



# DHL EXPORT BAROMETER 2021

How Australian exporters plan to take on the global export market and grow their e-commerce businesses in a post-pandemic world



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# ABOUT THE DHL EXPORT BAROMETER

Since launching in 2003, the DHL Export Barometer has been an independent annual indicator generating industry-specific insights for Australian exporters by examining the issues directly affecting export businesses, including latest trends and fast-paced changes in overseas markets.

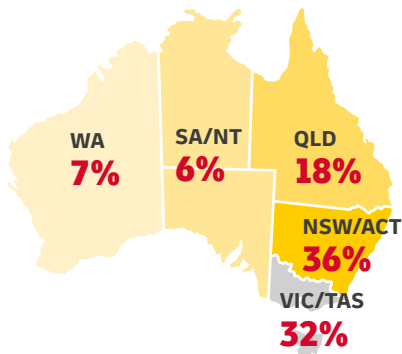
The DHL Export Barometer 2021 was conducted by ACA Research, which surveyed 1,438 Australian exporters online between 1-22 September this year.

Businesses ranged from small operations with fewer than five employees to large organisations with more than one hundred staff.

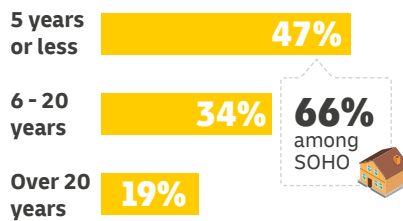
This group of exporters is a broad cross-section of the country, with New South Wales/ Australian Capital Territory (NSW/ACT) businesses making up **36%** of those surveyed, Victoria/ Tasmania (VIC/TAS) businesses **32%**, Queensland (QLD) **18%**, Western Australia (WA) **7%**, and South Australia/ Northern Territory (SA/NT) **6%**.

Respondents were selected from the databases of DHL Express Australia and the Export Council of Australia and invited to participate.

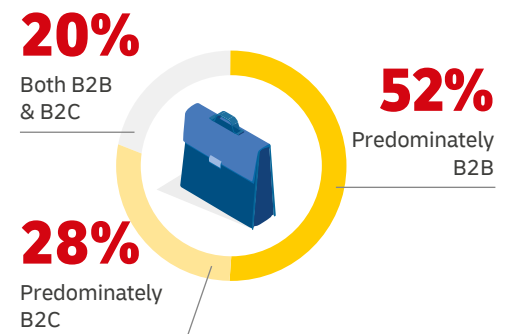
## LOCATION OF BUSINESS



## EXPORTING TENURE

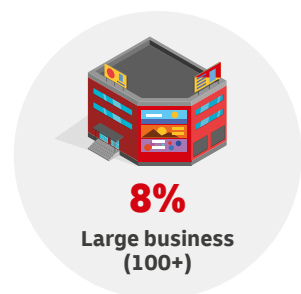
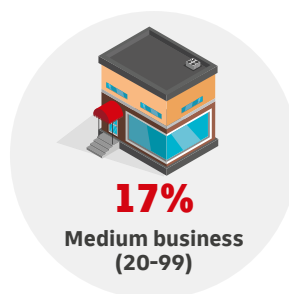
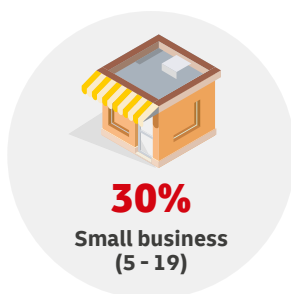
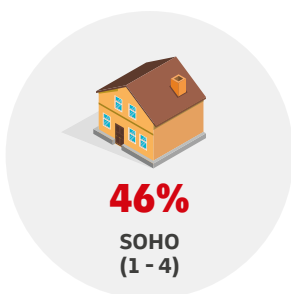


## TYPE OF BUSINESS



## BUSINESS SIZE

by number of full time employees



# FOREWORD

**The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly had a considerable impact on Australian exports and the way we do business.**

**At the start of the pandemic, the closure of Australia's international borders and the subsequent cancellation of passenger flight services created an overnight shortage in commercial cargo capacity.**

As the industry worked to pivot, putting on chartered cargo services, demand for urgent imports of personal protective equipment and medical supplies surged. Meanwhile, the closure of seaports overseas due to COVID-19 outbreaks created delays in ocean freight and economy services. Businesses which previously relied on these services sought to overcome delays by transferring their freight to premium express air services, putting further demand on an already tight sector.

As the months went on and the health situation stabilised, demand for cross-border e-commerce delivery services increased to levels never experienced before. Consumers with new habits acquired during lockdown sought to purchase goods from overseas.

In 2021, globally we have experienced a new wave of pandemic-related challenges. Fluctuating COVID-19 cases have called for a continuation of health and safety measures. Border closures, geographical constraints, and growing consumer uptake of e-commerce have contributed to strong demand for logistics services in a sector still facing a significant capacity shortage.

Unfortunately, more exporters this year have faced issues stemming from the pandemic. The increased cost of freight is the most pressing challenge for businesses, with 65% highlighting this, up from 51% last year. Supply chain issues such as a shortage of products and ability to transport freight (43%, up from 38%) and difficulty doing business due to restricted international travel (43%, up from 25%) also register high on the list for exporters.

However, throughout the most significant public health crisis in a generation it is clear that the power of global trade will continue to sustain our communities.

Enabled by interconnected global supply chains and digital technology, Australian businesses have persevered and continued to deliver for consumers, helping to keep some degree of normality throughout the pandemic.

This year's DHL Export Barometer survey of more than 1,400 exporters shows that businesses have indeed bounced back with resilience. Compared to 2020, exporter confidence is on an upward trend as 69% predict their export revenue to increase in 2022. This is in stark contrast to 47% the previous year and is on par with exporter confidence recorded in 2019.

At DHL Express, we are proud to have played a role in connecting people and Australian businesses to the world. Furthermore, we are honoured to have contributed to the pandemic relief effort with the transportation of more than one billion vaccine doses globally.

The pandemic has proved to us that a global logistics network, stringent safety measures and a dedicated workforce of international logistics specialists can overcome the impact of unexpected world events.

For Australian export businesses, the findings of this year's report point to a promising recovery. As more exporters take to e-commerce channels to connect with new customers overseas and grow their market presence, they plan to invest in online marketing and improve the fulfilment and delivery experience for customers.

We hope this report provides you with a comprehensive overview of the global export market, as told by Australian exporters, and is beneficial to your business' export strategies for 2022.

**GARY EDSTEIN**  
CEO and Senior Vice President  
DHL Express Australia and Papua New Guinea



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After a challenging 2020, 45% of exporters have seen an increase in revenue over the past year, while a quarter have seen a decline in revenue.

Looking forward, 69% of exporters anticipate an increase in orders over the next 12 months, mainly during 2022. This is a big jump on 47% in 2020, the lowest in the survey's history. In fact, 69% is the second-highest level of confidence recorded by the survey, which averages at 63%.

E-commerce has driven small office home office (SOHO) based businesses into the export game, with 40% of them generating 100% of their export sales online.

And what about the workers? Thanks to the contribution of larger export businesses, employment expectations are bullish, with 48% of exporters expecting to employ more workers in the coming 12 months (up from 28% last year) and 57% expecting to pay a wage increase (up from 30%).

New Zealand, North America, Europe, and the UK are thought to be the markets with the best prospects for expansion.

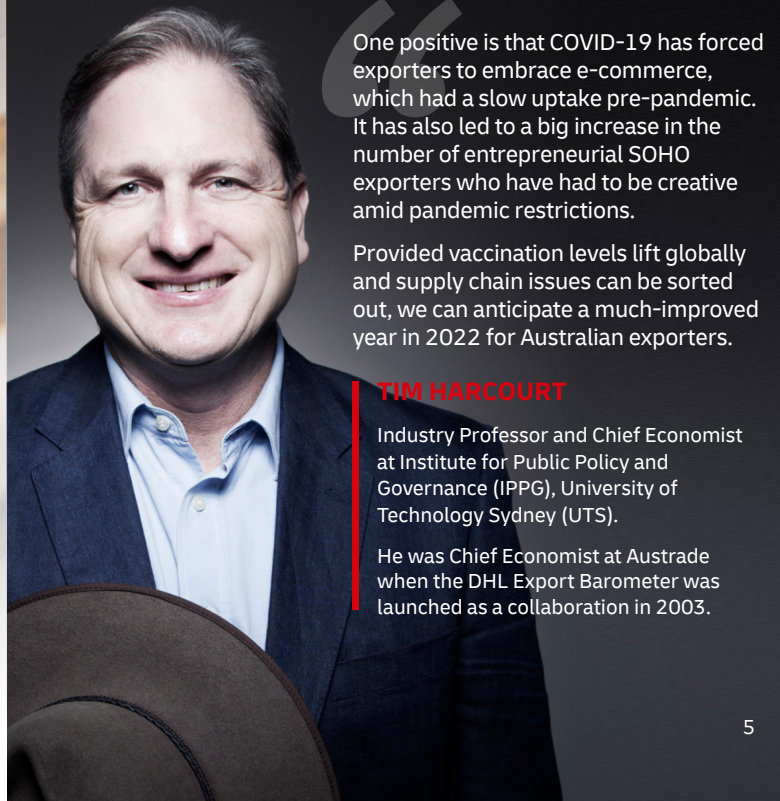
That is the good news.

What is holding exporters back? It seems the cost of freight (especially in North America) is a major issue (now 65% from 51% in 2020), followed by supply chain issues (43%, up from 38%) and overseas travel restrictions (43%, up from 25%) which are holding back visits to emerging markets in North-East Asia, Africa, South and Central America. Fortunately, customer demand is holding up for most exporters, with supply-side issues (transport and logistics), tariffs and exchange rates being the major non-pandemic-related challenges.

Overall, exporters are indicating that recovery is well underway for the majority surveyed, especially in the goods sector where businesses are not affected by the "tyranny of social distance" and travel restrictions as much as in the services sector.

## There's light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel.

That is the main finding of the latest DHL Export Barometer, surveying 1,438 exporters over September 2021.



One positive is that COVID-19 has forced exporters to embrace e-commerce, which had a slow uptake pre-pandemic. It has also led to a big increase in the number of entrepreneurial SOHO exporters who have had to be creative amid pandemic restrictions.

Provided vaccination levels lift globally and supply chain issues can be sorted out, we can anticipate a much-improved year in 2022 for Australian exporters.

### TIM HARCOURT

Industry Professor and Chief Economist at Institute for Public Policy and Governance (IPPG), University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

He was Chief Economist at Austrade when the DHL Export Barometer was launched as a collaboration in 2003.



# CONFIDENCE RETURNS



## EXPORTER CONFIDENCE REBOUNDS

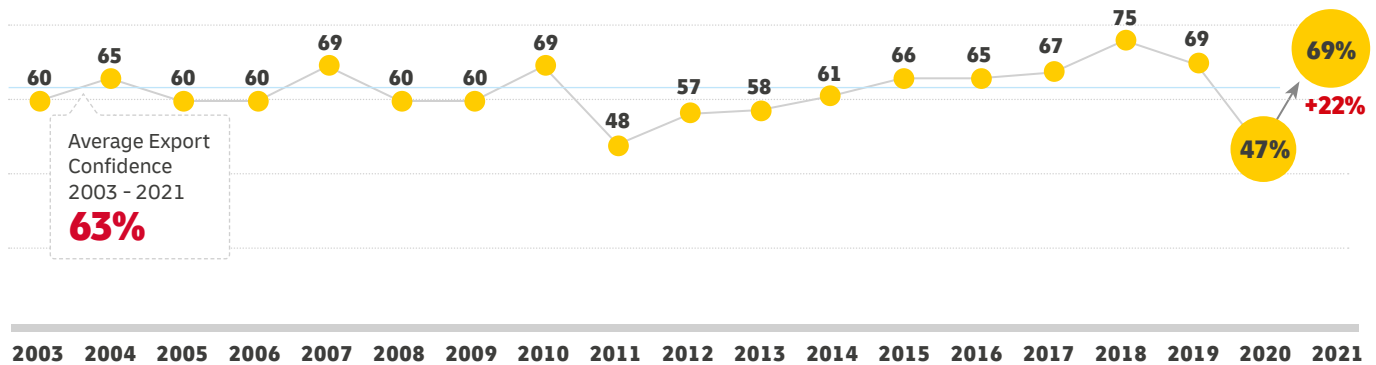
**Australia's export industry is gearing up for a big year, with confidence rebounding in 2021.**

The 19th edition of the DHL Export Barometer shows 69% of Aussie traders are optimistic about the next 12 months with expectations revenue will grow. It's a significant upsurge from the record low of 47% in 2020 and puts current confidence levels above the 19-year average of 63%.



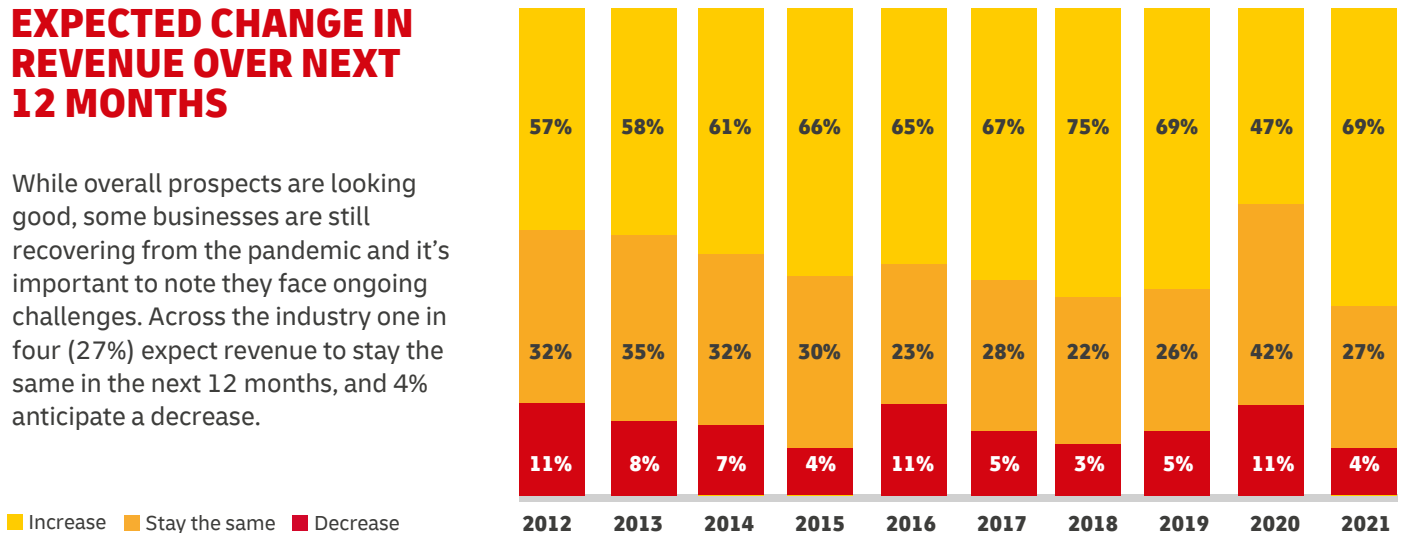
## EXPORT CONFIDENCE

(% believe export revenue likely to increase)



## EXPECTED CHANGE IN REVENUE OVER NEXT 12 MONTHS

While overall prospects are looking good, some businesses are still recovering from the pandemic and it's important to note they face ongoing challenges. Across the industry one in four (27%) expect revenue to stay the same in the next 12 months, and 4% anticipate a decrease.



## CONFIDENCE BY LOCATION

When it comes to location, exporters Australia-wide have positive expectations.



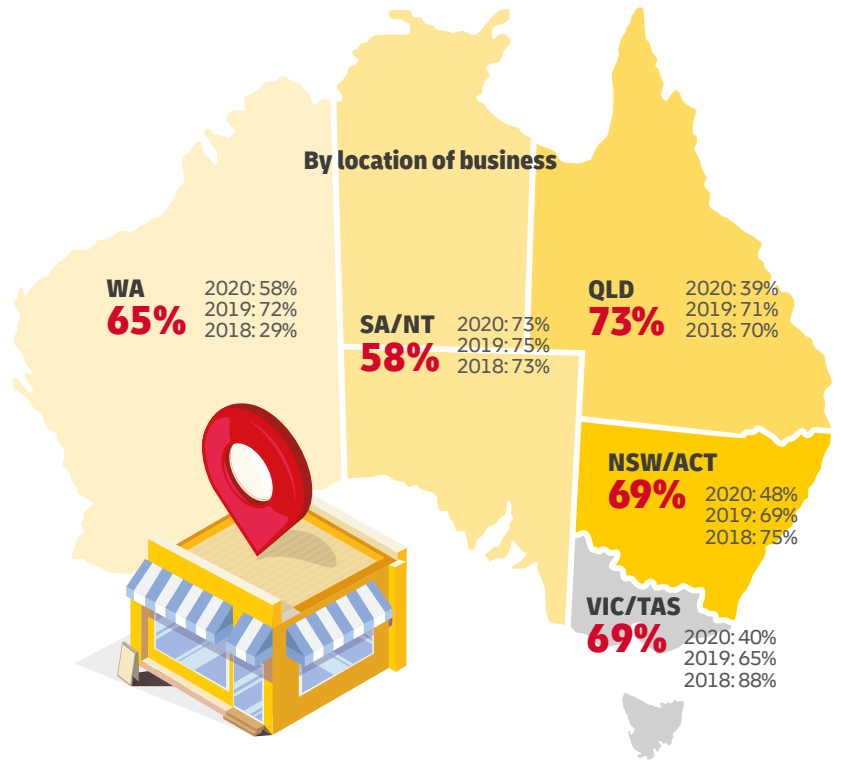
QLD businesses are leading the way, with 73% reporting an optimistic outlook.



Following is NSW/ACT and VIC/TAS, where 69% of local traders foresee a good year – despite these regions experiencing the most lockdowns in 2021.



The least upbeat markets are WA at 65% and SA/NT, where confidence dropped to 58%, down from 73% last year.





# SMALLER AND NEWER BUSINESSES MORE UPBEAT

Distinct patterns between outlook and business size have been revealed in this year's Barometer.

**Roughly 70% of small-to-medium-sized businesses are feeling buoyant moving forward.**

A sentiment likely attributed to their ability to be agile and respond quickly to changing trends.

Confidence levels are higher among newcomers that have been operating for five years or less (76%). In comparison, only 58% of large companies and operations with 20-plus years' experience report feeling optimistic.

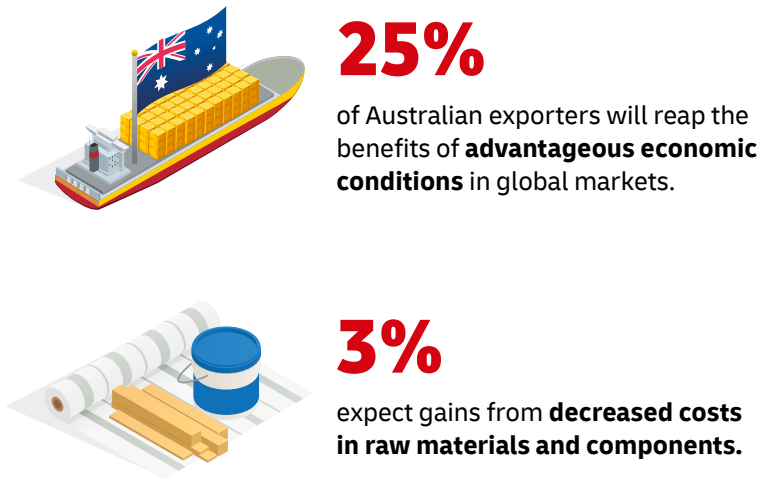
Curiously, when it comes to the break down by sector, the data shows confidence is slightly higher among the goods exporters (70%) compared to those in the services industry (63%), and positive sentiment is higher among B2C businesses (75%) than B2B exporters (66%).

## PUSHING FOR PROSPERITY

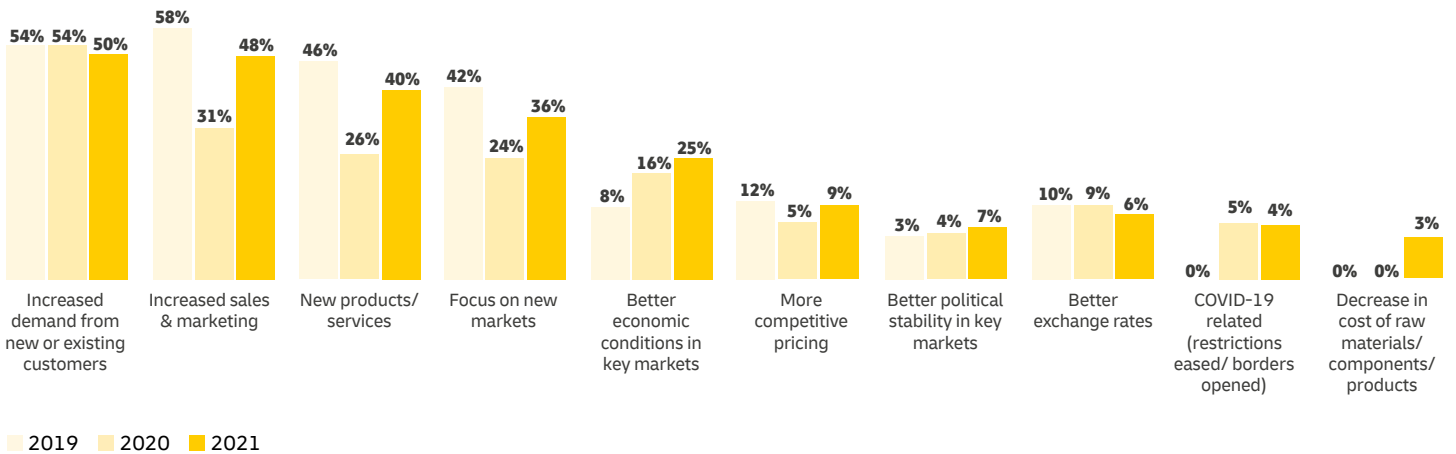
As economic conditions continue to improve, savvy Australian exporters are acting on the opportunity and proactively driving demand.



Half of those surveyed plan to increase orders by acquiring new customers and increasing business from existing clientele.



## REASONS FOR EXPORT REVENUE INCREASING



## GROWING TOGETHER

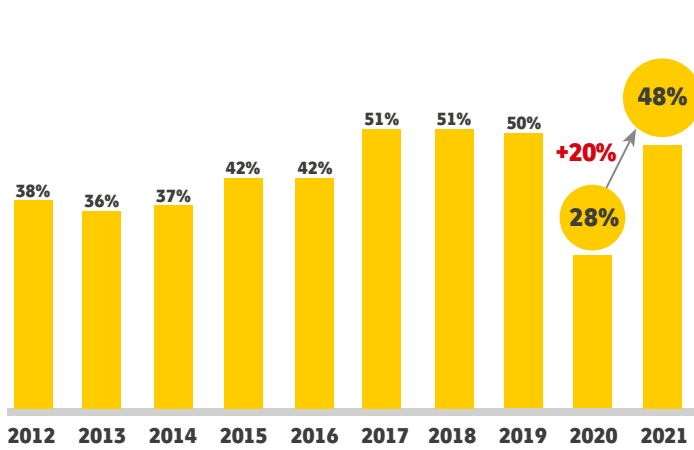
With business picking up, many exporters are once again preparing to increase staff numbers and wages in line with the years before the pandemic.



Almost half (48%) of the businesses surveyed intend to grow their workforce, rising dramatically from 28% in 2020. Pay rises are also on the cards, with 57% of exporters expecting to boost wages for the majority of staff in 2022 – particularly medium-to-large businesses. These figures collectively reflect the overall strength of the industry, and also highlight the valuable contribution the export community makes to Australia’s prosperity.

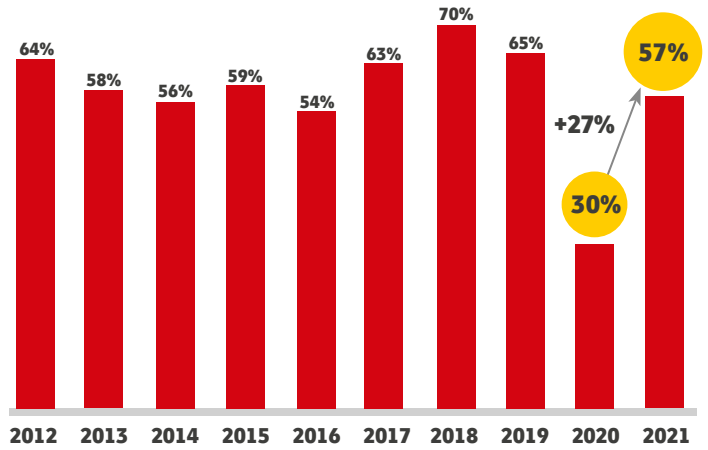
### NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

% increase



### WAGES

% increase





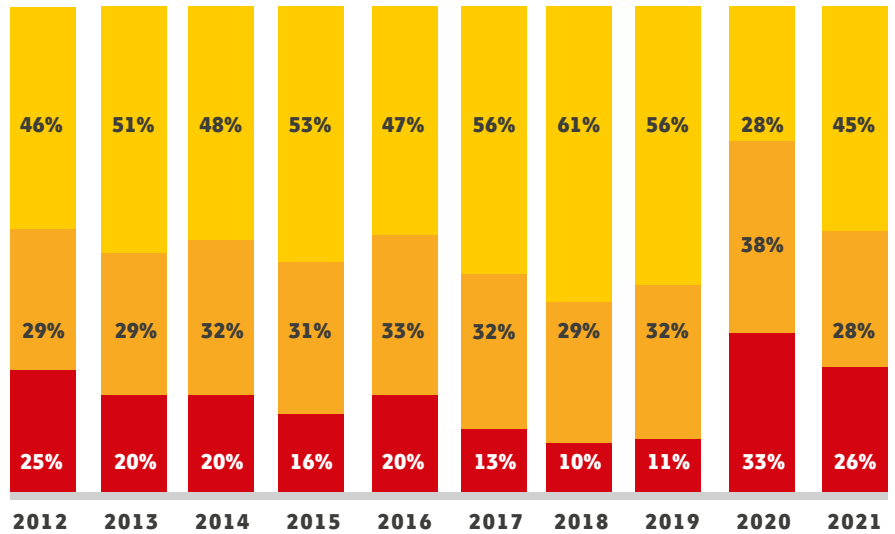
# IMPACT OF COVID-19

## ROAD TO RECOVERY

From SOHOs to big business, there's no doubt all exporters have been affected by the global pandemic, but the impacts are varied. A broad snapshot shows 45% of businesses increased export orders in the past 12 months, and orders stayed the same for 28%. However, one in four (26%) experienced a decline.

- Increased
- Stayed the same
- Decreased

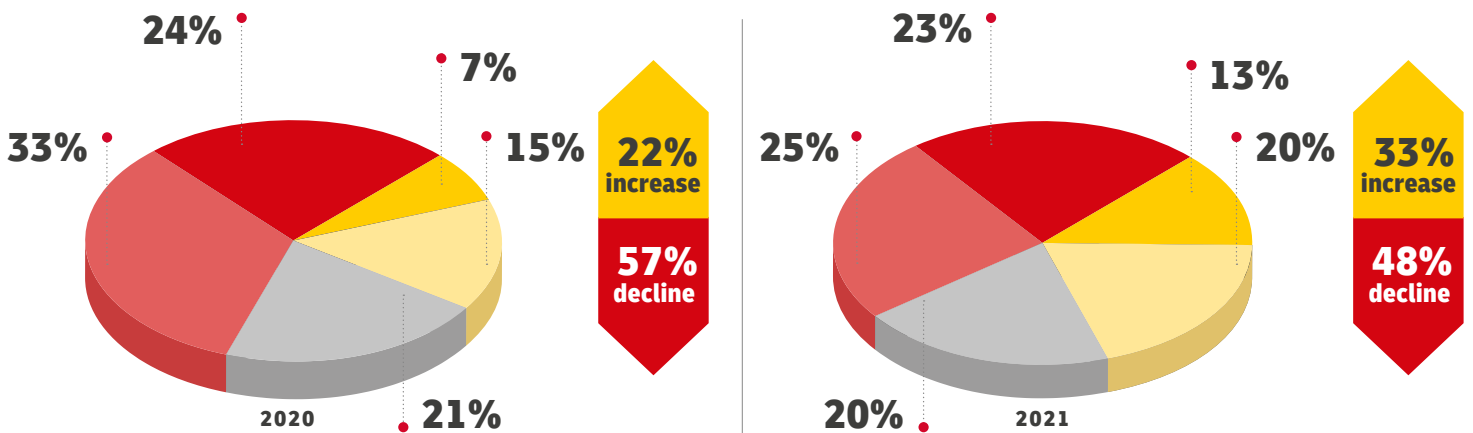
Change in export revenue over the past 12 months



## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON OVERALL EXPORT REVENUE

Looking at revenue, one in three exporters not only overcame the challenges of the pandemic to report income being up, 13% of these experienced significant increases

At the other end of the spectrum, 48% report a drop in revenue as a result of COVID-19, including close to one in four (23%) that suffered significant declines. This means the gap between average revenue increases and decreases is widening, suggesting as Australia emerges from the pandemic there is a two-speed recovery occurring.



- Significant increase in export revenue
- Slight increase in export revenue
- No impact on export revenue
- Slight decline in export revenue
- Significant decline in export revenue

## REVENUE A MIXED BAG AUSTRALIA-WIDE

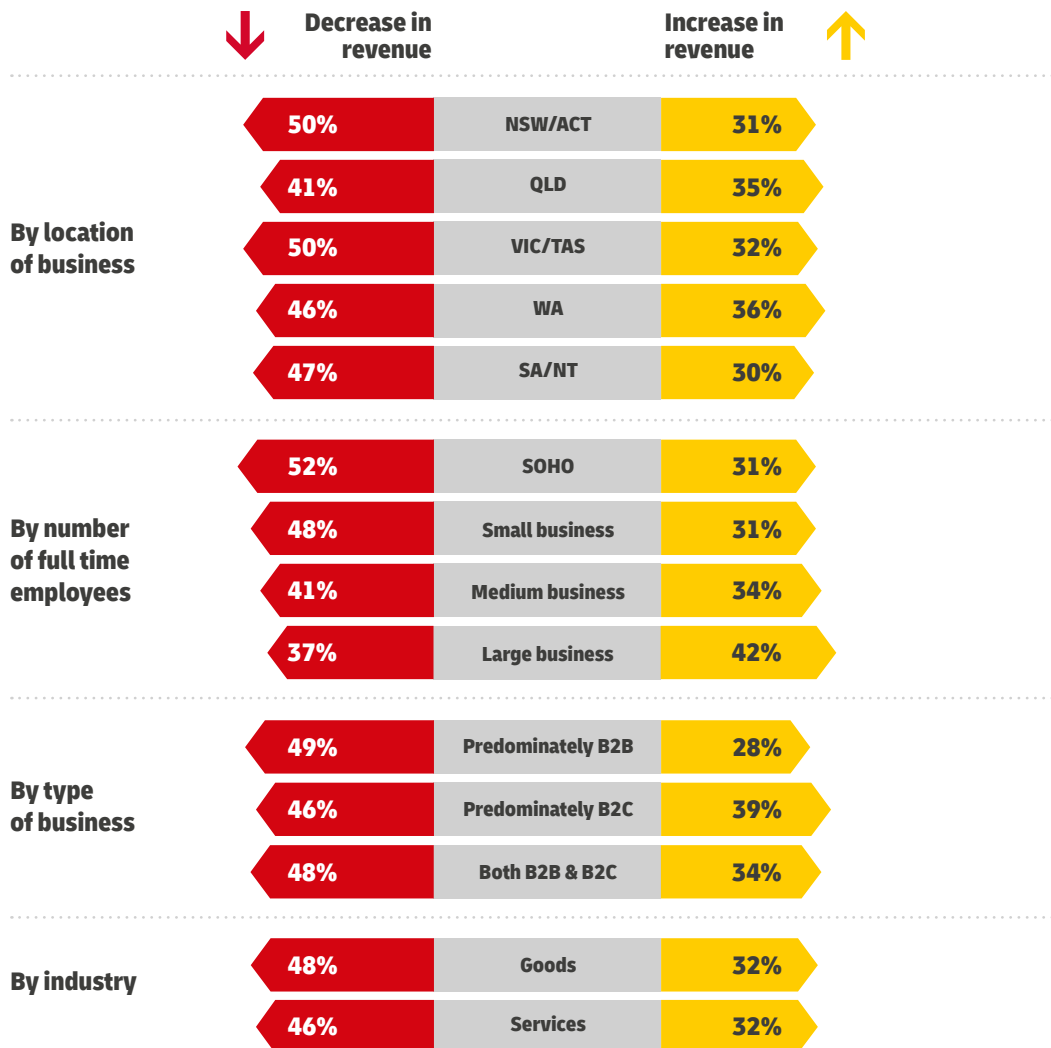
**There have been winners and losers in every state this year, but not surprisingly, businesses operating in states under extended lockdowns have been hit the hardest.**

In NSW/ACT and VIC/TAS, 50% of exporters report revenue being down over the past 12 months. However, one in three (31% and 32%, respectively) of the exporters in these states recorded gains. Looking at all states, QLD fared the best, with revenue decreasing for only 41% and increasing for 35%.



Gauging the impact by the size of the exporter, small office home office (SOHO) businesses and small operators had the biggest revenue declines. Earnings decreased for 52% of SOHOs and 48% of small businesses, compared to almost one in three in these categories that reported increases. Larger exporters appear to have navigated the pandemic slightly more successfully, with 42% reporting growth and only 37% reporting downturns in revenue.

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON OVERALL EXPORT REVENUE



# WHEN REVENUE IS EXPECTED TO RETURN

In reality while some businesses have recovered and thrived, the time it takes to return to normal will vary for exporters. Among those negatively affected by the pandemic, 59% expect to return to pre-pandemic earnings by December 2022. A further 11% say recovery will not be complete until 2023 and beyond.

Most concerning is that 28% are unsure about future trading conditions and could not pinpoint a recovery timeline – meaning some of the sector could be feeling the impacts longer term.



**expect to return to pre-pandemic earnings by December 2022**

# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ORDERS BY REGION

When it comes to export orders by region, in 2021, across the globe levels are still lower than previous years. However, strong signs of recovery are being seen in all regions.

In South-East Asia, South Asia and the Pacific, all major trade locations saw the proportion of exporters with increased orders rise, and fewer businesses reported decreasing orders. The trend is particularly noticeable in the Pacific Islands and Indonesia.

It was a similar story in the Europe, Middle East and Africa markets.

Interestingly, in North America, the number of traders reporting increased export orders jumped from 14% to 30% during the past 12 months. However, the proportion of businesses reporting a decrease stayed the same at 41%.

In North-East Asia, the most robust recovery is happening in Japan, Taiwan, and China.



# EXPORT DESTINATIONS



# DESTINATION DIVERSITY CONTINUES

Aussie traders have always had a wide global focus, and this has continued during the past year, despite the pandemic.

In 2021, on average, businesses targeted 3.8 destinations – a slight drop from 4.4 in 2019.

Generally speaking, larger companies have more diverse range of destinations, navigating a mix of diverse cultures and languages. Meanwhile, smaller exporters tend to focus on English speaking countries and Western markets.



New Zealand is still the destination where the most trade activity occurs for Australian exporters, with 58% active in the area.

This is followed by:



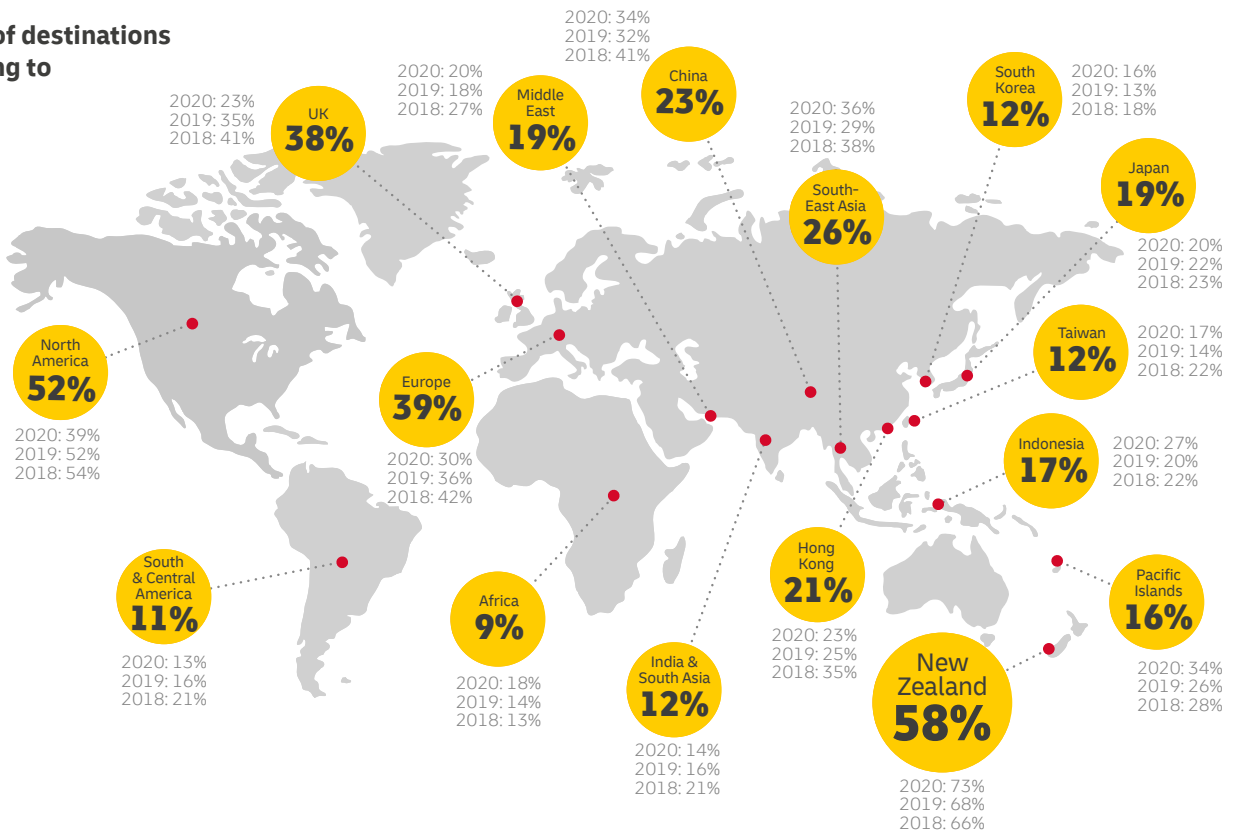
However, when it came to the main export destination North America surpassed New Zealand, with 27% of survey respondents saying it is now their most significant destination compared to the 25% that nominated our Kiwi neighbours.

## CURRENT EXPORT DESTINATIONS

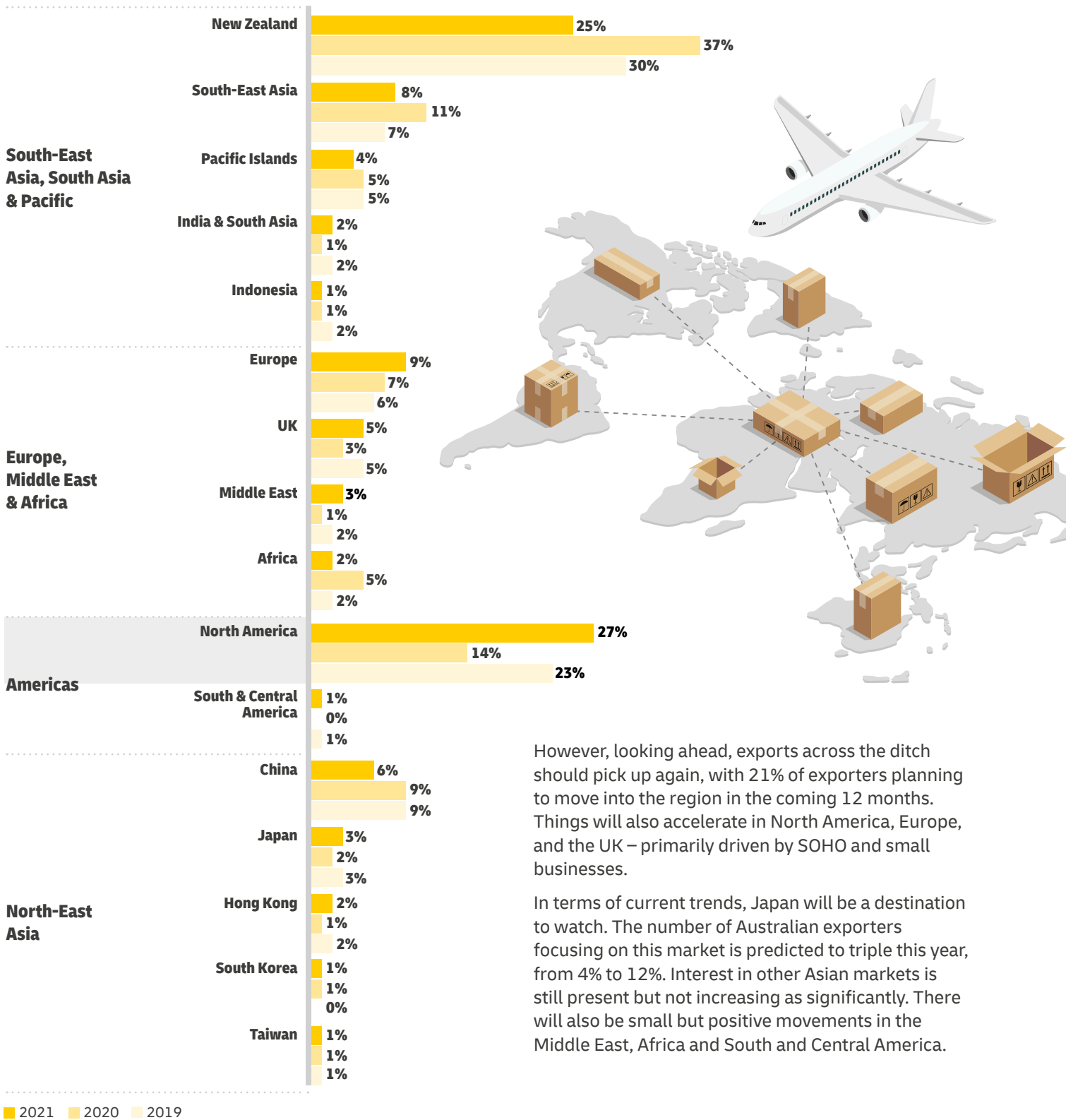
Average number of destinations currently exporting to

- 2021: 3.8
- 2020: 4.4
- 2019: 4.4
- 2018: 5.1

● 2021



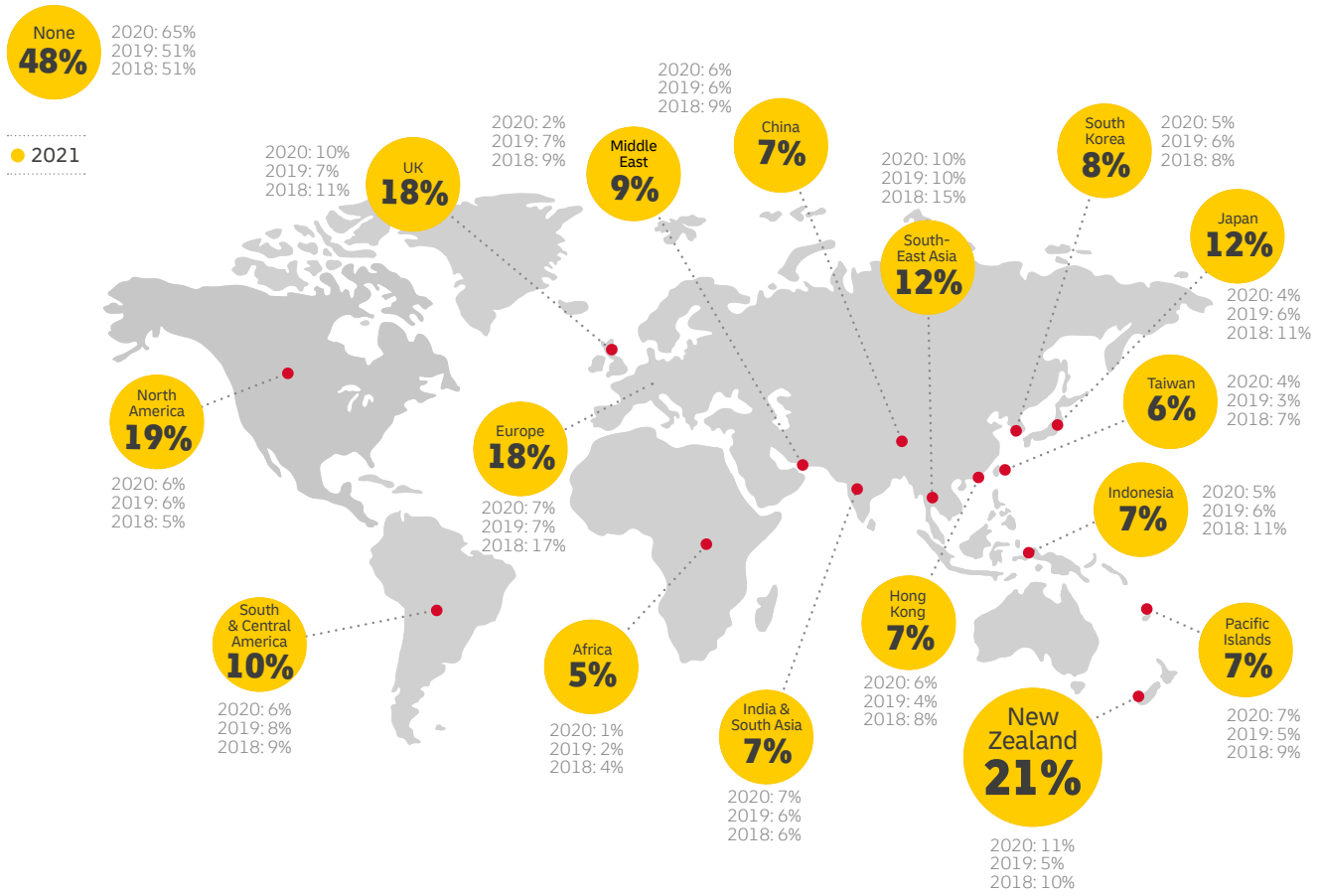
## MAIN EXPORT DESTINATION



However, looking ahead, exports across the ditch should pick up again, with 21% of exporters planning to move into the region in the coming 12 months. Things will also accelerate in North America, Europe, and the UK – primarily driven by SOHO and small businesses.

In terms of current trends, Japan will be a destination to watch. The number of Australian exporters focusing on this market is predicted to triple this year, from 4% to 12%. Interest in other Asian markets is still present but not increasing as significantly. There will also be small but positive movements in the Middle East, Africa and South and Central America.

## DESTINATIONS PLANNING TO TARGET IN NEXT 12 MONTHS



# BIG VS SMALL

Looking at where businesses are active, this year's Barometer shows clear trends when it comes to the size of the exporter.

A high proportion of SOHOs are targeting Western economies, namely North America, the UK and Europe. But they will be increasing their presence in Japan and China this year.

For small businesses, the trend is similar to that of SOHOs. However additionally, these exporters will be active in Indonesia, India, South Asia, and the Pacific Islands. For medium-and-large-sized businesses, New Zealand and Europe remain highly desirable destinations due to their ease of access and stability. But as would be expected, larger Australian exporters continue to look to various potential new markets across the globe.



# EXPORT CHALLENGES



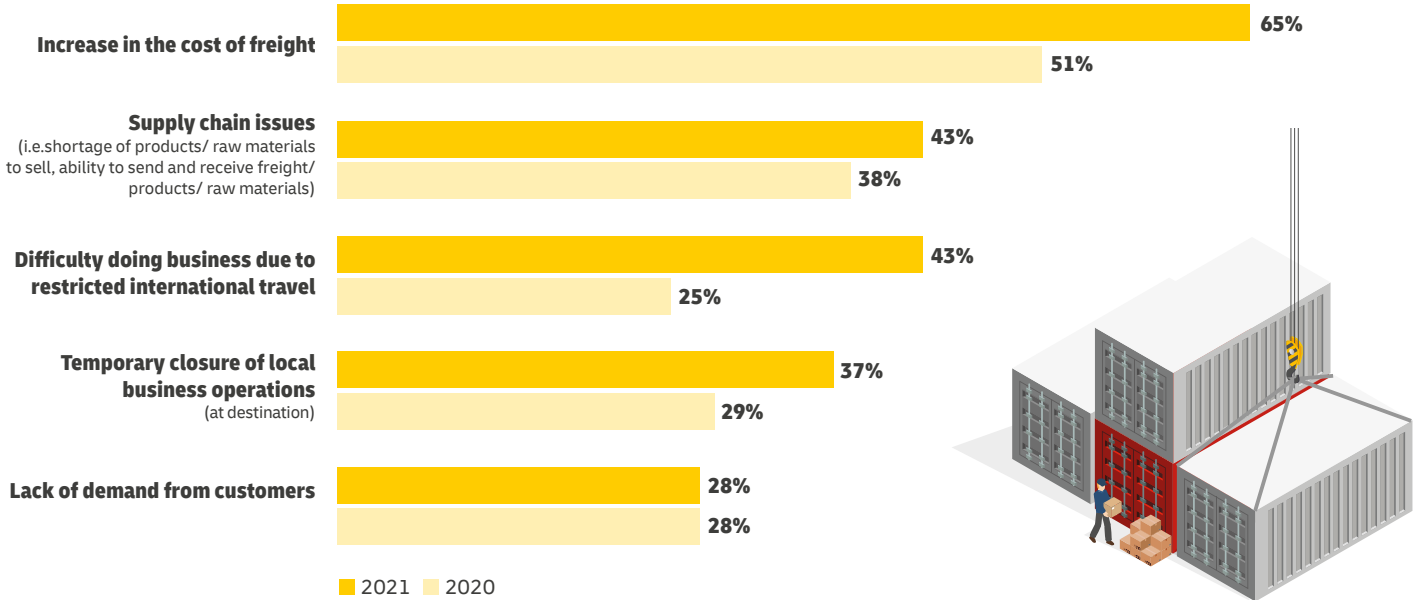
# COVID-19 CAUSES EXTRA CHALLENGES

**The pandemic has created unique hurdles for Aussie exporters, with the resulting operational challenges often affecting revenue and customer demand.**

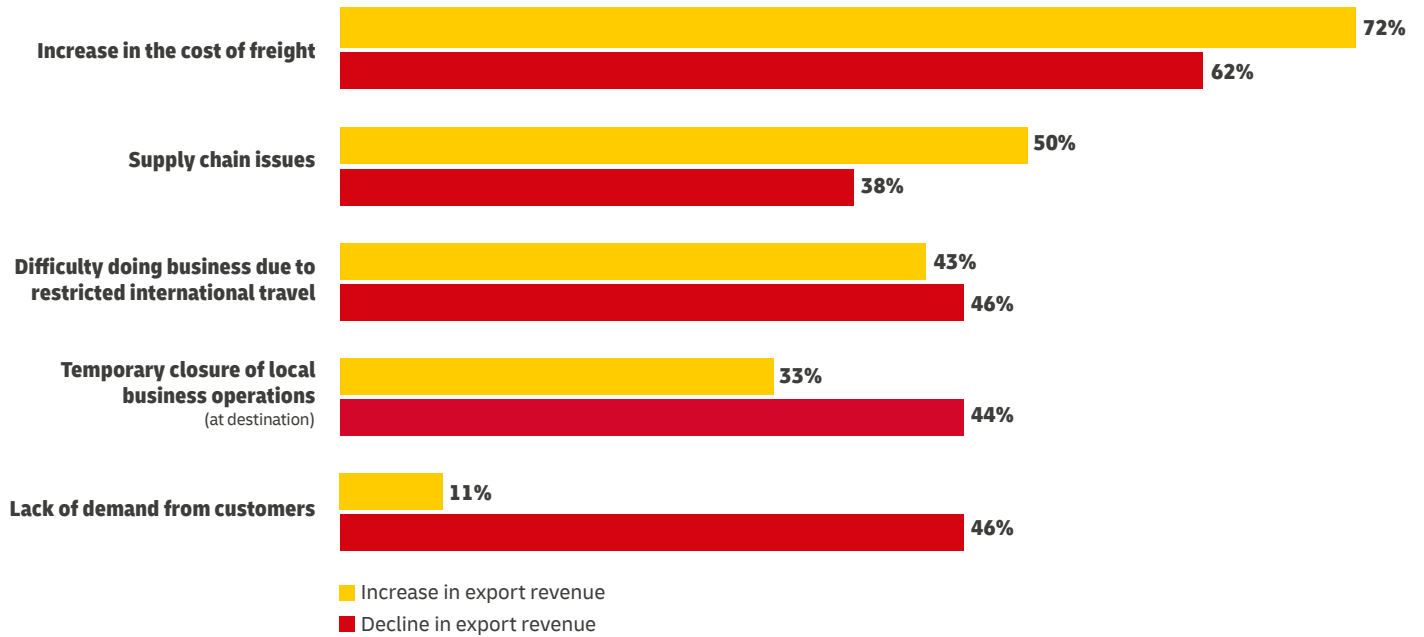
Across the industry, the most significant barrier has been the cost of freight, an issue for 65% of businesses, up from 51% in 2020. This is particularly evident in North America, with seven out of 10 (74%) exporters reporting higher prices.

Other significant challenges are supply chain issues (43%), difficulty doing business with international travel restrictions (43%), local lockdowns at destination (37%), and lack of customer demand (28%). Travel restrictions significantly hampered exporters trading in China, Hong Kong, Africa and South and Central America.

## CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED WHEN EXPORTING DURING THE PANDEMIC



## BY COVID-19 IMPACT ON REVENUE





## OVERCOMING TRADITIONAL CHALLENGES

Along with the added obstacles of COVID-19, Australian exporters are also increasingly navigating the usual challenges as trade returns to normal.

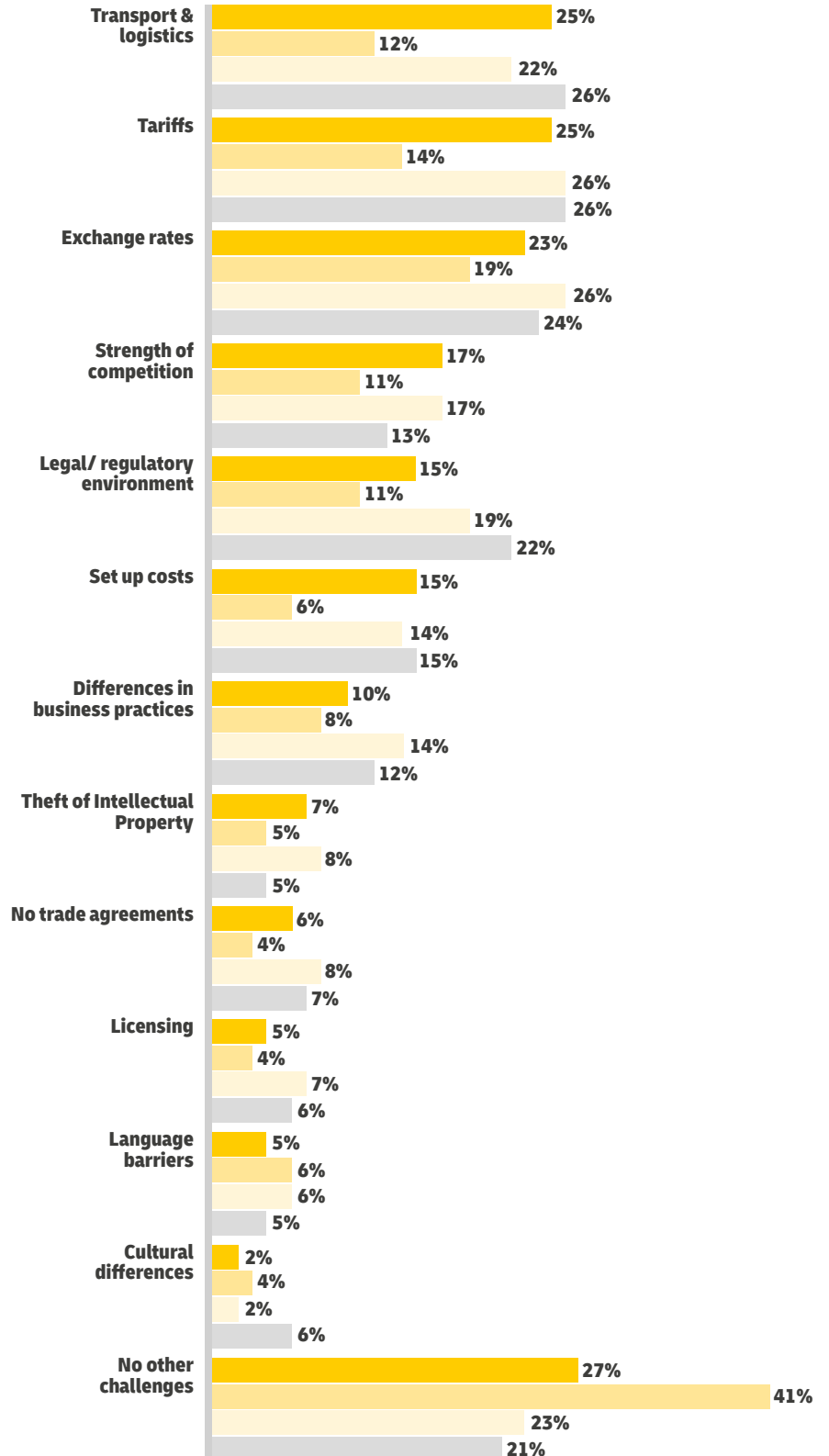
This year’s report shows traditional hurdles are now being encountered at the same levels as 2019. The most widespread problem is logistics and transport. Overall, the number of companies limited by this issue doubled in the past 12 months to 25%. The impact is particularly noticeable in the Americas, where 31% of exporters flagged concerns.

Also rating among the top four challenges across all global regions was tariffs, which were experienced by exporters particularly in North-East Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Fluctuating exchange rates affected 23%, and 17% faced strong competition.

The good news is 27% of exporters report no challenges apart from COVID-related issues.

■ 2021 ■ 2020 ■ 2019 ■ 2018

### Exporting Challenges



# EXPORTING CHALLENGES BY MARKET

	AMERICAS	NORTH-EAST ASIA	SOUTH-EAST ASIA, SOUTH ASIA & PACIFIC	EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST, AFRICA
Transport & logistics	31%	21%	24%	20%
Tariffs imposed on goods and services	25%	28%	20%	33%
Fluctuating exchange rates	33%	20%	16%	26%
Strength of competition in new markets	22%	18%	14%	13%
Legal / regulatory environment	17%	20%	10%	21%
Costs of setting up in a new market	20%	19%	12%	14%
Differences in business practices	7%	16%	8%	13%
Threat of Intellectual Property theft	8%	10%	3%	9%
No trade agreements with certain markets	5%	5%	5%	14%
Licensing	7%	6%	3%	8%
Language barriers	2%	10%	4%	5%
Cultural differences	1%	2%	3%	2%
No challenges	18%	24%	36%	24%

■ Top 4 challenges by market

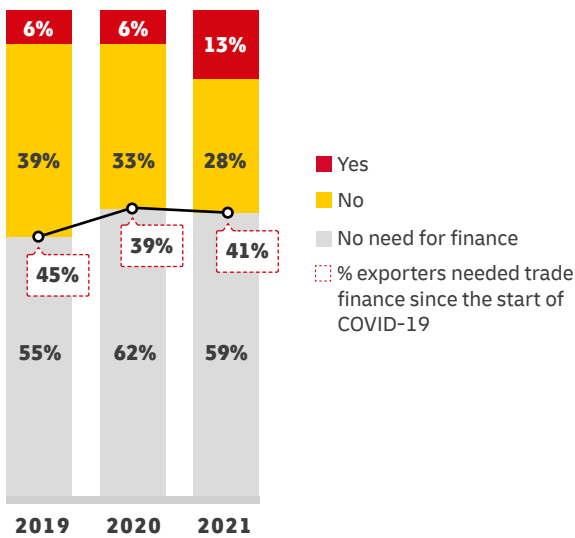
Another problem businesses are dealing with more often is bad debts. With the pandemic hitting countries' economies hard, one in ten exporters (11%) had customers default on accounts, a 3% jump from 2018-19. This is a problem most common in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, and the South-East Asia, South Asia and Pacific regions.

## SEEKING FINANCE

There has been a significant jump in the number of exporters experiencing difficulties accessing finance this year. Of those needing help, 13% had problems getting funding – more than double the 6% that experienced the same issue in 2020.

The biggest roadblock is stringent lending criteria – close to half of those rejected cited this as the reason for being knocked back. Additionally, the cost of finance and the banks’ understanding of the applying business also continue to hinder some exporters from accessing financial resources and expanding operations.

### DIFFICULTY IN OBTAINING TRADE FINANCE



### MAIN REASONS FOR DIFFICULTY





# E-COMMERCE

## RIDING THE E-COMMERCE WAVE

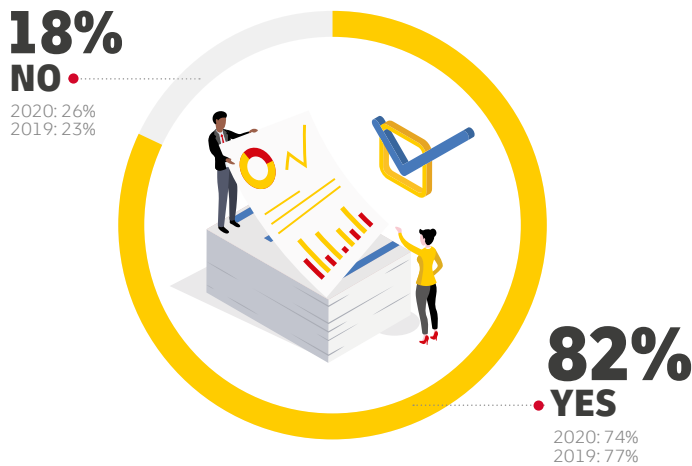
Online business continues to boom, with the number of Aussie exporters taking advantage of the internet rising from 74% in 2020 to 82% this year.

This won't come as a huge surprise, given the surge in online shopping during the pandemic. But now, almost a third (28%) of all export businesses generate 100% of their revenue purely through online channels – a dramatic rise from previous years and a sign of what's to come.

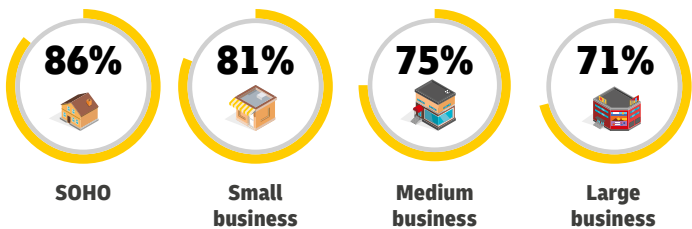
SOHOs are most reliant on online, with 86% generating sales through the web. Of these, 40% get all their orders from online. Big businesses are the least dependent on online sales, with only 71% generating web orders.



## PROPORTION OF EXPORTERS WHO GENERATE ORDERS OR ENQUIRIES FROM ONLINE CHANNELS

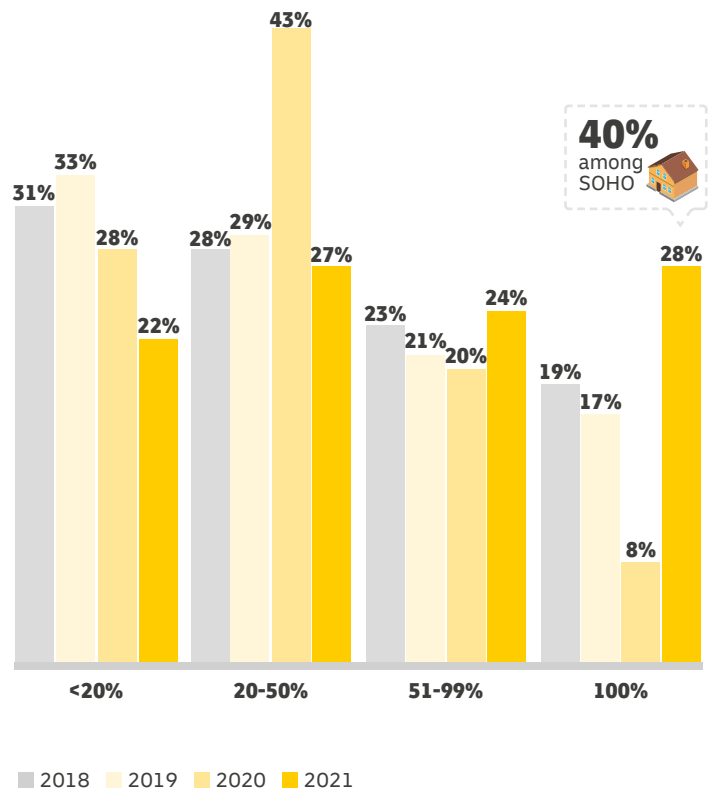


### % generate orders online by size of business



## PROPORTION OF EXPORTER ORDERS/ ENQUIRIES GENERATED THROUGH ONLINE CHANNELS

(Amongst exporters who generate online sales)



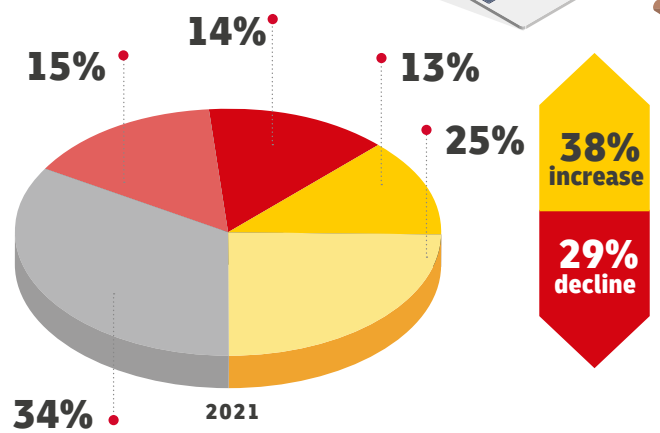
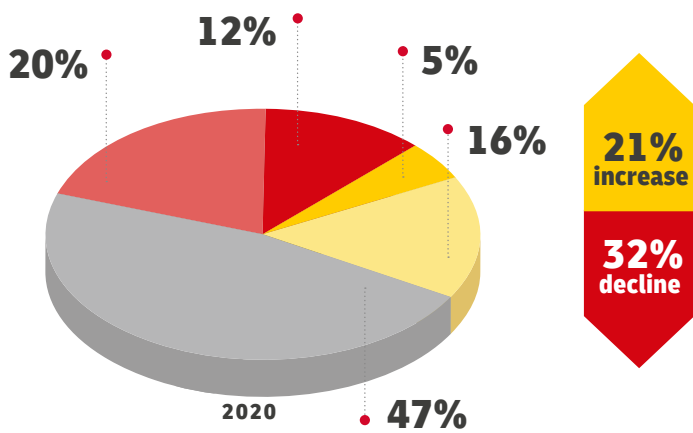
## ONLINE ORDERS CONTINUE TO RISE IN THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

As previously highlighted, it's undeniable that the pandemic has created unprecedented momentum for online purchasing, and exporters can attest to this. More than one in three (38%) trade businesses experienced web order growth during the pandemic, up from 21% in 2020. This trend was evident across all regions, but businesses operating in North America in particular saw a considerable uptick, with 46% reporting an increase. Followed by South Korea (46%) and Japan (43%).

Even at the bottom of the scale the change was significant, for example, 22% of exporters targeting Africa reported increased online orders, followed by 25% of traders active in China.



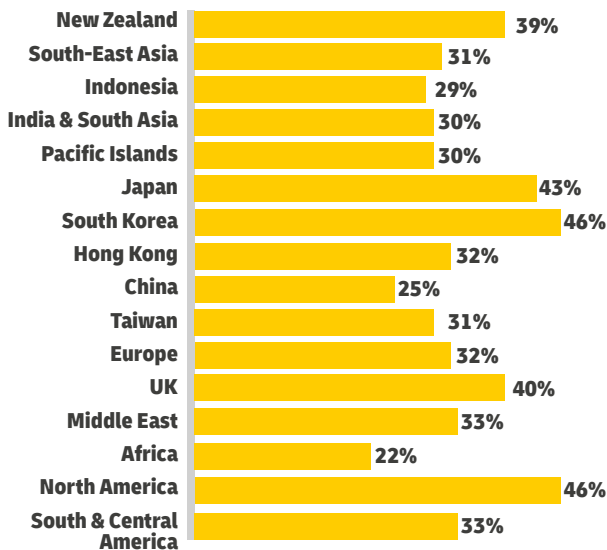
## CHANGE IN ONLINE EXPORT ORDERS SINCE START OF COVID-19



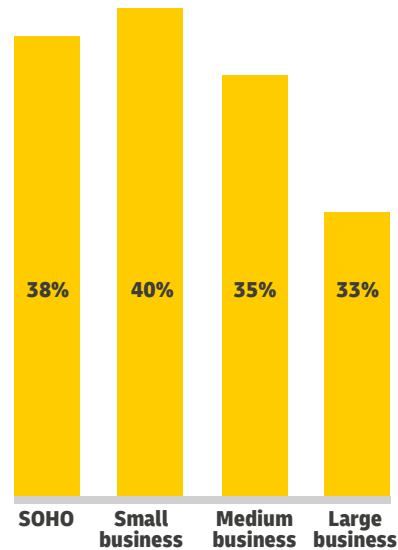
- Increased significantly
- Increased slightly
- No change
- Decreased slightly
- Decreased significantly



## BY MAIN EXPORT DESTINATION



## BY BUSINESS SIZE

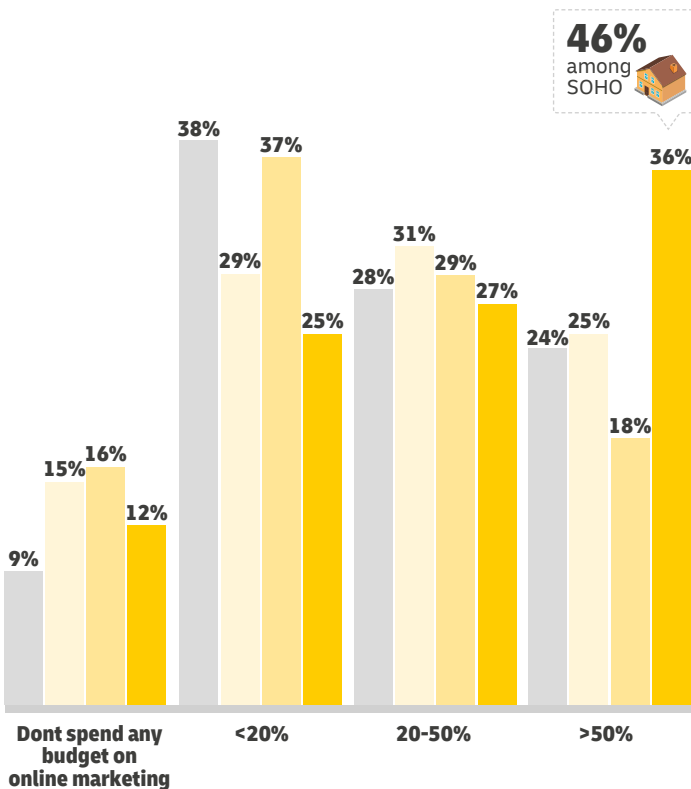


## WHAT ARE BUSINESSES DOING TO DRIVE ONLINE ORDERS?

As more exporters embrace the online space, many are enhancing their virtual presence using sophisticated strategy to drive online sales.

Firstly, online marketing is on the rise. In 2021, 36% of exporters put more than half of their marketing budget toward online channels, up from 18% in 2020 and 25% in 2019. At the same time, 27% of the exporters using digital marketing channels spent between 20% and 50% online. The rising investment in the web by some businesses coincides with a drop in exporters that do not allocate any money to the web (12% down from 16%).

One point worth noting is online marketing is used more by B2C businesses, with 58% spending more than half their marketing budget online, compared to just 21% of B2B exporters.



## PERCENTAGE OF MARKETING BUDGET SPENT ONLINE

(Amongst those who generate online sales)

The shift toward more online marketing is also set to continue with almost half (40%) of exporters planning to boost their budget for online marketing in the coming 12 months.

Other popular online growth strategies include, improving website design (34%), refining the fulfilment and delivery of orders (29%), improving customer service (26%), more promotions and discounts (24%), and offering free or discounted delivery (24%).

■ 2018 ■ 2019 ■ 2020 ■ 2021

# ACTIONS TO DRIVE ONLINE EXPORT ORDERS



Another interesting trend noted in this year's Barometer is exporters who had revenue growth during the pandemic will likely be more proactive and savvy online moving forward,

adopting a mix of approaches to drive online sales. In comparison, companies that had a decline in revenue are relying more on promotions and discounts, which could end up being detrimental to their bottom line.



## SOCIAL MEDIA LEADS THE WAY

Social media continues to be the top sales channel, with six out of ten (65%) exporters using these platforms to attract customer orders – up from 47% in 2020.

Facebook is the favourite used by 48% of exporters. Also in the top three are Instagram (41%) and LinkedIn (24%). Search engine marketing is also a popular strategy, used by 41%. Furthermore, 33% use online marketplaces such as Instagram Shopping and Facebook Marketplace, and

17% are tapping into influencers, content creators and bloggers to generate orders.

Newcomers to the online social scene are gaining momentum, but interestingly the newest platform TikTok, which has taken the world by storm, is only being used by 4% of exporters at this time.



## ONLINE CHANNELS USED TO ATTRACT EXPORT ORDERS

Percentage	Channel	2020	2019	2018	B2B	B2C
<b>65%</b> use social media channels 2020: 47% 2019: 56%	<b>Facebook</b> 48%	32%	44%	45%	35%	69%
	<b>Instagram</b> 41%	19%	32%	30%	28%	63%
	<b>LinkedIn</b> 24%	24%	19%	20%	28%	15%
	<b>YouTube</b> 15%	9%	11%	16%	12%	18%
	<b>Twitter</b> 9%	8%	9%	9%	8%	9%
	<b>Pinterest</b> 9%	3%	5%	6%	4%	17%
	<b>WeChat</b> 5%	6%	5%	6%	6%	4%
	<b>TikTok/ Douyin</b> 4%	1%	0%	0%	1%	9%
<b>44%</b> use online advertising 2020: 12% 2019: 20%	<b>Google Advertising/ Search Engine Marketing</b> 41%	28%	37%	31%	33%	52%
	<b>Display Advertising</b> 14%	11%	12%	12%	11%	17%
<b>33%</b> use online marketplaces 2020: 12% 2019: 20%	<b>Instagram Shopping</b> 18%	3%	7%	0%	8%	34%
	<b>Facebook Marketplace</b> 14%	3%	6%	8%	8%	22%
	<b>eBay</b> 12%	8%	12%	13%	6%	19%
	<b>Amazon</b> 9%	4%	5%	6%	6%	11%
	<b>Influencers/ Content Creators</b> (e.g. bloggers, vloggers) 17%	4%	11%	14%	9%	29%
	<b>None</b> 20%	35%	28%	30%	30%	7%

When it comes to website building tools, WordPress dominated again, used by a third (32%) of the industry. Shopify (24%) and GoDaddy (7%) are also popular. For those with an online store, Shopify is the favourite e-commerce software provider, with 44% of Aussie traders using it.



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