QUESTIONS FOR *SEO* AGENCIES

Name of Agency:

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1. QUESTIONS FOR SEO AGENCIES

Please find below a short form containing some of the questions that we have for our potential SEO suppliers. It should not take longer than ten-minutes to fill out but would be tremendously helpful for us.

The questions can be found from the fifth page onwards. On the second page is a brief overview of what we consider to be spam, derived from Google Webmaster Guidelines and Matt Cutts' blog.

We take the quality of our suppliers very seriously. We are aware that SEO, or inbound marketing, is an unregulated industry. We are also aware that Google has strict and clear guidelines that should be adhered to for the safety of a website's Google positioning. Failure to adhere can result in short term gains but usually in medium to long-term losses. Because of this we ask that all of our potential SEO suppliers answer the following, to confirm the quality of the work that we would expect from them.

If you could please email the completed form back to us, alongside your pricing and strategy proposal, we would be very grateful!

A summary of the Google Webmaster Guidelines can be found on pages two and three of this document. They have been summarised from the original version, as found at:

https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/35769?hl=en&ref_topic=6002025

2. DEFINITIONS OF LINK SPAM

Summarised from Google Webmaster Guidelines:

https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/35769?hl=en&ref_topic=6002025

And

Matt Cutts' blog: http://www.mattcutts.com/blog/

The below summary focuses on the definitions of several common forms of link spam as identified in Google Webmaster Guidelines and by Matt Cutts, head of the Google Webspam team. The summary focuses on link spam as opposed to other forms of spam. This is because link spam is the kind of spam that gets most businesses into trouble with Google, and we are therefore doubly cautious to avoid it. For definitions of **content spam, onsite spam** and other forms of spam, please refer to Google's Webmaster Guidelines (link above).

What is considered link spam?

A link is an important ranking factor as it acts as quality control for Google. A link from one website to another is considered by Google to be a vote of confidence from the linking website to the linked to website. If, for example, BBC news was to write an article, and in that article quote a business' representative, it may then link to that business' website as a citation. BBC news is a great website because it has great content and makes great recommendations. If BBC news started to produce poor content or link to poor websites (bearing in mind that people actually click on the links on the BBC news website and follow them to find the linked-to website), its users would have a poor experience and might stop trusting BBC news for its content or referrals. BBC news would be the loser in this case. Based on this, when BBC news (or any other good website) links to another website, Google considers it to be a vote of confidence for quality of the linked-to website (why else would BBC news link to it?). In turn, Google trusts that linked-to website to be of a good quality, thus increasing the likelihood that the linked-to website will rank well in the Google Search Engine Results Pages.

Spammy links are links that are sought from websites that exist solely or mainly to generate links (spammy guest blogs, link networks, link directories etc), or placed on good websites but in irrelevant areas (comments sections of blogs, author signatures on forums etc). These links do not provide quality control for Google, are not placed with the intention of a real user finding the link, following the link, and finding useful content at the end of the link. They are solely there to manipulate search rankings. In the case of spammy guest blogs the spam can be well disguised as relevant and high quality. But spam is spam and, when caught by Google, it can get the offending website into a lot of trouble.

Common forms of spammy link building

- Spammy Guest Posting/ Blogging

This is the industry standard 'spam of the moment'. Links from good, well read blogs with great content and committed and engaged readers are great. They provide the benefits of genuine online exposure (online PR) as well as Google ranking benefits. However because these links are difficult to obtain, many fake or erroneous "Blogs" have been created. Posting to these erroneous blogs is considered to be link spam. There are usually obvious tell tale signs to indicate a fake blog. The fake blog is sometimes well designed and there are usually word count and relevancy guidelines (sometimes with payment required). That aside, articles and links are usually guaranteed to be posted, in spite of quality. There are usually little to no loyal readers of the blog, little user integration and no committed blogger who blogs regularly on a subject that he or she is passionate about. Most "posts" seem to be written by third parties. There is little to no user value and the blog exists solely to generate links to other websites to manipulate search rankings.

- Reciprocal linking/ link exchanges

This is when two website publishers agree to link to one another to mutually enhance rankings. I.e. "I will link to you if you link to me".

- Link Networks

This is a more sophisticated form of reciprocal linking, in which a network of websites interlink in sometimes-complicated patterns to mutually increase link metrics whilst avoiding detection (usually unsuccessfully). For instance, website A links to website B, website B links to website C, website C links to website D and website D links to website A

- Link Farms

These are website that has no content and only links, sometimes in their many hundreds. Increasingly uncommon.

- Spammy Link Directories

These are so called directories. They come in different forms, usually categorised by industry i.e. "Business Directory", "Cleaning Directory" etc. Essentially they are lists of business names, often sorted alphabetically, with their website URL and a link (and sometimes contact details). Submitting a URL will guarantee acceptance and there is little to no quality control. The vast majority of online directories, with only a few exceptions (for instance, the Yahoo directory) have not active user base and are only there to generate links, thus being link spam

- Spammy bookmark site links

Websites that only exist to bookmark other websites, and with little-to-no active user base that trust the website to provide quality bookmarks

- Using automated programs or services to create links, or manual blog comment linking

These are programs or bots that automatically generate links. They usually post in places like the comments section of a blog. Links are usually of little use to the readers of the blog post and do nothing to enhance the blog post. Please note that blog comment linking can also be done manually, which is also spammy

- Spammy forum linking

These are defined by forum comments that do not enhance the topic of conversation in the forum, and are only there to generate links to the linked to website. Sometimes they come in the form of optimised links in the post or signature

- Hidden Links

These are links that are hidden in the page so that they are visible to Google bots but not to viewers

3. QUESTIONS

Link Building

If my proposal is successful, I confirm that:

1.   We would be engaging in a monthly link building campaign for the client's website

      ◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

2.   The links that we would build would be from relevant, high quality websites, avoiding links spam or links from websites that would be considered spammy by the Google web spam team, as defined on the second, third and fourth pages of this document.

To summarise the definitions of link spam on page two, link spam is considered:

a.   *Spammy guest posting/ blogging (defined by posting onto fake or erroneous "blogs" that exist mainly to establish links to other websites for the purposes of SEO)*
b.   *Reciprocal linking/ link exchanges*
c.   *Link networks*
d.   *Link farms*
e.   *Spammy link directories*
f.   *Spammy bookmark site links*
g.   *Blog comment linking and automated link products or services*
h.   *Spammy forum linking*
i.   *Hidden links*
j.   *Any other forms of link building that violate Google's Webmaster Policy or the spirit of the guidelines (thus exposing us to large risks from future updates), or that have been warned against by Matt Cutts (head of Google Webspam team)*

      ◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

3.   The links that we would build could be considered a form of online PR: they would be links from relevant, high quality websites with good levels of monthly interaction from real users, and would be good for both online exposure and referral traffic as well as for Google rankings

      ◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

4.   Further to question 3, we would expect the links that we would build to provide the client's website with noticeable levels of referral traffic from the linking websites.

      ◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

5.   We would not engage in the over optimisation of anchor text

   ○ I agree   ○ I do not agree

6.

a.   All of our link building would be done in-house

   ○ I agree   ○ I do not agree

b.   If your answer to 6a is "I do not agree", please specify to whom you would be outsourcing the link building for our campaign?

c.   If your answer to 6a is "I do not agree", would any of the link building for our campaign be outsourced to a business or individual working from a country where English is not the primary language?

   ○ Yes   ○ No

Link Examples

7.   Please provide four examples of links that you have built for existing clients in the past three-months. The links do not need to be from industries relevant to ours, but they do need to be of a like-for-like quality to those that you would be building for us, should your proposal be successful

a.

b.

c.

d.

8.   We would build links for the client that are of a similar quality to those showcased above (point 7)

   ○ I agree   ○ I do not agree

Onsite Optimisation

If our proposal is successful, I confirm that:

1.   We would not engage in keyword stuffing, keyword cloaking, doorway pages or any other form of web spam in the onsite optimisation of the website

         ◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

2.   We would not use duplicate content

         ◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

3.   We would not plagiarise other websites or other copyrighted material

         ◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

Content Creation

1.   We would be engaging in a monthly content creation campaign

         ◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

2.   The content that we would create would be of a high quality, and would not contain spelling errors or grammatical errors

         ◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

3.   The content that we would create would be unique to the client's website and not duplicated

         ◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

4.   The content that we would create would be interesting or useful and would be written to enhance the user experience (not just to gain content metrics)

         ◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

5.

a.   All of our content would be created in-house

         ◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

b.   If your answer to 5a is "I do not agree", please specify to whom you would be outsourcing the content creation for our campaign?

c.   If your answer to 5a is "I do not agree", would any of our content creation be outsourced to a business or individual operating out of a country in which English is not the primary language?

◯   Yes   ◯   No

Affirmations

If my proposal is successful, I confirm that:

1.   We would aim to achieve first page Google rankings for the client for the chosen keywords, and we believe that the strategies that we would employ would be sufficient to achieve this

◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

2.   The chosen campaign keywords would have decent levels of monthly search traffic, and will be confirmed by the client prior to the commencement of the onsite optimisation

◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

3.   We would abide by Google Webmaster Guidelines, as outlined in Google Webmaster Policy.

◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

4.   If there are any additional points or comments that you deem important then please note them here:

4. CASE STUDIES

Please provide 3 case studies of rankings achieved for current or previous clients. PLEASE MAKE SURE to only use examples wherein Google Webmaster Policy has been adhered to.

Client Name:

Website URL:

Keyword: **Rank:**

Keyword: **Rank:**

Keyword: **Rank:**

Example Link *(from link building campaign)***:**

Client Name:

Website URL:

Keyword: **Rank:**

Keyword: **Rank:**

Keyword: **Rank:**

Example Link *(from link building campaign)***:**

Client Name:

Website URL:

Keyword: **Rank:**

Keyword: **Rank:**

Keyword: **Rank:**

Example Link *(from link building campaign)***:**

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I acknowledge that I have answered the aforementioned questions truthfully and accurately to the best of my knowledge and in knowledge of Google's Webmaster Guidelines. I agree that if any points were unclear I took steps to clarify and cross check with Google Webmaster Guidelines. I agree that the answers given serve as a contract to protect the interests of the client and are legally binding. I agree that, if my proposal is successful, at any time in the campaign the campaign can be checked by a third party search analyst of the client's choosing to ensure compliance with my answers.

◯   I agree   ◯   I do not agree

Signed:

Print name:

Name of Company:

Position within Company:

Date: