€400M B2B SAAS SEO PLAYBOOK | Felix Zipf, Senior Director Marketing @ sevdesk | #4

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Show notes

Felix spent 10 years building the marketing that led sevdesk from startup to a €400m exit. In this episode of the Masters of Search, he's revealing how search (especially SEO) played a key role in it.

While most marketing leaders jump companies every 2–3 years, Felix stayed the course at sevdesk for a full decade.

And it paid off big time.

He told me that search marketing was one of the key pillars of their growth strategy throughout the entire journey.

So key, that when I asked their CFO (yes, I really did that) if he's happy about the ROI of their search efforts, he said "absolutely."

When the finance team gives search marketing a thumbs up at a €400m exit company, you know they cracked the code.

This is the guy who:

- Built sevdesk's search strategy from zero to acquisition-ready in 10 years
- Made search marketing so profitable that even the CFO is a believer
- Navigated multiple algorithm updates while maintaining consistent ROI
- Developed search strategies that actually moved the revenue needle

We'll dive deep into:

-> How search became a key growth pillar at sevdesk -> Which search strategies delivered the ROI that made the CFO happy -> How he built a search engine that survived 10 years of changes -> What role AI search is playing in their current strategy -> How they think they can continue their success in an AI search world

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Full conversation

[00:00:01] So, hi everyone. Thanks for joining the Masters of Search talks. We will kick off the interview and after that go into a Q&A so everybody has the chance to get their questions answered. Uh please mute yourself for now if you haven't done it already. And if you have a question along the way, uh maybe note it down or uh use the feature, the Q&A feature here in Google Meet. It's the dots in the right bottom corner of your screen in the Google Meet UI and then you have to click on Q&A and then you can enter your question so nothing gets lost. Uh you can also unmute yourself in the Q&A part if you want to explain something around the question or if we want to go into a little bit of a discussion with um Felix.

[00:00:45] So without further ado, I'm super happy to introduce today's guest who is Felix Zipf who played a key role in uh building the marketing engine of sevdesk, a German B2B SaaS in finance and accounting accounting. I think a lot of people from Germany at least and probably also from Europe will know sevdesk. um they had an incredible growth over the last years and then sold to cegid I'm not exactly sit I'm not exactly sure how to pronounce it so cegid for reportedly there are rumors of about $400 million um so Felix some people joining us today will probably know you and also people watching this recording um but for the rest of us can you just give us a little introduction about yourself and your role at seesk Yeah, sure. Uh, hello everyone and uh, first of all, thanks for this kind intro, in Nicholas. I'm excited to be here and, uh, also congrats to you on this really nice new interview format.

[00:01:44] And maybe also thanks to everyone who may have postponed the weekend a bit to participate. Um, I hope it will be worth your time. And, uh, maybe as a quick disclaimer, I know this uh, interview series is called Masters of Search. Um, but perhaps this is not the correct framing for me because I'm not a master of search and I think uh some of my colleagues within our great marketing team at sevdesk uh deserve that title much more than I do. Um that said in my role as marketing strategy and operations leader I I think I oversee our strategy quite well and I can assess the role and importance of search within our yes go to market approach and I think it's also kind of part of my responsibility to ensure we are well prepared for future developments in this field and so I hope this all of this makes me a valuable interview partner today and I look forward to the next hour and to an open discussion about this really relevant an important marketing topic.

[00:02:43] >> Okay, Felix, you're a very humble guy and I think um this speaks for you. So, uh shout out to everybody who has worked with you or who works with you in the team who has um built this together with you. Um you've been with sevdesk for almost 10 years now. I think it's 9 years and 6 months or something. Um let's go a little bit back in time and um let us uh like borrow your thoughts. Why did you join Septes back then in 2016? >> Yeah. Um well I started my marketing career roughly 10 years ago as a working student at a digital agency and I was gaining back then yeah my first digital marketing experience. To be honest, it was more or less a coincidence that Fabian as co-founder of Sephesk and Peter Suta as former uh marketing chief were both former handball teammates of mine and were looking for a new working student for their marketing team. And just to give some context back then sevdesk was still in a very early stage with about 10 employees and also in our region as sevdesk was founded in offenburg being a startup in the SaaS space was quite unusual at that time and anyway I I didn't hesitate for a second and decided to join because uh yeah I wanted to be part of something where I could grow where I could learn and where I could create and now nearly 10 years later I'm still part of selfesk Even though we've developed and changed obviously a lot but I definitely never regretted this decision. Yeah. >> Very nice. How many people are you today like in the whole company not only the marketing department? >> I think we are roughly about 220 230 people now. Yeah.

[00:04:31] >> Yeah. This is a nice development from 10 people and working student to your position now and to um this this this um this uh size of the company. Um you had quite a few roles as you said you started as a working student and I uh saw and everybody can see it on your LinkedIn profile that you uh somehow moved up the ladder if you say so. Um can you share a little bit about how your role has changed over time? >> Yeah, sure. I mean uh I started as a typical marketing generalist and gained yeah hands-on experience in uh in the beginning across several marketing disciplines like SEO, content marketing, affiliate marketing, partner marketing and I think somehow that's quite common for an early stage startup where roles are usually broad at first but um I think over time and especially because Septesk and our marketing team were growing I had the opportunity to specialize and to build this kind of T-shaped profile with broader knowledge in digital marketing on the one hand side but on the other side deeper expertise in product marketing and uh conversion rate optimization and I think from these operational roles in the first years I had then the opportunity to move into a team lead position in 2018 and yeah and today I'm a director of marketing with the responsibility like I mentioned for our operating model for our marketing strategy this means that uh besides working with a lot of really talented and ambitious marketers, there was a more or less natural shift from operational tasks to this kind of more strategic work over time. >> Mhm. Very nice. And even though that we are talking uh about search today, uh I'm curious what was like the channel or the initiative or something that you that you liked the most? So was it an event? Was it was it search or was it something else? What what where did you feel like hey this is my home turf? Yeah, home turf I would definitely say product marketing, conversion rate optimization and now in the last years definitely marketing operations, marketing data. But when we're talking about what are my favorite marketing channels, I would definitely say that I'm in love with organic search for sure. And um I'm also pretty proud about our digital partnerships we established over the years which are also quite relevant in this whole AI search discussion right now.

[00:06:58] So that would be my two favorites I would say. I would say >> what what what are the partnerships? So is it uh is it accountants or is it other um companies in the space or what are what are the partnerships? >> Yeah, we have some long-term business influencers for example. Then we have a lot of media publishers where we work with for a couple of years now and I think that's the field what we how we define digital partnerships. Yeah. >> Oh very cool. I think my colleague Mario actually said that Sephesk I think you also saw this comment on LinkedIn um that he saw SFES like a very long time ago in uh a YouTube video. >> Yeah. And that SFES has become top of mind for him ever ever since uh just because of that. So yeah. Okay. He actually saw it in many videos.

[00:07:49] So it's really cool. I think you guys have actually created this feeling of omniresence that you can't go around Septus. Was this something that you that you had as a plan also from the beginning that you want to be present in like all sorts of channels because I mean this can also have the risk of losing focus, right? >> Yeah. I think in hindsight you can always say yeah it was the plan but to be honest it was it was a sustainable yeah GTM motion for us and therefore we invested even further into it and yeah a lot of we have a lot of presence on YouTube for example because a lot of uh yeah business influencer talk about us and I think yeah it was kind of a conscious choice but in hindsight it's always easy to to find a narrative why we did what we did and uh I'm not sure if this is always fair and rational view at all.

[00:08:41] So >> yeah, if something works, you just say, "Hey, it was strategy." And if it fails, you say, "Hey, it was an experiment and at least we learned something from it." >> Exactly. Okay. Yeah. I like your honesty about it. Um, so from our previous conversations, I know that search uh has played a big role in your growth and you also mentioned organic search yourself. Now, can you give us a little bit of your reasoning behind this? So why do you think it was so important? Yeah, I mean the reason behind our early investment in organic search was quite obvious at least in hindsight and I think we are a

cloud-based accounting software for microenterprises and self-employed in Germany and Austria. What means that we are somehow both on the one side a B2B SAS solution but uh on the other side we also operate in this really high volume and low price environment very close to B2C and uh what we saw was that within our target audience there was this really strong search demand not only informational search but also transactional search and it was therefore one main goal and quite obvious that we wanted to try to establish a sustainable and costefficient organic search GTM motion not only from a performance perspective with some kind of good rankings for transactional keywords to generate leads and maybe also more this kind of uh traffic in the mid and lower funnel but uh also from brand perspective by ranking well for this kind offormational keywords to generate this high volume of upper funnel traffic and yeah I think overall these early and also consistent investments in organic search definitely paid off for us and were a key factor in our growth story especially from a new new customer acquisition perspective.

[00:10:25] >> Very cool. You always um you already mentioned one one key term here I think which is consistent. So from my understanding when you guys started to invest into the channel you basically never stopped right that's absolutely correct. Yeah, it was an always on GTM motion which um yeah and it was quite cost efficient. In the beginning you have to you have this initial invest but afterwards you always uh get something in return which is quite great and is way more efficient than most paid channels are. So >> m I think this is a really this is a key learning because I was also amazed as we uh spoke the first time like um before this interview um that still to this day you are constantly investing into this channel because I mean I also speak to a lot of marketing leaders and founders and I think um they are smart people but some of them still have the question okay but when can I stop like when is the point reached when don't have to invest in this anymore and I sometimes say yeah never >> and then >> this question does not make sense for me because when you stop you definitely will lose traction and you have to invest con constantly and that makes totally sense and then uh you have also the chance that this uh channel evolve over time as well.

[00:11:52] So >> you should not stop from my perspective. M and can you give us a little bit of an idea about the balance between organic search and paid search because I can imagine that you invested a lot in organic search but also paid search. So um as you said there's um there's a vast amount also of transactional and commercial queries. So I can imagine that you also probably had uh a strong bias towards uh yeah grabbing the lowhanging fruits maybe so to say and converting people right away. >> Yeah. Um when we're talking about website traffic uh the majority of our traffic is organic. We are talking about 60% something like that from Google alone and then maybe 5% from Bing. Um but in terms of leads there the the the it's quite different. I would say there is a bigger dependency on paid as well but I would still say that paid search and organic search are our strongest uh lead channels as well and they are on a on the same level I would assume. Yeah. >> Very cool.

[00:12:59] I think this is also this is key because if you look at like we we will come to the point on how Google will uh develop in the future etc. But if you look at at the search engine result pages even today, it's like this this mix of organic placements, paid placements, and basically Google understands pretty well where people have like a commercial and transactional intent. So if you want to if you want to get like the biggest piece of the cake, uh you have to always play both games, right? >> Yeah, that's absolutely right. And um Google for sure or in general search engines play a really dominant role in our environment and I think that we have this uh special circumstances with high volume low price but um yeah search is definitely a key driver for us and for our acquisition engine.

[00:13:49] >> Super interesting. I mean now you have uh yeah years of experience also with organic search uh how SEO has developed over time etc. Now we are maybe calling it GEO or something like that. We'll come to that. Um but can you give us some insights about how your playbook developed

over time because I can imagine that maybe the things you did in the beginning are maybe not the things you still do now and that there's some like learnings that you um saw along the way. So can you just enlighten us a little bit about how Seph's organic search strategy evolved over time? Yeah, I mean chronologically we started uh our organic search efforts in 2015 and early 2016. That was even before I joined the company. And we started with some kind of landing pages for some important transactional keywords like um accounting software, invite in invoicing software, write an invoice and uh we also established quite early a blog where we had some early wins with broaderformational keywords.

[00:14:58] We had this really uh successful blog post about ideas for self-employment early on where we had really early a quite decent inflow of organic website traffic because we had good rankings on this keyword. Um a bit later we then added a a lexicon directory containing articles and topics related to self-employment accounting and taxes. We then created uh template landing pages like an invoice template or business plan template where we offered this kind of free templates and achieved also some quite uh impressive rankings and we also established quite early landing pages with useful calculators where you could calculate for example working hours or hourly wages and uh then I think our latest two major efforts were on the one hand to establish another directory which is called our advisor directory where we offer even more specialized and tailored content around self-employment.

[00:15:56] And on the other hand, we invested heavily in the last years in what we internally call toolkits which are actually kind of lead magnets where we offer generators for free and ask and return for user data especially mail addresses. And uh some examples are here an invoice generator or an e- invoice viewer. And yeah, I think that's more or less a short and high level overview of our SEO efforts over the past decade. Um and when we then talk about how our playbook developed over time, I would say that we set different priorities in different stages and we constantly rebalance whether we should focus more onformational search demand which tends to feed the upper funnel and increase maybe also more overall website traffic or whether we should concentrate more on this mid and lower funnel where we try to rank for important transactional money keywords and uh generate this kind of transactional search traffic. Yeah. Which has then probably in direct impact on our lead generation. And I think that was always this balance that we uh yeah needed to set priorities and the is very neither neither black nor nor white. So I think that's that's the game. >> Yeah. Very very cool.

[00:17:16] So I mean I love this approach. I feel like some people look at their product and they immediately think in some uh like very closely related transactional terms and and keyword. Um but from my understanding you guys rather looked at the the person you're selling to, right? and you try to create this ecosystem of ideas around the product because I mean the the business ideas for self-employment like SES does not uh set up the company for you but if you self if you start self-employment then you need to write invoices etc. So was this your reasoning? >> Yeah, I think from a from a brand awareness perspective it totally makes sense to create early touch points in the customer journey. uh but uh on the same time I would say that's also kind of a don't what you should not do and we did this mistake maybe also you should not distance yourself too far from your target audience in terms of search demand I think ranking for keywords that are relevant very early in the customer journey but still relatively far from a purchase decision is okay but uh ultimately there should be some connection to the topic of self-employment in our case what is you know that what your target audience is and maybe some example I recently saw that some of our competitors ranked for only fans which is kind of weird I think and yes you can maybe argue that also content creators on only fans have to do their accounting but I'm not sure whether it was a conscious choice to rank for for this keyword for example and I think so there should be the fit with your target audience when we talking about uhformational search demand and to use it also to use organic search also for building uh brand awareness and to see it as a brand marketing measure. >> My favorite example of this is HubSpot and

um HubSpot has also um or not also but HubSpot has seen quite some traffic decline over the last month. Um and a lot of people on LinkedIn used it to say hey Google has that.

[00:19:27] And I just dug a little bit deeper and my favorite example I found there of content where I felt like, okay, where's the connection to the product was in the content piece um how to do the shrug emoji uh in 2 seconds flat. Uh but then they had a button still um to download their social media report. So at least they positioned the lead magnet. >> But did you also did you also have something like that? Because you said you you made this mistake. So obviously I want to know where the the septes drug emoji content is now buried. >> Yeah. I mean what what we saw we had this lexicon and I mentioned that we uh dealt with a lot of topics about self-employment but also accounting in general and maybe also starting a business and what we saw we got from time to time requests from pupils which uh need to hold or held a presentation in school and they wanted to ask what the sources of our articles is and stuff like that. And this also shows somehow that maybe there we did not uh did not achieve to reach our target audience. But um yeah, I think that's the best example where we saw that we may be a little bit too far away from our target audience.

[00:20:41] But then you could still argue that in the long run you maybe can um foster or support uh pupils on their way to self-employment and then it would make sense. But then the time horizon is even longer. And so I think uh yes that was one example for us. >> Very cool example. I always also um say to our clients if we are unsure about the quality of traffic especially in B2B. So in B2C it's a little bit u more difficult. But if you're unsure about the quality and if we feel like that uh probably the traffic won't convert right away use a tool like and I'm not affiliate with any of these tools. use a tool like sales viewer or lead info or whatever to understand um the companies that come to your page.

[00:21:28] So obviously um this is just an indication but I feel like this can give you at least an idea if the people you're bringing to the site are actually part of the target group you're trying to reach. >> Yeah, I think that's a good advice. Maybe for us it's a little bit harder because again we are really high volume so we have a lot of traffic on our website but especially for this kind of medium-sized enterprises or yeah enterprise SAS it definitely makes sense to use tools like sales fewer. Yeah I would >> yeah I would agree here. Yeah >> cool thanks. Um so obviously we have this elephant in the room which is um AI AI search GEO some call it AEO whatever we want to call it but basically the disruption of the classic search engine as we knew it for the past years. Um and the first thing that where at least my impression was that everybody in Germany was a little bit like uh awakened was the introduction of AI overviews.

[00:22:29] So basically this short summary uh at the top usually at the top of search results. Um so can you give us a little bit of an idea how big is the impact uh of AI overviews already for you? Have you lost traffic? >> Yeah, we are definitely not immune to the developments current currently taking place in the market. Uh this means that since the launch of AI overviews, our non-branded organic traffic has dropped actually by 20 to 25% in a year-over-year comparison. And we are also noticing this growing gap and the so-called alligator or the great decoupling. Yeah, exactly. Where our impressions according to the Google search uh console remain at a high level or even increase while um clicks drop significantly.

[00:23:19] And uh that said my over all assessment of the impact of AI search for selfesk is actually not negative. We see and we monitor that we uh already have a really strong visibility on all major AI platforms and all large language models like Jet, GPT, Publexity, Claude, Brock, Gemini and therefore I recently appreciated the framing by uh one of my colleagues who noted that with the current market developments maybe upperfunnel traffic will likely become a vanity metric because we now already see that the referral rate from AI platforms is really low and I think through AI overviews the referral rate from Google is also already decreasing rapidly and in the long run through AI mode I guess it will decrease

even further uh because we will have this kind of natural shift towards conversational search and I think people will probably remain on the search engine or the AI platform instead of going to company websites to get their information in the future.

[00:24:21] So this means from my point of view getting website traffic through organic search will be harder in the future which does not mean that you are not necessarily visible in the market and not visible for AI search. So from my perspective these should probably be separate discussions. That's my >> uh now a spicy question, a spicy follow-up question. Um because you um admitted the the drop in traffic and I think it's something that is just an inevitable reality that that most companies at least at the scale of seesk face. So if you are significantly smaller than seesk, you still have more of the cake to eat but selfesque already eats a lot of the cake to stay in this picture. Um but have you also seen um a drop in in conversions on the same level or has the conversion level stayed steady? >> I would say they stayed steady somehow. We have also at some points increases in lead generation. um maybe also direct channels work better now. Um and uh so I cannot uh I cannot recognize yet that we have a significant drop when we talking about leads yet and especially overall our our lead generation still works and I think that's that's quite important.

[00:25:42] So it is more this kind of website uh traffic is decreasing but our overall performance is is quite well and it is still increasing what is what is a good sign for us >> because I think this is this is such an important point that a lot of people miss in this discussion they they always say and I don't want to blame them it's just what we learned over the last years we have always said clicks are a proxy for success and we said if clicks go up leads go up if clicks go down, leads go down. But now we have this thing where we just have to rewire our brain. And I said internally, we we the the exchange rate just changed. Like previously maybe you needed uh 50 clicks for one conversion. Now you might just need 30 because they are more highly qualified because you don't get some of the topfunnel clicks u but more of the mid and bottom funnel clicks.

[00:26:38] Do you also feel like this is something where we have to rethink how we compare clicks to leads? >> Yeah, sure. And I think that's a fair perspective and I would definitely also say I don't see this uh very huge threat when we're talking about transactional search right now. Maybe this will come in the future as well. But I see especially that uh information uh informational search uh is is uh decreasing and therefore I'm more worried about what this will mean for our brand awareness in the long run but not so much worried about what it will mean for our um yeah performance in the short and midterm. So that's my perspective here and yeah >> got it got it. You already mentioned um your presence in AI search and with AI search now I mean JBD perplexity uh Gemini Gro and Mistral and whatever code. >> Um can you give us your thoughts about traffic from these sources and visibility? So how do you think about uh do I get traffic from there? Am I visible there? Because I mean you always me you already mentioned that the conversation will happen more into the platform but I feel like some people still have like they have difficulties to say okay if I don't get traffic how is how can this be relevant to my business? Yeah. Yeah. Maybe just to make a reality check, uh, our referral traffic from Czech GPT and perplexity has been constantly increasing uh, since the beginning of this year, which indicates an increasing adoption of these tools by our users, I guess, and probably also shows our good visibility on these platforms.

[00:28:23] That said, I just mentioned this kind of referral gap from AI platforms, right? So of course this is also true for us and according to Google Analytics and also according to our own website tracking and our own attribution right now less than 1% of our traffic and of our new website visitors currently come from chat GBT and the numbers for from all other AI platforms are even lower and uh just to put this in perspective almost 60% and I mentioned it before of new users come through organic search on Google and even 5% through organic search on Bing. So I think from an organic traffic perspective,

ChatGpt and the other AIL platforms are not relevant yet. And as I mentioned, I'm not sure if they will become really relevant as a traffic source in the long run. What does definitely not mean that we won't actively invest into AI search going forward. Mhm.

[00:29:24] Um, speaking of actively investing in AI search, can you share some I know you can't share everything because if competitors are listening, we can't spoil the secret sauce to them. But what are you doing like what's your activities, experiments? >> Yeah. Yeah, definitely. I think last maybe 18 months in the search field we were mainly focused on experiments and establishing the capabilities to use AI for yes gaining content production and creating search content. I think this was more or less a tactical move not strategy and I guess many companies out there did experiments like we did. So uh yes of course we produced AI supported and AI generated search content first with chat GPT then we tested other AI platforms and uh recently we started to use a more specialized and quite powerful tool uh called Zenji and I think while these tactical moves worked very well for us for a while I think with the latest developments especially AI overviews and the upcoming AI mode I believe that this approach won't be effective forever. So I think we need to adapt our search strategy and for me one of the key questions will be how can we continue to produce unique and relevant content in the future because to be quite frank in search marketing has never been easier than today. Right? So uh the real challenge or the real art is producing something unique what others can't produce on their own.

[00:31:01] And I have two examples here. And uh just to mention it, while we are in the middle of a process to figure out what this means in the long run, I still think that there are some areas where we have already a quite clear picture. This means that we definitely think it makes sense to transfer some of our existing SEO measures into this new kind of GEO world. What means we will definitely continue to invest in topics like calculators, tools, and also comparison pages. We are talking here more about transactional search, right? >> And additionally, there are I think some areas where we see great potential beside the things we have already done. And I think one example here is I believe that with our really big or large customer base, we can for example aggregate customer data in a completely anonymized way to publish regular studies as kind of health check for self-employment in Germany and Austria.

[00:31:56] And I think not only AI will appreciate this kind of data and studies but there's also a chance that um trustworthy media publishers will pick this up and yes here I believe in a kind of renaissance of public relations because I think trustworthy digital mentions uh they will be an quite impactful currency when we're talking about AI search in the future and I think that's also a reason why we will continue to foster our digital partnerships and I'm really happy that we many advocates and partners of selfesk out there in the market that are producing content about us on their platforms on their communication channel. That was one example and maybe another one uh and just looking at it from another angle. Um I believe we have a pretty good understanding at selfesk of our customers and we conduct many customer interviews on a regular base not only in the marketing team but also in the product team and moving forward we want to use these kind of customer interviews and the data from from them even more to create this kind of unique and authentic content and um that's also one opportunity that will hopefully uh be be an advantage for us in the in the long run. Very cool. Um this was uh a lot shared so um really appreciate that. Um you already mentioned that there's something on the horizon coming and um you also uh you also uh named the game which will be AI mode.

[00:33:28] Um give us a little bit about your thoughts about AI mode. So what do you expect to happen? How do you see uh Google integrating this? Do you think it will be the default experience anytime soon? >> I think I mentioned it already. I think we uh recently see a real shift in search behavior and the way people search, but just as another disclaimer, uh I don't know if I'm brave enough to make this really kind of bold predictions in the current times. uh what I can certainly say for myself is that I'm deeply

impressed about the pace at which uh things are currently developing and uh I have not experienced this in my 10 years of digital marketing so far and um I think things change very fast and this is especially true for search behavior and search topics and I see that um yeah keywords could probably be replaced by prompts in the long run um text could be replaced by by speech.

[00:34:28] So the entire interface will maybe change. I wouldn't be surprised even more people will shift their search behavior from traditional search engines to AI chat bots or if other people and I think especially about younger generations. So Chen said and younger will integrate also social media way deeper to gather information and and to search for information. And that said, uh I I definitely see that Google get a lot of competition right now, but um I still believe that they are really well prepared for all of these developments. And you mentioned already AI mode. Um so in the short term, maybe they will lose some market share, but in the long run, I think they have a future proof strategy somehow.

[00:35:17] um not only with uh AI mode and with Gemini as impactful um large language model but maybe also with with YouTube as social media platform. So I think it will be kind of hard to uh to to attack um Google in the mid and long run but here I would definitely be interested also in your perspective and maybe also uh the entire audience has an opinion on that that would be interesting for me. So yeah, I will be quite interested to see what the future brings and right now it feels a little bit like looking into a crystal ball, right? >> Yep. 100% 100%. Um I think we can also engage in that um in a second, but I think uh a key thing you mentioned is that Google uh at least they don't um say hey okay uh they are fleshing their teeth.

[00:36:11] So, they they still seem to really want to win this. And um actually the the Q2 earnings just dropped two weeks ago when we were recording this. And for everybody that might not have seen it, as at least from a financial perspective, Google is doing quite well. So they actually did uh 96 billion dollar in revenue in the second quarter of 2025 which is up 14% to the previous year and their net income which is basically uh the the pre-tax revenue. So I mean I'm not an accounting um and especially not international multi- corporation accounting expert but their net income was 28 uh a billion. So this is also quite a lot. Uh and Google search and other and YouTube ads everything is up. Only the Google network probably because people are not investing into display ads anymore. Um only this is down.

[00:37:15] uh but at least from a revenue and from a business model perspective so far they have not uh lost any significant uh key in their business model. Uh but we will see how this plays out. >> I think that's interesting and they still have to make the decision how they want to integrate paid search into this AI overview AI mode. That will be interesting and I don't have a really clear picture yet but um and then yeah the future look bright for them probably. >> Yeah I mean it's interesting because this is um obviously Google worldwide uh data um but AI overviews have been around the US for even longer than in Germany. In Germany and the EU I think most of the countries in the EU I'm not 100% sure it rolled out in March. So actually these Q2 uh earnings uh which is the quarter that ended in June 13th this actually includes this period already. Uh so at least there it seems like um it it does not disrupt their business model uh at least in a way that they uh stop their innovation progress. So we'll see.

[00:38:27] I heard this interesting take from Malta Lante who was uh working at Idiallo for I think five years and then five years before that at search metrics. So he has some knowledge about the search space to say the least. Now he's CMO at peakai. Um, and he basically said that Google will probably just well like I mean maybe Google won't do it manually but just based on the auction having less impressions that the CPC will just rise but in the end you might not pay significantly more for the conversion because the users are significantly more qualified. So do you see do you see reasoning behind that? Do you also think that that could make sense? Yeah, that sounds absolutely reasonable and in the end I'm convinced that uh uh Google will will definitely want to earn money to the paid

business also in the future and therefore yeah that could be a development which sounds quite reasonable.

[00:39:26] M then maybe one last question uh on a personal note before we go into the Q&A. Um if you as Felix like as the the private Felix and also the business Felix if you have to search for stuff or if you research stuff be the next vacation or uh maybe a new mountain bike I don't know what whatever you have on your mind which platform do you turn to? I think I integrate more and more chatb2 also in my personal life and I'm also aware of this kind of studies where where we see that 89% of B2B buyers already use uh chat GBT or AI within their uh buying process but um for me personally as a B2C as a consumer I already use CGBT as well there maybe I'm kind of an early adopter when we're talking about this technology but um yeah it's definitely CGBT That's my go-to tool. I always I also experiment with other AI platforms, but I think my usage with JBT is definitely the dominant one here.

[00:40:34] >> Cool. Interesting. Thanks so much for sharing that. Um, so guys, now we uh open up for the Q&A. I already have one question here um live in the Q&A section. Maybe just for everyone um as a quick reminder in the Google Meet interface at the bottom right corner you see these dots. It's nine dots somehow like tic-tac-toe uh and then you have to click on Q&A and then you can add your question. Um we already have one. I also got two beforehand from LinkedIn. Um but I want to start with the question we got here which is what does the SFES marketing team look like especially regarding organic and paid search? How many people, which qualifications, how's the work divided across the team? So there someone wants to do the X-ray. >> Yeah, I mean I can do the deep dive on organic uh on the organic team because I think that's the that's the main topic today.

[00:41:36] And I would say we have here a small but mighty team. Uh right now we have two full-time employees, one yeah content expert, one SEO expert, and three working students. And I think all of them uh and I want to emphasize that are doing a really great job. And uh additionally the yeah content and go team collaborates closely with a small web development team which also consists of two full-time employees and then we are working with a pool of external copywriters. This means that we outsource consciously larger parts of our content production and established over the years I think a quite solid workflows which yeah ensures a pretty smooth content production process and beside the operational part we also have an agency on board which primarily supports us from a strategic point of view and I think yeah all in all for us this is a really good setup and um I'm really happy with our work in this field.

[00:42:36] >> Okay. Um maybe because um paid search was explicitly mentioned can you just give maybe a very short idea about who is involved in that part? >> Yeah the setup looks quite similar I would say we have also yeah one and a half uh full-time employees as performance marketing manager >> and then we also work with an agency here which supports us on an operational level but mainly on a strategic level as well. Okay, cool. Thanks so much for sharing. Um, then we have another question from Misha who asked, "Imagine you launch the SAS bootstrap startup today. How would you start with SEO and what will be your pace?" >> Yeah, that's a that's a really good question. I think Septis is in the comfort comfortable situation that we are already have a quite a decent uh present and I I already mentioned it that I think digital mentions are a quite important currency in this entire game.

[00:43:42] But I still I would definitely still invest also as a a a startup in these times into this game. And so I would also ask myself what kind of content can we produce? how can we be unique uh with our content? So, I think the game is still the same and a lot of SEO measures um are still relevant for the GEO world. So um I would definitely say um that you definitely need to invest there and maybe I would have a little bit more this shift to transactional search demand and would focus a little bit more there because I see this cannibalization from informationational search through AI platforms. would probably

not be the starting point for me personally but uh I think you are also yeah a a really expert and uh so you will probably also have something in mind right and you see a lot of out there in the market what all also early stage startups do right now. Yeah, of course.

[00:44:40] Yeah, I can I can add to that. So, um, Felix pointed this out absolutely correctly. So, what I would always uh try to think about is uh where do I see the best um product search fit? So, we all know this concept about product market fit and I would always try to understand product search fit. So, uh what are people actually looking for and this does not only mean on Google. So, it's to me completely tool agnostic. So if Felix for example says he uses chubri most of the times and I would consider him a potential customer I would try to understand how is he using it and this obviously you have to do it on a larger scale. So, if you for example already have a user base, um maybe uh ask them if they want to do a quick interview for you.

[00:45:26] Um maybe offer them some Amazon uh gift card or whatever to say, "Hey, do you have 30 minutes for me to understand your search behavior more?" Um and if you understand how people are actually looking for stuff and where you see uh potential connections to your product, invest in content on your own site around that. and also try to understand uh who is um who is present in the citations for example on uh AI search tools. So for example, we we just did an analysis for German um landing page and website builder. Um they are basically setting out to challenge the market of uh of Jimdu, of Squarespace, of WordPress. Um and we just checked um for prompts that we feel people might uh enter into chatbt or perplexity.

[00:46:20] Uh what are the sources? And obviously this is um it's a little bit the hype train. There is um some Reddit uh there are some Reddit threads in there but there are also other other platforms. So sometimes it's even gutfra.net which is a German equivalent basically of kora. Sometimes you have directory websites and you have to understand that if you want to influence the conversation there you also have to be present there. you might not necessarily need a backlink but I mean Septes as Felix said has this wide range of creator network partnerships etc. So obviously if I'm looking for for accounting software I always see you guys come up also in in charge etc alongside some competitors um that have far inferior products. Um but I think this is something that you just have to understand.

[00:47:13] So you you basically as a rule of thumb if you think about Google no matter AI overviews and also AI mode in the future you see basically more uh owned content so content from yourself and then if you go to perplexity it's a little bit mixed owned and earned and then on chatbt basically it's it's significantly stronger earned so not your own content but other people talking about you and this is something that is a rule of thumb I would just keep in mind and try to influence the conversation on all these platforms. Hope it makes sense. Cool. Um, we have another question from Max. Thanks, Max. He asks, um, when you think about an AI visibility tool, what would it need to deliver to be truly valuable for you? >> Yeah, I think that's also a good question. Um and to be honest um I really like the approach from PKI. We are also using this uh this tool right now and I think they do a quite good job and what I see is really extremely valuable is especially the sources which they show.

[00:48:24] So they they show us uh which kind of platforms uh there's a cicitation about selfesk and how relevant is it for for uh for selfesk and I think um that creates real real value for us because uh for most of these kind of uh platforms we have already partnerships some are our competitors there we will not uh establish any kind of partnerships for sure but uh so I think um yeah PKI is doing a quite well job and I'm also kind of curious curious how the market will develop there because I think uh most traditional SEO tools will also step by step add features for AI search. So I think there will be a lot of development in the next weeks and months and I already noticed this that Cyrix for example also started to integrate some first AI features in the beta version and I will I would assume that a lot of uh a

lot of um yeah provider will now start to integrate AI feature and maybe in the long run we will also see and I think that was also a hypothesis from you also the AI platforms will start uh to to add analytics feature directly on their platforms and that will make sense. So I'm not sure I think it will be valuable to have AI visibility tools but I think the the market there will also be quite crowded I guess. Yeah, probably even more crowded than now. I mean, Malta from PKI um he he challenged me on my my prediction, but I mean that's the whole point of doing bold predictions on LinkedIn to um uh also sometimes engage in an interesting conversation.

[00:50:07] But what I see happening and I mean we see it with CHBT now already in the partnership with Shopify at least for the ecom sector that they are planning a direct integration uh of a checkout and I mean this is so we always have to keep in mind this is stuff that is not new. So um Instagram has tried this, Google wanted to do this once. Uh now Tik Tok shop has launched big time and I've seen so I listened to to Tar Müller from about you and from other people um where I would say that their product assortment is generally something that could match there but nobody so I I've I've heard no one really convinced about Tik Tok shop. So I don't want to compare the the breakthrough innovations of AI with Tik Tok shop obviously but sometimes I feel like with AI developments we we lack some critical thought about user adoption.

[00:51:09] So will users actually use this? Will they like it? Will they trust Chat GPT with their credit card? So, even if I if I like, for example, when I look for a new espresso machine um at home, which could be uh a €200 or €1,500 purchase, will I really put in my credit card on CH GBT and really expect the product to arrive at my home in 3 days? Maybe yes, maybe no. We will see. Uh but this is something where I just feel like we have to always keep in mind that users actually have to use this stuff. Yeah, I think it's fair this philosophical perspective as well and also this kind of critical reflection and um >> yeah yeah >> yeah we will see how this plays out. Um I got one question uh from LinkedIn beforehand which is what were other channels that helped you grow and how do you see them play together with search? >> Uh yeah that's also a good one.

[00:52:09] Uh I think um uh some of our first function or actually our really first functioning uh GTM motion functioning and scalable GTM motion was paid social with really short-term impact and short-term return on invest um and actually that gave us the opportunity to establish without pressure with organic search then the second more sustainable GTM motion but I I'm not sure if this uh would still work like it did for us in 2015 because back then cost per click were quite low on paid social and we we had the chance to establish this motion as well. But um yeah, that was definitely one we we established early on and I think then our third motion was then back then already this kind of digital partnerships I mentioned earlier. So um yeah I I think these were were the fields where we started and later on we also invested more heavily into paid search which was quite expensive already at that time.

[00:53:16] So um that was done not any longer the the bootstrap phrase I would guess but uh yeah paid social paid out for us quite well but in different times I would say. >> Okay. Yeah. Really cool. I think I heard Fabian um one of the the founders or the co-founders of SE SES also in the Unicorn Bakery podcast >> uh talk about it and if you say paid social if I'm not mistaken it was Facebook ads or now it's called meta ads but it's Facebook and Instagram. >> Yeah, it was back then Facebook also with another adoption rate there. Back then Facebook was the go-to social media platform and um now there's a lot more more competition there as well. So different times. >> Yeah. Yeah. I also remember friends from paid social departments uh talking about 45 CPMs and now I think this is so I'm not as deep into that um still anymore but this is probably a thing of the past right? Yeah, I I think on on Tik Tok for example, we still see quite low CPMs, but uh definitely not possible on uh Facebook or MA in general any longer from my perspective or what what I we see in the >> in our data and LinkedIn is even more expensive. But there you can argue that is more or less not this kind of brand awareness

channel but more a performance channel. So yeah, also different game here.

[00:54:43] And does Tik Tok work for you in terms of conversions? Because I I can see it working in terms of a cheap distribution. But >> yeah, no, I would definitely say right now it is more a brand awareness channel for us and we really uh yeah, generate so much reach there and that works for us quite well from a brand marketing perspective. But this is not actually a performance channel for us right now. Maybe that can change over time, but right now it is definitely more to building uh or to increasing brand awareness. >> Mhm. Cool. Very interesting. Um I got another question beforehand from uh LinkedIn which is what's your strategy for YouTube and I think it's a relevant uh question because YouTube is also becoming more and more of a search discovery engine.

[00:55:34] So >> can you around that? Yeah, I think we have to discuss also this holistically and we definitely want to invest even further in uh video content um in the future. We did this in the past. Then we stopped it a bit and um now then we recycled a lot of our short uh video content formats because uh yeah YouTube shorts is the same like Tik Tok and like uh Instagram reels and in the future we definitely want to to um want to increase again to produce also content on YouTube also because we think it will be relevant for AI search as well. And then there what I mentioned we want to yeah create unique content probably also with our partners and with our customers that will be the chance and I definitely believe in user generated content not only this short format but also with uh with longer video formats and that will be the future but we definitely see this as part of our entire yeah content and GEO strategy as well.

[00:56:39] >> Very cool. I would second what uh Felix said around YouTube becoming more and more important because there's a study of profound which is like a AI visibility monitoring tool. I mean I don't know what they call themselves but um where they basically took the data from 10 million citations that are used in Google AI overviews which is I think either US or globally. So I'm I'm not sure about that. Sometimes they produce research and like it's commercialized research so they don't give too much info about the background but their YouTube is like a big chunk of the citations and I mean it makes so much sense because if you think about uh Google uh in their whole ecosystem with YouTube as their own social media network it makes a lot of sense then a huge like I mean if you think about the knowledge that is captured in YouTube videos it's like immense and this is probably also something that Google tries to to bring more to the surface like in terms of their search interface. Um so yeah super interesting. So really interested to see uh how you guys do it in the future. Um and uh yeah we'll definitely watch some videos. Sounds good. Sounds good. >> Cool. So then we have already reached the hour guys.

[00:58:05] If you have uh any other questions, feel free to either put it into the Q&A now or if you think about the question afterwards, um Felix, if someone uh is more interested in your perspective on marketing in following Sephesk marketing journey, um maybe also has a follow-up question, where is it best to contact you or to follow you? >> Uh contact me on LinkedIn. uh I would appreciate it and I'm always uh open for discussions about any kind of digital marketing topic and I can also connect you with our master of uh search experts within the team. That's absolutely no problem. But I'm always open and would be happy if some of you contact me on LinkedIn. Um yeah, absolutely no problem. >> Very cool. Very cool. This is also how I discovered Felix because he shared some really cool insights from Sephesk Marketing Engine. So um this was already inspirational for me. So thanks so much Phillip. I think um this was quite a wrap. Uh thanks so much for sharing um so much knowledge uh from uh uh from the machine room the marketing machine room of selfesk.

[00:59:18] Uh I think this was really uh packed. Um yeah thanks for all the questions everyone and uh all the best to you navigating through this SEO GEO ecosystem shift. Um, have a great weekend and

uh see you soon. >> Yeah, thanks for inviting me. Have a good one. Bye-bye. Nice weekend to all of you.