

How To Hire A Quality Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Company (Part 2 of 3)

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Saturday, 10 June 2006

Step 2: Arm yourself! The good SEO, the bad SEO, and the just very very ugly. The SEO industry is not regulated, plus due to the ever changing search engine algorithms, the industry and techniques are constantly in flux. This provides a market place ripe for scam artists that will take your money and use excuses as to why the campaign was not successful. However, there are many good reliable SEO companies that will provide you with quality results. In order to determine the good from the bad you MUST do your homework when hiring an SEO company. This means familiarizing yourself with the basics.

Do Your Own Preliminary Keyword Research One thing you should really consider is doing some preliminary keyword research yourself. Understanding the keywords that your customers use is the first step to any successful SEO campaign. Doing some basic keyword research will:

- Save you a little money. You won't be paying the SEO rate for something you can do yourself
- Can help you select a quality SEO Company. When you discuss what keywords you should use with your SEO company, you will already be somewhat familiar and will be able to sniff out any "unscrupulous" activities right away.
- You will learn more about your customer. Knowing the keywords and phrases your customers use will help you better understand your customer. Preliminary keyword research is not rocket science, and is easy to do yourself. Just stick to the basics, don't try to get too detailed. The SEO company that you hire, can take your preliminary keywords and perform a more detailed analysis. Wordtracker is a keyword research tool that the pros use. A 1 day subscription is just under \$8 and is well worth the money. You can also try the free Overture tool. This tool is known to skew much higher than Wordtracker. However using both tools together should supply you with more than enough information. There is no such thing as a guarantee in SEO

Reputable SEO companies will not offer a "guaranteed" placement (unless it is a Paid ad which is not SEO). It is impossible for a SEO company to offer this type of guarantee. Steer clear of any company offering guarantees. Some companies may indicate that you have a good chance of high rankings for very specific terms. This is perfectly acceptable, however be sure that these terms are actually used. Anyone can say that you will rank high for "blue widgets with red things in the front", however you need to determine if this phrase will help increase sales. If it does then great! In addition, be aware of what you ask from the company. Do not ask them for money back if you do not get the results you want. This is in fact a guarantee, and a reputable company will not agree to this.

Open Communication With A SEO Company

A quality SEO company should be willing to list the techniques that they will use. This is not to say that they will provide you with every single detail, but they should be willing to describe their techniques (i.e. keyword research, link building). Be very weary of any company isn't willing to provide you with this information. Separate PPC and SEO. Separate your SEO from your Pay Per Click (PPC). Some unethical companies will take your PPC budget and spend it all on a few keywords to trick you into believing that an increase in traffic is due to the SEO. PPC is a legitimate technique and reputable companies often offer this service, just be sure that you are able to separate the results. For example, have PPC campaigns point to specific landing pages. This way you can easily tell if an increase in traffic is from the PPC or organic search engine results. Steer clear of any SEO company that does or recommends:

- SEO companies that send bulk emails ; A good rule of thumb is to stay away from any SEO company that sends out bulk emails. Most reputable SEO companies will not use this method of advertising to attract new clients.
- Repeating keywords over and over, this includes in the meta tags and in your web site's actual copy.
- Hiding keywords (ie. Using a font color that is the same as the background) is a big "no no".
- Cloaking: showing a different web page to the search engine crawlers than the ones that are actually shown to visitors. (See Part 1) | Coming in Part 3: Making Informed Decisions