



STRATEGY DOCUMENT · 2026 Edition

THE COMPLETE SEO GROWTH ROADMAP

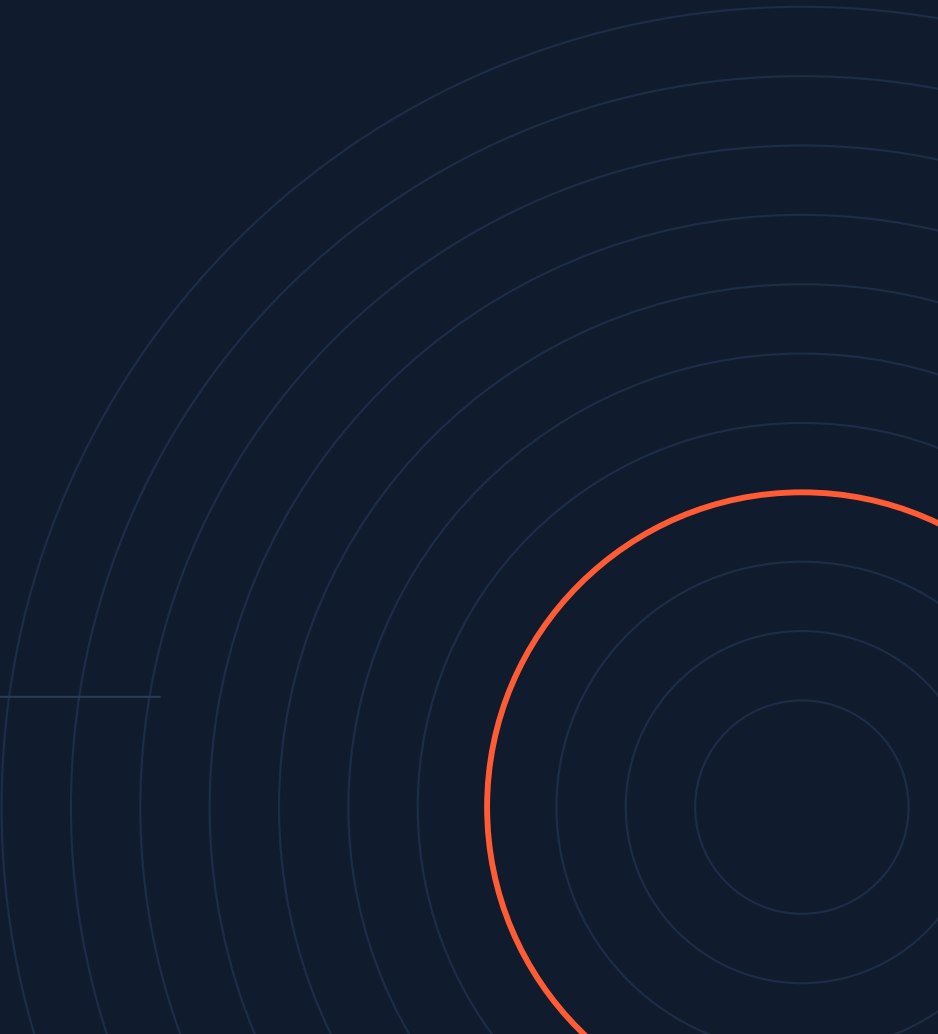
A 12-month, phase-by-phase operating plan covering technical SEO, on-page, content, analytics — and a deep, execution-ready playbook for off-page authority building.

TECHNICAL / ON-PAGE / **OFF-PAGE** / CONTENT / ANALYTICS

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A series of concentric circles in the bottom right corner, with the outermost circle being orange and the others being light blue.

READ ME FIRST

How to use this roadmap

This is not a checklist to skim once. It is a 12-month operating system: five pillars, four phases, and a set of repeatable workflows you can hand to a team and run every week.

Who this document is for

- **Business owners and founders** who want to understand exactly what they are paying for, and what “good” looks like at each stage.
- **In-house marketers** who need a defensible plan to take to leadership, with owners, timelines and KPIs attached.
- **Agencies and freelancers** who want a proven delivery framework to standardise onboarding, execution and reporting.
- **Content and outreach teams** who need day-to-day playbooks rather than theory — especially Pillar 3, Off-Page SEO.

How the document is structured

- 1 Foundations — the growth model and the five pillars**
Why SEO compounds, how the pillars interact, and the sequencing logic behind the phases. Start here so the tactics later make sense.
- 2 The five pillars, in execution order**
Technical → On-Page → **Off-Page** → Content → Analytics. Each pillar opens with a dark divider page, then moves from strategy to step-by-step workflow to a printable checklist.
- 3 Off-Page SEO — the core of this roadmap**
Roughly a third of the document: link evaluation, prospecting, guest posting, digital PR, outreach templates, anchor strategy, risk management and reporting.
- 4 Execution and reference**
A 90-day sprint, RACI model, budget allocation, KPI benchmarks, a risk register, glossary and a one-page master checklist.

A note on sequencing

Do not start with link building. Links amplify whatever is already there — if the site cannot be crawled or the pages do not match intent, authority flows into a leaky bucket. The order here is deliberate: **fix the foundation, earn the right to rank, then push hard on authority.**

How to read the notation

Element	What it means
Phase 0 – 4	The stage of the 12-month plan an activity belongs to. Phase 0 is pre-work, Phase 4 is compounding scale.
Owner	The role accountable for the deliverable — not necessarily the person doing the work.
Checkbox rows	Printable. Every pillar ends with a checklist you can run as a live audit or QA gate.
Cadence	How often a task repeats: one-off, weekly, monthly or quarterly.

NAVIGATION

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THE THESIS

Executive summary

SEO is not a channel you switch on. It is an asset you accumulate — crawlable infrastructure, intent-matched pages, topical depth and third-party authority — that keeps returning value long after the work is done.

The growth model in one paragraph

Search engines rank pages they can **access**, that **match intent**, and that they **trust**. Those three words map cleanly onto this roadmap. Technical SEO buys access. On-page and content buy relevance. Off-page buys trust. Analytics tells you which of the three is currently the bottleneck. Most underperforming sites are not failing at all three — they are failing at one, and spending their budget on the other two.

01

Diagnose the bottleneck before buying tactics

03

Compounding assets: pages, links, brand

12

Months to a defensible, durable position

What this roadmap delivers

PHASE 1**A clean foundation**

Crawl budget, indexation and Core Web Vitals resolved so every future page and link is fully credited.

PHASE 2**Intent-matched pages**

A keyword-to-URL map with no cannibalisation, and templates that convert as well as they rank.

PHASE 3**Authority at scale**

A repeatable off-page engine: prospecting, outreach, digital PR and editorial placements with quality gates.

PHASE 4**Topical ownership**

Clusters that make you the obvious answer for a whole subject, not a single query.

ALWAYS**Measurement you trust**

Clean GA4 and GSC data, a KPI tree and a reporting cadence tied to revenue rather than rankings.

ALWAYS**Risk control**

Anchor discipline, link velocity monitoring and a documented disavow policy so growth is not fragile.

The five bottlenecks, and their symptoms

Symptom	Likely bottleneck	Pillar to attack first
Pages are not in the index at all	Crawl and indexation	Technical (Pillar 1)
Indexed but ranking on page 4–6 for target terms	Relevance and intent mismatch	On-Page (Pillar 2)
Ranking positions 5–15, stuck, good content	Authority deficit vs. competitors	Off-Page (Pillar 3)
Ranking for one term but nothing adjacent	No topical depth	Content (Pillar 4)

Symptom	Likely bottleneck	Pillar to attack first
Traffic grows, revenue does not	Wrong keywords or broken tracking	Analytics (Pillar 5)

Where most of the budget should go

After the foundation is fixed, the majority of ongoing SEO spend in a competitive niche goes to two things: **content production** and **off-page authority**. That is why Off-Page SEO is the longest pillar in this document — it is the work that most teams under-resource, execute inconsistently, and measure badly.

FRAMEWORK

The five pillars

Each pillar answers a different question a search engine asks about your site. Weakness in any one caps the return on the other four.

Pillar	The question it answers	Core output	Weight
1. Technical SEO	Can this site be crawled, rendered and indexed efficiently?	A site that costs search engines nothing to understand	15%
2. On-Page SEO	Does this specific page deserve this specific query?	A keyword-to-URL map and optimised templates	20%
3. Off-Page SEO	Does the rest of the web vouch for this brand?	A durable, editorially-earned backlink and mention profile	35%
4. Content Strategy	Do we own the subject, or just a keyword?	Topic clusters, refresh cycles and a production engine	20%
5. Analytics	What is actually working, and what is it worth?	A KPI tree, clean tracking and a reporting rhythm	10%

Weighting is indicative for a mid-competition commercial niche and shifts by context — a large e-commerce migration is technical-heavy; a new domain in a competitive SERP is off-page and content heavy.

How the pillars reinforce each other

- 1 Technical unlocks everything downstream**
A page blocked by robots.txt or buried nine clicks deep cannot be rescued by better copy or more links. Fix access first.
- 2 On-page converts authority into rankings**
Domain authority is distributed across pages. If titles, headings and internal links are vague, that authority lands on the wrong URL.
- 3 Off-page raises the ceiling for the whole domain**
Links and mentions do not just lift the linked page — they raise the level at which the entire site can compete.
- 4 Content gives off-page something worth linking to**
Outreach without a linkable asset is begging. Outreach with a genuinely useful asset is distribution.

5 Analytics closes the loop

Without attribution you cannot tell whether a placement was worth \$400 or \$4,000, so you cannot scale what works.

The compounding effect

Each pillar makes the next cheaper. Clean architecture makes internal linking effective; effective internal linking makes each new backlink more valuable; more authority makes new content rank faster; faster rankings generate more natural links. By month nine, well-executed programmes need *less* input per unit of output, not more.

TIMELINE

The 12-month phase map

Four phases, each with an exit condition. Do not advance to the next phase because a month ended — advance because the exit condition is met.

MONTH 0–1	MONTH 2–4	MONTH 3–9	MONTH 6–12
Phase 1 Audit, foundation and measurement setup	Phase 2 On-page, architecture and core pages	Phase 3 Off-page authority engine at full run	Phase 4 Topical scale, refresh and compounding

Phase	Window	Primary focus	Exit condition
Phase 0 — Baseline	Week 1	Access, benchmarks, competitor set, goal setting	Tracking verified, baseline snapshot archived
Phase 1 — Foundation	Month 1	Technical audit and fixes, indexation, Core Web Vitals	>95% of priority URLs indexed; CWV passing on key templates
Phase 2 — Relevance	Month 2–4	Keyword map, on-page optimisation, internal linking, core content	Every priority keyword owns exactly one URL; no cannibalisation
Phase 3 — Authority	Month 3–9	Off-page engine: linkable assets, outreach, digital PR, editorial placements	Referring-domain gap vs. top 3 competitors closing month on month
Phase 4 — Scale	Month 6–12	Topic clusters, content refresh, conversion optimisation, programmatic wins	Non-brand organic revenue growing without proportional spend

Phase overlap is intentional

Phases 3 and 4 run concurrently for six months. Off-page work needs assets to promote, and content work needs authority to rank — running them in series wastes half a year. What must stay sequential is Phase 1 before everything else: never buy links, pitch journalists or commission content for a site that cannot be crawled properly.

Realistic expectations

Month 1–2: little movement. Month 3–4: long-tail and low-competition terms lift. Month 5–7: mid-tail positions consolidate. Month 8–12: head terms and compounding. New domains sit at the slow end of every range.

What breaks timelines

Slow content approval, dev tickets that sit in a backlog, stop-start outreach budgets, and changing the keyword target set every quarter. Ninety percent of missed SEO timelines are delivery problems, not algorithm problems.

PILLAR 1

Technical SEO

Buying access. Everything downstream depends on search engines being able to find, render, understand and afford your site.

IN THIS SECTION

- Crawl budget and indexation control
- Site architecture and URL strategy
- Core Web Vitals and performance
- Rendering, JavaScript and mobile
- Structured data and entity markup
- Migrations, internationalisation and log files
- The technical audit checklist



PILLAR 1 · TECHNICAL SEO

Crawlability and indexation

Indexation is a funnel: discovered → crawled → rendered → indexed → ranked. Diagnose which stage is leaking before changing anything.

The indexation funnel

Stage	Where to check	Common failure	Fix
Discovered	GSC Page indexing report	Orphan pages, no internal links, missing from sitemap	Add internal links from relevant hubs; include in XML sitemap
Crawled	Server log files, Crawl stats report	Crawl budget wasted on parameters, facets, pagination	robots.txt disallow, parameter handling, canonical consolidation
Rendered	URL Inspection → rendered HTML	Content injected by JS that the crawler never sees	Server-side render or pre-render critical content and links
Indexed	site: checks, Page indexing report	Soft 404s, duplicate/canonical conflicts, thin pages	Consolidate, noindex deliberately, strengthen thin templates
Ranked	GSC Performance, rank tracker	Indexed but no impressions — relevance or authority gap	Move to Pillar 2 (on-page) or Pillar 3 (off-page)

Crawl budget: who it actually matters for

Crawl budget is a genuine constraint for large sites (roughly 10,000+ URLs), sites with heavy faceted navigation, and sites that publish or change content constantly. For a 300-page brochure site, it is almost never the bottleneck — do not spend a month on it.

- **Eliminate low-value URLs** — session IDs, sort and filter parameters, printer-friendly duplicates, infinite calendar pages, internal search results.
- **Return correct status codes** — 410 for permanently gone, 404 for not found, 301 for moved. Avoid soft 404s that return 200 with an empty template.
- **Fix redirect chains** — every hop wastes crawl and dilutes signals. Target a single hop from old URL to final destination.
- **Keep sitemaps honest** — only canonical, indexable, 200-status URLs. Split by section so you can diagnose indexation by content type.
- **Speed up server response** — TTFB under 200ms lets crawlers fetch more pages in the same window.

robots.txt vs. noindex — the classic mistake

A page blocked in robots.txt cannot be crawled, which means the **noindex** tag on it will never be seen. If a URL is already indexed and you want it out, allow crawling and serve **noindex**; only after it has dropped should you consider blocking it. Blocking first freezes the page in the index.

Site architecture and URL strategy

Architecture is how authority moves through a site. A flat, logical structure means a link earned on the homepage still carries meaningful value to a product page three clicks away.

Principles

- Every important page within **three clicks** of the homepage.
- Directory structure mirrors topic hierarchy: `/service/sub-service/`.
- Short, lowercase, hyphenated, keyword-bearing URLs without dates or IDs.
- One page per intent — never two URLs chasing the same query.
- Hub pages that link down to every child, and children that link back up.

Anti-patterns

- Navigation that hides categories behind hover-only JavaScript.
- Pagination with no crawlable links to deeper pages.
- Orphaned landing pages built for campaigns and never linked.
- Subdomains for the blog — keep content on the main domain wherever practical.
- Faceted URLs indexed at scale, creating near-duplicates.

Internal linking as a technical lever

1 Map the current link graph

Crawl the site and export internal inbound links per URL. Sort ascending — the priority pages at the bottom of that list are your quickest wins.

2 Fix orphans and near-orphans

Any indexable page with fewer than three internal inbound links needs contextual links added from relevant, already-authoritative pages.

3 Push authority deliberately

Identify your top 20 pages by referring domains, then add contextual links from them to the money pages you want to lift.

4 Use descriptive internal anchors

Internal anchor text is fully under your control and carries real relevance signal. Replace “click here” and “learn more” with the actual topic.

5 Re-run monthly

New content changes the graph. Internal linking is a cadence, not a project.

Core Web Vitals and performance

Performance is a modest ranking factor and a large conversion factor. Optimise it for revenue first; the ranking benefit is a bonus. Always work from **field data** (CrUX / real users), not lab scores alone.

Metric	What it measures	Good	The usual culprits
LCP	Largest Contentful Paint — when the main content appears	≤ 2.5s	Unoptimised hero images, slow TTFB, render-blocking CSS, client-side rendering
INP	Interaction to Next Paint — responsiveness to input	≤ 200ms	Heavy JavaScript on the main thread, third-party tags, oversized hydration bundles
CLS	Cumulative Layout Shift — visual stability	≤ 0.1	Images without dimensions, injected banners, late-loading web fonts

Metric	What it measures	Good	The usual culprits
TTFB	Time to First Byte — server responsiveness	≤ 0.8s	No caching layer, slow database queries, distant origin, no CDN

The performance work order

- Serve modern image formats (AVIF/WebP), correctly sized, with explicit width and height attributes.
- Lazy-load below-the-fold media — never the LCP element itself.
- Preload the LCP image and critical fonts; use **font-display: swap**.
- Defer non-critical JavaScript; audit and remove third-party tags nobody reads reports from.
- Cache aggressively at the edge and put a CDN in front of static assets.
- Reserve space for ads, embeds and cookie banners to eliminate layout shift.

Prioritisation rule

Fix the template, not the page. A single fix to the product template improves ten thousand URLs. Rank your templates by sessions × conversion value, then fix in that order.

Rendering, JavaScript and mobile

- **Test rendered HTML, not source.** Use URL Inspection and compare what the crawler sees against the DOM in your browser.
- **Links must be real links.** `<a href>` elements only — onclick handlers and button-based navigation are not crawlable paths.
- **Prefer SSR or static generation** for content and navigation. Client-side-only rendering delays indexation and can drop content entirely.
- **Mobile-first indexing is the default.** The mobile version is the version that ranks — parity of content, links, structured data and metadata is mandatory.
- **No interstitials** that block content on mobile, and tap targets large enough to use with a thumb.

Structured data and entity markup

Schema does not directly boost rankings, but it earns rich results, clarifies entity relationships, and increasingly determines whether AI answer engines can parse and cite you. Implement in JSON-LD.

Schema type	Use it on	Why it matters
Organization	Homepage, sitewide	Defines the brand entity, logo, and sameAs links to profiles — the backbone of entity SEO
WebSite + SearchAction	Homepage	Enables sitelinks search box and clarifies site identity
BreadcrumbList	All templates	Improves SERP presentation and reinforces hierarchy
Article / BlogPosting	Editorial content	Author, publisher and date signals that support E-E-A-T
Product + Offer + Review	E-commerce	Price, availability and rating rich results

Schema type	Use it on	Why it matters
FAQPage / HowTo	Support and guide content	Eligibility varies by market — still useful for machine comprehension
LocalBusiness	Location pages	NAP consistency, opening hours, service area for local packs
Person	Author bio pages	Ties content to a real, verifiable expert — increasingly important

Validate, then monitor

Run every template through the Rich Results Test and Schema Markup Validator before launch, then monitor the Enhancements reports in Search Console monthly. Markup that describes content the user cannot see is a manual-action risk — mark up what is on the page, nothing more.

Migrations, hreflang and log files

Migration non-negotiables

- Full pre-migration crawl and GSC export, archived.
- 1:1 redirect map, old URL → closest equivalent, single hop.
- Staging blocked from crawlers, live site never is.
- Launch on a low-traffic day, then crawl the live site immediately.
- Daily monitoring for 30 days: indexation, 404s, rankings, revenue.

Internationalisation

- hreflang on every page, self-referencing, with return tags.
- Use ISO language codes; add region only where content truly differs.
- An **x-default** for unmatched audiences.
- Do not mix hreflang with conflicting canonicals.
- Choose one structure — subdirectory, subdomain or ccTLD — and keep it consistent.

Log file analysis

Server logs are the only source of truth about crawler behaviour. Quarterly, export 30 days of logs and answer four questions: which URLs are crawled most, which important URLs are never crawled, what share of crawl hits non-200 responses, and how quickly new content is discovered. Every one of those answers converts directly into a fix.

Technical SEO checklist

Run at onboarding, then quarterly. Anything unchecked is a ticket.

Crawl and index

- ☐ robots.txt reviewed — nothing important disallowed, sitemap referenced
- ☐ XML sitemap contains only canonical, indexable, 200-status URLs and is submitted
- ☐ GSC Page indexing report reviewed; every excluded reason understood and either fixed or accepted
- ☐ No accidental noindex, nofollow or canonical to an unrelated URL on priority templates
- ☐ Redirect chains and loops eliminated; a single hop to the final destination
- ☐ Soft 404s identified and resolved with real content or correct status codes
- ☐ Faceted, parameter and internal-search URLs controlled
- ☐ Custom 404 page returns a true 404 and links back into the site

Architecture

- ☐ Priority pages reachable within three clicks of the homepage
- ☐ Orphan pages identified and linked from relevant hubs
- ☐ Internal anchor text descriptive and varied
- ☐ Breadcrumbs implemented and marked up
- ☐ One URL per intent; duplicate or cannibalising URLs consolidated
- ☐ HTTPS enforced sitewide with a single canonical host (www vs non-www)
- ☐ Trailing-slash and case-sensitivity behaviour consistent

Performance and rendering

- ☐ Core Web Vitals passing in field data for the top three templates
- ☐ LCP element identified, preloaded and not lazy-loaded
- ☐ Images in modern formats, sized correctly, with explicit dimensions
- ☐ Render-blocking resources deferred; unused third-party scripts removed
- ☐ Rendered HTML verified to contain the primary content and navigation links
- ☐ Mobile parity confirmed for content, links, metadata and structured data

Markup and monitoring

- ☐ Organization, WebSite and BreadcrumbList schema live and validating
- ☐ Template-appropriate schema (Article, Product, LocalBusiness) implemented
- ☐ Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools verified for all property variants
- ☐ Log file review scheduled quarterly
- ☐ Uptime and crawl-error alerting configured

PILLAR 2

On-Page SEO

Buying relevance. Making sure the right single URL is the obvious answer to the right single query – and that it converts once it wins.

IN THIS SECTION

- Keyword research and the intent matrix
- Building the keyword-to-URL map
- Titles, metas, headings and copy
- Semantic optimisation and entities
- Cannibalisation and consolidation
- Templates, snippets and CRO overlap
- The on-page checklist



PILLAR 2 · ON-PAGE SEO

Keyword research and intent

Keyword research is not a list of phrases. It is a decision about which markets you intend to compete in, and what you must build to win them.

The research workflow

- 1 Seed from the business, not the tool**
Start with what you sell, the problems it solves, and the exact language customers use in sales calls, support tickets and reviews.
- 2 Expand mechanically**
Competitor organic keyword exports, Search Console queries you already get impressions for, autocomplete, People Also Ask, related searches and community threads.
- 3 Classify by intent**
Every keyword is informational, commercial, transactional or navigational. Intent determines the page type — get this wrong and no amount of optimisation rescues the page.
- 4 Score the opportunity**
 $\text{Volume} \times \text{business value} \times \text{realistic winnability}$. Winnability means: can we match the referring-domain profile of the current top five within two quarters?
- 5 Cluster into page-level targets**
Group keywords that the same page can satisfy. If the top ten results for two keywords overlap heavily, they belong on one page.
- 6 Map, do not hoard**
Every kept keyword gets exactly one owning URL. Anything unmapped is either a future page or deliberately out of scope.

The intent matrix

Intent	Query signals	Page type that wins	Primary KPI
Informational	how, what, why, guide, ideas, examples	In-depth guide, tutorial, explainer, comparison of concepts	Impressions, assisted conversions, links earned
Commercial	best, top, vs, review, alternatives, pricing	Comparison, listicle, review, alternatives page	Qualified clicks, lead form starts
Transactional	buy, order, near me, discount, service + city	Product, category, service or location landing page	Revenue, leads, calls
Navigational	brand names, login, brand + feature	Homepage, product, support or login page	Brand click share, support deflection

The SERP is the brief

Before writing a single word, search the target query and record: the dominant content format, the average word count of the top five, the SERP features present, the number of referring domains the top results carry, and what all of them cover that you would have missed. The SERP tells you what the algorithm has already decided the answer looks like — differentiate *within* that format, not against it.

The keyword-to-URL map

This single artefact prevents most on-page problems. It is a spreadsheet, it is owned by one person, and it is the source of truth for content briefs, internal linking and reporting.

Column	Purpose
Primary keyword	The one query the page must win
Secondary keywords	3–10 supporting terms the same page should cover
Intent	Informational / commercial / transactional / navigational
Target URL	The single owning URL — existing or to be created
Page type	Guide, comparison, category, service, location, hub
Funnel stage	Awareness, consideration or decision
Current position	Baseline from the rank tracker
Competitor RDs	Median referring domains of the current top five — the off-page budget signal
Internal links needed	Which hub pages must link to it
Status	Not started / briefed / drafted / live / optimising
Owner and due date	Accountability

Cannibalisation: find it and kill it

Cannibalisation is two or more URLs competing for the same query. The symptom is a query where the ranking URL flips between pages, or where several pages hover in positions 15–40 and none breaks through.

- **Detect:** in Search Console, filter by query and check how many distinct pages receive impressions for it.
- **Consolidate:** merge the weaker page into the stronger one, keeping the best sections of each, then 301 the loser.
- **Differentiate:** where both pages have a genuine, distinct purpose, re-target one to a different intent and rewrite the titles and headings accordingly.
- **Re-link:** update internal links so every mention of the topic points at the winning URL with consistent anchor text.

Consolidation is the highest-ROI on-page tactic on mature sites

Sites older than three years typically carry 20–40% redundant content. Merging four mediocre pages into one authoritative page concentrates links, internal signals and topical depth on a single URL — and frequently produces double-digit ranking gains without a single new backlink.

Element-by-element optimisation

Element	Standard	Notes
Title tag	50–60 characters; primary keyword early; brand at the end	The single highest-leverage on-page element. Write for the click, not just the crawler — test variants and watch CTR in GSC.
Meta description	140–160 characters; benefit plus a call to action	Not a ranking factor; a click-through factor. Rewritten by search engines roughly two thirds of the time — still worth writing.
H1	One per page; matches the search intent, not necessarily the title	Should read like a human headline, not a keyword string.
H2–H4	Structure the answer; use question phrasing where the SERP shows PAA	Headings are the outline a machine reads to understand scope.
URL slug	Short, lowercase, hyphenated, keyword-bearing	Do not rewrite the slug of a page that already ranks unless the gain is clearly worth the redirect.
First 100 words	State the answer and include the primary term naturally	Both users and models weight the opening heavily. Never bury the answer under 400 words of preamble.
Body copy	Cover the topic completely; use the entities the SERP shows	Depth beats length. Word count is an output of completeness, never a target.
Images	Descriptive filenames, meaningful alt text, compressed, sized	Alt text is accessibility first, SEO second — describe the image honestly.
Internal links	3–10 contextual links out, descriptive anchors	Link to the hub above and the siblings alongside.
Schema	Match the template	Article, Product, FAQ, LocalBusiness as appropriate.

Semantic optimisation and entities

Modern retrieval is entity-based. A page about “running shoes” that never mentions pronation, cushioning, drop, outsole or the major brands reads as shallow to a machine, no matter how many times it repeats the head term.

- Extract the entities and subtopics that appear across the top ten results and ensure genuine coverage of each — not keyword stuffing, actual explanation.
- Answer the People Also Ask questions explicitly, with a clear heading and a direct two-to-three-sentence answer beneath it.
- Define terms on first use; models and readers both reward self-contained pages.
- Cite and link out to authoritative sources. Outbound links to quality references are a trust signal, not a leak.
- Add original elements a competitor cannot copy: proprietary data, first-hand testing, screenshots, expert quotes, a calculator.

Winning SERP features

Feature	How to earn it
Featured snippet	Place a 40–60 word direct answer immediately under a question-formatted H2. Use lists and tables where the current snippet is a list or table.
People Also Ask	Dedicate a short, clearly-headed section to each question. These expand your footprint far beyond the primary query.
Image pack	Original, well-compressed images with descriptive filenames, alt text and surrounding context.
Video	Embed a relevant video with a transcript; host the canonical version on YouTube and link back.
Sitelinks	Clear architecture, strong internal linking and descriptive titles — not directly controllable.
AI overviews and answer engines	Clear structure, direct answers, strong entity markup, verifiable claims, cited sources and consistent brand mentions across the web.

On-page and conversion are the same job

A page that ranks first and converts at 0.4% is a failure. Build every template with the answer above the fold, trust signals near the call to action, one primary action per page, and page speed treated as a conversion metric. SEO delivers the session; the template decides whether it was worth anything.

Click-through rate as an on-page lever

Position is only half of traffic. Two pages at position four can differ by a factor of three in clicks. Search Console gives you a free, continuous CTR experiment on every page you own.

- Export queries with high impressions and below-median CTR for their position — these are pure upside with no new links required.
- Rewrite the title around the specific benefit, a number, or the qualifier the searcher used; keep the primary term but stop leading with it if a stronger hook exists.
- Add the year, price range, quantity or location where it genuinely applies — specificity outperforms adjectives.
- Change one element at a time and give it three to four weeks before judging the result.
- Watch for position drift while testing: a CTR gain that coincides with a ranking drop is not a win.

On-page checklist

Use as a pre-publish QA gate for every new or updated page.

Targeting

- ☐ Page has exactly one primary keyword and it is unclaimed by any other URL
- ☐ Search intent verified against the live SERP and the format matches
- ☐ Competitor referring-domain median recorded, so off-page support can be scoped
- ☐ Secondary keywords and PAA questions listed in the brief

Content and markup

- ☐ Title tag under 60 characters, primary term early, written for the click
- ☐ Meta description written with a benefit and a call to action
- ☐ Single H1; logical H2/H3 hierarchy that outlines the whole topic
- ☐ Direct answer to the primary query within the first 100 words
- ☐ All major subtopics and entities from the SERP genuinely covered
- ☐ Original element included: data, testing, imagery, expert quote or tool
- ☐ Author byline, credentials and last-updated date visible
- ☐ Images compressed, sized, named descriptively, with alt text
- ☐ Appropriate schema implemented and validated

Linking and follow-up

- ☐ 3–10 contextual internal links out, with descriptive anchors
- ☐ At least three internal links added to the page from relevant existing pages
- ☐ Outbound citations to authoritative sources included
- ☐ URL added to the keyword map with status and owner
- ☐ Submitted for indexing; position tracked from day one
- ☐ Review scheduled at 30, 60 and 90 days post-publish

PILLAR 3

Off-Page SEO

Buying trust. The deepest section of this roadmap — a complete, repeatable engine for earning links, mentions and brand authority that competitors cannot easily copy.

IN THIS SECTION

- How links are actually evaluated
- Link quality scorecard and red flags
- Backlink audit and competitor gap analysis
- The acquisition portfolio and linkable assets
- Prospecting, outreach and follow-up systems
- Guest posting and digital PR playbooks
- Reclamation, local, social and brand signals
- Anchor strategy, risk control and reporting



PILLAR 3 · OFF-PAGE SEO

Why off-page still decides the outcome

Two sites can have identical technical health and near-identical content. The one the rest of the web references wins — because that reference is the only signal a competitor cannot fabricate on their own server.

What off-page SEO actually covers

Off-page is broader than link building. It is every signal about your brand that exists somewhere other than your own domain.

SIGNAL 01 Backlinks Editorial links from independent sites. Still the strongest third-party endorsement available.	SIGNAL 02 Unlinked brand mentions Your name in context without a hyperlink. Reinforces the entity and is the easiest link source you own.	SIGNAL 03 Digital PR and press Coverage in publications your audience already trusts — links, traffic and credibility at once.
SIGNAL 04 Citations and profiles Consistent name, address, phone and description across directories and industry listings.	SIGNAL 05 Social and community Distribution, discovery and the discussion that leads to links. Not a direct ranking factor — a powerful indirect one.	SIGNAL 06 Reviews and reputation Volume, recency and sentiment of third-party reviews. Decisive for local and commercial queries.

How a link is evaluated — the eight variables

Variable	What raises value	What destroys it
Authority of the linking domain	Established site with its own earned links and organic traffic	New, thin, or traffic-less domain that exists to sell links
Topical relevance	Same or adjacent industry; the surrounding page is about your subject	A general 'write for us' blog covering casinos, law and pet food
Editorial context	Placed mid-article, in a sentence that makes sense without it	Footer, sidebar, author bio, or a bolted-on paragraph
Anchor text	Natural, descriptive, varied across the profile	Repeated exact-match commercial anchors at unnatural ratios
Link attribute	Followed, and the site links out selectively	Blanket nofollow/sponsored, or a page linking to 200 sites
Page-level authority	The linking page itself has links and traffic	An orphaned page nobody visits or links to
Traffic and audience	Real referral clicks arrive from the link	Zero traffic — a strong indicator of a link farm
Uniqueness	First link from this domain	The eleventh sitewide link from a domain you already have

The one-question test

Before pursuing any link, ask: **would I still want this placement if it passed no SEO value at all?** If the answer is yes — because it drives qualified traffic, credibility or customers — it is almost certainly a good link. If the only reason is the metric, reconsider.

The link quality scorecard

Score every prospect before outreach. Anything under 12 goes to the rejected list with a reason recorded, so the team stops re-prospecting the same weak sites every quarter.

Criterion	0 points	1 point	2 points	3 points
Topical relevance	Unrelated	Loosely adjacent	Same industry	Same niche and audience
Organic traffic	None	Low but real	Solid, stable	Substantial and growing
Authority metrics	Very low	Below target	At target	Above target
Editorial standards	Publishes anything	Light review	Real editors	Named, credentialed writers
Outbound link hygiene	Links to spam	Very high outbound	Reasonable	Selective and curated
Placement type	Footer/sidebar	Author bio	Listicle mention	In-body contextual
Audience overlap	None	Marginal	Partial	Direct customer overlap

Scoring bands

18–21 — priority target, invest real effort and a custom asset.
 12–17 — good target, standard outreach sequence.
 6–11 — only if effort is near zero.
 0–5 — reject and log.

Metric caution

Third-party authority scores (DA, DR, AS) are useful filters and terrible decision-makers. They are trivially gamed. Always pair a metric with two human checks: does this site get real organic traffic, and would a customer of mine plausibly read it?

Red flags — walk away

- A public price list for “guest posts”, or a rate card sent before you have discussed the topic.
- “Write for us” pages covering wildly unrelated verticals — the classic general link marketplace.
- Sites with strong authority metrics but negligible organic traffic — a signature of metric manipulation.
- Dozens of outbound followed links per post, most to commercial targets.
- Private blog networks: multiple sites sharing hosting, templates, authorship or a common footprint.
- Directories that accept every submission, and “SEO friendly” link packages sold by volume.
- Comment, forum and profile links created at scale by tools.
- Any placement described as “permanent” for a one-off fee — permanence is not something a vendor can guarantee.

On paid links

Paying for links that pass ranking credit is against search engine guidelines and carries genuine risk: manual actions, algorithmic devaluation, and sunk cost when links are removed. Paying a publication for **coverage** or a creator for a **campaign** is normal marketing — but any resulting link should be marked **sponsored**. Build your programme so that it would survive being described publicly, in detail, to your client's board.

Step 1 — Audit your existing profile

You cannot plan acquisition until you know what you already have, what you have lost, and what is actively harmful.

- 1 **Export from at least two tools**
No single index sees the whole web. Combine two backlink datasets plus Search Console links, then deduplicate by referring domain.
- 2 **Classify every referring domain**
Tag as: editorial, guest post, directory, PR, partner, UGC, self-created, or toxic. This tells you what your profile actually looks like to an algorithm.
- 3 **Map links to landing pages**
Which URLs hold your authority? Almost always the homepage and a handful of blog posts — rarely the pages that make money.
- 4 **Find lost and broken links**
Links pointing at 404s, redirected chains, or removed entirely. Recovering these is the cheapest link work available.
- 5 **Profile the anchor text distribution**
Percentage brand, naked URL, generic, partial-match and exact-match. Compare against the profiles of the sites currently outranking you.
- 6 **Flag genuine toxicity**
Not 'low DA' — actual spam: hacked pages, adult or gambling injections, scraped content, obvious networks.

Step 2 — Competitor link gap analysis

This is the single most productive prospecting exercise in off-page SEO. Your competitors have already qualified hundreds of link opportunities on your behalf.

Analysis	What you are looking for	Output
Referring domain gap	Domains linking to two or more competitors but not to you	A pre-qualified prospect list, sorted by how many rivals they already link to
Top-page analysis	Which competitor pages attract the most referring domains	The content formats that earn links in your niche
Anchor benchmark	How the market leader's anchor distribution is composed	A safe target range for your own anchor plan
Velocity benchmark	New referring domains per month for the top three	The minimum monthly acquisition rate to stop falling behind
Source-type mix	Share of links from PR, guest posts, directories, resources	Which channels are proven to work in this specific niche

2+ Rivals linking to a domain = a strong prospect	30–60 Realistic monthly prospect list per campaign	5–15% Healthy cold outreach reply-to-link rate
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Set the target from the gap, not from a wish

If the median top-five result for your priority keyword has 180 referring domains and your page has 22, the plan is not “build some links”. It is: 158 domains to close, at a realistic 8–12 quality domains per month, is a 13–20 month programme — or a decision to target a less competitive query first. Say that out loud at the start, not in month six.

The link acquisition portfolio

No single tactic builds a natural-looking profile. Run a portfolio, weighted to your niche, and rebalance quarterly based on what is actually converting.

Tactic	Effort	Link quality	Scalability	Best for
Digital PR / data studies	High	Very high	Medium	Brands needing authority fast and at the top of the market
Guest posting	Medium	Medium-high	High	Consistent baseline volume and relevance
Linkable asset promotion	High	High	Medium	Compounding, passive link acquisition
Unlinked mention conversion	Low	High	Low	Brands with existing press coverage
Broken link building	Medium	Medium-high	Medium	Established niches with old resource content
Resource page outreach	Low-medium	Medium	Medium	Education, non-profit, tools and B2B
Expert commentary / source requests	Low	High	Medium	Founders and practitioners with real expertise
Podcast and interview circuits	Medium	Medium-high	Medium	Personal-brand-led businesses
Partnerships and supplier links	Low	Medium	Low	Companies with existing commercial relationships
Local citations	Low	Low individually	High	Local and multi-location businesses
Community participation	Medium	Varies	Medium	Niches with active forums, Reddit or Slack groups
Scholarships, sponsorships, events	Medium	Medium	Low	Local and regional visibility

A sensible starting mix

For a mid-market brand running a full programme, a defensible monthly allocation looks roughly like this. Adjust hard by niche — e-commerce leans PR and product reviews; B2B SaaS leans expert commentary and guest posting; local leans citations and community.

Channel	Share of effort	Expected links/month	Owner
Digital PR and data-led campaigns	30%	3–12 (spiky)	PR / content lead
Guest posting and contributed articles	25%	4–8	Outreach specialist
Linkable asset creation and promotion	20%	2–6 (compounds)	Content lead

Channel	Share of effort	Expected links/month	Owner
Reclamation, broken links, mentions	15%	2-5	Outreach specialist
Community, local, partnerships	10%	1-4	Marketing generalist

Quality gate before quantity

Ten genuinely relevant, editorially-earned links will outperform a hundred marketplace placements — and they will still be working in three years. Set a monthly *quality* target, not a volume target, and make the team report rejected prospects as proudly as won ones.

Linkable assets — giving people a reason

Outreach fails most often because there is nothing worth linking to. A linkable asset is a page that solves a problem for the linking site's audience, not for your sales funnel.

Asset type	Why people link to it	Production effort
Original research / survey	Journalists and bloggers need citable statistics that do not yet exist	High — 4-6 weeks
Proprietary data analysis	You already hold data nobody else can publish — anonymise and release it	Medium — 2-3 weeks
Free tool or calculator	Utility earns links passively, forever, with no ongoing outreach	High — dev required
Definitive guide	Becomes the standard reference people cite instead of re-explaining	Medium-high
Templates, checklists, frameworks	Immediately usable; shared inside teams and communities	Low-medium
Interactive map / visualisation	Highly shareable and easy for publications to embed	High
Industry glossary or statistics hub	Perennial reference target for writers on deadline	Medium
Expert roundup or annual report	Contributors promote it; it becomes an annual fixture	Medium

Asset validation before you build

- **Has a similar asset earned links before?** Check the top link-earning pages of three competitors. Precedent beats originality for a first campaign.
- **Who specifically would link to it?** Name twenty real sites before production starts. If you cannot name twenty, the asset is wrong.
- **What is the single-sentence hook?** If you cannot pitch it in one sentence, a journalist will not run it.
- **Is it evergreen or timely?** Evergreen assets compound; timely assets spike. Plan for both.
- **Can it be updated annually?** An asset you refresh each year earns links every year for a fraction of the original cost.

The 40/60 rule

Spend forty percent of a campaign's budget creating the asset and sixty percent promoting it. Most teams invert this, publish something excellent, send fifteen emails, and conclude that content marketing does not work.

The prospecting system

Prospecting is a repeatable weekly process, not a burst of inspiration. The goal is a steady pipeline of scored, de-duplicated, contactable targets.

- 1 **Define the campaign and the ask**
One asset or angle, one target audience, one specific request. Campaigns with a vague ask convert at a fraction of the rate.
- 2 **Build the raw list**
Competitor link gap exports, search operators, curated lists, industry directories, journalist databases, podcast directories and conference speaker pages.
- 3 **De-duplicate against history**
Check every domain against your CRM: already linking, already rejected, contacted in the last 90 days, or currently in sequence.
- 4 **Score against the scorecard**
Reject early and log the reason. It is cheaper to disqualify a hundred prospects than to write ten bad emails.
- 5 **Find the right human**
The specific author, editor or resource owner — never info@. Verify the address; keep bounce rate under two percent to protect deliverability.
- 6 **Record the personalisation hook**
One concrete, verifiable detail per prospect: a specific article, a broken link, a stat they used, a gap in their resource page.

Search operators that surface prospects

Goal	Operator pattern
Resource pages	[topic] inurl:resources inurl:links intitle:"useful links"
Guest post targets	[topic] "write for us" "contribute" "guest contributor"
Statistics pages	[topic] "statistics" "by the numbers" intitle:[year]
Roundups and lists	[topic] "best tools" "top [n]" -site:yourdomain.com
Unlinked mentions	"[brand]" -site:yourdomain.com -site:facebook.com
Competitor mentions	"[competitor]" "alternatives" "vs"

Pipeline hygiene

- One CRM or sheet as the single source of truth: domain, contact, score, campaign, status, dates, outcome, notes.
- Never run two campaigns at the same domain simultaneously — it reads as spam and burns the relationship.
- Cool-down period of at least 90 days before re-approaching a non-responder with a genuinely different angle.
- Track by **referring domain**, not by link. Ten links from one site is one result.

- Log every won link with its cost in hours so you can calculate cost per link by channel.

The outreach system

Outreach is a numbers game only after it is a relevance game. Volume applied to a badly-matched list produces nothing except a damaged sending domain.

Deliverability first

- Send from a **separate domain or subdomain**, never the main corporate mail domain, and warm it for two to four weeks before volume.
- Configure SPF, DKIM and DMARC correctly. Without these, a meaningful share of outreach never reaches an inbox.
- Cap volume at roughly 30–50 cold emails per mailbox per day; add mailboxes rather than raising per-mailbox volume.
- Plain text, no images, no tracking pixels on the first touch. Signature with a real name, role and website.
- Keep bounce under 2% and reply rate above 5%; pause and re-diagnose if either breaks.

Anatomy of an email that gets a reply

Element	Rule	Example
Subject	3–6 words, specific, no hype, lowercase reads more human	quick fix on your seo resources page
Opening line	Prove you read their work. One concrete detail, no flattery.	Your piece on technical audits — the section on log files is the clearest I've read.
The reason	Why you are writing, in one sentence, tied to their audience.	I noticed the tool you link to in point 4 shut down last year.
The ask	One specific, low-effort request.	Would a current alternative be useful there?
The value	What they get. Never lead with what you get.	Happy to send a short summary you can drop straight in — no attribution needed.
Close	Easy exit. No pressure, no fake deadline.	Either way, thanks for the piece.
Length	80–130 words. Every extra sentence costs replies.	—

Follow-up cadence

Touch	Timing	Angle
1 — Initial	Day 0	The personalised ask
2 — Bump	Day 4–5	Two sentences. Add one new piece of value, not a repeat.
3 — Final	Day 10–12	Different angle or a second asset; close the loop politely and stop.

Three touches, then stop

A fourth and fifth follow-up adds almost nothing to reply rate and materially raises spam complaints. Move the prospect to a 90-day cool-down and spend the effort on a new, better-matched target.

Outreach templates

Use these as skeletons, never verbatim. The personalisation line is what converts — the rest is scaffolding.

Template A — Broken link replacement

Subject: broken link on your [topic] page

Hi [Name],

I was working through your [specific page title] this morning — the [specific section] is genuinely useful.

Small thing: the link to [dead resource] in that section now returns a 404. Looks like they shut down in [year].

We published [your resource] which covers the same ground, if it is a useful replacement. If not, [alternative third-party resource] would also work — just thought you would want to know either way.

Best, [Name]

Template B — Data / statistic pitch (digital PR)

Subject: new data: [surprising finding]

Hi [Name],

You covered [related topic] in [month] — thought this might be relevant.

We surveyed [n] [audience] and found [single most surprising finding, with the number]. Two other findings that stood out: [stat 2] and [stat 3].

Full methodology, charts and raw data are here if useful: [link]. Happy to pull a custom cut for [publication]'s audience, or put [expert name, title] on a call.

[Name]

Template C — Guest contribution pitch

Subject: article idea for [publication]

Hi [Name],

I read [specific recent article] — the point about [specific detail] matched what we see with [relevant experience].

You have covered [topic A] and [topic B], but I could not find anything on [specific gap]. Three angles I could write:

1. [Headline] — [one line on the angle and why it is new]
2. [Headline] — [one line]
3. [Headline] — [one line]

Each would be original, around [n] words, with original data and no promotional links beyond a byline. Previous work: [two links].

[Name], [role] at [company]

Template D — Unlinked mention conversion**Subject: thanks for the mention**

Hi [Name],

Thanks for mentioning [brand] in [article title] — much appreciated, and the surrounding point about [detail] was spot on.

One small ask: would you be open to linking the mention to [specific URL]? It would help readers who want the detail behind it.

No problem at all if not — thanks again for the write-up.

[Name]

Guest posting playbook

Guest posting is not dead; low-effort guest posting is. Done properly it is a publishing relationship that delivers relevance, referral traffic and author authority. Done badly it is a paid link with extra steps.

1 Qualify the publication, hard

Real editorial standards, named authors, organic traffic, an engaged audience, and a topic overlap a reader would recognise. Apply the scorecard — most 'write for us' pages fail it.

2 Study before pitching

Read the last ten posts. Note the house style, typical length, formatting conventions, and — critically — what they have not covered.

3 Pitch three specific angles

Not topics: headlines with a one-line rationale each. Show why each fits a gap in their archive.

4 Write the best thing on their site that month

Original data or first-hand experience, concrete examples, screenshots, no filler. The bar is: their regular readers should notice it.

5 Place the link naturally

One contextual, in-body link to a genuinely relevant resource, plus the author bio. Never force a commercial page into an informational article.

6 Promote what you publish

Share it, cite it, send it to your list. Editors remember contributors who bring an audience — that is how one post becomes a column.

Guest post quality gates

- ☐ Publication scored 12+ on the link quality scorecard
- ☐ Site has genuine organic traffic and a real, identifiable audience
- ☐ Outbound link profile is selective — not linking to unrelated commercial sites in every post
- ☐ Topic fills a real gap in their archive and has not been covered elsewhere by us
- ☐ Article contains original data, examples or first-hand experience
- ☐ Link is contextual, in-body, and points to a resource that helps the reader
- ☐ Anchor text fits the anchor plan and reads naturally in the sentence
- ☐ Author bio includes real credentials and a link to a real profile
- ☐ Placement logged in the CRM with URL, date, anchor and target

Warning signs mid-process

If the editor asks for payment after accepting the pitch, requests you insert links to unrelated third parties, or offers to publish without reading the draft — walk away and mark the domain rejected. A placement you have to pay to keep is a liability on the balance sheet, not an asset.

Digital PR playbook

Digital PR is the highest-ceiling off-page tactic: a single successful campaign can deliver more authority than a year of manual outreach. It is also the highest-variance — plan for campaigns that fail.

Campaign types

Type	How it works	Best for
Original survey	Poll a defined population, publish the surprising findings with methodology	Any niche with a quantifiable opinion or behaviour
Proprietary data study	Analyse data only you hold; anonymise and release	Marketplaces, SaaS, fintech, anyone with usage data
Public data analysis	Combine open datasets into a ranking, index or map	Local, property, travel, health, education
Newsjacking	Offer fast expert reaction to a breaking story in your field	Founders and specialists with genuine expertise
Expert commentary	Respond to journalist source requests with specific, quotable insight	Consistent baseline coverage, low cost
Creative / visual campaign	Illustrations, maps or interactives with an emotional or curious hook	Consumer brands and lifestyle verticals
Reactive stunt or index	Recurring annual ranking that becomes a fixture	Building a repeatable, ownable news moment

Running a campaign

1 Angle first, data second

Write the headline you want a publication to run before you collect anything. If the headline is not interesting, the data will not rescue it.

2 Build the media list

Named journalists who have covered this exact subject in the last twelve months — not a publication-level list. Fifty relevant names beats a thousand generic ones.

3 Prepare the press kit

One-page summary, key statistics, methodology, charts at publication resolution, quotable expert commentary, and a landing page that loads instantly.

4 Pitch in tiers

Offer an exclusive to one tier-one target for 48 hours, then go wide. Exclusivity is the strongest currency you have.

5 Be available

Respond within the hour during a pitch window. Journalists work to deadlines measured in hours, not days.

6 Sweep for coverage and mentions

Track pickups daily for two weeks. Convert every unlinked mention, and pitch syndication partners who covered the story elsewhere.

Journalist source platforms

Responding to reporter queries (Connectively, Qwoted, Featured, SourceBottle, journalist requests on social platforms) is the cheapest reliable source of high-authority links available. Rules that work: reply within the first hour, answer only where you have genuine expertise, give a complete quotable answer rather than an offer to talk, and include your title and one line of credentials. Budget thirty focused minutes a day.

Reclamation and low-hanging tactics

Before spending on new links, collect the ones you have already earned. Reclamation is consistently the highest ROI activity in off-page SEO.

Tactic	The opportunity	The process
Unlinked mention conversion	Your brand named without a link	Set up brand alerts; monitor weekly; email the author with a specific, useful URL and a genuine thank-you
Broken backlink recovery	Existing links pointing at your 404s or long redirect chains	Crawl your backlink export for non-200 targets; restore the page or 301 it to the closest equivalent
Lost link recovery	Links removed during a site redesign or content refresh	Compare month-on-month lost-link reports; ask politely with a reason why the link still serves readers
Image and asset attribution	Your charts, images or data used without credit	Reverse image search and quoted-stat searches; request attribution rather than removal
Product and partner links	Suppliers, distributors, integrations and clients who do not link back	Audit all commercial relationships; ask for a listing on their partners or customers page
Employee and founder profiles	Team bios, association memberships, speaker and alumni pages	Systematically add the company link to every legitimate profile
Testimonial and case study links	Tools you genuinely use want customer quotes	Offer a real testimonial with your name, role and company link

Broken link building at scale

1 Find dead resources in your niche

Crawl the outbound links of major resource pages and industry hubs; collect 404s and dead domains on the topics you cover.

2 Check the demand

Pull the backlink profile of the dead URL. If fifty sites linked to it, you have fifty pre-qualified prospects for one asset.

3 Recreate something better

Not a copy — a current, improved resource that serves the same reader need.

4 Outreach with the favour framing

Lead with the broken link, offer your resource as one option, and mention an alternative. Being useful first converts far better than asking first.

Local off-page signals

For any business with a physical location or defined service area, local off-page work often outperforms national link building on revenue per hour spent.

Google Business Profile

- Claim, verify and complete every field — categories, services, attributes, hours, description.
- Primary category chosen deliberately; secondary categories added only where genuinely accurate.
- Photos added monthly; posts published weekly.
- Q&A seeded with real customer questions and answered properly.
- Reviews requested systematically and every single one answered.

Citations and NAP

- Name, address and phone identical everywhere — to the character.
- Core aggregators and the major directories first; niche and local ones next.
- Audit for duplicates and claim or suppress them.
- Chamber of commerce, trade bodies and local business associations.
- Consistent business description and category across all listings.

Local link sources that actually work

- Sponsoring a local sports team, school event, charity run or community festival — genuine, well-linked and hard to replicate.
- Hosting or speaking at local meetups, workshops and industry events.
- Local news coverage: a genuine story about hiring, expansion, an anniversary or a community initiative.
- Partnerships with complementary local businesses — mutual referral and resource pages.
- Scholarships and bursaries, where the programme is real, administered properly and awarded.
- Local blogs, city guides, 'best of' lists and neighbourhood publications.

Reviews as an off-page ranking and conversion signal

Dimension	What good looks like
Volume	More than the median of the local competitors you are trying to outrank
Velocity	A steady trickle every week, never a batch of thirty in one afternoon
Recency	The most recent review is within the last two weeks
Distribution	Spread across Google, industry platforms and relevant marketplaces — not one platform only
Response rate	100% of reviews answered, including — especially — the negative ones
Content	Reviews that name the specific service and location, because customers were prompted to describe what they bought

Never incentivise a rating

Asking for a review is good practice. Paying for one, gating requests so only happy customers are asked, or offering a discount for five stars violates the policies of every major platform and risks removal of your entire review history.

Social signals and amplification

Social shares are not a direct ranking factor. They are a distribution mechanism that puts your work in front of the people who create links — which makes them indirectly essential.

Channel	Off-page role	How to use it well
LinkedIn	Reaches B2B decision-makers, editors and analysts	Publish the insight natively, not just a link; founder-led posts materially outperform brand pages
X / Threads	Where journalists and practitioners discover work	Thread the key findings; tag the people whose data you used; be genuinely useful in replies
Reddit and forums	High-intent discovery and honest feedback	Participate for months before you ever link; answer questions completely, link only when it truly helps
YouTube	Second-largest search engine; ranks in web results	Repurpose guides into video; full descriptions, chapters and transcripts
Newsletters	Owned distribution that triggers third-party pickup	Give subscribers the asset first — they are your most likely sharers
Slack / Discord communities	Niche professional audiences	Contribute expertise; share resources where the group rules allow
Quora / niche Q&A	Long-tail visibility and referral traffic	Answer thoroughly and only where you add something; treat links as citations

The amplification sequence for every asset

- 1 Owned first**
Email list, on-site placement, internal links from your strongest pages.
- 2 Social native**
Publish the substance on each platform in that platform's format — not a bare link.
- 3 Contributor outreach**
Everyone quoted, cited or featured gets a personal note and an easy way to share.
- 4 Community seeding**
Post where the discussion already happens, respecting each community's rules.
- 5 Direct outreach**
The prospect list built during planning — this is where links actually come from.
- 6 Paid amplification**
A small budget to put the asset in front of journalists and industry followers can dramatically raise organic pickup.

Brand search is the sleeper metric

Growth in branded search volume correlates strongly with overall organic performance. Every off-page activity — PR, social, podcasts, community — that makes more people search your name by choice is compounding into your rankings, whether or not it produced a link that month. Track branded impressions in Search Console as a first-class KPI.

Brand entity and off-site E-E-A-T

Search engines increasingly evaluate the *entity* behind a site: who you are, what you are known for, and whether independent sources corroborate it. This is off-page work that produces no links and still moves rankings.

Entity signal	Action
Consistent identity	Identical brand name, description, logo and founding details across every profile, listing and social account
sameAs connections	Organization schema linking to every verified profile you control
Author entities	Real named authors with bio pages, credentials, external publications and their own profiles
Wikipedia / Wikidata	Only if genuinely notable by their standards — never attempt to force it, and never edit your own entry
Independent corroboration	Coverage, reviews, awards, certifications, memberships and directory listings from bodies that vet members
Consistent topical focus	Being repeatedly mentioned alongside the same subject builds the association that drives topical authority
Employee footprint	Team members publishing, speaking and being cited under the company name

Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trust

What you control on-site

- Named authors with verifiable credentials and real bio pages.
- Clear about, contact, editorial and correction policies.
- First-hand experience made explicit: testing, photos, case data.
- Sources cited and dates of last review displayed.

What must come from off-site

- Citations of your work by recognised industry sources.
- Author bylines on reputable third-party publications.
- Independent reviews and unprompted discussion of your brand.
- Professional memberships, awards and accreditations.

Anchor text strategy

Anchor text is the most common cause of self-inflicted damage in off-page SEO. Natural profiles are dominated by brand and URL anchors because that is how real people link.

Anchor type	Example	Healthy share	Notes
Branded	BuildWithOwais	40–55%	Should always be the largest single category
Naked URL	buildwithowais.com	10–20%	Common in citations and resource lists
Generic	click here, this guide, read more	10–20%	Entirely natural; do not try to eliminate it

Anchor type	Example	Healthy share	Notes
Partial match	this SEO roadmap guide	10–20%	The safe way to build topical relevance
Exact match	seo roadmap	1–5%	Powerful and risky. Earned, never manufactured at scale
Image / alt	—	Remainder	Whatever the alt attribute says

You do not fully control anchors — and that is the point

On genuinely editorial links, the writer chooses the anchor. That natural variance is exactly what a healthy profile looks like.

Where you do have influence — guest contributions, resource listings, profiles — default to branded or partial-match, and check the profile-wide distribution monthly rather than optimising link by link.

Risk management, toxic links and disavow

Modern search engines ignore most bad links rather than penalising them. The correct posture is therefore calm monitoring, not anxious disavowing.

Situation	Correct response
A handful of low-quality links appear from scraper sites	Do nothing. This happens to every site and is ignored algorithmically.
A sudden spike of thousands of spam links (negative SEO)	Document it, monitor rankings, and disavow at domain level only if you see actual impact
You inherited a site with a history of bought links	Audit thoroughly, attempt removal of the worst, then disavow the remainder at domain level
A manual action appears in Search Console	Full audit, genuine removal effort with documentation, disavow, then a detailed reconsideration request
Links from an agency you no longer trust	Request the full placement log, evaluate each against the scorecard, remove or disavow what fails

Disavow with extreme care

The disavow file is a blunt instrument that permanently discards link equity. Disavowing good links is a far more common and more damaging mistake than failing to disavow bad ones. Use domain-level entries, keep a dated log of every change and the reason, and never let an automated ‘toxicity score’ generate the file for you.

Practices to avoid entirely

- Private blog networks and any site whose only purpose is to host links.
- Bulk directory submissions and automated link tools.
- Article spinning and mass-produced low-value guest posts.
- Comment, forum-signature and profile link spam.
- Reciprocal link schemes and three-way link exchanges at scale.
- Sitewide footer links across partner or client sites.
- Hidden links, links in irrelevant widgets, and links in user-generated content you control.

- Buying expired domains to redirect at your money site.

Monitoring cadence

Check	Frequency	Trigger for action
New and lost referring domains	Weekly	Loss of more than 5% of quality domains in a month
Anchor distribution	Monthly	Exact-match share climbing above 5%
Link velocity	Monthly	Unexplained spikes not tied to a campaign
Manual actions and security issues	Weekly	Any notification at all — respond same day
Competitor referring-domain gap	Monthly	Gap widening two months running

Measuring off-page performance

Off-page reporting fails when it counts links. Report on authority movement, competitive position and revenue contribution.

KPI	Definition	Target direction
New referring domains / month	Unique domains linking for the first time	Meet or beat the competitor benchmark
Quality ratio	Share of new links scoring 12+ on the scorecard	Above 70%
Referring-domain gap	Your RDs versus the median of the top three competitors	Narrowing every month
Cost per quality link	Total off-page cost ÷ links scoring 12+	Falling as the programme matures
Outreach reply rate	Replies ÷ emails delivered	5–15% for a well-matched list
Placement rate	Links won ÷ prospects contacted	3–8% is healthy for cold outreach
Referral sessions from links	Real humans arriving via placements	Rising — proof the links are on real pages
Branded search volume	Impressions for brand queries in GSC	Rising month on month
Page-level authority movement	Position change on pages that received links	Measurable lift within 4–12 weeks

The monthly off-page report — six slides

- 1 Position**
Referring-domain gap versus the top three competitors, trended over twelve months.
- 2 Acquisition**
New referring domains this month, split by channel, with the quality ratio.
- 3 Highlights**
The three best placements, with a sentence each on why they matter.

4 Pipeline

Prospects in sequence, campaigns in flight, and assets in production.

5 Impact

Ranking and traffic movement on the specific pages that received links.

6 Next

What is planned for the coming month and what is needed from the client to unblock it.

Set expectations on lag

Links do not move rankings the week they go live. Expect four to twelve weeks between placement and measurable impact, and longer in competitive markets. Report leading indicators (placements, quality ratio, gap closure) monthly and lagging indicators (rankings, traffic, revenue) quarterly.

The 90-day off-page sprint

A concrete starting plan. Run this as written for the first quarter, then adapt based on what your niche rewards.

Days 1–30 — Foundation and quick wins

- ☐ Full backlink audit completed across two data sources plus Search Console
- ☐ Competitor link gap analysis run against the top three competitors
- ☐ Link quality scorecard agreed and documented with the client or team
- ☐ Anchor text baseline recorded and target distribution set
- ☐ Outreach infrastructure live: sending domain, SPF/DKIM/DMARC, mailboxes warming
- ☐ CRM or tracking sheet built with the agreed fields
- ☐ Reclamation sweep: unlinked mentions, broken backlinks, lost links identified
- ☐ First 30 reclamation emails sent — the fastest available wins
- ☐ First linkable asset scoped, briefed and in production

Days 31–60 — Engine running

- ☐ First linkable asset published and technically optimised
- ☐ Prospect list of 150+ scored targets built and de-duplicated
- ☐ Outreach sequences live across two channels (e.g. resource pages and broken links)
- ☐ Guest contribution pitches sent to 20 qualified publications
- ☐ Journalist source platforms monitored daily; five expert responses sent per week
- ☐ Second asset briefed; digital PR campaign angle validated
- ☐ Local citations and profiles audited and corrected, if applicable
- ☐ Weekly link tracking dashboard live and reviewed every Monday

Days 61–90 — Scale and PR

- ☐ Digital PR campaign launched with a tiered media list
- ☐ Guest posts written, published and logged
- ☐ Outreach volume scaled within deliverability limits
- ☐ All coverage swept for unlinked mentions and converted
- ☐ Anchor distribution reviewed against the target
- ☐ Cost per quality link calculated by channel; budget rebalanced
- ☐ Quarter-two plan written, with channels reweighted by measured performance
- ☐ Full quarterly report delivered: position, acquisition, impact, next

30

Days to first reclaimed links

60

Days to a running outreach engine

90

Days to a measurable gap reduction

What ‘done’ looks like at day 90

- A documented, scored prospect pipeline that a new hire could run tomorrow without asking anyone a question.
- At least one published asset that has earned links without further outreach.
- A referring-domain gap that is measurably smaller than it was on day one, with the trend visible in a chart.
- A known cost per quality link for every channel you have tried, so quarter two's budget is an evidence-based decision.
- Working relationships with a handful of editors and journalists who will open your next email — the real compounding asset of off-page SEO.

Off-page master checklist

The complete standing checklist for the pillar. Review monthly.

Strategy and audit

- ☐ Backlink audit completed and classified by link type
- ☐ Competitor link gap analysis run and refreshed quarterly
- ☐ Referring-domain target set from real competitor benchmarks
- ☐ Link quality scorecard documented and applied to every prospect
- ☐ Anchor text target distribution defined
- ☐ Channel mix agreed with expected links and owners per channel

Assets and campaigns

- ☐ At least one linkable asset in production at all times
- ☐ Each asset validated against twenty named potential linkers before build
- ☐ Promotion budget planned at roughly 60% of total campaign cost
- ☐ Digital PR campaign angle tested with two journalists before production
- ☐ Annual refresh scheduled for evergreen assets

Outreach operations

- ☐ Dedicated sending domain warmed, with SPF, DKIM and DMARC configured
- ☐ Bounce rate under 2%; reply rate tracked weekly
- ☐ Every prospect has a recorded personalisation hook
- ☐ Three-touch cadence enforced; no fourth follow-up
- ☐ 90-day cool-down respected for non-responders
- ☐ All placements logged with URL, date, anchor, target and cost in hours

Reclamation and brand

- ☐ Brand mention alerts configured and reviewed weekly
- ☐ Unlinked mentions converted on a rolling basis
- ☐ Broken and lost backlinks recovered monthly
- ☐ Partner, supplier, employee and association profiles linked
- ☐ Reviews requested systematically and 100% answered
- ☐ Organization schema with complete sameAs profile links live

Risk and reporting

- ☐ Manual actions and security issues checked weekly
- ☐ Anchor distribution reviewed monthly against target
- ☐ Link velocity monitored for unexplained spikes
- ☐ Disavow file version-controlled with a dated reason log
- ☐ Monthly six-slide report delivered on the agreed date
- ☐ Cost per quality link reviewed and the mix rebalanced quarterly

PILLAR 4

Content Strategy

Owning the subject rather than the keyword. The engine that gives on-page something to optimise and off-page something worth promoting.

IN THIS SECTION

- Topical authority and cluster architecture
- Content types mapped to the funnel
- Briefs, production and editorial workflow
- Refreshing, pruning and consolidating
- Programmatic and scaled content, done safely
- Optimising for AI answer engines
- The content checklist



PILLAR 4 • CONTENT STRATEGY

Topical authority

Ranking for one keyword is a tactic. Being the site a search engine associates with an entire subject is a position — and it is what makes every subsequent page rank faster.

The cluster model

A topic cluster is one comprehensive pillar page supported by focused sub-pages, all interlinked. The pillar targets the broad head term; the cluster pages target specific questions and sub-intents. Internal links flow up to the pillar and across between siblings.

1 Define the topic boundary

One subject you intend to own, framed as a customer problem rather than a keyword. Everything inside the boundary is in scope; everything outside is deliberately not.

2 Map every sub-intent

List every question, comparison, use case, objection and adjacent problem a buyer encounters. Aim for genuine completeness — typically 15–40 sub-topics.

3 Assign page types

Pillar, cluster article, comparison, tool, case study or landing page. One page per sub-intent, no overlaps.

4 Sequence by value and winnability

Publish the commercially valuable, winnable pages first so the cluster generates return while it is still being built.

5 Interlink deliberately at publish

Every new page links up to the pillar and sideways to two or three siblings; the pillar is updated to link down to the new page the same day.

6 Complete before you widen

A finished cluster outperforms three half-built ones. Resist starting a new topic until the current one is genuinely complete.

Depth compounds, breadth dilutes

Forty articles spread across eight unrelated topics will underperform forty articles that comprehensively cover two. Coverage of a whole subject is the signal that lets a site rank for terms it has never explicitly targeted.

Content types mapped to the funnel

Stage	Content type	Primary job	How success is measured
Awareness	Guides, explainers, industry data, opinion	Get discovered and earn links and mentions	Impressions, referring domains, branded search lift
Consideration	Comparisons, alternatives, reviews, calculators, case studies	Move a researching buyer toward a shortlist	Engaged sessions, assisted conversions, email signups
Decision	Product, service, pricing and location pages	Convert intent into revenue	Conversions, revenue, cost per acquisition

Stage	Content type	Primary job	How success is measured
Retention	Documentation, onboarding, support content	Reduce churn and support load	Support ticket deflection, product adoption
Authority	Original research, tools, annual reports	Earn links and cement the brand entity	Referring domains, press pickups, citations

The content brief — non-negotiable fields

An unbriefed writer produces content that must be rewritten. The brief is where SEO quality is actually decided.

Field	Detail required
Primary and secondary keywords	From the keyword map, with the owning URL confirmed
Search intent and SERP notes	Dominant format, average depth, SERP features present, referring-domain median of the top five
Audience and stage	Who is reading, what they already know, what they are deciding
Required subtopics	The entities and questions the page must cover to be considered complete
Angle and differentiator	The specific reason this page is better than the current top result
Original element	The data, test, interview, screenshot set or tool that competitors cannot copy
Internal links	Which pages this must link to, and which existing pages must link to it
Call to action	The single action this page should drive
Format requirements	Target depth, heading structure, tables, images, schema type
Author and reviewer	Named writer and named subject-matter reviewer

Editorial workflow

- 1 Brief**
Owned by SEO. Nothing enters production without one.
- 2 Draft**
Written by a subject-capable writer against the brief.
- 3 Expert review**
A practitioner checks accuracy and adds first-hand insight. This is what makes content defensible.
- 4 SEO QA**
The on-page checklist from Pillar 2, applied as a gate.
- 5 Publish and interlink**
Live, internally linked in both directions, submitted for indexing.
- 6 Promote**
Handed to the off-page team as a distribution asset, not left to be discovered.

7 Review at 30/60/90 days

Position, clicks, conversions. Decide: keep, improve, consolidate or prune.

Refreshing, pruning and consolidating

On any site older than eighteen months, improving what exists usually beats publishing something new — on both cost and speed to result.

Signal	Diagnosis	Action
Ranked well, now slipping	Content has aged; competitors have updated	Refresh: update data, add missing subtopics, improve the intro, republish with a new date
Positions 5–15, stable, good content	Authority deficit	Hand to off-page as a link target; add internal links from strong pages
High impressions, very low CTR	Title and snippet failing	Rewrite the title and meta description; test and measure in Search Console
Traffic but no conversions	Wrong intent or weak template	Re-map to the correct intent, or add a relevant conversion path
No impressions after six months	Not competitive or not indexed	Consolidate into a stronger page, or prune with a 301
Two pages splitting one query	Cannibalisation	Merge into one authoritative page and redirect the weaker URL

Pruning is not deleting

Redirect pruned URLs to the closest relevant page so any links they hold are preserved. Delete only genuinely worthless pages with no backlinks, no traffic and no strategic purpose — and check the backlink profile before you do.

Scaled and programmatic content

Templated pages built from a structured dataset — location pages, integration pages, comparison pages — can be extraordinarily effective or catastrophically thin. The dividing line is whether each page contains genuinely unique, useful information.

Do

- Build on a real dataset where every page carries different, substantive facts.
- Add unique media, reviews or local detail per page.
- Launch a controlled batch, measure indexation, then scale.
- Interlink the set and provide a genuine index page.

Do not

- Spin one template with only a city or product name swapped.
- Publish ten thousand URLs in one week on a young domain.
- Generate content wholesale with AI and publish it unreviewed.
- Index pages with no search demand behind them.

Optimising for AI answer engines

A growing share of search journeys end in a generated answer. The optimisation overlaps heavily with good SEO, but three things matter disproportionately.

- **Extractable structure.** Clear question-formatted headings with direct, self-contained answers beneath them are far easier for a model to lift and cite than flowing narrative.

- **Verifiable specificity.** Named sources, dates, figures and methodology make a passage safe to cite. Vague claims are skipped.
- **Corroborated brand entity.** Models synthesise across sources. Being described consistently across many independent sites — the direct output of Pillar 3 — is what makes you the brand that gets named.
- **Freshness signals.** Visible last-updated dates and genuinely current data increase the odds of selection for time-sensitive queries.
- **Measure it.** Track brand mentions in AI answers for your priority queries the same way you track rankings, and watch for the shift from clicks toward impressions and branded search.

Content operations and cadence

Activity	Cadence	Owner	Output
Keyword map review	Monthly	SEO lead	Updated priorities and new gaps
Brief writing	Weekly	SEO lead	Two to four briefs
Publishing	Weekly	Editor	Agreed volume, quality-gated
Internal link sweep	Monthly	SEO lead	New pages linked from existing content
Performance review	Monthly	SEO lead	Keep / improve / consolidate / prune decisions
Content refresh batch	Quarterly	Editor	Five to fifteen pages updated
Content audit	Annually	SEO lead	Full inventory with an action per URL
Cluster planning	Quarterly	SEO + business lead	Next topic boundary defined

Content checklist

Strategy

- ☐ Topic boundaries defined; current cluster documented with all sub-intents
- ☐ Every planned page mapped to a single intent and a single URL
- ☐ Publishing sequence ordered by commercial value and winnability
- ☐ Pillar page live and linking down to every cluster page

Production

- ☐ Every page produced from a complete brief — no exceptions
- ☐ Named author with real, relevant credentials
- ☐ Subject-matter expert review completed before publication
- ☐ At least one original element per page: data, test, imagery, quote
- ☐ On-page QA checklist passed
- ☐ Handed to the off-page team as a promotion asset

Maintenance

- ☐ 30/60/90-day review scheduled for every new page
- ☐ Quarterly refresh batch selected from the decay report
- ☐ Cannibalisation check run quarterly
- ☐ Annual full content audit with a decision recorded per URL
- ☐ Redirects in place for every pruned or consolidated URL
- ☐ Decay report reviewed monthly for pages losing position or clicks
- ☐ Updated dates and changelogs shown on substantially revised pages
- ☐ Top-performing pages checked quarterly for accuracy and broken links

The compounding library

Treat published content as inventory, not output. A library of two hundred pages where every page is reviewed annually, internally linked and genuinely current will out-earn a library of six hundred pages that nobody has touched since publication — at a fraction of the ongoing cost.

PILLAR 5

Analytics & Tracking

Knowing what worked, what it was worth, and what to do next. Without this pillar, every other pillar is guesswork with a budget attached.

IN THIS SECTION

- The measurement framework and KPI tree
- Tool stack and configuration
- Search Console and GA4 setup
- Attribution and conversion tracking
- Dashboards and reporting cadence
- Forecasting and proving ROI
- The analytics checklist



PILLAR 5 · ANALYTICS & TRACKING

The measurement framework

Rankings are a diagnostic, not a goal. Build the measurement layer so that every SEO activity can be traced to a business outcome — or consciously accepted as a leading indicator.

The KPI tree

Level	Metric	Who cares	Review
Business outcome	Organic revenue, qualified leads, pipeline, cost per acquisition	Leadership	Monthly / quarterly
Channel performance	Non-brand organic sessions, conversion rate, revenue per session	Marketing lead	Monthly
Visibility	Share of voice, average position, keywords in top 3 and top 10, impressions	SEO lead	Weekly
Authority	Referring domains, quality ratio, gap versus competitors, branded search	SEO lead	Monthly
Content	Pages published, pages ranking, decay rate, clicks per page	Content lead	Monthly
Technical health	Indexation rate, Core Web Vitals pass rate, crawl errors	SEO / dev	Weekly

Separate brand from non-brand — always

Branded organic traffic mostly reflects demand you created elsewhere. Blending it into your SEO reporting makes a paid campaign or a PR spike look like an SEO win, and hides genuine decline. Every dashboard in this roadmap should default to **non-brand**, with brand reported separately as a health indicator.

The tool stack

Layer	Purpose	Typical options
Search Console	Ground truth for queries, impressions, indexation	Google Search Console, Bing Webmaster Tools — both, always, free
Analytics	Sessions, engagement, conversions, revenue	GA4 plus a server-side or privacy-first alternative if needed
Rank tracking	Daily position monitoring by device and location	Any dedicated tracker — consistency matters more than brand
Crawler	Technical audits and internal link analysis	A desktop crawler plus a scheduled cloud crawl
Backlink data	Link acquisition, gap analysis, monitoring	At least two indexes — no single one is complete
Log analysis	Real crawler behaviour	Log analyser or a data warehouse query

Layer	Purpose	Typical options
Visualisation	Reporting and dashboards	Looker Studio or an equivalent BI layer
Outreach CRM	Prospect and placement pipeline	Dedicated outreach tool or a disciplined spreadsheet

Configuration that prevents bad decisions

Search Console

- Verify every property variant plus a domain property, so no data is silently missing.
- Connect to BigQuery or an export pipeline — the interface only retains sixteen months, and year-on-year analysis needs more.
- Build saved filters for non-brand queries, by page group and by country.
- Monitor the Page indexing and Core Web Vitals reports weekly, not when something breaks.

GA4

- Define conversions that map to real business value — not pageviews or scroll depth.
- Assign monetary values to lead events so organic can be compared with paid on the same basis.
- Exclude internal and agency traffic by IP, and filter known bot patterns.
- Configure cross-domain tracking if the checkout or booking flow sits on another domain.
- Create a dedicated organic-only exploration with non-brand landing page reporting.
- Check attribution settings and understand which model your reports use before quoting a number to anyone.

Attribution: what SEO is actually worth

Last-click attribution systematically undervalues SEO, because organic search dominates the early research phase and is often the first touch in a journey that closes through direct, email or paid brand.

Model	What it tells you	Watch out for
Last click	Which channel closed the sale	Undervalues discovery and research content
First click	Which channel created the demand	Overvalues top-of-funnel, ignores the closing effort
Data-driven	A weighted view across the path	Opaque; requires sufficient conversion volume to be reliable
Assisted conversions	How often organic appears anywhere in the path	The most honest single view of SEO's contribution
Incrementality testing	What genuinely would not have happened otherwise	Costly and slow — but the only true answer

Agree the model before the programme starts

The most common source of conflict in SEO reporting is that the agency reports assisted conversions and the client reports last-click revenue. Agree one primary model, document it, and report against it consistently — then show the alternatives as context.

Dashboards and reporting cadence

Report	Audience	Frequency	Contents
Health check	SEO team	Weekly	Indexation, crawl errors, manual actions, Core Web Vitals, ranking movement, new links
Performance dashboard	Marketing lead	Live / monthly	Non-brand clicks and impressions, conversions, revenue, top movers up and down
Off-page report	Marketing lead	Monthly	The six slides from Pillar 3: position, acquisition, highlights, pipeline, impact, next
Executive summary	Leadership	Monthly	One page: revenue contribution, progress against target, three wins, three risks, next month
Strategic review	Leadership	Quarterly	Roadmap progress, competitive shifts, budget reallocation, next quarter's plan
Annual audit	All	Yearly	Full technical, content and link audit; roadmap rewritten

Reporting principles

- **Lead with the business metric.** Revenue and leads first, rankings last.
- **Always show the trend.** A single month is noise; twelve months is a signal. Include year-on-year to neutralise seasonality.
- **Explain the why, not just the what.** 'Clicks fell 8%' is data. 'Clicks fell 8% because a competitor won the featured snippet on our top query' is a report.
- **Report the misses.** Credibility comes from naming what did not work before anyone asks.
- **Every report ends with decisions.** What we are doing next, what we need, and by when.

Forecasting organic growth

A defensible forecast is a range built from evidence, not a promise. Use it to set expectations and to prioritise, never to guarantee.

- 1 Start from mapped keyword demand**
Total monthly search volume across the keyword map, segmented by priority tier.
- 2 Apply realistic click curves**
Model expected click-through at the position you plausibly reach, adjusted for the SERP features present on each query.
- 3 Apply a probability of success**
Weight each keyword by winnability, using the referring-domain gap as the primary input.
- 4 Convert to revenue**
 $\text{Sessions} \times \text{conversion rate} \times \text{average order or lead value}$, using your own historical figures.
- 5 Publish a range and the assumptions**
Conservative, expected and optimistic — with every assumption listed so the model can be challenged and corrected.

Analytics checklist

Foundations

- ☐ Search Console verified for all property variants, including a domain property
- ☐ Bing Webmaster Tools verified
- ☐ GSC data exported to a warehouse for retention beyond sixteen months
- ☐ GA4 installed, validated in real time, with no duplicate tags firing
- ☐ Internal and agency traffic excluded
- ☐ Cross-domain tracking configured where journeys span domains
- ☐ Consent mode and privacy compliance implemented for the relevant regions

Measurement

- ☐ Conversion events defined and mapped to real business value
- ☐ Monetary values assigned to lead events
- ☐ Brand and non-brand segments configured everywhere
- ☐ Rank tracking live for the priority keyword set, by device and location
- ☐ Backlink monitoring configured with new and lost link alerts
- ☐ Brand mention alerts configured
- ☐ Baseline snapshot archived before any work begins

Reporting

- ☐ Attribution model agreed and documented with the client or leadership
- ☐ Live dashboard built and shared with the right access
- ☐ Weekly health check automated and reviewed
- ☐ Monthly report template agreed, with a fixed delivery date
- ☐ Quarterly strategic review scheduled in calendars
- ☐ Annotations logged for every launch, migration, campaign and algorithm update

Annotate everything

Six months from now, nobody will remember why traffic jumped on the 14th. Keep a dated log of every deployment, content batch, PR campaign, tracking change and confirmed algorithm update. It turns unexplained noise into a causal record, and it is the cheapest analytics habit there is.

PILLAR 6

Execution & Governance

Strategy is the easy part. This section covers who does what, when, with what budget — and how to keep the programme alive when quarter three gets busy.

IN THIS SECTION

- The 12-month master plan
- The 30/60/90-day launch sprint
- Roles, ownership and the RACI model
- Budget allocation by stage
- KPI benchmarks and realistic targets
- The risk register
- Glossary and master checklist



EXECUTION

The 12-month master plan

Everything in the five pillars, sequenced into a single quarter-by-quarter plan with owners and exit conditions.

Quarter 1 — Foundation and first authority

Workstream	Deliverables	Owner
Technical	Full audit, priority fixes shipped, indexation resolved, Core Web Vitals on key templates	SEO + dev
On-page	Keyword map built, top 20 pages optimised, cannibalisation resolved	SEO lead
Off-page	Backlink audit, gap analysis, reclamation sweep, outreach infrastructure live, first asset published	Outreach lead
Content	Cluster one defined, first six briefs written and in production	Content lead
Analytics	Tracking verified, baseline archived, dashboards live, reporting cadence agreed	SEO lead

Quarter 2 — Relevance and momentum

Workstream	Deliverables	Owner
Technical	Second-tier fixes, schema rollout, monthly crawl cadence established	SEO + dev
On-page	Next 40 pages optimised, internal linking sweep, template CRO improvements	SEO lead
Off-page	Outreach engine at full volume, first digital PR campaign launched, guest programme running	Outreach lead
Content	Cluster one completed, cluster two defined, refresh batch one shipped	Content lead
Analytics	Attribution agreed, forecast published, first quarterly review delivered	SEO lead

Quarter 3 — Authority at scale

Workstream	Deliverables	Owner
Technical	Log file review, performance regression monitoring, migration support if required	SEO + dev
On-page	Optimisation driven by decay reports; snippet and CTR testing programme	SEO lead
Off-page	Second and third PR campaigns, channel mix rebalanced on cost per quality link, anchor review	Outreach lead
Content	Cluster two in production, annual flagship asset scoped	Content lead
Analytics	Incrementality view, cost per acquisition by content cluster	SEO lead

Quarter 4 — Compounding and consolidation

Workstream	Deliverables	Owner
Technical	Annual technical audit, next-year infrastructure roadmap	SEO + dev
On-page	Full content audit with keep/improve/consolidate/prune decisions	SEO lead
Off-page	Flagship annual asset promoted, relationship list consolidated into a repeatable media network	Outreach lead
Content	Cluster two completed, cluster three planned, refresh batch two shipped	Content lead
Analytics	Year-in-review, next-year forecast, budget case for renewal	SEO lead

The 30/60/90-day launch sprint

If you take one page from this document into next week, take this one.

First 30 days — see clearly

- ☐ Access secured: Search Console, analytics, CMS, hosting, rank tracker, backlink tools
- ☐ Baseline snapshot archived: rankings, traffic, conversions, referring domains, indexed pages
- ☐ Business goals translated into SEO targets with agreed definitions
- ☐ Competitor set defined — the three sites actually beating you in the SERP, not the ones sales worries about
- ☐ Full technical crawl completed and issues triaged by impact
- ☐ Keyword research completed and the keyword-to-URL map drafted
- ☐ Backlink audit and link gap analysis completed
- ☐ Tracking verified end to end; dashboards built
- ☐ Quick wins shipped: critical technical fixes, title rewrites on high impression / low CTR pages, reclamation outreach
- ☐ Roadmap presented and signed off with owners and dates

Days 31–60 — build the machine

- ☐ Priority technical fixes deployed and verified in production
- ☐ Top 20 pages optimised against the on-page checklist
- ☐ Cannibalisation resolved; internal linking sweep completed
- ☐ First cluster briefs written; production running weekly
- ☐ Outreach infrastructure warmed and first campaigns live
- ☐ First linkable asset published and promoted
- ☐ Weekly health check and monthly report templates operational

Days 61–90 — push and prove

- ☐ Digital PR campaign launched
- ☐ Guest contribution programme producing published placements
- ☐ Second batch of pages optimised; first refresh batch shipped
- ☐ Schema rolled out across all major templates
- ☐ First quarterly review delivered with results against baseline
- ☐ Channel mix rebalanced using measured cost per quality link
- ☐ Quarter two plan agreed, resourced and calendared

The rule that saves programmes

Ship something every single week. SEO dies in the gap between an excellent audit and the first deployment. A mediocre fix shipped in week two beats a perfect fix still in the backlog in month four.

Roles and ownership

Role	Owns	Typical time commitment
SEO lead	Strategy, keyword map, prioritisation, reporting, quality gates	Full ownership; 40–60% of programme time
Outreach specialist	Prospecting, outreach, placements, CRM hygiene, off-page reporting	Full-time for a serious off-page programme
Content lead / editor	Briefs, production, editorial standards, refresh cycle	Full-time above four pieces per month
Writers	Drafting against briefs	Variable by volume
Subject-matter expert	Accuracy review, original insight, quotes	2–4 hours per week
Developer	Technical fixes, performance, schema, migrations	Heavy in month one, then a standing monthly allocation
Designer	Linkable assets, data visualisation, templates	Project-based, concentrated around campaigns
Business sponsor	Budget, approvals, unblocking dependencies	One hour per month, reliably

RACI for the critical decisions

Decision	Responsible	Accountable	Consulted	Informed
Keyword targets	SEO lead	Business sponsor	Sales, content	All
Technical fix priority	SEO lead	Dev lead	Product	All
Content topics	Content lead	SEO lead	SME, sales	All
Link prospect approval	Outreach specialist	SEO lead	Brand / legal	Sponsor
PR campaign angle	Outreach lead	SEO lead	Brand, sponsor	All
Disavow changes	SEO lead	SEO lead	Sponsor	All
Budget reallocation	SEO lead	Business sponsor	Finance	All

Budget allocation by stage

Category	Months 1–3	Months 4–9	Months 10–12
Technical and development	35%	10%	10%
Content production	25%	30%	30%

Category	Months 1–3	Months 4–9	Months 10–12
Off-page and digital PR	20%	45%	45%
Tools and data	10%	7%	7%
Analytics and reporting	10%	8%	8%

Indicative only. Technical spend front-loads because most fixes are one-off; off-page and content spend rises because both are ongoing and both compound.

KPI benchmarks and realistic targets

Use these as sanity checks when setting targets. They vary enormously by niche, domain age and starting position — always calibrate against your own competitor set.

Metric	Month 3	Month 6	Month 12
Indexation of priority URLs	>90%	>95%	>98%
Core Web Vitals passing (key templates)	1 of 3	3 of 3	3 of 3, maintained
Keywords in top 10 (non-brand)	Baseline +15–30%	+50–100%	+150–300%
New referring domains per month	5–10	10–20	15–30
Quality ratio of new links	>60%	>70%	>75%
Non-brand organic clicks	Flat to +15%	+30–60%	+80–200%
Branded search impressions	Flat	+10–25%	+30–80%
Organic conversion rate	Baseline	+10%	+20–40%
Pages earning organic clicks	+20%	+60%	+150%

The risk register

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Dev capacity blocks technical fixes	High	High	Agree a standing monthly dev allocation in the contract; batch fixes into sprints
Content approval bottleneck	High	High	Fixed review SLA, named approver, default-approve after the deadline
Off-page budget cut mid-programme	Medium	High	Report leading indicators monthly so value is visible before rankings move
Core algorithm update	Certain	Medium	Diversify traffic sources; never rely on a single query cluster; hold a recovery playbook
Competitor outspends on content and links	Medium	Medium	Compete on depth and niche ownership rather than volume
Site migration or replatform	Medium	Very high	SEO involved from day one; migration checklist enforced as a release gate

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Low-quality links from a past vendor	Medium	Medium	Full audit at onboarding; documented removal and disavow policy
Key person leaves	Medium	Medium	Everything documented in this roadmap and the shared trackers, not in someone's head
AI answers reduce click-through	High	Medium	Optimise for citation and brand mention; shift measurement toward branded demand and conversions

Glossary

Term	Meaning
Anchor text	The visible, clickable words of a hyperlink
Canonical tag	Markup declaring the preferred URL when several show similar content
Cannibalisation	Two or more pages on one site competing for the same query
Citation (local)	A mention of a business name, address and phone number on another site
Core Web Vitals	Google's field-data metrics for loading, responsiveness and visual stability
Crawl budget	The resources a search engine will spend crawling your site in a given period
Disavow	Telling a search engine to ignore specified inbound links
E-E-A-T	Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness and Trust — quality-rater concepts
Entity	A distinct thing — a brand, person, place — that a search engine understands and connects
Hreflang	Markup declaring language and regional targeting for alternate versions of a page
Indexation	Whether a URL is stored and eligible to appear in search results
Linkable asset	A page created primarily to earn links and citations
Link velocity	The rate at which new links are acquired over time
Nofollow / sponsored / ugc	Attributes signalling that a link should not pass ranking credit
Orphan page	A page with no internal links pointing to it
Referring domain	A unique website linking to you — the unit that matters, not raw link count
Schema / structured data	Standardised markup describing page content to machines
SERP	Search engine results page
Share of voice	Your visibility across a keyword set relative to competitors
Topic cluster	A pillar page plus interlinked supporting pages covering one subject comprehensively
TTFB	Time to First Byte — server response speed
Unlinked mention	Your brand referenced on another site without a hyperlink

One-page master checklist

The whole roadmap, compressed. Print it, pin it, review it monthly.

Technical

- ☐ Crawl clean, robots and sitemaps correct, no accidental noindex
- ☐ Priority pages within three clicks; no orphans
- ☐ Core Web Vitals passing on key templates
- ☐ Rendered HTML contains content and links; mobile parity confirmed
- ☐ Schema live and validating on every template

On-page

- ☐ Keyword-to-URL map maintained; one intent per URL
- ☐ Titles, metas and headings optimised on all priority pages
- ☐ Cannibalisation resolved; consolidation done
- ☐ Internal links added in both directions for every new page
- ☐ Every page carries an original element

Off-page — the priority

- ☐ Backlink audit and competitor gap analysis current
- ☐ Quality scorecard applied to every single prospect
- ☐ Linkable asset always in production
- ☐ Outreach infrastructure healthy; three-touch cadence enforced
- ☐ Digital PR campaign running each quarter
- ☐ Reclamation sweep run monthly
- ☐ Anchor distribution reviewed monthly against target
- ☐ Placements logged with cost; mix rebalanced quarterly
- ☐ Manual actions checked weekly; disavow log version-controlled

Content

- ☐ Current cluster fully mapped and being completed before the next starts
- ☐ Every page produced from a complete brief and expert-reviewed
- ☐ Refresh batch shipped each quarter
- ☐ Annual full content audit with a decision per URL

Analytics

- ☐ GSC and GA4 verified, clean and exporting to storage
- ☐ Brand and non-brand separated everywhere
- ☐ Attribution model agreed and documented
- ☐ Weekly health check, monthly report, quarterly review — all calendared
- ☐ Every change annotated

Where to start

Do not try to run all five pillars at full intensity from week one. Take the 30/60/90-day sprint, secure access, archive a baseline, and ship something in week one. Fix the foundation in month one. Get the keyword map right in month two. Then put real, sustained weight behind off-page — because that is the pillar that decides how high the ceiling goes, and it is the one almost everyone under-resources.

Consistency beats intensity. A team that ships one good page and three good links every week for a year will beat a team that does a brilliant quarter and then stops.

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This roadmap is a living document. Revisit it quarterly, mark what is done, and rewrite what the data proves wrong.