

How Much Does SEO Cost?

A GUIDE BY BUSINESS SIZE AND INDUSTRY

Get a larger, more detailed breakdown of SEO costs by business size, number of employees, and industry in this guide!

Our Methodology

We surveyed over 250 businesses to learn how much businesses spend on SEO, from traditional SEO to local SEO to technical SEO and everything in between. Plus, we looked at real-world data, like backlink requirements and content velocity to understand why costs differ between businesses.



Introduction

Search engine optimization (SEO) remains one of the most effective digital marketing channels for driving traffic, leads, and sales. But when businesses ask, "How much does SEO cost?" the answer isn't one-size-fits-all. SEO pricing varies depending on business size, industry competitiveness, and the type of SEO provider.

Below, we break down SEO costs by business size and industry, explain why prices differ, and help you benchmark your own budget.

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How SEO Pricing Works

Before diving into costs, it's important to understand how SEO services are structured. Different pricing models fit different business sizes, goals, and resources:

1. Monthly Retainer (Most Common)

How it works: Businesses pay a flat monthly fee for ongoing SEO campaigns, which usually include keyword research, content creation, link building, technical fixes, and reporting.

Best For:



- Companies that view SEO as a long-term investment, especially **small to medium businesses (SMBs), e-commerce stores, and enterprises** aiming for steady growth.

Pros:



- Predictable costs, consistent effort, and the best model for compounding results.

Cons:



- Requires a long-term commitment, often 6–12 months before seeing significant ROI.

2. Hourly Rate

How it works: Freelancers or consultants charge by the hour, typically for audits, troubleshooting, training, or small projects.

Best For:



- Startups, local businesses, or companies with limited budgets that need expert advice but don't want a large contract.

Pros:



- Flexible, pay only for what you need.

Cons:



- Can become expensive for bigger projects; less scalable for ongoing SEO needs.

3. Project-Based Fee

How it works: A one-time cost for specific deliverables, such as a technical audit, content optimization, or website migration support.

Best For:



- Businesses with short-term goals (e.g., fixing site issues, optimizing a product launch, or preparing for a rebrand).

Pros:



- Clear scope and deliverables, good for testing an SEO provider before committing long-term.

Cons:



- Limited impact unless followed by ongoing SEO work.

4. In-House / DIY SEO

How it works: Companies assign internal staff or marketing teams to handle SEO using tools and training.

Best For:



- Mid-size to large businesses with in-house marketing teams, or startups that want to build SEO knowledge from scratch.

Pros:



- Full control, deeper understanding of brand and industry.

Cons:



- High learning curve, ongoing tool costs, risk of slower results without expert knowledge.

Which Pricing Model is Best for Your Business?

- ✓ **Local businesses & startups:** Hourly consulting or small project-based work can provide cost-effective solutions without long contracts.
- ✓ **Growing SMBs & ecommerce:** Monthly retainers are the most efficient way to build consistent traffic and revenue over time.
- ✓ **Enterprises:** A mix of in-house SEO specialists supported by agencies (retainer or project-based) works best for scaling across multiple markets.
- ✓ **Budget-conscious businesses:** DIY SEO can work if you have the time and willingness to learn, but it's usually slower than outsourcing.

SEO Costs by Number of Employees & Business Size

SEO spend scales with company size. Larger businesses typically have bigger budgets, more complex websites, and higher competition in search.



Monthly SEO Spend by Employee Size

Company Size	Most Common Monthly Spend	Typical Range
1–20 employees	\$500 – \$2,500	Less than \$500 to \$5,000
101–200 employees	\$5,000 – \$10,000	\$5,001 to \$20,000
501–1,000 employees	\$2,500 – \$5,000	\$500 to \$15,000+
1,001–2,500 employees	\$1,001 – \$5,000	\$500 to \$50,000+
5,001+ employees	\$20,000+	\$15,000 to \$50,000+

Key Insights from our Data

**Startups & Small Businesses (1–20 employees)**

Typical spend: Many spend conservatively, often under **\$2,500 per month**.

Why they spend this amount:

1. Smaller budgets and tighter cash flow mean marketing dollars must stretch further.
2. SEO efforts are often focused on local search visibility (e.g., Google Business Profile, local keywords), which requires less investment than national or global campaigns.
3. Many small businesses supplement SEO with DIY efforts or rely on freelancers/consultants rather than large agencies.

Goal alignment: The focus is on attracting nearby customers, generating consistent leads, and building an online presence without overspending.

**Small to Mid-Sized Companies (100–500 employees)**

Typical spend: SEO budgets generally fall between **\$5,000 – \$10,000 per month**.

Why they spend this amount:

1. Mid-sized companies often compete in broader markets or multiple regions, which increases the complexity of their SEO campaigns.
2. They require a **balance of technical SEO, ongoing content creation, and link-building strategies** to grow visibility.
3. Many operate in competitive industries where ranking requires sustained investment.

Goal alignment: These companies are looking to **scale lead generation, boost brand authority, and support sales pipelines** with higher-quality organic traffic.



Enterprises (5,000+ employees)

Typical spend: Enterprises frequently exceed **\$20,000/month**, with some investing **\$50,000+ monthly** on SEO.

Why they spend this amount:

1. Large organizations often manage **massive websites with thousands of pages** (e.g., e-commerce, SaaS, publishers), requiring constant optimization, monitoring, and technical upkeep.
2. SEO campaigns are usually multi-layered—spanning multiple languages, regions, and product categories.
3. Enterprises are competing for **top-tier, high-value keywords** in extremely competitive spaces where the ROI justifies significant investment.
4. They often partner with agencies or maintain **hybrid in-house + outsourced SEO teams** to manage large-scale initiatives.

Goal alignment: The aim is to **dominate search visibility**, maintain brand reputation, and ensure that SEO integrates seamlessly with global marketing strategies.

Key Takeaways

SEO investment scales with business size because:

1 **Smaller companies** need affordable visibility in local or niche markets.



2 **Mid-sized businesses** require broader campaigns to support growth and compete regionally/nationally.



3 **Enterprises** face high stakes and complex digital ecosystems, making advanced, large-scale SEO essential for maintaining market leadership.



SEO Costs by Industry

Industries differ in competitiveness, which directly impacts SEO pricing. Highly competitive industries like finance, ecommerce, and technology demand more resources, while less competitive sectors (like niche services) may require lower budgets.



Monthly SEO Spend by Industry

Industry	Most Common Spend	Observed Range
Accounting	\$500 – \$2,500	\$500 to \$20,000+
Automotive	\$1,000 – \$2,500	Around \$2,000
Banking/Financial	\$2,500 – \$25,000	\$500 to \$25,000+
Education	\$5,000 – \$15,000	\$500 to \$50,000+
Hospitality/Tourism	\$2,500 – \$5,000	\$2,500 to \$10,000
IT / Technology	\$5,000 – \$10,000	\$500 to \$20,000
Manufacturing	\$7,500 – \$10,000	\$7,500 to \$15,000
Food & Consumer Products	\$500 – \$2,500	<\$500 to \$7,500

Monthly SEO Spend by Industry

- ✔ **Banking and financial services** invest heavily, often exceeding \$20,000/month due to fierce keyword competition and compliance needs.
- ✔ **Education** (particularly large universities) shows some of the highest SEO spends, with enterprises allocating \$50,000+ monthly.
- ✔ **Manufacturing and IT companies** lean toward mid-to-high tier SEO budgets, reflecting competitive B2B search landscapes.
- ✔ **Hospitality and tourism** businesses cluster around \$2,500–\$5,000/month, balancing local and seasonal search strategies.
- ✔ **Small-scale consumer products and local services** typically spend under \$2,500/month.

Why SEO Costs Differ

Several factors explain why SEO pricing varies so widely:

- 1. Business size:** Larger organizations require more complex SEO (enterprise-level sites, international SEO, compliance).
- 2. Industry competitiveness:** The more valuable the search terms, the higher the cost to compete.
- 3. Scope of work:** A local plumber may need citation management and local SEO, while a SaaS company needs content marketing, technical SEO, and link building.
- 4. Provider type:**
 - Agencies often charge higher retainers but offer full-service teams.
 - Freelancers and consultants may cost less but provide narrower services.
 - In-house SEO costs vary based on salaries and resources.
- 5. Goals and aggressiveness:** Ranking nationally for “best credit cards” costs exponentially more than ranking locally for “dentist in Austin.”

How to Budget for SEO

If you're planning your SEO budget, here are some general guidelines based on survey data and industry benchmarks:



- **Small local business:** \$500 – \$2,500/month
- **Growing mid-sized company:** \$5,000 – \$10,000/month
- **Competitive industries (finance, legal, healthcare):** \$10,000 – \$25,000/month
- **Enterprise-level SEO:** \$20,000 – \$50,000+/month

When evaluating providers, consider not just the price but also the value: transparent reporting, demonstrated results, and alignment with your growth goals.

Conclusion

SEO is not a fixed-cost service — it's an investment that scales with your business size, industry, and ambitions.

When deciding your SEO budget, benchmark against your industry peers, consider your growth goals, and choose a provider who can deliver measurable ROI.

What to read next

- [Can You Do SEO Yourself?](#)
- [Your 56-Point SEO Checklist for Beginners](#)
- [Is Paying for SEO Worth It?](#)
- [How to Make a Strategic SEO Investment for Your Company](#)
- [How to Choose an SEO Agency](#)
- [What Does a Bad SEO Agency Look Like?](#)
- [SEO Services for Traffic and Revenue Generation from WebFX](#)

