



THE AFFILIATE SEO + AI SEARCH PLAYBOOK

Rank where buyers **decide.**

Buyers no longer decide on your homepage. They decide on "best of" pages, inside TikTok search, and in AI answers. This is the operator playbook for owning all three, written for brands doing \$1M+ per year.



Josh Snow

Founder, AffiliateMarketing.com

\$1B+

in online sales driven across our brands and partners

\$200M+

in exits, including a \$70M cash exit

6B+

organic views generated across social

25,000+

creators activated across our network

Search did not die. It moved.

Three shifts happened at once, and most brands are still optimizing for the world before all three.

4,700%

year over year growth in AI referral traffic to US retail sites, per Adobe Analytics (July 2025)

32%

longer sessions from AI-referred shoppers vs other channels, per the same Adobe data

~40%

of 18 to 24 year olds start searches on TikTok or Instagram instead of Google, per research Google leadership shared publicly in 2022

82%

of Perplexity citations point to content published in the last 30 days, per a 2026 study of 680M AI citations (Leapd)

The three surfaces where your buyer decides

G

Google + the listicle economy

For "best [category]" searches, the winners are review publishers and listicles, not brand sites. You do not outrank them. You get placed on them.

T

Social + TikTok Shop search

TikTok is a search engine with a checkout attached. Search placement follows content volume, keywords, and review velocity. Creators are your crawlers.

AI

AI answers

ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google AI Overviews compress the whole funnel into one answer. They cite a small set of sources. Your job is to live inside those sources.

THE OPERATOR THESIS

All three surfaces feed on the same raw material: a high volume of credible third-party content about your brand. Creators, publishers, and communities produce it. That is why affiliate and creator programs are now a ranking strategy, not just a sales channel.

What is inside

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The money map

Every high-intent query type has an owner. Before you spend a dollar, know whose page the buyer is standing on when they decide, and what your move is on that page.

THE BUYER SEARCHES	WHERE THEY DECIDE	WHO OWNS THAT PAGE	YOUR MOVE
"best [category] 2026"	Google, AI answers	Review publishers, niche listicles	Get placed, then climb positions. Move 1.
"[your brand] review" and "is [brand] legit"	Google, YouTube, Reddit	Creators, communities, review sites	Seed honest coverage. Move 2.
"[your brand] vs [competitor]"	Google, AI answers	Comparison publishers	Brief affiliates on the comparison angle. Moves 1 + 2.
"[problem] for [audience]"	TikTok, Instagram, YouTube	Creators	Creator volume with searchable captions. Move 3.
"what should I buy for [need]"	ChatGPT, Perplexity, AI Overviews	The sources AI cites	Live inside those sources. Move 4.
"[brand] discount code"	Google, coupon sites	Coupon publishers	Control it with an official code page and clean affiliate terms. Move 2.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR CAC

Paid traffic rents attention one auction at a time. Rankings are attention you stop paying for. Every placement you win on these pages keeps converting while you sleep, which is why blended CAC falls as this system matures.

The mistake almost every \$1M+ brand makes

They treat SEO as blog posts on their own domain, social as an ad channel, and AI as a curiosity. All three decisions happen on **other people's pages**. The playbook that follows is about winning real estate you do not own: listicles, communities, creator feeds, and AI citations.

- ✓ **Own less, appear more.** One brand site cannot outrank an ecosystem. A hundred third-party mentions can.
- ✓ **Volume is a ranking signal.** On TikTok and in AI answers, the amount of credible content about you is the algorithm input.
- ✓ **Every surface feeds the others.** Creator videos become search results, search results become citations, citations become default recommendations.

Get placed on the pages that already rank

When someone searches "best [your category]," the entire first page is listicles and review sites earning affiliate commissions. That page is a marketplace. Here is how to buy in with product and partnership instead of luck.

Step 1: Find every money page in your category

Run these searches and log every URL on page one and two into a sheet:

best [category] 2026

best [category] for [audience]

[category] review

[competitor] alternatives

[competitor] vs

top [category] brands

intitle:"best [category]"

[category] site:reddit.com

Repeat the same phrases inside TikTok search, YouTube search, ChatGPT, and Perplexity. Log who appears everywhere. That overlap list is your target list.

Step 2: Qualify before you pitch

Not every page deserves outreach. Score each target against this checklist:

- ☐ **It actually ranks.** The page sits in the top 10 for a buying-intent phrase, not just any phrase.
- ☐ **It monetizes with affiliate links.** Look for disclosure language and tracked links. If they already earn commissions, they have a reason to add you.
- ☐ **It gets updated.** A "last updated" date within 90 days means an editor is actively reworking positions. Those are winnable.
- ☐ **The audience matches.** Their reader is your buyer, not just your category.
- ☐ **AI already cites it.** Ask ChatGPT and Perplexity your money question and note which of your targets get cited. Those pages are double value: human traffic plus AI visibility.

OPERATOR NOTE

Sort your target list by one question: if my brand were added to this page tomorrow, would revenue move this quarter? Ten pages usually drive most of the category's affiliate volume. Obsess over those ten before touching the long tail.



The pitch that gets you added

Editors of money pages hear from brands every day. They add products that make the page better and make them more money. Lead with both.

What publishers actually evaluate

LEVER	WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE	WHY IT MOVES THEM
Commission	Competitive for your category, with a private bump for top placements	They rank products partly by earnings per click
Cookie window	30 days or more	Longer windows credit more of their traffic
Conversion proof	Your site CVR and AOV, shared openly	Their EPC math depends on your funnel
Exclusive offer	A reader-only code they can publish	Exclusives justify a dedicated section and higher position
Product access	Sample shipped before you ask for anything	Credible pages test what they list

PITCH EMAIL TEMPLATE · COPY, PERSONALIZE, SEND

Subject: [Product] for your "[exact page title]" page

Hi [Name],

Your "[page title]" page keeps coming up when customers tell us how they found the category. Thank you for the rigor behind it.

I run [Brand]. Why your readers may want us on it: [one-line differentiator], [proof point such as review count or a third-party test], and a [X]% commission with a [30/45/60] day cookie. Our site converts at [X]% on this traffic, so the EPC math should work in your favor.

I would love to send you a sample to test, no strings. If it earns a spot, we can set up an exclusive [Brand] code for your readers. Worst case, you got a free [product].

[Your name], [Brand]

ON PAID PLACEMENTS AND THE FTC

Some publishers sell placements outright. That can be worth it on a true money page, but insist on performance context first: traffic, click-through by position, and their EPC range. Disclosure runs both ways: their page must disclose affiliate relationships, and your brand should never ask anyone to hide one. Clean disclosure is also what platforms and AI systems reward.

- ✓ **Track with SubIDs.** One SubID per placement shows which page and position drives revenue, not just which partner.
- ✓ **Renegotiate with data.** At day 60, trade a commission bump for a higher position.

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MOVE 2

Own your branded search results

Before buyers pay, they verify. Five branded queries decide whether your paid and creator traffic actually converts. Control all five.

● The five queries to control

- ☐ "[brand] review"
- ☐ "is [brand] legit" or "[brand] scam"
- ☐ "[brand] vs [top competitor]"
- ☐ "[brand] discount code"
- ☐ "[brand] affiliate program"

Search each one monthly in an incognito window, on YouTube, and in ChatGPT. Screenshot. If anything on page one makes you wince, that is your next content brief.

● The official pages you must publish

- ✓ **An official discount page** on your domain, so coupon sites stop owning your "[brand] code" traffic and last-click commissions.
- ✓ **An affiliate program page** with commission, cookie window, and a real application. It recruits partners while you sleep and ranks for "[brand] affiliate program."
- ✓ **A comparison page** for your top "vs" query. Honest, spec by spec. Publishers and AI both borrow from it.
- ✓ **An FAQ page** with direct answers in the first sentence of each block. This is the format AI systems quote.

Reddit and communities: the rules

Reddit is now a top cited source across AI platforms, which makes community threads permanent search assets. Handle with care:

- ✓ **Show up as yourself.** Founder accounts that answer questions with disclosure build threads that rank and get cited. Astroturfing gets detected and archived forever.
- ✓ **Seed the question, never the praise.** Encourage genuinely happy customers to share their results in relevant subreddits. Never script them.
- ✓ **Answer the ugly threads.** A calm, specific founder reply on a critical thread often becomes the top result for "is [brand] legit." That is a gift.

OPERATOR NOTE

Your affiliate program page is secretly an SEO asset. Publishers searching "[category] affiliate programs" are money pages looking for you. Put your commission, cookie, EPC range, and a one-click application on it, and it becomes inbound deal flow.



MOVE 3

Rank inside TikTok Shop search

TikTok Shop search is the closest thing to early Amazon SEO in years: high intent, low sophistication, winner-take-most. The inputs are listings, reviews, and creator volume.

The signals that consistently move placement

SIGNAL	WHAT TO DO
Listing keywords	Put the exact phrases buyers type into your product title and first description lines: category, audience, and problem. Write "[Category] for [Audience], [Benefit]" before any brand poetry.
Review velocity	Fresh reviews beat old totals. Follow up every Shop order for a review while the package is still on the counter. A steady drip outperforms a one-time surge.
Creator content volume	Every affiliate video tagged to your product is a searchable asset and a relevance vote. A hundred creators posting weekly beats one viral hit for search placement.
Caption and on-screen keywords	Brief creators to say and show the search phrase. TikTok reads captions, text overlays, and transcripts.
Conversion rate	The algorithm promotes listings that turn clicks into orders. Your hero image, price anchor, and bundle structure are search inputs.
Fulfillment and refunds	Shop scores sellers. Late shipping and refund spikes quietly suppress placement, and no keyword fixes that.

LISTING TITLE WORKSHEET

Formula: [Search phrase] + [Audience] + [Differentiator] + [Format or count]

Your buyer's exact search phrase: _____

Title draft:

Three phrases creators should say out loud: _____ .

_____ . _____

OPERATOR NOTE

Treat every creator brief as a search brief. If fifty affiliate videos this month all say "best [category] for [audience]" on camera, you are training TikTok's index on exactly where your product belongs. That phrase should match your listing title word for word.



Get recommended by AI

When a buyer asks ChatGPT what to buy, there is no page two. You are in the answer or you are invisible. The good news: AI systems pick from a knowable set of sources.

What the citation data shows

3x

higher citation probability in ChatGPT for brands present on major review platforms, per a 2026 study of 680M citations (Leapd)

#1

Reddit is the top cited source for both Perplexity and Google AI Overviews in the same study

YT

brand mentions in YouTube titles and transcripts were the strongest single correlate of AI Overview visibility

30d

Perplexity strongly favors recency, with 82% of citations pointing to content from the last 30 days

Translate that into strategy

- ✓ **AI reads the pages you won in Move 1.** Listicle placements are double assets: they convert humans and they are exactly what ChatGPT retrieves when asked "what is the best [category]." Placement work now compounds twice.
- ✓ **Reddit threads are citations waiting to happen.** The community work in Move 2 is also your Perplexity strategy. Threads where real users recommend you are the highest-trust input AI can find.
- ✓ **YouTube is underpriced for AI visibility.** Long-form reviews with your brand in the title and spoken in the transcript feed both YouTube search and AI Overviews. Two or three honest creator reviews per quarter is a real GEO program.
- ✓ **Recency is a lever.** A placement updated monthly keeps winning Perplexity. Ask your publisher partners when pages get refreshed, and time your commission bumps to those cycles.

TEST IT YOURSELF, TODAY

Open ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google in AI mode. Ask each one: "What is the best [your category] for [your audience]?" Note every brand named and every source cited. Run the same test monthly and track it like a rank position. That list of cited sources is your GEO target list, in priority order.

MONTHLY AI MENTION LOG · ONE ROW PER PLATFORM

Prompt asked: _____

Brands named: _____

Sources cited: _____

Action routed (pitch, brief, or content): _____

The nine-move GEO checklist

Run these in order. The first five use assets you are already building in Moves 1 through 3. The rest harden your own domain so AI can quote you directly.

- 1 Win placements on the pages AI already cites.**
From your monthly AI test, list the cited pages. Pitch every one you can be added to. This is the highest-leverage GEO move that exists.
- 2 Build a Reddit footprint with disclosure.**
Founder answers, customer threads, and an AMA in your category subreddit. One strong thread can be cited for a year.
- 3 Commission long-form YouTube reviews.**
Brand name in the title, spoken naturally in the video, chapters that answer buyer questions. Transcripts are the index.
- 4 Get listed on the review platforms for your space.**
Trustpilot and category-specific review sites for consumer brands. Complete profiles with fresh reviews correlate with materially higher citation rates.
- 5 Keep money pages fresh.**
Recency wins Perplexity. Placements on pages that update monthly beat placements on pages that never change.
- 6 Publish direct-answer content on your domain.**
FAQ blocks where the first sentence answers the question outright. AI quotes clean sentences, not marketing paragraphs.
- 7 Add structured data.**
Product, FAQ, and Review schema on your key pages so machines parse price, rating, and availability without guessing.
- 8 Publish your comparison page.**
An honest "[brand] vs [competitor]" table on your domain gives AI a safe, factual source for the exact question buyers ask it.
- 9 Monitor monthly and close the loop.**
Rerun your AI test, log which brands and sources appear, and route next month's outreach, briefs, and content from what changed.

OPERATOR NOTE

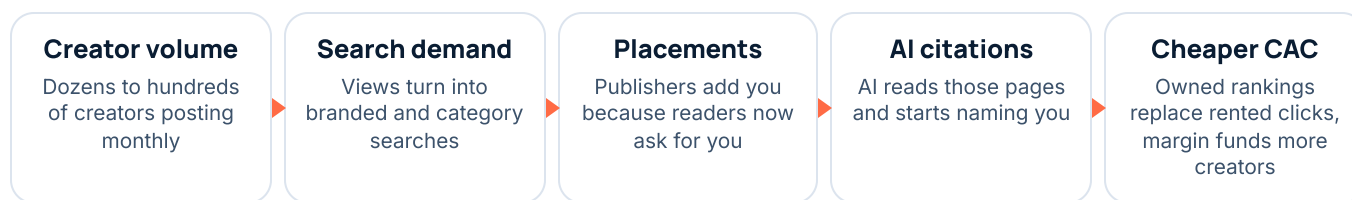
Nobody can guarantee an AI recommendation, and anyone selling you one is guessing. What you control is presence density: how often credible, current, machine-readable sources mention you. Density is a volume game, and volume is exactly what a creator and affiliate program produces.



MOVE 5

Stack the flywheel so it compounds

Run the first four moves as one system and each layer feeds the next. This is the structure behind what we call Flywheel Stacking® at AffiliateMarketing.com.



Why volume is the moat

A competitor can copy your product, your price, and your landing page in a quarter. They cannot quickly copy 200 creators posting weekly, 40 listicle placements, a two-year Reddit history, and the AI citation graph all of that builds. Distribution density is the last durable advantage in consumer, and it is built, not bought.

The weekly scoreboard

One owner, one sheet, five numbers reviewed every Monday:

METRIC	SOURCE	DIRECTION THAT MATTERS
Active creators posting	Affiliate platform	Up and to the right, every single week
Live money-page placements	Your target-list sheet	Count and average position, both climbing
Branded search volume	Google Search Console, TikTok search	The flywheel's clearest leading indicator
AI mention rate	Your monthly AI test	Share of test prompts that name you
Blended CAC	Finance	Falling as owned rankings take share from paid

OPERATOR NOTE

Most brands quit at week six because nothing compounds yet. The flywheel typically feels dead for a quarter, then it does not. Fund it like infrastructure, not like a campaign, and hold the Monday review without mercy.

The 30-day sprint

Four weeks to a working ranking system. Each week has one theme, a handful of shippable outputs, and a definition of done. Assign one owner per line.

WEEK	THEME	SHIP THIS
Week 1	Map the battlefield	Target list of 25+ money pages, scored and ranked. Baseline screenshots of your five branded queries. First monthly AI test logged. TikTok listing keyword audit done.
Week 2	Fix what you own	Listing titles rewritten around real search phrases. Official discount page and affiliate program page live. FAQ page with direct answers published. Review follow-up flow turned on.
Week 3	Pitch and seed	Ten publisher pitches sent with samples. Two YouTube reviews commissioned. Founder Reddit account active in three threads. Creator briefs updated with search phrases.
Week 4	Close and systemize	First placements negotiated. SubID tracking live on every placement. Weekly scoreboard built with owners. Next month's pitch list drafted from AI test results.

● Do this daily, 20 minutes

- ✓ Answer every publisher and creator reply within one business day. Speed wins placements more often than commission does.
- ✓ Skim new creator posts and reviews. Flag the phrases customers actually use, then feed them back into listings and briefs.

● Do not do this

- ✓ Do not buy placements before qualifying the page. Position without traffic is decoration.
- ✓ Do not script Reddit praise or undisclosed reviews. One archived astroturf thread costs more than ten placements earn.
- ✓ Do not judge the system in week two. Judge it at day 90 on placements won, branded search, and AI mention rate.

The 10-point ranking audit

Score each line honestly: 0 if it does not exist, 5 if it exists but nobody owns it, 10 if it is owned, measured, and reviewed weekly. Then read your band below.

#	ASSET	WHAT A 10 LOOKS LIKE	SCORE
1	Money-page target list	25+ scored pages, refreshed monthly	/10
2	Live listicle placements	10+ placements with SubID tracking	/10
3	Branded SERP control	All five branded queries owned or answered	/10
4	Official code + affiliate pages	Both live, ranking, and converting	/10
5	TikTok listing SEO	Titles match tested search phrases, reviews dripping weekly	/10
6	Creator volume	50+ active creators posting monthly with search-phrases briefs	/10
7	Reddit + community presence	Disclosed founder activity, threads that rank	/10
8	YouTube review coverage	Fresh long-form reviews with brand in title and transcript	/10
9	Machine-readable domain	FAQ, comparison page, and schema shipped	/10
10	Monthly AI mention test	Logged monthly with actions routed from results	/10

0 to 40: Invisible

You are renting every click. Start with Move 1 and Move 2 this week. The fastest wins are placements and branded SERP control.

45 to 70: Emerging

The assets exist but do not compound. Assign owners, wire the weekly scoreboard, and push creator volume. You are one quarter from escape velocity.

75 to 100: Compounding

You own real estate on every surface. Now defend it: refresh cadence, deeper publisher deals, and AI monitoring as a standing metric.

BRING THIS TO A SESSION

If you book time with me, bring this scorecard filled in plus your five branded-query screenshots. We will skip the diagnosis and spend the entire session on moves.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Josh Snow

Founder of AffiliateMarketing.com. Made his first million at 17. Built SNOW® into a nine-figure consumer brand on creator distribution, and exited MediaAlpha for \$70M in cash. Across ecommerce, AI apps, lead generation, and insurance, his teams have driven \$1B+ in online sales, \$200M+ in exits, and 6B+ organic views with a network of 25,000+ creators.

\$1B+

online sales driven

\$200M+

in exits

6B+

organic views

25,000+

creators in network

Work the playbook with me

Book a session through my MentorPass profile and we will apply this system to your brand directly: your target list, your listings, your creator briefs, and your AI test results. Come with the audit on page 12 filled in and we will leave with your next 90 days sequenced.

- ✓ **Bring:** your audit score, blended CAC, hero SKU margin, and last month's creator count.
- ✓ **Leave with:** a prioritized placement list, listing rewrites, and a 90-day flywheel plan.

Sources cited in this playbook: Adobe Analytics, "Generative AI-Powered Shopping Rises" (business.adobe.com, 2025). Leapd, study of 680M AI citations across ChatGPT, Google AI Overviews, and Perplexity (leapd.ai, 2026). Google leadership public remarks on Gen Z search behavior (2022). Figures reflect the periods studied and will move; rerun your own tests monthly. This playbook is educational material, not a guarantee of rankings or revenue.

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