

Ep.98 How to Optimise Your Local Digital Presence for Real Growth

With Ferhan Janjua

Maria Lloyd

Hello, everyone, and welcome to My Local Marketer podcast. I'm Maria and today I'm speaking with Ferhan Janjua, owner of Reading Web Agency. Ferhan, hello and welcome to the podcast.

How are you?

Ferhan Janjua

Yeah, good, good. How's it going?

Maria Lloyd

Yeah, really good, thanks. People who are not watching the video version won't know, but I was commenting earlier, you are in a lovely box there, aren't you? Did you say it was Regis?

Ferhan Janjua

Yeah, Regis, yeah. It's one of the meeting rooms.

Maria Lloyd

So that's your co-working space, isn't it?

Ferhan Janjua

Yeah, yeah, it's good. I can't really work from home, so I had to get this to just be more productive, really.

Maria Lloyd

How long have you been in your business for again? Remind me.

Ferhan Janjua

So we started about 2024, so it's been about two years now.

Maria Lloyd

How did you get into your website design? And now I know you're doing more digital marketing, so how did you end up doing that?

Ferhan Janjua

So with the website, so I've always wanted to start a business. I saw someone else started selling websites and got some good success with it. So I decided to copy them, really, and it was ideal for me because all you need is a laptop.

And I'm quite technical anyway. So before I started my business, I was working in tech for about five, six years. So I knew how to write code.

I knew how to do all that stuff. And it just seemed quite easy to sell because everybody understands what a website is. And they can be quite close to the money as well, so it's easy to justify.

So a good website can make you a good amount of money, and therefore it's easy to justify the investment.

Maria Lloyd

And we're getting into the good stuff now, because I think, as we were saying earlier, you have pivoted more to talk about SEO and digital marketing, haven't you? But you still lead a little with the websites because that's easier for people to understand, isn't it?

Ferhan Janjua

Yeah, yeah. So with the SEO, the reason I started doing SEO is because people started asking for it. So people I had sold a website would then ask me if I did SEO.

And that's really how that started. So I sell local SEO. So with the Google profiles, I can optimise your Google profile and get really good, quick results with it.

And that's the thing that I kind of sell on the surface, but then I'll keep in contact with my clients. And surely, but slowly, they will start to tell me about other problems that they have in terms of lead generation and positioning. And then through that process, I'll give them ideas from time to time.

I'll help them out with their strategy. But I never sell the strategy itself because I don't think a lot of people either would understand it or it's a bit too abstract. It's not close enough to the money, but you can hook people in with the local SEO because it's quite easy to justify the investment.

It's quite easy to understand what local SEO is.

Maria Lloyd

From your experience, are people more aware now that they need SEO because it's going to help with AI?

Ferhan Janjua

So in terms of SEO, I think everyone I talk to understands what SEO is. So I think at this point it's been around for so long. In a way, it's quite old school.

Everybody knows what Google is and therefore they kind of understand what SEO can do for them if they get, like, say, number one on Google. So it's never really been a challenge for me to kind of market that stuff. And then in terms of AI, in general, you know, I don't really hear too many people speaking about AI.

I mean, personally, when I build out a website, I don't really lean too heavily into AI. I'm always thinking about the user experience because I have a theory. I think it's more like a trickle-down effect where if you can target the right person at the top, for example, if you consider what the user experience is going to be like, what would a customer like to see on a website?

What kind of information are they after? If you can then put all of that stuff onto the website, if you target the user to start with, then everything from that is kind of downstream.

Maria Lloyd

I think you're right. As we were saying before, if you have a good service, a good reputation, then people start to know about you. And that does help with them wanting to go to a website, find out more about you.

So it's what you do off your website as well that matters. So I think that leads on to what we were saying before about what is the purpose of a website now?

Ferhan Janjua

Is to let people know that you're legit. The purpose of a website is really to act as a business card in terms of letting people know who you are, what you do, why they should trust you. And it also has a call to action.

So maybe you want to call the guy up. It's like an information board.

Maria Lloyd

Thinking about the website then, is there a particular structure that you think about when talking to a client about a website? Obviously, it would vary on what they're offering. But is there a general format to a layout that you can advise people on?

Ferhan Janjua

Well, you have to have a homepage because that's what people expect to see. So in general, it depends what industry you're from. But if you just purely think in terms of pages, you would have a homepage, an about page, and a contact page.

That's like the minimum. And that's only just because that's what people expect to see. So when you go on a website, as a user, you're expecting to see certain things.

And if a website doesn't have things that you expect to see on there, like, for example, sometimes I've seen the navigation bar will be vertical and not horizontal. That then throws people off. So unless there's a good reason that you're breaking all the rules, it actually kind of breaks the trust that people have in you.

So that's what I would say is just try and structure it in a way that people expect to see.

Maria Lloyd

You need to give people familiar, but at the same time, you need to give them something a bit different. So it's familiarity. So they're comfortable and they understand it, but it's with a tweak.

So is that what people should be aiming for, for their websites?

Ferhan Janjua

I think you're right. I think what I would say, like, add on to that is if I was going to tell someone generally what you want on a website, you want good assets. So you want good imagery and you want good media on there.

So like videos, things that are really, really hard to replicate from other people. So if, for example, you run a restaurant, say it's like three Michelin stars, then you need really good photography of your food, because something like that is something that would be really difficult for a restaurant down the road to replicate. If you're in a really good location, you would want to basically demonstrate that.

So you would show people really good photography of the location that you're in. Maybe the kind of like interior of the restaurant, if it's like really decked out and a lot of thought has gone into it. So a website should really show people the parts of your business that are really, really hard to replicate.

And the best way to do that is through imagery, is through testimonials. If you provide a service and you have like, you know, 100 reviews, then because that's something that not everyone can demonstrate, then you should definitely say that you have 100 reviews. If you engage with the local community, again, because a lot of people don't do that, then you should definitely talk about it.

Maria Lloyd

Oh, I love that. I actually wrote that down. You need to put on your website the parts of your business that are hard to replicate.

I think that's a really lovely, clear way to look at it. On that point, then, what is your view? I know it's very situation to situation on AI.

There is definitely a place for AI. I think we can agree there's a place for AI. But how can you advise, and again, I know this is case by case basis, people to use it wisely.

Ferhan Janjua

So generally, I wouldn't use AI to generate product images. If I could get a photographer to get the real thing, you know, to give you an example, if I climbed, I don't know, Mount Kilimanjaro, and I was at the top and I took a picture, that picture would be worth a lot more than if I got ChatGPT to just make that same picture from my laptop. Even though like, you know, it's the same pixels and it's the same thing.

The picture that you actually had to physically climb up to capture, a lot of effort went into that. So to me, if you have the mindset that I'm going to actually take pictures that are real, then that will trickle down into the kind of like energy or the message that you're trying to transmit to your client.

Maria Lloyd

Oh, absolutely. I suppose as a business owner, it's up to you. You've got to decide where does the trust lie?

What is it your customers, your clients who you should know very well, hopefully, what is it they would want to see? Where are the places that you need to spend the money on?

Ferhan Janjua

Yeah, yeah. So I'll use AI to maybe write code or generate templates for the website itself. But I try to discourage using AI to, you know, if you can get a photographer to take a picture, I'd rather do that rather than using an AI image.

Because I think at this point, like you can tell, right, if someone's used AI. So it's too easy to make mistakes with AI. It's too easy to make it look fake.

And you might not realise it, but you know, in the background, there'll be like someone with six fingers or something. So, you know, you're better off getting real assets if it's possible.

Maria Lloyd

So use AI to help you with the planning and things on the back end. But yeah, on the front end, things they're actually going to see, interact with, that you're going to be using to convince them, try and keep it real.

Ferhan Janjua

Yeah, yeah. I mean, generally I'll use AI to, you know, as a sounding board. I'll talk to the AI to see what ideas it has.

But again, when it comes to AI, you just need to have your own vision and tell it that this is what I want. This is what my own vision is for the business. This is how I want it to come across.

So as long as the stuff that you're doing with AI has your own opinion attached to it, then I think you should be fine. I've come across websites that I really like the look of. So rather than manually recreating it myself, I'll ask AI, I really like this website, can you write some code that replicates that look?

But you have to do it this way and you have to do it that way in my clients like this. Because there's so much opinion that's gone into it, then the thing that it generates to me presents something that actually looks good rather than something that looks generic. That can be okay, depending on what your goals are.

Not everybody needs a website that looks amazing. Sometimes you just need a contact form. And in that case, you know, just ask AI to do it.

Maria Lloyd

So you have to be leading the AI. So I suppose you need to know yourself, your brand, your tone of voice, your clients, what you want to stand for very well. And if you understand that, AI can help you and guide you with how you bring that to life.

But that has to be at the core of it. If you don't really know, then it's going to lead you all over the place.

Ferhan Janjua

Yeah, yeah. Because the problem with AI is it will take an average of everything that exists and it will serve that to you on a plate, which means that you'll often end up in overcrowded markets trying to compete with everyone else. So a lot of businesses can actually perform really well, especially service businesses where, you know, you're not in a fixed location.

You can probably increase your sales or increase the quality of leads by fixing your positioning. But that's something that you have to put a lot of thought into yourself. I'm not sure AI is at the point where it can do that for you.

So if you ask AI to fix your positioning, it's just going to end up copying everyone else and then just give you that thing where you're just going to compete with a hundred other guys.

Maria Lloyd

Well, we've spoken about the purpose of a website, what it should look like, tips for how you use AI to help you with your business. Could you give two or three tips for people on how to develop their online presence?

Ferhan Janjua

So again, you know, it depends on who you are. And are we talking about a physical location? Are we talking about a service-based business?

Are we talking about someone who just started? My biggest tip is to just have a positive mindset, positive attitude, and to have a kind of mindset of availability rather than the opposite, which is, you know, you think that there's only finite resources, there's only a finite number of customers. And so what ends up happening if you do that is you can end up thinking small sometimes, which is bad.

So in general, if you have a long-term mindset where you take every day as it comes, you have a long-term vision, but every single day, you know that there's a natural kind of variance in the results that you're going to get. Some days are good, some days are bad. If you can kind of ride that storm, then that's going to set you up really, really well for making good strategic decisions.

And in general, I think people put too much emphasis on the website. So they think that if they have a bad business, that you can fix all of that by having a better website, because once you turn on the website and you change the design and it looks really, really good and it looks professional, and it's number one on Google, then suddenly you're going to get so many customers and then more customers means more revenue, which means that you're going to be able to reinvest that into your business.

But if at the core of your business, things aren't working, the system is broken, then all a website's going to do, if it does get to the number one spot on Google, all it's going to do is actually just amplify the problems that you already have, because now you have more customers, but you're not set up to actually deal with that extra demand. So in general, I would say that you need to think about how there are multiple touch points to your business and a website by itself is not going to fix everything. If an operational level, you're unable to reply to customers on time or you've got logistical issues that are causing you stress, or maybe you don't have a lot of cash in the bank, but you have taken out a lot of money on credit.

I've met people like business owners like this, where then they expect the website to just fix the business and it's not going to work. What ends up happening is you start thinking really, really short term and you're unable to wait for the kind of results to come.

Maria Lloyd

You said before, one of the things that you recommend people do is develop a Google profile. That is like a nice, quick, easy way for businesses to start developing a reputation. Do you have a couple of tips for business owners on developing their Google profiles?

Ferhan Janjua

Yeah, so for the Google profiles, all you need to do is get more reviews and fill it out. So, you know, upload pictures on it that look good and just post updates on it from time to time. Most businesses that I've seen that are quite local will neglect their Google profile in one way or another, but it's like a really, really easy fix to do.

So just get more reviews, reply to all the reviews and then upload good looking pictures because say, for example, you're a home decorator. If your images don't look good, then it just means that people will click off and they'll go to someone else. That's just like one other touch point.

Ideally, you should have multiple touch points. So if someone sees your signage outside your shop, that's one touch point. If someone sees you on Facebook, if someone talks about your business.

So all of these things should work together to help you get more sales. And if you do the Google profiles correctly, if you start to get more reviews, then within about two to three months, you should start seeing results because then Google will start to recommend your business above others on the search results.

Maria Lloyd

So do an audit of all their online presences, think where they are and do an evaluation to see do they all align and just keep asking people for reviews and consider developing their Google profile.

Ferhan Janjua

Yeah, I would say if you're a local business, maybe a local service provider or a local shop, go for the Google profile first because still most people, I think 80 to 90% of people still use Google. So just go for that first if you don't have the time or budget to do any other social media.

Maria Lloyd

Wonderful. So is there anything you would like to leave our listeners with before we finish today?

Ferhan Janjua

I would say that ever since the internet became a thing, it's been quite easy to fall into a trap of thinking that we only need to focus on our online presence. So especially with social media and algorithms, it's quite easy to think that if we want our business to survive, then we need social media. But if you have a good offline presence, more often than not, that is the thing that is probably going to give you more stability and momentum.

I think that in order to do that, if you're a local business, then it's really important that you engage with offline initiatives if you can. So where you spoke of relationships, I think that relationships are really, really important. And often we kind of neglect that part of marketing.

For example, if I'm a commercial plumber and I want to serve hotels, for example, then it's really important for me to have a list of hotel owners or managers that will just give me contracts. So if I have that relationship already, then it doesn't matter what my website looks like. If they trust me, if they trust the uniform, if they like the look of the van, then the selling part has already been done.

And the website probably doesn't even need to exist at that point. I think offline is probably in some ways a lot more important than online.

Maria Lloyd

You're talking yourself out of some customers there, but hopefully that will prove the point and develop that you really care about your clients and actually getting the results that they need. So Farhan, thank you so much for your time today and for sharing your knowledge with all of our listeners.

Ferhan Janjua

All right. No worries. Thanks for having me.