Portfolio

Case Study #2: rebuilding an old website while Google rewrites the rules

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At a glance

I took over, solo, the SEO and GEO of an old website with about a thousand unoptimized pages. As AI arrived in Google's results, I **reduced cannibalization**, **improved rankings**, and Google now cites the site **as its first source** in AI answers.

Pages visible in Google

−44%

1,061 → **597**, with no ranking loss

Pages in Google's top 3

+60%

45 → **72** pages

Average position in Canada

+2.6

12.6 → **10.0** (spots gained)

Clicks on branded searches

+22%

595 → **723** clicks

Queries citing the site in an AI Overview

92

First source in 90 cases

Sources: Google Search Console, June 5 to December 31, 2025 compared with March 1 to October 5, 2026. Semrush, Google Canada, data from late July to October 5, 2026.

The context

The website belongs to a licensed insolvency trustee firm in Quebec. It helps individuals and businesses in debt find a legally regulated solution.

Starting point

An old website, a construction site, about a thousand unoptimized pages.

A demanding sector

Sensitive financial topics, where Google expects a high level of trust and expertise (E-E-A-T).

My role

Head of SEO, GEO and content, working solo, for the past 2 years.

The challenge

I had to rebuild the site from the ground up, at the very moment Google search was **being turned upside down**.

01	**A site to rebuild**	Hundreds of pages written without a shared strategy targeted the same search intents and competed with each other. Google no longer knew which page to show.
02	**Rules that keep changing**	AI Overviews arrive in the results, AI Mode rolls out, ChatGPT becomes a search engine in its own right and Google updates keep coming. Today, **72% of tracked queries** show an AI answer above the links.
03	**Aiming at a moving target**	Every strategy had to account for an ecosystem that kept changing while it was being rolled out.

Steps 1 to 4: the groundwork

Not a one-shot redesign, but iterative groundwork: **audit, fix, measure, then start again**.

01 **Audit after audit.** I audited the site again and again, cluster by cluster, to find competing pages, weak content and redirect chains.

02 **A clustering map rebuilt several times.** With every new audit and every shift in Google's results, I revised the topic map so it matched how people actually search.

03 **An architecture rebuilt several times.** I grouped competing pages around pillar pages, using 301 redirects rather than deletions to keep the authority already earned. Result: **44% fewer pages** in the index, yet more pages in the top 3.

04 **Ongoing re-optimization.** I reworked existing content: angle, search intent, structure, internal linking. I reassessed it every 6 to 8 weeks.

Steps 5 to 7: AI and conversion

05

Content built for AI

I wrote new content so AI engines would pick it up: direct answers, actionable blocks, a human and non-judgmental tone, and the firm's advisors' expertise front and center.

06

AI visibility tracking

I tracked the site's citations in Gemini, AI Mode and AI Overviews. I also spotted a technical setting blocking ChatGPT's crawler and flagged it as a priority fix.

07

Conversion and strategy

I built a landing page with a lead form, then delivered a 24-week SEO and AI visibility strategy for what comes next.

THE KEY RESULT

Fewer pages, better rankings.

44% fewer pages in the index, yet 72 pages in the top 3, up from 45.

The results

Today, the site has **strong semantic health** in Google's eyes: fewer pages, better rankings.

72

pages in the top 3, up from 45. Cannibalization dropped sharply: from 1,061 to 597 visible pages.

10.0

average position in Canada, up from 12.6, with stable impressions (+3% per day).

+22%

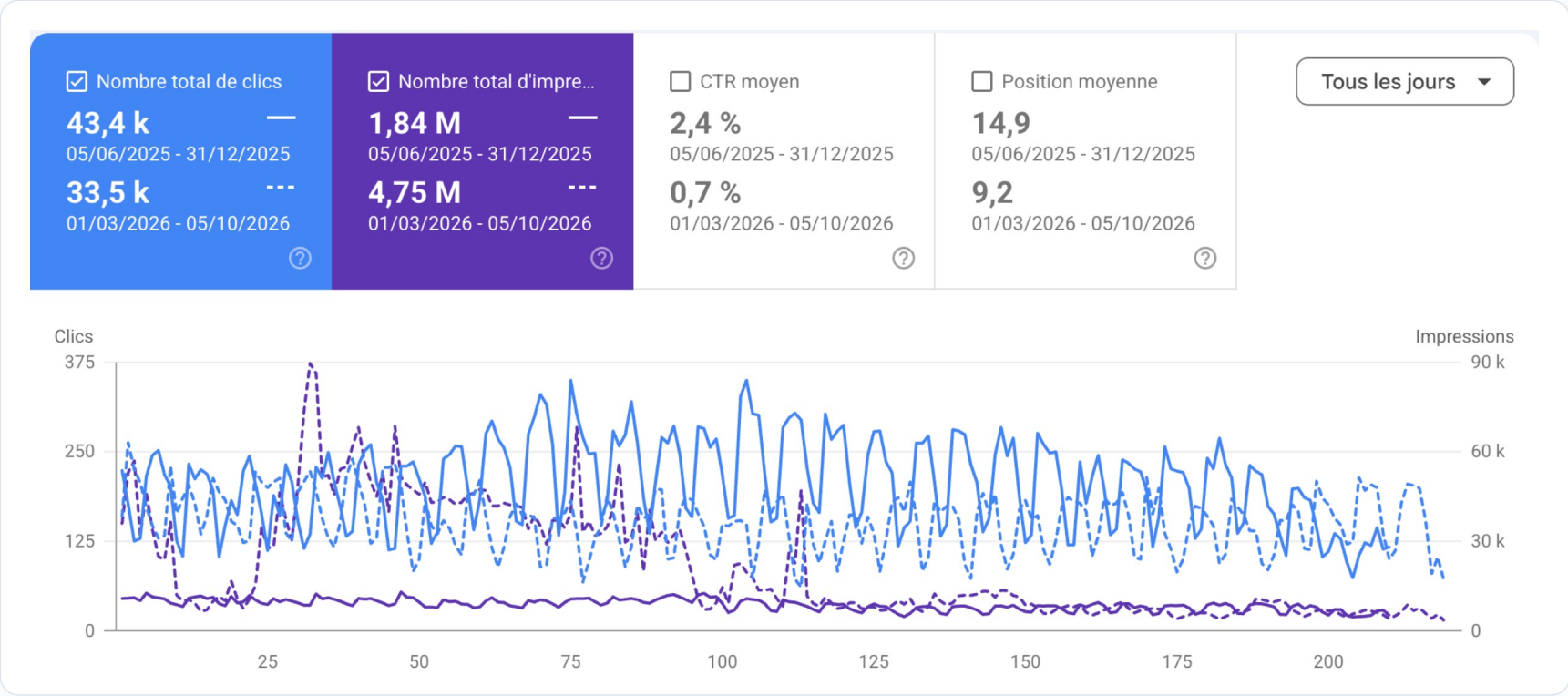
more clicks on **branded searches**: a brand people look for more.

92

queries where **Google's AI cites the site**, about 24,500 searches per month. First source in 90 cases, 31 pages cited.

The Search Console comparison

Average position: **14.9** → **9.2** · CTR: **2.4%** → **0.7%**. The site climbs in Google, but AI answers capture part of the clicks.



The impact of AI answers

In full transparency: clicks in Canada went from **176 to 141 per day**. This is not an SEO decline.

THE CONTEXT

72%

of tracked queries show an AI answer above the links.

PAGE ONE

5.2 → 4.5

It moves up in rankings, yet **loses three quarters** of its clicks.

PAGE TWO

13 → 6

It climbs 7 spots, yet its **clicks drop by half**.

A better-ranked page getting fewer clicks is the signature of **zero-click search**: the AI answer responds directly in Google.

What this case shows

An old website can be brought back to life, even when the rules change along the way.

-44%

Fewer pages, better rankings

Consolidating a thousand pages led to more pages at the top, not fewer.

Iterate

Iteration beats a fixed plan

Rebuilding the clustering map and architecture with each audit is what kept pace with Google's changes.

1st source

Being cited is the new first position

When AI answers instead of the links, being its first source matters as much as the click.

Is your website aging, or is your traffic dropping while your rankings hold?

I help you stay visible on Google and in AI answers. Let's talk:

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