SEO proposals: Particular challenges and how to avoid getting a silent no

30-second summary:

- Unlike paid media, earned media lacks the tools to form trustworthy predictions about the outcomes, which can make potential SEO customers indecisive.
- A quick look at the typical story of how the pitching process works and the top reasons that make customers indecisive about an SEO proposal.
- SEOmonitor looks into all the aspects of pitching an SEO proposal, the key components, and how to help your customers say a loud yes instead of a silent no.

Unlike paid media, earned media lacks the tools to form trustworthy predictions about the outcomes, which can make potential SEO customers indecisive. Let’s take a typical story of how the SEO proposal and pitching process works.

Sarah, the CEO of a successful SEO agency, gets introduced to the CEO of another successful ecommerce company through a common friend.

She rallies her team and meets the client over Zoom. They have a wonderful conversation, and both of them are excited to start a great partnership.

Filled with optimism, Sarah assigns her best colleagues to craft an insightful SEO proposal. They analyze the competitors, do the keyword research, take the organic opportunity into account, and form a unique strategy on how they can reach impressive results.

The day of the presentation comes, and the ecommerce team gathers around, continuously nodding along with each slide. By the end of it, everyone feels excellent. Sarah is thrilled.

Checking emails stopped being a chore for Sarah. She quickly scans all of them, looking for confirmation on starting the project.

She does this daily for almost two weeks and, with each day, her confidence drops. There is no answer from the potential customer.

She feels awkward* to follow-up. What could she ask? Why don't they at least say if they want to pursue the SEO campaign or not? What is with this "silent no"?

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What could be the reason that makes customers get indecisive?

If you've pitched a few clients already, you've probably experienced a similar situation.

It feels like a win, but then communication gets postponed. It's not clear if you should follow-up or not. And even if you were to follow-up, what would you ask?

They haven't raised any particular concerns or downright rejected the SEO proposal. There has to be something that brought them to your agency in the first place.

They've invested the time for the meetings and maybe even shared their analytics account. So there's a hint of trust-building up so far.

What if the dilemma stems from them forming trust based on "gut feeling" in the meetings, but lacking enough knowledge to judge whether the projected results will, in the end, be

achieved.

They want to make sure they make the best rational decision – but they can’t.

Explaining the reasoning behind each data point and action in your SEO proposal, and arguing from first principles, should leave less room for doubt and more for critical thinking.

Let’s look through the steps that can go into an SEO proposal and how to bring clarity and convey trust using granular data along the way.

What goes into an SEO proposal?

1. Show a deep understanding of the industry

Keyword research

Keyword research is the first step into better getting to know your customer and their industry.

The entire quality of the pitch depends on choosing the right keywords and being able to explain the principles behind your decision.

Coupled with your expertise of choosing precisely the ones that you know are valuable for optimizing, you’re building the keyword portfolio. But this may prove challenging for your customer.

Sometimes, business owners would have a different way of describing their business. So they could mistake queries for whichever words they would want their brand to be associated with.

You can help your customers focus on the end-users' search habits in your SEO proposal by describing why it doesn't make sense to improve visibility for queries that are navigational keywords and trigger site links. Then, follow-up with why you grouped the ones that set off the same search results and are part of the same topic, for more understanding.

Competitor overview

Customers might think of their competitors as being other companies selling similar services and products, regardless of their organic visibility. They might even disagree that a particular website or company is in their industry, but you have data on your side. You've selected only the companies that get the most impressions for the selected group of keywords – and it's all easily verifiable by searching on Google.

The different visibility scores set the stage for what the opportunity will be. While it’s impossible to predict what the future will hold, the present results are precise.

If a competitor has already achieved success, it shows there’s a substantial opportunity.

2. Establish the truth on the current SEO performance by splitting the organic traffic in brand and non-brand

The outcome of SEO is the increase in organic traffic. This makes many people turn towards the organic traffic figure whenever they want to measure SEO performance.

The total number of organic traffic is composed of both brand and non-brand organic visits. Still, it is only the non-brand traffic that connects to and is dependent on, search engine optimization.

Your customer might intuitively realize this, but they didn’t have the tools to be able to study the data. If you split the two, you focus the evaluation process on SEO. It, also, shows

that you would not take credit for marketing activities that were already going on, and so removes another fear that could make the customer doubtful.

Plus, it might be the first time the customer can put their finger on how much their branding drives their income, a question they have probably struggled with for a long time.

3. Present a realistic forecast that can be understood and verified

Estimating impact in terms of clicks and conversions instead of rankings

From a customer perspective, all of the improvements in visibility have just one final goal – an increase in their business performance.

Clicks, ecommerce transactions, or goals are the way businesses keep track of them. By transposing better rankings to clicks and conversions, you tie the SEO campaign to the reality of running a business.

Decoding the impact of rank changes into clicks and conversions can look like a simple formula for a customer at first.

Still, when taking into account search volumes, year over year trends that influence the past data, and dynamic changing CTRs, you show much work and thought goes into the process.

But to do that, you need to get into an even lower layer – the way Google displays results for each keyword and how changes in search features influence click-through rates.

Not only that, but the advent of mobile brings even more pieces to the puzzle.

The “ten blue links” have diminished in favor of a mix between search features and organic results. For example, a search for “hotels in Paris” would trigger Google’s hotel widget and at least two ads. It takes more than three full scrolls to get to the first organic result.

By using a variable CTR model for each SERP, you remove the possibility that the methodology could be considered oversimplified and expose the customer to the complexities of modern organic optimizations.

By adding monthly swings in search volume and year-over-year trends, you set the building blocks for a data-driven, comprehensive forecast.

Highlight how their traffic would look like with and without the SEO campaign

Unless your customers have just launched their website, they already rank in search engines.

By going the extra mile and first creating and presenting a forecast based on their current traffic and the search trends that might influence them, you lay out a foundation of transparency and easily researchable assumptions.

Highlighting the difference between existing, projected, and additional traffic and conversions you remove one last piece of doubt – What might happen if I won't go through with the SEO campaign?

Setting expectations and aligning SEO with the customer's business projection

While some customers know that SEO is more of a marathon than a sprint, for others, it can be their first foray in attempting to improve visibility.

By acknowledging that the first months would bring less impact, but it picks up as the campaign progresses, you are transparent from the start.

A 12-month forecast allows customers to be able to take their sales projections and fit them on top of the SEO opportunity.

Instead of treating SEO as an independent tactic, they can now imagine the campaign as an essential activity to their day-to-day business operations.

Including seasonality allows for better inventory planning and proves, once more, that you're committed to their long term success.

They also get to learn about consumers' habits and maybe, in the future, rely even more on search data when making a business decision.

4. Compare the SEO budget to the equivalent in PPC

Is the SEO campaign worth it?

This question might go through someone's mind when having to make the final decision.

By bringing an external source of truth in the form of how much it would cost to run a paid search campaign on the exact keyword portfolio, you highlight how valuable it is for other companies to grab the first results.

It allows the customer to perform their independent research and build more trust in the projected outcome. Not only that, but they now have a point of reference for your pricing as well.

5. Convey transparency by discussing performance tracking

As you have now navigated the ins and outs of the forecast, there's still one more thing that may get the customer stuck in a loop.

Can they trust your agency on delivery? Would they be able to check the progress by themselves?

They can’t just load up their analytics account and see the impact – the results are a mix between branded and non-branded keywords.

You could provide a detailed explanation of how reporting will run in a relationship with the set goal and what goes into the metrics that describe their visibility.

Taking it a step further and including the objective in the contract can remove any fear they still have.

It’s bold, but isn’t it worth it to have your agency’s day-to-day operations aligned with your customer’s results?

How to help your customers say a loud yes instead of a silent no?

Remove doubts that can form in their mind, by explaining each hypothesis and backing it up with evidence, going through the following:

- Show a deep understanding of the industry
- Establish the truth on their current SEO performance by

splitting brand and non-brand traffic
- Present a realistic forecast that can be understood and verified
- Compare the SEO budget to the equivalent in PPC
- Convey transparency by discussing performance tracking

Meticulously going through all of these steps is hard. We get that. That's why we've launched a new version of our "Search Awards" winning SEO forecasting module.

It helps you along each of these actions, except for one. The hangover you get after celebrating your 10th closed deal in a single month.

Our forecasting methodology has been successfully used for more than four years, by hundreds of clients, to set realistic objectives and improve their pitches. That's why we've gone a step further.

We created an SEO proposal builder that leverages data from SEOmonitor, with the simplicity of Google Slides, and gives real-world examples from other SEO agencies around the world, in an intuitive drag-and-drop interface.

But that's only a part of what we do. We've designed SEOmonitor to help you acquire, manage, and retain more customers for your agency.

Join us, and hundreds of SEO agencies clients, in the journey of bringing more transparency and measurability to the SEO industry. Click here for a trial that doesn't ask you for a credit card, but gives you full access to the platform.

Top tip: How to follow-up without the awkwardness

Instead of just asking busy customers if they had time to review your proposal, why not take a bit of time to go through

their existing organic industry landscape and look for significant changes that they may not even know about – Yet!

With Signals, you can easily spot those insights that can help you re-open the conversation with your indecisive customers.

More about:

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