



10 Critical Questions to Ask Before Hiring a PPC Agency

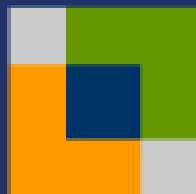
So many small and mid-sized companies today are experiencing the value of a reliable stream of leads and new business generated using pay-per-click (PPC) advertising on Google, Bing, LinkedIn and Facebook.

Sadly, others aren't.

The difference is often due to the skill level of the PPC agency or consultant with whom they're partnering. So how can you go about finding a good, dependable agency for your company?

By asking the right questions.

A little work on the front end will maximize the odds of success – and reduce the likelihood of regrets. Read on for 10 questions you need to ask a potential PPC partner before you decide to move forward with the engagement.



1

Are you “Google Certified”?

The largest pay-per-click advertising service by far is Google AdWords. Google recommends that you select a Google AdWords Certified Partner—**and if you’re vetting a certified company, make sure you’d be working with a certified individual in that company.** While it might seem self-serving for Google to say this, we absolutely agree with the recommendation. Google is still the leader in the PPC world, and who better to learn from than the master itself? Using a Google AdWords Certified Partner will *likely* give your PPC campaign that extra edge.



A Caveat:

We use the word “likely” above because it’s important to keep this in mind: Certification means that the person has spent a certain amount of money in the last three months and passed a proficiency test each year; it does not necessarily mean that the person will do a good job. That said, the certification test has gotten more difficult recently, and it would be difficult to pass it without on-the-job experience.



Do you offer free assessments?

Many pay-per-click agencies and consultants provide complimentary assessments of an existing campaign or recommendations and costs for a new campaign. **When discussing your business and marketing goals, we recommend that you ask your PPC candidate to do an assessment for you.** Going through this process will allow you to get to know the consultant better.

Here are some additional questions you should ask yourself as you work with the consultant:

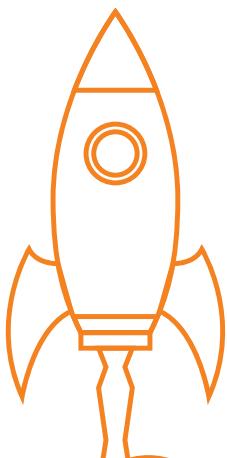
- Do you feel the consultant will take the time to understand your business? (Does he or she ask you questions about your business and your competitors?)
- Does the consultant take the time to answer your questions in clear, understandable language?
- Is the person responsive to your questions, requests, and emails?
- Has the consultant shared his or her track record with you, without disclosing their existing client's confidential information?
- Does the consultant clearly outline where the money is going (i.e. which portion goes towards advertising and which portion is paid to the agency or consultant for managing the account)?
- Does the consultant make promises? (Note: be wary of any promises; there are no guarantees in this field.)
- Do you feel comfortable with him or her?

Remember, while there are many factors in running a good pay-per-click campaign, it's not rocket science. Your consultant should be able to explain what he or she plans to do in a way that you can understand.

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Who owns the account?

You should have ownership of the account and be able to log in, see everything that's happening, and make your own changes. Within your account, there is a place to designate the consultant as the account manager. This means that the consultant can make changes to your account and generate reports but cannot see your credit card information.



This also provides a separate login for the consultant that's different from yours, as well as any other logins used by members of your team. **This is helpful because Google maintains a history of changes made in the account, and in that history, you can see who made the changes by login name;** having separate logins provides a clear record of who made the changes to the account.



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Are you conducting an account setup, or will you provide ongoing management of the account?

If you want to manage the day-to-day aspects of a PPC campaign yourself, make sure you work with someone who knows his or her role is simply to set up your account. **If, however, you're looking for a long-term relationship (a monthly retainer, for example), make sure the agency you talk to has a clear direction for managing accounts on a regular basis.** This includes monitoring spending and setting up and testing keywords, ad copy, and custom landing pages. They should also analyze the results of those tests and adjust those factors to optimize the campaigns so that they generate the most qualified leads for the least amount of money.

A good consultant will examine the Google Analytics data as well as the AdWords data to see how the pay-per-click campaigns are performing in the context of the overall website performance. An even more skilled consultant will also have suggestions for improving your website to increase the conversion of visitors to leads and sales.

Note:

Google Analytics (GA) is a free program (and the gold standard when it comes to understanding the performance of the website and Google AdWords campaigns). Your agency partner should be well versed in GA and should provide the installation instructions if your webmaster has not already installed the code.



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Who exactly will be working on my campaign?

This question is meant to ferret out two things:

1. To identify those PPC agencies who spend very little time on your account
2. To identify those who don't take a marketing approach

Find out how many other accounts your assigned point person is managing. The answer to that will provide additional insights.

For example, there are agencies that have their analysts managing 100+ accounts. Now, think about it like this. If they work 40 hours per week and every minute is dedicated to account management (which isn't possible), they can spend a whopping 24 minutes/week on each account. It's just not possible to manage so many accounts effectively, no matter what PPC platform you use.

It's safe to assume that one person can only manage 15-20 accounts – maybe fewer if they are large, complex campaigns.



What is your process for getting good results?

By asking this question, you're not looking for all the technical details ("we use the XYZ platform, we adjust our keyword bids X times per week to get optimum results, we do extensive keyword research, etc."). The objective is to dig into how they approach the marketing of your business online. Make no mistake. Marketing is the heart and essence of what a PPC company needs to be doing for you.

What you want to hear is, "First, we seek to understand your business, your offerings, and your prospects."

- What are you offering the marketplace via PPC?
- Who are your target searchers?
- What pain points are driving them to a solution like yours?
- What are the value propositions that can pre-sell your solution to the right people?

The keywords, the ads and all the adjustments that need to happen must be driven by a clear understanding of marketing fundamentals.

Too many agencies become enamored with the tools and tactics and shortchange the core reason for success or failure in PPC: message to market matching.

For example, we took over an account that had ads saying in effect, "Buy our product! Get it today!" Okay, but why? Why would someone pick your product over another product?

Asking a PPC agency to explain their process should yield critical insight into how they will obtain the needed information to effectively market your product or service... attracting the right prospects whose needs are best met by your offering.

Do you ever recommend that a company NOT do PPC? If so, why not?

This is a valuable question because it will help you identify those PPC companies that just want to sell you their services.

Here's the truth: PPC is NOT advisable for every company.

The problem is that some agencies seem to have one club in their golf bag. If all you have is a driver, you think the solution to every problem is "hit it hard, hit it far." That doesn't work in golf, and it doesn't work in marketing.

In reality, there are MANY ways to successfully generate leads and sales besides PPC. You want your PPC agency to recommend what's best for YOU, not for them.



What are the deliverables – and how do you measure success?

What information will the consultant provide to you and in what format? Ask for what will fit your needs. You could also ask to see a sample report so you know what you will be getting. He or she can simply block out proprietary data from the client report to show you the type of information provided.

Success should be measured by conversions. **What you consider to be a conversion—a form submission, a download, an email, a registration, a sale—is something to define with your consultant.** To track conversions, a tracking mechanism needs to be set up. The consultant should work with you to determine what to measure and then provide instructions as needed to the webmaster to incorporate the tracking code, set up the goals in Google Analytics, and import conversions into AdWords.



What results have you achieved for your clients?

Of course, you want to work with someone who is getting good results on a consistent basis. But what's the best way to determine this?

You can review some testimonials and case studies (every agency should have some of these). However, it's easy to cherry pick the good ones and not mention the ones that didn't go so well.

A great way to determine the totality of results is by looking at client retention. When many clients work with a PPC agency for a long time, this usually indicates they are pleased not only with results but with the working arrangement.

What's a good retention rate? Look for agencies that retain 75% of their clients for at least a year. There will always be client-side reasons that companies move on (their priorities change, they want to do PPC in-house, etc.) so you shouldn't expect 100%.

One more thing: If the agency requires a long-term commitment, and then brags about their high client retention rate, don't be fooled. It isn't necessarily willing retention. Instead, ask them what percentage of their clients renew their commitment.



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What commitment is required of me?

Some agencies seek to lock you into an annual contract. But, what if they're not getting the job done? Well, you're stuck.

Instead, you want an arrangement where the PPC agency needs to continually earn the right to work with you. If they do a good job for their client, they keep getting paid. If they don't, the client can look for someone who will.

If everything else sounds good about an agency, but they require a long-term commitment, you should negotiate that out of the arrangement. If they won't, consider backing away. It may be a red flag that this is the main way they get client retention (vs. good performance).



“He who asks the right question is a fool for five minutes; he who does not ask a question (or the right question) remains a fool forever.” – Chinese proverb

As it is in life, when it comes to getting the best PPC agency for your company, asking better questions usually produces better results.

The bottom line? It's your money, and any consultant or agency (PPC or otherwise) should be respectful of that. The consultant who happily and honestly answers the ten questions in this guide is one you can confidently add to your short list of prospects!