



# Relevance-First Link Building & AI Search Visibility

*A Conversation with Bradley Benner of Semantic Links*

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Host: Jeremy Rivera · Unscripted SEO Podcast

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# Table of Contents

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- 01** About Bradley Benner
- 02** AI as an Operational Unlock
- 03** The New Link Building Equation
- 04** On-Page Entity Architecture
- 05** LLMs, Citations & AI Search Visibility
- 06** Closing Thoughts
- 07** Key Takeaways
- 08** Resources & Links

# 01 - About Bradley Benner

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Bradley Benner is the founder of **Semantic Mastery** (an information product and coaching business for local SEO and AI implementation) and **Semantic Links** (a white-label off-page SEO fulfillment agency serving local marketing agencies worldwide).

Bradley's origin story is a familiar one in SEO: he started as an electrical contractor around 2010, taught himself to generate leads from Google, fell in love with the process, and by 2012 had left contracting to work full time in local SEO. Semantic Mastery followed as a teaching platform. Then in January 2022, after extensive testing throughout 2021, he launched Semantic Links — which quickly became his highest-revenue business.

He also still runs a niche local SEO agency called **Tree Care HQ**, focused exclusively on tree service contractors, where he now builds full AI operating systems in addition to traditional SEO.

**Semantic Links: White-Label Off-Page SEO Built Around Relevance  
— Not DA or DR**

# 02 - AI as an Operational Unlock

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One of the recurring themes in this conversation is AI not as a content shortcut, but as a process-building accelerator. Jeremy frames it as the "silver lining" — smart AI application can reduce the capital requirement to bring operational ideas to market from what used to cost tens of thousands of dollars in development to a few weeks of iteration.

Bradley takes this further through his contractor work. His core insight: **you cannot automate a process that isn't documented**. If a contractor's workflow is sloppy or undefined, AI doesn't fix it — it compounds the problems by adding complexity on top of inefficiency.

## Bradley's Process-First Framework

Before building any AI operating system for a contractor, Bradley runs a structured discovery conversation — usually over Google Meet — where he has them walk through every step of their lead-handling process. He then feeds the transcript into Cursor (an AI-assisted IDE) to produce a proposal and build plan.

His critical evolution: instead of saying *"here's the process, build an automation for this,"* he now tells the model: *"here's what the process is, here's the desired outcome — now can you improve this process?"* The

models consistently find optimizations that neither Bradley nor the contractor had considered.

*"If they don't have clear processes in their own business, you can't automate it — because then you're just automating a sloppy process. You add another layer of complexity on top of an inefficient process, and having AI perform that inefficient process compounds the problems."*

— **Bradley Benner**

*"Don't accept the first draft of any plan given to you from any LLM. That should be like rule number one for anybody using these tools."*

— **Jeremy Rivera (citing Melissa Pop)**

## 03 - The New Link Building Equation: Relevance Over Metrics

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Bradley's central thesis — and the founding principle of Semantic Links — is that **relevance is the only metric that matters** for link building in the language-model era.

Third-party metrics like Domain Authority (DA), Domain Rating (DR), and Trust Flow were proxies invented when Google's algorithm was simpler. Today, language models run the algorithms — and language models are fundamentally about understanding meaning, relationships, and relevance, not numerical scores from third-party tools.

### From Keywords to Search Queries

Bradley has stopped using the word *keywords* entirely when teaching and coaching. He uses **search queries** instead — because the algorithm isn't keyword-based and hasn't been for years. He still sees 80% of work coming across his desk from agencies using keyword-based thinking. His view: if you're selling SEO services and doing things that have been outdated for years, that's unethical.

### Brand Anchors & Compound Anchors

Nearly 90% of every link Semantic Links places for clients uses a **brand anchor** or what Bradley calls a **compound anchor**:

- Brand only (e.g., "Semantic Links")
- Brand + product/service (e.g., "Semantic Links white-label link building")
- Brand + location (e.g., "Permacast Walls in Florida")
- Brand + product + location (e.g., "PureAire oxygen monitors for industrial facilities")

The goal of every link is to create and strengthen **entity associations** — connecting the brand name to the products/services it offers and the locations it serves, in a way that language models can recognize and reinforce.

*"It's not some stupid third-party metric like DA or DR or trust flow or anything else that matters about whether a link is valuable or not. What matters is whether it's relevant."*

— Bradley Benner

**Our job as SEOs: Create Associations. Strengthen Them. Help the Models Recognize Them.**

## Three Layers of Relevance Matching

Layer	What It Means
1. Anchor text	Brand or compound anchor within relevant surrounding content
2. Referring domain	Site's overall topical theme matches the link destination
3. Backlink profile	Links pointing TO the referring domain are themselves relevant to the niche

# 04 - On-Page Entity Architecture

Bradley's on-page optimization framework is built around six core optimization elements, each serving a specific purpose in communicating entity associations to language models and human visitors.

Element	Purpose	Audience
URL	First touch point for bots; how the page was found	Bots
SEO/Meta Title	Strict semantic triple: Entity + Service + Location	Bots & models
H1	Restatement of entities using variants; compelling copy	Humans
H2/H3+ Headings	Sub-entity and topical signals for crawlers	Bots
Media	Alt text reinforces entity signals; image search presence	Both
Internal Links	Build topical clusters; strengthen entity associations	Both

## The Semantic Triple

The SEO title (meta title) should be written in a strict semantic triple format:

**Entity (who we are) + Service (what we do) + Location (where we do it)**

Example: *"McAllister's Tree Service / Tree Removal & Trimming / Nashville TN"*

The H1 is a **restatement** — not a repeat — of those entities, using variants. It should read as compelling advertising copy. It's for the human who landed on the page, not for the crawler.

*"The meta title is for the bots and the models. But the H1 is for the human visitor. It should be compelling and a lot more conversational, but still referencing the entities that were mentioned in the SEO title, using variants."*

— Bradley Benner

# 05 - LLMs, Citations & AI Search Visibility

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This is where the Semantic Links philosophy becomes most differentiated. Bradley explains how language models interact with links fundamentally differently from how Google uses them for PageRank.

**LLMs use links as navigation elements** — they're how models crawl and traverse the web. The question is not "what's the DA of this link?" but rather "does this link connect two relevant properties in a way that makes sense?" A link between a plumbing company and a generic tech blog raises no useful association signals.

## The Two-Signal Win: Backlinks + LLM Citations Simultaneously

This is Jeremy's key synthesis from the conversation: a **brand anchor with compound context** — e.g., "Permacast Walls delivering concrete perimeter walls in Florida" — hits both signals at once:

- Google sees a brand anchor with topically relevant surrounding content → backlink signal
- LLM sees a brand mention with service and location context → citation signal

## Citations: Structured vs. Unstructured

A **citation** is a published mention of at least two NAPW data points (Name, Address, Phone, Website):

Type	Format	Examples
Structured	Strict NAP+W in defined fields	Yelp, SuperPages, Google Business Profile, directories
Unstructured	Brand mention + any NAPW element in natural content	Press releases, blog posts, branded assets, podcast show notes

## What Moves AI Search Visibility Fastest

- **Hyper-local citations** — brand mentions on geo-relevant sources (local news, local events, Keep America Beautiful affiliates)
- **Topically relevant citations** — brand mentions on sites with the same niche/topic as the business
- **High-authority structured citations** — major directories (Yelp, SuperPages, BBB, etc.)
- **Press releases** — high-authority, news-style, freshness-factor sources that LLMs favor as citations

*"The quickest way to actually improve AI search visibility right now is through third-party mentions — citations. High authority, highly relevant, or hyperlocal, depending on what the search prompt or query is."*

— Bradley Benner

**Freshness matters.** LLMs tend to favor citing recent, authoritative sources. Press releases and news-style publications carry a freshness signal that directory listings do not.

## 06 - Closing Thoughts: Back to Real Marketing

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The conversation closes with what both speakers agree is an unexpected silver lining of the LLM era: it has forced the SEO industry back toward real marketing.

When Google was the only search surface and spam tactics could move rankings, the incentive was to take shortcuts. Now that LLMs have made Google no longer the only game in town — and because LLMs evaluate natural language, entity associations, and brand authority rather than manipulable metric scores — the tactics that work are simply **good marketing**:

- Write compelling copy for humans (H1, paragraph text, CTAs)
- Optimize structure for bots and models (URL, meta title, heading hierarchy)
- Build real brand citations and references across relevant sources
- Use link placements that make semantic sense — not just ones with high scores

*"The arrival of LLMs almost makes link building easier to justify in the budget now."*

— **Jeremy Rivera**

*"It's almost forced us to get back to more traditional marketing and copywriting techniques and skills. I was never proud of some of the spammy stuff I did as an SEO. But it worked, so I did it. Now I'm really a lot more focused on sustainable practice."*

— **Bradley Benner**

## 07 - Key Takeaways

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- 01 Relevance beats metrics**

Third-party scores (DA, DR, Trust Flow) are secondary at best. The first and most important question for any link is: is it topically relevant to what it's linking to?
- 02 Brand anchors are the standard**

~90% of Semantic Links placements use brand or compound anchors. Goal: create entity associations between the brand, its services, and its locations.
- 03 Links are LLM navigation signals**

Language models use links to traverse the web, not for PageRank. Relevant contextual links double as brand citations, hitting both Google's backlink signal and LLM citation signal.
- 04 Unstructured citations drive AI visibility**

Press releases, branded blog mentions, and podcast show notes are the fastest path to improving LLM search visibility. Freshness and authority of the source are key.
- 05 SEO title = bots; H1 = humans**

The meta/SEO title follows the semantic triple (entity + service + location). The H1 restates those entities using variants — written as compelling, human-facing copy.
- 06 Document first, automate second**

AI compounds bad processes. Map and define your workflows granularly before building any AI operating system — then let the model suggest improvements rather than just automating existing steps.

## 08 - Resources & Links

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### Bradley Benner

- Semantic Links (white-label link building): <https://dash.semanticlinks.io/r/R141GR>
- Semantic Links homepage: <https://semanticlinks.io/>
- LinkBuilder Bulletin newsletter: <https://newsletter.semanticlinks.io/>
- Bradley on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/bradleybenner/>
- Semantic Mastery YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSSydnF2bT1MaoeaVCp4YoA>
- Semantic Mastery: <https://semanticmastery.com/>

### Unscripted SEO Podcast

- This episode on YouTube: [https://youtu.be/AUf1U\\_kINCM](https://youtu.be/AUf1U_kINCM)
- Listen / Download: <https://the-unscripted-seo-interview-podcast.castos.com/episodes/unlocking-the-power-of-relevance-in-seo-and-link-building-with-bradley-benner>
- Previous Bradley Benner interview: <https://unscriptedseo.com/building-relevant-links-agencies-with-bradley-benner/>
- Unscripted SEO Podcast hub: <https://unscriptedseo.com/>
- Jeremy Rivera: <https://jeremyriveraseo.com/about/>

### SEO Arcade Resources

- Link Building & Authority Guide: <https://seoarcade.com/link-building-authority-the-complete-resource-guide/>
- Entity Optimization with Jason Barnard: <https://seoarcade.com/unscripted-seo-podcast-entity-optimization-and-ai-interview-with-jason-barnard-of-kalicube/>

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