



Interview with Hamlet Batista from RankSense



Adrian Bye: Today, I am talking with Hamlet Batista and this is actually quite an honour because Hamlet is in fact from the city that I live in, in the Dominican Republic. He is from Santiago and he now lives in Santo Domingo.

I have to be a little nicer to Hamlet because English isn't his native language but he speaks it very well.

I first met Hamlet about three or four years ago when he was one of the top search affiliates for the keyword Phentermine.

Phentermine is, I think, a now banned weight loss drug and I personally watched Hamlet on the search results for at least six months on the front-page of Google in the top 10 search results for that keyword and I was very impressed by that.

When I was researching that space and I noticed that Hamlet was on contact information in the whois on the domain so I went and tracked him down, and went and met him in Santo Domingo.

I've seen what he's done with my own eyes, and I went and found him so I know that he's completely real and more real than just about anyone else I've come across on search. I went to his office and seen how he's worked and now finally got the chance to interview him.

So, Hamlet, welcome and thanks for coming onto an interview.

Hamlet Batista: Yes. Thanks to you, Adrian. It was definitely a pleasure and a surprise. We met a few years ago and it was really interesting. I'm really honoured to be part of these interviews with this elite group of internet professionals.

Adrian Bye: Sure thing!

Why don't we start off and tell us a little bit about who you are and where you've come from? I mean, I know some of your story but maybe tell us a little bit about how you started out in Santiago? Tell us how things worked from there, how you got your start with the internet and everything else?

Hamlet Batista: Yes.

As you say yourself, I was actually born in Puerto Plata which is north. That's where my parents are from and where my grandparents live. But, I was pretty much raised in Santiago and pretty much feel like a Santiaguero – the way we say it in Spanish because I was living in Santiago since I was probably like four or five years old. I was more like five years old.

Yes, you live there, you know. We love the city. It's a really beautiful, nice city. I spent most of my time there living like a normal kid and then, I was always attracted to challenges, to technology. When I was a kid, I used to play a lot of videogames and I used to keep a notebook of all the games that I was able to finish from start like a collection of games I was able to fully complete.

From the beginning, I was always somebody that loved to be challenged. I like to be pushed to the limit to find out how far I can get.



Then, I went to study Telecommunications Engineering and was really interested in Telemartica, that's the name of a career in Santiago, PUCAMAIMA. It was interesting because my career is like a mix. I see a lot of electronics. Through years, I'm sharing classes with people that take Electronics Engineering but I also share a lot of classes with people from Computer Science. But, what interested me the most was the programming and the internet. I think school was the first time that I was introduced to the internet and I have a really funny story to tell about that which is:

One of my teachers used to work for Codetel which is a big ISP company here and he was really proud of his job. Internet was kind of new then, I mean, talking about 1994. As a teacher, he had access to it and then, he installed a dialup account in one of the computers in the laboratory in the class laboratory so that we could use it there but the thing is that back then, I also was playing a little bit with Linux and I wanted to be able to use the internet from home, and he wouldn't give us the password. It was a dialup connection. A classmate that is working for me right now is a chief software architect – we both went into the computer and we identified the encrypted password that was stored. Back then, it was trumpet...something. We reversed the cryptography algorithm that it was using and then, we took the password and we started using it on our computers at home.

Adrian Bye: So, you broke in.

Why don't you move on and tell us a little bit about how you got started with Party Poker?

Hamlet Batista: Yes.

When I moved to Santo Domingo, I worked with Codetel for like two years. When I was working in Codetel, I was System Administrator. As System Administrator, I had Solaris experience. I was working with Solaris servers. Some servers ran a Solaris OS and I saw an ad in the newspaper that they were looking for people with Solaris experience. I saw the ad and I called the phone. I remember somebody passed me the ad and say, "Hey, they're looking for a Solaris System Administrator." I called the phone number and one of the owners picked it up. Her name is Ruth Parasol. Right now, she's one of the...the last time I checked...

Adrian Bye: Ruth Parasol!

Hamlet Batista: Yes.

Adrian Bye: So, you just called off an ad in the newspaper and you talked straight to Ruth Parasol who's now a billionaire today.

Hamlet Batista: Exactly, yes. I called her and I told her that I was a Systems Administrator. She started talking with me and said, "Yes," and then, she wanted to talk a little bit more to see how my English was and she said, "Yes, that's fine," and she's so aggressive. She told me that she wanted me to go to the interview the same day. I started telling her that yes, I worked for Codetel, and this and that. The funny thing is that I went to her. I was not prepared. I went to the store and I bought a suit just to go to the interview. So, I picked up my suit. I went there and I tell you, I sat and I went to her desk and then, she introduced herself. She was sitting right with two other guys and one of them is the other owner which is Anurag Dikshit which is a billionaire, too. He's one of the owners and then, these two guys...

Adrian Bye: Yes, I know Anurag as well.

Hamlet Batista: Yes.

Adrian Bye: So, why did you leave Codetel? I mean, what were you making at Codetel and what were they offering you to make you want to leave?

Hamlet Batista: On that interview, they were impressed with the interview and they doubled my salary that time. But, I was...

Adrian Bye: What were you making before and what were you making afterwards?

Hamlet Batista: I was making about...I think it was...P22,000 or something like that. It was about \$1,500 or something.

Adrian Bye: So, they offered you \$3,000.

Hamlet Batista: They offered me \$3,000. They doubled my salary. They offered me also to work as a consultant for them and develop software and I chose that. I didn't work for them immediately.

So, I was working for them for a year. I was given an e-mail system to capture obtained e-mails – compliment e-mails and all that. Then after that, I saw all the problems that we have. I went one day and I taught them, "Hey, this is what you need to do. You have all this mess in your IT." I told them that they need to hire a group of people and all that and then so, they came back with another offer and told me to lead back to hire the people that I think I needed then help them to solve problems that I was talking...

Adrian Bye: So, they had a lot of money back then, didn't they?

Hamlet Batista: Yes, back then they were probably making about, I'd probably say, \$12 million a year. They were still a small operation compared to...

Adrian Bye: So, not tons of money. They were doing okay. So, about \$1 million a month.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, they made a lot of money when they moved to poker because they were online casino's first.

Adrian Bye: So, you were there at the beginning of Party Poker, is the basic point.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, yes, I was there when they were targeting about their deal and they were creating everything. I mean, I helped with the structuring in Canada that they had – the server form that they had on the Indian reservation. I once did...

Adrian Bye: Have you been in contact with Ruth or Anurag, or whatever his name is since?

Hamlet Batista: Anurag.

No, I haven't been in contact with them. I haven't been in contact with them but last time I saw them was when they were here before the last...

Adrian Bye: Do you have any idea on how they think about license? I mean, they've seen their stock growth to very high and to very low. What do you think they'd be thinking about the industry and what's going on? Will they be just cashing out and not caring or still working hard? What do you think is going on?

Hamlet Batista: I have no idea. I haven't been following that particular industry so I don't know who's...

Adrian Bye: You made the jump over to search. How did Party Poker help you get into being a search affiliate?

Hamlet Batista: It's really interesting because I wanted to be an entrepreneur, I wanted to build a software company.

One day, there was a similar demand in people. I just got fed up and I said, "Well, I'll start my own if these people are making money and they don't know their heads from their toes with all these problems they have. I'll set out on my own." I spent like three months testing different things and then, I met one of the marketers...I used to work for them...who was doing search marketing via pay-per-click. We didn't start much while we were working there and he wouldn't share much information because he had a contract with AOL also and he is not the kind of guy who likes to share. He only told me that he was promoted by AOL and that he was doing pay-per-click, and that was the only thing that I needed to know.

I started doing my own research and then, I figured out how to start making money myself, promoting Viagra also.

Adrian Bye: So, you just started testing Viagra on pay-per-click and that was it.

Hamlet Batista: Exactly, yes. I started doing different things, playing a little bit with e-mail marketing, spamming and things like that and then, I saw that, that didn't work. With pay-per-click, I started with searching and then, I found that it was actually something that if you know how to do, it can be really profitable. So, I started with Viagra doing pay-per-click and that was first.

Adrian Bye: How much were you making in your first month on Viagra on pay-per-click?

Hamlet Batista: When I was doing pay-per-click, I was making most about \$8,000 a month profit.

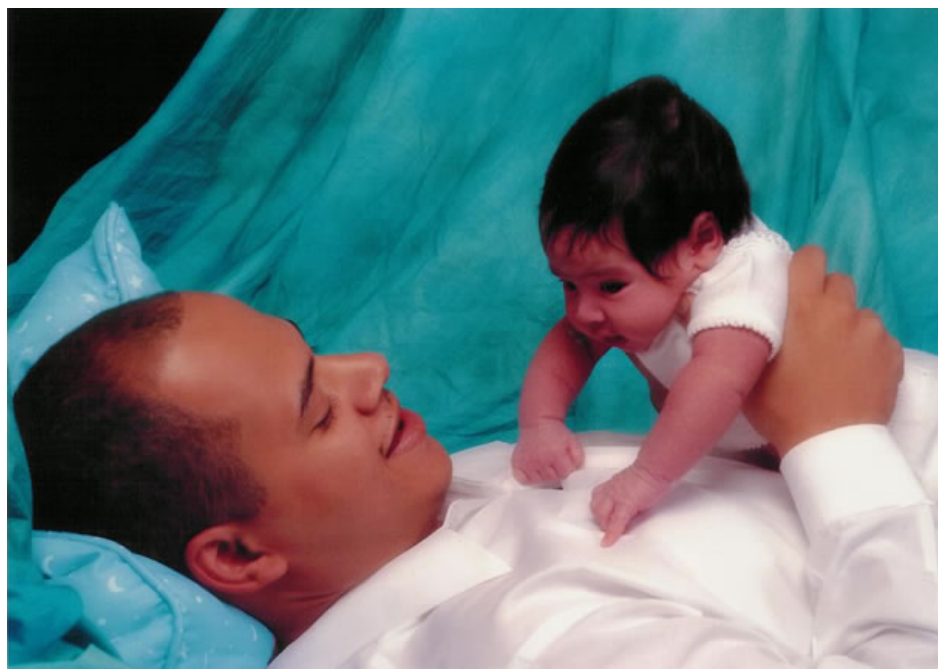
Adrian Bye: Yes, but when you first started, how much were you making?

Hamlet Batista: When I started the first month, I probably made like \$1,000-something, kind of like \$1,000 or...

Adrian Bye: Right. So then, you could see that it worked and so, that was where the potential was.

Hamlet Batista: Yes. The funny thing is that the first month, I didn't even have the credit line. My uncle – I borrowed his credit card so I maxed it out the first month. The next month, I pretty much almost didn't do anything because I had to wait for the commissions to come in. But I mean after a month coming, I was able to invest the money, grow my marketing budget and then, get up to \$8,000. It was when I stopped...

Adrian Bye: That's okay. I mean, you went from where you were making \$3,000 a month up to \$8,000 as a Viagra affiliate.



Hamlet Batista: Yes, yes. My goal was that I wanted make a...

Adrian Bye: Were you just using Google and Yahoo or using other pay-per-click outlets as well?

Hamlet Batista: No, I was just using Google and Yahoo. I started with Yahoo. Back then, it was Overture and then, I jumped in right away with Google AdWords and just stood with those two. I tested the second tier ones but I didn't see any result from those. I dropped them. I

didn't waste time with those.

Adrian Bye: Then, how did you make the move into search and why did that come about?

Hamlet Batista: Yes. When I was doing the organic search, I had a competitor which is now a friend of mine that I keep in touch with them. We were always like competing on the pay-per-click, right?

So one day, I do a search and then, I see his site on the organic results. I wanted to find out how he got his site – this on the organic results. I started looking at his site, looking at his contents. I researched then I figured out that he hired a link network called AutomatedLinks that they put a bunch of links in the footer of the pages. They include a Java Script quote. I mean, you include a PSP quote on your page and you get a bunch of invisible links with different accredit text pointing to a lot of different sites. So, I signed up for that service, too.

It was broken at first so I kind of had to sign up from a Google cache but I signed up to the system and threw all my sites there and then, I started ranking, too.

That only lasted like for two months because Google killed the automated links and all the sites that were listed there.

Adrian Bye: Then suddenly, you got the taste of free traffic and you wanted more of it.

Hamlet Batista: When I did that, I jumped from \$8,000 to \$15,000, right? So, I said, “Hey, there is money here,” so I spent more time researching and studying the top-ranking sites. I was learning from them. When I finally got to the first page of Viagra on Google with one of my sites which is Pillrank, that’s when I started making money. I made about \$50,000 and then...

Adrian Bye: \$15,000 or \$50,000.

Hamlet Batista: No, \$50,000 and then...

Adrian Bye: \$50,000 so being on the front-page of Google for Viagra was worth \$50,000 how often – a month?

Hamlet Batista: \$50,000 a month ran up to what I made like back then and I think yes, that’s what I was making with Pillrank on top of Viagra.

I don’t remember if that was when I started doing Phentermine, too but I think it was Viagra where at some point, I got to \$100,000 or \$120,000 – something like that.

Adrian Bye: What was the highest ranking? Did you ever get to number one in Google on Viagra?

Hamlet Batista: My highest was number three on Viagra. Nobody has been able to get to number one because Viagra – it’s always at the number one.

Yes.

Adrian Bye: So, you got the number three. Of the available positions, I guess Viagra themselves had one and two so you got to the highest position that anyone can get to.

Hamlet Batista: I have some really good competitors. I mean, I heard a site called Pillwatch, MixedPills and other name on the webmasters that weren’t doing really good. But, I was the first one to get there and then, a lot of other people started seeing what I was doing because it was really easy back then. I just started doing link exchanges. I’d choose A – I need links and these links with these specific anchor texts. So, I started doing a massive of link exchanges and I even built programs, too, out of the link exchange and I even had my own programs to protect things that I had created from the others, spying on them. Actually, it was really amazing.

But, Google caught on. I mean when you’re doing 5,000 link exchanges in a site, they kill the site.

It’s an interesting industry but the big money was then I started doing Phentermine, too. Phentermine has a higher demand and a lot of people didn’t even know that. Most people would say, “Viagra was the best one I made.” Phentermine was really so bad that I got so tough and.

Adrian Bye: Was the keyword ranking much harder for Phentermine than Viagra?

Hamlet Batista: When you are doing pay-per-click, Viagra was probably worth – the number one spot was about \$7. Phentermine was worth \$15.

Adrian Bye: When you were doing the organic search, was Viagra less competitive than Phentermine or more competitive?

Hamlet Batista: They were about the same level of competition, I would say because a lot of Rx approvers – they know that, that was a really highly valuable keyword.

Adrian Bye: What kind of dollars were you doing in this feat on Phentermine?

Hamlet Batista: I remember that our tab was – we were number one of Phentermine. I think that's when you saw us. Number one...

Adrian Bye: I saw you on the front-page and I'm sure that they're consistently for six months.

So, what kind of revenue – what kind of money were you making on Phentermine?

Hamlet Batista: I think the average probably was like \$180,000 or \$200,000. I think, we got to \$300,000 one month.

The problem was with that industry was that, a lot of the providers had problems. I mean, you cannot depend on a provider to fulfilling on a consistent basis so that's where your revenue always was like...

Adrian Bye: So, you send sales to guys and they go out of business.

Hamlet Batista: I'm sorry.

Adrian Bye: You would send sales to affiliate programs and they'd go out of business.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, a lot of them went out of business and took your money because of the problems with the regulations and everything. A lot of them were having like shortage. I mean, they were losing their pharmacy, they were losing their providers and they couldn't fill the orders in time and then, a lot of crazy issues they that were having.

Adrian Bye: Probably, they lured you in with a higher payout but then when you started giving them volume, they weren't prepared to be able to fulfil it all.

Hamlet Batista: Well, yes, you can say that, you can say that. I mean, this is really diffluent and a lot was shattered people in that industry.

Adrian Bye: I remember when we talked about this a couple of years ago and the really interesting thing you talked to me about was how you split-test and you split-test in the organic search results. Can you talk a little bit about how you do that?

Hamlet Batista: Yes, the way we were doing it was getting several sites to rank. We had a bunch of target terms and we try to use completely different strategies with all the different sites and then depending on which sites were coming up and which sites were coming down, we kind of like know what is the direction that we needed to take.

We think about it like you're having some sensors. Let's say, you want to pollute Google's path, you put several different sensors just to get a picture of where Google is going.

With the years, we had sites using completely different strategies and tactics to get to organic results and then, we'd monitor the service to see.

Adrian Bye: You'd watch which sites were moving up and which ones were moving down, and that'd be testing all the different strategies so you could see which direction was starting to rank better in Google.

Hamlet Batista: That's correct, yes. That's correct.

Adrian Bye: How many sites did you have out there like that, using all these different strategies?

Hamlet Batista: We had about 10. We didn't have that many – about 10 or 11.

Adrian Bye: That was enough for you to get a read on what was happening.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, because this is what happens. When you start, you do something, you hit it and then, you get down. You try something else and then, you hit it. You kind of like learn the different things that you need to do and sometimes, they go back.

Let me give you an example. For example, at some point using all the links with the same anchor text is not a problem. You could get high by doing that, okay? But then, they change that so we

started to make the anchor texts but the way that you make the anchor texts of incoming links is very important. I mean, we had some sites with the strategy of linking only one or two more keywords – I mean, small keywords in the anchor text. We had some other sites that only had anchor text with long phrases which were variations of the different keywords. We had other sites that were mixing also the brand of the site, the name of the site in the URLs. We have a completely different strategy for our links and also, we have some unpaid stuff like having some sites with the keywords in the URL, with the keywords in the title and some didn't have it.

When you combine all those, you have several different sites with different strategies and also of course, it's where we get our good links.

Adrian Bye: You just watch those on a daily or a weekly basis and if some sites started to rank higher then you'd modify your main site so that they'd reflect that.



Hamlet Batista: Exactly, yes, exactly. That was what we're doing.

Adrian Bye: There was another key strategy which I saw and you took me to a tour through. You had guys almost like call centres. You had just a team of guys going and getting backlinks. How did that work? I know you paid them per backlink. I mean, you had a nice setup for processes here in this country. You certainly invested in what you were doing.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, yes, yes. As you know, building links is the most critical of ranking especially that we are targeting the most competitive terms. You see, going for the most competitive terms requires a lot of link-building, planning and researching.

So, we're going for mortgages. We've got sites for a lot of big industries – life insurance and all that.

I had that team. They were building links for some sites. They were building links for like a year using the winning strategies that we already had done in Viagra – where to get the links and how to make the anchor text of links. Yes, I had to have people creating the links because although I'm a technical guy and I always want to automate as much as possible, building links is not something you can automate. They had to go to the directories, they had to read the requirements of the directories, they had to know how to evaluate the directories whether they're good or not and then, they had to store so many of the links from our sites, weighing down those specific ideas on each one once you sign like a group of sites.

We did at first, link exchanges when they were working and then, directory submissions.

Adrian Bye: How many guys did you have getting links for you?

Hamlet Batista: I think back then, I had like 12 or 15 guys – something like that.

Adrian Bye: I thought I remember going into one of yours and you had like 20 or 30. So, it was only 12 or 15. It seemed like there was quite a few.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, probably 20. Yes, probably something like 20.

Adrian Bye: With that team, you took advantage of cheaper labour in the Dominican Republic and with that team. That was what was enabling you along with monitoring some sites out on the web to see how they're performing. That was enough to keep you at the top of some of the most competitive keywords on the internet being Phentermine and Viagra.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, it definitely helped because it was or competitive advantage but I would say that if I didn't have automated a lot of the things that they were doing, I would probably have two or three times the amount of people that I had.

Adrian Bye: Right.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, because...

Adrian Bye: How much did you pay each guy working there for a new link?

Hamlet Batista: I no longer have to have that setup but I used to pay like – I think it was P10 or P20 per link – something like that. Of course, this child that I chose once made P6,000 or something like that...

Adrian Bye: You're talking like \$0.50 to \$1 per link.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, on each one and the supervisors would make like P15,000 or something like that.

Adrian Bye: You were paying your guys like \$200 a month and then, the supervisor's making like \$500 a month and that kept it all running. So given the margin, you could have afforded to pay them a lot more, too.

Hamlet Batista: Yes. For them, I mean, it was great because the job is like data input that they were doing. They weren't doing anything particularly smart or sophisticated. I mean, we just got guys going to college. The type of job that they were doing was not really sophisticated and that was one of the challenges that we had.

Let me tell you. This is funny. One of the guys...that's how you know that they weren't even paying attention to what they were doing...sent a link request to guy, telling him, "Hey, I really liked your site and your site ranks for Phentermine sucks," "...Phentermine is dangerous," or something like that and the guy replies absurdly, telling him, "You're stupid," or something. I don't remember the exact keyword but it was something really funny.

So, they don't even pay attention to it.

Adrian Bye: It was an anti-Phentermine site and he tried to get a link from it...

Hamlet Batista: Yes, yes, exactly.

Adrian Bye: ...because they're speaking Spanish so they probably didn't understand exactly what it meant. Yes.

Hamlet Batista: Exactly.

Adrian Bye: Not too clever, I guess.

Hamlet Batista: No, when we hired them, they had to know English...

Adrian Bye: Really?

Hamlet Batista: ...because they need to read the instructions of each site.

Adrian Bye: Okay.

Hamlet Batista: They need to be able to read English and use the internet.

Adrian Bye: Two other things I remember you mentioning that were interesting is you did on-page split-testing where you actually split-test the pages as to what would make the affiliate programs convert better, didn't you?

Hamlet Batista: Yes, say that again. I'm sorry.

Adrian Bye: You were split-testing what was on the pages on your landing page and you were split-testing those in the organic search results so that you could figure out what would make the affiliate programs convert the best.

Hamlet Batista: I don't think I got to do that. I do that now but not back then. Back then, I was...

Adrian Bye: I remember you telling me about how you were split-testing on-page searches like you try different things and then, you'd leave them in the search results and you'd see if the overall revenue from the site increased or not, and you were doing that in organic search. Did I understand that incorrectly?



Hamlet Batista: If I was doing that, I don't remember. What I remember doing was that I did test the merchants obviously. Most of my sites were review sites or comparison of pricing sites where I was giving the offers of my merchants and then, I look at the revenue sides of things and the best converting ones – I pushed them to the top so that they get more sales.

Adrian Bye: Right.

Hamlet Batista:

Yes. That's what I remember doing.

Adrian Bye: What about keywords? I think, I remember you telling me that one of the best keywords most people didn't realise – everyone thought like Phentermine was the best keyword but I think that the actual best keyword was buy Phentermine, wasn't it, or cheap Phentermine.

Hamlet Batista: Yes. Now, I remember what I told you. Yes, yes, this is an interesting thing. Now, I remember what I was doing then that nobody was doing is that in the organic results, I had like a script on my site that will record in the keyword that referred the visitor, right? I had another script that when I send the visitor to the merchant will include that cookie and will pass it...most of my merchants allow you to direct campaign ID so the queue will pass like a campaign ID to the merchant. So when the sale is made with the merchant, I was able to track which were the best-converting keywords.

For a merchant, it's easy to track the best-converting keywords organically because the visitor is on the same site, right?

Adrian Bye: Yes.

Hamlet Batista: You just have your analytics and you say, “When they reach this page...” so that your analytics can tell you the best converting keywords, organically when you’re a merchant.

As I was an affiliate and I was doing it organically – I was getting the script organically, I wanted that information so that I can focus on the most important keywords and that’s what I did.

I’m not sure if you understand the concept I made.

Adrian Bye: Yes. So, you do that by passing that data through the merchant and then, getting it when the sale was made.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, I was passing to one of the variables. I have the affiliate ID and then, I have a campaign ID. In the campaign ID, I included the keyword because they use the campaign ID for using traffic...

Adrian Bye: Overall, was it more profitable spending time on keyword Phentermine, keyword buy Phentermine or cheap Phentermine?

Hamlet Batista: The thing is that with buy Phentermine, you have higher conversion rate but for Phentermine, you have more traffic so at the end of the day, I think, Phentermine was the winner because you get more sales from Phentermine than from buy Phentermine.

Adrian Bye: Okay. So, what was the top-converting keyword for Phentermine?

Hamlet Batista: I think it was buy Phentermine.

Adrian Bye: Buy Phentermine?

Hamlet Batista: Yes.

Adrian Bye: Then, what were the top five?

Hamlet Batista: I think, the ones related to buy. I mean, order Phentermine, purchase Phentermine. I remember, cheap Phentermine was really the one to close the deal...

Adrian Bye: That’s kind of funny that cheap Phentermine would be a better converting keyword when you weren’t necessarily giving them cheap Phentermine, you were just getting up there first.

Hamlet Batista: No. I mean, I was giving it cheap. That’s why it was converting very good because as a super-affiliate, I have lower-based prices. I was able to compete.

One of the things that I did was as an affiliate, when I got to the top, when I became the number one in the results, I tried to get some exclusive deals from the merchants. I mean, I told them this, “I’m sending you this business. I want you to give me something you’re not giving everybody else,” and what they usually do is they drop the prices, they give me higher commissions.

For example, the guy from Viagra gave me an exclusive coupon that I could give my customers and it’s something exclusive because I know eventually, we’re going to be fighting with a lot of people in this service

because it's hard to hide your link structure. That's why it's not difficult. If you know how to study a competitor, it's not difficult for you to get the ranking that you want because it's really hard to hide your link structure.

Adrian Bye: So, what happened? How long did all this last for? I know you did mortgages as well. How long did all this last for and what happened?

Hamlet Batista: I tried all the different industries and then, I got to the top of them but I...

Adrian Bye: You got to the top of keyword mortgage.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, on Yahoo, that I guess...

Adrian Bye: What number ranking were you on Yahoo for keyword mortgage?

Hamlet Batista: The highest, I was like number eight.

Adrian Bye: You were number eight on keyword mortgage in Yahoo. That's pretty tall of you.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, I was number eight. Yes and I was number...

Adrian Bye: Then, what happened? I mean, you're not still doing this now so what happened between then and now?

Hamlet Batista: Yes. The thing is for those keywords, I got to number two for refinance mortgage which is a lot more valuable than mortgage. We got higher-quality leads.

The thing with those other industries is that the payouts are not as attractive as from Rx. I mean, a first place ranking for mortgage was not worth as much as I thought because the merchant makes most of the money. I mean, they don't give that much of a commission to affiliates. On the Rx, I got tired of jumping from one affiliate network to the other because some of them were doing some things that behind the scenes would be shoddy and they got shut down and then, all of them – they were closing and running with your money. I think some of them got in jail.

Yes, it's really messy stuff so I got tired of that and also, I got tired of Google kicking my ass. I mean, they started getting tougher and tougher, and dropping my sites. It's really hard to compete on both sides with doing white hat things and I really didn't have like the team to create a white hat sites, I mean, to do like Google accounts or something, you need English people that are going to be creating that type of account so, I built an affiliate network. I leveraged my position as a super-affiliate with lower-based prices and they gave me private labels. So, I integrated my site via XML to their sites and created an affiliate network of those that was pretty much like taking my affiliates' orders and pushing them via XML to the merchants.

That was the second phase that I did that.

Adrian Bye: That's interesting. So, you went from being the endpoint, you stepped back and almost became like a wholesaler.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, it was really interesting and it was more stable, I mean, because I had a bunch of affiliates pushing orders to me and I didn't depend. I had my sites as well pushing orders but I didn't need to depend that much on the crazy things like that went up, that went down. I mean, it was crazy.

Doing the XML thing, I jumped from several merchants, too because they got out of business and the last one got out really nasty.

At the end, I kind of like connected all the dots so I became a merchant last year, I think it was. I became a merchant last year.

Adrian Bye: So, you became a merchant for what – selling what?

Hamlet Batista: I became a merchant. First, I was just focusing on non-controls because of the risk related to controls and all that.

Adrian Bye: Sorry. You were focusing on what?

Hamlet Batista: ...on the non-controls. Non-controls are Viagra and the other ones – the ones that are not on the DA jurisdiction.

Adrian Bye: Alright.

Hamlet Batista: Yes.

Last year, I got a lawyer from the US and then, I got a legal opinion from him. Then, I became a merchant for Phentermine but I...

Adrian Bye: So, Phentermine's still going.

Hamlet Batista: I'm sorry?

Adrian Bye: So, Phentermine's still going. You're now a Phentermine seller.

Hamlet Batista: No, I only ran it like for two months. I started in December last year and it lasted up to February because the lawyer sent me an e-mail out of the blue, telling me that the government is doing this and that you need to grow apart of that business, and I killed it. In January that year, I processed about \$600,000 or something like that. Then, I had to kill that business because my lawyer told me that, hey, this is not a good idea or something like that.

I went to the US, I hired a law firm and then, I said, "No, I don't need this. The money's good but I don't want to be behind bars because of..."

There is no law in place that's on business. There is no law in place that it's illegal. They're pursuing people like it was. What is happening is that when they go up to people and they find anything there. They throw a bunch of charges and a lot of these people doing this are doing some more shoddy things. They got him for those things so I didn't want to be in the same boat.

The main reason that I dropped it is because I didn't want to get involved in that. I didn't want to be part of that.

In June, it's going to be four years. I worked for the last four years building this company, building an organisation.

Adrian Bye: So, you migrated away from all of the search stuff into making a software company.

I mean, you were effectively one of the best SEO guys in the entire world far none and you stopped. So, can you help me understand? I mean, you mentioned that Google was kicking your ass. Is it just because it was too much work to keep up and so, it was easy to become a wholesaler? I mean, you could have kept doing it but it's just too hard – is that the reason? I mean, why the switch? That's a fascinating question for me.

Hamlet Batista: No, I didn't completely switch. I mean, I still do SEO. My blog is ranked in Google for advanced SEO. I had other sites in the travel industry – Tripscan which still ranks high on vacation packages.

Yes, SEO for me is something that's really challenging and I keep doing it but I need to make the money. I still find it because I have to do it now.

I really didn't like to be a consultant. You see when you can make that much money on your own, creating your own sites, why would you be selling your services on an hourly basis. So, that's something that I'm still struggling with.

Yes, when you're an SEO, the biggest money is going to the most competitive industries but not like an affiliate. So, my switch was trying to move away from affiliate marketing and becoming more of a merchant and ranking my own sites. That was the switch because being a merchant unless you're in casino, porn or something, the merchant is the one who makes most of the money. In a sense once you become a merchant...

Adrian Bye: That's because there's a lot of competition between merchants and so, that keeps the prices down.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, there is a lot of competition but most of the merchants are not really good in internet marketing, SEO, pay-per-click or something and so, they can compete as much as they want.

When you're an affiliate, you know how to market and then, you become a merchant – you become far more profitable.

I can tell you when I moved from affiliate to merchant, my profits doubled because it was jumping over the middleman.

Adrian Bye: Your profits doubled from being an affiliate to being a merchant.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, because I cut out the middleman.

Adrian Bye: Okay. So, you cut that middleman out and that was because you were doing your own search and being a merchant at the same time, is that right?

Hamlet Batista: Yes. You were recruiting affiliates. You have all the people bringing you revenue. It's beautiful. It's something that you need to do.

Adrian Bye: How much time do you spend now still on search and SEO?

Hamlet Batista: What we're doing right now is I launched myself back in February...

Adrian Bye: This is a software company. I mean when I visited you, you were telling me about this several years ago so this is software that's been under development for a long time.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, this software's been under development on January, it's going to be four years. We launched it back in February – the software. So, what I'm doing right now is I'm with the leads that we get from the software, we approach them and we try to help them use the software to get them better rankings in the results. We're in the end of stage of the software where we're still creating the success stories. We plan to do another launch now that we have learned a little bit more about internet launches. Right now, what we're doing is creating success stories with those customers.

Adrian Bye: As a former Viagra and Phentermine affiliate, you've made software that will help people get search rankings.

Let's use me as an example then. So, with meetinnovators.com, I should do some SEO on the side. I haven't looked at the space for years and I'm not very good at SEO. I just know the basics. What would you be able to do for a site like mine using your software?

Hamlet Batista: I no longer see SEO like ranking for X-Y-Z keyword and getting there especially because it's getting more and more difficult to do that but improving the overall kind of quality, the overall kind of qualified traffic that you get to your site and there are three things that you can do to improve your website. You can get more links and this is the most important thing but that's something that I personally recommend and I do – is to get it manually. You want to build a relationship. You want to get the links.

That's what I do with my blog. I get several thousand links and I don't do any manual link-building for my blog. It's just natural links coming to me site because I'm building relationships and sharing content.

Same thing you're doing. You just need to promote your site a little bit more. You need to make it more visible. I would have...

Adrian Bye: You're talking about building relationships with guys that have high rankings. So, getting to know them so they naturally link to you, is that what you mean?

Hamlet Batista: You build relationships with the marketers, the connectors, the people that you get a mention from them and that's going to spread and other people are going to mention your story. They're going to link to you.

That's the first and most important.

Adrian Bye: You get that by providing good content that people want to link to.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, you have to provide a good content but you need to promote. You need to make sure that people from...

Adrian Bye: So, how do you promote it? I mean on a site like mine...I'm a busy guy...I don't really care much about search rankings so let's say, I do care.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, the good thing...

Adrian Bye: I just want to know that because I don't have a lot of time for it.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, I'm a busy guy, too and what I do is I get a bunch of subscribers and they promote my content. They submit it to the social media sites – the social network sites.

Adrian Bye: Why do they do that for you?

Hamlet Batista: ...because they enjoy it. They became fans on my blog, on my site. They go and they promote my site on StumbleUpon because I share information that they value, you see what I'm saying? I'm kind of like a mentor. I'm kind of like teaching them something. They like it so much that they want to share with other people and that's how not only you become an affiliate but you also build trust and you build relationships.

So, you know my dark side – my previous past, I mean. But, it's a completely different switch because my dream was this software, was this company and that's the kind of...

Adrian Bye: If I do things like that and get to know the connectors online that are promoting and talking about different stuff like I go and get listed on Boing Boing and things like that – I convince them to write a story about me – whatever, I don't need a software for that. So, what would your software do to help me?

Hamlet Batista: Yes, that's what I wanted to get to.

First, that's the most important thing. You need to build the relationship, you need to build the links. So once you do that, the search engines are going to rank you automatically. You're going to start getting referrals from the search engines.

The problem is that 100% of the time, you're not going to be getting qualified traffic.

I had this same conversation with a company called VentureLoop. They got a bunch links. They did exactly what I'm telling you so they're not getting the exact traffic that they want.

You see, that's where the SEO or my software's going to help you. My software's going to help you by helping you identify the areas of your site that need improvement.

The most important one is the most valuable keywords that you should be targeting. Okay, my software's going to identify the keywords that you're really targeting, that you're getting ranking for. It's going to tell you, you're ranking for all these keywords. You are in page one, two or three of this specific keyword. Then, it's going to give additional keywords that you should consider and then when you get all that, it's going to give you – this is the keyword where you have the best opportunity, the best chance of success. These keywords have too much value and low competition. You shouldn't be missing those.

Adrian Bye: How does it recognise that they have value though?

Hamlet Batista: We use a Google AdWords API and we cross-reference data from the pay-per-clicks obtained in the...

Adrian Bye: I'll give you an example in my case. A keyword that is going to have value for me fairly soon is Hamlet Batista, right, because I want to get traffic from your name because of your interview and then

hopefully, people will read your interview, find it interesting and then, want to read some of the other interviews.

Hamlet Batista: Exactly.

Adrian Bye: That's not a keyword that's going to have value according to Google's API.

Hamlet Batista: But, you're going to select it. The value what I'm saying is in terms of sales. I mean, it's in terms of a business value and the beautiful thing about our tool is that you can give weight to whatever one of the metrics you want to give.

For example, we weight the number of competitors for a keyword. We weight the potential amount of traffic that, that keyword's going to send you. We weight the number of links organically that are competing for that specific page for that specific keyword phrase and then, we put all that together and we measure the opportunity.

By default, I assume that most people want sales so we give a lot of weight to keywords that people are bidding high on it.

But in your case for example, if you're not...

Adrian Bye: Okay, so you'll then put all the value on the keyword.

Hamlet Batista: Yes.

In your example, if you don't want to give weight to the bar value, you just move the bar and you say, I don't want to give weight to this, and it's only going to be taking into account the traffic for it. If you think that competition is not good, you move the bar to where you need it. If you do a search for example on Google for my name, you'll see that...if you're familiar with the side links...my site just started getting side links which is the small number of links you get on the URL like a sign of footer..

Adrian Bye: I'm sorry. I don't understand.

Hamlet Batista: When you do a search on Google for a brand name and you see under the name of the site under the description...

Adrian Bye: Like contact us and all that stuff.

Hamlet Batista: ...you'll see a lot of small internal links of the site.

Adrian Bye: So, you have that now, do you?

Hamlet Batista: Yes, I have eight – eight of those links right now.

My name is listed on Search Engine Land. I'm in the BlogWorld of Search Engine Land which is the biggest site and then, I get links from different places to my blog even for Computerworld. The blog from Computerworld – I get links.

That's why it's so powerful and what you're doing is...

Adrian Bye: Yes, that's interesting. So, I'm looking on your name. You have that and I don't have any for mine.

Hamlet Batista: Exactly, you see? Look at all the articles that I've been doing.

I mean, I've been interviewed like twice. A guy came here and interviewed me in person. I have a Gold Villa in Casa de Campo. He went to Casa de Campo for the interview. You can see that on SEOmoz 101 interview probably like the seven or eight result on the page. I was interviewed by some guys out of the UK.

I've been part of three projects of experts that they call a group of experts to share tips and secrets about SEO, and I've been part of three projects and I just started blogging last year.

So I'm telling you, you still haven't got into the really good, interesting stuff.

I started blogging back in May and you know that English is not my first language. I started blogging and sharing information with all these guys now and I'm teaching to speak in one of the search marketing conferences that's going to happen in June.

Do you see that?

Adrian Bye: Yes.

My site's getting posted on a lot of different places. I guess I'm going to have to get you to teach me some of this and how to do it better.

Your software – does it help with the on-page stuff as well?

Hamlet Batista: Yes, yes, my software is really interesting because I've built the same processes that I use internally to rank sites...

Adrian Bye: I mean, how does it work in a case like mine? My blog is run on WordPress. How does your stuff optimise my site without messing up WordPress?

Hamlet Batista: ...because my software integrates with WordPress. We support the WordPress APIs. It's going to pull your post on your previews directly from your site so you can make changes from my software and update your tools and everything. We support more than 90% of...

Adrian Bye: How do you mean, you support WordPress – you actually modify WordPress?

Hamlet Batista: Yes, yes. I mean, the software's integrated to WordPress. You just provide your username and password and then, the software's going to pull the pages and posts from the blog.

Adrian Bye: Does that mean, I'm using your software in real time on the Google search results? So, how does that work?

Hamlet Batista: This is how the software helps you. When I want to write for any industry, it's one of the easiest things. I mean, the things that we do on a consistent basis. But, there is sort of research that goes behind the scenes in order to get there so what I do is when I want to rank for a particular term, I look at the top-ranking sites and then, I'm on the top-ranking sites – I try to identify a site that has been ranking there for

the longest time and then, I try to analyse that site. I spy on my competitor and look at how the competitor uses the keywords on the site and on the anchor text of incoming links and also, the sources of the sites it's getting the links from. So, I pretty much like take a snapshot like an x-ray of a competitor that I consider a winner.

Similar in life when you want to become successful, you try to learn from successful people. That's what I do here. I try to model my SEO approach by studying successful competitors – sites that I keep seeing for a long time.

Adrian Bye: So, I guess that you're out there, studying what's out there working and then, building all of that into the algorithms in your software, is that right?

Hamlet Batista: Yes, exactly so that we come in...

Adrian Bye: Now, what I don't understand is I'm using WordPress – how do you modify WordPress to do those things for me. I mean, you don't know what my site – what I care about ranking for and in fact, I care about ranking for your name once your interview's published. So, how do I tell it that? Does it modify my pages in real time or is it a plug-in for WordPress? How does that actually work?

Hamlet Batista: ...because it's a work flow, okay?

If you go to the homepage, you have to follow a set of steps and one of the steps is that you need to identify the keywords that you want to be ranking for, okay?

So first in a bird's eye view of the software, it first helps you establish a baseline – where you're at, where you're getting traffic from, how many of your pages are being indexed, what are the problems that you're having. Then once you establish that baseline, it helps you do a marketing research – what are the keywords that you should be ranking for and what are your competitors that are ranking for those keywords doing.

Adrian Bye: Is this something I have to do myself or can I pay you to do it for me?

Hamlet Batista: Yes, you can pay me to do it for you. We provide the software and we provide professional services to the software.

Adrian Bye: How much would that cost for a site like mine to get it done?

Hamlet Batista: The software is like \$630 and the consulting is going to be like \$2,000 or something. Very, very affordable...

Adrian Bye: How long is that going to last for to keep my site ranking where I need it to rank?

Hamlet Batista: That's for a quarter. I mean, you get the licence of the software for a year and the consulting is for like 10 hours for four months so you don't need to worry about it.

We identify the goals that you have and we take care with the software. We make sure you get to where you want to be.

Adrian Bye: Cool. Okay.

Is there anything you want to talk about that we haven't covered?

Hamlet Batista: Yes. Well, maybe we can talk about my plans for the software and where I see me going forth.

Adrian Bye: Okay.

Hamlet Batista: I'm on an early stage with the software. I'm definitely looking to build sales channels this public relationship with people for letting complimentary services. That's something I'm definitely looking for and I'll be interested in connection, and meeting people that will see a win-win situation with myself and my experience, and what they offer to the customers.

Adrian Bye: So, you're open to partners, you're open to anyone that wants to do deals. There're companies that are out there running training materials on how to train in different stuff. You'd be open to doing training – all of that sort of stuff. Does that sound correct?

Hamlet Batista: Yes, yes and I already started doing that.

I don't know if you know Jill Whalen from High Rankings.

Adrian Bye: I know the name vaguely, yes.

Hamlet Batista: I demoed the software to her and she was really excited about it. She was really impressed and I'm hoping to reach a lot of people with a high authority like she is, and that's one of the things, that I want to start getting to conferences and speaking, and getting out there because I see a lot of...

Adrian Bye: You're doing that here.

Is there anything else you'd like to talk about – what your future plans are or anything else?

Hamlet Batista: I think that'll be it.

Right now, I'm considering opening a sales office in the US for the software because that's my direction. The direction I want to take is to make this a really successful product.

Adrian Bye: Cool.

Hamlet Batista: Yes. I've been approached. I will not tell the name. It's a public company in the search marketing space. I was approached by them and they mentioned the possibility of acquiring us. That's something that I'm not really sure at this stage...

Adrian Bye: I'm sure you have many options, my friend.

Hamlet Batista: Yes.

Adrian Bye: Okay, is there anything else you like to say before we close?

Hamlet Batista: No, it's fine.

So, what do you think of...

Adrian Bye: Hamlet, thank you very much for doing an interview.

Hamlet Batista: Yes, thanks to you.