

# SEO & Local Search Marketing

## How To Select A Professional - Part 1

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Congratulations! You have a great website with up-to-date code, it's mobile responsive, it's attractive, and it makes you feel really good inside when you look at it. Job well done.

Except...the job isn't really done. This is when you realize there is still another aspect to online success, what we at ProClass Web Design call **Life After Launch**. Whether you address this during the planning stages of your website (great!) or you only come to the realization you need it sometime after your site is launched (better late than never), the fact is that there is a lot of local competition and you are going to need to have a game plan. This is the time you will probably want to enlist the help of a pro to help guide you through the myriad choices, options, and costs of winning your share of the online market.

This multi-part overview is complete with helpful tips to help you understand and evaluate the choices available to you. There are a few terms to know before we begin.

For those of you who are new to the game, **SEO** stands for *Search Engine Optimization*. It is the art of discovering what the search engines want to see in order to rank a website highly in the SERP's (Search Engine Result Pages) and then applying that knowledge to a website.

**Local Search Marketing (LSM)** refers to any and all activities involved with marketing to a local audience. This could be citywide or statewide. *LSM* plans should address the shape of your website, including SEO, as well as discussing tools such as directory management, link building, content creation, social media, PR, pay-per-click ads, video, and more.

It won't take long to realize that there are a LOT of options out there when it comes to the help you can hire to get the job done. One of the first pitfalls to avoid is buying into a snappy sales pitch and thinking that whatever they are offering must be good and your job is done just by simply hiring someone at all.

The fact is that each segment that could be incorporated into a *LSM* plan is often a specialty in itself. Simply hiring a person or firm that does one thing well does not mean you have a real *LSM* plan...you just have a piece of it.

So, if you are interested in doing this right you'll realize that hiring a professional who understands large numbers of these specialties, one who can evaluate and recommend which combination of them is right for you, is probably going to have a greater impact than pouring all your money into a single specialty service. And, since the professional will coordinate the implementation of all the various specialty services, your life ultimately becomes much, much easier.

You'll also have the choice of whether you hire a large firm to handle things, an individual professional, or even a small shop to provide a more personalized touch. Let's begin the evaluating.

## Initial Considerations

Much like the practice of medicine, SEO & LSM have grown into a field of specialists along with general practitioners. The general practitioners may have a good handle on the basic foundation of SEO, and a good one will likely be able to handle most all the needs for small to mid-sized companies. However, if your business has a specialty aspect to it such as large ecommerce, international, or heavy social media, then you need to make sure that your choice of SEO person or LSM firm has strengths in these areas, or if not, will be able to arrange for specialists in the area needed to be brought in when the time comes.

## Budget and Time

A good plan, with all its parts, does not execute overnight. In fact, having things happen too fast, a/k/a Velocity, is one way of raising red flags with the search engines and getting your site scrutinized and possibly penalized. While a program may be implemented within a couple of months, expect a good program to roll out over a period of months up to a year. Certain plans involve second and third phases which may occur during subsequent years. Some of this is due to strategic planning by the professional, while some is a factor of the budget you have to work with both initially and over a period of time.

## Lining up an RFP

Whether you are considering hiring a full-time person to handle SEO & LSM, want to outsource it to an independent contractor, or are considering retaining an online marketing firm, doing your homework is critical. An RFP, or Request For Proposal, is a great start. Depending upon the scope of what you are requesting, this may be free, or you may be asked to pay for some or all of the time it takes to prepare it.

## Setting Goals

First, define some goals you want to achieve. This means asking yourself some questions before you pick up the phone or send an email to anyone.

- What are my expectations? How realistic are they?
- What is my budget: overall, monthly, etc.? Is the budget phased as in; for example, if I hit an initial goal I would then release more funding to continue?
- How would I know if a program works? What sales figures, increase in revenue or lead numbers, for example, are my target?
- If it works, would I then want to build on that by doing more? Or, is just hitting my goal enough?
- What is my hoped-for time line? How written in stone is it? At what point will I get nervous? Freak out? Throw in the towel? Fire the expert?

## What To Ask

Come up with a list of questions surrounding your goals for each candidate to answer. Typical questions might include:

- What experience do they have in achieving these types of goals?
- How realistic do they feel the goals are?
- How would they approach the project?
- What steps or tools would they bring to bear?
- How long would it take?
- How much will it cost?... Why?
- What sort of results should you expect to see? How will success be evaluated?

If possible, get these questions and their answers in writing. And remember that there is a difference between what you want to hear and what you need to hear.

Lastly, keep in mind that both Search Engine Optimization and Local Search Marketing are NOT exact sciences and guarantees should never be part of the proposal you receive. Guarantees of certain rankings in the SERPs (Search Engine Results Page) are usually a large red flag and more often than not indicate someone who is working on the far edge of ethical SEO. Even if they are able to produce those results, they likely won't last.

Okay. This should have given you an idea of the playing field and how to prepare yourself for the next phase: evaluating the proposals and making the selection. All that will be covered in Part 2 of this multi-part piece.



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