



THE FOOLPROOF
26 **STEP FORMULA**
TO START YOUR OWN
DIGITAL AGENCY

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The Foolproof 26 Step Formula To Start Your Own Digital Agency In 2017

Imagine knowing every piece of the puzzle.

Imagine being able to know, step-by-step, what you need to do to **start** your digital agency. Get your first clients. And, attract the talent you need. How great would that be?

I know how it feels to sit there at the bottom of the mountain. You have no mentor. No guide. And, honestly, no *idea* what you're doing. You just turn up every day and hope to god you get one step closer to, well...wherever it is you're going.

It's scary as hell.

But it doesn't need to be. It is possible to take your digital agency from where you are now – just you, sat in that chair, looking at this screen – to six or even seven figure heights.

You just need to know the pillars of success. Those simple and easy steps that will take your agency to new heights. And, that's exactly what I'm going to show you in this article.

What You'll Learn

By the end of this article you'll have learned::

- The Complete A-Z Guide Of Starting Your SEO Agency
- Tried And Tested Pillars From Current Industry Professionals
- How To Start Your Agency From The Second You Close Your Browser
- No BS Information To Help You Break Your Limiting Beliefs

And, if you click the link below, you can get a **complete** checklist of these steps. Allowing you to follow all of these steps in **real time** and move at your own pace.

Actionable Goals



First, let's talk about **who do you want to be?**

In order to be the resounding success that we both know you can be, you're going to need clear goals to work towards. Because, as the advertising legend Paul Arden (<http://www.amazon.com/Paul-Arden/e/B001H6J1GK>) once said, "Without a goal, it's hard to score".

And there's a lot that's been said about goal setting. Hell, throw the term into Google and you can enjoy 8,590,000 plus results on the topic. But there's one element that SEO's always forget to do and that's this:

You need to reverse engineer where you want to be. Let me explain...

Let's say you've started an agency – we'll call it SERPed Heroes for now – what's the finish line for you?

- How much money do you want to make?
- How many clients do you want to have?
- What type of clients do you want to work with?
- How many employees do you want to have?

Once you know your end goal you can **work backwards** and create goals that fit your chosen pathway.

For example, if SERPed Heroes wanted in five years:

- To Make \$500,000 a year

- Work with 20-25 clients
- Work with clients in the Health Sector
- Have 10-12 Employees

You could look at how to reverse engineer that into goals and actionable steps.

And once you have your end result, it pays to set your business goals using SMART. Because, as boring and unoriginal as it sounds, it works at all levels. If you've never set a SMART Goal, here's how it should look:

- **Specific:** Be clear about what you want to do. Replace vague terms like, "be the best in the industry" with "Generate \$500,000 in sales from health sector clients".
- **Measurable:** This is answering the question, "How will I know when I've achieved it?".
- **Aspirational:** This is normally *Achievable*, but as research from Locke and Latham (https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_87.htm) found, having aspirational goals here is far more beneficial. Try adding 20-25% onto what you think you can achieve, and you'll find you're hitting goals faster than ever.
- **Realistic:** By the same token, know what's in your reach. Landing \$500,000 worth of work probably won't happen in your first year. But, over five years, why the heck not?
- **Time Bound:** Set a clear, specific, time frame to achieve your goal in. This can be short, medium or long term, depending on the goal you're setting.

So, based on the reverse engineering you read about a minute ago, here's how a SMART goal for SERPed Heroes might look:

*To land **one client** in the Health Sector that pays \$2000 – \$3000 per month by the end of the fourth quarter.*

You can then start to break that down into specific, actionable, steps, which we'll look at more in-depth later.

Get More From This Step

This awesome video from Entrepreneur shows you **exactly** how to do what you've just learned in this step.

Build Your Brand Identity



Okay, you've just looked at *what* you want to achieve, now let's look at **who** you want to be.

There are lots of reasons you need to have a clear brand identity. In fact, most of them are well known cliches like, "People buy from people they like". But there's one often overlooked, but incredibly important, reason that ties them altogether.

As Lois Geller once put it in an article for Forbes (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/loisgeller/2012/05/23/a-brand-is-a-specialized/#1e5d0b2504ad>), "A brand is a promise".

It's a promise you have to keep every single time someone uses your service. For example, SERPed Heroes would promise to...

"Create Search Content for the Health Sector that: adds value to users, generates income and is managed in house to save you time"

From this promise you could start to create a solid brand identity that suggests this promise to your clients. You can create:

- Logo's
- Slogans
- Tone of Voice
- Downloadable Content
- Services and Products

That's all based around this promise. Want a real world example? Take a look at Search Engine Land. What's their promise?

The deliver the latest SEO news and how-tos in short articles that are easy to read. That's what you expect from them **every single time** you visit. So if that's what you're interested in, you'll keep coming back as long as they're keeping it.

Don't get *too* caught up in your brand identity, either. It's important, but at the start you need to be **responsive** to what people want. Maybe there is an aspect of your brand that people resonate more with. Pay attention to the data and adjust accordingly.

Get More From This Step

Check out this video from Dan Martell. He takes you through some simple steps on what branding is, and how to stand out in your marketplace.

Capital, Do You Need It?



Starting an agency feels like it should be expensive, doesn't it?

That if you're going to get this business off the ground you're going to need a lot of investors and money. After all, you need to spend money to make money, right?

Wrong.

Firstly, check your ego. A lot of the time you want money because you don't want to swap your time for free. You want to get paid for everything you're doing. So, if that's the reason you *think* you need extra capital, you definitely **don't**.

Secondly, six figure businesses have been known to start for as low as \$62.50 (<http://liveyourlegend.net/how-6290-turned-into-a-six-figure-business-lyls-full-100-startup-roadmap/>). And, a lot of agencies start off as just a single person, like Mike Ramsey's Nifty Marketing (<http://niftymarketing.com/>), and end up as million dollar agencies (<https://moz.com/blog/from-zero-to-a-million-20-lessons-for-starting-an-internet-marketing-agency>).

He started off by taking clients on a Freelance rate, then growing his agency from there. One step at a time. Until he reached where he could hire someone. That's those goals, and actionable steps, coming in.

There are ways you can cut costs, too.

For example, you don't need **every** SEO tool under the sun. You could spend \$2000 – \$3000 a month in recurring costs just from these tools. Half of which, you'll never even use. Instead choose one or two tools that do everything you need them to do.

There's also the problem that having investors and partners detracts from your **ownership** of the agency.

The more people that are putting money in, or are sharing your company, takes away from what you actually own. You'll find the most successful agencies are the ones who knuckle down, go independant and turn themselves into a success on their own.

Get More From This Step

This post from Start Up Bro's documents how you can start a business for under \$100, with advice from experts in lots of different fields. It's worth a read if you really need to bootstrap to start.

Click here to read it (<http://startupbros.com/successful-business-100-dollars/>)

Develop A Business Plan (But Not How You'd Think)



Business Plans are *hard* to make in the world today. Damn, just take a look at how often Google updates itself, as well as **all** the channels you use to market yourself.

A five year business plan which used to be easy to implement in the 80's, 90's and early 2000's is almost impossible nowadays. As I type this, for example, millions of people are sending Snapchat's that didn't even exist five years ago.

So why the hell would you be able to predict, and plan, what you're going to do with your Agency every minute, of every day, for the next five years?

Don't even bother.

Instead, once you have your reverse engineered goal, you should look at actionable steps that can help you achieve those goals for **this year** and into next year (at a push).

Let's head back to the SERPed Heroes goal before, *Obtain One Health Sector Client*, here's how that could break down into actionable steps:

- **Goal:** Obtain One Health Sector Client
- Attend Five Local Health Sector Conferences

- Find (Or Create) 10 Health Sector Connections
- Create Downloadable Health SEO Content
- Find A Health Sector Endorsement
- Create Health Sector Portfolio Piece

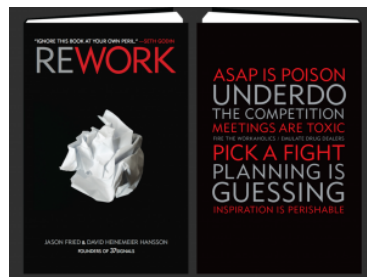
This is suddenly more achievable, more realistic and it does something else important...

It stays **flexible** and is easy to adjust to what happens along the way. Which, as you saw earlier, is important in today's SEO environment.

You need to know **what** you want to achieve – that's the business plan – but you need to remain open, and not rigid, against change.

Get More From This Step

I'd recommend you go out and pick up a copy of the book, *Rework* (<https://37signals.com/rework>), by the founders of 37Signals. It's one of the most forward-thinking books on starting your agency.



Expertise – Who Do You Need?



Let me tell you about one thing that **kills** lots of Agencies...

One person trying to do **everything**. Why does it kill them?

Simple. You're just not good at everything. Don't fight it, it's a good thing.

If you're the *SEO Guy* you're probably not that savvy with sales techniques, business management, finding clients or networking with people at conferences.

If you're the *Business Guy* you're probably not good at keeping up to date with Google Updates, Backlinking Strategies, understanding what *SERP's* are or knowing that a Panda update isn't the local Zoo adding more animals.

You may have some skills that crossover, but being good at **all** of these is beyond you. Especially in practical application.

Before you launch into becoming an Agency you need to find out what your – or your current team's – strengths and weaknesses are. Then decide if you need to hire someone, or bring someone in as a partner, accordingly.

If your head is full of Algorithms, maybe you're going to need to pull your MBA Student Buddy in to come and help you set up.

If you want to start an Agency and don't care about learning in the trenches SEO, you're going to have to find someone who is.

This is a highly personal subject, so I won't tell you what to do or who you are, it's up to **you** to be honest and find where you're strongest and weakest and build accordingly.

Get More From This Step

Self awareness is one of **the** key components for success. Because once you know who *you* are, you know who you can hire to cover your weaknesses.

This video from Gary Vaynerchuck hit's the nail on the head:

Find Your Value



If you've ever listened to an old school marketer they'll tell you that you need a Unique Selling Point (USP) to differentiate yourself. But that terminology can be **hard** to get your head around. So here's how you should look at it instead...

Where can you add value to someone that your competitors can't?

This can be **anything** that sets you apart. Do you:

- Create content *only* for a specific niche?
- Do you generate reports differently?
- Do you have a tried and tested strategy (with results)?

- Are you exclusive to clients over a certain budget?
- Do you focus on X, Y or Z that nobody else cares about?

Knowing this – and how it resonates with your potential clients – can help set you apart and make customers *more* attracted to you in the long run.

Get More From This Step

Fizzle wrote an evergreen guide to finding your Unique Selling Point. It's stood the test of time and is super easy to wrap your head around.

Click here to read it (<https://fizzle.co/sparkline/unique-selling-proposition>)

Generate Unique Content



You're at risk of becoming *just another* SEO Agency.

As I type this, in a coffee shop in Manchester, England, I'm within walking distance of at least 10 different digital agencies (<http://digitalagencynetwork.com/agencies/manchester/>). And these are just the ones I know about. So, on top of adding a different level of value, you also need to **separate** yourself from the competition.

The best way to do this is content.

There are hundreds, maybe thousands, of SEO Blogs, Twitter feeds and Facebook pages trying to get themselves heard. But *most* of them are creating the same content over and over and over again. What can you do differently?

- Do you run experiments on your blog?
- Do you expose claims from other SEOs?

- Do you have a YouTube Channel where you try challenges?
- Do you interview people about the SEO challenges?
- Do you hack the strategies of Google's top ranking competitors?
- Do you find back-doors where small businesses can outrank the Fortune 500?

The Skyscraper method may be effective. But, it's the strategy *everyone* is using right now.

If you want to make a splash and get your Agency noticed you **need** to do the *opposite* of what your competition is doing right now.

Get More From This Step

Okay, there's a little bit of extra reading here. Check out these articles to help you create better, more unique (or at least, successful) content:

How To Create Unique Content To Build Your Blog's Authority
(<http://www.problogger.net/unique-content/>) by ProBlogger

Why Most "How To's" Suck (And How To Write Great Ones)
(<https://smartblogger.com/how-to-posts/>) by SmartBlogger

How To Use Udemy To Create Dozens Of Content Ideas
(<http://nichehacks.com/content-ideas-website/>) by
Nichehacks

Have An Epic Portfolio

Actions have, and always will, speak louder than words.

If people see that you've worked with, and delivered results for, a brand that they know and trust, they're more likely to buy from you. Because if they trusted you enough to work with you, why shouldn't they?

Now if you don't have a portfolio yet, don't worry. That's easily remedied. You can simply try and do some free work for people (and build some good relationships while you're at it) to get these. Or, you can compile a list of previous projects your staff have worked on in the past as a placeholder until you've got some agency work under your belt.

A portfolio is now considered a **minimum requirement** for an agency to have. So, it's essential you get one in place. A good portfolio is made up of:

- Headlines and shorts snippets
- Further, in depth, result case studies
- Testimonials from clients
- Future goals and targets for that client

Showing people that not only you can deliver the results, but you will continue to deliver them to people continuously.

Get More From This Step

Your portfolio is unique to your agency. Your brand, your style of work, it all needs to become part of the portfolio.

This next guide is designer for people looking to be hired and what should be in their creative portfolio. It's aimed at freelancers, but the lessons carry across to agencies looking for clients too.

Click here to read it
(<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140714113053-15709148-what-do-clients-look-for-in-your-portfolio>)

Invest In Yourself

You read about Capital earlier and whether you need it or not. But you should *always* have a budget for self development.

You already know that you can't be good at everything. However there are parts of your business you **need** to get better at if you're just starting out.

It could be brushing up on your SEO skills; it could be learning how to generate leads; it could be sales; it could be people management or whatever it is that goes with your business.

You can find courses on almost **everything** on Udemy, or you can take a stroll down to your local bookstore. But having a budget to invest in yourself, or your team, is paramount to grow further.

Get More From This Step

Hongkiat put together an great list of Udemy courses for Budding Entrepreneurs. You don't have to take them, but one can't hurt, right?

Click here to read it (<http://www.hongkiat.com/blog/udemy-courses-new-entrepreneurs/>).

Join The Local Community

Working in the Internet Industry it's normal to focus **all** of your: networking, lead generation and content efforts on the online world. But by doing that you're missing out on the **easiest** way to build your business at the start.

Because, while you're searching for hard to access leads on the Internet, you're driving past **hundreds** of easy to access leads on your way to work. And, just because they're local businesses, doesn't mean they don't have a big budget.

For example, if I was started *SERPed Heroes* right now, I'd:

- Find local businesses in my Area
- Contact **all** of them
- If they didn't respond I'd *go* to their offices and schedule a meeting
- Attend local business meet ups
- Find conferences, events and forums happening in the local community
- Ask **everyone** I know if they, or anyone they know, needed SEO Services

Now the important note to make here is that you need to **join** the community and do some of the above:

- Provide value (this is easy locally, you'll be in the minority as an SEO)

- Show your different content
- **Help people with their problems**

Don't go straight into the sell. Don't be there to make money. Be there to get to know people, talk to them and become a **long term** part of that community. That's when you'll start to see real sales.

Get More From This Step

I recently wrote a **free eBook** on how to get your next five local clients, and how to become entrenched in the local community. All you have to do to get it is sign up for our mailing list below:

[INSERT SIGN UP LINK]

Keep It Simple For Your Clients

For all the years I've worked in SEO, I've learnt one incredibly valuable lesson:

Your clients don't give a crap about SEO.

At least, they don't care – even a little bit – about the technical Jargon that you love to use. Because it doesn't mean anything to them. So, don't try and sound smart or intimidating by using it.

You may not think it, but this is a technique a lot of SEO's employ to get clients.

Instead here's what they *do* give a crap about:

- Results
- Cash
- ROI
- More Traffic
- More Customers
- Less Worry

So find a way to explain it to them in terms that they **do** understand. Want an idea? Here's an exercise you can do right now...

Go to Google, choose a niche, and find a company on the back of the results. Like this:

I found this site, Health+Care, which is a medical conference in the UK.

Now with the company you've found, and I'm going to do it with you, I want you to figure out what their **dream** situation would be. If everything in their life would go to plan, what would happen?

For Health+Care that may look something like this:

To have a completely sold out conference of the UK's best health professionals. They'd have completely subscribed exhibition lists and attract the most important speakers from around the world, as well as the attention of pharmaceutical companies.

And, once you have that, you can flip it on it's head; what's the **worst** situation they could find themselves in?

That might look like a little like this:

*To host an event that is undersubscribed, **costs** more money to run than it makes, doesn't get any media or professional attention. Not having enough funds to run another conference, and going out of business.*

Remember, stop what you're doing and make these notes for the page you've found **right now**. Because once you know these dreams and fears you can begin to frame your SEO – both for sales pitches and for showing results – in a way they understand.

- “By getting more backlinks we can **increase** how many people see your event”
- “By guest posting here we can **target** people more accurately”
- “When we target these keywords we put you *in front* of people who will want to advertise at your event”

Now they're methods a business owner can get behind.

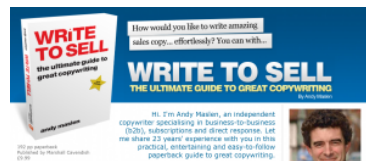
Get More From This Step

Learning to separate features and benefits is a key skill to learn. So, there are two tools you need for this step.

The first is this post from Copyblogger that asks, “Does your content pass the forehead slap test?”, and shows you how to extract benefits from features.

Click here to read it (<http://www.copyblogger.com/benefits-not-features/>)

The second I'd recommend is to buy this book from Andy Maslen called, *Write To Sell*. It's **the best** book on copywriting I've ever read and makes all of your writing much better. It taught me everything I know about keeping it simple.



Look For Ways To Save Money

There are certain parts of running an Agency that, on the surface, feel costly:

- Marketing
- Advertising and Exposure
- Finding Clients
- Providing Customer Service

Sometimes it feels like you're looking down the barrel of a big dollar shaped shotgun, doesn't it? Yet, with the right mindset, you can find ways to do all of this cheaply.

Look at using sites like UpWork (<https://www.upwork.com/>) to build a team of Customer Service reps that can work for \$5-7 dollars an hour. Or, look for different hacks and methods to get Facebook Ads down to 1c per click (or like these guys who got \$0.0005 per engagement (<http://www.upwordsem.com/how-to-hack-facebook-ads-down-to-0-005-per-engagement/>)).

And, as the old saying goes, Marketing is like sex (only losers pay for it). Find ways to build word of mouth, marketing that you can rely on. Offer unique sales points, add a value that nobody else can, or provide a service that people will scream about. It doesn't have to cost you anything, but it can drive you a **tonne** of business in the long run.

Get More From This Step

Entrepreneur put together an awesome resource of 50 ways to save money in your business. Bookmark it and look for how you can take a chainsaw to your business expenditure.

Click here to read it
(<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/71318>)

Make Connections In Person

Earlier in this article you learned about getting involved in the local community. This point looks at the topic in a much broader sense...

When I broke into the SEO field I was given a timeless piece of advice that has never failed me. And, I want to share it with you:

Meet **all** of your potential clients in person.

That's right, meet **every single one** of them in person. Because that's how you start to forge relationships that last.

In an online industry that sounds against the grain. You *should* be able to just send out emails, catch people on social media – or through Facebook Ads – and drive a tonne of clients your way. But, that's not the way it works, at least not until you're an **established** SEO agency with a track record.

That involves:

- Going to conferences

- Going to events
- Attending parties for their favourite charity
- Playing Golf with some Darren who you met at a networking event
- Going and sitting in their office and *showing* them what SEO is
- Having a Skype session where they can **see** you on their screen

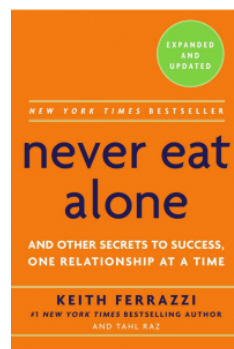
This is **the most overlooked** method of getting new clients in our entire industry. Many SEO agencies **fail** on this pillar alone.

Because when someone can look you in the eye, feel like they know you and get to like you, they **want** to spend money with you over someone they don't know.

You and I *both* know all of these businesses you interact with – either in the next six months or the next six years – will need SEO services. You just have to be the person the person that was friends with them **before** they realised it.

Get More From This Step

Kieth Ferrazzi wrote possibly **the best** book on networking when he penned, *Never Eat Alone* (<http://keithferrazzi.com/products/never-eat-alone>). It's easy to read and really easy to implement.



Nurture Them

Don't treat that point like the hard sell though. Once they say they don't need your services, don't fall off the face of the earth, like when a guy or girl at the bar tells you they're not interested right now.

Keep in touch. Check in. Ask the questions. Find out how their kids soccer practice is going. Take an interest in them as a friend.

Just because **they** don't need your services doesn't mean that they don't know someone who does. Who better to refer than their new SEO friend?

Get More From This Step

Hubspot put together a great guide on lead nurturing and keeping people in your funnel.

Click here to read it (<http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/7-effective-lead-nurturing-tactics#sm.00007nwc3ikyeqdqox28afyl4h69>)

One-Step Marketing Principle

Want to know why people are *skeptical* about your SEO agency?

It's because there are **thousands** of horror stories on the internet about how an agency took a company, spammed the hell out of them, took their money and left them to deal with the ruins of what was their website.

The number one way to stand out in SEO right now – and this is the best marketing principle you can employ – is to **show you care** about your customers.

That has to show through in your content. In your tweets and facebook updates and emails to clients and **anything** they can possibly come into contact with.

The intimidation of SEO algorithms doesn't work any more. The black hat approach to getting clients has overstayed it's welcome. The way to create an SEO agency now is to create one that cares.

Get More From This Step

Help Scout wrote a phenomenal post on how to get your customers to fall in love with you, and how you can demonstrate just how much you care, right here:

Click here to read it (<https://www.helpscout.net/blog/customer-appreciation/>)

Positivity In Adversity

Okay I'm going to change the pace just a little and hit some of the wishy washy, real life, stuff right here...

The road to a 6 figure agency is long and hard.

There's no overnight success. No short cuts. No hitting and hoping. Just hard work, late nights, blood, sweat and tears.

But you have to keep a positive attitude throughout it all. If you're starting an agency, you have a vision of what it is that you want to achieve. And, you have to keep that positive mental image of it for as long as possible.

As one of my mentors once told me, "Why get frustrated with no's? They're just stepping stones to your next yes".

Who knows, your biggest hit could be just one more rejection letter away?

Get More From This Step

Let's get inspirational, shall we? Here's a list of 16 extraordinary success stories who failed spectacularly before they made it to the top:

Click here to read it
(https://www.buzzfeed.com/kimberlywang/extraordinarily-successful-people-who-failed-miserably-be?utm_term=.ncogVWbDE#.rfx4xaDMr)

Quote The Right Price (For You)

Pricing is often the *most* asked question I get from start-Up Agencies. You've probably thought it yourself:

"How do you set prices that make me money but don't scare away potential clients?"

Let's be clear here...

Pricing shows how you value yourself to your clients. And, nothing is more valuable than yours (or your employees) time.

If you're starting from the ground up as a one person agency, it can feel more comfortable to charge \$40-\$60 an hour, or to take on clients for \$300-\$400 a month, because you can still make a **great** living doing it that way.

But, if you want more from your business, you can't stay that way.

Take a look at the Nifty Marketing example again (<https://moz.com/blog/from-zero-to-a-million-20-lessons-for-starting-an-internet-marketing-agency>), when he upped his prices to a minimum \$100 per hour, he noticed he started generating more interest, attracting better clients, making more money and growing faster. Because he started attracting the *right* people for his agency.

Instead of looking it as pricing clients out you need to look at it as pricing *the wrong* clients out. Because if you keep taking jobs at the lower rate, you'll find yourself overworked and underpaid compared to where you want to be.

Get More From This Step

Check out this episode of *The Fizzle Show* where they talk about how to price **anything** for your business:

Recognise (And Plan For) When You'll Need Employees

There will come a point where you **need** employees. If you're committed to your goals and your business, you will outgrow the ability to do work just on your own. A six-figure one man band might be a good dream, but it's highly unlikely you'll do that and keep any quality of life.

But the key to making sure your business survives the need for employees is to

scale how, and when, you hire them. This will vary from agency to agency, and the type of service you offer, but I find a good way to survive these transitions is to work in these steps:

- **Just You:** Start out as just you, knuckle down, and complete as much work as possible.
- **Freelancers:** When you build up enough, look to outsource work to Freelance SEO's. It could be specific tasks for a project, or full projects for themselves that you take a percentage of.
- **Part-Time Employee:** You either do this as a freelancer, or in-house. Take someone on a permanent contract for x,y or z requirements each week. This way you get used to paying out a salary, while not having too many overheads.
- **One Full Time Employee:** Once you're making enough money, take on a full time employee to alleviate your workload. And, to allow you to bring in more custom because you can effectively do double the work.

You could, theoretically, stop here and become a successful six figure agency. At least at the lower end of the six figure world. But, if you want to keep growing to get towards those top figures, you'll find there's a point where you need to take on even more employees.

It's possible to plan out when you'll need employees by your earnings, too. Which would look a little something like:

- **Just You:** \$30,000 – \$50,000 a year
- **Freelancers:** \$50,000 – \$80,000 a year
- **Part Time Employees:** \$80,000 – \$100,000 a year
- **Full Time Employees:** \$100,000+

This will change from agency to agency, and the amount of work you feel people can handle, but putting it in these terms let's you have a rough idea of when you'll need to start looking at taking someone on the books, and how much you can allow for it.

But, as with everything in SEO, timing and precision are key here. Don't start with employees from day one; and make sure you don't go too long without taking someone on board.

Get More From This Step

For some additional reading, you can check out this guide from HubSpot on, *When Should Your Agency Hire Its Next Employee?*

Click here to read it (<http://blog.hubspot.com/agency/hire-next-employee#sm.00007nwcm3ikyeqdqox28afyl4h69>)

Study The Art Of Sales

Sales is *the* bottom line for you. I'm yet to meet a successful agency owner that couldn't sell their services.

But, sales is hard and scary and tricky...I get it. That leaves you two options to work with:

- You can **hire** someone to sell for you
- You can **learn** to sell for yourself

Like all things in business you can either spend time doing something, or spend money getting someone to do it. The choice is yours.

Now become a salesperson isn't an overnight strategy. It takes time, and practice, and dealing with rejection. But you **have** to know how to do it.

Think of all of the components of sales and break them down:

- **Communication:** How good are your communication skills?
- **Product knowledge:** How well do you know what you do?
- **Emotion:** How well do you transfer emotion from what you do, to what they want?
- **Relationships:** How well do you create, and nurture, relationships with people?

These are just a **handful** of the components. And, as I spoke about way back at the start of the article, it comes down to being self aware enough to know what you can (and can't) do.

Get More From This Step

This is by far the best video I've found online about sales. It comes from seasoned professionals, and it's actionable straight away.

Track All Of Your Results

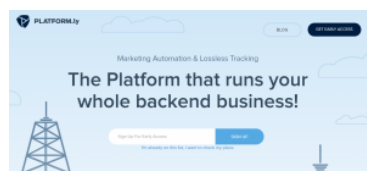
Everything your agency does, at any point, track it.

Firstly, understanding the data allows you to adjust and grow your business based on what works. Being able to develop a strategy is of an importance I really can't stress enough.

Secondly, it can become the portfolio piece that lands you a new client. There's nothing worse when you're pitching than *not* being able to demonstrate your value with real results.

Get More From This Step

The best data tracking and management software I know about is Platform.ly. They're waiting-list only, but once you're in, you can automate all of this stage.



Understand The Boring Stuff

There are some back of house bits of business you really need to understand, too. Here's the top three you need to learn...

Reporting Tools

Although clients may not be that interested in the ins and outs of your practices (at least at a technical level), you have a duty as an agency to deliver reports of what it is you're doing and the results you're getting. You'll also want to track all of these things internally, too.

I'd recommend starting with Microsoft Office Software to begin with, like Excel, because you can add your own branding and keep all of your files saved permanently for backup. Google Docs is a good second option, but you run the risk of things getting messy and disorganised quickly.

Bookkeeping

You don't need to be a fully chartered accountant to do this. But, you need to keep tabs on what you make, what you spend and where all of your money is going.

It helps to use invoicing software like FreshBooks (<https://www.freshbooks.com/>) or Hiveage (<https://www.hiveage.com/>) to keep track of your invoicing. While a simple spreadsheet of your monthly incomings and outgoings can work wonders to making sure you know where all your money is at all times.

And, you know, it always pays to not run up a tab on the company credit card either.

Budgeting And Forecasting

This is the final step, but it's one of the most important. Knowing how your business is going to grow over the next year, both in how you **want** it to grow and how it **looks** like it will grow, are big factors in your success.

There will come hard times, and there will be good times. Knowing when each of them is going to happen is important to managing your time, money and finances. This is also the 'measureable' part of the SMART Goals you set right back at the start of this article.

Get More From This Step

Here's three separate articles on how to get better acquainted with each of these topics:

Top Reporting Software (<http://www.capterra.com/reporting-software/>) by Capterra

How To Bookkeep (<http://www.wikihow.com/Bookkeep>) by WikiHow

12 Best Tools For Budgeting
(<http://www.inc.com/guides/2010/09/12-best-tools-for-budgeting.html>) by Inc.

Very Early On, Decide What's Important

Do you know how many conversations I've had with people about the importance of letterheads and signatures?

Stop it.

Stop it now.

From the beginning decide what's important for your business. Decide what is going to get you the biggest return on investment and grow your Agency.

Once you have paying clients you can worry about your logo and a mascot for your blog.

Get More From This Step

Check out this article from Brian Tracy that gives you the five key questions you need to ask to set your business priorities.

Click here to read it
(<http://www.briantracy.com/blog/general/5-key-questions-for-setting-priorities/>)

Watch What Your Clients Respond To

Pay attention to your client's behaviours – both potential and current – and see what works well when you interact with them, and what falls on deaf ears.

Found a particular email, pitch, phone call or product is getting the most attention? Adjust and act on it.

Don't worry about vanity metrics – like traffic and likes on Facebook – instead look at what converts and drill down to get even more from it.

Get More From This Step

This little known article on LinkedIn is a real gem for understanding client behaviour. Especially as it pertains to sales. Double win.

Click here to read it

(<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/successful-sales-understanding-client-behaviors-chris-nielsen>)

eXplore New Techniques

I'm allowed one that doesn't fit exactly, right?

Always looks for **new** ways to market and grow yourself. Innovate. Try new techniques and use new tools to see what **gets results** for you and your clients.

- Create a Periscope Q&A
- Build an SEO-Geek Snapchat Feed
- Create and brand an SEO Technique
- Design a coffee-break podcast about small business SEO

Do **something** to get you out of the old SEO mould and innovate on the old things you've done. Just because nobody is doing it now doesn't mean it should be done.

Get More From This Step

This is one of my favourite concepts from Seth Godin called, *The Purple Cow*. If you're not familiar with it, watch this video:

You Should Be Proud Of What You Don't Do

Be proud of what your agency doesn't do as well as what you do, do.

If you try and offer **everything** you'll find yourself at the careers office with all of the other Agency owners who tried to be a people pleaser.

Don't take on clients in a specific industry? Be proud of it.

Refuse to work for less than \$50 an hour? Be proud of it.

Don't work on Sundays? Be proud of it.

Get More Out Of This Step

Just read this post. Go ahead and read it.

Click here to read it (<http://www.ashread.com/saying-no/>)

Zone Out On What Your Competitors Are Doing

What you **don't** do is as endearing to a potential client as what you can do.

Instead of worrying about what someone else is doing, focus on what you **should** be doing.

This is your agency.

This is your chance to make your mark.

Stop worrying what everyone else is doing and think about what **you** need to do to get better.

Get More From This Step

Watch this episode of the #AskGaryVee show from about 1:00 inwards until he stops talking about ignoring your competition. It's a brilliant twist on the old strategy. And, one I personally employ.

That's All, Folks...

Phew! Here you are. You made it right to the end.

Don't forget to get your own, free, downloadable checklist of this article so you can start your own agency **right now** too.

Just click here to get it.

Now, it's over to you! How are you going to get started on *your* agency? Our suggestion would be with a subscription to SERPed.net (<http://serped.net/privateaccess>) – Your all in one suite of tools.

"If you really look closely, most overnight successes took a long time."

- Steve Jobs

serped.net

