

The Official Agency Interview Guide

Use this guide to assist during your next agency interview.

1. **What does your process for kicking off a new search program look like?** A good agency has a proper and formal kick off process, which will include the primary account lead, all digital strategists and day to day specialists on the team as well as your team. The purpose of the kickoff is to map out the effort, deliverables promised, expectations and timeline of the scope of work you hired them for. This is usually an hour in length and should be scheduled very soon after you sign off on your SOW.
2. **What types of websites or industries have you worked with?** There are some agencies who only specialize in one industry or market. This does not mean those types of businesses are the only ones, but is a good indication they found a specialty and solution to match it. It would be helpful to find out if your agency has worked with other B2B or B2C, and specific same businesses as yours to understand the work they provided and results.
3. **What is your methodology from start of working with a client and throughout the duration of the program?** This question forces your agency to talk about the amount and type of communication you'll have with them ongoing. It's important to establish a working relationship early on with your agency and know what type of deliverables will be delivered, by whom, and how those will be implemented, either by your team or by theirs. What type of access will your agency need including access to Google accounts, analytics and any historical reporting, etc? If they don't ask for any of this, that should be a red flag to you they are not doing their due diligence.

4. **How do you develop strategy for your clients? Who initiates strategy and do you include the client's team during this process?**

Inquire as to what method or practice they go through in developing a strategy. Ideally, your digital marketing agency should create a strategy for your business. If you have someone internally who manages all your digital marketing efforts and has possibly developed a strategy, they should be consulted and discuss any strategic plans with the agency to make sure you're all working collaboratively to achieve the most successful result.

5. **What type of tools are used in your agency? Are they third party or proprietary?**

I've worked with many agencies who both have their own proprietary software and also use third party software such as Brightedge or Conductor Searchlight, Marketo, etc. There isn't one right or wrong answer here, but your agency should have a variety of technology and human intelligence intermixed throughout your marketing program, and not solely reliant on just technology.

6. **What is the process by which you deliver your recommendations to your clients?**

This should not be via email or shared dropbox method, but ideally, you should have a monthly at the very least, if not weekly scheduled meetings with your agency to review all the material they've developed for you, justification and strategy that should be reviewed with you. You should fully understand all the information they deliver and how it directly impacts your marketing program and the objectives and goals set forth.

7. **What type of specific technical challenge have you experienced and what did you do to solve that? *(This would require you actually are aware of some typical technical SEO challenges, but if you do ask, you might hear some difficulty in answering if they haven't***

ever rolled their sleeves up and dug into major technical challenges – which occur on larger sites and ecommerce) This question is to really

understand the level of experience your team has. They should be subject matter experts at what they do and this should be backed by many varied and challenging experiences. All too often the sweet talking young dude tells you things he thinks can occur because he read them on someone's blog, or took a course, but unless you've actually dug in and rolled up your sleeves and lived it, you can't understand how to react when a potentially challenging situation occurs and your traffic is tanking.

8. **When do you determine if a content audit is required for a client's site?** I don't think this should be a question. You should have a regular look at your content and including a thorough content audit should be something your agency does at least annually for your site. What occurs in the content audit is another topic entirely, but I'll [leave this reference here](#) for you when you're ready.

9. **How do you understand user intent and what is the way you develop content strategy based on that?** This too should always be considered. This is 2018, and the Google algorithm requires you to think about your visitor's intent as they search for products or services your business offers. If your agency doesn't have a discussion involving user intent, I would seriously consider working with another agency who does. Through your content audit, you should determine where the opportunity gaps exist. What type of content is serving that visitor who has the intent to research a topic relating to the service you offer? What kind of content will serve the visitor who's intent it is to compare a product you offer with another of your competitors? User intent is intertwined within the buyer journey, which, if done correctly, results in a positive user experience and ultimately more sales for your business.

10. **Name at least three publications, websites, or industry conferences you visit or read to keep up with all the changes in the search engines? (I would write each of these down and Google the resources – SEORoundtable, Searchengineland, SMX are all good answers – hopefully they're familiar with those)** I'm still asked how I keep up with my education, and any digital marketing professional you work with, should be asked such questions. You may not know all the industry leading publications or conferences, but hopefully you get a solid understanding as to that individuals view on the constant changes that exist throughout the internet and especially when it comes to how it relates to customers, search engines, and various algorithms within many platforms. The most important takeaway here is make sure you hire the agency that continues to learn, doesn't know it all, and makes it part of their job to continue their marketing education.

11. **What types of deliverables do you provide on a monthly basis? Does this include some level of executive summary or next steps in the process or analytics to gauge how well the program is performing?** The next set of questions all relate to what your company should expect from your digital marketing agency. They should absolutely spell out what the deliverables are. When working for Accenture, there were many clients that asked us to provide in what form those deliverables were to be delivered, i.e. PPT, XLS, etc. They should also provide you with some sort of timeline, in the form of a Gantt chart, including milestones. Make sure they stick to those timelines, or discuss with your team why some of those dates may slip if that must happen. You should also expect an executive summary, or a presentation that should be stripped of any digital marketing jargon or technical language that only a subject matter expert might understand. This executive summary should be something your CMO or CEO should

easily read to learn the success or lack of, within the program and know easily what the next actionable steps will be and any predictive analysis.

12. How do you properly assess KPIs and ROI across all your

search programs? Early at the start of your program with your agency, this discussion should have happened. Your agency should coordinate with you and any other digital marketing professionals you either employ or work with as a third party. All should be on the same page with regards to your goals, objectives and key performance indicators and they should connect with all your programs.

13. How many team members will be assigned to this account and

can you guarantee the same team throughout the entire length of

the work promised? When you are considering hiring a marketing agency one of the first questions you should ask is who will be managing your account and who will be executing the work. Some agencies have experienced in-house teams that manage client work, while other agencies simply outsource client work to contract and offshore workers. Other agencies use a combination of skilled internal account strategist and a network of engaged freelancers for specific tasks. It's important you know who will be your main point of contact, and what strategist is on your account during

14. What makes a great client? Your agency has likely worked with lots of

clients. Some good, some not so good. Some more demanding than others? You want to avoid being that burdensome client. That means, understand how often you'll meet with your agency. What is an appropriate response time when you email your agency contact? And one of the most important, understand the expectations of what actually can be done and in what period of time. It's in your best interest to understand your agency is not made up of magicians who sprinkle pixie dust on your website to make the Google God smile on you. And no agency has a direct line to Google to get the rankings up (yes I've been asked that before). At the same time,

when evaluating an agency ask them what makes their best clients so good to work with, and what makes their worst clients so bad. Interviewing a potential agency is very similar to interviewing a potential new hire – there needs to be a great cultural and organizational fit.