



Choosing an SEM Agency

Nine Questions to Ask



Getting Started

The SEM agency market is saturated with companies offering different levels of service that range in price and benefits. Yes, options are important, but too many options can lead to confusion. How do you figure out which agency is right for you?

The key is to do your research and ask the right questions. Make a list of your needs and have it in hand when talking to an agency salesperson. Discuss the needs of your team so that you get exactly what you're looking for. Surprises, when it comes to cost or anything else for that matter, are the last things you want after signing with a new digital marketing agency.

Be Prepared

Identify your specific needs, see what's on the market and spot potential vendors. Develop a list of questions and make sure to include those that follow as part of your agency investigation.

This eBook will help you hit the ground running so you can choose the best agency for your individual needs...

Contents

Nine Questions to Ask:

- 5 What's so special about your agency?
- 7 Can you promise me results?
- 8 Support – who, what, when, where, & how?
- 9 Do you have experience in my industry?
- 10 Can you show me case studies?
- 11 What's the real price tag?
- 12 Can I see your reports?
- 13 How do you optimize campaigns and set bids?
- 14 How do I get started?
- 15 **Good Luck!**



Choosing an SEM Agency Checklist

Questions

What's so special about your agency?

Can you promise me results?

Support – who, what, when, where and how?

Do you have experience in my industry?

Can you show me case studies?

What's the real price tag?

Can I see your reports?

How do you optimize campaigns and set bids?

How do I get started?

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QUESTIONS TO ASK



1. What makes your agency stand out?

This question will open a salesman's floodgates, so get ready for a deluge of information. This is the salesperson's moment to shine, so listen carefully because you'll have to decipher the real value from the sales pitch. If no concrete info is offered, walk away – no information equals a bad agency or a bad salesperson, either way, you don't want to associate with that vendor. What should happen is a showcasing of the agency's best assets and as you hear your inventory of needs being addressed, you can check each off your list. If there are services you need but haven't heard the salesperson talk about, ASK! You need the agency to meet and/or exceed your needs.

Each agency should have a few selling points that are exclusively their own that they claim surpass their competition. The key word here is "claim," so stay focused and ask questions: you want REAL value, not fluff. Ask for a demonstration! The salesperson should be able to SHOW you why their agency is the best.

If the salesperson does his job as good as he should, you'll be thinking "Wow! This agency is going to solve all my digital marketing problems and make my life a breeze!" That might be true, but you need additional proof before buying – it's time to do more research.

QUESTIONS TO ASK



You're armed with your notes on what the salesperson offered, so ask yourself these questions:

- Is this agency reputable?
- Are the services as good as the vendor says they are?
- How do I find out?

Go online and search for opinion-based social networks that provide views, observations and real-life testimonials from search marketing professionals that have tried working with the agency you're checking out.

This is a great place to find out what your peers think, including:

- Which aspects of the agency suck?
- Which aspects make the grade?
- What are the biggest complaints?
- What are the best services?
- What are the opinions on cost vs. value?

A helpful hint, stick to the comments and assessments made by industry professionals when looking up reviews.

QUESTIONS TO ASK



2. Can you promise me results?

You know what you need and what you want and there's no reason to settle for anything less. If you are ready to hire a marketing agency that means you're looking for real results and you need to feel confident that whichever agency you choose, you've found the best most capable partner.

There's a wide variety of agencies available at every price point, and it's important to know that a higher price tag doesn't mean you'll get better results. You may even find that a significant increase in price means a handful of services you don't even care about, so make sure you check twice.

You definitely want to see a demonstration. Some things to ask yourself in the demo include:

- Is it easy to understand? Can you see the results and interpret the data presented?
- Does the agency seem easily accessible and is information clearly shared with you?
- Do the results presented to you mirror your own business situation? If the information shown is all for big businesses and you're a mom and pop shop, that's a red flag.
- Is there a trial period?

Don't be an agency player and tease too many vendors – testing multiple agencies takes way too much time. Once you have your top vendors narrowed down then you can start taking advantage of their trial period.

Find your top agency candidate first, test second.

QUESTIONS TO ASK



3. Support – who, what, when, where, and how?

SEM agencies are designed to save time and money over the long run, but in the short term, getting started with an agency and answering all their questions can be time consuming. The campaigns need to be setup for all your ads across multiple search engines or publishers, and rules need to be created, tracking enabled and reports set up and ready to deliver. This is no easy task in the first few months, so there will be a lot of back and forth.

If you don't get enough information or support from the agency, this could hurt your campaigns.

So ask the vendor what the deal is:

- How much time and effort will it take to get it up and running?
- How many reports will you get?
- What aspect of this partnership are they going to take care of?
- What are your responsibilities?
- Are there any additional costs for their set up?
- Are their additional costs for future problems and account changes?
- How much support time, training and tech assistance is included in this partnership?
- When is the staff available for contact?

All of these details should be considered along with the price when narrowing down your options.

QUESTIONS TO ASK



4. Do you have experience in my industry?

When you're searching for the right SEM agency, one of the most important questions you can ask is whether or not that agency has experience with your specific industry.

An auto dealer has very different needs than a company in health, and depending on the list of requirements you created before meeting with agencies, you may need someone in your exact niche rather than someone who is a jack of all trades, with clients across all fields.

If an agency tells you they have experience in your industry, ask them for proof in the form of success stories.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

5. Can you show me case studies?

You want to know that someone like you has had success with this agency, and any vendor should be able to tell you that, straight-up. In fact, vendors should have case studies prepared with hard facts to show you on how their clients, of your size and niche, have benefited from their services.

Review each case study closely and ask:

- How does the company being highlighted compare to yours?
- What services provided by the agency seemed to help them most?
- Do you consider these services a selling point?
- Are the examples and numbers realistic for your business?
- What's missing from this case study?

Once you're done, get your team's feedback. They're going to be working with the agency as well, so see what they think.

You need to trust the agency you choose, so really evaluate your company against the success of others before being swayed one way or another. Ask as many questions as you can about each success story you see to get the full picture.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

6. What's the real price tag?

You've heard of hidden costs? This is one instance where you need to make sure you ask, ask and ask again about any additional charges outside of the basic agency fee. Many agencies or salesmen provide a basic pricing model, but when you get to the checkout, the cost to you is significantly higher.

There are some charges you may be surprised to learn were NOT included in the basic price, initially quoted to you:

- Setup fee
- % of ad spend
- Fixed monthly fee
- A jump in price from trial to sign up

Make sure you are aware of all costs before moving forward, and compare those prices with other vendors. There's no harm in negotiating a bit to try and get a better deal.

QUESTIONS TO ASK



7. Can I see your reports?

A quality SEM agency will offer high quality reports so you have visibility into the progress and success of all of your campaigns. A strong agency uses a robust PPC management tool, in order to create regular reports that are sent directly to you at the same time each month.

Some agencies provide complete, client-ready reports whereas others offer little more than aggregated data, so make sure to ask vendors what their reports include.

It would be great to have:

- Control over appearance of graphs, tables and templates
- Reports scheduled and sent to you regularly
- Various levels of detailed reporting
- Flexible graphs, tables and charts
- Reports with your brand logo on them
- Clean appearance and presentation
- Data from multiple sources
- Supportive images
- Reports available in Excel, PDF or PowerPoint

You will want to have regular reports that seem intuitive to you and your business. These will be one of the most valuable resources to learn how effectively your campaigns are running.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

8. How do you optimize campaigns and set bids?

When shopping for an agency, it may not seem important to ask the vendor if they use a tool that includes a bid management component or to see whether that system is rule-based or algorithm-driven, but it is!

If you want to understand how the agency claims to optimize your campaigns, ask about the tech they use.

A rule-based system makes changes to your account based on rules that an agency puts in place, influenced by your needs. This is a manual process and is time consuming on the agency's end. If you have multiple accounts and lots of campaigns to manage, rule-based bidding may not be for you.

An algorithm-based system manages each campaign automatically based on your goals, like optimizing for clicks or conversions. This is a technical solution built to maximize campaign performance given the set budget.

When selecting an agency, it's important to know the difference between rule-based and algorithm-driven systems so you know the depth of the agency's bidding capabilities. Once you understand the difference, it's up to you to decide which is better suited to your needs and choose an agency that uses that technology.

QUESTIONS TO ASK



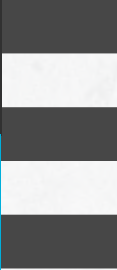
9. How do I get started?

If you're convinced the agency can work well with your industry requirements, if the success stories inspired you and if the representatives seem to have solid knowledge and understanding of the support and technology offered as well as the results to be expected, the next step is finding out how to get started.

When you're ready to get started, it's important to know where both you and the agency stand in terms of commitments, timelines and responsibilities. You don't want to all of a sudden be in the dark or all of a sudden be bombarded with emails and requests for information.

When you ask how to get started, you want a clear answer. Realistically, the agency will get back to you in a timely manner with forms, information, guides and more so you can start the setup.

If you are transferred back and forth, if you have to chase the agency down for updates or info, these are bad signs and it's not too late to look elsewhere for an agency that can follow through and give you the support and guidance you need.



Good Luck!

Once you've gone through the stressful and laborious process of choosing an agency, you've signed the paperwork and you're comfortably getting settled and adjusted to having an agency support your every campaign need, it's time to keep pushing your agency to deliver the quality service they promised along with those killer results.

Until then, remember, nothing is perfect, but with the right amount of research and patience you can really profit from an agency, and their management will make your life a whole lot easier.

ABOUT ACQUISIO

Acquisio is a high-powered performance media solution that enables digital marketers to optimize their search campaigns and report on all PPC initiatives including social, mobile, and display, all in one easy-to-use dashboard.

Acquisio's automated system does 90% of the work for its users, ensuring more of their time is free for analyzing data and improving campaigns.

Acquisio's best-in-class technology is enhanced by the company's outstanding support team of real people: Account Managers, Account Analysts, and the Acquisio Trading Desk.

The comprehensive and user-friendly Acquisio model ensures campaign managers maintain full control over every aspect of their online marketing initiatives, while maximizing their productivity.

With more than 500 agencies and 25,000+ advertisers in its portfolio, Acquisio is recognized as being one of the fastest growing companies in North America, winning the Deloitte Tech Fast 500 and Fast 50 awards for three consecutive years. Acquisio software is used by companies like GroupM, Sensis, iRep, Yellow Pages and Microsoft.

With its headquarter in Montreal, Acquisio also has offices in New York, Seattle, London, and Japan.

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