

**Trademark Productions Web Talk Radio Show Transcript
Eric Enge**



Dwight Zahringer: Your alternative to ordinary radio. Welcome to another edition of the Trademark Productions SEO Web Talk Radio Show. Hi, I am Dwight Zahringer, owner and operator of Trademark Productions, a small digital boutique agency located in the outskirts of beautiful Detroit, Michigan. We've been involved in online marketing and Web development since 1993. We figured we'd talk with a couple different industry experts on a regular basis just to keep everybody up on what's happening in the world of Web development, online marketing, and optimization. We hope you enjoy our show, and we welcome your comments.

Eric Enge: Yeah.

Kelly: Oh, sorry about that. We were trying to get Dwight on the other line, but it just didn't seem to work out.

Eric Enge: Ah.

Kelly: Okay, back to the introduction here. Eric is the president of Stone Temple Consulting, a six-person SEO firm with offices in Massachusetts and California. Eric is also vice president of marketing for Moving Traffic Inc., a Web publishing company that publishes its own Websites. These sites can have many tens of thousands of pages. Eric handles all the SEO for Moving Traffic. Eric is a regular speaker at Search Industry conferences such as Searches and Strategies and Search Marketing Expo. Also, Eric is particularly known for his in-depth interviews of major players in the search industry, including dozens of people who work in senior capacities at the search engines.

Eric Enge has a lot of knowledge to offer to TM listeners. He is well known around the SEO realm, both for his Websites and understanding of SEO. He can offer our listeners a lot of insight about what works and doesn't, based on his experience. Okay, could you briefly explain to us for our listeners a little bit about your background and how you've gotten your career in SEO?

Eric Enge: Well actually, I fell into the career by accident. I had a consulting business and was doing a different kind of marketing consulting, specifically helping people do business development work for their businesses. There was a friend of mine who had a business and asked me to come in and help him, and I started helping him. Then I realized what he really needed was more traffic from search engines. So this is now back seven, eight years ago. So I went and

figured it out. Ah, well, here's what you gotta do. He ended up getting tons of additional traffic to his site, and I should say that's really what search engine optimization or SEO is really about.

Kelly: Right.

Eric Enge: Getting new customers that you don't have today from search engines. As I said, I kinda fell into it, and it became a career.

Kelly: Well, that's great. It sounds like you're doing pretty well for yourself then.

Eric Enge: Yes, indeed.

Kelly: Let's see. Can you explain a little bit about StoneTemple.com and what your role is at the company and how that got started?

Eric Enge: Yeah. So initially when I was doing search engine optimization consulting, it was just me.

Kelly: Okay.

Eric Enge: And it was that way for two or three years, but at a certain point in time, we made the decision to expand the company and brought in somebody to be my partner in running the business, and then we just started to proactively add clients and grow the business. But, actually, it's at ten people now. So we've grown since when we first talked.

Kelly: Okay, that's great. Through your years working with SEO, what were some of the most challenging moments? Also, how do you feel the industry has grown since you began and what are you looking forward to into the future of the industry?

Eric Enge: Sure. Well, I mean back in the beginning, the search engine algorithms were not very sophisticated. So the things that you needed to do to get traffic were actually quite simple. You could just put lots of keywords in your keywords meta tag, and that would work. Or you could just pump lots of words onto your webpage, and maybe even make them invisible, and the search engines would find them. If you had this keyword which was a high-volume search term, and if it appeared 100 times on your page, then you ranked very high. Probably higher than for the person where it only appeared 90 times on the page.

So it was almost a game for many people, but the search engines have gotten far more sophisticated now. They're much better at truly figuring out what websites are the ones that will be of most help to a user entering a search term.

Kelly: Okay. Sorry, we're still trying to get Dwight on the line, but he just couldn't come through. I'm sorry.

Eric Enge: Yeah, that's all right. So it's kind of interesting. One of the ways we like to talk about this now is that it's a situation where you want to really learn very, very well what the search engines want you to do from a strategic perspective.

Kelly: Right.

Eric Enge: What's their long-term goal? Then you want to execute against that very, very well, because the search engines keep doing things to improve their algorithms. One of the big areas is there are still people who try to fool the search engine.

Kelly: The black heads?

Eric Enge: Who are gaming it. We call 'em spammers.

Kelly: Uh-huh.

Eric Enge: They're getting better and better at fighting spammers. So if you do a really good job of knowing what they want and doing that well, then if they knock off the spammers, your rankings go up and up and up.

Kelly: Right. Well, what are your thoughts about all this talk that there is a huge change in Google's algorithm, possibly going into place after the holidays. What effect do you think that's gonna have on the industry? Do you think it's really going to alter everyone's rankings on Google? Or how do you see that impacting everything?

Eric Enge: Well, every time they go through an algorithm change like the one that is coming up, there's definitely an impact. More often than not, one of the big impacts is... as I said, if they do a better job at filtering out poor quality sites and placing more emphasis on good quality sites. There are a couple of other things that are kind of new in the search engine picture. One is that Google has a much greater emphasis on the speed of a Website as being an important factor in what makes a good site to show an end user.

Kelly: Right.

Eric Enge: So by which I mean if someone clicks on a link in the search results and goes to a webpage and it takes six seconds for that webpage to load, that's a poor quality experience.

Kelly: Right.

Eric Enge: So Google has made the statement that they will begin to actually use that as a ranking factor. So if your site performs really poorly, they will probably lower your ranking in their results.

Kelly: Right, and no one wants that.

Eric Enge: Right.

Kelly: Let's see. Well, there's been talk about real-time search in Google and how they just implemented that this past week, I believe. How do you feel about that, and how do you think that's gonna impact the search industry down the road?

Eric Enge: Yeah, it's interesting. The main question you have to ask yourself is what kind of things users are searching for where a real-time answer would be the desired result. If you're searching on a digital camera because you want to buy a new digital camera, you don't need to get the up-to-the-minute news on the digital camera industry, right?

Kelly: Right.

Eric Enge: We just want to know what products we can buy now and what the prices are and read reviews and things like that. However the **doctors**, of course and **news** query **where you** need to see is excellent, but there are a couple of layers to this. One of the things that Google is doing is integrating results from Twitter.

Kelly: Right.

Eric Enge: For listeners who are not familiar with that, Twitter is a social site where people do what we call micro-blogging. They write little posts that are 140 characters or less, and it's actually quite popular. It's becoming very, very popular, but not everybody is aware of Twitter. In fact, it's still a relatively small percentage of the population knows about Twitter, and the integration of Twitter in the Google search results. It's also happening with Bing and it is

going to create a tremendous amount of visibility that the company hasn't had previously. So that would be one of the interesting side effects of that.

Kelly: Okay, that sounds great. You were at PubCon recently, and you and Dwight were supposed to meet up. What, how did you feel about that conference? What do you think were the best topics discussed there? Were there any that you felt were not necessarily the best ones, but the ones that you think had the most impact?

Eric Enge: Well, I always like the various keynotes.

Kelly: Okay.

Eric Enge: Because, honestly, a lot of the conferences are targeted at people who are in much earlier stages in their SEO. That's why I speak to most of the conferences is to help teach and provide visibility, of course, to our firm in the process. With the keynotes, you always get a very different kind of industry perspective, and it's really interesting. So they had a keynote by Ben Huh, that's H-U-H, who spoke about how he built a network of a very low-cost, Web properties that is doing tremendously well, because it built a huge volume of traffic, and that was very entertaining.

It's, of course, always interesting to sit in on the latest kinds of panels. Like a discussion of Twitter and micro-blogging is pretty interesting stuff for me, but I think for most listeners who are probably not professional SEOs, there's just so much different stuff at these conferences that you can learn, and it can really help accelerate your growth in the understanding this area.

Dwight Zahringer: Eric, this is Dwight, originally the person that was supposed to talk to you on this. How are you?

Eric Enge: Excellent, hi, Dwight.

Dwight Zahringer: I am so sorry. We are in the midst of the season, as you know yourself. We do a lot of e-commerce, and I was putting out a little bit of a fire. I just want to apologize for not being able to connect right away and be on the cast with you here. Thanks for taking the time and talking to Kelly a little bit today.

Eric Enge: Absolutely.

Dwight Zahringer: It is just one of those times in the season. If I can just jump in here, and kind of getting with the dialogue, you talked a little bit about

PubCon. Overall, what was your impression? I know you just kind of digressed on it a little bit, but there was just really a ton of about Twitter. There's a couple bombshells that were dropped. Now, we have the integration of social search into our search results with Google too. What's your thoughts on some of those things as far as businesses using Twitter and really integrating that?

Eric Enge: Yeah, so I think the whole real-time search thing that's going on now with Google, Yahoo!, and Bing, in different manners, is actually quite a big event for Twitter. As I mentioned before to Kelly, it's going to create a huge amount of exposure to people who are not familiar with Twitter.

Dwight Zahringer: Right.

Eric Enge: For those in the industry who know Twitter, and it's got a blooming audience. It's still not, by any means mainstream. The integration of Twitter into the search results has potential to make it much more mainstream.

Dwight Zahringer: There was some talk I had with some different people. We did a couple of interviews while we were out there, but one of them was with **Dixon** Jones of Majestic. One of the things that we kind of speculated on a little bit, is this possible integration of Twitter results coming back into search. So, those providing a little bit of some organic value to a potential company that's pretty active on some of those things and being repeated over on other sites. Is this maybe a talk or a speculation that there could be something in the works with Google in the near future here?

Eric Enge: I'm sorry, what kind of thing are you alluding to that might be in the works?

Dwight Zahringer: Well, that there might be a purchase or a partnership that's a little bit more solidified between Google and Twitter.

Eric Enge: Yeah, that's an excellent question. Of course, it would be just pure speculation on my part. To me, I think it could make sense. Again, I don't think that Twitter is mainstream yet, and Google may wanna wait for it to get a little further along and prove out its business models before it takes the step, or it just may be that Twitter is setting the price tag too high.

Dwight Zahringer: Sure, sure.

Eric Enge: At this point.

Dwight Zahringer: I think the –

Eric Enge: I think that's how I look at that. I mean I think that the integration into the search results may cause Twitter to become mainstream, and that's definitely a really big event.

Dwight Zahringer: To that point there, too, was another thing that **echoed** from previous PubCons, SMXs, and SESes from years ago. Is this a part of providing users with search results that are relative or search results that are fresh and new and not junking them up with a lot of nonsense? That was a big thing for Mr. **Cutts** as far as paid links and providing what users want as quickly as possible to solidify their engines. Could this real-time search and social search potentially damage some of those components?

Eric Enge: In terms of making it less relevant? If it does make it less relevant, then it won't be in there for very long.

Dwight Zahringer: Right.

Eric Enge: Because relevance is what search engines get paid for. I mean there are other mechanics or rather relevance drives their ability to make money is probably a better way to put it.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah, exactly.

Eric Enge: That's not something they're going to put at risk for really anything. Search yields right now, the single best way for nearly any business to get new customers they currently don't have. People talk about like how much traffic they get from Twitter. For example, they'll say, "Yeah, I'm getting hundreds of visitors a day." Well, there aren't many businesses where you can make a lot of money getting hundreds of visitors a day.

Dwight Zahringer: Right.

Eric Enge: But if this acts as the catalyst to make it mainstream, then I think you have a wholly different sort of things. A wholly different story to talk about. I think the other main thing that was talked about at PubCon was **Matt Cutts'** statement that Google was likely to begin using the performance of your Website as a ranking factor in the coming year. As I explained to Kelly earlier, if your Web page takes six seconds to load, that's a crappy user experience, and Google will likely lower your rankings when they see that.

Dwight Zahringer: Well, let's dissect that a little bit for them. Again, our podcast listeners are from all over the gamut. So there is small businesses. Let's look at a little bit more towards the guys that aren't the Fortune 1000, Fortune 500 type of a client. Let's look at some of the smaller people that maybe have a good establishment or are doing a couple of million unique visitors. What are some of the things they need to be concerned about based off of some of Matt Cutts' speculations of Google algorithmic change coming up this year?

Eric Enge: Yeah, so I think one thing you wanna do is make sure you're not skimping on your hosting environment, the place where you would host your Website. I mean you certainly can get decent Web hosting for ten bucks a month or even less, but you're probably on a shared server. Your performance may be uneven, and I think it's a strong disincentive for that now. It's short money at the end of the day once you've gotten to the point where you have a few million visitors a year.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah, ten bucks versus fifty bucks a month for a dedicated box that you're the sole proprietor on that. You have all those resources and the processor and all available to you at any given time. So quick access to this quick load time.

Eric Enge: Correct, and the other thing you wanna look at are content management systems out there. They have been used by many well-meaning businesses, they just offer a really slow performance. I think you want to test and evaluate the speed which your Web pages load.

Dwight Zahringer: Now, we are talking .

Eric Enge: There are tools out there that allow you to do that, although I apologize. I don't remember any particular one off the top of my head at the moment. Still you can run some tests, to see how it does, and then you can just do the human thing, and do it as a human. Go there and say, "Uh-oh, this is kind of slow. Oh, my gosh." If you get frustrated when your Web page is loaded, imagine your potential customers.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah, absolutely.

Eric Enge: Right?

Dwight Zahringer: So maybe more of, just to throw a couple out there, speculative, but maybe more in the rooms of Joomla. A content management system like that, something more open source?

Eric Enge: Yes, but Joomla is actually pretty good.

Dwight Zahringer: Okay.

Eric Enge: And Drupal is pretty good. For people who want to use a blog-based platform, WordPress is pretty good. They all can be. They all require some tweaking and configuration to get them to be SEO-friendly, but it can be done with all of them, which is the good news.

Dwight Zahringer: Okay.

Eric Enge: There are other systems which don't work nearly as well.

Dwight Zahringer: All right. So we talked about performance of your hosting environment, accessibility from that, and then we talked about just accessibility of the content management system, the ability of that to be crawled, the ability of that to serve up dynamically the content a user's looking for. What were some of the other topics let's go maybe two more.

Eric Enge: Well, I think that the big underlying message for me in all this, which is something that it wasn't necessarily new to PubCon. Is that Matt Cutts has been saying for years, but it's becoming more and more appreciated and understood by the webmaster community at large, and that is that your two main jobs as a publisher is to create great content and promote it well. It sounds very trite, but Google and the other search engines, and as sure as the sun comes up most days, is just pressing continually towards forcing you into that goal.

The games and the tricks start to disappear. It's things that work, and you have to be focused on those two main missions. That doesn't mean that you don't have a bunch of things that you need to do to be search engine friendly. You do, but that's sort of a different context than making it easy for the crawler to crawl your Website. It's different than figuring out how to fool the search engine into giving you a ranking you don't deserve.

Dwight Zahringer: I'm going for a number of things, but especially for SEO as a whole, or really just marketing your Website. Is the more ways that

you try to be dishonest, and try to be manipulative, sooner or later, that's gonna catch up with you.

Eric Enge: Yeah, that's right. Then you have to get to sort of the next layer, the marketing your Website from a search engine perspective. Pretty much means getting people to link to it, and that's gonna broaden. That will broaden to include social media-type signals. It probably already does, to some degree. Like how many times you're mentioned on Twitter or Facebook or whatever, but at the end of the day, people aren't going to link to you or talk about you in Twitter or on Facebook or elsewhere if you have a naked commercial site, and that's all it offers. You can go and buy a product, but there's nothing wrong with that kind of Website. It's just not one that a lot of people are going to link to.

Dwight Zahringer: Right.

Eric Enge: So you have to understand the importance of implementing quality, non-commercial content as a basic component of marketing any Website today.

Dwight Zahringer: Right, right. What was your topic? You were speaking on?

Eric Enge: Actually, I did not end up speaking at this PubCon.

Dwight Zahringer: Oh, okay, I apologize. I know that that one day we were trying to connect, it was in between sessions, and then you were flying out. It's just a crazy time meeting a lot of people. Everybody tries to get together and have a little fun, relax a little bit, and get some business done.

Eric Enge: Yes, indeed.

Dwight Zahringer: Talk about Bing. Recently, I think it was in *Search Marketing Standard*, forgive me for the magazine name. You were in there, interviewed about Bing and some of the pros and cons of using it. Share a little bit of that with us.

Eric Enge: Sure. So I think that what Microsoft is trying to do is basically set a direction with Bing. It's rightly focused on a goal of helping users for the things that they do most, and one of those big things is make decisions. So that's why they are starting to call themselves a decision engine, and I think that's a great direction to proceed in. They're going to be a little more sensitive to certain kinds of signals than Google. Such as in the anchor text of links to your site or the depth of content on your site, but they weigh more heavily

than Google does, for example. That's fine, and I think that's workable, but you can, of course, implement optimization efforts targeted at those factors. Just want to be careful that you're not doing things which would effectively be at the expense of your Google traffic.

Dwight Zahringer: Right, because I'm sure in a lot of peoples' analytics and stats, like our customers, Google is still really the main supplier of traffic to the site. It wasn't until the second quarter of the year that Bing started to make a dent in a lot of peoples' refers. I'm sure that's probably similar for yours, and Bing is definitely trailing Yahoo! and Google in helping to bring referral traffic in. They spend a ton of money on doing so, in doing that. Moving forward with this here, it seems that the Yahoo! and Bing partnership deal has been firmed up this month. So what about as far as that partnership, and what's that gonna play for us as SEOs and agency people, but also for our customers in the near future?

Eric Enge: Right, well, assuming that everything ripples through the full implementation, it makes Bing a much more significant player. It gets their total market share north of 20 percent.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah.

Eric Enge: Maybe in the 25 percent range, and that's a big and very good step. There's sort of a lot of drama in that.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah.

Eric Enge: One of the big points of drama is the fact that Yahoo! basically made a statement. Which they had actually made in other ways before, but this kind of confirmed it. That they're not going to be search engine innovators. They're not gonna try to compete in the search game. It's a fascinating statement because it's the hugest new market probably in history.

Dwight Zahringer: For them to make a statement to say that, "We tried to compete in this. We were innovators in the beginning, even before Google. We've ran our course, and it's time for us to peter out."

Eric Enge: Right, well, that **team** was really quite fascinating. At the end of the day, I think they saw that they were not in a in the long-term position, to compete in that game. So they probably made a very smart business decision. Can't forget that Yahoo! has the largest reach across the Web of anybody. They're No. 1, their Web

properties. So they have a way to own, operate, and grow a business if they sort of stick to their knitting, as it were.

Dwight Zahringer: Right.

Eric Enge: Then of course, for Bing, in getting access to Yahoo!'s search and volume, it gives them a much more critical mass from an advertising perspective. They have needed to offer a more compelling proposition to advertisers, and the thing that advertisers care about most is the number of quality people they get exposed to.

Dwight Zahringer: Right.

Eric Enge: So that goes up by 3X, basically, and it's a significant step forward for them.

Dwight Zahringer: Well, rounding this up here, because I don't want to kill up the rest of your day here. If you could offer maybe a couple tips for consumers, for smaller independent owners, affiliates, and people out there managing sites, that they need to take in consideration for the first quarter of the coming year, post-holiday season. What would be some of those be for as far as the Website work, maintaining their rankings, and being competitive?

Eric Enge: Yeah, so I think there's a few things that I'd say. One is, SEO is a very complicated area, and you can get completely lost in it and spends hundreds of hours and get led down all kinds of different paths.

Dwight Zahringer: And how.

Eric Enge: However, for a small businessperson who has a small number of hours a month to think about SEO, you want to get focused on very basic things. One is that you do want try to figure it out. Perhaps get advice if you need it on how to use a search engine-friendly tool to build your site. Whether it's a content management system or something somewhat similar or simpler, rather. It is worth going out and seeking that kind of advice, because if you start with the wrong platform it's sort of game over. You don't even get to play, and that doesn't have to be that intense or lengthy an investment of time if you approach it in the right way and reach out early on. Fixing it later will be extremely expensive, because you may have to throw out your Website and start over. You don't want to do that. You want to address that upfront, and that's very, very important.

Dwight Zahringer: That is an important point, if I could just elaborate on that with you there, too. This is something we call in our office the resentment sale where you have someone that comes to you. They could be small, or they could be of very significance in regards to who they are as a company and their budget they have to spend. Being actually steered down the wrong direction and going through this process a number of times. I'm sure over at Stone Temple, you've had customers come to you that have spent tens of thousands of dollars a few times over the past couple years going through vendors and people to help them with their online presence. You bring up a very, very good point there. It's really important, now more so, for any business to really take the time, analyze, and determine which path they're gonna be led down, and if it's gonna be the best for them moneywise and long-term.

Eric Enge: Yeah, absolutely.

Dwight Zahringer: As far as Stone Temple, how are you guys doing over there, what are your plans for the new year, and anything good going on the first into the second quarter this year?

Eric Enge: Well, we're expanding, and business has been going well. Actually, we were fortunate to grow pretty significantly during the course of 2009, and you got to know there aren't a lot of people who can say that.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah, that's good.

Eric Enge: That's been good for us, of course. So now we grew from six people on staff to ten, and have more and more clients that we're handling, including two companies in the Fortune 25.

Dwight Zahringer: That's nice.

Eric Enge: So some pretty good-sized ones along the way.

Dwight Zahringer: I guess that's also testament to that. People that are out there and considering looking for an agency, firm, or people to handle your online presence and manage that with software. With content and optimization, and in online spending. It's no longer the age of large agency and the large prices. Small, very tight managed, and people that are really into the industry can really help to take you to the next level, manage those things.

Eric Enge: That's right, and the large traditional agencies certainly are trying to get into this game. I'm sure they'll work at different stages. This is kind of natural of development and progress, but the reality is you want to make sure that when you're dealing with somebody, you're getting real SEO expertise. It's all too easy to read ten blog posts and start repeating those phrases you heard and sound smart to someone that's uninitiated. Most people who say they offer SEO services, in fact are good people, and they have things to offer. Unfortunately, there's the other crowd out there, which is not really legitimately representing themselves as experts in this area.

Dwight Zahringer: Riding the bandwagon and trying to make a buck, and that's unfortunately something that us professionals in the industry have to continue to fight against to reestablish our names and protect it for what it is.

Eric Enge: Yeah.

Dwight Zahringer: Eric, I want to thank you very much for taking the time out, finally. We've rescheduled this conference quite a few times. Where are you speaking at next?

Eric Enge: Actually, I don't remember the order of conferences, so there's SES New York, Search Engine Strategies New York. There's Search Marketing Expo West, and then there's PubCon South.

Dwight Zahringer: I think it's –

Eric Enge: Those are all coming up in the spring. I may also be speaking at the Web 2.0 Conference somewhere in there. So there's a few coming up.

Dwight Zahringer: Perfect, perfect. Well, again, thank you very much for your time. Make sure you guys check him out online, StoneTemple.com. Thank you very much, and have a happy holiday.

Eric Enge: You, too, Dwight. You, too, Kelly.

Dwight Zahringer: All right, bye-bye.

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