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Analytical tools can make the life of a search engine optimisation or digital marketing professional much easier. The burning question is: which ones? With so many to choose from, it can be difficult to know where to turn for the time-saving solution you need.

Pay attention to the source of the tool you are buying. It might be obvious, but some are more reputable than others and many tools are often accused of returning inaccurate results, such as several that aim to evaluate links and the domains from which they originate. This should be expected (within reason), since there is only one tool that can predict the total value and relevance of a web page connected to all terms within SERPs without any errors - the search algorithm that underpins them. Cracking this is the holy grail of search marketing, but the goalposts move on a monthly basis and even if it happened, keeping up would probably take an engineering team to rival those of the major search engine operators.

Some of the more attractive tools and services ask a monthly fee rather than a one-off payment for the privilege, making the wrong choice a costly mistake. At the same time, a monthly fee reflects the changes and challenges that need to be made and overcome on a near-constant basis to ensure the continued effectiveness of some tools. Imagine a tool that reliably assessed domain value before Google Panda. Imagine what happened to it after Panda if nothing was changed. Choosing carefully where to spend your time and money will greatly reduce the chances of frustration further down the line. Back the winning horse.

Having said that, there are different horses for different courses. Even tools that have a significant overlap (such as many of the toolbar plug-ins you can find online) will have different strengths and weaknesses. Researching these in-depth never hurts: it takes time to save time. Reviews on the internet should always be taken with a pinch of salt and particularly where they relate to products and services designed by tech- (especially internet search) savvy businesses, but these are often your best starting point. Beyond that, you should consider building relationships with industry experts and ask for their advice. Some will be understandably unwilling to share the secrets of their success, but others may surprise you with their willingness to point you in the right direction.

As a general rule, it is safer to go with products, services and tools designed by the most reputable businesses in the industry (SEOmoz, for example). Personally, I would recommend the MajesticSEO service as one of the most useful and usable I have encountered.

If you have recently signed up for a new tool, it is important to undertake rigorous testing before adopting the tool as a major part of your campaign management process. Conduct original research wherever possible and compare your findings with those made by the tool. If the tool gives a good approximation of what you discovered through sweat and toil, the chances are that it will prove useful within the context of your search marketing campaign.

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