

Niche Pursuits Podcast #23: How to Build Links the Right Way with Jon Cooper

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Hey everyone, it's Spencer here at NichePursuits.com, and today I'm happy to share with you an interview that I recently did with Jon Cooper. Jon is the owner of the site PointBlankSEO.com, and he also happens to be a student at the University of Florida right now, studying Business Finance, which is also the degree that I got as well. However, Jon has quickly established himself as a link building expert over the past couple of years. And his link building resources page on Point Blank SEO is actually one that I refer to a lot. Jon was willing spend a few minutes with me and discuss some link building tactics that are working for him right now and some thoughts on the future of link building. Overall, I hope that you pick up a few ideas that work well for you as you build links to your own websites. So, enjoy the show.

Welcome to the Niche Pursuits Podcast! Are you ready to discover some niche business ideas that actually work? Well it's time for a motivational kick to jumpstart your next big idea. Here's your host, Spencer Haws.

Spencer: Hey everyone, welcome to another Niche Pursuits podcast. I have Jon Cooper on the call with us today. Jon, welcome to the show.

Jon: Thanks for having me.

Spencer: Absolutely, it's great to have you here. I've mentioned you a number of times on my blog actually already, in regards to link building, you're quite well-known for your strategies with link building and other things. And we're gonna dive into that, but before we do, I wanted to get just a little bit of your background so we can get to

know you. What were you doing before you ever created PointBlankSEO.com?

Jon: Yeah so I got into SEO and, more broadly, digital marketing about 3 ½, 4 years ago now? I was in high school at the time, and I got a job working for my neighbor who had a website and she needed some SEO done. So I kinda researched it, really got into it and after a little bit I started doing a lot of my own sites and started experimenting on my own, which then eventually led to Point Blank SEO, which at the time, was more so just a project to test some different things out on a live blog, because obviously there's different aspects of doing SEO for a blog as for a static site that just has 10-15 articles, kinda like a traditional niche site. So it was more for testing, and then once I realized people were reading it, I just kinda went with it and started to kinda put more up over time and to take it seriously.

Spencer: Yeah! That's awesome, and that kind of answers that other question of why did you create the site in the first place, it sounds like it was almost more of an experiment to start, at least, but then as you saw that it was gaining momentum, you said, what the heck, I've got a market here, let's build this out, right?

Jon: Exactly, exactly. It was very much just kind of like a passion at the beginning, it was just, I wanted to test some stuff, it was fun keeping all my notes kind of in a live place online, and it was really nothing more than that until I set up Google Analytics and once I started seeing traffic in about late 2011, I said, you know what, let's give this thing a shot. I relaunched in early 2012 and then it just kind of became a beast of its own.

Spencer: Yeah and I love that, that's really the way it should be, right? I mean, you built something that you're passionate about, and basically, putting down things that are important to you, and as you do that other people see that's important. Makes a good case study I guess, in and of itself, as well for how to get natural traffic and natural links and things like that, so well done there.

Jon: Thanks.

Spencer: So, what's always interesting about your story, at least sort of the subplot of your story, if you will, is that you're still a student right now at the University of Florida right?

Jon: Yeah I am a sophomore in the undergrad business school at the University of Florida.

Spencer: Okay. And so you're very young, when it comes to terms of a lot of people in the industry. You know, as far as age, you don't have 5-10 years, or whatever, that some people with business backgrounds have been doing this for a very long time. You're young in the industry, but you've shown a lot of knowledge and expertise in the area of link building that we're gonna go into here. So you're at the University of Florida, studying business, but part of the success that I see that you're having on your site, I look at that and say, well why study business at the University of Florida? Why not go out on your own and build a full-time income?

Jon: Yeah so after my first semester of my freshman year, I did take a semester off because I didn't know if I wanted to drop out or not. Then I actually went back, just because I thought I could probably do both at the same time. Because I was originally starting engineering, and that was just a lot of work and I got frustrated really quickly. So I actually reentered Business Finance. Honestly, the workload's been very minimal, and I realized that I could pretty much easily do both at the same time, and kinda get the best of both worlds. So I get the benefits of still being at school, even though the degree isn't really important to me, nearly as much as to some other people, there's a lot of advantages of being labeled as a full-time student. And a lot more sympathy from other people. A lot of people seem a lot more interested in my story when I say I'm also a student at the University of Florida and whatnot. So it initially was an issue like that, but I realized that I could kinda make them both work. But also, the question is why don't I just kind of do a full-time SEO business? And I realized that my goal long-term, I don't really see my goal being starting an SEO agency or anything like that? You know kind of like an SEO rack for one of those agencies and trying to build it up over time. Just because I do like SEO, and it is something I'm passionate about, but I also like a lot of other aspects of business just as much, and it's also just a lot more fun to do a lot of other aspects of

business, not just one core focus. It's kind of interesting to do multiple things at once and keeping up with different things. And so I realized that longer-term, I'm trying to invest in some bigger projects, and bigger site projects, whether that's kinda running a more authority site on my own, or just partnering with some people on some different other ventures and stuff. So even if I was in school, I don't see myself trying to build out an agency long-term.

Spencer: Sure. No, that's awesome. When I ask that question, I'm not trying to encourage you to drop out of college or anything like that, but you know, if the opportunity's there to build a business, a lot of people would say why not. But for your own information, people listening out there, I actually graduated college with a degree in Business Finance as well, so not such a bad choice there either. You're right, the degree, at the point in my career, the degree means basically nothing to me, but that's okay. I went to 4 years of university, I actually went to graduate school, got my MBA as well, and was in the corporate world for 7 or 8 years. The experience was great, and I learned a ton. Really the whole education throughout university and my corporate career, I learned so many things that I think I internalized now that I don't even realize maybe I picked up along the way, so the experiences are very valuable. I think you're right, that you can do both. You don't need to go out and try to build a million dollar business right now. You have a couple more years of college, and then if the time is right and you can do something full time, then I think you've got a lot of great experience to draw on.

Jon: Yeah.

Spencer: So, you did mention here that before you started Point Blank SEO, you built a few either niche sites or other sites. Are you still building out some of your niche sites or authority sites outside of Point Blank SEO?

Jon: Yeah, so I started off doing niche sites just because – and I'm glad I can finally touch on this and kinda speak about niche sites and my perspective on them – a lot of people are attracted to the idea of niche sites just because when you hear those big success stories of guys making 5, 6 figures a month off these big authority sites, sometimes it's hard to believe and it's hard to convince yourself that

that's something that you can do. Just because to a lot of people, really anybody, that's a lot of money. For it to be found in such a way with the internet and what not, it just seemed kind of hard to believe. And so when the whole idea of niche sites were introduced, I think it caught on just because a lot of people thought that's a manageable thing that they can do, it's believable, and I think I can go and get it just because it's not too far-stretched. Getting into it early, I realized that I definitely fell into that, I definitely thought, hey I can do that. Just like making 4 or 5 hundred dollars a month, that seems measurable, I can do that. And so I did build out some niche sites, but I also, I wouldn't say quickly realized, but I did realize over time that a lot of the more profitable ventures out there, in a lot of the more competitive spaces, in terms of the difference between income you can make, and the difference between time and effort you put in, it's really not big enough to justify putting all that time and effort into a niche site when you can put in just a little bit more effort into a more authority site and yield multiples of income of what niche sites are. And honestly, this trend, I think it's increasing in that way, because I think niche sites were originally kind of around and awesome for people who thought it was the most profitable way to make money, because they could be scaled in a way in a lot of aspects that basically allowed it to be very automated to where niche sites, and just kind of the growth of internet is going, to continue the trend, you're having to put a lot more time and effort into niche sites than you did 6 years ago. And I bet you can speak to this Spencer, I know you've built out a lot of niche sites. It's definitely not the same ballgame. [Absolutely.] Content used to be a thing where you could outsource a text broker, just slap some content on it, 500-600 word articles, then you could throw a few different link building packages out there and watch it rank for 2-3 years. And that was kinda the original idea that kinda made niche sites beautiful for what it was, for the people it was right for. But I think that it's really trended in the other way, you know, today you're talking in a lot of your niche series type stuff, that you should be creating content that really attracts links, that is generally more quality, and I think that fundamentally goes against what niche sites were supposed to be, which was low effort and low time, and really high quality content, which is kind of what you need for any site now, is not characterized by something that's low time and investment, low effort. And therefore I kinda realized that the overhead time and effort costs were increasing over time no matter

what site you're building out. And that's just the content side – you haven't even gotten to the link building side, which has obviously changed drastically. But I realized that these overhead costs were increasing over time, so I thought, if I'm gonna build out sites, if I'm gonna put this much time and effort into them, why go for some low-hanging fruit – you know, a goal for a niche site is maybe 5 or 6 hundred dollars a month for a lot of people – whereas I could build out some more authority sites, put in a little bit extra time and effort, but actually go after those bigger opportunities that were once kind of hard to believe, but once you kind of understand the amount of opportunities out there, it really is graspable.

Spencer: Right. Yeah very well said. I actually agree with what you say. People listening in maybe think I'm gonna jump in and defend niche sites if you will. But I actually agree with what you're saying. There definitely was a point in time, you know, 4 years ago or whatever, when I first got started, the point was to scale a lot of niche sites very quickly, doing exactly what you said. You could get content a little bit cheaper, the sites could be small, you could buy a particular link package or whatever, and it was hands-off. You just did that and then you repeated the process over and over again. And it worked very well for me. I will say that niche sites was 100% of my income and is what led me to quitting my job 2 ½, 3 years ago. So the money was very good if you knew what you were doing. But, there's been a lot of changes since then. And I've spoken a lot about this on my blog of course. And now when I'm doing my niche site projects, my case studies that you refer to, the process is different. I'm not talking about building dozens and dozens of these and automating the process and things like that. It almost has gotten to a point where you have to be more careful with what you're building, the quality has to be better, and so on and so forth. So what I recommend that people do in regards to niche sites is to use them either as a testing ground, or, if you're just getting started, it would be okay to maybe build two or three niche sites just to learn the entire process of building a website, learning the process of keyword research, going through all the hoops of setting up hosting and wordpress and plugins... use it as a training ground. So that's kind of my recommendation is people build maybe 2 or 3 niche sites if you're just getting started and at that point, you should try to find one larger project, niche, passion that you have that you can work on long-term. So, niche sites have their place, but I

actually agree that, long-term, building a large authority site really is the way to go. Now, the one other thing that I will say about niche sites, is that if you want to be a little bit more risky, and participate in the things that are very high-risk in regards to the fact that they're practices that maybe google doesn't fully approve of, you can still try to take some shortcuts, but that should be a minimal part of your website, portfolio, if you will, and you should be aware of the risks. So that's my thoughts on niche sites.

Jon: All I can say is, I'm not trying to diss niche sites, because I know for a lot of people they are very profitable and they still are. I'm just saying I'd rather be on the right side of the trends, but also as you said, they're great for testing. And if you're new in this, why invest into a bigger project just to find out you actually didn't understand these things? There's a lot more to lose in terms of your time, which is really your most valuable thing at the end of the day, And so don't invest a lot of it into your first project trying to build out some mega health site or something like that. Start with something small, manageable, understand all those aspects. But also, I mean, the thing about niche sites is, or just any site that you're building out, is once you define your business goals, I think it's a lot easier decision to make, just because your strategy for building out a niche site, if you're just building out a couple, versus let's say 50 or even 100, because I know there are people out there who do build niche sites in those kind of numbers, the strategies are definitely very different. Obviously you can't do everything manually for 50 niche sites. So you're gonna have to be able to scale some things. But you don't necessarily have to make them as long-term as we ideally like them to be. If you can get 50 niche sites ranking for 12 months, with a process that's very scaled – obviously you wouldn't be doing it by the most Google-approved things, you'd probably use some more link building packaging type stuff, or the stuff you have found that still works, but I mean even now the type of link building that you do is definitely doing to differ based off your business goals. And we'll kind talk about that in a little bit when we talk into link building strategies for niche sites.

Spencer: Yeah, absolutely. When it comes down to it, people do have different business strategies. And I still dabble around with niche sites, and I will probably continue to do that to either test

markets or just because I know I want to test different link building strategies or I want to do different things. But long-term, I think everybody probably needs to have sort of a core, larger-type project or website that they can work on. And I think that's where some people maybe miss the boat, is they have 100%, if we're looking at it from an investment perspective, they have 100% of their portfolio in one type of risky asset – niche websites. And that's just bad, because if that sort of strategy gets crushed by Google, 100% of your income is gone. But if you have that diversification with a larger site, or maybe a software product that you've developed, or some other type of business, you're not as likely to lose out on that portion of your income. So it's just smart to diversify and be aware of what's going on out there.

Jon: Just one thing I want to touch on, I remember reading a post on I think it was Smart Passive Income (Pat Flynn). And he asked a simple question which is, would you guys rather have ten sites making \$200 a month or one site making \$2000 a month? Which is basically the same income, but you can have 10 sites making that income or you can have one site. And a lot of people – there's this general idea that you should diversify and they think it would be less risky to have ten sites instead of one. But I strongly disagree with this. I think that's why a lot of people like to build niche sites – they kinda wanna spread themselves out, they want to diversify their income – but the truth is, to increase your revenue 50%, you could work on one site and increasing it 50%, or working on ten sites. And that's generally gonna be a lot more work as time goes on, just because you're gonna have to do a lot of things manually, as well as you can't really invest and focus and really get the intangible benefits of trying to work in one space versus trying to work in ten different spaces and understanding all the different nuances of competitors, webmasters in that space and what not. I don't think I best explained it, but if you're trying to build a lot of sites to diversify your income, I think you need to rethink whether or not that's actually the best mode, even though a lot of people say "Don't have all your eggs in one basket." But I mean the way things are going, from consumer pickiness to Google trying to see quality aspects of a website – you can't really do that at scale. So it's riskier to try and do it at scale than it is to try and do it on maybe one or two sites.

Spencer: I completely understand your point there. I agree, I think that it is a lot easier to scale one property, to have more industry knowledge in that particular space that you may be in, versus 10 or 15 or 20. You really can't manage one person being involved in 20 different niches, it just doesn't make sense. So very well said.

I want to dig in to some actual link building strategies. Maybe we're gonna do this in a couple of phases, because there are a lot of new people out there that are just getting started. And I am doing some niche site case studies on my blog. So people want to know how to build links for, maybe a smaller niche site. One that they just built, a brand new one. Maybe give us an overview of your best strategies, your best ideas, for some basic general link building for niche sites.

Jon: Yeah, definitely. Basically, I just want to start off saying, your strategy for trying to build links is going to greatly differ if your end goal is trying to create 50 niche sites versus two niche sites. Because with 50 niche sites, you really can't do the manual stuff at scale, because it just really doesn't scale. And so for that strategy, you might try and find some general link opportunities that you can get to any site, and kinda try and build up your own little black book of basically sites you can drop links on. Because that's the only way you can really scale niche link building. But if you're just starting a new site or what not, there's a few different things you can do. There's the obvious just trying to find any type of niche relevant directories. Which, there's probably not gonna be very many, but there's hopefully usually a few that you can get a link on. So that's one place to start. I'd also recommend monitoring blogs and looking for blogs that are relevant to whatever your niche is in, and trying to monitor for posts that mention your keywords and trying to leave a comment on those posts with a link, even though it's no-follow. So just blog comments on articles about whatever keyword you're targeting. And Google has their own blog search, which is a good tool to just type in your keyword and find all blog posts kind of mentioned in the last 30 days.

Spencer: How effective do you feel like blog commenting is, as far as a link building strategy?

Jon: Yeah I don't think it's huge, but I think with niche sites, you're gonna want to do your best to diversify, solely because, for the sites

that I've tested out on, I might find something that works, so I try to just do a lot of that and the like. But then one little nuance, one little update, can really hurt that type of link. So I realized that when I try to build 3 or 4 or 5 different types of links, when those little nuances hit, I move back 3 spots instead of 30, I realized that's probably the best option to go with. So I wouldn't say this kind of blog commenting is going to be your bread and butter, but I think it's something that you should just kind of sprinkle in with the rest of your strategy, especially if you just have a few sites. And as well as just looking for general sites that you can just drop the link on. So sites like AboutUs.org, you can basically create a profile for your domain, you can add a little bit of information, and then you can actually get that link to be do-follow, and the domain authority is like 70 or 80 or something like that. So there's just like a handful of sites that you'll come across that you can just get a link to for any site, mainly because you can create a profile, or you can leave a comment, or you can just submit a link. You're gonna come across these opportunities where you can just get a link without too much trouble. So it's about kinda looking for those opportunities, doing a few blog comments here and there, trying to find any type of niche relevant directories, and basically just going down the list because there are lots of lists of link building strategies across the web. I published one on my own site. There's just a lot of really specific small ways to get links and just kind of trying to build up maybe one or two from each, really.

Spencer: Yeah, I think that's good. I've actually linked to your link building strategies page, where you've listed, I don't know, 200 or so different strategies that people can follow. And so that makes complete sense to me. There's a lot of these either resource-type pages, where you can submit your website as a resource, or the profile links that you've mentioned. These places where you can essentially just submit your link or your information and get that back to your niche site, that's a great way to start. Any other sort of low-hanging fruit or strategy you would consider for the basic niche site there?

Jon: Yeah so I realized that probably the first step that you should be doing is really researching your competitors. That should really be the foundation; I always skip over it because it's kind of like second nature to me that when I start off doing any type of link building

project is obviously looking at competitors. A fair amount of people do understand this, this concept of just look at other sites ranking, especially other niche sites that are ranking for your same keyword. See how they're getting links, get the same links, and just optimize better on-site. But also, something that very few people kind of understand and grasp, is that even if there aren't other sites in your space, that are like direct competitors, that have the funnel, which is just building a small site and getting links to it, there are a lot of other people building niche sites and having the exact same issues you're having. So you can learn a lot from other people in other spaces. So what I would really recommend is look for niche sites not just in your space, but really any space. See how they're getting links. Sometimes you might find some exact, copyable prospects. So you might find that they're getting links from some random general site that you can get the same links from. But more so, look for those broader takeaways of links that they're getting, and see if you can apply the same kind of ideas to your site. So even though this isn't really direct competitor research, I call it indirect competitor research, and it's basically how I do a lot of projects, not just niche sites, but for my bigger authority sites. So let's say if I've got a ecommerce site that I work on, I do a lot of research at looking at other ecommerce sites in other spaces. Because we are both trying to build links to, let's say, our product or category pages, and the way that we can do it, I can learn a lot from other people in other spaces. So even those aren't direct opportunities that I can kinda take advantage of, it's really instrumental in terms of how I've learned to build links, solving these same problems just because some other people have had them.

Spencer: Yeah, that's a great point. And in fact, I've done that, looked at competitors, well, not direct competitors, but other niche site builders, or just other people in other spaces. Not only to look at some of the links, which I have done, but also it's been interesting to find maybe other niche ideas completely, or other content ideas completely. I've been able to find niches a number of times by just looking at different link profiles and who's linking to who. Essentially you find out that, hey, this guy, person A, is also building a site in niche B and C, and those are good niches to go into as well. So it also works for good niche research, low-hanging fruit, low-

competition markets that perhaps you can target as well, so great point there.

Let's maybe up the ante here a little bit. So we've got some basic link building that you can do for niche sites, that you can really do for any type of site. What do you do differently for a larger, authority-type site? What is either your bread-and-butter, or what should people focus on to get really great links to their larger, long-term project sites?

Jon: Yeah so one thing if you noticed I didn't touch on for niche site link building, was really just general outreach for like resource pages. It could be really any type of opportunity where you're actually reaching out to a person, because again, the model of a niche site isn't to build up this really super-high-quality site, because the return on investment wouldn't be that much in terms of the time you're investing into it. But for a more authority site, you can really invest into these bigger things that a lot of these marketing blogs talk about. The whole "create great content," "make everybody love your brand," and stuff like that. So you can actually really invest in these things, and get the real benefits of them. Because the thing about creating really high-quality content and just other aspects that a real company does, that a few people have said, it's really not something that you can half-ass. And if you really try and half-assed it for a site, which is something that if you try and do it for a niche site, you'd probably end up half-assing it. But it's not something you can half-ass just because you have to invest a lot of time and effort into it. So for bigger authority sites, you can invest this time and effort. So the way that they differed for me is, for authority sites, some of the things I've done is doing some real in-depth content research, seeing the most linked-to content in my space. I do a lot of dead content recreation, which is basically looking for old content that got a lot of links to it, recreating it, and then getting the same links to it. And that's usually like a lengthier process, but because it's an authority site, I can really invest into it. There are a lot of other things that you can do for a bigger authority site. For me, I got a big ecommerce site that I've been working on for over a year now, and so some of the things I've been able to do for it, that's really scaled well, is, there are lots of pages on the web that list off different discounts to different online stores. A lot of these are general opportunities, as long as your products are

family friendly – so if you're like adult products, or something like that, or gambling products or something like that, then you couldn't really get links from a university discount page. But if you've got family friendly products, then you can get a lot of these types of links. But with those, you're signing contracts and stuff like that, to say that you're gonna hold the discount. But again, that's something that I'm willing to do for an authority site. Other things that I've done that have scaled well... so we actually drop-ship products, and so we actually carry a lot of different brands. We carry about 3 to 4 hundred brands total. As a result, a lot of those brands actually have their own websites and they list off different online stores that you can buy the products at. Those are really low-hanging fruit for that, just because I just reach out to them, say hey, we sell your products, we were just wondering if you could add a link to us. And they do it. And we actually sometimes get links directly to category or product pages for their specific brands. And so those deep links are really, really helpful.

Spencer: Yeah. Lemme back up to the previous strategy that you mentioned, the coupon discounts that you mentioned. Now did you say that you are looking at universities that are offering these discounts, is that what you said?

Jon: Universities are a big portion. If anybody goes to Google and they type in something like "student discount program" or "employee discount program," you are going to find some different... there's a good portion of them that are .edu's, but they could be regular businesses, they could be organizations and stuff, and if you're a member or student with them, then you get access to this program, it gets you discounts on stuff. And a lot of times they'll list those discount pages publicly – they might not list the codes to actually get the discount, but they'll link out to all the different business that offer those discounts.

Spencer: Yeah, that makes sense, okay, very cool. I can see that that could be pretty effective, and yeah, it really wouldn't be that hard, if your website truly is offering that discount, obviously. Which is, again, gonna be the difference between having a small niche site, which really you're not offering any sort of product, to a larger site, where you actually are selling a product. That makes sense. What else you

got? Let's dig another nice strategy out of you. I know there's a ton, obviously, but maybe you can give us one more.

Jon: Okay so I'm really into ecommerce right now, and so I he taught you on ecommerce, but that's two of the three bigger authority sites in the building right now, and there's just, ecommerce versus let's say the more content-heavy site, it's gonna be a lot different in terms of the strategy you do. But something I do, for that big authority site that I have, we've actually got some categories that have enough products in them to where we actually have competitors just for those categories. We have competitors that are just carrying that category of product. So these are kind of like more niche ecommerce sites, I'd kinda say. But I've also realized that I could do competitor research on a category level, and not just like a top level of that main type of... let's say it was health products, I could initially do competitor research just looking at people selling general health products. But if we're selling, say, health supplements, then I can look at all the different sites that are just selling health supplements and get links to my category pages doing competitor research that way. So even though that's just competitor research, honestly that is probably going to be your more lucrative way of getting links, because there's just so much opportunity. Because honestly, the prospecting that I do for link opportunities, no matter what type of opportunity they are, I'd say about 80-90% of the time I'm not actually doing raw prospecting, which is typing an advanced query into Google, then scraping the results, then going from there. I use Ahrefs, which is a competitor to Open Site Explorer, and that's actually the tool that I use, again, for like 80-90% of my prospecting. I just basically follow the link trail to different pages, whether that's competitor research or not.

Spencer: Yeah, that makes sense, and there's a wealth of information out there, really, when you can see what links are pointing to every website out there. There's just a depth of different links, opportunities, everything. That makes sense. And yes I'm familiar with Ahrefs as well, so we'll link to that here after the interview.

So, it sounds like you've got a couple of different projects you're working on, hope you don't mind if I ask, but you've got the ecommerce site, and it sounded like a couple of other maybe more

content-heavy sites. How are they going? How are those projects moving along for you?

Jon: Yeah so I basically narrowed it down to about three pretty big authority sites, obviously a little bit of consulting – but right now, I'm kinda seeing how I got set up and trying to not take on very many clients. I honestly don't know what I'm gonna do – I could be in a completely different spot 6 months from now. But, with the authority sites that I'm building: I've got a generally large-size ecommerce site that I've been working on for the last year. It was very slow-going at the beginning. The guy came to me – he found me through my blog – and he wanted to partner up with me on the site. He was doing about \$1000 a month in revenue. He just basically launched it. He had all the connections in the industry to get the supplier set up. He was doing maybe 30, 40 visits a day. And so a year later, it's nowhere near where we wanted to be, but we made progress. We're now at about 400 hits a day, after really only about 2 months of link building that I did. Because I realized shortly in that the on-site was just terrible. The way he categorized stuff was bad... it wasn't his fault, it was just a master project for him to do, and he was really eager to get it up and going. So for the past 4 or 5 months I've been doing a ton of on-site architecture. And we're actually re-launching the site in about a couple weeks. Finally it's gonna be live. I've been waiting for that for forever. But that's gonna drastically help the on-site SEO and the conversions. We're currently doing about 5-6 thousand dollars in revenue, but I'm pretty confident that that's gonna be about 3x in about 6 months.

Spencer: Awesome!

Jon: I've been very big on that project, it's got a huge ceiling to grow. And interestingly enough, I initially got into... his vertical really sparked interest in me, because it was probably not the best way to make decisions, but I kinda made my decision based off the fact that I could get a ton of great links to the site. There was just so much opportunity from so many different spectrums that I realized, again, I just talked about it with discounts – I could get a ton of discount links. There was so many different content opportunities. There was a lot of competitors, which might sound like, why would you get into it, there's so many competitors. But they were like medium-level competition.

So there was no big huge authority site. But there's also so many different category keywords, there's so many different product keywords, and so many different top-level keywords, that, there's just so much opportunity from an SEO perspective. And luckily, the phase was actually... it's gonna be lucrative, and it is definitely an opportunity to make a lot of money. But if I did it a second time, I probably would have done a lot of research into how to actually make good money ranking for these terms and stuff like that, and actually bringing in the traffic.

So that's the first project. The second project is another site that I partnered on. It's a lead generation site in the education space, which is a very competitive space and it's very broad. But it's been doing okay, it's been doing very slowly and we don't know whether we should kind of call it a day and just move on to the next space, just because the guy's really smart and he's got a lot of connection in different lead gen spaces. So I'm gonna play that one by ear for the next 6 months or so.

And then the third and final one is another ecommerce space. It's a very specific product; it's very interesting. I can't really talk much about it, just because my partners are very NDA-focused. But between those three things, and then my agency side has definitely kept me busy with that – school.

Spencer: Yeah, it sounds like it. So it'll be probably a relief once you're actually out of school and you can hopefully do this stuff full-time, right?

Jon: Yeah, that's the plan.

Spencer: That would be awesome. Boy, I could ask you a ton of questions. And you know what, maybe I will. [Go ahead!]. Because I know there are a lot of people out there that are building more content-focused, blogs, if you will. And so I want to touch on maybe some strategies specifically for blogs. Even in my case, I'm working on a larger project that I haven't really shared on my site. You know, I have my business blog, but I am working on another blog in a completely different niche that I haven't really shared, with a partner and I. And we got some big plans for that. But right now it's just all

content focused, we have actually done almost zero link building. You know, I've gone out and reached out to a couple other blogs, left comments, and things like that. But I haven't really even tried to do any link building. We're basically publishing content daily on there, so there's a lot of great content. And because, luckily, I'm good at keyword research, we're getting 6-700 hits a day and it's growing already with no link building. But we could do a lot more. So maybe use my example, and lots of other people out there, that are building content blogs. What's maybe a good link bait strategy, or overall, a good strategy that will work for a general blog?

Jon: Yeah so for blogs, link building is a lot different of a beast than your average niche site or even one of my ecommerce sites, just because, especially, let's say if you're in tech. So if you have a tech blog, your competitors are generally gonna be some guys who definitely get their fair share of links each month, just because they publish content and because it's on something interesting. So doing traditional link building, where you're doing outreach and broken link building type stuff, that's not going to really work. It's not going to scale well for a blog when your competitors are building natural links by the hundreds each month. And so a lot of the link building things that you're doing for a blog – again, it's gonna differ based on your space. It's gonna differ based on the amount of opportunity there is for manual stuff as well as the amount of competition. If your competitor blogs don't have more than like a hundred, a couple hundred linking root domains, then that's something you can attack from your own perspective, which is doing a lot of outreach. But if your competitors, if you understand their velocity and how many links they're getting a month, as well as kind of what you're doing from the content side, your best bet is usually going to be really focusing a lot on-site, and the things that you do on your site instead of doing more outreach-heavy things. So, things like, I'm trying to think... so one idea is, you could build up kind of like a library of images that are free to use by other sites. And as you get more traffic, a lot of people will see those images more and more. They'll grab them and put them on their site – and then hopefully they give you an attribution link. And if they don't, you can do link recommendation, which is usually like a quick email, works really well. But something like that, that's gonna scale well as you grow your traffic and you grow your content. It's really gonna be a lot more content-focused, which I don't love talking

about, because I feel like so many people talk about how link building is just content. And it really isn't that for the majority of us, I mean that's why you're listening to a link building podcast right now. Just because you usually don't hit publish and get hundreds of links. But with a more content focus, especially if you're producing content on a daily basis, content is going to be really the bread-and-butter of your link building strategy. Which is just making sure that you're doing everything in your control to make it as shareable, as link-worthy as possible. And that's really just coming down to doing your research, putting in the time, and really doing all that you can to make that content as great as it can be. So it's not super-actionable, what I just told you, it's definitely depending on the space you're in, but content is definitely gonna be the biggest portion.

Spencer: Yeah, that makes sense, and as well, a lot of the other strategies you already talked about will work. When it comes down to it, sounds like a lot of it will be competitor research. You can look at what your competitors are doing in your particular niche, and you can try to replicate a lot of that as well. So I think those are good points for sure.

Jon: So I hate, hate, hate giving examples in the SEO industry, just because a lot of people do and it's so misleading to so many other people. Because building links to your SEO agency site is going to be a lot different than your average space. Just because we have such a broader knowledge of SEO and how the web works and stuff like that. So if you're trying to build links in a construction space, or something like that, and you're trying to do the same kind of outreach to a webmaster, and they're just not gonna care. But I will say that for my blog, I would be really stupid if I were trying to rank for some different keywords in the SEO space by doing manual link building. Just because, looking at my competitors, they're not doing any manual link building. They're actually getting links at a velocity much higher than me, just because they're got so much content out there that's actually worth sharing and stuff like that. So if I did actually legitimately focus my blog on building links, it would really be from a content side. Because that's the only way I can really scale it with just getting as many eyeballs and knowing that a lot of those eyeballs have their own sites.

Spencer: Yeah, that makes sense, and it's one thing to say, produce great content because people will share it. Maybe the question is, how do you get people to share it. Maybe you have a blog only gets 100 people coming a day, which isn't really very much, and not that many people are gonna share it. Should you be syndicating content other places, how do you get that content out there?

Jon: I think there's kind of like a chicken-and-the-egg problem for a lot of new sites and a lot of new blogs and content. Because a lot of the content-heavy link building strategies are usually for sites that already have an audience. So they've already got the eyeballs. So all they need to do is give those eyeballs exactly what they're asking for, and then they'll kinda do it on their own. But it's like, if you produce great content on a blog and nobody reads it, is it really great content? So you need to understand that, if you're a new site, you're gonna have to do some manual stuff to get kind of started and get the ball rolling. For you guys, you just published a lot of content, probably on some low-competition keywords, and so you didn't really need the links to rank. And so that's an awesome strategy to get started, especially if the amount of link building opportunity in your space is very limited, but for when it isn't limited, and you're actually willing to go after a little bit more competition-heavy keywords, then you might have to do some manual link building to start, just to start ranking for some medium-level keywords to get some eyeballs on it. But basically, as the rate of visitors goes up, the amount of manual stuff that you'll be doing off-site is gonna definitely go down, to a point where, any big publication today, the way that they're gonna build links is to publish a great story, not to outreach to thousands of sites. Because have people who are already interested in what they're producing and stuff like that. So it's definitely gonna differ hugely off of, what is your current situation in terms of your audience.

Spencer: Yeah, that makes complete sense, definitely. So, let's switch gears for just a little bit. One thing that I've talked about on my blog a number of times as a link building strategy is using expired domains. It's something that's a little bit more on the gray-hat, black-hat, whatever you want to call it spectrum. Are you familiar with this process? I'm sure you are. And what are your thoughts on the strategy?

Jon: Yeah, so I probably should've let you know before this, but I actually don't do a lot of expired domain link building. I've done some in the past, and I know that a lot of people did it really successfully and it scaled well. But for me, in terms of, I'm generally like a low-risk person, and so this was something I know I would actually have to invest a lot of time to really iron out all the details to make sure I was using the right auctions, knowing what to look for when a domain expires, and knowing how to decide, for example, what is the authority of the links to it, was the PageRank fake, or was it real, and there's just a lot of different things that you have to learn from experience and I realized that it wasn't something that I really wanted to dive into. So I'm not saying it's bad at all; I know a lot of people are doing it really well. It's ridiculous how it's been working pretty well for kind of a long time. You'd think Google would perk their ears up at this idea after a while, but it seems to be working like a charm still, for the people who know how to do it right. But if you don't know how to do it right, you could end up losing a lot of money, just because sometimes paying for 5 or 6 of these expired domains, for a hundred bucks a pop, you know, that can add up pretty quickly.

Spencer: Yeah, you know, it really can. And it is a complicated process, and it's something that I've tried, if you will, with varying degrees of success. It's a huge learning curve that just, depending on who you are, the amount you have to invest, the amount of time that you have. For most people, it's probably something that they're not gonna want to get involved with. But I just thought I'd ask for your opinion on that particular link building strategy, since it's a fairly unique one that people are using nowadays.

Jon: Yeah and for beginners, I wouldn't recommend that be your first place to stop [Definitely, right], but if you've been in the game for a while and you're willing to take some risks, and trying to kind of sneak past Google in some aspects, then by all means go for it, I would not stop you.

Spencer: Interesting. Very cool. Let's talk a little bit about the future of link building. I mean Google has said a lot of different things as far as, you shouldn't be building links to your site; but then Matt Cutts comes out and says, well, link building isn't illegal, there's certain things you can do. And then, on top of that, Google is always making

tons of changes for how they're ranking sites and different things. What is the future of link building, from your perspective? What should people be focusing on when they're building links to their sites?

Jon: Yeah so, honestly, I'm not a huge fan of posts that talk about the future of this, the future of that, especially such a fast-changing area. But honestly, Google is relatively pretty slow with any big changes that they do, and they happen gradually. They'll even roll back certain updates just to make sure everything goes correctly and stuff. So in a lot of trends, they haven't really changed direction anytime soon. Anything that automates, or scales well, especially something that's publicly known, is obviously something that's on Google's radar. They're eventually gonna go after it. So obviously the future will not include those things nearly as much. But you also have to understand, you can date back to the earliest things that Google targeted with the algorithms – directories, reciprocal links, even... I even see people doing article directories right now, they're still doing that kind of stuff. There's always gonna be people that are gonna get by, that know how to do it in a certain way that basically slips by Google. And what that basically comes down to is not leaving footprints, and not doing it the same way as thousands of others. Because Google really doesn't care about one spammer; they care about a thousand. And so as long as you're not doing the same thing as anybody else, you can generally get by with a lot of what you're doing. But honestly, from a futuristic perspective, it's pretty obvious that Google is trying to crack down on anything that could be deemed to manipulate. I don't really see something like broken link building being targeted, but it's been pretty obvious from a content perspective, from a link building perspective, what they're going after, it's really no secret. So, obviously we all know that guest blogging is gonna take a hit someday, today it's still working like a charm for a lot of people, even like low-quality stuff. And I'd recommend if people are looking into some more automated, link building package type stuff, which I wouldn't recommend a beginner to do, but if you are, there's a lot of guest blogging services out there. And I know a few that work like a charm. And I can't tell you because then immediately, if I tell somebody, a thousand other people start using it, then Google goes after it, so it's kind of an obvious reason to kind of keep it to myself. The point is, it's been trending in certain ways for a really long time,

and it's really not hard to decipher where we're gonna be at in 3 or 4 years. It's really gonna depend on how quickly Google is gonna get to that point and to what degree are they actually gonna take action on it.

Spencer: Yep, I agree. Google has kinda made clear what their intentions are. And when it comes down to it, Google is based on a formula, it's a mathematical equation if you will. Links have always been, really, that was the original formula, and they're still gonna be critical in the future. What links count for how much? And different strategies may change slightly, but I think your answer's spot on there. For people to sort of look to the future of link building, they can kind of look at what the trends have already been leading up to this point and make their own deductions as to what that will be.

So I appreciate your time coming on the show very much. If people wanted to get in touch with you, or follow along, what's the best place for them to do that?

Jon: Yeah, thank you Spencer so much for having me on. I definitely keep up with you; you're obviously doing amazing things, and it's just been great to chat with you today. Places you can keep up with me – I've been very infrequent in terms of the updating I do really on anything, but I am on Twitter, @PointBlankSEO. I try to keep my tweets pretty relevant to link building but I will have some personal tweets. I am big sports fan, so I might send a tweet out about the Tampa Bay Buccaneers losing or something like that. So I'm on Twitter, I got my blog, PointBlankSEO.com, which, again, I'm very infrequent, so I'm not gonna, you know, if you subscribe to RSS, I'm not gonna bug you too much. And then I also have my newsletter, which I generally keep very targeted for the stuff I give out. It's generally pretty helpful stuff. I'm very infrequent in terms of the stuff I do send out. So yeah, those are the three places you can kinda keep in touch.

Spencer: That's great, I'll link to those after the show in the post, so people can follow along there. Again, it's PointBlankSEO.com. Jon, it's been a pleasure having you on the show. I appreciate your time.

Jon: Yeah! Thanks Spencer, appreciate it.

Spencer: Thank you.