SEO Case Studies: Patterns and Tradeoffs — Course Overview

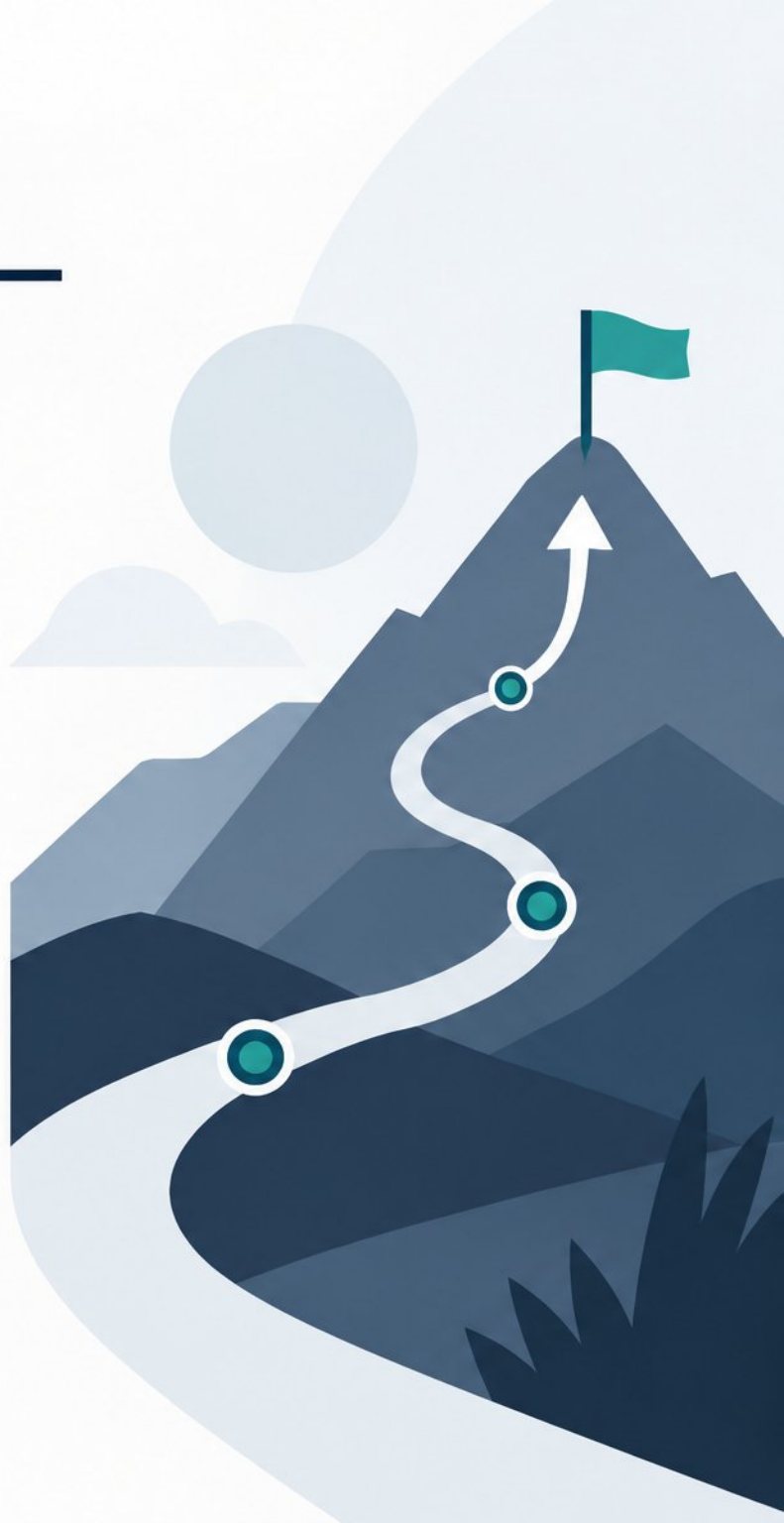
Goal: judge whether a technical SEO intervention is worth doing on your own site

What counts: crawl control, indexation, rendering, architecture, structured data, Core Web Vitals, migrations

Why case studies mislead: survivorship bias, selection bias, and attribution problems

Recurring loop: baseline → hypothesis → intervention → measurement → tradeoff decision

Roadmap: reading cases, four intervention families, a tradeoff framework, guided workshop



Why Published SEO Case Studies Mislead

Survivorship bias:
agencies publish wins, not flat quarters or quiet client churn

Selection bias:
the published case is usually the most flattering, not typical

Correlation vs. causation:
same window often includes launches, campaigns, PR, seasonality

Convenient time windows:
charts start at lows and end at highs

Vanity metrics as outcomes:
traffic and keyword counts are inputs, not results

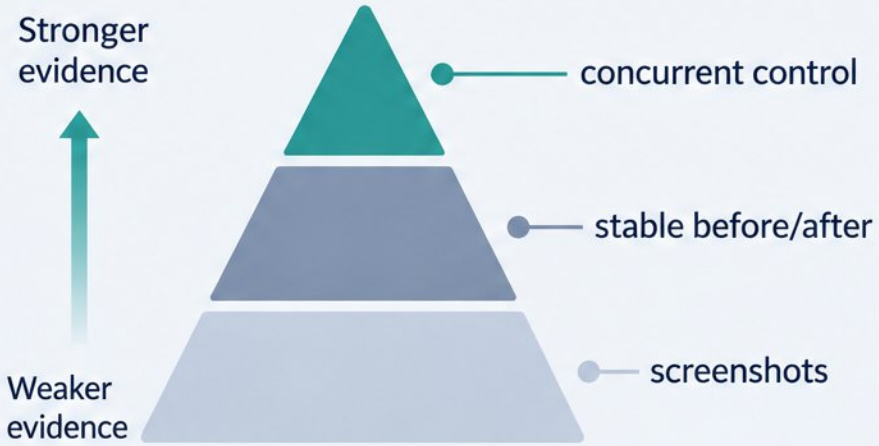


Anatomy of a Credible Case Study



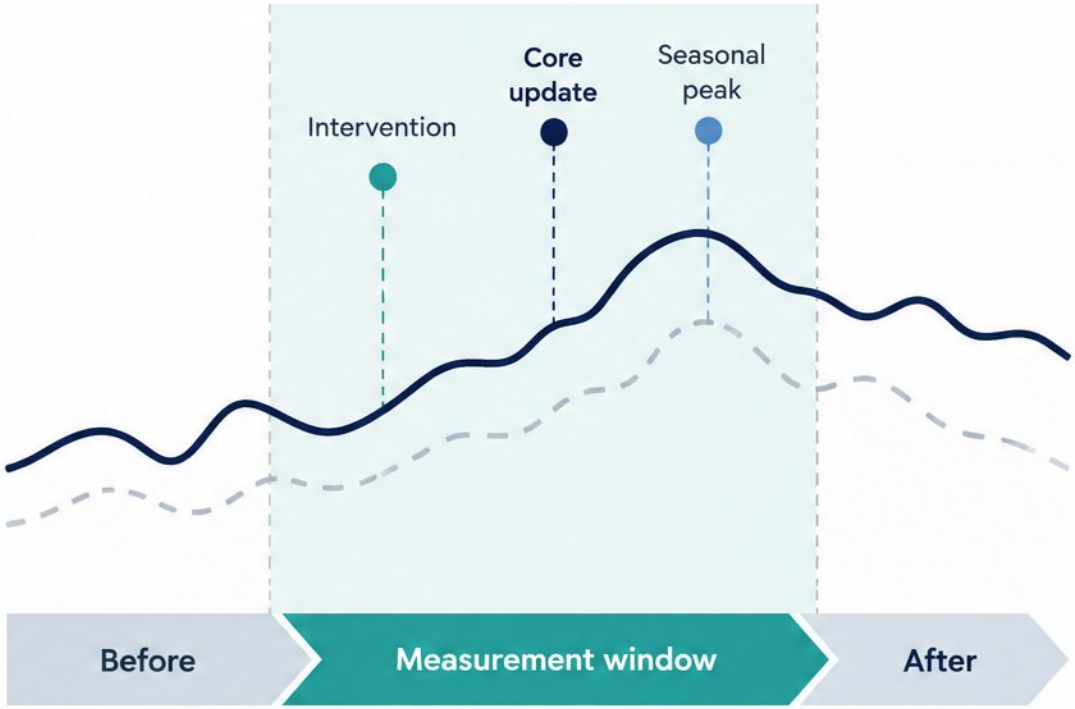
- **Five parts:** context, baseline, intervention record, measurement window, outcome
- **Evidence hierarchy:** concurrent control beats stable before/after, which beats screenshots
- Show the full pre-intervention trend and absolute numbers, not just a percentage
- Define "traffic": clicks vs. sessions, channel, page group, keywords tracked
- Reconcile Search Console clicks with analytics sessions; flag tracking breaks

Evidence Hierarchy



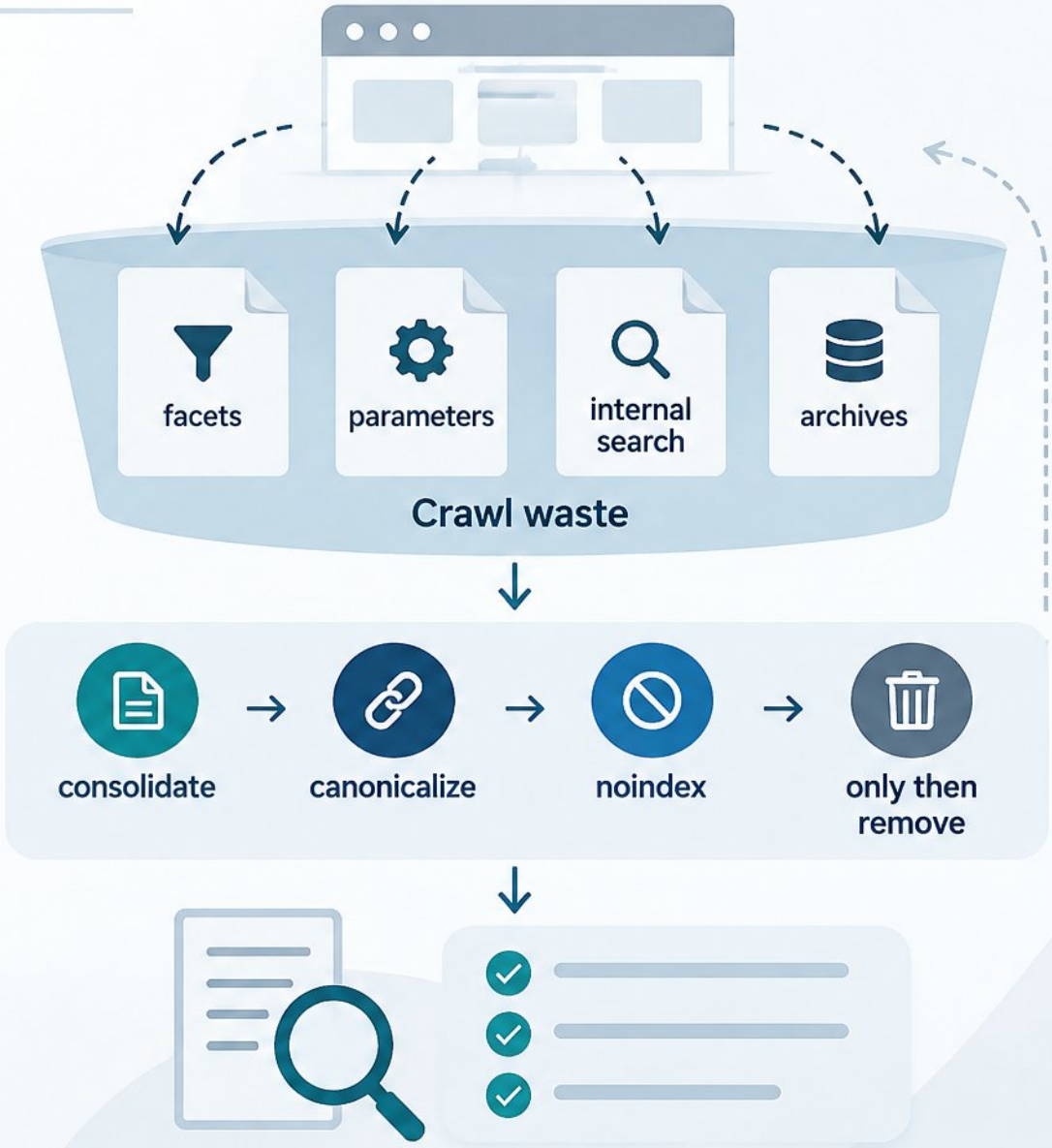
Red Flags and Confounders: What Would Have Happened Anyway?

- No baseline, or several changes shipped at once — attribution breaks
- Google core and spam updates inside the window mimic intervention effects
- Seasonality and demand shifts: compare like periods against a control set
- Search Console data gaps hit every property — if only yours changed, check your site
- Sometimes the honest answer is "not enough evidence to tell"



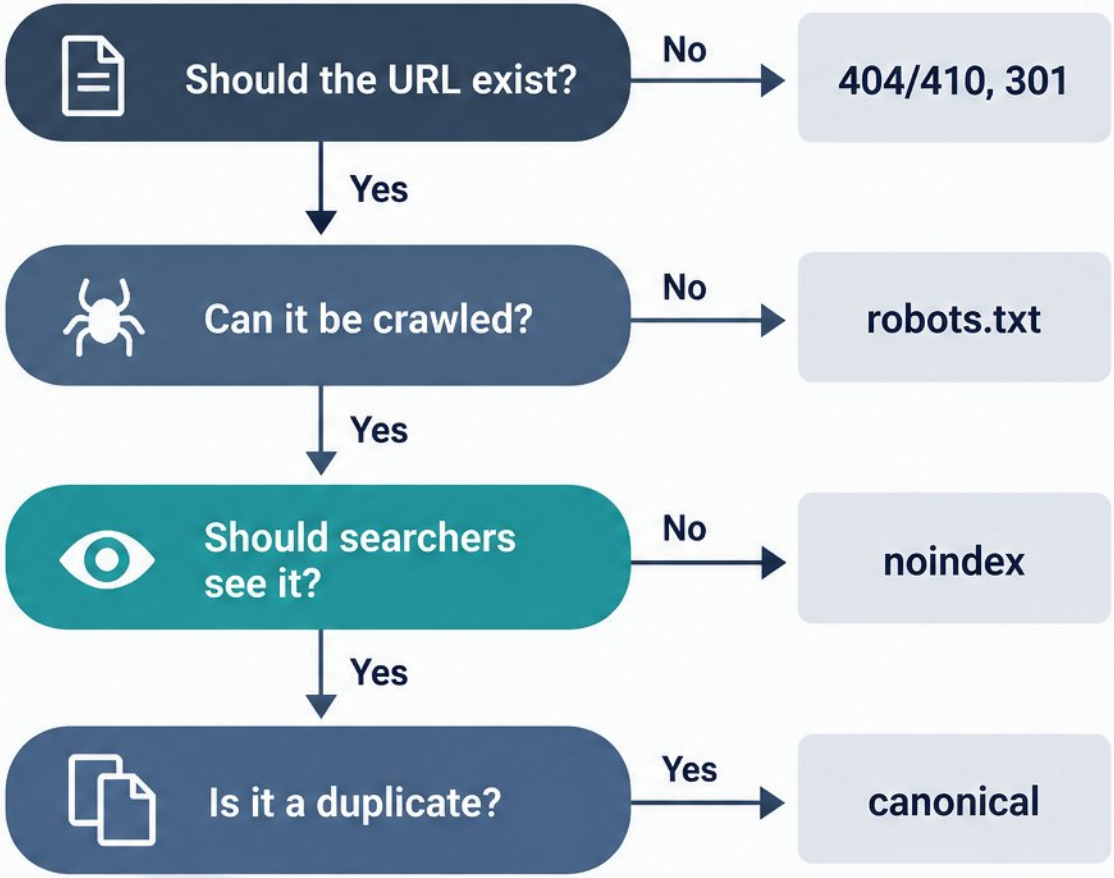
Crawl and Indexation Interventions: The Core Patterns

- Pattern: cut crawl waste from facets, parameters, internal search, and archives
- Index bloat cleanup order: consolidate → canonicalize → noindex → only then remove
- Fix leftover accidental noindex or robots.txt blocks from migrations
- Measure logs and Crawl Stats first; classify URLs by pattern
- Verify in Crawl Stats, Page Indexing, sitemaps — status shows a cause only after inspecting the URL



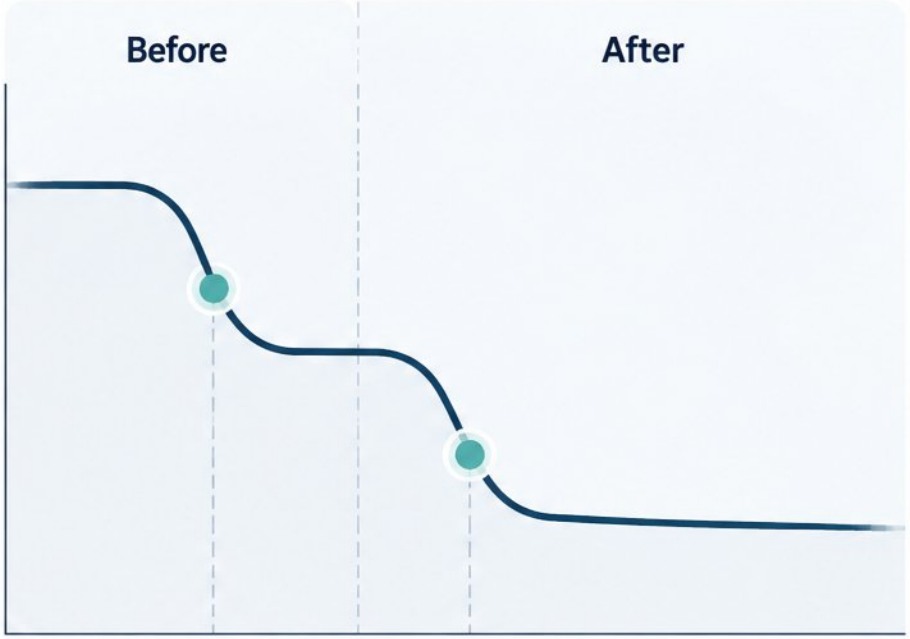
Robots.txt, Noindex, and Canonical: How the Tradeoffs Interact

- Three tools, three questions: robots.txt controls fetching, noindex controls listing, canonical controls consolidation
- Expensive trap: a robots.txt disallow silently disables noindex and canonical — Googlebot can't read them
- Correct deindexing sequence: keep URLs crawlable, let noindex be read, confirm the drop, then block
- Deindexing low-value sets can hold or improve visibility — reversible with noindex, not deletion
- Ask in order: should the URL exist (404/410, 301) → crawling (robots.txt) → listing (noindex) → duplicate (canonical)



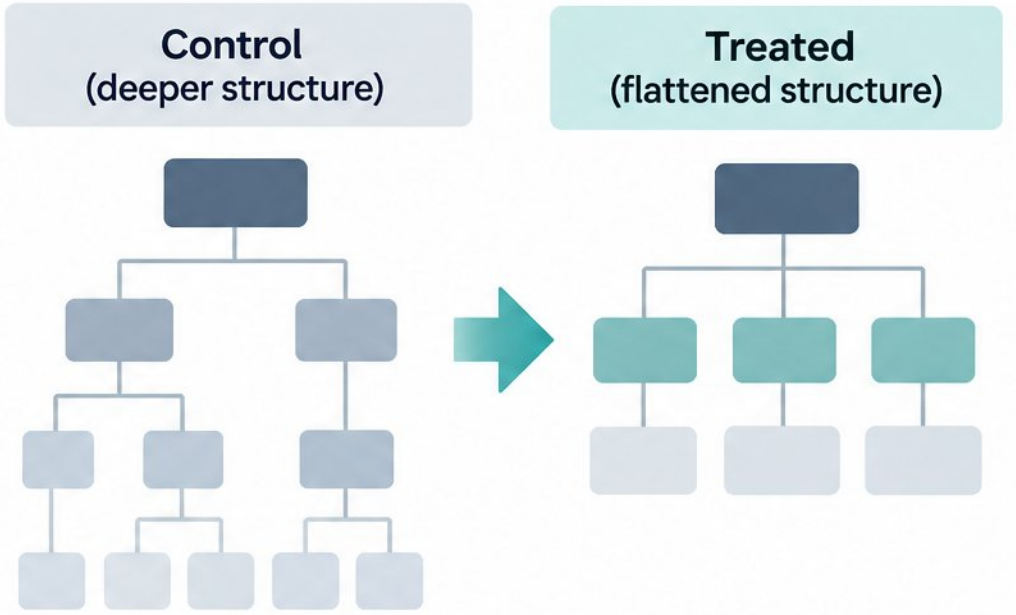
What Deindexing Case Studies Actually Show

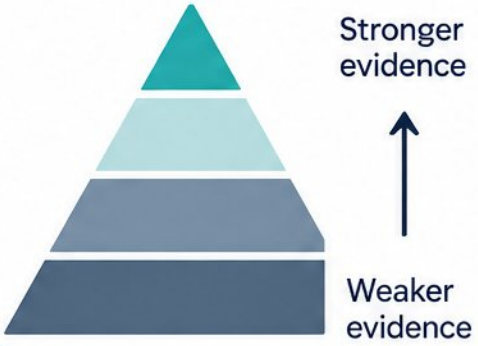
1. Moz: ~75% of URLs deindexed, pages kept live — visibility held, but uncontrolled
2. One site took ~3 months for thin pages to drop, in two separate waves
3. Marketplace and enterprise cleanup cases: directionally better, confounds unresolved
4. Recovery tracks recrawl rate — expect months, not weeks, on large sites
5. The fix is rarely isolated; few cases report a true counterfactual



Site Architecture and Internal Linking: Evidence and Limits

- Flatten click depth and rebuild internal links to priority commercial pages
- Iceland Groceries split test: ~25% uplift on treated level 2–3 category pages
- Most cases cluster at 5–25%; 260% headlines often reflect tiny baselines or bundled changes
- Cheap to plan, expensive to execute, easy to regress as templates and pages drift
- Track click depth, crawl requests, indexation rate, and ranking distribution; redesigıs confound







Core Web Vitals: Real UX Wins, Weaker Ranking Evidence

BETTER
EXPERIENCES
BRIGHTER RESULTS

1. Thresholds at p75: LCP ≤2.5s, INP ≤200ms, CLS ≤0.1 (poor: >4s, >500ms, >0.25)
2. Clear wins: UX, conversion, and mobile speed on image-, JS-, and font-heavy templates
3. Weaker evidence: CWV as direct ranking lift — check what else changed
4. Field data (CrUX, Search Console) is a rolling 28-day p75 window; lab data diagnoses only
5. Tradeoff: engineering cost vs. ranking expectations vs. business KPIs

Core Web Vitals (p75 thresholds)

LCP	INP	CLS
≤2.5s	≤200ms	≤0.1
(poor: >4s)	(poor: >500ms)	(poor: >0.25)

Field data (CrUX, Search Console) is a rolling 28-day p75 window

Lab data diagnoses only

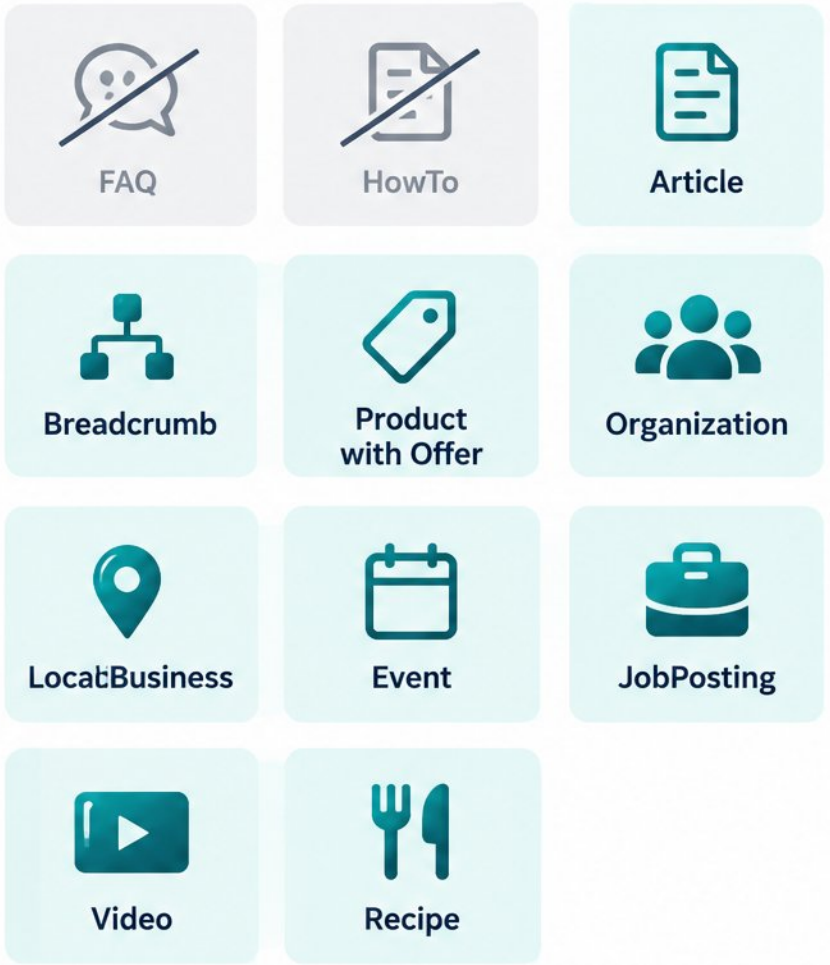
Weaker evidence: CWV as direct ranking lift — check what else changed



Structured Data and Rich Results: What Still Pays in 2026

- Eligibility is not entitlement: markup enables, the algorithm decides
- FAQ rich results fully sunset May 7, 2026; HowTo died in 2023
- Still shipping: Article, Breadcrumb, Product with Offer, Organization, LocalBusiness, Event, JobPosting, Video, Recipe
- Markup can lift CTR without lifting rank — separate the two
- Validate with Rich Results Test; mismatched markup gets ignored

Rich Result Types



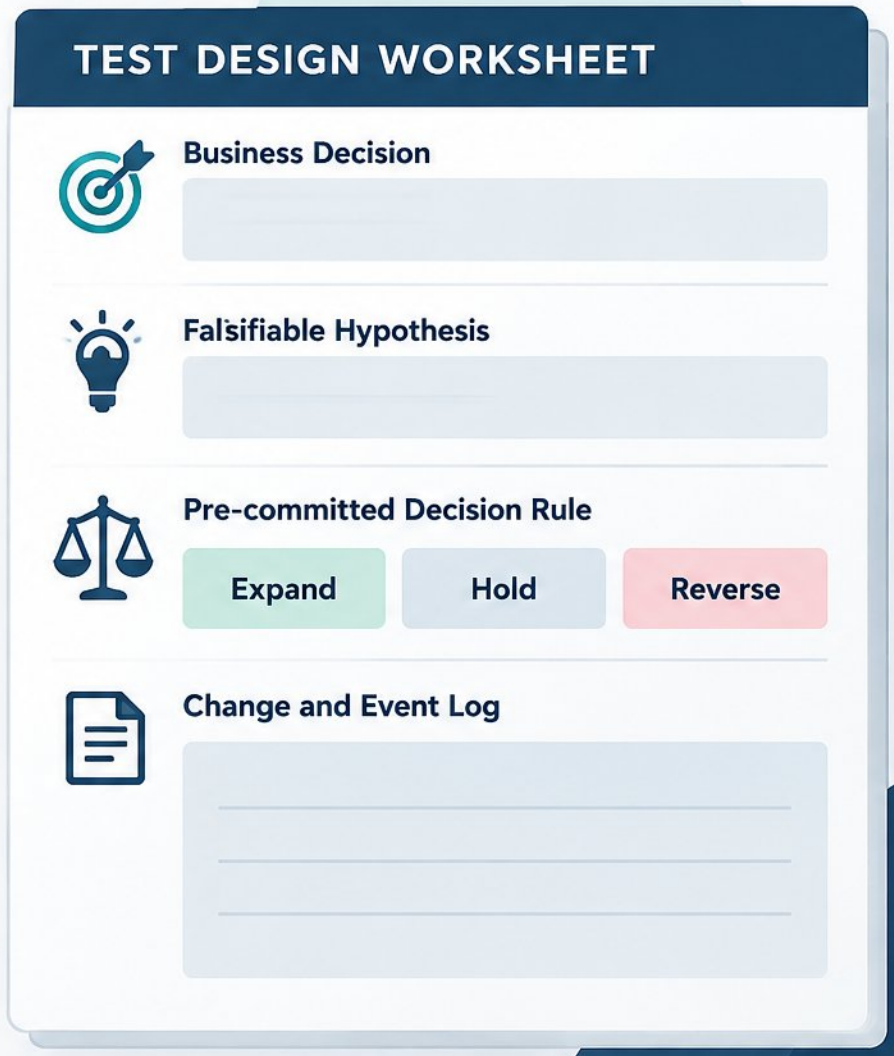
Migrations and Redesigns: High-Risk, High-Learning Cases

1. **Failure #1:** incomplete redirect maps, not content loss
   Documented case: 163,198 URLs unredirected, 26% traffic decline
2. **Failure #2:** old-site directives carried over (robots.txt, noindex, staging canonicals)
3. **Failure #3:** client-side JS left Googlebot with empty shells
4. Diagnose drops with crawl comparison, index coverage, release dates
5. Tradeoff: launch speed vs. QA completeness; recovery 1.5–6 months



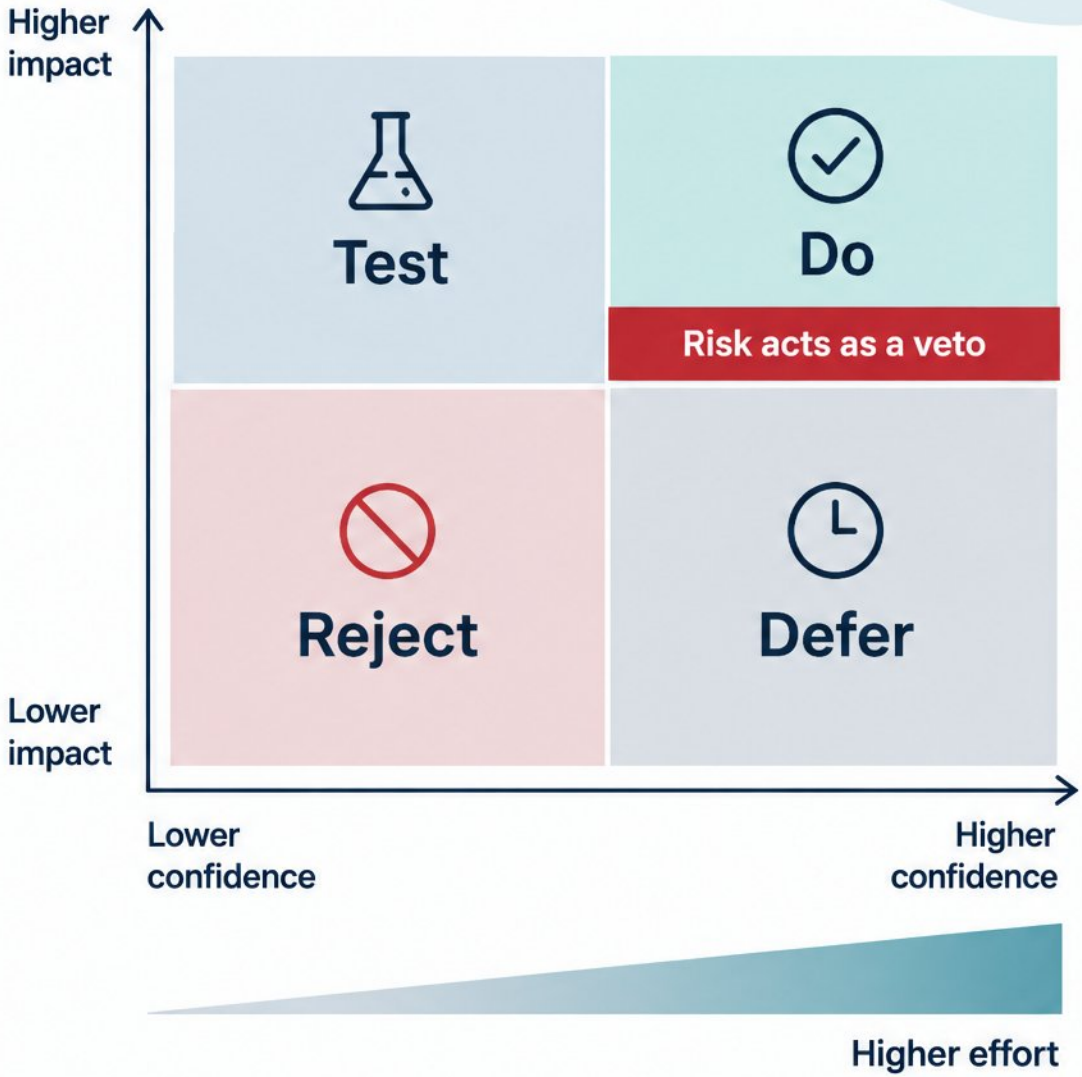
Designing a Test So You Can Learn Something

1. Start with a business decision, not a tactic to prove
2. Write a falsifiable hypothesis: a number, page set, and period
3. Set the decision rule before results: expand, hold, or reverse
4. Keep a change and event log to catch confounders early
5. No concurrent control? Label it structured observation, lower confidence
6. Log every test — inconclusive results still build evidence



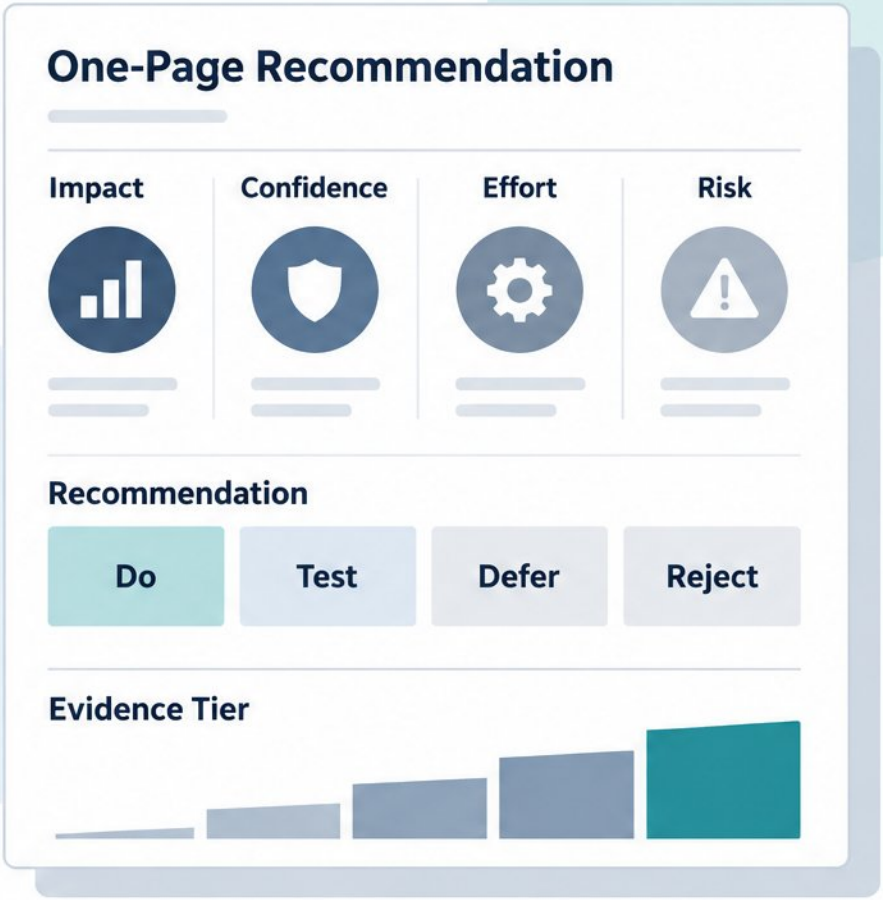
Tradeoff Framework: Do, Test, Defer, or Reject

- Score every candidate fix on impact, confidence, effort, and risk
- Simple formula: (Impact × Confidence) ÷ Effort — risk acts as a veto
- Fix by layer: crawlability and indexing first, then rendering, then UX/performance
- Check transferability: site scale, CMS, templates, market mix, update timing
- Upward: state the range, name the assumption, say what would change your mind



Workshop: Evaluate a Technical SEO Intervention End to End

1. Apply five-part case anatomy and red-flag checklist to a supplied case
2. Name the baseline, exact intervention, confounders, and measurement gaps
3. Score it on impact, confidence, effort, and risk for your own site
4. Output one page: do, test, defer, or reject — state evidence tier
5. Peer review on evidence quality and tradeoff reasoning, not uplift size



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