

About that cyber snake oil you're being pressured to buy



BY ERIC CAWLEY

You can have thousands of new website visitors in weeks.

You can have the No. 1 spot in Google within a month.

Your website is breaking a number of

search-engine rules and must be fixed immediately.

These are actual statements by supposed website “search engine optimization,” or SEO, specialists.

They are very similar to a practice also found in the construction industry: A home builder says he can construct your new home significantly faster and cheaper than anyone else. Invariably, you later discover the build-

er cut corners and/or used substandard materials, leaving you to pay for essential repairs or renovations.

No matter if it's a new home or a new website, these modern-day, snake-oil salesmen can and do take advantage of a person's naiveté. To have the upper hand:

1. Understand what really makes the difference. A few months ago, a Google senior manager revealed the

three most important criteria Google uses to rank a website's placement in its search engine results:

- Quality content, or the relevance of a webpage's content based on several factors, including originality and how often you use certain words in that content.

- Authority, or the number of links pointing to a webpage and how trustworthy those links are.

- RankBrain, Google's artificial intelligence system that helps sort through its search results.

Although you cannot control RankBrain, you can control the quantity and quality of your website's content and, to a lesser degree, the links that point to it.

2. Find a great writer. This is essential. When consulting an SEO “expert,” ask about his professional writing experience. How long has the expert been a copywriter? Where did he learn about and hone his professional copywriting skills? What results has his copywriting

brought about for his clients?

3. Be wary of certain guarantees. Ask about past results and how transparent the SEO “expert's” operations and data are to you. If the expert guarantees a certain number of links to your content, run away.

Legitimate SEO takes time to build and often longer to see results. You can succeed at it, provided you don't give in to cyber-snake-oil salesmen.

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