

Google's Advice On Hiring An SEO And Red Flags To Watch For via @sejournal, @martinibuster

Google's Search Off The Record podcast discussed when a business should hire an SEO consultant and what metrics of success should look like. They also talked about a red flag to watch for when considering a search marketer.

Hire An SEO When It Becomes Time Consuming

Martin Splitt started the conversation off by asking at what point a business should hire an SEO:

"...I know people are hiring agencies and SEO experts. When is the point where you think an expert or an agency should come in? What's the bits and pieces that are not as easy to do while I do my business that I should have an expert for?"

John replied that there is no one criteria or line to cross at which point a business should hire a consultant. He did however point out that there comes a certain point where doing SEO is time consuming and takes a business person away from the tasks that are directly related to running their business. That's a point at which hiring an SEO consultant makes sense.

He said:

"Yeah, I don't know if there's a one-size-fits-all answer

there because it's a bit like asking, when should I get help for marketing, especially for a small business.

You do everything yourself. At some point, you're like, 'Oh, I really hate bookkeeping. I'm going to hire a bookkeeper.' At that point where you're like, 'Well, I don't appreciate doing all of this work or I don't have time for it, but I know it has to be done.' That's probably the point where you say, 'Well, okay, I will hire someone for this.' "

SEO Should Have Measurable Results?

The next factor they discussed is the measurability of results. Over more than twenty-five years of working in SEO, one of the ways that low-quality SEOs have consistently measured their results is by the number of queries a client site is ranking for. Low-quality SEOs charge a monthly retainer and generate a report of all queries the site has ranked for in the previous months, including garbage nonsense queries.

A common metric SEOs use to gauge success is ranking positions and traffic. Those metrics are a little better, and most SEOs agree that they make sense as solid metrics.

But those metrics don't capture the true success of SEO because those ranking positions could be for low-quality search queries that don't result in the kind of traffic that converts to leads, sales, affiliate earnings or ad clicks.

Arguably, the most important metric any business should use to gauge the effect of what was done for SEO is how much more revenue is being generated. Keyword rankings and traffic are important metrics to measure, but the most important metric is ultimately the business goal.

Google's John Mueller appears to agree, as he cites revenue and the business result as key measures of whether the SEO is

working.

He explained:

“I think, for in SEO, it kind of makes sense when you realize there’s concrete value in working on SEO for your website, where there’s some business result that comes out of it where you can actually measurably say, ‘When I started doing SEO for my website, I made so much more money’ or whatever it is that goal is that you care about, and ‘I’m happy to invest a portion of that into hiring someone to do SEO.’”

That’s one way I would look at it, where if you can measure in one way or another the effects of the SEO work, then it’s easier to say, ‘Well, I will invest this much into having someone else do that for me.’”

There is a bit of a problem with measuring the effects of SEO. The effects on sales or leads from organic SEO cannot always be directly attributed. People who are obsessed with data-driven decisions will be disappointed because it’s not always possible to directly attribute a lead from an organic search. For one thing, Google hides referral data from the search results. Unlike PPC, where you can track a lead from an ad click to the sale, you can’t do that with organic search.

So if you’re using increased sales or leads as a metric, you’ll have to be able to at least separate attributable paid search from earnings, then guesstimate the rest. Not everything can be data-driven.

See also: [How To Justify And Make A Business Case For SEO Budgets](#)

Hire Someone With Experience

Another thing Mueller and Splitt recommended was to hire someone who has actual experience with SEO. There are many

qualifying factors that can be added, including experience monetizing their own websites, ability to interpret HTML code (which is helpful for identifying technical reasons for ranking problems), endorsements and testimonials. A red flag, in my opinion, is hiring someone from a cold call.

John Mueller observed:

“Someone else, ideally, would be someone who has more experience doing SEO. Because, as a small business owner, you have like 500 hats to wear, and you probably can figure out a little bit about each of these things, but understanding all of the details, that’s sometimes challenging.”

Martin agreed:

“Okay. So there’s no one-size-fits-all answer for this one, but you have to find that spot for yourself whenever it makes sense. All right okay. Fair.”

Red Flag About Some SEOs

Up to this point, both Mueller and Splitt avoided cautioning about red flags to watch for when hiring an SEO. Here, they segued into the topic of what to avoid, advising caution about search marketers who guarantee results.

The reason to avoid these kinds of search marketers is that search rankings depend on a wide range of factors that are not under an SEO’s control. The most an SEO can do is align a site to best practices and promote the site. After that, there are external factors, such as competitors, that cannot be influenced. Most importantly, Google is a black box system: you can see what goes in, you can observe what comes out (the search results), but what happens in between is hidden. All search ranking factors, like external signals of trustworthiness, have an unclear influence on the search

results.

Here's what Mueller said:

"One of the things I would watch out for is, if an SEO makes any promises with regards to ranking or traffic from Search, that's usually a red flag, because a lot of things around SEO you can't promise ahead of time. And, if someone says, "I'm an expert. I promise you will rank first for these five words." They can't do that. They can't manually go into Google's systems and tweak the dials and change the rankings."

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