

KSJ GROWTH • 2026 EDITION

The Small Business DIY SEO Playbook

A practical, jargon-free 90-day system for improving your website's visibility on
Google—without paying an agency every month



Opening sample: Chapters 1-3

Produced by KSJ Growth

How to use this sample

This sample contains the opening three chapters of the proposed guide. They establish the rules that every later chapter will follow:

- begin with a commercial reason for doing the work;
- separate established guidance from opinions and experiments;
- make one controlled improvement at a time;
- record the starting point before judging the result; and
- never confuse activity, rankings or traffic with profitable business.

The finished guide will turn each principle into a task, worksheet or 90-day action. It is written primarily for UK owners of small service businesses. You do not need to become a developer or buy an expensive SEO platform, but you will need access to your website, time to make careful changes and the patience to collect enough evidence before drawing conclusions.

SEO is not a promise that Google will reward every change. It is a disciplined way to make a website easier to discover, understand, use and evaluate.

1. What SEO can—and cannot—do

“I want to rank higher on Google” sounds like a goal. It is usually only the beginning of one.

Higher for what search? In which location? Which page should appear? Who is the right person to reach? What should that person do after arriving? If a website attracts twice as many visitors but none of them needs the service, has the SEO succeeded?

These questions are not an attempt to make SEO sound complicated. They prevent you from spending weeks improving the wrong number.

A practical definition of SEO

Search engine optimisation is the work of improving how a website is discovered, interpreted and presented in organic search, while making its pages more useful to the people the business wants to reach.

That definition contains two audiences:

1. **Search systems**, which need to access and understand the website.
2. **People**, who need a useful answer and a convincing reason to take the next step.

Ignoring either audience creates weak SEO. A technically perfect page that says very little will not persuade a customer. Brilliant service information hidden behind an inaccessible or confusing website may never receive a fair opportunity to appear.

Google's own guidance recommends useful, reliable, people-first material rather than pages made primarily to manipulate rankings. It also states that SEO can be useful when applied to people-first content.¹ This gives us a sensible working boundary: make it easy for search systems to understand genuinely useful material; do not manufacture pages merely to create the appearance of relevance.

The outcome chain

SEO operates inside a longer commercial journey.

The SEO outcome chain

Measure the whole journey—not just where a page appears.

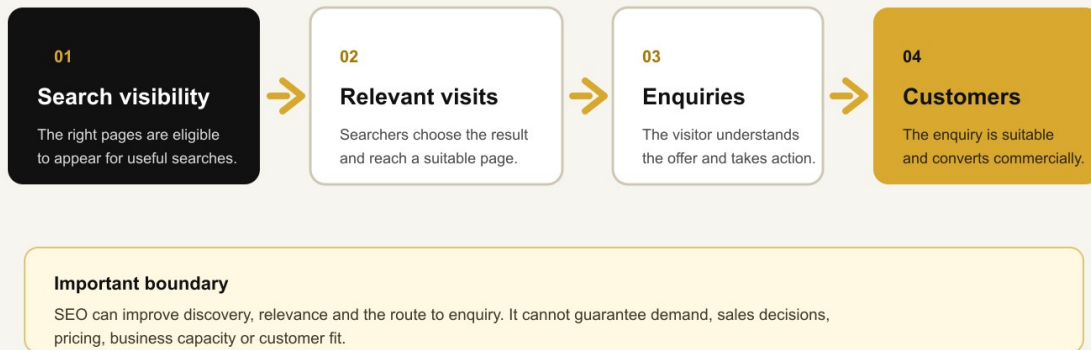


Figure 1. SEO supports the journey towards an enquiry, but it does not control every stage.

The four stages are related, but they are not interchangeable.

Search visibility

A suitable page becomes eligible to appear for searches connected with its subject. Early evidence might include impressions in Google Search Console, more relevant queries or the discovery of newly published pages.

Relevant visits

Some searchers choose the result and reach the website. The important word is *relevant*. A hundred visits from people outside your service area may be less valuable than ten visits from people actively comparing the service you provide.

Enquiries

The page answers enough questions, builds sufficient confidence and provides a clear next action. Depending on the business, that action may be a telephone call, contact form, booking, quotation request, shop visit or purchase.

Customers

The enquiry is suitable and converts into worthwhile business. SEO contributes to the opportunity, but many other factors influence the result: price, availability, reputation, follow-up, sales ability, location and the customer's circumstances.

This is why no honest SEO guide can promise revenue from a title change, a new article or a particular ranking. The guide can show you how to improve the conditions. It cannot control the entire market.

Rankings are diagnostic, not the final destination

Rankings matter because a result that is rarely seen has little opportunity to earn a visit. Problems begin when “position” becomes the only score.

Search results can vary by query, location, device and context. Search Console reports an *average position* across recorded impressions, not a permanent numbered place owned by a page. Google itself recommends paying attention to trends in impressions and clicks rather than concentrating on position alone.²

A useful measurement order is:

1. Is the correct page indexed?
2. Is it appearing for relevant searches?
3. Are impressions developing?
4. Are suitable searchers clicking?
5. Are those visits producing appropriate actions?
6. Are the resulting enquiries commercially useful?

You will use rankings and average position within this sequence, not in isolation.

What SEO cannot honestly guarantee

Be suspicious of advice or services promising:

- a guaranteed first-page position;
- a fixed ranking date;
- a precise volume of leads from organic search;
- permanent results from a one-off action;
- a secret relationship with Google;
- payment to Google for better organic rankings; or
- a single technical score that guarantees visibility.

Google states that it does not accept payment to crawl a site more frequently or rank it higher. It also makes clear that crawling, indexing and serving are not guaranteed, even when a page follows the technical requirements.³

That does not make SEO a lottery. It means the work has to be evaluated like other business development: make a reasoned change, observe the evidence, learn and improve.

How long should SEO take?

There is no responsible universal answer.

A new local business, an established specialist and a national comparison website have different starting points. The condition of the website, strength of competitors, clarity of the service, search demand, existing reputation and amount of useful content all affect progress. So does the size of the change: correcting an accidentally blocked page is different from building recognition in a competitive market.

For this guide, the first 90 days are a **working cycle**, not a promise of results. Ninety days is long enough to:

- establish access and a baseline;
- identify priority pages and search themes;
- implement important improvements;
- publish or strengthen selected content;
- check discovery and indexing; and
- collect initial evidence for the next decision.

Some changes may be processed quickly. Commercial outcomes may take much longer.

KSJ in practice: proof in progress

KSJ Growth does not currently present its own website as proof that every reader will achieve a particular result. Instead, it publishes the changes being made and the developing Search Console signals.

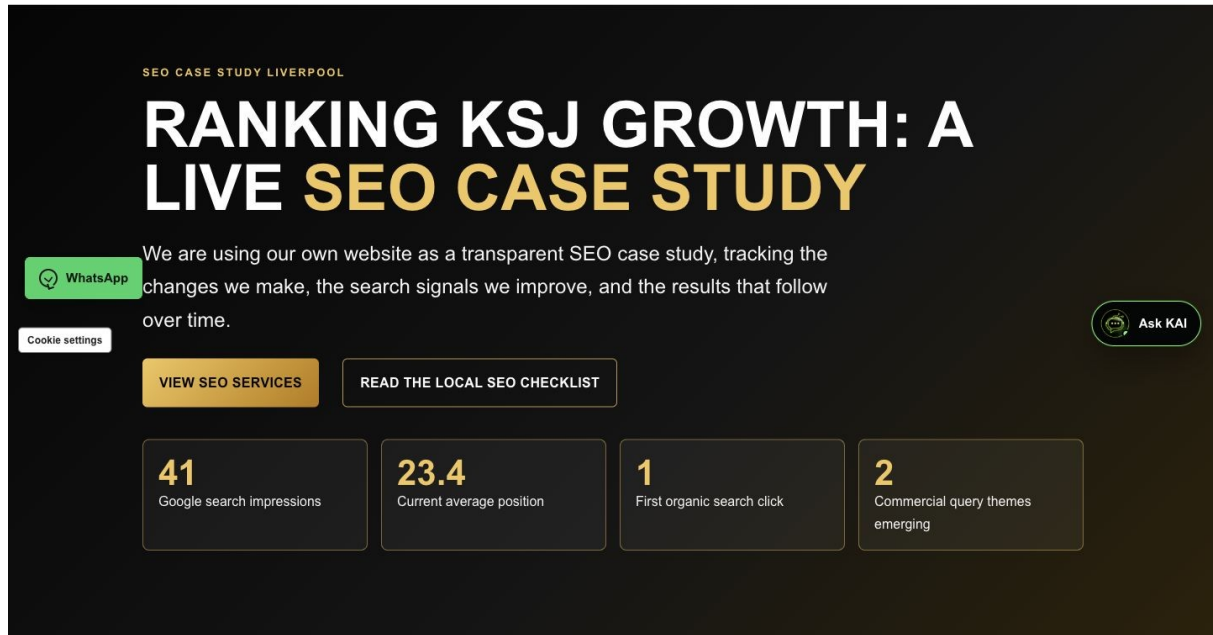


Figure 2. KSJ Growth presents its own site as a live case study and labels the figures as developing evidence.

This is a useful model for a small business because it separates three things:

- **Work completed:** pages created, links added and technical foundations checked.
- **Search signals:** indexing, impressions, queries, clicks and average position.
- **Business outcomes:** enquiries, sales conversations and customers.

The first category is within your control. The second is evidence that must be interpreted carefully. The third depends on the entire customer journey.

Chapter action: write a commercially useful sentence

Complete this sentence before doing any keyword research:

We want to help **[type of customer]** who is searching for **[need or service]** in **[location or market]** reach **[specific page]** and take **[useful next action]**.

Example:

We want to help homeowners in South Liverpool who need an emergency electrician reach our emergency call-out page and telephone the on-duty number.

This sentence will change as you learn. Its purpose is to stop you beginning with a disconnected list of keywords.

Chapter checklist

- ☐ I can name the customers I want to reach.
- ☐ I can describe the service, problem or decision they are searching around.
- ☐ I know which website action has commercial value.
- ☐ I understand that visibility, visits, enquiries and customers are different measures.
- ☐ I am not relying on a guaranteed ranking or deadline.
- ☐ I am prepared to record a baseline before judging the work.

2. How Google finds and understands a website

You do not need to understand Google's complete infrastructure to improve a small website. You do need a reliable mental model.

Google describes Search as a three-stage process: crawling, indexing and serving results.³ For practical diagnosis, this guide separates *discovery* from crawling because a search system must learn that a URL exists before it can request the page.

From a page to a search result

A useful mental model for diagnosing where progress has stalled.

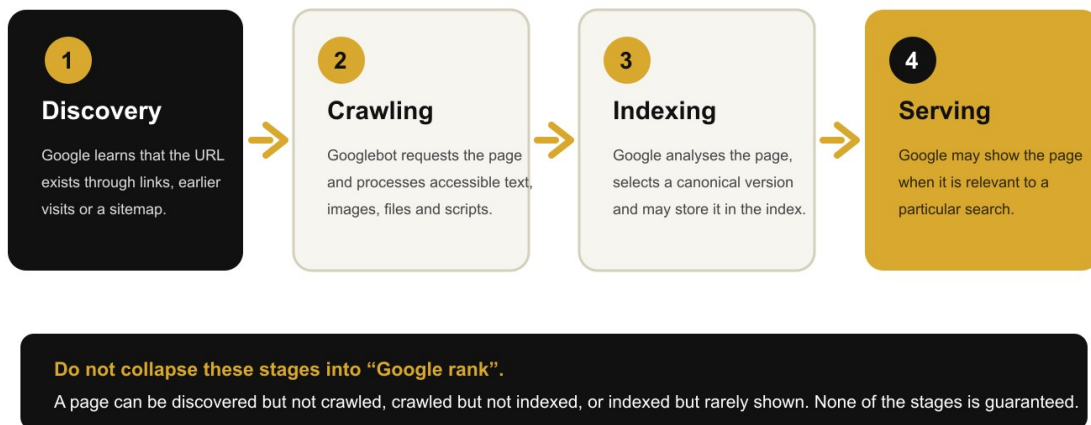


Figure 3. Discovery, crawling, indexing and serving are connected stages—not synonyms for “ranking”.

Stage 1: discovery

There is no central register containing every page on the web. Search systems continually discover URLs.

A new page may be found through:

- a link from another page Google already knows;
- your website navigation;
- an XML sitemap;
- a link from another website;
- a previous crawl; or
- a manual inspection or submission route within Search Console.

For most small websites, the practical lesson is simple: important pages should not be hidden.

If you publish a valuable new service page but nothing on the website links to it, visitors may struggle to find it and search systems receive a weaker discovery path. Adding the URL to a sitemap can help, but Google describes sitemap submission as a hint rather than a guarantee that the page will be downloaded or crawled.⁴

Think of a sitemap as a supplied list of preferred doors. Internal links are the corridors people and crawlers actually use.

Stage 2: crawling

Once Google knows about a URL, Googlebot may request it. This is crawling.

The request can fail or be restricted. Common causes include:

- server errors;
- password or login protection;
- an unavailable domain;
- rules that block crawlers;
- redirect problems; and
- important content that is difficult to render or access.

For a normal WordPress service-business website, you should not begin by changing the robots.txt file or inserting technical directives copied from a forum. Begin with observation:

1. Can you open the page normally in a private browser window?
2. Does the final address match the address you intended?
3. Does Search Console's URL Inspection tool report an access problem?
4. Has a developer or SEO plugin applied a setting that prevents indexing?

If you do not understand a robots rule, canonical tag or redirect, record it and seek help before changing it. A mistake at this stage can affect more than one page.

Stage 3: indexing

After crawling, Google analyses the page and may store information about it in its index. This analysis includes visible content and important page signals such as the title element, images and alternative text.

Google may also group duplicate or very similar URLs and select a representative version called the **canonical**. Website owners can indicate their preferred canonical URL through redirects, `rel="canonical"` annotations and sitemap inclusion, but these are signals rather than a command that search systems must always follow.⁵

A typical small-business duplication problem might look like this:

- `http://example.co.uk/service`
- `https://example.co.uk/service`
- `https://www.example.co.uk/service`
- `https://example.co.uk/service/`

These addresses may lead to the same apparent page. A well-configured site should establish one preferred version and redirect or signal consistently.

Indexing is not guaranteed. A crawled page may be excluded because it duplicates another page, carries a `noindex` instruction, offers little distinct value or presents other quality and technical problems.

Stage 4: serving

When somebody searches, Google looks for relevant information in its index and decides which results and search features to present.

The same page will not appear identically for every person or every query. Location, language, device and the meaning of the search can affect which results are useful. A search for a nearby emergency service is different from a broad research question, even when some of the words overlap.

Being indexed therefore means:

Google may be able to show this page.

It does **not** mean:

Google will show this page prominently for every phrase the business wants.

This distinction prevents a common mistake: creating more pages when the immediate problem is that the existing page is poorly matched to the searcher's need—or changing copy when the page is not accessible to crawlers.

A careful use of the `site:` search

You can search Google for:

`site:yourdomain.co.uk`

This is a quick way to see examples of pages Google knows about. It is not a complete indexing report. Google's documentation warns that the `site:` operator does not necessarily return every URL indexed under the prefix.⁶

Use it as an initial observation, not as your official page count. Search Console's Page Indexing and URL Inspection reports provide more useful evidence for a verified owner.

KSJ in practice: establishing one main domain

The KSJ live case study records a move to ksjgrowth.com as the main address, correction of canonical signals, Search Console verification and WordPress sitemap submission.

The important lesson is not that every business should change its domain. Domain changes create risks and should have a clear reason. The lesson is that once the main address was chosen, the discovery and indexing signals needed to agree:

- internal links should use the preferred domain;
- canonical signals should point to the intended version;
- redirects should take old addresses to suitable new destinations;
- the sitemap should contain the preferred URLs; and
- the correct Search Console property should be monitored.

This is a **consistency exercise**, not a ranking trick.

Chapter action: inspect one priority page

Choose the single page most closely connected to your commercially useful sentence from Chapter 1.

Record:

Check	Your observation
Intended page address	
Page opens without login	
Final browser address after redirects	
Page title visible in browser tab	
One clear main heading	
Linked from website navigation or another relevant page	
Included in your sitemap, if available	
URL Inspection status	
Google-selected canonical	
Any warning or uncertainty	

Do not try to repair every warning immediately. The objective is to identify which stage deserves attention.

Chapter checklist

- ☐ I understand the difference between discovery, crawling, indexing and serving.
- ☐ My priority page is not hidden from normal visitors.
- ☐ I know where to check the page in Search Console.
- ☐ I treat a sitemap as a discovery aid, not an indexing guarantee.
- ☐ I do not use a `site:` search as a complete index count.
- ☐ I will not change robots, canonical or redirect settings that I do not understand.

3. Set the goal and record the baseline

Making changes before recording the starting point creates an avoidable problem: if the numbers move later, you will not know what “before” looked like.

A baseline does not need to be sophisticated. It needs to be dated, repeatable and connected to the business goal.

Convert the wish into a working goal

Use four components:

1. **Audience:** who you want to reach.
2. **Need:** the service, problem or decision behind the search.
3. **Page and action:** where the visitor should arrive and what they should do.
4. **Measurement:** which signals will indicate progress.

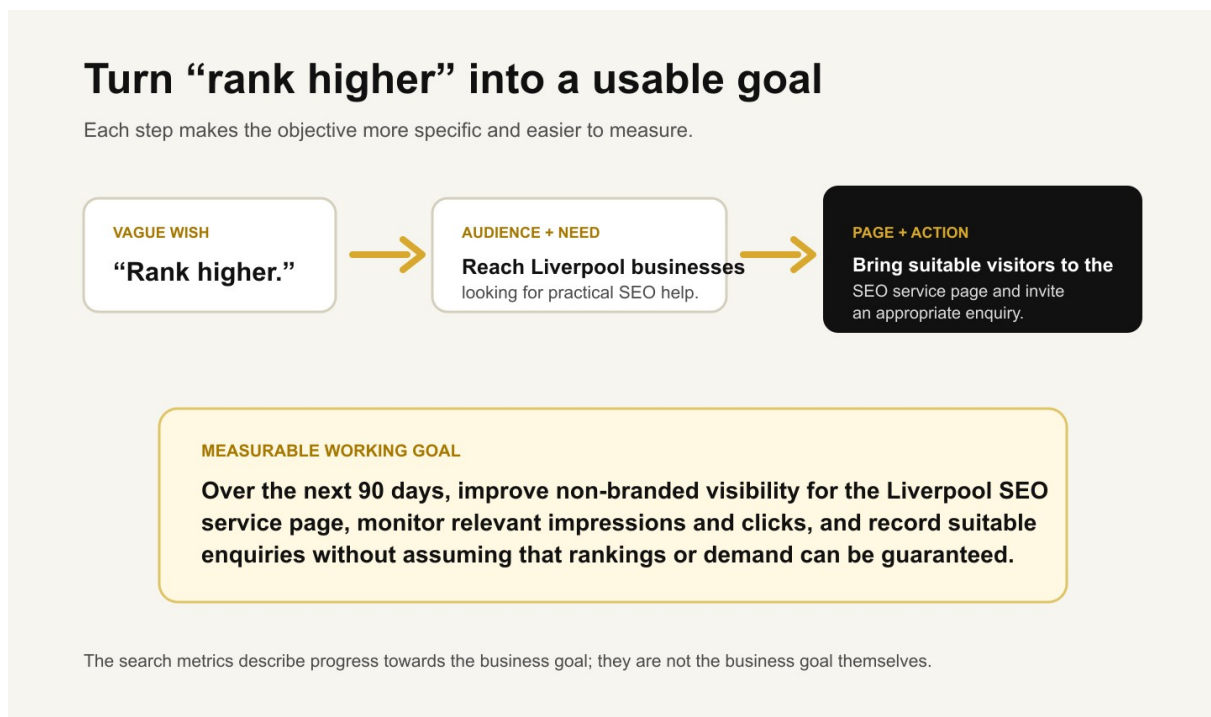


Figure 4. A useful SEO goal links the audience and page to an action and a measurement period.

Notice what the working goal does not say. It does not promise first place. It does not assume that every click becomes an enquiry. It describes the change being pursued and how the evidence will be reviewed.

Choose the valuable action first

Before opening an analytics report, decide what counts as a meaningful action.

Examples include:

- telephone-number click;
- completed enquiry form;
- confirmed booking;
- quotation request;
- directions request;
- email link;
- purchase; or
- a qualified conversation recorded manually.

A “contact page view” may support the journey, but it is not the same as a completed contact. A ten-second visit is a visit, not evidence of interest. Choose the strongest action you can measure honestly.

If your website does not yet track completed enquiries, keep a simple manual record while you improve the setup. Record the date, enquiry route, service requested, location, whether it was suitable and—if appropriate—whether it became business. Do not collect more personal information than you need.

Establish Search Console access

Google Search Console is the main first-party source used in this guide for organic search evidence. It can show:

- **impressions:** recorded appearances of links or content from the property;
- **clicks:** recorded clicks from Google Search;
- **click-through rate:** clicks divided by impressions;
- **average position:** the average topmost position reported for the property or page across impressions; and
- **queries and pages:** subject to privacy, aggregation and data limits.

These definitions contain important subtleties. Data can be aggregated by property or by page. Average position changes across searches and is not a fixed rank. The newest data may be preliminary. Search Console may also omit less significant query rows even when those queries contribute to chart totals.²

For a small business, this leads to three rules:

1. Compare like with like.
2. Use the same filters and date length when reviewing a trend.

3. Do not make confident conclusions from a tiny sample.

Your first baseline

Record the following for the previous 28 complete days:

Area	Baseline item
Business	Suitable organic enquiries
Search	Total clicks
Search	Total impressions
Search	Average CTR
Search	Average position, treated as a trend metric
Priority page	Clicks and impressions
Priority page	Relevant queries appearing
Indexing	Status of priority pages
Work	Important changes already made

Add the exact date range and filters. If there is no data yet, write zero or “not available”. An empty baseline is still a baseline.

KSJ in practice: a modest baseline used properly

The KSJ live case-study page published the following early snapshot:

Current measurement snapshot

The case study is being judged on real Search Console data, not guesswork. These are early figures from a new .com property, so they are a baseline for future comparisons rather than a claim that the ranking objective has already been achieved.

Metric	Why it matters	Current status
Indexing	Confirms whether Google has found and can show the page.	12 pages reported as indexed. Newly published pages are still moving through discovery and indexing.
Impressions	Shows whether pages are appearing in search results.	41 search impressions in the 28-day Search Console view recorded on 21 June 2026.
Clicks	Shows whether searchers are choosing KSJ Growth in results.	The first organic search click has been recorded.
Click-through rate	Shows how often a search appearance becomes a website visit.	Current click-through rate is 2.4% from the early data sample.
Average position	Shows movement over time for target searches and related queries.	Overall average position is 23.4. The site is appearing for a broader set of searches, but the current sample remains small and most visibility is not yet on page one.
Enquiries	Measures whether visibility becomes useful business activity.	Tracked through contact activity and sales conversations.

Data note: Google Search Console data can arrive with a delay. Average position combines different queries, locations and devices, so future updates will compare like-for-like periods as more data becomes available.

Figure 5. KSJ's published measurement snapshot identifies the figures as an early baseline rather than a completed ranking result.

At the time recorded on the page:

- 12 pages were reported as indexed;
- 41 impressions appeared in the 28-day view recorded on 21 June 2026;
- the first organic search click had been recorded;
- CTR was 2.4%;
- overall average position was 23.4; and
- enquiries were to be tracked through contact activity and sales conversations.

These figures are too small to prove that the strategy has succeeded. They are useful because they establish a dated point from which later like-for-like periods can be compared.

The best part of the example is not the numbers. It is the wording around them. The site states that most visibility was not yet on page one and that the sample remained small. This makes later improvement more credible and protects the reader from false certainty.

Record changes as well as results

Maintain a simple SEO change log:

Date	Page	Change	Reason	Evidence to review	Review date
23 Jul 2026	/example-service/	Rewrote title and main introduction	Better match commercial intent	Impressions, CTR, enquiries	20 Aug 2026

This log prevents three common problems:

- forgetting what changed;
- changing the same page repeatedly before search systems and customers have had time to respond; and
- claiming that a result came from a particular action when several actions happened together.

SEO rarely offers laboratory conditions, especially in a small business. A change log will not prove causation, but it creates a much stronger record than memory.

Set a review rhythm

Checking rankings every morning encourages emotional decisions. Use a rhythm suited to the amount of data:

- **Weekly:** confirm that priority pages remain accessible and record major errors or enquiries.
- **Monthly:** compare Search Console signals, page performance and the change log.
- **Quarterly:** review the search themes, commercial value, content plan and whether DIY work remains the best use of your time.

New or low-volume sites may need longer comparison periods. If a page received five impressions last month and ten this month, the percentage increase sounds dramatic but the evidence remains small.

Chapter action: complete the baseline statement

Between [start date] and [end date], our priority page received [impressions] impressions and [clicks] clicks from Google Search. We recorded [number] suitable organic enquiries. The main relevant query themes were [themes]. During the period, we made [changes or none]. We will review the same measures on [date].

Keep this statement with a screenshot or export of the original report where appropriate.

Chapter checklist

- ☐ I have defined a valuable website or offline action.

- ☐ I have access to the correct Search Console property.
- ☐ I have recorded a dated 28-day baseline.
- ☐ I understand that average position is not a fixed ranking.
- ☐ I have separated branded and non-branded context where the data permits it.
- ☐ I have started a change log.
- ☐ I have chosen a review date instead of checking impulsively.

What happens next

You now have:

- a commercial reason for doing SEO;
- one priority customer, need, page and action;
- a practical model of discovery, crawling, indexing and serving;
- a baseline against which to compare later evidence; and
- a record of the changes you make.

The next part of the guide turns customer language into a defensible keyword and page plan. Only then will we begin rewriting pages.

Source notes for the sample

1. Google Search Central, [Creating helpful, reliable, people-first content](#), updated 10 December 2025.
2. Google Search Console Help, [Performance report: common tasks and use cases](#) and [What are impressions, position and clicks?](#), accessed 23 July 2026.
3. Google Search Central, [In-depth guide to how Google Search works](#), updated 18 December 2025.
4. Google Search Central, [Build and submit a sitemap](#), accessed 23 July 2026.
5. Google Search Central, [How to specify a canonical URL](#), accessed 23 July 2026.
6. Google Search Central, [Get your website on Google](#), accessed 23 July 2026.