Podcraft, Season 16, Episode 1

SEO Tips for Podcasters

Mathew: Welcome to another episode of Podcraft. This is the show all about podcasting from planning and launch to growth and monetization. My name's not Colin, as you might have already guessed. It's in fact Matthew, Colin's out there in the world somewhere. I don't know where. I think he's maybe at an event, or who knows, he might be on holiday. He is an international man of mystery, but the good news is you don't have to suffer me alone. I'm joined by a much more intelligent fellow than myself Sean from the Alitu team. How are you doing, Sean?

Sean: I'm great, thanks. Thanks for having me, Matthew. I wouldn't go as far as to say much more intelligent, but I'm glad to be here. Thanks.

Mathew: Substantially more intelligent then. Just for a seasoned podcast, going in deeper and utilize the talent. The various team members here at Alitu and the podcast host because we've got lots of different skilled people that do lots of different skilled jobs, all of which could really benefit you, the podcaster, the listener to towards giving me tips towards growing your own show. Building Your own show. On this episode, we're leaning on Sean's expertise of being found out there in the world, SEO, that complicated world, and all that jazz. SEO, Sean, what does that stand for? Just for anyone who's not aware of it.

Sean: Yes. Well first, thanks for having me. It's a real pleasure to be here speaking with you, Matthew, and I look forward to talking through SEO. SEO happens to be search engine optimization. That's probably a phrase that many of you have come across. What that essentially is, there's two very specific elements to SEO, which is onsite SEO and offsite SEO. Now onsite SEO includes anything from blogs to meta titles, meta descriptions, all of these backend elements to a specific post that helps search engines to find you naturally on the internet, whether that's Google or Bing, or DuckDuck Go, whatever search engine you opt and use.

Ideally, though, they're going to be finding you. This is where search engine optimization comes in. It's the organic traffic that's coming to you as opposed to direct traffic, somebody typing in your URL directly into their browser or somebody coming to you through paid ads.

Mathew: Yes, it's one of those things that we've talked about a lot on the show, the fact that like you figured out when you're planning your podcast, you know what your target audience wants. You hopefully know that anyway, you know what they might be searching for online. You create content that's similarly titled or it is got the relevant keywords and stuff like that, and then they find you. That sounds really simple, doesn't it? If it's that simple, why is it such a big-- not necessarily complicated, but it's a multibillion-pound industry, I guess, isn't it?

Sean: Certainly. I think the complication comes from, obviously, there's a lot of tools in the industry and we'll get into those tools and the tips and tricks that they provide you for optimizing your content. I think ultimately what makes it so complicated is

that there's hundreds, if not thousands of other businesses or organizations out there who are actively seeking the same keywords that you are.

Structuring your content in the right way and making sure that you have the right number of keywords, the right number of images, content within your website is essential. Not only is it a very detailed thought process to get getting your content visible to your readers but it can also be very analytical one where you're being very nitpicky on the details and the degree of which you're implementing some of these SEO strategies.

Mathew: I guess a big question that some of the listeners might have just now is, well, why would this matter to me if I'm working an audio? I guess we need to look. The audio podcast or video podcast if it might be an isolation because these things are all backed up by the written format, aren't they? Whether that's just purely in the titles or whether it's extensive blogs and websites as well.

Sean: Yes, absolutely. Of course, from an SEO perspective, you need written content. At the moment, search engines, they're not capable of analyzing video or audio in order to be SEO friendly. Ultimately you need to be converting that content, the audio-visual content into something that's written and tangible for these search engines to pick up on. Basically because that doesn't translate, you need to be putting effort into bringing that to your blog.

That's where transcripts come in really handy. You can convert your existing podcast into a fully written transcript. I wouldn't suggest taking that and then simply uploading that to a blog post but what it does is it creates all of the content that you've generated through your podcast into written word and gives you a framework from which you can create a blog post from. You can go through and refine that into more legible more reader-friendly content.

Mathew: Yes. That could even happen at the planning stage, can't it? Because when you go on our podcast episode, whether you're cohosted or running solo, you usually do have some script or a flow that you're going to hit, certain beats that you want to cover. Those are almost your subheadings and your articles, aren't they? We're going to start with this, we're going to talk about that and that, and that could lead to a very good structure for a blog post that might be quite SEO friendly.

Sean: Exactly. I think there's a lot of similarities in podcast structure in terms of how you're recording that translate really well to written content. It's not a big stretch to be taking that transcript and applying it to a blog post. It's a perfect stepping stone in my opinion.

Mathew: Some listeners, I guess they could be slightly disillusioned because it's the same just if we look at podcasting on its own. There is that fact that when you're starting a podcast and the way that your show ranks in a podcast search engine, most of the popular apps, they're maybe going to-- if we take Apple Podcast, for example, the search ranks that come up when you type a keyword then is based on the all-time number of subscribers that a podcast has had.

If I launch a show today under a certain keyword, I'm going to rank quite low down. Then similarly if we look at just our websites and how our articles are ranking,

especially, you mentioned already, Sean, that they could be quite competitive depending on your topic. Some listeners might think is there any point in even starting now, because I'll just be so far behind now that is there even any point in getting involved in this?

Sean: Well, it's a really good question and I think something that can be very daunting for individuals who are starting out. Certainly, SEO is a long game. When you're deciding to pick up an SEO strategy and implement it for a blog or for a podcast like we're discussing, you need to be planning into the future. You're not going to be showing up ahead of those high-ranking, high subscribed podcasts right from the beginning. That's not to say that putting in the effort to capture those keywords and rank for that on search engines is going to be fruitless because ultimately your ideal listeners are not necessarily searching through Apple Podcasts or Spotify only to find your podcast.

They might be searching through any search engine to come across your content. Focusing from a blog perspective on your website and generating that content will inevitably help you grow your podcast more organically. Then basically later on those platforms, Apple Podcasts and Spotify, you can then begin to focus your content as you build those subscribers and those listens, you can then begin to optimize it a little bit further in terms of the keywords that you're putting in your titling, in your show notes, et cetera.

Mathew: Here's another we use on maybe the similarities between just podcast on its own and building strategies like this. We talk a lot on this show about seasonal podcasting and that's it regardless of whether you're taking breaks in between your seasons. The key point here is that your content is organized and blocks that tie in each other. On the podcast we've got a season about starting, we've got a season on equipment, we've got a season on monetization. I guess, Sean, that is a good practice to look at your website of content in that sense too. The term content clusters, for example. Is it a good idea to look at your website almost like a map and say, "This content over here on this subject should tie in here and there should be a structure." rather than just, "I'm going to create articles on whatever takes my fancy in this moment."

Sean: Yes, absolutely. I think, obviously, as I mentioned previously, strategy is a big one going into this. If you begin to segment down the content that you're going to be producing and like you say, clustering those topics together, then you begin to set out a hierarchy of the content that you're creating on the website. Then you can do internal backlinking within your website to refer to these other articles, which are within the same umbrella of content. Then as you build out those seasons, you start to develop more umbrellas that this detailed content can live below. Like you say, it webs out into a much more cohesive strategy as you build out these seasons.

Matthew: Another term we've talked about, clusters there. Another term I hear quite a bit is pillar content. Could you give us a wee definition of that, Sean?

Sean: Yes, pillar content or cornerstone content is a more broader look at specific keywords. Give me an example of one of the cornerstone content that you've written, Matthew.

Matthew: Probably the general, how to start a podcast article.

Sean: Absolutely. Perfect example, how to start a podcast. It's a very broad term. It's not niching down in any specific way. You write a very thorough blog post on how to start a podcast. With this, what's called a pillar post or a cornerstone, you're basically creating the framework from which you're intending to structure your future content. As you develop that, you are writing further posts that are more niche but still help the overall focus of the cornerstone article. With that, you begin to point back, link back to the main article, giving the main article some SEO juice as it's referred to. As these further developed secondary pieces refer back to the main article, you continue to build up this cornerstone piece. The more articles that are referring back to that, the more authority that you're giving to that specific pillar article.

Matthew: I found that about, in writing and maintaining of pillar content or a cornerstone content as we could call it. I'm always of the opinion that bad writing has too many caveats. You're talking about less than, but also that's also less, also less, if you keep doing that on a huge article, like how to start a podcast on a huge wide topic, you're never actually going to finish the article. It's always a good way of determining, does this need a paragraph or does this in fact need its own article? That then we could just hyperlink to that and it's also going to go off and then do its own thing if other people are searching for that term. As small as that might be, maybe just three people-a-month except for that, but they really need the answer to that thing, and you're getting them back on your site. You've then maybe got your podcast player on there, you've got your subscribe links, so you're just drawing people in all the time, aren't you?

Sean: Absolutely. I think that's a really good approach. As you write these cornerstone pieces, like you say, they begin to grow their own legs. If you find that's happening a little bit too much when you're reviewing your cornerstone pieces, then you can write an entire separate article on even a small single sentence from the cornerstone piece or expand on a paragraph that already exists in there. Then from the cornerstone piece, you're linking out to the secondary piece.

Matthew: What about, we've talked about internal linking between your website and how you might set that up, how you might look to structure it. What's the value in getting links from other people out there, other websites out there?

Sean: This goes back to the very beginning, those two main sections of SEO. We talked about onsite search engine optimization, but as you suggested, Matthew, there's offsite and this includes referrals from other trusted websites, social media signals whether it's your own social media that's pointing back to your content or others. Question spaces like Reddit or Quora all pointing back to your website. To answer your question, the benefit of offsite links, when you begin to build these backlinks, is what they're called from other sources, what essentially the internet and search engines are recognizing through this process is that, you're in authority on a specific subject. Say for instance you've got your cornerstone piece on how to create a podcast.

There will be other individuals, other businesses that recognize that as an educational source. They'll link back to it and through this process, say for instance, they also exist in the podcast space, them linking back to your website, giving you

credit, suggests to Google that you are to be trusted on this specific detail. Then you'll get more value through those backlinks. Obviously, the more backlinks that you generate from other sources, the more value that you're giving to your own website, and not all backlinks are created in the same way.

What I mean by that, they don't all have the same value. Say, for instance, you've got a backlink from a very reputable governmental agency or a news agency, those are going to be a lot more credible than your mates who's running a blog post, a podcast blog and gives that same backlink to your website. Ultimately, you need to be focusing on the quality and the credibility of these backlinks. Starting from somewhere is better than nothing. Having your friends link back to your blog post is also quite valuable.

Matthew: Yes. A link from the BBC's better than a link from Tom's Myspace. We might look at what's known as a domain authority score for stuff like that to gauge that. Is that right?

Sean: Yes, there's a number of noted measurements for this, but domain authority is the gold standard for how you measure the quality of that backlink. That's really simple to find out. You can go to HRFs which we can include in the show notes because that's one of the tools that we will be discussing shortly. They have a backlink checker where you can just put a URL into their website and it'll assess what the domain authority is on that specific website.

Matthew: Cool. Time to maybe switch over to some tips or low-hanging fruit, early-stage tactics for the listener then. Have you prepared a few for them Sean?

Sean: Yes, sure. I think one of the tools that is really overlooked and is such an easy win to give you a broader perspective on your current SEO standing is Google Search Console. It's a free tool provided by Google, obviously. You just go in there, you plug in your domain, you get set up, and within a week, you'll have useful information to see how your website is currently performing on Google Search. With that, you'll see a number of keywords that you're already ranking for, you're already getting either a decent amount of visits to your website directly through that or at least you're coming up, your website or your blog post is coming up in those searches.

With that, you have an idea of the potential search volume and visits that you could be generating to your websites. You can just begin with those keywords that already exist there. In some cases, it might be the name of your podcast, and that's great if your podcast is descriptive in the name because it can already start generating potential listeners. It might have to do with some of the subjects that you're focusing your content on. This is a really great start because ultimately with ranking through SEO, you need to rank for something before you rank for the bigger keywords.

You're not going to go out there and rank for the keyword podcast. It's just not going to happen. Nor would it necessarily be helpful to you in the long run but the more niche keywords, which you're already probably showing up for in Google search, are the ones that are going to generate you the listeners who are relevant to what you are producing. Google Search Console is a great place to start. Then just focusing on those niche keywords, getting ranked for something, and developing that further.

Matthew: Can you use that for free? The Google Search console.

Sean: Absolutely free. As is Google Analytics. Many of the Google tools provide those entirely free to users. That's why it's such a valuable point to start your search engine optimization strategy.

Matthew: Cool. Google Search Consult is definitely something that the listeners should be checking out then to get a bit of a helping hand with stuff like this. Before we kick on, Sean, let's just talk quickly about Alitu because well, you work cover there at Alitu, don't you? We just released that big grand feature recently, didn't we? On hosting.

Sean: Yes, it's been really exciting. Obviously with hosting, it's difficult if you're new to podcasting. It's difficult to understand what sort of value this provides to podcasters. Myself being very new to the podcasting scene, I didn't know what the workflow and the tools that were necessary to get set up with your entire podcast, but now with hosting from Alitu, it is a complete package. You can literally start with recording, editing, producing, and then publishing straight through to hosting all in one space. Obviously, I'm a fanboy of Alitu so working there has been really exciting, but it's really fantastic what they've done in such short order to provide this tool to not only beginner podcasters, but creatives throughout the spectrum.

Matthew: Yes, if I look back 12 years ago now when I got into podcasingt, a tool like this would've been unthinkable back then and learning how to record and edit and upload and publish and distribute, it was pretty complicated. It took me a lot of-- and there wasn't even content like ours in that day. There was very few of it so I was asking a friend that I knew that ran a podcast and had to do some quite clunky things. Having a tool like Alitu these days, pretty much an all-in-one platform for podcasters. We're running a-- For anyone who's interested, I believe, can they get their first one for $5 now? Is that right?

Sean: Yes. That's right. Just under $5 actually and that'll give you an opportunity to get in, try it out, and see how it works for you. Ultimately that's what the deal is all about. People having an opportunity to try it and see if it's what they need to create their podcast.

Matthew: Lovely stuff. If you're interested in checking out Alitu, head on over to A-L-I-T-U.com and give you a look over there. Kicking on with our SEO discussion, Sean, I had a couple of wee things to ask you before we get wrapped up. Just looking at when we're talking about running a website, I know that there are a lot of different platforms you could use out there. One of the most popular, probably the most popular is obviously WordPress. Certain things that I noticed when I'm in the WordPress interface, I'm creating a blog post. You're creating a URL for your post. Is it good to get a couple of keywords in your URL rather than by default sometimes it'll create this huge URL for you? Is that something we should be paying attention to?

Sean: Absolutely. Refining down your URL to the most relevant keywords that you're trying to rank your content for is probably the highest priority of the blog post, including structuring your title very well. Making sure that you've got the keywords within the URL so your domain.com/keywords for that specific post is going to be a very high priority. Trickling down from that as a priority would then be, obviously the

name of the post itself. Making sure that you're getting the keywords within that initial title. Then also focusing on things like meta title and meta description. These are the title and this description that would show up in a Google search and these--

If you're using a WordPress site you would use a tool like Yost. In order to structure these on Squarespace or Wix, you have similar tools, but they're built in directly to the backends of the blog post generators. Just making sure that you're going through your blog posts and utilizing those tools, making sure that the meta description and meta title are in there and that they're relevant and beneficial to the actual content that you're writing. Don't go out of the way to like keyword stuff and overwhelm you. Ultimately, you want it to be appealing for the reader. Getting the reader through is the absolute goal and if you start to keyword stuff, meaning you're throwing the keyword in there more times then would make sense as a general title or description, then Google will pick up on that and you'll be penalized, so avoid that.

Matthew: Yes, Google's getting more intelligent every year, isn't it? They really do stress from our limited knowledge about it. Write for humans here. Don't write for what you think the machine wants to hear, because it's getting very sophisticated with the keyword stuffing, isn't it?

Sean: Absolutely. I think you're right. Focus on the human first. This is what Google's latest release on their algorithm has been, is to focus on content that is most useful to the human reader as opposed to the bot. Just write as you'd like to be reading content ultimately.

Matthew: What about categories or tags in our posts? The category we might select, this might be an equipment category. We're going to talk about a microphone, so that'll build that into the URL as well, won't it? It'll be whatever.com/equipment/then your actual URL. Is that important for SEO?

Sean: Certainly, it can have an effect on the SEO that you're working with. Ultimately if you're niching down your content, you're making it more specific to your reader. Say you're doing an article about best microphones for a podcaster. If it's under that equipment leg of the website, then it has a bit more thoughtfulness and just structure for both Google and for the reader. It's not to say that it necessarily will improve your search value, but it helps with site structure overall, which is recognized from search engines. If it's a well-thought-out structure, it will be then more beneficial to your SEO.

Matthew: Just one final question or scenario I guess, let's say you've got two rival podcasters competing for the same search term. It's a very popular search term in the niche and they're maybe both fortunate enough to be up at first and second place and they're battling it out and one day, one podcaster checks and she's top. Then the next day the other guy's top, what's going on there? What's happening?

Sean: Yes. Basically what people are doing is going back and refining their content. This is recommended in any SEO strategy. It's not a set and forget type of work. You need to be actively going there and reviewing your content on a regular basis. Ultimately, that's what's happening is these two individuals are going back and forth, reviewing their content and seeing how they can tune it to be just slightly better than the competitor. This is constantly ongoing. It's why SEO is a long-term strategy and

why this space continues to be so fluid is because people are constantly reviewing and updating their content to be most viewable to the end user.

Matthew: It's a bit terrifying too, isn't it? You could build an entire business based on a few articles that are well-searched for and Google could just end that for you tomorrow. They could change something and that could just go away.

Sean: Well, this is the thing that then you go into other structures of marketing and making sure that you are best preparing yourself for that inevitability that you might disappear from Google overnight. Making sure that you're integrating email lists into your podcast and getting people to follow you on social media. That's a whole other podcast that you and I could go through, Matthew. Yes, making sure that you're not only betting everything on one horse like, Google. You need to be spreading out your marketing strategy.

Matthew: Yes, I guess that's again, the benefit of a podcast is that it lives on its own. It's very linked up with your website, but it still has its own home elsewhere. You're RSS feed and all that. If you're getting folks to subscribe to your podcast, you're keeping that audience no matter what Google does, aren't you?

Sean: Absolutely.

Matthew: Is Ask Jeeves still a thing? Do you know anything about Ask Jeeves?

Sean: Yes, so I think it's now just ask.com. Jeeves went by the wayside, but I don't know. I haven't used it in probably since it was Ask Jeeves.

Matthew: I'm scared to type it in just in case it's been hijacked by some weird--

Sean: I wouldn't be surprised.

Matthew: Malware. I'm not typing it in, but yes, a lot of people asked him questions back in the day. He probably got just bored, tired. Maybe lives in the Caribbean now. Jeeves, if you're listening, please get in touch. Just to know you're okay.

Sean: Thinking about you, Jeeves.

Matthew: Sean, it's been a great conversation. Just in closing, like you did that with Alitu ad recently, you filmed an advert in a cafe in Edinburgh, I believe. That looked a lot of fun. I'll put a link to it in the show notes, but what was that like just doing that wee set piece?

Sean: It was a lot of fun. We worked with a local director and producer and we had really great neighbors who opened up their cafe for us to film it, but it was a really great creative journey to put together this commercial, which I think is quite fun, sort of circumvents the typical tech commercial. It doesn't really focus on the tech, it focuses on the story of the individuals and the challenges that individuals have with segmenting software just all over the place that is a little bit more challenging to navigate than if it were cohesively in one single package.

Matthew: One login, one subscription, that's like a future Lord of the Rings, I don't know. They could maybe do something, one login and roll them all.

Sean: Well, there it is. You just created our next commercial. Perfect.

Matthew: The Alitu advert then, is it just going to be online? Any plans to play is it the Super Bowl? Is that the really famous-- the adverts are more famous than the event itself. We could maybe stick it in there.

Sean: We've pitched to launch it at the Super Bowl. I'm not sure our budget will quite cover it, but we'll just try and see how it goes.

Matthew: They could only say no and they will. Good stuff, Sean, I really appreciate you spending some time with me and the listeners in the absence of Colin as well. Like I said, don't know where he is. He could be literally anywhere, but I think that's been a really useful conversation. I've learned some stuff as well. I'm going to take that into my day and perform some heroics in the old SEO world. Any plans for the rest of the day or week, Sean?

Sean: We've got some exciting things that we're working on both with the podcast host and Alitu. I won't go into detail because you'll be hearing about those shortly. Yes, thanks for having me on. It's been a real pleasure and it's been excellent practice for me because I plan on launching a podcast in the not-so-distant future, and this was my first opportunity to participate in a podcast.

Matthew: Great stuff. Well, I'm sure it won't be the last time, Sean. I'm sure we'll lean on you again in the near future. Thanks again for joining us. Thanks very much to the listener, all links and the show notes, just open up your podcast app, you'll find it all in there or you could head over to thepodcasthost.com as well. Check out all the great content that we've got. Thanks very much and we'll see you on the next one.