Grow That Local

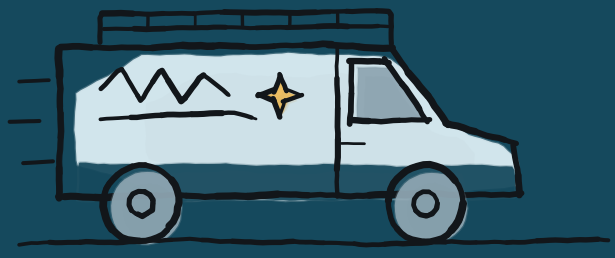
a free guide

How to pick a marketing company

The questions to ask, the red flags to walk away from, and what a fair monthly report looks like.

For owners burned by an agency before.

- 9 short sections in 3 parts
- 36 things you can do in the next 24 hours
- An example in every section
- Sources for every figure



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Before you start

If you've paid a marketing company before and couldn't tell what you got, this guide is for you. It's nine short sections: what to check before you talk to anyone, the questions to ask, the red flags, and what a fair report looks like.

Each section has a short example and a checklist you can do in the next 24 hours. You can use it on a company you're thinking of hiring, or on the one you pay now.

Two rules we kept while writing it:

- Every rule we mention links to the public page that states it, listed at the end. When something is our own judgment, we say "GTL estimate" and tell you why we think it.
- Every example is made up to show the idea. None of them are real companies, customers or results.



Part 1

Before you talk to anyone

1 Find out what you already own

The idea. The worst agency stories end the same way: the owner leaves, and the website, the domain or the Google profile stays with the agency. Before you hire anyone new, find out what's in your name today. It takes about half an hour.

Three things matter most:

- **Your domain** (yourcompany.com). Look it up at ICANN Lookup, the free public tool for domain registration data (ICANN Lookup, lookup.icann.org). If the owner's name is hidden for privacy, the record still shows which company the domain is registered with. Then ask whoever set it up to show you the account, in your name.
- **Your Google Business Profile.** Open your profile's settings and find "People and access." Google's rule: only owners can add or remove people, and only the primary owner can hand over primary ownership (Google Business Profile Help, support.google.com). You want to be the primary owner.
- **Your website login.** Can you log in to where your site is hosted, or only email someone and wait?

Example. A made-up roofer checks and finds the domain registered to their old web designer, and the Google profile's primary owner is an agency they left two years ago. They ask both, in writing, to move ownership to them before they hire anyone new.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Look up your domain at lookup.icann.org and write down where it's registered.
- [ ] Open "People and access" on your Google profile and write down who's listed and what role each has.
- [ ] Try to log in to your website's hosting. Write down whether you can.
- [ ] For anything not in your name, send a short written request to move it to you.

2 Write down the one number you're buying

The idea. Most bad marketing deals start with a fuzzy goal: "more visibility," "a better online presence." You can't check fuzzy. Before any call, write down the one number that would make the money worth it to you. More calls a month. More booked jobs. More reviews. Then every company you talk to has to explain how its work moves that number.

Our free leads calculator works out how many leads a month you need to hit a sales goal, if you'd like a starting point.

Example. A made-up plumber writes on a sticky note: "Two more water heater installs a month. Ten more Google reviews by spring." On every sales call, they read it out and ask, "How does your work get me there, and how will I know?"

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Write down the one number you most want to move in the next six months.
- [ ] Write down how you count it today (your phone log, your invoices, your Google profile).
- [ ] Find last month's count, so you have a starting point.
- [ ] Keep the note on your phone for every sales call.

3 Ask these eight questions before you sign

The idea. A good marketing company is happy to answer every one of these in plain words, in writing. A company that dodges them is telling you something.

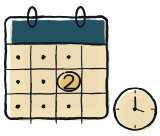
1. **Who owns my domain, website and Google profile?** A good answer: "You do, in your name. We're added as a manager."
2. **How long is the contract, and how do I cancel?** A good answer gives a clear term and the exact cancel steps, in writing.
3. **What exactly will you do each month?** A good answer is a list you could check off yourself.
4. **What will the monthly report show?** A good answer names real numbers (calls, booked jobs, reviews, rankings for named searches), not a lone "traffic" chart.

5. **What happens to my site, photos and words if I leave?** A good answer: "They're yours. We hand them over."
6. **Can I see the work before I pay?** A good answer: a sample made for your business, or live local sites you can look up yourself.
7. **Who do I talk to, and how fast do you reply?** A good answer names a person or a number, and a reply time.
8. **What do you need from me?** A good answer is honest about your time, even if it's more than you hoped.

Example. A made-up house cleaner sends the eight questions by email to three companies. One answers all eight in a day. One answers five and skips the contract and ownership questions. One sends a link to book a sales call. The choice gets easy.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Copy the eight questions into a note or an email.
- [ ] Send them to every company you're considering, and ask for written answers.
- [ ] If you pay someone now, send them questions 1, 4 and 5.
- [ ] Cross off any company that won't answer questions 1 and 2 in writing.



Part 2

The red flags

4 A contract you can't get out of

The idea. Long contracts aren't always wrong. But the owners who feel burned often signed something they didn't read: a long term, an automatic renewal, a fee to cancel, or a notice period that has to land on one exact date. Read the cancel clause before anything else.

Look for these words: "term," "auto-renew" or "renews automatically," "early termination," "notice," and anything about who owns the work.

Example. A made-up painter reads a 12-month agreement and finds it renews for another 12 months unless they cancel in writing 60 days before the end. They ask the company to change it to month to month, or to remove the automatic renewal. If it won't, they walk.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Find the contract for any marketing you pay for now.
- [ ] Highlight the term length, the renewal rule, any cancel fee and the notice period.
- [ ] Put the cancel deadline in your phone calendar, with a reminder a month before.
- [ ] For a new company, ask for the contract before the sales call, not after.

5 They own your domain, site or Google profile

The idea. This is the red flag that costs the most later. If the company registers your domain in its own name, makes itself the primary owner of your Google profile, or builds your site where only it can log in, leaving means starting over. Your reviews, your web address and your search history are on the line.

A fair setup is simple: everything in your name, with the company added as a manager. You can remove them any day.

Example. A made-up HVAC owner asks a new company to set up their Google profile. The company adds the owner as primary owner and itself as a manager, then sends a screenshot of "People and access" to prove it. That screenshot is what fair looks like.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Ask any company you hire to put the domain, the site account and the Google profile in your name.
- [ ] Ask for a screenshot of "People and access" on your Google profile showing you as primary owner.
- [ ] Save your domain's registrar name and login in a safe place you control.
- [ ] If a company says it "owns the site" or "licenses it to you," ask in writing what happens when you leave.

6 Promises nobody can keep

The idea. No honest company can promise you the top spot on Google by a date, or a set number of new customers. Google decides rankings, and customers decide who to call. A company that promises either is selling the promise.

Watch for one more: an offer to "get you reviews" that means buying them or writing them. An FTC rule in effect since October 2024 bans buying or selling fake reviews and paying people for positive or negative ones, and lets the FTC seek civil penalties (FTC, final rule on fake reviews, 2024, ftc.gov). If they get caught, your business name is the one on the reviews.

Example. A made-up landscaper hears on a sales call: "We'll have you at the top of the map in 30 days, or your money back." They ask, "What will you do in those 30 days, and how will I see it?" The salesperson can't say.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Write down every promise a company has made you, word for word.
- [ ] Next to each one, write the work that would make it happen. If you can't, ask them.
- [ ] Ask how they get reviews. A good answer: "We send your real customers a request with your review link."
- [ ] Cross off any company that offers to buy, write or swap reviews.

7 Reports you can't read

The idea. A report full of charts you can't read is a red flag, even when the numbers go up. Words like "impressions," "reach," "visibility score" or "hits" can be real, but they aren't jobs. If a report doesn't tell you what was done, what changed in calls, jobs or reviews, and what's next, it's not doing its job.

One honest detail to look for: a report should say "taps on your call button" when that's what it counted, not "calls." A tap isn't always a call, and a call isn't always a customer.

Example. A made-up roofer's old report: 14 pages, 31 charts, the word "impressions" 22 times. No list of work done. When asked "How many calls came from my Google profile last month?", the agency sends another chart.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Open your last marketing report and find three things: what they did, what changed, what's next.
- [ ] Circle any number you don't understand and ask what it means for jobs.
- [ ] Ask your marketer to add your one number from section 2 to every report.
- [ ] If they can't, take that as your answer.



Part 3

What a fair report looks like

8 One page, plain words: what we did, what changed, what's next

The idea. A fair monthly report fits on one page and you can read it on your phone between jobs. It has three parts: the work done, the numbers that matter to you compared with last month, and the plan for next month. It also tells you plainly when something didn't work.

Example. A made-up fair report for a plumber, one month:

> **What we did:**
> **Posted 8 job photos and 4 updates to your Google profile. Sent 23 review requests. Fixed your hours and added "water heater repair" as a service.**
>
> **What changed:**
> **9 new reviews (last month: 3). 61 taps on your call button from Google (last month: 44). You now show in the top three on the map for "water heater repair" in your town, and not yet for "drain cleaning."**
>
> **What's next:**
> **A drain cleaning page on your site. Ask your techs to send the review text before they leave each job.**
>
> **Didn't work:**
> **The holiday post got almost no views. We'll skip that kind of post next year.**

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Hold your current report up against the four parts above.
- [ ] Write down which parts are missing.
- [ ] Send your marketer the example above and ask for next month's report in that shape.
- [ ] If you don't pay anyone, write your own one-page report this month from your phone log and Google profile.

9 Already with someone? Do the 30-minute check

The idea. You don't have to leave to get a fair deal. Spend half an hour checking what you own, what you signed and what you get. Then decide. If you do leave, leave cleanly: ownership first, then cancel.

Our free quiz, Are You Overpaying Your Marketing Company?, asks ten questions about what you pay and what you get, and gives you a fair-price verdict.

Example. A made-up house cleaner does the check. The domain and profile are in their name, but the contract auto-renews in six weeks and the reports don't show calls. They ask for a one-page report and month to month. The company agrees to the report but not the terms, so they set their cancel date and move on.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Run the ownership checks from section 1.
- [ ] Find the cancel terms from section 4 and put the deadline in your calendar.
- [ ] Send your marketer questions 1, 4 and 5 from section 3.
- [ ] If you leave: get primary ownership of your Google profile, your domain login and a copy of your site files and photos before you cancel, then cancel in writing.

or we can do it for you

Free sample: Your first report card, this month

So you can see what a plain monthly report looks like. The monthly report card is free.

Monthly report card: growthatlocal.com/services/report-card



Your first 24 hours, in one list

If you only do five things this week, do these:

- [ ] Check who owns your domain, Google profile and website login (section 1).
- [ ] Write down the one number you're buying (section 2).
- [ ] Send the eight questions to anyone you're considering, or questions 1, 4 and 5 to whoever you pay now (section 3).
- [ ] Find your contract's cancel deadline and put it in your calendar (section 4).
- [ ] Ask for next month's report in the one-page shape (section 8).



If you'd rather hand it off

Grow That Local is a marketing team for local businesses. Our terms, as our site states them: a free sample before you pay, no card needed to start, and month to month.

Websites — **from $1 a month · 7-day full refund**
A fast, good-looking site that turns visitors into calls. Free sample: a preview of your new site.

Google Business Profile — **$200 a month · 7-day full refund**
Show up in the map when neighbors search for what you do. Free sample: a profile check-up with 10+ fixes.

Review requests — **$100 a month · 7-day full refund**
More 5-star reviews, without the awkward asking. Free sample: your first 10 requests sent.

Social media posts — **$200 a month · 7-day full refund**
Fresh posts every week, made from your real job photos. Free sample: two weeks of posts, ready to go.

Email newsletter — **$50 a month · 7-day full refund**
Stay top of mind, so past customers call you first. Free sample: your first newsletter, written.

SEO — **$400 a month · 7-day full refund**
Climb Google for the searches that bring in jobs. Free sample: a ranking check and 10 fixes.

Win-back texts — **$100 a month · 7-day full refund**
Bring past customers back for their next job. Free sample: your first 25 customers texted.

Neighborhood postcard — **$400 a month · 7-day full refund**
Your ad in mailboxes across nice neighborhoods. Free sample: your ad, designed and shown on the card.

Monthly report card — **free**
See how you stack up against local competitors. Free sample: your first report card, this month.

Text us at (423) 924-2014, or start at growthatlocal.com/start.

Sources

This guide uses no statistics. These are the rules and tools it cites:

- ICANN Lookup, the free public tool for domain registration data: lookup.icann.org (section 1)
- Google Business Profile Help, "Manage your Business Profile owners and managers" (only owners add or remove people; only the primary owner transfers primary ownership): support.google.com (sections 1, 5)
- Federal Trade Commission, final rule banning fake reviews (announced August 2024, in effect October 2024): ftc.gov (section 6)

GTL estimates

These are our own judgment, not measured facts:

1. Checking what you own takes about half an hour (sections 1 and 9). Reasoning: it's three lookups (domain, Google profile, site login) and one look at your contract, all from a phone or laptop.
2. A fair monthly report fits on one page (section 8). Reasoning: an owner reads it between jobs, and the three things that matter (work done, numbers that moved, next steps) don't need more room.

want it done for you?

Every part of this guide is something we do.

Each one starts with a free sample, so you see the work before you pay. Text us at (423) 924-2014 or start at growthatlocal.com/start.

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