



Omnizant

CHOOSING THE RIGHT  
**DIGITAL MARKETING AGENCY**  
FOR **YOUR FIRM**

8 questions to ask before you  
hire an SEO company

Marketing Agencies and SEO Consultants are sometimes viewed as snake oil salesmen or worse. While it is inarguable that a modern firm needs to be visible online, it is incredibly difficult to know who to trust with your money and, more importantly, your firm's reputation. Making the right choice can lead to an increase in new business for the firm, while the wrong choice can result in a damaged reputation with search engines and your target audience.

Several years ago, a reputable SEO industry leader conducted an experiment to challenge the many critics who claim that most SEO consultants are scam artists, providing minimal assistance at exorbitant prices. The experimenter posed as an inexperienced webmaster whose site had been suffering from a drop in ranking following a Google update. He reached out to over 30 third party marketing companies for advice on strategies to improve his site. Of all the responses, only 7 gave him correct advice on what he could do to help his site; the others delivered tips that would not help his site in any significant way. The findings confirmed what many suspected to be true – it is difficult to identify a qualified, trustworthy digital marketing agency.

The overwhelming majority of law firms recognize the necessity of a strong online presence, however most don't have the technical knowledge to build one. They rely on outside consultants who unfortunately take advantage of their lack of knowledge (and time to oversee campaigns) to sell them inadequate solutions. In an effort to help attorneys choose wisely, we've compiled a list of eight questions that should be asked during the selection process to ensure you choose an agency that can deliver a strong ROI.

## 1. Do you have experience working with legal professionals?

You wouldn't go to a podiatrist for an EKG or to a general dentist for braces, but when it comes to marketing, people tend to undervalue specialization. Sure, any marketing agency can put together an attractive website or set up AdWords, but that doesn't mean they can develop and implement an effective ongoing marketing campaign. And the truth is you may not even want them to try, considering the ethics requirements imposed on attorney advertisements in all 50 states.

Some components of search engine optimization are technical but given changes in Google's algorithms over the past few years, quality content is tremendously important, creating a necessity for specialized consultants who truly understand the industry for which they're optimizing. When it comes to the legal industry, specialization is required for three main reasons: 1) an understanding of the market and keywords, 2) content and effective engagement of prospects, and 3) insight into ethics.

**KEYWORDS** As you know all too well, little is simple when it comes to the practice of law. Understanding prospective consumers of legal services is also complex, requiring keen insight into digital content consumption habits and the ways in which prospective clients are searching for an attorney (these have changed drastically over the past few years). If you tell most marketing consultants that you are an estate planning firm, they will likely optimize your firm's website broadly for "estate planning" in your geographic location. With limited knowledge of the field, they're not likely to know that most people searching for an estate planning attorney won't search by "estate planning" but instead use layperson terms like "I need a will drafted" or "attorney to create a trust for my grandchildren." This knowledge gap can lead to seriously poor campaign performance.

**CONTENT** More importantly, would you be comfortable letting a non-legal professional, who has never worked with an attorney, prepare information that will represent your firm to the public? If you're like most attorneys, the answer is most definitely NO.

**ETHICS** As an attorney, you're familiar with the Rules of Professional Conduct and understand the ethical requirements which must be considered in any advertising (including your firm's website). The issue with working with a consultant who has no experience in the legal industry is that they have no knowledge of these requirements. Most will ask for the login credentials to your Content Management System and go to work optimizing your meta titles, descriptions and keywords. And this seems rather harmless because these parts of your website aren't visible on site pages but they too are subject to ethics rules. Far too often, SEO consultants become accustomed to using phrases like "Attorney Smith is the best divorce attorney in Newark, NJ" in the meta descriptions (these appear in the search engine results pages) in hopes of increasing the click through rates. Of course, the use of superlatives, like "best", which can't be substantiated are generally prohibited. Unless you routinely check on your SEO consultant's work (which can prove rather challenging if you're not highly technical or well versed in SEO), you may run afoul of ethics requirements without ever realizing it.

## 2. What will you do to optimize my site?

Marketing consultants love this question because many attorneys have no idea what the correct answer should be. If you have ever asked it, you've likely encountered a long list of tech gibberish; things like meta tag optimization, dynamic sitemap creation and submission, optimization of alt tags and off-site link building. And while some of these strategies may help, the list for many consultants is missing one HUGE, and the most important, component in success - ongoing content creation. If you are considering hiring a consultant, ask them for specific strategies that they will use to optimize your site. If a dynamic content strategy isn't a part of that list, take your business elsewhere - you're about to be ripped off.

Before you begin the selection process, take time to understand the difference between SEO and SEM. Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of increasing a site's visibility by increasing its ranking in the organic search results. Search engine marketing (SEM), on the other hand, focuses on Pay-Per-Click campaigns which will get your site in the "sponsored results" of the search engine result pages (SERPs). Of course the problem with SEM is that while it will get you immediate results, you will continuously have to pay for this top placement, and your site's placement in the organic results isn't likely to improve. For optimal results, a combination of both SEM and SEO is recommended for new sites, ensuring you get business early on while also building a strategy for long-term success in the organic results. Very often SEO consultants will make a Pay-Per-Click campaign the focal point of their work, meaning the minute you stop using their services, your business from the web is likely to take a hit.

Ask your prospective SEO consultants about both SEO and SEM, and make sure that both will be included in your campaign.

### 3. Can I see writing samples?

As the world of online marketing continues to evolve and the focus shifts to dynamic content, which delivers value to the site visitor, it's imperative that you select a consultant who can actually create high-quality content. Ask whether or not they have attorneys write legal content. And be sure to ask for writing samples. An experienced consultant who recognizes its value will undoubtedly have a great portfolio of sites, and content projects, which they've developed for clients. If they don't, don't risk it.

### 4. How long will it take to see results?

The answer to this question is of course two-fold, and is largely dependent on whether the consultant's strategy is based on organic SEO or paid search. If you are asking how long it will take to see visitor volume to your site increase, the response may be immediately by using a Pay-Per-Click Campaign. However, if you're asking how long it will take for your site's ranking to improve in the search engine results, the answer should be a few months; this is because it can take some time for your site to gain credibility with the search engines and ultimately update their indexes accordingly.

Any consultant who swears that they can obtain great rankings for your site overnight is lying, or worse, employing black hat strategies which may initially boost your ranking but may ultimately get your site penalized once the search engines catch on to the foul tactics. These penalties can last for months.

When done correctly, there is no magic bullet to improve your site's rankings, but a reputable SEO consultant will be able to present you with a plan to help you achieve your goals and a reasonable timeline outlining when you can expect to see results.

Be sure to ask prospective vendors if they offer any sort of guarantee in the event that they can't deliver on their promises or help boost your site's rankings. Guarantees are not common in this industry, but they should be considered as they can help foster greater accountability and ensure your marketing dollars aren't wasted.

## 5. **Are your sites fully responsive and accessible?**

In 2021, mobile phones generated 54.25% of web traffic while desktops accounted for 42.9%. To deliver a better user experience, Google released mobile-first indexing which evaluates a site's mobile experience (and how content is presented on mobile devices) to determine ranking. When speaking with developers, be sure that all sites they develop are fully responsive.

In vetting providers, you'll also want to ensure that the site they develop for your firm will be accessible to individuals using assistive technologies (for example, screen readers). Over the past few years, there have been thousands of lawsuits brought against companies that don't have ADA-compliant websites and experts warn this number will only increase in the coming years. To ensure your site is a valuable resource for all members of your community, including individuals with disabilities, your site should be developed in accordance with WCAG 2.1 Guidelines.

If a provider explains that they will provide you with an accessibility plug-in or widget for ADA compliance, insist that the site be developed from the ground-up in accordance with WCAG guidelines as these widgets will not help you deliver a fully-inclusive web experience or protect your practice from legal action.

## 6. **How will you measure success?**

This is an important question for you to ask both yourself and your consultant. Is your goal to just increase your site's ranking or is it to get more phone calls or, more specifically, an increase in the number of people who sign up for your monthly seminar? It's absolutely critical that both you and your marketing consultant understand, and agree on, a strategy to reach those goals.

Very often consultants just focus on your site's ranking and number of visitors. If they increase both, they've done their job. But what if the number of calls doesn't increase with that jump? Will they be able to help you understand where the visitors were lost? If not, you might be better suited working with a full-service marketing firm.

At the least, a marketing consultant should provide a monthly report which highlights the statistics that correspond to your particular goals, and have regular calls with your office to provide you with updates on the strategies being employed and any changes that may impact results. After all, you

## 7. How much will it cost?

As you probably already know, the costs can vary drastically and will largely depend on whether paid search is being used (this will require a monthly advertising budget) and just how much work is being done (if you are in a very competitive market, more will be needed). As a note of warning, be wary of prices that are too cheap. As with anything else, you get what you pay for. A lot of companies advertise packages starting as low as \$99 a month. At that price point, you can be sure minimal work is going to be done. Quality optimization is not something that can be automated and is labor intensive when performed properly. Generally speaking, an SEO campaign with a strong content component can cost anywhere from \$1000, in a smaller market, to \$10,000+, in a competitive one.

## 8. What will happen to my ranking if I stop using your services?

Since you likely don't want to be tethered to an agency for life, this is an important question to ask early on, and it will allow you to better gauge just how honest they are. If a consultant is implementing sound strategies and you find that your site's ranking does increase, you should not see any sudden drops should you discontinue the service. However, it would be fair to warn your firm that Google's algorithms are always changing (while the exact number isn't released to the public, it's estimated that the leading search engine makes anywhere from 500 to 1000 updates in a single calendar year) and consequently your site's ranking may change. Also, if your SEO Consultant was providing you with regular content updates, and then you fail to update your site for a few months, your site will also likely take a hit.

## CONCLUSION

Most attorneys aren't web development or online marketing experts; thankfully, you don't have to be one to select an honest, qualified consultant or agency. As you consider your options, don't be afraid to ask questions and if you don't understand the proposed strategies, ask for further explanation and examples of how this has worked for other law firms. And while you probably won't have the time to learn all of the ins and outs of SEO, remember the business goal of the search engines; they can only be successful if they deliver high-quality sites which are relevant to their users' search queries, meaning they can't afford to have poorly-designed websites with subpar content in those top spots. They have become very sophisticated in the past few years, and can now detect the difference between good, bad and mediocre. If a prospective provider is making claims and proposing strategies which even the worst website could implement, without delivering more value to the visitor, explore other options.

Be sure to take detailed notes throughout the selection process, and once you have made your decision, refer back to these notes and ask the provider about their progress in implementing the proposed strategies. A reputable consultant will request periodic calls to report on the campaign. Take time to ask questions during these calls, and learn the basics of digital marketing so you can expand your knowledge base during the process.