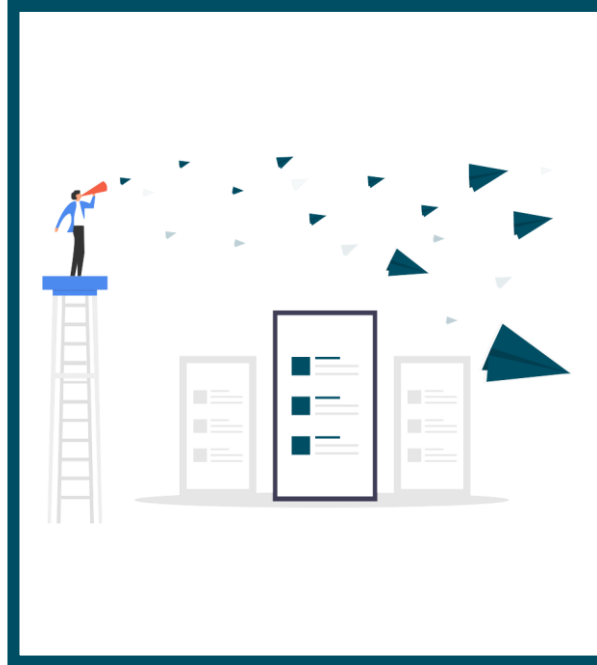


2020 Local News Digital Review



 epilocal

Methodology



**Random
sample of 100**



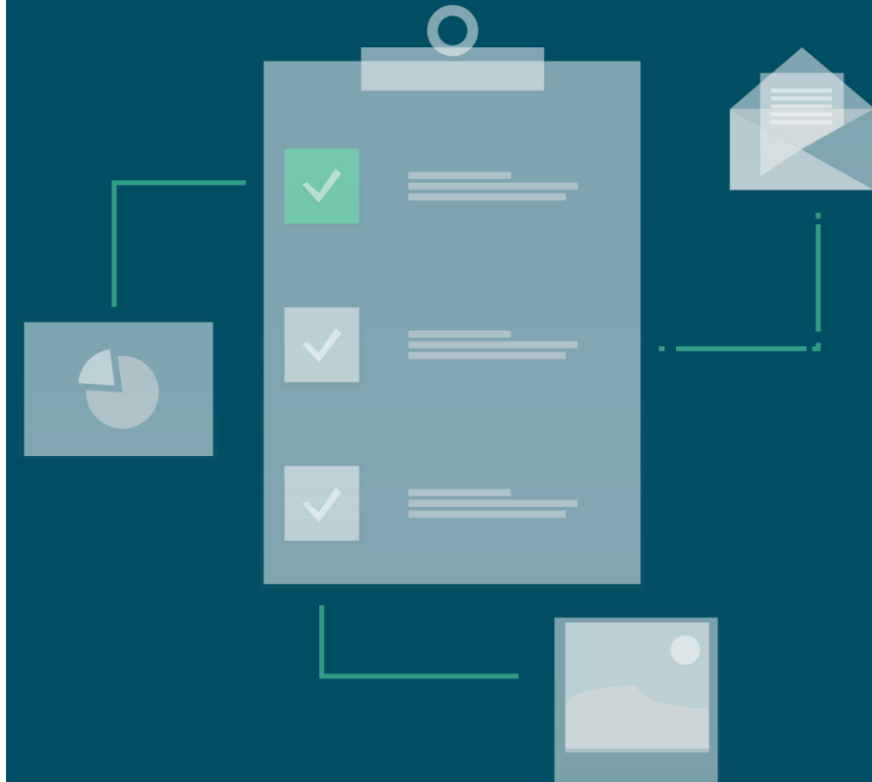
**Independent
news sites**



**Wappalyzer
and manual
inspection**

100 sites were chosen at random from the Local Independent Online News Publishers (LION) members' directory.

Sites were inspected in November of 2020 using the Wappalyzer Chrome extension and manual inspection of site elements and newsletters.



The Local News Digital Stack



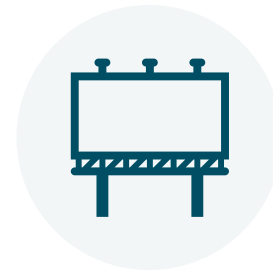
Content Management System (CMS)



Analytics



Email / Newsletters



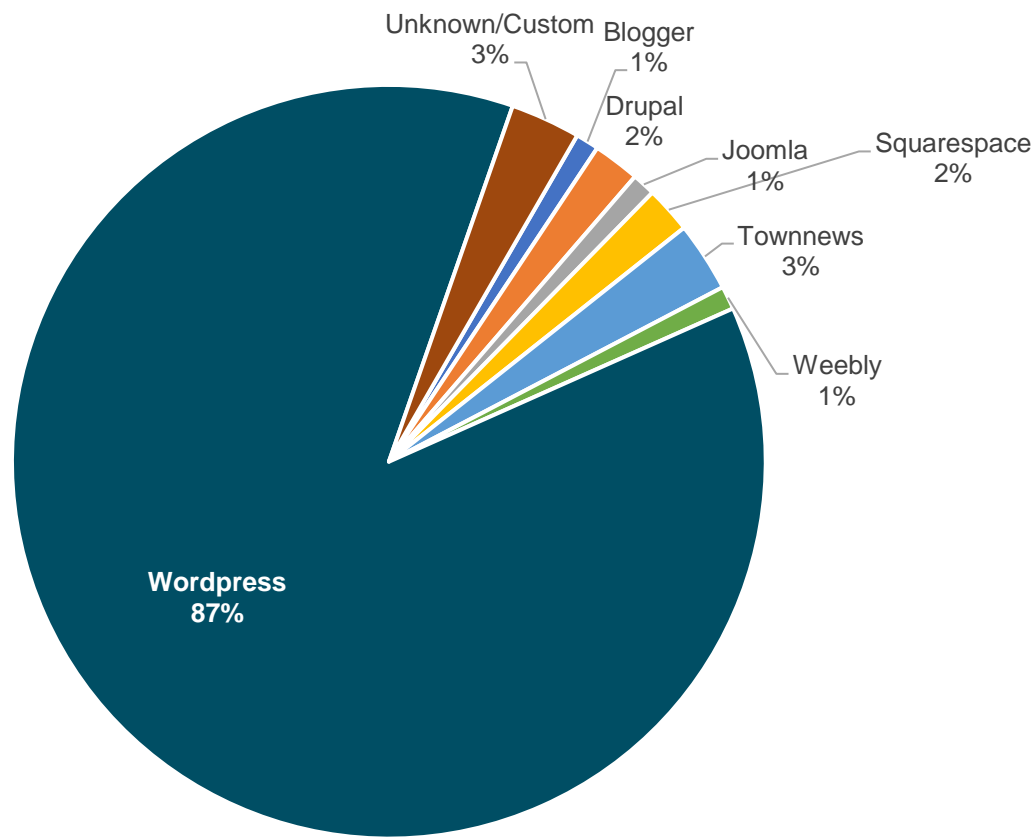
Advertising



Membership / Donations

Sites were evaluated across the above 5 categories that match up with the key elements of the digital business model for news sites

CMS Breakdown



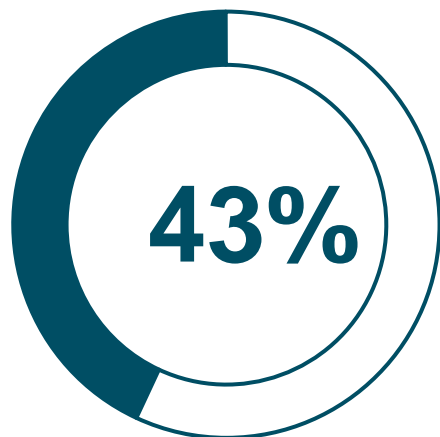
WordPress is far and away the standard CMS choice used by 87 of the 100 sites reviewed

Other less popular options include:

- *Townnews (3%)*
- *Custom site with no apparent CMS (3%)*
- *Squarespace (2%)*
- *Drupal (2%)*

Managed Hosting

A significant number of sites, although not the majority, use managed hosting services in order to streamline their WordPress delivery



22 out of 43



FLYWHEEL

4 out of 43



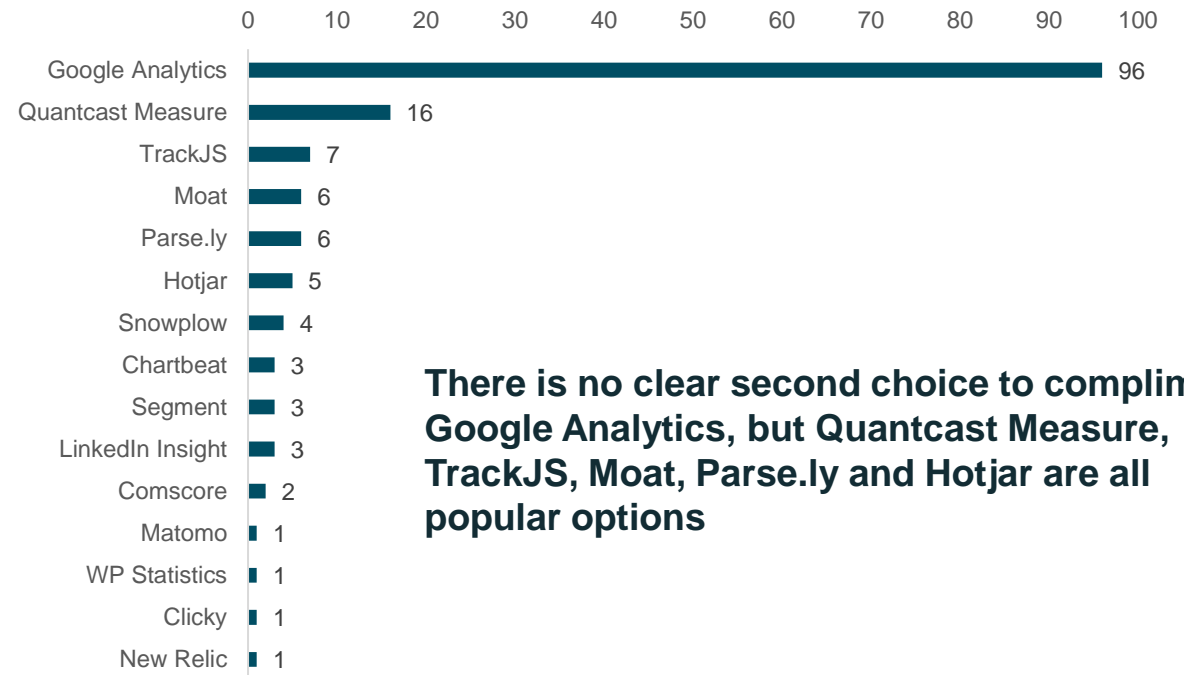
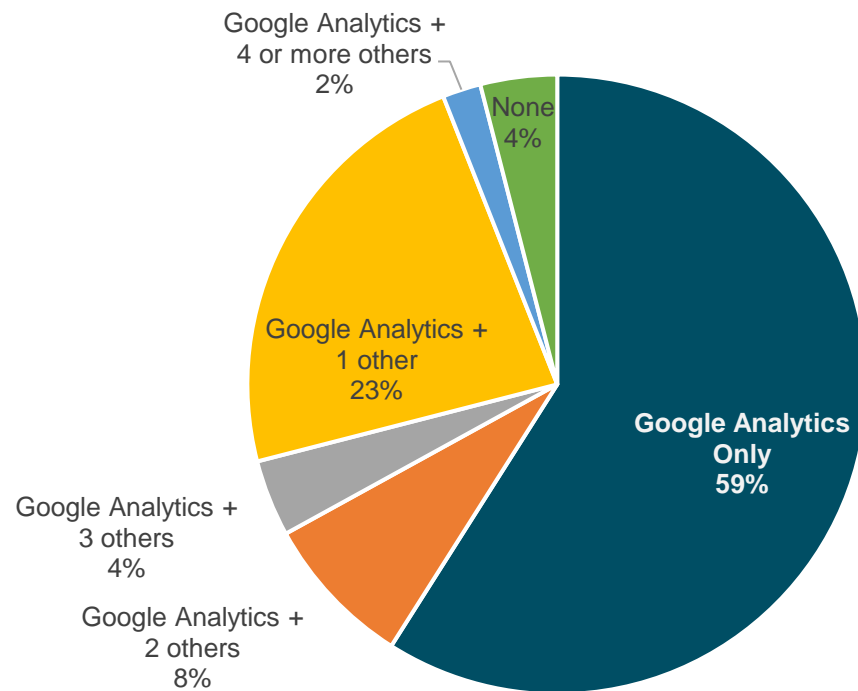
4 out of 43

Other less popular services include: Web Publisher PRO, WordPress VIP, Siteground, Kinsta, Bluehost, News Project

Analytics Tools



Google Analytics is the foundation of analytics for news sites, with 96% using it and 59% of sites using it exclusively



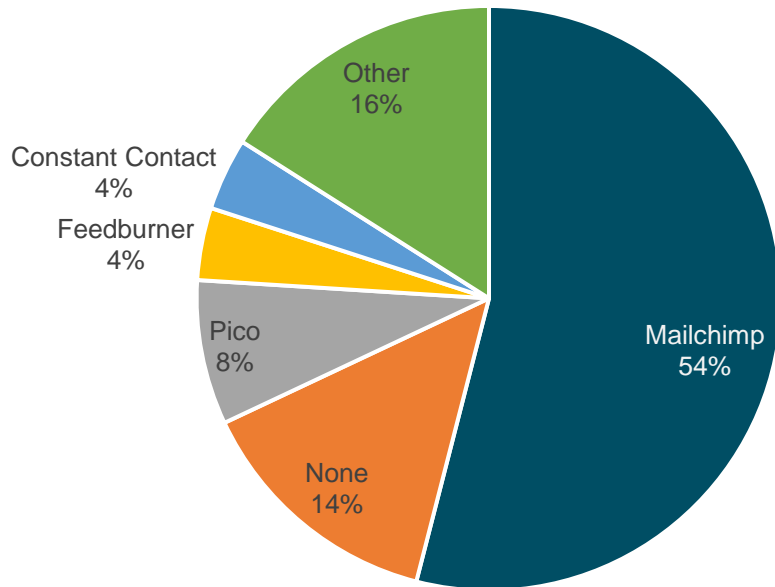
There is no clear second choice to compliment Google Analytics, but Quantcast Measure, TrackJS, Moat, Parse.ly and Hotjar are all popular options

Email Marketing Tools

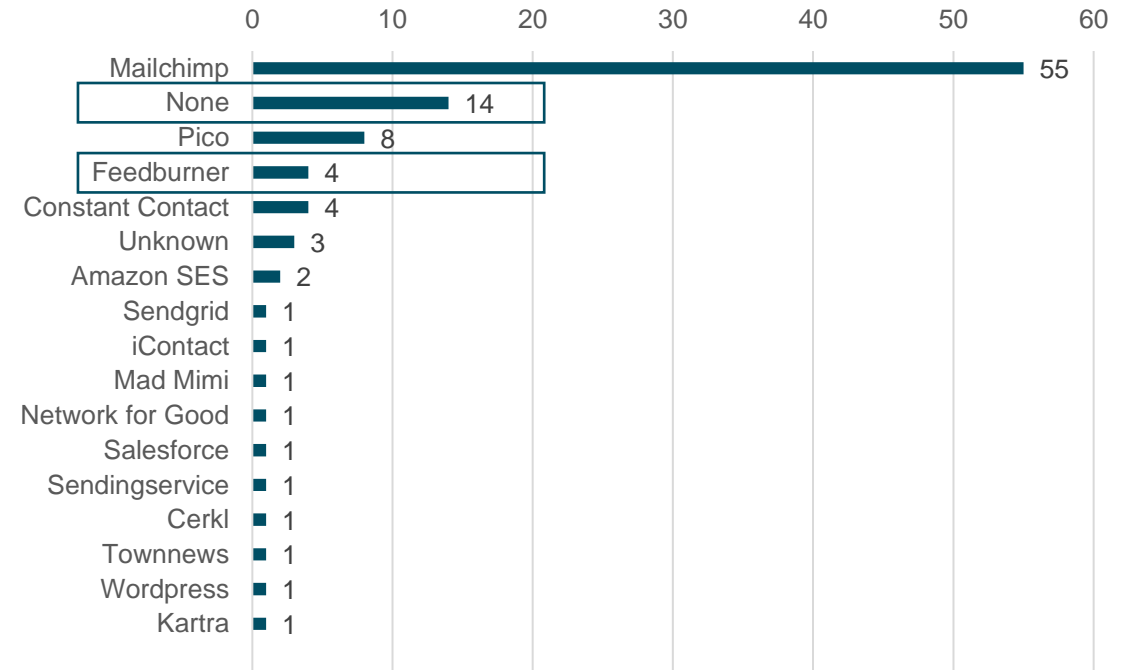


Email /
Newsletters

Mailchimp is the default choice with 54% of news sites, but there are a large variety of alternatives



Surprisingly, many sites still have no newsletter at all or use legacy options like Feedburner that may be discontinued soon



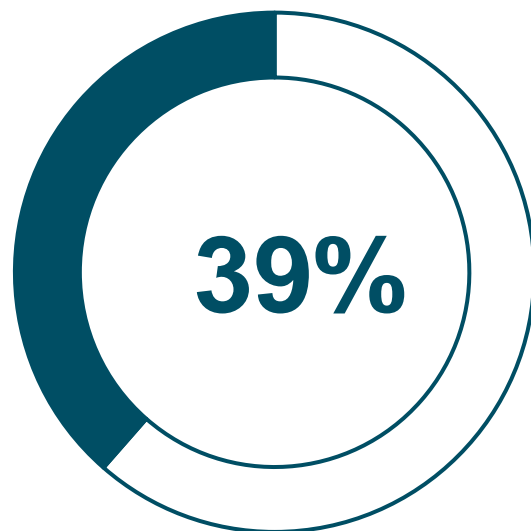
Newsletter Behavior



Email /
Newsletters

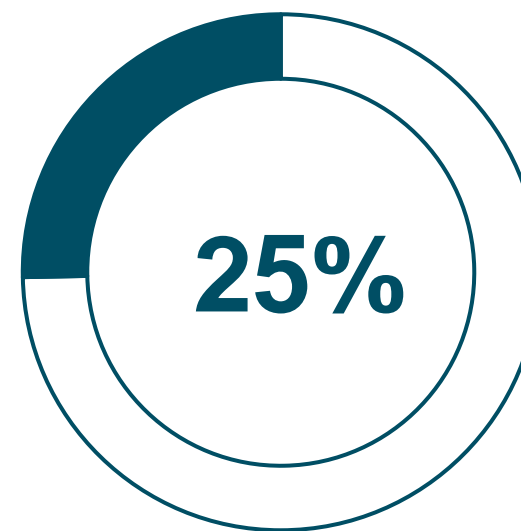
Dual Opt-in

Out of 83 newsletters that were able to be successfully subscribed to, 32 had dual opt-in confirmation emails.



Custom Welcome

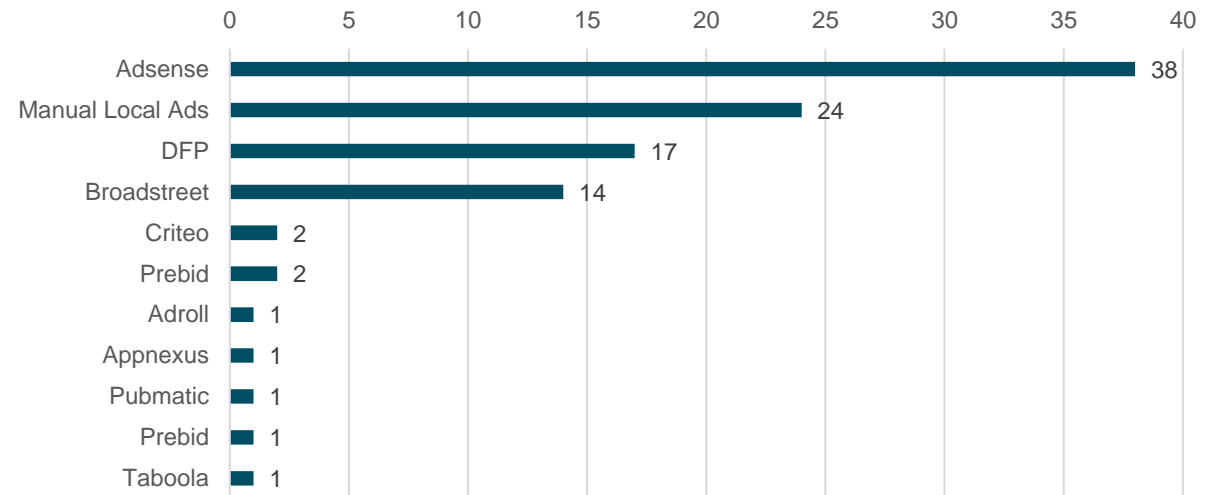
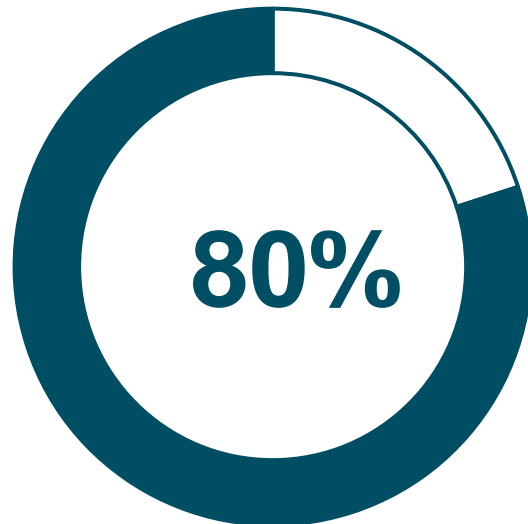
Only 21 out of the 83 had custom welcome messages for new subscribers to their list. Many provide no confirmation at all.



Advertising Approach



80% of news sites had some sort of advertising, which means 20% of sites are surviving with no advertising revenues at all.



Not surprisingly, Google AdSense and DFP are popular options although there is no clear majority. Many sites (24) still manually place local ads through their CMS while Broadstreet is also a popular option for managing local ad inventory.

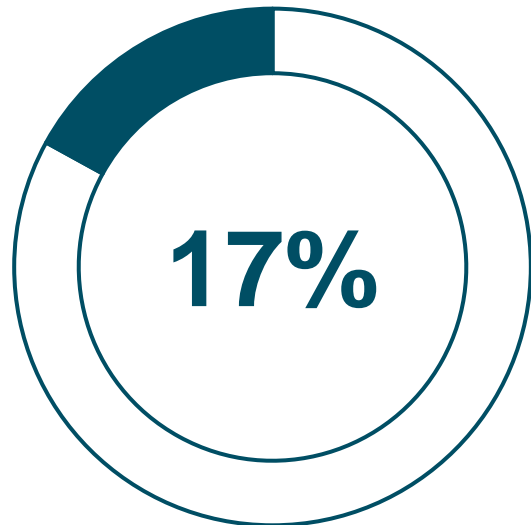
Membership / Donation Strategy



Membership /
Donations

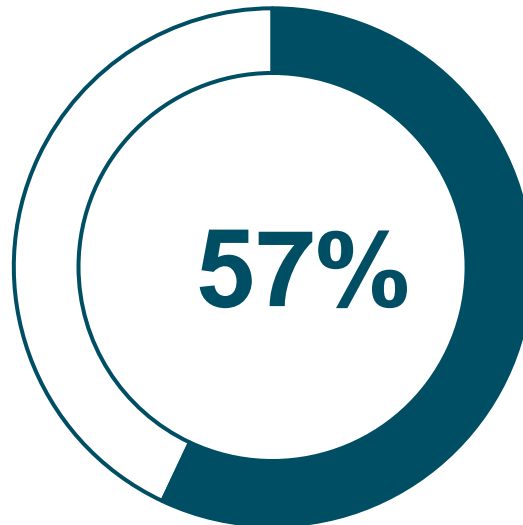
Membership/Subscription Benefits

Only 17 out of 100 reviewed sites offered some sort of premium subscription or benefits for becoming a member.

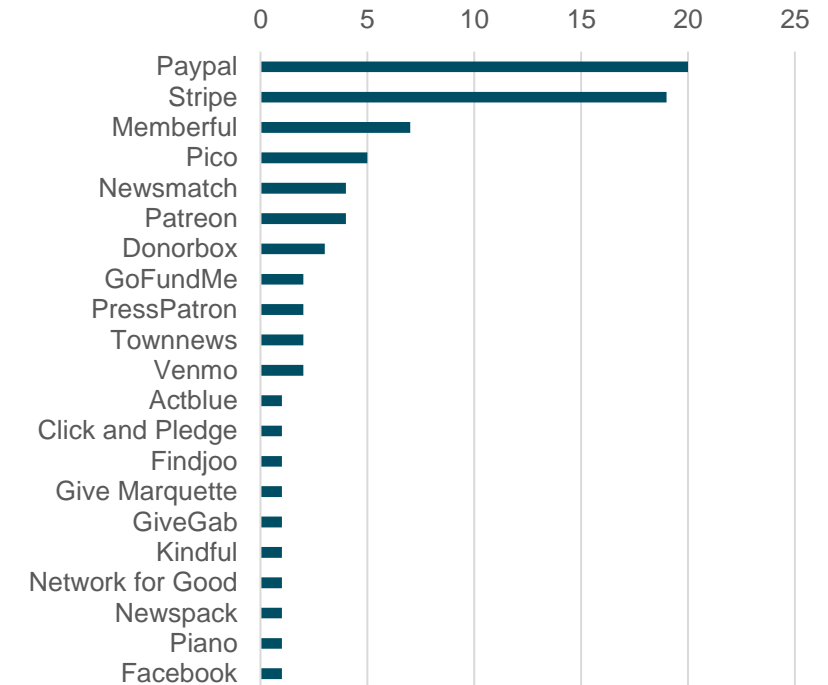


Donations only

57 sites are actively seeking donations but offer no premium member services



Large variety of tools used to collect donations/membership fees with PayPal and Stripe the default options



This includes paywalls, print editions and other member benefits such as discounts, meetups, premium newsletters and Facebook Groups.

Conclusions

- 1 Publishing still firmly routed in WordPress ecosystem, although some experimentation observed in managed hosting services
- 2 Google Analytics is foundational for analytics, but a wide variety of platforms are used as supplements
- 3 Newsletters could be improved with more focus and by adopting email marketing best practices
- 4 Advertising models are evenly split between ad-free, programmatic and local ad approaches
- 5 Donation and membership options are common, but value not always made clear

