

SBTV E11 SEO – Nabil Freij guest 29:06

Dennis Zink: Consumers are bombarded by digital marketing messages daily. Business owners are aware that digital marketing is essential to their growth and survival. This show will explain digital marketing and the fundamentals of using SEO, which is better known as search engine optimization. Stay tuned for the answers on this episode of SCORE Business TV.

Dennis Zink: Welcome to SCORE Business TV sponsored by Wells Fargo. In this series, experts share their opinions with business owners and entrepreneurs on a variety of topics. Today's focus is digital marketing and search engine optimization, also known as SEO. My expert guest today is Nabil Freij.

Dennis Zink: In 1996, Nabil started and still owns GlobalVision, a translation software localization service. Nabil's a certified SCORE mentor and the author of Enabling Globalization. He's trilingual and holds a BS in electrical engineering from Northeastern University, and an MS from Brown University and on top of that, an MBA from Bryant University. Nabil, welcome to the show.

Nabil Freij: Thank you for having me, Dennis.

Dennis Zink: You're welcome. Nabil, what is digital marketing?

Nabil Freij: Well, even in this digital world, the principles that you and I learned in business school regarding marketing still apply. What digital marketing brought is a couple of very important nuances. One with the advent of the internet, there is a slew of new digital marketing channels that have been created since the '90s, and because they are digital, that enables marketers to keep track of data, analyze it, and that will enable them to optimize and streamline their marketing campaigns, so they can improve their return on investment.

Dennis Zink: Let me ask you about this. There's a lot of different channels. So, what channels are there?

Nabil Freij: Right. So, all these channels, basically, their role is to drive traffic to your website. For instance, organic traffic. This is when somebody goes on Google or any other search engine, enters in a set of keywords, key phrases, or even voice commands where they get a list of websites. When they click on it, they end up on that website. That's considered an organic traffic or organic search.

Nabil Freij: Another one is potentially direct traffic. If somebody comes and visits our website, for instance, at [manasota.score.org](http://manasota.score.org), just by typing that domain into a browser, that is considered direct traffic. That is extremely important. It basically is a function of brand building. Another one is a referral traffic. So, if you're browsing any website online and you run across a link and you click on that link and that takes you to another website, that's a referral. That's also extremely important for many reasons.

- Nabil Freij: There are additional marketing channels like social media, for instance, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn. Email channels. When you send out your email blast, typically they contain links that bring traffic back to your website. That is considered email traffic. As well as advertising traffic like pay-per-click. With all these different channels, companies can reach their target audience very effectively.
- Dennis Zink: Would an affiliate program be considered a channel?
- Nabil Freij: Yes, definitely. That's another way of reaching like Ebates, for instance, or Groupon or through Amazon or eBay.
- Dennis Zink: Yes. You mentioned a bunch of different channels. Is there one that's more important than the others?
- Nabil Freij: They're all very important. Probably the organic search, organic traffic is the most coveted because of the perception that people have about it, that it's free. What I tell my SCORE clients is that you got to think about your digital marketing strategy as a scalable engine of growth. That engine has multiple cylinders. So, the digital marketing channels each represent a different cylinder. The more cylinders you have in an engine, the more robust and the more powerful it would be. So, you want to try to implement as many of those channels as possible.
- Nabil Freij: When you get started as an entrepreneur or a small business owner, you can't obviously focus on all these channels at the same time. You have to pick and choose. What I tell the entrepreneur is look inwards, think about what your strengths are and pick the channel that suits your strength. So for instance, if you are an extrovert and you like to network and connect with people, perhaps social media is the optimal channel that you should pursue first. If, however, you are an introvert with a knack for writing, maybe a keyword driven digital content strategy that leads to organic traffic would be the ideal channel for you. What's even more important than picking a certain channel is to know what your USP is.
- Dennis Zink: Okay, so why is the ... explain what USP is and why is that important for digital marketing.
- Nabil Freij: So, USP is the unique selling proposition. The business model canvas and the lean canvas both talk about the value proposition, how every business should have a value proposition. I'd like to go further and say that value proposition or that selling proposition should be unique. When you have a unique selling proposition, you are basically raising your content over and above the white noise that's prevalent on cyberspace. For you to be able to on the first page of Google, you have to offer something unique that nobody else offers. It's extremely important for you to get on the first page of Google because that drives 99% of the organic traffic from Google to a website. So, for any

entrepreneur basically that is looking at driving traffic to their website, they need to make sure that they find something unique and articulate it well into their content.

Dennis Zink: I thought it was really interesting when you mentioned that if you're an introvert or an extrovert, I've never heard anything like that before, but you're absolutely right. I mean I do a lot of writing myself, but yet I'm definitely an extrovert, so I could blend the both combinations there.

Nabil Freij: You're the best of both worlds.

Dennis Zink: There you go. Are there other important elements to a successful digital marketing strategy?

Nabil Freij: Right. So, you could have a unique selling proposition, but if you don't have a target market that is interested in your unique selling proposition, you'll not get any traffic, you're not going to get any business. So, what you need to know is identify who your target market is. I like to call it the DTP. You need to define the target personas. So, who is your customer? When I say who is your customer, I don't really mean you should know them by name. You should know them by persona. Try to define who that target market is as best as you could. That target market typically is not just the purchaser, the person that buys your product, but it's also their influencers and the end users, the people that end up using the product.

Dennis Zink: You're referring to demographics and psychographics, correct?

Nabil Freij: Correct, Dennis.

Dennis Zink: Okay. By psychographics, for the benefit of our audience, I'm referring to the things that relate to a person's life, such as if they're a golfer, maybe they drink red wine on Thursdays or they like reading certain types of magazine like Food and Wine or Sports Illustrated that kind of thing.

Nabil Freij: Right. That's why social media channels are extremely important because they keep track of the habits of everybody.

Dennis Zink: Okay. So, let's get down to the meat of this topic, which is what is SEO? Why don't you give us a good definition on that and then tell us the ins and outs of it.

Nabil Freij: Okay. That's a good segue into getting into all the different digital marketing channels. A search engine optimization is basically modifying content that's online in order to present it in a better light, make it look more valuable in the eyes of search engines. So, marketers like to search engine optimize their web content, for instance, because by doing that, they're increasing the probability and the chance for that content to show up on the first page of Google. That's basically the most important thing. By getting it on the first page of Google, they

are standing a chance of getting 99% of organic traffic from Google to their website. When they get that traffic to their website, they could work on converting it into leads or into sales.

Dennis Zink: How does keyword strategies affect that process?

Nabil Freij: Right. So, keywords are extremely important in that process. I tell my SCORE clients, you have to make sure that the keywords become the DNA of your content. You have to build a list of the keywords that your defined target persona is using. If you have a unique selling proposition and if you know who the target market is, you could pretty much come up with a list of these keywords. Once you come up with a list of that keyword, then what you got to do is either modify your content or enable your content with these keywords so you stand a much better chance of being found online when people use these keywords in the searches.

Dennis Zink: Okay. So, give me an example. I understand there's a difference. There's keywords that are maybe one or two words and then there's three or more words and that's different, isn't it?

Nabil Freij: Correct. So for smaller businesses, it's very important for them to focus on what we call the long tail of the keywords. This is basically three or more words that are used in one keyword. The popular keywords are typically one or two words. Popular keywords are much more frequently used online than long tail keywords, so they drive a lot of traffic. However, they are very competitive. So if you're just getting started, if you just built a website, it's very hard for you to show up on the first page of Google using these popular keywords. It's better to focus on long tail keywords.

Nabil Freij: I tell my clients you should prefer to show up on the first page of Google two or three times a day rather than showing up all day long on the fifth or six or seven page of Google, because by showing up on the first page of Google, you can drive organic traffic to your website. I could give you an example if you like.

Dennis Zink: Yes, please.

Nabil Freij: For instance, let's say a business owner wants to search about a small business online. If they enter small business in a search engine, the first listing on the first page of Google that shows up is sba.gov. This is the small business administration. It's a multibillion dollar government organization. It's got a very high authority domain, and it also has small business in its name, which helps quite a bit. So rightly in the United States, if you do that search, it should show up first. However, if you refine your search even more by searching for instance for a small business mentoring, if you're seeking some mentoring help, then the score.org website, which is our national organization's website, will show up first on Google.

Nabil Freij: If I'm the business owner defines a search even further and searches for small business mentoring in Sarasota, suddenly the manasota.score.org website will show up ranking first on Google. The more refined your search is, the longer the keywords are, the more likely that you find the actual information that you're looking for.

Dennis Zink: So, it's a more relevant hit if it's your website and they're using long tail and they get to you for the keywords that you want to rank for, then it's going to be a more relevant potential client.

Nabil Freij: Exactly. Your goal should be driving relevant and important visitors to your website, not just any kind of traffic.

Dennis Zink: Can you explain a little bit about on-page optimization and off-page optimization?

Nabil Freij: Okay. So, on-page optimization is implementing the commonly accepted practices in the industry in order to make your content rank better on search engines. So for instance, you could go to your website content and identify the keywords that you want to use and use those keywords and any other pages or create new pages around them. Those keywords have to exist in the title of the page. They have to be embedded in headers. They got to be also in the body of the text. Also, it helps to have them in the meta tags and this is code that is embedded in the HTML of the pages and there are tools actually that help you do that. So you don't really need to know how to write HTML or code it.

Nabil Freij: For instance, meta description tags, you need to have the keyword in it. The title tag, the image alt tag for instance. If you follow all the standard practices, then what you've done is enabled your content so it is better ranked on Google. That is what's called on-page optimization.

Dennis Zink: That gets a little technical with HTML and that's hypertext markup language as I recall from my studies, it's confusing. I'm sure a lot of our audience may not have a clue of what we're really talking about, but if they can kind of hang in there and follow basically what we're covering here, I think they'll learn a lot. So, what about off-page optimization?

Nabil Freij: Right. So, off-page is the opposite of the coin. Here, what you have to do is influence content that you don't really have control over that belongs to somebody else. This is extremely important. Just to give you a little background. In the early and mid 90s when the early search engines emerged, basically the way they ranked pages is by looking at the meta data, the meta descriptions that is embedded in a code, which the content provider created that data.

Nabil Freij: Then Google came into the picture in the late 90s and they turned the industry upside down. They said, "Wait a second, we're not just going to go with the way you promote your own content. We're going to look at how other people

promote your content or other people refer to it." So, just like with scientific journals, you identify the journals with the highest authority, the ones that receive the most citations. Same thing, Google said, "Now we're going to look at how many websites are going to cite your website. The more higher authority websites that cite your website, the higher authority your website becomes." Here citation online is actually a back link.

Nabil Freij: So, what you want to do is you want to pursue aggressively going out and building back links back to your website because that's how you elevate the authority of your website. As you elevate the authority of your website, it's like a rising tide. It's going to lift all the ships and those ships are your web pages. So, it will raise the authority of all your webpages.

Dennis Zink: Is there any kind of hierarchy of authority like Google maybe the top one for argument's sake or maybe YouTube? Is there a number assignment to those or percentage or how does that work?

Nabil Freij: That's right. So, Google ranks pretty much all pages and Alexa as well. Amazon's Alexa rank all these pages and that ranking is actually published, so you could tell where your pages are ranked. Yeah. When Google came into the picture, they basically started to establish a pecking order of the different domains and different websites. By ranking all these websites, they could define and determine how to gauge the value of each website and how to assign an authority to it.

Dennis Zink: Okay. So for example, a local newspaper, would that have more authority than just somebody issuing a press release or printing something on their website?

Nabil Freij: Yes, definitely. So newspapers, periodicals like magazines, even local TV stations, they have websites that relate to their stations. Those are typically pretty high authority.

Dennis Zink: How about just even joining your chamber of commerce or something and they publish a directory and your name is in it, does that rank?

Nabil Freij: Right. So, that's another easy way, for instance, to gain a back link. If you join your local chamber of commerce, most of the time they will add a link back to your website. That will give you a decent back link to the website that adds value.

Dennis Zink: What about black hat optimization? What does that mean?

Nabil Freij: Okay. So, black hat is pursuing tactics or techniques that try to gimmick search engines or trick them into believing that your content either has higher value or is of higher authority. There are different ways of doing that. Search engines are getting wiser to these tactics, and they can identify when that happens. They

will typically penalize the site by lowering its authority and lowering the ranking that it achieves.

Dennis Zink: Way back when, when websites first came into vogue, people would put their words throughout the document and they'd use white on white so you didn't see them, but they were there and the search engines picked it up. Is that considered a negative or black hat technique?

Nabil Freij: Absolutely. Those tactics may be used to work in the 90s, they are definitely not working today.

Dennis Zink: Okay. So, what kind of SEO tools are out there for someone to know how well they're doing in their different marketing campaign?

Nabil Freij: Right. So, there's lot of really great tools right now in the industry and actually many of them are free. For instance, Google gives you Google Analytics, Google Search Console and the Webmaster Tools. I would recommend for any marketing professional to study those tools, learn how to use them and use the information that's on it because it's extremely relevant and valuable.

Nabil Freij: For instance, Google Analytics will tell you how many visitors you get every day, how long they stay on your content, what content they consume, which content they bounce off of for instance. You could monitor and see the progression of these visitors through your websites. You could see if they're converting or not. By converting means, are you capturing that lead? Are you capturing the sale? You could set up goals on Google Analytics and track them and monetize them to see if those campaigns that you are pursuing are generating enough returns on your investment.

Nabil Freij: On Google Search Console, they also tell you what keywords people are using to find your content, what content they're finding, where it's ranking on Google. So, you can analyze all that and determine ways to improve the optimization of your pages so you stand a better chance of ranking on the first page of Google. Google Webmaster Tools also give you a lot of tools that help you fix the technical aspect of your website, so you're not penalized for having broken code or broken pages.

Dennis Zink: This is all free?

Nabil Freij: That is all free. There are paid tools, obviously. You subscribed to them. It's under \$100 a month and they are extremely helpful as well, but I like to get my information from the horse's mouth. Google gets all the traffic. They keep track of all that data. I might as well get that data from them.

Dennis Zink: What would be some examples though of some of the paid tools that you could buy if you really wanted to spend a few bucks?

Nabil Freij: Okay. So, I use SEMrush. That's a very popular tool out there, cost about \$70 per month. There's a tool called Ahrefs. It started out as a tool to enable you to monitor what back links come to your website. There's keyword finder, which is called KWFinder and Moz also has some tools that are very useful.

Dennis Zink: So basically, it's confusing. So, should somebody do this on their own or should they hire an expert?

Nabil Freij: Right. So, it depends. I tell my SCORE clients, look at where you are in your business. If you got a lot of time on your hands and if you have the attitude and the aptitude to learn this stuff, you're the one with the vision to start the company. You're the one who is building that unique selling proposition. You're the one who knows who your target market is. You're the ideal person to sit down and try to create some of these channels.

Nabil Freij: As business picks up and as entrepreneurs and business owners start getting too busy with a lot of other functions, and I've been an entrepreneur and business owner for 22 years. A lot of times I try to wear more hats than I could wear, so I know what it's like. Things will start falling through the cracks particularly those strategic tasks such as marketing, such as content creation, such as back link building. When that happens, my recommendation is seek professionals and outsource the work.

Dennis Zink: Yeah. How do you know if you're getting a good provider? Because there is no real degree that I don't believe is an SEO degree. So, how do you know who to hire?

Nabil Freij: Yeah, it's very hard. What you have to do is do your due diligence. So, what I would do is I would go online and I would search for the companies that I am potentially considering hiring. I will look at their websites and I will analyze them. I will see, are they actually practicing what they're preaching? Is their website showing up on the first page of Google or not? If it isn't, it's unlikely that they could get your pages to show up on the first page of Google. So, that's the first thing that I would do.

Nabil Freij: Then I will talk to them and I will gauge the questions that they would ask me. If they indicate interest in trying to learn what my USP, my unique selling proposition is and what my DTP, my defined target personas are, then I know they're homing in on what's important to build those appropriate channels. If they're not asking these questions, then that's a big red flag.

Nabil Freij: Then the other thing that I will do is I will ask them, what is it that you're going to do for me? What kind of marketing channels are you going to build for me? I tell my SCORE clients, the companies that are not willing to build content or back links for you, they are not going to add value for the long term.

- Dennis Zink: So most people are not writers. Should they buy content from companies that create content? It's not really authentic, but I mean, can they do that? Does that work?
- Nabil Freij: You could hire a ghostwriter that will create content for you, but they'd have to be properly directed. So, that ghostwriter will have to have the set of keywords that you want them to use and the content. That's extremely important. That's why we talked about keywords early. You have to give them specific topics that your target audience is interested in reading about. So they have to write for your audience, not for just any audience. Then you have to review the content that they provide to you to make sure that it is fresh, that it is valid, that it is relevant and that is search engine optimized. If you do all that, then that content will be useful.
- Dennis Zink: What about length of content? What about number of pages of words or the depth that they go into and is more better than less? Is it better to have more articles and less articles and it should be on the same topic? Some of that, if you could answer.
- Nabil Freij: Yeah. So, content is king. The more content in my view, the better. You could break it down into multiple pages if needed. You want to have a significant amount of content on your landing pages. Researchers found out that you should have anywhere around 1,900 words, so just under 2,000 words if you want to stand a good chance of tracking on the first page of Google. So, content volume is extremely important and obviously the value, so you can't just fill it up with fluff. You've got to make sure that you have the appropriate value inside.
- Dennis Zink: So, you hire a search engine optimization firm to help you out and they help you with your keywords and they help you with the content and maybe they guide you through the maze of what you need to do. How do you know if they're doing a good job?
- Nabil Freij: In one word, metrics. So, you have to keep track of the metrics. We talked about the fact that digital marketing is about the digital channels and the data that you're capturing and you're tracking, you're analyzing. Ask those experts to give you reports on a monthly basis and analyze these reports and make sure that you connect them to your KPIs, your key performance indicators. By the way, SCORE mentors can do a really good job at helping you doing that. If those metrics end up improving your KPIs, if they end up improving the bottom line, then you will know that what you're doing with them is actually paying off. It will take time for that to happen. It's not going to happen overnight.
- Dennis Zink: Nabil, let's take an example of a client that might come to SCORE and says, "Look, I have a hair salon and I want to get more customers. I don't do any SEO. What should I do?" How would you answer that?

Nabil Freij: Okay. So, the first thing I do is look at their website. I would run a quick audit on it with the tools that I have, if I have access to Google Analytics and Search Console, I could get a lot of information about where they are ranking on Google, what pages are ranking and I could get a pretty good feeling of what should be done to take advantage of any low hanging fruit that may be existing where either on-page optimization can take place pretty quickly, so we could position that content in a better light with search engines.

Nabil Freij: So for instance, if you have a website and your content is showing up on the third or fourth page of Google, what can we do? Can we modify some of the popular keywords that you're using on most pages to long tail keywords and by doing so and search engine optimizing for these long tails, can we push that ranking from the third page of Google to the second and then to the first? What kind of back links can we add in order to elevate the authority of this website? I also look mechanically to see if there is any kind of technical issues impeding the website. Usually those would be in my recommendations to the client. After investigating all these recommendations, we try to put together a strategy to execute it.

Dennis Zink: What do you do if someone comes to you and calls your emails you and says, "I can get you on the top page of Google in a month"?

Nabil Freij: Yeah. That's typically deceiving. They may be able to get you on the first page of Google in a month, but it's most likely for irrelevant keywords or keywords that will not lead to any organic traffic to your website. Nothing will take a month when it comes to search engine optimization. It's going to take months, and if you want to do it right, you want to get the proper content and you want to get the proper audience.

Dennis Zink: In SCORE, you mentor clients that need help in this area, correct?

Nabil Freij: Yes.

Dennis Zink: We charge them how much?

Nabil Freij: Zero.

Dennis Zink: Can't beat that. Nabil, I want to thank you for being our guest today on SCORE Business TV. You've done a fantastic job explaining a very, very complicated topic search engine optimization.

Nabil Freij: My pleasure.

Dennis Zink: I'd like to thank our sponsor, Wells Fargo in addition to Nabil. Please tune in for our next episode. Until then, this is Dennis Zink. Thank you and have a great day.

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