

015 - How Toxic Links Can Hurt Your Site with Christoph Cemper

Christoph Cemper 0:00

When we talk about optimizing Facebook, trying to get your, your own posts rank, organically rank well to appear more often use it of people. It's not even ranking. It's some exposure. But that's a different ballgame. It's not the web. Facebook is not the web. It's an app where you can scroll forever. It's an endless scroller. And Google manages something very different. They manage data, they crawl books, they crawl websites. And that is something very different from the structure. Everything social media is more like a stream, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Tik Tok, 15 seconds per random, random if you want. So, and you cannot apply the concept of the one to the other just because the search engine and the web works well.

Intro Music 0:56

Welcome to the SEO Leverage Podcast, where we talk about search, marketing, and conversion.

Gert Mellak 1:06

Hello, and welcome. My name is Gert Mellak. Thank you so much for tuning in. This is Episode 15 of our podcast at Seoleverage.com. I'm really honored today to welcome the inventor of LinkResearchTools, link detox, speaker and author, Christoph Cemper to the show. Welcome, Christoph.

Christoph Cemper 1:22

Hi Gert, thank you for having me.

Gert Mellak 1:24

Thank you so much for taking the time. I would like to start off by letting people know who might not know link research tools directly. This is the main reference tool. I would say every SEO in the industry knows what link research tools is. Every SEO who knows what they're doing is going to say link research tools is the best link and backlink analysis tool is all around it. I would want to just briefly ask you to give us a little bit of background about your your history, what's the history of link research tools? What How does it start? Where are we now?

Christoph Cemper 2:01

Okay. So back in the day, I used to be I mean, I'm not starting programming as a teenager. But I used to have commerce link billing agency, and we were in the need for good data for links. And back then the problem like today was that no comprehensive data set was available. So of course back in 20, 27, 28, tools were less matured, we didn't have Ahrefs, we didn't have Semrush, they were called SEO Quake back then, and actually motivated me to write my own

stuff. Because all of these tools, Bos was their Sistrix was there, provided piece of the puzzle, I had a little bit of data. And I remember well how I paid my first link builder, a student, and she was working with that data. And then she came to me and said, I cannot get these links, because these pages are not there. You know, I screened a screen for four prospects based on the data I got in my Excel sheet. And then I gave it to her. And after some hours, she came back and said, I cannot build that link. And that's where I realized, I need a validation of data. All these tools are great, and they are great data sources. Ahref is not a competition by the data. So Semrush is not a competition, but a data source. And we take in link research tools, everything together, recorded and validated up to the minute, this was the original pain I saw for myself and many others, our customers love link research tools for the fact that they cannot see old data. And you have to understand when I say old data, and some of the link databases that you can buy data from, you get up to five year old data. So what's that worth? It's raw data, we call it raw data internally. And link research tools specializes in taking all that data together, combining it to something more useful, being more accurate or up to date. And then of course processing the knowledge that we try to get out of there. And the best example is Link Detox, where we calculate a risk metric for every link based on all these data points, you know, for every link, that was the second problem. And we collected different metrics from SEO Quake and other tools and put it into a spreadsheet. Today for every link, we got 150 metrics. And with these 150 metrics and the history of those metrics, we can calculate a risk of a link a power of a link trust of a link. And that was the crucial, let's say foundation to be able to say if a link is helping rankings or not. And people call me crazy professor or German engineer or overdoing things. But the reality is in 2011, we launched like 2012 sorry, penguin 2012. We launched link detox, not because we build it, but because we had it and I said You know what Teba, we built this little sales tool where we showed him some data. And then they see how much data we have. The truth was, that was sufficient. We had everything to fix the penalties. And the rest is history, where we became really popular, but everything was ready by the time and that's also why we were the first ones to be able to do that. And to collect all this data about the penalties if I remember,

Gert Mellak 5:22

I remember that moment when you launched link, link detox really well, because I remember thinking these guys were really fast. So there was always buzz about negative links, and, and what's going to be penalized and stuff like that. Yeah, like this link research tools had a solution, but and I was like, wow, yeah. Either works before that. Yeah, yeah, you can definitely see you, you guys have your your finger on the pulse of of links, link building profiles, etc, you know, interesting for me. So I had a conversation a couple of months ago with a consulting client out of our Erica program. And at some point in consulting, we get to a point where I say, look, the content is optimized, the internal linking is optimized. And the site has a good speed, good user experience, etc. What else can we do? Because we're still not ranking with everything where we want to rank? And then it really links we know, move the needle. Okay. Yeah. But this time came back to me and said, he's been doing marketing all his life, but not really too much in SEO. And he was like, how is it possible that today? 2021, this was 2020? Was it at the end of the year? How is it possible in 2020, Google still needs links in order to come up with a suitable search result.

Christoph Cemper 6:37

A lot of people say, oh, Google is so so fancy, they built so much stuff. But the reality is also in 2020 2021, the Google core algorithm is based on links. That was the one key innovation that Google had, where compared to all the other search engines that were using concepts like TF IDF, and, you know, normal text retrieval database, they were analyzing the interlinking, the citations, as you say, in scientific community, and that made Google successful because they could measure relevance. Over the last 20 years, they only edit on top of that, or as Google refer to it as an onion and algorithmic onion. So for example, the penguin algorithm, the panda algorithms, they were all built to change the results by modifying what that link algorithm had. And they added on top and 2016, they managed to integrate that filter into the core algorithm, which means they were just faster in calculating it. But it's still the link algorithm, that Telsco with which other websites find that website important. And it is also links. And this is important to understand. It's not just about the links that are in the content. It's people reading that content and clicking on it to the other. So we're not talking about just an algorithm, some some program that Google built. We're talking about how the web works. So the web works by people reading stuff, clicking there, and being somewhere else. Some people, you know, really go crazy and say, oh, every link has to have traffic. Yes, but not like 1000 visitors from one referral link. The way the web works is its content linked together. That is the idea of the of the hypertext and hyperlinks and hypermedia back then it was a really big deal, you know, in the 90s, when you had a video playing somewhere. Yeah, exactly, exactly. You would call in tonight to download it later when the phone rates are cheaper or something like that. But the web works like that. And that's why Google needs links, not because they need it for ranking, because the web works like that. And if you want to understand how people consume content, you have to follow that. And of course, they got Google DNS, they got Google Chrome browser with 65%. They got all these services, infrastructure services, some of them are even provided for free like the DNS. And they can analyze traffic patterns downstream, upstream, everything with that, in addition to but if you look at DNS traffic, you only get this on a host level or domain level. So it's not as precise as going page to page. And yeah, you know, watching people's moves in Google Chrome, and then, you know, cookie analytics is a privacy issue, always has been, and even more so. And links are just a too strong signal. And remember, many years ago, they announced that they would try to to, to not use links, and then did not even do it. And there was this big story about Yandex many years ago who said they don't use any links because they got so many spam links. And a couple of months later, and nobody talks about that. They also announced, oh, we put it back in place. So for a whole year 2014, I think half of Germany thought, Oh, if the Yandex doesn't need links, then Google doesn't need links, because Google is much cooler. But the reality is, the Yandex experiment was a big fail. And even today, hyperlinking is the difference between, you know, the web that we consume, and a stupid news feed. You know, when you go on Facebook, there are no links you, you get this pre chewed, you get stuff presented, you can scroll and scroll and scroll, and eventually, you'll find something funny a cat video here, or when announcement from Christoph and that that's not the web, that's, you know, you can do that completely drunk and still consume content. If Google would remove links, they would have something like that. Imagine opening Google and just surfing random websites. That's terrible. And so besides all this, let's say high level faults on links. It's Google who says that they need

links, and they keep repeating that and said, even even said, Gary, Lissa, ranking without links is really, really hard. And we made t shirts about that with him as a comic character. And he didn't like that too much. But, yeah, that that's how it is. It's

Gert Mellak 11:28

just the reality is we're just starting with a new client who came in last week. And you see, they have been trying putting out putting out stuff, putting out content, etc. Yeah. And I mean, it's understandable. The way I explain it, is that Google simply doesn't trust a new site. They want to keep their users happy. So they don't send traffic to a new site. Make sense? links are just signals. And it's funny. It's funny that how how some things in SEO moves so fast. And then there are other things where it's okay, I started SEO on a very low level 19 years ago, 20 years ago. So I did web design, web, programming everything around around online marketing, essentially, and then slowly build up SEO to a state where we don't do anything else right now anymore. Yeah. But it's funny that we have seen everything from like, people putting white text on a white background and got their site ranking to all the algorithm updates, detoxing and everything. And people asking you how can you keep track of as you enter? Like, yeah, there are some things that really move faster. I think content user experience, there's a lot of movement in there. But then there are some things where I say 15 years ago, I probably did the same thing. So 15 years ago, 10 years ago, I remember talking to clients. And look, we're not only placing a link, so you have one of 250 links to build every month. But we do this link, we invest a lot of effort into content creation. So this link, then this content itself can rank. Yeah, and also drive traffic. This was 10 years ago, car, car classifieds, for example. Remember,

Christoph Cemper 12:58

exactly, I'm

Gert Mellak 12:59

thinking really don't change so much. I

Christoph Cemper 13:02

know, it's links, drive rankings. And that is a major thing to understand. It's the main criteria. So everything on top when we talk about user experience, when we talk about page load times, that is user experience. And that makes sense. Search Engine, I remember Google search results, also on my own sites, my own affiliate sites, ranking number one and not responding, you know, throwing either you know, 22nd, timeout, or even a server errors, I had that I had my server errors, my PHP server errors indexed in Google all over the place, because they hit so hard on the servers. And back then, the only mistake I made is I tried to solve this with caching and all sorts of fancy algorithms, instead of just buying more servers to make more money. That was stupid from my point of view, but I'm a developer. So yeah, that's a programmer in me. But back then it was really unbearable what Google would do to end Yahoo and MSN, Bing, back then what they would do to a server. So I had many different websites, or the same server, different IPS and everything. So they had no idea to understand that it's the same server that responded 30 seconds. And that, again, is a modifier to the rankings, you have a number one ranking, and if the number one ranking doesn't come back, well, fast enough for the user. It

cannot be number one, and this is what they edit. They improve that. But the original ranking criteria as people call it, they didn't go away. And even Google went on stage saying, Yeah, Andrew Lippert said, its component links. What do you want from me? It's component links. That's what we have. We don't have anything else. And he wasn't a spokesman for Google very long because he said this just like I did, like, like really annoyed like, what the hell you want from me? But that was I think 2017. And he spoke with a developer heart as well, because what else is there? You want to really believe, you know, some people believe that Google looks at social signals, you know, take a third party company like Facebook, as dangerous as Facebook as, as in stable and volatile as Twitter and take their data for their own rankings. No, no, certainly not. I mean, they tried Google Plus. But really, they failed to incorporate social signals to a level that it really impacts rankings.

Gert Mellak 15:37

Here. Remember, when Facebook work got really big, everybody was saying, okay, we're not going to do searches on Google anymore. We're going to search for, for the local plumber, and Facebook and just peace and all the engagement was done by Facebook and recommendations. Whatever we're looking for, yeah, not happen. I really want to summarize what you said so far, which is really interesting. So you, you say links are at the core of Google's algorithm. They just build on top of this is, which is really important. Because, yeah, people expect that everybody is everything is shifting on Google. So yeah, everybody see everything shifting social social media, as there is now we have Clubhouse and Google is going to rebuild everything based on Clubhouse. And I don't know what yeah, it's really layers that are built on top of it to further refine what is available in search results, so to speak.

Christoph Cemper 16:26

Exactly, yeah, I think about, you know, one of the first filters was built by Metcalfe's the safe search field. And it's, I think, easiest to understand, you have a million search results. And the objective for the machine is to find out those search results that are not suitable for adults. For for kids, so to find all the porn, and so you have a million results, and the algorithm needs to take out 500,000, half of that, which is porn, that's it a filter. And another filter would be a simple penalty. That that has been around for 20 years, could be penalties, removal of websites happened forever. Before penguin before panda before all this, before they had names, like like now we don't have names for updates anymore, just to cope that. And so that always had the goal to remove non suitable non appropriate results from the original result set and that on and on. And of course, you can refine it forever. I mean, you have legal you have copyright, you have privacy issues, you know, exposed private data, credit card data, all these things are filtered filters that nobody talks about, but it's always the same method. And I don't see how how that would, would change. Fundamentally, it doesn't. So when we talk about optimizing Facebook, try to get your, your own posts rank, organically rank well to appear more often use it of people. It's not even ranking, get some exposure. But that's a different ballgame. It's not the web. Facebook is not the web. It's an app where you can scroll forever. It's an endless scroller. And Google manages something very different. They manage data, they crawl books, they crawl websites. And that is something from very different from the structure. Everything social media is more like a stream, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Tik Tok, 15 seconds per random,

random if you want. So and you cannot apply the concept of one to the other just because the search engine and the web works well, to the

Gert Mellak 18:42

Absolutely, I think it's a really very often referred to search marketing really as being like a special moment. So I'm, I'm standing in a line at a Starbucks or somebody that is trolling my feed, this is not necessarily the best moment for me to consume an article about the touch. Yeah, yeah. But if I'm sitting down, I open up Google, I search for what is the latest information about disavowing links, we're going to talk about this in a moment. And then I really am ready to dedicate a few minutes of my time to this piece of content. So it sends it also the algorithm presenting me with certain pieces of content is a different one. Because I'm in a completely different state. We have the opposite extreme with here with zero click searches with Google showing the answer directly, which obviously is great for users not so great for for websites. But obviously, if I want to know the height of the Eiffel Tower, it's not really necessary for me to read an entire article to find out where they were, where they showed it information, or if I want to know how to say hello in Spanish, I can probably do with Google's answer, and that's great. Because they're not so not so positive points about this. We obviously can talk about it in an article. You were mentioning Google algorithm updates. We had the last core update in December, we had the last core update in May. Have you seen from your experience with you obviously have a really good big data set, have you seen any impact on how Google treats links? In last year?

Christoph Cemper 20:12

So what was due this year? Sorry, what was due in 2020? What was the rollout of the nofollow indexing? So in September 2019, they pushed out overnight, the realization, the statement that they will also count nofollow links, if they feel like too, depending on and that just was confirming what I've seen for many years before, but they put it in writing. Yes, we will look at nofollow links, so be careful. And if you have paid links, better marked them as sponsored links. And if you have comment links, better mark them as UGC. So they said, we take it serious now, which I think they did for many years before. But that's official. The nofollow tag was also used or is still used by many websites for crawl optimizations, that was a huge campaign or a huge trend for for for budget, crawl budget optimization. So even if you only have 30 pages on your website, it was very important to optimize how they both crawled, which it really isn't, you know, if you have 30 million, we can start talking now maybe 3 million. But a nofollow was a trick or a hack that even Google recommended that you could use to, to to, to, to influence how the bot crawls your website. And they said, we're going to change that in March 2020. They didn't change that in March 2020. But in May, we had a core update. And the only thing that makes sense to me is that this is a delayed rollout of this nofollow indexing, which means that all websites that use nofollow to exclude terms pages, privacy pages, or you know, order forms or sign in forms, which was recommended the recommended way for years, they suddenly faced a completely different distribution of link, equity of link choose in the website. So that was the moment when the internal page ranks as people refer to it, inside Google changed for websites. And of course, if the page ranks inside a website change, then the power of pages change. So there are many crazy changes that are not even. You know, we cannot even report on that not

even Google has a pre calculated answer to that. Because what they just did is they changed the rule of how crawling works of how PageRank calculation works. So when I say PageRank, I don't mean the green toolbar PageRank that we had for many years. I mean, Google's internal measurement for the strength of links, they they have something there, and it's not what we had public. But they need to calculate that and the page rank paid them is old. And it's very different today, I guess. But they need to calculate the strength, and the trust for everything, just like link research tool does as well. And if you change the rule of which links to follow, and I wrote a huge article about which cases that might result in which special cases, then the rankings change all over the web, and this is what we saw. So it doesn't mean that links are more important or less important, or that they don't work or work. Again, it's just a work different, different strength. And

guess, for me, and it's interesting, in terms of everything related to hyperlinks, the one major change, this was the one major change that Google did, after 15 years, they introduced the nofollow tag in 2003. This is where the calculation of the link graph changed. And then in 2019, 16 years later, they changed that, that is a big change. Few people are talking about that. But compared to the filters that we had before, this now is really a core update. The calculation of every single link changed with it. So and we still see the ripple effects of that, Google still probably has crawled that recrawl their whole index, the whole web re crawling the whole web. It's not easy. It's not fast. And also Google has. This is why we use LinkedIn to expose to force them to crawl some websites, crawling, let's say weak websites or spammy websites. It's not something that they will often why because they're not important to Google. So we still see fluctuations in the link graph and in the rankings. And when people have a big problem, understanding what happens in the core updates and Google doesn't want to say, it's really that they cannot say, because if they would, they would reveal more about the algorithm than they would like. And they did that in the past more and more, then there's Christoph listening to everything and testing and the Google is not interested in giving us a real clue about what they're doing what, you know, whatever you may think. So they're interested in having websites. fast, very fast now with core vitals. So they can crawl the web better, so they can get the complete recrawl and complete coverage faster. That's what they're after. That's really it.

Gert Mellak 25:43

Now links, we said links are in general, the trust signal. But we have come to you mentioned, penalties already links can be harmful as well. And isn't very important point I would want to discuss with you. Yeah, you're obviously the expert in this in this area here. What makes the link harmful?

Christoph Cemper 26:04

What do you have to know is that until 2012, all the links that are harmful, on a scale from one to 100, with just ignored by Google. It was very, very hard to get a penalty. So they had quality criteria back then, as they have now. One criteria is a simple network pattern. If there is a certain network pattern that identifies many websites belonging to a link scheme to a link network, then they see someone is trying to mess with us. And this is not one link, you know, link networks mean that on the link graph, there are dozens or hundreds of links coming from

suspicious places, or even toxic places. And Google tries to find out- did they manipulate me? Give you a simple example. Every day, I get 10 emails with people offering me to buy links and they sent me a list of those domains where I can buy, guess what? I'm getting these, Google gets these and we're doing our trading in our system, like Google has this all way better automated than we. But if you have a seat set, trust rank calculation works just like that in the positive way. The positive trust rank takes a lot of reputable sides, like, you know, BBC and CNN and you know, real, real real, no nonsense, no bullshit websites. And wherever they link to, gets trusted. And again, where those websites link to, gets trusted. And the spam calculation works in the opposite way, you have a seed of link sellers, you know, they are selling links, they were caught for selling links, they are offering links. For instance, the Globe is offering links to be bought purchased, a very annoying example that is very special. But buying a link from a network where other people buy links is one of the very critical parts where you have to be very careful, because once you're in bed with other link buyers, if they get caught, you get caught too. And I wrote articles and made videos about this forward and backward analyst analysis to find patterns like that. And Qubik does, just like that. And then link detox, we also do apply similar methods to find patterns. So when you think about that, that's probably the most critical element. People were caught, link spamming buying links on various simple article directories, for example, or link directories. Those were used for many years and they worked. Because out of 10 links, maybe one was okay, and nine were ignored. And now we're talking about balances. If you have 100 links, and 10 of them are bad. That's okay. You may want to clean that up. If you have 100 links, and 90 of them are bad. It's it's overweighted, toxic and disbalance. It gets out of balance. And so this is what Google is looking at. They're not looking at one link. So if someone wants to do negative SEO to one of your clients, the client has a million links, and they take 100,000 spammy links. Okay, let those 100,000 links be placed, be indexed, be crawled, and then be as strong and effective as the existing links. So that's really hard. The problem is really with a smaller businesses. If you have a small business, if you have a website and you have a couple 100 links, you are very vulnerable to attacks like that. And attacks could happen from competitors trying, you know, just make your drop in rankings, because then they would go up. But there are also automated schemes like the globe spam, where you are just part of some lists of domains and should not, maybe not even potentially harmed, but you are harmed. So there are some people that say, Oh, this cannot be okay, this cannot be legal? How can someone else do all of this and then how am I rankings? And the reality is, it is because it's possible at Google doesn't care. It's not their business. If you rank or not, it's not their problem, it's your problem. And actually, if you don't rank,

you are more likely to buy Edwards, nobody will ever go on stage and say, Oh, we don't care about that. Of course, they care about quality. But what I also say is you need to maintain your website, you need to maintain your backlink profile, if you feel like you have a lot of bad links that you don't feel good about it, then disavow them. This is why the Disavow tool has been around for nine years now and it was just recently moved, migrated to the new search console. So and these bad links are - so number one, they are sometimes done by SEOs that are doing it wrong. There's sometimes a thing of the past that needs to be cleaned up but they could happen anytime again. So these days, it's actually cheaper to harm a website in rankings with spammy paid links than to help it. So if your competitor goes and buys links for you, that's really

nasty. Because those are links that are, they don't look too spammy, too crappy to to scrape a link style. They look like you try to manipulate. And Google has no way of telling.

Gert Mellak 31:56

I've seen a really nasty example here. That was I think it is like like a plumber in Sydney and they bought links for him as if he was from Ottawa, Canada. So just really confused. Google announced they didn't even want to harm it. They just wanted to confuse their targeting. Yeah. So this is essentially what what suddenly then brought them out of shape. Yeah. And just made sure they got it confused enough to lower the Sydney ranking, because something

Christoph Cemper 32:23

add up. Yeah, of course. Yeah, exactly. So a simpler example of a problematic link attack would be if you get a lot of links from porn websites. If 90% of your links are simply from adult content, we had cases where the website was then put into the safe search filter. And that means that a lot of customers who have this enabled by default, will just not see your site, you're removed from the filter. Even worse than that, and this is one of the most critical elements that we always highlight in link research tools on top of virus or malware links. If you have enough links from websites that are hijacked, or have virus and malware on them, then you are also flagged as a suspicious or compromised result. And these databases that flag you, they are not even owned by Google. So for malware and virus, they collaborate with other you know, virus program distributors, and getting off those lists is really painful. If you think Google penalties are painful, try getting off a virus list and that, those are the things that people usually don't talk about, because it's not a pleasant topic in general, but also because it does not happen that often. It does not happen because it takes money. It takes effort. So that plumber guy, he probably you know, ignite someone really really bad, but I have a hard time, well, I don't know that specific area maybe some emergency plumbers, you know where you pay for emergency plumbing \$1,000 for for you know him coming 24 seven, maybe that. But industries where that happens is usually industries with very high cost per click, you know.

Gert Mellak 34:18

Everything tourism and financing. Yeah, medically as well, the lawyers. For us, it's just really important. We have like, we have a framework built, we call this ERICA, and the I in ERICA stands for interlinking. What I call this, this internal and external links, where I try to make sure people just understand that it's important to get an idea of what links come to your site because this is exactly what most site owners completely ignore. They check their rankings, they check their content, they check their heritage, they might check the conversions. Many don't. Yeah, yeah. But they completely ignore what links point to the site apart from the links they build themselves or they by themselves. Yeah,

Christoph Cemper 34:55

yeah, yeah

Gert Mellak 34:56

This is where I just grabbed people every couple of weeks and show them exactly what links are pointing to the site. Yes, to make sure that we're on the same page. We know anything's been going on, going on. We just had a tourism client being attacked with a no, let's let's do a disavow again, because somebody is playing with you again. But they really don't have this on their radar. This is where I think it's just important to revisit the link profile in general, but also on a regular basis, at least I mean, many, many of my clients at least have Ahrefs, Semrush, anything, whatever tool they have for a start, just to check out what that those tools, tell them what Google Search Console tells them. They obviously don't have a similar data set, but at least they might see a sudden spike and then again, then engage with an SEO firm, or someone to take a closer look and really analyze what do you see this all the time you see this all the time.

Christoph Cemper 35:49

Exactly. It's also tough because Google doesn't talk about it. So if Google doesn't talk about it, it's not important. They only talk about the stuff that is important, right? A fast website. Yeah, so Google can crawl a website faster, huh. even faster website. So Google can crawl the website even faster. That's important to Google. They only have a very basic functionality to look at some links of a website, which is useful in Google Search Console, we take that out. But just to give you an idea of the link data that we get there is usually between one and 5%, of the link data. It's sometimes it's 10%, for smaller websites and it's really useful to have that information because some negative SEO attacks are done in a way that search engines can see the links. And you know, typically bots can not see them. So a lot of Icos, for example, block bots for hrs at sem rush. So they cannot, so they are not allowed to crawl the website, based on the robots.txt standard. We don't use the robots.txt standard, so we crawl more, a lot more and five more links, but they are very fancy, technical ways to show links only to specific Google data centers and those type of links are the nastiest one. If you have links like that, that only show up in Google Search Console, you know, something is cooking, that is not good. And then you can say you have a negative SEO attack or someone trying to do that, you know, sometimes it just starts with testing a little bit. But that should make you cautious.

Gert Mellak 37:31

Yeah, it's essentially just trying to discover something you can see right?

Christoph Cemper 37:34

Yeah, exactly.

Gert Mellak 37:35

A target you can't even see.

Christoph Cemper 37:37

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. And people, people, you know, experts in negative SEO are usually veterans like me that have been in the business for many, many, many, many years, and are very technical. And that's not something that is to take lightly.

Gert Mellak 37:56

How would it, how would a site owner know that potentially there is a penalty going on? We don't there are manual penalties. But there are algorithmic penalties. Yeah. Yeah. How would this I don't know they might even being penalized on this?

Christoph Cemper 38:10

Well, number one, we have the luxury of Google Search Console telling us, you know, Google really implemented emails saying, Hey, you got a penalty. If people hate that, imagine, being me in 2003. In 2003, we had nothing like that we didn't even know what was going on. The website didn't receive any more traffic, it wasn't listed in Google. So this is what you can check. Second, if you suddenly stop getting orders, if you stop getting visitors stop getting, you know, comments, that something's wrong, and you should look at your analytics setup. But you can also look at SEO tools like Sistrix, Semrush, Ahrefs, if you have them or call your your agency to see if there is a major impact in the rankings. have to be careful though, because for many websites, the key traffic is not what these tools show, they show you more the head terms, let's say the more generic words. And if you drop for a generic word doesn't mean you're dropped for the longtail phrases. A longtail phrases are those that make the money, sometimes a drop in visibility, as they call it often. It's not necessarily a drop in traffic in in converting traffic, but it's a signal. And just yesterday I've had a private site connect with a guy losing all of his traffic like all and, and then you need to check of course for the signals. You need to check and your backlink profile where we found something but you also need to check the website. And in that case, it was yet again how WordPress with some crazy multilingual plugin with some well known SEO plug in and that didn't play well together. And redirects were completely messed up on that site and all the content was just redirected to images. Yeah, there you go. Go Good luck with your free website, CMS system with a cheap hosting, and some plugin from some other guy who doesn't even know that you use that other plug in. And then you have some, some software keys, essentially. And that was the case here. So this is why you need a trusted provider who takes care of your websites. Free is not free, a free WordPress is not free, it causes a lot of trouble. Not in the first month, not in the second month. But if you you know, maintain a WordPress instance for 10 years, you have problems. I can tell you I've been there

Gert Mellak 40:32

after 10 years, you probably have been through a few hack attacks. And

Christoph Cemper 40:36

Exactly, exactly.

Gert Mellak 40:38

Yeah, many, many years, we were using a system, hardly anybody used, which was called EZ publish. It was essentially a content management system more for enterprises, but they had like a community version. Yes, using that one for for my websites back then and I remember sites not being touched in six years, no update, no badge, no anything. And they had didn't have a senior hacking attempt. It was it was just not very often people go for the system that's used the most because they need to find a program. It's going to be easy to have all the plugins, you

don't need to program anything, but obviously the system use the most is the most attractive target for hackers. Like, who really has an anti antivirus system on their Mac. Yeah, probably hardly anybody. Yeah. Apparently there are viruses for Mac, but it's not, not something people would be focusing on if they want to go and attack computers. Right.

Christoph Cemper 41:32

Exactly, yeah. And the same is true here. WordPress is, it's a nice system, but it is a complex system. And complexity that you have in WordPress these days with all the speed optimization plugins, is crazy. So if you have a very big car, it needs a strong engine, not to move you around to move the big car around. And that's the case with WordPress, either a frickin huge server to host a WordPress instance that performs well. And then you still need some optimizations, because some things are still not built in. It's a CMS system, where you still need to install in 2021, a plug in for for duplicating an article. Wow. Yeah. So just an example. I recently saw Mario post on Facebook that he he managed to optimize his website. And he had a time to interactive of, I think one second for his article. It's just an article text, no images, nothing. And the question is about takes one second to load of an article out of 10 kilobytes. So a lot of people are now looking into alternatives that don't have that complexity. And the reality is, most websites don't have any complexity. Most websites have, let's say 100, blog posts, maybe 200. articles, static, you write them, and then they stay there. And then you have an About Us page, you have a team page, you have a contact form. It's all static. Of course, you write an article every week, or maybe you write 10 articles a week. But it's data. It's not a dynamic system, like a forum. It's not like fluctuating like Facebook changing every second. So you do not need a database to serve that. And once you get to that point, you realize, Oh, we can just generate HTML files.

Gert Mellak 43:34

There's no login for that. I've tested these ones where you can install a plugin on WordPress to produce HTML. Yes. You have your administration on purpose. I don't think it works with any page builders anyway. But you essentially can have WordPress generates dedicated HTML files, so they get rendered fast index file. Yeah, I think Yeah, probably somewhere the future might be there, I think. And then you get Yeah, yeah. A lot of hacking attempts.

Christoph Cemper 44:00

Yeah, well, those cache plugins have always been around to generate HTML. But if everything is on the same server, I can still hack your database. The idea about static site generators, like Hugo or Gatsby, for example, is to give it to a distribution network like Netlify. And then you have HTML files, not sitting on any server everywhere. It's on CloudFlare or Amazon CDN, right at the edge. So if you're in Vienna, if I'm in Vienna, and I load that ebsite I loadd it from next door, not from your server in Spain or in California. So there is not even a server to be attacked. That content is just distributed. And yesterday, I just looked it up. They give you a free, free hosting free tier for up to 100 gigabytes of traffic.

Gert Mellak 44:55

Interesting. Interesting. I think the future definitely goes there. If you want more speed more Bye Bye bye. more speed more. Yeah, as the responses etc, are definitely going to go back to steady delivery at some point. It'll be such a Yeah, with this low. We see this all the time, especially when sites have been growing over time and slow response, I had this on a, on a language learning side of thing where the site was extremely slow. And it was just a database cleanup. There was no time for logins for everything. But there was no plugin that would do a database cleanup and remove all the versions and drafts and know what, so it was removing those and decide whether they can go two seconds faster.

Christoph Cemper 45:33

Yeah, yeah, but the version control is something for instance, hosting is hosting companies like WP engine that disable revisioning to disable versioning, because it's slowing WordPress down so much. But a much bigger question is, why on earth does the CMS have its own version control, we get Git and Mercurial that are used to build software with trillions of lines of code. So a static website generator, for instance, uses that as well established version control with all of fancy features that you can imagine that is used to build Linux and Windows and NASA software. Bite went to veal, and this is another. We don't need that approach in the CMS world and works like a charm, actually.

Gert Mellak 46:24

I want to make sure we don't we don't continue to learn to nerd out. I really love this stuff into my programming brain and, and love these this kind of discussion for our audience. I think there was one one more question I want to become. Appreciate the time. You very often we hear things about maintenance, brands being mentioned, but not linked. What do you think, is this valuable, is Google taking this into account? Is it worth the effort reaching out to the sides and get really a link placed? Is Google taking into account that brands get mentioned a lot and so the site behind the brand might be more important? What's your take on this?

Christoph Cemper 47:06

Brand managers have always been important because they create brand traffic. And brand traffic creates links. If you have a lot of people searching for your brand, your brand comes up more often, it's being clicked on more often. So that's an indirect ranking factor if you want. If there is somebody copy that has link researchwhos .com, and a clearly visible domain name, that this is a mention that can be attributed to a domain, which is useful and probably used by Google. But it's not so often that people you know, use the normal link. I mean, in forums, for example, it is. But the real killer question is, how far are they with their entity mapping? You know, Google entities reminds me about Google Plus, they did the Google Plus thing and try to get a map of everyone, every person, every company and all that. And they're doing that just again, and so I wrote a book, so I'm an author, entity, and they know Christoph, spaghetti code, blah, blah, blah, belongs to link research tools. They know all that. So when they when they have someone mentioning link research tools, spelled correctly, also some misspellings, they can connect it, but it's also not so often that that happens compared to linking for example, when people just link to a certain blog post saying or nice tutorial or interesting case study. I

have not seen any ranking impact of any brand mentions anywhere, just from the link perspective. So if you say we don't need the link, it's okay. If they just mentioned the name. That's a little bit too hopeful. I would not

Gert Mellak 49:03

I was going to say really, really risking potentially get from this site.

Christoph Cemper 49:07

Yeah, yeah. And there is a link building tactic to just look for those mentions. And I've sent them an email to ask for that link.

Gert Mellak 49:15

In seconds because I was when I was heading for so this is definitely when there is a brand has been around for a few years, they probably have quite a few mentions a quick win can be to reach out to those pages and ask if they could also place a link so people can directly click on the name.

Christoph Cemper 49:29

Yeah, sometimes that is really easy. So imagine you have multiple languages. Or you change your domain name to something slightly different from dub dub dub link research tools, com to smart link research tools com, and you just tell them, you know, we want to make sure that your readers hit on the right website. They get the most recent piece or what you're actually referring to is not here on the homepage because we got so many different product but the article is about a product by that company that is posted here, and we explain that here. So you may want to link there for better user experience for your readers. Oh, thank you. That's a great idea. So it's not, you don't need to chase the links. Think about what the user experience would be and if, and if a journalist writes about a company and just mentioned that company, in the context of a product, he just maybe didn't have the time or the knowledge to, to find a better place to link to. But the web is content and links, and that's, I would say, after 20 years or so, some journalists get it, you know, there's still discussions in the in the news community, you know, linking or not, and should we link somewhere and then the essays have some bad rep some, some in some places, but more and more articles, just use the web, the way it was intended by Tim Berners-Lee and, and write content with links in it to the right places, so I can research further. And so that is really, I would say one of the most promising link building tactics in general, just look what you have, who wrote about you wouldn't try to help them make their websites better.

Gert Mellak 51:16

Perfect. Yeah. Awesome. Awesome insights Christopher, I want to wrap this up here, I think we use enough of your time, I think we've gotten a lot of food for thought for for the audience. We've heard about Google still relying on links, we've heard about having different filters, as you explained it really well where Google is just trying to get better and better in the search result. And not only to rely on links, but the fundamental criteria for what should be ranking what should be ranking higher. Other links, we need to be careful about what links come to our website, we

want to disavow the bad ones, we don't want our website associated with bad links, neighborhoods or link networks as you as we explained them, running link research tools, I want to stress this is definitely one of the leading tools there, especially I think agencies in general are using link research tools as soon as they can. And I think also there are some some automatic detox tools and features out there right now that also make it a very good option too for business owners.

Christoph Cemper 52:17

Yeah, yeah we try to automate as much as we could. And some of the spam patterns that I talked about, are now highlighted, because we have such such a big, a vast amount of data and experience that we just see things over and over and over again. And we can just tell you, so that's, I would say advisory automated based on the experience of well, nine years, I've just linked detoxing. So yeah

Gert Mellak 52:47

To the count for something, yeah. Thank you so much Christoph for your time to come to Seoleverage.com. Thank you so much. If listeners to this show feel they might have an issue with links definitely get get in touch with us at SEOleverage.com. If you want to check this out yourself, check out linkresearchtool.com, get in touch with Christoph'ss team and are definitely what your links, what what links gets pointed to your site, and reach out if you need help. Thank you.

Christoph Cemper 53:16

Thank you very much Gert.