



They Wanna Do What??!!

9 Shady Ad Agency
Tactics That Raise
More Red Flags than a
Communist Color
Guard (And How to
Protect Your Biz)

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Let's cut to the chase.

There are bad bad hombres in the marketing world.

Individuals and companies who are nothing more than snake-oil salesman out to pad their bank accounts... at the expense of yours.

You find 'em in every industry. No reason marketing should be any different.

The key is KNOWING how to spot these marketing vultures from a mile away so they don't even get a chance sink their tainted talons into your biz.

Helping you spot these jokers is what this guide is all about.

The tactics listed below are ones I, trusted colleagues in the marketing world, and many of my small biz clients come up against all the time.

I compiled them here to help prevent you from falling for the same repulsive rip-offs so many other business owners have fallen prey to.

One quick note before we dive in...

Just because a marketing firm offers or does something listed below doesn't *automatically* mean they're gonna screw you over.

However, when you encounter ANY of the tactics listed below they should raise more red flags than the communist color guard.

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So, when you spot 'em, go in with your eyes WIDE open. Do your homework and know what you're gettin' into BEFORE turning a dime over to anyone hocking them.

With that said, on to the tactics...

1. They Don't Give You Direct Access To Your Assets

I have a cousin who got swindled by Bernie Madoff. As did a lot of other smart, savvy folks.

The problem was that they really didn't know the real story on what was happening with their moolah.

They just got a pretty report each month showing them how much money they were supposedly making.

Which, as we all now know, was *totally bogus*.

The problem was my cousin and the other investors were *in a position where they had to trust, but could not verify*.

That's a bad place to be when it comes to investing. And it's a bad place to be when it comes to marketing.

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You should have 100% control over - and access to - ALL your marketing assets.

Your domain name.

Your website and web server.

Your Google AdWords account.

Your Facebook account.

The database where your email list resides.

ALL of it.

I've worked with clients who worked with a, let's say, less-than-ethical agency in the past.

And we couldn't get access to their website or Google account or whatever and had to *start from scratch*.

Which, believe me, sucks for everyone!

(Sometimes it's not that the agency ain't ethical, it's that they've gone outta business and have all moved on... taking or deleting all their clients' account usernames and passwords in the process.)

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And, unfortunately, there's not a helluva a lot you can do when this happens.

INSIST you get access to any and all accounts an agency creates for you.

Even better... create the accounts yourself and give them the access they need. That way you'll ALWAYS have ownership if the relationship turns south.

Doing this'll save you untold heartache down the road.

2. Long term contracts

Some agencies and ad platforms lock clients into long term contracts.

What's long term?

Well, 3 month contracts can kinda sorta be justified... in SOME cases. (It does take time to get a new campaign off the ground so you, the client, need to have some patience and give the agency a chance.)

However, if someone wants you to sign a 6 or 12 month contract... it's a RAW deal man.

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You don't want to be married to an incompetent, underperforming agency or ad platform who's only REAL skill is extracting cash from your bank account every month.

There's just no justification for a long term contract in marketing.

If a campaign isn't performing after a few months, there's little chance your fortunes are gonna magically change 6 or 12 months down the road.

(A POSSIBLE exception is Search Engine Optimization (SEO). It takes a *long time* for legitimate SEO programs to kick in and the rankings to take off. But you have to know that going in. Even so, most of the reputable SEO firms I know of don't lock their clients into long term gigs.)

Anyhoo, not much else to add here. When it comes to long term contracts, just avoid them!

3. Talk With The Person Working Directly On Your Campaign

Dirty little secret here...

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A lot of the work ad agencies do (even especially the big firms) is farmed out to other agencies and/or freelancers.

It ain't necessarily a bad thing.

I've been the hired gun an agency brings in through the back door in the dark of night to do their dirty work.

The agency just handled the relationship with the client and I did my thing.

Sometimes it worked out. Most of the time it didn't. Usually cuz the agency's perky, yet still-wet-behind-the-ears project manager didn't understand what the client wanted and/or what they hired me to do which screws up EVERYTHING.

And, remember, I was a highly respected U.S. based freelancer.

Most agencies don't exactly go for Grade A freelance meat.

They go for the cheapest hired gun they can find from whatever corner of the Earth they can find 'em.

Though it's not just the quality of the person doing the work.

It's the big game of Telephone you'll all be playing.

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You never quite know what'll get lost in translation between you and the person actually doing the work. And vice versa.

Protect yourself here by asking questions about who will be doing the work. See if you can talk to the person BEFORE you hire an agency and/or WHILE they're doing the work for you.

A lot of marketing ain't rocket science. And pieces of your campaign can certainly be outsourced with no ill effects.

Just go in with your eye WIDE open and know who'll be doing what.

Cuz generally, the more you'll be in direct contact with those actually doing the work, the better.

4. Blowing Your Budget on Website and Logo Design

Back in the year 2000 I was working for a market research company. Our Vice President decided it was time the company got a website.

So she hired one of her friends who worked at a local design shop.

The site he designed looked AMAZING.

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The fonts, images, layout, etc. were all incredible creative. It was truly a work of art.

Problem was few people could figure out how to USE the damn thing.

Design had eclipsed everything else.

So it was hard to navigate around the site. It wasn't clear how to get in touch with us. And the search engines treated it like an evil stepsister.

The boss man paid a pretty penny for that site but never got a DIME of it back in return.

Because the designer got caught up in his own artistry and creativity and paid no attention to the things that REALLY matter when it comes to making money in business.

Similar deal with logo design.

Professionals can charge anywhere from \$250 - \$5000+ for a logo. And very well-meaning graphic designers can come up with all sorts of reasonable sounding reasons why to spend that much.

But I've yet to see any evidence that justifies spending that much. The ROI just ain't there.

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Have you ever heard of someone telling a biz owner...

"Hey, awesome logo! Let's do business together!"

Doesn't happen.

(And before you point me to logos from Nike, Amazon, FedEx, etc... I'll tell you that it's not the *design* of those logos that make them so valuable, it's the *companies behind* them that truly matter.)

Need a logo?

Go spend \$5 on Fiverr. It's all most businesses need.

I've gotten at least a dozen clean, professional logos there over the years and they're the bee's knees.

No need to obsess over fonts, colors, etc. No need for input from every Tom, Dick and Harry about what THEY think about it in their not-so-eggspurt opinion.

Just get it done and move on to money making endeavors.

Bottom line...

... Most small businesses don't need big expensive websites or logos.

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The focus should be on strategy and all the messaging, offers, calls-to-action, etc. that goes along with it.

Design comes AFTER all that.

Just live by the saying “form follows function” and you’ll be A-OK.

5. Guaranteed Rankings

This one is particular to the search engine optimization (SEO) industry.

A lot of SEO firms will promise they’ll get your site ranked on Page 1 of Google. May even promise you the #1 spot.

Just what you want, right?!

Yeah, well, a few things before you get too excited...

First, no one can guarantee a #1 ranking on Google. There’s only ONE spot there per keyword, so 99.9999% of websites are gonna lose that game.

Second, “Page 1 ranking” on Google can mean different things.

Some particularly ethically-challenged players will just sink a few bucks into an AdWords ad for a day or two and say “Wallah!” Look, we delivered on our promise. There you are on Page 1.

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Other slimeballs will choose some totally irrelevant and/or zero traffic keyword to get your site ranked for. A #1 ranking for a word like that plus \$0.25 will get you, I don't know... whatever \$0.25 will buy you these days ;)

Lastly, and most importantly, the focus of your SEO strategy should NOT be about ranking #1 for a *specific* keyword on Google.

The good SEO firms focus their efforts on getting your site ranked higher for a *variety* of keywords.

And they measure success based off of the number of QUALITY leads your site is generating. Not where you rank for any one keyword.

Anyone who tries to sell you on anything other than that is about as honest as a man who says he goes to Hooter's for the food.

6. Fees That Seem Too Good to Be True

There's a saying to keep in mind when you hire marketers (or any service professionals for that matter)...

"When you hire the best, you only cry once."

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Every now and then you may luck into finding a highly talented young whipper-snapper who isn't confident enough to charge for the value they genuinely provide.

Most of the time, however, when you get a quote that's really low, be prepared to get what you pay for.

Work that doesn't get done.

Work that gets outsourced to some sweat shop in a 3rd world country.

Work that causes more harm than good (and, in the end, forces you to pay MORE to fix than if you'd just had it done right the first time).

I totally understand the desire to sock away as much of your hard earned moolah as you can.

But when you come across a marketing bid that seems too low to be believable, look for savings elsewhere.

7. They Sent You a Cold Email Telling You How Horrible Your Site Is

I get emails like this ALL... THE... TIME...

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“Dear Kind Sir/Madam,

We came across your website and found there are problems with it that are costing you lots of business. If you had a 1st Page Google ranking you will be making many thousands of dollars more. Our agency is SEO experts that can help you get 1st Page Google ranking for just \$99 a month...”

And they prattle on from there.

Others will send you an official looking report with a “grade” for your website.

Hey, guess what all their reports tell you? You failed!

Whatever their cold approach, these pinheads throw out a laundry list of things that need fixing on your site. And, not surprisingly, they’d be MORE than happy to fix it for you.

Chances are SOME of the things on their laundry list may need attention. (*Hey, if you throw enough spaghetti against the wall, some of it’s gonna stick.*)

But the majority of the garbage in these reports are about as useful as an ashtray on a motorcycle.

They’re designed to scare you into shelling out money to fix things that don’t need fixing.

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Not to mention... the majority of companies sending you these reports do a shoddy job of fixing things (and could actually make things worse for you).

If you're worried about your website... If you're worried about the things in these reports...

... DON'T address them with the company that sent it to you!

Instead, find a seemingly reputable company to discuss your site with. It may even be worth it to pay them to do a REAL audit.

See what they recommend. See if what they recommend jives with what the cold email reports recommended.

Then decide if you want to address the issues or not.

Just don't get caught up in the hysteria of the *"Your website and SEO suck"* marketing scare tactics some agencies and individuals use.

Get a second opinion (at least) and go from there.

(NOTE: If you have some budget to put toward something like this and need a referral to a reputable SEO firm, [drop me a line](#) with your website URL and your concerns and I may be able to put you in touch with one of the good guys out there in the industry.)

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8. They Claim to Be Good at Everything

You've surely heard this expression...

"Jack of all trades, master of none"

That applies in spades in the world of Internet marketing.

It's IMPOSSIBLE to be an expert at everything involved in marketing a biz online successfully...

- Web design
- PPC
- SEO
- Email marketing
- So-shill media marketing
- Conversion Optimization
- Marketing funnel creation
- Remarketing/retargeting
- Lead generation
- Copywriting

... Just to name a few.

Doesn't matter how talented someone is or that their heart is in the right place... they can't be good at doing ALL those things.

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But it's not just individuals that struggle to be good at it all. Agencies do to.

Scaling a marketing agency is REALLY hard. (Believe me, if it was easy, I would have done it years ago.)

And offering high quality service at a reasonable price to the masses in any ONE of the areas listed above – let alone ALL of them – is darn near impossible to pull off.

In order to keep overhead low, they have to hire wet-behind-the-ears recent college grads who, overnight, become social media experts. Or whose qualifications are they once "did" SEO once for their dad's website.

You DO NOT want these people cutting their teeth on your dime!

This dynamic is why so many small businesses have horrible experiences with the big agencies.

There are a few diamonds in the rough. Usually it's a smaller agency staffed with truly talented folks who, together, can handle all these things.

I can think of exactly ONE. (And even they outsource stuff like copywriting and a few other things.)

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So beware... especially of the big agency that promises they're the be all end all. Generally what they're really good at is sales. When it comes to delivering on the salesperson's promises, that's a whole nutter can o' worms.

Your best bet is to find a PPC specialist to handle your PPC, an SEO specialist to handle your SEO, etc.

If you want to be the dominate player in your market, you need all A players on your team.

Anything less than that costs too much.

9. How They Measure/Report Results

If you take nothing else away from this report... pay attention to this one.

There are some agencies out there that are extremely talented at producing great looking fancy pants reports.

These reports have it all...

... Charts. Graphs. Lists. Pretty colors. Lotsa important looking numbers and data.

The whole she-bang.

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What they generally don't have, however, is MEANINGFUL data.

When it comes to marketing, you should be interested in ONE thing and one thing only...

... Is your marketing campaign producing an ROI?

That means measuring things like: leads, sales, dollars in, and dollars out.

What doesn't really count for much are things like: Clicks, Visitors, Likes, Retweets, Views, Connections, Impressions, etc.

Those things are a means to an end. They are a *distraction*.

Agencies who give you reports based on those things try to justify their existence using a little sleight of hand trick on you.

"Look at how awesome these numbers look... aren't we incredible?! Now give us our money."

It's VERY easy to cheat with those numbers. Clicks, Visitors, Views, Likes, etc. are cheap and easy to come by.

But it's all about quality. Not quantity.

And quality is measured by sales and ROI.

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THAT'S what your reports should focus on.

So before you hire an agency, understand what they'll be reporting on. Even ask for a sample of what your reports will look like.

That way, before you get engaged you can make sure they'll be reporting on the kind of bottom line numbers that really matter to your biz.

Whenever you're ready, here are 3 ways I may be able to help your business...

1. Sign Up for a one-on-one Marketing Advocate Strategy Session with yours truly

Confused, overwhelmed or otherwise frustrated when it comes to marketing? In my role as your Marketing Advocate, you and I work together to simplify your marketing. We'll identify the strategies, tactics, messaging, etc. to help you produce a predictable and profitable flow of leads for your biz. If you're interested, just [email me](#) and put "Marketing Advocate" in the subject line... tell me a little about your business and what you'd like to work on together, and I'll get you all the details!

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2. Connect with an honest, talented, results driven marketing firm

There's an expression... "When you hire the best, you only cry once." I've talked to a boatload of biz owners over the years who've been sobbing their way through an endless parade of unethical, unreliable and/or unsuccessful marketing firms. Over my 10+ years in the industry, I've built relationships with good folks that I know do tremendous work for their clients. So, IF you have budget to work with and would like one of the good firms around to help you with your website, SEO, email, PPC or more, [email me](#) and put "Marketing Referral" in the subject line. Then let me know what you're looking for help with and, IF I know someone who would be a good fit, I'll connect you with them.

3. Become the most highly reviewed business in your area

If you own a local business, I don't need to tell you how critical having glowing reviews about your business is to success. A close friend of mine (and one of the most likable guys you'll ever encounter) has built a system that automates the process of (legitimately) getting 5 star reviews from your happy customers to blanket the web. If you'd like to find out more, [email me](#) and put "5 Star Reviews" in the subject line and I'll get you the info.