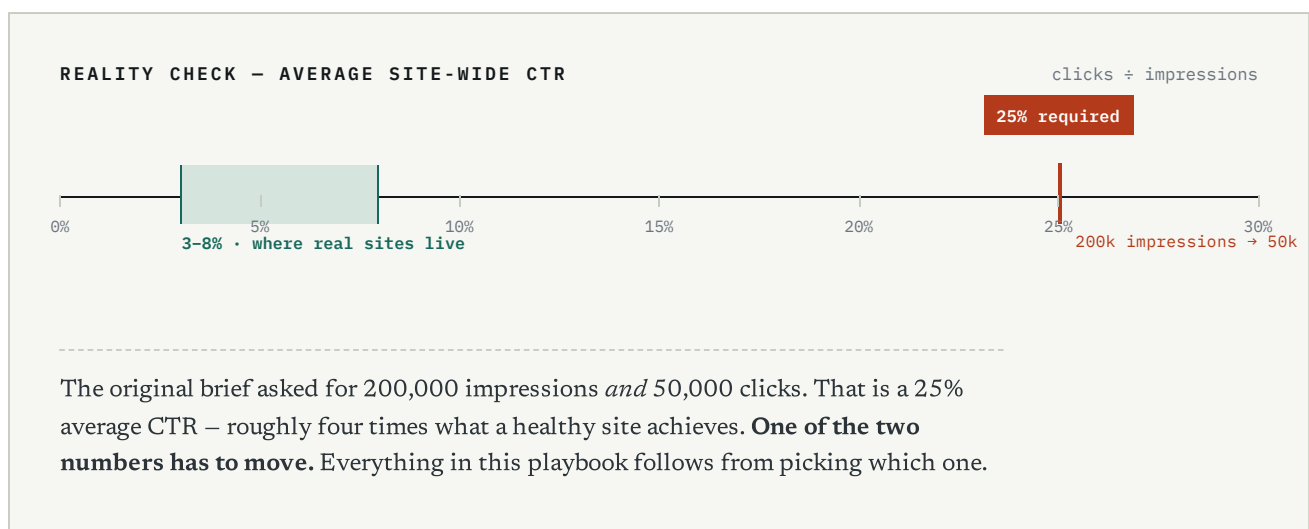


Stop counting impressions. Count what clicks.

An operating plan for taking a business site from almost no organic footprint to a traffic engine that survives contact with the current search results page.



FOR SITES UNDER ~1K IMPRESSIONS/MO

HORIZON: 3-9 MONTHS

12 SECTIONS

CONTENTS

- | | | | |
|----|------------------------|----|---------------------|
| 00 | Fix the target | 06 | Authority & local |
| 01 | What changed in search | 07 | Compound |
| 02 | Diagnose first | 08 | Honest measurement |
| 03 | Foundation | 09 | 90 days, with gates |
| 04 | Capture what you have | 10 | The non-negotiables |
| 05 | Coverage that clicks | 11 | How this fails |

Fix the target before you plan anything

Site-wide CTR sits at roughly 3–8%. The top organic result earns 20–30% – but only when it is the first thing on the page, which it increasingly isn't. So pick a version of the goal and commit to it.

SCENARIO A RECOMMENDED 200k → 12–20k IMPRESSIONS CLICKS Needs 6–10% CTR Achievable in 6–9 months in a normal niche. A genuinely strong outcome.	SCENARIO B LONG HAUL 600–900k → 50k IMPRESSIONS CLICKS Needs 6–8% CTR Holds the click target by finding 3–5× the content and authority. Plan on 12–18 months.	SCENARIO C NOT AN SEO GOAL 200k → 50k IMPRESSIONS CLICKS Needs 25% CTR Only possible if most queries are branded or bottom-funnel and you rank first. That's a brand-building programme.
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Target **Scenario A**, and put a second number beside it: **organic-sourced leads or revenue**. Twenty thousand clicks from commercial-intent queries beats fifty thousand from “what is [topic]” – and the second one is what most sites accidentally build.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Impressions are the cheapest metric to inflate and the least connected to money. Rank a thin page on page four for a high-volume term and you have “grown impressions” while earning nothing. Never report impressions without CTR and conversions beside them.

What changed in search, and what stopped working

Plan against the results page that exists now, not the 2019 one.

- **AI Overviews and AI Mode absorb informational clicks.** Definitions, quick how-tos and “how many” queries resolve on the results page. You still collect the impression; you don't get the click. So down-weight pure informational content and up-weight queries where the user must reach a site to finish the job – compare, price, buy, book, download, configure, contact, see examples.
- **Assistants are a second discovery surface.** People ask ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini and Copilot for recommendations. Being mentioned and cited across the web – reviews, listicles, forums, comparison sites – now shapes whether you appear in those answers. That rewards PR and reputation work over keyword density.

- **Scaled low-value content is an explicit spam violation.** Google's 2024 policy on scaled content abuse makes volume-for-volume's-sake a downside risk, not a neutral bet. This changes both cadence and programmatic strategy.

CORRECTION TO V1

FAQ and HowTo rich results are effectively gone – since 2023 FAQ results appear only for authoritative health and government sites, and HowTo was retired. Keep FAQs if users need them, but don't budget effort for the SERP feature. And FAQ markup never drove People Also Ask: PAA is generated from content, not schema.

02

Diagnose before you produce

Two hours here saves two months of misdirected writing.

Pick your archetype – the plan diverges sharply

- **Local service business.** Google Business Profile, reviews and service-in-city pages carry about 70% of the result. Content is secondary. Fastest archetype to reach large impression numbers.
- **Ecommerce.** Category and product pages, structured data, and “best X for Y” comparisons. Blog posts are support, not the engine.
- **SaaS / B2B.** Use-case, integration, alternative-to and pricing pages. Long sales cycle, so weight toward commercial intent early.
- **Content / media.** Volume genuinely is the engine – and this is the archetype most exposed to AI Overviews.

Then run a can-I-rank check on your top 20 keywords

1. **What page type ranks?** If the top ten are product pages, a blog post will not rank. Match the format.
2. **Who ranks?** All Reddit, Amazon and DR-80 publishers means skip it for now. Note it for month nine.
3. **Is there an AI Overview?** If yes and the answer is complete, expect low CTR even at position one. Deprioritise.
4. **Domain age.** New domains commonly see 3–6 muted months regardless of quality. Front-load work that pays before authority arrives: local, branded and ultra-long-tail.

Keep only the keywords that survive all four filters. That list is your real plan.

03

Foundation – week one

- **Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools.** Search Console is the scoreboard; Bing matters as an assistant-adjacent index.

- **Submit a sitemap, then verify indexing** in the Pages report. On a small site, “Discovered – currently not indexed” is usually a quality or internal-linking signal rather than a technical bug: Google found the page and chose not to bother. Fix it by improving the page and linking to it from something that already ranks.
- **Crawlability.** Clean `robots.txt`, no stray `noindex`, every page reachable in three clicks or fewer.
- **One canonical domain.** HTTPS, no duplicate homepages, no parameter-driven duplicates.
- **Core Web Vitals.** LCP under 2.5s, minimal layout shift, WebP images, lazy-loading. Speed rarely wins rankings on its own; it does stop you losing clicks.
- **Conversion tracking is not optional.** Tie organic sessions to form fills, calls, bookings or purchases. Without it you can't tell a good month from a busy one.

SET THIS UP ON DAY ONE

Save two Search Console segments – **branded** (a query regex for your business name and its misspellings) and **non-branded** (the inverse). Branded traffic inflates your CTR and hides whether SEO is actually working. Always read both lines.

04

Capture what you already have — weeks 1–4

You almost certainly have latent rankings. Harvest before you write.

Striking distance, corrected

v1 said positions 8–20. Tighten it: **positions 5–12 is where a push pays fastest**. Fifteen to ten changes almost nothing in clicks; eight to four changes a lot. Work the closest cases first – put the exact query in the title and H1, expand the section matching the query's intent, add the sub-questions Search Console shows you, then request indexing.

High-impression, zero-click queries

Filter for queries with real impressions and CTR under 1%. Two diagnoses, two different fixes:

- Ranking 3–10 with a weak title → **rewrite the title**.
- Ranking 3–10 with a good title and still no clicks → **intent mismatch, or an AI Overview is eating it**. Change the page type or drop the term. Don't keep polishing.

Title and meta rewrites

Lead with the keyword. Add specificity a competitor can't copy – a number, a constraint, a format (“for six-person teams”, “no-code”, “with

template”). Keep under about 60 characters. Promise a concrete answer in the description.

Treat titles as **experiments, not fixes**: change one, wait 14–21 days, compare CTR at a comparable average position. A lift that came from a position improvement teaches you nothing.

Kill keyword cannibalisation

Search `site:yourdomain.com [keyword]`. If three pages half-target the same query, none will rank. Consolidate into the strongest, redirect the rest, reclaim the internal links. This is a common cause of stalled sites and it's missing from most playbooks.

Own your brand and near-brand terms

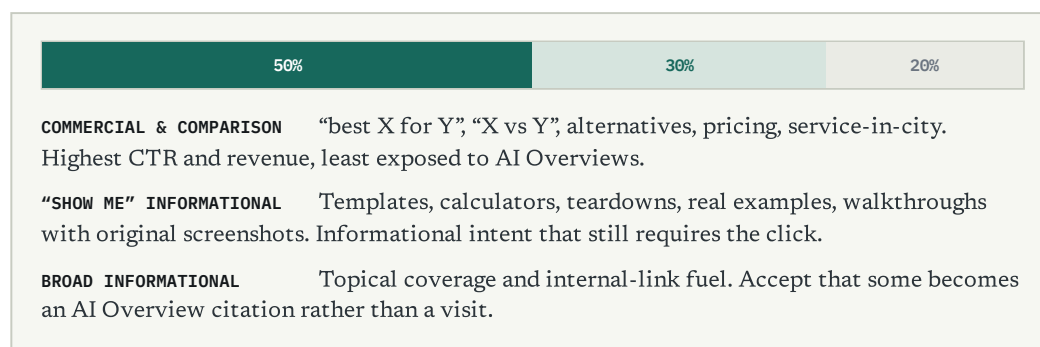
`[brand]` `[brand] reviews` `[brand] pricing` `[brand] vs [competitor]` `[brand] + city`. These convert best and carry 30–60% CTR. Write your own comparison and pricing pages before a review site does it for you.

05

Build coverage that earns clicks — weeks 2–12

One pillar page on your money topic, plus 10–30 supporting pages answering specific sub-questions, linked up to the pillar and across to each other. That builds topical depth and gives every new page an internal link on day one.

Weight the calendar toward clickable intent



Brief from the results page, not from a keyword tool

Open the top five. Note what all of them cover (table stakes), what none of them cover (your angle), and the format Google is rewarding. Then write something *more specific* – not longer.

Cadence tied to capacity, not ambition

Three to five pages a week is right for a team with a dedicated writer. For one person also running a business, **one or two genuinely strong pages a week will outperform four mediocre ones** – and won't put you near

scaled-content territory. Sixty thin pages is a liability; twenty excellent ones compound.

Add something uncopyable to every page

Original data, your own screenshots, a real customer example, a downloadable template, a number you measured. This is the experience signal in E-E-A-T, and it's also what gets you cited by other sites and by AI answers.

SET KILL CRITERIA IN ADVANCE

A page indexed for 90 days, refreshed once, still below position 20 with negligible impressions is not “still ramping”. Consolidate it into a stronger page or delete it. Pruning dead weight measurably helps some sites.

06

Authority, reputation and local — weeks 4–16

Coverage buys impressions. Authority buys top-five positions, and that is where the clicks live.

Links you don't have to beg for

- **Original data.** A small survey, an analysis of your own aggregate numbers, a state-of-the-industry report. Journalists link to statistics, not to opinions.
- **Free tools and templates.** A calculator or checklist gets linked and re-linked for years.
- **Journalist request platforms** – Connectively, Featured, Qwoted – for high-authority citations.
- **Podcasts and guest contributions** in your niche: links plus the brand exposure that drives branded search.
- **Unlinked mentions.** Find sites naming you without a link, and ask.
- **Competitor link gap.** See who links to competitors, then pitch the ones with a reason to link to you.

Quality over count. Ten relevant links beat two hundred directory submissions, and cheap bulk link buying is now a reliable way to hurt yourself.

Be the recommended answer

Get onto the third-party listicles, comparison sites, review platforms and subreddits where your category is discussed. That drives referral traffic, branded search, and inclusion in AI-generated recommendations – three payoffs from one activity.

Local SEO – the highest-leverage lever if you serve an area

- **Google Business Profile.** Every field complete, correct primary category, real photos, services list, weekly posts.
- **Reviews, collected continuously.** Ask every satisfied customer, respond to all of them. This moves Map Pack ranking more than almost anything else available to you.
- **Consistent name, address and phone** across major directories and your own site.
- **Service × location pages** – but only for areas you genuinely serve, each with real local content: actual projects, local specifics, your own photos. Twelve real city pages beat two hundred templated ones.

SEQUENCING

Map Pack and local finder impressions can reach tens of thousands per month for a single business. If you're local, do this before you write a single blog post.

07

Compound – ongoing

The refresh loop

Still the highest-ROI activity available. Every six to eight weeks, revisit pages that already rank: update stats and screenshots, add the new sub-questions Search Console surfaced, strengthen internal links, request indexing.

CORRECTION TO V1

Update the content, *then* update the date. Changing the year in a title without changing what's underneath is a bait-and-switch that erodes trust and gets caught.

Internal linking

Each new page links out to three to five relevant pages and earns three to five links in. Point links from your strongest pages at what you most want to rank. Use descriptive anchors – but *vary* them. Fifty internal links with identical exact-match anchor text reads as manipulation, not helpfulness.

Programmatic pages, with a hard quality gate

If you have genuinely structured data – locations, integrations, use cases, product comparisons – templated pages can add ranking coverage fast. Three guardrails: every page carries data unique to that page; every page answers something a person would actually search for; and every page passes the test “*would this justify existing if search engines didn't?*” Launch 50, measure indexation and engagement, then scale. Launching 5,000 at once is how sites get classified as scaled content abuse.

Structured data that still earns something

Product, review, breadcrumb, article, LocalBusiness and Organization markup. Skip FAQ and HowTo as a rich-result play. Also: descriptive image filenames and alt text, and video where it fits – image and video search are underused impression sources.

08

Measurement that doesn't lie to you

WEEKLY

Leading indicators – these move first

- Pages indexed vs pages published
- Query counts in positions 1-3 / 4-10 / 11-20
- New queries appearing at all
- Links and mentions earned

MONTHLY

Lagging indicators – the actual result

- Impressions and clicks, split branded vs non-branded
- CTR by position bucket
- Organic-sourced leads, calls, bookings, revenue
- Top gaining and top losing pages

Count queries per position bucket rather than tracking average position – averaging unrelated queries produces a number that can worsen precisely because you started ranking for more things. Compare month over month against the same period type, and expect seasonality: a flat month in your industry's dead season isn't a failure.

09

Ninety days, with decision gates

WEEKS	FOCUS	GATE – IF THIS ISN'T TRUE, STOP AND DIAGNOSE
1	Foundation, tracking, keyword filtering	Everything crawlable, indexed and measurable
1-4	Striking distance, titles, cannibalisation, brand terms	CTR up on rewritten pages at comparable position
2-12	Cluster engine at sustainable cadence	At least 80% of new pages indexed within three weeks
4-16	Links, reviews, local, PR, repurposing	First non-branded top-five rankings have appeared
12	Checkpoint	Non-branded impressions up 5× or more, and at least one page converting. If not, the problem is targeting or authority – not volume. Writing more will not fix it.
Ongoing	Refresh, prune, internal links, programmatic	Older pages growing, not decaying

The seven non-negotiables

- 01 Set a target that is arithmetically possible, with a revenue metric beside it.
 - 02 Fix indexing first. Unindexed pages earn nothing.
 - 03 Harvest positions 5–12 and rewrite titles before writing anything new.
 - 04 Filter every keyword against the live results page – page type, competitors, AI Overview presence.
 - 05 Weight production toward commercial and comparison intent.
 - 06 Earn reviews, mentions and links. The ceiling on your rankings is trust, not word count.
 - 07 Refresh, internally link and prune, so wins compound instead of decaying.
-

How this usually fails

-
- ✗ **Volume without intent.** Sixty informational posts, plenty of impressions, no leads.
 - ✗ **Chasing head terms you can't win.** Six months on one keyword owned by a DR-85 publisher.
 - ✗ **Format mismatch.** Blog posts aimed at queries where Google only ranks product or category pages.
 - ✗ **No conversion tracking.** Traffic grows, nobody can prove it mattered, budget gets cut.
 - ✗ **Judging too early.** Real movement on a new domain typically starts in month three or four. Rewriting the strategy in week six guarantees you never find out whether it worked.
 - ✗ **Reporting average position.** A number that can get worse precisely because you started ranking for more things.
-

HONEST EXPECTATIONS

A low-competition local or long-tail niche executing this well can reach **100,000–200,000 monthly impressions in four to six months**. A competitive national niche should plan on nine to eighteen.

The variable that decides speed isn't cleverness. It's **sustained execution volume against correctly chosen targets** – which is why sections 00 and 02 come before all the tactics.