

SEO SOFTWARE PLATFORM

Buyer's Guide & Workbook

Data-Driven Insights, Monitoring and Reporting for SEO + Social + Content



SEO Software Platform: Buyer's Guide & Workbook

Digital marketing professionals face more selection in the technology landscape than ever before. When you find yourself deep within the process of selecting any platform, it can be difficult to know which questions to ask and how to compare your options. Narrowing down a list of platform vendors is only the first step.

“As an SEO software platform provider in the marketing technology space, we find ourselves helping organizations through this process every day. We have seen the pain points facing most organizational decision makers and understand the challenges facing industry professionals today.”

~ Krista LaRiviere, Co-founder & CEO, gShift

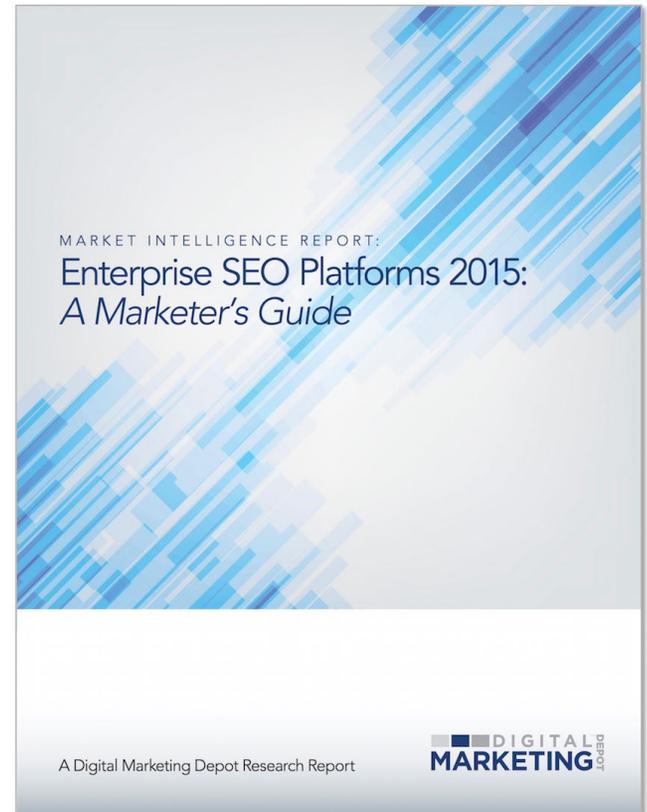
As the market becomes more complex, so does the selection process. For instance, which aspects of your digital marketing strategy are most important for your brand; influencer marketing, content performance, discoverability, etc.? How do you select a platform, which best aligns with your strategic goals?

How to Use This Workbook

We have developed this workbook to act as a companion guide when you are evaluating an SEO software platform provider. However, many of the basic principles to take away from this document can be applied to any technology investment you are looking to make.

Take your time going through the content. Think about the reasons you are making your SEO software investment and the goals you have for your overall digital marketing strategy. Use the spaces provided to make notes on both the content in this workbook, as well as the online direction you have in mind for your brand.

This workbook is also intended to be a companion piece to the [Enterprise SEO Platforms 2015 report](#), published by Third Door Media. This report outlines a feature-to-feature listing of each Enterprise SEO Software vendor. The list can look daunting when you see many platforms have the same checkmarks next to each feature. This workbook is meant to help take the evaluation process a step further to ensure you are making the best investment possible.



Search Still Leads Digital Marketing Efforts.

If you have heard that SEO is dead, it isn't. In a recent [State of Search Marketing Report](#), issued by SEMPO, 500 digital marketers weighed in that SEO still leads the way. 94% of the respondents ranked SEO as the main effort in digital marketing strategy, which is a two percent increase from the results of the same report in 2013.



Contents:

- Survey Says – Which features of an Enterprise SEO software platform are the most important to industry professionals today?
- Be Inquisitive – Top 10 questions to ask when evaluating an SEO software provider
- Entering a Relationship – How to build an effective partnership with your chosen SEO software provider



Survey Says - Which features of an SEO software platform are the most important to industry professionals today

We surveyed over 100 search-marketing professionals to see which features of an SEO software platform matter most for their organizations' strategies. We asked them to evaluate these features based on what they use the most and which metrics would help them make data-driven decisions about their digital marketing tactics.

The respondents came from various career levels and roles, from Intermediate SEOs to VPs of Marketing and represented many different industries, including media, hospitality, travel, automotive, marketing and others.

The list included 17 common SEO platform features/functionalities, which were ranked on a scale of 1-5, where 1 was Not Necessary and 5 was Critical. While nothing on the list fell into the Not Necessary bucket, there were certainly clear and consistent winners visible in the results.

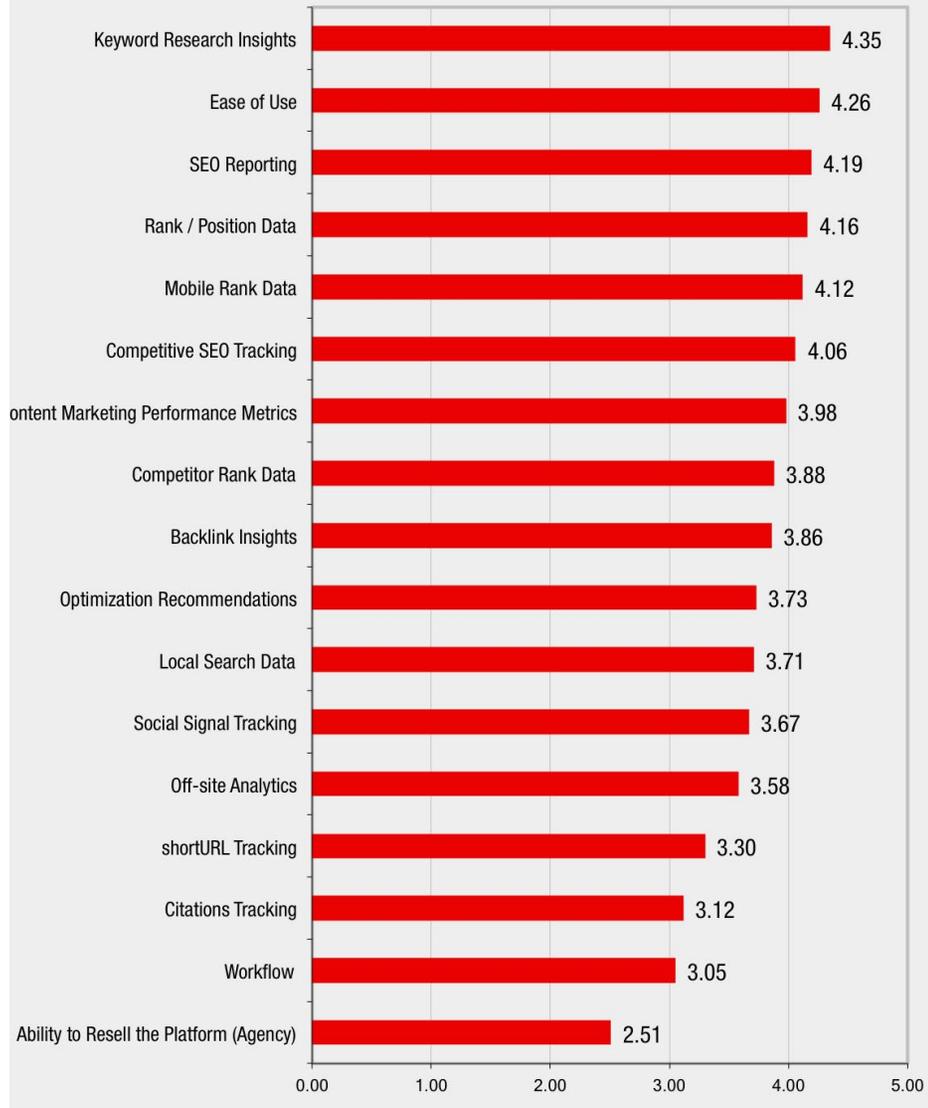


The top 3 results were:

1. Keyword Research Insights – The ability to provide insights into which keywords should be driving your SEO, content and social strategies.
2. Ease of Use – The option to run ad-hoc, scheduled and custom reports on the data most important to you.
3. SEO Reporting – The development of tools within the platform, which are easy to use and understand.

Full Breakdown of Feature List

What features of an SEO platform are most important to your organization?



What are the challenges you currently face as an organization when it comes to your SEO strategy? This may include lack of keyword and visibility insights, on-site SEO basics or competitive analysis.

From these challenges, identify the top 3-5 SEO platform features you feel are most important to your organization today.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

The Ultimate Purchasing Decision

Many organizations head into an evaluation process with one specific aspect in mind as the deciding factor. For some it may be the reputation of the platform, while for others it may boil down to the features or final price. Which factor depends entirely on the company, their budget and priorities.

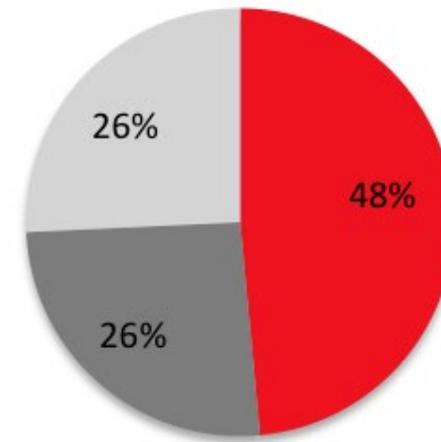
In [a recent webinar](#), we asked the attendees to weigh in on which factor they feel ultimately decides the fate of the purchasing process. Interestingly, as the industry has evolved and marketers have become more savvy, we have seen the trend for deciding factors move from price to feature set and the results of our webinar poll confirmed it.

It is important to note, the other poll results, which indicate an equal value being placed on price and reviews/support/services. This means marketers value the reputation of an SEO software platform as much as they do the price tag.

REMEMBER: Always take time to look at online reviews of a software provider and asking them to provide client references that you can speak to directly. There are a number of great review sites, such as [G2 Crowd](#), to help you compare various vendors at once and see what verified professionals are saying about the company and the platform.

Chart Title

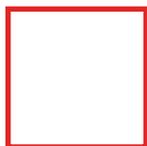
■ Feature Set ■ Price ■ Reviews/Support/Services



Be Inquisitive – Top 10 questions to ask when evaluating an SEO software provider

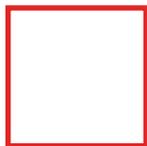
After attending various digital marketing and search-focused events this fall, a few trends stood out when talking to conference attendees and the exhibit floor crowds. First, most people use a set of tools for SEO insights and they freely admit it is not the most efficient process. Many expressed interest in wanting to look at changing their process within the next year. Secondly, many do not understand the difference between a tool and a true software platform. Finally, out of the people who use enterprise software and understand the market, many wonder why there is such a difference in enterprise pricing.

Based on our conversations with the people who are directly involved with the marketing stack, including search marketing, social and content marketing, here are 10 questions you should ask before selecting your organization's next SEO software platform partner.



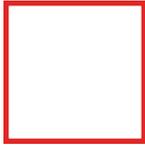
Do They Have A Web Presence-Centric Approach?

This is a key differentiator within the SEO industry. Can they track your brand's on-site and off-site content in the search results? Upwards of 60% of new brand interactions and sales funnel activities are based on off-site content. As a brand, you should understand how this content plays a part in your overall content visibility.



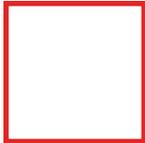
Can You Set Up Customized Reporting & Dashboards?

You are going to need to communicate your content performance from the CMO/VP down to product managers, outsourced digital agencies or your in-house team. Customer dashboards enable a glimpse into a short-term performance versus analyzing trends in a quarter-over-quarter or a year-over-year view in PDF, MS Word or Excel formats.



Discuss the Accuracy of Global Web Presence Data? Ask about tracking your brand's visibility, by country, by city, by engine, by language, by device.

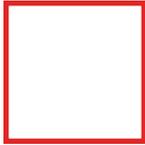
The best example of how complex search data is can be found in Google Belgium. Belgium has three separate indexes; the Default, a French index and a Dutch index. This means your potential visibility can be different even within a single country. It also means managing a brand's web presence in the European Union with multiple languages is more complex than simply monitoring one language in one country.



Keyword Data From Google Analytics and Webmaster Tools is Not Enough - Ask About Not Provided Insights.

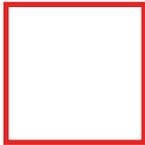
While Google Analytics and Webmaster Tools provide some insight into keywords driving traffic to a website, it is not nearly enough to make informed decisions on your strategy. Only seeing traffic from organic search cannot provide the full story for content marketing insights. Ask what the SEO platform can provide in terms of helping to actually identify the potential keywords hidden behind Google's Not Provided stance. Which keywords are most likely driving traffic to your content?





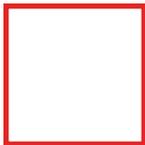
Does the platform have Competitive Intelligence & Search Visibility Scoring?

Every CMO or VP of Marketing wants to know their brand's visibility score/share of voice when it comes to the keywords which matter to their market. They also want to know how it compares to a competitor by country, region or search engine. This can be trended over time and used as an index to gauge the success of your content marketing strategy from a search perspective. Do you know who your true online competitors are and how do you conduct competitive analysis?



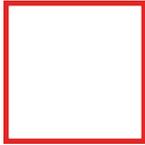
Does the platform provide Business Intelligence Extendibility?

Does the platform allow for 3rd party data to be easily incorporated into dashboards or reporting? You may want to combine other lead generation data points or even Pay Per Click (PPC) data with your Organic Search data, based on a specific content campaign. Identify the flexibility platforms have to play well with other tools in your marketing sandbox.



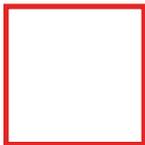
Are there Built-In Site Auditing Capabilities?

Understanding if there are any technical SEO issues with a website is a critical starting point in the optimization process. An SEO Site Audit is typically used as a one-off report, which can be sent to an external web team or in-house webmaster. However, audits should be run regularly and tied directly to your search data to gauge the impact of improvements over time. Brands should be automating a report like this to check for 404s, 301 redirect issues, crawl issues and overall structural website issues, as each can affect visibility, accessibility and traffic.



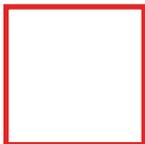
How can the platform help build content and keyword insights into your content marketing workflow?

Understand how you can get keyword insights to help drive strategy in your content planning meetings. How easy is it to obtain this information? Can you review the content your team has published for optimization insights? Look at the metrics provided for tracking content marketing performance based on on-site and off-site keyword insights.



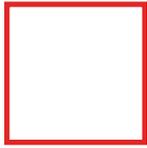
Culture, Education and Community: Discuss what happens after the sale. How does the vendor build up your internal team's competency in search, social and content marketing with training and education?

Every SEO vendor should have a vision to educate and train your team, so they become experts and can apply their acquired insights into your digital marketing strategy. Ask specifically about the support your team will be provided beyond the platform. This is above and beyond any paid set-up/on-boarding fees, which may already be included. Understand the level of on-going training available and how your team can leverage it.



Bonus Question: What does the track record of innovation look like for a vendor and do they seek client input?

This may be the most important question of all. Is the platform adaptable to changes in an ever-changing industry? As you are presumably investing in this piece of technology long-term, you need to ensure the platform will grow with industry developments and will have staying power. You do not want to invest in tech, which will be obsolete within three months. Ask what innovation strategies the company has to grow the platform accordingly.

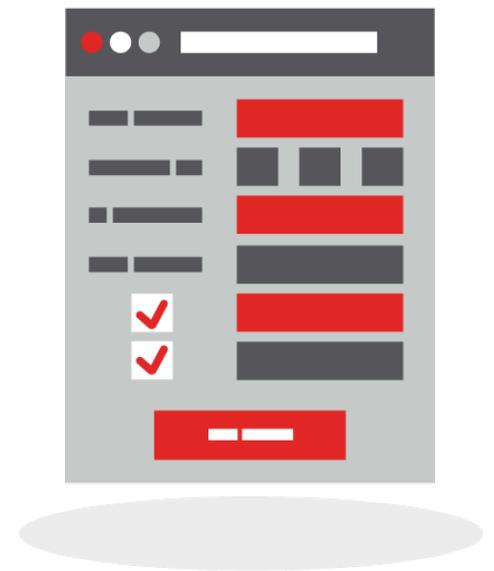


In the boxes beside each question, rank these questions based on how they fall in the priority scale for your company, using the following guide:

1 = Not Important, 2 = Considered, 3 = Nice to Have, 4 = Important, 5 = Critical

Brainstorm 1 or 2 more questions you feel will be important to your team during the buying process:

REMEMBER: Whether you already have a list of SEO software providers in mind, or you are evaluating based on the Enterprise SEO Platforms 2015 report, take your time and talk to each vendor. Ask a few of the questions above which best resonate with you and your needs.



Entering a Relationship – How to build an effective partnership with your chosen SEO software provider

Over the past six years, we have developed many long-lasting relationships with brand and agency clients. We have worked closely with them to understand their current strategies and ultimate goals. Consistently, there are a few key aspects of the relationship building process, which lead to success for everyone involved.

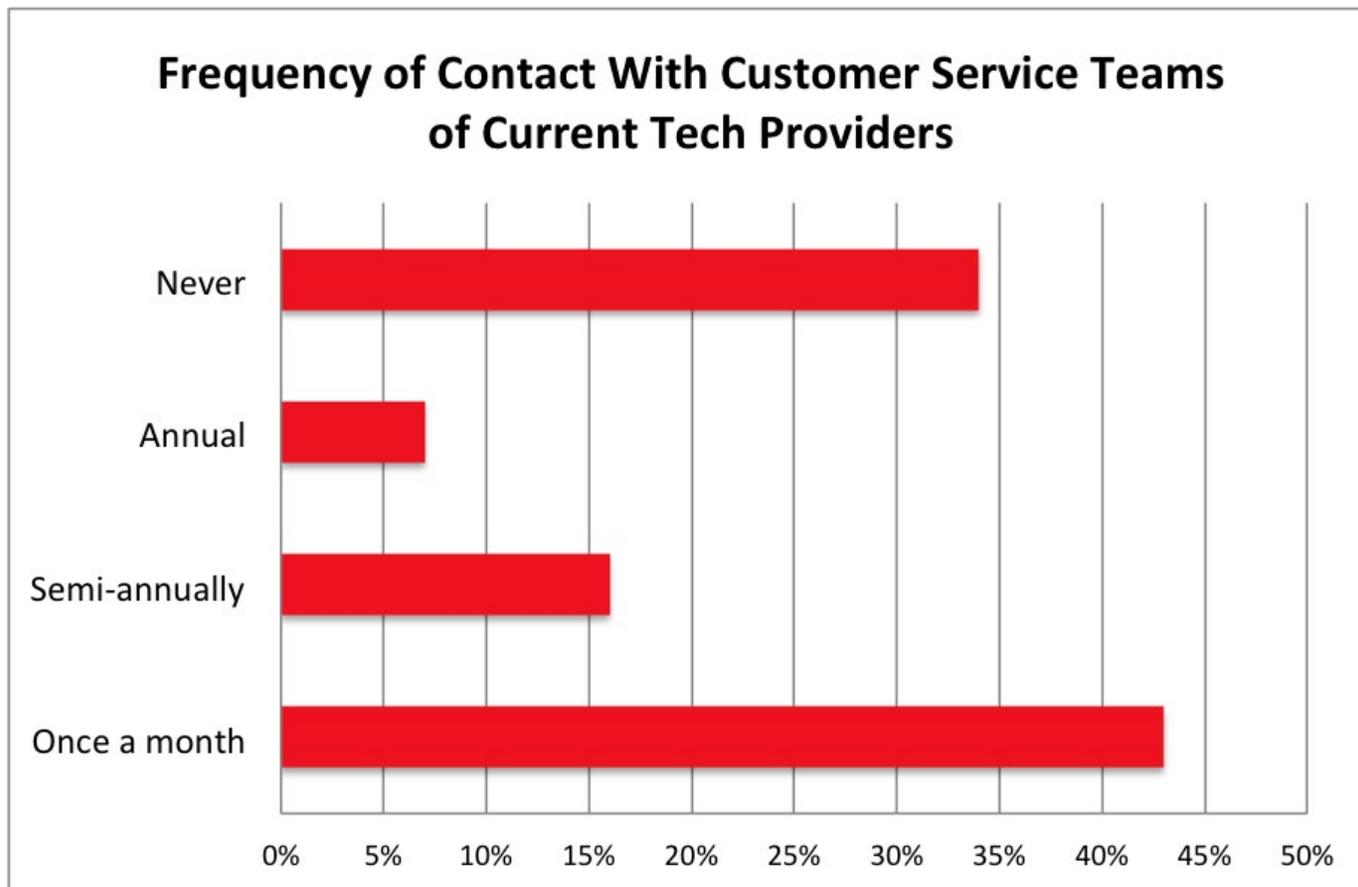
Once you have invested in a SEO platform provider, you will want to ensure you have a clear understanding of how the relationship will develop between your team and theirs.

Do you have a dedicated Client Success Manager, who understands your business needs and goals?

When it comes to software, one aspect of a good partnership involves having a solution provider who will work directly with you in a way, which best suits your needs. You may need more guidance around implementation and set up, but can take over with minimal services going forward. Alternatively, you may require ongoing client success support and services to complement your team and their skill set. You want to make sure your SEO software provider understands where you fall on the services spectrum in order to develop a build, train and transfer schedule to support it. Having your team and your client's team focused on specific goals will help you achieve the desired results. On-going communication can reduce risk and manage expectations along the way.

During a recent webinar, we conducted a poll of the nearly 200 attendees to get their point of view on the subject of customer service or client success. We asked how often they currently connect with those departments of their existing SEO software platform or any other major technology they use.

Interestingly, nearly half of the attendees said they are in contact once a month. Alarming, 34% said they never hear from or connect with the client success team of a current piece of technology.



Does your provider seek feedback on features and how you are using the platform?

Any software vendor hoping to excel at user experience needs to ask for feedback from their regular users. This provides you an opportunity to express what you like about the system, but also what you think may be missing. While not everything you suggest will make it onto a product roadmap, obtaining user feedback can help to highlight missing features the software developers may not have thought of.

Has the technology evolved to be more than just on-site SEO?

SEO is still arguably at the root of all digital marketing and helps to lay the foundation for your content and social strategies. However, in today's market, an SEO platform needs to provide insight into so much more than just on-site optimization and website search performance. Has your SEO software provider evolved their platform to address developing market trends in social, mobile, content and influencer marketing? Further, do they understand which aspects of digital marketing are most important to their audience and are they seeking feedback to build their applications accordingly?

Does your software play well with others in your marketing stack?

Today's marketing technology stack is expanding rapidly. Many digital marketing teams use a variety of tools to add functionality and reporting to enhance their strategies. It is important to find solution providers who can work well with others in your stack. This may not be in the form of full integrations, but simply in the willingness to align data and give guidance around how one piece of technology can support or augment another.

What pieces of technology do you currently have in your marketing stack? e.g. Website Analytics, Call Tracking, Lead Nurturing, CRM, Content Publishing, Social Media Management, Digital Asset Management

REMEMBER: Keep these in mind when speaking with a potential SEO software provider and ask about possible integrations or data import opportunities.

Does your software partner help you identify under-used features, so you can maximize your investment?

Make sure you select an SEO software you will use to its fullest. There is no point paying for features, which are never used. When the relationship you have built is a true partnership, your vendor will be involved in looking at what you are not taking advantage of and will make suggestions to maximize the value you are receiving from the platform. Likewise, they will ensure you are spending your time in the areas, which matter most and will have the greatest impact on ROI.

When evaluating a list of features within a platform, be sure to understand any functionality you are currently unfamiliar with. What value and/or return does the feature provide? How do other clients best use the feature?

Are you currently looking at or working with an SEO platform vendor? List out any features you believe you need to learn more about below. Then reach out to their team to see how those features may be relevant to your strategies.

Does your provider understand your business and how the platform fits into your strategy?

Further to the last point, your software provider should ideally be giving you guidance to ensure you are obtaining the right data and insights from their system. This will help you gauge the ROI of your digital marketing efforts, as they pertain to data provided by the platform. However, it will also help you measure the ROI of the system itself and how valuable the data is to your daily decision-making.

REMEMBER: Always keep your list of important features in mind when using the platform, but be open to exploring some of the other pieces of functionality the vendor offers. Be sure to pay attention to product releases and find out how you can benefit from new features or functionality. Think about how the platform on a whole can be best utilized to meet your strategic goals.

In Summary

Selecting any software provider to fill parts of your marketing stack needs can be difficult. There are so many choices facing digital marketing professionals today. Taking a strategic approach, understanding key elements of the buying process and conducting due diligence to select a long-term technology solution partner will go a long way towards a positive and profitable experience.

Hopefully some of the methodologies outlined above will help you build a solid marketing tech stack you can rely on.

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About gShift

gShift's industry leading Web Presence Analytics Software Platform helps Brand and Agency teams efficiently understand and improve on the impact and engagement of a organization's content across its web presence. gShift's software infrastructure has been collecting and storing web presence data since 2009. More than 10,000 brands in 24 countries benefit from gShift's insight data and software, as they optimize their time to improve the discoverability and the sharing of their content. gShift placed 29th on the PROFIT HOT 50.

For more information, please contact us at 1-888-743-5960 or sales@gshiftlabs.com