STOP OBSESSING OVER KEYWORDS | Margarita Loktionova, Content Marketing Lead @ Semrush | #16

Masters of Search · Episode 16 · Published 2025-11-19 · Length 1:02:47 · Host: Niklas Buschner

Source: https://www.masters-of-search.com/podcast/stop-obsessing-over-keywords-margarita-loktionova-content-marketing-lead

Listen: Apple Podcasts · YouTube · Podigee

Show notes

STOP starting your content workflows with keyword research. If you don’t trust me, trust someone way smarter than me — and learn why it’s just one piece of the puzzle. New #MastersOfSearch episode with Margarita Loktionova (Content Marketing Lead @ Semrush) is LIVE now.

Here's what we covered: -> Why customer research should come before keyword research -> How to use keywords to validate demand, not generate ideas -> What “net-new value” content actually looks like -> Why original research scales distribution across AI, PR & social -> How research turns your brand into a source, not a commentator

Let's connect! Niklas on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/niklas-buschner/ Radyant on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/radyant/ Margarita on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/margarita-loktionova/ Semrush on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/semrush/

Full conversation

[00:00:00] Margarita Lakjanova is content marketing lead at SEMrush. As a strong voice in the AI search space, she works right at the epicenter of the AI search revolution, leading content and product-led marketing efforts for SEMrush's AI products. In her almost five years of working at SEMrush, she's witnessed firsthand the biggest shifts in the search ecosystem since the rise of Google in the early two thousands, which makes her the perfect guest for the masters of search. So before we dive in, Margarita, thanks so much for joining. Yeah, thank you for having me. Cool. Let's start with an easy one, maybe, because I feel like people are still very confused about this one. So is it now GEO, AEO, LLMO, or are we decided on another acronym yet?

[00:00:47] I mean, unfortunately, I don't think we have a universal acronym yet. But honestly, I don't think it really matters. On the one hand, they all point to the same thing, which is optimizing for AI search. In traditional SEO, we were more focused on rankings for Google's blue links, GEO or AEO or whatever. They all focused on pretty much making sure that you had GPT, perplexity, but also Google's AI features they mentioned inside your brand. And that said, Google's Even Google search page results are changing, right? So we have AI overviews, we have AI mode. So at this point, I'm not even sure we have to separate GEO from SEO, if like the constant SEO itself evolves. And I would say that of all the things, this should be out probably like the least of our concerns.

[00:01:44] Okay, got it. But I just spoke to a potential client yesterday and he wrote me beforehand that his chairman said him, hey, but keep in mind when you talk to these guys, SEO is dead. It's all GEO now. What do you say to that? Well, I mean, I think we will kind of uncover more about it, you know, the difference in where SEO is heading, but. I would say, yeah, if your clients or your stakeholders like the word GEO because it makes them feel more progressive than to, like, go for it and use it. I mean, for me, honestly, it doesn't matter. It's just, you know, whatever term is trending. But technically, GEO, AEO, LLM optimization, I really like the word AI shortchip optimization. I mean, this term, because it's pretty much covers it all, they all focus on the same thing.

[00:02:38] Okay. So this would be, would it be AISO then or ASO? Oh my gosh. No, just kidding. Let's take to AI search optimization or AI visibility. I think it's way, it's more direct. Okay, cool. I like it. But let's unpack this a little bit more. What would you say like with your vast knowledge about the space? And I know you're watching this very closely. Where do you see? however we call it, EO, AEO, AI search optimization, how do you see it being different from like traditional SEO that we used to work on before Chattivity was introduced, AI overviews, etc. was introduced? Yeah, definitely. I mean, I would have to say that there are both similarities and differences, right? because on the one hand, Google rankings and especially the overall domain authority still influence AI visibility.

[00:03:39] We did this study, AI mode study, this summer, and we saw that, for example, when it comes to Google's AI features, there is a fifty-one percent domain overlap in AI. bold sidebar links with Google's top ten results. Right? There are also tools like Proplexity or SearchGPT mode in ChatGPT that definitely drive information from high-ranking content and also some best practices, like structuring content, content quality, etc., they stay true for AI visibility. But what is different is in these two areas, they don't function, they don't always function the same way. I mean, the search behavior is different itself, right? There is no single SERP, there is no single answer, so the optimization is becoming more complex.

[00:04:34] but also AI tools, they might drive from different sources, like Reddit, Quora, LinkedIn, review sites, and some domains that have never ranked on Google might start ranking on chat GPT, for example. In addition, there are other structural differences, right? Let's say there are mentions that there are citations. So in SEO, we have ranking. It was just very much more simple than this complexity. You would have a SERP, you would have top ten results, you want to be on the first page. In AI search, we have mentions and we have citations. And actually as research shows, brands that often get cited, for example, they don't necessarily get mentioned. So you actually need to optimize for two distinct areas for AI, both to trust you as a source, but also know your brand and understand your product.

[00:05:31] Well, and there are also other differences, you know even authority like external signals are changing. Let's say backlinks still matter and actually we're gonna publish a study on this within the next couple of weeks. But also unlinked brand mentions are becoming way more important. So all this means that on the one hand all Traditional SEO hacks, I mean, they already were not working as well, but they stopped working completely. It's not about having a specific number of keywords in your text and hoping it's going to work. It's not about buying links anymore. So it's much more complex. You need lots of teams working together, SEO, content, PR, influencer, managers, brand, et cetera. And you also need a very strong differentiator, because since a lot of generic content is already covered, and AI can answer a lot of informational queries, what you really need to stand out is to be truly original, right?

[00:06:37] To create content that is not high quality on paper, but that actually says something different, to have a very strong brand and brand personality. So it's just that many more factors now have to be considered. And yeah, and trying to hack it for me, I just don't think it works. I mean, there are technical standards that you have to adhere to, right? As the same as with SEO, but it's just not going to be

enough to try to optimize for this channel. I have like five to seven questions based on that, but let's go like from one topic to the other. You mentioned mentions and citations versus traffic, and I feel like when I talk to people about this new reality, even pretty smart marketing executives still have a hard time understanding the value of mentions and or citations compared to traffic because traffic was fairly easy to understand.

[00:07:38] You get a thousand users to your site. You have your average conversion rate or maybe other metrics that you're tracking depending on the final stages. And then you know, like, OK, this is how many leads or purchases signups I get. But now you have this new category. And I feel like people have a hard time comparing these. What would your advice be to understand this new set of metrics better? Yeah. I mean, what we need to understand here is, of course, everyone would prefer to just have traffic and for things to be easy from the marketing standpoint. It's just that since the search behavior is changing, we can't really do anything to control it, right? And yeah, Adobe posted this research recently, that basically, seventy seven percent of us charge PT users, they already use it like a search engine.

[00:08:32] And basically, this behavior will only continue to. be more widespread, right? And what it means is that whether we want it or not, we have to adapt. And if at this point the user behavior changed, you just need to accept this new reality. So people are not going to be going through ten different links, opening pages and trying to find a question. They can do it ten ways faster. I mean, people will still discover brands, right? People will still want to buy things and do research. Actually, there was more data confirming that people are actually searching more and researching products more than they used to, let's say, one year ago. So what this means is that we need to just change the mindset. basically that yes it's not going to be easy and yes it's not going to be directly trackable and you cannot attribute everything.

[00:09:32] so yes there will be a certain point of you know we let's say trying to match things. for example we saw that we were already a visibility share or our share of brand mentions on the increase and then let's say okay we saw a certain lift in you know sales or whatever. so for now it's like this. I mean I would assume that over time, there will be better attribution, better tracking tools, better research to kind of provide a direct proof of how those things work, right? But for now, it's a bit of chaos. It's a bit of complexity. But still, if you have to choose between not being there at all and not being anywhere, because people will just not go on your side this obtain way anymore, or, you know, Or you can be among those brands that ChadGPT mentions that people see on social media or whatever.

[00:10:23] And yet, they might not go directly to your site, but they will remember your brand. And this might convert into direct traffic. This might convert into referral traffic. This might convert into like a twenty-step buyer journey where they will end up buying from you because you are already sort of on their mind. So yeah, I look at this like this way, it's more of a mindset and user behavior shift versus just a different tracking methodology for marketers. And how are you thinking about this internally at Samrush? So I can imagine that you guys probably also do to just like the enormous level of traffic That you have gotten. that you have probably also seems a little bit like the however people call it crocodile great decoupling whatever in search console.

[00:11:17] But are you are you still closely monitoring traffic? Are you? Shifting more towards tracking your AI visibility. Are you only looking at conversions now and then try to Look how these correlate with a new traffic reality. Just can you give us a little bit of the of the ins and outs of how Samrush does this. I mean, I can speak for myself because we have different teams right at Samrush. Yeah, I am more on the product marketing side of things. so. we have a different team that, let's say, is much more focused on the blog, for example. But what I can say in general is, number one, yeah, we had a lot of traffic

drops and I spent a year trying to combat it, but of course, nothing really. You couldn't have done that much.

[00:12:15] I would say at this point, it's a mix of things. We definitely are really focused on the visibility. I mean, EI visibility is also a complex concept, right? It's not just about being there, it's being there in the right conversations. For example, for Sam Rush, we're definitely a leader when it comes to the SEO category, no questions asked. But when it comes to EI visibility, you know, we might want to invest more resources and time until you know, being more prominent in this category of, let's say, in this topic as well. So, yeah, a lot of work is, it's a multi-dimensional process at this point. You know, there is the visibility. There is also brand sentiment. There is still traffic, of course, and conversions.

[00:13:08] I mean, at the end of the day, it kind of depends on the team and your role. For me, I mean, for some projects, I'm much more focused on just driving our visibility in a specific space because, you know, because we want to be a leader in this category and thereby we need to talk about this topic. We need to be everywhere. We need to be noticeable. On the other hand, you know, there are campaigns or content projects that are much more aimed at getting conversions. So it's just it's a complex systems of metrics and I wouldn't say that we only do this and then we never look at anything else. But I personally sort of stopped looking at traffic that much for a while now. Got it. Let's tap into another topic you already addressed being.

[00:14:03] content, unique content, and I think you, I don't know if you coined this term, but at least I wrote it, read it the first time in something you put out. It's the term of a net new value content. Can you explain this concept a little bit? Yeah, I mean, I would say it's also nothing necessarily new. from what we've been talking in SEO and content marketing for years now. It's just that it has a bit of a different meaning now that we have AI. What it means is that AI, it's content, it's information, original information that AI cannot necessarily or easily synthesize from what's already online. So this might include proprietary data, customer research, file Basically, the content that you need to be seen as an authoritative source for AI to reference to site, but also for people to share, to talk about.

[00:15:08] For me, honestly, it means good content marketing because just the strategy of creating a bunch of what is articles and just saying what has been said a hundred odd times already. where you cannot add anything new or anything personal at all, it just doesn't make sense, it's a waste of resources. That's why at SEMrush, one of our biggest focus are research pieces. We have always been doing a lot of those, but lately the base has increased a lot, so we have something new going out literally every week. And yeah, and this pretty much helps us not only to be cited by AI, but also for people to actually talk about us. And I really like using this example. I think I've used it in many places already, but it just illustrates it pretty neatly.

[00:16:05] So like a year ago, I think, I was working on our AI writing solution and we knew that based on the sales conversations, a lot of people were, a lot of leads, users were kind of scared to use the tool because they thought Google would penalize them just because of AI detection. So we collected a lot of data, we took from SEMrush, we did a survey also and we published research piece that we then like repurposed into many more other things. And the research confirmed that air detection per se was not an issue, you know, it's the content quality, originality, etc. And then I think until now, if you search whether on Google or in charge of PT or in perplexity or other AI tools. If you search, can AI content rank on Google, our research still pops up first as the source.

[00:17:05] So that's kind of the essence of it, right? Taking real-world questions that actually haven't been answered yet and that your customers really care about and then saying something original and helpful to address it. And ideally, I should also help you to sell what you offer. It makes total sense. And I think, like you said, that it's not necessarily something new. Like it is good content marketing in

essence, but I feel like just because something is common sense does not necessarily mean it's common practice. So what would be like, so if someone in the audience is like a marketing executive and they feel like, okay, we're probably still doing too much of remix content. So taking stuff that is already there, remixing it, making a little bit more SEO optimized, so to say, and then putting it out.

[00:17:58] And if they feel like, yes, I also want to get started with net new value content, unique content, what would be like your top two to three practical recommendations on how to get started? Yeah, I mean, I would look at what you already have. Because every business has something unique to offer. That might be in the form of, you know, you have subject matter experts on your team that have something to say. Or you have a product that has some proprietary data that you can use to run research, like it's the case with SEMrush. Or you have a very active, engaged community that you can use to source ideas and whatnot. I would say yeah look at the resources you have that no one else does and then look at your brand and kind of your story that you're trying to say and the people you're talking to.

[00:18:58] because for sure every business has something unique of this sorts whether you are a sales product or an agency or an e-commerce brand or anything else. yeah there is something unique about you and there's also something that you believe in that you know you're trying to achieve. So I would just start from there. I mean there are brands like let's say Revenue Cat that have a super engaged large community of users and then a lot of content that they create literally comes from this community. You know they work with experts for a part of the community and every content piece they publish is coming from those experts. So it will be a regional by default, to a certain extent anyway. Yeah, Semrash uses this data and also let's say outside experts, internal experts.

[00:19:51] So that kind of thing. And I would just say, start with mapping those points of strength that you have, but also the people you're trying to talk to. And I mean, really think about those people. because what I A commonly saw with SEO is, let's say there is an enterprise brand that literally targets very senior ICPs, right? Let's say head of brand or something like that. And then they would publish a lot of SEO content on keywords like, what is influencer marketing? I mean, realistically, this person will never go and look for this keyword. They will, I mean, hopefully already know what influencer marketing is. So I would say the second half of it is talking to customers and for me as a content marketer and product marketer, talking to people has been immensely useful because you really have a clear idea of who this person is and what they care about and oftentimes you get a lot of content ideas simply from having across deaf conversations.

[00:20:55] And then you kind of connect the dots and you start making it happen, maybe not overnight, maybe not in one month, but, you know, bit by bit. I feel like even if people are progressively thinking and understand this, like, maybe not necessarily new type of content creation, but at least like a forward thinking type of content creation, They still have a hard time letting go of starting with keyword research because they feel like, hey, but when I create this type of content, how can I ensure like if I wanted to be distributed well through whatever organic search on Google or even on an AI search like chat to be perplexity? How can I ensure that people actually see this that somebody finds me? What would be your answer to those who say, But should I really just start with what I feel like is interesting?

[00:21:54] How do I ensure that there's enough volume? What about keyword difficulty? Is this all irrelevant now? I mean, I wouldn't say so. I would say for me keyword research can be a useful way to kind of to double-check whether your topic still has some demand, but it wouldn't be the case for every little thing. For example, I recently published a piece on how to use SEMrush to track your AI mode presence, which is literally just a very product-focused blog post. But now when you search in perplexity, for example, how to track your Google AI mode, it lists tools. blah blah blah, same rush, and

then the source is this article. So sometimes it's less linear, but there was a certain keyword about tracking a Y-mold that I think I saw, even if it was low demand.

[00:22:53] But I also knew that our customers really care about it. But also, well, there are tools like our AI SEO toolkit that now show you the search for AI prompts. So you still have the database, you have the keyword database, you have the AI prompts database that you can cross-reference and you can get the ideas from. I think it's totally valid. It's just that... I would say look for ideas that are more long tail, that are more specific versus less generic, and also validate them with your own understanding of your audience. So, yeah, use it either to cross-reference, but also we have a client, for example, that use the data from the AI SEO toolkit to create a content plan. So they just checked a bunch of prompts that their competitors were ranking for and they didn't.

[00:23:48] And they just started creating content to match those prompts. But those prompts were definitely very specific, a very long tail. And I wouldn't expect to get a lot of traffic directly from those pieces necessarily, right? But if they contribute to your overall visibility for the right topics, for the needs that you want to own, then it makes sense. And yeah, sometimes they can actually contribute to traffic, like this AI mode example that I just shared. We already talked about AI search in general, but we also mentioned, or you mentioned different tools, like I would say the most popular, obviously, chativity and perplexity, I think also from like all the usage research that's out there. It might depend a little bit on the geography.

[00:24:35] So in some geographies, it's maybe also then deep seek. But then we also have AI overviews, and then we have AI mode, which is which is in pilot or like in beta testing in the US and I think also in India. Now, I feel like people not only have a hard time thinking about how to optimize for AI search, but then they also question, like, is it the same for all these different platforms? Do you see any meaningful differences between, let's say, judgeability, perplexity, Google AI mode and how would you approach optimization for those? Yeah, I think there has been quite a lot of research that shows that there are enough differences based on each platform. You know, let's say with AI mode, based on this research that we published recently, it looks like there is still a lot of overlap with SERPs, but not always linear, right?

[00:25:35] When it comes to chat GPT, for example, it's The training data, it's much more focused on kind of authoritative knowledge bases like Wikipedia or also community platforms like Reddit. I mean, perplexity, let's say it also really loves referencing Reddit and whatnot, but also, again, it looks into web results. in AI overviews, from what I remember in our research, Quora was actually the number one cited source, while Quora doesn't really appear on that much in perplexity in charge of PT. So I would say yes, you need to develop platform-specific strategies. And on the one hand, yeah, like there are quite a few research pieces already available to check the different sources that different platforms use.

[00:26:28] they are not universally applicable to everything and I think those researches will be changing over time. but it's a starting point. and but also if you're using an AI visibility tracking tool you can pretty much see based on each platform which sources cite you where you are ranking ranking or appearing well or where you're lagging behind. so yeah I think the analytics tools at this point they allow you to see more or less your presence based on each platform, and then you can develop somewhat different strategies, you know, for like I said, maybe you want to keep your Wikipedia page really up to date and really complete for chat GPT, and maybe you want to be on Quora for AI overviews, and maybe you want to be on Reddit for perplexity, and so on and so forth.

[00:27:21] When we talk about AI as marketers, we often talk about it as we have also done so far today as a channel or like a distribution opportunity. But there's also obviously the AI as a tool for us to do all kinds of stuff. Can you take us a little bit behind the scenes how you use AI like in your daily

workflows? Yeah, totally. We actually just did a webinar with Maddie Osman on this a couple of days ago or thing. So I have a pretty good Workflow already in mind. I'll be honest when it comes to what we do at Sam Rush to me there We're still getting there there. I would say there's still a lot that I would like to change but Kind of the main Suggestions like I give here is that number one. Again, everyone talks about it, but I still see companies not understanding this well enough that AI is used to aid people and not to replace them.

[00:28:31] I don't really believe that AI-only systems can fully support content marketing right now. It just doesn't make sense, right? If it's all about differentiation and whatnot, how can you use AI effectively to create all the content. On the other hand, I don't really believe in denying AI. So what makes the most sense is creating workflows and processes that have human specialists sharing original insights, again, coming from SMEs, from research, et cetera, et cetera, and then using AI tools to automate entire workflows or create bits of pieces, you know, depending on the area. So for example, let's say if you want to get started with the automation, I would say first make sure that you have really effective content production processes in place, you know, that you have a clear workflow, you have people responsible for every stage, you have SOPs, you have templates, etc, etc.

[00:29:43] And then analyze where work gets stuck most often, what are the main bottlenecks and tasks that let's say require a lot of effort, frequent, but also somewhat standardized, and start automating those areas. And not necessarily the hype one that everyone talks about. For example, for us, and we're still working on improving that, one of such examples is updating. I mean product information and blog posts. because imagine Samrash has new features and new products and changes every other week and then a writer or conscious specialist needs to go in and manually update all the product information on like hundreds of blog posts. So that's a clear example of an error that needs automation and that this automation let's say multi-step workflow with the tool like writer or something else it's it would really improve the processes versus decrease the quality.

[00:30:47] necessarily you know as long as you have set up it correctly. but other things like thought leadership or long-form educational content for me I still approach it. I mean, I use AI for everything. But I don't fully automate it. Let's say the process might look like we have done research or an interview, et cetera, then I would use AI to help me to analyze the interview script faster, to put together outlines based on super long input that I give. Then I can also use it to write. But again, it's never like, OK, create me this piece of content. It's more like section by section. with a lot of human involvement and revision. So still, you know, if it would take me ten hours before, it will still probably take me five now.

[00:31:37] So there is still work done and it still takes time, but it's much less than it used to be, if it makes sense. And yeah, basically the most important things are having clear goals in mind and like what exactly do you expect and want to get from AI. having existing efficient content operations and operational discipline, and then spreading this on the company level, because what I also see often happening is, let's say marketing managers, especially the writers in the company, all have access to chat GPT, for example, but then there are no shared tools like custom GPTs. They might be using projects, but that they are on projects. And then there are no AI quality standards and guidelines. And then some teams might be producing text that is horribly, horribly AI cliche.

[00:32:35] And then I can see it instantly, but maybe they can. So I think it's very important to have this company wide education and standards, you know, let's say brand guidelines, AI writing guidelines that need to be uploaded to projects, to custom GPTs, etc. And then from here, yeah, you can also work on already more complex things like multi-step automation of separate processes, you know, wipe coding to create internal tools and that kind of thing. I see a lot of people, when they think about AI workflows and how AI can support them, they see one key aspect of basically getting the most out of AI in proper

prompt and context engineering. How do you think about these two? Yeah, that's definitely, I would say that's a bit of a, I mean, like the initial stage, right, where you start developing those prompts and those contexts.

[00:33:39] Let's say you have Like specialized projects on charge PT like a project for a different kind of content different kind of work different clients whatever depending on your context. And yeah, you have the problems that you know that already working. and let's say you have a prompt library Plus tools like charge PT and like Claude now they have the memory function. So they tend to learn Based on what you do and you tell them. So yeah, it's for sure They kind of the fundamental part. and then from there, you know, you what you start doing is making sure all this is used on the level of the company and not just on the individual level. Do you like to use chat GPT most of the times or something else? because you already mentioned Claude?

[00:34:25] Yeah, different tools really. I like chat GPT for, let's say for thinking, you know, let's say if I have Yeah, if I have ten different transcripts from an interview with an expert and I want, you know, and I want like a specific angle or quotes or whatever, I would probably go to Chagapiti. Same for, you know, I use a lot the deep research function, let's say to find statistics, but I'll always double-checking. Then the agentic mode, you know, to find also specific information for specific project. Then again, yeah, I have different projects in Chagapiti for different kind of tasks. For writing specifically, I still prefer Claude. Although lately, I kind of feel like it became a bit more slow. I'm not sure what's happening.

[00:35:12] But yeah, I still like Claude in that sense. I mean, sometimes I still use perplexity to validate some information. You know, if it's factually correct, for example, let's say to like cross-reference, then yeah, and then there are builder tools, right? Relay is really nice for, you know, if you want to build like small agents for yourself, you know, let's say, if you want to get updates on your competitors without having to check the menu, it can send you computer updates, your email, or if you want to, you know, to check specific updates in specific reddit press, it can also do it for you. Yeah, and then there are tools like Zapier, what With Maddie Osman, this AI content operations consultant that we did the webinar with, she's basically using Zapier a lot to build custom agents for herself.

[00:36:07] Let's say if someone is asking her for a quote on a specific topic, let's say the agent can go and look for her content and quickly extract a piece of information so you don't have to rewrite it yourself. And yeah, and then again, there's a tool like Ryker Ryder that you can use to build multi-step workflows. And yeah, like everyone else, I'm getting FOMO from everything all the time. Feels like I need to do more. Yeah. And I think it's also fine to admit that it's a lot. We have to also do our work. We have to keep up with all the changes and we have to upgrade our skills on the job market. And yeah, I think everyone is getting the same anxiety from not using it enough and we'll get there eventually.

[00:36:59] I also had massive FOMO when Chatchapiti introduced their agent and immediately tried it for I think something like I'm looking for a vacation house in Tuscany or something. And what I found really interesting is that the agent basically so they it would you say it. yeah it. the agent searched for the right vacation houses and then identified booking.com as a potential source to check. and then I checked it in the logs. The agent said basically the interface is too confusing. I have to go back and then it went to a small site like. Casa in italia.com super small and i felt like hey this super interesting. i posted about this but not in not. a lot of people are talking about like. Agents in terms of the agent does research and how can you optimize for that etc.

[00:38:00] because i felt like the the inside of the booking dot com ui. Not being very well usable for the agent is somehow interesting. Is there research coming from Semrash around how to optimize for AI agents? Oh, I'm not quite sure, but thank you for the idea. I'm going to think about it. I mean, but yeah, I would say that there are certain technical rules for pages in general. Let's say what happened with us

lately. realized that our product pages, right, they didn't have some elements that were necessary. And then we kind of made the pages invisible to AI. Let's say, you know, there was, like the content wasn't appearing in raw HTML. Like the FAQ was in those like loading sections, which means that agents just, I mean like AI, LMS just couldn't access this information because you need, you had to click even if like for SEO normally who was considered the accessible.

[00:39:08] So there are, yeah, like technical rules for sure that I think there has already been published a lot in that sense for optimizing the website. But yeah, thank you for the idea. I'm going to try to come up with something here. I think it would be super interesting. Please tag me if you do a post and I will be happy to engage and share it further. One thing that you already touched on and I feel like we have to talk about this is the notion of AI aiding you versus AI replacing you. because you put out a research piece where I think you interviewed marketers, maybe you can share a little bit about how you came up with the findings, but where a lot of marketers, I think it was sixty eight percent, agreed that it's harder to find jobs now with a big portion of them, so thirty three percent blaming AI directly.

[00:40:11] And my question would be, what would you recommend to those people that are Like? I would say actually they are probably frightened to lose their job. Yeah, I mean, I don't think this was my research. I think it was referencing someone else's research, but you know, just just FYI. But yeah, there are a couple of things here. first I would say learning AI instead of resisting it. I mean, I would personally rather hire a market here or a writer that openly says that they use AI and they know how to do it right versus those that are very vocal about not using it. and especially the first year there was a lot of people so proud that I am zero AI or agents that are zero AI. And I'm like, honestly, I would never hire you because I think it's really backward thinking.

[00:41:05] I actually want to work with people that are not afraid of technology, that want to embrace it and that the innovation is like this, the same with SEO and traffic, right? Yeah, I mean, it really sucks. It's difficult, but it's just. the reality is that this new environment is better for users. Right? Uh, thereby we need to adjust and we need to, um, yeah, we need to integrate it into our skill set, not being afraid of it. Um, that's why, yeah, I would say with AI specifically, learn how to use it correctly, learn how to write with AI instead of making it sound generic, generic, and instead of producing, um, AI cliche writing, learn different use cases, learn AI content engineering if you want, learn how to build, how to buy code, how to build different tools, how to create workflows that do the work for you in multiple steps.

[00:42:07] And also, I mean, I don't want to sound harsh, but I always felt like the reality is that AI is just a tool. you feel like you can get replaced by it. I mean, I'm sorry, but you really need to do something about it, right? Because for me, I've never felt for a second like threatened. Actually, thanks to AI, I now managed to do way more than I used to that I could ever do before, way faster at bigger quantity and actually better quality. So I would say if you are a good specialist, you know, don't be afraid, just embrace it. Plus, I mean, I think it's for professions like SEO or content strategy, marketing strategy, it actually there's even more demand, I feel. From what I see, everyone is looking for a CEO specialist.

[00:43:05] Everyone is looking for strategies. So strategy is definitely the area to focus on and is what will be needed more and more because even if you look at AI search imagine, you have to do this but also that and attend more other things. So we definitely need people who can manage all that and who can build strategies. And I would say also expanding your area of focus, your skills. If you were doing just content marketing, get deeper into product, get deeper into campaigns, understand how external channels work, how to work with Reddit, how to work with Bora, how to set up brand partnerships and content partnerships, how to get mentioned on industry sites, how to create founder content for LinkedIn and grow brand there.

[00:43:57] Yeah like how to talk about its features and products in an engaging way. so actually you'll

get cited and mentioned. So a lot of those things. and yeah and for writers specifically which I think is the area that has been really affected. I mean the thing is yeah it's complicated right. the demand for those kind of okay SEO blogs for a keyword very easy to create you know expensive. it's going to reduce, unfortunately, so that's just the reality because it's just not worth the investment at a certain level. So I think, yeah, it's important to learn to work with new formats, whether it's thought leadership, it's interviewing people, it's working based on the data brief that you've been given to create a research base, growing your own thought leadership on LinkedIn.

[00:44:51] And also from the writing perspective, I mean, I feel like just writing nicely for marketing content, it's not enough. And it's, you know, I honestly, I think when I use AI or when writers use AI, not like, okay, writing the whole thing, but sort of, okay, I wrote this and for example, improve it for me when you do it right. Actually, the results is better, it's less clunky. What I worry more about is like structural thinking. Because let's say for me as a writer, I always get really good feedback in the sense that it's easy to read, right? And I have very, very intense in DHD, and I kind of write for someone who is like me, you know, that you need to read and instantly understand, you know, like writing for kids.

[00:45:39] Because otherwise the intention span, you know, I'm just not going to focus on anything if it's like, if it's, I'm just going to get distracted. So what I'm looking for in writer specifically is this logic and structure. You know, it's the quantum design, if you will. So I would say AI cannot do that. Um, yeah, I can follow your instructions to do some bits and pieces and it can follow your instructions. Let's say, you know, I wanted to be more bluff, you know, bottom line upfront and it can help you redo things, but you need to understand how to do this content design for users. And if you do that, I feel like as a writer, you're still going to be extremely, uh, in demand. Hmm. I also feel like as a individual professional, you have to move up market, so to say.

[00:46:26] So focus on the harder things. get better there, but then also work becomes more rewarding and probably your work also increases. So yeah, very, very good perspective. Something very human that you mentioned that I also feel and that a lot of other marketing teams feel is being overwhelmed by all the changes and all the new developments. And like I would like to give people, let's say a couple of actionable steps they should take In the for example next thirty to ninety days. so if in some of the marketing team or marketing leaders says okay. I want to double down on a search and be visible there or get traction from there what would you recommend as like the top first actionable steps. Definitely.

[00:47:19] As always, start with analyzing where you stand now, so audit your AI visibility, ideally using a specialized tool. There are many on the market. SEMrush has one as well. It's called the ASCO Toolkit. It basically lets you look at pretty much everything, your AI visibility, your competitors, the prompts you're ranking for, your citations. you know, the trends over time, sentiment, etc. So start with that to understand where you stand now, if your brand positioning is actually reflected correctly, which might not be the case. For example, I think up until recently at least, let's say, corporate AI, which is an At this point, I mean, I don't know, they were a workflow automation based tool at some point, and then maybe they changed already, but originally they were an AI writing tool.

[00:48:19] And when I checked what is called the AI, just a couple of months ago, ChudgeGPT still said it's an AI writing tool. So you might have actually an issue there. Maybe you have some sentiment issues. Maybe your competitors are getting I'm moving faster than you do. So basically, yeah, analyze your current situation and list your priorities first, where to focus your efforts, whether it's, you know, to increase your overall visibility or to work on controlling the brand narrative better or something else. And here again, I mentioned it briefly that there are kind of two parts of it, usually the being mentioned and being cited, and our Enterprise team recently published this EI Visibility Index study, and they also mentioned the Zapier paradox, that basically Zapier is the number one cited source, but it's, as a

position, forty-four for brand mentions.

[00:49:26] So this means that from here, you might also kind of develop two main areas of focus, right? One, about getting more brand mentions, basically recommended as a product. And for this, right, you might want to work building a presence on review sites, community like Reddit, or working on getting more UGC and social proof, being part of the best tools for essential listicles. And then you might also focus on getting cited. And in this case, you make sure you need to make sure your website is actually optimized for AI, which is what I mentioned. Clean HTML, schema, that kind of thing. You might also want to make sure you are very well represented on Wikipedia and the information is correct. For example, for Sembrush, that's actually something we're working on because the current Wikipedia and it doesn't fully reflect all the scope of things that we offer, and it's actually not that easy to go and edit it yourself.

[00:50:35] You know, you need to work with a specialized Wikipedia writer that has authority there. Yeah, and also it might be making sure your website has all the information about your brand, about your product, you have very well-developed help center articles, FAQs, and you also build original research. So I would say, yeah, I mean, understand where you are now, what are your priorities are, and work on those two areas because they usually require different efforts. But the good thing is, you know, if you are present already, If you are present on review sites and your website is actually very complete and detailed, I mean, it's a good thing for you anyway. It's marketing, right? You're doing everything for people to know who you are, what you do, and that you can be trusted.

[00:51:28] I also saw something about the Zapier mentions versus citations insight. And my understanding is that Zapier put out a lot of this content where they basically say these are the best, let's say email marketing automation tools or something like that, where they basically showcase their integration partners or the tools you can integrate with Zapier. And I was wondering, and I'd like to hear your thoughts on that. So is it good now? So does it translate into actual business impact and business value that Zapier gets cited for all these requests around software? that is not Zapier's software category, but the category of their integrations partner, or is it something that is cool to see but has no real deep value?

[00:52:22] I would not have a universally correct answer. I can just assume, because I don't really know. I don't have access to their internal data, but what I would assume is one. for such listicles, and yeah, they rank for a lot of things. Let's say even things like AI image generators. I think here, one great thing to have, it would be to make sure that those integrations are visible, right? Because if citations give you traffic, then you might as well use this traffic to convert people. So again, I don't know, I haven't really revised a lot of their listicles lately, but I remember that they did have some of them that didn't necessarily mention they appear directly. Probably a good idea would be to say, okay, hey, actually AI traffic tends to convert better because people come with a certain intent.

[00:53:17] So yeah, we have a list of all these tools, but we also make sure that our brand is mentioned here. And generally speaking, I would guess that if you If you're so trusted that you get cited all the time, it's still a good thing. That means, you know, if you create listicles in your own space, you're probably also likely to get cited for those as well. So I would say, I mean, yeah, make it strategic if you can. Just creating a bunch of random listicles would not necessarily be very useful for you, but also Yeah, but if it's those are the listicles that you actually say you have to something to say about because someone you have tested them and but not and they are connected to what you do. Yeah, totally.

[00:54:02] So it's a it's a good thing. It makes me it makes me wonder about how we can translate it into actual excellent action with steps for our clients. But this is this is a topic for another day. To wrap things up a little bit. I always like to completely selfishly pick the brain of my guests for looking into the

future to be able to predict it better than others can. And for that, I'd like to ask you if we would look ahead like to twenty twenty six, twenty twenty seven. And if you like even beyond that, what do you think the search landscape will look like by then? Yeah. I mean, I would say probably the transit we are already seeing will continue to deepen, if you will. So one of the research pieces that we published recently at SAMRESH was that basically, based on our projection, the AI traffic, AI search visitors, likely to overtake traditional search visitors in the next well a few years let's say by twenty twenty eight.

[00:55:16] I think it was yeah by twenty twenty eight. but also this same study found that an average AI search visitor converts four point four times better than an average traditional organic search visitor. We also see right that there is a global adoption of AI tools among users. right. around fifty percent of online shoppers like in the US, UK, Canada, Australia already used NAI for e-commerce tasks based on other research. There was also the data that are referenced recently like at our interview that over seventy percent of chat GPT users already kind of treated as a search engine. So basically on the one hand for sure we will move away even further from the bluelinks into this Better user experience, right, where people get results faster, that they have very detailed queries, that they, yeah, they use the AI to find information at the much deeper level.

[00:56:23] I mean, on the same time, it's not like Google is going anywhere. Like in twenty twenty four, they handled over, I think, five trillion searches, and they still have over a ninety percent of the market share. And I mean, it's like, change your PC. It's pretty much nothing compared to that. But Google itself is changing, right? The AI mode. And they will probably have a trillion of other updates and experiments. So yeah, the search behavior will continue to evolve in that sense. And probably we just need to stay really when it comes to checking all the updates and algorithm changes and that kind of thing. But it's not like people stop searching on the contrary. You know, while there is the zero-click environment, right, that, let's say, fifty, sixty percent of Google searches end up without clicks, people actually are searching more.

[00:57:28] Like there was the search engine land data that says that fifty-four percent of people now check more results pages than they did five years ago. And also fifty-one percent of them spend more time searching for products and services. So the search behavior will still be there. People will be searching, but also both will be looking for information, right? And AI platforms allows they actually need content to, well, to source and to get trained on. So that part is not changing. What is changing is the user behavior. And we will need to better understand how to track it, how people find us. And basically, a lot of it, for me, is still traditional marketing. It's brand marketing. It's creating great content.

[00:58:18] It's elevating your own employees. So it's just doing multi-channel. marketing and you know having Hopefully a great product in the community and perhaps Yeah, let's say working on more own channels like you know own communities to both like to have access to Well to your target audience, but also to source ideas to understand your customers. That's kind of thing. and yeah, we did this little survey that will go live, I think, in November. So we're planning, I'm working on that right now, to publish the Zero Click Playbook, which is basically a collection of strategies that you can do, you can use now to survive and to thrive, so to speak, in this environment. And we, yeah, we asked our own users of how, what was going on for them now, how they're dealing with it.

[00:59:18] And yeah, well, over half. of them did have traffic drops, but also a large proportion, large percentage of our users now say that they're starting to get more and more traffic from AI, you know, that actually, I mean, although the traffic drop, it's not always like directly translated to revenue loss, you know, the famous HubSpot story, like everyone, yeah, HubSpot dropped in traffic, so what, but their revenue is fine, you know? So it's basically, yeah, like rethinking marketing a little bit, accepting the new reality that is traffic itself might not be the end goal and the end value, and maybe from the content

marketing perspective, much more targeting Targeted and niche, you know topics or efforts might all together bring you more value than just having one page that drives you hundreds of thousands of you from yours per month.

[01:00:20] Yeah, and like finally in this same survey we also asked people sort of what they Were doing right now to respond to traffic declines. and yeah optimizing content for AI was the number one tactics. But also people actually, I think over fifty percent of people said that they start to invest in SEO more and not less. So also something to keep in mind, right? Yeah, and the rest were everything that we talked about today. structuring your website, making sure the information is there, the FAQs are answered, right? Video content, covering new channels, thought leadership, employee led content and marketing, all those different strategies. So yeah, I mean, we'll see what happens, but I think more or less it's going to stay within these lines.

[01:01:12] Awesome. Thanks so much. We're super insightful. I learned so much today about content marketing, about the future of SEO, about product marketing. about how to tap into really unique insights into your own company. And I think probably people listening or viewing this will also find it interesting if they want to see more of you or for example if they want to be the first to know about when the zero click study or survey a play zero click playbook. when this comes out what's the best place to follow you around. Yeah, for me, LinkedIn is the best platform. So yeah, feel free to connect there. For Samrush content specifically, well, check our blog. But also we have a newsletter that I think you can subscribe to.

[01:02:02] And yeah, this way you can make sure you won't miss any updates. We will put this in the video description below. Margaritas, thanks so much for taking the time today for sharing so much insights. I feel like I learned a lot, still have to process it. I wish you all the best for all the things on your plate at Semrush. Hope to speak soon. People follow Margarita and follow Semrush for everything, AI search and beyond. Awesome. Thank you so much again for having me. I really hope this was useful and hopefully we'll talk again in the future. Hopefully. We'll see you around. Speak soon. Bye-bye.