

Search Off the Record - 54th episode

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[00:00:10] **John Mueller:** [00:00:10] Hello and welcome to another episode of Search Off the Record, a podcast coming to you from the Google Search team, discussing all things Search and maybe having some fun along the way.

[00:00:24] My name is John, and I'm joined today by Lizzi and Gary from the Search Relations team of which I'm also a part of. Today, we're doing a "year-in-review" episode. Hi, everyone!

[00:00:36] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:00:36] Hello.

[00:00:38] **Gary Illyes:** [00:00:38] Hello.

[00:00:39] **John Mueller:** [00:00:39] Today, we're recording in the studio, which is a lot of fun, but unfortunately, we're missing Gary. Where are you today, Gary?

[00:00:46] **Gary Illyes:** [00:00:46] I'm right here, thank you for asking.

[00:00:49] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:00:49] Wait, wait. Are you saying that you're missing him?

[00:00:52] **John Mueller:** [00:00:52] Yes.

[00:00:53] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:00:53] Yes, in your heart.

[00:00:55] **Gary Illyes:** [00:00:55] Thank you for making this awkward. I appreciate it.

[00:00:57] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:00:57] Yeah. [laughs] That's why you invited me here, right? It's my special talent.

[00:01:01] **John Mueller:** [00:01:01] It's fine.

[00:01:02] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:01:02] [laughs]

[00:01:04] **Gary Illyes:** [00:01:04] More awkward. Fantastic!

[00:01:06] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:01:06] [laughs]

[00:01:09] **John Mueller:** [00:01:09] Today, like I mentioned, we're going to do a "year-in-review". Kind of looking back at the last year of the podcast and at some of the stuff the team has done. Maybe thinking about the podcast first, do you have any special or favorite episodes that you really enjoyed doing or really enjoyed listening to?

[00:01:30] **Gary Illyes:** [00:01:30] I really liked the interview-style episodes. It was loads of fun recording them and loads of fun listening back to them when they were processed and released. And I would want to do more of those, but maybe not with people.

[00:01:46] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:01:46] What do you mean?

[00:01:47] **Gary Illyes:** [00:01:47] I don't know... Create a bot, a GPT3-bot that...

[00:01:53] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:01:53] Oh!

[00:01:53] **Gary Illyes:** [00:01:53] ...answers our questions, maybe.

[00:01:55] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:01:55] We could do an episode that's interacting with the bot.

[00:01:58] **Gary Illyes:** [00:01:58] Yeah. Or we create two bots and then they interact with each other. What can possibly go wrong?

[00:02:04] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:02:04] We don't have to do the podcast anymore, we outsource the work. Hmm...

[00:02:07] **Gary Illyes:** [00:02:07] Yes, yeah. And we don't have to pay them.

[00:02:09] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:02:09] What do you think, John?

[00:02:10] **John Mueller:** [00:02:10] I think that's a terrible idea, Gary. It's like...

[00:02:14] **Gary Illyes:** [00:02:14] Thank you.

[00:02:15] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:02:15] [laughs]

[00:02:17] **John Mueller:** [00:02:17] I don't know, I'm missing your good ideas.

[00:02:19] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:02:19] [gasps] That is a burn, huh. Wow!

[00:02:22] **Gary Illyes:** [00:02:22] Wait...

[00:02:23] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:02:23] John, have you and Gary switched places?

[00:02:25] **Gary Illyes:** [00:02:25] Are you telling me something...? Also, so that's my line, right? Yeah.

[00:02:29] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:02:29] Yeah, this is disconcerting, I don't know. have you switched roles?

[00:02:34] **John Mueller:** [00:02:34] Okay, so more guest posts, that sounds like fun.

[00:02:37] **Gary Illyes:** [00:02:37] Guest posts?

[00:02:38] **John Mueller:** [00:02:38] Guest posts? Oh!

[00:02:40] **Gary Illyes:** [00:02:40] Did you say guest posts?

[00:02:42] **John Mueller:** [00:02:42] Guest recordings? I guess?

[00:02:45] **Gary Illyes:** [00:02:45] Thank you.

[00:02:46] **John Mueller:** [00:02:46] Okay, cool. But more people in the podcast to chat with, people who are outside of the team.

[00:02:52] **Gary Illyes:** [00:02:52] Yeah.

[00:02:53] **John Mueller:** [00:02:53] Where we can get, I guess, more... I don't know diverse perspectives, about how things in the SEO world are going, or what aspect did you really like about having guests?

[00:03:06] **Gary Illyes:** [00:03:06] I mean, there are multiple aspects to it. One is that it's nice to highlight that there are people behind the role. I thought that's a really nice touch. And for example hearing from Barry Schwartz about his life that was really, really cool. Jennifer Slegg, same thing. And then the diversity aspect, that's also really nice to bring focus on. And then all the technical stuff that we learned from these interview podcasts. That's also really eye-opening, I guess.

[00:03:38] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:03:38] Yeah, I would agree with that. I feel like with those episodes particularly, it felt like we were learning more from them. Interviewing them about what their career was like and the subject matter that they know about. It felt more fun because you came away learning something new, I think.

[00:03:55] **John Mueller:** [00:03:55] Yeah, cool. Okay, here I am nodding my head in a podcast, which doesn't seem to work very well. [laughs]

[00:04:02] **Gary Illyes:** [00:04:02] Yeah. After 50 episodes, I would have hoped that we stop doing that but, well...

[00:04:08] **John Mueller:** [00:04:08] Oh, well... I also do the hand stuff, so, whatever. I mean just waving my hands.

[00:04:14] **Gary Illyes:** [00:04:14] That's signature.

[00:04:15] **John Mueller:** [00:04:15] Okay. Yeah, well, cool. Okay. Having more guests, that means probably we'll reach out to more people outside, or are you looking for people to volunteer?

[00:04:27] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:04:27] I mean this past year, you selected people for a particular reason, I'm guessing, Gary? You sort of had an idea to do a series of six, I think, throughout the year.

[00:04:38] **Gary Illyes:** [00:04:38] I think I just reached out to a bunch of people and then was waiting for replies. I didn't have anything in particular, basically. I generally know who are the SEOs that I want to talk to.

[00:04:53] Well, not just a SEOs, I guess, because Barry for example, Barry Schwartz is not really an SEO, but all the people that we talked to, I know personally, and I really love chatting with them when we meet each other at conferences or after conferences or whatever. And I just thought that it would be nice to bring them on the podcast.

[00:05:14] Next year, we can do something else, perhaps. If I remember correctly, the planning is either in your hands or in Martin's hands, so you can knock yourself out with it.

[00:05:24] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:05:24] [laughs] I'm curious if we would focus it differently. This past year was more of a highlight or spotlight on that person specifically, like their career path... It was more of a, "How did you get into SEO and what are you doing that's really specific to you in the industry?" Would we change that in the next year? Because there are a couple of different approaches that you could take like highlighting newcomers, for example, someone who's more fresh. Or bringing someone who's... I don't know, to talk about a specific topic instead of like highlighting their career.

[00:05:59] **Gary Illyes:** [00:05:59] Yeah, sounds good to me.

[00:06:01] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:06:01] What do you think, John?

[00:06:02] **John Mueller:** [00:06:02] I think someone has to take it up and set up a plan and go for it. From my point of view, that sounds like a great idea, having a different focus on the people that are coming in to the podcast. So pick something and run with it. I think from a general point of view about the podcast within the context of everything that we do, externally, we can go in any direction.

[00:06:31] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:06:31] How is the podcast doing, by the way?

[00:06:34] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:06:34] It's doing surprisingly well and I don't know why. We've reached one million downloads this year, which is kind of crazy. And all of the downloads...

[00:06:43] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:06:43] Wait, wait, wait...No, you...

[00:06:44] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:06:44] [laughs] Let me say it again: one million.

[00:06:48] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:06:48] How?

[00:06:48] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:06:48] I don't know, and all of the downloads were from this year. We're at 1.3 million, and 1.1 is from this year alone, even though we've been doing it for two and a half years now.

[00:07:00] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:07:00] Do you think it's a bot?

[00:07:01] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:07:01] It's also weird because most of the downloads are the transcripts. Is it views on the transcripts themselves?

[00:07:09] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:07:09] Oh, maybe it's crawlers.

[00:07:12] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:07:12] Could be.

[00:07:12] **John Mueller:** [00:07:12] Search engines in your podcast, it's more likely than you think!

[00:07:18] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:07:18] [gasps] Oh, I had a epiphany!

[00:07:20] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:07:20] "The" epiphany?

[00:07:21] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:07:21] The epiphany: we could start a podcast and talk about search engines.

[00:07:26] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:07:26] [laughs] Like other search engines, not ours?

[00:07:30] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:07:30] This is a terrible idea. Okay.

[00:07:32] **John Mueller:** [00:07:32] Okay.

[00:07:33] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:07:33] Moving on.

[00:07:34] **John Mueller:** [00:07:34] Moving on. Okay. What was the most surprising thing that happened this year from your point of view?

[00:07:40] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:07:40] For me, it was that 15-megabyte thing. That completely...

[00:07:44] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:07:44] Don't say it.

[00:07:45] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:07:45] I'm going to say it again, 15...

[00:07:46] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:07:46] No, no, no 15 megabytes.

[00:07:48] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:07:48] 15 megabits?

[00:07:51] **John Mueller:** [00:07:51] Bytes.

[00:07:52] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:07:52] Bytes.

[00:07:52] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:07:52] Bytes. [laughs] I don't know, that whole thing just blew my mind because it was such a subtle change that we made. Not subtle, it was a small thing, one sentence, I think, just saying the limit, and we didn't think that this would be of note, I guess.

[00:08:10] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:08:10] Also, you said change. I think it's worth noting that it was a change on devsite.

[00:08:15] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:08:15] Correct.

[00:08:15] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:08:15] Basically on our publishing platform, and not in how Googlebot works.

[00:08:20] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:08:20] Correct.

[00:08:21] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:08:21] That's how Googlebot worked for the past... I don't even know, 15 years or something. I don't think it was eye-opening because I don't think I would have done anything differently.

[00:08:32] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:08:32] No.

[00:08:32] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:08:32] It was just really, really surprising that everyone and my grandmother freaked out about that addition to developers.google.com/search, and I couldn't explain why.

[00:08:45] **John Mueller:** [00:08:45] I kind of think it's one of those things where it's hard to grasp what is 15 megabytes and nowadays, you think, "Well, my phone has gigabytes of storage. So my webpage might be 15 megabytes, I don't even know." And maybe that's what's throwing people off. It's some technical change that they found in documentation and they don't know if it actually affects their website, because they never looked at it.

[00:09:11] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:09:11] Hmm. Well, for me, it was super weird.

[00:09:14] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:09:14] Do you recall if-- because we did a few changes there, we wrote a blog post. But when we had initially changed it, did we add that note that said, "This is just a change in the documentation. It's been functioning this way?" I think that might have been a turning point for us to start saying that more, just to head off people who were like, "Is this new in general?" No, this is a technical limit that has always been there. There's no change. Even though this is new to you, it has been functioning this way this whole time.

[00:09:43] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:09:43] Yeah. I think there were few things that came out of that fiasco...

[00:09:49] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:09:49] [laughs]

[00:09:50] **Gary Illyes:** [00:09:50] [laughs] ... that are positive. One is what you just mentioned. The updates page where we document more aggressively the things that we... well, document. And the other thing was that we started looking more into what else can we document, more obscure things.

[00:10:08] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:10:08] Because you had too much fun with this? [laughs]

[00:10:11] **Gary Illyes:** [00:10:11] Kind of.

[00:10:11] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:10:11] You want to cause trouble? [laughs]

[00:10:13] **Gary Illyes:** [00:10:13] Well, not necessarily trouble, but one thing that was very obvious, that people were interested in this.

[00:10:20] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:10:20] Mm-hmm.

[00:10:20] **Gary Illyes:** [00:10:20] It's such a minor thing and it affects so few pages, probably you can count on...

[00:10:26] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:10:26] We did. We did count how many pages this affected. It was such a small amount.

[00:10:32] **Gary Illyes:** [00:10:32] I don't remember the number.

[00:10:33] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:10:33] Ridiculous...

[00:10:34] **Gary Illyes:** [00:10:34] Yeah, it was such a super small number. But people were still interested and then why not document more of these things, especially if they are not changing too often?

[00:10:45] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:10:45] Do you think part of it is a number thing, like a fascination with... We publish some kind of number that's a maximum or a minimum, and that's just like...

[00:10:52] **Gary Illyes:** [00:10:52] That's Barry. Barry's fascination.

[00:10:56] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:10:56] Numbers?

[00:10:57] **Gary Illyes:** [00:10:57] Otherwise, people are just like, "Huh, it's a new thing. It's shiny. Look!"

[00:11:02] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:11:02] People also seem to like when we publish the things that we don't support because that's also been something recent that you've been doing to say, "These things don't work." Not just writing about the things that are supported, but also not supported, which is, I think, something that we were... I don't know. If we don't mention it, why would it not... We're just documenting by default, by the fact that it's not there.

[00:11:27] **Gary Illyes:** [00:11:27] Yeah.

[00:11:28] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:11:28] Why do we have to just go overkill and say it's not supported?

[00:11:32] **Gary Illyes:** [00:11:32] Yeah, implicitly not supported. I think that is way trickier than what we support, or documenting what we support. Because obviously, we don't support probably millions of file extensions and content types. For example, binary files, generally, are a no-go for search engines. But

documenting those would be fairly impossible, I guess. The other thing is HTML element attributes, like rel attribute and class and name and what not.

[00:12:10] We can't possibly document them all. Especially with custom attributes like data-*. Literally, there are virtually infinite number of attributes that we would need to document. We can't.

[00:12:24] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:12:24] When do you think it's particularly beneficial to document what we don't support? Because it feels like it might be where we need to have a reference, where people keep asking us or we want to debunk something like keywords.

[00:12:35] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:12:35] Yeah, that's exactly it. Thank you for answering your own question.

[00:12:38] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:12:38] Oh, okay. [laughs] I'll just have my own podcast. [laughs]

[00:12:43] **John Mueller:** [00:12:43] Cool. What other things surprised you this year? One the one hand, giving more information, I think, that feels unsurprising that people really like that. And also telling them things that don't work. Anything else that stood out from your point of view?

[00:13:03] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:13:03] I didn't anticipate that we would be moving over to Mastodon.

[00:13:08] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:13:08] Oh.

[00:13:09] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:13:09] If you had asked us like at the beginning of the year, like would we be on Twitter or not, that, I don't know. Did you anticipate that, John? Did that surprise you?

[00:13:18] **John Mueller:** [00:13:18] I thought it was surprising. Yeah, at least at the moment, we don't have the official account on Mastodon, but a bunch of us are more active there now with all of the changes around Twitter. I don't know how that will evolve by the time this podcast actually comes out, but we'll see. I think it's cool to put yourself into a different mindset when it comes to some of these social media things, because there are different philosophies around it, and it makes you recognize the things that you almost took for granted with the old setup.

[00:13:58] And lots of things are different on Mastodon. I don't know, some of them are probably good, some of them might not be not be as good as what we had before. I don't know, we'll see how it pans out.

[00:14:10] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:14:10] Is Mastodon one of those Web3 things?

[00:14:13] **John Mueller:** [00:14:13] Web3 things... I don't know. I don't think it uses blockchains or anything weird like that. I think what's interesting about it is it's built on Open Standards. So, anyone can build something around that or create bots or weird things. That's kind of cool, compared to Twitter, where it's a lot more locked down. It's almost like going back to the time of RSS feeds and things like that.

[00:14:43] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:14:43] We could just launch a Google Reader sort of thing.

[00:14:47] **John Mueller:** [00:14:47] Okay.

[00:14:48] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:14:48] [gasps] Million-dollar idea.

[00:14:50] **John Mueller:** [00:14:50] Go for it, Gary. [laughs]

[00:14:53] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:14:53] Huh, maybe not.

[00:14:55] **John Mueller:** [00:14:55] Cool. Last year, I saw we did a podcast, we were like, "Oh this is going to... what is going to happen in 2022?" I took a look at the transcript and there are a bunch of things in there. What do you think? Did we do what we wanted to do or what we had almost like the idea that might happen?

[00:15:18] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:15:18] Yeah.

[00:15:19] **John Mueller:** [00:15:19] Do you remember, Gary?

[00:15:21] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:15:21] Uh... Well... One thing that we failed is... failed at is that JavaScript is still alive and happy.

[00:15:32] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:15:32] Oh, did you say that you wanted to kill it? Like at the beginning of the year?

[00:15:36] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:15:36] I didn't-- I would never say that.

[00:15:39] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:15:39] Oh. But would you insinuate it?

[00:15:41] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:15:41] That allegation is ludicrous. It's... How can you say that even. Well, maybe I was hoping that something happens to JavaScript. I don't know, like a bus hits it or something. It didn't happen. So that's sad. Events, in-person events are back.

[00:16:00] **John Mueller:** [00:16:00] What?

[00:16:01] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:16:01] Yes, I went to one.

[00:16:02] **John Mueller:** [00:16:02] So, you're back to hugging people again?

[00:16:04] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:16:04] What do you mean, again?

[00:16:06] **John Mueller:** [00:16:06] Oh, they're hugging you?

[00:16:08] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:16:08] No, people are not hugging me. I have a resting grumpy face, so I repel people. It's nice.

[00:16:15] **John Mueller:** [00:16:15] You're going to events and then you're all alone? Or how does this play out?

[00:16:21] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:16:21] Yeah, sure. Only at events I'm all alone. No, but really, going back to events, that was such a fantastic change and I really like it. I went to one conference so far, I think, and we had hallway discussions, and we had coffee discussions, and I got lots of ideas, exactly what I was missing. I'm not saying it's good ideas, but it's ideas. For example, I'm going back to parachuting. That was one of the ideas.

[00:16:51] **John Mueller:** [00:16:51] Oh, no! [laughs] That sounds like a weird discussion. It's like, "Gary, you should jump out of planes more."

[00:16:57] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:16:57] Have you considered, also? [laughs]

[00:17:00] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:17:00] I mean, that's not a new thing. I just stopped a little, a few years. No, but I really feel that these conferences, the in-person conferences, somehow stimulate the brain in such a

way that you get more ideas to develop, and that is really, really welcomed, because for two years, I was working on Docs, and it was very nice. Oh wait, Lizzie's here.

[00:17:29] **John Mueller:** [00:17:29] [laughs]

[00:17:30] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:17:30] [laughs] What are you saying? [laughs]

[00:17:33] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:17:33] [laughs] It was fantastic. Best experience of my life.

[00:17:37] **John Mueller:** [00:17:37] Okay. You're happy to meet people again, chat with them in person. Cool, cool. I think we should have more of these events as well and definitely go to more. It's... I always find that you get different kinds of feedback when you talk with people in person, versus when you do emails or even video calls.

[00:18:00] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:18:00] Yeah.

[00:18:01] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:18:01] Yeah, and people feel more comfortable sharing in a one-on-one than in front of a group. If they can speak to you in the hallway, it's a much different vibe than in front of-- like ask you a question or something Q&A after a session. It's sort of...

[00:18:15] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:18:15] Yeah.

[00:18:15] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:18:15] You generalize it so that it's okay for everyone else who's listening. But if you want to get a specific thing or tell you something specific, feedback, there's a little bit more openness, I think.

[00:18:26] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:18:26] And speaking of Docs, we published Docs.

[00:18:29] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:18:29] We did. We had a huge project that landed in October, I think. We got rid of Webmasters completely. That was the last icing on the cake.

[00:18:40] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:18:40] Wait, can you rephrase that? Because it sounded ominous.

[00:18:44] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:18:44] [laughs] We got rid of Webmasters. [laughs] We had one document still left over from our rebrands, that still had the word Webmasters in it, and that is now gone. Wait, that's still not a good rephrasing, I think.

[00:18:58] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:18:58] No! [laughs]

[00:18:59] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:18:59] [laughs] That's probably worse. [laughs] You want to take a shot?

[00:19:02] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:19:02] No.

[00:19:02] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:19:02] No?

[00:19:03] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:19:03] I like how you're trying.

[00:19:06] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:19:06] [laughs] I'm drowning over here. You're just going to keep letting me flounder? [laughs]

[00:19:09] **Gary Ilyes:** [00:19:09] Yeah. Legal will have a call with you, but...

[00:19:12] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:19:12] [laughs] Right. So, Webmaster guidelines has been around for... how long? 20 years.

[00:19:20] **John Mueller:** [00:19:20] 20 years.

[00:19:20] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:19:20] It's a long time. And it had the same name for 20 years and most of the same points, like the core of the document, has been the same for this whole time. But we've also grown as a site. So we've not wanted to touch that document. We published other best practices and just grown beyond that.

[00:19:40] **Gary Illyes:** [00:19:40] I think my problem with the old Webmaster guidelines was that we kept adding stuff to it that was not necessarily the thing that people should focus on when they start a site, for example. Yes, it's nice to have, for example, a speedy site and it's nice to be on HTTPS, but it's not an absolute must.

[00:20:05] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:20:05] Yeah.

[00:20:05] **Gary Illyes:** [00:20:05] But then not spreading spam, that's an absolute must. And having your site reachable by Googlebot, that's an absolute must. And weeding these things out, basically just having those 10 points at the end, the best practices...

[00:20:22] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:20:22] Key best practices, yeah.

[00:20:24] **Gary Illyes:** [00:20:24] Key best practices, that was also a good exercise for us.

[00:20:28] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:20:28] Yeah.

[00:20:28] **Gary Illyes:** [00:20:28] Like when we were sitting in a meeting room and then we were trying to rank those different points that we have Onesie on our site, that was a good exercise for us, I think.

[00:20:41] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:20:41] Yeah. We looked at all the points to evaluate what is actually important and what are the main things that you need to do, because we started publishing additional documents and then not mentioning things that should be mentioned, potentially, in the Webmaster guidelines.

[00:20:54] So we sort of ranked them like priority 0 is you must do. The next one is really important, impactful for most sites. And then 2, nice to have if you can do it, if you can get around to it. And that set the direction for what we would put in our new guidelines. But even the word guidelines, we had a problem with, because as you were mentioning, there are requirements and policies that are like, "You need to do this." Or if you violate this, then this is a different kind of criteria, I think, than the key best practices and how we were referring to the Webmaster guidelines before. Like "If you violate this, then you can't appear in this other thing" was maybe too intense for the stuff that's in there...

[00:21:38] **Gary Illyes:** [00:21:38] Yeah.

[00:21:39] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:21:39] That was in there. Like "Have a speedy site." How do you violate that?

[00:21:42] **Gary Illyes:** [00:21:42] Yeah, yeah.

[00:21:43] **John Mueller:** [00:21:43] Yeah. I'm so glad that we were able to make some changes there. It felt like over time, that document had just grown and grown, and everyone was afraid to touch it because

it's such an established piece of content. And now, it's... I feel something that's a little bit more alive and dynamic and where we could make changes if we recognize, "Actually, this is a big new topic with regards to spam," or maybe there are different requirements or different key best practices. It feels a lot more approachable now. That's super cool.

[00:22:19] **Gary Illyes:** [00:22:19] Yeah. That's one thing that I like about it the most, that it's more modular, so we can separate things and we can say that, "Don't violate our spam policies," for example, versus, "Don't violate our webmaster guidelines," which was, as Lizzi said, was kind of stupid.

[00:22:35] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:22:35] Yeah.

[00:22:36] **Gary Illyes:** [00:22:36] Because it was like, come on, how do you not-- how do you violate the speedy sites thing?

[00:22:41] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:22:41] Or not making it accessible to Googlebot. That's not a thing that you violate, it's just a thing that you either do-- We can access the page or we can't. What do you mean, violate?

[00:22:51] **Gary Illyes:** [00:22:51] Right. And then going back to ranking the different things that we have on Onesie. That was also interesting that when we started ranking it, what are the absolute musts. And then we came up with three.

[00:23:02] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:23:02] [laughs] Yeah!

[00:23:03] **Gary Illyes:** [00:23:03] Only three things that are absolute must from a technical perspective. And that was kind of surprising. I never actually thought about it before, like how many things you have to actually absolutely do to your site to appear in or have a chance to appear in search engines, and then it ends up being three, just three things. And they are basically things that, by default, any site does.

[00:23:31] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:23:31] Yeah. I think that makes it more approachable as well. It's not like, "Oh here's this like document that we hand to you that has 30 bullet points in it." It's just three things that are pretty normal.

[00:23:42] **Gary Illyes:** [00:23:42] Yeah, good change. Would not do it again.

[00:23:45] **John Mueller:** [00:23:45] We should do an episode talking about what we're going to do for next year, but not today. Whoo! Anyway...

[00:23:54] **Gary Illyes:** [00:23:54] What? Wait, why?

[00:23:56] **John Mueller:** [00:23:56] Because it's time for the outro.

[00:23:58] **Gary Illyes:** [00:23:58] Aww!

[00:24:00] **John Mueller:** [00:24:00] Dun-dun-dun!

[00:24:01] **Gary Illyes:** [00:24:01] Okay, fine.

[00:24:01] **John Mueller:** [00:24:01] Thank you both for joining us here, and all of the listeners as well. That's it for this episode. In the next episode of Search Off the Record, will be starting the year by checking out the Search Console Help Center with our other Tech writer, Josh Cohen.

[00:24:18] 🎵 [music] 🎵

[00:24:21] **John Mueller:** [00:24:21] We've been having fun with these podcast episodes, and I hope you, the listener, have been finding them both entertaining and insightful as well. Feel free to drop me a note on Twitter or chat with us at one of the next events that we go to if you have any thoughts. And of course, don't forget to like and subscribe. Thank you and goodbye!

[00:24:42] **Lizzi Sassman:** [00:24:42] Bye.

[00:24:43] **Gary Illyes:** [00:24:43] Goodbye.

[00:24:44] 🎵 [music] 🎵