HOW TO WIN AI SEARCH | Eoin Clancy, Head of Growth @ AirOps | #12

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Show notes

Eoin Clancy is Head of Growth at AirOps, one of the most exciting AI platforms currently helping marketers scale content operations.

Before AirOps, Eoin spent over 6 years at Telnyx, scaling from Growth Engineer to Head of Marketing, where he also got his first taste of AI tooling. He founded "Build AI-First" in late 2023, positioning himself at the forefront of AI-driven growth strategies.

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Full conversation

[00:00:00] Welcome to a new episode of the Masters of Search Talks. I'm super happy to introduce today's guest, which is Owen Clancy, who is head of growth at Aerobs, one of the most exciting AI platforms currently helping marketers scale content operations. Before Aerobs, Owen spent over six years at Telnix, scaling from growth engineer to head of marketing, where he also got his first taste of AI tooling. He founded Build AI first in late, twenty, twenty three, positioning himself at the forefront of AI driven growth strategies. So, Owen, first of all, thanks so much for being here. Thanks so much for doing this. Can you give a quick intro about your role at Aerobs and what made you jump into the AI search world?

[00:00:48] Yeah, I love it. Thanks for having me as well, Nicholas. I think you gave a very good intro there that covered all the bases. And so. Prior to AirOps, as you mentioned, I was at Telnix. We were in the CPAS space where Organic drove a large portion of our pipeline. We were both a sales-led growth and PLG company, so having great content was a huge part of our engine. So I was actually an AirOps customer for about a year before I jumped on the team. And it was kind of that year after OpenAI released Shad GPT, like I ran RevOps, I was like super deep in the weeds there. So was a deep clay user. And then I was like, wow, like under the hood, AirOps has like all of these LLMs, I can like stitch stuff together.

[00:01:32] I can create like really personalized emails and outbound and lead magnets. So that's really where I started like tinkering. And then after that, I was like, actually, AirOps is very much focused on content. We should probably bring it on to the content team. So it took us a couple of weeks to really organize what workflows we wanted to port over. We've done a lot of programmatic. We've done a lot of thought leadership. We've done listicles, articles. We've done everything. So we narrowed down to one type of content and then really started to rearchitect our entire content operations. on top of AirOps. So

it was very familiar. It was kind of like an air table like grid. We could like orchestrate workflows left to right.

[00:02:17] We could do keyword research all the way to fully fleshed out briefs. And what we really liked was it maintained like the human nature. Like we had like human reviews at the points we really wanted, which as we were trying to like like enforce or like adopt these different tools. We wanted to make sure that people felt comfortable with it. So even as we went from like full human writing to like human assisted, even that nature of like the term human in the loop was like helpful in trying to like help someone internally adopt it. So I saw the light. I saw that a company like AirOps was not going to get displaced by model improvements. In fact, it's going to get like better. And I thought the value that it could deliver to a team, we were a small content team of like two or three people, very heavily focused on SEO.

[00:03:06] So overall, I was like, I want to try and democratize access to this tool a lot more. So joined the team about a year ago. And then since then, in my role, it's a matter of like trying to find the channels that can help us again, get the tool, get the platform in front of more people. And yeah, take bets on the channels that can work. So we've done everything from webinars and thought leadership content to a lot of outbound and starting to do paid channels. So yeah, it's been a wild year so far, full of great growth. I think most importantly leads us to great conversations with the likes of yourself, Nicholas, and amazing customers. So in addition to being able to bring the tool to people, it's actually great to still Talk to people and learn what they're seeing and what they're doing.

[00:03:49] So yeah, it's been an amazing year so far Super cool. I mean full disclaimer. We are also an Arabs customer and the content you were doing or the initiatives you were pushing also helped to convince us to implement Arabs and to do Really cool stuff for our customers. now Arabs has you already said that grown a lot over the last month and you also raised a good amount of capital. Yet it seems and also from What you were just mentioning, you're focusing more heavily on content than on ads or different forms of content. Is that true or is it just like an impression from the outside? And you mean like content that we produce or like our own growth motion or on behalf of customers? I mean your own growth motion.

[00:04:36] Oh, yeah. content is huge. If we think about what we serve from a customer perspective, it's the ability to deliver great content with amazing distribution. Our own growth on the team has very much stemmed from that as the core. One of the first things I did when I came in was audit what we had live. A lot of it was older listicles. It was part of like an older evolution of the business. So we really started to try and like express our own opinions and that was taking subject matter expertise internally, putting it through workflows and then like again, keeping a human in the loop to make sure that it was really thoughtful. when we had like almost exhausted some of our own opinions, then that led to, okay, let's go outside the building.

[00:05:21] Who else can we speak to? And that was customers, that was amazing like thought leaders. So that brought us into this whole new surface area of Kevin Indix, Alayla Salas, Eli Schwartz, and then kind of organically out of those. internal conversations, spawn our webinar series, and like that's just gone from strength to strength. So we basically run an episode every two weeks. That becomes the core of our content for that. Following two weeks, we're able to like take it, snip it up and put it on different channels, which again, we can get into. We can start to promote it with paid as well, which we do a small amount of. But we've even like stemmed it off from like an SEO series to also like a CMO series.

[00:06:02] So as we as a business have evolved in terms of the customer or the persona that we serve, our content is like changing with it. So yeah, content is key to how we've kind of gone on our growth

curve over the last couple of months. Another webinar is like a key pillar of content that contributes also to pipeline. Correct. I've had mixed success with webinars in the past, like other companies. They're a significant driver of pipeline for us. It's just great to be able to give value to people in terms of live conversations. We don't gate them. like anyone can sign up, anyone can join us any Wednesday or Thursday for an hour to hear from these amazing people. So we feel that by giving off value, we actually don't do that.

[00:06:50] many like product demos. Generally, we focus on what's working for these people. What are they seeing across their clients, their customers? If they're working at a company, they show off what they're doing in-house. And then I think by being part of that conversation, we just gain brand awareness. People get into the tool, they tweak and they're like, oh, like they get this, they get this like aha moment, which when people find themselves, they're like, hopefully customers for life. But yeah, we're not on a sales pitch with any of our webinars. We just want to be the company that seemed to broker these relationships, broker access to amazing insights that just help you if you're in content, if you're in SEO, and if you're trying to win AI search, get you to the forefront.

[00:07:36] And what do you feel are the success factors of the webinars you're doing now at Aerobs? What are you doing differently, for example, to the webinar programs you've been running at other companies because you said you had mixed success? Yeah, I think just marketers nowadays are super eager to like upscale. Like the previous audiences I would have dealt with were developers. And again, maybe that mind shift exists today with developers where they're using co-pilots, like a large portion of code can be written by your like GitHub co-pilot or other tools. But I think we're in this sphere today and we also run and content engineering cohorts who were there just like intentionally training the best of the best to people who have like high aptitude and really high attitude to learn how to do prompting, how to do orchestration, how to do automation.

[00:08:28] So I think the average marketer today is just like, how can I go deeper? How can I use these tools to help me do more in my day or reach a higher quality bar or do stuff faster? So I think it's that kind of marriage of like the moment with just the persona that we target which is like marketers that they love seeing another company do great marketing. they want to go deep right now and it's the ability to like get their hands dirty and use amazing tools. so I would say it's a mixture of like timing and then the content we put out there and whoever privileged enough to get on our events. all of that kind of comes together and it just I think delivers amazing value to folks. You mentioned the term content engineer and I feel like you guys coined that a little bit and it reminds me of the term GTM engineer from clay, which they coined.

[00:09:22] Can you give us a little bit of your reasoning behind? what is a content engineer? How is a content engineer different to a content strategist, to a content writer? What does it involve? really kicked off the content engineer motion back in Qtoo. It kind of came again like what I mentioned earlier around, it was just like internal point of view that we had from talking to amazing customers and from our own internal need of wanting to use AirOps more. People were asking like, where does my team need to change? Where does the skill set need to go deeper? How does the average person on my team upscale? Kind of between everything. we come up with this term of like the content engineer. We know we've seen it at like other maybe like agencies meta have like aversion of it But it just seemed like the right Terminology and like you said kind of like GTM engineers been out there for ages but and it was a nice mixture of the systems builder and someone who is like an amazing hinker or strategist.

[00:10:33] and then also They're a marketer at heart. They have a core marketing or growth background. And I think today, in addition to being an amazing builder, where a marketer stands out, is in having that super high bar for quality and taste. So yes, anyone can go into China GPT. You can get

a load of. crap out, but a great marketer is going to use it to elevate what they do. They can use it as a brainstorming partner. They can use it to, again, just enhance what they're doing. But the barrier for taste has now just risen like ten notches. For us, a content engineer is someone who can marry the ability to design systems. think logically about what makes sense to automate, what makes sense to keep the human of the loop on.

[00:11:21] And then they have that really strong growth or marketing background. So that could be you come from brand, you have a really like key knife for creativity and design. or you've been deep in SEO and content where you just know the technical aspects of it. You've gone super deep there and you know like what structure you need and you can like figure out your tone of voice for the company. So I think it's this amalgamation of these three units is what is kind of like making these like Penex content engineers stand out. Really cool. I think it's a very interesting point of view and it also stuck with me a lot and I thought about this. and we're also trying to upskill our people more into these content engineer roles.

[00:12:08] You mentioned the content engineer cohorts. Can you share a little bit about what you're doing in these cohorts? Is it also an upskilling program or how does it look like? Yeah, great question. So our cohorts were kind of driven by customer demand. So we had amazing customers who signed on who were just like using the platform self-serve and they're like, I feel like I can go deeper and I feel like I need someone to like help coach me. So again, I kind of come from like a growth background and reforge was huge a couple of years ago. You would do a reforge course to be connected to peers. You get really great content and you join this like live session with someone who was like amazing. So we try to like almost recreate that.

[00:12:53] With our cohorts, so they're all live. We take about thirty five forty people for three weeks. We do a couple hours a week with the onus or like the. our attention is directed towards a lot of the live sessions. So we have amazing builders. Cindy and Andrea on our team have been implementing air ops for some of the biggest brands you will all know and they're the ones taking time out of their day to create the materials to upskill people. Again we started to build this like massive bank of best practices around prompting orchestration like even as I mentioned about like decoding if you're a programmer like working with a co-pilot. That alone is like a massive skill set where people can improve on today.

[00:13:38] So that's a lot of the asynchronous material that we have. And then part of the fun of being in a cohort is getting to talk to your peers, learning what other people are doing. So in our most recent one, we have some shining lights. We're putting in loads of hours. They're building some amazing stuff that even before the end of the three weeks, they have hitting production. So like one person I'd call out is Deep Sheikah, who's like a product marketing manager at Stripe. She, maybe not within like the roles and responsibilities of her typical job, she's just gone super deep in Aerox. And you can imagine Stripe is kind of like financially regulated. I presume there's a lot of red tape to get stuff live.

[00:14:18] She already has a lot of her workflows like in production, helping her out creatively, like open new ideas, positioning tactics. So it's just amazing that our goal by the end of the three weeks is that everyone has kind of like their capstone project complete. We do a big demo day where everyone gets to like share what they've learned. but it's amazing that people even before the three weeks are off have stuff in production, have stuff that's like benefiting internally their own company, or they've already like deployed it to different customers. So Core is like kind of this magical moment right now where everyone can learn from each other, they can learn from our team, and then it's really trying to like upscale people in those key areas of prompting, orchestration, using a co-pilot on AirOps and then not to, and then all at the aim of like, what will be your capstone project, what's going to elevate you and your team so that you can get some wins on the board.

[00:15:13] I think it's super nice when you build with Aerobs, so I totally get the excitement. It feels like when building your first Zap or your first Make Automation or nowadays N-AIDN automation. By the way, N-AIDN, it's a company from Berlin, and we are also based in Berlin, so I'm super proud of them that they've... got this international fame, but I also felt the same excitement. So I totally get how people, like it just clicks and suddenly you're able to build things that haven't been possible before. And you already mentioned that you're also using Aerobs internally for the growth of Aerobs. I feel like this feels very meta. Can you share a little bit of the behind the scenes, how you're actually using it for yourself?

[00:16:06] Yeah, for sure. Just to echo your point there, I think there is this like, aha moment, but like a lot of tools, definitely within NADN as a big clay user and still am, that like... when you get this outcome, you're like, oh my God, like the direction of my career has changed. Like how I thought about something is very, could be very different. And I think my aha moment, going back to like air ops was more in like the Revop zone of personalization. It was the ability to take, and it's one of these workflows that we have right now, which is taking like sales conversations and conversations with like amazing experts, which live in like dong or attention. I'm able to turn them into amazing briefs for extra content.

[00:16:51] So we can do a one-to-one mapping, or we can say, OK, let's pull everything around a given topic, which might be schema, and it's important in AI search. We can do a lookup on that to our knowledge base, and then start to, again, craft this amazing article that's founded in deeply authoritative quotes. It's backed by proof points. And then we can put the structure on it that, again, we push it to our website will help us win AI search and get ranked. So that's one key example of, again, you saw that aha moment of the first piece coming out amazing. You're going to need to tweak it over time. But that's the nature of any system. It needs to evolve. So yeah, turning internal and external subject matter experts' opinions into great content.

[00:17:38] That's one big workflow that we run. Another one is around like webinars, which we talked about earlier, which is it used to be super manual. Like I was the only marketer on the team for a couple of months. So in terms of doing outbound doing coordination with someone trying to get their ideas as to what they want to speak about what's new in their world. There's a lot of pre work that needs to be done. And then even we host the event. And then What I get excited about nowadays is like the live event is just like almost the beginning of the rest of the work that can come. We're getting like extra amazing insights within the hour long session. And then we turn that into different piece of content. we might push to social.

[00:18:22] We're going to push it to our own blog. They want to get snippets themselves, their co-hosts and push it on to like their channels. pre-work and post-work. So we have a number of Aerobs workflows that help us do everything from extra research on the guest. And that might give us ideas for topics. We can do a double click on any of those and see what are proof points that they've had, what are previous decks where it might just help us get a head start on the materials we need to go and create. And then if we think about like post the webinar, we're able to start to automatically refresh our existing content with those quotes. So if you and me, Nicholas had a great conversation on content engineering and you said something amazing, we'd be able to like capture that in our workflow and be like, oh, that snippet from Nicholas should go in like this article here and let's give like a backlink back to Radiant.

[00:19:16] So we've all that logic to make sure that. for each new conversation that we're adding to the world, the rest of our catalog of materials is going to get improved and enriched because of it. So I would say webinars are a huge one. Individual articles and listicles, that's another. And then I'm a growth guy at heart, so I love a good lead magnet. I love giving people value for free. So whenever you go to our website and you see something which is just insert your domain, It runs some logic in the

background. that's all hosted on AirOps. And it's like logic that will have built in the builder. And we just make sure that it runs sequentially and then gives you value. So yeah, everything from really good content to lead magnets.

[00:20:01] We do some around like analysis of like page channels and other like organic channels with some like simpler workflows too. But yeah, end to end, we try and like drink our own champagne as much as possible. Super nice. So even the AEO scoreboard or like the AEO analysis you built, this is based on ERAPS. Correct. Yeah. So once you put in your domain, it's immediately added to a grid in Aerox. We have like a number of workflows that get kicked off. So if you were to put in Radiant, we're going to go and get some like third party data from like a SEMrush or another provider, and then that gets injected. And then we're going to start to crawl all your pages, score them with our own kind of like methodology and models and doing an analysis of the whole thing.

[00:20:53] publish that back out to the web page. Very cool. You are using the term AEO, so Answer Engine Optimization, at least on this scoreboard analysis thing. I saw Andreessen Horowitz claiming, or maybe not coining the term, but putting out this opinion piece where they were calling it GEO, so Generative Engine Optimization. I think we should solve this once and for all now. What's your reasoning? to go with AEO instead of GEO and then maybe already setting the follow up? Why should people care? Why shouldn't they care about what the correct acronym is? It's it's a great question and then it's also like a question We don't need to spend too much time on or like give mental space to. I feel like What. what we have more?

[00:21:49] Come to terms with over time is just the framing of like AI search and I think it's like broad enough where like It basically does as it says on the cane It's very much no matter if you're talking to a an LLM that has no access to the internet You're dealing with like perplexity or dealing with like a very different agent like an AI overview. It's like AI search kind of like umbrella term to me just like captures the essence of everything and it can kind of just like Mute all the noise of GEO or AEO. I heard a CMO yesterday talk about LLMO And I was blown away by that. So there's like new terms that come out all the time. I feel like going back to basics of like AI search is probably just like the easiest place to have a conversation because we can talk about all these acronyms.

[00:22:40] But at the end of the day, they all mean the same thing. We want to track the right metrics. We want to make sure we take action on the right opportunities that are available on our domain. And then we want to measure it. So I think we can often get lost in the sauce on the acronyms, but sometimes it's better to pick one and move on with this. Okay. I like the term AI search. We are also using it because I feel like the others are like somehow artificial and AI search people at least. clearly understand what this is about because it's like it's at least understandable language and not like an acronym where you're not really sure what stands behind each letter. I see a lot of debate on LinkedIn especially but also like when we talk to customers etc.

[00:23:27] about AI search being or not being a distinct challenge from traditional SEO or like being a different like field. What's your What are your thoughts on that? Is AI search different to SEO? Is there an overlap? How do you see it? I think there's definitely an overlap. If you look at a company like Charitya, who've put in amazing work into their content library today. I'm a big Charitya user. I was recently looking up stuff about stock options and equity. I was doing it in AI search engines. And every time I was getting an answer back, it was mentioning character, it was citing them. So they've done something right. And I think that was true as of their content, even up to like, twelve or eighteen months ago.

[00:24:21] So, like, content that was built with the right structure, it was kept fresh, it was iterative. I think those key principles have been true, and will continue to be true. And if you think about, like, what

Google has optimized for over the year, years, it's been the search experience. Like as a user, I don't think I would see the experience getting worse or anything. It's getting better. And how it gets better is that it understands what a user wants more of, which is like direct answers and like the most relevant pages and information brought right up the top of the page. So then if you're just to think about AI search as one evolution of that, I think the the bar for quality the bar for structure goes up.

[00:25:08] So you're talking then about like agent readability, sentence complexity, but I think what a human likes, an agent also really likes. So core principles, I think remain the same. But it's definitely an evolution of, okay, now you got to really double down on your page structure. Can you keep pages up to date? Can you enrich it with the right content? So I wouldn't say that it's a completely new ballgame, just as we spoke about earlier, like a content engineer is kind of like a morph of this content marketer or like an SEO expert. So I think it's the same people who are generally doing the same types of tasks, but the bar is definitely higher and there's little tweaks around the edges that you definitely need to be aware of and take action on to make sure that your content lands in the right spot.

[00:25:56] But definitely not a full new ball game. I think Eli Schwartz's book on product led SEO. I do this app every night called Readwise where it shows you like five highlights from books you've read throughout the years. Eli Schwartz's book comes up probably like twice a week and it was written in like, twenty nineteen. This is before anything AI ever came out. And like a lot of the principles he speaks about then is like answer engines are going to become more personalized. Google just like amazingly favors and can start to bubble up great content. I think if you take us on six years from what he said then, the same is true if not more true now than it was then. So. core principles are the same, just like certain tactics of how you can like gain extra mentions, extra citations, certain tactics have changed.

[00:26:51] Very cool. Very interesting view on that. Another topic or another like debate was AI overviews or Google AI reviews and also AI mode, where like we have to be have to make at least the distinction of AI overviews being rolled out already across the world on a large scale. Whereas AI mode is still like in this testing phase and not already part of the default search experience at least at Google. And I've seen some posts and also like some, let's say uncertainty around traffic declines at HubSpot. Then there were like a few I think last week or two weeks ago, there was a little outcry about Monday.com, their stock price going down, et cetera, all of that. Do you see anything that your clients are doing, or maybe also in the larger ecosystem, how they're adapting their content strategies to these new interfaces or these new changes at Google?

[00:27:57] now specifically? Yeah, great question. I think going back to HubSpot, which is kind of the zeitgeist of the time, or it kicked off a lot of conversations. And I think AI Search, GEO, a lot of that has stemmed from that initial bubble. Going back to almost what they got punished on, I think it very much holds true that Google started to look more deeply in that algorithm update at your topical authority. not maybe trust is not the right word, but you really trust HubSpot to be like the number one ranked URL or domain for like emojis. Probably not. Like I think the famous one that they always ranked number one for was like the shrug emoji, but at their core they're like a CRM. They're like a marketing automation platform.

[00:28:45] So like the signals they want to give out to the world should be to do with like moving your business forward, like tracking your data and like they had inbound this week where like the talks they're giving are on their core platform and not on emojis. So I think even though we saw that big dip, like there was nothing in terms of the pages they lost traffic on or the content they would have had to retire that I think the core team would have been overly upset about. So I think Google just did this. Big reset that happened to hit some big players, but it really just forced everyone to like double down on and rethink. Are we creating content within our own subject matter expertise? that's adding to the

conversation?

[00:29:31] It's like well structured again. It's persuasive and it's bringing new opinions into the world that the average person doesn't know like you can imagine. all the conversations that happen at HubSpot, even the side of their own company, how they use a CRM, how other businesses are trending in terms of their revenue or what data they want to see. If you're a RevOps person or you're a single marketer at a new agency getting started, that's the content you want to see. I think that's really where they've doubled down. If you look at their overall content strategy now, and I think this is true for everyone. It's a lot more multimodal, like HubSpot have gone deep on podcasts, we've done webinars, they really start to do a lot more of programmatic pages that are personalized.

[00:30:17] So you're an inbound marketer at an agency, you're a paid search specialist at an agency, like they're creating very personalized pages, which when you're starting to go to AI mode or your AI overview, Google. or chat to PT or perplexity, it has more history on you. It knows what role Nicholas has. So when you're asking that question, their ability then is the engine to go back to reputable domains, find amazingly rich content, and surface it up. That's how HubSpot starts to win that conversation. They don't really care for what emoji traffic they lost. They care about being a severe or an amazing thought leader. where they want to sell their products. So I think across our customer base, what we try and bring from our sides would be help on team structure, but then in terms of the qualities of content that gets you cited, mentioned in AI overviews, AI mode.

[00:31:18] One thing we recently learned, again, this is more marginal tactic around the edges, but where perplexity and chat GPT really favor citations of Reddit, AI mode leans far more heavily into LinkedIn. So if you really want to make sure that your content is getting cited within that AI overview snippet, you might want to take your blog post and turn it into a LinkedIn article or have your executive team snip it further and do like a video and a LinkedIn post. And then I think there's like other topics, there's like newsletters, there's groups that are on LinkedIn as well. If you really wanted to make your presence felt more within like the Google surface area, LinkedIn would be one area to double down on.

[00:32:03] And I think that all comes back to... like the underlying incentives, like perplexing each IGBT have a relationship and a partnership with Reddit, Google have done the same with LinkedIn. So always follow where the money goes and that can often help you to figure out like what tactics you might want to use to help find your audience. Speaking of Google with AI overviews and AI mode, what's your take on this narrative of Google? being that and chat, you basically eating up the market share of Google like it was very tasty cookies? Yeah, great question. I would say I had a much stricter opinion that it was a kind of like winner takes on market up until the last few months, where now we're starting to just see like the total pie is growing.

[00:32:58] And my parents are like technophobes like their ability to use email is negligible. But now they're starting to like ask their their most important questions of the day to like chat GPT. Now they're still going to go to Google to like find the URL or like do the last mile kind of like purchase or information discovery. But I think what we're now starting to see is like the total pie is growing. For previously you might have made one or two Google searches, you might have got what you wanted, you found a dead end, then you'd like bounce. Now it's like you might be starting ten steps further back. You're like I want to do X like. what are my options now? You're able to like create far more search queries Even outside of Google you might still end up in Google.

[00:33:44] But I think the total pie as a whole is growing as we're starting to address newer markets. with a lower barrier to entry You can do deeper research. So I definitely given the size of Google and I think the investments they're making which they're willing to cannibalize their own paid search product for. I don't think they're going anywhere. They still own the vast majority of the traffic and how users find

different pages, find your content. But I definitely think the search pie is growing. But that sliver that answer engines have today is growing exponentially. And I think that rate of increase will continue to increase as well. Speaking of your customers, there are like some of the, I would say, most AI forward thinking companies out there.

[00:34:35] What's something that you learned from them about like the traffic share from Google or like traffic growth from chativity, perplexity, maybe also other AI search tools, like something that you found interesting that you wouldn't have expected that way. Yeah. What's really interesting. Even before the metrics is just there like mindset. So someone called it like clock speed yesterday, but like velocity and experimentation like everyone realizes that. okay, it might be a sliver of our traffic today, but that's going to be far bigger in six months time and twelve months time so. Each of these things takes a little bit of time to compound and develop over time. So they need to be making those investments now.

[00:35:19] So just on like public proof points that are out there, like Josh Grant at Webflow leads their growth team. He's publicly shared that they're like percentage of signups. And referred by LLMs have gone from like sub two percent to greater than ten percent over the last. I think it's like four months. So that's you can imagine the size of webflow huge company. They're getting more than ten percent through GPT perplexity etc. referrals. That's a huge chunk that they have like invested resources and time and workflows into and Lightspeed similar sort of like point-of-sales space. They're also seeing interestingly And that seems sort of increase on like referral traffic to their website, but kind of like what Kieran Flanagan at HubSpot shared out recently, when that traffic from LLMs lands on the Lightspeed website.

[00:36:14] they convert, like, double the rate of someone who's through organic search. So someone has done their, like, research more thoroughly. Now when they land on your site, maybe it's in, like, smaller numbers, the funnel is tightened, but they're more educated, they're, like, ready to make a purchase decision. They're ready to, like, book a demo. And, yeah, I think, like, Descript would be the third one I'd call out, where they were. They're an AI company themselves. They create a great product. And they were one of the first ones to really try and get ahead of other players in the market, creating, or I would say updating rather than creating that new content, but updating their content to have the key principles of structure, freshness, and authority.

[00:36:58] And similar to Webflow, I think they're seeing something like ten to fifteen percent of their paying signups. come from LLM referrals today, which is amazing. That was not there twelve months ago. So again, if you start to forecast this out, it doesn't mean the demise of Google, but just the total search pie is definitely growing. Based on the actions that these companies are taking to like not only survive, but also thrive in this new environment. I see there's a lot of talk about content on your own side, not being relevant anymore. There's a lot of talk about Reddit. You also mentioned LinkedIn, like being favorite on AI mode. And I'm just wondering how you think about the content you have on your own side, the content or like the actions you can take on other sides, how to balance this and like Also how to to budget in terms of not only money, but also in terms of resources capacities.

[00:37:57] So what's your take on that? Great question. Um, I don't think it's anything new for this age of like AI search, but there are four buckets that are very like explicitly standing out, which again, they rose around, but now they're content creation content refresh. off page mentions, and then what I'll call the last one, social conversations. So again, you go back three, four years ago, if you're in SEO, you're in content, you're thinking about all of these things, but where you start to split your calories would have been different. Again, you might have focused more on the on page, you were keyword focused, you were kind of like, get to page one. Now it's, I would say, more evenly spread. You want to be like spreading your calories, fifty percent onsite and amazingly like fifty percent offsite.

[00:38:51] So even taking one of those two offsite buckets, which would be like herd party mentions, it's really interesting when you start to look at the top topics and queries that you care about in your space. So for us, it would be like AI search visibility, content creation, content optimization as a topic. You break that down and it's like, what's the best tool for X? Or I'm a given persona, what should I do to achieve Y? Like those are the queries. When you look at the content that gets cited and mentioned within those queries, so that means as a backlink, it's often not content from a brand. It's content from maybe someone like Radiant who has like a ton of exposure across different tools. They're giving their own personal opinions.

[00:39:36] Again, it's authoritative, persuasive, useful content. Like that, if it doesn't mention AirOps, should be a trigger for me to go and say, hey, Nicholas, you haven't heard of AirOps, let's try and like get you a demo. Or if you have heard of us, maybe I can get like a back link or I can get like a mention in a different way. So I think off page where Maybe in the past, we looked unfavorably on people who could give us a backlink for the right site with high demand authority, high reputation. That's increasingly coming back as a key activity that you should give time to. And then similarly, like we spoke about earlier, be it LinkedIn or Reddit, making sure that your name is in the conversation for the important conversations and subreddits.

[00:40:19] That's so important because when someone's about to make that. Like conversion decision of like what e-bike to purchase or what toothbrush to go with like they might have consumed a ton of like oral be hygiene information up the top of the funnel like informational and like middle of funnel. when they make that decision they're going to start to look more and be biased towards the pages that talk about reviews that talk about like safety. so. definitely from like a full funnel perspective, you need to make sure that you're in the conversation across all of these moments. But just going back to some of the stuff that you can directly control within your own content, within content creation, like I mentioned earlier, structure is so key.

[00:41:04] So when we looked at the difference between for a given query what got cited and what was on page one in Google but not cited. The big difference as we saw amazingly was nothing that new. It wasn't as if these pages had like llms.txt installed or anything like from out of this world. It was more they used lists over bullet points. They really prioritized having a single H one, which a lot of pages on page one of Google don't have. And they had consecutive or sequential ordering to their headings on the page two. So when you look at like what got ranked on page one, and where some of those pages didn't make it into the AI citation, it was just that the bar for structure got higher. So like, simplest.

[00:41:59] The simplest things that an SEO person can do, just like AI and like these agents truly appreciate. So that's on the content creation side. And then for refresh, obviously that's still important. But depending on the space you play in, if you're in like non-profit or education, your industry moves slower. So your need to refresh content is kind of every like six to twelve months. But if you're in SaaS, and I was speaking to someone yesterday who's at like an AI agentic workflow company, They noticed it too, but our proof point was that content is three times more likely to get cited if it's less than three months old or if it's been refreshed in the last three months. So definitely true of SAS where every competitor is making different moves at the same time.

[00:42:44] The more often you can update your content, again, pushing the conversation forward. not just updating it for the sake of it, that's going to get you mentioned. So, come back to your question, where you can lay your calories. in past years might have been closer to creation and then maybe a little bit of a split amongst the other three. Now, I would say you need to be very much focused on all of them, but does workflows, does processes, their systems to help you kind of automate that as well? Based on all your knowledge, based on all the conversations you had with all those very forward-looking

companies, if you had to predict how search will look like in two to three years, based like from a user behavior perspective, what would you tell the CMO or maybe like VP marketing, whatever the best role is, who's planning their content strategy today?

[00:43:40] Like what would you tell them or what? Which recommendations would you give to them? Great question. If I use the exact answer, I would hope to be a millionaire by this point. But I think if I were to advise a customer today or CMO, it would be to create deeply authoritative content that is well structured. So I might buy myself a little bit of wiggle room there over the next two, three years. That structural aspect might change, but who you are as a company is probably the thing that's going to be the least likely to change. You have an amazing surface area of who you speak to from your investor standpoint, who your customers are, who your self-serve users are, who are not. your customers are equally valuable.

[00:44:27] So what you do as a company, I think is your your greatest bank of this knowledge and how you can express that in the thoughtful content that's well structured for the engine of its time, I think is like where everyone can start to win. So that's going to make sure that you can still get your page one ranks in Google. It's going to make sure that you're prioritized in mentions and citations for AI agents, but having deep topical authority, adding to the conversation, keeping it fresh, you are not going to go far wrong if you prioritize those given actions. And then it comes back to the basics of marketing. It's like, Where does your audience live? Are they actually using AI search engines or are they living in different communities?

[00:45:13] So where you would start to lay your bets in terms of distribution then need to be very much informed and backed by where your core audience consumes their content and where they live in the conversation. Sounds great. I think this is a very thoughtful answer. Now, we are already talking, I think, around fifty minutes-ish. So I think let's wrap it up maybe a little bit. One of the last questions I want to ask you is, I think I still see a lot of people wanting to implement AI, but struggling to implement it effectively and efficiently. from your perspective also looking at yourself, your team, but also the companies that are successfully using ERAPS. What would you say, what are like the treats or maybe like from a mindset perspective or maybe even from team structure, I don't know, whatever comes to your mind.

[00:46:11] What separates winners from those who struggle with AI implementation? Great question. I think there's like two parts to it. One is not to be afraid to experiment. So that means like trying to figure out your systems, like what do you today that could be automated? Like getting in there, trying to like document how it's done, where the room for opportunity is. So like experimentation, come up with hypotheses. And then I think the part people get very much stuck on is just like, take action. like get the ball rolling, get something built. And like even those workflows I mentioned, I know Nicholas on your side, you've like amazing stuff going on as well. Like it didn't start that way. Like it didn't start with like a hundred steps in NADN or twenty columns in play or two hundred things in AirOps.

[00:47:05] It started with like two. It started with like, can I take the input? Can I do something with it? And can I get like an output out? And then you can involve it like really. It's kind of like an artist need to see something on the palace to be able to react to it. You can see what's good, what's bad, what needs optimization. So I think high velocity experimentation. And then just start. If it's one chat GPT query that gives you a little bit of insight to go further, and you can stitch one more thing onto it, progressively build. And it gives something that people get stuck on, where they go way too deep, way too quick. A professional engineer, professional content engineer couldn't go and solve it what they try and end up with.

[00:47:48] So start simple and build from there. It's a great answer. I also think this is something that I

learned from enabling my own team. I don't know if you were able to look into our Aerobs workflows, but it's especially, I think, the experimentation part. I had this moment where I was just thinking about, ah, we could do this and that and then we just try to do it and then we had a first obstacle and then a second one and then I think it's a critical moment not to get frustrated but to actually try to overcome it. and maybe use, this is the great time we live in, use a Claude or use a chat GBT to help you understand this. I think you also have this co-pilot feature inside of ERABS that can help with that.

[00:48:40] And this is something that I also feel like just from my own experience, so plus one to what you said, if you keep experimenting and if you overcome this frustration, there really comes promised land. Totally. I think if anyone wants to see someone else experiment in the wild, Jason Lemkin, I think it was early August of this year, founder of Saster, he wanted to get into vibe coding. He did a little bit of a documentation every single day. What he started off with was super simple, but like four or five days in, he hit this like massive roadblock where he felt like out of his depth, but because he had progressively built his knowledge had built with him. He understood the system better and took him a day to get over that then, but what he ended up with was amazing.

[00:49:27] It was kind of like his aha moment of like, I've pushed through the barrier, but I think had he tried to go zero to a hundred immediately, he would have failed and it would have been like more difficult to get past that like break point. But yeah, progressively build. You're going to encounter some tough moments, persevere, and I think you'll come up better at the fireside. Super nice. I always like to wrap up these talks with something very actionable. I think you already shared a lot of actionable stuff, so it was amazing. I really liked it. But if we have someone listening today in the audience who runs growth or marketing, Maybe at a B to B SaaS company, what would be from your experience, but also from what you see with successful customers?

[00:50:14] What would be like your top two to three practical recommendations for getting started with AI content workflows? Great question. Number one, I'll like self-promote, but come to our cohort. We're going to have a lot more of a asynchronous version of it as well soon. But if you want to work with your peers, experiment, fail, learn, succeed with them, our cohort's a great place to get an early foot in the door. It's also catered for people at different levels. So if you do have high expertise and you want to just go deeper on an aspect, there's streams there for you. So from a practical standpoint, I think trying up skill, super, super important. I think learn from your your peers. And we're starting to have more like roundtable discussions starting to facilitate people speaking to one another.

[00:51:08] And it's amazing what you can learn from what an individual SEO and a massive enterprise team has done or what like a head of growth of a small hacky startup. They've tried stuff I heard yesterday. GitHub is this amazing avenue to go down for publishing content that can really interact with a developer audience. So I think just talk to your peers and then I'll leave you with just experiment. Figure out what is one topic that you want to dominate and then trace the line back to what are related queries. Where does your persona live? Where does your audience live? And then really just try and see if you can build a workflow that can help you achieve that individual stream. If you can help automate or add AI enablement to your workflow stream that's gonna give you pipeline, it's gonna give you more users, that's the highest ROI.

[00:52:04] you see your time. So figure out a single stream, might be a single content type, it might be a new product line. but define something that's like narrow in scope and then progressively build and I think you'll find success. Amazing. I think these were really, really great recommendations and I think also the talk was like super interesting. I already told you before we started to hit the record button that I always like to do this talks out of a very selfish reason to just get insights from amazing people. that know a lot about their topic and have very interesting opinions. And this really worked out so well. And

since I have the option to also share it with the world, I think it's okay that it's a little bit selfish of me.

[00:52:53] But if people felt like this was very insightful, they like how you think about this stuff. And if they want to read or hear or see more of you, Where can they go? Like, where to find you? Where to find more about AirOps? Yeah, I think the simplest place is go to airops.com. Across our nav, then you'll see different resources. So if you liked a lot of the first party research I spoke about, you'll find that under reports. If you want to join the cohort, that's under our live cohort one as well. And then for the webinar series, we have like a SEO track, even a CMO track. Again, you'll find all of that under events. Otherwise, On social, you'll find Aerobs under the company name. I'm Owen Clancy. Feel free to connect with anyone on the team.

[00:53:42] But yeah, we'd love to see more of the audience at our events and hopefully more to come in real life as well. Thanks so much. Owen, thanks so much for doing the talk. Really appreciate it. I hope you guys keep crushing at Aerobs. We try to keep crushing it with Aerobs. hopefully speak soon. And everyone that wants to learn more about AI search, etc. I can just echo what Owen was saying, follow the guys at Aerobs. I think you're doing great work. So yeah, keep it up, keep crushing. Thanks for having me, Nicholas. Talk soon. Bye bye. Bye bye.