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Jake: All right. Hello everyone. I am Jake, conducting my subject matter expert interview for ENT 645 here at Western Carolina University. I'm joined today by Gilbert Bentley, founder, owner, operator of Asheville SEO Ninja, the best in the biz. I've known Gil for quite a while now. We're friends, we are professional work colleagues, and he truly is an expert at what he does. So Gil,

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Gil: Thank you. Thank you so much for asking me to do this and for, you know, wanting to pick my brain. I appreciate it.

Jake: Yeah, of course man. Sweet. Well, let's jump right into it. So, uh, first off everybody gets asked, you know, um, tell us a bit about yourself. Where are you from? Where are you now? What do you do for a living? What's your favorite dish to cook?

Gil: Um, let's see. I'm originally from Toledo, Ohio. And like most folks, I no longer live in Toledo, Ohio. Um, Asheville and I plan on staying here for definitely the foreseeable future. I enjoy long walks on the beach, margaritas, and my favorite food to cook is homemade pad thai. Let's go,

Jake: Which is bangin'. And if you ever get a chance to have Gil's pad thai, take the chance.

Gil: Yeah, it's a great Sunday activity when I've become too inebriated and I just decide to cook for half the neighborhood. So if you're within a three block radius, I'm gonna be bringing you a...

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Jake: You started your own company, that is, Asheville SEO Ninja. Do some contracting work, you've done some consulting. A lot of entrepreneurs know that SEO is a thing, but may not know exactly what it is. So, could you, in layman's terms, talk to me like I'm five, explain what SEO is?

Gil: Cool. So, I think the best way to explain SEO is with examples, like many things in the world.

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or I don't know, organic dirt, right, for your raised plot that you just put in in the new house that you bought. And so you type in, you know, organic gardening dirt near me, right. SEO, folks in my career field.

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try to make sure that their clients show up first. When somebody types in something like organic dirt near me, organic gardening supplies, or yada yada yada, any number of things. Nashville wedding photographer, best trading software for the stock market, any number of things. It's recognizing Google as a great place to be.

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of one of the most important highways that a business should put its billboard up on.

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Right. So same type of concept, same idea, but it's a nice little mixture between the content on the website, our overlord Google, and getting into and understanding what people say when they're not saying it out loud, and they're just typing in questions or inquiries on their phone.

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things together and hoping that if you're honest enough along the way more clients will come to the website.

Jake: Yeah, okay Okay, perfect. Yeah, thanks. That's that really helps kind of fill in some of the gaps there And I would love to touch back on the idea of your if you're honest along the way Yeah, that seems like a really crucial point that gets missed sometimes But yeah, so okay So that that makes a lot of sense that SEO would it be fair to say it kind of like the goal is to Be seen first

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and more often when people search for any number of search terms related to your business.

Gil: Yeah, and as you kind of advance in it, you start to, or at least I did, started to recognize that it wasn't just about being seen more often, it's about being seen at the right time. Okay. Right? So there's a buying process, a buying cycle. You don't just say, wake up on Friday, and you're like, you know what? This weekend, honey, we're going to buy a house. And then you just, you know, you're just like, that one, right?

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You don't look at anything else. You don't even care about how many rooms are there. Does it have central air? Does it da-da-da? You go through a process. And a lot of times, and this is a nice little trick for anybody wanting to do SEO, you look up top 10 tips for buying a home. For buying a home and insert name of a community. Or any number of things. But you try to understand the actual sales

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process. Obviously, something say soda at the gas station, much shorter sales cycle than a company that's looking to hire a patent lawyer, where it's like there could be potentially billions of dollars on the line if they don't get the person that knows their legal speak just right. So recognizing the sales cycle and the process behind that and then learning

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what moment can I pop in and become the first person that somebody sees that will give my client the best advantage. So it's not always the biggest and most boisterous keyword with the highest search volume that is actually the whim. Sometimes it's right underneath the surface. Yeah totally, that makes a lot of sense.

Jake: Okay well so now with a better...

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keeping in mind that our audience is our entrepreneurial minded folks. What are, what would, like, why should an entrepreneur care about SEO? And maybe another way to frame that would be like, what would say the top three primary benefits of focusing on SEO, what would those be for an entrepreneur?

Gil: Yeah. So one of the, one of the best benefits, and it's, it's kind of a, it's a slow benefit, but it works. It's, it's investment, right?

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Some of the other alternatives that you might have for getting your name out there would be paid advertising, you know, pay to play. There's a number of issues and plenty of rumors, some substantiated, some that are just too common sense in a capitalist society that for things say like Instagram, right, or Facebook, you have a business, you pay to promote, and all of a sudden your organic reach, the second you stop paying, drops.

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Right. So now there needs to be a constant drip from from your budget into Facebook's.

Jake: Right.

Gil: Right. So there's that example. Now it obviously be social. But the same kind of goes with with Google. And truth be told, you know, when you set up a website properly and this goes across all different types of industries, businesses, professions, skills, you know, so on and so forth. When a website is set up properly.

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don't need to keep paying to show up on top. Right? The work has been done and in a cycle, depending on the business between six to eight months, now all of a sudden you're not paying \$1,500 just to show up for a specific key word. Um, you're not paying every single time somebody clicks or depending on like, are, do you have competitors that day at that time or this or that or the other, or is it a busy time?

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of year, you know, obviously florists are going to have more expensive keywords around Valentine's Day, right? Maybe not so much for Boxing Day. But, but, you know, so yeah, so the seasonality can actually cut into your, your bottom line into your profits at the end of the day, because times of the year that you should be making the most money, you're also having to pay the most money.

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in order to get sales. Google will go through and it'll make the first top, generally one to three, depending on the keyword, which again goes back to what I said about timing and the specific keywords that you're going for. But it'll make the top two or three results an ad. But as long as you're showing up as like number one or number two, that still means you're in the top like three to five results in a search result,

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in somebody's view and when they click the advertisement realize it's hokey and that they're just you know kind of running with a splint on their legs right you know then they go back to your website which the reason why it's showing up there

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in this scenario is because you have good SEO, which means it's a good website, which means people want to use it and you've been essentially awarded through the ranking algorithms for

investing in a website. So it's not just a matter of getting folks there. It's also a matter of keeping them. And the better you keep them, higher your rank will be, it all kinds of builds up. And then at the same time, and I know I'm getting along on this, but this is...

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run together. Yeah. At the same time, something that's important to keep in mind with SEO is that it might take months to fully reap the benefits. That also means that it takes months for your competitors to catch up. Right. Right. So it's like it's not overnight, but that's the

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beauty of it, is that it's like, oh no, now we're number four, number five, number six, this person, this upstart came in, right? And outranked us, they have better SEO. So now you're in a position where your website's doing well and you already have an SEO on board, whether an individual or a team, and they're monitoring the positions of your competitors. So if there starts to be some movement that would not look good for you, you have to be

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time to react and you're already in that the top spot. Right. So once you get up there, it's maintaining being up there. Much, much, much more different than keywords, which change prices, you know, phrasing and yada yada yada. And a lot of times it's just kind of, you know, not that.

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Not the best pages that you end up on when people are doing paid advertising. It depends. But so that, that would be my number one thing. I'm promised to make the next two points a lot shorter. But the, the next one would be client and customer insights. So this kind of goes back to what I was saying about actually having a good, useful website that's well structured, where the words make sense to the person that lands there, right? Because that's, those are the words that they typed in.

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Those are the words that you rank for. Those are the words people find when they get to the page. So it's structured in a way, and it's monitored in such a way as to constantly improve to create a more honest, direct appeal to potential clientele, to potential customers, while at the same time, a good SEO strategy is going to go through and just wholesale, pick apart every single aspect of your competitors.

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The third part is like the competitors and any trends in the market and recognize what are the best practices of all of these folks. I don't even care about the weaknesses. What are their best practices? I'm going to do all of it. I'm going to throw it all in there. So like this person might have three fifths, this person might have two fifths. It doesn't even matter. You got five fifths, you got a whole, you got a full setup. And now everybody else in their different ratios where they were lacking is now having to try to catch up there.

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image right at least in terms of

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Google, and then your clients, your customers, things like that, and your monitoring. So you kind of get in there and ambush them. Yeah, yeah, totally. But yeah. Okay, that's awesome. Yeah, that's great stuff. So one more thing on that around the awareness. I'm going to give an example

here. Their reference is not on my website because they are no longer in business because they didn't listen to this example here.

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a very high-end CBD company that did extracts of CBD. And the owner was completely obsessed with the purity of his isolate, CBD isolate. And when you would order it, it was, you know, looked like any number of illegal substances in the mail, but it was technically legal if you could convince, you know, whatever officers happened to find you with it. This was early on in my career, but they...

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They insisted on just selling CBD isolate, right? And so after running through and seeing, you know, how many searches a month, right? Does CBD isolate, isolated CBD crystals? You know, all the variations of the words. How many searches a month actually happen for the product you're selling? And it was about 10.

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And so I told them, I was like, hey, you know, you have a very capped limit on success here. If you convert 70% of them, that's seven people. That's not much. And this would actually be an example of like when paid advertising would make sense, because now it's an awareness campaign. Obviously, people weren't aware of it. And, you know, I never used the isolate, but the owner often did and claimed it was great. So, you know, I'm sure if people discovered it, they would have loved it.

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Nobody knew what it was, and so now we're in a PSA campaign kind of situation. I showed him, I was like, well, you got about 10 to maybe 15, and that's assuming all 10 of those searches, A, three or four of them aren't you looking for your own website, which is a real thing, and that the other six to seven folks are definitely going to buy from you and not go somewhere else.

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you might get three sales if we're really kicking butt. On the other hand, at over 3,650,000 searches a month were CBD gummies.

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with the person's equipment, laboratory equipment, their food grade, everything, and so on. Their facility's more than capable of making CBD gummies. So now you can tap into over 3.6 million searches. That is a solid market. And he refused to do it and complained about only getting three or four sales a month. And I'm like, well, I'm sorry. It's, you know. Don't argue with me.

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just shown you the numbers here. So again with the client slash customer awareness part of this and with trend information, it can be incredibly beneficial.

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right to any entrepreneur that's out there because you might go in with an idea of one thing and not realize that you have an a la carte option in front of you that will definitely get you farther reach. And once you get that reach, you can always combine everything back together into your original vision now that you have eyes on you. Right, right. But you gotta get the eyes on you first. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So that like in that SEO analysis, it could even show you new products or services that are like tangential to what you're currently doing

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it for you and then pull people back into your core competency if you want. Or even just be like, hey, you know, you phrase it this way, you have all the content phrase this way. People use these words instead, right? These synonyms. It's literally the same thing. The difference between a blank notebook and a blank journal. Blank notebook, people search about 15,000 times a month. Blank journal is over 150,000 times a month. So if you're in the bookbinding business, you know, which used to be a...

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a hobby of mine, which is before I even got in an SEO, and I was like, oh, I need to stop calling these notebooks. Because people might say it in casual conversation, but again, when they sit down, and they're in silence, and they're typing it in on their phone, they're not saying notebook, they're saying journal. Same thing, right? So this crosses over across industries, businesses, products, everything.

Jake: Okay, well, I wanted to return back to something you mentioned regarding the,

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paid advertising versus SEO. Obviously, I think you could make an argument that each one has its sort of like place and time and can be more effective or less effective than others. But correct me if I'm wrong, but it sounded like you were saying for sure. You never want to emphasize paid ads at the expense of SEO entirely. There's always a focus there and kind of a corollary to that question, too. You mentioned once you stop paying for paid ads, organic traffic can sometimes

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I was wondering if in defining organic traffic you could then kind of like compare those to paid ad versus the investment you make into SEO. Sure.

Gil: Well for anybody that's listening to this go to Google and type in Used car sales.

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you know, I guarantee you everywhere that you go across this country and most others, you're going to see search results where the top couple are going to say, add. They normally try to make it a little bit faded on the page and not really make it prominent, which depending on Congress this week, they might be like, this is misleading. It's been a fight as long as I've been doing this. So that would be a paid ad. Somebody is literally paying to be in that position.

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pretty much technically could just put up a blank page literally just all white with just the words used car sales on the page and if they paid Google enough money that would be the top result that a bunch of people would click and that person who's paying for that keyword would then have to pay for every single click going to that because well they just brought you a lead you know so

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define what you're saying. Organic is going to be, you know, you've met Google's best practices. There's a nice nexus between Google's best practices and the best practices met by your competitors.

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Right. I've seen some absolutely horrible websites who are incredibly strong in one area. But like the joke about bodybuilders, you know, they never do leg day, right? You know, like they never, they never put in the work to actually hold up all that mass. Right. So they might have, might be some Ma and Pa shop with a website that was designed, you know, probably 15 years before Craigslist came out. And, you know,

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They barely have any information, but they have like 6,000 five-star reviews and they're in a small town. And it's like just the pure customer testimony will lift them up. Doesn't matter how great your website is, you are competing with the giant, you know, in that case. And I've been in those situations. And so organic, not getting too far into the weeds about what influences it, it's just...

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when you go to Google, you are Google's customer. And it's important to keep in mind is that Google provides a service to its customers. They double dip in their customers, and they sell information to a lot of other folks. And that's how they make the money from people using free search. Fun fact, in the tech world, a lot of these big things are not free. They're making a lot of money off of you. Even if you never buy it, you fit into buckets, and you help explain buyer behavior, which is very valuable information for large companies.

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So Google wants to make sure that when you type in a word and the results come up, you're happy with the top few results. You click, you go to the page, they're tracking that. And how long do you spend on the page? Well, if you spend a half a second, you go back and you go to the number two spot, you spend a long time there. Google's gonna assume that you're satisfied, that your answer's been, you know, you've been satiated, basically in whatever your inquiry was.

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There's a lot of factors that go into it, but organic is basically trying to optimize for those moments for all of the ranking signals that Google recognizes and just basically being like, Hey, we're the best recognize us as the best. Look at what everybody's saying. We don't even need to pay to be in the top spot, right? We just are answering the people's questions. And for Google, it means that you're not going to leave. And all of a sudden being is going to become popular because Google's not paying attention to user experience to client experience, customer.

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experience. Yeah. Okay. Don't know if I answered all your questions.

Jake: Yeah. Yeah. And it was a long question too, but you did great covering all the different bases of it. Yeah. Okay. Well, so again, keeping the audience in mind here, I was thinking, if you're comfortable with it, could you describe some of, like, not, you don't have to use names or company names, but like maybe even just professions or industries.

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that have come to you for SEO work and like trying to get a feel here as well for like, you know, are these people that just have a business idea and are just starting out? Are they massive companies? Are they any, you know, range in between?

Gil: Yeah. So, um...

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If you're like me and you have very powerful ADHD and also don't mind spreadsheets once in a while, then SEO is great because it forces you to quickly just adapt and consume and learn everything about different industries. A single phone call could have you literally learning about a sex therapist, right? And sex therapy and like how people search for that, what the needs are, it could lead

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sexy note, it could lead you over to STI testing, STD testing, prevention, things like that. It could lead you to wedding photography, wedding rings. I realize there's a theme here. But it could also be like a local paving company, right? It could be a home inspector, a solar company. Depending on how you decide to focus, a lot of SEOs focus on a single industry.

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all the time. I for one can't do that. I enjoy the task of being like well now I'm learning about advanced welding techniques you know and I have to become an expert on this at least topically because that's the folks I'm trying to attract right. So everything that I just said I've helped clients they've been clients in the past or are currently including wedding photographers, large fintech corporations

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shoot, what else, LGBTQIA health centers.

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know you know every industry you can think of a lot yeah I'm constantly surprised though the the sex therapist which is a few months ago just that was out of left field but I was like well what do people search um so yeah I mean it's it's anything anything that you know people have a website for

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can use SEO. And so the more that my name gets out there, the more that I get references and, you know, the better I do at my own job and I show up when people are looking for SEOs, the more random it gets. And I love it. It keeps my job interesting.

Jake: Yeah, that sounds really cool. I hadn't thought about it from that perspective. But yeah, you get to learn about a lot of different career fields. And I'm sure you meet a lot of different people. It's fun solving problems. It can be fun once the problem is solved,

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But yeah, but so I guess this is kind of skipping ahead just a little bit But so given that sort of wide breadth of experience in industry A lot of the folks that they might hear this may have been running a business for years may just be getting started Maybe they're not familiar with SEO or haven't worked with someone before What makes someone a good client for you? Do they need to know?

Gil: in order and like know where to plug and play analytics tags and or can they just come in and be like fix my stuff so so yeah if and this I guess this will answer the part of the question I



didn't answer your last one for no no it's good it's good well written but um yeah so if you are hiring or looking to hire someone for SEO well first

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Don't click on paid ads when you if you're looking for say local SEO services on Google and the top results are paid ads I've refused as somebody who specializes in SEO to take out paid advertisements because that's just you know, you own A BMW factory, but you drive a Ford like what what that you know, like it's just like it doesn't make any sense Like I wouldn't trust that right, you know, that's that's not a good that's not a good signal

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So go for the organic search results for SEO or e-commerce SEO or local SEO, whatever you need.

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And there's a million lists that can word things a lot better than I can online about what the variations and the differences are. A lot of them are fairly self-explanatory once you get the concepts down. But yeah, so go for the folks that appear in top organic search results if you're looking for an SEO. And the next thing, honestly, is that they listen. That is the biggest thing I have refused.

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business to offer packages, to offer one size fit all solution for everybody's unique entrepreneurial, you know, their enterprise, their dream, their passion, whatever it happens to be, you know.

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I've refused to do that because that forces me to not pay attention to opportunities that might be right in front of me. I'm assuming that every website needs a blog post every other week or needs this or like that. These key ranking factors are the most important things and it's like, well, once you kind of get into SEO, there are your main checks. A lot of times it's...

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you know, whoever you hire needs to A, be competent, but B, listen and explain back to you what they heard and how that's going to affect the strategy that you were going to be paying them for. SEO is, like I said at the top, you know, it's an investment.

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I often use the metaphor of SEOs. The best way to view it is planting a garden, right? Sometimes when you come in, you have to do a bunch of work to the soil in the fall so that it can be planted in the spring. Some websites need a lot of work done to them. But regardless, from the time that you put those seeds in the ground to when you're actually reaping the rewards, reaping the benefits, eating it, enjoying it, it's going to be about six to eight months.

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Right and so while the SEO is doing a bunch of things that you don't have time to learn and understand and become an expert on Because you're running a business that's not SEO You need to make sure that Everything they're pushing and moving you towards that you won't actually see results from for eight months Like is actually what you want, right? You know and that's where Communication comes into play and letting folks know like hey I know you really want CBD isolate

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it to rank number one for that. The top 16 results are articles from the government, from Wikipedia, from health websites. None of them are product related. I don't think we should rank for this. Also, nobody will buy it. So you want to make sure that you listen to them and that they listen to you. And that when they're focusing on ranking signals, they're doing it based off of your actual competitors.

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five-star reviews, a good SEO will come in and be like, look, 90% of what I do is gonna be irrelevant. You need to focus on getting reviews. We're gonna hyper-focus our marketing campaign, and a lot of the effort might not even actually be regular SEO. It's just like, this is your best choice. This is your best option. That would be completely ignored if it's just like, well, we write a 1,200-word blog post for you once a month on general customer interest topics, and yada yada. That's not gonna do shit.

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Yeah. Sorry to cuss, but yeah.

Jake: Yeah, gotcha. Yeah, so it's like you want to find somebody who, like you said, first off, if you're an entrepreneur looking for an SEO consultant, you want somebody who's showing up in organic search because that's the point. That's the whole point of your job. And you want somebody who's going to listen and actually work with you and align interests. Adapt, yeah. And then take a more holistic approach

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Gil: just the blog post, I'm gonna do some keyword stuffing, I'm gonna do some whatever practices like that. That's all. If they're delivering a strategy to you, that strategy should include examples, it doesn't have to be ad nauseam, but most folks know who their main competitors are. Something I've discovered in SEOs, a lot of times they have blind spots. They focus so much on just like, darn you, Daryl's auto service.

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especially in like local competition. They'll focus so hard on somebody, actually this goes for international too, I don't know how they think about it, but they'll focus so hard on somebody who like honestly only covers about 30% of their market. You know, their services, their products, and it might not even be the 30% that that client prioritizes. It's not their biggest ROIs. And so like, yeah, if they're not coming at you with something that you don't know,

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I would just ask like, why are you hiring them? You know, they should be challenging you and you should go into it with an open mind of like, I'm not going to be duped, but I am going to learn today. Yeah. You know, sure. Sure.

J: Okay. Yeah, that's perfect, man. Um, okay. So, so shift in text just a little bit here. Um, moving on to kind of like the DIY side. So say you're, you're kind of cash strapped and you're trying to get your business off the ground. Not ready to hire somebody yet. Looking to that in the future. but you want to improve your SEO I guess I was trying to take this one or two directions I'd start with. What's something that somebody could do like today? They like shut down this podcast

and start working. You know, they're going to do this one thing today. What's, what's something an entrepreneur could do, you know, right now to, to improve something about their SEO.

Gil: Okay. Um, honestly, the, the first steps I would recommend is, um, go to the website app sumo. No, I am not an affiliate. Um, I'm relied on it for years. Jake, you can back me up on that. The amount of times I've sent you deals. Um, uh,

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a majority of their deals are lifetime licenses to different types of marketing software and it runs the gamut on like what type of software, but they almost always have two to three to four really honestly good SEO softwares, either auditing software, ranking software, keyword information software, competitor analysis, things like that. Go there, spend 40, 50 bucks, get a lifetime license to it. If you don't like it, return it in 60 days, you get your money back again.

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I promise, but if you do go use promo code 33. No, no, but um, but go there and buy some some decent paid software that's showing promise in the fields

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after you do that, after you get any basic SEO software, which is going to show you search volume for keywords, how many times a month, you know, depending on your location in the US, are people searching in English for this or for that. It's also going to show you information like type in the name of your competitor's website, click go, you know, and it's going to say these are the keywords that they're ranking for. And this is how many times a month people are searching for those keywords. And this is da da da. And it'll give you

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competitor analysis. The best way to kind of approach all this is competitor analysis. I mean I would be you know kind of shooting myself in the foot if I was like well these are all the steps you have to take. It's like no no no I mean you know that would go against what I just said about you have to customize it to your field to your industry and you know be open-minded enough that of course nobody has your super unique super special you know 100% original

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know, whatever. Of course they don't, but they do have aspects of it, you know, unless you actually did invent a true widget, you know. So recognize those aspects and those opportunities and dig in and research. Look at the, if you find a keyword that you like, say local coffee roasters or something like that.

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got your keyword, you recognize your local competition. At that point, it's a matter of just using your eyes. Going through and being like, right from Google, local coffee roasters, what are the top five search results have in common with the blue text, which would be the title of the page, and with the off grayish, depending on the week, Google's changed it a few times, like summary text, the meta description, and the URL that Google displays. What do all of those have in common?

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all have local coffee roaster as the first three words in the title of every single page and then as you go down to six seven eight nine it goes local roasters for coffee coffee locally roasted there starts to be variations look for the pattern at the end of the day Google you know obviously very

smart very intelligent it's still a machine and it's still recognizing patterns so you don't need to know every pattern by heart you just need to learn to recognize them so after you kind of got that that gives you a great idea of

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Well what you should title your page and what your description should be Next you go to those pages and there's a number of on page ranking factors some titles Image compression, you know all sorts of geeky things that are all rabbit holes But just just take the time to actually look at them Do all of them have an image at the top? Do all of them have the same word similar to the titles and search results do all of them have the same main?

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words right at the top of the page. Do all of them have their phone number in the menu bar? It could be any little thing, but the point is that you know if you completely emulate them, don't literally copy them again, but if you completely emulate them, yeah, then you don't even always have to see the pattern, you just have to know, well, these things degrade as you go farther into search results.

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But all these commonalities at the top are always there. I should probably do that. And that's the best advice I can give is like, look at the keywords, go through it. Again, don't always go for the biggest fish, right? Sometimes the biggest fish is the oldest and the meat don't taste as good. So, yeah. But yeah, just dig into that and...

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from there, hopefully with the same software, you would run an SEO audit. If you wanna learn SEO, just run an audit and go through and actually be like, why is this an error? And read the descriptions. And if the tool doesn't have a great description, look it up, watch a three minute video on YouTube or listen to a podcast, learn about it. Obviously all these things become more in depth and refined skills over time. But when you're just starting, just run an audit with a solid tool.

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have it literally tell you these are important and then be like well why is it telling me they're important you know that's the best way I can say to learn that's honestly how I learned so

Jake: okay sweet so to summarize then kind of two different tax you could take that overlap significantly but if you you know like I said if you were trying to distill it down to one thing you could either you know one option would be app sumo comm yeah and pull up just type in SEO audit software....

38:00

Gil: and scroll through. It is a great website. That's how I bootstrap my own business. That's how I afforded marketing software when I had literally no money to start my business. It was like, well I can pay \$1,200 a month for an SEO like auditing software subscription or grab it right now for \$50 once. It's like, so when you're starting a business, you know, and when it might just be a hobby or something that a lot of times folks...

38:27

start learning SEO or start looking into it, they get frustrated and they go back to your previous question, which is when you're hiring somebody. Because at the end of the day, this is a legitimate career. And trying to have two careers at once is very difficult, depending. But you can definitely get some things going. And I've seen this too. Going through and practicing and learning and trying to dig into it and doing an audit and seeing this and seeing that and getting used to seeing keyword information

38:57

that's going to make you so much more educated when you are ready to hire an SEO. Everything won't be Greek to you. You'll actually be able to be like, oh, why did you use this? And hopefully by then you actually have like a genuine like kind of interest in it and you'll be excited to learn. And again, that'll open up the door to can they explain what they're doing? Are they talking to you about things? You don't even need to play dumb just being like, you know, what are the words they're using and how are they describing stuff? And how come they're referencing things that all of these

39:27

websites that are is irrelevant and you know the 2020s and but they're referencing something from 2005 and maybe I shouldn't hire them you know yeah that's legit yeah that's good stuff

39:40

Jake: Okay, okay. Well, I've kind of two more thematic elements I wanted to touch on here quickly as we're kind of wrapping up. So I don't want to take up too much of your time. We're pushing 40 minutes here. But so this is kind of more on your sort of like personal philosophy towards entrepreneurship. So you've, you know, like you mentioned, you built your own business. You've seen you've kind of been in a unique seat where you can observe, you know, different business owners at different stages of growth in their businesses.

40:10

had a chance to see what works, what doesn't. Two questions here, and feel free to answer them in whatever order or neither. One, how do you measure success as an entrepreneur? And then the second one is, if you could tell a budding entrepreneur like three things or three lessons learned to be successful, what would they be? So like what is success and three things as to how you get it?

40:39

Gil: Let's see.

40:45

That's a good one. So in terms of measuring success, gonna get all flowery here for a second. Yeah, bring it on. Yeah, and I'm gonna say that if your motivations aren't the results of...

41:01

things that make you happy, right? So if it's not actual true happiness, if it's things that give you the potential for happiness, money, right? You know, well that's a never ending process, right? That'll never end. And you know, if your ego aligns with that character type or that pursuit, well

congratulations, you met the first rule, which is whatever makes you happy, which is aligning your ego with that. So if that's your motivation, fine, go for it.

41:31

plenty of people that can speak speak better to that but I would say like what do you want out of life and how will whatever you're pursuing lead to that affect that improve it hinder it in about five years yeah right honestly you know go really hard for years in whatever you're doing and that should be you know

42:00

It should only be hard because you're mad at yourself because you're tired and you have to sleep not because you don't want to Literally don't want to that's a that's a huge red flag Is there gonna be stuff in life that you don't want to do? No, everything is rainbow and sunshine and perfect, you know, but but honestly though, it's um, yeah like

42:23

pursue happiness and if you're in the position of starting your own business, you're in an incredibly great spot to form your business, your business practices, your daily routine, your monthly routine, you know, whatever it is around how much money do I need to make to keep myself happy when I'm not working and in the future that I'm predicting for myself. What do I like to do in my day to day life? Right? What types of things do I

42:52

I find enjoyable at work? How do the things that I don't like to do get negated by the things that I do like? Bam, now I've just got my schedule set up that actually helps me maintain some semblance of sanity when starting a business. So embed happiness and being content in as many areas as you can and never be afraid to go back and audit yourself and be like, is this panning out?

43:22

Because if you know everything when you start that you know in three months, six months, five years, then you never started, you were already a professional. So you will learn as you go. So yeah, plan for yourself, your lifestyle, your happiness. Everything else is irrelevant when you're dead. That's fair.

Jake: Preach.

Gil: So, just being honest there.

43:52

three lessons, right? So... Yeah, it can be a mindset, can be, you know, practical things, can be whatever. Yeah, so lean into your daily strengths is something that took me way too long to realize and even longer to actually get better at implementing. So a lot of times with SEO, it ends up dabbling in web design as well, because again, if the website sucks, if it's not mobile-friendly number of things, you're not going to rank well, right? So SEO just kind of this

44:22

to like grabbing things and just all sorts of different professions and careers in websites and development. But I've learned that like I'm like when I have to design a page, right?

44:36

am I in the mindset to think about design? Like design is incredibly intimidating, right? You know, blank canvas syndrome, right? You know, like what do I paint? I just know what the client told me that they would like and what their competition is, but this is our budget, this is reality, and these are my skills. Am I inspired, am I excited about, you know?

45:01

throwing some paint on the canvas and going to town on it. Or am I in a more...

45:07

guess level mindset. Am I more aware? Am I more just kind of zoned out? If that's the case, I might spend the next three hours just collecting keyword information because it's fairly mindless, incredibly important, super important. A lot of business decisions get made off of that. But you know, the whole copy, paste, download, copy, label, paste, it's incredibly monotonous. And so for me, learning where my strengths are at, you know,

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is it the left or right hemisphere of my brain that's more dominant right now, and what tasks I can form to that. That has helped me establish a better cadence, but also a happier cadence in my day-to-day life. And if you're self-employed and you have those days where it's like you don't have a deadline that day and you just don't got a cadence, take a break, you're self-employed. That's the freaking point. You're allowed to relax. If you wake up at three o'clock in the morning inspired,

46:06

start working at three if you want to take a nap from noon to four o'clock, go for it. You're self-employed. I mean, it's your paychecks. So lean into your daily strengths. Another one would just be love learning. Like whatever career, the nuances and stuff about it, if you're not obsessing over learning about it, you're going to suck.

46:32

You're going to be really bad, you're going to get sloppy, you're going to get lazy, and I mean especially in the career of SEO, you're going to fall behind in like a month or two. It's very competitive and everything is changing every other day. But that doesn't matter if you're actually trying to compete in whatever you're doing, learn. Have, you know, half or 90% of the people that you follow on Twitter.

46:56

Be the figureheads, be the leaders, the thought leaders in whatever areas that your business is related to. Listen, learn, follow. A lot of folks say, take 10 minutes a day to do it. You shouldn't have to do that. You should be excited about doing it. And if you're going through a lull in your interest in things, which just like any other relationship in life, there's gonna be ebbs and flows, then focus on administrative things.

47:26

How do I improve my process? Like, oh crap, look at my taxes, you know. Focus on other things when you lose excitement about your career temporarily. It'll come back to you if it really means something to you. And eventually you'll be obligated to it coming back to you, right? But again, it goes back to the daily strengths, goes back to where you're leaning. And I think the last one, embrace rabbit holes.

47:52

right when you're starting but set a timer.

47:58

every time you come up against a challenge in business or in your career, your specialty, whatever your wheelhouse happens to be, you have a chance to actually become better than your competitors every time you come across a problem or something that's slightly interesting. Again, this goes back to love learning, right? If you're finding something that's like, well, this isn't technically what I'm supposed to be doing right now or trying to solve, but this isn't due for this long and I'm willing

48:28

time as a consequence because this is really interesting. Learn it. Please, for the love of God, take the time to dig in and learn things outside of whatever rigid view you have of what you do because there is in no way will that hurt you later. It never does. And frankly, if it becomes a big enough rabbit hole, then you just changed your career. So embrace the rabbit holes, but especially on the day to day. Set a timer. You know, just

48:58

like try to get in a habit of already have the timer set before you start Google searching for a problem, you know, or a solution to a problem. And um...

49:06

Yeah, and play around with that stuff. Like I do all the time with SEO where it's just like, I find other software, especially on like GitHub of people's little projects and these things that are super exciting. Not at all what a client is paying me to do and I will just bookmark it, set a reminder, email it to myself, any number of things. And then I'll just do that on like a Saturday night when I'm bored. You know, I'll just like, I'll just go to town. I already be Friday the second I get off of work and I spend the rest of the night just trying to get something to work that's totally outside of my wheelhouse, but.

49:36

Holy crap, does it make conversations with developers and designers and other business owners and stuff like that a lot easier years later? Because now you actually have a dabble in other types of things that are, basically if they don't completely fit in your career, then that means you're probably gonna be working with somebody that does those things because it's just on the peripheral. So like embrace rabbit holes, but again set a timer for yourself.

50:06

but yeah.

Jake: That's great man. No, I'm gonna use that one tomorrow. I think that happens to me all the time. Yeah, anybody that I feel like sits on a computer for work all day knows like, yeah. I mean, and sometimes you come across like legitimately great ideas. And it would be a shame to just squash them. But if you like, if you give yourself that grace, say 30 minutes and then at the end, pin it somewhere and come back to it. Like, yeah, no, I love that. That's a great idea.

Gil: It's only helped me. It's never been like, oh, I wasted time. It's like, no, I've not got paid

50:36

it then but I'm getting paid more for it now so it's like I'm glad that I did.



Jake: Yeah man, sweet. Well this is the final question and this is a whole other can of worms that we do or do not have to get into the depths of but I couldn't let you let you go without asking about AI and its impact on SEO specifically. You know if you use any AI tools in your work, if you see some changes that are

51:05

the pipe here. If you can even, if there's tools that you use that you like and can recommend to people, for you know, obviously for, I mean some folks in our audience here might have experience with SEO, some maybe not. But yeah, anyway, that's like seven questions all rolled up into one. What do I think of AI?

Gil: Yeah, I mean I think the...

51:30

we're not gonna be able to put the toothpaste back in the tube. You know, it's here, it's prevalent, new models are coming out on a regular basis and it's AI, so there's also machine learning behind it and it's improving itself and 90% of these times, I mean, you know where something's going when people make it a joke and then all of a sudden, people start employing it, right? So it's goofy at first and that's actually kinda your cue to start learning about it when it's in that goofy, kinda awkward stage, right? But just like a newborn baby,

52:00

they walk. Eventually they talk and eventually they run jobs and businesses and countries and all sorts of things. So yeah, in terms of AI in SEO, I think it's Steven Spencer runs a great SEO podcast called Marketing Speak. I've been listening to him since before I started a career in SEO. But

52:29

You know, he's been saying for seven years now, I've heard him probably like once a month when the topic of AI comes up. So I don't know if I'm brainwashed or if it's actually a good point at this point. But he always says, he's like, well, how do you fight AI with another AI? And so people are like, well, you know, SEO is going to get killed off with AI. And I'm like, you think everybody's going to have the exact same brand of AI that they apply to their website? And like,

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like competition is going to disappear overnight. I'm like, not as long as we're in a capitalist society that's like based on upward mobility, quarterly profits, yada, yada, yada. No, people are going to constantly try to figure out how to improve their AI to compete with another person's AI. And even the people that are programming it will need consultants for SEO, for recognizing ranking factors. And I stand by the point that as long as an algorithm is involved in search,

53:27

results, patterns will exist. Right. It's just where you look for those patterns will change. You might have to change it from just keywords on a sheet to actually understanding individual client profiles and buyer tendencies and developing, stepping away from the spreadsheets until you can step back into them with a different set of data. But AI is going to change it, but I definitely don't think it'll make SEO go extinct.

53:57

in terms of any other business, yeah, it's all up for grabs. I'm gonna be honest, because again, it's a profit motive and it's creativity are meeting at this moment in time. So you have people that are just excited to create and build.

54:14

AI models, right? And that is their passion and they love it and they want to complete tasks better. And you have folks that want to cut bottom line. And as we can look at, you know, the history of like NAFTA or most free trade agreements or, you know, like anything else is like lowering the cost of your workforce is the number one way to make a quick buck, right? Damn to the quality later, right?

54:45

So yeah, businesses, institutions, you know, and individuals are all going to adapt to AI in ways that frankly I'm just too lazy to think into. I just know that it's gonna be taking over everything. And yeah, you're gonna have to find your place in it. That's all I can say. You know, it was...

55:09

what did hunter-gatherers have to do when people started, you know, the agricultural revolution, it's like they had to find their place in it. They either kept trying to move around it forever, until now we don't have many hunter-gatherer, like tribes and societies left, because most of the land has been settled. AI is going to do the same thing, right? You can either, you know, pitch a tent and get into it. Yeah, and in terms of specific tools, any of the main tools that are come up for, you know, top 10 best SEO softwares,

55:39

They're going to everybody's testing it right now. Everybody's trying to get on everything. The amount of advertisements I get for AI generated emails for Gmail. And it's just like, I don't need this. You know, I'm not writing essays in my email. I can I can say three o'clock is fine, you know. But they're just trying to attach to everything and see what sticks right now. So got no clue, but I keep an eye on it. Yes, that's about it. That sums it up, man.

Jake: I think that's a great that's a great posture to have.

56:09

Well Gil, thanks a ton man. This has been huge hugely helpful for myself and I think a lot of other folks especially People early on in the the business growing stages or maybe people that are like plateaued and are looking for that edge I think there's that's SEO is applicable at all ranges of outcomes and your expertise will go a long way for that So before we take off here if someone wanted to reach out to you and contact you in a professional context How could they do that?

Gil: Yeah best way to find me

56:39

is Google. Type in Asheville SEO Ninja and the best compliments I can give to myself in terms of credibility is my competitors who are paying to show up for the words Asheville SEO Ninja. But yeah, my website's there. It's literally AshevilleSEO.com.

56:59

Ninja. Very simple website. I haven't updated in five years because I haven't had time because my business has been busy. So, but yeah, hit me up on there. Request an audit. Reach out to me at gill at ashville seo dot ninja.

57:17

or just ashvilleseo.ninja, you'll find me. I'm around. Hopefully, otherwise, I did a bad job.

Jake: Well, just so people don't miss that, Gil is so good at what he does at showing up on Google that other companies paid to rank for keywords like Ninja that are not even part of their business model, just so they can steal the clicks away from Gil. It's pretty insane. So if you're looking for SEO in the Asheville area, or any area, hit up Asheville SEO Ninja.

57:47

Thanks for listening and thanks for coming out, Gil. I appreciate you, man. Thank you. Thank you for asking me to come on.

Gil: Sure thing. Thank you.

Jake: We'll see you later.