

A close-up portrait of a man with short, dark hair and a slight stubble, looking directly at the camera. He is wearing a dark blue collared shirt. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage and a tree trunk.

JAMES SCHRAMKO

Beyond Keywords: The Critical Role of Branded Search in Boosting Your SEO

James and SEOleverage's Gert Mellak dive into the often overlooked but very important impact of branded search on your SEO efforts.



Gert Mellak

James: James Schramko here. Welcome back to my podcast. This is episode 1003. Today, we're talking about branded keywords and the critical role of branded search in boosting your SEO. For that, of course, our very special dear friend, repeat guest, [Gert Mellak](#), from [SEOLeverage.com](#). Welcome back.

Gert: Hey, James, it's so good to be here. And really, congrats on passing those 1000 episodes. I can't believe it. I think we're on episode 100 at SEO Leverage right now. So still a way to go. But definitely great to be on this journey. Be a part of this journey, actually.

James: Well, it's only possible because of guests like you, Gert. Every single time you come on, I get great feedback, my audience can pick up on some of the actionable things we talk about. Today's a really good topic, because we're not often hearing about branded SEO. I'm really interested in this topic, because I feel like, you know, and I haven't really gone deep into our show notes here, but I feel like I'm probably doing some branded SEO. But I know for a fact you and I have been doing some keyword SEO.

Branded SEO - what is it?

I'd love you just to start off with like, what are we actually talking about here? What does branded SEO mean, and what are non-branded keywords, just so we can get that unpacked up the front here?

Gert: Absolutely. So we definitely do some branded SEO for you and your personal brand right now already. When we talk about branded searches, we talk about searches that contain at least part of your brand name. So somebody might be typing Schramko revenue share.

James: I think a lot of people do, definitely writing James Schramko, right?

Gert: Revenue share, right? Absolutely, absolutely. They type in your name plus what you said about XYZ. So what does James Schramko think about email marketing, right? This would be a branded search. We call those very often all the compound texts where they contain a keyword and they contain a name.

And what's important here is to see the value in branded searches. Somebody's already trusting you because they want to get your input about what is actually the topic of their interest. They're not searching blindly what is email marketing, they want to know specifically what you have to say about it.

And this is where content creators like you have a huge advantage, because you just talked about so many things that people once they know and like and trust you, they are going to use your name in order to figure out more about your thoughts, more about your approach, and more about your systems when it comes to their area of interest.

James: I know it's really effective, because often when someone's talking about a topic, and I know I've done a podcast on it, so let's say in a month from now, someone says, I'm wondering, is it worth doing branded SEO? Oh, I did a podcast about that. I may not remember the number 1003, right? But I'll actually go to Google and I'll type, Schramko, Gert Mellak, branded SEO, and it will come up, it'll be the top result.

And so I'm actually using it. And I know that it's really good at finding those things. So I often put my name plus the guest's name or my name plus the topic, or my name podcast and topic, and it always comes up. I think also, this was a huge factor when [I switched my brand name last year to my personal brand](#), because I figure since there's only two or three of us out there in the whole world, I've got really good odds of being able to rank for my own name and control my own brand.

And it's actually why I registered this domain, JamesSchramko.com was the first domain I ever registered, because I wanted to take control of my brand over the listings that were showing before that.

Gert: Absolutely, absolutely. A big part of it. And it's important to see here, it's not difficult to rank for your brand name plus a modifier. This is a very, so to speak, easy thing to get ranked for. But it already connects the dots for Google appropriately, which is going to have a big advantage afterwards.

A layered approach to SEO

But when it comes to really search branding, as we call it here, it's really about people then typing in just your brand name and figuring out what they see. So usually with SEO, we have, call it more or less like a multi-level approach or a holistic approach maybe to SEO.

James: You should never say multi-level. [laughs]

Gert: [laughs] Why is that?

James: Well, multilevel marketing, it's like a Ponzi scheme. Very spammy, junky.

Gert: Okay, I like holistic better anyway.

James: I think what you're saying is, you might take a layered approach.

Gert: It's a layered approach. It's a multi-step approach, maybe, where you definitely go in to have SEO, be part of the customer journey multiple times. And what I mean by this is that if I'm selling SEO services, people might discover me because I talk about ranking drops, right, what to do if your ranking dropped, what to do when you were hit by a core update?

So they discover SEO Leverage, my brand here in this moment, and next time when they have a question, they might just type in SEO Leverage, or when they are ready with their decision-making process, they're going to type in SEO Leverage, and are going to look at what comes up on page one for this brand, and this is really where today's discussion goes.

Educating the child Google

James: if you wanted to call your business something, or you had a common name, you know, like, Fred Smith, I don't know, there's common names in other dialect, like Vietnamese, it might be Nguyen. There'll be common German names, of course, I imagine. So if you wanted to name your company, or you had a common name, would this be consideration before you go too far down the track? Like could you even have a chance at page one?

Gert: You can definitely have a chance. But it's all about educating Google. So we talk about educating Google, like if Google was a child, and whoever's got children - we talked about parenting before, whoever got children, you know it's not just one time that you tell your child something, and it's going to happen. It's a repeating process, it needs to be solidified in their knowledge, in their way of perceiving the world and understanding instructions.

So you talk about the same thing all the time. And if you give varying instructions, the child is not going to know what to do. I remember my daughter saying, Hey, yesterday, you said this. Today, you're saying that. What am I supposed to do, right? And this is, funnily, what we do with Google all the time.

So you want to be positioned as someone in a particular area. But maybe Google has some information from youth three years ago, five years ago, which contradicts what you're saying today. So Google, the child, doesn't really know how to perceive you. So whether you have like a very common name, or a very unique name, it's the same thing.



You need to educate Google in the market where you want to be active about who you are, what you do, and who you do it for. And those are the three things that are actually going to be very important when it comes to all the aspects of search branding that we might be talking about later.

What branded campaign success looks like

James: One thing I remember from having an SEO business is what the SEO company thinks is a success might not be what the customer thinks is a success from an SEO campaign. What would you say, Gert, is a success criteria or a goal for our branded campaign? What does success look like that we might all agree on?

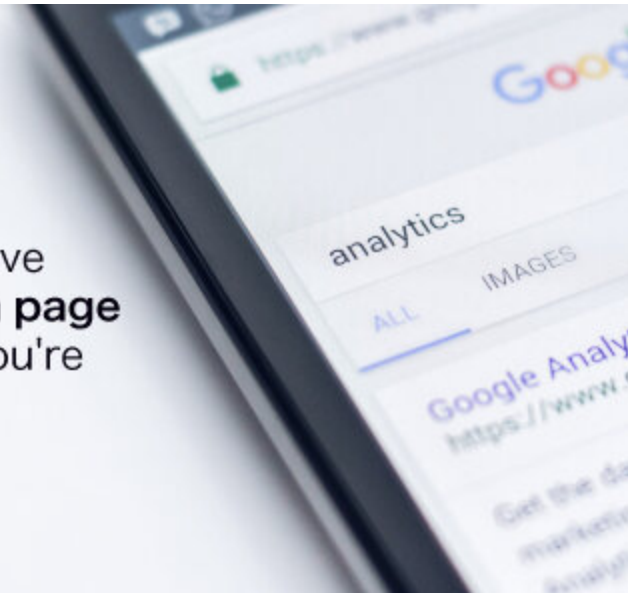
Gert: That's an excellent question. So first of all, I would type in my brand name and see what comes up here, am I in control of my page one? And what I mean by this is, can I control what's coming up there, if I have tomorrow a different goal, or a different title, or a different profession, a different target client? Am I in control in changing what comes up on page one, in order to adjust it to my profile? And in control, control has multiple layers again.

So something that's under your full control, like your website, for example, right? You control your website, you control if it's getting taken down, if it has a completely different look and feel, different content, 100% control. But then we also have social media coming up for our names, or our brand names. And there, you only have partial control.

JAMESSCHRAMKO

"The more **control** you have about what is **showing on page one**, the more **success** you're going to have with your **search branding.**"

- GERT MELLAK



If Facebook wants to push a customer comment from one of your posts into your page one feed or on Twitter, the same, Google accesses directly Twitter, you only have partial control about what's happening there. So the more control you have about what is showing on page one, the more success you're going to have with your search branding, or the higher I would rate this level of success you have with your branded search.

James: What about when I type for my name, which, you know, I don't do very often, I just want to put that out. I'm not a self-interested maniac.

Gert: You should, you should, you should.

James: I do occasionally check, because it's like, the very reason I got my domain was to outrank IMDb, because I was an actor, and I was listed, and I still am listed on IMDb for my acting performance. But I figured it's probably good to control my own brand name. So I don't know where it ranks now, I haven't looked for a while.

Google My Business and the knowledge panel

But I do see on the right hand side of Google's page, there is a panel, which has got some information about me and some links to things like my book and so forth. Can you just talk about what that is? And if it's achievable?

Gert: Right, so on the right hand side, there are two things that can appear. One is the Google business profile, which was called Google My Business listing or Google Maps listing, very often as well, where Google fetches information from a directory where you can add your company for free, something which I actually encourage everybody to do.

If you can get positive reviews on a regular basis, it's a good thing. It's going to improve very, very quickly, almost instantly, the way your website is showing on Google, and you can then ask clients for reviews and give some information, talk about their products, etc.

More established brands, especially personal brands, publicly traded companies, very important brands out there are triggering on Google a so-called knowledge panel. Knowledge panel comes directly from Google's understanding about the so-called entity. We don't want to get too technical here, but an entity here, it's like a thing, so to speak, to simplify a little bit, or a person.

And now, Google has a lot of information, the child, Google, has learned who James Schramko is. And it has learned James Schramko has a book, James Schramko has social media, James Schramko is an author, I think right now it says author, we want to see if we can tweak this a little bit. There are some images that are identifiable.

James: Hey, what's wrong with being an author?

Gert: It's not wrong at all. But you could be a business coach, for example. We could educate Google to become a business mentor and entrepreneur.

James: Prefer mentor to coach.

Gert: Yeah, we can talk about that, right. But this trigger, this label really comes from Google's understanding. So we have podcasters, for example, that have a knowledge panel already that trigger knowledge, not something you can configure, you need to convince Google to trigger this. This is important. This is not something like a switch you can flip and now have a knowledge panel.

This is definitely consistent work, where Google is going to try to make sense of all information, and if the information corroborates each other. So I say something on my homepage, on my website, that's also being said on other people's site.

James: So if I was being a guest on other people's podcasts, which I do from time to time, is it in my interest to give them a bio that they might publish or use?



Consistency is key

Gert: Yes, and it should be consistent, you don't want to change it. Or if something changes, maybe reach out to those past guest appearances, and ask them kindly if they can tweak the bio, because something has come up, just to make sure that whatever Google discovers should be consistent. If it's not consistent, it's an issue.

James: Should I be asking people to link to my old business domain to change it to my new business domain?

Gert: You could, and in this moment, maybe also see what is the surrounding text, what is the context Google might take into account, just to know that this is updated. This is a consistent work that we do for clients, where we reach out to those sites and define, On this social media platform, we need this text, etc., just to make sure that we are consistent.

We have specific tools just to figure out where the inconsistencies are, in order to better help everybody with this. But it's absolutely about different sources corroborating what is on your so-called entity home. Your website that you control is like the host, like the headquarters, whatever is here should be corroborated on other websites. And there is a strategic interlinking happening as well.

James: Is it still true that the title of the website is critical?

Gert: Yes.

James: Would that be the brand or a keyword or a combination?

Gert: I'm very fond of combinations. Definitely the brand is probably the most natural thing to have at the beginning. But we do run tests regularly, and we know the keyword and the title still matters.

Tackled so far...

James: Okay. So if we're listening to this episode, we're taking on board the idea that we should have a look, firstly, we audit, where do we sit for our own brand that what people would know us as, that we should have a look at what other people are saying about our brand and how they're linking to us, what words are around that link, what words are hyperlinked, what words are near that link, and what words are on our page title? Is that what we've got so far?

Gert: Absolutely. So definitely, first of all, it's always awareness is where we run a search branding analysis. So people across different markets, and important to know that it's not the same in every market. Across different market, we want to know what comes up and be more aware of this.

How social media impacts things

James: And so obviously, for a lot of people when they search, their social media profiles are going to come up in some of the early rankings. And they should try and control the name on the social profile, the bio, and make everything consistent as well, because that's semi within their control. Right?

Gert: Absolutely. It's partially controlled as we call it. And you really want to just acknowledge that if people in your business life might be searching for your brand, your social media, even if you're not planning to use it for business, is still going to be part of it. So there are people out there that are entrepreneurs and they maybe use Twitter for business purposes, but on the Instagram they say, I'm a lifestyle lover or a traveler. They have no relation.

James: Some might be their old career or an old thing that's sort of confusing the child, Google.

Gert: Absolutely, and it's just lost potential. You could just be consistent, right? Make sure there's one consistent phrase and then say, Okay, I love traveling, and that's fine. But it's really about the consistency across the platforms, because Google knows you're the same person.

James: We're getting into a world where social media platforms are wanting to bill us, to give them our ID and validate us. Is this good or bad?

Gert: That they want to bill us?

James: Yeah, they want to verify us. They charge us a subscription to be verified so that they can actually provide customer support or remove cloned accounts. Neither of those things are happening for me at the moment, with some of the platforms, you know?

Gert: If it could really, really get rid of cloned accounts and people stealing content this way, I would probably say there's definitely a good aspect.

James: It's the weirdest thing, Gert. I've had more cloned accounts in the last few months than I've ever had, at the same time as they roll out a subscription. I can't figure it out.

Gert: It doesn't make sense. Right now, it doesn't make sense. If it doesn't help, it's useless. Obviously, it's just making them an extra money. I think the big goal needs to be to always know who you're talking to, and whose content you consume, and I think this is going to be a big part of the future also with AI coming.

Are we already getting branded results?

James: How do we know if we're already getting branded search results? Like when you're looking at my account to help me with our SEO, do you say, Oh, gee, you know, you actually get a lot of traffic for your name. And what does that actually mean? How do you interpret that to me? Do you say, James, by the way, I don't know if you know, you get a lot of traffic for people coming for your name.

Is there anything that I can do with that information? Or does it mean that I'm missing out on keyword, like non-branded search? Or if all my traffic's for keyword non-branded search, is that then you'd say, Hey, you know what, you should be doing some branding, like all the direct response marketers in the room are like, What? What's this branding? How dare you speak of this exotic beast?



JAMES SCHRAMKO

"We think we have done a **good job** when **clients get conversions**, not just an extra amount of **traffic**."

GERT MELLAK

Gert: I think it all comes down to sometimes wrong assumptions, right? So people come to me and say, Look, we want to rank for this particular term, because then we think we're getting clients. And we rank those people for this term, and nothing happens. We're conversion-driven. So we think we have done a good job when clients get conversions, not just an extra amount of traffic.

James: So you're working the different scoreboard. You're thinking, well, conversions will be great, because you're getting a return on investment. And they're thinking, well, I just want to rank number one for this particular phrase. But even though no one converts, it makes me feel good at night.

Gert: Exactly. There's a lot of big ego aspect when we define the strategy that we need to address at least, and say, Okay, which keywords do we need for ego, and which keyword do we need for business growth? The important part is that we see SEO is not going to only be one search for a keyword and then you have a client.

SEO is going to help you expose yourself to certain keywords that are addressing certain pain points, and then people know you. And this is the goal. So what we see when we track conversions is that people are getting conversions from branded searches very often, after people got exposed to keyword searches. So they rank for a keyword, people get exposed to your brand, they know this brand. And now they search for the brand name specifically. And from the homepage, then a conversion happens.

They opt in for the mailing list, they purchase a product, whatever it is. So we have multiple steps going on here. And this is why we develop at SEO Leverage inside our tool a branded and non-branded search analysis. So we first of all, get awareness. People come to me and say, Now we get a lot of Google traffic. And then I check it out and say, Hey, it's all branded. What does this mean?

It means that because you have 100,000 subscribers on YouTube, everybody knows you, and they search for your brand name. And then they come to your website, you're not ranking for a single keyword that would be relevant. We see this all the time. So people need to be aware about where their traffic comes from. And once you know, look, 80% is branded traffic, this is a good moment to build up some keyword content and say, Okay, hey, let's build this up. But also look at what is actually showing on Google.

When people hijack your brand

We had a client who was selling an online course, for example. And when typing in his brand name, there was another competing course listed, who was reviewing my client's program and said, Hey, it's not bad. But here's mine, and mine is cheaper.

So my client over the years has been building up his brand recognition, authenticity has the best products on the market, everything out there. And then another one comes and just places a few links to another click and ranks for their brand name and piggybacks on top of their experience and their track record. And this is really something we need to get under control.

James: So it's a brand hijack.

Gert: A hundred percent.

James: And what do you do in that situation, Gert?

Gert: There are different strategies that we can approach. Our goal is first of all, to see, is this something that we can control on this website? If it's a competitor trying to make sales based on your brand name, they're not going to be open to take this down. It's just the way it is. There is not even legal requirements.

I had one client tell me about his story, and he had a lawyer reach out to this person with a cease and desist letter, etc. So they took this down and published a cease and desist letter and said, this person had a lawyer reach out to me to remove my content. This is the letter. So it was even worse than before.

James: Yeah, it gives them food energy, right? Anything you discuss with the enemy like that, they're likely to use it as ammunition against you. That's a difficult one. And what about, are there things that can be trademarked or something like that, that you might be able to ask them legitimately to say, Can you stop using our trademark?

Gert: You can certainly ask them probably about it. But usually, the more likely strategy to work hard faster is to leapfrog those results with your own content.

James: Just outrank them.

Gert: Outrank them with other content that you push actively with SEO tactics upwards. This can be guest appearances on podcasts, like this one, for example. This can be a social media profile that you push. This can be more engagement on Twitter, etc.

The stuff that's ranking well

James: What sort of content is ranking strongly? There seems to be a really strong push for YouTube, which is owned by Google, to rank videos in search results. Should we be sticking our brand name in videos?

Gert: It definitely, a good part of personal searches, if you have videos are definitely a big part of it. Another big part is Twitter. If you have a good engagement in Twitter, Google is very likely to put up a Twitter box, which is going to push at least one or two results off the page. And instead of 10, you might only have eight and a Twitter box.

You can actively work your images and make them more brand-optimized, so Google might show like a little bit of a gallery in terms of images, you can definitely push guest posts. Google likes when a person has appeared on other shows, and guest posts, or guest appearances on podcasts tend to rank really, really well.

And then obviously, your own site, maybe you have another website where you can talk about it. There are definitely different strategies, but there is some SEO work behind it in order to actually push those results so Google sees them as relevant.

Where do reviews come in?

James: Gotcha. And what about things like reviews? Should you be encouraging people to leave positive reviews, if you provide a service or you're a local business? I mean, I occasionally leave a Google review. If someone asks me and they did a great job, I will. Or if someone burns me, and they do a terrible job, I might just warn others and say, Listen, don't go there. [laughs]

Although, I'm sure someone's going to want to sue at some point, but you've got to tell the true story, because one defense against defamation or whatever is the actual truth. So if you can verify, that's okay. And the secondary consideration I have is privacy. Not that keen on people knowing all my suppliers or whatever. But are reviews important in the ranking wars for reputation and brand?

Gert: Definitely for reputation, we just need to see that it's so easy to leave a negative review for a competitor, and for them, it's not easy to get it taken down, they can report it. But if it's only a handful of people reporting it, it's probably not going to be taken down. It's important to always respond to reviews, and to encourage positive reviews all the time, because this gives you a little bit of a cushion in case a negative one comes in. Imagine you get a one-star review.

James: I've seen some of those, like, Hey, Fred, we've looked through our records, we can't find your name in our system, if you want to reach out to our support with your details, we'll be more than happy to assist, you know?

Gert: Absolutely, take it away from the thread. And this is also true for forum posts. So if somebody's aware, for example, that they get some negative reputation on the forum post, it's better to take it off the post and have an active discussion there. And then back and forth, because this engagement just drives it up Google. This is a really, really fascinating thread, let's rank this higher. Take the discussion of the review sites. But just be aware that there are review sites, and it's not only the Google business profile.

James: Oh, there's plenty of review sites you have no control over, and they won't take it down because they make a living off selling people services around trying to get rid of it, etc.

Gert: Exactly, for example, we work a lot with SaaS companies, and there are review sites that just pick up every SaaS company out there and start having some reviews. And this might not be even a site that you're aware about, but it comes up in Google, and it shows when somebody types in your brand name, it shows one out of four stars or five stars. It's definitely negative for your reputation.

Just think about the thought process somebody goes through when they type in your brand name and they see a one-star review. They might not even click on it, but it's definitely not encouraging them to take the next step.

James: Well, you know, if I'm about to invest money in a service or spend a substantial sum, I will go and look for the negative reviews to see if there's any valid warnings that might be interesting to know about in advance, and then I can observe. Firstly, my process to buy something is I have a minimum criteria of review average and then I'll check some negative ones and positive ones.

But then if I were to start seeing some of the traits of the negative reviews, there's always someone's got, I mean, someone gave me one star on my book, which is outrageous, because it's an amazing book, right? I can't believe that.

Gert: It definitely is.

James: But there's always going to be some freakazoids out there who just have a very skewed or warped scale. But if I start to see the behaviors of that, I might be wary and desist. So they'll never know that they came close to a sale, but didn't make it.

The episode takeaways

So what I'm really picking up is, if you haven't thought about it until now, it might be worth doing a little review of your brand exposure, to see if any others are monopolizing your brand, and do something about it, to adjust your profiles and bios to be more consistent, to control the content that you are putting on social profiles or discussion threads so that if they do get randomly picked up that it would be in your favor.

And of course, if you want some help with this, get in touch with Gert. Tell him Schramko sent you. There you go, that's a brand hook. He's at SEOLeverage.com. Always doing great work for my clients, and for me. It's worth saying, you know, JamesSchramko.com gets a significant amount of search engine traffic based on the guidance we've had from Gert and his team and the SEO Leverage app interacting with my team.

We just do what he says, and it works. So I'm very trusting in your process, Gert, because I experience it firsthand. And I appreciate all the guidance you give us and the results you get us. Thank you.

Gert: Thank you very much. Thank you to the team as well for the ongoing implementations. Everybody who wants to know more, just ring me up, DM me, or head over to SEO Leverage.

James: Yeah, type in some names, see if Gert comes up. See if he's got the chops. Also, if you ever want an introduction, just email me, reply to one of my email broadcasts, that comes to me directly, and I'll forward it to Gert, so I'll get you straight into Gert's eager and waiting reception there. He can let you know.

The thing I like about Gert too, is he'll tell you if he can help you or not. He'll tell you what to look for. He's very smart, been involved with working with Gert for many years. And he's helped a lot of my customers. So I know there's validated results.

Now, on the topic of SEO, if there's a question you've got for Gert or a topic that we haven't yet covered, and we have covered a lot, and we'll put a link to all the [other podcast episodes Gert and I have recorded on this show](#), then please send me an email, just tell me, I'd love Gert to cover this topic, or I'd like to know more about that. And then I'll just kindly request Gert if he'd like to come back and share with us some more great information. So there you have it.

Gert: Absolutely, will be happy to.

James: Yeah, this is episode 1003 on [JamesSchramko.com](#). If you liked this episode, let us know. Send a comment, share it with a friend, post it somewhere on socials. I appreciate it. I'll catch you on the next episode.

Gert: Thank you very much.

JAMESSCHRAMKO



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