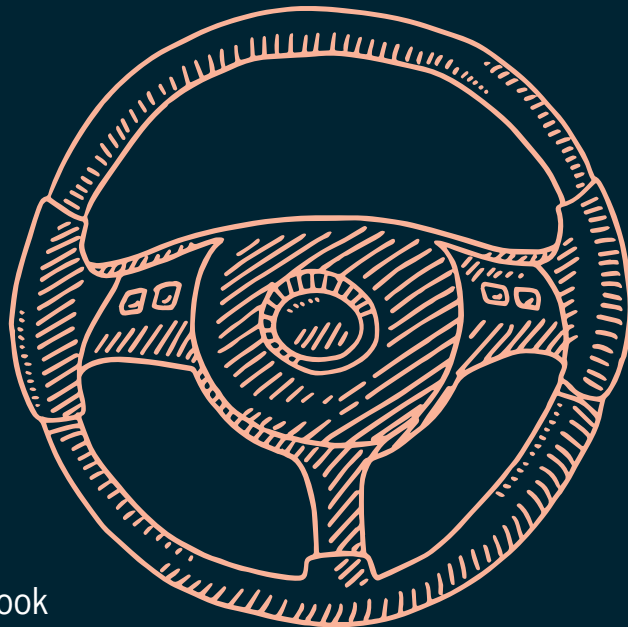




# PLAYBOOK

## Opportunities to Drive RevOps Efficiency



An Admonsters Playbook  
December 2022  
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## *What's a Playbook?*

**A playbook is an extension** of what the AdMonsters community has been doing at our conferences for 20 years. A playbook solidifies what has made our events “must attend” for many digital strategists. By bringing people together to share learnings and best practices in a focused way, people can create a plan and avoid hours—if not days—of doing research on their own.

The AdMonsters playbook concept takes existing AdMonsters content (from conferences and AdMonsters.com) and, with the help of the AdMonsters community, “crowd sources” a document that outlines best practices on a particular topic. Our belief is that this will allow for a free exchange of ideas with the benefit of curation for accuracy. This document does not get into specifics around individual solution providers intentionally.

Great effort has gone into writing the playbook in a fashion that applies to as many publishers as possible without becoming too general. In a technology-driven industry like digital advertising, information quickly becomes obsolete. The intention is that, based on the feedback of the AdMonsters community, the next playbook will start to take shape and, with additional contributors, grow in both depth and breadth.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Challenging a Long-Held Notion: Increasing Revenue Means Compromising Brand Standards

Bloomberg Media **recently announced** it will no longer fill ad inventory via open-market programmatic. The company said it was willing to accept a short-term loss of revenue in order to gain long-term improvements in its user experience, which the company expects will ultimately lead to better revenue as readers will visit more often and spend more time on the site.

This announcement speaks to a widely held perception within the digital publishing world that there is an inherent tradeoff between revenue and ad quality. To drive advertising revenue, the thinking goes, publishers must lower their quality standards. This, in turn, has a negative impact on the user experience, which can hamper a publisher's ability to grow its readership.

This quality vs. revenue debate is occurring with greater frequency as publishers consider their options in the event of a recession. Will consumers cut back on subscriptions? Will advertisers reduce their ad spend? If publishers find themselves relying more heavily on open-market programmatic, will they sacrifice long-term degradations to their UX? If they focus on driving more direct sales, how will they manage the increased workload, especially if they're forced to reduce headcount?

It's important to note that these questions are based on assumptions that may or may not be valid. Can we assume that revenue optimization always leads to compromised brand standards? Can publishers participate in open-market programmatic and still keep their users, brand reputations and advertisers safe? Is it possible to create and automatically enforce publisher-specific brand standards? For instance, if a publisher has an exclusivity arrangement with a direct advertiser, is it possible to prevent competitive brands from placing ads programmatically on the site? Can publishers dramatically increase direct campaigns while simultaneously decreasing the workloads of ad ops team members?

To help answer these questions, we surveyed publishers about the strategic decisions they are confronted with right now, and the challenges they face in optimizing their overall revenue strategies.

This Playbook is built on a previous Playbook, **How Publishers Balance Ad Revenue With Ad Quality**.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How can publishers drive revenue? It's not merely a question of finding more advertisers to run campaigns on their sites. Publishers are keenly aware that maximizing revenue is a multi-pronged effort that involves:

- ***Improving overall programmatic ad quality in order to attract more premium advertisers***
- ***Enabling users to report poor ads and ensuring such issues are addressed***
- ***Streamlining the direct sale asset management process so that fewer problems arise and less manual work is required.***

But their efforts are often thwarted by a lack of automation within their workflows. This leads publishers to assume that any efforts to increase inventory yields will inevitably lead to degradation of their user experience (which can ultimately work against their revenue goals, as users who encounter bad or inappropriate ads will be less likely to stay on a site or return to it often).

Nearly all publishers have adopted some form of ad quality tool, but those tools are limited and therefore not up to the task at hand. Some publishers are wary of such tools, convinced they lead to increased latency or diminished viewability, or simply don't believe that they offer the flexibility they need to enforce their specific brand standards.

As a result, ad trafficking is still highly manual; 0% of survey respondents said their team's workflows are fully automated (although 46% said they were "somewhat" automated). This lack of automation leads to revenue strategy decisions that are based on gut feeling rather than data. Publishers sever relationships with SSPs or DSPs rather than fix problems, leading to higher rates of unsold inventory and blindspots throughout the industry.

Direct campaigns, arguably a publisher's most valuable source of income, suffer the same lack of automation. Due to a highly manual process for testing campaign assets, only 50% of publishers are able to test the bulk of their campaign assets against their specs. The result is delayed campaign launches and ads that don't render correctly because they don't conform with the publisher's specs.

Automating ad quality enforcement and streamlining the management of campaign assets can greatly enhance a publisher's revenue, and may be the publisher's best strategy for weathering the economic headwinds they may face in the year ahead.

**71%**

*of respondents say they learn about bad ads that appear on their site only if these ads are reported by a reader, user or internal team member via email or social media.*

**29%**

*have dropped a SSP or DSP due to poor ad quality*

**50%**

*agree that poor process for testing creatives leads to issues.*

**0%**

*say their team's ad trafficking workflows are fully automated*

### 3. KEY FINDINGS

- **71%** of respondents say they learn about bad ads that appear on their sites only if they are reported by a reader, user or internal team member via email or social media.
- **29%** of respondents report terminating a relationship with a supply partner over the past 12 months. Of those that did, 75% cited too many bad ads or sub-par advertisers as the reason.
- **40%** of respondents say their organizations are rethinking their fulfillment strategies due to ad quality concerns.
- **60%** of respondents say their organizations are actively adapting their ad quality standards in response to user behavior and stated preferences — proof positive that publishers see a clear connection between carefully curated brand-specific user experiences and strong revenue.
- **66%** of respondents strongly agree or somewhat agree that establishing high ad quality standards, enforced automatically, will attract more premium brands to advertise on their sites.
- **42%** expressed some level of concern that automated ad-quality tools will cause latency or viewability issues on their sites.
- **50%** say that poor processes for testing assets for direct campaigns are in part responsible for off-spec ads being loaded to their site.
- Only **50%** of respondents say that they test most (76% to 100%) of campaign assets against their own specs.

# 4. IMPLICATIONS OF AD QUALITY ON PARTNERSHIPS, REVENUE AND USER EXPERIENCE

Publishers assume that driving revenue will result in lower ad quality, which in turn diminishes their user experience and brand reputation. Why is this notion so widely held?

According to Amnon Siev, CEO at GeoEdge, “To a large degree, it is the result of a lack of holistic ad quality control, including tools that enable publishers to receive actionable user ad feedback.” For instance, only 29% of survey respondents say they receive reports via tools that have been built for that purpose; the remaining 71% must rely on information from individual users or employees. If people don’t email ‘contact us pages’, the publisher has no way of knowing they were served. Publishers are then left scrambling searching for the specific creative, and how to stop future bad ads from appearing.

***How do your AdOps or RevOps teams hear from users who encounter bad ads that appear on your site?***

***Receive reports via a tool we have created for that purpose***



***We receive an email to a general email box listed in our “contact us” page***



***We read about it on social media***



***Other (internal teams)***



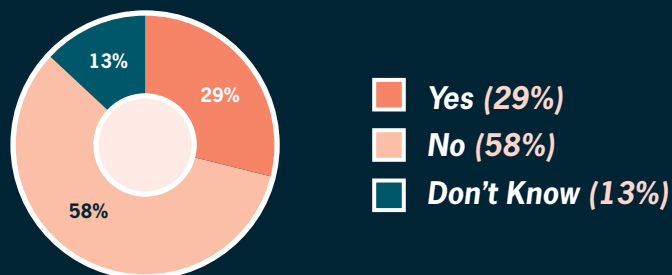


**GEOEDGE TIP:** Proactive ad quality tools can go a long way in preventing ads that don't meet your brand standards from appearing on your site. To protect your brand and your users most effectively, make sure you choose a tool that looks at the entire ad experience — ad creative, message, landing page — before displaying it to your users. Such tools will reduce your reliance on reporting, which by their nature alert you to a problem after it has occurred.

That said, it's still a best practice to allow users and other employees to report questionable ads. Select a tool that offers a feedback loop to report an ad from the ad itself, and routes that report directly to the ad ops team workflow and not a general mailbox. Routing reports directly to the teams ad quality solution will allow them to investigate and remove it. For fastest possible response time and action, ensure the tool can capture critical insight, including a preview of the ad and landing page, the URL, and offers a mechanism to stop displaying that ad immediately when appropriate.

This lack of control over ad quality can have a detrimental effect on the partnerships publishers have within the ecosystem. Some 29% of respondents said they stopped working with a DSP or SSP over the past year, with many of them citing poor ad quality or sub-par advertising as a cause for concern. Such decisions can have a big impact on revenue if the SSP or DSP filled a significant portion of the publisher's revenue.

**We asked: Has your organization dropped an SSP or DSP this year?**



## Why did your organization drop an SSP or DSP?

Too many bad ads



Sub-par advertisers



Too many partners, we wanted to consolidate



Part of a supply chain optimization (SPO) initiative



Too many bad ads



To what degree do you agree with this statement: *Establishing high ad-quality standards, which are enforced automatically, will attract more premium brands to advertise on our site?*

Strongly agree



Somewhat agree



Neither agree nor disagree



Somewhat disagree



Strongly disagree



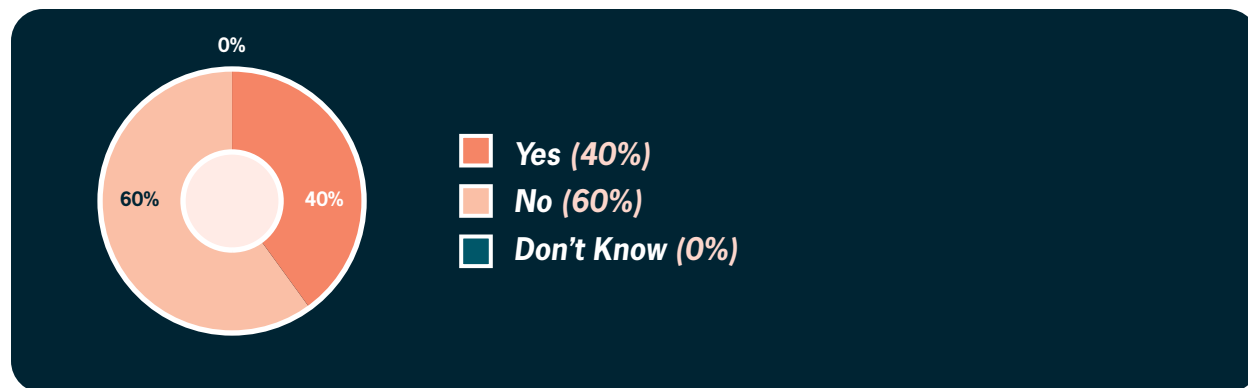
Don't know



**GEOEDGE TIP:** It's wise to monitor the overall ad quality of all your partners so that you can compare which deliver the most value to your brand. Overall ad quality improves when the industry works together to identify and mitigate poor quality ads or ads that don't meet a particular publisher's brand standards. To preserve the relationships you have with SSPs and DSPs, make sure to use an ad quality tool that automatically collects, analyzes and shares data on the problematic ads that appeared on your site with your partners in real time.

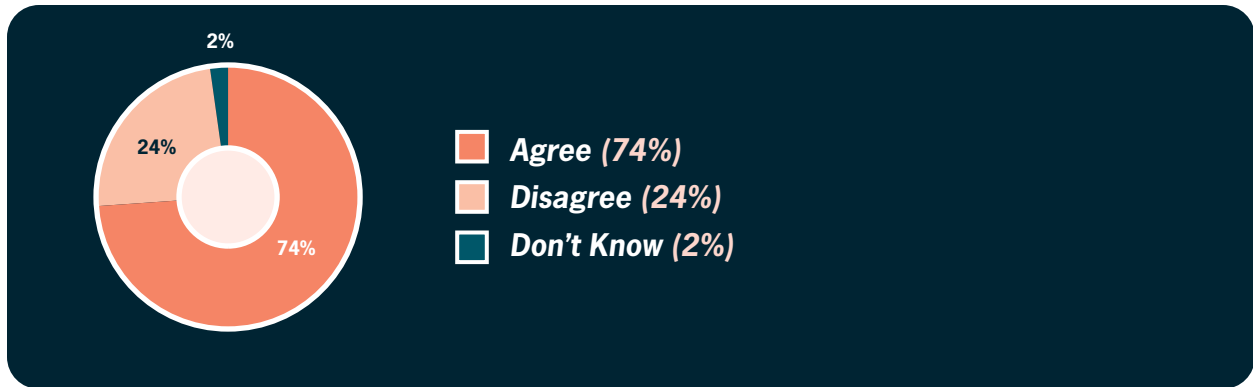
While respondents generally have confidence that their existing tools are effective at catching bad ads, some 40% of respondents report that poor ad quality is forcing them to rethink their fulfillment strategies. When asked: Are ad quality issues prompting your organization to rethink its fulfillment strategy?

**We heard:**



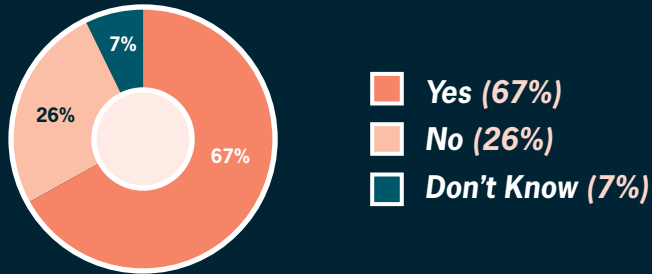
**GEOEDGE TIP:** To eliminate the “tradeoff” between revenue and ad quality, deploy a tool that proactively stops bad ads from appearing on your site automatically. This level of automation negates any need to compromise on brand standards, and enables you to continue working with existing partners if desired, or even increase the number of partners with whom you work in order to maximize fill rates.

Bloomberg Media isn't the only publisher placing a high value on user experience. Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents said that enhancing the UX takes precedence over optimizing revenue. Still, the data begs the question: Is it necessary to minimize revenue generation in order to maximize the user experience? With a proactive ad quality enforcement tool in place, that answer is no.



***GEOEDGE TIP:*** *It's not necessary to leave revenue on the table. Block only campaigns with bad ads on the pre-impression level without removing the entire creative, and automatically replace blocked ads with a clean safe ad.*

**Are publishers actively adapting their ad quality standards in response to shifts in user behavior and stated preferences? When we asked them, we heard:**



***GEOEDGE TIP:*** Publishers should ask, rather than guess, their user preferences, which is possible if they deploy a tool that provides a feedback loop – a channel of communication where users can share their ad preferences. Select a tool that is able to present statistics as to the number of times a specific ad was reported, when it was reported, along with the reason.

For many publishers, automated ad-quality tools come at a risk. Why? These tools monitor and filter ads in real time and might cause latency if their technology is not robust enough. Latency can lead to issues that have a direct impact on revenue. For instance, if a page takes too long to load, the user may click away, preventing the publisher from monetizing that user. If latency is widespread, the publisher's overall viewability score may decrease, making it difficult to command high CPMs for inventory.

**We asked: To what degree do you agree with this statement: *My organization resists automated ad quality tools because we feel such tools will have a negative impact on latency and viewability.* We heard:**

**Strongly agree**



**Somewhat agree**



**Neither agree nor disagree**



**Somewhat disagree**



**Strongly disagree**



**Don't know**



***GEOEDGE TIP:*** While automated ad-quality tools can cause latency, this is a challenge that can be addressed by vetting the right solution and tweaking the implementation of its code on site. When selecting a tool, check the viewability and latency scores of your website both with and without the ad quality tool in place to assess its impact.

# 5. CHALLENGES OF MANAGING CREATIVES IN DIRECT CAMPAIGNS

Direct campaigns are among the most desired campaigns, both for publishers and advertisers. For publishers, these campaigns offer the highest CPMs, and a chance to curate the advertisers seen by their readers. For advertisers, direct campaigns provide guaranteed access to bespoke audiences in known and brand-safe environments.

Surprisingly, much of the direct campaign workflow is highly manual and rife with inefficiency. For instance, the process for managing direct campaigns assets begins with email messages from the advertiser's agency with the various campaign creatives attached. The recipient must download each ad, and upload it to the ad server in order to test the creative against the publisher's specs. If an asset isn't tested beforehand, it can go live and lead to rendering issues, or slow down the website. All troubleshooting is done via texting between the agency and the ad ops team.

Assuming that there is no issue with an ad, the ad ops team is most times required to capture screenshots of the various ad units as they appear on the site or app, and consolidate them into a report that they send to the agency.

All of these tasks must be performed in a high pressure environment, adding stress to all parties involved in trafficking a campaign. Without a significant increase in staff, some publishers wonder if they can increase the number of direct campaigns they sell while maintaining the high-level of service their advertisers expect and deserve. Ad ops team leaders often lack real-time insights into the campaigns of individual traffickers, making it harder to predict future capacity.

Complicating matters further, there is a dichotomy between the perception of efficiency for managing direct sales creatives and the outcome. For instance, when we asked, how efficiently their organization manages creatives in direct sales, we heard:

**Very efficient**



**Somewhat efficient**



**Neither efficient nor inefficient**



**Somewhat inefficient**



**Very inefficient**



**Don't know**



**Yet when we asked if their process leads to unnecessary delays in launching campaigns, we heard:**

**Strongly agree**



**Somewhat agree**



**Neither agree nor disagree**



**Somewhat disagree**



**Strongly disagree**



**Don't know**

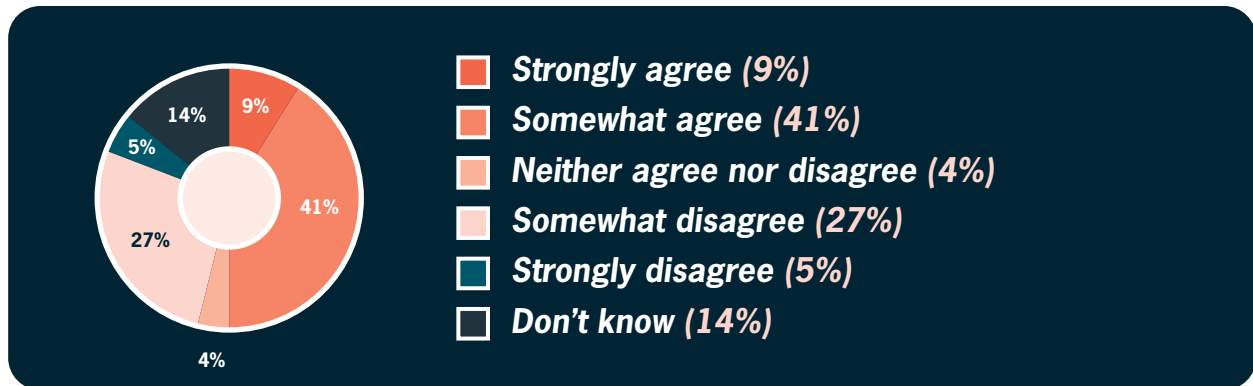




More than that, 50% of respondents said that a poor process for testing creatives leads to issues that require troubleshooting and resolution once the campaign goes live.

**We asked: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Poor processes for testing creatives results in off-spec ads being loaded to our site?**

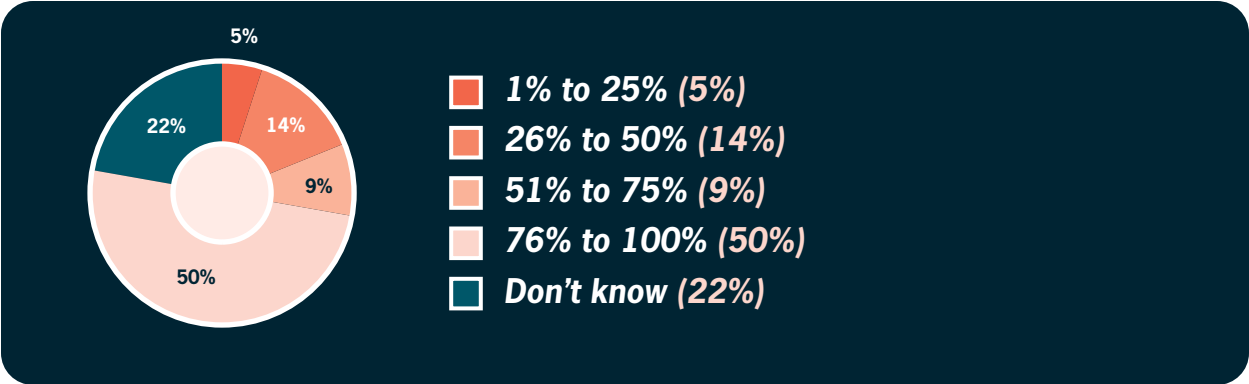
**Here's what they said:**



A highly manual and time consuming testing process limits the number of ads campaign managers can test. **Not surprisingly, nearly 20% said their organizations test less than half of the direct campaign assets they receive. Worse, nearly one-quarter of respondents said they don't know how many assets are tested prior to going live.** These problems can have a direct impact on revenue in terms of delayed campaigns and make-goods.

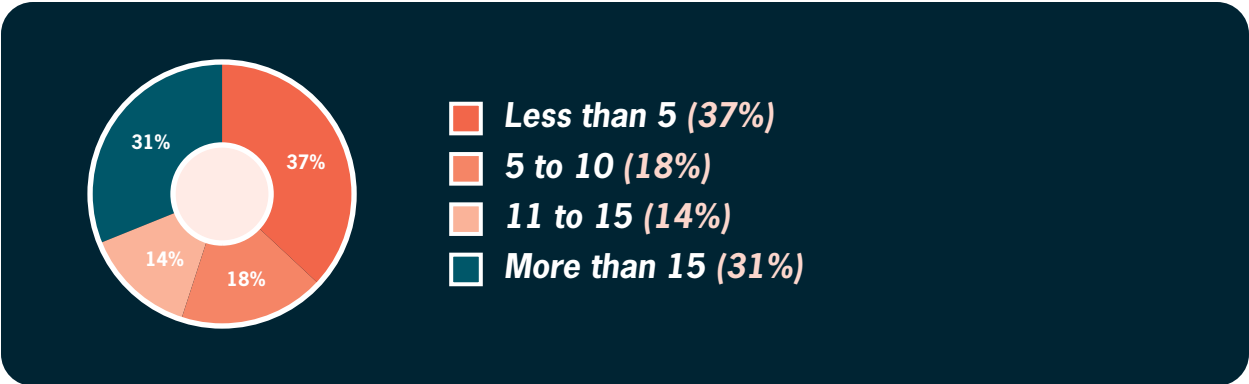
**We asked: What percentage of direct campaigns assets are tested against your specs?**

**We heard:**

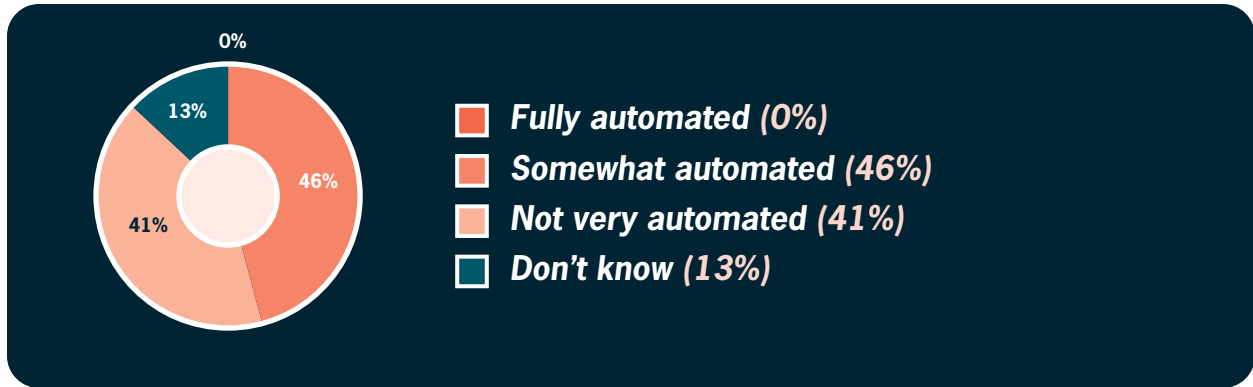


45% of respondents say they have 10 or more people on their payroll manually tracking direct campaigns. Despite this investment in personnel, most are able to check less than half of all assets.

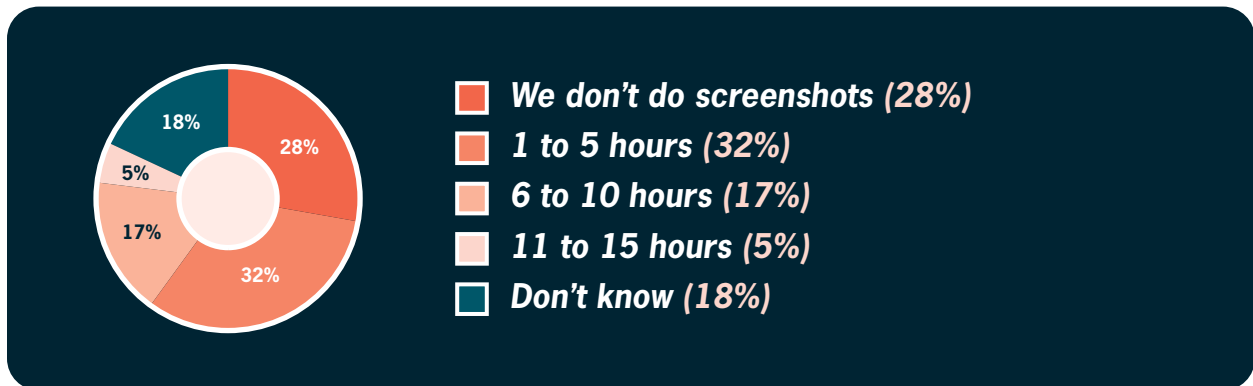
**We asked: How many team members manage direct campaigns trafficking? We heard:**



To what extent is ad trafficking team's work automated? While most publishers have automated part of their processes, not one respondent said their organization had fully automated the management of campaign assets.



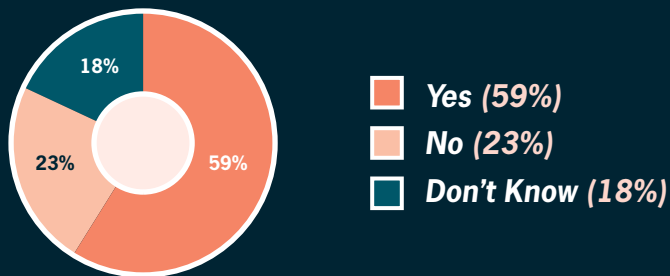
Team members spend hours each week taking screenshots of ads to send to clients. When we asked how much time does your team spend each week taking screenshots of ad placements for agencies, we heard:



**GEOEDGE TIP:** Eliminate the **manual management** by deploying a platform that streamlines the entire process. Automation is possible when the platform has your creative specs pre-written into it so that when the campaign is pushed, it automatically tests 100% of creatives against your requirements.

Efficient tools will automatically upload all tested creatives to your ad server, capture screenshots, and send them to the advertising agency, completely eliminating all manual management tasks.

Does the team leader of your trafficking team have the tools he/she needs to obtain a holistic picture of the status of each campaign?



**GEOEDGE TIP:** Consider a tool that provides full transparency as to the status of all managed campaigns. This is valuable for team leaders who need to see the entire picture of their workloads for reporting and planning purposes. It will also allow them to ensure continuity of campaigns when team members are absent and another needs to take their place.

## 6. GEOEDGE'S REVOPS PLAYBOOK

- 1. Articulate what ad quality means for your brand and your readers. Implement a tool that allows you to automatically block any ad for any reason. Create and enforce granular rules for security, content and user experience (e.g. intrusive ads) standards.**
- 2. Assess the ads that come from each DSP or SSP partner to ensure they're meeting your ad security standards. Most ad security incidents today occur post-click, implement an ad quality solution that catches the 10 distinct categories of ad scams.**
- 3. Monitor the ads that appear on your site, and determine if they meet the criteria laid out in your brand standards. Advertisers categorize their own ad content, which is why publishers can't necessarily rely on an ad server for ad content filtering. Ensure you're automatically blocking all offensive, sensitive or off-brand verticals.**
- 4. Let your users, and your own team, flag any unwanted ads on your site, so adops teams instantly fine-tune customized ad policies. Ensure the ad unit includes a 'report' functionality that allows the team to view flagged ads and execute decisions automatically and in real-time. AdWatch, GeoEdge's Ad Review Center provides an additional transparency layer by providing visibility into all programmatic creatives.**
- 5. Streamline the end-to-end process for managing direct campaign assets, from receiving the assets, to testing them and uploading to the ad server, to capturing screenshots of how the ads appear on your site. Automation will allow your ad ops team to test 100% of campaign assets against your specs, thereby eliminating the need to troubleshoot the reasons why a creative doesn't render correctly.**

# 7. ABOUT THIS STUDY

Number of Survey Respondents: 50

## Type of Publisher

General news	15%
Business	5%
Sports	5%
Lifestyle	22.5%
Entertainment	12.5%
General	12.5%
Tech	2.5%
Financial	5%
Other	20%

## Size of Organization

1 to 49	5%
50 to 499	45%
500 to 999	15%
1,000 to 4,999	15%
5,000+	20%

## Role within Organization

AdOps/Campaign trafficking	17.95%
Revenue Ops	33.33%
Programmatic Director	15.38%
Yield Manager	2.56%
Other (please specify)	30.77%

## Fulfillment Strategies

Direct deals	97.3%
Programmatic open exchanges	86.49%
Programmatic guaranteed	72.97%
Programmatic marketplaces	75.68%
Other (please specify)	5.41%



The global leader in strategic insight on the future of digital media and advertising technology. Through our conferences, website, and original research, we offer unparalleled in-person experiences and unique, highquality content focused on media operations, monetization, technology, strategy, platforms and trends. We provide a forum to share best practices, explore new technology platforms and build relationships.

AdMonsters has built its reputation on providing objective editorial leadership based on deep, real-world expertise. We have continued to evolve our editorial strategy to address the changing needs of the market and, as a result, AdMonsters has attracted a highly focused audience who are at the forefront of the industry, and leading marketing partners have found AdMonsters to be a powerful channel to reach these decision makers. Today, our portfolio of integrated media solutions includes industry-leading live events, our innovative Connect content solutions, email marketing programs, and more.

AdMonsters is part of the [Access Intelligence](#) family of companies.

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GeoEdge's mission is to protect the integrity of the digital advertising ecosystem and to preserve a quality experience for users. GeoEdge's advanced security solutions ensure high ad quality and verify that sites/apps offer a clean, safe and engaging user experience, so publishers and app developers can focus on their business success.

App Developers and publishers around the world rely on GeoEdge to stop malicious and low-quality ads from reaching their audience. GeoEdge allows publishers to maximize their ad revenue without quality concerns, protect their brand reputation and increase their user loyalty. GeoEdge guards digital businesses against unwanted, malicious, offensive and inappropriate ads—without sacrificing revenue.

To learn more, visit: [www.geoedge.com](http://www.geoedge.com)



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