

An Interview With Li Evans

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March, 2007

Today I'll be talking shop with my new-found friend and search marketing expert Liana Evans of [Commerce360](#). She, as most of you know, is also the creator and main-contributor to the [Search Marketing Gurus blog](#), a blog best known for its efforts in offering search marketing related advice, tips, tricks, and news.

I first met Li at this past December's Search Engine Strategies Conference in Chicago. I was walking through the hotel bar and happen to stop for a quick chat with [Todd](#) and [Lisa](#)... before I knew it I was wearing a joker hat on top of my signature FireFox cap and [posing for Li's "HatBait" contest](#). Little did I know that I would later come to win that contest, become friends with Li, and begin writing for her SMG blog... isn't it funny how things turn out?

I'm extremely excited to be doing this interview today, as Li is a well-respected veteran in our industry. She has been manipulating search engines as far back as 1996, and has plenty of great advice to offer in regards to developing and marketing websites via search engines and social media outlets. With that said, I am hoping that this interview comes across as both educational, as well as entertaining, and that readers are able to walk away with something of value. And without any further ado, here is the exclusive one-on-one chat with Li Evans.

Hey Li... welcome to my neck of the woods. I know you and I've been talking about doing this Interview for quite a while and so I'm glad we're able to be throwing it down here today. You've obviously been quite busy with work, your side projects, moving, and just recently attending an SES Conference in London... and so I'm very thankful that you were willing to take some time away from all of that to come and chat with me.



It's been a world wind month! Packing, traveling, unpacking and making my apartment a place that I live in rather than just the place I moved too, has been time consuming. Thankfully that's mostly done and now I can actually fit two cars in my two car garage. I'm glad though you could work with my schedule to do this interview Karl, I'm glad to speak with you and your Klog audience. :)

Not a problem at all. Alright... let's kick this interview off right, and start by having you share with us a little bit about yourself, specifically your background, and how you first became involved in search engine marketing.

When I decided to go back to school to attain my bachelor's degree, search was really starting to take off. I would be in the computer labs working on projects, I had a few odd ball pages ranking in Alta Vista and Lycos for odd things and trying to figure out why it did. My personality is very methodical & logical and the major portion of my background is highly technical - so I was driven to figure out how these "search engines" all worked, this was in '96/'97.

From there it just took off - I actually had professors coming up to me to ask me how I found what I did, or how I got things to rank.

Very cool Li! It sounds to me like you were able to get in on the ground floor of the search industry... not to many people can say they've been involved in search as long as you have. Kudos to you! To be honest, I know very little about the company you work for. Can you tell us a little bit about Commerce360, and your position with the company?

Commerce360 is a full service online marketing firm. From strategy to analytics, paid search and natural search optimization, the goal of our firm is to drive quality traffic that converts and produces revenue for our clients.

My role as a Search Marketing Manager is to oversee all of the SEO work and other marketing channels that affect SEO. Those other marketing channels include Social Media and Blogging. I also work with the shopping comparison engines, figuring out which ones will work for our clients and helping to ensure that their feeds are optimized.

As you're well aware, online companies come in many different shapes and sizes, and sell just about everything there is to sell online. How would you describe the typical Commerce360 client?

I don't think we have one "typical" client, each and everyone of ours is unique, other than the main goal of wanting more revenue from their website. We have some clients where heavy word of mouth marketing is key to their success and paid search is just a drain on their resources. We have others where an affiliate marketing course of action works perfectly. And still we have others that a combination of both PPC and SEO is exactly what is needed to boost the qualified/converting traffic to the site. It's about analyzing each of our clients and understanding their market space - and then figuring out what works for them.

That's an excellent approach to this business. Offering a cookie-cutter solution, and expecting clients to fit the mold is certainly not the way to go. Moving forward, I, for one, am a big fan of your "Search Marketing Gurus" blog (even before becoming a writer), and certainly believe that it is one of the better Blogs available in terms of providing up-to-date search engine news and commentary. What is your overall goal with the blog?

Thanks Karl! It's always nice to hear people enjoy reading SMG! The overall goal of the blog is and continues to be to share with the community information, tips, ideas and news about Internet Marketing Strategies that can and do affect Search Marketing. We're not exactly a breaking news place like Barry's [SE Roundtable](#), Loren's [Search Engine Journal](#) or Danny's [Search Engine Land](#), mostly because I've got a day job (that I love!) and do most of my blogging early in the morning, late at night and on the weekends.

The other writers help to expand in areas that I don't get nitty gritty into. Greg Meyers, who is also my coworker, really helps me round out the paid search and other areas that I might not delve into everyday. I've also added Michael Abolafia who is our resident expert in the Affiliate Marketing part of our industry, he's got some great insight that I certainly lack and is very willing to share with the audience.

Then, of course, I've added you Karl! How could I not want the writer of the Klog Blog on SMG?

Wonderful Li... I'd certainly recommend your blog to just about anyone serious about this industry. In fact, just recently you've started a Wednesday "Women of Search" interview series in which I enjoy tuning into each week. I've especially enjoyed your Jill Whalen, Lisa Barone, and Kim Krause Berg interviews! What gave you the idea to start such a series? What are you hoping to achieve with it?

Ironically enough I have Phillip Lenssen to thank for the inspiration, in a round about way. In a direct way, Kim Krause Berg was the other inspiration. Phillip wrote this article on Google Blogoscooped about popular blog posts and not one woman was featured. He claimed he did ask a woman, but she never replied (he also didn't name her).

Kim did a post about this, and when I went to look at the comments on it a lot of men were coming down on Shelley Powers for pointing out the lack of female representation. That's when I decided that someone needed to point out the great women in this industry and that they do indeed have blogs and are active marketers.

What I hope to achieve is to bring awareness that there are some really talented women in this field who are just as smart, just as talented and just as important as their male counterparts and shouldn't be left out because we are in the minority. And for the record, I'm not a "feminist"! LOL I just feel it's about time the women got some recognition. As Brandy Shapiro-Babbin says "I'm all about girl-power!"

Absolutely no arguments here. Lol... well then, in addition to the "Search Marketing Gurus" Blog, what other avenues do you take part in to help share and spread SEO news and information?

I'm somewhat active in the forums and boards - you'll see me as "storyspinner" or "storyspinn" in those places. Mostly in HighRankings, but also occasionally in SEW, and once and a while WebMasterRadio (I'm LiEvans) for the Daily Search Cast. I find though I don't have as much time for it as I blog a lot these days.

Just about 2 weeks ago, my good friend Kim Krause Berg of Cre8asite Forums sent me off an email asking me if I'd like to be a moderator. I figured, what the heck, I love helping people and this was a great opportunity. I'm now the moderator of the SEO forum with Rand and Ron Carnell and the Social Media & Tagging forum with my good pal Chris Winfield of 10e20.

I'm also a speaker at Search Engine Strategies (SES) where I speak on the "Search and Regulated Industries" session, and the "Images & Search Engines" session. In fact, I just finished up speaking at London SES and now am slated to speak at NYC SES. Each one is unique and has a different audience, but both end up with people saying to me... "Wow, I didn't realize that, thanks for sharing that." That really makes your day when you know you've shared some piece of knowledge that can help someone else's job/life be a bit easier in the long run.

Speaking of SES, tell us a little bit about the "HatBait" project? It was certainly a big hit at this past December's SES Conference, and I think

people really enjoyed themselves with it. I know I did! What were some of your goals for the project, and what do you think you've accomplished?

My goal was to meet people. This gave me an avenue I never had before, to do just that. I didn't want to pin anyone into saying they were a black hat or a white hat ... I wanted people to have fun, and that we'd get to meet, that's why I had elf hats, cows, angels, and even a princess (yet another opportunity to plug for [Princess Neil Patel](#)). I also didn't want to exclude anyone and only go for the "A-Listers" (like Danny, Rand, Barry, Lee, etc) so to speak, that'd be so limiting! If I had done that, I would have never gotten to meet you, Karl!

Overall I think people finally were able to remember who I was and were glad to meet me (at least I hope they were), and they got to meet a few other people they might not have known before too.

Li, are you insinuating that I'm not an "A-Lister"...? I'm the author of the Klog Blog dammit! LOL... ok, I'm so low in the ranks that I'm like an "S-Lister". In any case, do you have plans for a follow-up project... maybe another "HatBait" contest or something new altogether?

[Becky Ryan](#) (aka web moxy) from Trellian is wanting me to, but I'm still undecided. The last thing I want is people saying "oh no here she comes again" and groaning and rolling their eyes. I can tell you this though - what ever is done (if it's done) won't have the term "BAIT" attached to it! LOL.

Lol... considering all that went down after the contest, I'd say that's probably not a bad idea. Moving forward... you mentioned above that you were Cre8asite's new "Social Media and Tagging" moderator. What are your exact thoughts on the subject? As a search marketer, do you feel that search media optimization strategies are worth venturing into, or do you feel the benefits are limited and therefore not worth the effort?

It all depends on your client. A nursing home probably has no need to be in Digg - its not their target market. But, they could have a blog aimed towards the children of their residents. Social Media is worth the effort, because it can drive highly targeted and relevant traffic to your site. It also can help to boost your website in the search engines.

The key really is, knowing which channel of Social Media will work the best for each of your clients.

Does Commerce360 offer or have plans to offer Social Media Optimization solutions? As the benefits of Social Media campaigns continue to grow... do you think more and more companies will begin to adopt SMO strategies?

We don't define Social Media as a "service" you can buy "ala cart" so to speak. We bundled that into the SEO offerings and look at it from a strategic point of view. If it makes sense to offer it to our clients, we'll present it, but we don't go to every client and say "you've got to do SMO, it's the newest, greatest thing!" That's the entirely wrong approach for how we structure our relationships with our clients. It's a true understanding of what our clients business models are and how we can better enhance their bottom line with online marketing.

Having worked in the Search Marketing field since 1999, what do you feel are some of the biggest misconceptions floating around today?

That the general public has figured out what Search Marketing really is. Inside our own "world" here, our fishbowl so to speak, we all know that Title Tags help. We all know a linking strategy is important - this is easy stuff for us. But ask your neighbor, or the small business that's a carpet installing service - they have no clue, and are only just realizing that the internet is likely more valuable to them than a yellow page ad.

Wow... I like that a lot. I've asked that same question a couple of times in my past interviews and have never liked an answer more, than yours today. In most cases, interviewees just bash on a technique or a strategy. You, on the other hand, really hit the nail on the head. In regarding to SEO techniques and strategies, there are obviously many that one can implement into their SEO efforts. Which do you feel is the most important?

I don't think there's "one" thing for every client. Each client of ours is in a diversely different market, so what works for one client, doesn't work for another. So with that in mind, the strategy I always employ is constant, in-depth thorough research for each client. Knowing the competitors and knowing the market space are critical in planning SEO strategies.

In general though, basic on-page optimization (title tags, bold, relevant content) in conjunction with an organic linking strategy are the best building blocks.

Which do you feel is least important?

Most of the Meta tags like "author" or "revisit". The meta keyword tag is "almost" useless, I utilize that for keyword misspellings I don't want in my content, which if it's not that competitive does help on occasion, but forget about it for competitive terms. The only meta tag that is of some value - and not even SEO-wise, is the description tag. Writing a description of your page is important in order to let the searcher know exactly what they are going to find on the page. When you tie that together with your title tag, you have a powerful way to get a marketing statement across (for free).

That's a great tip for my "do it yourself" readers and I certainly couldn't agree with you more. Utilizing your description tag to promote your company's marketing message is very beneficial in almost every way possible. What other general tips can you offer? What about tools and resources? What are some of those that you use religiously that you would recommend to others?

TRELLIAN!! I'm a big fan of their Keyword Discovery tool. David, Hilton, Larry, Becky & the rest of the team have such a great product. Anyone that asks me, it's the first words out of my mouth.

We also have some in-house tools that I've helped to improve or develop that we use in our research and strategy methods.

I also consider WebmasterRadio one of my biggest resources. What Brandy and Daron have created is a wonderful source of information, great ideas in a fun format

to obtain. Plus I also love hearing Danny sigh, sing and rant all in a 20 minute span of time.

Interesting picks. Trellian indeed has a great keyword research tool, and I too consider WebmasterRadio and their shows to be very resourceful. With this industry being capable of growing very quickly and into places not yet foreseen, in your opinion, where do you see the Search Engine Marketing industry being 5 years down the road?

Five years is a long time in this industry, so it's really tough to see that far in advance. Heck there was a time where "3 months = 1 year" on the Internet. Where I see things going though is to personalization and socialization. It's all about "me" and "what I belong to".

We can see the beginnings of it now. Most widgets appeal to the personalization and the displaying of "me" or "what I like" and sharing that with others. Just look at the MyBlogLog widget - it satisfies two "me's" - "Me" the blog owner (look who's been to my blog) and "Me" the reader (oh look there's my avatar in "lights").

As a big "Trekkie" fan (no I don't dress up in the uniforms!), there's always that hope that one day, maybe in my life time, we'll have some kind of gadget similar to Spok's or Bones', or I can just say "Tea, Earl Gray" and it'll appear. Yes, I know I'm dreaming, but that's the fun of it all!

Let's assume that the industry does move in a more personalization and socialization state, well... more so than it is now. Where do you see yourself and your company being at that time?

I'll probably be still knee deep and hands dug into developing internet marketing strategies for our clients. I'm really a hands-on, type of person, I love to "do" and then "see" the results. Perhaps I'll oversee the implementation of the strategies developed for our clients.

As for Commerce360, I see us as a major player in the industry, but distinguishing ourselves by having a partnership with businesses, rather than just being seen as a resource they call when their rankings drop. My CEO, [Lucinda Holt](#), is a true visionary and the plans for Commerce360's future are really amazing! I have every confidence that Lucinda's vision for C360 will come to fruition.

Very cool indeed! Ok... one last question and then I'll let you get back to work. What can the search marketing industry expect to see from you and/or the SMG blog in the near future? Any major projects or happenings that you'll be involved in?

More "weekly" type columns. I'm hoping that maybe I can look at how all the politicians are utilizing Search Marketing to their advantage or disadvantage. Perhaps some more interviews, too! Projects wise, I've just taken on moderation duties at Cre8asite forum, for a new forum on Social Media & Tagging as well as their SEO Forum. I'm also going to give Barry a hand with blogging the session at SES NYC this year.

Well, with all that was said, I'm now out of questions and that means that you're officially off the hook and free to go. On a more serious note, I think

we were able to put down a GREAT interview, and I thank you for your time and for sharing your search marketing insights with me and the Klog readers.

It's been a pleasure chatting with you.

Thanks for taking the time to ask me all these questions Karl, it's probably been more beneficial to me than you know. Now, how do I get a Klog?

About Li:

Liana (a.k.a Li) Evans is the creator and main contributor to Search Marketing Gurus and has assembled a well rounded group of professional search marketing professionals to contribute to the blog. Li is also the search marketing manager at Commerce360, located just outside of Philadelphia, in Plymouth Meeting, PA. Li has an extensive I.T. and marketing background, holding degrees in both Public Relations and Information Systems. In a prior life, Li was a database and visual basic programmer who "found the light" with search marketing back in 1999.

Li's main areas of expertise in the online marketing industry is Natural Search Optimization, Blog Promotion, Search Media Optimization, Link Baiting & Viral Marketing with a sprinkling of PR for the Web mixed in.

Li is an active contributor and moderator on the SEO and Social Media forums at [Crea8site Forums](#), she also contributes from time to time on [High Rankings](#), [Search Engine Watch](#) and [Webmaster World](#) Forums. She has also been a speaker at the [Search Engine Strategies conference](#) on the Search & Images and Search & Regulated Industries panels.

Working professionally in the search marketing field since 1999, Li has run her own company, worked for a Fortune 500 Internet Retailer as the Natural Search Marketing Manager, she is now currently employed with [Commerce 360, a Search Marketing Strategies Firm in Plymouth Meeting](#), PA and resides in Limerick, PA with her Rescue Greyhound, "Reilly"

About Karl Ribas:

Karl Ribas is the Project Manager at [All Web Promotion](#), and on the side runs his own [search engine marketing Blog](#) and [consultant website](#). He has been designing websites since 2001, and began his involvement with search engine marketing in September of 2003. As both, Project Manager at All Web Promotion and owner of his own website, Karl provides up-to-date, valuable, and effect Search Engine Marketing and design services to a wide range of small to medium sized online businesses.