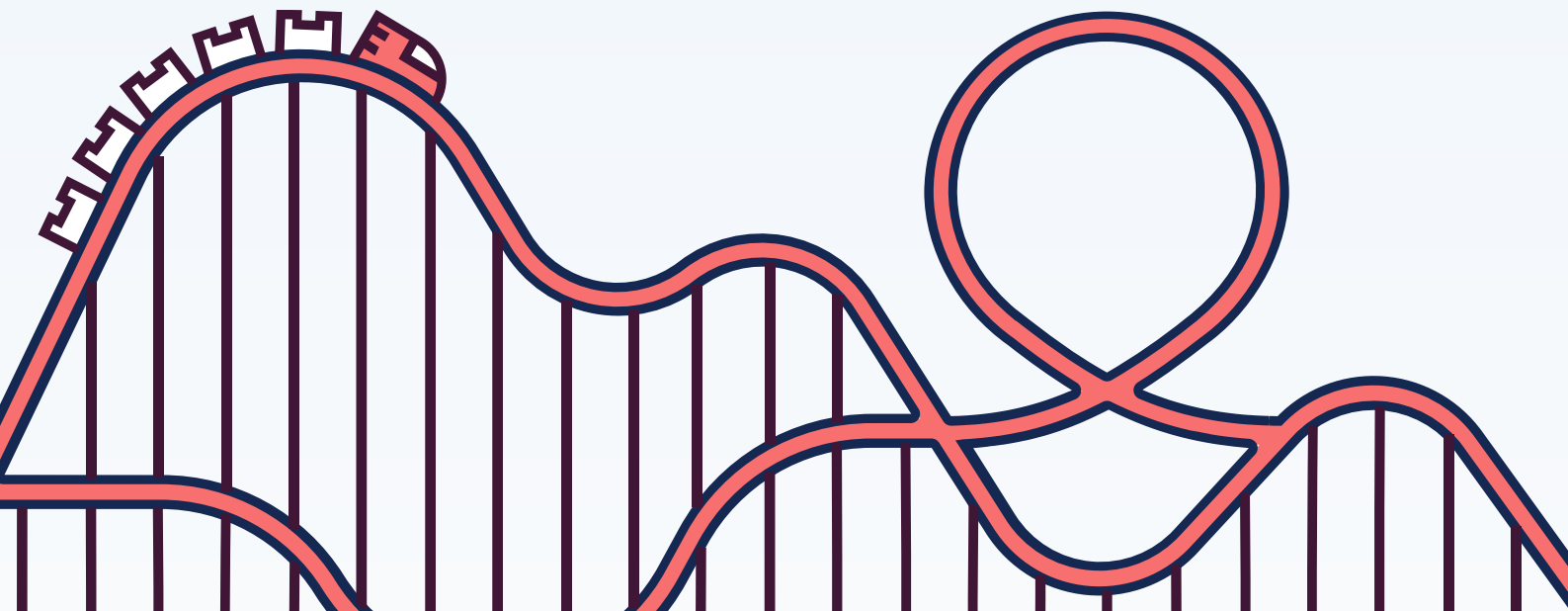


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# The State of Publishing

Industry Report  
H1, 2020



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# The State of Publishing in 2020

No need to bury the lede: 2020 has been a year unlike any other in recent history.

While we're eager to share the (actionable) insights that we've gleaned from our industry-wide State of Publishing in 2020 survey, it would be disingenuous for us to not first acknowledge the widespread damage and loss that the coronavirus has caused around the globe.

Of course, we'd be lying if we said that the publishing world has been immune to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, in many ways, the fallout has been paradoxical. While the public's appetite for breaking news and escapist content has never been higher — signs that typically indicate a positive financial outlook in the realm of publishing — key revenue streams, notably programmatic advertising and in-person events, have taken major hits.

That said, as we continue into the second half of the year, things are looking up for publishers.

To help get a better read on how the industry is adapting, and ultimately, to share those findings back with the broader publishing community, we reached out to our network of marketers and asked them to answer a series of questions. Does the so-called "new normal" for publishers actually exist in 2020? And if so, what does it look like?

In this e-book, we share the findings from our State of Publishing in 2020 survey, which covered a host of topics ranging from experimental revenue streams and social media strategy, to the impact of the pandemic on the structure of marketing teams and their media budgets.

**More importantly, we'll discuss how the results of those findings can help you identify meaningful growth opportunities for your organization as you navigate through the remainder of this year and beyond.**

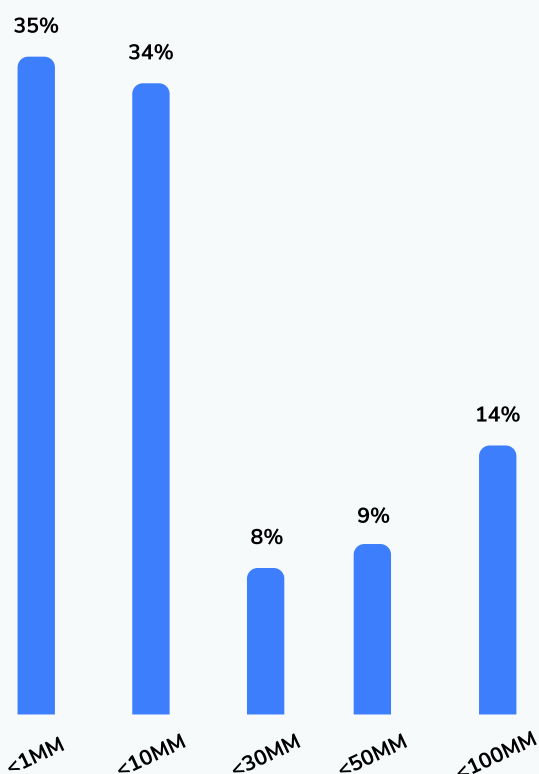
# 2020 Benchmarks: Taking the Industry's Pulse

## So, what is the state of publishing in 2020?

To help set the stage for the analysis that you'll read throughout this eBook, it's useful to start by looking at a high level snapshot: who contributed their insights to the survey, and where do they fall within the broad spectrum of publishers? Not only does this provide benchmarks that allow you gauge how you stack up against your industry peers, but it also offers additional context that will help you to better apply these insights and advice to your own unique set of circumstances.

Let's take a look at the data.

### What are your site's monthly page views?



Using monthly web traffic as a proxy for the size of a publisher, you can see that the organizations represented in this report run the gamut, with the largest group consisting of publishers receiving fewer than a million page views per month.

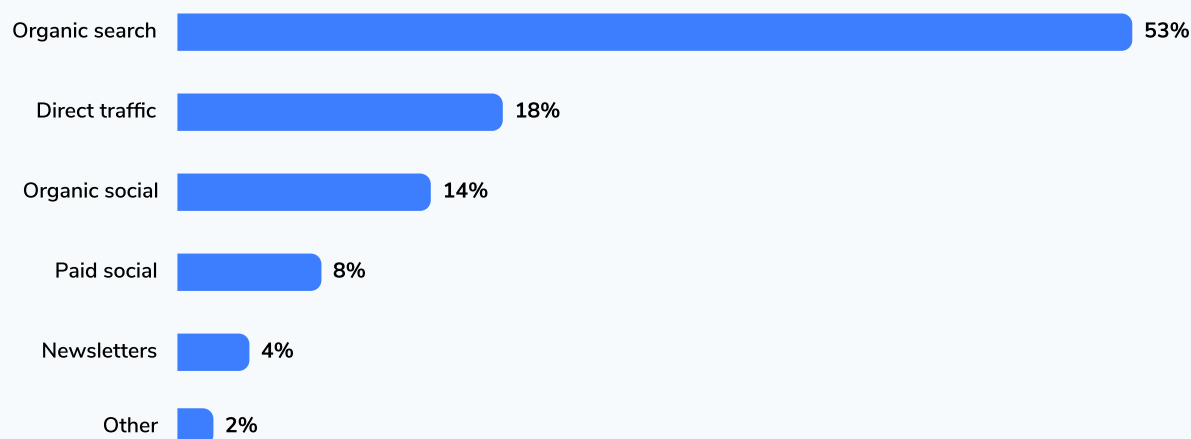


#### **Growth Opportunity:**

*These days, audiences are looking for comfort, and they tend to turn to publishers they trust to get just that. If publishers keep that in mind, they're sure to see their loyal readers increase.*

When asked where the majority of their web traffic comes from, publishers overwhelmingly pointed to organic search (53%) and direct traffic (18%) as their two primary sources.

### Where do most of your page views come from?



If you slice the data another way and look at social traffic as a whole (i.e. organic and paid combined), socially-driven traffic takes the second place spot with a 22% share of overall responses.

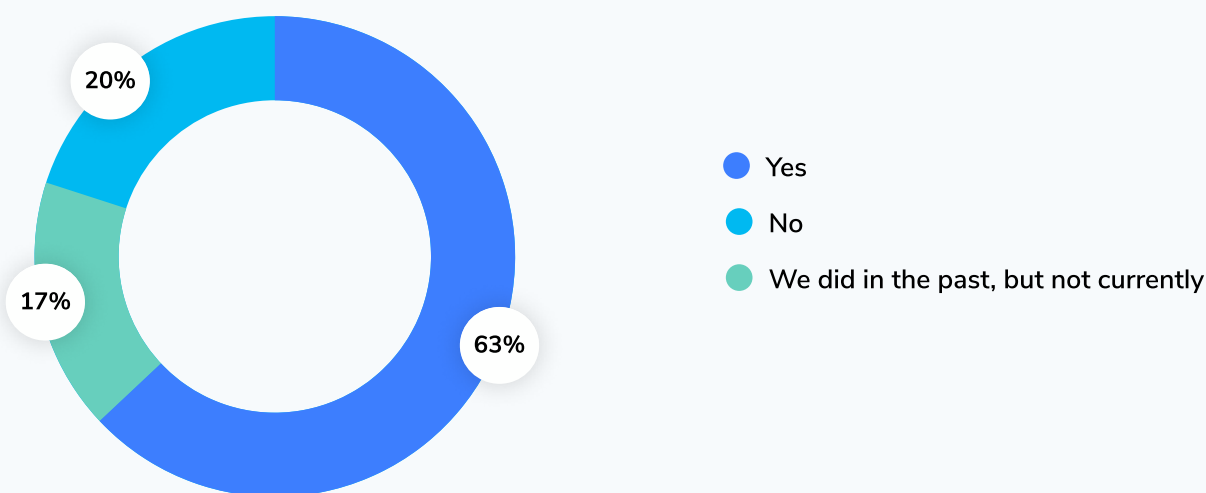
In reality, it's not surprising that paid social accounts for about 8% of our hypothetical "primary traffic." That's because most sophisticated publishers use paid social campaigns to not only drive traffic, but also as a powerful and versatile tool for achieving a variety of other business goals. At the end of the day, many of these other important efforts — take email acquisition, for example — contribute to growing these publishers' traffic numbers.

#### **Growth Opportunity:**

*It's important to consider how your investments will contribute to both your immediate and long-term goals. For example, if your end-goal is to get readers to sign up for a paid subscription product, you may want to consider allocating more of your media budget to efforts that produce results further down your marketing funnel, such as email acquisition.*

Despite only 8% of publishers citing paid social campaigns as their primary driver of traffic, for a large portion of content creators, these types of paid efforts are mainstays of their day-to-day operations. The proof? Heading into the second half of 2020, 63% of publishers reported that they're actively running paid media campaigns.

### Do you run any paid media campaigns?



#### **Growth Opportunity:**

*If you have yet to dip your toe into the world of paid media, now is a great time to take advantage of low distribution costs. As one publisher put it, "[Q4 is about making money](#)," so use the months of Q3 to build an effective plan.*

# Trends in Paid Media and Content Distribution

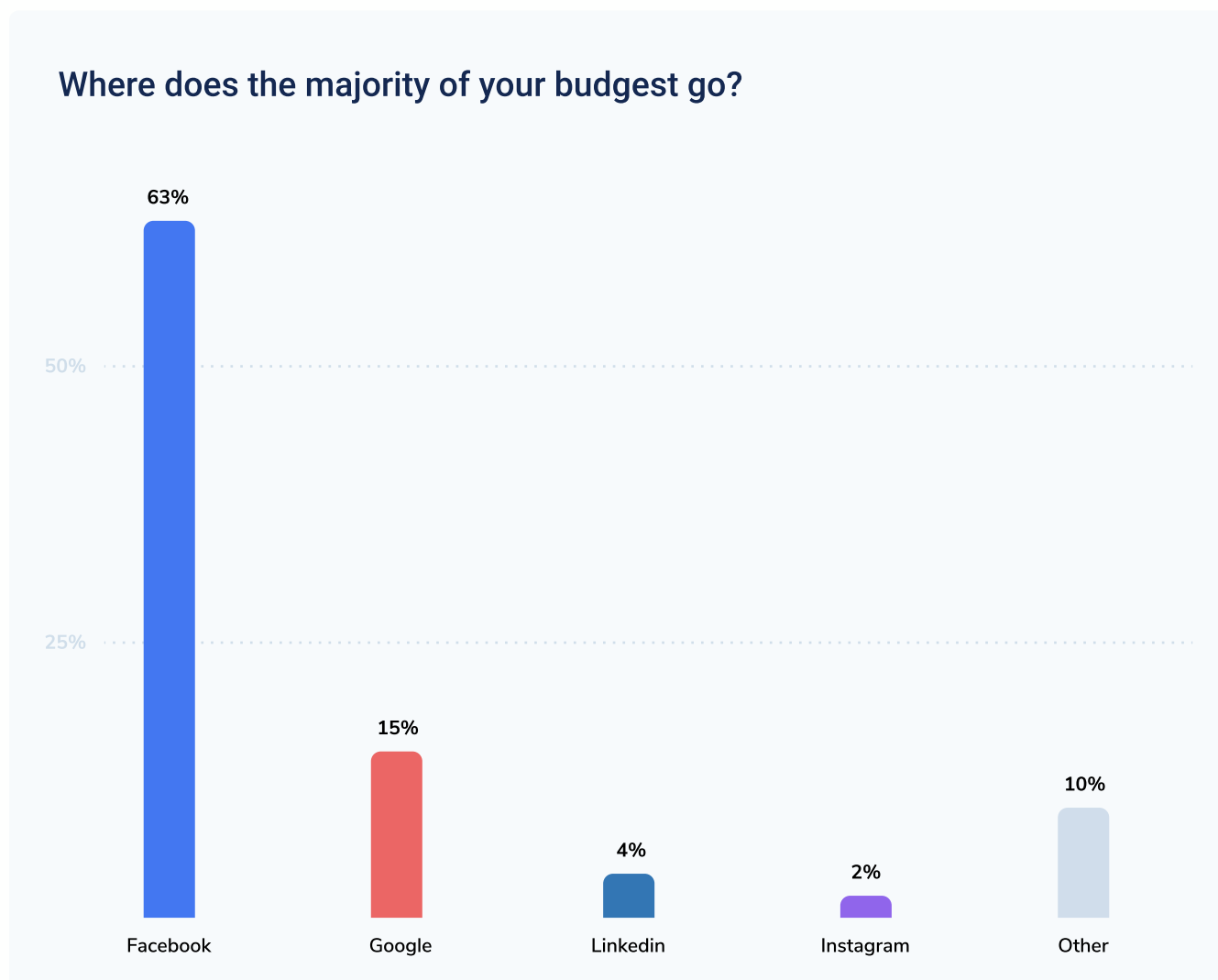
By now, platforms like Facebook, Google, Twitter, and the like have become synonymous with the concept of paid content distribution. **When we asked publishers to clue us in on their paid channels of choice, Facebook stood out as the clear winner, with 67% of respondents listing it as a primary channel.**

About half as many (30%) claimed Google as among one of their primary channels, and less than 12% of publishers listed Twitter, LinkedIn, and Snapchat as part of their go-to paid channel mix.

## What are your primary paid channels?



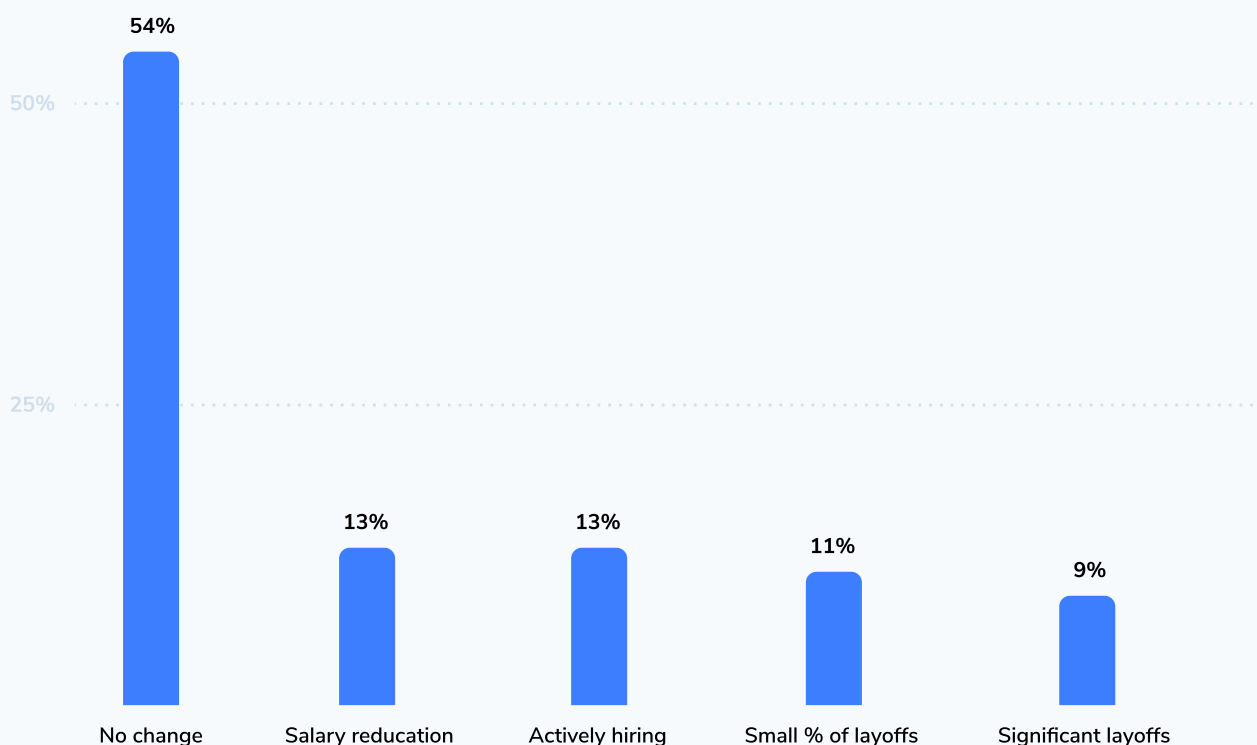
It should come as no surprise, then, that a major chunk of publisher advertising budgets are going to Facebook. When pressed to choose a single channel in which the majority of their budgets are allocated, 3 in 5 publishers opted for the social media juggernaut.



# The Impact of COVID-19

Amid all the reports of coronavirus-related staff reductions and cutbacks across newsrooms, one would expect to see similar trends taking place across publishers' marketing teams and their budgets — but that's not what we discovered. In fact, the opposite appears to be true.

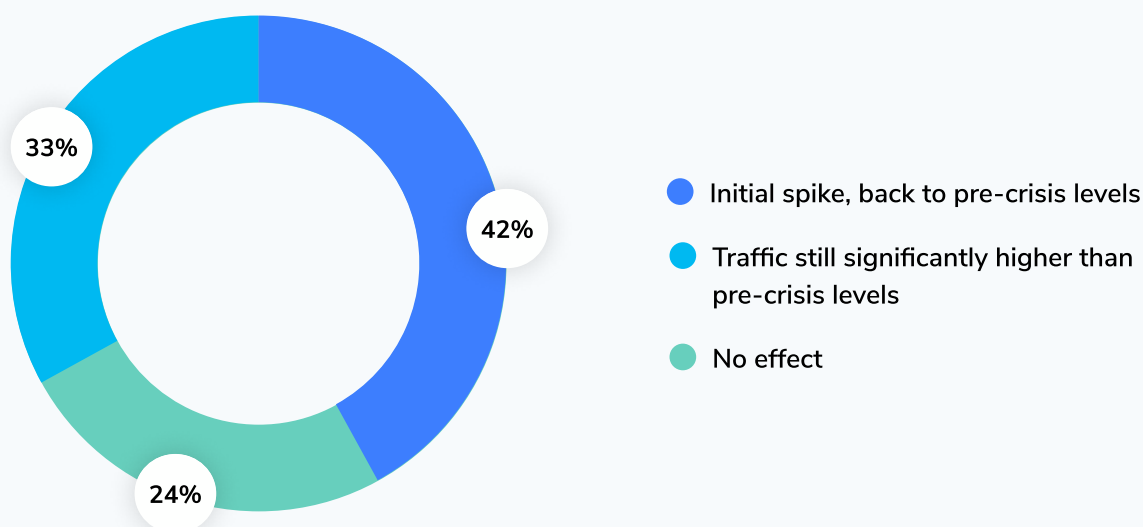
## How has the recent crisis affected your team?



Over half (54%) of survey respondents reported that the coronavirus has not significantly impacted the makeup of their marketing teams. The data also shows another silver lining: in mid-2020, 13% of teams are actively growing and hiring.

One of the major stories among industry outlets this year was the “corona bump” — a spike in pageviews that occurred as the public sheltered in place and sought out the latest news about the pandemic from trusted sources. **As of mid-year, a third (33%) of publishers continue to see significantly higher traffic levels compared to their pre-crisis numbers.**

### Do you run any paid media campaigns?

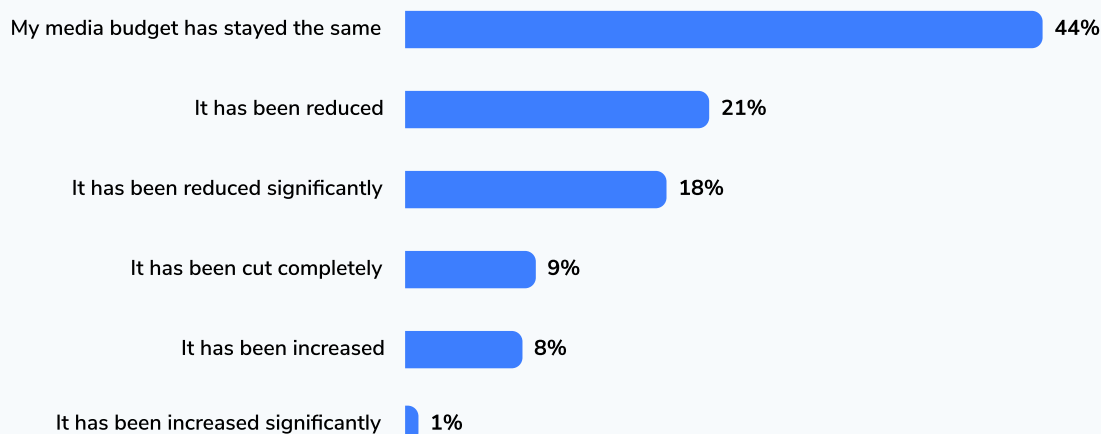


This sustained boost in traffic lines up with what we’ve been hearing from industry leaders like Dan Shar, CCO of Barron's Group and GM of MarketWatch:

“MarketWatch and Barron's readership, which had already reached record highs before the pandemic, skyrocketed in March as readers sought to make sense of the crisis. Even after that initial jolt to our lives, markets, and economy, audience engagement continued to remain above a highly elevated baseline, up triple digits year-over-year. Readers around the world are seeking financial guidance in these uncertain times, and they’re turning to our journalism as a trusted source. We’re currently taking active steps to provide more value to our readers while making sure that we’re reaching our full revenue potential. We’re testing new content formats and exploring new revenue streams that range from affiliate partnerships to virtual events. Moving forward, we’ll be investing in the channels that produce the best results and make sense from an ROI perspective.”

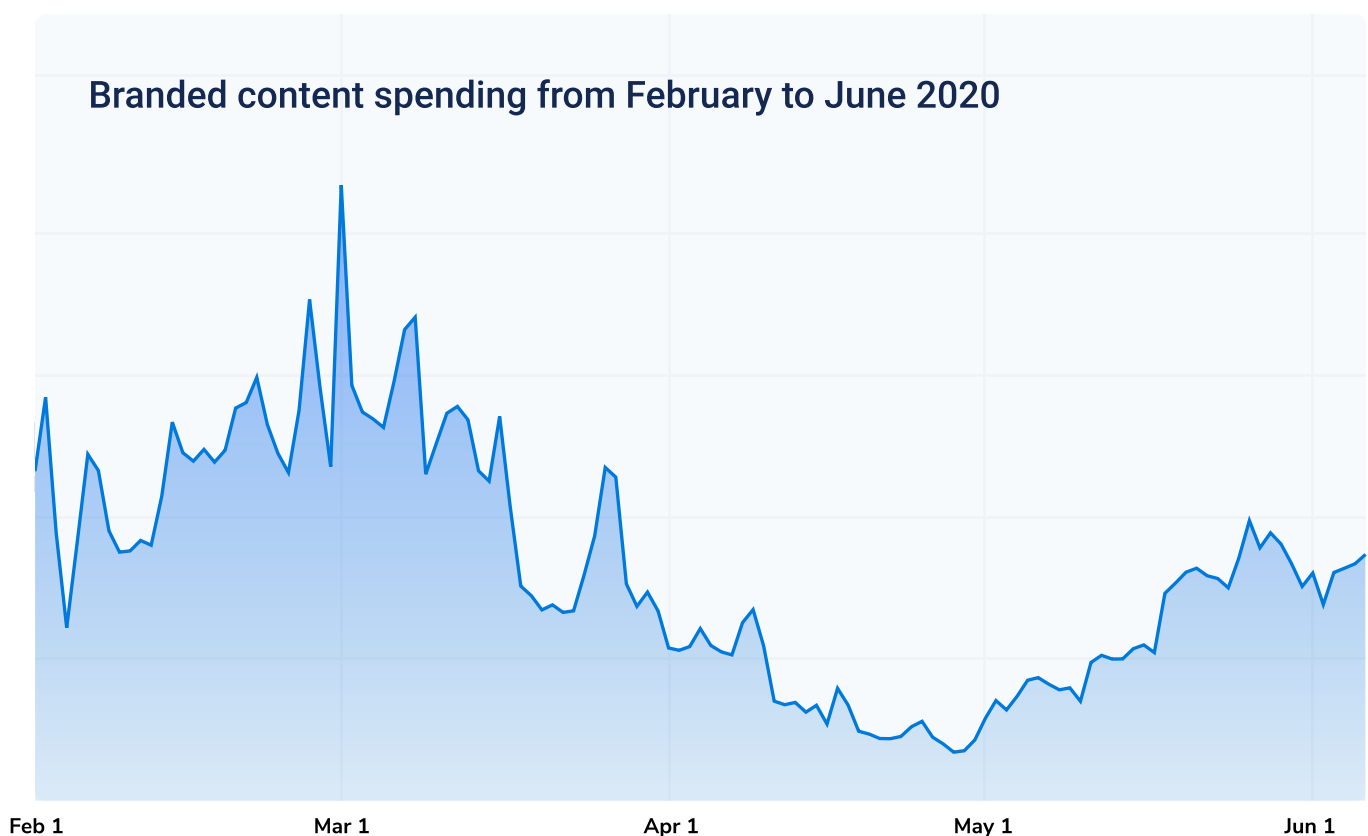
Just as one might suspect that the crisis hit publisher marketing teams harder than they actually did, it's easy to see how a similar assumption could be made about the pandemic's impact on those teams' budgets. Here again, the data shows that things aren't as bleak as may be expected. **As a whole, about half of marketing team media budgets have either stayed the same (44%) or increased (9%).**

### How has the recent crisis affected your media budget?

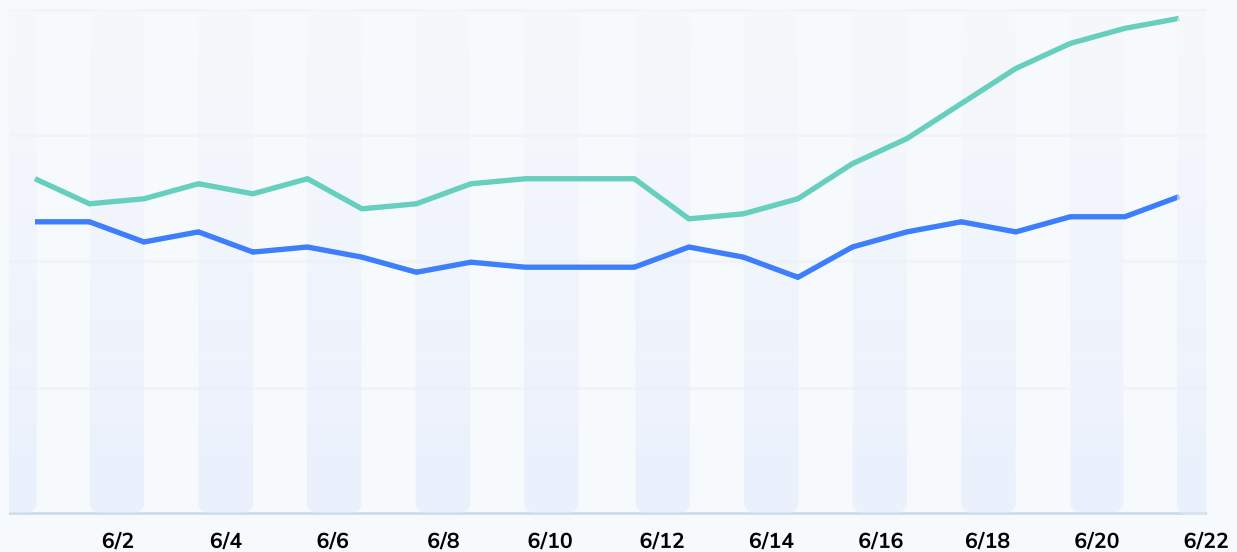


# The Future of Publisher Revenue Diversification

While there are hopeful signs that the industry is on its way to a much more stable version of itself, we'd be remiss to not acknowledge that the events of this year have put a strain on business operations, and therefore, on revenue expectations. About half (52.5%) of publishers expect revenue in the half of the year to come in lower than Q3 and Q4 of 2019. We assume that this is due to many publishers' reliance on branded content and advertising dollars, which underscores a financial vulnerability. Both of these revenue streams have made comebacks post-crisis; branded content's upswing [began around the beginning of May](#), while ad revenue's uptick started a month and a half later in mid-June.

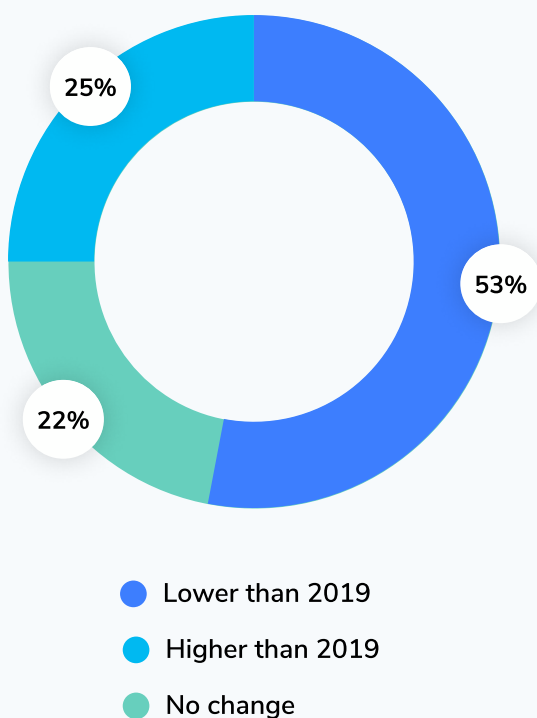


## Publisher CPCs and RPMs in June 2020



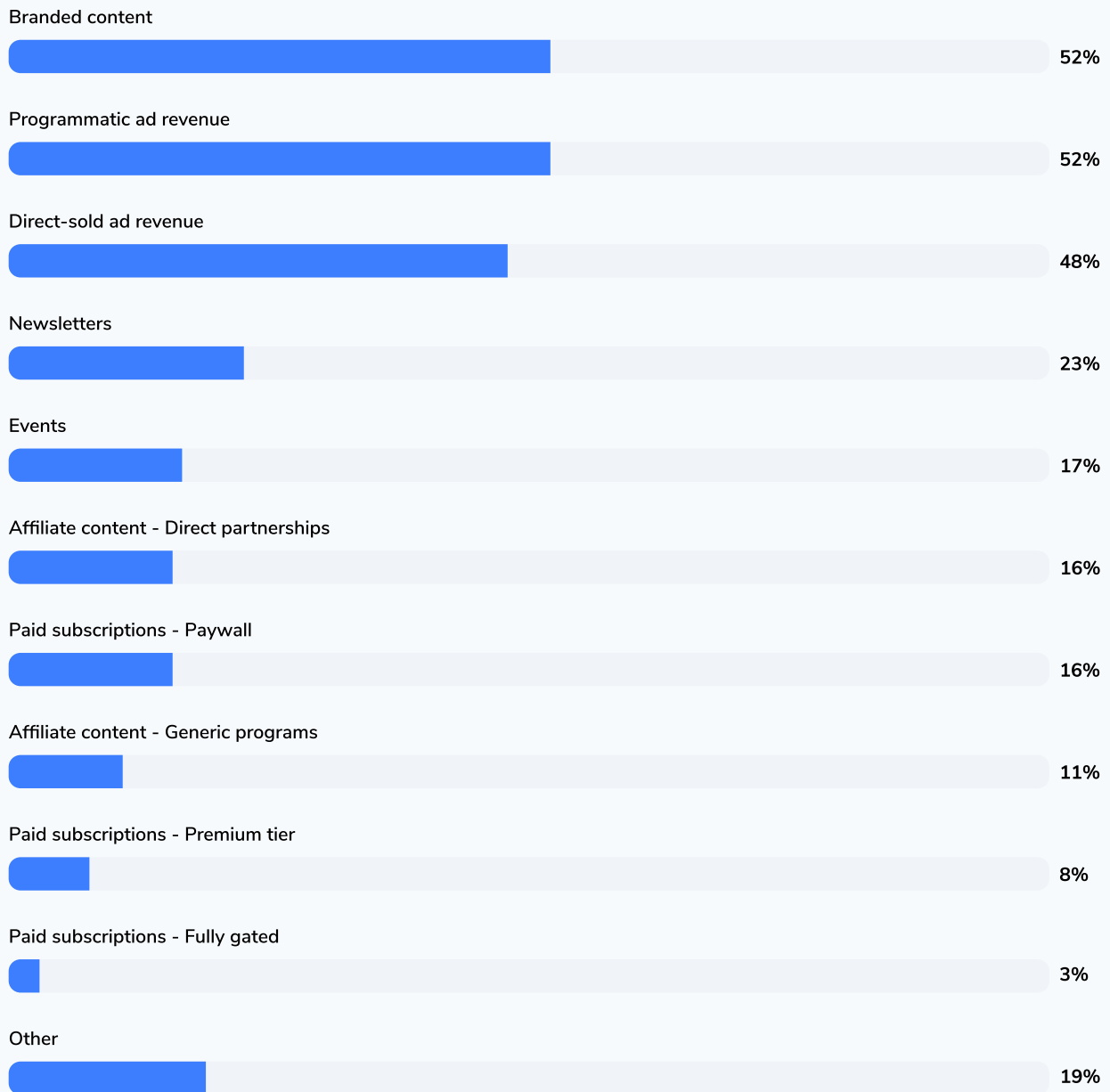
Call-out: Thankfully, CPC and RPM numbers have begun to behave predictably again. Even better news? RPMs are ramping up quicker than CPCs, thereby increasing profitability.

## What are your Q3/Q4 revenue expectations?



Despite many publishers expecting to see a dip in revenue in the coming months, there are still positive signs in the data – 22% of respondents don't foresee any major revenue hiccups on the horizon, and a **quarter (25%) of publishers expect revenue to be higher in Q3 and Q4 of this year than during the same time in 2019.**

## What are your primary revenue streams?



### **Growth Opportunity:**

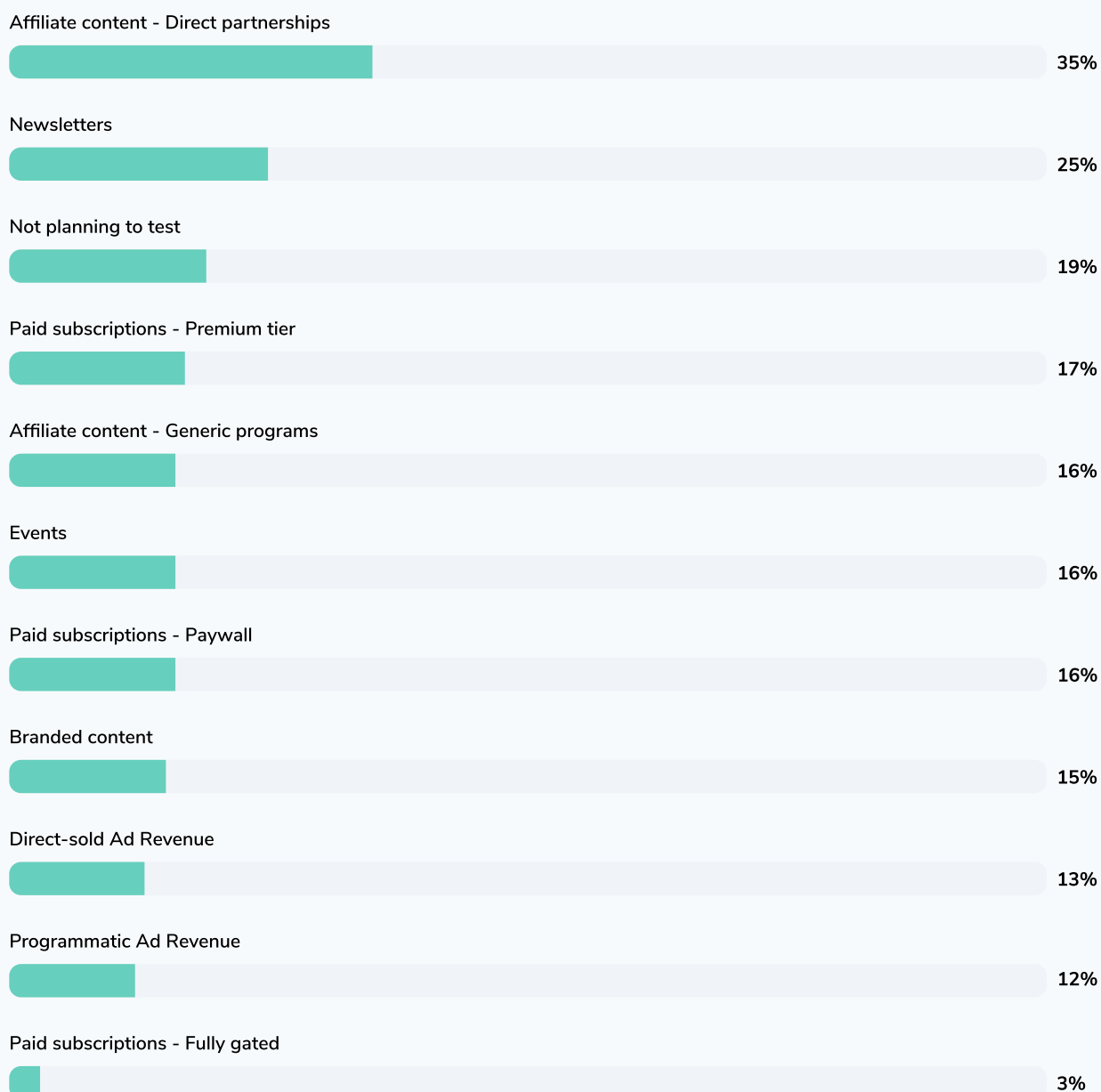
One area prime for revenue generation in 2020 is affiliate content – Q2, which historically was not a particularly strong quarter for e-commerce before the crisis, this year saw [online shopping numbers surpassing Q4 2019 numbers](#).

Rather than stepping back, publishers are taking active steps to diversify their revenue, with a whopping 73% planning on or already actively pursuing new revenue streams. At the same time, we were surprised to see that 26% of publishers weren't planning on testing at all, as diversification is key to long-term survival.

With so many publishers planning to experiment with their revenue mix this year, it naturally begs the question: what revenue streams do they intend on trying out?

Here's the breakdown:

### What revenue streams are you planning on testing?

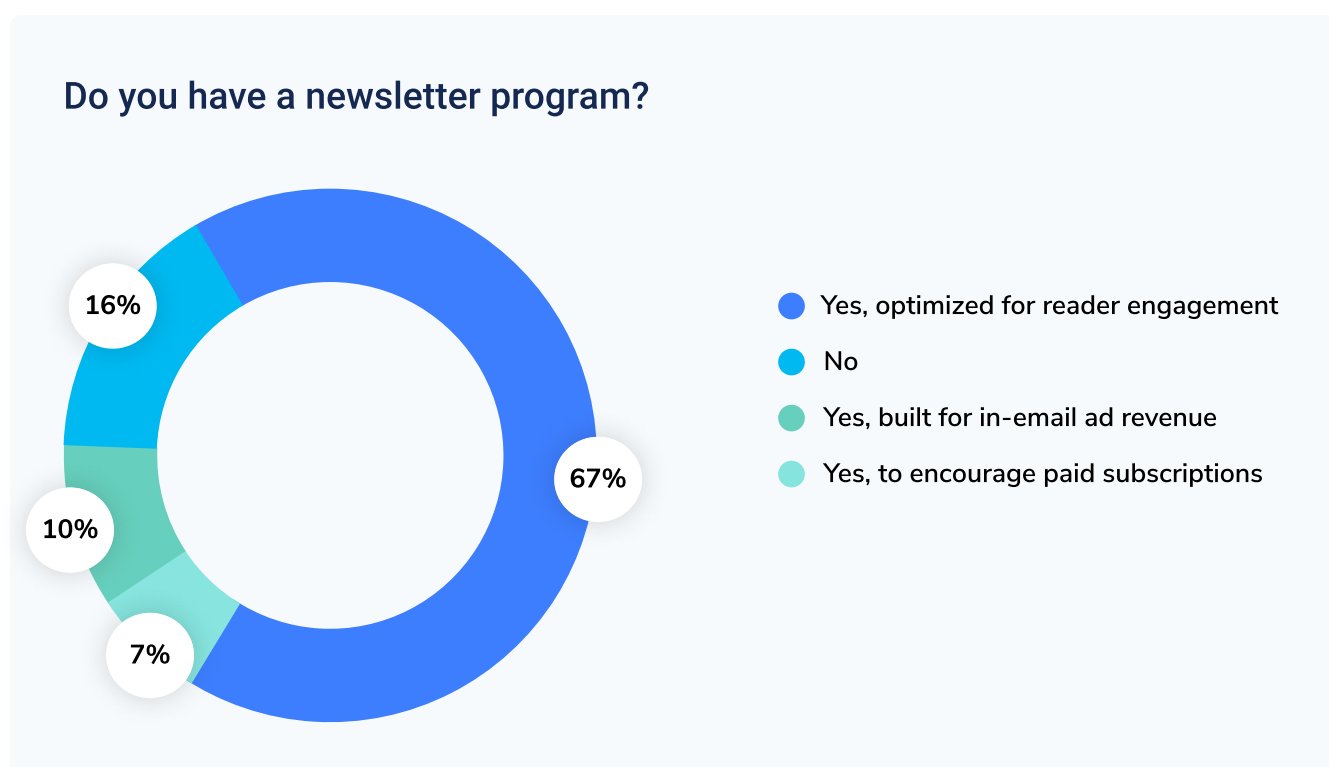


It's great that publishers plan on testing out affiliate campaigns; even though things have changed, this year's Q4 is expected to be mammoth when it comes to ecommerce, and CPCs will start to spike the closer we get to the big online shopping days of the year.

 **Growth Opportunity:**

*If you're looking to ramp up your commerce content efforts this year, use Q3 to experiment with and optimize your affiliate campaigns so you can hit the ground running once the holiday shopping season arrives. For more on this topic, see ["The Transformation That's Driving Affiliate Growth."](#)*

With increased pressure to own their audiences, it makes sense that newsletters would be second on the list of channels that publishers are looking to explore. As previously mentioned, apart from being an effective traffic driver, newsletters are an ideal vehicle for creating more revenue opportunities.



Missed opportunity here. Newsletters, apart from being an effective traffic driver can be a vehicle for more revenue opportunities.

 **Growth Opportunity:**

*To learn five ways that you can get more dollars out of your newsletter efforts, download our eBook, ["How Top Publishers Monetize Their Email Databases"](#).*

# Looking Ahead

Despite being a trying and tumultuous year, 2020 has shown us further proof that the publishing industry is resilient and quick to adapt when faced with unprecedented challenges. Riding this wave of change is leading companies to reconsider the ways in which things have traditionally been done — events have gone virtual, paywalls are going up (or in some cases, down), and it feels like brands across the industry are double or tripling down on their email newsletter efforts.

If you're focused on building your audience while navigating higher distribution costs in 2020, you're not alone. Teams across the industry are working to drive additional revenue streams

and maintain profitability. While it can be a challenging endeavor, there's no need to go at it alone. Keywee helps hundreds of the world's top publishers lower their audience acquisition costs, increase reader engagement, and maximize profitability through paid content distribution.

**If you'd like to hear more about how Keywee can help your team, please [reach out](#).**