

Staffing Gross Margin Benchmarks by Segment

"What's a good margin in staffing" doesn't have one answer, because staffing isn't one business. A light-industrial book, a clinical/healthcare book, and a professional or IT book carry structurally different margins for reasons that have nothing to do with how well any one agency is run.

Why segment drives margin more than skill

Margin in staffing is largely a function of how much value-add and risk the agency is absorbing, not just the skill level of the worker being placed. Segments with higher placement risk, more specialized sourcing, tighter candidate supply, or more regulatory and compliance overhead (healthcare and clinical staffing is the clearest example, with credentialing and licensure requirements the agency has to manage) tend to command higher margins, because the agency is doing more, and taking on more risk, than simply filling a seat. Light-industrial and clerical staffing, where candidate supply is broader and the agency's role is closer to logistics and volume fulfillment, tends to run thinner margins that get made up in volume rather than in rate.

Local labor market conditions, competitive density (how many agencies are competing for the same clients and candidates in your market), and how much of your book runs through VMS/MSP programs (see [How VMS and MSP Fees Affect Staffing Margin](#)) all shift the achievable margin further, on top of whatever the segment itself implies.

Why we're not publishing a single benchmark table here

Specific margin benchmark figures by segment are real, published, and worth knowing, but they're also dated the moment they're written down, and vary by source methodology (survey-based industry association data measures differently than a payroll processor's aggregated book of business). Rather than present a number here that would already be stale by the time you're reading it, or imply a false precision borrowed from a specific survey year, the honest guidance is to pull current figures directly from primary sources built for exactly this purpose:

- The **American Staffing Association** publishes industry economic data and benchmarking reports drawing on member survey data, segmented by staffing category.

- **Staffing Industry Analysts** publishes market sizing, segment, and margin research, generally the deepest independent data source in the industry, with much of it available to members and subscribers.
- Payroll and back-office platforms serving staffing agencies (several publish periodic benchmarking reports drawn from their own processed-payroll data) offer a transaction-level view that survey-based sources can't fully replicate.

Treat any benchmark you pull from these sources as dated context for where your own numbers sit relative to the market, never as a target this site or any calculator assigns you. The engines here don't apply a benchmark margin on your behalf for exactly this reason: your actual achievable margin depends on your specific market, client mix, and cost structure, not an industry average.

What to actually do with a benchmark once you have one

A benchmark is most useful as a sanity check, not a target. If your realized margin in a segment is meaningfully below what current published data suggests is typical for that segment, that's worth investigating: is it pricing (run Staffing Bill Rate against your actual cost structure), servicing cost eating into contribution (see How to Measure Staffing Client Profitability), or a genuinely more competitive local market than the national benchmark reflects. If you're meaningfully above benchmark, that's not automatically good news either, sometimes it signals an account that's about to face competitive pressure to come down, and getting ahead of that with your own analysis beats reacting to a lost renewal.

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