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SEO veteran, Steve O?Brien, reflects on two decades of algorithm changes, digital authority, and why credibility remains central to online visibility

Steve O?Brien, founder and CEO of specialist SEO agency Woya Digital and Digital PR platform Fleet Street News, is marking 20 years in the SEO industry, reflecting on a sector that has continuously evolved through algorithm updates, mobile-first indexing, and now AI-driven search experiences.

Having entered the industry in 2006, O?Brien has worked through some of Google?s most significant search changes, including Panda, Penguin, local search evolution, and the recent introduction of AI Overviews and large language model integrations into search.

Despite repeated claims over the years that SEO is becoming obsolete, O?Brien believes the industry is moving toward stronger standards of authority, trust, and digital credibility.

?Google still processes billions of searches every day, yet every few months someone declares SEO dead,? said O?Brien.

?Through every major shift, from Panda and Penguin to mobile-first indexing and now AI Overviews, the narrative has remained the same. The reality is that SEO is not dying, the narrow understanding of what made it work is.?

O?Brien said the biggest industry changes have consistently removed low-quality tactics rather than reducing the importance of search visibility itself.

?When Panda and Penguin arrived, they did not kill SEO. They killed manipulation. AI is doing something similar now. Visibility increasingly depends on proof of credibility that extends beyond your own website.?

In his view, the businesses continuing to perform well in search are those investing in genuine authority, trusted recognition, and consistent expertise signals across the wider digital ecosystem.

Over the past two decades, O?Brien has overseen the evolution of Woya Digital from its founding through to its current position as an international SEO and digital marketing agency, adapting strategies alongside changing technologies while maintaining focus on long-term authority building rather than short-term ranking tactics.

He believes AI-powered search is changing how people discover information online, but says the underlying principles behind online visibility remain largely consistent.

?Whether through traditional search results, AI Overviews, or conversational AI platforms, search systems still rely on trusted signals of authority, expertise, and credibility when deciding which sources to surface,? he said.

According to O?Brien, AI search should be viewed as an extension of SEO rather than a replacement for it, with increased emphasis on wider digital presence, trusted third-party recognition, and authoritative brand signals across the web.

He also highlighted the importance of ongoing professional development within the industry, pointing to events such as BrightonSEO as essential for keeping pace with rapid changes in search technology and user behaviour.

?Adaptation does not mean abandoning fundamentals,? O?Brien added. ?Authority was never about gaming

systems. It has always been about building genuine credibility that survives the next industry shift.?

Read more about Woya Digital - Woya Digital Advises Aesthetic Clinics on Leveraging Digital PR to Boost AI Visibility and Online Authority

About the Company:

Woya Digital is a global SEO and Digital PR agency with an international team. The agency specialises in delivering outcomes-driven strategies for clients in finance, healthcare and specialist sectors. Combining expertise in SEO, PPC, Digital PR, and AI-optimised solutions, Woya Digital helps organisations achieve digital dominance through transparency, innovation, and performance. Headquartered in Malta, Woya Digital is strategically positioned to support clients across the UK, Europe and beyond.

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