



# How to Select Your First Digital Marketing Agency

When you need to expand your brand's reach, you turn to marketing. Generate leads and keep the sales pipeline humming? Marketing, marketing, and more marketing. The question is, how do you deliver on these important organizational objectives with limited in-house staffing or no marketing staff at all? You hire out to a digital marketing agency for help.

**Sounds easy enough!**



Not always, especially if you've never worked with a digital marketing agency before. What questions should you ask during your first phone call? What qualities should you look for in a reputable digital marketing agency? And what kind of results should you expect?

What the heck does a [digital marketing agency actually do?](#)

You have questions, we have answers. Tuck this little guide to selecting a digital marketing agency into your cap. Reference it early and often, especially when all those agencies start blowing up your inbox with emails and phone calls. Some are good. Some are bad. And some just love making promises.



# Why hire a digital marketing agency in the first place?

If you're like most companies, the precipitating event that sends you out searching for a digital marketing agency comes in the form of a simple question: do we want to do it in-house or outsource to an agency? The decision to go with a digital marketing agency is typically due to a few common scenarios:

- **Your in-house marketing team is small and overtaxed**, unable to scale up marketing activities to meet ambitious growth objectives. You need help.
- **The marketing budget is limited**, making it difficult or impossible to hire additional marketing staff.
- **Stale strategies and limited expertise** in areas of specialty like [SEO](#), [paid advertising](#), and [social media management](#).
- **Keeping up with your competitors is becoming difficult**. You know you need new technologies and innovative digital tactics to get ahead.

Sound familiar? Good! You're in the right place. Because choosing the right digital marketing agency really can provide you with fresh perspective and industry experience that helps you compete in invaluable (and measurable) ways. Here's how:





# What a digital marketing agency can do for you

There are a few core competencies of any modern, full-service marketing program that a good agency can and should deliver on, including:



Website development and optimization



Content creation and creative services



Search engine optimization



Pay-per-click (PPC) advertising



Social media management and advertising

**Search engine optimization (SEO)**, that slippery, widely misunderstood marketing essential that parks your website content on the front page of search engine results pages (SERP) for the branded and unbranded keywords you need to own to grow your website traffic. Learn more about SEO.

**Content marketing**, an umbrella category encompassing the writing, production, and dissemination of marketing assets that help generate, cultivate, and sustain momentum throughout the entire sales funnel. Content marketing includes both the assets needed—blogs, ebooks, video, and so on—and the business reason for creating them.



**Digital advertising** to make sure the right audience is aware—and engaging with—your brand. Managing digital ad campaigns is an art, one that ought to be data- and user-driven. Good marketing agencies know how to measure, monitor, and refine things like display, PPC, and social media advertising.

**Web design and development** to build professional, well structured, and search-optimized that are built to meet the high performance and web best practices standards called for in today's fast-paced digital environment. From front-end to back-end, start to finish, good web design and development can pay massive dividends.

**Brand reputation management** that helps establish, grow, and monitor your brand's standing on product, company, and employee review sites. What was once a nice-to-have is now essential—prospective employees and even investors evaluate review sites before making their final decision.

**Social media management** to keep your brand visible, relevant, and engaging in the channels that your target audience and existing customers use most. A good agency knows how to grow and capitalize on social media, rather than go through the motions.

A top-notch digital marketing agency will be able to not only offer you any or all of these services, but bolster their impact to your business by handling the strategy, tactical plans and campaign management, reporting, monitoring, and continual improvement.



# Wait, do I need all of that?

A digital marketing agency's suite of services can feel overwhelming. You might be asking yourself, *do I need them to do all of that?* Not quite, no. A good digital marketing agency will be sensitive to companies that are new to outsourced marketing services, or that have strict budget constraints. Maybe you'd like to start small with one campaign and then add additional services later?

The trick is to find an agency that's willing to start small and scale-up. Sometimes, it's better to start with a single campaign, business location, or project and then scale based on the results. *This is common practice*—there's no need to break the bank, necessarily, or dive in headlong with every kind of marketing tactic out there.





## The advantages of hiring a digital marketing agency

If you can handle it all using your in-house staff, more power to you! In our experience, though, even the deepest, most experienced marketing teams suffer from organizational silos and tunnel vision. A digital marketing agency often brings a fresh perspective.

First and foremost, it provides you with access to more diverse marketing skillsets without the cost of hiring additional staff members. Bingo! Agencies are often at the cutting edge of new marketing trends and technologies, too (since they have to remain competitive). Finally, most agencies have years of experience helping companies just like yours—the same size, vertical, and organizational needs—achieve their business objectives.

If you run marketing in-house, you know that everything is based on results. If your team isn't delivering on the advantages listed above, it might be time to seek outside help.

# Data analytics for the win

For whatever reason, be it limited resources and analysts or a lack of established data infrastructure, many in-house teams can not—or don't know how to—measure the efficacy of their marketing initiatives. Which marketing activities are actually attracting leads, conversions, and customers?

This is where a top-notch marketing agency can shine. Good marketing agencies spend time early on identifying measurable goals. They have the technical and strategic expertise to track these goals, report on them frequently, and refine strategy based on what's working and what's not. And the agencies that are serious about data analytics, often have their own [proprietary software](#) that pulls together disparate data sources.







# How to evaluate a digital marketing agency

When it comes to digital marketing agencies, it's a wide, wide world out there. The second the market gets a whiff of your interest, suitors of varying size and quality will abound. Here are some strategies to help you determine whether or not your digital marketing agency is the real deal.



## **Match their skills and experience to your needs.**

This is essential. Hold your agency's skills up to the light to determine if their specialty aligns with your specific needs. Generalists need not apply! Instead, look for an agency that specializes in a few areas and does them very well. These agencies will be better suited to deliver targeted results compared to a big firm that does a little bit of everything.



## **Remember that it's about more than skills and tactics.**

Bells, whistles, and fancy technology are nice to have (and they can help). But what you really need is an agency that has the strategic vision to act as your partner.



### **Cost should match value-add and experience level.**

It's true. And while it can be tempting to go with the cheapest option out there, cheap marketing agencies are often very much smoke and mirrors. The more experienced the agency, the more expensive (usually); but the more suited to help you achieve your business goals, too. Ask for examples and case studies specific to your business and beware agencies that promise results.



### **Partner with an industry expert.**

You can narrow the field significantly by only looking at digital marketing agencies that have experience in your industry and understand your unique challenges. If you're in manufacturing, you want an agency that's worked in manufacturing, don't you?



### **Assess their analytical abilities.**

Because being able to execute a marketing plan is only part of the equation. Data analytics is a huge component of developing successful digital marketing campaigns. An agency must be able to analyze performance and optimize accordingly. Look for agencies that can share case studies that contain real metrics. Does the agency have their own analytics platform? What analytical tools do they use? These are important questions to ask, too.



### **Read the reviews!**

These days, reading the reviews should be part of any good digital evaluation. Think about this, too: reputation building is usually part of what a good digital marketing agency can do for you. Read independent reviews to gain a better understanding of what it's like to work with them. Look for red flags.

**Be informed! Keep reading for 15 questions to ask a Digital Marketing Agency**



# 15 Questions to ask a digital marketing agency



1. How long have they been in business?
2. Are they members of professional organizations that are important in your industry?
3. What services do they provide?
4. What is their area of expertise?
5. Do I have to go all-in? Or do you offer smaller digital marketing packages so I can test the waters?
6. If we start with one or two campaigns, can we scale up? What does that process look like?
7. Have they worked with a similar company?
8. How did they help that company achieve results?
9. What was their approach?
10. What is their client retention rate?
11. What is the onboarding process like?
12. Do I have to set up all the new marketing software systems or can they help?
13. How long until we're rocking and rolling?
14. How often will I receive campaign updates and reports?
15. What metrics can they report on?

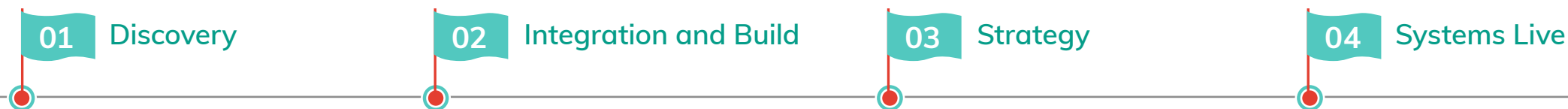


# What you can expect when working with a digital marketing agency

Whether you're hiring everything out to an agency, or you need an outsourced team to supplement the work of your in-house team, the agency-company relationship will be essential to success.

Good agencies will have an established onboarding process that helps outline, detail, and inform the way forward. Who are the organizational stakeholders involved, including points of contact, specialists, and decision-makers? How will new technologies be integrated with the existing tech stack? What about campaign management, communication, and ongoing reporting?

In our experience, thorough and transparent communication coupled with a thorough and transparent onboarding process—supplied and facilitated by the agency, of course—are the keys to successful agency-company relationships.



A good digital marketing agency should have defined, transparent onboarding process so you know what to expect. For a step-by-step overview to the marketing agency onboarding process, check out this book, [What to Expect During Agency Onboarding](#).

Considering hiring a digital marketing agency, but not sure what to do next? Feel free to reach out to us, we're happy to answer any questions. We also offer a [free digital marketing assessment](#) that may shed a little light on what services will help improve your bottom line.

**Sign up** for a free digital marketing assessment

