

A close-up portrait of a man with short, dark hair and a slight smile, wearing a dark blue t-shirt. The background shows a wooden fence on the left and a brick wall with a window and some greenery on the right.

JAMES SCHRAMKO

Game of Brands: Winning the Reputation War Online

A good brand image is crucial in business. James and SEOleverage's Gert Mellak explore SEO methods to build and maintain a solid online reputation.



Gert Mellak

James: James Schramko here, welcome back to my podcast. This is episode 1022, and we're talking about the game of brands and winning the reputation war online. And that's going to apply to big brands and small brands. Basically, if you're online, you've got your own name at the very minimum. So, I've brought along [Gert Mellak](#) from [SEOLeverage.com](#) to chat to us about reputation management. Welcome back, Gert.

Gert: Thank you, James, for having me. It's a really interesting topic these days with AI coming up.

SEO as reputation management

James: It's a really fascinating one to me, I think back, the origin story of me learning SEO was around reputation management. True fact. Back when I was working as a general manager at Mercedes-Benz, Google was starting to become a big thing. And it started to list things. And one of the things that listed was the IMDb acting database.

And it listed me as an actor, because when I was about 23, I was in a feature film called Muriel's Wedding. And my acting listing ranked number one for my name. And I realized that if I wanted to control my own brand, I needed to be able to rank above that. And so that's why I purchased my first domain, which was JamesSchramko.com.

And here we are in 2023. That is the prime domain for my business. I took a long way to get there, there's so many lessons in that. But the simple fact is, a lot of my online journey was built around the desire to control my own reputation. I thought it was that important. I wonder if other people think it's that important, or if they haven't yet connected that this is a possibility.

Gert: It is an interesting fact. And it's actually the starting point of a lot of conversations here where somebody says, Look, I should really have more control over what Google shows when somebody searches for me. So, we have this starting point a lot, we have people who in the past were doing other things, companies who had a different focus, and this still comes up some stuff, and they might have shifted, they might have changed their program, they might be haunted by some negative comments from a program from 10 years ago.

So, this is a very good starting point. Very often people have SEO like, in a corner of what we classify as non-branded searches, which is absolutely necessary and great to grow your business, people search for what you're selling, and they find you, pretty much a Yellow Pages approach to Google. I need to know, I need a plumber, I find a plumber, I call them, they make the sale, everybody's happy.

But people forget that a lot of other channels also play into SEO and into search. Specifically, people are spending thousands on ads, for example, to get the brand awareness up, people are going to Google your brand before they do business with you. So, if there is anything that bothers you on page one of Google, this is very often a good reason to have a conversation.

James: So basically, there's a potential for someone if they have bad listings, they've spent all this money on ads, someone goes to do their research and then stops.

Gert: Absolutely. And it's also, although they might be clicking on a competitor, it's even worse, you're essentially running ads for your competitor. We've seen this as well, people spending almost six figures a month on ads, in order to then probably get 10%, 15%, 20% clicking through to a competitor afterwards.

James: How does that happen?

Gert: It just happens because people are very happy to check out an alternative. And our competitors very often have very catchy titles, along the lines of, Read This Before You Buy from XYZ. This is really catchy. If you're in buying mode and you really want to go for this program, and you'll see this, you're definitely going to check it out if you see it.

There are other people who want to just push their own program based on your brand awareness. So, there's okay, I have something similar, something that could also be a fit for this audience. Everybody knows it's good to sell to another person's audience, everybody has learned that. But some people have really shady methods, and this is where we help a lot of clients, just making sure that you have as much control as possible over what's this first impression your brand is making on Google.

James: So, in essence, we're talking about controlling your own reputation. And that could be even if you haven't done a bad thing, like my example, it wasn't a bad thing. But I wanted the deal flow, if someone goes to look me up, I'd rather they come to my information than someone else's website about me. And I think this is actually a podcast strategy of people, they will get famous people on the podcast because they want to bring in all the traffic for that famous person.

And a good SEO will advise you, you know, if you've got names that people are searching for, you know, you make feature pages, and I think you even helped us with that. And we ranked pretty well for other people, I think you've seen that with our results, as you helped us with our SEO. So, there's that, there's managing your own reputation.

Even if you haven't had a bad reputation, you can just make sure you control the flow. You might also have a bad reputation. I guess, if you're in business for a long time, if you've had lots and lots of clients, and even if you've tried your best, sometimes, someone's going to have a bad experience, even if it's one in a thousand, or one in 10,000, they might have a bad experience, or they've had a bad day, or they genuinely had a bad experience.

And they have an extra amount of leverage and purchase with some of these review sites or complaint sites or the ability to comment on social platforms that can actually end up in the search listings. So that's like the negative reviews that you want to manage. And maybe there's a few strategies around that, we'll talk about it. I imagine you're going to say one of them is to suppress it. And maybe another one is to ask people to remove it, which often they'll say no.

In fact, the worst case, I think, they'll even take your documents, asking them to remove it, and then put that on their site saying, Look, this person hates this content so much, they want to get it removed. That's why you've got to be really careful with this whole online game. So, can you tell us about what that looks like for people, those different categories?

A number of brand management categories

Gert: Yes, definitely. So first of all, it's just polishing your brand, is what I call it, right? So, there is some stuff coming up. But you think you have a book that should really be one of the key things coming up and it might be just the lowest result on page one. So, this is where you say okay, this is the order of things I want people to know about me, and I want them to go to my homepage, I want them to see my book, I want to have them see my socials and ideally Instagram and ahead of Twitter, because I'm more active on Instagram. You just want to kind of guide people through your profile.

And you have the case, which is really nasty, but it just works for them, is when competitors come up, right? Competitors showing up for your brand name to have those articles, your brand versus my brand, this brand versus that brand. And then I push minus the third option, which is the best one, etc. They just try this on purpose, they know that you have been spending a lot of money on your ads.

In order to get this brand awareness, they just invest in SEO and then just grab a percentage off of it for their own purposes and might then remarket to those audience or however they use it. This is the second one. The third one is really, I think, a negative review that you might be having, where somebody really was unhappy.

Sometimes, unfortunately, they even get the brand wrong. We had cases where people have a negative review from somebody who actually tried a different product. They gave it a review, made it a one-star review on this brand, but they were actually talking about something completely different. You still need to tackle it because somebody typed in your brand name, they see a one-star review. And this is it. This is the end of the journey.

Hardly anybody is going to do more research or distrust negative reviews coming up. You need to take lead, you need to optimize it, outrank it, or suppress it, whatever you can do, right? And then we have some cases where, like you said, if you try legal actions, it might even raise more awareness.

We call this the Streisand effect, right, based on a story with Barbra Streisand who wanted an image suppressed. And this was actually the end of story that made the connection that this was actually her mansion in Malibu, I think, that was in the picture and it went viral. It can really backfire.

So, with legal actions, you really need to be careful, you can request some removals if it's really a copyright infringement. In these kinds of things, you can request the removal directly with Google. In most other cases, it's much better to push positive content ahead of the negative one.

James: So just something that came to mind then, given that it can be something, like you talk about polishing the brand. Is reputation management a component of the SEO service you're offering? Is it built in? Or is it a separate thing that people need to ask for?

Gert: It's an excellent question. So, up to a certain extent, we obviously monitor what comes up for a branded search. It is true that it is an entirely different methodology. Because once you focus on the branded searches, you need to do different things, create specific content, create a different kind of links, inform Google, really, educate Google more about the brand than you would with a non-branded search aspect.

Why everyone should Google themselves

James: Would it be almost - like almost everybody should be doing this for their personal name if they're known, like they've got a face online?

Gert: I would think so. At least first of all, I would actually encourage everybody to just search for them with an incognito window. Where it's like, you're not logged in, you just type in a search, like your potential client would, for your name and for your brand, or the name of your course, your program, your product, or whatever, and just see what comes up and make an assessment in your head and go through this.



Okay, so how many people might be interested in clicking on this? It's really, I think, a big misunderstanding, or it just works in a different way. When people search for your brand name, this doesn't mean that they only want you. They have heard you in context to solving a problem they have or something they want to check out. But this doesn't mean they only want you.

They're happy to get this from someone else, especially in the initial stages if they don't have an engagement with you just yet. So, we want to just really watch out who else is getting attention when somebody searches for my brand or for my personal name. So, awareness is really the first step. And this is one of the key layers of our brand reputation service, really.

James: And might be good to use some modifiers too, right, like your name plus, like reviews, or review.

Gert: Review is just an important one.

James: I notice some of the search queries come back that are very trust-oriented, or maybe curiosity-based, they put like, James Schramko net worth, or James Schramko partner, etc. Like they want to sort of fish around, they want to find out more information. And maybe it's a good idea to provide some information about some of the things people have said, and we'll just say, Well, you know, okay, your concern is not warranted, because it's all legit, etc.

So, I feel like, sometimes if you scroll down the bottom of the page, right, it will show suggested keywords, they might be some clues, other things you could search for after you look for your name.



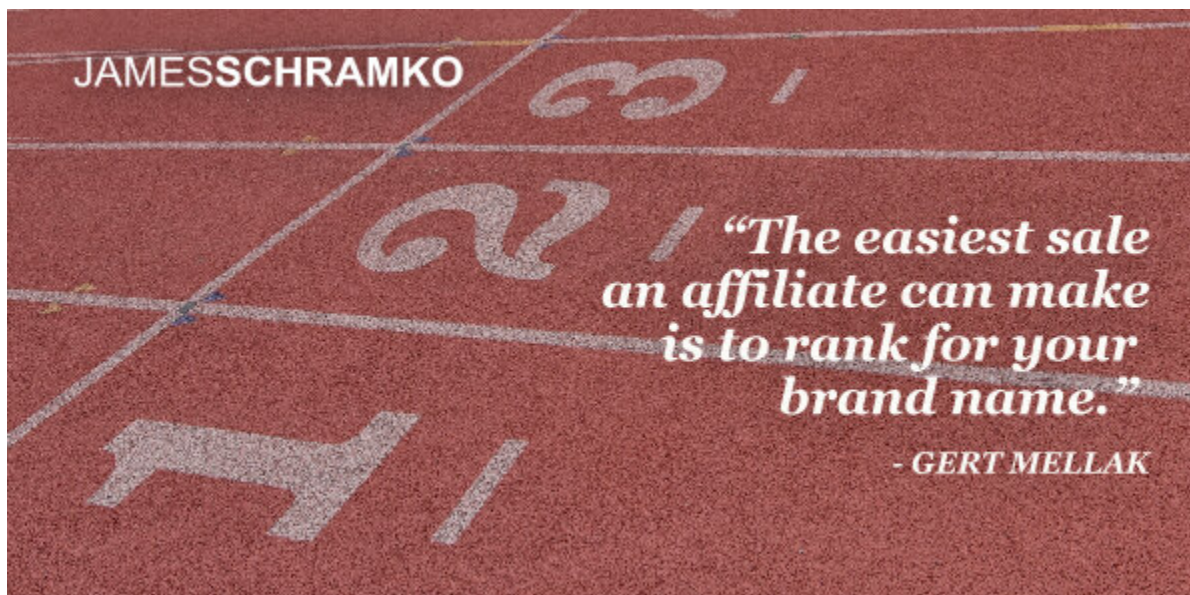
Gert: Absolutely, you just want to control the conversation as much as possible. And controlling the conversation in search means actually creating this content that's answering specifically to what people search for. So, if people search for your net worth, have a page there. Even if you say I'm not talking about my net worth, this is the best answer people are going to find, right? And Google, if you write it correctly, and technically correct, might even extract some data out of it.

An example from the field

James: Well, I'd love you to share some examples of what you've seen, because you've been practicing this art for a long time. You're good at it. I know you've had different types of projects, so it'd be good to get some different flavors of it so that if there's anything we can resonate with, that it will sort of jump out at us. But is there a couple of stories you could share about cases you've seen and give us some insights as to what to look for and how you might have solved it?

Gert: Absolutely. So one is, for example, somebody running a high-ticket coaching course, coaching program, they have been doing this really successfully, spending six figures on ads every single month, then just to see that on page one for their brand name, but also with the modifiers, brand name plus reviews, their own name, etc.

There were affiliates coming in, and competitors coming in. Some competitors pushing their product through our client's name. And so, okay, this might be good, but it's overpriced, here is a cheaper one that's even much better and has even more value. So definitely a value proposition you are going to check out before you buy.



There were others, actually affiliates. Affiliates very often are really sneaky, and just trying to rank for your brand name. And this is where I always inform and really try to educate clients where they say, I'm going to down the affiliate route, I just say, Look, the first thing they're going to do is they're going to try to outrank you, because the easiest sale an affiliate can make is to rank for your brand name.

Somebody already typing you in, your name in and wanting to buy, they don't care if they buy through an affiliate link. And this is where very often, you're then suddenly going against your partners. And in this case, our client had actually to invest in SEO and reputation management to outrank his own affiliates who wanted to make him sales, because their commissions were so high with all the ad spend that it was absolutely outrageous.

But this was one of those things. What we did here was specifically creating content on his website, content on other people's websites, we created a link building campaign, we worked a lot with structured data, some technical things on the website that we can do to better educate Google what this is about.

But we've really created, also, a series of pages just answering and controlling this conversation people want to have with the search engines, where they say, okay, what is this network? What kind of reviews, what kind of results has he been getting with this program, in order to make sure that we can provide the best possible answer to it?

James: Hopefully he did get results for the program.

Gert: Absolutely. He did. It took a few months. But absolutely, he definitely absolutely dominates right now, which is amazing.

When the negative reviews are deserved

James: What do you do if someone doesn't actually get results? Like if someone comes to you and they say, I've got some negative reviews online, and it turns out that that's in all likelihood, they probably did have a bad service or a bad product? And I actually remember when we had an SEO business, we would have people come to us who had convictions in court. They had legitimate actions against them from governing bodies, etc., and like, they wanted it all to go away. Where do you stand on that?

Gert: We definitely make a decision who we work with and who not, like every business will. We do realize that things change over time. So, we had a client, for example, who eight years, nine years ago, had a really shady program. And he recognizes that, Look, I really went down the wrong path. Got some really bad reviews on Reddit, for example.

And Reddit threads tend to be very sticky. So, Reddit thread is very sticky. It can haunt you for a while. And he has completely changed his program, it's actually much more expensive right now than the Reddit thread said it was overpriced back then. But now he's getting amazing results. He's doing really good work; he's learned his lesson.

We believe he shouldn't be haunted forever for a mistake he made in the past, honestly. And in this case, I decided to work with him, and we actually got this completely turned around. And he's got an amazing brand image right now. In the case where it would say, Okay, we started and after maybe three months, four months, we see we're not really making an impact is the moment where I get on a call with a client and say, Look, we're not having the impact we were expecting, let's see what else can we do in order to polish the brand reputation, because this might not leading to the results we were expecting.

James: Yeah, it's a tough one, isn't it? I mean, I'm pretty surprised that someone can actually redeem themselves after sullyng their reputation. Because, you know, wounded customers from back then who have a legitimate concern, they will still make it a thing to go and find their posts and find their socials and make life difficult, because they're still upset about the previous grievance.

I wonder if any part of that is confessional. I've seen these sometimes, people confess to having misled people or not served them well. And they just sort of do a big, raw, open thing and basically people let them off the hook after that sometimes. Is that part of the repertoire?

Gert: I think people need to be very careful with this. Sometimes they try to then get back to those old Reddit threads and then put up, Look, I have changed. [laughs]

James: And give it new life.

Gert: They give it new life. And this is very dangerous. So very often, sometimes it's better to just shift industries and say, Look, this is not my target anymore. And now I work with somebody else, just to see that everybody who can check this out say, look, you're not doing this anymore, you're now doing something else.

And then maybe start a new Reddit thread with better customers, better feedback. And Google might just switch one Reddit for the other one, and say, Hey, this is just more updated information about this guy, we can actually put up something that makes more sense now. But this is really on a case-by-case basis. Reputation management is not a standard thing. We need to assess what is happening, what are the goals, where does this come from, and then really draft the best action plan.

When affiliates are involved

James: It's so true, what you said before as well, about the affiliate thing. I can't leave that alone, because I was a super affiliate, and I'm still an affiliate for other products. And it's of course, they're going to go for the easy pickings, which is the brand name. A lot of programs will forbid bidding on the brand name for paid traffic.

And they'll also, if they're clever, will forbid the affiliate from registering a trademark domain name. And a lot of the smaller operators don't know this, but they should. If you were to have an affiliate program, it'd be good to stop your own customers from selling - they're selling to your own traffic that you've earned through goodwill by passing off as you, essentially, I think that's a legal term.

And that's one of the reasons I stopped having an affiliate program all those years ago, I was disappointed that so many people would just register domains with my own name. One person even got my Skype username. And I'm like, why? And then he contacted me a while later and said, Listen, I registered your Skype username because I'm an affiliate of yours, and I thought it'd be handy. And he said, but people keep contacting me thinking it's you.

I'm like, gosh, that's shocking. I'm speechless. He said, Do you want it? And I said, Yeah, I'd like my own name. Thanks. So that's how I ended up with my own username for Skype, because someone else took it. Someone else was registering my domain names and they got domain names with all the modifiers, it was really eerie. So, it sucks when you're having to pay an affiliate commission for someone to outrank you for your own brand name.

I'd say, if you're going to have an affiliate program, get a strong base. You know, if I open up an affiliate program again in the future, at least I feel like I would protect myself or my own brand name. I've got enough traction now, hopefully, that that wouldn't be the most obvious place for them to poach sales.

How much can you actually control?

Gert: Yeah, we see this all the time, really. And it's so hard. Of course, you can usually talk about the paid ads. It's like I put on my name, I don't want to see an ad with organic. It's not that easy, right? So, people might tell us talk about you that still get it ranking, do some link building, etc. They are getting in the way. And ultimately, it's one of those parts that you don't control.

When we assess a search branding, where it's like, okay, what comes up in search for this brand name, we really go based on the level of control. There's full control, like you would have about your assets, there is partial control on social media. If there was a negative comment on every single post, it's still a negative comment. And then there's no control at all, where it's like, okay, this is something else.

And then you want to assess, is this positive, neutral or negative, in order to get what we call here internally, like, a reputation score. We internally make reputation score, it's like, okay, this is now at 60%. Let's see how can we get it to 70 to 80 to 90, and ideally, also, in the process, educate Google about your brand, so they really can figure out what is your page, what are your other pages, maybe your social profiles connect everything, and they can represent you much better than what Google knows about you, the more they're going to show people things from your assets.

James: One of the negative slant campaigns people used to run was the product name and then warning, don't buy such and such before you see this. I know that in some cases, people can stop other people using trademarks in paid campaigns. What about on a page? Can you ask someone to not use a trademark name in a search title, on a website, or not?

Gert: I'm not a lawyer. I just know that those kinds of things very often take months and years. I was talking to a lawyer the other day where they said they have a client who knows exactly. And the other person even confirms, yes, I know this is your trademark, but I'm still using it. And it had already costed like \$40,000, I think, and it's still not solved. And when they remove it, they probably leave a comment there that says this was removed because this other person sued me and who doesn't want me to talk about them, or whatever.

James: It just all reflects badly, doesn't it?

Gert: How do you go about this? I think in reputation management, it must be a really severe case where you go to legal action. I will try everything else first, before I go to this step, because it's going to cost a lot of money and take very, very long, and you might not even solve it at the end.

James: There's one thing I would say to this, because I did read an article saying, if you're bidding, or trying to rank, in this case, for a competitor, people searching for the competitor are not necessarily searching for you. So, you really have low odds of them. Like if I wanted to search for a particular surfboard brand, and I search for that, that's what I'm looking for.

If you rank for something that's not relevant to me or whatever, it'd be a big bridge for me to cross to consider some brand I'd never heard of when I'm specifically searching for a thing. I would need a site to have the thing I'm searching for, and then gently introduce me to the concept that there might be this other product to consider and then work their magic to make me feel like, oh, I now want that. That'll be a drawn out and lengthy process. And it has to be done artfully, I think, for that to carry.

Gert: I guess it's also different for physical products, right? When you have a physical product in mind and a specific brand, or you consider paying \$5,000 or \$25,000 for a course or a coding program, I think people are going to also evaluate things a little bit differently and really do their research. Like Nike shoes.

James: A hundred percent. Before they drop big bucks. Yeah, they're researching for risk issues to see if that's, you know, a problem, especially because it's online. But I think you're right, if you don't know the brand, or the product, if I was searching for an auto electrical supplier in my local neighborhood, I just got to try and work out my way through that.

And of course, if you see negative reviews, or those one stars, that's terrible, and it's shocking to hear that someone would put it for the wrong product, that sucks even more. I've seen people artfully reply to reviews, because it seems like it's not easy for them to be removed.

Gert: It can be really tricky. You need, like, a big user base really flagging this in order to have the algorithms take action. Very often what we recommend is to take the conversation elsewhere. So not really try to convince those people in a thread that you were right, they were wrong, or whatever. To really try to figure this out, make a statement like, Let's contact customer support with your details. Let's figure this out. We're going to compensate or whatever it is, really take this conversation off this thread, give this a really good helpful closing as soon as possible.

The importance of monitoring your brand

And this is also why the brand monitoring is so important. You want to know about these things as early as possible. Somebody has talked about you in a Reddit thread and you don't know about it. You just let it sit there and everybody who wants to vent about you is going to add to this thread without the brand ever answering, it's a really bad sign, and this can haunt you forever.

But if you just proactively, a day later, answer and say, Look, we come across here, can you let me know in support more about this particular case, and I'm personally going to get back to you, this is a much more helpful approach and everybody coming across this is going to understand, yeah, there can be issues, but apparently, they are very responsive, and might even take a more positive impression away.

James: How do you know when there's been a change like that? What sort of monitoring program would you suggest?

Gert: There are different pieces of software, the last one we were checking out was Brand24, for example, they just really scan the Internet. You can use in a very basic level, you can use Google Alerts, there's a free Google tool that's going to give you a lot of information about those results that actually end up in Google's index.

It might take a while though. So, it might be handy to have something else. It's also an interesting approach to use this on your competitors and say, Okay, what are the people actually talking about that brand? And maybe you can join those conversations, just as a potential hint to get some brand awareness going there as well.

James: What about Nike, I believe you had a story around Nike, in relation to this topic.

Gert: It gets interesting, it gets interesting, and I'm happy to share this one. Because now with AI, what we see right now in like an experimental state we have access to from Google, is that AI with the language models similar to ChatGPT, very often make stuff up that's out of context. So, they're going to use whatever content they find on the internet, in order to provide an answer to train their models, and based on this training, provide an answer.

And I was just having a case even documented on my LinkedIn profile then, where I asked Bard, Google's ChatGPT version pretty much, what the top running shoe brands were. And I was surprised Nike didn't come back because I liked the brand, and it didn't come back. And I was like, Why isn't Nike in this list? And they just came back and said, They have manufacturing issues.

And I was like, what? [laughs] So, I did some research, I really wanted to know where this came from. And I found it came pretty much literally from one customer review, talking about one particular model of shoes that apparently five years ago had a manufacturing issue. But this is what we're looking at right now. And this is what people underestimate.

So, we see all those advantages with AI now coming up. Everybody freaking out how efficient this is, and how good this is. And they don't have to write this anymore. And everything is great. And Google is just going to give me all the answers I want. The answers are made up. They're not at the stage where Google is only going to use facts. And but made up means that there is like, a tiny bit of truth behind this. But it's definitely not at the scale where I would leave out one of the top brands on this planet, just because there was one customer review, which is exactly what happened here.

So, you need to be aware, it's going to be harder and harder to monitor those kinds of things. But you want to account for those most common queries that you just have to expect. And really be aware of any negative mentions that's sitting there without a positive comment or a clarification or something like this. Because otherwise it might be taken just as face value by the algorithms.

James: I have a friend called Sean Vosler. And he writes books with AI. It's one of his projects. And he's saying that it just makes up quotes. That's the part that he hasn't, at the time of when I was reading his posts, that was the part that was causing an issue, because it would just put in anything, like wrong attribution.

And I do think there's still room for actual experts who have the ability to judge an output and say, Oh, this is good, or this is not good. So, we're in a good stage.

Some takeaways for the average marketer

So, this is very interesting. It sounds like if we were just sort of running ads or just going about our business normally, there's a few takeaways we might pull from this, and maybe a slight change of path or reallocation. Your thoughts on that?

Gert: Absolutely, you definitely want first of all, you really want to have the awareness about your brand, and say, okay, does this connect? Do I have issues? And then have a conversation with someone you trust, [SEOLeverage](#) could be a good one here. And then just, let's go through this and assess, what is the level of control that we have? Can we actually fix this? Or can we not fix it?

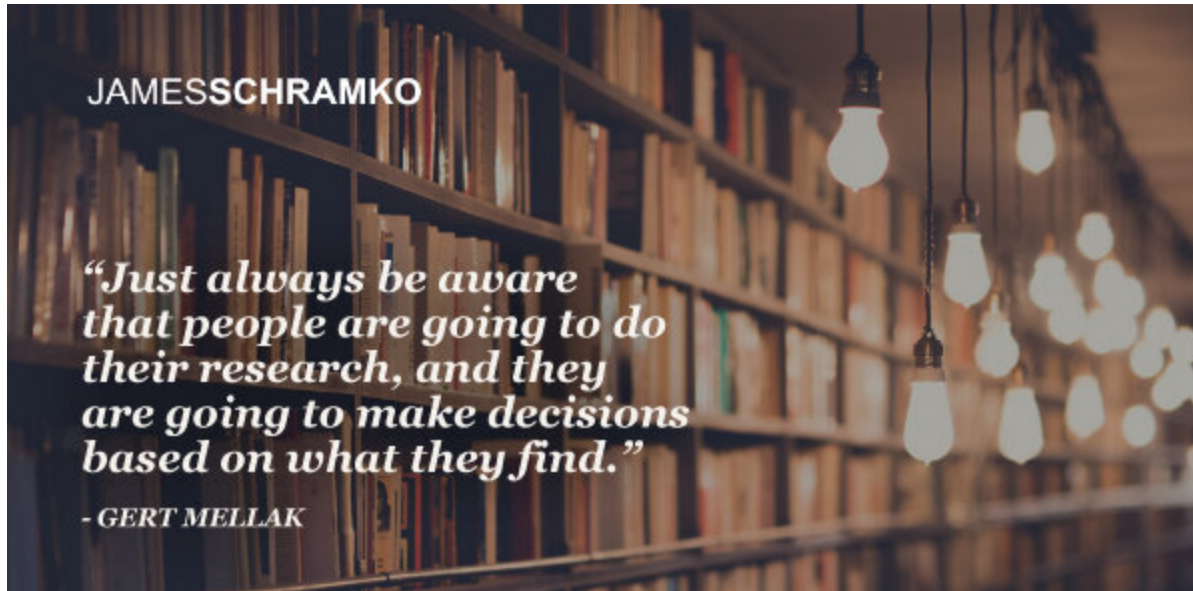
If we can't fix this, we might have to completely change something and say, Okay, let's go down a different route, sometimes different domain, or different branding, or different industry. For some people really in the worst case, usually there is something you can do about it. And then you really want to get as much control over the communication about your brand as possible.

James: So, some people are probably doing like two steps forward, running ads, and then one step backward with negative reviews. And I've actually seen this with someone I've worked with before. They had a big front end, in terms of their marketing approach, and then people would go and look stuff up and then start canceling appointments and asking for refunds. And it's like, wow, all that work and money to just go backwards again. Maybe direct some energy there?

Gert: Absolutely, usually I would actually start with the search branding before I run ads on a larger scale, just to make sure that whoever searches for me right now should get the best impression they can get. And once I'm there, I can now scale it and make sure more people search for me. Because otherwise, it might just completely backfire. Or you just check out the ads' KPIs in isolation, and say, Hey, I'm getting good clickthrough rates, I'm getting conversions, etc. But you're completely missing out that a large portion of those people are not buying, just because of what they find out about you.

James: You know, my friend, [Chris Benetti](#), who was on a previous episode, he said, that's what's happening with my book. We're giving away the book, [Work Less, Make More](#), available on Amazon or on my website, for free on my website. And we're giving it away for less than 90 cents a copy. And that's what it costs me to give the book away, because of all the work I've done with the content. So, it's like the reputation goodwill in the market has made my ads cost less to run.

And also, of course, as each year the book goes, we have more content around the book, getting results in terms of the search results. Someone wants to look for the book, they're going to find it pretty easily now, because it's in different places. And they'll find reviews and all the rest of it. But when you layer ads on top of a preexisting campaign, I think that's what you just said, I'm seeing the result of that for sure.



JAMESSCHRAMKO

“Just always be aware that people are going to do their research, and they are going to make decisions based on what they find.”

- GERT MELLAK

Gert: Absolutely. Just always be aware that people are going to do their research, and they are going to make decisions based on what they find.

James: Is it still low risky putting budget towards Google? I mean, you've just mentioned AI before, that's one possible area people are migrating to or moving towards. Is it still the main player? Is it still a game worth playing?

Gert: Absolutely, Google is not going away. And AI is no real time, there's no real time AI engine, doing the research and checking out 20 websites for you to come up with the best answer. This is all preexisting in Google's index, in Google's database. So, what we do see is that SEO has been getting a lot more technical.

Where does AI fit in the picture?

So, it's not as "easy" as it was 10 years ago to write a lot of content and get enough visibility to make this worthwhile. You need to write content these days in a way that the engines can understand it, and can actually use this content properly for the AI answers. So, we are looking at a situation where in a few months, probably Google is going to have AI everywhere. And whatever they come up with is going to be based on what they have on their index, what they have learned about the world, what they have learned about you personally, with your Gmail account, with all your data, what you probably want, this is what we're looking at.

But it still requires that the engine that is being fed with really correct, coherent and really extensive data. So, we're essentially looking at the dialogue between your website and your content, and the AI. They are interacting. So, we need to make sure that we verbalize everything about your brand, about your products, about your programs, in order for the AI to properly understand it and be able to come up with you as one of those main options, like Nike actually should.

James: Yeah, and I think you showed me where the AI had been trained on my name or my book. So, it's like, there is stuff out there, feeding it. So feed it good stuff. And I think you've, in the past, said we should be consistent with our SEO, it's not like a one and done type thing. It's something you'd look at ongoing.

And I've certainly noticed that with our interactions when you are updating us with our SEO results, some of the things we've been working on over time, they just float to the top. And there it is. But that's been a gradual process of idea through to changes or curation, or in some cases, new content creation, sometimes deletion, or merging. And then the result happens in time. So, it's like a gradual, continual process.

Gert: Absolutely. It needs to be continuous and it absolutely needs to be consistent. So, we see very often brands talk about what they do in very, very different ways, which makes it extremely hard for a machine, right?

As a human being, you can understand why somebody with a coaching program might call themselves a lifestyle expert in social media. You can work with this as a human being and I guess, pretty much fits this entire image I have from this person, but the machine doesn't understand it. Are you either a lifestyle expert or are you a - I don't know what - career coach, for example, right? They really need to know, we need to be consistent. And this takes a lot of monitoring, a lot of analysis, and then a lot of strategy in the content creation process.

So, we actually, whatever we produce should actually add value and clarity about our brand. If we just produce content for the sake of having an article out, it's definitely not getting results. But if we do this, because it's another opportunity to communicate what our brand stands for, and our main values, and who we work with, and how we help them, and who we are in a way that the machine can understand, and there are different ways to phrase this as well, then it's going to add value to the brand on top.

Quality first, or quantity?

James: So, I'm hearing that quality might be more important than quantity now.

Gert: It's a little bit of both, interestingly, these days. So, we went through a phase in the last years where quality was more and more important. Right now, Google is very keen on ranking specific answer to specific questions. And if you think about everybody listening to this, think about your industry, how many questions there are about your industry, actually, the more questions you answer there, the more you're going to become an authority, a topical authority, as we call this, in SEO and in Google.

So, it's a little bit of both. You want to have the quality and make sure that it's definitely a good answer, and a clear answer the machines can understand. But you want to do this a lot of times in order to have an impact.

James: So, in summary, a good step would be to go and look for my brand or my business, add a couple of modifiers, see what suggestions are at the bottom, and pay attention to what people would see if they're looking for me, and what they're going to experience if they go and click on that link.

Is it a dead end? Do they have to come back? Is it something unexpected compared to what the title says? Is it somebody else? Me on someone else's podcast, or someone's giving away my book without authority or whatever? Like, that would be good to know. And then I can adjust my campaigns moving forward on an ongoing, consistent, high-quality basis to target a specific result. Is that sort of the essence of what it looks like?

Gert: Absolutely. And just be sure that whatever comes up is going to get at least a few clicks. So, it's not like somebody just sees your website and wants everything else.

James: But if I want clicks, if it's someone else's website, it doesn't really matter so much, does it?

Gert: It matters because they essentially take your attention away. If somebody's looking for you and goes to another website, their attention is gone.

James: So I need to outrank those people.

Gert: Absolutely. We need to outrank them, we need to make sure that the results you control and that are in your favor are on top in Google.

If you want help with your SEO...

James: What about when someone searches for you, Gert, and they find my podcast? Is that okay?

Gert: For me, it's okay. Because when they listen to the show, they're going to see that I'm just trying to add value. If you were now pushing you were an SEO agency, I would probably try to outrank it.

James: Oh, yeah, I'm pushing an agency alright. It's [SEOLeverage.com](https://www.seoleverage.com).

Gert: I can't let that happen. [laughs]

James: They do this terrific search branding analysis. So, if you want someone to have a look at your brand and reputation, I guess, Gert, you're the guy, you're my SEO guy. So, you know, you've always had my SEO heart. Since I don't have an SEO business anymore, I'm really a big fan of yours. And I've mentioned this before, you know, there's a strong association, there's some crossover with our old team, you help us with our SEO now.

I do recommend your business. You're a partner of mine, because your product quality is how we became partners. I kept sending people to you because you were the guy in the forum who had an SEO business. They kept coming back saying thank you. And that's what I'm looking for. And over such a long time, every time we publish an episode, Gert, I'm sure you probably get feedback too, but I get such great emails and comments saying, Thank you, that was really good information. Very practical. Gert's a fantastic guest. Keep him coming back. So here you are.

And I appreciate you and all the help you do. And hopefully, this is a sweet spot topic for me, because it's why I learned SEO in the very beginning. And thanks to you and doing good SEO, I feel like we've got pretty good brand control now of my own name. And if you are curious about my old acting past, I don't know how many results you'll have to flick through to find it, but it'll be there somewhere.

Gert: Definitely going to be found. I definitely appreciate being able to share a few insights here and there on this platform. Appreciate you taking some time here to talk to me as well. And yeah, I believe branded search is going to be what's going to survive in the next 10, 20 years. So, I think this is definitely the best moment right now to start taking this seriously.

James: Yeah, look, I couldn't be happier about [switching across to my own brand](#) last year. It was time to just really do the King Kong move and go back to the beginning. It took a long time to do that. But I did it from 2005, I think, or six at the very latest, to 2022. That was a big gap between where I was not using that domain for much at all. And I have seen a big impact from that. Owning your own brand and being confident with it is a good idea.

So, I've been chatting to [Gert Mellak](#) from [SEOLeverage.com](#). We'll have you back for sure.

Gert: Will be happy to. Thank you so much.

JAMESSCHRAMKO



**Optimize your
business strategy
with James's help**