



Expand2Web Podcast #5 PDF Edition

Don Campbell Interviews Dev Basu - President of Powered By Search

Don Campbell: Hi everyone. Don Campbell here from [Expand2Web](#). In this interview, I'm going to interview a friend of mine [Dev Basu](#). Now, Dev is a local search expert based in Toronto, Canada. You'll see he's got a ton of great tips. He's got a lot of great experience. He's one of the contributors to the [local search ranking factors](#). He speaks in industry conferences, he's got ton of marquee clients in his new company, [Powered by Search](#). Dev is going to share some great tips with you. I think you're really going to like this, Dev is a super nice guy, as you'll see in the interview. So here it is.

Don: All right, Dev. Well, hey thanks for being here. It's great to meet you, at least over Skype. We've talked a lot on these different email lists, that we kind of hang out on, over the web. You've even been a customer of my [SmallBiz theme](#), which I appreciate, and super nice guy. I just wanted to, I sort of did an intro earlier, but one of the things that I was a little curious about is, how you got started in local search? Because I know you had your Search insights marketing blog for a while, and now you've started a new company right, Powered by Search.

Dev Basu: Right, yeah.

Don: With [Shagun Vatsa](#), did I say her name right?

Dev: She's just over there. Just let me.

Don: Oh [laughs] .

Dev: Say hi [inaudible 01:17] .

Shagun Vatsa: Hi Don. [background noise]

Don: That makes you guys kind of unique, because you've got two people in the local search ranking factors. Not very many companies can say that. Search marketing companies.

Dev: We're only one of two, I think, in North America. There might be a third on right now, because Will Scott's company, I think he has two more people that were involved in his answers. So one of three I guess.

Don: Yeah, cool. Then there's the SEOverflow folks right?

Dev: That's right, yeah. Mike Belasco.

Don: Very cool. So hey it's great to meet you.

Dev: Yes, thanks for having me.

Don: You bet. So how did you get started with local search? I mean, what got you into it?

Dev: Well, I'll tell you a little bit about how I got started in SEO first, then I'll transition into the local search. I was working at Microsoft Canada a couple of years back, and the responsibility landed on me. I was working on their OEM side, and marketing for them. The responsibility landed on me, to manage their OEM portal, which was 10,000 unique visits at that point of time. A reseller community. My goal was to increase the number of people that were using this portal. But I found out by talking to most of these resellers, that they didn't even know that it really even existed. They couldn't find it in search, not on MSN at that point in time.

Don: Oh wow.

Dev: They couldn't find it on Google. So that got me interested in SEO, and I started learning more about it. That summer, when I quit Microsoft, I started working for Search Engine People, which is another well known agency in this industry. I was talking to a guy called Tom Tsinas over there, who was my superior at that point in time. Well before Google Maps came out in the 7-Pack, we were predicting how search was getting more and more local. People were going from generic search terms, to more and more local, in terms of focus. So I said that's a niche that people don't know about yet, and that's really something that I'd like to get into, and dominate if possible. So now, we're two and a half, three years down the road, and I think that local has really evolved in many ways, but in others it's still like the wild, wild west, right?

Don: Sure.

Dev: Local SEO today is kind of like what Google was in 2003. So our email chain, you, myself, [Mike](#), [David](#), the other guys, all probably 30 to 40 of us, is really the who's who of the local SEO world. In speaking at conferences like SES and SMX, I still find many mainstream SEOs that are well know and have been well known for many years to be publicly stating that they don't really have a very good handle on it. So that's what attracted me to it. On the flip side, it delivers a whole ton of value. The minute I saw the apps pushing down the organic results, I said this is something that we have to offer our clients, and our clients will be itching for. I was right with that.

Don: Yeah for sure. It's cool when you help out a small business owner, and all of a sudden, they're getting tons more, real quality prospects coming in just from the web, that they weren't getting, for a lot less budget than what they were paying before. It's kind of exciting for them.

Dev: Exactly. It is.

Don: Yeah. So you're based in Toronto right?

Dev: That's correct.

Don: So I know you have clients in the US, and all over the place. One of the things that I was thinking would be interesting for people. A lot of the readers of my blog, they're either small business owners, like do-it-yourself small business owners, or consultants who are helping small business owners. I was wondering if you had some tips on for local SEO in Canada. I grew up in the Detroit area, so I was really close to Canada, and spent some time up there. I've got clients that are helping businesses in Canada, and I have some people that bought my theme there in Canada. What kind of things are different for local search there?

Dev: Well, at a macro level, the first thing that is really different is the way Canadians search is different from Americans. So, for example, I wrote [a blog post about this](#) on Search Marketing Insights, and it's called "Canadian SEO," and how Canadian SEO is not the same as US SEO. So I'm just reading some tips off that, I wrote this back about a year and a half ago. The one that really still stands out to me is that we have thinner geo-centric marketing. What that means is that, for many of my US clients, we look at optimizing on a county basis. They look at doing pay per click on a zip code basis for example. But, the way we still search as Canadians is very largely based either on generic queries, or if it is local based, then it's on larger metropolises. So Toronto, Calgary.

If you look at Canada as a total, we might have about 10 to 15 large cities, and a lot of suburbs within these cities. But folks that live in the suburbs, still end up searching with the larger cities. So for example, in Toronto, we have about five well defined suburbs. But still most of the search volume comes with just Toronto, plus the service area, or service type for example.

Don: Oh OK. So you're saying that people are searching differently, in that there are less of these centers of - there's not as much rural searching?

Dev: Exactly, yes. Search is still very, very macro. It's thin in the essence that people are searching with the larger areas. There's not much rural. There's not much [inaudible 06:36] related searches, for example. Just in general, we have less to go around. We have about the same population as California, 33 million people. So most of that is concentrated in Ontario, and then in British Columbia. Everything in between is kind of sparse.

Don: Got it, I see. So what does that mean, in terms of getting somebody to rank then? How do you have to approach it differently?

Dev: It's different is the essence that, when we're looking at a local SEO program, the competition for the top market leaders is actually going to be tougher in many cases, than in the States. For example, we have one client who is in Monsey, New York. Tiny little

area, very easy to get him ranked for his different vases because he's a ceramic tall vendor, go check him out at CeramicCreation.net. But, at the same token, when we looked at some of the larger cities, even though we have vendors or advertisers that are, let's say, really located into the suburb, they want to rank for the bigger city. So, when you have about 10 different suburbs that are all targeting this one major city, it becomes a problem, right?

Don: Saturation.

Dev: Saturation.

Don: See you don't have the - like in the US, there are some opportunities that like you mentioned where there are these little towns and rural areas where it's fairly easy to rank for some of those, right?

Dev: Exactly. Small counties are out of the question in Canada.

Don: Right. So then, what you're doing is to challenge is you got a metropolitan area that lot of people are gunning for they have to stand out. So, if that's the case, you know, one of the strategies obviously in the US is to get citations, or links or mentions of your mentions of your business from some of the trusted data sources and places for your vertical or your geo, how is that different? I mean, are they the same or differ in Canada?

Dev: So there's two very big major differences in Canadian citations versus US. We don't have a major sort of data aggregator like Acxiom or InfoUSA or we don't even have a local user for that matter, that's specific around [inaudible 08:40] .

Don: Yeah.

Dev: So, everybody sort of gather their data silos around business information. The one major provider over here is Yellow Pages Group, which is YellowPages.ca. They bought up Canpages as well.

Don: OK.

Dev: They syndicate data to Google. But other than that, it mean it really is a very big monopoly you could say. So as local SEO, we have to figure out specific Canadian local citation sources that are not the same as the US. So we have to essentially look harder in many ways.

Don: Wow! I didn't realize this until you and I were chatting about the reviews stuff a couple of minutes ago. And you were telling me all these review sources, and yeah, different animal kind of, right?

Dev: Yeah. And there are some that are present in the States that don't crossover to Canada. AmericanCircle, for example, wasn't up here until a couple of months ago. And now, they actually have the AmericanCircle.ca? I just put up my own kind of AmericanCircle profile up there today. But we have less citations sources that are

apparent at least to work with. So, we have to do a lot more competitive research, for example, in the metropolitan area, mine the database and citations form from competitors to find what's making them rank.

Don: Right. So, looking at the [local search ranking factors that David Mihm](#) publishes and you and Shagun and myself are contributors, what do you see? Are there things that are a lot different from ranking in Canada from that perspective? Or would you reorder any of those things or is it still, you know, consistent in terms of what the highest ranked factors were from the group.

Dev: They're pretty similar in terms of overall factors. There's market dynamics that are bit different. I find that work with most of my clients in the US. The propensity for customer to leave a review on a US based business is higher. It seems you have to struggle for our Canadian clients to actually get there. Their clients leave reviews on their pages.

Don: That's interesting.

Dev: And at the same token, you know, when you look at the US, you have things like InsiderPages, Kudzu other citation sources that also serve as a review sort of syndication portal, right? And those review that called in to the GooglePlaces pages. We don't have that over here. And the other big difference is that the only, real local search engine platform we have here is GooglePlaces. Canadian business cannot submit to Bing or to Yahoo.

Don: Oh! Wow! I actually didn't know that. That's amazing. So Google was it? I mean that's what you're going to answer. Obviously, you're getting back links to from other places but I mean it's like that's... So what kind of tips would you have if you were a small business? I guess, I mean it, I wouldn't tip from a US or Canadian based business but I know that you've worked with both so I mean what would be like your top sort of advice for somebody who is trying to rank in one of those metro areas like that?

Dev: Sure. So the first one would be a very basic one. Ensure that you claim your listings with the appropriate name, address, and phone number. Don't do anything funky in terms of trying to add keywords to your business name. Use your DBA for doing business as name.

Don: That's really important recently too. Isn't it? I mean Google started to crack on all of that so...

Dev: Yeah. We've been informing all of our who have tried to either change around their own titles as such or they've asked us to. And letting them know that Google recently hired many manual reviewers for GooglePlaces.

Don: Let me ask you this: I've been actually even going as far as recommending to some of my clients that they change their name of their business. And I mean if they're a small company and that's feasible to include the right keywords in their...

Dev: Yeah.

Don: I mean it not to make the business name sound weird. But let's say they're chiropractor, but their name is Wellness Center or something, right?

Dev: Yeah.

Don: I mean, would you agree with that in light of this new change or not?

Dev: It's something that I would put into, Chris Silver Smith actually wrote, I remember a year or two ago, [extreme local SEO tips](#) and he mentioned this.

Dev: It's not always feasible for a business to do obviously.

Don: That's right.

Dev: In the case, for example, we work with many service based businesses where they don't actually have a physical location in a particular city, and in that case, we have flexibility and being able to establish history based on, you know, actually having a more keyword optimized business name.

Don: Right. OK. Well, sorry, I interrupted you there. You are saying about basics like, "Hey, make sure to claim..." And by the way, the Work.com article that you published that you posted [really nice SEO guide](#) there, which I'll include in the notes for this, because I refer people to that all the time. It was just really well done so...

Dev: Taking notes? I was inspired by Aaron Wall. He put out a Guide to SEO on Work.com as well. That was in 2004 or 2005. And this would be - well, we really need to actually have a local SEO guy that's similar to him. So, that's why I spend that over the weekend.

Don: Oh really? Yeah. And it really covers that - like I have a bunch of blog posts, I know a bunch of blog posts that covered different things, but you really pulled it together and turned into a nice format and added some cool stuff to it and I thought that was great so. So, obviously, people can follow that article too, but you are saying you know the business name, making sure that your data is clean, right, like that you're doing up different addresses and phone numbers like for example, the name, address, phone number. Like fingerprint, the NAP has to be consistent, right?

Dev: That's right.

Don: Yeah. What else comes to mind in terms of...

Dev: So I have two more tips, the second tip is obviously trying to build as many citations as possible.

Don: OK.

Dev: There's a couple of authoritative prose on citations, on the [Powered by Search blog](#), we put up the 20 most important citations.

Don: Yeah. It's all that.

Dev: And that's been getting a fair bit of traffic of United States clients as well as folks who just coming on Google.com typing in "local SEO citations sources" and we seem to rank OK for that on the first page. Right? And so we get traffic out of that and they find value out of it. But aside from that, if you're looking at a Canadian standpoint, there's a couple of good sources. David Mihm has actually got an updated post on [Canadian citation sources](#) as well. I did one back in 2008, which you can find on DevBasu.com. And most recently, Jim Brodnick has posted sort of a meteor update. His URL is [connectseo.com](#). And you can find a mid-year update of the different citation sources affecting Canada over there.

So the first thing I would do if I was a small business is, go ahead, put up as much information as possible about your business on those citation sources. That would include not just your NAP -name, address, and phone number - but things like images, videos, extraneous information such as service hours, service types, service areas even. All of those can help you rank in the long-tail.

Don: True, sure, OK, good. I always ask people this, is there a secret that maybe not everybody knows that you would use - if you had a client that was having trouble getting ranking or something? What is in your toolbox that you would pull out and use to help them?

Dev: There are a couple of things and Shagun being instrumental in coming up with a bunch of tactics as well. One of the things we face as a challenge not so much in ranking but a frustration is that Google Maps does not update very often even if you create an update in the place page. Many small business might just be waiting and waiting and waiting for something to happen. So we found a way of re-checking Google Maps in certain cases to get off an old data center and get to a new data center and refresh data quicker. We actually had an example of this today with an existing client, and all Shagun had to do at that point in time was go into Google Places, change around the description field a little bit - add or delete a sentence, add or delete a couple of punctuation marks like commas, full-stops or periods - and then go a head and update. We found that within a 10-15 minute time span since doing that, Google will magically sort of have the new results displayed both on the google.com and in 7-Pack.

Don: Oh, that's a great one.

Dev: So that's one that I don't think has been discussed before. Other than that, I found that when creating a review program it's really important to have customers place reviews not only on Google Maps using their Gmail address, but also trying to identify as many third party sites where Google pulls reviews from. We found that the more significant

ranking factor than just more reviews on Google Place page using a Google login or Google account.

Don: So, are you saying that they should get customers to review them on other sites, other than just Google? Is that what you mean?

Dev: Let's say that you are an auto-dealer. OK? And one recommendation that we have is to have a computer handy, or maybe even use the sales consultant's computer as you're finishing your transaction with your client. Then ask your customer to type up a little about their experience. They can use their own Gmail login at that point in time, but every once in a while you have a savvy customer that will also have a Yelp! Login, or InsiderPages, or Kudzu login. It doesn't happen very often, but if they do, ask them to leave a review at a different place than Google Place pages. Over time what we've found is that, as those reviews on Yelp! And other third party sites get pulled in, it can affect rankings on the 7-Pack more so than just simply adding on reviews just to the Place pages.

Don: OK. That makes sense. It is kind of like citations, right? It is the signal strength building up over time. I also noticed this week, and you probably did too, on the Places pages now business owners can respond to reviews, which is pretty significant, right?

Dev: Yeah. And I tweeted out about whether that would be a ranking factor or not. Regardless of whether it is, I think you should respond to your reviews - to positive reviews by thanking them for their comment or feedback, and to negative reviews by engaging them as per Google's guidelines or in the best way possible.

Don: Exactly, it a great opportunity to show good customer service and show engagement. That is a huge deal. We definitely have seen a lot of great results from those interactive reviews like that. Well, those are some awesome tips, thanks for sharing those. Tell me, just before we wrap up, what are you doing with Powered by Search? When did you launch that, was it earlier this year or was it before that?

Dev: It was in 2009 that we launched.

Don: OK.

Dev: It came as sort of a natural progression of me moving out into my own, I was a consultant in the past, and the level of business just kept growing. Much like my cohorts in the same industry, you tend to grow a business around your name. When Shagun came on board, we said that we can't just be our individual consultants, we have to have a brand around it - that is how Powered by Search was born. The name is very literal: everything that we do is powered by search.

Don: That's a great name, that's awesome.

Dev: Thank you. And so what we've done since then, we've been growing pretty fast actually - there's another staff member over there - Mrs. Zunaira.

Don: What's her name?

Dev: [Zunaira Karim](#).

Don: OK. Great.

Dev: So Zunaira, say hi...

Zunaira Karim: Hi Don.

Don: Hi Zunaira. [laughter]

Dev: So essentially, we've been growing pretty fast. Our focus has been much like many other agencies, with most agency focused industries. So we have folks who were in legal, bankruptcy, medical, education, auto-dealers, for examples, contractors, service-based industries. The leads have just been sort of pouring in by web and by referral. It has been a nice way of organic growth. We focus on full service in terms of doing organic search, which many folks miss out on because we are known more for our local SEO, but it is part and parcel. Any of our search programs include organic and local together. With that we combine local PPC as well.

So that is sort of the local portion of our business. Personally, I've been focused on growing a lot of our enterprise business as well. So two of our clients that are worth mentioning are WiMAX Canada as well as Delta Hotels.

WiMAX is a particularly unique challenge, it's enterprise local SEO, which is a bit of a dilemma. It's a dilemma that you face when you have more than 10 locations, how do you get them ranked. In WiMAX's case, there are 350 brokerage offices, and about 8000 agents that we have to start creating this local search challenge and solving it. Part of that process is best practice around the bulk upload, the white-listed bulk upload, for example, making sure that these Place pages for all of these different locations have as much information as possible, and then creating a wide-scale citation building program.

Don: Nice, I can see how that would be a challenge. But that's a good one to have though.

Dev: It is a good problem to have. Yeah.

Don: Great, well, that sounds awesome. I noticed your website, and I loved it. I really dig the introductory video that you guys have on there too. It looks really professional, it looks really good. Well, that's awesome. Thanks for your time today, Dev. It was great to chat with you, and I hope that we get a chance to talk again soon. I appreciate all your support. I plan on following up with you on the WordPress plug-in for the Canadian review sources and things like that.

Dev: Awesome, yeah!

Don: Good deal, thanks a million, we talk again soon I'm sure.

Dev: Pleasure, thanks for having me again, Don, take care.

Dev Basu founded Powered by Search after having worked in multiple roles in the search marketing industry for agencies, in-house firms, and as an individual consultant. Dev heads up [Powered by Search](#)'s SEO & Social Media operations and focuses on educating enterprise and SMB clients on the value of search marketing as a key business driver. He also speaks at conferences such as [Search Engine Strategies](#) and blogs on the topic of Local Search and Small business marketing at his personal blog, [Search Marketing Insights](#). You can follow Dev on Twitter [here](#).

Don Campbell is President of [Expand2Web](#) where he helps business owners create [WordPress Websites](#) that get top rankings in Google search results. Find out more on his Blog at <http://www.expand2web.com/blog/>. You can follow Don on Twitter [here](#).