A close-up portrait of a man with dark hair and a slight smile, wearing a white shirt. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting.

JAMES SCHRAMKO

The Vital Role of SEO Website Migration: Building Strong Online Foundations

Website migration and SEO are related. SEOLeverage's Gert Mellak discusses how you can refresh your online presence without losing search rank.



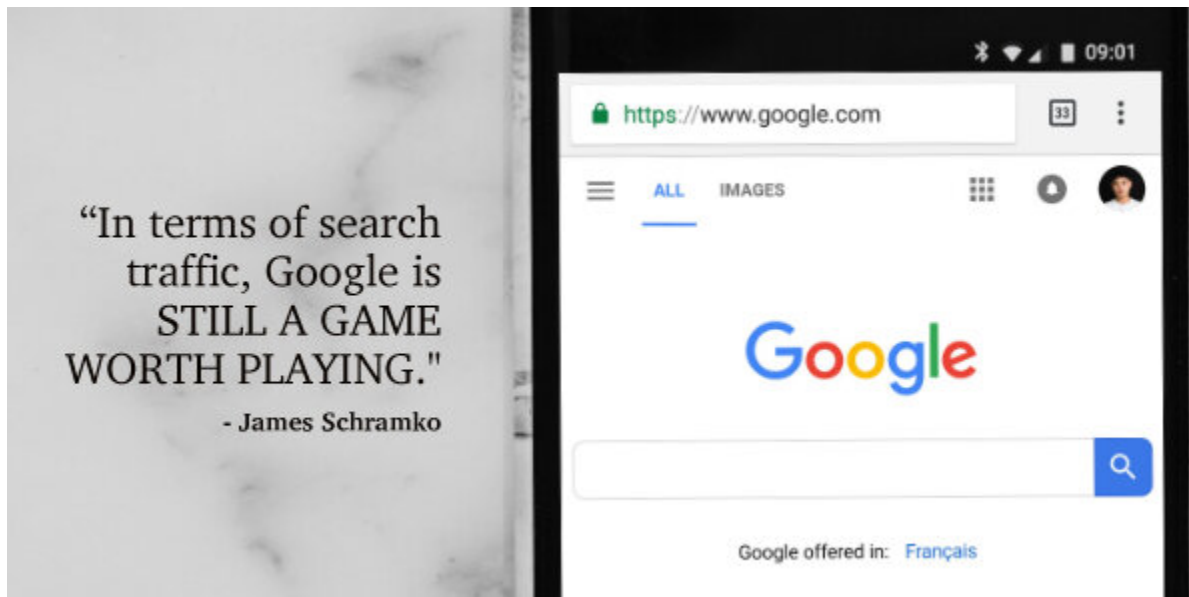
Gert Mellak

James: James Schramko here. Welcome back to James Schramko's podcast, my podcast. This is episode 1015. You'd think I'd be able to figure out an intro by now. I'm having a chat to my friend, [Gert Mellak](#), from [SEOLeverage.com](#), today. Welcome, Gert.

Gert: Hi, James.

James: Well, a lot's happening in the SEO world. Firstly, with the rise of Bing and incorporating their AI stuff, is Google still in play? Is it still a thing?

Gert: Yeah, definitely. I think they're just more careful launching stuff, but they're definitely behind the scenes and have been behind the scenes, moving a lot of things for a long time. And I think it's just going to rock the entire world when they start launching the stuff they have in test already.



James: That's what I was thinking, I was thinking maybe Bing or Microsoft might have got a little start. And the Bard launch didn't go so well. But you'd have to think Google's got all sorts of geniuses and AI capability. And it looks like all the AI tools are now incorporating an element of search and AI. So they're all having a play at this. But in terms of search traffic, Google is still a game worth playing.

Gert: Absolutely. And if you're just thinking about how many Google tools we are using, from Google Photos, to their Office Suite, to all kinds of search elements and stuff like that, it's going to be everywhere. It's going to help you answer your emails, it's going to help you find stuff, it's going to help you compare things and do VA-like jobs. When they flip the switch and just enable this everywhere, it's going to be a different way of working.

Why this episode's topic is important

James: Nice. Well, I'm loving the results that we're still getting with SEO, thanks to your help. And you had an interesting story to share with me, which I thought would be a good podcast, because this is something that impacts most people if they're online for any number of years. At some point, you may come up with a [brand change](#), or a [hosting change](#), or some kind of website update. But I'm talking about the topic, of course, of website migrations.

And this is where I've seen spectacular fails from an SEO perspective. I mean, there's the obvious one, which is where the website developer switches the site to no index no follow for their development version, and then they make it go live. But they forget to turn that off. So the whole website disappears. <Woosh!> Where did it go? That's a pretty common one.

But I'm sure there are a number of other technicalities. And I think it'd be interesting just to talk about what kind of situations have you seen crop up when people want to change something about their website? And what considerations should we have when it comes to the SEO component?

Gert: I think it's such an important topic, there are tens of thousands of dollars every single week reported to me that got lost with a migration. One client, even the other day, reported like seven-figure losses. And this is why they want to now start fixing stuff. And the interesting thing is how much we rely very often on an individual tech person to make decisions that might bite us, maybe a year, a year and a half later down the track. And during this time, nobody knows what's actually happening.

We had a client losing actually seven figures after 14 months of revenue, just because one developer at some point thought it was a good idea to use one plug-in for the navigation rather than another one. So it's just a different way of doing the same thing. And this ultimately led to a seven-figure loss.

So very often, we need to be careful who we actually delegate certain decisions to. It's clear, you can't make the technical decisions. But you want to at least have somebody who takes you by the hand and says, Look, these are my considerations, that involves you in the process, because just the way how they programs things can have a huge impact.

The things that can go wrong

And what you mentioned that the site gets no indexed, obviously, a really bad thing that can happen, but it's probably the smallest problem you can have because it just switches back on. And a few days later, you're up there. But we see so many migrations that just continuously drop. So Google just continuously trusts this website less and less. So every month, they get a little bit less traffic. And this ultimately, obviously, turns into revenue losses, profit losses afterwards, and definitely can bring things out of business.

We got an e-commerce site, for example, coming to us, I think four or five months after the migration, and it was migrating, and they started dropping continuously, and every month, they reported lower revenue. It took us then a few months to get it back on track just because Google then takes a while to crawl all those pages again once things are fixed, and actually, take these things into account again.

James: What was broken with the e-commerce store?

Gert: Several things, several things. Everybody, when you talk to a tech person, very often they say, Now we handle SEO, no problem, right? We do this on the site. And the times where we could do SEO on the site are definitely over. Right? So everybody has heard probably about some redirections, you just need to do the so-called 301 redirections, and then everything is fixed.

But the problem very often already starts in the design process, where the designers want to be overly creative, maybe, or overly conversion focused and put like big calls to action on top that pushes everything relevant down.

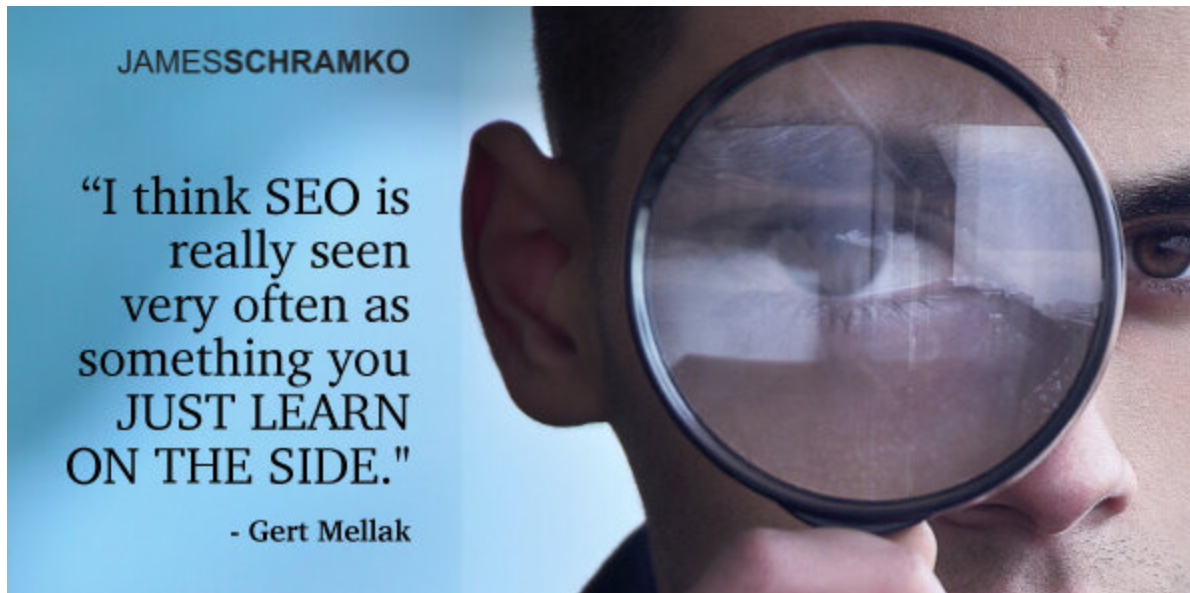
We have a lot of considerations, we actually have established frameworks by now that we go through and when we are involved in the design process already, very often, we ask them to redesign certain pages in order to make sure that we minimize the negative SEO impact or even give them a head start when they launch.

James: You definitely got to balance the needs of everyone, don't you? You've got the business owner in there. Well, let's be kind, you know, I had a website development business, and a lot of them have a strong attachment to a certain look or way that a website has to be. Usually, they want it to look like Apple, right? But let's say owner, stakeholder, that ego, certain appearance, design requirements.

You've got the designer, they want to make it look, you know, design amazing, absolutely beautiful, the latest schmick looks and best fonts, and all the rest of the cool stuff, the gadgets. You've got the techies, they want to be able to manage it from a code perspective and a technical layout. And then there's the copywriter, they have to have all the conversion elements the way that they want for the words to work and the site to do what it wants.

What people think they know

And then probably somewhere in the mix, you've got an agency or an in-house CMO, somebody who's other than the owner is also trying to glue all this together. But I don't think SEO makes it into the top shortlist for this. Does everyone actually involve an SEO in this process? Or do you think it's just been handled by the devs who, you know, maybe they're good-natured and they feel like they know it, but they don't really know it, maybe they just don't know what they don't know.



Gert: It's a good point, I think SEO is really seen very often as something you just learn on the side. And every marketer can do SEO. And every programmer can probably do SEO. And they think if they put a few tags in place, SEO is being taken care of. But they just don't have a glance at the bigger picture, right?

If you look at 40, 50 projects all the time and see what's moving, what's changing, what Google actually pays attention to, when you look at the website, even when it's still in this useless staging or testing environment before the launch, you can already tell what Google is going to think about it, very often.

And they're going to say like, this is probably not going to be interpreted in the same way, the internal linking structure is completely different. So this takes Google a while to figure it out in order to crawl 50,000 product pages maybe, if the internal linking is different, but it is going to have an impact. And you want to be aware of those things.

And there are just a lot of best practices, the experts of the different fields, be it design, be it development or a CMO, there's more running the numbers, they might have some basic SEO knowledge. Absolutely. And very often, when we talk to business owners, they say, Hey, I actually got to seven figures with SEO. So I know a lot about this.



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And that's fair, that's fair enough. But it's a different thing when you have a migration, than when you need to create content that's being ranked. They are two different things, and if you don't have the framework to analyze a website this way, it's a really tough job.

How an SEO would handle things

James: So how does it work? I mean, what I'm hearing loud and clear is that you should involve an SEO before you migrate, right? Say, Hey, this is what we're planning to do. Give us your tips, give us your advice.

Let's say you've got an SEO client, you're helping them out with the usual stuff. You're helping them with content suggestions, layouts, frameworks, maybe building links, etc., keeping things running smoothly, reporting in your dashboard. And they say, Gert, we need to move our site, we need to change platforms. What's your process at that point?

Gert: We definitely try to get involved as early as possible. So the earliest I got involved was actually with handwritten wireframes, hand-drawn wireframes, where they just photograph this and say, Look, this is what I want the website to look, this is what I want the article page and the sales pages to look, are there any SEO considerations?

Usually, we would probably get the first draft from the design company where they have this in a Photoshop or a JPEG or whatever they send over, where we can just assess this, and we try to assess it from Google's perspective, really. Obviously, we also look at conversions and potential conversion issues.

But really, from Google's perspective, how are they going to scan this content, crawl this content, index it, understand it, what's important on this page, what's not important for Google, because they might just assess your main sales page in a different way, just because the design changes. So we try to get involved in this stage already, give feedback, work together with the design companies and the development companies.

And then look, this is what needs to be considered, which page builder are you going to use, which platform are you going to use, are the URLs going to change? We have a series of questions we ask them for, just to make sure that we have everything, really, all the boxes ticked when the launch then really happens, but there's a lot that is being built up until then.

James: Right. And how quickly do you know if something's not right, after they go live?

Gert: It can take a while. And this is the tricky thing about it. So first of all, what we do usually is we scan or analyze the new website before it launches. Several times, several iterations. And we say, Look, this is what's missing. This is now what needs to be done. And they fix this, we go through it again. And we pretty much do what Google would do.

Google knows which URLs, which pages you have, and they're going to continue to crawl them, see if there is anything new. And suddenly, one day, they're going to figure out that all those pages have changed, but they're not going to figure it out at once because there is no setting that you can say, Hey, I have a new website, now crawl everything and process it new, they're going to do this sequentially.

And every day, they might crawl a few pages or a few 100 pages, depending on the size of your website. And then they're going to make up their mind how everything is really related, which is why very often, it's normal with site migrations to see a little bit of a dip in traffic. Because Google says, hey, something is up, right? This can be a mistake, an error on your website, or this can be a completely new design.

And the more pages they crawl, the more they're going to figure out, hey, they definitely have a redesign happening. So now we need to see, how Do Google users react to this new website? They might not like it, so I don't want to rank it as high. They might like it much more, so I want to give this a boost. We have seen all kinds of things. And the more you can prepare this, the better the results are going to be.

Some of the elements that change

James: So what are some of the elements that people will change? They might change the layout or the design, but they might also change their hosting. So there might be a difference in speed or location of where that content is being served. They might change platforms, they might go from one platform to another, which loads differently or has different specialties, I suppose, or quirks. What things should people be aware of? And I'm really leading to an ultimate question, which I'll ask you after this one.

Gert: Okay, so first of all, I would definitely look at performance, this is an easy one. And usually, the tech team should be taking care of this. Very often, the redesign is the moment where you relocate the server. So if you're serving Australian audience, you don't want to have the server necessarily in the States, because there is going to be an overhead in terms of serving time. But you also want to be very aware of which platform you choose.

So the platform choice is going to be a major factor in the migration. We have a lot of people switch from WordPress and WooCommerce to a Shopify environment, for example, or things like those, it is going to have an impact also, because the URL is very often changed. So the URLs are going to be different, the redirects need to be in place. And this also is something that Google needs to process.

Another thing that changes very often is the layout itself. So where elements are located, how we represent a menu, is this a mega menu that opens up like 50 different menu items? Or are we shrinking down in APA style and only have like six, eight menus on the top? It is going to impact every single page and how we transfer the authority within the website.

Should you actually migrate?

James: So the next question I wanted to ask is, are migrations good or bad?

Gert: I think migration is very often unnecessary, migration meaning relaunches of websites, giving them a fresh look and feel. We have clients where we literally said, before you start working with us, please do a redesign, because it's just outdated. I remember a tennis website just looked like from, like one of the first websites that I ever had seen, and I said, Look, before we start working at this, redesign the header and the footer and put a different font on it. I gave them a few pieces of advice, and then they came back a few months later with this done.

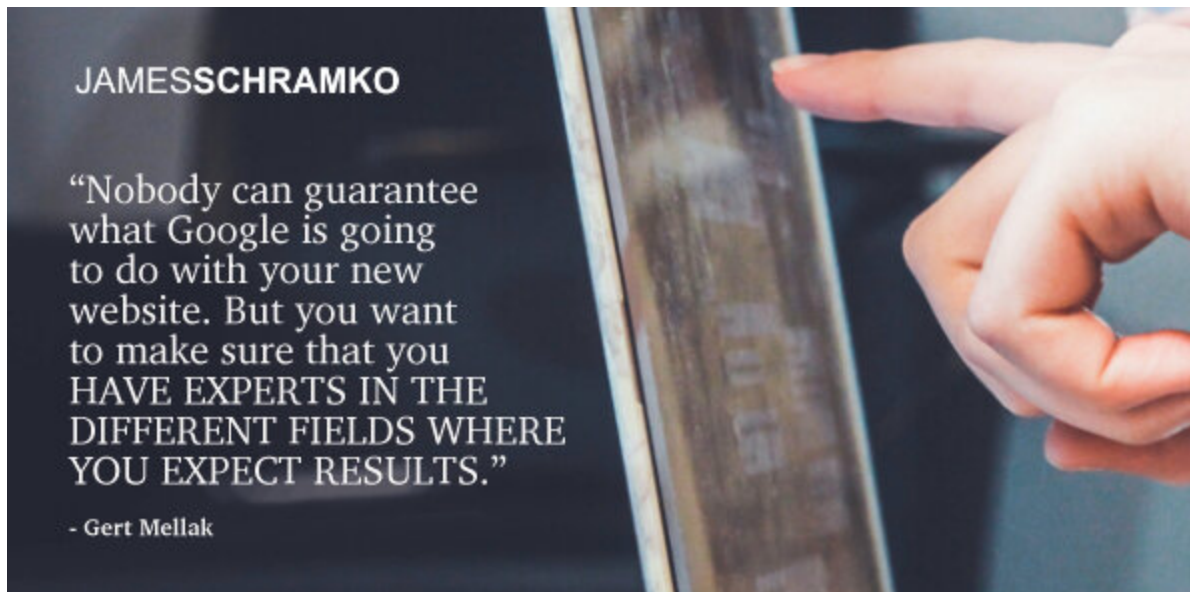
So definitely, it is necessary to refresh. The question is, how often do you have to relaunch the entire website? Sometimes you can do small things that have a lower impact, lower risk, and you just maybe change the header, change the layout, change the font, maybe, change the style of the sidebar, remove a sidebar, but whatever it is, it doesn't always have to be a complete redesign. When there is a complete redesign based on different reasons, you definitely want to make sure that you look for the potential impact.

A bit of qualified SEO advice

James: Right. So what advice would you have for someone listening to this, they're thinking of a redesign, or a migration, or change of server, change of platform, some kind of change to the status quo. They think, okay, I should speak to an SEO, what would be your advice to them?

Gert: Definitely find an SEO that you trust, do not trust anybody advising you in this process that they know enough SEO to be accountable for this. Because six months later, when you have lost a lot of traffic, you're going to get back to them and they're going to say, Hey, on my invoice, it's only saying web development, it doesn't say SEO.

And we hear this all the time, where they say the developer said they can handle this, now we have \$50,000 in losses already, and it's going to go up. And now they go back to the developer and they say, Hey, I just invoiced \$2,000 for this or \$5,000 for this, I can't be held responsible here, and it's not even written on the invoice.



Whatever result you want to have from this migration, you want to have somebody who is going to be accountable for it. Nobody can guarantee what Google is going to do with your new website. But you want to make sure that you have experts in the different fields where you expect results.

James: Love it. Good advice there, [Gert Mellak](#), [SEOLeverage.com](#). And if someone's listening this and they want help from you, how do they get in touch?

Gert: Absolutely. Just head over to [SEOLeverage.com](#), schedule in a call or get one of our quick wins reports, which is a good entry point to see what's happening on your website anyway. And then we just have a conversation, see if we can help.

James: Nice, nice short episode. But I mean, there's only so much you can say about this. The bottom line is, if you're going to migrate a website, sure, you've probably thought about the design, you've probably thought about the copy, you've probably thought about the conversions, you might have talked about the platform and the hosting, but what about the SEO?

Get someone to check the SEO and make that transition go smoothly, so you don't dip in traffic. And if you're lucky, that's a good opportunity actually to set things up in an even better way for the migration so that you can come out winning. Thanks so much, Gert. It's always a pleasure.

Gert: Thank you very much, James.



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