



How to Build Recurring Revenue by Adding SEO as a Service

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Introduction

Build a website. Find your next customer. Rinse, repeat.

As a web design / development agency, you've probably gotten good at acquiring new customers because your income depends on it. But beyond reselling managed hosting or setting up small site maintenance retainers, it's tough to build a healthy recurring revenue stream out of web development alone.

You may not realize it yet, but SEO is a natural extension of your skills and services. It may also be your ticket to long-term recurring revenue.



What's in This Guide?

In this guide, we'll help you overcome your reservations with a systemized way to begin structuring your SEO service offering and procedures.

What's NOT in This Guide?

This guide won't teach you the ins and outs of how SEO works, simply because there are already so many good guides that cover that! But we will point you toward some resources for getting up to speed on SEO basics and best practices.



Information in this guide courtesy of Lindsay Halsey, Pathfinder SEO. To work with a hands-on SEO expert, visit www.pathfinderseo.com

Reality Check: You Already Do SEO

When you're designing a website for a company, are aesthetics your only concern?

No, you're thinking about things like:

- Providing a great user experience
- Ensuring pages load quickly
- Developing a mobile-friendly, responsive design

What you may or may not know is that each of these elements are vital components of SEO. Whether your client is paying you for SEO services or not, you're already playing an important part in their SEO success.

Why Offer SEO as a Service?

For many of your clients, the cost of hiring a specialized SEO agency is prohibitive. At the same time, DIY solutions can be overwhelming when your customers are also trying to focus on running their business.

You can provide a solution in the form of guided SEO, working together with the client to improve their rankings over time.

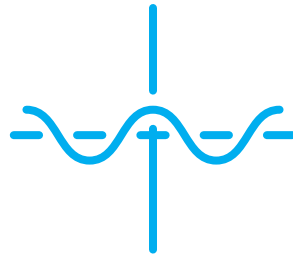
The Market Opportunity

SEO is a \$65 billion+ industry, and it's only continuing to grow for a few important reasonsⁱ:



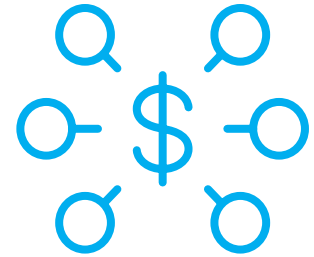
SEO works.

Organic SEO works about 5.66 times better than paid search ads, and 70-80% of search engine users only focus on organic results.ⁱⁱ



SEO solves a huge pain point.

When asked their top marketing challenges, 63% of companies say generating traffic and leads.ⁱⁱⁱ



Companies believe in SEO.

Well over half (61%) of marketers say improving SEO and growing their organic presence is their top inbound marketing priority.^{iv}

ⁱ <https://searchengineland.com/seo-industry-worth-65-billion-will-ever-stop-growing-248559>

ⁱⁱ https://www.hubspot.com/marketing-statistics?__hstc=191390709.667f01a94e616db539f33c50f37fa71f.1561045829452.1561045829452.1562866896141.2&__hssc=191390709.1.1562866896141&__hsfp=4248830902

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*

^{iv} *ibid*



SEO is a \$65 billion+ Industry

The Business Opportunity

Providing SEO services puts you right at the center of this opportunity, and gives you a way to elevate your business to new heights by:

1. **Maintaining relationships** – Suddenly, your client relationships are not one-and-done projects but ongoing partnerships. That means less time spent acquiring new customers and more time serving the ones you have.
2. **Winning more new business** – When you can offer your clients a one-stop shop for web services and SEO, you stand out from the competition, making it easier to close deals.
3. **Building your recurring revenue** – Having substantial monthly retainers can give you a more predictable business model and make long-term growth and hiring decisions much easier.

Why Not Offer SEO?

Just to do a quick gut check, let's talk about the doubts that may arise when it comes to adding SEO services.

Your Fears

You can do web design and development in your sleep. You may not feel the same comfort level with SEO yet, and that's OK. The first step is acknowledging your fears and understanding that they aren't insurmountable.

1. **Lack of expertise** – SEO requires fundamental knowledge sets you don't have, right? So how can you possibly bill yourself as an expert? The truth is you don't have to be an expert to be an effective SEO manager. All you need is a standard process to follow. (P.S. And as mentioned, your expertise is probably higher than you recognize.)
2. **SEO is overwhelming** – The tool options alone can make your head spin. But don't try to eat the whale in one gulp. SEO involves a steady application of effort over time in a focused direction. You'll take a step-by-step approach and, in doing so, will deliver valuable results for your clients over time.
3. **SEO changes too much** – This is the big one, right? How will you possibly keep up with the ever-changing search engine algorithms, and won't you wake up one day to find everything's changed and your clients have disappeared from Google? This fear is overblown. Google does evolve its algorithm, but that's all it is — an evolution. Seasoned SEO pros have seen that changes may happen, but they won't be unmanageable. Have confidence that you'll ride the wave like everyone else.



SEO involves a steady, step-by-step application of effort over time in a focused direction.



Your Clients' Fears

As much as your clients want and need SEO, they will have fears to overcome, too. They may think SEO will be too big of an undertaking for a few reasons.

1. **Too expensive** – SEO agency prices range substantially, so your clients may think they need an enterprise-level budget to achieve what they want. As we'll discuss in another chapter, you can set an appropriate monthly budget for each client by simply slowing or accelerating the pace of work.
2. **Too complicated** – The perception of SEO as being complicated typically melts away as you get into the nitty gritty. The great thing about SEO is it's highly systemized and tactical, so you can assure your clients that you'll work through the process step by step.
3. **Too much data** – Data does play an important role in SEO, but you can drill down to the information you find most valuable. It will be your responsibility to direct your clients toward the metrics that matter, ignoring the noise.
4. **Too time consuming** – SEO does take time and effort, and that's again why it's good to set a reasonable pace of work that is manageable for both you and the client. No one says you have to go from 0 to 60 on an SEO program. A bit of effort applied each month can make a big difference over time.



Where to Start

The first step is, of course, learning how to actually deliver professional SEO services. We won't cover the ins and outs of doing SEO in this guide because there are already so many great guides out there! Here are a few to help you get up to speed:

[Moz: The Beginner's Guide to SEO](#)

This guide is designed to describe all major aspects of SEO, from finding the terms and phrases (keywords) that can generate qualified traffic to your website, to making your site friendly to search engines, to building links and marketing the unique value of your site.

[Yoast: An Easy Guide to Getting Started](#)

If you're building on WordPress, there are great plug-ins like Yoast that can make SEO easier and more effective. This guide will teach you how to use the Yoast plug-in to get started with SEO.

[Wordstream: Learn to Optimize for SEO](#)

This guide will give you an intro to and overview of SEO by covering what SEO is and why it's important, SEO keyword research and targeting best practices, and on-page optimization best practices.

[Liquid Web: 30 Tips for WordPress SEO](#)

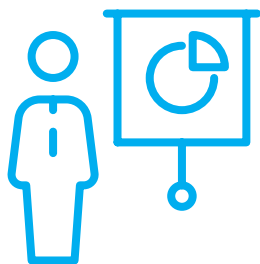
WordPress and SEO go together like peanut butter and jelly, and this guide gives you 30 ways to make the most of the relationship.



3 Ingredients to Successful SEO Relationships

Once you know how SEO works, it's time to start structuring your business strategies and procedures.

SEO is all about setting and following a systemized approach, and that starts from the first conversation with a prospective client. When you're implementing your SEO services, there are 3 ingredients for success.



Pitch



Pricing



Process



Pitch

You've got a prospect lined up, and you're ready for your first discovery conversation. There are three things to keep in mind during your pitch meeting.

1. Ask the right questions.

Your goal is to start setting the tone for a mutually beneficial relationship, and that means steering the conversation in the right direction. Ask questions like:

Q: How have you approached SEO in the past?

In response, the prospect will probably tell you a story or two about their past efforts (or lack thereof), their experiences with other agencies, and what is driving their current interest in SEO services. If you actively listen as they talk, you'll hear details that will paint the picture of what you can expect when working with this client.

You'll learn things like:

- the importance of SEO within the organization,
- the value they think it will add,
- their experience level,
- pain points they're trying to solve,
- expectations as they currently stand, and
- which people will be involved.

Q: What would your business look like if Google sent you twice as much traffic as they do today?

This type of question Move from selling service to selling the destination. People may say it will improve Tuesday-Thursday restaurant visitors, could hire more staff... Get them selling back to you about where they're heading by growing their business with more traffic. Better than talking about page titles, etc.

2. Avoid industry jargon.

This may seem like premature advice, given that you may not even know the industry jargon yet, much less picture yourself using it in meetings. But as you get up to speed on basic SEO rules and start selling your services, remember that your clients are likely beginners.

Using jargon in your pitch meeting can make prospective clients feel alienated, overwhelmed, and frustrated, so be sure to avoid phrases like these:

- Rich Snippet
- Featured Snippet → Above #1 (more exciting, creates collaborative sense they want to help)
- Canonical Tag
- 404 Page
- 301 Redirect
- SEO --> Getting Found (often people think it's paid ads, take SEO out)
- XML Sitemap
- Page Title
- H1
- Link Building
- H2
- Robots.txt
- WordPress

That's right, you should even avoid using the term "SEO" too extensively because it's often misunderstood to mean paid ads. Consider using a term like "getting found on Google."

*Replace industry jargon with its meaning.
Ex: SEO → Getting found
Featured snippet → Above #1*

3. Set clear expectations.

This is vital. It's easy for clients to come into an SEO contract with overblown expectations, such as wanting to rank #1 for a term that is general and extremely competitive.

Just because a client comes into your pitch meeting with lofty goals, it doesn't mean they will cut and run if you bring them back down to Earth. In fact, it's your responsibility to do so — unreasonable expectations will only lead to issues down the road.

Set clear and reasonable expectations by discussing the following in your pitch:

- SEO is collaborative – In fact, it takes an 80/20 breakdown of effort. Depending on the size of your contract, that may mean that you do 80% and your client does the other 20. Smaller budgets may necessitate that the client does 80% and you serve as more of a coach. Whichever approach you're taking, be sure the client understands that part of the responsibility for delivery and execution falls on their shoulders.
- Needs and next steps – Have a list of next steps ready so the client has action items when they leave the meeting. What will you need from them to put together a proposal (e.g. Google Analytics access, list of major competitors, etc.)?
- Desired timeline for results – Make sure the client knows that results will vary based on factors like how mature the industry is, how competitive the space is, and how much time per month both parties can devote based on budget and bandwidth.
- Proposal timeline – Let them know when they will hear back from you with a proposal, and honor that commitment.

Pricing Models

There are three basic ways to price SEO services: one time, monthly, or one time + monthly.

But there are a couple of reasons you're better off choosing one of the last two approaches, rather than treating SEO as a one-time project.

Why to Price SEO as Recurring Revenue

1. **SEO is always evolving** – If you optimize a client's website and then walk away, their results will diminish over time as Google's algorithms evolve. The goal is for the client's site to stay fresh, relevant, and consistently trafficked.
2. **The client's business is evolving** – Say they add new products or locations. Without optimizing for those efforts specifically, they're missing out on huge opportunities to drive additional traffic and revenue.

Three Tiers of Service

Client budgets and needs vary, so meet your client where they are by offering three service tiers:

1. **Awareness** – For the client who just wants to get things started. This will be a slower cadence of work and, therefore, command a lower budget.
2. **Action** – For the client who is ready to get results from their SEO efforts. This may be your most common SEO contract and should command a mid-level budget.
3. **Accelerative** – Some clients may be losing ground to competitors or have other reasons for needing aggressive growth. More work per month, higher budget.

Example Pricing Matrix

Prices should also depend on how competitive the client's space is and how much their competitors are spending on SEO.

	Local Business <i>Local competition & low spend</i>	Travel <i>Some large players & medium spend</i>	Insurance, Manufacturing, Technology <i>Highly competitive & high spend</i>
Awareness	\$300/mo	\$500/mo	\$1500/mo
Action	\$625/mo	\$1250/mo	\$3000/mo
Accelerate	\$1250/mo	\$2500/mo	\$5000/mo +++

Important Pricing Tip
Price your value, not your hours.

How do you define your value when you're just getting started? Think of it this way — you have an insider's

knowledge of the prospect's business and audience by virtue of the fact that you're building their website. You also have an all-access pass to implement their onsite SEO because you developed the site. So instead of thinking, "Who am I to charge market rates for SEO?" it makes sense to think, "I can deliver more value than anyone in the market."

Process

Have we mentioned that SEO is all about putting processes in place? Here's where the rubber meets the road. Make sure your monthly processes include these key elements.

Reporting

Deliver a monthly snapshot that shows your results and offers some insights into where you're heading. Focus on 4 key areas:

1. **What's happening in the data** – You can pull in reporting data from tools like Google Data Studio or specialized SEO software like SEMRush, MoxPro, or Pathfinder SEO.
2. **What you're working on** – Highlight the areas that are your current priority.
3. **Where you're heading** – Give clients an idea of what you're going to tackle next.
4. **What you need from them** – In keeping with the spirit of collaboration, make sure your monthly reports include action items for the client.

Communication & Collaboration

As you collaborate with clients, it's helpful to communicate all of your (and their) efforts through the lens of the four SEO pillars.

4 Pillars of SEO:

1. **Technical SEO** – Making sure search engines can access and index your website. This involves tactics like using SSL encryption, making the site responsive, creating a site map, and other technical best practices.
2. **Content & UX** – Creating a user-friendly site with high-quality content that matches the intent of the people searching.
3. **On-site SEO** – Focusing on incorporating and improving on-site elements like title tags, meta descriptions, H1s, etc.
4. **Off-site SEO** – Getting links to your site from other reputable sites, maintaining local search profiles, and maintaining a social media presence.

[Here's an in-depth guide](#) to the four pillars when you're ready to dig deeper.

Action Items

Each month, you should communicate in advance clear action items and deliverables to not only set your clients' expectations but make your own life easier.

The plan will depend on the pricing tier, with accelerated plans packing in more activity each month and awareness plans taking a slower approach.

3-Month Plan Example:

(See Where to Start section to learn more about each of the listed items.)

Month 1	Month 2	Month 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Kickoff: Intro to 4 pillars of SEO● SEO score on how they stack up within those pillars● Access to all the portals you need GA, GSC, and GMB● Keyword research to understand the audience● Competitive Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Share keyword research & competitive analysis● Page titles and meta descriptions● XML sitemap and robots.txt● 301 redirects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Review page titles and meta descriptions and then implement● Create a content strategy

Make It Happen

Building out your SEO services will take some research and dedication, but you can make it happen.

Using Liquid Web Managed WordPress to host your clients' websites makes providing SEO services easier for a few key reasons:

- **Speed matters.** Google is not just looking at the content on your clients' pages — it's looking at how quickly that content loads. When you build your clients' sites on Liquid Web Managed WordPress, we continuously optimize the back end to ensure the sites you build load quickly and smoothly.
- **Built-in features make SEO management simple.** Liquid Web Managed WordPress makes it simple to access analytics and SEO data at your fingertips, and also includes features like automatic image compression, automatic plugin updates, and free SSL setup to help ensure you've got the most SEO-friendly site infrastructure possible. We provide you with iThemes Sync Pro, which makes it easy to update and manage dozens of WordPress sites from one place. [Read all about iThemes Sync Pro in this ebook](#)
- **We're a wealth of WordPress knowledge.** From the plug-ins that will make or break your SEO experience to the best practices and tools for building an optimized site, we're constantly providing current information that helps our partners build better-performing sites.

We'll focus on providing you with reliable, fast hosting and great WordPress tools, so you can focus on building and optimizing your clients' websites.

Good luck on your SEO service journey! We hope to be a part of it.

Learn more about Liquid Web Managed WordPress

<https://www.liquidweb.com/products/managed-wordpress/>

Get help from a hands-on SEO expert

<https://www.pathfinderseo.com>



Liquid Web™

POWERING YOUR
BUSINESS POTENTIAL

Content. Commerce.
Applications.

About Liquid Web

Liquid Web powers content, commerce and potential for SMB entrepreneurs and the designers, developers and digital agencies who create for them. Everything we do is about being a partner you can trust. As an industry leader in customer service, we're known for our secure, reliable, fast, hassle-free hosting, backed by the Most Helpful Humans in Hosting™ (24x7x365 by phone, chat or ticket).

To learn more visit:

<https://www.liquidweb.com/products/managed-wordpress/>