Transcript

Jim: Yeah, okay great. All right, welcome to the Denver SEO Meetup. This is our first ever virtual meetup. I'm sure we have a lot of people outside the area, but I'm glad to see a lot of locals and a lot of people that haven't physically been able to come to a meetup for a long time able to make this one. So, welcome everybody. It's a little bit different. I'm not buying any pizza today. You have to furnish your own drinks. We have a great presentation today on how branding can impact SEO. Now, if you're not aware, also one quick announcement, we moved SearchCon to be in the fall. It will either be entirely virtual, partially virtual, we're still figuring everything out. It will definitely have a virtual component to it. It's great to have so much practice by doing the Meetups. Let's see, before we start today, I'd like everybody to just introduce yourself in the chat. You can just put your name, what company are with, and maybe what you love about SEO. It looks like we have a little bit of chat activity here. All right, well great. Chris Ralph with Boulder SEO Marketing. Don Parcher with Checklist.com. And here we go, let's see. Dave Taylor sent to all attendees, Ask Dave Taylor. He's a YouTuber and is highly recommended. Dave Taylor actually video records at SearchCon for us and does a great job with quick videos that look amazing. Let's see, Chris Rolfe does off-page SEO. That's your favorite, Chris? Chris has done a lot of international SEO. Dan Stratford, Dan's a longtime SEO and collaborator. Let's see, Katy Go. She manages SEO and SEM for HealthGrades.com and Share Care. Allen Todd with Page Cafe, local SEO in Colorado Springs. Great. Welcome, Ellen. Let's see, Patty SRG. She likes helping companies and seeing the results. Yes, it's like a video game, isn't it? It's so addictive. Dan Stratford currently senior director of digital strategy for Olive. Alright, and Natalie Henley. Hi, Natalie. She's with Volume 9 and a long-time member and supporter of the MeetUp and of SearchCon. Let's see, we also have Kerry Stewart with Kismet Writing and Development, working with authors and small business on SEO and branding. Ryan Masterson with Green Hat Web Solutions. Great and he's got a Meetup SEO dev. All right, I'll check that out and maybe we can do a collaborative Meetup on that. Ping me, Ryan, and let's figure something out. I'd love to do a collaborative Meetup. All right. Oha in SEO for Denver Appliance Pros. Great, welcome, Oha. I see Jordan Brewer with Quality Cage Crafters based in Austin, but remote from Johnstown. Oh, great. Who loves blog SEO? All right. Monica Valdez, one of the court organizers of the SEO Meetup and actually really helped this happen, so thank you, Monica, that we finally are back on and doing a virtual meetup here. Oh and if you're interested in presenting, Monica Valdez is your contact, so get on her calendar. Her favorite part of SEO is content strategy, so if you have something on that, you know now her soft spot, so it's good. We have Tyler Jacobsen the digital strategist at Omnifonic and Amy Sigrest at Mapper Agency in Boulder, a full-service integrated PR marketing firm. She's the director of digital marketing and she loves the power SEO gives to good PR and vice versa. Yeah, it's a good point. All right. Phil Nugent, he's interested in branding and SEO, so very much looking forward to this. And okay, I think that's it for the intros. Okay, all right, here we go. All right, well I'd like to thank our panelists and I'll let you introduce yourselves. I'm so excited just how powerful branding has become for SEO, so thank you both for giving this presentation, which was originally scheduled for March in person with pizza and thanks for rolling with the punches. So, I'll turn it over to you, Christina.

Christina: I'll pass it on over to Danielle.

Danielle: Well first and foremost, thank you, Jim, and thank you, Monica, for allowing us to have this opportunity. We are so excited and happy to share with you and present virtually. Today, CreativCat and MediaSesh have partnered together to present on how branding can impact SEO. I am one of your presenters today. I am Danielle, the creative cat. I'm a branding expert The little guy on my shoulders is Captain Jack, and you'll see a little bit of how he plays into my brand today during the presentation. Alongside me today, virtually of course, is Christina.

Christina: I'm Christina Brodzky, I am an SEO consultant and I'm the founder of MediaSesh, which is an online consulting and training sessions firm. I've been in the SEO industry since 2009, so it's seen a few things to evolve over time. I've supported businesses of all shapes and sizes during those years to help them navigate through search, since I am a firm believer that everyone should have a fighting chance in being found by their customers online. So, for today's agenda, we're gonna go over a very high-level overview of what SEO and branding are, why they're important, what each of them do individually, and then we'll get into how branding can help SEO to be more efficient, along with how I interpret it to be better for E-A-T, and I'll go over a little bit more about what that is later on, and a few examples of sites that are doing branding well, and those sites that could be doing branding just a little bit better. Then Danielle will get into branding tips, which will include items such as how to find a good branding expert, things you should ask a branding expert, things to consider, and how your branding should evolve

over time. Then, we'll wrap it up with some final thoughts.

Danielle: All right, so we're gonna get started here on branding and SEO overview. First, what is branding and why is it important? Branding is your logo, it's your font, it's your colors, it's your images. Everything that relates to you or your company, it's your story. Think of branding as the first impression. Before a new customer can buy your product, they must buy your message. Branding allows you to tell your story and you want to tell it before somebody else does. Also, most importantly, it builds a relationship between you and your customers. What does a branding expert do? Simply put, we establish strategy and shape your brand to take it to the top of the mountain and here's how. We use these four key elements to establish your brand. First and foremost is your vision and mission statement, along with your brand values. This is the "what" and "why" of your brand. Its who you are. Second is your logo. This is the first visual impression of your business and brand image. It's how people are going to see you and remember you by. Third are your brand guidelines. Think of this as the blueprint to your brand. It includes your brand's story, your vision, your mission, your values. It also shows you how to use your logo, the colors, the fonts, keep everything consistent. And last is your website. It's crucial to consumer engagement. It's an essential informational tool and landing place where you can engage with your customers.

Christina: And then for SEO, this is what you use to be found by your customers on search engines. What I love about this industry, more specifically for the way that I like to think, it forces me to think strategically and analytically. I also love that constantly forces our industry to test best practices to see what works and what doesn't work because our industry has evolved over time and, oftentimes, whatever we read online as a best practice is not always what we see when we actually implement those strategies ourselves. The other great thing about SEO that I love, and I'll talk about that on the next slide, is that it has evolved from being this siloed strategy working on its own, to now being more integrated with other marketing departments, such as developers. I work very closely with developers day in and day out. I also help social media strategist, public relations -- it's a beautiful marriage there, as well as web designers, which would be Danielle for mock-up designs. Then as far as why SEO is important, with that first box, it helps you to be more competitive in the search engine marketplace. One way I like to visualize this is, let's say you go to a grocery store, those food items that are eye level, that shelf that's a little bit higher up, that gets a few more impressions, a few more eyeballs, if you will. When you compare that to food items that are maybe a little bit lower down, they don't get quite as many eyeballs, so you run the risk of not being found by your customers. What SEO does is it helps you to have a fighting chance to share that search landscape and be more competitive with others. The second thing that I love about it is that it helps you to remain a little bit more relevant online. When I think of this, I like to think of the saying "if you're out of sight, you're out of mind" and that your potential customers don't know to consider you if they can't find you. They don't know what they don't know. Another way to think about it is a magazine. Whoever is on that cover slide is a little bit more

relevant than someone that may be mentioned on page 98. Then the final thing about SEO that I love is that it will force you to make impactful business decisions. This is where SEO and analytics go hand-in-hand and how you can learn what's working, what's not working, and how you can tweak your strategies because SEO is not a set it and forget it strategy. It is ongoing and it requires evolution. The next thing is what is an SEO expert do. For all the SEOs on the call, I hope you could get a little chuckle out of this slide. For those of you who are not familiar with SEO or would peg yourself as slightly more junior, these boxes represent just a sampling of the support that SEO can provide. Basically, wherever there's a search box, there is SEO and the types of support can range from the absolute basics that have not changed so much over time. That could include keyword research, it can include content writing and optimization, it can include technical analysis, and link building. Of course, those strategies have evolved over time, but those are things that I've worked on 11 years ago and those are things that I continue to work on today. But then there are some more advanced strategies that have been introduced over time and that would include Amazon optimization, internal site search, and conversion optimization. This is not an exhaustive list of everything that SEOs do and I think the reason for that is because our responsibilities continue to grow and evolve over time and become so integrated with other marketing strategies, such as PR, or working with developers. In a way I think because of that, SEO strategists have become almost like business consultants. Then, how do we bring these two seemingly very different strategies and marketing items together. They are separate, but they are very important, and they can benefit from each other. So, from my end, without good branding my efforts can only go but so far. You can have the greatest content in the world, your website can be technically sound, but it is my belief that you run the risk of turning site visitors away if they cannot get past the look feel the design of your website. Good branding helps to provide a much better overall user experience and help to increase those conversion rates because you've helped to establish trust and you've helped to make the process a little bit easier.

Danielle: And without good SEO, the branding, everything that you work towards to build your vision can only go so far. Your great branding would have been for nothing since it runs the risk of not being found by search users. You want to be found.

Christina: So, now we'll get to the meat of it. How does branding help SEO? To help in illustrating how branding can help, here is a visual of the typical search engine user behavior pattern. Of course, not always, but usually. someone wants to search for something, they turn to Google. There's actually this quote around and it says that 93% of online experiences begin with a search engine, which can be very significant considering there are billions of searches happening every single day. And once someone plugs in their keywords into the search box, results begin to populate, and based on their search query, and assuming that the search was long tail, meaning there were several keywords and the results are more targeted, assuming we're starting from that place, versus if they started with a very broad keyword phrase, didn't see something that they were looking for, went back to the search box to refine their query, now we're at the second step. They are going to, assuming you were also ranking prominently on that first page of Google, because as you know most people don't go to the second page of Google. There's a fun saying that the best place to hide a dead body is on the second page of Google, which is one of my favorite quotes ever, but you want your listing with good SEO to be engaging. That could help encourage a visitor to click on your result or click on multiple results from that first page of Google. One could also argue that this is where that first impression of your website and your brand begins. Then step three is that someone lands on your website, on your landing page, and before they even read the article, they quickly decide how good of an experience it is or how good of an experience they think they're about to expect. This is where branding can play a really big part in just the way it looks, it feels. It's not just the great content that you're sharing, it is also how the information is being displayed. So, after a visitor skimms, or they read on the content, they could quickly decide if they want to convert, by either a soft conversion maybe email newsletter, or they click on some social icons because they want to follow you on social media and engage with you there, or maybe they decide to download a white paper, or an e-book, or the ultimate conversion is they pick up their phone or they purchase right there on the website. So, you want to make sure that you provide this outstanding experience from start to finish. So, E-A-T. Now, this is an acronym that has been around for a few years, but from my own personal experience, it's not an acronym that has -- it's an acronym that's gained more momentum I would say within the last year, especially over the last few months. Maybe your experiences have been a little bit different than that, but it stands for expertise, authority and trustworthiness. So, when looking at "E" for expertise, this is where you'll ask if you are an expert in your industry. Do you have the credentials? Usually for something like this I will use the example of diabetes. The people that should write about diabetes, this would include doctors, this would include people that are actually physically experiencing it, or people that are very close to it, versus some random person that really just quickly conducted research around it. Do you have the credentials to sort of back up what you're saying. The "A," it stands for authority and this is how people think of you. Are you an expert in your field? Do people reach out to you for quotes for PR pieces or content articles? So, if I'm using that diabetes example from before, are you such a reliable source of information that, lets say, a medical journal would reach out to you for more information. Then the "T," that stands for a trustworthiness. Basically, are you honest? Do you provide accurate and truthful information? So, with the diabetes example, if people saw your information whether on your own website or someone else's website, do they believe what you have to say. To give more visuals behind E-A-T, these are just three of many examples on how to exemplify that. One would be including a bio with your information and your credentials, whether it's on your own blog or whether it's on if you're guest posting elsewhere. This is a screenshot of the bio from my website, so for your bio feel free to include accolades or really noteworthy items to position your expertise in the industry. Then another example would be citations, meaning do people include quotes from you on their website because you provide reliable information and you are an expert in your industry. This screenshot is a humble brag of me getting quoted on Business.com on the importance of SEO. This is helping to build my authority within the industry. Then the third thing is beefing up your reviews. This could be especially helpful when you're a business, when your business, is part of that "consideration phase," where maybe that consumer has narrowed down their search and now they're doing a little bit more investigation into the businesses that they are interested in. Reviews might be the grain of salt that tips the scale, whether they want to work with you going forward and if they trust you. Again, these are just three examples of many. Then as this relates to branding, I think that it should also exemplify E-A-T. There are two quotes from Google's Quality Raters guideline that I interpret to relate to that. If you're not familiar with the Quality Rater Guidelines, it is this behemoth of a document, it is about 160 pages long, so it makes for some very light night time reading, but it is a guideline that is used by 10,000 search quality raters from around the world that gets to evaluate search results, which I absolutely love and wish I was part of. What I like about that is it still emphasizes the importance of using real-life people to evaluate real-life searches and that could help inform how the algorithms evolve over time. So, the first quote is "Lowest quality main content is content created with such emphasis insufficient time, effort, expertise, talent and/or skill that it fails to achieve its purpose. The lowest rating should also apply to main content that is so difficult to read, watch, or use, that it takes great effort to understand and use the page. Broken functionality of the page due to lack of skill and construction, poor design, and lack of maintenance." The part that stands out to me there is having poor design, and creating with a lack of time, effort, and talent. Then the second quote is "Some pages are deliberately designed to manipulate users to take an action that will benefit the owner of the website rather than help the user. Here are some common types of deceptive we designed pages. Pages that disguise ads as main content, pages that disguise ads as website navigation links, pages where the main content is not usable or fixable, and any page designed to trick users into clicking on a link. I don't think anybody on this call would design deceptively such as that, but they're out there and they rank prominently all the time. They might even one day become a potential new customer, and it's really important that you emphasize that manipulating users and search engines to benefit your own agenda is not going to fly. Let's say you've gotten away with it for a very long time, there will come a day when your practices will no longer work anymore.

Jim: I have a question about that. Do you think that there's a place for clickbait in page titles and meta descriptions. Do you think that's deceptive? What's your feeling on that?

Christina: I think some websites have gotten away with it. I believe it was either last year or the year prior, there was a algorithm update where those clickbait titles, I think the New York Times was hit by this, where those titles were no longer ranking prominently for some of those articles. In my opinion, and maybe if there are any social strategists that are on the call today, I think those titles work best on social media. If you use Open Graph or maybe even Twitter Cards, maybe adjusting some of the verbiage on there, versus with SEO, I believe that you should just get to the point. There's no fluff around it. Just include your targeted keyword phrase that's also making the title very engaging, but as it relates to how can we make this more clicky, and I'm sure social strategists just never think how can I make this article clickbait, but they do need to structure their titles maybe a little bit more differently than organic strategists. I think there's a place for it in that arena.

Jim: Okay, great. Well, we have another question from the peanut gallery here. Dave Taylor who wants to cause a fight says doesn't Google search results keep trying to disguise ads and sponsored content as regular organic search.

Christina: Well, I would say that they've changed the way in which they promote it as an ad. I would always say that they've always included the word "ad" to some degree whether it was this tiny little black bolded font that says "ad," but I've never actually seen them take the word "ad" away, but I do think they test around to see what works and what doesn't work over time, but please feel free to jump in if you've seen otherwise.

Jim: Gotcha, I can bash Google all day, so I'm not even gonna keep going. Let's see, all right, go ahead, I have a few questions I'll ask at the end here.

Christina: Okay and I will pass it on over to Danielle.

Danielle: All right, we're going to start covering some branding tips. First and foremost, when you're choosing a branding expert, the branding expert should ask you the customer or the client the right questions when building your brand. Those questions are crucial to how a designer like myself will build your brand. First and foremost, who is your audience or customer? Who are your competitors? Which brands do you love? Which do you hate and why? What makes you different? What's your story? What are your business goals? What colors do you like and why? What emotions does your brand have? These are the fundamental questions to ask because this is how the designer is going to build the foundation of your brand. And earlier I talked a little bit about Captain Jack, the assistant creative cat, you see little cat ears in my logo, you see the color teal. So, what we've actually been doing is building a little bit of brand recognition throughout this presentation. So for those of you that may know me, or don't know me, you already are starting to connect with me because I was showing you a few cat icons with the content I'm presenting, I'm wearing the color teal, which is my brand color. I do this because this is my brand. This is the thing that I love most. My goal is to make sure that you love your brand just as much as I love my brand. Having the answers to these questions helps me build a brand that you love. Then, in order to find the right branding expert, because as much as I love to design logos and build brands all day, and I love to work with everybody, that doesn't mean that's the perfect fit for me, or maybe for you. So, it's it's very important to take the time to do your research before you dig in and work with a branding expert. You should be asking the branding expert what's their experience? How many years have they been doing this? Is there something that they're just starting out or have they been doing this for 10, 20 years? Next, do they have a strong portfolio? What does their portfolio look like? Does that portfolio reflect the vision of what you think that your brand should be? I'm a very clean, simplistic designer and that's just my specific style, but there are thousands of designers out there and we all design a little bit differently. That's why it's important for you as you're making the investment in your brand to do a little bit of research on that branding expert to make sure that they're the perfect fit for you and your company. Do they specialize in my niche? Have they worked with you and your company or your type of company before? Is this something that's completely new to them and are you willing to jump in and take a risk and see what magic you can create with your brand? Lastly, what is their reputation for the work that they do? How did you hear about this branding expert? Did somebody refer them to you? Did you check out their website and really like it? Did you read their testimonials? Did you read their reviews? Those all help the success of helping you build the brand that you want by making a perfect match within the branding expert when you're building your brand. This kind of ties in a little bit with a few slides ago. One of the questions that I ask when I'm building your brand is who is your audience. And it's very important to know who your audience is when I'm designing your website or your branding (audio cuts out). On the left here, you'll see this is more of a budget friendly website. On the right, it's more of an environmental-friendly website. Both of these websites are ranking in Google. I'm actually drawn to the website on the right because it's clean, it's simple, my eye knows exactly where to go. The font is a little bit bigger where their headline is. It's just easy to navigate. The website on the left isn't as easy to navigate, but that doesn't mean that if I was more on a budget, that I still wouldn't go to this website and use their website or their product that they're offering. Now, because I'm a branding expert I have a little tips and tricks up my sleeve of how we could help them still design a budget-friendly website to call out special items in the website, such as their coupons, to help the user navigate their website, to get the audience, the customers, that they are looking for. Christina, did you have anything to add to that?

Christina: Oh I think you covered it very well. I think what I loved about both of these is they're going after two completely different audiences, and therefore, they would be successful for different reasons. And you're kind of right, I am also drawn to the image on the right. Maybe it's because it's a millennial with cool headphones playing on a plushy carpet. I'm attracted to. But it also will depend on what I'm motivated by, so if I am on a budget, maybe the left is one that I still would consider, and then on the right, depending on a few different factors, if I'm driven because of saving the environment, maybe I would go with them. But, let's say I was interested in both of them, I would at that point they have both entered the consideration phase and I would plug both of their names into Google and see what results pop up. That's where reviews can play a really big part in the decision factor.

Jim: I have a question. Have you done any conversion tests on this? I mean there are some things on that, that one on the left, like all of their reviews that I think is a compelling part of it, too.

Christina: Oh yeah, I'm a huge advocate for A/B or multivariate testing. I think the best website that does this with the whole testing is Amazon, and how if you remember Amazon back then, they look very similar to what they look like today, but it's because they've made very small subtle changes on their website over time, and have been able to look back at the analytics to see what has worked and what doesn't work. I think that's really shaped their business into what it is today. So, I think conversion testing is important. So, of course, branding you never want to -- or SEO you never stop there. You then need to test and look at the analytics to see what the data is trying to tell you.

Jim: Gotcha. Alright.

Danielle: Next, we're gonna go over fonts. When a brand designer is creating your brand, they should spend hours and hours finding the perfect font for your brand. Fonts are pretty important to your brand because it helps identify who you are. Those fonts are then used on other platforms, such as a website or a brochure. They all tie in and connect to your brand. First up, we have of a Serif font that's considered more of a traditional or respectable font. Typically, I would use this if I were, say by chance, creating a logo for a law firm. Next up, we have a Sans Serif font. It is strong, clean, and modern. I use this font most often because it's so clean and easy to read. If you'll notice, the CreativCat and MediaSesh logos both use a Sans Serif font. They were both bold and easy to read. Next, we have a script font that's more of an elegant font. I typically don't use this type of font as much because it's a little bit harder to read. I use this in cases such as building up possibly a personal brand or if it were a wedding website. Last, we have a display fonts. They are very unique, fun. They range in all different types of shapes and sizes that are specifically unique to your brand. When a designer is thinking about fonts and tying it into your brand, we're also thinking about the website presence and how that font is being used. You want the content on your website to be skimmable and easy to navigate and easy to read. You want to help your customer know where to look and we can do that by changing the size of the font. Maybe changing the color of the font, as well -- one of your brand colors to make certain types of text pop. So, let's say it's a headline, for example, you want that font size to be a lot larger on the web site to really call attention to that, and the supporting text underneath to be a little bit smaller.

Christina: On top of that, I want to also mention how font size can be really important. I once heard a really funny joke that the font size on your website should be your audiences' age and divide that by two. But, on a more serious note, if your eyes are going like mine are and your audience is a little bit older, going for a font size that's a little bit larger can really help them. If you've ever gone to a website with super tiny font, you definitely start to roll your eyes and say "I can't read this." Then you run the risk of that's leaving altogether.

Danielle: This next slide really gets my whiskers twitching. This slideshow cases the consistent branding. This is my personal brand CreativCat across all mediums, digital platforms. You'll see that I'm using the brand colors in every aspect, so the website, my Instagram page, the CreativCat LinkedIn page. So, let's say, for example, you somehow found me on LinkedIn first. You automatically recognized the "C" with the cat ears, the colors teal and gray, then you click into my website, and you'll notice that it mimics that same look and feel. So, you're once again brand recognition. You're seeing the cat icons, you're seeing the color teal. All of that relates to and ties in with the brand. When you have good branding, that helps you be memorable by your clients or by your customer. It builds trust, so they see you on multiple platforms and they already now know who you are. By this point in this presentation, you might still not know as much about what my company does, but you know that I love the color teal and you know I love cats.And to piggyback on the last slide, where we were talking about fonts, on the homepage banner of my website, you can see what I was talking about in terms of enlarging headline text, making it a different color so that it pops. That's where I wanted the customers eye to move to first, so that they read that, and then if they decide to stay on my page, they can scroll down and they can read more about me and what my services are. Your branding and your company should evolve with the times and your audience. A prime example of this is Miss Taylor Swift. She started out as a young country singer-songwriter, and she's evolved into an amazing, strong pop diva. Your brand and your company should be evolving and it should be growing. You want to grow and evolve with your company. Pretty much you don't want to stay stagnant. You don't want things to stay the same. You always want to be bringing in new customers. You can do that by allowing yourself to grow and evolve. An example of not really evolving and growing is taxis versus Uber and Lyft. Christina, do you want to talk a little bit more about that?

Christina: Yeah. So, for that image on the right, it's really there to highlight how the taxi industry missed the boat with adapting to new technology and trying to reach a new audience. Maybe that's the way they like it, but I think sooner or later it's possible that they will become the next Blockbuster of the taxi industry. While Netflix and Hulu take more of that market share. Of course, only time will tell, but I personally can't remember the last time I maybe have used a taxi, with the exception of whenever I go back home to New York City. So, I think about the first website I've ever and it was child's play in comparison to the website that I have today. I'm sure I would have the same viewpoint ten years from today looking at my website today. It's just evolving with the times, trying our best to provide the best user experience for our customers and still remaining relevant. And I was just thinking about how I know people that are successful still without any kind of branding, but it really depends on who your audience is, and the other methods in which you're reaching out to them. I know someone who doesn't even have a website and she is highly successful, but it really all depends. For the vast majority of us, having a website, a very impactful and valuable website, is how we're going to maybe seal the deal for some of our potential customers and almost be an extension of our business cards. So, the seventh tip I'll go over is using the right CMS for your branding and for your SEO based on where your business is at in its journey. I see this question float around so much, which is why I want to address it here. I think it's really easy for any of us to tell new businesses to automatically build a website on WordPress, but it really all depends on a few things. I would say that is namely because of budget and resources. For those businesses that are just starting off, they're brand new, just started their business, and you have very limited budget, I say go for creating a website on something such as Squarespace or Wix or GoDaddy. You're just starting off, you really want to prove the concept and see if you can grow your business. I would say though from an SEO perspective, Squarespace and Wix it is quite limited. It might be okay for content, but from a technical/dev perspective, it's very limited. For this option, I want to emphasize that if you're just starting out, it's fine to go with these two options, just note that it may not be the best option for your SEO, but I don't think it is an exception. It shouldn't exclude you from having good branding on that website. Still have good branding no matter what website that you're using. But then as your business grows, your CMS should grow with it. Your business is profitable and now you're able to reinvest those dollars back into it. This is when I would say when your business graduates, so should your CMS, and now you should work your way up maybe to a platform such as WordPress. It does allow more customizations. It allows a developer to come in, it allows them to improve items such as page speed, and it also allows them to develop using the designs from a branding expert or graphic designer. This is also a great platform when you are adding more content, like a lot more content, to your website. It just makes it a little bit easier with the customizations. Then, the third phase is when your business is still growing, I kind of broke it up between WordPress template because there are plenty of templates that you could just purchase online, versus WordPress plus, what we're dubbing it, this is when you really bring in a graphic designer or branding expert to create a design that nobody else has because your business deserves better. It deserves to stand out amongst the competition and provide the greatest level of customizations. I would also say that this phase three includes some more enterprise platforms, maybe such as WebLinc, that are better suited for larger enterprise scale websites. From an SEO perspective, it allows a lot more customizations, from a technical perspective, content perspective, and I think it's also great for branding since no one else will have your design.

Jim: We do have one question from the group. This one is from Bethany Sigler, who is a very experienced with WordPress, among other things. She's asking she heard Wix has some new SEO tools. Have you experienced them? Are they any better than Wix in the past?

Christina: I do, I'm glad you asked that. I do want to clarify that if your website is on Squarespace or Wix, you can still rank. I worked with a company recently, which laughably, multi-million dollar company on Squarespace, but they moved over eventually. Yeah, I haven't played around with their new SEO tools, but I do know from my experience with them there are certain things that you can do. You can update the title tag, add a meta description, tag some headers, but the real limitations come from the technical items. Maybe with this new software that they're introducing, maybe there are some technical items that have been added in there, but usually when I perform a technical audit, it is very comprehensive and I would be surprised to see a site like Squarespace or Wix be able to allow that level of customizations, especially since they pride themselves on being a very turnkey solution and that's why it's very templated, but please let me know if you have seen otherwise. I am always happy to learn about what these platforms are doing and how they're evolving over time.

Jim: Okay, great thank you.

Christina: Sure. Well, final thoughts. You guys stayed with us for the entire hour and we thank you for that. So, the first is that when you're thinking about SEO and branding, I would love for you to think of it like this, while SEO can help with optimizing a website, branding can help with optimizing decisions. I mentioned earlier you can have the greatest content in the world, but you run the risk of people leaving your site completely if they cannot get past the look and feel of the website. Of course, that depends on your audience and the goals of your website. Then I want everyone, if you are ashamed of your website, if you are embarrassed by it, please do not be. I want you to be kind to yourself. I want you to be patient. I would say our website branding and our SEO it's not going to be perfect because we are not perfect. For many businesses, they wear many hats and there's not enough time in a day to hire someone or to do it ourselves, and that's okay! You just try your best and also know that you have a great community with the Denver and the Boulder SEO Meetup groups. We are here to grow and learn together.

Jim: I love it. Thank you. We do have a couple of questions from the group here. Natalie Henley from Volume 9 asks "I'm hearing a lot of buzz about a new WordPress plug-in called RankMath. Do you have any experience with that?"

Christina: I sure do. I used to be on the Yoast bandwagon, but recently transitioned over to RankMath maybe a few months ago. I have not recommended it in the beginning just because I was testing it, but I am a fan. I personally find it to be a lot lighter in terms of the coding and the speed of it versus Yoast. There are maybe a couple things I don't like about it, but would say the pros outweigh the cons, from my experience. There are a few people I've heard that have gone to RankMath and have gone back, but from my own personal experience, I think RankMath is awesome.

Jim: Okay, great thanks for that perspective. Let's see, we have another question here. Do you have a recommended list of do's and don't things to remember when you're doing SEO on these self-designed sites using HTML5 and CSS?

Christina: Wait, do you mean using a site such as Squarespace? Or what type of site and fudging around with? Is it building the website from scratch with HTML5 and CSS or using WordPress and fudging around with the code. Let me know what you're -- so I can answer your question more appropriately.

Jim: Okay, this one's from Mia. Mia are you still here? I know she had to leave early. I got the feeling, you know, from the way it's worded that somebody has hand coded an HTML5 and CSS website.

Christina: Hand coding is fine. I know when I started with SEO back in the day, I was building websites from the ground up, but I don't think that's really necessary anymore, especially as we try to add enhancements to the site. I think WordPress and other enterprise tools do a fine job of dealing with a lot of things, and maybe there are some developers on the line that can speak a little bit more differently, but from my experience working really closely with developers using a platform, it just evolves from hand coding to using a platform and just sort of modifying from there.

Jim: Okay. great. Well, Ryan Masterson just asked in the chat: "How many people in the group have used RankMath and love it?" And so that'll be an interesting, I guess I could do a poll, but we'll just ask your in the chat. You know, I have a I have a few more questions that I thought I'd save for the end. Is this the right time? Okay, great. A one-question is just, you know, for somebody that doesn't even know where to begin with updating their website, where should they start if they want to do a refresh or a rebrand?

Christina: Hmm, that's a great question. Let me pass it over to Danielle to see if she has any initial thoughts.

Danielle: Yeah, sure. So, where I would start first is ask your community if they have worked with any graphic designers, any branding or website design specialists, because their recommendations usually lead to good leads. If not, just searching within your area there are so many design agencies out there. Again, this ties back to finding the right agency for you, so just you know searching local web designer in the Denver area on Google and seeing what agencies pop up, what design firms pop up, and join some research to figure out if they're a right fit for your type of company and who you want to work with. Christina, anything to add to that?

Christina: No, I think that's great. Joining a community like ours is a great way to kind of get your feet wet, doing some initial research. I think as your business will grow and you're able to reinvest those dollars back into your business, and you realize it's not a passion of yours to rebrand your website on your own, or to even do your own SEO, then reach out to those people that specialize in SEO and branding. Speak to them, interview them, use the questions that Danielle had mentioned earlier. It's pretty applicable to both branding and SEO in a lot of ways. Just get a feel to see if there's someone that you trust, who exemplifies E-A-T. They've got experience, authority and trustworthiness.

Jim: Nice, alright, I've got one more question for you. How do you know if you're rebranding has been a success?

Christina: That is a great question. I think I mentioned it a little bit earlier that SEO and analytics go hand-in-hand. What I would do is -- whenever you've made changes to your website, whether it was a full rebrand or one technical item from an SEO perspective, annotate that in Google Analytics or document that somewhere, so when you're looking at the analytics, you can see how traffic starts to change, how conversions start to change, and you could build certain correlations based on the changes you've made to your website to why traffic patterns look the way they look.

Jim: Okay, we have one more question from the group. Page Crio is asking: "Are there any enterprise CMS tools or website builders that you would recommend as an alternative to WordPress, especially for a mid-sized company, or do you think WordPress is just typically the best solution?

Christina: I think WordPress is a great solution. I might lean a little bit on some of the developers in the group to jump in on what they find to be very helpful. I know that the clients that I work with that are on enterprise tools, it's almost as if they've built the tool, or it's really interesting. It's by no means templated at all. It's extremely customized. So, any recommendations that are provided from an SEO perspective, they're able to work with it because they created this environment and just work with web servers, enterprise web servers, to help with hosting the site. [Jim] Great. All right, I believe that is it for our questions. Thank you both so much for presenting today.

Christina: Thank you.

Danielle: Thank you.

Jim: Oops, I disabled my own video. Let me pop back on here.

Christina: Well, if there are any other questions, feel free to send an email to Danielle and I. Jim will share this presentation with you, so it can be circulated to everyone in the group, and they'll be able to absorb it afterwards and see if any questions come up, but we're really grateful that you all attended. Thank you so much for your time.

Jim: Oh wonderful. Well, thank you both. Thanks everyone for attending the first virtual Meetup. I've had many lessons here about my video and how to run these, but please do ping feel free to send me your feedback. Feel free to reach out to our presenter, presenters, and you know, send any questions or collaboration ideas their way. All right, well, thanks everybody. We'll end the meetup now.

Christina: Thank you.

Jim: Bye.