With so many brands and online publishers creating content and websites competing for attention, to increase your chances of being seen and clicked, your website or content must appear close to the top of the rankings for relevant searches.

Now, as to how you can actually make that happen, there is debate as to which is best: managing your SEO in-house or outsourcing to an SEO agency?

As a foundation or core element of [digital marketing](#), some will suggest you keep core ownership of this valuable channel in-house. However, there are certainly benefits to outsourcing SEO that can help make your program more efficient and successful.

In this article, you will learn more about each of these models — in-house SEO vs. outsourced SEO — and the benefits of each one. But first, what is at stake here?

SEO is Now Front and Center of Digital Strategies

COVID and the resulting need to better understand consumer behavior have accelerated the shift to digital. Digital channels now account for almost 80% of budgets, with 59% going towards owned and earned digital media such as websites, SEO, and mobile marketing (source: [Gartner](#))

Increasingly, brands recognize the value of search data and insights to every facet of the digital marketing program. In fact, search insights are about as close to a real-time representation of the customer's voice as you can get. Search and Digital



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Marketers alike are using SEO and associated data as an [invaluable business intelligence tool](#).

As consumers search for solutions, browse the result pages and engage with different types of content, they are directly (via search queries) and indirectly (via behavioral signals) communicating valuable information to brands.

Are you listening?

This recognition of the [value of SEO](#) has elevated the practice from a dubious practice of manipulation to achieve search rankings to a cornerstone of modern-day digital marketing.

Interest in SEO services and the demand for skilled SEO professionals has reached an all-time high.

Digital Marketers are expected to understand the basics of SEO and how to work with its experts. At

BrightEdge, we have found that our users are not just SEO professionals but are also [Digital Marketers](#).

Today, SEO is front and center in digital marketing campaigns across paid, social, content, and email.

Search is not only a major consideration for any digital campaign, but often provides the data to inform engagement in other channels.

It's the main touchpoint along just about every customer's journey.

In addition to the increased informational needs of pandemic-affected consumers and the necessity for digitally enabled transactions to accommodate a stay-at-home world, the value of earned and owned media assets has grown. The need to keep a [daily pulse](#) of market and search trends in tandem has become a necessity.

Even so, brands are being asked to do more with less. This is where the agency vs. in-house SEO conversation often comes up in the boardroom: should we outsource some of this? Are we able to find the right people in-house to strategize and execute on our SEO and digital goals, or should we enlist the help of an agency?

Let's look at the benefits of each approach in turn.

Benefits of In-House SEO Management

Having your SEO operations in-house can bring several advantages. In fact, Search Engine Journal reports that according to the Digiday and Bannerflow, over [90% of brands](#) are moving many elements of their digital marketing in-house.

1. Strong internal relationships

In-house SEO is a crucial function that can and should touch many other teams.

Development, Marketing, Commercial, Advertising, and Sales are just a few of the teams and departments that can benefit from close collaboration with SEO. By investing in SEO in-house, you will be ensuring this is an organizational investment and building that knowledge base and those relationships for the future.



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2. Ease of resource allocation

Keeping SEO in-house gives you an internal project owner with a more precise line of sight into the goals and objectives of other in-house teams than an agency might have. You can be more fluid in moving resources around to focus on SEO, notably in areas of [migration](#) and product launches.

3. Ownership of your data

Outsourcing SEO can result in some loss of ownership of or control over your data. With the rise of first-party data and increased [data security](#), brands need to own their data. Given that SEO is your largest owned media channel, you want to make sure you understand the implications of search data ownership and access.

4. Deeper business knowledge

Investing in developing SEO talent in-house can also ensure that the discipline of SEO is closer to your [brand strategy](#). As an internal team, your SEO pros can create a deeper understanding of your brand guidelines, product and governance model, and where the company is heading. An in-house team is constantly on the lookout for new ways that SEO technology, market trends, and other external factors can offer opportunities for your brand.

According to the [Boston Consulting Group](#), one of the biggest drivers of digital maturity — and marketing results — is the use of first-party data.

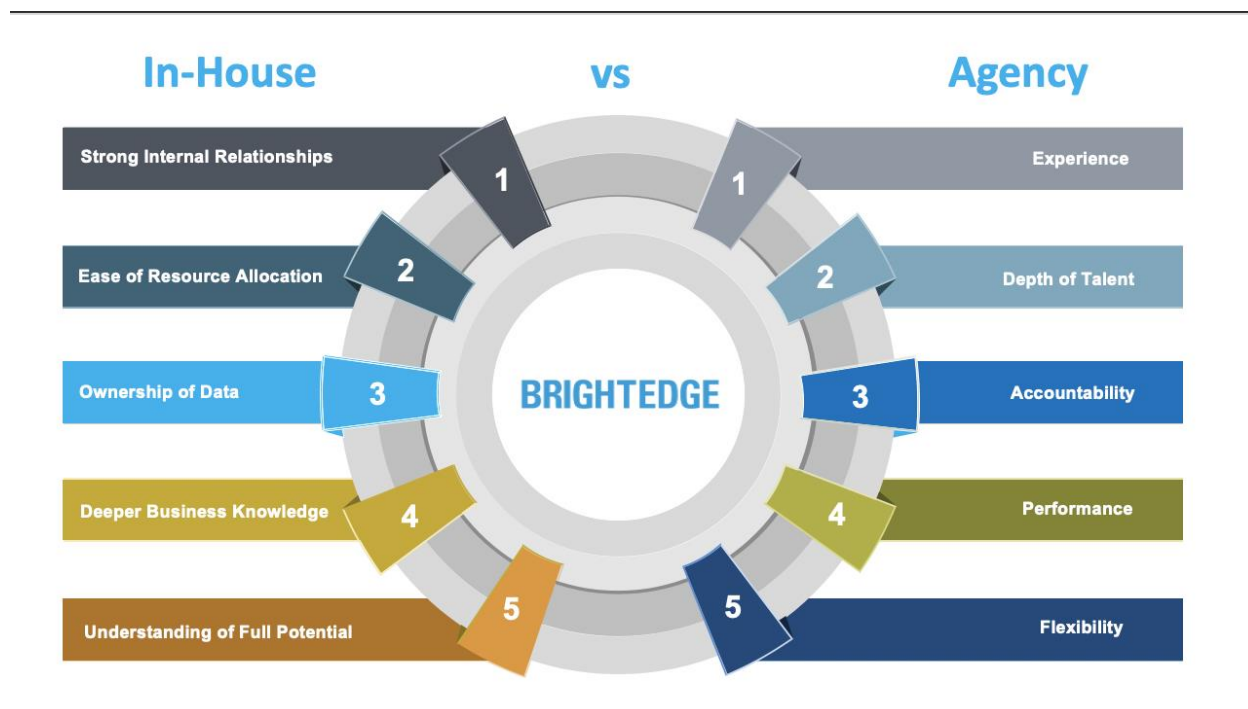
5. More understanding of the full potential

Typically, brands will naturally increase their investment in SEO each year as the strategy is refined and benefits become more tangible. Having an in-house evangelist communicating wins across the organization can help all, from [scaling content](#), to digital marketing, to the C-suite. It helps all these groups to better understand the opportunities inherent to a well-run, in-house SEO program.

In your first year of in-house SEO, you may be looking for [quick wins](#), and to as well as establish a basic foundational knowledge, process, and systems of measurement. In year two, you can expect greater involvement and interest from other cross-departmental stakeholders and departments. By year three, you should have established elements of capacity planning and a larger SEO team established to ensure your business is not reliant on one person.

Sounds great, right? So why are SEO agencies even a thing?

The fact is, there are many different facets to a holistic [SEO \(and PPC\)](#) program: link building, content creation, technical SEO and site architecture, personalization, market research, and data analysis, among them. Add local SEO or enterprise-level scale to the mix, and you can see that it takes specialized skills and knowledge to fuel a comprehensive SEO program and build an [SEO center of excellence](#).



Benefits of Using an Agency

Bringing on an agency can give you access to people, tools, and technology that might otherwise be unattainable or unaffordable to keep in-house. Here are a few of the benefits of the agency.

1. Experience

Agencies tend to have access to team members and contractors with deep and varied sector experience. Having a range of other customers gives agencies a broader perspective on the market. Conversely, in-house teams can be siloed and lack [insight](#) into the more macro search trends happening in your business or industry category.

2. Depth of Talent

While SEO is growing, the depth of talent is still low. If you are not based in a major city and have limited access to talent, an agency with solid talent to support you for the short or long term can be incredibly beneficial. A good agency will have talent in [different facets of digital](#), from highly technical SEOs to innovative content creators. This will help you get an array of SEO talent touching your program and ensure you are not limited to one profile.

3. Accountability

One of the mistakes organizations make is accountability. By hiring an SEO manager, leadership may feel they have ticked the SEO box even if the position is limited in accountability and is not set up for success. Agreements with agencies tend to have clearly defined terms of engagement and success metrics.

4. Performance

As part of this, a good SEO agency is typically open to talking [performance metrics](#). These can include service, delivery as well as outcomes. Don't go too far, though — strictly performance models in SEO are dangerous and have many flaws.

5. Flexibility

Finally, one of the most significant benefits a good SEO agency can provide is the flexibility they bring your marketing program. Providing coverage for resource gaps and working on a project basis can help ensure your operating costs are not inflated by the cost of hiring.

A Hybrid Approach Could be the Answer

Agencies add value, and there are benefits to having an in-house SEO team. Choosing one or the other is often too simplistic. You want to retain ownership of the SEO program and [set strategy to scale in-house](#), then outsource components of that to an agency to broaden your skills and toolset.

As you work with your agency, have a two to a three-year vision of how the program will evolve and grow. Using a retainer model can give you flexibility as your strategy changes.

Not sure how to get started?

Conduct a SWOT assessment of your current talent, organization, and SEO program. Evaluate the program's maturity. What tools or skills would improve your SEO performance? What capabilities and resources do you lack in-house?

These findings will help shape an effective brief so you can find the right SEO agency to support your in-house team.

At BrightEdge we work many with agencies via a hybrid approach. Within this approach you should look how your in-house team can work efficiently through processes and technology whilst using your agency hours strategically to focus on deliverables you don't have capabilities or capacity to manage in-house.

The key to success is having a fluid, flexible and focused approach to your partnership as it changes through the year.

To find out more about BrightEdge solutions, email your designated CSM at BrightEdge.

About BrightEdge

BrightEdge, the global leader in enterprise organic search and content performance, empowers marketers to transform online content into business results, such as traffic, conversions, and revenue. The BrightEdge S3 platform is powered by a sophisticated deep learning engine and is the only company capable of web-wide, real-time measurement of content engagement across all digital channels, including search, social, and mobile. BrightEdge's 1,500+ customers include global brands such as 3M, Microsoft, and Nike, as well as 57 of the Fortune 100. The company has eight offices worldwide and is headquartered in Foster City, California.