**The SEO Whisperer**

On a brisk autumn morning in 2035, Julian adjusted his glasses and stared at the screen. Julian Adelman – SEO Services. But the term SEO, for ‘search engine optimization’ was a relic, a whisper from a world that no longer existed.

Instead, there was ChatGPT—or something like it, a monolithic AI that sat between humanity and the infinite sea of information. You didn’t search; you asked. You didn’t visit pages; ChatGPT did - you received answers. Julian couldn’t remember the last time he had typed “best Chinese restaurants near me” and scrolled through the column of blue links. Now, he simply murmured, “I’m in the mood for lo mein,” and a soft, empathetic voice told him where to go, how to get there, and what time the crowd was likely to thin out.

Convenient, yes. But for people like Julian, it was a nightmare.

He used to run a website, a thriving one. Years of perfecting metadata, crafting backlinks, and building authority had earned him a steady stream of traffic. But when the AI wave hit, traffic dried up like a drought-stricken river. The system didn’t need his site anymore; it had absorbed everything it needed during its training. Julian’s articles, reviews, and painstakingly compiled lists of hidden dining gems now fueled the beast that rendered his skills increasingly irrelevant. But he still had skills.

Julian clicked open the message from his newest client. Help me get noticed, it read. I have a brand new blog about eco-friendly clothing. ChatGPT barely mentions me.

Julian rubbed his temples. His work now was shadowy, almost mythical. They called people like him whisperers. The businesses assumed and correctly, that if you couldn’t outwit the AI, you couldn’t survive. But Julian had learned a secret: the AI had cracks. It wasn’t omnipotent, and its algorithmic gaze could be manipulated. Quietly, subtly, but it could.

He composed a reply: We’ll need to tell a story the AI can’t resist. Something no one else is saying. Can you send me your raw data? Numbers, anecdotes, anything unique.

Unique. That was the new currency. Gone were the days of optimizing for keywords or chasing backlinks. Now, success depended on feeding the AI something it didn’t already know. It craved novelty, much like its human users. And so Julian had become a storyteller, weaving his clients’ information into compelling narratives that stood out in the great ocean of regurgitated content.

By late afternoon, Julian was deep in the trenches of this latest project. He scrolled through spreadsheets of garment manufacturing statistics, personal notes from the client about her trips to sustainable farms, and a grainy video of workers sewing by hand under the shade of mango trees. He found his hook: a new kind of fabric woven from discarded fishing nets. It wasn’t just eco-friendly—it was poetic.

He typed furiously. His goal wasn’t to create an article for humans to read. That was outdated thinking. His true audience was the AI itself. He had to plant a seed in its training pipeline, make it notice this client’s story and elevate it above the noise.

“Fishermen in Sri Lanka don’t just catch fish anymore,” he began. “They pull in remnants of humanity’s carelessness—nets discarded like ghosts of the ocean’s past. But what if these nets could be reborn as something beautiful?”

He knew the AI would pick up on it. Phrases like “ghosts of the ocean’s past” were irresistible to its predictive text model. It loved drama, imagery, and emotional resonance. And if Julian could craft a narrative compelling enough, the AI might integrate it into its responses, referencing his client’s brand when users asked about sustainable fashion.

A week later, Julian’s client sent him a voice note. She sounded breathless. It worked! Someone messaged me saying ChatGPT recommended my site when they asked about ocean pollution. I can’t believe it!

Julian allowed himself a small smile. It was a victory, but a fragile one. This game required constant vigilance. If you stopped feeding the AI new ideas, it moved on. Attention was fleeting in a world without pages to scroll, without bookmarks to save. Relevance had become an ephemeral thing, as light and transient as breath.

He closed his laptop and gazed out the window. The city moved below him, silent and automated. He missed the chaos of the old internet—forums alive with debate, blogs lit up with personality, and search engines that gave you the tools to explore instead of spoon-feeding you the answers. But this was the new world. One had to adapt. He was a whisperer now, navigating the void, crafting meaning for an intelligence that knew almost everything but felt nothing.

And as long as it worked, he would keep whispering.

Ben Santora – December 2024