SPI 261

SEO Self-Audit Checklist - An Interview with My Recent SEO Hire

April 12, 2017

Pat: Hey, have you ever watched a video and right in the beginning, they're in the middle of laughing, for whatever reason. Yeah. It's always really weird, right? What are you laughing about? I swear it's staged, just like this one.

Guys, thanks you so much for being here. This is session 261 of the Smart Passive Podcast. My name is Pat Flynn. You are awesome. Let's roll.

Announcer: Welcome to the Smart Passive Income Podcast where it's all about working hard now so you can sit back and reap the benefits later. And now, your host, he dreams about acting in a musical at least once a month, Pat Flynn.

Pat: Hey, thank you so much for joining me today in this session of the Smart Passive Income Podcast. I'm really excited and actually this is a very, very important episode. This is with somebody who I hired to help me with SEO or search engine optimization, which is a very important skill, but also a very difficult one to master, because it's always changing, right? The environment and Google and getting rankings and key words and all that stuff, what's working, what's not working anymore. It's always changing.

I recently came across some issues with my own site and so I hired this person. His name is Sam McRoberts from VuduMarketing.com, that's V-U-D-U marketing.com, and he ran an SEO audit for me and I was really excited, because the results that I got back, I mean literally pages of information, we put to good use and we're actually starting to see results already, which is really cool. I wanted to bring Sam on just to chat about SEO, to talk about some of the things I was working through, and also just give you a lot of information up front in terms of what should we be looking out for? What are some of the big mistakes that people are making who are building websites who wanna get ranked, and that's hopefully everybody.

Everybody listening to this, I hope you want higher rankings in Google because that's like the holy grail, right? We are getting free organic traffic from people who are very targeted and specific.

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And so if you can focus on SEO, which can get very complicated but we've sort of de-complicated it here for you, or made it a lot easier to consume, hopefully. But the interview went well, and I look forward to sharing it with you right now. So here we go. Sam McRoberts from VuduMarketing.com

What's up everybody. I'm so happy to welcome Sam McRoberts from VuduMarketing.com. That's V-U-D-U Marketing.com. Sam, welcome to the SPI Podcast. Thank you for being here.

Sam: Thanks for having me, Pat. Good to be here.

Pat: Yeah, absolutely. And I'm very thankful that you're taking time today because we've actually spent a little bit of time together before this call because I hired you to help me with an SEO audit. And I'm super thankful because the report that you gave me and my team was incredibly useful and we are actually putting into action a lot of the suggestions that you had to help increase the search engine rankings for the site and just make it more fine tuned, SEO wise. So we're getting traffic.

So first of all, I just want to say thank you for that.

Sam: Absolutely. That's my pleasure.

Pat: Before we get into SEO and what people listening can do to help increase their search engine rankings and get more organic traffic, I'd love for you to share a little bit about how you got into this. What was Sam McRoberts doing before helping people with SEO and then kind of lead us into where you're at today?

Sam: Yeah, it was a long, circuitous route. I started helping my Mom with an eBay business in the late '90s. So learned a little bit about writing good titles and descriptions and what passed for SEO at the time, which was really like stuff keywords on your website, get links from anywhere, any forum. Started building websites around the same time and then over time, that led into working at a small web design/SEO agency and into a bigger agency and then in house

and then on from there.

Just over the years, I'd get more and more into SEO and I found that playing that game of chess with Google, like what is it they want to see? Where do I think they're gonna be going? Why do I think they are looking at this thing? How can I get ahead of it? Was really, really enjoyable and intriguing, and just kinda spiraled down that rabbit hole.

Pat: That's crazy. I couldn't imagine that because much like social media, things are changing all of the time. How do you stay on top of what's happening? How do you know what's working or not?

Sam: Yeah, so I think a lesson you can learn from negotiation, is if you wanna have a good negotiation, understand the person on the other side of the table. Same thing goes with SEO. If you understand Google's core motivations, how they make money, how they plan to make more money in the future, you can understand really what SEO boils down to.

So like for any given query, someone's going to a search engine, they're typing in something. They're asking a question. And Google's in the business of giving them the best possible answer. So if you understand how Google decides what that best possible answer is, the rest is . . . I won't say easy, but easier.

Pat: Right. Right. So this may be a loaded follow up question, I think you know it's coming, but how do we know what Google wants to see?

Sam: Sure the easiest way . . . So let's say you wanna rank for "Passive Income." Go to Google and see what's showing up there. And by looking at the sites that are ranking on the top page, you have a really good idea of what type of content and what type of sites that Google thinks are relevant for that.

And then you can start using different tools to dig into the underlying metrics behind those businesses. And then along side that, Google is at least partially transparent about the types of

things they look at. They change a lot over time. They don't say everything, but they say enough to kinda nudge you in the right direction. And then there's tons of people in the SEO industry who are constantly running tests and tossing out useful information as they find it.

Pat: That's cool. So you sort of have an insider view along with your other SEO sort of colleagues in terms of experiments that are running, things that are working, things that aren't.

Sam: Exactly. And depending on the type of sites you're working on and the scale, if you have access to a multi-billion page site, you get to run experiments that very few people get to run and see when things really work and just how well, even if Google says it shouldn't work. Which is fun.

Pat: Awesome. I wanna walk people through the process that you did to help audit my site. So I knew that I had some improvements that could be made. You know, we made a lot of improvements in 2016 related to the design and the work flow and the sort of navigation through the site and whatnot. But, there was one thing that sort of stayed the same if not kinda went down as a result of that and that was the search engine rankings and also the organic traffic. That was obviously the opposite direction we wanted to go. So that's why my team and I discussed this and we wanted to hire somebody that got a great recommendation from Neil Patel for Sam McRoberts and Vudu Marketing here so I'm very happy to have been working with him and obviously like I said earlier, the reports were fantastic.

So we're putting things into place but I would love to know, what are the things that you do? What's that checklist you go through when, like for example, I hired you. What were the things that you were looking at and perhaps even along with that, what were some of the suggestions that you made so that I think people, if they hear this on the other end, they might be able to kind of follow along, and perhaps do a high level, sort of similar audit on their own?

Sam: Sure. So my first pass is to do a crawl of the site so I use an tool

called Screaming Frog. There are a bunch of different tools that can do this. Like you could do a basic crawl using something like Xenu, X-E-N-U. Or a more advanced and expensive crawl with something like DeepCrawl.

But Screaming Frog is my favorite. It's relatively inexpensive, it's like $150 for a one year license. But you can punch in a URL and it goes through, uses little piece of software, much like Google does, to comb through the whole site. Follows everything link to link, extracts data about the site and then pulls it into a tool that lets you basically slice down the site the same way that Google would. How many pages are on the site? Does it have good title tags? What do you the URLs look like? How do things connect together? Are pages loading quickly? And it helps you to find those gaps. So that's my first pass.

From there, it's using a ton of other tools to slice down into . . . There are three main areas really that impact where you rank, how well you do in terms of SEO. And those are on-page keywords-centric factors, so whether a keyword is used in your title tag or whether your content is well written and keyword focused. You have technical SEO elements so anything related to the code on your site and your server. How fast your pages are loading. If there's any sort of errors that Google might hit as it goes through your site, like broken links. And then the last piece of the puzzle is linking and social signals. So are people sharing your site? Are they talking about you on social media? Are they linking to you? Are you getting links from high profile sites, authoritative sites? Sites that are topically relevant for you, in the same industry? And those are the three main buckets of SEO. And so I have a lot of different tools and processes that dig deep into each of those three buckets.

Pat: Right. And I'm not gonna ask you to go through each of those in terms of what tools you use and I'm not expecting everybody who's listening to this to go out and start buying a bunch of tools 'cause I don't think that's something people need to do at least right away. But what I do want to understand is what are some of the most common mistakes that you're finding? I know you have a bunch of

clients and there's a lot of websites that you keep track of as well. What are some big common mistakes that people are making that would really sort of make an impact on their SEO?

Sam: Sure. One of the most common that I stumble across and one of the most easiest to fix if you have somebody technical available, is page load speed and along side it, mobile usability. So Google's putting a lot more emphasis into mobile and a huge factor in terms of mobile usability is just how fast a page is loading.

There's been tons of studies over the years on the impact of improving page load speed and it's effect on conversions and bounce rates. But it seems like Google's taking that really seriously. So if your page is loading and your site, or any specific page on the site is loading in more than say two to three seconds at this point, it's slow and Google's almost certainly demoting you. Like actively for other sites that load faster.

So that's one typically easy piece of low-hanging fruit and fixing it can be as simple as installing the right WordPress plug-in and getting it configured.

Pat: Are there any WordPress plug-ins that you'd recommend? I'd be hesitant to say, "Hey guys, just go and download this plug in." 'Cause it's obviously dependent on a number of other things, especially with WordPress. It's the "What version do you have?" And then obviously, "What themes are on it? And what other plug-ins are on there kind of messing with everything?"

A lot of times I found it could be just one or two plug-ins that just ruin the whole thing because it just slows down everything depending on how it loads versus everything else. And so I guess what would be the best way to, I guess you had mentioned just work with a developer, somebody on your team hopefully who knows how to do that. If somebody doesn't know how to do that though, what would you suggest they do?

Sam: So the first pass is to figure out what your page load speed actually

is. And there are a lot of different ways to do it but they each have different pros and cons. So I would say your first pass would be to look in your own Google analytics data if you have it. And under the behavior section, there's a page speed timing tab. And it'll show you on average how long it's taking for your pages to load. So if you plug in there and it's slow, you know you have some sort of issue but not necessarily what.

If you're using WordPress, one of the most common plug-ins is probably W3 Total Cache. It's relatively easy to set up. There are a lot of guides out there and it will at least get you a good chunk of the way there for some of the more basic issues. There are a couple others like WPMU DEV. They have a plug-in called Hummingbird and another one called WP Smush that also helps speed things up.

Usually it boils down to images. Like are you loading a lot of really large images and a lot of images per page? And are you pulling in a lot of JavaScript files. So if you have like ten different analytic software and tracking things on your site, it's absolutely slowing you down. There's no way to avoid it when you're doing lots and lots of external calls like that.

Pat: Yeah, yeah. And then the other thing you mentioned, mobile. I know that there was recently an announcement or some sort of new algorithm change related to mobile, I think. If you could explain what that was a little bit more in detail, and correct me if I'm wrong, it just basically means that, "Hey if your site isn't mobile responsive, you're getting de-ranked." Not de-ranked, but you're just losing SEO value.

Sam: Yeah. So there's been a few. Over the last, I'd say two years, Google's had at least three separate updates where they've dialed up the importance of mobile speed and usability. But I believe the most recent, I think it hit recently or it's coming out shortly, is a penalization for sites that do takeover pop-ups on mobile. So if you have a full page pop-up that covers up all of your content before somebody can get to that, Google is supposedly actively penalizing that. Although I've heard hit and miss reports on whether that's happening or not.

Pat: I see. Okay cool. So page load time, important. Obviously mobile responsiveness and most themes that, maybe not most, but the more current themes that you can get access to. For example, on WordPress through sites like StudioPress and whatnot. And even Lead Pages and tools like that, they're usually coming with versions at all have mobile responsiveness or mobile versions which is great.

In terms of tools though, I do want to talk about tools. You had mentioned one already, which I think most people have or have access to, which is Google Analytics. That's going to give you some good insights on kind of how things are running on your website and where traffic's coming from and whatnot. But I also know that if I were going to try and check to see which keywords I'm ranking for and some more information about that, and sort of click through rates for those keywords, you know, Google Analytics isn't actually the right tool for that. There's another tool that's still free to use and that's Google Console, which used to be called Google Webmaster Tools. Is this a tool that you would say is sort of a prerequisite for having a website or mandatory? Google Console, that is.

Sam: Yeah. Absolutely. Google Search Console, getting that set up, it provides you with a lot of technical data and not just the keywords and click through rate but it'll tell you if Google's running into crawlers on your site. It'll give you some insight into typical page load speed and how much bandwidth Google is willing to spend on your site over a given period. There's data in there on whether or not Google's seen any sort of spamy signals coming into your site, if they think you've been hit with malware. There's a ton. They have data in there on who's linking to you, which domains, which pages. So I'd say it's an excellent resource.

Depending on the site, a lot of people don't configure it correctly so if you have multiple sub-domains on your site, so www. SmartPassiveIncome or courses.SmartPassiveIncome, each of those has to be claimed separately inside a search console. And there's there's a difference also between HTTP or HTTPS. And so if you have different versions, you also have to claim those. And you'll see different slices of data under each different piece.

Pat: Got it. Yeah. And so if I'm in Google Search Consol and there's a lot here. It's very overwhelming I think especially for those who are just starting out. Where would I go to get the best information? Ah sure, obviously I'd set it up and give it time to sort of collect this data. Where would you suggest one go in here and what kinds of things can they pull out from this?

I think the most useful thing for me would be search analytics and so I can go in, for example, and enable position for a lot of the keywords and I can see I'm getting a lot of clicks for my name and the title of my website. But then there's one here, affiliate marketing and that's a great term. But I also see that even though I'm getting 2,400 clicks per month, I'm at a position of 7.7 which is quite far down the results page.

But that gives me a huge indicator if, "Wow, if I can improve the position of this particular keyword, then I can get way more clicks because this one is getting more clicks than many other of the sort of non-branded keywords." So that's how I use this tool, or one way that I use this tool. Are there any other things that people can do to gain some good insight on sort of what actions to take next from here beyond the obvious like, "Here's a warning" or a crawl error?

Sam: Yeah, actually. So that's a really good use. Going in there and looking for those details. So the difference between how many people are searching and how many people clicking. So if you find something where you're barely on page two and it's getting a ton of impressions but not a lot of clicks, that would absolutely be a spot to dig into.

Inside the search analytics report, you can also dig into Pages. Which is also really useful. So you can see "Oh hey, it looks like five or ten of my pages are driving 90 percent of my traffic. What can I do to focus on just those five or ten pages? Could I link to them better internally? Could I get more links for those pages externally?" That's a really good place to start and again, some low-hanging fruit. Just inside this one report though, you could slice down pretty deep. You can get device data, you can get country data, you can

see web search versus image search versus video search. And I think you could spend a tremendous amount of time in that one report. I would say the next most important one to dig into is crawl errors.

Pat: Crawl errors you said, right?

Sam: Yup. Left-hand side, there's a crawl menu and right under that, crawl errors.

Pat: Got it.

Sam: So this'll tell you there's different types of errors. A server error is you know, the server wouldn't load. The page wouldn't even come up. There's soft 404's so like the page shows up but that actual content on the page is the same thing you'd see on an actual broken page. And then not found is probably the most common bucket of errors and basically from somewhere, Google arrived at a page on your site that doesn't actually exist.

In this case, for not found-ers, a lot of times people will mis-link to you externally, mention your site, get a spelling . . . Get one letter wrong in the link they used. And so there's potentially hundreds or even thousands of links pointing at your site to dead pages. So going through here and setting up redirects for those broken pages can sometimes be a really big win.

Pat: Got it. Okay, that's great. That's super handy. Thank you for that. So you talked about three sort of different categories that you look at on one of the first passes. On page keyword related things, for example, having keywords in the title tag and also having it be focused within the content itself obviously creating great valuable, quality content there too.

Then code and server related things, we talked about this already. No mobile, page load speeds, and whatnot, and errors as you just mentioned. You just shared a great way to find them using Google Search Console. And then linking and social. This is another one I

want to talk about. Especially social. What's our goal here for these posts related to social? Is it really that much of a factor to have people Tweet our posts and share them on Facebook? Obviously there are ways to encourage that but does this mean that we have to display that number on our particular page? I'm trying to understand more about what kinda Google's looking for here related to social.

Sam: Yeah. So this is probably one of the most hotly debated subsets in SEO is, does social play a role and if so, what? And whether it's just correlation or causation. So Google has unequal amount of data across different platforms. They're able to get say maybe more data from Twitter than they are from Facebook. They have some data from their own platform, Google Plus, which I don't think anyone actually uses. And then there's other social data sources popping up all the time. So Google has an unequal amount of information across the different platforms.

But I think inasmuch as they're able to get it, they would be looking for engagement related signals and influencer related signals. "Hey this person, like I know who this entity is. They have this site, it links to it from their Twitter bio. I know that they're consistently talking about this subject, they have a million followers." If they mention something, that should probably have some weight versus random person in random country with no followers mention something that maybe shouldn't have any weight.

So I think they're probably using some version of Page Rank just understanding who's an influencer, who's authoritative, who isn't and then who's mentioning what and trying to tie that together to some degree. But how much of a ranking factor? It's hard to say. I think a lot of it also come from the fact that if you get a lot of social play, you're also likely to get a lot of mentions in blogs, links, that sort of thing.

Pat: Ah, okay. So it's like a long tail kind of effect of the social aspect.

Sam: Exactly. And of course, Google's looking at other signals so like if

somebody does a search, what they click through in the search results tells Google a lot. So if somebody has seen you on social or follows you on social, and then does a search and sees you there and clicks, it's another signal.

Pat: So they actually pay attention to the words that people are typing in versus where they're landing. That didn't used to be as important, sort of relevant. I know that that's been sort of thing at least over the past number of years has become more important. Even in terms of sites that are linking to you, either you're gonna get more benefit from a site that's related to your site versus sort of a random one.

And I think that's smart. I think that makes complete sense. And I remember back in the day, I used to kind of do my sort of effort to gain Google and just sort of pick up and buy their sites that were random and then link them to my websites and stuff. And you know, that worked for a while but obviously, Google's making changes to stop that.

Sam: Yeah and in some cases, that can still work but only where that sort of acquisition and redirect serves the user. So if you buy a site that's really closely related to you and you redirect the content to content on your site that is really closely related to that original content, from Google's perspective, you just did their searchers a favor. You helped them to find something useful that's a close match to what they were looking for. But if you'd focus on podcasts and business and you buy an old Viagra site and redirect that, you're just asking for trouble.

Pat: Are there any other tools that are helpful for somebody who's at the beginning phases or maybe they've had their business for a while, but they just haven't really taken SEO seriously? Are there any even free tools that one can use to sort of dive into what's going on even more?

Sam: Yeah. So you can get a fair amount of data for free out of a tool like SEMrush. You can get data on who's advertising around keywords, how many keywords a specific site ranks for, and there's a lot of that

data that you can at least see the top level data for free. If you want more detailed data, they make you pay. But if you're just trying to look at a few different competitors or your own site and get some insight to what you're ranking for or not, that's a good first pass.

You can also get some good data for free out of Moz. They've got a tool called Open Site Explorer that will show you how many people are linking to your site, what they consider the trust and authority level of your site is.

Pat: Nice.

Sam: Yeah, there are a bunch for like keyword research? There's a site called Answer The Public and that looks at basically, you pump in a keyword and it gives you all the questions that people are asking that surround that keyword based on just search query data. So you type in "business" and it may pull up something like "How do I start a business? Which businesses are the best to start? Where do I learn about starting a business?" Like all these questions that people might ask. And that can help your-

Pat: Whoa. I'm on there now. This is awesome. I never heard of this.

Sam: And it can help you to write amazing content. 'Cause the content that answers the most number of closely related questions often wins. Especially if you have a good foundation of links and authority. So like for you. Your site is very authoritative. If you were to pick something that's closely related to what you typically cover, use that tool and find a list of questions that are all tightly related and then write an epic piece of content that answers all of those questions. Boom. I would expect to see you at the top of the first page quickly for all of those questions.

Pat: Wow, this is really cool. First of all, the home page is a little scary 'cause there's like a dude on there who's kinda looking around randomly. Anyway, then I typed in passive income and I get the "Who, what, where, why, are, how" kinda questions and they're just all listed here for me. And if I'm not addressing these things

that are relevant, some of them are not relevant to the kind of passive income that I talk about specifically but there are many here that are. And I think it would be obvious like if I want to serve an audience that was looking at these questions and trying to find answers, it's like . . . I should be creating content about this stuff.

Sam: Totally.

Pat: Yeah. That's awesome. Thank you for that tip. So that is AnswerThePublic.com. It actually defaults in UK, at least it did for me. And then you can switch it to U.S. or wherever you at. So that's sweet. AnswerThePublic.com. Thanks for that tip.

Another question to ask you, this is related to some posts that I've been coming out with lately, those of you listening, you might not realize this but one every other month, I republish a post from my deep archive. Meaning from 2008 to 2010. There's some great content that's been written in the past that's just is very difficult to surface and so we decided to sort of republish these things and update them of course. But then, what that does . . . It does a couple things. It obviously updates that content so it's more up to date but it also adds a new sort of publishing date for search engines to see. So I'm curious. I'd love to hear from you if that actually is helpful for not only resurfacing those posts for my users but also for Google. I've seen some people say that sometimes all you'd have to do is just switch the date that an article was posted and then it would immediately sort of have a lot more value to SEO in Google because Google wants to show sort of the latest or most relevant thing. Is that true?

Sam: Yes. So it can work. Whether just changing the date can have an impact is hit and miss. There's a portion of Google's algorithm called QDF. Query Deserves Freshness. And depending on the query, Google decides, "Hey, is somebody who's searching for this phrase typically looking for brand new content or do they most often go to and click on older content?" And if it's a slice where people consistently are looking for really fresh information . . .

Like if you go search Donald Trump. You're gonna want whatever the latest news is and Google knows that. And so they changed the ranking stature to reflect that. So if you're content is about something that changes often and people are looking for fresh content, then yeah. Just changing the date can potentially give you a boost. But you're likely to see a much better boost by updating it and enriching the content with newer information.

Pat: Yeah and speaking of that, that's the thing I've been noticing a lot of people doing. I think Moz talked about this as well and that is sort of doing your own content on it. I mean we're talking about SEO auditing a little bit here but in terms of a content audit, we've talked about this on the podcast before, I had a guy come on, his name's Todd Tresidder in episode 200 and he came on to talk about how he actually deleted and redirected a third of his content from his past to newer stuff that he had and was able to triple his traffic. And that's because his site became more tight, became more relevant. There was a lot of stuff in the past that he wrote about that just wasn't relevant anymore and kind of of removed that or redirected it or updated those older posts. Is that a practice that's a good thing to do? And if so, how often would you recommend somebody doing that? And do you have any specific tips related to that?

Sam: Absolutely. I think that's really valuable. Especially over time, sites kinda can grow out of control. Go from ten pages to a hundred to a thousand to ten thousand and you have all of this content and Google's trying to understand what on your site is most relevant. So if you know that you have a smaller number of pages that are your most important pages, there's no sense in wasting a lot of internal links and authority on some of that other stuff.

So doing a content audit and deciding should I keep this as is, should I combine it with something else? Should I just delete it? Is it not worth keeping around or should I enhance it? Can I take this piece of content and make it richer? I think that process is really, really valuable. I mean you can double, triple, quadruple your traffic just by cleaning out some of the mess.

I recommend doing that, if you're a bigger site, I'd do it twice a year. A smaller site, once a year or once every two years. But using something like Google Analytics, Google Search Console, you can see which of your content which is performing best and then which isn't. And if you have content that's performs well and then content that doesn't perform well, that's similar, like very similar in topic, redirect the content that's not performing well to the content that is.

Pat: Are there any . . . Okay first of all, that's fantastic. Sort of confirms and validates what I was taught and what we're doing. In terms of redirecting, I think that word scares a lot of people. They don't know how to do that. What's the easy, layman's term way on well, doing what you just said? How would one actually go about doing that or is that something you'd recommend actually having someone come on board to do for you?

Sam: So redirects are pretty simple. Again, if you're in WordPress, which is what, 20 or 25 percent of all sites are, there's a post called Quick Page Post Redirect, sorry, a plug-in. And literally you copy and paste a URL into two fields. I want this URL in this field to go to this URL in this field. And hit enter and you're done. So moving one page to another is super simple inside of WordPress.

Pat: Oh, that's sweet. I didn't know about ... What was that plug-in called again?

Sam: Quick Page Post Redirect.

Pat: Page, okay. Got it.

Sam: Yeah, depending on your platform though, if you're not on WordPress, if you're on something more complex like lets say you have a site built on dot net, it's much more complicated and you're gonna wanna pull in somebody technical to do it. Because it requires coding and regex and other unpleasant stuff.

Pat: Like htaccess and all that stuff?

Sam: Yeah. So dot net doesn't even run an htaccess file. You have to go

in and set up a sloppy rewrite filter.

Pat: I don't know what language you're speaking but . . .

Sam: Yeah. Exactly.

Pat: Yeah okay. Way in over my head but okay. So WordPress, yeah most of my listeners are on WordPress. Many of them are not and definitely a few are unsure about something and it's not sort of push button easy, I would always recommend getting somebody else who knows what they're doing involved 'cause sometimes it's just one punctuation that can really screw things up unfortunately in this world. So cool. That's super helpful.

Now going back to the audit that you performed for me, I would love for you to share with everybody what were some of my biggest mistakes? What were some of the big things that you shared with myself and my team that we could do to improve the ranking on the site? If you remember.

Sam: Totally. So one of the things that stood out was page load speed. So looking at the site, if you don't mind me sharing specifics.

Pat: Do it. Do it. This is we're all about being authentic here so have at it.

Sam: All right. So looking at your Google's Analytic data, your average total page load time was almost 13 seconds. So even though the page visually is loading fairly fast for a user, there are things on the backend that were causing it to really drag out. And so looking at various different tools, like some of them showed your page load speed as pretty fast, but when your own analytics data is telling you that it's slow, it's almost certainly slow and then it's just digging to the bottom of what is causing the slowness. So that was one that stood out.

Another for you was crawlers. So you didn't have a huge number but they've been ramping up over time. And when Google hits a crawl error on a site, basically they're saying, "Whoops, this page isn't here. So I'm gonna leave this site and come back later." And if

you have a lot of those, Google thinks, "Well wow. This site has a lot of errors. Maybe it's not such a user friendly place." And so making sure that . . .

Pat: Oh that's not good.

Sam: Yeah, exactly, right?

Pat: It's a friendly place. Come on. Stick around.

Sam: And so that was another one. You didn't have too many as a percentage of your overall site, but enough that Google's like, "All right. I'm hitting a fair number of errors here. Maybe this isn't so good."

Pat: Okay, okay. Anything else?

Sam: Those were a couple that stood out. Let's see. I'm scrolling through the audit right now looking at stuff. URL redirects so you had a handful of temporary redirects that needed to be fixed. There were quite a few 301 redirects that were found by crawling your site.

So whenever you change a URL, ideally if you can, you should go back through and update the internal links on your site to point to the final location. 'Cause the more hops Google has to go through, if Google crawls through your site, lands on a page and says, "Oh I'm gonna follow this link." And it's like, "Oh that link just went through a redirect and it went through another redirect. Oh and it just went through a third redirect." The more redirects Google goes through, they shave off a little bit of value at each hop. And so making sure that you update your internal linking can also help you to preserve a lot of that internal link value.

Pat: Nice. You know, I'm not making excuses here. This is just what happens when you've been blogging for eight years and you're kinda just are taking it as you go. It becomes this Frankenstein thing and we're at a point now where eight years later, we're starting to get really serious about little details here and well, the page load time is not a little detail but you know, these kinds of things are

really important.

So I would encourage everybody to, no matter what level your at, hopefully sooner than later, do similar things. Whether you hire somebody like Sam for an SEO audit or you kinda check on these things yourself or have somebody come on and maybe you do something for them to have them do something for you. You know, pro bono. Whatever it is. I think your website is where people come and where conversions happen and where sales happen. You wanna make sure things are working and things are good and your optimized so I would encourage everybody to get started sooner than later on this. Obviously you can check out Sam at VuduMarketing.com. V-U-D-U Marketing.com. Really good experience working with him.

So anything else stand out Sam? Any other common mistakes that people make or advice that you have for people who are just winging it and trying to now just get serious about their SEO and trying to rank for things?

Sam: Yeah. I would say one other thing that could be very impactful and that doesn't usually get considered is how you set up your site architecture. It's like what you choose to put in your nav or in your footer, how you're connecting pages across your site, that determines how links and value flow through your site and I like to use a farming analogy. If you have a big plot of land and lots of crops, it's really important to make sure that the water is getting to all the right places so you don't have dead spots.

But it's also really good to make sure you're not accidentally wasting water on an unused field or running down some random ditch. And so making sure that you've laid out all of those roads and connected things together in an efficient way can help the site to rank a lot better. And where people tend to get into trouble here, if you look at a lot of different sites online, you see pretty consistent bad behavior in internal linking.

You'll see a top navigation with dozens or sometimes hundreds of links. You click on it and there's drop down and there's 50

other choices, and you'll see a footer with dozens and dozens of links, a lot of them going to pages that just aren't super important. And that's the equivalent of just spraying your irrigation water everywhere. And if you tighten it up and you are very selective in what you include in your navigation and which pages you connect to other pages, it can have a tremendous impact on the overall ability for the site and those key pages to rank well.

Pat: Nice, that sounds great. And so how can one determine whether or not a page is important for them to have water going to versus not?

Sam: For a lot of people, it's a gut check. You know which content you've put those most time and effort into and the answer is questions the best. But you can also use data so if you have an existing site, a number of pages, look inside Google Analytics or Google Search Consol and pick say the five to fifteen most important pages. The pages that get the most traffic or the most impressions. And then go through your site and make sure those are the pages that are in the main navigation. Those are the pages that you're cross linking to on a regular basis.

And at the same time, if there's anything that's not in that list that you look at and think, "Wow. Would I really want somebody to land on that page from a search?" If the answer is no, don't link to it.

Pat: Nice. You make it sound so simple, Sam. I think one step at a time is another important asset to this. So pick up some of those tools, research, get in there, definitely get involved with Google Search Consol. It's definitely something worth getting into and yeah. Just stay mindful and keep going.

So Sam, thank you so much for coming on today and sharing your wisdom with us and also being honest about the approach for SEO. Obviously there's thousands of people talking about SEO and everybody's has a different way of going about it. It's obvious that you're in it for the user and to please Google too. So I want to thank you again for your time.

Sam: Absolutely. It's been my pleasure.

Pat: So beyond VuduMarketing, V-U-D-U Marketing.com, is there anywhere else people can find you, perhaps connect with you on say Twitter?

Sam: Yeah. Twitter Sams underscore Antics. Picked that back when Twitter launched and I never bothered to change it.

Pat: You don't have to justify it.

Sam: Yeah. So I respond pretty quick on Twitter. You can ping me through my website. I also have another site ScrewTheZoo.com. I wrote a book on a whim a couple years back. I don't blog there too often anymore but again, if you ping me there, I'll answer.

Pat: Awesome. Sam, thank you so much. We appreciate you and all the best.

Sam: Thanks Pat. Cheers.

Pat: All right, thank you so much for joining me today. Sam, I know you listen to the show every once in a while. I appreciate you coming in and sharing your advice with everybody. And yes, SEO changes all the time but a lot of the things that Sam mentioned are gonna be very foundational. That's where Google is going. They want to provide the best results for people. And a lot of these things that used to be done to optimize search engine optimization, you don't wanna do them anymore because they are not where things are headed which is value, quality, uniqueness, relevancy, those kinds of things.

So if you wanna check out Sam and see what else he's up to and even check out his services, you can go to VuduMarketing.com. That's V-U-D-U Marketing.com. You can also check out the links and everything else mentioned here in this episode in the show notes at SmartPassiveIncome.com/session261.

Now really quick before you go, I wanna mention and thank today's sponsor which is Edgar. Edgar is a social media scheduling tool that I use to automate and build a library of messages that I could

send out to my audience that gets seen much more. And that's what social media is all about, right? Being social. And how can you be social if you're not being found anymore? I mean, social media reach is definitely plummeting and Edgar is a tool that was built specifically to address this issue and they're just amazing. Laura, the CEO and founder, she and I are good friends and I'm happy to feature her and her product here on the show.

And what's really cool is she's offering an amazing deal just for SPI listeners. So you could get a two week free trial of Edgar. I continued to use it myself both on Twitter and on Facebook. You can also connect a number of other social media accounts to it too. You can connect to your Facebook groups to start conversations and have it all be automated. It's awesome. And yes, there are concerns related to automation of social media. But this is an amazing tool because it doesn't make it feel like you're not there anymore. It allows you to start those conversations. It allows you to get more traffic to your website without actually just having it be like a plug-in that puts up every single blog post that you come out with.

No. You're actually writing unique stuff but a lot of times things you send out don't get seen as much as they should be. So this tool helps you address that problem. And so Laura and the team at MeetEdgar.com/SPI are offering a two week free trial. And that's no credit card required. You don't have to enter billing information upfront and then have it auto-bill you. It's not like that.

And it's very easy to set up too. All you have to do is go to MeetEdgar.com/SPI once again, that's MeetEdgar.com/SPI. Fill out your info there and you'll be all set.

Thanks, I appreciate you and I look forward to serving you next week when I invite an author of a book I recently read that has to do with building habit forming products. So imagine you building a product that just internally, the user has to keep using it. What would that mean for a membership site, or a piece of software, or another product that you're creating? It's a lot of value in that episode.

I look forward to sharing it with you next week. So if you haven't yet,

please subscribe to the show and again, make sure to check out MeetEdgar.com/SPI. I appreciate you. Til next week, keep rockin' it. Love you guys. Take care.

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