HOW SURFER BOOTSTRAPPED TO €15M ARR | Tomasz Niezgoda, Co-Founder & CMO @ Surfer | #14

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Show notes

Tomasz Niezgoda (CMO @ Surfer) let me pick his brain for 60 min on how they bootstrapped to €15M ARR, get ~20% of paying customers from AI Search, and talked to 50+ customers per week in the early days.

If you care about SaaS, bootstrapping, SEO, AI Search, or marketing in general, this conversation is packed with insights.

Here are 5 things that stood out:

1. They didn't touch SEO for 4 years

While building an SEO tool, they focused on community, webinars, and education first. SEO came later when they had the domain authority to compete with Ahrefs and Semrush.

2. 50+ customer conversations per week in year 1

Not async support tickets. Real customer calls. Tomasz and the team split them. The knowledge they gathered became their unfair advantage over competitors.

3. AI search isn't magic, it's discipline

Monitor your prompts weekly. When competitors get cited, create similar content. Track visibility like a hawk. Act fast. Repeat every single week without missing.

4. They killed top-of-funnel content completely

Traffic dropped as a KPI. Now they focus purely on middle and bottom-of-funnel content. "Best alternatives" and "vs" pages feed LLMs with the exact narrative they want.

5. They doubled down on YouTube and it paid off 10x

They started with just 2 videos per month, and it took 3 months to see first signs it worked. Now they have 24K subscribers, published 180 videos, and it's one of their top channels.

This is just 5 of 20+ insights from our conversation.

Let's connect! Niklas on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/niklas-buschner/ Radyant on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/radyant/ Tomasz on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/niezgoda-tomasz/ Surfer on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/surfer/

Full conversation

[00:00:00] Surfer is a bootstrapped SaaS startup that helps you boost visibility in Google, chat GPT and beyond. They scaled from zero to fifty million euros in ARR in just seven years and earned their spot alongside industry giants like Ahrefs or Samrush. That's why I'm incredibly excited to have Thomas Nisgoda, co-founder and CMO at Surfer on the show today. We'll talk about SEO, content marketing, profitable bootstrapping, the modern-day CMO role, and so much more. I think I have way too many questions for too little time, but before we dive in, Tomas, thanks so much for joining. Thank you so much, Niklas, for having me. Super excited about our upcoming conversation. We can keep going. Nice. Thanks so much. I appreciate it.

[00:00:49] So maybe because people always hear these titles and it's like co-founders CMO, obviously it's an impressive title. But can you share a little bit with us like what does the day in the life of a bootstrap SaaS CMO look like? Sure. So every day is a little bit different. That's for sure. I think that's my weekly routine consists of definitely meetings. I meet with marketing team, but also other departments. I have this privilege of being kind of target person for this entire organization. We always want to build products that other CMOs could use. I'm talking a lot with product teams, with our designers. I'm sharing some thoughts about how we could improve particular features. This is definitely a very important part of my job and also something that brings a lot of satisfaction.

[00:01:54] I'm also on the front line when it comes to any conversations outside of our company, about AISCO, about search, future of search, all of those very important topics. I'm trying to find time to look at Reddit, look at LinkedIn, Twitter, currently known as X, and any other platforms where the discussion is happening. And if I see that I can bring something to discussion or at least share my thoughts, I always do it. And this is also related to the fact that I'm trying to be a filter for the team to filter out what's the noise and what matters as of today, let's say. So that's it. That's pretty much how my week looks like. Whenever possible, I try to also find time for creative work, some deep work.

[00:02:52] I still write my own articles. I write scripts for videos. I try to write as much as possible on LinkedIn and all things like that. Awesome. Speaking of your team, can you share a little bit how your marketing, so obviously you also spoke about the product team, but can you share a little bit about the setup of your marketing team currently? Sure. So we have two designers, one web designer who is also pivoting towards product design, more aggressively than in years before. Brand designer, so any thumbnail on YouTube or, you know, OG image you saw from surface blog, that's Eva. We have a outreach slash influencer slash partnerships specialist, Tamara. Paulina, who is basically my VP, and she takes care of product marketing plus coordinating all of the campaigns.

[00:03:54] Satya, who runs our SEO and AI SEO these days, plus coordinates work between all of the freelance writers. We have Christavia, content marketing specialist. She's mostly responsible for making sure that we have relevant data studies. sometimes case studies, some baffle content. that's important for, for example, people who are about to make decisions to sign up for Serfer. We have Pawel, who's a video guy, and Dani, who's brand manager. She is the face of Serfer, basically. If you notice, we recently released a search master class. and Dani, this person that's doing this entire video course. And on top of that, we also work with some partners like, for example, Matt Canyon, who is our face on the YouTube channel.

[00:04:53] We work a lot on those things together. Nice. I think a lot of people in the audience might already know Surfer, but if someone has never heard of you guys before, how would you describe like your product or your main value proposition. So Safari is essentially a platform that allows all of the customers to create content that's already optimized for Google and AI search. Think chat GPT,

Perplexity, any other LLM. And it does it by offering one end-to-end workflow. So you can research your topics, write content, optimize it, generate it with AI, add some custom voice instructions or brand knowledge, then automatically insert internal links in all of those pages. And finally, which I think it's very often kind of left by content teams to offer monitoring.

[00:06:01] and performance analysis. So whatever is happening later on with that content, you are being notified, server monitors, everything that's happening. And if it notices, Rangdrops, for example, it send you an email or an in notification inside application that you should prioritize updating this. I released a cool data study on my LinkedIn profile yesterday about the fact that the content that's Not updated is slowly declining in rankings, while the content that you update is two times more likely to hit top ten within the next thirty days. Clearly, leaving those pages that you wrote a year ago is not the smartest decision, so I would always prioritize keeping an eye on it and then updating, of course.

[00:06:54] And how did you come up with the idea for server initially? Because I mean the SEO and content and the space is so crowded and I think when you guys started, I think Ahrefs or SamRush and also other players were still around, but obviously you saw something that was missing. Yeah, we focused on something that was definitely not on the HS or Sembrash radar, so to say. There were solutions like that on the market, but in many areas, we kind of brought something unique and definitely the most useful for some customers. So initially, server focused on scraping pages from top ten, top twenty, and we filtered out around five hundred different ranking factors. We allowed people to create different charts to compare potential coloration between a particular ranking factor or a group of ranking factors and positions.

[00:08:03] Currently, this product is named Serp Analyzer, and it's available at Serfer Steel up to this date, but it's pretty much technical solution, and only very, very data slash. SEO heavy folks are using it. And so, you know, another iteration that our users asked for was, okay, I love the fact that so much data driven, but what should I look at? where are the things that I should look at and then improve? that would make a biggest difference for my particular case. So we developed audit where you put your URL keyword and we were looking at all of the ranking factors and then we've picked those that your page needed the most to optimize. So to say those outliers. Then people came to us and said, that's great.

[00:09:00] why I need to publish my page and then check what I need to improve in it, publish it again, and see ranking boosts, why I can't do it right away inside some sort of content editor. And this is how we came up with an idea for content editor, which is by far the most popular and the most successful product we ever built. Every month, two hundred fifty thousand content editors is being created new content editors. and may I remind everyone that some people create contentators and use the same coordinator to optimize you know pages from time to time. uh which by the way it might not be the ideal uh solution for for that very particular case but it's secondary. two hundred fifty thousand contentators every month.

[00:09:52] uh that the most successful product we ever built and it came from iterating on the same idea, how to make sure that on-page SEO could be used by literally everyone. I feel like if people would look at Surfer now and they see everything that you've built, like the big product portfolio, the awesome brand you have. I went through the website just yesterday again and you have so much content on there. You have explainer videos, all of that. I feel like if we would have someone that is fancying also starting in the software space now because they have the same feeling as you had back then. So there is something missing in the current big players in the market. What gave you the confidence to pursue this idea despite the big competition.

[00:10:48] What would you tell like a potentially first time founder with the idea, like, should you still pursue this idea? It sounds bad. So what's your reasoning behind that? There was not so much

business thinking when we were doing it. We were doing those things because we felt very passionate about it and everyone had It's his own, because they were like five founders of Surfer. Everyone had his own idea of what success could look like for our current CEO, previously CTO, Lucian. Even if we wouldn't make any business out of it, he could master his skills when it comes to very specific technology, infrastructure, and the programming language, right? For me, I wanted to go deep into SEO. I wanted to work with data.

[00:11:47] I wanted to develop myself as an expert in that industry. So everyone had his own idea of what we could learn from when running Serfer, and business was secondary to all of that. So we didn't spend much time thinking about business model or our competition or whatever. We just, we have been and we are passionate about what we are doing. And it turned out that so many people loved using Serfer. So we were doubling down and then everyone left their jobs to fully focus on building Serfer. And in two thousand eighteen, so seven years ago with. finally founded Surfer as a separate entity and we started spending almost every working second building adding value to this organization. I said it in the introduction that you have this tremendous growth trajectory now, especially also Bootstrap, so without venture capital raised to now, fifty million ARR.

[00:12:59] What do you feel like was most important to grow Surfer? to where you are today despite passion because this is the first nugget you drop that you should look more or follow more your passion and your energy than looking at business models. but what was key to your growth? Past iterations, that's for sure. The way Lucian was able to iterate on product, introduce new features, improve existing features. was blowing my mind, still blows my mind, really. I think that the scale we currently have versus how fast we iterate and how fast we improve server is still unmatched. There are literally a few companies out there who can match that pace with the number of employees and the scale of our operations. So this is definitely at core of this organization.

[00:13:54] Second thing is networking, talking with those users. Back in the days, Miho Suzuki, another co-founder, head of innovation, and also we like to introduce him always like the first customer of Senfer. Entire app was built around his needs eight, nine years ago. So he spent every day, many hours, talking with users, then because he just couldn't handle a lot of that, I joined him and I started talking with those customers. So we basically split all of the charts, all of the support queries, and all of the onboarding meetings between us, and we ended up having like fifty-sixty conversations every week. So if you consider that one meeting is approximately thirty minutes to one hour, it's already a work week, right?

[00:14:51] So yeah, that was definitely intense. But the amount of knowledge we've got from those users about their needs, about the feeling from the market. is unmatched was unmatched and this is probably some of the biggest lever you can have over your competitors because really everyone knows that you should talk to your customers but not everyone is doing that. from my experience this is probably one of the things that most companies don't do and they just. think they are gathering feedback from users because they analyze whatever the people are sending them on chat. But that's something else, really. Having those conversations like we currently have is a different level of immersive experience and also in the way it creates connection between you, your brand, and potential customer.

[00:15:50] And on that note, Those conversations were not about surfer only. They were about helping those people, right? Sometimes we couldn't help them by offering any service or any product that we built. But we could just talk with them, listen to their problems, suggest some potential solutions, sometimes even referring to other other companies and products. And that's why that's how you basically build trust. So those people that we've talked to seven, eight years ago are still there. As long

as they are in SEO space, they're still there and are using Surfer and are being in touch with us. Yeah, so I think that that's it. Maybe also don't be so obsessed about chasing monetization in early days. you know if you have product market feed there will be time to monetize it properly but don't be obsessed about it in early days.

[00:16:55] Awesome I feel like also the part with talking to customers. so you can talk to customers meaning that you talk to one customer every two weeks and you can talk to customers the way you did it where you have to. so I feel like the passion is like the basis. to be able to pull this off. So because how can you have fifty meaningful conversations per week if you are not passionate about the people about the problem you're solving? Yeah, it's like a necessary condition, right? Exactly. And I'm looking at it from distance right now, you know, the time distance. And I just can't believe how we did it. You know, it was so much time involved into this. But then I remember I just I wasn't doing anything else. I was waking up, eating breakfast, and then I was working for like ten, twelve hours.

[00:17:47] Didn't have much of the, let's say, life back in the days outside of work, but I was so passionate and so energetic and optimistic about what I was doing that it didn't bother me, you know? I'm not saying that everyone should grind. There should be some balance, but I didn't feel I needed. it back in the days, right? So if you feel that way, kind of obsessed about work, about what you are doing, why to limit yourself? I don't know, maybe it's not needed. Another thing you're obviously super passionate about is SEO and content. And it's like this little meta lever where you basically have a product that helps people with SEO and content and obviously also like a lot of other things. But Then you also used SEO and content for yourself.

[00:18:40] So can you give us a little bit of a behind-the-scenes look, which role SEO played in your own growth at Surfer? You would probably be surprised. But we didn't invest in SEO for the first four years. Because you always need to take into consideration the investment you need to make. competition, potential ROI, and I would say timing. We had much better channels to reach our customers back in the days, to name a few. Our community on Facebook, the way we interacted with people on conferences, our webinars and education materials outside of our blog, even some data studies, that kind of content marketing. work like a charm, even video courses. The first one we did in two thousand nineteen, then two thousand twenty, it was, it was a massive success, right?

[00:19:43] We've been teaching people about our, our, our niche. We found a hundred percent focusing on, on pitching surfer. The value was absolutely at the most important. So if you take into consideration potential rate of investment, competition and your own potential. SEO for many companies is not something I would recommend starting with. But then you achieve plateau in those channels that I mentioned, for example. And you start thinking, okay, we are a mature company. We've been investing into marketing activities for curious already. We have so much. uh back links pointing to our domain that you know the domain on its own is already strong enough to compete with hrefs with samrush with backlinko with nil patel and with all of those other big brands.

[00:20:43] big domains at least in some in some niches for some keywords. so let's start using that as a lever. let's focus on some long-term keywords. Let's focus on some keywords that are relevant for our niche like content optimization, SEO copywriting, things like that. This is exactly what we did. We gradually started investing into content. I hired the first SEO specialist to the marketing department who is also an editor, Satya. I've mentioned him before. And he started growing our blog and it was like two thousand twenty one twenty two. I don't remember precisely right now, but it was, you know, years after we launched the company. Interesting. I also heard it from pipe drive where they had this early success with the sales course they did.

[00:21:40] So I think it really resonates also with the webinars and the courses you did, which is

obviously also still. part of your playbook today, that you don't necessarily should go just for the hard sell channels, but you should also build community, build trust and educate people, right? Would you say that this is also something that pushed you at the beginning, so not going for the sale, but rather going for building up a network, building up a community, like bringing value first. and then You also said that thinking about monetization and thinking about growth. Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. That's at our core up to this date. I personally feel weird. You know, it's it's very it's like personal, right? Because I don't like hearing people pitching.

[00:22:35] So I'm not going to do it myself. But then there are some areas where our product is best suited to help you with the job. We've designed it precisely to help you with, for example, updating existing content or writing new content that will show up frequently on Google and in LLMs. So then it fits naturally to just explain how those things work. And this is why I believe webinars, video courses, even LinkedIn posts. are so great, right? You bring a lot of value, you educate people. If they want, they can just get that knowledge and go to your competitors. You know, no one will be offended. If they find the competitor better suited for them, for example, because they have some very specific feature that they require or whatever, that's okay.

[00:23:31] At least we are still in their head. We did something nice. We help them at some stage of their journey and maybe they will recommend us sometime later or not. And that's fine too. Our entire job in our marketing team is to constantly increase reach that our brand has and to kind of pop up frequently when the discussions about our category are happening, no matter where. Either it's YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, we always aim to be part of the conversation by ourselves or at least by the people who can bring up the server organically. Speaking of the where, I saw you did a post on LinkedIn. I feel like this is also something where you just went with your philosophy of sharing and giving value where you posted about the share of paying customers you get by channel.

[00:24:41] So first of all, I have to say I really honor such transparency because I feel like it's so important for other people that are like two, three, four steps before you in their journey to understand. things like on that in that transparency. But I think it was really interesting because you had a quite diverse channel mix like between YouTube and word of mouth, but then also Google search and then chat GPT. So what do you feel like? How did you come up with this so diverse channel mix? Like, was it by accident? Was it planned? Like, how did this come about? It's just years of testing and doing different things and leaving stuff that works. I think that we still do plenty of things that are not moving the needle, but we just don't know what are those things yet.

[00:25:39] Once we figured out that we are doing something that don't move the needle, we'll just don't do it anymore. But currently, as we speak, I don't know, right? So we keep pushing, we keep doing what we believe is helpful. And after years of investing in, for example, YouTube or in SEO, invisibility in LLMs, I know that they're fundamentals to our go-to market. So we just can't afford losing that and can't afford kind of losing the momentum. keep pushing, keep doing it. And of course, you can't do it the same way for years. You need to experiment with new formats on YouTube, for example. You need to feel the basic need. So create tutorials for your product, kind of orientate your product around very specific use cases.

[00:26:32] But then what? Keep doing the same videos over and over again? I don't think so. What you need is to reach new folks. who might look for a product like yours, but without knowing that they need it at the stage, with a different format. Maybe with some entertainment content, maybe with some top of the funnel education on YouTube. that just sparks those ideas around content optimization or LLM visibility, AI search visibility. So yeah, our channel mix is huge, but we definitely have a few channels that are moving the needle. And this is where we focus our attention on the most. And that's AI search

visibility, Google, obviously, YouTube, word of mouth and peers. So we try to foster that. But to be fair, the best way to foster it is to create amazing product that just works really good.

[00:27:33] Then people are recommending it pretty, pretty organically. Then external advisors, also partners and affiliates. And lastly, it's LinkedIn. Then this is just a mixture of things, like pretty much everything from events to Facebook, to Reddit, threads and Facebook groups, things like that. You already mentioned AI search visibility and A couple of weeks ago, I think there was this chart all over my LinkedIn feed from Webflow, where Ethan Smith from Graphite, San Francisco based SEO growth agency, posted about that Webflow now already gets like eight percent of their signups from AI search. Now, I think everybody was super hyped. But then I saw your post and I saw that you, at least from the data you shared at that point, you're getting twenty four percent of your paying customers from Chatchity or other AI.

[00:28:38] This is three X. Now, my first question is, why is everybody so hyped about Webflow and not talking about server more? My second question is, how did you do it? How did you achieve twenty four percent of paying customers from Chatchity and AI? This is like incredible. Yeah, yeah. I mean, Webflow is huge brands. That's a big success. Ethan is an amazing guy. I love what they are doing for Webflow. And that's not that that's a solid number, right? For us, I'm looking at the average number from the last three months. We have nineteen point five, so almost twenty percent of people that are registering to server are coming from LLMs, like ChudGPT and any other AI assistance. So it's like twenty percent of people who registered to server are coming from those platforms and twenty three percent of customers.

[00:29:36] So, you know, as you see, slightly better conversion. on acquired customers than registered users. That's a lot. And I would also probably surprise you, but there's no magic tricks to it. That's just years of investing into fundamentals in general SEO visibility, making sure that we win in all of those software review sites if there is, you know, G-II. we've been asking our customers to leave those reviews for years. We never ever paid or did something in order to get a positive review. But even if that's semi-positive review, it's still better than none. So we've been inviting all of our customers for years to leave those reviews. We developed Affiliate program a few years ago where we offered very, very generous commissions.

[00:30:40] And back in the days, plenty of affiliates were promoting that kind of software by just ranking their blog posts. And because of that, there are hundreds or maybe thousands of different blog posts mentioning server in the web. So this is pretty solid training base for those models. But then, you know, there are new rankings and listicles. And whenever we see the article that mentions surfer about, for example, on relatively low position, like third or fourth, we try to reach out to those authors and just discuss, you know, to ask them what made them put us. let's say, so low. And that's another reason to get so much useful insight, so much great feedback about it. But sometimes it's just the fact that they were doing it kind of automatically.

[00:31:38] They were basing some of the things on stuff that's available on the web, not precisely the experience they had with application. And that one conversation can change entire perception of the product because you just show them what what Serfer is capable of, you sometimes offer a free account for them for like one, two months to give it a try. And then what's happening is that they naturally do it on their own to update the article. And that's a big lever. We also monitor around a hundred different prompts in Serfer's AI tracker. And whenever we see that there is this source that's super important for LLM when they are bringing up the answer, when they are creating answer, and it's on our competitor's side.

[00:32:30] We know that we need to create similar content on our own blog as well. If we see that

competitor X is being cited as a source hundreds times every month, and there is no competition to it, no one is touching that kind of topic, We just do it. And it works. It really works. Then Serfer becomes the source. And obviously, if we are the source, we own the narration. We own everything around what Serfer is known for. And yeah, that's pretty much it. I would say the biggest lever is the discipline to do it every week. and to monitor those things, to act when it's possible, and to never miss a week on optimization, basically. So I learned that there's no magic trick, but as you were speaking and talking about your affiliate program, for example, or people writing about server and promoting it, I was wondering if maybe setting up affiliate program is sort of a magic trick because we know that the brand web mentions somehow correlate with visibility in AI search.

[00:33:51] So maybe setting up affiliate program and having a product that people like being like promoting is a magic trick. Magic tree. I don't like the naming of it. But if you if you have a product. a SaaS business that could benefit from having an affiliate program, then I would definitely advise giving it a go and then trying. Affiliates are amazing partners, could be amazing partners. But keep in mind that the world has changed a little bit and the affiliate baseline that used to be, yeah, I have a very popular blog post. I'm going to put some affiliate links and it's going to print me money. It's not working like it used to years ago. Now be successful affiliate. You need to have YouTube channeling to record some videos, TikToks, things like that.

[00:34:53] So the format has changed. But it doesn't mean that you can't get those mentions on blogs. You still can, but it might require you having an outreach specialist or you outreaching on your own. Okay, so it's something that still has to be maintained and still has to be taken care of and it's not something that just you set it up and then passively runs on your runs on its own. Got it. Yeah, definitely. You can even look up, you know, where your composers are getting mentions from and start there, right? Try to steal that strategy and try to go and talk to those sources, go with those publishers to see if you can kind of convince them to include you as well. Got it. As you guys are obviously absolutely on the frontline of AI search and all the shifts in the ecosystem, I'm curious to understand how you have maybe adapted your approach to content and SEO, especially in the last six to twelve months with all the changes going on?

[00:36:09] Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Biggest change is that we completely stopped investing in top of the funnel type of content on our blog. We are focusing on Bofu and Mofu, right? So bottom of the funnel, middle of the funnel, things like best alternatives, competitors, versus pages. This is very important. People are having conversations with LLMs. And if they are shortlisting some products in different categories, they might have follow-up questions like, OK, so why should I pick HubSpot over MailChimp or whatever, or Intercom? And if you can provide good arguments for LLMs on your own blog, that's probably the easiest win out there, right? It ranks on Google because it's on your domain. And if this is about you, it should be easy.

[00:37:04] to reach top ten and then it feeds LLMs with the knowledge that you want them to actually pass over to the user. So yeah, this is the biggest change. We basically stopped investing in top of the funnel and we focused on the middle and bottom of the funnel plus some useful tools, right? This is the intent that we also kind of grab with our tooling towards server humanizer detector, some writing tools, that kind of things are helpful for people. And we also developed some, let's say, content strategy around this. For some people, it might be obvious why you stopped investing in top of the funnel content. But can you quickly explain the why? So why did you stop? Yes, thanks for following up on this. Top of the funnel content is basically very, very high level informational content and a very high level informational intent that people have behind looking up for that kind of queries.

[00:38:15] So back in the days, you wanted to go to target top ten or top three preferably for very

popular phrases like what is SEO or what is three or one redirections because you could wrap traffic to your website and then try to kind of warm it up, maybe run some remarketing campaigns. Basically entire motion go to market strategy could be oriented around this and it worked. But now majority of those top of the funnel type of queries. is handled by AI Overviews and ChargedGPT. People have those questions, they get the answer, they are happy with it. They don't need to go and visit your website, the traffic shrink for that kind of queries. While bottom of the funnel and middle of the funnel where people have clear intention, for example, they already know that they are looking for a solution for content optimization and now they're researching the best options.

[00:39:14] This is where the true battle happens. We need to build up the arguments, we need to convene them that we are better over competitors. This is why we just ditched completely top of the funnel queries because we don't believe it's worth our time anymore. Got it. I recently spoke to the head of growth at HubSpot for the Dach Market, so for Germany, Austria and Switzerland. And she told me that they have buried the traffic. So to say that they stopped focusing on traffic as a metric for itself, like as a proxy for success, because they know that it's like. There are so many changes with AI overviews and maybe also people going to chat GPT and then maybe AI mode around the corner. I would like to hear your perspective on it.

[00:40:08] So how much are you still looking at traffic? Or have you also buried the traffic as a KPI on its own? Yeah, definitely. We don't use it as a KPI on its own. What we are looking at is how much quality traffic do we have? So what's going on? What keywords do we rank for? how our visibility is improving in key prompt in AI search? So we, for example, we want to grow visibility in certain areas, certain cluster of prompts. Our current visibility is, let's say, eighty percent. So we show up pretty often, but there's still space to improve it. And how we can get to this magical one hundred percent. You need to create plenty of different content to target all of the query found out queries that Charlie PT searches for when it's building up the answer.

[00:41:08] You also need to improve position in top ten for key articles that you already have. And they are sometimes sourced, but not that often as they could. And then if the visibility is growing, we know why. And we can replicate the same process, repeat the same process over and over again. So definitely, I'm not stressed about traffic drops in Google Search Console that much anymore. The same with impressions. We just focus on what we know that will move needle. So for example, how well he articles are positioned, right? For example, to us, content optimization tools, that kind of article, best content optimization tools, we wanted to keep ranking on the first position on Google, right? That's the priority.

[00:42:06] And if we notice drops in clicks in rankings of that website, we are going to act on it. Got it. A lot of people will will tell you that now Reddit is super important to drive AI visibility. I think there was this phase when it was all over on LinkedIn. Now, I don't know if it stopped or if I just unfollowed all the people that I found so annoying. But are you including Reddit in your AI search strategy in any way? And if yes, how? Reddit is very, very important. But I think that it's just the community on Reddit and the way the Reddit works makes it very, very tough for companies to just pop into conversation, bring up the tool, they are promoting the service and call it a day. No, it doesn't work like that.

[00:43:06] You are going to be banned, removed from the community or your post won't even be accepted in the first place. So what I'm doing, I'm trying to have very pragmatic approach. I wasn't using Reddit that much years ago. I'm trying to get convinced that it's helpful for me on like even personal level that I can learn and grow within the community. And I'm trying to have honest conversations there. I'm trying to be part of the trends. I'm trying to answer questions. I'm trying to help people. I'm trying to give people much more than I'm asking for. the way I operate. But I never used it to promote server or

to improve our visibility in AI search because I don't think it's going to stick. It's very difficult and I think that you just need to build up your karma.

[00:44:04] You need to build up your authority on Reddit to be able to perhaps allow yourself or be allowed to start. But I don't know, maybe not. Maybe people will just, you know, remove your comments anyways. And what do you feel like would be more important? So if you could only focus on one thing, would you focus more on YouTube? So like generating awareness for people that might not be aware of the product already, but like some sort of also branding measures. or rather focusing on Reddit and doing this like reverse engineering thing where you try to look at the citations and then try to say, hey, where can I go into the conversation? So if you could only focus on one of the two, what would you focus on?

[00:45:00] I think that YouTube is difficult and it requires significant resources relatively to being active on Reddit. You want to be active on Reddit? Go get the phone, install applications, start writing those comments and engage with people, right? You want to start YouTube channel? You'll at least need some time, good lighting, good mic, right? And also some editing capacities. In general, you know it. Creating one video can take days of your work. While being active on Reddit, it's basically just... You're writing stuff getting engaged and so on so forth. So I would say depending on the stage your company's apps right now. prioritize Do both but balance things. I Start with Reddit. start being active. comment some things.

[00:45:59] be active for like fifteen minutes every day. That's what I'm aiming for personally to be active there for like fifteen minutes. It's few threads, few comments, few people that I can help, and some potential new topics that I can learn from also. And for YouTube, if your company is matured enough, can have resources, starting something simple, start creating two videos a month, that's how we started. But if there are people listening, I wouldn't prioritize YouTube if you don't have those resources, really. It's it could be at that and it could be very very costly and Entire marketing team will be working around those videos instead of focusing on other aspects of marketing as well. and how like we we already talked about the the share of users like paying customers you get from the different channels.

[00:46:58] And so depending on the data you posted on LinkedIn and the data you have right now, which is real time. So I think the data you shared there, YouTube was around. Ten percent. Ten percent on average for the last three months when it comes to acquisition. It dropped a little bit, but mostly because other channels kind of lifted up like LLMs. Now what I would let what I would be interested in. so obviously you guys started YouTube at some point. But the numbers weren't there yet. so you didn't have ten percent of paying customers saying they came from YouTube probably week after you started. so I feel like when I talk to people about YouTube. It's it's not necessarily that they don't see the value in it but I think they like the patience and the conviction.

[00:47:51] so what would you say to someone. So how long does it take or how long did it took for you to actually see that it's working and that it's contributing to paying customers? First signs that it's working, we saw on the bottom line after three months. But there were signs before that, right? People saying thank you for doing this video. I learned a lot. Our support team reaching out and saying thank you so much for doing it because now we can kind of use this material to help people understand different concepts slightly better. So this was proving that we are onto something. But then we achieved plateau. The channel stopped growing. The numbers weren't going up. And we knew that we need to find another idea for it.

[00:48:44] And we need to find amazing guy or a lady native speaker that could allow us to scale up the production so it can reach. hundreds of thousands of people in US. And this is how we found Matt Kenyon, and he took over the YouTube channel from me. As you hear, I'm not a native speaker, right? I

have Polish accent, and this is not the most appealing way to learn stuff if you are a US native speaker. That's true, right? I fully understand it. I have the same exact thing when I hear some folks that are not Polish native speakers trying to speak Polish. I love the fact that they do it. I love people that are learning the language, but it's not very, very appealing for me to listen it for like thirty minutes straight.

[00:49:35] If there is another way, there is another channel native speaker who can do the same exact thing but do it. you know, kind of slightly more comfortable for me. Pretty good insight. Let's get back to the course topic again. So we already talked about webinars and courses initially, and now you guys also released, I think, relatively recently an AI search optimization masterclass and it has twenty modules and like hours and hours of content. So obviously we don't have hours and hours here still, but can you share a quick rundown for the audience of like the most important takeaways you teach in this masterclass? Yeah, we've touched plenty of things already and the course is free. We released it a week ago.

[00:50:29] I mean, depending on when you will publish the podcast, but At least, as we speak, it's just a week from the premiere. I think that one of the key things that weren't mentioned up to this moment is that fact coverage is super important for LLMs and also for ranking on Google. So if you want to have your page optimized to be cited, make sure you cover all of the facts, all of the relevant facts. how to get the list of all of the relevant facts. You can compare your page to top ten ranking pages that are currently ranking on Google for a different keyword. You can also run deep research with perplexity, with chat GPT, to kind of get an idea of what people are asking for, what's important, what's not.

[00:51:21] And then you can compare what your article writes about what your article covers already versus what's missing. That's a manual process. You can also use pull like server, does it automatically under three minutes total. That's one thing. Second, in that, LLMs love grid structure, bullet points, tables, lists, all of that. They absolutely love it. not using it properly is just missing on opportunities. One idea very practical is that when you have an article that explains something, you can explain it by writing a very good paragraph, but then just turn that paragraph into a table for people to be able to fund the information and also for LLMs to be able to assess it properly. to then make you a suitable source.

[00:52:27] Lastly, sources, becoming a source or asking existing sources to include you is probably the biggest lever you can have. At least now, we've covered it a few times during our conversation. But in the course, we teach you exactly step by step how to approach it, how to find sources that you need to kind of reach out to or how to become a source yourself. So I highly encourage everyone to take a part of it. It's over two hours of purely full meat education, not so much pitching only when it naturally fits and it's free. So go check it out. It's serferesio.com slash academia and then you will find it in navigation. Okay, awesome. We're already talking and the time has flown, I think, for around fifty minutes.

[00:53:21] And before we have to close the conversation, I always like to give people, besides everything that we already covered, which was super helpful, I guess, I always like to give people practical takeaways. So something that they can take away from the conversation and ideally start implementing immediately. So if you would have to give two to three practical takeaways to a fellow CMO or maybe a marketing executive on whatever stage, on how to drive growth from search, no matter if it's Google or AI chatbots, what would it be? The first and most important thing is start, right? Start investing it. start researching the topic, start practicing it. Go buy AI tracker, build AI tracker yourselves, and add fifty to one hundred key prompts to start gathering data.

[00:54:26] So whenever you and your team feels ready to pick off content strategy around this, you are not starting from scratch. You already have weeks or months of data to act on and to properly prioritize. you know, what to do in what order. So that's absolutely the first thing. Second is that fundamentals still work, right? So don't abandon Google. Don't do it. It's just you need to add another layer. not change

Google with LLM optimization, so to say entirely. Keep in mind that the perspective is very, very important, right? Google is huge. And the traffic that LLMs are generating is just a fraction of what Google offers. So don't abandon Google, add LLM optimization, AA search optimization on top of it. Third thing, I'm trying to figure out the most important things.

[00:55:26] It's also something we kind of covered a little bit, but focusing on the middle of the funnel and bottom of the funnel type of content is also something that companies are not doing that much. While it's very, very important also, it's super easy win. I say it's low hanging fruit. You can also consider writing articles on LinkedIn because they are indexed very fast on Google, they are ranking high, and they allow you to also be frequently cited in AI overviews. We've published data around this, and LinkedIn is one of the most frequently sourced domain in AI overviews. We analyzed thirty six million AI overviews, and LinkedIn was among top five domains, if I'm remembering that correctly. How to get there?

[00:56:22] Just publish articles directly on LinkedIn. It's that simple, really. You can get great engagement on the platform and also rank your own content about yourself on Google. Perfect. Win-win scenario, right? Awesome. And if I may add to the folks that are listening or viewing this, learn something from the surfer. Story because if you still look at the if you still come up with topics based on a keyword research tool where you just try to go for high volume low difficulty as we did back in the days but you do not talk to customers this. Has probably already stopped working and this will not leave any meaningful return in the future. but I mean you don't have to do fifty customer conversations per week but try to learn a little bit from what.

[00:57:18] Thomas and the team at Surfer has done and applied to your own business, and I think you will probably have a lot of success. Yeah, yeah, don't ignore it. The whole system already collapsed. New is being formed and forged. We are not there yet. Fundamentals still work, but it's very important to be active now, right? Don't wait. to the moment where the new system is fully operational because your competitors will be there faster than you. Now everyone has relatively... We all start from the same position, right? Why to wait and to lose the any hedge that you might have? I wouldn't allow ourselves to just sleep on it. So I encourage everyone to start, to start lurking, start learning, and to definitely buy access to one of the trackers out there.

[00:58:23] I highly recommend Surfer's AI tracker. It's the price to value is probably the best out there. And go get at fifty prompts, start tracking it. You will have amazing data to act on in like three months from now. Awesome. Thomas, it has been a really insightful conversation and time has flown. If people want to follow you for more insights, follow Surfer, learn more about what you do, learn more about Surfer, where it's best to follow you. We will put the links in the video description. Thank you for that. I'm the most active on LinkedIn. This is where I publish all of the recent findings. I try to write stuff three to four times every week and I would very, very much like to connect with all of you. Thank you so much for having me.

[00:59:17] I hope that we've been able to entertain you and maybe you've learned something useful during this episode. Absolutely. I think this was... great education and also a little entertainment. Awesome. Thank you so much. Thanks so much. Hopefully speak soon and see you around. All the best for server and for yourself. You too. Thank you. Bye-bye.