# When SEO isn’t your SEO problem



If you’ve been doing SEO for any length of time, you’ve undoubtedly experienced your fair share of failures. And in many cases, frustratingly, the SEO program itself was not the issue. While I’ve discussed meta topics such as management challenges, getting executive buy-in, and the need for flexibility in the past, I haven’t directly addressed the question, “What do you do if SEO isn’t your SEO problem?”

As search marketers, we work our tails off analyzing data, search results, client websites and more, with the goal of providing recommendations that will move the needle. Unfortunately, the best recommendations in the world don’t matter if they aren’t implemented – and therein lies one of the biggest challenges of SEO.

Let’s look at a few common obstacles that can hinder an SEO program’s progress and discuss how we can overcome them.

## Just following up

We’ve all been there: You’ve sent one, two, three emails and still have heard nothing back. How can you possibly get anything done if the client won’t even answer your emails?

It’s not a simple solution. People are busy; they have other priorities, and it’s our job to ensure our clients understand the importance and value of the program.

If a contact goes silent, there are a few options we can try.

**Pick up the phone**

Your clients are busy people, and many of them probably receive dozens or even hundreds of emails per day. That's a lot of messages to sort through! While it can be frustrating to not receive a response, it's possible your contact has more important emails to get through.

Pick up the phone. It's so simple, yet we often forgot to do it. In the age of technology, everyone is emailing and texting. Talking to someone can go a long way.

**Use an email tracker**

If your emails aren't being responded to, maybe you are sending them at the wrong time of day. Even worse, maybe they aren't even getting to your client's inbox.

Tools like Yesware and Bananatag show you when a person opens your email, allowing you to see if your emails are being read – and giving you an opportunity to follow up quickly. Did your client just open the email? Send another one while it's top of mind, or give them a quick call.

**Go to the next person**

Sometimes, the only option is to go a level up. I only like to use this as a last resort – we certainly don't want to make anyone look bad, but at the end of the day, the program's success is tied to our ability to make things happen.

# I disagree with you

As a marketing consultant, you typically end up working directly with an organization's internal marketing team – a marketing team with experienced professionals, brand knowledge and more often than not, a whole lot of opinions.

For agencies, the key to program success is getting buy-in from key decision-makers. The person in charge needs to ensure that their team approves and implements what you are

recommending. However, in some cases, the boss will rely on his or her team to make those decisions. And that's OK. A sign of a good leader is trusting one's team.

Unfortunately, the team may not always agree with what you are recommending. Perhaps they've done it a different way in the past or don't think it's worth the effort. How do we change their minds?

**Lay out your strategy**

It's no secret that there's a lack of education in the SEO world, both inside and out. The result? More work on the front end. Instead of just providing a recommendation, make sure you discuss the *why*. What is the overall goal, and how is this suggestion going to help them get there?

**Pick your battles**

We provide a lot of recommendations. In many cases, we make recommendations that aren't going to move the needle significantly but are best practices that will make the site better. Sure, we'd like these implemented – but sometimes it's okay if they aren't. We have to pick our battles.

Let's take ALT text, for example. A few weeks ago, I had a client who disagreed with an ALT text recommendation my team had made. The client wanted to use something else, so they decided they weren't going to implement our suggestion. And that's OK – overall, it wasn't a high-priority task.

In all likelihood, you won't be able to implement every SEO recommendation you put forth – so be sure to save your fights for the ones that are really going to matter.

**Run a test**

For efforts that may require additional time and resources, it can be hard to get buy-in. Suggest running a test.

A few months ago, we provided recommendations to improve a client's product pages. Unfortunately, the client didn't want to spend the time and effort making the changes. Our suggestion? There's a new product page launching, so why don't we try the proposed improvements on that page and see how it performs?

The new page outperformed all the others – and as a result, the team is now ready to go back and revisit the rest of the product section.

Like most things in life, we want reassurances. If we can prove that our recommendations will get results, it makes it much easier to push for others down the line.

## We don't have time

Time. Precious time. How often have you uttered the phrase, "There's not enough time in the day?" You aren't alone.

We only have so many hours in our work week, so we have to prioritize the things that matter to us. Unfortunately, SEO isn't always the top item on your client's list of things that have to get done. How can we overcome this hurdle?

**Agency implementation**

We learned a long time ago that if we wanted things done, we needed to do them ourselves. While agency implementation takes time (and trust from the client), it ensures your recommendations are applied and the program can move forward.

**Prioritize recommendations**

There's a thing I like to call "deliverable overload." A client falls behind, but we continue to send out deliverables. Instead of working through them from start to finish, the client gets overloaded and is unsure where to begin.

Make it easier. When a client starts getting behind, the first thing I do is make a list of outstanding deliverables and prioritize them based on what's going to have the biggest impact on the site and/or what can be done quickly. That makes it easier for the client to sort through our recommendations and start working on them.

**Make your case with data**

It's extremely frustrating to have to put together a bad report for your client – especially when you know that the reason for the poor performance is that nothing was actually done.

If you aren't making any headway, and if you aren't able to implement the recommendations yourself, start pulling data. What metrics are important to the client? Show them how those metrics are (or are not) being impacted, and explain how your proposed changes can help.

# Final thoughts

As search marketers, our jobs are hard. On top of doing great SEO work, we are managing different personalities, dealing with internal company issues and trying to manage our own day. But if we can proactively address the issues above, we can remove some of the biggest impediments to our SEO program's success.

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