



How to evaluate SEO experts before you hire them

Use this checklist while reviewing proposals, talking to SEO agencies, or comparing providers. It's designed to help you spot strong partners, avoid red flags, and hire with confidence.

How to use this checklist:

Use this list to compare SEO experts side by side and identify where expectations, communication, or strategy may not align.

1. Success and goals

- ☐ The agency asked about our business goals, not just our website
- ☐ They explained how SEO could support leads, sales inquiries, or revenue
- ☐ They set realistic expectations for the first six to 12 months
- ☐ They talked about success beyond rankings or traffic alone

Notes:

2. Strategy and prioritization

- ☐ Their recommendations feel specific to our business and industry
- ☐ They explained why certain work comes first
- ☐ They outlined what progress should look like over time
- ☐ Their plan doesn't feel recycled or one-size-fits-all

Notes:

3. Communication style

- ☐ They explained SEO concepts in plain language
- ☐ They answered questions directly and clearly
- ☐ They were transparent when something was uncertain
- ☐ They adjusted explanations based on our level of experience

Notes:

4. Reporting and decision-making

- ☐ They described reporting as a tool for decision-making
- ☐ They explained how results guide next steps
- ☐ They talked about trends and changes, not just metrics
- ☐ They connected performance to actions and priorities

Notes:

5. Process and adaptability

- ☐ They explained their onboarding process clearly
- ☐ They described how they handle website or strategy changes
- ☐ They set expectations around collaboration and roles
- ☐ They showed they can adapt as SEO and our business evolve

Notes:

6. Red flags to watch for

- ☐ Guaranteed rankings or timelines
- ☐ Heavy jargon without clear explanations
- ☐ Vague answers to direct questions
- ☐ Tactics not tied to business goals
- ☐ Identical recommendations across different industries
- ☐ Blaming poor results entirely on algorithms or external factors

Notes:

Questions to ask before hiring an SEO agency

Strategy and priorities

- **“How would you approach SEO for a business like ours?”** Look for answers that reflect your goals, industry, and current challenges.
- **“How do you decide when to change priorities?”** SEO experts must explain how various factors (such as performance, constraints, or new information) influence strategy over time.

Success and measurement

- **“How do you define success for your SEO clients?”** The best answers connect SEO work to business outcomes and their clients’ specific goals.
- **“Which metrics matter most early on versus later?”** This shows whether the agency understands long-term growth and realistic expectations.

Communication and collaboration

- **“How do you typically communicate progress and updates?”** Find out if they have regular cadence, format, and discussion regarding performance reporting.
- **“What do you need from our team to be successful?”** When you hire an SEO expert, you work together as a team. Good SEO agencies are upfront about collaboration, responsibilities, and limitations.

Reporting and problem-solving

- **“Can you walk me through a time when results didn’t go as planned and what you changed?”** SEO pros would cite specific examples, explain what signals prompted action, and show how their strategy evolved. Look for accountability and problem-solving, not blame or deflection.
- **“What usually changes as an SEO campaign matures?”** SEO experts would typically explain that priorities, metrics, or focus evolve over time based on performance and their clients’ goals.

Adaptability and change

- **“How do you handle website changes or shifting priorities?”** Experienced SEO professionals know that their clients’ goals and priorities may change over time. When you ask this question, they must explain how they reassess strategy, ask follow-up questions, and adjust recommendations based on new directions. Be cautious if an agency treats changes as an inconvenience instead of an expected part of the partnership.
- **“What challenges do you anticipate with SEO for our business — and how would you approach them?”** This question reveals how an SEO expert identifies risks and constraints upfront. You’d want honest, specific answers paired with a clear plan for addressing challenges.