



How to Establish Authority by Helping Google Understand Your Niche

This transcript was lightly edited for clarity.

Chris: I'm excited to have as my guest today, Hans Kaspersetz. He's the Founder and President of Arteric, a digital agency for biotech and pharma. Hans, welcome to Life Science Marketing Radio.

Hans: Thanks, Chris. I'm really glad to be on the show. I've heard a lot about it and listened to a handful of them so looking forward to it.

Chris: Wow, this is going to be a good one. I recommend everyone pay close attention today. There's going to be a lot of valuable stuff that I think almost everyone can use. Today, we're going to talk about how stories can influence Google's index and search results, and how you can help connect the dots for Google in your narrow niche. Then, we'll also talk a little bit about using paid search for research. The goal here is of course driving traffic and engagement. I'm sure many people listening understand the basics of how Google ranks sites, but Google's learning all the time, and especially in small niches where there hasn't been a lot of content, and there's an opportunity for marketers, brands, and influencers to be the teacher, right? Hans, can you take a minute and explain that, how we can help Google?

Hans: Yeah. Google crawls the web frequently. They've indexed lots and lots of books, and they indexed lots and lots of scholarly work, and through that collection of content, they've built a semantic map of the entire web. Now, we

operate in the life sciences and pharma and biotech in really narrow niches where there's going to be less activity and less content for Google to use to build up the taxonomy of our particular content area. As marketers and content producers and storytellers, we have an opportunity to craft and to really curate the web for Google, and to categorize the content and create that taxonomy for the artificial intelligence. We're really teaching it.

Chris: Nice. There's a lot to be learned by understanding not just how Google works, but how people search, so how can we figure that out?

Hans: Yeah, and there's a ton of data on this. There's about 1.2 trillion searches per year in Google, 60 billion of them are health related. Of that 60 billion, some 15% is absolutely unique to Google. Google's never seen this combination of words or this combination of words like a query against the search index. There's always opportunity to mine that information. We do it lots of ways, right? In the old days, we used to just go to Google Analytics and take a look at the referral data and see what keywords were passed onto us. Now, that's been removed. Google has gone to fairly great lengths to remove that and now it shows up as "not provided" and other ways.

That old data source was removed, but that data still exists, so we can go to two places. We can go to Google Webmaster Tools or Webmaster Console, and query data is there, but we don't know what pages were served for that. Or, we can run pay-per-click and when we run pay-per-click we have the search terms report and interestingly, for two separate clients in the last year, we've had an opportunity to take a look at I think about two million impressions for one client, and a couple hundred thousand for the other client. Now, in both cases we were trying to learn what is it that, what are people really looking for? How are we going to be able out-compete our competitors in search?

How do we tell better stories? How do we satisfy users' query intent more accurately? The best place to start is to see what people are actually searching for. We took this data and we did an analysis and we really looked at the question words. What, where, how, why, can, should, could, et cetera, and started to categorize all of these search queries. For one client, I think we came up with about 1400 questions that were being asked against the search engine. We then went another step further and started to categorize those and see of those, how many were actually unique and how many questions were variants on a particular topic.

Because of this concept where Google is seeing all these unique searches, people are asking the same question in many different ways, which creates an opportunity for us. Then, we narrow it down further and we get down to 250 questions or question types that are relevant to the brand, and then we say, "Okay, based on our budget, we're going to try to answer these 40 variants," or these 40 question types which may have four or five variants each. This is a really, really prime area for research because Google's come out and said multiple times in the last couple of years they're going to do two things.

One, we need to be conscientious that things are happening in micro moments so these are all the really small touchpoints along the way that lead to some sort of an outcome for a brand. Then two, they're going to rank content that either helps somebody complete a task or answer a question. Google's mission is to organize all the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful. We want to really play to that and so by taking these different question types or questions and all the variants on them and then creating a single answer that satisfies all of them, and then publishing all say five or six forms of this question with that one answer, and then feeding that back into the search index, we go a long way to helping Google satisfy its mission, and we're creating the taxonomy for all of these different questions on a particular topic. This is equally applicable even when we get out of the question and answer space and we get into more high science or reagents or methods out there.

Chris: Sure. So the one thing that stuck with me, right at the end you said, "Publish all answers to each form of a question." Did I hear that right? You're taking a question that's asked a lot of different ways but publishing some content so that the exact search phrase shows up, or?

Hans: Yeah. If you take a look at Google's search results, often times at the bottom of the page it says, "People also asked." Those are related questions to the originating question. Now, we took that theme and we go a step further. Trying to think of a really useful, simple example. I had some yesterday. In any event, we can ask the same question in a couple of different ways. What's the weather going to be today? How warm is it today? Is it sunny today? Those are all basically the same question formulated in different ways, and they all basically have the same answer. It's going to be 50 degrees out and partly sunny. The same thing happens in life sciences and healthcare

information. For instance, how do I use product X? Or, even better, what does product X cost? How much is product X? What's the price of product X?

Those are three different ways of asking the same question. They all have the same answer and so when we build our content strategy, we might build an FAQ page that says, "How much does product X cost?" And then we present the answer of what it costs, and then at the bottom of the page we say, "People also asked," and we have the other three variants of that question, with a self-referencing link that takes you back to the same page. Now, that's a super simple example. We can think of much, much more complex examples around or products and services.

Chris: Right. That did exactly answer my question, so you're not creating three, for example, different answers, but somewhere on the page, and an FAQ is a great example in general, you phrase the question differently, it all points to the same place, but Google has seen that that page has the answer to all three questions.

Hans: To all three forms of that question. It's really the same question. For your more sophisticated content publishers will actually use dynamic content injection in order to do this. We might have one page in our content management system that takes the question as a query string and then dynamically inserts that into say the title tag and the H1 tag, and into the content, and then we'll do the same sort of programmatic dynamic insertion of content into our ads as well. That overtime, as accumulate additional variants of that question, we can just feed additional variants of that question into the page or into the content management system.

Chris: Right. That brings to mind, it's kind of the opposite. I had a gentleman on the podcast, probably a year and a half ago, Steve Rotter and I'm trying to remember the name of his company (Acrolinx). I'm going to look it up, honestly, right here. Maybe he has a new job, but anyway, he was working for this company that helped many companies, but his example was Illumina, who's a big player in the life sciences of course, use the right phrasing for different things all the time. In other words, they had a brand catalog of words they would use and the whole point of it was they were generating content, maybe from multiple contributors, and they wanted to keep it brand consistent. Their software would prompt you, if you used a certain phrase, let's just say "operating system" and someone else plugs in "OS," it would prompt one of them to say, "Don't you want to say 'operating system' here?"

It wasn't forcing you to write in a certain way but it would always ask you to make some judgment about terms that you would use so that when a document or a manual or something is put together from multiple contributors, it sounds like it was written by one person. I bring that up because your solution there is taking all of the possible ways someone could write something and making sure they're all present somewhere in your content so that Google knows all these things are the same thing and I have an answer no matter how someone asks the question.

Hans: Yeah, and it's actually even bigger than that. The really important piece in triggering an action from a consumer, whether it's B2B or B2B2C, or anyone we want to take action, is to create trust really, really quickly. People aren't going to invest a lot of time, and the average attention span is like five or six seconds now. Creating really close alignment between what the individuals search for, the ad or the organic search result that you serve up, and then the page that they land on is really important to keeping people in the flow and in that conversion funnel. That conversion funnel leads to lots of different actions, it's just you can see, it's the read more buttons that they can consume the whole page, it's the start the video, it's fill out a form, it's all of these different kind of actions.

This methodology uses the pay-per-click data and the other data that's available to us and it's quite a lot of data, to narrowly define what we're going to present and align it super closely, ultra-closely with what the user's looking for. Then, when we go a step further, this supports reusable content, and much bigger enterprise level content strategy because even within an organization now, to your point when somebody searches for a particular thing, even if they're not completely on topic or they don't know all the words, we can still do some natural language processing in order to serve up the right answer for that query.

Now, we're fortunate that Google's doing all this work already for us, but if you wanted to go out and take a look at Azure or some other artificial intelligence platforms, and you wanted to just start teaching those platforms, this is the place to do that.

Chris: Nice. Okay, so there's a paid search strategy, so you talked about a pay-per-click, that drives relevant, targeted traffic and helps brands learn what people are asking, and that provides a level of intelligence on top of

essentially learning what queries you don't want to pay for. What does that look like?

Hans: Yeah. I'm going to tell you a little story. We were working for somebody in the immunology space. We go out and we need to buy interleukin 17 on pay-per-click AdWords, and so we're going to buy "interleukin 17" and then we're also going to bid on IL-17. Well, for us, as healthcare marketers, IL-17 is clearly interleukin 17, but for the rest of the world, it's Illinois State Highway 17. On the day, on one of the days we were running this campaign, there wasn't enough noise around this highway to mean anything, but one day there was a traffic accident on Illinois State 17, and suddenly our pay-per-click traffic spiked and our budget started to get wiped out, because of this sort of greedy pay-per-click bidding.

I mean, this is a funny example. Monitor all of your campaigns and pay your agencies to do that, that's important, because that means that we can hedge the risks and we can take advantage of them, and constantly update your negative keyword list. Now, that's one facet of it and it's a really gross example of it, but when we start to refine that and we start to look at the way people ask questions, and then the behavioral data associated with how they act once they get on our landing page, we can learn pretty quickly, or at least in relatively modest sample sizes whether or not the page we've built satisfies the user intent, and whether or not the audience we're able to get in front of with a particular question or a particular keyword or a particular topical concept is the right audience for us.

When we build content strategy, we want to look at all of that data and we want to really think deeply about it, and then we want to be in a test and learn mode all the time. We might go out in the beginning and buy relatively broad terms. Reagent, the name of your reagent, or we might buy your competitors name, or we might buy something relatively broad or something that's on topic, or a particular treatment target. Then, we're going to collect that data for a while, because in our narrow niches, we're not going to have a lot of volume on it. It's going to take us a while to get useful data, but once that data starts to come in, we're going to see that Google is going to start to indicate to us what are the related topics to what we're buying.

That's going to show up in your search terms reports, it's going to show up in some of the other data feeds that we have, and then we're going to want to actually go buy some of the things we saw in the search terms report. Some

of them we're going to put into our negative keyword lists and we're going to get rid of because they're low performing, some of it we're actually going to buy advertising on those things and then we're going to create ads targeted for those things. We might run broad match advertising or phrase match advertising on it, bidding strategies, and see what else that produces. That will start to produce the variance that we're talking about, and then we go back to our clients, we go back to our creative teams and our authors, and our writers, and we start to create content tailored to those particular examples.

I mean, I think you talked about something very similar to this with Protocols.io. They put in the original protocol and then people are able to duplicate that protocol and then make modifications to it, and then that becomes part of the common record, the public record for those protocols, and we can see how reagents are used across all these different areas. We're really adopting the same sort of branching approach in our bidding strategies and our pay-per-click strategies, and then our content strategies. We publish something, we see what kind of traffic it attracts, we see how it does in the SERPS and then we publish something in response to that or an optimization of that piece in order to perform better or perform in the way we want it to perform.

Chris: Right. Maybe you've already answered this, but tell me how you use the results of an experiment like that. I mean, it is essentially what you just said. Am I right? Modifying the content you have or branching out and creating new content.

Hans: Yeah, that's exactly right. Like we were talking about earlier, we identify a question, we write an answer to that. We go and look at where we think we want it to rank organically, because 72% of all traffic goes to the organic search results, so only a small fraction goes to the paid search results, so you really want to optimize for organic search, and you build the content, you publish the content, you link to the content, and then you see if it performs the way you want it to, and you see within the data whether or not there's opportunities to publish additional content.

A really good strategy is to identify a topic, create a video on that topic, then you take the manuscript for it, you associate the manuscript with the video, you buy some advertising, you point at it, and then over time you modify that topic, the video and the content, in response to how it performs based on the

pay-per-click data, the Google Analytics data, and the other data feeds that we have access to.

Chris: Got it. I know we talked about this previously, I don't know if we mentioned it here today, but is that what you mean by a taxonomy of content? Or, is it something different?

Hans: Yeah. We started talking about curating the web earlier, right?

Chris: Right.

Hans: There's all these disparate pieces of scholarly work and blogs and articles and journal publications and whatnot all over the place. In a really narrow niche, at times Google can have a really hard time, actually all search engines can have a really hard time building up a cohesive picture of how this content relates to each other. There's co-citation and there's co-occurrence which when two articles are cited together, Google's able to determine that they're both on the same topic and then, of course, if it can crawl the content, it can figure out how these things are related, but as storytellers and content publishers, we have an opportunity to pull all these things together, and to create the roadmap that the search engines will follow to understand how these disparate pieces of content and concepts come together to create a story about a topic.

We're fortunate that there's not so much activity and so much competition on a lot of these topics, that we can influence that, by doing that either through our linking strategies or by our bibliographic strategies and citing articles together and pulling concepts together as we write authoritative content on a particular topic.

Chris: I see. Yeah, this comes back to what we talked about a little bit at the beginning. Imagine as many people listening here, they work in a small niche or they're selling to scientists who work in ... Every scientific project is a niche unto itself to some degree, and for that there may not be a lot of content but you have a product that serves that and you can create content. This is part of a strategy honestly I've never thought of before so I really like this idea of publishing content that brings existing references together in the same place which essentially tells Google, "My page and those two articles by those two scientists are all about the same thing."

Hans: Yeah, that's exactly right, and the beautiful thing is you're able to steal a little bit of brand equity from those scientists by referencing those primary sources. We don't necessarily have to be the primary researcher in a particular area, or we don't have to be the lead investigator in the publication, but by writing what is essentially review articles on a concept and pulling together all of these primary sources, and then publishing it, and then you have to have the rest of the picture as well. Google relies on the authority, established authority of an author. I mean, if I generally write about SEO, or agency operations, I'm authoritative on that topic.

If I start writing about PD4 or and its downward modulation of cyclic AMP, the hydrolyzation of cyclic AMP, Google's probably not going to see me as authoritative on that topic. Authorship is important in this particular concept, but for the companies that we work for and the companies that we support, they have experts, domain experts in this area and even the brand, that company's brand is a domain expert in this particular area. As it publishes, it has sufficient authority on topic to pull together these primary resources, publish the article, publish the story, publish the post, and gain authority on it and help curate the web so that when somebody searches on this particular topic, they find the review article or the blog post, and then they're able to link out to the primary sources to really dig in much deeper.

Chris: Yeah, and so you mentioned the word curate which we mentioned at the top of the podcast which is exactly what this is, and it's a new benefit to curation that I don't think a lot of people have thought about. Often you're curating content just to put something interesting in front of your audience, but the added benefit is by curating multiple relevant pieces of content, articles, primary research together, you're adding to your authority in that space and again, teaching Google that what you do is relevant to every one of those assets.

Hans: Yeah, and this is applicable across channels. If you're in social media and you're publishing links to articles, and stories online, if people are sharing those things and retweeting them and republishing them, and commenting on them, they're now third party endorsing you as an authority in that particular area. As brands, we want to be doing that. We want to be collecting up all of these different sources of information, pulling them together, sharing them with our audience in an authentic way, in a very helpful and supportive way of whatever endeavor they're into. A very interesting possibility is you have a reagent, or you sell reagents, or you sell laptop

equipment and you're buying pay-per-click on these things and you're trying to sell into them. Then, suddenly you start to see a spike in a particular product that you sell, or even one of your competitors' products, if you happen to be buying their product names and bidding on their product names.

Well, that's an opportunity to go out and identify, "Well, why is there a sudden spike?" Because this is a leading indicator of market activity around these particular products. You have an opportunity to go out and start to create content to support that product, or launch a competitive product, or make an adjustment in your marketing strategy around these things. Often times we have trailing indicators of sales and deliveries that drive our decision making. I think really taking advantage of the search data that's available and the activity in these spaces and how content's being published and what the trends are gives you a forward look or a leading edge look into what you should be doing in the near term, around content strategy and around how to pull things together to make thing useful for our customers and buyers.

Chris: I like it, I like it a lot. We're getting close to wrapping up here. I mean, I think we've gotten to this part where we're really putting together content and storytelling, we're answering the questions that our users are asking, and so how do we, if we haven't covered this, how do we create an ecosystem of content to not only answer those questions but educate Google that our content is the go-to source for everything that's related?

Hans: Yeah, I have to think about that for a second.

Chris: I'm not sure that we didn't just answer that, right?

Hans: Yeah. I mean, in large part ... I said this earlier. Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful. If we want to win as brands, we need to play to that end. We need to be thinking about where our users will be down the road, six months, 12 months, 18 months, where we think Google's going to be down the road six months, 12 months, 18 months, and then we need to build content strategies that look that far out. Because what we don't want is a really strong pop when we launch this stuff and then it just tails off and doesn't give you any long-term ROI. We want to take our unique vision and perspective in the domains that

we're experts in, as life science marketers and biotechnologists and pharma people, and think about where things are going to be.

Then, lead both our customers and Google in that direction by building really authoritative, deep content. I mean, I think I looked at some data last year that the average article had 1200 words if you wanted to rank in a semi-competitive niche. That's a lot of content. That's about two and a half pages in a Microsoft Word document, and if we really want to win, and we're not talking about selling sneakers, we're talking about science here. We're talking about dealing with very sophisticated buyers who understand their topics probably much better than we do as marketers, we need to have authoritative writers who are experts on these topics, creating content for us.

Then, we need to be creating distribution strategies, multichannel distribution strategies through organic search, through link building, through social media, through pay-per-click advertising, through other sorts of media, even press releases and shows like this one, to ensure distribution utilization of this content. Google can see it. When somebody searches for a topic and they get the search results back, when they click on a link and they go to that site, if they bounce back to Google pretty quickly, and then go to another link and stay for a long time, that's a really clear indication that that second link satisfied their query intent. It's a little bit noisy, it's not the greatest signal for them, but it is a real signal for them and it is a real signal for us. Driving engagement through rich authoritative content is the way we should be going. It's the way to win.

Chris: Nice. Well, Hans Kaspersetz, this has been a fantastic interview. I really appreciate you taking the time to answer all those questions and it really gets me thinking, and I hope everybody listening, a little bit differently about Google which we sort of I think lean on to say, "Oh, we need to be ranking" but not really thinking about how we can use it for research, and then also the fact that not only can you optimize your content to rank in Google but you can actually teach Google that you are the one that should be ranking on top. That's just a different mindset about how you're going to create content, particularly if you're in a specialized niche. Where can people go to find out more about you and your agency?

Hans: I'm not sure that anybody really wants to find out about me, but I founded a company called Arteric. We founded in 1999. We build websites, mobile apps, and web applications for pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies.

We do all the work that's required to drive traffic to them, and when people ask us why we do it, we really truly believe we're in the life extension business. Our job is to connect people to the products and therapies that they need to either invent and commercialize, life changing technologies and drugs, or to get people onto therapy that'll extend their life. We're pretty passionate about it, I think it's really hugely rewarding to do that work.

Chris: Well, that sounds yeah, obviously that's a great thing to be working for. I'll put a link to Arteric in the show notes and once again, Hans, thank you so much for a great podcast.

Hans: Chris, thank you very much for the opportunity.

Chris: My pleasure.

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