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Getting a startup website off the ground is the necessary first step to solving the visibility puzzle. With nearly every company these days putting heavy focus on online aspect of business, it's becoming increasingly competitive to get a new brand in front of as many eyes as possible.

According to imFORZA, 93 percent of online experiences begin with a search. Therefore, omitting search engine optimization (SEO) from the marketing mix is simply not an option. When a strategy is properly executed, it can work like magic to provide opportunities that may not have presented themselves otherwise. This is why it is crucial for young businesses to invest in SEO early on to get the ball rolling.

Here are three tips to keep in mind when choosing an agency.

## **1. Gauge the portfolio before reaching out.**

If you look at the website of an SEO agency, you will most likely find a number of case studies or a list of businesses they've worked with in the past. Even though there are certain reasons for some clients to remain private, many have no problem with putting their link on an agency's website. After all, it's free publicity. But, if there is no list of clients or any indication they've worked with actual companies, this is a potential red flag.

Looking at an agency's portfolio helps you understand what types of businesses it serves. Look for patterns related to your niche. For instance, if you are a law office and you see the agency has worked with a number of other firms, it shows they are experienced within your industry and know what it takes to see fruitful results. Conversely, if they have a portfolio spanning across a wide range of industries, this is a good sign they are a versatile agency and can easily adapt.

## **2. Examine and develop your goals.**

Once you've identified a number of potential agencies, you need to have a firm direction written up before making contact. What exactly do you want an SEO strategy to accomplish? Typically, such goals might be to increase exposure, boost leads or gain more conversions.

While these are great, you need to go a step further and provide tangible figures that define success. For instance, how many unique visitors per month are you aiming for? What is the exact number that will justify your ROI?

"The key to getting the best results is promoting client-agency transparency in terms of goals," says Eddie Madan, CEO of EdKent Media. "While we always expect to sit down give



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clients our best recommendations, the process goes much smoother when everyone is on the same page from start to end.”

Keep in mind, SEO is not a field where you generally see results overnight. In most cases, it's a slow process that requires consistent effort. As important as your overarching goals are, you need to have a clear roadmap developed with reasonable KPIs to judge your success rate. Without it, an SEO agency will find it much harder to help you.

### **3. Conduct a background check.**

When you are looking at the testimonials on an agency's website, they will most likely be the most outstanding success stories. While these are always good for reference, you need more to judge a company.

The stories you want to hear are those from the average clients. What was their experience with the company? If you can, try to get a hold of at least three businesses that have used the agency's services. In addition to asking about the end results, you will want to get a feel for the day-to-day interactions.

Ask for their honest accounts: Were they good with communication? Did they deliver on their promises? Did you feel like a priority? Also, check out the agency on the Better Business Bureau to see if they have a clean reputation.

Choosing an SEO team is similar to hiring a new employee. You need to consider third-party opinions to get a better impression of whether there might be a good fit for you.

### **Don't fall in love.**

Choosing a company to do your online marketing is an extremely important task. As many experts will tell you, the search engines are constantly changing, and it takes a keen eye to stay on top of the trends.

One of the most important things to keep in mind is not to fall in love. The last thing you want to do is jump the gun and choose an SEO agency that ends up wasting your time and money. As a startup, you are putting a lot of faith in whoever you select. Don't agree to work with the first one you talk to. Be picky!