

Search Marketing Firm Vendor Comparison Checklist



Hiring a search marketing firm can be a challenge. It's hard to know who to trust, and who will really generate results for your business.

We've put together our own checklist that provides smart questions for you to ask the firms you're considering. We've even taken the liberty of providing our own answers for your reference. Of course, we'd be happy to discuss our answers further with qualified prospects.

	Prominent Placement	Vendor X	Vendor Y	Vendor Z
The Business				
How long have you been in business?	2001			
How long has someone at your firm been providing search marketing?	1998			
How long has someone at your firm been involved with Internet marketing?	1995			
Are you financially stable and debt free?	Y			
Are you active in any professional organizations?	Y			
Do you attend and/or present at nationally-recognized search marketing conferences?	Y			
Do you regularly publish articles on search marketing?	Y			
The Partnership				
Do you provide a good value and a pricing model that makes it easy for me to budget?	Y			
Are there any hidden, additional support and/or add-on costs associated with your search marketing programs I need to be aware of?	N			
Will you explain how you are optimizing our site and what our money is paying for?	Y			
Experience				
Are you a full-service search marketing firm, offering:				
Search engine optimization (SEO)	Y			
Search term research & strategy	Y			
Pay-per-click campaigns (PPC)	Y			
Pay-per-click copywriting & testing	Y			
ROI Analysis	Y			
Optimized press releases & articles	Y			
Link building	Y			
Directory analysis and submissions	Y			

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Experience (cont.)				
Are you a full-service search marketing firm, offering:				
Local search marketing	Y			
Internet Yellow Pages	Y			
Search engine reputation management	Y			
Blogging consultation	Y			
Do you have a proven history of success with search marketing?	Y			
Have you consistently won awards for your search marketing work from recognized organizations?	Y			
Can you show me results you've achieved for other clients?	Y			
Can you provide references from current and previous clients?	Y			
Account Service				
Will you provide me with a dedicated Account Manager who's experienced in both client service and marketing?	Y			
Do you have a training program for your Account Managers that's comprehensive, ongoing and accredited?	Y			
Will you collaborate with me and educate me about search marketing so I can understand everything you're doing and become the search marketing expert within my company?	Y			
Will you keep me updated on industry trends and ensure my search marketing campaign always includes the latest techniques?	Y			
Does your service include an extranet where all our correspondence, documents and project schedules will be housed for 24/7 access by all team members?	Y			
Will you provide a robust web analytic software that tracks results as part of your service?	Y			
Search Marketing Philosophy				
Are you focused only on search marketing?	Y			
Do you perform search marketing the ethical ("white hat") way and follow the search engines' Terms of Service and Webmaster Guidelines?	Y			

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Search Marketing Philosophy (cont.)				
Have you ever used shadow domains and/or doorway pages to funnel traffic to a client's site?	N			
Do you look at both SEO and PPC as long-term, ongoing processes as opposed to short-term projects?	Y			
Do you have a formal process that all projects go through?	Y			
In order to ensure that we target the right search terms, do you do comprehensive search term research that includes both primary and secondary research?	Y			
Do you use professional copywriters to revise copy on my site and keep my marketing messages and tone intact?	Y			
Will your optimization program harm the usability, professionalism and/or the brand essence of our site?	N			
Can I still use my in-house webmaster or third-party web developer that I'm happy with? (Or, if I don't have someone I like to work with, can you recommend someone?)	Y			
Will you work only with my company in my industry and decline to do business with my competitors?	Y			
Will you outsource any of the SEO work to a foreign country with cheap labor?	N			
Have you ever promoted gambling, MLM, affiliate sales, Viagra-type and/or adult sites?	N			
Ongoing Search Marketing Program				
Will you provide me comprehensive, written reports every month without fail?	Y			
Will my monthly reports include all data as well as a written analysis and interpretation of what the numbers mean and recommendations for responding to the results?	Y			
Which metrics do you measure and report on:				
Organic rankings?	Y			
PPC data (rankings, impressions, clicks, click-through rate, average cost per click)	Y			
Website traffic	Y			
Conversions, conversion rate & cost per conversion	Y			
Return on investment	Y			
Revenue generated	Y			