M&A in SEO | Daphne Monro, Head of Website & Content @ hosting.com

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Show notes

M&A in SEO is a topic that you won't find a lot of content about. But it's a high-stakes topic that can make our brake organic visibility.

My guest today is Daphne Monro, who is Head of Website & Content at hosting.com, where she oversees web strategy, content operations, and SEO for a global hosting network powering over 3 million sites.

She lived through multiple high-stakes domain migrations and rebrands, and knows the ins and outs of how to make this a success.

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Full conversation

[00:00:00] MNA in. SEO is a topic that you won't find a lot of content about online, but it's a high stakes topic that can make or break your organic visibility. My guest today is Daphne Monroe, who's head of website and content at hosting.com, where she oversees web strategy, content operations, and SEO for a global hosting network, powering over three million sites. She lived through multiple high stakes domain migrations and rebrands and knows the ins and outs of how to make this a success. So, Daphne, welcome to the podcast. Thank you so much for having me today. I'm really excited to discuss this topic and share all my insights. So let's go. Yeah, I tried to make sure to extract as much knowledge as possible out of you.

[00:00:54] But let's start personal. How did you come into SEO? So my SEO journey became a very natural progression, I think. So I started... my career agency side working on personalized emails back in Las Vegas where I grew up. And then once I moved over to the UK, I started building websites to start something on my own and grow into the business. And obviously, once you start working on the web, you realize that SEO is kind of a foundational thing that every website needs if you want to be found. So I got... really into the performance of these sites that I was working on, the user experience, and then diving into keyword research and all the other stuff that comes with it on site, off site. And yeah, I realized I didn't want to do anything else.

[00:01:51] I really wanted to niche down into SEO. And so I've just stuck with it and grown into it for almost the last decade now. And I love it. I wouldn't want to do anything else. Nice. And how did you

end up at hosting.com, your current employer? So I came to hosting.com about two years ago when we were a world host group. So this is pre-acquisition of A-II and pre-domain name purchase. So I got to be here kind of when we were building the foundations and as the business grew through M&A, so did my role naturally. We realized there was a lot of websites through all of these new businesses that needed love and attention. So I moved into the head of website performance role and then got really into the content side too.

[00:02:44] So now I'm head of website and content, which means I get to help build our brand tones, work with our local leaders, and really develop all of our different content strategies cross-channel internally and externally for all of our different brands in locales. So it's my dream job and it's super, super cool. But you're obviously being paid to say that. They don't pay me to say that. No, no, no. They obviously just pay you a decent salary that you deserve in like your role. But I obviously introduced M&A and SEO and you already mentioned like the history of... take over domain name purchase etc. So obviously the journey is very strongly connected to that. I can imagine a lot of folks either reviewing or listening to this that they're not really familiar with what's involved in like M&A and SEO.

[00:03:44] So I would suggest let's start maybe with a super high level understanding of M&A and SEO. My very stupid question is, is this just about buying a company and thinking about what to do with their web presence or what's involved? So M&A, which stands for mergers and acquisitions, only works when it's strategic. You can't just go throwing money at issues hoping to solve problems. And I think everybody in SEO knows that foundationally. However, when you find a partner, for example, one of our most recent mergers with Rocket.net, you can build better businesses together and strengthen everybody at the same time. So using that as an example, we were lacking in a high quality managed WordPress product. And Rocket.net has the best product on the market.

[00:04:45] So through being present at events like CloudFest and just natural conversations, it seemed like a no-brainer that we would make this connection and build our brands together. So having Ben Gabler move in as Chief Product Officer, he's the CEO of Rocket.net, has been a super powerful strategic move, not just for us, but also for our customers, because we're solving an issue that we know customers were complaining about. But taking it back to the SEO side, when you look at mergers and acquisitions, sometimes people think of it as a dirty word, right? You know, big businesses buying businesses. But it's so much more than that. And we actually strengthen each other by working together. And, you know, some of our smaller acquisitions early days have been some of the most foundational team members that we have here today and have been able to grow with us.

[00:05:42] So, yeah, that's kind of my synopsis on that. Got it. So if I understand this correctly, if we quickly separate the M&A and then the SEO part, it's basically UCA company. that would be, for example, a great addition to the group and has a strong offering where you might not necessarily have a blind spot, but where you just feel like, hey, they are the leader there and we want to have them on the team, so to say. And then the SEO part is about how do we make sure that we get the best synergies? Or is it also buying a company that, for example, has a strong SEO presence, so you're basically buying them due to their SEO, if that makes sense? I mean, it's definitely part of the driving, is understanding the SEO.

[00:06:39] strength of their sites. and also that goes into strategically deciding whether we're going to migrate these sites into our bigger brands like hosting.com or let them be stand-alones like we have for Web Central for example because it's a leader in the Australian market that we just couldn't be at hosting.com because we don't have that authority that Web Central has built over these years and years of being present member of the community. But when we have the discussions about which companies we're going to purchase, of course SEO is one of the first things that we look at. What is

their keyword portfolio? What is their authority, their domain ranking? Do we trust their domain? Do we want these domains pointing to other businesses that we own?

[00:07:27] Are they spammy? So we do a deep investigative dive, but also then it comes to things like the team members and the products that they offer and the educational side, what we can leverage and build together. And I like that you use synergies. I think that's a good way to summarize this. I think probably some people will obviously say we're just sugarcoating M&A, but I think as you said, some some some topics get a bad rap. So for example, AI search also or GEO also gets a bad rap for like being like just SEO in like a new more fancy clothes. But I think we should yeah, we should talk about just the things basically behind the scenes and like take it with a pinch of salt and not be like too biased already from the get-go.

[00:08:21] So let's maybe look at this one example. You just shared where you said we couldn't just immediately integrate them into hosting.com because this is obviously something that I could imagine a lot of people asking themselves. I buy a company and I integrate maybe the offering into my product suite. They have built up an SEO presence under their domain. Maybe their presence was even like a positive factor in the due diligence for us. What do I do with the domain? Do I let them live on their own or do I integrate them immediately and like redirect etc. So what's your take on the nuances here? like any SEO would say, it depends. A unique situation has its own unique resolution. Really just diving into more than just SEO, less than their keyword portfolio and more about how customers want to engage and where people are expecting to go when they interact with the brand.

[00:09:33] So, WebCentral has An example is a long-standing community present in the Australian market. So we had looked at customer feedback and customer experiences and realized that people want to pick up the phone and have an Australian on the other end of the line. And we don't want to ruin those experiences by just buying a company and taking it over and changing everything. deeply care about these businesses and the customers to give them the right experience that matches with their expectations. So for some people, it does mean that hosting.com is the solution because there's a lot of earlier acquisitions that we had that are smaller brands that didn't have the infrastructure, the products or the care that hosting.com can offer.

[00:10:22] So those, those ones were easy, but some of these are much more nuanced and deserve their own marketing and their own global leaders. So actually internally in my team, we in the content department have Georgina who leads the global marketing strategy. And then we have local leaders who lead their own locales. So, you know, the Australian market is going to be having marketing done by Australian people in Bangladesh. We have marketing done by people in Bangladesh, so on and so forth, so that the right people know who they're engaging with and we don't just think that everybody's the same and everybody wants the same experience. We want to keep the authenticity that these brands have built and also empower these communities with our global infrastructure.

[00:11:12] Makes no sense. I also recently had a guest on the podcast who talked about this. Like the balance between having global strategic elements and like centralization than also local leaders. So he leads a thirty people enterprise SEO org and they operate like in Germany and Belgium and France. So not, I would say, culturally. So different countries, if you look at it from like a bird's eye perspective, because all the Europe, but like the south of France is like very different to the north of Germany. So if I see you like operating globally and you mentioning something like Bangladesh, so how do you balance that? What are the things that you keep like globally or like where someone owns the global perspective?

[00:12:06] And what are the things that you keep locally? because I feel like there's no obvious answer to that. Yeah, there's not. One thing that we do well, I think, is keeping a lot of the CEOs on board with

us. So Ben, who I used as an example, but Imran from EY Host is one of our recent acquisitions, and he's come in and he's actually the operations leader for all of Bangladesh. right there in person, you can come the community, speak with him, and he is leading what strategic decisions we're progressing with. So things like pricing or marketing or how-to content videos, we have boots on the ground. So I think that that... having those really senior people who have built these businesses, be able to pass that knowledge on to us, and then we work together to enhance the global strategy, but also keep that local leadership present.

[00:13:14] It is an ongoing challenge to give each brand and location the right experience, and sometimes we do mess up. We're humans at the end of the day. But we have back-to-back conversations with our community all the time to keep on getting better. We will come to the hiccups a little bit later. But let's take a step back again and look at whatever recent M&A project you've done. So I'd like to understand a little bit the phases. of the project because I can imagine that there are. there are points like where you are particularly involved and then there are aspects of it where it's maybe like an M&A team or like other teams in the company like give us a little bit of maybe like the timeline the roadmap like how is this all unfolding and where are you stepping in and and how.

[00:14:19] Yeah, so a lot of the times the conversations happen when I'm not in the room. We have a very active C-suite who engages with the community and is always looking out for opportunities for M&A, but partnerships and just ways to build and work together. So often... There will end up being an invite in an NDA that gets sent to me, and then I'm welcome into the conversation. And this is typically because in the hosting space specifically, M&A is very competitive. I'm sure there's lots of markets that are similar, but it's a tight nip. group of people and a lot of these people have been working either in hosting or WordPress for the past twenty years. So you start to know everybody and go to the same events and etc.

[00:15:10] So yes, I'll get an NDA and then I'll get an invite to a meeting and this will be when I start to do my research and I'll look into typically, you know, head to insert SEO tool here and dive into what their keyword portfolio looks like, what their performance is, what have they been doing over the last five years, and what opportunity do I see? But also, this is the point in our business where I kind of have to sell us, too, because we want it to be a mutual arrangement and agreement. We want both parties to be happy. So I also have to go back and look at all the great stuff that we've been doing and put together reports on how we've been successful in the past and how we're going to bring that strategy to life with this next move.

[00:16:00] So it's a lot of sitting down and talking and opportunities and nice meals sometimes if I'm lucky And then then we get the ball rolling and pretty much once the ink is dry on the paper we start with the migration process. Okay, and migration process means not necessarily all domain Goes into goes with the redirect so to say like very simplifying here goes into a new domain. But migration process also involves like what does it involve? Yeah, so for us migration can be The customer migration to our like customer portal which we want all of our clients to be on Which I'm less involved in but then from a website perspective we like to have all of our websites on our stack. so Pretty much every time there's an M&A, we are going to be migrating them to a new CMS.

[00:17:01] I don't want to necessarily plug any one here, but I'm sure you could go to any of our sites and see that we're run on Statomic, which is great, super fast. So we do that movement, which also will probably include a content consolidation task. When you look at some of these businesses like A-II, for example, We're talking twenty-five years of blogs. There's a lot of stuff that wasn't performing and, you know, bloating the site. So we'll do content consolidation, CMS migration, and then put our redirects in place. And sometimes, if necessary, we'll do a rebrand. So you can look at Sue Impressa, WebCentral.

What else have we done? Mockahost.easy. And these ones have all had rebrands post acquisition, which has been run by George Walters, who's our creative director, who is phenomenal.

[00:17:56] And we get to get some flavor in there and make these brands sing, which is a part of the process that I really love because we can be very technical and strategic. But once you add that flavor on top, these websites come to life and you can see why it's important to have different. brands to be in these different places in the market. And given these different steps across the whole project timeline, what would you say are the make or break points? Timelines. Timelines I think is a good one. So we acquired A-II hosting in January and I found out about it in December. Um, and then we needed to completely rebrand in April, April, twenty eight. That's the day that we went live at twenty five year old.

[00:18:47] Business moving to a domain name that was just parked with no, no authority, no nothing. Um, so I'd say one thing that I would. suggest to other businesses is allow for a little bit more time. Luckily, we have a phenomenal team and we were successful in hitting that deadline, but it was stressful. There was a lot of sleepless nights, but it brought the team together. I think timelines is a really, really big one for make or break. And then also just silly checklists. The URLs aren't changing domains and you're keeping your URL structure. Make sure that you have trailing slashes. If there's trailing slashes, check that the redirects that you had in place are still going to be in place. All of the things that can easily be forgotten, like if you are doing a domain name migration, Tell Google search console that you're moving your container to another container and things like that.

[00:19:50] So just taking time to do like a pre-flight checklist and actually finishing everything on that list. I think I was really lucky to work with several agencies on this project as well. So I think in the end we had like three agencies just to make sure all the SEO was as good as it could be. And then, of course, my great internal team that we have on staff. So lots of people, lots of checks, and then ideally, if possible, lots of time. And if you reflect on that migration process, obviously, time is one component, but you were very constrained on time there. Would you still say, like, operationally, everything went well, were there things where you felt like, if I would have to do it again, here are a couple of things that we learned that maybe we added to our playbook, so to say, that we can do better in the next migrations.

[00:20:52] For sure. So in the case of A-II, I think a lot of the conversations were... If we're going to do it perfect, we'll never launch. So I kind of liked that approach, which I struggled with personally, but I learned from that. But going back to the migrations that I did learn from, Sue Impressa was one that we launched with just our core product portfolio and kind of forgot about some products that had been ranking really well just because we were looking at a list and trying to achieve a list with the new perspective. So one thing I learned from that, which was earlier on in my career here, was to definitely take the time to dive into what that brand already is before we make our moves. If we're not offering a product in the new portfolio or for whatever reason, do we want to leave that landing page?

[00:21:50] Because there's lots of links back to it anyways and put some information on there to direct users to the correct product that we currently offer. And just leveraging that existing authority. That was definitely one of the early learnings. Thank goodness before we had the big ones. And if you recap on migration projects, where you basically did not or discontinued the old domain and moved everything over to the new one. So I'm not sure if this has happened now after you moved to hosting.com already. But I'm wondering like is this basically a net new increase then in traffic and invisibility etc. If I'm thinking like the domain I'm buying, they're getting, I know traffic is vanity, but for the sake of my example, they're getting like, fifty thousand clicks from Google a month.

[00:22:53] So, and then you're moving it over. Probably most people would love to see those fifty thousand clicks just coming on top on what I already have. But is this the case? Like, can you do a

simple calculation like that? Obviously, you need to keep in mind that Google's going to catch up with you or wherever you are. It's going to catch up with you even if you're doing some quick wins. So as long as you're purchasing a domain that's within your topic and you're not just migrating it over to a landing page that has no relationship with. the information that you're sharing. I think that there that is a quick win that could have long-term advantage. I don't think you're going to keep your fifty thousand clicks.

[00:23:47] if you're going to migrate all of that existing content that was on that domain name that you've purchased onto this this guy over here that you're building. and then properly redirect, then I think there's a case that you can keep those fifty thousand clicks. And I think that we can see in the market people are picking up on this and building businesses this way for sure. It's often about keeping the authority though and making sure that you have the right content on the end that still matches customer intent, which is just foundational SEO strategy. So we're kind of entering a world where I'm considering it a bit more of black hat SEO strategies coming back with the rise of AI and all these cheeky ways that you can get yourself in like AI overviews for example.

[00:24:39] still never want to push those strategies, even though you can win right now. And always think about the long-term benefits and think about the sentiment that you want to resonate with your community and your customers. But hey, if you want to buy that domain for fifty K clicks, go and buy it and test it out. Let me know how it goes. Got it. So please people comment if you have experience on that or if you're going to do an experiment. tapping into the other scenario if you keep the domain as is and like let the brand live on its own so to say like obviously connected in the back end etc. but is there anything you're doing in terms of strengthening each other like doing content collabs or like? does it make sense to set links from hosting.com to like The other side something like that.

[00:25:35] It's good. It's a really good question And it's something that we talk about a lot actually. so we haven't actually done it yet Because I keep feeling that I should test it. I should just test it, but I feel I Don't know if I want to be sending links to all of these different brands and not letting them just perform in their own because the whole philosophy is that they should be standalone brands. And if we need that network to strengthen them, maybe that's a sign that they don't need to exist on their own. That's just something that pops in my head when I dive into that scenario. So we haven't. There's definitely different brand owners and people who have come to me and said, hey, can we please get a hosting.com link?

[00:26:17] And I'm always like, I don't know. Because I'm very precious and I want hosting.com to remain. You know the the number one in the hosting space, which I'm sure it will. So I don't know. watch this space. Maybe I'll let you know if I do and we can put an update on Because maybe it is time to just test it. awesome Maybe another use case I was thinking of where. just would like to know if you've already done something like that or like. if not what's your take on that? so i could see maybe hosting dot com and one of the brands you you purchase or purchased um like let's say for example for whatever query that feels relevant and important to you. unfortunately hosting dot com is not yet like in the top spots but maybe like somewhere In the upper middle, let's say so.

[00:27:12] we are talking now Classic Google rankings. I know it's much more nuanced but for the sake of the example Let's say hosting.com is like spots three or four and then also In the top ten you have like the other domain like the other brand that is obviously part of the company group. now They're like then with their own landing page or article whatever on position seven or eight. Would you consider then for example? cutting the page from the other domain that is not hosting.com and then redirecting from that to the hosting.com page to strengthen this one? because in the end it's better to be number one than just be number three and number seven. Again, typical SEO answer, it depends. If it's one of our

local brands, like our local leaders, then I would leave it and let it exist in its own right because Google will have different rankings for different locations.

[00:28:13] And I still want that brand to be big and loud for people in India. For example, with hosting Raja, like people in India will want... That hosting Roger brand in some instances because it's run by Manny who is physically in India and has his team in India Who are all fantastic by the way? Or you know, I don't want to take that away from those people who are looking for that. But if it's a really small brand like gosh, we have quite a few floating around And I don't want to necessarily name any of them as small ones, but there's some littler brands floating around in time and space that are not getting the love that they deserve from us. And from a business perspective, I'm bringing in the revenue to warrant that time.

[00:29:00] Therefore, absolutely, I'm like, cut, redirect, send that juice over to hosting.com because... Yeah, I mean we are one family, but there is a priority in a pecking order. We definitely want that order to be hosting.com and local leaders being level and then you know everything else falls in line. You mentioned the term local leaders already and you obviously have like a wide-ranging nets of domains and companies in the group. And I saw that you recently launched in Bangladesh, which I found super interesting because honestly, I don't know enough about Bangladesh. I should educate myself more about that. So this is something that I always find super interesting if people are operating like in these regions.

[00:30:00] And now I'm wondering because You were also physically there and you obviously played in the role in the whole lounge and everything. How difficult is it for you to lead such a new market that maybe it's a wrong premise that I would consider also quite different culturally and language-wise. No, you are absolutely correct. That was what my speech was all about when we were in Bangladesh. And I think I started it by saying, you don't want an American woman to stand here and tell you how to run your business in Bangladesh, right? That's not what people are looking for. But that's not what I'm here to do. I'm not here to take a brand... like hosting.com, translate everything and just say, oh, we've launched in Bangladesh.

[00:30:58] That's not launching. That's not building community. That's not building trust. What we are there to do is leverage the incredible team that we have there and let them lead us. So Imron, who I've spoken about today already, who is a founder and CEO of EY Host, is the business that we acquired and the reason that we went and did this big launch event in Bangladesh. But also, we had some team members there already who have been with hosting.com longer than me. For example, Pfizer. And in my team, I have Assad and Zayed. So these are content creators in the local community who tell me, hey, Daphne, we're not going to say it like this. The community is not going to engage well. We're going to actually physically phone call people instead of sending out emails because that's how our community prefers to be spoken to.

[00:31:55] Or, you know, people are going to want to barter. for hosting prices and we got to give them the opportunity to barter. I said different things like this. There's no way that I could come into this community and know that without having these important conversations and also by physically being there and standing in these rooms and having these Q&As. I think we had about eight hundred attendees, which were existing customers. tech minister, loads and loads of founders, women of WordPress. Bangladesh was there. And we put the mic out on the floor and we let people ask us the tough questions in real time. And off the back of that, we change our content strategy or we go and look at our pricing because we actually want to be local.

[00:32:44] We don't just want to bring big business to Bangladesh. But you still have to lead the team in a way. So do you mainly lead it? So obviously it makes total sense to have people basically do upwards

management and also make clear what's the mature goal and then help them have the autonomy to make these calls and guide you in that sense. But do you mainly then For example, just look at like quantifiable data stuff. So in terms of how we're doing ranking wise, how we're doing AI visibility wise, whatever is like concerned in that sense, because I mean, it would also be like not really helpful to go to pages and then have Google translate, translate from like Bangladeshi to English, because it's obviously lacking a lot of nuance.

[00:33:43] So how are you handling this operationally? My job is to be the voice between these local leaders and then of course the C-suite and the board which ultimately our decision-making has to be profitable decision-making and we do need to hit KPIs and we do have metrics that we need and that does tend to drive the priority order of which location we're looking in and what content we will be creating. The good thing is is that we have a very similar product portfolio across all brands. And we have a very large and talented team who get to have their voices heard. But yeah, sometimes, unfortunately, we do have to shut down ideas and progress with the things that are going to drive results because at the end of the day, we are still a business.

[00:34:36] And I think that's the part of M&A that gets heard the most is that It's just big business. and I do get it because yeah, we are corporate. of course we are but we do absolutely give autonomy in the platform for different people to to educate and share and the content creation in twenty twenty six driven by trust and authority. I mean strategically from a business perspective makes sense to be led by people who know these people and places the best. I think it's super interesting because I also know a couple of people that are working in leadership for sometimes German companies that have like expanded in Europe and other places and they have similar challenges. So it's definitely something. where I feel like it's just like it's part of the process.

[00:35:38] So I would never judge M&A based on just being like we have to acquire a company. I mean, in the end, it's to, to hopefully adults, people that agree that we will engage in a deal. But how do you ensure because I mean autonomy and letting the local leaders do their thing? Like, I mean this positively. So it makes total sense, but how do you ensure that the knowledge travels, literally travels across the globe? Things that are maybe working well in Bangladesh that could also be helpful and inspiring to a business in, I don't know, if you have another fancy country where you're operating. Let's say just the US. a market of course and obviously the stuff that works in the US is going to work ninety percent of the time everywhere else because we all want to access our products in a way that's just simple right like we don't need to make things super complicated all the time.

[00:36:48] but there's also something simple like I had to learn how to say Bangladesh. You pronounce it Bangladesh. But everybody, you know, as an American, you're going to come in and be like Bangladesh. It's just those nuances and being able to speak to people correctly. That is where I really get that support. But my content team are also hosting experts. WordPress. like pioneers. So people who already know the space in the products and want to make that content easily digestible and that is simply put just ninety percent of the time what we're going to put out everywhere anyways. But for that other ten percent of the time we have those voices internally and we are going to stop and listen to them. Let's quickly talk about team because I think also people listening or watching that are in a leadership position themselves, they obviously have to decide on hiring and decide on the perfect candidate profiles.

[00:37:53] And what is it that you're looking at, like in terms of what people have as attitude or skill set, whatever, that you need to work in such a truly global business? because I could imagine that it's different to work in a company that is solely operating like domestic US versus US, Bangladesh, other countries obviously in connection to the local leaders but still like you have to work with this like global

perspective all the time. For sure. hosting.com is not for everyone and I will just start by saying that we are at almost a thousand people big but we still operate as a startup and like our core is built on like hustle culture like I am still doing things I was doing as an SEO associate because when the job needs to get done you do the job and that's kind of.

[00:38:59] I know some people in their career don't want to work like that. And that's totally fine. But we're looking for people who get up out of bed and go, wow, I am part of this phenomenal global brand. I get to empower people all over the world. And sometimes that means I have five AM meetings. Sometimes that means I have eight PM meetings because I have to be here for my team who is everywhere. But I love that. I love that I get to speak to all these different people and share and grow in a way and actually physically be present in places that I may have never been able to go myself. For example, going to India last year, I went with the CEO, just me and the CEO to India to go and meet our team. And it changed my life.

[00:39:50] It was just such a phenomenal experience. But you will get there with hard work and sometimes giving up your Sundays and hustling and building quickly and breaking things and then finding out how to fix it in post. It's not for perfectionists, but it's for people who are passionate. And that's what I would say about hosting.com culture for sure. Nice. Agree. A personal note on that one. I once had the honor to um host of webinar with aerops the like aio platform from the u.s. and uh it was scheduled for friday and i think like based on eastern time or like I don't know like one of the time zones in the US At like twelve a.m. And we were writing back and forth and I didn't realize that it was starting only at six p.m.

[00:40:47] On a Friday. my time now you could say like no issue at all But I I bet you there are a lot of people that would say yeah hosting a webinar like with a Q&A at the end at six p.m. On a Friday like I want to be off for the weekend By five p.m. Yeah bad so and this is so. I just want to give a plus one on that one. If you want to make things happen, sometimes you just have to go the extra mile, especially if you're working with people in like different countries and like strongly different time zones. And I will just add on to that that. Everybody in our team does do it, and I want to give a shout out quickly to Corey Miller, who runs our agency success program, and so much more, our community leader.

[00:41:35] His title is actually Chief Evangelist. When he joined, he was part of the A-II acquisition. He joined, and that man was on calls at like... four AM because he didn't want to miss a thing. He was like so excited. Nobody was telling him to be there. He just was there, you know? And that energy and being surrounded with people who are so excited to be here is awesome. Because it is, I mean, with a name like hosting.com, I mean, why would you want to be anywhere else? Yeah, it's like, it feels like Google. Like I'm not going to lie. That's how I feel. Nice, nice. We have this in the transcript so AI search will be able to use this in the sentiment when people ask like AI mode. So how is it working at hosting.com?

[00:42:28] and then I hope that this video will be part of the citations and then it says hosting.com is like working at Google. This would be nice. Cool. Another topic I would like to talk to you about is we, I would say, mainly talked about M&A SEO in the sense of acquiring a business where there's also like a huge importance in the product of the business. So, like, as you said, WordPress hosting specialists, and they're the best at what they're doing, like rocket.com, we want to like... have them on the team, so to say, but then there were also two occasions in the SEO space even where obviously it's also maybe somehow about product, but I would say it's more about like media. The first was twenty twenty two where Samrush acquired backlinko.com.

[00:43:28] And the second one was I just quickly looked up again last year actually where hrefsacquireddetailed.com and the accompanying SEO extension. So have you somehow followed or like heard anything about these acquisitions? Yeah, I mean just bringing up Sandrush right now is

making me think that I believe Adobe just recently acquired them. So that, like acquisitions are happening all around us, right? But going back to the content perspective and acquiring for education and just like great content that's been built over time in your niche, I think that that strategically makes so much sense. And I don't think hosting.com is in the business of doing that ourselves just because we We are building our own content hub off of the back of the hosting experts that we have internally and kind of leveraging those authoritative speakers themselves to align with EEAT and all that jazz because we have full ownership of it.

[00:44:44] But for other businesses, I can absolutely understand why you would do an acquisition like this. I do think it's kind of funny just going back to the Adobe acquisition with Ahrefs having acquired as well, because I've loved their marketing campaigns about Adobe acquiring SEMrush. I don't know if you've seen it, but take a look. They're just little fun marketing material pieces. Yeah, let's see how it goes with Adobe and SEMrush. if Adobe will... Like let Samrush live on their own. Do you have a take on that? It's actually it's a super interesting topic. I once I want I wanted to get someone that is ex Samrush on the podcast to discuss like what. what do you think like? how will this go? they declined unfortunately, but You're free to speak about it.

[00:45:40] I'm not affiliated. But I am experienced, obviously, in mergers and acquisition. And I will say that there's always change. There's always lots of new people who are going to make new decisions. And in all cases, and this is kind of why M&A gets a bed. bad rep is because they're for better or for worse. And sometimes looking in the hosting sphere, EIG is known as the enemy of the world because they went and bought lots of hosting companies and really diminished the support, raised the prices incredibly. And sometimes hosting.com gets compared to EIG online. We are not EIG. And I can tell you, you can hop on a phone call right now with our CEO who wants to put time. in with the customers and work on building products and brands that are right for our users.

[00:46:35] Do I know if Adobe is gonna have that kind of passion for some rush? I don't know. I don't think it's a normal thing in the M&A space to have, but I can say fullheartedly that our team does. And it's been very cool and it's shifted my perspective on everything. So who knows, maybe they will and it'll be phenomenal. watch this space, I guess. But do you think, for example, maybe quickly drawing back on the SEMrush backlinko acquisition, do you think it's then a buy or build thing and you decide to just build it? Like SEMrush decided to just buy the educational content platform, so to say. I think they still operate it. They also still operate it separately. So it's still backlinko.com. But the cookie banner is the same as on Sembrash.

[00:47:28] And it's like, it has a lot of integrations, like where it says, like find the best keywords and try Sembrash for free, et cetera. But yeah, I guess the buy and build, buy or build perspective definitely makes sense because if you have the opportunity to acquire a large voice in your community, and strategically angle it in a positive light for yourself as a business. I mean, that makes sense. It's a quick win and probably a long lasting one. I mean, I'm just going to do a quick peek at the domain ranking on faculty though and just see what we're working with. But if it was driving great value as a resource, I mean, It makes sense to put yourself in there in a positive light of course. Yeah, of course.

[00:48:26] Yeah, they also. I think it's interesting because if you just check like a content piece for example on backlinko Which is like link building for SEO and then you just scroll down so you don't Like there is a little pop-up at the top at least on the desktop like use some rush to check check my size SEO. But then what I found even what I find even more interesting and like more subtle is that they then use screenshots from the Samrush product To make certain points like how you do a backlink analysis, etc. And this feels feels smart to me. Totally drawing on that. Are you familiar with the? the kanji now called eru, the sequence, content and thingy. Let me try to summarize it really, really shortly and then

I'm interested to hear a perspective.

[00:49:20] And maybe it's something that could be interesting to consider in future acquisitions. So the previous CMO at kanji, now they're called eru. mobile device management kind of software. So like managing Apple devices, I think. She did a post. So her name is Sylvia. Something like it's a little bit complicated name. I can't remember. She posted that they have launched a what she called content brand, which is called the sequence.com, I think. And where they basically post content about this whole mobile device management topic. And then they just like integrate Kanji now Eru into the whole like not only educating but then what is a good software to help you do that? and what they noticed is that in terms of classic SEO metrics it like didn't really do anything.

[00:50:24] so not a lot of traffic not a lot of rankings but they were cited a lot in AI search and it helped them basically have alongside their own content and maybe alongside Reddit, etc. Just another domain that basically acted as a support in ensuring that your brand is part of the AI answer. For sure. Like I kind of nodded to earlier in our conversation. I do feel like we're back in the black hat SEO sphere. Do you feel like it's black hat? I kind of do a little bit. It's that middle ground, right? Where I think it's, you're kind of trying to cheat the system. And I don't think that it's going to, I don't think it's going to have that long-term value, that trust and authenticity. And no, I'm worried about being quoted on this.

[00:51:18] Maybe Black Hat's a step too far. But I do, sorry, no. Do you feel like then backlinko? So for example, if I look at backlinko and I have like there, it's obviously like the site was already established. So it's a little bit a different timeline here. But when I look at the link building for SEO article, he is just randomly, if I search on the article, if I search for hrefs, if I search for surfer SEO, if I search for like sys tricks, It's not mentioned at all. If I search for Samrash, it's mentioned nine times and also like just in the content, just casually like built on it by pulling competitor backlink reports using Samrash's backlink analytics tool. Like it's just, it's just part of the answer.

[00:52:08] So would you also consider this grey hat? I think it's strategic. It's definitely strategic. Nice. It's not grey hat. It's strategic. It's a hundred percent strategy in action. I do think that just with the evolution of Google and crawling and people wanting the most trustworthy sources We will start to get a better look into who owns what when we're asking these questions in the future. I think when we look at any brand or business and you start to look at how many people actually own these businesses in any sense of products in the world. People are always shocked. There's a few big guys. So I think having that transparency and trust is where people will shine in the future, as opposed to just shoving your name on every single thing.

[00:53:05] Instead of getting rewarded for just being great. Okay, so but then in your perspective, it's not just about doing this, like having this portal, but it's about the disclosure. Like, am I making it transparent to the reader or the customer that this is, like, Backlinko is part of the SEMrush company? I do think that that is, and hosting.com, that's our mission, is to be the world's most trusted hosting company. You'll hear every single person say that, because trust online... It's hard to find. And we want to be clear and transparent. We do post on our status updates when we're wrong. And we apologize to our customers. And we take ownership. And I think that is what people are looking for. And I think, especially with the rise of AI and all of the changes online, that's what's really going to let companies shine in the future.

[00:54:05] But if I would now start like an educational platform where I share a lot of knowledge about hosting and like WordPress and stuff, and you would maybe see, for example, this platform being showing up consistently as citations on prompts or like query searches that are meaningful to you. And like I'm not. not mentioning any provider, for example. So it's just based on the actual stuff I'm doing, like tutorials, how-to's, etc. Would this be something that you feel like you could consider in the future,

like doing partnerships with them, maybe not even buying the whole thing, but affiliate partnerships, for example? A hundred percent. And we do do that already, like with different plugins for WordPress or... conferences and events.

[00:55:03] But we do want to clearly be like, we are sponsors. Like we are hosting.com and we're choosing to put our money here because we want to invest in the community as opposed to creating a little bit sneaky, which I'm not shaming. I think that it is strategic and obviously going to bring value. And at the end of the day, we are all businesses and we got to make money to pay our bills and keep roofs over our heads. So if it works. Okay, so then then I will be clear on that. if anyone from backlinko listens to this guys Get your stuff together and be more transparent in this closing that that that you're paid by Samrush like this is. this is Daphne said it is strategic I would say I would say it's it's questionable.

[00:55:49] so and we know what you're doing there like we get it Cool. Okay. I have two more questions. Actually, the first one is, I try to always make... So I feel like this part, we could go into even more detail here, but it was already a lot of fun. So I tried to make the podcast insightful, entertaining. I think insights we checked, entertaining also, like I felt entertained. And I also tried to make it actionable. So I always like to, I like for people to go away with like a couple of like practical takeaways. So if you were advising or if you were advising a company either starting or going through an M&A process right now, or maybe considering like they maybe have a target and they are not sure about the whole SEO aspect, like will this work out, etc.

[00:56:52] What would be your two to three top pieces of advice for them? So my first piece of advice is keep in mind the existing customers. That business is successful and you're interested because they're already doing something great. I think that's one thing that gets missed in a lot of M&A. So keep those customers top of mind during this experience. And then number two. Make sure your migration strategy is rock solid. Make sure that you're doing things because it makes sense for the users, CMS migrations, product portfolio changes, content consolidations. I mean, really take the time to dive into all of that on your site and their site and make the moves only where it makes sense. That's what I got. Yeah, that's good.

[00:57:50] I have a final surprise question, which is, I just, I bluntly stole this from Lenny's podcast, which is, what didn't we talk about that we should have talked about? Oh, gosh, I feel like we covered so much. It came unexpected. I think I would have liked to discuss more just about my amazing team. I mean, I could spend an hour talking about each one of them. There's seventeen of them currently, so it would be a long discussion. But it really is the people behind the scenes. I'm very public. I'm in loud. But I can only do everything that I do every single day because of the team that I work with. And yeah, around me, above me, Like I'm just covered with successful people and it's just very exciting. But don't you feel like so?

[00:58:51] obviously massive shout out to everybody on the team and hopefully they will like and subscribe this episode and like leave a comment on whichever platform. I think this should be the minimum engagement here. But don't you think also that there are people on the team because you said you're like out there loud. There are people on the team that appreciate just being like heads down on the work and not have to, like have to in quotes. I already have names popping in my head. Yeah. For sure. Um, yeah, but we have people who are amazing at what they do. Like we have content writers who are fantastic technical writers who definitely don't want to be spending their time on a podcast. Um, and I would never ask that of them.

[00:59:36] Yeah. But guys, it's super fun, so maybe you should reconsider. Whoever definitely has in mind, I don't know obviously, but maybe you should reconsider. So definitely we have crossed the hour mark. It has been an insanely, so now I can check all three boxes. Insightful, entertaining and actionable

conversation. I can't thank you enough for sharing so much also behind the scenes also like your how you think about stuff. I think it's always massively helpful not just to get an answer like do this do that we did that but also understand like how you're coming to conclusions etc. so massive thanks to that. If people want to follow you around more or if they want to follow hosting.com or maybe even, I don't know, if you're hiring or if hosting.com has job openings, what's the best place to follow and to check it out?

[01:00:41] The best place for sure is LinkedIn. We post all of our job openings, company updates, webinars, all on LinkedIn all the time, hosting.com, quite easy to find. And yeah, check out our site as well, hosting.com. And I just want to say also, thank you so much for having me. This has been so much fun and just a really great opportunity. So thank you. Thank you so much. And also I have to say like hosting.com. This domain name is, I think. So obviously I'm spending a lot of time like with domains and and samrush, etc. I think it's like super like it's so on point It's so simple. It's really straightforward. You can't get this wrong. So if I see people like spelling their domain names and like yeah, but then there's like then then there's like an underscore like You know, it's like I know we're out of time, but that's also a very fun discussion because I was here before we bought it, so I got to do the research and put together the case study, the business report for the benefits of buying a domain name with no authority.

[01:01:50] Yeah, that's a topic for another day. I have to add one more thing. Of course, let's do it. He did a video with Seb's our CEO in Bangladesh, and it's just him explaining why we spent millions on a domain, and I checked that out. That's on our LinkedIn as well. Okay, I have one really final question. Did you disclose what you paid for the domain? I don't believe we've disclosed the number, but I can say it with millions. Who you bought it from like. was it another company? was it like a random guy that purchased it like at the beginning of the internet? You're asking the wrong person unfortunately. Okay. Yeah, I wish I had more context to to who it came from but just knowing the guys it's probably like somebody who started.

[01:02:50] their business when they were thirteen with servers in their bedroom or something like that. It's kind of what the community is. But I'm sure I can find out and come back another time if you have me. Yeah. Yeah. It sounds like a story where somebody bought a Bitcoin like ages ago and didn't even know what it was. And then suddenly someone knocks on the door and tells you, hey, this is worth millions. That's only the stories the internet writes. So cool that we were able to tap into some of them. Thanks so much for today, guys, gals. Go follow Daphne. Go follow hosting.com if you need a good hosting provider. I'm not getting paid to say any of this. I just generally think the offer looks very solid. I will put a link in the description below or show notes or wherever you are and watching, listening to this.

[01:03:46] So go check it out. And then Daphne. Thanks so much for coming on and all the best to you and your whole team and the whole company. Thank you so much. Bye bye. Bye.