

Search Demand Generation: A Strategic Framework for Building Competition-Free SEO Zones

January 2026

I. Introduction: The Traffic Paradox	5
Look At The Numbers	5
What Google Did	5
You Have No Leverage	7
I Know What You're Feeling	8
The Exhaustion	8
The Invisibility	9
It Gets Worse	9
Everything You've Tried	10
The Content Trap	10
The Diversification Trap	10
The Quality Trap	11
The Authority Trap	11
The Long-Tail Trap	12
The Pattern	12
So Stop	12
II. The Enemy	13
The Belief Underneath	13
The Assumptions You Never Questioned	14
Why Escape Feels Impossible	15
The Structural Problem	16
The Cycle	17
What It Costs	18
What It Costs The Team	19
The Real Cost	19
III. The Paradigm Shift	20
The False Belief	20
The Reality	20
The Space Station	21
The Different Question	22
IV. The Solution	22

A Different Game	22
The Philosophy	23
Competition-Free Zones	24
Examples That Exist	25
The Two Components	25
V. Search Query Design	26
What You're Actually Doing	26
Tactic 1: Problem Naming	27
Tactic 2: Framework Creation	28
Tactic 3: Metric Invention	29
Tactic 4: Question Surfacing	30
Tactic 5: Comparison Creation	30
VI. Demand Jacking	31
The Problem	31
The Principle	31
Tactic 1: Existing Content Injection	32
Tactic 2: Gateway Pages	32
Tactic 3: PR and Media Coverage	33
Tactic 4: Community Seeding	34
Tactic 5: Paid Search Arbitrage	34
Tactic 6: Speaking and Conferences	35
Combining Tactics	35
VII. The Canvases	36
Two Pages. One System.	36
Canvas 1: Search Query Design	36
Canvas 2: Demand Jacking	38
Using The Canvases	40
VIII. The Flywheel	41
Why It Compounds	41
The Mechanics	41
The Compounding Math	42

What Feeds The Flywheel	43
What Breaks The Flywheel	44
IX. Measuring Success	45
Different Metrics For A Different Game	45
Leading Indicators (Months 1-3)	45
Core Metrics (Months 3-12)	45
Long-Term Indicators (12+ Months)	46
What To Ignore	47
The Dashboard	47
X. Objections	48
"This Takes Too Long"	48
"I Need Traffic Now"	48
"What If The Term Doesn't Catch On?"	48
"Competitors Will Copy My Term"	49
"My Industry Is Different"	49
"I Don't Have Authority To Coin Terms"	50
"This Feels Like Marketing Jargon"	50
XI. The Choice	51
What I've Learned	51
Two Paths	51
What This Costs	52
What You Gain	52
The Real Shift	53
XII. What Comes Next	53
The Tools	53
The Influences	54
If You Want Help	55
The First Step	55

I. Introduction: The Traffic Paradox

Look At The Numbers

Look at the numbers. I need you to actually look.

In 2015, a #1 ranking got you 30-40% of clicks. Thirty to forty percent. That was the prize. That was what you were fighting for.

By 2020, that same #1 ranking? 15-20%.

Today? Today that #1 ranking—the absolute best position you can achieve, the thing you've been killing yourself to get—gets you 5-9% of clicks.

Five. To. Nine. Percent.

Just sit with that for a second.

You're ranking #1 and capturing less than 10% of traffic. Where did the other 91% go?

I'll tell you where it went. Everywhere else. And that wasn't an accident.

What Google Did

So somewhere along the line, Google redesigned the search results page. And I need you to understand what they did because nobody's saying it plainly.

They turned the search results page into a retention mechanism. Every single element on that page exists for one purpose: prevent the click. Keep you on Google. Never let you leave.

AI Overviews — Answer questions without you visiting a website. User gets what they need. Google keeps them. Your content never gets seen.

Ads — Sitting above organic results. More of them on competitive keywords. You're not just competing with other websites. You're competing with companies paying for visibility.

Featured snippets — Google extracts the answer FROM YOUR CONTENT and displays it directly. You provided the information. Google served it. User moved on. You got nothing.

People Also Ask — Rabbit holes that keep users exploring within Google. More questions, more answers, fewer reasons to ever click through to you.

Shopping results, local packs, video carousels — Every single one fragments the attention. Every single one reduces the percentage of users who make it to your site.

Enshittification — And this one's darker. There's evidence Google deliberately surfaces mediocre results. Not by accident. By design. Because when you click a bad result, you bounce back to search. And when you're back on search, there's another chance you'll click an ad. The worse the organic results, the better the ad revenue. Think about that for a second. They may be making results worse on purpose.

And here's the thing—this is accelerating. Not slowing down.
ACCELERATING.

Google's business model is clear: more time on Google means more ad revenue. Your organic listing is competing against Google's entire business model.

That's the structural problem. Not your content. Not your authority. THE SYSTEM ITSELF.

You Have No Leverage

And while Google's fragmenting your clicks, competition is intensifying.

Everyone's doing SEO now. Your competitors hired content teams. Every SaaS company has a blog. AI makes content creation cheaper and faster, which means more content, which means more competition for the same shrinking pool of clicks.

You're competing harder for less. The effort increases while the returns decline.

And you have ZERO leverage in this relationship.

Zero.

Google owns your distribution channel completely. They can change the algorithm tomorrow and your traffic disappears. They can add more ads and push your listing down. They can expand AI Overviews to more query types and eliminate clicks entirely.

You have no negotiating power. No alternative. No recourse.

The game changed. You're still playing by the old rules.

I Know What You're Feeling

I know what you're feeling right now. If you're a marketing leader at a growth-stage company—Series B through IPO—responsible for pipeline, I KNOW what you're feeling.

"I'm hitting my SEO targets, yet I'm still missing traffic goals."

There's a cognitive dissonance in that. You're winning by every metric that's supposed to matter, and you're still losing.

Rankings up. Traffic down. Quality high. Visits low. Dashboard green everywhere except the number that actually matters.

Try explaining that to the board. Try justifying why organic traffic dropped 15% this quarter while your keyword rankings improved.

You can't make sense of it because the metrics that used to correlate don't correlate anymore.

You're winning a game that doesn't determine the outcome.

The Exhaustion

So you try harder. Right? That's what you do.

Publish more content—traffic doesn't budge. Build more links—marginal gains that disappear next quarter. Optimize more pages—still lose to fragmentation.

You went from publishing 2 posts a week to 10. Traffic went up 20%. The moment you slowed down? Dropped again.

You're not building an asset that compounds. You're renting attention that evaporates the second you stop feeding the machine.

There's a specific kind of exhaustion in that. And I see it in you right now. The sprinting on a treadmill that's speeding up. The team burned out. The budget stretched. Barely keeping pace with where you were last year.

Everyone's got this exhaustion. EVERYONE.

If you're doing SEO in 2024, you're exhausted. That's not weakness. That's the game working exactly as designed—to exhaust you.

The Invisibility

And while you're exhausted, you're becoming invisible.

Your organic listing looks identical to your competitors. Google treats you all the same. Same keywords, same positions, same featured snippets, same People Also Ask boxes fragmenting the same clicks.

You're a generic option in a crowded list. One blue link among many. The brand you built gets reduced to 160 characters of meta description.

Competing for the same keywords as everyone else means you look like everyone else. And looking like everyone else means you have no leverage.

No leverage. No differentiation. No ownership.

It Gets Worse

And here's the part that's hard to sit with:

This keeps getting worse.

AI Overviews are expanding to more queries. Google is showing fewer organic results per page. The trajectory is clear—less traffic, not more. And you have no control over it.

Every quarter, Google tests new features that keep users on-platform. Every algorithm update seems designed to reduce your visibility, not increase it.

The game isn't just hard. The game is actively working against you.

You can see where this is heading. More AI answers, fewer clicks. More ads, less organic space. The trend line doesn't bend back in your favor. It gets steeper.

Everything You've Tried

So let's talk about everything you've tried. Because I know you've tried things.

The Content Trap

"If we publish 5x more articles, we'll get 5x more traffic."

No. You won't. You publish more, you get marginal gains that don't compound. The moment you slow down, traffic drops again.

You're not building an asset. You're renting attention. And the rent keeps going up.

The Diversification Trap

"We'll reduce Google dependency by going multi-channel."

Now you're competing on LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, and every other platform. The fragmentation problem is the same. Algorithms control your reach everywhere.

You haven't escaped the trap. You've just spread it across more surfaces.

The Quality Trap

"If we just make better content, we'll win."

Quality is table stakes. Everyone has quality content now. AI makes it cheaper and faster. Your competitors can match your quality without matching your budget.

And you can't out-quality the search results structure. You can write the best article on a topic, rank #1, and still get 7% of clicks because Google added an AI Overview, three ads, a featured snippet, and a People Also Ask box.

Quality doesn't overcome structural click dilution.

The Authority Trap

"Build domain authority and we'll rank for everything."

Authority helps you compete better. It doesn't help you escape competition. You're still fighting for the same keywords in the same fragmented results.

Authority used to mean traffic. Now authority means you get 7% click-through rate instead of 3%. You're winning more of a pool that's worth less every quarter.

The Long-Tail Trap

"We'll target thousands of long-tail keywords."

You're still fighting for searches that already exist. They're just less competitive. You're not creating demand—you're finding smaller pools to extract from.

More content, same extraction game, no ownership.

The Pattern

You see the pattern?

More content. Better quality. Higher authority. Multi-channel distribution. Long-tail targeting.

They're all variations of the same game. Compete for keywords that already exist. Optimize to capture a bigger share. Hope the math works out.

But the math doesn't work anymore.

The search results fragment clicks. Competition increases supply. Your share of a shrinking pool gets smaller. The effort to maintain position increases. Nothing compounds.

You've been trying harder at the wrong game.

So Stop

So stop.

Stop trying harder at the thing that isn't working. Stop optimizing your way out of a structural problem. Stop competing for positions that become less valuable every quarter.

That was before. This is now.

There's a different game. And before I show you what it is, I need to name the enemy clearly.

Because the enemy isn't Google. The enemy isn't your competitors. The enemy is a belief system you didn't even know you had.

Let's look at it.

II. The Enemy

The Belief Underneath

I need you to see something you've never seen before.

There's a belief underneath everything you do. Every strategy you've built. Every playbook you've followed. Every late night publishing content. Every dashboard refresh.

The belief goes like this: Keywords exist. People search for them. Your job is to compete for the ones that matter.

And here's the thing—that belief doesn't feel like a belief. It feels like physics. It feels like the way SEO works. It feels so obvious you've never questioned it.

"Of course you compete for keywords—what else would you do?"

I need you to sit with that question. Because that question is the trap.

I call it the **Competition Trap**. The belief that you must compete for demand that already exists.

The Assumptions You Never Questioned

The trap hides inside assumptions that feel so obvious you don't even see them as assumptions.

Assumption 1: Keywords are fixed. The list of search terms already exists—you just research them, prioritize them, optimize for them. That's the game, right?

But here's what you missed: new keywords are created every day.

"Loop marketing" didn't exist until HubSpot coined it. "Product-led growth" wasn't a search term until someone gave that pattern a name. "Net Promoter Score" had zero search volume before Fred Reichheld invented it.

You never thought about **CREATING** keywords because every tool you use assumes keywords are discovered, not designed.

And once you believe that, you're trapped.

Assumption 2: Success means capturing a bigger share. You're fighting for percentages. Rank #1 instead of #5. Capture 9% instead of 3%. Win a larger slice of the pie.

But that math ignores something. 100% of 100 searches beats 5% of 10,000—if that 100 grows into 500, then 1,000, then 3,000 over three years while you still own all of it.

You were so focused on winning slices that you never considered baking new pies.

Assumption 3: You can't influence what people search for.

But you can. Every successful framework proves it. When someone coins a term that spreads, they've created demand, not captured it.

You just never thought of that as SEO.

Why Escape Feels Impossible

And here's the painful part. Even when you see the Competition Trap, it's hard to escape.

It's invisible. When the entire industry operates the same way, it doesn't feel like a trap. It feels like the way things work. Agencies teach it. Tools reinforce it. Conference speakers assume it. There's no external reference point to show you something's wrong.

It's self-reinforcing. You hired an SEO team—they need work, so they target more keywords. You bought tools—their dashboards show competitor rankings, so you compete. You built content calendars around keyword clusters. Hard to pivot when your whole system depends on the old model.

Every tool, every workflow, every team structure locks you deeper in.

And it promises wins. That's what makes the trap so seductive—it works. You CAN rank #1. You CAN win the keyword. The promise delivers. Partially.

But then you have to defend that ranking forever. And fight for every other keyword too. And produce more content to maintain what you have. There's no escape velocity, no point where you've "won" and can stop. Just perpetual effort.

You're not building something that compounds. You're maintaining something that depletes.

There's a specific kind of exhaustion in that. The feeling that you're doing everything right and still losing ground.

I see that exhaustion in you right now.

The Structural Problem

And here's what makes it worse. The more competitive a keyword gets, the less it's worth.

This isn't a coincidence. It's a structural relationship.

High-value keywords attract ads. Google monetizes winners. Search "marketing automation"—you'll see 4-6 ads above organic results. Search "CRM software"—the entire first screen is ads. Your #1 organic ranking is below the fold, invisible until someone scrolls.

Popular topics trigger AI Overviews. Google keeps users on-platform by answering questions directly. You provided the information. Google served it. The user moved on without clicking.

Established queries show featured snippets. Zero-click answers. You rank #1, but your click-through rate is near zero because the snippet answered the question before anyone clicked.

And here's the bitter irony: the better your content, the more likely Google is to feature it. The more Google features it, the fewer clicks you get.

Excellence gets punished.

Competitive terms show People Also Ask boxes. Rabbit holes that keep users exploring within Google's ecosystem. Video queries show YouTube carousels—Google's own property. Discussion topics show Reddit threads.

Every feature that fragments your clicks is a feature that increases Google's revenue.

You're not paranoid. The system is designed this way.

The Cycle

Watch how this plays out:

A keyword becomes valuable. Everyone competes for it. Competition signals value to Google—more advertisers bid. Google adds more ads. The keyword becomes popular enough that Google adds an AI Overview. Featured snippets appear.

Your click-through rate collapses.

You're still #1. It doesn't matter.

The harder you fight, the less you win. That's the structural relationship. Competition attracts fragmentation. The more valuable a keyword, the more Google fragments the clicks.

It's not a bug. It's the system working as designed.

What It Costs

The Competition Trap bleeds money in ways that aren't always obvious.

You're paying the same amount—same team, same tools, same content production—but getting less traffic every year. Your cost per visit is rising even when your rankings don't change.

When organic declines, you compensate with paid. But paid gets more expensive too—same competitive dynamics, different channel. Your acquisition cost creeps up quarter after quarter.

You're spending more to stay in the same place.

But the strategic costs are worse.

Anyone can target the same keywords you're targeting. Tomorrow, a well-funded competitor could launch and split your traffic. You have no moat, no protection, no leverage. You don't own anything—you're renting rankings from Google.

And you're forced to keep competing even as ROI declines. If you stop, you lose traffic immediately. If you keep going, you lose traffic slowly. There's no winning move within the game.

Only the option to change games entirely.

What It Costs The Team

Try explaining this to the board: "My rankings are up, but my traffic is down, and my customer acquisition cost is up, but it's not my fault."

That's a hard conversation. SEOs are getting laid off for failing to solve a problem that can't be solved within the Competition Trap framework.

And the team feels it. More content to maintain rankings. More optimization to fight algorithm changes. More paid spend to compensate for organic decline. More, more, more—and you're still behind.

Nothing kills morale like working hard with nothing to show for it. The content team ships 10 great articles—traffic declines anyway. The SEO team improves rankings—clicks decrease due to search result changes. Effort disconnects from outcome.

People burn out. People leave.

And maybe the biggest cost: while you're competing, others are building Competition-Free Zones. Every quarter you wait, they pull further ahead. By Year 3, their zones are producing 10x what they started with—and still compounding.

You can never catch up because they have a head start that accumulates over time.

The Real Cost

The cost isn't just traffic.

It's the opportunity cost of not building something that compounds.

So if the Competition Trap is the enemy, what's the alternative?

There has to be a different game.

Let's look at it.

III. The Paradigm Shift

The False Belief

Everything about the Competition Trap rests on one belief. It's so fundamental you didn't question it. It felt like physics.

The belief: demand is finite.

Keywords exist in a fixed pool. Your job is to capture a percentage of that pool. Success means taking share from competitors. The pie doesn't grow—you just fight for bigger slices.

You believed this for years. It shaped every strategy you built. Every content calendar, every keyword prioritization, every competitive analysis.

And it's completely wrong.

The Reality

The internet isn't a fixed space. It's expanding constantly.

New searches are created every minute. People articulate new problems—"Why is my #1 ranking getting 5% click-through rate?"

Industries coin new language—"Product-Led Growth" didn't exist in 2015. Technology creates new categories—"AI Overviews" is a brand new search term. Every day, searches happen that didn't exist yesterday.

And here's something counterintuitive: LLMs are generating more queries, not fewer. You'd think AI would reduce search—people just ask ChatGPT. But AI makes people better at asking questions. They search for explanations, frameworks, definitions. The query space is expanding, not contracting.

Language evolves constantly too. "Dark social" didn't exist ten years ago—now it gets thousands of searches per month. "Zero-click search" was coined in 2019—now it's industry standard. The language of the internet is being written in real-time.

And whoever writes it owns it.

The Space Station

Let me give you a picture.

Imagine you're on a space station. It's crowded. Everyone's fighting for the best sleeping pod, the best window view, the best spot in the cafeteria. That's what competing for keywords feels like. Cramped. Zero-sum. If they get the pod, you don't.

Now look out the window.

There are entire planets out there. Unexplored and unclaimed. And the universe is expanding faster than you can explore it.

You've been fighting over a bunk bed while infinite real estate expands around you.

The Competition Trap is a scarcity mindset applied to an abundant reality. It assumes the space station is all there is. It ignores the planets.

The Different Question

Once you understand that demand isn't fixed—that it's generative, expanding, infinite—the math changes completely.

The old question: "What do people search for?" This assumes demand is fixed and your job is to capture it.

The new question: "What WILL people search for?" This assumes you can influence demand and your job is to create it.

That's the paradigm shift. Not a new tactic. A new question.

The game becomes: how do you claim a planet that's yours?

IV. The Solution

A Different Game

So if you're not competing for demand, what are you doing?

I call it Search Demand Generation. And the shift is this: instead of fighting for keywords that exist, you create keywords that don't exist yet.

Keywords you own 70-100% of. Not because you outranked everyone—because you're the only one there.

Here's what that looks like in practice.

You design the keywords people will search for. Not the keywords they currently search for—the ones they'll search for once you've introduced the concepts. You're creating search terms, not discovering them.

You seed awareness so people discover and use those terms. New keywords have zero volume by definition, right? No one searches for something they've never heard of. So you inject your terms into existing channels—content, PR, communities—until people encounter them and start searching.

And then you own the results when they search. Because you created the term, you own the content that defines it. When they Google it, they find you. Not you among ten competitors. Just you.

The volume grows over time as the terms spread. More people use them. More people search for them. More content gets created about them. And you still own 70-100% of the results.

That's Search Demand Generation.

The Philosophy

Here's the distinction that changed everything.

Competing is extraction. You're fighting for a percentage of a fixed pie. You capture, you defend, you capture more.

Generating is creation. You're building new pies you own entirely.

Extraction exhausts. You capture what exists, then have to capture more. There's no end to it.

Creation compounds. You build once, and it grows. Each piece of work makes the next piece more valuable.

That's the shift. Not tactics. Philosophy.

Competition-Free Zones

A Competition-Free Zone is a keyword or category you created where you own 70-100% of search results and can grow volume over time.

You know the difference between ranking #1 for a competitive keyword and owning a Competition-Free Zone?

Ranking #1 means fighting. Defending. Watching your click-through rate erode as Google adds more features to fragment the clicks.

Owning a Competition-Free Zone means you're the only result. Not because you beat everyone—because no one else is there. You created the space.

Here's what defines a real one:

- You own 7-10 of the top 10 results
- Volume is growing, not fixed
- Others cite you when they use the term
- It compounds over time

There's a specific kind of peace in that. Owning instead of fighting.

Examples That Exist

HubSpot created "Loop Marketing." Search that term today—HubSpot dominates the results. They coined it, they defined it, they own it. When others write about loop marketing, they cite HubSpot. When people search for it, they find HubSpot. The term gets thousands of searches per month, and HubSpot owns the category.

Another example is from someone whose ideas have influenced me greatly. Dan Sullivan of Strategic Coach created "Unique Ability." Search that term—the majority of results are from strategiccoach.com, or they reference Dan or Strategic Coach. He coined the concept, he owns the language, he captures the searches.

SparkToro coined "Zero-Click Search." Rand Fishkin gave a name to a phenomenon everyone was experiencing but couldn't articulate. Now the term gets tens of thousands of searches per month, and SparkToro is the authoritative source.

These aren't accidents. They're deliberate acts of language creation. And you can do the same thing.

The Two Components

Creating a Competition-Free Zone requires two things working together.

Search Query Design — Creating the keywords themselves.

This is the what. What term are you creating? Why will people search for it? There are five tactics for designing terms that stick. The key is that they need to be both meaningful and searchable. Not jargon. Language people will actually Google.

Demand Jacking — Seeding awareness through existing channels.

This is the how. New keywords have zero volume by definition. So how do you get people to start searching? You inject your terms into channels where attention already flows. You "jack" existing demand to create new demand.

Both are required. And here's why.

If you create a term without seeding it, no one searches. You have a clever concept that lives in your head and nowhere else.

If you seed a term that isn't searchable, it won't stick. People won't Google something that doesn't feel like a searchable phrase.

The magic is in combining them. Design a searchable term, then systematically seed it.

That's how Competition-Free Zones get built.

V. Search Query Design

What You're Actually Doing

Here's what creating keywords really means: you're giving language to things that already exist but don't have names yet.

You're not making up jargon. You're finding patterns, problems, frameworks that people experience but can't articulate concisely. And you give them words.

The key is that these need to be terms people will actually Google. Not vanity terms. Not clever wordplay. Phrases that feel like something you'd type into a search bar. Terms that name something real.

There are five tactics for designing searchable keywords. Each creates a different type of term.

The goal is to create a comprehensive strategy that leverages all five tactics and compounds over time.

Tactic 1: Problem Naming

The most powerful keywords are the ones that name a problem people feel but can't articulate.

Think about it. People feel the pain. They describe it in paragraphs on Reddit, in forums, in Slack channels. But there's no short term that captures it. No language that lets them say "yes, that—that's what I'm experiencing."

You create the term. They adopt it. And then they search for it.

"Click Dilution" — the problem of #1 rankings getting 5% click-through rate. People experienced this frustration for years. They wrote long posts about it. But there was no concise term.

"Revenge Bedtime Procrastination" — staying up late to reclaim personal time. People did this for years without having a name for it. Once someone named it, everyone recognized themselves. The term now gets thousands of searches per month.

"Zero-Click Search" — searches that don't result in clicks. SEO professionals watched click-through rate decline for years. SparkToro gave the phenomenon a name. Now it's industry standard language.

When to use this: when there's widespread pain without established terminology. You see people describing the same problem in long paragraphs. No industry term exists yet. The pain is real, frequent, and growing.

The signal is length. When people need a paragraph to describe something, they're waiting for a word.

Tactic 2: Framework Creation

If Problem Naming gives language to pain, Framework Creation gives structure to solutions. You're not just saying "here's the problem" — you're saying "here's how to think about it."

"Inbound Marketing" (HubSpot) — attract rather than interrupt. A framework for marketing that matched how modern buyers actually behave. Now it's an entire category.

"Product-Led Growth" (OpenView) — growth driven by product adoption rather than sales. A concept that named an emerging pattern in SaaS. Now there are conferences about it.

"Jobs to Be Done" (Clayton Christensen) — understanding what customers hire products to do. A methodology that reframed how to think about innovation.

When to use this: when existing frameworks don't fit your unique approach. You've developed a proprietary process. Your methodology

solves problems differently. You see a pattern emerging that others don't see yet.

And here's the thing about frameworks—once one catches on, derivative searches follow: "How to use [framework]", "[Framework] template", "[Framework] vs [alternative]", "[Framework] certification."

One coined term generates dozens of searchable keywords. That's the compounding.

Tactic 3: Metric Invention

Create a new way to measure something, and everyone who wants to improve that thing will search for your metric forever.

"Net Promoter Score" (Bain) — customer loyalty metric. One question: "How likely are you to recommend us?" Now gets enormous search volume. Entire software categories built around it.

"Domain Authority" (Moz) — SEO ranking potential. A proprietary metric that became industry standard. Everyone in SEO knows what DA means.

When to use this: when existing metrics don't capture what you're measuring. You've identified a gap in measurement. Current metrics don't predict what matters. You have proprietary data or methodology.

Metrics create annuity searches: "What is a good [metric]?", "How to improve [metric]", "[Metric] calculator", "[Metric] benchmark."

Once your metric becomes standard, people search for it forever. That's the power of this one.

Tactic 4: Question Surfacing

Sometimes the most powerful keyword is a question people didn't know to ask.

You have data or insights others don't. You reveal a hidden problem through a question. The question itself becomes searchable.

"What percentage of my rankings are in diluted search results?" — reveals click dilution as a measurable problem.

"How much of my traffic is dark social?" — reveals an attribution blindspot.

When to use this: when you have unique data or insights that reveal hidden problems. You can answer questions others can't. You have proprietary data or tools. Your perspective reveals blindspots.

Question Surfacing works best when paired with a tool or calculator. You surface the question, provide the answer, own both searches.

Tactic 5: Comparison Creation

When you're new, comparison searches don't exist yet. "[Your thing] vs [Established thing]" has zero volume. Right? No one's searching for a comparison to something they've never heard of.

But once you create demand for the comparison, you own both sides of that search.

Create comparison content before volume exists. Be fair and honest—that builds trust. Own your positioning. Clarify what makes you different.

As you grow, searches appear. And you already rank #1. Because you were there first.

This is a long game. Year 1 = 10 searches. Year 3 = 1,000 searches. Year 5 = you own the comparison category.

Now comes the hard part: getting people to actually search for it.

VI. Demand Jacking

The Problem

So you've designed a keyword. It names a real problem, or introduces a framework, or creates a new metric. It's good.

But it has zero search volume. By definition. Right? No one searches for something they've never heard of.

So how do you get people to start searching?

You inject your term into channels where attention already flows. You "jack" existing demand to create new demand.

That's Demand Jacking.

The Principle

Here's the insight that makes this work: existing demand is a vehicle for new demand.

People are already searching for related things. They're already reading content, attending conferences, scrolling LinkedIn. You don't need to build an audience from scratch. You introduce your term where they already are.

They encounter the term. They recognize it names something they've experienced. Later, they Google it.

Now your zero-volume keyword has volume.

Tactic 1: Existing Content Injection

This is often the fastest win.

Your top-performing content already has traffic. Visitors are already there, reading. You add your new term naturally.

Here's how: Identify your top 10 pages by traffic. Add your new keyword naturally where relevant. Link to your definitive content about the term.

Example: Your "B2B Marketing Strategy" post gets 5,000 visits/month. Add a section: "One pattern we're seeing is [Your Term]—the practice of [brief definition]." Link to your comprehensive post defining the term.

5,000 people per month now encounter your term. Some percentage will search for it later. You've created demand from traffic you already had.

Tactic 2: Gateway Pages

Create new pages targeting easy keywords that naturally introduce your term.

Here's the play: find informational keywords with low competition—keyword difficulty under 10. These are questions your

audience is already asking. Answer the query fully. Give them what they came for. Then introduce your term as the framework for understanding the answer.

Example: If your term is "Click Dilution," create a page targeting "why is my click-through rate declining despite ranking #1." That's a KD 8 keyword. Someone searching that exact question is experiencing the problem you've named. Your content ranks, answers their question, and gives them language for their frustration.

They came looking for an answer. They leave with a concept they'll use again. And some of them will search for that concept later.

These pages are gateways. Entry points. They meet people where they already are and lead them somewhere new.

Tactic 3: PR and Media Coverage

Get your term mentioned in publications your audience reads. Press coverage creates search demand directly.

Pitch stories around the problem your term names. Offer yourself as a source for trend pieces. Create newsworthy data or research that requires your terminology.

Example: Pitch a story on "The Hidden Metric Killing Your SEO ROI" to a marketing publication. The article introduces your term. Readers search for it to learn more.

Publications have built-in audiences. One mention in the right outlet can create hundreds or thousands of searches. Plus, the article itself becomes a search result you don't control but that references you.

Tactic 4: Community Seeding

Use your term naturally in communities where your audience gathers. Not spamming—genuinely helping, while using your language.

Participate in relevant communities. Slack groups. Reddit. LinkedIn. Industry forums. Answer questions using your terminology naturally. Link to your content when genuinely helpful.

Example: Someone asks "why is my organic traffic declining when my rankings are stable?" You respond: "This is called click dilution—here's what's happening..." and explain, linking to your comprehensive resource.

Communities are high-trust environments. When you help people solve problems using your language, they adopt that language. They share it with others. The term spreads organically.

Tactic 5: Paid Search Arbitrage

This one flips the script on how most people think about paid search.

You're not buying ads to sell something. You're buying ads to spread ideas.

Here's how it works. Find informational keywords related to the problem your term names. These keywords have decent volume but low cost-per-click—because they're not commercial. No one's bidding aggressively on "what is a good ctr for organic search" because there's no product to sell at the end of that query.

But you're not trying to sell anything. You're trying to introduce language.

Example: "What is a good ctr for organic search" gets 300 searches a month. Low competition. Cheap clicks. You run ads pointing to your article "How to Get 60% CTR for Your Keywords" — which explains the problem and introduces your term "click dilution" as the framework for understanding why CTRs are collapsing.

They came looking for benchmarks. They leave with a new concept. And some of them will search for that concept later.

The arbitrage is this: you're paying pennies for informational clicks that have no commercial value to anyone else—but massive strategic value to you. You're buying attention to seed language. Nobody else is playing that game.

Tactic 6: Speaking and Conferences

Introduce your term from stages. Live audiences become search demand.

Build talks around the problem your term names. Use the term repeatedly and naturally. Include it in slides, titles, and takeaways.

Example: A talk titled "Escaping the Click Dilution Crisis" introduces the term to hundreds of people. They write notes. They tweet about it. They search for it later.

Speaking creates high-engagement touchpoints. People remember terms from talks better than from articles. And the social amplification from live events creates multiple touchpoints.

Combining Tactics

No single tactic creates a Competition-Free Zone. You combine them.

A realistic launch sequence:

1. Create definitive content for your term
2. Inject into top 5 existing posts (immediate exposure)
3. Publish 3 long-tail bridge posts (SEO foundation)
4. Pitch 2-3 relevant publications (credibility + reach)
5. Start community participation using the language (organic spread)
6. Run low-cost paid search
7. Build a talk around the concept (high-engagement touchpoint)

The goal is surrounding your audience with your term. They see it in articles, hear it in talks, encounter it in communities, find it in search results.

Repetition creates familiarity. Familiarity creates search behavior. That's the engine.

VII. The Canvases

Two Pages. One System.

I'm going to give you the planning tools. Two canvases. Print them out. Fill them in. Put them on your wall.

The two canvases force you to answer the questions BEFORE you start creating. One for designing the keyword. One for seeding it. Both required. Neither optional.

Canvas 1: Search Query Design

[Download here](#)

This is page one. The WHAT. What term are you creating and why will anyone search for it?

Five boxes. Five tactics.

Problem Naming — This is the big one. The most powerful keywords name pain people feel but can't articulate. They describe it in paragraphs on Reddit. In long Slack messages. In frustrated emails. You give them a word.

Ask yourself: What frustration do people describe in paragraphs? What has no industry term yet? What would they Google if they knew the word existed?

Examples: "Click Dilution," "Revenge Bedtime Procrastination," "Zero-Click Search," "Dark Social."

Framework Creation — You're not naming pain. You're naming a solution. A mental model. A methodology. A way of thinking about something that didn't have structure before.

Ask yourself: What's your unique process? What trend is emerging that needs a name?

Examples: "Inbound Marketing," "Loop Marketing," "Product-Led Growth," "Jobs to Be Done."

Question Surfacing — Sometimes the most powerful keyword is a question people didn't know to ask. You have data or insights others don't. You reveal a blindspot.

Ask yourself: What data do you have that others don't? What blindspot can you reveal?

Examples: "What percentage of my rankings are diluted?" "How much of my traffic is dark social?"

Metric Invention — Create a new way to measure something, and everyone who wants to improve that thing will search for your metric forever.

Ask yourself: What gap exists in measurement? What would people benchmark against?

Examples: "Net Promoter Score," "Domain Authority," "Customer Health Score."

Comparison Creation — Position yourself in "[X] vs [Y]" searches before those searches exist. When you're new, no one's comparing you to anything. Create the comparison yourself.

Ask yourself: What comparisons will people eventually make? How are you different from incumbents?

Pick one. Be honest about which fits your situation. Then move to page two.

Canvas 2: Demand Jacking

[Download here](#)

This is page two. The HOW. How do you get people to actually search for the term you just designed?

Remember: your term has zero volume right now. By definition. No one searches for something they've never heard of. So you inject it into channels where attention already flows.

Five boxes. Five tactics. Use as many as you can.

Update Existing Pages — This is the big one. Your fastest win. You already have pages getting traffic. Add your term to them.

Which pages get 1,000+ visits per month? Which are contextually related to your term? Add a paragraph or two introducing the concept. Link to your definitive content.

5,000 people per month encounter your term. Some percentage search for it later. You've created demand from traffic you already had.

Gateway Pages — Create new pages targeting easy keywords that naturally introduce your term. Target low-competition, informational keywords—KD under 10. Answer the query fully. Then introduce your term as the framework for understanding the answer.

What keywords does your audience search that your term could answer?

Digital PR — Get journalists and publications to use your term. Pitch stories around the problem your term names. Use HARO, Qwoted. Guest posts. Podcast interviews. Create data or research that requires your terminology to explain.

One mention in the right publication can create hundreds of searches.

Problem Hijacking — Find people discussing the problem your term names. Reddit threads. Quora questions. LinkedIn posts. Slack communities. Answer with genuine value—and use your language.

Someone asks "why is my organic traffic declining when my rankings are stable?" You respond: "This is called click dilution—here's what's happening..." and explain.

Communities are high-trust environments. When you help people using your language, they adopt that language.

Influencer & Paid — Two things in one box. Get industry voices to use your term. And buy cheap traffic to educational content that introduces your term.

Find informational keywords with low CPCs—under a dollar. These keywords have no commercial value to anyone else. But they have strategic value to you. You're buying attention to seed language.

Using The Canvases

Fill them out before you create content. Both pages. In order.

If you can't fill out the Search Query Design canvas, your term isn't ready. Maybe the problem isn't real enough. Maybe you don't have the insight to name something new. That's okay. Better to know now.

If you can't fill out the Demand Jacking canvas, you don't have channels. Maybe you don't have existing traffic to inject into. Maybe you don't have a community presence. That's a different problem to solve first.

The canvases force clarity. They show you where you're strong and where you're weak.

Print them. Fill them in. Put them on your wall.

Then execute.

VIII. The Flywheel

Why It Compounds

Here's what makes Competition-Free Zones different from traditional SEO: they compound instead of deplete.

Traditional SEO is extraction. You capture a percentage of existing demand. Then you have to capture more. Each piece of content is a new fight. There's no flywheel—just perpetual effort.

Search Demand Generation is creation. Each piece of work makes the next piece more valuable. The system feeds itself.

Let me show you how the flywheel works.

The Mechanics

Stage 1: You create a term and seed it.

You design a keyword using one of the five tactics. You create definitive content. You begin seeding through existing channels.

At this point, you have near-zero volume. The term exists in your content and nowhere else.

Stage 2: Early adopters find it.

People encounter your term through your seeding efforts. Some recognize it names something they've experienced. They start using it.

Some of them search for it. Your search console shows the first brand queries. Volume is tiny, but it's real.

Stage 3: Others start writing about it.

As the term spreads, others write about it. Blog posts. Tweets. Conference mentions. Each mention is a new touchpoint.

And here's the key: when they write about your term, they usually link to you. You coined it. You're the authority. The backlinks are natural.

Stage 4: Volume grows and you still own it.

More people encounter the term. More people search for it. Volume compounds—10 searches becomes 100 becomes 1,000.

And you still own 70-100% of the results. Because you created the term. Because you have the definitive content. Because everyone links to you when they discuss it.

Stage 5: The term becomes standard.

At some point, the term enters common usage. People use it without knowing who coined it. It's just "what that thing is called."

The searches keep coming. You still own the results. You've created an annuity.

The Compounding Math

Year 1: 500 searches/month. You own 100%. 500 clicks.

Year 2: 1000 searches/month. You own 90% (some competitors write about it). 900 clicks.

Year 3: 2,000 searches/month. You own 80%. 1,600 clicks.

Year 4: 5,000 searches/month. You own 75%. 3,750 clicks.

Year 5: 10,000 searches/month. You own 70%. 7,000 clicks.

Compare that to traditional SEO: fighting for 5% of a 10,000-search keyword means 500 clicks—and it declines over time as Google fragments the results.

The Competition-Free Zone starts smaller but compounds. Traditional SEO starts bigger but depletes.

That's the math that changed my mind about all of this.

What Feeds The Flywheel

Several factors accelerate the compounding:

More content using the term. Each new piece you create that references your term creates more entry points. Someone searching a related topic finds your content, encounters the term, might search for it directly later.

Others are writing about it. When competitors, journalists, or industry voices mention your term, they create new touchpoints—and usually link to you.

Derivative searches. Once a term exists, derivative searches appear: "What is [term]?", "How to implement [term]", "[Term] examples", "[Term] vs [alternative]". You can create content for all of these and own the entire category.

Word of mouth. People share language. When someone learns a useful term, they use it in conversations. Their colleagues hear it. They search for it. The term spreads socially, not just through content.

What Breaks The Flywheel

A few things can slow or break the compounding:

Abandoning too early. The hardest part is months 1-6. Volume is tiny. It feels like nothing is happening. Most people give up before the compounding kicks in.

Not enough seeding. If you create a term but don't actively seed it, volume never materializes. The flywheel needs fuel.

Weak definitive content. If your canonical content isn't comprehensive enough, others will write better resources. You'll lose ownership.

The term doesn't stick. Sometimes a term just doesn't resonate. It's too long, too jargon-y, too hard to pronounce. If it doesn't feel natural in conversation, it won't spread.

The good news: you can usually diagnose which factor is the problem and adjust.

IX. Measuring Success

Different Metrics For A Different Game

Traditional SEO metrics don't work here. You can't measure Competition-Free Zones by keyword rankings or domain authority. Those metrics assume you're competing for existing keywords.

You need different metrics for a different game.

Leading Indicators (Months 1-3)

These tell you the seeding is working before volume appears.

Brand searches in Search Console. Even a handful of searches for your term means someone encountered it and searched for it later. That's validation. The flywheel is starting.

People Also Ask appearances. When Google starts associating your term with related questions, it's recognizing the term as real. This is huge validation—Google is indexing your language.

Mentions and usage. Others use your term in their content, in communities, in conversations. Track this manually at first. Set up Google Alerts for your term.

Engagement on seeding content. When you inject your term into existing posts or publish bridge content, track engagement. Are people clicking through to your definitive resource? That's the pathway working.

Core Metrics (Months 3-12)

These tell you the Competition-Free Zone is materializing.

Search volume growth. Track your term in keyword tools. It will be zero or "no data" for a while. When volume starts appearing, that's the inflection point.

Search results ownership. Google your term weekly. How many of the top 10 results are yours? You want 7-10. If competitors are appearing, assess whether they're citing you or competing.

Backlinks to definitive content. Are people linking to your canonical resource when they discuss your term? Natural backlinks to your definitive content are the strongest signal of authority.

Traffic from the term. In Google Analytics, track sessions where the landing page is your definitive content. As volume grows, this should grow proportionally.

Long-Term Indicators (12+ Months)

These tell you the term has become standard.

Competitors using your term. When competitors start using your language—even if they're trying to compete for it—you've won. The term is standard.

Derivative search volume. "What is [term]?", "How to [term]", "[Term] examples"—when these start showing volume, you've created a category, not just a keyword.

Citation patterns. Are people citing you when they discuss the concept? Or are they using the term without attribution? Both are fine—the second actually means deeper adoption.

Cost of acquisition. Track the customer acquisition cost of traffic from your Competition-Free Zone versus competitive keywords. It should be dramatically lower—because you own the traffic.

What To Ignore

Some traditional metrics will mislead you:

Keyword difficulty. Your term will show zero difficulty because no one's competing for it. That's the point.

Search volume at the start. Early volume will be zero. Don't let that discourage you. You're creating volume, not capturing it.

Rankings for competitive keywords. Your Competition-Free Zone strategy is separate from competitive keywords. Don't measure one by the other.

The Dashboard

Keep it simple. Track these weekly:

1. Brand searches for your term (Search Console)
2. Search results ownership (manual Google search)
3. Definitive content traffic (Analytics)
4. New backlinks to definitive content (Ahrefs or similar)
5. Mentions/usage (manual tracking or alerts)

Everything else is noise until the flywheel is spinning.

X. Objections

"This Takes Too Long"

It does take longer than traditional SEO to see initial results. 6-12 months for real traction versus 3-6 months for competitive keywords.

But here's what traditional SEO doesn't tell you: those 3-6 month wins require perpetual maintenance. The moment you stop producing, traffic declines. You're renting attention.

Competition-Free Zones compound. Year 1 is slow. Year 3-5 is exponential. And you own it forever.

The question isn't "which is faster?" It's "which builds something that lasts?"

"I Need Traffic Now"

Then do both.

This isn't either/or. Keep your competitive keyword strategy running while you build Competition-Free Zones in parallel. The competitive strategy pays the bills. The Competition-Free Zone strategy builds the asset.

Over time, shift resources as the zones start producing. But you don't have to stop everything to start this.

"What If The Term Doesn't Catch On?"

It happens. Not every term sticks.

But the cost of failure is low. You've created some content, done some seeding. If it doesn't work, you've learned something about what resonates.

Compare that to competitive SEO, where the cost of failure is months of effort for a ranking you might lose anyway.

The key is testing terms before going deep. Use the Canvas to assess viability. Seed lightly, watch for early signals, then double down on what shows traction.

"Competitors Will Copy My Term"

They might. Eventually.

But here's the thing: you created it. You have the definitive content. You've been building backlinks while they're just discovering the term.

When competitors start using your term, it actually helps you. It validates the concept. It creates more touchpoints. And most of them will cite you.

By the time competitors try to compete for your term, you should own 70-100% of the search results. They're not catching up.

"My Industry Is Different"

Every industry has problems without language. Every industry has frameworks waiting to be named. Every industry has metrics that don't exist yet.

The tactics work across industries. The specific terms change.

If you're struggling to identify opportunities, look for:

- Conversations where people write paragraphs to describe something
- Problems that have no standard name
- Processes that everyone does differently
- Trends that are emerging but unlabeled

The opportunities are there. You might just need to look harder.

"I Don't Have Authority To Coin Terms"

You don't need authority to start. You build authority by coining useful terms.

HubSpot wasn't an authority when they coined "Inbound Marketing." They became one by defining and owning the concept.

The term creates the authority, not the other way around.

What you do need is valuable insight. You need to name something real—something people actually experience. If the term is useful, people will use it regardless of who coined it.

"This Feels Like Marketing Jargon"

Bad terms are jargon. Good terms are language.

The difference: jargon is made up to sound impressive. Language names something real.

"Synergistic value optimization" is jargon—it doesn't name anything specific.

"Zero-click search" is language—it names a specific phenomenon everyone experiences.

If your term sounds like something a consultant made up to charge more, it's jargon. If your term sounds like something you'd say to a colleague to explain a problem, it's language.

Aim for language.

XI. The Choice

What I've Learned

I started this journey frustrated. Rankings going up, traffic going down. Working harder every quarter for diminishing returns. Feeling trapped in a game that was rigged against me.

And somewhere along the line, I realized the game was the problem. Not my execution. Not my content quality. The game itself.

The Competition Trap is real. Click dilution is real. The structural forces fragmenting organic traffic—they're not going away. They're accelerating.

But here's what I also learned: you don't have to play that game.

Two Paths

There are two paths forward.

Path 1: Compete harder. More content. Better content. Stronger authority. Fight for every ranking. Defend every position. Watch click-through rates erode. Work harder every year for the same results.

Path 2: Create instead. Design keywords. Seed demand. Build Competition-Free Zones. Own 70-100% of searches you created. Compound instead of deplete.

Both paths require work. But only one builds something that lasts.

What This Costs

I should be honest about the cost.

Choosing to create instead of compete means accepting slower growth in the short term. It means walking away from certain competitive keywords. It means measuring success differently than everyone else.

It means patience when the dashboard shows near-zero volume for months.

And if that means slower growth in Year 1, so be it.

Because what you build compounds. What you capture depletes. That's not tactics. That's math.

What You Gain

When you stop competing and start creating, something shifts.

You're not fighting for position anymore. You're building territory. You're not defending rankings. You're owning language.

There's a specific kind of peace in that. The quiet confidence of knowing your traffic exists because you created the demand. Not because you

captured it. Not because you outranked someone. Because you built something.

That's what Competition-Free Zones give you. Ownership.

The Real Shift

The shift isn't tactical. It's identity.

You stop seeing yourself as an optimizer fighting for scraps. You start seeing yourself as a builder creating something new.

Not keyword chasers. Not rank defenders. Not content mills.

Builders. People who create demand instead of fighting for it. People who own language instead of renting rankings. People who build something that lasts.

And maybe that's the kind of SEO the world needs right now.

XII. What Comes Next

The Tools

If you've read this far and you're thinking about building your first Competition-Free Zone, here's what might help.

[The Competition-Free Zone Canvases](#) — Two pages. One system.

Page one is the [Search Query Design Canvas](#). Five boxes for the five tactics: Problem Naming, Framework Creation, Question Surfacing, Metric

Invention, Comparison Creation. Forces you to answer: what term are you creating and why will anyone search for it?

Page two is the [Demand Jacking Canvas](#). Five boxes for the five channels: Update Existing Pages, Gateway Pages, Digital PR, Problem Hijacking, Influencer & Paid. Forces you to answer: how will you seed this term into existing attention flows?

Print them. Fill them in. Put them on your wall. It's the difference between "I have an idea" and "I have a plan."

The Influences

This methodology didn't emerge from nowhere. It builds on work from people who've been thinking about category creation for years.

Category Pirates — Eddie Yoon and Christopher Lochhead write about category design extensively. Their thinking on "[damming the demand](#)" and [reframing problems](#) shaped how I think about owning language.

Positioning by Al Ries and Jack Trout — The original book on how brands win by owning a word in the mind. Published in 1981. Still relevant.

[Geometry For Staying Cool & Calm](#) by Dan Sullivan — This free book gave me permission. The core idea: you get to make things up. No one is in charge of making things up. There's no authority you need to ask. That's the mindset shift underneath everything in this minibook. You're allowed to create language. You're allowed to name things. No one's stopping you but you.

If Search Demand Generation resonates, these sources go deeper into the underlying principles.

If You Want Help

Building Competition-Free Zones isn't complicated, but it isn't easy either. The concepts are simple. The execution takes patience and skill.

If you're thinking about implementing this and want support, that's something we can help with.

I'm launching a pilot service to help companies design, build, and launch their first zones. Strategic planning. Content creation. Demand Jacking campaigns. Metrics and optimization. Training your team so they can scale it.

It's a 3-6 month engagement, typically. Long enough to see real traction. Long enough to transfer the knowledge.

If you're interested, shoot me an email at mail@dwaynehogan.com.

But honestly? You could also just start. Pick a term. Seed it. See what happens. The methodology is in your hands now.

The First Step

The hardest part is starting.

Not because it's complicated—because it means accepting that the old game isn't working. That's a difficult thing to sit with.

But here's what I've learned: once you start building instead of competing, something shifts. The exhaustion lifts. The treadmill stops. You're not fighting for scraps anymore. You're creating something.

So pick one term. One problem you could name. One framework you could coin.

And start.

That's it. That's how every Competition-Free Zone begins.

Search Demand Generation: How to build Competition-Free Zones that compound.