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## Lindsay Halsey - SEO Strategy for Web Designers

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Hi, I'm Lindsey Halsey with Pathfinder SEO and I'm so excited to be here with you today at the Page Builder Summit to talk about SEO strategy for web designers, page builders and digital agents. And when I think about SEO and strategy, I think that most web designers and really business owners and marketers in general, they tend to focus on SEO tactics. And when I talk about tactics, I talk about things like they focus on site Speed, Site Security 301 redirects under the umbrella of Technical SEO.

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They focus on things like publishing a blog post once a week or using keywords throughout my copy. They focus on page titles, meta descriptions, headers, alternative text, and in the off site world, something like creating a Google Maps listing and link building. And these are definitely things that are going to benefit a website and a business's SEO and traffic from Google, but they're not always the most impactful and it's hard to know which of these to prioritise. And so some of the challenges that I see with this kind of tactical approach to SEO, the first one is that you're just not investing your time for impact. There's all these things that we could be doing, but that ultimately we're not really sure which one would be most beneficial for our client's business.

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The next is that this concept of ranking factors is a little bit of an outdated mindset in the way that we think about how Google search

engines work. So in sort of years past we've thought about ranking factors, meaning that Google's algorithm is comprised of a lot of different elements that rewards different things. Like it rewards, oh, this page has a page title, it rewards, this image has alt text. And that is a mindset that sort of shifted as Google has moved more into a modern framework where they really look at how helpful a website is, how user friendly it is. They look at like real world marketing to judge what the best user experience is for any given search query.

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So this kind of tactical mindset is kind of becoming outdated in some ways because ranking factors are sort of an outdated way to think about SEO as well. The other thing I think about tactics is that they're sort of being replaced by AI. Not entirely, but in part. And so yes, I can use AI to generate a blog post for me to meet that mark of a weekly blog post, or I can use AI to generate my page titles or to even add alt text to images. And so as web designers and agencies who are making our living essentially by adding value for our clients, it can be a little scary when we see some of our skills getting replaced by something around the world of AI.

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But the end of the, the good news to this is that AI isn't replacing the strategy side of things, and that when we get this strategic mindset, we can really add value for our clients, whether we're just weaving in sort of this SEO mindset into our new web designs and our new projects, or you're actually offering SEO services and increasing your recurring revenue by having a paid service there. Either way, my hope here is that my talk will help you move forward with more of a strategic plan. And that is to say that SEO really isn't all about tactics and tools. It's really about strategy and that we can apply frameworks to create impactful future proof SEO strategies for our clients. And it's those frameworks that I'm going to teach you today to help you kind of put that strategic hat on when it comes to the world of SEO.

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And the first framework I want to share with you is what I'll call the customer acquisition funnel. And it is basically to say, okay, let's apply

this marketing framework of how we get new customers, how we acquire customers and retain them in businesses, and apply it to our mindset around our keyword strategy and keyword research. And so where we begin here is to always focus in on our target audience. Because Google wants to showcase the right website for the right intent. Audience really matters here, the intent behind the who of the person who's searching.

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And so when we work with clients in the world of SEO or web design, whatever it might be, we often start here trying to understand who is the business trying to reach, where are those customers located, what challenges do they face, and what are their goals. And so anchoring yourself in the beginning, at the beginning by understanding target audience is the key to this framework. And then we can start to think about the customer acquisition funnel that we apply to all things marketing. And that is that when we acquire a new customer that we've usually engaged with them in multiple touch points that move somebody from awareness to consideration to conversion. So when I think about this in terms of SEO, I'm going to start at the bottom of the funnel or conversion.

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And at the bottom of the funnel we typically have people on Google, Yahoo or Bing and they're searching for the business by brand name, right? So they know exactly who they want and they're ready to convert. And so they're searching by business brand and business name. For many businesses this is sort of gimme traffic. You don't necessarily have to work to fill the bottom of the funnel in terms of your keyword visibility on Google, because the website already ranks well for the brand.

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But if you're working with a brand new business or a business changing names, then you actually might be investing strategically at the bottom of the funnel. Because the worst case scenario would be that people know they want to do business with you and they can't find you on Google. Right. So filling the bottom of the funnel would, from a strategic standpoint, be your most important next step with SEO. As we move up

the funnel, we move into the consideration space and this is sort of the middle of the funnel and this is where people are searching for what the business does, what their service or their product is, but they don't actually know it by brand name.

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So they're searching for, if it was an E commerce business, they could be searching for backpacks for kids, you know, school backpacks for kids or something like that. They're looking for the actual product. If it was a service based business, interior designer in Chicago, for example, these would be the kind of keywords that fit into the middle part of the funnel. And from a strategic standpoint, this is often helpful for businesses to have good visibility on Google because when you're in the middle of the funnel, you are usually one step away from a transaction. So I'm pretty close to being ready to take action.

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I might be still doing consideration, I'm still thinking about it, but I'm kind of an active shopper, so to speak. So it's not necessarily going to be a long time before I hit the buy now button. And typically in the world of SEO, you get your visibility for the consideration phase of the funnel. You get it with your pages, so your services page, your product page, your product collection pages. It's generally speaking page based content that will play well in consideration.

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And as we move to the top of the funnel, we get into the awareness space. And in the awareness space we really think about things like, hey, I'm just doing informational queries, I'm not looking for the product or the service, but I'm in your audience and I'm searching for things that are in your space. So if you were working with a hotel, then awareness might be things to do in Baltimore in the summer. Right. And that would get an awareness level visitor who's thinking about planning a trip to Baltimore and gets in front of them before they start actually looking for their lodging.

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And so it fills the top of the funnel. So from a strategic standpoint as business owners, and you can think about this, like for your own agency, you kind of want to be everywhere, right? Like in a perfect world, I would have organic search placement in awareness keywords, consideration keywords, and conversion keywords. But we have to operate and develop our strategies for our clients within the constraints of where they are today, how competitive their industry is, and how much they have to invest. And so sometimes I think about a local small business may not be in a position to invest in the awareness space and filling the funnel with blogging because they can't afford to hire you to build the blog.

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They can't afford to keep the blog content up to date. So they're going to play aggressively in the consideration and conversions space while they build their business. And then maybe down the road strategically, they can move into a blog. On the other hand, we have clients that are in like the E commerce space and their consideration space, that transactional space, it's so competitive that they really can't engage there with SEO. So yes, they have product pages and product collection pages, and yes, they have content there, but they're not really getting any traction or visibility because of the level of competition.

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So they have to go in and fill the top of their funnel and say, okay, we're going to meet in the awareness space from a strategic standpoint with the blog where it's less competitive because it's informational. And then we'll be in front of them and maybe we can collect an email and engage with them when they hit conversion and consideration via other marketing channels. So this mindset can really help you quickly go from essentially thinking about target audience to kind of strategically thinking about how different pages might play in the search engine results and thinking downstream a few steps. I want to give you two examples of a keyword funnel strategy just to make sure that this all makes good sense. And the first one is for a local business.

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And this local business provides like private transportation services in a tourism market. And so the conversion phrases are actually the name of

the business, Aspen private transportation. And then also sometimes people put in the phrase like reviews around it. So sometimes in the conversion space people are like, they're almost about to do business, but they want to read reviews about the business or they want to compare and contrast with another brand. So that's their conversion side.

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Consideration is going to be everything in the middle of the funnel. And that's when I'm looking for this service in the service area. But I don't know the name of the brand. So I search Aspen limo service, Aspen car service, car service and Aspen, et cetera. And then if this business had the budget to fill the awareness side, they might create blog post content to get in front of people before they need the car service.

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So examples would be somebody searching on Google, do I need a car in Aspen? I'm deciding, will I hire a car service, Will I get a rental or can I take public transportation? I might research something like is there Uber in Aspen? Because I think, hey, maybe that's an alternative choice and going to be my transportation. Only to find out we don't really have Uber in the town of Aspen.

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And so they need to kind of come over and hire a car service. I might be looking for specific types of transportation like ski transportation or airport transportation. So this brand could fill their funnel by having content on their website that maps to all of these different areas. Another example of a keyword funnel strategy would be for like an e commerce brand or something with a national to international audience. In this case, I took a random brand, mountain hardware, which makes like outdoor gear.

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And in this space you can think about the conversion space of being they look for mountain hardware and they might add review keywords like sale reviews, or a specific product line like mountain hardware tents, or a little bit of a comparison mountain hardware versus another

outdoor brand like Patagonia. So they would want to have content that is going to basically align with those spaces. In the consideration space, we're going to have those transactional keywords. I'm shopping for a lightweight tent or a 30 degree sleeping bag or a climbing backpack. These are going to generally map to their product collection or category pages, right?

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Like their page all around women's hiking pants. And then in the awareness space, we can fill the funnel and get in front of outdoor enthusiasts. So if somebody searches for something like Kilimanjaro packing list, they're probably just starting to think about a trip. They're going to climb Kilimanjaro. We could have the best Kilimanjaro packing list online and get traction there.

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And I bet we'd be able to move people from finding us for the packing list and then actually needing to shop for something Like a pair of hiking pants. The other thing that you can sometimes see in this space is that to get a little complexity, sometimes our awareness and consideration space kind of overlap a little and somebody might search for something like best tents for camping, like camping with dogs. That's a very specific query, right? It's kind of like our tents keyword space that matches to the consideration phase. But we've layered in this idea of like who the audience is.

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In this case it's a dog owner. And so we can create sometimes blog post content that hit these like niche spaces and can really power up our overall SEO strategy. So the big takeaway here is that whether you're offering SEO services where you're just trying to kind of infuse a little bit of keyword awareness, understanding your client's dynamic in this customer acquisition funnel is going to help you downstream when you're designing websites, when you're implementing new content, except, et cetera, and can be kind of a framework behind the scenes that is really powerful. So some examples of when I like to apply the framework, the first is if I'm creating a site map. So if I'm doing initial planning for a new website, I want to think about this in terms of, hey,

what kind of pages am I going to need to be able to align with these different, with these different spaces?

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For example, if you are an agency and you offer web design, email marketing and SEO, and you know that you want to meet people in the middle funnel when they search for web designer in your city or web designer for whatever industry space you offer, and then you also want to reach SEO agency in your city and SEO agency for, etc. And you want to do the same with email marketing. Then when you're developing your sitemap, you're going to want to probably have one page for each service so that you have sort of a place or a home where you can hone in and say, this is my page all about web design and this is my page all about my SEO services. So it's helpful when creating a sitemap, because down the road if you're like, wait, why am I not ranking for something? If you don't have a page that really best represents or best fits that keyword space, you're unlikely to rank for that keyword set.

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So when creating the sitemap, it can be really helpful when creating marketing strategy. So for instance, do I need to blog? This is going to help to answer that. That website, that E commerce site that is in such a competitive space, they can't fill their mid funnel. Their answer to do I need to blog?

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Is probably, yes, they probably do need to blog. Whereas that local business example, I bet we can go and get really good traffic in the consideration space because the competition is pretty low and we can phase in a blog downstream if the business is still trying to grow. But that right out of the gate, we have a tonne of initial opportunity just in consideration, no blog required. So strategic marketing planning, it can be helpful. This framework can be helpful during the sales process.

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So I sometimes come back to it to help align expectations. You know, a client comes to you or a prospect and says, I want to build a website or I want to redo my website and I want to rank number one for this

keyword, and you're like, ooh, there's a big disconnect between where they are today and where they're trying to go. This framework can help give them a sense of where you think you're going to have success sooner or later. So you can go back to the framework and say, okay, I think we should really focus on the conversion space, because right now you don't even rank for your brand. So we got to start there.

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And then we can start moving up the funnel and getting more competitive and you can start to align expectations on timing using this kind of funnel strategy as early as the sales process. And then the other big part of when we apply this framework is actually when we're implementing SEO for impact, when we're saying, okay, we have five hours to do SEO for this client's website each month, or whatever it might be, whatever our time budget is, and I want to use that time for impact. I can say, hey, should I be focusing on the upper funnel and creating blog content? Should I be investing in creating more content, for instance, for a product collection page, etc. Or should I be fixing page not found errors with 301 redirects?

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When I have lots of things I could do to try to move the needle for SEO. This framework is going to help you better decide which thing is more likely to have more immediate impact, which will increase return and increase the likelihood of your client staying on a sizable SEO retainer for the months to come. So that's kind of my first framework that I wanted to share with you. And the second framework I want to share with you in some ways is a step backwards. The step backwards is that we start to think about SEO a little bit more in ranking factor department by thinking about SEO in its component parts.

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But I'm going to show you how having multiple frameworks and different mindsets in the end can help you have a broader strategy. And we use them in different places. Right. So we kind of looked at the ways that we're going to use that first framework in these really core, important marketing processes. And in the second framework, we think about SEO and websites that rank well as having good scores, so to

speak, in four areas of SEO, Technical SEO, content on site optimisation and off site SEO.

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And when we look at each of these four pillars, I'm going to just walk you through them and then I'll bring it all together for you. Technical SEO is all about how the search engines crawl and index a website. And it's sort of SEO 101. Because if Google can't crawl and index your website, then they certainly can't display it in the search results. And so elements that fall into technical SEO are things like having a good robots.txt file that tells the search engines where not to go, Having a good XML sitemap that's like your site's resume, it tells them where to go, having good security, so serving up a website over with SSL and having an HTTPs protocol in place, having good site speed so that when Google sends traffic to the website, the page loads reasonably fast.

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Similarly, making sure it works well on mobile devices is going to be really important. And then kind of SEO102 would be structured data or schema, adding the markup to a page to help Google be able to extract information from it. Fortunately, with most modern Page Builders and WordPress, your technical SEO scores, if we had to look at it in that way, would be pretty high. And good is good enough in this department. So yes, you might be able to eke out a little more speed, et cetera.

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But for the most part, modern page builders take care of a lot of things for us, especially if you layer in a plugin like Yoast SEO or Rank Math, et cetera, to help tune up a few of these files. The next element on a website that matters for SEO is the content. And that is because content is essentially how we share expertise online. And so with content, we look at things like we want quality content, we want to make sure we use our keywords, there's some recency scoring, so it's helpful to have kind of more up to date content or be kind of continually adding content to a website. And underlying all of this is that we want to make sure our content showcases our genuine expertise and experience.

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So as a side note, last year our Pathfinder website lost a lot of traffic on its blog. And we were like, hey, this doesn't make sense. We share a lot of expertise and experience on our blog. It was all human rented before really the age of AI doing a lot of content generation. Why isn't it resonating with Google as much as it used to?

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And so we looked more critically at our content and realised that it was clearly written by an SEO me. So it's not written by like a great copywriter per se, so it was probably a little over optimised, et cetera. But a lot of our genuine experience and expertise wasn't shining through in the content. So there wasn't a lot of storytelling, there wasn't anything in the first person, there wasn't anything about the who behind the content. It was just very formulaic, like, want to learn about how to configure an XML sitemap?

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Let me show you how. And so we went back into some of our posts and we revised it to kind of showcase the who and tell a little story or have a more engaging intro. And we rebounded and regained a lot of that lost traffic. So having your content showcase the who is kind of a new component to be really thinking about when you think about SEO in 2025. The third pillar is on site optimisation.

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And this is how we add context to our content. So we think about things like page titles and meta descriptions, header tags, alternative text and internal links. And these are all elements on a webpage that help the search engines get more context out of it. But if you think about it, they also help the user experience along. So the header tags, for instance, add visual structure to a page.

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They make it easier for me to scan through it. Same with things like internal links. They help me navigate to other pieces of content on a website. So on page optimisation is a really important area to be using our keywords, but it actually also has an impact on the end user's

experience on the site. And these first three pillars, they make up about 60% of SEO.

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And so the website you can kind of think of like 60% of the puzzle. And that's the part that really falls into your purview as a page builder and a web designer, right? That's the area that you probably feel the most control over. And then we move to offsite SEO. And this is where a lot of business owners, agencies, etc.

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Are like, oh, I don't know where to go with off site SEO and I don't know if I like this part. And the reason is because Google is trying to essentially say, okay, great, you've got this great website and it meets the mark in all of these areas. But is it on a trusted domain? And does that domain and business come with genuine experience, authority and trust and things that are a little harder to measure? Right.

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And so we think about how Google measures it, and the easiest way Google can measure this, and this has been part of Google's algorithm forever, is the concept of backlinks. So when somebody else links into my website, I pick up a backlink. And that backlink is a small vote of endorsement that builds up my brand and my domains authority and trust. And so when a business is just getting started and launching their first website, they have like no backlinks generally, or maybe they have one or two. And so Google is going to take a while before they trust and want to show that website for even something as simple as a brand search.

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And so the number of backlinks that a business needs to be competitive, it really depends on the business space that they're in and how competitive their industry is. So that example of the private transportation space, there are only a few competitors. It's a small geographic area. They don't need that many backlinks to be competitive. On the other hand, if you were a big e commerce website, you're playing

in a big space with a lot of sites that have been around for a long time that have a lot of backlinks.

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You'll probably need to invest in like a pretty sizable PR campaign to be able to play there. So I mentioned backlinks with a little added component because a lot of times when clients are like, I can't find my website online and we're doing all of the things with the website that we know Google loves, it usually comes back and falls on like, yep, but there is no trust here. Local search is another way to build your off site SEO for a client. And this really relates to Google Maps. Having a listing in Google Maps is going to give extra trust around a business because Google really will know their physical place of business.

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And then finally we have social media. And with social media, there's not as strong of a connexion in terms of SEO in terms of the value, but there is a little bit of value that gets pushed from a social media website over to the website in terms of off site SEO. So as we think about this framework, we can really look at this with a mindset of when we understand how a client's website stacks up in terms of technical SEO content on site and off site, we can understand their strengths and weaknesses. And the way that this can help inform our strategy is we can double down in some of the areas of weakness. And what I mean by that is if you're working with a website that has a great build, so their technical SEO is strong, they've invested in content, so they have strong content marketing.

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And you've dialled in some of their on site SEO and they're still not getting traction on Google. It might come down to the offside piece. So they may be a new business that doesn't, that doesn't already have a lot of backlinks or Google Maps reviews. And so we know that our strategy can focus on trying to turn a weakness into a strength and putting more emphasis in that category. On the other hand, sometimes we work with businesses that have a strong off site presence.

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Maybe they've invested in PR for many years, but they haven't really invested in content marketing. And so that can be one of those areas where you say, okay, what I think we should really do here to get more traction on Google is double down in content investment. So sometimes you might apply this framework. The four pillars of SEO. One is in the sales process, including creating a project scope.

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It can be helpful scaffolding, essentially to help clients understand how SEO works in simplistic terms and why you're helping them in a certain area. Another time can be when you're completing an SEO assessment. This is our onboarding project. It's like a paid discovery project where we put together the SEO strategy. And so this framework can be a really great way of just getting a basic understanding of where the client is today, what their strengths and weaknesses are and where you'll have the most impact working on their site in the months to come.

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It can also be helpful when you're building the SEO Foundation. At our agency, we call that an SEO setup. And this is where we're going to go through and try to check the boxes and kind of level up in some of those areas that we talked about, like things like customising those page titles and meta descriptions. This framework can be helpful for staying organised. We also might apply the framework in monthly SEO where we might want to decide that we're going to invest more in certain components or certain pillars because they're areas of weakness or areas of opportunity.

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And then ultimately this all wraps around to being really helpful just in client communication. I remember being new in the world of SEO and learning individual skills and I understood why page titles mattered or why site speed. Speed mattered, for instance. But it took me a long time before I could kind of put it all together under one roof and understand how all of the different pieces of the puzzle of the roof came together. And so that's kind of this idea for a client that they might understand the why behind a specific task.

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They don't really need to understand the how, that's why they're hiring you, but they can put it all together more conceptually and understand the strategy behind it when you give things a place to hang. Like, hey, this is technical SEO and this matters because of reasons X, Y and Z. The last framework I want to leave you with is eeat. And you may have heard of this. It's part of Google's systems in their algorithm and it stands for expertise, experience, authority and trust.

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And that is really to say that websites that tend to perform well in the search engines have kind of, they meet in the middle of this diagram and that is that they engender authority and trust. The trust comes from good design, Google Maps, reviews, ease of things like finding a contact page, etc. Authority comes from backlinks and kind of being out there in the world and, and knowing that it's a credible business. And then expertise and experience is all of the lens behind the content that you're sharing. The business shares its expertise and it is a genuine expert and they have actual experience in this space.

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So it's websites that fall into the middle here that tend to do the best in SEO. And so this is just another nice framework when you're thinking about, hey, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the client's website and how does it play within Google's EEAT system? Sometimes we find, hey, we're sharing expertise, we have good authority and there's good trust, but maybe our actual experience isn't showing through. And so you find opportunities to kind of highlight the people behind the content to show that they have genuine experience in the space. And that could be the thing that elevates that website in Google's algorithms.

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Ultimately, when I think about this concept, I think about creating sometimes a flywheel that's really based on real world marketing that moves you around. Sort of this idea of I'm going to share expertise and experience, I'm going to engender trust and I'm going to build authority in sort of a cyclical way. And so what this might look like, and this is where we started with Pathfinder SEO is I took a topic within the area of

SEO that I'm an expert in and I wrote a blog post on the topic. Then I went out and I asked a current customer for a review on Google Maps that was kind of unrelated to the blog post, but it was just something I could do to kind of go out and kind of build a little bit of trust around our business. And then I would take the topic of the blog post that I wrote on and I try to go be a guest on a podcast or a webinar, but something external to my website, something like, hey, I'll be a guest at the, at the Page Builder Summit.

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And I would talk about the same thing that I wrote about in the blog post. And ultimately typically that podcast or webinar would link back to the blog post that I wrote as another reference point of where I've been sharing expertise and experience, experience on a subject matter. And then I take a step back and analyse results. And so that was a flywheel that worked really well as we got Pathfinder off the ground as a new business, as, as a new, as a new website. And that flywheel might look a little different for different clients.

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For instance, they may not be comfortable being a guest on a podcast, so they may need a different avenue for building that authority and trust. But you can see that this is kind of real world marketing. It all makes sense why it would influence the search engines. And it's also going to be kind of a rising tide that lifts all boats because that blog post doesn't operate in a vacuum. It's good for SEO, Google Ads, email marketing, social media, et cetera.

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And the same with the guest on the being a guest on a podcast, that's a marketing channel in and of itself. So the frameworks that we've really reviewed are this concept of thinking about keywords as a customer acquisition funnel. So kind of thinking strategically about trying to be in the right places at the right time to get in front of the intended audience. We've talked about the four pillars of SEO which is going to help you kind of have scaffolding around any SEO tasks or action items you do. And then we've talked about this idea of expertise, experience, authority and trust.

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This is kind of a flywheel that we can move around and kind of constantly be doing real world marketing for our clients to really help move the needle so that our strategy just makes real world marketing sense. It should be logical, it should be focused on impact, there should be some cross channel value and just generally speaking, everything should kind of meet the test of is this genuinely helpful? So if you improve site speed, for instance, on a website that's a little sluggish. I would describe that as genuinely helpful to the end user. If you create a blog post that shares experience and expertise in a helpful way, you're going to meet that mark.

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If you go back into a services page on your website and you add FAQs, for instance, that's genuinely helpful. So we're trying to kind of make sure that we are meeting these checks and balances, that what we're really putting our time and effort towards are things that elevate to this kind of real world marketing world. And when you do that, you'll be creating a holistic SEO strategy for your clients and you can apply the same knowledge to your own website. I want to leave you with a little bit more around guided SEO at Pathfinder. We are a community for web designers and digital agencies and our community is really designed to help you build your confidence in SEO.

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Whether it's having skills like the actual skills to deliver the service or just get comfortable talking to clients or you're looking for process documentation. We have lots of checklists. Our memberships include group and one on one coaching, tonnes of business resources, email templates, proposal templates, and then also a community with discussion spaces and a mastermind group specifically for web designers and agencies. So you're more than welcome to join us over at Pathfinder SEO. Whether you're offering paid SEO services or you just want to get more comfortable in this space and make sure you're kind of doing right by your clients by building websites that have SEO woven in.

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That is really what Pathfinder is here for. And so I want to leave you with the PowerPack download here. You can access it at our website [pathfinderseo.com/pagebuilder](http://pathfinderseo.com/pagebuilder) the resource I have for you is a handout that will give you all of the common questions and example answers you can use to answer clients questions about SEO. So sort of this idea that you go from a strategic standpoint but then you have to communicate about it. And so clients ask lots of questions and it's really helpful to have a little bit of a playbook of some answers that you can use when clients ask challenging questions.

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So thank you so much for being here. I'm Lindsay Halsey, My email is included. [Lindsay@pathfinderseo.com](mailto:Lindsay@pathfinderseo.com), hit me up with questions over email and I hope you have a great rest of your day. Bye.