

What SEOs Expect From Their Clients

By Kalena Jordan

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I've seen a lot of articles around lately about how to pick and choose a search engine optimization company. That's fine and dandy, but it often works the other way around in this industry. The most successful SEOs pick and choose their own clients. Good SEOs can spot a tire kicker from a mile off and I know of a few SEOs that quickly "fire" clients that give them too much grief.

Why? Because they can. Their reputation is widely known and they are constantly in demand. Many of them are too busy to spend time haggling over price or technique and why should they? Their reputation is rock solid, their results outstanding, the ROI for their work impressive. Companies are lining up to pay for their expertise and to benefit from the amazing income generation potential that a well-executed search engine optimization campaign can bring. To quote one of the best:

"I choose clients who choose me" - Jill Whalen, HighRankings.com

So how do you recognize top performing SEOs? Most will be regular contributors to popular webmaster or search engine forums and many will have their own newsletter or web log keeping people up to date with the latest developments in the search industry. Some write regular articles about the search engines and have them published in popular search engine portals and resource sites such as Search Engine Guide (<http://www.searchengineguide.com/>), Search Engine Watch (<http://www.searchenginewatch.com/>), Pandia (<http://www.pandia.com/>) and SEO Today (<http://www.seotoday.com/>). Or perhaps you've seen their articles syndicated on news channels like Moreover (<http://www.moreover.com/>), ClickZ (<http://www.clickz.com/>) or ZDNet (<http://www.zdnet.com/>).

Of course some of them are so busy, they don't have time to write articles. But if they have a good reputation, chances are people are talking about them. Of course the opposite is also true. Want to know more about their reputation in the industry? Conduct a search for their name in the search engine of your choice. I don't mean the name of their company either - I mean the name of the actual person who would be responsible for the optimization of your site. If you find lots of positive references, they're a keeper. Finding negative discussions or comments? Better think twice. Can't find them at all? Then they probably aren't worth talking about.

Once you've located a top performing SEO, don't expect to call the shots. Search engine optimizers have certain expectations of their clients. Let me run through a few of them. To keep your SEO happy:

1. Don't automatically expect a guarantee - Not all SEOs offer them. Not because they aren't good

at what they do, but because offering a guarantee can give the false impression that SEOs have full control over search engine rankings when in fact only the engine has this. Also, while many top SEOs will offer a satisfaction guarantee, many others don't believe a guarantee is necessary because of their public track record of results and because they feel a client should trust them fully before signing on rather than relying on some piece of paper to protect them.

2. Don't choose by price - The most expensive SEOs aren't necessarily the best. By the same token, don't make the mistake of thinking SEO is not worth much. Search engine marketing is not an "add on" or a short term ad campaign - it is a continuously evolving marketing channel that can bring upwards of 50 percent of your total site traffic if done correctly. Therefore you should allocate a good portion of your marketing budget towards it each year.

3. Don't assume an SEO isn't good because their own site isn't ranking highly - Remember the old adage that plumbers taps always leak? Some SEOs are so busy helping clients that they don't have time to optimize their own sites. Also, as you would imagine, competition for rankings in the SEO industry is fierce. Just because an SEO isn't ranking highly for all SEO related terms does not mean they aren't good at what they do - maybe they don't have the time or inclination to compete with their peers. For proof of results, look to their client site rankings and references.

4. Don't question the SEO process after it has begun - It should all be outlined in the initial proposal, but a SEO worth his/her salt will make actual changes to your site. They will change the visible text and/or design. They will probably get rid of that pretty Flash image or graphic from your home page. They might change your graphic navigation menu into a bland looking text menu. But remember they are doing this for a very good reason - to ensure your site is as search engine compatible as possible. Listen, learn and trust them - they're experts at this stuff.

5. Don't expect high rankings overnight - It really yanks my chain when clients call me up a week after their site has been submitted wanting to know why they're not ranking highly yet! All good things take time and it can take up to 3 or 4 months for the search engines and directories to index your optimized content and re-rank your site accordingly. That said, you should notice an improvement on some of the faster engines within 2 or 3 weeks.

6. Don't assume traffic is the goal - While your new SEO campaign might generate high traffic levels, your site needs to encourage all these visitors to stay, browse, join and/or buy from you. This means you need to ensure your site is looking its very best, your navigation structure is intuitive, the copy is enticing and convincing and the interactive features of your site (such as catalogs and shopping cart facilities) are working and easy to use. Not all of these items are the responsibility of the SEO.

7. Don't assume the campaign ends with submission - Web sites are not static, they are not like a brochure that is printed and distributed. They should be thought of as organic - always growing and changing upon visitor demand. Are your site visitors finding your site via search queries for information on a particular product? Why not expand your web site to accommodate this demand? You should always be analyzing your log files or visitor statistics to see how people found your site, what pages they like best, what keywords they used to find you, how long they stayed and what they did while visiting. Use this information to grow your site and work with your SEO to expand your search engine focus.

8. Don't undo all their good work - Speaking from experience, there is NOTHING more frustrating than a client who makes significant changes to their optimized pages without telling you. I've heard horror stories from other SEOs about clients that agree to everything, let their site be optimized and re-launched and then completely remove the carefully optimized body text or META tags a week later - aarrghh! I won't mention the client of mine who decided to shut down their site for Christmas,

removing all pages and optimized content without realizing the impact this would have on their rankings. Search engines are constantly refreshing and indexing your site content. Just because your site is ranking well this month, doesn't mean it will rank that way forever. If you change your site significantly, your SEO's hard work and all your high rankings could be down the drain.

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