

118 - Content Marketing and AI with Katrina McKinnon

Prologue 0:00

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Podcast Intro 0:49

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

Gert Mellak 1:00

Welcome back to Seo leverage.com. This is episode 118. My name is Jeff Miller. And I'm very pleased to welcome Katrina McKinnon back to the show, welcome Katrina.

Katrina McKinnon 1:12

Thank you so much good. It is delightful to see you again and just to have a fantastic conversation as we always do.

Gert Mellak 1:19

It's always a pleasure to talk to you, I always listen so much, you're definitely one of the main go-to-experts when it comes to professional content creation, especially also on the largest scale. We regularly turn to, we have been working together on several projects, as well. And I have seen your work and really impressed. You need to be impressed. And I'm also interested in knowing how your work really and your, your business life or your work on the Content Marketing World has changed lately, because everybody's still on this AI drive, I would say. It seems to be tuning down a little bit. I think the heights, it was overhyped initially, things now seem to be coming back to how can we actually use this thing? What is your take on what's going on right now?

Katrina McKinnon 2:06

I've got some really fun stories for you. So one of my first fun stories is that, we have now seen the case of the first affiliate who's been knocked back for quality, you know, for, for not adhering to quality guidelines in their AdSense program. So Google's not coming out and saying, you

know, we're going to ban your website, we're going to, you know, we're going to, you know, block ban and sandbox it, you know, whatever those words are that the SEOs we all use, but there is the first case where someone has built a website purely with AI. And Google has rejected it from the AdSense program for quality guidelines. And you can read about that on [originality.ai](#). So that's the first fun thing. We're also hearing people are coming back and asking if we could fix their AI content. So that's always a fun thing. But the thing that's sort of, you know, the thing, you know, it's like, oh, gosh, you know, but the point, the thing that I sort of want to say to people is, it's, it's a really, it's actually very clear if you think about it in common sense terms. So in 1989, when we wanted to create a logo, we had to hand draw it with paint and pencil and you know, paper, and then we had to use a \$20,000 bromide machine to take a photo of that logo. And then the negative plate that was produced had to be couriered by car off to the printers to be put onto your business card. Because the bromide machine was so expensive, the technology wasn't very advanced, there weren't very many graphic designers around. And it was very expensive to get a good quality logo made. So only a graphic designer who was willing to invest in their skills and time and equipment, was working as a graphic designer. Fast forward, and then Photoshop came along, and it was \$895. Now, I think we can all agree that you could throw a stick down the street and hit a graphic designer in the head. Not only that, but you could go throw a stick into the internet, and you could find a \$10 logo. So what's happened is that when Photoshop became very affordable, a lot of people started creating logos. Anyone who could use the tool would create a logo. Now we know for an absolute fact that a serious business doesn't necessarily want a \$10 logo for their entire business, you know, life. And it's exactly the same with these AI tools. So scaled AI and there's there's a whole bunch of them copy this, [gojasper.ai](#), you know, all of these sorts of tools. They allow anyone for very, very affordably on Chat GPT, very affordably to create an article or to create content. That doesn't mean that it's any good. But, and we can see as well, but it's, I was sort of speaking to my father about this today with my frustration for this. And I said to him, it's like eating McDonald's, you know, like McDonald's is rubbish food, it can't sustain you, you know, it feels a whole, you know, for a minute, but it can't sustain you. And I was like, why? And then I was like, 'But hang on McDonald's is one of the largest, you know, businesses on the planet'. So I am, I'm swimming against this tide of what I think is common sense. Don't eat McDonald's every single day for your meal. Don't use Chat GPT to produce very average content. But anyway, the internet's not listening. So it will take a while.

Gert Mellak 5:38

I love, I love it. I love the comparison with McDonald's because it just shows that convenience very often rules, right? So convenient. I did my own experiment, we created a local dentist website completely with AI, it started ranking. It's really like frustrating this, this thing just works, but you see, after after a few weeks, the results and that the rankings drop. It's just not the same thing, right? I mean, there's a reason why we didn't fire anybody of our five, right of team, right of the team here because it's just it, we definitely use those tools on in our end, but we use them really as like a first draft part of analysis, which kind of gets you going. We have refined very, very much the process, how we use it, which fact we feed in, what the preparation is, what the brand voice training needs to be doing, etc. And I'm looking forward to seeing what tools can, can do that. And especially the fact checking is going to be an interesting one. But it's it's really

funny, we have people reach out to me directly after Chat GPT hit the news and say, 'Hey, we're canceling everything'. Because everybody's going to use chat GPT to search, nobody's going to use Google anymore. So what's the point of SEO? We had, we had interesting conversations, they assigned back up, paintrees, even the program with us because once they understand how these all works, and how, where this information comes from, and how those, those, those tools actually don't produce an answer, but to something that sounds like an answer, then the entire game change, right?

Katrina McKinnon 7:12

Yeah and it's right, like, I think we sort of felt that as well, is people were sort of going oh, well, we're not going to get any content written because, you know, we can just use chat GPT now. And, you know, I understand your point to the convenience, is very valid. People, business owners are so busy, they're doing a million things, and they don't have time necessarily to really make sure that that quality is coming through. But you know, it's a fun thing because, you know, I sort of think, you know, sort of talk to people about Google and the AI tools, Chat GPT. They, they scrape the internet for information. Now, unfortunately, they don't actually want to eat their own dog food, you know, that's not something they're interested in. So, I sort of say to people, you know, like, a query, like, what is a fountain pen? You simply don't have to write that anymore, because Google already knows. And it'll provide the answer and the snippet, and the AIs will also answer that. But if I was to produce a brand new product that no one has ever seen, and let's say it was a fountain pen that had a torch on the end of it and had sparkles coming out of it, and maybe it vibrated to massage your hand, the LLM, the large language models and Google, they don't know what that thing is. They've never heard of it, they've never read about it, they've never scraped that content. So people are still going to need content to sort of tell the world about their brand new sparkle unicorn pen and Google and the LLM, the AIs is going to come around and they still want to read that content. They still want to create, scrape all that content. So you know, it will it will like. Gert, it will come full circle. It's just that, you know, this new technology, it's very interesting. And it sort of caught everyone by surprise, so fast. Everyone will settle down, you know, it'll all come full circle.

Gert Mellak 9:01

It's such a good point. It's like, it's like if they don't know something, they just make it up. It's very, very much like politicians, very, very often have their speeches where you feel like they just, just kind of kind of composing their speech based on 25 components they learn sometimes and it all sounds the same and it's obviously dull. And it also happens with brands, right? So, so a lot of brands, probably including definitely including my own, as well, we're not as we're not Microsoft, we're not Google Amazon, we're not well known enough so that the people on a wide range of people would know us. But then again, when you, when you people still use those tools now to ask about those brands, they say, 'Is this and this person legit. Can this and this company help me?' Does this and this company has a good product and the answers are shocking. I had like an experiment were I asked, I think it was Bard, Google's Chat GPT variant, so to speak. And I asked, what is, what are the top 10 running shoe brands? And it was funny because Nike didn't come back. And I'm like, I asked a follow up question, 'So why isn't Nike in this top 10 list? It seems weird'. And they said, yeah they have many manufacturing issues. And

I was like, what? And I like, I'm really interested. Absolutely, yeah. I even documented this then on LinkedIn, because I found it really, really interesting. And I started to dig deeper. And it goes back to one review that was left on one website, where one person talked about one model, and some issues that probably go back to manufacturing. So this is how then the AI models use this, this text to get trained on it. And this is where now brand awareness is on a completely different level. We have been doing ORM, online reputation management for 10 years minimum, I think, even 15 years probably, where we essentially help brands polish their image, when somebody searches for them, or searches for their reviews, etc. But this is now a completely different thing and this is skyrocketing. Because if every single reviewer out there that's not contracted on the same page, can train an algorithm to tell you that Nike is not a top shoe brand, this is a completely different situation now. Yeah,

Katrina McKinnon 11:19

Yeah, it's fascinating, isn't it. And I think that that brand management is going to come through far more to the fore because the LLM 's, the AIs and Google are now trying to work out who to trust for work because SEO is, as we know, are always, we're always trying to fudge the, fudge of the little edges as much as we can. And, you know, we're seeing now that people are creating fake author profiles, they're trying to trick the AI to think that you know, this is a legitimate website, you know, this is a legitimate author. I mean, these tricks have been around for absolutely ages. But I'm seeing, I sort of think all the updates that Google has been creating over the last sort of eight years, 10 years, they are all leaning towards this kind of engagement metrics. And an even engagement metrics can be faked by bot traffic. But it's really who are these people and whose real, so for example, you and I are having this conversation, there is a particular cadence to the way we speak. There is a particular pattern in the word usage. And you know, if I've made another couple of videos that are, you know, available online, that pattern of the way I speak in my Word patterns, are able to be compared with this one. So Google and the AIs can come along and say, 'Well, that's unique content, it's got Katrina's pattern, that's probably legitimate, she's probably a brand authority or a brand leader for that particular organization.' So the the tool, the scrapers are now scraping audio, and they're scraping video very, very easily. You know, we can now get transcripts straight out of YouTube. So we've got a tool that we use, I forget what the name of it is, Harper, Harper AI. And it can just scrape an entire YouTube video and give you the key talking points and then you can say to it, or what, what, what questions should I ask on LinkedIn of this person and that video that they've just released. And so there's this lack of authenticity that's coming through. And I think that I think that's where the next pursuit is going to be for SEOs is, how to really work with clients to create an authentic online reputation that's actually tangible and real and solid.

Gert Mellak 13:32

It's definitely gaining more holistic and it's funny because we have been, I have been running and like a full service agency for probably 10, 15 years, until we decided to completely focus on, on SEO. And it's interesting now how how some of those capabilities or those those trainings and appearance points, we were able to get back then, now actually get relevant again, right? So where it's okay, it's obviously we want to get those rankings, but we don't want them if they don't convert. So conversion has always been a big, a big part of SEO here. But now it's really just

brand awareness thing is, well. How can I get people or how can I run, raise brand awareness because more people searching for a brand could actually indicate to Google that this brand is more legit. How can I, how do I need to create content and where do I need to distribute it in order to for more language models to pick it up? So, some old stuff like press releases even come out again, right? It's, it's crazy. It's crazy press releases were dead. It has been floating, floating around. It's so crazy. It's so crazy. Now press releases for brands is one of the one of the main things you probably want to do moving forward, just to make sure that, that there's a higher chance for, for language models to pick up part of this, this consistent content.

Katrina McKinnon 14:56

Yeah, because they need that consistent story. So that's the other thing we've spoken to Jason Barnard about is creating that very consistent brand story that is interwoven in every single micro content, every single content pays you. And it's more than just a tagline. It's the narrative. It's the words that you use. And that consistency tells Google that that's really, you know, all those connection points, which says, 'Well, this is a real thing, you know. A real human's made up of lots of different cells, lots of arms and legs, and hairs, and, you know, eyebrows and all the bits and pieces. And so Google's just looking for all those little telltale signs, that means that it's a real person, that it's a real thing. And so if you're missing a nose, well, apart from you know, obviously accidents, but if you're missing a nose, you're not really a human, you may be an Android. And so Google's really looking for those tells that show that maybe this isn't a real company, that they're not really invested in their customers or their brand. But, you know, and I also think, Gert, that these businesses are here, again, a lot of E commerce stores, we primarily work with Ecommerce stores, but clients are sort of saying, you know, 'Oh, my goodness, you know, how do I, how do I make sure that I can be found?' And it's, I was gonna say, it's, I've lost my train of thought just then, but gosh, I've lost my train of thought. But yeah, it's, it's this interesting thing where this brand awareness is coming back to the fore.

Gert Mellak 16:21

Absolutely. And I also wonder, wonder how many, how many platforms people really need to cover, right? So if your brand brand awareness, obviously, a lot of, a lot of brand awareness is being raised on surfers, very often, I find it really hard as an agency to help people social media, because in order to drive this authenticity, you need a lot of video content, you need a lot of experience reports, you need a lot of stories, etc. And their agencies obviously is focusing on this. What do you think it takes for a company. for like an Ecommerce site right now to really drive the brand awareness?

Katrina McKinnon 16:55

I think it takes, it's now better quality content, you don't have to create so much content at scale. So for a little while everyone was talking about velocity and how velocity of content and producing a lot of content would attract Google. And Google would come and crawl. Google, it's well known, have it, I think my believe that group, Google's crawl budget has been decreased and the language models as well, it's very expensive to crawl all over the internet. So they're really only looking for the best quality content. And I think information gain is going to become extremely important. I think that if Google comes around to your website, and it sees what is a

fountain pen, or it sees, you know, five best fountain pens for Father's Day, and it thinks, you know, I already know all that information. If it doesn't trigger something in the algorithm about, well, this site is a good source for information gain, then I think it won't come back and crawl as often. So I would say to people that, you need to still be producing content, particularly about the products that you sell, you need to produce content that's more interesting, or educational for your clients, or for your customers to use. And I think that visuals matter a whole lot more. So the language models and the and Google, you know, they've come around, and they've all been text-based. But I think they can now interpret images, they can now interpret video, or podcast, audio and they're interested in, you know, access to more areas. So I would say, as well, just make sure that the content that you do produce is very rich, a lot of rich media and a lot of visuals in it.

Gert Mellak 18:30

That's really interesting, yeah. That's, I love that. I love that it's definitely matches our experience, as well. information gain, just in case somebody hasn't heard it, we always explained is like a plus one or something like this, what do I have that nobody else has on this on this particular page? Where Google would say, 'Hey, this is something something new, there's definitely more valuable.' It does become interesting, obviously, when, when AI needs or tools need to make sure they don't use AI content for the next answer, and consistently dumped down their answers a little bit this way, which already is happening sometimes We have seen some examples where, when AI might actually use AI content to give an answer and that's a difficult one. But the cost that you mentioned, we have been talking about it for a long time. It's just Google, Google does need to spend money in order to crawl a website. And they said what many people don't don't realize it, all the things, this is this endless amount of money with this huge corporation, etc. They spent extra money to crawl every single page. And, I mean, we can we can, we could see here and as SEOs a lot of more potential to save money actually, because they still crawl a lot of stupid stuff on the website, they actually could know that, it's not available. But we also see more and more sites struggle to get articles indexed, that are actually legit and elaborated articles, just because a big part of the rest of their articles are low quality. So where the engine just says, 'Hey, I know that this particular website always gives me quality content, I'm more inclined to crawl their new content', whereas these other sites that is 80% of this stuff is AI written or just some, some spin, spun up content from from other sources, is less valuable. So for a site, in order to make sure that you consistently get your content out there, especially if you produce content on a regular basis, like an E-commerce site, or a publishing site, they just rely on those new content pieces for new sections, etc. It's really important to look at the entire website and say, 'Hey, this is all quality, I don't have anything that's not quality for Google to be accessed and to be indexed.' And this is where we also see a lot of, a lot of gain very often, where we initially audit a website and say, 'Hey, let's take all these off the page, all these pieces of content, so Google can actually focus on what you really want to communicate.

Katrina McKinnon 20:51

Yeah, we're saying that, as well Gert, that when we can produce content, we don't need as much of it anymore. As long as it points into the collection pages, the collection pages will often rank very well. A healthy ecommerce site, the collection page will most often rank. An

unhealthier website and even though people think, you know, maybe it's better, but we've seen, we see less websites, ranking their product pages. And then I actually think you've got problems if only your blog content create rank. So we've got a couple of clients that we've sort of, that have sort of broken their websites, because their stores, because we can get all their blog content ranks brilliantly, we get a huge amount of traffic, but it doesn't, you've got to be careful that it's always on intent, and that you've got a mechanism, you've got conversion mechanisms really well bedded in. I mean, this is something that people say to us is, you know, why isn't my content converting? It's kind of like, because you haven't put any conversion mechanisms in it, you need to do that, as well. But I think that, you know, the Chat GPT tools are, I think they have got a place there. We'll give you one example, when, when someone's got very complex products, you know, with lots of specifications, lots of features, we use Chat GPT to do a comparison. So the writer will use it to say, "Well give me the comparison, what are the differences in these two products?" And what are the features that might stand out for this particular demographic? So it's an excellent copilot. It's an excellent partner for surfacing ideas and content and information that you give it. So it's excellent at analyzing text or you know, entities and surfacing it, so your poor little tired brain doesn't need to read, you know, 15 different product specifications, and then map it, you know, which ones

Gert Mellak 22:43

Easy does that? Definitely, it definitely gets, it gets interesting, right? We use it, for example, now more and more, because it's just in the content writing division here. We obviously work with a lot of extra content as well, you know, have more experience here where than, then we do. But what we found interesting was that we can now finally use like a podcast transcription, and turn it very efficiently into a piece of content, just extracting, like you say, those main points, what are the main points that were talked about? What are the topics, what are the different angles, what kinds of examples were given, etc. And you create a central brief to then hand over to an expert writer, and say, 'Look, this is the information I want you to write about. You don't have to do any additional research, it's all in there, because we were talking about this topic for 45 minutes, it's all linear'. Just put this into a shape that's easy to read, that's helpful for a reader, that's user friendly, that has the visuals, has the summaries, it has the lists and tables, and all else those kinds of things. And then produce a valuable piece of content. I think where people, people need to compare AI or Chat GPT, or other tools like this more to, to an intern, they have in the team and say, 'Hey, this is an intern and the intern would get all those specifications and would say, make those comparisons, elaborate this for me and then I'm going to write this content'. Rather than thinking this is like a one-stop-shop, where I just put something in and they get my quality article already published on my site. There are tools that pretend to do this. But we have found there is a lot of work necessary afterwards. And a lot of fact checking before you actually can do this. You wouldn't publish in an article that comes from an intern, even if it looks legit, you wouldn't publish it, you would go through it, you would edit it and then you would publish it. But people just think now this is also and you really need to break it down to an individual use case and say, 'Okay, for the blog content process, this is how we use it. This is how we don't use it. And this is how we then manually refine.'

Katrina McKinnon 24:44

Yeah, but it's so tempting, isn't it? It's like, you know, you and I are convinced and you know, we understand what this, you know, narrative that is that we're trying to sort of convince others of then dump. But, you know, it's one of these things where you and I sort of say to my clients, I sort of say you know, our clients are mostly in the end. You spoke much in the multimillion dollar mark and I sort of say to them, you know, 'You've got a multi million dollar business, do you really want to risk it?' Like it's a very risky thing to do when it's so brand new? Why don't you wait until everyone else's jumped off the cliff first, and then just have peer over the cliff and see whether they're intact. And so this is the thing is, I sort of think there's no hurry like people are often in such a hurry to embrace a new technology. But there's a sweet spot. There's a sweet spot to embracing new technologies and working out how to use it. But it's not sort of saying, you know, this is God's gift to SEOs and content writers. Let's see, you know, all hail, thank you very much, let's bring it down and let's use it to write everything. So I agree with you, but interns, you know, interns burnout, this this thing won't ever burn out and just get better. That's the temptation.

Gert Mellak 25:51

Absolutely. But it is funny for me, because people, if I have two quotes from two writers and one charges \$5, and one charges \$50, I do automatically expect a better result from the \$50 writer, right? However, now I have a tool that's free, and expected to be at the level of the \$50 writer and just trust that this is going to be the case and then publish it, and off it goes. So it's really funny to see how people how people just forget about 90% of what they believe in, just because something is convenient. I think there's a big lesson here. And I think a big psychological experiment, as well, for the universities to study how this option works and you'll see people that are like 60 years old, suddenly installed apps and searching in those apps. They have no idea where the content comes from, they have no idea whether the information comes from just trusted, because it's just so convenient.

Katrina McKinnon 26:43

One of the things I love is that the universities are very worried about the students using chat GPT to write essays, and then the universities are now implementing Chat GPT to help them mark essays. And then they're using Chat GPT to write the courses to teach the students that the students then write the essays on. Snake eating its tail, and I sort of, you know, what is wrong with you all, you know, you know, you're, you know, it's okay for you to use Chat GPT to, you know, create efficiencies, but it's not okay, for those people, you know, I think, oh, gosh, it'll all settle down. You know, it'll all settle down. But I think you know, you made that point, Gert, that we can sort of seeing this as well that, you know, all the content mills, you know, I think a lot of them are really struggling with a lot of job losses through there. I know that Scale AI and Jasper have laid off loads, people in their workforce, as well. So these sort of these lower quality tier content producers, they, they sort of think, 'Well, we've got chat GPT now, so our qualities moved up, but they don't realize that we were already at that level, and we've moved up. So we've moved beyond them, because we use the tool in a different way. But you know, it is it is, it is fascinating to see what's happening in our industry, because I'm sure like, you know, people in the SEO world think you know, well, what's happening with Google? Is all of Google going to

disappear? Well is the, is my position in Google going to disappear. And I sort of say to people, Google literally relies on ecommerce stores to fund them, you know that, that trillion dollars didn't fall out of the sky, it came from E commerce stores. So why on earth would Google no longer allow you to promote your products in its search, in the results pages, it's just going to change slightly. And just like Google build AdWords to help extract money from all of us, it's going to keep developing those tools to keep extracting money from business owners. So you know, I don't think it's all going to change that dramatically.

Gert Mellak 28:44

Absolutely. I definitely, definitely agree with this, we're going to see where this, where this really goes. To wrap this up a little, well, if you had an e commerce store right now and you were like looking at all this situation, what kind of like three decisions you would make or what kind of three guidelines would you pursue in the next month, in what to, maybe to not overreact, but also not to lose potential advantages that this current technology could kill you?

Katrina McKinnon 29:13

I think that you've got to be very careful with your writing team. Writing is a creative process and people burn out. So I see that time and time again, that people think oh, well, now I've got a writer. I'll just burn them, burn through them and the writer they get tired and they will try to turn to chat GPT. So be careful with people, be very human. The other thing I would say is pictures, visuals, images, that is still, there's still an opportunity in the search. The search engine results pages to, there's a gap. Not many people produce very high quality images and digital assets. So things like PDFs, Photoshop files, AI files, unique images, unique hoto images, unique videos, podcasts, it's still very hard to produce all of that manually. And AI can't do that yet, so again, that's still a gap for people. And then the last thing I would say is just go steady, I would say that you've got to remember that content and SEO is like a snowball. You give the snowball a little push, and it rolls down the hill, but you got to keep pushing the snowball. You can't pick up the snowball and look at it and say, is the snowball working? Is it getting bigger? Because one day you'll think to yourself, gosh, that snowball is huge and it's going down the mountain by itself. It's got its own momentum. SEO content, all the type of work that we do takes a great deal of patience and you can't see the snowball getting bigger as it goes along. It's a bit like paid search, you know, paid advertising and AdWords, it's like a rocket ship, you shove a bit of fuel into it and it goes up and it makes a big bang and it's very, you know, interesting. And you know, it has a big impact on everyone. As soon as you stop paying for the fuel, it crashes to the ground, and it's got nothing but a snowball. He's just patience, and you have to be kind to the snowball, and you have to trust that the snowball, if you keep giving it a push, it will eventually roll down the hill by itself one day and it'll be enormous.

Gert Mellak 31:15

And delivered with this image of beautiful. Thank you so much Katrina Keenan, if anybody wants to get in touch with you talk about content strategy, content marketing, what's the best place to find you?

Katrina McKinnon 31:26

Just on LinkedIn, Gert. Everyone can just find me on LinkedIn. That's where I, that's where all the cool kids hang out, on LinkedIn.

Gert Mellak 31:32

Absolutely. I agree. Definitely going to link to your LinkedIn profile. By the way, this is episode 118. We have a written summary, fact-checked and written, edited by one of our writers here over at [SEO leverage.com](https://www.seoleverage.com) forward slash podcast episode 118. Katrina McKinnon, thank you so much for taking the time again to talk to us. And I hope we can welcome you back in the show sometime in the future. Thank you so much.

Katrina McKinnon 31:58

Thank you, Gert.