



The AI Revolution: How It's Reshaping SEO

AI is making the news, and here to talk about AI for SEO is SEOLeverage's Gert Mellak. What does it mean for the industry? He and James discuss.



Gert Mellak

James: James Schramko here. Welcome back to my podcast. This is episode 998. Today, we're chatting about SEO, and AI, and all those interesting juxtapositions. We're seeing where is SEO at. We've heard from our other experts. [We've talked about traffic, we've talked about copywriting, we've talked about teams.](#) So continuing on in this AI series, I've brought along [Gert Mellak](#), welcome to the call.

Gert: Hey, James, so good to be here again.

James: I've kind of like we saved the best to last, we've got the most excited, passionate, technologically interested, former developer, I think you are, to talk about this. So I know you're going to bring some punch to this discussion. We've had some really interesting discussions to see how it's affecting our business. And I'm super curious to know how it's impacting the SEO side of things.

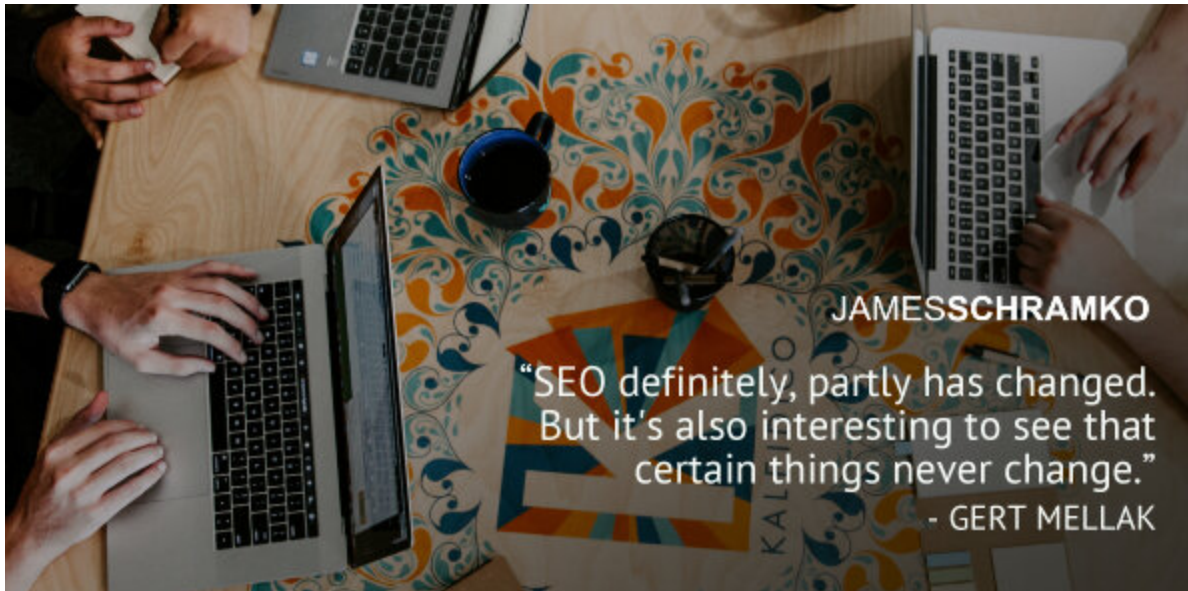
And just to sort of set this up nicely, I'm always full of gratitude for what you're able to help us with for my own business. I recently had a client come on board who found us through an article that you told us to write, which we did, and then ranked for, and it turned into a conversion pathway. So, Gert, your stuff actually works.

You're over there at SEOLeverage.com, and you help our team with it. And as a customer, and as a partner of yours, and as a friend, I'm really curious to know where we can go with this. But I'd like to know like, firstly, what, if any changes, have you observed in the way that SEO is being done for your clients?

Gert: It's really an interesting question. First of all, AI now with SEO, in combination, definitely ticks a lot of boxes for me, it's really, I'm down a rabbit hole, and it's hard for me to get out.

James: Well, I don't see you smile that often. And then you're already like, you're off the meter this episode already. Like, clearly, this topic is something you love.

Gert: Yeah, I definitely have been spending quite some time. There are a lot of ideas ahead for our SEO Leverage platform a few years back that are now finally possible and easily doable actually for our developers as well, because artificial intelligence really used to be something like, for the academics and in university areas where they had their own networks, and I don't know what.



But now, this is accessible for a normal agency like ours, and we are definitely able to really produce things that are in line with where our clients want to go. So SEO definitely, partly has changed. And we're going to talk about this. But it's also interesting to see that certain things never change.

Where AI was and where it's at

James: Yeah, that is interesting. It sounds like the internet in a way that was originally for military and universities and then made its way into households. Same with supercomputers. You know, the computers were for big companies. And there was, I think, Thomas Watson from IBM said the worldwide market of computers will be three. And now we all have multiple devices.

So it's here, it's coming, there's changes. We certainly use some of the features of AI in day-to-day business now in our own team and myself. Things like naming podcasts, come up with page, table of contents for book chapters, blog post ideas, social media posts, hooks, etc. As a research tool, it's been tremendous.

I imagine there's some implications, though, because when I think of SEO, of course, a lot of people go straight to link building, like they think SEO equals link building, which I'm sure is probably not the case. But I usually think of it more in fundamental terms of giving the search engine what it really wants, and a lot of what it wants is fresh, fantastic content. Now, aren't they using AI on their side of the fence?

Gert: Google, actually, and other search engines as well have been using AI for years. They just weren't talking about it too much. Their real focus is to make the search experience better. So whatever we can contribute now as an agency for our clients in order to improve Google users' search experience by leveraging AI is going to be great.

We've been doing this for over two years now. And right now, AI starts to become mainstream, which is interesting. But we have been using AI tools for two years for content creation. I remember doing the first trainings for my team, and the AI products were awful, really, they were absolutely not user-friendly yet. And I told them, let's wait another year, another year or two. This is definitely going to come, and I want everybody to be exposed to this.

But now we're at the place where you do training with a writing team, and you're getting a little bit worried. We're going to talk about this, but for a writer, I think if you're good at what you're doing and really love what you're doing, there's no need to worry just yet.

James: Now that's reassuring. So, yeah, I've been talking about this for, I think about six years on the podcast, and a couple of years ago, and the consensus was it's going to happen slowly, and then it will happen quickly. And we're in the fast-moving phase now. In fact, it's overhyped, there's people just wasting hours on mucking around with stuff that really is probably taking them off track from just doing the things that are actually important in their business.

When I say examples of search engine, I know behind the scenes, they're probably using AI to present the most relevant search results for a client. But also when you type in a search term, they're starting to autofill, right, and to give you suggestions as you type, to help you out. Or in your Gmail account, and I know people can advertise into Gmail with paid traffic, etc., they start to sort of auto respond the replies that it thinks you might want to write based on your content.

So it's everywhere. We've all been using it, we just probably didn't know what they were doing behind the scenes. So is it kind of like our artificial intelligence versus the search engine artificial intelligence? Is this a battle? Is it who's going to have the most intelligent AI that can trick the other one? Or is there a simpler answer than that?

Gert: I think the answer is that AI is going to be part of our daily life. And it might be in the fridge, and it might be in a coffee machine, and it might be in your watch. It's definitely going to be in a lot of apps you have, and it's just going to be standard. We're just going to expect certain things. I believe we're going to expect that when we open up an email program, it's going to help me write this email or already know what I'm probably going to write, right?

I'm going to open up a Word document, and I'm going to get some AI guidance for it. But this is only the content creation part. There's a lot more to AI we're not going to discuss today. But just think about video creation, image creation, all the image libraries that used to be out there, now you can pretty much auto generate the images you actually want. And this is getting better and better and better. Let's wait for six months and see where this is then.

It's not a magic wand

But it's definitely moving fast. But at the same time, we also see like, you see this overhyped period, where it actually came out around the start of the year, is really cooling down and everybody kind of got frustrated with AI at some point already, and so okay, it's not that straightforward that I type in what I wanted, it's going to be a magic wand that's going to do everything I wanted, then upload it to my WordPress blog, and I'm going to rank and start getting clients. This is not what it is, right?

James: Should you do that? Are you giving a specific warning here, don't just ask it to generate something and then paste it onto your website?

Gert: A hundred percent, as specific as it gets. And especially, don't expect AI to come back with something suitable if you're just having one prompt or one command.

James: So it's about good prompts. So prompt engineering, about being a great communicator, about knowing what you want, and then being able to assess and judge the quality of the outputs. And then perhaps hand finishing it, or adjusting it, or changing it according to your own personal point of differentiation, or voice, or technical specs.

I remember when we had the SEO business, we'd often have sticky situations with clients where they were like a pet vet, or an engineer, or a doctor, or a lawyer, and they had really specific, you know, factual components that were really hard for the writers or the team to generate unless they had been to, you know, done a course on that in university. Perhaps they can get much closer to the mark now with this sort of tools.

Gert: Absolutely. I just had a lawyer who we really want to rank for a particular term, we know it's the perfect entry point for his client business. And essentially, the strategy was to create topical relevance, and I think it makes sense to explain this term a little bit. Topical relevance, or topical authority, they call it very often as well, is when a brain talks a lot of content about a particular topic, or talks a lot about a particular topic that search engines at some point say, I probably do know a thing or two about it.

It's like the person you know that always talks about surfing for example, right? After a while, you probably have an idea, they probably know how to surf, they probably have a few surfboards, they probably got barreled at some point. And then you kind of think, okay, if I have a surfing question, I know who to ask, right?

We can simulate the same thing with SEO and strategic content creation. So for this particular client in the legal space, what we suggested was to create 50 different articles around this topic, which pretty much the goal is to cover this topic entirely, so Google does not find any angle to this topic that wouldn't be covered on this platform, on his website. And this content needs to strategically be created and internally also linked together.

So Google establishes connections between different pieces of content. And this would be a huge task, really daunting task, and especially difficult because it's technically, it's not something my team can easily campaign and create and link that will actually make sense. We usually need a lot of client inputs.

So it's not only the cost to create this, but also the input of the client giving us at least some bullet points, telling us where to go down to, what not to research, what not to put in, etcetera.

Where 50 articles is no longer a lot

But now 50 articles in an age of AI generation is not that much anymore. Why? Because we can pretty much give our client, we still need them, we still need your expertise. But we can give them a really detailed outline, very detailed, where they just really pretty much fill in the blanks.

James: That's amazing. Yeah. Because in the old days, when you'd say to a client, Hey, we need 10 articles, then it's just like a waiting game. You wait and wait, and then they never come, and then you say, Hey, I'll tell you what, how about we engage a writer for you, and we'll have them written? And then you get them written, and then you send them over for approval, and then the waiting game starts, right?

It's like, yeah, we looked at them. But it doesn't really say what we do, or there's still some technical things you can't say or that it should say that - and this is just filling in the gaps. So I can see, and particularly for the less technical fields, it must be extremely easy to generate content fairly quickly. So what you're saying is, it's removed one of the stumbling blocks that people have to being able to get a result.

Gert: A hundred percent. We just ran our own test on the local website, for example, where we really, just for testing purposes, copied and pasted content into the site, made a local business, fake local business, and it started ranking within a couple of weeks. So I think, adding a few links to the mix to play around with this a little bit more, and see how far we can get and possibly use it for lead generation or something. But it's definitely interesting.

So if you're in a non-competitive market, where it's okay, there are really only a few players, and most of them are probably not even engaging too much in SEO, really strategically placed content, positioned content and optimized content can absolutely do wonders in your market. And if you're in a competitive market, it's really very often a matter of finding a niche where you can say, Okay, I can dominate this niche within my industry, because I can create a lot of content about it that actually makes sense.

The thing ChatGPT lacks

But there's one important point that people very often don't discuss here, which is we need to add something to the discussion, right? We need to see ChatGPT isn't creative, ChatGPT doesn't create anything that wouldn't be out there in one shape or form.

James: Because it's been loaded up with information, it's just regurgitating from its available database.

Gert: A hundred percent. So it really needs this person or expert in the field that can add something. And this adding could be a customer story, this adding could be that we have a different methodology, this could be that we have a different tool to accomplish something, for example, but we need to add something. And this is also what Google values a lot in general.

James: Well, the customer story would separate it from being artificial intelligence, right? Because it can't do personal stories, it can't do emotion very well. So it has this sort of formulaic pattern about it. I was talking to a friend of mine today, actually, very smart guy. And he said, Look, I think all the money is going to be in building tools on top of the AI.

And I said, Is that essentially prompt engineering? And he said, Not really. There's two components, there's the prompt, sure, but you have to train it, and you train it by adding data and showing it examples of the outputs. You say, Here's the prompt, and this is a perfect output. Now go and make more like that. And you build up the tool using that process.

I actually experienced this when I was showing my dad how to write his book. He's writing a book about his own life. And he couldn't believe that a computer could help him do that. And I said, Well, you actually give it the prompts. You know, give me a suggested table of contents for a book about my own life, right? And it spat it out instantly. And he's like, Wow!

And then he said, But it doesn't know my stories. I said, Well, that's the cool thing. Now we can say, Okay, now for chapter one, you know, like early life, write me a chapter and include these stories, and I said, Tell me six stories about your early life, you know, like visiting a farm, or going off to school early, or the time that he did this, or the time that he did that, and it writes the chapter now with those stories in it.

And now we're really getting progress. And you could stack those together, and he could end up producing a book in a weekend instead of over five years, because it's filling in all the gaps. It's kind of like making an elaborate join-the-dots picture, and then you just come along and hand-fill them in with some colored pen and now it looks pretty original and pretty cool.

What AI can do for ecommerce

So I think that's a great story. What about if I had, say, an e-commerce store, and I've just replicated the manufacturer's description for all of my products, from every SKU, like most people do? And then they've got one of the 500 websites with the exact same description for the same product, could we ask it to help us out with those sort of things?

Gert: Absolutely. E-commerce sites are definitely going to embrace it. I just remember a conversation with a client the other day from Australia. And what he essentially said is, Look, we upload 20, 30, 40 products every single day. And then the most normal thing that's going to happen is that we just copy and paste it from the manufacturer. Like you said, here's no chance it can rank, it's exactly the same as on a lot of other websites.

So either we spend the effort, which is very often on low-priced products, not even worth it, spend the effort to create a custom product description that hopefully also has a sales focus, or you just leave it without the product description, or you leave it with a manufacturer. And now with AI, you can actually be creative very, very fast.

So you still need a human putting some value to this. But you could extract, like, key takeaways, key fact characteristics out of the manufacturer description, right? Those are going to be everywhere the same, Google is not going to know if you pick the characteristics, and they're not even going to care if they know.

Will Google punish you for using AI?

So there's also this risk, for example, the assumption that Google is going to punish AI-created content, and it's going to detect it. It's probably, like we see in recent weeks, not even that much of an issue as people thought initially. And it was more about getting content out that it's not detectable. It's really about finding a way to add your additional value to this piece of content, rather than just copying and rewriting what else is out there.

So Google has been using and ranking very well AI-generated, machine-generated content for a long time. Just think about sports reports, stock prices, company information, all those directories that rank for company information. This is not human content. There's a database showing this content automatically, with no human interference whatsoever.

So we can expect that Google is just going to accept there is now content that's low quality, where people just copy and paste, and there's going to be high-quality content, where Google with their AI can determine there is some added value.

Could Bing be coming back?

James: Okay, now, just a big thought occurred to me, and this might be controversial. You and I, we've both been talking about Google this, Google that for the whole podcast. But is there a paradigm shift happening? Is the Microsoft involvement with ChatGPT and incorporating into their Bing results, is this powerplay going to mean that people start using Bing again?

I mean, this sounds weird coming out of my mouth, because we've been in a Google-obsessed world for a long time. But you know, when you and I both started before Google, there were other search engines, you know, back in the day. And remember there was Ask Jeeves, and Alta Vista, and Yahoo, and MSN, and Lycos and all. I'm just thinking of all these things, even way back, Mosaic.

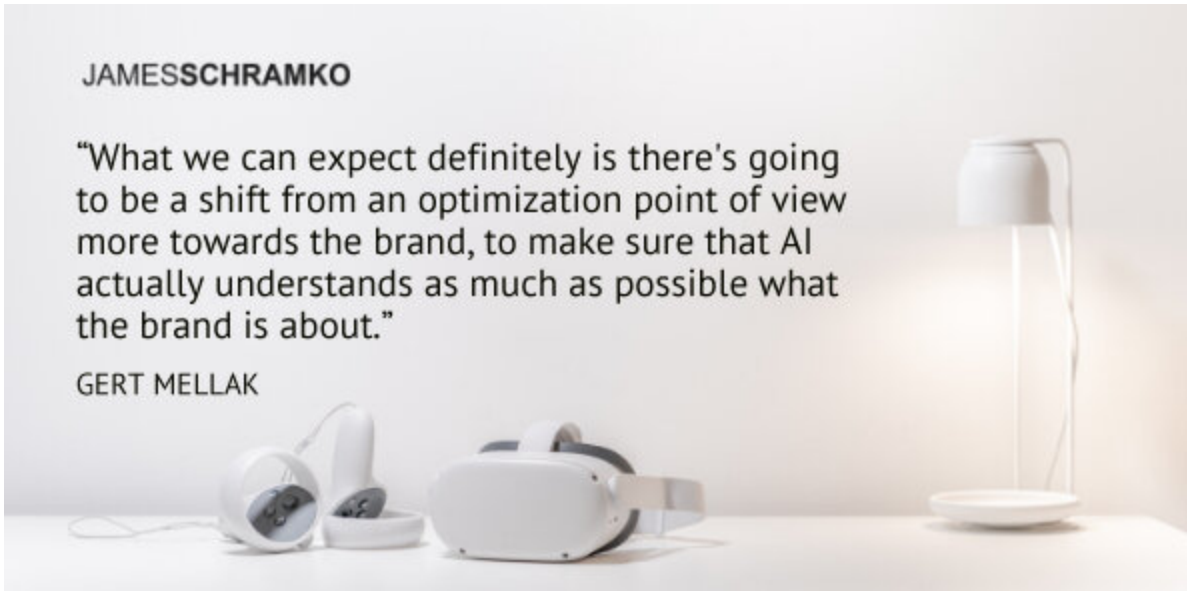
And then, you know, Google just took over and had the dominant share. Is there a chance that we should be optimizing for somewhere else? Or is there a chance people stop using Google? Will they just use AIs? And, you know, in my [previous podcast](#), Lloyd mentioned there was a browser add-on for Chrome where you can, when you Google something, it shows you an AI response in the right hand column or whatever.

So I'm finding, since I installed it on my phone, I'm going to the AI tool about equal to Google. You know, if my roller door for my garage needs a service, I'll go to Google. If a friend of mine or a family member has some symptoms or whatever, then I'll go to Doctor GP Chat, right? And tell it what the symptoms are and ask what it could be. Now I trust that more, and I get more accurate results. And because I can iterate on the responses, which you can't do in Google, does that mean we're going to see a mass user behavior change?

JAMESSCHRAMKO

“What we can expect definitely is there's going to be a shift from an optimization point of view more towards the brand, to make sure that AI actually understands as much as possible what the brand is about.”

GERT MELLAK



Gert: I would expect behavior is going to adjust a little bit. I don't see Bing taken over, we're still talking about three percent market share, I think, or two point something in Australia, for example. So first of all, a lot of SEO optimizations are valid equally for both sides. What we can expect definitely is there's going to be a shift from an optimization point of view more towards the brand, to make sure that AI actually understands as much as possible what the brand is about, who the brand wants to work with, etc. with simple terms, on your website very explicitly.

On the user side of things, I would believe Bing is probably because they seem to be a little bit more aggressive. I wouldn't even say advanced, they're more aggressive putting things out, but Google has a lot of more fears about possible brand issues when something might come out as biased, as racist, as whatever, because ChatGPT, obviously, there's always somebody who convinces the machine to do things it's not supposed to do, and this could impact their brand.

James: It doesn't want to talk about pandemics, it doesn't want to talk about vaccines, it doesn't want to talk about politics, it doesn't want to talk about gender topics, etc. It's already been neutered in many ways, like whoever's programmed it has definitely got a preset notion of the world view, and it's going to serve up results around that.

The search experience versus ChatGPT

And the thing that's really fascinating with it is the iterative state. If you're not happy with the results, you can keep refining and refining. Actually a lot like my daughter, when she's trying to get the right song to play on a voice-activated robot like Siri or Google. She'll keep iterating until she gets the one she wants.

Gert: I think the interesting part is going to be where we'll be happy to reiterate. And where are we going to expect to make a three-second assumption. Like, right now when you Google something, Google very often either knows what you want, or they give you different options. And within seconds, if not milliseconds, we have just been trained over the years, right, we are able to find what we're looking for. And mostly on the first page, mostly on the top half.

James: I agree. People don't want to do iterations.

Gert: Exactly. And it's not the same experience. So I think there are going to be use cases where it's okay, it's easier for me to put in the symptoms than finding a site that has a filter where it can select the different symptoms, it's easier to just speak it into a voice assistant, or into the chat, and then have a few iterations, perfect, absolutely, 100% okay.

But there are going to be a lot of other use cases where people are going to want the search experience. And they also want to know where the data comes from. The data is very often plain wrong, it's completely invented. You ask about facts, and it just makes it up.

James: It's confidently wrong.

Gert: It absolutely makes it up. So it helps a little bit, just as a side note, to sometimes ask it for the source. So give me the three top income cities in the United States and the source, and they might give you the source and then it's maybe a little bit more accurate, but you cannot trust a single fact it puts out.

What it means for writers

James: That's very interesting. And so where does that place us in terms of article writers? Do we still need those? Do they need to be more technically educated so that they are good at the prompts, and that they understand if the outputs are actually good or bad?

Gert: I would definitely say there is going to be no place for junior writers.

James: Right.

Gert: Absolutely not, and there wasn't last year, pretty much.

James: That's what I think. I think the robot is already up to the point of a university graduate.

Gert: A hundred percent. And also I think, there is going to be a really good place for expert writers. If you're a legal expert, and you can judge on AI content that's in the legal space, and you're able to see, is this good, is this bad, can I tweak it, etc. So expert writers are always going to have a job, I believe.

And then if you're a writer, you definitely need to upskill, and this is what I have been telling my team in the last two years. Guys, we're not going to hire junior writers anymore. Whoever is here needs to embrace AI as a tool to be more efficient, to reduce research time, get more creative, more resourceful into the creative process of writing, actually make it sound like our clients' content sounds, etc., brand voice, things like those. We definitely are still hiring writers. Just as a side note, we're not going to get rid of anyone. We actually hire experienced writers. But it definitely has changed a lot.

James: Wow. And I mean, I think there's a chance to kind of speed up. I'm wondering if you're a junior writer, and it's like, this is kind of bad news. I don't have juniors in my team. I have a [recruitment business](#), and we're hiring people who are starting out as juniors as VAs. I think those roles are good because they can augment, and use these tools, and build around your business, and learn your business values and mission, and figure out how they can support the growth of the business like my team do. And over time they can grow into your team.

I think it would be hard to replace that at the moment. There was someone made an offhand comment on one of my posts that you don't need VAs anymore because AI can do everything. And I was like, No, actually it can't. It can't do everything. It's not able to go through my content, find the right stuff, and send out an email broadcast, or answer a support ticket properly, or do my bookkeeping effectively, or have the ability to judge which of the snippets is most likely a match for our audience, etc., not yet.

And I've said to my team, you know, we're all on this ride, and we're all enjoying this together. And we're still sticking around, because I think we're still years away from the point where it's really challenging us in that regard. And everyone in my team is good.

The takeaway from this episode

So what's your overarching message as a result of this episode? From what I'm hearing, I'll just do a quick recap and then you can add on to this, Gert. AI has changed the way that we can create content, it can speed up the research and development process for the content, and combined with a good strategy, it can now get you high quality at high volume, as long as there's a human operator jockeying that, validating if the material is good or not, and that you're actually operating under the right strategy. And you can still use the value from Google, in particular, it's still a strong search engine. That's sort of the sound bites I'm getting from this episode.

Gert: A hundred percent. It's a tool that makes you much more efficient, allows you to do more of the right things. But you definitely need an overall strategy that you actually know what to do with all this what you're creating, right? There's a chance that people now go out and create 20 articles, and they just put them up, and they're not going to work.

They're not going to rank, they're not going to do anything because you need to do things within an overall strategy that brings you closer to your goals. And otherwise, you're just generating random traffic, which is also not going to convert. A large portion of people that come to me have traffic on their website that doesn't do anything.

So this is where really the conversion focus comes in, we haven't even talked about, right? So you have a machine creates something that doesn't know your goals, doesn't know what you want to achieve. You might even get traffic maybe out of it temporarily. But it's definitely not going to be the right traffic you want.

James: Nice. So Gert, how do we get in touch with you if we want to have a chat about getting some help with our SEO?

Gert: That would be great, just head over to SEOLeverage.com, book in a call with me, we have a chat, develop a little bit of an action plan of what makes sense, and see if this is a good fit.

James: And will you tell someone if they're not a good fit?

Gert: A hundred percent. We look at everybody who comes to a call as a potential case study. And if I can't see the case study in this call, I usually advise to either look into other channels or other agencies.

James: Thank you. I appreciate it. And thanks for coming to share. It's always a pleasure. We're going to put up the show notes at episode 998 at JamesSchramko.com. That's Gert Mellak from SEOLeverage, always a treasure trove of SEO and technical information. And I'm excited, hopefully you'll come back and tell us the developments as you see changes in the marketplace.

Gert: I'd love to. Thank you so much, James. It's always great.

A top-down view of a wooden desk. In the upper left, a person's hand is visible holding a pen. A silver laptop is open, showing a webpage. In the lower left, another silver laptop is open, with a person's hands typing on the keyboard. A blue mug is in the center, and a black pen holder with pens is to its right. A colorful patterned mat with orange, teal, and white floral designs is on the desk. A brown cardboard box is partially visible at the bottom.

JAMES SCHRAMKO

**Keep up with the latest
in marketing tools with
James's help**