

### Domain Names and Search Engine Optimization - With Danny Sullivan

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<http://www.domainsherpa.com/danny-sullivan-searchengineland-interview/>

Three messages before today's interview educates and motivates you.

First, if you're a domain name investor, don't you have unique legal needs that require domain name technical know-how and industry experience? That's why you need David Weslow of Wiley Rein. Go search for David Weslow on DomainSherpa, watch his interview and you can see for yourself that he can clearly explain issues, can help you with buy/sell agreements, deal with website content issues and UDRP actions, and even help you write your website terms and conditions. David Weslow is the lawyer to call for Internet legal issues. See for yourself at NewMediaIP.com.

Second, managing multiple domain name marketplace and auction site accounts is a pain. Inevitably, you forget to sign into one and lose a great domain...or worse. Now imagine using a single, simple-to-use and comprehensive control panel to manage all your accounts. That's Protrada. You can setup search filters, analyze domains, automate bidding, list domains for sale, and buy domains across all major marketplaces. Protrada also has a new semantic engine that builds Google-friendly websites with rich content and network feeds. Sign up at Protrada.com to get 20 free credits and start building and monetizing your domains today.

Finally, if you have questions about domain names, where should you go to ask them? The answer is DNForum.com. Not only is DN Forum the largest domain name forum in the world, but it's the best. You can learn about domain names and the industry, buy and sell domain names, talk about domain name news, and meet other domainers just like yourself. Register for a free DN Forum account and begin advancing your skills and knowledge today. And when you do signup, send me a friend request so we can connect.

Here's your program.

Michael Cyger: Hey everyone. My name is Michael Cyger and I'm the publisher of domainsherpa.com. The website where you can learn how to become a successful domain name entrepreneur directly from the experts. Then when you have a success to share, you can come on the show and give back as today's guest is going to do.

Everyone knows that being top-ranked in Google's organic search results can send a tremendous amount of traffic to your website. Google now touches something like 93% of all web users and can make or break a business online. There are a tremendous amount of resources and websites that are available to understand search engine optimisation, but very few that discuss the intricacies of domain names as they relate to search engine optimisation or SEO, as we'll be referring to in this show.

So here's today's big question. How important is an industry-defining, keyword-rich domain name, to ranking high in the search engines? Joining us to answer this question is Danny Sullivan. Danny is a journalist that has covered the search engine industry since 1995 when he published his study entitled A Webmaster's Guide to Search Engines. He's often referred to as the leading authority on search engines, and has been quoted in The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, The L.A. Times, Forbes, and many others.

Danny is the editor in chief of Search Engine Land at searchengineland.com which covers search engine marketing and search engine news. And he also produces SMX, the Search Marketing Expo Conference series.

Danny, welcome to the show.

Danny Sullivan: Thank you for having me.

Michael: Danny, you've provided tremendous resource through your website, searchengineland. One of the resources that I'd like to point domain name entrepreneurs to is, your periodic table of SEO ranking factors. I'm going to embed a copy of this below the video with attribution, of course, because I know it's one of your pet peeves that when you break a story or write an article and somebody doesn't give you attribution, you call them out on it.

Danny: Attribution is great.

Michael: So I'm going to embed a copy of it below the periodic table of your SEO ranking factors so people have access to it. But, tell me, Danny, what was your intention for creating this table?

Danny: I wanted to give people some kind of a framework to understand some of the most important things that they should be focusing on with SEO and how to weight them. And so, I think people are familiar that there are all these different signals, and if you're really into SEO, people will start debating whether or not things like, "Hey, anchor text at the top of the page might be more important than anchor text in a link at the bottom of the page."

And I felt like people were perhaps getting a little too lost in the weeds or not seeing the trees through the forest, that sort of thing. And so the chart was designed to say, yes, there are whole bunch of major factors that people need to consider. But these are the ones that have been standing the test of time. Some of them are a little bit newer, some of them are very old favourites like, say, header text, and they're also to give some people kind of a framework as to the importance of them.

So every factor that's on the chart, there's a colour code, and it gives you a weighting, so this is like a—on a scale of 1-3—it's really a 3. It's really important. A title tag, what the titles are for you pages are. Did you use a header tag? That's a little less important. You're probably going to be fine with it.

And it was also designed to explain that it's not that any one of these things is more important than the other. Yes, URLs and the keyword in the domain name might be helpful. But they need to work combination with all these other factors in the way that elements work in combination so that you end up, I suppose, with gold rather than something that's not gold.

Michael: I'm looking at your table right here, I have my copy here and I can see that you've got on page SEO, off page SEO, you've got some violations, and you've got some blocking areas. But all these things work together.

You're not saying one is more important than the other. So whereas you might look at the periodic table in chemistry and say, "Well, these factors—these elements are heavier, these elements produce more electrons, these have whatever," you're not necessarily saying that CQ here at the top is more important than CF. You're just saying that they all fall under content and these are—

Danny: In terms of being a content factor, the quality, the CQ of your content is much more important than anything else, and in fact the way the chart runs as that top corner says, it all begins there. So if you're hoping to succeed, and you don't have all that, it's a serious drawback to all the other factors coming into play.

But it is correct that it really is that these things have to work in combination. That you might not have all of them, but the more that you have coming together, and the more important ones you have coming together, the better off you're likely to be. So it's sort of like, if you want to make water, you need hydrogen, you need oxygen. And you can have all the hydrogen you want, but if you don't have any of the oxygen to go into it, you're not going to get water. So if you have the greatest keyword-rich domain name in the world, which is actually a factor on there, but you don't have the quality content to go with it, you just may not get the rain.

Michael: Great analogy. So we serve everybody that's interested in domain names here on domainsherpa, and it could be somebody that's brand new, starting a business in the U.S., there's over half a million per year started in the U.S., it's the lifeblood of the American economy, all these small businesses—and a lot of them want to have an online presence, and a lot of them don't understand how to get their domain name.

SmithPlumbing.com. "I'm Joe Smith. Why can't I get my domain name? It's just sitting there. Nobody's using it."

And so we're trying to help educate how important is Smith Plumbing to ranking high when somebody searches for Smith Plumbing and will Jim Smith Plumbing work just as well? So those are the kinds of things that we want to answer, but also we have a lot of people that watch the show who are

domain name investors that have fantastic domain names like searchengines.com or what have you. Premium domain names. So what you're saying is, domain names is a factor on here, and I'm going to ask you which element it is, but it all starts in the top left-hand corner with CQ which is the quality of the content that you're producing on that website.

Danny: Right. So it is a factor and I don't have my copy with me to bring it up, but I believe it's under the Site Architecture column, and I believe it's probably ranked around a 1 or something. It's a nice thing to have if you can get it.

From my perspective, if you're thinking about domain names, the first thing you think about is if you have an existing brand. Because you can have the great keyword-rich domain name all you want, but if you already have an existing brand and your name is Wal-Mart, suddenlygettingtobuystuffcheap.com doesn't necessarily work with all the other things that you're going to be doing.

And in the case of Joe Smith plumber, if that's what they're known as, if they can get a name that kind of matches that, that helps reinforce your existing customers and that's an important factor you don't want to give up on. I think a lot of the domainers I've talked with, they tend to come into the space from the opposite direction, which is, "I don't have an existing brand, but I've got an opportunity for a really good domain name and I want to put that up and just watch the cash roll in." And that can still happen, and people will still guess at names. This is the way things used to be, is that you would type into Firefox, used cars, and it would slap the two words together, throw on a .com and away you'd go.

But that changed ages ago where the major browsers really will go through and try to conduct a search. And people will still do that kind of guessing. "Well, I'm still interested in blue widgets. I guess there must be bluewidgets.com." So there's still value in getting all that direct traffic and plenty of people do get it. But if you're trying to make the leap away from just the direct traffic, and you really want the search engine traffic, yes, having the keyword-rich domain could help a little, but really for the longer

term success, it's going to be that you've got some content that stands behind that.

And I think a lot of domainers have gotten the idea that content means, "Okay, I've got Google AdSense for Domains."

Michael: That's my content!

Danny: "I have content, what's the problem?" And over the past year to two years, Google has really been focusing on saying, "Content means something that people are going to spend a little more time looking at, not just clicking away." And it's great that our AdSense for Domain Team wanted to sell you all the ads, but over here on our Search Quality Team, we're actually taking efforts to penalize sites that may seem to be too heavy in ads or don't have really substantial content and even are stopping hosting that kind of content on the domains that Google itself owns.

So the writing has kind of been on the wall for ages and it's getting even more—bolder, if you will—that that is probably not going to help you in the long-term. You really do need to have some kind of a content plan that goes into it. If you're looking to get maybe more value out of it than the domain name and just hoping that you get a lot coming in.

Michael: Now let me ask you about this, Danny, because I think a lot of people wrestle with this content question. So on one hand you have the domain investors, let's say, that don't want to park it anymore, because they know that maybe they understand that typed in traffic is going down, or Pay Per Click advertising that Google AdSense is delivering is going down, or Yahoo! is going down, whatever. And so they want to develop it. So they develop these—I've seen a lot—these lightweight sites. Maybe they have ten pages or 15 pages of content and they're focused on certain keywords related to that domain name and they write it.

But to your point, it isn't the kind of content that people are coming to that they're going to think is authoritative, that they're going to spend a lot of time and if you had to quantify what a good website with quality content is, not by describing the content, but by describing the experience that users are

going to feel, that Google looks to when they say, “Okay, is this the kind of thing that we want to rank highly within our search engines?” How do you describe those qualities?

Danny: I’d say that what you’re aiming for is a site that Google can’t live without. That Google would think, “Wow, this is a really essential site!” and that people in general would recognize, saying, “This was a great resource on this particular topic.” And if they didn’t see it in Google search results, they would go, “What’s wrong with Google?” Not, “What’s wrong with the site?”

That’s really difficult to define beyond that, but it probably isn’t that you hired somebody at five dollars a page to write ten pages for you. It’s that you’ll have multiple pages, and you’ll have really substantial content and perhaps unique content that can’t be found in other places as easily.

For the person who’s sort of getting going, when I look at different sites that are out there—well, one site I always point at is called holdalottalatte, I think that’s what it’s called.

Michael: Oh, I visited that site. I love that one!

Danny: And it’s great. They sell coffee machines. But they don’t just sell the coffee machines. They have huge amounts of resources to help you understand why you’d want a coffee machine, the kinds of coffee machines that are out there and so on. And it’s a great resource. And if I ever have to go buy another coffee machine again, then I’m back there because I know and recognize it’s where I’m at.

I always tend to do a lot of searches for products and services and I’m only typing in “\*techname something\* + review.” And then it’s usually a nightmare, and I always think, “Why didn’t I just go to a gadget or cnet or gizmodo or any of these tech blogs?” Because they have the reviews that are there. And that’s the kind of branding type of thing that I think you also want to build up. This idea of, “Oh, yes, I should have just gone straight to that sort of place.”

So it's that kind of content that you're looking for. It's content that someone's going to spend a minute or two or three reading and a minute doesn't sound like a long time, but it actually is. Especially if you just have a lot of ads that are on the pages.

Michael: And indirectly in comparison to visiting a site, looking at it and bouncing, hitting the back button immediately back to the Google results or Bing results or what have you.

Danny: And that's the challenge I think for a lot of domaining sites is that they either are carrying ads, or they're carrying affiliate links, and that's how they're going to make their money. Their money is getting you, kind of like Google, off the site as fast as possible. Which would be fine if you were a search engine like Google and you were known for that, but you're not. You're trying to actually be lifted as a destination. That's what Google and Bing are trying to do are list destination sites. And so it may be pulling back a little bit on the explicit monetization opportunities that—being in your face with the ads are that's all that you're getting. It might cost you on the short term, money that you might be earning, but it might gain you better in the long-term, because potentially you start getting search traffic that you weren't getting before. Now you've gotten beyond the type in. Hopefully you're still getting that as well.

But better is, is you've kind of taken that keyword-rich domain name and built it into its own brand, that people are starting to recognize and they're searching for themselves in Google, not just the generic terms that you're relevant for to find the site. Now you have a domain that really is something that ought to be attractive to someone else to perhaps buy and say, "I want to do something with this."

Michael: Let me contrast that website where people—let's say domain investors have put up a six page mini-site, and it's really optimized for a few keywords and it's not much content. We've clearly identified that search engines don't want to have those sites that aren't destination sites, that aren't providing a tremendous amount of content that users cannot live without. That's what Google wants.



Now contrast it to Joe Smith plumbing that I mentioned earlier. Joe Smith plumbing is a website that probably doesn't provide a lot of content, is six pages, is probably the #1 search result when somebody is searching for Smith Plumbing in my city because he's located in my city, and it's probably pretty thin content because he has some—a name and address, maybe him and his wife's picture—not a lot of information.

So how does Google know—Google or Bing—know that that's actually a good site with good content even though it's thin, and mirrors a lot of this made for Google AdSense type sites that are out there?

Danny: If you're a real bricks and mortar kind of business, there are going to be a whole bunch of cues that they're going to see.

First of all, you do your search on Google or Bing, and they already know where you're located. So if you're in Los Angeles, they know you're in Los Angeles. They know the cities within the general areas. If you're in the city of Long Beach, they know that. So first of all they're going to go through and they're going to try to find websites that seem oriented to that area. And Joe Smith probably has their address on the website, so they're going to be seen as local. In addition, chances are they've got a Yelp listing. Chances are they've got a Google Pages listing. There may be other things like Yellow Pages listings to help Google understand that this website is also associated with one of our Google Places pages as a local listing. And that's a huge relevancy boost when you have people that are doing locally-oriented searches like plumbing. You really can't as easily compete with it, you're just sort of a generic, "Hey, I'll find a plumber for you."

And that's how they know. They look at that and they can see that people are reviewing so often there, which is also why Joe Smith doesn't necessarily need to have the .com domain name or the whole domain name. They're not really trying to be found for people who are looking for plumbing specifically. And they're trying to be found really for their name. They could just be called JSP. And if the website is known as Joe Smith Plumbing, that—all the other cues like the text on the page, the links that are pointing over to it and some of the other citations might be enough to do that for them.

Michael: So if I look at your periodic table, I don't see any elements on here that are called domain names, Danny.

Danny: Well, it's under the site architecture, the URL and keywords area. I think—my computer is literally sitting on the thing, but if I slide it over here, it's the URLs, and I'm trying to think of how I'll put myself back here—URLs, short, containing keywords to the topic.

It's considered to be part of that. So that can mean both, you have a website and the URLs within the website itself, internal pages may have some of the keywords that are being used. Or you have the domain name. But it's not really that big of a factor that gets broken out beyond that. And there can be debates on this, by the way. When we created the table, that was our initial stab at it, to say, "This is our take, not necessarily everybody will agree with it, but this is kind of where we're at."

Michael: I did some research prior to our show. I went on Google and I searched "cord blood" which you may be aware of. It's an enormously high cost per click. It's on Google. And what I found is, the #1 organic result on Google is [cordblood.com](http://cordblood.com). The exact match. I went and searched for car insurance quote. The #1 result is [carinsurancequote.net](http://carinsurancequote.net). I went and searched for immigration lawyer. The #1 search result is [immigrationlawyersnow.org](http://immigrationlawyersnow.org). I didn't see [immigrationlawyers.com](http://immigrationlawyers.com) but maybe because that website's in Spanish and Google knows that I only speak English and eat yoghurt for breakfast and have a dentist's appointment after this interview and everything else that Google knows about me.

It seems to me that good businesses coupled with great generic keyword domain names gets a website to the top of the listings. Is my logic sound or flawed? Is it happenstance?

Danny: It can help. I'm assuming that the sites that you went to were all substantial in some way. That there was substantial content.

Michael: They are, from what I can see.

Danny: That can definitely couple with it, especially when you kind of get into these generics, but perhaps lesser known types of areas. So there's no issue at all with that. That's all we've been talking about; the idea that if you can come up with the good content to back up the good domain name, that's very very golden.

Michael: And have you seen that results as a result of pairing great domain names with great content actually gets you exponential results? Does  $1+1 = 3$  or  $4$ , or does it just equal  $2$  like any other factor on your periodic table?

Danny: It's going to vary on all sorts of things. It's not like great domain name, great content, you win. Although that would be great if you really are great content, but it may be great domain name, great content, but other sites out there have better content. Other sites out there are better known.

So for example, if [cordblood.com](http://cordblood.com) came up and they were started five years ago and along comes [bettercordblood.com](http://bettercordblood.com) and they're a brand new site and they have all the same exact awesome content, but nobody necessarily knows about it and they haven't built up any social buzz and they haven't built up any links, it's just sort of like, okay, why do I want to toss out this perfectly good thing that everybody's been happy with with something that's perhaps new?

So you kind of have to build up your reputation. That's where the quality is and where the history of stuff comes into play.

Michael: When you say quality and history, those are some of the factors that are listed on your periodic table that people can go and reference.

So as I mentioned early in the show, over half a million new businesses form in the United States every year. Here's a scenario. If there's a regular business person out there who can hand register a domain name for \$10 for a brand new website that they want to put up, but that \$10 is only going to get them a three or a four word combination like [bettercordblood.com](http://bettercordblood.com), or they can spend \$20,000 to buy an exact two word keyword phrase that represents their product or business perfectly, what would be your advice?

Danny: Well, my combinations were \$10 versus how much?

Michael: \$20,000. And that's what I generally see. \$20,000 is what a great single or double or two word domain name—generic domain name—typically costs nowadays.

Danny: So in general, I think the shorter names resonate and work better on a variety of levels. First of all, they're easy to remember. That's one of the key things that are coming into it. Actually, that's probably the main thing that's coming into it. I think that sometimes domainers make is, "Well, I'll get a bunch of the words in my domain name." And actually, one of the signs I tend to feel like of something that's low quality, is when I go to better-cord-blood-products-now. You don't see a lot of hyphenated domains and I think doing as well as they used to in the past in part it's because the search engines I think have seen that as a high correlation between sites that can be very spammy, and so it's maybe something you kind of want to avoid.

Now you can get all those words combined and the search engine should seem to be doing a better job of understanding of your cordblood.com, that those are two different words that are in there and pulling them out separately like that for you. Even if they're all put in the same—I'm kind of curious, I wanted to do a search here, and when I do a search for 'cord blood'—if you do a search for 'cord blood' on Google, you'll see that the URL in 'cordblood,' that word will be highlighted. The word 'cordblood' is one word. Bolded, even though you searched for the words separately. Two different words. And that's telling you that Google is understanding that even though the words are typed together, I understand that they're related to them being separately.

So I think the hyphenated pressure has kind of gone away over time. And then that brings you back to—well, do you just want kind of a short easy to respond URL? There's been a research reports where they have found that people when they're searching, they're looking at things that are linked in the search engine, tend to prefer shorter URLs.

But it's a balance. \$20,000 can be a lot and there are plenty of cases where people have done well with domain names that don't have any relation to

what they're searching for. Do your search for books and—Amazon is like the classic example. They rank for books, and books is not in their domain name.

Michael: But spent a lot of money delivering a lot of different things, not doing a tremendous amount of marketing, but putting it into customer service so that people talk about it and post on social media and post links and so what you're saying is, you can overcome any single deficiency in any one of these or maybe more, by doing some of the others much better.

Danny: If you're low in one area, but you're high in many other areas, that can definitely have an impact on you. There are plenty of sites that are built, for example, all out of flash. And they don't have the content that can be read by search engines as well as HTML copy. And yet with a lot of buzz and a lot of links and other things pointing at them, then they do well almost despite themselves.

Michael: So I have an example for you. I get a few different lists just so I can keep track of the domain name industry now that I buy a lot of domain names because like yourself, I try to be a journalist focused on the topic, but I recently saw listed a couple days ago for \$24,000 through Andrew Rosener – a person that a lot of my readers know, luxurygifts.com. Seems like a great brandable domain name, keyword-rich for anybody that's selling luxury gifts. And if you go on Google, there's actually 1300 monthly U.S. searches, the cost per click is \$3.40, it's not enormous like cord blood, which I think is \$30 a click, but it's decent, but that's another one of my scenarios.

Should somebody spend that \$20,000 to have that domain name that represents their entire business that gets bolded in the search results at Google versus buying dannysfineofferings.com? And I ask you, because are you an expert in search engines and search engine optimization, but you also understand search engine marketing and internet marketing in general. And so, as business owners that don't understand anything about the internet, go to make this decision, that will affect their business online likely for the rest of their lives. What advice do you have for them when making a choice like that?

Danny: Between the more generic name and the name that might resonate more as a brand?

Michael: Right. Luxurygifts.com versus a name that is more brandable that they need to then overcome a deficiency in the keyword in the domain name.

Danny: I think that if you're in an area and you can get a nice keyword-rich domain name that makes a lot of sense. There are still inherent advantages with that if you're coupling it with everything else. So if I could get luxurygifts.com? Yeah. Versus coming up with fun-patel-lacking-dolls and things like that. I would rather go for the name that people could resonate with.

What is—there's an ad going around right now for Dollar Shave Club, which is really really funny. But it's like a cheap razor blade or whatever, but the name says what it is. So that works. If you don't have a brand already going for that kind of name, I think that would be awesome. But there is that balance to how much it's going to cost you to get it versus building it up on your own and kind of going with it from there.

Michael: So that's what new business owners should wrestle with.

Danny: Right. And at some point, you might just not have the money, and I think that if you don't have the money to do it, I think you should also understand that, yes, you can start off from scratch. Plenty of people do.

Michael: I'm going to switch to the new TLDs that are coming out. One of the elements on your periodic table is TH for Trust History. You describe it as follows. "Has the site or its domain been around for a long time operating in the same way?" I interviewed Juan Calle, the CEO of .CO SAS (Internet) which is the registry operator for the .co top level domain. You may have seen him all around the news, Danny. Overstock bought o.co, godaddy has x.co, twitter uses t.co. A ton of companies out there are using them. .co is trying to get a lot of new start-ups to use the .co. But .co hasn't been around a long time. The domain names haven't been in existence as long as .com, let's say and they haven't been used. Have you seen .co treated just like any other generic top level domain in your research and your reporting?

Danny: Yes, and there's a difference between having a domain name with history and having a top level domain that has history. So what I mean by that is when you register your domain name, you start using it, the search engines can sense, "Okay, you've been online since 2006 and I can see that you've had links to you over time and I can get some sense of what reputation you have as a site," if you will.

That's independent of whatever your domain name itself is. That's just really more of what your site is like. So you could be .co, you could be .co.uk, you could be .com, it's just that I have a sense of your personal history and that's important. The longer you've been around, the longer you've kind of been a good player, the better it is for you with the search engines.

Now separately from that, there are the TLDs. And the TLDs, I mean the .co's actually has been around for a long time. I think it's the Colombian domain, so it's not like it's a new domain, but what's happening is that it's having new uses. They've actively been trying to push this as the alternative to .com and the reason we have all these companies using it is because they've been enticed to come on over. "Hey, I'll give you 't.co'!" Hey, that's kind of nice. But that doesn't mean that being a .co is necessarily any better or worse than a .com. Those sites are really kind of operating independently of themselves.

They will have a better chance of not being seen as a Colombian site, because the search engines will probably see that there's enough links pointing at them and that the domain is being used more as a generic. You can't just necessarily think a .co site is Colombian. So as far as if you see a .co, a .com, .co.uk site, that's a UK site. It's very unusual to find a site that is using .co.uk that is not a UK site. So there's a high correlation that the search engines will consider it to be a just a UK thing. Which would give you a boost when you're searching in the UK but potentially not give you a boost when you're searching elsewhere.

For the most part, whatever top level domain you're going to use is probably going to be fine. There was a thing where .cc, I believe it was, was so highly correlated with spammy domains that Google actually penalized them all. So

it was really—that’s where it kind of comes and when you start looking at the new TLDs and then you start going into history, it’s like “Who’s playing in that pond? Who’s splashing around?” And is that really the kind of general brand you want to be associated with?

Yes, when you have Google and other people using .co, it means that that domain is probably fairly safe for you to be also doing. It doesn’t necessarily mean you’re going to rank better, but it’ll probably be safe for you to be there. If you’re doing .xxx and everybody else that’s doing .xxx is a porn site and Google’s doing special things for a porn site, typically they’ll drain them out if you’re not doing porn queries, then you’d better understand that unless you’re a porn site, you probably don’t want to be a .xxx.

What you also probably need to understand, though, is that being .xxx doesn’t necessarily mean you’re going to get some kind of a boost on porn types of things that are happening. Google potentially can say, “Okay, that’s more porn content,” but they have other ways of looking at it. And you see a bunch of new domains coming in and this is not new at all when where the TLD come in and say, “Hey, everybody’s going to be using .mob to find mobile content!” You do your searches on your phone, you tell me how often you run into sites called .mob.

Sometimes these are nice ideas that just don’t play out. Just because someone wants to declare that it’s going to be that way, it’s really what happens in practice that determines it.

Michael: It seems that we can’t get away from the news that ICANN the Internet Corporation for Assigning Names and Numbers is accepting their new applications for generic top level domains. The stuff to the right of the dot, so instead of .com, it’s .anything there. So we’ll see more alternatives to .com, .net, .org, and as of Monday, Kevin Murphy over at domaininsight.com reported that there were 207 applications for new TLDs. So these could be .brand, .car, .green. You name it. There’s 207 applications that ICANN’s going to be reviewing.

Are these a wise investment for normal people starting a business and expecting a decent search engine ranking in a reasonable amount of time, or



should they opt for a longer .com or an alternative top level domain that's already aged so that they rank a little bit higher in that one factor?

Danny: If I were having to do it today and get going, I would just go for what's out there. I wouldn't be sitting there waiting for these. If they were suddenly all available, if I could get a good domain for a reasonable price, I might do it although you might be saddled with the fact that you're going for a generic up against somebody else that's a generic. And if you're usedcars.cars, and there's another site called usedcars.com, it becomes harder and some of the branding type of issues come into it.

And to go back with .co, Overstock just talked on their financial call about how they were doing a whole rebranding to o.co and what a nightmare and what a disaster it was for them apparently, that they lost all this traffic, nobody understood it. So it is a significant channel to come through and think, "I'm going to take a big gamble on a new TLD and everyone's going to recognize it, that it's a big new brand or whatever."

There is the concern that you don't want to be the person who did get in on the ground floor and you kind of missed out and there's something that sort of tainty so I think that, if I had some money to spend and I was a gambling person, I'd probably grab up some of the generics. Why not? If they weren't that expensive or if I didn't mind spending some money because I'm successful in other things.

But I don't think for most people that it's going to be the thing that they should be banking on. Actually, I think it's just going to be a fricking nightmare. I think what it's going to cause is a bunch of big companies to be yet more annoyed that they have to go out and buy cocacola.brand which they're never going to use. They're just going to park it because it's cheaper to buy the thing and park it than go through all the legal fees of whatever it is to try to get back the term.

On the one hand, it can be incredibly sucky that when the name you want is not available out there, and it can be a relief to find out that there's a .info, or there's a—there is these sorts of alternatives and I hope it really does come through that those sorts of things work, and yet every day, people are finding

new names. If they buy them from other people and those sorts of things work—it's still, there's still opportunities out there.

Michael: Hey, Danny, I want to be cognizant of your time. We've been on this show for about 35 minutes so do you have time for me to ask you about 3rd level domains and Panda before we wrap up?

Danny: Yes, we can wrap up with that.

Michael: Great. So let me ask you about 3rd level domains. Also known as subdomains. So these are the things that come before the domain name. So it's thirdlevel.domainname.com, let's say.

In your research, would gifts.luxurygifts.com rank slightly higher for people searching for luxury gifts because it has gifts twice in the beginning part of the domain name? What factor does 3rd level domains play in ranking higher with respect to keywords in the URLs?

Danny: They used to have a factor in that they would be seen as a distinct site and therefore you potentially could have luxurygifts being lifted and gifts.luxurygifts being lifted as well. The search engines have kind of gotten savvier about that and they treat them in various ways.

For the most part, I wouldn't be doing the subdomains for any reason other than I have a substantial website that deserves to be out on its own. Amazon does kindle.amazon.com. Makes a lot of sense, right? You want to have a link to park all your kindle stuff, you want have a homepage, you want to have a fairly short URL for people to get to, makes sense to put it out there.

But they don't have nameofbook.amazon.com for everything that's out there. So the more substantial the content is, the more that you think it needs to be out on its own kind of area in its own house, then it's more likely that you want to do it.

Michael: So Amazon could have bought kindle.com and for all I know, they probably own it and put a website there. They could have done amazon.com/kindle where people clearly understand that it's a domain name,

a top level domain, and a folder on that—and they understand that. A lot of people don't understand these 3rd level domains where it's `kindle.amazon.com`.

Does it have any search engine benefit to do a 3rd level domain today as opposed to a standalone website, as opposed to a directory within a website already?

Danny: There's a slight benefit to having words in your URL. It's not a big benefit to have it anywhere in the URL. So having it as a subdomain, it's just not—it's not that big a deal in my view that you would think, "Great, I'm going to put all this on a subdomain, and that's going to suddenly be the thing that makes this pop."

I wouldn't go out of my way to do it. I'd do it if it made sense for me to offer it on its own site.

Michael: Back in the late 1990s, I used to go to your search engine event—and I still do. You're coming to Seattle soon, so I'll be there. But I used to go to your events and people used to say, "Keep your content as close to the root as possible. You don't want to have it in ten different folders so your URL is this long, and then your keywords are way out here at the end."

Does putting the keywords at the beginning of the URL help in any way?

Danny: It really shouldn't make that much of a difference. Where the keywords tend to resonate is in two different things. Someone takes the URL of your article or your story or whatever and they put it onto a page, or they put it into a tweet, and it turns into a link and the words themselves being in the URL get seen as actual words. So that's why having them in there is kind of like giving you this extra text that helps describe what the page is about.

Separately, people do a search on the search engine and they see when they did their search that some of the things they searched for light up in the URL, and then they go, "Oh!" It's a further cue that maybe that's more relevant. The search engines have a minor part of saying, "Oh, I see the words here in the URL so maybe that's what makes it relevant, too."

Where exactly it's appearing isn't that much of deal.

I wouldn't go out of my way to say, "Right, I'm going to make sure everything's right up there at the front," but I would go out of my way when creating a page to think, "Hey, I should come up with a short, snappy URL that describes what my page is about."

Michael: Here's the final question, Danny. You were on the SEO panel at Domain Fest in February 2012. Someone on the panel talked about the Google Panda update being a continual update. It might have been you, I didn't reference it in my notes. And not necessarily a one-time update.

Is that correct, and what can developers expect to see in the near future from Panda updates?

Danny: Yes, Panda's actually a filter and you can visualize—we did an infographic about it, actually, at searchengineland—but you can visualize it as Google periodically, maybe every 3 weeks or so, takes all the content it has found on the web and sifts it through this filter. And things that it decides in the filter that are too light in content get stuck and everything else falls through and it looks at all the stuff it's kind of filtered out and says, "All right, you're all being tagged. Panda panda panda panda." Panda, and if you have enough Panda content within your website, then your whole website kind of gets tagged as being a Panda-based website and you don't do as well for that website.

Then you make a bunch of changes, everybody changes and every 3 weeks or so, Google comes along and it filters everything out again. And it changes that filter. It realizes, "Hey, I had a hole here. I'm going to fix that hole and this isn't catching the right kind of stuff." So they have a different kind of filter to the Panda filter that's just kind of fine-tuned it. So something slipped through that were getting caught before because the filter's been changed. Some things get through that were caught before because they've changed and they actually are different and new things may get caught. And yes, that's not going away. That's a fact of life at this point.

Michael: So when I'm cooking my dinner and I'm filtering my lettuce and whatever else and washing it, I can see what's going through my sieve and what shouldn't have gone through and what did go through, when Google's looking at billions of pages out there and sifting everything through it. How do they know when there's a good site that got tagged Panda or a bad site that didn't get tagged Panda when they're dealing with massive quantities like that? And how do I notify them if I'm a small business owner that maybe got tagged?

Danny: They find it in a variety of ways. They do their own internal testing, and so people might say, "Hey, you know what, we see that the quality has gone down." They have a bunch of reviewers who go out there and try to figure things out. They hear a complaint. And they suddenly go back and go, "Oh, right, this was really a prominent site, it kind of disappeared. We need to go fix that thing up," and they can kind of pick up with it that way.

But they also miss things. Things will get through and things will get missed and that will be a problem.

Michael: What's the best way for a small business owner to notify Google if they think they might have been tagged or filtered inappropriately and try and get somebody to look at it?

Danny: You can file a reconsideration request with Google. The problem is, it doesn't really—it's not considered—Panda's not considered in their sense something that they would reconsider. They would just consider it part of a filter. But you can try it anyway and see what happens with it from there. Maybe they'll take a look at it.

Michael: And if I search "reconsider request Google" on Google—

Danny: Yes, it's in Google Webmaster Central and they have a forum where you can find it.

Michael: If you have a follow up question, please post it in the comments below and I'll ask Danny to come back and answer as many as he can. He's got a pretty full schedule and I appreciate you, Danny, peeling off a few

minutes to chat with us. If people want to follow you, Danny, what's the best way that they can do that? Do you have a twitter account or a Google+ account or anything like that?

Danny: Yes, I'm dannysullivan on twitter. On Facebook, it's the same thing. Facebook.com/dannysullivan. I'm on Google+--you kind of have to search for me because they have those really long URLs. And if you go to searchengineland and you find any of my stories, all the URLs are down there.

Michael: I'm going to urge the audience as I always do, if you received value out of this interview, please take a moment and say thank you to Danny. Send a tweet, Google+ one of his pages, post a comment, go over to searchengineland.com. His conference company is at searchmarketingexpo.com. If you're going to be in Seattle, send me an email, let me know that you're going to be there, it's coming up this coming June, I believe, right, Danny?

Danny: That's right.

Michael: In Seattle, Washington. And you also offer some internet marketing training courses nowadays. I haven't seen those before.

Danny: We have. We actually just recently moved them into our Search Engine Land Pro area. So within searchengineland, I think it's \$199 a year, we have both training courses that are there as well as content from some of our past shows and the guy—that periodic table actually has an associated guide that goes with it and that's a PDF that you can download and read, so there's a lot of material that's out there to try to get people up to speed.

Michael: And that is at imtcourses.com for the transcriber.

Danny: That should redirect you over there. We moved it back over so it's all within searchengineland.com and you just click on the little Pro link at the top.

## DomainSherpa.com: The Domain Name Authority

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Michael: Danny Sullivan, editor in chief of Search Engine Land at searchengineland.com, thank you for being at domainsherpa sharing your search engine expertise and thank you for helping others become more successful business entrepreneurs.

Danny: You're welcome. Thanks for having me.

Michael: Thank you all for watching. We'll see you next time.

**Watch the full video at:**

<http://www.domainsherpa.com/danny-sullivan-searchengineland-interview/>