

7

of

MISCONCEPTIONS

SEO

What You Need to Know Before Hiring an SEO Company

by James Reynolds



James Reynolds

 @FollowJames

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Reynolds is the Founder and Managing Director of **SEO Sherpa** and **Click Jam**.

James has spoken on the topic of Search Engine Marketing at more than 20 conferences around the globe. He is a regular columnist for publications such as Entrepreneur Magazine and Gulf Business.

In 2014 James was given the prestigious role of Chairman for the Middle East's inaugural search engine marketing conference; The Search Exchange. His network includes search marketing leaders like Rand Fishkin, Eric Enge, Larry Kim and David Amerland, allowing him to access the highest knowledge base fast.

James has appeared many times in the media discussing entrepreneurship and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). Appearances include Search Engine Journal, Gulf Marketing Review, Dubai One TV, The Business Breakfast and Communicate Magazine.

“Totally switched on about search. James is one of the new breed of SEOs that get the change and are running with it.”

— **David Amerland** —

Best selling author of Google Semantic Search and Getting to No.1 on Google

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“As Featured On”



INTRODUCTION

Hi! I’m James Reynolds. Firstly, I’d like to thank you very much for opening up this Search Engine Optimisation buyers guide. I’m grateful for the opportunity to provide you with information about SEO and help you navigate the minefield that is choosing an SEO provider.

If you’re reading this, you already realise that SEO is essential to making sure your business is competitive and profitable. If you can’t be found online, that’s a serious inhibitor to success these days. You’re probably now beginning to look for an SEO provider. However, I’d recommend you read this guide before you hire anyone.

In the time I’ve been in SEO, I’ve learned that it is the subject of much confusion. In fact, people have so many misconceptions on the subject, this is the reason I decided to offer this buyers guide so that when you select an SEO provider, you can make an informed and intelligent decision.

However, before I share my 7 misconceptions, I’d like to tell you some of the experiences of SEO I have witnessed, just so you can see how badly things can go wrong if you DON’T read this guide and take note...

INTRODUCTION

A client of ours decided, unfortunately, to jump ship to a provider that had been recommended by a friend of theirs. This provider had promised to 'game' Google at a cost that was less than the investment they were making with us. I took one look at this guy's set up and could see that the guy was juggling dozens of clients by himself and lacked the infrastructure needed to generate the dozens of qualified leads that we had been providing for them, and that he was probably partnering with a cheap foreign company. This is what happened... Within just a few short weeks, the work done by this SEO company caused their website to be entirely de-indexed by Google!

This not only meant that they could not be found in search results, with an inevitable loss in traffic and sales, but also meant they had to start again, from scratch; new identity, new website, new domain, new hosting, new investment of thousands in SEO. This is not a stand alone case, it has happened to thousands. If you read this guide, I'll help you avoid the pitfalls and make sure the same doesn't happen to your business.

The information I am about to share with you may just save you thousands of wasted dollars, and perhaps much trouble with my 7 misconceptions...



WARNING

GAMING GOOGLE

MAY RESULT IN

A

PERMANENT

LOSS OF TRAFFIC



MISCONCEPTION #1

RANKING A WEBSITE TAKES 12 MONTHS OR MORE

Have you been told that results take time in SEO? Or been put off taking the SEO plunge by lengthy and thus costly 12 month minimum contracts? Well, more often than not it doesn't take anywhere near that long for a good SEO provider to get results.

While it is true that in some cases it may take months for a website to be ranked, it is certainly also true that results can be almost instantaneous. When we take on new clients at SEO Sherpa, we usually expect to move them significantly (our average is 184 places) in less than a month.

Since all customers are different, some sites may take a little longer, and some will take less. In essence, every site will have a different time frame in which to expect results, but an SEO provider who tells you it will

MISCONCEPTION #1

RANKING A WEBSITE TAKES 12 MONTHS OR MORE

take a year and then precedes to lock you into a 12 month contract probably isn't going to get you great results, no matter how long you give them.

So, in that case how do you know when to expect results for your site? How do you know if a potential SEO provider is being honest and realistic, or just signing you up for a lengthy minimum contract when in truth they know they'll never achieve great results? It just depends on a few factors.

These factors will influence how quickly your site will rank:

- **THE AGE OF YOUR DOMAIN.** Quite simply, Google prefers older sites as it considers them to be more reputable.
- **YOUR PAGE RANK.** This is Google's measure of how reputable a site is from 0-10. If you have high quality content on multiple pages of your site, this should equal a good page ranking.

HOW
TO KNOW WHEN

TO EXPECT RESULTS

..... FOR YOUR

SITE?





FACTORS
AFFECTING
HOW FAST
— YOUR —
WEBSITE
WILL RANK

MISCONCEPTION #1

- **YOUR DOMAIN AUTHORITY.** Domain Authority is a rating determined mostly by the number and quality of websites linking to your domain. The higher the number of reputable websites linking to you, the higher your Domain's Authority will be. If your website has high Domain Authority it will rank more easily.
- **PREVIOUS SEO WORK DONE.** If no SEO work has ever been done on your site, then obviously it will take longer to rank your site highly than if your SEO just needs tweaking.
- **YOUR COMPETITION.** If you have strong competition with lots of SEO in place, it will take more time and resources to outrank them.
- **THE KEYPHRASES YOU ARE AIMING FOR.** If you are wanting to be ranked for a short, popular keyphrase (known in the business as short-tail), such as something like 'credit card', it may take an enormous investment in time, energy and resources for your site to see a difference in rankings. If, however, you are wishing to target a more specific phrase, such as 'best deals on credit cards UAE', it will be far easier to improve your rankings for that phrase.

MISCONCEPTION #1

RANKING A WEBSITE TAKES 12 MONTHS OR MORE

So, you've probably got an idea now whether to expect instant turnaround, or whether your site may need more work than some to get itself a higher ranking.

In that case, what kind of contract should I look for?

I'd recommend looking at contracts of around 6 months. As I said before, results may not be instantaneous, so just doing SEO for one to two months may not pay off.

However, if you've picked a quality provider you should be seeing significant improvements in your ranking by the 6 month mark.

Yet, don't make the mistake of thinking that fast results mean SEO comes cheap; I'll talk more about value for money in my next Misconception...





MISCONCEPTION #2

YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE CHOOSING THE CHEAPEST SEO COMPANY

The cost of your SEO supplier is of course going to be an important factor. Return on your investment is paramount, but don't think that going cheap when it comes to SEO is going to be worthwhile. Unfortunately, going with the cheapest often comes at the greatest expense!

You may have heard the popular phrase 'buy cheap, buy twice'. Yet, this is a risk many are willing to take. I have often heard business owners say "I'll go with the cheapest option and if it doesn't work out, I won't have lost much. I can just upgrade to a better supplier later". I'll explain why this is a VERY risky strategy in the case of SEO..

Unfortunately, the cheaper end suppliers of SEO tend to take short cuts. They prefer to buy 'spammy' links from sites such as 'fiverr.com', or use link farms or automation scripts.

MISCONCEPTION #2

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The idea behind this is that the many, many links to your site will give it apparent 'credibility' and make it appear to be very popular, thus appearing higher in search engine rankings. It is a cheap tactic for SEO companies to implement since it is fairly automatic, plus it means that even the weakest websites can appear to be popular and credible.

However, Google are wise to these techniques, and have focused their Google Panda and Google Penguin updates on making sure that using these automatic, spammy techniques are a waste of time. To Google, the appearance of only the highest quality sites at the top of their rankings is paramount.

Still thinking that a cheap SEO provider might be worth the gamble? Just in case you are, I'll explain why these types of SEO providers are not just a waste of time and money, but are also DANGEROUS for your business:





— BUY —

CHEAP

— BUY —

TWICE

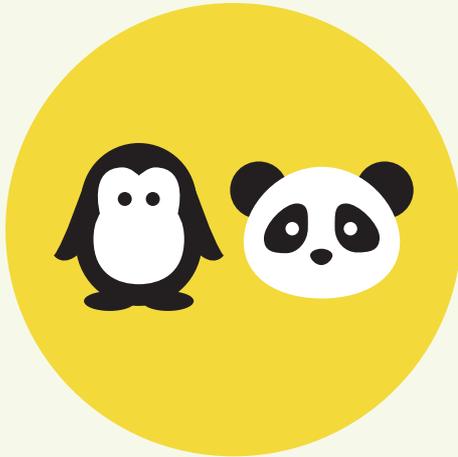
MISCONCEPTION #2

Using the techniques I detailed above may cost a business immensely. At the end of February 2012, the entire deindexing of some public paid blog networks, including much-used *Build My Rank*, meant that sites relying on low-grade backlinks from these networks fell foul. Some businesses disappeared from top google results overnight with a catastrophic effect on their online business profile and thus sales. Many SEO companies struggled to keep promises made to clients to keep their Google rankings high.

Google have made it clear that they plan to deindex all similar public blog networks in the future and has issued hundreds of thousands of warnings to webmasters to improve their marketing strategies or risk a slump in ratings, or worse still, a complete deindexing. This would have a catastrophic effect on a company, requiring them to completely rebuild their web presence from scratch with a new domain and hosting, plus new SEO.

MISCONCEPTION #2

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Google launched its Penguin filter in 2012 and has updated it several times since. Its primary function is to catch out 'spammy' sites and those in violation of its guidelines in regards to linking. It's worth noting that if you are caught out by a Google Penguin update and subsequently immediately make changes to your site, you will have to wait several months until the next update before you know whether these changes are acceptable to Google. That's several months of being stuck at the bottom of the pile, with obviously devastating effects on business.

Similarly, the Google Panda filter aims to penalise sites whose content is thin or which is duplicated from elsewhere; this technique is another 'black hat' method used by some SEO providers to climb the rankings.

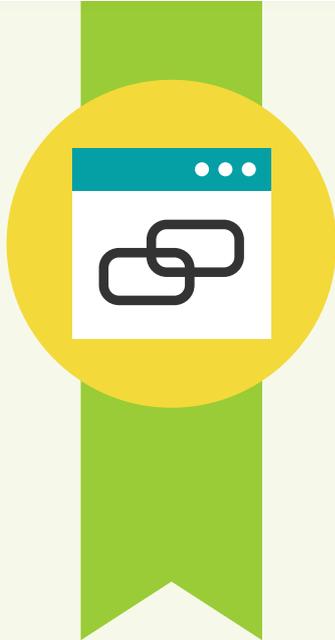
Below is a graph that shows the sudden decline in visits for the client I mentioned in the introduction, who left our services for a cheap SEO supplier. This time period coincides with a Google Panda update. It makes it clear: use a cheap supplier and suffer the consequences.

MISCONCEPTION #2

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Quality SEO takes time and resources from skilled people: original and quality site content, custom videos and one-to-one outreach are among the techniques that really work, and that Google favour. You can appreciate that this level of detail and skill needed means that good SEO can never be truly cheap.



MISCONCEPTION #3

THE COMPANY THAT OFFERS THE MOST BACKLINKS IN THEIR PACKAGE IS THE ONE YOU SHOULD CHOOSE

As mentioned before in Misconception #2, SEO providers add links from other websites to their clients to give the site credibility and apparent popularity. While the poorer SEO providers use this as their main technique (by using link farms and other automated ways of linking), better quality providers recognize that there are many other equally important factors in receiving a high ranking. Quality SEO providers do use backlinks, but they also ensure that content on sites is relevant and of high quality. They also appreciate that social media signals (i.e. how many people share your content on Facebook, Twitter, etc) are important in climbing up the search engine rankings.

MISCONCEPTION #3

THE COMPANY THAT OFFERS THE MOST BACKLINKS IN THEIR PACKAGE IS THE ONE YOU SHOULD CHOOSE

Going for quantity over quality when it comes to links is misguided, mainly because not all links are equal. Google employ a system called PageRank, named after their co-founder Larry Page. It is their method of determining how important a website is by measuring quantity and QUALITY of links to each page, with the underlying assumption that more important websites are more likely to receive links from other sites.

PageRank ranks each page with a value of PR0-PR10, with PR0 being the lowest value. When it comes to the PageRank for your own site, this is determined by the ranking of links coming to your site, so if you are linked to by web pages that are PR4, PR5, etc., your own PageRank would be higher than if you were linked to by PR0 and PR1 web pages. The links coming from link farms used by cheaper SEO suppliers tend to be those of PR0.

So, what is better - a hundred links of PR0 to your site or one of PR10?





— NOT —
**ALL LINKS
ARE CREATED
EQUAL**

MISCONCEPTION #3

Well, there is a lot of musing around the relative worth of the PRs. searchengineland.com speculate that each is worth around 5.14 x higher than the previous i.e. $PR1 = 5.14 \times PR0$, $PR2 = 5.14 \times PR1$, etc. Other research has suggested similar values. When the value of something increases exponentially like this, it obviously means that a link of PR10 is worth an incredible amount more than a PR1 or PR2 link.

So low ranking links used by poor SEO providers, bought in by link farms and networks are not just dangerous (see Misconception #2), but are not very useful in the first place.

VALUABLE links include those from other sites that are related to your own in terms of subject. Links from 'on theme' websites help search engines to decipher what your website is about and give it authority.

So, make sure you choose a provider that has means to build higher PR links from 'on theme' sites that relate to your own. Quality providers would have a 'small', portfolio of websites from which to provide links that is never likely to be discounted by Google, since it is neither automated or providing irrelevant links.



MISCONCEPTION #4

THE COMPANY THAT OFFERS THE MOST KEYWORDS IN THEIR PACKAGE IS THE ONE YOU SHOULD CHOOSE

Being ranked for a variety of keywords will be appealing to business owners. I'm sure many would like to think that no matter what term a potential customer is using in their search, their business will appear in the search results for that term and they will be found. However, as is often true, quantity doesn't necessarily mean quality when it comes to return on investment for SEO.

This is because of the way search engine users use their results. Research completed by Moz.com suggests that over 50% of traffic goes to the top entry in the results, over 20% look at least one site in the top 4, but less than 10% of users go beyond the first page and first 10 results .

MISCONCEPTION #4

THE COMPANY THAT OFFERS THE MOST KEYWORDS IN THEIR PACKAGE IS THE ONE YOU SHOULD CHOOSE

Average CTR



Average click through rate for top 10 positions in Google search results, according to SEOmoz.org

In other words, ranking highly (i.e the top 5) for one keyphrase will pay more than ranking several times on the second or third page.

As mentioned in Misconception #1, ranking in some keyphrases is harder than others, due to competition etc, so a company that attempts ranking in lots of keyphrases will be spreading their resources too thinly.

MISCONCEPTION #4

A good provider works by starting out with a limited set of high value phrases, and focuses on getting them highly ranked before moving onto another set. This means a faster return on investment in the short term, and in the long term the client will rank in high positions for many more phrases, helping them build a dominance of their market.

When a provider chooses to optimise for a limited number of phrases, a sign of quality is that they will be using variations of the keyphrase in their content. By using semantic technology Google are smart enough to recognise variations of a keyphrase and will rank a website for very many keyphrases (search terms) that have the same search intent.

Using key phrase variations is essential for fluid, natural sounding content and using them means avoiding over-optimisation penalties from the Google Panda updates mentioned in Misconception #2.



EFFECTIVE SEO
IS FOCUSED
— *around* —

THEMES
OF KEYWORDS

MISCONCEPTION #4

THE COMPANY THAT OFFERS THE MOST KEYWORDS IN THEIR PACKAGE IS THE ONE YOU SHOULD CHOOSE

The other bonus we have found at SEO Sherpa is that it helps to improve ranking on many related keyphrases, not just the particular one we are working on.

At SEO Sherpa we describe these sets of semantically related terms as key phrase themes.





MISCONCEPTION #5

HAVING EXPERT KNOWLEDGE OF SEO PRACTICES IS ALL AN SEO PROVIDER REQUIRES TO RANK YOUR SITE

Of course, I'm not saying that a good SEO provider doesn't need to know everything about SEO; they definitely do! It is an incredibly intricate subject that is constantly changing, and it takes absolutely expert knowledge to succeed at significantly improving rankings for clients. But what I am saying is that they need MORE than this...

A good SEO provider isn't just one individual, but a whole team of talented people. Quality SEO involves a large team of highly skilled writers, video creators and manual link builders who do everything by hand. Like most products, SEO that is created by hand with dedication and skill, tailored to the client takes a lot of people's time and is far more likely to please for a lot longer. Automated cheap SEO may get short term results, yet will not last.

MISCONCEPTION #5

A good SEO company should also have an internal Research and Development team to test and adapt to changes in the Google algorithms. This ensures a client's site always remains safe. SEO Sherpa have a team always working on testing and evaluating link sources, as will any good SEO provider, to ensure clients' sites are safe from future Google algorithm updates.

The quality provider will also have access to their own private website portfolio (as mentioned in Misconception #3) as a way to get safe, high PageRank links to client's site and to also ensure safety. Creating a niche publisher portfolio of this type takes \$100's of thousands of dollars to build and maintain and is therefore out of reach to the vast majority of providers.

AN SEO PROVIDER
NEEDS FAR MORE

— *than just* —

EXPERT KNOWLEDGE

IN ORDER TO

RANK

— YOUR SITE —



MISCONCEPTION #6

GO WITH A COMPANY THAT GUARANTEES NO.1 RANKING

Despite the fact that no-one can be sure of getting a number one ranking for your business, many SEO providers do offer it.

However, be wary! If something sounds too good to be true, it generally is. The way in which this guarantee works is that the provider will choose very obscure phrases to achieve a number 1 rank (just like those who promise to rank lots of keywords do- see Misconception #4). It would be fairly straightforward to achieve a number 1 rank for these phrases as they'll be little or no competition to do so. This also means that very few people will be using these search terms too, so it will drive next to no traffic to your site.

MISCONCEPTION #6

For example, it would be easy for an SEO provider to guarantee a number 1 spot for a phrase like 'underwater sumo wrestling in Mozambique' as there would be very few people, probably no-one, also trying to rank for this phrase. However, it is also unlikely that anyone would be searching for this phrase, so it is of little use to anyone to rank number 1 for it.

A reputable provider will offer high rankings on competitive key phrases and be realistic and honest about the difference it can make to your business. At SEO Sherpa, we guarantee to increase a client's rankings within 23 days or we keep working for free until we do. We are able to offer this guarantee to any new client because before we agree to work on their site, we make sure we are able to make a significant difference to their rankings with some simple checks on the site's content, and its competitor sites.



DON'T JUST GO
— WITH A —
COMPANY
— *that* —

GUARANTEES

#1
NO.1
RANKING



MISCONCEPTION #7

THE ONLY REASON TO DO SEO IS TO GAIN TOP RANKINGS FOR YOUR BUSINESS TERMS

Outranking competitors and achieving the lion's share of traffic for your business terms are, of course, major reasons why you should be doing SEO. This will be an enormous boost to your business. However, it is not the ONLY reason.

Another important reason is to secure your online reputation. By this I mean, if you are not creating credible content about your company and ranking that in the search engines then you are leaving the door wide open to someone else to rank on your behalf. For instance, perhaps a disgruntled customer could write something nasty and have that appear in the search results for your brand name.

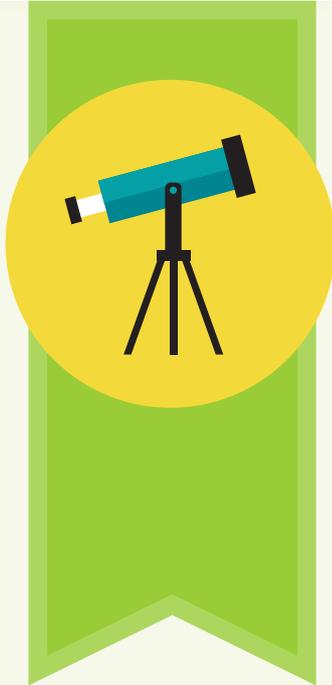
MISCONCEPTION #7

Imagine how a few bad comments will impact sales if that is what appears high in the listings for your brand.

SEO for reputation management is very important to secure your assets online. It can be done to either replace bad content that already exists in the search results i.e. by creating new content and ranking that and in turn pushing the bad content down the search results where it is less likely to be found. Or it could be done to secure your reputation for all your brand and product names by not allowing negative press to rank highly in the first place.

'Owning' the content on the first page or 2 of Google allows you to control the conversation happening around your products and brand. When you consider that 'Googling' a potential buy, or provider of a service before committing to buy is almost par for the course these days, you can imagine the damage that could be caused if bad news about your product ranked highly. Yet, significant work can be done to repair this with clever SEO.





LOOKING FORWARD...

After reading this, I hope you feel much more confident in your knowledge of SEO, and also how to avoid the SEO pitfalls that have caused others to fall.

SEO is more than just ranking higher on Google at this time; it's about ensuring your website and your brand maintains its reputation; it's about making sure that your status in search engine rankings is a long-term result and that the stream of traffic to your site is maintained and improved after the initial impact of SEO.

It should be clear now that SEO can have a huge impact on your business, for the better or unfortunately worse. However, by using this guide and not falling for the misconceptions listed you can be confident in finding a good SEO provider at the right price.

In the coming days, as you start thinking about engaging with potential SEO providers, I'll be sending you very useful further information. These FREE guides will help you choose the right SEO provider for you!

LET'S TALK

“ I’ve driven over 1,000,000 pre-qualified “wallet-out, ready to buy” visitors to my clients’ websites. Lets chat and see if I can do the same for you. ”

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JUST SOME OF OUR CUSTOMERS

NISSAN

DAMAC

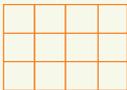


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