conductor

How to Hire an In-House Enterprise SEO Team

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Table of Contents

Hire a Leader

In the first phase, you'll hire your primary SEO leader and task them with assessing your needs, auditing your current website and SEO efforts, developing and implementing initial processes, and determining the right team structure before you can progress to phase two.

The most important decision you will make at this phase will be hiring the right person **at the right level.** Hire too low, and all you will have is someone who yields to every challenge thrown their way, but hire too high and you will have an ego-driven finger-pointer who never gets anything done.

Here is what this role will focus on and what to look for in this stage.

SEO Director

SEO Director

Areas of responsibility:

This role should take over all strategic and process-oriented aspects of the SEO campaign. For this individual (and the SEO program) to succeed, they can't be reliant on other individuals to make decisions or provide approval on what needs to be done. If you're going to hire this person, be prepared to hand over the keys.

This includes all aspects of technical SEO, content optimization, content creation, and technologies related to SEO. They will also be the primary educator and thought leader within the organization.

Who to look for:

Your best bet here is to hire someone looking to take the next step in their career but, more importantly, looking to add a resume-building and defining opportunity to their journey.

- **Years of experience required:** 8+

The right level for this role is someone currently at the manager or senior manager level looking to become an SEO director. A critical component to verify in the interview process is ensuring your top pick is ready and willing to roll up their sleeves and do the work themselves—because they most likely will for the first year.

Where to look:

In-house or digital marketing agencies

Why? My best recommendation is to look harder at agency folks, as most will be burnt out on agency life and looking for something to dig into and make a splash for their career.

Agency folks typically have a more well-rounded skillset as they have had to adapt to their roster of clients vs. working on one site in one vertical.

> ### Pro Tip
>
> Big, well-known agencies are a common talent resource pool that your competitors will also pull from. Look at boutique or smaller agencies as their books of business are typically more diverse than the bigger folks, and you can get the right person at a more affordable salary. **Remember, bigger isn't always better.**

Typical length of Phase 1:

Once hired, you are likely looking at **9 to 18 months** for this phase as the individual that you choose will need that time to put together an in-depth assessment of your situation, build a plan, start getting some processes in place, and then ultimately making a plan for the team.

Hire a Technical SEO & Sr. SEO Strategist

Once you have your leader and strategy in place, it's time to start building the infrastructure around them.

From an SEO perspective, that means it's time to hire two more folks: one who understands the technical side of SEO and one who understands the content side of SEO.

Here is what these roles will focus on and what to look for in this stage.

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│   Technical SEO  │  │  Sr. SEO Strategist  │
└──────────────────┘  └──────────────────────┘
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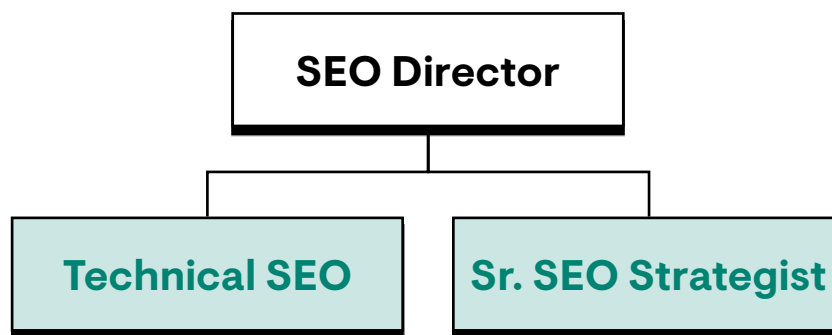
Technical SEO

Areas of responsibility:

Anything related to technical SEO needs to be handed over to this person once they start. They need autonomy when it comes to determining which technologies they need to make the site as technically sound as possible while also being able to set up an infrastructure that will allow them to make updates and fix issues as they occur (think real-time auditing).

They will also need to own the relationship with the engineering team to make sure that there is an understanding and process in place to have SEO updates be a part of every sprint.

Who to look for:

Technical SEOs are an interesting group of folks as they are highly specialized, can be expensive, and are a bit high maintenance. The tradeoff, though, is having someone who can bridge the all-important gap between engineering and SEO.

- **Years of experience required:** 5+

You need someone who knows how to code and can speak the same language as engineers. One of the most significant hurdles in SEO is effective implementation, so having someone who knows how to do it themselves, write technical requirements, and get into the room with engineers and communicate the value of the technical changes will be, in many cases, the backbone of your SEO program.

Where to look:

Large digital marketing agencies

Why? Technical SEOs are a rare breed, but agencies are typically the best place to find them. While they will be more expensive than your typical SEO strategist, the ROI of this hire will be exponentially higher than what you pay them.

I suggest looking at larger agencies for this role, as you want someone who understands large-scale sites and knows how to navigate the sprint cycles of larger organizations.

Sr. SEO Strategist

Areas of responsibility:

This person will be your content and tactical day-to-day expert. They will need to own the relationship between SEO and the content and marketing teams, as they will need to understand what changes are happening on the site and why.

They will also need to own the process of optimizing existing content, researching and creating new content, and working closely with the SEO director on educating the content team on how to research and optimize content as they create it and implement processes to ensure these practices are followed.

Who to look for:

This is actually a very exciting role for an SEO strategist looking to make a mark for a big brand and expand their experience and skill set. You don't need an SEO expert with 10 years of experience for this position. Instead, your focus should be recruiting someone who has had exposure to enterprise websites in the early stages of SEO implementation and understands the related challenges and scale.

- **Years of experience required:** 5+

Where to look:

Digital and creative agencies—large or small

Why? Some of the best SEOs I've hired only had 3-5 years of experience and turned out to be true rock stars. This is what you are looking for.

> **Pro Tip**
>
> While SEO is definitely about the road that's behind you, you can find some amazing talent in the younger generation who want to add that "senior" distinction to their title.

The right person will be ready and excited to help manage the day-to-day of the site and lighten the load on your SEO director so they can focus on the bigger picture and educate internal stakeholders on the value of the channel and the changes and evolution of the algorithm.

Typical length of Phase 2:

Once both roles are hired, and you have the baseline strategy in place with some of the gears moving in the right direction, this part of the process should take about **9 to 12 months** to get into place and running smoothly.
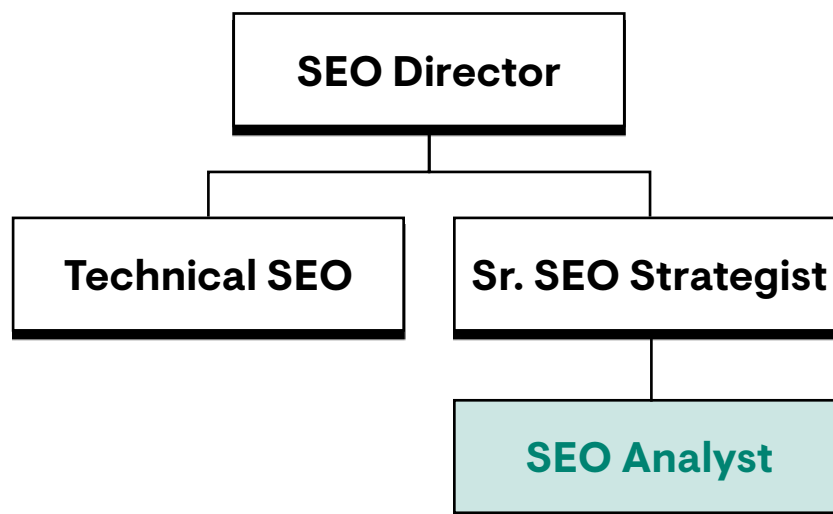
Hire help tailored to team needs

The third and final phase is when you'll hire a junior analyst (or *analysts*, pending the amount of work) to support your Sr. SEO strategist in the day-to-day efforts of the SEO program.

As the program grows, so will the demands on the team, and you can't leave that in the hands of one person while expecting the SEO director to take on other day-to-day responsibilities regularly.

Here is what the SEO analyst role (or roles) will focus on and what to look for at this stage.

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                             │   SEO Analyst    │
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SEO Analyst

Areas of responsibility:

An analyst (or *analysts*, pending the amount of work) will help **alleviate the grunt optimization and research work** needed on a daily basis.

Arguably, even more importantly, they will also start to develop their skills further and slowly transition into the next strategist or senior strategist on your team to **give you a safety net** should your current strategist choose to leave for another opportunity.

Who to look for:

An analyst needs to be someone who can provide support from day 1 and does not need any handholding or training on the basics. With this in mind, you shouldn't be looking for someone right out of college, as the right hire needs to have some SEO chops to provide value right off the bat.

- **Years of experience required:** 2+

Where to look:

Digital and creative agencies—large or small

Why? Your program will only be as strong as the support system you set up around it. Having a solid analyst who can pick up the slack and ultimately replace your Sr. Strategist if needed will be key to continuity in the long term.

While some folks will say this is a luxury hire, I completely disagree as I view this as a vital support mechanism and safety net to ensure the long-term success and continuity of the program.

Additional roles to consider in Phase 3:

A large SEO team ≠ SEO success.

Rather than looking to build out a massive team thinking that will guarantee success, focus on finding the right people for the critical roles outlined in this guide who know how to educate and execute.

After you've given your core SEO team enough time to implement processes, identify areas of opportunity, and tackle your most pressing issues, you can consider collaborating with them on which additional roles or support—if any—they need to continue to scale.

Typical length of Phase 3:

This is simply an add-on to the previous phase and is determined by how underwater your Sr. SEO Strategist is or if the budget and appetite to expand exist. Unlike the other phases, this doesn't have a corresponding time length estimate as it's ongoing and dependent on your specific needs.

Now, it's time to execute

Building an in-house enterprise SEO team is a journey. Start strong by hiring an experienced leader ready for a challenge, then build up the technical and content pillars before expanding as needed. This phased hiring approach will set your SEO program up for long-term success.

Now that you have a plan, it's time to take action. Start networking and recruiting from agency talent pools to build an SEO dream team equipped to maximize your website's growth potential.