

Infinity Curve

12 questions to ask any SEO agency before you sign.

And what their answers should sound like.

If you've been here before — paid an agency, watched the months go by, and ended up unable to tell whether anything actually worked — this guide is for you.

Every question below is one we'd want you to ask us. Every answer is what an honest agency should be able to give without flinching. The point isn't to trip anyone up. It's to help you tell, in a 30-minute call, whether the people sitting across from you have done the work before, or whether you're about to fund their education.

Read through it once. Then use it. The questions where an agency fumbles, deflects, or smooths past are the ones that tell you what you need to know.

Before you start

Two things to keep in mind as you go through these.

First: the right agency for you might not have the most impressive answer to every question. Smaller agencies trade scale for accountability; larger ones trade accountability for capacity. Neither is wrong. What matters is that the answer is honest and the trade-off is one you can live with.

Second: trust your gut on tone, not just content. If an agency sounds rehearsed, oversells, or talks down to you, those are the same signals that predicted the last bad experience. The right partner sounds like a peer who happens to know more than you about this one thing — not like someone selling.

The questions

1. Who, specifically, will be doing the work?

What you're really asking: are the people who sold me also the people who'll deliver?

The single most common pattern in agencies that disappoint: the senior person who sold you the contract hands your account to a junior, or a contractor, or another agency entirely, the moment you sign. You never speak to the salesperson again. The people doing the work don't really know what was promised, and the salesperson can't answer questions about delivery.

An honest answer names actual humans. "Sarah will be your project lead — you'll be on calls with her, not me." Or, in a smaller agency: "I'll be doing it myself, with help from two specialists for technical work and content." If you get a vague "our team" or "we have specialists assigned based on need," ask the question again, sharper.

Red flag: any answer that doesn't produce a name and a role.

2. How much of the work is done in-house versus outsourced?

What you're really asking: how long is the chain between me and the person actually doing the work?

A lot of agencies sell SEO, then quietly pass the actual delivery to other agencies — who may pass it to wholesalers, who may pass it to freelancers in a different country. By the time the work reaches the person doing it, four layers separate them from your account, and nobody in the chain knows your business well.

An honest answer is specific about what's done in-house and what isn't. Almost every agency outsources something — link outreach, for example, often goes through specialists, because no agency owns the websites it gets links from. That's fine. What you want to hear is that the core work — strategy, content, technical, the things that depend on knowing your business — happens with people you can talk to.

Red flag: "everything is handled by our team" without specifics, or any reluctance to explain how the work actually flows.

3. What does a typical first 90 days look like?

What you're really asking: do they have a plan, or are they making it up as they go?

A real agency has a rough shape for the first three months and can describe it: audit and baseline in weeks one to four, technical fixes and on-page work in weeks four to eight, content and links ramping into months two and three. The specifics depend on your site, but the shape doesn't.

What you don't want is a fully rigid plan — that's the one-size-fits-all approach that doesn't adapt when something isn't working. But you also don't want vague promises ("we'll get to know your site first and then decide"). The truth is in between: a structured opening that adapts to what they find.

A good follow-up: "What would make you change the plan?" The honest answer is something like "if rankings move differently than expected by week six" — specific, observable, with a real response.

4. How will I know if it's working?

What you're really asking: what does success look like, in numbers I care about?

This is the question that separates real agencies from ones who hide behind dashboards. A bad answer talks about "improved visibility" or "stronger online presence" — meaningless phrases that can't be measured.

A real answer ties success to outcomes you actually care about: leads, calls, deals. Rankings and traffic matter, but they're inputs, not outputs. If an agency only reports on rankings and traffic and won't talk about whether those translated into business for you, they're measuring the wrong thing — and you'll get a year of "look how impressions are up!" without your phone ringing more.

The harder version of this question: "If we hit your six-month traffic projections but my deal flow doesn't change, what would that mean?" If they have an answer, they've thought about it. If they don't, they're measuring inputs and hoping for outputs.

5. What happens if I can't tell, three months in, whether anything has changed?

What you're really asking: how do they handle the moment when I get nervous?

Every honest SEO engagement has a stretch where the work has been done but the results haven't fully shown up yet — usually months two and three. This is the moment most clients start to wonder if they made a mistake. It's also the moment most agencies go quiet, hoping you don't notice.

A good answer acknowledges this directly. Something like: "Months two and three usually feel slow — most of what we're doing is laying foundations that compound later. That's when I make sure I'm sending you more updates, not fewer, so you can see the work happening even when the rankings haven't caught up yet."

The wrong answer is anything that promises you'll see results in 30 days. SEO doesn't work that fast. Anyone telling you it does is either lying or about to do something that'll hurt you later.

6. What's the worst thing that could realistically happen?

What you're really asking: are they capable of telling me the truth, including when it's not flattering?

An agency that won't name realistic downside risks is an agency that'll struggle to tell you the truth when things actually go sideways. Every campaign has dips. Algorithm updates happen. Competitors respond to your moves. Content takes longer to rank than expected. These are normal, and an honest agency talks about them up front, not after they happen.

A real answer might be: "The most common bad scenario is that we underestimate the competition in some keyword cluster, work hard for three or four months, and barely move the needle on those terms. When that happens, we'd shift the budget to where it's actually working and tell you why."

If the answer is "we don't really have bad scenarios because our process works" — run. You're about to hire someone who can't tell you bad news.

7. Show me a client that's currently struggling, and tell me why.

What you're really asking: can they talk honestly about failure?

This is the question that breaks most sales pitches. Every agency has clients where the work isn't producing the results either side hoped for — competition is stiffer than expected, the budget can't match the goal, the client's business has changed. That's reality. An agency that can't produce an example of a current struggle either has very few clients, or won't be honest with you about the ones they have.

A real answer doesn't name names — confidentiality matters — but describes a real situation: "We have a client right now where the budget just isn't enough to compete against the entrenched local players. We've been having that conversation with them. They'll either expand the budget, or we'll narrow the focus to sub-markets we can actually win." That's an agency that talks to its clients honestly.

Ask the follow-up: "When did you last tell a client to spend less or stop working with you?" An agency that's done this can tell you about it. An agency that hasn't doesn't prioritize client outcomes over revenue.

8. What's your reporting cadence — and what's in it?

What you're really asking: am I going to spend a year in the dark?

The standard answer is "a monthly report." The standard report is something an agency generates from Ahrefs or SEMrush in two clicks: keyword rankings, traffic, backlinks, maybe a summary paragraph. You could pull this yourself. It tells you almost nothing about whether anyone is actually working on your site.

What you want to know — and what an honest agency tells you — is what specifically got done, what's planned next, what's waiting on something, and what's changed in the plan. In plain language. Without you having to decode a dashboard.

Frequency matters less than substance. Weekly noise is no better than monthly silence. What you want is a steady drumbeat of what's real and a clear signal the moment something's off track. If an agency can't describe what their reporting actually contains beyond "the standard metrics," that's the level of communication you'll get all year.

9. Will you work with my competitors?

What you're really asking: am I one of fifty firms paying for the same playbook?

Some agencies happily take on multiple businesses competing for the same keywords in the same market. The economics work for them — same playbook, multiple clients, no extra cost. The economics don't work for you. You're paying for an edge they're selling identically to the person trying to outrank you.

A real answer is a clear policy. "We don't work with two businesses in the same market category. If we take you on, we won't take your competitor." Or a transparent version of the opposite: "We do work with multiple firms in the same vertical, but in non-overlapping geographies." Either is defensible; what's not defensible is vagueness.

If the agency dodges this question, assume the answer is "yes, we already work with several of your competitors, and we'd rather not tell you."

10. What are you going to do about links — and can you show me an example of a real one you built?

What you're really asking: is the link side of your business legitimate?

Link building is the part of SEO most likely to involve practices that look harmless in month three and tank your site in month nine. Private blog networks, mass guest-post farms, paid links on irrelevant sites — these can produce short-term ranking lifts and long-term damage that's hard to undo.

A legitimate agency can show you actual links they've built for other clients (with permission, anonymized). They can describe their outreach process — who they talk to, why those sites agree to link, what makes the link relevant. The links exist on real sites, with real traffic, with real editorial standards.

A red-flag answer is anything that emphasizes volume ("we'll build 50 links a month") without quality specifics, or anything that gets vague when you ask to see examples. If they won't show you a link, it's usually because they're embarrassed by what they'd show.

11. What does it cost to stop?

What you're really asking: am I about to be trapped?

The agencies that burn clients hardest are usually the ones with the longest contracts and the steepest exit fees. They lock you in for twelve or twenty-four months at the moment of maximum trust, then deliver to the floor of what the contract allows, because they know you can't leave.

A good agency can defend its commitment terms. SEO does take time — a one-month engagement isn't enough to do meaningful work, and an agency that signs you for thirty days isn't serious. But there's a difference between "we'd like a three-month minimum so we have time to do the work properly" and "you're committed to twenty-four months with a 50% cancellation fee."

The right answer respects that you're hiring on faith. Month-to-month after an initial setup period is the most client-friendly version. A short minimum term with no exit fee is also defensible. Anything more aggressive than that, you should walk away from — not because long contracts are inherently bad, but because the agencies that need them are the ones least willing to earn your continued business each month.

12. If you decided we weren't the right fit, would you tell me?

What you're really asking: are you capable of saying no to my money?

Most agencies will take any client who can pay. The good ones won't. There are situations where SEO is genuinely the wrong channel — too little budget against too much competition, expectations that no realistic strategy can meet, a timeline that doesn't match how SEO actually works. An agency that takes you on under any of those conditions is setting both of you up to fail.

A real answer comes with an example. "We turned down a roofing company last quarter because their budget couldn't compete with the established local players, and we couldn't honestly promise them the growth they needed at what they could spend." If they have an example, they've done it. If they don't, they take every client.

This is the question the entire decision rests on. The agency that's willing to walk away from your money when it's the right thing to do is the agency that will tell you the truth when something isn't working. Everything else flows from there.

One more thing

Most of the bad outcomes in SEO start with a sales call where the agency was telling the client what they wanted to hear. The questions in this guide aren't designed to expose deception — they're designed to make it harder to fudge.

Use them. Ask them of whoever you're considering, including us. If we ever stop being able to answer them honestly, fire us — that's the deal.

— Lionel, *Infinity Curve*