

OK, so you've done your homework and built up a working knowledge of SEO and have decided to use an SEO firm. You've identified a couple and had one or two referred to you from your business associates. Now what?

Here are ten key questions and answers that you should put to prospective SEO firms, some questions they should be asking you plus some important resources to help you brush up on SEO...

1. What do you think about my site's technical structure, on-page and off-page content and link profile?
 - a. Ask them to make some observations about these three key SEO factors that influence Search Engine visibility in relation to your site.
2. What kind of changes will be required to your website and will they be noticeable?
 - a. You should expect them to talk about on-page and off-page changes. On-page will require the subtle inclusion of the targeted keyword phrases in various locations on each page, off-page will require changes to your meta data such as your title tag and meta descriptions
3. I know that developing an incoming link profile is important, how will you develop additional links to my site?
 - a. You should be looking for them to talk about quality of links as well as quantity and a balanced link profile including free and paid directories, local websites, government or educational institutions, your suppliers etc
4. Can you show me examples of your work?
 - a. Don't bother with references, no one will provide you with a bad one. You just want to see that they can point to current examples of their successes – short competitive keyword phrases such as “computer repairs” rather than “computer repairs for left handed plumbers”
5. What volume of traffic increase is it reasonable to expect and over what time frame?
 - a. There are a lot of factors to consider here but assuming your site is technically sound and has quality original content you should expect a 50-100% increase in quality traffic within about three months and potentially much more if your site is languishing
6. What keyword phrases do you think should be targeted for my website?
 - a. Not easy during an initial discussion but they should be able to identify the core keywords for your industry and let you know how competitive the segment is. They should discuss geographic considerations and talk about the “money” keywords such as buy, find, deals, get, compare, best, cheap or luxury
7. How many people on your team?
 - a. This just allows you to understand whether you are dealing with a small, medium or large SEO firm. Each has it's strengths and weaknesses. Small or one-person firms can be great but may get busy with other more lucrative clients or they may struggle to keep up with the latest trends. Large firms can be like a sausage factory, churning out SEO in bulk.
8. Who will be working on the assignment?
 - a. Often you may be speaking to a Business Development person or the company principal. They should be experts and probably are, but once you have signed up, you should expect to be dealing with a qualified SEO expert with at least three years SEO experience
9. How long have you been doing SEO?
 - a. This is a general fact finding question but you might be surprised at the answers you receive and the way they answer. If it is less than three years, keep shopping around.
10. Amongst all the SEO companies out there, in one minute, why should you choose them?
 - a. This is giving them the chance for their “elevator pitch”. If they can't confidently answer this, move on...and you would be surprised how many will stumble at this question.

Naturally, you should also ask them how much, for how long and whether there are any long term contractual obligations. You should also ask for a written proposal that clearly states every action and initiative that they will be undertaking.

Questions your SEO company should ask you...

A smart SEO representative should also be asking you some questions. This enables them to evaluate you as a client. The very best SEO companies are busy and can afford to be selective when determining how reasonable your expectations are and how easy you will be to work with...SEO requires a partnership between client and provider to get the best results.

- What are some of the keywords you would like to turn up for?
- Who do you see as your major competitors, online and offline?
- How old is your URL?
- Do you have a Content Management System (CMS) to edit your site content?
- Have you conducted any SEO activities before?
- Are you using Pay-per-click advertising?
- What do you expect from your SEO investment and over what time frame?
- Can you provide access to your web stats or Google Analytics account?
- Do you have any other URL's or websites?
- What other marketing initiatives do you undertake, online and offline?

If they start asking you these kind of questions then you know you are well on the way to choosing your SEO provider.

Resources...

Apart from our own SEO Tips and Ideas, here are some additional resources that you may find useful in developing your own SEO knowledge...

- www.seomoz.org – latest SEO articles and tools
- www.seobook.com – buy the ebook, it's worth it
- <http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/> - a great place to follow changes to Google
- www.mattcutts.com – Google's anti-spam advocate
- www.webmarketingnow.com – Jerry West's SEO research and testing is the best

You can join their email lists, bookmark the sites or several have a Premium paid subscription that is well worth considering if you seriously want to grow your SEO knowledge.

We hope you find this article to be a useful resource and checklist and that it will aid you in choosing an SEO company to work with. You can also download "How to choose an SEO company" as a PDF from our website www.seoworks.com.

Good luck...