REDSUN

INDEPENDENT MARKET RESEARCH

THE STATE OF RECRUITMENT MARKETING

The “That’ll Do” Line

How small recruitment agencies actually market themselves, and the point where the average agency stops investing.

A FIRST-PARTY AUDIT OF 391 UK & US RECRUITMENT AGENCIES · ≤50 EMPLOYEES · JUNE 2026

CONTENTS

Inside this report

01	Executive summary	04
02	The maturity curve	05
03	The buyer-journey funnel	06
04	Signal adoption	07
05	The technology stack	08
06	Website platform & signals of life	09
07	Sector benchmark	10
08	What the research suggests	11
09	Self-audit scorecard	12
10	Methodology	13
11	Data sources & validation	14
12	Codebook	15

THE HEADLINE NUMBERS

27.9 / 100	Average marketing-maturity score across all 391 agencies
54%	sit at Tier 1 Foundations and go no further
7%	are optimised to be cited by AI answer engines
1%	can tell which companies are visiting the site
0	agencies reached Tier 4, the growth engine

FOREWORD

Why we built this

Every recruitment agency has a website. Very few can tell you what it actually does for them.

There is no published benchmark for how small recruitment agencies market themselves, so we built the first one. In June 2026 we audited 391 agencies across the UK and US, every one with 50 employees or fewer, against 34 marketing signals read directly from their live websites: website and SEO, lead-capture, paid and marketing technology, visitor identification, and answer-engine optimisation (AEO).

We deliberately excluded the global staffing brands. The interesting question is not what the biggest players do. It is the moment the typical owner-led agency decides its marketing is good enough and stops. That moment turns out to be remarkably consistent, and it has a shape.

What we found was not a spread of strong and weak marketers. It was a wall. The average agency builds a decent-looking website that never tracks or captures the demand it relies on, then holds there. This report describes that wall, where each sector sits against it, and the few capabilities that separate the 18% who climb past it.

Every figure here is reproducible. The full methodology, data sources and the complete signal codebook are published at the back so any number can be checked, challenged or rebuilt from the same evidence.

THE INSTRUMENT

391 AGENCIES AUDITED
34 MARKETING SIGNALS
5 WEIGHTED CATEGORIES
8 RECRUITMENT SECTORS
2 MARKETS · UK + US
0–100 MATURITY SCALE
5 MATURITY TIERS

Signals are binary (present / absent) and read from each site's rendered homepage and key inner pages. Category scores combine into a single 0–100 maturity score and a five-tier band. See **Methodology** (p.13) and **Codebook** (p.15).

01 · EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What we found

27.9

AVG SCORE / 100

Almost the whole sector settles for the same thing: a decent-looking website that never tracks or captures the demand it relies on.

01 **The average agency scores 27.9 / 100.**

99% sit at Tier 2 or below; just 3 of 391 reach Tier 3 and none reach Tier 4.

02 **The plateau lands in the same place for almost everyone.**

A website, analytics and a contact form, then the spending stops. 54% of agencies sit exactly there, at Tier 1 Foundations.

03 **Adoption collapses the moment marketing needs intent rather than a quick install.**

Visitor-identification tools 1%, marketing automation 7%, gated content 2%.

04 **Being citable by AI answer engines is open ground.**

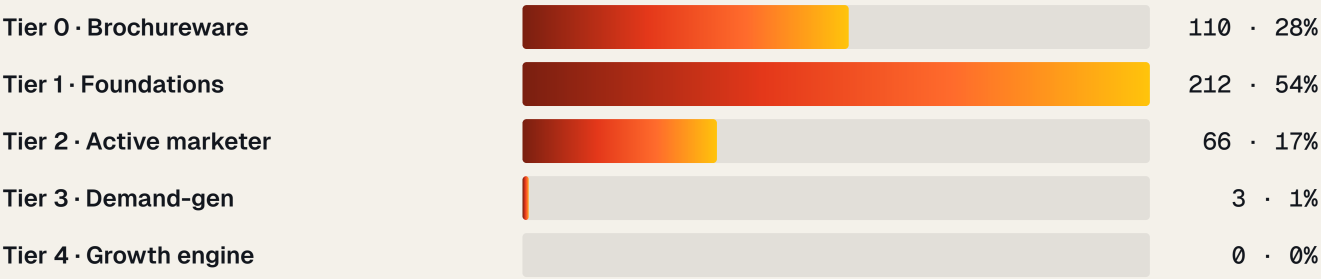
AEO readiness sits at 7% overall, and in low single digits on the signals that matter. Only one sector reaches double figures.

05 **The tech recruiters come last.**

Engineering/Construction (32.4) and Finance/Accounting (32.3) lead; IT/Tech (22.9) trails, and even the strongest sector still averages a Tier 1 score.

02 · THE MATURITY CURVE

Where agencies land, 0–100



Average maturity across all 391 agencies is **27.9 / 100**. The distribution looks like a wall at Tier 1, with a sharp drop into the tiers where a website starts to generate pipeline.

0 · Brochureware 0-20	A site exists; little beyond SSL and mobile. No real analytics, capture or content.
1 · Foundations 21-40	Analytics, a contact form, basic SEO. Functional but passive, waiting for inbound it never sees.
2 · Active marketer 41-60	Content cadence, social pixels, a genuine lead form, schema. Credible, still top-of-funnel.
3 · Demand-gen 61-80	Visitor identification, marketing automation, gated content, retargeting. The site becomes a pipeline.
4 · Growth engine 81-100	Full martech plus AEO, multi-channel, qualifying forms. Findable by AI and self-optimising.

03 · THE BUYER-JOURNEY FUNNEL

% reaching each stage

Lead tracking 53% → identification 1%

Half of all agencies can watch traffic arrive; almost none find out who it was. This is the single widest gap in the dataset.

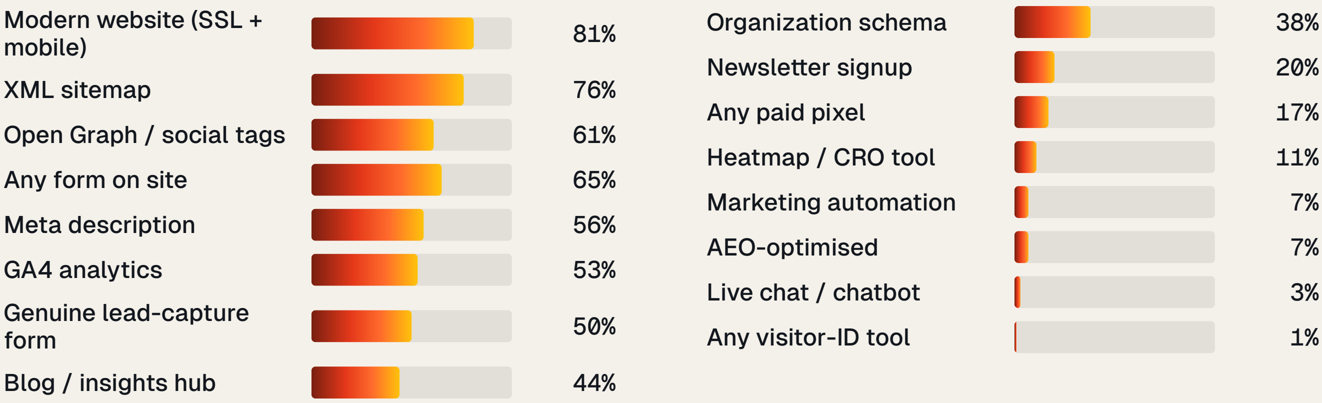
The journey rarely reaches conversion

Only ~2% run a structured conversion asset, so for most agencies a contact form catches whatever demand it can, if anything does.

Each stage is matched to its nearest directly-observable website signal (shown in mono). Stages are measured from rendered site code and content, not self-reported.

04 · SIGNAL ADOPTION

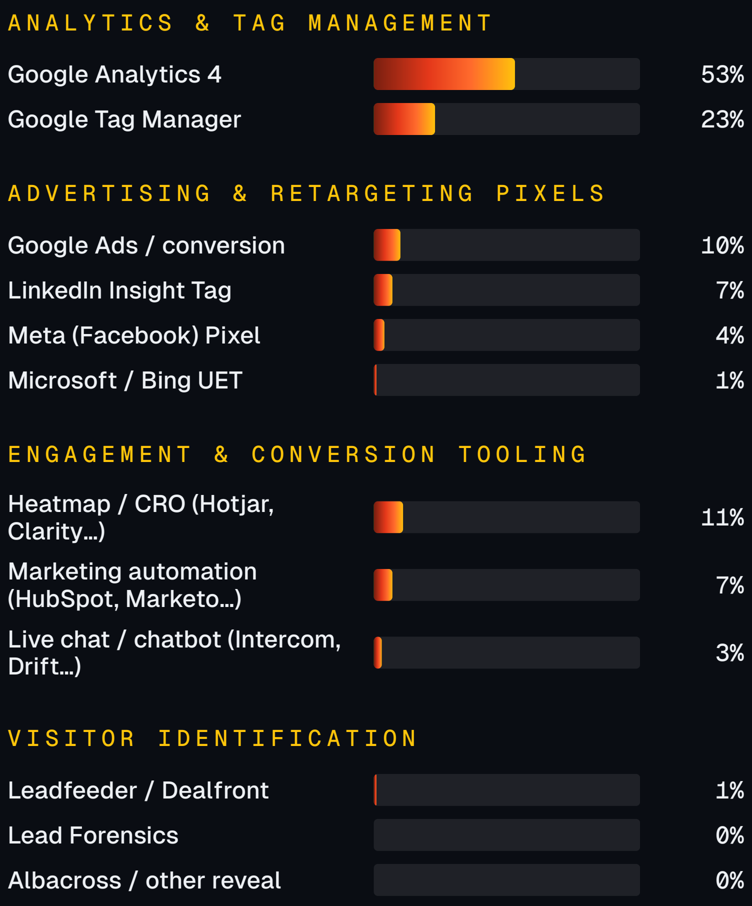
What 391 agencies actually have



The foundations are widespread. Most agencies have a modern site, over half run analytics, and half have a real lead-capture form. Everything that turns a website into a measurable, demand-capturing channel is rare: automation, visitor identification and AEO all sit in single digits. The gap between “has a website” and “has a marketing system” is the whole story of this dataset.

05 · THE TECHNOLOGY STACK

Which providers are installed



Behind every maturity score is a stack of specific tools. Analytics is the one habit that stuck, with GA4 on 53% of sites. Beyond measurement the stack thins out fast.

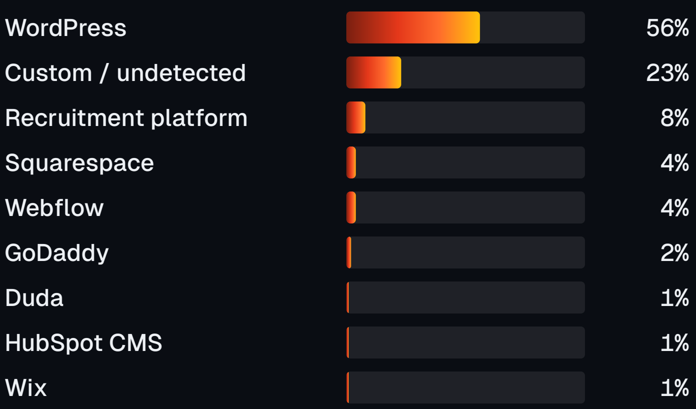
Advertising pixels stay rare. The tools that turn anonymous traffic into named pipeline, visitor-identification from Leadfeeder, Lead Forensics and Albacross, appear on just 4 sites in the whole sample of 391.

Percentages are share of all 391 audited sites with each provider's signature detected in rendered page code. Category-level detection; see the Codebook (p.15) for exact signatures.

06 · WEBSITE PLATFORM & SIGNALS OF LIFE

Who builds these sites

PLATFORM MIX · FULL CENSUS



WordPress runs over half of all sites. Just under a quarter are bespoke or can't be fingerprinted from rendered markup; only 8% run a purpose-built recruitment platform. The rest split across Squarespace, Webflow and SMB builders (GoDaddy, Duda, Wix).

Outsourced by default

Most sites run a custom or off-the-shelf theme rather than a modern design tool. 38% sit behind a managed host or CDN (26% Cloudflare), yet 49% set no security headers at all, and 46% have no cookie-consent layer.

Where an applicant-tracking system was visible, **Bullhorn, JobDiva** led. For most of these firms the applicant tracking system is the only serious software layer, and marketing tooling barely features.

ON A COMPETITOR RECRUITMENT PLATFORM

SourceFlow 10 · **Volcanic (Access)** 7 · **Venn / Vennture** 6 · **Shazamme** 5 · **HotLizard** 1 · **RecruiterWEB** 1

8% of agencies already run a named recruitment website platform. The rest are the open market.

SIGNALS OF LIFE · IS ANYONE KEEPING IT UP?

66%
have a live vacancies page

22%
have no social presence at all

22%
posted a blog since 2025

98%
don't block AI crawlers

On AEO the ground is unclaimed: **98%** of sites leave AI crawlers unblocked, and just **7%** are built to be cited by them.

FULL CENSUS · 391 SITES CRAWLED VIA enrich_platform.py · 367 RESPONDED, 24 UNREACHABLE AT AUDIT TIME. BEHAVIOURAL FIGURES ARE SHARE OF RESPONDING SITES; CONTENT-FRESHNESS IS BEST-EFFORT (MACHINE-READABLE POST DATES).

07 · SECTOR BENCHMARK

Maturity by specialism

SECTOR	N	AVG	WEB	BLOG	GA4	PAID	VIS-ID	LEAD	AEO
Engineering / Construction	39	32.4	92%	49%	46%	21%	0%	69%	5%
Finance / Accounting	41	32.3	95%	54%	76%	22%	2%	46%	2%
Sales / Marketing	83	30.0	72%	52%	63%	16%	1%	54%	7%
Legal	44	28.9	89%	48%	61%	5%	0%	52%	9%
Industrial / Logistics	26	27.4	69%	27%	62%	23%	0%	54%	0%
Healthcare / Life Sciences	44	26.2	80%	36%	43%	20%	0%	45%	9%
Exec / Generalist	30	25.3	70%	50%	43%	13%	0%	37%	17%
IT / Tech	84	22.9	80%	36%	37%	17%	2%	43%	5%

Read across a row to compare a sector. Visitor identification never exceeds 2% in any sector; AEO reaches double figures in only one of the eight sectors. IT/Tech, the agencies placing the very people who build this technology, sit at the bottom of the table, while the hands-on sectors of Engineering and Finance lead. Even so, every sector average lands inside Tier 1 Foundations. The plateau is universal, and only the starting line moves.

Web = HTTPS + mobile responsive · Paid = any advertising/retargeting pixel · Vis-ID = any visitor-identification tool · Lead = genuine lead-capture form · AEO = flagged AEO-optimised.

08 · WHAT THE RESEARCH SUGGESTS

For marketing leaders

01 **Benchmark honestly.**

The realistic peer set for a small agency is other small agencies, not the global staffing brands. Against that peer set a Tier 1 Foundations site is normal, and there is no shame in it. The real question is whether to stay there.

02 **The differentiators are few and consistent.**

Across the minority that progress, the same four capabilities recur: measuring demand (analytics), capturing it actively (forms and visitor-ID), nurturing it (automation) and being findable by AI (AEO). Four things, done well, and nothing more.

03 **The gap is knowing who is on the site.**

Most agencies already attract relevant visitors. The unrealised value is knowing which companies and candidates are on the site before a form is ever submitted.

04 **AEO is the clearest first-mover position.**

With near-zero adoption sector-wide, the first agencies in each niche to structure content for AI answer engines face an open field.

05 **Sector shapes the starting point.**

In IT/Tech recruitment the bar among peers is unusually low; in Finance or Engineering it is higher, though still firmly inside Foundations. Know which start line you are on.

09 · SELF-AUDIT SCORECARD

How does your site compare?

Tick what your site has today. The figure beside each item is the share of all 391 audited agencies that have it. An empty box next to a low number is an easy win few of your peers have made; an empty box next to a high number is something most already have.

01 · WEBSITE & SEO

- Modern website (SSL + mobile) — 81% have it
- Meta description — 56% have it
- XML sitemap — 76% have it
- Organization schema — 38% have it
- Blog / insights hub — 44% have it

02 · LEAD CAPTURE

- Any enquiry form — 65% have it
- Genuine lead-capture form — 50% have it
- Newsletter signup — 20% have it
- Gated content / lead magnet — 2% have it

03 · DEMAND & MARTECH

- GA4 analytics — 53% have it
- Google Tag Manager — 23% have it
- Any advertising pixel — 17% have it
- Marketing automation — 7% have it
- Heatmap / CRO tool — 11% have it
- Live chat / chatbot — 3% have it

04 · IDENTIFICATION

- Visitor-ID tool — 1% have it

05 · AEO READINESS

- FAQ / Q&A schema — 3% have it
- Article / BlogPosting schema — 7% have it
- llms.txt present — 0% have it
- Question-formatted headings — 41% have it

Score yourself: under 6 ticks = Tier 0–1 (Foundations) · 6–11 = Tier 2 (Active marketer) · 12+ with visitor-ID, automation and AEO = Tier 3–4, the top 1%.

10 · METHODOLOGY

How the study was built

Sample

391 recruitment agencies, UK and US, all ≤50 employees, across eight specialisms. Firmographics were sourced from Apollo.io (NAICS 5613, Employment Services) using sector keyword tags and the 1–10 and 11–50 employee bands, capped at ~50 per specialism. Global staffing groups were deliberately excluded.

Detection

Each site was assessed on 34 binary signals read from its rendered homepage and key inner pages (contact, blog, FAQ). Path files (robots.txt, sitemap.xml, llms.txt) were validated by content, not just status code. AEO readiness covers FAQ/Article schema, author / E-E-A-T markup, llms.txt and question-structured content.

Sector verification

Each agency's specialism was confirmed from its own website during the audit rather than trusting the firmographic tag alone.

Scoring model

Total score is a weighted sum of five signal groups, 0–100. Each group score is (signals present ÷ signals in group) × group weight.

Website & SEO	25 pts
Paid & martech	25 pts
AEO readiness	20 pts
Lead-capture forms	15 pts
Visitor-ID / lead-gen	15 pts

TIER BANDS

TIER 0	0-20	BROCHUREWARE
TIER 1	21-40	FOUNDATIONS
TIER 2	41-60	ACTIVE MARKETER
TIER 3	61-80	DEMAND-GEN
TIER 4	81-100	GROWTH ENGINE

11 · DATA SOURCES & VALIDATION

Where the numbers come from

This is first-party research. Nothing here is survey-reported or bought in. Every figure traces back to a signal read from a named agency's live website, following a documented rule.

Firmographic frame	Apollo.io organisation search	NAICS 5613 (Employment Services) + sector keyword tags; employee bands 1–10 and 11–50; capped ~50 / specialism; exported June 2026.
Sample size	391 agencies	US 203, UK 158, country not returned for 30 (retained on website sector-verification).
Signal collection	First-party website audit	34 binary signals read from rendered homepage + inner pages; path & schema files validated by content.
Provider detection	Script / markup signatures	Each tool detected by documented signature in page code (e.g. gtag G-, snap.licdn.com, leadforensics). See Codebook p.15.
Scoring	Fixed weighted model	Five groups, 0–100, deterministic. Re-applying the codebook to the same sites reproduces each score within rounding.

GEOGRAPHIC SPLIT

United States	203
United Kingdom	158
Country unspecified	30

LIMITATIONS

Tracking tags are read at homepage load, so consent-gated tags may be undercounted; site-wide tags (analytics, pixels, visitor-ID) are representative. Builder-default path files were excluded from AEO credit. Percentages are rounded. Sector counts reflect post-verification classification. Provider detection is category-level, not brand-attributed.

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PUBLISHED BY REDSUN · 391 AGENCIES AUDITED · JUNE 2026 · FIGURES MAY BE CITED WITH ATTRIBUTION.

12 · CODEBOOK

The signals in full

All 34 signals, their weight and the exact detection signature used so anyone can collect them the same way. This is the instrument behind every number in the report.

WEBSITE & SEO

1	**HTTPS / SSL**	2.5 pt	`URL resolves on https:// ; valid certificate`
2	**Mobile responsive**	2.5 pt	`<meta name=viewport ...> present`
3	**Meta description**	2.5 pt	`<meta name=description> present & non-empty`
4	**Optimised title tag**	2.5 pt	`<title> present, 10-65 chars, not default`
5	**Open Graph / social tags**	2.5 pt	`<meta property=og:*> present`
6	**Canonical tag**	2.5 pt	`<link rel=canonical> present`
7	**XML sitemap**	2.5 pt	`/sitemap.xml returns 200 & XML`
8	**robots.txt**	2.5 pt	`/robots.txt returns 200`
9	**Organization schema**	2.5 pt	`JSON-LD @type Organization/LocalBusiness`
10	**Blog / insights hub**	2.5 pt	`nav/link to /blog /insights /news /resources`

LEAD-CAPTURE FORMS

11	**Any form on site**	3 pt	`<form> element present`
12	**Genuine lead-capture form**	3 pt	`form with email + (name|phone|message), not just job-search/login`
13	**Gated / downloadable content**	3 pt	`whitepaper/report/guide behind a form or 'download' CTA + form`
14	**Newsletter signup**	3 pt	`email-only subscribe field / 'subscribe' CTA`
15	**Booking or multi-step form**	3 pt	`Calendly/booking embed OR multi-field qualifying form`

12 · CODEBOOK, CONTINUED

Paid, visitor-ID & AEO signals

PAID & MARTECH

16	Google Analytics 4	2.5 pt	gtag/js?id=G-XXXX or G- measurement id
17	Google Tag Manager	2.5 pt	googletagmanager.com/gtm.js?id=GTM-
18	Meta (Facebook) Pixel	2.5 pt	connect.facebook.net/.../fbevents.js or facebook.com/tr
19	LinkedIn Insight Tag	2.5 pt	snap.licdn.com / li.lms-analytics
20	Google Ads / conversion	2.5 pt	googleadservices.com or googleads.g.doubleclick.net
21	Microsoft/Bing UET	2.5 pt	bat.bing.com/bat.js
22	Marketing automation	2.5 pt	HubSpot(js.hs-scripts)/Marketo(munchkin)/Pardot/ActiveCampaign
23	Heatmap / CRO tool	2.5 pt	Hotjar / Microsoft Clarity / FullStory / Mouseflow
24	Live chat / chatbot	2.5 pt	Drift / Intercom / Tawk.to / HubSpot chat / Zendesk
25	Other retargeting pixel	2.5 pt	Twitter/X, TikTok, Quora, Reddit, Taboola pixels

VISITOR-ID / LEAD-GEN

26	Lead Forensics	5 pt	script src contains 'leadforensics'
27	Leadfeeder / Dealfront	5 pt	lfeeder.com / sc.lfeeder.com / dealfront
28	Albacross / other visitor-ID	5 pt	albacross / Visitor Queue / Warmly / Clearbit reveal

AEO READINESS

29	FAQ / Q&A schema	3.33 pt	JSON-LD @type FAQPage/QAPage/Question
30	Article / BlogPosting schema	3.33 pt	JSON-LD @type Article/BlogPosting/NewsArticle
31	Author / E-E-A-T markup	3.33 pt	Person schema author + visible bylines/bio
32	llms.txt present	3.33 pt	/llms.txt returns 200
33	Question-formatted headings	3.33 pt	⩾2 H2/H3 phrased as questions (how/what/why/...?)
34	Speakable / structured Q&A	3.33 pt	Speakable schema OR on-page FAQ/Q&A content blocks

REDSUN

INDEPENDENT MARKET RESEARCH

The line is where most agencies stop.

The average small recruitment agency scores 27.9 out of 100: a decent-looking website that never tracks or captures the demand it relies on. The few that cross the line do a short, consistent set of things well, and the ground above it is still open.

THE STATE OF RECRUITMENT MARKETING · 2026
391 UK & US AGENCIES · ≤50 EMPLOYEES · JUNE 2026

redsunplatform.com