COMPETITIVE DECISION INTELLIGENCE · PRE-BUDGET COMPARISON

SEO Territory Comparison Field Guide

Define the commercial unit, expose structural relationships, separate gross demand from incremental opportunity, validate comparability and preserve non-dominated trade-offs before budget is committed.

Direct answer
An SEO opportunity territory is a bounded commercial search/discovery opportunity - not a keyword list. Compare only valid, compatible territories. Remove duplicates and parent/child double counting, surface overlap and dependencies, qualify the buyer-to-outcome path, and let trade-offs remain when no territory dominates.

Use this guide when

- several SEO growth proposals all look plausible;
- tool scores disagree;
- technical and content work may be dependent;
- gross search demand is being treated as business value;
- an executive asks for a single winner before evidence supports one.

Do not use it to

- assign a budget percentage;
- guarantee ROI or traffic;
- set the execution sequence;
- define reversal rules;
- decide Fund / Prepare / Defer / Ignore inside this stage.

Method Version: SEO Territory Comparison Protocol v1.0.0 · Fictional examples only.

1 · DEFINE THE COMPARISON UNIT

What is an SEO opportunity territory?

A territory is the smallest useful commercial search/discovery unit that can survive an investment discussion without losing the buyer, offer, market or outcome context.

> **Boundary contract**
> Target buyer + buyer problem/job + search/discovery intent + offer/solution + market + geography + language + query/topic/entity footprint + page/experience requirement + SERP/AI environment + valuable action + commercial outcome + evidence horizon + decision horizon.

Territory signature

Create a semantic identity from the fields that define the commercial unit. The display name is not part of the identity.

Example signature
Enterprise marketing leader × competitor-monitoring problem × Competitive Decision Intelligence service × US B2B SaaS × English × commercial-evaluation intent × qualified consultation/pipeline.

What is not automatically a territory?

- keyword
- keyword cluster
- content hub
- traffic gap
- competitor-keyword list
- topic
- category
- AI mention gap
- AI citation gap

Those can be inputs. They do not by themselves prove a separate commercial opportunity.

Stop invalid units before ranking

Boundary state	Meaning	Decision behavior
DEFINED	Buyer, problem, offer, market, geography, intent, outcome and horizon are coherent.	Proceed.
PARTIALLY_DEFINED	A material edge remains uncertain.	Proceed only with an explicit caveat if the unit itself is stable.
BOUNDARY_CONFLICT	Stakeholders/evidence define materially different units under one name.	Stop and resolve.
NOT_DEFINED	The proposal is still a topic, list or broad idea.	Do not compare.

Identity relationships

DISTINCT · ADJACENT · PARTIAL_DUPLICATE · FUNCTIONAL_DUPLICATE · NESTED_CHILD · NESTED_PARENT · UNRESOLVED

> **Parent + child is not automatically additive.**
> Do not sum both as fully independent opportunity until the child overlap has been removed from the parent interpretation.

Quick identity test

1. Ignore the territory names.
2. Compare buyer, problem, offer, market, geography, language, intent, outcome and type.
3. If those describe the same commercial unit, treat the proposals as duplicates even if ownership, keyword export or naming differs.

Overlap, dependency and cannibalization are different

Overlap

Shared buyer, intent, query/ entity footprint, page role, valuable action or outcome. Heavy overlap limits additive interpretation.

Dependency

One territory requires another, or both require a shared prerequisite. A prerequisite is not merely another competing opportunity.

Cannibalization

Owned experiences compete for the same role. Multiple ranking pages are not automatically harmful cannibalization.

Pattern	Example	Correct interpretation
Technical prerequisite	Indexation recovery → commercial page growth	**DEPENDENT**; resolve prerequisite before direct dominance.
Parent/child market	US category → US enterprise subcategory	**OVERLAPPING / NESTED**; do not add totals.
Same intent, different names	“Competitor intelligence services” vs “competitor analysis consulting”	Test **FUNCTIONAL_DUPLICATE**.
Two useful owned pages	Definition guide + commercial comparison page	May be **COMPLEMENTARY_COVERAGE**, not cannibalization.

Gross demand is not incremental opportunity

Keep these layers separate
Total observed/estimated demand → current organic capture → relevant paid/brand capture → overlapping owned capture → uncaptured qualified demand → incremental reachable opportunity.

Layer	Question	Evidence
Gross demand	How much search/discovery activity is visible?	GSC, Keyword Planner, platform estimates, AI visibility data.
Current capture	What do owned organic experiences already capture?	Query/page/country segments; landing-page analytics.
Overlap	Are current pages already serving the same territory?	Query-page mapping, intent/page-role review.
Qualified uncaptured demand	What remains relevant to the target buyer and offer?	CRM, sales, paid-search qualification, market evidence.
Incremental reachable opportunity	What additional qualified reach is plausible?	Current-capture + reachability + commercial-path evidence.

MEASURED PARTIALLY_MEASURED INFERRED UNRESOLVED

No fake subtraction.
If current capture or qualification is not measured, do not invent an “80% addressable” adjustment. Preserve the evidence state.

Trace value link by link

Search / discovery → buyer → problem → offer → valuable action → business outcome

Each link is OBSERVED INFERRED UNRESOLVED CONTRADICTED .

Model	Evidence path
B2B / SaaS	Search → ICP/buyer → problem → lead/demo → qualified opportunity → pipeline/customer.
Ecommerce	Search → category/product → engagement → purchase → revenue → margin/contribution.
Local / service	Search → local qualified demand → call/booking → appointment/service outcome.
Enterprise	Discovery → buying role/committee → evaluation → qualified engagement/influence → opportunity/ pipeline.
AI / answer engine	Prompt/topic → mention/citation → discovery/consideration → referral/search lift/action → commercial outcome.

Evidence quality is not one number

Check relevance, scope fit, recency, independence, directness, first-party status, channel transfer, sample context and contradiction. Do not average material contradictions away.

6 · COMPARABILITY GATE

Validate compatibility before dominance

Check	Question
Decision context	Are both territories answering the same executive decision?
Granularity	Are the units at compatible scope, rather than parent vs child?
Horizon	Are time horizons compatible?
Business outcome	Are the outcome types decision-compatible?
Market / geography / language	Are these boundaries compatible?
Identity	Are they distinct and not a hidden duplicate?
Dependency	Is a prerequisite understood?
Boundary quality	Are both territories sufficiently defined?

Valid states

COMPARABLE · COMPARABLE_WITH_CAVEAT · DEPENDENCY_CONSTRAINED · OVERLAP_CONSTRAINED · NOT_COMPARABLE · BOUNDARY_UNRESOLVED

NOT_COMPARABLE is a legitimate result.
Do not convert incompatible units into a winner through scoring.

Remove clearly weaker options; preserve real trade-offs

Compare required dimensions such as buyer fit, problem importance, offer fit, valuable-action credibility, outcome credibility, incremental opportunity, reachability and strategic scope fit.

> **Dominance rule**
> A can dominate B only when A is at least as strong on every required comparable dimension, materially stronger on at least one, and no unresolved dependency, overlap, contradiction or material evidence gap invalidates the comparison.

Pairwise result	Meaning
A_DOMINATES_B	B can be removed from the current valid frontier relative to A.
B_DOMINATES_A	A can be removed relative to B.
TRADE_OFFS_REMAIN	Each retains at least one material advantage.
DEPENDENT	Prerequisite structure blocks direct dominance.
OVERLAPPING / DUPLICATE	Additive interpretation is unsafe.
NOT_COMPARABLE / UNRESOLVED	No winner should be fabricated.

Non-dominated territory frontier

For every territory that remains, state why it remains, its weakness and what evidence could remove it from the frontier. Frontier membership is **not** a funding state.

Change only what the scenario changes

Scenario	Change	Do not change automatically
First-party evidence improves	Evidence/commercial-path state supported by new CRM/sales data.	Market size, reachability or dependency.
Reachability weakens	Reachability dimension.	Buyer fit or commercial outcome evidence.
Dependency resolves	Dependency relation after prerequisite proof.	Other pair relations.
Current capture higher	Incremental interpretation.	Gross search demand.
Commercial action contradicted	Relevant commercial-path link.	Visibility metrics.

Stability states

ROBUST
Stable under the evidence and bounded scenarios actually tested.

EVIDENCE_SENSITIVE
Better evidence could alter the frontier.

ASSUMPTION_SENSITIVE
A bounded scenario changes the comparison.

STRUCTURALLY_UNRESOLVED
Validity issue blocks stable ordering.

Robust does not mean guaranteed. It means stable under the tested state, not under every possible future.

Replace “do more research” with a bounded next evidence set

Unresolved question	Decision-changing evidence	Could change
Is broad informational demand commercially qualified?	CRM lead quality, paid-search conversion, sales qualification.	Buyer/action/outcome credibility.
Are two territories separate?	GSC query-page segmentation, intent mapping, page-role review.	Duplicate/nesting/overlap state.
Is a territory prerequisite-bound?	Crawl/indexation, product availability, architecture evidence.	Dependency and direct comparability.
Is the gross market still incremental?	Current capture plus qualified conversion evidence.	Incremental-opportunity state.
Does an AI visibility gap matter commercially?	Referral/action data, qualified engagement or pipeline evidence.	Visibility → action path.

The objective
Identify the smallest credible evidence set that could change comparability, dominance, frontier membership or the commercial path before more budget is committed.

Fictional B2B SaaS territory comparison

Territory	Commercial evidence	Incremental reach	Reachability	Structural relation
A Evaluation-intent comparison	Stronger buyer/offer/ action path	Moderate	Moderate	A depends on C
B Broad education	Weaker / more inferred	Stronger apparent reach	Weaker	Independent from A/C in example
C Technical recovery	Strong commercial-page relevance	Moderate	Strong	Prerequisite for A

Pairwise interpretation

A ↔ B: **TRADE_OFFS_REMAIN**. A has stronger commercial evidence; B has stronger apparent incremental-reach potential.

A ↔ C: **DEPENDENT**. A direct winner is invalid while the prerequisite relationship remains.

B ↔ C: **TRADE_OFFS_REMAIN**.

Current portfolio interpretation

A single winner is not defensible. B remains non-dominated in the default worked example while A and C are dependency-constrained. The next useful evidence is qualified commercial-action/current-capture evidence for B and prerequisite evidence for C.

This example illustrates engine behavior only. It does not claim real search volume, traffic, ROI, lead or revenue outcomes.

11 · EXECUTIVE RECORD

Portable pre-budget comparison record

Capture enough context that Finance, Sales, RevOps, Product, Engineering or another SEO lead can understand why the comparison produced its current state.

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METHOD VERSION: SEO Territory Comparison Protocol v1.0.0
DECISION: [what is being compared before budget commitment]
SCOPE: [market / geography / language / horizon]
TERRITORIES: [IDs + names]
SIGNATURES: [semantic identities]
BOUNDARY STATES: [defined / partial / conflict / not defined]
IDENTITY: [distinct / duplicate / nested / unresolved]
OVERLAP: [state + evidence]
DEPENDENCIES: [state + prerequisite]
CANNIBALIZATION: [state]
GROSS / INCREMENTAL: [measured state + evidence]
COMMERCIAL PATH: [link states + sources]
CONTRADICTIONS: [none / resolved / material unresolved]
PAIRWISE RESULTS: [A↔B etc.]
FRONTIER: [members + weaknesses]
SCENARIO: [baseline vs bounded changes]
STABILITY: [state]
DECISION-CHANGING EVIDENCE: [smallest evidence set]
SUPPORTED USE: pre-budget territory comparison
UNSUPPORTED USE: budget %, causal ROI, execution order, funding state
HANDOFF: Fund / Prepare / Defer / Ignore
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12 · OPERATIONAL CHECKLIST

The 22-stage protocol in one page

1. Define the decision.
2. Define each territory.
3. Validate boundaries.
4. Validate identity.
5. Detect duplicates/nesting.
6. Detect overlap.
7. Detect dependencies.
8. Detect cannibalization/substitution.
9. Separate gross from incremental.
10. Validate comparability.
11. Qualify commercial paths.

1. Audit evidence quality.
2. Audit contradictions.
3. Audit organic/AI reachability.
4. Compare required advantages.
5. Test dominance.
6. Build non-dominated frontier.
7. Run bounded scenarios.
8. Test stability.
9. Identify decision-changing evidence.
10. Create comparison record.
11. Hand off to the next portfolio decision.

Three invariants to remember

- Increasing gross volume cannot repair a broken commercial path, duplicate identity or dependency.
- If units are not comparable, the method cannot fabricate a winner.
- Adding an unrelated third territory cannot legitimately change the A-vs-B pairwise relation.

Use platform data as evidence, not as automatic commercial truth

- Google Search Console - performance dimensions/groupings
- Google Search Console - clicks, impressions and position
- Google Ads - Keyword Planner forecasts
- Semrush - Keyword Gap
- Ahrefs - Content Gap
- Ahrefs - keyword cannibalization
- UK Government Analysis Function - Introductory Guide to MCDA
- HM Treasury - The Green Book 2026
- UK Government - Uncertainty Toolkit

Handoff to the next decision
Carry the validated territory set, structural constraints, commercial/evidence state, pairwise results, frontier, stability and decision-changing evidence into **Fund** / **Prepare** / **Defer** / **Ignore**. Do not decide that funding state inside this comparison.

Commercial boundary
SERPIFAI Competitive Decision Intelligence can independently review territory boundaries, evidence, overlap, dependencies, incrementality and decision risk before an executive budget gate. The method in this guide remains useful without a paid engagement.

No real-company outcome, search volume, traffic, keyword difficulty, conversion rate, ROI or revenue benchmark is asserted in this field guide.