EE Podcast #86 SEO & Digital Marketing with Dana DiTomaso

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Lea Alcantara: You are listening to the unofficial ExpressionEngine Podcast episode #86 with special guest Dana DiTomaso here to talk about SEO and digital marketing. I'm your host Lea Alcantara, and I'm joined by my fab co-host,

Emily Lewis: Emily Lewis.

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Emily Lewis: The ExpressionEngine Podcast would also like to congratulate Pixel & Tonic, our major sponsor of the year, for releasing Assets 2. They have completely rewritten and redesigned it from the ground up, adding some highly-requested new features like Amazon S3. Visit pixelandtonic.com/assets for more details.

[Music ends]

EmilyLewis: Hey Lea, how are you doing?

Lea Alcantara: A little harried since I'm teaching again because I think it's always a balance doing that while also doing LeaLea Design stuff.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I'm often wondering how come I'm not just satisfied strictly doing freelance stuff. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: Why I have to also be involved in so many other projects. It's harried and seeking balance are a constant states of mind for me.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, it's the same for me. I'm always looking for new challenges, and I think that's part of the reason why while it is a bit harried, I do enjoy balancing the freelance with teaching, and I think teaching also helps me become a better professional too.

Emily Lewis: I definitely know one of the reasons why I'm involved in so many different types of projects … It keeps my mind from getting bored.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: I really like building out a site in ExpressionEngine, designing it and working with clients – well, I don't always like working with clients, but… [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: But sometimes I don't feel like doing that on a given day.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And since I get to edit Web Standards Sherpa some days, I can spend a whole day writing and editing, which I find really satisfying, and then the time we spend doing research for this podcast is a totally different part of my brain.

Lea Alcantara: And one of the things that I like to do with this podcast beyond just like recording and things like that and figuring out the topics and getting guests is I also try to figure out, well, how do I improve the site.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Because as we know even after we hand out a project to a client, a site is kind of a living, breathing thing. There's always a better way to make it faster, or more efficient. So when I have a bit of time or maybe when I'm procrastinating… [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs] Productive procrastination.

Lea Alcantara: Yes, productive procrastination. I like to poke around the EE Podcast site, and one of the things that I try to do is kind of figure out how to optimize it for SEO, so when people Google for topics on ExpressionEngine, it's easy to find that particular episode. Really, I think when I think of SEO, it's just how do I make the site more useful for everyone involved.

Emily Lewis: [Agress]

Lea Alcantara: Even though I'm not a giant expert and it only graze the surface by figuring out like where should our H1s be, and what our keywords are, trying to optimize page loads and things like that. I think overall those types of considerations help increase the user experience for everyone involved. That's why I'm so excited to have Dana DiTomaso as our guest today to talk about digital marketing and SEO. So Emily, why don't you introduce our guest?

Emily Lewis: Dana is CEO of Kick Point, a digital marketing agency based in Edmonton, Canada. She is also the technology columnist for CBC Edmonton AM, co-organizer of the Edmonton Girl Geek Dinners, and communications chair of the Advertising Club of Edmonton.

Welcome, Dana, thanks for joining our podcast today!

Dana DiTomaso: Thank you so much for having me.

Emily Lewis: It sounds like you have a bit of the bug that Lea and I have where you are involved in lots of different activities and projects. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: Would you mind telling our listeners a little bit more about yourself?

Dana DiTomaso: I was chuckling to myself while you were reading that through. I'm like, "Yeah, that sounds exact. I can't say no." And my wife pokes me about it all the time. When I have phone calls, she says, "Did you just say yes to something else?" I'm like, "No. Yeah, I totally did."

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: I liked being involved in lots of different things definitely, and I think that's why I'm drawn to digital marketing because it changes all the time. It keeps you on your toes. So for the stuff I do, I mean, you outlined it. CBC which is every Monday, so this morning I was went at 6:30 going to CBC to do the column.

Emily Lewis: If you don't mind me interrupting you, is that like a "real" radio show, like you're in a booth with like headsets and proper mikes and all that other stuff?

Dana DiTomaso: Yeah, and it's live, so you can't swear.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: Or say uhm. I'm getting pretty good at eliminating the word whiskers from my vocabularies as a result of doing this CBC definitely.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: For those that aren't in Canada, the CBC is television and radio network up here, so it's kind of like PBS or the BBC for those in the United States and the UK.

Emily Lewis: You don't have to worry. As an edited podcast, you can speak out of turn if you want, our listeners won't hear it, but Lea and I can enjoy it.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: [Laughs] I know. With my column I was just thinking the entire time, "Don't swear. Don't swear. Don't swear."

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: But I did okay, and they had me back, so I've been doing it for almost a year now actually.

Lea Alcantara: Fun.

Dana DiTomaso: Yeah, and then the other stuff I'm involved with is the Girl Geed Dinners which there's Girl Geek Dinners around the world so if any of your listeners are female and nerdy, which imagine a great deal of the probably are, see if there's a Girl Geek Dinner near you. And if there isn't, you should start one, and it's a great way for women in technology to get together because as you know, when you go to technical conferences, usually it is overwhelmed by me, and this gives women a nice space to be nerdy together. Men can come to the Edmonton dinners, but they have to be the guest of a woman, so it keeps the ratio to at least 50/50.

Then the Advertising Club of Edmonton, I love advertising and digital marketing, fits right into that, so it's been a really great experience being on the board.

Lea Alcantara: Let's talk about your history with digital marketing. It sounds like you really love it, but was that something that you were always drawn into? Like how did you get started with your career?

Dana DiTomaso: Well, I just tweeted this morning actually that I realized that this year is my 20th high school reunion.

Lea Alcantara: Wow!

Dana DiTomaso: Which means that I'm old. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: And it also means that. [Laughs]   It's been 20 years since I've used the first web browser which is and was NCSA Mosaic, and that's when I got to university in 1993 and I was like, "What's this web browser thing?" And it was not even version 1.0, I think at that point. I think it was version 0.8 or something as the first one I used, and I was like, "Yeah, this web thing is kind of interesting, but whatever." And I actually have a degree in Geography."

Lea Alcantara: Wow!

Dana DiTomaso: And then when I graduated school, yeah, I had a degree in hiking.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: And then when I graduated school, I got a job in an environmental software company, and from there, I moved pretty heavily into technology. I worked at a couple of different software companies. Then in 2002 I got laid off from my job, but I got a really nice package so I started a web design business in January 2002.

Emily Lewis: And what's your history with ExpressionEngine? I know you use it for some of your projects. When did that enter the picture for you?

Dana DiTomaso: Well, when pMachine came out, which I think was also in 2002, if I'm recalling correctly, I started using it back then, and this is pre-WordPress. I think pMachine was the very first CMS I ever used, and it was a whole word of – I remember trying to get mySQL working locally on my computer, and then figuring out how to install it. I feel like that's everyone's first steps, the first time you use a CMS, "How does this database crap work?" And fighting with that.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Dana DiTomaso: And I used pMachine for a number of client sites from the very beginning, and then as soon as they came out with ExpressionEngine, I just switched over to using ExpressionEngine, so I've been using it since the very beginning.

Emily Lewis: Have you tried any other CMSes, mixed things in, or has ExpressionEngine exclusively been your preferred tool?

Dana DiTomaso: We definitely use other CMSs. At my web design company, we use ExpressionEngine and WordPress a little bit, not as much as I use it now actually. I find that I use WordPress now more than I use to, and like the Kick Point website is built on WordPress right now just because it was quick and easy, and then I've also have a little bit of experience with Drupal and

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I've used the CMS called CMS Made Simple for a number of years, but I don't use that one anymore. I think their community unfortunately isn't as robust as the ExpressionEngine community so we stopped using it.

Lea Alcantara: So what are some of the considerations when you choose a CMS, and specifically you decide, "Okay, ExpressionEngine is the best solution for this project." So why would it be the best solution, and what type of project would you subscribe EE for?

Dana DiTomaso: Well, ExpressionEngine takes, I think, more time to get the way that I want it to be, but then other CMSs, you can just go on a theme for it and buy a cheap WordPress theme and then toss it up on a site, and then, bam, you got a website, right? I've said to people, "You know, WordPress is almost the new flash where you can go on and just install a theme. You don't actually have to know any web development. You can just change the colors using the admin panel." And I think ExpressionEngine forces you to be a little bit better as a web developer because of the decisions that you have to make in terms of how things are displayed, and I think it's comparative to Drupal, for example, in that way because of the way that you have to really think about what the end product is going to be.

So why I choose ExpressionEngine is primarily budget, if the client has enough time to go for that kind of solution, and then also the ExpressionEngine has so many advanced features. So for example, for a recent client, they have a full biography section for all the partners in their accounting firm, and for each partner, we need to have specific details such as their degrees and their job title and a link to their vCard, and ExpressionEngine is really the better option for that because it does handle custom field so well. That's probably my favorite feature in ExpressionEngine is the custom fields feature.

Lea Alcantara: So how does that tie in to EE and SEO?

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Dana DiTomaso: I love EE for SEO because again it is so customizable. What I hate about WordPress is that it tosses all these crud into the head that you don't actually need, and especially if you buy a theme and then you have to customize it, but the coder isn't very efficient or they are just trying to make it work for everybody so there are tons of code bloat, and I find that with EE sites, you can get something that's really code light and it moves or goes quickly and it's basically just customize as you want it to be so you control what the final output is, whereas with WordPress, there's a lot of extra crud that gets tossed in there.

Emily Lewis: I don't have a whole lot of expertise in SEO beyond optimizing my markup, but that code bloat, does that actually have an impact on search engines or digital marketing?

Dana DiTomaso: Oh, absolutely. I just did a talk actually at WordCamp Edmonton on site speed, and [laughs] someone who's there was like, "You just yelled at us for an hour about site speed."

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: Lea, were you at that?

Lea Alcantara: Oh, no. Unfortunately, not.

Dana DiTomaso: Okay. Well, that's what I did. Actually, the slides were on the Kick Point website. But all I did was talk about how WordPress is terrible for site speed out of the box. There's a lot of optimization that you can do, but a lot of people don't make the effort to do it. I also compared an iPhone 5 to a 336 modem in terms of the amount of speed that you get out of your phone, and if somebody is trying to download your great big website on a teeny tiny little phone using a terrible 3G connection, it's just not going to happen, and I think that a lot of designers need to be aware of how people who aren't you use the web, including the poor suckers who are still using Internet Explorer, and from a Google perspective, Google only gives a certain amount of time to spidering your website. So if you would take longer to serve the pages and Google is willing to wait for, they just won't bother taking a look at your site in full so they might skip some pages that you feel are really important.

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Lea Alcantara: Interesting.

Emily Lewis: That sort of segues us a little bit to the what Google wants and what SEO is, and I have to admit, I have a bit of a perception that there are some people peddling what they call SEO, and I think they're hacks. Some of my clients hire them, and my gut is telling me that what my clients are being told by these SEO experts is not entirely accurate, and in fact, goes against what Lea was saying earlier about making a site usable. If that's your foundation for starting making a site usable to all users including the search engines, so do you feel like your area, your industry, your specialty is sometimes misperceived or gets a bad rap? Or is it a fair rap that there are people out there doing that?

Dana DiTomaso: Well, that's a fair rap that there are totally these snake oil salesmen out there, and that's a new field since it's only been around for, I mean, really ten years or so, I would say, in terms of the public eye, and people take advantage of that ignorance absolutely. I mean, just as there are bad web designers out there who charge $5,000 for a WordPress template, there are terrible SEOs out there, and I think that for us at Kick Point, what we are trying to do is get away from the word "SEO" and instead focus on digital marketing because SEO in the traditional sense is really this technical basis of making your site look good to the search engines, and in terms of our effort, typically it's only about 10% of the entire search engine optimization project.

Emily Lewis: Oh.

Dana DiTomaso: Most of what we spend our time doing is on usability, making sure that the site does the thing. You don't want to make it hard for people to do the thing that you want them to do, whether it's your podcast for example, or fill out a form, or buy your stuff. Why are you making it difficult for them? Making sure that it works, making sure that it's usable, and then creating really compelling, interesting content that is share worthy so that people will share links to your website, and ideally that's what we want. I don't want to see a Google Analytics show that 80% of your traffic is coming from Google because that's putting too many eggs in one basket.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Dana DiTomaso: I would love to rather see an even spread between Google, there are two other search engines too. I don't know if people are familiar with them.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: We're talking about Google all the time, but there is a Bing thing out there, and everyone is like, "Who uses that?" But I bet your mom does, right?

Emily Lewis: Right.

Dana DiTomaso: You know?

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Dana DiTomaso: Because there are lots of parents out there who use all other kinds of search engines. My father-in-law uses Dogpile for crying out loud.

Emily Lewis: Oh, really? [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: He will go on Dogpile and he will google Google, and then he will go to Google and google something else.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: It's pretty hilarious, but he uses it.

Lea Alcantara: That's hilarious.

Dana DiTomaso: So this is how other people who are not us use the web, and I think it's important for us to remember that, and to really think about our target market and how they use the web and how can we speak to them, and how can we encourage them to do that things we want them to do.

Emily Lewis: How can you integrate that higher level, bigger picture digital marketing plan with the more technical aspects like of SEO? How do you bring them together? And even more specifically, how do you take that marketing plan and decide what technical things you're going to execute?

Dana DiTomaso: Well, there's basic technical stuff that we do to every website. So we have an audit checklist that we go through for technical purposes, and we do that as the very beginning of the engagement, and then we'll review it every six months to a year depending upon to how big the site is and how much work is being done on it, and so if it's a very small site, we only need to look at the technical only once a year.

If it's a very big site, we might look at it quarterly or twice a year. Often with a technical solution, it's just a list of things that, "Hey web designer, they should be H1s, you put all the headings and at H3, please don't make the logo on H1." Simple stuff like that. It's often those things. Sometimes there's deeper stuff like, for example, maybe you've got these parameters gone wild where you ended up with tons of URLs serving up the same content, which is a duplicate content penalty. We like to avoid that if possible, but really dealing with all that technical stuff is generally not that hard.

What it comes down to in 90% of the clients that we work with is rarely a technical issue and more like nobody is coming to your site because you don't have anything interesting to say, and I think it's really difficult because that's work, and nobody wants to do work, and I think that that's where the problem is. I mean, as web developers, you know how hard it is to get client, good content from clients. I mean, what's the number one thing that holds up web projects, right?

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Dana DiTomaso: It's content. Everyone is like, "Oh yeah, all right, next week," and then two years later, "Oh, the content is done." [Laughs] So for us, a lot of our time is spent in helping clients either creating the content for them or taking what they have and then making it more awesome, and then sharing it out with the audience, and talking to our clients and saying, "Look, who do you want to reach?" And then figuring out where do these people hang out, and then how can we attract them.

Emily Lewis: Do you think that that more time-consuming process of really crafting content effectively is why there are so many black hat and grey hat SEO solutions out there? Because it seems like it's the faster, quick fix.

Dana DiTomaso: Oh yeah, it's the same thing with going on like Fiverr.com and buying a 1,000 Twitter followers. Why should I go through all the hard work when I can just pay $5 and get it for peanuts? And I think that this is where people just want the quick fix and easy solution, and unfortunately having a really outstanding web presence is a lot of work, and you can't be at the verge without having a team of writers who are creating content on a regular basis, and really outstanding content.

OkCupid is a wonderful example. They do amazing blog posts. They have data that they can pull information from. I don't know if you've seen OkCupid's blog posts, but they are amazing, and they just dig into the data and say, "I'm interested in finding about the data." There was one great post about talk to short men and tall women, and I think it was one of their very best and it was looking at responses to profiles by short men and tall women, and it was really enlightening, but they have all these data at their fingertips.

In your industry, even if you think it's something boring, there must be data that you can take a look at and then take that data and write a blog post about it, and I find that half the time with clients, you have to convince them that what they do is actually really interesting and a lot of them are like, "Oh, it's the same stuff I look at every day." "Yeah, but I don't work in your industry. I find what you do interesting."

I mean, with some clients, it's just interesting out of the gate. If you have a beer blog, well, of course, that's going to be interesting. Everybody loves beer. [Laughs] If you're an accounting firm, how do you make what you do interesting?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Dana DiTomaso: Because people only find what you do interesting around tax time, and so that's definitely a challenge for your industry, but one way we can tackle it and say, "What are the kinds of stuff that people are looking for? Let's answer these questions."

Lea Alcantara: Do you think some of those answers can be found through analytics to give you clues over what people do find interesting?

Dana DiTomaso: You can definitely find it analytics. We find a lot of it in keyword research as well, and keyword research, if you're not familiar with it, is when we go out and look at sources of keyword data and determine what people are actually searching for when they look for your site. So for example, one interesting search for the ExpressionEngine community would be ExpressionEngine (one word) versus Expression Engine (two words) versus EE.

Lea Alcantara: Sure.

Dana DiTomaso: How do people use it? And then the different levels, if the Expression Engine is two words, they probably are not super familiar, and if it's one word, they are probably more familiar, and then if it's EE, they are an expert, so then crafting contents to those different experience levels. And then take a look at the content on your site. Go through that keyword list and look at the content in your site and what are people searching for that you're not answering, and then how can you answer that question via content.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I think one of the things that's in some projects that I've worked for in the past is I've had clients who come to me with a bunch of keywords that they have decided is what people are searching on just based on because that's how they talk internally.

Dana DiTomaso: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And what you said, showing them that their behavior as internal users of this system is going to be totally different than who their audience is. Like you said, they may not even find a given topic interesting that their audience could.

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Dana DiTomaso: And a lot of what we look at too is also intent. So let's say you're looking for a home to purchase and you search for quick possession versus ready to move in. Those two phrases have very different intent behind them. Quick possession is probably looking for a foreclosed home. Ready to move is looking for a home that is probably newly built, ready to go. So if I'm a homebuilder client, I'm not going to go after quick possession. If I'm a realtor, quick possession is the keyword instead. So there is also a lot of intent, are they in the research phase, or are they in the purchase phase?

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Dana DiTomaso: How quick are they going to be ready to make that decision based on the types of phrases that they are using? And again, it's work. Nobody likes doing any work. I mean, that's why we do the work for you, but a lot of it is just going through the list and looking at the keyword and saying, "Okay, what did this person mean when they did this search?" And sometimes we are like, "You people are crazy. Why are you looking for those things?" Misspellings always get me, a lot of the time, and years ago, I did a campaign for a cold sore medication manufacturer, a very popular one that you probably know, and a lot of people are searching for lip herpes.

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Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: That's all right, we will help you find solutions to your lip herpes.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: So yeah, people search some weird stuff.

Lea Alcantara: I think what's interesting you pointed out is just really what you're trying to do is putting actual data and research as opposed to just assumptions of what people are looking for. Just because you as the owner think that people are going to be searching for cold sore medication when

lip herpes is actually [laughs] the more common and realistic search thing, you kind of have to get past your own discomfort or your own perceptions in order to actually be successful. Do you find yourself fighting with clients about that in terms of maybe even branding because do they want to be found even though…

Emily Lewis: Right.

Lea Alcantara: Well, like, I mean, that is the medical reality of cold sores, but do they want to be found using that? Would there ever be a situation where even though that's the popular term to find, branding-wise, do they want to? Like would you ever suggest, "No, that's not something where we should go for."

Dana DiTomaso: Often, I find that clients are already coming up strongly for the phrases that they feel they should be ranking for, and then at that case, you can just look at the analytics and say, "Look, this is how many visits we got for this phrase. We know you're in the top three. You are already pulling most of the traffic, and these people just aren't converting."

I find that the strongest report we can do when we start an engagement with the client is set up some goals in Google Analytics for what their conversions are, whether it's filling out a form or commenting on a blog post. There has to be some sort of conversion, and then looking at conversions from each channel, looking at social versus Google versus referral traffic, and determining where your high converting categories are, and then digging deeper into the organic channel, which is what we call the non-paid search traffic, and look at what keywords converted, and if you think you're ranking more for a keyword, then yes, pulling up some traffic but nobody is converting, either that's not the right keyword for us and these people are not looking for what you think they're looking for, or there's something wrong with the page that's turning them off so they're not converting.

I think seeing that data really provides a compelling argument for clients to say, "Look, I know this is what you think it is, but this is what the data is telling us, and it's not us so much, it's the faceless masses of the internet who are telling you that you're showing for the wrong stuff." So I think it's less

of a fight as in you versus me and more of a "okay, let's look at the data." Although sometimes we do have discussions when it comes to this because we do some paid search work as well and sometimes clients will say, "I want to try this ad." "Yeah, sure thing. We'll toss it in and see how the click-through rate is." Sometimes it's amazing, and sometimes it's terrible, but this is where the data always bears it out.

Lea Alcantara: Well, the thing that I'm actually thinking about where there could be some controversy, and I've seen this happen too, and this is really what I was trying to get at with my question in terms of branding, the term "thinspiration" versus "fitspiration," right?

Dana DiTomaso: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Thinspiration could be really, really, really popular and can drive a lot of traffic for you in a lot of channels, but is that necessary?

Dana DiTomaso: Do you want that traffic?

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, exactly, and at the same time though, one could argue, "Maybe I do want to have that traffic, but then give them a fitspiration message instead to convert them." Or marketing-wise, does that even make sense? Do you even want to have any sort of association with those types of terms? That's really what I mean where it's just like yes, and let's say the data tells you it is converting, it's giving you all these types of stuff, but it's for a phrase that's not necessarily the message you want to send. Would that be something that you would suggest to move away from? Because to me, that's where it becomes almost like an ethical conundrum in terms of like branding versus sales versus traffic, and what would your suggestion be?

Dana DiTomaso: Well, for us, we do make an ethical decision when we are taking on clients.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Dana DiTomaso: And if a client is going after phrases that we don't feel comfortable with in terms of marketing them, then we will refer them elsewhere. So I can tell you that internally we would never

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take on a client who would try to be marketing on those phrases, and actually, we do have a client in the fitness vertical here in Edmonton, and they actually have a bit of a controversy because the person who set them up on Instragram and elsewhere told them to use that hashtag, and then as soon as we started working with them, we talked to them and we were like, "What are you guys doing?" He said, "Oh no, this other guy told us to do that." We were like, "No, don't do that." And we explained to them what it was, and they were immediately horrified, and stopped it immediately.

So it's not something that for them they were interested in doing, but if they have come to us and said, "No, no, we want to market to this because of…" Why would have to be a really compelling reason for us to continue to let them use that hashtag and keep them on as a client. So there's definitely a judgment call that we make in terms of clients as well because we want to make sure that we're a good fit.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Dana DiTomaso: It's a very collaborative process. We don't just write a bunch of recommendations and then implement them and then you send your check in at the end of the month. We are definitely more of a consultancy than a vendorship, so you talk to us and we talk to you, it's a collaborative process. Clients also have complete access to our workforce. They know the stuff that we're working on, so we want to make sure that we feel comfortable with the kinds of things we're marketing and that they feel comfortable with decisions that we're making on their behalf. It's a big amount of trust in the relationship. Does that answer your question?

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely.

Emily Lewis: So I'm just curious, it's clear that it's a very close relationship with the client. Once you have made those decisions regarding keywords and the approaches you want to take and it comes time for them to be implemented, do you work directly typically with the web developer, or does the client do that? I mean, is that part of your team?

Dana DiTomaso: Typically, there's a web developer of some kind out there, [laughs] and unless it's a site that I did back when I had the web design company, then typically it's a third party developer. Most of them are pretty receptive to the changes we request. Because I do come from a web development background, it's nice because we can talk nerdy to each other.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Dana DiTomaso: And then the client doesn't really care to be involved in that conversation. They get too pointed where they're like, "You're asking about things that I don't understand. Why don't you to two talk about that." And at that point, that's fine. The client doesn't necessarily need to be included on all the conversations that we have about the intricacies, the H1 tag. They don't really care. They just want to make more money via their website. [Laughs] So there is that, and I find that most web designers are pretty receptive to it. Every once in a while I run into a few who get really territorial about their websites.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Dana DiTomaso: And often when that happens, the client is usually kind of fed up with them at that point too. They are the kind of web designer who won't give over editorial access to the website, for example, or you'd never actually had an admin login. You just had this just an editor login and they don't want to share the admin login with them, in that kind of really protective web designer, and that's a difficult thing to negotiate, and usually we try to just tiptoe as much as possible. I don't want to damage the relationship that a client has with the web developer, but I think that some of them need to just relax. I'm not trying to steal your clients. I'm just trying to make things better for all of us to make us all look good, and from the web developer's perspective too, you can learn from the kind of stuff that we're doing and apply it to future client websites as well.

Lea Alcantara: So I kind of want to focus a little bit about the developer stuff in terms of what you would suggest technically. I know with ExpressionEngine, there's a few technical solutions to help

with those keywords and analytics. Do you have any particular favorite add-ons or setups for EE, so it does help optimize the technical aspects of the site for SEO?

Dana DiTomaso: Yeah, we use SEO Lite on all of our ExpressionEngine sites.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Dana DiTomaso: And I also use the Sitemap Module which is just called Sitemap Module. [Laughs] I can't remember who published this. It's a paid module. It's on Devot:ee, but those are the two that we use most of the time. I know there's another one, the Better Meta. I haven't used that as much just because I've been comfortable with SEO Lite and Sitemap, and between the two of them, I think it pretty does the same thing that Better Meta does.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Dana DiTomaso: So I would say any of those solutions would be good. Ideally, you want something that allows you to edit title tags, meta descriptions, and provides a sitemap .xml. Those are the big three you're looking for.

Lea Alcantara: Okay. Have you ever considered integrating the analytics data into EE, or do you think that would be something that's dangerous for clients to look at?

Dana DiTomaso: I don't think it's dangerous for clients per se, but I worry about the kinds of analytics that are presented. Because what we are looking at is less with raw visitor numbers and more at conversions. I don't care if you had 10,000 visitors or a 1,000 visitors as long as you have a really nice conversion rate, and so I think for clients, they can get kind of hung up on, "Well, I got 500 visitors today. Is that good or bad?"

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Dana DiTomaso: I don't know. Did they buy anything? That's the thing that I worry, and so sometimes, one of your blog post, maybe they'll get picked up by something and go viral. That's fabulous, but Reddit traffic is not necessarily going to convert well for you.

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Lea Alcantara: Yeah. That's…

Dana DiTomaso: You know?

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, that's something that… [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: Yeah, so I try not to get clients too hung up on it. What we do is we create customer reports often on Google Analytics with the data that we consider to be important. We give the clients access to them, show them how to use it, so they can go in and look anytime they want, and then we do a nice summary report for them on a monthly basis, so they get a sense of the analytics that really matter. Because you can spend all day in Google Analytics if you want, and if you're having a slow day, you can just look at the real time analytics and just watch. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Okay. I know this might be too general a question, but how do you gauge a successful digital marketing campaign? What are the typical things you look at? You mentioned conversions, but really, what is a conversion? Does that necessarily mean a sale, or just a contact information, or what? Like what is a successful digital marketing campaign?

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Dana DiTomaso: It depends entirely upon the sites. So for the example, let's take your podcast, for example. What would be a successful conversion for you? It would be somebody subscribing to it, I would assume. So that means that in my case, I would put Google Analytics event tracking around your subscribe an iTunes buttons and record each click of those as a successful conversion, for example. For other clients, let's say they do some sort of consulting or they are accounting firm or health clinic or something like that, somebody filling out a form might be a conversion, and at that point, they need to come back to us and say, "Okay, so we got 18 form fills and half of them ended in sales, so that was really great for us."

We also want to find out from the clients too like how much of these actually sold as well. How many phone calls did you get? And if we can, on the page site, we can set up a call tracking number so we know people who called specific numbers were via paid search. On the organic side, we can't do that

because of restrictions with Google and the Local Search, which is a little long to get into, but you can't use call tracking numbers on your main website. You can only use it on paid tracking pages. So there are stuff that we can do to find out how people are converting, and the phone is often a popular way for people to convert so we try to track that via paid channels if we can at all.

But the first time we sit down with the client, we say, "What are your marketing goals for the next 12 months?" And usually, if they are a big enough client, they'll usually have a plan and will say, "Okay, we want to increase sales by 10%." And then we start digging that down and saying, "Okay, so they have multiple products. What's their highest priority product? What's their highest profit margin product? How do clients find them now?" Answering those kinds of questions, or sometimes will say to us and say, "We have too many customer support calls. How do we make that go down so we can be more profitable?" So it's entirely dependent upon their marketing goals.

Lea Alcantara: So in terms of those marketing goals and then now you've implemented some stuff, like how do you really test whether you should change a tactic if something is working or not working, like do you do any a/b testing for clients like you say, "We are going to do this for like a month, and then we're going to try this other thing the next month." Or do you ever just stick with one thing as long as it's working?

Dana DiTomaso: If something is converting ridiculously well, then we sometimes won't touch it, but I also am kind of a tinker. We like to play around with stuff and see, and I find too that it's easy to get into the mindset, especially for clients, of the website is this fixed piece that, 'If it's up on shelf, we can't touch it, and you can't possibly change the home page." But these are the things that we want to change on a regular basis, and if it doesn't work, we'll change it back, and that's okay. So getting them into the sense that a website, because it is not a brochure, it is not a print piece, it is not a business card, you can change it all the time and that's okay, and that's what you're supposed to do with website, and I think a lot of that comes from the graphic design realm like graphic designers who would come over as web designer where everything needs to be pixel perfect.

You can't guarantee, especially when you get into responsive design, the size of the screen people are going to be using. People use so many different devices to access websites. You can't guarantee that this is what the experience is going to be like, so you have to let go a little bit and just try some stuff, and sometimes it's not even conversion rate optimization, is what we call that discipline, and people think about, "Oh well, let's change the color of the button. But sometimes it isn't the color of the button. Sometimes it's your text and how you approach the answer to the question that they are searching for. Are we providing the information that this person needs to feel comfortable with us? Are the trust factors there? Do people feel like they can trust us with their personal information? And often solving those questions can go along a way to improving conversion rate optimization.

Lea Alcantara: So how long do you wait before you do a tweak? Because you're like, "Okay, I'm always trying to improve this and see how to track and all that kind of stuff." How often do you want to make those tweaks or changes?

Dana DiTomaso: It depends on how many visitors you have. I mean, you could wait until it's statistically significant, but sometimes that isn't even enough time. It really depends on the volume of customers you have coming in, and you also have to look at the types of visitors you have coming in too and make sure that there hasn't been a significant change on the types of visitors that come in, like suddenly I talked about earlier. If you get something linked on Reddit, you get thousands of visitors. Right then it's not a good time to compare test data. Taking a look at your data and saying, "Is this a pretty typical time for us? Is their business seasonal? Are people looking for different things in the fall than they look in the spring? How do I answer those questions in a different way for that time of the year?"

Emily Lewis: Now, does your digital marketing process involves working directly with any users like usability testing?

Dana DiTomaso: Yeah. We do usability testing. We actually worked with someone who shares office space with us here, Lisa Hagen, who is also based in Edmonton, and she's great with usability and interaction design. She will help us write test cases to get users to do specific things, and we use Usertesting.com. I don't know if you've used that before, but it's a lot of fun. You write a test case, "You know, here's what I want you to do." And then real human beings who are not in the web business do the thing you want them to do, and they record video and annotate it, and it's really honestly hilarious to watch the things that people do, and you're like, "Just click on the button," and they can't find the button. That button could not be there for all you can tell.

So it's really interesting to get with real human beings just going through your site and seeing what they do. We also sometimes do this for competitor sites as well. We try to do the same test in our website, and then we try to do it on a competitor site, and comparing the two and see what's going on, and Usertesting.com is really cheap for what you get out of it.

Lea Alcantara: You know what, that's the first time I've ever heard someone say….

Dana DiTomaso: Really?

Lea Alcantara: Well, the competitor…

Dana DiTomaso: Oh, it's amazing.

Lea Alcantara: The competitor thing, because everyone always tests their own site.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And then getting them to do the exact same thing in another competitor site is brilliant. [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: Oh thanks. And often what we will do too for the competitors is just let's say there's a phrase that is really key and converts really well for the client, or they want to convert really well for them.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Dana DiTomaso: Do a Google search on who are top five, and take a look at those results. If I'm a normal person looking through these results, which one of these answers the question, and be really objective about it. And I think that we are in a unique position where we can be a little bit more objective about the competitors than the client can, because the client will be shaking their fist at those jerks all the time.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: So we can look at them and be like, "Well, to be honest, these guys are actually doing a better job of things." And I think it's important for the client to understand from an outsider perspective who isn't emotionally invested in your product, "Who's answering my question the best? Who am I going to go to?" And maybe it isn't the client. If it was the client, then everyone will be calling us in the first place, so the question is, how do we make that better?

Emily Lewis: Dana, where does social media factor into the digital marketing plan?

Dana DiTomaso: We do a lot of social media work for clients, and when I say social media work, I don't mean tweeting or Facebooking for them, because we actually really hate doing that. What we prefer to do is strategy, and often clients come to us and say, "Okay, I think I need to be on the social media thing, but I have no idea what I'm doing." And so it's taking a step back and saying to them, "Okay, where does your audience hang out? What are they using?"

We create these things called personas which are little biographies of theoretical people who would be visiting your site or purchasing your products, and what social networks would they typically be using. If you're in a B2B environment, then LinkedIn, LinkedIn is the monster. If you have something visual that you sell and it's B2C, then you're looking at Pinterest.

So it's what social network should you be tackling, not necessarily all of them. With some of our clients, we've said, "Don't bother with LinkedIn. It is not for you. Or don't bother with Facebook, that's not where you should be going." And figuring out the right social network and then the right strategy to reach out to users or potential clients or current clients who are already using these

different social networks, and then how do we attract them. I find too actually, this is interesting from a mobile responsive perspective, we find that most users who come to sites via social channels are on mobile devices.

Emily Lewis: That makes sense, yeah.

Dana DiTomaso: Yeah, because if you're doing a good job with social media, people should be clicking on the links of your blog post, for example, that you tweet out, or your Facebook out, and a lot of people are doing it on their mobile devices probably during the work days because they are not allowed to get Facebook on their desktop, so they use Facebook on their phone.

Emily Lewis: When you found results like that with a client, do you then find yourself in a position where you're entering into design discussion, designing for a mobile device?

Dana DiTomaso: Yeah. We do talk a lot about responsive, and another thing too, and just from a general design perspective, if the client is doing a good job from a digital marketing SEO perspective, most users aren't going to start on the home page of their website.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Dana DiTomaso: And I think that that's really difficult for them to understand because they think of the home page – this is the first thing they want to see, "Show me the home page first." And I think that as web designers, we fall into this trap of focusing so much time on the home page when really, ideally, 20% of the visit should start on the home page, 80% of the visit should start somewhere else. So we have to give those other templates that aren't the home page equal importance from a usability and conversion standpoint as well.

Lea Alcantara: Well, Dana, thank you so much for being a part of this podcast. Before we wrap up, do you have any last nuggets of advice to leave our listeners?

Dana DiTomaso: What I would say is the most important thing that you can do is try to look at your sites as if you're not the client or the designer, or try to put yourself in the consumer's shoes and

figure out if you're actually really helping that customer with a question that they have, or if you're just talking about yourself and how awesome your company is.

Emily Lewis: In case our listeners want to follow up with you, where can they find you online?

Dana DiTomaso: The best place is probably Twitter, which is where I hang out most of the time. I'm @danaditomaso on Twitter.   I know it's hard to spell. You should see our Google Analytics logs. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Dana DiTomaso: And the website is kickpoint.ca, and if anybody has any questions, feel free to tweet me or email me at dana@kickpoint.ca.

Lea Alcantara: Perfect. [Music starts] Now, we'd like to thank our sponsors for this podcast, EE Coder and Pixel & Tonic.

Emily Lewis: We also want to thank our partners, EngineHosting, Devot:ee and EE Insider.

Lea Alcantara: Thanks to our listeners for tuning in. If you want to know more about the podcast, make sure you follow us on Twitter @eepodcast or visit our website, ee-podcast.com.

Emily Lewis: And don't forget to tune in to our next episode when Travis Smith of Hop Studio will join us to talk about the largest ExpressionEngine sites. Be sure to check out our schedule on our site, ee-podcast.com/schedule for more upcoming topics.

Lea Alcantara: This is Lea Alcantara

Emily Lewis: and Emily Lewis

Lea Alcantara: Signing off for the unofficial ExpressionEngine podcast. See you next time!

Emily Lewis: Cheers!

[Music stops]