074 - SEO Experiments

Gert Mellak
We cannot change something and immediately expect results. Google is going to take a while. And the reason is, for example, that it's going to take Google a while a few days probably to crawl your page, it's going to take them a few days to index it, process it, really roll out those changes across all the data centers around the world. And then this new information might also have to mature a little bit. So even though Google Now with this change, once you're ranking on page one, and you're now on page five, you still need to probably go to page four and three and two, eventually, and then come to page one. So things take a while. My suggestion is to have SEO experiment run for at least four weeks, but possibly even eight weeks in order to make sure that you can really trust the data more and give Google enough time to actually do something.

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

Gert Mellak
Welcome back to Seoleverage.com. My name is Gert Mellak. And if you're listening to this episode, you're probably wondering what this SEO experiments thing is all about. Before I jump in, I would like to make sure you know that over at SEOleverage.com/podcast, you're going to find all our episodes, this is number 74 already. And we also provide a written version of these podcast episodes. So if you want more information head over there. SEO experiments very often are not considered important because many people think that between Google's Webmaster Guidelines and SEO tutorials and some videos you might be watching, this is already enough. And if it doesn't work, SEO just doesn't work for you. The truth is, it's much more complex than that. Google's algorithm is really, really complicated. And the idea is that Google, whenever you type in a search query is going to create essentially like a mini algorithm there in order to figure out what is the best search result. What does Google want? Google wants to make Google users happy. And the way to do this is by providing the most relevant answer to a search query as fast as possible. What this also means is that even if we know the best practices in SEO and apply them to our site, we still don't know if they are going to work for a particular algorithm set that's going to kick in for a particular surgery. Sometimes even completely counterintuitive things happen where something doesn't work at all for one website, and works wonders and almost produces instant results on other websites. We have seen this before. We just had an example of a site getting almost an instant 20 to 25% boost on the sample set of URLs with something that didn't work at all, on another website. As an agency, SEO leverage is in the position of always testing things on a large set of websites. At any given time, we usually work on about 30 to 40 projects at least. And apart from this also have our own testing sites where we do all kinds of things to them and with them in order to see how Google react in order to test things in a safe space before applying them to our clients. I want to share

in this podcast episode a framework for SEO experiments I have developed in case this also works for you. This is also what guides our application where our clients can specifically track their experiments, the assemble set of years and a lot of the legwork, so to speak is being done by the app as well. First of all, you want to know what to test. This podcast or our YouTube channel at SEO Leverage are going to give you a lot of ideas on what you can try on your site. And you really want to test things first, before rolling them out site wide. Why? Because you want to minimize the risk. Anything you change on a website can potentially impact it. So it can be impacted in a negative or what we hope is going to be a positive way. But if you test it on the small sample set of URLs, you minimize the risk while still trying to leverage more SEO tactics and strategies, methodologies that could actually bring you to the next level. We can't stay static. Even if we have good rankings, we still want to make sure that we are ahead of our competition. So SEO tests are just a really important thing to engage with. The second thing you want to make sure that you know is your data. You can't test or improve something you can't measure. So you want to make sure that depending on the tests you run, you establish first a benchmark of what is happening right now in for example, impressions, clicks, click through rates, average position, whatever you want to track, so that you can then after you make the change, compare with what those benchmark values are afterwards. And this brings me to the timeframe. We cannot change something and immediately expect results. Google is going to take your while. And the reason is, for example, that it's going to take Google a while a few days probably to crawl your page, it's going to take them a few days to index it, process it, really roll out those changes across all the data centers around the world. And then this new information might also have to mature a little bit. So even though Google Now with this change, once you're ranking on page one, and you're now on page five, you still need to probably go to page four, and three and two, eventually, and then come to page one. So things take a while. My suggestion is to have SEO experiments run for at least four weeks, but possibly even eight weeks in order to make sure that you can really trust the data more and give Google enough time to actually do something. The sample URLs you pick, need to be carefully selected. Because on the one hand, you don't want to test new things on your most important URLs, those that bring in the conversions and sales. You want to test things on your ads that get the decent amount of traffic, but are not like really, really important for your business survival, just to stay in a safe place. You can also not use URLs that Google doesn't care about at all, because it then might take them weeks or months to actually process them. And results are going to take too long to kick in. When you want to implement the changes you have defined on the URLs and ideally over the test period, not do any other chain major changes on them. So if this is a content change, if you build links at the same time, and what you want to test is content, it's going to skew your results. If those are articles that suddenly then stop appearing, or they get a lot of redirections placed to them or whatever is going to impact your results. As much as possible, try to eliminate all other factors. So you're really just doing a single variable test, as we call it, where you change one thing and see what happens. The next step is evaluation. If this was an eight week test, you want to check what are the results after eight weeks and compare them to the eight weeks before and see what happens. Make sure that you account for any peak periods in your industry, if you're selling Christmas baskets, maybe December is not the ideal month to run a test. Because the example the results are going to be vastly different from October anyway. So account for peak periods, or avoid them as much as possible. And then just

make testing part of what you do. For us in as an SEO agency, it's easier because we have in our agency has specific people for r&d, that are not doing anything else. But high level analysis, and SEO testing for all our clients projects. If you don't have this r&d resource in your team or on your business, either get in touch with us, we're happy to help you out there. Or find a way to just make r&d and testing part of what is being done in your day to day SEO routine. Because then you can really leverage those incremental results that are going to come in here. My name is Gert Mellak. If this was interesting for you, we'd love to see it shared on social media, or connect with me on Twitter, on Instagram or Facebook and let me know what you think about it. Thank you so much.