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business support

THE IMPORTANCE OF A SEO CONTRACT

The SEO contract is an essential aspect of your relationship with the company



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01 Introduction

Once you have decided on a SEO Company the contract is the most important aspect of your relationship with the company. It should state the service to be performed and the payment schedule.

Importantly, it should also protect you from any wrongdoing on their part and ensure that your money is well spent.

To further help you, Acumenology has produced a series of Business Guides on a range of relevant topics. You can find these at: www.acumenology.co.uk/business-guides

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What should the contract include?

The contract should include all services to be performed by the SEO company.

They should be presented in detail and in plain language so that it is easy to understand exactly what the SEO campaign consists of.

If you do not understand any of the terminology you should ensure that it is suitably altered.

Some of the services that may be performed can include but are not limited to:

- Evaluating your website
- Keyword research, analysis of the degree of competitiveness
- Site structure analysis, recommendations and adjustments - Fixing the site for users and search engines
- Manual submissions to directories such as the Open Directory
- Paid inclusions to directories and search engines, trusted RSS feeds
- Link building
- Consulting and training
- Providing accurate reports on web site performance



There can be any number of additional services such as PPC management, multilingual optimisation, copywriting, e-mail marketing etc.

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Payment for services

The contract should clearly state whether you are paying by the hour (the most common method) or by performance.

If the pricing structure is based on an hourly rate, then the contract should provide a figure regarding the number of hours each service or task requires.

That is essential to establishing how much your budget is buying.

You also want to be able to predict any additional expenses.

Make sure the SEO Company consults and gets your approval before they start spending on your behalf and you're faced with a huge bill.

Performance-based pricing structures are trickier. Customers and companies have different ways to measure performance.

Some unethical companies may try to trick you into believing your site is doing well.

You can measure performance by rankings (for keywords that actually deliver qualified traffic), by targeted traffic or by ROI.

Your contract should spell out quite clearly what performance means and how it is measured.

Payment should ideally be on a schedule that suits both parties.

Avoid paying for each visitor or "per click" as that might add up to an unreasonable figure.

If the SEO Company accepts such pricing structure then you should still expect to pay for consulting hours, meetings etc.

Their time is worth money and you can't get around paying them for that.

This is often where misunderstandings arise as businesses feel that "pay for performance" means that if there is no performance, they will not be paying any fee.

SEO companies see matters differently, they will charge you for the cost of carrying out the consulting and implementing changes, but they will not charge you above that limit in order to make a profit.

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Other considerations

The time scale needed to perform and obtain results from SEO services can vary based on the varied complexity of some services.

A minimum of 3 months and a maximum of 6 months are needed to obtain the desired results.

If at the end of the 6 months there are no satisfactory results you should end the contract and ask for a refund – but only, if this has been agreed upon at the onset.

Some SEO companies will want to link back to their website in order to help their own rankings.

Discuss this with them and insist on a discount in exchange of a link back to their site or to their clients'.

If the SEO is also going to write content, it is a good idea to buy the copyrights. This will avoid any discussions regarding copyright in the event of contract termination.

The agreement should also outline all responsibilities of the SEO company:

- They should present timely reports of the services performed on your website, be prompt in responding to your requests.
- Assume responsibility in the event that your website should be banned or penalised by search engines or in case of any other wrongdoing on their part.

Should this occur, not only should you be able to claim a refund but also ask for compensation for damages caused to your business.



If the SEO guarantees results or top rankings, double check the refund conditions.

No SEO can guarantee top rankings but if they do, make sure you can get your money back and it's not just sales talk. SEOs can be tricky and may guarantee results for obscure keywords that are of no real value to you.

Without a well-drawn contract, you are at the mercy of search engine marketing companies.

If you don't make sure you're covered, you may find yourself in a position where you invested money in SEO and obtained virtually nothing in return.

Don't let a poorly written contract put your business in a vulnerable position.

If you decide to use the services of a company based in overseas, you need to be aware that any contractual disputes will be difficult to settle due to the geography and different jurisdictions and thus as such a contract may not necessarily have any great value.



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Conclusion

It is important to ensure the SEO contract stipulates your requirements and does not allow the company to cite contractual reason for not carrying out what they promised.

Often the desire to secure your contract may preclude them from pointing out 'escape clauses' set out in the contract. They are likely to have a standard contract but that does not mean that it cannot be modified for your business

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