WIN IN SEO AS AN EARLY-STAGE STARTUP | Irina Maltseva, Growth Advisor @ Aura, Sphere, Artisan & more | #17

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Show notes

Most people will tell you SEO takes too long for early-stage startups. That it's a waste of time when you're at zero. Today, you'll hear proof why this is a limiting belief, and we'll show you exactly how to start.

My guest today is Irina Maltseva, a Barcelona-based Growth Advisor who's helped companies like Aura, Sphere, Artisan, Hunter, Riverside, and Nextiva build their organic growth motion from the ground up.

I found Irina's work particularly interesting due to her focus on early-stage companies like YC alumni. They come to her with a brand-new website, zero domain authority, and a fresh product.

In other words, she's solving one of the hardest problems in SEO: how do you drive meaningful growth from the ground up?

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

Full conversation

[00:00:00] Most people will tell you that SEO takes too long for early-stage startups. It's a waste of time when you're at zero. Today, you'll hear proof why this is a limiting belief and we'll show you exactly how to start. My guest today is Irina Maltseva, a Barcelona-based growth advisor whose help companies like Aura, Sphere, Artisan, Hunter, Riverside, Nextiva and many more build their organic growth motion from the ground up. I found Irina's work particularly interesting due to her focus on early stage companies like Y Combinator Alumni. They come to her with a brand new website, zero domain authority and a fresh product. In other words, she's solving one of the hardest problems in SEO. How do you drive meaningful growth from the ground up?

[00:00:50] Before we dive in, Irina, thanks so much for joining. And thanks so much for inviting me. Nicholas, great to be here. Thanks so much for coming on. So maybe let's start with the first question to casually start in. You work primarily with companies that have done little to know SEO before. I already mentioned that in the introduction. Walk me through what that first conversation you have with them typically looks like. Yeah, so the conversations with these companies, they look differently from the ones who already invested in SEO before, who are doing it for a while. I would say it's probably kind of fifty-fifty. Fifty percent is more like educational where I need to explain some of the main concepts of SEO.

[00:01:36] So if I'm juggling these terms like link building and this is the person in front of me doesn't understand these terms. So we just like go into like you know the basics kind of the educational thing. because normally like obviously on the first calls as I mean, like for any client, I'm trying to understand, okay, what are the goals? What is the background? What they are doing? What are the expectations and stuff? But the difference is obviously that these companies need a little bit more education because, for example, I'm working a lot with IC alumnus and these founders. pretty young founders like I have. I'm working with CEOs of twenty four years old like thirty years old and normally for them it's a first company.

[00:02:24] so they are also exploring like you know this new channel. they know something about it they know it works. it needs to be the part like one of their marketing channels and they are kind of okay. so tell us how would how would the work for us and staff so as the first part like for fifty percent of the companies like educational and for those like other parts probably where education is not needed. it's more about communicating like the expectations and communicating the SEO. since YC startups they normally go very fast and they also want to move very fast. and I unfortunately you know in SEO things are not moving that fast. if you set up like, I don't know, a PPC campaign or something like, I don't know, an email newsletter or like a link, founder's link in profile.

[00:03:19] So at this stage, it's very important, like on every call I communicate, guys, I know that you are growing fast. I know that you want to get results. I mean, like probably like very soon, not the next day, but probably upcoming weeks, upcoming months. But considering you're having this like no authority scenario. We will need to work on it. And I'm asking if they are ready in general to invest time and not to see results the first few months, sometimes half a year, sometimes more. So it's like my job here is to set expectations early. So like, I'm not so late. Yeah, let's do a sale. Like you'll see something like in one day, in three days or whatever. So That's kind of an important part to start this on a first call when they first start talking as potential customers.

[00:04:14] And what would you say? how did SEO payment to their minds? Because as you said, I can imagine like a fast growing startup leaning more towards paid channels like PPC and something because like you spend money and you immediately get distribution. So what? What makes them think about SEO in the first place? I think it's kind of in my scenario, a lot of founders, I normally talk directly to founders in the first calls, they are very open minded. And then they start as a startup, they want to test all of different channels. And obviously, I don't know if you even like Google something like top ways to grow a startup or like top digital marketing channels. a server will be one of them. I think, I don't know exactly, I'm never asking them how did you learn about SFO?

[00:05:12] Probably will ask like, you know, how did you learn about me or something? But this I never asked, but for me it's kind of on the surface. If you search, if you talk to other people, it's one of the key like driving channels of traffic, rather new traffic, unfortunately, a bit less these days. but still revenue. So I think it's why we are exploring it as one of the first channels. Interesting. And you mentioned setting expectations that this is a key part of your job. Walk me through like maybe one of the recent conversations you had. What are the expectations you set? So if I would be a founder and I would say, okay, can we get results like in six weeks? Can we get meaningful pipeline from that? Would you say yes, that's possible?

[00:06:02] Would you say it depends like how does the whole expectation setting? Conversation looks like so. first of all I'm telling it's a long process No one knows. I cannot I cannot give any timeline and I think this is something where what sounds probably be confusing to the founders because first you can you can. you can start talking to a professional who and this professional tells you I don't know just because there is like so many things that impact in it or you can talk to a scummer and this scummer is

like They will be taking your budget for half a year, do nothing, or something that is not related. And for them, it's very hard to say who is coming and who is not at this stage, because you won't see results at least a few months, half a year.

[00:06:59] So yeah, obviously, I'm showing the examples of the previous clients. Like, hey, guys, you can see probably a Google search console. I don't really mind like without any kind of client like data or decisionally, but they see it was like flat flat flat flat and then it start grows again like in other clients. it's flat flat flat and it started to grow it never like this from the very beginning. so I'm trying to show like the patterns and also the same for their competitors. If they are like more or less at the same stage, but probably they started like on SEO one year, two years ago, a bit earlier than them. Not those who are operating like twenty years in the market. They will see that this is something that they can expect.

[00:07:47] like more or less showing them what's happening on other websites in their industry, like with my clients, just like to give a bit of background. Sounds interesting. And if you start with them, so if they agree to move on with you compared to a scammer, which I would recommend to everybody listening, so rather go with Irina than going with the scammer, How do the first steps look like? like if we think about the roadmap or your framework for like the first few weeks or maybe first three months. Like how does it look like what are the first actual steps you're taking. So the first two weeks, they can be like even slower. They can seem even slower because nothing is happening on the website. Of course, everyone wants like from the very beginning to start, I don't know, like, okay, let's do like a landing page.

[00:08:48] Okay, let's start publishing a content. So the first two weeks are about learning the company. what's going on, talking to the founder normally. It's like the main source of information for me. Putting all this data together, listening to the gong conversations, reading intercom, all the information they have, I'm just like collecting to understand how we can put this together. So it's like first, second week, like normally looks like this. Based on that, And obviously like checking the competitors. It's kind of, you know, the standard thing that I'd say you do like for companies that never did a zero or someone who did a zero like for the last like like ten, ten, twenty years. In this case, if we if we are speaking about someone who comes to me with a zero website, it's the next step is to find the opportunities for them where they can start growing.

[00:09:48] And it's the most challenging part because Like the keywords that those clients want to target, like for example, if you are taking our startup and a sales niche, they obviously want to get visibility in best sales tools or best sales automation, blah, blah, blah. And I cannot do it for them. I cannot even start targeting this keyword, probably in the next six months, even in one year, even like, depending, like in two years, because if you see half-spot, four words, And those big players, you know, just like even if you build crazy amount of backlinks and write the best content, it won't work because just like the main authority is lacking. So the goal on the first month is just like focus on building the authority and also obviously try to find this low-hanging fruit which we can target.

[00:10:47] I'm trying to stay away these days from top of the funnel content for because there isn't, you know, so like zero clicks, AI reviews, change GBT, serving better than like our content and stuff. So, and also the problem is that bottom of the funnel is Hard to attain because one of the panels those best spike keywords. They have a very high difficulty. So we are trying to find for them something in between. So to make sure they're getting getting getting visibility and getting those clicks in the end There's those terms that are related to their business and what actually customers are asking about based on the gone conversation in your common stuff. so First step, if I can summarize it, it's just like to find those low-hanging fruits and slowly, slowly start building authority.

[00:11:43] And once we are filling the R at this stage, the things are slowly growing, we are getting visibility for those articles or for those pages that we build. Is this like kind of easy but relevant

keywords? We can make next step and we can target more difficult keywords, not obviously those like... keyword difficulty eighty plus, but something a bit more difficult. If I'm listening to you and hearing your first steps being listening to gone conversations reading intercom I suppose support tickets and all that stuff or like maybe chat conversations. It makes total sense. but then I listen to people that adhere to maybe a more classic SEO playbook and they will probably start with keyword research. Now I'm wondering obviously why do you start with.

[00:12:37] the customer research instead of going to a SEMrush or Ahrefs and just like looking up keywords that you want to target. So customers are always first. We are not doing Azure for Google. We are not doing Azure or GE or for Chargivity. There are some keywords. I mean, there can be like lots of keywords, thousands and thousands related to sales. How do we know that these keywords are related to the audience? First, we need to ask them. Second, we need to read what they are telling based on their previous conversations and stuff. So an idea is first, just like to read, like to consume lots of information and then to match them with these existing keywords, like in a draft and some Russian stuff. Because if you do it, like, vice versa, you target the keywords.

[00:13:36] that are probably easy to attain for you, but then you're ranking, you're getting some visibility, quick suppression stuff, but they're not converting just because it's not the audience, it's not what people are looking for, it's not what they're asking. So I prefer doing like kind of diverse things, first research and then like on the audience on what they need and then matching those keywords, matching this like questions of the audience is the keywords itself. Now, in my introduction, I already mentioned a company you work with, which is Artisan, and they maybe also have launched other products now, but they, I think, started with the AI-SDR, so sales development representative or AI-BDR business development representative.

[00:14:30] And these topics, I guess, were quite new. So probably didn't have any existing search volume or maybe very low existing search volumes. So how do you approach this? Like how do you approach SEO for products with little to no existing search volumes like for artisan? So for artisans it's very interesting clients because they do a lot of cool stuff besides SEO. that is helping SEO. So when the founder first approached Zeke, he said, okay, we are building an AISDR and AIBR as well. And I've heard already, so we started working like two years ago and AI thing was everywhere. Everyone is talking about AI, everyone is incorporating stuff. Like, you know, first of all, you know this topic is trending and it's the future just because everyone is talking about it.

[00:15:29] And so when I checked the interest, I remember for the first time, because the founder really wanted to optimize the product page on ASDR. For me, the volumes were not that significant. I don't remember exactly, but it's not what you expect from one of the main pages. When you are normally doing it, you want thousands and thousands of people searching for it. But it was just probably a hundred. I don't know, like, two hundred, three hundred, not that much. But first, you hear all of this conversation around, like, Reddit, LinkedIn, that AI is growing. So you have, like, kind of instinct that probably this keyword has the potential in the future because the industry is still evolving. Then you are talking to the founder who has lots of information from the customers that they are actually looking for it but they didn't know how to phrase it just because not many people matched at that time the word SDR NEI like so they didn't know how to call it like.

[00:16:33] at the very beginning. they were just like assistant like you know SDR assistant or like something like that variations so and and and down. like you you are checking like a trust and you see there is like a prediction trend that it will start to grow and you kind of compound everything like your conversations with founders and what you see in the market, what you see in the tools that they are predicting that these keywords start to grow and you just kind of know that it's the right one and it will

bring here great results in the future based on all of this information that you are gathering. Sometimes you can be wrong because it's hard to predict the future, but there are so many different signs telling you, okay, this product is a good one, it's trending, it's going, and we go all in, and now it brings thousands and thousands of visits on a monthly basis to my client.

[00:17:41] So instead of being reactive in the sense that you rely on keyword tools that tell you that people are searching for it, you have to be very proactive about basically getting a point of view on where the market will probably move and what people will search more and more. Would you say this is a correct summary of the artisan story? Yeah, yeah, yeah, so it's very important to be proactive especially now as there are so many Interesting like new searches happening especially in AI industry. So you just need to be first. actually I think Because we started very early and did a lot of There was some content, but not much and not great. And we started doing like this like long, like in-depth articles, educating on like EISDR, how it's working, what it is and stuff, creating like a very good product page, et cetera.

[00:18:44] I think it helped us. And even now it's helping just because we were one of the first at that time. Because I see the signs in Google kind of reverting. awarding the ones who started earlier and then you enter. even if you enter like a bit later half a year like even couple of months later you can see completely different thing even if you follow the same playbook. you should be. you should be proactive you should be first and obviously if you are first but you do average you won't get results. but if you are first and you do great you will see results. You previously mentioned AI overviews, the role of AI overviews. Then we also have AI mode. We have chat, GPD answering a lot of informational queries or prompts.

[00:19:33] So probably the whole search ecosystem is going through the biggest shift like in the last twenty, twenty five years. How has your approach to SEO, especially for these early stage companies, how has it changed? Let's say in the last two to three years. So with all the developments and all the changes going on. So it changed completely. Okay. Interesting. Yeah, we do not as a search engine optimization, we do search every verb optimization. I really like these terms that ran fishking like implemented. Yes, there is like a lot of like a limo, geo, or IO and stuff. But it really describes that. Now you are not a professional in one niche. You need to optimize for all the platforms where the search is happening.

[00:20:28] And I think the mindset when we were analyzing like before and talking to these clients, we were talking Google, Google, Google. Obviously Google, like not being, not anything else, just because we see like Google is ninety percent the traffic and stuff. But now. Since this is a trend that's growing and obviously Google will be always a little bit less and AI search always will be a little bit more since the user adoption. Growing the implement AI search optimization, search optimization from Davon. And even sometimes it's easier to get visibility on strategy for complexity, faster, like for this smaller company than Google, because Google algorithms, you know, like sometimes they prefer those big brands, big companies and stuff, that judgeability and algorithms are different, but sometimes it's easier to get the ability there.

[00:21:28] So we started doing like kind of everything from Davon, just because like, If you don't focus on it right now, probably if you start focusing on it in one year, you will be like really, really behind. And what it means, what it means for the clients. So getting visibility like everywhere, it's obviously better than like in one channel. I also heard this from Ethan Smith from Graphite from San Francisco. He basically said that SEO has always been in tendency more for the already grown companies. As you also said, Google sometimes prefers the companies that already built up more authority, etc. Whereas, as he says, AEO, so let's say AI search optimization, however you want to call it, brings in more

potential also for early-stage companies because there can be a quicker time to results with the presence and chattivity and perplexity.

[00:22:38] Would you agree with that? Is that also what you see in your advisory cases? Yeah, I can for sure agree with this. I was obviously actually saying to It has podcasts, like Lenny's podcast. Super, super good to recommend to everyone to listen to it, for those who want to implement. It's really great, and yeah, I completely agree with it. So, basically, Google algorithms are very advanced already, and they, unfortunately, prefer, in many cases, some bigger brands. And if you see the SERP, full of this, like, DR-AD plus, NINET Plus websites, .gov, .edu, and stuff, you probably don't want to target it even with your DR-zero client, like someone who has like zero demand already. But if you're speaking about searches on chat.gbt, proxity, I search, those algorithms I feel still underdeveloped.

[00:23:43] And you can still manipulate them. Like, it's obvious. It's obvious, but you need to do it in the right way. Obviously, I see companies doing the best listicles, like versus listicles, like reviews and stuff. They are even creating pages on their website, like saying what they want LLMs to know about the brands. This is like what I call manipulation, not like the spammy techniques. But obviously, if there is no If there is no website, it's no place where LLAMPS can pull information about you, how does it know who you are? So you can actually create a page on your website saying, okay, this is my product, my product is doing that. This has the features, blah, blah, blah. And you kind of give that information to LLAMPS because if not you, probably competitors will lose the article.

[00:24:43] versus competitor and then they will tell how bad you are or like how they are outperforming you. And this is what our lamps will take. So you need to be a little bit more proactive here. and there's a nicer search. that Cabin and Zed recently. It was on AI mode. That shows, so they were talking to a lot of different people about how they are using, how they are using the A-mode, and they were also checking what is visible for an A-mode for these searches. And they found out that the brand websites really influence visibility in the A-mode and in other alums. So basically, if you are just starting a website and SEO activities, AO activities, And you think that for SEO, I need to do the classic playbook.

[00:25:42] But for GEO, IO, I need to outreach other listicles. I need to get visible on review sites. Not always. Start with your website. In some cases, it's just like, fifty-fifty. Fifty percent of the information they are pulling from the external sources, fifty percent of the information they are pulling from your own website. So instead of going the hard way, you can. kind of influence it with your own website. And it can be easier. It can be easier than like ranking on Google for this keyword. And this is what I see right now with my clients. So we have, we do like this alternatives articles with them. And the product finally started to get visible for this like best main keyword tools. It's like ranking like more or less.

[00:26:33] like in top five depending on how you put how you put the search and we see it. it pulls like from our own article from our own article like best blah blah blah their alternatives it's it's not from anywhere else. however we are doing also articles on other website like on other review website. so it it it works. for now i i don't say it will work like for a long time. algorithms are changing but for now it's easier. yeah it's easier Makes sense. I think it's also in line with what I learned in my conversation with Tomas Niesgutter, who is a CMO and co-founder at Surfer. He also said that they sometimes see gaps in the citations and, for example, churchivity, perplexity, and I think it will also... uh correlate with google ii mode.

[00:27:24] and then they um create owned contents or almost server domain to explicitly target. so their target is becoming the cited page there and then owning the narrative or at least contributing their perspective to the narrative. and for for them it's actually a super impactful tactic. and um in terms of numbers so. They obviously do a lot, but they are getting around. It's publicly available information. He shared it himself. So they are getting twenty percent of their paying customers from AI, Chatbot's

assistance, however you want to call it already. So quite interesting. I'd like to go to another topic related to AI because we market us. now often think about AI as a channel, so as a new distribution opportunity.

[00:28:18] But AI is obviously also a super powerful tool. And when I talked to founders also from early stage companies, they sometimes asked me about using AI to create big amounts of content. I would say they don't use the term, but it's like programmatic strategies. So creating, for example, hundreds or like hundred, two hundred pages around a certain topic. And I would like to get your perspective on that. Do you feel like this is actually a shortcut to scale or is it something that is too good to be true? Honestly, like when founders come to me with just like new websites, this is the thing is that I don't recognize starting base. just because it sends like very big signals to Google, like in our goal to send strong signals to Google and to all other algorithms as well, just like how they see it, you create like hundreds of thousands of pages or thousands of pages and stuff.

[00:29:24] And people like normally, I don't know, if you take like, for example, to zoom in, for example, very, very famous and programmatic world survey, if you someone type saying the name of the person, like find an email or phone number and then you get the page with this person's name and phone number and then there is like place sign up or like pay. So if you're not getting actually what you want because you think there is here and then you need to do like some extra effort and stuff and they bounce. So like normally from what I see like a lot of like programmatic pages You don't bring that much value from the very beginning, just take some raw data. So the bounce rate is super high. And if the person leaves your website, they can five, ten seconds after visiting it, and there is like lots of... sessions like this, that's definitely not a good sign.

[00:30:23] Because Google monitoring, we know what people are doing, how much time they're spending, the scroll index, blah, blah, blah. So it's not giving these signs that they want to achieve, like to build an authority. So what I recommend to do, and also the problem is the scroll budget. So afterwards, like, in the year four, Google updates. The crawl budget is like unlimited. I see like so many pages exist on the website, but they are not even crawl. So they are not. they are not index. They are like they exist. So and it kind of messes up everything on your website and stuff. So I prefer doing like great content, like something that really brings value, something like which Google calls helpful, which is really helpful for your audience.

[00:31:17] And I'm not thinking in super mathematics as you probably not at the very beginning, not one of the first strategy you should do. And once you build this, like great signals, like great content, great everything on your website, you can probably start with that, but it should not be like, you know, some basic basic stuff that people can find everywhere. Probably if you have some super powerful data that only you have, and it can kind of involve people into further actions on your website. Yes, so there's like lots of great key studies. I really like the Canva, for example, how they do programmatic asia. Insane amount of like the templates, but this is what people are looking for. And actually you can use Canva for free.

[00:32:02] So there is no big kind of bounce rate. It's easy to sign up. You use it like forever free with those templates and stuff. So there are like budget exams and bad exams when the founders are thinking about getting traffic, but not actually surveying something helpful, valuable to their audience. And yeah, that's the biggest problems. say sending like wrong signals from the very beginning and then getting punished for this. Love your Canva example. I think what Canva did super well is actually creating products that are built for distribution because they knew that people would search for templates for all sorts of stuff like birthday cards, wedding cards, resumes, etc. And I feel like Eleven labs for example.

[00:32:55] so this i voice company from from europe is also really cool example. we just did another breakdown for that. when the this podcast will come out the breakdown. Will not be live but depending on when you listen to this will probably be live. and there we found the same. so. Eleven labs and they actually posted about it on linkedin that they get a million. new signups per month from seo and it's driving millions in revenue for them. and they are now i think valued at three point three. Billions are already unicorn and like their top pages if you look at non-brand is like voice changer text to speech audio to text voice cloning voice isolator in the like dubbing studio video to text and it's all product lead.

[00:33:49] so it's basically parts little parts of their product. Build as tools and that you can use and it's so smart. So I really love these strategies. I'd like to focus on another topic which is I think helpful for founders but also helpful maybe for other people that are listening that are themselves either working as freelancers, advisors or working in agencies. Because you obviously work as an advisor rather than in-house and I'd like to know how you structure your work. so that you can actually drive results rather than just providing recommendations and creating like nice looking slides. So yeah, I'm not an advisor who is just like talking and sitting. I know there are like some good people like who do it, but I'm kind of trying to cover everything.

[00:34:43] We obviously do like the strategic calls, strategic sessions with clients, but editor side of the work is just like. actually doing something with your hands, like, you know, not just like only talking. And since I'm working with multiple companies, I'm not a person who is working with one company only. I'm just trying to focus, you know, like this like, many AD Pareto principle, like, on this, twenty percent of the things that will bring a big percent of the results. So not not everything I can do but for example what I can do, I can really focus on that and the rest. I can give a certain advice to the team and I can kind of guide them through it and do like the strategy like oversight and stuff.

[00:35:32] So it's hard to find like normally the balance being the advisor because you can easily start like working like full-time for one client but you should really know what to focus on, which will bring results like faster or will make the biggest impact rather than implementing all of the strategies you know at the same time. And if you would put yourself in the shoes of a founder, like an early stage founder, let's say YC alumni and they're building a cool new product and thinking about bringing on someone as a growth advisor, growth partner, freelancer agency, however you want to call it. What would you recommend them to look for? So what is basically the assessment they should do to determine if this person or agency or growth advisor is the right one for them?

[00:36:34] Yeah, I think the most important thing is that for them to understand what you're doing as an advisor, just like to make a CEO. simple to understand. So I know there are so many people who are Japanese as big terms, blah, blah, blah, I'm doing this, I'm doing that, and who understands like what you're doing. So first of all, if you're communicating everything you're doing, like in a simple words, it's like a really good sign for the founder just like to understand where things are moving. And besides making it so simple, it's important to make it measurable because I'm not talking about again the published like one hundred articles and what, but measurable in terms of what did it bring for the business, like for the business revenue, for example, how you impacted it.

[00:37:29] Obviously, like this year is so super hard to attribute everything that is coming to Azure, but the advisor's goal and I don't know, an agency goal, like we have a course externally is just to make as you're measurable. So the founders know how the progress is moving. You obviously need to create all of these dashboards and stuff. So whereas they can check even without you and understand what you are doing and where things are moving. Like for example, with my clients, everyone has access to the Custom Looker Studio Report. There are like lots of different tabs, but there is like only one tab. Super simple, super easy. You've got, okay, here is like they, and they're analyzing both like together in one

looking studio report.

[00:38:20] Google, like general. search and also in AI search. you see okay the percentage of the visitors came from AI search. percentage of the visitors came like from from the traditional search. you see the conversions and you can also compare the conversion there. you can see the time span and all that stuff all of the pages pages and bring you like this traffic referrals and stuff. so like my goal honestly to make it as simple as possible. um so over complicating like the tons of reports and stuff and yeah if it's easy to understand for the founder and is growing. These are the best indicators that your advisor or your agency is doing a great job. Now, speaking of real-time Dashboards Looker Studio, when I talk to, I would say, old-school agencies, which I like to sometimes call legacy agencies, I have heard the objection towards real-time Dashboards that you can't control uh the numbers that your client is exposed to.

[00:39:26] so this works. this does not create any problems if the numbers are looking good but if the numbers might not look as good as expected or like not moving the right direction obviously a founder or a marketing leader would look at that and maybe get angry or be disappointed. So what would be your response to them to overcome this objection? Because obviously transparency is great when it's going well, but transparency can be challenging if it's not going well. So I think it's more of the communication issue. Because for me, transparency is number one. I have nothing to hide. Everyone in the company normally has access to what I'm doing. We have an example. I saw on the dashboard that everyone can check and see the progress.

[00:40:14] Also, they can see Google Analytics, Google Search Console, like HREF tracking, as ranking, and stuff. So everything, I'm trying to update it on a real-time basis, because I don't have anything to hide. And if things are not going well, which are often the case in SEO today, we have position five, tomorrow we have position seven. And it's not the point to panic and to hide this number. like a recent example I will tell you. So it was one of my clients. we do like ranked tracking just in a in a trough. and since like last month, when it happened like in September, so Google banned this like the non-one hundred parameter and everything like looks super red now in the right ranked tracking tools. So all the positions you can see only like the first page position like the rest and visible the organic keywords like all in red and stuff.

[00:41:12] and the client saw this. and there's the coloriness. look it looks alarming. so just because it had access to this report and then I sent to them yeah here's like google banning bots from crawling and it's my like. they implemented these things. so They looked with the client and Google search console and they say they didn't lose any keywords. They didn't lose like any rankings like significantly everything either stable or growing. So it's kind of communication issues. Sometimes like you can you can you can you can check the reports and you like oh my god but it's around group reports to check. So yeah being being transparent I think it's. it's very important for you as an advisor or an agency. I hope legacy agencies will listen to this and maybe change their approach.

[00:42:00] Now speaking of approach, you obviously chose to go the route of being an advisor that works with several companies compared to going full-time in-house with just one company. What's from your perspective and also from your experience? What is the most interesting, the most fascinating thing about not being full-time in-house with just one company, but working with a wide range of companies. You learn insane amount of things. Not like every big, but every day. Just because you are in different industry, all those different things are happening. For me, just like Mofa. On the stage, it was like my last work. I've been working like three years, like with the same clients. That was kind of a great company and stuff.

[00:42:52] But the kind of movement, I was missing it, that like UK, there is something happened here,

there is something happened there. And there is always, always, always like this, this, this movement where you are learning, where you are doing some stuff that you probably never heard about like a month before. So yeah, for me, it's just like, I don't know, an interesting way to learn things and to help other companies grow this way. And I don't see myself now, for example, working for a company just because I want more, I want to help more, I want to do more. And that's just like my way of doing things, of thinking. And I can imagine your clients also particularly valuing this wide range of experiences and insights you can bring to the table from different cases.

[00:43:46] Yeah, actually, actually, this is something that we bring up in the course, because like, for example, if we see there is something happening, I don't know, for example, like some decline or some Google update, for example, and the clients are asking, you know, do you see the same bizarre stuff your clients in the other industries? And I'm saying, yes, it's affecting everyone. Or for example, when everyone started to panic about AI overviews rolling out like AI mode. Every like the clients obviously started to panic. okay where our clicks are going impressions are up clicks are down we have this crocodile mouse and and you need actually it helps to show clients that they are not alone so they are not stressing much about it because it happens to Everyone, everyone in the business.

[00:44:38] And if you're working, like, for example, only in one niche, I don't know, like finance, smart tag, probably this thing can be affecting only your niche. You don't know what's happening in the others. But since I'm working, it's a very wide range of niches. So I have clients in the cybersecurity, I have clients in smart tag, sales tag, like taxes. So all of the south businesses, but different industries. And we see if there's like some big, rollout happening on Google site. We see this pattern like that is happening, something like sample with every Google search console, or if it's a specific issue, like with one of the clients that we can dig deeper into this because it's not applicable to all of the websites I'm working with.

[00:45:26] So it helps to see the bigger picture. Makes a whole lot of sense. Now let's put ourselves in the shoes of an early stage founder again for one last time and let's try to wrap up all the knowledge you dropped and all the great insights you shared and I always like to like. Perhaps the conversations with very practical advice that people can take away from the conversation and ideally start implementing right away. So if you had to give two to three practical or tactical pieces of advice to a founder, either launching a new product today or maybe wrapping up their time at Y Combinator and they haven't touched SEO yet, what would these pieces of advice be? Yeah, that's that's a good question because yeah, so I would say be visible early as Like as a founder probably as a very like early stages like proceed.

[00:46:32] You have a lot of money to invest into into asset. probably you have advisor But you won't have like crazy budgets to invest into content or link building or other activities. So what on your end as a founder you can do? you can? Join webinars. You can go to podcasts. Where you can talk about your product, go and talk about it, because it leaves the footprint on the web. And especially if you can control the narrative, great. If you did a podcast, ask for a backlink to your homepage. And ask for a description, to add a description about your product. So it's the same that you can control as a founder, obviously. control the narrative and spread the word about it, about your product, which is good for many, for many, for many different reasons, not only SEO.

[00:47:25] This is what I actually recommended to do. I have a founder who didn't have, like at the very beginning, they were raising money and they didn't have a budget on in-building. So, but he was pretty visible. And he's like, okay, every time you do a webinar, just ask for a backlink. And he built like crazy amount of backlinks with that for free. Just like because you didn't know that there is an opportunity to ask for it, or we did like this online functions with them that save them like thousands and thousands of dollars. So that's a good thing to do. Another thing, like the recommendation is talk to your audience

before you talk to Google. So if someone told you there is like a nice keyword exist and you should target it, probably better ask your audience.

[00:48:13] or see if this keyword is in general relevant to their problems. And if you decide to, like, I don't know, if you, for example, the very early stage and you don't have an advisor, an agency, and you want to start working on the content, and you don't even have access to the SEO tools, you'll know how to use them, whatever, just create a content based on what your customers are asking for, your customer support or you, or on a demo call, on a regular basis, that's a good start. That's the best start, something that you can do. The third thing, the last one is stay consistent and don't give up. You started doing ASIO, please don't give up in one, two months. Wait, if you're working not with this camera, but with a decent professional, you will see results, but not immediately.

[00:49:08] The main authority needs time to be built. And unfortunately, no one can speed it up. So just be consistent, invest time, invest into great content, and you will for sure see the results. Great. I feel like especially the first one is really non-obvious. So I haven't heard this piece of advice anywhere yet. And the idea of leaving this footprint Hi, it's really back to your like change of the acronym SEO from search engine optimization to search everywhere optimization and just thinking about where you can leave traces of your product etc. So this is awesome. Obviously the others also arena. I told you beforehand that I was looking very much forward to this episode because I expected you to drop some serious knowledge and I feel like you fully delivered on that.

[00:50:07] so. Thanks so much for that. Thanks so much for so many insights. If people feel the same like me, either listening to this or watching this, and they want to follow you around, hear more or see more of the stuff you are putting out, what's best to follow you? Yeah, LinkedIn. I'm pretty active there. Probably not always the best response, but I'm doing my best. always to clean up my DM but yeah I'm responding to everyone. probably a bit time to wait like one day too. Yeah but please follow me there and it's nice to connect with everyone in the industry and outside of the industry as well. Awesome. So people go to LinkedIn, follow Irina, we'll put the link to her LinkedIn in the video description below, but please don't spam her DMs and only write her if you are a founder or marketing exec searching for support and otherwise value her free knowledge.

[00:51:11] she's dropping. Irina, thanks so much. Anything I will start asking this question now because I saw it in Lenny's podcast and I really liked it. Anything important we didn't talk about? Anything I forgot about? I think he covered pretty much everything, so it was kind of an intense conversation. I think everything, but I mean, if your listeners have any questions or they're missing something, they can DM me. Awesome. I'm not so sure. I'm more on the topic than if you missed something. Okay, glad to hear. that's the best feedback for a host if we covered everything. so then thanks so much. Hope to speak maybe like in a year. Maybe we'll do an update episode I already talked about that with a couple of other previous guests and then see how this whole ecosystem evolves because I think the only constant currently is actually that everything is changing all the time.

[00:52:19] so Really appreciate your time, appreciate you sharing so much insights and wish you and your clients and your team all the best for the future. Thank you, Nicholas. Likewise. Bye-bye.