

Dianne Talks Business  
Interview of Nikki H. M. Jackson  
Dianne Gubin  
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Dianne Gubin: Welcome. This is Dianne Gubin on Talks Business. Dianne Talks Business. Our show is about professional development, your career, being an entrepreneur, and big corporate business.

Today, it is my absolute pleasure to welcome Nikki H.M. Jackson. Nikki is an Internet search engine optimization and Internet marketing specialist. Today, we are going to talk about search engine optimization and how to get your web site to the top of the rankings.

Welcome, Nikki.

Nikki: Thank you, Dianne. I'm glad to be here today.

Dianne: Thank you. Nikki, what is search engine optimization?

Nikki: Dianne, search engine optimization is a procedure for making a web site search engine friendly so that the search engines place it at the top of the rankings when searchers are looking for the service or product.

Dianne: Every company that really wants to market their services wants their web site right at the top of the rankings, right? You put in, for example, Tech Exec Partners. If you want to do IT consulting services, I want to be right up there, right?

Nikki: Absolutely.

Dianne: Great. How does a company do this? What are the five main things that a company should do to get their Internet site to the top of a search engine?

Nikki: There are five key factors, Dianne, for top search engine placement. All these factors are just as valuable as the each of the other.

The first one is to identify your company's web site objective. What is the purpose of your web site? What do you want your web site to do for you? Do you want it to sell product to e-commerce? Do you want it to collect data, data-capturing objectives? Or do you want your phone to ring? You have a service. You want to

connect with your market over the phone. Identify your company's web site objective.

Two, a comprehensive keyword research and keyword analysis. Those are big words. But it's real simple. You need to find out what your audience is typing into the search engines, looking for you, so that they can find you.

Dianne: Usually you want to keep it as simple as possible, don't you?

Nikki: You kind of want to keep it real simple. The simpler, the better. Certainly, the search engines are developed to read text only. Searchers are using words to find your service, so the simpler, the better.

Dianne: Got it. Would I use the same words for every search engine? Let's even define what a search engine is in case someone is not sure.

Nikki: A search engine is a type of a program that reads documents. It has the ability to read text on a document, on a web page. It files or categorizes and indexes the information that it finds and then it qualifies relevancy on what each page is about, what the web site is about, and keeps this information in a database.

Dianne: And some examples are the Googles, Yahoos, MSNs of the world?

Nikki: Yes.

Dianne: SGs, whoever else is out there?

Nikki: Yes.

Dianne: Would I use the same tools no matter what the search engine? Does that matter? Or there are different ones -- maybe we'll go into that later -- that you would use depending upon which search engine you're in?

Nikki: You'd use the same techniques, tools to rank well, to have visibility in a search engine search. Same tools. Same techniques.

Dianne: When you consult with a company, and I know you've work with my chamber of commerce, and you've counseled thousands of companies on how to do this. You owned your own firm doing this for about eight years.

You are now with a company called Brilliant Blue. You work with corporate clients. When you sit down with a corporate client to find out how they want their web site to appear at the top, what technique do you use to find out the information from the client to even implement this?

Nikki: Well, currently our process at Brilliant Blue, and also I've always used, is to send out a questionnaire to our prospective client, to our client. This questionnaire asks questions asking the client, again, to brainstorm what they believe they want their web site to do.

We need to identify what a company's web site objective is. Then we ask them to list what the keywords that they think that searchers are looking for to find their product. With that information, the next phase of the process is for us to get busy and do the research.

Dianne: The research in terms of what? In terms of what the keywords would be that one would search under?

Nikki: Exactly. We need to know where the audiences are in their industry. For example, Tech Exec. Let's just say a questionnaire is returned to me. The client – you – is telling me that you believe that your business is being searched for the term –

Dianne: “Technical staffing services.”

Nikki: -- “technical staffing services.” Three terms.

I do my research. I come back to you. I tell you, “Dianne, technical resource” –

Dianne: “Management” or “staffing services” –

Nikki: “Staffing services.”

Dianne: -- or “candidates” or “hiring.”

Nikki: The words you gave me are searched this many times. Maybe only 20, let's just say.

I bring you the research where I've analyzed and I've identified that terms like –

Dianne: “Executive search.”

Nikki: -- “executive search,” that term maybe was searched 500 times.

Dianne: Wow.

Nikki: You wouldn’t know this because –

Dianne: I wouldn’t have the resources.

Nikki: -- you wouldn’t have resources. Of course, that’s what you hire me to do for you.

Dianne: That’s so interesting because what we do with Tech Exec Partners is, through the web host company that we use, we paid for some extra add-on service. We had to come up with like – I don’t know – 150 words that somebody might search for us on. So, I always wonder, how effective is it? How do you actually make your web site more friendly to the search engines?

Nikki: Certainly. Making a web site more friendly to the engines has two components to it. It requires configuring the server so that a search engine spider can get onto the server, can crawl through the server infrastructure comfortably. This is a technical work and technical activity as its simplest when I say “this crawler crawls through your server.”

Once it’s crawling through the server and it has a smooth crawl, it can gather the information, the data that it needs to off the web pages that are labeled and are sitting at your hosting company.

Dianne: Really, the secret to this is making sure that within the pages of each of your web site, you use whatever words you want somebody to search for. If we’re searching for engineers or accounting and finance or HR, I need to make sure that those terms are also added into our site so that someone looking for those services could find us.

Nikki: Relevance. Relevance. Relevance.

Dianne: Got it. Isn’t there’s some back-end thing where you’re supposed to like write some secret code on the back of your web site that only the search engines can read? Is that true?

Nikki: We hope that the code isn’t quite such a big secret.

Dianne: One of the subliminal things.

Nikki: Right. It's about simplicity. It really is. It's about simplicity. It's about following simple basic techniques and, of course, keeping your content on focus. Focused on what your business is.

There are certain areas of the web page back behind in the code, in the programming language that we concentrate on, that we know are of value to the spiders. It's what the spiders are looking for. It's what the search engine spiders – it's how they access information.

It's not a big secret. But certainly knowing how many times to add a keyword, how many keywords to add to a page, these are all important little qualifying techniques that we want to remember.

Dianne: Got it. What we started off talking about was there are really five key factors for top search engine placement. The first one – if you can just kind of run through them really quickly. Let's make sure we've covered them in this segment.

Nikki: The first one is identifying your company's web site objective. The second one, comprehensive keyword research and keyword analysis.

Dianne: We've talked about that, right.

Nikki: Three is relevance. Making your site and each web page relevant for highly traffic keywords in your industry. Four, configuring your web server to be search engine friendly.

Dianne: Have we done that?

Nikki: Yes.

Dianne: Yes.

Nikki: And five, linking up with as many other related web sites as possible.

Dianne: I know I haven't done that. How do you even go about doing that?

Nikki: That's really important. What we want to do is we want to get out on the web site. There are numerous software programs and techniques. We use both in identifying other web sites that are related to our industry that we want to solicit for a link to our web site from their web site.

Dianne: Got it. I would really like to say the purpose of this is not to sell the services of Tech Exec Partners but more to use as an example because it's one most certainly that I'm familiar with and you and I have known each other for a number of years, so you're familiar with our site.

If you're going to work with other related web sites, for me, in my industry, would that mean the job boards and having links into the job boards for people to find me?

Nikki: We have a list of links that we like to get that are just more or less for everybody. They certainly include Yahoo! directory, which is a search engine. They certainly include Info USA, which is the yellow pages in brick and mortar.

Dianne: And on that, we're going to have to go take a quick break. I'm talking to Nikki H.M. Jackson, an Internet search engine optimization/internet marketing specialist. That's a mouthful. But it's what you do. She's with Brilliant Blue. When we return, we're going to talk about the five top mistakes and search engine optimization. Thank you.

Dianne: Welcome back. This is Dianne Gubin on Talks Business talking to Nikki H.M. Jackson on Internet search optimization.

Nikki, in this segment we are going to talk about the top five mistakes in search engine optimization. You were starting to tell me a story about one of the situations you had with your clients. Can you go into that?

Nikki: Yes, Dianne. We were talking about some of the mistakes that have been made out there. I was brought in on a project. A company had launched a brand-new web site and had inadvertently not checked to see if the web site was search engine friendly. As it turned out it was completely invisible to the search engines.

Dianne: How come? Because if I had all the keywords that you said and I put them in there or I said what we did on – first thing, I drew a page on my web site – wouldn't I get picked up somewhere?

Nikki: Sometimes web sites are built with graphics. Sometimes web sites are built purely in Flash technology.

Dianne: Oh, I know. Bypass that. They're pretty, but get me there.

Nikki: The search engines just can't see that. It's invisible. There is some programming technology available now that allows Flash to be visible. There are techniques that are available now that make frames visible, images somewhat visible.

Again, search engine spiders are programs. They can't see images. They can only read texts, words.

Dianne: Can I find a spider? Like what can I do to spider? Or just by typing into a search engine what I'm looking for – I'm looking for a restaurant, Woodland Hills in a specific kind – that's a spider going out there and picking up that information for me?

Nikki: Yeah, that's a spider. Let's just say, for example, we were doing that at Google. Google has its own crawling bots. It has its own spiders. There's scooters. They're called crawlers. And these names are used interchangeably.

But when a searcher types in a keyword at Google, looking for a product or service or just some information, Google has its own crawling ability to crawl through its own database to serve up relevant web sites that have been added to the database from, again, spiders and crawlers that have gone out into the Internet, out onto the web, and brought back information.

Dianne: Interesting. What happened with this client that you're starting to tell me about?

Nikki: A few tweaks here and there and I had them visible.

Dianne: What were the few tweaks? Did you go into like the back end code to do this, or you did it on the front page of the web site where they had all their language printed?

Nikki: For spiders and crawlers, we work inside of the code, inside of the HTML programming language. For them it was adding some additional fields. They were a dynamic web site. Their programmers had ... oops.

Dianne: Forgotten. Got it.

On the corporate web sites, many corporations have like an entire IT team to go do this or they farm the work out. But sometimes people put up their own web sites or they're smaller companies that are trying to get this kind of visibility.

If you're a smaller company, how can you do this? Do you have to give it to someone else to do it for you, or do you do it to get to the top of the search engines? Like what's the best way for any company to get out there in terms of the mechanics of the marketing?

Nikki: In 2006, the environment in search engine rankings and top search engine rankings has become very competitive, somewhat hostile. Now we have many, many people aware of search engine optimization, many people wanting to make a lot of money on the Internet.

One of the most important, critical ways of getting visibility and getting traffic to your web site is to be ranked on the search engines. It requires a tremendous amount of resources. Although a small business can make a difference in getting their web site able, it's advisable to call in an expert.

Dianne: Interesting. Well, I'm glad I have a web person who works with me to do this. Most certainly.

Well, we're talking about the top five mistakes in search engine optimization. And most certainly, having underdeveloped keyword research and keyword analysis, which is what we were just talking about, is probably one of the biggest mistakes a company can make.

Nikki, we're going to take a break. When we come back, we're going to talk about some other mistakes that companies make in terms of getting to the top of the web sites. Thank you.

Dianne: Welcome back. This is Dianne Gubin on Talks Business. I'm talking to Nikki H.M. Jackson from Brilliant Blue. We're talking about the top five mistakes in search engine optimization.

We talked about underdeveloped keyword research and keyword analysis. We talked about having unclear web site objections, not quite knowing what you're doing with your web site.

Nikki, the next topic in this is not having enough subject matter content on each of your core web pages. What does that really mean?

Nikki: Dianne, that means that it's important for a web site to have essay-like content. In identifying what you want to say, you want to be sure and have enough text.

Dianne: The more you write, the better?

Nikki: Enough subject matter. The more you write, the better.

Dianne: It's interesting because I always thought it was somewhat the opposite where you're supposed to kind of keep your web site clean because everybody's reading so much stuff these days that almost less is more. Here's what we do. The end. But you're really saying you need to write and write and write.

Nikki: It depends again – what is your company's web site objective? If it's to please search engines, then we do what pleases search engines. If a client brings me a web site with one or two sentences sprinkled throughout the web page – there are other techniques that can be utilized to get the rankings up.

There have even been cases where web sites have ranked well at the top of the search engines for a keyword without having that keyword on the page at all.

Dianne: Really? It's implied. The search engines just know it.

You're supposed to have a clear theme overall to your web site, aren't you?

Nikki: Yes.

Dianne: If you have a clear theme overall – for example, we're a staffing services. It would be "staffing services" on each and every page.

So as we talk to our clients or we talk to our candidates or we post our jobs, it's having a coherent theme through there?

Nikki: Relevancy.

Dianne: Relevancy to –

Nikki: Relevancy. Relevancy. Relevancy. Be relevant with all of your pages. Have your keywords sprinkled throughout. Do your professional job in getting the message out. Communicate. Communicate what the benefit is to the individual visiting your web site. Communicate what you offer. It's about communications. The technical part of it – there are many tutorials online. Of course you can call Nikki.

Dianne: Got it. Really, what I'm hearing from you is there is tremendous job growth in this area because this Internet space is just expanding so much that besides what you do in SEO optimization space – I mean, you need web writers, web designers, web masters, web maintainers, web growers, web builders, web everything -- shopping cart people, credit card people. I mean, it's just this huge goliath behind just having a web site, isn't it?

Nikki: It really is. It's very exciting.

Dianne: It is. What are some of the issues that you've seen with some of the clients that you've worked with in terms of not having a clear theme overall? How would you describe that? Is that just a writing issue or just adding more pages?

Nikki: It's a writing issue. It can be adding more pages, depending on the industry. If my client was in mortgage, it's a very, very competitive industry as opposed to a client who might be in termite control.

Dianne: Right.

Nikki: Again, I would have to do the research before I could really sign off on even what I just said because we might find that termite control in some areas of the world are –

Dianne: -- bigger issues.

What happens if a company has products that they market versus services? If a company has a shopping cart on each item that goes into a shopping cart, so you would really say for each product to really do a full write up on it so then that product gets pulled up on the engines too, correct?

Nikki: Exactly. That would be the most excellent. I've seen clients that have product pages with one or two sentences that didn't even have the keyword in. Even if a search engine were to read the two sentences, there wasn't anything to indicate that the product was what it was. The search engine cannot read pictures. They just can't see what the product is. Again, keep it simple.

Dianne: That's a shame, especially since everybody looks on the Internet first now – or most people do.

What about links from external web sites? How does that tie in to this particular issue of having a mistake? Like do you find that companies just don't have enough of those links?

Nikki: The Internet is a community. Again, communication is really important. Especially Google, but numerous search engines now, part of their algorithm and part of their qualifying factors is that there be a community, that a web site be an authority, if you will.

There are different levels of authority but that they be an authority, that they be a strong communicator, and that they be welcome in their communities. That's what these links are about: The more links pointing to content on your site or services that only you do or information that you provide, community resources.

The algorithms at the search engines, the ranking qualifications actually allow and look for these outside, external, inbound links so that they can qualify the site as to how community oriented are they, how relevant are they to their industry, and what do their peers think about them.

It's a vote. A link pointing towards your web site is a vote that you are who you say you are and that you have some viability to be somewhat of an authority in your area.

Dianne: Interesting. Blogging. How does blogging tie in to that concept? Because we don't really have a blog. But yet I know a lot of people and companies put up blogs. They watch each other's blogs. They link to each other's blogs.

If what you're saying as being part of a community and the more hits and the more relevant you are in that community, that it would really stand to reason that almost every company should take almost that extra step to a blog? Does anybody really read that stuff?

Nikki: Well, I just had lunch with my dear friend Sally. Sally is an international PR expert and a specialist in blogging and speaks all over the world and educates in blogging. She just informed me that *Time* magazine on the front cover had an article on blogging. But even up to this point where *Time* magazine now -- I mean, main stream media is talking about blogging even up to this point.

Blogging was certainly a way for the community to touch company's executives, the company's customer service, and to

have a voice. It's very interactive. It can be very interactive. Certainly it gives voice for many major corporations.

CEOs have their own blogs. They give the community an opportunity to have a voice about the product, about the policy of the company, and so forth and so on.

Dianne: That really does tie in to getting your search engines higher because if you have a blog and you're part of a company, then it really allows the public to have that exchange with you besides just sending you an email.

Nikki: Well, certainly a blog is all text. It's communication in writing. Certainly search engine spiders really love text. It stands to reason that a blog has a strong ability to rank even higher than most web sites. We're finding that a lot too.

Dianne: Very interesting. Really, the whole secret to this in terms of a marketing solution is the higher you are in the search engines, the more likely someone is going to find you and the more likely someone is going to call you. The phone will ring. They'll buy your product or service. Correct?

Nikki: Correct.

Dianne: Got it. It also comes to establishing credibility in the bigger marketplace.

Nikki: Exactly.

Dianne: Right. The more you're tied in to your community that you serve, whatever that is, it goes back to having extensive networks, whether it's personally or professionally. In many ways, building your professional network would include having all these links to your space.

Nikki: Absolutely.

Dianne: It's really networking squared, isn't it, if you want to look at it that way?

Nikki: It really is.

Dianne: Because it puts you out to that whole bigger world.

Nikki: Visibility and traffic. Visibility and traffic. Getting the word out, being of service to your community, and being relevant.

Dianne: I love it.

Let's just regroup on the top five mistakes that you make in search engine optimization. We've talked about unclear web site objectives, an underdeveloped keyword research and how much it takes to get all those keywords out there, not having enough subject matter. You've got to really build up your pages, correct?

Nikki: Correct.

Dianne: Having a clear theme that goes throughout your web site.

Let me ask you, is that really an issue? Wouldn't most companies just have a clear theme if they have a web site?

Nikki: Not necessarily because, in this case, having a clear theme is having a clear theme using words. The keyword research, the keyword analysis that we do is actually similar to what Google offers, and that's keyword groupings: The parent keyword, the major keyword with related keywords to support.

This grouping then supports the page and the content and the subject matter written using the particular keywords that have been identified in each grouping to provide a clear theme.

Dianne: Very interesting. Plus all the inbound links.

What are some of the other global Internet marketing tools that are out there? We talked a little bit about blogging. E-mail marketing is huge now. How does the SEO space tie in to e-mail marketing today?

Nikki: Well, certainly global Internet marketing tools are whatever tools that are available and whatever it's going to take to increase visibility and increase traffic to the web site. These tools are e-mail marketing. In order to market effectively, even using e-mail, optimization is very important.

Optimization is where the e-mail message, again, needs to be theme based. Its message needs to be based on what your target keywords are.

There's affiliate marketing. Again, this is in the linking area. Affiliate marketing is sort of – think of it like an outside salesperson that you pay a small commission to sell your product for you or to market your services.

With affiliate marketing, external web sites, related web sites that want to sell your product on their web site using their marketing tools, their e-mail campaigns, their e-mail lists get a percentage of whatever they sell on their web site for you.

And podcasting is another Internet marketing tool. It's very high tech.

Dianne: Podcasting. Everybody seems to be podcasting these days. How does podcasting relate into the SEO space? Because podcasting, you would download, correct? Does the SEO space pick up how many people are downloading or hitting a certain site? Is that it?

Nikki: Actually, podcasting in SEO, even podcasts are finding themselves into the top rankings. Again, these are all marketing tools that are available for visibility, to get your message out. Then there is social networking.

Dianne: There are probably some people who wouldn't want you to tell me about podcasting.

It's just exponential, where all this is going. In terms of the global Internet tools that tie in to SEO, you've got the blogging, the e-mails, the affiliate marketing where you link to other people's sites, correct?

Nikki: Correct.

Dianne: Podcasting. You carry it around with you, right? It's not just on the Internet then. It's on your body.

We haven't even talked about the social networking space, have we? Very briefly, before we take a break, social networking is?

Nikki: Social networking is like –

Dianne: LinkedIn, My space.

Nikki: -- blogging, like My Space, community places.

Dianne: We're going to take a quick break. We will be back in a moment. Thank you.

Dianne: We're back. This is Dianne Gubin on Talks Business with Nikki H.M. Jackson. Nikki is an Internet search engine optimization and Internet marketing specialist.

We were just talking about some of the global Internet marketing tools out there. We were just getting to social networking.

And really, Nikki, what I'm curious about is where you see this whole Internet SEO space going?

Nikki: Well, Dianne. The Internet is dynamic. It is not static. It changes even while we're talking. There's brilliant movement.

I was thinking. Young people are growing. They're being educated in technology.

Dianne: Three-year-olds. I've seen three-year-olds on the Internet.

Nikki: Three-year-olds are on the Internet. They've learned how to search for toys.

Dianne: It's true. My kids do it all the time. They have their favorite spaces that we go to on a daily basis. Everyone is growing up with this technology.

Nikki: It is not going to look like what it looks like today. If we keep that in our mind, if we remember how dynamic the Internet is, I think we'll weather whatever changes that there are. I know I've seen a lot of changes in eight and a half years. I expect to see a lot more.

Dianne: It went from nothing to huge. Eight years ago, it was barely a presence. Maybe you're starting to get your email address then.

Nikki: Yup, maybe.

Dianne: But, really, what it comes down to it is marketing is just marketing.

Nikki: True.

Dianne: I mean, no matter what, if you're a company, you've got to market your products or services or nobody knows that you're out there.

Nikki: Marketing is marketing. Business objectives will remain business objectives.

Business owners will choose to own their company's success and continue to use whatever means that there is to get their message out and to focus on increasing their bottom line, increasing their revenues.

Dianne: And for many companies, since we're now a global economy, having this higher search engine tool really allows you to do business, not just with people in your neighborhood or in your state, but the whole country and the whole world. You read some of these great stories about people from all over the world doing these hits on eBay and buying stuff. It's out there.

The SEO, if there was one parting thought on SEO and how somebody could really get their web site to that highest point that they could in the easiest way possible, what would that be?

Nikki: If there was one thing that I would – it would be relevance. I really can't stress strongly enough. I know how strongly supported I am in my community. And that is, to have your web site, the message be relevant to what you're doing, relevant to what you want from your business.

Get the message out. Help people understand what it is that's a benefit to them in using your product or in calling you and hiring you for your services. Help others to see how you can help them.

Dianne: Really, the best way is to really have a very strong Internet presence and really put yourself out there.

I know within Tech Exec Partners, we put just about no money into a collateral marketing that we hand out that's printed. Everything is on the Internet. That's where our marketing dollars have gone. And most certainly, that's the place that most people would look for us.

In terms of what you're saying, in terms of the visibility and being out there, I know it has definitely worked for us.

In the SEO space, it sounds like there are a lot of changes coming. Do you see it just getting bigger and bigger as more companies just grow?

Nikki: I see revenues growing. I see great success on the Internet. Search engine optimization is not going to go away because linguistics and words will always be how computers can identify messages.

Dianne: Fantastic. As we wrap up here, I'm Dianne Gubin on Talks Business. I'm also the president of Tech Exec Partners.

If you would like to reach Nikki, her web site is Goldranking. You can find out more information about her there. She's currently affiliated with Brilliant Blue. That's brilliantblue.com.

Nikki, what's the best way for someone to reach you? Is there a phone number or just through your web site?

Nikki: I'd love to invite phone calls at (949) 450-9244, extension 211.

Dianne: Thank you, Nikki. It's been a pleasure having you.

Nikki: Thank you, Dianne.