

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

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Step 3: Make informed decisions Check Their References

You should check a minimum of 3-5 references, and this means making actual phone calls, not just checking their web page results in the search engines. If a SEO company is not willing to provide contact information for their references (sometimes they will just offer a case study) then move onto another company.

Write the questions down before calling the reference. Make sure that every question you ask has a purpose. Examples of good questions are:

- How long have you been using them?
- Would you hire them again?
- How do they compare to other SEO Companies you have used?
- If you could go back and ask them one question before you started the campaign, what would it be?
- Name 2 things that the SEO Company should keep doing, name 2 things that they should start doing and name 2 things that they should stop doing.

These are just examples to get you started, ask any question that you want, but make sure that it has a purpose. Try to ask them open ended questions, and be sure to let them talk. The less you talk, the more you will learn from the reference.

Research them

Use the search engines!

Perform a couple of searches on the company itself. See what results come up, are there any complaints? Be sure to search for the president or owners name and the salesperson's name. Search in google, google groups, and Yahoo, plus any other places you can think of.

Establish Metrics

Using your goals that you established in the beginning, set some core metrics. Examples are:

- Increase traffic to the blue widget page by 25%
- Increase blue widget sales by 20%
- Increase search engine referrals for the keyword "XL Blue Widget"; (this assumes that this is a quality keyword).

Share the metrics with the SEO company and gauge their reaction. The purpose of this is two fold.

- To understand if your metrics are realistic and also to get a feel for what the SEO company thinks they can achieve. Your goals may be too aggressive, or they may not be aggressive enough. Adjust the metrics if necessary, but make it clear that you will be using these metrics to establish the campaigns success. There is nothing wrong with telling the company that this is what you will use to determine future projects, etc.

- Use this as an opportunity to gauge how the SEO Company communicates with you. Ask them what their honest opinion is, and use this to do a gut check. Do you think you will be happy working with the company? Do you feel that they are being honest with you? Are they talking in a language you can understand or are they using technical jargon? This discussion will be a good representative of future discussions. If you are not happy with it, move on to another company

Baby Steps

When hiring a SEO Company for the first time, you may want consider running a pilot campaign. Consider having them optimize a few pages to see how things work out. Some SEO companies may not be open to this. Please note that this, doesn't necessarily mean that they are unscrupulous; it just may not be cost effective for them. However it wouldn't hurt to discuss this type of approach with them. Costs SEO companies vary in their rates.

- In general, the larger SEO agencies can charge from \$100-\$175/hr. It all depends on their clientele and experience.
- There are a lot of independent SEO consultants (that some of these agencies hire) that can do very good work for lower rates. Generally you can expect to find their rates to be between \$40-\$100/hr. These consultants generally work out of their home and often find work by word of mouth. Good ones are hard to find, so keep your ear out.
- You can find SEO companies that charge \$14-\$25/hr, however they typically are located outside of the United States. I am a big fan of "you get what you pay for". That is not to say that someone charging these rates is bad, they may very well be very good. However, established consultants usually have more work than they can handle, and therefore charge premium rates. If you are looking into a company that charges the lower rates, be sure to check at least 5 references.

See Part 1 | Part 2