BROWN BEAR DIGITAL

Plastic Surgery SEO Cost

The line-by-line math behind every quote, and the break-even number in consults.

A practice owner's guide | 2026 edition

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SECTION 01

The short answer

01

Most plastic surgery practices pay between $1,500 and $10,000 a month for SEO, and a full program for a single-surgeon practice typically runs $3,000 to $6,500 a month. Ask three agencies and you can get three quotes that differ by a factor of five. Very few price guides tell you what the money actually buys, or how to tell whether a quote can pay for itself.

How to judge any quote:

1

Convert the fee back into hours.

An SEO quote is hours multiplied by a rate. Two quotes on your desk are almost always buying different amounts of work.

2

Check which line items get real hours.

Every budget splits across the same six lines: strategy, technical, local, reviewed content, links and AI search.

3

Size the budget to your market and procedures.

A crowded metro costs roughly twice what a small market does, and every procedure you target is its own small campaign.

4

Work out the break-even number in consults.

Then ask whether your market can plausibly produce it. Read the contract terms before you compare prices.

BELOW ABOUT $1,000 A MONTH

You are buying a handful of hours, not a program. At the most common survey rate, $900 a month buys roughly 9 to 12 hours: enough to maintain a Google Business Profile and fix a few technical issues, and nothing else.

Who this guide is for

Solo surgeons holding two quotes that look nothing alike, multi-surgeon practices in crowded metros that need to know what a serious budget looks like, and marketing managers who have to defend the SEO line to the surgeon who signs the checks.

SECTION 02

What practices pay, in hours

02

Practice type	Typical monthly budget	What the budget has to cover
Solo surgeon, smaller market	→ $1,500 to $3,000	Local SEO, Google Business Profile, a small number of medically reviewed pages a month
Solo surgeon, full program	→ $3,000 to $6,500	Technical, content, local and off-site work every month
Multi-surgeon, one location	→ $5,000 to $10,000	More procedures, more pages, more surgeons to build authority for
Multi-location group	→ $8,000 to $20,000+	Everything above, per location, plus coordination
Under $1,000	→ Hours, not a program	Usually one scope area, often maintenance only

Generic SEO quotes run lower, and that is where a lot of the confusion starts. Those providers serve every kind of business. A plastic surgery practice competes in a crowded, high-value local category, under the stricter quality bar Google applies to health topics.

20.4%

of SEO providers charge the most common retainer, $501 to $1,000 a month.

68.8%

of providers charge $2,000 a month or less. A landscaper's price is not evidence of what your market needs.

Source: Ahrefs survey of 439 SEO providers.

What a monthly fee buys at $75 to $100 an hour

Monthly fee	Hours it buys	Monthly fee	Hours it buys
$900	Roughly 9 to 12	$3,000	Roughly 30 to 40
$1,500	Roughly 15 to 20	$6,000	Roughly 60 to 80

SECTION 03

What each budget tier buys, line by line

Every budget splits across the same six line items. What changes from tier to tier is how many of them get real hours. This is how Brown Bear expects a well-run budget to be allocated.

Line item	Under $1,000	$1,500 to $3,000	$3,000 to $6,500	$6,500 to $10,000+
Hours a month	Under 14	15 to 40	→ 30 to 87	65 to 130+
Strategy and reporting	A template report	Monthly report, consults tracked	→ Senior strategist, results by procedure	Plus quarterly planning
Technical	An audit, rarely fixes	A short list of fixes	→ Ongoing fixes, implemented	Architecture, speed, JavaScript
Business Profile and local	Listing upkeep	Profile and citations	→ Plus reviews and location pages	Per location
Reviewed pages	Under 1 a month	About 1 to 2 a month	→ About 2 to 4 a month	About 4 to 6+ a month
Links and digital PR	None, or a purchased package	Citations and a few earned links	→ Editorial outreach	Digital PR campaigns
AI search work	None	A baseline check	→ Tracking and third-party profiles	Plus research and placements

6 to 10

hours for Brown Bear to research, write, get surgeon review on and publish one procedure page.

52%

of #1 breast augmentation results in 101 cities were practice homepages, ranked on authority.

Source: Brown Bear 101-city study, 2026. Winning procedure pages ran 2,000 to 2,500 words in competitive metros.

That is why $1,500 carries about one page a month and $900 carries none, and why a budget with nothing for links can still lose to an established homepage.

SECTION 04

The quote decoder worksheet

04

Step	The math	Quote A	Quote B
1. Monthly fee	The SEO retainer only, not ad spend	_____	_____
2. Hourly rate	$75 to $100 survey bracket, $150 senior team	_____	_____
3. Hours a month	Step 1 divided by step 2	_____	_____
4. Reporting hours	15% of step 3, at least 2	_____	_____
5. Content hours	45% of step 3 minus step 4	_____	_____
6. Pages a month	Step 5 divided by 8 hours a page	_____	_____
7. Pages needed	Procedures times 3 small, 4 between, 6 metro	_____	_____
8. Months to build	Step 7 divided by step 6	_____	_____

The other hours split about 15% technical, 15% local, 18% links and 7% AI search, and under 3 hours on any is too thin. A line at zero is a scope question for the agency. Shares and 8 hours a page are Brown Bear planning assumptions.

Reading the result

If you see	Verdict	What it means
Under 14 hours	→ Hours, not a program	Ask which single area the fee covers
Under 1 page a month	→ Maintenance, little content	New rankings come slowly, if at all
Over 24 months	→ Underpowered	Narrow the list or raise the budget
12 to 24 months	→ Workable, but slow	Tight if a competitor is ahead
12 months or less	→ Well matched	Hours left for technical, local, links

SECTION 05

Sizing the budget to your market

05

Your market sets the floor, because the budget has to outwork the practices already ranking where you want to rank. Search your three most important procedures with your city, the way a patient would. Count the distinct practices in the map results and the first page of organic results, then note how many have a dedicated, substantial page for that procedure.

What you count	Your market	Solo surgeon budget
5 or fewer serious competitors, most with thin procedure pages	Smaller market	→ $1,500 to $3,000, if the proposal names exactly what it covers
Somewhere in between	In between	→ The procedures you target decide which side you fall on
10 or more, with deep procedure pages and strong review counts	Major metro	→ $3,000 to $6,500. A quote under $3,000 is usually a junior account or template work

Every procedure is its own small campaign

Each needs a core page plus supporting cost, recovery and candidacy pages, gallery cases and links. Rank procedures by what a case is worth and how winnable the search is, then fund the top of the list properly.

Procedure	Surgeon's fee, ASPS 2024
Breast augmentation	$4,575 to $8,000
Rhinoplasty	$7,500 to $12,500
Tummy tuck	$8,000 to $13,500
Facelift	$12,000 to $19,000

- **Revenue in two or three surgical procedures:** put most of the content budget there. A focused budget that wins two procedures beats a spread budget that ranks on page two for ten.
- **A large non-surgical menu:** injectables and lasers are crowded with med spas and each case is worth less. Treat them as a separate line with its own target.

SECTION 06

SEO cost in the 10 largest US cities

All ten are major metros, but not equally expensive. Where a thin homepage holds #1, it is an authority fight. Where a long procedure page holds #1, it is a content fight. Ranges are Brown Bear estimates for a solo surgeon running a full program.

City	Monthly cost	Why it costs more or less
New York	→ $4,500 to $6,500+	**More.** Mount Sinai and NYU Langone on page one, five boroughs
Los Angeles	→ $4,500 to $6,500+	**More.** Beverly Hills content depth, a 2,688-word #1, difficulty 62
Chicago	→ $3,000 to $6,500	**More.** Hardest keyword at 64, Rush and Northwestern on page one
Houston	→ $3,500 to $6,500	**More.** Demand ties New York, extra location pages needed
Phoenix	→ $3,000 to $5,500	**Mid.** Difficulty 51, but a 3,116-word Scottsdale page held #1
Philadelphia	→ $3,000 to $5,500	**Mid.** A 642-word homepage held #1, so money goes to authority
San Antonio	→ $2,500 to $4,500	**Less.** Difficulty 50, top three all independents, about 880 searches
San Diego	→ $3,000 to $5,500	**Mid.** Procedure pages hold the top, so the budget goes to content
Dallas	→ $3,500 to $6,000	**More.** A 1,381-word homepage held #1, so authority ranks
Jacksonville	→ $1,500 to $3,500	**Least.** About 170 searches a month at difficulty 49

Semrush web interface, "plastic surgeon" plus the city, US database, October 12, 2026. Page data from Brown Bear's 101-city study, August 2026.

Demand and difficulty do not move together: San Antonio gets more searches than Philadelphia and is easier to rank for. In six of the ten cities the #1 page carried review stars in its markup.

SECTION 07

How AI search changes the budget

07

AI search changes where the budget goes more than how big it is. Patients now meet practices inside AI answers, so part of the money that used to go to rankings alone now goes to the sources those answers are built from.

8% vs 15%

of visits clicked a traditional result with a Google AI summary, against without one. Pew Research Center, March 2025.

2.1%

of its own ChatGPT description came from the average named practice's site, across about 33,000 citations.

Sources: Pew Research Center; citation study reported by Medical Economics.

The line items that grow in a crowded city:

- **Third-party mentions and digital PR.** Local press, best-of roundups and regional Top Doctors lists. Earned press is the most expensive hour in SEO.
- **Directory and profile cleanup.** Hospital rosters, board profiles and national directories carried more than half the citations. The most common error Bryan finds is a slightly different practice name, address or phone number.
- **Reviews on more than one platform,** across Google, RealSelf and other sites.
- **Video.** Across a subset of Brown Bear's plastic surgery clients, videos holding AI Overview placements drew at least 70% more impressions than the rest.
- **Tracking what assistants say** about you, for each procedure in each city you serve.

REBALANCE BEFORE YOU ADD

Outside the biggest cities, keep the total roughly flat and move 15 to 30 percent into these line items, funded by cutting commodity content and over-scoped technical projects. In New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston and Dallas, plan on the top of that range. For a Dallas surgeon at $4,500 a month, 30% is $1,350, roughly 13 to 18 hours: enough for profile, review and outreach work, not a press campaign on top.

Be wary of a separate "AI SEO" package at a very low monthly price. Most of what earns AI visibility is the same crawlable site, credible content and third-party reputation a real program already builds.

SECTION 08

The return and the contract

Judge any price by how many organic patients it needs to produce, then ask whether that is plausible in your market.

Step	The math	Your number
1. Total investment	Monthly fee times months. Two years is a fair test	_____
2. Revenue per case	Your main procedure's fee, or what you keep from each case to break even on margin	_____
3. Cases to break even	Step 1 divided by step 2	_____
4. Consult-to-surgery rate	The share of consults that book surgery	_____
5. Organic consults needed	Step 3 divided by step 4	_____
6. Consults per producing month	Step 5 divided by the months left after a 9 to 12 month lag	_____

$96,000

for $4,000 a month over two years. At a $6,000 breast augmentation fee, that is 16 cases.

48

organic consults at one in three booking, 2 a month, or a little over 3 a month after a nine-month lag.

Worked example from the post. The $6,000 fee sits inside the ASPS range.

Three organic consults a month, in a practice that already books ten from referrals and ads, is a modest target. That framing gets a budget approved, and it lets you fire an agency that cannot hit it.

Six contract terms that cost more than the fee

1

Guaranteed rankings

Google's own guidance on hiring an SEO says no one can guarantee a #1 ranking. A guarantee is a sales tactic, not a plan.

2

A long term with no review

A 12-month agreement is reasonable. One with no performance review and no exit for clear underperformance is not. Negotiate a 90-day review against named milestones.

3

Agency-owned assets

The practice should own the domain, site, content, Google Business Profile, and admin access to Search Console and analytics.

4

Link packages

A fixed number of links a month for a fixed price is usually purchased links. Google's spam policies call that link spam, and the penalty lands on your site.

5

Setup fees for audits nobody implements

Fair when the fixes are in scope. Paying for a PDF your web developer then bills you again to implement is paying twice.

6

Reports with no consults in them

Traffic and rankings with no organic consults means no way to run the break-even math, which is often the point.

RETAINER OR ONE-TIME PROJECT

A one-time project suits a defined job, such as a technical cleanup or a site migration. Ranking for competitive procedures takes ongoing content, links and local work, which is what a retainer pays for. Be skeptical of a one-time fee sold as a permanent ranking fix.

SECTION 09

Is your SEO quote built to pay for itself?

09

Answer for the proposal or program you have today. Each "no" is a question to put to the agency before you sign or renew.

Question	Yes	Partly	No
THE FEE			
Have you converted the monthly fee into hours at a stated hourly rate?	☐	☐	☐
Does the proposal say how those hours split across strategy, technical, local, content, links and AI search?	☐	☐	☐
Does the fee sit inside the band for your practice type and market?	☐	☐	☐
THE PLAN			
Have you counted the serious competitors for your top three procedures in your city?	☐	☐	☐
Does the content line produce at least one medically reviewed procedure page a month?	☐	☐	☐
Is the budget focused on the two or three procedures worth the most to you?	☐	☐	☐
AUTHORITY AND AI SEARCH			
Is there money in the links line for earned links, not a purchased package?	☐	☐	☐
Does the plan cover reviews on more than one platform and directory profile cleanup?	☐	☐	☐
Does the plan track what AI assistants say about your practice, by procedure?	☐	☐	☐
RETURN AND CONTRACT			
Have you calculated how many organic consults the fee needs to break even, after the lag?	☐	☐	☐
Does the monthly report show consults from organic search by procedure?	☐	☐	☐
Does the contract include a 90-day review, no ranking guarantee, and practice ownership of every asset?	☐	☐	☐

YES	PARTLY	NO
_____	_____	_____

SECTION 10

Next steps

10

1. **Run every quote through the decoder worksheet.** Hours first, then pages, then months.
2. **Count your market** for your three most important procedures, and pick the budget band it calls for.
3. **Fill in the break-even worksheet** with your own fee, term, procedure value and close rate.
4. **Read the contract for the six terms** before you compare prices, then take the consult target to the surgeon.

WORK WITH BROWN BEAR

Brown Bear builds every SEO plan from this math, by procedure and by market, and reports consults rather than traffic. brownbear.digital/services/seo | bryan@brownbear.digital

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bryan Passanisi is the founder of Brown Bear Digital. He has 15 years of experience across SEO, paid search, and AI search strategy, and received a 2025 Semrush AI Visibility Award with the QuickBooks team. He walks practice owners through this budget math before they sign, and started Brown Bear to give businesses direct access to senior search expertise without the agency overhead.

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