Why SEO agencies will struggle in 2026 | Nick LeRoy, Independent SEO Consultant

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Show notes

Seven years ago, Nick LeRoy got fired. Today, he runs one of SEO's most trusted newsletters with over 12.5k subscribers, operates SEOjobs.com with over 200k annual sessions, and consults with enterprise brands on SEO strategy that actually moves the needle.

Nick is an independent SEO consultant who helps enterprise brands turn SEO into a revenue-generating channel, not just a traffic report. He's also the mind behind SEOjobs.com and PPCjobs.com, connecting talent with opportunities, and publishes the #SEOForLunch newsletter, read by everyone from enterprise SEOs to Google employees themselves.

What makes Nick different? He'll tell you the uncomfortable truths most consultants won't. Like why your 5k/month retainer probably isn't working. Or why "organic visibility captures demand; it doesn't create it." Or why SEO alone won't save a business with a shitty product.

Check out these links if you want to learn more about Nick's work:

- https://nickleroy.com/blog/seo-freelancing/
- https://www.seojobs.com/
- https://www.ppcjobs.com/

Let's connect! Niklas on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/niklas-buschner/ Radyant on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/radyant/ Nick on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/nickleroyseo/

Full conversation

[00:00:00] My wife and I had made it kind of an official agreement that if in six months I couldn't replicate what I was earning, working for somebody else, I needed to give it up because I work really well in boundaries. Otherwise, I'll just be so dedicated and I'll drive myself nuts. How do you actually work as a consultant? So what's basically your operating model? You can bleed me if you need to, but I tell people that my job is to get my clients the fuck out of their own way. And what I mean by that, and most people would agree, is the larger the company, the stronger the politics are, and all that kind of junk that just goes on. So I spend far more time advocating for the channel, advocating for teams.

[00:00:45] Forcing mom to talk to dad and you know these people you don't kind of like. so I do a lot more of that. Do you think? twenty twenty six would be a good or a bad year for SEO agencies? So now you're you're gonna definitely throw me in the hot seat because this is my hot take. I think agencies are gonna really struggle in twenty twenty six. So reason behind that is not because SEO is dead not because AI and LLMs are everything and anything in the future. it comes down to one primary thing.

You could say that the chat GPT launch and everything that came after that and the AI overviews roll out and the traffic going down that this could be an awakening moment. So if you were one of the agencies who are able to invest in testing, you know, time to learn and consume all this new information, you have the opportunity to truly stand out and you will be a top provider.

[00:01:41] The problem is, is everything that I just mentioned is expensive either in time or getting the right individuals who are motivated to push themselves to that next level. Because I have kind of come to this conclusion that good SEOs can't exist unless they have at least a certain level of passion for the industry. Each week, I sit down with some of the smartest people around the world in SEO and AI search to bring you their strategies, mental models and top pieces of actionable advice. If you enjoy this podcast, don't forget to like and subscribe and follow it in your favorite podcasting app or YouTube. It helps us get top-notch guests and create the best possible content for you. Let's dive into today's episode.

[00:02:33] Seven years ago, Nick Leroy got fired. Today, he runs one of SEO's most trusted newsletters with over twelve thousand five hundred subscribers, operates SEOjobs.com with over two hundred thousand annual sessions and consults with enterprise brands on SEO strategy. that actually moves the needle. Nick is an independent SEO consultant who helps enterprise brands turn SEO into a revenue generating channel, not just a traffic report. He's also the mind behind SEOjobs.com and PPCjobs.com connecting talent with opportunities and publishes the SEO for lunch newsletter read by everyone from enterprise SEOs to Google employees themselves. So what makes Nick different? He'll tell you the uncomfortable truth most consultants won't, like why your five K a month retainer probably isn't working or why organic visibility captures demand.

[00:03:31] It doesn't create it or why SEO alone won't save a business with a shitty product. I think there's a lot to dive into. So welcome to the podcast, Nick. Yeah. Thank you so much for having me. I think that's one of the kindest intro as I've received. Yeah, I always try to make the end. I always try to put a lot of emphasis on the intro as you usually do like with the hook on LinkedIn. So I really, I really appreciate that feedback. Let's start with the beginning of your entrepreneurial journey because I obviously had this little downer at the start with like you getting fired seven years ago. You actually wrote yourself getting fired sucked, but it was also the start of everything that actually mattered.

[00:04:18] Like we're super intriguing. So take us with you through that phase. Yeah, I mean, it's so true. I tell people all the time that actively make a decision to like forego their paycheck to take an entrepreneurial route. Like I have so much respect for those people because I kind of joked that I got pushed out the window and then I just landed on the entrepreneur world. And going into that, as you had mentioned, I was actually let go twice. From two different roles, you know, I, you know, seven, eight years ago had been dismissed from a role. And then two years after that, I was leading a team and the company was impacted really hard with COVID. And so my entire team got let go. In fact, they let them go before they even told me.

[00:05:06] And then I was given a thirty day runway to kind of wrap up the service. And Honestly, the TLDR of the story is I always wanted to go out on my own, but I have a wife, I have three kids, health insurance in America is ungodly expensive, and it just never really felt like a good practical solution, even if that's what I wanted. But so I always just did things on the side, you know, a little project here and there to push myself and learn. But you know, nine to five is the day. But what happened with this situation was, and I actually wrote about this, you know, Nick, I'll send you the link if you want to include in the show notes, you know, and it's basically documenting kind of this story that I'm giving you the heads up on.

[00:05:57] But like I said, I got a thirty day runway. Hey, you're losing your job in thirty days. If you'll

stick around and do this, great. I started interviewing. You know, you know how it goes. Like you're. talking in your industry, you're trying to figure things out. And that was the first thing. we'll talk about this later, but I hated every experience I had on like Indeed and LinkedIn and Zip Recruiter. These big mammoth sites where you type in SEO into the search bar. Sure, you'll get some SEO jobs, but you're also going to get Java developer where there's a bullet halfway down that says like, if they know SEO like bonus points. So it just felt really unrelated. But then through my own network, I was very fortunate to basically have two different job opportunities.

[00:06:46] The first one was for a local large company, Fortune-Five Hundred here in Minnesota. And I went through five interviews and I knew people on the team. I was more than qualified for the position. And then I was kind of shocked. I got the phone call and they were like, yeah, thanks, but no thanks. And what drove me crazy is I remember like kind of being heartbroken because I kind of had in my brain like figured out this is where I'm going to be. But I asked her, I said, okay, I wasn't expecting that. But what kind of feedback can you give me? Like obviously I made it to the end. I wasn't the right or the best option for you guys. Like, can you give me something that I can take away? And the response was, no.

[00:07:34] Like we we don't share that stuff externally and so I'm just like flabbergasted and you know click and it's just like oh shit like what are we gonna do? and It kind of just occurred to me You know through that interview. and then I had one other interview that you know it went. it was someone I had known we were Discussing kind of bridging a salary gap with ownership and his agency and it just really didn't go the the direction that either one of us saw as, you know, a real option. So it was really at that point where I was just like, wow, like it's COVID, like none of the regular rules, you know, stand. I think I've got to try this. And I realized that I'm being very lengthy right here, but this is what was most important for me.

[00:08:26] I had mentioned before, for many, many years, I had wanted to go out on my own, but I felt like I was irresponsible given the I actually felt like it was kind of selfish. Like, you know, for me to prioritize, I tell people, it's one thing for me to eat ramen every night. It's one thing for my wife and I to eat ramen. We're committed to each other, but my kids didn't volunteer to come into this world eating ramen and, you know, scrambled eggs. So what it came down to was my wife and I talked, I told her, I was like, I got to do this. I was like, because it's the only way. that I'm going to be a good employee again. I have to do this and fail. And then I can become a good employee because I've scratched that itch.

[00:09:11] Or if it works, like even better, like then you get to own your own business, right? And that brings us to today. Fast forward, you know, six, seven years and, you know, fortunate enough to be joining you today. I mean, in retrospect, if now it all makes sense and now we're talking from a point in time where you have already worked with some great companies and have achieved some great results. We'll talk about that in a second. But was there anything in terms of like mental model, mindset wise, etc. that helped you push through? Because I mean, it's something where it could also see people just be very desperate and like being this limbo of, okay, I'll I'll just try the next interview process and maybe it will work then and like not really moving any back and forth.

[00:10:06] So what helped you? I think, like I said, I had always wanted to go out on my own, but I will tell you now, I feel like I made more excuses for why I can't do it. So it really felt like this was that shot. You know, and it's like, I'm not trying to do the whole M&M thing. You know, it's like, you know, one shot. But that's really what it was. It was like we are in a really, really unique situation with COVID. There's very little to no cost with upstarts for like a consultancy position. And so I just went all in. And to be completely honest with you, I just took the mindset of like failure was not an option. I checked my ego. I came from agencies where I was working with the three, four, five largest clients.

[00:10:59] they have overseeing a million dollars in book value and did it well. Heck, even the part of the reason I got let go during COVID was simply because it was a million dollar plus annual contract that they didn't renew all because of COVID. All that to be said, It was just, I wanted it to work so bad, and I was unwilling to compromise. my children having what they need, my wife getting what she needs. And that's nothing, you know, glamorous, but I just know it wasn't an option. So, I'm sure we'll talk about it more, but I took all the work. Like, you know, here I am being billed at five, six, seven hundred dollars an hour at these agencies in a senior, you know, team lead role. And I'm working for fifty bucks an hour.

[00:11:53] Like, and it's just one of those things. It's like, again, here's ego and here's like feeding your family. And when you have those two, it's really easy to, you know, drop one and raise the other. You know, whereas if you are by yourself, you know, maybe like I said, you're the one eating ramen, not as big of a deal. And maybe you lose a little bit of motivation because of it. I have to add on that point that in Berlin, there are actually quite a few fancy ramen restaurants where you pay for a good bowl of ramen anywhere between like an equivalent to dollars, probably ten to fifteen dollars. So I'm talking about the bacon at home. You know, it's like seventy cents here for a little brick of ramen is what I'm thinking back in my head.

[00:12:42] Yeah, got it. Yeah, I know there's also an equivalent to that product. We just call it a little bit differently but I can't remember it. Let's go down the route a little bit of these early days because now we're like a couple of years past and you already gave a little insight into working for like fifty bucks an hour and I also remember it from my early days as a freelancer like the pre-radient phase. So like take us through maybe the first couple of month up until maybe the first year. So how did it go? Where also, where did you find work and like, have you been in any, in any sense selective in who you work with? Yeah, I mean, I'm very fortunate. I kind of lump my independent career into like three phases.

[00:13:35] One was survive. Two was thrive. And then three is optimize. And I feel very, very fortunate to be kind of in that third tier now. But kind of going back to what you're saying, when it was survival, I mean, the thing that's the most scary as you know, it's like whether you have a big agency, you have, you know, by yourself, the money coming in today is only part of the equation. Every owner, every entrepreneur has to think about the dollar tomorrow. And that terrified me. It was like, oh, great. I made my paycheck because I used to have a spreadsheet. that was literally what my annualized salary was previously broken up into twelve months. And then I would sum up one of my earnings as a freelancer. And my success metric was, did you hit that number or did you succeed or like exceed it?

[00:14:31] But all of that to be said is, again, I checked the ego. I was very, very fortunate that I had been so interested in SEO as a whole that kind of indirectly, I had always been a part of the industry online and made friends and started the newsletter. And these were all things that I did purely out of passion. And I was so fortunate I didn't never realize the value that I was building until I went out. Because unlike many people who go out on their own, I had the benefit of like... I'm not kidding you. I went to LinkedIn and you know, we have the like people you're connected with. I went down the list and I took about fifteen names that either own their own company or were basically in a position to spend a company money and I sent them all a message and it basically was two things, you know, and remember this isn't the first time I've talked to them like I have relationships with them on some level or degree.

[00:15:34] but the first thing I would say is One, I just went out on my own. Do you have any feedback for me? Like, I am a sponge right now. I assume I know nothing. And two, if you happen to come across an opportunity where you think I might be a good fit, please consider me. And that started getting me, you know, some things. You know, I have one buddy Trevor. He's local here in Minnesota. You know, we go out for dinner every couple of times a year. I didn't really know it at the time, but like he paid me

basically like five hundred bucks to like look at what he had done. And at the time I was so focused on, you know, everything and anything, I'm not too good for anything. You know, I thought I was providing value, whereas now it's like, I totally see it.

[00:16:23] It's like a buddy's in a weird spot. I'm just going to throw him five hundred bucks. So it literally was everything and anything. And I think. I was saying this on a different podcast. I think I had serviced like thirty two or thirty seven different clients in that first year because it was everything just from I had one whale client that I coincidentally had signed like two months before I had been let go. So pure luck. And then just like I said, the network really kind of filled me with small projects that added up and fast forward the rest of that calendar year. And I deemed it a success because, one, I was still consulting. My wife and I had made it kind of an official agreement that if in six months I couldn't replicate what I was earning, working for somebody else, I needed to give it up because I worked really well in boundaries.

[00:17:21] Otherwise, I'll just be so dedicated and I'll drive myself nuts. Makes total sense. Let's sort a couple of things here because you mentioned the newsletter and that you already made a couple of like you already been part of the industry. So when did you actually start the newsletter? Because it sounds like you started it prior to going independent. That's true. So let's see. I started SEO in two thousand nine and it was very quickly after that that I joined kind of the SEO industry because I was fortunate. and it didn't feel like it at the time that the job that I was able to secure out of college was at a development, you know, web dev shop, and the owner was just sick of sending their finished projects to like SEOs to make more money.

[00:18:11] But he didn't really believe in SEO enough to pay somebody who is experienced. So my entire job was, hey, I'm going to give you a six month contract. You need to self teach yourself SEO. and then we'll see where you're at at six months. So that required me to be active in Twitter when it used to be really good. SEO chat used to be a great message board, all these opportunities. So that's how I kind of got connected with the industry. Fast forward maybe five years and because I was connected to the industry, I felt like I kind of had a pulse on the industry updates, like as they came in and I was regularly the person on the team that was saying, hey guys, check this out, you know, Barry Schwartz is writing this or, you know, Matt Cutts at the time, you know, you know, wrote this, you know, and it was just kind of an opportunity to be like, that's kind of how I set myself apart.

[00:19:13] And so what I ended up doing, and I know, again, this is getting kind of long, but I started sending emails to my active clients. Like once a week, once every two weeks, just be like, hey, here's what's going on in the industry. Like here's your performance, but FYI, like what should you know? And they loved it. And then it turned into, oh, can I make sure that everybody on the team is in that distribution list? And then it turned into the SEO for lunch, which was a weekly newsletter. that just exclusively recapped the events that were happening in the industry, as well as just some like articles and blogging and videos that I thought was really cool from the industry. And I did that for seven years, eight years almost.

[00:20:04] Like it was four hundred issues, I think it was, before I pivoted to what it is today. I think there's so much into that for people that are either thinking about going independent or that are maybe still like in their early phase. So for you, it might sound kind of trivial when you're telling the story, but I also know a couple of people that are still pretty early in their freelance journey and so I highly recommend them, like if you're listening to this, like go back to the start and listen to it again so you can actively like take notes from there. I also once had a client who told me, and I think this draws perfectly on your, um, hey, FYI, here's what's going on. Um, sorry. He once told me most people hire agencies just to do things for them.

[00:21:00] So they were basically, the client is basically one step ahead of the agency because. The client tells the agency what to do, but he always wanted to have an agency to be one step before the client. So exactly what you said, you should be my eyes and ears out in the market, explore the opportunities for me. So do you also feel like this mindset that you obviously had for years already is part of why you then also have been so successful in consulting big enterprise clients as in your independent role? Yep, without a doubt. And I don't tell this story, but this is kind of like the unofficial, what nudged me to start sending the emails. I was in a call with a client and they said, hey, Nick, I heard about X update.

[00:21:49] What can you tell me about it? And I didn't know. And I felt so embarrassed and it wasn't about, you know, I didn't, I couldn't just like get through the conversation, but it was that mindset of, wow, you guys are paying us so much money. If you are hearing this news, very likely you're not on top of the market, so it's already been around for a little bit. And if I, as your SEO provider, can't give you at least a high-level overview and be like, hey, I'll follow up with some links and resources if you're really interested, that was just kind of a gut punch to me. And that is partially because, again, I'm very passionate about the SEO space, so when someone knows something that I don't, I get competitive.

[00:22:33] It's like, whoa, hook me up. I need this. And, you know, so that's what I do now. And I think a lot of my clients value me because to this day, especially with like Slack and Teams and whatnot, I'm always sending little notes. You know, it's like, hey, look, this was published by Google and reaffirms what we are prioritizing. You know, just like all these things, you know, especially with AI and LLMs right now, it's like, Hey, we only know what we know, but we're going to learn together. And I just think there's a lot of credibility you build when you don't try to be the master from end to end. You know, it's like, I hate the word expert more than anything, especially in this field. But I think the true experts are the ones that are willing to raise their hand and say, I don't know, I'm going to figure that out and get back to you.

[00:23:28] We already talked about your clients without ever naming someone, so can you maybe share just a couple of companies you've already had the chance to work with? Yeah, I've been very fortunate. Since I've gone out on my own, I've been able to work with some really big companies. For example, Sapa.com is a leader in selling mattresses. And for anyone who's ever done like the affiliate space like you would be shocked at how competitive mattresses are. But I've worked with q-reg so that was really fun. You know the built-in was a great marketplace that I was able to work with. Let's see apartments.com was really early. That was a referral from my friend Marie Haynes. You know that really helped me out early.

[00:24:18] Yeah, and then I'm trying to think of other ones like. I'm trying to think of what's kind of like unique. I worked for Sun Country. Like that was a really interesting airlines because there's all sorts of regulations and stuff like that. But again, it's just kind of some really big brands, but all over the place. It was just really fun to learn their industries. And as you know, there's a fortunate benefit of like enterprise. It takes forever for things to get executed. But when you do, even like a one or two percent increase in performance can be hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions. Let's tap into that a little bit because as you rightfully said, enterprise can take a long time to actually implement things.

[00:25:06] So how do you actually work as a consultant? So what's basically your operating model, if you want to say so? You can bleed me if you need to, but I tell people that my job is to get my clients the fuck out of their own way. And what I mean by that, and most people would agree, is the larger the company, the stronger the politics are, and all that kind of junk that just goes on. So I spend far more time advocating for the channel. They came for teams forcing mom to talk to dad and you know these people you don't kind of like. so I do a lot more of that. and Nick where you'll think is interesting is I get

people that are like What do you do for an enterprise client for SEO? and they think it's just like this wizardry that gets unlocked when you go above like five hundred thousand pages and My response to them is probably a lot less than you do.

[00:26:06] for you know the mom and pop shops because you get access to WordPress, whereas I have had clients that have like three releases in a year, and I'm lucky if I can get SEO points in two of them. And these are things like basic canonicals, getting your titles metadata correct, nothing exciting. But again, when you can make those changes at the scale of these sites, the return is very, very clear. And what would you say, how is the consultant model, for example, different to an agency model and then to in-house SEO roles? So why does a company and what is the situation a company is usually in when they're looking for a consultant? So what I, the, how do I say this? The way that I've kind of interpreted that, and I love that question, because I think ultimately we all have the same goal.

[00:27:11] What I would say the differences are is the restrictions that we have in each of these rules. And what I mean by that is somebody who's in house is already deeply entangled with like the politics. So if they're trying to, you know, bust through that or do something new, they're inherently is just that. battle of. internal ideas are less valuable than like a consultant. I think a lot of us have been in a situation where we've been pushing this idea for what feels like years. They hire an outside consultant. They say more or less the same thing, execute it, and then, bam, like, the consultant looks awesome. On the other side, agency, and again, I came exclusively from an agency background before I went out on my own.

[00:28:03] I think it's very similar to independent consulting. with one difference. You always as an agency consultant, if you will, have to, in the back of your mind, think about is everything that you're doing beneficial to the agency that employs me. And that's where I really rub people the wrong way, because I had no problem telling people that they're spending too much money. They don't need this. You know, this isn't working. All things that make me a really good consultant today because I build a lot of trust and credibility with my clients. But from an agency perspective, when they're looking at their P&L and they see Nick like taking chunks of cash right out of it, it's not necessarily as great. So I think those are really kind of the two differences between those positions.

[00:29:04] And I would just say as a consultant, you get to create that narrative, you get to decide what's important, you get to decide what you say, and like you can take your own calculated risks. And there are times where I call CMOs out and obviously not like in front of their teams and I try to be as respectful as possible, but I will tell them with all due respect, you're not paying me to just say yes. Like I'm a very expensive yes man if that's what you want. So, and it's like sometimes with leaders, it's like they just need that little bit of shock value of just being like, we, you're not talking down to me as a contractor. We're talking eye to eye as partners with the same goal of lifting your company.

[00:29:52] And that is the power of being independent. And I've also told people before, and this isn't to try to paint myself in a good light, but I've told CMOs, The reason that I'm telling you that I'm not a yes man is because I am not reliant on your sole payment this month to feed my family and what that allows me to do is be pickier. I can be direct and if it doesn't work like then I have an opportunity for new work and Most of the time it just re situates the whole situation. and again when you're talking as kind of equals per se It's a far more productive than when you are nervous and trying to kind of appease mom or dad. Let's talk agencies a little bit more because I know you have put a lot of thought into the agency model and how agencies operate.

[00:30:50] Do you think twenty twenty six will be a good or a bad year for SEO agencies? So now you're gonna definitely throw me in the hot seat because this is my hot take. Maybe. I think agencies are going to really struggle in twenty twenty six. The reason behind that is not because SEO is dead,

not because AI and LLMs are everything and anything in the future. It comes down to one primary thing. It historically has been very easy to set up an SOP like standard operating procedures and then just kind of hire warm bodies to execute it. like you had to get that work done. And we as an SEO industry could expect reasonable returns from what I would kind of call that SOP or checkbox. SEO is what I always call it.

[00:31:47] And I think the world that we're in now, checkbox SEO is table stakes, meaning if you don't have that, you're far more at risk of losing what you had, let alone trying to grow upon it. And one of the things that I find that happens with agencies is, and don't take this as anti-agency, I have some buddies that run agencies and I think they do all the right things, but there are other ones that the sole purpose is to make money and to be as profitable as possible. And when you do that, the expense is individuals who are consulting or doing the work that just don't have the reps, they don't have the experience. And I think what that's going to do in twenty twenty six and beyond is it's going to separate those who are really good at SEO from those who are really good at operating an SOP or checkbox.

[00:32:49] And the gap is going to widen. This side, which is good, is going to become even more expensive. Agencies that are looking just to like get as much money as they can with the least amount of expense. aren't going to pay these people. They're very likely going to wrap up and I suspect they'll move to either the next bad, which will be like AILM optimization, or whatever Bitcoin equivalent is for marketing that year. But why do you think agencies tend to be so sluggish in adapting and then changing? Because, I mean, there has been. You could say that the chat GPT lounge and everything that came after that and the AI overviews roll out and the traffic going down for some, that this could be an awakening moment.

[00:33:52] Yeah, and I think that is a really good question that allows me to clarify kind of everything that I had said before. I think there's a very fine line in the middle of kind of when we define agencies. there is the part that I think will struggle because of everything that I just said. And then I think those on the other side of it actually benefit and provide the most value. Because the biggest selling point of being an agency is I'm not looking at just your site every day. I have a portfolio. I know what this industry looks like, you know, for many, many touch points. So if you are one of the agencies who are able to invest in testing, you know, time to learn and consume all this new information, like you have the opportunity to truly stand out and you will be, you know, a top provider.

[00:34:48] The problem is, is everything that I just mentioned is expensive either in time or getting the right individuals who are motivated to push themselves to that next level. Because I have kind of come to this conclusion that good SEOs can't exist unless they have at least a certain level of passion for the industry. And I don't mean that you have to be like me and, you know, do a newsletter and SEO jobs like I'm just like too far over to get back. But you shouldn't, like you should be curious. Like if there is an algorithm update that's actively rolling out right now and you're at home and you're just kind of watching Netflix and you see like you got tagged on Twitter or whatever and it's just like, hey, we've got new data.

[00:35:44] Like do you pull your phone on it and you just like kind of quickly look at it? Or do you truly just be like, nope, like work-life balance, you know, which I totally respect. I just don't see digital marketing as a place that you can strictly nine to five. And a lot of people disagree and they get very angry with me for saying that because it's not about, can you do good work? It's just what you had said. How can you be the one that's on the cutting edge and always learning? Because the last thing that I'll kind of add with that is, especially last year, I was even in a kind of a dark place thinking, Holy cow, is SEO actually dead? The skill set that I've been investing fifteen years in, is it going to be relevant in two years?

[00:36:34] And where I was able to kind of like get to is the best example I have is calligraphy. You

know, people that do fancy writing, nobody like pays for that, but yet the best of the best are still getting business. And that was kind of my mindset. and it's not because I truly thought SEO was going to die. It was just more of a, okay, wake up. Like this is how we're going to add a little fire to yourself because we're going to step up and we're going to do even more. Maybe drawing on that for people that are just listening to that and do not watch the video. Nick has a Vikings like two Vikings posters behind him on the wall and you will not often hear a guy from Europe do a football metaphor. but here it comes.

[00:37:26] So you probably also will never have the chance to make it to the NFL if you just go to the football training because mom and dad. told you so, but you will only make it if you have so much passion that you actually want to stay on the field up until the lights go out, right? Without a doubt. I used to always tell people that, you know, I'm not in a position anymore where I'm hiring people on my team, but when I was hiring, especially the more junior you were, I tried to get, like I'd ask you softball questions to tell me something like you're passionate about. and I'd be very clear. It's like, I'm not saying, tell me you love everything about SEO. If you love playing the guitar, tell me everything you love about, if you love swimming, you love traveling, because what I wanted to see was like, is this person capable of like being passionate?

[00:38:16] Can they go deep on something that they decide is important? And I don't see it very often, but I will hire somebody who knows very little to know SEO, who can show me the ability to be passionate, and effectively communicate because those two skills like you cannot teach. I can teach you SEO, I'll give you fifteen years of knowledge, give me two and a half years, I'll give it to you all. But you have to want to receive it, you want to be good, and you have to be curious. Yeah, quick shout out on that note to my friend Andy months who has also been on the pot already. He's head of AO at Telnix and he introduced me to the concept of the airport test for hiring. He's also actually a high school football coach or he was a high school football coach.

[00:39:06] So he also talks a lot about camaraderie and all of that. but his test is basically can you imagine if you hop on a flight and then you basically go through transit and the next flight is delayed and you have to sit an hour with the person like in front of the gate. Will it be awkward or will you have something to talk about? and will also the other person be like inspiring and passionate about something? and I feel like it totally fits the picture that you just outlined. I love that you said that. I obviously won't say any names, but... There was one point where I had hired somebody and we were talking and their answers were pristine. Like literally. if they could take the words out of my mouth and say them, that's what they said.

[00:39:59] But I just didn't feel like we clicked. Like it was just like, felt like we were just, you know, just like you said, if we were sitting at an airport, we would definitely be on, you know, our phones. We'd be going and using the restaurant wherever. so this person was brilliant. They absolutely knew their SEO. But the fact that there just wasn't comradity there wasn't an ability to kind of work as a team That that's a huge factor that I think a lot of people greatly like. Undervalue hmm and to add to that so I obviously we only operate at least now a small boutique agency, but I at least had the chance over the course of my career to hire around thirty people and I would say most of the decisions were good.

[00:40:50] but with one decision I was really struggling. I had this exact feeling of ah is there really like a fit? and then we still went for it. but honestly over the course of one and a half almost two years. it's just it cost more and more and more problems and then at some point I just felt like man. you should have trusted yourself. So for everybody listening or watching, if you have this feeling and if you have to make these decisions, I would rather say, do yourself and the person you see as a candidate a favor and rather turn down the offer or do not make an offer instead of hiring someone and then three, four months in the job, feel the sense of disconnection and then have to somehow get rid of the person on

the team.

[00:41:35] Obviously, this is like we're talking about People exist and etc. here, so I don't want to take this lightly. But in the end, a team at a workplace is, I think, in a lot of aspects pretty similar to a team in sports. And in a team in sports, sometimes people go out of the field and it's just what happens because you have to have the best team on the pitch to win the game. At least if you want to play to win, if you just play to play, totally fine. I think most companies actually want to win their category. So I heard only after I was let go from this one agency that leadership had their team. And what they used to do is they would plot people on a chart. And maybe you know about this one. Like the Y axis would be like your talent, zero to a hundred.

[00:42:32] And then the X axis would be like zero to a hundred. Like how much friction. Like do you provide on your team? And it was funny because in my mindset, like just to be clear, I was up and to the right. So talented, but a pain they asked to work with. And in my, I always thought there is always room for someone who's a rock star that rocks the boat. And in reality, like there really isn't. And to your point, Nick, that individual that I had mentioned before, I thought I was always a good manager or director for people that wanted to learn and were showing progress and succeed. I was a horrible leader for people that didn't care and just kind of skated by. And just everything that you had said, it was a nightmare with this individual because I was just dedicated to... Making them care making them want to do all this stuff and to the point where it's like by the time Decisions have been made to part different ways Like I was sick to my stomach like I literally had to leave the office and like Walk around because it just was such a disjointed experience for everybody from beginning to the end and That was kind of my tell.

[00:44:00] that was like I have some opportunity to learn here from a leadership perspective. That's the part that I don't miss. You'll be an odd on my own. Let's talk about a topic that has actually been, I would say, somehow talk of the town for at least the last one and a half, maybe two years. What should SEO actually drive? So should it drive traffic, should it drive visibility, should it drive rankings? And as I said in the intro, you're also someone that is passionate about turning SEO into a channel that is revenue generating, that is tied to critical business outcomes. And I think also a lot of the people that are really respected in the industry, as you are, have this mindset. So my question is, How do you see it like in the industry as a whole, has everybody already landed on this new reality?

[00:45:01] Or is there still like traffic? Are there still slides where traffic growth is being reported as a KPI? I think people as a whole, we don't actively want to do bad work and we don't want to make people upset or disappoint people. So we come up with performance narratives that support the idea of progress. And I think that's where kind of like the impressions come by, the rankings come by, the sessions, because that all paints a picture that I am doing something, and in exchange, things are going up and to the right. Now, I'm not saying that I've never done those, but I'm gonna... put an asterisk here because my opinion has changed, but my historical answer was revenue is the only thing that matters.

[00:46:00] SEO, whether we like it or not, we'll touch on this later, is in performance marketing. Whether we want to emit it or not, the CMO, the CEO, all the leaderships, she's treating SEO results the same way that she is treating paid search. And it's a very small scale in comparison. but I've never met anybody who isn't. So, I was on a panel at SMX last year and somebody asked that question and it was something along the lines of like sessions and impressions. Like, what do you think? My answer was, I will start caring about those when my electric company allows me to pay my bill in sessions and impressions. And I kind of caught some people off guard with that. But I mean that's how I firmly believe especially as like a performance marketer and I think a lot of people Should approach that now.

[00:46:59] there's a lot of caveats to that but I would love To be in a situation where revenue is up year over year and traffic is down year over year because I could fight that narrative all day long. Now what I

will say is this is the asterisk so that is nick of yesterday and it's kind of biting me in the butt a little bit because I am even challenging people now that maybe we've been measuring SEO wrong this whole time. And what I mean by that is historically with let's just assume the attribution is fair and accurate, which it's not. But we could drop down into like default channel, organic search, and those are your numbers. and that felt fairly reliable and accurate. We are not in that world anymore.

[00:47:55] Like with AIOs, with all these individual LLMs, with YouTube, with Reddit, I mean, all these things, that ecosystem of how people search used to be kind of a one-to-one relationship of people going to Google. We do the search, we land on the site, and we purchase or we don't, or let's just call it take action. Now, it's not that ridiculous to think of a situation where I was on TikTok and this brand kind of had a cool, goofy ad. So then I went to Google and it's like, okay, they are a site. But then I went back and it's like, I trust Reddit because those are real people and they have no problem telling people that it's a garbage company if that's the case. Then I read a couple best articles that we know are affiliate sites.

[00:48:47] But then we go back and we type in website.com. So, Nick, who gets credit for that? You tell me. Yeah. Well, and I don't have the answer. So, you know, some people would say, TikTok should, whatever that first touch was. Most of our reporting, most people will do like last touch attribution, which means that sale, that session, that user is now mapped to direct. which is the bucket we know the least amount about. So all that being said, what if SEO wasn't deemed a performance marketing channel? And where I'm kind of challenging some CMOs and they all laugh because they know that I'm potentially right, but nobody's ever going to break the habit. What if we looked at SEO as a lever within brand marketing.

[00:49:54] For anybody that hasn't worked with a PR team or traditional ads, their KPIs are a lot softer. And what I mean by that is they typically report on placements, and then they'll use third-party tools, think of, well, any of them, that will just kind of give an estimate of how much traffic they get every single month. So then what they're ultimately reporting on is placements and eyeballs. So for me, it's like if we're trying to translate that into SEO and LLM world is that Impressions equals eyeballs? Guess, you know, that's a situation where I'd have to eat a little bit of crow. because I guess in that situation I get paid for impressions, you know, and then I could pay my electrophil. but placements like If I track citations and mentions, is that the same thing?

[00:50:57] If I get a link from a site or I'm getting referral traffic or the YouTube video is now sending people back, is that valuable? Because in performance marketing, everything of yesterday, none of that counts. Nick, the best example I want to give you for this is we've all been asked this question. Client comes in they sit down with Nick and they're like Nick our videos good for SEO and Then we kind of sit there and we're like Well, no, like it's not the basis of a video on your page But if you created a really badass video like that could be Engaging and lifted up but also like no because it's truly hosted on YouTube so they could rank. you know, it's just like this very convoluted question and I think where and what that did is like.

[00:51:58] it hurt us because we never were collaborating with other teams and or other efforts that kind of lived outside of our websites ecosystem. And if SEO is viewed as like brand marketing or just building the brand overall, I think that kind of removes that expectation. Because then when we talk about visibility, citations, mentions, impressions, you know, rankings, gotta hate rankings, but... You know, all that kind of stuff, you know, then those, what I would call secondary or tertiary KPIs become the primary success metric because we are building a brand and we're making it so that you are discoverable. And then all these KPIs can just literally support this idea of is the company succeeding as a whole, then SEO is playing a role in that, similar to how they define is PR providing value.

[00:53:06] Because most leaders, he or she would not necessarily be like, I gave you a million dollar budget. Where's my four to one return? And because every PR team would be like, you got eight million eyeballs, which doesn't work. But leadership somehow has lumped PR into kind of like the fixed branding cost. And I just wonder if there is a middle ground between performance marketing and branding. And what I am referring to it with my clients is kind of like SEO plus reporting. And what that means is as attribution is becoming far more foggier because of that ecosystem expanding, our KPIs that we traditionally relied on for success are decreasing. But let's still acknowledge that. You are paying for SEO, so this is what we know absolutely without a doubt, your value.

[00:54:08] And then can we just have the plus all this? Again, I can't give you an exact number, but let's just say that again, if we're using an example from paid search, I need a four to one return for me to be able to get my budget next year. If I can quantify three to one, And then I say you got all this other stuff and the company had a record year. If you're a leader, can you kind of go? I can see a world where that makes up for one of the points. Again, like I said, I could talk about that all day long. I think that that is the direction it could go. But I also think the day that we say like money is not the primary KPI is the day that SEO services kind of take a hit in quality because I think the game is just different.

[00:55:02] then. but do you have a specific measurement or like KPI framework that you implement for your clients? so other specific like levels of importance so between citations and mentions and then traffic. or then like other metrics, maybe revenue, maybe pipeline contribution. I don't know. Can you take us a little bit behind the scenes with you to like at least metrics where you feel like, hey, there you have a strong sense that they actually matter? Absolutely. So I'll profess by saying that every industry is a little bit different. what I'm gonna say for an e-commerce site is obviously gonna be different from a SaaS company. But I'm a big fan of having tiered KPIs. And what I mean is like tier one, think of it as like a triangle.

[00:56:02] Like the only thing that matters in tier one is revenue. And then you get to tier two and maybe that is sessions and impressions and page views and downloads of whatever widgets you're creating. Tier three is ranking, you know, I don't even know, something along those lines. Like let's just like another thing that kind of supports again that narrative that it's going up and to the right. And then what I like to do is then just kind of map how, like what's the narrative? Like provide data to support the narrative. Don't be like, we're up seven percent year over year. That's it. Keep in mind, like if you were in the leader's seat, like what would she ask you for? And now try to answer those questions. So if I'm coming to the table and saying, we're up seven percent in organic revenue, I'm going to follow up and be like, and that is led by an increase of the homepage, and also our products as like a category, our collections, and our blog, and I kind of break it down.

[00:57:17] And then that way, I'm going to get that question that all leaders like to do because, again, they're thinking of us like paid media. They go, oh, wow, the blog's exploding. That's super cool. If I give you a hundred thousand dollars right now, can you like ten X it? And you're like, no, don't work that way. But what it does is it allows that conversation. Like it's not because the biggest issue that we have as an industry and it's only getting worse with AI and LLM is. We have done a huge disservice to ourselves by embracing this like SEO lives in a black box. And we all know and we've all done this because we work magic. I mean, people, you say, you need to do all of this. And that's how SEO like transforms your business.

[00:58:06] And then they make every excuse for why they don't do it and it never gets done. So you go out and you buy some links or, you know, you just start, you know, spamming, you know, these blog posts and it makes those secondary metrics go up and to the right. And then it makes it seem like, great, well, I hired an SEO and they, you know, did the wand and it's great. And because again, let's

compare that to paid media, that's kind of how it works. I give you a check, you give me a check back, that's bigger. So that is... kind of how I'm always approaching, like how do I measure SEO? The other thing, and I won't go too deep into this, is I love the idea of like assisted conversions. So this is a situation where it's like now we're dealing with, you know, robbing Peter to pay Paul.

[00:58:59] And instead of trying to be like, Well, you know, they did come in the blog, but they left and paid search retargeted them, so shouldn't I get some credit? Like, to me, what it is, is it's like, okay, here's my revenue. It's broken up by those sections. But also, as that kind of the plus metric that I was talking about, what if I said, all of these users that came and didn't convert directly within the organic search channel, but came back through any other channel, but you were like the impetus for them discovering the brand. That led to make a big number. Now, again, I'm not saying that's mine. I'm just saying it's not all of theirs. And what it can do, especially early on in a campaign, is it can show value in a world where it's not directly attributed.

[01:00:00] For instance, if we were to do a blog, You know, you're not going to expect revenue to come from that very often. And then for like six months is an uphill battle where you're asking mom and dad for more and more money and you're getting less and less performance, it seems like. But what if we could say that, you know, over that six months, you know, we got a couple thousand visits, couple hundred thousand visits, and yes, SEO only comes back at this. But look, there's a touch point in this much money. Somewhere in that journey, the blog played a role. Now all of a sudden, when you're talking the big numbers, twenty grand for content or whatever it is feels like an absolute given. And I just think that that's where we need to go.

[01:00:49] And it's just because our data, unfortunately, isn't reliable enough to truly go in anymore and just say, I may do this much money. And have you ever come across a attribution tool or data analytics tool or whatever that actually helped solve the whole like multi-touch attribution and the whole like media mix miracle. Because there is definitely a big category of attribution and like marketing analytics tools out there that promise to basically help you solve that miracle, but I have not came across one that actually solved it. And I agree with you. The one thing that I should have said that I did not mention was to be able to do everything that I had just said, it relies on having a conversation before.

[01:01:50] That's critical of just alignment on how we're going to measure because it's not about because first touch isn't right. Last touch isn't right. Multi-touch is just kind of a joke because it's somebody's best guess of calculating, you know, a fraction in between. To your point, I don't know of anybody who has it down perfect. They will become richer than rich when they do. And then we don't even want to talk about like online to offline attribution because things get. It's super crazy when you start talking about a store location and then you can go into loyalty points and we're not going to go there. But if you can again, remember we are dealing with most SEO budgets are like single percentages of total paid search.

[01:02:39] So what I try to do is like, God, this is kind of a bad analogy, but it's almost like a legal case. It's like all I have to do is create like a shadow of doubt. Like and then that person like gets off. but I can kind of do. the other thing too is when you're playing with like small dollars If I can just seed the idea that maybe this is how it's working. I don't have the data But what do you think like? so? but again the the reason that I said that Having that conversation beforehand is so critical is because no leader ever wants to be given bad news and then be told about this because that comes off as an excuse. Like you're rationalizing why it's okay to have negative performance. Whereas if you come to the table day one and say, hey, we know attribution doesn't favor SEO in any way shape or form.

[01:03:35] We know AI overviews are killing our clicks. We know this ecosystem has gone well beyond our website. Here's what I propose for unofficial... We will have your official reporting that levels up to

your big number, all channels go in, but I would love to get your buy-in to have this second look and then walk them through it. And most leaders are going to say, one, I just want to double check, you're not going to try to screw up the source of truth because every other channel seems to work pretty well that way. And you say, great. And then they're like, sure, let's do that. And then what that does is it allows that consistency of kind of like dual measuring. And in a world where official measuring, I'm using air quotes for those not looking, if or when that goes down, which we're going to see a lot more if we haven't already with like AIOs, what if that other unofficial metric is still supporting the narrative of success?

[01:04:42] I think at worst, it gives you the benefit of the doubt and extends your runway. And at best, like you have worked with these individuals, these leaders to buy into this. So that is enough on its own to warrant those smaller budgets of total marketing budget. And what would you say to people that say all of these like very like tries in creating channel specific attribution and measurements. It basically just leads to analysis paralysis. So we just like we lose ourselves in the data, whereas we should actually try to use these resources, the time and also like the brain power to do stuff that we are. Confident that moves the needle. I sometimes use the analogies analogy with people that in the whole pre on online marketing era where you basically had just very Like maybe you had a couple of data points like if you have this billboard there are like Ten thousand cars driving by it on a given day.

[01:06:00] Yeah, exactly the eyeballs. But then what most people would tend to for marketing is just conviction. Like, do I have conviction that this message and like this visual, et cetera, actually resonates with my target group? So what would you say to those people that I might be part of? It's so funny because again, if we went back two years ago, I would call you out. I'd be like, you're full of shit. Like you're not doing your job and like you're making excuses to like, you know, justify it because dollar is king and queen. But now this is where I ecrow because I do think that we have almost become polarized because the data was viewed at such a granular level. So now between like cookies, you know, GA-IV, which just seems to always be a mess, like... Your data, even before you start slicing and dicing it, is not accurate.

[01:06:58] It requires assumptions. And I think to your point, that's where sitting up front and having that conversation and saying, we're going to spend five grand on the billboard. We don't have a good way to truly measure the impact, but we're told that it has you a hundred thousand people that go through it. And then, you know, the success metric is, Do we believe that that has a lift in the brand? Maybe, you know, there's a, you know, counter that, you know, when people drive over it and you can say, well, we got ninety two thousand. So like that is believable. And our assumption is that, you know, what if even one percent converted? You know, it's like, then you can get to numbers. And all that to be said is like we're leaving a world where hardcore performance market or Nick is out, you know, saying, dollars or nothing.

[01:07:54] Because I think we're going to have a really, really hard time justifying the level of spend, even though it's a small percent. Four liters that I think things are getting so much more complicated. The dollars are not that big. The rewards are kind of big. But if we take that much space up in the leader's head, she's going to be like, screw this, I'm just going to throw it to paid search because I know I'm getting four to one return. So. All that to be said is I think everything you said is where we need to go. There needs to be logical reasoning. I just think it's really, really critical to not align on that after you're trying to justify a performance going up or down. Thanks for sharing that. Yeah, of course.

[01:08:51] Okay. No, I just, I, I, I, a hundred percent. I can share my opinion. So I would say, so what we try to work with is a three level measurement where it's somehow similar to your like tier one, tier two, tier three. So, um, For me, level one is the first level and not one in terms of priority number one.

So level three is what we actually want to go for. So level one, what we look at is citation share, either of, so no matter if it's Chachibiti or AI overviews or AI mode, obviously still currently on Google, we don't have AI overviews for all of the SERPs, but I think there's a good argument. that Google will eventually move to whatever search experience that looks like AI reviews, AI mode like combined.

[01:09:48] So there will probably not be the classic ten blue links serve again. So citation share either based on our own content or content on other sites, earned content, YouTube, Reddit, industry publications, where we are part of the conversation, so where we are mentioned. So this is level one. Then level two is brand mentions. So how often is our brand actually mentioned in these conversations across prompts that we care about? For these prompts, obviously, I know this is like the next big black box, and I think we would need another episode for that. We try to have a lot of data sources that basically influence our decision on how to come up with these prompts. So when some people basically just go into Profound or PKI or whatever tool they're using and then click on Suggest Prompts.

[01:10:45] Don't do that. It's not a good idea because they don't have the data to actually make good suggestions. So we use audience research like mining sales transcripts, speaking to head of customer success, using user interview data from product teams, et cetera, et cetera, then query data from the search console, maybe SAMrush data, et cetera. So having actually an understanding of What does our target group care about? What do we believe how they would search? And do we have data to validate that? there's a demand for that? Do we have data to validate the actual words they're using? So speaking of search console, et cetera. Yeah, brand mentions this is level two and then level three is actually a conversion.

[01:11:34] So, and I see this. as like it can be a mixture. So for example, for e-commerce, it could be a signups for a newsletter or like email opt-ins and then also revenue. And then it's obviously hard to differentiate between the signups you got for the newsletter or for whatever email opt-in mechanism you have. Did these convert into revenue? Then when you did like your winter sale, tracking this like, I mean, In theory, it sounds super simple, but who actually has the data to do that? Not a lot of companies, so maybe the real big ones, but not a lot of them. And then for sales lab models or B to B and service businesses, we basically look at leads, then we look at pipeline contribution, then we look at close one revenue, and ideally, Honestly, this is me painting a picture here of the future.

[01:12:31] We are not there yet. Ideally, we also have a grip on customer lifetime value because I think eventually the true north star is customer lifetime value and not the number of signups, etc. And to have a good idea at least about where did the signups actually come from, we try to use last click, first click. As far as it's available from GA-IV and HubSpot Pixel, for example, we also use self-reported attribution based on ideally, this is like my preferred version, a free text field that is required. So no dropdown because it limits the creativity of people saying something in there. So I had all created the kinds of stuff also for leads that we got as an agency that people put in there. Like this guy told me about you and then I saw you on LinkedIn, like you can't really have this in.

[01:13:27] quantitative data. And then also what we do is, I don't know if it's an official term, we call it sales reported attribution. So basically the person that's like on the discovery call or wherever, actually saying, hey, you know, it would be massively helpful for us to get a little bit of an idea of your research journey. So like, where did you look and where did you find us? And then sometimes, and it's funny, people just so at one occasion, somebody just put a smiley. How do you know about us form on the website? And then when the SDR or account executive actually asked them, then it came out that they found the company via a perplexity research. You know, and this is also why we have like these different levels.

[01:14:12] And it's always also the team sometimes hates me for that, that I constantly push them to be

very clear that it's like this very, as you said earlier, convoluted answer. But there's like a very distinctive person purpose for all of these different data points to ensure that you get the best picture possible. And it's still imperfect. But yeah, these are these are my thoughts on that. So Nick, I'm gonna do your job for you, because this is like a full circle moment. You know, we kicked off by talking about what are the risks for agency, and I kind of said there's the ones that want to put the effort in, and the ones that don't. Because everything you just said there, that's a lot of work, and a lot of people would say, that's not SEO.

[01:15:03] But that's what SEO is today. Yeah, and because if you're not gonna go that level you're either gonna be guessing or lying for your narrative. Yeah, and honestly so if I if I told you that we we were just creating like The documentation internally for our audience research framework and like the different levels of Who we want to talk to and why. like we we even made distinctions between so we can talk to individual sales team members at our clients. It could be helpful because they're more available. Like it's easier to talk to them than ahead of sales, but they only have like their... I'm not meaning this negatively, but their limited view on the leads they get. But then we could also talk to the head of sales.

[01:15:58] that might be a little bit detached from the day-to-day, but they have maybe an own overview over the different conversations. And then the same goes for customer success. So why should we talk to sales? Because we want to get a better grip on the prospects and pre-sale. And then customer success actually helps us to understand what customers get most value from these products and why and like where patterns etc. and this enables us to even if we do not do it explicitly like optimize towards customer lifetime value because we just get a better understanding of where people get the most value from. and if like it's a value exchange if people get more value from specific types of the product and we try to focus our SAO efforts more on these parts of the product, then naturally we will attract customers that will bring more value to the company also because they stay longer, etc.

[01:16:52] And then mining stuff on Reddit with Reddit answers, top converting search terms on Google ads, all of that stuff. So this is also something where I would say you I don't actually know how we came up with the vision for that, but I just think that there are certain points always where we are just very clear with ourselves on, do we actually have an answer to that question? So are we actually able to answer the question, what parts of the product does somebody get the most value from? And if we do not have the answer, we do not opt to, yeah, but maybe it doesn't matter. We go the route of Okay, we have to like pull up the sleeve and like put in the work to get a decent answer because we think it will be massively beneficial for the work we can do for the client.

[01:17:50] And then obviously we're not perfect. Yeah, just wanted to say we're not perfect. We like this work in progress. We're doing like progress every day. But yeah, this is something that is like very top of mind for me currently because we started in twenty twenty six with a lot of like we have a lot of thoughts, etc. Let's really like get this into operation as quickly as possible because some of that was already floating around Some of it was just in our minds and now like we have kicked off the year with like We are really making big steps in progress every week and it feels like it feels good also to have someone like you Confirm us a little bit at least in the direction. That's exactly what I was just gonna say though is you guys are putting action to kind of what I was suggesting as well, because at the end of the day, we only have so much information that we know definitively.

[01:18:52] I think all of us can agree, whether you're a client or the intern, we have a lot more questions than anybody's got the answers for. So when you can go in and talk to that leader, And then she understands, again, before we're ever going to talk about performance, that, yep, here are those hard KPIs as we would normally do it. These will be what they are, and we promise to report on them. But

here is our process for how we're going to kind of remove the black box. It's not going to give us hardcore, one hundred percent certainty data, but it's going to be strong enough. where we can draw a correlation that makes sense. And again, that doesn't live on its own, but also the hard data doesn't live on its own.

[01:19:43] And I think that's where we're going now. And I think leaders that are open to that conversation will continue to find a lot of success in this organic realm that is not just Google Now. Like you said, it's the LLMs, it's Reddit. And I think those that... are very stuck on saying my organic is measured like my paid. I think they're going to give up on the channel. I think I want to spend a couple of minutes still talking about two other passion projects you have actually worked on. And I think we should. Definitely not let them fall through the cracks here. So I'm obviously speaking about SEOjobs.com and PPCjobs.com. Can you give us a little behind the scenes, what made you decide to build them? Yes, so remember at the very beginning of this podcast, you asked for my story, and I specifically said make kind of an annotation right here when I was looking at LinkedIn.

[01:20:54] career builder, all the junkie big sites, or at least junkie for the SEO. I had this opportunity after I went out on my own, because of course it's too late for me. But I basically had this opportunity to join the original owner to build this site. And then I had the opportunity to buy it. He wanted to jump into a different project. But I'm passionate because I know what it's like to have that feeling of stress and anxiety, trying to find jobs that are of quality, finding jobs that are real. And on the other end, I can't be the only one in my career that has not left, even though I knew I needed to, but just because I wasn't seeing the right jobs. Now, I may not have been putting the right effort into it, but so I built.

[01:21:54] or I should say I continued building upon what I wanted to exist back when I needed it most. And I feel that that empowers me to be like a really good voice behind it. Like if you look at the like our mission page on SEOjobs.com, it literally starts with like, I've been fired. And it's not like to try to feel bad for me. It's just more like, Wow, like you and me, we're the same. Like nobody wants to admit that they got bad marks or that they got fired or, you know, they lost a promotion. But to be able to make that connection, I just feel like that's allowing people to kind of trust me to build something that they are supporting. Because this project does not succeed without the industry supporting it.

[01:22:52] Like this is not an affiliate site, this is not AdSense site where I can trick Google because I don't even care about Google traffic. Fifty percent of my traffic every month is direct traffic. So it's a fun project. But a lot of people would probably thought in the beginning, hey, there are these big job platforms like Indeed, Stepstone, No matter. maybe there are specific other ones and different geographies, definitely also LinkedIn. So why should you like create a new job board? Like this is a lot of effort. Do you really think that anybody would care? Again, obviously you did it and obviously it's a great success. But like what made you like be immune to? maybe you also had this voice like in the back of your head, but why didn't you care?

[01:23:49] Yeah, well, I think at first, I'm not a very good businessman in this aspect. I saw it just as an opportunity and a significant gap in our industry. SEO, paid media, all this. We are amazing at creating really good resources. You can learn everything from A to Y on YouTube. But when it came down to, okay, now where do I go get that job? If you're starting at Indeed or any of these, like, oh, I just feel like that's such a miss. And then so what it just came down to is I talk to people who are hiring and I hear two main pain points regularly. One is enter big job board name here. is super expensive. Last time it cost me twelve hundred bucks, you know, just to have my listing the way that I needed it and to get to the right people.

[01:24:52] And then they go, okay, but you know what? If I get somebody, that's totally worth it. The bigger issue is the fact that when you have these large platforms like a LinkedIn and whatnot, you get

thousands of applicants. You know, I'm sure you've had this experience like the like automatic apply now is like the worst thing that's been created from an actual like business owners perspective. It's great for those metrics we talked about for all these. So my sales pitch, if there is any, is one, like I know this industry. It's like I'm bringing my friends in every single day to see these jobs. So they're real people. And two, I never pretend that I'm going to provide nearly the amount of applicants as I can indeed or LinkedIn.

[01:25:48] But I do ask them, okay, you have this one role. How many people are you looking to hire? And they'll say one. And I said, what if I sent you fifteen people and five of them are like perfect matches? Like if you had five roles, you'd hire all of them. Like, does that make me less valuable? I would argue that it makes me more valuable because you're not looking to hire a twenty-five and I gave you fifteen. You're looking for one. So efficiency has cost. And that just, or sorry, efficiency has value. And then right now, I mean, I sure it'll increase over time, but the most expensive package is a hundred and forty nine dollars. And that's for ninety days listing premium visibility in our newsletter. It just tries to check all the boxes when possible.

[01:26:44] I think you should actually double the price. So sorry for everybody hiring that. maybe if Nick actually does it, but you are compared to. So actually, you know, sometimes price also gives you a sense of value. Like there are these watches that cost like five thousand euros, et cetera. And obviously there's also a lot of manufacturing behind it, blah, blah, blah. It's somehow also the exclusiveness comes from the high price and I feel like people might even think like. can this actually help me hire the roles if you compare your price point to not even just a step zone or indeed but like to a headhunter or like to these like active sourcing platforms. So there's, for example, one very, very successful company in Germany.

[01:27:41] I think they, they have like a talent pool, et cetera. And like, it's a, it's a, it's a very great product, but they charge, I think, is it either one? Let's say it's one gross salary. So. Yeah, it's the traditional recruiter approach. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So, and I mean, In the end, you could say, okay, you don't have a guarantee that you hire someone from your platform, but let's be honest, it's a super specific platform for dedicated job profits. It's not like, okay, you can look for a janitor role and then an SEO role and then whatever role, but it's like SEO purely or PVC purely. So I think actually you should at least charge. And I'm kind of going that direction. I feel like there's a lot of goodwill that I want to extend to the industry.

[01:28:45] that allowed me to kind of build it. I will increase prices over time because like you said, it's important and you don't want to make it the right option for everybody. But the one thing that I will say is you are absolutely right. I cannot guarantee that you'll hire somebody. But the one guarantee I really do like and I stand by is if it doesn't work the way that you want it, there's no additional cost to me or you now. I'm going to rerun that sucker. If you need to run it for three years before you find your perfect person, great. I'm probably going to ask you why you can't make a hire, but that's a whole nother conversation. And I think again, I am a big fan of doing what I think is right. versus doing what I think can make me the fastest buck.

[01:29:39] I will end up probably leaving lots of millions of dollars on the table in my lifetime. But for me, it all comes down to like, do I feel good at the end of the night when I'm putting my head on my pillow? So yes, I've thought about putting it all up to two ninety nine and like literally almost did it at the start of the year. And I was just like, you know what? I have some other plans. Let's see if I can hit some of these growth targets. And then I will do it. And again, that makes me feel good. If I can make people feel like they're getting a huge win even at four hundred bucks, six hundred bucks, whatever it is. I just want everybody to win. Like that's what's important to me. And that's the passion behind it.

[01:30:20] Because anybody running this as a business would have jacked us up immediately. And I'm thinking about it through the lens of seven years old or seven years ago, Nick. panicking about how he's feeding his kids. Got it. Nick, wrapping up the conversation a little bit, because we already talked through a lot of stuff. I want to, like I always have, and I say this all the time, I always have like three goals for this podcast. I wanted to be educating, check. I wanted to be entertaining, also check. And then the last piece is always, I want to make it actionable. And I think we somehow also already managed to do that, but I think sometimes you just have to like like summarize things again or like make it really compact.

[01:31:13] So I want to ask you if you were advising someone now today with all your knowledge accumulated over the years, who's considering going from in-house to an SEO consultant or maybe even forced to do that due to being laid off, what would be your top two to three pieces of advice? My very first one would be, your network is your net worth. I don't know who told me that at one point in time, but it's true. I could probably attribute eighty percent of my revenue to who I know in the industry that refers work to me. And twenty percent goes back to the LinkedIn and the newsletter and all that kind of stuff. So invest in your network. Go to that event. I know it's uncomfortable. Shake hands. Say hi. Ask questions.

[01:32:13] And then find them on LinkedIn and just follow up and just say, hey, I really appreciate the, you know, two minute conversation we had. And you'll be shocked at like that'll boomerang around. I guarantee you. So that's the first thing is like. Don't network only when you need something. Network all the time and build up your roster of friends and colleagues. Number two, a lot of people think, oh, I don't know enough about technical SEO. I don't know enough about server logs and all this kind of stuff. And it gives them paralysis. Remember what I told earlier about when I was interviewing people? If you can talk... just even fairly well, coherently, that already puts you above a lot of candidates. And I don't say that to like dog on our industry, but I always joke that we're kind of like the cousin of the developers.

[01:33:13] Developers are notorious for not having, you know, very good person, personable skills, but their job is mostly behind the scene. So, but with SEO, while we can do some more technical stuff, it very much is reliant on being able to build relationships and navigating conversations and being able to persuade people. And then I think the last thing that I would say, and it sounds cliche is, like, don't give up and don't listen to what anybody else says. Like, I know that sounds, it's so much easier than said than done, but SEO industry specifically, we have a habit of making these absolute statements like, no follow does not provide value ever any know how. Run your own tests. I talked to people, I used to say to people that I felt very strongly that H ones provide zero value and I got ridiculed.

[01:34:20] Absolutely. I mean, we're talking of laughed at by like team members. And then like, Four years later, I was still at the same company. John Mueller said in like his presentation, he's like, nope, like headers don't really matter. It's like how you're structuring the page and the value you have with it. And I turned around and looked at like my boss and his jaw was on the ground. Take those POVs. I'm not saying be argumentative for the sake of it, but you know, come up with your own answers. Test, learn. That wasn't quick. But just to recap, building network, talk well, learn, test, learn, learn, learn. Be one step ahead. Nick, that's very strong. I have one final question for you. This one is, what didn't we talk about that we should have talked about?

[01:35:20] I think we talked about SEO jobs a ton and we touched on the direction of agencies. But I think that the industry as a whole is still scared about. is SEO dying. So what is the trajectory of SEO jobs? Not my site, but just the career as a whole. And the answer to that is this time last year, it was really scary. I mean, the site had its all time high in traffic because the demand for a job was that high. The inventory was low. And again, I'll be a little bit vulnerable here. Like my mental state kind of went to

hell because the amount of messages that I got from people saying, I got fired, my whole team was let go, like they outsourced, they did AI on top of LinkedIn where everyone's like, Hey, everybody, I need a new job.

[01:36:23] Like it was rough. And then it was like Q four started and I swear like all these marketing leaders were like, oh shoot, I have a use it or lose it budget. And then they started hiring again. And I attribute this all to people. We all just don't know. we said we have more questions than answers. And I think a lot of people were very hesitant. And I can even say with my own consulting agreements, people don't want to commit to SEO for a year at a time. If there's a possibility that AILLMs are taking over the world, I want to do that. And so I think a lot of people just kind of sat on their hands and it's like, well, I'm going to let like the early adopters learn and then I'll be the second wave. And we're still stuck in this messy middle.

[01:37:09] So that's the only thing that I would have added. And again, I want to just reiterate. I keep using the calligraphy example over and over. Even if SEO dies, like, There is always work in every angle industry skillset for the one percent. So are you in the one percent? Only you can answer that. That's a nice cliffhanger question. Nick, it has been a blast. A really great conversation. Thanks so much for sharing so much of the knowledge that you usually keep behind a paywall. Not for the SEO for lunch. This newsletter is completely free. At least up until now. Maybe I inspired Nick today to raise prices across the board. Don't blame me, actually. It's a value exchange. I think there's more to gain than to pay.

[01:38:12] But thanks so much for making the time. I really appreciate it. I really appreciate all the knowledge you shared. This was a lot of fun, at least for me. And I hope also for people, if people want to follow around, like we obviously going to put the SEO for lunch link in the description, the SEO jobs links in the description, the PPC jobs in the description, something you mentioned in the beginning that I should put into the description, but I lost it now. Oh, I wrote up the story of like my first year going out on my own. Yeah, maybe you can send this over. I'll send that too. You can also put this in the description. What else should we put into the description? You know what? If Morty Oberstein is listening to this, he always gives me a hard time.

[01:39:01] He's like, I'm always terrified to have you on my show because your intro is eight hundred words long because you were involved with so much. So I will just leave it by saying, you know, go check out nickleroy.com. I have all my socials there. I love hanging out with people and connecting. Like I said, your network is everything. So say hi. Sounds great. Nick, thanks so much. Hope to catch up soon. And people go follow Nick, give a like, give a subscribe. It doesn't cost anything. And if you want to hire in SEO or in PPC, definitely consider Nick's platforms because it's actually, it has visibility worldwide. So there's a high chance that you can actually find pretty qualified candidates on there. Nick, thanks so much.

[01:39:54] Thank you, appreciate you. Bye-bye.