How much should SEO cost?



How much should you be paying for SEO services?

This subject can be a real minefield, so we first recommend some quick background reading of Jayson DeMers' commentary from 2015 on how much time SEO should take, and also Clark Boyd's recent article on choosing the right SEO agency.

All read up? Great, let's get cracking.

Determining a price for a service like SEO is unlike buying a product with a set amount of industry standard component parts and an easily distinguishable utility, which tends to allow for a tighter range of pricing.

The price associated with an SEO campaign can be determined by a significant amount of factors: what work has been conducted previously? What internal resources are available to support the campaign? How competitive is the industry? What are the goals of the campaign?

These are but a handful of the types of factors involved. As a result, putting a cost on SEO can sometimes feel akin to a 'how long is a piece of string' scenario.

(Twice half its length, in case you were wondering).

In an attempt to give some quantifiable measures, Jason DeMers estimated that SEO campaigns could require between 12 and 104 hours per month, which is a rather large range, especially with no indication of price per hour.

It is the unfortunate truth that it would be irresponsible to give an exact answer as to how much you should be paying for SEO: the real answer is that no one size fits all. This is demonstrated by the range of pricing shown by North Star Inbound's survey into enterprise SEO.

We therefore need to ask key questions which will allow us to hone in on a range of pricing for an SEO campaign, from which you should be able to make a more educated decision.

Is SEO a viable marketing channel for you?

According to research by BrightEdge in 2014, more half of the traffic to an average brand's website comes from organic search. But you don't need a study to tell you that. You probably use a search engine every single day.

As such, there is a decent chance that SEO is indeed a viable marketing channel for you. However, you should still do some initial calculations to understand if you should be investing in SEO. This is particularly poignant for businesses that are either trying to create a market, or are operating in a fledgling industry where there may not be established search traffic.

Use a combination of keyword research tools, click through rate percentages, conversion rates and net margins to understand what the likely monetary benefit would be if you were to gain your coveted relevant top spots in the SERPs.

This exercise will also demonstrate a maximum budget at which point (purely from a revenue generation point of view) the investment will not deliver an ROI or will start to result in diminishing returns, at which point layering in alternate marketing channels to your strategy may become a better option.

If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Are you being offered £200 per month with guaranteed first

place rankings in a competitive industry quickly? Sure.

The problem is that the phrase ‘do it cheap, do it twice’ doesn’t quite explain the potential impact of this situation. The result of bad SEO doesn’t stop at lost marketing budget and time.

The potential ramifications of cheap, spammy SEO are much worse. Not only may you have to undo all of the work previously conducted but should you feel the fury of, say the salty cold slap of a Penguin-related Google penalty, your website may become near invisible in the SERPs for a considerable amount of time.

Scaremongering over.

Speak to more than one agency

In the end, as with a lot of things in the world, you can pay whatever you want to. As an example, most coffee shops charge in the region of a couple of pounds for a coffee but there are those that charge hundreds of pounds for a single cup of the brown stuff. It is the same for SEO.

That is why it is important to speak to a number of agencies so that you are able to get an understanding of the price ranges and also what each agency is offering in return for your money. It’s also just good due diligence.

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Another unfortunate fact about the SEO industry: people get their fingers burnt by agencies all the time. That may not be a popular statement to make, but it is the truth. Don't get me wrong – there are lots of awesome agencies out there, but making sure you instruct one of the awesome ones can be tricky.

We would highly recommend ensuring that someone in your business has a solid understanding of SEO basics so that the correct questions can be asked during the tender process. Identifying what you are trying to achieve and what is required in order to provide an ROI is a good starting point, from which you can dive into the campaign strategy with your prospective agencies.

Over the course of your tender process you should get a clearer understanding of what the general consensus is for your campaign strategy and also highlight red flags if they appear. For a concise list of questions to ask, please see Clark Boyd's article.

Select what's right for you

One thing is for sure: good SEO ain't cheap. The aforementioned survey from North Star Inbound demonstrated that campaigns can range from below $1000 per month to $20,000+ (with over a quarter of those surveyed in the $20,000+ per month bracket).

The point is though that for some businesses paying over $20k per month would be suicide; the search market may not be large enough to warrant such expenditure or the business might not have sufficient marketing budget set aside.

On the other hand, for a business that requires a $20,000+ monthly retainer in order to get the required results, paying

$2000 per month just won’t cut it. To fall back on yet another phrase, it’s horses for courses.

So where does that leave us? Hopefully closer to a process by which you can assess how viable an SEO campaign would be for your business.

You may not have an exact price upon which to go out to the market, but as I mentioned earlier, SEO isn’t quite that simple. What this article should help you do, along with other articles on Search Engine Watch, is identify which bracket you sit in according to your own requirements and subsequently narrow down selecting an an agency to work on the campaign.

The price range will likely provide you with a floor at which it is clear that you would not get the desired results, and also demonstrate where the point of diminishing returns is.

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’re indicative of the trends currently making their way through search, which

could show up on a much larger scale later on.

Organic search accounts for 51%

of the traffic brands receive on average. To capitalize on this opportunity, brands

often partner with an SEO agency to add firepower to their existing marketing efforts

forts. However, with so many agencies all promising so much, how can brands ensure

they select the right company?



In the run-up to Black Friday and the holiday sh

opping season, retailers are competing like crazy to attract the eyeballs of as

many paying consumers as possible through paid search advertising. But how well is

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