



SEARCHING FOR THE RIGHT OPTIMIZATION PARTNER

How do you know what to look for in a Search Engine Optimization Partner? There are many search engine optimization companies out there and it can be hard to find someone you trust. Search Engine results are different than web development; it's a little harder to see tangible results and often undisclosed costs in the fine print. To help you along, below you'll find a few things to keep in mind when looking to invest in Search Engine marketing.

WHAT DO THEY PROMISE?

Do they promise #1 results in all the search engines? If so, run. Quickly. It is extremely difficult to achieve this without paid listings or unethical practices being put to use, which can actually harm your search engine longevity in the process.

We recommend you request your vendor to specify whether they are talking about paid (sponsored) listings, natural listings or to (exactly) specify the means by which they intend to achieve the promised results. For top dollar you can get #1 results through paid listings, but that gets expensive and is typically a temporary means of driving traffic to your site.

Look for a company with a history of achieving results ethically; simply meaning that they work in ways that do not try to trick the search engines. Work with someone who understands the dynamics of search engines and how to work with your site and industry to get attainable results. The bottom line is this: ethical practices can still equal fabulous results.

HOW LONG HAVE THEY BEEN IN BUSINESS?

When shopping for an SEO company, it's sometimes hard to decipher exactly how long that company has been in business. The longer they have been in business, the more likely they are to understand search engines, web development, and be able to compete in the marketplace. There are many businesses out there that have invested thousands of dollars in search engine optimization, only to find out that company no longer exists. You should also request a list of references and sites that they have worked with for search engine optimization. And check up on those claims they're making; your reputation is staked on it.

WHAT'S IN THE FINE PRINT?

If it's not included in the proposal, assume you aren't getting it. For example, find out if you have options as to where you can host your website. Some companies exclude that information, only to over-charge you later.

Other items to consider:

Monitor incremental costs that crop up to actually *make* the changes recommended on a regular basis. It's one thing to receive recommendations that can change the way people find you online; it's another to pay additional unanticipated funds month after month to get the recommendations implemented. Preventing this is easy: find out if the actual changes are included in your ongoing monthly charge. A true partner will disclose this up front and not keep you guessing.

Pay attention to how many actual pages are being optimized. Often times, 'package' deals will sell you short in terms of how much optimization is included vs. what you need. Work with professionals who evaluate you as a unique circumstance; not a square peg to fit into a round hole.

Be careful of ambiguous statements, such as 'and much more' or 'behind the scenes' work. A good SEO partner will be forthright about all aspects of optimization, including sharing the nitty-gritty details if you want them about the Website code, recommended changes and overall strategies. **Bottom line: find out what all possible charges could be for your project and get it in writing as well as what is expected of you during this project.**



WHAT'S THEIR PROCESS FOR OPTIMIZING YOUR SITE?

Do they keep you in the dark about what they are doing? If so, they're not the right partner for you! It's your money and you **can** make sure that they will submit to everything they will be doing on your site, in writing. All too often, SEO companies will submit sites to irrelevant and unethical "link farms" for a quick fix. This ends up hurting the site in the long run. So make sure all work is in writing before it's done.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD YOU CONSIDER?

- **Consider the possibility of more content generation as the site grows.** Having a good copywriter at the ready will be important for your site's growth. Often times this can be included as an addendum in an ongoing monthly agreement for a set fee/set deliverable by month.
- **What kind of reporting will you get?** After investing in site-wide changes and modifications to better your rank, the report you see each month will be telltale to your success and progress. A true partner will be more than willing to share a sample with you so you understand exactly what you'll be seeing each month.
- **Can you make changes to the site yourself?** You may already have the capabilities in-house to make changes to your website. Check to see if your search engine optimization partner will work as a consultant, letting you retain control of your site.

For more information on optimization strategies and partnership, please contact Jessica Hose (Jessica@ecreativeworks.com).