

#94 Why don't people understand tech SEO and analytics? (with Matt Jones @ Freelancing Friends)

Intro - [00:00:00]

Topic - [00:05:08]

Rapid Fire/Outro - [00:49:45]

Intro

[00:00:00] **Dan:** Welcome back to another episode of The Measure Pod. This week, we've got a tech SEO freelancer called Matt Jones joining us on this one. And I have to say, we've just come off the back of recording it and it was so interesting to understand. And the reason we arranged this podcast with Matt is because quite often we bucket or a lot of other people bucket the world of analytics and the world of tech SEO into the same kind of area of nerdy people, as he described it, sitting in the corner with the lights off or something like that.

[00:00:40] **Dan:** But actually there is a huge overlap in terms of the things we're doing, the people we're speaking to and the way we approach things. And I think it was really good to get that insight from Bhav as well, of course, from the experimentation side as well, understanding how that works for SEO, but just hearing from Matt, understanding the challenges and how similar they are to the kind of stuff that me and you do Dara all the time.

[00:00:56] **Dara:** Yeah, definitely. And I think what stood out to me as well is how difficult a job it can be aside from the obvious keeping up to date with the kind of Google, Google Search updates, he's also having to keep up with, you know, GA4, the switch to GA4 was such a big deal for us, but we forget that other people had to make that shift as well and learn that alongside their other kind of job or their main job so it's interesting getting that perspective from him of just how kind of wide reaching it can be it's not just a case of looking at the kind of technical health of the website from an SEO point of view but actually knowing about tag management and analytics and reporting as well.

[00:01:36] **Dan:** Yeah and I really, really did like that really quite healthy attitude towards all these changes as well. This idea of, you know, the search

generative experience, integrating generative AI into search results, you know, it's just a change like anything else, like GA4 was a change and we'll ebb and flow and we'll adapt and SEO is not going anywhere websites still need to exist at least for the foreseeable and even then you know, we'll adapt and we'll change to something else.

[00:01:57] **Dan:** And like I say, it was a really refreshing perspective of this kind of sometimes doom and gloom of the world is ending compared to the attitudes that are shared there. And just for the listeners, you might hear the Bhav's obviously not with us right now. And for those that are watching we now have a video version of this podcast that we've integrated on YouTube and Spotify. So feel free to watch this episode, we talk about guitars and skateboards later on in the podcast during the rapid fire, you'll be able to see what we're talking about there.

[00:02:19] **Dan:** But Bhav had to jump off slightly early because you know, he's a busy man and has things to do. Obviously I don't know if that says a lot about him or, or less about us though Dara. But this was a great episode with Matt, we've included lots in the show notes, so please check those out including ways to stay in touch with Matt, pick his brains about tech SEO and ultimately find out about his new album he's writing, right? Well, enjoy listening from Matt firsthand. Enjoy the episode.

[00:02:43] **Dan:** It's great To welcome Matt Jones from freelancing friends, a podcast all about freelancing and SEO onto our podcast to talk to us about SEO analytics and all sorts of data. So firstly, Matt, welcome to the podcast.

[00:02:55] **Matt:** Thank you for having me and I appreciate your taking the time to let me be here.

[00:02:58] **Dan:** No, our pleasure. One thing we always ask all of our guests when they come on and it's become a bit of a habit and a ritual almost is to ask about how you found yourself in the world of data, marketing, SEO. Often it's not a linear, obvious journey. And so what's your story? How did you find yourself in the world of data?

[00:03:16] **Matt:** So I probably back nearly 10 years ago and now ended up in, and when I say a random apprenticeship, I mean, I couldn't remember applying for it. And then the next second it was my job. So that was an interesting start to marketing as a whole. From there, I kind of I say, dabbled. I went In-house initially after that apprenticeship. From there, I thought I'll give agency a try, you know, do something a little bit different. And it was probably from going

agency side where I suppose I've really got into data as a whole. So obviously in-house that we're already people looking after that anyway so I didn't have to really touch it.

[00:03:52] **Matt:** Going agency side, you know, starting to do all the reporting for the clients, et cetera, that started to be a case where I'd then go into GA, GA3 at the time, the good old days. But yeah, so from there, obviously kind of generally got to grips with how analytics worked and then kind of decided it was part and parcel of what I've really enjoyed most about the job. So it was the technical side of SEO alongside the reporting and how we can use the reporting and data analysis to help not just SEO, but obviously when you're working in an environment like an agency as well every other service that was offered. So I've worked on multiple agencies around Sheffield kind of, yeah, I think there was one particular one where I worked and helped out a lot with data, especially on digital PR projects as well. And kind of really helping shape firstly, where do we need to, you know, build the links to on the website through to how did it actually perform?

[00:04:49] **Matt:** And then, yeah, about two years ago now, decided to go freelance and take that leap. I think everyone thinks about doing it occasionally. So did that leap and as I say, kind of stuck with the tech SEO and data side of things and really just threw myself into offering that as a service more as well.

Topic

[00:05:08] **Bhav:** I know that all too well, Matt. First of all, can I just start off by saying it's really nice to have you on the show. Like tech SEO is a subject that has eluded me all my life. And I don't know about the data side of it. I mean, I know how to analyse SEO traffic data, but what else goes into understanding tech SEO is a subject that I feel like I should know more about it, but I don't know, so I'll start with that. Second thing was I know all too well about that with taking the leap and going freelance slash like solo. I did it the start of this year. Unlike you, I only stuck it through for eight months. So my hat's off to you for sticking it through for so much longer. I jumped back in the agency side after sort of like eight months.

[00:05:45] **Matt:** Yeah, it's definitely sometimes where I sit and think, would it be easier to go back, you know, not have to do everything myself, but then I remind myself how much I enjoy staying in bed a little bit longer in the morning so.

[00:05:56] **Dan:** Maybe you just haven't found the right salary job yet, then maybe that's it. You can stay in bed and work from home.

[00:06:01] **Matt:** Exactly, it's the beauty.

[00:06:02] **Dan:** This is actually the main reason why I actually kind of connected with Matt on LinkedIn. We shared a couple of messages around this because I've been thinking for quite some time now around how like tech SEO and analytics people, it's a venn diagram that's almost fully overlapped. And yet there's the kind of people never truly mixed too much. And I, and I think it's these things that we get categorised in the same buckets far too often as the kind of the nerdy misunderstood techie side of things when actually it's kind of underpinning a lot of the stuff that a lot of marketers and a lot of people are using.

[00:06:31] **Dan:** So actually that's the genesis of that conversation. As you said, Bhav about not understanding the tech SEO. I think that's the same with other people can be saying, I don't understand the analytics of products and marketing. And I think it gets kind of bucketed in the same category. So anyway, just wanted to set the scene as to kind of like why we're having this chat, but yeah, Matt, I mean, I don't know if you have the same kind of thoughts around coming from it from the tech SEO side, because I don't know, there's a different, different kind of lens on it compared to the other side of SEO, for example.

[00:07:00] **Matt:** Yeah, it's, it is one of them things I think generally when you start to think about tech SEOs and people who maybe do more data analysis side of things. People from the outside do generally tend to think, you know, they are the people sat in the corner really quietly. And in my case, that was generally where I tend to want to be. So that worked well for me. But I think a lot of it, you know, most SEOs, I say most, not all of them, but most SEOs have probably got some level of knowledge of, probably Google Analytics in most cases and they'll be able to pull together a monthly report but there's also other tools these days such as Data Studio or Looker Studio now and being able to build that out so someone else can do it and you can pull the numbers.

[00:07:42] **Matt:** So it was for me, it was always a case of it's nice to see these numbers and yeah, I can say to the client last month we drove X amount of traffic compared to the month before or whatever it might be, but I wanted a bit more for myself as well in thinking, I can tell them that we've done that, but what's that actually achieving, you know, maybe for the top level C suite, that's all they want to know. But when we move further down, how did we get to that

point? What actually drove that climb in traffic or it might've been a decline as well. And really trying to understand the work that we're doing, especially in SEO can take, you know, three, six months generally to start picking up, but it's understanding how does that actually perform?

[00:08:24] **Matt:** It's easy enough to say in January I did XYZ task from an SEO perspective and then never check it again, you know It's just for me there's a side of SEO and I don't know if everyone would agree with this or not but I'll say it anyway but there's a side of SEO where it's more looking at the health of the website. So is it technically sound, even from an on page perspective as well? Are we ticking all the right boxes? And while that's good and that's important and something that I still do myself, there's also the understanding. And I think that's where there probably is a gap in terms of, you know, how often people integrate those together, whether it's one person who can do it all or building a smaller team of people that are maybe more technical based on the SEO side and then people who are data driven as well.

[00:09:13] **Matt:** But you can find some really interesting things there that actually truly form the strategy that you should be doing moving forward as opposed to kind of just guessing and crossing your fingers and hoping for the best.

[00:09:25] **Bhav:** I think one of the challenges I've always seen in tech in the, not just tech SEO, in SEO as a whole is if data analysts are like one of the loneliest parts of an organisation, I would say SEO is even lonelier, right? So I think your role and the role of certainly only the handful of SEOs that I've ever worked with have a much tougher time than we do in terms of getting resources and making an impact and having people listen to us. Because you're kind of in this weird intersection of marketing and tech, right?

[00:09:52] **Bhav:** Because you're not quite on the engineering side of things, despite the fact that you're looking at the performance of the website, how it's doing, which arguably should be the role of an engineer. And then you're not quite on the marketing side of things because you know, you're trying to work on like content and PR and get those backlinks and all of the other things that are in this weird SEO black box that Google never, you know, shares with anyone. So how do you make an impact? And then on top of that, you have the even more uphill battle of a three to six month lead time before you can see the impacts of the work you're doing. Like, is this the reason why SEO isn't a prominent role in every organisation?

[00:10:30] **Matt:** I think it is. And a lot of it comes down to, especially if we're going to say working agency side, or if you work in anything other than in-house, then you're going to end up coming across some clients where you feel like you've won the lottery. They understand the impact of SEO, they are very forgiving of the time that it does take to action things or for things to start picking up.

[00:10:52] **Matt:** But on the flip side, you're going to get ones who don't particularly understand it. And that's not a bad thing, but it does make things a lot more difficult when you're trying to say, I want you to, you know, this is the retainer that you're paying us. I'm going to spend two months worth of that full retainer in a Google sheet, and you will not physically see what I'm doing as the output of it, because it's all going into the backend. And obviously at times like that, it can be a lot more difficult to get that buy in. And I think that's where I kind of jumped into the data side of things as well, because I found, and this was probably from working in-house initially.

[00:11:26] **Matt:** If you can use the data to back up essentially the hypothesis that you're having, if you look at it more of a, you know, an actual scientific experiment, as opposed to just some marketing, you're probably going to get the buy in more whether that's in-house or agency side, you know, the client for the agency either has in-house development teams or they outsource that to an agency as well. And they've obviously got their own track that they're working on, whether they're using Jira or whatever it might be. In my experience being from an SEO background, you've probably got the hardest job trying to get a ticket anywhere on there that isn't about five months worth of scrolling downwards.

[00:12:04] **Matt:** But when you can use that data, people, you know, generally it gives you a lot more buy-in. Forecasting in SEO is a very interesting topic that probably could have a four hour debate by people on it. There's no steadfast way of doing it right or wrong and 9 times out of 10, if someone got it a hundred percent correct. I probably would just offer them my house to work for me. But it, you know, you can use the data to kind of say realistically based on what we've seen over the past X amount of months or years, we would likely see this increase in performance moving forward if we can action these tasks. And I think a lot of it does come down to probably the experience of how many years you've been in SEO and also what kind of tasks you've done or clients you've worked on but generally, obviously, it's the same with most jobs, but the longer you work in it the better you get at guesstimating the impact something will actually have on the end product.

[00:13:03] **Dara:** When you say performance matter you, are you looking mainly at driving additional traffic and then it's effectively somebody else's challenge to convert that traffic or are you, are you, when you're talking about performance, are you talking kind of right away through to conversion?

[00:13:19] **Matt:** From my personal point of view, I talk about it all the way through to conversion. Some of the roles that I've had have been kind of SEO and CRO in kind of one job encapsulated anyone in the industry who mentions performance probably could be, there's never a steadfast, you know, this is exactly what I mean. Sometimes it is just looking at driving that traffic and, you know, finding more users to drive to the website and that's my job done, I'll cut, you know, I'll cut myself there and it's someone else's job. Other ones you do have, obviously, you know, the one to push through to the end. For me personally, I think especially on a freelancing perspective it's obviously much more impactful if I can turn around to my clients and say I may have driven you 50 percent more traffic but I've actually, you know increased your yearly revenue by 40 percent from that traffic as opposed to just going I sent an extra 2,000 people to you last week, have fun.

[00:14:16] **Dan:** This is a subject that I know that me and Bhav were in a room in a session, this was at MeasureCamp this year in London, and it was all around proving the value of analytics. And I suppose the same can be said here. And again, another parity between analytics and tech SEO, is that, is that how you look to kind of justify the return on ad spend? You know, these are two sort of areas within a business that don't typically have a revenue associated next to them.

[00:14:37] **Dan:** So when people are looking and maybe they've not invested in tech SEO before they're speaking to you as a freelancer and saying, hey look, we've, we've heard of this thing, we know it's important, but you know, how do you justify your spend of X from your proposal per month when all of the things you said before, which kind of go into the kind of lazy kind of snake oil side of it, which is like, you know, I'm not going to see results for three to six months, this might not work. So how does that work? Because I can imagine that again, it's just a harder job than maybe we see in the analytics sphere.

[00:15:06] **Matt:** Yeah, a lot of what I do relies heavily on reporting dashboards. So personally, I use Looker Studio. I know people use various different tools, but for me, when I bring a client on it'll generally always be the same. I'll do an audit for them to begin with. In month one, we'll completely essentially tear apart the website and say, this is everything that's wrong. Month one onwards, it's saying, here's a list of the tasks that need doing. If I just left it

at that and said, I'll do these tasks, and I'll come back to you in four months and say, they're done, there we go. There's not any proof other than, you know, I can prove I've implemented the work, but so what?

[00:15:44] **Matt:** I could have implemented the wrong thing and it's never going to help, but they won't know and they've paid me. So for the reporting dashboards, it's, for me, I always build Data Studio or Looker Studio because of the 24/7 kind of real time reporting factors that it holds the client can essentially go and look at it whenever they want, change the date range to whenever they want, regardless if I was on the account at that time or not. But from that, I can really start to break down here's the traffic that we're driving. Now I'll have one page that focuses on organic, which is obviously what I'm actually attempting to improve for them, but I can have every other channel as well So they gain extra value because they can see all the paid stuff and you know referrals direct traffic, etc.

[00:16:30] **Matt:** And then start to really drill down well, what have we actually driven the traffic to is it all the homepage because it's not going to be useful for whatever it might be If you're selling a product, as an example, the homepage isn't always going to be that helpful at making someone become a customer. So are we starting to drive the traffic to the right places on the website? If we do, you know, what's kind of that return on investment, if it's a product based or service base, you can usually give a pretty definitive answer thereof. You know, you pay me X amount a month, that's my retainer. You know that, but here's what I've done over the last six months, you know, with boosted revenue, 20%, whatever it might be, if it's a lead gen, it becomes a little bit harder because at that point it is kind of a case where you have to just hand it over to the client because they've usually got internal sales teams, you know, I'm not going to jump on that.

[00:17:20] **Matt:** I'm not, you know, that's not my kind of forte, but from there, you can still say, well, we've given you X amount of leads and that's an increase over the last six months. Usually what you can do as well, depending on your relationship with the client, is then start to factor in the reporting that they use for the leads. So whatever CRM they're using, and sometimes you can output a revenue from that. But generally, you know, even at that point, the client can go away and look at it if they need to. So a lot of it for me is showing that report visually to say, here's the impact it's actually having. Making sure, you know, they are aware that for the first few months, it's probably not going to change that much.

[00:18:00] **Matt:** But after that, when it starts to pick up, it's really saying, now you're paying me the money, like, you know, you've paid me from month one, whatever work I do month one, might not impact you until month three. But if you've paid me for six months and you're still getting results in month nine and twelve, when I'm not on the account, but it's the work I've done, you're still kind of getting that you know, return on investment, even afterwards, even though I've lost the benefit of paying my bills, but that's kind of the way I see it working as well is, at that point, they might have stopped being a client after six months, but when they're seeing fantastic results at month 12, they might come back and say, actually, you know, we're still using this dashboard that you built and we can see these results can we restart a contract together? Or You know, maybe another project?

[00:18:47] **Dara:** Matt are you accounting for any of that, that like lag when you're doing the reportings or, or is it just kind of it's probably hard to pin down, but are you kind of including that in the narrative to the clients to say, well, actually, you know, this, this bigger than expected uplift now is actually because of work I did three months ago, or are you just trying to educate them that they have to accept that and that the, there's not going to be a direct change or immediate result from the work that you do and you could see those because let's say you, let's say there was a campaign you were working on and they said, right, we want you to double down and spend extra time on this, but then the result doesn't come for two or three months later. Are you, you know, how much are you trying to actually tie that together in the reporting versus just saying to them, look, you know, we don't know exactly when the impact is going to show, but we're going to try our best to correlate it back when it, when we do see that spike,

[00:19:37] **Matt:** I think a lot of it comes down to educating clients and obviously not in a patronising way, otherwise it wouldn't be a very successful business. But it is educating them in terms of, you know, generally you'll speak to an SEO, they will probably say it will be at least a few months until you see results. There is always, in 99% of cases, some low hanging fruit where you could, you know, fix them pretty imminently and you know it's going to have a positive impact. So it might slowly, you know, improve over the first few months. And I usually tend to focus on trying to get some of those done alongside starting the really big tasks in the back that are going to take a long time.

[00:20:16] **Matt:** But a lot of the time with the client, I think for me, it is just educating them and you know sitting on a call and kind of just walking them through why it takes so long, you know, it's not you could go to another SEO.

It's not going to change. It's Google or you know, whichever search engine it is that has this lag, not us, and we can't really, you know change that. I wish we could it'd be fantastic, I'd be a multi millionaire if I could do that, but i'm not so a lot of it It's kind of just walking them through step by step.

[00:20:45] **Matt:** There's a lot of hand holding again in a non patronising way because I like to you know if I have a client, if they're going to leave me at any point I want them to leave more educated than when they came in So if they ever need to go to another SEO or they look at maybe hiring Internally for an SEO to start working full time for them. They've got that bit more knowledge so their I suppose as well, it's going to be harder for someone to pull the wool over their eyes if they are being sold something again in future, which whether or not it's a good or a bad thing, I always like to try and be transparent and nice to my clients to not just take money for the sake of money.

[00:21:23] **Bhav:** I imagine there's going to be a lot of people who we've been talking about tech SEO who have no idea what tech SEO is. And I wonder maybe if you could just really you know, an elevator pitch type of thing Matt, just explain what is a tech SEO and how does it differ from non tech SEO?

[00:21:38] **Matt:** Perfect. So SEO itself is generally split into a few different categories. You've got on page, off page, and technical. Off page is anything looking like building links or digital PR anything along those lines. On page is looking at kind of the content you're creating. So what blogs are we making? What kind of text are we just including generally on the website as well? Is it going to sell? What we're actually doing.

[00:22:01] **Matt:** And then your technical side kind of looks more at the back end of the website itself. It's really focusing on essentially what search engines look at when they're crawling and indexing websites. So it's kind of a, it is a very nerdy thing I think, it's not the sexiest thing to do, but you know, you're looking at page speed, you're looking at how crawlers and bots actually access and understand the website. Is it working from a way where essentially what I always try and explain it to, and I'm going to use my family as an example here, because they haven't got a clue what I do.

[00:22:34] **Matt:** You know, if Google's going onto your website, it doesn't see anything visually, it's not built to do that, it just looks at the code. So my job is to make sure when it looks at that code, it understands the output should be what I visually see, as opposed to something completely different.

[00:22:49] **Dan:** This is where I think the same, when my parents ask me what I do, I think they just assume I do Google search stuff, SEO stuff. I think there's the outside eye, I think there's the analytics and SEO or the tech SEO is kind of lumped into the same bucket. I don't have the heart to tell them no, because I don't want to have to explain to them what analytics is. But Matt, I did have something you mentioned just now around, like in terms of that kind of the validation of the work that you're putting in and obviously the kind of return on the investment of tech SEO.

[00:23:14] **Dan:** To people bought into it, it's kind of not something you have to justify all the time, but you mentioned about kind of like going all the way through, not just getting clicks, but to kind of all the way through to conversion, but what that, and something else that's just sprung to mind is the kind of updates to the algorithms and especially in Google. I know they've got something, was it the INP that's kind of a new web vital that's coming out next year that they're leaning into. So what this just tells me is that, that not only are you kind of having to delve into the tagging implementation of all their stuff, because that affects things like page load times, which can affect the crawling and the ranking algorithms, not only are you then going through to conversion, which you need to make sure that the consent banners are set up right and you've got the limitations there that if you're using their GA4 implementation or another platform, you need to be aware of their implementation and make that right, just to kind of justify the effort that's going in.

[00:23:59] **Dan:** That's very wide. That's very sprawling. How the hell do you manage to keep up on top of, you know, everything along these things? Or where do you kind of draw that line and say, hey, look, I'm an SEO, I'm not here to sort out tag manager or to fix your GA4 implementation, for example.

[00:24:15] **Matt:** I think working agency side, I always struggled having that kind of line to draw I've always been someone who just, I kind of like to learn a lot and I think that's probably the same for most people in any techy kind of job if you want to call them that, but for me it's kind of consistently learning about new things or how can I improve one skill by learning another skill, whatever it might be. So, you know, at one point I thought I want to learn coding. I can't code a website to save my life, but I know enough code to be able to look at it and go, that's wrong, we need to fix that.

[00:24:48] **Matt:** So it's, a lot of people will try and do it all. And I think if you're probably relatively new into your career or towards the beginning, there's nothing bad, nothing wrong about that. Soak up as much as you can, try and do a bit of everything because you'll get the experience to realise, do you enjoy it?

Do you like it? Is it something that's not for you? But always be careful of burnout. That's the biggest thing and I think in any job doesn't even matter being in marketing or tech or data whatever it is

[00:25:19] **Matt:** Eventually, you're probably going to hit burnout if you're trying to do everything all at once. So when I went freelance and I kind of managed to sort of do this in my last few roles agency side I was very much, I do tech SEO, I do data and analytics and I do reporting and that's why I do. So I'll look after, you know, the analytics implementations, consent banners. I'll do Tag Manager and your normal tech SEO, but then I won't be doing content or link building or whatever else it might be.

[00:25:53] **Matt:** They were the things that I didn't enjoy as much as the tech side of things. And I think going freelance as well is obviously the beauty of it is I can, I control what I offer. Someone comes to me and says, will you do this? And it's not on my list of what I actually want to do. I can say no, and I won't be horrible about it. And I'll usually try and find someone who can offer it to them, but I'd rather them spend extra money on someone who's, you know, an expert at whatever they need, as opposed to me bolstering it on and not sleeping for three nights.

[00:26:25] **Matt:** So a lot of it does involve kind of keeping up to date as well. One thing about SEO is it's a fantastic community and that's on, I say Twitter, not so much anymore or X should I say, but back when it was Twitter, it was a lot better. LinkedIn, there's Slack groups, WhatsApp groups for various different parts of SEO as well.

[00:26:47] **Matt:** But that community really helps you keep on top of stuff. You know, there's people from all walks of life and every industry and role going. That kind of thing, I've seen this, I've seen this, and you know, kind of pass about ideas because with the Google updates, it's you know, there's always probably a good bunch of them every year that are big and have a huge impact, but there's also probably more than one update going off per day but in a tiny way, you know, it's going to eventually impact you no matter how small it is.

[00:27:18] **Matt:** That's their business model, they need to make sure that, you know, Google works. It is a search engine and it offers what the user wants. Like I think sometimes people forget that Google itself is a business and their business is someone goes on there and searches for something, show them what they're looking for and make it the best it can be for them. So a lot of it is kind of thinking, you know, looking into that. And I think that's where UX also comes into tech SEO as well. And thinking, you know, you don't have to be a

design pro and you don't have to completely map out the journey, but you need to think to yourself this search term for example is a person that's searching that actually going to want my product or service or is it just something that might slightly relate and can drive a bit of traffic a month, but no one's ever going to convert.

[00:28:07] **Matt:** So I think it's always keeping up on top of everything that's going on basically, but making sure you hone down your skills to what you enjoy most and sometimes you can ignore quite a lot of, in the nicest way possible, fluff, that's floating about as well.

[00:28:23] **Dara:** Does that make the updates less of a risk? Because I remember, maybe this is slightly outdated. This has going back a little bit, but the updates used to be a big, big worry for SEO agencies because it would, it would often mean they had to undo the work they had previously done. So something that was previously the done thing, you'd then charge your clients to undo the work that you'd previously paid them to do. Is that becoming less of an issue now? If you're focusing on, especially if you're thinking about it from like with a bit of a UX angle and thinking, right, I'm going to present content in a meaningful way that search engines will find, but will also be useful for the end users. Is that, is it becoming safer? Are you less at the mercy of Google releasing an update and one of your clients losing all their, all their traffic overnight?

[00:29:09] **Matt:** Yeah, generally we're a lot better off now than we were. I think it definitely was the case that years ago, there were some updates that came out, and you could be undoing everything for the last four years. I think the good thing about that, if you didn't have to deal with it personally at the time, is those things are still in place. So those updates that kind of started marking people down will still mark people down but because it's so far away from when it was actually done now those tactics aren't particularly used much anymore, you know, some are on the sly but generally they're not being used that much and especially over the last probably two years, but it's been going on for years anyway.

[00:29:55] **Matt:** Most of the updates, when you stop and look into them, and again, obviously we'll always get a brief from Google of this will target X, Y, Z, but you shouldn't do anything to, you know, before this happens because it won't affect you. But there's loads of articles out there, people that are steps above me in terms of their analytical mind of saying, this is probably actually affected and what the update was, but most of them now are all based around UX and I believe Google do put this out there sometimes, but something that,

you know, it doesn't get said enough is when you're doing SEO, if you've got any website, whatever you're doing, whatever marketing, focus on the user, because you could do everything, you could spend hundreds of hours a month working on SEO, making it perfect.

[00:30:44] **Matt:** But then you're focused on that so much, no one's going to convert. So your business is going to, you know, flop because any business needs money coming in. So a lot of it should come down to what do the users actually want? What information can we get? And this is where it comes in with the analytics side, from the customers we've got, obviously within GDPR or whatever consent we have now. But what can we learn from them to say this is actually a real target persona? You know, we can find another hundred thousand of this one person that's going to again become a customer.

[00:31:19] **Bhav:** Matt, you mentioned earlier on about experiments. And I guess seeing as you're talking about user experience and this is a topic that's obviously close to my heart. And I'm a bit of a purist on it. So I'm going to push you now for a very difficult answer. How do you, if you think about experimentation in this classical sense, being done via split testing, if you're making changes on the site today, and you're saying that there is a three to six month wait time to see any real impact, and you're not keeping one half of your traffic to the old version of it, and you're just, and you've rolled out, how do you say with proper confidence that the impact you've made and all the changes you've made have had the impact you're seeing six months down the line.

[00:32:04] **Matt:** A majority of that generally comes from prior experience of actually doing those things. There are certain aspects of tech SEO that will 100% work on improving stuff every single time. They're usually the fundamentals, obviously, and if people haven't got the fundamentals, then they're going to fail. So with those you can usually be quite certain and a lot of the time, a lot of SEOs, I say in the spare time, have their own websites, which are consistently testing theories and ideas on, so it's obviously less damaging. It's not an actual client, if that makes sense. You're a bit more, oh, well, if it goes wrong, it goes wrong, I'll just undo it.

[00:32:47] **Matt:** So with a lot of this stuff, again, it comes from experience and even someone starting out relatively new into the industry is probably going to be working with someone who's been in the industry for many years more, so they can feed off them as well. And there are some aspects and sometimes where if you've got a high enough traffic website, running tests is the best way to do it. So, I've not done one for a while, but I used to use a tool called Google Optimize. If it's still called that, it might not be, but there's other ones like VWO

as well, and essentially from that you can start running that split test and you know, most of the time it's probably not going to be a huge tech change in terms of the code base or anything going off in the back end might be something a bit more visual or, you know, tech space, but you can start actually doing a real experiment at that point and start analysing the data properly, but it does have to be.

[00:33:45] **Bhav:** I was going to say that experiment would be based on the content, right? So if you're talking about sort of like the technical changes you're making today, there's no way to have a holdout group because and again, I don't know if this is still true. Google, there was a point in time when Google would give you like a, some leeway to run, have the same page with two different bits of code. Nowadays, you kind of ingest that code through certain changes anyway. But if you, let's say you are doing it that way there's no way to hold out 50% of your traffic to tech changes, right?

[00:34:17] **Bhav:** So I think I'm just trying to wrap my head around how, because again, I'm coming from pure sort of like statistical background here and like looking at it from a pure econometric perspective, any changes you see six months from now, so many things have changed in six months that it's, and I get it they're are some like intuition based changes that you would make on client websites. But once you've kind of hit those foundations and everyone's got the basics correct, how do you, you know, how do you experiment on tech SEO?

[00:34:47] **Matt:** There have been ways in the past where, again, it usually comes down to the type of client you've got. If you've got clients who are very techy, I suppose we can put it that way, and, you know, they know what they're doing from a code perspective as well, there have been ways where you can essentially run that split test through your own website by, once someone tries to run it obviously, access the page through the browser, essentially pushing that to either A or B, as whatever instance it might be.

[00:35:22] **Matt:** Those have probably started to slow down over the years because, as you say, one of the big things for Google is no duplicate content. And you can, you can get around it with certain things like canonical links, for an example. But at the same time, you're then kind of shooting yourself in the foot to be able to run experiments properly. So, it's a weird one, I think Google doesn't want you to experiment much because they want you very much to stick by their guidelines. But most people who are going to be the most successful in an SEO space, don't listen to those guidelines. They listen to the ones where, you know, if you do this wrong, your website will disappear forever.

[00:35:59] **Matt:** We'll never do those things. But you know, outside of that, a lot of it does come down to, I think tests these days are sometimes run as well on two pieces of content. You know, if you've got the right CMS in place, technically you could take two blogs, if we say, for an example, that have similar traffic each month, but in one of them, if you can make a change to the code behind that to sell it, let's say speed up page speed, for example, and leave the other one as it is, you know, can we use that as well? So it's finding these really small niche ways to run smaller level tests, but multiple times to try and build up to what we had or what we could have done.

[00:36:41] **Bhav:** So it's about getting as creative as you can and I think that sounds like if, you know, to be an SEO, to be able to test successfully in like tech SEO and content SEO, you have to have this creative arm belt. How do we show value? Because I think that's, that's the biggest challenge that I think an SEO person would face, not just the internal, but also freelancer, right? Just how do you show that value and prove it? And actually, if you can get creative with these types of things.

[00:37:06] **Dan:** Taking the concept of experimentation off the page and, and something that I've been kind of present in and have done over my, my years in the analytics world is this idea of the experimentation on the SERP page, the search engine results page itself. So looking at things like SEO, PPC cannibalization experiments and understanding that, you know, you can do all of the work you want to do on SEO and then all of a sudden someone starts bidding on brand and just decimates SEO because all of that traffic's no longer coming through organic is coming through paid, but understandably we're doing the same kind of, we're talking about the same page here with the same Google search page or the Bing search results page.

[00:37:39] **Dan:** So I suppose more of an open question, but how do you get SEO and the work SEO are doing to play nicely with the paid search guys and the work that they're doing? And how have you found success in running things like collaborative experimentations around things like cannibalization in the past? Because in my experience it's hit and miss depending on the organisation, whether or not those two teams even talk to each other and yet they are kind of doing a very similar kind of area of things.

[00:38:04] **Matt:** Yeah I've had a lot of experience of those teams essentially acting like they're on opposite sides of the world, even though they're opposite each other on the desk. It can be difficult and I think sometimes each arm of marketing or branch of marketing that you have in an organisation gets siloed off too much, and I can say exactly the same for SEO and development.

[00:38:28] **Matt:** But it's SEO and anything needs to be integrated at least somewhat, even if it's just one person from each team that communicate with each other. Again, PPC can be a fantastic way to test things from an SEO perspective, because when we're looking at PPC, we know it's different than SEO and in terms of what causes people to really click through on those results, but you can test new sort of titles and descriptions on your ads, which you can run them against each other and whichever one wins put it as your meta description and meta title from an SEO perspective. Generally, we should see an increase in the CTR compared to what we had.

[00:39:09] **Matt:** And again, a lot of it comes down to that cannibalization. If you can rank position one for a really, you know, competitive keyword, which is costing let's say multiple pounds a click on PPC. Are you wasting your money? Potentially, potentially not, but if the teams don't talk together, you aren't actually going to know the answer, you're just going to guess. Because it might be that the PPC is not as competitive there, and actually the organic is driving most of the click through rates. So if you're position one, why spend five pound a click when you could invest that five pound to another subset of keywords that might be 50p a click. So you can get 10 times as much for the same thing.

[00:39:54] **Matt:** And as I say, it's the same with every team and SEO in any business. It's important to be integrated in some way and kind of chat with them. So if I work with anyone now, you know, if I go to a client and they outsource to a PPC manager as well, I'll want to be in contact with them because so much of it can be learned from each other.

[00:40:18] **Matt:** I can pass things on to them, vice versa, in terms of we need more traffic to this section of the website, or something's happened over here. So we're going to lose traffic for a few months while we fix it. Can you bump that up on PPC? So we don't technically lose as much as we would, regardless. So, yeah, I think when you don't communicate into teams, it just leads to, as you say, anything from cannibalization to just completely throwing budget down the drain and getting nothing for it.

[00:40:50] **Bhav:** Well, you have my utmost respect. Honestly in the CRO experimentation, we use terms like confounding variables which are factors outside of your control that affect the experiment. I can't, I like literally off the top of my head, I can see, I think I can think of a billion factors that SEOs have to deal with. There's Google changing algorithms, there's competitive bidding, there's your own PPC campaigns, like down-bidding, up-bidding. There's so many changes. I just, I can't even fathom how you have, like, trying to prove ROI from an SEO perspective. So you have my utmost respect.

[00:41:25] **Dan:** One of those things, I know Bhav, you've got to jump off in a minute, but maybe just throw the bomb, the grenade in and see what happens. But one of those big changes is the search generative experience, right? And this is the generative AI that Google and other search engines are rolling out. So what the hell? What's that going to do to SEO and PPC? Like, where's that going?

[00:41:46] **Matt:** It's an interesting topic, which you could chat to any SEO about right now, and I guarantee everyone's answer is different. Since ChatGPT itself started kind of gaining a bit more mainstream knowledge and, you know, people using it more. There's been, is AI going to kill SEO, or, you know, is search generative experience going to change as well and, you know, a lot of it, who knows? Because the thing is, I think the way we need to think about it is, we'll always need some human aspect to marketing. Regardless, no machine can ever replicate common sense.

[00:42:26] **Matt:** And I know people might argue with me about that, but common sense plays the biggest role in SEO, like when I was hiring people, that was the first thing I looked out for, you know, wasn't how many years have you done it? Have you got a degree in X, Y, Z? Have you actually got common sense? Because if you have, you're halfway there.

[00:42:43] **Bhav:** I mean, I would argue that for most humans, common sense is probably the easiest thing to replace because so many of us like it.

[00:42:51] **Matt:** It is, it's always a nice little test to try and figure out good ways to get them to prove they've got common sense. But yeah, I don't personally think it's going to affect things too much. I think it's just another change that we'll have to deal with, you know two or three years ago whenever GA4 was announced and a few people use, you know the beta and they were demoing it, but then when they announced, okay, we're going to sunset Universal Analytics you may as well have just said we're just going to shut down any reporting and you're never going to see anything again because it was the end of the world.

[00:43:28] **Matt:** And while GA4 is questionable at times you know, again, it's one of them, you have to learn and adapt to it. It's only the same as looking at UA when you first started in your career, depending if how old you actually are, but you know, it's one of them, you're always going to have to adapt and learn, but you're always going to need someone to help make sense of it at the end of the day and yeah, AI is going to change how search works but we just adapt to that because there'll be new ways to report on it and there'll be new ways to

figure out how can I hack into the AI to make it love my website more than this competitor's website?

[00:44:07] **Matt:** It's the same thing we've done since day one of SEO and it's just a new technique. It used to be buy as many links as you can afford in a budget, and you will show top if you've got the most. Then that became, do this and your website will never be seen. You know, then everything just kept changing that way, then it was keyword spamming, or PBNs. Everything's always going to change, and whether this is just a downfall of me or not, I don't know. But I generally tend to try and not worry too much about these new things. Because everyone's going to have to learn it. We could see from GA4 itself, Google released the product and said, you've got a year until this is what you have to use, and then got a load of uproar and figured actually it's not fundamentally working, it's missing things that should just be there anyway.

[00:44:54] **Matt:** So they had to rework it. And it's going to be the same with any product that's released. So I think for me, it's. try and take the time to digest information on it, try and get as much information as you can on how it works, but then the same as anything else, test, run your own tests and see how it works.

[00:45:13] **Bhav:** I mean, this is all under the assumption that Google is the dominating search you know, way to search in the future. I'm too old to you know, maybe appreciate this, but I've seen so many tweets. You know, you mentioned the SEO communities active on, on Twitter. I somehow seem to be connected to loads of SEOs and there has been, I don't know, there's some wave of people talking about the fact that TikTok is the new search engine for, you know, young people and you know, and then is ChatGPT going to be the first go to place for information? So, I mean, I agree that I love the sentiment so much. I really think that it's not a case of, ah, everything's on fire. You know, the world is going to end for us SEOs, you know, it's going to be hey, let's adapt. And how do we adapt?

[00:45:54] **Bhav:** And it's only those people who are capable of adapting that are going to make it through. Because I, you know, I think there'll be a lot of people who are just so resistant to change. And of course, you know, we're going down a bit more of a philosophical discussion now about the future of roles. And, you know, I don't want to try and cover that in 30 seconds. But it is those of us who can adapt and embrace changes that will, you know, will be the ones that survive in the future.

[00:46:18] **Matt:** A hundred percent. You know, it's funny that you mentioned about TikTok being the new search engine. I've seen a few debates on LinkedIn this week alone about that, I usually try and stick out of them myself, publicly anyway. But again, is TikTok going to be the new search engine? Probably not. It's, yeah for young people because it's what they use and it's what they're used to. My niece hasn't got a phone and somehow knows about all the latest trends on TikTok and I'm like, how, like, this is more, you know, insightful than anything else. How are you accessing TikTok? And how do you know what this latest dance trend is or whatever it might be? But at the same time 10 years ago, people would have probably said YouTube is the new search engine. Is it? It is a search engine, it

[00:47:01] **Matt:** works.

[00:47:02] **Dan:** It's ebb and flow. And like you said, it's common sense about adapting to change and not getting stuck in the mud, I suppose, in one system. And we've already had the rise of apps and app store optimization as this kind of subdivision or a tangential part of SEO from a web perspective. I mean, people always say things like they kind of like make the extreme argument of like, what do we even need websites in the future when it's all generative and it's just a Google doc that could be crawled and why not begin to go down that path?

[00:47:26] **Dan:** But I suppose the phrase, the phrase is just, you know, we always overestimate the short term and underestimate the long term impact of these things.

[00:47:32] **Bhav:** Matt, as you know, I need to jump off, the trying to work a full time job and do podcasts is a nightmare with calendars, but it's been an absolute pleasure meeting you. Dan and Dara are going to take you into the, my favourite part of the podcast, which is a quick fire round. It's where we really get to know how you think and more specifically think on the spot. So I look forward to listening back to that.

[00:47:52] **Matt:** Pleasure, thanks Bhav.

[00:47:54] **Dan:** So Matt just as we edge towards the end of the episode, and I know Dara's got his questions lined up and ready to go, the quickfire ones ready to go. I just want one last question for you. So you started your own podcast, Freelancing Friends. Give us the pitch, tell people where they can find it and how they can engage with you if they wanted to learn more about what you're doing on that podcast.

[00:48:13] **Matt:** Perfect. So, Freelancing Friends itself was born out of, I'm going to say, loneliness and boredom this time last year. As a freelancer, you know, you kind of lose that track of having a team that you can just chat to, whether it's in person or on Slack or whatever, you know, instant messaging is used. So, I figured I'm probably not the only person who thought that.

[00:48:34] **Matt:** So I started a community. It's a Slack community called Freelancing Friends. I truly thought I'd probably get about 20 people that just felt a bit sorry for me and joined it. We're now pushing close to 300 members from all across the world. Essentially it's an online community for anyone working in digital marketing. That's from SEO to PR through to data and web development as well. Anyone who does any form of marketing is welcome. It's also completely free, but it's just a place where you can essentially just chat. You can ask questions based on specific services if needs be. You can pass over referrals, ask random questions, whatever comes to your mind.

[00:49:12] **Matt:** Or also just chat so you don't feel as lonely during the day and there is someone to, you know, have that water cooler talk with. The podcast is essentially an extension of that, just chatting with people in terms of advice on if you want to go freelance or how to build a business, how to maybe work with agencies as a freelancer. And yeah, you can head on over to freelancingfriends.co.uk to find out more about the community itself, the podcast is on there, but it's also on all your streaming platforms, Spotify, Apple Music, et cetera, as well.

Rapid Fire/Outro

[00:49:45] **Dara:** Amazing. And we'll include links in the, in the show notes for all of that as well. So before we let you go, Matt, we're just going to put you in the hot seat and ask you a few rapid fire questions. So you can answer these in terms of the tech SEO world, or you can go a bit broader and include data or all of digital marketing it's really up to you how broad or narrow you want to go. So the first question is what's the biggest challenge today that you think will be gone in five years time?

[00:50:13] **Matt:** Oh, that is a good question. Personally, I think it will be this, I don't even know how you'd explain it, but the general rush of a new thing comes out and everyone worries. So as we've mentioned, it was GA and now it's AI. I think once we get past this AI topic that we're currently on and we figure out how to adapt to that, people will really start to see, actually it's the same as anything, same as any industry. We will adapt, we'll overcome it, and I think it's this ultimately probably call it a fear, widespread panic that the industry is going

to go dead, SEO and marketing itself will never die, regardless of the tools. So for me, I think that's the thing in five years, people will finally realise that as long as I'm can adapt and stay on top of things, I'm good. I've got a job.

[00:51:02] **Dara:** I love your optimism. I'm really sceptical, I think that's never going to go away, but I hope, I hope you're right. So what will be the biggest challenge in the next five? So once that's all solved and no one has any fear of new technology anymore, what's going to be the biggest problem facing us?

[00:51:18] **Matt:** I think the biggest problem, especially from a tech SEO perspective is going to be what really sets you apart from competitors, you know, as technology has grown and Google's grown itself. If we use that as a search engine, for example. Yeah, we've got insights into, you know, what they're looking for, what the algorithms are doing, but eventually probably within the next five years, we've got that much technology now and that many experienced people, nine times out of 10, a website technically is going to be exactly the same. So what else are we going to do that's really going to set us apart and put us above there, for not just search engines, but customers ultimately.

[00:52:01] **Dara:** Okay, what's one myth that you'd really like to bust?

[00:52:04] **Matt:** Oh, a myth that I'd like to bust. I think the myth that I'd like to bust is that not all techie data people are the people that like to sit in a corner in the darkness. I think, you know, while a lot of the tech SEOs that I know and data people are probably quite introverted myself included with those type of extroverted introverts who generally, we're probably going to be a bit awkward but put us in the room of people that know what we're on about and we won't shut up, we will talk forever. So I think that is it, you know, it's one, tech SEOs and SEOs don't work for Google, that's probably the big myth. And the second would be, you know, we're actually really nice people, please talk to us, don't be scared of us.

[00:52:51] **Dara:** Next one's kind of, well I always say this, it's kind of similar, I think it is anyway. If you could wave a magic wand and make everybody know one thing, what would it be?

[00:53:02] **Matt:** Ooh, I think, I think it would actually be what my job is and not even just me generally, but what tech SEO or SEO means, because I think, you know, if people understood that everything would be much easier, we'd have that buy in from clients a lot quicker and a lot easier and you wouldn't be having the same conversation with your parents every christmas saying, no, I

don't work for Google. No, not YouTube no, I don't build websites either, but we're getting close

[00:53:34] **Dan:** I love that answer. That's incredible. And I yeah, I completely agree. I wish people knew what we did.

[00:53:40] **Dara:** Yeah, I think we we're stealing that answer definitely. Okay last one, could be the easiest one, it could be the hardest one. What do you like to do most to wind down?

[00:53:49] **Matt:** So, I don't know if you've ever seen in the background, but I've got a lot of guitars. So, play music, it was something that I did when I was a lot younger, as a teenager. I stopped doing it for a while for certain reasons and now I'm back into it again. So, started up a new band and just writing music at night. I like to record it as well and kind of produce it at home, so yeah, basically still sitting in front of a computer and being a bit nerdy all night, but musically.

[00:54:18] **Dara:** It is an impressive looking collection of guitars. Is there five? Four?

[00:54:22] **Matt:** So there are five guitars and one bass there. There's a few in the other room. And there's one that you can probably just about see on the wall, which is a one of one piece from there's a band in Sheffield that I love they're called Malevolence, people probably don't know them but the guitarist built that himself from a tree in his back garden and used it for a music video and to play Download Fest and he was selling it, so I bought it and it's now pride and place on my wall.

[00:54:52] **Dan:** It looks very reminiscent of how many skateboards I've got on the wall around me as well, mate. This is a, it's become a problem actually, beyond a hobby, it's become a problem. Have you got your music anywhere for people to find? Could we put a link in the show notes somewhere? I'm just thinking if someone Google searches Matt Jones, I'm not sure if they'll find you straight away.

[00:55:10] **Matt:** Well, yeah, a hundred percent because my parents thought let's give him, you know, let's give him a unique name. So there's currently nowhere, but we are currently working on our first EP. So although you can't find it now, if you do find me on LinkedIn, when it does come out, it will a hundred percent be on there and I will be annoying people for about three weeks straight trying to get Spotify listeners.

[00:55:30] **Dan:** Yeah, we'll put that in the show notes. Yeah amazing. We'll keep in touch, I look forward to that. Thank you, Matt.

[00:55:37] **Matt:** Thank you very much. No worries at all, appreciate your time guys.