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What's it Worth to You? Are you Getting What YOU Paid for from your Internet Marketing Company?

By David Evans, PhD, MBA

Growing numbers of companies are trying to cash in on the search engine optimization (SEO) and Internet marketing game, but how much are these services really worth? And how can you tell if you are getting what you paid for?

The cost for SEO should vary by the size and competitiveness of the market. It is a lot more difficult (and more costly) to rank on the first page of Google in a market like Los Angeles or Chicago than it is in Des Moines, Iowa. A good rule of thumb, across all industries, for SEO fees is \$750 to \$5,000 per month, according to Search Engine Watch. For the aesthetics market, a general range of \$500 to \$3,000 per month is reasonable.

Once you agree on a fee, put it in writing. The vast majority of SEO companies, both inside and outside of aesthetic surgery, charge on a flat fee per month contract. With a flat fee contract, the fee is fixed and your practice can budget accordingly. That said, the fees are bundled and companies typically do

not provide an hourly breakout of the work performed.

The other widely used model is payment on an hourly basis. Here, your practice receives an “hourly bill,” similar to what a lawyer provides. The practice can review the bill and see how each hour is used, but each additional request or call to the company is billed on an hourly basis. This billing procedure often impedes practices from requesting regular consulting or additional reporting.

Don't sign any long-term contracts. Regardless of whether you pay a flat rate or hourly consulting, you should be able to move vendors within a few months if you are unhappy with the services. Online visibility is just too valuable today to lose more than a month or two of progress while you wait for a long-term contract to expire.

Contract Deal-Breakers

The devil is in the details with these contracts. Make sure that the domain name for your practice is in an account that you control. If you have control of your domain name, then the SEO company cannot hold your website hostage if you want to switch companies.

It's also important that you own the design and content of your website. This means you will not be charged an additional exorbitant fee (more than \$1,000) to transfer your site to another

vendor. Also, ask your vendor whether any of the functionality of the site is proprietary before you sign. If some features are proprietary, such as the before-and-after gallery or a video player, these functionalities may have to be rebuilt on your dime, by the new vendor when you move.

The only way to know if you are getting your money's worth is to set actionable goals with your vendor, such as a 15% improvement in traffic or a 20% increase in online leads, and then this goal should be the focus of your strategy. If you are dissatisfied, you should be able to break up with your vendor and find another company to help you achieve your goals—and get what you are paying for.

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