

Top Required Skills for SEO Specialists

Worldwide Research

April 2021



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SEO Jobs Worldwide Research

In 2021 Semrush Academy analyzed around 3000 SEO vacancies on Monster, Indeed and LinkedIn.

We analyzed job offers in the UK, Canada, the USA, Australia and India to find out which skills employers want to see in their ideal candidates.

We reviewed job vacancies for SEO Managers and SEO Specialists.

MONSTER

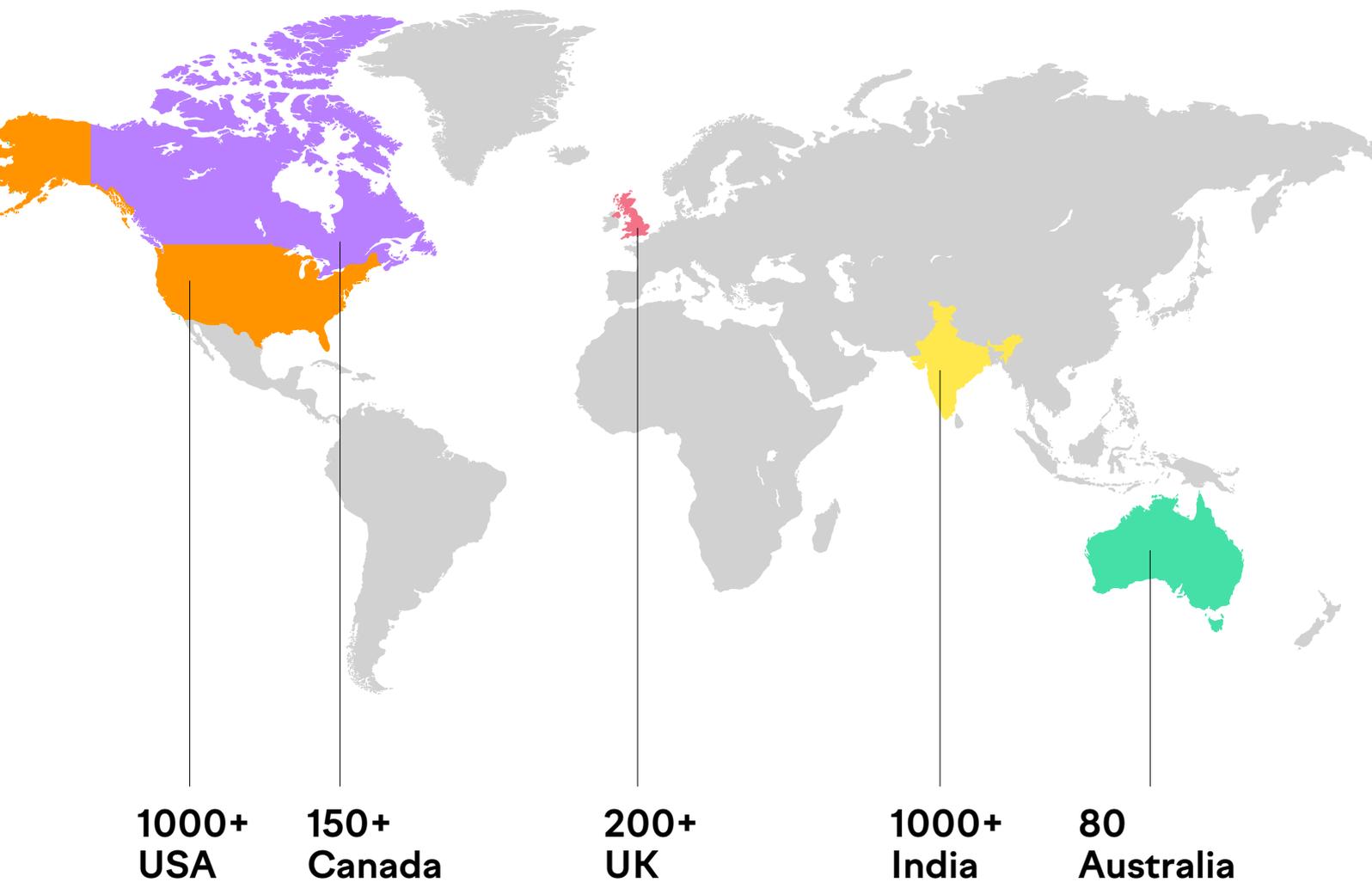
LinkedIn

indeed

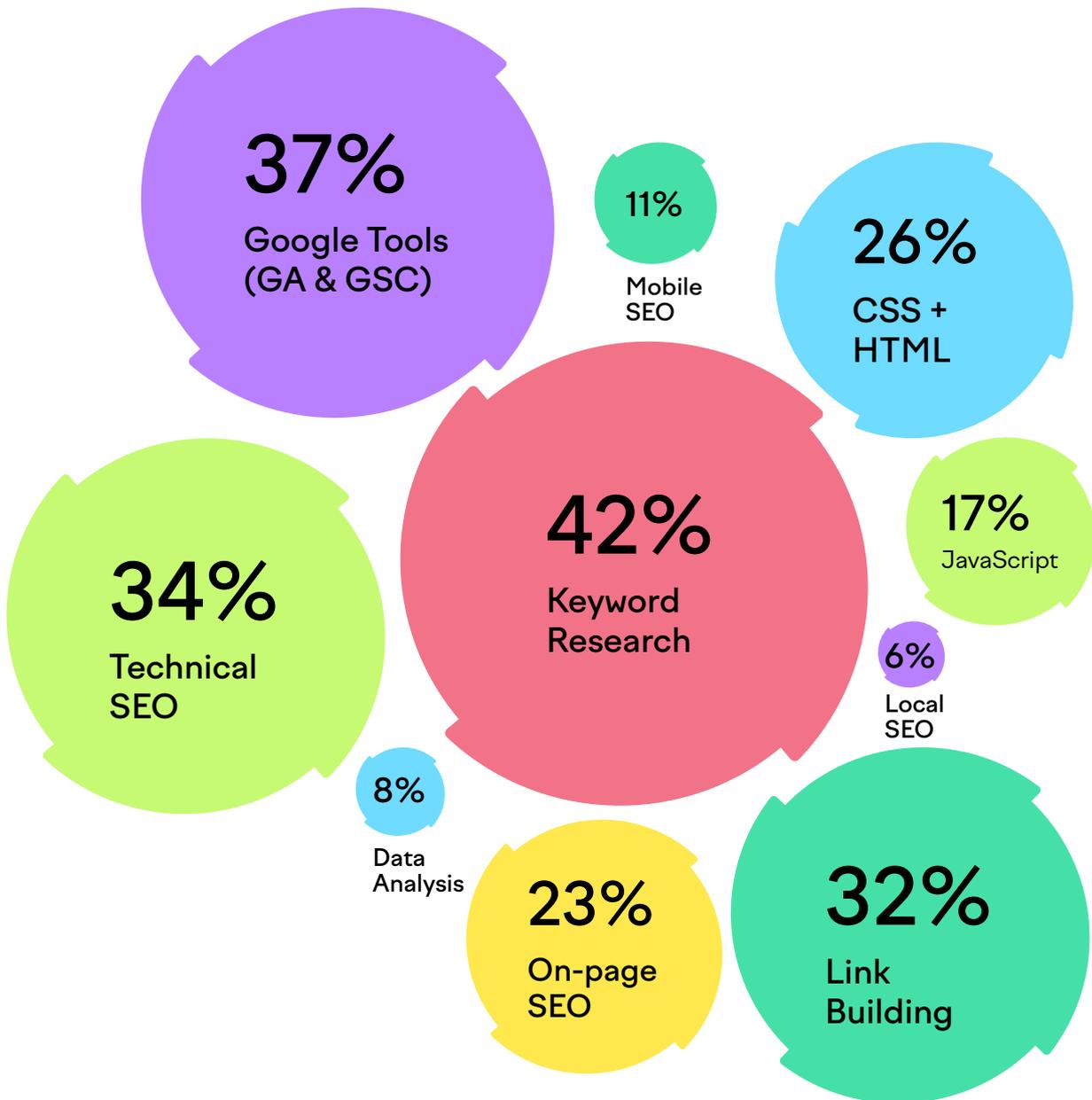


The Research Geography

Number of job offers reviewed worldwide



Most Required Skills



The above data represents the employer's requirements mentioned in the job offers and can differ for each particular job offer. The percentage shows the number of mentions of a particular skill in the total number of SEO job offers.

Top Required Skills in the SEO Industry, 2021

 USA	 India	 Canada	 Australia	 UK
Technical SEO 37%	Google tools (GA and GSC) 47%	Technical SEO 46%	Google tools (GA and GSC) 79%	Keyword Research 57%
Keyword Research 29%	Link Building 47%	Google tools (GA and GSC) 34%	Keyword Research 52%	Google tools (GA and GSC) 52%
Google tools (GA and GSC) 24%	Keyword Research 46%	Keyword Research 27%	Link Building 37%	Technical SEO 52%
Link Building 20%	On-page SEO 38%	Data Analysis 24%	Technical SEO 30%	HTML+ CSS 32%
CSS+ HTML 17%	CSS+ HTML 37%	HTML+ CSS 24%	Local SEO 20%	Link Building 24%
On-page SEO 17%	Technical SEO 20%	Link Building 21%	HTML+ CSS 15%	Backlink Analysis 24%
Java Script 14%	Java Script 13%	Java Script 19%	Backlink Analysis 15%	Java Script 23%
A/B Testing 7%	Mobile SEO 13%	Mobile SEO 17%	Java Script 10%	Mobile SEO 14%
Mobile SEO 7%	Data Analysis 8%	On-page SEO 16%	On-page SEO 10%	Local SEO 8%
Backlink Analysis 6%	Local SEO 7%	Local SEO 16%	Mobile SEO 7%	Data Analysis 8%

The percentage shows the number of mentions of a particular skill in the total number of SEO job offers.

Most Desirable SEO Skills in 2021

SEO specialists are in high demand nowadays. Every business from small-scale to global requires SEO efforts to be visible. Many candidates declare themselves to be experienced SEO specialists, but what are the skills that employers want to see in their ideal candidates?

Being a great SEO specialist requires a wide range of skills. All the mentioned skills are important for an efficient SEO manager, but it is especially crucial to be familiar with technical aspects, search engine algorithms, keyword research and link building, and, definitely, to be able to work with tools that enable better performance of SEO activities and facilitate the work routine of an SEO expert.

1. This year, keyword research skills got the top position among employers' requirements. Keyword research is a robust SEO strategy when relevant and well done.
2. Knowledge of Google tools like GA and GSC is essential nowadays and gives extra power to an SEO specialist. The tools are indispensable for a professional who keeps a finger on the pulse of the most recent SEO trends and tracks the results and effectiveness of campaigns and activities.
3. Search engine algorithms are constantly changing, so it is important to be aware of the technical aspects of SEO to be able to fix any issues and maintain perfect visibility of a website.
4. Link building, which is also in the top 10, helps businesses to stay ahead of the competition, and detect and disavow toxic backlinks to avoid Google penalties.
5. According to our study, knowledge of HTML and CSS and on-page SEO are also important and frequently mentioned, so do not overlook them.

Boost your knowledge of the keyword research basics with this free in-depth course brought to you by Semrush Academy and Greg Gifford.



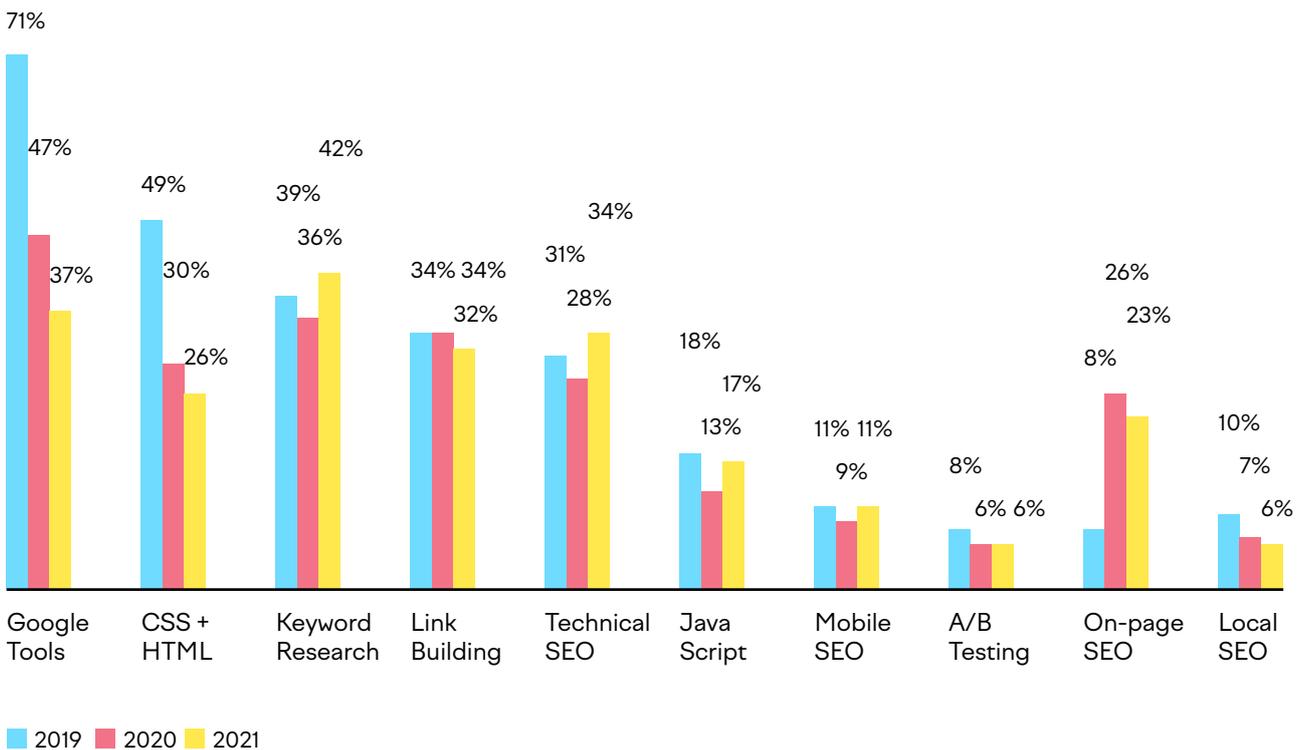
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SEO Skills Dynamics

There have been certain changes in employer's requirements for the ideal SEO candidate in the last few years. In 2021, compared to 2019 and 2020, the percentage of SEO job offers requiring Google tools and familiarity with HTML and CSS has decreased, probably replaced by other skills that are gaining more importance.

On the contrary, keyword research, on-page SEO and technical SEO skills have become more frequently mentioned.

Local SEO, A/B testing and JavaScript knowledge have remained on a similar level throughout 2019-2021.



The percentage shows the number of mentions of a particular skill in the total number of SEO job offers.

SEO Tools

There are many SEO tools on the market that allow easier and more effective implementation of SEO strategies.

Here are the top 5 most in-demand tools that employers want ideal candidates to be familiar with. Although the ranking of the tools varies slightly depending on the country, the top 3 tools on the worldwide English-speaking market are Semrush, Moz and Ahrefs.

In the US, Canada and the UK, Semrush is the most popular tool mentioned in job offers. In India, Moz seems to be the most frequently named tool.

In Australia Screaming Frog was the most frequently mentioned tool in the job vacancies. In the UK, shares of mentions of Moz and Ahrefs are almost equal. Among other tools DeepCrawl, Majestic, Net Insight, Omniture, Raven, Schema, and Spyfu were mentioned.

	US	India	Canada*	Australia*	UK	Total
ahrefs	16%	5%	16%	11%	18%	16%
BRIGHTEDGE	6%	1%	3%	2%	5%	5%
MOZ	20%	11%	18%	16%	17%	19%
Screamingfrog	17%	3%	13%	21%	15%	15%
SEMRUSH	26%	9%	21%	19%	26%	23%

* The data for these countries are based on a small sample and can therefore be considered only as a reference.

Semrush is a popular and frequently used tool, according to the research, so visit the Semrush Academy and take a free SEO toolkit course.

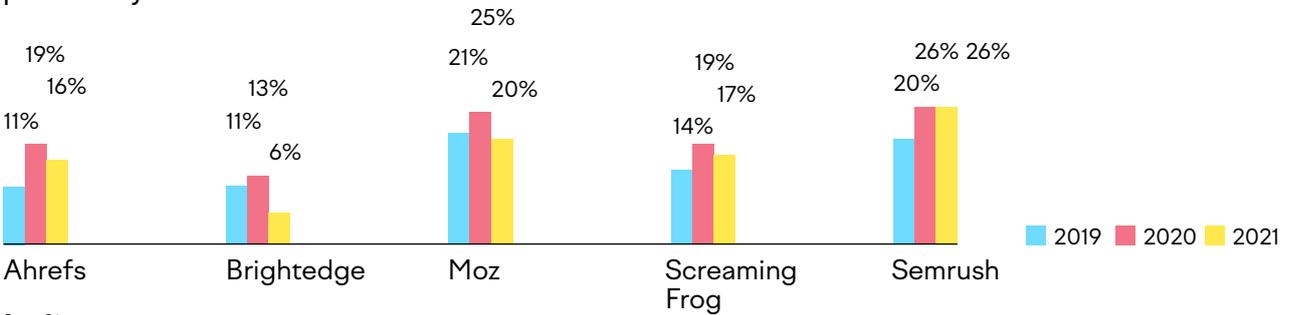


SEO Tools Dynamics

It is useful to see the dynamics in the required tools for SEO vacancies.

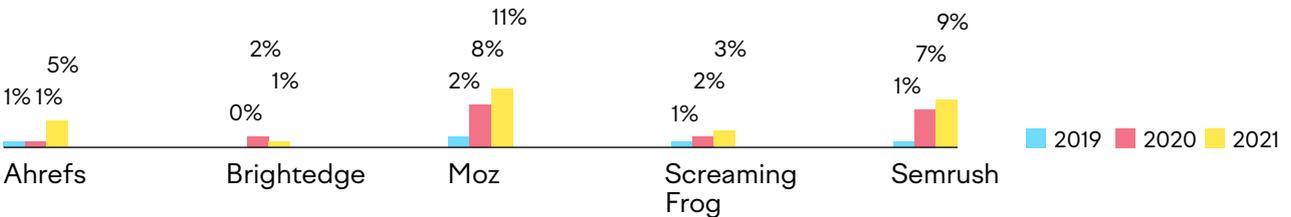
USA

In the US, the percentage of SEO jobs where knowledge of Ahrefs, Screaming Frog or Semrush is beneficial has risen since 2019. Compared to 2020, in 2021, all three tools maintained their positions. Brightedge showed a decrease in popularity compared to the previous year's data.



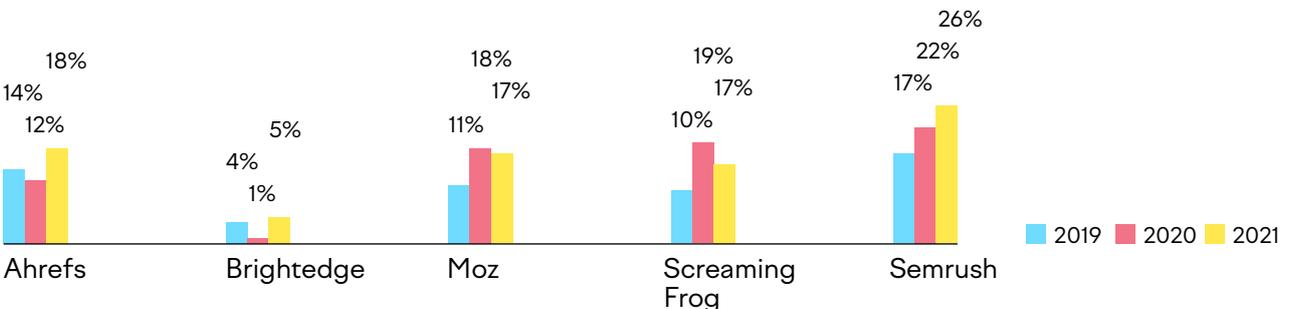
India

In India, tools are not often mentioned in job vacancies, although of course knowing them is a competitive advantage for job seekers. All of the tools (except for Brightedge) show slow growth in 2021, although this growth fluctuates between 1% and 3%. Compared to 2019 in 2021, mentions of Moz and Semrush increased from 2% to 11% and from 1% to 9% respectively.



UK

Compared to 2019 in 2021, the SEO jobs market in the UK has demonstrated growth in the demand for knowledge of all 5 top-mentioned tools. Compared to 2020 in 2021, shares of mentions of Moz and Screaming Frog have decreased.



The percentage shows the number of mentions of a particular skill in the total number of SEO job offers.

SEO Search Queries, 2021

Using Semrush, we decided to find out what people would like to know about SEO, and to identify areas that lack information. The results show that most questions refer to SEO definitions, and to the ways of doing SEO. So, people wonder “What is SEO”, “What does SEO stand for?”, “What is SEO marketing” and “How to do SEO”. Such questions as “How to improve SEO?”, “How SEO works?” and “What is SEO writing” are also in the top 15 list.

Keywords	Search Volumes*
What is SEO	51 000
What does SEO stand for	5 660
What is SEO marketing	4 790
What is SEO and how it works	3 550
How to do SEO	3 070
What is SEO in digital marketing	3 000
What does SEO mean	2 950
How SEO works	2 860
How to improve SEO	2 070
How does SEO work	1 900
What is SEO mean	1 830
How to SEO	1 800
What is on page SEO	1 800
What is SEO writing	1 610
What is local SEO	1 240

* Sum of average monthly search volumes for US, UK, AU, CA, IN.

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Search Query Topics, 2021

We have also divided the most popular Google queries about SEO into several topics. According to the results, most queries relate to definitions of SEO and different areas of SEO. The second most popular group refers to the SEO process, where users wonder how to do SEO generally and in specific areas to get better results. Educational queries are also on the list, as users want to know how to learn SEO on their own. Then come queries about different SEO types, which are followed by questions about prices of SEO, and SEO tools that make the life of an SEO professional easier.

Keywords	Search Volumes*
Definitions of SEO	80 870
How to do SEO	21 900
Queries about types of SEO	9 090
Educational	2 710
SEO Tools	2 150
Prices of SEO	1 320

* Sum of average monthly search volumes for US, UK, AU, CA, IN.

Key Takeaways

1. The most important skill for an SEO candidate in 2021 is knowledge of keyword research. Around 40% of the job offers mention this skills as highly desirable.
2. Google tools (Google Analytics and Google Search Console) were mentioned in 37% of the SEO job vacancies. And we have a strong feeling that in the remaining SEO vacancies it is supposed to be present by default.
3. Then, candidates should be familiar with technical SEO and be ready to perform site audits and solve issues that appear.
4. Link building is also in the top10 required skills. As links are a signal to search engines that your site is trustworthy, it is extremely important to acquire “quality” links.
5. HTML and CSS were mentioned in 26% of SEO vacancies.
6. It is appreciated if a candidate has a knowledge of on-page SEO (23%). In 2019, only 8% of job offers mentioned this skill as a requirement.
7. Mobile SEO is logically getting more attention with the fast penetration of mobile devices in life. The world is changing and mobile search dominates over desktop, so it's no surprise that 11% of job vacancies require an understanding of mobile SEO basics.
8. Employers give more attention to special tools that can facilitate working on SEO strategies. Ahrefs, Moz and Semrush are the most popular.
9. Most Google queries are about definitions of SEO, the process of doing SEO and particular SEO skills, although, compared to 2020, the average volume of educational queries (How to become SEO, How to learn SEO at home, How to do SEO yourself etc.) increased from 180 to 2710.

Expert Comments



Peter Mead

WordPress SEO Consultant



Semrush reviewed the top SEO specialist skills required in five English-speaking countries. What is your view on these findings?

Technical SEO skills are a must if you want to get any real and long-lasting SEO results. A large number of the SEO challenges you'll encounter will involve in a large part the ability to understand technical SEO to be able to diagnose the issues and then decide on the most appropriate action to take. Common SEO considerations such as Schema, Core Web Vitals, Javascript SEO, website architecture, Website migrations and various URL-related considerations all require a range of technical skills.

As an SEO, you're going to need some level of HTML skills, which is a technical SEO skill. Also, commonly, you will need to know how to deal with CSS issues, and Javascript rendering issues, which can cause major problems in search. You will need to be able to understand and read the data in Google Analytics, and Google Search Console, and be able to troubleshoot highlighted issues. Using the URL inspection tool, and following up on errors are all technical skills every SEO should possess.

Semrush found the tools most frequently required in SEO job offers. Do you agree, or can you name some other tools that are essential for an SEO specialist?

I use Semrush as my comprehensive platform of tools, in conjunction with other tools such as Screaming Frog, Google Search Console, Google Lighthouse, Bing Webmaster Tools and many more.

I can acknowledge that a huge portion of my career has only been made successful due to my heavy focus on, and continuous upskilling and learning of, emerging technical SEO. I highly recommend anyone who is serious about SEO to dive into learning the skills. There are many resources available, including the Semrush Academy, which is a great way to learn best practices from industry experts.

How will the SEO job market change in the next 1-2 years? Will other capacities and skills become important for an SEO specialist, or some skills see a fall in demand?

Technical SEO is here to stay, and SEO continues to become more technical, so it's no surprise that highly skilled technical SEO consultants are in high demand.



Rob Peck

Director of Client Services,
O₃M



Semrush reviewed the top SEO specialist skills required in five English-speaking countries. What is your view on these findings?

I'm delighted to see such a consensus for the importance of keyword research. If that is not sound initially, all future SEO efforts may largely be for naught. Additionally, I think Covid underscored the importance of continual keyword research — so many aspects of consumer behavior pivoted during lockdowns; companies must understand these shifts and act accordingly.

Google Tools seems high. While “straight from the horse’s mouth” may work well for some things, I’m not sure this is one of them. Of course, SEOs must understand Analytics, GMB, etc., but, for example, in 2021 is Google Keyword Planner really the best source of keyword data (trick question — of course Semrush is the best source)?

Local SEO is surprisingly low. Perhaps many SEOs (particular juniors) don’t understand just how much local impacts a brand’s appearance in the search results? Perhaps they are thinking “local SEO” is inherently “SMB SEO”? It’s not. Even a large bank or international restaurant chain must succeed in local SEO.

Semrush found the tools most frequently required in SEO job offers. Do you agree, or can you name some other tools that are essential for an SEO specialist?

This looks about right. And congratulations! I may want to see something a little deeper on the brand listening side. It probably goes without saying, but Google Analytics, Search Console, and GMB are musts.

How will the SEO job market change in the next 1-2 years? Will other capacities and skills become important for an SEO specialist, or some skills see a fall in demand?

Sorry that so many of my answers are Covid related, but I believe the industry will continue to grow, perhaps at an even quicker pace due to so many businesses now clearly seeing that they must succeed online.

The biggest job market change I foresee (again Covid related) is the increased trust in remote work. If leveraged, this will be a massive boon for Indian SEO agencies as well as individual SEOs across Asia. I am seeing lots of tremendously talented SEOs in the Asian market who are at the same skill level as US and UK-based resources, but work at (much) cheaper rates due to a lower cost of living. Stateside SEOs must focus on being strategists and leaders (still a gap there), but as far as “doers” — the future is looking Eastward.



Emanuel Petrescu

SEO Specialist,
emanuelp.com



Semrush reviewed the top SEO specialist skills required in five English-speaking countries. What is your view on these findings?

The results seem to reflect the reality of our business. For keyword research, I would go in depth, adding that figuring out the intent behind each search is also a particular set of skills, as this tends to be slightly more important than the keywords themselves in some cases. Additionally, HTML, CSS and JavaScript are part of the so-called technical SEO as they are required in order to fix bugs (and there are many bugs popping up) on the website — most of them are from JavaScript. Knowing these languages definitely helps. As for local, I know businesses that get most of their prospects via local search, so mastering the rankings on a local level can differentiate one specialist from the rest.

Semrush found the tools most frequently required in SEO job offers. Do you agree, or can you name some other tools that are essential for an SEO specialist?

It's no coincidence that Semrush is the most useful/required tool in most agencies. Its versatility and complex reporting are features that fulfill most SEOs' requirements. Not to mention the amount of free content available via webinars, interviews and articles that Semrush offers (it sometimes feels like every day is a conference day). Having the Academy and offering free courses from industry experts also helps, because people can learn about the tool while learning the skills. That being said, obviously, there's more to the job than knowing how to use a tool. As with any other job, the attitude you have towards them makes a difference.

How will the SEO job market change in the next 1-2 years? Will other capacities and skills become important for an SEO specialist, or some skills see a fall in demand?

Adaptability is the key word here. Most of the basic concepts will still be around, but you should pay more attention to the intent of the search.

Consider voice search, how and also where people search will shift. SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization, so, to a certain extent, Facebook, Pinterest and TikTok are search engines as well.

Take into consideration the rumours that Apple is building their own search engine, and consider the number of iPhone users — this can significantly impact the landscape.

On a side note, imagine how an algorithm update on Apple's search engine will roll out if they apply the same strategy as they do with their software and hardware.



Harry Sanders

Director & Head of Search
STUDIOHAWK



Semrush reviewed the top SEO specialist skills required in five English-speaking countries. What is your view on these findings?

As we start heading into 2021 we can see that the understanding of core Google principles has become more important than ever, with development skills like HTML+CSS dropping off in favour of a better understanding of core algorithm skills like keyword research (search intent), link building (offsite SEO), as well as technical SEO and onsite SEO (combined totalling 57%). This tells me that now more than ever it's important to understand the fundamental needs of search engines and users, and this is refreshing compared to the flavour of the month SEO that we have seen in previous years. It means that the industry is maturing and we are becoming better SEOs for it.

Semrush found the tools most frequently required in SEO job offers. Do you agree, or can you name some other tools that are essential for an SEO specialist?

I'm surprised to see Screaming Frog at only 15%, I think there are a lot of new tools coming out every day and the job market often falls behind in what the practitioners are actually using. I would say some tools on that list, like Brightedge, are used less, while others like Semrush, Ahrefs, and Screaming Frog are used more.

How will the SEO job market change in the next 1-2 years? Will other capacities and skills become important for an SEO specialist, or some skills see a fall in demand?

The SEO job market is already changing rapidly, but I think you will see more SEO specialists focusing on core skills and competencies, rather than the more traditional jack of all trades approach that we may be used to. I can already see a huge demand from big internationals seeking individuals with not just specialized SEO knowledge, but specific knowledge within that such as knowledge of EAT, Javascript, Information Architecture etc.



Ross Tavendale

Managing Director
at **Type A Media**



Semrush reviewed the top SEO specialist skills required in five English-speaking countries. What is your view on these findings?

I think it's surprising that there are no wider business skills that have started to creep into the top skills that SEOs need to possess. It's my experience in hiring SEOs that everyone is relatively good at basics like technical audits and keyword research but lacks business skills like data analysis and setting business strategy. Over the coming years, being able to make a compelling business case for SEO to be implemented in an organization is going to be far more important to achieve SEO success.

Semrush found the tools most frequently required in SEO job offers. Do you agree, or can you name some other tools that are essential for an SEO specialist?

Using tools can be useful to speed up the process; however, the real best-use case for tools is being able to extract their data and use it for your project. This is why I am a huge advocate of using the Semrush API inside of Google sheets — you can get all of the data that you need and create custom views on it in order to understand the best way to drive more traffic to your site.

How will the SEO job market change in the next 1-2 years? Will other capacities and skills become important for an SEO specialist, or some skills see a fall in demand?

The SEO job market will continue to boom, but we will see many more digital PR and content strategy roles than before. As the tools, such as Semrush, get better and better, they start to remove the need for entry-level SEO people. On client-side SEO, there will be a far greater need for competent account managers that are able to take complex technical SEO information and distil it down into terms that a layman can understand.

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