

SEO RESOURCE GUIDE

How to judge an SEO agency proposal

12 questions that separate outcome plans from **ranking theatre**.

12 questions

1-3 scoring

Side-by-side scorecard

INTRODUCTION

Most SEO proposals look the same.

They open with a custom audit describing your site’s weaknesses, promise meaningful traffic growth within three to six months, and close with a monthly retainer and a service breakdown.

Unless you know what to look for, it is very difficult to tell the credible ones from the ones that will cost you twelve months of budget and produce nothing you can point to.

Choosing an SEO agency is one of the more consequential decisions a business owner makes, and most people make it with very little information beyond what the agency chooses to share at pitch. This guide gives you 12 questions to ask before you commit.

1

Send ahead
Share the questions with your shortlist before the proposal meeting.

2

Score as you go
Give each answer 1–3 in the A, B or C box under each question.

3

Compare totals
The scorecard adds up every agency's score for you.

Tip: Pay as much attention to how an agency answers as to what they say. Specific, data-backed answers signal genuine capability. Vague or defensive responses are a signal worth taking seriously.

Scoring each answer

Score	What it means
3 Strong	Specific, data-backed, accountable answer
2 Adequate	Some specificity, but follow-up questions needed
1 Weak	Vague, defensive, or missing entirely

Reading the total (out of 36)

Band	Interpretation
29–36	Strong candidate. Proceed with confidence, confirm named strategist in writing.
20–28	Proceed with caution. Go back with follow-up questions on the weakest areas.
Below 20	Look elsewhere. The proposal is built around activity rather than outcomes.

The 12 questions · tap to jump

01 90-day success measures

p3

02 Keyword priorities

p3

03 Rankings to revenue

p3

04 Monthly reporting

p4

05 Technical SEO plan

p4

06 Who does the work

p4

07 Link quality

p5

08 Handling traffic drops

p5

09 Honest case study

p5

10 Site-specific risks

p6

11 Contracts and ownership

p6

12 Strategy fit for your stage

p6

01

What does success look like in month three, and how will you measure it?

A credible agency should name specific, measurable milestones at the 90-day mark: a baseline established in Google Search Console, technical issues resolved, target pages indexed and performing, early signals on organic click growth. Twelve-month projections are educated guesses. A 90-day plan is testable.

✓ STRONG ANSWER

Specific KPIs tied to crawl health, keyword visibility, and early conversion signals. A clear account of what the first 30 days will focus on and why.

✗ WEAK ANSWER

"SEO takes time" offered as an explanation rather than a plan. No benchmarks. No accountability mechanism at any specific milestone.

SCORE 1-3

A

☐

B

☐

C

☐

NOTES

02

Which keywords are you targeting first, and why those?

The answer should be built on data, not instinct. A good agency will have already researched your keyword landscape, matched search volume to commercial intent, assessed the competitive difficulty, and made a prioritisation decision based on how quickly rankings in that cluster could convert to leads or sales.

✓ STRONG ANSWER

Specific terms with volume data, intent classification, and a clear rationale for why those keywords are the right starting point given your business model and current domain authority.

✗ WEAK ANSWER

A list of broad terms pulled from a tool without explaining the selection logic or the connection to your actual revenue streams.

SCORE 1-3

A

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B

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C

☐

NOTES

03

How do you connect ranking improvements to revenue?

Rankings are a means to an end. If an agency cannot explain how they will track the path from organic keyword to business outcome, you will spend months reviewing ranking tables without knowing whether your investment is working.

✓ STRONG ANSWER

A clear description of the tracking infrastructure they will set up in the first 30 days, including how organic sessions will be attributed to specific conversion events in GA4 or your CRM.

✗ WEAK ANSWER

"We focus on rankings and traffic. Revenue attribution is on your side." That division leaves the most important question unanswered.

SCORE 1-3

A

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B

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C

☐

NOTES

04

What does your monthly report include, and can we see an example?

A reporting sample tells you more than a pitch deck. Look at whether the report shows organic conversions alongside traffic data, whether it attributes performance to specific changes, and whether it includes a forward-looking section explaining what next month's work is and why.

✓ STRONG ANSWER

A redacted real report showing organic traffic by landing page, conversion events from organic sessions, keyword position changes with click data, and a clear next-steps section tied to the data.

✗ WEAK ANSWER

Reluctance to share a real report, or a sample that shows rankings and total sessions without any conversion or revenue data.

SCORE 1-3

A

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B

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C

☐

NOTES

05

What technical SEO work will be done in the first 90 days?

Content and links are visible and easy to pitch. Technical SEO is the work most agencies deprioritise because it is harder to explain. But for most sites, technical health is the ceiling that determines whether everything else works.

✓ STRONG ANSWER

A specific technical audit process with named checks: crawl errors, index coverage, page speed, structured data, internal link architecture, duplicate content, and mobile usability. This work starts in month one.

✗ WEAK ANSWER

A plan that begins with content production and treats technical work as something to "address over time" rather than as a foundational first step.

SCORE 1-3

A

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B

☐

C

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NOTES

06

Who will be working on our account, and how do we reach them?

Many agencies win business at senior level and then hand it to a junior account manager. Ask for the name of the person who will be executing the strategy, their experience level, and how you reach them directly.

✓ STRONG ANSWER

A named senior strategist with direct contact details. The person presenting the proposal is, or can introduce, the person doing the work.

✗ WEAK ANSWER

References to "your dedicated account manager" who serves as an intermediary between you and an unnamed execution team.

SCORE 1-3

A

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B

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C

☐

NOTES

07

What is your approach to link building, and how do you assess link quality?

Link building has a long history of shortcuts that produce short-term rankings and long-term penalties. A credible agency should explain their qualification criteria for a link: domain authority, topical relevance, editorial context, and traffic to the linking page.

✓ STRONG ANSWER

A clear quality framework covering domain relevance, editorial standards, and how they approach outreach or content-led acquisition. Honest acknowledgement that high-quality links are slower to build than templated packages.

✗ WEAK ANSWER

Monthly link quotas without a quality filter, or vague references to “white-hat” practices without being able to explain what those are in concrete terms.

SCORE 1-3 A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ NOTES

08

What happens if traffic drops, and how will you communicate it?

Traffic drops happen. The question is not whether they happen but how your agency responds. An agency that goes quiet or deflects blame onto external factors without a diagnosis is not a partner.

✓ STRONG ANSWER

A clear communication protocol: they notify you before you notice, they provide a root-cause analysis within a defined timeframe, and they return with a prioritised response plan rather than reassurance.

✗ WEAK ANSWER

“Algorithm updates are unpredictable” as a first response, without a defined process for diagnosing or responding to drops.

SCORE 1-3 A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ NOTES

09

Can you share a case study where SEO took longer than expected, and what caused it?

A more revealing signal than their best-case examples is whether they can talk honestly about a campaign that was harder than anticipated. The answer will tell you how they handle complexity and whether they take responsibility when things do not go to plan.

✓ STRONG ANSWER

A specific example describing the complicating factor, what they did about it, and what the final outcome was.

✗ WEAK ANSWER

Only positive examples offered. Resistance to the premise of the question. Generic references to “SEO being a long-term game” without a concrete example.

SCORE 1-3 A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ NOTES

10

What are the risks specific to our site, and what could slow results?

A good agency does a real diagnostic before they pitch a plan. If they have done that work, they will be able to name the specific factors on your site that could complicate results: penalty history, a thin backlink profile, significant duplicate content, or a platform with known crawl limitations.

✓ STRONG ANSWER

At least two or three specific risks identified from a pre-proposal audit, with an explanation of how the strategy accounts for each one.

✗ WEAK ANSWER

A risk-free framing that presents a clean path to results. Generic "SEO takes 3-6 months" without site-specific context.

SCORE 1-3

A

☐

B

☐

C

☐

NOTES

11

Are we locked in, and what happens to our assets if we leave?

Contract structure tells you how an agency thinks about accountability. A month-to-month model means the agency needs to earn the relationship every month. Ask specifically who owns your Google Ads accounts, Analytics property, Search Console access, and any content produced.

✓ STRONG ANSWER

No lock-in contracts. The client retains ownership of all accounts, tracking assets, and content from day one. A clear offboarding process described upfront.

✗ WEAK ANSWER

12-month minimum terms, or vague answers about account ownership. Any suggestion that the agency "manages" accounts on your behalf without giving you admin access.

SCORE 1-3

A

☐

B

☐

C

☐

NOTES

12

What does a good SEO strategy look like for a business at our stage?

The right answer is specific to your business: your domain authority, your competitive landscape, your current traffic mix, your revenue model. A templated answer covering "content, technical SEO, and link building" tells you nothing.

✓ STRONG ANSWER

A response that varies by business type, site maturity, and keyword opportunity. References data from a pre-proposal audit. Acknowledges trade-offs between different strategic starting points.

✗ WEAK ANSWER

The same answer regardless of what you told them about your business. A service breakdown rather than a strategic rationale.

SCORE 1-3

A

☐

B

☐

C

☐

NOTES

COMPARE YOUR SHORTLIST

Proposal scorecard

Scores you enter under each question appear here automatically, and you can type straight into this table too. Totals and verdicts fill in as you go. Printing instead? Write your scores in and add each column. The differences will often make the decision for you.

#	Question Type agency names →	AGENCY A	AGENCY B	AGENCY C
01	90-day success measures			
02	Keyword priorities			
03	Rankings to revenue			
04	Monthly reporting			
05	Technical SEO plan			
06	Who does the work			
07	Link quality			
08	Handling traffic drops			
09	Honest case study			
10	Site-specific risks			
11	Contracts and ownership			
12	Strategy fit for your stage			
Total / 36				
Verdict				

● 29–36 Strong candidate ● 20–28 Proceed with caution ● Below 20 Look elsewhere

What to do with the answers

These twelve questions will not give you a definitive verdict on their own. An agency can answer all twelve well and still be a poor fit for your business.

What the questions will do is give you a much clearer picture of how an agency thinks, what they prioritise, and whether their model of success is built around your business outcomes or their own deliverable targets.

A NOTE FROM CCM

We've seen what happens when no one asks these questions.

We have been providing specialist SEO agency support in Sydney since 2008. In that time we have audited a significant number of accounts transferred from other agencies.

The most common finding is a reporting framework that was never built around business outcomes, and a client who did not know what to ask before they signed.

Since 2008

Specialist SEO support in Sydney

No lock-in

Month-to-month retainers

Senior-led

A named strategist with direct access on every account

Put us to the test.

Ask us all 12 questions. We'll answer every one.

clickclickmedia.com.au/contact-us