



Which SEO Company?

What to look out for when choosing an SEO agency

INTRODUCTION INTO FINDING THE RIGHT SEO COMPANY

When you are looking for a competent SEO company that provides you with quality, results-driven and dependable services, you need to make sure they have a proven track record and can write well-constructed articles, press releases and design and publish your company's PDFs.

SEO has, for quite a long time now, been concentrated on writing quality copy. Matt Cutts, the head of Google's Search Quality team in Google working on search engine optimisation issues, pointed out that webmasters can improve the rank of their sites by creating high-quality sites that users will want to use and share.

In the past, SEOs were producing good quality links but the focus has now changed in that Google want to see less emphasis placed on link building and more on building quality content. Any decent SEO company must be able to create natural backlinks through article marketing, PDF distribution, social media marketing and writing blogs, at the very least. This can extend further into video making and podcasting, and creating infographics.

The next issue that is fundamental to the SEO/SEM process is the ability to quickly understand a website's architecture and recommend changes that will make the site far more 'friendly' to the search engines.

So, for example, if you're linking to an inside page or blog on your website that has been erroneously named, such as 'homes/rent' or 'blog', terms that people will not search on, they need to be changed so that the keywords are more relevant and meaningful.

COMMON SEO PRACTICES

Almost every business today needs the internet to drive customers to their products and services and therefore should spend time on considering what search engine optimisation (SEO) agency is going to serve them best. In today's competitive world, this is not an 'if' question but an imperative. By implementing a cohesive marketing plan that is robust and produces results your ROI will escalate but this is something many businesses fail to address.

So the next question for business owners is: "How much will it cost me per month for an expert SEO company to bring my website up on the search engine rankings?" There are many methods SEO agencies employ as detailed below.

Monthly Retainer: Under this model, clients pay a set monthly fee each for an agreed-upon number of hours for their services. Monthly retainer arrangements usually include on-site content updates, articles, press releases, PDF distribution, maintaining internal and external blogs and reporting.

Package Plans: Package Plans are perhaps the most common method of pricing in the industry. Fees are paid according to the level of service that is required. This sometimes gets

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confusing as SEO – normally a one-off exercise in getting the architecture of the website right and optimising all of its pages – is often bundled in with the monthly marketing (SEM). There are of course exceptions to every package plan and SEO companies should not strictly adhere to what they think a company might need. For example, if there is a big company with thousand upon thousands of good quality links and an in-house marketing team, they may simply want their site reviewed and optimised with no SEM services requirements.

Monthly Consultancy: In this model a company may decide that all they really need is to be pointed in the right direction while they get on with the blog posting, brochure and PDF dissemination, etc. themselves and only need to be steered along the right lines.

So, to get back to the initial question of how much it is going to cost, we have looked at Search Engine Watch, one of the world's most pre-eminent search engine websites that provide some of the best information on search engine optimisation and marketing, including forums, reviews, articles and ratings, to see their views on the matter.

The costs they propose really does depend on the level of services you require and can range anywhere between \$350-\$5,000 per month, relating to the the extent of the services being offered by the agency. Businesses that are just starting out in contracting their SEO services to an agency probably do not want to dive into the deep end from the outset.

Instead, they usually take an entry point stance. For example, our site audit costs costs between \$285 to \$415 depending on the size of the website, SEO copywriting is based on a 500-word article taking two hours to research and write and costs \$55, and social media sites setup would set you back \$15 per site. Remember, we are in Asia and our pricing structures are significantly cheaper than those proposed by Search Engine Watch.

FALSE PROMISES AND LACK OF INTEGRITY

Be suspicious of the following promises:

Guarantees: SEO agencies are normally unable to provide blanket guarantees because of the keywords(s) being targeted. If a client asked us to get them to #1 on 'music' and outstrip MTV and YouTube, we would politely turn the job down. The amount of hours needed to get highly competitive keywords on to the first page of Google is something the client should think about carefully because of the time it takes. It is often far better to 'localise' the search than go global unless it is a very big company with a huge budget to throw at the project.

Instant Results: There are cases where an article has appeared at the top of Google within five minutes, but it must be said that it was not a particularly popular search term. Unless a website is producing reams of unique copy per day, sometimes hourly like the BBC or CNN, it is unlikely that Google will index a site's pages more than once a week. For start-ups, pages are often cached in their 'supplemental index' until the site is 'trusted'. This generally takes a month or so before you start to see results. They certainly do not appear instantaneously.

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Getting You to #1 on Google: If an agency promises to get you to number one on Google, it might sound like they really know what they are doing, but usually this only happens in uncompetitive markets and it always takes a lot of hard work and strategic planning.

Linking to 'Bad Neighbourhoods': Link building is a vital part of all SEM campaigns: it is not possible to get highly ranked without without quality, relevant inbound links. And the SEO agency you choose should be well aware of where to build these quality links and what sites should be avoided at all costs. The links provided must come from ethical, white label websites as links from 'bad neighbourhoods' incur penalties and will hurt your website.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN MAKING YOUR CHOICE

As you begin shopping around for SEO agencies to make your decision, be mindful of the following points:

SEO is a Continual Process: SEO is a long-term investment and it should be regarded as such from the start. The most enduring results come from a continual process of building up links by offering unique and quality information. The efforts made in any SEM campaign will not be realised in the first month, you need to have continuity or your site will fall off of Google rankings and your business can suffer irreparable damage. Three years ago we worked for a real estate company that enjoyed a #1-3 placement on virtually all of its search terms. The SEO was abandoned and their main search term 'bangkok property', now sits at #53.

Algorithms Change Over Time: Changes to search engine algorithms will affect your website as soon as they are launched. Best practices ensure that the general rules of engagement are complied with from the outset or your rankings will falter. For example, in April 24, 2012 Google launched the Penguin update that affected many websites that had been violating Google's Webmaster Guidelines. Black-hat SEO techniques, such as keyword stuffing, cloaking, participating in link schemes, etc. were swiftly pounced on and punished.

The Cheapest is Never the Best: It is almost pointless to shop around for the cheapest price, it's about finding the best qualified agency you are able to find. Based in Bangkok, we are certainly far cheaper than those in developed countries because the market will not bear international rates. But we like to think we are experts and here to educate you in the process of what needs to be done. Remember, the aim is to bring in new business to your company, which if done right will pay massive dividends. By paying modest fees to an SEO specialist is counterproductive and, above all, a source of constant frustration.

All Puff and no Substance: Having a beautifully crafted website is of the essence but unless people can find it, it is almost not worth even having one.

The Pitfalls of DIY: Armed with a bit of knowledge is dangerous, but some people actually think they can outsmart Google and do SEO on their own. The truth is, you will never succeed if you try to do it by yourself. We have never seen high levels of ROI for those that have tried.