

2026 EDITION

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# Technical SEO for founders who don't have time.

The compounding work nobody ships because it is unsexy: schema, speed, internal links, intent clusters, and content that ranks because it actually answers something. Six pages, no jargon, built for teams that want ownership in-house.

WHY MOST SEO FAILS

# Ranking is the side-effect of being genuinely useful at scale.

SEO died as a standalone tactic around 2020. What works now is being the most useful answer to a specific question, structured so machines understand it, and linked so other pages vouch for it. The tactics haven't changed in five years. The execution bar has.

## Three mistakes everyone makes

Writing for keywords instead of users. Publishing without a link strategy. Chasing volume instead of intent. All three feel productive. None of them rank.

## What compounds

A cluster of 10 deeply useful pages, internally linked, all covering related intents, with clean schema markup — outranks 100 shallow keyword pages every time. Less content, better content, tighter structure.

### LLM ERA

AI search is changing distribution, not fundamentals. ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google AI overviews pick the same pages humans did — authoritative, structured, comprehensive. Write for the reader and you're writing for the AI.

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THE FIXES THAT PAY BACK FIRST

# Boring technical hygiene — before any content.

- Schema.org markup on every important page.** Organization, Person, Article, Service, Product, FAQPage, HowTo. Not for ranking directly — for how AI and Google understand what the page is.
- Core Web Vitals under thresholds.** LCP < 2.5s, INP < 200ms, CLS < 0.1. Measure with real-user data (CrUX), not synthetic.
- Clean URL structure.** No tracking parameters in canonical URLs. Consistent trailing-slash policy. 301s from old URLs, not 302s.
- Sitemap + robots.txt** that actually reflect what you want indexed. Noindex'd pages still get crawled — saving crawl budget matters on bigger sites.
- Internal linking that reflects your site's logic.** Hub pages link to cluster pages; cluster pages link back. No orphans.
- Mobile + desktop parity.** Same content, same links, same metadata. Google's index is mobile-first.

**3×**

CTR increase from FAQPage  
+ Article schema (typical)

**< 2.5s**

LCP target for compounding  
ranking gain

**6–12 mo**

Before technical SEO  
compounds into real traffic

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HOW CONTENT ACTUALLY RANKS IN 2026

# Clusters, not a blog archive.

The unit of SEO today is the cluster — a topic page that acts as the hub, with 5–15 supporting pages that each address one sub-intent, all internally linked. This works because it signals topical authority to Google and AI answer engines.

## How to pick the cluster

1. Identify the commercial outcome (leads, signups, purchases). 2. Find the single-biggest "big question" that precedes the outcome. 3. Map the 5–15 sub-questions a user asks on the way to the main question. That's your cluster.

## What each page does

Hub answers the big question comprehensively, links to all sub-pages. Sub-pages answer one specific question, link back to hub and laterally to 2–3 siblings. No duplicate intents.

## CONTENT QUALITY CHECKLIST (PER PAGE)

- Answers the title question** in the first 100 words — before any setup

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- Specific, with numbers, examples, and names** — not "many businesses" but "teams of 5–15"

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- Contains an FAQPage schema** if the page naturally answers sub-questions

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- Internal links** to 3–5 related pages with descriptive anchors, not "read more"

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- Author byline with credentials** — E-E-A-T matters, especially for YMYL topics

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- Original imagery or diagrams** where helpful — not stock screenshots

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RANKING IN CHATGPT, PERPLEXITY, AND GOOGLE AI

# The new surfaces all reward the same thing.

AI answer engines don't index everything — they synthesize from a short list of trusted sources. Ending up on that list is an extension of good SEO, not a separate discipline. But a few tactics specifically matter for the AI layer.

## llms.txt and llms-full.txt

New convention (like robots.txt, for LLMs). Hosts a structured directory of your content so AI crawlers can understand your site's shape. Early-mover advantage while adoption is still sparse.

## Structured answer blocks

Dedicated Q&A sections with unambiguous answers and clear attribution. These get extracted into AI responses with citation. Perplexity in particular rewards this structure.

## Citations > keyword density

AI engines care about being able to point to a source. Pages with clear authorship, dates, citations of primary sources, and unique data points get cited. Pages that read like SEO content don't.

## Speakable schema

Marks specific elements as optimised for voice/read-aloud. Small but free signal. Costs 10 minutes to add.

### THE THROUGHLINE

Every tactic in this guide rewards the same thing: specific, sourced, structured, authoritative content. If the core writing is bad, schema won't save you. If the writing is good, schema makes it compound.

# Six weeks. Ten pages. One cluster.

Don't try to "do SEO" across the whole site. Pick one cluster, build it properly over six weeks, measure for three months, then repeat. Compounding beats sprawl every time.

- Week 1-2: Audit + cluster picking.** Technical fixes. Choose one hub + sub-pages. Map every page to a specific intent.
- Week 3-4: Write.** Ten pages. Real writing. Cite primary sources. Original examples. No recycled takes.
- Week 5: Internal linking + schema.** Every page linked. Every page marked up correctly.
- Week 6: Submit + measure.** Search Console, sitemaps, analytics baseline. Wait.
- Month 3: Double down on what's working.** Pages ranking? Expand the cluster. Pages flat? Rewrite or merge.

NEED A TECHNICAL SEO AUDIT OR A CLUSTER STRATEGY?

I work with teams that want technical SEO, content structure, schema, speed, and AI-assisted publishing systems they can keep owning in-house. Audit, roadmap, implementation, or focused ongoing support.

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