# The Death of SEO Playbooks.

Why copying case studies no longer works.

Emilio Takas | CAMPEÓN GAMING

# I break iGaming SEO for a living.

Emilio Takas | CAMPEÓN GAMING

# Which means I lose to worse pages every week.

# Your page was better. It lost anyway.

# Why?

01 You read the SERP properly.

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02 You built the better page.

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02 You built the better page.

03 By every standard we teach, you won.

01 # A thinner page beat you.

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02 A forum thread from 2014 beat both of you.

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02 A forum thread from 2014 beat both of you.

03 And you blamed your execution.

# 18 months ago.

**Athens**
one automation

**Estonia**
six agents

**It worked**
and I showed the numbers

**They asked for it**
and I gave it away



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# Nobody measures what happens after the talk.

# So this year I measured it.

# 30 markets. 300 results. 153 websites.

# Three things, in this order.

01 Why copying fails in 2026

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02 How to think from first principles

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01 Why copying fails in 2026

02 How to think from first principles

03 The Door Audit: how to test instead of copy

# Forbes Advisor.




**15.8M**
peak, Apr 2024

**22,303**
Jan 2025

**1.4M**
today



forbes.com/advisor/ · US organic traffic, monthly · Semrush · Own pull · Semrush US · 5 Oct 2026

# -99.86%

in nine months. The biggest affiliate playbook in history.

# HouseFresh. 166 visits.




**166**
Apr 2024

**185,974**
May 2026

**140k**
today



housefresh.com · US organic traffic, monthly, log scale · Semrush · Own pull · Semrush US · 5 Oct 2026

# Today HouseFresh is #1 for "best air purifier".

# Same two years, opposite results.

# The playbook didn't decide it.

Part one

# Why copying fails in 2026.



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Reason one

# Case studies only publish what worked.

# Nobody ever sold a course called"Here's what didn't work for me."

Reason two

# No control group.

# 100 blogs, same playbooks.

**−85%**

median traffic change across 100 six-figure blogs, 2022 to 2026



Daniel Stanica, Monetize Better, "The Great Blogging Collapse", Apr 2022 to Apr 2026

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# 100 blogs, same playbooks.

**−85%**

median traffic change across 100 six-figure blogs, 2022 to 2026

**49**

lost 80% or more

**12**

are at zero

**21**

grew



Daniel Stanica, Monetize Better, "The Great Blogging Collapse", Apr 2022 to Apr 2026

# If the tactic caused it, those 21 couldn't have grown.

Reason three

# Every playbook has a clock on it.

**It works**
for one site, once

**It gets written up**
a year later, by the winner

**It becomes a course**
two years later

**It reaches your feed**
after the edge is gone



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"A title tag change may be a big winner on one site and a big loser on another."

Will Critchlow, SearchPilot

A playbook is last year's result, written by someone else.

Part two

# How to think from first principles.



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**My hypothesis: the bigger the brand, the higher it ranks.**

# Nothing in common except the word "best".

hiking boots
dog food
laptop
espresso machine
meal delivery service
online therapy
password manager
budgeting app
car insurance
office chair
sunscreen
blender
language learning app
treadmill
baby monitor
air purifier
credit cards
crm software
electric toothbrush
mattress
noise cancelling headphones
pet insurance
project management software
protein powder
robot vacuum
running shoes
standing desk
travel insurance
vpn
web hosting

# The method.

**Pull page one**
top 10 for each

**300 results**
153 websites

**Brand demand**
monthly searches for each name

**Correlate**
does known predict position?

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**Brand demand**
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**Correlate**
does known predict position?

# +0.06

## Correlation between brand demand and position. There's no relationship.

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Spearman, 300 slots · p = 0.31 · +0.08 (p = 0.22) excluding Reddit, YouTube, Amazon, Facebook · Own pull · Semrush US · 5 Oct 2026

# And the sign points the wrong way.

**11,450**

median brand searches of the #1 result

**246,000**

median brand searches of the #8 result



Platforms excluded · Own pull · Semrush US · 5 Oct 2026

# 13 of 30 number ones are brands nobody searches for.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| web hosting | hostingstep.com | 0 |
| air purifier | housefresh.com | 880 |
| baby monitor | mommyhood101.com | 20 |
| treadmill | treadmillreviews.net | 10 |
| robot vacuum | thesmarthomehookup.com | 20 |



Monthly brand searches · position 1, US · all 30 on the QR · Own pull · Semrush US · 5 Oct 2026



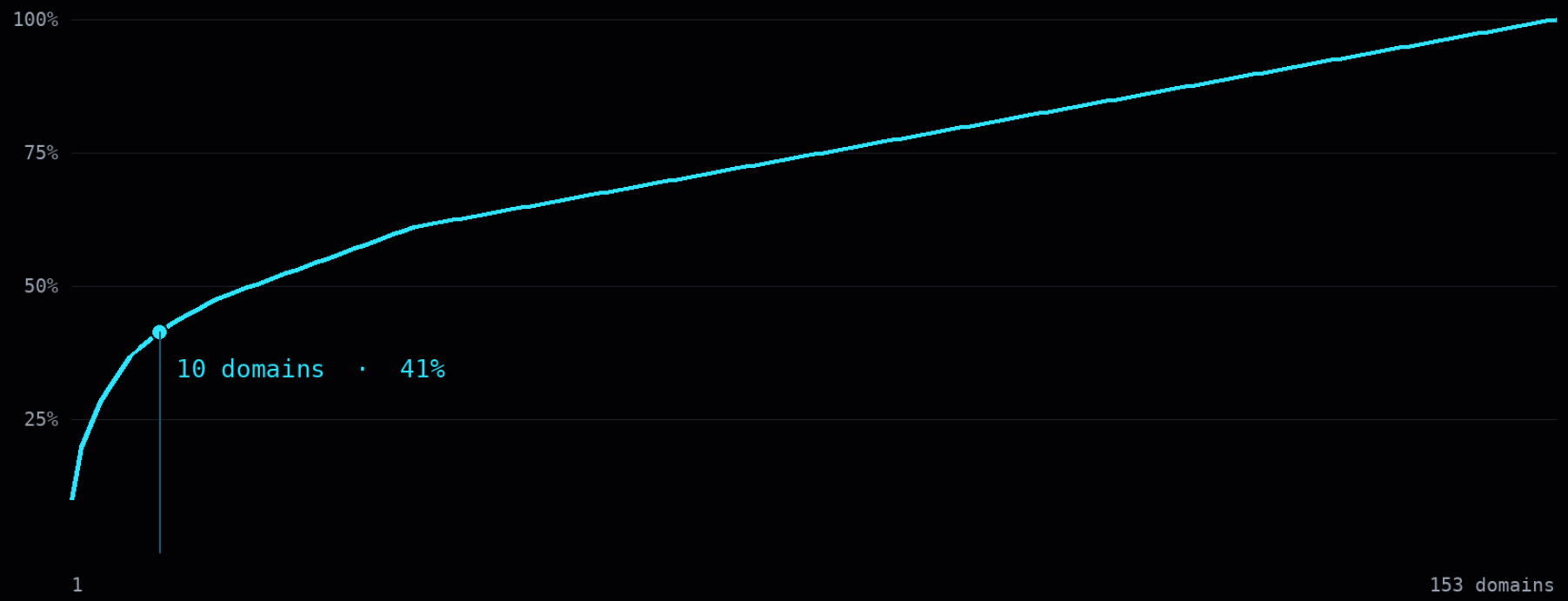
# brand searches a month.

hostingstep.com is #1 for "best web hosting".

# Nobody publishes this result.

# So what does being known actually decide?

# 10 websites hold 41% of page one.






Cumulative share of 300 page-one slots by website · Own pull · Semrush US · 5 Oct 2026

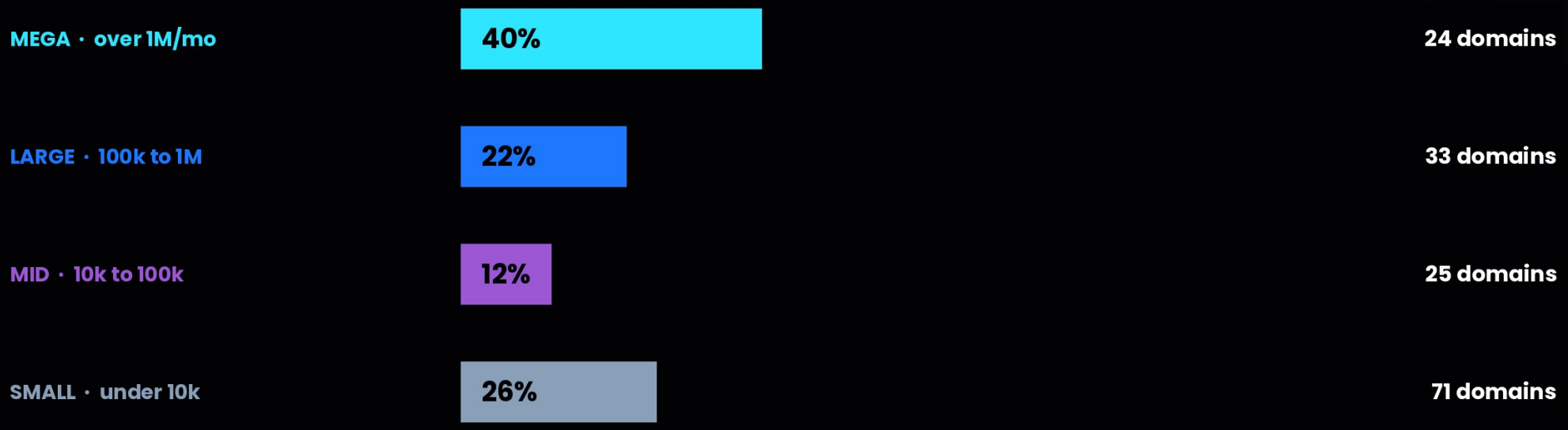
# The ten that hold the door.






Page-one slots per website across the 30 markets, max 30 · Own pull · Semrush US · 5 Oct 2026

# 24 brands hold 40%. 71 sites share 26%.






Tiers by monthly US searches of the brand name · Own pull · Semrush US · 5 Oct 2026

# Known doesn't decide where you rank.

# It decides whether you're on the page at all.

# Better is how you move up.
# Known is how you get in.

# What this does not prove.

01 This is page one only. It can't see who never got in.

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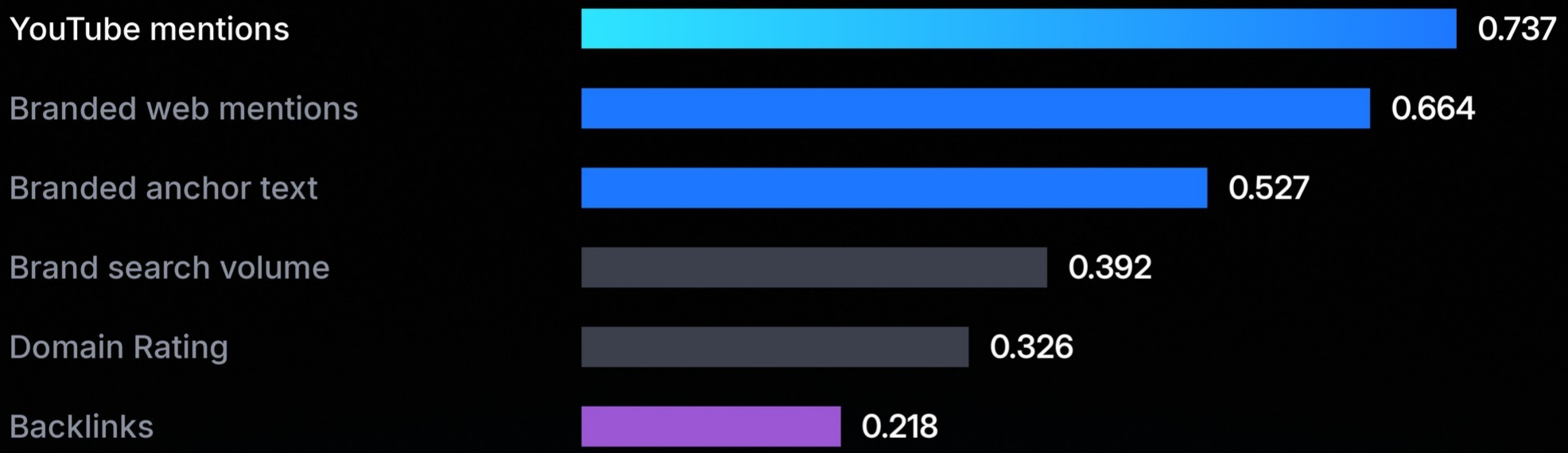
03 Brand searches are a proxy for known, not a measure.

AI search

# Now do it again, one layer up.



# The strongest signal is not a link.






Ahrefs · 75,000 brands DR>40 · Spearman vs AI citation · May 2025 and Dec 2025 · vendor-published

# It decides who to name, then goes looking.

**53%**

cited when the brand is named in the answer

**11%**

cited when it is not



Seer Interactive · 53.1% vs 10.6% · 541,213 responses · 20 brands · 6 platforms · Feb 2026 · agency-published

# 76% → 38%

**of AI Overview citations that come from the organic top 10.**
**One year apart.**

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Ahrefs · 863,000 SERPs, Mar 2026 vs 2025 study · vendor-published

# Known is necessary. It's not sufficient.

**96%**

of brands are described correctly when asked about directly

**89%**

never appear when someone researches the category



Victorious · 175 brands · 8 platforms · via Search Engine Journal, Jul 2026 · agency-published

# Known gets you considered. Better gets you chosen.

Part three

# How to test instead of copy.



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# SEO was always a testing industry.

**719,326**
experiments

> **124,942**
side-by-side evaluations

> **16,871**
live traffic experiments

> **4,781**
changes launched

Google, 2023: ranking changes tested before launch



Google, "How Search works: rigorous testing", 2023 figures

# 0.66%

of Google's experiments shipped. The other 99.34% are the losses nobody wrote up.

"The awkward truth is that best practices can lose traffic."

Will Critchlow, SearchPilot

# The Door Audit

Three steps. One afternoon.

01 **Count the door**

Inclusion rate, not average position.



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01 **Count the door**
Inclusion rate, not average position.

02 **Map the gatekeepers**
The ten sites that hold half the page.



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# The Door Audit.

Three steps. One afternoon.

01 **Count the door**
Inclusion rate, not average position.

02 **Map the gatekeepers**
The ten sites that hold half the page.

03 **Run one mention test**
Against a control. Read it on day 90.



Step 1 · Count the door

# Inclusion rate = the share of your 50 target queries you appear on at all.

Anywhere in the top ten counts. Position does not matter yet.

# Not average position.

Step 2 · Map the gatekeepers

# Which 10 sites hold half the page in your category?

Count slots across your 50 queries. Sort. You get mentioned there; you do not outrank them.

Step 3 · One mention test

# One mention. One control. 90 days.

Same budget as one link. A matched set of queries you leave alone. Decide with the inclusion rate.

The Door Audit on a real market: "best air purifier"

# Page one, today.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | housefresh.com | small site | 6 | airpurifierfirst.com | small site |
| 2 | nytimes.com | gatekeeper | 7 | bestbuy.com | gatekeeper |
| 3 | consumerreports.org | gatekeeper | 8 | amazon.com | gatekeeper |
| 4 | youtube.com | gatekeeper | 9 | rtings.com | brand |
| 5 | reddit.com | gatekeeper | 10 | rtings.com | brand |



Top 10 organic, US · gatekeeper = one of the ten most frequent websites across all 30 markets · Own pull · Semrush US · 5 Oct 2026

# HouseFresh got named by the gatekeepers long before it outranked anyone.

From 166 visits to #1 while becoming the most talked-about small site in search. I can't prove the mentions did it. The audit is how you'd find out.

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# The test card.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Hypothesis** | Two category round-up videos raise our inclusion rate on 50 tracked queries. |
| **Metric** | Inclusion rate. Secondary: brand searches. |
| **Control** | 50 matched queries in a second market. We do nothing there. |
| **Window** | 90 days from the second video. Read on day 90, not before. |
| **Decision** | Up 5 points over control: fund five more. Under 2: stop. Between: extend once. |

# Before you copy anything.

01 What was the control?

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01 What was the control?

02 What was the base rate?

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03 When did it work, and for how long?

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04 What else changed at the same time?

# Before you copy anything.

01 What was the control?

02 What was the base rate?

03 When did it work, and for how long?

04 What else changed at the same time?

05 Who benefits if you believe it?

# Same budget. Two plans.

## Links

20 to 40 links. Moves a signal that correlates at 0.22.

## Mentions

3 videos, 2 podcasts, 1 dataset. Moves signals at 0.66 to 0.74.



Run both for 90 days. Let the inclusion rate choose. Correlations: Ahrefs, vendor-published.

# This week.

01 Monday: count your door. One afternoon.

# This week.

01 Monday: count your door. One afternoon.

02 Tuesday: list your ten gatekeepers.

# This week.

01 Monday: count your door. One afternoon.

02 Tuesday: list your ten gatekeepers.

03 This month: buy one mention, not one link. Read it on day 90.

# They were never alive. Better doesn't win. Known does.

# And then better decides what happens next.

# Everything from today. Free, no email.

- **The dataset**
  30 markets, 300 results, 153 websites
- **The Door Audit spreadsheet**
  Template plus two worked examples
- **The test card**
  Print it, fill it in before you start
- **Every source**
  Each number on the slides, with a link
- **My own Door Audit**
  E-bikes, US: 50 queries, 500 results

emiliotakas.com/chiangmai

# ขอบคุณครับ

# Khop khun krap, Chiang Mai.

Now go count your door.

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