

Angela Kelly Smith

How to Improve Your SEO with Ling Wong Brand + Design Scoop ep. 009 Podcast Transcript

[Kelly] Welcome to brand design scoop, where I share practical, relatable tips on branding, design, and building a business for people-centric entrepreneurs. I'm Kelly, a brand strategist and Squarespace website designer and founder of AKS Design Studio. Today I'm chatting with Ling Wong. Ling is a website and content strategist, a copywriter, and ghostwriter. And, I just have to mention this, the cover image on her LinkedIn profile reads, "I'll write the damn thing for you." Isn't that awesome?

[K] Welcome, Ling. It's great to have you here.

[Ling] Thanks, Kelly. Thanks for having me.

[K] Absolutely.

[K] So, we're going to be focusing on search engine optimization, particularly as it relates to content creation. But first, would you tell us a little about exactly what you do for your clients?

[L] Like all sorts of things. I make words for my clients. Like, seriously. So, I work with, in a more simple way, there are two types of clients, you know, the company types, like, they need, they have a content strategy. They need articles written.

[L] So, there's long form content, a lot of white paper, a lot of B2B marketing stuff. A lot of technologies and stuff like AI and cybersecurity and data. So, you know, data analytics, and all sorts of, you know, B2B technology stuff. Somehow I fell into that. But I also work, you know, just like yourself, Kelly, we have a coaching background, and I still have a lot of connections. And once in a while I get coaches and solo entrepreneurs, and, you know, just solo business owners like approaching me, whether they're coaches, or just all sorts of service professionals in a way. And I know that they will need something a little bit more comprehensive, like a content strategy, or, you know, some help with positioning, how to use content brand themselves, or, you know, creating content for a website.

[K] Awesome. Yeah, it sounds like you do a little bit of everything.

[L] Yeah. That's the fun.

[K] Yeah. The benefits of working for yourself. So, with search engine optimization, I think a lot of people think that doing SEO is simply a matter of setting it up, you know, like in the SEO settings on our website. But it's really much more than that, isn't it? You know, it's not a one-and-done thing.

[L] Oh, absolutely not. And, you know, especially if you hear the, you know, the fire drill and in the marketing sphere, right, like, every couple years, like, Google is changing everything. Oh, my God. Right. And, you know, reason not specifically do SEO, but the whole privacy thing, and Google doing away with cookies, and all that fire drill. So, it's definitely not one-and-done. And it's definitely like me, other than, like, you know, really keeping an eye out on what's going on. It's also a matter of like, how you keep improving. And you monitoring the results, to see like, are you actually targeting the right keywords? Or are people changing their search behavior? To are they looking for different keywords? Or what's the buzzword of the day that, you know, you can, for lack of a better word, hijack it in a way. So, that and also, like, what are people talking about, searching about these days. What's trending and what can you hop on, you know, sort of hop on the bandwagon in a way, especially for longtail keywords. And that is very important for say, the small-business owners and solo entrepreneurs where you simply don't have the domain authority to compete with, you know, compete for like, very competitive keywords for very established website.

[K] Right. So, you talked, you mentioned three things there I definitely want you to touch on more. So, first, how about long term [longtail] keywords? Can you say what you mean by that

[L] Longtail keywords, so...

[K] Yeah longtail keyword, sorry.

[L] So, essentially, like if you type "weight loss," like, no, like, you're not going to get into the first 20 pages of Google because it's so competitive, and you don't have the domain authority. [You're a] smaller operation that you don't have, you know, 10 grand and it's 20 grand to throw in content marketing a month, right? So, so what you can target is: People type in things that are much longer, right? For example, one is a good example for longtail keyword like, let's say ecommerce. Just what pops into my mind. Of course, it could be like, for example, ecommerce, you can pick the longtail keyword is like, say the brand name, the model name of a shoe and the shoe size, color. So it gets really specific and, and the benefits of targeting longtail keyword is that you are really catching people with a high purchase intent. So they're really looking for a particular a very specific product or service or solution, rather than just like, oh, "weight loss," right.

[K] Yeah, "weight loss" is very is a weak keyword, or keyword phrase to use, because you're just gonna get too much that comes up. I used an example in my podcast last week of the the keyword "podcasting." And when I Googled it, on the first page was how to start a, well, the very first thing was the definition of podcasting. Everything after that was "how to start a podcast," which is great. That's probably what most people are looking for. So, a longtail keyword would be "how to start a podcast" or "best practices for running a podcast." Things like that. You need to get much more specific than just podcasting, or like you said, ecommerce or weight loss.

[L] Exactly. And for, you know, like, let's say if you're a service provider, and you work with people locally, one way to leverage that is the, you know, at a specific location name.

[K] Yeah, I think a lot of people forget that when as service providers who want or who work online and want national clients. I added Pittsburgh to my site description and my contact page, even though I work

remotely and take clients from across the country, I don't want to miss out on local clients. So I put Pittsburgh in there.

[L] And, like, yeah, like you said, I think all of us these days just work with clients, you know, remotely, unless you're a massage therapist, or really requires something hands on. But right, getting the local traffic is actually a great way for, you know, solo providers or small businesses and entrepreneurs to also service providers to capture the local traffic or, like, take advantage of local SEO. Because, you know, you're basically, you're making the pond much smaller so you can be the bigger fish in the pond.

[L] And then there's also the advantage of getting on the local pack in the Google search result. So, I don't know, I'm sure everybody has this expert experience, like, you type in, "massage therapists near me." And then [there's] a map on the top of the Google search and that is the local pack. So, that is not even like, of course, if you create content that boosts the domain authority, and absolutely, you know, give you a leg up on, you know, getting on to the local pack. But the first thing is like, yeah, duh, of course, you want to get that get on that.

[L] You know, it's just an, it's interesting. That brings to a another point, is that a lot of people say, "Hey, I want to get onto the first page of Google." Right? And if they have a local presence, I'm like, "So have you figured out your local SEO?" rather than just saying like, you know, all these, you know, buzzy keyword things, trying to pump out content to hit highly competitive keyword.

[L] Because I think SEO really, you know, it's not just, you know, publishing keyword. Stuffed content is not just about one thing. As you know, when you create a website, it involve, say, how you format the content, how you make people to engage with the content. Can Google effectively read and index the content? What is the load time all of that affects your SEO. And then how you're keeping people on the page. Like, if people click and then say, okay, you put a lot of money into driving traffic and you learn that people land on your page and you're not offering any value, then people click away and, like, no dwell time, no bueno.

[L] Like, you know. So I think there's so many aspects of it that you really need to take a holistic view to say, like, what is it just a little bit like that coach-y thing. And it's that wheel of life thing, when you have spokes and you drove one cycle, right, and then the wheels are gonna roll. So right like that, you really have to, you know, look through all the different aspects.

[L] And I'm actually not discounting the role of content, because it's really important. And creating articles and long-form content is a great way to increase dwell time. It is a great way to hit a lot of longtail keywords that you may not be able to hit in, you know, the more general website, things like the about page or the services page, for example. And it can even help with local SEO. And you know, one example for my client that I just read, he is a personal trainer. He sent me an outline and say, "Hey, I want to write an article on why do you need a personal trainer." So, I suggest there is an opportunity toward the end to say, "How to find a personal trainer in New York City." That hits keyword. That hits key phrases. Okay digress just a little bit. That thing is awesome because you can actually, when you search for keywords, you can see like, the "people also ask" thing.

[K] Yes, the related searches.

[L] Yeah. So you can—I actually have a client whose strategy is [to] have a FAQ section in a blog post. That actually, you know, you just put in that exact question. Yeah, to capture that, you know, that search that longtail search phrase.

[K] That's brilliant.

[L] Yeah. So, let's so go back to this client. So I said, "Hey, how about we do a section on how to find a personal trainer in New York City?" Great. So he sent me a little bit more material. And then what I did is that I position it so that we mentioned New York City. And then we mentioned the particular area that he works in by using how he does things with client is an example. So, in one paragraph, I would say your personal trainer should use to leverage the unique characteristic Manhattan and neighborhood to make the workout more engaging. For example, "I have been working with clients in lower Manhattan." Bingo. "For five years, we like to go to Pier 25 on a good day when the weather's nice to bring there, and we work out." And then we also look in the keyword "Financial District" and try backup by saying, "There are a lot of buildings in Tribeca and Financial District that has a gym in the building. So, you can just go hang out and see the trainers in action and find one that you like." So, winning keywords for the local SEO as well as the more general question kind of thing.

[K] That's really great. So when yeah, you mentioned earlier about trends. So how can people research trends?

[L] Google "trends." It gives us everything.

[K] That's easy!

[L] But also, if you work with clients all the time, you know what they're asking. You pay attention. There's a treasure trove in those conversation. Also, breaking news, like just, you know, the news for, you know, five minutes a day, and you should, anyway.

[K] Exactly. And that "related search" section of Google is just yet another treasure trove of information. So you can google your keyword ideas and just look down there and see what else comes up.

[L] Yeah. It's really good.

[K] So, you also mentioned a few times domain authority and competing against them. I wanted to ask, and this is related to that, most people are never going to make it to page one of of the search results pages. So what is a good ranking? Like, what pages are considered good?

[L] Like, there's really no one size fits all answer to that. The truth is, most people don't go past the first page of Google. And that's like the cold, hard truth. So, and that's why I emphasize so much about local SEO and longtail keyword, because, we're not, you know, you cannot lose your domain authority overnight, but you're on a lot smaller. How long does it take to do ranking? Even if you do everything, right, you're gonna have to let a content strategy marinate for like six to nine months.

[K] And people just don't expect that or realize that.

[L] Yeah. And, you know, it's like, "Where is my listing?" The two things that just came to mind right now. One is zero-click through. And the other one is actually making branding and SEO work together—as an issue of brand awareness in other places. When people will go to Google and actually search for your name or your business name, it is more likely to come up.

[K] That's true. So, so how can you do that so that they're actually searching for you and your business name?

[L] It's really about building brand awareness.

[K] Yeah, you have to share it in person, you have to post on social media. If you can, write guest blog posts on other people's websites, doing a podcast. When I do my podcast, I mention my website, and I give a link to it in the show notes. Because there are people who are coming to this podcast through podcast streaming services, and not from my website. So I mentioned that there.

[L] Yeah. All these are good way to, you know, raise your brand awareness and get people to actually enter your, your name or your business name, rather than just a general say, product category or service category. Yeah, another thing is, like, there's you and another big wave, sort of monkey wrench that's thrown into the whole SEO thing is the zero-click search results.

[L] So I don't know if you know that over 60% of people don't have to click out to a third party website anymore from search results page. So, you have those instant answers. And, yeah, things like definition, or the one of the things that if you type in a business like business name, you can claim, submit a, I don't know the details of it. But you can actually submit sort of like your business name.

[L] The definition of legacy is like the little answer box on the right hand side of the right of the search results page. So if people type in the company name that shows up, so you'll type in your company name, and you submit that information to Google, then that's a way to serve as your your company in your website.

[K] Right, so submitting it to Google business. Is that what you mean?

[L] Yeah, I don't know about I don't know the details of it. The zero click at the local pack is also part of the zero click. Why? Because people actually see your business. Oh, they're just gonna write down the address and go. They'll have the website right away—to structure your, like, combining a longtail kind of search phase with well formatted answer. So you become the featured snippet or for instant answer. And that may not yield you the traffic because people see it. And they're like, "Okay, got it."

[L] Right ways to format so that you can pique curiosity so that people want to read on. So, you have to offer value, and then also drive people to come and, you know, get in, dig in if they want to. But that's a way to build trust and build brand awareness because they see your website. They can see who is creating the content. So gradually, you know, if you write diligently enough on all the things that your audience cares about, they will probably see you quite a few times on their search and that ability and build your brand awareness.

[L] So, and there's the conversation about "Okay, so how do you track?"—you know, SEO effectiveness, if Google is working so hard on keeping all the traffic on the Google property instead of sending it to a third party site. There's no, I mean, there's really no like, cut and dry answer. So how do you, but I think it's really like taking all these into account and just say, like, it is a more holistic approach to search engine marketing than just like, okay, stuff the keyword and get on to, you know, the top position.

[K] Right. And a lot of that, as you were mentioning, has to do with creating a lot of content that is free, informative, and valuable. It can't be fluff. And you keep mentioning long form. It needs to be lengthy, but

not too long. You know, it can't be book-length, or short-story length. But it needs to be long enough to have real information in it that your ideal client cares about.

[L] Absolutely. And the formatting is actually critical. Because if people come to your website, and they see a wall of text, like, "Oh, I click away." For example, yeah, who comes to your website, if it wants to understand what you're saying. Everyone is looking for things like features snippet, like bulleted list. Right. And, and sort of like, even if you're not talking about, you know, the actual value of the content you're talking about, the people interacting with it is, you know, reading through it. You have to be inviting. And that's why the design of the website and the layout of the blog is also important.

[K] Yeah, very true. It's good to have comments turned on because Google can tell if people are interacting that way. You need to use headers properly. And I'm not referring to the the header where the navigation menu is, but the the text type h1, h2, h3, h4. I mentioned this in last week's podcast: You should have only one h1 header. That should be the title. Don't overdo the other headers, but it's okay to use them to identify different important sections. And the text and the paragraph should not be too small. Nobody's gonna stick around and squint to read your content!

[L] And you could also incorporate keywords into the headers that will..

[K] Yes, that would that's an important one.

[L] And internal linking? So it will just it help a search engine sort of, in a way make sense of how things come together. And that's what a lot of, and that's a HubSpot thing. And that's why a lot of clients who have accumulated enough content, right, proceed to make sense of the content and then create pillar pages [that] will link back out to all these different content that they have previously created to: Number one, make sense out of. Number two, also make sense for the visitors. Because you can actually make people, the number one show your authority in the subject matter. Number two, is that you keep people engaging with your content stay on your site.

[K] Yeah, very true. And one way to do that is when people arrive at your blog, you could have a bar have features posts that are some of your most popular posts, or the ones with the most valuable information and have that there to guide them where you want to go to next. You know, don't leave them just floating there wondering, "Okay, now what?" They might not even know what to search for.

[L] And then they leave. Exactly, yeah. Yeah. And yeah, that's, you know, to a little things, and I'm sure you have talked about it already. So I'm not going to dwell on it is load time.

[K] Yes. I have mentioned that. But please, yes, please say something about that.

[L] Well, I mean, people click away if your site doesn't load in like something like two point some things second, yes.

[K] Two to three seconds.

[L] Yes. And it's even worse when it's mobile. So, load time and mobile. Make sure that your site is mobile, was that mobile optimized?

[K] Responsive.

[L] Mobile-first indexing from Google. The other did happen like it was already old news in the SEO world. But you know, I still see people with an older site that you can see it just doesn't.

[K] I'll still see like a desktop version that shows up on mobile. And you have to flip your phone to the side to say like, "No, nope, I'm, I'm just not..." And you have to like zoom in and then scroll. No, I just close it. And then I'm like, "Okay, I'll go look on my computer later." But now I don't.

[L] And then also like all these things, right? Like, you think about mobile, and you think about the mobile layout is like, worst, simple thing, where's the damn button? But you're not gonna go forever to look for a button. So, and especially with the Google mobile-first indexing is actually not a nice to have anymore. Like, if you don't have a mobile responsive site, you're actually tanking your SEO.

[K] Very true. And there are there are plenty of website platforms now that automatically do that for you. So Squarespace is one of them. I know that there are others. It's just I work in Squarespace. So I can speak to that.

[L] Yeah. Most most of these [all-in-one] platforms are mobile responsive.

[K] They just automatically do it. Yeah. If you have a site coded from scratch for you, then the developer has to do that by hand.... If you need a really complicated site, or you're a big business, then obviously you're going to do that. But yeah, it's just, yeah.

[L] You have to custom code, some maybe specific application or the application. There's so many, like APIs and plugins that you can just easy these days. It's like, I have to like figure out my WordPress site.

[K] Oh, oh, I know. My very first websites were WordPress. And I bought premium templates. And I, you know, there were still problems that I wanted to solve and things I didn't love. So I would use developer mode in Safari and look at the code of other websites I admired. And then I would take parts that I liked and alter my HTML code. And so I taught myself some HTML code that way.

[L] Wow!

[K] And I would you know, like, redo my premium template to improve it. Yeah, it was crazy. Oh, my goodness. Okay. What else? We've talked about so much.

[L] Yeah. So I think one last thing, you know, when we chatted the other day is like, okay, so people want it, people are like, okay, I want to talk about like, you know, how to how to do something, or, you know, strategy for doing that is a very popular topic. Right, and that's great. But what I push people for, what I push my clients for, when if they're, like, you know, service professional, and, you know, basically really built that business on relationship and trust, is that they sound generic. That's another point about creating content is like, "Oh, I really want to sound like Mayo Clinic." I'm like, No, you don't.

[K] They already exist, they're already getting all the hits.

[L] Exactly. So because one of the, like, one of the big goals that you should have for your content marketing is to build relationship and build trust with your audience. So that, you know, like, what, what they read on the page should feel like you. So when they talk to you, there should not be any, you know, like gap that there'll be like, "Oh, doesn't, it's not the same person." And I think this is very important, not for SEO, but for the purpose of building relationship. And for the purpose of really, you know, building

your client base, building a fan base, whatever you call it—building the trust and making people want to work with you.

[L] It's really about, you're making your voice come through in your content, though you got nothing to do with it. But I want to mention that because there's so many people who are like, I want to sound like so authoritative and like so serious because I'm the professional. But at the end of the day, it is still a person selling something to a person. It is a, you know, it is on a personal level. They need to trust you to proceed the conversation to want to work with you. Because honestly, most people are not selling one-of-a-kind services that, you know, that anyone can always go to someone else that they feel like they, they trust more, they resonate with more.

[L] And obviously, you don't want to be the cheapest one on the block, right? So you don't want to be competing on price. So what do you compete on is that trust factor is that you have your secret sauce, you want to communicate that you know your stuff. You have your secret sauce, and you have a unique approach that, you know, that resonate with a specific audience. So, I think that's just worth mentioning. Like, you know, don't just, don't just go about chasing SEO, chasing keywords, and forget about your voice and forget about, you know. At the end of the day it's about connecting with people.

[K] That's great. Yeah. And the best way to understand that is by listening or outright asking them. What you were just talking about, actually, I think, is directly related to SEO. Because to me, SEO isn't just about attracting people to your website, it's about keeping them too, because once they get there, you don't want them to just look at or read just that one article. You want to keep them. And, like you were just saying, it's not just a matter of having good content. It has to be content that sounds like you, that is totally aligned with your brand. Because when it comes down to the clients making the decision to hire you, when you're a service provider, you know—if it's a product that's a little bit different—but as a service provider, they will often make a decision based on personality. Because, like you said, I am by far not the only one making Squarespace websites! You could find lots of people doing what I'm doing. And I'm not competing on price, you know. They're gonna find lots of people with the same investment level that I am. So it's, it's going to be personality a lot of times. And if I hide that, then they won't know. They won't know if we resonate or not. So I'm not going to pretend to be something I'm not.

[L] Absolutely and especially for your line of work, like you know, I think, you know, yes, you understand the client. You understand what they want. But at the end of the day, of course, your personality and your taste comes through everything that you do so very true.

[K] Oh, this is wonderful. Do you have any last tips for listeners?

[L] I talked a lot already!

[K] Everything you said was just fabulous. This is really, really helpful. I really appreciate your being here today. Just awesome.

[K] So next week, I'll be back with tips on best practices for running a podcast. Oh my gosh, I think I mentioned that earlier, didn't I? Forgetting it was gonna be next week. So please check out my website at [AKS Design Studio dot com](http://AKSDesignStudio.com) for more podcasts and blog posts about branding, design, and building a business—including videos that walk you through setting up SEO on Squarespace, creating a blog template, and more. You can email me at Kelly at [AKS Design Studio dot com](http://AKSDesignStudio.com) with any questions or comments. And I'll put a link to Ling's LinkedIn profile in the show notes. So, see you next time on Brand + Design Scoop!

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