

089 - How to Grow a SAAS With SEO

Kevin Sahin 0:00

So the first problem is that there is too much information available. And the second problem is that there are lots of experts or so called experts in the industry that have completely different views on the same topic. Why? For a simple reason, simple reason is that the Google algorithm is kind of a blackbox. So people are assuming things and like, there are many experts that are assuming different things, or worse opposite things.

SEO Leverage Podcast Intro Music 0:35

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

Gert Mellak 0:45

Hello and welcome back to Seoleverage.com. My name is Gert Mellak. This is episode 89 of our podcast. At SEO Leverage we're working with clients from all kinds of industries. Some of them are in their SaaS business software as a service business, which is a particular field where SEO and content marketing in general, I think, is a little bit different than in other fields. We do have a software in house as well. So we have some development experience. I myself was, have been a developer for more than 20 years already. And I've just learned that we have a very common ground there with our guests today. So we have invited Kevin Sahin from scrapey.com, scraping bee sorry, ScrapingBee.com. Over to you to, to the podcast. Welcome, Kevin.

Kevin Sahin 1:34

Thanks for having me, Gert excited to be here.

Gert Mellak 1:38

Awesome. I really want to tell you about this called SaaS thing. And also where you come from, your background. Could you give our listeners a little bit of a background on, on how you got your experience in, in SaaS, and the common ground and just mentioned we share?

Kevin Sahin 1:56

Sure. So I started my career as a software developer. So I went to university in France. I, I spent three years in university, at first I wanted to pursue a master's degree. But after three years, I got kind of bored. And, you know, I wanted to get some real world experience as soon as possible and I joined a startup in France. The company I was working with was doing, it's kind of a plaid.com in the US. So kind of a bank account aggregation and we were doing a lot of web scraping because in order to connect to customers account, and fortunately, banks don't offer any API. So we had to programmatically extract data. I really, it was really a great experience to learn about this world of web scraping, and also to work to learn about the startup world because the startup I was working with was in, inside an incubator. So there was many, many different startups. And they could speak to all these entrepreneurs after work and go through

these meetups and workshops after work. And it was really exciting. And I was seeing lots of, lots of different companies, and kind of started the flame, the entrepreneurial flame inside me. And yeah, I mean, that's where I knew that at some point in my life, I would quit my job and launch a company. The company got acquired, unfortunately, I didn't have any stock or anything, but it was really interesting to live a big acquisition from the inside and then to get some experience with the acquiring company. It was a big French bank. So I knew that the corporate world wasn't for me. But it was still interesting to you know, learn how all this work. And then at some point, I just decided to not quit immediately, but first start some kind of project. And I launched a blog. So it was my first experience with SEO. I launched the blog that obviously talked about programming. This blog, I hadn't, I haven't any ambition with it. I was just enjoying writing blog posts after my work and talking about the things that I learned. And I think I got pretty lucky with this blog, because it got featured in big tech publications, like the IntelliJ blog. So IntelliJ for those who don't know, it's like the most well known kind of text editor for developers, and it was like, it boosted my, my rankings and my domain authority and like, kind of overnight, and this was my first foot in the SEO world. And then eventually I quit my job and worked on two, two startups that failed. And then with my lifelong friend, Pierre de Wulf, I launched ScrapingBee and, and here we are.

Gert Mellak 5:32

it's amazing. It's an amazing story. And I can see a lot of, a lot of parallels from from starting out as a developer and working in software companies and in launching and talking online about programming. I think if you type in my name, you'll still find some of my early forum questions and posts about my programming doubts, which is interesting. Personally, I also found very, very soon that corporate is definitely not for me, also always trying to do my own thing. But it's interesting how really technical or tech focused job still drives you to entrepreneurship, to through to marketing, just in order to make things work. I remember when I built my first website, I think it was like 15, or 16 years old. I just found a key. Now I have very, know how to build a website. So what are they going to do with it? Nobody comes, nobody's going to see it. Nobody talks about it. So let's see how this SEO thing is all about. Right? So it's really interesting. So now this is ScrapingBee.com. Can you very briefly tell us what you're doing there?

Kevin Sahin 6:31

Yeah, so um, I was mentioning the the failed startup, we did before with my partner, that basically previously we were working on an SAS business called Pricing Bot dot co. So basically, what Pricing Bot was were, it was a SAAS, a price monitoring tool for E commerce owner to monitor their competitors. So basically, you could enter your competitor, we would crawl the domain, and then extract all the data from the products like the price, the description, the images, and would track it every day. So that you could have alerting, you could see how your products are priced compared to your competitors, reprice dynamically your own product, etc. But we failed, we failed for many reasons. One of the main reason why we failed was that we didn't manage to get a proper distribution channel, like we couldn't find a good way to beat the competition in the search engine, we couldn't find a way to build a repeatable sales process, etcetera, etcetera. And we didn't like manage to get past \$1,000 in MOR, which wasn't great. So we decided to shut down the company, we didn't really shut down, but we sold it to one of our

competitor for like a really small amount. The great thing about this business was that we encounter lots of issues while doing the web scraping. So one of those issue is what is called JavaScript rendering. So when you scrape the web at scale, there is a technical problem that is that you encounter more and more nowadays, is that the more and more websites that are using a JavaScript frameworks, like Vue.js, React, etc. And it's kind of hard to scrape those websites, because if you don't use a headless browser, you will get basically an empty page because all the content is rendered with JavaScript. So you need a headless browser. And scaling headless browser is hard. There are tons of issues like it's a real ops problem. It costs a lot in servers, because you need powerful servers, etc. So we had solved this problem with Pricing Bot and the other problem that you have when doing web scraping at scale, is proxy management. So you need proxies, for example, when you want to access internationalized content, if you want to see a price in euro on an international online retailer, you need an IP address in the European Union, et cetera, et cetera. And the other thing that you need is that lots of websites that are going to block your request, if you do too many requests per day, or if you want to do more than that you need more IP addresses. So proxy management is also something that we solved with Pricing Bot. And so we we thought that we dump more and more companies and startups that are extracting data in many different industries, data from the web, I mean, and they probably all face the same problems. And we, we just thought that if we could launch an API that wraps and package the two solution, proxy management, and JavaScript rendering, well, it could be used by lots of companies in many different industries. And the other thing, so that was for the product. And for, we thought that, okay, but we're not going to repeat the same mistake that we did with Pricing Bot, so having a product is good, but we needed to have a way, a reputable way to attract customers. And we already had this way, because both my partner and I had successful programming blogs and we knew that we could easily rank for many keywords related to web scraping, because on my personal blog, I already ranked for some of those keywords. And I had a pretty significant traffic already, like four or 5000 unique visitors a month and we knew that we could probably 10X this number if we spent more time and wrote more content about the this topic. So like we, we spend a lot of time working, on launching this packaged API, and like it, from I would say, I won't say from day one, but like from month one, we started acquiring customers and at a rate that was a significantly higher than our previous projects.

Gert Mellak 11:54

It's really, really interesting story. So obviously, appreciate you also also share the failed startup here. And as always, with every failed project, have those in my mainstream as well. There are a lot of learnings and very often new ideas to start from from a big failure, but you still can leverage the learnings you have in there.

Kevin Sahin 12:11

Yeah.

Gert Mellak 12:12

So do it. I do realize I did work, I think for 16 years on an E commerce project as well, which we programmed from scratch back then, and did a lot of price comparisons, as well so I can see

where this was definitely a market. But I also know that even my client back then was really reluctant in, in starting to implement this and trusting the automation, etc. Remember, there were a lot of trust issues around, is this really scraping the right thing? And how automated can we make those price reductions? This is interesting, but I can see yeah, definitely we have we head into an era where more and more, more and more content is just rendered with JavaScript. It's not as easy to extract data anymore and just a lot of company have this necessity, necessity. I'm really interested in in two things right now. Now we talk about this startup, how, how did you get your first clients because I imagine you can't wait for SEO to just magically happen and start getting some rankings, you need some some feedback on seeing your product out in the wild. How did you go about getting the first clients?

Kevin Sahin 13:14

So what we did with Scraping Bee is that we started the blog four months before launching the product. So when we launched Scraping Bee publicly, we already had some traffic on our blog, and pretty significant traffic, like a few 1000 visitors a month. So it really helped during our launch, to acquire the first customers. We did the usual, you know, startup playbook, if I could call it that way, for the launch, meaning we launched on different platforms. We didn't do a one big launch, but we, we did the beta first. We announced the launch in beta in you know Better List, Product Turns, Reddit, Hack in Use, all those websites. And it helped us get a an initial email list of, I don't know, couple 100 emails. So it helped us getting the first beta users, not not paying users but beta users. And then when we decided to publicly launch, it was in August 2019, we immediately got our first customers. I think in the first month we, we acquire like N customers, paying customers in August 2019 and then it just, you know, I don't know I, I would say that we probably at the time acquire between five and 10 new customers every month, and then it started growing slowly, but surely.

Gert Mellak 15:07

Awesome. That's, that's really, really, really good. I like to just started the blog ahead of time is what I tell people, when they sell Christmas party kits, you can start in December. With your SEO, you probably started in, in spring or summer to get those rankings in. And we did a similar thing. Interestingly, we, we started the link building blog in Spain, when nobody talked too much about link building, and nobody wanted to do link building as I am saying. Nobody wants to do it, I'm going to do it for them. So we ended up building links for quite a few agencies in Spain. And we started out with this link, link blog. And again, we built a blog way before we actually started launching the service, but it just got a lot of traction. And very often you can leverage the content this way or, or sometimes we see even clients launch products, once we audit their website and tell them look, you're getting a lot of traffic on this article, but you don't leverage it some, anyhow, you don't get conversion, conversions in. Many people don't even know what they actually rank for. In terms of, of keywords very often, once you see what Google already gives you relevance, you can extract a completely new service or product for them. Right? As interesting. How do you go about the cont, or did you go about the content creation for this blog? Is there any, did you, how much did you research? Or how did you how did you go about creating those blog posts to get them ranked so well?

Kevin Sahin 16:28

So I would say that, at the beginning, I, I kind of learn SEO at the same time as I was implementing it. Because when I started my blog, my personal blog I mean, when I was working at my first company, I had no idea what I was doing. I was just, you know, write my thoughts about what I just learned, etc. When we launched Scraping Bee and when we start work started working on the blog, I was reading a lot of things about SEO on the side and it was really hard. Like, I think, like the problem with the learning in 2022 is that like there's too much information available and it's like the most difficult thing is to filter noise and find, you know, the real information and, and especially in SEO that there, there's, so the first problem is that there too much information available and the second problem is that there are lots of experts or so called experts in the industry that have completely different views on the same topic. Why? For simple reason, simple reason is that the Google algorithm is kind of a black box. So people are assuming things and like there are many experts that are assuming different things, or worse, opposite things. So that what makes learning SEO hard. And then, but I was lucky enough to find, like good mentors along the way that helped me focus on what matters. And for me what matters, there are two things that matters or three things I'd say, keyword research, content and link building. So we focused on these those three. To answer your question about the content. At the beginning, we were not really doing a formal keyword research, we were taking the articles that were working well on my personal blog, and implementing variations of those articles on our Scraping Bee blog, for example. There was one blog post that worked well on my personal blog, which was introduction to web scraping with Java. And so we did an introduction to web scraping with many, many different languages, JavaScript, Ruby, Python, etc, etc. And it worked really well. And we didn't do any keyword research for this. We just, you know, we knew that it was working. And like Python was a big language so why not do a web scraping article about Python? And it was well after when we exhausted all those variation that we started to learn about keyword research, how to do it, how can we focus on counterintuitive keywords, etc, etc. For the content itself, we wrote everything by ourselves at the beginning. And then slowly we started changing our process. Like for me, I've always wanted that you know, there's this big SEO advice where people are telling you, you should write the best content. And but it's much easier said than done. So what we, what we did was, you know the obvious things, which was, when we had, let's say, we want to work, to write an article about web scraping with Ruby. I think we're probably the first results for this query, by the way. We looked at every ranking articles about this query on Google. And we try to find the gaps, what could we improve? There is one thing that is pretty easy. When you're writing about technology, it's that technology is changing at a very, very fast rate. So it's really easy to write an up to date article about any kind of technology. That's the first thing. The second thing that you can do to write good technical content, or great, even very great technical content, is to change the tone. Like there are many technical articles that are just boring. They're boring, because you know, developers are used to read documentation, documentation is boring. And when they write a blog post, they just don't know what happens in their head. But it seems to me that they are writing documentation. So one simple trick is to change your mindset and try to write something that is engaging. And that doesn't feel like a documentation. One thing that we did in order to help us with that was to hire a Content Editor, I highly, highly, highly recommend everyone to hire a Content Editor, especially if like myself, you're not a native English speaker. Like a

Content Editor, not only they can help you write correct English with the typos, etc. but they can take a boring article, and translate it to an engaging one. And that changes everything. Because like, you know sometimes we had comments when we distributed our content on Reddit, etc. Like, whoa, this is so well written blah, blah, blah. And like, it has a big impact. I think, it has a big impact on like, how much shares will you have on your articles, it will have an impact on your bounce rate, it will have an impact on many things. So I highly, highly recommend everyone to do it.

Gert Mellak 22:28

Well, a lot of a lot of really good points. So definitely, I'm very often think Google, what what, it's really hard for Google to figure out what good content is, right? So as long as you take the the main boxes, you should be taking in this topic, your niche. My personal theory is it Google just takes use of signals. So they just randomly show sites and see what happens after they come back or they do not come back? How long do they stay? What do they do? My personal theory, and confirm it that way, but I think a lot, a big part of the algorithm is just how do people feel when they come to a website. And what what kind of feeling do they get. We saw, and this also gets confirmed with some clients where I say, 'Look, before we do anything else, let's change the header and redesign it' because it's just awful and people are going to jump off, they're not even going to read the text you have or the title you put in there because it just doesn't look serious. A lot of this, I think is just really based on on user experience. And I can imagine that engaging content, first of all, is, is great for a change if you're a developer or tech person, and you're used to the documentation, and you finally find another key that's really nice to read on top of giving the information. It's, it's definitely working, and I like the other point you made about this example about the introduction to scraping for the programming languages, is very much ties into what we call topical mapping. So meaning, meaning you, you map out the topic and try to cover everything around this topic, ideally, especially if you see you're starting to get some traction, you really want to go a mile deep, so to speak, and just really cover it inside out. Rather than touching upon all kinds of different queries, if you find okay, this introduction with a programming language works then do this for everything. If you have a location page, and that works, tried to target more locations. So we see a lot of success here with clients as well, we have to say, Okay, if you're already ranking decently with this, really explore this make sense, make sure you establish yourself as a topical, topical authority there. So there is a thing called topical trust. So if there is, if there is a lot of content about a particular topic, who is going to see you as a higher authority than someone who just mentioned this briefly on an article. I always tell people that if I was going to give advice on cancer treatment tomorrow on SEO leverage, hopefully Google would rank me because they don't know what I'm talking about. But we do know a thing, or two about SEO and Shopify SEO and these kinds of things, and we have a lot of content there. So Google can understand that it makes sense to rank us for these kinds of terms. You mentioned, you mentioned, so this this content editor role, we have this implemented at some point in-house as well, to have someone only focusing on the quality rather than the SEO related stuff. And you can definitely confirm this works wonders, what else would would be would be important if you're write for a technique, tech savvy audience, so to speak.

Kevin Sahin 25:19

Yeah. So I think when you like, when you, when you do content marketing, for a technical audience, one of the most important thing is to, like, provide as much value as you can and not advertise your product in any way, because developers especially they hate marketing. Like, if they feel that your content is some kind of marketing, and that you're trying to sell them something, they're going to hate it. That's just the way it is and and you won't be able to distribute it on Reddit, you won't be able to get your content on the front page of Hacker News, you won't be able to, like they would really, really badly react to it. So one thing that we did is, and like from day one is that we, we didn't implement any of the usual I would say marketing, technique or growth hacks on our blog. For example, we have a free ebook on our blog and we just give it for free without having without even asking for an email address. And why we do that? It's because if you like, maybe this is work, I mean, it's clearly a great lead magnet in many industries, but in tech, like, it doesn't work with developers. It works maybe with executive and decision makers, like product managers, CTOs, whatever, you can write a new book about high level stuff, but for the developer audience, it doesn't work at all. And that's my advice, when you're doing content marketing, targeted at developers is, forget about all the conversion rate optimization, techniques, forget about, you know, emails getting your content, forget about big CTAs, and all that, all those things, it won't work with developers. And we've tested this many times and sometimes even this slight, like, a little mention through your product inside the blog posts can be badly received by the developer community. They just they don't, they don't like it. And especially on social platforms like Reddit, Hacker News, Lobster, and all those Link Aggregation platform, which are, by the way, really huge. It's a huge marketing channel. For example, we front page Hacker News several times, each time it's like 30,000 visitors to our website. It's like insane. And I'm not sure if I, if there are many industries where you have those kinds of aggregation platform that can send so much traffic to your website for free. And how did you get there, you get there by only providing value, no marketing trick, no conversion rate optimization trick, only like a pure, long form tutorials without asking for anything, and then you get their attention. And in the end, that's what we want. We want to like the goal of our content strategy is not direct conversion, but it's more like brand awareness and long term, like the same way that you know, it's the same strategy that is used by Digital Ocean. For example, Digital Ocean, they have this they have an open writing program where they basically pay \$300 to for anyone to write a technical article on the blog. And they rank for like, many, many, like, I think when you look for anything in Google related to servers, deployment, etc, you will find something written by Digital Ocean but there's no mention of Digital Ocean in this article. It's just meant for long term brand awareness and someday when you need a VPS or server or whatever you'll think about Digital Ocean and it just works.

Gert Mellak 29:49

Absolutely. I think yeah, we definitely do have in other niche, s we do know those CTAs work, we do know that conversion rate optimization works, but I think it goes down back to really know your, know your audience really well, right? I mean, even if you got the email addresses, I bet nine out of 10 email addresses are fake, if you have developers putting, putting their email address in, because every developer I know has probably 25 different email addresses. So the opt in wouldn't be worth anything anyway. So the only thing you can really squeeze out there is a, is an, a download of the brand awareness. But we have also seen this working, I remember

we did this in, I think this was an office refurbishment project in Austria, we would just offer the catalog for free, because it was clear that people were going to download the catalog, they were going, were going to print it out, we're going to take it to the next meeting. So we didn't want to put any boundaries there. And maybe then you have deliverability issues. So you should ask them for double verification, or all those kinds of, kinds of barriers. At the end of the day, you want to make it easy for people to buy from you and make a selection. And I think there's also a lot to say about, about just establishing yourself as an authority over the long term, people are likely really eager like, you write a blog, post today and tomorrow, I should be ranking number one and, and should see my leads coming in because otherwise I don't write another blog post. It's just the long game. You really need to need to look into into what, what kind of business you want to build. Because very often, if you frame it the wrong way, we just see results are not coming through at all. So yeah, definitely congrats on on the long term view. And obviously the Hack and use front page is definitely a really good achievement, and they can see how this, put some spikes into your revenue graphics. Awesome. I want to slowly wrap this up, we already consumed quite some, quite a bit of your time and appreciate it. If someone listening to this wants to grow their software as a service business, what kind of advice could you give them with your experience. Now, if they want to take SEO or content marketing seriously to grow their business?

Kevin Sahin 32:00

I would say several things. The first thing is that you have product market fit. And you you understand and you notice that there is some search volume for that, for keywords that have some business value for your business. You have to like for me, SEO is a no brainer. It's like, I like to think of SEO as gardening as opposed to let's say cold outreach, would be like fishing. And if, for me, SEO fits really well with my personality, because I really like to stack things, you know, I really like to build something for the long term and that's what SEO is in the end. So to be more actionable, I would say that you should start with the course from Ahrefs, Blogging for Businesses. In my opinion, it's one, it's one of the most, I can say the best SEO course for SAAS businesses on the internet, it's only like four hours long. It will be the, I think the, the highest ROI you will get from your time for your SAAS business. Likely, it will be the very well spent four hours. They will teach you everything from keyword research, to how to build, you know content briefs, how to write good content, like the all the technical, the 'How To' will be answered in this course. And I highly recommend it. They will teach you how to build links, they will teach you basically everything. And then, that but, when you like there are lots of people who follow this course and still failed at SEO and I think the number one reason is that, it's like people lacks consistency and they, as you mentioned earlier, they expect to rank first immediately and to get results immediately and unfortunately, it will take a lot of time. It will take a lot of time for you to write a lot of content, it will take a lot of time for you to build great backlinks. In order to build great backlinks you need to first build great relationships and it doesn't happen overnight. And so my advice is just like, first you need to find product market fit. And then when you have product market fit, and if in your industry, there is enough search volume because it's not the case in every industry, then go for it and you know, target the long term. It's a long term game, and you just have to be consistent. And, and enjoy the process.

Gert Mellak 35:11

This is amazing, definitely there's no word for enjoy the process, it's a long game, it's definitely something you cannot just press a few buttons and expect those results. I want to wrap this up a little bit, we've learned a lot and I appreciate your, your, your openly sharing your, your story and what you have learned here as well . We learned that how important it is to know really your audience, what can, what you can ask what they do appreciate, what they don't appreciate. This might as well impact how much, how much shares you get, how often you are mentioned, how often you're cited, how engaged people are with this content. And talked about the content editor role as one essential piece to make sure that someone really cares about how it is actually being read and not what information needs to be in there. But this is actually reader friendly. Is this engaging enough for people to actually like it, because this might then trigger some other signals on Google, if people really enjoy the content. You talked about a long term view, which definitely is in line with what we try to achieve here where researchers I guess, here's to something you're going to do, it's not going to have, there's not going to be an ROI calculation where you say I'm going to put X amount into SEO and I'm getting, getting X amount out. It's just not the way SEO works, because it's just every, every keyword triggers a different set of algorithm layers in Google. It's just too complex to have a clear calculation, I think, we see a lot of people coming from social media advertising and they roughly have an idea that if they spend X amount, usually they get X amount of leads at a certain price. And they kind of want to give this this mold, they want to put it on on top of SEO and ends in that kind of, to have SEO fit into my formula in my spreadsheet. It just doesn't work this way. However, we also know that consistency, which is what we're trying to support here with our ongoing consulting framework and our app as well, just to make sure that the consistent efforts are working and work in the right direction. So we don't do anything important that might not have an impact, but do the things that actually do work really consistently over time. We know that consistent implementation just works. And this is where then the clients and clients get 5000 email opt ins, not from developers, from other other people, or get those leads, get those sales in on the Ecommerce site. And it's just work so the definitely a lot goes back to the brand awareness to build to the goodwill you build with your audience over time.

Gert Mellak 37:32

Thank you so much, Kevin, for joining us here today. We're going to make

Kevin Sahin 37:37

Thanks so much for having me.

Gert Mellak 37:39

It was pleasure to talk and definitely interested in the SAAS thing all together. We're going to host this podcast episode over at [SEO leverage.com](https://www.seoleverage.com) forward slash podcast find it at episode 89 We're going to also write a put up a written summary of what we talked, about the main points, main takeaways we're going to link to the Ahrefs course, as well. Ahrefs is definitely, unfortunately when I started this to 20 years ago, Ahrefs wasn't wasn't around instructing everybody but today I agree it's definitely one of the main sources of information and when we bring on trainees in SEO leverage part of a part from my own training program, part of this is

definitely have them check out what Ahrefs put out because it's definitely high quality material and, and our team saw it, so our team there know definitely what they're doing.

Gert Mellak 37:42

Thank you so much, Kevin.

Kevin Sahin 38:24

Thank you.