

A man with short brown hair, wearing a grey blazer over a red polo shirt and dark trousers, is sitting on concrete steps outdoors. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. His hands are clasped in his lap. The background shows a building with a white metal railing and a concrete wall.

JAMES SCHRAMKO

If You Have a Local Business... Do THIS for SEO

Looking to up your local SEO game? James and SEOLeverage's Gert Mellak have got you. Discover how to gain the benefits of SEO for local businesses.



Gert Mellak

James: James Schramko here. Welcome back to my podcast. This is episode 1033. Today, we're talking about local business SEO with [Gert Mellak](#) from [SEOLeverage.com](#). Hello, Gert.

Gert: Hey, James.

James: Good to have you back. Of course, we're talking about [all things SEO](#). SEO means of course Search Engine Optimization, we love this topic, because it's a good way to get traffic for the long haul. There's still significant rewards for playing the SEO game. It's not on everyone's radar, we're hearing so much about all these other things about paid traffic, about AI, about who knows what. But what we're not hearing about much of is good old-fashioned search engine optimization. And as someone who still uses Google every single day, I think it's here to stay for a little while, what do you think?

Gert: I would think so, and I think it's actually stronger than ever now with all the AI movement we have out there. AI really searches for training material to provide answers. And if you don't give it to them in a structured and strategic way, they're just making stuff up. So it's crazy, I think SEO is stronger than ever.

A sample of how local SEO works

James: Yeah, and look, it's on my mind, because I made some purchases recently. And there were some good examples that I think might sort of come into play today. For example, I went to a store and I purchased some new shoes. And I really liked the shoes. I was at my local shops. So it's a national chain, but they have a shop in my local shops. And I really, really liked the shoes.

And when I got home, I thought, you know what, because I was having a bit of color choice fatigue, I'm like, I don't know whether to get this color or that color. You know what I thought, Gert, I thought, I'm going to buy the other color. I know my size. I love how they feel and the way they look. So I went online, I start searching for the shoe.

And, of course, I'm going to get different options, I'm going to get the national brand, I'm going to get their paid ad, I'm going to get their organic site. But I'm also seeing other resellers vying for my business. And they might also be local. And sometimes they might even be local to me and I didn't know they were local to me. There could be other retailers.

For example, if I wanted to search for a pair of jeans, like Levi jeans is a popular old-fashioned brand. There's actually three stores in the local shopping center that sells that brand, they stock that brand. But I didn't know that until I searched for it. But is it possible that some of these stores could have a greater influence on which results come up than the other stores or the national brand themselves?

Gert: Absolutely. And it's really interesting how local SEO actually works. If you think about it, there's a statistic that says almost half of all searches performed on Google have a local intent. So what does this mean, then? If there are a billion searches, half of them is actually going to have a local intent, meaning I'm searching for something that's near to me, right, I'm searching for a pizza delivery, I'm searching a car repair shop, I want to know the opening hours of the local vet, all those are local results.

And Google has been doing a really good job in making sure that they match queries with a local intent with local providers. So it pays off to be close to the actual user because Google is going to already give you a few starting points when they determine where you should actually be ranking. And then the second part of this equation is that a lot of those local queries have just a very, very high purchase intent as well.

We know that about 80% of local searches actually lead to somebody actually converting into a customer, which is crazy, if you think about it. And this is also where even nationally selling brands, very often, we advise them to create, like, local versions or local pages of their national service, just to present themselves as a local provider with the local stores.

Who this episode is for

James: That's what I was going to ask, who should listen to this episode? Because it sounds like a national brand or even an e-commerce brand that would sell a similar item might be able to edge out a local brand who's busy focusing on their social media page or something.

Gert: A hundred percent. Everybody, I think. We're getting leads from Brazil from people searching for an SEO company in Madrid, because they want to have a Spanish partner, they type in SEO in Madrid. They tell us, Look, I was searching for an SEO company in Madrid because I know you know Spanish and we want to get SEO from the Latin American market. And so they reach out to us, they find us this way directly. And this happens for a lot of companies.

So whatever you're selling, if you're selling skateboards, people automatically, intuitively - and this might be a little bit of a historical reason as well - they look for somebody near them, right? I'm in CBD in Sydney, CBD, I'm looking for somebody in my area. I don't care if I can purchase from somewhere else. I could purchase in France and Sydney from Queensland. If it arrives next day, I really don't care. But the initial purchase or initial search is going to be local, very often.

The difference SEO could make

James: I've noticed I've started purchasing more stuff from Amazon. But sometimes, there's not stock, or it's not any cheaper or better value. And I do try and go local, if possible, but often the local sites are not showing up. But I did purchase something today, I actually bought a UV filter protector for my Canon lens. I did order one on Amazon. But it's about three weeks away, and it hasn't shipped.

And then I saw a local store. I was driving past it. And it was a camera store. And I went in and they had what I wanted. So I ordered that, and I was able to cancel the order from Amazon. But had that store done a better job, perhaps when I'm googling for that product, could they have come up for the product because they're local to me? And would Google work out they're local to me?

Gert: Absolutely. So if they do a really good job, they try to attach their brand and their website with a lot of local aspects. So a lot of businesses we work with actually depend on just what you're seeing, they depend on the traffic driving by, they have a good location, they pay high rent just to have this location, because this is how they actually acquire leads, so to speak, to get a chance to make a sale.

But if they presented themselves well, if they tied their product offering to the location as a local provider, and really embraced the fact that they're local, very often people see this as a weakness. But in many cases, it's their strength and it's a strength they have, and they can build up on it, they absolutely can come up as a provider for this particular product.

James: So me searching for this product name, I'm seeing some local, I'm seeing some national chains, I'm seeing some local stores, and I'm seeing Amazon a lot. It's so easy to purchase on Amazon, that's probably where they get you. But if you can outrank Amazon and you have this local thing, then that's good.

I liked the fact that I was able to have it straightaway, and also support a local business. But still a lot of interesting things happen, you know, when I went in there, it was more expensive. They had labeled the price incorrectly, they weren't exactly sure what stock they had in stock, they did not ask me how I found out about them, they did enroll me into their loyalty program, which is usually just means they're going to be selling me stuff for less than what I would normally pay. Because generally, customer loyalty programs are not effectively marketing.

I'm getting a feeling that they're really not necessarily tracking the success of their marketing or their presence or putting too much effort into that. And maybe, they're just leaning on the fact that they do have a good retail presence. And I'm just wondering, what could happen for them if they just got a little bit more active in that?

Where many businesses fall short

Gert: Yeah, definitely, there's a lot of businesses we work with the local, they just have the traditional channels, right? They don't even think about digital marketing too much. They have somebody running their Facebook ads and probably posting here, a photo here and there, or even the business owner posted from their phone with a comment or something like this, they probably get the same 20 people liking the post every day. And that's about it.

And then they just rely on people referring clients to them or just driving by, popping in, not something they would actually even track how many people actually enter my store. They don't even get to that level. Because if you're not in digital marketing every single day, it's just not top of mind. And very often, this is when we audit the website and say, Hey, you don't even have tracking in place, do you actually know if your website is working?

And I have a funny story then, we had one client actually open up the browser showing the website and said, Look it is working. And I'm like, Yeah, this was not what I was talking about. Right, if the website is functioning, it's a different thing than if it's working for you.

James: This is up online right now.

Gert: This is crazy, right? Because it's just so interesting how people think so differently when they're not in the trenches of marketing all the time. And I was like, Yeah, how many people come to your website? They have no idea. If somebody knows how many people come, they have no idea where they come from.

Do they come from social? Those Facebook ads updates that you pay for \$200 a VA for, do they actually do something for your business? Do they drive traffic? Do they get engagement? Do they do anything that would indicate that this is a good idea to keep spending this money? They just don't even ask those questions.

So very often, initially, with a local business, there's a lot of coaching involved. And then we just get them set up and say, Hey, look, this is now the benchmark. This is the data, we give them a dashboard, we give them in our app, they just see what is actually happening with the SEO part of the traffic, and then educate them about the other channels as well.

How Gert actually helps these businesses

James: How do you successfully take a business from that state of shock? And I imagine they get angry with you for asking all these questions, where the answer is not good. How do you take them from that to having a dashboard, showing them what their metrics are? Does that ever actually happen? Or do they just tell you to piss off, right?

Gert: It actually does happen. It obviously requires people to have realized that there is something else out there, or understand that they might have been missing something in the past 10 years. And say, Hey, Gert, I need help. And they say, Look, sounds really good. I would love to have this dashboard. Can you help me create something like this?

And this is where we then start, and very often, even get them rethink some of the things they are doing on other channels, because they just don't have the data to back up that this is a good idea. Or they might even rank for completely irrelevant stuff. In SEO, we see them, I just tell clients sometimes what they actually come up for in Google. And they say, hey, we used to sell this eight years ago, but we don't. Why are we still showing up for this?

And this is finally, they understand why people call and want this thing, because they just happen to rank for this. They don't even have it in stock or have completely changed their business. But they are open to this, we have done this several times where we bring people from completely offline to an online business that knows their data, works really, really well. And once this is in place, people are happy.

But we definitely need somebody to be open to this. And so give this a few weeks until we have everything set up and start tracking data. And then we very often also ask them to track how many people actually enter the store. Can you just put an X somewhere, whenever somebody enters the store and put a second note next to it if they make a purchase, to just track, how many purchase are you actually making?

What's the conversion of people entering your store? Does it change if you change the window presentation out there? Right? Can you have an updated billboard, because it really doesn't show well. Right? So there's just a lot of things that you automatically notice when you're in this every single day. And it definitely can skyrocket a business.

Taking the retail approach

James: Yeah, the retail approach is so critical. And it reminds me of pre-internet. In the dealership, when I was running the Mercedes-Benz dealership. You ever seen that movie Moneyball, you know, Brad Pitt and Jonah Hill, and they're doing statistics? We were using a concept like that. We were tracking every single person that walked in, man in red jumper, lady with yellow dress, etc.

We'd see who they spoke to, we'd see what they were driving, we'd follow up if they had their car evaluated, if they test drove a car, if they met a manager in the dealership. And we were able to track it all from a G drive, back in the old days, right? We had the central drive and the computer, but it was an intranet. And we would get a spreadsheet printed off every single day for the sales manager, and we'd have a meeting on it the next morning, every single day.

This is 20 years ago, more than, 25 years ago. So this is definitely possible in a retail environment. But it's just so rare. So I guess what you're saying, the first step is you need to take stock of where you're actually at in terms of best practice and what's possible. And you do that via an SEO audit, from what I gather.

Gert: Exactly. This is usually where we start, we just need to know what we're dealing with. Like if you go to a gym, they do a checkup before, they weigh you, they measure you, they get your metabolic baseline, and etc, just to make sure that they see where you are, and then say, Okay, where do you actually want to be? And let's say, Okay, how do we believe we can get there across the different channels? And we then handle usually the search marketing part of it.

James: Man, you just blew me away with metabolic baseline. I was speaking to my friend [Zac Mason](#) yesterday.

Gert: I've learned a lot from those podcast episodes. Thanks, Zac. [laughs]

James: But as we were talking about his product and his offer and who he talks to, and I said Zac, no one knows what metabolic baseline is. You can't use words like that. And then the next day, Gert's on the podcast talking about metabolic baseline. Mate, you're proving me completely wrong.

Gert: I definitely learn a lot from these other episodes as well.

James: I mean, I've learned a bit about it now but I've said, don't talk to prospects about metabolic baseline. All they want to know is can they still eat chocolate, hamburgers or takeaway, right? So anyway, I digress. So you do this audit, you tell them about this dream dashboard. Some of them say yes, please. I'm ready to get help. What happens after that?

Do you stand a chance against the big guys?

They start tracking, you interact with them, you show them what's going on. And can they actually start edging out the multinationals, the nationals, the geo-independent people who are competing for that customer, can they start muscling in and owning that local database?

Gert: Very often, they can actually. And this is where people say, okay, you can never compete with Amazon, you can never compete with Target, you can never compete with these big guys. But the big guys are not going down to a local level. So if you just focus on where you're really strong, which is this personal, customer service, they know your name, probably customers come back, and they ask, and they just leverage this direct access.

If you double down on it, a lot of good things are going to happen, because you are playing in a field where the big guys are not playing. And you're really strong, because you're probably, from the local providers, one of the few that actually embraces this, this opportunity, and presents themselves well.

We have taken car repair shops, dentist's, office partition manufacturers, all kinds of businesses, to a level that they hadn't even expected, to multiple millions, really, in euros, here, for example, in Europe, just because they were nowhere near and the competitors completely slept over, over the opportunity back then. And this still works. It's still happening.

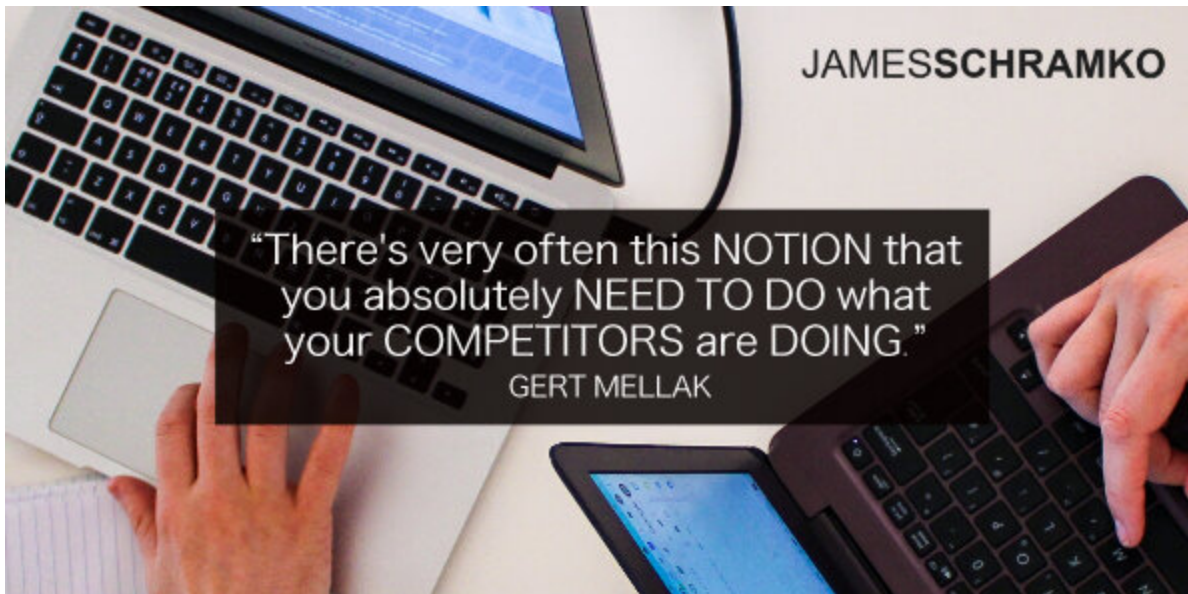
And we just did this recently, I think a few months ago for another local company. And we broke this thing at gym in Singapore and within a manufacturing company in Australia, I believe. So it's really working. But you need to really go all in and understand what does Google really want. Google wants to give a good result. And somebody already searching for a local provider, the best result they can get is a local provider offering this product.

James: Yeah, and I imagine it's a bit harder. Like, way back 2008, I signed up my two local business clients. I had an injury lawyer and a car dealer. Shortly after, the car dealer was coming up for almost everything on the first page of Google for that, if you put the brand and the suburb, we owned it. We had videos, we had paid ads, we had search listings, we had images, like, everything that you could have, we had it.

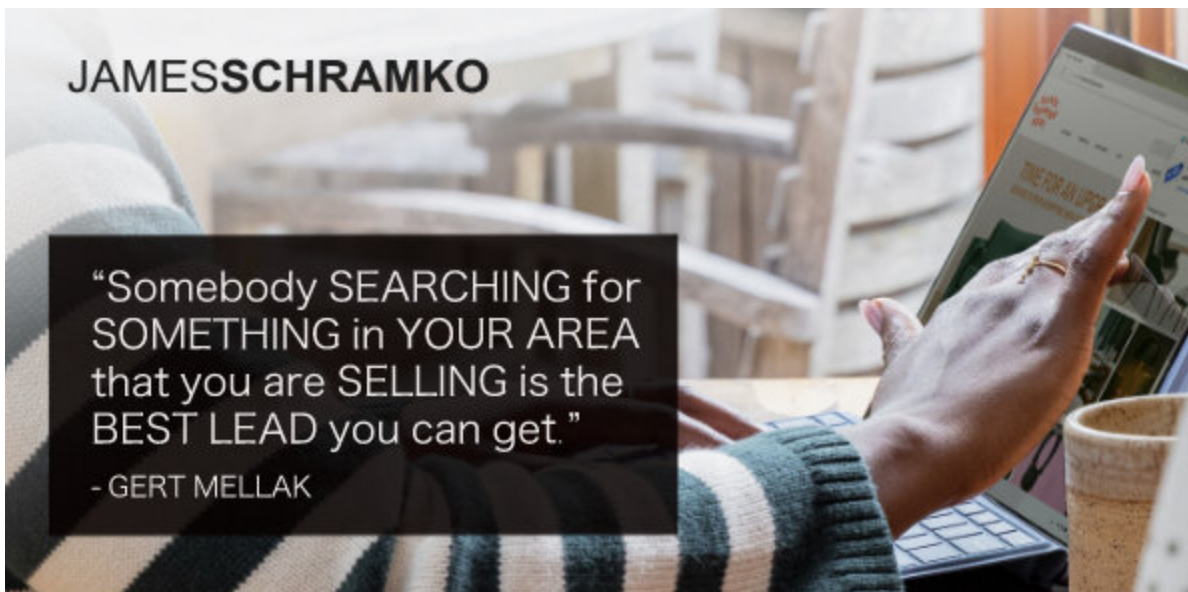
And I put the screenshot of this in a product that I sold later called Traffic Grab. It was like the most incredible testimonial possible. And I imagine now a lot more people have got the wherewithal to both run paid ads and do search engine. They're probably doing some YouTube stuff, they might be appearing for those couple of images, maybe some e-commerce type style ads, not sure what options are there.

Are people just too busy with other stuff?

But I wonder, do you think some are distracted, you know, like too busy creating TikToks, or Instagram stuff? Is that who takes your budget, when you're out there in the market with local businesses? I'd love to do something, Gert. But we're spending it all on AdWords or, you know, we're all in on video creation, and we're doing short viral videos now.



Gert: I think there's very often this notion that you absolutely need to do what your competitors are doing. I have a local store who jumped on TikTok like crazy. They had a great search marketing campaign going and got more calls that they could actually handle, but they had a competitor who was really successful with TikToks. And so they dropped everything and said, no, TikTok is now the thing.



So obviously, they stopped getting the search marketing leads. But they're now all in TikTok, they do get a lead here and there. But it's definitely not as consistent. It's much more work for them. Instead of focusing on the business, they're focusing now on creating videos every day, and editing videos, and line up a completely new marketing channel. I think it's important that we understand one thing. Somebody searching for something in your area that you are selling is like, the best lead you can get.

The benefits of focus

James: So just on that, do you basically say, Okay, this is what we want to sell. These are our best local type clients, let's make a campaign to really target that?

Gert: We go as niche as it makes sense for a particular product, right? So if somebody says, I'm a car repair shop, and I can repair all cars, and all brands in all kinds of fashions and all price levels, we are going to have a long conversation until we get them to a point where they say, Hey, if I could choose two or three things I really like to repair and we're good at it, let's do this.

We had specifically a car repair shop who said, Look, we are really good at repairing gearboxes. And not every car repair shop can do this. I'm just substituting tire gearbox, but this company can actually disassemble it. And I saw one of them open. And it's crazy. I don't know how they put this thing together again. But they actually specialize on this for a fraction of the price.

So we just set them up with a Google ads and SEO campaign. And within days, the Google ads campaign started bringing in calls, and within, I think, a couple of months, SEO was ranking there. Because we just got so focused in their area for this particular niche product that this completely skyrocketed. So they stopped, they didn't want to hire more people. They could have hired more people to just focus on more of those sales.



“You CAN'T
possibly be an
AUTHORITY in
EVERYTHING.”
GERT MELLAK

JAMES SCHRAMKO

So if you can focus it, it's easier because you have less competition and probably are much better at what you're doing. You never want to go in too broad there. So you can always start with something and then spread out. But we really try to pinpoint something and get as narrow as possible at the beginning, because this is also how you convince Google that you're an authority, you can't be possibly an authority in everything.

James: Yeah, it's hard, I've tried it. If you're the TikTok guy, you'd say go broad, make the broadest possible videos to get the virality, that's how you get a million views. But you can't cash views down at the supermarket when you want to buy food. So here's the thing. I imagine the secondary benefits of getting that reputation as being the very best gearbox repair in that area. Because occasionally I log on to Facebook, still, and there are local community groups.

And I see stuff, like I saw one yesterday, it's like someone put a picture of they had dents on their car. And they said, Who's good at doing dents in this area? And they actually say who they tried and why they - I tried this person, and they said it can't be done. I tried another one. They said they'll look at it in two months.

And then I saw a couple of people chiming in with the name of a dent company. And then I saw a pattern of like three, four, five, six people recommending the same place, they're now getting the reputation of being the person, this is the person to go to in this area for that thing. So now they're leveraging a free social group. It's like a Facebook group.

But maybe they kick that whole thing off by running ads, or by ranking for this search term, and then doing a good job. And now they've got these raving advocates out there in the community, who when they see a post like this, because a lot of people are in a community or Facebook group, they can just chime in and say, Oh yeah, these guys.

And that's also how I ended up with my pool guy. My pool guy was highly recommended in the local area. And also, I found him when I searched. And if someone's not organically in the first page, I'm a little more hesitant. If it's a sponsored ad, I feel like they're just a call center selling leads. If they're organically in the first page, and they have good reviews - and I want to ask you if that's part of the deal - then I will have a criteria of making sure that they're predominantly good reviews, and I'll look at the very worst reviews and the very best reviews, and I'll make a decision there. And then I'll call them.

Because I'm going to give this person business for a long time. Actually just paid him \$550 for a new salt cell, whatever they are, I actually Googled that to see how much they should cost and what they are. And apparently that's about right. Even though I trust him, I just wanted to know what the hell it is.

Do Google reviews play a part?

But anyway, is it important to get Google reviews as part of local SEO? Is that a factor, a part of the algorithm?

Gert: Absolutely. But it has multiple nuances to it, right? So first of all, Google reviews, if somebody doesn't have Google reviews, this is part of Google business profiles, which used to be called Google My Business, a couple of years ago, can just sign up for free there, put in your details, upload some photos, etc., more photos the better, pretty much, and then even send clients, happy clients, a link. So they leave a review for you, encourage them.

So we very often educate local business clients specifically about this as well, how and at which stage they should be asking for a review. Because it ultimately signals of real users, Google knows if this is a fake profile, a fake Gmail user, or somebody who's online every day and matching a natural pattern. And with local businesses, Google very often through the phone and to your Google account, Gmail etc., knows if you have actually physically been there. So they have a very good idea if a review can be correct.

James: You raise a point, like they can literally track your phone to that address.

Gert: Exactly. They even know how busy this place is at a certain time of the day, right?

James: And I would 100% believe that they would do that. Because I get in my car and my phone tells me how long it's going to take to go home, which it knows I do at the same time every day.

Gert: Yeah, 100%.

James: They are totally - that's a very interesting - I've never thought of that, Gert, but we are carrying a tracking device at all times, aren't we?

Gert: There are people creating traffic jams and Google maps with 500 phones in the trunk of their car, just to see if they can manipulate Google enough. And also some Blackhat stuff, really shady stuff we don't engage with, where they just try to manipulate things short term, to get like, a business up with additional traffic or like a campaign that apparently goes viral just because there are 200 phones hanging around.

But yeah, if you play things well and there's no need to engage in those kinds of actions, just play things well, make sure that you get good reviews from happy customers at the right time, ask them at the right time for a review. And you can get them naturally, and you're going to be protected in the future.

James: It's the simple things, isn't it? It's that retail person who says, you know, after the guy installed my pool heater, you know, he said, Hey, by the way, if you could, it'd be great if you could leave a review, it really helps my business when people are looking at it. Of course, I leave him a review. That's a nice thing to do, and he did a great job. And he was out there quickly.

The other place I called, they didn't even call back. By the time they called back, it was already installed. And it cost a lot. So I was happy to leave a review. And it will actually have a continual effect of him getting more and more business.

And eventually, some businesses will survive or die based on how well they're doing that local SEO. And I think it's imperative with the local SEO that the business owner engages the team, whoever's face to face with the customer, to gather that information, to ask for those reviews, and to update all the images, and the website, and keep it all relevant.

Advice for two types of listeners

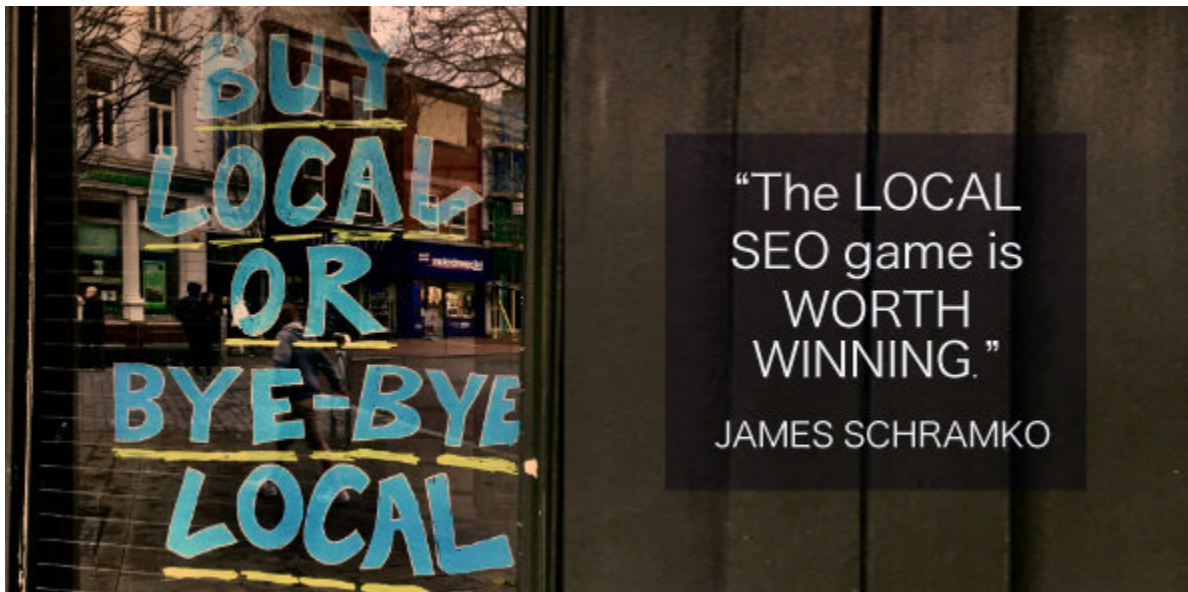
What other advice would you have for someone who's - I'm going to ask it on both behalf - someone who's got a local business, what are the top couple of things they should do? And for someone who doesn't have a local business, who's maybe got an e-commerce store selling a piece of equipment, and they're trying to get people in different regions, what could they do?

Gert: So if somebody isn't a local business, but wants to catch regions, one good thing they can do is to actually analyze the reports in their so-called Google Search Console, which is a panel Google gives website owners, so your tech person probably has access to it or can set it up. And then you're going to see that keywords queries people use in connection with specific locations come up here and there in a very bad ranking.

So you might show up on page eight, for somebody searching in your area for what you're selling. There's a good indicator that you could probably create an entire page about it, and say, Hey, I'm the Mercedes car repair shop in Sydney CBD, and you create an entire article, an entire page about it. And you're going to probably rank much higher in a matter of a few weeks.

If you already have a local business, I would just see, how can you actually embrace this aspect of the local business? And what I mean by embracing is that people very often then don't even show their address everywhere on the page, they might not show a map, they might pretty much want to present themselves like a big national business rather than embracing the fact that they're local, that they have two people, everybody knows by name, and that could show on the front page of their homepage, really, because you'd probably know them from your local town anyway.

And then also tie the content that you publish, always back to your location and your product. Because Google ultimately needs consistency. AI in general can only learn language models, only learn with consistent information. So if you, your brand, consistently appear with what you're selling, and the location where you're at, AI engines are going to take their learnings out of that. And this is what's going to also make sure that you build a solid foundation for whatever is going to come in the next month and couple of years in this field.



James: You're a treasure trove. I appreciate everything you always share with us. So the local SEO game is worth winning. And do you have anything that you've put together, like a checklist or something that people could learn from, perhaps at your website, or somewhere that we can say, hey, here's the sort of things that you'd be looking for if you were to audit a local SEO business, like to say, Okay, are you doing this, this, this or this, or make sure you got these things in place?

Gert: We used to have a checklist, but then found it's not personalized enough to actually provide enough value. So what we're doing right now, and we're selling this on our website for \$100, is a quick wins analysis where somebody of my team goes through the website, analyzes the website from a few different aspects based on what the kind of business is, and then puts together a report that's customized, manually reviewed, and then it's going to be sent over and then usually we also have a call.

So what I would like to do is to give this away for free. Whoever reaches out to support@seoleverage.com after hearing this, mention the podcast that you heard this on with James, and my team and I are going to be happy to put this together for you for free. Like I say, we sell this at \$100, but this is a free offer. So just let us know about it. And then ideally, we have a conversation afterwards because you might want more context and maybe some more specific action items, but this is a really good starting point.

James: That is very generous. So it's normally \$100, and it involves someone in your team, like you're paying for this labor. Do you want to put an expiry date on that? Like, how long would - because someone might listen to this in three years and send you a cheeky email. I get a couple of those.

Gert: Yeah, we can probably do it for a few months. Let's see about the three years.

James: In 2023, how about that?

Gert: Twenty twenty three sounds fair. Afterwards, hit me up and we'll see what we can do.

James: After that, you know, try it, but no guarantees. That's only fair.

Gert: Sounds fair.

James: Gert, thank you so much. I've been chatting with [Gert Mellak](#) from [SEOLeverage.com](#). A good friend. He's a partner of mine. I refer all my clients to Gert's business because he's steady hands. He also has - plenty of his team used to work in my business. So I'm really excited that they're still continuing, and imagine the deep knowledge they have after being in that for 12 years or so.

And Gert, you've been doing it for double that. So like, an absolute industry icon. This is episode 1033 at [JamesSchramko.com](#). Thank you so much for joining us, Gert, and we'll have you back to talk about more SEO stuff in the future.

Gert: Thanks, James. Always a pleasure to chat, and yeah, let's see what other topics we can talk about.

James: Thank you.

JAMES SCHRAMKO

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