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When it comes to differentiating between search engine optimisation companies, many people succumb to the temptation of labelling companies according to their perceived ethical standpoint. While it is certainly important to bear ethical practice in mind when choosing between SEO companies, there is more to differentiating between companies than the simple white hat or black hat opposition.

Any business decision should be motivated by a desire to make the greatest possible profit while incurring the smallest possible risk. Choosing a search engine optimisation company should be no different. One common risk faced by businesses seeking an SEO agency is that some such agencies engage in illegal techniques. In extreme cases, these might involve hacking into authoritative government domains and creating unsanctioned links. Involvement with this type of clandestine activity can land an organisation and its associates in severe trouble. Without performing in-depth analysis, there is no easy way to tell for sure whether a particular company breaks the law. There are several indicators, among the most reliable of which is whether a company lists testimonials from recognised brands on its website - this is a good sign that they are trusted by companies with the resources to investigate the matter thoroughly.

One of the best ways to differentiate between search engine optimisation companies is by assessing their relative performance. This can be difficult without access to detailed analytics, and even when case studies are provided as evidence of success, these can sometimes be misleading. Client testimonials are one of the strongest ways to differentiate between SEO agencies on the grounds of performance, but it is best to obtain these 'straight from the horse's mouth' wherever possible. Although some companies are too busy to respond to such requests for information, many will make time to promote their trusted partners to other businesses.

Another useful way to differentiate between search engine optimisation companies is by searching for competitive terms related to the industry and seeking out their position. Although many SEO campaigns are successful by focusing on less competitive keyterms that demonstrate a strong desire to purchase a particular type of product, search engine optimisation professionals should have the necessary know-how to get themselves ranked for extremely popular search terms. If a company is relegated to the umpteenth page of search results for the term "search engine optimisation company" then that company lacks either in knowledge, business sense or operations capacity.

Personal correspondence can also be a good indicator of whether a particular agency will form a positive working relationship with your business. In some cases, a search engine optimisation agency may have all the skills and testimonials in the world, but some strong personalities or methodologies that make them incompatible with your business vision. In these cases, it is always best to go with your gut instinct.

Ultimately, you will have to rely on your business acumen to differentiate between one search engine optimisation agency and another, but bearing the above factors in mind can help you to make an informed choice.

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