



**Honest SEO**

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**Last Updated:** Sunday, August 1, 2004

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While following this guide should help you find a good SEO and help improve your rankings, the author shall not be held responsible for damages because of the use (or misuse) of this information.

## Problems with SEO & SEO Organizations

Search engines are not prone to promote or suggest an SEO service because they lose ad revenue and be held liable when the SEO firm does a bad job. SEO organizations do not work due to the power struggles between various marketers.

### Why Search Engines do not like SEO

Search engines cannot come right out and openly agree with SEO services since SEO service providers may directly take away revenue search engines would gain from pay per click services. As well as taking revenue from the search engines some SEO services may also decrease the relevancy of search results.

There is no official guidance on how to do SEO. Search engines give brief vague guidelines, but they will never provide precise guidance. If they had exact rules one could find similar techniques to manipulate their search results that were still fine in their rule book. Search engines cannot set out a precise guideline that judges intent.

What matters in the SEO industry is results. How did the top site get there? How can my site rank at the top?

### Why You can't Trust an SEO Based on Their Rankings

Even if an SEO did good work in the past, or owns a site that ranks well for competitive terms, there is still no guarantee that they will do a good job for you. Most people who buy SEO services lose money from their purchase or end up buying again.

Some SEOs have qualities outside the SEO field that make them popular and help them spread their message. This help does not necessarily mean that these people are good at promoting your site, only that they are good at promoting their site.

Quality SEO is expensive and takes much time. Shortsighted people see doing a bad job as easy money, thus bad SEO services is sadly a common event. Sadly the entire SEO field gets "tarred" with the same brush for the actions of a few people.

Some firms also sell pay per click marketing as regular SEO. Organic SEO is different than pay per click marketing. Both will be touched upon later.

## The Problem with Labeling SEOs

The job of all SEOs is to make search engines believe a site is important (whether or not it actually is). There is more than one way to skin a cat. No matter how you do it the job of the SEO is to improve rankings.

Anytime SEOs use the "us VS them" strategy in their marketing they are hurting the industry as a whole.

Certain sites will require certain techniques whereas other sites will require other techniques. Some categories may be so competitive that they require that you operate outside the SEO guidelines set by the major search engines. Ultimately it is up to the SEO service consumer to decide what risks they are willing to take and what techniques should be used to promote their sites.

## Other Problems with SEO

Some SEOs do stupid stuff that will get your site banned from search engines. These people are not the only big problem in the SEO industry. Some SEO firms are too lazy to do a good job.

Sure a site will not likely get banned if you are not aggressive. Of course many keywords absolutely require research, a ton of effort, and extensive link building.

Link building (or creating ideas that naturally build links over time) is the most time-consuming and most expensive part of SEO. Often it is also the more important parts of SEO, sadly the process is skipped or done inadequately by many members of the SEO community.

## Lazy SEO Case Study

One such example of the lazy SEO firm was told to me by a customer who eventually hired me. That customer previously hired one of the largest SEO firms in the world. Over the course of 6 months they built that client 4 links for a total cost of \$6,000. That is unacceptable.

No matter what anybody tells you **there is no silver bullet to SEO. Quality SEO requires time, effort, and monetary investment.**

## Why Personal Education is the Only Way You can Guarantee You will find a Quality SEO

Any SEO organization will be biased toward promoting its creators. An example of this would be the recently organized [SEMPO](#) which arbitrarily gave its founders "SEMPO Circle" status for free. If you or I wanted that status it would cost us **\$5,000 a year**. That is an uneven playing field, [which may hinder the SEO community more than it helps it](#).

Bruce Clay offers the Bruce Clay code of ethics, but it has his name on it. Marketers will not get behind an arbitrary standard which promotes one person or a select few people.

There are a bunch of SEO directories on the web. Many of the best SEOs are not listed in some of them. Some SEO directories are willing to list anyone who submits their SEO site (which does nothing to guarantee quality). Other SEO directories pride themselves on rejecting people who do not meet their random opinion based personal standards.

You should do your own research and ask your own questions when looking for an SEO. No directory listing can guarantee quality services.

## The Difference between this Site and SEO Directories / Guides

On this site you will notice there is no "hosting provided by" or other promotional links. This site is a free and honest SEO resource which was created to educate people about the SEO **without offering any sales pitch or preferred sellers list**.

My name is not on the site and I registered the domain by proxy so this domain is not connected to me any way.

## About Honest SEO

**D**ue to the commercial nature of the web and self interest of marketers it is difficult to get marketers to come together on a solution to help people out. This paper was designed to help consumers learn about SEO without being attached to any centralized body.

### Where did the Idea for this Site come from?

The World Wide Web was successful only because it was organized to be a free database of information with no central power. Had [Tim Berners-Lee](#) decided to keep the web for himself or place his own proprietary profit making system at the center of it the web would have never took off.

The single biggest problem with SEO organizations is that financial restrictions and/ or greed driven marketers prevent them from being honest and open.

Many SEO marketers make more money for their services because people are afraid to hire some of their competitors. Some people push random quality assurance tags, but as they relate to the SEO industry they are frequently "just a marketing angle."

You should use your best judgment and research before you hire an SEO. While this list of ideas and questions is not all-inclusive, feedback to help improve this site can be posted on the associated weblog day or night.

### The Focus of this Paper:

This paper will not review any specific SEO firms because if it did then it would be **biased promotional crap** like much of what else is available on the market – and thus far the market has proven that this does not

work. This is simply a free guide of questions you should ask yourself and your SEO firm before spending a free dime.

This site will have no sales pitch and no SEO preference. These are simply questions I wished I would have asked myself before I bought SEO services from a questionable SEO firm a longtime ago.

## Some SEOs are great

Not all SEOs are bad. **There are many honest and hardworking SEOs who provide exceptional value to their customers.** Unfortunately the ratio of effective quality SEOs to the number people claiming to be SEOs is low.

**If you shop for SEO services by price you are likely to get scammed. Quality SEO services are not a commodity.**

These questions will hopefully help you save time and money by making sure you buy quality SEO services with your first SEO purchase.

## SEO is a Small Part of Running an Online Business

Many sites believe they can exclusively depend on SEO as a business model. These sites are also the ones which are typically hurt the most when search engines make significant algorithm changes.

**Do not design your site and business model exclusively around search engines.** Create a useful site for visitors which also is well coded for proper search engine placement.

If SEO is your entire business model you may want to change your business or you need to be prepared for extreme risks. Good businesses also develop brand and other intangible assets which enhance the value of their business.



## How PPC Marketing Works

There is a big difference between pay per click marketing and SEO. Neither of these sections are intended to be a complete how to guide, but are designed just to give you a brief intro into both topics.

### What is PPC?

Pay per click ads usually appear in a colored box on search results pages and are separated from the regular search results on most major search engines and portals. Some portals (such as Ask Jeeves and AOL) are not clearly separating the ads from the regular search results.

Many of the larger PPC networks have many search partners and broad sweeping contextual advertising networks.

### Who Owns the Largest PPC Networks?

This is a rough estimate, but between 10% and 30% of purchases which originate from search come from pay per click ads. Currently [Google AdWords](#) and [Overture](#) are the two largest pay per click search engines.

### Risk Involved with PPC?

Pay per click search engine marketing has no risk involved other than the money you are spending buying the clicks. This means that you do not need to worry about your site getting banned from a search engine for PPC services.

The recurring costs for PPC marketing can be expensive since you pay for every click. Some competitors may click on your ads to cost you money (this is more prevalent in high margin industries). It is important to track your ads and report suspicious behavior.

## How PPC Works

With pay per click marketing you buy search engine traffic based on relevant keywords bought in an auction model. (Some smaller pay per click engines charge by category.) You pay for every click so **targeting is important**. You can view Overture click costs for your primary keyword phrases using the [Overture view bid tool](#). Google hides bid prices and factors ad clickthrough rate into click cost.

## Why Should I use Big PPC Networks?

There are many smaller pay per click networks, but I recommend starting off with the two largest to ensure you are buying quality traffic and that your business model is sustainable. Using these networks will also provide your business with a rapid feedback loop.

## Overture VS. Google AdWords

The trick to doing well in Google AdWords is encouraging a high clickthrough rate which will lower click costs. Google created a [free PDF report](#) offering tips on how to use AdWords effectively. Overture also recently created a [free "how to" PDF](#).

The trick to doing well in Overture is to use many different variations of your keywords since they place exact match listings before broad match listings. This means if you bid on the exact term someone is searching for and someone else bids on a different variation of a similar term your ad will appear before theirs, even if your bid is significantly cheaper.

Some people will do better with Overture and other industries are better using Google AdWords. I recommend trying both.

## PPC VS. SEO

Pay per click marketing may provide a quick cheap alternative to investing in a full service SEO program. This will help you test your business model before investing into quality SEO services. Over time good SEO is likely going to be cheaper than most pay per click marketing, though the value of each depends on a market. A person selling a report about using Google AdWords would find Google AdWords as a great place to market their product.

## Many PPC Ads Lose Money

Like anything else there is a learning cycle associated with PPC marketing. Many people who use pay per click marketing lose money, so you should not assume your competitors know what they are doing (especially if they are a large corporation like Wal-Mart). Many business models cannot support pay per click marketing, while others rely on PPC marketing.

Many successful marketers and webmasters use both PPC and SEO with each other. The only way to be sure of the value provided by each is to test and track the results.

## How SEO Works

**T**his is an extremely brief introduction to SEO. It aims to inform you what SEO is, but not to teach you how to become an SEO expert. Much of the SEO process is just hard work and learning from your errors.

If you do your own SEO you will still likely want to chat in SEO forums and read books on the topic before starting. Many of the print books can go quickly out of date, but if you ask around there will likely be at least a couple good guides which are commonly recommended.

### What is SEO?

SEO is the art or science of gaining top search engine placement for relevant keyword phrases through making search engines believe your site is more relevant than your competition's websites.

### What are Keywords?

Keywords are terms or (more often) phrases you would expect someone to search for to find your website. With SEO you pick your keywords and create pages focused on them. You can only focus each page on a specific keyword phrase or few specific keywords. One of the best tricks to SEO is to gain traffic using many pages focused on specific terms vice focusing on broad single word terms. Specific terms are usually easier to rank well for and often have a higher conversion rate (since a longer query is often associated with greater searcher intent).

### Using the Correct Domain Name

Acquiring links is important to rank well for competitive terms. When possible you want the links pointing at you to use your keywords in them. Other sites (especially directories) are more inclined to link to you with your keywords in the link text if they are also in your official site

name or domain name. It is usually a good idea to use your keywords in your domain name when possible.

## SEO Feedback Time Frame

When you search a search engine you are not searching the web. You are searching their cache of the web. It takes search engines some finite amount of time to find and properly index new links and pages.

If you are new to SEO (or are just beginning to do SEO on your website) it may take up to six months or more to gain a top ranking for a competitive phrase. If you work hard enough you can usually rank well for less competitive phrases in as little as a couple months.

## Gaining Top Rankings can take a Long Time

Some of your biggest competitors have likely been around for a long time and have many links built up over time. You can view their links by:

- Searching Yahoo! for linkdomain:www.CompetingWebsite.com.
- Searching Google for link: www.CompetingWebsite.com.
- Yahoo! usually shows more links to your site than Google does, and each search engine will likely show some links the other is not showing.

Search engines know of and evaluate many more links than they show using a backlink check. Even though all links do not display, checking backlink can help you estimate the popularity of a site.

## How to Build Links

- Register your site in major directories such as the [Yahoo! Directory](#) and [DMOZ](#). I also register my clients websites in many of the smaller directories and niche specific directories. Search engines often do not count links that go through redirects, so before spending money on a listing you will want to check if the directories provide static links. Business.com and the Yahoo! Directory are two directories which provide static links and show tracking URLs in the status bar when you hover over the links. **Most other directories that show tracking URLs do not provide links that are evaluated by search engines.**
- Write press releases and articles and syndicate them on other sites. Link back to your site (using your keywords when possible) in the article signature block.

- Ask friends, product manufacturers, product distributors, and other business partners to link to you.
- Sponsor sites and get them to link to you.
- Buy advertising from related websites.

## How Much Should SEO Cost?

Quality SEO is time-consuming and usually requires an investment of at least 4 figures if you are paying someone else to do your SEO for you. You may be able to find a cheaper SEO service if you are in a niche field and have your keywords in the domain name. I would suggest setting aside at least a thousand or few thousand dollars for SEO if you are hiring an SEO.

Some SEO steps are time-consuming and expensive. Long-term link building requires significant expense in both time and money. The cost of effective SEO can sometimes be as low as \$500 to \$1,000 and it can cost \$10,000 a month depending on how niche or competitive your field is.

The price of SEO is typically market driven. Niche fields do not cost much, but if you are in a business that can make thousands of dollars per day then you should expect to be paying thousands of dollars per month.

It may be worth it to hire someone in-house to do SEO. If you do your own SEO services make sure you account for the time you spend when figuring out how much it is costing you.

## Questions to ask Yourself before Hiring an SEO

Communication is the key to successful SEO. Before you can adequately communicate with others you need to know what your goals are. If you do not have set goals then it is going to be hard for your SEO do to exactly what you want them to.

1. Am I prepared to wait at least a few months to see any return on my investment?

You can see returns from pay per click marketing in as little as a few days, but the feedback loop for SEO (especially in Google) can take many months.

2. Do I realize there is risk in any form of SEO?

Aggressive SEO may return greater results, but also stands a greater chance of being penalized by search engines. In any business venture you should weigh your risk and reward. Most websites do not require the use of techniques that will likely get your website banned from search engines.

Some common aggressive SEO techniques are cloaking, creating doorway pages, and setting up a link farm. If an SEO tells you they are doing something just for spiders (especially if it is hidden from site visitors) then they are likely using aggressive techniques.

Even if a person is not aggressive there still is some risk in any SEO service.

Some of the more common search engine penalties are:

- Filtering out duplicate content. Yahoo! also actively edits their search results to remove low quality websites which lack original useful content.
- Removing sites from the index for exchanging links with link farms.
- Removing sites for using invisible or illegible text.
- Removing sites for using deceptive redirects or cloaking.
- Penalizing sites for using the same inbound link text over and over again.
- Penalizing sites for openly selling PageRank.
- Penalty for using expired domains. Google has penalized some sites for reusing expired domains.
- Since search algorithms can change tomorrow it is impossible to create a complete list of potential penalties. Search engines try hard not to flag false positives. Across the web few sites are penalized, but the more aggressive you are the greater the likelihood you will be penalized.

Different search engines place emphasis on different parts of their algorithms and find spam using different techniques. In most job fields if a person does a bad job you may be forced to buy again. In SEO if a person gets your site penalized you may need to **spend to undue what they did and then spend again on new services**. Bad SEO services are extremely expensive in terms of time and money.

- Yahoo! actively edits their search results. If an editor flags your website you will likely be required to pay the \$99 [Overture Site Match](#) program inclusion fees to get your site listed. They will immediately accept payment, but your site errors will need to be corrected before they list your site in search results.
- Google does permanently penalize some websites. Most sites that receive an automated penalty can be relisted in Google within 60 days from removing the problem from their site.



### 3. Do I have any knowledge about SEO?

If not: why shouldn't I take a few days learning before my investment? You can learn free at sites like [Search Engine Watch](#) & [Search Engine Guide](#). SEO is also an industry filled with slang and jargon. Definitions for some SEO and search engine terms are located [here](#) and [here](#).

### 4. What words or phrases would I expect people to search for to find my site? (These words or phrases are called keywords.)

[Digital Point's Keyword Suggestion Tool](#) provides rough search volume traffic estimates. (Please note: Overture traffic estimates on the Digital Point tool run a bit high because Overture lumps together singular and plural traffic and automated bots scour the Overture distribution network.) [WordTracker](#) is a more full featured keyword tool that many professional SEOs use, but it too can be off with its search volumes.

The best way to find out search volume is to create an ad on [Google AdWords](#) and [Overture](#) and bid enough to know your ad will show on every search. Please note this is an expensive technique in many fields.

### 5. Who is my competition?

If you are uncertain who your competition is search a couple of the various major search engines for some of you primary keywords and take note of the top ranking websites. If you have no idea who your competition is then you have no idea what you are up against.

6. What profit potential exists using my current business model?

If it is a large sum of money then odds are your industry is competitive. You can get a rough estimate of industry competition (and thus profit potential) by using the [Digital Point keyword suggestion tool](#) to look at search frequency and [view Overture bid prices](#).

Please note the Overture search volume estimates do often run high (sometimes 10 fold or more on competitive terms) because of automated bots scouring their distribution network. These two tools should give you an idea if there is much competition and perhaps value in your market.

Hiring an SEO is not economically possible for all webmasters, and there are many effective non search engine related ways to promote your site on products over the web.

7. Is my business model original? Is something other than price my unique selling proposition? Does my business idea naturally want to spread?

If your answer is no to these questions: are there ways you can improve your message or business model before investing thousands of dollars into spreading it?

Many webmasters buy SEO services before they are even sure of their business model or unique sales proposition. You should know what message you want to spread before you heavily invest in spreading it.

It is far easier to build link popularity into non commercial sites than it is with completely commercial sites. Providing useful information builds trust and can help build your link popularity.

8. Does my site look attractive compared to that of my competition? Is my site as functional as my competitors sites are?

If not perhaps you should have redesign done before or during the SEO process. It is far easier to spread your message if your site looks good.

Also SEO is a numbers game. If your site is not focused on conversion and your competitors are they will easily be able to reinvest profits and take market share from you.

9. Do I need pay per click marketing, organic SEO or both?

It may make sense to do both or just either one. They are slightly different skill sets though. Both have different setbacks and benefits. You may want to use pay per click marketing first to iron out conversion issues before investing heavily into SEO.

It may be worth doing both types of marketing concurrently if you have a great idea and know you have found a great SEO firm.

10. Is my site indexed by the major search engines?

You should check to see if your site is already in the search engine indexes and see how many pages are indexed. If only part of your site is indexed you may be able to make a few quick changes to make your site more search engine friendly.

You can search most major search engines for `site:www.mysite.com` and see how many pages are indexed.

## 11. What do the search engines say about the SEO firm I want to hire?

I would not recommend buying SEO from a firm because they rank well, but the search engines can tell you a decent amount about an SEO firm.

Some SEO firms do not rank well because they get most of their business from referrals and spend little time promoting their sites. If the SEO firm has a site it should show up when you search for their URL. If an SEO firm does not show up in search results when you search for their URL then likely they are being penalized. If their site is being penalized the odds are good that your site may get penalized. To see if their site is in the Google index search Google for cache:www.TheirWebsite.com.

You may also want to look through the search results of various search engines to see what other people are saying about your prospective SEO firm. Obviously the SEO field has many marketers in it. Some stuff that is posted might not be true, but if you have seen dozens of websites saying how awful an SEO firm is that is certainly a reason to use caution.

You may also want to check the backlinks of the SEO firm. Likely you should see some links from other SEO type websites or webmaster resources in their backlinks. If they have a large quantity of inbound links from casino, drug, and other high margin off topic sites and have no other links from SEO type websites then that would likely raise a flag in my mind.

## 12. This SEO firm called me with a great deal!!!

Quality SEOs do not have enough time to call people out of the blue. Quality SEOs work off referrals and from inquiries. If a firm calls you out of the blue they do not understand the power of reverse broadcast networks and are likely lousy at their job.

### 13. Should I buy the cheapest SEO?

Small SEO investments are likely a waste of money for multiple reasons.

Almost any quality SEO can create a topical site about their interests which produces hundreds to thousands of dollars of automated income a month without needing to worry about customers.

If you are only paying a few hundred dollars for SEO you should ask yourself "Why are they willing to work for me so cheap? Are they going to do anything, or are they just taking my money?"

If you are spending fewer than \$500 you must realize that anyone else will likely be able to spend around what you are spending or spend a small amount more and steal your market position.

As long as your business model is functional it is a good idea to overspend to protect your position. The web grows with or without you so it does not hurt to overspend to ensure you will maintain your position for a decent amount of time.

If you are in a high margin field such as credit, prescription drugs, porn, or casinos you should expect to pay at least 5 figures and some ongoing fee.

## Questions to Ask an SEO Before Hiring Them

Communication is the key to running a successful service based web business. SEO firms should have no problem answering a few questions prior to you hiring them. Communicating before business partnerships builds trust. With so many variables in the SEO field trust is an extremely important issue.

There is no reason to make blind investments when asking a few questions can help you find a great SEO.

### 1. How Long have You been doing SEO for?

Years and years of experience are not necessary, but you probably do not want to be their first project.

### 2. How Would You Describe Your SEO Process?

Most good SEOs have no problem explaining how they do what they do. Good SEOs want their clients to understand what they are doing. It helps to build trust.

Building trust with clients is important so clients will know the SEO firm is working hard to restore their rankings if search engines change their algorithms and cause rankings to drop temporarily.

Words like doorway, hidden, or automated are usually a bad sign unless you are willing to take large risk. While most do not, some industries will require aggressive sales techniques. Anything that is "just for the spiders" is usually a bad call if you are trying to

build a long-term brand.

### 3. Is My Industry Competitive?

Understanding the economics of your business away from the web should help you discover how competitive your business field is. If their response surprises you ask them why it surprises you and explain a bit more about why you thought your industry was more or less competitive.

A good SEO can usually gauge how competitive an industry is quickly. Since their workload will depend on how competitive your industry is your SEO should be able to tell you about how competitive they think your industry is while or before they quote you a price.

### 4. Do you have any other clients in my Industry?

Most quality SEOs will not work for competing websites in the same industry. It may benefit you if they are working for similar sites that are not directly competing because of geographic boundaries or other limits, but I would not recommend hiring an SEO firm whom actively had customers competing against each other.

### 5. Does My Site Needs a Redesign?

Many sites have design flaws which make them unappealing to link to and sometimes even confusing to the user. User confusion will equate to a low conversion rate. Your site should make it simple and easy for your user to do what you want them to and look appealing to the eye.

6. Do You think My Site Has the Ability to Rank well with its Current Design?

They should tell you if they think there are problems with your current design because they will likely need to be changed, and the changes will have associated fees the firm will need to justify.

You should also make sure your SEO is comfortable working on a site built with the technology your site is using. Optimizing an ASP (or other dynamic language) coded site requires additional knowledge which optimizing a straight HTML site does not.

7. Have You Worked for other businesses which are similar in size to my business?

A good SEO can do a good job on small sites and large site alike. Different sized companies have different policies and it would be helpful if your SEO had worked on a site owned by a company of a similar size/ in a similar position as your company.

8. What is the most competitive phrase you have ever ranked well for? Do you still rank well for it?

If you site is not in a competitive category you may not need a great SEO. If you are in a category such as debt, consumer electronics, casinos, world travel, pornography, or prescription drugs you need an SEO whom is aggressive and has a proven track record. In these competitive fields you likely will spend at least \$10,000.

9. How Long Should I expect to Wait to See Results?

If you are doing pay per click marketing they may be able to have you set up in a week or less. Regular SEO takes a good bit longer.



For most SEO projects you should expect at least a two-month wait to see results. If a person tells you that you will have top rankings in only a few days it is typically a reason to be suspicious. The SEO firm should commit to a rough time table. It may not be a firm one but they should at least give you a time range where they would expect you to see results in.

Some search engines occasionally have major shifts in their algorithm which can delay results, but usually your SEO should be able to give you some idea of how long the process should take and when you should start seeing results.

If you are in a competitive category you should expect to pay the SEO ongoing monthly fees for keeping up with the competition.

#### 10. What Phrases are We Targeting?

For an SEO to quote you a solid price they should know what goals you have. To do this they should know some of terms they are going after (perhaps not all of them, but at least some of them).

Basic economic knowledge should help your SEO guess at how competitive each industry is, but much of the work done in the SEO field is on a keyword or keyword phrase basis.

Do not pay an SEO until you and the SEO firm both understand what they other's intent is.

#### 11. I understand that Link Building is Important. How Many Links Should I Expect to See Added Each Month? How many new unique sites should I see linking to me each month? How do you go about building link popularity?

Some sites may need a few dozen links from a few dozen different sites. Many sites need a ton of links to compete for competitive phrases. By looking at some of the top ranking sites for your

keywords (and checking their backlinks) you can determine how competitive your keywords are.

The word automated is often a sign of bad things if you are trying to build a long-term brand. The key is to get a bunch of links (with your keywords in them if possible) from various sites. If you can get links from related sites they should help more than unrelated links since they may also send direct traffic to your site.

Some search engines may use filters to penalize artificial link building, so you want to make sure you use a couple different link text phrases in some of the various links pointing at your site.

Quality link building takes time, but you should see more links pointing at your site a few months after you hire your SEO firm than you saw the day you hired them.

12. Do you use cloaking or other techniques which are considered risky or deceptive toward search engines?

Cloaking and other deceptive techniques in and of themselves are not bad. What is a bad thing is when an SEO firm uses deceptive techniques without letting you know. In certain competitive fields aggressive SEO techniques may be necessary, but most keywords do not require cloaking or other aggressive techniques to gain top rankings.

If you have a pharmacy or gambling type website expect to need to use risky techniques, spend a large sum of money, and build a large linking campaign.

13. Have you ever got any sites banned from search engines?

Getting a single site banned is not necessarily bad. Some of the most respected SEO professionals have been too aggressive and

had websites banned from search engines (though many SEOs are conservative and never have had this happen).

You do not know what the limits are unless you test them. Most webmasters buying SEO services are not interested in donating test sites though. Ensure your SEO firm knows how much risk you are willing to take.

It is not important whether they have got any sites banned, but what is important is the language of their response. If they sound defensive and rude then they probably would be a bad SEO partner.

#### 14. Do you have any guarantees of your work?

Many top SEOs work off their reputation and do not have any guarantees. Many SEOs will explain why they do not have guarantees or what their guarantees are. Make sure you understand exactly what keyword phrases, search engines, and time frame they guarantee.

#### 15. Could I please speak to a few of your current customers?

Many SEO firms keep many of their clients secret so they may keep their competitive advantage. It does not hurt to ask and talk with a few clients though.

Some SEO firms may have buddies sing for them. Check out site details of the sites they worked on from sites like [Internet Archives](#). If a client says they have worked with the firm on their current site for 3 years and the site is 2 months old it is likely a shady SEO firm.

Also use your best judgment! If something seems like it is questionable or it is too good to be true then you should look elsewhere.

## Why Ask SEO Questions?

**L**ikely you would not buy a used car because it was both used and a car. You also would not likely want to buy the cheapest used car (at least you would not if you wanted a reliable used car).

When you buy the services of an SEO you are investing and taking a chance. Most successful businesses take chances though most do not take blind risks.

Many SEOs may not have the time to answer all of the questions listed above (as I probably would not answer all of them). They should have time to answer a few of your questions though. It is their job to sell you their services. It is not your job to blindly buy them. In addition to the above questions you may also want to ask a few questions that are not listed. You should ask multiple SEO firms various questions you consider vitally important to your business model.

There is nothing that is concrete about SEO. The things that work today may not work well tomorrow. The people who do the best job of answering a few of your questions prior to you hiring them stand a good chance to also provide the best customer service after you hire them.

SEO forums have a ton of good information and a ton of misinformation in them. Read through a few different ones to learn the tone of each and ask a few questions about things that concern you.

There are usually no guarantees with SEO, but you stand a far greater chance of finding a good, honest SEO if you ask around and learn a small amount about SEO vice picking an SEO firm at random.

Best of luck with your site and SEO.