



SEO for E-Commerce



In this time of increased e-commerce activity, what can you do to boost the conversions of your online store? SEO expert Gert Mellak returns to give answers.



Gert Mellak

James: James Schramko here. Welcome back to SuperFastBusiness.com. This is Episode 766. I'm chatting to my good friend [Gert Mellak](#) from [SEOLeverage.com](#), again.

Hey, Gert. Welcome back.

Gert: Hey, James. Thank you. It's always a pleasure to be here.

Quality work paying off

James: Is it true? I've heard rumors that you're hiring people now because of how much business you've been getting from our [previous discussions](#). And all the good SEO work you've been doing is generating you a few referrals?

Gert: Absolutely. It's been great. We have got a lot of brand exposure to SEOLeverage.com. We got in front of a lot of eyeballs, which is so important, and ears, essentially through the podcast, as you have been teaching for years. We're now feeding our top of funnel; things are going great.

We're growing the business. We're more than 15 people right now on the team and growing fast. Just starting the R&D team and getting some more experiments going and getting some more attraction here to leverage more findings for our clients, so things are going great.

James: Nice. Well, you know, SEO is one of those fields where there's a lot of bandits operating out there. So when you find a good supplier, you will rise to the top. And it's great that you've even been using some of the IP and some of the team members from my old SEO business, which is really exciting. And I'm glad to be able to be, in some way, a part of your success.

The current trend in e-commerce

But today, I want to talk about e-commerce for SEO, because it's such an emerging field. We've seen through the pandemic a big rise in e-commerce sites, we're looking at, time of recording, Amazon had a massive share price increase again yesterday. It looks like people are ordering a lot of stuff from home.

And I also got a notification from our local post office. They're going to be delivering letters every second day, so they can cater for all the parcels and packages coming to the homes. I'm sure they're not all just coming to my house, we're going to spread it around in other places.

But I've been buying a couple of things online, because we used to go to the shops and it makes sense to get online. But as we start searching, you know, I notice how competitive it is. I was looking for a bicycle the other day, I sold my e-bike because e-bikes are in very, very short supply, like really short supply. I sold my e-bike for a profit in about 15 minutes of listing it, like it was insane. And I just wanted a regular bike, because I need to get rid of some of that COVID chub.

And so if you've been watching any of my videos, I've got a little bit of extra chin fat right now. So I just wanted a bike where I get to pedal. And when I looked at the bikes, it was really interesting to see what came up when I searched for different criteria of bikes. I noticed I've been stalked by remarketing ads and so forth, on social media. And I ended up making a purchase.

I used the online site to educate myself. And then I went to my local store. In fact, I phoned another store first and they had no supply until the end of 2020, which is too long. And I found a store that had one in stock indicated on their website, and I went down there. And I described to the guy what I was after. I didn't tell him the model. I didn't tell him I knew anything about it. I just said my riding needs and he took me straight to the one that I thought was the perfect model for me. And then I purchased it on the spot.

What SEO can do for online stores

But let's talk about e-commerce stores like that. How can they take advantage of SEO? And is it more busy now than it was, say, a year ago?

Gert: You're raising a lot of great points, starting with the bicycle industry being really tough. I have also been to the bicycle store here.

James: They have no stock. There's just no stock in there.

Gert: No, they have no stock. I was going to purchase the next size bicycle for my daughter the other day, and there is just no way you can get a bicycle of any kind. I think they only have, like, the retro-style bicycles my grandfather had, and that wasn't exactly what my daughter was looking for.

James: What, like a pennyfarthing?

Gert: Something like that, yeah. Something like that.

So it's definitely interesting that certain industries that used to be working normally, right now are really off the shelves. They have no stock at all. You can't even order. There's a friend of mine had her orders cancelled because they just couldn't deliver on the bike, and they couldn't even tell them when they would be delivering. Not even end of 2020 or whatever.

James: Right.

Gert: So there are a lot of niches, and we have this thing, even down to a level of AA batteries. So people purchase things they used to purchase in the supermarket, things they used to purchase in the specific store. They now purchase this online.

So search volume is growing tremendously fast, especially in this pandemic, but also other micro events very often have an impact on how many searches are performed. So the search volume, the number of searches that are performed for a certain keyword, is something we pay very close attention to in SEO.

As an example, as you're pretty much into surfing, I understand...

James: Just a little.

Gert: I did some research. I really don't understand anything about it, but as I research, I took the term, that's paddleboard, not exactly sure if it's the same as you use...

James: No, it's kind of the enemy. That's the Nemesis.

Gert: That's the Nemesis. I need to do my homework here.

James: They sit out one layer behind the surfboards and catch all the waves before us.

Gert: Okay.

James: And then they're so big when they fall off, they can take you out. So you've got to watch out for them. The even worse version beyond that is the foilers, the people who have those foil boards. And the motorized ones, because they can catch anything. And if they come at you, those things could slice you in half.

Gert: Right.

James: So yeah, interesting you brought that up.

Gert: Yeah, I should have done my research first. So just to stick with this example, the paddleboard has 45,000 searches in the United States per month.

James: Wow.

Gert: Right? So 45,000 times...

James: That's 45,000 too many in my mind.

Gert: But we just need to imagine that there are 45,000 times someone is searching for paddleboard in the United States, every single month. So based on my brief analysis, and with some tools we have, the number one ranking site gets 8,000 visitors just out of this every single month.

So even with a two-percent conversion rate, and maybe an average price – I don't know, about \$400, as far as I researched approximately, this would mean more than \$60,000 in revenue every single month if you get this number one ranking.

This is just one single keyword. Average stores we deal with have between 15,000 products. Imagine if you do this at scale, the potential that's there. Obviously not everybody is going to get to number one. But even a number five or number eight might very well put your business into another league, if you get this for a few keywords or in a specific segment.

So definitely search volume is increasing. We're even seeing that people get more search, more traffic than we estimated they would be getting, because this year search volume has changed. So our tools and the analysis tools we have, our experience, we more or less know in many niches how many searches are performed, but we are seeing drastic changes this year. For example, everything that's in the online business, online coaching, courses, etc., has skyrocketed with the pandemic, and e-commerce definitely is on the fast track.

The types of searches involved

James: Let's talk about the different types of searches. Because I know how specific e-commerce stores are for qualified traffic.

Like, someone who's typing that into Google, like me, when I'm looking for a bicycle, I'm pretty specific. I'm going to be using phrases like my geographic location, because I don't want to buy a bicycle overseas or in another state. I want to go somewhere nearby, ideally. And I definitely want it to be delivered quickly.

In the beginning, I might be typing the type or the category of the bicycle. And then as I refine my search, I might be typing in actual model numbers to compare between different retailers to see who's got stock, because that became an issue. So I know there's different types of search queries and keywords. Do you want to run us through what we can optimize for?

Gert: Absolutely. So essentially, we want to take the key tags or keywords from different stages of the funnel. So even if someone just types in, bicycle, at some stage it depends on how far you are with your store. Those might be interesting to have an impact on them with your brand, just so that they know that you also sell bicycles, right?

And you might give them some tips on how to tune your bicycle and what you can do, or some bike routes in your area, etc. This could be content that's interesting for these people but they have no buying intent.

The danger with e-commerce is that we go too broad, meaning we think that just because we are an online store for bikes, we're suddenly responsible for all kinds of bikes, all kinds of topics related to cycling and people looking for sportswear and clothing, etc. are also going to purchase our bikes. It could happen, but it's not as likely. Okay?

Whereas someone looking specifically for a specific bike like you might have been searching for, or someone looking for their area, someone looking for pricing, price comparison reviews on a certain bike, reviews on a certain brand, those are very specific searches. We call them informational and transactional, commercial and navigational searches, other searches that could be performed.

Navigational is like, you told me the name of a store, I type in the store's name and website. This is a navigational search. I just head there, I just want to get their website. I have no purchase intent yet so far. But then I have like, informational keywords. So I want to know, is it better to get an e-bike? Is it better to get a normal bike? What are the differences? What should I pay attention to?

James: Well, one, you have to do a lot more work, I can tell you. And the other one's really expensive.

Gert: Absolutely, absolutely. But people might not know a price point for an electric bike, so they want to get some more information about it.

James: Everyone wants an e-bike until they realize how much they cost.

Gert: Absolutely. And then you've got the commercial keywords where you say okay, I've got kind of a commercial intent, I'm planning to purchase a car in the next month. So I'm going to go a little bit more specific. Okay, so I'm going to research some brands, I'm going to compare some products, different car models, different bike models, etc. This has a commercial intent, but buying cycles can be very long still.

And then you've got transactional keywords. So I want the best price for bike XYZ, very specific, price-related, very often with an area code. This is something people very often forget.

And I think this is one of the tips we can give here, is to sign up for Google My Business. If someone has an online store, they think they're online, they don't have any local relevance. But very often people are going to search for a provider in their industry. A huge percentage, I think it was 50, 70 percent of searches have a local intent. So even if it goes to Google, we still want to perform the purchase within our area, because we just feel more comfortable in this way.

James: I mean, does that apply to countries as well?

Gert: If you sell countrywide, you're saying?

James: Well, in my case, when I was searching for the bike, Google did a pretty good job of presenting me with Australian retailers.

Gert: Right.

James: I think it realized I don't want to import a bicycle from the United States, for example.

Gert: Exactly. Google has a pretty good idea which niches usually look for providers in their area.

James: You can nominate a country code, can't you, for your domain, in Google?

Gert: You could get the country code directly, if you're specifically targeting a country. You could get the .com.au, and Google automatically knows your intended target market.

James: Yeah.

Gert: But you could also target specific creatives. You could build up content about bike riding in Brisbane, for example.

James: The Northern beaches.

Gert: In order to get more traction there, right?

Or you could convince people in Manly to get paddleboards rather than normal surfboards.

How different it is from typical SEO

James: How would you say e-commerce SEO is different from normal SEO? Like when you get someone saying, I've got an e-commerce store, I want you to have a look over it, what are you looking at? Like, what do you automatically know that's going to be different to your average service business, you know, like a lawyer or an accountant or whatever?

Gert: That's an amazing question, because very often people try to apply what they see on SEO tutorials to the e-commerce store. And there are a few ways why it doesn't work.

Let me start with what is similar. Google, in any case, is going to try to make their users happy. How do they do this? They want to deliver the best possible answer to their request. So an informational search about e-bike versus normal bike or whatever, is not going to search for a product, a specific product or a product category, it's going to search for a content illustrating the different options, explaining, or maybe a video embedded, maybe an infographic, maybe a lot of text, etc.

Whereas if I want to buy a specific bike – to stick with this example – we just want to show probably, Google wants to show directly the category. So you need to know what you're going after. Right? So you want to check what Google is ranking.

What Google is ranking right now is what they think makes users happy or gives the best user satisfaction on search. Because then if users are happy, they're going to perform another search on Google and not head over to Bing or DuckDuckGo, or whatever alternative there is out there.

Okay? So based on the premise that Google wants to make users happy, we need to be aware of what Google wants to rank. If I want to rank for a certain brand, for example, bicycle brand, and the queries that go with this brand, I need to see what Google searches for. Okay? So this is what's always the same. Even if you have a B2B website, you will need to check out what Google wants to rank and see if you can provide something similar to start with.

On e-commerce, there's a lot more complexity because e-commerce sites usually have a very big scale, meaning it's hard to find. There are a few one, two-product stores out there that then do their promotion via Facebook ads and sell essentially one gadget, and they're doing very well and that's fine and they have different needs and they're more similar to normal websites rather than e-commerce solutions when it comes to SEO.

Are you wasting Google's budget?

But very often, we deal with pages that have 15,000 products. You essentially have 15,000 pages because every page gets a product. You've got filters, you can filter by price, you can filter by brand, you can filter by application, or by –

James: Compare, you can compare models.

Gert: bulk pricing and single pricing. Exactly. You can do a lot of things.

And all those options at the backend, create a lot of URLs, a lot of individual pages. Not only every product creates pages, but also every collection or category creates a page and all those filters also create pages. So there is a huge amount, it can be millions of URLs, with all the combinations that technically exist on your site.

And sometimes sites are not aware that they are making Google index all those pages and crawl all those pages. So what happens, for instance, is that Google sometimes has to crawl 2 million pages because the site owners didn't make it clear that only 50,000 are relevant. And Google starts to crawl all those pages, starts to index all those pages, starts to find hundreds of duplicate content, where essentially, it's the same content, just Google found different ways to find it, and nothing ranks.

And essentially, you're wasting what we call Google's crawl budget, or I usually refer to it as processing time. So Google is not going to spend days indexing your website just because it looks so nice. Google is going to be very picky on how much time to spend on your site, because at scale, when crawling millions and millions of websites, this is costing Google a lot of money. And this is something people underestimate.

So Google is not going to throw out money if they think what you deliver is not valuable for the users, at least after some time. So they might crawl invaluable pages, but at some point, they are going to throttle down and say, Okay, I'm going to crawl five pages every day on on this site, but not more, because most of the of the URLs it's sending me aren't going to be valuable for my searches. I'm never going to rank them, so why should I spend money and time on processing those pages?

So a big part of the e-commerce SEO question is to streamline crawling efforts of Google, especially if you have a few thousand products. If you have 200, it's not a big issue. But already there, you can make some optimizations. But very often, you want to really be specific on what you want Google to crawl, what you want Google to spend their time on. So scale is a very, very big issue.

Pay attention to the text

And the second issue really would be the text.

James: Oh. I mean, this is such a huge thing I noticed with the bikes, and especially with the surfboard industry. They cut and paste from the manufacturers side, word by word, you get nothing new or interesting. When you go to a reseller site, it's regurgitated from the manufacturer's site. Almost every surfboard reseller has the exact manufacturer's description.

I made an entire site, and I know you know that I've got this site, where we collated different reviews and specs and dimensions from users and from the manufacturer's site. And we put personal, custom-written reviews, and I often actually speak to the manufacturer and get custom content from them – behind-the-scenes notes, those sort of things that we can then put into text. And we outrank the manufacturers for their own equipment, because we're so different.

And it's an interesting point on this, the bicycle that I purchased is a 2021 model that was not even showing on the manufacturer's site. They only had the 2020. So the reseller had cleverly found information about the newer model, and updated their website to be newer and fresher than the manufacturers.

And having worked for large manufacturers in the past, like Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Vodafone and General Motors, I can say often a crafty or motivated Independent can outrank and outcraft the manufacturer if they want to just do that one thing.

And when I was at Mercedes-Benz, I did a case study where we built our own dealership website and put it against the one Mercedes-Benz gave us. And after, Mercedes-Benz wanted to charge us a few thousand dollars to install the analytics pixel on the manufacturer's site. I couldn't believe it. Our website, it actually got 100 times more traffic. It wasn't even close. So you know, we were able to do that.

So please, if you have an e-commerce store, and you're selling a similar product to other stores, please make the content unique. Would you agree with that?

Ways to power up your content

Gert: Absolutely I would. And I think there is one more point that should be mentioned here. People get overwhelmed. They think, okay, I've got 50,000 products, now I need to write up to 50,000 individual texts. But then I really try to focus them based on the conversions, based on how many people really access those pages.

James: 80/20. What are the top ten products?

Gert: Exactly.

James: Which products already rank? Which makes the most profit? What do you sell the most of? Start with that. Hire a team member, go to [VisionFind.com](https://www.visionfind.com), and hire a researcher to go out and create brand new custom description content for your top 10 products. And when you've done that, do the next 10, and the next 10, and watch your site catapult.

In fact, the number one type of business who's hiring team members from our business portfolio, VisionFind.com, are e-commerce stores. They're hiring, like, six of them, eight of them, 10 of them. Because this is a big deal. You want to dominate the search results with your e-commerce store, you can by having differentiated content.

Gert: Absolutely. I'm working with more and more teams, essentially, that have been built through VisionFind through other providers, where I guide them in the process on an ongoing consulting.

We have a call every couple of weeks for example and I tell them, Look, you could be doing copies on 50,000 articles. But let's focus on these 200. And if you have two people that can go through this in a week or two, and get those articles original feedback, they could embed YouTube videos they find out there and give people more direct product reviews.

It's going to be more tangible. One of the product problems in e-commerce is really that it's just so virtual, so you can't really get a feeling of, what's the size of this product, how does it feel, what's the material like, etc. So very often people would then head over to YouTube. Why not present them those findings directly on your product page?

James: I see them. There's boxing videos, tutorial videos.

Gert: Absolutely.

James: How to install it, how to assemble it, different ways you can use it. Get customers to submit content for you. I've got a client at the moment, and we get the customers sending in the best videos that we can actually display and educate other customers.

Ezra Firestone's done a brilliant job of content marketing. He added things like blogging and social media and customer testimonials and remarketing and good email segmentation and segmented audiences based on video views and so forth, to just supercharge his e-commerce business. So it's such a great frontier to do something better and next-level.

And I will say that almost all the young people coming through have a good education, usually university degree, and most people who have been through university have good research skills. That's a big key component apparently of the education system. Don't ask me, because I didn't finish university.

But apparently researching, collating, reorganizing and preparing content is actually a good skill set that you can plug into just about any online business from right now. We do it.

I even do research before our podcasts, now. One of my team members goes and looks up the person I'm podcasting with, and they actually find information, and they give me bullet point notes of what they've been up to, where they studied, their previous businesses. And I use that information in the podcasts that I do.

I have it on good authority that you've got a close fascination with bears and strawberry trees. Is that true?

Gert: Yeah. That is true, yeah. It refers to the official symbol of Madrid. I'm based in Madrid in Spain, so this is our official symbol there.

James: There you go. So, you know, research, baby, that's the ticket.

Consistency in SEO

I also heard rumors that you're part cyborg. I'm not so sure about that. But you're very, very efficient. Every time we podcast, you turn up exactly on time, and everything you say you'll deliver, you deliver. That's very rare. It's really rare, and I admire that quality about you. So, you know, keep up that consistent delivery, and you'll win a lot of friends, I imagine.

Gert: I appreciate that. Consistency is definitely something I think that sets us a little bit apart in SEO. It's consistent effort. SEO is a long term game. I think most people know this by now, it's not something you set and forget, you hire someone to do some research, create some copy and then forget about it.

We're going through Google updates all the time. Google is shifting based on what they think at a certain time Google users expect. With the pandemic, for example, they shift very quickly. So people looking for virus in January and people looking for virus in March are going to get search results that are vastly different, because Google knows what they're probably up to.

So this is a long-term game, you need to be consistent. And just to talk a little bit about the product copy and product descriptions, again, this is really something we're seeing, especially with drop-shipping businesses. So at [SEO Leverage](#), we get a lot of calls from drop-shipping sites asking us why their content doesn't rank, why their sites don't rank.

And very often, there are even systems out there that create your drop-shipping business on the fly. You just pay a little bit of money or you connect Shopify with some other providers. They put up your store, you have a store in half an hour. I did this myself. You get 5000 products in half an hour, you're going to deliver through the drop shipper, that's all fine. But what you essentially have is the copy number 158,000 of these products here.

If you put yourself into Google's shoes, and this is what I try with my clients and my coaching clients, my consulting clients to do, if you were Google and you had 150,000 exactly the same version of the text, what would you do? What would you base your criteria on? Why would you say one should rank and one shouldn't rank?

So it's just as simple as that, and very often the manufacturer texts aren't even correct. They have spelling mistakes, they have grammar mistakes, they have bad translations that have been pushed out, because they obviously don't want to spend too much money on creating the best text out there on a \$2 product. That's understandable as well.

But if you focus, if you get your 80/20, if you focus on the URLs, and you focus especially on the categories, the collections on your store, for a start, I think this is definitely time well invested in the text.

Can you compete with Amazon?

James: What about, you know, if we were selling cameras or something? Can we go up against sites like Amazon, or is that just unrealistic?

Gert: That's an awesome question, because this is something people always compare with. So they say, look, Amazon is doing this, or Amazon is using the manufacturer text, why can't I? And the answer is simple: because you're not Amazon. Right?

James: Is it like, marketers saying, oh, Coke does this or Coke does that?

Gert: Exactly.

James: You're not going to go and take out billboards for your product or run primetime television commercials. So basically, pick a fight you can win, rather than just look at your peer groups or other competitors in your market, and do more outstanding work.

Gert: That's exactly what I tell clients, literally, I say pick your battles.

James: Right.

Gert: So this is really important, you need to know where it's realistic to rank for. Like I said, You're not going to aim for ranking for bicycle also, because the intent is not really there, the purchase intent, and it's just probably too far away. But you're definitely going to be able to rank for combinations with your city, with your state, with your country.

So looking for bikes and Sydney, for example, or something like this, is much less competitive. Big brands are usually not focusing on the local area, they focus on the big searches, and we need to see that they leverage. People coming to Amazon are not going to only purchase a bike, they're going to purchase additional products. They have a much bigger margin to work with.

Google might even have something in the algorithm preferring or giving Amazon a certain push. We don't know about this. But just based on the brand importance Amazon has, or eBay or Etsy, etc., just got a client point to Etsy as a reference, they have a very strong brand, meaning they get a lot of links, they have a lot of trust. And I think trust and brand is something e-commerce sites should not forget.

So essentially, you want to get your domain authority higher, which means you need to get links, quality links from quality sources from the internet referring you or recommending you for a particular niche, as you on this podcast might be linking to my agency for SEO. If I have a bike store, I want to have relevant sites about sports, about biking, about my region, my local area, etc., point to me as the reference for biking, and then I'm going to get some trust.

If you have your Google My Business listing, this means Google is sending you a physical mail that arrives at your post office or in your post box. You put in a code, you put it in on the site, so Google knows if they sent to a specific real business with a real address, where someone really opens the post box and gets this notification. So they can authenticate this.

The problem posed by AI

There is a thing that's called EAT. Expertise, trustworthiness and authoritativeness. And this is something we see grow more and more. Because Google has a growing problem and artificial intelligence is going to skyrocket this to differentiate serious content from non-serious content, real content from automatic content.

We probably have a year away from a commercial offer that can create AI-based content just with a few keywords. Like, put in a few keywords and they get an original, non-copied text for a product, maybe a product description, from an AI engine, and those get better and better. So they have a growing problem of texts being automated or not knowing if the brand behind the site is really legit. So they need to see if there are trust signals that indicate that this might be a real business.

So Google My Business signup is one of the things you can do. Getting important other brands linked to your manufacturers, linked to you, etc, is another thing, for example.

James: I know the new language AI just ranked a post that was completely written by computer. With just a subject line in the first sentence written, the rest of it was all made up by the AI. And it instantly ranked at the top. And then people started suspecting it was made. I think the AI was called GTP3, something similar to that.

Gert: GTP3 is very strong. You can even just type in what your website should be like, and GTP3 is going to put the website up. So you say header, a little bit bigger, left sidebar, big button on the top that's green, etc. You just type this in and the AI is going to build the entire website. So this is a big topic that's coming and it's amazing what it can already do.

And it's going to be very hard. I remember I used to study translations and simultaneous interpreting, and we always said, the computer is never going to substitute us. I'm not so sure anymore about that one, right? So there is a lot of fields where AI is going to step in. And it's going to be a challenge for big brands like Google, Amazon, etc, to figure out who is really a person, who is not a person, what was really produced manually.

And very often even we already rely on machine learning tools and AI to analyze Google results. For example, if I want to help a client rank, I need Machine Learning Tools these days to analyze what's ranking on the top 10 search results, and then apply my findings to my client's page in order to be able to compete. Otherwise it's going to be very hard if you just write an article about what you think is interesting for your target audience to get any traffic.

James: It's good that you've got a handle on that stuff, because you've got access to subscriptions and tools that the average e-commerce store owner is not going to have or be overly inclined to get involved with, because I imagined they're pretty busy trying to run this intensely complex business already.

Dealing with various markets and languages

What about if you do have multiple target markets and languages? You mentioned languages, etc? Like, how do you get your on-page SEO rocking with that stuff?

Gert: That's another thing that differentiates, very often, e-commerce stores from other sites, because they very often want to have different languages ranking. If I just look at Spain, we have multiple individual official languages and some dialects that are pretty well recognized. So very often e-commerce stores are going to translate their Spanish version into the localized versions, or localized languages.

And this can be an issue for Google unless you do proper markup. There are special HTML tags you need to put in there, special coding, special configurations on Google Search Console you might need in order for Google to not get confused.

Because if the languages are very similar, or for example, between Austria and Germany, the German is a little bit different, so you might have a version where Germans click on checkout, and this version might be different in Austria or in Switzerland.

So you even have, from the same language, you have different conversion-impacting versions you might want to have on your site. Okay? So there is special coding you need to take care of. And if you target different markets, I was just talking with a store that's going to target New Zealand after they are ranking very well in Australia. They need to make sure Google doesn't see this, even if it's the same product description and collection texts and category text, Google doesn't see this as duplicate content.

Google doesn't want you to try to rank in the same market with the same content or the same product with the same company. So you need to put in proper tagging so Google figures out which side ranks in which market. We had a client that ranked with the Canadian version of their website within the United States and vice versa. This can sometimes be interesting, because there might be different price points, different offers, etc. So sometimes this works out. But more often than not, it's a big issue people are dealing with.

What markup is and why it matters

Jame: What is structured markup? Because we hear the name markup, I imagine that needs a little bit of explanation.

Gert: Okay, sorry about that. Markup really refers to the code behind the website. Okay? So there's HTML, usually represents a website. So many people know that if I type in a website's name, the web server is going to produce HTML code that's sent to the client. Okay, so to my browser.

So I type in SuperFastBusiness.com, you have your machine, your website, your WordPress is going to produce a code that's coming to my Chrome browser. My Chrome browser knows then how to interpret this, what to make out of it, and then puts your photo with the sea in the background and the buttons, etc, and the beginning, so it looks nice for me, there is a styling, etc. This is all code that's at the back end, telling the machine what to do, essentially. Okay?

Google is very smart these days. They're very smart figuring out what's the content on the page. They try to understand every page, they try to understand what this content is for, or who this content is for, just to really make a good match between a user and the content they're looking for. Okay?

Structured markup then means giving people details or giving Google details they can interpret. So if you search for Barack Obama's birthday, for example, you're going to get a date. You're not going to get a page that then has a date.

James: I bet that people are searching for Barack Obama, birth country.

Gert: Probably. Birth certificate and things like those definitely have a lot of searches these days. But Google's trying to give the answer directly in the search results, which is a little bit something in SEO we're not too happy about, because this means that sometimes people are not going to click through to our website. They're going to stay on search.

James: I see a lot of those rich snippets. I actually, as a Google user, use those rich snippets a lot without having to click through to the website. So it is very interesting to observe that.

Gert: Exactly. So this is, for example, this is the search components as we call them. This is the section that's called "people also asked", where you have a drop down and you have the questions and answers, for example, and the more you click on those, the more questions and answers are going to come up. Because Google thinks Okay, you want to have an answer on some questions, you're going to get more of them as you click through this. You can do this exercise and you're getting up to 50 or even more questions there, because Google just found what makes you happy and they just give it to you.

Okay, this is really essentially, I very often get reminded to what you teach in your forum, is actually, if you have a client who wants something, try to give it to them.

James: Yeah.

Gert: Or as you phrase it, find what people are buying and give it to them. Right?

James: That's it. I have an adaptive style. I'm platform-agnostic. For example, when I'm doing coaching calls, some people I do a telephone call, some people I'm using Skype, some people Zoom, some people Google Meet, some people GoToMeeting. Like, I'll just figure out the learning style and the cadence in what sort of inputs stimulate the result for my client. And I'll adapt, much like Google's doing with the search.

So taking all of this into account, we've listened to this, we've got an e-commerce store, we're kind of interested in the next step. Like, what would you suggest people do as the next thing right now?

What to do now

Gert: The next thing is really, I usually try to start with a site audit and see what's really the situation. So you might already have an SEO agency working for you. If you're happy with them, if they are providing results, try to, what I call fill all the buckets. So for me, in my mind, and I think this is something also Google confirmed at some point that it is in a very similar way, there are a lot of buckets. There might be 200 of them, and we maybe know 20.

There is a bucket for site speed. Your site needs to be fast. If you don't fill this bucket and your competitors are faster, and have all the other buckets filled, you're not going to rank. So let's make your site fast.

Let's make your site have easy navigation. So on e-commerce sites, good e-commerce sites should have products only three clicks away from wherever the user lands. So the navigation must be easy, if possible. Don't compare yourself to Amazon where everybody performs a search. This is not usually happening in normal e-commerce stores. We need to have a proper navigation in place.

When you want to do the structured markup we talked about, we want to tell Google, look, this is a product. This is the price. This is the availability. This is the location where we sell it. This is the shipping time. This is the brand, etc.

We can put this up in structured code so then Google can extract. If someone searches for a specific brand, Google can bring up the product page or the brand page we have on our store. Just because we marked this up, we make sure that Google is able to understand this.

Another very important point is site architecture. So you really want to make sure you don't have any categories buried down there, you don't have Google waste crawl budget, waste their processing time across pages that are really not that relevant. I had a client even deciding, and I think this was a good move, to completely no-index low-value products, because they said, Okay, if someone really only comes in searching for this product, I don't even want to sell it to them, because it's more expensive to get this invoice, billed and product shipped, than this client just purchasing this individual product.

So they de-indexed everything that was below \$15, I think, just in order to streamline, make sure Google focuses on what's really important. So there's a lot to win in site structure as well.

The magic of image search

And one thing I think we should not ignore here is really image search. So we have more and more people searching in the Google image search, but also searching with images. So with Google's application, you can now take a picture, use this picture for search and find a store that sells the same product, just by the picture.

So I see a bike I like, take a picture, search for it, and I get probably from my area available bikes from local stores.

James: Great tip.

Gert: And this is definitely something you want to focus on. We see tons of e-commerce sites that do not use the alternative text on images, for example, which is a very easy win. The good thing on e-commerce sites is that very often, just you go in once and you can automate something on the development level, that's then going to be applied on 50,000 pages. You can't do this on a normal web site, because every page is different.

But if you want to tackle the alternative text, and you'll figure out what could be a good alternative text for a product image, it's usually based on the brand and the brand product name and the price or availability or whatever. You can program this so it's at scale applied across the entire website.

So there are quite a few things. I think there are a few tips here people can definitely take into account, and yeah, as always, I'm more than happy to take a look at whatever e-commerce site needs help or things they might need help. So I'm happy to provide additional insights, or just have someone reach out to me at SEOLeverage.com.

Testing is important

James: And when people are implementing the changes, I think I've heard you say before, you'd like to just test little parts. It's like when you get a new glue or something, you test it on a little bit of the thing you're trying to glue before you go for it, because it might melt through. So just changing a little bit to see the reaction.

I know you and I've done that. We changed a couple of page titles. And then we wait and see. And sure enough, the changes happened and then they stuck, and we're like, okay, we're onto something here.

Gert: Absolutely. Very often with testing, you can identify patterns in your niche. I've been doing this for 19 years – it's not possible for me to suggest the best meta title or meta description, which are the texts that come up in search, for a random store I just find out there. Because I really don't, honestly don't know, and I think nobody knows. Okay?

What you want to do is you want to do some testing. You want to pick 50 or a hundred of your product, and put in certain differences in the meta title. So imagine you have titles that start with, Buy product XYZ, now available, for example. This could be a title that leads to a lot of clicks from search, for example, or to good conversions. Or it might just be the worst title you could have put out there.

You just really don't know if it's too pushy, if people are going to accept it, etc. But imagine you put in a bad title on 50,000 products. It's going to ruin your business. You can be out of business in a few weeks when Google picks up those changes and starts lowering your click-through rate. You might lose rankings as a consequence afterwards. It's really dangerous, right?

Know what you're risking

Especially if you have a business that's doing pretty well or at least getting to a decent revenue level, you don't want to risk anything. And this is where I see people risk a lot. They purchase links, they don't really know what's going into this. They purchase 15 links a head.

Someone purchased 25 links, sent them to me and see, look what I've done for my SEO this month. I would probably get rid of those links because they're going to penalize your site. If not, now, it's going to happen in a month. Okay? By the time Google crawls those links and takes them into account, it was just too obvious a pattern and they get penalized.

So very often people are not aware of what they are risking. And we are working quite a bit in raising awareness these days with a PDF guide we are going to put up very soon about how to assess your agency seriousness, because we see a lot of very weird things.

And as an agency, I'm not in the position of risking a client's business. As an agency, I'm trying to act in the best interest of my client, raise awareness.

I had clients sign twice before they asked me to do something, where I was not a fan about, and I said, look I can do it. I'm happy to do it. We have been doing this working with you for a few years. But I need you to sign and twice that you know that I don't recommend this, that you know that I think you're going to get penalized. So we don't have any discussions afterwards, right?

Because it's sometimes clients see some tutorial or see some case study and someone's saying, look, I've purchased 25 links. After a week, I'm number one. That's fine, that can work. This can work, but it's usually a temporary success, and you're risking much more.

I've got one client now who came with me to lift a manual penalty, which is a very tricky thing to do. This is really someone personal at Google, making sure that your site doesn't get any visibility, just because of the shady stuff you have been doing. And it's very hard, sometimes impossible to get those things lifted, okay?

And it takes months. So people usually then get another domain meanwhile, build another business essentially from the ground up, while they try to recover the first domain. And this is a very expensive task to work on. So you really want to know what you're risking, or you want to get professional, serious, transparent help.

James: Yeah, it's such a good tip. And this applies to lots of categories. I know one of the reasonably well known people in my industry has said they regretted buying Instagram followers because their accounts got no engagement, no interaction. Everyone can see that it's fake and it actually looks worse for him than if he'd just had less followers with engagement.

Gert: Exactly.

James: So, easy to make a mistake cheaply and quickly that is almost impossible to recover. So that's why you want a practitioner who's fairly conservative and knowledgeable and treats the website with the same sort of risk profile that he would if it was his.

Gert, you're just a fountain of knowledge. Again, thank you for coming along and sharing all of this expertise.

If you're listening to this episode, and you have an e-commerce store, of course, get in touch with Gert, SEOLeverage.com. Gert, we'll link to you from the show notes. I'm sure that'll make your day.

Gert: That's a valuable link.

James: Well, you know, you keep coming back on the show and delivering great stuff. I get wonderful feedback, because this is just like a content masterclass. It's all free here at SuperFastBusiness. If you know someone with an e-commerce store, please share this episode with them. This is Episode 766.

If you've got any SEO questions, by all means, make a comment or reach out to Gert, let him know you listened to this episode. Gert, I hope to have you back in the future. And thank you so much for looking after our own business and for the businesses of our referrals so well.

Gert: It's a pleasure. Thank you so much, James.



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