In the Know
Nick Eubanks, Part II

Nick Eubanks: Links that make you money are the best links on the internet, and so again, don't just get so caught up with, well, that's a no-follow link; it doesn't have value. If there's a post that has a blog post or a core question or a forum question that has some commercial implications, be one of the first one or two people to comment on it. All the people are gonna click through to that link that you drop.

Buckley Barlow: Hello, hello, and welcome to In the Know. This podcast is dedicated to all those listeners who want and need the best strategic and tactical advice on engineering growth. And for Season 2, it's all about digital commerce. All right, buckle up. We'll see you on the inside.

Hello, hello, insiders, and welcome back to the conversation with Nick Eubanks in Part 2 of a two-part SEO series. If you missed the last episode, Part 1, and you really want a foundation on SEO and how to drive traffic, I highly suggest you go back and listen to that episode before diving into this one, which is gonna be a little bit more advanced. Nick, welcome back, my friend.

Nick Eubanks: Thanks for having me.

Buckley Barlow: We're just talking about that dog barking in the background, and it's not your dog.

Nick Eubanks: No, it's not even my dog.

Buckley Barlow: So the insiders have gotta forgive Nick on this one. This is what happens when you live in a big city.

Now, this season, Nick, is all about digital commerce. And I think you're the only guest that will be talking SEO this season. And I love SEO and I love it when I can rank No. 1 in Google for my keywords, especially with limited content, a new −

Nick Eubanks: It feels good.

Buckley Barlow:	– yeah, it feels great – a new site, a new URL. It's a challenge, both from generating the infographic, the content, understanding how to plan the keywords, and I love that challenge. But I have to tell you, having built a couple different e-commerce companies in the past with multiple products, SEO all of a sudden is a lot more challenging, and it's not as straightforward as it is with a blogging site, especially when you're trying to rank product pages. So I'm excited to dig in and really roll up our sleeves on this on your strategies, your tactics, and even some additional tools that you didn't mention in the first episode that you use to build rank for multiproduct sites which are doing incredible revenues. In fact, if I may ask and you're willing to share, how much are you doing at your e-commerce store, TrafficSafetyStore.com?
Nick Eubanks:	I actually – I got kind of reprimanded last time I quoted an exact number.
Buckley Barlow:	Oh, did you? Okay.
Nick Eubanks:	Yeah, well, so here's what I'll – and the reason was –
Buckley Barlow:	Well, we know it's eight figures.
Nick Eubanks:	– my partner who started it, who is the majority owner; he doesn't want people thinking like, "Oh, crap, I didn't realize there was that much money in that industry." So he's just – he's worried about potentially creating competitors, people's eyes getting too big.
Buckley Barlow:	Got it.
Nick Eubanks:	But, yeah, we're in the eight figures and we're growing really strong and, yeah, it's a good spot. It's a good industry.
Buckley Barlow:	Well, those are awesome numbers, Nick. And how long has the site been around? Tell us a little bit about it.
Nick Eubanks:	So he launched the site in 2002, and if anybody really wants some entertainment, go to the Wayback Machine and look at – so I joined four years ago – look at it, like, four and a half years ago. It's right nav; it's all black; it just – the experience was horrendous. It was all web forms.

I mean, at least now we're MVC. We've got an ElasticSearch Backend. We're getting ready to roll out some super, super slick technology that does not exist anywhere else right now. It's an ElasticSearch-driven architecture, so it's gonna be − the site itself, all of our category and subcategory pages, just to give you a little preview, they're not actually gonna be category and subcategory pages anymore. They're gonna feel like it; they're gonna look and feel like it, but they're gonna be search results pages. But all of the product attributes are going to all build hierarchically in the URLs and all be completely indexable.

Buckley Barlow: Wow.

Nick Eubanks: We're gonna crush, man. I can't − I'm so excited for it.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah, that's exciting, that's exciting. We talked about site architecture before, and you knew that you had to go back, even though it was gonna be a bear to go back and redo the site architecture. How long did it take you?

Nick Eubanks: So it's been a work in progress. The first pass we did was probably three or four months and then rolling out MVC to get the URLs we have now and making hard decisions on what's the top level product that we wanna rank for, and what are the variations that don't have enough volume or don't have enough margin that we're willing to sort of let fall by the wayside − because we don't have a unique URL for every product currently. It's like this was the first step in our phase for setting priorities.

So our root product, the most important product on the product page has the URL and has the page title, but then the variations, the attributes, the configurations thereof that we sell, that we want people to buy obviously, are on the page and available and hopefully it's easy for them to get them, but they don't have the − we don't give them any limelight in terms of Google.

Buckley Barlow: Give us an example of the URL.

Nick Eubanks: So the best one is, right now, if you go to our page for our 28-inch injection molded traffic cone, the orange traffic − orange is the most volume and then lime and then it goes blue, white, yellow, red. But

orange is the big power product, so that gets all of the prevalence on the page.

So all the other variations − so we use that page to sell probably 40 or 45 SKUs, seven-pound bases, ten-pound bases, ones with stencils, ones with logos, ones with reflective collars, all the color variations. But orange is the one that Google knows about. All the rest of them, we populate the SKU for that specific product in a hashtag, so Google doesn't know about it essentially.

Buckley Barlow: Oh, interesting. That is interesting. Now, let's go back again like we did with the first episode, if a listener and insider's wanting to rank an e-commerce site today or they're a digital marketing manager that's trying to absolutely grow into eight figures or even nine figures, let's make this content actionable.

Let's start with how you go about making sure that you're going to crush it. And I think, like we talked about pre-show, it's all about understanding keywords. Why don't we start there?

Nick Eubanks: Sure. I think the first thing that's really important to understand is that there is no recipe for success. And what I mean by that − because that sounds super discouraging − is that there is no −

Buckley Barlow: Or actually, it sounds very hopeful because if you know what you're doing, I think you can crush it, right?

Nick Eubanks: Yes, definitely. But this key piece of understanding that's taken several years and hundreds of thousands of dollars of testing to sort of realize is what works for one keyword is not gonna work for another keyword. And they could be the same vertical. Within traffic safety, what helps us rank for traffic cones doesn't work the same way for parking blocks.

Google uses different signaling properties. You have to − here's the best way to think about it too is you're competing against hundreds of thousands, if not millions of pages. And Google identifies who they trust and they identify who has the best recipe, the best mix of the ranking signals for a keyword, and then they sort of set those in place, and then they test them.

They're constantly testing all of these qualitative − they're testing qualitative metrics at a quantitative level because they have so much

test data, right? So they use these to refine, to give, you know, over time to give the users the best set of results. That's ultimately what they're always trying to do.

And so using who's currently ranking on the Top 10 as your barometer for, like, what do my URLs need to look like? What do the words need to look like on the page? How many links do I need to have internally and externally? And how many outbound links can I have? And all of these onsite and offsite heuristics, using who's there as your initial sort of roadmap or blueprint is the best place to start.

And you have to do it at the keyword level. You can start, you know, if your keywords are category keywords, you can look at category pages. But then you have to − you can't use that same logic and those same signaling priorities for the subcategories. And then you can't use those for the detail pages. There's no room for assumptions in SEO in 2016.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah. So you're saying URL structure and foundation is so varied on e-commerce because you have no idea what Google's gonna do, which takes a lot of testing. And once you find that sweet spot, you really start pumpkin hacking. You're really focusing on those keywords that are ranking well.

Nick Eubanks: Well, and it's really hard − like, your development team is gonna hate you when you tell them, "I can't have uniformity. I need to be able to have these URLs have this product attribute in them, but then I need to be able to have − so I wanna have the color in these URLs, but I want the size or the height or the weight in these other URLs." They're gonna be, like, "We can't do that."

And anything's possible in software, anything. Anything you can dream of is possible. It doesn't mean your developers aren't gonna tell you to go to hell. It's just it's a tough pill to swallow because it doesn't make sense in computer science world.

Buckley Barlow: Hey, that's very interesting. I love how you brought that up because with a lot of shopping carts, with a lot of websites that essentially duplicate or replicate the pages, you're going out and saying, listen, in order to avoid duplicate content issues or penalties and understanding what Google wants, you're changing everything you

can on each webpage. And for a lot of SKUs, that's a heck of a lot of work.

Nick Eubanks: It is. It is really difficult for super high SKU stores, which would be why you have to choose which SKUs you're gonna focus on first, whether that's on volume, like, sales volume potential, like, what's the total adjustable market for people purchasing these or margin, which is probably where I would start because I like profits, you know, focusing on if you've got a store with 10,000 SKUs, focusing on − this is gonna sound sort of crazy, but focusing on 100 first. Just start with 100, and then pick another 100. And then when you've got 300 doing relatively well, move on, and just biting off these small iterative chunks.

Buckley Barlow: But Nick, what you just shared, I think is so insightful because, listen, I built several multimillion-dollar companies and I will tell you, I have never done something like that, that extensive, mostly because I haven't had a huge development team to lean on, right? I've had a self-funded budget for the most part. And that's just a lot of work to be able to go and do that. But it doesn't have to be.

                  If you have an e-commerce site, all you have to do is make those subtle changes to see what's working. And give us an example of someone that is just coming out with an e-commerce site, and what things should they be changing to test, even down to the attributes?

Nick Eubanks: So if you, let's say, you're building a Shopify store as an MVP, and you've defined which product attributes for your product mix are the most important for the URLs, but then you've got some outliers. And you just can't fit them into, you know, what you've identified − it just can't − it's too few products for you to consider changing your entire architecture for how your product pages are built out.

                  So instead, maybe build a static page. Build a page that looks and feels just like a product page. It can have an Add to Cart button, but it's all static. It's not technically a product page. But the users don't really know this.

                  And it gives you the opportunity to, without having to rely heavily on a development team, to test some of these other URLs because one of the things that I test a lot with e-comm sites is should − in a perfect world, you'd never have the category in the URL, right?

You wanna be able to have − in a perfect world, in a perfect e-commerce world, you wanna be able to have a product in multiple categories and you don't wanna have to worry about canonical tags because they're weaker than redirects and creating these false parent-child relationships in the URLs. So ideally, everything − all products live in the root directory.

Sometimes, based on the SERPs, that's not possible. We are, you know, our first − to build the relevancy that we needed to start ranking for these traffic cone product pages, we needed traffic cones. We need to create a crap-ton of relevancy at the traffic cones category level, and we needed that to be − we needed to harness that relevancy and push that downstream to our product pages.

So our product pages live in the first subdirectory off of our category. And our category names are in our product URLs right now. This is − we're changing this, but it was systematic. It was, you know, let's get these rankings first. Let's build this trust. Let's build this relevancy. And once we have the link equity that we need to make the change to push these into the root director, then we can do that.

But it takes time. I think that's the hardest part for SEO for a lot of people. People do it for three or four, even six months, and they give up. They're, like, "This just doesn't work. It's too hard." And they didn't realize how close they were, you know.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah, it's the same with content marketing, isn't it? SEO and content marketing go hand in hand, especially in the blogging site.

Nick Eubanks: Oh, yeah.

Buckley Barlow: And it's just hard to keep up, and it's technical and people have a hard time. Their budgets just dry up. So I get it. What's another major tactic that you use in your business that absolutely drives growth?

Nick Eubanks: So perfect question actually. I was gonna say, so it's easy to promote blog − well, I won't say easy − easier to promote blog posts. You can't promote category pages. You can't. You start Tweeting and sharing on Facebook your product category page URLs, you're gonna lose your audience real quick. Nobody cares. And so you

can't lean on promotion and paid amplification, all these things that you normally would for category pages.

So you have to get really creative. And you have to think more like an engineer. And it's how can I get these links and these trust signals that I need? And for e-comm, a lot of it is brute force research and then some creativity.

The best link I ever got to this day was from the EPA. EPA has a recycled manufacturers' page and it's indexed, and we have products that contain recycled material. So it took a bunch of legwork and a bunch of follow-up, and it was a long turnaround. It was, like, five or six weeks. But we got four or five of these links from the EPA.

Buckley Barlow: Wow, fantastic.

Nick Eubanks: They were the best links I ever got, yeah. And so the other thing too is I think is important for e-commerce owners is deep links are great, but don't get so caught up on trying to get these deep links to your category, subcategory and product pages that you miss other linking opportunities.

Be happy with homepage links. Homepage links still move the needle. Get the homepage links. Get the naked URL links. Don't worry about anchor text. Get the links and then worry about sculpting your page rank or your citation flow on your site.

Do what you have to do to maximize the things you can't control, like link destinations and link targets when you get them, and then worry about the things you can control, like how you control that citation, like, that flow of equity downstream within your own site.

Buckley Barlow: Hey, that's great. So basically, if you're gonna − if you have your druthers and it's gonna take six months to get a product anchor link versus a naked link, you'd say, hey, let's take that naked link in five weeks or four weeks and then use a lot of on-page SEO internal linking to really build up that link equity.

Nick Eubanks: Exactly, yes.

Buckley Barlow: That's great.

Nick Eubanks:	The other thing that I've found that's pretty cool as sort of a growth hack for e-comm is building content pages that live in, say, right in the root for a specific set of products or for variations of category terms, building them, getting some juice flowing through them, getting them to start to rank, and then just folding them into my actual category page URLs.
Buckley Barlow:	Interesting. I like that. That's great. One thing I've noticed that Amazon products, they rank really well, consistently well on keyword product searches. How do you compete against Amazon? How do you do this?
Nick Eubanks:	Honestly, it comes down to links in a big way. Amazon does get organic links. People share Amazon products, but people don't link to Amazon products in blog posts. People don't − most of Amazon's links the last time I looked were from forums. And you can go get those same links, and you can be more creative than Amazon is. You can create scholarships and you can create big resource pages, and you can run outreach and you can go get the links that Amazon doesn't have people in place to go get.
Buckley Barlow:	If you were going to sell this on your site versus Amazon, where would you go? How would you start? Would you just say, I'm gonna start selling it on Amazon, and then I'm gonna start building my own real estate, or am I going to start on my own real estate and eventually work my way over to Amazon?
Nick Eubanks:	I'd go out and immediately before the page was even live, I'd get my − essentially my promotion plan together. So where are the people who use this? Where are the people who talk about this? Are there people writing about this? Are there questions in forums? T
	here are search operators you can use in Google to only search certain kinds of sites. Find people who are asking questions about it and go drop comments. Some of the best links don't pass − some of the best links on the internet are no-followed, and it's because they send qualified traffic.
	Me and actually Jon Cooper, who I'd mentioned on the last episode, from Point Blank SEO, are working on a poster now that talks about links for traffic, not links for rankings.

Again, those are the − links that make you money are the best links on the internet. And so again, don't just get so caught up with, well, that's a no-follow link; it doesn't have value. If there's a post that has a blog post or a core question or a forum question that has some potential commercial implications, be one of the first one or two people to comment on it. All the people are gonna click through to that link that you drop.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah, that's great. Let's kind of cap this off if we can with site search data. I mean, this is the way that you do ongoing refinement of your search strategy. I'd love it if you'd share with the insiders exactly what this means and how you do it.

Nick Eubanks: Totally. So every month, I've got a canned report that I have GA spin up and email to me. And it's the Top 100 most searched terms on the site. And then some of the other pages that are in that PDF are which ones created the most revenue? Which ones had the highest conversion rate? And which ones had the highest page views, or which terms created the most page views and the least revenue?

And what I'm doing is I'm looking for behavior. I wanna know, what are people calling things that we don't sell that maybe we should sell? What are people calling things that we do sell that they're not finding? So we need to think of other ways to call them the things that the people who want to buy them are calling them. Naming conventions are critical. And it's hard.

Like, one product we sell is our parking blocks, and the big heavy users call them parking blocks, but consumers call them parking bumpers and garage bumpers and bumper blocks and a 1,000 variations. And it's trying to figure out how we get all these words on pages on the site within that category to create the relevancy.

Anyway, so that site search data, we use as our ongoing blueprint for content creation. We use that to write how-to guides, to change the language on our install guides, to write − a lot of our FAQs, we keep a pretty rolling schedule of FAQ creation. Probably every three or four months, we make a bunch of updates. But we use the site search data to figure out what FAQs should be added.

When is an FAQ important enough that it should get its own page? When is that page important enough that it should get linked to from either the main navigation or the home page or a category page?

Buckley Barlow: Yeah, fantastic.

Nick Eubanks: So the data is invaluable.

Buckley Barlow: Now, you had mentioned GA, Google Analytics. Any other tools that you're using for e-commerce sites or reporting tools that just are invaluable?

Nick Eubanks: I'd mentioned Deep Crawl, SEMrush, Term Explorer. Hotjar is one that we recently started using a lot more. Their mobile heat mapping is really, really cool. Their exit − their little exit surveys − it's not like a bounce exchange exit survey where you get that big intrusive popup. It's just a little chat window almost that pops up.

Speaking of chat, that's worth mentioning too. We make so much frigging money thanks to chat.

Buckley Barlow: That's great.

Nick Eubanks: That was one of those things that I brought − again, I just − I thought of it when I first joined the team, and people poo-pooed it. My team didn't like the idea. They're, like, "Nobody's gonna use it. Our customers don't use chat." God, were they wrong.

Buckley Barlow: Hey, that's fantastic. So how are you using chat differently than anybody else in an e-comm, for example? Is it just − it's just standard?

Nick Eubanks: We use canned responses a lot, and we use Olark, which allows for co-browsing. So people, through Olark, people can give us the permission to essentially share their screen and we can see what they're seeing, and that lets our customer service reps sell directly over the phone while people are on chat. It's like a guided tour all the way to the shopping cart. It's essentially like taking their hand and walking them to the bank.

Buckley Barlow: Well, this is awesome stuff, and I'd love to talk to you for about three or four more hours. It's always a pleasure. But before we

launch into our final round of questions, I'd like to take a second, actually 30 seconds to be exact, to thank our sponsor.

Hey there. I hope you're enjoying the episode today. I sure am. But I do wanna take a second and thank our sponsor of today's episode. This is Backblaze. They do unlimited backup in the cloud of your personal or business data. And I'll tell you, if you've ever lost data, you know how frustrating it can be.

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All right, Nick, final round of questions. Let's talk mistakes. What's the biggest mistake you see companies, new or mature, making in digital commerce today or e-commerce when it comes to their SEO strategy?

Nick Eubanks: Not managing their crawl budget. So Mangento, Shopify, WooCommerce, all of these e-commerce platforms allow − and almost everybody does sort of out of the gate − creates an individual URL for all their products. That's really useful when PLAs are a big driver because you need to be able to do that. You need to be able to give all those product variations and those product attributes to Google with their own URL.

The problem is you can have your cake and eat it too. Just because a product should be in the PLAs doesn't mean you should allocate crawl budget to it.

So figuring out which of your product variations don't deserve Google's time, you know, Google doesn't think that is a delicious page; Google Crawler is not interested in it, so no indexing that page or even setting it to no crawl and no index, just so it's there for users. It's there to sell the product, but it's not eating up the amount of time and attention that you get each day from Google.

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Buckley Barlow:	So what is a perfect crawl budget in your estimation, in terms of number of links, number of URLs?
Nick Eubanks:	It depends on how important Google considers your site. Google Crawler crawls sites on average five or six times a day depending on which vertical and how big your overall site footprint is.
	So looking at doing a log analysis and looking at the pages that are getting crawled the most and the most frequently and figuring out, does this page rank? Is this page worthy of this crawl budget? And that's where your pumpkin hacking for e-commerce starts is right there. This page got crawled five times yesterday. We have a five-percent margin on this item. Let's kill it. It's not worth it. It's not important enough.
Buckley Barlow:	Yeah, that's perfect. Well, what's the No. 1 tip on the other side of the spectrum? What's the No. 1 tip you'd recommend to anyone trying to grow and significantly trying to grow their business online?
Nick Eubanks:	Do a content gap analysis and then invest in a server log analysis. Those are illuminating. It's people handing you money sandwiches essentially.
Buckley Barlow:	What's the best tools, resources for insiders to learn how to do this?
Nick Eubanks:	Builtvisible has a fantastic guide on server log analysis that is absolutely worth checking out, Richard Baxter's company. And content gap analysis, I like URL Profiler.
	There's really nobody that's written a really comprehensive guide on how to do a content gap analysis. Mike King wrote a pretty good one on ProBlogger, I think it was. But it's still not − no offence to Mike − it's still not completely soup to nuts.
	I would love − like, URL Profiler, the smartest thing they could do would be for Patrick − which I'm gonna make listen to this podcast − would be for them to really do a very detailed, step-by-step how-to on how to use their tool to do a content gap analysis.
Buckley Barlow:	Well, there you go, insiders. He just gave you a huge tip for a potential ranking.

Now, listen, Nick, if you were to hire someone right now who you would be looking for that could just absolutely help explode the value of your companies, what kind of person would you be looking for? What kind of skill sets would you be looking for? Talk to us about that.

Nick Eubanks: So this is gonna be a really weird answer, but an illustrator. They are so hard to find, and all the good ones seem like they're working for game companies. The best one that I probably know is named Parker Whitney, but he now owns a game company. He's busy making too much money selling IOS apps to ever get him to do the work.

But I would − we're doing so much stuff on the client side with really interactive types of content. And having somebody that's able to create GIFs and create these process illustrations that support all of the cool interactive stuff that we're doing with all these cool JavaScript libraries, is just so hard to find. And that would just be a game changer for us if I could find somebody that had that skill set.

Buckley Barlow: Interesting. That's the first I've heard from anybody out of − how many interviews have I done? About 25, 26. That's cool. Well, fantastic information, Nick. Thanks so much for coming on. You're a stud, and I really enjoyed it.

Nick Eubanks: It's absolutely my pleasure.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah, I continue to look forward to your posts. And if you wanna know more about Nick and what he's up to, head on over to SEOauv.com. You can also check out TrafficSafetyStore.com. And again over on our site, beintheknow.co/podcast, you'll get all the links, show notes and information that we talked about in these two amazing, amazing episodes. They've been great.

So, insiders, that is a wrap. So thanks so much for joining us. Now, if you're interested in knowing what my previous guests' advice have been on growth, you need to head on over to our homepage at beintheknow.co and grab your free copy. You can't miss it. The content kicks butt, and you are going to love it. So thanks again for joining us, and we'll see you next Tuesday.

Announcer: We appreciate you joining us for this episode of In The Know. You can find show notes, past episode and special giveaways for insiders

at beintheknow.co. Thanks again, and we'll see you next Tuesday on In the Know.

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