Attributes of Award Winning Websites

A study of the 2013 WebAward winners

and what made them successful.

Web Marketing Association
www.WebAward.org
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Study Overview

Welcome to the Web Marketing Association Attributes of Award Winning Websites Report - A study of the 2013 WebAward winners and what made them successful. Our goal is to provide the Web development community with insights into current industry trends by examining various aspects of websites selected as winners in the 2013 WebAward competition for website development and comparing them to those entries that were not selected as winners.

As you would expect, evaluating websites is a very subjective procedure. Since 1997, the Web Marketing Association has attempted to create a transparent, quantitative process for adjudicating websites based on specific industries and set criteria.

The WebAwards dares to be different. In order to put this study in perspective, we will start with some background on the Web Marketing Association's WebAward program.

Why the WebAwards began

The Web Marketing Association was founded in 1997 to help set a high standard for Internet marketing and web development on the World Wide Web. Staffed by volunteers, this organization is made up of Internet marketing, online advertising, PR, and web site design professionals who share an interest for improving the quality of online advertising, internet marketing, and website promotion.

The major initiative developed by the Web Marketing Association to set the standard of excellence for website development in 1997 was the WebAward Competition. Patterned after the best aspects of off-line advertising and marketing award programs, the WebAwards was designed to be more than just a beauty contest or popularity contest where the biggest brand wins the award. We never wanted to be the Oscars of the Internet. We preferred to be more like the "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval" and "Road and Track Car of the Year."

The WebAwards is a program created by online marketers for online marketers. Most of the awards available when the competition began consisted of receiving a "Top 5% of the Web" logo that did more to drive traffic to the award's site than to the winner's site.

We developed and published specific criteria which were used by our panel of judges, made up of independent industry professionals, to fairly evaluate each site's strengths and weaknesses.

We felt it was also important to allow sites to compete against others in their industry, as well as, against an overall standard of excellence. A wide range of industries were selected for our first award program and others were added over the years as needed. In 2013 there will be 96 industry categories in which participants can compete head-to-head against their peers..

Few Website award programs recognize the individual achievement behind the creation of today's top web sites the way we do at the Web Marketing Association. We believe it is important to recognize the people and organizations

responsible for developing some of the most effective and best web sites on the Internet today. Winning a website award is also an internet marketing opportunity for the award winning web site.

But more than just an award program that Internet marketing experts use to increase a website's visibility, the WebAwards provide a benchmark by which all Website development can be judged. A decade's worth of judging scores define what Internet marketing professionals should strive for in their website marketing and design efforts. These historical results are now used to provide a point of reference and feedback to website marketing professionals who enter.

Judging Process

From the beginning, the Web Marketing Association has felt it important to have a clearly identified judging process, not a backroom where some staff member picks a few finalists for "Big Name" judges to pick based on their personal preferences.

Here is how the WebAward judging process works:

Each site is randomly assigned to three or more expert judges for evaluation. The award judges are informed of the mission statement and prospective audience for the site and provided a link with password, if needed, to enter and review the site. Award Judges are not told who submitted the entry or which category it is entered into. They then visit the site, starting with the URL provided on the entry form, and assume the role of a target user. After reviewing the site, they enter their scoring and record their observations and comments before moving on to the next site. At the conclusion of the judging, the two highest scores are averaged for the final score. Any lower scores are dropped, although the comments are retained and provided to the participants.

Entries are judged on the following seven criteria on a scale of 0-10 points:

Design	Interactivity
Innovation	Copywriting
Content	Ease of use
Technology	

Each site is judged on each of the seven criteria, earning a score between 0 and 70 points. The highest score in a given category wins Best Website of that industry. If the remaining entries receive a score of 60 or greater, they receive the Outstanding Website WebAward. Entries receive the Standard of Excellence WebAward when their score is above the average of their industry, but below 60 points. Only one Best Website of each industry will be given (except in the case of a tie). However, the Outstanding Web Site and Standard of Excellence WebAwards may have multiple winners in each category. If all scores in a particular category are below the standard minimum, no award will be granted for that category.

2013 Award Winning Website Study

Since 2006 we have included a section of the entry form dedicated to gathering demographic data on the site itself. These questions include: target audience, development platform, programming platform, site developer, budget and website features including signing up for email mailing lists, RSS feeds, use of Flash, live chat, use of audio and video, banner ads, a shopping cart and multiple languages.
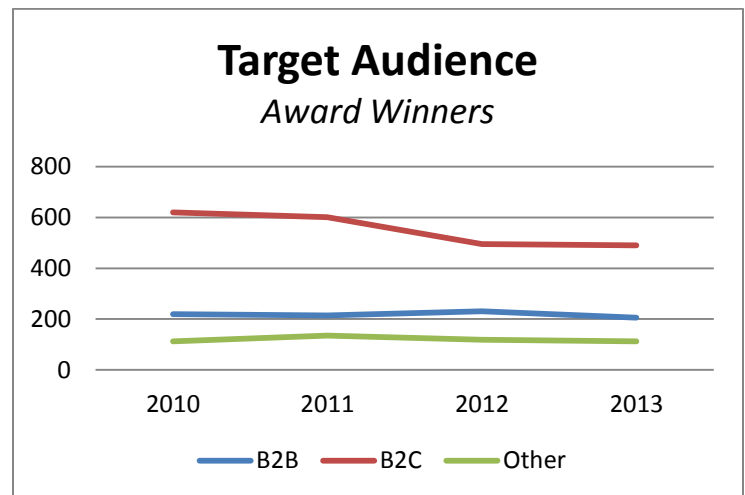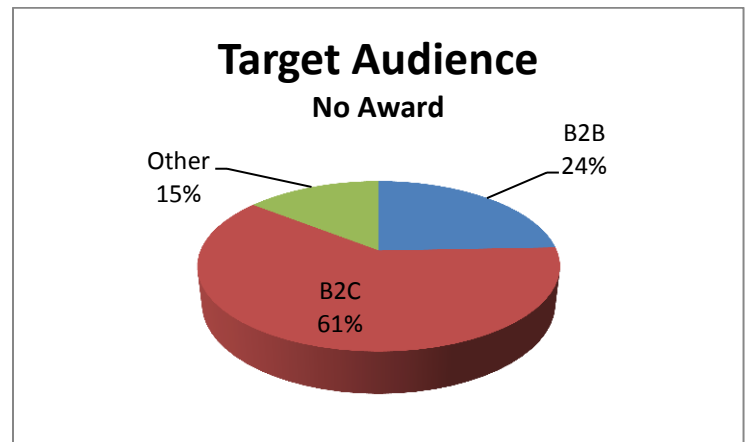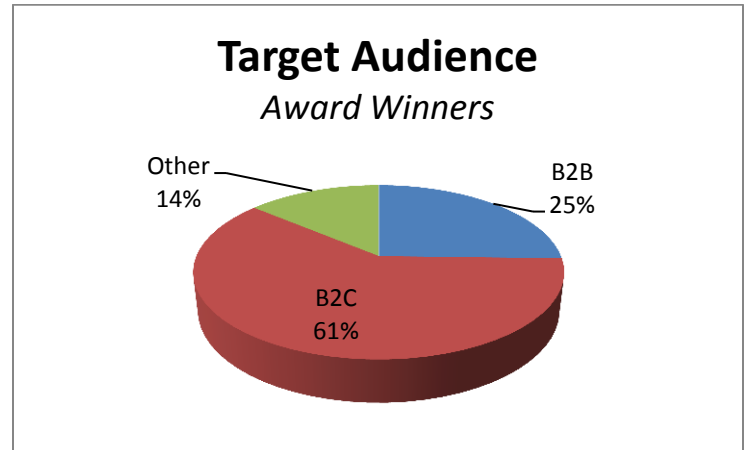
Here is what we found from the sites submitted in 2013.

Target Audience

B2C websites out number B2B websites more than two to one when it comes to target audience in the 2013 WebAward competition. Sixty one percent of WebAward participants are consumer oriented sites while almost 25% are business to business. Another 14% of websites selected "Other" which can be a result of targeting both audience segments or target a very narrow segment, like government. Target audience resulted in virtually no difference when it came to winning, with award winning B2B sites (25%) comparing to non-winning B2B sites (24%) and 61% for both award winning and non winners.

Overall there has been a slight decrease in B2C sites winning since 2010.

The Webaward competition includes 96 industry categories, many of which favor either B2B or B2C sites. Examples of B2B heavy sites are B2B, ASP, Construction, Diversified Business, Information Services, Interactive Services, International Business, ISP, Manufacturing, Medical Equipment, Military, Professional Services and Transportation. Examples of B2C dominated industry categories are Airline, Arts, Auto, Bank, Computer Hardware and Software, Consumer Goods, Education, Entertainment, Faith-based, Fashion, Health Care, Investment, Magazine, Photography, Real Estate, and University.

Target Audience
Award Winners

Other 14%

B2B 25%

B2C 61%

Target Audience
No Award

Other 15%

B2B 24%

B2C 61%

Target Audience
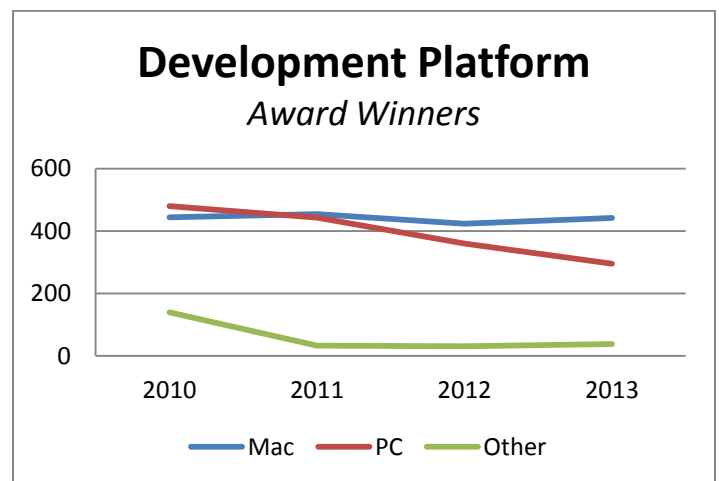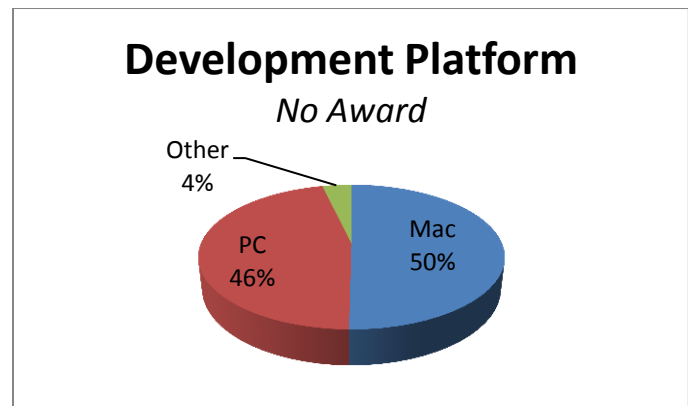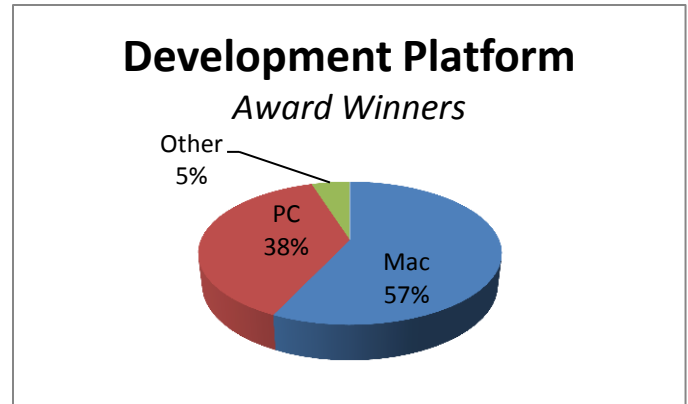*Award Winners*

B2B   B2C   Other

Development Platform

A higher percentage of PC developed websites did not win an award (46%) than did win an award (38%). At the same time, the majority of websites are developed on the Macintosh operating system.

Over the past four years, there has been a declining trend of winning entries being developed on a PC platform.

Apple computers are the dominate design platform at most interactive agencies today. Corporate in-house developers may be required to use PC-based systems in order to be supported by their IT departments. Small business owners are also more likely to be PC-based than Mac-based. Luckily there are outstanding software programs on each platform to allow for the design and execution of exceptional websites and they all can win awards.

Development Platform
Award Winners

Other 5%
PC 38%
Mac 57%

Development Platform
No Award

Other 4%
PC 46%
Mac 50%

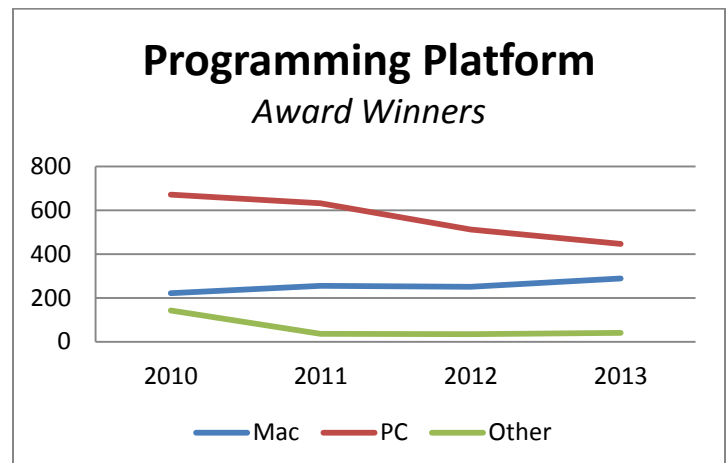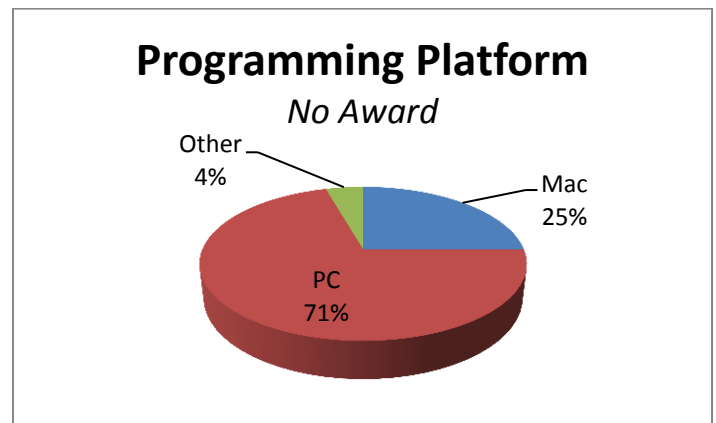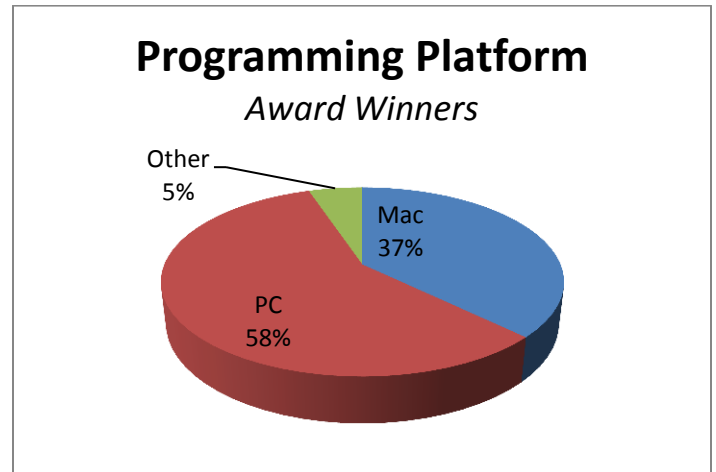**Development Platform**
Award Winners

Programming Platform

It is no surprise that PCs rule the roost when it comes to programming websites. Both award winning websites (58% PC vs 37% Mac) and non-winners (71% PC vs. 25% Mac) rely heavily on PC computers for the programming behind a sites design.

However, over the past four years, the percentage of programming on PCs has declined steadily while Mac programming has been on the increase.

Windows based PCs are traditionally used in a development environment due to the software tools needed to create server side code like .net and ASP classic. Those being Microsoft server based products, Windows machines typically dominate here. PHP and other Linux based sites can be created on any platform, but sometimes tradition is hard to break once tools are purchased. Also, if you have a PC for small to medium business, you probably will simply develop on that platform.

Programming Platform
Award Winners

Other 5%
Mac 37%
PC 58%

Programming Platform
No Award

Other 4%
Mac 25%
PC 71%

Programming Platform
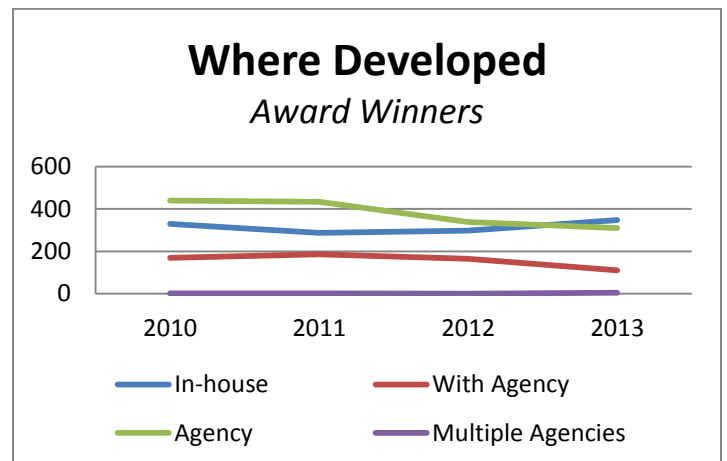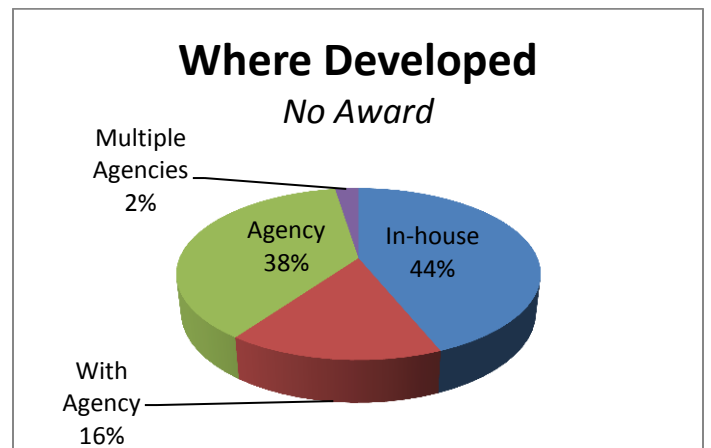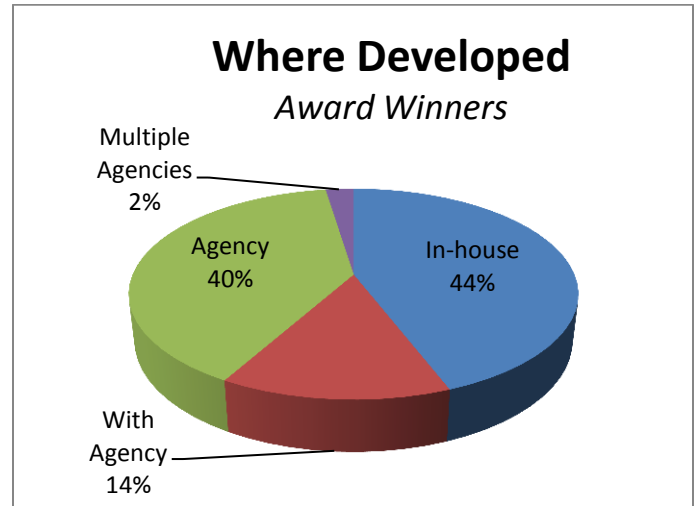*Award Winners*

Mac — PC — Other

Who Develops Award Winning Sites

Most companies that are looking for a serious website are using the help of experienced interactive agencies. 54 percent of award winning websites in 2013 used an interactive agency to help them strategize and/or execute their website development compared to 44% who choose to rely only on in-house development efforts.

There has been a slight trend away from websites being developed only by an agency since 2010. This may be due to staffing increases on the corporate site resulting in more marketing departments taking an active role in web development.
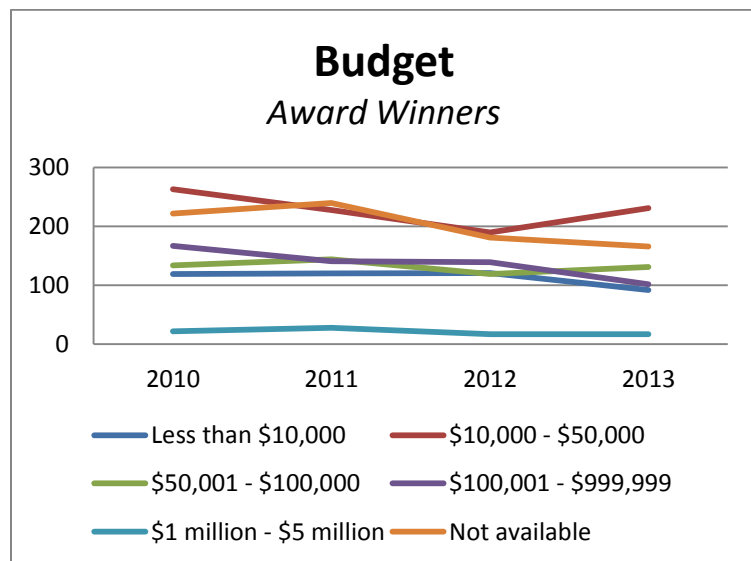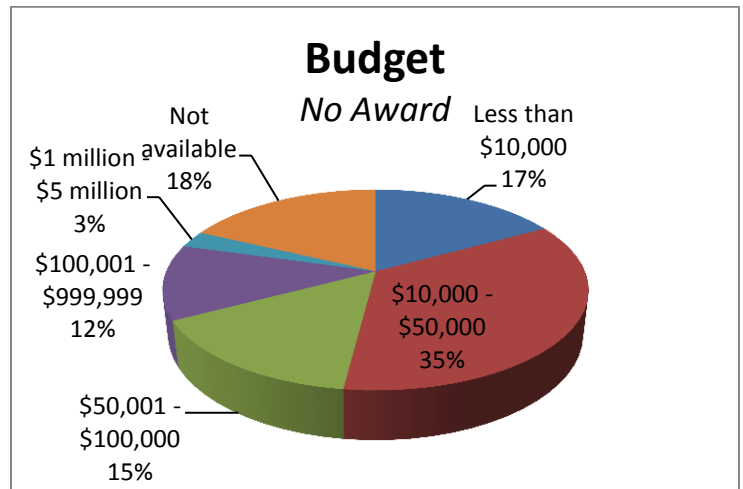
Interactive agencies play an important part in developing a successful website. Their access to top creative talent and experience across multiple industries and companies allows them to be successful in an ever changing online environment. The best interactive agencies are partners with their clients, both working to create an engaging online experience for the users of the website. There also may be a bias towards using agencies in the numbers as awards are an effective marketing tool for interactive agencies to demonstrate their expertise to both existing and prospective clients and result in more sites being submitted for adjudication.

Where Developed
Award Winners

Multiple Agencies 2%
Agency 40%
In-house 44%
With Agency 14%

Where Developed
No Award

Multiple Agencies 2%
Agency 38%
In-house 44%
With Agency 16%

Where Developed
Award Winners

In-house   With Agency
Agency   Multiple Agencies

Budget

The reported budgets for award winning websites tend to be fairly evenly spread across the gambit with 61% of the sites spending less than $100,000 USD per year to operate. The highest concentration of award winning sites seems to be in the $10,000 to $50,000 range (31%). At the same time, 52% of non-winning sites reported a budget of $50,000 or less.

The WebAwards have always worked to insure that both small and large websites have a chance at winning recognition for their efforts. It's not surprising that budgets run the gambit, just like on the Internet as a whole. Large budget sites can certainly be impressive in scope and interactivity. Small sites can still be very effective in providing content to an interested audience. Budgets are also a difficult thing to broadly calculate because each organization bundles costs differently and often do not account for personnel in their calculations.

Budget
Award Winners

- Less than $10,000 — 12%
- $10,000 - $50,000 — 31%
- $50,001 - $100,000 — 18%
- $100,001 - $999,999 — 14%
- $1 million - $5 million — 2%
- Not available — 23%

Budget
No Award

- Less than $10,000 — 17%
- $10,000 - $50,000 — 35%
- $50,001 - $100,000 — 15%
- $100,001 - $999,999 — 12%
- $1 million - $5 million — 3%
- Not available — 18%

Budget
Award Winners

Legend:
- Less than $10,000
- $10,000 - $50,000
- $50,001 - $100,000
- $100,001 - $999,999
- $1 million - $5 million
- Not available
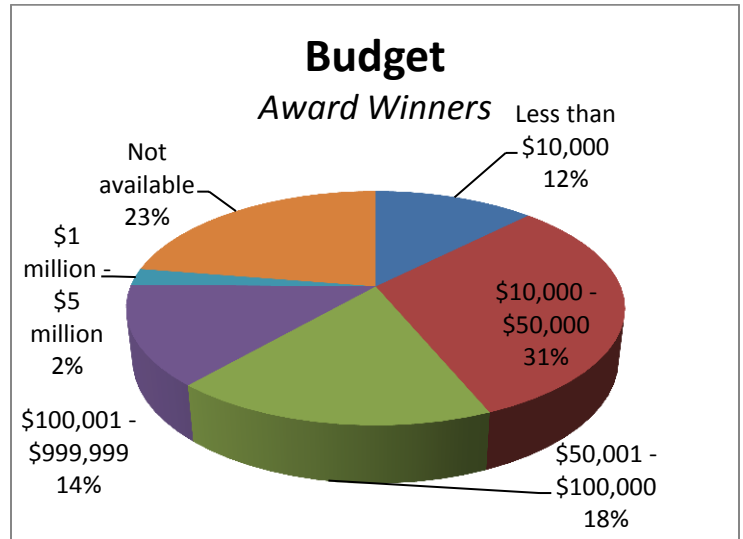
Website Features

Every website uses a mix of technology and features to deliver content and create an engagement with their visitors. In this section, we take a look at different features offered on award winning websites, including signing up for email mailing lists, RSS feeds, use of Flash, live chat, use of audio and video, banner ads, a shopping cart and multiple languages.

Overall, award-winning websites generally offer more features than those who have not won awards. No one feature stands out as a "must have" in order to win awards.
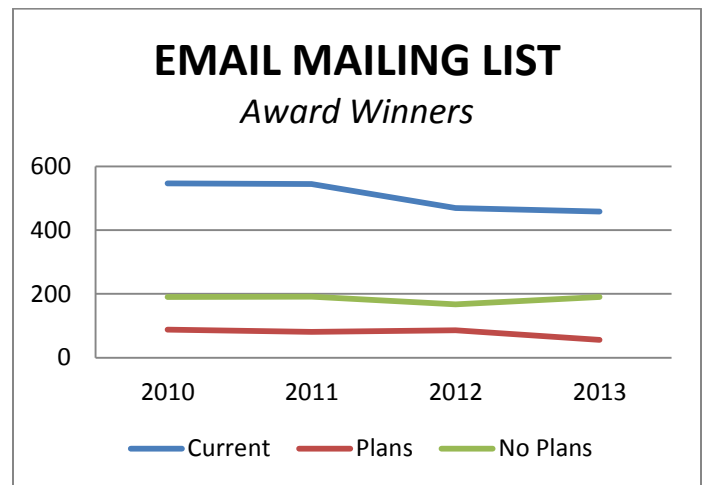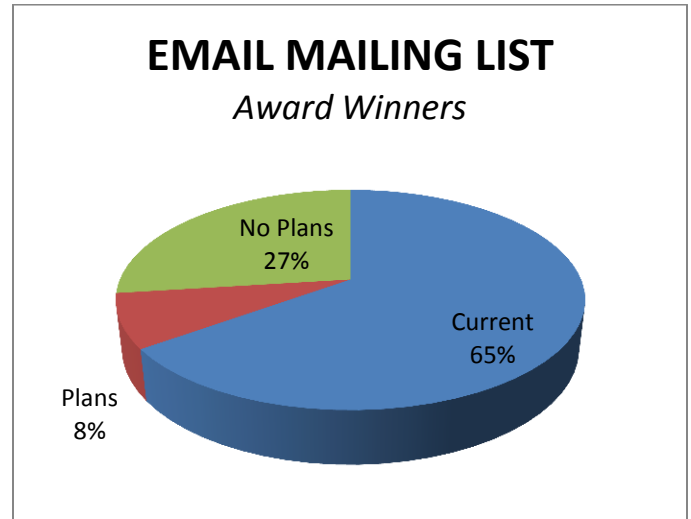
"Current" indicates the site currently is using the feature, "Plans" indicates the developer is looking to add the feature to the site in the near future and "No Plans" means there are currently no plans to implement the feature on the site.

The 2014 WebAward entry survey will begin gathering data on additional features including questions on social media usage, responsive design, mobile sites, comments and HTML5. This data will be available in any future Attributes of an Award Winning Website reports.

Email Mailing List

The majority of sites today offer this basic feature to their visitors with 73% of award winning websites and 72% of non-winning websites using the feature or planning to use it in the future.

Email is the backbone of Internet communications. It allows a site to push content directly to visitors who want to stay in touch, however, inboxes are now flooded. Emails that have been requested end up stopped by filters and never get seen. Allowing site visitors to identify themselves as wanting an ongoing relationship is a valuable tool for a website to have.

EMAIL MAILING LIST
Award Winners

- No Plans 27%
- Current 65%
- Plans 8%

EMAIL MAILING LIST
No Award

- No Plans 28%
- Current 63%
- Plans 9%

EMAIL MAILING LIST
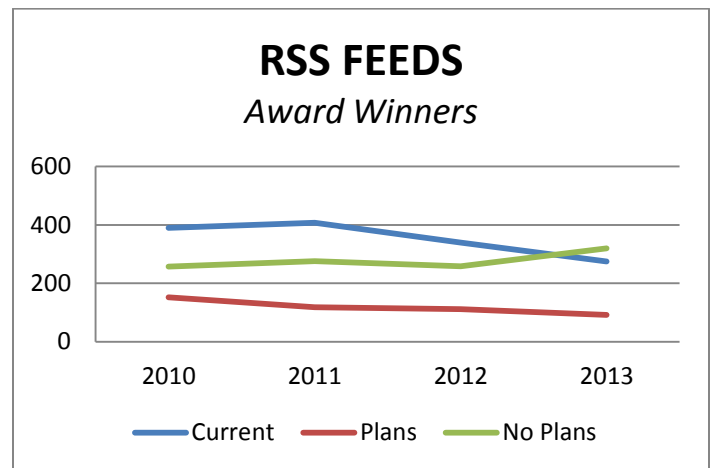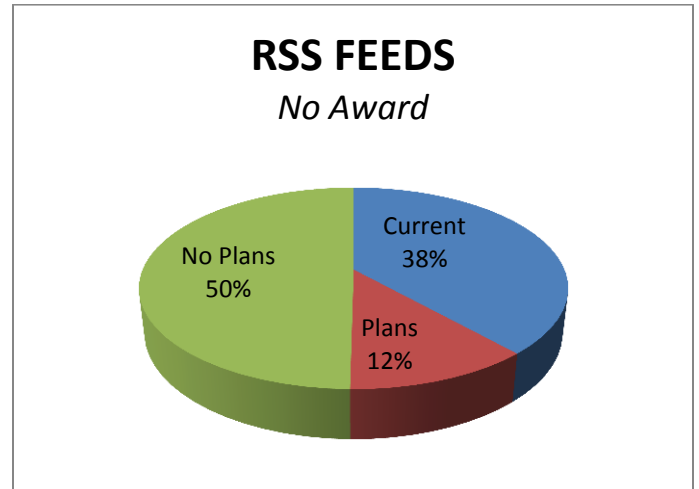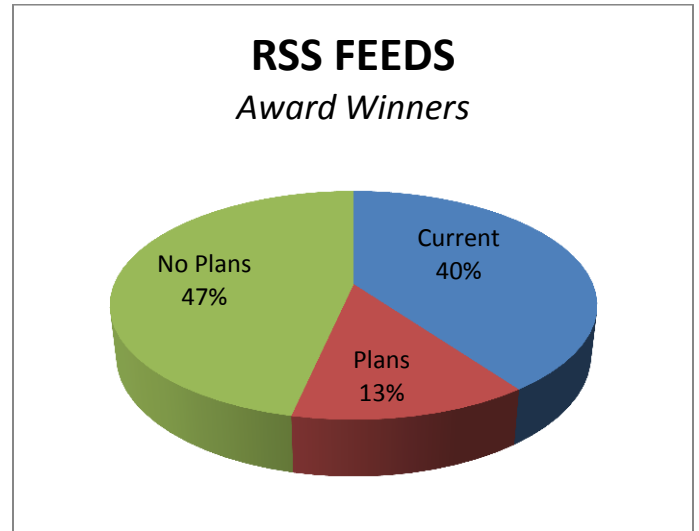*Award Winners*

Current — Plans — No Plans

RSS Feeds

RSS (Really Simple Syndication) Feeds were present in 40% of the award winning sites compared to slightly less (38%) for non-winning sites.

It appears that the new implementation of RSS may be declining as other feeds from social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, take more of a role in pushing content to key audiences.

RSS is another example of pushing content out to site visitors and allowing them to establish an ongoing relationship with the site provider. It can be expensive to bring a visitor to your site, RSS allows you to remind them why they came in a format convenient to their needs. RSS feeds can also be helpful in syndicating your content to social media platforms. However, those same social media platforms are undermining the need for separate content feeds such as RSS.
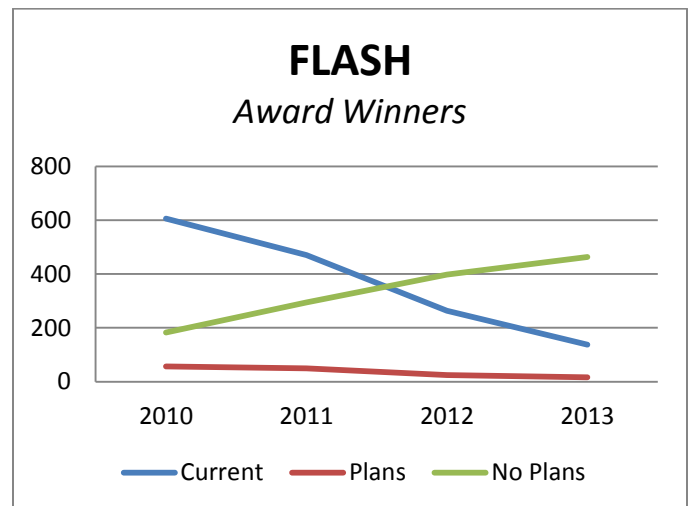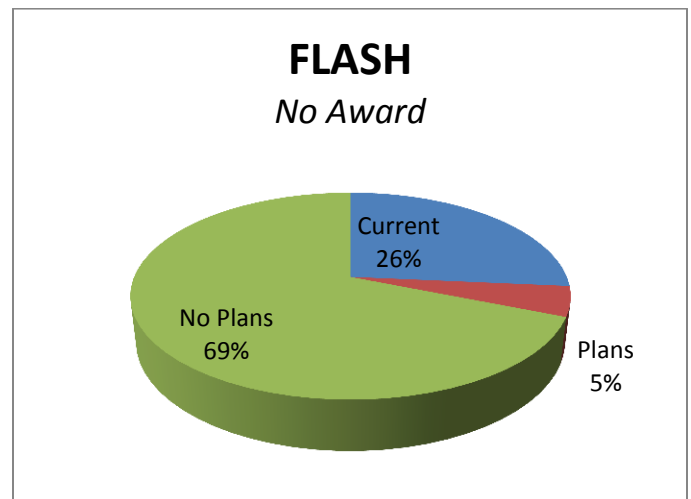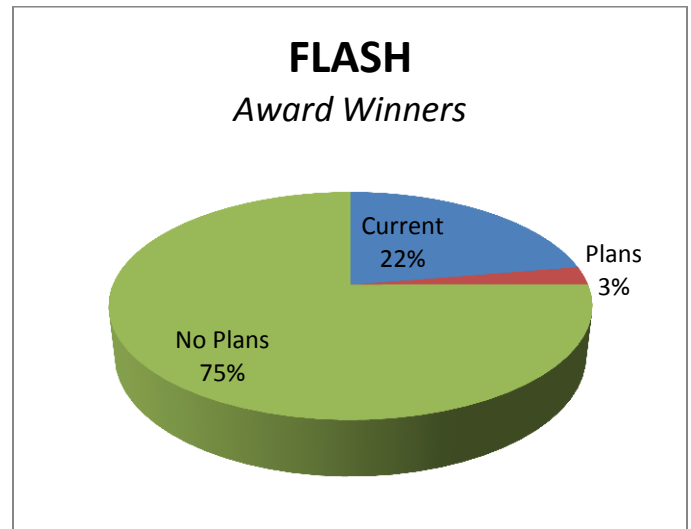
RSS FEEDS
Award Winners

No Plans 47%
Current 40%
Plans 13%

RSS FEEDS
No Award

No Plans 50%
Current 38%
Plans 12%

RSS FEEDS
Award Winners

Current — Plans — No Plans

Flash

Currently, only 22 percent of award winning websites and 26% of non-winning sites use Adobe's Flash technology to augment their user experiences. This is a far cry from 2011 when 71% of award winning websites and 67.5% of non-winning sites use Flash. Very few participants are currently looking to add this functionality in the future.

The trend since 2010 shows a marked decline in the use of Flash in website development.

Flash is a multimedia platform used to add animation, video and interactivity to web pages. It can be used to accent navigation, provide multimedia content or program entire web experiences. The low future adoption rate is either an indication that the market is saturated or that developers are looking elsewhere for their multimedia needs.

This declining trend is largely due to the growth in tablet computing and the inability of Apple's iPads to view Flash. Flashes decline also marks the introduction of HTML5, a more multi-media friendly markup language.

FLASH
Award Winners

Current 22%
Plans 3%
No Plans 75%

FLASH
No Award

Current 26%
No Plans 69%
Plans 5%

FLASH
Award Winners

[Line chart showing Current, Plans, and No Plans from 2010 to 2013, y-axis from 0 to 800]

— Current   — Plans   — No Plans

Live Chat

Only 13% of award winning and non-winning websites currently offer live chat on their websites. While less than one quarter of those without the feature are looking to add it, the majority of Internet developers are not using this feature.

Live chat remains a niche product that can be a useful tool for both sales and service on larger sites. However the cost of training and staffing chat centers make it impractical for many sites. However, with a new generation of younger consumers coming online with a propensity for chat, this feature might bare watching.

LIVE CHAT
Award Winners

Current 13%
Plans 11%
No Plans 76%

LIVE CHAT
No Award

Current 13%
Plans 11%
No Plans 76%

LIVE CHAT
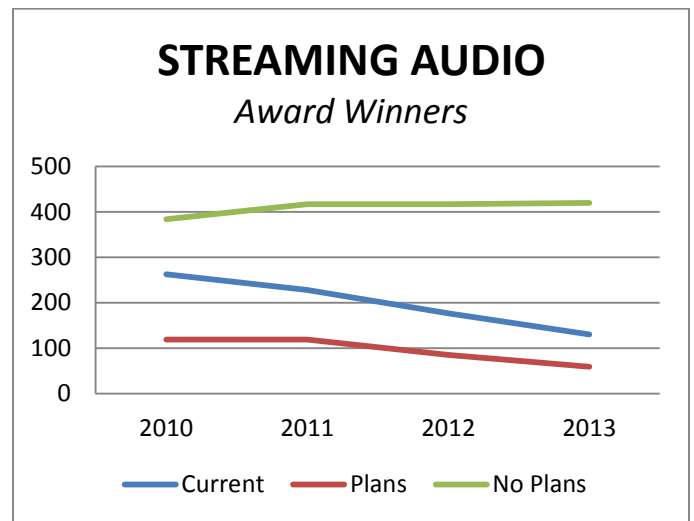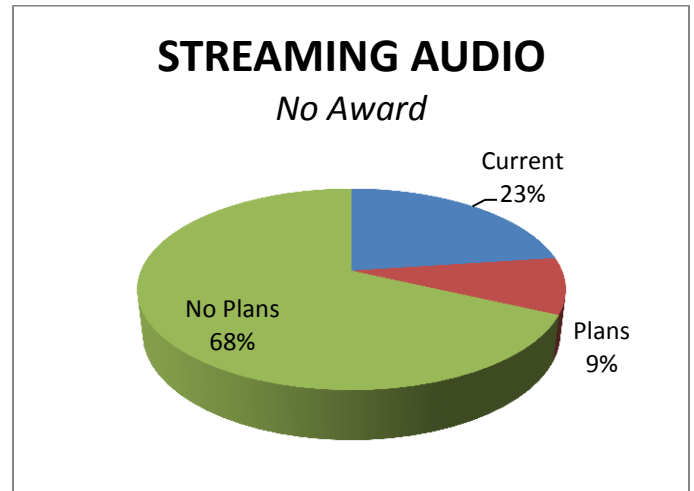*Award Winners*

Current — Plans — No Plans
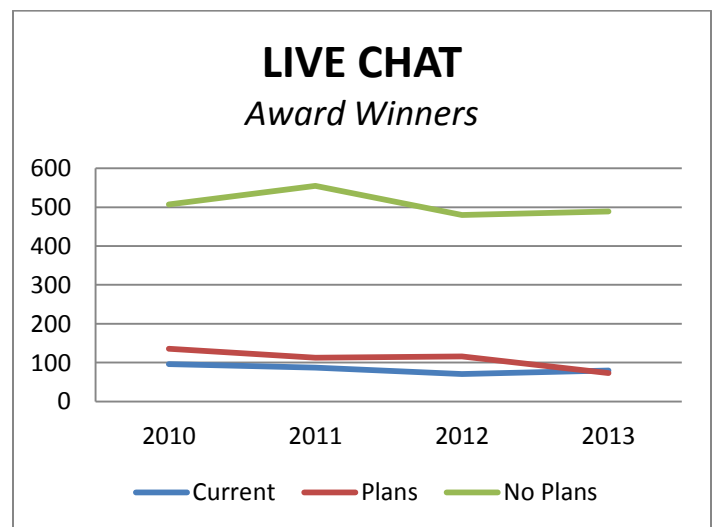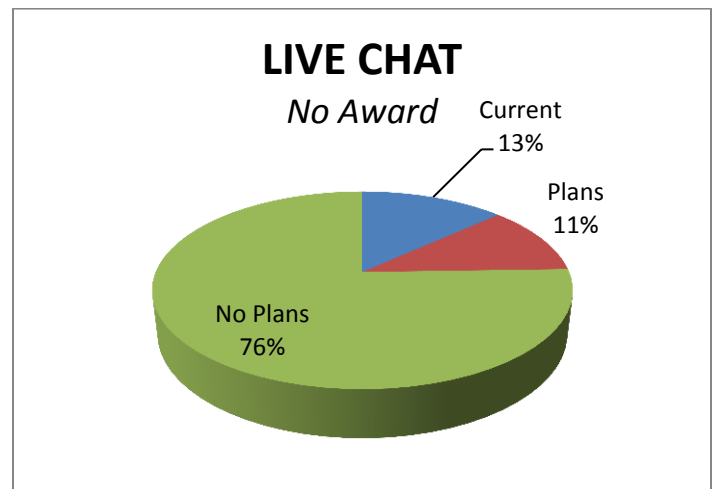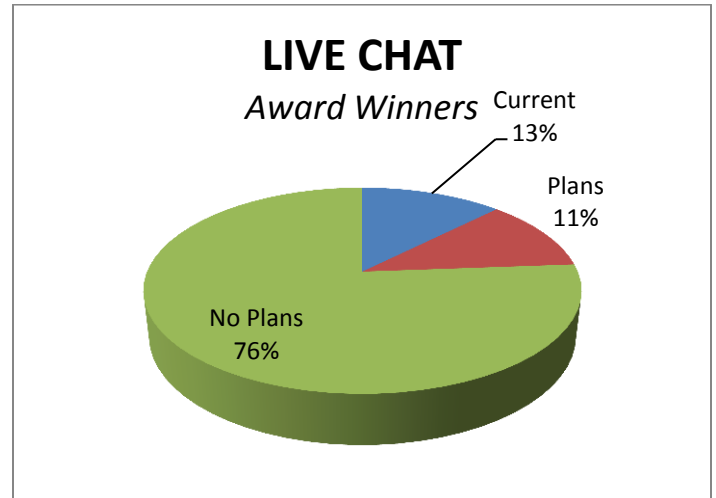
Streaming Audio

Fewer than 21% of award winning websites use streaming audio on their site. This is slightly less than the 23% of non-award winners who use it on their site. Still, the majority of all sites do not plan on using streaming audio in the future.

Since 2010, use of streaming audio has declined steadily in its use in website development.

Streaming audio can really help make a website come alive to a user. Often sound, either background music or narration is incorporated into an animation. When done right, sound can help set the mood of a site and make it really stand out from its competitors.

STREAMING AUDIO
Award Winners

Current 21%
Plans 10%
No Plans 69%

STREAMING AUDIO
No Award

Current 23%
Plans 9%
No Plans 68%

STREAMING AUDIO
Award Winners

Current — Plans — No Plans
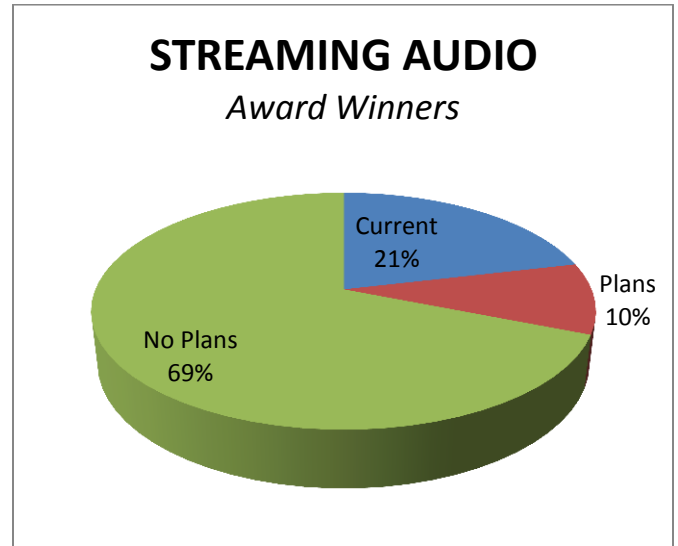
Streaming Video

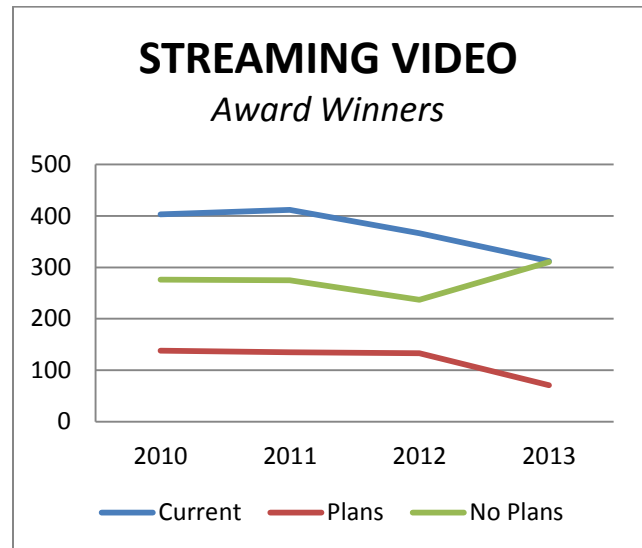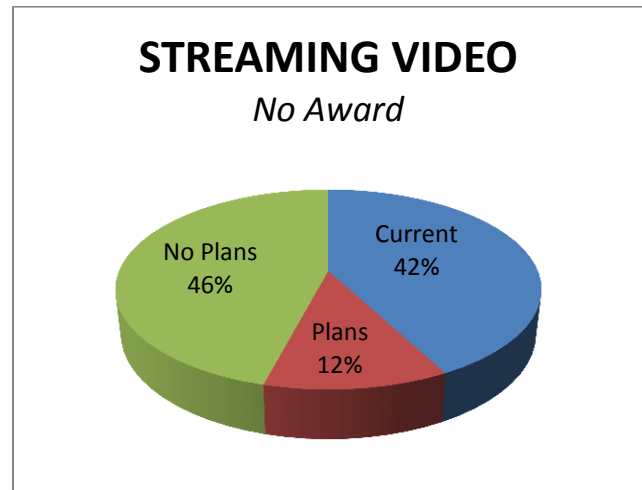45percent of all award winning websites entered into the 2013 WebAwards used video to engage their audience. Another 10% of sites are planning on adding video in the future.

However the trend since 2010 has seen a marked decline in both the number of sites streaming video and of those who have no plans to add it.

Flash has allowed video to move from a browser plug-in required player to a seamlessly embedded content element that allows a webpage to come alive. With the demise of Flash in the mobile world, video streaming has become less critical to a websites overall experience. However, streaming on page video remains an excellent way to grab the attention of the "You-Tube" generation of consumers.

STREAMING VIDEO
Award Winners

No Plans 45%
Current 45%
Plans 10%

STREAMING VIDEO
No Award

No Plans 46%
Current 42%
Plans 12%

STREAMING VIDEO
Award Winners
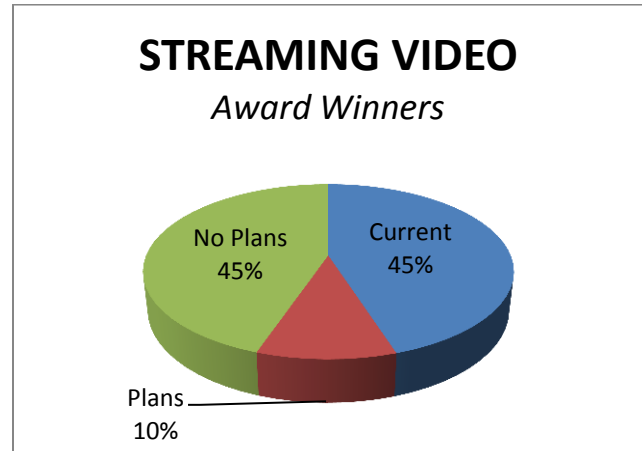
Banner Advertising

Non-winning websites had a slightly higher use of banner ads on the site (25%) than their award-winning counterparts (21%). However, more than 70% of participants said they are not considering adding banners in the future.

Banner ads can be an important source of revenue for many sites. Nonetheless, businesses that do not rely on an advertising model generally do not include banner ads on their site for fear of distracting visitors away from their primary marketing messages and risking them moving to other sites. The use of interactive banner ads has allowed advertisers to engage consumers without needing to take them away from the site they are currently visiting.

BANNER ADVERTISING
Award Winners

Current 21%
Plans 5%
No Plans 74%

BANNER ADVERTISING
No Award

Current 25%
Plans 5%
No Plans 70%

BANNER ADVERTISING
Award Winners

— Current   — Plans   — No Plans
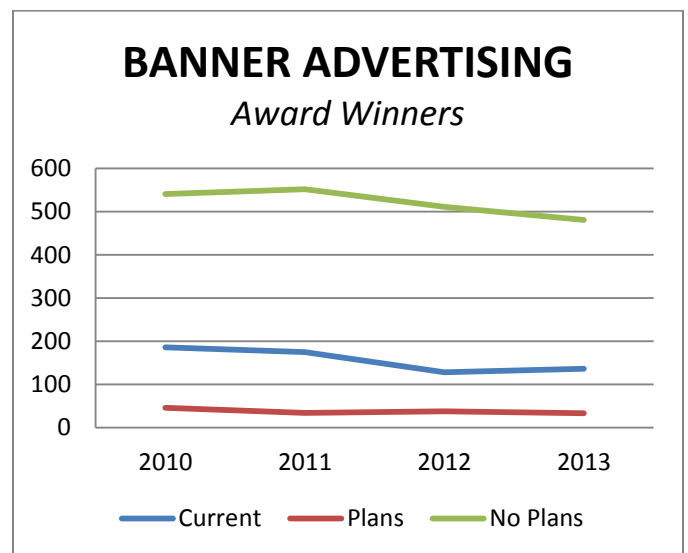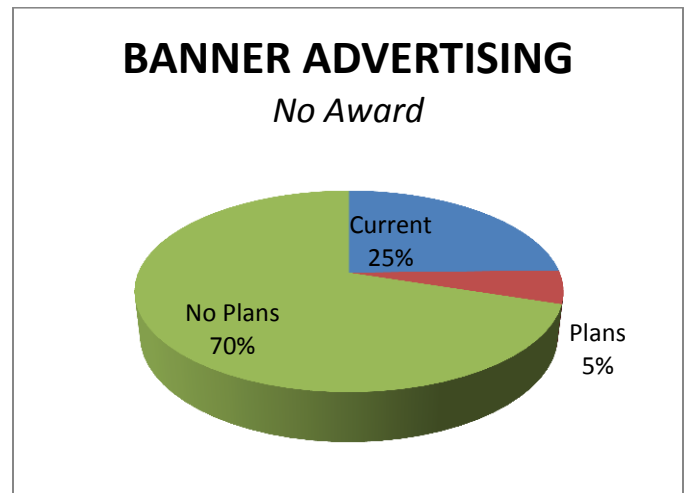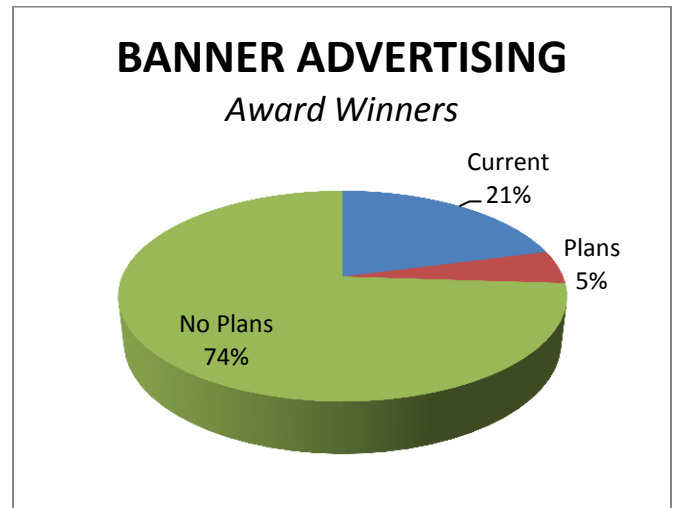
Shopping Cart

Slightly less than one quarter of award-winning websites (21%) offer a shopping cart to purchase goods from their site. This number is virtually the same for non-winning sites (23%). About 8% of award winning sites are planning on adding a shopping cart in the future, but most (71%) are not looking to make direct sales from their sites and using shopping carts to facilitate sales of multiple products.
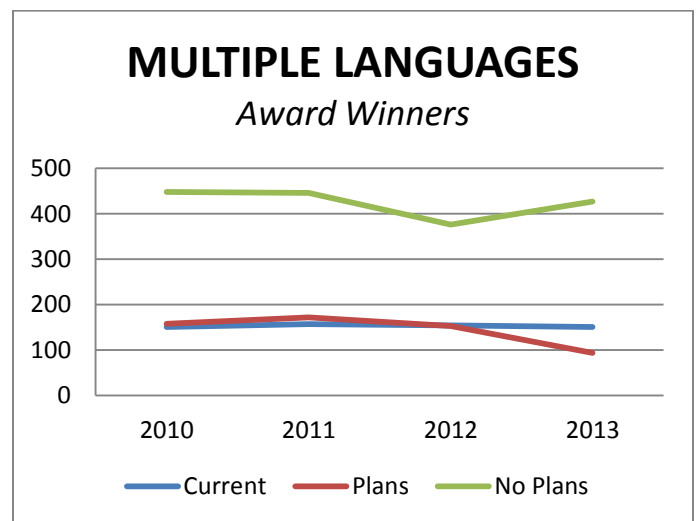
Like banner ads, a shopping cart is used based on the revenue model for the business. If direct sales are a goal, then a shopping cart is generally present.

SHOPPING CART
Award Winners

Current 21%
Plans 8%
No Plans 71%

SHOPPING CART
No Award

Current 23%
Plans 6%
No Plans 71%

SHOPPING CART
Award Winners

Current — Plans — No Plans

Multiple Languages

Less than a quarter of the current websites seem to have their websites available in multiple languages. While about 14% of award-winning participants are planning on adding this capability, the majority (64%) are not.

Given the global possibilities of the Internet, it is surprising that 64% of participants are not planning on adding multiple languages to their web offerings. While it is relatively easy to translate a static website into different languages, it is important also to have the ability to interact in that language when visitors become customers.

MULTIPLE LANGUAGES
Award Winners

Current
22%

Plans
14%

No Plans
64%

MULTIPLE LANGUAGES
No Award

Current
23%

Plans
20%

No Plans
57%

MULTIPLE LANGUAGES
Award Winners
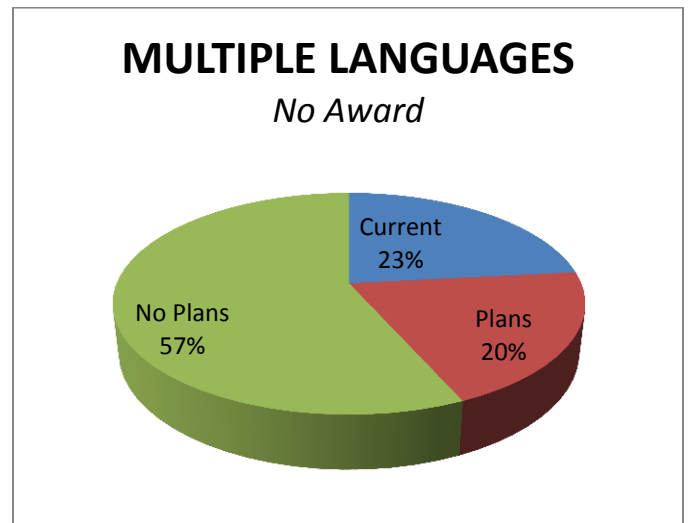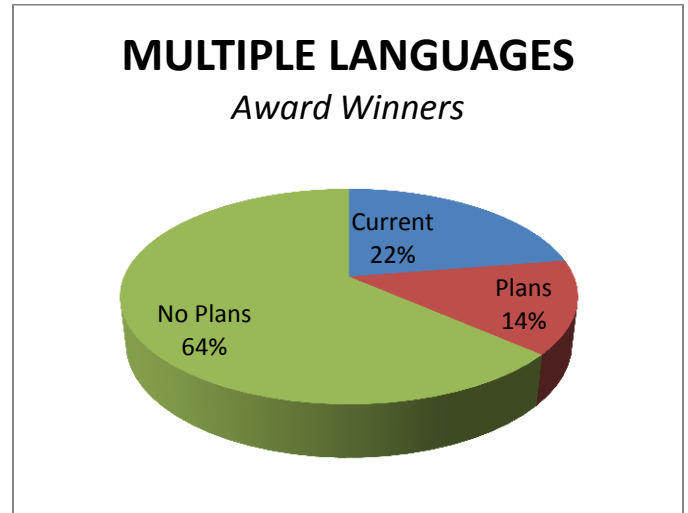
Conclusion

In conclusion, it's time for you to make your own conclusions. While award winning sites have more features than non-winners, we've given you the data and some of our thoughts about what it means. Now it is up to you to decide how you can best position this data to your advantage. Maybe it will help you win a WebAward, maybe it will help you get additional budget for an important site upgrade or redesign or maybe it just gave you something to think about.

2014 WebAward Call for Entries

You can help shape the future of Web development by participating in the Web Marketing Association's 2014 WebAward competition. Now in our 18th year, the WebAwards recognizes the people and organizations responsible for developing the most effective Websites on the Internet today. Entrants benefit from a Website assessment by a professional judging panel and the marketing opportunities presented to an award-winning Web site. For more information, visit www.webaward.org.

Who knows, you might be part of next year's report.

Appendix

Target Audience	B2B	B2C	Other
Best of Industry	28%	52%	9%
Winners	20%	57%	13%
No award	19%	57%	14%

Target Audience	B2B	B2C	Other
Best of Industry	28%	52%	9%
Winners	20%	57%	13%
No award	19%	57%	14%

Development Platform	Mac	PC	Other
Best of Industry	47%	30%	4%
inners	41%	44%	3%
No award	36%	51%	2%

Programming Platform	Mac	PC	Other
Best of Industry	28%	45%	6%
Winners	20%	62%	5%
No award	16%	69%	3%

Budget	Less than $10,000	$10,000 - $50,000	$50,001 - $100,000	$100,001 - $999,999	$1 million - $5 million	Not available
Best of Industry	3%	16%	14%	24%	2%	27%
Winners	11%	24%	12%	15%	2%	20%
No award	19%	26%	11%	12%	2%	17%

EMAIL MAILING LIST %	Current	Plans	No Plans
Best of Industry	77%	6%	17%
Winners	66%	11%	23%
No award	63%	12%	25%

LIVE CHAT %	Current	Plans	No Plans
Best of Industry	26%	18%	56%
Winners	13%	18%	69%
No award	9%	17%	73%

RSS FEEDS %	Current	Plans	No Plans
Best of Industry	57%	15%	28%
Winners	49%	19%	32%
No award	44%	21%	35%

STREAMING AUDIO %	Current	Plans	No Plans
Best of Industry	35%	11%	54%
Winners	34%	16%	50%
No award	32%	19%	49%

FLASH %	Current	Plans	No Plans
Best of Industry	81%	4%	15%
Winners	72%	7%	22%
No award	68%	7%	26%

STREAMING VIDEO %	Current	Plans	No Plans
Best of Industry	56%	14%	30%
Winners	49%	17%	34%
No award	51%	19%	30%

BANNER ADVERTISING %	Current	Plans	No Plans
Best of Industry	30%	4%	65%
Winners	24%	6%	70%
No award	27%	5%	67%

SHOPPING CART %	Current	Plans	No Plans
Best of Industry	31%	4%	64%
Winners	22%	8%	70%
No award	22%	10%	68%

MULTIPLE LANGUAGES %	Current	Plans	No Plans
Best of Industry	28%	18%	54%
Winners	20%	21%	59%
No award	17%	20%	64%

Source: 2013 Web Marketing Association WebAward competition official entry form data.