

The Small Business Owner's Guide to Hiring A SEO Provider



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7 things you need to know and understand *before* hiring

The key differences between 'good' and 'bad' SEO providers

12 questions that you *must* ask (and have answered)

Why should you read this report? If your business has any online components (such as a website), then SEO is crucial to your business. You can develop the biggest and most expensive website in your industry, but without web traffic (visitors) to that website, it is essentially useless. It is not just traffic that you need, but targeted traffic. Having a lot of irrelevant visitors to your website is as useless as no visitors at all. Good SEO can provide relevant, consistent web traffic to your websites. This report will make it possible for you, as a non-expert, to distinguish between good and bad SEO providers. There are many of both kinds – this guide will equip you to find the good ones.

In today's economy businesses cannot afford wasting money on bad SEO, for a few reasons:

- **Monetary cost** - Ineffective SEO is a waste of any money spent. It needs to be implemented to a point that it is effective in achieving your SEO goals. Any less than that renders your SEO efforts wholly ineffective and a waste of your money.
- **Opportunity cost** – even if a business does not waste too much money on ineffective SEO, the time wasted during that period of ineffective SEO implementation is time that could have been spent implementing effective SEO, as well as time that your competitors could be spending on their own SEO, thus widening the competitive gap.

A SEO provider is an asset to your business. Your decision to hire should not be made only on the price of their services, but rather the potential return on your investment.

- Bad SEO is money wasted, good SEO will always pay for itself -

Some terms used in this report:

Good SEO / Good SEO Provider = effective SEO that produces real and measurable results.

Bad SEO / Bad SEO Provider = ineffective SEO that does not produce the desired results.

Google = the term 'Google' is used to refer to search engines in general.

7 things you need to know and understand before hiring a SEO provider:

- 1) **Hiring a SEO provider should be seen as an investment in your business.** You should not view it as a business expense, but rather a business strategy. Do not go in with the intention of "buying some SEO". Hiring a SEO provider should be viewed rather as hiring an employee (even though they may be a contactor) that understands and cares about your business and its online objectives, rather than a typical supplier. A supplier generally does not care what you do with the goods or services that you purchase from them. A SEO provider should treat your business, and be treated in return, as if they are your partner. Use the questions in this report to interview prospective SEO providers.
- 2) **The first page of Google (or any search engine) is everything.** Few people ever go to the second page of the search results anymore. Google is so good at being a search engine that people blindly trust Google's ability to deliver the most relevant results on the first page. Think about how often you click through to the second page. This means that if your business is not on the first page, it's almost as good as nowhere. The top positions on page one get the most clicks, which decrease going down the page.
- 3) **The 'big' keywords are not everything.** Rather be on the first page for a few smaller keywords, than try to rank for bigger keywords and not be on the first page at all. For example, an accountancy business in Chicago may not rank for the highly-competitive keyword 'accountant' (unless they have a lot of SEO budget and time to wait for rankings); but the same business could conceivably rank highly for the keyword 'chartered accountant chicago'. A good SEO provider should research the keywords that your business could realistically rank on page one for, that also have enough search volume to be worthwhile for your business to try ranking for.

- 4) **SEO is all about beating your competition.** There is no guarantee from the search engines to say you will be on the first page of Google if you do certain things. Put simply, SEO works like this: the search engines have their conventions, and websites that conform by giving the search engines what they want will find themselves achieving better search engine rankings. The only thing standing between you and the top spots in the search rankings is your competition. Not your actual business competitors, but your *online* competitors. The websites that currently have the top spots in the search engines for your desired keywords are your online competition, and you need to beat them out of those top spots. Some keywords will be easy to rank for, others will be more difficult. It is only your online competition that dictates which will be the case for each individual keyword. A good SEO provider will research your competition for each of your keywords, after your best keywords have been identified according to point number three.
- 5) **There is on-page and off-page SEO.** Search engine optimisation is a complex and always-changing science, but in order to intelligently interview a prospective SEO provider you need to understand that there are two main types of SEO. On-page SEO is the factors on your website that affect your SEO (keywords, usability, page headings, outbound links, internal links, etc.). Off-page SEO is the factors outside of your website that affect the SEO of the website, such as back links, citations, social sharing, etc. SEO providers can work on your off-page SEO fairly easily, but if you are not willing to change on-page SEO, according to their recommendations, you cannot blame them for lack of results. A good SEO provider will review your website and report back about your on-page SEO, and how it can be improved. You should have your web designer make the adjustments.
- 6) **An increase in search engine ranking is not necessarily an increase in leads and sales.** All your SEO provider can do is get your website, videos, Google Places, articles, blog posts, etc. further up the search engine results. They cannot guarantee an increase in sales or leads, because that factor is determined by your own sales funnel. It is not the SEO provider's job to make sure that the extra web traffic you receive will convert to more leads or sales. Your website needs to convert those visitors with good marketing, which is an issue for your marketing consultant to deal with.

7) **Bad SEO is easy.** Many of the providers of bad SEO are often chosen by businesses because they may seem to be at the more reasonably-priced end of the spectrum. The truth is that they offer cheap SEO, but provide even cheaper SEO. For example, one may charge \$95 per month for SEO (a typical cheap rate), but they will simply outsource it to cheap link-builders for \$5 - \$20 per month, or use their own software to blast the client's URL to hundreds of irrelevant, spammy blog posts. This can damage the reputation and, ironically, the long-term SEO of the website. Good SEO providers do not have time for too many clients, but rather deliver higher quality to fewer businesses. Truly excellent SEO is not cheap, because you get what you pay for. In terms of an investment it is much 'cheaper' than bad SEO.

The key differences between 'good' and 'bad' SEO providers:

Good SEO Providers

- Good SEO providers know and understand the points mentioned on the previous pages. You can judge this by their answers to the questions provided later in this report.
- Good SEO providers want to build a solid foundation and a proper SEO plan for your business, with extensive initial keyword and market (competitor) research. They will often insist upon it, even if the prospective client does not see the need. Sometimes a good SEO provider will refuse to work with a client that does not want the important groundwork to be done, because they know that without it they will not be likely to provide the client with the results that they want. A good SEO provider will want to provide their client with results as their first priority. Often a client will say "but I've already done the keyword research". Many potential clients sit down for 5 or 10 minutes to write out all the keywords that they think are relevant to their business, and then think that they have now done all the keyword research that is needed. Real keyword research is a lengthy, investigative process.
- Good SEO providers use responsible SEO methods, such as paying more attention to on-page SEO, securing quality back links, improving citations, aiding social sharing, ensuring a good user experience, etc.

Bad SEO Providers

- Bad SEO providers will have trouble answering the questions provided in this report.
- Bad SEO providers will want to take their clients' money as their first priority. They will not conduct proper keyword and market research, but will say, for example, "what are your three keywords and your URL that you want to rank for". If this happens (as it often does) you can be sure they are simply plugging your website into software to get irrelevant back links all over the internet, using spammy blog comments, link farms and other means. In many cases this approach is ineffective because the URL, or domain, may not match the client's desired keywords.
- Bad SEO providers use bad-quality SEO methods, which can cause more damage to your website's reputation (in the eyes of Google) than it will do it good.

12 questions that you must ask (and have answered):

Do not be afraid to ask your prospective SEO provider these questions and treat it like a job interview. After all, it is an investment in your business, with possible wasted opportunity cost at stake, as well as your company's online reputation (with customers and the search engines), and the risk of bad SEO which can take some time to be undone.

1) How long will it take to see results?

SEO is a medium- to long-term business strategy. Websites can take from a few days to a few months to rank in the search engines, depending on the keywords and competition. If you are launching a new website or promotional campaign, and you require your website to rank immediately, you may want to consider a PPC (pay per click) campaign alongside your SEO campaign. Rather look at the prospective SEO provider's past results and testimonials. The point is that they can achieve the results, which should be solid and long-term. Be wary of any SEO provider that seems over-eager to promise fast results, without providing proof of previous fast success, as this can indicate that they are being unrealistic to please you.

2) What is your approach to keyword research?

A SEO provider will not necessarily be able to tell you your best keywords immediately, but should be able to discuss their methodology with you about how they will choose the keywords for your campaign. Keyword selection will depend on different parameters such as search volume, geographical location, nature of your business, seasonality, etc. A good SEO provider uses a combination of what users are searching for, how they are talking about your product or service online, competitor websites, and your products and services.

3) What is your approach to link building?

A SEO provider should be able to explain their link building strategy in detail. There is no correct or incorrect answer, but the most important thing is that they have their own strategies and tactics for your type of business. Many bad SEO providers link their clients' websites to untrustworthy websites, in order to artificially boost rankings. This can lead to penalties, or even banning, by search engines. A good SEO provider should always be able to report exactly how many back links they have built, and the link locations.

4) What is your approach to local SEO and personalised search?

Google has an increasing focus on local SEO and personalised search (with Google Plus now playing a large role). It is important for a SEO provider to understand which elements are vital to search engine rankings. Local businesses should always have local maps/listings optimisation, with Google Places playing a major role. You do not however need to work with a SEO provider that is local to your location.

5) Can you provide case studies and testimonials?

An experienced SEO provider should be able to provide testimonials and/or case studies from previous SEO campaigns. Some companies may not want to advertise their client list on their website, but some should be available on request. When evaluating case studies, you should look at page ranking, increase in website visitors, increase in page views, increase in sales and leads, and increase in search engine

ranking positions. In addition to examples, they should be able to discuss why each project was successful, and what methodology they used to attain success. If the portfolio looks unimpressive, or the candidate has a difficult time explaining their methods, this should be a red flag.

6) Do you have any other clients in my industry?

You do not want to hire a SEO provider that has clients in the same industry sector, competing for the same keywords. This would be a conflict of interest, because a SEO provider cannot compete against themselves. A SEO provider can have clients in the same industry, but with different geographic keywords.

7) What are your reporting strategies?

Providing regular feedback and progress reports to clients is an essential part of an SEO campaign. Feedback and reports should be sent out to you at least monthly, and you should be able to receive feedback on request. Responsiveness to emails and telephone calls is also something you should be looking for in a SEO provider. The type of reports you should receive are: monthly traffic analysis report, monthly keyword rankings and analysis report, monthly keyword rankings and visibility report.

8) How will you measure the progress of my SEO campaign?

A good SEO provider should develop goals for your SEO, and a plan to achieve those goals. This plan will be a working document, which will evolve as your SEO unfolds, and also as your business's online needs change. SEO is generally required as an ongoing service, but it should not be endless and aimless. There should always be short- and medium-term goals.

9) Do you guarantee your search engine rankings?

You may think the answer should be yes, but the truth is that no SEO provider, big or small, can guarantee rankings for any keywords on any search engine. If a SEO

provider promises guaranteed rankings, this is a red flag that the company may not be ethical in their SEO methods. A Search Engine ranking is fluid and can change depending on your competitor's activities, search engine algorithm changes, etc.

10) What will you do if my website does not move up in the rankings?

While no SEO provider can guarantee rankings, they must still be accountable for their work. They should set realistic goals and have a strategy to achieve those goals. They should be able to tell you what they will do if your goals are not being met.

11) What are your fees?

This is very important to establish at the start of a campaign. A professional SEO provider will outline exactly what you will receive in each SEO Package that they provide, and whether there are any extra charges or fees. If they ask you to sign a contract, you also need to know the duration of your commitment and whether there are penalties if you wish to break the contract early. Remember that SEO is an investment, not an expense.

12) What is your number 1 SEO rule?

Of course there is no single correct answer to this question, but you can see whether or not it catches them off guard. Their answer should give you more insight into how they think.

Resources:

[Find Affordable SEO Providers on Fiverr](#)