AI SEO In Detail

Traffic drop diagnostic checklist — six steps, always in this order

Episode 16 · Explaining a traffic drop
youtube.com/@AISEOInDetail

> ***Rule out the cheap and common causes before the rare and expensive ones. Each step removes a whole branch from the next. Stop at the first step that explains it.***

Define the drop first

- ☐ Compare **equal periods, same weekdays**. Leave out the last 2–3 days (Search Console data there is incomplete).
- ☐ Use **Search Console clicks**, not only your dashboard.
- ☐ Is it **bigger than normal week-to-week noise**? Take the standard deviation of your weekly change in clicks — on the example site it was about 24 %.

Step	Check	Verdict
1 · Measurement Real, or just counted wrong?	Search Console clicks vs GA4 sessions from Google organic. Missing tag after a deploy? New cookie banner? Changed filters? Hostname filter (ep 15). Both sources fell together and by more than the noise?	Only GA4 fell → Google still sends visitors; you lost the ability to count them. **Inside the noise → stop. Most drops die here.** Both fell, beyond noise → real, go on.
2 · Demand Did fewer people search?	Same weeks last year (say so in your notes if history is under ~13 months) — or the demand index from monthly volumes (ep 13). Clicks per unit of demand. Split brand / non-brand (ep 14).	Demand fell as much and clicks per demand held → season or market. Only brand fell → look at marketing, not SEO.
3 · Indexing Still in Google's index?	Switch to pages: which lost the most clicks, grouped by section or template. URL Inspection on a **sample**. Suspects after a release: noindex, a robots.txt rule, a changed canonical, a redirect to the wrong place.	Even across the site vs concentrated in one section (→ something technical there). **Don't use the sitemap report's "indexed" count as evidence** (ep 17).
4 · Rankings Did the pages lose positions?	Same queries, both periods: position and impressions, before vs after. A few queries or all? One page type or the whole site?	Position worse + impressions down = ranking loss. A few queries → a competitor, or two of your pages competing (ep 12). Whole site from one date → *now* check for a Google update that week, not before.
5 · Results page Did the page itself change?	Live results for your biggest queries: new feature above you — AI summary, video row, question box, more ads? Split mobile / desktop (mobile fills first). Compare stored snapshots; if none, note what is there today.	Position barely moved but clicks fell → features are taking the attention.
6 · Click-through rate Same position, fewer clicks?	Did the title change — by you, or rewritten by Google? Compare against your own CTR curve (ep 11). Did a group of pages drop below the line together?	What do they share: a template change, a new title format, a missing date?

Write the diagnosis — one line, with the evidence

Drop	Period	Step found	Evidence	Action	Re-measure date

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e.g. clicks −30 % (232 → 163) · 2026-W15 vs W14 · step 1 · inside normal noise (±24 %), right after a +57 % week · action: none
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No answer at step 6? Go back to step 1 with a narrower question: not "why did the site drop" but "why did *this section* drop on *this date*". Kept every time, the one-liner becomes a history of what went wrong, what didn't, and how you found out.

Example figures are from an anonymised site; no domains or search terms shown.