



SEO READINESS CHECKLIST

12-Point SEO Checklist

Technical, content, local, authority, AI search, and conversion checks to run before you invest another dollar in a growth sprint.

Most SEO spend is wasted on campaigns layered over an unaudited foundation. Before any agency proposes new content, links, or budget, twelve fundamentals should already be verified. This is the checklist we run internally on every account before a growth engagement begins.

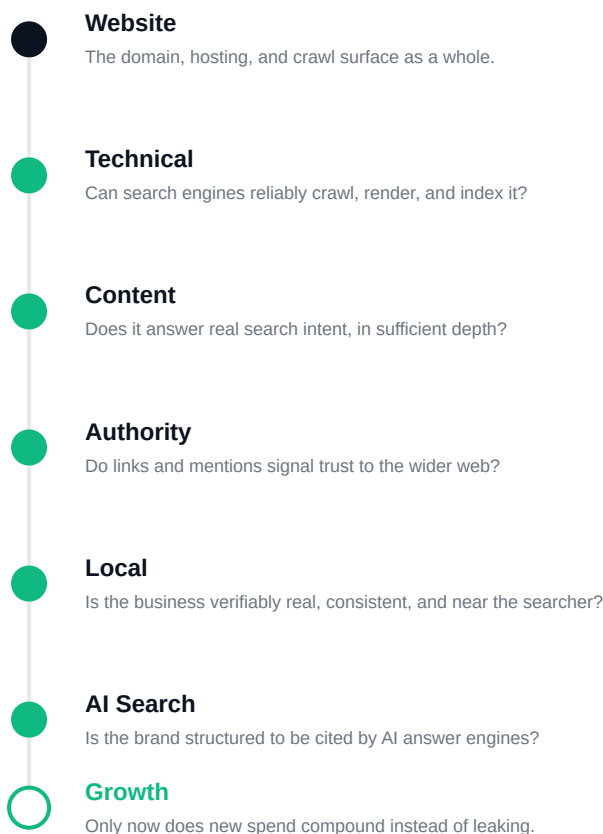
SECTION 00

Why Most SEO Campaigns Fail

Businesses rarely fail at SEO because they lack effort. They fail because campaigns are built on top of an unaudited foundation — new content and new links poured onto a site with unresolved technical and structural issues underneath.

A growth sprint amplifies whatever is already true about a website. If the technical base is sound, new content compounds quickly. If it isn't, the same investment produces inconsistent rankings, wasted crawl budget, and reporting that never quite adds up. The checklist in this document is the sequence we work through before recommending any spend — in the order a search engine, and an AI answer engine, actually experiences the site.

THE AUDIT SEQUENCE



"Data becomes valuable only when it drives better decisions — and a growth sprint is only ever as strong as the foundation it's built on."

SECTION 01

Technical SEO

The nine checks that determine whether search engines can crawl, render, and trust the site before anything else is evaluated.

- ☐ **Core Web Vitals**
LCP, INP, and CLS within Google's "Good" thresholds on real mobile devices.

[PAGESPEED INSIGHTS](#)

- ☐ **HTTPS Everywhere**
Valid certificate, no mixed content, and no HTTP pages left reachable.

- ☐ **Mobile Usability**
Passes Google's mobile-friendly test with no tap-target or viewport errors.

[SEARCH CONSOLE](#)

- ☐ **Indexing Coverage**
Important pages are indexed; low-value pages are deliberately excluded.

- ☐ **Robots.txt Rules**
No accidental disallow rules blocking pages that should rank.

- ☐ **XML Sitemap**
Current, submitted, and free of 404s, redirects, or noindex pages.

[SCREAMING FROG](#)

- ☐ **Broken Links**
Internal and outbound links resolve — no orphaned 404s bleeding equity.

- ☐ **Redirect Chains**
Single-hop 301s only; no multi-step chains or redirect loops.

- ☐ **Canonical Tags**
Every template emits one clear, self-consistent canonical signal.

WHY IT MATTERS

Technical issues silently cap the ceiling of every other channel. Content and links can't compound on a site search engines struggle to crawl or render.



SECTION 02

On-Page SEO

Seven checks confirming each page is explicitly labelled for the query it's meant to win.

☐ **Title Tags**

Unique, under 60 characters, and led with the primary keyword or brand.

☐ **Meta Descriptions**

Written to earn the click, not just describe the page — every template covered.

☐ **Header Hierarchy**

One H1 per page; H2/H3 structure mirrors how a reader would skim it.

☐ **Image Alt Text**

Descriptive alt attributes on every meaningful image, not keyword-stuffed.

☐ **Internal Links**

Every page links to, and is linked from, at least one relevant page.

☐ **URL Structure**

Short, readable, and consistent with the site's information hierarchy.

☐ **Keyword Intent Match**

The page format matches what searchers actually expect to find.

[AHREFS](#) / [SEMRUSH](#)

WHY IT MATTERS

On-page signals are the clearest, cheapest lever a site owns outright. Misaligned titles and headers routinely cost rankings that would otherwise require zero new content to win.

**FAST CHECK**

Pull a crawl export and sort by title length and H1 count. Any page with zero or duplicate H1s is an immediate fix — no strategy required.

SECTION 03

Content Quality

Six checks on whether content is genuinely worth ranking.

☐ **Helpful Content Alignment**

Written for the reader first, search engines second.

☐ **E-E-A-T Signals**

Visible author expertise, sourcing, and credentials on key pages.

☐ **Originality**

Not a rewrite of the top-ranking result — a genuinely new angle.

☐ **Content Freshness**

Statistics, screenshots, and claims updated on a real cadence.

☐ **Search Intent Match**

Format and depth mirror what's already ranking for the query.

☐ **Topical Depth**

Coverage goes beyond the obvious subtopics a reader expects.

SECTION 04

Keyword Strategy

Five checks on whether the keyword map still reflects demand.

☐ **Primary Keyword Mapping**

One clear target per page — no internal cannibalization.

☐ **Supporting Keywords**

Secondary terms naturally covered, not force-fitted.

☐ **Long-Tail Coverage**

Lower-volume, higher-intent variations are represented.

AHREFS

☐ **Search Intent Segmentation**

Keywords grouped by informational, commercial, or transactional intent.

☐ **Opportunity Gaps**

Terms competitors rank for that this site doesn't yet target.

SECTION 05

Internal Linking

Five checks confirming authority flows to the pages that need it most.

☐ **Hub Pages**

Core topics have a clear, well-linked central page.

☐ **Topic Clusters**

Supporting content links back into its parent hub consistently.

☐ **Anchor Text Quality**

Descriptive anchors — not repeated "click here" or bare URLs.

☐ **Navigation Structure**

Primary nav reflects actual priority, not just page count.

☐ **Orphan Pages**

No indexable page exists with zero internal links pointing to it.

SCREAMING FROG

SECTION 06

Technical Health

Five checks on the ongoing housekeeping most audits skip.

☐ **Schema Markup**

Structured data validates and matches visible on-page content.

RICH RESULTS TEST

☐ **Crawlability**

No JavaScript-rendered content invisible to the crawler.

☐ **Duplicate Pages**

Parameter and near-duplicate URLs are consolidated or canonicalized.

☐ **404 Errors**

Dead pages are redirected or intentionally retired — not left live.

☐ **Page Speed**

Server response and asset weight tested on throttled mobile.

SECTION 07

Local SEO

Five checks for any business competing in a map pack or service area.

☐ **Google Business Profile**

Categories, hours, and services complete and actively maintained.

☐ **NAP Consistency**

Name, address, and phone match exactly across every directory.

☐ **Reviews & Ratings**

Consistent volume and a real response cadence, not just star count.

☐ **Local Citations**

Listed on the directories that matter for the specific industry.

☐ **Location Pages**

Each service area has a genuinely distinct, non-templated page.

SECTION 08

Authority

Five checks on whether the wider web actually vouches for the brand.

☐ **Backlink Profile**

Growing at a natural pace relative to content and category.

AHREFS

☐ **Referring Domains**

Breadth of unique domains matters more than raw link count.

☐ **Brand Mentions**

Unlinked mentions tracked and converted where it's worth pursuing.

☐ **Digital PR**

At least one active initiative earning coverage, not just outreach emails.

☐ **Link Quality**

Relevance and site trust outweigh domain authority as a metric.

SECTION 09

AI Search Readiness

Six checks most agencies still aren't running — whether the brand is structured to be cited by AI Overviews, ChatGPT, and Perplexity, not just ranked in blue links.

- ☐ **Answer Engine Optimization**
Key pages directly answer the question in the first two sentences.
- ☐ **Generative Engine Optimization**
Content is structured for extraction into an AI-generated summary.
- ☐ **Entity Optimization**
The brand is unambiguously identified as a distinct entity, not a string.
- ☐ **Structured Data**
Organization, FAQ, and Article schema present and validated.
[SCHEMA.ORG](https://schema.org)
- ☐ **Question-Based Content**
Pages address the specific phrasing real users ask AI assistants.
- ☐ **Knowledge Graph Presence**
Confirmed panel or verified entity data across major platforms.

WHY IT MATTERS

AI answer engines don't rank ten results — they cite one synthesis. Sites that aren't structured for extraction are invisible to a growing share of search, regardless of where they rank.



SECTION 10

User Experience

Six checks on whether the traffic SEO earns actually converts once it arrives.

☐ **Navigation Clarity**

A first-time visitor can find what they need in under three clicks.

☐ **Readability**

Body copy scores well for grade level and visual scan-ability.

☐ **Accessibility**

Contrast, alt text, and keyboard navigation meet WCAG basics.

☐ **Trust Signals**

Testimonials, credentials, and guarantees visible above the fold.

☐ **Form Usability**

Minimal required fields; errors are clear and inline.

☐ **CTA Clarity**

One primary action per page, stated in plain, specific language.

WHY IT MATTERS

Rankings without conversion are a vanity metric. UX is the multiplier that turns organic visibility into pipeline and revenue.

FAST CHECK

Watch three real session recordings on the highest-traffic landing page. Rage clicks and dead scrolls reveal more than a heatmap summary ever will.

SECTION 11

Analytics

Six checks confirming the numbers behind every other section can be trusted.

- ☐ **GA4 Configuration**
Correctly scoped, deduplicated, and free of bot traffic inflation.

- ☐ **Search Console Setup**
Verified across every relevant property and subdomain.

- ☐ **Conversion Tracking**
Every meaningful action — lead, sale, call — fires reliably.

- ☐ **Event Tracking**
Scroll depth, clicks, and form interactions captured where relevant.

- ☐ **Dashboards**
One source of truth leadership actually opens each month.

- ☐ **Reporting Cadence**
A fixed monthly rhythm, not an ad-hoc pull when someone asks.

SECTION 12

Growth Prioritization

Once every check above is scored, plot the fixes on a single matrix.



- ☐ **High Impact**
Prioritize first — worth dedicated budget this cycle.

- ☐ **Quick Wins**
Low effort, real impact — schedule immediately.

- ☐ **Medium Impact**
Valuable, but sequenced behind higher-leverage work.

- ☐ **Low Impact / Long-Term**
Revisit once the top two quadrants are cleared.

SECTION 13

Final SEO Scorecard

Score each category from 1–10 after completing the checklist, then plot the overall trajectory.

TECHNICAL —	CONTENT —	AUTHORITY —	LOCAL —
AI SEARCH —	UX —	ANALYTICS —	OVERALL SCORE —

SCORING LEGEND

● Excellent (9–10) ● Strong (7–8) ● Needs Improvement (4–6) ● Critical (1–3)

HOW TO READ THIS

An overall score under 6 means the foundation isn't ready for a growth sprint yet. Fix the lowest two categories first — the rest compound faster once they're clear.

SECTION 14

Ready to Build Sustainable Organic Growth?

A checklist tells you where things stand. It doesn't fix them. RankForge helps leadership teams move from a completed audit to a measurable, budgeted growth plan — so every review ends in a decision, not just a longer list.

SERVICES

- Executive SEO Consulting
- Local SEO
- Generative Engine Optimization (GEO)
- Content Strategy
- Technical SEO
- AI Search Optimization (AEO)
- Entity SEO
- SEO Audits

Book Your Free Strategy Session

A 30-minute working session on your scorecard, not a sales pitch.

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