

Interview With SEO Expert Aaron Wall

Chat Transcript

January 24, 2007

NOTES:

First, let me say that it was a GREAT chat. It was my first “big” chat, and despite a few bumps that I’ll be ironing out for future chats, I am *definitely* going to do this again.

Second, I highly recommend you take a look at Aaron Wall’s *SEO Book*. It answers just about any search engine optimization question you can ask (and a whole lot more). I bought a copy myself, which is the reason I asked him in for an interview! Here’s the link:

<http://www.jonathanleger.com/recommends/seo.php>

Aaron gives you a free 15 minute consultation with him when you call! That’s worth more than the cost of the book alone (he charges \$500 an hour for phone time).

Now, to the transcript!

Introduction to Aaron Wall

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: Ok guys, let's get started.

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: Thanks for coming Aaron. Very glad to have you here today.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Thanks for having me Jonathan

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: Why don't you start off by telling us a little about your background in SEO. What got you into it, how long have you been doing it, etc?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: I have been an SEO for about 4 years. I write a book and blog by the name of SEO Book.

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: I've read your book. It's really awesome.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: I got into SEO because I made a low quality rant site and wanted to rank it... I have since learned more about the web and am more into seeing how SEO fits in with other marketing techniques.

What are the basic steps for ranking in the big 3 search engines?

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: What are the basic steps for ranking in the big 3 search engines?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: I will describe them one at a time so people can see the differences between them.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: MSN tends to like fresh links and is not real good at scrubbing link quality. So lower quality links still work with them. Also MSN tends to be quite literal in nature. Like if I want to rank for cheddar cheese it helps to make it obvious that the page is focused on cheddar cheese.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Google is more focused on domain related authority and trust. The reason sites like Wikipedia rank so well are because they have lots of real content, many people link at it, and the site is at least a few years old.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Google is also more focused on semantics or word relationships.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: If I make it obvious that my page is about cheddar cheese and use that everywhere then Google may filter that page out for manipulation.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: So with Google it makes sense to use a lot more variation in what you are doing.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Use their keyword tool to research what they think your page is about.

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: The AdWords tool?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordSandbox>

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Google is also a lot better at scrubbing link quality (counting real links more), so if you focus on quality links and can get people to talk about you then you should rank well.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Yahoo! is somewhere in between Google and MSN... not as elegant as Google, but probably not as easy to manipulate as MSN.

How long should we expect it to take to get ranked in the big three search engines?

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: How long should we expect it to take to get ranked in the big three?

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: I can get indexed fast, but ranking seems to take a while.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Typically MSN days or weeks. Yahoo! weeks to months. Google months to a year.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: But if you have something that redefines your industry you can rank quickly in Google as well.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: I think the key with Google is to focus on link quality rather than quantity

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: and to satisfy real market demands

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: For example, my SEO for Firefox extension ranked in Google in like a couple weeks for "seo"

Is there any one element that is often overlooked or misunderstood by the average content publisher?

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: Is there any one element that is often overlooked or misunderstood by the average content publisher?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Well I think the biggest thing is that we create a formula and replicate it (or think in that way).

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Create some cheaper easy to create content that is monetized more aggressively, and then create some expensive high value content and get that content exposure. Use the authority gained from that to allow search engines to trust everything on your site more.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: So the key is not that there is any one right or wrong way.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Just mix it up. And don't be afraid to take risks and do new things.

Do the search engines still look at meta tags?

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: Do the search engines still look at meta tags?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Absolutely, but more importantly, so do people.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Often the meta description tag appears in the search results. If you have a small website and want to differentiate it from the competition you have the URL, the page title, and your snippet.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Since the meta description appears in the snippet so often it is worth making a high quality one. Put in a call to action and differentiate yourself there.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: A strong appealing page title and meta description can inspire many more clicks than a higher ranking page with bad title and description.

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: wow. The "general understanding" has always been that they don't matter now. So that's a new point for me! Next question:

Should nofollow tags be used for all links to other websites on my site? Will it improve my PageRank?

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: Should nofollow tags be used for all links to other websites on my site? Will it improve my PageRank?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: I think PageRank hoarding hurts your ability to get links.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Imagine if I link to lots of people in my community and they like me for it. Imagine if another person refuses to link out. Who is going to be more likely to be well liked and frequently linked to?

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: That makes sense.

Should I link to sites that are related but have different keywords (i.e. a sports site linking to a baseball card shop)?

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: Should I link to sites that are related but have different keywords (i.e. a sports site linking to a baseball card shop)?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: If there is a reason why people would be interested in the offer (and it wouldn't look weird or offensive) of course.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: But it is not just who you are linking to

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: but also how

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Is it organized well and looks like it makes sense? That is what counts.

It's said that search engines put more importance on relevant backlinks. What's the difference between a "relevant" link and one that isn't "relevant"?

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: It's said that search engines put more importance on relevant backlinks. What's the difference between a "relevant" link and one that isn't "relevant"?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Well I think it helps to view the perspective as though you were a librarian, a source of authority, or a search engineer.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: So if you reviewed the site would you trust it.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Like would the link possibly send traffic? And if it wouldnt send much traffic, is it at least from a trusted source? Does it put you in your community?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: And having some irrelevant links isn't bad...everyone has some, but the key is to not look deceptive in your intent.

Is buying high PageRank links (or any links really) a good strategy for ranking?

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: Is buying high PageRank links (or any links really) a good strategy for ranking?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Generally I would say not really.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: If you look at the algorithm research on stuff like trustrank, sites that have lots of pagerank are flagged for review more frequently.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: So the key there is to make your ad not look like an ad.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: So if you can get in someone's blogroll, or have them list you amongst resources that is going to be better than an overtly obvious paid link.

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: ah, I didn't know that.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: A great paid link is one where it is hard to tell that it was paid for.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: And some expensive links are actually of great value BECAUSE of the associated cost.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: A Yahoo! Directory link, for example, will run \$300. That price will prevent many automated spam sites from being able to afford it.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: So that is why it is good to focus on a core of high quality trusted links... get them as a base and then work from there.

I post to dozens of forums a day. Will the search engines see my signature link as link spam?

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: I post to dozens of forums a day. Will the search engines see my signature link as link spam?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: It is a common activity to post to forums, so they probably will not count them as spam, but also because forums have so many pages and so many links on each those forum signature links probably do not carry much weight.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Forum signature links have more value in driving direct traffic than in driving search engine related trust.

What ranking algorithm changes does Google have in store for us in 2007?

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: What ranking algorithm changes does Google have in store for us in 2007?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: It is hard to predict the future, but I would say Google is highly focused on core domain authority right now. Going forward they may have to move away from that a bit because many people are starting to spam that aggressively. They may start looking for more signs of topical community integration.

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: What is "core domain authority"?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: It generally relates to the age of a site and who links to it. If many trusted link sources link at you in natural ways then you are trusted too, especially if your site is old. The other part of that equation is that you haven't shot yourself in the foot via creating duplicate content, or low quality content, or bad site architecture related issues.

How much should you change an article to avoid duplicate content penalties?

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: That brings me to my next question:

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: How much should you change an article to avoid duplicate content penalties?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: I dont think there is an exact easy to share mathematical ratio. And over time it changes as far what levels are acceptable, plus trusted authoritative domains can get away with more duplication than newer domains without much trust.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Everything is a sliding scale.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: I think if you are new and trying to build authority... rather than saying how much duplication can I get away with a better approach is what can I do that would make people want to pay attention to what I am saying... how can I build authority.

What are some of the "must have" tools that make the SEO tasks easier?

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: Okay, great. Last question before I open the floor to everybody:

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: What are some of the "must have" tools that make the SEO tasks easier?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: <http://tools.seobook.com/firefox/seo-for-firefox.html>

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: <http://www.webuildpages.com/cool-seo-tool/>

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: then really learning your topic well and community well are keys, IMHO

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: understanding how to know what a quality link is and how to make people want to talk about you

Is buying directory links worth spending money on as long as they are on topic?

mal -> Chat Lobby: Back to directory paid links, are there worth spending cash on as long as they are on topic

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Ok now as far as directories go

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: there are ways to check the general health of them... like are they being cached regularly, do they mostly list quality useful sites, etc.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: and here are a couple more links for those interested in directories

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby:

<http://www.search-marketing.info/newsletter/articles/trustrank-company.htm>

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: <http://www.seobook.com/archives/001583.shtml>

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: <http://www.seobook.com/archives/001958.shtml>

Should I buy Web Position?

www.airportinnovation.com -> Chat Lobby: aaronwall - should I buy Web Position?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: I generally do not recommend Web Position because I think most seo software has you focused on arbitrary data points rather than creating things people want and effectively marketing them. Like some software still talks up keyword density long after it is no longer a useful measure of relevancy.

Supplemental Index - what is the best way to get out? I have added new original content - is it just a matter of time? Are links a way out?

BOB NEWHART -> Chat Lobby: Supplemental Index - what is the best way to get out? I have added new original content - is it just a matter of time? Are links a way out?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: On supplemental index related issues... the keys might be building trusted links or getting rid of duplicate content related issues, and making sure you are linking out to quality sites.

When creating static counterparts to dynamic pages, should we use noindex robots on the dynamic pages?

oggy -> Chat Lobby: Hi Aron! When creating static counterparts to dynamic pages, should we use noindex robots on the dynamic pgs?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: I dont know that anyone should need to make a static version of the site... just make sure the URLs of the dynamic part of the site are clean.

If I want to buy a high PR (lets say 7 or 6) RELEVANT link from texlinkbrokers.com, will I get penalized by google?

Reinhardt Gallowitz -> Chat Lobby: If I want to buy a high PR (lets say 7 or 6) RELEVANT link from texlinkbrokers.com, will I get penalized by google?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: You cant say yes or no to if you will get penalized.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: All you can do is take informed educated guesses.

Could having text at the bottom of my page that's close to the same color as my background color get me deindexed?

Jerirama2 -> Chat Lobby: You say to take risks and not be afraid. I recently got a site deindexed from Google - no email or console message of a violation, just the whole site removed, with a generic message saying "Indexing takes time." I'm wondering if the page-relevant keyword lists I had at the bottom in a gray font were the cause of the removal. There was no repetition or "stuffing" of keywords, just a comma-delineated list. Could that be the problem, especially the commas? Or could it just be a Google glitch, as I've been hearing about? My site has lots of useful and original content, with a good number of decent backlinks, nothing shady or deceptive. If I remove the "offensive" material and wait, will it come back?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: To Jerirama2...if an editor saw it yes, but you may have other issues as well.

Is there a site where Seo Professionals can test new seo products being developed?

Wizardseo -> Chat Lobby: Aaron, Is there a site where Seo Professionals can test new seo products being developed

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Hi Wizardseo... there might be, but most stuff in this market (maybe even some stuff I say) comes off at least a bit as self promotional, so I think there are too many conflicting interests for there to be a totally trustworthy unbiased source of information about where to catch the

newest software...though I and others highlight cool things we find in our blogs. Wolf-howl.com is a great great blog that reviews a bunch of new and interesting stuff.

Does having many high quality outbound links to resources in your niche raises your page rank and trust?

rex -> Chat Lobby: Hi Aaron, Do you agree or disagree that having many, high quality outbound links to resources in your niche raises your page rank and trust?

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Hi Rex I think it can approve your authority and rankings... keep in mind that PageRank and rankings are two separate issues.

Closing Comments

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: Okay everybody, it's close to quitting time, so let's get quiet and let me say a couple of things.

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: First, thank you VERY much for coming Aaron.

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: Considering that you charge \$500 an hour and gave us an hour of your time, you saved us a lot of money.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: Thanks for having me Jonathan

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: hope your members found this helpful

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: No doubt they did!

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: One last thing. If your question wasn't answered.

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: I strongly recommend you read Aaron's SEO Book. At:

<http://www.jonathanleger.com/recommends/seo.php>

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: He gives you a free 15 minute phone consultation if you purchase the book.

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: hope everyone has a great day

aaronwall -> Chat Lobby: :)

jonathanleger -> Chat Lobby: bye Aaron!

NOTES:

Thanks so much for coming (if you made it). If not, you're getting the benefit anyway by reading this transcript!

Stay tuned for more interviews (watch your email and my blog for an announcement).

In the mean time, read Aaron's *SEO Book* and get 15 minutes of free phone time with him at:

<http://www.jonathanleger.com/recommends/seo.php>