

SEO & Local Search Marketing

How To Select A Professional – Part 3

In **Part 1** of this three part series we defined some terminology as well as discussed important topics like budgets and timelines, defining goals, and setting realistic expectations. In **Part 2** we began exploring the process of evaluating the people, firm and materials being presented for consideration. Now we take things to the next step, evaluating the actual proposal in preparation for making a decision on who or what to hire.

PART 3

Evaluating the Proposal - Questions & Answers

You need to take your time and think this part through. If you don't you may find yourself many months and thousands of dollars down the road before you realize that hey, maybe asking questions would have been a good idea.

At this point you are looking for a person or business you can trust and that means asking a lot of questions, listening to the answers and then trusting the business sense which has gotten you this far in the first place. It is always ok to say "no, thank you" to a proposal, just do it for the right reasons.

OK, since much of this part of the process is subjective I am going to prime you with a lot of questions you will want to consider and possibly ask. From there...if you listen carefully...you just may find a great service provider.

What are each of the services being proposed ?

Have they described each in enough detail for you to clearly understand it?

Why do they suggest it?

How will it benefit your situation?

Which services do they think are most important?

Directories

How many directories do they say you need to be listed on?

Which directories will they use? Why?

Will these be manually submitted or via an automated service?

Will you be provided the usernames and passwords for the directory listings? When?

Social Media

Do they think you would benefit from using Social Media?

Which channels?

Why will it benefit you?

How will it be managed?

Social media takes time, knowledge, personal knowledge of the business and a relevant audience. It is not right for many businesses... so, does what they propose make sense? Why is it a good fit for your business? How much time will be required of you? Ongoing costs?

Outreach

Outreach can mean the activity of maintaining and growing existing client/lead base. It can also mean building exposure for your business, establishing market credibility, forging partnerships and more.

Do they have ideas? How would they do it?

Do they have a plan for working with your existing list? Building it?

Have they covered things like; newsletters, email blasts, coupon distribution, loyalty programs, referral programs, list building activities? If these aren't mentioned by them be sure you bring them up and listen to their responses. Not every tool is suitable for every project but a general understanding of the tools available, along with the ability to access and utilize them, is a good sign you are dealing with a pro, not a one trick pony.

PR...can be handled with media exposure, social engagement, community involvement, article writing, charity work...the list is long. It is ok to focus on other things or prioritize activities; however, there should at least be some understanding of PR and how and when it can be brought into play.

Content

Content creation can play into blogs, website building, PR, etc... If this is being proposed...how well do they understand your business? Who will do the writing? Can you proof before it is distributed? Ask for example ideas... maybe not full-fledged project pieces, just ideas of what sort of topics might be used for content building on the website, what would be the topic of a PR piece? Do you really need a blog? If you don't have informative and interesting things to say, at least once a week, a blog may be a waste of time.

What is the plan? Number of pieces, topics, schedule, cost?

Links

How do they propose to get you links? What quality? How many for how much? Beware the 100 links for \$100 trick.

Done right, link building is a time intensive and usually costly undertaking, although successful link building is well worth it. There are typically some relatively easy links to acquire and then there are harder links to line up. They should be able to discuss their approach to link building, the time and cost involved in acquiring easy links, mid value links and high value links. They should also be upfront about the challenges and should be hesitant to guarantee a certain number of links for a certain price. That's right...if you hear guarantees like that it could be indicative of a link farm. Link farms are notorious for catching the disapproving eye of search engines and everyone around them gets penalized. Not good. On the other hand, many established SEO people have a quiver of sources for links which they can tap into in order to arrange links. Be sure to discuss this with them.

How are they going to determine which source to arrange links from? How are they going to do it? How relevant to your site will the links be? This is a whole science in itself so going into much detail in this article is just not feasible. Do a little research into link building and ask a lot of questions. Good links will help you...bad links can hurt you. Learn the difference.

Website considerations

The quality and design of your website plays a large part in not only how the search engines treat you but also what happens to the visitors which arrive on your site...do they stick around? Inquire about your services? Or, do they leave five seconds after arriving? A website which is not running at its best can negate many of the other efforts you or your pro may be undertaking.

If you have an older non-responsive i.e. not mobile friendly site, do they comment on it? If they ignore that it could mean they aren't very aware of the design side of things and how that can affect your efforts. Mobile is all-important now with over 75% of online traffic running through smart phones. You can test some of their websites, or the websites of their clients, at the [Google Mobile Test](#) site.

As of the writing of this article Google is also now running more mobile friendly parameter tests via their [Accelerated Mobile Pages](#) (AMP) protocols. This further refines what a mobile friendly site should demonstrate and is just another evolution in the world of mobile friendly websites. It seems a bit design restrictive so whether these parameters last or are just another one of Google's passing ideas remains to be seen.

Are costs one time or ongoing?

Be clear about this and understand why each piece of the project is scheduled and billed the way it is.

Does the service in question need to be handled/updated, checked once every year, 6 months, month, week?

What happens if you stop utilizing that particular service? Does it slowly deteriorate? Does it completely stop working? A website might make it for several years without a tune-up, just slowly fading out of the forefront of style, coding, performance and ranking. A blog without a weekly update is pretty much

DOA. Even a directory management tool like Yext can create a bit of a mess once its “account locks” are lifted after the service is cancelled, deteriorating things over a period of months.

Ask questions about each service, know what to expect, write down everything so you know what is what if or when the time comes to reevaluate a service or the entire program.

Tracking & Reporting

Pieces identified? What is going to be tracked? Why? Are these the pieces YOU want tracked?

Example report? Can they show you an example of the type of report you will be receiving?

Easy to understand? Does the report example make sense? Is it easy to understand?

Frequency? How often will you receive a report? Will it be current? Will it still be relevant by the time you receive it?

Assignable Costs? Can costs be equated to specific actions? Or...is everything lumped together? Often times a lump price hides a lot of padding you won't see until it is broken down to the piece level.

Easy to Adjust? Can actions be substituted, halted or amended as needed? If you can see each piece and its cost you can often get a good idea what needs more focus and what needs less.

OK. That should cover it. If you have read and applied all three sections of this three-part article you should be feeling a lot more in control of your online marketing future.



[Chris Bachman](#) is a business consultant and Project Director at [ProClassWebDesign.com](#) as well as a self confessed serial entrepreneur. He is a regular writer on topics pertaining to marketing, SEO, and business websites as well as an instructor and independent consultant. Learn more about Chris Bachman on [Google+](#) or [LinkedIn](#).