Visible Search Domain Role Screen

A73 V1.0.1

Search or AI visibility can reveal who appears around your category, but neither proves who can win the purchase. Classify role, first-party fulfilment, buyer substitution, decision boundary and Evidence Readiness before competitor treatment.

Fast rule

Retrieval visibility is candidate-discovery evidence, not commercial-competitor proof.

Established distinction, governed extension

SEO-versus-business competitors is established practice. A73 adds the governed layer: role -> own fulfilment -> buyer substitution -> boundary -> Evidence Readiness -> permitted treatment.

AI-search extension

A domain cited or mentioned in AI Overviews, AI Mode, Gemini, ChatGPT-style results or other answer engines may be an AI-visibility competitor. That still does not prove first-party fulfilment or buyer substitution.

1. Classify role before rivalry

Observed role	What it does	Default treatment
Provider / seller	Fulfils a buyer need with its own offer.	Commercial candidate only if buyer/offer/comparison/market evidence supports it.
Marketplace / directory	Aggregates, lists, brokers, refers or hosts offers.	CONTEXTUAL unless verified first-party fulfilment changes the role.
Publisher / reference	Educates, defines, compares or attracts attention.	CONTEXTUAL authority/attention influence.
Platform / ecosystem	Provides infrastructure, workflow, community or access.	CONTEXTUAL unless first-party fulfilment and substitution are established.
Unknown	Role cannot yet be supported.	VERIFY - MORE EVIDENCE REQUIRED.

2. First-party offer + substitution bridge

Test	Question	What moves treatment
Fulfilment	Does this domain itself satisfy the buyer need?	Direct first-party fulfilment can support provider treatment; listing/referral alone cannot.
Own offer	Is this domain's own offer substitutable, alternative, or absent?	Do not count third-party offers it lists, hosts or refers as its own.
Buyer overlap	Could substantially the same buyer choose it?	Unsupported buyer overlap blocks direct treatment.
Comparison	Would customers plausibly compare the choices?	Sales, switching, win/loss or comparison evidence strengthens rivalry.
Market scope	Can it serve this geography/segment/context?	Out-of-scope = EXCLUDED for this bounded decision.
Decision relevance	Would inclusion materially change the decision?	Immaterial = EXCLUDED for this decision.

3. Controlled treatment + precedence

State	When	Permitted use
DIRECT - candidate; verify in CFC	Provider + direct fulfilment + own substitutable offer + buyer/comparison support + in-scope/material.	Promote to governed six-lens analysis; not final approval.
CONTEXTUAL - ecosystem/search	Marketplace, directory, publisher, reference source or platform without direct fulfilment.	Analyze discovery, authority, channel and comparison influence.
CONTEXTUAL - substitute	Provider serves same need through its own materially different workflow.	Alternative-choice and switching analysis.
EXCLUDED - current decision	Out of market scope or immaterial to decision.	Boundary wins before role investigation; retain role-change note only for monitoring.
VERIFY - more evidence	Material role/fulfilment/buyer/offer/comparison/market claim unknown or contradicted.	Collect smallest proof capable of changing treatment.
VERIFY - role contradiction	Intermediary/reference role also shows direct fulfilment inside an in-scope material decision.	Verify hybrid/first-party role before classification.
REPAIR INPUT	Impossible role/fulfilment/own-offer combination.	Correct the controlled inputs before any treatment.

4. Worked SERP: five visible, five roles

Visible result	Observed role	Correct analytical use
Dental CRM vendor	Own offer fulfils target workflow.	DIRECT candidate if buyer/comparison/market evidence supports.
General CRM vendor	Own offer can serve need through alternative workflow.	CONTEXTUAL substitute until stronger comparison evidence.
Review marketplace	Lists/compares vendors; no core fulfilment.	CONTEXTUAL discovery/comparison influence.
Association directory	Organizes providers; no core fulfilment.	CONTEXTUAL ecosystem/reference role.
Dental publication	Same audience, educational content.	CONTEXTUAL attention/authority role.

Myth busted

The SERP can be strategically important without being a five-company competitor set. AI-answer citations can create the same false-rival problem: retrieval overlap is not the buyer's purchase set.

5. Evidence Readiness and reclassification

VERIFY is not a softer DIRECT

If a missing or contradictory claim could change DIRECT / CONTEXTUAL / EXCLUDED treatment, keep the provisional role visible and use MORE EVIDENCE REQUIRED.

Smallest-next-evidence rule

Verify only the claim that can change treatment: first-party fulfilment, same buyer, plausible comparison, market serviceability or decision relevance.

Decision boundary first

After impossible inputs are repaired, OUT OF SCOPE or IMMATERIAL ends the current decision screen as EXCLUDED. A hybrid-role warning can be retained for monitoring without forcing investigation now.

EXTERNAL SOURCE BOUNDARY

Ahrefs/Semrush illustrate search and AI-visibility competitor discovery. CMA/DOJ illustrate customer substitution. None validates SERPIFAI's proprietary role screen or a specific domain.

6. Portable classification record

Field	Record
Search / AI visibility	Discovery evidence only; do not convert rank, mentions or citations into competitor proof.
Entity role	Provider / marketplace-directory / publisher-reference / platform-ecosystem / unknown.
Fulfilment	Direct / intermediary-referral / no core fulfilment / unknown.
Own first-party offer	Substitutable / alternative workflow / no commercial offer / unknown.
Buyer + comparison	Supported / not supported / unknown.
Market + decision	In/out of scope; material/immaterial/unknown.
Evidence Readiness	Sufficient / material gap / contradictory.
Treatment	DIRECT / CONTEXTUAL / EXCLUDED / VERIFY + next evidence control.

NEXT STEP

Only a real commercial candidate enters the governed Competitor Fit Challenge for exact six-lens treatment. Keep ecosystem roles separate, exclude bounded non-candidates and verify material unknowns.