Red Flags of a Black Hat SEO Agency

By Melody Gandy-Bohr

You know that feeling you get from a suspicious offer — you don’t know exactly what it is, but something about it just doesn’t add up. As a small business owner, you’ve developed a sixth sense when it comes to protecting your practice, and you should trust your gut.

A good quality SEO agency can help you reach your goals by using legitimate Search Engine Optimization strategies instead of Black Hat tactics that try to trick search engines into ranking your website higher. While the gains promised by these companies seem incredible, if they’re being achieved through shady practices, it will be your website, and your practice, that feels the sting of Google’s retribution. Here are some red flags to look out for when choosing your SEO agency.

Guaranteed Results
There are new SEO best practices and search engine updates every day. SEO isn’t a fixed marketing strategy, and results cannot be guaranteed. If your SEO agency guarantees 1st page organic (natural and unpaid) rankings for your practice on Google, this should be a huge red flag. Either the agency knows that it can’t deliver on those results and is just after your money, or they are employing Black Hat SEO strategies such as link farming to get those results. In the latter scenario, your 1st page ranking will only be temporary once Google discovers that your site is violating their terms. Your practice website will be penalized and possibly blacklisted from the search engine — a serious consequence that is difficult to recover from. The only true way to “guarantee” first page results is to pay Google for first page Google Adwords PPC ads. Organic SEO rankings take time and work to achieve, and there is never a guarantee of how Google’s algorithm will rank your site.

They’re Keeping Their SEO Strategy a Secret
Although it is constantly developing, you can learn SEO if you have the time. If an agency won’t explain their SEO strategies to you, it’s probably because they are dishonest. Any reputable agency will gladly go into lengthy detail on how they optimize your site for better rankings. Black Hat agencies will be less than willing to explain their strategy, particularly if it includes no-no tactics like keyword
stuffing, invisible text and gateway pages. If the agency can’t be forthcoming about their policies, how can you trust them with your practice’s SEO?

No Reporting
Analyzing data and sharing it with clients is a common practice for all reputable SEO agencies. Only by looking at a detailed report of your website’s progress will you be able to gauge how your current strategy is performing. Before signing up with an agency, make sure to ask what kind of analytics reporting they provide. If they flat out refuse to provide you with reports, do yourself a favor and, run, don’t walk, away from them. It’s your practice, and you have the right to view and access your website’s analytics.

The Price is Too Good to Be True
Obviously you don’t want to spend an arm and a leg on SEO when there are many affordable options available. But as the old saying goes, you get what you pay for. If the price seems too good to be true, do some digging to make sure that you know exactly what you’re getting. Quality SEO requires detailed planning and a significant amount of time analyzing metrics and adjusting data. Don’t expect that kind of work for a dirt cheap price — in fact it is a telling sign if an agency values its services far below the competition. If they don’t value their SEO service, neither should you.

As you do with all of your practice decisions, listen to your gut. It’s usually right! There are numerous SEO agencies available, and that number grows every day. Don’t settle for an agency that sets off Black Hat warning bells. Make sure that your agency is completely transparent with you on their SEO strategy, before your practice - and your pocketbook - suffers the consequences.

Melody Gandy-Bohr is a marketing content writer who loves learning about new tips and trends related to online marketing. She writes and edits engaging marketing collateral, case studies and website content. As a food fanatic, Melody is known for exposing her coworkers to new and tasty delicacies. Interested in learning what a white hat SEO agency can offer your practice? Contact Officite at 855-208-9125 for more information!