

11 Big SEO Challenges You'll Face in Your Career by @SEOBrock

*Editor's note: This is a chapter from Search Engine Journal's new e-book, **SEO 101: Learn the Basics of Search Engine Optimization**. Want to read the full guide? Download your copy of SEO 101 now!*

Whether you run a solo operation and personally handle every detail of a campaign for a small number of clients, or oversee a wide roster of projects as part of an agency, there are certain challenges that you will face in the course of your SEO career.

No matter how diligent, organized, or proactive you are, there will be:

- Angry clients.
- Website malfunctions.
- SEO campaigns that crater with no explanation.
- Internal issues and logistical dilemmas.

Most of these challenges can be resolved when handled with poise, but it's always good to know what's on the horizon as you embark on your SEO career.

How will you handle these 11 common challenges?

1. Project Management, a.k.a Balancing Client Load & Task Load

You need to be ultra-organized if you are going to be a successful SEO professional.

There are going to be times when you feel you have taken on too much or it simply isn't possible to achieve everything you have promised on schedule, with appropriate quality control.

To confront this challenge, it's essential to have proper project and task management structure. This will allow you to spread the workload across your resources and reduce burnout.

In SEO, a successful campaign is not a means but an end; it comes from small, manageable tasks performed over a stretch of time.

In neglecting these little moments – weekly rankings audits, routine speed optimizations, regular content publication – your whole campaign will never achieve what it needs.

You can't pull an all nighter before a client review meeting and expect there to be results. Digestible tasks spread between your team over a wide window of time is the recipe for success.

As you grow from one to multiple team members, it will be critical that you document your processes, continually improve them, integrate them into your project management structure.

Listen to your staff and value their insights about how to improve day-to-day workflow and audit the process regularly.

Don't rely on yesterday's tactics for too long, or you will fall behind.

2. Managing Client Expectations

This is not a lesson you want to learn the hard way, after over-promising and under-delivering to a client. This is especially common if you are chasing a “big fish” client who you feel you have to impress.

Make no mistake: failing to live up to impossible expectations will never impress the client in the end, so keep your promises realistic. Stay in your wheelhouse. Wow them with results, not words.

Whether it’s an exploratory call with a potential client, a quote or proposal, or upselling an existing client, I always try to set the correct expectations. You may not get the sale every time, but that’s the right outcome because you were transparent.

Clients and would-be clients will appreciate that honesty in the long run. You’d be amazed at the number of times a prospect calls up six months later to reopen the conversation with adjusted expectations.

In addition to setting the right expectations when it comes to deliverables and campaign goals, learn to set the right expectations for project scope and communication.

A needy client who takes advantage with hours of free work out-of-scope, or who oversteps boundaries by emailing, calling, or texting at all hours can rarely be reeled in.

Set these expectations early, value your work, value your time, and you can manage this challenge successfully.

3. Unexpected Rankings Drops

You can be managing a successful campaign, generating great results, witnessing great traffic increases, and enjoying a

smooth relationship with an ecstatic client. All of a sudden, all that success comes crashing down.

Sometimes this cause is technical, like a search engine algorithm change. Perhaps it is caused by a change in client direction – they might be experiencing budget issues or are in the midst of getting acquired.

You need to be able to rise to the occasion and pivot at a moment's notice.

For a search issue, have a protocol in place to investigate and rescue a rankings drop. For a client-side issue, identify ways you can support them through the transition and prove your value.

4. Staying Up to Date

The expectation to stay current with the search industry, algorithm updates, and Google features can place enormous pressure on your shoulders. This can be especially challenging when you're trying to grow your company, trying to network, and having to deal with staff issues and logistics. Suddenly that daily research on the industry becomes a lot harder to find.

When time becomes limited, investing in tools becomes absolutely critical.

Don't be afraid to invest in that new keyword research tool, tracking tool, or heat map software.

Talk to your team and ask what resources will make their days easier, more productive, and more efficient. The minute you believe you know all there is to know is the minute you're over the hill.

There's always a new social media network, CMS, and search feature just around the corner. How can you make it work for

you?

5. Relying on a Single Channel Approach

While there is great value in specialization, it is a mistake to rely on a single channel approach. You can't have only one tactic and expect to be successful in SEO today and in the future, no matter how well you do it.

In reframing your approach from *search engine* optimization to *online presence* optimization, you will generate better, more stable results for clients.

Optimize not just client websites but also social profiles, citations, and directories, remembering that everything from Amazon to Instagram has a search engine.

Think smart: optimize Yelp for restaurants and businesses that want to be listed in iPhone search. With a Foursquare profile, your client can be tagged in a location on Instagram.

More than ever, it's critical to optimize your online presence across these different outlets to have success.

6. Overstepping a Multi-Service Approach

SEO goes hand-in-hand with web design, content writing, paid ads, email marketing, and social media management. Offering all of these services in tandem makes logical sense and allows clients to have a consistent web presence with the convenience of having it all done in one place.

However, if you start providing related services outside of your area of expertise at a client's request, no one wins.

If you aren't careful, you could end up knee-deep in a failed email migration with an angry client, and they won't care one bit about their SEO rankings.

Stick to what you know.

It's OK to refer email support, brochure design, and event management elsewhere while you focus on excelling at what you do best.

7. Prioritizing Vanity Metrics Over Leads & Sales

Over the years, you'll learn that most clients only care about two things: leads and sales.

You can tell them about the amazing SEO audit you completed, update them on all the technical change you made on their website, or share that you got their website load time down to one second.

In the end, the only thing that truly matters is results.

If their phone isn't ringing, or sales are down year-over-year, a client won't care that the bounce rate is down 6 percent.

Focus on what actions can increase leads and sales. Don't get caught up in just rankings or vanity metrics.

8. Getting Too Comfortable

You will go into a client meeting, ecstatic to share the results. Leads are up 200 percent, traffic is up 500 percent, rankings are higher than ever, and the new site you just launched looks beautiful. You will boast about these results, unaware that the client is about to fire you.

No matter the results, constant communication is so important.

Never take a client for granted and never assume results, effort, or achievements guarantee a client for life.

Be confident in your abilities and service, but don't be so full of yourself that you miss when a client is unhappy.

Warning signs like a sudden lack of responsiveness, longer than usual delays in paying invoices, or uncharacteristic push-back are signs that they may be discontent.

9. Breaking Through Client Plateau

No matter the quality of your work, there is typically a lifecycle in an SEO-client relationship.

After two or three years, many clients want to try new things and change things up. Sometimes, it is financially motivated. Even though you've done great work for them, they're ready to invest their money elsewhere.

In other instances, they consider the SEO work a success and are ready to move on. They have reached a plateau and don't see how things can continue improving – where do you go from top of Page 1?

You won't be able to keep every client, but try to reduce your churn by being a proactive communicator and you will have much better client retention.

Work together to position SEO as another tool in the arsenal to help them achieve their wider business goals. You want to be seen as a partner in continued success.

10. Choosing the Right Tools

When launching an agency, it is never too early to invoice in a proper CRM (customer relationship management) software and

invoicing tool.

When you start and only have a handful of clients, you may think you can get away with DIY invoicing or a CRM that's little more than a to-do list and address book. You'll learn early on that these methods are unscalable and will leave you in a world of hurt if something gets missed.

Though SaaS like Salesforce is no small investment, it will deliver measurable ROI by allowing you to grow our client base and hire more staff members. Being able to track contacts, leads, opportunities, accounts, and projects in one centralized, collaborative location is so important.

As your agency scales, you'll thank yourself for laying a strong foundation. Should you choose a fly-by-night CRM, or none at all, it could hold back growth considerably.

Though there are plenty of good options on the market, you have to invest in the right email platform, CRM, rankings software/tracking tools, competitor research tools/backlink checkers, and invoicing software at the bare minimum. They'll make your job easier and give you the flexibility to scale.

11. Handling Adversity

Even with utmost preparation, processes perfected to the smallest detail, and a nimble approach, you're still going to encounter obstacles, if not disasters, on the way.

Your biggest client could walk away. An aggressive competitor may eat at your market share. Staff turnover, leasing issues, client malaise... every day brings something new, not to mention wider issues like a recession where client budgets inevitably tighten and the value of online marketing services becomes less apparent.

You will face adversity, that much is inevitable.

The question is: will you rise or fall in face of these challenges, big and small?

You must be creative, flexible, poised, and open. Build a safety net so no client loss, staff loss, or data loss causes you to crumble.

BONUS: Scaling Campaigns

Getting great results locally is one thing, but can you take it to the next level and scale to several cities or find national success? This can be a bigger challenge.

With local SEO, you can use a lot of crutches that simply don't scale, like optimizing the homepage title and H1 to an individual location.

Ultimately, you'll see that having strong processes in place and a solid project management structure will help you scale, but there will be complications along the way that you may not have anticipated.

Conclusion

SEO is a rewarding industry, where your entrepreneurship, creativity, technical prowess, and thirst for knowledge can take you far.

Nothing good comes easy, and such is the case with a career in this field.

Though you can't predict every obstacle you will face, these 11 challenges are common, especially as you grow from a small consultant role to a larger agency serving dozens if not hundreds of clients.

By understanding what may lie on the road ahead, you can better prepare to face such challenges not with fear or

apprehension, but poise and composure.

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