

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION

The SEO Playbook.

How search engines rank pages, and what to do about it.
Rebuilt for a results page that now includes an AI answer.

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Two things rank a page.

Its structure, and who links to it.

Everything in this book is one of those two things, or a way to measure them.

What SEO is

Search Engine Optimisation is the work of structuring and writing a website so that search engines can understand it, trust it, and show it for the right searches. Done properly it brings in sales, not just visits.

Rankings are generated by machines. There is no manual review of your site, and no one at Google can be paid for a position. That is good news: the system can be observed, tested and learned. It is not rocket science. It is experimentation and iteration.

Four numbers worth knowing

INDEPENDENT STUDIES, 2025 TO 2026

27.6%

of clicks go to the first organic result. The top three take about half. Page two gets under 1%.

3.8×

more backlinks on the first result than on positions two to ten, across 11.8 million searches.

94%

of pages on the web have no backlinks at all. Most content is never cited by anyone.

–58%

clicks to top-ranking pages when Google shows an AI Overview above the results.

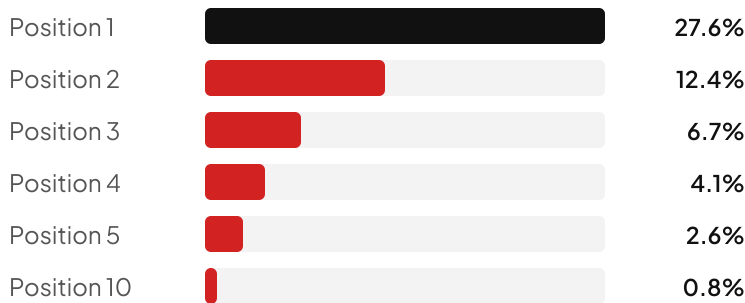
IN SHORT

Two things decide rankings: how a page is structured, and how many trusted sites link to it. The first is called on-page SEO and is entirely in your control. The second is called off-page SEO and takes longer. Content strategy alone can grow traffic. Content plus links wins.

How Google decides who gets the click

Google earns money when people click. The most important signal it watches is therefore the click-through rate: clicks divided by impressions. A listing that gets clicked more than expected for its position tends to rise. One that gets ignored tends to fall.

Organic click rate by position, 2026



21.7 million Search Console impressions. Position one was 39.8% before AI Overviews. The drop from first to second is the steepest step on the whole page.

FIG. 1 · A SEARCH LISTING

mojodojo.io › au › seo

SEO Services Melbourne | Mojo Dojo

Rank higher on Google with an SEO agency that reports revenue, not just rankings. Free audit for Australian businesses.

[Packages](#) [Results](#) [Contact](#)

Three parts: URL, title, description. Sitelinks appear sometimes. Every one of these is something you write.

The trade-off

A catchy title earns clicks but may say less about the page. A descriptive title ranks for the topic but is dull. The fix is to make the page structure carry the relevance, allow the title some freedom, and repair any lost authority with links.

TIP You do not need clickbait. Plain titles that answer the search directly often get the highest click rates. What kills a click rate is a title that is about something else.

Experience, expertise, authority, trust

Google's quality guidelines ask its human raters to judge pages on four things, and its systems are built to reward the same four. The framework was E-A-T for years. Experience was added in December 2022.

E

Experience

Has the author actually done or used the thing?

E

Expertise

Does the author know the subject in depth?

A

Authority

Do others in the field recognise and cite the site?

T

Trust

Is the page accurate, honest and safe? The one the others serve.

How to show it

- Write in depth. Long, complete pages on a topic demonstrate expertise better than many short ones.
- Show first-hand experience: your own photos, data, results and examples.
- Make contact details, ownership and policies easy to find.
- Put a named author on expert content, with a short bio and a date.
- Earn links from trusted sites. Inbound links are how authority is measured.
- Cite your sources. Unsupported claims read as low trust to readers and to machines.

NOTE Links from pages where the author is a named expert carry about 1.7 times the ranking effect of anonymous links. Authorship is no longer cosmetic.

Keywords are not topics

Google treats a keyword and a topic differently. “SEO” is a keyword. “Search engine optimisation” is a topic. Search for the first and the results are guides on how SEO works, not agencies who sell it. Google has learned from behaviour that people typing that word want to understand, not to buy.

So before you target a page at a set of words, look at what already ranks. If the results are guides and you are selling a service, you are aiming at the wrong page of results.

BROAD · LOW INTENT

“SEO”

14,800 searches a month in Australia. A student, a job candidate and a buyer all type it. Results are guides. Aim to rank in 12–24 months, not now.

SPECIFIC · HIGH INTENT

“expert SEO services”

Far fewer searches. Almost all of them from someone ready to hire. Results are agencies. This is where a service business starts.

Two rules

- 01 **One topic per page.** Keywords come in clusters of related words. A page can carry a cluster. It cannot carry two topics.
- 02 **Match the intent of the results.** If the first page is guides, write a guide. If it is product pages, build a product page. Google has already told you what it wants there.

Keyword research: finding the words

Keyword research is finding out what your customers type when they look for what you sell. It matters for two reasons. It proves there is demand before you write, and it puts the words people actually use into your pages. Roughly 90% of pages get no traffic from Google at all, usually because nobody searches for what they say.

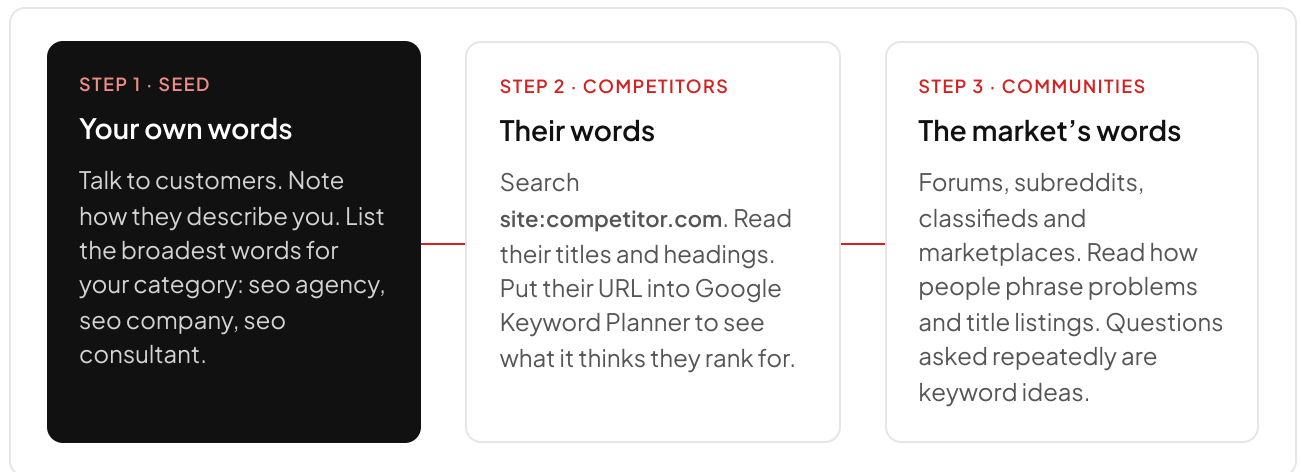


FIG. 2 · THREE SOURCES, ONE LIST. NONE BEATS SPEAKING TO YOUR CUSTOMERS DIRECTLY.

Who counts as a competitor

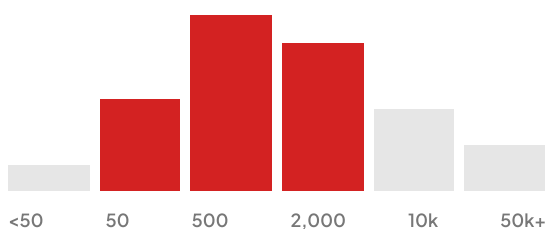
Not everyone who ranks for your words competes with you. A publisher ranking for “SEO” does not sell SEO. A real competitor matches you on location, primary product, domain extension and type of content. Do the exercise for each of them and keep the words that appear on every list.

TIP Ignore “top pages” reports on competitor sites. Their busiest pages are usually blog posts with little commercial value. Research the primary topics first; broaden later.

Choosing and mapping keywords

The sweet spot: 50 to 2,000

FIG. 3 · MONTHLY SEARCHES VS RETURN ON EFFORT



Under 50 searches a month rarely pays back. Over 2,000 draws heavier competition and needs more links. Between them is where most businesses should start.

Reading Keyword Planner

Avg. monthly searches	Twelve-month average. Demand.
Competition	Advertisers bidding. High means four ads sit above you.
YoY change	Trend. Growing terms are worth more than they look.
Top of page bid	What advertisers pay. A proxy for commercial value.

Keep medium-to-low competition, positive trend, good volume. Remove competitor brand names and tool names: they are someone else's traffic.

Keyword mapping

Group the surviving keywords into clusters. Each cluster becomes one page, with its own URL. The groups become the sections of your site. A service business is usually one level deep. Ecommerce may need two or three. Once every cluster has a page, the research is done, until you start ranking. Then it begins again.

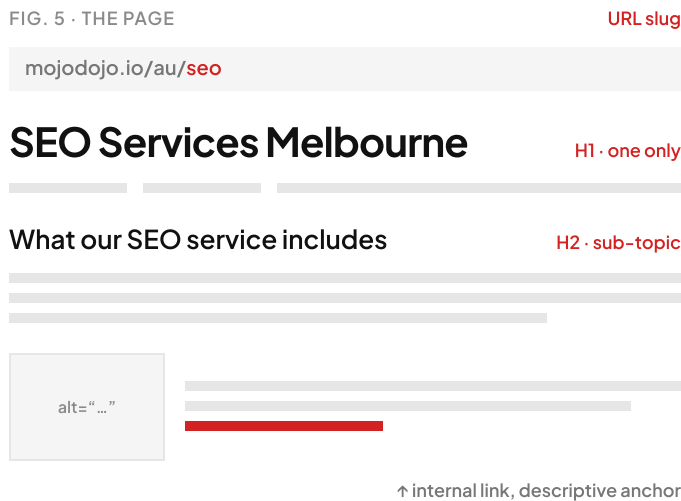


FIG. 4 · ONE CLUSTER, ONE PAGE. THE HUB ABOVE; THE CLUSTERS BENEATH IT.

The anatomy of a page

On-page SEO is the structure of the document. These elements are enough to reach page one. Getting from page one to position one is harder and takes links, but nothing below is optional.

FIG. 5 · THE PAGE



URL slug. Short, readable, one keyword, no parameters.

Title tag. Under 60 characters; matches the H1.

H1. One per page, the primary keyword, states what the page is.

H2 / H3. Sub-topics; where long-tail phrases live.

Body. Around 1,000 words does markedly better than 500.

Media. Named files, alt text, sized to fit, lazy-loaded.

Internal links. Often, with anchors that say where they go.

Structured data. Schema for what the page represents.

PRO TIP Install the Web Developer browser extension and use Information → View Document Outline on any page, including your competitors'. It shows the heading structure exactly as a crawler sees it.



Titles, descriptions and headings

The title

Google shows 50 to 60 characters. It usually respects a clear title, and rewrites one that is stuffed with keywords, repeated across the site, or a poor match for the query.

Use the `<title>` element; keep it under 60 characters.

Make it match the H1, in title case.

Primary keyword once. Describe, don't stuff.

On JavaScript sites, put it as high in the head as possible. Better: serve static HTML.

The description

Not a ranking factor, but it decides the click. Google shows about 920 pixels on desktop and 680 on mobile: roughly 155 characters and 120. Write it like an advertisement, with the promise in the first 120.

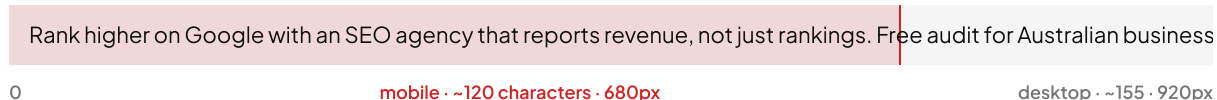
Unique on every page. Duplicates get ignored.

Use attributes: prices, sizes, locations, dates.

Active voice, one action.

Summarise the page. Don't generalise the topic.

FIG. 6 · WHERE IT GETS CUT



H2 and H3

H2s carry the secondary topics or split the main one into branches. H3s break an H2 down further. Both are where you place related long-tail phrases without forcing them into the body. Google will pick an H2 for the title if it judges the H1 less relevant to the query, so they matter.

Links, media and structured data

Internal links

Search engines follow internal links to find pages, and read the link text to learn what those pages are about. Wikipedia ranks for almost everything, and its single biggest advantage is that every page links to dozens of others with plain descriptive anchors.

Link internally and link often. Use anchor text that says where the link goes. Style links so they look like links.

Structured data

Schema markup is a few lines of code that tell search engines what a page represents: a product with a price and SKU, a service with an area, an event with a date, an article with an author. Google uses it to show richer results and, increasingly, to understand the page at all. Every common CMS has a plugin. It is one of the highest-return tasks in this book.

Media

Crawlers can now recognise images, but they still prefer to be told. Name files in plain language (`melbourne-beach-wedding.jpg`, not `IMG_7220.jpg`), write alt text that describes the picture, output at the size displayed, and lazy-load anything below the fold.

Don't add images that don't earn their place. Each one costs load time.

25%

higher click rate
on pages with
markup.

35%

more visits to
recipe pages
after adding
markup.

82%

higher click rate
for rich-snippet
results.

3.6x

higher
interaction rates
on marked-up
pages.

Case studies presented by Google at I/O. Individual results; your figures will differ. Find every type at schema.org.



The technical floor

None of this ranks you on its own. All of it can stop you ranking. Content a crawler cannot reach, or reaches too slowly, does not exist as far as search is concerned.

Mobile first. 63% of organic traffic is mobile and Google crawls with a mobile crawler. Design the phone version first.

SSL. Free from Let's Encrypt. Browsers now label its absence "not secure."

Broken links and errors. 301-redirect anything gone to the most relevant page. Search Console lists every error it finds; clear the list.

Speed. A ranking factor, and a crawl budget factor. A slow site gets crawled less and abandoned more.

Sitemap. XML, generated by your CMS, submitted in Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools. How new pages get found.

One version of each URL. www or not, trailing slash or not, http never. Canonicalise the rest.

Crawler directives

A robots meta tag on the page tells crawlers what they may do with it. Don't add one unless you need to hide something. The same instructions can go in `robots.txt` at the site root, which is a request, not a rule. One careless line there can remove your whole site from search.

index, follow	Default. Index the page, follow its links.
----------------------	--

nofollow	Pass no authority through its links.
-----------------	--------------------------------------

nosnippet	Show no description in results.
------------------	---------------------------------

noindex	Keep the page out of results.
----------------	-------------------------------

noimageindex	Don't index images on the page.
---------------------	---------------------------------

unavailable_after	Drop the page after a date.
--------------------------	-----------------------------

ALSO Don't block GPTBot, PerplexityBot or Google-Extended in robots.txt unless you have decided you do not want to appear in AI answers. Page 16 explains why that matters.

Pruning and de-optimisation

Content pruning

On large, established sites, removing weak pages helps the strong ones. The aim is crawl budget: keeping Google's attention on the content that matters now. Old pages are either deleted with a 410, or 301–redirected to the closest relevant page. Redirecting everything to the homepage is common and lazy.

On a small site the gains are marginal. Fix and merge before you delete.

De-optimisation

Sometimes Google ranks the wrong page of yours for a term, usually because of anchor text in links pointing at it. De-optimisation moves the ranking to the page you want.

Merge similar pages so the valuable one isn't diluted.

Canonicalise near-duplicates to the page you prefer.

Noindex pages you need but don't need ranked.

Delete thin pages that steal traffic from better ones.

Freshness

When you update a page, show the modified date, not just the published date, and update a real portion of the content. Google compares versions. A changed year in the title with nothing behind it no longer works, and reads as manipulation to the reader too. Use dates when the searcher is explicitly asking for a year.

Getting to page one is losing the first few kilos.

Getting to position one is losing the last ten.

Backlinks

Links are how the web votes. Without them, a search engine has no way to judge one page's worth against another. They remain the strongest single correlation with rankings in every large study, and the first result has nearly four times as many as the rest of page one.

66

referring domains, on average, on a top-ranking page. Domain diversity matters more than raw link count.

12x

the value of one link from a strong domain compared with a dozen from weak ones.

90%

of pages with no backlinks get no traffic from Google at all.

+28%

year-on-year growth in digital PR as a link tactic: data, research and newsworthy content that earns links.

What works, and what doesn't

Publish something worth citing. Original data, research, tools and comparisons earn several times the links of opinion.

Prefer new domains over more links from one. The second link from a site is worth far less than the first.

Avoid private blog networks. Cheap links from networks of empty sites lower your authority over time and invite penalties.

Don't chase authority scores. Every tool calculates its own. Work on acquiring links; the numbers follow.

NOTE Google's official position is that you should not go out and acquire links. Its own former staff who start companies make link acquisition a priority. This book takes the practical view and says so where it departs from Google's guidance.

Measuring what matters

Agencies report rankings because rankings are easy to show. Measure yours by the thing that matters: revenue. Everything else is a leading indicator of that one number.

Track long term

Sales and leads from organic, by landing page.

Keyword rankings for the mapped clusters, not vanity terms.

Visitor loyalty. How many return, and how soon.

Click-through rate by page, in Search Console. The earliest warning you'll get.

Secondary

Lifetime value of an organic customer

Bounce rate over time

New versus returning visitors

Referring domains gained per month

Audit on a schedule

Re-audit your money pages every few months, and immediately when position or traffic moves. Tools help you find problems; none of them ranks you. The one we use routinely is Screaming Frog, for crawling large sites. Search Console is free and tells you most of what you need.

TIP Read Search Console's CTR column before its position column. A page holding position three with a falling click rate is about to lose position three.



What changed: the AI answer

Since this guide was first written, Google has put a generated answer above the results on a large share of searches, and a growing number of people ask ChatGPT, Gemini or Perplexity instead of searching at all. This does not replace anything in the previous fifteen pages. It changes what the reward for doing them looks like.

68%

of US Google searches now end without a click to any website.

8% vs 15%

click rate on results pages with an AI summary, against those without, across 68,879 real searches.

+35%

organic click-through for brands cited inside the AI Overview, compared with uncited brands on the same page.

>90%

of AI Overviews cite at least one page from the top ten organic results. Ranking is still the way in.

What this means for the work in this book

- Fewer visits per ranking. Expect traffic to fall even as rankings hold.
- Schema, authorship and E-E-A-T are now how machines decide what to trust enough to repeat.
- Structure matters more, not less. AI systems quote pages that state things plainly, in self-contained sections.
- Brand mentions, even unlinked, now count towards being cited.

COMPANION VOLUME

The AEO Playbook

How answer engines choose what to quote, what each platform reads, and how to measure it. SEO gets you ranked. AEO gets you quoted. You need both.

PLAYBOOK 02

The AEO Playbook

mojodojo.io/playbooks



What this looks like in practice

The method in this book is the one we run for clients. These are the headline figures from our published results; the full case studies, by industry, are at mojodojo.io/au/results.

+317%

revenue from organic traffic. Published client result; industry, timeframe and programme to be added from the case study.

+386%

paid-media revenue. Published client result; context to be added from the case study.

500+

businesses helped across Australia and internationally.

CASE STUDY SLOT 01



Drop a results screenshot
or [browse files](#)

Client, industry, starting position, what was done, result, timeframe. One paragraph. Numbers over adjectives.

CASE STUDY SLOT 02



Drop a results screenshot
or [browse files](#)

A second industry, ideally one where the starting point was a penalty or a migration, to show the technical floor at work.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The three headline figures are from mojodojo.io; their context (client, industry, timeframe, what was done) still needs adding from the underlying case studies. The two slots below need real client data. Search Console screenshots showing the before-and-after click curve are the most persuasive artefact we have; a permission line from the client makes them usable.



Quick wins for the next 30 days

None of this needs a rebuild. Order the work by impact and effort, and give each item an owner.

● HIGH IMPACT · LOW EFFORT · THIS WEEK

Verify in Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools; submit the sitemap

Install SSL if missing; redirect http to https

Fix every 404 Search Console reports with a 301

Add schema to the top 20 pages via your CMS plugin

Rewrite the ten most-seen titles to under 60 characters

Add author name, bio and date to expert content

● HIGH IMPACT · MEDIUM EFFORT · THIS MONTH

Complete the keyword mapping sheet on page 19

Build or repurpose one page per cluster in the 50–2,000 range

Write unique descriptions for every money page

Add internal links from every page to its three closest siblings

Rename and compress images on the ten heaviest pages

Pull a Screaming Frog crawl; clear duplicate titles and thin pages

● LONG-TERM PAYOFF · THIS QUARTER

Publish one piece of original data or research worth linking to

Start a monthly link acquisition routine targeting new domains

Expand the top five pages to 1,000+ words of real depth

Set up revenue-by-landing-page reporting

Prune or merge pages with no traffic in twelve months

Run the AI-readiness audit from the AEO Playbook

Rank first. Then be worth the click.

Position is half the outcome. The listing, the page and the load time are the other half.

Keyword mapping sheet

One row per page. Start with the hub, then each cluster beneath it. Search volume from Keyword Planner; intent from reading the current results. A row with no URL yet is a page you need to build.

[illegible]

Remove competitor brands and tool names. Keep 50–2,000 searches. Check that what ranks today matches the intent you want. One cluster per row; if two rows share a topic, merge them.

Structure. Links. Repeat.

SEO is a continuous improvement process, not a project. The sites that win are not the cleverest; they are the ones that do the ordinary things on every page, measure the result, and do them again. Most of your competitors will not.

START HERE THIS WEEK

01

Fill in the keyword mapping sheet on page 19 with whoever owns the website.

02

Do the six this-week items on page 18. None takes more than an afternoon.

03

Read the AEO Playbook. Ranking is now the way into the answer, not the end of the job.

Ready to see where you stand?

Get your free SEO audit →

mojodojo.io/au/strategy-form

AUSTRALIA

1800 959 990

Suite 20 / Level 5

150 Albert Rd, South Melbourne VIC
3205

UNITED STATES

888 234 2349

730 Ripple Brook Ln

Elgin, IL 60120

UNITED KINGDOM

020 4634 5777

Unit 61, 38-40 The Oval

London E2 9DT

