



## 10 Revealing Questions to Ask An SEO Consultant

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a hot topic and a confusing one. There are many misconceptions and preconceived notions. In my recent article, I discussed in greater detail the so-called [secrets of SEO](#). In short, SEO is the process of sculpting your website's pages so they have more topical relevance and topical authority to the search engines so you will outrank your competitors.

If you want to invest in SEO, there can be a significant payout. However, it is easy to get taken because there is so much confusion around the topic. Additionally, while some service providers have good intentions, they may not have enough experience or understanding, especially in more competitive markets.

While you don't have to really understand how SEO works to hire a consultant, it does make sense to be knowledgeable enough to hire a really good one. It's easy to be fooled by tech-speak and make the assumption that tech-speak equates competency.

**Here are four questions to help you find a consultant that has integrity and knows what they're doing.**

**1. Can you guarantee that my business will be ranked number one? How long will it take?**

**Bad answer:** Yes, of course. It will take 60 days.

**Good answer:** It's difficult to know how quickly you will get results, specifically how high you're going to rank and how soon. The SEO process is about outranking your competitors by being optimized better than their sites and the competitive landscape varies significantly per topical niche. In some cases, high rankings may be achieved in as little as 60 days, but in tougher cases, it may take years to achieve a No. 1 spot.

Based on our track record, we can predict what your outcome will be but we can't guarantee it any more than a stockbroker can guarantee your return on a stock investment. We can guarantee a set of deliverables and evidence of work completed.

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## 2. How do you get results? What is your methodology?

**Bad answer:** We have a proprietary system and we can't disclose it.

**Good answer:** We have a systematic approach to optimizing your site. Our work includes keyword research to identify the keywords best suited for your business. We consider both search volume and the commercial intent of each keyword. We perform an analysis of your current on-page SEO factors and make recommendations for improvement based on SEO best practices. We look at URL structure, title tags, body copy, internal linking and your content production, among other things.

After your on-site factors are improved and we've helped you implement a content generation strategy, we work on getting quality links to your site in high quantity. Link building has the greatest impact on your rankings in the long run.

## 3. How do you get links?

**Bad answer:** We buy some, we get links in forum threads, and we comment on blogs.

**Good answer:** We never buy links. [Buying links](#) is in violation of Google's Webmaster Guidelines. Our link building campaigns are 'white hat', meaning they are above board. We seek out sites within your topical niche to acquire links from. Our link acquisition strategies include guest posting on blogs, listings in authoritative directories, partner sites, vendor sites, badges and widgets, etc.

## 4. What kind of work reports do you generate? Can I see one?

**Bad answer:** We tell you how many links we acquired in the previous month.

**Good answer:** I would be happy to share a sample report with you. Our monthly reports include what we've done to date, what results were achieved, and what we're going to do next. We include any insights we've gained or uncovered opportunities that we find while looking at your analytics. Additionally, we are very transparent about the links we've acquired. We give you link reports including where links came from and how many we've acquired. You can see them for yourself.

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## 5. I heard that Google algorithms are constantly changing. How do you keep up with the changes?

**Bad answer:** They change all the time and we know someone at Google that gives us inside tips.

**Good answer:** It is true that the algorithms change often. However, most changes go unnoticed. In our experience, if you follow Google guidelines, SEO best practices as accepted by most industry professionals, and don't participate in producing low-quality duplicate content and/or spammy links, then algorithm updates typically aren't a major threat to your site or your rankings.

Occasionally, Google makes a noticeable update that has a widespread effect and it becomes a hot topic, like the [Panda update](#) in 2011. We keep up with these changes in multiple ways. We read a lot of industry blogs and daily news regarding search marketing, and we also attend conferences dedicated to the SEO profession. Additionally, we have tests that we run internally to validate our methodologies.

## 6. How do I know which keywords to target?

**Bad answer:** We recommend targeting as many keywords as possible and their synonyms and misspellings.

**Good answer:** First, it's important to note that not all traffic is good traffic from a conversion rate perspective. It's better to have a lower volume of highly qualified traffic than it is to have high volumes of low quality traffic that won't convert. Knowing this, we use Google's keyword tool and your site's historical analytics to identify keywords with the highest search volume and greatest propensity to convert. If commercial intent for a keyword is questionable, it can be easily tested in a pay-per-click campaign before investing in a long haul SEO campaign for a word that only produces tire kickers.

## 7. Can't I just put my keywords into meta tags and get ranked higher?

**Bad answer:** Yes, we will load all your keywords, even misspelled variants, into the keywords tag field.

**Good answer:** It's a common myth that optimizing your site exclusively involves putting targeted keywords on your pages. This is what's referred to as "on-page optimization." You might have read before that all you have to do for good rankings is load (or stuff) all your keywords, even misspelled variants, into the keywords tag field. While on-page factors matter, the majority of SEO factors have to do with external links to your site.

Stuffing the page's copy and the meta tags is a waste of time and it could result in a ranking penalty. Title tags are the most important factor on a page and should include your

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most important keywords. Body copy should include your target keywords and variations of them sprinkled naturally throughout. It's also a good idea to include them in meta descriptions, image alt tags and headline tags.

#### **8. How much of an increase in traffic can I expect from your SEO work?**

**Bad answer:** When we achieve #1 rankings for your site you will capture nearly 100% of the traffic available for keywords you're targeting.

**Good answer:** We can predict an approximate increase in traffic based on specific rankings being achieved. However, there are no guarantees and precise prediction is impossible. We use Google's keyword tool to estimate the amount of traffic available for targeted keywords and then based on a #1 ranking we can assume future traffic. An AOL study done years ago and [recently confirmed](#) showed that a #5 spot receives as little as 5% of the traffic available via search, while a #1 receives as much as 35%. With Google's new blended search results, predicting traffic share is even more difficult as recent [eye-tracking studies show](#). There are many factors in addition to your search results positions that influence 'the click'.

#### **9. If links are important for helping ranks improve, how many links do I need?**

**Bad answer:** We get you hundreds of links per month and that should be enough.

**Good answer:** Once your site is optimized internally, getting links from other sites is of paramount importance. The search algorithms are largely based on the quality and quantity of links pointing to your site, and what text the links contain. Most SEO professionals believe that as much as 80 percent of achieving ranks is driven by external linking factors.

This being true, it's difficult, if not impossible, to say precisely how many links you need to outrank your competition. When we build links to your target pages, we monitor the rankings closely. If the desired ranking hasn't been achieved, we simply keep building links to the page. Once desired rankings are achieved the link building campaign can taper off, but if it's a highly competitive term you never want to completely stop acquiring links.

#### **10. Do you have any special affiliations with Google?**

**Bad answer:** Yes, we have an exclusive relationship with Google, which helps us improve your rankings even faster.

**Good Answer:** No, we do not have any special affiliations with Google. Google actually [warns site owners](#) to "beware of SEOs that claim to guarantee rankings or allege a 'special relationship' with Google."

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Some SEO professionals may be “Google certified,” but this is simply acquired through taking an online certification test based on Google-provided study guides. Having such an accreditation does not qualify one SEO company over another.



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