

## Ask SCORE

# THREE THINGS SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS SHOULD UNDERSTAND BEFORE HIRING A SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION EXPERT

A website is a critical sales and marketing tool for just about every business. It's a hub for product information, a conversion point for capturing leads, the holding place for marketing materials and company news, and many times serves as your potential customer's first impression of your business.

However, before any prospect can interact with your website, they first have to find your website. This discoverability is the culmination of a strong SEO, or search engine optimization, strategy and an SEO expert behind the scenes.

Most business owners are digital marketing novices making it hard to know what you're really buying when you hire an SEO expert. If you're like most business owners, you understand the role of an SEO expert from a high level but aren't as familiar with the full scope of what's involved or the time required. This makes it a lot harder to confidently hire the right SEO expert and forces owners to take these professionals at their word.

Before you hire an SEO expert, make sure you have a basic understanding of what it takes to properly optimize a website and what to expect from a reputable professional.

### Google Values Quality Content. Expect to Create a Lot of It

An effective SEO strategy is rooted in good, quality content. When you hire an SEO expert, expect there to be a lot of discussion about writing blogs or creating new web pages for your website and adding this new content on a regular basis.

The key here is "quality" content. If an SEO expert suggests adding pages or blogs to your site that don't help your customers in some way, repeat content already on the site or are written simply to jam in keywords, you can actually do more harm than good to your site's search ranking. Google wants to see content that's helpful to the visitor and will reward quality content with higher search rankings.

### Optimizing a Website is as Much an Art as a Science

No two websites are alike, and neither are their SEO strategies. When you work with an SEO professional, expect to work closely with them as they consistently reassess what part of the SEO strategy is showing to be most effective. Your SEO consultant will likely run tests against keywords and not every aspect of the strategy will always work the first time. Optimizing your website with the right keywords, text links, headline structures and all of the SEO elements that factor into a high-ranking Google search result is an educated game of trial and error. Once your SEO consultant finds the right SEO approach, however, your traffic and conversion results should speak for themselves.

### SEO is a Long-Term Commitment

An SEO expert who promises to come in and have your website at the top of Google's rankings within a few months presents a huge red flag. Effectively optimizing your website takes time and consistent effort. Google prioritizes websites that have proven themselves valuable to web visitors over a period of time.

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Trying to cheat the system and get a high ranking without putting in the work is not how the game is played.

**Arm yourself with a high-level knowledge of SEO to help you identify the true experts**

Unfortunately, with any specialized profession, there will always be the one 'expert' who tries to cut corners while promising the world. When it comes to SEO, your best bet is to do your research and gain a rudimentary understanding of SEO so you can ask the right questions when you sit down with a potential SEO consultant one on one.

Invest in an SEO expert who wants to get to know your company and your customers and work with you to build your online presence and overall business. Avoid self-proclaimed experts who promise a silver bullet.

**Get references and ask for referrals from your network and other owners you trust**

Before you hire an SEO expert, ask your colleagues, peers and mentors who they trust to manage their website's SEO. This is the best place to start your search.

A trusted business owner or mentor who's worked directly with web and SEO firms in the past, like a SCORE mentor, can help you find a professional SEO expert to grow your business.

Since 1964, SCORE "Mentors to America's Small Business" has helped more than 10 million aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners through mentoring and business workshops. More than 11,000 volunteer business mentors in over 320 chapters serve their communities through entrepreneur education dedicated to the formation, growth and success of small businesses. For more information about starting or operating a small business, contact SCORE TriCounty, <https://tricity.score.org/content/find-mentor-183>.

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SCORE is funded in part through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration. All opinions, conclusions, and/or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the SBA.

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