

Interview with Aaron Wall about the Blogger's Guide to SEO

This exclusive interview is in reference to recently published Slovak translation (<http://www.seochat.sk/seo-pre-blog/>) of The Blogger's Guide to SEO with one of the authors – Aaron Wall.

Aaron, thank you so much for taking time to answer the questions. Let's start from the top of the article. The headline of the Bloggers SEO Guide says "by Aaron & Giovanna Wall", could you tell us how much work is yours how much Giovanna's? :)

Giovanna (<http://www.heygio.com/>) came up with the idea and put the finishing touches on it. I did the grunt work in the middle.

Whose idea was to publish such a guide and how long have you been working on a comprehensive guide like that?

Well it actually stemmed from a blogging conference we went to. I put together a powerpoint presentation for the Blog World Expo (<http://www.blogworldexpo.com/>), but since they had me speak on the pre-day, there were only like 30 people in the audience. It felt kinda wasteful, and so Giovanna thought it would be a good idea to expand it out into featured content online, especially since so much research work was already done.

We had been collecting related information for weeks (and have read blogs for years), but from when we decided to create it until launch it to about 3 days straight of work.

We can all agree with the first chapter that Google knows a lot about our blogs. But it's quite interesting that you didn't pay too much attention to explain the effect of backlinks. Should we understand that backlinks for blogs are not that much important as for regular websites?

Backlinks are every bit as important for blogs as they are for other sites. But with sites like blogs links represent relationships, and there are so many people writing that it is easy to forge a few relationships with the right people. Or, put another way, it is much easier for a leading blogger to build links than it is for the average commercial site. So if you write a compelling blog and develop friendships and business partnerships the links flow very easily...they are a side effect of people reading your site and talking about you.

You mentioned that the number and quality (in the sense of relevance) of RSS subscribers can be a trust factor for ranking a blog in Google. How important do you think this factor is? Have you experienced the effects of this factor on your own blog?

I do not think it is much of a direct effect yet, but it is a crucial indirect effect. Imagine that one guy has 5 readers and the next guy has 5,000. If they post about the same story the same day the first guy is going to have to be exceptionally remarkable, talented, or lucky to gain ownership over that story when the second guy has so much more market momentum.

Plus the guy with more readers probably has more inbound links, which means that people new to his field are also more likely to find his site at the top of the search results than the competition's less popular website.

A big part of the article is explaining the ways ho to follow the trends. Does a regular blogger really need to follow that much information (Buzz, Popular Lists, News, Trends, etc.) to be successful?

Realistically many of those sites end up being nothing but noise and recycled information to the average blogger. But when you are brand new to blogging and web publishing and you want to know what types of ideas spread (which emotional hooks work, what formatting works well, what headlines to use, etc.) then many of those sites can be good at helping you pick up the patterns needed to create a piece of work that is more likely to spread.

Knowledge is power. But clear communication skills, good formatting, and emotionally compelling writing are needed to make other people want to care enough to subscribe to your site and/or link at your site.

Do you think Google can be threatened by popular blogs, so it is less likely to penalize them? I am asking, because we all have seen manual devaluation in toolbar PageRank for very popular websites. Google just doesn't seem to pay attention to the popularity when it comes to penalization.

Well I think if you read this post (<http://www.gregboser.com/why-big-brands-should-spam-search-engines/>) by Greg Boser you will see that BMW was only banned for like a day or two after they got caught spamming. Bloggers may not have the brand strength of BMW, but if they have the ability to spread a meme to 30,000 readers (where half of them have blogs with 100 readers each) the potential risks from sewing the seeds of hate are significant.

Bloggers like spreading stories so the cascading effect can actually even be worse than 30,000 * 100. When I got sued a few years back, within 2 days thousands of bloggers were talking about me, nearly 100 people donated money to help pay my legal campaign, and I was talking to all kinds of people in the media, including the Wall Street Journal.

Other well known blog personalities like Brian Clark had their PageRank scores edited by Google, and after they complained their PageRank scores were quickly returned to normal (<http://www.copyblogger.com/no-really-thanks-google/>).

There is a paragraph about tags and categories. What do you think about tags, why don't you use them on your blog?

When I first started blogging back in 2003, tags were not used much. I did not know as much about SEO then as I do now. Also my blog grew far more popular than I was expecting it to. Because of those 3 things my site structure is far from ideal.

I think if tags replicate categories they are quite wasteful. But if tags are used to create mini-category pages for doing a special series that is important (but not important enough to get its own category) then using a few tags on those sorts of series make sense.

Controversy is one of the ways to be unique. Is there a level when a blog is too controversial? Or would be your suggestion to be as controversial as possible?

I think your strategy largely has to stem from your strengths and weaknesses. In the long run if you want to sell it typically helps to be more positive than negative and controversial

because people are attracted to things they want to believe in. If you create a community built around excessive negativity that will prevent it from growing into something you can extract direct profits from. If you read the post about why I closed Threadwatch (<http://www.threadwatch.org/node/15907>) one of the biggest reasons was that the negativity made it hard to want to keep building it up.

Some people do use controversy and negativity quite well to sell. Barry Ritholtz runs The Big Picture (<http://bigpicture.typepad.com/>), which is one of the most successful financial blogs on the web. Jason Calacanis funded one of the largest link farms on the web (<http://www.threadwatch.org/node/6312>), and yet he talked trash about the field of SEO to gain publicity for his new project.

At the end you're offering more great free information resources about SEO and more importantly, your paid services. There are several modules available in your training program, which one would you offer the most for internet marketers and why?

Well I think everyone is different. I have come across ideas that allowed me to turn a day of work into a \$60,000 a year revenue stream that could easily be grown or sold for a lot more. And I have wasted a lot of money on stuff that simply does not work.

The idea of my blog, SEO tools (<http://tools.seobook.com/>), & SEO training program (<http://training.seobook.com/>) was to do my best to try to give people a strong foundation such that they can really capitalize on good ideas without wasting a lot of time and energy on ineffective techniques. And then our exclusive SEO community (<http://community.seobook.com/>) helps answer any additional questions they may have.

As far as what module is the best, I put a lot of work into the Google module as I have tracked them for about 5 years now, and they are the kings of search. Also the site architecture and internal linking module offers a video and spreadsheet explaining how to align your keywords with your content, which is quite useful and I do not think there is anything similar publicly available at this point in time. Based on my experiences with domaining, I think that module is worth a lot too.

Someone could argue that there are some differences in marketing for other languages and different cultures, what makes your services/information international?

Well I view SEO as a subset of marketing. To do marketing well you need to know the market – that includes both the your topical community as well as the local marketplace.

Two other things that gave me great insights into how Google's algorithms are different overseas (<http://www.seobook.com/5-differences-between-google-com-international-google-search-results>) are reading their leaked documents for remote search quality raters (<http://www.seobook.com/full-text-googles-general-guidelines-remote-quality-raters-april-2007>) and searching while I was overseas.

Last question, if you have only 3 words to explain what the 2008 SEO is/will be about, what would those be?

Branding, nepotism, PR...and by PR I mean public relations (not PageRank).

In behalf of Slovak SEO geeks and SEOchat.sk readers, thank you so much for this interview.

Thank you for the interview. I hope your readers like it and find it useful. 😊