

**Trademark Productions Web Talk Radio Show Transcript
Aaron Wall**



Dwight Zahringer: Welcome to another addition of the Trademark Production's SEO WebTalk Radio Show. Hi, I'm 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 with 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 to date with what's happening in the world of web development, online marketing, and optimization. We hope you enjoy our show, and we welcome your comments.

Hi, thank you for listening to another edition of the Trademark Production's SEO WebTalk Radio Show. I'm Dwight Zahringer, Founder and President of Trademark Productions, and each week, we like to do a podcast with local, national, and international industry leaders on the topics of Search Engine Optimization (SEO), marketing your business, your company, your website, and your products online. Today, I am graced to be speaking with one of the forefathers of our industry; one of the people that developed a great manual. Back in 2002, 2003, I'm sure he's going to correct me if I'm wrong, that really helped us guide our agency and go beyond into other aspects of SEO for our clients. It was also something where I learned a lot about the importance of link building that helped me to start up our company LinkXL that we just got rid of, that really specialized in building links online. So without further adieu, we have Aaron Wall, who is the CEO, owner of the website SEOBook.com. Aaron, thank you for joining us today.

Aaron Wall: Thanks for having me; it's a pleasure to be out.

Dwight Zahringer: Great, great. So for those of you who aren't aware of who Aaron is, he's a forefather in the industry. He wrote the book, SEOBook.com. You're probably going to realize and understand the importance of keywords and the relevancy of these things, and how these play into you being ranked online. He has a ton of knowledge to offer to all of our listeners in this podcast, so I suggest you download this one, and play it back a couple different times. I know he's going to be giving a lot of different tips and strategies and different things away on this that are going to be invaluable, and he has a lot of great things he can offer you in the downstream as well. He's been all over the place. He's a speaker; he's definitely one that ruffles some feathers out there as well.

He's been featured on a number of different publications on and offline, CNN, MSNBC, USA Today, SeoMaz, personal great friend and probably vacationer buddy of Matt Cutts, who's with Google. It's just a pleasure, it really is. So let's just get this started. Tell us a little bit about how you got involved in SEO. What made you really gravitate to write the book on it? What was really the seeds that started all this?

Aaron Wall: So, my first website wasn't a very good website, and I had no money to market it on, so I sort of fell into SEO that way. Then I saw a few affiliate programs, like, "You know, you could probably make money with this."

Dwight Zahringer: About what year was that, when you got that started?

Aaron Wall: 2003.

Dwight Zahringer: 2003, okay.

Aaron Wall: So, by the end of 2003, that's when Google did the Florida update, and I wrote an article about it that became really popular, and I went from not being very well known, to having lots of demands overnight. But I did have a ton of – I had sold baseball cards in high school, at flea markets and baseball card shows and stuff like that, but outside of that, I was still pretty new to marketing and stuff, because I was in the military for awhile after high school. So, in 2003, I started ranking well, and then I wrote that article, and went from being obscure to pretty popular. It was kind of overwhelming.

Dwight Zahringer: Now your site was about selling baseball cards online?

Aaron Wall: No, that was the only other marketing experience I had before I really got into that field stuff.

Dwight Zahringer: What was the site you started?

Aaron Wall: Eh, it's kind of goofy. I'd rather not mention.

Dwight Zahringer: That's not a problem. So instantly overnight, you became a known expert on the Google Florida update. I'm assuming that because of the Florida update, it has some adverse changes to your rankings.

Aaron Wall: Yeah, the thing that was interesting about it was because I wrote that article that got really popular, got well referenced, and linked from all over, so that actually made the SEO site rank really well.

Dwight Zahringer: Sure, sure. So for our listeners who are trying to get more involved and integrate their SEO – and Aaron, for myself, it’s really hard for a lot of our clients and the listeners as well, the feedback we get. SEO is such an acronym now that people throw out there, it’s so easy to jump on, so being a web developer, being an SEO, it’s really convoluted from my point of view, which I really try to be descriptive, and try to clean up and tell my listeners about this, and some of our clients. So now, from an SEO point of view, what Aaron just said is very important to hone in on. He, all of a sudden, got a ton of links for writing a great piece of content.

Aaron Wall: Right, and the other thing I did that was a bit more clever than I probably appreciated even then, is I had the publicity of kind of being sort of well known for a couple days, what I did was I helped further promote that, and promote myself by going around to other webmasters. There’s a lot of creative ways you can get links. One thing I did way back when is I used a closed citation tool, like we have a tool called Hubfinder, it’s part of our server. Some other companies have some other tools that do the same sort of stuff. The idea with tool is you look at sites that are linking to multiple competing sites, and then you try to figure out a way you can get a link from some of those sites. So let’s say you’re in the SEO industry, or let’s say you’re in the knitting industry. What you can do is take a list of 10 or 20 competitors or so, put them into a tool, find out which common back links they have, and then look at those pages, and see if there’s a way you can contact those webmasters, and get on them. And then there’s kind of, derivative ideas based off that. So, for example, let’s say if you know someone else’s website moved location, so then you can look for people that are linking at that site, plus other sites in the industry, and you can email some of those other webmasters, and say, “Hey, just like Fred’s site moved, here’s a couple other decent SEO sites you might consider listing.” Something like that. Sent out emails like that back then, and then I got a bunch of links too, in addition to all the other sites that were happening. So the site went from kind of obscure to pretty well established, in like a month, maybe.

Dwight Zahringer: Sure. Well, that’s another point, for all the listeners who have their pen and paper out, that is another thing. He has a tool which we’re going to talk about as well. There are lots of things to cover here, because Aaron is the dynamic individual. He has so much great stuff going on. But that Hubfinder, that’s another way to do some analyzation, some deep analyzation; a big asset of SEOs and people doing optimization to find links back to your site. And you’re going to notice during this conversation that we’re going to

keep gravitating back to one of the backbones of SEO, which is link building, and how you build those links. There's numerous different ways, and we're probably going to get into some of those as well. Recently, you did a blog post, you talked to Shoemoney. We've talked to him before as well, and one of the things is his journey going through the search industry all-stars, which you're definitely a part of. Talking about the journey; that it's not that easy. A lot of people that are our listeners, even some of our clients that are individuals, have started off from the cuffs, being in the trenches, essentially themselves – freelancers. It's definitely a hard journey; it can be easier in a lot of ways. It's definitely a lot of knowledge and re-education. But one of the things you talked about with Schumoney is it is just not easy to get to the top, and where really is the top. You've definitely changed your business model radically over the past two years, from when SEOBook came – now you originally got that book completed probably in early 2004, right?

Aaron Wall:

Yep, that's when it was – yeah, because after I got that popularity, and saw the wave of popularity come in – it was actually for Christmas of 2003, I gave away the very first version of it, and got feedback on it, and then I improved it, formatting, made it thicker, and then over the years it kept getting thicker and thicker as SEO became more complex. But, I gave it away for Christmas, and then for the following week or something. Then I started selling it, sometime, I think, late February.

Dwight Zahringer:

Now, I have a small confession to make, that I remember very, very vividly, or specifically, back in 2004. It was around March, but I did come across your book. At that time, I was working on building up a charity I had founded, and one of the things that you did, was you gave away to educational facilities, like universities, schools, or non-profits, your book for free. So while I have a non-profit, but I also have an agency, and I do SEO, and I do development as a primary source of income for myself, I kind of swindled one of those books away from you for free. But in doing so, here's another great lesson that our listeners can take note of – that by giving something of value away, that you actually had a – what were you selling it for at that time?

Aaron Wall:

Not that much when it was first brand new, I think \$40.00.

Dwight Zahringer:

Yeah, 40 bucks, and I'm sure that it went up just under 100 bucks eventually before you actually ended up just giving it away to everybody.

Aaron Wall: I don't just give it away to everyone still, because I feel that if I did that, there's actually a number of – I feel that would frustrate some of the old people who paid for it. Also, a couple other things are that since it's kind of long and complex, and includes a lot of intro, I thought that if I gave away that much information in one chunk, a lot of people go, "Oh, this is overwhelming," because they don't want to get into it. Because people tend to not respect information that's free, in most cases, unless maybe they got a free deal on it and it's supposed to be paid. But even then, a lot of people, if you put the price as free on something, then people want to say, "Okay, well now I'm going to email him, and he's going to be my free consultant too."

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah, it dilutes the value of what knowledge you really have earned. You've spent a lot of time and a lot of money in your time learning this stuff, by all means.

Aaron Wall: Yeah, that's the hard part. That's one of the warnings. Yes, it is good to give stuff away to get links. However, at some point it also gets tough, because what happens is if you're kind of obscure and new, you can try giving stuff away, helping people out and all this until you start building up a certain amount of momentum, and then at some point, you got to start pulling back on it, because otherwise you're going to be overwhelmed, because there's only 24 hours in a day.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah, absolutely. You can't monetize yourself too well there. But what I was getting to was that you gave away an item of value for free, and I remember in doing so, I did talk up that book because I was so well impressed by that. I probably still have that book lying around that has side notes and highlighter all over the place, and the pages are all wrinkled and curled up on the edges, but I know that I did post out on different forums, if not actually gave you some links myself. So that's another tip to our listeners: If you gave away something that actually has value that people are going to want and they're going to utilize, chances are you're going to be getting a lot of links in doing that, and that's a great component to SEO as well.

Aaron Wall: And another thing along those regards is some people are worried about when they're brand new and obscure. They're worried about people stealing their stuff, and all that. And when you're new, if people do steal your stuff, it's actually beneficial because retail only matters if you have an audience and it is costing you to sell it. If you're selling information or a software program, and other people are using it, some of those people may mention it at some

spots. I've had people tell me they downloaded my e-book off torrent websites, and liked it so much they ended up buying a copy of it. It's rare that people do that, but the thing is if you're new and obscure, any additional distribution channel you get off to start, that's a good one. But then over time, as you get more well known and you develop a bit of a brand, people will try to kind of leech off that brand, so eventually it makes sense to pull back and change your model.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah, absolutely. And that's something we can all appreciate. Going back to the interview with Shoemoney. You guys have a long-term history, but also, the other thing too is definitely similar paths down separate parallels. Tell us a little bit about your story that you experienced, and the obstacles similar to what you had talked about with Jeremy. How did it really kind of make you who you are today? How did you overcome those, and what's your plan for success that's given you so much great recognition? Because again, there's a lot of great things that we know about you, and that a lot of our listeners do about you and Shoe, but there's a lot of bad things that have happened. There has been a lot of trials and tribulations, and there's been a lot of hard times to achieve this.

Aaron Wall: Yeah. I think any time you want to do something. Before I got started in that field, I was actually in the military, and I didn't like it that much, so that was kind of a bit of not liking that experience too much was what my first website was about.

Dwight Zahringer: Sure, I've read that.

Aaron Wall: Yeah, so some of the other stuff is one time someone cold-called me offering me some scammy stuff. It annoyed me that they called me, and I thought, "Why would these guys need to cold call me to get those leads?" Because in my mind, if you're doing SEO, and not necessarily selling something, but you're flat-out selling SEO services, if you're cold calling for leads, you probably don't know what you're doing. There are so many other ways to market yourself if you understand direct marketing and you're good at SEO. So I wrote a post about that, and what happened is a lot of people commented on that post about how that firm, how they hired that firm and they ripped them off.

Dwight Zahringer: Oh, wait a minute, is that TP?

Aaron Wall: Yeah, that's Traffic Power.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah. Yes, okay.

Aaron Wall: And other stuff, you have to be willing to be kind of somewhere in the gray area. Did you ask other people to find rules guide you completely? The goal of a lot of rule-sets and guidelines of suggestions are to tilt the playing field of the person who makes the rules.

Dwight Zahringer: Sounds like you're going somewhere.

Aaron Wall: Yeah, so like with paper click stuff, a lot of people who were established said, "Well, it's scammy if you bid on anyone else's name or anyone else's brand," but I did that for a little while, and when I did that and someone mentioned that, they flamed me, and there was a forum thread about it, and while that forum thread with flames was going on, my sales were double normal, and that lasted for a week long. Also, in general with SEO, when you're new, you just got to try to get momentum any way you can. I wouldn't suggest doing the spamming of 5,000 blogs, or submit your site to 5,000 web directories. Nothing like that. But some of the other techniques, submitting to some of the better directories or trying to interview people. The goal is not to find one route to pass, but to try 20 or 30 different things, and hopefully five of them stick. And each additional thing you do makes your profile that much harder to compete with, and helps you pick up momentum that much quicker.

Dwight Zahringer: So in the terms of any other industry or profession, it's really trying out a lot of different tactics or strategies, and then refining that to see what's going to give you the best return on investment. And what you're saying is maybe even dip your feet in some waters that are uncharted, or maybe dip a toe to see if you may be in a bad neighborhood or something, that may be the best.

Aaron Wall: Yeah, and I'm not saying that a person has to spam me, but they can certainly operate in the gray region somewhere. And there's a lot of stuff where if you listen to the advice that's given – I think if you listen to the search engine guidelines too strictly, you can have a view of marketing that's so puritanical, it never gains any momentum. It applies at every level. So, for example, when I got my five seconds of fame, I turned it into five minutes by trying to get more links and leverage that exposure. And whenever you have exposure of any type, you have to keep thinking about how can I refine this, grow this, get this more exposure. Because the thing is, if something's the five seconds of fame, if you just kind of bask in the glory of it and do anything with it, then wait a couple

months out and it'll show that you only had five seconds of fame. But if you can try to push it a bit harder and build up more links while something is already spreading and you help push it hard – you're emailing your friends, asking if they know anyone that can mention it, the more you can involve getting a network of people trying to push it, the better it's going to be in the long run, because three months later, those links are still going to be there, and the choice if you want to get five or ten links, or if you want 500 or 5,000.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah. So, you know, just coming back to it, I want to talk about something as far as distinguishing white, gray, and black. Because some of our listeners may be very aware of this, and know this terminology, they do not know the specifics of it. So I'm going to have you identify those and define those. But I have also read a little bit about the history about how you came about in regards to this, and I think a lot of that information is probably still out there available for people to read. But it's not always been champagne and roses for you. There have been times where it's been a bit of a financial crisis, and you've really pulled yourself out of there. So for a lot of us in this industry, and for people in general, in business, definitely success stories come out of you.

Aaron Wall: Yeah, I think a lot of people kind of get in a bad situation, and you try to figure your way out. When I started I didn't have a family. I had a mom, of course, but I didn't have a wife and kids, so if I wanted to spend 18 hours a day running and participating online and figuring things out, there was time to do that. And to be fair, I got a job when I first started for awhile to pay the bills. So a lot of people think sometimes you get one hundred bucks a month online, and then you quit your job. Well, I actually did that, but part of what allowed me to do that was that I had built up a lot of social capital, and I wasn't just singularly focused on trying to build cash flow.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah. There was a lot of sacrifice involved too.

Aaron Wall: Yeah, if you think about any sort of business, rarely do you get any sort of sustained momentum, unless you really put effort in for awhile, and the easiest way – if you ever have a lot of money, you can leverage capital to buy a nice domain name or buy an existing site, but if you don't have a lot of capital, then how you catch up is putting in more time than the next guy. The good thing is though, after you put a lot of effort in and things start working out, is every additional piece of marketing you do, even if it only just pays for itself, it doesn't produce a profit, but it just becomes self-

sustaining. Each additional item you do is that much more barriered entry between you and anyone new to your market. It sucks to start, when you have to work your ass off, but after awhile that's like, "Hey, I know I worked hard for a long time, so this should last for awhile."

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah, definitely. So let's go back to what I was just pointing out. You mentioned in there for some of our listeners to point out, this is another pen to paper item, but talking about white, gray, and black. And in the SEO industry, we've defined different kinds of tactics that you may do online, and everybody has a little different of a definition of them, but I think it would be good to ask you to define, just really quickly, what each of those are, and what some examples are.

Aaron Wall: Okay. So first, disclaim that, a lot of what you can get away with, in terms of how big you are and how well known you are. I read a great post a couple years ago, I think he had said, the title was "Why Big Brand is the New Black Hat," and basically what it lists was a bunch of information and if you read, there's like some leaked guidelines, some leaked remote quality guidelines that have leaked from Google into the hands of some SEOs that you may know, and when you read those sorts of things, you can see how a lot of stuff is open to interpretation, a lot of things can look very similar, like a lot of stamps techniques versus good techniques that are considered clean, and a lot of it is who's doing it. So if say, let me think of a few companies here –

Dwight Zahringer: Let's talk about Coke or let's talk about Macy's.

Aaron Wall: Okay. So, if Macy's buys out a competing website, and then –

Dwight Zahringer: Oh wait, let's use Circuit City. Yeah, let's use that one. That's a great example, because that will also talk about the white, gray, and black, but then we can also talk about the value that's also an SEO strategy that you actually posted about very quickly after the bankruptcy and acquisition and dissolution of their assets.

Aaron Wall: Yeah, so Circuit City went bankrupt, and then the website was bought for something like 14 million. All you'd have to do is slap any old website on there. After you get the website up, you would probably produce that much sales per month at least, just based on the old links and the authority of the website. So it's a big brand that's sometimes seen as fine, whereas if you buy a domain for its links and then you redirect it into another site, there might be risks associated with it. So everything's relative to the market you're in.

If you're in casinos or doing some porn or something like that, maybe almost all the competing sites are using heavy reciprocal links and buying links. But maybe in other markets, there are a lot of organic markets, like people linking to you because they like your content or you offer some free tools. And you're only really competing with people in your market, so you only have to be more than the other people in your market, so if you have a wad of organic marketing, where you're getting a lot of good mentions, and people like you and trust your brand, well then the risks are kind of a bit less, because when you're evaluated, you're not evaluated based on having three spammy links. They evaluate kind of the whole profile.

Dwight Zahringer: So again, let's go back to a couple key terms. And again, listeners, I can't extend to you enough of, Aaron probably charges \$500.00 an hour for consulting, and we're getting an hour of it here for free. So really take notes of some of these things. But a large brand is getting so much saturation out there online. This is a common question you get a lot too, Aaron, as we do, is, "How does SEO work? Can I just do a couple of these things?" So as people start to become educated, it fuels their questions with their education, but they don't understand it deep enough to maybe understand the psychology and the dynamics of it. So if we take a big brand like Circuit City, pre-bankruptcy, they had so much saturation in traditional media, online media, consumer reviews, and third party sites. They built up their link popularity in a very, very large fashion, and if they were to do something that were adverse or be considered gray or black, which is going to be very spammy and a big no no in Google's eyes, it wouldn't be looked on as such a hard effort, because they have too much of the back links from all these other types of authorities that's giving the value and off-setting.. Does that sound right?

Aaron Wall: Yeah, and if you do something that's super – even if they do something really black, I think it was BMW 3 or 4 years ago.

Dwight Zahringer: That was in Germany, right?

Aaron Wall: Yeah, they got some really super spammy stuff, and they were out of the search index for like 24 hours, and then they were ranked again, just where they were before the spamming. So they had all the benefit of spamming for like three or four years, and then boom, in one day, they lost only one day of traffic, and then boom, they were right back where they were. So they gained three or four years of benefits, and they only had one day of downtime.

Dwight Zahringer: Well, they also made themselves a case study, which, that would be something that would be a very, very smart, controlled tactic of a large corporation, because here we are bringing it up three, four years later, of what they did that was really a pivoting point in SEO history, and they're getting a lot of benefit, and that brand name is being re-mentioned again and again and again, probably in a ton of links, to posts in regard to things like that, if not back at their original site.

Aaron Wall: Right, and the thing is, you only get in trouble like that if it's mentioned publicly, and it's really overt. There's lots of ways to do things that's less overt, like showing them gray versus black. So black would be like if you put a huge block of 300 misspelled words in the footer of your page, that would be kind of spammy and be black hat.

Dwight Zahringer: That's what we call so 2003.

Aaron Wall: But at the same time, if you look at about.com, they'll have pages on their site where they're like, "Did you mean?" And then they offer, "Did you mean," and then they list the right word, and then they list common misspellings, and then they're like, "Hey, these are common misspellings of that word," and it kind of looks sort of legit, and then a couple different brands, totally legit. So that's gray, not black.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah, because that's basically, they're trying to provide because of their backbone of Internet clout and who they are and their longtime reputation they have online, they're trying to offer some useful tools in the eyes of someone like Google, that may want to look at that and say, "Are they really trying to keyword pack?" But in essence they're utilizing it in a very gray fashion, providing very elect anchor text, going into those internal pages and suggestive terms, trying to bleed in a lot of potential value.

Aaron Wall: And there's a lot of different ways to achieve the same goal in SEO. So for example, let's say you buy a bunch of high-paid links that all say credit cards and point them at your site. That will probably seem pretty easily, be deemed as pretty spammy. Especially if you have a new site, and it's an affiliate site. Well, what if you bought a domain name that kind of matched the topic, say creditcards.com, and built off of it? Well, then when you get your links to your site, they look more natural, and then maybe instead of needing to get those high links, you can get links with maybe average to mid quality, or low quality, and they can still add up to something. So that way, if you're linking your site using a

keyword and that keyword is not in your domain name, and you're really aggressive with buying links for it, it can look really spammy. But if that keyword is your site's name, then it doesn't look as spammy.

Dwight Zahringer: For the friends in our industry, you'll notice that Aaron is just intuitively talking in a general fashion, where I'm going to try to pull back and digress about this far, some of the tips he is pointing out, just because it's so natural of him to do so; keywords being very, very important ones. But one of the most important parts too, because we're going to talk about a small value set before we let you go too, is maybe your top ten tips. But if you can get a keyword in your domain name, that's high, high relevance, it's pretty good dominance, is that correct?

Aaron Wall: Yeah, and it looks good in the search results, and can deliver high click-through rates.

Dwight Zahringer: There's just a lot of good to it, it's just something you definitely want to have. So that's definitely one of the tips there. Aaron, SEOBook and your site – great site, great brand. He definitely has put something together here. I want to touch on a couple points here, if our listeners are really looking to get SEO integrated in their business, which so many are now, depending on if you're small local business and you may be medium size enterprise, multiple locations, corporate, if you're really looking to integrate this, a great page on his site, this is all free information, by the way, is the website credibility page. Their errand really outlines what every SEO you should be talking to uses as a basis of how to integrate optimization into your business, and how it has to become part of your marketing tool sets. So I definitely suggest you all go out there and read his page on website credibility, because he lists it out there in very plain English. Like Crayola crayons, it's just that simple. Aaron, you've got a couple other websites that you run right now. What are those?

Aaron Wall: I don't always say all of the sites we run.

Dwight Zahringer: Maybe just ones you want to tell people about.

Aaron Wall: Yeah, my wife runs one – so here's the problem, going back to who owns the website, if you're known, if you're branded as, "Hey, I'm one of the top SEOs in the world," the people at Google are like, "Oh, this is owned by a damn spammer," because to them there's not much of a difference between the two words. Publicly, they'll pretend there's a difference such that people trust them

enough to give them information, and people trust them enough to follow what they say, but generally, in a lot of ways, they view SEO and spam as being the same thing. So one example of that is one website that I used to have an ownership stake in, Yahoo gave it an extra directory listing in the Yahoo directory – excuse me, I was thinking of another one. Microsoft, back then, it was MSN Search. They put our website as a shortcut above the organic search results, so it's like the lead resource for the keyword in the topic, and then a person at Google told me they thought the site was spammy, based on its marketing. But my point is, the clear market-leading site, as determined by an unaffiliated third party, is seen as spam based on who owns it. So that's why I'm not like, "Oh, here's my site list."

Dwight Zahringer: Okay. We'll skip over that one, that's quite okay. So if you want to find out the other things that Aaron is doing online. What are some of the biggest trends and changes we're seeing? Now you were part of Rand Fishkin's SEO Survey this summer, and one of the things that I had appreciated seeing in there that you had, as part of your votes and your feedback amongst others, was the value of back links still being very strong, and organically ranking a site. It's way up there at the top.

Aaron Wall: Yeah.

Dwight Zahringer: What are some other trends you're seeing in optimization?

Aaron Wall: I don't think that's a change, I think back links have always been way up there.

Dwight Zahringer: Oh, absolutely, but I'm saying that it hasn't changed still. With the whole paid linking debate, links are still the backbone. It's still the nebulous black hole that Google cannot cover up.

Aaron Wall: Right, so, I mean the other trends are, you see a lot of consolidation markets right now. Lots of financial bloggers, or they bought out credit card guide for 34 million, or something like that,, so you're starting to see a lot of those leading networks trying to buy out other individual sites, the collections of sites. Twin Street bought out internet.com's assets. They now own internet.com, javascript.com, all of these killer domain names with tons of age down links and content. They got it for something like 16 or 18 million for the whole collection.

Dwight Zahringer: Right, but what you're saying in that statement is that one of the trends we're seeing is that a lot of major companies are buying up

individuals and smaller bloggers that have a very, very defined niche presence in certain markets online.

Aaron Wall: Yeah, so you're seeing network effects sort of come in, where some of the biggest players and biggest brands are buying down the stream, either new areas they want in, or areas where they want a second or third bite of the apple, and the search results.

Dwight Zahringer: So I think there's some social equity. The search equity, the links, there's a lot there to be purchased there.

Aaron Wall: Yeah, so that's kind of big. Another thing that's kind of big is the creation of mass user-generated, or underpaid editorial garbage content.

Dwight Zahringer: Is that gray or is that black?

Aaron Wall: Well, it depends on how much skill you have. If I do it, it's black.

Dwight Zahringer: Okay, so we're talking a little bit about article writing, user-generated content that's made for the purpose of putting a footer link, and being passed around and reposted on numerous sites. Am I correct?

Aaron Wall: I was talking more like demand media. They had an article in Wired last month where they talked about how they create 4,000 pieces of content a day, and they're trying to get it up to a million pieces of content a month, and they have an algorithm that screens keywords, that combines data from Google, Google Tools, plus ISP data, plus their old data from their internal analytics from their current articles, and then they just start paying people five bucks an article or whatever to write all these topics like, car donation or whatever. And the article is just completely filler and wrapped in AdSense, but it's legitimate because they're probably pulling in 500,000 a day because of it.

Dwight Zahringer: And that's legitimate because of the scale. So now let's even look at another component of it. We're going a little off track here, but that's not considered to be an issue with Google AdSense or AdWords because of the revenue it's generating for Google. Why would they turn off a faucet that large?

Aaron Wall: Right. Also, Google, like with Youtube, YouTube told the main studios that, "Hey, we don't have enough Spanish. Advertisers want more Spanish video content." So then they started going out and making that, so there's kind of a direct message in some ways.

- Dwight Zahringer:* Ahh. So what's the purpose overall? It's just the revenue generation through the AdShare revenue with Google?
- Aaron Wall:* Yeah, if you look at their content, you will rarely be amazed by quality.
- Dwight Zahringer:* Oh, so I guess the whole model then is just to go back to, "Don't be evil."
- Aaron Wall:* Yeah, so that one, the model there that's interacting, there's monetizing a lot of search, and producing content quite cheaply. The other thing that's happening is more of an economic trend, where a lot of the big time publishers are about to go bankrupt, like a lot of traditional newspaper companies. Even though Google has GoogleNews – so there's something called universal search results, where Google has the core database of search results, and then they have all these vertical databases, so there's the database of blogs, a database of news, and a database of video. With universal search, a lot of those news companies are getting featured, and getting more exposure in search, but news – people who come in on a news topic are not very easy to monetize, because they're just in the moment. It's not as strong as a person who just searched for something out of the blue that's not in the news.
- Dwight Zahringer:* So a quick jolt to traffic, potentially, maybe some revenue or some types of conversation that's happening on their site, reading the article.
- Aaron Wall:* Yeah, a lot of those media companies aren't making enough for those kind of bloated content production models, so a lot of them may go away at some point, and that's still up, maybe a year or two off, but that's kind of going to be interesting to watch as well.
- Dwight Zahringer:* Sure. Let's go back to the demand media thing. So, they're creating all this content and everything else, and that's being flooded and ranked in search results, right, because of the sheer volume and the amount of authority that it's gaining?
- Aaron Wall:* Yes.
- Dwight Zahringer:* Now is that considered to be quality?
- Aaron Wall:* It's not quality –
- Dwight Zahringer:* But they show up in search results.

Aaron Wall: Yeah, but they usually show up for the rankings. Also, eHow was a site that was purchased for its old links. It used to be a start-up back in ninety-nine, so it already got a bunch of old links way back when.

Dwight Zahringer: All right, let's talk really quickly about some trends in SEO that would be beneficial to regular Joe business owner, and some of the people that are listening that are sitting at an organization, part of the marketing department.

Aaron Wall: Yeah, if you are some of those though, there are ways to apply some of that as well. For example, if you know that eHow ranks really well, well then sometimes you can maybe start by submitting an article or two there, and seeing if you can rank it.

Dwight Zahringer: Sure. What are some of the changes you'd like to see in SEO in the future?

Aaron Wall: So how would I like to see SEO change in the future?

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah. And how are you going to be involved in changing it, Aaron?

Aaron Wall: I think it's kind of a tough question, because I think our role is mostly to be reactive, and do what works. I think, in time, there's going to be more and more search engines users can use, they're going to pull in more data from more different databases, and more content from Google book search, after they get all the legalities from that sorted out, will appear more often. I think that the biggest thing is, SEO is going to start becoming more integrated everywhere.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah.

Aaron Wall: Word Tracker did an article, an interview with a guy named Brad Maine, who is the in-house SEO for the Tribune Company. He talked about how they were using SEO to help come up with article titles, cross-linking through their network, through the one or redirecting some of the stories to the core story to get some momentum for the rank click, so people will see it, and it'll pull more links in. So it's already starting to head in that direction. The tough thing though, the SEO is becoming – the one thing I think is hard about SEO, is a lot of it is based so much on the link graph right now, but the link graph, because so many people are becoming aware of the value of links, is becoming so heavily polluted, that it's becoming harder to get signal. Like, links used

to represent, “Hey, I linked to you because you did something in a citation that was good or great,” but now a lot of links tend to represent nepotism, rooting for your own site, or just the link is old and was there, but the business model, the people behind the business changed, because people bought it out. The link graph is kind of a bit static. It changes as new links get added, but a lot of the old sites change drastically after they acquire the links and still keep it. eHow was more an editorial controlled curated site in the past, whereas now it’s not so much.

Dwight Zahringer: Absolutely. SEOBook, let’s go back to your site, and your pay tool site. You know, for SEOs that are out there that are not using – in fact, I think I emailed you the beginning of this year or late last year, asking for permission to use your graphics and write a review on the toolbar that you have, the SEOBook toolbar, which if you are in any aspect involved in marketing online or SEO yourself, if you can’t find this toolbar useful, you’re a damned idiot, because this thing has so much power at your fingertips. This is something I recommend to everybody, all my clients; I make them install this with Firefox, and the web developer toolbar ASAP. It has a ton of great things, so again we’re talking to a gentleman that’s given so much back to the community as whole, and got a lot of links for doing that too as well. So he definitely knows how to utilize this as well. What other paid toolsets are out there, like keyword elites? And do you think these are effective, that we could recommend?

Aaron Wall: Eh, I’m not convinced that a person – I’m not convinced in too many of the tools. I think there’s so much available online that’s pretty good. The Google toolset is my favorite keyword tool. There are two tools they have. One is called the search-based keyword –they have three tools, actually. The search-based keyword tool, the traffic estimator, and then there is the basic keyword tool. They’re all good. The only issue with them is that sometimes Google selectively filters some stuff. So, for example, let’s say there are 100 top words in the industry. Well, Google knows what the top 100 are, but maybe they’ll show you 85 of the top 100, and then show you some other random 15, and they won’t show you data for some of those selective selections, those keywords specifically into the tool, but I already know of them. I like to use the Google tools as my first step, and then I also like using word tracker, or there’s also another tool, and kind of cross compare and cross reference back and forth a few times, and then if I have a really big keyword list, I might run it through the Google AdWords ATI, and have it grab the data as far as estimated search volume, estimated keyword value, and then from there you

can sort it by value, and look at what keywords fit well in your business, and compare it with your analytic conversion data, and start refining your strategy as you get some traffic. So as far as keyword tools, I generally don't recommend too many of them; certainly none of the desktop ones. I think a lot of the desktop ones are in favor of things that are either a web-based tool or a part of a browser extension.

Dwight Zahringer: Right. And as we know also, you can see that we're very much validated here. Aaron is definitely a forefather in this, very knowledgeable. He even created his own keyword tool, which is available over at his site, SEOBook.com, or tools.SEOBook.com.

Aaron Wall: Yeah, that one is actually powered by wordtracker.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah, that's what I'm saying. It just validates what you recommend. So if you want the same Kool-Aid that Aaron's drinking, chances are you're going to find it at tools.SEOBook.com.

Aaron Wall: Yeah, we list a lot of tools beyond just our own. The people who have tools will just be like, "Here are all the tools you need, and they're ours." And I'm like, "Here's a variety of tools," because I feel I should keep innovating. It's kind of a weird mindset, but if you're willing to link out to competitors, then it forces you to make yours better to compete.

Dwight Zahringer: Okay. Let's get down to some helpful consultation from Aaron Wall from SEOBook.com. Let's talk about small businesses. A big topic, and of course, next week you're going to be in Vegas, I'll be in Vegas, I'll definitely be in your session on link building, but there's going to be a lot of great things talked about there, and one of them is going to be a small and local search. Let's talk about small businesses that are trying to really trying to get their foot in the door, get their businesses ranked online. They may not have a big budget to do so. From a small business standpoint, trying to gain a web presence, what are some of the key things you feel they need to do to make sure they show up in rankings? Let's talk basics.

Aaron Wall: Okay, I think one of the best starting points is, start off with the domain name, because it's going to play into every other piece of marketing that you do.

Dwight Zahringer: And now, in saying that, let's talk about a fact of – because I'm sure you have a lot of people that come to you and question you,

just ask you questions, might be at a conference, just like we have at our agency, is, they say, “Well I’ve already got my company name, I’ve already got this, this, and that.” Is there a value, potentially, of them looking at other assets or other domain names expired, or because of different values to associate or replace their current domain name?

Aaron Wall: I can give you a lot of pieces, certainly; especially if they don’t have any online footprint or any online presence yet. They have a domain, but they don’t have any links for it or anything because as a small business, if you own an exact domain, you can start using that for your business name to start to control the link impact, and that helps influence some of the rankings with some local search, because you’ll look really relevant, a lot of people will click on you. The other thing about local too, is once you get local listings, you want to get citations through the site called GetListed. It lists a bunch of sites that you can submit to, some general directories like Axiom, and they provide data to a lot of the other providers. The trick with the data too, is with local, is if you can get a business location that’s kind of central to a city or central to the location you want, that’ll not only help you out by getting seen and known more, it’ll also help you online, because if a lot of people live by there, part of what the search engines look at is how central you are to the city, or how close you are to people searching for that.

Dwight Zahringer: So like for us, we’re near Detroit, but we’re in a suburb. I think you’re out near Portland?

Aaron Wall: I’m in Oakland, actually.

Dwight Zahringer: Oh, okay.

Aaron Wall: So if you search for Oakland SEO, they list me number one with a little map to my house, which is creepy.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah. So nobody go and search that. But, let’s pull the throttle back a bit and go back a little higher level. So we talked about a domain. A domain is going to be an important component for a small business. What are some other ones?

Aaron Wall: So a domain name is important. Then, if you can encourage your customers to give reviews to your site, like if they can review it on Google Local, or other services, if you get a bunch of positive reviews, that’ll help you rank better. So that’s two. Three is the physical location of the business. If you’re deciding amongst two

different business locations that are heads or tails. Well, the location, the more central you are to the city, the better it'll be.

Dwight Zahringer: Okay.

Aaron Wall: And then, if you can get citations, a lot of the known local directories, that'll help as well.

Dwight Zahringer: Perfect, perfect. And a lot of this might be a little bit to pay for. You might be able to utilize a local SEO company or agency that offers these components, although to Mr. Joe Businessowner, you definitely want to be aware of what you are getting. Don't jump, start, and get the \$299.00 SEO package, because you want to make sure that some of these listings may be a price to join, and you want to make sure you have a little bit of control over where some of those listings are being placed, and who owns those accounts. Isn't that true?

Aaron Wall: Yeah. It's worth spending a bit of time and money getting yourself at least a little baseline knowledge. That way, you're not buying a black box from some vendor. The more you know about what that vendor is doing, or at least have a baseline set of knowledge, that's going to help you and make sure you picked the right sort of vendor, and ensure that everything is going in the right direction.

Dwight Zahringer: Right. With an SEO department and a business infrastructure, this is definitely a growing trend. Do you think SEO in-houses are going to be the norm moving forward in the future, like a desktop publisher internally? With the dying age of traditional media or the decline of it, and also the ad agencies, a lot of people brought that in-house. Is this where we see it's going with SEO as well?

Aaron Wall: Yeah, because I think a lot of the SEO stuff is getting lost in the process itself. A lot more SEO-related material is certainly moving in-house. That's a big, big trend.

Dwight Zahringer: Let's talk a little bit on a topic of social media. Real-time search, it's been a real major topic in recent news, I'm sure we're going to hear a lot about that next week at Pubcon. Do you think this is going to impact the search industry as a whole, and what about the evolution of it?

Aaron Wall: I think the impact is mostly going to be on the personal, your social circle, like Google Social Search, how they can see who your buddies are on Twitter or elsewhere. I think that that is really one of the few ways they can provide a lot of value with it. A lot of the

stuff doesn't – there's not a lot of signal around a lot with social media, so promoting it quickly, it doesn't have a lot of signal. Like most areas where it would have a lot of signal, because there are supposed to be a lot of traditional weblinks as well, going around those areas. So it probably doesn't help too much with facilitating better indexing or anything like that.

Dwight Zahringer: Let's talk about the social media component, and recently Google talking now about the indexing of Twitter feeds again, and those showing up in results. Now, we're going to go back to talking about SEO and links and pertaining to that, but what about social media for small businesses, and for companies that are out there. The social presence is important, and that can span and conjure up and evolve to having posts, having reviews, having different forms of results of people's comments or posts and questions. But right off the cusp, do you feel that social media has a big component to SEO as a whole?

Aaron Wall: I think it can be helpful for some, but for most small business it's typically a mismanaged amount of resources, that they put too much effort directly into Twitter or Facebook because most of them would be better off spending that time to write how-to blog posts on their own website. And then after they establish a pretty strong destination, at that level, it might make a lot of sense.

Dwight Zahringer: Okay, and I'm going kind of wrap it up here, I don't want to kill too much of your time here. But you recently wrote a blog post that addressed a perception of the Internet amongst the common folk, common people. A key ingredient in designing and developing a successful website is knowing your audience, specifically. Do you think this is a problem with most websites for businesses today that they try to incorporate way too much? They try to get into the social, just – my opinion is right in line with yours, too, regarding social media for businesses. They try to incorporate too much, and their website is missing out on giving basic elements that can make a website more successful. So how do you see a web design development industry evolving over time to reach the demand of the consumer, so to speak?

Aaron Wall: I think there will always be shoddy providers. I think it'll just be some amount of people will care, some won't. Different people will talk about improvements using different language. Some will call it usability. Some will call it SEO. Some people will call it design. The thing is though, a lot of the shoddiest providers of services, like design services that aren't very good are probably being driven out of the market based on making yourself cool.

You can get a decent website theme for \$10.00, and you can get a custom-made logo for \$100.00. I think, in time, a lot more of that will get more rolled together, with a lot more DIY. Which means a lot of it will still be terrible. But I think there will be winners and losers in every market, and there's always going to be way more losers than winners.

Dwight Zahringer: Right. Well you talked about the key ingredient in designing and developing a successful website, and knowing your audience. I guess elaborate on that.

Aaron Wall: So, if you know what a market wants, then you can out-provide for what it wants. If you know your market well, you can see, hopefully, some of the halls in the marketing strategies that might work in it, but if you don't much about a market, then the person that knows a lot about that market has a huge advantage over you.

Dwight Zahringer: Right. So, I just kind of want to wrap this up with you. Tools in training, you have an awesome site, if I haven't mentioned that already, you've got a great toolbar plug-in for Firefox, which is the browser everybody should be using, and you also have an entire training class. That's been a little bit of an evolution of your business as well. I was going to go into some of the subscription base, and the consulting component of it. Tell us a little bit about the training, and what you do offer people and how they can find out about it.

Aaron Wall: So, we have a forum that's a private forum for members, where they can interact directly with me and other members. We have over 100 training modules, actual training modules that people can learn on various SEO apps, like link building.

Dwight Zahringer: SEO training, paper click, advertising, analytics and results, tracking those, website credibility, and really making your site just search engine friendly. Monetizing the site, utilizing video and audio. Marketing tools and a lot of different values added that you're giving away as well with that service.

Aaron Wall: We keep trying to add to it whenever we can.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah, it's definitely the cat's meow. The cat mutt's meow, I should say. And it's something that all of our listeners should talk about. Aaron, before I let you go, first of all, I appreciate you taking the time. I definitely owe you a drink next week in Vegas. Your session that you're going to be talking about?

Aaron Wall: Well, I'm actually doing three different sessions. One's going to be a review session for link-building strategies, where we try to give them more link-building tips and strategies. Another is supposed to be a panel on link buying, which always ends up being an interesting panel because there's always an audience. And then the third panel is going to be on monetization of websites using contextual ads.

Dwight Zahringer: Okay, perfect. And then give us three good tips that you would charge \$500.00 for to our listeners.

Aaron Wall: So, do a site search on our website for the exact match domain, and read up on that.

Dwight Zahringer: For the exact match domain?

Aaron Wall: Yeah. So that one, that's so good.

Dwight Zahringer: Okay.

Aaron Wall: Look to buy, look through for stuff on page three or five, look for sites to buy if you can afford to buy a site. Look for sites not well monetized.

Dwight Zahringer: So go to Google, do a search on sites to buy, and look on page three or four.

Aaron Wall: No, I'd say search for your topic, and then look for sites that aren't quite breaking the top, and see if you can buy them.

Dwight Zahringer: That's a great tip. And give us one more little one.

Aaron Wall: One more. You will rank better on Google if you link to my site. No, I'm kidding.

Dwight Zahringer: Because you do link your reciprocal linker.

Aaron Wall: Oh, I was just joking.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah, that's great.

Aaron Wall: Third one was a scam because the first two were good.

Dwight Zahringer: Yeah, that's great. Aaron Wall, thank you so much. I am honored to take up an hour of your time. Again, he is going to be speaking next week at Webmaster World Pubcon Conference at Las Vegas,

Nevada. If you don't get a chance to get out there, I'm sure you'll be able to find some of those streaming around YouTube minutes after he gets done with his sessions. If you're looking for some great SEO advice, he's available for private consultation and group consultation, and he has awesome tools, like I said. The SEO toolbar, and SEOBook.com, and the training, this is definitely a client I would recommend to my clients. I'm not afraid to lose business to this guy because he's that good. Thank you so much, and I will see you next week in Vegas, Sir.

Aaron Wall: Yep. See you then, have a great week.

Dwight Zahringer: Bye.

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