



WHAT IS SEO?

SEO (or “Search Engine Optimization”) is an essential part of building a reputable internet presence to support your business. No website that is highly visible to its intended customer got there without extensive research and SEO application implementation. However SEO is also an extremely sensitive art. Because of this, choosing your SEO provider should be done with great attention and care. It is important that you proactively inform yourself of the potential consequences that both good and bad SEO can have. Understanding what makes a competent SEO campaign is the best way to ensure that you do not waste time, money, or reputation on an SEO provider that will not do the job right the first time. A good SEO campaign is a lot of work to begin with, but can easily and smoothly be maintained as it succeeds.

Some of the services you might see mentioned by an SEO provider or other internet consultant might include the following:

- A full-site review, analyzing the content and structure of your current website and any SEO campaign currently being implemented.
- Technical website development advice.
- Content development.
- Online business campaign development management.
- Keyword research.
- SEO training.
- Expertise in specific markets or locations.

One of the key points of SEO to remember is that search engines such as Google include in their results pages both ORGANIC and PAID/SPONDERED results. That is, buying ad space (such as putting money into an Ad-words campaign on Google) will grant you placement on the search results page but it will have NO bearing or representational value in terms of your ORGANIC internet presence. The idea of an SEO campaign is to build your internet presence in such a way that your site successfully moves up in rank in the relevant searches WITHOUT paying for any type of ad space. The only money you should be spending on increasing your internet presence and success is to any SEO provider you hire outside of yourself.

That being said, before choosing an SEO provider you should have an idea of what a search engine optimizer does (and why). The first step to understanding SEO is to understand how search engines themselves work. A couple of excellent sources are as follows:

- Google’s Webmaster Guidelines
- Google 101: How Google crawls, index, and serves the web (Google 101: How Google crawls, indexes and serves the web).

Another key point of SEO to keep in mind is that the earlier you can begin implementing an SEO campaign for your site the quicker and less obstacles you will face down the road. If you are launching a new site or a site re-design, this is the perfect time to start a new, full-force SEO campaign. However, SEO can be implemented on any site at any time in its existence. Good SEO should always improve your site, but the patience it might require can vary.

Once you are more familiar with what SEO providers often list as services, how search engines work, and what SEO is actually supposed to do, you can begin looking for your provider. The following is a list of suggested

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questions you might want to interview your potential SEO provider with in order to better understand their level of expertise, experience, and indicate your own knowledge and expectations:

- How long have you been in business?
- Do you have examples of previously successful work that I may review/hear about?
- Do you follow the Google Webmaster Guidelines?
- Do you offer online marketing services or advice to compliment your SEO business?
- What kind of results can I expect to see and in what timeframe with your services? How do you plan to measure the success of your efforts?
- What's your experience in my industry/city/country?
- What are your primary and most essential SEO techniques?
- How can I expect to communicate with you and at what level of detail should I plan to be informed of site changes and given recommendations and advice with reasoning?

Negative or harmful SEO is SEO that is irresponsibly implemented. This can be through sloppy or lack-of research or attempting to utilize now "illegal" techniques to "trick" search engines. SEO providers that provide these types of sneaky services not only give the SEO industry a bad name, they can PERMANENTLY DAMAGE your internet presence. For example, if Google determines that your website is using unfair practices to advance its SEO results, it can BLACK LIST you. This will mean that your internet presence will be virtually eliminated and become unsalvageable altogether. The time, money, and business lost by you can then never be recovered.

While it is not necessary for you to understand ALL of the potential violations an SEO provider can make, here are a few warning signs to consider as red-flags:

- Be wary of SEO providers or other internet consulting companies that send you an e-mail you were not expecting. While they may be filled with enticing offers and appears at just the right time, consider them spam!
- Be wary of anyone that "guarantees" a #1 Google ranking. NO ONE can guarantee this. Every site on Google must be submitted the same way, and it is free of charge. There is no such thing as a person or company that has a "special relationship" to Google that can increase your rank.
- As with any business or service you might invest in or purchase, be wary of any SEO provider that will not tell you specifically what they do and how. Being cautious of deception is a good way to rule-out those SEO companies that intend to strengthen your search engine results with "illegal" practices. Any SEO provider you hire should be able to explain to you in detail everything they do.
- Be wary of any SEO provider that attempts to require you to link to them. "Free-for-all" links, link popularity schemes, and other such things are typically not only useless but potentially very damaging for your site.
- Understand what you're paying for. Again, your SEO provider should have an open dialogue with you about all of their practices. Do not be conned into giving your SEO provider more money for immediate results and have them place you in advertised space while your organic search results continue to flounder. Specifically, make sure you ask your SEO provider which of their fees go toward "permanent inclusion" (paid advertisements) and so on.
- What are some other small things to keep an eye-out for from an SEO company?
 - "Shadow" domains¹
 - Links their other sites on "doorway" pages²
 - Offers to sell keywords in the address bar
 - Doesn't distinguish between organic search results and paid advertisement space on a results page.
 - Operates with multiple aliases or falsified WHOIS info

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- Runs traffic from fake search engines, spyware, or scumware
- Has already had SEO problems in the past, especially that results in domains being removed from Google's index and "black listed"
- Companies that are not listed on Google themselves

The importance of a trustworthy SEO provider cannot be overstated. If you suspect SEO deception in some way, consider reporting it not to protect yourself but to enhance the quality of reputable SEO in the general online market.

To file a complaint in the US, contact the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) at:

<http://www.ftc.gov/> and click on "File a Complaint Online"

1-877-FTC-HELP, or

Write by mail to CRC-240, Washington, D.C. 20580.

¹A shadow domain is a common scam in which users are funneled to a site with deceptive redirects, often owned by the SEO provider to their own advantage in case they are discovered.

²A doorway pages are link drains in which an SEO provider loads keywords and often inserts links to their other clients and themselves, lowering their link popularity.