Podcast Transcript

ECC 149: When to Fire Your SEO Agency

Jones: [00:00:00] Do not assume that SEO because you've read a couple articles on it. SEO has a lot of theory and what one person thinks is right is maybe an article that you read, another person might disagree. So you want to have those like very candid conversations with your agency and understand what their strategy is for you.

Like for instance, Keywords, right? not everybody thinks that there's a report to put on your page. they're really not. But at the same time, I like to keep track of my strategy, so I will use it to keep track of things.

Intro VO: Welcome to Endless Coffee Cup, a regular discussion of marketing news, culture, and media for our complex digital lifestyle.

Join Matt Bailey as he engages in conversation to find insights beyond the latest headlines. And deeper understanding for those involved in marketing. Grab a cup of coffee, have a seat, and thanks for

Matt: joining. hello and welcome to another edition of the endless coffee cup [00:01:00] podcast. As usual, I'm your host, Matt Bailey.

And I can, I guess I can say this again, Ashley, as usual, a great co host to always provide that inspiration, but also that expertise, Ashley Jones is back with us. Ashley, how are you doing today? I'm doing great.

Jones: I'm good. Thank you for having me again. I love talking about the AC. types of discussions and I always have a lot to say as do you.

So I'm excited.

Matt: Absolutely. I've been looking forward to this because I've been helping a couple of local companies who just through referrals, people have said, Hey, you need to talk to Matt. And they start showing me the reports. And so this discussion today, dear listener, is the result of me doing Some offhand consulting, which I don't normally do and getting completely frustrated and then just shooting off emails to Ashley, you wouldn't believe this.

Look at this. And so today's topic, and Ashley was all in, [00:02:00] is when to fire your SEO company.

Jones: Yeah, I am in on this because it's surprising when I see certain things still happening that have been outdated for some time.

Matt: Oh, you're not kidding. And not just outdated things. I feel like there's new things that people have integrated into SEO and SEO reporting that are distractions.

There are distractions that show how busy we are rather than here's the results you're getting and Unfortunately, I think people don't know how to read These reports so they're not sure what to ask for because the big question I get from companies when I talk to them is What should I expect and that's the biggest question When working with an SEO company, it hasn't changed over the years.

Jones: No, it hasn't. I will say even your SEO company should be asking you, what do you expect? Because I know [00:03:00] whenever I'm working with our clients, everything is so customizable between what somebody wants to pay for with SEO because SEO is not just, Hey, I have five keywords I want to rank for. It is so much more than that.

So depending on, what your budget is, if you're paying for on page, off page and technical, or even if, you have a website, I know we were just talking about this, that the website isn't very good and there's not much that you can do with that platform. So you have to make decisions as.

a company that say, and I'm very transparent. I think that is more what you should be looking for is, there transparency and are they having collaborative conversations with you? Most of my clients, I try to get them into being more than just, your old school SEO type stuff, right?

Like I have 10 keywords I want to rank [00:04:00] for, or I just want to look at my organic traffic because. SEO is so much more these days than that. It really is an omni channel approach, and you should be looking at all types of marketing. we take a very unique approach when we're doing SEO for a client. We don't just look at, one type of traffic.

We actually look at everything that you're doing and we look at, what you want to pay to. So yeah, because they want everything in SEO and they just don't have the budget for that. So is your SEO company being honest with you about what they can do with what you

Matt: have? Yeah. I think the first.

Place everything starts is what kind of questions do they ask? That has been a consistent theme and I would just say throughout my experience throughout my You know, even when I had an agency when I worked for other it's when you meet with that agency Or that individual, what kind of [00:05:00] questions are they asking?

Are they putting you into a box that you're going to fit into their system? Or are they asking you about your business, your objectives? What are your priorities? Are they? Asking more than they're proposing because if they don't understand, if they don't know your business, if they don't know what you're trying to accomplish, then they're going to be working with four different goals and they could be all rankings.

they could be ignoring the bigger picture. and that gets to, outside of those questions, I've talked about this before that so many see SEO as a rankings only exercise.

Jones: I know. And I really can't stand that. It's there's a pet peeve of mine. I'm going to go off for a little bit. I deal with this.

Oh, I deal with this all the time. Like I'll get companies that, will hire us and they just dive straight in net and this isn't always the case because I do try to [00:06:00] have more of a. Collaborative approach from the very beginning. And I'm very honest because I don't want someone who's just going to be with me for a couple months.

And has these unrealistic expectations because SEO, depending on what you let your agency do, can take anywhere. I'll get the canned response and it's. Six months, right? On average, once you implement those things that you start seeing some type of a return, it's a while. And so if you're not having those collaborative conversations, then you're just saying, Hey, why don't I see my keyword rankings?

Are you really understanding what those keyword rankings are doing for you? Oh, this reminds me of something like we got, handed a client that their SEO company. Had some rankings that they were going after. So they had some certain terms. They were local terms. I started looking at doing some keyword research on those terms.

those terms didn't even have a high search volume. They were very low. And, so I'm just thinking what kind of traffic are they even bringing? Yeah, you're [00:07:00] ranking number one for them because Going after it. There's that. And is it really helping the end goal?

Matt: Yeah. and this is the site that I showed you earlier in the week.

they sent me the keywords that they were going after every single one of them were under 500 searches a month. And. I'm like, really, you're really limiting, you want to nail a part of the market, but the bigger thing was no one outside of these keywords know that it exists. And the possibility of this product was broad appeal, but they were going for terms that were.

So in fact, I think the company probably ranked for these before they, they ranked for these before they retained the SEO company. So that's one approach that I just don't like. And any SEO company that only focuses on rankings, you're going to have trouble with.

Jones: I think only is key there because you [00:08:00] can take those long tail SEO terms that are more like question oriented.

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you there. I didn't want to forget what I was saying, but

Matt: I'm used to talking with you, Ashley.

Jones: I know I am such a big mouth and I do this all the time with my clients. I try not to interrupt. I just get excited.

Matt: We interrupt each other. It's okay.

Jones: It's like that. No, but it's, if you have these long tail keywords, you can write blog posts that are for questions That's that low hanging fruit, right?

That is relative to your audience. So you want to make sure that what's being picked makes sense that, okay, are they just, are they trying to get the right audience to your site? Maybe these people that are asking questions are further out in the sales funnel. Let's write a blog post on it. That totally makes sense.

But if that's what they're really going after that's like your cream of the crop that you know that's a problem. it is a balance.

Matt: Yeah, and when your ranking's focused, that affects how you view bank backlinks. And [00:09:00] especially, and we briefly talked about this in our last podcast, the, the massive Google update.

And by the way, 54 percent of SEOs said that there's been no or there has been No change or increased traffic to their websites. The noise you hear is coming from a certain part of the industry. And I would say, and this is, when people in the industry realize that SEO is a part of marketing, it's not a one off activity.

It is marketing. And when you look at backlinks as a result of marketing, You're going to view them differently than backlinks as a result of, I would call traditional link building, because that's what's. a lot of the conclusions have come out that your backlink profile says a lot about what kind of company you are, how you're building for rankings, that if you're [00:10:00] focused on Google or if you're focused on building a brand and there's a distinct difference between the two and how you will go about building those.

I'll say it this way. If you're doing marketing, you don't care about backlinks.

Jones: it shouldn't be a natural part of the process if you're doing the right marketing.

Matt: It's an outcome result of doing good marketing and I'll say it PR Yeah.

Jones: that's the thing. if you're doing good marketing, because that's key Matt, because I do hear a lot of people say, SEO doesn't really matter.

You do need to understand it. And it does matter. Those things do matter. But cause they're like, oh, I don't need to do SEO. I'm just going to do my regular marketing. Then you start looking. And what they're doing, even from a regular

marketing standpoint, isn't good. So ultimately they do work together and you do need to understand how all of them work together.

So good marketing is key because whenever you're doing any [00:11:00] type of digital PR, you don't want to just go, if you're doing good marketing, you want to go after the publication that has Your perspective customer on there. So you want that customer to look at that content, click on maybe, Oh, who's this by click on the company, go to your site, right?

Or if you're allowed, maybe you could play a link to a white paper. If you're allowed some publications will let you do that.

Matt: And in the PR pitches that work, you've done all the work. And we've seen that you will increase your pickups. If you have a video, it will increase your pickups. If you have a pre written story, if you have a link, if you have everything there that an editor or reporter, all they have to do is review it.

put it in their publication. And if you include a video, it increases things even more. So that is intrinsic to that larger marketing picture that we're actually creating content. We're creating video. We've got a landing page. We've got [00:12:00] the content on the site to back this up. And now here you go. Now we're pitching stories to people, but we can show that we've got that, a quality site that we are driving people to our quality information.

So again, it comes back to building that brand. It comes back to marketing, comes back to that bigger picture of which SEO is a part because if you're creating video, if you're creating content, you're naturally going to do the keyword research. You're going to structure it correctly, and it's going to be developed inside the site in a specific format in order to enhance those rankings.

But you've got to go beyond that.

Jones: You do. And the thing is, if you're developing that content and you're looking at different publications to pitch that to, if you're just SEO minded, you're going to look at the domain authority, right? At that site. Now, if you're just marketing minded, hopefully the domain authority is good for a website that has a lot of your prospects on it, right?[00:13:00]

They should work hand in hand. You should understand how they work.

Matt: Do not get me started on domain authority. I've talked with three different companies in the past, just, and again, not an official consulting capacity, just they called. Could can we ask you, can anything like that?

All three of them have told me that. The SEO company they're working with, they highly focus on domain authority as part of their reporting.

Jones: that takes so long, which

Matt: blows my mind, but let's go through the reasons. Number one, domain authority is a made up number for that software that you're using. If you're using Moz, if you're using, what's some of the others?

Ahrefs, if you're using any of those, it's a score made up of what they think Google does.

Jones: it doesn't even factor in like bad links or if you're doing like disavowing or something.

Matt: Yeah, it's their own [00:14:00] algorithm determining a score based on factors they think. Google has. I had the advantage of having access to a lot of these different tools and all of them, their domain authority, domain trust, or whatever they call it, are radically different because they each have different interpretations of how Google works.

But I think anything that has shown us is these companies don't have a clue how Google works. I think the latest number we had, I think in 2022, there were over 2000 changes to the Google algorithm. These companies are not taking into account those types of changes and you know that the latest document leak shows us that they had no clue about a lot of these things.

Jones: it just gets me, did they really have no clue? Because if you've been doing this for a while and you know what works, right? you See what's working.

Matt: But what I'm getting to is using that domain authority as we're doing [00:15:00] our job. look, Mr. Client, domain authority went from 25 to 35.

We're doing great. No, that's not the outcome I want.

Jones: how are they going about doing that is what my question is, because that gets me thinking, is there black hat SEO going on?

Matt: either that or you're, doing it according to this software's measurement, not a business measurement. And there's a distinct difference.

One of the things too, is I dug into domain authority on a couple of these tools. Looking at the backlinks and I found a domain that had a domain trust or domain authority of 40 I clicked on it went to that domain and it was obviously a scraped Site made specifically for building backlinks and it had a domain authority of 45 It doesn't take a genius to physically look at that and say, that is a maid.

That is, [00:16:00] it was in Latin. it was a scrape site. It didn't take anything to know that was a 100 percent spam site, but yet it's being assigned a domain authority of 45, which was higher than legitimate competitive sites in that industry. And that tells me that these tools are very easily fooled, whereas Google might not be easily fooled in identifying made for spam, scraped content websites.

And just based on a lot of those things, I, it's I can't take this score seriously. As a clear metric of success because it is easily fooled. It's a guess. And yeah, anyone has been doing this to your point. It understands these things, but yet to make a score and then judge my work according to that score.

Ah, that's the wrong metric to be looking at.

Jones: Yeah. [00:17:00] don't get me wrong. I do look at domain authority here and there just to just to see what's going on, but it is not something that I prioritize. Eyes. Because it does take a long time to build that regardless if you're doing it the right way.

This I was like, how are they building that five points up? what are they doing to get all of those links, those backlinks? are they doing the right things? Are they going after quality, content?

Matt: Even when, one of the backlinks in one of the clients that I was looking for, they, as a result of PR, had a link from NBC and a bunch of NBC affiliate websites.

like NBC Atlanta, NBC Cleveland, NBC, New York. The domain authority was only 90 on those. Oh, gee. These are legitimate media outlets and you're only giving them a domain authority of 90? And so yeah, it's a metric. It's a metric and it's about as undependable as impressions.

Jones: I'm just so glad you mentioned digital PR though, because it's amazing to me that I [00:18:00] never see people really leverage that.

It is such an untapped area when it comes to doing marketing and doing, SEO is such an untapped area, especially like I have a lot of clients that have industry publications. That, not just like your local news outlets, but these are industry publications and usually those pubs are starving for content.

They want the quality content. They want the unique content. And it's not that hard to get in there if you're writing truly unique In good quality content that, that should be an easy win for any company. So you should definitely be leveraging digital PR. If you can't, I know sometimes it is hard.

Some clients, don't, what you've read, that type of content, they want to control it. It can't get hard. So that's why your SEO company should be having a very real conversation with you about. What those expectations are and what it's [00:19:00] going to look like.

Matt: Absolutely. and part of that, just to back you up on the PR aspect, the sites that I see that consistently have good rankings and good performance.

They've got media backlinks. That's it. whether it's television, whether it's a, an online version of a print, whether it's industry pubs, those that have consistent rankings have links in media. And you just can't get around it. And that's what back in the day, I even, I would say it's one good link.

One good link will outweigh thousands. Of mediocre links, just one.

Jones: even this is another area that, we could get into, but like organizations, like if you're, a manufacturing company and like trade organizations to get links from, if you're at a trade show or something like that, you'd be surprised, those do help your SEO.

they absolutely help. [00:20:00] So I've noticed a huge difference. Cause companies don't get into trade shows as much as they used to. there has been a little bit of a drop in that, but I've noticed that the ones that don't do it anymore, I can actually see a difference in their traffic.

Matt: Yeah.

Looking at rankings and backlinks, those are the two, I would say main functions of an SEO that they're looking at. And another area where I think an SEO only company misses the boat and also where I would, when to fire an SEO company is that they don't understand conversion or conversion optimization.

If they don't look at your site and say, okay, when someone comes to this page, here's what they're going to see. What do you want them to do here? Do you want them to fill out a quote request? Do you want them to fill out, do you want them to subscribe? And then do they evaluate the page in terms of that progression or intent?

And then do they, assess? Is it visible? [00:21:00] Is it clear? Is it easy to do? this is the other part of SEO or the other part of website marketing is once we get people to the page. Now, how do we get them to do what we want them to do? And if they're not evaluating that process or evaluating that page in those usability or conversion optimization terms or views, you're missing out on basically you're wasting your money.

You're getting people to an amusement park where the rides are all broke.

Jones: I know. It does depend on the industry, too. Because I, do agree. Because, there's a, most of my clients, they, you would do that, right? You would look at that. But then I have some clients that, their sales process is very different.

it isn't as straightforward. you just want to think about what that looks like. Is your site structured according to your current sales funnel? for instance, there's websites that may have an e [00:22:00] commerce portion of their site, but they prefer not to sell directly to an end user, right?

But they have it on there. So there's stuff like that you want to measure and see, what's working is you might want to rank for certain terms. Like here's another client that I'm thinking of. They want to rank for terms that a contractor would use.

But a contractor isn't, it's a big part of their audience, but it's not where they really want to focus their strategy toward.

They want to go towards the end user. So the end user could technically still use those words, but they're going to look up certain types of questions. So it's going to be different. So that's where it's okay, you're going to have a portion of your site that's for the contractor that is going to be more straightforward.

we're technical, very straightforward, but these folks, they may not be there yet because they're looking to find a contractor, right? So they're going to be looking at the content. They're going to be looking at, do you have white papers? Do you, are you answering my questions? Those types of things. you really want to look at what you're trying to do.

Your sales cycle [00:23:00] is, and those are the conversations that you should be having with your SEO company. That's why one size does not fit all. Like I. Like I tell you, I was thinking before this call about some of my reporting. Cause I knew you would get in a reporting, knew it. Cause that's a big thing. It is a big thing.

I know, but my reports, like personally, mine are so customized with the client and what they're doing and what they're enabling us to do. Because sometimes I want to do things and I'm not allowed. so because of that, you're going to get a certain type of result. I'll use an example. This is an older client, but, their blog was targeting a specific audience.

And. It was writing about content that was definitely of interest to that audience. And as I was diving into it, I was like, man, they have a huge bounce rate. We went to why that content was all getting the traffic. It was all this like fun type, cool stuff type [00:24:00] content, but these people were never going to convert because it wasn't relative to what they were offering.

So there's a nice balance. And bounce rig does impact your site because it's a usability. it's, a user signal. So if you have a high balancer, you should care about that. So I'd be careful about that type of strategy.

Matt: Oh, absolutely. I, I, was looking at even my own site, but also some others just looking at, what's, bringing in traffic and what's bringing in single page views and I realized I've got a lot of students hitting certain articles consistently.

They're, I can tell they're writing a paper and they want content and that's what they find. And so part of that is, okay, I've got it on my list. I'm like, I need to update that. I should rewrite it. add some more onto it, leverage it because it producing and so developing it from there. But again, that gets back to what happens on the other side of the click.

That [00:25:00] once I get that ranking, what's happening? What's the experience that people have after they click that, that result and go to the page, what are they looking for? What are you answering their question? And just to give you, even just earlier today, we were on a website and it was a government website.

And after you did all the required for, it was a form we were filling out. And after you did all the required fields, which by the way, half the required fields. Forced you into an answer. You didn't want they didn't. They didn't. It was all like this. Why are you contacting us? And there were five reasons and none of them were the reason why we're contacting.

I'm like, how do you not have? I just want an update or something. Yeah. But then once we completed all that, we got three buttons. All the same size, same text inside and very low contrast. But again, and one of the buttons was back. Another button was cancel [00:26:00] and the other button was submit. And then this is what I get to is understanding the science of conversion, that what's the button you want people to click.

You want them to click submit. Yeah, that's

Jones: the one that should pop out. Absolutely. I Yeah, there's certain colors that do perform better than others. like just doing A B testing that.

Matt: Yeah. The size, the arrangement, the contrast, you make the button you want someone to click obvious as I like to say, it's gotta be the biggest, boldest, most beautiful button on the page.

The one that makes me money.

Jones: I'll give the listeners a tip here. So say you have a landing. Page is for, we'll say AdWords, you got to use that landing page for some SEO initiatives, right? So you have this landing page, the call to action, because I remember I did this A B testing on this page.

I was so shocked that this made such a big difference, because you would think a button that's sticking out, [00:27:00] It's a color that pops out from the rest of the colors that's within your brand. And this is where it could get hairy with your designers because designers want everything to look, the same, and I get it, but your buttons do need to stick out.

So your SEO person might come, head to head with that designer a little bit, and they should, because those buttons do need to stick out, but what I noticed is when I did this AB test, just to see what You know, if we change the button, I actually did like an arrow, I asked him to put like an arrow to the button and that increased conversions drastically.

You would think that common sense, come on, people, you don't know to click on the button, it's sticking out, but that arrow for some reason, push them forward. So something. minor like that can make the biggest difference.

Matt: There's a whole science behind that persuasion. And like you said, over the years, it has been the smallest changes that have resulted in [00:28:00] the biggest incremental gains.

And they've usually involved a change of color. Change the size, change the contrast, prioritize which buttons are most important, which ones are least important. Just doing that. I'm amazed at how many sites just don't implement, integrate that. Or when you are selling most SEO companies, they sell themselves on, you get higher rankings, you get more business.

Jones: Yeah. You know what? I can't stand that.

Matt: But that's part of the picture. You're not giving the full picture. If you're not. Integrating conversion optimization. That's what makes business happen is once people get to that page.

Jones: And how are you getting those rankings? That's like my question, because.

There's times where, you have got to be a good writer before I hire anybody. You have to be. Because I believe SEO [00:29:00] requires quality content and good writing. Not just because of the digital PR aspect, but the byline articles, or even, the basic, right? Blogging. we all know you should blog if that's what you want to do.

You're not blogging by now. You need to get on the train. As everybody knows that you need to blog when it comes to SEO, it helps with your internal linking. It helps you to rank for a long tail terms. It's something you need. If they're not writing content for, say, even category pages or product pages, because You do want to have now, I know there's people out there and I've heard you talk about this, Matt, a lot where there isn't a secret amount of like terms or like paragraphs or, words that you want to have on a page that's going to help with having good quality content.

It's just make sure it has quality content. I always say how much, I think we talked about this in the last podcast. If you're looking at it like it's a, Groupier. How much pop is there according to foam? I want to see a lot of pop, not a lot of foam. [00:30:00] So that's what like your SEO company should be writing some pop here on your page because I do have it to where, it's surprising to me that companies don't realize that you do need to have text and copy on pages to, to help with your rankings.

Or, if you're not going after a certain term, that's fine. think about it. At the end of the day, these algorithms, they have AI in place. So AI is going to understand what it is that your site is about by looking at certain things that are on a page. your certain tags. So if you're writing about the topics, like it's going to look at words, not like your videos, not your images, unless you have an alt text behind your image, but even now in the course of prior on the level of priorities, it's not high.

Okay. So you have to have. text. Even if you're not going after a lot of rankings, you have to let the search engines know what it is you're about. So you need to have that text on those pages. It is [00:31:00] astounding to me when companies do not let me touch their web pages.

Matt: That's a big red flag. If I can't change anything, if I can't change content, can't change pages, can't change design, why are you hiring someone?

Do you think this is all going to take place offsite? And that's been a very rare case where someone doesn't want anything touched. and that gets into my, my yes, but sales rule that the more people say, yeah, but we're not going to, You say that now, I think I used to say three times if someone says yes, but now I'm down to one.

Oh my god. Alright, fine. You don't want to do it. I'm done. Yeah.

Jones: I know. I usually, because I don't want to be arguing with clients and so there's always ways that I could get around it if I'm not allowed to touch a website. I will do the off page, right? So I'll do some byline articles and things like that.

But yeah, otherwise it, it is what it is. So I'll just do some metadata.

Matt: And it gets to, when you brought up reporting and you knew we were going to go there, it gets to [00:32:00] the reporting aspect. And this also gets back to beginning that relationship with questions that when I sit down with someone, it's what is it that you want to accomplish?

What makes you money? What do you want to accomplish with the site? What do you want to accomplish with your business? What is What are we trying to do here? I want to understand from them their business processes and how a website can fit those business processes because sometimes, and you've probably seen this before, you've got a client and they use the website in one way but yet it doesn't quite fit the business.

And so we have to come in and say, Yeah, you know what? Maybe you should do more lead generation rather than trying to sell things. Or maybe you should focus on this aspect, as a part of customer service rather than this. And in that way you can guide how their online [00:33:00] presence is fulfilling their business objective.

But you have to know that business objective first. Then you can say the website fits or it doesn't. Then what your website is doing, does it fit the business objective or not? But what this does is when you bring it then into the reporting aspect, now if I'm going to report what I've been doing, I'm going to report it against the business objective.

That if your goal was to get business leads, then I'm going to report business leads. That's it. Rankings to most CEOs are completely irrelevant. But. The number of backlinks you've attained, the domain authority, all those things. Really, nobody cares. They want to know, and not just that, but, okay, we were getting this many leads anyway.

before you even started. And So now we, the SEO company needs to understand incrementality, but if [00:34:00] you are already getting 200 leads a month and now you're reporting, Oh, we generated 225 leads a month. No, we were averaging

200 before you even started. So there's this claiming of victories where there was not a victory.

It's starting with that business objective. How did we meet the business objective that should be first and foremost, rather than a 50 slide deck. On trends and rankings and oh my goodness, just filler.

Jones: Yeah, it's tough. I do try to, understand looking at my notes here. I do try to understand other SEO companies and why they're reporting on what they're reporting because I just want to be very transparent with the listener.

if you're not giving your SEO company the ability to make certain changes or to do things, it's. You're going to get, you're going to get what you're enabling. So that's why it [00:35:00] should really be a conversation. You do want to have that. And that's why I do, whenever I sell SEO and we're doing SEO, I look at it as a much larger package than just, Hey, we're going to, raise some blog posts or going to do that.

It's we're going to look at your advertising. We're going to look to see what we're doing here because, you can't combine your pain and your organic efforts, and those can work together because it gets into our new channel marketing, right? So you're creating user signals back on a page.

Those user signals, depending on what, you're using to generate traffic there and how you're doing it should hopefully be, good quality. So that's just going to naturally help you organic. So it should be a much bigger picture incorporating other areas of marketing.

Matt: And at this point, I'm wondering if I should still say SEO company.

If they haven't, before everything even starts, before they optimize a page of content, if they don't do an analytics audit to [00:36:00] start, And by that verify that analytics is installed correctly. Verify that your conversion points are being I knew this is where you were

Jones: going.

Matt: Yeah, verify that your conversion points are being tracked correctly.

To verify that everything is in place and tracking correctly. And that the data is there and because how it blows my mind that companies will do SEO or marketing, but not use analytics. And I'll give you an example that one of the companies I looked at, they had duplicated conversion points in their goals.

So things were being counted twice. But, and again, that's part of that initial conversation. that in order to track things properly as a result of work, there should be provable data. And if your company is not, number one, [00:37:00] doing an analytics audit to make sure everything's set up correctly and everything's tracking correctly and that we have agreed upon conversions and I'm going to throw this out here.

The value I'm amazed at how many analytic setups I see where there is no value set, like the value of a lead, the value of someone looking for a dealer. The value of a new customer, the value of a new subscriber. Those are methods that will help you learn not only what's working, but the extent to what it's, working and the financial value of each of these actions.

I'm absolutely amazed. I would say maybe. One out of a thousand sites that I look at has values put in and it adds just a great layer It is hard.

Jones: I completely agree with you It is hard because not everybody because that's something that [00:38:00] you want to work on with the client And sometimes the client doesn't know depending on the type of business.

Matt: It is hard. And what do they say? If it was easy, everyone would be doing it.

Jones: Yeah, but it's nice if you have that metric on there. It does. It's easier to show ROI. I would say I, know we did, we started talking about some of this, but I haven't seen some of this lately and I wrote it down because I was really surprised I haven't seen some old school SEO tactics that I'm surprised are still happening.

Actually, one of the ones I've seen with a couple different clients, in fact, someone that came to us, we saw that their old SEO company was doing this. And then someone Left us and of course I look to see what they're doing and they're doing all of this that you shouldn't be doing anymore. Like it's eventually they're going to get, they're going to get caught.

So they got bamboozled, unfortunately by somebody. So it's doing that. when you have local SEO [00:39:00] and, doing those like doorway pages, you know what I'm talking about? Like those left 10 years ago, I'm surprised to see companies still doing this. because you're going to end up with several problems, like duplicate content, right?

Like you're going to like, say, if I have a page, it's like marketing agency in Canton, Ohio, and then I'm a marketing agency in Akron, Ohio. Yeah, I'm going to, it's going to help me to rank for those, but at the same time, eventually Google's going to catch on. It's pretty much the same content. Unless you have truly unique content that is for Akron, maybe it's a testimonial or something that is truly unique on that page versus like the one that's Canton.

I have been seeing a lot of clients still having that type of practice on their site. And it's shocking to me because That has been done like 10 years ago. Like

Matt: more than, yeah, The 15, six, 20 years ago that [00:40:00] Google's been trying to target in those sites. They're decades. Yeah.

Jones: It's just astounding to me to see companies still doing it.

I was shocked. I was shocked.

Matt: It's amazing to me how many are still using old practices that are completely outdated. And, I would tell site owners or anyone who, if you are going to hire an SEO company. One thing that I would recommend is reading through the Google SEO guidelines. I'll put that in the show notes.

They used to be pretty simple. It used to be like a one pager and now it's gotten a little more in depth, but it walks through here are acceptable practices. Here are unacceptable practices. And if you're in, charge, if you're making a decision, this is great content. It just get a cup of coffee.

15, 20 minutes and read through this and you will be much more prepared in hiring a company and knowing what questions to ask and understanding a little bit of the lingo that goes along with it. [00:41:00] But Google provides this great information and I'm absolutely shocked how, People don't look for it and they don't know what to look for.

So that I think that's yeah,

Jones: they don't know what questions to ask or they make a lot of assumptions. do not assume that SEO because you've read a couple articles on it. I have to say that because what you think is important. That is, SEO has a lot of theory, you know that Matt, there's some theory in SEO and what one person thinks is right is maybe an article that you read, another person might disagree.

So you want to have those like very candid conversations with your agency and understand what their strategy is for you. Like for instance, keywords, right? Like doing your meta keywords, like not everybody thinks that those are important to put on your page. And they're really not, but at the same time, I like to keep track of my strategy.

So I will use it to keep track of things. I think it's still a good, why not? It doesn't hurt you, like a doorway page. And you're not, you shouldn't be stuffing anyways. You [00:42:00] shouldn't be adding like 10 keywords to that. And right, just add one. Just add one. Just so you know, really what you want to be front and center on that page.

Matt: Yeah. Oh, of course. And it's best practice, I don't want to say best practice. It's a good practice to reflect the words that people search for, On the page. How else are they gonna know that's what it's talking about? So the basics are great But you got to answer the question You know, what do people want to know?

And that's understanding how to design a page so that people will follow the content. Remember people don't read, they scan. And if you don't design a page for easy scanning in order to get the answer they want, it's not going to work. A wall of text will not attract anybody to stay on the page.

Jones: No. But I almost feel like SEO is, you can do all these great things, right?

If you're a client and you're willing to spend it and you're like, yep, I am willing to do the technical off page and off page, on [00:43:00] page SEO. I am willing to change my site so I get these conversions. Like you're willing to spend the money, go for it because it's great. But then you could be a client that's you know what?

I know I need to have some kind of SEO on the site. And maybe you don't have a big budget. I still think you need to have SEO regardless. and that's, I almost view

it as a website is a body. I know I've used this before with you when it came to, I think a previous podcast and I love this analogy with people because if you think of a website as a body and like the clothes or almost like the user experience, right?

It's what people see and how they interact with you, like the appearance. But an SEO is like the deodorant, right?

Matt: I was wondering where you were like, Ooh, what's it going to be? What's it going to be? I don't remember the deodorant.

Jones: I know. Like I said, it's you don't have to wear deodorant, but you're probably going to smell.

I look at it as you don't have to do it, but you probably should.

Matt: That was a [00:44:00] surprise. I did not see that one coming. That, that, but that's. I love it. Yeah.

Jones: So then your SEO, if you have all this SEO, I'm trying to think of where else I could go with this. If you have all this SEO, you're willing to pay for it.

You could have cologne that matches your deodorant and clothing that just, it could all like work nice together, everything you expected. Oh my.

Matt: So I thought you were going to be like, it's the bone structure. It's the information architecture, which by the way, if you've got information architecture, Designed by keyword research and all that.

Yeah. That's your bone structure. And if you build it in, it works great.

Jones: honestly, if you're, yeah, if you're going to have SEO, please start at the beginning. If you can. Like with the technical SEO, I hate it when I get sites.

Matt: It's not, yeah, it's not bolt on like Frankenstein. Yeah. When you bake it in from the beginning, it makes it a pleasant difference.

So I want to hit a couple of things, and I'm going to circle around to analytics again [00:45:00] as well.

Jones: Yes, it does.

Matt: that's part of it. And because this gets to something you said earlier about, I'm going to point it like in the camera there. What you said earlier is I measured, it's got a high bounce rate.

I go look at the page and go see what's going on. Without analytics, how do you know the effectiveness of the content? And so this is the ABCs of analytics, acquisition, behavior, conversion, where their people come from, what do they see and what do they do? And what was the result? If you're not running analytics, then you don't know, as I look, as I've heard people say, you don't know which pages are paying the rent.

You don't know which pages are working for you. Yeah. and you can figure out, and even without ranking reports or things like that, should be able to figure out why people are coming to certain pages. And if they're coming based on that keyword, a keyword family, or that topic, you should understand, okay, not only is this page have a [00:46:00] high bounce rate, it's got a low time on site, it's got low depth of visit, it's got a zero, 0.

001 percent conversion rate. It doesn't take a genius to realize, okay, the content, the experience on that page is poor compared to what they were expecting. Now on the other side, if I've got low bounce rate, high engagement, high scroll depth, high page depth, and a great conversion rate, you know what?

I might want to consider paying people to come to this page or paying Google to get more people to this page because it's a high converting page. So doing that analysis, Helps, how else do you know your SEO is working? That's what it gets back to me is that page level analysis. That's so critical with analytics.

Jones: But you also have to be realistic, right? So I'm gonna, I'm gonna use an example. I actually see this a lot. So sometimes I'll come in [00:47:00] on, to do SEO. Actually this isn't sometimes, this happens a lot. You would be surprised at what I'm gonna tell you. And I'm getting handed a site that we didn't develop. It was a site that was already done.

And I find out that there were no redirects done on the site. This happens a lot. There are companies that will develop a new website and there was already an old

site that was existing and they didn't redirect all your URLs. I'm sorry. Every URL should be redirected. Not just you don't just pick and choose everyone.

And it should be to the best page that it fits to. Yeah. And it happens a lot. And I have some clients that, that happen with and, at that point it's going to take some time. It's going to take some time because you're essentially starting over with SEO. So my first thing, my strategy, I'm very honest.

I'm like, look, this is going to take some time. We're going to [00:48:00] start with some content development, but this is going to be one of the fastest ways to do it. Like content development. That's how we're just going to dive right in.

Matt: that and going back to internet archive to see what the old structure was.

And

Jones: if you can change any of that,

Matt: just to get some redirects in place, even if it's been a year. maybe getting some redirects in place might help a little bit.

Jones: I tried that. I know I tried that, man. It's just I was talking with my developer and I was like, Oh my gosh. Cause when you have these huge sites, it doesn't even make sense at that point because Google probably already crawled the new site.

Matt: It's hard, but you want to keep, yeah. Any, and that's the one thing. So whenever we look at a site that has gone through a transition, like a new website or anything like that, we're looking at the high referral pages. The high link referral pages, the high ranking pages, and what's the plan. So you may, if you've got thousands of pages, yeah, doing a redirect plan is going to take forever.

But if you focus on the pages that are [00:49:00] linked to the pages that are high ranking, those things. Focus there first and then, whatever you want to do, you can also make it happen at the directory level. So you don't have to do individual pages.

Jones: Yeah, exactly.

Matt: So we're winding down. I honestly, I actually, I feel like we can go another hour with, reasons.

So let's do rapid fire. Let's do like a rapid fire reasons to fire your, SEO company, or I'll even say your marketing company, because number one, at the top of this, is one thing I texted you about earlier in the week. Having a Google ads campaign. That is set for conversion optimization, but not having conversions set in Google ads.

Jones: Yeah, that, yeah.

Matt: Rapid fire. Why would I fire?

Jones: quick fire, no transparency. You don't know what it is that they're doing. do they have a project management system that you know what they're doing every month? Because I think it's very, easy, not even just with the reporting. [00:50:00] Matt, but not knowing what it is that they're doing.

Matt: Absolutely. and what they're doing from a big picture standpoint. Yeah. I saw one report. What we're doing this month is we're changing words and it was just a, page from the website and we're changing these words this month. That's, okay, you're trying to empty the ocean with a spoon.

What's your big goal? What are you trying to accomplish? Another reason would be improper reporting. And this gets to what I talked about earlier, that if you're claiming that we produced this many conversions, this many quotes, this many, But the company was already humming along at a pretty good average and you're claiming some.

And also, by the way, if you're counting conversions, but you haven't taken the step of eliminating spam submissions from those conversions, And this was one of the companies I ran into. They made a report that we had this many conversions. And then when that was questioned, because it didn't line up with analytics, it didn't line up with Google ads, it didn't line up with anything.

They [00:51:00] claimed, there was a lot of spam submissions too. isn't your job,

Jones: isn't

Matt: that your job to make sure that those spam submissions are either eliminated. Or dealt with if you're reporting numbers that you know are incorrect because of spam, that says a lot to your competency.

Jones: they should also have like timeframes, because I know we try to do like a full month of comparison.

So we'll do, either month over month or year over year. It's always better to do year over year if you can. sometimes it's hard having that data because of, you want to keep in mind seasonality.

Matt: Seasonality is big, yeah. That's why I hate month to month, yeah. Summer is, depending upon what business you're in, yeah, if you're in the summer right now you're like, It's so low!

Nothing's happening! Haha!

Jones: Yeah, I know, the thing is, too, like with a lot of the changes with Universal, like going from Universal, if they're using Google Analytics.

Matt: Another [00:52:00] big red flag is when you ask the company for a report and basically you get a 50 slide PowerPoint deck of charts and graphs and things that are screenshots out of their SEO management software.

Which, that irritates me to no end because, I could pay and get that software for myself. Why should I pay you for your screenshot? They should

Jones: write a story. What does that stuff mean? And why do I care about this? Yeah. Like when we're doing, we look at the trends, right? We look at what is the organic traffic trend or is it trending up?

If there are certain terms to say a company wants to focus on, we will put those rankings in there because that's what the company requested,

Matt: but it has to have explanation.

Jones: Yeah, it does. Cause you know, here's the thing too. Keywords naturally fluctuate. So that's another reason why I don't like just looking at specific terms and not looking at the overall trending, like what's going on, is it trending up?

And if it's [00:53:00] not trending up, is there something going on in that industry? Because we've seen that before where, and this is actually a good problem to have. They were literally, this specific client that I was thinking of, they were literally dominating the industry, certain terms. So it was nice because we were noticing that they were trending up and then all of a sudden they're not Increasing as much as they were year over year like literally the increases were astronomical But guess why?

Because they already had their title tags or meta descriptions Like all those things were replaced alt tags all that kind of fun stuff and we're doing You know internal linking but we were doing a ton of content development You So blogging byline articles, we were helping with their media buying.

So obviously it's a little bit different than, your traditional SEO, but they were doing so much that I knew that's why all of it was working together and their, traffic and their organic traffic in particular, in this case was trending up. [00:54:00]

Matt: And that's the thing when you're doing the right things, and as much complaining as there has been about Google the past few months, a good part of the industry has seen their success increase, their traffic increase.

So there's something to be said for I think doing things the right way, but yeah, just to warn people. In fact, this even happened in one of the classes, I was giving a week long workshop and day one, I joked that If you wanna know what kind of SEO company you've got or what kind of marketing company your agency you're using, ask them, how are things doing?

Can you give me a summary of what we're doing? And I said, if what you get in response is a 50 slide PowerPoint deck with all data and no explanation, that'll tell you everything you need to know. And three days later, one of the people came forward and they said, do you wanna see the deck they sent me?

And it was all data, no direction, just all data, here's where we're at, here's what's going on. And it's almost like you interpret it. [00:55:00] I think agencies have figured out we can overwhelm people with data and they won't ask questions.

Jones: I think what happens too Like they get too many clients and, they don't personalize because every report reports take time.

And unfortunately it's time that you do. not unfortunately, but you do have to build for that time. And it's not time that shows like a ton of work being done. So you have to make sure the client understands that, you need to do these reports. And this is why factor that into their hours and it should be You know, you should be spending a good amount of time on a report.

Like we do, we look at the numbers every week and, depending on the client, what they have going on, we'll develop a customizable report for that client that is. It's pretty big because we're writing information in that and what we think needs to happen and what's going on. Sometimes you just know.

You're

Matt: giving your insight. You're interpreting the [00:56:00] data and providing insight and recommendation. And that's different. That is different. That's people aren't used to getting that.

Jones: It is different. That's what we do. We also. that's why it just depends on the client because I am very cautious with what we spend our hours on.

because I do try to not, spend a ton of hours on things that. it's just like busy work, right? So if I know a client, so say if there's a client that they came to me and they had, they didn't do any redirects, right? So I know that's going to take some time. So I went ahead and did an initial audit, told him what was going on.

This is what we're seeing. This is what we're going to do. I may not do a report again the next month because I already know it's not going to change on that point. I'm not going to spend an hour plus on a report that we could spend A blog post or something on it that I know at that point you don't need it.

So that's like you want to make sure your agency's using some common sense Talking to you and they're just they're collaborating

Matt: and the more you collaborate the less you've got to report [00:57:00] that I think comes down to it because Like I tell people I want to know what is your insight? What are you recommending?

Why? Because otherwise all you're showing me are your copy and paste skills That doesn't show me anything when you, it shows me you can copy and paste out of a program that anyone could buy into a report. And you're expecting me to interpret that as, Oh, you're busy. That's, not how it works. And that's my goal is to teach people.

No, these are not the reports that you want. And that's where it all comes back. Just like what you said, it all comes back to that initial meeting. What is, what do you want to achieve? What are your objectives? And when I understand that, then that will guide how I report. That will guide the relationship because it is a collaborative relationship.

It's not, I'm going to go away, sit in a dark room, hit my keyboard a bunch of times, and then I'm going to overwhelm [00:58:00] you with it, with software reports.

Jones: and that's why I'm encouraging, Anybody who's listening that's hiring it. you have got to be open minded and have a conversation because you're going to get what you're giving at the end of the day, this is going to happen.

Because it's like what you were saying, Matt, you give it three times. You said, was it three times? Like you'll give Hey, can I do this?

Matt: It used to be three times. Yeah.

Jones: Yeah. cause you don't want to argue with the client. You're paying my check, I'm not going to sit here and argue with you.

if you're not going to take my recommendations after three times, honestly, at the end of the day, it's on you. that's why you have to ask yourself, if you're not happy with your agency, are you doing something? I hate to say it, but are you collaborating with them? Are you asking them the questions?

Are you letting them do their job? And, because I'm saying this a lot, because this is something I run into a lot. it's just where I can't change the website. I can't do certain things. I don't have the permissions to do it. So my hands are a little

[00:59:00] tied. So because of that, my reporting and how I communicate to you is going to be with what I can do.

Matt: And that's unfortunate because you're missing the greater part of what a marketing company can do for you. Because again, it's. Yeah, I look at that conversion optimization is if you're doing SEO without conversion optimization, you're doing half the story, half the work, and you're going to get half the results, maybe less.

Jones: Yeah, exactly. And it's nice if you can look at it as a digital marketing package than just an SEO package. That's what I sell. I don't just sell SEO.

Matt: and it goes back to something. I learned very early with conversion optimization that if I look at your analytics and I see, okay, you're getting about, 20 leads or 20 sales a month or something like that.

If you want to double that, Here's how long it would take me to double your traffic at the current conversion rate, and here's what you would make. [01:00:00] like you were talking about, if I want to double the traffic, it's going to take this long, we're going to have to go this with keywords. However, If I double your conversion rate, that could happen next month because that's fixing the process, the experience, and it's so much easier to increase the conversion rate than it is to double the traffic.

And this is why it's such a hand in hand process of the visitor experience. And if they're not talking about that, then you're missing out.

Jones: Yeah, no, I, agree. I do agree with that.

Matt: thank you, Ashley. Appreciate that.

Jones: yeah. I'll be honest. Cause it's I do try to see all sides. Like when we're getting, I don't like to talk bad about other agencies and I always feel bad if, cause I'm an agency too.

So it's if an agency is losing, clients and I do try to be understanding because. there was a client that we got, what was it? I think it was last [01:01:00] year. And they did get a deck from the SEO person, like what you're talking about. And I did look

through the deck and I could see, there's copy and paste stuff, but I could tell that this was a guy that was good at technical SEO.

And so I could see some of his strengths and the company just didn't understand what they were.

Matt: Yes. Yeah, and that's where SEO does have disciplines within it. And that's also why I tell people do not go out on your own. Until you've worked at an agency, until you've worked at a brand, until you've learned how to manage a complete client relationship and everything that's involved.

I love people that focus on technical. They're great people to call when there's an issue, when you've got to develop something, when you've got to fix something. But unfortunately, it's not as big a requirement as it used to be. And now the focus is content. It's content, [01:02:00] content, and PR that if you can't do it, you've got to have those relationships to bring them in to that client and know when it's necessary and when to grow.

Jones: we, like my personal forte is definitely more on the content side. So off page on page. But technical, I have people on my team and even like before they were on my team, I knew who to call. So that's why you have to know where, cause there's going to be times where it's like, there's nothing you do that you can do on that site unless that certain technical things are fixed.

if a company has a video on their site, do not put a video on your site without having to be embedded from like YouTube or something, because it slows down. You're loading time dramatically, and that's something that, a developer would know.

Matt: Unless you, yeah. You know how to fix those things.

I'm just using that as an

Jones: example. there's other things that slow down your site. But that loading time is an impact. It does have an impact on SEO. [01:03:00] Yep.

Matt: Absolutely. Ashley, we have been going, and like I said, I think we can go another hour here, but we'll take a little break from the listeners and I think you and

I, we will regroup because there's many other issues coming up here as well, especially with Google and I know you've been doing a lot in the paid side.

we'll talk about that as well, but thank you so much. Joining me.

Jones: Oh, yeah. I have a lot to say about that.

Matt: We'll leave that for the show. But thank you for coming on. I knew as soon as I suggested this topic, you would be ready to go. So

Jones: Oh, I am because I'm just excited. it to. And that's why I do have a heart for other agencies.

I get it, but I understand both sides. So I do try to help everybody.

Matt: I appreciate that in you because I may not have as much patience as you when it comes to these things. I'm a little, I find myself to be a little less forgiving and it's hard because when you see things that just Where my heart [01:04:00] is with the business owner.

And especially from the teaching standpoint, I want to teach people to succeed and I want those businesses to succeed. And sometimes, yeah, I overlook the, the agencies because I see them sometimes as a hindrance. They're not enabling it.

Jones: They are sometimes I agree, but sometimes their hands are tied.

That's what that happens. And it's Oh, the socks. Cause you know, what needs to happen. And

Matt: a lot of that comes down to experience the experience of the ownership of that agency or the experience of that person and how to negotiate, how to handle. And that's why I tell people as SEO, please do not start your own thing because there's a lot you've got to learn.

And it's not just SEO, it's client management, it's negotiation, it's understanding that if my hands are tied on a site. It might be better to walk away. And so it, there's a lot of nuance to it.

Jones: yeah. Or how can I help them [01:05:00] still succeed, but, show that success, right? That Hey, you are still succeeding, but you still need to do this.

You can succeed even more, right? you got basically like a B on your term paper, but you could get an A. You have to understand how to communicate that.

Matt: And that's why you're here, Ashley. You bring that soft touch of that empathy for the agency. And I need them a little bit more. So yeah,

Jones: I used to be like that, man.

And then I, I. Got some more experience and I understand when sometimes your hands are tied, there's nothing you can do.

Matt: dear listener, I hope this has been an informative episode of when to fire your SEO. Yes, honest and informative episode of when to fire your SEO company. Oh my, I hope you have taken a lot of this in the spirit in which it was intended as educational, but also understanding both Ashley and I have.

[01:06:00] things. And there are some companies that I would say need to be avoided, and there are some companies that just need to learn a few things in order to be better. So we'll leave it at that. Ashley, thanks again for joining me today.

Jones: Yeah. So for having

Matt: me. And thank you to your listener for joining us on another episode of the endless coffee cup.

And maybe you made it through two cups of coffee today. I know it is, it didn't take much for me to, get, energized for this one. So I look forward to talking with you on the next edition of the Endless Coffee Cup podcast.

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